Review Essay

AROUND THE WORLD IN RELIGION AND THE ARTS

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Shefspace in Euro-American libraries and bookstores dedicated to non-western traditions of religion and art will not soon compete with displays accommodating works on Christianity and Judaism. But the Linear Footage Balance is changing inexorably. Beginning in Europe and heading eastward, through the Arab and Persian Muslim Middle East, into Muslim and Hindu South Asia, and on to Taoist China, here is a cheater’s dozen of recent offerings to expand minds and wish lists alike.

Deborah Howard’s *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100-1500* makes a significant contribution to appreciating the broad dissemination of Islamicate cultural themes in medieval times by opening a European window on the material culture of the eastern Mediterranean. That window is the complex and intriguing city of Venice. Howard opts for a thematic, rather than strictly chronological, treatment, the better to trace the strata of layered memories “encoded in the architecture and decoration of Venice” (217). Those memories of a biblical world in the eastern Mediterranean, she suggests, fed the European imagination, thus affording “religious and intellectual stature” to Venice. Moreover, through their expansive trade and cultural networks, the Venetians developed a facility (long admired among Arab historians) for describing the built environment of the Islamic Middle East in such detail that they were able to re-present important themes in its architecture and ornamentation, and even larger elements of its urban planning.