



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

The Islamic Stucco Stained-Glass Windows of Arthur Rotch at MIT: Preserving a Legacy of Art and Education

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Abstract

Stucco stained glass windows are a significant architectural feature in Islamic architecture, and several museums and collections worldwide contain these intricate works. However, at MIT's Arthur Rotch Library, four such windows—donated by the architect's family in the mid-19th century—remained uncataloged and unresearched. Initially referenced as originating from either Syria or Egypt, no definitive records confirmed their provenance. This uncertainty prompted my investigation, focusing on traditional window-making techniques to authenticate their origin.

Through the study of original examples from Cairo and Damascus, along with a collaborative analysis conducted with the Vitrocenter and MIT's Department of Materials Science, it was determined that the windows are of Cairene origin. Scientific analysis revealed that they remain in their original condition, untouched by restoration—an uncommon occurrence in comparable collections. To ensure their preservation, a conservator was hired to clean the windows, stabilize the gypsum, and replace missing glass.

This paper will present the history and development of stucco stained glass window-making techniques in Syria and Egypt, with a focus on original examples. It will also highlight the significance of these four MIT windows as examples of Cairene craftsmanship and discuss their role in MIT's teaching materials.

Keywords

Stucco, Stained glass , Windows, Islamic Art, AKDC/MIT

Session

8. Islamic archaeology

Type of paper

Oral presentation