



Murphy, James Cavanah

Blackrock, Co. Cork, Ireland 1760 – 1814 London

The Arabian Antiquities of Spain.

London, Cadell & Davies, 1815 [–1816]

FOLIO (640 × 480 mm), (12)ff. letterpress, unsigned single leaves, paginated (2) 1–21 (1), with engraved headpiece (lettered *Introduction* with imprint line dated 28 April 1812); plus engraved title (transcribed above, with imprint line dated 1 June 1815), engraved sub-title (part II, *Description of the Palace of the Alhambra*, inserted after pl. VIII), and ninety-eight plates (numbered I–VIII, VIII No. 2, IX–XCVII; pl. XII is double, plates LXXIX, LXXXIII–LXXXV are composed of multiple matrices). All the plates are signed by Murphy as draughtsman, except for five (nos. VIII, XI, XXXV, LXXXIII, XCVII).

Light spotting in some plate margins; overall in fine state of preservation.

BOUND in russia leather, decorated in gilt; engraved ticket on blue paper *verfertigt bei Ph. Selenka in Wiesbaden*.

A SUPERBLY-BOUND COPY of Murphy's posthumous work on the Islamic architecture and art of Spain, edited by Thomas Hartwell Horne,¹ and published serially between July 1815 and mid-1816, with the complete volume offered for sale later in that year. The ninety-eight plates are architectural plans, elevations, exterior and interior views; topographical views; and reproductions of antiquities, including the famed Alhambra vases,² mosaic pavements, mural paintings, and inscriptions.

Born in Cork, and trained in the Dublin drawing schools, Murphy obtained the patronage and friendship of the Hon. William Burton Conyngham, who in 1788 sent him to Portugal to record the Dominican church and monastery of Batalha. Arriving in Oporto in January 1789, Murphy worked at Batalha for thirteen weeks, and afterwards commenced a long journey throughout Portugal and Spain, also recorded in numerous drawings. That visit resulted in the publication

¹ T.H. Horne, *Reminiscences personal and bibliographical of Thomas Hartwell Horne, with notes by his daughter Sarah Anne Cheyne* (London 1862), p.201 ('A Chronological List of the Rev. T.H. Horne's Works', no. 19): 'T.H. Horne...edited Mr. Murphy's Arabian Antiquities of Spain, 1816, folio; Mr. M. having died without leaving any materials for the descriptions of the engravings'.

² Murphy's plate XLVII records a lost vase; see Summer S. Kenesson, 'Nasrid Luster Pottery: The Alhambra Vases' in *Muqarnas* 9 (1992), pp.110–111 and p.101 fig 8.

of a folio volume of engraved plates, *Plans, elevations, sections and views of the church of Batalha...To which is prefixed an introductory discourse on the principles of Gothic architecture* (1795) as well as *Travels in Portugal* (1795) and *A General View of the State of Portugal* (1798).

In 1802, Murphy returned to the Iberian Peninsula, this time to Cadiz, where he was engaged in unspecified diplomatic missions for the court of Portugal to the Spanish court. His principal occupation, however, was in architectural draughtsmanship. The fame of his folio on Batalha led the Governor of the Alhambra to give him carte blanche to draw every detail of that monument, as the Governor was 'desirous that the knowledge of its splendid architectural remains should be accurately transmitted to posterity' (publisher's introduction, p.1). Murphy was indulged similarly by the Governor of Cordoba, and these two sites are the principal subject of *Arabian Antiquities of Spain* (plates I-IX: the Great Mosque of Córdoba; plates X-XXVII: Alhambra and the Palacio de Generalife at Granada).

When Murphy returned to England, in 1809, he settled in London and immediately announced the new publication.³ In 1813, he began to pass his drawings to printmakers (the title carries the date 1813 within the plate; the publication line below reads 'June 1st 1815').⁴

³ James Savage, *The Librarian, Being an Account of Scarce, Valuable, and Useful English Books*, III (no. 13, 1 July 1809), p.94, 'Literary Intelligence': Mr. J.C. Murphy, Architect, and Author of the *Designs and Descriptions of the Church of Batalha*, is preparing for Publication a Work on the *Arabian Antiquities of Spain*. It will be elegantly printed in large Folio, and contain about one hundred Plates of the most interesting Arabian Remains in that Country; such as the Royal Palace of Alhambra, the Generalife, the great Mosque of Cordova, &c. Descriptions will be given of the different objects, illustrating the merits of their Style and Manner, together with translations of the Cufic and Asiatic Inscriptions, &c. &c. It will be completed in four parts, published separately'.

⁴ Murphy's drawings for the engravings in *Arabian Antiquities of Spain*, together with proofs of the plates on china paper, some in colours, were later gathered and bound into a copy of his book. That copy was sold by Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 'Catalogue of the extensive and valuable library of manuscripts & printed books of His Excellency Monsieur John Gennadius, D.C.L., F.R.S.I., late Greek Minister at the court of St. James's', London 28 March 1895, p.184 lot 210: 'A unique copy of this magnificent work, the author's own, with 100 of the Original Drawings for the Work; twenty-two other drawings apparently for his other work on the Church of Batalha; fifty-five extra engravings, some Proofs on China paper in various states, some in colours, several of which were suppressed, all inserted in their proper places and mounted; and MS. Notes of the Author'. It was purchased by the bookseller Grevel for £19, on behalf of Gennadius, and is now in the Gennadeion in Athens. The drawings are in the process of being catalogued by Michael McCarthy.



'A perspective view of the Court and Fountain of Lions', engraved by Samuel Porter after a drawing by the author (pl. XXXIII). Murphy deliberately distorted the proportions 'to make them more palatable to Gothic taste'⁵

Numerous engravers worked on the book, the most active of whom were John Roffe (19 plates), John Le Keux (12 plates), Henry Le Keux (10 plates), Edmund Turrell (8 plates), John Shury (6 plates), James Neagle (6 plates), and Samuel Porter (title-page and 5 plates). Their

⁵ Tonia Raquejo, 'The "Arab Cathedrals": Moorish Architecture as Seen by British Travellers' in *The Burlington Magazine* 128 (no. 1001, August 1986), p.559.

progress was slow and Murphy did not live to see the first fascicule off the press: on 12 September 1814, he died in Cavendish Square, ‘a victim to his labours’.⁶

Cadell and Davies continued to publish Murphy’s work for some years, reprinting the plates and reissuing the letterpress, until the dissolution of their partnership. The matrices were then acquired by H.G. Bohn. At uncertain dates, Bohn added four plates to the series, signed by J. Warner as engraver, numbered LXXIX*, LXXX*, LXXXVI*, LXXXVI** (none of these plates is described in the text and none has either an imprint line or Murphy’s signature as artist). The late issues of the book are thus easily identifiable.⁷

Our copy was bound by Philipp Selenka (1803–1850) of Wiesbaden, brother of Johann Jacob Selenka (1801–1871), Hofbuchbinder in Braunschweig.⁸

REFERENCES Leopoldo Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato dei libri d’arte e d’antichità posseduti dal conte Cicognara* (Pisa 1821), no. 2536; Antonio Palau y Dulcet, *Manual del librero hispanoamericano: bibliografía general española e hispanoamericana* (Barcelona 1948–1977), no. 186308; *Early printed books, 1478–1840: catalogue of the British Architectural Library Early Imprints Collection, Volume 3: M–R*, compiled by Paul W. Nash [et al.] (London 1999), no. 2220

⁶ T.F. Dibdin, *The Bibliographical Decameron* (London 1817) II, p.391: ‘The author fell a victim to his labours!—but in the pages before us he has put on a species of immortality. As the expenses of this publication were enormous, the price of the volume is necessarily large in proportion: — yet where is the man of virtù, with pistoles in his purse, who will not hasten to unstring this said purse to possess such a treasure? If the day be dull, or the night long, let these ‘Antiquities of the Arabs in Spain,’ by Cavannah Murphy, be a constant, as they will be a cheering, companion!’.

⁷ W.T. Lowndes, *The bibliographer’s manual of English literature*, new edition by H.G. Bohn (London 1860), III, p.1635 (Bohn’s reissue ‘with 4 additional plates’). Cf. • Sotheby’s, 7 May 2003, lot 149 £4800 (with engraved title and 98 plates, described as an early issue without the four starred plates added 1830–1860) • Bradford copy, Sotheby’s, 15 March 2000, lot 57 £7500 (engraved title and 103 plates).

⁸ Two bindings by Philipp Selenka in the Fürstlich Waldecksche Hofbibliothek, Arolsen, are described by Rudolf-Alexander Schütte and Konrad Wiedemann, *Einbandkunst vom frühmittelalter bis Jugendstil aus den Bibliotheken in Kassel und Arolsen*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel (Kassel 2002), p.54 no. 68 and Abb. 51. He was a specialist ‘Portefeuillearbeiter’; see Hektor Rössler, *Ausführlicher Bericht über die von dem Gewerbeverein für das Großherzogthum Hessen im Jahre 1842 veranstaltete Allgemeine deutsche Industrie-Ausstellung zu Mainz* (Darmstadt 1843), p.240.