

WILLIAM GELL'S ENCOUNTERS WITH ISLAMIC SPAIN, 1808–36

by Richard Ansell¹

The British antiquary William Gell (1777–1836) is known for his work on ancient Greece and Rome, which he based on a lifetime of Mediterranean travel and two decades of residence in Italy. This article uses a remarkable notebook held at the British School at Rome to explore his unheralded interest in Islamic Spain (al-Andalus), which emerged from his Iberian travels of 1808–11 and took up much of his energy in the early 1830s, the final years of his life. As such, the notebook shows how engagement with other cultures might continue well beyond an initial encounter through travel. It brings together Gell's on-the-spot sketches and descriptions of the Alhambra, his copious later reading on the Emirate of Granada and evidence that he was teaching himself Arabic, offering a case study of early nineteenth-century scholarship that straddles the transition between eighteenth-century antiquarianism and Romantic, Orientalist approaches. The materiality and the contents of Gell's notebook chart the changing ways in which British travellers and writers incorporated al-Andalus into their understandings of Europe and the Mediterranean.

L'antiquario britannico William Gell (1777–1836) è noto per il suo lavoro sull'antica Grecia e Roma, basato su una vita di viaggi nel Mediterraneo e su due decenni di residenza in Italia. Questo articolo utilizza un taccuino estremamente interessante conservato presso la British School at Rome per esplorare il suo interesse, non ancora pienamente sviscerato, per la Spagna islamica (al-Andalus), che emerse dai suoi viaggi iberici del 1808–1811 e che assorbì gran parte delle sue energie nei primi anni Trenta dell'Ottocento, gli ultimi anni della sua vita. Il taccuino mostra come l'interesse verso culture altre possa continuare ben oltre l'incontro iniziale avvenuto attraverso il viaggio. Il taccuino riunisce gli schizzi e le descrizioni dell'Alhambra, realizzati da Gell sul posto, le sue successive numerose letture sull'Emirato di Granada e le prove che egli stava appiccando da autodidatta lo studio dell'arabo, offrendo un caso di studio dell'erudizione di inizio Ottocento a cavallo tra l'antiquariato settecentesco e gli approcci romantici e orientalisti. La materialità e il contenuto del taccuino di Gell concorrono a delineare i diversi modi in cui i viaggiatori e gli scrittori britannici incorporarono al-Andalus nella loro comprensione dell'Europa e del Mediterraneo.

The antiquary William Gell is best known for his work on ancient Greece and Rome – ‘classic Gell’, to quote Lord Byron’s *English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). The phrase alludes to Gell’s first book, *The Topography of*

¹ I am grateful to Rosemary Sweet for sharing research and discussing earlier drafts, to Osaid Mdawar for translating Gell’s Arabic, to Erin Dailey for discussions of it and to Valerie Scott and Beatrice Gelosia for their help and advice at the BSR. This article was written as part of Professor Sweet’s Leverhulme Research Project at the University of Leicester, 2020–24, ‘War, Travel and Cultural Exchange: William Gell and the British in Iberia, 1750–1830’ (RPG-2020-194).

Troy, and Its Vicinity (1804), though Byron's dissatisfaction with the survey on his own visit to the site made him change it to 'rapid Gell' in his fifth edition (Byron, 1809: 80; Gell, 1976: 3, 21; Thompson, 2019: 24).² The hint of superficiality has dogged Gell, but he solidified a reputation for classicism with a string of publications, including *The Geography and Antiquities of Ithaca* (1807), *Pompeiana* (Gell and Gandy, 1817–19; Gell, 1832) and *The Topography of Rome and its Vicinity* (1834) (Sweet, 2021). These were the fruits of regular travel in the Mediterranean and, from 1815, permanent residence in Italy. This article argues that the image of 'classic Gell' misses an important preoccupation of his travels and his scholarship, however: the history and remains of Islamic Spain (al-Andalus), which he and his contemporaries tended to call 'Moorish'. To do so, it introduces a remarkable notebook of his Spanish and Portuguese travels, 1808–11, held at the British School at Rome and soon to be available through the BSR's Digital Collections.³ Gell's time in Iberia sparked an enduring interest in al-Andalus that reshaped the notebook in later years. Alongside descriptions and drawings from 1808–11, he filled it with notes about medieval Iberia and especially the Alhambra, the palace of the Nasrid emirs of Granada, as well as traces of his efforts to learn Arabic. It quickly becomes clear that 'classic Gell' was also, as he put it to one correspondent, 'Professor of the Alhambra'.⁴

Gell's relative lack of publications on al-Andalus has obscured this fact, but it makes the BSR notebook a valuable source in several respects. It is unusually clear evidence of the afterlives of travel, an instance of how engagement with other countries and their histories could continue long after an initial, in-person encounter. Within that, the notebook provides a case study of early nineteenth-century scholarship, with Gell's reading, drawing and language-learning suggesting how someone could set about writing history in the period. We already know something of this from Gell's work on Pompeii (Sweet, 2015), but the Spanish and Portuguese notebook indicates the range of sources available for medieval Iberia and the uses to which they could be put. Gell was deeply interested in Islamic Spain and incorporated it into his understanding of an Islamic Mediterranean, both historical and contemporary, even though there is little on either theme in his published work.⁵ In the process, he also hints at the place of al-Andalus in early nineteenth-century ideas of Europe.

Gell's work emerged from a lifetime of travel (Sweet, 2021; Thompson, 2019: 17–30). His first trip to Greece and the eastern Mediterranean came in 1800–2, producing his book on Troy, and he undertook a mysterious mission to Ionia

² For the text of the suppressed fifth edition of 1812, see Byron, 1903–5: I, 379. Byron's original manuscript had read 'coxcomb Gell'.

³ BSR, WG[MS]-6: William Gell, Notebook 6, Spain and Portugal; <https://ipervisions.digitalcollections.bsr.ac.uk/gell/> (accessed 11 March 2023). Pagination is inconsistent, so references are to the facsimile numbers as they will appear in the BSR's Digital Collections.

⁴ Beinecke Library, Yale, OSB MSS FILE 5648: Gell to Edward Hogg [1833].

⁵ *Views in Barbary and a Picture of the Dey of Algiers, Taken in 1813 by W. G. Esq.* (London, 1815) is often attributed to Gell, but the illustrations and text are not in his style. By 1815, the title would have included his recent knighthood.

(western Anatolia) in 1803, possibly on government business. Gell began a third tour of the eastern Mediterranean the next year, having decided that antiquarian travel and writing were his best hope for an income as the younger son of a minor Derbyshire gentry family. He published the resulting book on Ithaca in 1807, when his financial prospects were further boosted by election to the Society of Dilettanti, who would prove important patrons. Thereafter, Gell would travel with his long-term partner, Keppel Craven, whom he met in early 1808 (Thompson, 2019: 14–15); in Craven's words, they soon formed 'an intimate companion & friendship', making their first trip abroad together later that year.⁶ The Peninsular War of 1807–14 was in full swing, following Napoleon's occupation of Portugal and then Spain, but the successful response of the Spanish Patriots in mid-1808 convinced Gell and Craven that the time was right to seek some winter sun.⁷ Gell suffered from gout and probably rheumatoid arthritis, while Craven's 'shattered' constitution included a persistent chest complaint (Thompson, 2019: 27, 150).⁸ They arrived in Galicia in September 1808 and headed southwards through Madrid. After three weeks in Granada, which were formative for Gell's work, they passed a month in Málaga, visited Gibraltar and moved on to Cádiz, making an excursion of a few days to Tangier and Tétouan. They were back in London for late March 1809 and Gell was soon drumming up support for another journey to the eastern Mediterranean, as well as publishing another outcome of his earlier travels, *The Itinerary of Greece* (1810) (Sweet, 2021).⁹ Instead, Gell's next trip sought another 'good broiling pot' in which to improve his and Craven's health, and they escaped the winter of 1810–11 in the Lisbon area, where Craven's connections to the British high command provided accommodation, sociability and sightseeing trips during a stalemate created by a renewed French invasion of Portugal (Esdaile, 2003: 311–39).¹⁰ The BSR notebook covers these two Iberian journeys.

Gell's best-known travels came afterwards. He led a two-year expedition to Greece and Anatolia for the Dilettanti in 1811–13, which resulted in books on the antiquities of Attica (Gell, Bedford and Gandy, 1817) and Ionia (Dilettanti, 1821; Dilettanti, 1840). The journey also took him and Craven back to Iberia, however briefly, with a few days in Gibraltar on the way to the eastern Mediterranean and two weeks at Lisbon while heading home.¹¹ Gell was knighted for his services on the voyage in 1814, when he and Craven also became vice chamberlains in the travelling court of Princess Caroline, the

⁶ BL, Add MS 63609: Keppel Craven, Diary, 1799–1809, fol. 32.

⁷ DRO, D258/50/16: William Gell to Philip Gell, 6 Sep. 1808; 18: same to same, 12 Aug. 1808.

⁸ BL, Add MS 63609: Craven, Diary, fol. 34; Add MS 63610: Craven, Diary, fol. 34.

⁹ BL, Add MS 63609: Craven, Diary, fol. 32v.

¹⁰ DRO, D258/50/41: William Gell to Philip Gell, 31 Aug. 1810; BL, Add MS 63610: Craven, Diary, fols 33–34v. Craven's uncle, Admiral George Cranfield Berkeley, was naval commander-in-chief at Lisbon.

¹¹ BM, Society of Dilettanti, Gell Notebook 1, Journal of the Dilettanti Mission to Asia Minor &c, 1811–12, fols 1v–2v; BL, Add MS 63610: Craven, Diary, fols 38–40.

estranged wife of the future king, George IV (Thompson, 2019: 31–49). Both men resigned from this difficult assignment only a year later, but they remained in Italy for the rest of their lives, moving between Rome and Naples (Thompson, 2019: 51–64, 119–51). There, Gell could enjoy a healthier climate, cheaper living and the pursuit of his antiquarian interests, which culminated in books on Pompeii (Gell and Gandy, 1817–19; Gell, 1832) and Roman topography (Gell, 1834). He died in 1836 and was buried with Craven's mother in the English cemetery at Naples, where Keppel joined them in 1851.

Amid all this travel and residence in the Mediterranean, Gell's Iberian journeys seem unlikely. Spain and Portugal are left out of histories of the Grand Tour, which focus almost exclusively on France, Italy and Greece, and we are told that travellers avoided Iberia on account of discomfort, inaccessibility and the Inquisition (Black, 2003: 72–6). Gell's long stays in Rome, Naples and the Aegean fit more neatly with assumptions about travel in the period, but his notebook at the BSR has served as the starting point for a project exploring the depth and diversity of British encounters with Spain and Portugal between 1750 and 1830.¹² In fact, journeys to Iberia for education, pleasure and health multiplied as just one part of growing travel to continental Europe after the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. The 1770s were a key decade, as peace coincided with rising determination to learn from the decline of the Spanish empire and a new interest in reforms under Carlos III (reigned 1759–88), while influential books by Richard Twiss and Henry Swinburne prompted further travel. Renewed war slowed the flow of travellers during the 1780s and 1790s, when a saturated market also saw fewer publications, but British interest in Iberia endured. It enjoyed a second, larger peak during the Peninsular War, when thousands of Britons saw Spain and Portugal in Wellington's army. The letters and journals of these 'travellers in uniform' have received plenty of attention in recent years (Kennedy, 2013: 92–113; Daly, 2013), but the British military presence on the peninsula also offered logistical assistance, networking opportunities and excitement to unheralded numbers of civilian travellers. War *with* Spain made travel there more difficult either side of the 1770s but war *in* Iberia encouraged and facilitated journeys, Gell's and Craven's among them. As Britons travelling to Spain and as civilians travelling in wartime, they were far more common than it would initially seem.

Gell's fascination with the Alhambra and al-Andalus may also seem surprising, because they are often said to have been 'discovered' by Romantic travellers, writers and artists in the 1820s and 1830s (Sweetman, 1988: 118–23; Holland, 2018: 104–5). But by the time that Washington Irving, David Roberts and others were popularising an image of Spain as a land of gypsies and ruins, Gell was drawing together decades of his own interest in Islamic Spain. He was not alone. British writers and travellers had explored the topic since the mid-eighteenth century, when easier journeys after the Seven Years War coincided

¹² Rosemary Sweet's Leverhulme Research Project (see note 1).

with rising interest in the question of whether aspects of western European culture might be traced back to Christian–Muslim interactions in medieval Iberia. The theory that Gothic architecture had ‘Saracenic’ origins encouraged travellers to examine the Alhambra and Córdoba mosque in detail, from Thomas Pitt’s pioneering manuscript (1760) via Swinburne’s descriptions and plates (1779) to James Cavanah Murphy’s extensive treatment (1815), based on his residence in Spain between 1802 and 1809.¹³ At the same time, from the 1760s onwards, antiquaries began to find the roots of lyric poetry in exchanges between Arabic and Latin traditions in medieval Iberia, the supposed font of chivalric romance. Spanish ‘frontier ballads’ accordingly became more familiar to the reading public over the late eighteenth century, included in collections of verse by Thomas Percy (1765) and John Pinkerton (1783), afforded a prominent place in Thomas Warton’s *History of English Poetry* (1774–81) and examined in context by the travellers John Talbot Dillon (1781) and Robert Southey (1797). Although claims of an exclusively Iberian origin for lyric poetry faded from the turn of the century, Spanish ballads continued to gain popularity in English translation (Saglia, 2000: 53–4, 257–9; Carrasco Urgoiti, 2009). From verse tales to the Gothic arch, both strands of thought pushed British writers and travellers to engage with al-Andalus as an important element of the European past, before its Romantic ‘discovery’.

The British did not ‘discover’ the Alhambra in any period, of course, but depended on scholarly and artistic developments in late eighteenth-century Spain. Under Carlos III, court-based writers and artists tried to incorporate the Islamic past and its built remains into a Spanish national heritage, looking to shape interpretations of the country’s ‘Arabian antiquities’. The project held ideas in tension, drawing on the cultural achievements of al-Andalus to place Spain on a par with its more ‘enlightened’ neighbours even while attacking foreign writers for using the Islamic past to denigrate the Catholic present; hence the desire to appropriate al-Andalus into a unified national history (Monroe, 2021: 27–40; Navascués, 2019; Schulz, 2008).¹⁴ At the pinnacle of these efforts, the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (the Royal Academy of Fine Arts) had been working on the Alhambra, the nearby Generalife and Córdoba mosque since 1756, compiling views, interiors, plans and details of the monuments, as well as translations of their inscriptions. The resulting book, the *Antigüedades árabes de España*, was severely delayed, with the sketches appearing in 1787 and the inscriptions only in 1804, but the *Antigüedades* nevertheless directed British writers towards the Alhambra well before the likes of Irving and Roberts. Swinburne copied drafts of its plans and translations in the 1770s and Murphy, who planned to collaborate with Spanish contemporaries, cited the book as an inspiration for his publication of

¹³ BL, Add MS 5845, fols 111–46, Thomas Pitt, ‘Observations on a Tour to Portugal and Spain’, 1760; Raquejo, 1986; Mateo, 2016; Heleniak, 2005; Mulvin, 2019.

¹⁴ On earlier efforts to see the monuments of al-Andalus as spoils of war and repositories of classicism, see Urquizar-Herrera, 2017.

1815 (Heleniak, 2005: 185–6; Mulvin, 2019: 149–50). Gell's notebook shows him going further, drawing on the intellectual products of Carlos III's court to feed his fascination with the history and culture – as well as the monuments – of Islamic Spain.

THE BSR NOTEBOOK

Gell's notebook is a beautiful object that combines manuscript text in ink and pencil, printed material and colour sketches. It immediately places his encounters with Iberia in the context of its Islamic past, with front and back covers bearing the Nasrid shield (Fig. 1), colour portraits of the last of the dynasty, Muhammad XII, on the first and final pages (Fig. 2), and an Arabic inscription on the title page. Miscellaneous frontmatter includes two printed maps of Iberia, colour sketches of Arab costume, genealogies of Muslim rulers and a printed mockery of the French occupying forces from 1808. The itinerary through Spain then takes up just over 100 pages, from A Coruña to Cádiz, before a few pages on Morocco. Gell's route can be traced precisely in the north and he gives descriptions of the people, clothing, language, customs, towns and countryside of Spain, often with accompanying sketches. The winter of 1808–9 was a difficult period for the British and Spanish armies, as Napoleon himself rolled back the summer's allied victories (Esdaile, 2003: 109–63), and Gell pays some attention to the war in his text and printed ephemera.¹⁵ The digitised notebook should therefore repay research on all kinds of Iberian social, cultural and military history, but its intellectual heart is its pages on Granada. Gell's time there would influence his thinking about Spain for decades to come, prompting later research that has left traces of the Alhambra and its rulers throughout the notebook. By contrast, there is little detail on a month that he then spent in Málaga, beyond a few plans and sketches, and his southern and Moroccan itineraries are less clear than his time in northern Spain.¹⁶

Gell's second journey, over the winter of 1810–11, takes up less room and he spent almost the whole period in the Lisbon area, hemmed in by the French invasion. As a result, his 30-odd pages on Portugal are more compendium than itinerary, including sketches around Lisbon and Sintra, observations of daily life and the lyrics and music of popular songs. The war is more prominent in this section, with the capital surrounded and Gell and Craven tied to the British military presence in the country. The pages on Portugal are increasingly interspersed with notes on al-Andalus and the Arabic language, drawn from reading in the 1830s, so not all the material here relates to Gell's time in

¹⁵ For example, a print mocking the French army (BSR, WG[MS]-6, 009) and the lyrics and music for Fernando Sor's song about the Battle of Bailén (053).

¹⁶ On Málaga, BSR, WG[MS]-6, 089, 092, 093, 096, 097, 109.



Fig. 1 Front cover of Gell's notebook, with the Nasrid shield and the Arabic name of Granada [BSR Library, William Gell Collection, WG[MS]-6, 001].

Lisbon. Amid the sketches of Sintra, for example, are coloured prints of a bathhouse and another interior, to which Gell has added turbaned figures, Nasrid shields and historical references in Arabic, presumably during his period of renewed interest in al-Andalus in the 1830s.¹⁷ The Portuguese section then

¹⁷ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 146, 148.



Fig. 2 Portrait of Muhammad XII, from inside front cover of Gell's notebook [BSR Library, William Gell Collection, WG[MS]-6, 002].

gives way to over 40 pages of dense notes on Islamic Spain, the fruits of this later research. The notebook ends with a handful of loose sketches on the same theme, mostly based on illustrations of Granada by David Roberts, as well as anomalous views of Algiers, Cairo and Tunis. After just over 200 pages, the notebook ends as it began, with a portrait of Muhammad XII and a back cover bearing the Nasrid shield and the Arabic name of Granada.

Aspects of Gell's Spanish and Portuguese notebook will be recognizable to those familiar with his journals for continental Europe and the eastern Mediterranean, some of which have been digitised by the British School at Athens and the Getty Research Institute.¹⁸ Gell's notes are in his characteristically neat hand and use his standard abbreviations, including small sketches that denote arches, bridges and other features. The Iberian notebook carries an unprecedented level of illustration, however, depicting the towns, countryside, people and animals of Spain and Portugal extensively and in vivid colours, alongside the relief maps and views familiar from his other travels. In Iberia, Gell often sketched with a camera lucida, a mounted prism that allowed him to reproduce distant buildings and landscapes with great accuracy.¹⁹ William Hyde Wollaston had patented the device only a couple of years previously, and Gell's use of it here set a precedent for his work in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean.²⁰ The Spanish and Portuguese notebook is also distinctive in its division of an average page into a left-hand column for Gell's itinerary and a right-hand space for notes, leaving plenty of room to return to his experiences in the years afterwards. The document sets itself apart from evidence of Gell's work on Italy, Greece and Anatolia, as his most sustained manuscript writing and his most consistent and colourful illustrations, but it places his Iberian interests firmly on a par with these more familiar objects of study.

GELL AND THE ALHAMBRA

Where did Gell's fascination with Islamic Spain come from? There is little indication that he was interested in al-Andalus before his Iberian travels, beyond the possible impact of a brief stop-off in Gibraltar in 1804, and – as we will see below – only a few textual similarities to suggest that he knew his Swinburne.²¹ Gell may nevertheless have discussed Islamic Spain with friends

¹⁸ Comparisons are with BSR, WG[MS]-1, 2, 3: William Gell, Notebooks 1–3, Topography of Lazio; WG[MS]-4: William Gell, Notebook 4, Roman topography; WG[MS]-5: William Gell, Notebook 5, Northern England and Scotland; UoB, DM 7: William Gell, Travel diaries in Greece and Germany, 1800–2; Bodleian, MS Eng. Misc. e. 154: William Gell, Notes on his journey to Greece and travels in Greece, with maps and sketches, 1804–5; MS Eng. Misc. f. 53: William Gell, Notes and sketches made during travels with Edward Dodwell in the Peloponnese, 1806; BSA, GELL 4534a–4534f: William Gell, Notebooks on Greece, 1805–10; BM, Society of Dilettanti, Gell Notebooks 1–3, Journals of the Dilettanti Mission to Asia Minor, 1811–13; GRI, 2002.M.16 (bx.425): William Gell, [Sketchbook of Pompeii], [c. 1830]. For the BSA digitisations: <https://digital.bsa.ac.uk/results.php?collection=William%20Gell%20Personal%20Papers> (accessed 21 March 2023). For the GRI digitisation: <http://hdl.handle.net/10020/2002m16b425> (accessed 12 March 2023). The Beinecke erroneously attributes a digitised journal of 1814–15 to Gell (Osborn d293): Thompson, 2019: 32, n. 8.

¹⁹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 019, 092, 093, 125, 133.

²⁰ The camera lucida's accuracy was a selling point for *Pompeiana*: Sweet, 2015: 261.

²¹ Bodleian, MS Eng. Misc. e. 154: Gell, Notes on journey to Greece, fol. 1v.

who had seen its remains: Craven's mother went no further south than Madrid in 1792 (Craven, 1826: I, 398–429), but the sculptor Anne Seymour Damer had brought back tiles from the Alhambra the previous year (Berry, 1865: I, 338–40) and a member of Gell's Cambridge circle, George Whittington, toured Spain in 1803 ([Whittington], 1806; Sweet, 2021).²² Gell certainly promised to 'explain' the Nasrid palace to another university friend, the Earl of Aberdeen.²³ The tiny sketches of rounded and pointed arches, which appear within the lines of Gell's Spanish account, suggest that he shared Whittington's and Aberdeen's interest in the origins of the Gothic, though it was not a major preoccupation.²⁴ It may be that Gell also followed the taste in Britain for medieval Spanish balladry, or the widespread fascination with exoticized Islamic interiors fired by the popularity of the *Arabian Nights*.²⁵ In any case, his curiosity about Islamic Spain developed quickly after his arrival in the country.

As he headed southwards, Gell saw multiplying traces of al-Andalus in nineteenth-century Spain. In the north-west, far from any famous sites, he had doubted local claims that several castles were 'Moorish', but from Toledo onwards he more confidently identified the physical remains of Islamic Spain.²⁶ The city had 'Moorish' fortifications and an oratory, though the Catholic Spanish had built over the palace, and he passed several more 'Moorish' structures as he left.²⁷ Moving southwards, he saw the ruins of 'Moorish' castles and walls at Antequera, Tarifa, Gibraltar and Málaga, where he sketched the gate into the Atarazanas market.²⁸ At Jaén, which had been '400 years under the Moors', there were 'few or no Moorish remains but their style is visible in the buildings'.²⁹ Gell also saw legacies of al-Andalus in the people of Spain. He sketched a 'Bearded Priest with a Moorish face' at the ferry over the Guadalquivir, although he only dared to draw the man from behind, and he noted the survival of names such as Zegri and Maças in the population of Granada.³⁰

Whether in people or buildings, Gell saw similarities between southern Spain and what he knew of the Ottoman Empire. His familiarity with Greece and Turkey allowed him to draw more specific comparisons than other travellers, who saw 'eastern' aspects to Andalusian culture (Jacob, 1811: 289, 309, 319). At Jaén, the ruined mountain-top castle looked 'very like a Turkish fort', the

²² Damer's tiles are now at the British Museum: BM, 1802,0508.1.a–e, 1802,0611.1.a–b.

²³ BL, Add MS 43229, fol. 350: Gell to Aberdeen, 3 Dec. 1808.

²⁴ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 013, 026, 040, 084, 089, 122, 164; Hill, 2021: 64–5. Aberdeen edited Whittington's posthumous book on Gothic architecture in France (Whittington, 1809).

²⁵ Contemporary travellers read the Alhambra through the *Arabian Nights*: DRO, D239/M/ F16318/6: Henry Gally Knight, 'Journal of a Six Week Tour in La Mancha', 1809; Jacob, 1811: 283; Sweetman, 1988: 120–1.

²⁶ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 036, 040.

²⁷ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 057–058, 062.

²⁸ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 090–093, 112, 114–15.

²⁹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 070–071.

³⁰ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 066, 085.

crenellations at Manzanique were ‘Turkish battlements’ and the whole town of Loja had a ‘Very turkish appearance’.³¹ Gell also thought that he recognized manners and customs from his time in the eastern Mediterranean. The women of Alcaudete, between Granada and Córdoba, ‘dressed like Turks’, in ‘red gowns & white shawl veils’ that resemble his sketch of an ‘old woman of Malaga’.³² Gell tended to see domestic life as a window onto a civilization, most notably in his later work on Pompeian homes, and he did the same on his Spanish journey. ‘South of the Guadalquivir’, he noted, ‘the beds are made on the ground as in Turkey, & the chairs are not in general above a foot high’, while the lattices of Alcalá la Real were ‘as in turkey’, the ‘remains of Moorish custom’.³³ Such comparisons connected Spain to what Gell knew of the Islamic world, bringing his developing knowledge of the Spanish past to life.

Gell’s interest in Islamic Spain culminated in Granada and its most famous monument. Over his three weeks in the city, he went ‘every day to the fairy palace of the Alhambra till I had every part of it by heart & in my book’.³⁴ The BSR notebook has seven pages of contemporary text on the complex, the nearby Generalife and the neighbourhood of Albaicín, which dates to the Nasrid period, as well as accompanying sketches fitted around Gell’s onward itinerary (Fig. 3). These pages describe the decorative styles and building techniques of the Alhambra, running through ‘richly worked’ chambers, ‘enriched’ galleries, ‘exquisite’ doors and ‘patterns of flowers & fancy meanders very sharply executed’. Gell also pays great attention to colour, noting green and white ‘moorish pavements’ and the blues, reds and golds of the stucco work.³⁵ He was one of the first to recognize that ancient Greek buildings and statues had been painted in bright colours, while his book on Pompeii would emphasise the Roman taste for vivid decoration (Sweet, 2015: 270–5). In the Alhambra, he paced out the courts and halls but his lack of Arabic prevented interpretation of their inscriptions; he could only note that one phrase ‘seems very often repeated’.³⁶ The consistency of hand, ink and tone across Gell’s two-columned pages suggest that, exceptionally, almost all the text on both the left and right sides dates to his time in Spain, adding to the sense that he saw his encounter with the Alhambra as a moment apart.

Gell’s engagement with the complex was highly visual. Most of these pages are dominated by pen and ink sketches of the *vega* (plain) of Granada, a plan of the Alhambra complex and a view of Córdoba mosque, which he never visited. Gell supports his descriptions with little sketches within the text, representing bricks, arches, ornamented doors, closets and floorplans from the Alhambra and plans and galleries of a house in Albaicín. These descriptions also sit alongside a Gell

³¹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 062, 072, 087.

³² BSR, WG[MS]-6, 072–074, 096.

³³ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 074, 075.

³⁴ BL, Add MS 43229, fol. 350: Gell to Aberdeen, 3 Dec. 1808.

³⁵ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 079–085, 095, 097, 114, 118–23, 162.

³⁶ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 081, 083–084.

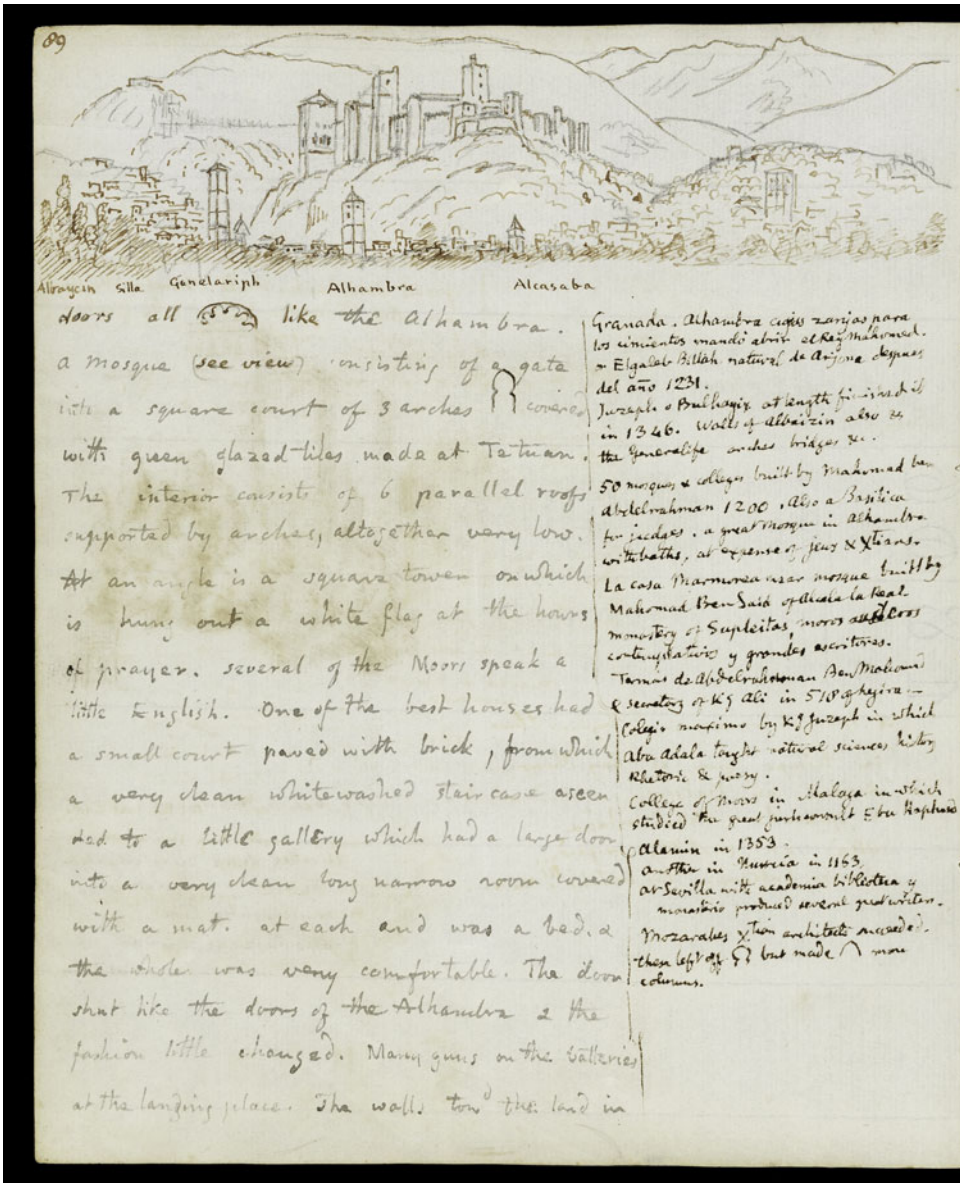


Fig. 3 A page of Gell's notebook, with a view of the Alhambra above an account of Tangier from 1808 (left) and historical notes from the 1830s (right) [BSR Library, William Gell Collection, WG[MS]-6, 122].

sketchbook at the British Museum, comprising 62 sheets in pen and ink with frequent watercolour.³⁷ Like the BSR notebook, the BM sketchbook contains plenty of material that probably dates from the 1830s rather than 1808, not

³⁷ BM, 1853,0307.655–1853,0307.719: William Gell, Sketchbook 12, [c. 1808–36].

least the imagined view of medieval Granada with which it begins and the extraneous images of Sicily, Tunis and a man in Turkish costume at its end. In between, however, the sketches date to Gell's time in Spain.³⁸ After a few views taken on the way south from Galicia, most sheets refocus on the Alhambra, with some external views and many colour-tinted sketches of rooms and courtyards. Here, Gell's attention to detail has left some of the last accurate images of the Alhambra before the French destruction of parts of the complex in 1812. The book continues with a handful of other sketches done in Andalusia and elsewhere in Spain, but it is dominated by Gell's time in Granada.

While he explored the city, Gell had by him the first volume of the *Antigüedades árabes de España* (1787). His copies of floorplans, elevations, paintings, capitals and ornaments in the bound sketchbook at the British Museum appear amid views and interiors taken on the spot, so he must have had access to the first volume in 1808–9. The BSR notebook suggests the same, because the idealized view of Córdoba mosque is taken from a plate in the *Antigüedades* and appears alongside text written during Gell's time in Spain.³⁹ There are occasional overlaps between plans and illustrations of the complex in the notebook and the sketchbook, but the two documents are generally different.⁴⁰ In any case, when Gell wrote that he had got every part of the Alhambra in his book by December 1808, he must have meant the British Museum sketchbook, because most material relating to the palace and al-Andalus in the BSR notebook in fact dates to the 1830s.

Gell was aware that the Alhambra had undergone changes over the centuries. Just as British travellers contemplated the fall of ancient Rome as they stood in the Forum, so too a visit to the Alhambra was a reminder of how swiftly a civilization could vanish. Like Rome, it offered the opportunity to lament the effects of Catholic government, which allowed the glories of the past to fall into decay (Sweet, 2012: 107–63). Gell noted that the Spanish had filled up intercolumniations and introduced poor imitations of the original tiles and plasterwork, tearing up vibrant pavements for 'dusty Spanish bricks'. They had imposed themselves and their superstitions on the monument, from the 'Tanto Monta' motto of Fernando and Isabel all over one of the galleries to the 'most dreadful spectacle' of a 'lean & bloody' *pietà* placed among delicate 'moorish

³⁸ The sketchbook appears to have been pre-bound. Gell seems to have filled most of its pages in 1808–9 and finished the book in the 1830s, when he also added material on verso pages and loose sheets. The imagined view of a festival under the walls of the Alhambra used to be pasted onto the inside front cover, where Gell's associated captions in Arabic remain, dating it to the 1830s when he was confident in the language. A later contents page, not in Gell's hand, describes it as 'an outlined etching highly coloured & gilt'. For potential sources for the view, see Villafraña Jiménez, 2016.

³⁹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 083; *Antigüedades árabes*, 1787: plate 1, 'Descripción de la Santa Iglesia Cathedral de Cordova'.

⁴⁰ Plans of the Alhambra (BSR, WG[MS]-6, 085; BM, 1853,0307.713), portraits in the Hall of Justice (WG[MS]-6, 097; 1853,0307.697), views of Málaga (WG[MS]-6, 097; 1853,0307.695) and the same view of 'Tunis mosque', with the BM version coloured (WG[MS]-6, 212; 1853,0307.717).

work'. 'Wherever the Spaniards have touched the building', Gell thought, 'it is ruined, both in taste execution & durability.'⁴¹ While he engaged more deeply with the Alhambra than most British travellers, criticism of Spanish bigotry and neglect was commonplace (Berry, 1865: I, 338–41).

Gell nevertheless tried to visualise what the Alhambra had been like in its medieval glory.⁴² He could still see the remains of gilding on the roofs, but he was forced to imagine goldfish in a muddy pond and splendid upper rooms 'now full of gunpowder'. As he would later do for Pompeii, he thought about how people must have lived in the palace (Sweet, 2015). The use of low columns kept out the sun, for example, and the north side of the Court of the Lions was half-covered with soil: 'It being a summer apartment & therefore made cool in every manner.' One gallery overlooking the Garden of Lindaraxa had 'the old Moorish Zelosia shutter or lattice', but there was not room to get by it 'for a moderate sized person', presumably himself.⁴³ Gell relied on these kinds of inference because he did not yet possess the familiarity with Alhambra lore that he would acquire in the 1830s. He was sooner able to draw comparisons with Morocco, which he visited a few months later. British travellers to southern Spain often made short trips to North Africa and saw them as a sort of time travel, since so many Moriscos – Christian descendants of Spanish Muslims – had fled there after their expulsion from Spain in 1609 (Greg, 2007: 130). Gell was still thinking about the Alhambra in Morocco, finding doors in Tangier like those in Granada, 'the fashion little changed'. Indeed, his account of the Moroccan city had to fit around sketches of the Nasrid palace that already took up much of these pages (Fig. 3).⁴⁴

Beyond the walls of the Alhambra, Gell explained its urban surroundings by drawing again on his experience of the Islamic world. The cathedral bore traces of its past as a mosque, in its circular form, and the nearby Plaza de Bib-Rambla must 'in the time of the Moors' have been 'a market as now'. At a gate into the plaza, Gell imagined that 'those who used false weights & measures were nailed by the ears ... as at this day in Turkish countries'.⁴⁵ Granada was 'full of Moorish houses', each with at least one fountain, almost all of them built around a courtyard and many with 'marble pillars of Arabic workmanship'. Some had 'Turkish lattice work' and others on the Cuesta de Gomérez, which leads up to the Alhambra, were 'evidently of Moorish construction', their jalousies 'quite Turkish'.⁴⁶ Gell was particularly interested in domestic architecture and visited 'many Moorish houses' in Albaicín. One, belonging to a painter called Martínez, had a court with columns, a fountain and a bath 'in the Alhambra style but very small', its plasterwork 'much

⁴¹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 080.

⁴² He occasionally used 'imaginative reconstruction' in his work on Greece: Gell, 1976: 22.

⁴³ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 080, 082, 084.

⁴⁴ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 120–123.

⁴⁵ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 080, 082.

⁴⁶ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 079–081.

spoiled' by whitewash. Another, the 'house & garden of a moor' by the Generalife, was similarly 'very pretty though decayed', with 'Arabic pillars & inscriptions' that Gell was as yet unable to record. His description of a stream of water running through the house nevertheless identifies it with the little 'Plan of a Moorish house under the Generalife' that he drew in his notebook.⁴⁷ Later, during his time in Morocco, he returned to his account of Granada to note that the houses 'yet remaining' in Albaicín, especially Martínez's, were 'like one we saw at Tangiers of the present day'.⁴⁸ The implications of domestic space are unspoken here, but Gell would pay similar attention to houses in Pompeii, explaining that their layout reflected the need for protection and – as in 'modern Eastern nations' – privacy for women (Gell and Gandy, 1817–19: 142).⁴⁹ In homes and public spaces, Gell read surviving Andalusí architecture against what he thought he knew of the nineteenth-century Islamic world, bringing his encounters with the wider Mediterranean to bear on the Iberian past.

THE AFTERLIVES OF GELL'S IBERIAN TRAVELS

Gell's three weeks at the Alhambra stayed with him. In the next few years, ornamentation at the Palace of Sintra ('at a distance'), a mosque at Miletus in Anatolia and some flower gardens on Rhodes would all remind him of the Nasrid complex.⁵⁰ He even recorded dreams about Granada's Plaza de Bib-Rambla in 1823, among several set in Spain, and he dreamt that he and Craven were back in the city a decade later, touring 'the Alhambra in all its glory. A great deal of it was of a purple reddish colour, whence its name, much gilding & fine domes & trees.'⁵¹ By that point, in the early 1830s, Gell was probably taking opiates for his rheumatoid arthritis and would have been having ever-more vivid dreams (Sweet, 2021). The Alhambra had begun to occupy his waking moments, too, not least those spent in the 'Court of Lions with flowers & a fountain' that he had recreated in his garden in Rome (Talbot, 2012: 24). His comment on the derivation of the name 'Alhambra' reflects deepening research into Islamic Spain and the Arabic language, as he returned to his Iberian impressions and reworked them for new purposes.

Gell had always looked to support himself by writing and his growing interest in Spain was part of a wider determination to monetize a lifetime of travel in his final years. Friends had often urged Gell to publish more of his experiences abroad, perhaps even an autobiography, and he was beginning to soften his

⁴⁷ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 082, 084.

⁴⁸ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 084. This later addition is in a lighter ink also used in the account of Tangier (120).

⁴⁹ The 1832 edition of *Pompeiana* considered domestic plans more fully: Sweet, 2015: 267.

⁵⁰ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 150–151; BM, Society of Dilettanti, Gell Notebook 3, Journal of the Dilettanti Mission to Asia Minor, 1812–13, fol. 18v; Gell, 1823: 48–9.

⁵¹ Bodleian, MS Eng. Misc. d. 186: Account of Gell's dreams, 1823, fols 2v, 10–11v, 22v, 51.

opposition to writing for a popular market, even if he remained too discreet for overt life-writing (Thompson, 2019: 147–50). In the years around 1830, he drafted an accessible history of Italy, for example, and a novel about the sixteenth-century Ottoman pirate, Hayreddin Barbarossa, alongside other plans to illustrate editions of Homer, Virgil and Pausanias, or to make new maps of Greece, Italy and the biblical conquests of Joshua.⁵² But it seemed an especially lucrative moment to return to Iberia. Since Gell's travels of 1808–11, British interest in Spain and Portugal had grown considerably with the reportage, life-writing, poetry and history that had come out of the Peninsular War, as well as more recent accounts of the series of Spanish political revolutions between 1808 and 1823. The Romantic 'discovery' of Islamic Spain was under way, too. The painter David Wilkie toured the country with the American author, Washington Irving, in 1827–8, and Irving spent several months at the Alhambra the following year, gathering materials for his book on the palace. Richard Ford, who would publish a *Handbook for Travellers* in 1845, also lived there for some of his period in Spain (1830–3), during which he was visited by the painters John Frederick Lewis and David Roberts. Owen Jones arrived in Granada the next year, beginning work on his monumental survey of the Nasrid complex (Howarth, 2007: 188–213; Sweetman, 1988: 118–23). It was a propitious time for Gell to focus on al-Andalus.

But how best to channel his work? Gell was already touting a potential book on the Alhambra to publishers in 1827, though he found little encouragement in London for anything but 'novels and plays' (Blessington, 1855: II, 53). He had broadened his scope by 1832, when he thought he could 'make an interesting work on the Arabs of Spain, interspersed with translations of some of their poetry, which would suit one or any of the annuals', though it would need 'some views of the Alhambra, to make it more interesting'. Ideally, Gell hoped to 'give the public an account of the Moors, with the Alhambra as an embellishment, as the last and most exquisite of their works'. He already had 'notes without end on the subject', no doubt meaning the BSR notebook, and thought that they 'would make a very interesting book' (Blessington, 1855: II, 67). By late 1832, Gell's friend and literary patron, the Countess of Blessington, had made inroads into finding him a publisher for 'something about the Alhambra', but Gell was already favouring his history of Italy (Gell, 1976: 94–5). His Spanish thunder may have been stolen by Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* (1835), as will be discussed below, and in the next few years Gell limited himself to planning contributions to annuals or 'gift-books', which used the new technique of steel engraving to carry cheap but high-quality illustrations (Saglia, 2006: 125). Over the 1820s and 1830s, these publications regularly included lyrics with Andalusí themes (Saglia, 2000: 300). The

⁵² Bodleian, MS. Eng. hist. c. 54: William Gell, A short history of South Italy from about A.D. 1200, [c. 1830]; GL, MSS 70.3: William Gell, An authentic narrative of the History of Jacob of Jenigawarder and his son, Ariadeno Barbarossa, of the island of Mitylene, in the Aegean Sea, [19th century]; Gell, 1976: 12. For Gell working on Barbarossa at this time, see Gell, 1976: 152–3.

countess edited one such series, *The Book of Beauty*, and Gell offered her translations of ‘some of the old Spanish Moorish ballads’, perhaps accompanied by a plate of ‘the next lady you have in an Oriental costume’. He also retained grander ambitions, however. The painter Richard Rothwell looked over Gell’s ‘book of the Alhambra’ in 1834, presumably the British Museum sketchbook, and reassured him that ‘a Moorish Annual or Album’ could be successful with good engravings. Gell imagined a series over two or three years, modelled on the countess’s editions (Blessington, 1855: II, 81, 89). Poor health soon overtook him, though, and the only publication to emerge from his interest in al-Andalus was a ‘little Essay’, ‘On the Romantic History of the Arabs in Spain’, which appeared posthumously in *Heath’s Book of Beauty* for 1837 (Gell, 1836; Blessington, 1855: II, 91).⁵³

Gell’s projects of the early 1830s had a material impact on the BSR notebook, reframing his time in Spain as an encounter with its Islamic history. It was then that he added the Nasrid shield and portraits to the front and back covers and a tracing of an Arabic inscription to the title page, which had previously just read ‘Spain 1808, Portugal 1810’.⁵⁴ He maintained his Spanish and began learning Arabic, evidence of which recurs throughout the notebook. He made 40 pages of cramped notes on the history of al-Andalus, drawn from Spanish, French, German and English texts published between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, and he drew up a table of contents for them.⁵⁵ He even inverted the pagination of the whole book, so that the notes now came at the front. Gell’s later reading also provided material for marginal comments on his itineraries of 1808–11, as his decades-old memories became the starting point for deeper engagement with al-Andalus.

As a result, the notebook offers a rare case-study in the history of scholarship, even if Gell’s efforts brought little end-product. The research practices of his contemporaries must usually be inferred from publications, but careful reading of the notebook offers insights into how historical knowledge could be constructed in the early nineteenth century. We find the questions Gell was asking himself (often literally), the reading he thought he needed to do, the ways in which he set about his research – including a system of internal referencing – and the interpretations at which he arrived.⁵⁶ These insights are especially useful because Gell’s career intersected with several transitions. His work on Pompeii, for example, demonstrates the aesthetic interests and dilettantish persona of an eighteenth-century antiquary, while anticipating the observational accuracy and domestic focus of nineteenth-century archaeologists (Sweet, 2015: 281). Gell’s interest in Islamic Spain also placed him at a

⁵³ Poor health prevented all writing by mid-1835 (Blessington, 1855: II, 96).

⁵⁴ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 001–003, 203–204. Dated to the 1830s because they show familiarity with Arabic, which Gell did not have in 1808–11; they are in keeping with dateable reading discussed below; and the tracing is from Conde, 1820–1: I, 517; III, 268.

⁵⁵ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 013.

⁵⁶ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 069, 074–075, 084, 086, 112, 120, 128, 167, 174, 176–8, 186.

transitional moment. In 1808–9, he had visited the country within late eighteenth-century contexts. His description of the Alhambra as a ‘fairy palace’ recalls Swinburne, whose enchantment with that ‘species of fairy-land’ had done most to introduce it to the British reading public (Swinburne, 1779: 177).⁵⁷ As the flow of new books about Spain stemmed after the 1770s, the likes of Swinburne continued to influence travellers in Gell’s day, before the mass publication of Peninsular War memoirs. As his use of the *Antigüedades* demonstrates, Gell also benefited from late eighteenth-century Spanish scholarship. When he returned to his notebook in the 1830s, though, he could take account of the latest Anglophone interpretations, from Irving to Roberts, and a new generation of Spanish scholarship, shaped by the turmoil of French invasion. As such, Gell straddled the transition from eighteenth-century antiquarian travel writing to nineteenth-century Romanticism.

READING ABOUT ISLAMIC SPAIN

Gell transformed his journal of 1808–11 into a working document by reading in Spanish, Latin, English and French. Some of his Spanish texts were old enough to have come from his Iberian travels, but they appear in the same passages and in the same format as notes on books that he could only have read in the early 1830s. The fifteenth-century writer Hernando del Pulgar, Miguel de Luna’s *Historia verdadera del rey Don Rodrigo* (1592, 1600) and Ginés Pérez de Hita’s *Guerras civiles de Granada* (1595–1619) all offered anecdotes about al-Andalus.⁵⁸ Pérez de Hita was already influential in English translation (1801), furnishing material for Romantic novels and histories (Saglia, 2000: 47, 256–7), but Gell turned to his original Spanish. He engaged especially closely with Luna, a Morisco convert to Christianity, summarizing and translating passages from his book.⁵⁹ Luna and Pérez de Hita both fitted within a tradition of authors passing off their works as translations from the Arabic, and Gell sometimes cites ‘Abulcacim’, Luna’s alleged source. He nevertheless knew the work to be fictional, as was already common knowledge (Monroe, 2021: 7–11).⁶⁰ Luis del Mármol Carvajal, another Christian of possible Muslim ancestry, provided stories and facts in his *Historia de la rebelión y castigo de los moriscos del reino de Granada*, which also claimed – this time truthfully – to draw on Arabic sources (Monroe, 2021: 15–17).⁶¹ Together, these texts offered accounts of the Reconquista and the 1609 expulsion of the Moriscos from a range of perspectives.

⁵⁷ BL, Add MS 43229, fol. 350: Gell to Aberdeen, 3 Dec. 1808.

⁵⁸ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 011, 073, 086–087, 097, 158, 163, 168.

⁵⁹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 073, 163, 168.

⁶⁰ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 168, drawing on Conde, 1820–1: I, x.

⁶¹ Gell refers to the 1797 edition of Mármol rather than the 1600 original: BSR, WG[MS]-6, 086, 187.

Beyond the BSR notebook, Gell kept other material on ‘the Moors of Granada’ in a ‘precious little volume’ that passed to his niece and survives at Derbyshire Record Office. The document is undated but must also have been compiled in the early 1830s, to judge by Gell’s knowledge of Arabic, his deep engagement with al-Andalus and some overlap with the BSR notebook. Alongside Pérez de Hita and Mármol, it contains passages taken from books that are not in his more extensive notes, including Golden Age poetry on Granada, extracts from late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spanish histories and dozens of heraldic shields belonging to ‘families who fought the Moors’. Gell also used this smaller book to compare Islamic Granada with Morocco and especially Fez, taking notes and sketching figures.⁶² With passages in English, Spanish, some French and a little Latin, it continues themes treated at greater length in the BSR notebook, showing that Gell did indeed have ‘notes without end on the subject’.

Gell’s work benefited from the expansion of writing about al-Andalus in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Spain. The court-sponsored project to incorporate the Islamic past into a national history was also an effort to bolster Bourbon prestige, focusing not only on their palace at the Alhambra but also on their collection of Arabic manuscripts at the Escorial. The key figure was Carlos III’s librarian, Miguel Casiri, a Rome-educated Syrian Christian whose published catalogue (Casiri, 1760–70) offered excerpts and summaries to readers of Latin throughout Europe (Monroe, 2021: 29–31). Gell may have seen the library as part of an afternoon and morning at the Escorial in October 1808, a visit long enough to sketch the palace and chat with the monks.⁶³ Years later, he certainly pored over Casiri’s catalogue, using it to survey the rich literature of al-Andalus.⁶⁴ Although Gell did not get beyond Casiri’s first volume, he engaged with it carefully and only made a few errors of transcription. He also added his own observations: Arabic books on anger, virtues and vices were like those found at Herculaneum; Muslims ‘who would not allow of music’ were ‘Mahometan methodists’; and an account translated into Spanish from the Arabic was, therefore, ‘true history’.⁶⁵ Gell’s facility with Latin allowed him to sample the extent of learning in Islamic Spain.

More specifically, late eighteenth-century Spanish texts helped Gell to deepen his understanding of the Alhambra. He had taken plans, elevations and details of the complex from the first volume of the *Antigüedades árabes de España* (1787) during his time in Spain, but he only turned to the Arabic inscriptions and Spanish translations of the second (1804) as part of his renewed interest in the early 1830s. Sometimes he copied lengthy passages of Spanish directly into

⁶² DRO, 258/58/3/1: William Gell, Extracts from various books relating to the Moors of Granada, [early 1830s].

⁶³ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 050–051.

⁶⁴ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 062, 110, 115–16, 133, 138, 178–80, 182–5, 187, 194.

⁶⁵ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 183–84, 194.

his notebook and at other times he put them into his own English.⁶⁶ Most travellers relied on translations of the inscriptions provided in published English or French tours, including Swinburne's book, which drew on Casiri's early drafts for the *Antigüedades*, but Gell's direct use of the second volume allowed deeper engagement in later life.⁶⁷

In his efforts to understand the Alhambra, Gell also refers frequently to 'Paseos'. In 1764, a team of local clergymen had contributed to the *Paseos por Granada y sus contornos*, a series of pamphlets in which a guide leads a foreign visitor through the city, dwelling on legends attached to the Alhambra and explaining its inscriptions (Carrasco Urgoiti, 2000). Twiss mocks the book for its religious credulity and Swinburne for the involvement of its authors in fraudulent excavations, but both men depended to some extent upon its stories and translations (Twiss, 1775: 244–5, 373; Swinburne, 1779: 155; Álvarez Barrientos and Mora Rodríguez, 1985). While the *Antigüedades* stalled, visitors were left without a more detailed guide to Granada's monuments and the *Paseos* were soon bound into a single volume. Although Gell could have used the book in Spain, as did many British and French travellers, the formatting of his notes – amid material that he only saw in the 1830s – suggests that he was using the more accessible 1814 reprint, after his travels (Echeverría, 1814; Fernández Herr, 1973: 119–25).⁶⁸ In the late eighteenth century, the interpretation of the Alhambra had become an area of tension between court-sponsored projects and provincial intellectuals, something more generally characteristic of the Hispanic Enlightenment (Álvarez Barrientos, 2020). When the second volume of the *Antigüedades* finally emerged, therefore, it took aim at the mangled translations offered by the *Paseos*, which had polluted the accounts of foreign travellers (*Antigüedades árabes*, 1804: preface). Gell recognized as much, taking his inscriptions from the *Antigüedades* and using the *Paseos* rather for the functions and decoration of rooms in the Alhambra. Together, the two books helped him to understand the complex and how people had lived in it.

By the 1830s, Gell could also draw on a new generation of Spanish scholarship that, while building on Casiri and the *Antigüedades*, had also been forged by the French invasion. In particular, he used José Antonio Conde's *Historia de la dominación de los árabes en España* (1820–1) and the *Noticias de los arquitectos y arquitectura de España* (1829), developed over six decades by Eugenio Llaguno y Amírola and Juan Agustín Ceán-Bermúdez. Conde was one of Casiri's successors as royal librarian at the Escorial. His three-volume *Historia* stretched to almost 1,400 pages and presented the first history of Islamic Spain from the conquest to 1492, building on advances made under Carlos III. Conde's reformist views drove his sympathy for both al-Andalus and

⁶⁶ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 089–091, 093–094, 110–11.

⁶⁷ Robert Hyde Greg relied on Bourgoing, the French writer, for his Alhambra inscriptions: Greg, 2007: 92. On Swinburne and Casiri, see Heleniak, 2005: 185–6.

⁶⁸ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 086, 091, 094, 111, 113, 124.

the French, and he may have seen analogies between improvements brought to Spain by its successive conquerors. Certainly, he hoped to use Arabic chronicles and poetry to overturn perceptions of 'Moorish' cruelty and reframe Muslim rule as a true Spanish 'Golden Age'. Conde's pro-French views forced him to spend most of his final years in Paris, but his book soon became a valuable resource for Spanish liberals looking to accentuate the country's 'oriental' inheritance and for foreign Romantics, including Irving, who were painting more florid pictures of al-Andalus (Monroe, 2021: 44–54; Saglia, 2000: 262). The long gestation of the *Noticias* meant that it was similarly a product of both late eighteenth-century efforts to counter the condescension of Spain's 'enlightened' neighbours and the more recent war against France, in this case the nationalist impulses to which it gave rise. The *Noticias* focused on celebrating Spanish classicism, though, and Gell only used the book for a few buildings and inscriptions from al-Andalus (Cera Brea, 2019).⁶⁹

Conde was far more valuable. The *Historia* was not translated into English until 1854 and, although Gell could have had German and French editions available to him after 1825, frequent quotations in Spanish show that he had the original version (Conde, 1824–5; Conde, 1825; Conde, 1854). Page references confirm that Gell was using the 1820–1 edition, while his habit of switching between English translation and Spanish quotation, often mid-sentence, show him taking notes as he read. Occasionally, Gell even adapts or abridges Conde's text with his own Spanish. His notes regularly cite Conde but the debt is greater than it appears, as many unattributed passages are also lifted from the *Historia*. Gell used it primarily for a narrative of the conquest but also for historical context, ranging from lists of rulers to the poetry and scholarship of Islamic Spain to interfaith relations in the period.⁷⁰ Much of this reading was active. Gell occasionally misunderstands Conde's Spanish, but he also suggests errors, additions and clarifications.⁷¹ Even the tracing on the title page of Gell's notebook is from Conde, an inscription from a *minbar* (pulpit) in Fez that the *Historia* reproduces and translates into Spanish.⁷² The book's grounding in Arabic manuscripts provided an account of unmatched balance and, as will become clear, plenty of material for language-learning.

How did Gell get hold of all these Spanish books? By the 1830s, of course, he had been living in Italy for almost two decades, dividing his time between Naples and Rome. Enduring connections between Naples and Spain, which had been in a personal union until Napoleonic intervention, must have allowed him to get hold of some items from Neapolitan booksellers. It is easy to imagine old Spanish texts floating around, and it is clear that Gell read even the sixteenth-century works

⁶⁹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 026, 054, 092, 120, 122, 179, 188.

⁷⁰ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 069, 159–160, 164, 167–78, 201; Conde, 1820–1: I, iv–xxiv, 1–7, 22–57, 61–80, 84–92, 98–105, 123–9, 134–5, 145–6, 543, 625–7; II, frontmatter, 108–9, 294–307; III, v–viii, 38–9, 165–6.

⁷¹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 170–1, 176–8, 201–2, 205r–205v.

⁷² BSR, WG[MS]-6, 003; Conde, 1820–1: I, 517; III, 268.

during his Italian residence. These connections must also have helped when he needed to send to Spain for other books, though they did not always make things simple. His three large octavo volumes of Conde, ‘in blue paper covers & my name written on the outside’, had cost him ‘an infinity of trouble & more than a year to get from Madrid’.⁷³ When they finally arrived, they proved invaluable.

Gell complained of the difficulty of getting hold of other reading matter, especially in Naples, and depended upon an intermittent supply of books and periodicals sent from England by friends such as the Countess of Blessington (Blessington, 1855: II, 73, 89). This scarcity shaped his research. He read Gibbon on the Gothic and Arab conquests of Hispania in Brewster’s *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* rather than the fifth volume of *Decline and Fall*, to judge by phrasing and the reproduction of errors, and linguistic evidence reveals that, while some material on the Prophet Muhammad was drawn from Barthélemy d’Herbelot’s famous *Bibliothèque orientale*, notes on Islamic Granada and Andalusí verse came from French journals and reference works.⁷⁴ Gell also relied on reviews and extracts in the latest London periodicals, using them to familiarize himself with Silvestre de Sacy’s *Chrestomathie arabe* (1806, 1826–7 second edition), which translated Arabic writers into French, and to mine articles on Joseph von Hammer’s history of the Ottoman Empire (1827–32) and Francisco de Porras Huidobro’s 1830 book on Spanish archives. Gell rarely mentions these filters and occasionally adapts their terminology, changing ‘Saracen’ in the review of Silvestre de Sacy to ‘Moorish’ and ‘Morescoes’ to ‘Moors’ in that of Hammer.⁷⁵ Such reviews were nevertheless testament to the context in which he was working, as the British reading public grew more interested in Islamic Spain and the history of Islam. With access to encyclopaedias and periodicals, it was unnecessary for someone setting out on a survey of these themes to gather an enormous library.

Somewhat surprisingly, Gell engaged with little travel writing. He had probably read Swinburne before his visit to the Alhambra in 1808, but his later research mostly drew on the Spanish and Portuguese volume of Josiah Conder’s *Modern Traveller* (1830) for a few notes on historical and present-day Andalusia. Gell used Conder as a store of British and French accounts, paying attention to passages that channel Swinburne, Dillon, Townsend, Jacob,

⁷³ Beinecke, OSB MSS FILE 5648: Gell to Edward Hogg [1833].

⁷⁴ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 167, 185; Brewster, 1830: XVIII, 277–9, 281. Gell cites Brewster’s 640 mosques in Córdoba rather than Gibbon’s 600, confirming that he read it in the encyclopaedia. Notes on early Islam (BSR, WG[MS]-6, 121, 149, 180, 200) make the same points in the same order as Herbelot, 1776: 88, 303–4, 591, 603–9, with French spellings. The same evidence traces anecdotes about Granada (BSR, WG[MS]-6, 181) to La Martinière, 1726–39: IV, 196, with a couple of Gell’s additions. Gell partially translates a *Bibliothèque universelle* article on Spanish romances from the original French (Sur les romances espagnols, 1831; BSR, WG[MS]-6, 194).

⁷⁵ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 124, 165–6, 199; *Foreign Quarterly Review* (Sep. 1828); *Westminster Review* (Oct. 1834); *Quarterly Review* (Jul. 1833).

Murphy, Peyron, Bourgoing and Laborde.⁷⁶ Though Murphy would have been an obvious precedent for Gell's interest in the Alhambra, the notebook shows no direct debt to his work. One of the few books of Spanish travels cited by name is Sir Arthur de Capell Brooke's *Sketches in Spain and Morocco* (1831), but Gell gives it an alternative title, 'Modern Moors'; he uses it for the Moroccan present and the Spanish past, but not contemporary Spain. Although Brooke contrasted what he saw as European civilization and African barbarism, arguing that both countries had degenerated from the glories of al-Andalus, Gell's interest is rather in evidence of a timeless 'Moorish' character, above all in stories of sultanic cruelty.⁷⁷ Gell may have struggled to get hold of much travel writing on Spain but he also found little of use to his work, until a productive encounter with Thomas Roscoe's *The Tourist in Spain. Granada* (1835) right at the end of his life.

There are a few traces of engagement with the most influential treatment of Islamic Granada in these years, Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* (1835). Irving had lived in the Alhambra for a few months in 1829, when it had deteriorated since Gell's day, and the *Tales* present the complex as a lost paradise, dwelling on local legends supposedly told by the families then living in its ruins (Scraba, 2010). Gell probably discussed the book with Irving's friend, Walter Scott, when Gell guided Scott around Rome and Naples in 1832 (Gell, 1957; Thompson, 2019: 133–6; Sweetman, 1988: 121). Scott had a long-standing interest in Iberian history, having placed Wellington's victories in the context of the Muslim conquest in his *Vision of Don Roderick* (1811), and he had planned several abortive trips to Spain (Brown, 2020: 37–47, 145–9). Gell even lent Scott his precious volumes of Conde, so they must also have discussed the *Tales*.⁷⁸ The BSR notebook does not cite Irving's book by name, but Gell used it for the building of the palace and the 'last sigh' of its final ruler, Muhammad XII, whom Irving calls Boabdil. The latter passage draws rather on Roscoe's paraphrasing of Irving and another summarizes sections that were extracted in periodical reviews, but Gell does include aspects that only appear in the original text of *Tales from the Alhambra*.⁷⁹ We can be sure that he read Irving, but this is a shallow impact for such an influential work, so perhaps the *Tales* encouraged Gell to direct his energies elsewhere, towards his novel about Barbarossa or the popular history of Italy.

⁷⁶ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 164–5; Conder, 1830: XVIII, 11, 256–67, 273–87, 293–5, 300.

⁷⁷ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 177; Brooke, 1831.

⁷⁸ Beinecke, OSB MSS FILE 5648: Gell to Edward Hogg [1833].

⁷⁹ Gell was evidently using Irving's pseudonymous 1832 edition, rather than the revised version of 1835, because he reproduces a printing error ('Arjoua': BSR, WG[MS]-6, 181) that appears in the former (Crayon, 1832: II, 275) but not the latter. Gell corrects it to 'Arjona', so he may also have seen the later edition (Irving, 1835: 230); equally, though, he may have been drawing on reviews with the correct spelling (for example, *Monthly Review*, 1832: 243–6) or on his own knowledge. WG[MS]-6, 096 follows Irving's topics and wording (Crayon, 1832: II, 296–9). The note on Yusef Abul Hagig (WG[MS]-6, 181) appears in Irving's original text (Crayon, 1832: II, 291–9) but not in the *Monthly Review*. WG[MS]-6, 206v seems to draw on Roscoe's paraphrasing of Irving (Crayon, 1832: I, 170–2; Roscoe, 1835: 173–5).

If Irving did most to spread a Romantic vision of Spain among the British public, the painter David Roberts looked to capitalize on that popularity. Roberts went to Andalusia in 1832–3, producing watercolours of the Alhambra for his richer clients and, for a humbler audience, the illustrations to the 1835 Granada volume of Roscoe's *The Tourist in Spain* (Roscoe, 1835; Howarth, 2007: 193–6). The latter was one of many such annuals or 'gift-books', whose illustrations often came to bear more importance than the text that they accompanied. While Roscoe's words were cobbled together from earlier travellers, the book played a key role in diffusing Roberts's Romantic visions of the Alhambra (Saglia, 2006: 125–30). These followed Murphy's elongated proportions and altered perspectives of 1815, emphasizing the connections posited between Islamic and Gothic styles, but Roberts's efforts were far more successful. His distortions also went further, creating a familiar yet sublime effect that was highly marketable to an audience acquainted with the lofty cathedrals of home (Raquejo, 1986: 559–60; Heide, 2010: 205–9).

Like so many others, Gell came to Roberts through Roscoe. He obviously continued to think about the Alhambra after Irving's book, even into his final months, since *The Tourist in Spain* only came out the year before his death (Saglia, 2006: 141). Gell had run out of room in his notebook by this point, so he copied several of Roberts's sketches onto loose paper alongside summaries of Roscoe's text, though neither source is credited. One image, which Gell has titled 'Painters View of Torres Vermejas', is not an exact copy, though on tracing paper, because it has slightly different dimensions to Roscoe's plate and does not reproduce all of Roberts's figures (Fig. 4). This and the other loose illustrations nevertheless show Gell adopting Roberts's elongated proportions, which were new to his depictions of the Alhambra.⁸⁰ During his time in Granada, for example, Gell had sketched the Tower of Comares (Fig. 5) with greater accuracy than Roberts's later version, all slender structure and forced perspective.⁸¹ By the 1830s, however, Gell's memories and sketches of 1808 were blending with new, Romantic approaches.

Although Gell cut corners in his research, he was in touch with the most influential recent representations of the Alhambra by Irving and Roberts. He had access to some – though not all – of the latest Romantic treatments of Spain, which he merged with memories of his time in the country and a range of Spanish texts published between the sixteenth century and the late 1820s, but especially since the promotion of Arabism under Carlos III. Gell was reading, writing and sketching during a period of unprecedented British interest

⁸⁰ With small changes, Gell has copied Roberts's Gate of Justice (BSR, WG[MS]-6, 206r; Roscoe, 1835: 72–3), Tower of the Seven Vaults (WG[MS]-6, 206v; Roscoe, 1835: 172–3), Entrance to the Albaycin (WG[MS]-6, 207c; Roscoe, 1835: 97), Hall of Judgment (WG[MS]-6, 208; Roscoe, 1835: 258–9) and Vermilion Towers (WG[MS]-6, 209; Roscoe, 1835: 36–7). The Casa del Carbon (WG[MS]-6, 207; Roscoe, 1835: 116–17) has greater differences but Gell's version is accompanied by Roscoe's text.

⁸¹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 162; Roscoe, 1835: frontispiece.



Fig. 4 Gell's version of Roberts's Vermilion Towers, near the Alhambra [BSR Library, William Gell Collection, WG[MS]-6, 209].

in al-Andalus and of new approaches to the Alhambra, but his knowledge was cobbled together not only from a portion of the latest work, but also from older, often second-hand, material and his own recollections. This is, perhaps, what participation in artistic and scholarly trends often looks like.



Fig. 5 Gell's original view of the Tower of Comares, part of the Alhambra [BSR Library, William Gell Collection, WG[MS]-6, 162].

LANGUAGE-LEARNING AND HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Language-learning was an important part of Gell's working process. Most of the notebook is in English, but the whole is decidedly multilingual, with lengthy passages in Spanish, regular phrases in Arabic, Latin and Portuguese, and evidence of reading in French, German and Italian. A classical education gave British gentlemen some confidence in Spanish, which was 'half Latin'

(Macdonald, 1790: 355), and Gell had been fluent enough during his travels to note differences in pronunciation, to record songs and graffiti and to use the language to communicate in Tangier.⁸² During his stay in Lisbon, he had read and perhaps heard Portuguese with enough accuracy to record street signs and song lyrics; certainly, Craven had thought the language ‘so like Spanish that it will soon be familiar to me, as far as the understanding it goes, though the speaking it is not so easy’ (Sharpe, 1888: I, 426). In later life, Gell continued to read Spanish extensively, as we have seen, and occasionally spoke it with friends in Naples (Talbot, 2012: 57).

By contrast, there is no indication that Gell had any Arabic in 1808, when his on-the-spot sketches of the Alhambra rendered its inscriptions as squiggles.⁸³ His fascination with the complex inspired him to learn the language years later, though, and the undertaking has left traces across the notebook. The document is a record of Gell’s progress from hesitant, separated Arabic letters on some pages to more confident script on others, made through repetition and attention to certain letters. Phrases also appear in Kufic script, which Gell recognized as a difficult but necessary skill because it was often used for inscriptions; around this time, he deployed it when interpreting a possible Islamic site near Naples (Gell, 1976: 145).⁸⁴ He may have taken Arabic lessons in the city, but they are not necessary to explain the contents of his notebook, all of which can be traced to a handful of books.⁸⁵ The most important – though unacknowledged – was Claude-Étienne Savary’s trilingual grammar, which gives the option of learning Arabic through French or Latin. Gell chose the latter, noting declensions and basic phrases.⁸⁶ He also used Casiri and Conde against the grain, as sources for language-learning as well as historical research, since both books use extensive Arabic type. Gell took pride in deciphering a couple of their quotations – ‘I translated this’ – and he could clearly read Arabic, because Casiri’s passages are separate from their Latin translations.⁸⁷ That Gell did not use the second volume of the *Antigüedades* in the same way, preferring to copy or translate its Spanish versions of the Alhambra inscriptions rather than its original Arabic, suggests that he read the book earlier in his research.

As an antiquary with deep philological interests, Gell saw language as the key to understanding history and culture. His education at Derby School and

⁸² BSR, WG[MS]-6, 052, 056, 123.

⁸³ For example, BM, 1853,0307.665, 667–70, 672, 674, 676, 687, 692. Snippets of accurate and translated Arabic (as on 1853,0307.677, 687, 711–12) appear to have been added in 1830s Italy, alongside a view of the Real Alcázar in Seville (1853,0307.701) that uses the city’s Italian name, Seviglia; an interior of Córdoba mosque (1853,0307.714) copied from a plate in Ferrario, 1826–32: VI, 56–7 (not from Murphy, 1815: plate V, which has some key differences); and a watercolour dated 1832, an apparent gift from the Spanish artist Luis Muriel (BM, 1853,0307.718; Villafranca Jiménez, 2016: 59).

⁸⁴ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 057, 095, 103, 181, 200.

⁸⁵ Thompson says that Gell took Arabic lessons in Naples but provides no evidence: Thompson, 2019: 147.

⁸⁶ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 200; Savary, 1813: 210–11, 253–7, 270–1, 276, 283–7, 292, 295–300, 308, 315–18, 323.

⁸⁷ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 112, 115, 180, 187; Casiri, 1760–70: I, 106, 161–2.



Fig. 6 Gell's Arabic learning, alongside Nasrid shields and the Peinador de la Reyna, part of the Alhambra [BSR Library, William Gell Collection, WG[MS]-6, 095].

Cambridge had furnished him with Latin and Greek, and his classical research also prompted him to begin teaching himself Etruscan. Other notebooks show him getting to grips with Egyptian hieroglyphics.⁸⁸ By also learning Arabic in

⁸⁸ Bodleian, MS Eng. Misc. e. 152: William Gell, *Archaeological notes on the Etruscans*, including copies of inscriptions, c. 1829–31; Thompson, 2003. Gell's approaches to Etruscan and hieroglyphics, including copying text and listing vocabulary, mirror his attempts at Arabic around

the 1830s, he progressed beyond his earlier squiggles to deeper engagement with the history of the Alhambra. He could now return to his copies of Nasrid armorial shields, for instance, and translate their mottos, writing Roman letters backwards as he worked through them word by word (Fig. 6).⁸⁹ More broadly, Gell's growing familiarity with Arabic allowed him to engage with the people, places and concepts of Islamic Spain and to trace their legacies. His borrowings from Casiri, Conde, Llaguno y Amírola and Ceán-Bermúdez include lists of people, places and battles in Arabic and Roman script ('Names of Moorish Towns K[in]gdom of Granada', 'Arabian Spanish names &c') and Arabic vocabulary on political, religious, military and architectural themes.⁹⁰ Gell had 'some acquaintance with the Oriental languages and hieroglyphics', as one friend put it (Gell, 1976: 169), an asset that helped him to understand connections across the Mediterranean. Yet, despite his linguistic progress, Gell never drew straight from Arabic writers in his work on al-Andalus: the Spanish filter remained in place.

CONCLUSION: 'THE ROMANTIC HISTORY OF THE ARABS IN SPAIN'

In the end, terminal illness prevented Gell from finishing his work on Islamic Spain. Alongside rheumatoid arthritis and probably drowsiness from opiates taken as a result, doctors now diagnosed asthma and dropsy (Sweet, 2021). Gell's declining health manifested itself in his handwriting, with particularly shaky notes on Roscoe's book, made in or after 1835.⁹¹ They show that he was working on Iberian topics right up until his death, which came on 4 February 1836. When Gell's essay on 'The Romantic history of the Arabs in Spain' appeared posthumously in the Countess of Blessington's *Heath's Book of Beauty* for the following year, she praised his 'perfect acquaintance with Spain and its language', qualities that 'peculiarly fitted him for becoming its historian' (Gell, 1836: 4). It was certainly well received in the press, with one reviewer regretting that 'the same competent hand had not traced the entire history of the Moors in Spain' (*Literary Gazette*, 5 Nov. 1836: 709) and another wishing 'that some clever writer would carry out the subject into the length that it deserves' (*Metropolitan Magazine*, Dec. 1836). Gell himself had envisaged the piece as the first in a series.

the same time. He had also learned Turkish on the way to Anatolia: DRO, 50/64: William Gell to Philip Gell, 19 Oct. 1811.

⁸⁹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 095.

⁹⁰ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 175–6, 180, 182, 185, 189; Casiri, 1760–70: I, vii, x–xvi, 144, 161–5, 169, 172–3, 178–81, 184–5, 189, 193–5, 197–8, 240, 295–6, 312–13, 315, 318, 378–83; Conde, 1820–1: III, vii–viii; Llaguno y Amírola and Ceán-Bermúdez, 1829: I, 243–51.

⁹¹ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 207.

The essay is a clear product of the BSR notebook, although Gell's hopes for lavish illustrations and specimens of poetry have given way to a drier, historically-informed itinerary (Blessington, 1855: II, 89). It proceeds along a route drawn from Gell's travels of almost 30 years previously, skipping over a 'weary and uninteresting' first leg to begin in Toledo, where one 'can safely begin to indulge in the idea of treading on Moorish ground', and ending abruptly around Jaén, Gell presumably having intended to proceed to Granada (Gell, 1836: 4–5).⁹² It carries only one plate – apparently, as Gell had suggested, of the next woman the countess could find in 'Oriental costume' – but none of the Alhambra.⁹³ Gell blends memories of travel with subsequent reading, citing several authors mentioned in his notebook but particularly Conde. 'The histories of the loss and reconquest of Spain have often been related by the Christians', he writes, 'but Conde has at length given the account from the Arab writers, which represent things as they appeared to oriental eyes; and names, as they sounded to oriental ears.' The royal librarian was 'devoted, as all who give way to the pleasures of imagination must be, to the failing cause of the waning crescent of Islam' (Gell, 1836: 11–12). Gell even carries over from his notebook a couple of his own translations from Casiri's Arabic.⁹⁴

There are notable differences between Gell's rough and published work, however. He balances sympathy for al-Andalus and its cultural achievements, evident in his notebook, with new accusations of cruelty, arguing for 'the total disregard in which the lives of their fellow-creatures were held by the Arabs of Spain'. Writing of one Cordoban ruler who burnt out a prisoner's eyes, Gell regrets that 'This sort of tragedy characterised the sovereignty of the Moslems wherever they existed', leaving him to wonder only 'that the power of the Moors should have endured so long' (Gell, 1836: 9–10). He also makes liberal use of the word 'oriental', a term that never appears in his notes, which draw more specific comparisons with Turkey and consistently favour 'Moors' or 'Moorish', even to the point of changing terms used in his source material. In the essay, though, Spain adopts 'a more oriental character' from Toledo southwards and the locals 'assume an oriental aspect and costume' around Alcaudete. After crossing the Guadalquivir, 'every thing is Moorish both in recollections and appearance': tables and chairs in Alcalá la Real are 'so low as to be almost Asiatic' – where the notebook compares them more precisely to those in Turkey – and the walls of Antequera look like 'the decayed cities of the East' (Gell, 1836: 5, 8, 26–8).

These sentiments owe little to Gell's experiences in 1808–9, but they reflect his efforts to reframe his encounter with Islamic Spain for publication in the changing intellectual environment of the early nineteenth century. Gell had travelled to the country as a product of eighteenth-century antiquarianism, both Spanish and

⁹² For anecdotes drawn from the notebook, see Gell, 1836: 20, 24; BSR, WG[MS]-6, 130, 135.

⁹³ The plate (Gell, 1836: between pp. 4–5) is titled 'Habiba'. A list of plates in the book's frontmatter gives the painter as A.E. Chalon and the engraver as W. Eagleton.

⁹⁴ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 112, 115; Gell, 1836: 24.

British, looking to incorporate al-Andalus into his understanding of a European past. As such, his early notes and sketches demonstrate the sophisticated engagement that was possible before the Romantic ‘discovery’ of the Alhambra and its history. But when Gell returned to the theme in the 1830s, he hoped to write for a readership increasingly attuned to Romantic and Orientalist tropes. The notebook shows him engaging with texts that had been instrumental in these developments, not least Silvestre de Sacy, whose work between the 1800s and the 1820s had done most to establish the idea of a distant, alien ‘Orient’ in need of recovery and mediation by western scholars (Said, 1995: 122–30). Where late eighteenth-century British travellers and readers were inclined to see Spain and its past in European terms, Gell returned to the topic at a moment when the likes of Irving, Roberts and Brooke were applying these tropes of unknowability and exoticism to al-Andalus, treating southern Spain as part of an Islamic world (Heide, 2010: 205–6). By the 1830s, Spain was well on the way to becoming ‘semi-orientalised’ (Bolufer, 2016; Andreu Miralles, 2016) and Gell’s published thoughts on the matter reflected that.

Beyond his ‘little Essay’, the lack of other publications means that Gell’s engagement with Islamic Spain has received far less scrutiny than his books on Troy, Ithaca, Pompeii and Lazio, but his Iberian notebook and related material deserve greater attention. We see anticipations of his approach to ancient Roman domesticity in his 1808 description of Granada, which he compared at the time to Tangier, and his work on Spain was contributing to his picture of a wider Islamic Mediterranean by the 1830s. His copies of Roberts sit alongside illustrations of a mosque in Tunis, an Algiers interior and a Cairo street scene, presumably taken from further reading. Gell never made it to Egypt, apart from in his dreams, but he read about Cairo and inferred that the houses there were ‘possibly like those of Granada’.⁹⁵ The final pages of the British Museum sketchbook, which were also filled in the 1830s, similarly include views of the Real Alcázar in Seville and an interior of a Córdoba mosque next to a man in Turkish costume, a coloured version of the same Tunis mosque and muqarnas vaulting at the Norman castle of La Zisa near Palermo.⁹⁶ Elsewhere in Italy, aside from the Kufic inscriptions near Naples, Gell likened ‘Persian Turbans’ on a frieze at Pompeii to ‘those of the Kings of Granada yet remaining in the Alhambra & which I with some difficulty copied there’, twenty-five years earlier. Comparisons between ancient Pompeii, medieval al-Andalus and present-day Tangier or Cairo depended on misconceptions of Islamic homogeneity and timelessness, which Gell had built through decades of travel and more recent engagement with Orientalist scholarship; as he wrote of the turbans, ‘Oriental fashions never change’ (Gell, 1976: 104). Gell nevertheless reminds us that, despite one major recent treatment (Holland, 2018: 16–18), we cannot leave Islam out of British imaginings of the Mediterranean.

⁹⁵ BSR, WG[MS]-6, 210–12; Bodleian, MS Eng. Misc. d. 186: Account of Gell’s dreams, fols 48–48v.

⁹⁶ BM, 1853,0307.700–1, 714, 716–17, 719. For dating, see note 83.

The BSR notebook shows that travel could have long afterlives, in which cultural encounters might continue for years or even decades beyond initial contact. Gell's vision of Iberia was the product of many influences, including his own experiences in 1808–11; his debt to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Spanish scholarship; his familiarity with British and other European scholarly texts, often through the London periodical press; and only lastly, in his final few years, his engagement with Romantic and Orientalist contemporaries. The fact that all this effort bore so little fruit does not make it any less useful as evidence of scholarly practice, and of how piecemeal reading and personal experience combined in the production of knowledge. Accounts of Gell's career tend to emphasize his lifelong classicism and a facilitating role in Egyptology in his later years, but the return to Islamic Spain and the Arabic language took up plenty of energy in his final decade.⁹⁷ Had he lived past 58, he would surely have produced more scholarship and creative writing in this vein, and it is tempting to wonder how he would have greeted Owen Jones's systematic survey of the Alhambra, which began to appear in the year of his death (Jones, 1836–42, 1845). That Gell published little on Islam does not mean that he did not appreciate its significance, and in its materiality, as well as its textual and visual content, the BSR notebook shows how he incorporated al-Andalus into wider histories of Europe and the Mediterranean.

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Abbreviations

Beinecke	= Beinecke Library, Yale
BL	= British Library
BM	= British Museum
Bodleian	= Bodleian Library, Oxford
BSA	= British School at Athens
BSR	= British School at Rome
DRO	= Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock
GL	= Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens
GRI	= Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
UoB	= University of Bristol Special Collections

⁹⁷ Thompson, 2019: 119–51, on Gell's final years, with Spain mentioned only on 147.

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