



BRILL



GÜLRU NECİPOĞLU

REFLECTIONS ON THIRTY YEARS OF *MUQARNAS*

In this volume marking the thirtieth anniversary of *Muqarnas*, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect on the evolution of our publications over the years. To that end, we sent the members of our Editorial and Advisory Boards a questionnaire, asking them to comment on the contributions of *Muqarnas* and its *Supplements* series to the field of Islamic art studies over the past three decades. We also asked them to provide suggestions for possible future directions, and to point out areas that may be improved in the coming years. I would like to thank the contributors, whose observations, thoughts, and hopes for *Muqarnas* have been anonymously incorporated into this foreword, which, in conversation with their comments, looks back on the history of the publication and offers some possibilities for the path it might take going forward.

When Oleg Grabar, the founding editor of *Muqarnas*, launched the journal thirty years ago, in 1983, he compared the state of the art then to thirty years earlier and proposed “some approaches to the further investigation of the history of the arts in Muslim countries.” He observed in the first volume’s opening essay, titled “Reflections on Islamic Art,” that the field in those early years was essentially a “Western” endeavor, originating from three paths:

Thirty years ago, the study of Islamic art was easy enough to define. Most people came to it along one of three simple paths. One was archaeology... Another was collecting... And finally there was the old and much-maligned Orientalism... Whatever the mix of these three preoccupations in any one scholar or essayist, the result was nearly always the same: the formation of a small group of practitioners with largely overlapping knowledge, asking many of the same questions, and using commonly accepted modes for exchanging information.¹

By 1983, the growing complexity of the scholarship and the increasing cultural diversity of its practitioners held the potential to go beyond “traditional and restricted scholarship” (although that was necessary as well) and to offer “a unique opportunity to try something else, to use the more speculative and more theoretical approaches developed in other disciplines, or to develop an entirely new methodology that could eventually be translated into other fields.”² Since the history of Islamic art was “still in its infancy,” Grabar pointed out that this heady projection had to be tempered by solid empirical scholarship in order to fill in the gaping lacunae in basic documentation:

Whole regions—Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Africa—have hardly been explored. Barely half a dozen illustrated manuscripts have been published, and what we know of the processes of creation and beautification in the Islamic world since its inception is minimal. Ideologically, old notions of iconoclasm and ornament predominate and still percolate into the manuals and surveys that form the taste of the educated public. An argument can therefore be made for a massive effort to catch up with other subfields of the history of art. Monuments should be studied and published, stylistic and iconographic analyses pursued, written sources culled for information, theories and hypotheses tested and discussed.³

In this connection, Grabar stressed the need for a widely available journal “that would provide bibliographical, and other practical information about research and thinking in the field; and that would serve as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas about Islamic art.”⁴ He also underlined the importance of considering the historiography of the field: “for beyond the traditional scholarship of information, one of the objectives

of this annual is precisely to investigate and to reflect upon the attitudes that shape our understanding of Islamic art.”⁵

It is worth highlighting the needs of the field that the founding editor outlined, so that readers may assess to what extent thirty years of *Muqarnas* has succeeded in meeting these goals. His essay provided a critical review of prevalent approaches in the few manuals and survey books existing at that time, on the basis of which several desiderata were charted for the future. Given that the annual was a publication of the newly established Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a fundamental focus on architecture and the built environment was notable in Grabar’s essay. Observing that greater attention had been paid in past scholarship to architecture and decoration than to the other arts, he speculated on the possible reasons for this preference:

It is as though, at the level of what may be called universal prestige, architecture and its related techniques outrank painting, sculpture, and objects. The question is whether or not this corresponds to some profound truth about the Muslim world...Or have the historical circumstances of Islam in fact preserved something that is true of all cultures: that the built environment is consistently the most meaningful form of human creativity? Is the tendency to emphasize the artistic history of painting, sculpture, and objects an aberration of Western elites since the Renaissance and of Chinese literati?⁶

The Aga Khan Program’s mission to improve contemporary architectural practice through meaningful engagement with historical models and values brought along with it an emphasis on how *Muqarnas* might bridge past and present. In addressing this concern Grabar commented on the expectations of differing audiences, ranging from modern practitioners of architecture, with their increasing demands on and expectations of the academic scholarship, to the general public:

The past decades have sharpened and increased our understanding of much of Islamic art, but new concerns and questions, many of them raised outside the academic world, require that we pursue something beyond traditional and restricted scholarship. We must also deal with the protean complexities of the past as they merge into the present in ways that are attuned to contemporary quests.

What these might be is less clear, but I hope that *Muqarnas* can serve the two functions of scholarly accomplishment and imaginative, even speculative, discourse on the meaning of yesterday for today.⁷

Grabar aptly raised the issue of simplistic generalizations regarding Islamic art in discourses on its supposedly unchanging universal “character.” Noting the “contemporary demands for a definition of Islamic forms independent of time and space,” he also detected in general survey books the “lurking question” of “what is Islamic” about Islamic monuments. He furthermore commented on the issue of the relation of Islamic art to “regional, ethnic, and eventually national entities, and to characteristics that grew out of climactic conditions but which have become tied to ethnic and national identity.”⁸

As a way of transcending these prevailing approaches, Grabar underlined the need to comprehend more fully the conceptualization and contextual specificities of monuments within time and space: “The study of Islamic art requires, first of all, a better understanding of what Islamic culture thought of itself and how it operated in any particular time.”⁹ This would become one of the main objectives of *Muqarnas*, which sought, among other things, to shed light on the underestimated complexity of Islamic art, as an antidote to its presumed “otherness” and easily digestible simplicity. The founding editor drew attention to the importance of scrutinizing primary written sources, which “have not been sufficiently used in dealing with Islamic art,” and stated with conviction that the available information “does allow for greater depths of meaning than have been reached so far.”¹⁰ He also underscored another obligation of art historical research on the Islamic world, namely, cultivating the field’s interdisciplinarity by setting up problems and posing questions for “cultural and literary historians.”¹¹

Grabar made several perceptive predictions about future trends in the field, which until then had been dominated by archaeologists and medievalists. He forecast the development of interest in later periods, with their linguistically more diverse and abundant primary sources:

The concentration of scholarly effort on the early centuries of Islam, with its concomitant emphasis on the Arab world,

reflects in part the earlier concern of scholarship with unraveling and explaining the beginnings of Islamic culture and in part the influence of archaeology, a technique far more at ease with early monuments than with recent ones. It is unlikely that books written ten years from now will exhibit the same bias, for the present concentration of research on later times will provide better representation for the fourteenth century onward. An awareness of regional differences is also bound to develop further, if for no other reason than that the share of sources for the later periods is more evenly distributed among Arabic, Turkish (in several forms), Persian, Urdu, and Malay than it was for the first six centuries when Arabic prevailed.

He frankly admitted that our knowledge of Islamic art had been skewed by the prevalent focus on the early centuries of Islam, to the exclusion of the last three centuries:

In the meantime, however, we have a vision of Islamic art in which the earliest monuments create the norms by which the whole artistic span is defined. This emphasis gives undue importance to the pre-Islamic origins of Islamic forms at the expense of their Islamic operation, and it implies that the contemporary world does not descend from an earlier time, but in some way still partakes of its culture.¹²

The founding editor's critical commentary on the state of the field was meant to induce reflection, not to prescribe a set formula for future studies. In fact, he explicitly professed that no single approach could do justice to the sophisticated complexity of Islamic art:

These remarks are not meant to comprise either a systematic doctrine or a method of dealing with Islamic art, but rather to suggest that the artistic experience of the Muslim world in over 1,400 years is too rich, too varied, and too complex to lend itself to a single message, a single voice, or a single explanation. No one person can master its intricacies with the accuracy and commitment it deserves, and it would be a betrayal of its history to limit it to one formal system or to one set of explanations.¹³

The nine articles that accompanied this farsighted introductory essay in the inaugural volume of *Muqarnas* displayed the cutting-edge scholarship of the time, which then continued to lean heavily toward the conventional era deemed worth studying, the Middle Ages, with only two articles on the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and another on a typological study of Berber

dwelling in the High Atlas Mountains. The volume was predominantly architectural in focus and featured just two articles on metalwork and painting. In subsequent years *Muqarnas* began to broaden its range of topics and methodological diversity, while consistently maintaining a high caliber of scholarship. This transformation reflected the exponential growth of the field from the late 1980s and 1990s onward, as well as the Aga Khan Program's unquestionable role in expanding the frontiers of "Islamic art" chronologically, geographically, and intellectually.¹⁴

As Grabar predicted in 1983, there was a subsequent shift in focus from the early period in the central zone of the Islamic lands, to other regions and eras. This transformation came about in the wake of a rising global interest in early modern and modern studies in other fields, which brought the Islamic world in these centuries to the forefront. Moreover, just as the disciplinary gulf between the fields of archaeology and art history in general was growing wider, it was also becoming increasingly difficult to attain access to early Islamic archaeological sites, particularly in Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. These developments shifted the primary focus of studies away from early monuments in the so-called central Islamic lands to countries where materials across media—art and architecture—were more accessible. The medium that seems to have benefited the most is the arts of the book, conducted in the safe comfort zone of easily reached manuscript libraries, even though publications in this field were not lacking before. The growth of research on Islamic manuscript painting can be correlated with the rise of "image studies" and the "visual turn" across the disciplines of art history, literary criticism, and cultural and visual studies. The current fascination with "materiality" and "the thing," however, has started to swing the pendulum toward the physicality of architectural monuments, accompanied by a renewed attention to "object studies." The latter trend partly intersects with the augmented prestige in the twenty-first century of museums, with their concern for promoting "close encounters" with rarified *objets d'art*.

Growing criticism of ahistorical approaches to Islamic art and architecture also contributed, beginning in the 1990s, to a change in emphasis from artistic/cul-

tural unity to variety. The typical question, “What is Islamic about Islamic art?” became marginalized in academic scholarship by inquiries that began to foreground diversity and intercultural exchange. This transformation brought about a diversification of concepts and approaches, often characterized by interdisciplinary frameworks and a closer engagement with primary textual and visual sources. More recently, however, outdated approaches and stereotypes have been revived in several popular venues, such as documentary films, exhibitions, and new museums of Islamic art, thereby exposing the tenacity of more easily comprehensible older paradigms. This signals a growing gap between the simplicity of populist messages preferred in public forums and the complex interpretations developed in recent academic scholarship.¹⁵ That gap further complicates the dialogue between past and present that *Muqarnas* has aimed to foster.

My goal here is neither to assess the historiography nor the current state of the field thirty years after the opening essay of volume 1, subjects I have addressed elsewhere. In fact, these topics have recently turned into fields of inquiry in their own right, to a degree previously unforeseen.¹⁶ Instead, I shall focus on the evolution of both *Muqarnas* and the *Supplements* series, before turning to the successes and shortcomings of these publications, as outlined by some members of our Editorial and Advisory Boards.

Both publications have benefited from the invaluable input of superb full-time managing editors: Margaret Bentley Ševčenko (vols. 1–19 [1983–2002]), Julia Bailey (vols. 20–25 [2002–2008]), and currently Dr. Karen A. Leal (vols. 26– [2008–]). Their editorial expertise and wisdom have not only assured the perpetuation of high standards but have also educated senior and young scholars alike in the tricks of the trade. The first nine volumes of *Muqarnas* (1983–92) were edited by Grabar; the tenth (1993), marking the annual’s first decade and the retirement of its founding editor, was a collaboratively edited festschrift dedicated to him. The next twenty volumes (1994–2013) have, under my editorship, aimed to maintain the founding editor’s forward-looking vision while at the same time introducing some changes in emphasis (fig. 1).

Faced in the beginning with the danger that financial support for the annual might no longer be forthcoming, I raised temporary funds for volumes 11 and 12, using this transitional period to secure permanent funding from the endowment of the Harvard Aga Khan Professorship. I also formulated new directions for the publication, and initiated a “peer review” system for submissions in order to ensure the highest possible standards. New Editorial and Advisory Boards were appointed to give the expanded scope of coverage and readership an interdisciplinary dimension, without changing the primary visual focus. To help solicit articles from a wider range of international contributors, the Aga Khan Postdoctoral Fellowships Program was expanded, with fellows being encouraged to submit articles to *Muqarnas* based on their new research.

In volume 13 (1996), the subtitle of the journal, *An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*, was changed to *An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World*, a decision that responded to debates on the controversial implications and limiting scope of the original subtitle. Earlier volumes did occasionally accommodate articles on photography, archaeology, urbanism, and vernacular or modern architecture—categories not readily identifiable as “Islamic”—and relevant monuments or objects created in non-Muslim contexts. Yet the new subtitle and call for papers in my “Editor’s Note” that year announced a further expansion of horizons, which largely defines our current purview as a “scholarly journal comprising articles on art, architectural history, archaeology, and all aspects of Islamic visual cultures, historical and contemporary”:

The substitution of “Islamic Art and Architecture” with the more inclusive category of “visual culture” seemed particularly in keeping with the broader scope and interdisciplinary framework we would like to envision for *Muqarnas*. This framework will accommodate essays on the reception of Islamic art and architecture in various contexts, and encourage historical and theoretical studies on such topics as the Islamicate forms in non-Muslim settings from the Middle Ages to the present, Orientalism, and the post-colonial critique. Critical essays on the historical development of the field, with its distinctive traditions of archaeological research, epigraphy, collecting, exhibiting and scholarship are also welcome. Along these lines, we would like to elicit occasional articles assessing the state of the field by reviewing a group of books or cultural events.



Fig. 1. Celebrating thirty years of *Muqarnas* (1983–2013): the covers themselves reveal the evolution of the annual publication over three decades.

We do not, however, wish to initiate regular book reviews, a service already performed by a number of other journals.

We will, of course continue to publish articles on art and architecture that introduce new information, documentation and interpretations. From time to time, there may also be special issues dedicated to the proceedings of conferences and symposia as there have been in the past. In addition to the traditional subjects included in previous volumes, however, we would like to increase the coverage of hitherto underemphasized periods (e.g., early modern and modern) and of regions generally considered marginal to the “central” territories of the Islamic world. We would particularly like to welcome visually relevant articles within the broadly defined scope of cultural and literary studies, as well as interpretive essays capable of engaging major art historical issues. Other contributions we would like to encourage are translations or interpretations of written primary sources capable of deepening our understanding of visual artifacts, their terminology, and the contextual meanings they embody. In short we hope to increase variety in our repertoire without radically changing the primary focus on art and architecture.¹⁷

Some of these directions were already envisioned in the founding editor’s preface, where he admitted the difficulty of realizing projected goals: “Obviously, many years will elapse before we will know whether these attempts will succeed. In large measure, success will depend as much on the response to *Muqarnas* as on the intellectual quality and excitement of the materials presented.”¹⁸ Today, thirty years later, even with the accumulation of an impressive set of thirty volumes, we are not too far removed from that initial observation.

In volume 26 (2009), I introduced another modification to the journal’s subtitle, *An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World*, a tweak meant to articulate the multiplicity of artistic traditions that can hardly be subsumed under an overarching, monolithic visual culture. Other changes include the introduction of illustrations in color (to improve visual appeal and documentary value) and greater accessibility. The founding editor’s initial wish to make the journal “inexpensive, so that it could be more readily available all over the Muslim world and wherever else Islamic art is studied or collected” was not feasible, being “an almost impossible goal in inflationary times.”¹⁹ Advances in information technology and the internet, however, have partially fulfilled that goal. *Muqarnas* volumes (except

for the last three) can now be downloaded from the ArchNet website (archnet.org), managed by the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT.²⁰ One of the most visited sites in ArchNet is, in fact, our publications. The articles are also available in JSTOR, and *Muqarnas* is now among publications indexed in the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI)*. Brill has also made *Muqarnas* available in e-book format, which will improve distribution worldwide.

We do, however, value the journal’s physicality and even its rather quaint, familiar format, which induces a sense of continuity and longevity of tradition. This was expressed by one of our board members: “I think *Muqarnas* is an outstanding journal with high scholarly standards. I love the fact that it exists in print and that, after a wait of several years, the articles are then available through ArchNet and thus to areas of the world where scholars do not have access or funds for expensive book purchases (and *Muqarnas* is expensive). I love the fact that there is such a good journal in *our field*.”

Starting with *Muqarnas* 26 (2009), another innovation was the addition of a “Notes and Sources” section at the end of each volume. We announced that this new section may feature shorter articles, news about recent discoveries, archaeological reports, occasional reviews of a group of major books or exhibitions, debates on selected issues, and primary sources (both written and visual). In the latter category we are especially interested in publishing notes on specific documents and texts (fully transliterated), as well as on monuments, objects, and illustrated manuscripts with all their images reproduced.

The “Notes and Sources” section is intended to complement the *Supplements to Muqarnas*, which have started to focus largely on primary sources (visual and textual, including inscriptions), instead of monographic studies, as in the past. This change in focus, introduced under my editorship of the series, is reflected in the last five volumes (*Supplements* 8–12), and in the modification of the subtitle from *Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture* to *Studies and Sources in Islamic Art and Architecture* (fig. 2). The main reason behind this reorientation has been the higher demand for translated primary sources in scholarship and teaching, with accompanying original texts and images, whereas



Fig. 2. *Supplements to Muqarnas: Studies and Sources in Islamic Art and Architecture*, vols. 1–12 (1987–2011).

monographs, if worthy enough, can be published by ordinary university or commercial presses. In fact, it is good news that two new field-specific monograph series have just been launched, by Brill (*Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World*, edited by Marcus Milwright, Mariam Rosser-Owen, and Lorenz Korn) and by de Gruyter (*Visual Histories of Islamic Cultures*, edited by Finbarr Barry Flood and Avinoam Shalem). Moreover, *Ars Orientalis* has recently started to focus on themed volumes, some of which are on Islamic art. These developments further testify to the expansion of the field and the healthy diversification of voices in it.

We might still consider publishing monographs occasionally, including conference proceedings (formerly featured as *Muqarnas* special issues, which have created longer waiting periods for regularly submitted articles) and festschrifts. The desire to publish primary sources more frequently than we have managed thus far (given the long gestation period of lined-up projects) has been expressed by one of our board members, a goal toward which we shall continue to strive. Nevertheless, we are reluctant to reimpose the former strict page and illustration limits on *Muqarnas* articles, as suggested below by the same colleague, since the annual should have the luxury to deviate from typical norms under particular circumstances:

The journal is the most important in the field—a landmark across its soon-to-be thirty volumes—and will continue to hold that position. It would obviously be nice to publish sources more regularly than in recent years—because they are widely used by scholars and have made such hugely important contributions. It would be good to beef up Arabic and Persian texts, especially Arabic sources....My one criticism of *Muqarnas* in recent years is its increasingly heavy weight! I remember Margie insisting on 40 pages, 20 illustrations, and the kind of argument it required from authors. Reimposing these tighter restrictions would deprive the possibility of publishing long essays, which might be better conceived as short monographs in years when a *Supplement* is not being produced.

In a highly specialized field with relatively few and short-lived or sporadic journals, the regular annual publication of *Muqarnas* (first by Yale University Press and subsequently by Brill) has been exceptional indeed. Today few would question the major impact of the journal. In fact, many of those who responded to our questionnaire characterized it as “generally excellent,” “outstanding in high scholarly standards,” and “the pre-eminent journal” in the field, noting its recognition and esteem among colleagues in related fields. One commentator qualified this widely shared assessment as follows:

Muqarnas started out with great ambition and became much more rigorous, experimental, and exciting than foreseen by Grabar in his initial notes. The problems that linger are those of the discipline. Despite the attempts to become more interdisciplinary, it is still very much a journal of art history and as such its concentration is on “high art.” In my opinion, the re-appearance of the same authors (unlike other journals in the field of art and architectural history) underlines this shortcoming and may mistakenly give *Muqarnas* the aura of an exclusive club—a qualification I keep on hearing. This is not helped by its exuberant price and limited distribution.

My “wish list” would prioritize an even broader cast of topics and geographic regions. Perhaps theme issues could be useful to attract those scholars who work on some of the “marginal” topics. I also think that the journal would benefit from a section dedicated to exhibition reviews, to be considered as archival essays. At this point in history, *Muqarnas* would be a good home to a comparative, thorough, and critical review of the new Islamic galleries in the Louvre and the Metropolitan, but also to the new wave of exhibitions on historical topics and contemporary art throughout the world. Some of the reviews could be in a conversation format between several scholars. Finally, I wonder whether it is possible to broaden the journal’s impact in the general field of visual studies, without compromising its focus on the Islamic world.

This commentator also took time to evaluate former contributions to the field:

After volume 13, new trends in the field began to emerge in the journal. The time periods covered extended from the Middle Ages to the pre-modern, and, to a lesser degree, the modern and even contemporary eras. Hence, sixteenth-century Ottoman art and architecture became a prominent presence, but the nineteenth century (also dominated by Ottoman case studies) and twentieth century (broader in scope, including critical evaluations of Hassan Fathy’s New Gourni Village and post-revolutionary Iranian architecture) also entered the repertory. This opening was accompanied by new ways of thinking about art and architecture that recall Grabar’s introductory projections. If there is one overarching theme, it is a profound consideration of the meanings behind the forms. Political readings of architecture (for example, in interpreting urban images, monumental complexes, and even single buildings) and objects (for example, coins) resulted in some of the most exciting contributions, highlighted by studies of patronage. Cross-cultural relationships (for example, between Byzantium and the Islamic world, between the artistic and architectural productions of Mehmed II’s reign and

the Renaissance, sixteenth-century Venice and Istanbul, the impact of Crusaders on Italian art, and the dialogue between European and Middle Eastern modernism) argued convincingly for an interconnected world. Economic issues came to the forefront with analyses of *waqfs*, as well as detailed research on the acquisition of building materials (a truly complex story was traced in the case of the Süleymaniye complex). Albeit selectively, other overlooked topics suggest productive perspectives for future work, such as environmental issues, exemplified in a recent article on the Alhambra. Along the way, geographical boundaries have been expanded considerably to include hitherto unlikely places, for example, Uganda. Even more importantly, many assumptions, among them the static nature of Islamic art and architecture, its emphasis on surface decoration at the expense of spatial and structural creativity, and the fixed formulas defining the shape of the cities, have been deconstructed for good.

Another commentator acknowledged the impact of *Muqarnas*, while thoughtfully outlining some possible new directions:

Beyond doubt, the most important contribution of *Muqarnas* to the field has been the establishment of an annual forum in which to showcase articles of quality that represent both innovative perspectives on established topics and original research that promises to broaden the scope of the field. It is clearly the preeminent journal in the field. The recent introduction of a “Notes and Sources” section is a welcome addition. A continued commitment to equal representation for early, medieval, early modern, and modern topics is essential to ensuring the ongoing success of the journal and its ability to appeal to as wide a cross-section of Islamic art historians as possible.

My impression is, however, that the readership is largely confined to those working in the field of Islamic art. Since many of the articles have the ability to appeal to a broader audience, it might be worth considering how this appeal could be brought to the attention of those working outside the field whose interests nevertheless intersect or overlap with our own. In my opinion, the most obvious room for improvement lies in expanding the geographical scope of the journal. To some extent, this reflects the limits of the canon as currently constituted, but the importance of the journal within the field is such that it could potentially initiate new trends by fostering scholarship of a high caliber on neglected periods, topics, and regions. The two most obvious regions to focus on are sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. There are colleagues undertaking pioneering work on Islamic material culture in both areas, who generally publish in archaeology or history journals, or in

dedicated area studies journals. Such individuals might be persuaded to publish occasionally in *Muqarnas*, perhaps even in the *Supplements* series.

Pre-Mughal South Asia would be another area to develop, since the important work of Howard Crane and Tony Welch on Sultanate architecture was pioneered in the journal.²¹ From what I remember, recent work on the Deccan (the major growth area of scholarship on Islamate South Asia) has yet to feature in *Muqarnas*. An article dealing with the transregional connections of the Bahmanids and their implications for artistic patronage would, for example, resonate with a long-term interest in early Ottoman connected histories, both chronologically and directly.

Rightly noting the uneven quality of articles, one board member suggested that commissioning occasional thematic volumes with guest editors might improve this shortcoming and help to further expand the frontiers of the field:

Muqarnas is clearly *the* preeminent journal on Islamic art and architecture, not only in the United States, but internationally as well—I know from what I hear from my Spanish colleagues that it is held in very high esteem. That said, I do often find the quality of the articles to be uneven... It is rare that a brilliant article simply floats in over the transom...[I]t is customary for the editor to commission special issues, usually built around a theme and usually through invited guest editors. I find that those efforts often generate coherent issues with notably higher-quality contributions. This might also be a way for *Muqarnas* to help expand the “centers” of the field—into other geographic areas beyond those usually represented, into later chronologies, into other themes, into areas of contact between Islamic art and other traditions. You might start by asking if any of the board members would be interested...And also think of commissioning promising younger scholars, who are usually full of energy and eager.

Another thing to be considered is commissioned review essays. The field is not plentiful enough yet to justify a full reviews section, but this might be a way to initiate conversations across the discipline (i.e., debate...), which is not something I see much of, at least on the surface, in the journal, and I think it would actually be good for it, and for the field.

A differing perspective on guest-edited thematic volumes, which we have occasionally published, is also worth considering:

The “theme” issues provide valuable platforms to investigate heady questions from various angles and through case

studies drawn from different regions and periods. I find, for example, the volume on “Historiography and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the ‘Lands of Rum’ ” extremely useful in my theory and methodology courses—regardless of whether they are on “Islamic” topics or not. This is really a superb undertaking, which identifies a set of thorny questions and addresses them relentlessly based on solid empirical research. Nevertheless, there is a strategic problem with theme volumes. They are not different than edited books and could easily be published as such. Given that *Muqarnas* comes out annually, it might be wiser to save the space for articles that cover diverse topics. [Then again, I do not know the number of articles received every year and the waiting period involved.]

It is true, in fact, that special issues have tended to create backlogs and extended the waiting period for authors by more than one or two years, given the increased number of worthy submissions that have been pouring in.²² Gone are the days when one had to scramble for suitable submissions to fill a volume, in what was a relatively small field: a welcome change that has partly contributed to the “heavy weight” criticized above. While the editors have a continued commitment to solicit works on a wide range of subjects, it is hoped that upcoming volumes might indeed feature subsets of articles with common themes, whenever possible.

Since it is not feasible to quote all the comments made by our judicious board members, I have opted to highlight thematically their assessments and “wish lists,” some of which predictably point to healthy differences of opinion. Let me start with the question of coverage. A most commonly shared desideratum is to maintain the current commitment to cover all periods, from early to modern. The commendable wish for greater coverage of modern subjects, toward which the journal has been striving, without much success, was also voiced several times. One commentator, for instance, wrote: “I think more material on nineteenth- to twenty-first-century art and architecture is needed, particularly architecture. Tentative steps in this direction have been taken, but more could be done.” As is well known, however, others have vociferously opposed the expansion of the field to modern and contemporary subjects. The scarcity of *Muqarnas* articles in this newly developing area is largely due to a shortage of submissions that go beyond descriptive or journalistic approaches.²³

While some of the board members quoted above expressed the desirability of further expanding the coverage of areas and encouraging links with related non-Islamic fields, others have conveyed a resistance to watering down a field-specific traditional focus. One colleague, for example, sees little point in opening the journal to articles on Italian Renaissance artifacts with Islamic subjects, even though it can be argued that such openings might bring *Muqarnas* to the attention of a broader audience beyond the Islamic field. Here is the reasoning:

After seeing the most recent issue [with the subtheme “Shared Histories of Islamic and Italian Art”], I thought the articles by Baskins and Pulido-Rull were of virtually no interest to Islamic art historians. They might be of great interest to historians, both of the West and the Islamic world, and to historians of Western art, but it seems a pity if more relevant articles had to be left out to accommodate them in *Muqarnas*.²⁴

It is welcome news that “Notes and Sources” has generally been received enthusiastically. One commentator wrote: “I appreciate very much the new section for the straightforward information it conveys. Perhaps encouraging scholars to submit more could expand this section into a larger and more dynamic medium for exchange. We all have so much more primary material in our files than we can use in our lifetimes...” Another colleague appreciated the differentiation “between main articles (in-depth analysis of a given topic and its history, including critical literature review) and the notes (short pieces that update us on new discoveries but where conclusions may not yet be ready).” This was one of the reasons behind the introduction of the section, which aimed to accommodate valuable and newsworthy short pieces that in the past would have been rejected. However, a differing viewpoint was put forth by one of the commentators, who prefers that the section focus on primary sources, both visual and written: “I like the Notes and Sources section of *Muqarnas*, but think that it has become something of a place for shorter articles or articles without substantial argument...I think the line should be held at introductions to unknown or reinterpreted artworks, documents, and other written sources.”

Reiterating the significance of written primary sources, another colleague has commented on the need for “more translations of essential sources for the *Supplements*: Something as basic as Maqrizi’s *Khiṭaṭ* has never been translated in anything near its entirety. Would *Muqarnas* be willing to take up the challenge to commission several authors for this? (It is probably more than a lifetime’s work for a single candidate.)” The answer would be yes, if this colleague might agree to be guest editor in charge of organizing such an important and timely long-term project. As in the past, we continue to encourage proposals for guest-edited volumes, as well as suggestions for promising projects and article submissions.

An often-underestimated contribution of the journal was acknowledged by one colleague:

Muqarnas has also been quietly doing a great service by welcoming younger scholars to the broader community of art and architectural historians. The chapters derived from their dissertations disseminate information about the work they do, while registering their names into the directory of the discipline. Personally, reading many of these essays whet my appetite for the forthcoming books and, in many cases, the results have surpassed my expectations.

In the past, however, *Muqarnas* has sometimes been criticized precisely for reaching out to younger scholars. Likewise, while a number of scholars in former years have disparaged the journal as too trendy, others have found it not enough so, even conservative.

Since the quality of an annual publication depends largely on the contributions it receives, future directions outlined as a “wish list” do not always materialize. (See the chronological cumulative index of articles from volumes 1 to 25,²⁵ which gives a sense of the range of topics that have been covered in the journal.) It is fair to say that *Muqarnas* has been, first and foremost, a reflection and barometer of the state of the field it seeks to cover. It is also our hope that it has already made, and will continue to make, a contribution to the development of that field, by providing a much-needed forum for the exchange of new information, interpretations, approaches, and trend-setting critical perspectives. As one colleague put it,

There is a remarkable breadth of approaches and materials, and while the journal can encourage new directions,

frontiers, geographies and chronologies, it is ultimately the reflection of what is available now in its best form. I do not think that the journal would be more widely read in art history if further changes were made to its content...nor would I make any in the hope of bringing about a wider and broader readership. I think the journal's content as it stands reflects the broad revolution conducted in our field since the 1990s.

Given the fact that the journal is one of the few stable venues for publishing scholarly articles in our field, I believe this brings with it special responsibilities toward differing constituencies. As such, *Muqarnas* constitutes a complex organism that will continue to require a tricky balancing act in negotiating the divergent needs, expectations, and viewpoints of a vigorously growing, stimulating field. Most importantly, the journal has never had a prescriptive "party line" or "politically correct" agenda. As a collective forum of the field, it is wide open to the entire spectrum of invaluable suggestions made above. Therefore, in celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of *Muqarnas*, I enthusiastically invite the members of our reinvigorated Editorial and Advisory Boards, as well as our readers, to be more proactive in taking charge of its future.

This volume comprises regular submissions rather than being a specially commissioned thirtieth-anniversary issue. Nevertheless, it charts some of the new directions outlined above. The volume begins with three historiographical articles, an ever-growing subject of inquiry: "A Field Pioneered by Amateurs: The Collecting and Display of Islamic Art in Early Twentieth-Century Boston," by Benedict Cuddon; "Ugo Monneret De Villard (1881–1954) and the Establishment of Islamic Art Studies in Italy," by Silvia Armando (winner of the 2011 Margaret B. Ševčenko Prize); and "Raqqa: The Forgotten Excavation of an Islamic Site in Syria by the Ottoman Imperial Museum in the Early Twentieth Century," by Ayşin Yoltar-Yıldırım.

The next three articles, while critically touching upon historiographical issues, explore the thriving subject of architectural and visual multiculturalism in particular geographies, between the tenth and nineteenth centuries. They focus on the Mughals and Rajputs in the Indian Subcontinent, the Fatimids in Syria and Egypt,

and the Iberian Jews with a diasporic Sephardic identity in Ottoman Salonica, respectively: "At the Margins of Architectural and Landscape History: The Rajputs of South Asia," by D. Fairchild Ruggles; "Method in Madness: Recontextualizing the Destruction of Churches in the Fatimid Era," by Jennifer Pruitt; and "‘As If She Were Jerusalem’: Placemaking in Sephardic Salonica," by Peter Christensen.

This is followed by three articles focusing on questions of interpretation, patronage, text-image interactions, and aesthetics in thirteenth-century Arabic, and fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Persianate manuscript painting, an artistic medium that has attracted unprecedented attention in recent years: "In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's *Maqāmāt*," by David J. Roxburgh; "The Patronage of the Vizier Mirza Salman," by Abolala Soudavar; and "An *Iskandarnāma* of Nizami Produced for Ibrahim Sultan," by Lale Uluç.

The volume concludes with three essays in the "Notes and Sources" section, which publish and interpret overlooked sixteenth- and seventeenth-century primary written sources from the Ottoman and Mughal empires: "Presenting *Vaṣṣāl* Kalender's Works: The Prefaces of Three Ottoman Albums," by Serpil Bağcı, with appendices by Wheeler M. Thackston providing the transcribed texts of two unpublished album prefaces, along with the English translations; "‘Virtual Archaeology’ in Light of a New Document on the Topkapı Palace's Waterworks and Earliest Buildings, circa 1509," by Gülru Necipoğlu; and "The Wooden Audience Halls of Shah Jahan: Sources and Reconstruction," by Ebba Koch.

Gülru Necipoğlu, Editor

Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art, and Director, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Department of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

NOTES

1. Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 1–14; cited from 1–2.
2. *Ibid.*, 4.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 1, 4.
5. *Ibid.*, 1–2.

6. Ibid., 7.
7. Ibid., 12–13.
8. Ibid., 6, 8.
9. Ibid., 4.
10. Ibid., 4, 9.
11. Ibid., 11.
12. Ibid., 7–8.
13. Ibid., 12.
14. Gülru Necipoğlu and Julia Bailey, "In Tribute to Oleg Grabar," in "Frontiers of Islamic Art and Architecture: Essays in Celebration of Oleg Grabar's Eightieth Birthday," ed. Gülru Necipoğlu and Julia Bailey, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture Thirtieth Anniversary Special Volume, *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): p. vii.
15. Gülru Necipoğlu, "The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches," in *Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to Art and Archaeology of the Muslim World in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Benoît Junod, Georges Khalil, Stefan Weber, and Gerhard Wolf (London, 2012), 57–75; electronically reproduced in "Islamic Art Historiography," ed. Moya Carey and Margaret S. Graves, special issue, *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (June 2012): <http://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/number-6-june-2012-2/> (accessed July 12, 2013). New exhibitions are critically reviewed in David J. Roxburgh, "After Munich: Reflections on Recent Exhibitions," in *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition "Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst" Reconsidered*, ed. Andrea Lerner and Avinoam Shalem (Leiden, 2010), 359–86.
16. Necipoğlu, "Concept of Islamic Art," 57–75. See collected essays in Junod, Khalil, Weber, and Wolf, *Islamic Art and the Museum*, and in Carey and Graves, "Islamic Art Historiography" (*Journal of Art Historiography* 6). See also Sibel Bozdoğan and Gülru Necipoğlu, "Entangled Discourses: Scrutinizing Orientalist and Nationalist Legacies in the Architectural Historiography of the 'Lands of Rum,'" in "Historiography and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the 'Lands of Rum,'" ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Gülru Necipoğlu, special issue, *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 1–6.
17. See Gülru Necipoğlu, "Editor's Note," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): p. vii.
18. Oleg Grabar, "Preface," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): p. ix.
19. Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," 1.
20. To download *Muqarnas* articles (through 2010) on ArchNet, visit http://archnet.org/library/documents/collection.jsp?collection_id=86.
21. There has been one recent article on Sultanate architecture: Elizabeth A. Lambourn, "A Self-Conscious Art? Seeing Micro-Architecture in Sultanate South Asia," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 121–56.
22. Out of thirty volumes of *Muqarnas*, six (i.e., 20 percent) have been special issues. The most recent ones include "Frontiers of Islamic Art and Architecture: Essays in Celebration of Oleg Grabar's Eightieth Birthday," ed. Gülru Necipoğlu and Julia Bailey, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture Thirtieth Anniversary Special Volume, *Muqarnas* 25 (2008); and "Historiography and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the Lands of Rūm," ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Gülru Necipoğlu (containing the proceedings of a symposium by the same name organized by the editors at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2006), *Muqarnas* 24 (2007). Guest-edited volumes have comprised the proceedings of a conference held in 1999 on "The Making and Reception of Painting in Pre-Modern Iran," ed. David J. Roxburgh, *Muqarnas* 17 (2000); and the festschrift "Essays in Honor of J.M. Rogers," ed. Doris Behrens-Abouseif and Anna Contadini, *Muqarnas* 21 (2004). Under Grabar's editorship, the proceedings of a conference on the "Renaissance of Islam: The Art of the Mamluks" (selected papers from a symposium sponsored by the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, and held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., May 13–16, 1981) were published in *Muqarnas* 2 (1984), while *Muqarnas* 8 (1991) was devoted to the proceedings of the conference "K.A.C. Creswell and His Legacy" (organized by J.W. Allan and Julian Raby and held at Oxford University in May 1988).
23. A notable resistance has been voiced by Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *The Art Bulletin* 85, 1 (March 2003): 152–84. For a critique of this position, see Finbarr Barry Flood, "From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art," in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth C. Mansfield (New York 2007), 31–53. The chronology of Islamic art, with its problematic omission of the modern period, is discussed in Mercedes Volait, "L'art islamique et le problème de périodisation," in "Périodisation et histoire de l'art," special issue, *Perspective* 4 (2008): 783–86.
24. The articles in question are: Cristelle Baskins, "The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, circa 1460," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 83–100; and Ana Pulido-Rull, "A Pronouncement of Alliance: An Anonymous Illuminated Venetian Manuscript for Sultan Süleyman," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 101–50.
25. "Cumulative (Chronological) Index of Articles, *Muqarnas* I–XXV," *Muqarnas* 26 (2009): 377–85. See also the "Cumulative Authors' Index, *Muqarnas* vols. 1–10 (1982–92)," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 387–90.