Muqarnas
Muqarnas

An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World

Gazing Otherwise: Modalities of Seeing In and Beyond the Lands of Islam

Guest Editors

Olga Bush and Avinoam Shalem

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This volume is the outcome of a two-day conference held October 11–12, 2012, at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut (KHI), in Florence, Italy. The conference, titled “Gazing Otherwise: Modalities of Seeing,” brought together sixteen distinguished international scholars whose work explores the varied modalities of seeing in the cultural production of the world of Islam.

We wish to express our gratitude to the KHI, and especially its directors, Gerhard Wolf and Alessandro Nova, for their enthusiastic support of our conference. We are grateful to the conference presenters for their participation and to the members of the scholarly community of the KHI for their contributions to the lively and engaging discussions that followed each paper.

We also wish to acknowledge Gülru Necipoğlu, the editor of the *Muqarnas*, for her interest in publishing the conference proceedings as a special issue of the journal. Ann Hofstra Grogg, the copy editor, and Karen A. Leal, the managing editor of *Muqarnas*, guided the volume expertly through the editorial process and deserve our many thanks.

And last but not least special thanks go to the conference participants whose work is published here. We greatly appreciate their constant cooperation and positive response during the long editing process as they revised and expanded their work. We wish to note that, although not all of the papers were submitted for this publication, the essays in the volume follow the order of the thematic sessions of the conference.

Olga Bush and Avinoam Shalem
Guest Editors
INTRODUCTION
We find ourselves yet again in the situation of the alienating choice. Let’s give it a radical, if not exaggerated formulation: to know without seeing or to see without knowing.

—George Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images

On January 22, 1817, Marie-Henri Beyle, better known as Stendhal, described his peculiar and unexpected aesthetic experience in the city of Florence: “As I emerged from the porch of Santa Croce, I was seized with a fierce palpitation of the heart (that same symptom which, in Berlin, is referred to as an attack of the nerves); the well-spring of life was dried up within me, and I walked in constant fear of falling to the ground.”

This feeling of being dizzy, of tottering and almost fainting while gazing at the beauty of Florentine masterpieces, is recounted by numerous travelers to Florence, especially those who visit the Uffizi. In 1979 the Italian psychiatrist Graziella Magherini diagnosed it as a specific psychosomatic condition that tends to afflict tourists exposed for the first time to the artistic riches of Florence, some of them requiring ambulatory treatment in the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. In La Sindrome di Stendhal (1989), she describes these patients as so immersed in specific works of art, to the point of identifying with one of the represented figures, that they lose their ability to distinguish between reality and fiction, truth and imagination. She calls this process “personalizing art.” Magherini associates her experiences with patients at the hospital with Stendhal’s autobiographical account and says: “The Stendhal Syndrome occurs most frequently in Florence, because we have the greatest concentration of Renaissance art in the world.” But beyond Magherini’s pride in the artistic wonders of her hometown of Florence, similar syndromes have been detected in other cities, including Jerusalem and Paris. The Jerusalem experience, which mainly involves delusions of a spiritual nature and seems to cross religious boundaries, appearing in Jewish, Christian, as well as Muslim travelers to the city, was detected by several Israeli psychiatrists and could be called, in analogy to the Florentine Stendhal Syndrome, the Felix Fabri Syndrome. The second one, the Paris Syndrome, seems to afflict mainly Japanese tourists.

The gaze is undoubtedly something that transcends the biological realm of optics and defies investigations of purely physical matters. It affects one’s body and mind and influences one’s behavior and, indeed, one’s way of thinking. The best example perhaps of the strong effect that it can have on the body is offered by pornography, a visual phenomenon still largely neglected by most art historians.

Powerful though it may sound, “the gaze” cannot be discussed in terms of a monolithic experience—as “The Gaze.” There are indeed a multitude of gazes, and the visual material attests to its variety rather than its homogeneity. During the Middle Ages and in the Muslim cultural sphere at least two distinct perceptual habits have been identified and discussed. As early as the eleventh century, Abu ‘Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen, d. ca. 1040), in his famous book Kitāb al-Manāẓir (Book of Optics), distinguished between glancing and contemplating as two different modes of perception. Interest in visual perception at the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–61) may well have been generated by the court’s chief physician Abu Zayd Hunayn ibn Ishaq al-Tbadi (d. 877), who wrote a famous treatise on the eye. His discussion clearly demonstrates his particular interest in the first stage of visual
experience, which he classifies as relating to the visual spirit. Moreover, he obviously accords precedence to vision over the other senses, stating, “Its [the visual spirit] most important service and that which ranks first in power and magnitude lies in the function of vision.”

And with regard to the visual spirit he adds, “This spirit of the sensitive variety, as vision is unique among the senses, the noblest of them and the most superior in quality.” Interestingly, Hunayn ibn Ishaq compares the various human senses to the cosmic elements, claiming that vision is fiery and luminous, hearing is air-like, taste is water-like, touch is earth-like, and the sense of smell is vapor-like.

Drawing on classical writings related to mathematical optics or physiology, Ibn al-Haytham was able to particularize the entire mental activity associated with vision, assigning central importance to the eye and the brain in processing visual knowledge gathered through emitted rays of light. In distinguishing between glancing and contemplative perception, he states that while the former is not yet an ascertained perception—although he does concede that it requires previous knowledge of the perceived object—the second is the result of a conclusive, extended operation and gained through the use of judgmental faculties. Ibn al-Haytham’s theory of the gaze is indeed to be understood as a major improvement on classical treatises on optics, as it conceives of the perceived image as something occurring also inside the mind. This understanding links his ideas to the psychology of vision and the ways in which objects and signs are recognized. Ibn al-Haytham may thus be regarded as a medieval “Panofsky” in the history of the visual.

Much interested in the phenomenon and idea of light (nūr) and the human ability to gain divine knowledge, Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111) proposed an understanding of vision that is also based on a clear dichotomy of outer and inner eye. He posits two worlds, a materialist one and a spiritualist one, and explains that a balance between the two is required. In his treatise on the permanent validity of the outward and visible sign he states: “The annulment of the outward and visible sign is the tenet of the Spiritualists [Batinniya], who looked, utterly one-sidedly, at one world, the Unseen, and were grossly ignorant of the balance that exists between it and the Seen. This aspect they wholly failed to understand. Similarly, annulment of the inward and invisible meaning is the opinion of the Materialists [Hashawiyya].”

This division goes hand-in-hand with the aesthetic concept in medieval Islam of the perceptible, visible, and manifested (zāhir), as opposed to the inner, hidden, invisible, and even esoteric (bātin). Zāhir and bātin in Islam are usually associated with philosophical theories of metaphysics and in particular with the idea of the sublime beauty of God. But according to al-Ghazali these terms also apply to the human perception of the visible world, for he says, “Prophets used to see concrete objects, and have immediate vision of the spiritual ideas behind them.”

A case in point is al-Ghazali’s interpretation of the Light Sura (sura 24:35) in the Koran, which indicates a desire to build a bridge between zāhir and the bātin, between light as a phenomenal entity and the idea of God as an absolute concept. Moreover, a careful reading of this verse reveals that al-Ghazali suggests classifying the idea of perceiving light—that is, knowledge—into several hierarchically organized categories that range from a phenomenological level to a spiritual and mystical level. His ideas on how we acquire knowledge and wisdom are thus fundamentally about the human processing of sensuous information and making meaning. Symbolically interpreting the different components of the parable of the Light Sura as referring to the five hierarchically organized levels of the human spirit, he explains: the first, the sensory spirit (al-ruḥ al-ḥassās), is symbolized by the niche; the second, the imaginative spirit (al-ruḥ al-khayālī), by the glass; the third, the intellectual spirit (al-ruḥ al-ʿaqūlī), by the lamp; the fourth, the discursive spirit (al-ruḥ al-ṣikrī), by the tree; and the fifth, the most highly sacred prophetic spirit (al-ruḥ al-ṣudūṣ al-nabawī), by the oil.

Al-Ghazali’s division of the human process of acquiring knowledge into five different stages obviously expands the entire act of gazing and understanding the data gathered from the phenomenal world. The sensory spirit is, according to him, “the recipient of the information brought by the senses,” and “its [the phenomenal world’s] lights, you observe, come through several apertures, the eye, ears, nostrils, etc.” The imaginative spirit is the recorder of the
information gathered by the senses. It is needed “in order that intelligent knowledge may be controlled by it…. The images supplied by the imagination hold together the knowledge supplied by the intellect.” In fact, the imaginative spirit is the human faculty that memorizes and remembers images. It is our ability to store images in the mind and call them back to mind even if they are not visible to our eyes and our senses. The intellectual spirit enables us to apprehend ideas beyond the spheres of the senses and the imagination. Al-Ghazali explains: “It [the intellectual spirit] is the specifically human faculty. It is not found in the lower animals, nor yet in children. The objects of its apprehension are axioms of necessary and universal application.” It is an interesting stage in the processing of knowledge that engages our ability to abstract, that is, to theorize and conceptualize things; hence it gives, as al-Ghazali states, “cognizance of the divine ideas.” The discursive spirit, he says, “takes the data of pure reason and combines them, arranges them as premises, and deduces from them informing knowledge. Then it takes, for example, two conclusions thus learned, combines them again, and learns a fresh conclusion; and so goes on multiplying itself ad infinitum.” What is described here is an open-ended, synthetic approach. It is not surprising that al-Ghazali chooses the image of the tree, the olive tree, to illustrate this specific human faculty, because, as he says, “Its peculiarity is to begin from one proposition, then to branch out into two, which two become four and so on, until by this process of logical division they become very numerous.” The final stage is the transcendental prophetic spirit, which is absolutely luminous and clear and possessed by saints and prophets. It is the sphere that the intelligent and the discursive spirit cannot encompass. Al-Ghazali goes a step further and tells us that all these five human spirits are lights, “for it is through their agency that every sort of existing thing is manifested, including objects of senses and imagination.” Therefore, he concludes, “Finally, the existence, as we have seen, of a graded succession of Lights explains the words of the text [the Light Sura] Light upon Light.”

Another major scholar who discussed the idea of knowledge as related to light and, more important, the notion of physical observation (irşād jismānī) as compared to spiritual observation (irşād rūḥānī) is Shihab al-Din Yahya b. Habash b. Amirak al-Suhrawardi (executed in Aleppo in 1191 and therefore also known as al-Maqtul). Suhrawardi defines the epistemological process as made up of several stages. The first stage involves the subject, the beholder (that is, the philosopher), and demands specific activity that results in a particular physical and mental condition. In the second stage, light—that is, knowledge—will enter the subject’s being and establish itself within him to form the specific basis for true science. The latter process forms the third stage and involves the subject’s discursive spirit. The experience is then assigned a place and can be later deduced. The final stage consists in writing down these experienced illuminations (ishrāq). As Hossein Ziai says, Suhrawardi’s theory marks “a transition from the mental approach to knowledge to the approach that emphasizes direct ‘vision’ of essences of real things and insists that knowledge is valid only if the objects are ‘sensed,’ seen, or experienced.” What he provides us with is, in other words, an ontologically based epistemological theory; according to him, the real and the living creatures that exist, or existed, are the objects of our perception that are seen, sensed, and experienced. Sight (mushāhada) is the actual encounter between the seeing subject and the object seen. Suhrawardi places this mode of mushāhada above predicated knowledge and argues that it serves as the foundation by which the certitude of knowledge is established. Idrāk ḥissī, or sense perception, is thus seen as immediate and distinguished from the idrāk ‘aqīlī, or intellectual perception.

Hence it seems that in medieval Islam perception could be dissected and, indeed, divided into at least four levels, ranging from its first sensory stage to its fourth discursive stage. In the period from 1000 until about 1200, the experience of light obviously fascinated major philosophers and theologians of the Muslim world, leading them to link it to the question of human perception and the acquisition of knowledge.

The first stage pointed out by all these medieval scholars as the specific moment of the sensed gaze, in which a first connection is established between subject and object in an immediate experience, is what sparked the idea for the conference “Gazing Otherwise:
Modalities of Seeing," held in Florence, at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz—Max-Planck-Institut, in October 2012. Astonishment (ta`ajjub) and amazement (muta`ajjib) were the points of departure for the subsequent analysis and expansion of concepts that informed this conference.33

Art history as a discipline has focused on vision as the main tool for gathering knowledge. However, a shift in scholarly interests occurred in the context of the so-called iconic turn and the establishment of the field of visual studies within art history departments. Various new avenues were explored, including the investigation of the bioneurological processes underlying the gaze and its interaction with the body, the mechanics of instruments that enhance vision, and the methods of rendering the phenomenal world into aesthetic expressions and imagery. It almost seemed that art history could be renamed “history of gazing.” But these new areas share basic Western conceptions of the gaze with more traditional approaches to art history (for example, the scientific, philosophical, and artistic dimensions of Renaissance perspective) that have also found their way into the study of Islamic art. The historicizing of the gaze in the context of art history in general and in the arts of Islam in particular may well be called for. Not surprisingly, Heinrich Wölfflin wrote at the very beginning of the last century, in his introduction to Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe (1915), “The mode of vision, or let us say, of imaginative beholding, is not from the outset and everywhere the same, but, like every manifestation of life, has its development.”34 Art history is therefore Anschauungsgeschichte (the history of beholding).35

The conference was aimed at examining the gaze and the aesthetic experience of the beholder as they are constructed, depicted, and theorized within the culture-specific frameworks pertinent to the field of Islamic studies, through approaches developed in the fields of art history, visual culture, and anthropology. Within the broader categories of the functions, constructions, and limits of the gaze, it intended to explore, among others, the following topics: (1) astonishment, the overwhelming of the eye at the first encounter with an object and the embodiment of vision at the interface with multisensory experience; (2) the empirical eye as a scientific tool and its impact on artistic perception and production, and as a concept in the historiography of the phenomenon of sight and the acquisition of knowledge; (3) the directing of the gaze in its various constructions, including political, social, and gender manipulations; (4) the mind’s eye and the “meta-image” in imagination, fantasy, and dreams; the poetic tropes of image-making; (5) the visualization of the invisible, concealing and revealing in the expressions of the sacred and the mundane; and (6) the repositioning of the gaze in the colonial and postcolonial discourse.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, what interested me most was the particular first moment of visual interaction between subject and object, and that prompted the study of the gaze for this conference. It is the very moment of the beholder’s discovery of his or her object of observation, the moment in which an invisible cord binds the beholder to a specific work of art and calls him or her to stop and to concentrate and observe a single work. While Olga Bush in her introduction focuses mainly on the capability of an object of art to dictate and convey a specific code of behavior, mode of thinking, and even ideas and feelings—in short, on the agency of the art object—my view of this moment focuses entirely on the mind of the beholder. I would like to draw attention to this particular cognitive and, indeed, emotional moment that creates a bond between the beholder and a specific work of art. This moment of the gaze embodies the entire Weltanschauung of the beholder and his Zeitgeist, because, as Wölfflin clearly cautioned us: “It goes without saying that seeing is not a mere mechanical act, but rather always emotionally contingent. A new meaning of the world crystallizes in each new mode of seeing.”36

I would like to illustrate this point with a specific image excavated by Ernst Herzfeld in Iraq: a fragment of a wall painting, a fresco, from the ninth-century Abbasid city of Samarra (fig. 1). It is, in fact, a drawing made up of relatively thick black lines that point to an utterly confident artistic hand. With just a few lines—quick, sketchy, and resolute—the artisan succeeded in drawing a human face. A continuous curved line forms the contour of the face. Several other lines mark the neck and the shoulders. Within the oval face, a few lines suggest slightly curved, thick eyebrows, wide-open almond-shaped eyes, and a straight nose. Two short scores,
In European art history this moment of freezing was largely discussed as a moment of amazement. In a brilliant article titled “I Wonder: A Short History of Amazement,” John Onians explains this sensory experience in anthropological, or rather Darwinistic, evolutionary terms. Drawing mainly on Edmund Burke and Charles Darwin, astonishment is defined as a fundamental category of a universal aesthetic experience expressed by the eye and mouth being opened wide and the eyebrows being raised. Darwin, in his analysis of this particular expression (fig. 2)—the raising of the eyebrows and the opening of the eyes—addresses astonishment as a result of either negative or positive experience. The positive one, which could also be defined as admiration, is associated with pleasure, whereas the negative one involves fear and anxiety. Either way, the changes in the expression on the face allow for better vision and breathing and involve essential behaviors and adaptations favoring survival. Astonishment is, according to Onians, “a fundamental adaptation which enhances the likelihood of survival.” And he continues, “The most obvious
situations in which survival is at risk are when there is danger of attack or when there is the need for food or for a mate. In fact, the gaze becomes intense, forceful, and focused, and all attention is given to the object of the gaze. The astonished gaze can be interpreted as the first act of learning, controlling, and taming the marvel. The beholder tries to understand, to consume, and to digest the object of observation.

In Islamic art there is yet another gesture that seems to signify this moment of amazement. This particular gesture, or rather iconographic motif, is frequently known as biting one’s finger. It appears mainly in Persian and Ottoman miniatures. The motif of a forefinger placed to the side of the mouth has a long tradition. J. J. Tikkanen, in his corpus study, *Zwei Gebärden mit dem Zeigefinger* (Two Gestures with the Pointer Finger), traced it back to ancient times, particularly to the image of Harpocrates. This Ptolemaic Greek deity is a syncretic Pharaonic-Hellenistic god adapted from the Egyptian child god Horus, one of the ancient and most important deities of Pharaonic Egypt. It is usually depicted as a standing figure raising one hand toward his head and placing his forefinger directly on his mouth (fig. 3). This Hellenized Horus god was much venerated in Alexandria after the arrival of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. The gesture refers to his role as the god of silence, the pointer finger on his mouth obviously suggesting that no words can be spoken. Indeed, the specific motif in Islamic art also hints at the particular facial expression of being wordless.

A prime example of this notion of being amazed can be found in a relatively large illustrated page that was most likely part of a mid-sixteenth-century *Falnāma* from Shiraz (fig. 4). It was acquired in Paris in 1942 and is at present in the collection of the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin. It depicts the story of the miracle of the camel from the Koran, in the Heights Sura (sura 7:73–78). According to this story, the prophet Salih was asked by the king of the Thamud tribe to present the unbelievers with a miracle, with the hope of convincing them to abandon their idols and accept Allah. To the astonishment of the unbelievers of the Thamud tribe, a rocky mountain was then miraculously transformed into a she-camel and her young. This miracle was followed by a debate about whether to accept Salih’s monotheistic prophecy; in the end the tribe decided not to accept it. The scene is rendered in amazing detail. The Prophet Salih appears at the center. He raises his hands, as if in prayer, apparently praising God for this miraculous divine manifestation on earth. A group of five figures appear behind Salih. They seem to illustrate the hesitation and indecision among the tribe of Thamud. In fact, their hands point in different directions, suggesting a lively discussion, as can be seen, for
Fig. 4. The miracle of the camel. From a *Fālnāma*, Shiraz, mid-sixteenth century, 59.5 cm (height) × 45 cm (width). Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, inv. no. I. 6945. (Photo: Reinhard Saczewski)
example, in the group of three figures at the top right corner of this painting. Two other figures at the top left corner are more suspicious of this miracle, and one of them touches the rock with both hands as if to examine the miracle’s physical and tangible aspects. The five figures portray different states of mind, from puzzlement and perplexity to recognition and belief. The two figures in the first row seem to illustrate, as if in a slow motion, two stages in the movement of the hand toward the mouth and the biting of the forefinger. The two other figures in the back row stare at the miracle, and an expression of deep devotion spreads across their faces. One of them silently rests his hand on the upper shoulder of his companion, as if expressing fear and looking for support from his friend. The other figure shows total devotion. His right hand is raised in a prayer and praise gesture, similar to the hands of the Prophet Salih. At any rate, the figure clearly biting his finger appears thoroughly amazed: his eyebrows are raised and tensely contracted at his forehead, just above his nose.

The varied expressions depicted in this Persian illustration remind us of Tamim al-Dari, one of the Prophet’s companions, and his encounter with the black-horned jinni. It is related that Tamim was so amazed that he lost his mind (went insane) and was no longer able to speak (dahasha wa-kharaja min ‘aqlihi wa-lam yaqdir ‘ala ‘l-kalām). Indeed, words usually signify the desire to understand images or at least to control them within the scope of human understanding. Tamim’s particular state demonstrates the superiority of the image over the word because, for while his eye is able to grasp the bizarre image of the jinni, his mind is unable to comprehend it, and therefore he is left speechless.

It is quite interesting that, in the pictorial world of Islam, the biting of the finger rather than the Darwinistic state of fear, with mouth open and eyebrows raised, turns out to be the common symbol for amazement. It is the urge to feel physical pain that serves here to distinguish reality from dream. Sensing pain clearly indicates to the amazed beholder that he is awake and that what he sees does, indeed, exist. Thus, the famous scene of the banquet of Potiphar’s wife, in which women amazed by the beauty of Yusuf cut their fingers with sharp knives yet feel no pain, underscores the astounding beauty of the young Yusuf: the aesthetic experience in the face of his beauty exceeds even the ability to feel pain. This is a particular, perhaps ecstatic, state of aesthetic experience in which physical pain is not felt and no longer serves to indicate the difference between life and fantasy.

Yet whereas the depiction of amazement in European art emphasizes the moment of being petrified and paralyzed as a preparatory stage, just before reacting, either defensively or aggressively, to the unknown marvel, the bitten of fingers suggests perplexity or hesitation, a suspended state of mind, indeed a pause to rethink the unknown. It is a particular stage in which the beholder is held between seeing and comprehending, that is, between idrāk ḥissī and idrāk ‘aqli. The finger gesture thus suggests a reflective gaze, a reconsideration of the unknown and its place in the visual archive of our mind. The following description of the beholder’s reaction in front of the pyramids, which is to be found at the very end of al-Maqrizi’s (d. 1442) account on the pyramids, may explain the specific gesture—or, indeed, state of mind—best: “In the heart of the man who gazes at (the pyramids) for understanding their essence, many thoughts are awaken, thoughts which cause one to bite one’s fingers’ tips [tarf banānihi].”

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NOTES

1. The epigraph is from George Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 140.
4. Graziella Magherini, interview by Maria Barnas, “Confrontations: An Interview with Florentine Psychiartist Graziella...


11. Ibid., 27.

12. Ibid., 28.

13. Ibid., 37.


17. Ibid., 80.


20. Ibid., 84.

21. Ibid., 85.

22. Ibid., 82.

23. Ibid., 85.

24. Ibid., 82.

25. Ibid., 85.

26. Ibid., 84.


42. Jens Kröger, ed., Islamische Kunst in Berliner Sammlungen (Berlin: Parthas, 2004), 102, fig. 81.


44. It could be argued that self-flagellation as part of mourning rituals likewise involves a desire of mourner to return back to reality by inflicting pain on his or her body, especially in cases in which an intense state of empathy with the object of mourning causes the mourner to lose his or her link to actual existence. In this sense, flagellation suggests empathy and illusion but at the same time a turning point toward reality.

Since Edward Said’s groundbreaking work on orientalism recognizes “the West” as an ideological construct rather than as an impermeable geopolitical and cultural boundary, the distinction between Western and non-Western art continues to have institutional weight in the practice of art history. In that context, one finds some work in visual culture that extends Western theories of the gaze to non-Western art—for example, studies by W. J. T. Mitchell, Norman Bryson, and Nicholas Mirzoeff—but one may state unhesitatingly that theories of the gaze familiar to other areas of art history have as yet had limited impact on the study of Islamic art.

The most significant contribution in this direction was made in an interdisciplinary conference of Islamicists, whose proceedings were published under the title “Mapping the Gaze: Considerations from the History of Arab Civilization.” Aziz Al-Azmeh offered there a challenging summary of the corresponding research agenda:

What needs to be mapped, on reflection, is not only the gaze and the frames it freezes, but also the glance, the visual or visible index, visual practices overall, metaphors and figures of visual practice and of its organ which has a greater involvement with the body and with its surroundings ... and, finally to gesture towards the outward and inward eyes, two eyes, one located on the visible face and the other, according to Arabic usage, in the “heart”, veiled by the visible body. Both of these are equally organs of perception whose relationship goes beyond the contrast of the ordinary and the extraordinary or uncanny, and reaches into the very structure [of] being, in which the visible and the invisible are both equally present.

In gathering a new group of Islamicists to discuss the gaze, then, for the conference titled “Gazing Otherwise: Modalities of Seeing,” we took the theoretical...
developments in the study of Western art as a provocation and anticipated two fundamental lines of inquiry in response. First, we thought Islamicists might return to Lacan and Michel Foucault, Laura Mulvey, and Martin Jay for theoretically informed approaches to their familiar objects of study. Second, we thought Islamicists might draw upon the cultural contexts, philosophical traditions, and visual evidence of their own field to speak of “gazing otherwise.” It is this second approach that proved to be the prevalent mode of inquiry in the papers delivered at our conference in Florence and in the more fully elaborated texts collected here. In the remainder of this introduction I will briefly illustrate the latter approach, pointing to the initial bifurcation and to at least one of its implications.

Like semiotic theory, which, in any variety, assumes a sender and receiver of the message, theories of visibility generally begin with the poles of the subject and the object of the gaze. In his part of the introduction, Avi-noam Shalem concentrates on the pole of the subject; I will concentrate on the object. Or more precisely, in taking up the agency of objects—a subject explored in the art-historical work of Aby Warburg and developed by the anthropologist Alfred Gell—I will turn to Islamic art for a base upon which to reconsider the status of the object in the formation of social interactions through the gaze.

I take as my theoretical source—that is, an exemplary articulation of a certain understanding of the gaze—a brief poem by Ibn al-Khatib, a prolific fourteenth-century writer and vizier of the Nasrid rulers of al-Andalus (1238–1492), whose verses embellish the palaces in the Alhambra. The poet’s divan indicates that the following verses were composed to be inscribed on the cupola of a pavilion built over a pool in his own palace, which once stood on the outskirts of Granada. I call attention in advance to the use of the first-person pronoun that enunciates the text:

Nothing like me has been seen in the past,
nor will be seen in the future;
I am unique, though I unite different things.
I am the bride; myrtles are my vestments;
the pavilion is my crown; the pool is my mirror.

Before proceeding to the analysis of this poem and the elucidation of what I propose as a theory of the gaze that developed during the medieval period in al-Andalus, exemplified here in Ibn al-Khitab’s verses, I note that I am led to this text by its connection to the Alhambra. The Nasrid palatial city is well-known for its abundant parietal epigraphy, but a characteristic feature of those inscriptions, namely, not simply the use of poetry but more particularly of poetry also speaking in the first person, has the effect—writ large—observed in the verses cited above. The “I” inscribed on the walls gives a figurative voice to the otherwise mute and inanimate architecture. The figurative invention is known in poetics as the trope of prosopopeia, and often in the Alhambra it allows the walls to speak for themselves and to articulate, in theory, the experience of beholding. To trace the workings of prosopopeia in the Alhambra is too large a task for this introduction, so, aware as I am of the irony of introducing the topic of the gaze without providing an example to gaze at, I turn to the more limited but by no means isolated case of Ibn al-Khatib’s poetic inscriptions for his palace.

I also acknowledge at the outset that the reference to the mirror in the verses might well open the alternative approach, that is, assimilating Ibn al-Khatib’s text (and by extension his palace and its architectural decoration) to the Lacanian gaze rather than investigating it as an articulation of gazing otherwise. Something would be gained, but much would be lost.

The image of the palace as a bride, taken as an object of desire, might provide the cornerstone for a psychoanalytic disposition, in which desire is the key to understanding the gaze. Following that line of thought, Lacan’s discussion of the idealization occasioned by the integrity of the mirror image, for instance, might provide insight into the palace’s claim to uniqueness. That such a claim would be a misrecognition, in Lacanian terms, would not have been lost on the contemporaneous fourteenth-century readers of the poet’s divan and/or of the parietal inscriptions in situ, for they would have been altogether familiar with the distinguished lineage of a palace-pool-garden setting in the medieval architecture of al-Andalus (fig. 1). But the Islamic context would give pause to those meditations.

In the literary culture of the Andalusi readers, the hyperbolic claim, “I am unique,” would have had a clear rhetorical basis, fulfilling the formal demands of the
genre of the *fakhr*, or praise poetry, which, when employed in connection with architecture, was intended to express the glory of the patron through the supposed perfections of the building. Likewise, the reader/beholder would have been well prepared for the extended use of metaphor—considered the chief trope in medieval Arabic poetics. The metaphors develop the description of the architecture from the initial image of the building as bride (a common figure)\(^\text{14}\) through the further substitutions of vestments, crown, and mirror for the architectural elements of the garden, pavilion, and reflecting pool.

Contrary to a Lacanian analysis, it is the bride here, and not her mirror image, that represents integrity, unifying diverse parts of the architectural ensemble. But this is another way of saying that what is most remarkable in the verses is that the bride—that is, the palace—says “I.” The bride/palace speaks for itself as a subject and is not merely an object of the gaze and its desires, idealizations, and misrecognitions.

 Whereas Lacan’s mirror stage, at least in its initial formulation, is resolutely prelinguistic and asocial, Ibn al-Khatib’s poem stages the gaze within language. More specifically, prosopopeia creates the fiction of a direct address in language. For, as the linguist Emile Benveniste observes of all uses of the first-person pronoun, in saying “I” a “you” is implied.\(^\text{15}\) In Ibn al-Khatib’s verses, this relationship is introduced explicitly as a problem of visuality. The building, or its likeness, cannot be seen in the past or the future; it can only be seen now, in the present moment of address when, in the act of reading the inscriptions, the building speaks to the beholder.

What is unique, then, is this present moment of visuality wholly distinct from the customary flow of before-and-after (the times when “nothing like me can be seen”)—a state of suspended temporality, to recall Jonathan Crary’s terms.\(^\text{16}\) By imparting agency to the inanimate architecture, prosopopeia, through its efficacious and authoritative “voice,” enables the imagination of a moment when “you” and “I,” beholder and palace, enter into a relationship in which each are subjects. Indeed, a certain intimacy is established by the reference to the bride, who, it is implied, addresses her groom. The subject/object poles of the experience of art are subverted in favor of a fundamental reciprocity—what Paul Crowther explains in a phenomenological analysis of art.
as “the ontological reciprocity of the subject and object of experience.”

The palace’s unequivocal declaration, “I unite different things,” may also be understood as a reinforcement of the reciprocity of such an encounter.

Ibn al-Khatib’s metaphors of vestments and crown for garden and pavilion suggest that the subject position of the work of art is embodied. If the architecture has a figurative voice, that is so because its implicit body has a mouth to speak. But then, the metaphor of the mirror indicates that the palace must also have figurative eyes to see: to look at itself in the reflection of the pool and also to look out at the beholder whom it addresses. Ibn al-Khatib’s text speaks for a theory of a reciprocal gaze.

Ibn al-Khatib’s prosopopeia, or the deployment of the same poetic trope in inscriptions in Islamic art from gift objects to the walls of the Alhambra, theorizes a gaze in which the work of art represents an embodied subject position and not only an object of perception, idealization, or desire. This understanding of the subjectivity of the object—to put matters paradoxically—and of the work of art as a performance, revealing that subjectivity through the staging of a direct address in an emphatic and ever renewable present, might then be brought to bear on the study of Islamic art of other times and places. That is, one of the benefits of taking a theoretical concept—here, the gaze—as the point of departure for discussion is to provide common ground for topics that would otherwise be incommunicable across the barriers of historical period, political geography, or even material of composition.

To close with a case in point, I leap ahead seven centuries and cross from a monument, even if now lost, to the work of a contemporary artist, who is as well an art historian and political activist, Azra Akšamija. The gaze articulated poetically by the inscription of prosopopeia in the example of medieval Islamic architecture discussed above, I will now suggest, is literally embodied by Akšamija’s Wearable Mosques. In one such work, the Dirndlmoschee (Dirndl-Dress Mosque) (2005), for instance, the artist’s vestments first appear as a traditional Austrian dress, still worn today in some areas, giving the wearer a very specific cultural location (fig. 2). When the artist undoes her belt, however, her apron unfolds into connected prayer rugs, literally constructing the ritual space of an open-air mosque, or masjid, which is to say quite another cultural location. In

Fig. 2. Azra Akšamija, Dirndlmoschee, 2005. (Photo: Rahkeen Gray and Azra Akšamija)
either case, dirndl or mosque, the seeming object of an exoticizing gaze that might hold the wearer at the distance of the folkloristic or religious. Other proves instead to be a subject position and a place of enunciation. In this and similar Wearable Mosques by Akšamija, the performance reveals that the body of the artist and the portable textile architecture occupy not merely a virtual, but in fact a real, shared space and a single, shared subject position, “an ephemeral space,” 20 she says, in which “the minimal volume [is] actually defined by the human body” and “in that sense ... represent[ing] customized architectural expressions” of identity.21

Here, of course, the “I” that expresses itself from the textile architecture is not only a poetic fiction but a real person—Akšamija herself—who can actively destabilize cultural presuppositions (e.g., a woman in a dirndl, that is, an Austrian, is not a Muslim). Furthermore, from her place in and as the architectural space, she can invite beholders to join her, since the Wearable Mosques are large enough to accommodate three people in communal prayer.22 Relying on reception and participation in her performative art, Akšamija’s socially and politically engaged work results in the unsettling of the multiple boundaries: between body and architecture, public and private, secular and religious, inclusion and exclusion, gender segregation, and, most crucially for the issue at hand, the subject/object opposition. This possibility of changing a spectator into a participant in Akšamija’s Wearable Mosques activates the potential for relationship constructed by Ibn al-Khatib’s prosopopeia, for there, too, the beholder/reader could (and no doubt often would) move from a place outside, gazing at the palace, to a place inside, gazing from the subject-position marked by the palace. Once the subject/object dichotomy is transformed into a balanced relation of subject positions, reciprocity can even become an exchange of shifting identities.

Although Akšamija does not rely on prosopopeia, as Ibn al-Khatib does in fourteenth-century al-Andalus, she subverts, if not to say deconstructs, the subject/object dichotomy and the one-sided gaze of the beholder. Her wearable mosques have eyes—her eyes—to see and a voice to address the passersby, to create relationships where there had been distance and disconnection, “to critically engage both Muslims and non-Muslims.”23 And again much as Ibn al-Khatib does, Akšamija explicitly articulates the issues raised by her reconstruction of the object of the gaze as a subject position in terms of visuality. She speaks of her wearable mosques as an effort to “evoke a more active involvement of Muslims in the discussions about their visibility and integration in the West.”24 Or, as I would say, in the terms drawn from my reading of Ibn al-Khatib’s text, she proposes and embodies a theory of reciprocal gazes.

The essays that follow do not make such leaps across periods, places, and materials, each on its own, but, we believe, as an ensemble “unit[ing] different things,” embody such movement between them across the bridge of the theory of the gaze, and so constitute a coherent and innovative scholarly dialogue within Islamic studies and, perhaps, an opening toward a critical engagement between Islamic and other art histories on a more reciprocal footing.

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NOTES


11. For an analysis of the poetic inscriptions in the Alhambra, see publications by José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, especially *Los códigos de utopía de la Alhambra de Granada* (Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 1990).


17. Paul Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame)* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

18. I wish to thank my friend and colleague Mirela Ljevaković, who introduced me to the work of Azra Aksamija.


23. Akšamija, “Echo of Islam in the West.”

24. Ibid.
CONFERENCE ESSAYS
This essay engages with the subject of the gaze and aesthetic experience by exploring the enticement and wonderment of the eye, the embodiment of vision through emotional states and desire, the disembodiment of the eye in introspective vision, and the cognitive capacity of sight to produce insight. With these diverse yet interrelated themes in mind, I consider the modalities of the gaze in sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century Safavid and Ottoman texts on the arts and architecture, starting with their origin in medieval paradigms of visual perception and artistic creation.

As I argued in The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture (1995), the realm of visual aesthetics was shaped not only by religion but also by an eclectic mix of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic concepts shared with Christendom. The dissemination of these philosophical concepts was initiated by the ninth-century translation into Arabic of sections from Plotinus’s Ennead as the Theology of Aristotle, with its Neoplatonic emanationist cosmology that elevates the immaterial luminosity of spiritual beauty above material form. Because my forays into theories of visual perception and aesthetic philosophies in that book were framed specifically with regard to late medieval geometric ornament, their broader relevance for the visual arts has been eclipsed. I therefore welcome the opportunity to revisit my former reflections by focusing here on the Islamic tradition of figural representation in diverse media, including architecture, which has particularly been misunderstood with respect to the question of the gaze.

A recent example directly relevant to this issue is Hans Belting’s timely book, Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science (2008, translation 2011), with its comparison between the gaze in Renaissance Europe and in the Islamic Middle East. The author proclaims that a conception of pictures was as foreign to Arab science as it was to Arab art, where geometry was dominant.... In this particular case, the issue of pictures separates the two cultures precisely because it reflects their different practices with regard to visuality and the gaze. The difference involves not just art but also a mindset and relationship to the world.

The diversified visual cultures of the Islamic domains were no doubt informed in varying degrees by restrictions placed on the gaze. These included constraints imposed on figural representation (particularly but not exclusively in religious contexts), on conspicuous consumption (luxury materials such as gold, silver, silk), and on the permissibility of ornaments or inscriptions in specific building types and objects. Such stipulations, which were primarily articulated in hadith literature and texts on jurisprudence (fiqh), nevertheless allowed a wide margin of options open to negotiation, resulting in a broad spectrum of varying interpretations. Hence there is little justification for positing a typical Islamic “mindset,” transcending time and space, that left its imprint on the modalities of the gaze. The predilection for abstraction in the pictorial arts may have responded in part to religious constraints. However, as we shall see, this predilection was generally theorized as a matter of aesthetic preference in the early modern literature on the visual arts, where the power of the abstractive inner gaze reigns supreme.

Engaging with Belting’s arguments at various points of this essay, I discuss primary written sources on the visual arts that yield a more complex and more accurate understanding of the gaze in both cultures. The next
section provides a synopsis of his thesis and introduces some of the relevant early modern Islamic texts to which I shall return after considering their medieval precedents. Themes highlighted from selected textual sources in the following sections include the esteemed position of the cognitive faculties of vision, of skilled human artistry, and of mimetic abstraction. In considering the scientific gaze, emphasis will be placed on the treatise by Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen, d. ca. 1040) on optics, with its humanistic emphasis on the mental dimension of visual perception and its distinction between glancing and gazing.

EARLY MODERN CULTURES OF THE GAZE IN WESTERN EUROPE AND THE ISLAMIC LANDS

According to Belting, the “Arab-Islamic” aesthetic aimed to “encode the sensory world through the use of script and geometry, and to impose a filter between the world and the gaze, which is thereby tamed and cleansed of the senses and their images.” This geometric screen was “of a fundamentally different kind than the geometry used to construct perspective painting in the West.” In support of his assumption about the absence of an Islamic “domain of representational depiction,” Belting extensively refers to my interpretation of the fifteenth-to early sixteenth-century Topkapı Scroll (figs. 1 and 2) and Ibn al-Haytham’s eleventh-century Kitāb al-Manāẓir (Book of Optics). He thereby sets up a binary opposition between the cultures of the gaze in the West and the Middle East during the Renaissance.

These two sources are not particularly pertinent, however, for pictures and pictorial theory in the Islamic lands during the early modern period, which is the main subject of Belting’s book. To begin with, the two- and three-dimensional geometric matrices of the Topkapı Scroll, which were primarily intended for Timurid-
Fig. 2, a and b. Topkapı Scroll, repeat-unit designs for two-dimensional star-and-polygon *girih* patterns, with generative geometric grids incised on paper. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Ms. H. 1956. (After Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Scroll*, 262, 319)

Turkmen architectural construction and ornament in Iran, are by definition irrelevant for the theorization of representational depiction. For Belting’s project, comparing Renaissance perspective painting with contemporaneous traditions of Islamic figural painting would have been more germane, but the multifocal spatial constructions of these paintings do not conform to the Topkapı Scroll’s rigid geometric matrices. Besides, Safavid and Ottoman sources on the pictorial arts list geometric ornament as only one of the “seven fundamental modes of decorative design” (*haft aṣl-i naqqāshī*) discussed below. These modes were deployed by painter-decorators (sing. *naqqāsh*) and figural painters (sing. *muṣavvir*) alike, whose manifold talents extended over diverse genres of image-making, which at times contributed to the blurring of boundaries between figural representation and ornamental design (figs. 3 and 4). The genres in question—comprising decorative design (*naqqāshī*), animal painting (*jānvār-sāzī*), and portrait/figural painting (*ṣūrat-gari*)—were applied to multiple media, ranging from the arts of the book and portable objects to architecture.6

Thus the visual cultures of the Islamic lands during the Renaissance can hardly be characterized as “aniconic.” The geometric mode of ornamental design codified in the Topkapı Scroll marked the last stages of a long medieval tradition that would soon be supplanted by more naturalistic modes of floral ornament and figural
Fig. 3. Illuminated page with margins decorated by an abstract vegetal (islīmī) scroll and a calligraphic frame around a standing princely figure facing a smaller one, signed by Hasan, before 1566. From the Amir Ghayb Beg Album, Safavid Iran. Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum Library, Ms. H. 2161, fol. 93a. (Photo: courtesy of David J. Roxburgh)
Fig. 4. Illuminated page with margins decorated by a floral chinoiserie (khatāʾī) scroll and a frame with a landscape populated by animals and divs around a standing courtly figure, signed by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, before 1566. From the Amir Ghayb Beg Album, Safavid Iran. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Ms. H. 2161, fol. 52b. (Photo: courtesy of David J. Roxburgh)
design which radically marginalized geometry by the mid-sixteenth century. Rather than newly formulated fifteenth-century Renaissance methods of perspective projection in pictorial theory, more appropriate comparisions for the Topkapı Scroll are late Gothic manuals of architectural and geometric design, which similarly marked the final stages of a long medieval tradition in the West that extended well into the sixteenth century.7 However, Belting prefers to consider the scroll designs in the context of perspective construction in Renaissance painting:

Whereas Necipoğlu was looking for parallels with medieval architectural drawings of the West, we must keep in mind in our context that the designs on the scroll are structurally the antithesis of the kind of spatial thinking used in perspective and its relation to the gaze. They are opposites on the same level, an opposition in which different worldviews find expression. Just as perspective was a symbolic form, so too were muqarnas in another culture, a culture with different priorities.8

The Topkapı Scroll compiled in Iran is seen by Belting as an “Arab-Islamic” counterpart to Renaissance perspective because the muqarnas, which had been in use “since the lifetime of the mathematician Alhazen,” reached a “peak in the fifteenth century, when Florence was discovering perspective.”9 In actuality, it was during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that the muqarnas reached a “peak,” losing its former preeminence after the early fifteenth century. The anachronistic juxtaposition of Renaissance Florence with the eleventh-century Baghdad of Ibn al-Haytham implies that only the Western gaze had a history, which is denied to its somewhat static “Arab-Islamic” foil whose postmedieval trajectory has not been elucidated. This asymmetry may partly be explained by Belting’s decision to combine a series of lectures on “the history of the gaze” with an unforeseen “shift of focus so as to include two cultures” in his book. The result is an essentialized, ahistorical treatment of the second “culture of the gaze.”10

As we shall see later, Ibn al-Haytham’s treatise on optics remained confined largely to the realm of the scientific gaze in the post-Mongol Islamic East, where the pictorial arts were more closely allied with aesthetic discourses on poetics, music, and calligraphy. Belting correctly observes that Renaissance Europe’s perspective gaze uniquely fused pictorial theory with Ibn al-Haytham’s geometrical theory of optics, a fusion that did not happen in Islamic lands. I, too, have interpreted the nonperspectival mode of geometric construction codified in the Topkapı Scroll as representing a “disjunction between internal and external vision, an aesthetic attitude that would be reversed in Renaissance Europe where these two types of vision became coordinated by perspectivalism, with its ‘neutral’ gaze that separated subject and object.” Embodying a multiplicity of viewpoints, the scroll’s geometric matrices “yielded an infinite isotropic space,” differing from the “Renaissance concept of the picture plane as a window frame that cuts through the spectator’s cone of vision, where rays converge at a central vanishing point.”11

Where I differ with Belting is his questionable attribution of this divergence to the lack of a pictorial theory due to the aniconic geometricism of “Arab-Islamic” culture, which constituted the essential quality of its “mindset.” For this viewpoint, Belting often resorts to evidence derived from prescriptive texts on Islamic jurisprudence and on modern fiction that serve him better than the art-historical literature. For instance, he relies on the novelist Orhan Pamuk’s Turkish novel, My Name Is Red (1998, translation 2001) for the alleged deadly religious illicitness of mimetic representation at the Ottoman court and for the unsubstantiated claim that Islamic artists depicted the world from “the eye of God” that is “both above and outside this world.” It is on the basis of the modernist Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy’s literary work, Fable of the Mashrabiyya (1949), that Belting defines the geometric window screen known as the mashrabiyya as a barrier that “tames the gaze and purifies it of all sensuous external images through its strict geometry of interior light.” Contrasting this window screen with the “Western type of window” that found its emblem in Renaissance painting, which represents the curious gaze seeking images in the world, Belting concludes that the mashrabiyya and muqarnas “should be recognized as symbolic forms” in Arab-Islamic art, in contradistinction to the geometry of perspective that is a symbolic form in Western culture.12

Unlike modern fiction, early modern primary sources considered in this essay provide a less dichotomous understanding of the gaze in Christian Europe and the
Islamic lands. Sharing many similarities overlooked in Belting’s antithetical account, both visual cultures were nourished by the same sorts of classical texts and were equally complex, just as their modalities of the gaze varied according to time and place. Rather than opposites, then, it may be more productive to see them as two sides of the same coin. Premodern discourses on visual aesthetics in both Christendom and Islamdom combined Neoplatonic concepts, characterized by a “distrust of the eye,” and variants of a more positive Aristotelian view that acknowledged the mental dimension of visual perception mediated by distinctly human faculties in the brain known as the “inner senses.” Focusing almost entirely on the geometry of vision in Ibn al-Haytham, Belting downplays the Aristotelian psychological component of his optics, which assigns a central position to these perceptual faculties. Those faculties would play a prominent role in late medieval and Renaissance pictorial theory in the West.

Translations and creative reinterpretations of classical written sources by early Arab philosophers and scientists rapidly became assimilated into the mainstream of medieval Islamic culture at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, continuing to enjoy currency in the post-Mongol era, when they were complemented by commentaries and translations into other languages. In the more specialized early modern literature in Persian and Ottoman Turkish, conceptualizations of the gaze came to be articulated through new genres of writing, including treatises on the visual arts (calligraphy, painting, architecture), prefaces of albums mounted with calligraphies and images, biographical memoirs of architects, and anthologies combining the biographies of calligraphers and painter-decorators.

These literary genres were partly rooted in late fifteenth-century Timurid precedents such as album prefaces and biographical dictionaries of poets, which started to incorporate artists and calligraphers who wrote poetry. Anthologies focusing exclusively on the lives of calligraphers and painter-decorators appeared around the late sixteenth century in the context of the growing prominence of court scriptoria (kitābkāna/kutubkhāna, naqqāshkāna) in the Safavid and Ottoman realms, with their shared Timurid-Turkmen artistic heritage. Narrative sources, complemented by surviving documents, testify to the multiple talents of calligraphers and painter-decorators (sing. naqqāsh) specializing in the arts of the book, who collaborated in court scriptoria that institutionally, though not always spatially, combined a workshop and library. This collaboration extended beyond manuscript production to the creation of designs for diverse media, including architecture.

Some painter-decorators were skilled in calligraphy and poetry as well, belonging as they did to the inner circles of royal and elite courts where they participated in assemblies (sing. majlis). Such intimate intermingling undermines the widespread assumption that earlier artists in the medieval Islamic lands were illiterate and unlikely to keep up with intellectual currents that surrounded them. The primary sources point to a more connected universe, at least in the better-documented early modern Islamic courts, where the rising prestige of practitioners of the visual arts and architecture paralleled that of their colleagues in Europe and East Asia. The emergence from relative anonymity of named calligraphers, painter-decorators, and architects with “star status” was among the factors contributing to the invention of unprecedented genres of writing.

One of the new breed of multitalented artists, Ahmad b. ‘Abdullah al-Hijazi, wrote a petition for employment that traces his career from Timurid Shiraz in 1422 to Edirne in 1441–42. There he sought to enter the service of the Ottoman court, like many other fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century Iranian artists, before the Persian-speaking Mughal courts in India began to provide a lucrative alternative. Such circulations of talent further enhanced the shared Persianate visual cultures of early modern Turco-Mongol dynasties in the eastern Islamic lands. The petitioner points out that he began his training by studying poetry according to the dictum “Poetry is necessary” and by learning calligraphy, which is “half of learning.” He then goes on to describe his other artistic skills:

The [Timurid] sultans of the age too, like Ibrahim-Sultan, Baysunghur, Ulughbeg and their father Shahrukh Mirza [r. 1405–47], have taken notice of this art [calligraphy], for “people follow their kings’ religion.” In the kutubkhana of each of these there was a group of learned people without equal in the world—copyist, illuminator, illustrator, binder.
I too laid some claim [to proficiency] in these arts by virtue of my aspiration and ardor, and through service and apprenticeship I acquired from every harvest a gleaning, and from every gleaning a seed, until during a voyage in the year 845 [1441–42] I arrived in Edirne ... I did this because I found that the market for my wares was sluggish and buyers were scarce.22

Given the interaction among poets, calligraphers, and painter-decorators, it is not surprising that aesthetic concepts articulated in the biographies of literati parallel those informing the visual arts. The coupling of calligraphers with painter-decorators in early modern biographical anthologies and album prefaces also found an echo in the Safavid theories of the “two pens” (the scribe’s “vegetal” pen and the painter’s “animal” pen/brush) and the aforementioned “seven fundamental modes of decorative design.” Formulated around the mid-sixteenth century, these complementary theories attempted to augment the religious legitimacy and status of painting by linking its origin with calligraphy. Both theories were articulated in Safavid album prefaces and biographical anthologies, genres that largely disappeared by the early seventeenth century. Variants of these texts were produced around the same time by Ottoman writers, but not in Uzbek Central Asia or Mughal India, where similar concepts informed artistic practices.23

Interestingly, Chinese pictorial theorists of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1386), such as the scholar-artist Zhao Mengfu (d. 1322), a calligrapher and painter affiliated with the Mongol court, developed a comparable claim that calligraphy and painting had a “common origin.” A key factor that triggered new artistic trends in the eastern Islamic lands was the increasing resonance with Chinese paradigms after the sack of Abbasid Baghdad in 1258 by the Mongols.24 Including the emergence of court scriptoria and the production of albums, these trends remained restricted mostly to the Turco-Iranian polities of the Islamic East (Mashriq), extending from Anatolia all the way to China. The relative cultural unification of this region owed partly to being brought under the umbrella of Mongol rule, unlike the western Islamic lands (Maghrib), where sinicizing tastes in the arts met resistance. The next section turns to forerunners of the post-Mongol literature on representational arts and the gaze, to which I shall return later by focusing on Safavid and Ottoman sources.

MEDIEVAL TEXTS ON VISUAL PERCEPTION AND THE INNER SENSES

Islamic texts generally accorded a lofty stature to skilled artistry, especially in arts addressing the highest of the five “outer senses”: sight and hearing. In some cases, sight predominates over hearing, an early example being the treatise on the eye by the Nestorian Iraqi court physician Hunayn b. Ishaq (d. 873), which emphatically affirms that “vision is unique among the senses, the noblest of them and the most superior in quality.” Likewise, two Cordoban scholars, Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) and Ibn Rushd (Averroës, d. 1198), ranked vision higher than audition.25 Nevertheless, Belting categorically asserts: “The question is whether one can speak of a gaze in the positive sense at all in Arab culture. The many social and religious limitations imposed on the gaze suggest the opposite.”26

The intimate connection between sight and insight is a leitmotif in medieval Islamic sources, which emphasize the cognitive potential of the arts and architecture. Another leitmotif is the creative imagination of the artist/artisan, nurtured by the inner (spiritual) senses that complement the outer (corporeal) senses, thereby testifying to the elevated productive and perceptual capacities of humankind.27 These concepts are encountered in an early encyclopedia of philosophical sciences and the arts, the tenth-century Rasā’îl (Epistles) of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ), attributed to a group of scholars based in Basra with an associated branch in Baghdad. This popular work, which interprets the inner senses within a Neoplatonic and Pythagorean cosmological framework, circulated among Shi‘i and Sunni elites, generally educated people, and artisans over the ages. One of its manuscript copies, produced in post-Mongol Baghdad in 1287, features a double frontispiece illustrating the sagelike authors who collectively compiled this text (fig. 5).

The Epistles list the inner senses of imagination, cogitation, and memory, along with two human faculties: the “faculty of speech” and the “productive faculty
knowledge, and insight.” The arts of painters (ṣināʿat al-ṣawwīrīn) and musicians are deemed particularly lofty in terms of their connection to the soul. Artists express love for their objects of creation by beautifying and adorning them. The Neoplatonic metaphor of mystical love and desire also extends to the yearning of the eye of the beholder for harmoniously proportioned forms and colors, which remind the human soul of its noble origin in the realm of intelligible entities. The instinctive love of beauty, then, embraces the bodies of both producers and beholders of the visual arts by simultaneously engaging their sensuous and spiritual-cognitive faculties. This innate attraction to beauty carries the potential of going beyond mere pleasurable wonder to the threshold of cognition, which is the domain of the intellect and guides intuitive knowledge.

The Epistles aim to disclose the subtleties of the sciences and arts, all of which reveal the wisdom of the divine artificer, the Creator, who created human “artists and inspired them with their crafts, with wisdom, knowledge, and insight.” The arts of painters (ṣināʿat al-μuṣawwīrīn) and musicians are deemed particularly lofty in terms of their connection to the soul. Artists express love for their objects of creation by beautifying and adorning them. The Neoplatonic metaphor of mystical love and desire also extends to the yearning of the eye of the beholder for harmoniously proportioned forms and colors, which remind the human soul of its noble origin in the realm of intelligible entities. The instinctive love of beauty, then, embraces the bodies of both producers and beholders of the visual arts by simultaneously engaging their sensuous and spiritual-cognitive faculties. This innate attraction to beauty carries the potential of going beyond mere pleasurable wonder to the threshold of cognition, which is the domain of the intellect and guides intuitive knowledge.

The Brethren regard hearing and sight as “the best and noblest of the five senses,” reminding their audience of the Koranic affirmation that God endowed humans
with the gift of “hearing, sight and hearts” (Koran 23:78). Nonetheless, their Neoplatonic view of mimesis (recalling the Parable of the Cave) accords a superior status to hearing: the species that inhabit this world are only representations and likenesses of forms (ṣuwar) and beings of pure substance that inhabit the higher world of the celestial spheres and heavens, “just as the pictures and images [al-nuqūsh wa-l-ṣuwar] on the surface of walls and ceilings are representations and likenesses for the forms” of animate beings of flesh and blood.31 This statement takes for granted the presence of figural painting on architectural surfaces. Besides calligraphy, ranked by them as the noblest of the arts, the Brethren cite, among other examples of visual beauty that rely on proportionality, the harmoniously combined colors and images (tasāwîr) of painters (al-musawwirîn) that trigger a pleasurable sense of wonderment (ta‘ajjub) in viewers. As is the case in proportionally executed scripts, in the production of pleasing pictures artists must observe the right proportions of colors and shapes and sizes of figures.32 It is without any theological qualms that the Brethren refer to mimetic representations by skilled artists who, while emulating as their model God’s creation in figurative works—whether “shaped, sculpted, or painted” (ashqāl, tamāthīl, ṣuwar)—seek to achieve that they should be well-proportioned in construction, composition, and arrangement. The human artist must imitate the divine artist in mimetic works, “just as it has been stated in defining philosophy that is an imitation of the deity to the extent that human faculties allow.”33

Similar views expressed in the Neoplatonistic writings of the polymath Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. ca. 1010) and his associates in Abbasid Baghdad, then under Buyid tutelage, negate the assumption that mimesis invariably has a negative connotation in Islamic visual cultures.34 A treatise on penmanship written by al-Tawhidi—a protégé of the mathematician-engineer Abu’l-Wafa’ al-Buzjani (d. 998), a man of letters, philosopher, and professional scribe associated with at least three principal members of the Brethren of Purity—should dispel doubts as to whether the Neoplatonic-Pythagorean conceptualization of the arts in the Epistles had any connection with artistic/artisanal practice. As noted above, these doubts revolve around the insistence that medieval artists/artisans were mostly illiterate and intellectually unsophisticated laborers. This view amounts to a segregation of Islamic art from other artistic traditions that are commonly interpreted in relation to aesthetic philosophies predominating in particular contexts, a complex correspondence that cannot simplistically be reduced to a provable “causal relationship.”35 Al-Tawhidi’s treatise on calligraphy suggests that such philosophical aesthetic concepts would have been familiar at least among chancellery secretaries and calligraphers, who must have collaborated with manuscript illuminators and perhaps painter-decorators. After all, it was in the same Baghdad milieu where the geometric mode of ornament, dominated by interlocking star-and-polygon patterns based on the modular use of the circle, came to be codified along with proportioned cursive scripts (al-khaṭṭ al-mansūb). In their epistle on ratio and proportion the Brethren explicate that geometry and proportion provide the shared basis of every art, referring in particular to prosody in poetry, letters in proportioned script, and harmoniously joined figures in painting and mechanical devices. They explicitly state that the proportions governing prosody and music are similar to those underlying calligraphy and painting, a statement repeated in later sources.36

In their epistle on music, which has the capacity to mediate between corporeal and spiritual senses, the Brethren explain that God created the human body according to the most eminent proportions of the universe, derived from the curved circumference of the circle and its diameter, from which the letters of proportioned calligraphy also originate. They specify that man’s height equals the distance between his fingertips when both arms are extended “right and left like a bird stretching its wings,” which defines a square inscribed in a circle, whose center lies at the midpoint of the body. This concept has convincingly been likened to the notion of the “Vitruvian man” as a microcosm of the macrocosm, which would later form the basis of the drawing by Leonardo da Vinci (d. 1519) of the “Renaissance man.” The close parallel affirms the lofty status of humankind in Islamic cosmology, where humans inhabit the very center of the universe, specifically created as their habitat. Visual aesthetics and mimesis occupy the core of this Islamic version of humanism.37
The Central Asian Aristotelian philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037) and his father are known to have studied the *Epistles*. Ibn Sina argued that although animals transform matter by building nests, theirs is a spontaneous activity of “sensitive imagination” when compared to the creation of artificial environments by humankind through work and creative invention involving “rational imagination.” Nonetheless, his emanationist cosmology is imbued with illuminationist and mystical tendencies that were subsequently elaborated by al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Suhrawardi (d. 1191). Drawing upon Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Ibn Sina linked “mimesis” (*al-muḥāqā*) in the arts with the “imagination” (*al-takhyil*), constituting one of the five inner senses or faculties that were less systematically explicated by Aristotle: the common sense (which centrally coordinates the inner senses from the brain), the faculty of imagination (capable of abstracting matter), the faculty of estimation (capable of a more elevated form of abstraction going beyond material accidents), the faculty of cogitation, and the faculty of memory.\(^3\)

The *Epistles* were also studied by the Sufi theologian, jurist, and philosopher al-Ghazali, who was affiliated with the Seljuk court in Iran and Iraq. He added to the five inner senses housed in the brain a sixth sense located in the heart—comprising the spirit and rational soul—that he likened to a polished mirror manifesting the light of truth. Through this sixth sense—referred to variously as the soul, the spirit, or the heart—al-Ghazali further assimilated the perceptual theories of Arab philosophers into a framework of mystical love and desire, whose highest goal is the intuitive perception of absolute divine beauty, partially reflected in the beauties of the universe and of humankind. According to him, the sixth sense could perceive the superior beauty of the inner world, which is far more perfect than that of the outer one, since inner vision (*al-baṣar al-bāṭina*) is stronger than outer vision (*al-baṣar al-zāhir*).\(^3\) Emphasizing the capacity of initiated Sufis to penetrate hidden beauties with “the eye of the heart and the light of insight” (*bi-ʿayn al-qalb wa-nūr al-baṣira*), al-Ghazali wrote:

> The love of visual beauty therefore allowed for both the formal autonomy of aesthetic value and its place within a unitary scheme of values in a cosmos that opened onto the transcendent and sublime. Since al-Ghazali regarded the source of all beauty as no other than God, visual beauty could induce in those spiritually or intellectually inclined a contemplation of the wonders of creation, semiotically replete with the signs of divine wisdom. The intuitive passage from aesthetic pleasure and wonder to metaphysical or mystical rapture could thus be virtually instantaneous. This passage was facilitated by an analogical mentality (ascent from the visible to the spiritual/heavenly) and the habit of connective thinking that equated microcosm with macrocosm in both Christian and Muslim contexts alike, well into the modern era.

Even though medieval philosophers had criticized the Sufis for embracing criteria of knowledge below reason—such as intuition, inspiration, and immediacy of mystical experience—these criteria would gain increasing currency in the post-Mongol eastern Islamic lands. In this context, the augmented importance of Sufi mysticism, the metaphysics of light, and the Neoplatonic...
tradition loomed large. But the simultaneous prevalence of Aristotelian notions of visual perception and aesthetics speaks against attempts to postulate a monolithic Islamic gaze. Like Ibn Sina, another contemporary scholar subscribing to an Aristotelian model of visual perception was Ibn al-Haytham, whose monumental seven-volume treatise on optics allocated a prominent role to the inner senses coordinated by the common sense in the brain.42

**IBN AL-HAYTHAM’S BOOK OF OPTICS AND ITS EARLY MODERN RECEPTION**

Known as Alhazen in the West, this polymath flourished in Abbasid Basra and Baghdad during the Buyid period and spent his later years in Fatimid Cairo. He is famous for his intromissionist visual theory, which synthesized the geometry of vision with the physiology of the eye and the psychology of perception. Ibn al-Haytham’s innovative theory was concerned primarily with understanding the sense of sight through a model of light and vision. He conceptualized vision as a cumulative process moving through stages, passing through the eye into the brain: from physical radiation, to visual sensation, to perceptual and conceptual representation, with each successive stage involving a degree of abstraction that yielded a relatively subjective image of objective reality.43

Besides positing the necessity of “unconscious inferences” such as comparison and memory for sensation to be transformed by the brain into conscious perception, Ibn al-Haytham recognized the crucial importance of eye movement for observing the visible world. This insight contrasts with the reduction of the beholder to an immobile and disembodied eye in Renaissance single-point perspective, which constituted a human subject that is hardly “humanist.” The problem was noted in Leonardo da Vinci’s treatise on painting, in which he criticized the painters’ perspective for reducing the viewing subject to a kind of Cyclops, in contradistinction to the actual circumstances of perception and the complexity of painting. Likewise, a marginal note in a copy of Ascanio Condivi’s *Life of Michelangelo* (1553) by his last assistant quotes the artist’s contradiction of his biographer’s claim that he had studied perspective at length: “Perspective, no, because it seemed to me to be a waste of too much time!” Giorgio Vasari’s (d. 1574) *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550, revised edition 1568) similarly demoted perspective to the level of a technique. This critical stance has been attributed to the “irreparable fissure” that the invention of perspective painting opened in “humanist” culture, a point I shall revisit in relation to an implicit critique of “Frankish” illusionistic painting in some sixteenth-century Safavid sources.44

As is well known, Ibn al-Haytham’s *Optics*, translated into Latin by the early thirteenth century as *Perspectiva* or *De aspectibus*, became available by the fourteenth century in an Italian translation. The Florentine sculptor of the early Renaissance, Lorenzo Ghiberti (d. 1455), extensively copied the latter’s section on the perception of beauty in his *Commentarii*. Leonardo’s treatise on painting also includes recognizable echoes of Ibn al-Haytham’s theory of visual perception.45 The *Book of Optics* explains that beauty (*al-ḥusn*) is perceived with respect to contingent factors, involving a complex interaction among twenty-two visual properties (light, color, distance, position, solidity, shape, size, separation, continuity, number, motion, rest, roughness, smoothness, transparency, opacity, shadow, darkness, beauty, ugliness, similarity, and dissimilarity). Only two of these, light and color (a corporeal property of light)—and to some degree proportion (the geometric order of light)—are in themselves capable of producing beauty.46

Unlike light and color that are perceived by “pure sensation,” other visual properties require “perceptual inferences” of two kinds, mediated by the sense of sight: glancing and contemplation. Ibn al-Haytham defines immediate or “glancing” perception as an instantaneous recognition of familiar forms firmly embedded in visual memory. By contrast, “contemplative perception” is a longer operation involving the inspection of complex visual elements by the inner faculty of judgment. He explains that intricate designs with subtle proportions and color combinations can be fully apprehended only by contemplative vision, involving the inner senses.47

Visually complicated forms that require the concentrated contemplation of the gaze include the “painted designs and decorations [*nuqūsh wa tazayn*] of a wall”
and “minute designs, letters of a script, tattoo marks, wrinkles and the difference between closely similar colours.” Ibn al-Haytham adds: “Indeed all fine features appear only after they have been scrutinized and contemplated.”48 This statement does not imply, as Belting maintains, that his optical theory was entirely aniconic. Assuming that the author “lived in a culture with no figurative pictures” and that the surfaces of muqarnas forms contained “no picture that is tied to an observer,” Belting writes, “The insight that Alhazen’s optical theory was just as aniconic as Islamic culture itself poses entirely new questions.”49

In fact, Ibn al-Haytham, like the Brethren of Purity before him, explicitly refers to painter-decorators who mimetically represented animate beings and even portraits of individuals. It is worth quoting this passage, which Belting discusses but selectively considers only the animals and plants mentioned therein. Here, pictures painted “on a wall or on a piece of wood or paper” are discussed with respect to errors of sight, caused when the seen “object’s distance exceeds the moderate range”:

This frequently happens with paintings [tazāwīq]. For painters [al-muzawwiqūn] make their pictures [ṣuwar] and paintings [tazāwīq] look like the visible bodies to which they correspond, and by means of flat pictures [ṣuwar musaṭṭaha] they represent particular animals, individuals, plants, utensils or other solid objects, and their features. For this purpose they make skilful use of colours and drawings [nuqūsh], paying particular attention to points of resemblance... They also make pictures of individual people, imitating what is visible in their forms of the outlines of their faces and bodies, their hair, the pores and wrinkles in their skin, and the creases in their clothes; thus they represent the roughness visible in their skin on account of the hair and the pores, and the roughness of their clothes due to their creases. Painted pictures will be perceived to be like the forms they represent if those who made them were skilled in the art of painting. Therefore looking [for example] at a picture of a hairy animal painted on a wall or on a piece of wood or paper, sight will perceive the [painted] hair as if it were real. And, similarly it will perceive the pictures of rough leaves as if they were [really] rough; and the same will be true of pictures of visibly rough bodies. Again it will perceive the painted pictures of individual men as if they were solid forms, their painted hairs and wrinkles and creases in their clothes appearing as [real] hairs, wrinkles, creases, although the surfaces of those pictures are smooth and polished. But if sight perceives a smooth picture as being rough then it will have erred in regard to its roughness.

Ibn al-Haytham goes on to explain that the smoothness of the surfaces of painted pictures can be perceived only by “contemplation” from close up, and that sight cannot contemplate them unless they are “very near.”50

At the time Ibn al-Haytham was writing, painted decorations on walls, muqarnas surfaces (fig. 6), and objects often combined figurative images with proportionally harmonized geometric, vegetal, and calligraphic designs, except for religious contexts characterized by aniconic imagery. To be sure, such pictorial representa-

Fig. 6. Plaster muqarnas fragment with painted decoration of a seated prince or noble holding a goblet in one hand, Fatimid, eleventh century. From the Bath of Abu Su’ud in Fustat (Cairo). Cairo Museum of Islamic Art, MIA 12880. (After The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo, ed. Bernard O’Kane [Cairo and New York, 2006], 64, fig. 51)
tions, like their counterparts in medieval Byzantium and the Latin West, differed from the illusionistic naturalism of Renaissance perspective painting. Yet the passage quoted above demonstrates the value attached to verisimilitude within the conventional parameters of figural depiction.

The widespread combination of figural with aniconic imagery in medieval Islamic artifacts and the outspoken appreciation of mimetic affects are expressed in a poem by the celebrated Abbasid poet al-Mutanabbi, who died near Baghdad in 965, the year Ibn al-Haytham was born in nearby Basra. It has been observed that al-Mutanabbi’s poem sheds light on a tenth-century Muslim intellectual’s attitude toward figural depiction and the appreciation of mimetic affects are expressed in a poem by the Egyptian and Iraqi painter, close to the time Ibn al-Haytham resided in Cairo. The contest was organized by the Fatimid vizier Yazuri (r. 1049–58), who is said to have been especially fond of “illustrated books” (kitāb muṣawwar) and “images and pictures” (sūrat wa tazwīq). The vizier invited the painter Ibn ‘Aziz from Iraq, whose fame equaled that of the calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022), to challenge the conceited Egyptian painter al-Qasir who demanded high wages because he was as great in painting as Ibn Muqla (d. 940) was in calligraphy. This comparison of the painters to the two leading calligraphers of Abbasid Baghdad, who codified proportioned cursive scripts, is an indication of the prestige of calligraphy as the standard against which painting is being measured. The vizier introduced both painters to his “assembly” (majlis) and incited them against one another. The Iraqi artist announced that he would “paint” (yuṣāwwiru) a figure in such a way that the beholder would think it is coming out of the wall. His Egyptian competitor proposed to depict the same subject as if the figure were going into the wall, whereupon those present exclaimed, “This is more wondrous [aʿjab]!” Their response captures the curiosity value of the feat and the performativity of the ensuing artistic show. The painters each painted the picture of a dancing girl, in two niches opposite one another—that of al-Qasir wearing a white dress against a black background, and that of Ibn ‘Aziz in a red dress against a yellow backdrop. Each artist succeeded in achieving the painterly illusion he set out to create, and Yazuri lavishly rewarded them both.

This episode, which stresses the importance of likeness within the bounds of prevailing seminaturalistic modes of abstract representation, indicates that the scholar al-Maqrizi harbored no religious misgivings about illusionistic figural painting animated by movement. Recalling anecdotes on organized competitions among ancient Greek painters, the leitmotif of the contest is a trope encountered in other Islamic texts that will be discussed later. The trope of the contest may perhaps carry the echoes of such classical sources as Pliny the Elder’s Natural History, according to which the highest artworks are created by artists granted by nature an “insight into art” that enables them to better imitate nature. Besides stressing verisimilitude and mimetic perfection as the principle aim of art, Pliny’s “art-historical” chapters underline the value attached to artworks that are curious, wondrous, and daring (mirabilia).

Al-Maqrizi explains that the Fatimid vizier’s contest was described in greater detail in a (now-lost) book entitled Ṭabaqāt al-muṣawwirīn, or Daw’ al-nibrās wa anas al-jullās fi akhbār al-muzawwiqīn al-nās (Biographies of Painters, or The Guiding Lamp and the Pleasure of Company in the Biographies of Painters among People). The title hints at the entertainment value of representational paintings in courtly gatherings (also the case with figural automata), for which there is ample evidence in early modern sources as well. For instance, in a courtly majlis of the Turkic vizier of Timurid Herat, ‘Ali Shir Nava’i (d. 1501), the celebrated painter Bihzad (d. 1535–36) presented a portrait of the vizier standing in a garden, leaning on a cane. The portrait was passed and evaluated by those present in terms of its
verisimilitude, even though painted portraiture on paper was governed by a marked tension between realism and convention.\textsuperscript{55} Individualized portraits were not confined just to the arts of the book but also enlivened the painted palace murals of the Timurid, Turkmen, and later Islamic courts.\textsuperscript{56}

To return to Ibn al-Haytham’s \textit{Book of Optics}, this Arabic treatise was disseminated in the post-Mongol Islamic East through the expanded Persian translation and commentary (1309) of Kamal al-Din al-Farisi, which explicitly refers to the “figurative arts” (\textit{ṣināʿat al-taṣvīr}). The author of this updated translation, entitled \textit{Kitāb Tanqīḥ al-manāẓir} (Revision of the \textit{Optics}), was a scientist who had studied with the polymath Qutb al-Shirazi (d. 1311) at the Maragha observatory of the Mongols.\textsuperscript{57} His Persian text, in turn, was abridged in 982 (1574–75) with a discussion of its main topics in Arabic and dedicated to the Ottoman sultan, Murad III, by the chief court astronomer, Taqi al-Din Muhammad b. Ma’ruf (d. 1586).\textsuperscript{58} Just around that time, in 1572, Friedrich Risner’s edition of Alhazen’s Latin translation was published in Basel under the title \textit{Opticae thesaurus} (fig. 7).

The reworking of Ibn al-Haytham’s treatise by both Kamal al-Din al-Farisi and Taqi al-Din within the context of astronomical observation exemplifies its confinement to the realm of the scientific gaze in the eastern Islamic lands, where the pictorial arts were not conceptualized as a field of applied optics (fig. 8). It is therefore important to distinguish between two kinds of perspective: the “painters’ perspective” exclusively developed in early modern Europe, and the perspective of astronomers, geometers, and architect-engineers that continued to flourish in both the Islamic and Christian domains.\textsuperscript{59}

For the Damascus-born Arab astronomer-engineer, Taqi al-Din, a royal observatory had been built in the Galata district of Istanbul, which was dominated by the European residents of the Ottoman capital. This court astronomer, who spent most of his professional life in Istanbul after an initial stage of astronomical experimentation in Ottoman Cairo, was keen to keep up with contemporary scientific advances in Europe. His collaborators included a Jewish astronomer from Ottoman Thessaloniki known as Davud “the Mathematician.”\textsuperscript{60}

A note Taqi al-Din wrote on a copy of the Arabic translation of Claudius Ptolemy’s (d. ca. 168) \textit{Almagest} explains that he had researched Greek manuscripts to determine the vocalization of the name Claudius and found the meaning of \textit{Almagest} in the Latin book of Ambrogio Calepino (d. 1511). The discovery of the note has suggested that he was “almost up-to-date on whatever philological works were being published during the European Renaissance.”\textsuperscript{61} It also points to a hitherto underestimated two-way traffic of scientific exchanges between Western Europe and the Ottoman empire, demonstrating the continuing vibrancy of Arabic sciences.\textsuperscript{62} Such a conclusion finds support in the striking correspondence between the high-precision observational instruments for star-gazing constructed by Taqi al-Din for the Galata observatory (ca. 1575–80)—built on the site of the former...
Fig. 8. The court astronomer Taqi al-Din using a quadrant to observe a comet that appeared in the skies of Istanbul in 1576. From Mustafa ʿĀli, Nusretname, 1584. Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum Library, Ms. H. 1365, fol. 5b. (Photo: Hadiye Cangökçe, courtesy of Emine Fetvaci)
palace of the Venetian merchant Alvise Gritti (d. 1534)—and those deployed in the observatory (ca. 1576–80) of Tycho Brahe (d. 1601) in Uraniborg, Denmark. Taqi al-Din explained that one of the precision instruments he created for the royal observatory was his own invention, inspired directly by the *Almagest* and previously unknown. The extensive library of the Galata observatory also included a major collection of Islamic scientific manuscripts on astronomy and geometry that once belonged to the Ottoman scholar and royal librarian Molla Lütfi (d. 1494). The latter was a student of the Timurid astronomer-mathematician ʿAli Qushji (d. 1474), who had joined the Ottoman court before 1472 (fig. 9). The fact that this manuscript collection, which Sultan Murad III ordered to be handed over to the “pride of astronomers,” Taqi al-Din, in 1578, was being kept at the chief architect Sinan’s (d. 1588) masjid in Istanbul, built and endowed in his own name, is suggestive indeed. The collection may have included Ibn al-Haytham’s *Optics*, all known manuscript copies of which are currently in Istanbul libraries. If so, this treatise and others on the mathematical sciences must have been deemed relevant for Ottoman architectural practice by Sinan and his team of architect-engineers. It is not a coincidence that an astronomer called Molla Fütuh was part of a survey committee, headed by Sinan in 1582, whose members were assigned to prepare an estimate for a canal project connecting Lake Sapanca to the Bay of İzmit.

Ibn al-Haytham’s influential Arabic treatise, along with its translations and commentaries, circulated widely in Europe as the major work on the science of optics and the study of vision until the early seventeenth century. It was then that the treatise on optics by
Johannes Kepler (d. 1630) advanced the modern understanding of the nature of light and the formation of the retinal image, based on data collected by the astronomical observations of Tycho Brahe (d. 1601). In *The Judgment of Sense* (1987), David Summers notes the parallel yet differing trajectories of Ibn al-Haytham’s theory of visual perception, coordinated by the faculty of judgment, in premodern Europe and the Islamic lands. Linking the rise of the inner senses in late medieval and Renaissance Europe to the new authority of artists, Summers regards these human faculties as the ancestor of modern aesthetics and the unconscious that paved the way to Surrealism and Modernist Abstraction. By contrasting the transformation of nature in Islamic art, which gives free reign to the faculty of imagination, with the Renaissance enterprise of making internal and external vision mutually reinforce one another, Summers anticipates Belting’s more detailed comparison between these two visual cultures. The union of naturalistic representation and optics in one-point perspective entailed the fixed point of view of an observer, a bipolar separation between subject and object that, in Islamic art, remained relatively fluid. While the immobile perspective gaze produced static images, the kinetic gaze allowed for the entry of the body, the senses, and desire into the fractured unity of visual spaces in Islamic art and architecture.67

Late medieval and early modern written sources, along with monumental inscriptions, capture the potential of architectural spaces to promote the type of prolonged contemplative gaze theorized in Ibn al-Haytham’s *Book of Optics* by stimulating the cognitive faculties of vision. The cases considered in the next section show how ravishing multisensory architectural ensembles could attract the subjectivity of attentive beholders like seductive visual magnets by inviting an intimate, close-up way of viewing. The willful complication of the optical field in architecture and the arts can be interpreted as a calculated way of inducing contemplative vision, a “way of seeing” that is often referred to in Ottoman texts as the “scrutinizing gaze” (*imʾān-i naẓar*).68 Regardless of the debate on whether or not theories of vision and aesthetics had an impact on artistic production, such texts offer precious glimpses into widespread sensibilities that framed visual hermeneutics. Despite their often underestimated value, Islamic narrative sources, poetry, and literary inscriptions provide valuable insights into aesthetic values that informed the modalities of the gaze and attitudes toward the visual arts, including the appreciation of lifelike figural representation.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE GAZE AND THE FASCINATION WITH MIMETIC IMAGES

The late fourteenth-century poetic epigraphy in Arabic at the Alhambra Palace in Granada, for instance, implies that sight could lead to cognition through pleasurable wonderment (fig. 10). One such inscription encourages the beholder to ponder the beauty of its architectural support, the visual perception of which exceeds the most extravagant conceptions of the “imagination.” This is a beauty that resonates with cosmological metaphors: “I am the garden appearing every morning with adorned beauty; contemplate my beauty and you will be penetrated with understanding.” Another inscription refers to the unfolding of so many wonders that “the eyes [of the beholder] remain forever fixed on them, provided he be gifted with a mind [to estimate them].” The Alhambra’s poetic epigraphy thus acknowledges the mental dimension of aesthetic perception, which is not limited simply to the eye.69

It has been argued that the poems in the first-person voice directly engage with and guide the beholder “from visual perception to imaginative cognition.”70 While the Hall of the Two Sisters and the Mirador de Lindaraja accessed from it, where some of the inscriptions are concentrated, feature entirely aniconic ornaments, the roughly contemporary Hall of Justice (Hall of Kings) in the same courtyard boasts figural paintings in a late medieval European style. Attributed to the Nasrid ruler Muhammad V (ca. 1362–91), these large paintings on leather, which adorn three contiguous vaulted ceilings, are seamlessly incorporated into an otherwise aniconic decorative program (fig. 11).71 The North African scholar Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) observed that decorating the walls of buildings and houses in Nasrid al-Andalus with Europeanate figural images was a widespread practice. Presumably because such murals were uncommon in his
exchange for the captive son of the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Bold, after crushing the Crusader armies at Nicopolis in 1396. In response to that request, the duke sent two packhorses laden with the finest-quality Arras tapestries portraying “the history of King Alexander [the Great], with the major part of his life and his conquests.” One of these Alexander tapestries was among the booty Timur brought from the Ottoman palace in Bursa to his own capital, Samarqand, upon defeating and capturing Bayezid I in 1402. The Arab chronicler Ibn ‘Arabshah (d. 1496), who had been carried off by Timur from Damascus to Samarqand in 1400–1401, saw this 10-cubit-wide “curtain” with lifelike naturalistic figural representations and deemed it “one of the wonders of the world,” whose “fame is naught to the sight of it.” His detailed description once again testifies to the unrestrained admiration aroused by mimetic figural imagery, animated by affects of motion, as noted above in al-Mutanabbi’s and al-Maqrizi’s verbal accounts. The tapestry was decorated with various pictures of herbs, buildings and leaves, also of reptiles, and with figures of birds, wild beasts and forms of old men, young men, women and children and painted inscriptions and rarities of distant countries and joyous instruments of music and rare animals exactly portrayed with different hues, of perfect beauty with limbs firmly jointed: with their mobile faces they seemed to hold secret converse with you and the fruits seemed to approach as though bending to be plucked.

Europeanizing images, attested in the figural mural paintings of Nasrid Granada, also began to appear in the Persianate arts of the book in the Islamic East during the fourteenth century. This trend would accelerate in subsequent centuries until figurative representations in the “Frankish manner” eventually displaced the post-Mongol taste for sinicizing imagery around 1600. The practice of “contemplative perception” described by Ibn al-Haytham was not only confined to secular images but also induced by religious architecture. His contemporary al-Tha‘alibi (d. 1038) recounts in The Book of Curious and Entertaining Information the story of a shaykh who was utterly captivated by the visual splendor of the Umayyad Great Mosque in Damascus (705–15), “one of the wonders of the world in its beauty and uniqueness.” This old man of Damascus used to say that
lavish aniconic ornaments, accompanied by intricate Kufic inscriptions, included representational Byzantine mosaics depicting ethereal architectural landscapes without animate figures (fig. 12).

This narrative once again illustrates the positive value attributed to gazing. By contrast, some puritanical hadith and texts on jurisprudence (fiqh) criticized the use of distracting ornaments and even inscriptions in mosques, indicating differences in opinion that were perpetuated by the shaykh’s enthusiastic aesthetic response to the allure of wondrous visual forms, continually revealing new beauties, can be likened to a process of mystical unveiling (kashf) that was particularly upheld in Sufi circles. The mosque’s partly extant, lavish aniconic ornaments, accompanied by intricate Kufic inscriptions, included representational Byzantine mosaics depicting ethereal architectural landscapes without animate figures (fig. 12).

This narrative once again illustrates the positive value attributed to gazing. By contrast, some puritanical hadith and texts on jurisprudence (fiqh) criticized the use of distracting ornaments and even inscriptions in mosques, indicating differences in opinion that were

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*Fig. 11. Alhambra Palace, Granada, Hall of Justice, late fourteenth century. (After Jesús Bermúdez Pareja, *Pinturas sobre piel en la Alhambra de Granada* [Granada, 1987])

a. Northern ceiling  
b. Central ceiling  
c. Southern ceiling  
d. Detail from the northern ceiling, depicting noble couples gazing from belvedere windows and arches, with a fountain in the foreground  
e. Detail from the southern ceiling, depicting a noble lady and her attendant looking out from the belvedere window of a castle at the landscape and battles scenes below*
negotiated according to the preferred orientations of diverse regimes of visuality across time and space.\textsuperscript{77} An account comparable to that of the medieval Damascene shaykh is narrated centuries later about an Ottoman painter-decorator called Nakkaş Ahmed Çelebi. This artist became so enamored of the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne (built by the Ottoman chief architect Sinan between 1568 and 1574) that he dedicated all his time after the prayers to gazing at its wondrous forms, which daily unveiled to him concealed beauties as a kind of visual revelation (fig. 13). He then reported these newly revealed marvels to his friends each evening in convivial gatherings.\textsuperscript{78} This state of affairs is described in an epistle on the Selimiye Mosque, written by Dayezade Mūstafa Efendi in 1741, where the author himself engages in a prolonged visual meditation and hermeneutical reflection on the mosque’s architectural forms in a stream-of-consciousness narrative mode. Dayezade individually ponders distinctive architectural elements as a source of spiritual revelation, involving a meditative exercise of unrestrained freedom that is deeply imbued with cosmological metaphors.\textsuperscript{79}

Like earlier narratives, sixteenth-century descriptions of Ottoman monuments frequently highlight the amazement aroused in discriminating beholders who are “clear-sighted” (\textit{sâhib-nażar, erbâb-i nażar}).\textsuperscript{80} That Sinan’s mosques could even transport their congregations into states of spiritual rapture is suggested by the

Turkish endowment deed of a mosque complex he built (1577–90) for the princess Shahsultan and her husband Zal Mahmud Pasha in a delectable garden along the shores of the Golden Horn. The mosque’s aniconic interior is portrayed as capable of triggering visionary experience by sharpening ocular vision. It could almost restore eyesight to the blind with its light-filled windows commanding spectacular vistas (fig. 14). An excerpt from this astonishing description reads:

Truly the mosque is a charming and immaculate sanctuary ... its windows are like doors opening from the belvederes of paradise for the eyes of worshippers. They provide vistas for eyes desirous of encountering God by making manifest the miracle-filled illumination of the true path. Those entering there for the joy of God are granted spiritual states [\textit{ḥālet}]. It is a meeting place where people are caught in rapture and ecstasy [\textit{vecd u ḥāl}]. This beautiful and alluring mosque is joy-giving and illuminated to such a degree that the eyes of humans, normally limited to perceiving the visible world, can almost penetrate the concealment of the sublime hosts of angels. This mosque embodies such a degree of charm and delight that it is possible for even the blind eye to behold brightness from its world-viewing belvedere windows.\textsuperscript{81}

In similar fashion, the mid-sixteenth-century historian Eyyubi exclaims that inside the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul (built by Sinan, 1550–57), “the garden of paradise becomes visible to the mystically inclined [\textit{ehl-i ḥāl}].”\textsuperscript{82} According to another observer, the visual

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\textbf{Fig. 12.} Umayyad Great Mosque, Damascus, 705–15, mosaic revetments at the west arcade of the courtyard. (Photo: Anna Gonosova, Harvard University Fine Arts Library Visual Collections)

\textbf{Fig. 13.} Selimiye Mosque, Edirne, 1568–74, interior. (Photo: Reha Günay)
The “eye offered the gaze control over the world,” perspective painting became a “symbolic mirror in which the gaze depicted itself.” The picture plane in Renaissance painting therefore came to be conceptualized as a mirror reflecting the artist’s optical gaze, in which the viewers found their own gaze. Drawing upon a rich medieval tradition, the mirror is also a recurrent metaphor in early modern Islamic written sources discussed in the following section.

The ongoing preference to place inner vision above the outer kind is more about a divergence in pictorial theory—a favoring of abstraction over optical naturalism—than about “aniconicism” or the lack of a “conception of pictures,” as Belting proposes.

We have seen ample examples that render these notions irrelevant. Besides, the abstractive faculty of creative imagination, which foregrounds the agency of the artist and beholder, is privileged not only in Islamic visual cultures but also in East Asian and Western European nonperspectivist image theories, such as those pertaining to medieval, Baroque, and Modernist art. A comparable notion in Chinese art theory, for instance, is that the picture comes not entirely “from an observation of external phenomena” but “from within the heart/mind of the artist.” Even Pliny the Elder, whose anecdotes are permeated by a preoccupation with mimetic perfection, credits the agency of the artists’ mind, intellect, and insight, thanks to which painting was recognized in Greece as the foremost among the liberal arts. He thus characterizes the artist Timanthes’s art as embodying a “sense of more profound content” and having “behind it an intellect that reached beyond art.”

Fig. 14. Mosque of the Couple Shahsultan and Zal Mahmud Pasha, Eyüp, Istanbul, 1577–90, interior. (Photo: Reha Günay)
Unlike Renaissance single-point perspective painting that sought to scientifically map the outer gaze on the picture plane, contemporaneous artists in the eastern Islamic lands aspired to mirror the insightful gaze by means of soulful and evocative mimetic abstractions that enlighten the beholder. Directed toward subjectivity rather than objectivity, such seminaturalistic, multifocal pictorial images solicited close attention from discerning eyes. They came closer to poetry, conceptualized as a mode of imaginative creativity arousing pleasurable wonder, than to the science of optics, with its own geometry of the gaze. Like poetic discourses, pictorial representations manipulated codified imagery and conventions, selectively integrating more naturalistic representational devices from the fifteenth century onward into the international Persianate painting tradition embraced by diverse Turco-Iranian polities. The degree of naturalism varied in accordance with specific regional traditions, genres, and styles.

It has been shown that the assimilation of theories of visual perception into literary discourses is already apparent in the writings of the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi (d. 1209), referring to the mental origin of images, painted from memory and from forms stored in the imagination. The terminology of Neoplatonism and Islamic mysticism, adopted in the medieval Persianate literary tradition and perpetuated in early modern texts on the visual arts, revolved around the dichotomy of outer appearance (ṣūrat) and inner reality (maʿnī), connected to the Sufi concepts of exterior (ẓāhir) and interior (bāṭin). Ideal beauty arose from a harmonious fusion between outward form and inner meaning, through the creative deployment of conventional imagery that would become invigorated with an increasing dose of naturalism in the post-Mongol era.

The image theory that pervades Nizami’s oeuvre is visually articulated in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts of his Khamsa (Quintet), produced in the Turkmen and Safavid courts of Iran. Paintings in these manuscripts illustrate the parable of a competition between Chinese and Greek painters, who are asked by Alexander the Great to decorate with murals two facing walls of a palace, separated by a curtain (figs. 15–17). In the version of Nizami’s parable narrated about eighty years earlier by the Iranian Sufi scholar al-Ghazali, the Chinese artist wins the competition in the “art of design and painting” (ṣanʿat al-naqsh vaʾl-ṣuvar) by polishing his wall like a mirror. When the curtain is lifted, its burnished surface reflects with greater luminosity and increased beauty the Greek artist’s mural painting. While the winner is likened to the Sufi who polishes his heart until divine radiance shines in it, his rival is compared to the ulema who strive for external knowledge. According to Nizami’s modified version of the parable, both mural paintings appeared to be nearly identical in drawing and color, except for one difference: one was giving and the other receiving. The Greek mural was judged superior in figural painting (ṣūrat-garī) and the Chinese
one superior in polishing (ṣaql). The conclusion of the contest was that “both are an aid to vision [baṣar].”

Different interpretations have been proposed for Nizami’s enigmatic account. According to Ibn Khaldun’s commentary, al-Ghazali’s version of the parable was meant to elucidate the difference between alternative modes of cognition by the soul, envisioned as turning on one side toward the material world and on the other side toward the eternal Reserved Tablet (lawh al-maḥfūẓ) of divine creation. The curtain of corporeal impurities separating the soul from the Tablet could be lifted by purification, so as to more effectively receive the reflections of luminous supranatural realities. The painter who polishes his wall thus represents the Sufis, for whom the reception of inspired knowledge (ilhāmi) through dreamlike visions constitutes the highest proof,

Fig. 16. Contest between Greek and Chinese painters. From Nizami, Khamsa, Shawwal 900 (June 25–July 23, 1495), Shiraz, Aqqoyunlu Turkmen. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Ms. H. 778, fol. 324r. (After Sultanların Aynaları, 20, fig. 7)
whereas the other painter personifies those who seek acquired external knowledge (kasbi). Ibn Khaldun explains that between these two facets of cognition, the brighter specular reflection alludes to the supremacy of mystical enlightenment, on which Plato, “the greatest philosopher and Sufi of antiquity,” placed a premium. Given Nizami’s own Sufi proclivities, the polished wall in his version of the allegory is probably a metaphor for the purity of the soul, affirming the value judgment that reflective mirror vision is a more profound mode of mimetic imaging than illusionistic painting, although he does not explicitly state this. The equivocal conclusion of the contest in his account recalls al-Maqrizi’s above-mentioned narration of another competition without an obvious winner at the court of a Fatimid vizier, in which both an Iraqi and Egyptian painter are rewarded for their equally successful realistic representations.

Early modern paintings illustrating Nizami’s parable can be interpreted as self-reflexive images, reflecting upon their own operation and upon their role in positioning the viewer/subject. It is tempting and not implausible to read into them an implicit critique of the deceptive mimicry of Renaissance perspective painting, which sought to mirror “reality,” as if what one saw on the picture plane seemed to mirror “truth itself.” As noted above, even some Renaissance artists expressed skepticism about the claim to truth of painters’ perspective. Such a critique is, in fact, hinted at in a mid-sixteenth-century Safavid version of the contest of painters (naqqāshān), now involving Chinese and European (fa-rang) figural painters (surat-garān), in which the former triumph. This competition conflating the painters of “China and Cathay” and “Greek and Frankish” painters ends with a description of the talismanic world-reflecting mirror of Alexander the Great installed above the lighthouse of Alexandria (a metaphor for the heart of the Perfect Man in mysticism), and of how Aristotle made an astrolabe to view the heavens.

One of the three manuscript paintings from Nizami’s Khamsa that are reproduced here shows the Chinese artists intently burning their wall like a mirror, in the manner of Sufi masters who purify the soul to increase its reflective capacity (see fig. 17). In each example, the wall paintings, whether figurative or nonfigurative, astound Alexander and his company, who bite their fingers in awe and wonderment. The doubled murals in one example represent an idealized garden with a standing couple (see fig. 15), whereas the other two variants feature abstract gardens composed entirely of decorative scrolls: a chinoiserie or Cathayan (khatât) floral scroll (see fig. 17) and an inhabited scroll with human and animal heads (vāq) (see fig. 16), respectively. Like these Iranian manuscript paintings, sixteenth-century Safavid album prefaces that will be discussed below conceptualize vegetal and floral scrolls as mimetic abstractions, distilled from the divine creation rather than as purely decorative motifs.

According to a later version of the parable in the biographical anthology of calligraphers and painters by the Ottoman polymath Mustafa ʿĀli (d. 1600), written in 1587–88, the legendary “Chinese artist Mani” (founder of Manicheism) wins the contest against three other masters of painting, each of whom is ordered to paint one of four walls in an emperor’s garden pavilion. All the other artists’ “wondrous creations” had been crafted with “inventions and [works of] originality,” as if they were signs of the divine “perpetual decorator and eternal artist’s” adornments in the highest gardens of paradise. Yet the winner, Mani,

that peerless master, gave the wall such a burnishing that [even] pure water had never been so transparent. And he gave his every image such a bright appearance that the world-illuminating mirror [i.e., the sun] has never furbished plants and flowers in that tone. Verses by the author:

With their pure, natural quality, Mani’s Designs became a mirror for his enemies.

He gave [his] world-renowned pictures such a light that From end to end they began to manifest God’s providence. The metaphor of the polished mirror or pure tablet of the painter-decorator’s heart/mind/soul is a recurring theme in sixteenth-century Safavid and Ottoman texts, rooted in an international Timurid-Turkmen cultural heritage that increasingly became infused with Sufi paradigms of enlightened inner vision and inspired creativity. The eminent Timurid historian and stylist Khvandamir (d. ca. 1535), for example, described a glass vessel with figurative representations of thirty-two artisans, made in 1465, as “such a configuration that no
more beautiful picture could be reflected in the mirror of the imagination."98 Khvandamir’s late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century preface to a now-lost album of calligraphy and painting samples, assembled by the painter Bihzad, eulogizes the album folios, which delight the soul with their “pictures” (ṣūrat) that “the artist of the mind [muṣawvir-i khāṭir] has transferred from the tablet of the heart/mind/soul [lavḥ-i dil] to the pages of this book.”99

In the preface of an album dedicated to the Safavid prince Bahram Mirza in 1544–45, the court calligrapher Dust Muhammad declares that “when the desired form is manifested from the invisible world, like a mirror, the surface of a pure heart is the best.”100 The same preface mentions the Artangi Tablet, consisting of images painted on silk by the legendary artist Mani, the likes of which “occur only in the mirror of the mind [āyina-yi ‘aql] through the eye of imagination [dida-yi khīyāl].”101

The mirror metaphor also appears in the preface of a Safavid album, dated 1564–65 and compiled by Mir Sayyid Ahmad for Amir Ghayb Beg. This preface extols the status of vision by defining the visual arts as the “key to wisdom” and the pen as the “key to art.” The characterization of the pen as the “designer of patterns” and “an unveiler of faces” encapsulates the fluidity between modes of ornamental and representational design, which multitalented Iranian artists mastered during apprenticeship (see figs. 3 and 4). The author of the preface praises the “amazing images and wonderful motifs” of this “art” (sanʿat), which are the “object of contemplation for those possessed of insight.” Stating that the “imaginative power and elegance of nature” of its practitioners is not possessed by experts in the other arts, he adds: “The beauty that unveils her face in the tablet of the painter-decorator’s mind [lavḥ-i khāṭir-i naqqāsh] is not reflected in everyone’s imagination.”102 In Mir Sayyid Ahmad’s preface, decorative designs in the seven fundamental modes, which parallel the six pens in calligraphy, are regarded as mimetic abstractions modeled on the divine artist’s wondrous creation:

With their gazes fixed on creation, they take an image from every prototype.103

These lines of poetry imply that depictions on the album’s folios echo the mirroring in the tablet of the painter-decorator’s mind of cosmic prototypes, inscribed with the Divine Pen on the eternal Preserved Tablet. It is not surprising, then, that Safavid prefaces often conceptualize albums as microcosms, comparable to the patchwork (muraqqa’) of the sky, which have been assembled to praise God’s creation and to invite an intimate gaze from insightful viewers. Their “pure” images drawn by the “spirit and soul” arouse “spiritual pleasure and eternal delight.”104

Similar statements are encountered in the preface of an Ottoman album combining images and calligraphies that was assembled by the artist Kalender for Sultan Ahmed I around 1610. Also conceptualized as a microcosm of the divine creation, this album is likened to the Mirror of Time, whose polished surface revealing kaleidoscopic images is the object of esteemed gazes. Kalender’s preface explains that gazing at the album’s wonder-arousing beautiful contents, created by talented artists and calligraphers, will perfect in the sultan “the eye of learning by example” (ʿayn-i ‘ibret) and increase his capital in “the science of wisdom” (ʿilm-i hikmet). Contemplating the album’s wondrous artworks will console the monarch’s troubled heart by enlivening his mind and please his soul by adding beauty to his radiant inner world. The skillful manner in which the album’s contents have been seamlessly joined together will be obvious to those with “acute perception” (ḥurdebnān) and to “sagacious people of insight” (ḥurdebān-i ehl-i ʿirfān), if each work is viewed with a “scrutinizing gaze” (imʿān-i naṣar).105 Briefly put, gazing at the album’s artistic beauties will not only beautify the beholder’s inner world but also promote pleasure, knowledge, and wisdom.

THE COSMIC GAZE AND THE RHETORIC OF SUPERREALISM

Glimpses of pictorial theory can also be gleaned from early modern technical manuals expounding the canons of painting and calligraphy. A Safavid example
entitled *Qānūn al-Ṣūvar* (The Canons of Painting, 1597) was written by the Turkmen court painter and poet Sadiqi Beg Afsar (d. 1609–10), the head of the library (kitābdār) of Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629). The author praises the multitalented master who trained him as having “piercing eyes” capable of gazing upon expansive cosmic vistas:

> When drawn to picture animate life, his achievements were sheer wizardry and miracle. When minded to portray a certain person, his creative imagination [khīyal] could penetrate to the inner man beneath. And none could truly distinguish between original and likeness—unless, perhaps purely physical considerations of motion were invoked. Indeed, when he painted “Maiden Beauty,” Passion’s thighs, beside themselves, went a-quivering uncontrollably. And when he portrayed “Sir Valor,” Prowess, cut the quick, was sent a-questioning the philosopher’s elixir. Then again, when he turned his brush [from the figural] to the decorative genre [naqqāshi], the fabled gardens of Iram rose re-created a-fresh on earth. And lastly, in view of his color-varnishing technique, Dame Purity would take one look and flush crimson to her shame.¹⁰⁶

What drew the author to his profession was an inner voice insinuating: “Your true vocation is art [hunar], seek it diligently the rest of your days. Pursue it militantly, and cling to it mightily; for life without art is bleak.” Sadiqi Beg passionately resolved to find a “master-follower of the Bihzadian line” of figural painting and to bind himself in apprenticeship and learn to “paint the bazaar-world of pictured things with the sole idea of drawing near to their Real Nature.”¹⁰⁷ Sadiqi, upon finding his incomparable master, Muzaffar-ʿAli (d. ca. 1576), faithfully bound himself to him in apprenticeship:

> So assiduously did I abandon myself to figural painting [ṣūrat-gari] that I was able to discover how, by this art, what was intrinsically real within a subject [maʿnā] could be represented, to all appearances, through its external form [ṣūrat]. I prided myself on having become a conquisador in the realms of these genres and techniques [fann]. For all these conquests were in the name of Muzaffar [i.e., Muzaffar-ʿAli], that saintly shaykh among men, my master.¹⁰⁸

Comparable praises of artistry and mimesis are encountered in late sixteenth-century Safavid and Ottoman biographical anthologies of calligraphers and painters. One was composed by the Safavid scholar and man of letters, Qadi Ahmad, around 1596 (revised second edition 1606), so that it “may prove useful to connoisseurs and find a place in the flourishing kitābkhana of the Shah of the World [ʿAbbās I], by the side of masters of writing and artists.”¹⁰⁹ Written a decade earlier, Mustafa ʿAlī’s Ottoman-Turkish version of the same biographical genre, introduced above, attests to the currency of similar yet divergent discourses on the visual arts in the “lands of Rūm” (i.e., the formerly Roman realm of the Ottoman empire). This work was intended to educate uninformed collectors of paintings and calligraphies, who were “addicted” to albums. It signals the emergence of an open market for the sale of artworks by renowned past and present masters.¹¹⁰

Mustafa ʿAlī highlights the regional distinctiveness of Ottoman (rūmī) aesthetic sensibilities from those of the Iranian (ʿacemī) artistic tradition. He characterizes some Ottoman artists and calligraphers as the “inventors” (mūcīd) of new styles differing from the “manner of the Iranian world” (ūslūb-i ʿacemī), where stricter imitative practices passing from master to disciple were preferred.¹¹¹ Thus the paragone set up in Dust Muham-mad’s and later Safavid album prefaces among Chinese, Frankish, and Persianate artists has been substituted here by a competitive comparison between practitioners of the arts in Iran and the lands of Rum.¹¹² It has been shown that such a comparative gaze informs the organizational strategy of the Sultan Ahmed Album, where Iranian and Ottoman works are juxtaposed to invite comparison.¹¹³

The divinely bestowed power of artistic invention and individualism is a key concept in Ottoman texts, in which the ideal of mimetic abstraction and the cosmic gaze occupy a central position. The autobiography that the chief architect Sinan dictated to Mustafa Saʿi in the 1580s is the prime example of the exaltation of innovation and creative genius, not unlike the lives of Italian Renaissance artists and architects. Since Sinan’s oral accounts were recorded with literary embellishments by his poet friend, who was also a painter and calligrapher, they closely echo concepts encountered in the biographies of calligraphers, painters, and poets. The chief architect’s self-assertive autobiographies stress his mental powers of invention. His God-given talent wins him
the status of “perfect man” (insān-i kāmil), which is the highest station attainable by humankind in Sufi parlance. Modeled on the lives of miracle-working saints, the autobiographies elevate Sinan to the status of sainthood (velāyet) and style him the “patron saint of master architects” (pîr-i ustādān). Existing in several versions, these autobiographical texts have no parallel in the Safavid context, or elsewhere in Islamic art history. It is suggestive that the proud first-person voice in them disappears in an early seventeenth-century biographical treatise on architecture, narrating the career of a student and successor of Sinan, Mimar Mehmed Agha (d. 1617). Its author independently decided to write this biographical memoir as a longtime household member of that chief architect, in order to commemorate his master’s life and achievements.

Among their intended readers (including Sultan Murad III, the crown prince Mehmed, and the grand vizier Siyavush Pasha), the autobiographical memoirs of Sinan address fellow architects and experts capable of appreciating his innovations with their special powers of visual discrimination. They are referred to as “brethren of purity” (ḫullān-i ṣafā), “companions” (dost), and “connoisseurs” (erbāb-i teʾlīf). Sinan’s autobiographies are also replete with allusions to the possessors of “skill/art” (ehl-i hüner, maʿrifet ehli) and “clear-sighted ones” (erbāb-i naẓar). Their prefaces reflect a humanist ethos in the exaltation of humankind as a mirror of God’s
perfection. They refer to special skills divinely bestowed on select individuals (the foremost being the Prophet Muhammad), among whom Sinan represents the earthly counterpart of the divine architect.116

Sinan is also glorified in a book of festivities depicting the parade of royal architects in 1582 at the Hippodrome in Istanbul (fig. 18). His farsighted cosmic gaze, capable of mimetically abstracting the universe on the tablet of his perceptive mind, is praised along with his fingers, which are endowed with extraordinary skills. The connection between his mind and fingers is reminiscent of the “productive faculty” of artists described above by the Brethren of Purity:

A talented person he was indeed
Each of his fingers had a thousand skills.
His intellect [ʿaḳl] was endowed with power in geometry
His cultivated mind [fikr-i maʿmūr] was an architect for all
types of work.
When he drew the form of the universe on the tablet [levḥ]
of his mind
He would instantly turn it into a working drawing [kār-
nāme].
When he lacked compasses, his fist
Would suffice to him with two fingers.
When he resolved to fashion the heavenly vault
He would turn Saturn’s palace into muqarnases.
When his adze struck a melodious tune
Dough would turn into wax and iron into stone.
When he designed a plan and elevation
Many a Euclid would draw lessons from it.
When he drew a wheat bud on marble, he would harvest it
When he carved a rose on stone, he would create a rose
garden.117

This eulogy echoes the same kind of rhetoric deployed for painter-decorators, whose pictorial representations are often described as more real than optical reality, as in Sadiqi Beg’s acclamation of his master quoted earlier.118 Rather than mere hyperbole, I prefer to interpret such rhetoric as the emphatic expression of an aesthetic ideal of “superrealism.” From this perspective, abstraction is more mimetic than optical illusionism because it better captures the essence of what is represented. Regardless of the tension between abstractive and naturalistic imitation, all mimesis required acute visual observation, the only way human beings could acquire knowledge of the cosmos. Hence Leonardo da Vinci (d. 1519) stated, “The eye, that is the window of the soul, is the principal way whence the common sense may most copiously and magnificently consider the infinite works of nature.”119 Leon Battista Alberti’s (d. 1472) statement in a collection of writings dated 1431 that “when we investigate all things [with the human eye], we emulate the divine”120 is not fundamentally different from comparable statements in Islamic texts, although it found artistic expression in a pictorial mode that privileged optical reality. The “anthropomorphism” of the Renaissance “cult of the eye” was, after all, not liberated from a theocentric ethos in an early modern world, where the cosmos constituted the basis for mimesis in the Christian and Islamic lands alike.

Ottoman biographical anthologies of literati, which include some references to painter-poets, shed further light on parallels between the conceptualization of visual and literary arts. In an anthology completed in 1546, the Ottoman poet Latifi (d. ca. 1582) asserts that the true masters of poetry are the inventors (ṣāḥib-i ṭarz) of personal styles (ṣāḥib-i ṭarz) because they directly imitate God’s creation instead of deriving art from art. Latifi considers himself the creator of a “new style” (ṭarz-i nev) of eloquent prose, which nobody else invented (ihdās) in the Ottoman lands (rūm) conducive for talented natures to flourish.121 This was a divinely inspired, beautiful style “drawn and pictured” on the “tablet/page of my heart,” a conceptualization that echoes discourses on the visual arts.122 Latifi partially quotes a qasida of his that he describes as a “mirror from which to learn lessons” (ʿibret aynast). Gazing at the beauties of the cosmos is the main theme of this poem whose first couplet exclaims:

O soul, purify yourself like water from turbidity and gaze
at the [divine] beloved
Polish the mirror of the heart [āyine-i ḳalb], and gaze at the
[divine] beloved’s face!123

Some Ottoman poets mentioned by Latifi even proclaimed the possibility of a reciprocal gaze between God and humans, using the metaphor of the lover and divine beloved. This concept was developed, among others, by the Andalusian Sufi, Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240), whose
pantheistic mystical writings were widely disseminated in the lands of Rum and beyond. For example, the Ottoman Sufi poet Shaykh Bayezid of Edirne, who wrote a commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabi’s Fūṣūs al-Ḥikām (The Bezels of the Wisdoms) composed a couplet which declared that God is both the seer and the seen, for he created humankind in his own image and gazes at himself through human eyes. It addresses God as follows:

You created your own beauty in the form of [human] beauties
Then you turned around to gaze at it from the eye of the lover.

Similarly, the mid-sixteenth-century Ottoman poet and calligrapher Gubari of Larende wrote a poem before retiring as an ascetic in Medina that expressed the reciprocity between the “forms of the microcosm” (suver-i ālem-i suğrâ) and images of the “macrocosm” (ālem-i kıbrâ). This tantalizing poem commends humans to “gaze with the soul’s eye to comprehend the cosmos” (naẓar it dide-i cân ile cihânu aṅla) because it is a storehouse of wisdom, manifesting knowledge of the divine mysteries with “symbols and signs” (remz ü işâret). The poem’s last two couplets read:

O Gubari, come to understand your own essence!
Listen with all ears to my advice, as it is filled with good tidings.

Do not be oblivious, open your eye, you are the macrocosm itself
You are the very Tree of Paradise, and the Tablet, and the Pen, and the Divine Throne!!

These daring verses hint at the currency of an alternative gaze of anthropomorphic humanism with a perspectivism of its own.

In conclusion, the coexistence of different modalities of gazing, which also included the scientific gaze, speaks against a monolithic Islamic way of seeing or mindset. I have emphasized the aesthetic, emotive, and cognitive dimensions of seeing, along with the “humanism” of Sufi discourses on the power of vision, positing a reciprocal gaze between God and humans possessing special visionary abilities that enabled them to perceive the reflexivity of macrocosm and microcosm. The subjectivity of the gaze and its engagement with human experience had the capacity to incorporate the body, affect, sensation, and memory, thereby raising the status of the visual arts and architecture into potential sites of knowledge. Suspended between embodiment and disembodiment, and between sensation and contemplation, the intimacy of the scrutinizing gaze involved diverse interactions of sight, insight, and desire.


NOTES

Author’s note: This essay further explores some ideas introduced in a shorter article, Gülru Necipoğlu, “L’idée de décor dans les régimes de visalité islamiques,” in Purs décors? Arts de l’Islam, regards du XIXe siècle: Collections des Arts Décoratifs, ed. Rémi Labrousse, exh. cat., Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Musée du Louvre (Paris, 2007), 10–23. I am grateful to the editors Olga Bush and Avinoam Shalem, and to Finbar Barry Flood for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this essay.


5. Belting, Florence and Baghdad, 165–66. Belting believes that a comparison between Western and East Asian art "cannot provide a model for the task of undertaking a cultural comparison of the gaze between the worlds of the West and the Middle East, since in the Far East we remain in the domain of representational depiction that separates the West from the Middle East" (p. 266).


7. A comparison with medieval European Gothic architectural practice extends throughout my Topkapi Scroll, esp. 41–53, 160–66, 196, 214–15, 222. The scroll codified a geometric mode of design, which was only "one of the canonical visual idioms that dominated the Islamic lands during the early (950–1250) and late (1250–1500) medieval periods" (p. 222).


9. Ibid., 205.

10. Ibid., 267. The lectures were delivered in 2003 at the Collège de France, Paris.

11. Necipoğlu, Topkapi Scroll, 210, 166.

12. Fiction by these two modern authors is extensively cited in Belting’s Florence and Baghdad, 48–54, 83–84, 211–13, 255–56, 260. For his thoughts on the muqarnas and mashrabiyya, see pp. 206–11, 252–55, 260, 265–66. In a critical book review Roxburgh notes that another modern source of Belting is Hamid Naficy, who writes about the veil in contemporary Islam and uses Persian miniature painting to describe "the averted look," or the habit of constructing pictorial space as hermetic cells separating actors from one another. Roxburgh, "Two-point Perspective," 64.


17. A petition (ʿarzadâshût), datable to ca. 1427–28, that has been identified as a progress report addressed to the Timurid prince Baysunghur Mirza (d. 1433) by the head of his scriptorium in Herat mentions the completed construction of a kutubkhâna for painter-decorators (naqqâshân) and scribes (kâtibân). It itemizes projects that include illustrated manuscripts; a little chest; painted tent poles;


20. For this assumption and the consequent skepticism about the relevance of texts on aesthetics for the visual arts, see Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan Bloom, “Ornament in Islamic Art,” in Cosmophilia: Islamic Art from the David Collection, Copenhagen (Chestnut Hill, Mass., 2006), 18, 25–27; Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field,” Art Bulletin 85, 1 (March 2003): 171: “There is no reason to believe that the literate milieu that produced texts that were identical to those that produced works of art.” While these milieus were obviously not identical, they did intersect, as my present essay demonstrates. In fact, Blair contradicts her and Bloom’s earlier view in a more recent article on the career of the Iranian potter Abu Zayd Kashani at the turn of the thirteenth century: “We sometimes envision medieval craftsmen as anonymous, impoverished, and illiterate laborers. The case of Abu Zayd shows us that they were anything but. As potter, poet, scholar, and scribe, he created works of art that were designed to appeal to his contemporaries, who were as visually and literarily sophisticated as he was.” Sheila S. Blair, “A Brief Biography of Abu Zayd,” Muqarnas 25 (2008): 155–76. Transformations in the early modern period are discussed in Necipoğlu, “L’idée de décor dans les régimes de visualité islamiques,” 10–23. See also 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. Translated in Thackston, Album Prefaces, 48–50, quotation on 49–50.


25. For the “inner senses,” see Wolfson, “Internal Senses,” 69–133. The “inner senses” are discussed in relation to the arts and aesthetic theory in Necipoğlu, Topkapı Scroll, 185–215.

that craftsmen made objects with sophisticated ornament, the connection between the two is unproven. In other words, she was unable to demonstrate any causal relationship between what learned and erudite scholars wrote and what craftsmen did." Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "Cosmophilia and Its Critics: An Overview of Islamic Ornament," Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie 3 (2012): 45–47. The authors approvingly quote Terry Allen's verdict that my book on the Topkapı Scroll is based on a "logical fallacy." Like them, Allen rejects a priori any connection between the formulation of proportion-based abstract design principles (particularly in Islamic geometric ornament) and the widespread dissemination of popular texts on Neoplatonic philosophy and on practical geometry addressing the particular needs of artisans, which I demonstrated in Topkapı Scroll through specific examples. Terry Allen, Islamic Art and the Argument from Academic Geometry, published by Solipsist Press, Occidental, Calif., 2004, http://sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/academicgeometry.htm (accessed September 11, 2014). On the assumption concerning the illiteracy of artists, see n. 20 above; on the synthesis of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian thought in early Islamic philosophy and mathematical sciences, see n. 1 above.

36. Necipoğlu, Topkapı Scroll, 188–89, see also 103–7.


40. Quoted in Necipoğlu, Topkapı Scroll, 192; Puerta Vilchez, Historia del pensamiento estético árabe, 731.


A. Mark Smith, "What Is the History of Medieval Optics Really About?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 148, 3 (June 2004): 80–94. According to Smith, Ibn al-Haytham’s theory of vision is about sight and differs from Johannes Kepler’s “luminocentric” optics, which is about the material qualities of light and “retinal imaging” from Johannes Kepler’s “luminocentric” optics, which is about the material qualities of light and “retinal imaging” and excludes the psychology of perception. From this disjunction “arose not only the modern science of physical optics but also the mind-body dualism of Descartes and his philosophical successors” (pp. 193–94). However, Ibn al-Haytham’s emphasis on experimentation paved the way to modern optics as a physical science of luminous phenomena in the seventeenth century (Kepler, René Descartes, Christian Huygens) according to Roshdi Rashed, “De la géométrie du regard aux mathématiques des phénomènes lumineux,” in *Filosofia e scienza classica, arabo-latina medieval e l’età moderna*, ed. Graziella Federici Vescovini (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1999), 43–59.


Ibid., 1:208, 222. Puerta Vilchez interprets the term *nuqish* (sing. *naqsh*) as a polyvalent term referring to pictures and decorative designs that are less imitative or naturalist. He notes that Ibn al-Haytham refers to mimetic paintings as both *nuqish* and *tāzwiq*, citing a reference to a glass object with “beautiful figures and images” (*nuqish wa tamāthil mustaḥsana*), *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe*, 715–20.

Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, 98, 129, 210. Belting assumes that when “Alhazen speaks of ‘figures’ he means not depictions of living bodies but geometric patterns on an object or a wall” (p. 64, see also p. 109). But by contrast, in Renaissance Europe “no one wanted to do without pictures created in the camera obscura, pictures that Alhazen had never mentioned and never desired” (p. 128).

Ibn al-Haytham, *Optics of Ibn al-Haytham*, trans. Sabra, vol. 1, Book III, pp. 295–37. See Puerta Vilchez, *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe*, 716–17. For Belting’s discussion of this passage, which deliberately omits its reference to mimetic representations of “individual people” or “individual men,” and his statement that for Alhazen “figures” do not mean depictions of living bodies, see *Florence and Baghdad*, 109–10. Elsewhere Belting states that in describing “Arab art” Alhazen is always drawn to “ornamental designs, yet he speaks of them as if they did not exist on a material object” (p. 119). Belting is rather selective in the examples of Islamic art and architecture he uses to illustrate the differing “mindsets” of East and West. In chapter 2 he refers to the aniconic mosaics of the Umayyad Great Mosque in Damascus and the Dome of the Rock without mentioning the figurative paintings and sculptures that populate Umayyad palaces and bathhouses. He mentions that in Ottoman Istanbul the Hagia Sophia Mosque’s “Christian images were uncovered for the first time by Sultan Abdülmejid I (ruled 1839–1861)” only to be covered again, without explaining that they were left open to the view of Muslim congregations for centuries, until being whitewashed in the mid-eighteenth century. See *Florence and Baghdad*, 55, where Belting also cites my article on the Hagia Sophia Mosque, which discusses the visibility of its Byzantine mosaics for about three centuries.


54. Al-Maqrizi, *Al-Mawâ‘iẓ*[^1], ed. Sayyid, 296. Rabbat, points out in “Ajib and Gharib” (p. 17957) that “Arnold erroneously attributes the book to al-Maqrizi, when in fact al-Maqrizi does not make such a claim.” This lost work was apparently a prosopography of eleventh-century painters. Other figurative painters are discussed in Rabbat’s essay.


59. For the term ‘painters’ perspective,’ see Damisch, *Origin of Perspective*, 270.


61. The note was discovered by George Saliba, who discusses it in “Blurred Edges: At the Intersection of Science, Culture, and Art,” in *Variantology* 4, ed. Zielinski and Furlus, 353–54. Saliba only briefly mentions the Arab-Ottoman astronomer Taqi al-Din’s work in his book, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), 247–48, which concludes with the sixteenth century, presumably because he considered the “golden age” of Islamic science to have ended by that time. Saliba believes that the “age of decline” started around the sixteenth century, defined as an age “in which a civilization begins to be a consumer of scientific ideas rather than a producer of them” (p. 248).


63. For the astronomical instruments at the Galata observatory that were similar to those constructed by Tycho Brahe, see Tekeli, “Nasirîddîn, Takîyüddîn ve Tycho Brahe’nin Rasat Aletlerinın Mukayyesesi,” 301–93; Taqi al-Din Muhammed ibn Ma’rub, XVI. *Yüzyıl Osmanlı Astronomu Takîyüddîn’in Gözlem Araçları: Alâ-ı rasâdiyye li zic-i Şehîngâhiyye; Sultanat yilda çizelgeleminiin hazırlanmasında kullanılan
72. Ibn Khaldun writes: "The [Muslim] Spaniards are found to assimilate themselves to the Galician nations in their dress, their emblems, and most of their customs and conditions. This goes so far that they even draw pictures on the walls and [have them] in buildings and houses. The intelligent observer will draw from this the conclusion that it is a sign of domination [by others]." Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 1:300.
73. For the sultan's demand of Arras tapestries through his envoy, Jacques de Helly, see Jean Froissart, Collection des chroniques nationales françaises: Chroniques de Froissart, ed. J. A. Buchon, vol. 13 (Paris, 1825), 401, 408, 412, 417, esp. 420, 422. The tapestries that were associated with Bayezid I's claim to be the new Alexander are discussed in Gürür Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople," Muqarnas 29 (2012): 3–4.
77. For hadith that reject the decoration of walls in mosques, see Irene A. Bierman, Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text (Berkeley, Calif., 1998), 52n60. On a legal opinion (fatwa)


89. See Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, 11, where with reference to Alhazen’s theory of visual perception he writes: “Since images were understood in Arab culture to be purely mental, they could not be copied or depicted as analogues of nature in physical artifacts.”


93. Unlike al-Ghazali’s parable, the contest in Nizami’s version occurs during Alexander’s visit to the emperor of China, when an argument arises concerning the achievements of Greek and Chinese painters. For different versions of the competition between Greek and Chinese painters in Nizami, al-Ghazali (Ифтар ‘идам ал-дин), and Mawlawi Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), see Soucek, “Nizami on Painters and Painting,” 13–14. In the version of Rumi, who wrote in Anatolia (Rum), it is the Rumi (Greek) painter who wins the contest rather than his Chinese rival. The complex issues of interpretation raised by these texts and other versions by Anvari (d. 1187), Amir Khusraw Dihlavi (d. 1325), and ‘Abdi Beg Shirazi (d. 1580–81) (dated 950 [1544]) are discussed in Angelo Michele Piemontese, “La leggenda persiana del contrasto fra pittori greci e cinesi,” in *L’arco di Fango che rubò la luce alle stele: Studi in onore di Eugenio Galdieri per il suo settantesimo compleanno*, ed. Michele Bernardini et al. (Lugano, 1995), 293–302; see also Porter, *Peinture et art du livre*, 137, 139. In the Safavid poet ‘Abdi Beg’s version, the contest is between Chinese and Frankish figurative painters, in which the former prevail.

94. In Ibn Khaldun’s explication of al-Ghazali’s parable, the Greek painter is replaced by a group of Indian painters and the Chinese painters win the contest. Ibn Khaldûn, *La Voie et la Loi: Ou La Maître et le Juriste, Shifâʾ al-sâʾil li-tadhhîb al-maṣâʾil*, trans. and introd. by Rene Pérez (Paris, 1991), 129–32. Given Nizami’s theory of painting, his text probably illustrates the superiority of mystical vision over acquired knowledge, like the accounts of al-Ghazali, Rumi, and others. Soucek detects “a curiously scientific flavor” in Nizami’s account, which may have been adapted from “an illustrative anecdote used in an optical treatise.” Soucek, “Nizami on Painters and Painting,” 12, 14.

95. Quoted in Damisch, *Origin of Perspective*, 344–45. From Antonio Manetti’s account of Brunelleschi’s invention of perspective projection in Florence, demonstrated by the use of a mirror.


97. Mustafa ‘Ali’s account differs from some Safavid texts that criticize Mani’s heresy, such as Dust Muhammad’s album preface. See n. 101 below. According to Mustafa ‘Ali, Mani is executed in the end not because his images are heretical but because the sages who envied his rising status incriminated him. For the transcription and translation of this text, see Muştafa ‘Ali, *Mustafa ‘Ali’s Epic Deeds of Artists*, ed. and trans. Akun-Kivanç, 275–81, 409–17.

98. Khwandamir refers to the Timurid painter-decorator Mawlama Haji Muhammad Naqqash, who was an expert in the
art of depiction and illumination, in similar terms: “He constantly painted strange things and wonderful forms on the pages of time with the brush of the imagination.” Trans. in Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 205, 224


100. This statement appears in a passage referring to the Timurid painter Amir Khalil, who gave up the art of depiction. Trans. in Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 14–15.

101. The Artang Tablet painted by Mani, who “began to pretend of prophesy” and duped “short-sighted ones whose turbid hearts could not reflect the light of Islam,” is mentioned in ibid., 12.

102. Trans. in ibid., 26. It has been noted that the Amir Ghyayb Beg Album’s preface closely follows Qutb al-Din Qissakhvan’s preface to a lost album dated 1556–57. See Porter, “From the Theory of the Two Qalams,” t18n46.


104. For the Preserved Tablet and the conceptualization of albums as microcosms, see Roxburgh, *Persian Album*, 90–93, 303. The reference to pure images that arouse spiritual pleasures is from the preface of an album, dated 1576–77 and dedicated to the Safavid shah, Isma’īl II. Trans. in Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 34.

105. Quoted in Başci, “Presenting *Vassāl* Kalender’s Works,” appendix II. Başci’s article also analyzes another preface written by Kalender for a *Fānāme*, which similarly likens that manuscript comprising texts and images to a microcosm. The Sultan Ahmed Album is discussed by Fetvaci, “Gaze in the Album of Ahmed I,” in this volume, in relation to the scrutinizing gaze.


107. Ibid., 1:260.

108. Ibid., 1:261.


112. For the paragone in Dust Muhammad’s preface, see Rox- burgh, *Album Prefaces*, 295–304.

113. See Fetvaci’s compelling analysis of that album, “Gaze in the Album of Ahmed I,” in this volume.


118. See n. 146 above. A similar eulogy is that of Shah Quli (d. 1557), a Safavid painter-designer who rose to become the head of the Ottoman court workshop under Sultan Süleyman. For the eulogy, see Aşık Çelebi, *Meşâʿir-i şu’arâ*, ed. Filiz Kılıç, 3 vols. (Istanbul, 2010), 1:248–30.


124. For an interpretation of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s works and other mystical texts in relation to architecture, see Akkash, *Cosmology and Architecture*. Ibn al-‘Arabi’s aesthetics and his concept of Existential Unity (waḥdat al-wujûd) are also discussed in Puerta Vilchez, *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe*, 744–805.


The mid-thirteenth century was a turning point in the history of Egypt. The hereditary Ayyubid dynasty ended and was replaced by a different kind of rule by former slaves, called the Mamluk sultans. It was not an absolute break because the first few in the new succession of slave-sultans had served under the Ayyubids. Thus their sultanate was not a rejection so much as a continuation of many of the same projects and political goals, foremost of which was to stave off assaults from the Ayyubids of Syria and the Crusaders from France. One notable change was the new emphasis on tomb-building in central Cairo, where each new, grand, prominently domed Mamluk mausoleum unmistakably proclaimed the importance of its occupant. Attached to waqf foundations such as schools and hospitals, these were highly visible monuments that made an enduring claim to the most important public space in the city. Interestingly, however, the practice of adding the founder’s tomb to his charitable complex was begun by someone who was herself hardly visible at all. The tomb (fig. 1) that the female sultan Shajar al-Durr (d. 1257) built in 1250 for her husband, Sultan Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub (r. 1240–49), is unusual among early royal tombs because it was not built by the deceased for himself during his own life or by a son who was the logical beneficiary of such investment as a link in the same dynastic chain. Instead, it was built by a singular woman who had no living sons of her own and whose qualification for rule—which was highly contested and ultimately overturned—was derived from her political relationship through marriage to the deceased sultan. This article explores the relationship among lineage, politics, and memory in tomb-building in mid-thirteenth-century Cairo and asks how, in lieu of surviving progeny, architecture became the means by which the relationship between the former (deceased) Ayyubid sultan and the new (female) Mamluk sultan was given material form.

SHAJAR AL-DURR’S RISE

The thirteenth-century was a turbulent period in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. In the second half of the twelfth century, Salah al-Din (known in Europe as Saladin, r. 1169–93) had been successful at keeping the Crusaders in check, but at his death in 1193, his territory of Syria, Egypt, the Yemen, and Palestine was divided among his heirs. The succeeding generations maintained relative peace among themselves and with the Crusaders until 1238, when the ruler of Ayyubid Damascus died and internecine fighting erupted among the remaining princes. Although, in hindsight, we tend to call the Ayyubids a dynasty, in fact they were more of a consortium of distrustful allies, fighting each other much of the time and acting cooperatively only when it was profitable to do so or when threatened by external forces. In Egypt, Sultan Salih Najm al-Din eventually emerged victorious. His claim was formalized when he was officially named sultan by the caliphate in Baghdad. Although he had briefly held Damascus in 1239, he did not manage to take it permanently until 1245, after which he held both Egypt and the region of Damascus until his death in 1249.

Sultan Salih ruled Egypt for nine years, continually defending his territory and warding off threats from his Ayyubid kin and, in his last year, Louis IX of France. At the sultan’s death, his heir proved so detestable that he
been published by Amalia Levanoni (1990, 2001) and Sabine Soetens (1999). Her architectural works have been studied and described by K. A. C. Creswell and Doris Behrens-Abouseif. These studies of the politics of mid-thirteenth-century Cairo and the history of Islamic architecture in that city are key starting points for an investigation into the specific problem that invisibility and sequestration posed for a female ruler such as Shajar al-Durr. This question is critical to understanding how she ruled that summer of 1250 and co-ruled in the years thereafter, her architectural patronage of two building complexes, and the circumstances that led to her ultimate fall. The fact that she was a woman, living sequestered in the citadel’s harem, permeated those factors and gives us an opportunity to see how architectural patronage can be a strategy for overcoming gendered invisibility.

Shajar al-Durr was a child of the Qipchaqs of the steppes of southern Russia, from where she entered into slavery. She became the favored concubine of Sultan Salih while he was still governor and before he took control of first Damascus and then Egypt. Through that relationship, she gave birth to the sultan’s son Khalil in 637 (1239–40), became his wife, and served as his occasional regent while he was away on military campaigns. The name Shajar al-Durr means “tree of pearls”—the kind of fanciful name given to slaves—but the historical sources also sometimes name her ʿismat al-Din, which is probably the name she took when she converted to Islam. Her son died after a few months, but nonetheless she earned the right to be called wālidat al-malik al-Manṣūr Khalīl (Mother of Prince al-Mansur Khalil), which became an important title in her later career, at a point when the sultan had no other living sons.

Sultan Salih ruled during a turbulent period when the Ayyubid political consortium threatened to fall apart, the Crusaders had to be repelled, and Cairo itself kept under control. One of his strategies for maintaining power was to assign regional authority to men who were not his equal and who reported only to him (thus weakening the Ayyubid consortium); the other strategy was to keep a large mamlūk slave army whose Turkic soldiers from faraway Russia and the Caucasus were loyal to him rather than the Arab majority over which he ruled. When the sultan was away on military campaigns, he

Fig. 1. Madrasa-mausoleum of Sultan Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, Cairo. (Photo: Caroline Williams)
entrusted the government to Shajar al-Durr, who had authority as the mother of his deceased son. She “ran the affairs of the kingdom during his absence on military expeditions. Her orders were obeyed, her decrees were carried out and she signed with the seal of Umm Khalil.” Additionally, her status as a manumitted slave gained her the loyalty of Salih’s advisers and the cooperation of military leaders, many of whom, like her, were Qipchaq mamlūks.

Thus, when the sultan himself died on 14 Sha’ban 647 (November 22, 1249), Shajar al-Durr was well versed in statesmanship and fully prepared to serve as regent until the heir, Turanshah (the sultan’s son by a different wife), could be recalled from his provincial post. That took several months, during which time Shajar al-Durr governed as previously: in the name of the sultan (whose death was kept secret) and as the regent for his heir. When Turanshah finally arrived home, he drank too much and behaved so badly that the politically powerful mamlūks—either with the assent or at the urging of Shajar al-Durr—assassinated him on 27 or 29 Muharram 648 (May 1 or 3, 1250). In the dramatic series of events that followed, which brought the Ayyubid dynasty to its close and ushered in the rule of the Mamluk sultans, Shajar al-Durr was an important agent.

On 30 Muharram 648 (May 4, 1250), in crisis, having lost Sultan Salih and killed his heir, and with the Crusader armies of Louis IX poised to attack, the mamlūks placed Shajar al-Durr herself on the throne. But now, instead of acting as regent, she ruled as sultan in her own right: it was her name that was read in the Friday sermon, the khutba. She had the executive power of decree, issued coins in her own name (fig. 2), and signed official documents with her own seal, not as regent for Sultan Salih or his son Turanshah but as malikat al-muslimin (Princess of Muslims) and as Mother of Khalil. This is the first key point to the question of visibility because these are aural and visual instances of occupying the public sphere, of making herself “visible” through the voicing of public speech—notably the khutba—and the circulation of her name in written inscriptions. Nonetheless, as a ruler, Shajar al-Durr could not perform all the public duties that were required precisely because of the limitations imposed on her as a woman. As public exposure would have been immodest, she ruled from within the harem in the Cairo Citadel and did not take the sultan’s normal place in street processions, funerals, and ceremonies of obeisance. Levanoni points out that Shajar al-Durr could not hold public audiences, and even the oath of office had to be administered privately, as a woman could not appear in public. Perhaps most critically, she could not lead the army, an important deficiency at a time when Egypt was constantly under attack or instigating attacks against its neighbors. These are examples of important ways that she could not occupy the public sphere, could not make herself visible.

Al-Maqrizi reported that with Shajar al-Durr’s elevation to sultan, the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad sent a stinging missive in which he wrote, “If there is no man among you [who can serve], tell me and I’ll send you one.” However, al-Maqrizi was writing in the early fifteenth century, by which point Shajar al-Durr had already become a legendary character. The historians who were witness to the events—most importantly Ibn Wasi—do not mention such a letter, and Gottschalk dismisses it as part of the mythology that became attached to Shajar al-Durr. The oft-quoted letter may have been an invention on the part of al-Maqrizi (or one of his unnamed sources) to underscore the fact that having a woman as head of state was problematic and left Egypt vulnerable to attack. Indeed, Shajar al-Durr’s counselors soon learned that the Ayyubid vizier whom Salih had placed in Damascus, having rapidly conquered many territories in Syria, had set his sights on Egypt.

Whether forced by the caliphate in Baghdad, or through fear of increased political and military vulner-
ability under a female sultan, the mamluks persuaded Shajar al-Durr, after she had ruled autonomously for three months, to enter into an arrangement with an upper-middle-ranked army mamluk named al-Muʿizz ʿIzz al-Din Aybak (d. 1257), who was given the title of atābak al-ʿasākir (army commander). Probably because face-to-face contact between the two was otherwise impossible, she eventually married him (the precise date is unknown). The marriage reveals another dimension of the visibility problem: the ways that kinship and marriage determined which women could be seen by which men. This co-rule arrangement lasted for a short while, and then at the end of the summer of 1250, Shajar al-Durr was demoted from sultan and Aybak elevated in her place, only to be replaced after five days by a minor Ayyubid puppet-prince, who was in turn replaced by Aybak by 652 (1254).

From the time of her demotion onward, matters remained in delicate balance between Shajar al-Durr and Aybak. She seems to have continued to do what she had done as regent and then as sultan, ruling de facto if not in name, one indication of which was the fact that she continued to sign official decrees as wālidat Khalīl al-Ṣāliḥīyya (Mother of Khalil and [former] Slave of Salih) and was still sometimes referred to as Sultan ʿIsmat al-Din. Aybak, meanwhile, led the army and was formally recognized as the head of state. Their uneasy union also served to bind factional interests among the powerful mamluks, many of whom remained loyal to Salih and thus to Shajar al-Durr as a nominal Ayyubid replacement, and others of whom were fully prepared to dispense with the Ayyubids and accept a merit-based rule by a mamluk. All of them regarded Aybak as weak and therefore easy to manipulate, although he proved to be a much better, more durable leader than they had expected. Thus Shajar al-Durr and Aybak divided up the role of sultan between the visible public role of the man and the invisible and nonpublic role of the woman behind-the-scenes.

**SHAJAR AL-DURR’S ARCHITECTURAL PATRONAGE**

If Shajar al-Durr had had to cede public authority to Aybak, she found other ways to assert her own agency. Like many other patrons of her time and previously, she used architecture to make a mark in the public sphere. Throughout the Islamic world, while women did not build at the same rate as men, female members of wealthy families were often entrusted with representing the family’s fulfillment of obligatory zakāt (alms-giving) and voluntary charity to the outside world by building waqf (endowed) institutions such as religious retreats, madrasas, local mosques, tombs, and soup kitchens. In Ayyubid Aleppo, Shajar al-Durr’s contemporary, the regent-queen Dayfa Khatun (d. 1243), was the patron of two important Sufi khanqahs. R. Stephen Humphreys’s study of Ayyubid Damascus showed a high level of patronage activity among women: they paid for 24 percent of the madrasas and 21 percent of the Sufi hospices, with 21 women and 126 men constituting the total number of patrons of religious and charitable architecture in that city. In Mamluk Cairo, the percentage of female patronage at 5 percent was much lower than Ayyubid Damascus. But regardless of the rate of overall patronage, in the case of mausoleums, it is highly likely that the person for whom the tomb was intended was engaged in its construction, and thus the many tombs of women in Egypt reveal traces of their architectural involvement. Case in point: Howayda Al-Harithy says that Fatima Khatun, wife of Sultan al-Mansur Qalaʿun (r. 1279–90), was actively involved in her own tomb construction, built in 682 (1283), a year before her demise.

Shajar al-Durr, as the highest-ranking and most-powerful woman in Cairo, was obviously more than a mere figurehead for family piety. She was a signer of decrees and a decision-maker, and her architectural commissions for her husband and herself clearly reflected personal interest and agency. Like any other ruler, she was well aware of architecture’s representational function, but as a female ruler with no heir to succeed her, she pushed the metonymic function of architecture in innovative ways that were subsequently adopted by her Mamluk successors, making her patronage important not only for the specific works that she built but also for its impact on later foundations.

When Sultan Salih was alive, he had had to win and control Cairo. One of the earliest Ayyubid strategies for both serving and maintaining a grip on the people had been to build public institutions, such as madrasas, and
hence by 1243–44 (641) he had completed the construction of his own madrasa in Cairo. Paid for with his own funds but donated as a charitable waqf endowment, it bore his name as the madrasa of Sultan Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub. The complex stood on the Bayn al-Qasrayn (a street known today as al-Mu‘izz li-Din Allah), the main street through the center of Ayyubid Cairo that had been a processional way for the Fatimids in their weekly parades to each of the congregational mosques as well as the avenue along which they built their palaces. The sultan had removed part of the old Fatimid palace to make space for his new complex.27 His selection of this location may have been a deliberate erasure of his Shi‘i precursors, or it may have been chosen as prime urban real estate, or both.

A narrow alley divided the complex into two identical structures, one of which still survives, albeit in a lamentably fragmentary state (fig. 3). The madrasa was unusual in that it was the first institution with four iwans to house the four branches of law taught there. Each of the twin buildings had two iwans that faced each other across a central courtyard. Although the madrasas were gutted by later building activity, a large part of the northern madrasa survives, revealing it to have been a grand complex, united by a continuous masonry street façade with a handsome brick minaret standing midway along a regular parade of tall, flat niches with windows at street level (fig. 4).

Although the madrasa structures themselves were oriented to the qibla so that the eastern iwan in each could serve as a prayer hall, the complex’s façade on the western side accommodated the preexisting street. The ornamentation and skewing of the façade, both of which had begun in the Fatimid period and become common in the Ayyubid period, show the way that building exteriors had begun to be developed as urban...
embellishments. Instead of a streetscape consisting of a labyrinthine series of twisted spaces left over after the construction of major architectural complexes with high, plain walls—in other words, treated as surplus exterior space—some major streets began to emerge as important spaces in which a succession of adorned façades attracted the admiration of passersby. An early harbinger of this development was seen in the projecting portal and salient minaret bases added to the Mosque of al-Hakim in 393 (1002–3) in early Fatimid Cairo. The decorative, skewed façade as a well-developed urban concept is especially notable at the Fatimid Aqmar Mosque (519 [1125]) (fig. 5). Both mosques stood on the same major thoroughfare as the Sultan Salih madrasa. The emphasis on the façade of the sultan’s madrasa, therefore, was not an entirely new architectural idea, but it reveals the attention paid to urban public space in that period in Cairo, especially the public space of the street.

The Sultan Salih madrasa is important in the history of Islamic architecture for its inclusion of four iwans to house the four schools of law, as well as for its ornamented façade and tall minaret. But equally important was the tomb that was added to the complex shortly after Sultan Salih’s death. Unlike the dilapidated condition of the madrasa, the tomb has survived in better condition (fig. 4 shows the domed tomb). In the early 1990s it was carefully studied and restored in a joint project by the German Institute of Archaeology in Cairo and the Egyptian Antiquities Organization.

The mausoleum is centrally planned with a dome that rises from an octagonal drum to a total height of about 21 meters (the ground level of the exterior street today is higher than it was in the thirteenth century). The pointed dome rises vertically and begins its curve from an articulated zone of transition with stepped corners and, on each façade, three stacked windows. These formerly had stucco tracery containing colored glass that filled the interior with a rainbow of light. Attached to the madrasa’s northwest corner and oriented to Mecca, the tomb has two street façades, one of which is ornamented and skewed to adjust to the qibla and thus parallel to the rest of the madrasa’s façade. However, the tomb does not simply extend the extant madrasa façade: it juts 5 meters beyond it, making an aggressive claim on public space and asserting its presence even more forcibly than the rest of the building. This projection into the space of the street, which we have seen was gaining importance as an urban element, together with the rise of the dome above the walls of the madrasa, gave the tomb extraordinary visual prominence.

The interior consists of a square chamber measuring 10.65 meters square. Due to the rotation often necessary to orient Cairene buildings toward Mecca, the interior...
space of the tomb does not match the outer dimensions marked by its skewed façade, and thus some portions of the walls reach a thickness of 5.30 meters.\textsuperscript{30} Notwithstanding, the outer walls are pierced by windows that allowed passersby to see the interior and, equally as important, to hear the voices of men who were paid to recite the Koran there.\textsuperscript{31} The deceased’s wooden cenotaph stands at the center of the chamber, with the actual burial vault directly below and under the floor in the ground. The cenotaph bears an inscription giving the death date of the sultan in 15 Sha’ban 647 (November 23, 1249). However, Ibn Wasil and others stated that when the sultan died, his tomb had not yet been built and thus his body was temporarily interred in the Rawda Palace; eleven months later it was removed and reburied at the tomb that Shajar al-Durr built as an addition to his madrasa. Thus the date on the cenotaph does not correspond to the date of the mausoleum.\textsuperscript{32}

In its day, the tomb was grand, sumptuous, and innovative. It was the first building in Egypt with interior corners spanned by squinches articulated as three-tiered muqarnas.\textsuperscript{33} In recent restorations, the floor and the walls were found to have been revetted in marble. Amid such luxury, the centerpiece was surely the very large mihrab on the qibla wall, made of marble laid in \textit{ablaq} technique of alternating light and dark panels—\textit{the first known example of such in Egypt.} Nairy Hampikian’s team from the German Institute found that carved pieces of marble from the dismantled Fatimid palace had also been used.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover, on the basis of vestiges of mosaics that were observed by Mahmud Ahmad in his 1939 guide, Michael Meinecke proposed that the mihrab’s hood was once sumptuously decorated with gold mosaic (no longer visible), a type of ornament imported from Syria.\textsuperscript{35} Behrens-Abouseif, who accepts these assertions, points out that although mosaic was present in the Mosque of ‘Amr in Fustat until the tenth century, and although the mihrab of Sayyida Nafisa received a mosaic mihrab in the mid-twelfth-century that lasted until the fifteenth century, the use specifically of
golden mosaic in Salih’s tomb—if indeed it had mosaic—was the first such instance in Egypt. However, it should be noted that Creswell, who was generally a meticulous observer of architectural fabric, mentioned no such traces.37

In addition to its ornamental innovations, the building stands out in the architectural history of Egypt because it launched the practice of attaching the founder’s tomb to his endowed foundation and, in so doing, established a new relationship between the deceased patron and his major public work that was his most visible legacy. The complex did not simply bear his name. It now also held his body and turned the madrasa as a whole into a grand commemorative institution that served as a frame for celebrating his importance. In empowering the building to become the eternal substitute for the sultan himself, the addition of the tomb changed the paradigm of what architecture could do: the architectural complex gained a new “identity” through the presence of the patron’s actual body. One of the body’s semiotic signs was the wooden cenotaph, glimpsed through the windows that gave onto the street, but in a larger sense the domed mausoleum as a whole became an even more powerful sign, projecting outward into that street where it demanded attention in the part of the city that mattered most. Previous royal tombs in Cairo had been built outside the city walls in sprawling cemetery zones such as Qarafa, which had many Fatimid mausoleums and had become sites for populist forms of commemoration and saint worship, and thus the placement of Salih’s tomb in the heart of Cairo may have been intended to shift attention away from those other cemeteries.38 The central location of Sultan Salih’s tomb was a new strategy.

The madrasa foundation had enabled the patron to embellish the streetscape, stake a claim to the city, and display his generosity and piety in his lifetime. The madrasa bore Salih’s name and was identified with him, but it was ultimately an educational institution for teaching and study. The tomb, in contrast, existed for the sole purpose of commemoration and—like all mausoleums—stood as a visible sign designed to preserve the memory of its occupant for eternity. By unifying tomb with madrasa, a powerful new ensemble was created that was much larger and occupied more highly charged urban space than previous tombs and, moreover, was guaranteed to remain a vibrant center of activity. From that point onward in Cairo, patrons combined architectural functions in this way all the time. The madrasa-maristan (hospital)-mausoleum of Sultan Qala’un (built 1284–85) and the madrasa-mosque-mausoleum of Sultan Hasan (built 1356–59) are but two relatively well-preserved examples of complexes that were intended to serve both as charitable foundations and as commemorative monuments to their founders. Each contains the real presence of the deceased person interred below its dome, and as a result each high dome is also a semiotic reference to that singular, important person. This was a profoundly important innovation that changed the way that architecture preserved memory and communicated individual identity in the public sphere. Earlier tombs had achieved the feat of commemoration and semiotic representation, but from Salih’s tomb onward, it was the urban placement of the tomb, its extraordinary visibility, and its aggrandizement as a defining element in a larger commemorative complex—guaranteed by its function to be full of people—that became the new paradigm.

GENDER AND THE COMMEMORATIVE TOMB

It is important to remember that it was not Sultan Salih who added the tomb, but rather Shajar al-Durr. This fact begs the question of her motivation. What did a monument to a deceased sultan-husband do for the living sultan-wifé?

A tomb serves the occupant in that it commemorates him or her forever, and it serves the descendants by celebrating the dynastic line that gives them political legitimacy. The concept of lineage is central to commemoration and mausoleums, but it is a lineage that can project in one direction only: backwards in time to the ancestors of the deceased. Thus, the inscription over the entry to the tomb of Salih identified the occupant as:

Our Master the Sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ, the Wise Just Lord, the Champion of the Faith, the Defender of the Territories, the Defender of the Shores, Najm al-Dunyā wa-al-Dīn, the Sultan of Islam and the Muslims, Master of the Kings of the Defenders of the Faith, Heir of the Kingdom from His Noble
The text celebrated Salih's lineage, as was fitting since his claim to the sultanate was made through "His Noble Forefathers" of the Ayyubid line. His claim was founded on being the son of his father, Kamil, himself the son of a sultan. Neither Salih's descendants nor the wife who succeeded him are mentioned, even though it was that wife who built and paid for the tomb. It was not her own patronage that Shajar al-Durr was emphasizing in the mausoleum inscription, but rather the legitimacy (as determined through family inheritance) of the man from whom she gained her tenuous authority to rule. The silence regarding Salih's progeny is explained by the fact that by that time Turanshah was dead and there were no other surviving sons.

Tombs celebrate genealogy, and free women typically built them for themselves or for their fathers or sons—members of their own bloodline—but rarely their husbands. In such commissions, free women celebrated their own family line as an inalienable part of their political capital. The spousal relationship was far less important since as a contract, it could be easily dissolved. But Shajar al-Durr had risen from slavery, and although she became free, she had no family ties of her own because in slavery that lineage is severed. Unlike women with family, her claim to legitimacy and status was made not through her father (somewhere back in the Central Asian steppes) but through her relationship to Salih, first as consort, then mother of his son, wife (although the precise chronology of motherhood and marriage is not known), and finally widow. Her titulature reflected this: we have already seen that in coins and documents she was called Mother of Khalil and al-Salihiyya (belonging to Salih).

Because Shajar al-Durr's claim to authority derived entirely from Salih, whether he was alive or dead, it was in her own political interest to embellish his major architectural work and celebrate his importance as the Ayyubid sultan of Egypt in a way that was as insistently visible and distinctive as possible. Thus the tomb projected into the street and its large dome rose above the madrasa and surrounding buildings. Through its row of open windows, a perpetual Koran reader could be heard, extending an audible invitation to the street. The tomb did not simply enlarge and enhance the madrasa on the same spatial and visual terms as previously; its visual prominence (and audibility) meant that the entire complex communicated more forcefully than earlier complexes, keeping Sultan Salih literally present in the heart of Cairo and insisting on his continuing claim to that space. It was a communication made visually in urban space but also through time, as a lasting commemorative monument. An earlier conjunction of madrasa and mausoleum had occurred with the complex of Nur al-Din (d. 1174) in Damascus in 1167, which Shajar al-Durr may have seen when she visited that city with Sultan Salih, but in Egypt we can credit both of these new ideas to Shajar al-Durr and her immediate circle of advisers. The Mamluk skyline of ornamental domes and minarets that is so admired today and that emblematizes historic Cairo began its development in 1250 with her addition to Sultan Salih's complex. It is because of this suppos edly invisible woman's architectural innovations that the men like Sultan Qala'un and Sultan Hasan are still visibly present in the city of Cairo.

Shajar al-Durr's astute use of the public monument to assert presence was not limited to her husband's complex. Although she came to a tragic end, assassinated in 1257 in the bathhouse in revenge for having ordered the murder of Aybak a few days earlier, she had already built her own endowed complex. This foundation, which stood outside the Ayyubid city walls in the cemetery of Sayyida Nafisa, consisted of a mosque, madrasa, baths, palace, garden, and a mausoleum, which received her body in 1257. Although only the tomb survives, its attachment to the patron's endowed foundation and its remarkable mosaic mihrab echo the innovations at the tomb of Salih and confirm that, as a patron, Shajar al-Durr was highly original.

It is commonly known that inscriptions provide an important means of communication in Islamic art and that images of people and animals are avoided altogether in Muslim religious settings such as mosques and tombs. Nonetheless, Shajar al-Durr managed to insert a clear reference to herself in the most highly charged place in any building where prayer occurs, the mihrab, where an image of an upright branch with pearlescent fruit recalls her name: shajar (tree) and durr (pearls).
Despite the evidence in favor of Shajar al-Durr’s patronage, several scholars have proposed that the mosaic mihrab hoods in the tombs that she built in Cairo were the work of Sultan Qala’un, inserted in the course of restorations in the 1280s. This theory was expressed at least as early as the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1913–36) and was repeated by Michael Meinecke, and more recently by Finbarr Barry Flood.44 Given Qala’un’s prodigious building activity and his rule over both Egypt and Syria, he is indeed a plausible conveyor of not only mosaic style but also of actual artisans from Syria to Egypt, a theory accepted by Nasser Rabbat, who suggests that mosaicists from Damascus installed scenes for Qala’un in the citadel.45 After all, Qala’un did complete the tomb of Baybars I (left unfinished at the latter’s death in 1277) in Damascus in 1281 with a mosaic mihrab hood, and he built his own madrasa complex in Cairo in 1285 with a mosaic hood in the mausoleum’s mihrab. Flood has argued that Damascene forms became especially important following the restorations to the Dome of the Rock starting in 1261 and the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus in 1269, and he attributes all the Cairo mosa-
Fig. 7. Mosaics in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. (Photo: Robert Ousterhout)

Fig. 8. Mosaics in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)
ics to Qalaʿun and his successors. The argument relies on the assumption that the restorations in Damascus and Jerusalem generated the expertise necessary to make the entirely new creations in Cairo. Under Qalaʿun’s rule, Cairo and Damascus were united under one ruler, and it is logical that there were close connections between them. But Sultan Salih had likewise ruled both Damascus and Cairo, and, by extension, so had his regent and companion, Shajar al-Durr. Other than style (from very few exemplars), there is scant evidence to support the theory that the mosaic restorations predated the new work. Indeed, even on the basis of style, it is hard to accept that the rather crude mosaics at Shajar al-Durr’s tomb were made by an artisan whose craft developed by studying and restoring the much more sophisticated mosaics at the Great Mosque of Damascus or the Dome of the Rock.

Moreover, the theory falls apart with the explanation of how this might have occurred. One explanation relies on the possibility that the mosaics were made with the new glass pieces that ‘Umari mentioned were left over from the 1269 restorations at the Mosque of Damascus; another, also relying on ‘Umari, proposes that they could have been salvage pieces that had fallen from the mosaics at the Mosque of Damascus, were saved, and then boxed up and carried to Cairo for reuse.46 While tesserae do indeed seem to have circulated and been reused in the way that ‘Umari described, it is doubtful that Damascene tesserae were used in Shajar al-Durr’s tomb. First, the color palette of the mosaic mihrab of Shajar al-Durr is very limited. On a golden background, it uses lots of black tesserae to form thick borders around flat, unmodeled shapes (fig. 9). The vine stems and leaf shapes are made with grayish tesserae with only a few sequences of green and red, with the “fruit” made of small disks of luminous white shell. The limited palette and plain shapes have little in common with the rich spectrum of colors and expertly modeled shapes in the Umayyad mosaics. If the Shajar al-Durr mihrab was made of spolia from Damascus, or from new glass pieces
that were used in the restoration at Damascus, what happened to all the other colored tesserae? Finally, and most important, it is hard to imagine Qala‘un collecting tesserae and sending them for use at Shajar al-Durr’s tomb in Cairo. If the introduction of Damascus-style mosaics was so important to him, why choose her mausoleum—which lacked political importance after her death—as one of the places to display that important connection to Syria?47

The theory of Qala‘un as the instigator of a “mosaic revival” in Cairo is ultimately not persuasive, but the point regarding the semiotic meaning of mosaics as a sign of a strong Mamluk connection to Umayyad Damascus still holds. Like Qala‘un, Shajar al-Durr might well have embraced mosaic as one of the clearest, most visible signs of a cultural link between Cairo and the Umayyad cities of Damascus and Jerusalem. And, as Rabbat notes with respect to the pictorial scenes in the Mamluk citadel, mosaic was the only medium for picture-making at that time.48

BECOMING VISIBLE

Ultimately, it is important to pay attention to the image as visual communication. In Shajar al-Durr’s tomb the image of a tree bearing pearlescent fruit was a clear reference to her name. The fact that it suddenly occurs in Egypt in this context, so clearly linked to her name, by a patron who thoroughly grasped the importance of visibility, underscores the intentionality of the semiotic association between the image and its referents. In that quarter of much-frequented tombs, one can imagine a visitor to the mausoleum entering and facing the mihrab. Astonished by the glittering golden mosaic—an unfamiliar site in Cairo in the mid-thirteenth century—the visitor looks at the image, perhaps recognizes the “tree of life” motif, and in describing it, speaks the name of the sultan herself.49 In every such utterance, the “tree of pearls” is always Shajar al-Durr and she is recalled, whether through conscious intention or not. The mihrab niche illustrates beautifully the way that “becoming visible” is entirely dependent on how we understand social, spatial, and pictorial visibility.

Shajar al-Durr lived her life within the norms that were imposed on respectable women: serving as the faithful companion to her husband during his years of military campaigning and even imprisonment, and then sequestered within the women’s quarters of the Ayyubid Citadel in her years in Cairo. She did not leave personal papers or many written clues to her identity as a person—all the contemporaneous texts that survive were written for her or about her, and they are generally brief, focusing on affairs of state. She remains an elusive character whose dramatic biography so astounded later historians that they heavily embellished and romanticized it, starting as early as al-Maqrizi but continued by modern historians.50 In this, she is like any other historical person who emerges from obscurity only through the texts, pictures, and architecture that remain after that person’s demise. But unlike a man, Shajar al-Durr was doubly invisible because she was not seen even in her own time, and that problem, as Levannoni tells us, became an impediment to her ability to govern.

I contend that the paradigm shift in architecture that Shajar al-Durr effected through her patronage of these two remarkable tombs—the expansion of architecture’s role in representing human identity—occurred precisely because of the challenge that her gender imposed. Invisible to the world as a female body, she used the architectural body as representation instead. Finally, because she was never one to respect normative boundaries, she pushed this beyond architecture and into the realm of pictorial representation, creating a mosaic that proclaimed her name in the presence of her entombed body.

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NOTES

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ing me to pursue this topic, I wish to express my gratitude to Antoinette Burton and Leslie Reagan at the University of Illinois.

1. Throughout, I use Mamluk to refer to the dynasty and mamliq to refer to the slave.


4. Primary texts are Ibn Wāṣil, Mafyarrij al-kurāb fī akhhār Banī Ayyūb (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʻArriyya, 2004); Abū al-Fidā’, Al-Mukhtarāṣar fī akhhār al-bashar, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Matba‘a al-Husaynīyya, 1997); Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, Mirʻat al-zamān (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Maqrizi, Kitāb al-sulāk li mar‘ifat duwal al-mulūk, 12 vols. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Talīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Qāhira, 1930–56). At this early stage of the ongoing research project, I am relying on published primary sources such as Ibn Wāsil and al-Maqrizi. For unpublished texts that exist only in manuscript, I have generally relied on the meticulously researched works of Götz Schregle and Amalia Levanoni.


11. Ab‘l Fida‘, Mukhtarāṣar 318b, reports the date as the 29th. Ibn Taghribirdi, Nujām (63731, cited in Soetens, "Sa‘garat ad-Durr," 107) reports it as occurring on the 27th. See also Schregle, who accepts the 29th as the correct date. Sultanin, 56–58.


14. Levanoni, "Sa‘gar ad-Durr," 214, citing Ibn Wāṣil, Kitāb jawāhir, fol. 62b, and al-‘Aynī, "Ifd al-jumān fi tahrīkh ahl al-zamān, fols. 114a, 115a. Levanoni points out that al-‘Aynī is reproduced by Ḥasan Ibn Ibrāhīm al-‘Aynī as his own Kitāb jamī‘ al-tawārikh, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Ms. arabe no. 1543, which is the version she cites for al-‘Aynī. On this situation, see William M. De Slane, Catalogue des Manuscrits Arabes de la Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883), 1291. With regard to female seclusion, however, Gottschalk argues that Ayyubid women were far less restricted than was typical among other Muslims. Gottschalk, "Die ägyptische Sultanin Sa‘garat ad-Durr," 42. With regard to the location of the oath
ceremony, Schregle shows that most authors place it in Fariskur, where Turan Shah had set up his camp. Schregle, Sultanin, 60.


16. The letter is given in al-Maqrizi, Sulṭānī, 1:368. Its authenticity is questioned by Gottschalk, "Die ägyptische Sultanin Ṣaḥārat ad-Durr," 47. But Schregle gives the letter more credence and says that while al-Maqrizi may have invented it, he may also have found a new source. Schregle, Sultanin, 23.


21. This is relayed by al-Nuwayrī (Nihāyat al-ʿarab), reproduced and translated in Schregle, Sultanin, 162–65.


26. Ibid., 168.

27. A detailed description is provided in Creswell, Muslim Architecture of Egypt, 294–100.


33. Creswell, Muslim Architecture of Egypt, 2102; Behrens-Abouseif, Islamic Architecture in Cairo, 91.


41. The longer story of Shajar al-Durr’s rise to power, as well as her political decline and ignominious death, is the subject of the book that I am currently writing: Tree of Pearls: The Extraordinary Architectural Patronage of a 13th-Century Egyptian Slave-Queen.


44. Diez, “Mīhrab”; Meinecke, “Das Mausoleum”; Finbarr Flood, “Umayyad Survivals and Mamluk Revivals: Qalawun Architecture and the Great Mosque of Damascus,” Muqarnas 14 (1997): 57–79. In shifting the date of the introduction of glass mosaic to 1250, as I am proposing, it helps to remember that Damascus was not a new discovery for the Mamluks. Sultan Salih had fought for possession of Damascus, finally succeeding in 1245. Although it was in Cairo that the Mamluks gained the throne, large numbers of mamlūks also served in Syria.


48. Rabbat, Citadel of Cairo, 169.

49. My thanks to Avinoam Shalem for suggesting this auditory form of representation.

50. For early myth-making, see Schregle, Sultanin; Gottschalk, “Die ägyptische Sultanin Šağarat ad-Durr.” As an example of such romanticization, Max van Berchem called Aybak “first the lover and then the husband of the sultana,” infusing a sexual relationship into an alliance that the primary sources reported as one of pure political, convenience. Max van Berchem, Matériaux pour un Corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum, Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire 19 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1903), 113.
In a brief commentary on a prophetic tradition concerning prayer, the renowned Andalusian judge and hadith scholar Abu Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1148) refers to the Prophet Muhammad’s extraordinary visual ability, offering insights into a premodern Islamic understanding of the nature of visual perception.1 Facing a wall while leading a prayer, the Prophet was reported to have once reproached his followers, who were not praying properly behind him, saying: “Do you think my qibla is only here [before me]? By God, your bowing and prostrating are not concealed from me; I can see you even though you are behind my back.”2 Many Muslim scholars and hadith commentators have discussed and debated the ways in which the Prophet was able to see what was behind his back. Some went as far as to suggest he had a third eye between his shoulders; others proposed that he saw an image of his followers reflected in the wall before him that acted as a mirror; yet others were more rational, arguing for a kind of inspiration or revelation, or for a peripheral vision that involved a slight turning of the face but no bending of the neck.3 Ibn al-ʿArabi dismisses these rather twisted explanations, arguing in favor of a visual ability so extraordinary that the Prophet was able to see what was behind him without turning his head, just as, on another occasion, he was able to see Paradise in the breadth of the wall before him.4 Ibn al-ʿArabi bases his argument on a particular understanding of the nature of visual perception. “Visual perception [al-ʿidrāk],” he posits, “is a meaning [maʾnā] that God creates in the eye according to what the viewer intends to see of the visible things.”5 What the viewer “intends to see” is, of course, commensurate with his or her aptitude and disposition, and, being endowed with extraordinary powers, the Prophet was thus able to see what others were incapable of seeing. In his commentary on the same hadith, the celebrated hadith scholar Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani (d. 1448) goes a step further to distinguish between ībšār and ruʾya. In contrast to ībšār (seeing), he argues, ruʾya (vision) does not—by necessity of reason—presuppose an instrument of seeing, an eye, for it is commonly believed among Sunni scholars that vision is possible without proximity or visual contact.6 Thus he reinforces Ibn al-ʿArabi’s view that intentionality in itself can become a visualization, or a point of view, literally, according to one’s visual capacity.

INTENTIONALITY AND VISIBILITY

This understanding of visual perception poses some challenges to our modern, science-based conceptions. First, the indissoluble bond between the viewer and the visible, as well as the effective agency of the viewer in shaping the visible, challenges the nature of objectivity that gives primacy to the stable properties of an independent, self-standing reality (i.e., the world out there). The margin for malleability, which allows for changing the visible reality according to the viewer’s intentionality and disposition, has been completely eradicated in post-Cartesian scientific understanding.

THE EYE OF REFLECTION: AL-NABULUSI’S SPATIAL INTERPRETATION OF IBN ‘ARABI’S TOMB

SAMER AKKACH

In this wondrous order, there is an unusual mystery; contemplate it with the eye of reflection if you are among the possessors of insights.

—Al-Nabulusi, Al-Sirr al-Mukhtabi, fol. 316
Second, the effective agency of the viewer and the malleability of visible reality provide a space for the extraordinary, the unpredictable, and the unknowable, that is, a space for mystery (ṣīr). Al-ʿAsqalani considers those who adhere to al-ʿāda (unchangeable natural habits)—that is, the rationalists—to be ahl al-bidaʿ (heretics). Thus in the premodern Islamic view, there had always been a space for the breaking of the continuity of a habitual world and the normality of things as set by the laws of nature. In this space, a suprahuman or divine power partakes in the manipulation of history, the creation of events, and the making of things with a transcendental purpose of its own. This state of being formed an object for “the eye of reflection.” And third, considering “meaning” (maʿnā) as something that God creates in the eye, not the mind, poses yet another challenge to the dissociation between sensing and reasoning in our current views that differentiate between the sensible and the intelligible, giving superiority to reasoning over sensing. Meanings are normally associated with thinking and reasoning, and as such they are products of the mind, not the senses. When meanings become associated with the eye, the eye assumes a cognitive ability, visual illusion takes on a new significance, and the immediacy in the act of recognition tends to eliminate representation and limit the role of interpretation. The implication of this switch can be seen in Ibn al-ʿArabi’s explanation of rear vision. In his commentary on the above hadith, he refers to the human lack of rear vision as “visual incapacity,” or “absence of power” (ghayb al-qudra), in compensation for which, he says, God created the mirror. Thus the existence of the mirror, in Ibn al-ʿArabi’s view, came to provide evidence of, and an extension to, the limited visual capacity of humans. As an extension to human seeing power (qudra), however, the mediating instrumentality of the mirror becomes an issue, because the appearance of the reflection creates a duality of the object and its image. To overcome this duality, Ibn al-ʿArabi argues that what appears in the mirror is not an “image” (mithāl) of a thing but the thing itself, that is, its “reality” (ḥaqīqatuhu). This is so, he explains, because the mirror has no spatial depth and substance to support the embodiment of an “image” in it, even though it gives the illusion of depth and embodiment. This phenomenon proves to him that specular presence, which is dictated by the intention of seeing, involves no otherness or representation: the meaning that God creates in the eye—not the mind—is of the thing itself.

This understanding of the nature of visual perception, though not in agreement with the optics-based approach of Muslim scientists or the Aristotelian approach of Muslim philosophers, had currency among hadith scholars, theologians, and mystics until the eighteenth century. Elsewhere I have discussed how it mediated ʿAbd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi’s (d. 1731) reading of the history of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem as well as his appreciation of its spatiality, function, and meanings. Here I shall return to this renowned eighteenth-century Damascene figure to examine the way in which this understanding of the nature of visual perception mediated his reading of the spatiality, function, and meanings of—in this case—the tomb of his spiritual teacher, the celebrated Andalusian Sufi master, Muhyi al-Din Ibn ʿArabi (d. 1240). In a rare late seventeenth-century architectural treatise titled Al-Sirr al-Mukhtabī fī Darāh Ibn al-ʿArabi (The Concealed Mystery in the Tomb of Ibn ʿArabi), al-Nabulusi interpreted the spatiality of this rather humble Ottoman complex (figs. 1–4), employing visual hermeneutics that blur the borders between intentionality and visibility, meaning and mystery.

HISTORY AND MYSTERY: THE SĪN AND THE SHĪN

Before discussing al-Nabulusi’s hermeneutics of the spatial organization of Ibn ʿArabi’s tomb, a brief presentation of its history is necessary, as the way in which it was founded was rather mystifying. Nearly three hundred years after the death of Ibn ʿArabi, his complex was constructed in 1517–18 by the Ottoman sultan Selim (d. 1520), and much mystery and intrigue have shrouded its construction ever since. Al-Salimiyya, as it came to be known after its patron, was Sultan Selim’s first and only architectural work in Damascus, marking his triumphant ruling over this strategic Mamluk city. An enigmatic treatise attributed to Ibn ʿArabi titled Al-Shajara al-Nuʾmāniyya (The Tree of Nuʿman) presented the following prediction:
When Sin [ = S, for Selim] enters Shin [ = Sh, for Sham] there shall be revealed the grave of Muhyi-l-Din. The reason for this allusion is what the Real has disclosed unto me, through direct divine informing, that our death will be in the protected city of Damascus, which is called Julqa, and that our grave will disappear for a period of time until the emergence of a leader from great Constantinople. The letter Sin, from the family of ‘Uthman, shall be the cause for the disclosure of our grave, and the construction of our shrine. And the rising of this leader will be by the order of God and the consent of His messenger.17

The treatise and the prophecies it contains add a layer of mystery to the history of this unpretentious building. The text was presented in the form of riddles and symbolic allusions concerning the destiny of, and major events associated with, the Ottoman dynasty.18 The text has been dismissed by contemporary scholars as a fabrication. Yet, although neither al-Nabulusi nor Muhammad Ibn Tulun al-Salihi (d. 1546), the historian and religious scholar who witnessed the construction of

Figs. 1 and 2. Ibn ‘Arabi’s complex in its urban context at the foot of Mount Qasiyun, ca. 1940, showing the double-pitched roof over the prayer hall. (Photos: courtesy of Imad al-Armashi)

Figs. 3 and 4. Ibn Arabi’s complex in its current form in the suburb of Shaykh Muhyi al-Din, 2010, showing the modifications, additions, and the demolition of the double-pitched roof. (Photos: fig. 3, Samer Akkach; fig. 4, courtesy of Ola al-Zouhayli)
Ibn ‘Arabi’s complex, mentioned this mysterious text, it had received considerable attention, with at least three commentaries by or attributed to well-known figures. The first is attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi’s contemporary Ahmad al-Buni (d. 1225), the second to his close disciple Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 1273), and the third to the religious scholar Salah al-Din al-Safadi (d. 1363). In addition, the celebrated historian Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) in his Muqaddima (Prolegomenon) wrote about the history and wide popularity of this kind of text, called malāḥim (sing. malhama, epic) and referred to a specific one he had seen concerned with the Turks written by a Sufi called Muhammad al-Bajarbaqi (d. 1324). This apparently popular text seems to have been written in verse and was different from that of Al-Shajara al-Nu’māniyya.

While Ibn Khaldun was unambiguously dismissive of the credibility of these texts, his renowned student, Taki al-Din al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), was not. Almost a century before the Ottoman conquest of Damascus, al-Maqrizi made reference to Al-Shajara al-Nu’māniyya and its authorship. In his famous book on the socio-urban history of Cairo, Al-Khiṭat (Plans), he devoted a chapter to the destiny of his home city: what was being said about how long the city would endure, the major events which would befall it, and the predicted time of its destruction. This chapter was drawn from the prophecies presented in Ibn ‘Arabi’s epic, Al-Shajara al-Nu’māniyya, and although al-Maqrizi did not mention the title of the work, we can assume it was the source, as Al-Shajara al-Nu’māniyya was the only known eschatological treatise attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi that was concerned with Egypt, Ard al-Kinana. Al-Maqrizi also reported consulting an anonymous commentary on Al-Shajara al-Nu’māniyya, which proved to be of little help to him in deciphering its conundrums. Continuing to be concerned with its content, he consulted with a trustworthy colleague, who had seen a greater commentary in two volumes and who provided al-Maqrizi with the details he quoted in his book.

We do not know, of course, what was in the texts al-Maqrizi and his colleague had seen, but assuming they were the same as the extant copies of Al-Shajara al-Nu’māniyya and its commentaries, then al-Maqrizi’s reference testifies to the existence of the text long before Sultan Selim’s takeover of Damascus. Whatever the case may be, the authenticity of Al-Shajara al-Nu’māniyya is not of primary concern to us here, or whether the text was written by Ibn ‘Arabi, or indeed the accuracies of the prophecies. What concerns us here is whether the treatise had played any role in Sultan Selim’s decision to construct the complex and thereby to officially sanction Ibn ‘Arabi’s sainthood.

Arabic sources tell us that after his quick and decisive victory over the weak and disorganized Mamluk army at Marj Dabiq, Sultan Selim made peaceful entries into Syrian cities in 1516. He entered Damascus that year, and after a short stay to prepare his armies, he left for his next campaign in Egypt, where he likewise encountered little resistance. Immediately upon his return to Damascus from Egypt, Sultan Selim commissioned the building of the complex over the grave of Ibn ‘Arabi. The complex was designed and constructed with surprising haste. Sultan Selim arrived back in Damascus on Wednesday, 21 Ramadan 923 (October 7, 1517), during the Muslim month of fasting. He met with the governor and local dignitaries, and then immediately commissioned the construction of the complex. On Saturday, the site visit was conducted and an initial layout was agreed; on Sunday, an adjacent residence was purchased and a building supervisor was appointed; on Monday, the demolition of existing buildings commenced; and a few days later, on 2 Shawwal (October 18), construction of the mosque commenced. After one month, on Tuesday, 3 Dhu’l-Qa‘da (November 17), Sultan Selim ordered the construction of the domed chamber over Ibn ‘Arabi’s grave. That night the foundations were dug in the cemetery, to avoid any anger over the unavoidable disturbance of some of the graves. A month later, on 10 Dhu’l-Hijja (December 24), people celebrated the Adha feast and prayed in the mosque. To celebrate the event, Sultan Selim sent to this mosque 250 sheep and camels to be slaughtered and distributed to people, but only 30 sheep to all the other mosques in the suburb of al-Salihiyya, northwest of the old city. Forty days later, on 20 Muharram 924 (February 1, 1518), the pulpit was installed. Four days afterward, Sultan Selim attended the Friday prayer there and celebrated the completion of the complex. The project took less than four months
from start to finish. Three days after the celebration of its completion, Sultan Selim left the city.23

Sultan Selim’s keen interest in Ibn ‘Arabi is intriguing, to say the least. Despite being fully preoccupied with his military campaigns, Sultan Selim devoted much attention to this project, spending lavishly and donating generously in celebration of its completion. He also set up generous endowments that supported the employment of thirty Koran reciters, four announcers of prayer, and a number of teachers, religious leaders, and administrators. Despite Ibn ‘Arabi’s wide reputation and local popularity, his grave site had remained deserted for almost three hundred years. Thus Sultan Selim’s decisive commemoration seems to have elevated Ibn ‘Arabi overnight to the status of official saint. We do not know for sure the motives behind Sultan Selim’s action, or whether the curious prophecy attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi had anything to do with it. What we know, however, is that the mysterious treatise, which was in wide circulation to this project, spending lavishly and donating generously in celebration of its completion. He also set up generous endowments that supported the employment of thirty Koran reciters, four announcers of prayer, and a number of teachers, religious leaders, and administrators. Despite Ibn ‘Arabi’s wide reputation and local popularity, his grave site had remained deserted for almost three hundred years. Thus Sultan Selim’s decisive commemoration seems to have elevated Ibn ‘Arabi overnight to the status of official saint. We do not know for sure the motives behind Sultan Selim’s action, or whether the curious prophecy attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi had anything to do with it. What we know, however, is that the mysterious treatise, which was in wide circulation, declared the rise of the Ottomans to be “by the order of God and with the consent of His messenger”24 and portrayed this major event as an auspicious sign for the prosperity of Islam in Arab lands. The perceived religious character of the Turks among the Arabs was also propitious. Al-Maqrizi reports that the famous Fatimid caliph and founder of Cairo, al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah (d. 975), was once asked about the Turks: who were they? He replied: “Muslim people who enjoin right and forbid evil; they establish the law and duties, and fight, for the sake of God, his enemies.”25

Whether this real or fabricated treatise was used to sanction—through the mediation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s prophecies—the Ottomans’ invasion of Damascus and their rule over the rest of the Arabic-speaking Muslim world is uncertain. What is certain, however, is that the transformation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s forgotten and neglected grave into a significant shrine, signaling the Ottoman endorsement of his sainthood, played a noticeable role in the development of the city’s socioreligious life. Against the wishes of almost all hadith scholars, who, according to Ibn Tulun, were opposed to Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings, Ibn ‘Arabi became the new patron saint of the city. Not only that, but the city’s most celebrated hadith scholar, Ibn Tulun himself, ironically became the first imam in the mosque of a Sufi saint whose sainthood he did not acknowledge. This rather awkward appointment might have eventually contributed to the religious controversy surrounding Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas being extended to the architecture of his tomb, prompting al-Nabulusi to write his treatise on the spatial hermeneutics of the building.

CONTROVERSY AND ARCHITECTURE

Ibn ‘Arabi was a highly controversial figure, and his mystical hermeneutics caused a deep rift among contemporary and later Muslim scholars.26 Through his influential teachings, he maintained a strong presence in Damascus, yet so did his main foe, the renowned Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). For more than two and a half centuries after his death, Ibn ‘Arabi’s grave site lay deserted and forgotten in the cemetery of Ibn Zaki, indicating that his opponents, the jurists (fuqahā’), had the upper hand in the city. According to ‘Ali b. Maymun al-Fasi (d. 1511), who visited the grave site in 1499, people in Damascus were afraid of mentioning Ibn ‘Arabi’s name and reluctant to direct visitors to the location of his tomb. He wrote: “When I arrived at Damascus I found none to direct me, for all were frightened of the tyranny of the wretched clergy…. I finally arrived at the bath-house and requested of the keeper to open the door for me so that I could enter the shrine to see the tomb. Using a subterfuge, he scaled the wall and opened the door for me. I found the shrine to be devoid of any trace of visitors. The grass had withered, thus proving that none had frequented the place.”27 Thus the official celebration of Ibn ‘Arabi’s sainthood by the new rising power, the Ottomans, marked a significant swing to the side of his supporters. This intervention might have enhanced Ibn ‘Arabi’s presence and popularized his image locally and regionally. Certainly, with the Ottomans’ sanction of Ibn ‘Arabi’s sainthood, al-Salimiyya began to attract an increasing number of pilgrims and visitors. Nevertheless, the controversy surrounding his personality and teachings only grew sharper and deeper in the ensuing centuries.28

At the time of al-Nabulusi, nearly two centuries after the construction of al-Salimiyya, Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas and teachings were under strong attack, as were also the whole path of Sufism, and especially the notion of
sainthood (*wilāya*) and the rituals associated with it, such as saint veneration through grave construction and visitation. Under the influence of the puritanical ideas of the Kadizade movement, anti-Sufi sentiment grew. Al-Nabulusi wrote extensively in defense of Sufism in general, and of Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings in particular, and commented profusely on the rational and spiritual approaches in Islam, which were reflected in the crystallizing polarity of the law and the truth (*al-sharī‘a* and *al-ḥaqīqa*). He therefore was not looking for an occasion to extend his views onto Ibn ‘Arabi’s complex, but criticism and denigration of Ibn ‘Arabi must have reached an intolerable level and been extended to his sacred shrine, prompting al-Nabulusi to write his short rebuttal in the early months of 1089 (1678), at the age of thirty-nine. With *Al-Sirr al-Mukhtabi* the polemics over Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings took on a spatial dimension. By revealing a mystery concealed in the spatiality of the complex, al-Nabulusi endeavored to provide a new way of visualizing its spatial organization and appreciating the inner significance of its architecture, thereby offering rare insights into an Islamic architectural theory.

Al-Salimiyya was constructed on a steep slope at the foot of Mount Qasiyun in al-Salihiyya. Ibn Tulun described the original structure in detail. His descriptions are consistent with the current shape and layout of the building, taking into account the additions and modifications that took place over the past five centuries (see figs. 3 and 4).

The current form of the building shows one big flat-roofed, cubical block with two small attachments to the eastern side, one of which is the original domed tomb chamber, the other a new addition. In the original design, however, the complex was terraced and consisted of three levels: an upper level of the mosque that had a courtyard with arched porticoes on three sides and a prayer hall on the fourth (southern side), with windows overlooking a garden located at the southern end; a middle level of the domed tomb chamber and rooms for seclusion with windows overlooking the garden; and a lower level of the garden on the edge of Yazid River at the southern end of the building. The complex also had a minaret and other ancillary facilities, including a freestanding domed building for charity-related activities (*takiyya*) located opposite the main entry on the upper northern side of the building (figs. 5 and 6). The main building had two entries: one from the upper level (north) into the courtyard and the main prayer hall, which was covered by a double-pitched roof; and one from the lower level of the garden through the tomb chamber. The upper entry was and still is the main entry. We do not know anything about the size or design of the garden; however, the building was set back from the river, and a freestanding tower with a mechanical device raised water from the river to the mosque, channeling it to the upper level through an aqueduct, the remnants of which are still visible (figs. 7 and 8).

Among the many religious complexes in Damascus that house tombs of religious and spiritual figures, al-Salimiyya’s multilevel spatial arrangement was unique. Al-Nabulusi’s treatise suggests that the position of Ibn ‘Arabi’s grave in the spatial arrangement of the complex had become a point of attack, as his critics seemed to have used the lower position of the tomb chamber to point out his inferior status in comparison with the higher position of the mosque. And it is possible, given the intensity of the debates his ideas had provoked, that the rational jurists might have prohibited people from descending to the lower chamber, which in their view would represent descending to polytheism and unbelief (figs. 9 and 10).

In fact, an opening poem in *Al-Sirr al-Mukhtabi* suggests that going downstairs to the tomb might be likened to descending to hell. Al-Nabulusi wrote:

> The tomb of Muhyiddin is among the most splendid, a fire for the ignorant, but light in itself. Whosoever approaches it in the mode of Moses, shall converse with Truth with sorts of presence. Do not say fire, for fire is none other than you, and go beyond interpreting the outward. A mosque up high and a garden down below, with a river that is among the most beautiful. He is in a presence in between the two, below, yet above in the loftiest palaces. The way to him is through poverty and humility, and around these all shall revolve. So reflect on what we have granted you, of sciences belonging to this and the other world.
Fig. 5 and 6. Plans of Ibn ‘Arabi’s complex in its current form together with its adjacent buildings. To the west (left) is the Ayyubid Bimaristan al-Qaymari, and to the north (above) is the takiya (part of the complex of al-Salimiyya). The original plan of the prayer hall contained only one row of columns and two bays covered by a double-pitched roof. (Plans: courtesy of Ola al-Zouhayli)

Figs. 7 and 8. The water tower of Ibn ‘Arabi’s complex, 2010, originally positioned on the Yazid River to raise water to the level of the mosque and to the courtyard. (Photos: fig. 7, courtesy of Ola al-Zouhayli; fig. 8, Samer Akkach)

THE SIRR: THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE

Referring to the spatial arrangement of al-Salimiyya, al-Nabulusi wrote: "In this wondrous order, there is an unusual mystery [sirr]; contemplate it with the eye of reflection if you are among the possessors of insights."35

Thus al-Nabulusi hinges his spatial interpretation on the notion of sirr (mystery, secret), indicating that he wrote Al-Sīrūr al-Mūkhtābī to reveal an unrecognized objective concealed in the design of the building. Yet he does not explain what he means by sirr or how it should be
understood. The notion of *sirr* is complex and can be understood in general and mystical ways, so in what sense did al-Nabulusi use it? Considering that the selection of titles was often dictated by rhyming as much as by meaning, one can argue that the term *sirr* was selected for its general usage. From this perspective, the *sirr* would simply point to an unrecognized idea and can thus be explained as an alternative, or not-so-obvious, interpretation of the multilevel building, one that pays respect and reverence to the great master it houses. From the mystical perspective, however, we must take into consideration the Sufi articulation of the notion of *sirr* as well as Ibn ‘Arabi’s reflections on it.

Al-Nabulusi was not an ordinary writer; he was a celebrated Sufi master of the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya orders, one who was well versed in Sufi teachings and hermeneutics and in full command of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings, which he regularly taught throughout his life. Accordingly, it would be unreasonable to ignore the mystical understanding of the concept of *sirr* and to overlook its agency in al-Nabulusi’s theorization. In fact, it is safe to assume that al-Nabulusi’s focus on the *sirr* reflects a deliberate choice driven by his mystical preoccupations.

To understand the mystical meaning of *sirr* in the context of al-Nabulusi’s usage with reference to architecture, a distinction must be established between *sirr* and *ma’nā*. The Arabic term *sirr* (mystery, secret) differs from *ma’nā* (meaning), though both overlap in certain respects. *Ma’nā*, from *‘anā* (to care, to be concerned with, to intend), is attached to human thinking, intention, and self-conscious deliberations, whereas *sirr*, from *sarara* (to keep inside, to hide), is a form of concealment that is independent of human intentionality and self-conscious reasoning. Access to *sirr* can be achieved through mental occurrences or events called in Arabic *khawāṭir* (sing. *khāṭir*, quick passing thoughts), which refer to flashes of *in-sight* that involuntarily roam one’s heart, appearing and disappearing quickly without an identifiable cause and source. The *khawāṭir* are considered to be a source of inspiration and revelation.

In the opening of his treatise, al-Nabulusi explains the source of his ideas: “This is a breeze from the gardens of the unseen [al-*ghayb*] and a fragrance that removes from the noses of intending visitors the cold of uncertainty [al-*rayb*], in which I have explained aspects of what God-most-high has disclosed unto me in a state of inspiration, where there is neither sign nor speech.”

Thus understood, the *sirr*, as a form of concealment, is concomitant to every revealed reality as a hidden core that is there by virtue of the reality’s disclosure, just as the shadow is inherent in the nature of light. And just as the visibility of light is realized through contrast with
shadow, revealment is likewise affirmed through contrast with concealment. The sîr, in this sense, is seen as a medium of visualization, of which the verb asarra means at once “to conceal” and “to reveal,” and surîr means both “pleasure” and “happiness.”38 From a Sufi perspective, the sîr is conceived as a state of truth concealed in between existence and nonexistence, neither known nor unknown. In humans, the sîr is defined as “a subtlety placed in the heart as the spirit placed in the body. It is the locus of visualization [mushâhada], just as the spirit is the locus of love, and as the heart is the locus of knowledge.”39 Sufis differentiate the sîr’s function in three contexts, knowledge (ʿilm), situation (ḥâl), and truth (haqîqa), considering the sîr as an “eye” that enables certain visualization according to the condition of each context.40

In Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (The Meccan Revelations), Ibn ʿArabi distinguishes three types of human desire (raghba): one is motivated by the soul (natural desire), the second by the heart (spiritual desire), and the third by the sîr (divine desire).41 These are related to the tripartite constitution of humans: natural, spiritual, and divine. Constituting the divine component of humanity, the sîr is directly connected to the Real or Truth (haqq) of the Sufi concept of the sîr lies. As a state of truth, the sîr directs attention to what is being concealed in the process of revealing; it is the presence of absence.

THE EYE OF REFLECTION

Al-Nabulusi wrote Al-Sirr al-Mukhtabī to counter the criticism being leveled at the tomb of his revered master. He wanted people to see what is not outwardly visible and to share a mode of vision similar to that through which the Prophet Muhammad visualized the invisible. This invisible reality reveals itself through visible traces: the unique spatiality of the building that acts as a medium for “the eye of reflection” to discern what is being concealed. Here the concealed mystery is not the architect’s ideas or original design intentions or the patron’s purpose behind the building, none of which is in fact important or even necessary for understanding the meaning of a work of architecture. The true meaning resides in the sîr, the mystery that lies beyond the...
architect’s and the patron’s desires, intentionality, and self-conscious reasoning.43

While presenting a theoretical reading of architecture, the spatial visualization was presented from a mystical perspective, using architecture as a vehicle to illustrate the spiritual meanings of form. In this respect, Al-Sirr al-Mukhtabi is a valuable early modern source offering a rare theoretical interpretation of Islamic architecture from a nonarchitectural perspective. In his attempt to unravel the secrets of al-Salimiyya, al-Nabulusi focused his visual hermeneutics on three aspects: first, the sitting of the complex and its relationship to geography and natural setting; second, the approach to the complex from outside; and third, the experiencing of the building from the inside (fig. 11).

Siting

Al-Salimiyya was built on a steep mountainside where Ibn ‘Arabi’s grave was originally located. In this sitting arrangement, al-Nabulusi saw a significant relationship between the mountain and the cave, the outer body and the inner heart, and considered the grave, by its very location, to be the heart of Qasiyun. “It was divine wisdom and holy secrets that led to his burial at the foot of the Salihiyaa mountain,” al-Nabulusi wrote. “He is buried in a cemetery at a somewhat steep slope of Mount Qasiyun, because it is in the heart of the blessed mountain, and knowledge is in the hearts not the minds.”44 The mountain and cave symbolism of the manifest reality and hidden secret is widely known in many traditions, yet here al-Nabulusi uses it to point to the religious difference between the theologians who depend in their knowledge on reason (naẓar) and mystics who depend on divine disclosure (kashf).45 Both terms involve visual metaphors. Naẓar (literally, vision) has been associated with reason and rationality (ahl al-naẓar are the philosophers), whereas kashf (unveiling) has been associated with intuition and the suprarational (ahl al-kashf are the mystics). In the sitting analogy, al-Nabulusi associates the mountain with reason and sight, and the cave with the heart and insight. True knowledge, he asserts, lies in the heart, not in the thoughts (al-maʿrifa fiʾl-qulūb lâ fiʾl-afkār).

In mystical thought, the heart (qalb) is associated with centrality and truth.46 In the mountain and cave metaphor, this is what Ibn ‘Arabi stands for as he rests at the heart of Mount Qasiyun. A prophetic tradition often quoted by Sufis reports a divine saying: Neither can my earth nor my heaven embrace me, but the heart of my faithful servant can. Conceived as the seat of divinity, the “heart” is defined by the Sufis as an “abstract luminous substance that mediates between the spirit...
and the soul," and as "an eternal light and transcendental secret [sirr], revealed at the center of beings, whereby God gazes at humans."^47 Thus viewed, it is the center whereby humanity is realized. With reference to the Koranic verse, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of his light is as a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp is in glass, the glass is as it were a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west” (Koran 24:35), the niche is taken to represent the body, the tree the soul, the lamp the spirit, and the glass and brilliant star the heart.^48 Thus the heart is the invisible shield through which shines the light of truth, and this is what Ibn ‘Arabi's tomb is seen to represent (fig. 12).

Access

As already described, al-Salimiyya had two entries, one at the upper level (north), the other at the lower (south). Al-Nabulusi compares this dual accessibility to two approaches to religious knowledge: the outward and the inward. The mosque, which occupies the higher level, is taken to represent the outward divine law, which is accessible by the public, whereas the tomb that occupies the lower level is taken to represent the inward truth, which is accessible only by the elite. The fact that there are two entrances to the tomb itself, one direct from below, the other via the upper mosque, is taken to represent the ways in which one can approach the religious truth of Ibn ‘Arabi's ideas and teachings. Al-Nabulusi describes a side walkway on the right-hand side of the building that leads pedestrians from the upper street down to the lower garden, which provides a setting to the complex on the edge of Yazid River. The complex itself was elevated from the garden level, so whoever approaches the building from the garden had to climb up a stair to the level of Ibn ‘Arabi’s tomb. Viewing the tomb from the garden reveals it in a lofty place, al-Nabulusi writes, while viewing it from the mosque reveals it in a low place. He says:

If you descend along the sidewalk outside the mosque that is adjacent to it on the right-hand side, you will arrive at a lush garden [rawda khadrāʾ] with fresh running water.^49 When you enter this garden you will find the tomb of the shaykh ... elevated to the highest point, in contrast to your situation when you are in the protected mosque. In this wondrous order there is an unusual mystery; contemplate it with the eye of reflection if you are among the possessors of insights. And that concealed mystery is nothing other than the presence of absolute beauty, whereby the negligent [ghāfilūn] are perplexed while the knowers [‘ārifūn] are guided.^50

Here al-Nabulusi uses the spatiality of the complex to again engage the dichotomy between naẓar and kashf.
In this spatial visualization, al-Nabulusi seems to be setting up landscape against architecture, garden against building, nature against culture (as constructed beliefs and habits) (figs. 13 and 14).

In a polarized community sharply divided between supporters and detractors of Ibn ‘Arabi, entry to the building seems to have become an issue. It was possible to imagine entry into the complex to have become a declaration of identity and a statement of position. Those who enter from above became identified with the people of the law, that is, the jurists and their allies, (reason and revelation), rationality and spirituality, the law and the truth (al-shari’a wa-l-ḥaqīqa). He takes the garden to represent revelation, spirituality, and truth, with its lower location being seen as a constant reminder of one’s humility and selflessness, the main characteristics of the people of the truth. The garden stands for truth by virtue of its natural and unmediated existence, its primordiality and unconstructedness. By contrast, the mosque stands for the religious law by virtue of its designed, determined, and constructed reality. As truth is superior to law, in al-Nabulusi’s view, the lower open space of the garden is likewise viewed to be superior to the upper enclosed mosque. In this spatial visualization, al-Nabulusi seems to be setting up landscape against architecture, garden against building, nature against culture (as constructed beliefs and habits) (figs. 13 and 14).
whereas those who enter from below became identified with the truth, that is, the Sufis and their followers. In representing initiation into religious learning, the order of access in these two entries assumes new significance. “He who enters the mosque of the law [masjid al-shariʿa] before entering the garden of truth [rawdat al-haqīqa],” al-Nabulusi asserts, “will lose considerably, as he will find the tomb of the great shaykh, may God be pleased with him, in a very low place, so he would oppose, reject, criticize, and despise, yet this would only be his own status being reflected in the mirror of the shaykh.”

Thus viewed, the ways in which people engage with the spatiality of the mosque reflect their personal attitudes and “visual (in)capacity,” to use Ibn al-ʿArabi’s metaphor. As antimystical sentiment was well entrenched in Damascus during al-Nabulusi’s time, he asked those who reject Ibn ʿArabi’s teachings to reflect on their method of learning: “What virtue can you claim for yourself if you are following others in praise and dispraise? The donkey carries loads but cannot distinguish them; it could be carrying rubbish or precious stones.”

In his spatial hermeneutics, al-Nabulusi sees a connection between the spatial order of the complex and people’s attitude, and he uses al-Salimiyya’s spatial arrangement to guide people toward good moral conduct. Viewing the tomb as a Ka’ba located in the vicinity of Mount Tur, where Moses conversed with his Lord, al-Nabulusi writes:

Humble yourself before this transcendent status and take the right-hand sidewalk of the Syrian corner, and enter from the auspicious side of Mount Tur into the sacred spot near Moses’s tree. And take what has been revealed to you and be thankful of the shaykh’s truthful presence. And drink from that river’s sweet water and do not preoccupy yourself with knowing anything other than the Lord.

In al-Nabulusi’s visual interpretation, the garden, the water, and the waterwheel (i.e., the water tower) become important elements, assuming special significance. Water is seen as the principle of life, the source of knowledge, and the medium of purification. Its integral relationship to the garden makes it an indispensable element for the experience of the mosque. The people of the mosque have no source of water other than the river below, and they are therefore obliged to drink the water of the garden raised by the waterwheel. So they are dependent on the water of the garden. As for the people of the garden, however, they do not need the water of the mosque and the mihrab. In this sense, water becomes associated with belief in Ibn ʿArabi’s sainthood and spirituality, and while all people, believers and critics, enter the mosque, only the believer enters the garden. Yet all share in their dependency on the garden’s water, and especially the detractor, who despite his rejection “will still be in need of the water of life, extracted by the wheel of thought from that garden, in order for him to achieve a complete presence and perfect state of tranquillity and submission.” “So breathe in, in that garden, the breezes of acceptance,” al-Nabulusi calls, “and do not fear the criticism of the self-deluded and the jealous, for light cannot be seen by the blind.”

As to the proper order in the relationship between the truth and the law, al-Nabulusi explains that “he who enters the garden of truth [first] will perfect his condition by upholding the requirements of the law and possessing the happiness of the two abodes. He will find the tomb of the shaykh in the highest place, expose himself to the river of eternal life, and witness the fruits of eternal happiness.” Thus it is only through accessing the complex through the garden first that one will discern the standing of the shaykh as being the highest and his status as being the most proud.

Experience

Divine secrets and lordly wisdoms, al-Nabulusi discerned, necessitated that the grave should be located at the heart of the complex, just as the grave site was positioned at the heart of the mountain. Experientially, after entering the mosque from the higher entrance, one descends to the tomb’s chamber by seventeen steps. This spatial arrangement was unusual, as graves in other buildings were normally located at the same level of the main entry. Al-Nabulusi sees psychological dimensions corresponding to the ways in which the complex is spatially experienced. At the upper level of the mosque, one has a sense of authority and arrogance, so one feels empowered to criticize the great master. By descending to the tomb via seventeen steps, however, one humbles oneself and begins to realize the greatness of the master. “Whoever enters the mosque aiming for the mihrab,” al-Nabulusi warns, “will not recognize this mystery,
which is concealed from him by his own intention. So he will be imprisoned behind the door.\textsuperscript{59}

Here al-Nabulusi uses intentionality (qasād) as both mental and visual orientation. For those who restrict their mind and eyes to the upper level, the level of the mihrab, the level of reason, will not be in a position to see the concealed mystery in the spatiality of the complex. Their position amounts to imprisonment behind the door of intentionality, in both the literal and the metaphorical sense, as those who confine themselves to the prayer hall are both visually and mentally isolated by the doors of the hall. Seeing the shaykh’s tomb beneath their feet, in a lowly status, can only be a reflection of their own low status “revealed through the dazzling light” of Ibn ‘Arabi’s presence. That is why such a person “would not understand anything of the truthful speech in the presence of truthfulness, mistakenly believing that the darkness of thoughts and souls is in fact the lights of the bride’s presence. He is thus expelled from the house because he does not belong there, and everything returns to its origin.”\textsuperscript{60}

Al-Nabulusi relates intentionality to what he visualizes as the “door of worship and prayer,” which is the real access to the complex. “Whosoever enters from the door of worship and prayer by his own self, because of his negligence in witnessing his Lord in the traces of his reason and senses, he would be a polytheist without him noticing,” al-Nabulusi writes, wondering “how would he expect to reach the highest palaces while his knowledge of the folks of God is inadequate?” By comparison, “he who enters the door of worship and prayer from the right-hand sidewalk, he would humble himself before his Lord by descending along that clear pathway” to the garden of truth. “So understand, O jurist, what the intelligent is alluding to,” al-Nabulusi calls, “and search within yourself, by which you are acting, and you will find the mosque and the mihrab being removed from before your eyes, and you will see the tomb of the shaykh ... in the high and near status, not in the status of lowliness and concealment.”\textsuperscript{61}

CONCLUSION

By searching for a concealed mystery (sīrār) in the siting, access, and spatial arrangement of Ibn ‘Arabi’s tomb, al-Nabulusi presents a theorization of architecture that is based on visual hermeneutics laced with mystical ideas. From an architectural perspective, al-Nabulusi’s conceptualization can be seen as an attempt to read nonintended design ideas into al-Salimiyya. He sees the building as a signifying instrument, pointing to a hidden truth lying beyond its formal confines. For him, the significance of the form lies in revealing the fundamental difference between two competing approaches to religious certainty, and through this difference he is able to show—in visual and spatial terms—the truth of what Ibn ‘Arabi has stood for over the centuries. In this respect al-Nabulusi’s text is unique, as known architectural treatises of that period were mainly narrative based and descriptive. Contrasting his spatial interpretations with the spatial descriptions of Ibn Tulun, for example, we can see the merit of al-Nabulusi’s theorization.

In Al-Qalā’id al-Jawhariyya (The Pearly Necklaces), Ibn Tulun gave an eyewitness account of the actual making of Ibn ‘Arabi’s complex. He provided a detailed description of the building—its context, form, spaces, size, material, color, and texture—in addition to a detailed chronicle of its construction. Elsewhere in the same book, he also gave an account of the controversy over Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings among both the elite and the public. Yet he did not discern any overlap between the two domains of architectural forms and religious debates. In his historical documentations, architecture appeared, on one side, purely material and technical, while religion appeared, on the other side, purely conceptual and polemical. Such a separation was typical in premodern Islamic literature, which explains the limited scope of architectural theory in premodern Arabic-Islamic literature. Bridging this divide and visualizing crossings and overlaps between the two domains of architecture and religion offer new epistemological possibilities, and new horizons of theoretical understanding. It is in these epistemological possibilities and horizons of understanding that architecture assumes new socio-religious and intellectual functions, and through them it becomes invested with new meanings. This was the crux of al-Nabulusi’s treatise, in which he replaced Ibn Tulun’s “technical eye” with his own “eye of reflection.” Through visual hermeneutics of concealment and
disclosure, al-Nabulusi endeavored to take the mind on a reflective journey beyond the confines of materiality into the wondrous realms of mystery and spirituality:

Surely Muhyiddin is the magnanimous imam, and among the fingers he is the thumb. A finger of Truth among many extended to the creatures, yet in this a conclusion was reached. Puzzling is everything that belongs to him, sciences and self, and a tomb by which the minds were perplexed. As is the Real in whom some have strayed, while others were guided and became steadfast. And so are all of the messengers, they are light for some, and darkness for others. So reflect O brother of enlightenment and be fair, and contemplate when delusion spreads. His tomb is the very dust of yours, and in you, however you are, he has a station. He has your soul, to which you have become a shroud, and the preservatives are those words. When insights are healthy, they become like mirrors, in which one’s intention looms. But when they darken, every form of life becomes death among mankind, and that will be the end.

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NOTES

2. Quoted in ibid., 1360.
5. Ibid.: الادراك يعني بحقته أنه على قدر مراد من أمرائع. The Arabic word idrāk, from darakā, “to reach,” also means “conceiving” and “cognition”; hence it applies to both sensory and mental activities.
7. Al-ʿAsqalānī, Fath al-Bārī, 1534: خلافاً لأثر الدعوة لفهم معادلة...
8. From a certain Sufi perspective, the senses do not err because their mode of knowing is direct, involving no mediation.
10. Ibid.: وليس الذي تراه في المرة مالك بلوغ النسب الليبية، والدليل القطاع على ذلك أن المراة تكن في خلق قشرة الدهم ينقلب بها وجه كندف بن النهدة. A short memorable address will guide you. And the delusion spreads among others. And so are all of the messengers, they are light for some, and darkness for others. The Arabic phrase “الد…”
13. ʿAbd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731) was a Damascene Sufi who took it upon himself to achieve spiritual enlightenment. He kept up an intimate spiritual relationship with Ibn Ṭabarî (d. 1240), although they were separated by five hundred years. Many considered him as the reincarnation of the great master. Al-Nabulusi conducted teaching sessions on Ibn Ṭabarî’s works throughout his life, was a regular visitor to his tomb, and in his later years moved to al-Salihiyya to live in proximity to his complex. The house he constructed for himself, still extant today and functioning as a religious center, was only a short walk from al-Salimiyya. About the same time, al-Nabulusi was given a teaching post at al-Salimiyya, where he taught Koranic interpretation and other spiritual sciences. There, in an unprecedented practice, he conducted a series of public readings of Ibn Ṭabarî’s major work, Al-Futuḥat al-Makkiyya (The Meccan Revelations), causing much controversy and religious unrest in Damascus. See Samer Akkah, ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi: Islam and the Enlightenment (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 123–28.
14. I am using two manuscript copies of this text from the Princeton University Library (Ms. 4617 and Ms. 295). The first is older and was copied shortly after the death of the author in 1351 (1738); however, the second is more legible. References to folio numbers are based on the second (Ms. 295).

16. Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) is widely recognized as one of the greatest mystics and most influential figures in the history of Islam. Born in Murcia, Spain, he spent most of his life traveling and finally chose to settle in Damascus, where he died at the age of seventy-eight. Ibn 'Arabi was a prolific and controversial figure, with between four hundred and five hundred works attributed to him. His influential ideas swept over the entire Islamic world, forcing almost every religious authority of note over many generations to take a position on his works.


19. Copies of these manuscripts are kept in the National Library of Damascus: Ahmad al-Bānī, Zahirīyya Ms. 7352; Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qunawi, Zahirīyya Ms. 6879; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafādi, Zahirīyya Ms. 4398.


22. Ibid., 1396.


24. See n. 17 above.


26. Ibn Ṭūlūn gave a detailed picture of this polarization during his time. He reported that Ibn 'Arabi was revered by most of the Persians, all of the Turks, and some groups in Damascus; however, he was opposed by “the majority of the Arab jurists [fuqahā’] and all of the hadith scholars.” Two centuries after the construction of the complex, Damascus remained deeply polarized. An antimystical sentiment ran high, and the official establishment dominated by the jurists was against Sufi teachings and practices. Ibn Ṭūlūn, Al-Qalāʾid al-Jawhariyya, 2:538.


29. I have discussed this in a recent publication, Samer Akkach, Intimate Invocations: Al-Ghazzā’s Biography of 'Abd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī (1641–1739) (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 5–14. Influenced by the ideas of the Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya, the Wahhabis were among the most zealous advocates against these practices.


31. This was a prolific year for al-Nābulusī, during which he wrote a wide range of works.


33. This mechanical device is currently in a state of disrepair. It has been documented in Ahmad Yusuf al-Hasan, Taqī al-Dīn wa l-Handasa al-Mīkānīkiyya al-ʿArabīyya (Aleppo: Maḥḍī al-Ṭurāth al-ʾIlmi al-'Arabī, 1976), 51–79.

34. Al-Nābulusī, Al-Sīr al-Mukhtābi, fol. 316. This opening poem summarizes al-Nābulusī’s interpretive approach, showing that the debate around the spatial arrangements of al-Salimiyah was in essence a debate about two religious approaches to divine certainty: the path of the truth and the path of the law.

35. Al-Nābulusī, Al-Sīr al-Mukhtābi, fol. 316.


37. Al-Nābulusī, Al-Sīr al-Mukhtābi, fol. 316.


41. Ibid., 2:521–22.

42. Al-Nābulusī, Al-Sīr al-Mukhtābi, fol. 316.


44. Al-Nābulusī, Al-Sīr al-Mukhtābi, fol. 316.


47. Abi Khuzam, Mu'jam, 144.

48. Ibid.

49. Here he is referring to the Koranic verse:

50. The verse describes a flat land with visible running water.

51. Ibn 'Arabi's preference for the empty hijr over the building of the Ka'ba points to a similar analogy. See Samer Akkach, Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam:
Al-Nabulsi’s Spatial Interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Tomb


53. Ibid., fol. 317.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., fol. 319.

56. Ibid., fol. 317.

57. Ibid., fol. 319.


60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. In Arabic, ībām means both “thumb” and “ambiguity,” which in this context refers to Ibn ‘Arabi’s being a unique figure, just like the thumb, who had been ambiguous and enigmatic to many.

ENTANGLED GAZES: THE POLYSEMY OF THE NEW GREAT MOSQUE OF GRANADA

On July 10, 2003, the Comunidad Islámica en España (CIE, or Islamic Community in Spain)—founded and still largely composed of Spanish-born converts, not immigrants—inaugurated a mosque complex under the name of the Great Mosque of Granada (al-Masjid al-jámiʿ bi-Gharnāṭa). The complex includes an interior courtyard with an ablution fountain, leading to the façade of the sanctuary; a minaret on the north and a garden on the south of the upper portion of the site; and a house for the imam and the Centro de Estudios Islámicos (Center for Islamic Studies) on the descending north slope (figs. 1–3). Dignitaries from Muslim countries and delegates from European Muslim communities attended the ceremony, along with the local, national, and international press. The construction of mosques in contemporary Europe and the United States is almost always a subject of controversy, but in Granada, the capital of the last Muslim kingdom in what is now Spain, the event took on a special cast. El País, the leading national daily, reported that the CIE had succeeded “in obtaining ... something that they did not have since the time of Boabdil’s surrender of the city to the Catholic Monarchs in 1492.” In an interview with Al-Ahram Weekly, an English-language paper published in Cairo, members of the CIE also spoke of the “return of Islam to Spain,” stating that the mosque would become “the centre for the revival of Islam in Europe.” Meanwhile, the editorial page of ABC, a conservative national daily, echoing at once the notion of Islam’s surrender then and of its return now, asserted that fundamentalist doctrines would be taught at the mosque, concluding that “given our foolish complacency,” it would be no surprise “if one day, not too far away, we’ll have to start a new Reconquest.” At the inauguration ceremony, however, a representative of the mayor’s office made appeasing remarks inflected by a particular historical perspective when he emphasized the need for “defending the values of coexistence [convivencia] and tolerance,” citing the Albaizin, the neighborhood where the new mosque was built, as an example of “perfect harmony” and a place of “cultural and religious encounter.”

So if, as elsewhere, the recent wave of Muslim immigration and its xenophobic backlash certainly mark contemporary Spain, the accounts of the inauguration, whether conciliatory or inflammatory, extend the context some five hundred years to an earlier period of Muslim presence unique in Western Europe. Whereas in general, mosques built in the twentieth century in Europe have perpetuated a postcolonial ideology through the use of “alien” or “adopted” forms, as Nebahat Avcioğlu has cogently argued, the situation in Granada is distinguished by the availability of prominent local Islamic architectural models and a complicated history in which Muslims are neither alien nor adopted in any simple sense.

In Granada, then, the new building was “immediately charged with heavy symbolic meaning,” constituting what Pierre Nora has theorized as a “lieu de mémoire,” or memory-site: a point at which collective memory is evoked to construct and maintain “the monumental edifice that was the nation.” Was the mosque to be a reminder of an eight-century-long disruption in the continuous history of Christian Spain, or to represent the alternative continuity of a hybrid identity? The opposing views on the historiography of medieval Muslim Spain expressed on the occasion of the inauguration recall the terms of a debate initiated in the 1950s by Spanish historians that has continued to influence the views
Fig. 1. Great Mosque of Granada, courtyard and façade of the sanctuary. (Photo: Olga Bush)

Fig. 2. Great Mosque of Granada, garden of the mosque, looking northeast. (Photo: Olga Bush)
Thus one needs to consider it not only as an object of the gaze—whether from the privileged frontal position of the Christian majority or the marginalized, anamorphic perspective of Spain’s neo-Muslims—but also as an alternative subject position of a distinct scopic regime. For the new mosque, as an agent in the construction of viewership and an embodiment of multiple, diverse relationships, is as much a place to gaze from as to gaze at. The real battle was for the privileged view from atop the Alhambra hill situated directly across from the Alhambra, the Nasrid palatial complex on the opposing Sabika hill and Spain’s most-frequented tourist attraction (fig. 4).

Abdulhasib Castiñeira, director of the new mosque, framed the debate in explicitly visual terms when he declared: “There is a garage-mosque and a basement-mosque. The Great Mosque of Granada is on top of the mountain, plainly visible, facing history, and in the place most visited in Granada.” His statement recalls that the CIE, initially small in numbers and limited in funds, had previously worshipped in existing residential or commercial spaces in the Albayzín. At the same time,
Fig. 4. Alhambra, view from the minaret of the Great Mosque of Granada. (Photo: Olga Bush)

Fig. 5. Alhambra, view from the Mirador of the Church of San Nicolás. (Photo: Olga Bush)
he intimates a formerly clandestine character to the neo-Muslim presence. Now the community was to be highly visible, with an institutional home that would be an architectural landmark. From there, “facing history,” meant, literally, facing the Alhambra.

Yet a curious misrecognition in Castiñeira’s remark serves to locate more precisely the point of tension concerning the site. The summit of the Albayzín is not the “place most visited in Granada.” Castiñeira conflated what one gazes at with where one gazes from, precisely because he was entangled in a neighboring gaze. The most-visited point from which to gain a sweeping panoramic view of the Alhambra is the Mirador of San Nicolás, a belvedere named for the adjacent Church of San Nicolás, which stands no more than some 18 meters (20 yards) from the new Great Mosque of Granada (figs. 5 and 6).

The battle was joined. As is to be expected, the home page of the website of the Fundación Albaiçín (Albayzin Foundation), a branch of city hall, features a view of the Alhambra.13 Much less expected: it is the garden of the mosque that has been selected as the belvedere in the photograph. Yet the accompanying text omits all mention of the mosque, referring only to the general area of the Church of San Nicolás and so giving the misleading impression that the photograph represents the view from the Mirador of San Nicolás. Thus mobilized, accommodated, or contested, the visibility of the new mosque merges aesthetics with politics.

THE SITE

The mosque’s site at the summit of the Albayzin hill, measuring more than 2,000 square meters,14 occupies a special place within the city’s topography and history. Archaeologists and historians consider the site to be the point of origin of the city of Granada, dating back to the

Fig. 6. Albayzín, Granada, view from the Alhambra with the Church of San Nicolás and its Mirador, and the Great Mosque of Granada east (right) of the church. (Photo: Olga Bush)
Oppidum lliberi, an Ibero settlement of the second half of the seventh century before the common era. Although continuously inhabited during the Roman period, the next significant occupation of the site took place during the eleventh century, when the city (madina) of Gharbata was ruled by the Zirid dynasty (1013–90). A Zirid fortress, known as the old fortress (al-qasaba al-qadima), incorporated the Roman settlement and extended farther along the hill’s ridges (figs. 7 and 8).

Under the rule of the Nasrid dynasty (1238–1492), the Albayzín hill comprised many neighborhoods, each with its mosques, communal ovens, wells, baths, markets, and shops. The Albayzín was densely populated—with thirty mosques, 14,000 houses, and a population of 40,000—until Granada’s fall in 1492 to the Christian Monarchs (the Reyes Católicos, Ferdinand and Isabella) and the subsequent exodus of the Muslim population. Further transformations took place after the Moriscos—the Muslims who remained in the city after the Christian Reconquest and who, contravening the articles of capitulation, were forcibly converted to Christianity after a rebellion in 1500—were expelled from the city and the Iberian Peninsula after another uprising in 1568–71. New Christian residents repopulated the Albayzín, consolidating small Morisco properties into large estates. Mosques were demolished or transformed into churches.

In the Plataforma de Ambrosio Vico (1611), one of the earliest graphic renditions of the Albaizín hill, several houses, possibly of Nasrid or Morisco origin, are depicted on or near the site (fig. 9). This image also shows the site’s proximity to the Church of San Salvador to the northeast and the Church of San Nicolás to the west, which was among the twenty-three mudéjar churches begun in 1501 under Cardinal Pedro González de Mendoza to accommodate the converted Moriscos. Like many others, it was built on the foundations of a demolished mosque. The Church of San Salvador now stands on the site of the Great Mosque of the Albaizín, of which the Almohad patio is the only vestige. In his engraving, Ambrosio Vico also identified a Hospital of the Moriscos close to the site of the new mosque. After the Expulsion, the hospital was given to the Order of Augustinos Descalzos, which built a convent there (it is now a carmen, or large private house with a garden). The barren land adjacent to the mosque’s site on the east in Vico’s image later served for the construction of the Convent of the Tomásas in 1676, one of many new convents founded in the seventeenth century that further changed the urban fabric. The Convent of the Tomásas, which still functions as such, was built on terrain that slopes steeply downward from the mosque’s site.

Archaeological excavations have shown that part of the site served as a cemetery shared by the Church of San Nicolás and the Church of San Salvador from the early sixteenth century until the early nineteenth century. A photograph of the Albaizín taken from the Alhambra by Jean Laurent circa 1879–80 shows the site occupied by the thick vegetation of a garden and the high walls that delineate the property on the south and east sides. A house adjacent to the garden on the west side can also be discerned in this image. From the end of the nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth century, the site was a private property that changed hands several times; by then it comprised two houses and a large garden. A document from 1890 states that the property belonged to Enrique Linares García, a dealer in antiquities and an avid photographer of the Alhambra. In 1911 he solicited a municipal permit for the construction of a house that he wished to call Carmen de los Moriscos. The name he intended for his house is characteristic of that period, when some of the estates in the Albaizín were reconstructed as orientalist fantasies, adding another historical layer to the neighborhood’s character. Linares García planned to hire Ángel Casas Vílchez, an architect renowned for his public buildings in the center of Granada as well as for orientalist reconstructions in the Albaizín, such as Carmen de la Media Luna, which still stands. There is no evidence, however, that a house was erected on the site at that time. Nonetheless, during the 1950s the property had a house on it, documented as Carmen de los Moriscos when it passed to a new owner. More recently, another prominent citizen, Manuel Sola Rodríguez-Bolívar, mayor of Granada from 1953 to 1968, owned this residence.

In 1981, when the CIE purchased the site from Rodríguez-Bolívar’s son, much of the Albaizín was in a state of abandonment. The CIE was not the only group to take
Fig. 7. Part of the defensive walls of the Zirid fortress known as the old fortress (al-qaṣaba al-qadīma) in the vicinity of the Great Mosque of Granada, near Plaza Larga, Albayzin, Granada. (Photo: Olga Bush)

Fig. 8. Defensive walls of the Zirid fortress on the western slope of the Albayzin, Granada. (Photo: Olga Bush)
advantage of the resulting low real estate prices. Many foreigners and some Spaniards from outside of Granada began to rehabilitate houses, attracted by the favorable market, the vista onto the Alhambra, and the opportunity to create residences in a large urban quarter that had preserved its medieval layout. In 1994, UNESCO declared the Albayzín a World Heritage Site. During the second half of the 1990s, the international recognition of the neighborhood’s cultural significance became an impetus for a new surge in the rehabilitation of residences, often as rental properties to accommodate the swelling waves of tourists. Despite all the changes, the Albayzín continues to be perceived and experienced by visitors and inhabitants, and promoted by regional and municipal cultural entities, as a unique living environment in which medieval and early modern structures continue to be inhabited. Indeed, public wells, though no longer in use, still punctuate the narrow streets, and Plaza Larga continues to serve as an open-air market for local residents, as it did in the medieval period (figs. 10 and 11). More than eighty houses constructed or rebuilt by the Moriscos in the sixteenth century have been preserved in the neighborhood, which in 2009 had 8,277 residents. Medieval monuments, early modern churches, and picturesque views of the city and of the luxuriant, verdant gardens of cármenes terraced along the hillside bring visitors to explore the Albayzín. The Mirador of San Nicolás is the main tourist destination. From this belvedere, spectacular panoramic vistas open onto the Alhambra, the city below, and the mountains of the Sierra Nevada. In third place after the Alhambra and the Cathedral of Granada with regard to the number of visitors, the Albayzín is a key historical, cultural, and, therefore, economic asset to the city.

To evaluate the neighborhood’s potential for the tourist industry, the Ayuntamiento de Granada (Municipal Offices of Granada) undertook an exhaustive study of the Albayzín’s urban plan culminating in a 1990...
Fig. 10. Aljibe (cistern), Plaza of San Salvador, Albayzín, Granada. (Photo: Olga Bush)

Fig. 11. Plaza Larga, Albayzín, Granada. (Photo: Olga Bush)
report titled “Plan Especial de Protección y Reforma Interior” (PEPRI, or Special Plan for Protection and Internal Reform), which became the foundation for all further studies. A concern of the PEP, namely historic preservation, is of particular interest here. According to this study, there were 2,560 buildings in the Albayzin, of which 322 were recognized for their architectural or artistic value, or for their ambient value as examples of vernacular architecture; 42 percent of these edifices predate 1920. A more recent comprehensive study of 2005 states: “Now is the moment to develop initiatives of recuperation or maintenance on behalf of collective memory and of strategies of cultural management of available cultural resources to generate initiatives for promotion of new cultural products that lend themselves to consumption by Granadan tourism.” Among many historical narratives and their visualizations, the “Moorish” past continues to be of great value, both to regional institutions for cultural preservation and to regional political parties, for promoting the uniqueness of Andalusia and thus strengthening the tourist economy and giving Andalusia some leverage in the competition for federal subsidies.

The desire of the residents at large to share in the uniqueness of the past—whether appreciating the culture that includes the figure of a “historic Moor” or instrumentalizing it for the “consumption of the ‘Arabness,’” to cite the terms of anthropologist Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar—does not extend to the present and to the presence of today’s Muslims. On the contrary, in the context of recent, large-scale immigration from North Africa, Moroccan immigrants are perceived as “the embodiment of the ghost of the medieval Moor.” Nevertheless, the impetus for the preservation of cultural heritage, including important vestiges of the Muslim artistic past, prevails. In this process of revitalization, and in conjunction with the UNESCO declaration, two important municipal laws were promulgated that would govern the design of the new mosque. First, to obtain a city permit for construction, all properties in the Albayzin have to be excavated and archaeological finds thoroughly documented. Second, new buildings in the Albayzin have to “harmonize with the typical or traditional character of the neighborhood.” The excavations of the site of the future mosque made clear that such harmony was a vexed question in the multilayered Albayzin. What type, and which tradition? Harmonize with what, or whom?

THE FORMATION OF THE NEO-MUSLIM COMMUNITY

To situate the underlying question of national identity, which intersects with Islam with a special urgency in the twenty-first century, one must look back to a pivotal moment in Spanish history in the last quarter of the preceding century, namely, the death of Francisco Franco in 1976. Toward the end of Franco’s dictatorship, a process of democratization began that eventually brought freedom of religion and speech, thus opening Spain to cultural, religious, and political diversity. In Granada in 1975, a small group of mostly left-leaning, university-educated young Spanish men, in search of both a spiritual path distinct from Catholicism and a societal model distinct from the capitalist West, gathered around Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi al-Murabit (the designation al-Murabit is derived from the name of the Almoravid dynasty, which ruled Granada from 1088 to 1166). Born in Scotland in 1930 as Ian Dallas, Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi al-Murabit converted to Islam in 1967 in Fez, Morocco, and came to be a charismatic leader and the founder of the first modern Muslim communities in several cities of Andalusia. Under his leadership, that group of young Spaniards accepted Islam, forging a Sufi-leaning community of the Maliki school. Among the tenets espoused by Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi al-Murabit and his followers, known as Morabitunés (literally, People of the ribât, or the Fortress), was the return of Islam to Spain.

In that initial period of the formation of neo-Muslim communities in Spain, especially prior to Franco’s death and immediately afterward, conversion to Islam was an act of dissent and political resistance to fascism and the “ideology of the National Catholicism.” The neo-Muslims espoused a commitment to religious and social pluralism as a cornerstone of democratization, which they grounded in a firmly held view that Islam brings political reform in the name of equality and justice. They also held an idealized vision of medieval
al-Andalus as “an exceptional social experiment” in *convivencia*, that is, peaceful coexistence, which, many continue to believe, could be undertaken once again. The former position has been expressed through cross-cultural conferences, including an annual international conference on Islamic feminism. The latter, in which al-Andalus is viewed as a “recovered memory,” has led many neo-Muslims to speak, even now, of “reversion” instead of “conversion.”

At the same time, spurred on by the resurgence of regionalism throughout Spain, many members of the socialist and communist parties, as well as liberal intellectuals, viewed conversion to Islam as the means to recuperate collective Andalusian identity in their struggle for regional autonomy, which had been suppressed under Franco. Combining their political agenda and their historical vision, neo-Muslims took a leading role in the founding of new regionalist political organizations. This regionalist movement had representative groups throughout Andalusia, such as Frente para la Liberación de Andalucía (Front for the Liberation of Andalusia) and Jama’a Islámica de Al-Andalus (Muslim Community of al-Andalus), founded in 1978 and in 1980, respectively, sometimes involving only neo-Muslims but often with the participation of non-Muslims. By 1989 fourteen Islamic associations joined to form the Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas (FEERI, or Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities), and in 1992 FEERI merged with the Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España (Union of Islamic Communities of Spain), founded in 1990, to form the Comisión Islámica de España (Islamic Commission of Spain), an institutional entity that could represent the Spanish Muslim community to the State. In the same year, the Comisión Islámica de España signed an agreement, “Acuerdo de Cooperación” (Accord for Cooperation) with the Socialist government of Felipe González in which the legal rights of the Spanish Muslim community were articulated.

While within two decades of their formation, the neo-Muslim communities of Spain had achieved a consolidated representation at the national level, the same period witnessed many local splits along religious and political lines. From the very outset the neo-Muslims of Granada comprised several groups, among them the members of the CIE who relocated to Granada from other cities in the region; a commune of hippies, from the mountains of the Alpujarras, that was receptive to the tenets of Islam; and a group that belonged to Shaykh ‘Abdalqadir as-Sufi al-Murabit’s al-Murabitun movement. They tended to dress in djellabas and turbans, making themselves into the exoticized objects of the gaze of their Christian neighbors, even if their places of worship were inconspicuous. Islam generally appeared in the streets as disparate individuals rather than as a constituted group with an institutional face. The non-Muslim residents generally identified the neo-Muslims as “Sufis” and expected that, like the hippie communes, the “Sufi” community would be transitory, leaving no lasting impact on the city.

By the early 1980s the followers of the shaykh in Granada had already divided into several groups, with separate masjids in existing buildings—the figurative, if not literal, garage mosques and basement mosques of the Albayzín. Nevertheless, the visibility of the neo-Muslims began to grow when they started to move into the neighborhood of lower Albayzín known as Calderería. At that time, this area adjoining the center of the city was dilapidated, depopulated, and frequented by drug addicts. The neo-Muslims began the rehabilitation of Calderería, renovating houses and setting up shops there. With the increasing immigration of Muslims to Spain in general and to Andalusia in particular, coming from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and especially Morocco, the visibility of Muslims could no longer remain peripheral, either to the Christian neighbors in Granada or to the tourists frequenting the new stores and tea shops of the Calderería.

It was the vision of Shaykh ‘Abdalqadir as-Sufi al-Murabit to construct a new Great Mosque for the city, and he facilitated the initial funding. Although the Spanish government has always provided financial support to the Catholic Church (including religious education, social and charitable work, and artistic heritage within its 280 museums, 130 cathedrals, and nearly a 1,000 monasteries and nunneries), Muslim communities have been largely excluded from the state’s budget. The one exception has been making Islamic instruction available at public schools, articulated in the “Acuerdo de Cooperación” of 1992 but put into effect only in...
2005. So it was that the Morabitunes, a group that continued to follow the shaykh, sought financial support for the building project from foreign governments and individuals from abroad. The historical importance of Granada as a symbol of the last bastion of medieval Muslim power in Europe and of its flourishing cultural achievements, emblematized by the Alhambra, resonated globally then and now. Hence, aided by the shaykh’s connections, the Morabitunes were successful in securing funds: first from Libya for the purchase of the land, and later from Morocco, Malaysia, and the United Arab Emirates for the construction of the mosque. Constituted under the name Sociedad para el Retorno del Islam en España (Society for the Return of Islam in Spain), the Morabitunes purchased the site at the summit of the Alhambra in 1981. By 1985 the group had taken the less militant name Comunidad Islámica en España (CIE), and it had raised sufficient funds for the erection of the mosque and also for the purchase of another property in the Alhambra for the construction of a center for teaching and cultural activities.

DESIGNING THE MOSQUE

As the CIE gathered sufficient strength and financial support to initiate the process of building a new mosque at the summit of the Alhambra, a struggle erupted between Granada’s neo-Muslims and their neighbors. Visuality was the crux of the conflict. While the height and volumes of buildings were at stake, the garden and the minaret, the principal sites for gazing from and gazing at, respectively, became the focal points of controversy. Design and redesign of the buildings and of these two elements in particular aimed at addressing the contentious issues.

Several early designs for the new mosque envisioned a building of imposing height and proportions. In one of the early undated drawings (which I am designating Design 1), the mosque is conceived as a fortified enclosure, reminiscent of a medieval ribât, with its massive volumes projecting high above the surrounding landscape. One is tempted to conjecture that visuality here bespeaks social psychology or ideology, that is, a communal feeling of being a minority under siege or a vanguard in the restoration of Islam in Western Europe. What is more certain, however, is that from the time of this very preliminary (and unrealized) design and through the many subsequent transformations, visuality was the field for making claims—and contesting them—to a local genealogy for the Muslim community. At this stage, the reminiscence of the ribât recalls the Almohad reign in twelfth-century Andalus and, more specifically, its manifestation in the Alhambra, where the minaret of the Almohad Masjid al-Ta’îbin (Mosque of the Converts) still stands, having been incorporated into the Church of San Juan de los Reyes as a bell tower. The pertinence of the name of the Masjid al-Ta’îbin to a new community of converts draws attention to Nora’s assertion that “lieux de mémoire” combine material and nonmaterial elements. Hence, it has also been noted that the ribât-like structure links the new architectural project to the oldest extant minaret in the Alhambra: the remains of the Zirid Masjid al-Murabitin (Mosque of the People of the ribât), likewise incorporated as a bell tower into the Church of San José. The former minarets—significant visual markers in the lower part of the Alhambra—operated visually as material elements, while the names of these medieval mosques resonated with the CIE as a community of converts, many belonging to the al-Murabitun movement (figs. 12 and 13).

Another undated drawing (Design 2) shows the south side of the site occupied by a large mosque, while on the northern, downward slope of the site stands a complex of linked buildings organized around an open courtyard. It is possible that a school, a cultural center, and a house for the imam were planned for some of these structures. The buildings’ volumes, simple geometric forms, and flat roofing indicate a preference for modern forms (fig. 14). Despite the Modernist predilection, the imposing masses of all of the structures, but especially of the mosque and minaret, are evocative of the first Almohad-inspired design. The portico on the south side of the sanctuary and the minaret of impressive height and proportions here figure prominently at the edge of the high platform on the south side, facing the Alhambra. A monumental, two-tower gate separates the mosque from the rest of the complex and gives entry to the school–cultural center and auxiliary buildings linked to it. This gate is mirrored on the long axis by a massive two-tower
Fig. 12. Minaret, Maṣjid al-Ta‘ībin (Mosque of the Converts) (Church of San Juan de los Reyes). (Photo: Olga Bush)

Fig. 13. Minaret, Maṣjid al-Murabitin (Mosque of the People of the ribāṭ) (Church of San José). (Photo: Olga Bush)
As in the case of Design 2, it is noteworthy that Whiteman placed the minaret at the south end of the site (here at the southeast corner instead of southwest), closest to the Alhambra and also directly above the steepest part of the south slope. The height and proportions of the minaret were thus emphasized, visually dominating the approach of visitors climbing toward the Church of San Nicolás and its mirador. The sanctuary’s façade, situated on the north side, opens onto a square courtyard with a peristyle. On its north side the courtyard provides access to another building. A minaret, similar to that of the mosque, albeit reduced in proportions, stands in close proximity to the east of the second building. This second, smaller minaret suggests that the building was probably conceived as a madrasa for the community. The absence of a cultural center from this design might be explained by the fact that the community purchased another parcel of land elsewhere in the Albayzin for this very purpose. Hence the lower part of the site, as shown in the design, is occupied by a large garden that extends down the north slope.

In 1984, three members of the CIE, all architects by training, with Manuel Pastor as the head of the group, offered what appears to be a new architectural proposal (Design 4) (figs. 17 and 18). Here the mosque occupies the high ground on the south side of the site. The T-plan façade that gives access to the school–cultural center from the street below the site and, hence, independent of the entrance to the mosque.

Yet another early proposal (Design 3) was conceived in 1982–83 by Ian Whiteman, a British convert to Islam who spent time in Granada in the early 1980s. The drawings show the site with its buildings, courtyards, and a garden enclosed by a wall (figs. 15 and 16). The mosque is projected as a hypostyle building of irregular plan, with aisles parallel to the qibla wall and with a maqṣūra (lattice screen enclosing the area of the mihrab and minbar in early mosques) delineated by its cupola. The mosque’s exterior south wall, which gives access to the sanctuary and faces the Alhambra, is framed by an arcaded portico that transforms the wall of the building into an exterior screen-façade, recalling a similar solution in the previous design. Here the portico extends beyond the façade and links the mosque with the tall, massive volume of the minaret. Whiteman’s design draws on visual references to the sanctuaries of the early Umayyad mosques. Nonetheless, the site’s irregular configuration and the placement of the minaret in a prominent position at some distance from the mosque necessitated a structure to link them—the portico. The resulting overall design was rendered typologically and spatially incongruent with Umayyad models.

Fig. 14. Drawing of the Great Mosque of Granada, Design 2, n.d. (Drawing: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)
Fig. 15. Ian Whiteman, axonometric drawing of the Great Mosque of Granada, Design 3, 1982–83. (Drawing: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)

Fig. 16. Ian Whiteman, plan of the Great Mosque of Granada, Design 3, 1982–83. (Plan: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)
Fig. 17. Drawing of the Great Mosque of Granada, Design 4, 1984. (Drawing: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)

Fig. 18. Plan of the Great Mosque of Granada, Design 4, 1984. (Plan: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)
hypostyle is marked by the elevated roofing over the central nave and the qibla aisle, as well as over the bay of the mihrab, and is emphasized further by the projecting portal of a monumental gate. Aligned with the mihrab on the longitudinal axis of the building, the gate serves as the main entrance to the mosque. A courtyard with a peristyle adjoining the sanctuary’s north side affords an entrance to the sanctuary and to the rest of the complex. Although in this proposal the massive minaret of formidable height is reminiscent of Almohad models and so, in this respect, echoes the earlier designs, its placement drastically changes the overall conception of the complex. The minaret is located on the north side of the courtyard and is aligned with a pavilion-gate on the northwest side that serves as a secondary entrance to the site, providing access to the garden and auxiliary buildings on the northern, lower slope. The portico on the exterior of the sanctuary on the south side, similar to that in Designs 2 and 3, articulates the mosque’s façade that faces the Alhambra at a nearly even topographical level on the opposing hill, highlighting the visual relationship between these sites. The minaret, towering over the buildings, clearly marks the division between the upper south slope with the mosque and the downward north slope of the site. On the north side, much like in Design 2, a monumental two-tower gate gives access to buildings organized around an open space. Aside from a projected house for the imam, the precise function of the buildings remains unclear, since a school and a cultural center were to be constructed elsewhere.

In contrast to Design 3, this proposal underscores typological affinities not simply with the early medieval mosque architecture of the Umayyads but specifically of the Umayyads of al-Andalus. The recollection of some features of the Great Mosque of Córdoba inscribes the CIE in the historical narrative of al-Andalus as the rightful heirs of the Cordoban caliphate. Visually the design controverts the chronological, (art-) historical continuum by situating the new mosque as a structure in a history that predates the palaces and oratories of the Alhambra. Ideologically, this architectural narrative allows the CIE’s disassociation from the Nasrids, the last, defeated dynasty of al-Andalus.

None of these designs were presented to the Área de Urbanismo del Ayuntamiento de Granada (Department of Urbanism of the City of Granada) for study and the eventual approval of a building permit, nor were they exhibited to the public at large. All thus represent the internal search of the community for the expression of its identity. Although unfamiliar with those designs of the mosque complex, by 1984 political opposition to the project had been organized. The Asociación de los Vecinos del Albayzin (Association of the Neighbors of the Albayzín) asked the Área de Urbanismo to rezone the site and thus preclude the construction of the mosque. It was the results of the excavations conducted on the site in 1985 that brought the implicit battle of the gazes clearly into view.

THE BATTLE OF THE GAZES

Two crucial archaeological findings came to light in 1985, both on the south side of the site, the area that now corresponds to the space of the mosque’s public garden. First, remains of an Ibero wall and material evidence of habitation (pottery and glass shards) from the same and later, Roman periods were uncovered on the west side of this area. Second, to the east vestiges of two large houses were found, one facing the Alhambra, the other adjoining the first on its north side. On the basis of the north-south orientation of the houses, both organized around a central courtyard, and their construction materials and techniques, scholars dated these buildings to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, which is to say that they are of Nasrid or Morisco origin. The prominence of the site and the size of the houses suggest inhabitants of high social status. The two sets of archaeological findings, Iberian-Roman and Nasrid-Morisco, were measured and recorded. The question of which past should meet the gaze of the present at this site was now posed materially by the archaeological evidence.

In the charged atmosphere of continuing struggle over the site’s zoning, and having depleted its funds due to the expense of an obligatory excavation campaign, the CIE found itself obliged to sell a property elsewhere in the Albayzín that had been purchased for the
construction of a school and a cultural center. A long hiatus in the project then ensued.

In 1991, the CIE contracted a renowned Granadan architect, Renato Ramírez Sánchez, whose local knowledge and standing would prove crucial in negotiating the legal terrain. Having also raised funds depleted by the 1985 excavations, the CIE was ready to move forward. Ramírez Sánchez rejected all earlier proposals, explaining to the CIE that they were out of keeping with the character of the Albayzín and would never be approved by the city.67 He had the advantage of a clear point of reference with regard to the urban design in the neighborhood articulated in the PEP, which had been adopted in the city in 1990. Instead, he conceived a mosque of less imposing proportions, on a rectangular plan, with roofing that articulated the qibla wall and the aisles perpendicular to it, and with a pitched roof over the projecting mihrab (figs. 19 and 20).

Architectural style was not the only concern for Ramírez Sánchez. He envisioned a different relationship among the elements of the complex, with a view both to the historical Albayzín and to contemporary political sensitivities. First, he moved the minaret of the mosque from its prominent position in the earlier designs at the south end of the site, facing the Alhambra and looming over the main access to the Mirador of San Nicolás, to the back—that is, the northern end of the site—and aligned it with the oratory’s longitudinal axis. In its new location, the lower part of the minaret is concealed behind the volume of the mosque, diminishing the visual impression of its height. Second, he moved an expanded garden to the south end of the site (the cultural center remained on the northern, downward slope). In contrast, Designs 2 and 3 had a carefully laid-out garden on the lower, north side. In those earlier designs, the interior gardens embedded within the mosque enclosure harmonized with one history of the Albayzín, that is, with the Nasrid and Morisco garden typology that continued through the modern period and is still seen in some private homes in the Albayzín. The interior gardens, however, were discordant with another history, that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century orientalism, in which the Alhambra was made the object of the exoticizing gaze from a belvedere-like garden of private estates, similar to the open space of the Mirador of San Nicolás.

The change in the location and dimensions of the garden in Ramírez Sánchez’s 1991 design proved welcome to the city, which had stipulated the creation of a space “equivalent in proportions to that of the Plaza of San Nicolás” (that is, of the mirador) and “with ample vistas” onto the Alhambra, hence a garden-mirador that could be a benefit to the whole neighborhood and its tourists.68 A plan to include gardens with “free public access” was unanimously ratified by the governing board of the CIE on June 9, 1994.69 However, the minaret became the focal point of great contention when the design was presented to the public in 1993 as part of Ramírez Sánchez’s “Estudio de Detalle” (Detailed Study), which set the specific features of the buildings within the outlines of the urban plan of the Alhambra, as determined by the PEPRI. In this design, despite its placement, the structure of the minaret soared over the compact volume of the mosque and the whole site of the complex. More significantly, its immediate proximity to the Church of San Nicolás was taken as a visual challenge. Anticipating concern about the relative heights of the minaret and the bell tower of San Nicolás, Ramírez Sánchez had included a drawing comparing the two and demonstrating that the volumes of the mosque, including the height of the minaret, were substantially smaller than those of the church (fig. 21). That demonstration proved insufficient.

Further word needs to be said about the context of public debate. A series of major cultural events made 1992 “Spain’s Year”: the quincentennial commemoration of the Reconquest of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs and of Columbus’s first voyage to the Americas; the World Expo in Seville; the Olympic Games in Barcelona; and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty on the formation of the European Union with the designation of Madrid as Cultural Capital of Europe.70 These events were largely intended to recognize Spain’s emergence as a democratic European nation and its foundational role in European modernity. These two points intersected with the reexamination of Spain’s medieval history—and of course its relationship with its former colonies, which is less pertinent to the present discussion. Spain vigorously promoted the vision of convivencia, and
Fig. 19. Renato Ramírez Sánchez, plan of the complex of the Great Mosque of Granada, 1991. (Plan: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)

Fig. 20. Renato Ramírez Sánchez, elevations of the Great Mosque of Granada: top, west elevation of the Center for Islamic Studies and of the mosque; bottom, south elevation of the mosque with a partial elevation of the southeast end of the Church of San Nicolás, 1991. (Elevations: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)
Refundido de la Ley del Suelo (Revised Law of Land Usage) of June 26, 1992, which stipulates: “Constructions in places adjacent to or forming part of a group of buildings of artistic, historical, and archeological character, whether vernacular or traditional, will have to harmonize with the same.”

It was in this climate that debate about the mosque, focusing on the minaret, became the stuff of daily news in Granada. The local newspaper, Ideal, reported that nearly two hundred neighbors, led by the asociación de Vecinos del Albayzín, gathered at the first public meeting to discuss Ramírez Sánchez’s “Estudio de Detalle.” Recalling the language of the Refundido de la Ley del Suelo, they objected on the grounds that “the traditional environment of the Albayzin neighborhood had to be maintained and protected” and that the mosque “would radically change the sociocultural environment of the San Nicolás belvedere.” Their position was expressed, in part, as an architectural critique. In the course of the formal process of public commentary, one of the various initiatives focused on Muslim and Jewish heritage as a platform for tolerance in the present. For instance, a major exhibition, Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain, was presented by the Alhambra and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; the Centro Cultural Islámico (Islamic Cultural Center) was inaugurated by King Juan Carlos in Madrid; and the edict expelling the Jews from Spain was formally rescinded by the king. Nevertheless, the Christian Reconquest completed in 1492 was also commemorated amid growing social opposition to the rapidly increasing immigration of North Africans. Thus while on the national level the Sephardic Diaspora was celebrated in Madrid’s synagogue and in Toledo, Granada continued to hold an annual citywide festival on January 2, El Día de la Toma (The Day of the Taking), marking the date when the Nasrid capital was taken by the victorious Catholic Monarchs.

The heightened awareness of the history of Granada that informed the reaction of the public to the mosque was articulated explicitly in terms of visuality in the...
allegations stated that the type of the minaret “breaks with the profile of the neighborhood.” But this objection was easily overturned. As the lawyer for the CIE pointed out in later court proceedings, “The base, the height and the volumetric form [of the minaret] are similar to the tower of the Church of San José, except for, logically, the addition for the bells”—that is, the former minaret of the Masjid al-Murabitín in the lower Albayzín.

The greater obstacle had deeper roots than the question of architectural style. When the Asociación de Vecinos spoke of the need for “protection,” it implied that the neighborhood was under attack, and at times it said so overtly: “If we allow this, they [Muslims] will end up taking the city.” Similar remarks have been voiced publically time and again in Spain, equating Muslims with immigration, immigration with a rise in crime, and Islam and its believers with terrorism, especially after the 2004 bombing in Madrid. In the immediate context of the discussion of Ramírez Sánchez’s design, the potential attack was characterized by the Asociación de Vecinos as “radical change” and its target was what they called the “tradition”—the one-and-only tradition of Catholic Spain, not the reconstructed hybridity of medieval al-Andalus. For the Christian residents, that tradition had been shaped by parochial education and embodied in the collective memory of the neighborhood as the public settings for processions and other religious festivities.

It needs be emphasized that the objection of the Asociación de Vecinos to the mosque project was not expressed as opposition to the democratic principle of the freedom of religion for Spain’s Muslims. The issue was the perception and use of public space, or what it called the “sociocultural environment” of the mirador. This last term is crucial, for the mosque is not strictly speaking a public space, but in referring to the belvedere, the Asociación de Vecinos was clearly thinking of the summit of the Albayzín as a public viewing point. The tradition to be protected was the Christian gaze. The height of the bell tower of San Nicolás had defined a Christian regime of visuality for half a millennium. As the highest point in the Albayzín, the bell tower embodied the privileged gaze at the Alhambra from a Christian vantage point looking down figuratively, if not literally, upon the emblem of the conquered and converted people (see fig. 5). Moreover, those looking back from the Alhambra inevitably sought the bell tower to orient their gaze at the once Muslim quarter of the Albayzín (see fig. 6). As a memory-site, the area around San Nicolás stood for the enduring supremacy of the Christian Reconquest.

In more recent history—indeed, within living memory—this area became emblematic of the reaffirmation of Catholicism. San Nicolás was one of many churches in the Albayzín and elsewhere in the city that were badly damaged in anticlerical violence during the Second Spanish Republic (1931–36). A fire set to the building in August 1932 consumed the ceiling of artesonado (assembled of numerous wooden elements cut in geometric shapes) and the interior decoration but left the exterior walls and the bell tower standing. Two religious institutions within the immediate vicinity of the Church of San Nicolás, the Convent of the Tomás and the Church of San Salvador, sustained severe damage in 1933 and 1936, respectively. In 1936, in an article titled “El Albayzín es Cristianizado,” Ideal reported on municipal efforts to restore the religious patrimony—churches, convents, and stone crosses placed near their façades, all dating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—in the “red neighborhood” of Granada of the recent past. The efforts were stalled by the Civil War (1936–39) but resumed shortly thereafter, and by the end of the 1940 many churches had been restored. In addition to the Church of San Nicolás, the freestanding stone cross in front of its façade and a medieval aljibe (cistern) nearby were restored, creating an ensemble of distinct structures of historical significance in which the Muslim past was included but as a decidedly minor element (fig. 22). The same location became the example, par excellence, of a project to create public spaces with panoramic views of the Alhambra and the city below. In addition to the Mirador of San Nicolás, belvederes were constructed at other key locations of the Albayzín, including the Mirador of San Cristóbal, with its church and large, freestanding cross on the west side of the crest of the hill. The crosses mark these privileged viewpoints as the subject position of a Christian gaze, triumphant over Republican “reds” and medieval Muslims alike.

Some fifty years later, the controversy over the politics of the gaze—both at and from—was captured in
Ideal, which cited the negative impact on the view of the Churches of San Nicolás and of San Salvador and the neighbors’ right to panoramic views of the Alhambra. Eventually the matter was resolved not only by addressing the height of the buildings but also by excavation that lowered the terrain at the summit of the mosque’s site by 1.5–2.0 meters (between 5 and 6 1/2 feet). The excavation had the correlative effect of reducing the level of the platform of the mosque complex, including the minaret, to that of the base of the Church of San Nicolás.

In that light, the visual impact of the minaret was deemed so crucial that the city government made its approval of the “Estudio de Detalle” contingent upon a most unusual measure. The CIE was required to erect a full-scale model of the minaret in situ. As the lawyer for the CIE would later argue before the Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Andalucía (Superior Court of Justice of Andalusia) in opposing a similar call for the building of a full-scale model of the whole mosque complex (an objection upheld by the court): “The full-scale reproduction of the totality, not only of the Mosque, but also of the Cultural Center, as opponents demand, would not only have been unjust, but also unnecessary, since the graphic documentation is more than sufficient for qualified persons ... to decide.” In the case of the minaret, however, the full-scale model was in fact built at the CIE’s expense, so that the divided public at large and not only those “who have the competence to decide” could join the battle of the gaze (figs. 23 and 24). City residents and officials took to inspecting the model from many locations throughout Granada, and especially from the Alhambra, with photographs appearing in many publications. In the course of the ensuing debate, Ramírez Sánchez submitted a “Proyecto Básico” (Basic Project), the stage in the process of review that follows upon the “Estudio de Detalle,” in January 1994. Upon review the following month, the Servicio Técnico
Fig. 23. Full-scale model of the minaret for the Great Mosque of Granada under construction. (Photo: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)

Fig. 24. Completed full-scale model of the minaret for the Great Mosque of Granada, to the east (right) of the Church of San Nicolás. (Photo: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)
Municipal del Área de Urbanismo (Municipal Technical Service of the Department of Urbanism) demanded changes in the heights and volumes of the buildings. Ramírez Sánchez complied, of course, revising the “Proyecto Básico” and considerably changing his design. The elevation of the minaret was altered and its height was reduced (fig. 25). Moreover, the sanctuary’s height, its roofing, and its plan were redrawn (figs. 26 and 27). Although articulated as a one-nave interior space, the sanctuary has roofs of varying heights to accommodate the women’s gallery along the upper part of the west wall. The architect also proposed a pergola that would extend from the mosque’s south wall through the entire garden. This semipermanent structure not only physically linked the mosque with the garden, visually enlarging the building beyond the perimeter of its walls, but also extended the sight lines along the axis of the sanctuary across the garden to the Alhambra, emphasizing that the privileged subject position to gaze from is that of the Muslim community in its exclusive ritual space. It also shows that the lower, north slope, similarly to his design of 1991, was to be occupied by the Center for Islamic Studies, a house for the imam, and a courtyard that separated these buildings. The revised “Proyecto Básico” was accepted, allowing Ramírez Sánchez to proceed to the “Proyecto de Ejecución” (Execution Project), presented on May 27, 1994, and approved by the Servicio Técnico on July 12, 1994. On this basis, the Ayuntamiento finally granted the Licencia Urbanística, or building permit, to the CIE on November 18, 1994.

WHAT MEETS THE EYE

Even so, the battle of the gaze continued and construction did not yet begin. On one side, thousands of signatures had been gathered on petitions throughout the city in support of the mosque in 1994. On the other side, certain local cultural institutions, such as Granada Histórica y Cultural (Historical and Cultural Granada), lent support to the opposition by reitering a concern with regard to the urban environment and cultural ambience or, once again, the “tradition.” And in January 1995 the Real Academia de Bellas Artes Nuestra Señora de las Angustias (Our Lady of Sorrows Royal Academy of Fine Arts) brought legal action against the CIE—and the city government—in an attempt to annul the building permit. Then, when a new archaeological campaign began in January 1995, the question of which past the mosque must harmonize with resurfaced.

It is worth recalling that the excavations of 1985 on the south side of the site remained exposed for a decade.
Fig. 26. Renato Ramírez Sánchez, drawing of the Great Mosque of Granada, comparing west and south elevations, designs of 1991 and 1994. (Drawings: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)

Fig. 27. Renato Ramírez Sánchez, plan of the Great Mosque of Granada, 1994. (Plan: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)
The new archaeological team, working on behalf of the city, found the results of the 1985 excavations inadequate: “The information extracted from archaeological activity ought to be qualified as poor” because, the new report declared, “the chronological period best documented is the Islamic.”97 In light of the Proyecto de Arqueología Urbana de Granada (Project of Urban Archaeology of Granada), initiated in 1994 and establishing clear criteria for the interpretation of archaeological data and the articulation of hypotheses for further investigations, a different approach was proposed for the new excavations. Since during the preceding decade few structural vestiges that could be dated to the Iberian period were uncovered elsewhere in the Albayzín and the remains of the Iberian wall had been found on the site of the future mosque, the archaeologists proposed extensive excavations on the site. Thus the new campaign, financed jointly by the city and the CIE, moved farther north to the area where the Zirid wall of the al-qasaba al-qadima was (and remains) plainly visible east of the site. It was presumed that the wall once cut across this parcel of land, but the goal of the new campaign was not the unearthing of further Zirid remains. Rather, in the understanding that the early Muslim walls would have been built atop or near Iberian-Roman constructions, this latter evidence was the new goal.

Indeed, the new excavations uncovered the vestiges of Iberian walls and structures of unprecedented dimensions and in an unparalleled state of preservation.98 The uncovered Iberian wall measured 5–7.5 meters (16 feet and 5 inches to 24 feet and 7 inches) in width, 30 meters (98 feet and 5 inches) in length and more than 4 meters (13 feet) in height. Taking into consideration the topography of the site, the location of the wall at the crest of the hill, the construction techniques and materials, and the lack of domestic structures there, it was concluded that the wall belonged to the fortified enclosure of the Iberian Oppidum Iliberri. In addition to material culture from Iberian and Roman periods, a small portion of the channel of an aqueduct that belonged to the Roman settlement and the remains of a Zirid wall were uncovered. Because the mosque complex could not be made to fit between the excavation areas on the north and south sides of the site, a decision was called for: Which past should be preserved, the Iberian on the north side, or the Nasrid-Morisco on the south side, or both, or neither?

The city government proposed a solution, suggesting that the CIE relocate the mosque complex to the outskirts of Granada.99 The neo-Muslim community rejected that literal marginalization, claiming its “right to the city.”100 Hence, upon the archaeologists’ recommendation, the Área de Urbanismo and an office for historical preservation stipulated that the CIE was allowed to proceed with the building project on the condition that a portion of the Iberian wall be conserved in situ and left accessible for viewing. The remainder of the wall had to be interred in a space free of construction. To comply, the architect was required to relocate the footprint of the mosque 4 meters (13 feet) to the south.101 The preservation of a small triangular area wherein some vestiges would remain accessible also diminished the overall area for potential construction.

Curiously, in the final design, and hence, at present, the portion of the Iberian wall is not visible from any public space; the public can access it only through the Centro de Estudios Islámicos. There are no signs on nearby streets directing tourists to the view of the wall, nor is there much information in tourist literature about this material evidence of the origins of the city. It is an all but inevitable inference, therefore, that the decision to preserve the wall served an ideological, rather than an archaeological, need to frame the Muslim heritage and present-day use of the site within an older, non-Islamic history. This particular construction of visuality—what shall be seen and what invisible? what consigned to the historical archive and what forms an intentional memory-site?—reinforced a certain narrative of national identity.

The opposite decision was made with regard to the Islamic constructions on the site. The vestiges of the Nasrid-Morisco houses that were unearthed in 1985 were reinterred under the present-day garden.102 The archaeological justification was clear. By 1995, rigorous efforts of architectural historians and architects under the leadership of Antonio Almagro Gorbea and Antonio Orihuela Uzal of the Escuela de Estudios Árabes in Granada (School of Arabic Studies, a branch of the national research institution, the Consejo Superior de
the last legal obstacle, and construction of the mosque city government and the CIE on June 12, 2000, removing the world. Community’s accomplishment resonated far and wide in the sense of the community’s accomplishment resonated far and wide in fifteen years of delay and catapulting the CIE and the were in attendance, raising the profile of the story of the qibla wall on the site. In 1996, a defiant CIE laid the ceremonial stone of a protracted battle of the gaze embedded in preexisting historiographical object of Anidjar’s admonition, but rather taking up a subject position in the present in relation to that history.

BUILDING THE PRESENT, FACING THE FUTURE

The excavations were completed in February 1995, but the outcome of the legal action initiated by the Real Academia de Bellas Artes was still pending. Nevertheless, in 1996, a defiant CIE laid the ceremonial stone of the qibla wall on the site. Foreign dignitaries from the Middle East—many of them sponsors of the project—were in attendance, raising the profile of the story of the fifteen years of delay and catapulting the CIE and the mosque project to the center of local, regional, national, and international attention once again. The Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Andalucía ruled in favor of the city government and the CIE on June 12, 2000, removing the last legal obstacle, and construction of the mosque commenced in 2001. When the new mosque complex was finally inaugurated in 2003, the sense of the community’s accomplishment resonated far and wide in Spain and among Muslim communities around the world.

In Ramírez Sánchez’s definitive design the pergola in the garden was eliminated. With the exception of the minaret and signage in Spanish and Arabic identifying the building as a mosque, the resulting complex is a deliberately unassuming architectural contribution much in harmony with the character of the Albayzín. It is a building of modest proportions with a whitewashed exterior, and, like many of the nearby cármenes, it is surrounded by a wall of medium height, although with openings that allow the garden to be seen from the adjoining streets (figs. 28 and 29). Unlike the private cármenes, however, and in keeping with the agreement between the CIE and the city, the garden of the mosque is open to the public, which is also invited to cultural events staged there under the sponsorship of the neo-Muslim community. The Centro de Estudios Islámicos, dedicated to teaching and cultural activities and open to “all interested parties,” as indicated on the mosque’s website, can be accessed independently of the mosque’s enclosure from a façade on the Calle de los Hornos, a street below the CIE property (see fig. 3).

If the exterior aspect of the mosque was the result of a protracted battle of the gaze embedded in preexisting historical, political, and cultural narratives, activated, challenged, and adapted by the building’s design, the appearance of the interior of the mosque was never an issue for public discussion. Whatever fears the public may have harbored with regard to the activities inside the mosque complex, the sanctuary, as ritual space, was shielded from the public gaze. Visitors can make their way through a covered passage that leads from the public garden into the courtyard of the mosque with its ablution fountain, and they can glimpse the sanctuary from the doorway except during daily prayers, but entry into the sanctuary proper is normally prohibited to non-Muslims.

The sanctuary presents a unified space: the mihrab is situated on the short axis opposite the entrance and the women’s gallery above the doorway; double glass doors stand on the long axis on the south wall, opening onto the garden (fig. 30). The decoration of the sanctuary, designed by Karim Viudes, an artist and a member of the CIE, functions as a Muslim memory-site, for here the gaze of the community is not entangled with that of its often oppositional neighbors. The decoration of the
Fig. 28. Renato Ramírez Sánchez, final design of the Great Mosque of Granada, west elevation. The drawing on the top shows additional alterations to the wall of the garden. (Drawings: courtesy of Renato Ramírez Nogueira Estudio de Arquitectura, Granada)

Fig. 29. Great Mosque of Granada, exterior, view from the west. (Photo: Olga Bush)
mihrab refers to the Great Mosque of Córdoba (fig. 31), and the marble veneer used on the qibla wall offers an analogy to that of the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, thus recalling crucial buildings in the early history of the Umayyads and so claiming a place in the legacy of the dynasty at the height of its power. Yet the wood paneling of the qibla was made from cedar from the Atlas Mountains, and the ceramic tile mosaic in the ablution fountain in the courtyard was crafted by artisans from Fez (fig. 32). These Moroccan references may well recollect the Nasrid-Marinid (that is, Iberian–North African) connection of the past, but also—and this is crucial—bring the present into view.

Beyond the arts, profound ties link today’s Spanish neo-Muslim and Moroccan communities: to date, the imams of the new mosque have been Moroccan; many of the neo-Muslims have Moroccan spouses; Morocco is a destination for the community’s spiritual and educational trips; the ruling house of Morocco had a chief role in financing the construction; and the largest Muslim immigrant group in Spain is from Morocco. Even more significant is the neo-Muslims’ perceptions of themselves as the spiritual and even biological descendants of the expelled Moriscos. While some Spanish converts think that their family traditions confirm their Morisco ancestry, others who immigrated to Granada from Morocco assert that their family originated in al-Andalus. At the same time, when numerous Moroccan descendants of the exiled Moriscos are denied entry to Spain, the neo-Muslims might be viewed ideologically and symbolically as virtual “returnees.” As a married neo-Muslim couple in the Albayzín sums up the situation: “We are old Moors and new Muslims.” Thus the interior of the mosque inscribes the neo-Muslim community not only into the trajectory from the early Umayyad to the last, Nasrid dynasty, but also from the history of al-Andalus to its contemporary connections to Morocco.

The mosque has become the focal point in the visual field of the determination of the neo-Muslim community of Granada to live Spanish lives, as a continuation of, rather than relegated to, the history of al-Andalus. Anidjar has argued that as long as al-Andalus is “the name of a lost world, the absence of place and the loss of context,” in the perception of tourists, scholars, and the people of Granada, we will be continually “exporting
Fig. 31. Great Mosque of Granada, sanctuary, qibla wall. (Photo: Olga Bush)

Fig. 32. Great Mosque of Granada, courtyard, ablution fountain. (Photo: Olga Bush)
Fig. 33. Alhambra, view from the garden of the Great Mosque of Granada. (Photo: Olga Bush)

Fig. 34. Great Mosque of Granada, view from the Alhambra. (Photo: Olga Bush)
to the past that is still living, even if under impossible conditions.”112 Al-Masjid al-jami’ bi-Gharnata has enabled the congregation, its neighbors, and its visitors to envision new possibilities, now that the Alhambra, reconstructed as the object of the gaze from the sanctuary and its adjoining public garden, is also a subject position from which to gaze at a living Muslim community made visible in its mosque (figs. 33 and 34). When members of that community say, in the present tense, “We are al-Andalus,”113 they articulate that reciprocal gaze: facing the past, facing the future.

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NOTES

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9. There is a growing body of scholarship, especially in the past two decades, on the discourse of Islamophobia, national identity, and Muslim immigration to Spain, as well as on the role of al-Andalus in the collective imagery within that discourse. For instance, see Hisham Aidi,”The Interference of al-Andalus” and Hisham Aidi, “Let Us Be Moors: Islam, Race, and ‘Connected Histories,” Middle East Report 229 (2003), www.merip.org/mer/mer229_aidi.html (accessed April 10, 2012).
albaicín-granada.com/seccion.php?id=laocomunidadadmu
sulanamegran (accessed May 1, 2012).
14. Pablo Jesús Casado Millán, Cristóbal Pérez Barea, Margarita
Orfia Pons, Auxilio Moreno Onorato, Antonio J. Hoces
Prieto, Fátima Pérez de Baldomero, Manuel Moreno Quero,
and María Liébana Sánchez, “Nuevos aportes para el como-
cimiento del asentamiento ibérico de Iliberri (Granada),”
in Actas del Congreso Internacional: Los íberos, príncipes de
Occidente, sección I, Sagunto, ed. C. Aranegui Gascó (Bar-
15. For the reports of the archaeological excavations of the
site, see Isidro Toro Moyano, Ángeles Rodríguez Fernán-
dez, and María Ángeles Villareal Jiménez, “Excavación de
Urgencia en el Solar de la Calle Espaldas de San Nicolás s/n
del Barrio del Albaicín (Granada),” Anuario Arqueológico
de Andalucía 3 (1985): 155–60; Casado Millán et al., “Nuevos
aportes,” 137–44.
16. Joaquín Bosque Maurel, Geografía urbana de Granada
(Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1988), 78, cited in Fran-
cisco Javier Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?: Comu-
nidades etnoreligiosas en al Albaicín granadino” (PhD
diss., Departamento de Antropología Social, Universidad de
(accessed August 5, 2012).
17. Manuel Gómez Moreno has suggested that the Church of
San Nicolás replaced a mosque, known from a historical
text as azitiñí mosque, and that on a street called Cuesta
de las Cabras, which passes below the garden of the new
mosque and leads to the Church of San Nicolás, there
was another mosque, which he identified as the mosque
“gima Cachara.” Manuel Gómez Moreno, Guía de Granada
(Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 1998), 2:263,
1:433, respectively. Gómez Moreno’s identification of the
mosques is based on historical records of properties whose
taxes supported pious foundations, first of the Nasrids and
then, after the Reconquest, of the parish churches. For
historical records in general and for the Church of San Nic-
lás in particular, see Maria del Carmen Villanueva Rico,
Hábices de las Mezquitas de la Ciudad de Granada y sus
Alquerías (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura,
1961), 1:212.
18. Ibid., 1:68–70; Fernando Acalle Sánchez, Plazas y paseos
de Granada: De la remodelación creciente de los espacios
musulmanes a los proyectos de jardines en el ochochientos
(Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2005), 91–94; Mont-
serrat Castelló Nicás, La renovación urbana en el Albaicín
(Granada: Editorial Comares, 2003), 73.
19. Remains of seventy skeletons have been documented. Aux-
lío Moreno Onorato and Pablo Jesús Casado Millán, “La
intervención arqueológica de urgencia realizada en el solar
c/Espaldas de S. Nicolás, s/n (sede de la futura mezquita)
(Barrio del Albaicín, Granada), abril 1996,” excavation
report filed with the Área de Urbanismo del Ayuntamiento
de Granada.
20. Rafael Garófano Sánchez, La Andaluzía del Siglo XIX en las
Fotografías de J. Laurent y Cía (Almeria: Junta de Andalucía,
1999), no. 86.
21. The description of the property’s dimensions and the
names of its owners can be found in the office of the Re-
istro de la Propiedad Numero Uno de Granada. The docu-
ments indicate that at an unspecified date two separate
properties under the registry numbers 13342 and 1416 were
combined and registered as one under the new number
22540.
22. “1890. C.00735.0008 (Servicios. Cementerio), Clas.:
3.08.07.05” and “191. C.02238.0137 (Servicios. Fomento/
Obras y Urbanismo), Clas.:3.01.01.01.” Archivo Histórico
Municipal, Ayuntamiento de Granada. I am grateful to
Javier Piñero, the archivist at the Archivo Histórico Munici-
pal, for making the documents pertaining to the property
available to me for consultation.
23. “1952. C.0356.0575 (Servicios. Fomento /Obras y Urbanismo),
Clas.: 3.01.04.10.” “1957. C.0398.0993 (Servicios.
Fomento /Obras y Urbanismo), Clas.: 3.01.04.10.” and “1959.
C.0326.0510 (Servicios. Fomento /Obras y Urbanismo),
Clas.: 3.01.04.10,” Archivo Histórico Municipal, Ayun-
tamiento de Granada.
25. On the gentrification of the Albaicín with its potential for
“orientalism” and its impact on the tourist industry, see
ibid., 286–316.
26. Antonio Orihuela Uzal states that “approximately half
of these houses have been rehabilitated in the last three
decades.” Antonio Orihuela Uzal, “Casas moriscas de
Granada,” online bulletin of the Asociación de Vecinas y
is preparing a monograph on this topic.
27. “Distribución de la población de Granada por barrios y
distritos, Padrón 2009,” Ayuntamiento de Granada (2009),
http://www.granada.org/obj.nsf/in/GBBNKKJ/$file/
in El Albaicín en la encrucijada, ed. Juan Carlos de Pablos
(Granada: Universidad del a Granada, 2005), 196–222, esp.
199.
29. For an analysis of the PEPI, see Castelló Nicás, La renova-
ción urbana, 182–89.
30. Juan Carlos de Pablos, “El uso residencial del Albaicín,”
in El Albaicín en la encrucijada, ed. Juan Carlos de Pablos,
72–124, esp. 123. Among recent studies on various aspects
of Albaicín’s urbanism, the topics addressed in ElAlbaicín en la encrucijada are of special interest for my article. It should
be noted, however, that the impact of the neo-Muslim and
Muslim communities is mentioned only in passing in the
analysis of the neighborhood’s economy—the businesses
in the Calderería that cater mainly to tourists. Although the edited volume was published in 2005, it is a result of a project by the sociologists of the University of Granada that was undertaken in 2000 while the mosque was still under construction.


32. Among studies of the commercialization of medieval history in Spain, see Giles Tremlett, "Foreword: 'Welcome to Moorishland,'" in In the Light of Medieval Spain, ed. Doubleday and Coleman, xi–xix. Tremlett points out that the tourism industry "accounts for 11 percent of the country's domestic product" (xii).


34. Daniela Flesler, "Contemporary Moroccan Immigration and Its Ghosts," in In the Light of Medieval Spain, ed. Doubleday and Coleman, 116. In addition to this article, the following is also especially insightful: Daniela Flesler, The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2008).


36. In the last three decades the studies on the emergence of Islam in Spain and on the perceived impact of both the neo-Muslim and the immigrant Muslim communities have proliferated. For an overview, see Marvine Howe, Al-Andalus Rediscovered: Iberia’s New Muslims (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). A succinct analytical summary of the history of the neo-Muslim communities in Andalusia, the development of their organizations, and institutional interactions with the state is Lisa Abend, "Spain’s New Muslims: A Historical Romance," in In the Light of Medieval Spain, ed. Doubleday and Coleman, 133–56. On the formation of different neo-Muslim communities in Granada, see David Coleman, "The Persistence of the Past," in ibid., 163–75. Rosón Lorente, "¿El Retorno de Tariq?," provides a nuanced anthropological study of interactions between the neo-Muslims and their neighbors within the framework of historicizing collective memory in the context of the Albayzin.

37. Some critics and scholars accuse Shaykh ʿAbdalqadir as-Sufi al-Murabit of anti-Semitic views and of being a Holocaust denier. See, for instance, Tomás Navarro, La Mezquita de Babel: El nazismo sufista desde el Reino Unido a la Comunidad Autónoma de Andalucía (Granada: Ediciones Virtual, 1998), 61–64; Coleman, "Persistence of the Past," 166; Howe, Al-Andalus Rediscovered, 17–130. An examination of the shaykh’s ideology lies beyond the scope of this article.


41. Ibid., 142.

42. Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 75–98.


44. For a more nuanced analysis of the institutional representation of Spanish Muslims in their negotiations with the Spanish government and the "Convenio de Cooperación," an agreement signed in 1992, in which the rights of Muslim communities are articulated, see Abend, “Spain’s New Muslims,” 144–46; Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 366–71.

45. For a summary of this accord, see Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 369–134.


47. Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 333–42, 335–64.

48. I am grateful to Yusuf Idris Martínez Fernández, Escuela de Estudios Árabes, Granada, for conversations over the many years of my research in Granada and for an informal interview in June 2012 about the history of the community.


Abend, “Spain’s New Muslims,” 133.

53. In Coleman’s view, the term “Morabitunes” was understood by those who opposed the mosque as “intentionally provocative and symbolically loaded.” Coleman, “Persistence of the Past,” 166. It has been noted that the CIE of Granada did not join other Muslim communities of the city in 1999, when it formed the Concejo Islámico de Granada (Islamic Council of Granada), the official body to represent all Muslims to the municipal authorities. Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 372.


55. Drawings and plans have been preserved by the Renato Ramírez Nogueira architectural firm in Granada. I am deeply indebted to Abdes Salam Gutiérrez Fraguas, the secretary of the Fundación Mezquita, one of the CIE’s founding members, who was in charge of the construction of the mosque in the 1990s, for relating to me his knowledge of the history of the community and of the different phases of the mosque project in an interview conducted in June 2012. I wish to extend my gratitude to him for giving me his permission to access the archival architectural drawings and documents preserved in the firm of Ramírez Nogueira. I also wish to acknowledge Fidel Castellano Moliné of Ramírez Nogueira’s architectural firm, who generously put the archival materials at my disposal and shared his understanding of the firm’s various designs. Documentation of the decision-making process (e.g., minutes of internal discussions of the CIE) in the evolution of the design is lacking.

56. The records preserved in the firm of Renato Ramírez Nogueira have not preserved the name(s) of the architect(s) responsible for this design, nor could Fidel Castellano Moliné or Abdes Salam Gutiérrez Fraguas identify them.


60. I am grateful to Hanna Whiteman, who communicated to me that her father made one of the early designs for the mosque. A drawing that corresponds to Design 3, dated by Ian Whiteman to 1982–83, can be seen on the designer’s website, [http://www.ianwhiteman.com/architecture.html](http://www.ianwhiteman.com/architecture.html) (accessed February 18, 2014).

61. Gutiérrez Fraguas, interview.

62. Toro Moyano, Rodríguez Fernández, and Villareal Jiménez, “Excavación de Urgencia”; José Javier Álvarez García, “Informe sobre el seguimiento arqueológico en las labores de construcción de la mezquita, centro cultural y jardines en la Plaza de San Nicolás en al Albayzin (Granada), 9 de febrero, 1995, expediente #288/94, Área de Urbanismo, Ayuntamiento de Granada.” I thank Pablo Jesús Casado Millán, the archaeologist who conducted the second excavation on the site in 1995, for clarifying the findings of both excavation campaigns, bringing to my attention all published materials, and allowing me to consult unpublished reports in the Área de Urbanismo del Ayuntamiento de Granada.


65. For a summary, see Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 479–80.

66. Gutiérrez Fraguas, interview, confirmed by Fidel Castellano Moliné.


68. The “Certificación de Acuerdo,” signed by Nicolás Serrano and Moisés Gutiérrez (that is, Abdes Salam Gutiérrez Fraguas), on June 9, 1994, is included in the “ Expediente 4728/91, Ayuntamiento de Granada no. 3320, 20 de enero, 1994,” 42. Archives of the Ayuntamiento de Granada.


71. The discussion of the origins of this celebration and the analysis of its underlying political and cultural impulses go beyond the scope of this article. For an anthropological analysis of the celebration and its repercussions within the growing Muslim communities, as well as for a summary of counterproposals—a “Day of Reconciliation,” for instance—see Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 422–68.
73. Quoted in “Asesoría Jurídica Servicio de OO.PP y Urbanismo, Ayuntamiento de Granada, expediente 288/94.”
74. For a discussion of the opposition to the mosque championed by journalists and intellectuals in the national press and other publications, see Coleman, “Persistence of the Past,” 163–75.
75. Ideal, August 10, 1993, quoted in Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 408. For a more complete history of the litigation mobilized by the Asociación de Vecinos del Albayzín against the construction of the mosque, see ibid., 402–22.
76. “A la Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo del Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Andalucía, sesión segunda, recurso 177/95. Área de Urbanismo, Ayuntamiento de Granada,” Archives of the Ayuntamiento de Granada.
77. Ibid.
78. From an interview quoted in Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 408.
79. Such fears were conditioned by the statements made by foreign jihadists and Spanish politicians, such as José María Aznar. See Aidí, “Interference of al-Andalus,” 80–85.
80. See n. 76 above.
81. On an analysis of the impact of Catholic education and religious celebrations on the formation of the collective memory of the residents of the Albaicín during the twentieth century, see Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 148–70, 207–15.
82. Castelló Nicás, La renovación urbana, 121–23.
83. Ibid., 122.
84. M. Antequera, “El Albaicín se cristianiza,” Ideal, September 20, 1936, 10, quoted in Castelló Nicás, La renovación urbana, 122–23. Stone crosses were placed in front of other churches in the Albaicín (San Gregorio Alto, San Cristóbal, de la Victoria, San Idefonso) as well as in small public plazas, among them Cruz de Quiro, Cruz de la Rauda, and Cruz de Piedra. Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa, Guía de la Granada desaparecida (Granada: Editorial Comares, 1999).
85. On urban renovations and the recuperation of the national patrimony in the Albaicín under the leadership of Antonio Gallego Burín, during his tenure as mayor of Granada, see Castelló Nicás, La renovación urbana, 135–50.
86. The creation of the Mirador de San Nicolás and the restoration of its structures were executed by the Granadan architect Francisco Prieto-Moreno. Castelló Nicás, La renovación urbana, 123–25, 135–50.
87. The article is discussed in Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 408–9.
88. Gutiérrez Fraguas, interview.
89. “A la Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo del Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Andalucía, sesión segunda recurso 177/95. Hechos de la Contestación a la Demanda.”
90. “Informe de los Servicios Técnicos, 24 de febrero 1994,” “Informe de la Comisión Mixta de Seguimiento del Plan Especial de Protección y Reforma Interior Albaicín, Ayuntamiento de Granada, expediente 288/94. 24 de febrero de 1994,” and “Asesoría Jurídica Servicio de OO.PP y Urbanismo, Ayuntamiento de Granada, expediente 288/94. 1 de marzo de 1994.” See also the litigation between the Real Academia de Bellas Artes and the CIE, titled “Sentencia Núm. 838 de 2.000. Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo, recurso 177/95. Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Andalucía,” and the rejoinder by the CIE’s lawyer, “A la Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo del Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Andalucía, sesión segunda, recurso 177/95. Hechos de la Contestación a la Demanda, Área de Urbanismo, Ayuntamiento de Granada.” All the documents cited above have been preserved in the Archives of the Ayuntamiento de Granada. I am grateful to the Ayuntamiento de Granada for making them available to me for consultation.
92. For a summary of crucial dates in the process of obtaining a building permit, see “Sentencia Núm. 838 de 2.000, Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo, recurso 177/95.” For one of the first publications on historical Albaicín that includes the discussion of the mosque project, published before the mosque was constructed, see Gabriel Pozo Ferguera, Albaicín, Solar de los Reyes (Granada: Caja General de Ahorros de Granada, 1999), 141–46.
93. “Sentencia Núm. 838 de 2.000, Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo, recurso 177/95.”
95. On the positions of these institutions, see Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 412.
96. Recorded in the judgment, “Sentencia Núm. 838 de 2.000, Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo, recurso 177/95.”
97. Álvarez García, “Informe sobre el seguimiento.”
98. Ibid. For a summary of findings from the Ibero period excavated in the Albaicín from 1981 to 1995 and an analysis of the Ibero structures on the site of the future mosque, see Casado Millán et al., “Nuevos aportes,” 137–44.
99. Aveoğlu points out that in many European cities mosques have been banished beyond the city limits. This “solution” purports to promote “a more ‘passive’ presence of Islam,” enabling the preservation of the “traditional” [i.e., Western] architectural character of the cityscape. See Nebahat Aveoğlu, “The Mosque and the European City,” in Islam and Public Controversy in Europe, ed. Nilüfer Göle (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2013), 57–68.
100. I refer here to Henri Lefebvre’s work, in particular to The Production of Space, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, U.K., and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991). Similar disputes have occurred recently in many Spanish cities, among them Torrejón de Ardoz (Castilla), Lleida, Torroella de Montgri-L’Estatit, Badalona (Cataluna), and Zamarraga (País Vasco). These cases have received extensive coverage in national and regional press. For a scholarly analysis of debate in Badalona, see Avi Astor, “Memory, Community, and Opposition to Mosques: The Case of Badalona,” Theory and Society 41, 4 (July 2012): 325–49.
101. “Ref/Licencia Urbanística para la construcción de la Mezquita, Área de Urbanismo, Sección de Licencias,”
Negociado de Obras Mayores, expediente 288/94, 23 de marzo de 1994,” Archives of the Ayuntamiento de Granada. This major change is recorded in Renato Ramírez Nogueira, “Proyecto Final de Obra Mezquita, Centro Cultural y Jardines, Plaza de S. Nicolás y c/Horno de S. Agustín, Albayzín, Granada, Memoria,” which was made available to me by the architectural firm of Renato Ramírez Nogueira.

102. Pablo Jesús Casado Millán, interview with author, June 2012; Gutiérrez Fraguas, interview.


105. “Sentencia Núm. 838 de 2.000, Sala de lo Contencioso Administrativo, recurso 177/95.”

106. Architect Renato Ramírez Nogueira, the son of Renato Ramírez Sánchez, finalized the construction of the mosque and certified that the building complied with all of the conditions for the urban development in the Albayzín as stipulated in the PEPRI-Albayzín. This certificate is available for consultation in the archives of the Renato Ramírez Nogueira’s architectural firm and in the offices of the Ayuntamiento de Granada.


108. I am grateful to Abdes Salam Gutiérrez Fraguas and Ahmed Bermejo for granting me permission to study the interior of the mosque and take photographs for this essay. I wish to thank Batul Hernández López for facilitating my visits to the mosque and for many interesting conversations in the summer of 2012.


111. Quoted in Bahrami, “Door to Paradise,” 127.


113. Quoted in Rosón Lorente, “¿El Retorno de Tariq?,” 75.
In the preface to an album compiled for the Ottoman sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603–17) circa 1610, the album-maker Kalender (d. 1616) writes the following about the works of art in the Topkapı Palace: “In addition to the fact that his delicate heart is always filled with gems of knowledge and pearls of learning, those matchless pearls of crafted marvels, the personages of precious words and best of the features of depicted things, which are matchless pearls of crafted marvel in the flawless palace and heavenly castle adorned with words garbed in raiment of words and insight and seduced the hearts of world rule and mused the natures of the people of the heart with their beguiling beauty.” Kalender describes the effects of the “matchless pearls of crafted marvels” as “seduced,” “astonished,” and “excited” (firīfte, alüfte, and āşüfte). In the next section Kalender writes about the power of images to educate and inspire, especially during difficult times: they “will certainly cause the acquisition of the capital of the science of wisdom, will result in the perfection of the eye of learning by example, and will additionally console the felicitous person and troubled heart of the mighty sovereign by enlivening his mind and by pleasing his luminous inner self and his illuminated heart.” The next sentence, which tells us the sultan wanted these materials to be collected in an album, begins with the word “consequently” (bināʾen ʿalā). Because works of art, those seductive, astonishing, and exciting things that enlivened the spirit of the sultan and gave pleasure to him, could teach and inspire people, the sultan asked Kalender to organize some in an album format. Presumably this format would both make it easier for people to view the works of art and enhance the power of the artwork by juxtaposing select pieces. The visual relationships among paintings, calligraphies, and drawings carefully arranged on specific pages could perhaps guide viewers to conclusions they may not have drawn by looking at the individual works of art. Aesthetic pleasure and learning are intimately linked in Kalender’s understanding.

The idea that aesthetic perception could lead to edification was not unique to Kalender’s preface. Gülru Necipoğlu’s essay in the present volume makes abundantly clear that what she calls the “intimate connection between sight and insight” was a prevalent notion in medieval and early modern Perso-Islamic sources. We might understand Kalender’s organization and embellishment of the materials in the album as an aid to the “scrutinizing gaze” (imʿān-i naẓar). His interventions were intended to guide viewers to a higher level of understanding by encouraging them to gaze with contemplation—a level of understanding they might not reach by themselves if they were simply perusing these artworks individually or in a haphazard fashion. What Kalender was doing, in other words, was very much in line with what Necipoğlu has identified in the context of architectural ornamentation as “the willful complication of the optical field ... as a calculated way of inducing contemplative vision.”

The introduction to the popular medieval book of fables, Kalila wa Dimna (Kalila and Dimna) presents us with another example in which aesthetic pleasure and learning are closely linked. According to Avinoam Shalem, Ibn al-Muqaffaʾ (d. 756–57), the Persian translator of the fables, suggests in the introduction that the entertaining aspects of the book, such as its illustrations and its animal protagonists, help to captivate readers of various backgrounds and abilities, attracting them to the contents of the book and encouraging them to spend
time with it. Their perusal, initiated by these pleasurable aspects of the book, would eventually lead to learning from the deeper layers of the text. Yet this process is not automatic, and viewers must engage with the book deliberately and in a self-conscious manner to move from being entertained to being edified. Shalem highlights the following words from the introduction: “It is necessary, however, in order to reap the advantage which its study is able to impart, to understand fully the spirit in which it is composed, to disengage from its figurative language the truths which it is intended to convey, and to seize the exact purport of its fables: for reading without reflection is not accompanied by any solid profit.”

In the introduction to the album of Ahmed I, Kalender seems to suggest, like Ibn al-Muqaffa’, that the viewer of the album needs to look with care, in a contemplative fashion, so that pleasurable viewing can lead to learning. He writes that the sultan wanted the materials in the album to be arranged “with respect to each one’s relationship to each other” (her birisinin biri birisine münâsebeti ile tertib olunup) and illuminated. He repeats the phrase “each one’s relationship to each other” when he writes that he joined paintings (taṣvīrāt) and calligraphic panels (muḳaṭṭaʿāt), pasted them onto colored papers, and turned them into an album. He presents his organization of the album as guided by aesthetic concerns that can be appreciated by those who know how to look: “it is not unknown or hidden to those with acute perception and sagacious people of insight that by looking at each one of them with a scrutinizing gaze [imʿān-i naẓar], if attention is paid, God willing, the four corners and the facing one are all in harmony with and conforming to each other, be it in color or in size and length and width.” Kalender’s description of his own interventions here brings his work into the realm of artistic skill. Each folio was a careful composition in which he matched examples of calligraphy with paintings or illumination. His parameters were both mechanical, focusing on size, proportion, and the fit of edges, and stylistic, as is evidenced by the privileging of color and his illuminations that further unified the individual pieces. These works were chosen not by provenance or topic but rather according to their visual characteristics: the style of depiction, the calligraphic script, and the size and appearance of the sheets. Kalender’s illumination and paper joinery skills are evident in the visual play created by the multiple frames, the dazzling contrast between subtly illuminated margins and rulings of psychedelic strips of color, the different backgrounds of marbled paper, and the careful detail work added to many of the images thus unified on the pages of the album. Yet within the visual variety of colored papers, stenciled frames, gilding, marbling, and geometric colored strips, there is clear order and hierarchy on the pages as well. This organized spectacle certainly seems to guide the gaze so that the eye derives maximum pleasure and information from each page. The visual qualities of the works, when properly displayed, and when gazed upon with care, would help the viewer to move from pleasure to learning.

Kalender’s role, in short, was powerful, for his album-making brought these works to their full potential. If album-making does indeed enhance the astonishing quality of these works, one wonders how the album functions as a visual object, as an organized conduit to wonder and astonishment. One way of finding out is to explore its visual rhythms, examine how they direct the gaze, and investigate the tools used to guide the viewer’s experience of the object. By conducting such an inquiry focused around this one album, we are able to gain some insight into at least one Ottoman view on the role and power of the visual arts.

CONTENT

Ideally, this inquiry into Kalender’s tactics for guiding the viewer’s gaze would consider the order of pages in the album and examine what kinds of materials follow each other. But unfortunately the album has lost some of its pages, and it was rebound in the nineteenth century. It has not yet been possible to determine whether the current order of the pages was the original order, and this is beyond the scope of the present essay, but I will make suggestions further down about some folios that clearly belong together. In its current state, the early pages contain paintings from manuscripts on the history of the Ottomans’ ancestors, followed by Ottoman imperial portraits. Calligraphic examples dispersed between pages of single figure studies make up the bulk
of the album. In the middle of the album, there is a concentration of genre scenes with accompanying poetry. Following this section are single figures, calligraphy examples, illumination, and more imperial portraits.

One of the most striking characteristics of the artworks in Ahmed I's album is their unusual subject matter. The genre paintings seen in such large numbers and for the first time—at least in the Ottoman context—are a prime example. These narrative scenes are not connected to a literary text. Also unusual is the vast variety of the social backgrounds of the individual figures depicted on the album's pages. It is populated by many more foreign (Persian, “Frank,” or Georgian) figures, members of different professions, and various officers of the court than one finds in the Safavid or Mughal context at this time. Judging by the circa 1610 date of the album, interest in these different urban types appears to be a phenomenon that appeared earlier in Ottoman Istanbul than in Safavid Isfahan (the famous painting “Nashmi the Archer” by Riza ‘Abbasi [d. 1635] dates to 1622, for example), and their novelty renders them even more “exciting” and “astonishing.” Indeed the astonishment evoked by the variety of types here is not altogether different from the astonishment that aims to praise the ‘ajāʾib (wonders) of the creation of the world and thus of God. In addition to their inherent reference to the varieties of humans created by God, these types also draw out astonishment at the multiplicity of individuals in the Ottoman empire (or perhaps on the streets of Istanbul), indirectly praising the sultan who presides over this astonishing mass of people. The aesthetic experience once again leads to a different level of understanding. As the “scrutinizing gaze” wanders over the strange and wondrous people depicted here, the viewer inevitably ponders the wonders of creation and the wealth of the empire that encompasses them. Perhaps this was an edifying thought in the difficult times to which Kalender alludes in his preface.

**VISUAL TACTICS**

The unusual and varied contents of the album are undoubtedly seductive, astonishing, and exciting on their own. I will now outline what Kalender has done to enhance these effects—his tactics. Each page of the album can be considered a composite work of art, created by Kalender out of objects selected from Ahmed I’s collection. Kalender is a bit vague in the preface as to whether the sultan gave him specific pieces from his collection to put in the album or Kalender himself selected them from a larger subset. In either case, he was responsible for organizing them, as a curator would organize an exhibition. The pages then come together to form the album, itself a kind of meta-artwork. Whether his criteria for organization were purely visual, as he claims, or also took into account relationships of content and meaning, as I suspect, the album attested to Kalender’s skills not only as a paper joiner but also as a connoisseur, a refined courtier who could appreciate and suggest relationships among paintings, drawings, and calligraphies from disparate contexts. That his work as an artisan was appreciated is evident from notes on the margins of folios 29 and 30, which read “rare [or precious] paper joinery.” The rest of the album was meant to attest to his skills as a connoisseur. Both his aesthetic interventions and his connoisseurship prove his credentials as a courtier. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries increasing numbers of the Ottoman ruling elite engaged in the visual arts; we might even say it was expected.

One of Kalender’s tactics was to dazzle the eye with plenty. In earlier Ottoman albums, pages seem to contain fewer works of art, often single ones. Safavid albums are similar: even the Shah Tahmasp Album, which routinely combines multiple images on one page, rarely juxtaposes more than four images. In Ahmed’s album, however, astonishment seems to be linked with overwhelming the eye with multiplicity. This response is achieved not only through the sheer number of objects on a single page but also through the variety of works of art contained in the album as a whole. Yet within that variety there are also repetitions that contribute to the overwhelming effect by appearing to multiply the artworks. See, for example, the figures that are repeated with minute differences of pose or garments on folios 12a, 11a, and 27b (see figs. 2–4, discussed in more detail below). Kalender has also chosen to depict a vast variety of types of people from various ethnic and social
The poetry praises the beloved as so beautiful he or she puts the fresh rose petal to shame, possibly causing its red color, as it blushes in embarrassment, and so sweet that sweetness has borrowed sugar from him or her. And of course the poet, the lover, constantly thinks of the beloved’s face, that face which inspires flowers to bloom.

While it is clear we have a kind of love story here, we have no narrative for the story, no context, no information about identities, only love and praise.

The images below also clearly give a message of love and praise. While the passionate embrace of the amorous couple on the left could easily provide the context for such words, the female gathering in the center image, where a book is being read, might also suggest these lines being
verbalized, as one woman reads to the other. Or, perhaps, the viewer of the album would be inclined to say these lines to a beauty such as the one dancing in the right image. These images are also, to be sure, related to each other stylistically, thus enhancing their thematic links. The ambiguous, or perhaps generic, nature of the love story hinted at by the poem finds equally ambiguous visual expression in these paintings.

The organization of the page encourages the eye to move inward from the margins, with the use of multiple framing devices as well as a rather consistent illumination style. Finally, the band of illumination over the central image echoes the wider band placed above the brown-and-cream checkered frame surrounding the calligraphy and the paintings, encouraging further still the eye's movement toward the center. The two cypresses establish a visual connection between the calligraphy panel and the paintings. The slant of the calligraphy directs the eye downward toward the images, enhancing this connection. The thematic link between the poetry and the paintings, enhanced by the visual organization of the page, suggests that word-image relationships are one of the ways in which the gaze is directed across the pages in this album.

The importance of word-image relationships for guiding the gaze across openings, beyond the single page, is well exemplified by a pairing of a calligraphic panel with one of the most common types of pages here, one that combines multiple single figures (fols. 11b–12a, fig. 2). The poem on folio 11b, on the right, may be translated as:

It is the Night of Qadr and the book of Separation is finished
Peace [greetings] until the break of dawn
I do not want to repent from drinking [carousing]
Even if she [he] were to harm me through abandonment
or stone [stoning].

Various themes are evoked by the poem—distance, separation, drunkenness, and even the revelation of the Koran on the Night of Qadr. Readers might visualize a scene, perhaps fill in the blanks in their mind’s eye, but these few lines are far from telling us a story in its entirety. There is a narrative evoked here that is rather different from that in prose works, or in masnavi form long-verse works such as the Shāhnāma (Book of Kings), or the Ottoman histories written and illustrated during the sixteenth century. And evoking yet not specifying a narrative is not at all unusual for lyric poetry. The contents of this poem are quite similar in nature to the other poetic selections provided in the album, especially those that seem to be showcasing calligraphy, as this one does. Whether it was this very page that always faced folio 12a, or another, similar example, the structure of the poem and its evocative yet opaque character would be the same.

The facing page shows six male figures, organized across two registers, each painted inside a discrete frame. Their juxtaposition, especially the two on the upper right and the two in the lower right, hint at a certain kind of communication between them, suggesting, but not fully presenting, a narrative. Both the poetry and the images, due to their suggestion of narrative, give the sense of being parts of larger wholes that exist beyond the covers of the album. Their partial or incomplete nature is echoed in both word and image. The lack of a background, hindering us from identifying a context and fully imagining a story, ensures that these images remain on the same suggestive but opaque platform as the poetry. Thus, visually, the images have the same kind of structure as the poem. As the gaze moves from right page to left page, it is impossible not to notice the poem, or song, that the youth in the upper right image is reading to the young man facing him across the divide of the thin frame that separates them. The man on the left is holding his musical instrument, perhaps putting to music the poetry that his companion is reciting. The two figures are also bound together by the similarity of their costumes. The lower couple presents an even stronger image of communication because the wine cup offered by the sākī (cupbearer) pictured on the right actually traverses the frame toward the hunter to whom he is offering it. The tree behind the sākī also goes over the frame that seemingly divides the figures, thus helping to unify the composition further. The intended recipient of the wine cup has one hand on his side, carrying what seem to be arrows, and his other hand is raised in front of his chest in what can be interpreted as a gesture of communication. This hand helps to direct the gaze of the viewer back to the sākī on the right, strengthening the link and communication between the two figures. In both registers, then, Kalender has created
images of amorous communication of the kind one finds in the lyric poetry of the period, as is exemplified by the poem on the facing page.

The third figure, on the left hand side of both registers, repeats, and in doing so strengthens the link between the images and a poetic reading. This figure may be considered the representation of the rakib, or rival, that is present in the background story to many Ottoman lyric poems. His presence enhances the poetic narrative even further and encourages us to consider the relationships depicted by the images in the context of lyric poetry. The rakib figure who, as his posture and glance suggest, is listening to the poem and witnessing the encounter between the lovers, might also serve to remind the viewers of what they are doing—observing the relationships depicted on the pages of the album, reading the poetry, and looking at the images. As such, the rakib figure helps us to situate more concretely the gaze of the viewer that Kalender is manipulating.

Kalender has also constructed relationships across frames that are purely predicated on the visual, exemplified by folios 11a and 27b (figs. 3 and 4). These, too, suggest loose narratives. Depicted here are types of officials and servants one would find in the Ottoman palace. Yet instead of being organized into discrete pages as they were on costume albums prepared for visitors to Istanbul at the time, these images are organized in such a way as to suggest narrative scenes. The sultan converses with a eunuch in one, and a servant of the privy chamber in the other, while being guarded in the back by a eunuch, and vice versa. The figures, which at first appear to be distinct depictions simply pasted onto the same page, are clearly in communication with each other, creating a loose narrative about an unspecified moment in the
Ottoman court. The ruler is placed in the upper right, in a place of compositional authority, as he often was in narrative paintings. The courtiers then are organized in a loose circular composition with the sultan at its apex. As the eye moves across the pages of the album, it lingers further on those that hint at a narrative, perhaps encouraging the viewers to consider their own role in the narrative. If there was a courtly narrative to be gleaned from these images, certainly the original viewers of the album would have been able to do so: they were, after all, courtiers themselves. This elusive narrative, in turn, helps to give order to the dazzling array of images and calligraphies in the album.

These folios (12a, 11a, 27b [see figs. 2–4]) also contain another method of directing the gaze across the album: comparison. The two figures on the left side of folio 12a (see fig. 2) that I identified as the raḳīb are a case in point. They are wearing almost identical clothes but are in slightly different poses. The images challenge the eye to spot the differences. Mainly, however, the eye is invited to go back and forth, to compare. Kalender could easily have provided different raḳīb figures for the two registers: the lovers, after all, are different. Why, then, did he use different versions of the same figure? It is possible, as noted above, that this raḳīb figure might be intended for the viewer to identify with—after all, the other repeating gaze from register to register, folio to folio, is that of the viewer himself. But more important, the repetition immediately triggers the comparative gaze and forces the viewer to look carefully. When considered together with Kalender’s repeated statement in the preface that he organized the contents “with respect to each one’s relationship to each other” (her birisinin biri birisine münasebetti ile tertib olunup), it becomes
clear that the viewer is being asked to identify the relationships among the images. Kalender writes that when the artworks in the album are viewed with attention to detail and looked upon with the “scrutinizing gaze,” these relationships become obvious. The comparison, then, is meant to encourage the scrutinizing gaze and also becomes obvious by means of it, in a circular fashion. Out of this circularity, however, the viewer emerges edified, having thought beyond the individual works of art, beyond the aesthetic properties of the page, to something more grand.

The same comparative gesture seems to be suggested by other folios, too (fols. 14b–15a, fig. 5). The two female figures on the left side of folio 15a, for example, have costumes very similar to each other and almost appear to be mirror images, except for the fact that one has her belt unfastened. The slight difference in color between the tunics (one blue, one green) and the opposite directions they are facing encourage the eye to move back and forth, spotting the differences and similarities. The same can be said for the figures in red, rendered in different sizes, in the lower register of this page and the upper register of the facing folio 14b. At the same time, as the eye moves back and forth visually comparing, one notices the variety of types on these pages, too, and also realizes that some of the figures appear to be in conversation with each other. Thus the visual comparison works in tandem with the other two strategies of guiding the gaze that I have outlined above.

The two folios of palace-related figures discussed above (fols. 11a, 27b; see figs. 3 and 4) similarly come to life when viewed with the comparative gaze, and the
relationships among the figures on them become more significant in the comparison. Yet in this grander view it is not a comparison between the elements on a single page but rather a larger comparison of the folios with each other. The fact that a discrete composition is being created on each page becomes obvious only upon viewing the two pages in tandem. Currently these two folios are placed in different parts of the album, but the similarities between them are so remarkable that when the viewer comes upon the second page, he or she immediately remembers the first one. It is tempting to suggest that in the original order of the album these two pages were placed closer together, perhaps even facing each other, but at present this is not possible to demonstrate. Regardless of their placement, the two pages have uncannily similar compositions. Both have four figures in their upper register and three in the lower, separated by simple frames. The entire composition is framed by a tan-colored inner border, a brown-and-white checkered secondary border, and margins of a gold floral scroll against a neutral background. Each folio has one figure in the lower register that has been depicted against a different background color and framed with a more elaborate frame than the others. The upper registers show an Ottoman ruler accompanied, as mentioned above, by a servant of the privy chamber and a eunuch. The fourth figure on folio 27b is a servant bringing in food to the ruler, and the fourth figure on folio 11a is a dervish reading poetry. Both figures could have been present at court. The poses of the sultanic depictions are mirror images of each other, but they are placed in the same spot on both pages—second figure from the right in the upper register. With such strong invitations to compare the two compositions, one wonders if a deeper comparison is being suggested here between the courts of different Ottoman sultans. In this case the scrutinizing gaze encourages us to identify the rulers being depicted, since the differences between them suggest a certain kind of specificity. When considered in tandem (and compared with other portraits of the two sultans), we are tempted to identify the portraits as Selim I (r. 1512–20) on folio 27b and Ahmed I on folio 11a.

Another strong incentive to identify the rulers portrayed on these two folios is provided by the other portraits of Ottoman rulers in the album. The serial format in which these are presented incites the comparative gaze immediately (fig. 6). Currently there is one folio in the beginning with the portraits of four sultans and a folio bound at the very end that contains eight others, four on each side (figs. 7 and 8). It is quite likely that originally these folios were bound together, as they would have continued an existing tradition in Ottoman book arts of picturing all the sultans of the dynasty in a series. Yet in this series there are mistakes that are hard to comprehend and were perhaps intended as an inside joke. The first four are named in the correct order: Osman, Orhan, Murad, and Yildirim (Bayezid). The next four should be Mehmed I, Murad II, Mehmed II, Bayezid II.19 Instead the names are Mehmed, Bayezid, Mehmed, and Murad, going from right to left and from top to bottom. If we read the page from the bottom up, Mehmed
I, Murad II, Mehmed II, Bayezid, the names would be in the right order. Alternatively, it is possible that Mehmed II is illustrated twice, as part of a father-son coupling on both registers. In the upper register, he is the father and in the lower register, the son. However, this would mean there are no images of Mehmed I. These mistakes or repetitions become particularly striking when one compares this series with others.

Such series by their very nature encourage a comparative gaze. Necipoğlu first drew attention to the process of viewing imperial portrait series. She argued that the viewer was encouraged to make connections between rulers of the same name and to move back and forth across the series, spotting similarities and differences. She demonstrated that the comparative act helped to create a group identity for the rulers and laid the emphasis on the entire dynasty. Elsewhere I have made a similar point, focusing on the seriality of the imperial portraits in the Şemâ’înâme (Book of Dispositions) and their emphasis on order and repetition. For the purposes of this essay, I simply want to point out that these portraits are intended to evoke a comparison, and, indeed, they make sense only in a comparative context. As such, they attest to the importance of the scrutinizing
gaze in the workings of the album. Scrutiny reveals their individual and shared characteristics, both creating a corporate identity for the group and ascribing a distinct identity to each ruler. And it is only through scrutiny that the oddity of their ordering becomes obvious. The order also suggests something about the audience of the album: to fully appreciate the twist, one would not only have to be well versed in Ottoman history but also have to be familiar with the manuscripts of imperial portraits produced in large numbers at the end of the sixteenth century. Knowledge of these previous works of art, and their proper ordering of the sultans, highlights the oddity of Kalender’s ordering. Moreover, to the connoisseur familiar with the earliest versions of such portrait books, this series would seem rudimentary, as the paintings are rather small and lack the detail and finish of the original portraits.

In the realm of poetry, which seems to have provided aesthetic criteria for the other arts in the early modern Islamic world, the comparative impulse was rather strong. Necipoğlu has already demonstrated how the poetic comparative impulse displayed by the practice of naẓīre writing can be used to understand architectural history, as embodied in the architect Sinan’s (d. 1588) competitive response to earlier Ottoman and Byzantine architecture in his mosques. It is even more appropriate to consider the literary device of the naẓīre in the case of an album of painting and calligraphy in which the calligraphic fragments are for the most part poetic selections. Naẓīre poems respond to earlier works by contemporaneous or later poets by offering either praise or criticism, often with the intent of showcasing the responding poet’s literary skills. They would either refer to or parallel earlier poems by repeating the theme or the rhyme scheme, thus retaining some aspect of the earlier poem, but they were new, different creations.

Indeed, Ottoman poets and authors of poets’ biographies considered slavish imitation and substitutive translation to be inferior practices, and naẓīres needed to have originality in order to be appreciated.

Some translations of Persian poetry into Ottoman are also considered to be naẓīre-type responses. Walter Andrews considers such poetry to be of fundamental importance for incorporating the wider Persianate literary world into the Ottoman cultural sphere: Ottoman poets would write naẓīre to Persian poems in exactly the same way as they would to Ottoman poems. Andrews points out that sixteenth-century Ottoman poets considered Ottoman poetry proper to begin with the naẓīre responses of Ahmed Pasha (d. 1496) to the poetry of the Timurid poet and statesman Ali Shir Nava’a’ī (d. 1501). The act of writing responses to other poems continued to be a fundamental part of early modern Ottoman literary culture. Hatice Aynur gives the extreme example of 150 naẓīres being written to a single ghazal as proof of the prevalence of this practice. Naẓīre poems were also collected in mecmū’as (anthologies) beginning in the fifteenth century, and these collections became most prevalent in the seventeenth. One notable example is a naẓīre collection created by a servant of Süleyman I (r. 1520–66) but copied during the reign of Ahmed I. This collection also includes poems by Ahmed I himself, both response poems and independent poems. The increased popularity of such compilations corresponds to the century in which Ahmed I’s album was prepared.

Walter Feldman writes: “The importance of the concept of imitatio in Ottoman artistic thought can be seen from the fact that the term naẓīre had a parallel musical usage during the seventeenth century.” The contents of the album of Ahmed I suggest that imitation was not limited to the literary and musical arts but also had its place in the visual sphere. By incorporating the images of men and women dressed in almost identical costumes and in poses that are difficult to distinguish from each other, the album visually encourages comparison and seems to point to the idea of imitation. The images can be seen as responses to each other.

The seventeenth century is also a period in which Ottoman poets repeatedly rewrote or updated older texts. Examples range from the rewriting by Cevri (d. 1654) of the Selimnâme (Book of Selim) and other texts using more Persian and Arabic words than the original, to the Hamse (Quintet) of ‘Ata’i (d. 1635), which consists of five masnavīs that feature Istanbul and its inhabitants. Both the recasting of earlier texts in accordance with contemporary linguistic preferences and the composition of a new Hamse are ways of responding to older works and can be categorized as naẓīre. As such, they
invite or, indeed, depend upon, comparison in order to be fully appreciated.

The calligraphic samples in the album, all of the same script, nastāʿlīq, by Ottoman and Safavid calligraphers, also attest to such a comparative framework (fols. 31a–31b, figs. 9 and 10). Here we see the work of a Persian and an Ottoman calligrapher gracing the opposite sides of the same folio, arranged in a similar page layout, again inspiring an assessment. Furthermore, the use of the same nastāʿlīq style by Ottoman and Safavid calligraphers echoes the relationship between Ottoman and Safavid poetry. Ottoman calligraphers could clearly respond to or parallel the writing of their Persian peers. There is certainly an element of competition here, too, an invitation to judge the relevant competencies of the calligraphers whose works are in the album and perhaps even an invitation to judge the Ottoman and the Safavid calligraphic traditions against each other. Just as the organization of figures on a page encourages the eye to compare figures stacked above each other or in opposite corners of the same folio, so the eye is invited to see the similarities and differences between calligraphic panels.

Let us consider in detail the two sides of folio 31 (see figs. 9 and 10). No matter what the order of the album would have been, the two sides of the folio would still come one after the other. The illumination on these pages is almost, but not quite, identical. Both have an outer border of pale rose with gold floral pattern, and just inside this border is a checkered color block pattern of two colors—brown and cream on one, rose and cream on the other. The corners of the checkered ruling are blue in one case and pink in the other. Moving inward, both folios contain an illuminated ground with a tripartite design. While the “a” side has one whole and two half cartouches, and the “b” side has three whole cartouches, the rhythm they create is identical. The cartouches on one side have gold ground with a floral ornament executed in white, and the cartouches on the other side have a white ground with gold decorations, creating the impression that they are negatives of each other. Both have a smaller inner border of three strips, one of which is again a checkered pattern, but not in the same order or with the same colors. At the center of both pages are calligraphic panels with almost identical compositions. The size and style of the script, the angle at which the verses are placed, and the framing of the verses are perhaps the most important common elements. Again an extremely similar illumination surrounds the poetry, with triangular blank spaces filled with floral designs and the lower left corner of each frame occupied by a signature. The color scheme, too, is very close, but not the same. At first glance, the two pages seem to have the same design. Upon closer examination, the eye begins to spot the differences, and the viewer remains interested. On the one hand this arrangement can be interpreted as the album-maker’s decision to bring aesthetic unity to a group of disparate works of art, yet the subtle differences he introduces and his choice not to make the illumination identical but rather as “variations on a theme” enhance the comparative glance in a way not unlike the way imperial portraits are viewed in tandem with each other.

When considered together with the importance of comparative judgment in the practice and appreciation of calligraphy, Kalender’s illumination and organization choices become more obvious. For a comparison of our own, consider the calligraphic study from the Timurid context that David Roxburgh so astutely analyzed on two different occasions. The study in question consists of the responses, or imitations, of calligraphers at the court of Baysunghur (d. 1433) to a line by Ahmad al-Rumi (fl. before 1433). Roxburgh discusses how each calligrapher deliberately “personalized” the model but contends that their interventions become most obvious when all eighteen lines are seen together. That the imitation of a calligraphic line was a courtly pastime reminds us of the prevalence of such comparative modes in the early modern Persianate cultural sphere of which the Ottomans were a part.

Calligraphic training and practice offer an insight into the way comparative modes worked in the early modern Islamic world. As Roxburgh has recently outlined, the training of calligraphers included both the visual study of earlier models and the attempt to emulate them. Yet training also encouraged creativity, and calligraphers would often repeat a calligraphic composition with the incorporation of personal flairs. The subtle differences between the models and the works inspired
by them would become obvious when compared side by side.34

Thus the comparative framework can be thought of almost as a default mode among calligraphers and poets in the Ottoman empire, as well as in the wider Perso-Islamic world. Such a framework determined the way not only Ottomans but other participants in Perso-Islamic visual culture often viewed paintings and poetry, especially in the context of albums or other compilations.35 Visual comparison of artworks, whether calligraphy or painting, is closely related to the social contexts of viewing in which these works are appreciated, for they are gestures that belong to the realm of connoisseurship. Albums were often perused in small groups, and, as we can tell from the way images are often pasted onto album pages with different orientations, the audience would gather around the codex, sometimes moving around it, sometimes turning it. They would undoubtedly have had conversations about what it is they were looking at and discuss the visual characteristics of the images, the qualities of the calligraphy, and the use of colors or different inks. Comparisons would almost certainly be made to works of art that were not in this album, perhaps referencing other albums. The comparative mode in poetry, too, is in a way a gesture of connoisseurship, for one needs to know both the original
and the parallel poem in order to appreciate fully the relationship between them and to judge their relative merits, thus inviting a competitive interpretation as well. The connoisseurship aspect also explains the movement of the gaze across the pages and back, comparing things that are not necessarily next to each other. Such a viewing would require an excellent visual memory and a storehouse of preexisting forms to draw upon with every new encounter.

ORDER

While comparative judgment is encouraged every time the viewer turns the page, the cumulative effects of browsing through the entire album, with its astonishingly rich contents, would have been even more intense. It has not yet been possible to reconstruct the album of Ahmed I to appreciate the exact effect of Kalender’s full visual strategy, for the album was rebound. However, codicological analysis with particular attention to the illumination shows that some folios in the album are still in their original order, making it possible to tease out some of Kalender’s larger tactics. I would like to briefly consider a few of these visual strategies that go beyond the single folio.

Their current physical state suggests that folios 17b and 18a belonged together in the original album (fig. 11). The maroon border around folio 17b extends across the album’s gutter to the inner border of folio 18a, joining these two with certainty. From this pairing we can see that the border colors did not need to be the same in a single opening; indeed, the matching of a lighter and a darker color seems to have been used elsewhere. The gold floral motif on the border, however, is similar enough on the two pages to be considered a match.
Similarly, the ruling, which in this case consists of diagonal strips of colored papers, is, while not identical, closely related in its tones and hues in the two facing pages. The proportion of the border width to the text-block is also rather close on the two pages; that is to say, the borders have similar proportions and width.

Let us consider another pairing that again retains traces of the original binding, folios 21b–22a (fig. 12). Here, too, we have a page with a maroon border facing one with a lighter border, with the maroon paper extending onto the facing page ever so slightly. The characteristics of the previous paring are to be found here as well: the borders have similarly sized and shaped golden design elements, the ruling has diagonal strips of colored paper on both pages, and the text-block is of quite similar though not identical size.

The contents of both pairings are distinct from each other. In the case of folios 17b–18a, there are paintings on one side and calligraphy on the other. But they have been arranged into frames that approximate each other in size. They are thematically related to each other, very much in the same vein of the earlier folios discussed here. The paintings on folio 18a exemplify two kinds of love—the acceptable, demure kind of homosocialization in the bath scene above contrasts with carnal love gone mad in the image below. That they are the opposite sides of the same coin becomes obvious only by comparison. Of the three poetic samples on the facing page, one discusses unrequited love, a second is about a beauty who plays with his curls, and the last one curses those who do not want the beloved’s happiness. Folio 22a is a single page of text removed from a manuscript, and it is comparatively small in size. The space it occupies has been expanded through extensive illumination and the use of different colored papers; in fact, a whole composition has been orchestrated so that it matches

Fig. 12. Kalender, Album of Ahmed I, fols. 21b–22a. (Photo: Hadiye Cangökçe)
the dimensions of the center portion of the facing folio, 21b. In turn, folio 21b contains six discrete pieces of writing, two of which seem to have come out of the same manuscript, or, to be more precise, the same cong or sefine, which were small books or literary miscellanies, bound on the short end of their folios. The other four are calligraphic panels. These differences highlight Kalender’s effort to bring some visual unity to the pages. We can conclude from these pairings that Kalender’s modus operandi involved creating double-page compositions that held together aesthetically. While the facing pages did not at all need to be mirror images of each other, they did have some amount of stylistic unity.

The current state of the album provides us with another clue about the original ordering. It contains a large number of folios that have relevant works of art and closely related compositions and illumination on both sides. The two sides would be matched with facing pages that would also, in all likelihood, relate visually and in terms of content. Consequently, one might conclude that various sections of the album were intended to have thematic as well as stylistic coherence. See, for example, the two sides of folios 31 and 32. I discussed folio 31 above in great detail (see figs. 9 and 10). Folio 32 (see figs. 7 and 8, also discussed above) contains sultanic portraits on both sides. In this case the organizations of the backing pages are as similar as they are on folio 31, but their borders are of different colors. Furthermore, both the internal organization and the framing of this folio match the appearance of folio 7a (see fig. 6), featuring the first four rulers of the house of Osman. Together these portraits add up to twelve, the correct number of Ottoman sultans culminating with Murad III, the last one portrayed in the series. Although they may not have been adjacent pages, it is quite likely that originally these sultanic portraits would have been in the same part of the album. Similarly, folio 31 has affinities with other pages earlier in the album and may have been placed with them.
In addition to the presence of such folios, the current arrangement of the album also suggests groupings of thematic or visual relevance. A sense of different sections still remains in the album, and there is no reason to believe it necessarily distorts the original order of pages. It is even possible to think that works of art placed in proximity to each other on opposite sides of folios, or on facing pages, had a much more intimate relationship to each other when the album was closed. They would be mapped one to the other, in a way, as they would be placed on top of each other. The few exceptions that do not fit into thematic sections appear to be bound out of place. Folio 7 offers even further sense of thematic continuity, a clue to the “sectioning” of the album. While on its “a” side it features the four sultanic portraits mentioned previously, on the “b” side it contains two scenes from a historical manuscript that details earlier ancestors of the Ottomans (fig. 13). This arrangement suggests that the album had a section that focused on Ottoman genealogy in the broader sense. Given that this is the case, folio 28, which also has a page from the same (or a similar) historical text about the Ottomans’ ancestors, would also belong in the earlier part of the book (fol. 28b, fig. 14, compare with fig. 13). Its illumination and borders are also akin to those other folios that contain similar historical works. The consistent aesthetics of Kalender’s framing also strengthens the link between these pages.
CONCLUSION

This brief discussion of select folios from the album allows us to infer some of Kalender’s larger visual and content-related strategies. The album in its original form most likely had different sections that contained thematically related artworks. These sections had similar aesthetic qualities as well, as is evident from the consistent aesthetics of facing folios and backing sides. Openings of two pages held together visually and often worked in unison to create meaning, building on the motions of the eye as the gaze is directed by Kalender’s illumination and ordering of artworks. No two pages are identical, however, and the illumination is varied enough to create visual interest and keep the eye comparing, moving back and forth. Kalender’s tactics on the level of the individual folios or pairings—that is, the dazzling of the eye with plenty, the establishing of relationships across frames, the suggestion of narrative, and the encouragement of the comparative gaze—are thus complemented by his choices for sections of the album and his overall curating choices.

Kalender’s tactics draw upon the contemporaneous notion of the “scrutinizing gaze” examined by Necipoğlu in this volume. Word and image together inspire the scrutinizing gaze, and they are combined to good effect here. Kalender himself already states in the beginning of the album that images are tools to learning and sources of great wisdom. His manipulation of the gaze to encourage contemplation is intended to enhance this wisdom-inspiring capacity of the individual works of art. Kalender’s interventions are attempts to bring astonishment to the viewer and, through it, to inspire and educate. He does so by using unusual, exciting works of art, establishing ambiguous and changing visual relationships among works on a single page, evoking contemporaneous practices of comparison and imitation, and juxtaposing word and image to create fluid thematic and visual relationships among the folios. His tactics appeal to the connoisseur’s careful eye, reminding us that this album was intended for a limited audience of connoisseurs who leafed through the album they would come to appreciate the visual play and the connections set up by Kalender, as well as to admire the precision of his paper joinery and illumination work.

Kalender’s visual interventions suggest a movement through the album that is not linear. Indeed with the multiple traverses back and forth to compare pages and to trace potential narratives, each viewing of the album becomes personalized. As the eye takes stock of the full contents of the album, it becomes dazzled by the wealth of materials, the variety of figures, and the diverse visual formulas that anchor these disparate works of art in the album. By gazing at the image-text relationships, visual comparisons, ambiguous and suggestive relationships, the viewer is seduced, astonished, and excited.

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NOTES


2. These are my translations of these three specific terms, which Thackston has chosen to convey contextually and not individually.


4. Gülru Necipoğlu, “The Scrutinizing Gaze in the Aesthetics of Islamic Visual Cultures: Sight, Insight, and Desire,” in this volume, p. 40. The “scrutinizing gaze” was first discussed by Gülru Necipoğlu, The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and
The Gaze in the Album of Ahmed I


Necoğlu, Topkapı Scroll, 204.

Avinoam Shalem, "The Idol (Sanam) or the Man without a Soul: A Unique Illustration in the Kalila wa Dimma Manuscript (cod. Arab. 625) in the Bavarian State Library in Munich," in The Phenomenon of "Foreign" in Oriental Art, ed. Anne Hagedorn (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2006), 60–70, esp. 64–65. Shalem quotes from Kalila and Dimma; or, The Fables of Bīrūnī, trans. Wyndham Knatchbull (Oxford: W. Baxter for J. Parker, 1890; repr., Cairo, 1905), 48, and points to the Arabic original in Kitāb Kalila wa Dimma (Beirut, n.d.), 63.


Ibid., fol. 4b (Thackston, Appendix II, in Bağcı, "Presenting Vassal Kalender’s Works,” 304, 306): rengären olan nakş-i bükaleminî ebru vü sulünu vü ahi̇medlâbâdi vü devletâbâdi vü ēlîyâ vü ‘adilsâhî vü ‘adilsâhî vü ḥarîrî vü semerḳandî evrâḳtu ve eger şan’at-ı vassalîde her bir çeşti annâ-ki fereşetleri alaca kumâş târzanda ikişer i üçer kişin ve târzâna ve evrâḳkârt ışlavînîn i şarâdan ehl-i ırfana ışvî vü piştije de矜dirdir her birine imân-ı naşarî itibât mâîle allîk olası inşâî alâhü te’âlâ cîr şûrû vî mukâbalestî cem’tân biri birine eger renginde vî eger cirminde vî tâlî’ târzanda mûvaşîk u muṣṭaṣ oppàk vâ’î olmuṣtır.

I have discussed some of these in “Love in the Album of Ahmed I,” Journal of Turkish Studies 34, 2 (Fall 2010): 37–51.

For an excellent discussion of these notions and their embodiment in the Âjâ’ib al Makhlûqât (Wonders of Creation) manuscripts, see Persis Dickovskaya, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011). The Wonders of Creation text was translated into Ottoman Turkish in the late sixteenth century and was illustrated numerous times during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as Berlekamp also points out (157–61). Thus it would have been well known to Ahmed I, Kalender, and their courtly circle. Necoğlu also reminds us in her contribution to the present volume that according to al-Ghazali, “visual beauty could induce in those spiritually or intellectually inclined a contemplation of the wonders of creation.” Necoğlu, “Scrutinizing Gaze,” 33.


Ibid., fol. 11b: Shab-i Qadr ast ve şayd shud nâmâ-i hirji / Salâm âhettä mafla’ al-fujr / Man az rindī na khvāham kard tavba / Walaw aadhānî bîl-hajr wa’ll hajar.


Folio 10b, which faces 11a, has lyric poetry similar in tone to those discussed above, and folio 28a, which faces folio 27b, has other paintings that do not seem to relate to 27b. I suspect it was not originally meant to face folio 27b.

See n. 7 above. This is my translation; Thackston, Appendix II, in Bağcı, "Presenting Vassal Kalender’s Works,” 306, translates the phrase as “each with some conformity to the others.”

With Murad II abdicating the throne in favor of his son Mehmed II between 1444 and 1448 and then ruling again between 1448 and 1451, with Mehmed II then ruling until 1481.


25. Ibid.
28. Ibid. The collection is in the Topkapi Palace Library, Ms. B 406.
31. According to Haluk İpekten, Karamanlı Nizâmi Divani (Ankara: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1974), 27, since nazıre collections include poems that have a wide variety of relationships to earlier poems, our definition of nazıre must also be kept loose.
32. See Fetvacı, “Album of Ahmed I,” for an elaboration of this competitive idea.
35. Roxburgh, Persian Album, esp. 85–147.
36. Two folios currently at the back of the album (folios 28 and 32) are clearly related to earlier materials. Folio 28 contains a scene from a historical manuscript regarding the Ottomans’ ancestors that is clearly linked with folios 6b, 7b, and 8a. Folio 32 contains the eight sultanic portraits that belong with folio 7a. Their content suggests that they are currently bound out of place and that the order of at least some (if not all) of the folios has changed.
37. I have written more extensively about these folios in “Love in the Album of Ahmed I.”
39. One odd characteristic of these portraits must be mentioned, however: they appear to be in reverse order. If the order were from earliest to latest, we would expect the “b” side of folio 7 to have the images of sultans 5–8. Instead, there is a different kind of historical painting here. Judging from the thinner inner frame on the right side of folio 7a, it is not bound on the wrong side. Folio 32 also appears to be bound on the appropriate side based on the frame designs and proportions, and its “a” side contains images of sultans 9–12, with the “b” side containing images of sultans 5–8. Furthermore, the order of sultans 5–8 itself is reversed on the page, going from the bottom to the top.
40. For example, folios 9b, 11b, 12b.
41. I thank Avinoam Shalem for this suggestion.
42. Necipoğlu, “Scrutinizing Gaze.”
43. See n. 3 above; Fetvacı, “Album of Ahmed I.”
The vast palaces of Samarra are well known for their architectural ornament. The Abbasid dynasty of Iraq (750–1258) founded Samarra on the banks of the Tigris in 836 and used it as an imperial capital for a number of decades, returning to Baghdad in 892. The city shrank after the departure of the court, leaving a large area open to archaeological exploration. Surveys and excavations at the site during the first two decades of the twentieth century revealed that many of its palaces and smaller domestic structures had extensive interior decorations, the most common form of embellishment being dadoes made of stucco carved with repeating vegetal patterns. Several early publications introduced the art and architecture of Samarra to the scholarly world. Most influential were the publications of Ernst Herzfeld, a German archaeologist who conducted the first major excavation at the site in 1911–13. Herzfeld found hundreds of panels of carved stucco as well as more fragmentary samples of marble, wood, glass, and ceramic decorative elements. Many of these finds were published in a series of catalogues during the 1920s, and a sample was put on display in Berlin at the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (fig. 1). The material from Herzfeld’s excavations is currently dispersed among a number of museum collections, and some has been lost.

Samarra’s architectural ornament has received a great deal of attention since then, especially the carved stucco wall panels, whose abstract designs quickly caught the attention of art historians. In his publications, Herzfeld approached this material in terms of style: he identified three styles of carved ornament at Samarra, naming them the First Style (also known as the Beveled Style), the Second Style, and the Third Style according to the relative frequency of their occurrence in his finds. His immediate successors adopted his tripartite typology, and a number of studies have appeared debating the origins and relative chronology of these three styles. More recently, scholars have shifted attention toward the possible cultural resonances of Samarra’s architectural ornament, relating the tendencies toward abstraction and complexity so indicative of this material to contemporary aesthetic interests. The other types of architectural ornament found at the site have received less attention.

One problem that scholarship on Samarra’s ornament has not fully addressed is that the fragments of doors, walls, and ceilings excavated from the site are usually studied as individual pieces, with little reference to their original context as parts of buildings. In both museum displays and scholarly articles, single examples tend to stand alone as a masterpiece or serve as indicative examples of a style or other artistic phenomenon. As Marcus Milwright has argued, however, the experience of a viewer entering an extensively ornamented space must have been one of the key factors determining the design of Samarra’s decorations, in addition to costs, resources, and manpower. The implication is that to fully appreciate the ornament of Samarra, it is necessary to understand how its designers intended their original audience to see it. I want to push this idea further here: where, exactly, were these fragments of walls, floors, and ceilings located within Samarra’s monuments? Who got to see them, and under what circumstances? How might these factors affect our understanding of them?

This article utilizes archaeological evidence and textual sources to imagine the ornament of Samarra’s Main Caliphal Palace, known in Arabic as the Dār al-Khilāfa, from the vantage point of a hypothetical viewer, a guest.
to the palace during its period of occupancy in the mid-ninth century. I focus on the ornament of just one section of this monument, its main Audience Hall Complex. This investigation requires two distinct steps undertaken in two parts. Because the findings from Herzfeld’s excavation of the Main Caliphal Palace were never fully published, I first present his documentation of the complex preserved in archival collections to make an argument for the placement of various types of ornament and specific patterns within its rooms. Herzfeld’s notes, photographs, and sketches made during and after his excavations at the site make it possible to understand the original locations of the carved panels that once covered the lower half of the complex’s walls and to hazard guesses about the decorations in the upper reaches of the rooms. Analyses of Herzfeld’s other excavations undertaken by Thomas Leisten and Trudy S. Kawami serve as methodological models for this discussion. These studies also draw on Herzfeld’s archive to reconstruct ornament programs at their respective sites.

In the second part of the article, I turn to the context in which the ornamented Audience Hall Complex would have been experienced: the official audience. I revisit a group of celebrated texts describing official audiences under the Abbasids along with interpretations of these texts by other scholars to highlight the protocol used during these events. It is clear from such accounts that movements within the palace were strictly controlled, and what individuals could see depended very much on their rank. One implication is that the carefully designed ornament program presented in the first part of the article would have been only partly visible to most palace guests.

I conclude by pointing to the ideology of a “restricted gaze” facilitated by this decorative program, whose visibility would have depended on the status of the viewer.
The Plan and Ornament of Samarra’s Audience Hall Complex

Herzfeld excavated part of Samarra’s Main Caliphal Palace during his second season at Samarra, which began during the first week of December 1912 and ran for nearly seven months, until July 18, 1913. The findings of the excavation were briefly summarized in a preliminary report, which described the plan and ornamentation of the Main Caliphal Palace in general terms. Many but not all of the artifacts excavated were later published in the Ausgrabungen von Samarra catalogues, with information on dimensions, findspots, and physical descriptions. K. A. C. Creswell quoted Herzfeld’s preliminary report at length in translation in the second part of his Early Muslim Architecture, which also provided illustrations of indicative finds. These reports were meant to serve as an overview but were never followed up by a synthetic presentation of the architecture. A full publication of the architecture is still under way. Thus, while a great deal of finds information is published, it is difficult to connect finds to locations within excavated buildings on the site without consulting a number of sources, including unpublished archival materials.

Documentation related to Herzfeld’s excavation of the Main Caliphal Palace is preserved in the Archives of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Of particular importance is Herzfeld’s Second Campaign Diary, now housed in the Freer and Sackler Archives, in which he recorded the progress of the Main Caliphal Palace’s excavation. Also critical to understanding the excavation are Herzfeld’s sketchbooks and Finds Journal, the latter a handwritten inventory of finds from the excavations with sketches, findspot information, and brief descriptions of the objects. The information in these resources ranges from synthetic statements to disconnected descriptions of specific finds, however, and certain data are available only in the form of sketches or photographs. It has thus been necessary at times to draw conclusions not explicitly stated in but rather implied by Herzfeld’s records. In the following, I have tried to distinguish between my conclusions drawn from Herzfeld’s documentation and Herzfeld’s own conclusions that, due to the vicissitudes of history, were never articulated in print.

The palace plan

Among the notable features that scholars have identified for the palaces at Samarra are their immense scale, their restricted access, and their sprawling plans. Situated on bluffs along the Tigris that afforded vistas over the surrounding plains, these palaces took full advantage of the space and landscape available in Samarra to effectively represent the caliph’s sovereignty. Samarra’s Main Caliphal Palace embodies many of these traits. It was a massive complex that spanned 125 hectares and included gardens, game parks, and living quarters in addition to its audience halls and courtyards (fig. 2). The palace was built at the foundation of Samarra in 836 by the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim bi'llah (r. 833–42). It was probably inhabited for most of the period of the city’s occupation by the court until 892. Alastair Northedge has interpreted the plan as divided into two major portions. According to his interpretation, the southern portion of the complex, centered on a row of axially arranged gardens, courtyards, and halls, constitutes the public portion of the palace, referred to as the Dār al-ʿĀmma (Public Palace) in texts. This portion of the palace is shown in figure 2. Northedge interprets the rectangular double-walled enclosure just to the north of this complex as private quarters, possibly to be identified with the toponym al-Jawsaq al-Khāqānī.

All excavations at this site to date have taken place in the southern, public portion of the complex. The plan of its main axis is thus well established. From west to east, first came a monumental, three-arched gate facing the floodplain of the Tigris River, usually identified in scholarly literature as the Bāb al-ʿĀmma (Public Gate) but which I will refer to as the Western Gate. Immediately behind this gate comes a block of halls and courts, dubbed “the Reception-Hall Block” by Northedge. This block, in turn, opens on its east to a large open courtyard usually called the Great Courtyard or Great Esplanade in scholarly descriptions. Farther east still is a complex whose form suggests that it served as leisure grounds. At its center is a sardāb, or pool of water sunk below ground level surrounded by rooms opening onto it. To its north
Fig. 2. Plan of the Main Caliphal Palace of Samarra. (Plan, Samarra Archaeological Survey, after Ernst Herzfeld)
The original use of this space remains enigmatic, but halls of private audience (*majlis al-khāṣṣa*) are one possibility.

This article is concerned with the cruciform Audience Hall Complex (fig. 3). The identification of this space as an audience hall, first articulated by Herzfeld in his notes, rests on its sophisticated architectural form.26 One enters the complex on all four sides from open courtyards through a portico, which in turn gives onto a long covered hall. Clear traces of column foundations and shards of broken window glass found in these halls led Herzfeld to conclude that each had columns, four per side, which supported a central bay higher than the surrounding rooms with clerestory windows.27 Flanking these halls were a series of smaller side rooms. At the center of the complex was a square chamber that Herzfeld believed held a wooden dome due to its shape and the noticeable lack of debris from a plaster ceiling.28

and south are two courtyards with pavilions in the form of iwans, and to its east are a polo grounds and stables. Northedge has argued that this entire recreational complex was possibly a later addition to the palace, for it is aligned with a racecourse that clearly overlays an older course.23 It is possible that the area south of the Great Courtyard also contained an important entrance to the palace, given its communication with one of the city's major avenues.24

The Reception-Hall Block at the western end of the palace is composed of a series of entry halls, followed by a courtyard and then by a group of covered halls forming a cross, traditionally identified as an audience hall. Immediately south of this cruciform Audience Hall Complex is another group of richly decorated rooms centered on a domed hall surrounded by an ambulatory. Herzfeld called this space the “Harem,” given his finds of figural wall paintings in the debris around the domed hall.25
This architectural form (a long covered hall preceded by a courtyard) has several immediate historical precedents, for example at Ukhaydir and Mshatta, also interpreted by scholars as audience halls. The structure at Samarra’s Main Caliphal Palace is notably more complex, however, with four identical oblong halls situated on the axis of the Central Square Chamber. Because each of its modules is roughly aligned with the cardinal directions, I will refer to the various components of the complex with the associated cardinal direction, for example, West Columned Hall, East Portico, South Courtyard, and Central Square Chamber (see the labeled plan in fig. 3).

Figure 4 shows the area just described after Herzfeld’s 1913 excavation. The photograph was taken from the eastern edge of the Audience Hall Complex. In the foreground lies the East Columned Hall. Immediately behind it is the Central Square Chamber. The figure in the center of the photograph is standing at the western side of the Central Square Chamber. Beyond him, one can see the area cleared by Herzfeld’s team stretching to the back of the Western Gate. This space included the five axially aligned entry halls and two courtyards immediately behind the Western Gate.

There is evidence that the plan of the Audience Hall Complex was modified over time. These changes mainly had to do with the Central Square Chamber itself. Herzfeld noted that openings had been pierced into the short stretches of wall located between the Central Square Chamber and the spaces behind the arcades of the columned halls, two being refilled again at a later date, indicating multiple building phases (fig. 5). In addition, Herzfeld mentioned that he found evidence of the basin of a fountain that was originally set into the floor but was later bricked over or blocked up (zugesetzt). No such basin is readily identifiable in photographs taken of the Central Square Chamber, although the pavement is sketched and labeled in his notebooks. More significant, Herzfeld mentioned evidence for the remains of a floor some 70 centimeters below the level...
of the top floor in the Central Square Chamber, on top of which was a backfill layer.32 There was no evidence, however, for lower floors in the surrounding rooms or for steps leading from the doorsills into the Central Square Chamber, so Herzfeld concluded that this lower floor was a mistake quickly repaired during the foundation phase of the palace and not evidence that the Audience Hall Complex was part of a renovation.33 Another possibility is that this earlier floor pre-dated the Samarra period. Textual sources do mention that the public palace of al-Muʿtasim was founded on the site of a monastery.34 Other than these changes, Northedge has noted evidence of modification to the portico leading from the East Columned Hall onto the Great Courtyard. Namely, the piers and walls of this structure are substantially larger than those surrounding it, indicating that it might be part of a separate building phase.35

The wall ornament of the Audience Hall Complex

The surface ornament in the Audience Hall Complex echoes the sense of gravity achieved through the ground plan. Herzfeld’s findings demonstrate that the transition from the block of halls to the west is marked by a notable improvement in the quality of materials used for surface cladding and the complexity of their arrangement as part of a cohesive decorative program.

First, let us address the question of building materials. Herzfeld stated in his Second Campaign Diary that the columns of the columned halls were made of marble, although he never supported the point with evidence, and photographs of the space show that the columns had been removed long before the excavation.36 Supporting his statement, however, is the fact that he also found column shafts made of white marble in a room southwest of the Audience Hall Complex and a large stone column base just north of this room, demonstrating the use of these materials for columns in the palace.37 The fact that no marble columns were found in situ does not contradict Herzfeld’s theory, as such items would surely have been taken from the site and reused elsewhere after the court abandoned the palace in or around 892.

Herzfeld also advanced the theory in his preliminary report that the dadoes of the columned halls and their porticoes were clad with marble slabs carved with various repeat patterns.38 This theory has been assumed to be true since then,39 but the argument for it has never been articulated. I will take time to present that evidence here, as it also allows for further arguments made or implied in Herzfeld’s Second Campaign Diary regarding the specific character and arrangement of the marble dadoes in these halls.

Scarcely any marble paneling was found in situ in the Audience Hall Complex, but the architectural remains strongly support the idea that the bottom half of the side walls in all four columned halls and adjoining porticoes were indeed clad in white marble with blue veins. A photograph taken in the West Portico makes the archaeological situation clear (fig. 6). It shows a section of the south wall about 2 meters long where the layer of
at least three and, in all likelihood, all four of the columned halls of the Audience Hall Complex. The “impression of a Byzantine panel” mentioned in the handwritten notes below the photograph is visible to the right. Note also the large excavated column shaft (?) behind the wall. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.22.042 (Photo: courtesy of Smithsonian Institution)

plaster that coated the baked brick wall is exposed. The photograph shows concave impressions in the plaster marked by irregularly spaced vertical ridges. To the left, a marble baseboard element with a beaded pattern is preserved in situ just below floor level, with part of a panel still attached above it, demonstrating conclusively that these impressions were made from marble panels. To the right is an impression in the plaster made by another rectangular panel, this time with a carved design, placed horizontally into the wall. Herzfeld attributed this impression to a “Byzantine panel.”\(^{40}\) While Herzfeld’s specific attribution to Byzantium is debatable, this imprint is clearly from a carved panel taken from another monument and reused here.

From Herzfeld’s photographs and drawings, it is possible to deduce that marble paneling of this sort covered at least three and, in all likelihood, all four of the columned halls of the Audience Hall Complex. In addition to the spot on the south wall of the West Portico just described, I have identified photographs and drawings in Herzfeld’s archive that document concave impressions of irregularly sized marble slabs on the south and east walls of the West Columned Hall,\(^{41}\) the north and east walls of the South Columned Hall,\(^{42}\) and the south wall of the East Columned Hall (fig. 7).\(^{43}\)

It is also possible to propose the specific character of these marble dadoes because a large number of marble fragments used for wall facings were found in the rubble of the Audience Hall Complex as well as elsewhere in the palace. These fragments are identifiable as pieces of wall facing by their flat, rectilinear shape as well as by the presence of holes drilled in their sides ranging from
Fig. 7. Page 25 from Ernst Herzfeld’s Samarra Ornament Sketchbook. Sketches depict a corner fragment of carved and blue-painted stucco from a collapsed arcade element found in one of the columned halls (top), and impressions made by marble slabs in plaster bedding found in situ on east wall of the South Columned Hall in the Audience Hall Complex (center and bottom). Herzfeld’s caption for top sketch reads: Eckstück im [?] T-Raum Ostreihe blau bemalt. The caption for bottom sketch reads: Thürrahmen; südl. T-Zimmer. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Department of Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, eeh1500. (Photo: courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
.8 to 1.2 centimeters in diameter (figs. 8 and 9), like those in marble wall panels excavated from other early Islamic sites in Syria-Palestine. These may have been holes for metal clamps used to hold the panels in place, examples of which were found in the excavations. As for decoration, the vast majority of the many fragments from marble wall panels excavated by Herzfeld are carved with one of just four patterns. This observation convinced Herzfeld that the dadoes of the Audience Hall Complex bore these same patterns. I will review the four patterns here, all of which appear in Herzfeld’s Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik (1923).

The first pattern that appears on fragments of marble wall facings excavated from the Audience Hall Complex consists of horseshoe shapes in alternating rows (fig. 10). Among the pieces found are slabs large enough to show that this pattern was repeated to cover substantial surfaces. Several pieces had bits of beaded border patterns attached, oriented both vertically (to be used as a side border) and horizontally (as a baseboard or top border). This evidence suggests that the palace contained one or more dadoes of marble carved with the horse-shoe pattern, framed on all four sides by beaded borders.

The second pattern found on the fragments of marble wall panels was composed of trefoil motifs interlocking in alternation with vase-shaped motifs. The trefoil motifs were joined together at their bases by arched bands (fig. 11). For simplicity’s sake, I will call this the “vase-trefoil” motif. As was the case with the marble fragments bearing the horseshoe pattern, the vase-trefoil fragments were found in large enough slabs with and without border elements attached to suggest that they, too, were joined together horizontally to form large dadoes framed by beaded borders.

The third pattern found on the marble fragments consists of petal-shaped forms alternating with elongated stems rising from large, circular bases (fig. 12). Due to the appearance of this pattern in various media at the site, Herzfeld called it the “Samarra Frieze.” Marble fragments carved with this pattern in museum collections include both molding elements and wall panels, providing evidence for different uses. In at least one instance the pattern appears on a flat wall panel fragment with part of a beaded border. Based on this evidence, Herzfeld reconstructed a full dado decorated with this pattern and framed by a beaded border.

The fourth and final pattern is composed of a five-lobed leaf motif (oriented upside down) attached by a clasp to a five-pronged fan. At the clasp are two rounded knobs. The spaces in between these “palmette-fans” are shaped as double-pointed spades (fig. 13). This pattern is the most complex of the four. Like the previous two patterns, the palmette-fan is found on panels with beaded border elements attached. Unlike the others, there is no example of a marble fragment in which the pattern is repeated side to side, although it does appear in stucco as a repeat pattern (as seen in fig. 15). Two further anomalies should be mentioned: both Herzfeld and the Iraqi excavations in the 1930s uncovered examples of a marble slab with this motif in which the palmette-fan is repeated up and down and another with a beaded border on either side of just one motif. Thus, in addition to being used part of a repeat pattern for a long dado as Herzfeld suggested in Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik, marble slabs carved with the palmette-fan motif must have also been mounted individually as door frames, possibly in conjunction with dadoes that had other patterns.

The marble panels of these dadoes, then, were carved in one of four patterns in the Beveled Style. In one instance, Herzfeld’s notes indicate “traces of red color” on a panel. While virtually no traces of these pigments remain visible on the fragments I examined, the idea of painted marble dadoes is not far-fetched. Carved marble wall facings employed at other early and medieval Islamic sites had color. However, the fact that Herzfeld does not mention any other traces of paint on these marbles (at least to my knowledge) is cautionary: this may be a case in which a piece of marble was colored at a later date, and until further analysis is undertaken on the marble fragments from Samarra the possibility of coloration must be considered a hypothesis only.

To summarize the argument presented above: archaeological evidence supports Herzfeld’s claim that all four columned halls and their porticoes had facings on the lower halves of their walls composed of slabs of white marble with blue striations. These slabs were carved in one of four patterns in the Beveled Style. Two
Figs. 8 and 9. Fragment of a marble wall panel with vase-trefoil motif found at Samarra, views of front and side with pin hole, exact findspot unknown (Herzfeld IN 256), 18.8 cm (height) × 17.2 (width) × 6.5 cm (max. depth). Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, acc. no. Sam. I. 477. (Photo: courtesy of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)

Fig. 10. Fragment of a marble wall panel with horseshoe motif found in the Audience Hall Complex (Herzfeld IN 911). Current location of fragment unknown. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 PF.04.19.128 (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
Fig. 11. Fragments of a marble wall panel with vase-trefoil motif found in an area south of the Audience Hall Complex (Herzfeld IN 791). Current location of fragments unknown. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.19.118. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)

Fig. 12. Fragment of marble wall panel with what Ernst Herzfeld called the "Samarra Frieze" motif, found in an area south of the Audience Hall Complex (Herzfeld IN 883). Current location of fragment unknown. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.22.178. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
annotated maps in Herzfeld’s notebooks allow for further speculation regarding the placement of specific patterns in the four marble-clad halls as well as the other rooms in the complex. The first is preserved in his Second Campaign Diary (fig. 14). Each room is labeled with a letter (f–k). Corresponding notes in the diary indicate that the letter f signifies dadoes made of marble slabs carved in one of the four patterns identified above, letter i stands for stucco dadoes carved with the palmette-fan pattern, and letter k stands for stucco dadoes carved in the vase-trefoil pattern. Photographs confirm Herzfeld’s map, showing that these two patterns dominated the complex's wall ornament, alternating between rooms (fig. 15). The two other letters, g and h, signify two new patterns. Letter g, which appears in the two rooms southwest and southeast of the Central Square Chamber, indicates a pattern of shaped marble slabs. As is clear in photographs taken on-site, this pattern consisted of confronted pencil-tips in pink and gray marble with a row of diamonds in white in between (fig. 16). The beaded borders carved in white marble with blue veins that we have come to expect surrounded the dado. Letter h, which appears in the two rooms northwest and northeast of the Central Square Chamber, stands for a door frame motif closely related to the palmette-fan pattern (fig. 17).

In a later version of this same map, Herzfeld labeled each room with the name of the specific pattern (fig. 18). This version places the patterns in the same order, except that Herzfeld further suggested specific patterns for each of the columned halls with marble dadoes: the horseshoe pattern (Hufeisen) for the West Columned Hall, the vase-trefoil pattern (Vasen) for the East Columned Hall, and the palmette-fan (Palmetten) for the South Columned Hall. Because the marble slabs were all removed, there is no way to be sure that these specific attributions are correct, but the idea that each columned hall had just one pattern, and each was different, is plausible given that in all of the other rooms only one pattern was used.

Figure 19 combines Herzfeld’s notes and photographs and the subsequent work undertaken by Iraqi teams published in 1982 in the northeastern corner of the Audience Hall Complex, where the same patterns were
Fig. 14. Plan of areas of the Reception Hall Block in Samarra’s Main Caliphal Palace excavated by Ernst Herzfeld foldout preserved in his Second Campaign Diary. Each room is labeled with a letter (a–o and x) representing the room’s wall ornament. The Audience Hall Complex is labeled with letters J–K. In this case, J signifies marble dadoes carved in one of four repeat patterns, and g–k signify specific patterns. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A6 07.09. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
Fig 15. View of stucco and marble dados found in the southwestern quadrant of the Audience Hall Complex. Three rooms are visible here, each with a different dado pattern. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.19.119. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
Fig. 16. View of the south and west walls of corner room between the South Columned Hall and the West Columned Hall in the Audience Hall Complex, decorated with a dado made of shaped marble pieces arranged in a repeat pattern. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.22.052. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)

Fig. 17. View of the west wall and doorway of the corner room between the East Columned Hall and the North Columned Hall in the Audience Hall Complex, decorated with carved stucco door frames only. Note also the "field train" visible in the background. The field train ran through the palace's central axis and was used to clear debris and transport finds from the site. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.22.051. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
Fig. 18. Page 9 from Ernst Herzfeld’s Samarra Architectural Studies Sketchbook 9 with plan of the Audience Hall Complex. Each room is labeled with the name of the carved pattern used on its dado. Labels include: Palmetten, Vasen, Palm, Türrahm, Marmor Hufeisen, Marmor Vasen, Marmor Palmetten, and a symbol representing the marble dadoes made of shaped pieces. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 07.29. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
Material, marble, was strategically clustered in the spaces that were architecturally most important—the four columned halls and two adjoining corner rooms.

The wall ornament of the entire complex is dominated by a few patterns, rendered in two different media, all in the same style and at the same scale. Moreover, the dado patterns repeat in predetermined ways. For example, the room in the southeastern quadrant with a prayer niche that Herzfeld called the "Kalifenmoschee" (labeled with B* on the map in fig. 19) has an identical match in recorded in three additional rooms. Each dado pattern has been given a letter, A–F, and the rooms decorated with marble dadoes are signified by blue type. A question mark has been placed after the letters in the four columned halls to indicate the fact that the panels had been removed before Herzfeld’s documentation.

The point that this plan suggests and that I would like to emphasize here is that the ornamentation of the dadoes in the Audience Hall Complex was planned as a program in conjunction with the architecture. The best material, marble, was strategically clustered in the spaces that were architecturally most important—the four columned halls and two adjoining corner rooms. The wall ornament of the entire complex is dominated by a few patterns, rendered in two different media, all in the same style and at the same scale. Moreover, the dado patterns repeat in predetermined ways. For example, the room in the southeastern quadrant with a prayer niche that Herzfeld called the "Kalifenmoschee" (labeled with B* on the map in fig. 19) has an identical match in

![Fig. 19. Plan of the Audience Hall Complex with each room labeled with a letter signifying the carved pattern used on its dado. This plan is reconstructed based on Ernst Herzfeld’s excavation notes and the published report from subsequent excavations made by the Iraq Directorate-General of Antiquities in the northeastern quadrant. Key (black letters signify stucco decoration, blue letters signify marble): A = palmette-fan motif; B = vase-trefoil motif; B* = vase-trefoil motif on dadoes, version of “Samarra Frieze” motif in mihrab; C = horseshoe motif; D = Samarra Frieze motif; E = frieze of shaped marble slabs arranged as repeat pattern; F = palmette doorframe motif only. (Plan: Samarra Archaeological Survey, with my additions).](image-url)
the northeastern quadrant, also decorated with precisely the same dado: a vase-trefoil pattern surrounds the room and is replaced by a more complex version of the Samarra Frieze within the niche itself. There is no apparent reason for these duplications other than an underlying desire to maintain a sense of symmetry in the design.

A note on the date of the dadoes

Herzfeld stated emphatically in his notes and later publications that he believed the marble and stucco dadoes dated to the period of the palace’s foundation under al-Mu’tasim.70 If correct, this dating would have significant implications regarding the history of the Beveled Style of Samarra because it would demonstrate conclusively that the style existed from the beginning of the site’s foundation in both marble and stucco.

The fact that Herzfeld documented several changes to the building, including the floor underneath the Central Square Chamber, means that the dating of these ornaments must be approached with caution until more research can be undertaken. However, whether they date to the period of al-Mu’tasim as Herzfeld suggested or, less likely, to a later renovation, it is clear at least that they are contemporaneous with the construction of the cruciform Audience Hall Complex itself. Herzfeld noted that the baseboards of dadoes found in situ are either flush with or just slightly underlie the level of the floor in the columned halls, as is visible in photographs.71 Herzfeld also demonstrated that these baseboards were contemporaneous with the column foundations and doorsills of the rooms they adorned, as they were set at the same level.72 Furthermore, Herzfeld found no evidence that the stucco or marble dadoes in the outer rooms surrounding the columned halls had been renovated. This was not the case in other parts of the palace, where clear layers of carved and painted ornament were visible on fragments of wall ornament. His conclusion that the carved dadoes of the Audience Hall Complex represent the original ornament of that structure must be correct.73

To Herzfeld’s conclusions I would add that the distribution of findspots for marble panels at the site suggests that the marble ornament of the Audience Hall Complex may have been partly dismantled at some point during the Abbasids’ occupation of the palace. As I mentioned above, while Herzfeld only recorded impressions made from marble panels in the Audience Hall Complex, fragments of carved marble dadoes were found throughout the palace.74 For example, Herzfeld found a number of panels carved with the same motifs described above in the area to the south of the Audience Hall Complex (Herzfeld’s “Harem”) but recorded no extensive impressions there. This situation suggests to me that the marble dadoes of the Audience Hall Complex were partially dismantled and repurposed, either in a phase of renovation or after the Abbasid court abandoned Samarra. The area to the south of the Audience Hall Complex was renovated extensively, for example.75 Marble, being scarce in Iraq, may well have been repurposed within a site during its occupation period and was certainly one of the first materials to be harvested after a site was abandoned.

Ceilings and upper elevations: Wood and glass ornaments

The carved stucco and marble dadoes were only part of the Audience Hall Complex’s decorative program, albeit a significant one in terms of surface area. Herzfeld briefly summarized the evidence for other types of architectural ornament in his preliminary report as follows: “In the halls, a decoration of rhombic mother-of-pearl pieces and convex glass in various patterns was found that has otherwise never been researched. All of the woodwork (doors, beams, ceilings) was carved from teak, some pieces were painted and others not, and some were gilded. Decorative nails in gilded bronze heightened the effect.”76

More information is available regarding these finds in the Ausgrabungen von Samarra catalogues and the reports from later excavations, and others are documented in Herzfeld’s sketchbooks and finds journal. These sources suggest that in addition to the wood and glass inlay mentioned above, the palace’s ornament also included revetments of monochrome luster tiles decorated with vegetal patterns, animals, and Arabic inscriptions,77 revetments of shaped polychrome luster tiles,78 monochrome-glazed tile pavements or revetments,79 and fragments from opus sectile pavements of some complexity (fig. 20).80 Several types of glass tile were
findspots do not necessarily indicate the place in which the fragment was originally employed. Because the Ausgrabungen von Samarra volumes are organized according to medium and style, it is difficult to get a clear understanding of what was actually found in the audience hall and what can actually be attributed to its original ornament program. I will thus summarize Herzfeld’s findings here, supplementing them with additional information that has come to light since the 1920s, in order to provide a snapshot of other important ornamented surfaces in the Audience Hall Complex.

First, there is the matter of the shaped glass inlay pieces mentioned in Herzfeld’s report above. Dozens of these pieces were found in the rubble of the Audience Hall Complex and the surrounding areas, often along with shaped pieces of mother-of-pearl, strongly suggesting that they were used there in decorative compositions (fig. 21). The rounded manner in which the glass pieces are formed recall the beveled surfaces that dominate the carved dadoes, as does the vocabulary of

found, including millefiori tiles and a glossy, opaque black type, whose polished surfaces and rough backs led C. J. Lamm to believe they were used on walls. Herzfeld recorded one tantalizing fragment from an aquamarine glass floor panel of the type known from the glass-paved audience hall of Raqqā’s “Palace B,” a decorative technique that is otherwise unique to my knowledge. The Iraqi excavations of the 1930s even uncovered fragments from a glass inscription whose specific findspot is unfortunately not recorded. The reception area just south of the Audience Hall Complex (Herzfeld’s “Harem”) appears to have been extensively decorated with glass fixtures as well as wall paintings above the level of the dado.

Given the wide range of these finds, one can be sure that the palace had a number of opulent, glossy surfaces employing innovative glass and ceramic techniques. It is far more difficult to reconstruct the original locations of these elements than it was for the stucco and marble dadoes because none were found in situ. In this case, findspots do not necessarily indicate the place in which the fragment was originally employed. Because the Ausgrabungen von Samarra volumes are organized according to medium and style, it is difficult to get a clear understanding of what was actually found in the Audience Hall Complex and what can actually be attributed to its original ornament program. I will thus summarize Herzfeld’s findings here, supplementing them with additional information that has come to light since the 1920s, in order to provide a snapshot of other important ornamented surfaces in the Audience Hall Complex.
shapes represented, including roundels, rounded rectangles, diamonds, and tongue shapes. It is known from other examples at Samarra and elsewhere that mother-of-pearl was used as part of mosaic wall decorations, but the shaped glass pieces are more difficult to understand.\(^8\)\(^6\) Herzfeld’s finds journal and sketchbooks record examples of the shaped glass pieces still embedded in detached pieces of stucco, however, supporting his initial conclusion that they were arranged in patterns as wall decorations (fig. 22).\(^8\)\(^7\) These intriguing elements, apparently unique to the Main Caliphal Palace of Samarra, are discussed in Lamm’s *Glas von Samarra* (1928), where the various possibilities of patterns are presented.\(^8\)\(^8\) Two points can be added to Lamm’s otherwise detailed overview. That these elements were used high on the wall seems fairly certain as they were found in a fragmentary state, suggesting a fall from a height, and as none were found on the many dadoes that did remain intact. Second, an interesting comparison can be made between these pieces and the marble columns inlaid with shaped glass pieces excavated from the Byzantine Church of St. Polyeuctus (Hagios Polyeuktos) in Istanbul, constructed circa 525. In the church, the glass was colored, and shapes included squares and rhombi.\(^8\)\(^9\) This tradition of jewel-like, inlaid marble columns might be a precedent for this intriguing form of decoration.

Both Herzfeld and Henri Viollet found fragments of carved stucco with rounded undersides in the four columnn halls, suggesting that these halls had decorative arcades.\(^9\)\(^0\) Herzfeld reconstructed and illustrated the patterns, but the archaeological evidence for them should be clarified here.\(^9\)\(^1\) The flat, outward facing sides of the fragments excavated by Viollet and Herzfeld (the exterior face of the arch) had repeating pairs of winged palmette leaves, while the curved, downward facing sides (the soffits of the arches) had a more complex pattern consisting of a band of vase-shaped forms with trefoil blossoms that sprout pairs of the same winged palmettes (fig. 23).\(^9\)\(^2\) Notably, their undersides were also painted with blue pigment.\(^9\)\(^3\)
Fig. 22. Page 42 from Ernst Herzfeld’s Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8 with sketches of fragments of glass found in the Main Caliphal Palace of Samarra. In the center is a “stucco edge” (*Gipsrand*) with shaped glass inlay pieces still attached (Herzfeld IN 827). Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 07.19. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)

Fig. 23. Ink drawing of carved stucco fragments from a collapsed arcade found by Ernst Herzfeld and Henri Viollet in the Audience Hall Complex, and a reconstruction of the pattern on the exterior face. Herzfeld’s caption reads: “B. al-Khalifah, Arkaden d. basilikalen Säle. Bogenreihung von 2 Elemente.” Current locations of fragments unknown. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Department of Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, MMA eeh1383. (Photo: courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
Several door panel components and an intact wooden door were found in and around the Audience Hall Complex, providing evidence for carved wooden doors in this portion of the palace, though not necessarily in the large halls themselves. The intact door was composed of two leaves, each with four panels bearing knob motifs (fig. 24). Similar knob motifs occur on other examples of panels excavated at the site that may have been used as part of doors, and on a door in the Benaki Museum, Athens, suggesting that this motif was popular. Several intact leaves from wooden doors in museum collections bearing palmette-fans have traditionally been attributed to the Main Caliphal Palace on the basis of this motif, although more research is required to justify that attribution. One door panel with the palmette-fan motif was actually excavated on-site, but its findspot is not recorded.

A large number of fragments from other architectural surfaces or portable furnishings made of carved and painted wood were found in the palace. The array of morphological types is striking and speaks to the many uses to which this costly material was put, and the assemblage deserves more attention than can be given here. In addition to the door components mentioned above, the types of ornamental wooden fixtures found in the palace include flat panels with carved and/or painted decoration; composite "coffered" panels; strips with slanted fronts and painted decoration; large ornamental bosses or knobs; stepped masons; turned legs, possibly for furniture; sockets; inlay pieces; and a large frame, possibly for a window or door.

In the four columned halls of the Audience Hall Complex there is specific evidence for the use of wooden ceilings, as a number fragments that clearly belonged to ceilings were found in the rubble. These include fragments of the strips with slanted fronts mentioned above, whose shape suggests use as crown moldings (fig. 25), and a number of long rectilinear panels carved with nondirectional patterns in the Beveled Style (fig. 26). As Herzfeld noted, there are close comparisons to the form and decoration of this later type on several door soffits in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun at Cairo, strongly suggesting a similar use as ceiling elements at Samarra.

Two other decorative wooden pieces found in the Audience Hall Complex should be mentioned. One is a flat panel carved with a version of the Samarra Frieze motif in the Beveled Style painted in blue and red (fig. 27). At nearly a meter wide and more than half a meter high as is, this would have been a conspicuous piece. Its original use is difficult to determine, but given its shape, the presence of nail holes, and the lack of tongue-and-groove joins, it may have been part of a frieze. Second is a thick beam carved on two sides in the Beveled Style (fig. 28). Creswell suggested that it was a tie beam, but the fact that it has a tenon on one side suggests otherwise. Herzfeld’s suggestion that it was part of an “anchor” for a column (part of an entablature?) is more convincing. A lintel for a door might be another possibility.

As mentioned above, fragments of broken glass panes found in the four columned halls suggested to Herzfeld that clerestory windows above the arcades illuminated these spaces. The form of window for which Herzfeld found the most conclusive evidence is similar to the type known today as qamariyya or shamsiya, that is, stucco grills carved in patterns into which pieces of colorful glass were inserted. Herzfeld found part of a grill with a row of small round apertures in the South Columned Hall that still had glass panes inserted (fig. 29). A similar piece was found during the Iraqi excavations of the 1930s, although no findspot was recorded. In this case, it is clear that the row of circular apertures bordered a larger, central grill. Stucco window fragments found in the Abbasid “palaces” at Raqqa provide a close parallel in both form and construction. There, large stucco windows were composed of central grills carved with geometric patterns bordered by rows of small circular apertures. Pieces of the panes of glass were found in several colors at the site, ranging from amber yellow to aquamarine blue (fig. 30). Thus the windows in the clerestories of the four columned halls would have admitted filtered, multicolored light through patterned grills, bathing the marble and stucco decorations in a layer of color.

Conclusions from Herzfeld’s documentation

In conclusion, Herzfeld’s documentation suggests that the walls of the Audience Hall Complex were clad with
Fig. 24. Carved wooden doors found in a corridor leading from what Ernst Herzfeld called the “Harem” (area south of the Audience Hall Complex) to the bath located to the west (Herzfeld IN 965). Current location of doors unknown. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.22.036. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
dadoes decorated with a select number of repeat patterns, marble replacing stucco in the columned halls and in two of the corner rooms, and that the higher elevations of these rooms bore glass and wooden fixtures. The previously unarticulated reasons for accepting these suggestions include extensive marble impressions found in situ and the relatively large amount of wood, marble, and glass fragments found in the rubble of the complex. It is possible that the marble panels were eventually repurposed, and one can assume the same for the wooden fixtures given their fragmentary state. Herzfeld’s notes further demonstrate that these decorations are contemporaneous with the construction of this part of the palace, which he suggests fell under the reign of al-Mu’tasim, during the foundation period of the site. The precise date of the Audience Hall Complex’s construction is a question that requires more research and will be left open for the moment, but the archaeological evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the carved marble and stucco panels represent this structure’s original decorations, whatever its date.

Cumulatively, these points reveal that the Audience Hall Complex was planned with an elaborate decorative program that included a set of dadoes rendered in two media placed according to a decisive pattern. Architecture and architectural ornament were planned together as a cohesive unit.

THE OFFICIAL AUDIENCE

The planning evident in the decorative program of the Audience Hall Complex raises the question of who was intended to see the space and under what circumstances. There is little reason to doubt the long-standing assumption that the complex of four columned halls and adjoining rooms served as an audience hall, but it is worth examining the mechanics of official audiences under the Abbasids in detail to ascertain what parts of the complex were in use during these events and what was visible to whom. Previous studies of the palace’s ornament have not addressed these questions, and yet they are vital to understanding its design.

Several scholars have pointed to the importance of ceremonial at the Abbasid court and its potential relationship to the development of Abbasid palace
Fig. 26. Composite ceiling panel with painted border decorations found in the Audience Hall Complex, approximately 1 meter long (Herzfeld IN 925). Current location of panel unknown. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.6 04.PF.19.098. (Photo: courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)
Fig. 27. Carved and painted wooden panel found in the Audience Hall Complex (Herzfeld IN 95), 61 cm (height) × 92.4 cm (width) × 4.8 cm (max. depth). Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, no acc. no. (Photo: courtesy of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)
architecture. I wish to explore this relationship further in the context of the official audience. Descriptions of official audiences under the Abbasids make clear that these events were governed by a strict set of rules that informed where various parties stood, how they behaved, and how much they were permitted to see. I will quote one description of an audience at length here, as it contains a great amount of detail and strongly echoes other, less precise accounts of similar events. The description recounts the investiture ceremony of the commander in chief ‘Adud al-Dawla (d. 983) in 977 preserved in the *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa* (Rules of the Dar al-Khilafa), a manual of court ceremonial penned by the secretary Hilal al-Sabi’ (d. 1056). ‘Adud al-Dawla was a member of the Buyid dynasty, a family of military commanders originally from the Daylam region of Iran, just south of the Caspian Sea, who rose to power as mercenaries in the Abbasid army. By this time the Buyids effectively governed Baghdad and the adjoining provinces of Iraq and Iran but depended on the Abbasid caliphs for a sense of political legitimacy. The requisite investiture ceremonies that took place within the Abbasid palace were thus an important opportunity for the caliphs to present themselves in a position of authority.

The *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa* relates that ‘Adud al-Dawla’s investiture took place in Baghdad during the reign of Abbasid caliph al-Ta’i’ li-Amr Allah (r. 974–91), in a space called the *Dār al-Salām* (Abode of Peace):

> Al-Ta’i’ li-Amr Allah, God have mercy on him, sat on a raised seat [sarīr] in the center of the *sidillā* of the Dar al-Salam on a cushion made of black silk woven with gold. Some hundred servants from his personal entourage surrounded him there…. A brocade curtain sent by ‘Adud al-Dawla to screen al-Ta’i’ so that no soldier’s eye would fall upon the caliph before his did was hung on the middle columns [al-asāṭīn al-wustā]. In the Courtyard of Peace [Ṣaḥn al-Salām], ropes were tied to the columns [aʿmida]. The Daylamites and the Turks were the first to enter, without so much as a piece of iron. The Daylamites stood on the left and the Turks on the right. The nobles, judges, and others of high rank were in the courtyard before the columns [dīna al-asāṭīn] on either side, arranged according to rank, while the chamberlains of the Caliph, Mu’nis al-Fadli, Wasif and Ahmad ibn Nasr al-‘Abbasi, and their twenty-eight lieutenants … stood before the ropes on both sides.
Fig. 29. Page 16 from Ernst Herzfeld's Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7. Sketches depict various fragments of glass and wood found within the Main Caliphal Palace of Samarra. The sketch at far right depicts a fragment of a stucco window grill with glass panes still inserted, found near South Columned Hall (Herzfeld IN 893). Current location of fragment unknown, possibly London, British Museum. Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.607.18. (Photo: courtesy of Smithsonian Institution)
flanked by two side rooms. Either way, it was a covered space. The hall behind the *sidillā*, described here as a *riwāq*, must also have been a covered area: the term *riwāq* usually means a space supported by columns. It is of note that the distinction between interior and exterior space clearly corresponds to distinctions in rank and that much of the audience was stationed in an open courtyard outside the covered audience hall. Access to the interior was granted only to the guest of honor. Such hierarchical arrangements are attested to for other audiences held in the Abbasids' palaces. The description of a feast held by the caliph al-Mutawakkil ʿala ʿllah (r. 847–61) on the occasion of his son’s circumcision is a good example. The event is described in several sources, the most detailed description coming in *Kitāb al-Diyārāt* (Book of Monasteries) by ʿAli ibn Muhammad al-Shabushti (d. ca. 990). According to al-Shabushti’s account, the feast took place in the Balkuwara Palace at Samarra. Al-Mutawakkil was seated in the

Al-Sabi’ continues by describing how ʿAdud al-Dawla was admitted to the courtyard and crossed it with his arms held by the caliph’s chamberlains, kneeling every few steps to kiss the ground. When ʿAdud al-Dawla reached the threshold of the *sidillā*, he kissed the ground again and then was admitted and sworn into office. Then he and the caliph proceeded into “the hall that followed the *sidillā*” (*al-riwāq alladhī yalī al-sidillā*), where the caliph bestowed him with robes of honor.

Al-Sabi’’s account describes three distinct, hierarchically coded spaces: the *sidillā* where the caliph and his entourage sat, the *Ṣaḥn al-Salām* where the military and officials stood in rows according to rank, and the hall beyond the *sidillā* where ʿAdud al-Dawla was robed. Adud al-Dawla proceeded across a courtyard to the *sidillā* and then to the hall behind it. The Sahn al-Salam was certainly an open courtyard (*ṣaḥn* consistently means “courtyard” in medieval texts). The term *sidillā* refers to either a baldachin throne or possibly a room flanked by two side rooms. Either way, it was a covered space. The hall behind the *sidillā*, described here as a *riwāq*, must also have been a covered area: the term *riwāq* usually means a space supported by columns. It is of note that the distinction between interior and exterior space clearly corresponds to distinctions in rank and that much of the audience was stationed in an open courtyard outside the covered audience hall. Access to the interior was granted only to the guest of honor.

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Fig. 30. Fragment of a windowpane made of translucent blue glass found in the Audience Hall Complex (Herzfeld IN 970), 14.6 cm (length) × 0.2 cm (max. depth). Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, no acc. no. (Photo: courtesy of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)
heart of the palace’s main iwan (fi ṣadr al-īwān) surrounded by one hundred members of his entourage. The large carpet was chosen from the treasuries to cover the interior of the iwan. In front of al-Mutawakkil’s throne, thousands of seats were arranged for the many guests invited to the event, who were seated in rows according to rank. These place settings, al-Shabushti relates, “themselves formed an outstretched carpet.”

The fact that hierarchical seating schemes were so important to audiences at the Abbasid court has significant implications for understanding Samarra’s Audience Hall Complex and its decorative program. Al-Sabi’s description dates much later than the foundation of Samarra’s Main portico into a deep, covered hall. During official ceremonies in the same configuration: visitors can apply the pathway he describes to the plan of this complex and its decorative program. The intricate decorative program of the main Caliphal Palace of Samarra has been carefully controlled, and gazes guided by the elaborate rules and regulations enforced within the space.

The analysis of the evidence cited above implies that most guests would have had only a fleeting glimpse of the complex’s surface decoration. In fact, most of the rooms in the complex would have been completely invisible, even to those seated closest to the caliph within the covered hall who, like those in the courtyard, were expected to maintain their position throughout the ceremony. The intricate decorative program of the Audience Hall Complex, the elaborate design of which requires that one examine it in detail to fully appreciate it, would have in all probability gone largely unseen and would certainly not have been examined in detail.

While this proposition may at first appear to undermine the effect of such a decorative program, further consideration suggests that the idea of restricted visibility may have been the very principle informing its design. Indeed, the experience of not seeing has been identified by Avinoam Shalem as an aspect in the design of a range of ceremonial spaces during the early Islamic period. The idea is particularly prevalent in Abbasid ceremonies. In al-Sabi’s account, for example, it is clear that several elements of the investiture ceremony were designed to limit or otherwise control the audience’s ability to see what was in front of them. Hanging a curtain in front of the caliph’s throne was one strategy. This device is documented under the Umayyads (661–750), where the caliph al-Walid II and the governor al-Hajjaj are said to have had a sāhib al-sitr, or “curtain master,” in charge of opening and closing the curtain during official ceremonies. The Umayyads, in turn, probably adopted this practice from the Sasanians. Another strategy was the seating arrangement itself. Those who had lower rank were relegated to exterior spaces, while those of higher rank stood under a roof, protected from the glare of the sun and thus more able to see clearly.

Similar ideas are expressed in rules concerning eye contact developed at the Abbasid court. The ninth-century Kitāb al-Tāj (Book of the Crown), for example, states that those in the presence of the ruler should lower their eyes, never looking at him directly, even if they are among his intimates or inner circle. This act, the author explains, should be done in consideration of the ruler’s ḥurma, a word that could be translated as “sacredness.” The caliph, on the other hand, should never have to look upon a person’s back. The Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa specifies that when leaving an audience, the vizier should walk backwards, facing the caliph, as long as he is in the caliph’s sight. In this concept of court protocol, the gaze of the caliph actually dictates the behaviors of his inferiors whose sight is, in turn, restricted.

As a final example, I call attention to one of the most famous descriptions of an Abbasid palace: the account of a trip made to Baghdad by a Byzantine embassy in the year 917 during the reign of al-Muqtadir bi’llah (r. 908–32). Several scholars have discussed the resonances between this description and other evidence for the design of Abbasid palace architecture, so I will only briefly reiterate the highlights here. The narrative relates that the Byzantine embassy came to Baghdad to reclaim captives taken during battle. Upon arrival in Iraq, the envoys were not initially permitted into the city of Baghdad but were housed outside in a suburb. After being let into the city, they were then housed in a
secluded mansion for weeks until an audience with the caliph was finally granted.\textsuperscript{133} The court created a theatrical event out of this visit. The sources report that the envoys were taken through a series of gardens, pavilions, and audience halls in which they were shown displays of rarities and treasures until they became overwhelmed. Included in the list of items mentioned in accounts of the event are a stable of horses fitted with gold and silver saddles, a hall with four elephants and two giraffes, a hall with one hundred lions, a pool filled with polished lead, a grove of four hundred palm trees, a palace filled with rare fabrics and coats of armor, and many courtyards and audience halls filled with eye-catching items from the treasuries.\textsuperscript{134} The actual audience with the caliph, who sat in a majlis (audience hall) near the Tigris, was quite brief, only a matter of minutes.

The details of this account may well be exaggerated, but that is not important. The account serves as evidence of an idea that permeates many descriptions of Abbasid palaces—the idea that to restrict sensory experience is to wield power. The design of the Byzantine embassy’s reception, at least as it is recorded for posterity, is based on withholding access to the palace’s interior and then granting it in a rushed, overwhelming manner. It is a case of sensory deprivation followed by sensory inundation, an uneven but very much manipulated experience designed to impress a sense of the court’s power on the visitor by making it impossible for him or her to grasp the profundity of wealth accumulated within the palace walls.

It is important to note that while the Byzantine envoys were the main focus of this strategy, its effect also applies to the hundreds of palace personnel who attended the audiences. Like the foreign envoys, the servants and members of the military attached to the Abbasid palace may have seen such a configuration of objects and people only once in their lives. It is from the experience of this population that the tantalizing accounts preserved in Arabic texts must have originated. For the majority of Samarra’s and Baghdad’s population, such accounts were the only available form of access to the palace’s ornamented and lavishly furnished interiors.

The decorative program of the Audience Hall Complex of Samarra’s Main Caliphal Palace reinforces the concept of restricted or controlled visibility that underlies the design of official audiences at the Abbasid court. This series of continuously decorated surfaces is designed to elicit the interest of viewers but is never fully visible, especially if one assumes that the circumstances of viewing were similar to those described in the accounts cited above. Like the rules and regulations governing official events within the space, the decorative program itself shows the viewer the limits of his or her ability to see.

Consider once more the defining aspects of the program. Those who designed the complex’s walls and ceilings clustered together costly materials such as marble and decorative wood, further embellished by finishing techniques such as polishing, painting, and carving, in order to create a visually seductive space. Yet there seems to have been no single point of focus. While some of the dado patterns are more intricate than others, their distribution is kaleidoscopic rather than directional. The only thing that distinguishes the columned audience halls from the surrounding chambers is the change from stucco to marble, but the two media echo each other through the use of a standard set of patterns. There is clearly a scheme governing this layout, but to fully grasp it requires a bird’s-eye view like Herzfeld’s ornament map, or the ability to walk freely within the complex for an extended period of time. These vantage points and access privileges would not have been available to the vast majority of people in ninth-century Samarra who saw the space.

In this way, the decorative program of the Audience Hall Complex reflects the design of the palace as a whole. The palace’s plan consists of a seemingly endless web of rooms, courtyards, pools, gates, and pavilions. These units are bound together by the logic of axial arrangement and symmetry, and yet due to its massive scale, the plan would be difficult to understand on the ground without a map. In both cases, the design allows the viewer only a fragmented experience of the whole.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to shift the scholarly gaze from the close analysis of individual fragments to the
perspective of a hypothetical viewer in ninth-century Samarra. To imagine this perspective, I used the archaeo-
logical and related contextual evidence available to speculate on the arrangement of the surface decorations
in the Audience Hall Complex of Samarra’s Main Cal-
iphal Palace. Information from Herzfeld’s excavation
archives proved useful for reconstructing the layout of
the complex’s carved stucco and marble dados and al-
lowed for more tentative hypotheses regarding the
other types of architectural ornament that enlivened
the space. Herzfeld’s findings were important to present
in detail because they confirm that the ornament of
the complex’s many rooms was planned together as a pro-
gram, with careful attention given to the choice of me-
dia and placement of patterns.

A survey of some texts describing official audiences
under the Abbasids sheds light on the possible positions
of audience members at such events, suggesting that in
a space such as Samarra’s Audience Hall Complex, many
would not have been able to catch more than a glimpse
of the audience hall’s opulent decorations. These de-
scriptions make clear that other measures were taken
during these ceremonies to restrict visibility, an idea
that previous research has shown was a key aspect in the
development of other audience halls in early Islamic
architecture. I argued that the design of the Audience
Hall Complex’s ornament program, which requires a
privileged view to fully comprehend, reinforces and in-
tensifies the ideology of restriction that seems to have
prevailed within the design of Abbasid architecture and cer-
emonial.

Central to the idea of the “restricted gaze” proposed
here is the notion of a codified hierarchy. Depending on
one’s status within the Abbasid court, more or less of the
palace was made visible. At the top of the hierarchy was
the caliph himself. The caliph, one assumes, had the
most privileged access to various parts of the palace and
had the most direct line of sight through the audience
hall and adjoining courtyard during official ceremonies.
At the other end of the scale was the majority of Sa-
mara’s civilian population, people who may have never
set foot within the palace’s interior and seen its grounds
only from afar. Somewhere in the middle were palace
guests: foreign dignitaries, princes such as ‘Adud al-
Dawla, court poets, and other members of the caliph’s
entourage. These guests were offered alluring glimpses
of the palace’s interior spaces, but their experience was
likely mediated through rules and regulations specifying
when and where they were allowed. It is the experience
of this latter category that I have attempted to imagine
in this article.

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NOTES

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1. Early archaeological descriptions of Samarra include
Ernst Herzfeld, Samarra: Aufnahmen und Untersuchungen
zur Islamischen Archäologie (Berlin, 1907); Henri Viollet,
Description du Palais de Al-Moutasim fils d’Haroun al-Ras-
chid à Samara et quelques monuments arabes peu connus
de la Mésopotamie, Mémoires présentés par divers savants
à l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 12 (1909):
587–94; Henri Viollet, Fouilles à Samara en Mésopotamie:
Un palais musulman du IXe siècle, Mémoires présentés
par divers savants à l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-
Lettres 12 (1911): 685–717; Ernst Herzfeld and Friedrich
Sarre, Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-Gebiet,
4 vols. (Berlin, 1911–20), 152–109; Gertrude Rule, Amurath to
2. Ernst Herzfeld's excavation of Samarra took place over two seasons. During the first (January–October 1911), he excavated parts of the Congregational Mosque of al-Mutawakkil at Samarra, the Mosque of al-Mutawakkil at al-Mutawakkiliyya (Abu Dulaf), the Balkuwara Palace, the Qasr al-Ashiq, and Qubbat al-Sulaybiyya on the west bank of the Tigris, and sixteen private houses and two baths. His findings from the first campaign are discussed in detail in Thomas Leisten, *Excavation of Samarra*, vol. 1, *Architecture: Final Report of the First Campaign* (Mainz am Rhein, 2003). The second campaign (December 1912–July 1913) was mostly devoted to excavations in the Main Caliphal Palace, but a topographical survey was also undertaken and supplementary excavations made at Abu Dulaf. A comprehensive overview of Herzfeld's excavations at Samarra is available in Jens Kröger, “Chronik der Ausgrabungen von Samarra, 1911–1913: Eine kulturhistorische Studie zur Forschungs- und Förderungsgeschichte der Islamischen Archäologie im 20. Jahrhundert,” *Beiträge zur islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 4, ed. Julia Gonnella with Rania Abdellatif and Simone Struth (Wiesbaden, 2014), 234–346. Findings from Herzfeld's excavations were published in a series of six catalogues under the volume title *Die Ausgrabungen von Samarra*. Volumes 1–6 are: Ernst Herzfeld, *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik* (Berlin, 1923); Friedrich Sarre, *Die Keramik von Samarra* (Berlin, 1923); Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* (Berlin, 1927); C. J. Lam, *Das Glas von Samarra* (Berlin, 1928); Ernst Herzfeld, *Die vorgeschichtlichen Topfereien* (Berlin, 1930); and Ernst Herzfeld, *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra* (Hamburg, 1948). Elements of architectural ornament are discussed in volumes 1–4 and 6.

4. The division of finds from Samarra has been discussed in detail elsewhere. Although originally intended to be split between Berlin and Istanbul, the finds packed in crates at the site were seized by the British during World War I and shipped to London in 1921. At this point, they were divided (unevenly) among the U.K. and Germany, and smaller portions known as “type-sets” were sold to a number of museums. A number of stucco panels packed at the site were lost, as well as a number of crates containing small finds. See Sheila Canby, “Islamic Archaeology: By Accident or Design?,” in *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850–1950*, ed. Stephen Vernoit (London, 2000), 128–37; Magnus T. Bernhardsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past: Archaeology and Nation Building in Modern Iraq* (Austin, Tex., 2005), 75–84; Christoph Konrad, “Die Funde der Grabung Ernst Herzfelds 1911–1913 aus Samarra,” *Beiträge zur islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 1 (Wiesbaden, 2008), 51–54; Kröger, “Chronik der Ausgrabungen von Samarra,” 288–309.


has been published: Alastair Norledge, The Historical Topography of Samarra, Samarra Studies 1 (London, 2005).

16. The Ernst Herzfeld Papers at the Smithsonian Institution are housed in the Archives of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (FSA). The FSA has circa 30,000 items spanning Herzfeld’s scholarly career, including excavation diaries, photographs, and sketchbooks from the Samarra campaigns. This material was originally catalogued by Joseph M. Upton and has recently been digitized and catalogued online by Xavier Courouble. All documents cited in this article are available online through Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Smithsonian Institution, www.asia.si.edu/research/archives/HerzfeldTop.asp (accessed May 10, 2015). The Ernst Herzfeld Papers at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA), New York, are divided between two curatorial departments, the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Department of Islamic Art. The archive consists of several thousand documents altogether. The material in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art is mostly related to Herzfeld’s work on pre-Islamic subjects but includes a photograph album from the Samarra excavations. For an inventory description, see Margaret Cool Root, “The Herzfeld Archive of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” Metropolitan Museum Bulletin 11 (1976): 119–24. The documents housed in the Department of Islamic Art contain additional material related to the Samarra excavations, including three sketchbooks and a series of preparatory drawings and notes for Herzfeld’s Der Wandenschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik and Die Malereien von Samarra. These documents have been catalogued by the author and are in the process of being digitized. For documents available online, see Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Metropolitan Museum of Art, http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p6002coll1 (accessed July 24, 2014). The archive at the Museum für Islamische Kunst (MIK), Berlin, includes correspondence between Herzfeld and Friedrich Sarre, several sketchbooks, and a number of glass plate negatives taken on-site. These papers are discussed in Kröger, “Chronik der Ausgrabungen von Samarra.” In subsequent notes, I refer to archival materials by their collection abbreviation (FSA, MMA, and MIK) in the first citation, followed by their repository identification number and page number. Herzfeld’s excavation inventory numbers assigned to small finds (important for searching the online archives for specific artifacts) are preceded with the abbreviation “Herzfeld IN” here. Museum accession numbers (acc. no.) later assigned to the Samarra finds are preceded by the name of the museum.

17. Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, FSA A.6 07.09.

18. Herzfeld’s Samarra sketchbooks referenced in this article include three main groups: the Samarra Finds Sketchbooks 1–9 (FSA A.6 07.12–FSA A.6 07.20), which contain drawings of finds from the excavations; the Samarra Architectural Studies Sketchbooks 1–9 (FSA A.6 07.21–FSA A.6 07.29), which contain architectural plans; and the Samarra Ornament Sketchbook (MMA eeh1500), which contains drawings of architectural ornament from the Main Caliphal Palace. Herzfeld’s Samarra Finds Journal is catalogued as FSA A.6 07.01.


20. The strategic construction of vistas and views in Abbasid palace architecture is lucidly presented in D. Fairchild Ruggles, Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain (University Park, Pa., 2000), 94–100.

21. Alastair Norledge, “An Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph at Samarra (Dar al-Khilafa or Jawsaq al-Khaqani),” Ars Orientalis 23 (1993): 143–70. For instances of both toponyms in medieval sources, see Norledge, Historical Topography, appendix C.

22. Norledge, “Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph,” 146.


24. Norledge, “Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph,” 147. Herzfeld was at first convinced that this area contained a large gate but, after having made several unsuccessful soundings there, gave up the search. Herzfeld explained his lack of success in finding a gate on the southern side of the complex in a letter to Friedrich Sarre, dated January 20, 1913, MIK: “2 Züge waren kurz am Südtor tätig, welches kein Tor, jedenfalls nicht das Tor des Palastes war. Die Untersuchung ist schon abgeschlossen. 2 Züge waren in 29 v/w tätig, wo ebenfalls kein Tor vorhanden ist.” The coordinates “29 v/w” to which Herzfeld refers are located on the southern side of the Great Courtyard, along the retaining wall. See Herzfeld’s gridded map of the palace, FSA A.6 05.1018.

25. For a general description of these finds, see Herzfeld, Malereien von Samarra, viii–ix.

26. Herzfeld saw the Main Caliphal Palace’s Audience Hall Complex as part of a long evolution in the form of basilica-like audience chambers that he traced from ancient Iran through to Mshatta. He expressed this theory in his Second Campaign Diary, 79–80.

27. Column foundations are clearly visible in Herzfeld’s photographs. See FSA A.6 04.22.039, for example. The purpose of the rows of columns in the columned halls is discussed in a letter from Ernst Herzfeld to Friedrich Sarre, June 22, 1913, MIK.

28. That the Central Square Chamber was domed was clear to Herzfeld based on the architecture itself. The fact that there were no finds of plaster or brick vaulting led further to the conclusion that the dome was constructed of wood. See Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 81: “Dass der centrale

29. For Ukhaydir, see Gertrude Bell, Palace and Mosque at Ukhaydir: A Study in Early Mohammadan Architecture (Oxford, 1914), 26; Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, pt. 2, 63–70. For Mshatta, see Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, pt. 1, 2584–88. The connection between the Islamic audience hall and the Late Antique basilica (an elongated room with rows of columns on the long sides) is argued most thoroughly in Jean Sauvaget, *La Mosquée omeyyade de Médine: Étude sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique* (Paris, 1947), 124–29, 158–85.

30. Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 88. The explanatory text accompanying figure 5 reads: “Hier fand sich zuerst im Centrum eine Zusetzung eines ins Pflasterniveau vertieften halbkugeligen Springbrunnenbeckens, also 2 Perioden. Dazu kam, dass allerdings der centrale Saal zuerst folgende Bildung hatte: [my figure 5, left], jetzt aber [my figure 5, right]. Außerdem an 2 Stellen eine 3te Periode (sehr dichtig die zwei Durchbrüche wieder zusetzt).” This last remark also indicates that two of these apertures were reclosed in a third phase of renovation.

31. The bricked-over basin is perhaps indicated in Herzfeld, Samarra Architectural Studies Sketchbook 8, 40, where a sketch of a pavement is labeled “Mitte des Thronsaaales zugesetzter Springbrunnen” and is attributed to “III Periode.”

32. Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 88: “Neu fand sich das Merkwürdigste, 70 cm unter dem Pflaster ein älteres Pflaster, wenigstens Reste davon, u. darüber[?] 70 cm Abschüttung (sicher).”


34. Northedge, *Historical Topography*, appendix A, p. 267 (par. 2) and p. 268 (par. 8).

35. Northedge, “Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph,” 146.

36. Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 87: “Es hat sich Heute herausgestellt, dass die Basilikalen Säle (alle 4) Marmorsäulen hatten, keine Pfeiler, u. zwar je 2 x 4: also ganz Mshattā.”

37. The column shafts are photographed in FSA A.6 04.PF.22.028, and the base in FSA A.6 04.PF.22.034. The column base is also photographed in FSA A.6 04.PF.22.034 and sketched in Herzfeld, Samarra Ornament Sketchbook, 16. The current whereabouts of these column parts is unknown. A similar example is housed in the MIK (acc. no. Sam I. 484). Stone column capitals were also excavated from the private houses at Samarra. Two examples are now housed in the MIK: acc. no. Sam I. 485 (Herzfeld IN 185) and acc. no. Sam I. 492 (Herzfeld IN 186).


40. This attribution is evident in his descriptions of this impression in Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 70.

41. Photographs FSA A.6 04.PF.22.043 and FSA A.6 04.PF.22.044 show impressions on the south wall. FSA A.6 04.PF.22.038 shows a baseboard made of carved marble with bead motif at the threshold of what used to be an open passage between the West Columned Hall and the Central Square Chamber behind the columns.

42. Fragments of a carved marble baseboard and impressions in the plaster above are visible in photograph FSA A.6 04.PF.22.046 and in the background of photograph FSA A.6 04.PF.22.050. See also Herzfeld’s detailed sketch of these impressions in his Samarra Ornament Sketchbook, 25.

43. Photograph FSA A.6 04.PF.22.048.

44. I have seen such holes in two fragments of marble wall facings in the MIK (acc. nos. Sam I. 476 and Sam I. 489) and in Herzfeld IN 966, current location unknown but documented in Herzfeld, *Samarra Finds Sketchbook* 8, 14. In terms of the holes, one can compare Samarra’s marble slabs to the marble slabs used for a wall facing excavated from Khirbet al-Minya, which also had small holes for clamps bored in their sides. Unlike Samarra, however, Khirbet al-Minya’s marble revetments attached to a stone wall that bore no trace of plaster backing. Like other monuments in Syria-Palestine, the marble panels were attached solely with clamps. This material is described in detail by Markus Ritter in “Spätantike Kunst: Die Baudekoration des frühislamisch-umayyadischen Palastes Kirbat al-Minya bei Tiberias am See Genezareth” (master’s thesis, Bamberg Colloquium on Oriental Studies, 1994), 183–85. The detailed research on the marble wall panels excavated at Ghazni in Afghanistan provides an interesting point of comparison. At Ghazni, such pin or clamp holes are not evident, as the panels seem to have been attached to the brick walls with plaster and further secured by being partly submerged under the floor where they rested on a wooden foundation, as is suggested by the blank registers at the bottom of the panels. Martina Rugiadi, personal communication, April 2013, and see also Martina Rugiadi, *Decorazione architettonica in marmo da Gasni (Afghanistan): Tesi Dottorale* (Bologna, 2012), 1065. The fact that the Samarra marble, made for brick walls and plaster, came with pin holes comparable to those used in the stone architecture of Syria-Palestine could be an
argument in support of the information given by the Arab historian and geographer Ahmad ibn Abī Yaʿqūb al-Yaʿqūbī (d. after 905) that the marble for Samarra was sourced from a Syrian context or worked by Syrian craftsmen. For the Yaʿqūbī reference, see Northedge, *Historical Topography*, 268.

45. Examples of metal clamps, possibly used for attaching marble panels to walls, include Herzfeld IN 600, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 5; Herzfeld IN 972, MIK, no acc. no., documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 22; and Herzfeld IN 995, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 47.

46. The pieces found not carved in these four patterns are so few and so inconsistent that they might be interpreted as spolia recycled at Samarra for other structural elements. If they were employed as decorations, no more than one frieze or an isolated panel could be reconstructed based on the current evidence. For these, see Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 224–25.

47. E.g., Herzfeld IN 915, drawn in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, 8. Two pieces with this pattern are preserved in the collection of the MIK (acc. no. Sam. I. 101 and 102), both with undocumented findspots. This pattern is published as Orn. 146 in Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 98.

48. A large slab housed in the National Museum in Baghdad has six rows of horseshoe motifs (the bottom row is barely visible) and a beaded border on its left side. I thank Martina Rugiadi for bringing this piece to my attention. See also a piece published in Iraq Directorate-General of Antiquities, *Excavations at Samarra*, 1936–1939, 2 vols. (Baghdad, 1940), 2: pl. CXXXIII.

49. E.g., Herzfeld IN 966, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, 14.

50. E.g., Herzfeld IN 80 (MIK acc. no. Sam I. 490), IN 256 (MIK acc. no. Sam I. 477), IN 517 (MIK acc. no. Sam I. 476), and IN 629, photographed in FSA A.6 04.PF.22.117 and published as Orn. 235 in Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 91–92.

51. Herzfeld IN 966 (two fragments, one photographed in FSA A.6 04.PF.19.047 and the other documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, p. 7), as well as two large pieces found in the Iraqi excavations of the 1930s, have beaded border elements attached along their sides. See Iraq Directorate-General of Antiquities, *Excavations at Samarra*, 2: pl. CXXXIII.


53. Fragments of moldings can be distinguished from wall panel fragments (dadoes or door frames) by their shape. The surfaces of these fragments are usually rounded at the bottom and canted outward at the top to form a ledge. Examples include Victoria and Albert Museum acc. no. A.65-1922 (Herzfeld IN 36), and MIK acc. nos. I. 7741 (Herzfeld IN 38), Sam I. 487 (Herzfeld IN 59), and Sam I. 488 (Herzfeld IN 37).

54. Herzfeld IN 984, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, 17.


57. For example, Herzfeld IN 803 (photographed in FSA A.6 04.PF.22.171) has a beaded border element attached above.


60. A sketch made by Herzfeld of a marble fragment now in the MIK (acc. no. Sam. I. 490, Herzfeld IN 80) is glossed “Spuren roter Farbe,” suggesting that he found traces of red pigment on its surface. The sketch is preserved in MMA eeh407.


62. See transcribed text from Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary in n. 66 below.


64. In his diary, Herzfeld questioned whether both of these corner rooms had dadoes made of shaped marble slabs or the room in the southeastern corner had ceramic tiles substituted for marble slabs. This question was based on the fact that, in the southeastern corner room, the impressions were flat (rather than concave like those left by marble slabs) and were of a different size. See Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 85: “Für das westliche Zimmer ist Marmor durch orginale Stücke absolut sicher. Bei dem östlichen dachte ich zuerst an Kashi. Und das ist immer noch nicht ganz unmöglich, wenn auch fraglich (die Maße sind verschieden in beiden Zimmern, u. runde Abdrücke, d. h. von alten Säulenoberflächen gibt es nur im westlichen Zimmer).” The question of the use of ceramic tiles in lieu of shaped marble pieces is of great interest. If accurate, Herzfeld’s theory could explain one use for the shaped ceramic tiles painted in polychrome luster to resemble stippled stone found in what was possibly a storage area near the circular pool that Herzfeld called the “large sardāb,” examples of which are now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum (acc. no. C.620-1922), the MIK (many fragments, e.g., acc. no. Sam. I. 235), and the MMA (acc. no. .
Sarre had reconstructed these tiles as hexagonal in shape, likely after Herzfeld’s suggestion (Sarre, Keramik von Samarra, 52 [cat. no. 200] and reconstruction on p. 51 [fig. 121]), but an arrow-shaped form is equally possible. I have never seen a fully intact tile, and none of the fragments preserved are actually hexagonal. These tiles are discussed in Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 34–37.

The facing was not found still intact but rather its impression was clearly visible in the plaster bed, as seen in photographs FSA A.6 04.PF.19.073, FSA A.6 04.PF.22.050, FSA A.6 04.PF.22.052, and FSA A.6 04.PF.22.053. The pattern is sketched in Herzfeld, Samarra Ornament Sketchbook, 24, 26.

The key to the map is glossed in Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 84–86: "Der 4 Kreuzsäule mit ihren T-Queren haben sämtlich Sockel aus Marmorplatten, u. ich vermute mit Sicherheit, dass hier die Sockel sculptiert waren. Wir haben en masse Fragmente (er Muster: a) Palmettendacht [sic] Vasenmotiv (b) Hufeisenmotiv. Außer tulunid. Friesen (the Samarra Friee) kommt sonst in Massen nichts vor, u. diese 3 Arten stammen sätzlich aus diesem 4 Zimmern... (g) Marmorsockel ohne Sculptur, oben u. unten Knopfreihen aus weißem, blaugeädertem Marmor. Die centralen Rauten aus schneeweißem Marmor. Die [\*]-Stücke teils rosa muschelweißem, blaugeädertem Marmor. Die centralen Rauten (die 5-lobed leaf at the bottom) in the MIK measured 25 cm in height, while Herzfeld’s sketches indicate that it measured 27 cm on the marble slab. For the measured sketch, see Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, 6.

See, for example, Herzfeld’s statement in the concluding remarks to the excavation of the palace in Herzfeld, Second Campaign Diary, 97: “Alle Oramente u. Marmorverkleidungen in den Thronsälen sind also alt, erste Periode von Mu’tasim.”

E.g., photograph FSA A.6 04.PF.22.042.
in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 42), and IN 916 (drawn in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, 10–11). Other pieces in pink, white, and black marble were picked up in the surrounding area, but findspot information is vague and it is impossible to reconstruct their original location (e.g., Herzfeld IN 536 and IN 620–622, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 5).


84. All examples of the millefiori and opaque black glass tiles mentioned above were found in this area. Herzfeld also uncovered an extensive amount of shaped glass inlay pieces there, e.g., Herzfeld IN 602, a large piece shaped in the form of a vescia piscis, pictured in Lamm, *Glas von Samarra*, pl. XII, cat. no. 355.

85. Herzfeld IN 949, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, 41, and IN 986 (British Museum, acc. nos. OA+.11764, OA+.11765, OA+.11766, OA+.11768).

86. Several fragments of stucco with mosaic tesserae and mother-of-pearl inlay were found at Samarra, demonstrating the use of this type of wall ornament there, though not in the Main Caliphal Palace itself. For examples, see Lamm, *Glas von Samarra*, 115–18, esp. cat. nos. 324 (Herzfeld IN 5) and 325 (Herzfeld IN 45).

87. Herzfeld IN 827 and 856, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 8, 42–43.


90. Fragments from these arcades were found by Henri Viollet in his fouille 7, just south of the West Portico. See caption in Viollet, *Fouilles à Samarra*, pl. XVI, and compare to plan in pl. I. Herzfeld indicated in his notes that he found fragments in the East Columned Hall near the East Portico and in the South Columned Hall. These findspots are recorded in Herzfeld, Samarra Ornament Sketchbook, 24–26.


92. For fragments of exterior faces, see Herzfeld, Samarra Ornament Sketchbook, 20; Viollet, *Fouilles à Samarra*, pl. XVI, 1. For pieces of softs, see Herzfeld, Samarra Ornament Sketchbook, 16–17; Viollet, *Fouilles à Samarra*, pl. XVI, 2.

93. Herzfeld IN 910 had traces of blue color. This piece is documented in a colored pencil drawing (MMA eeh405). See also Viollet, *Fouilles à Samarra*, 26.

94. The intact wooden door was found in the area just south of the Audience Hall Complex: Herzfeld IN 965, photographed in FSA A.6 04.PF.22.036 and sketched in FSA A.6 07.11.27. The size of the door can be approximated through sketches with measurements that indicate that the fragmentary leaves reach a maximum height of 130 cm, meaning that the original height of the door would be somewhat taller. Two pieces that appear to be from hexagonal frames of the type used between rectangular panels in composite wooden doors were found in the audience halls. One was carved in a deep-cut style (Herzfeld IN 923, MIK no acc. no., documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 18, and published as Orn. 278 in Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 223), and the other had a simple bead motif (Herzfeld IN 924, documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 23). From Herzfeld’s excavation: Herzfeld IN 963 (documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 24) and Herzfeld IN 924 (documented in Herzfeld, Samarra Finds Sketchbook 7, 20). See also a sketch of several of these elements in FSA A.6 07.11.36. The Iraqi excavations in the 1930s uncovered two such panels. See Iraq Directorate-General of Antiquities, *Excavations at Samarra*, 2: pl. CXXXVI, top. A leaf from a double-leaved door with the same motif is in the Benaki Museum, Athens (acc. no. 9130). It is said to come from Tikrit. The door has recently been published in Helen C. Evans and Brandie Ratliff, ed., *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art (New Haven, 2012), 231, cat. no. 164.

95. Single leaves from two such doors are housed in the Benaki Museum (acc. nos. 9128, 9129). The partner of one of these now resides in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (acc. no. AA 267). See Elise Anglade, *Catalogue des boiseries de la section islamique* (Paris, 1988), 18–20, cat. no. 5; Sophie Makariou, ed., *Islamic Art at the Musée du Louvre*, trans. Susan Wise (Paris, 2012), 85–86. A separate door (two leaves) is now in the British Museum (acc. no. 1944.5.13.1). Also included in this group is a single door panel with the palmette-fan motif purchased by Herzfeld in Tikrit and now housed in the MIK (no acc. no., published as Orn. 102 in Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 72–73, and Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, pt. 2, 238). Two pairs of doors with panels bearing other Beveled Style motifs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art are also said to be from Tikrit (acc. nos. 31.119.1–2, and 31.119.3–4). See Maryam Ekhtiar, Priscilla Soucek, Sheila Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, ed., *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art (New Haven, 2011), 45–46, cat. no. 23. For a recent discussion of this group of doors, see Evans and Ratliff, ed., *Byzantium and Islam*, 231–32, cat. no. 165.

98. Among many examples are Herzfeld IN 797 (MIK acc. no. Sam I, 354), published as Orn. 74 in Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 55.

99. Herzfeld IN 874 (MIK no acc no.), published as Orn. 110 in ibid., 76.

100. Among many examples, see illustrations published in ibid., 139–42 (e.g., Orn. 197).

101. Herzfeld IN 793 c and Herzfeld IN 809 (both MIK no acc nos., documented in Herzfeld’s sketch FSA A.6 0711.26).

102. Herzfeld IN 793 b and Herzfeld IN 872 a (both MIK no acc nos., drawn in Herzfeld’s sketch FSA A.6 0711.34 and photographed in FSA A.6 04PF.2209b, respectively).

103. Herzfeld IN 702 and Herzfeld IN 786 a (both MIK no acc nos., photographed in FSA A.6 04PF.23124).

104. Herzfeld IN 923 (Victoria and Albert Museum, acc. no. A.333.1922).

105. Herzfeld IN 886 (British Museum, acc. no. OA-13658) and Herzfeld 796 (MIK acc. no. Sam I, 350). See also photograph FSA A.6 04PF.22147.

106. No Herzfeld inventory number, and current location unknown. This is a large arch-shaped frame constructed of several panels of wood carved in the Beveled Style documented in sketches and photographs. See photograph FSA A.6 04PF.22037 and Herzfeld, *Samarra Finds Sketchbook*, 8, 46.

107. Examples found in the Audience Hall Complex include Herzfeld IN 889 (MIK no acc no.), Herzfeld IN 922 (Victoria and Albert Museum, acc. nos. A.1301922 and A.1311922, and MIK no acc no.), Herzfeld IN 964 (Victoria and Albert Museum, acc. no. A.1291922, and MIK no acc no.).

108. Examples from the Audience Hall Complex include Herzfeld IN 925 (photographed in FSA A.6 04PF.19098 and drawn in Herzfeld, *Samarra Finds Sketchbook*, 7, 30, published as Orn. 109 in Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 76), and Herzfeld IN 970 (MIK no acc no., published as Orn. 17 in ibid., 23).


113. Herzfeld refers to it as "von den Anker über den Säu len der Thronsäule" in *Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, 134.


116. Many fragments of these windows are housed in the MIK. For an illustration, see Andrea Becker, “Das Glas von Samarra: unter Berücksichtigung neuerer Glasfunde aus Syrien,” in *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie*, ed. Gonnella et al., 4, 143–55, fig. 8. An article on the subject is forthcoming by Barry Flood in *Raqqa V*, volume 5 of the Raqqa excavation reports published by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (Mainz am Rhein, 1999–). I thank Barry Flood and Andrea Becker for alerting me to these windows.

117. Herzfeld IN 889 and Herzfeld IN 970. Two aquamarine-blue fragments are in MIK Berlin (no acc nos.). See Lamm, *Glas von Samarra*, 128, cat. nos. 375–376. Other colors were found here and elsewhere on-site, for example, those represented by MMA acc. no. 23.75.134–g, which include red, yellow, and brown pieces. See ibid., 127–28, cat. nos. 372, 374, 375.


122. Sidillā is a curious word and merits discussion here. Herzfeld traced it to the Latin sedilla, meaning a "recessed chair" or "throne." Herzfeld, *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra*, 122. Others trace its roots to a Persian phrase sīh dillāh, which suggested to Dominique Sourdel a baldachin throne with three (sīh) domes or some other tripartite division that would be placed indoors. Sourdel, “Questions de cérémonial ’Abbaside,” 129–30. It is significant that the Arabic lexicographer Isma’il ibn Hammād al-Jawhari connects the term sidillā to the architectural plan known as hārī wa’t-kummawīn, well known at Samarra, which is characterized by a large hall flanked by two side rooms. See Isma’il ibn Hammād al-Jawhari, Kitāb Ţaj al-lūgha wa-sīhah al-’arabiyya (Cairo, 1865–66), s.v. sidillā. A form of this configuration defines the arms of the Audience Hall Complex of Samarra’s Main Caliphal Palace. Jawhari writes: "sidillā: follows [the form] fi’dillā, an Arabized word whose root is Persian sidillah, as if it was three rooms in a house like the hārī bi-kummawīn." Such a close link suggests that the module of columned hall and portico opening onto the courtyard could be interpreted as a sidillā.

124. The plan of the Balkuwarā, excavated by Herzfeld in 1911, shows that its largest iwan measured approximately 26 × 13 meters and that it was extended approximately 5 meters in length with a wooden frame. Leisten, *Excavation of Samarra*, 96. The iwan, however, adjoined a much larger courtyard, which measured approximately 107 m. long. Ibid., 88.


128. A Sasanian equivalent to the Umayyad ṣāḥib al-sitr may have been the khurrām bāš. See Grabar, “Ceremonial and Art,” 53.


131. The event is described in several sources, including ibid., 16–18; *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, ed. and trans. Qaddūmī, 148–49.

132. Ibid., 151–53.


Knowledge conforms fully to the object known, because it is the spiritual form of the object known. The difference between the two is that the object known is a form whose substratum is matter, whereas knowledge is a form whose substratum is the soul.

—‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi*

On October 16, 2009, the Neues Museum in Berlin re-opened to the public after having been closed for seventy years. As the German Chancellor Angela Merkel officially inaugurated the newly renovated exhibition space, she was photographed contemplating the highlight of the collection, the famous bust of Nefertiti. Images of this moment flooded the news, internet sites, and other media, attracting the attention of the world.¹ It was probably the resonant tête-à-tête of two strong women that made this image so attractive to the public, calling to mind the history of female power and names such as the Queen of Sheba, Cleopatra, Theodora, Eleanor of Aquitaine, as well as, in the modern era, Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher. But apart from the deliberate recontextualization of the bust of Nefertiti within the framework of German history and the history of the Berlin museum—a no less ideological issue readily and frequently advanced in Berlin in order to thwart the oft-repeated demand by the former head of the Egyptian antiquities, Zahi Hawass, to return the bust to Cairo—it is worth reflecting on the particular fascination an object from another culture can exert in its new cultural environment.² In fact, Merkel’s gaze may be seen as epitomizing the long history of Europe gazing, with fascination, at the Orient. It emphasizes aesthetic amazement as a potential first step in a process leading to the acquisition of knowledge.³

This gaze of fascination is, generally speaking, the subject of this article, which examines how a “strange” and enigmatic object from the past history of another culture, in this case Pharaonic, gave rise to a new and novel mode of aesthetic investigation or, more accurately, a new mode of seeing. The object of the other—or really any exotic object—involves other aesthetic canons that challenge our conventional perceptions and as a result can foster new modalities of digesting knowledge. My object of observation is the famous Sphinx of Giza, an object that was, and still is, a source of fascination. For centuries the Sphinx has attracted the eyes of its visitors and been an object of public viewing, as evidenced today by the millions of tourist photographs uploaded to the digital global network and, for the past, by the numerous graffiti inscriptions that, according to medieval Arab writers, were to be seen on the now lost marble panels that once covered the pyramids of Giza immediately adjacent to the Sphinx.⁴ The latter are the best evidence of the medieval tourism that developed around this site, even though it must be pointed out that in the modern era no graffiti have been found on the Sphinx. As Andreas Hartmann has recently suggested, this remarkable one-time presence of graffiti may be due to the fact that the Sphinx was worshipped as a religious deity associated with Helios Harmachis.⁵

A huge map—one could even say veduta—created by Matteo Pagano around 1549 and titled La vera descrittione de la gran cita del Caiero (fig. 1) includes what is probably one of the earliest depictions of the Sphinx being observed or, rather, marveled at by travelers.⁶ The numerous extant images from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, especially up to the year 1925 when the excavation of the body of the lying Sphinx began,
Fig. 1. Matteo Pagano, *La vera descrizione de la gran cita del Caiero*. Italy, Venice, ca. 1549. Print on paper, 102.0 × 192.5 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin P.K., inv. no. 924-1000. (Photo: courtesy of the State Museums of Berlin)
clearly attest to the particular fascination this monumental sculpture exerted on humankind.\textsuperscript{7} Of course, we should keep in mind that the entire burial complex with its guardian Sphinx and the huge pyramids, indeed the thousands of years of Pharaonic civilization, remained completely inscrutable until 1822, when the Egyptian hieroglyph script was deciphered. Until then, these monuments were endowed with a special, if not magical aura.\textsuperscript{8}

It is tempting to speculate how Napoleon Bonaparte must have felt when he first encountered the Sphinx. Jean-Léon Gérôme (d. 1904) tried to convey this particular pathos-filled moment in a painting he created almost seventy years after Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt, in 1867–68. The painting, \textit{Bonaparte before the Sphinx} (fig. 2), presents the monarch on a horse in front of the Sphinx, in the large and wide desert, as if contemplating the grand history of times past.\textsuperscript{9} In fact, this image of Napoleon strongly recalls the mythological tale of the young Oedipus encountering a Sphinx. Like Oedipus, Napoleon tried to solve the riddle of this sculpture and, metaphorically speaking, that of the ancient civilization.

Arguably, the inception of Napoleon’s comprehensive research project, the \textit{Description de l’Égypte}, in May 1798, marked the beginning of a new chronological narrative of the history of civilization, a narrative that has had implications not only for the history of culture and humanism but also for political chronicles of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{10} A huge project that took about three years (1798–1801) to establish, it resulted in a mammoth descriptive and illustrated series of volumes covering most of the archaeological monuments of Egypt. In February 1802, a commission began to prepare for this monumental publication, and the volumes published between 1809 and 1822 were, and have been regarded ever since as, memorial legacies of the history of civilization, a testimonial for centuries to come. The publication put Egypt, if not the “Orient,” on the large historical map of the world and gave it—mainly its Pharaonic era—a place within the story of human civilization, a framework that to this day dominates the concept of classifying and displaying objects of art in most public museums aiming to tell the story of civilization.

As history shows time and again, cultural exposure of the West to the East, an exposure usually mingled with fascination and mystery, propelled and inspired Western academic investigations and intellectual reflection. In the case of Western exposure to Egypt, and especially Western interactions with its Pharaonic art and culture, an additional factor played a role. Since this period...
remained completely unintelligible until Jean-François Champollion broke the code of the hieroglyphs and deciphered the Rosetta Stone in 1822, the ancient epoch as a whole was endowed with an immensely powerful, autocratic cultural value. It was an indecipherable culture that until then appeared to some extent to be alien to, or placed outside of, world history. The fact that until 1822 no historical date could be attached to it to position it in time made it seem to be outside of history, hence the mystery and enigma associated with ancient Egypt.\(^{11}\)

**ʿabd al-latīf al-baghdādī’s intellectual integrity**

The present article focuses on ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, a scholar and scientist of the Ayyubid period who wrote, taught, and published extensively at the height of the Crusades, in the days of Saladin (d. 1193), and whose fascination with the ancient Pharaonic monuments in Egypt was reflected in his writings and ended up transforming, as I will argue, his views on how to encounter, learn, and understand the visible and tangible world of the past.\(^{12}\) ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s full name is Muwaffaq al-Din Abu Muhammad ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi b. Yusuf b. Muhammad b. ‘Ali, also known as al-Labbad. He was a prolific writer, philosopher, and scientist. The biographical information about him that has come down to us is found mainly in an edition of his autobiography compiled and edited by his contemporary fellow scholar Ibn Abi Usaybiʿah (d. 1270) in a book called ‘Uyun al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-ṭibbāʾ (Sources of Information on Classes of Physicians).\(^{13}\) According to this book, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi was born in Baghdad in 557 (1162) into a scholarly and learned Baghdadi family and died there in 629 (1231-32) at the age of 69. Wandering among and teaching in numerous learning centers of the Levant, he began his educational career in his native city of Baghdad, at the Zafariyya Mosque, mostly under the supervision of Wajih al-Din Wasiti (d. 1215). In those early years, ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi became a specialist in jurisprudence, grammar, and theology. However, from the very beginning, his interests went far beyond his particular education, extending to other fields such as tribal languages, war methods, medicine, and philosophy. Moreover, he became particularly interested in changing contemporary practices of learning and methodologies of teaching, which, in his day, were based primarily on memorization and repetition. We are told, for instance, that his knowledge of tribal languages, dialects, and war maneuvers was acquired in those early years through what we today would call fieldwork.\(^{14}\) One autobiographical anecdote about an early mentor and teacher in Baghdad, Kamal al-Din al-Anbari (d. 1181), shows ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s critical stance toward the teaching methods of the time: “I couldn’t understand one bit of his [Kamal al-Din al-Anbari’s] continuous and considerable jabbering, even though his students seemed pleased enough with it.”\(^{15}\) Nonetheless ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi was also interested, as mentioned, in medicine, literature, and philosophy, and his interests were arguably focused in particular on the acquisition of broad knowledge, as reflected at the time in the writings of Abu ‘Ali al-Husayn b. ‘Abdullah Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037), whom ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi knew well, and especially, as I will argue later, on Ibn Sina’s novel ideas about human cognition.\(^{16}\)

At the age of 28, in 1189–90, ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi began to travel. He visited Greece, Anatolia, Egypt, and Syria. For an intellectual of his stature, especially one who recognized the value of learning outside the madrasa and the library, those travels could be defined as learning expeditions that served to gather experiences and transform them into cumulative knowledge. That same year he also moved to Mosul and started to teach in the “suspended” (mu’allaqa) college of Ibn Muhajir. There he was exposed to the works of Shihab al-Din Yahya b. Habash b. Amirak al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul (d. 1191), which he viewed very critically and considered flawed. During this period in Mosul he wrote a book on the human body that brought him fame, as it became a definitive work for Arab scholars interested in the subject. A year later he was in Damascus and subsequently he joined Saladin on his way to Palestine. In 1191 he spent some time with the forces of Saladin that were camping outside the city of Acre and met with other famous scholars such as ʿImad al-Din al-Isfahāni (d. 1201) and Bahaʾ al-Din Yusuf b. Rafi b. Shaddad (d. 1235). The encounter with the Ayyubid forces of Saladin later
motivated him to travel to Cairo, probably also in 1191. His studies in Cairo seem to have been a turning point in his intellectual career. In this city he was first introduced to the writings of Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 950), Alexander of Aphrodisias (b. ca. A.D. 200), and Themistius (d. 390), and he met with Cairene contemporaries such as Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) and Abu'l-Qasim al-Sha'iri (d. unknown). His encounter with the writings of these scholars, and especially with the ideas of al-Farabi, transformed his thought, as his scholarly interest shifted from Ibn Sina's school of alchemy and medicine to a more philosophical and aesthetic way of thinking. His encounter with Abu'l-Qasim al-Sha'iri, moreover, seems to have been particularly crucial. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi apparently settled in Cairo but continued to tour the Ayyubid domains, visiting Jerusalem, meeting with scholars in Damascus and Aleppo, and even traveling as far as Anatolia. On his return to Cairo in 1197, he taught in the mosque of al-Azhar, the famous intellectual center of the medieval Arab world. He describes his daily schedule as follows: “Teaching students at Al-Azhar Mosque from daybreak until about the fourth hour; about midday medical students and others would come to me, and at the close of the day I used to return to Al-Azhar Mosque and teach other students. At night I used to work by myself.”17

Shortly after a major two-year famine (1200–1202) that ruined Egypt’s economy (described in detail in his writings) ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi left Egypt again and moved to Jerusalem, where he taught at the al-Aqsa Mosque. In 1207, or possibly one or two years earlier, he returned to Damascus and taught at the madrasa of the al-Aziziyyah Mosque and at the Great Mosque of Damascus. Later on, perhaps between 1212 and 1218, he taught in Aleppo, and during 1220–28 he also traveled in eastern Anatolia and visited various Seljuk courts. He spent most of his time in the province of Erzinjan, at the princely court of ‘Ala’ al-Din Dawud b. Bahram (d. 1237). In 1228–29 he moved from one court to another, visiting Erzurum, Kemakh (Kamakh), Divrigi, and Malatya. He then returned to Aleppo, where he taught medicine for some time. His last journey was to his hometown Baghdad in 1231, most likely in order to present some of his work to the caliph al-Mustansir bi’llah (r. 1226–42). It is also possible, however, that this visit to Baghdad was part of a longer journey, a pilgrimage to Mecca. But ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s health deteriorated and on 12 Muharram 629 (November 8, 1231) he died and was buried in Baghdad.

This short biographical account indicates that ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi led a very active itinerant life. Of course, his many travels and relocations to different intellectual centers in the Levant were probably also due to the turbulent times and the associated dangers. He witnessed the wars with the Frankish Crusader Kingdoms of the Levant; he witnessed the recapturing of Jerusalem and the Holy Land by Saladin; and at the end of his short life he could have been aware of the alarming rise in power of the Mongols on the eastern borders of the Islamic world. Yet academic mobility, whether in medieval times or today, leads to stimulating encounters with various scholars and with written texts kept in the major libraries of the various centers. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi also had a private library, which, according to his autobiography, was partially transferred to Jerusalem in 1202.18

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE BOOK

Certain books and treatises by ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi were likely the result of his encounter with other ideas and thoughts expressed either in writing or orally, at specific moments and particular locations in the scholarly zones of interaction he visited. It is beyond the scope of this article (and of my field of specialization) to examine, contextualize, and comment in detail on ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s intellectual profile or to scrutinize his writings. In the present study I want to concentrate on a particular, relatively short book of his, the Kitāb al-Ifāda wa’l-iʿtibār and the Birth of the Critical Gaze 201

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to the Abbasid caliph Abu’l-Abbas Ahmad al-Nasir (r. 1180–25).20

In the early modern era, the book gained a wide interest in Europe and was translated into German by Samuel Friedrich Günther Wahl in Halle in 1790 under the title Abdallatif’s eines arabischen Arztes Denkwürdigkeiten Egypts.21 A few years later, in 1800, a Latin translation by Joseph White appeared,22 and a decade later it was translated into French by Antoine Isaac Silvester de Sacy.23 The translation of de Sacy, which also includes excellent notes and annotations, was based on the facsimile of the Pococke manuscript of ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi kept at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

For all its popularity, the book has commonly been regarded as the “light” version of ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s major monograph on Egypt. This assumption was based on his introduction to the Kitāb al-Ifāda wa’l-iṭibār, in which he explains that when he finished writing his book on Egypt, which contains thirteen chapters, he felt he should “extract from it the events which I had witnessed directly.”24 Moreover, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi himself defined the book as his “little compendium” (al-mukhtasar).25 It also seems that its popularity prompted scholars to regard it as a short guide to Cairo, an impression not entirely unjustified considering the book’s contents.

The first book consists of six chapters, which are: (1) General Characteristics of Egypt; (2) Plants Peculiar to Egypt; (3) Animals Characteristic of Egypt; (4) Description of Antique Monuments Seen in Egypt by the Author (the focus of the present study); (5) The Remarkable Things about Buildings and Ships Observed in Egypt; and (6) Foods Peculiar to Egypt (probably the main reason for the book’s popularity). The second book is divided into three chapters: (1) The Nile, Its Rise, and the Laws Governing It; (2) The Events of the Year 597 [1200–1201]; (3) The Events of the Year 598 [1201–2].

And yet, I would like to argue that the book is a manifestation of a paradigm shift in ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s thoughts on the concept of acquiring knowledge. It is important to note that this shift in his thinking and writing seems to have occurred during his time in Egypt. In other words, although his aspiration and desire to bring change to the established methods of acquiring knowledge had already been evident in his early years in Baghdad, the Kitāb al-Ifāda wa’l-iṭibār is, in fact, the declaration of a new, progressive way of understanding and interpreting nature and history through experience. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s introduction, with its explanatory remarks on the character of his short book, clearly indicates this change in the evolution of his thought and perception.

When I finished my book on Egypt, which contains thirteen chapters, I thought I would extract from it the events which I had witnessed directly, as it is nearer to the truth, because that part inspires most confidence and excites the most admiration; also, it is more wonderful in its effect upon people who hear it. In fact, everything apart from what I witnessed personally is already to be found, or most of it, and in some cases all of it, in the books of my predecessors. I devoted two chapters of my book to the things I saw, and have separated these to form the relation which I publish today, which is divided into two books of chapters.26

In this introduction ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi presents the individual gaze and the act of observing in general as a scientific tool vis-à-vis the learned books of his predecessors. In his opinion individual observations are hierarchically more stimulating than those transmitted through the long chain of tradition; their value is all the greater because those things he did not witness could already be found in books, that is, in the written tradition. Individual observations are new and personal and, more important, nearer to truth. He therefore challenges the written tradition, as it is repeated by memorization of the writings of former scholars, and suggests a learning process based on observation rather than relying on older written scholarly texts. As mentioned earlier, this notion can be traced to the earliest stages of his academic carrier and especially to his critical views of his early supervisors and teachers in Baghdad, especially al-Anbari and, later, to his challenging of the writings of al-Maqtul in Mosul.

In his short yet innovative book, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi presents the specific “Egypt” that he saw and witnessed. His eyes are the main tool to bring us, as he says, as close as possible to the truth. There are numerous examples in his book that illustrate this concept, and I will return to them toward the end of this article. It is with this approach in mind that the following observations of ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi in front of the ancient
monuments of Pharaonic Egypt should be read and discussed.

Chapter 4 of the first book is dedicated to the antique monuments of Cairo and titled “Description of the Antique Monuments Seen in Egypt by the Author,” thus reassuring readers that he is including only the antique monuments that he actually saw (mā shūhida min athārihā al-qadima). An additional explanation is offered: “Of all the countries I have visited or known by report of others, there are not any that can [be] compared with Egypt for its antiquities. I will say [relate] only about [discuss only] the wonders I saw [ʿalā aʾjāb ma shāhadatuhum].”

Two issues should be emphasized. The first concerns the fact that the monuments of Egypt, notably its architecture, are regarded as identifiers similar to Egypt’s flora, fauna, and its specific foods, which are also discussed in this book. Second, because ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi is interested in its ancient Pharaonic monuments, Egypt’s ancient (qadima) history is explicitly viewed as part of its identity. His preference for a specific part of history that predates the “Muslim” era and lends a place its identity is intriguing and suggests a strong sense of time and periodization.

On the Pyramids
The pyramids are one of the wonders. They have engaged the attention of a multitude of writers who have given in their works the description and dimensions of these edifices. They are numerous and all of them situated in the province of Gizeh on the same line as the ancient capital of Egypt, and are comprised within the space of two days’ journey. At Bousir also there are many. Some of the pyramids are large, others small. Some are formed of earth and brick, but most of them of stone. Some of them are constructed in the form of steps or stairs: mostly, however, they are of an exact pyramidal shape, with smooth surfaces. Formerly there was a great number of pyramids, small indeed, at Gizeh, but these were destroyed in the time of Salah-eddin Yusuf ibn Ayyoub. Their ruin was effected by Karakoush, a Greek eunuch, one of the Amirs, and a man of genius. To him was entrusted the superintendence of the buildings of the capital, and he it was who built the stone wall which surrounds Fostat and Cairo, the space between the two towns, and the citadel on Mount Mukattam. He likewise constructed this citadel, and dug the two wells which are found today. These wells themselves are reckoned among the wonders of Egypt. They are descended by a staircase of nearly three hundred steps.... As to those pyramids, the object of so many recitals, to which I shall now advert, pyramids distinguished above the rest, the superior size of which excites admiration: the number of them is three, and they stand in a line at Gizeh in front of Fostat, at a short distance apart, their angles pointing to each other and toward the east. Two of these pyramids are of enormous dimensions, and the same size. The poets who have described them have given the rein to that enthusiasm they are so well calculated to inspire. They compare them to two immense breasts rising from the bosom of Egypt. They are very near to each other, and are built of white stone.

The third one, a fourth part less than the others, is of red granite, marked with points and so extremely hard that iron takes a long time, with difficulty, to make an impression on it. The last one appears small compared with the other two, but viewed at a short distance and to the exclusion of these it excites in the imagination a singular oppression, and cannot be contemplated without painfully affecting the sight. The shape chosen for the pyramids and their solidity are alike admirable. To their form is owing the advantage of their having resisted the attack of centuries: they stayed continuously against time, and time patiently waits on them. In fact, after mature reflection on the structure of the pyramids one is forced to acknowledge the combination of efforts of the most intelligent men, an exhaustion of the genius of the most subtle [kind], that the most enlightened minds exercised with profusion in favour of these edifices all the talents they possessed, and that the most learned theory of geometry called forth the whole of its resources to show in these wonders the utmost term of human ability. We may likewise affirm that these structures hold discourse with us even in the present day respecting those who were their founders, teach us their history in a manner intelligible to all, relate their progress in the sciences and the excellence of their genius, and in short, effectually describe their life and news [innovations?].

The most singularly remarkable fact presented by these edifices is the pyramidal form adopted in their structure, a form which commences with a square base, and finishes in a point. Now one of the properties of this form is that the centre of gravity is the centre of the building itself, so that it leans on itself, itself supports the whole pressure of this mass, all its parts bear respectively one upon the other, and it does not press on any external point.

Another admirable peculiarity is the disposition of the square of them in such a manner that each of their angles fronts one of the four winds. For the violence of the wind is broken when cut by an angle, which would not be the case if it encountered a plane surface.
‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī’s description of the pyramids is well structured. He starts with a brief introduction, discussing the tradition and providing information about other pyramids. Then he takes a typological approach and distinguishes between large and small pyramids and, based on the material used, between those made of bricks and earth and those made of stones and, based on their shape, between stepped and smooth pyramids. A brief historical account is also provided, stating that several of the pyramids were destroyed in the Ayyubid era, that is, in ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī’s time, when the walls of Fustat and Cairo were rebuilt. His further description is no less interesting. Drawing on his knowledge of geometry, he discusses the characteristics and architectural advantages of their specific structure. Aiming to reveal the pyramids’ quality of a ḥa’āb (wonder), he explains the logos behind their peculiar form and the mysteries surrounding the issue of these giant buildings’ gravity. His approach is enlightened and rational, and he incorporates the pyramids in the history of science rather than in the history of the marvels of creation. As he puts it, the pyramids ‘relate their progress in the sciences.’30

The following description of the various methods used to measure the pyramids is no less important. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī regards measurement as a scientific tool. He first provides the accepted size of the pyramids—400 cubits in width and height—but then tells of specific measuring experiments that he witnessed: “Of the following fact I was myself an eye witness: when I visited them we had an archer in our company who shot an arrow in the direction of the perpendicular height of one of these pyramids and another in that of its breadth, as its base, and the arrow fell at about the middle of this space.”31 Yet another attempt at measuring was undertaken, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī continues, by a well-trained person from one of the neighboring villages. This man mounted the pyramid up to its top and measured it with his turban.32 Another man skilled in the art of measuring, with whom ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī was personally acquainted, provided him with the following measurements: “a perpendicular height of about 317 cubits, and to each of the sides of the four triangular planes which incline to this perpendicular, 460 cubits.”33 And yet ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī is not satisfied by any of these measurements, stating: “I think there must be some error in these measurements, and the perpendicular height must be 400 cubits, but if I have opportunity and God helps me, I will measure it myself.”34

IN FRONT OF THE SPHINX

By far the most attractive structure of the ancient pharaohs of Egypt was—and still is—the Sphinx. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī’s account of this sculptured monument is remarkable. His gaze is at once scientific and aesthetically sensitive.

A little more than a bowshot from these pyramids is a colossal figure of a head and neck projecting from the earth. The name of this is Abu'l Ḥaṣdā [Sphinx] and the body to which the head pertains is said to be buried under the earth. To judge from the dimensions of the head of those of the body, its length must be more than 70 cubits. On the face is a reddish tint, and a red varnish as bright as if freshly put on. The face is remarkably handsome, and the mouth expresses much grace and beauty: one might fancy it smiling gracefully.

A sensible man enquiring of me as to what, of all the things which in Egypt were—and still are—the Sphinx. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baḥdādī mistakenly thought that the head of the Sphinx was part of a huge standing figure. But his observation of the Sphinx’s head is very subtle and detailed. He detects the faint, barely perceptible smile in its face,
an indication of the sensitivity of ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s gaze. Moreover, the handsome face of the Sphinx is explained based on an aesthetic theory of beauty that is based on a harmony between the components and the whole. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi explains beauty in terms of the exact human bodily proportions that exist among parts and the whole and as related to age and size. For his discussion of the well-proportioned face of the Sphinx, he likely drew heavily on his knowledge of physiognomy (firāsa, knowledge of physical features [and their significance]) based mainly on the Arabic translation of the treatise of Polemon. This treatise appeared in Arabic sometime between the eighth and tenth centuries and was incorporated into the canon of Islamic science by Ibn Sina in the tenth century, a work with which ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi was familiar.36

IN FRONT OF THE SCULPTURED HUMAN BODY

We encounter a somewhat similar approach and use of anatomical knowledge of the human body in ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s description of the monumental sculptures of the Pharaonic kings.

Among the monuments of antiquity in Egypt, those must be comprised which are seen at Ain-Schems, a small town surrounded by a wall still visible, though demolished. It is readily seen that these ruins belong to a temple. Here are found frightful and colossal figures in hewn stone 30 cubits long, the members of which all bear a just proportion. Of these, some are upright on pedestals, others seated in various singular postures, and in perfect order.37

The precise and careful description of the objects of ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s gaze is best illustrated in his account of the two obelisks of ‘Ayn Shams, the so-called Needle of Pharaoh, for he says:

In this town are found the two obelisks so much celebrated, called the two Needles of Pharaoh. They consist of a square base 10 cubits every way of nearly an equal height, resting on a solid foundation in the earth. From this base arises a square column of pyramidal form 100 cubits in height which near the base is about 5 cubits in diameter, and terminates in a point. The summit is covered with a kind of copper cap in the shape of a funnel which descends about 3 cubits from the apex.38

‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s next description, of idols (asnam), is astonishing because of the objectivity with which he observes the “pagan” divinities from the Pharaonic, pre-Islamic era. In no way do the words of this pious Muslim indicate rejection or disapproval of the idols. Rather, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi praises their verisimilitude, suggesting that he regarded the mimetic rendition of nature as an aesthetic quality. Apart from repeatedly emphasizing the ability of the sculptor to maintain certain human proportions in shaping the oversize massive sculptures, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi also draws on his knowledge as a physician in describing the idols’ physical features. This descriptive tactic lends his writing additional scientific flavor.

As for the idols found among these ruins, whether their number or extraordinary size be considered, they surpass description: nor can even a conception of them be formed; but most worthy of admiration is the nicety observed in their forms, their exact proportions, and their resemblance to nature. I measured one of them which, without its pedestal, was more than 30 cubits high. The breadth of it from the right to the left side was nearly 10 cubits: and in front and behind it was broad in proportion. This statue was formed of a single piece of red granite. It was covered over with a red varnish which appeared only to receive new freshness from its great antiquity.

Assuredly, nothing can be more marvelous than the sight of such minute proportions with respect to the different parts of the body preserved in a statue of this colossal magnitude. No one is ignorant that all the members of the body, whether they be instrumental [probably the body parts such as the hand or foot] or consimiles [analogous parts such as flesh, muscle, and skin], such as one buttock and the other one matching, have not only certain appropriate dimensions, but also certain proportions with respect to each other. From these dimensions and these relative proportions result the beauty and elegance of the whole figure: if any thing be faulty in these requisites, there follows a deformity, more or less great according to the extent of the defect. Now in these figures this congruity of all the parts has been observed with a truth that cannot be sufficiently admired, firstly, in the precise dimensions of each member separately taken, and afterwards in the proportions which the members respectively bear to each other.

In these statues, if attention be paid, the chest is seen to separate itself from the neck at the point of the clavicle, in the truest manner. Thence the bosom shaped by the upper ribs rises gradually to the two breasts which are protuberant above the surrounding region, and detach themselves from
the remainder of the chest with a surprising exactness of proportion. The breasts have a progressive rise to the nipples which likewise are fashioned with the justest conformity to the size of these colossal statues. Then descending, you examine now the sunken region of the sternum or breastbone, now the interstice formed by the false ribs at the point of the heart, and now the part where is noticed the alternate rise and fall of the ribs and their obliquity, all of which are given in the human frame. You next descend from where the ribs cease to the soft region formed by the exterior integuments of the belly. You see the obliquity of the tendons and muscles of the belly on the right and the left, their tension, and their form; the depression of the parts in the umbilical region adjoining the hypochondria; the exact form of the navel, the tension of the surrounding muscle, the depression of the hypogastrium towards the pubis, the groin, the arteries and inguinal veins, and finally the passage thence to the two bones of the haunches. In a similar manner you observe the separation of the scapula, its articulation with the os humeri and that of the humerus with the forearm, the torsion of the vena cephalica, the salient extremities of the cubitus and radius at the place of their articulation with the carpus, the point of the elbow, the two extruberances which form the articulation of the forearm with the os humeri and the muscles of the forearm. Lastly, the softness of the flesh, the tension of the tendons and other matters which to detail would be tedious.

Some of these figures are represented holding in their hand a sort of cylinder, a span in diameter, which appears to be a volume, and the artist has not forgotten to express the lines and wrinkles formed on the skin of the hand when closed, at the part adjoining the little finger. The beauty of countenance of these statues and their just proportions are the complete acme of excellence in the art of sculpture, and the imitation of flesh and blood. The figure of the ear and its sinuosities is likewise a counterpart of nature.®

In concluding his discussion of the subject Ḥāfiz al-Ḥāfiz al-Baghdādi states:

The reflecting man, contemplating these vestiges of antiquity, feels inclined to excuse the error of the vulgar who believed that mortals in those distant ages in which they were constructed lived to a more advanced age than is usual in our days; that they were of gigantic stature, or that by striking a stone with a wand they caused it to obey their orders and to transport itself to wherever their will dictated. In fact, one is seized with a kind of stupor on picturing to oneself the great resources of genius, the profound knowledge of geometry, the resolution and patience requisite for the completion of similar works; the numerous different instruments and unremitting toil they exacted: the diligent attention which must previously have been paid to the members of animals and the shape of man, to their precise dimensions, their relative proportions, the mode of their articulations, and their position, and the distance at which they should respectively be placed. In man, for example, the lower portion of the body is longer in a determinate degree than the upper, that is to say, the trunk; whereas in all other animals the proportion observed is the reverse. A man of exact proportions should be 8 spans high, the length from the hand to the bend of the elbow should be 2 spans, the arm should measure a span and a quarter, the extent of the span being that of the individual. All the other bones, whether great or small, the bones of the leg, the vertebrae, the bones of the fingers, are alike subject to certain rules as well for the dimensions whence their particular form results, as the proportions they bear to each other. The same holds good in all the other parts of the frame, whether external or internal, as the depression of the sinciput below the summit of the head with elevation above all that surrounds it, the extent of the forehead and of the two arches of the eyebrows, the sinking of the two temples, the elevation of the cheekbones, the flat form of the cheeks, the blunt blade of the nose, the softness of the cartilage that forms the point of it, the opening of the nostrils, the breadth of the isthmus by which they are separated, the thickness of the lips, the roundness of the chin, the cutting and rounded form of the two jaws, and many other particulars which it is almost impossible to describe, and which can only well be comprehended by the eye, by dissection, and diligent inspection of the parts.40

Ḥāfiz al-Ḥāfiz al-Baghdādi’s scientific gaze leads him to rethink the past and to correct any misleading interpretations that emerged from the noncritical approach of his forebears who tended to blindly marvel at these artifacts and exclude them from the history of human mortals. He points out that it is the aspiration for knowledge that provides us with the key to understanding the past and its marvels, even if for a moment it may seem that “one is seized with a kind of stupor on picturing to oneself the great resources of genius, the profound knowledge of geometry, the resolution and patience requisite for the completion of similar works.”41 The eye, he points out, is a tool, a device with which one can comprehend the phenomena. And yet Ḥāfiz al-Ḥāfiz al-Baghdādi is well aware that his discussions of the human body and the proportions of animals’ bodies as related to the sculptures he views verge on blasphemy or hubris,
as they imply a desire on the part of the artists to emulate the creations of God. For this reason he argues quite subtly and cleverly, introducing Aristotle’s concept of the broad scope of human knowledge into his discussion in order to actually emphasize the limits of human wisdom and thereby underscore his full acceptance of God’s unique and perfect wisdom.

Aristotle, in the eleventh article of his Book on Animals, employs one chapter to indicate that although people have displayed much cleverness and exactness in acquiring a knowledge of the parts of animals and their respective proportions, the extent of their information on this head is very limited and mean when compared with truth and nature; and if we place a value on this knowledge, imperfect as it is, the cause is to be attributed to the conviction we feel of the weakness of our faculties and the comparisons we draw between the man conversant in these matters and he who is not. Hence we admire the ant employed in removing a grain of barley, but suffer the elephant to pass unregarded which carries a burden of many hundredweights. The following is the substance of his [Aristotle’s] words, according to my interpretation: “It is a matter of astonishment that we should feel such interest in acquiring the talent of representing things in paintings, or in imitating them by means of the art of the sculptor or founder, and that we should succeed in comprehending the process of these arts, yet at the same time feel no anxiety to fathom the works of nature, especially where the possibility exists of our discovering the causes of them. We ought therefore to have no repugnance to the study of the nature of animals and those even which seem most vile, but should carefully guard against deeming it a toil, and thus imitating the conduct of children. For there are no works of nature but [that] contain subjects of admiration.42 Hence, we should seek information on the nature of all animals, and hold for certain that there is not one which is destitute of some natural wonder, for none of them was formed without some purpose, by accident. On the contrary, whatever has received existence from nature was produced for some purpose; I mean to say, for the perfection of the whole: thus each has its station, its rank, and distinguishing merit.43

Blessed be God the most excellent Creator of all things44

ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s criticism of artists who imitate nature and God’s shaping and making of the world continues in the following paragraph.

As for the interior of animals, the cavities of their bodies, and the wonders they unfold, the description of which is found in the anatomical treatises of Galen and other authors and in the work of that learned physician “On the uses of the parts”, the study of the smallest portion of these admirable works would be sufficient to make an artist despair of being able to portray them, and in vain would he seek around for one who might assist him or supply his defect of capacity. He must then acknowledge the truth of what God says in the Quran: “Man is created weak”.

I say, moreover, that the admiration excited in us by works of art forms part of what we experience at those of nature. For the productions of art under a certain point of view are the works of nature, seeing they are the effect and offspring of natural faculties. Thus the engineer is worthy of our praise who succeeds in removing an enormous weight; but would he not have much greater claim on our admiration could he form a model capable of itself to remove a weight of whatsoever value it might be?

“It is God Who has created you, you and all that you do.”44

CONCLUSION: BEING EMPIRICAL IS BEING CRITICAL

In sum, it seems likely that the specific chapters of ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s short book on Egypt should not be regarded as anecdotal or less scientific than his major treatise on Egypt, as has been suggested by some scholars, but rather as a manifesto of his ideas on knowledge and its appropriate mode of acquisition. His decision to create an abridged version of his large book on Egypt to focus on the things he actually saw is deliberate and based on his credo as a scientist that the best tool for understanding any given object is the eyes. Through careful observation one can learn the phenomenology of the universe and thus appreciate and evaluate traditions. This principle explains why, at the very beginning of the chapter on the monuments of Egypt, ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi explicitly states he will speak only about the wonders that he saw (ʿalā aʿjāb ma shāhadatuhum). Moreover, it may also explain his specificity in the two final chapters of the book, which are records of the events of the years 597 and 598, that is, the time he spent in Cairo, between 1200 and 1202.

ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s central concern, however, is how to read and examine the scholarly writings (taqlid) of his predecessors. This concern is evident in his criticism of his teachers as well as colleagues and in his firm rejection of the educational method of
memorizing by heart the writings of prominent, erudite scholars. His early criticism of the teaching methods in Baghdad was quite explicit: “Most of my time was spent in learning traditions ... and I gained diplomas from various sheikhs. During this time I learned writing: I memorized the Quran, the Fasih [a manual of grammar], the Maqamat of Hariri, the poetry of al-Mutanabbi, and other works of the sort, beside a compendium of law and another of grammar.” As a result, as we learn bi, and other works of the sort, beside a compendium of memorized the Quran, the law and another of grammar.” As a result, as we learn, the bias, and other works of the sort, beside a compendium of law and another of grammar.”

As a result, as we learn, we draw upon the experience of the learned eye and the contemporary visual world is astonishingly advanced over the theoretical canon but, rather, part of an exercise of testing objects on the ground, mainly through the scrutinizing examination of the scholarly eye. The result is, indeed, revolutionary: classical traditions and concepts of geometry, beauty as well as nature and anatomy, are introduced, along with the personal experience of the

... that which diadema ruʾayatu ʿayānan [wahādhi ruʾayatu ʿayānan].” This statement clearly puts experience front and center in deciding the dispute over this plant.

Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s accurate, indeed hyper-realistic, descriptions of the famine in Cairo are probably likewise attributable to his firm belief in detailed description. It is thus not surprising that readers are shocked by his accounts of cannibalism, specifically stories about hunting for human flesh in the streets and about cannibalistic “dinner parties.” He even passes along various recipes for preparing human flesh for consumption.

Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s reference to classical knowledge in combination with observations of the contemporary visual world is astonishingly advanced and bold. He proposes a scientific process in which concepts of knowledge are no longer part of an established theoretical canon but, rather, part of an exercise of testing objects on the ground, mainly through the scrutinizing examination of the scholarly eye. The result is, indeed, revolutionary: classical traditions and concepts of geometry, beauty as well as nature and anatomy, are introduced, along with the personal experience of the

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It is interesting to see how Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi relies on his senses in assessing the writings of others. When describing the characteristics of the sycamore tree, for instance, he tells us only what he actually saw: “I have seen some of them at Askalon [ʿAsqalan, today Ashkelon] and on the coast. This tree seems to be a wild fig, its fruit growing on the wood and not under the leaves.” He also tasted its fruits to be able to describe their flavor: “There are those which are excessively sweet, more so than the fig; but one always finds, when one has finished chewing, a woody taste.” In another chapter of his book that includes a description of the

plant al-Kolkasu (Colocasia), he provides information clearly based on close observation: the al-Kolkasu plant has “a root the size of a cucumber; some kinds are small, like the fingers. Its colour tends to a light red; they peel it and split it like the turnip. This root is thick and compact, its taste like that of a green unripe banana, its flavour slightly styptic, with a strong pungency, hot and dry.” Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi collected data on this plant by using at least three senses: sight, taste, and, to some extent, touch. He even performed an experimental procedure to learn more about the plant: “Boiled, it loses all its pungency, and then it joins to its slightly styptic taste a sort of gluey viscosity which was already present but was not made apparent because of the acridity which disguised it.” Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi also refers to a debate between Dioscorides (the famous first-century author on medicine) and another scholar called Israili (most likely a converted Jew) about the flower of this plant. Drawing on his observations, Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi goes on to decide this dispute: “I say Israili was mistaken, and what Dioscorides says is true ... that which I say I have seen with my own eyes [wahādhi ruʾayatu ʿayānan].” This statement clearly puts experience front and center in deciding the dispute over this plant.

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beholder, into an interactive process vis-à-vis the particular object of observation. This specific interaction of text and experience may signal the emergence of a phenomenological approach based on individual experience. I suggest, then, that ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi used empiricism as a scientific methodological tool and thus discovered the critical gaze. He then established new paradigms of sensorial approach to the world. Yet above all he genuinely and, for his time, boldly aspired to marry tradition and individual experience. His updating of writings from the classical past and his own tradition by subjecting them to criteria drawn from his knowledge—writings from the classical past and his own tradition by—subjecting them to criteria drawn from his knowledgeable eye may be regarded as foreshadowing the Renaissance, which two centuries later would profoundly change Europe. In fact, as other medievalists have suggested earlier, it seems that around the same time, in the second half of the eleventh century, a visual turn was occurring in Latin Europe. Selfhood and reinventing the self as individual, or at least group-affiliated, were central to this development, a prelude of sorts to the humanistic age of the Renaissance.⁵⁷ ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi may be seen as part of this global—that is, Mediterranean—change in the understanding of knowledge and its acquisition through vision.⁵⁸ It is worth going back to his definition of knowledge in the Mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa (a commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics) quoted at the beginning of this article: “Knowledge conforms fully (muṭābiq, musāwī) to the object known, because it is the spiritual form of the object known. The difference between the two is that the object known is a form whose substratum is matter, whereas knowledge is a form whose substratum is the soul.”⁵⁹

It is important to note that besides the well-established medieval hierarchical distinction between materia and spirit—which ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi obviously follows, as he contrasts spiritually based knowledge with the material-based object—his one-to-one juxtaposition of the known object and the acquisition of knowledge can be regarded as a clear-cut, positivistic approach, especially compared with the mystical thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240). Ibn al-ʿArabī, who visited Cairo on his way to Mecca the exact same year, 1202, that al-Baghdadi witnessed events in Cairo, developed an entirely different approach to the phenomenological world and brought another dimension of thought into the interesting discussion of perception—that of the imagination. In fact, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s definition of knowledge almost seems conceived to refute the concept developed by ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi. Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts:

Knowledge is not the perception [taṣawwur] of the object known, and it is not the concept [maʿanī] that perceives the object known, for not every object known is perceived, and not every knower perceives. Perception comes to the knower only from his being one who uses imagination [muṭakhayyil], and the form for the object known consists in its being in a condition seized by the imagination [khayāl]. There are objects known not seized by the imagination at all. Consequently, they certainly have no form.⁶⁰

For all the difference between the two, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s progressive method of gazing at nature and reevaluating established knowledge of the past deserves to be reassessed and appraised. It should have become clear that the time ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi spent in Egypt in front of its ancient “wonders”⁶¹ was inspiring. It exposed him not just to visual phenomena that stimulated his eyes and mind but also to classical writings and scientific treatises that caused him to rethink and reorganize his knowledge.⁶² Perhaps his early encounter with Ibn Sina’s thoughts on the importance of estimation and intuition in the process of arriving at knowledge, and especially the linkage between intuition and epistemology, strengthened his theory of the importance of the mushāhadāt (the “Things Seen,” that is, “the “sights”) and encouraged him to write an entire book based on his sensorial experiences in Egypt.

‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s dialogue with the learned Sheikh Abu’l-Qasim al-Shaʿirī in Cairo was most likely no less important. This encounter forced ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi to refine his ideas and clearly define the scope of his novel scientific thesis. Let me conclude this brief study with an astonishing, intense, and sharp-witted description of the scholarly interaction between the two from ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi’s autobiography that offers us a glimpse into the clash of minds between the two Cairene scholars.

When we engaged in debate, I would surpass him in disputation and the use of language, and he would surpass me in producing proofs and in the strength of his arguments. I was inflexible in not submitting to his enticements and
did not abandon my stubborn and passionate resistance to his theorizing. But he began to present me with work after work by al-Farabi and by Alexander Themistius to tame my aversions and to soften the tenor of my intransigence, until I began to incline toward him, hesitant, unsure which step to take next.53

ʿAbd al-Latif al-Baghḍādi’s book on things he saw and events he recorded in Egypt appears then as the petition of a progressive scholar who, similar to Walter Benjamin’s famous angel of history, is propelled into the future while his gaze is still fixed on the past.64

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NOTES


2. For a recent study on the modern history of this bust in its museum context, see Bénédicte Savoy, ed., Nofretete: Eine deutsch-französische Affäre, 1912–1939 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011).


4. See Andreas Hartmann, Zwischen Relikt und Reliquie: Objet-theozogene Erinnerungspraktiken in antiken Gesellschaften (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2010), 189n857. Still, it should be noted that ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghḍādi’s account of the many inscriptions seen on the marble panels of the pyramids likely referred to hieroglyphs rather than to later inscriptions from the post-Pharaonic period. In any case, Hartmann also makes reference to a particular kind of graffiti associated with Trajan.


7. For earlier “excavations” of the Sphinx, which usually involved clearing the masses of piled up sand, see Hartmann, Zwischen Relikt und Reliquie, 188–89.

8. A sense of curiosity with regard to the “secret” past of the pharaohs existed in the early Abbasid period. It is related that the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–33) assigned a group of “excavators” the adventurous task of investigating the pyramids’ interiors and that that they broke into largest pyramid near Fustat. Tombs and mummies were inspected, and several treasured objects were sent to the caliph’s palace. See the account of al-Maqrizi, Das Pyramidenkapitel in al-Makrizis “Ḥīṭat,” ed. and trans. Graefe, esp. 20–21 (English translation, pp. 66–67); Jan F. M. van Reeth, “Caliph al-Maʾmūn and the Treasure of the Pyramids,” Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica 25 (1994): 221–36. For the attitudes of Ibn Tulun (d. 884), his son Khumarawiyah (d. 906), and Saladin’s son al-Malik al-ʾAziz ʿUthman (d. 1198) toward the pyramids and Pharaonic past, see also the discussion of Ulrich Haarmann, “Evliya Celebi’s Bericht über die Alttümere von Gize,” Turcica 8, 1 (1976): 157–230, esp. 182.

9. This painting was first displayed in the Paris Salon of 1886 (no. 1042).


11. It is true that medieval and early modern accounts of the pyramids place them in particular moments in history and associate them with specific legendary figures, such as Shaddad ibn al-ʿAd, biblical figures such as Noah, Joseph, and even figures such as Aristotle and Alexander the Great. But the mythic components embedded in these accounts imply that the moments chosen are usually times


26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 107.

28. Ibid.


30. Ibid., 113.

31. Ibid., 115.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 123–25.


38. Ibid., 127.

39. Ibid., 141–47.

40. Ibid., 147–51.

41. Ibid., 147.


49. ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, Mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa [Istanbul Ms. Carullah 1279], fol. 163a, quoted in Rosenthal, Knowledge Triumphant, 60.

50. Quoted in Rosenthal, Knowledge Triumphant, 65.


52. On the importance of Egypt as the land of science and knowledge in the Arabic tradition, see Haarrmann, “Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt,” 55–66.

53. Quoted in Toorawa, “Autobiography of ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī,” 162. See also ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, Eastern Key, trans. Zand, Videan, and Videan, 6, where the translation is slightly different: “When we conversed together I used to outdistance him in dialectic and mastery of words, but he [outdistanced] me in power of applying arguments and making his point prevail, yet my spear would not bend in his vice, nor would I give up in spite of all his subtleties. Then he cited one passage after another, taming thereby my defiance, and wearing down my natural intractability, until finally I began to yield, like a man who puts one foot forward and the other back.” On the relationship between the two scholars, see Shawkat Toorawa, “Language and Male Homosocial Desire in the Autobiography of ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī,” special issue on Arabic autobiogra-


55. See Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s excellent discussion of
Is it still true that art history, traditionally understood as an explicitly object-based discipline, lacks a thorough understanding of an “action tradition” that could be employed to explain and theorize, for example, artistic agency? And that therefore art history, as opposed to other disciplines such as sociology or linguistic studies, has found it particularly difficult to look at its own historiography in terms of academic or scholarly action or agency? Such explanations were employed until quite recently when expounding the problem of a general delay in critical historiography concerning the discipline’s traditions and methods, particularly in relation to German art history under National Socialism.1

Today, however, in light of recent theories of Bildak and agency, together with the rise of historiographical metadiscourse, it is time for a positively agency-based approach in historiography that takes into account the interdependence between the aesthetic eloquence of particular images, artifacts, and artworks and the epistemological and political interests of those who produce them, but especially of those who behold and interpret them.2

TOWARD A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE ART HISTORIAN’S GAZE

Particularly when dealing with periods characterized by problematic or drastically changing social, cultural, and political paradigms, or when dealing with topics that seem to lie beyond an established canon, an agency-based approach has significant epistemological potential. Even if art history remains an object-based discipline, then the basic action of the art historian must be to look at these objects. As Margaret Olin has argued, “The term ‘gaze’ … leaves no room to comprehend the visual without reference to someone whose vision is under discussion.”3 Although she refers generally to the gaze of all possible kinds of beholders, viewers, or spectators, she also stresses: “While most discourse about the gaze concerns pleasure and knowledge, however, it generally places both of these in the service of issues of power, manipulation, and desire”; furthermore, “The choice of terms from this complex can offer a key to the theoretical bent or the ideology of the theorist.”4 Accordingly, an action-based theory of historiography must find its nexus in a critical history of the art historian’s gaze.5

In this article I seek to investigate the potential of this nexus when applied to one of the most crucial periods for the formation of the historiography of the arts of Islam, a branch of art that was traditionally often understood as an “art of the object.”6 In addition, the very idea of what Islamic art is was primarily filtered through the gaze of modern Western “agents” such as collectors, connoisseurs, and art historians.7 This sense of filtering, as has so often been emphasized, pertains more particularly to Islamic art than to European art, with its canonized discourse reaching back to Giorgio Vasari (d. 1574) and beyond, always intertwining artistic and theoretical positions. Hence, I will look into the development of the historiography of Islamic art as a global and yet notably Western phenomenon of mid-twentieth-century Modernism, epitomized in two standard works by the main protagonists, Ernst Kühnel (1882–1964) and Richard Ettinghausen (1906–1979).8

Kühnel’s formalistic ornament study Die Arabeske9 (1949) (fig. 1) and Ettinghausen’s iconographic work on
as well as on the scholarly gazes and products, of art history’s agents. Consequently I will seek to look at the art historian’s gaze as both method and symptomatic action.

**BACKGROUND: A CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES**

Indeed, metaphors of gaze and vision, and vice versa also of blindness, often appear in methodological discourses of the period in consideration. One particularly striking example can be found in Josef Strzygowski’s...
which explains its blindness against everything that lacks written sources (especially Latin ones). Accordingly, it did not see European art as growing out of the soil where it originated, but has always deferred to the southern influences of court, church, and humanism.¹³

This statement is central for Strzygowski’s argument for a more fact-based art history (Sachforschung) as a guideline for historical disciplines in general. Typically, he phrases his argument in a very polemical manner. It must be seen in the context of Strzygowski’s aim to establish the Ancient Orient as central to artistic development, arguing against the dominance of classical antiquity and its reception in European narratives of art. A number of recent studies have pointed to the catastrophic potential of this idea, as in the case of Strzygowski it coincided with a racist and nationalist worldview, ultimately creating a dangerous shortcut between the Ancient Orient and Aryan ideology.¹⁴

As Suzanne Marchand has described, Strzygowski’s art history is symptomatic of the decline of humanistic paradigms in the German-speaking academic world since the 1880s,¹⁵ a process that can apparently be understood in terms of both cultural canon and historiographic method. The shift away from classical antiquity leads to regions and cultures that are rarely accessible to the classical philologist, for written sources are often not available or only in languages that lie beyond the European canon of classical education and are outside the mainstream of the Western history of ideas. Also, compared to the allegedly objective truths of science, the humanities, including art history, were destined to be regarded as subjective unless they developed a new rational method in their own terms. For Strzygowski, the way out of this dilemma seems to have been Sachforschung, a strictly object-based approach, focusing on “the rhetoric of artifacts,” as Marchand phrased it.¹⁶

Here the close connection between art history’s historiography and its methodological biases becomes clear, as indicated at the beginning of this article.

Strzygowski’s claim for Sachforschung is of major importance because it is closely related to a larger intellectual debate of the early twentieth century between opposing hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches. Isaiah Berlin has traced the origins of this debate back to seventeenth-century rationalism and its
role in the discussion of humanist and enlightened paradigms for the generation and interpretation of knowledge.\textsuperscript{17} The methodological question of the 1920s is thus part of a long cycle in the history of ideas that influenced the professionalization of art history in the German-speaking academic world after 1900. The idea of a “rigorous study of art” (\textit{strenges Kunsthistorisches}) developed along with the rising importance of formalist categories, leading to a more and more “objective” and “scientific” image and self-understanding of the discipline, culminating in the terminology of \textit{Kunstwissenschaft} versus \textit{Kunstgeschichte}.\textsuperscript{18}

In fact, Strzygowski’s phrasing is often reminiscent of Edmund Husserl’s \textit{Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft} (1911),\textsuperscript{19} which is essential background for the arguments found in the introduction of \textit{Krisis der Geisteswissenschaften}: “The reason why natural scientists often tend to ask if the humanities can even be considered scientific disciplines lies mainly in the fact that the subjects which the humanities deal with do not seem to be based on any strict objectivity [\textit{strenges Sachlichkeit}], neither in contemporary research nor in the practice of the past.”\textsuperscript{20}

Considering the larger field of art history, at first this negotiation of objectivity as a justification of the thoroughly “scientific” character of the discipline was rather more dialectic than controversial. A number of methodological essays that appeared at about the same time as \textit{Krisis der Geisteswissenschaften} tried to fathom both the possibilities and limits of “scientific objectivity.” The discussion became more heated and increasingly ideological from the early 1930s on,\textsuperscript{21} as Strzygowski’s scathing tone anticipated. It also became explicitly linked to the ongoing methodological debate critiquing the established Eurocentric object-canon. The rejection of classical humanism and the establishment of scientific \textit{Sachforschung} are, in this case, two sides of one coin and a crucial—as well as problematic—background for understanding Islamic art studies in the twentieth century, their relation to the larger field of art history, and the implicit relation between the development of method and a political history of ideas. With this background, I will address questions of how a shifting focus between, or shifting definitions of, “humanistic” or “scientific” methods literally affected the gaze of scholarship under varying conditions up to the decades after World War II.

FROM ARABESQUES TO \textit{NORDISCHE KUNST} AND BACK

To look at this period for Islamic art history in Germany means mainly to look at the work of Ernst Kühnel (fig. 4).\textsuperscript{22} One generation younger than Strzygowski, he and his ideas were shaped during the first quarter of the twentieth century, before he became director of the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin in 1932. He had been trained as an art historian and earned his doctorate in 1906 with a thesis on the Florentine painter Francesco Botticini.\textsuperscript{23} When Kühnel turned to Islamic art around 1910, he remained true to his method of choice, an object-based \textit{Stilgeschichte} (history of styles) in the vein of Alois Riegl (1858–1905), focused on form and style, the qualities that can be discerned by primarily looking at the artwork itself and establishing quasi-taxonomic patterns for comparison. In this view, the history of art is described as a sequence of styles that is expressed not only in unique masterpieces in the sense of canonical sculpture and painting but also in products of the arts.
and crafts. Developments and changes in style are understood as motivated by a collective “artistic volition” or “will to art” rather than by single artistic individuals.\(^{24}\)

This formalist mode seemed most suitable for a Islamic art history, which deals with artifacts whose creators are often unknown and the aesthetic of which was considered “ornamental.” Moreover, its sources were not easily accessible for a scholar like Kühnel, who mastered Arabic but was not a philologist. Hence, this mode must have been a particularly attractive epistemological model, even more so as Islamic art history was fighting to be considered on an equal footing with the more traditional, text-based disciplines of orientalism and Islamic studies (Islamwissenschaft).\(^{25}\) Accordingly, Kühnel aligned himself with the formalist mode. By using the formalist mode, scholars could achieve an independence from text- and source-based methods, as they claimed they were able to “read” the object as object by looking at it directly. The gaze was thus, quite literally, the most important instrument of this method.

This mode may be considered a forerunner to structuralist approaches, especially as it was developed more or less contemporaneously with Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistique générale, which grew out of a series of lectures delivered between 1906 and 1911. Focusing on the structural interrelations and genealogical derivations of various idioms, it is considered the basis for the structuralist turn in linguistics. This development corresponds to what Strzygowski described as Sachforschung. However, it has to be stressed that in terms of cultural canon, Riegl’s Stilgeschichte was never so ideologically charged. Jaś Elsner has characterized the Vienna School of art history developing during these years as promoting an empirical method, focusing on single objects, but with the clear and idealistic potential of aiming “beyond the small questions.”\(^{26}\) Accordingly, while Riegl was primarily looking at the Mediterranean Late Antiquity, his approach provided the methodological means for encompassing—through comparisons—objects that were beyond the European geographical canon. He thus opened the way for an extension of the scholarly gaze but never aimed at a radical revision of the canon altogether. Riegl’s method was less politically charged than Strzygowski’s, and in this respect Kühnel was more a follower of Riegl. His formalist approach was also less politically charged.

Throughout his wide range of publications on Islamic art, Kühnel frequently refers to the formalist mode, explicitly naming Riegl as his source. A prime example is Kühnel’s small monograph on Die Arabeske, published in Wiesbaden in 1949, apparently the culmination of forty years of scholarship on Islamic ornament.\(^{27}\) The formalist attitude is implicit throughout the text and is even used to characterize the arabesque and Islamic art itself. Kühnel goes so far as to suggest parallels between the art historian’s and the historical artist’s “scientific” gaze:

> Doubtless, it was foremost the artist who carried in himself the Islamic world view to plunge into linear speculations of an abstract nature. He did not create from the memory of what he had seen or experienced but he transferred what we sense to be natural laws into unreal forms. It was essential that this effort did not degenerate into reckless fantasies but that it led to inspirations which were restrained by deliberate concentration and a disciplined rhythm.\(^{28}\)

The principles for judging the quality of arabesque ornament are described as the harmonious filling of surfaces, rhythmic continuity and abstinence from “plastic [three-dimensional] effects.”\(^{29}\) The arabesque thus is tamed through the analytic gaze, which turns it into an essential, timeless, bodiless, and impersonal form (fig. 5).\(^{30}\) Kühnel also emphasizes repeatedly that the arabesque is completely devoid of symbolism\(^{31}\) or artistic individuality. Instead, he detects the “basic worldview” (weltanschauliche Grundhaltung)\(^{32}\) of Islam as the driving force, thus presupposing an impersonal notion of culture. Even though this approach has a very spiritual essence, it is in line with the anti-individualistic, taxonomic thinking described above as Sachforschung.

Apart from its epistemological potential, standing in the tradition of a formalist “art history without names,” in the vein of Heinrich Wölflin (1864–1945), this line of argumentation also reveals an epistemological blind spot. For Kühnel, the application of Western methods to a corpus of unfamiliar non-European objects failed to trigger any interest for or understanding of artistic individuality in Muslim culture. Indeed, the question of artistic agency is present only as a collective, not a personal intellectual factor. In other words, to stay within
Fig. 5. Illustrations from Ernst Kühnel, *Die Arabeske*, 20–21, showing schematic renditions of arabesque ornament. (Published by Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Wiesbaden, 1949). (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Library)
the paradigm of the gaze, there seems to be no artistic individual, no master to meet the gaze of the scholar. In this mode of reception, it is the art historian who is privileged to see, and to understand rationally. As Andrew Zimmerman has explained for the case of Imperial German anthropology, such an antihumanist mode is directly related to the assumed alterity of the subject under consideration.33 There is a primitivist notion in this kind of art history, which appropriates something foreign for a Western negotiation of aesthetics. As much as Kühnel apparently strived for a canonization of Islamic arts on an equal footing with Western masterpieces, the agent was the contemporary art historian, not the historical artist.

Moreover, in terms of art-historical agency, Kühnel’s line of argument is clearly more than just “pure” art history. It should rather be considered an active symptom of contemporary history, particularly when placed into the larger context of his work during the preceding decades. Only a few years before he published Die Arabeske, he had demonstrated how his academic gaze could be charged to fit within the narratives of an overtly racist world order. In the 1930s and early 1940s, the antihumanistic gaze had become a political signal. Without much methodological trouble, Kühnel could use the collective and anti-individual paradigm to adapt the völkisch (racial) view for his art history, detecting formal parallels between “Nordic and Islamic art” (fig. 6).34 Always true to the principles of Sachforschung or formalism, he believed he did not need to search in written sources for evidence of this connection; it is the formal similarity itself that tells him how the “ancient Aryan worldviews”35 of Persia, which permeate Islamic art, relate to Nordic art. In these writings, he thus also moves away from accepting Late Antiquity and the Judeo-Christian tradition as the context for the genesis of Islamic arts, a view held by most art historians, including himself, before 1933. Rejecting the dominance of what he calls “humanistic and historical instincts,”36 he apparently seeks to establish a distance from everything that could be labeled “semitic.” Here his art history comes closest to Strzygowski’s idea of antihumanism, in this case not only in terms of method but also in terms of ideology. Because visual comparison between certain styles confirms the worldview, the scholar’s gaze is the ultimate instrument in the process.

Fig. 6. First page of proofs for a version of Ernst Kühnel, “Nordische und Islamische Kunst.” (Published in Forschungen und Fortschritte: Nachrichtenblatt der deutschen Wissenschaft und Technik, Berlin, 1934). (Photo: courtesy of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, Library/Archive)

So far, the historiography of art history has not paid much attention to this episode in Kühnel’s career,37 and indeed it must be stressed that, unlike Strzygowski, Kühnel was personally never a convinced racist or a National Socialist. Without excusing any of his ideologically charged statements of the 1930s and 1940s, it must be considered that he certainly also acted strategically as a museum curator, fundamentally motivated by a strong responsibility for his collection and its position. He may not have acted without inner conflicts as he balanced certain curatorial and political interests for the sake of
his collection and Islamic art history as a subfield within art history, even as it became more and more consolidated according to racist worldviews.\textsuperscript{38} However, such an interpretation of Kühnel’s stance must be made with utmost caution. It is very close to the explanation the philosopher Martin Heidegger notoriously used to justify his \textit{Mitläufertum}, claiming that at least some intellectuals had to partake of the new National Socialist world order to prevent a complete decay of culture in Germany.\textsuperscript{39}

Seen in this light, Kühnel’s writings from this period reveal how the seemingly objective scientific gaze could become a symptom of ideology. Precisely because the art historian looked at objects in a decontextualized and essentialist way, the objects were predisposed to being liable to a new political narrative-building. After 1945, Kühnel retracted overtly ideological terminologies, but even as late as 1951 he published on “art and folklore in Islam” (\textit{Kunst und Volkstum im Islam}),\textsuperscript{40} frequently referring to his own writings of the 1930s and early 1940s. Focusing, for example, on Berber and Coptic art, his argument culminates in a claim for thoroughgoing distinctions between court art and \textit{Volkskunst} (folk art) and a plea for increased attention to the latter’s significant contributions to art history. The connections between this argument and the cultural climate of postwar Berlin merit investigation, as during these years diverging definitions of democracy and the role of the people were elements in the new cultural identity being negotiated as the city was divided between two ideologies.\textsuperscript{41}

However, within the limits of this article, it remains important to note how \textit{Die Arabeske} had already set the path for Kühnel’s return to an almost administrative and seemingly neutral, unideological kind of formalism, consolidating a German tradition of Islamic art history that Robert Hillenbrand once described as methodologically rather “pedestrian,” particularly when compared with further developments in the United States.\textsuperscript{42}

**HUMANISTIC HETEROGLOSSIA?**

A synchronic consideration of a German and an American postwar perspective is indeed illuminating for a further understanding of scholarly agencies, especially as these academic communities were closely connected and at the same time distinctly separated by the course of history. While Ernst Kühnel’s career passed through its most ominous period of antihumanism, Richard Ettinghausen (fig. 7) experienced his formative years as a scholar and was at the same time very personally affected by the changing political tide.\textsuperscript{43}

Ettinghausen was born into a Jewish family in Frankfurt in 1906. Around 1930, he became a museum assistant at the Museum für Islamische Kunst, where Kühnel was just about to be promoted to the position of director. In 1933, Ettinghausen left Germany, first for London and eventually for the United States, where he was able to pursue a successful career. In 1944, he became a curator in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and was later on the faculty of New York University and chair of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Islamic Department. His academic training in Germany had focused not only on art history but to an even larger extent on Oriental languages and history.\textsuperscript{44} It is thus not surprising that the character of his writings differs quite strikingly from the formalist mode that went on to dominate the field of Islamic art history in Germany. In his monograph on \textit{The Unicorn}, published almost simultaneously with \textit{Die
Arabeske, Ettinghausen gathers a wide range of visual material for his iconographic subject, mostly from illustrated manuscripts but also other media, which he classifies according to iconographic types (fig. 8). He then examines them through a text-based approach, looking into written sources such as the writings of the Central Asian polymath Abu al-Rāyḥan Muḥammad ibn Ṭahir al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048). By combining visual and textual evidence, he seeks insight into what he calls the “mind of the medieval Muslim”:45 “The motif has to be studied and understood from the point of view of the medieval Muslim. Only then can it be properly interpreted.”46

Ettinghausen examines the relationship among iconographic modes and types with reference to geography, mythology, and even zoology, and he considers the extent to which medieval writers and artists would have been familiar with them. By this means, he seeks to establish the level of sophistication of medieval Muslim cultures. Ettinghausen’s interest in Muslim art is an interest in intellectual history. This method appears in sharp contrast to Kühnel’s almost atavistic concept of Islamic art as embodied in the arabesque.

Ettinghausen’s claim for a better understanding of the medieval Muslim “mind” is also symptomatic of the intellectual climate that characterized the postwar years in North America. Some of Ettinghausen’s general premises correspond rather well to the principles of democratic humanism that had been predominant in higher education and in conservative intellectual circles in the United States since the 1930s. It considered culture strictly as an achievement of the human mind and its individual agency, as opposed to collective systems, laws of nature, or impersonal forces.47 This approach seems to be an almost direct counterpoint to the concepts of formalism and kunstwollen (will-to-art). It also reflects a more embracing, less taxonomically restricted concept of science.

Indeed, this approach corresponds to the principles of the Smithsonian Institution, which anchors the U.S. capital’s museum landscape and is the umbrella organization for the Freer Gallery of Art, where Ettinghausen worked and published. In the first postwar years, the Smithsonian, famously founded in the mid-nineteenth century “for the increasement & diffusion of knowledge among men,”48 must have been considered a more important center of cultivation and education than ever before, a cultural focal point of the enlightened Western world, with implications for moral and political claims to leadership. In this perspective, it may be more than just a small point that, for example, for zoological questions that arose in his studies Ettinghausen turned to curatorial colleagues in the National Museum of Natural History, also under the Smithsonian’s umbrella. He mentions this fact in the preface,49 thus hinting at the truly encyclopedic potential of his working environment in Washington.

Ettinghausen’s work shows how humanism understood as a worldview and as a scientific method could leave space for an extension of canonical Western worldviews. This potential is quite literally exemplified when Ettinghausen subjects the word “unicorn”—which he apparently chose as a book title to appeal to a Western audience—to critical linguistic analysis. He argues that the word “unicorn” is not only lacking historical authenticity but actually misleading for the scholar or beholder, “since for a person steeped in the traditions of Western civilization the word has many connotations which have been nurtured by classical, Biblical, early Christian, and medieval beliefs.”50 For the historian of Muslim art who is trained in philology, the appropriate approach to this problem is not to question the validity of sources altogether but to look at non-Western sources and find the authentic terms: “If one wants to establish the associations which were formed in the Muslim mind in connection with this fantastic beast, one has first to establish its Arabic and Persian names.”51 Subsequently, Ettinghausen identifies the Persian term for a winged quadruped, karkadann, and integrates it into his text, very literally enlarging the vocabulary of description to a multilingual dimension, creating a more differentiated image of the subject and providing a more differentiated terminology. This expansive move is directly linked to gaze and vision, since the kardadann, which is more closely related to the rhinoceros than to the horse, will in the Muslim mind instantly conjure up an image very different from the image of a unicorn in the Western mind. Thus Ettinghausen’s view seems to point in the direction of the discursive, communicative potential of the “gaze” as Olin
Fig. 8. Illustration from Ettinghausen, *The Unicorn*, pl. 7, showing “Kardunn from a Naʿt al-Ḥayawān manuscript. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.” (Published by the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1950). (Photo: Eva-Maria Troelenberg)
deduced it from concepts of the “gaze in the expanded field”: “These conceptions of the gaze are inspired by Martin Buber’s attempt to supplant the I-it relation with the I-thou relation or by the heteroglossia (multiple, equally valid speaking voices).... If you can look back, you cannot be possessed by the gaze of the other.”52 For the historiography of the arts of Islam, Oleg Grabar described the need to invent new terminologies and modes of vision to avoid or at least gradually overcome the Eurocentrism that permeated the field for decades. As late as 1976, he noticed that “there certainly was a whole vocabulary for visual forms which is as yet undetected.”53

However, even if Ettinghausen’s obviously heteroglossic approach seems to be ahead of its time, there remains the question of who is Ettinghausen’s historical vis-à-vis: who speaks and who looks back? In this regard, the last chapter of his book is particularly revealing. Considering the unicorn as a “scientific and artistic problem,” it opens with a metalevel explanation of the interrelationship of written sources and artworks in historical perspective, and he assesses their significance for intellectual history, which he seeks to describe: “In the case of the karkadann writers set the pace for artists because the former were the first to deal with the problem and it is on them, as we have seen, that the artists heavily leaned.”54 This passage reveals how even Ettinghausen’s “humanistic” approach in the end stops short of engaging with artistic individuality per se. The artist as an individual remains mostly invisible behind tradition, literature, and historiography, or, to use a Warburgian term, behind a “social mneme.”55

Furthermore, this particular chapter, which deals with “the karkadann as a scientific and artistic problem,”56 reveals how Ettinghausen’s choice of subject is not only an investigation into the mind of the medieval Muslim but also mirrors the mind of the contemporary American scholar, or even specifically the mind of the émigré who has experienced distances, alterities, and uncertainties.57 Ettinghausen’s use of the word “scientific” and his application of the concept of “science” to a humanistic context may be considered an allusion to the German tradition of the “Verwissenschaftlichung” (“scientification,” quotation marks used deliberately) of art history with its apparently cataclysmic potential. For Ettinghausen the scientific approach lies not in a taxonomic formalist gaze. It is entirely different in nature, as it implies recourse to historical sources and to geographical and zoological facts.

Moreover, Ettinghausen’s monograph on the mythical beast is also an exemplary act of demystification, a test case for the universal quest for historical truth as a critical and deliberate act of coming to terms with a confusing reality:

After all, the myth of a strange animal represents a challenge to human resources and imagination and the approach to the problem reveals clearly the power of observation in explorers and the critical faculties in writers of each given period.... When an author was confronted with the accounts of sailors and travellers, his first problem was to decide, and this far away from the habitat of the karkadann, whether this strange animal was just a human fabrication or a reality.... Al-Biruni, too, had a scientific attitude when he clearly distinguished between his own observations and what he has been told by others. It is true, the reports of his informants are full of fantastic details which Al-Biruni does not challenge, perhaps because he lacked proper means of checking them, but he is at least fully reliable as to what he has seen. One has only to compare his observations with those of Ibn Battuta, whose preconceived notions of the rhinoceros obscured his perception of the animal on the several occasions that he saw it.58

Against the background of the mid-twentieth-century experience, Ettinghausen’s scholarly approach seems permeated by a quest for orientation. This orientation can be achieved by sober and “scientific” intellectual practice, rooted in humanist ground, or, as Robert Hillenbrand characterized the scholarly approach of a generation of art-historian émigrés: “The effect was that now they thought not just intelligently but profoundly, as it were from within. This was a victory for the human spirit. It gave them insights into human nature denied to those who had lived safer, softer lives, and had merely their intelligence and their learning to offer. Personal tragedy, in other words, transformed their scholarship and gave it heightened awareness.”59 This view also corresponds closely to Erwin Panofsky’s famous “Defense of the Ivory Tower,” written only a few years later, in which he defines his humanistic art-historical practice as an implicit ethic responsibility, an intellectual
counterreaction against the most recent experiences in contemporary history.\textsuperscript{60}

On the one hand, Ettinghausen’s very literal enlargement of an image-canon and of a terminology, with its careful consideration of historical and cultural distances, thus also seems ahead of its time in a very fundamental respect, reaching beyond questions of methodology. At first glance, it even appears quite in line with the new, culturally inclusive and canonically open democratic humanism of the postcolonial era, for which Edward Said pleads in one of his last essays on \textit{Humanism and Democratic Criticism} (2004), even though several decades lie between the two texts.\textsuperscript{61} But on the other side, while Said looks for the potentials of such humanistic approaches from a decidedly post–9/11 perspective, he also hints categorically at the conservative, elitist, and antimodernist tone manifested in many ways during the twentieth century. In this view, traditional American democratic humanism associated everything popular, multicultural, and multilingual with a “decline in humanistic and aesthetic, not to say also ethical, standards.”\textsuperscript{62}

Of course it would be going too far to read overtly political statements into \textit{The Unicorn} from today’s position. However, some of Said’s postcolonial objections against democratic humanist conservatism clearly do apply to Ettinghausen. His writing thus seems to be at least symptomatic of a certain zeitgeist in this respect as well: his sources come from the realm of educated elites; his material evidence is more often than not court art. Miniature painting, the primary subject for his iconographical enterprise, had always had the reputation of being a superior discipline, nearer to the categories and standards of European high art than any other branch of Muslim art. Now it is once more put in the center, suggesting a certain hierarchy of artistic gravity. In addition, Ettinghausen adopts the familiar model of cultural rise, golden age, and decline, thus following a traditionally Hegelian notion of liberal progress that culminates in Western modernity and that finds its dialectical counterpart in the idea of a retarded East devoid of progressive potential. Characteristically, Ettinghausen’s book ends with a critical note on “eighteenth century, al-Qazwini manuscripts of inferior quality, ... destined for the simple and impecunious,” whose realism he finds “disenchancing.”\textsuperscript{63} The underlying high-brow rejection of Modernism and mass culture testifies to an academic attitude that could be considered the antiprogressive and exclusive character targeted by the critique of the ivory tower worldview. This attitude must have had a significant impact, considering the image of Islamic art, its canonization, and the social codification of its reception in postwar America and beyond. The fact that until quite recently Islamic art history seemed to be a discipline without any modern or contemporary dimension may not be exclusively, but certainly is significantly, linked to this attitude.\textsuperscript{64}

Ettinghausen’s awareness of the larger intellectual and even educational implications of his methodology is confirmed by an essay on the state of research on Islamic art and archaeology that he contributed to an edited volume on \textit{Near Eastern Culture and Society}, published by Princeton University Press in 1951.\textsuperscript{65} The essay is a long recapitulation of the field’s development in the first half of the twentieth century that concludes with some methodological considerations. These can be read almost like an abstract claim deduced from his approach in \textit{The Unicorn}:

If we are also trying to visualize the future trend in research it can be assumed that it will be one which increasingly recognizes the fact that it is not enough to analyze the style of a monument (or painting, or object), its techniques and inscriptions—in other words, that it is not enough to look at it as a practically isolated phenomenon, more or less divested of the conditions and ideas under which it was created.... Pleasing as may be the general impression and the artful decorations of a building, painting, or implement, we should still go on to consider its wider aspects and cultural context if we want to know the true meaning and significance of an object of the past.\textsuperscript{66}

At this point it should be obvious that the comparison between these methods of Kühnel and Ettinghausen is not or at least not exclusively related to some kind of art-historical \textit{Blockbildung} between Europe and the United States. Rather, it must be considered part of a larger general methodological negotiation within the discipline as practiced in the Western world, dating back at least to the 1930s, when iconographic and formalist approaches had already competed with each other within German-speaking academia. Moreover, Strzygowski’s version of \textit{Sachforschung} drew some
serious interest in the United States during the interwar years. Karen Michels has shown how this methodological negotiation became ever more permeated by political and ideological narratives, and how it was re-interpreted and rebalanced toward a more iconographic focus by émigrés in the United States. According to Michels, scholars who were driven from Germany and Austria were particularly sensitive to the risks of formalist approaches. Focusing on a more interpretive method such as iconology enabled them to “liberate art from ideological usurpation,” thus aiming to fulfill Panofsky’s affirmative function of the “ivory tower.” Michels also stresses that Panofsky’s seminal *Studies in Iconology*, published in 1939, had been a downright “revelation” for an entire generation of young scholars at the very moment when the experience of exile was ascendant in their lives. Ettinghausen belongs precisely to this generation, which went on to translate these methodological discourses into their chosen subjects.

The American postwar version of democratic humanism that is linked to this turn to iconology is not only a reaction to the technoid jargon and method characterizing the German-speaking academia before and during the Nazi era, as Panofsky points out in his 1954 essay subtitled “Impressions of a Transplanted European.” At the same time, it also has an anticollective, anti-Marxist tendency, reflecting the climate of the early Cold War. How this tendency was connected to methodology is prototypically demonstrated in an essay “On Marxism and the History of Art” (1951) by the Princeton art historian John R. Martin, in which he criticizes Marxist claims for “scientific objectivity” and the resulting technoid character. Hence, the reactive interrelation between the “scientific” and the “humanistic” gaze can certainly be read as parallel to conflicting world orders as well as in terms of an evolutionary historical process that must be understood in dialectical terms.

“In Our Own Time”: The Contemporaneity of the Historian’s Gaze

In Ettinghausen’s writing, this fundamental interrelation between the “humanistic” and the “scientific” gaze is mirrored by the recurrent criteria of pleasure and knowledge, or “understanding and enjoyment.” As two qualitatively different, yet interdependent factors of perception, they appear throughout his 1951 essay on “Islamic Art and Archaeology.” It culminates in a rather explicitly political and educational statement for the present, directly referring to the affirmative action of the art historian in a humanistically defined idealistic worldview:

> Does such study represent just a fringe of the ever-growing quest for knowledge, a special form of curiosity for the past, or is there any further significance in it? In the Middle Ages Muslim scientists and philosophers exerted a powerful influence on the Western mind through the work of men like Rhazes, Avicenna, Averroes, and many others. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Muslim literature and sentiment was widely admired… In our own time there is little doubt that Muslim art has by far the strongest appeal to the West and is indeed exercising it in many ways. It is the task of the historian of Muslim art to deepen this aesthetic appeal to an understanding of the whole civilization of a sizable part of mankind. Muslim art can also have a special significance for the Muslim world of today. Since this is its one cultural achievement widely accepted and admired by the West, a rededication to it can compensate the East to a certain degree for its scientific and technological retardation, something which neither the oil fields nor strategic location can achieve. Be that as it may, there has been and still is no better ambassador of good will than art. If these considerations are more widely understood, Muslim art and its study will have an important role to play in the future.

In this perspective, the art historian’s gaze could at least superficially be interpreted “as a socially positive act.” However, it clearly reveals a rather self-confident and asymmetrical idea of multiculturalism, the writer apparently unaware of the problematic cultural hierarchy it creates for a contemporary discourse.

Accordingly, Ettinghausen’s approach also presents itself in sharp contrast to structuralist and poststructuralist criticism as represented by the Foucauldian nexus among gaze, knowledge, and power. This background hints at a fundamental, inherent tension between the conservative humanistic tradition in postwar writing on the arts of Islam and the rise of structuralist postcolonial discourse. On the other hand, as has been shown, there is also a very problematic background to transcultural structuralism in the formalist German tradition.
Both aspects deserve attention, as both together and in relation to each other are immediate precursors of present methodologies for Islamic art history within the larger field of “global” or “transcultural” art history. Avinoam Shalem has recently pointed to the interrelation between “the Hegelian mode of thought and any other theories that operate within the confines of indexical order and taxonomy, including the concept of globalization today,” and to the fact that these theories must always be considered as systems of authority and control, exerting functions of inclusion and exclusion.76

Hence it may be particularly interesting to consider both “humanistic” and “scientific” approaches to the historiography of the arts of Islam as represented by the postwar writings of Kühnel and Ettinghausen against the background of—or contrasting with—a rising structuralist debate that coincides with the renaissance of the liberal West.77 During the later 1950s and 1960s, the structuralist movement radiating from French intellectual circles was increasingly considered as a new universal principle for the modern organization of knowledge, explicitly harking back to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology.78

In a critical essay dealing with these methodological developments, the cultural historian Jost Hermand suggests that “what within the framework of this school is termed ‘structure’ could just as well be called form, Gestalt, essence, system or relative totality,”79 explicitly coined to relate to the tradition of German art history: “Similar tendencies are evident in the realm of stylistic analysis, where since 1900 the same neo-idealistic attitude based on preconceived notions of structures came to the fore. This is demonstrated most clearly in the art history of this era.”80 Referring to Alois Riegl’s “artistic volition” and Heinrich Wölflin’s “art history without names,” Hermand, himself writing in 1975, detects a “close resemblance to Roland Barthes’ de-emphasis of the individual.”81

In this respect, we could provocatively ask whether the lack of attention to individual artistic agency, especially growing out of the formalist tradition but also present in Ettinghausen’s approach, could even be considered as preliminary to a very modern phenomenon, anticipating what literary criticism was later to define as the “death of the author,” privileging the position of the critical mind who interprets a text or a work of art over the one who created it.

In any case, this connection also hints at some epistemological parallels stemming from the general contemporaneity of postwar historiography and Modernist art, which in the liberal West meant mainly abstract art. This connection seems particularly interesting in light of comparative approaches combining non-European artifacts and Modernist works of art that have been in vogue at least since the 1970s and remain a recurrent exhibition topic into the present.82 Of course this trend can and must be understood as another inflection in a long history of formalist parallelization and essentialization.83

On the other hand, it might also be interesting to regard this trend in relation to some heated debates about humanism and abstract art that were prominent in the early 1950s: the establishment of nonfigurative, abstract painting within the postwar canon of the democratic Western world was apparently a matter of canonization, cultural codification, and conflict. Particularly during the repressive era associated with U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy’s investigations, progressive institutions and scholars actively sought to assimilate abstract art into the narrative of humanism, in spite of its seemingly structuralist appearance. In early 1950, just after Kühnel had published his formalist study on the arabesque and Ettinghausen was concerned with iconographic questions related to the “Muslim mind,” the Museum of Modern Art and a number of other avant-garde institutions issued a “Statement on Modern Art” as an explicit response to right-wing attacks against abstract painting.84 From a transcultural point of view, this manifesto is of indirect, yet categorical significance. It stands for another variety of incorporating nonmimetic art into a traditional canon of high or fine arts: “We recognize the humanistic value of abstract art, as an expression of thought and emotion and the basic human aspirations toward freedom and order. In these ways modern art contributes to the dignity of man.”85 The paradigm of order and the idea of a nonmimetic expression of “thought and emotion” seems an echo of formalism with its Janus-headed idealistic potential, and it leads to additional, almost moral categories of “freedom” and the “dignity of man,” thus merging a formalist and a
humanist worldview in another specific, now explicitly democratic political order that aims to incorporate aesthetic differences into the Western mainstream discourse. This interpretation is epitomized in Meyer Schapiro’s monograph subtitled On the Humanity of Abstract Painting (1960). Its point of departure is one of Piet Mondrian’s last works, Broadway Boogie-Woogie (fig. 9). Painted in 1942–43, it reflects the artist’s experience of exile, translating an unfamiliar, yet apparently fascinating urban landscape into a synesthetic system, alluding to jazz music with its unmelodic disruptions. According to the Museum of Modern Art, where the painting is on display, the painting expresses an alternative, interpretive relation to reality, corresponding directly to Mondrian’s antimimetic and antinaturalistic vision. It thus represents a moment of departure from the mimetic principle, reaching far beyond mere ornament or decoration, or, as Schapiro explains, it shows us “that high accomplishment in art is possible where the imagination of colors and forms is divorced from the imaging of the visible world.” Schapiro concludes by dialectically opposing the notion of impersonal form and intellectual mind as expressed by an artwork: “The criticism of abstract art as inhuman arises in part from a tendency to underestimate inner life and the resources of the imagination. Those who ask of art a reflection and justification of our very human narrowness are forced in time to accept, reluctantly at first, what the best of the new artists have achieved and to regard it in the end as an obvious and necessary enrichment of our lives.”

CONCLUSION: GAZES OF THE POSTMODERN

What I have sought to sketch here are some important aspects of a larger political and cultural climate in the


Fig. 10. Cover of Oleg Grabar, The Mediation of Ornament. (Published by Princeton University Press, 1992, © 1992 by the Trustees of the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press). (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Library)
“free Western world” that apparently absorbed, mirrored, and reinterpreted a number of earlier developments in the history of ideas, opening certain windows for an aesthetics of difference, yet windows with very particular political frames. This is the climate in which a literally modern perspective on the arts of Islam was developed, with all its epistemological potentials and challenges.

By way of a brief postscript, I shall just touch on how Oleg Grabar, one long generation later, established his famous and often-quoted comparison between the very same Mondrian painting and a painting on a fifteenth-century Persian manuscript page that represents the name of Ali to illustrate his ideas about The Mediation of Ornament (1992) (fig. 10). Hence he creates a comparative nexus between modern artistic agency and aesthetic agencies in the traditional arts of Islam. Grabar’s concept of “mediation” is part of a development of historiography that considers Islamic art within a culturalist framework. It points toward a new awareness for artistic agencies, but at the same time seems less overtly charged with political connotations. However, as Nasser Rabat has recently shown for the field of architecture, the historiography of the last decades of the twentieth century must also be considered in close relationship to issues of identity, economy, and politics. Describing developments in, for example, Iran or the Persian Gulf region, Rabat suggests that during the postmodern decades and into the present there is a growing presence and also awareness of polycentric, globalized agency.

In his melancholy essay titled “Unpacking My Library Again” (1995), Homi Bhabha deals on a very fundamental level with the differences, the intentional and unintentional agencies, that grow out of the academic and cultural cosmopolitanism of the postmodern age. Interestingly, he begins and ends with another important migrant of the twentieth century and a contemporary of the protagonists of my investigation, Walter Benjamin. Bhabha refers to Benjamin’s concept of the Angelus Novus as the arch-symbol of renewal, its face turned toward the past, yet violently propelled into the future by the paradisiac storm of progress. This angel of history with its position “in-between” seems to be a kindred spirit of some of the humanistic agencies in art historiography that I sought to describe here. On the other hand, its dynamic movement also hints at open desiderata and ever-changing methodological requirements. It is against this principle that we have to constantly reconsider the most contested questions of postmodern and postcolonial intellectual perceptions. Bhabha summarizes: “What is the sign of ‘humanness’ in the category of the cosmoﬁlan? Where does the subject of global inquiry, or injury, speak from? To what does it bear relation? From where does it claim responsibility?"

As we have seen, during most of the twentieth century, the agencies of Islamic art historiography were often deﬁned through the instruments of either “science” or “humanism,” rooted in a Western tradition of knowledge that established the basic epistemological keys and acts of perception. Accordingly—and inevitably—these instruments also deﬁned the qualitative otherness of the subject, since in most cases there was no one to look back, thus no agency on the other side to be counted into the equation. The dichotomy between subject and object was clearly also an asymmetrical East-West dichotomy. However dramatically different the political implications may have been, maybe this epistemological dichotomy can be considered a common denominator, a “cardinal symptom” that characterized much twentieth-century scholarship and also remains an important point of friction when thinking about the role of the historiography of the arts of Islam in the present and future.

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NOTES


2. The literature on theories of agency is too vast to be cited here. Groundbreaking work that inspired further discussion up to the present is Alfred Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory (Oxford, 2012). See also Horst


4. Ibid.

5. Postcolonial art history in Germany as represented particularly by Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff has developed some approaches toward such a critical historiography, operating with the functions of aesthetic difference. See, e.g., Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, *Ästhetik der Differenz: Postkoloniale Perspektiven vom 16. bis 21. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Marburg, 2010).


7. As in many cases, Oleg Grabar has also set the path for this fundamental question. See, e.g., Oleg Grabar, “The Implications of Collecting Islamic Art,” in *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850–1930*, ed. Stephen Vernoit (London and New York, 2000), 197–98.

8. It is worth noting, yet beyond the scope of this article, that theories of the gaze found their place in a particular branch of Islamic art history theory about one generation later and in a rather esoteric context, when agents such as Titus Burckhardt and Henry Corbin discovered the Sufi-mystical approach. For a paradigmatic example, see Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, first published in 1976 and recently reprinted: *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning / Titus Burckhardt*, commemorative ed. (Bloomington, Ind., 2009).


12. For the purpose of this essay, I focus primarily on the lives and works of Kühnel and Ettinghausen because they in many ways represent the dichotomies shaping Islamic art history during the first half of the twentieth century. While Kühnel remained at the Museum für Islamisches Kunst in Berlin throughout his career and during all the political changes in Germany, Ettinghausen experienced migra-


16. Ibid.


Die Arabeske: Meaning and Sequences for the Decorative Arts in Islam

EVA-MARIA TROELENBERG

1. Die Arabeske: Meaning and Sequences for the Decorative Arts in Islam


7. Ibid., 5–6: "Zweifellos lag dem Künstler, der das islamische Weltbild in sich trug, die Versenkung in die lineare Spekulation mit abstrakter Tendenz besonders nahe. Er bildet nicht aus der Erinnerung an Gesehenes oder Erlebtes, sondern überträgt das, was wir als Naturgesetz empfinden, auf unwirkliche Formen. Wesentlich war, daß es dabei nicht zu einem wilden Drauflosphantasieren kam, sondern zu Eingebungen, die durch bewußte Konzentration und rhythmische Zucht gebändigt waren." The quotation here is from the English version, The Arabesque: Meaning and Transformation of an Ornament, trans. Richard Ettinghausen (Graz, 1977), 6–7; all other quotations from Die Arabeske are from Kühn's original German text. It is worth noting that it was Ettinghausen who translated Kühnel's Die Arabeske into English in the 1970s. This fact and both scholars' lifelong general cooperation testifies most vividly to a pluralism of methods and "gazes" rather than a competition—perhaps an advantage of the scholarly realm as opposed to "real" politics.

8. Ibid., 11.


11. ibid., 7. See also Gülru Necipoğlu, The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture (Santa Monica, Calif., 1995), esp. 75.


15. This statement is taken from a letter Kühnel wrote to the editor of Welt als Geschichte to explain his point of view. Kühnel to Hans E. Stier, August 23, 1934. Kühnel-Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin-Dahlem: "Ich gebe zu, dass ich den Gegensatz zur Antike wohl zu schroff betone, indem ich notorische Zusammenhänge vernachlässige, die mir für die Erkenntnis des eigentlichen Wesens der islamischen wie der nordischen Geistesrichtung unerheblich erscheinen. Ihre Feststellung liegt unserem humanistischen und historischen Instinkt besonders nahe, und Theologen, Orientalisten und Archäologen haben denn auch bezüglich des Islam unermüdlich hervorgehoben, was er vom Judentum, vom Christentum, vom Hellenismus ... übernommen hat; darüber aber oft das vergessen, was ihn von diesen Bewegungen grundsätzlich trennt. Sie sehen—ich habe das einmal mit Bezug auf C.H. Becker gesagt—tatsächlich die Kluft vor lauter Brücken nicht. Die Folge ist, dass noch heute die grosse Menge der Gebilde dem Islam, seinen religiösen, politischen, ästhetischen Problemen ziemlich fassungslos gegenübersteht. Bezüglich der nördischen Kultur lag es mutatis mutandis nicht viel anders, und konfuse Rassentheorien erschweren die Verständigung."


17. See also the related chapter in Eva-Maria Troelenberg, Mshatta in Berlin: Keystones of Islamic Art, Connecting Art Histories in the Museum 2 (Dortmund, 2015), forthcoming.


20. See Petra Winter, "Zwillingsmuseum' im geteilten Berlin: Zur Nachkriegsgeschichte der Staatlichen Museen zu


It is important to note that Kühl’s and Ettinghausen’s personal relationship remained close and apparently unimpaired through all the political ruptures of those years. A particularly striking example of this can be found in a letter Ettinghausen wrote to Kühl in May 1933, recently published in Regina Freyberger and Elisabeth Rochau-Shalem, “Volontäre an den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 1933–1945: Ein Überblick,” in *Zwischen Politik und Kunst*, ed. Grabowski and Winter, 79–80.


On this idea of culture, see, e.g., Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York, 2004), esp. 15.


Preface to Ettinghausen, *Unicorn*, iii.

Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 6.


Ettinghausen, *Unicorn*, 143.


Ettinghausen, *Unicorn*, 143–44.

Hillenbrand, “Richard Ettinghausen,” 175–76.


Ibid., esp. 16–19.

Ettinghausen, *Unicorn*, 162.


Ibid., 45.


Ibid., 152.


Ettinghausen, “Islamic Art and Archaeology,” 46.

Ibid., 46–47. Wendy Shaw also stresses the problematic significance of this very passage in the introduction to her essay on secularism. Wendy Shaw, “The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012): 1. In this essay she also addresses several issues related to the paradigm of the “golden age.”


On the dichotomy between a “humanistic” West and a “barbaric” East as concepts of historiography in this context, see also Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, esp. 8–9.

Shalem, “What Do We Mean When We Say ‘Islamic Art?’,” 2–3, with a reference to Jan Blommaert’s sociolinguistics of globalization.

On the development of this branch of art history, also in historical perspective, see, e.g., the contributions in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Kitty Zijlman (Amsterdam, 2008).


Ibid., 216.
For the larger context of this historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Scroll*, 61–90.


The contemporary Afghan artist Lida Abdul has said that Afghanistan works hard for the world, the site of and metaphor for intractable problems—war, gender, religion—and the screen for myriad orientalist projections.¹ Perhaps the most vexed arena of contestation in which Afghanistan has figured (along with other players) has been termed the image wars,² wherein diverse acts of iconoclasm have been committed: women were veiled, Buddhas were bombed, museums were looted, and Islam was invoked in efforts to claim and retain clout and credibility around the globe. That widespread and “deep uncertainty about the power, sanctity, and violence of images” (termed “iconoclash” by Bruno Latour)³ is not the main focus of this article, but it is the conceptual backdrop against which to position some photographs of Afghan women. Transgressive images in some contexts and compelling icons in others, these photographs entail power and risk in the cracks between people, classes, cultures, and nations, and therefore they can drive change, foment instability, and even incite violence or destruction. Such processes, transpiring in those interstitial spaces, are both synchronically and diachronically manifest, working to globalize visual culture. By subjecting these processes to scrutiny, this project is, in effect, an exploration of the aesthetics of social change across boundaries of time and space, among myriad agents operating in disparate centers of cultural gravity.

To explore the complexity of such interstices, one useful strategy is to situate images in what James Elkins has called “the weightless skein of vision,” that cat’s cradle of interlocking, overlapping, and otherwise tangled sightlines first articulated by Jacques Lacan and subsequently elaborated by many others.⁴ These imbricated processes of seeing and being seen, theorized as “the gaze,” advance the fashioning of self as well as the recognition of the other, and, by extension, they are constitutive of individual identities, diverse groups, larger communities, and ultimately, transnational relations. Such relational encounters—the terms of engagement implicating self and other in the “politics of vision”⁵ across wider fields—are exponentially complicated by modern technologies of image-making arising from the medium of photography. As Catherine Collins and Jane Lutz have elaborated, photographs entail the intersection of multiple gazes, including that of the photographer, the subject, and myriad viewers of different persuasions.⁶ One gaze of ambiguous but undeniable force is that which is encoded in a portrait photograph—the fixed focus of the represented subject, looking back at diverse audiences. Such faces can be powerful proxies in the self/other encounter, agents of both differentiation and homogenization.⁷

Portraits of Afghan women are a complex case in point, given the risks as well as the powers that photography offers to anyone ordinarily excluded from the public realm. Operative deterrents to female visibility and agency can vary, but the quandaries that Afghan women have regularly faced—whether to be seen and to look back or not—are fraught and situational, subject to a tenuous balance of variables and institutions, among them tribe, state, and Islam.⁸ Sometimes women are victims of coercion; other times they have the power to choose, opting for the security of the veil or the publicity of the photograph.⁹ I will consider cases in which photographs of Afghan women were widely disseminated, in the 1920s, at mid-century, and then at century’s end. In these instances and for diverse reasons, Afghan
women became visible, extricated from (presumptive) socially mandated invisibility by means of the camera, a globally disseminated but locally deployed tool of documentation and self-realization. My intention here is not to belabor the familiar feminization of “the Orient,” or to castigate abuse of Afghan women, or to revisit reductive refrains about iconoclastic Islam, though my comments impinge on all these issues to varying degrees. This project is also not about the performance of power over subalterns or others, although there are asymmetrical dynamics among players in the story as well. Rather, my goal is to track the helix of discrete or localized visual proprieties twining together to generate broader networks of seeing, as people and their proxy pictures transgress sightlines and transcend boundaries between self/other, man/woman, public/private, and ultimately between cultures and nations. Doing so will entail ranging across the full spectrum of visuality, from production to reception.

On one level, then, this is an exercise in what W. J. T. Mitchell has called “showing seeing”—sorting out the visual construction of the social and the social construction of the visual—as it transpires over time. On another level, it is a case study of female beauty as negotiable currency in transnational consumer culture, manifest vividly in the entanglement between two quite disparate political entities—Afghanistan and the United States. By throwing a spotlight on some universally legible photographs operating in the interstices between local and global, I hope to explore the imbricated processes of looking, of being seen and looking back, of exercising agency and being erased. Thus the project concerns images but also “image,” a ubiquitous anxiety in the contemporary public domain.

AFGHAN IMAGES IN TIME AND OVER TIME

By way of preface, it is necessary to acknowledge the relationships between image-making and self-fashioning, between photography and nation-building, in Afghanistan in the early decades of the twentieth century, because the modern polity took shape even as the technology was being adopted. Over the course of a few short decades, tribes under the hand of the “Iron Amir,” Abdur Rahman (r. 1880–1901), gradually coalesced as a bounded state, albeit in relative isolation from the outside world. After Abdur Rahman, Habibullah took power as amir of Afghanistan (r. 1901–19), and the ruling clan began to formalize and modernize the nation, molding the society from the top down, beginning in Kabul; the changes were manifest in architecture, institutions, dress, and other aspects of visual culture.

Photography was a significant part of this transformation, with images figuring diversely in private and public spaces. In general, it was a useful technology for those in power, confirming rule with verisimilitude, extending and reifying established social norms, and offering new options for expression and communication. Deployed initially from the top down and the center out, photographs were obedient agents in the larger campaigns of modernization—until they were not.

Images of women are indicative of this complex functionality. A formal portrait taken in the Arg harem serai around 1915–16, shows Amir Habibullah surrounded by fourteen consorts from the royal household (fig. 1). For the ruler, it was clearly a desirable and even flattering picture, posed to capture power, comfort, and privilege. It was also evidence of being “modern,” but it was not intended for public distribution. Since the women, the photograph, the negative, and the photographer—that is, all possible sightlines—were controlled by the patron patriarch, the canons of visual propriety more broadly operative in early twentieth-century Afghanistan were not overtly violated with this act of image-making.

The situation was quite different when the next ruler, King Amanullah (r. 1919–28) and Queen Soraya went abroad for the first time, in 1927–28, to introduce their fledgling republic to other countries. During the course of this diplomatic tour, Soraya chose to perform her role as a royal ambassador in “modern” terms and to capitalize on “modern” technologies such as photography. Not surprisingly, to veil or not to veil was a critical question, and while she ultimately acquiesced to covered modesty in both Egypt and Iran, she charted an incremental path to visibility as she traveled through Europe, thus effectively advancing her own (orientalist) exposure. Described in the Illustrated London News as veiled and retiring in Bombay on January 7, “unveiled in public for the first time” by January 14, lauded for her fashion sense
and skin tone by February 4, she appeared on the cover of that august publication on March 24. Exposed, dressed, and launched appropriately in “civilized” society, Soraya thus became, in picture and person, an international celebrity.17

Publicity shots of the queen traveled considerably farther than she did, and the reception they garnered was mixed. For example, whereas English audiences applauded her sartorial panache, the Turkish press published the same images, noting patronizingly that social proprieties in “far away Afghanistan” were comparable to those operative in Turkey ten or fifteen years previously.18 Thus cultural commonalities between the two young republics were acknowledged even as Turkey’s own more advanced modernity was asserted. Finally, when such vagrant images found their way back to Afghanistan from abroad, they were deemed incontrovertible (visual) proof that traditional notions of proper behavior had been flaunted by the rulers.19 For some, it was a travesty of collective honor wrought in and by mechanically reproduced images, an unfamiliar technology. This, then, is the critical conflation of medium and message, wherein resistance to the making of images is coterminus with resistance to the content of images. What resulted was a moment of iconoclastic zeal and political upheaval within the nation-state of Afghanistan.

That the same photographs sustained three qualitatively different gazes/perspectives, synchronically operative in discrete locales, is worth elaborating. At each site, individuals/societies made meaning, forged values, and confirmed identity with reference to the queen’s portrait, although those processes entailed quite disparate codes of honor, norms of behavior, and claims to sophisticated civility. In the moment, a few images bridged vast distances and convened heterogeneous audiences around shared experience; such is the potential of photographs to activate the spaces between cultures in diverse and even seemingly contradictory ways simultaneously. But if such diversity is refracted in the localized reception of images in the moment, that very diversity is also subject to homogenization over time, as peripatetic pictures summon unprecedented gatherings, blurring and cross-fertilizing previously discrete systems of representation and propriety. To substantiate that claim, I will now operate diachronically in the arena between two different political entities (Afghanistan and the United States) to track the genesis of a larger, transnational visuality. A pair of pictures can set the stage.

Fig. 1. Anonymous, *Amir Habibullah and Consorts*, ca. 1915–16. (Photo: KES Archives, 158-H-69, courtesy of the Williams Afghan Media Project)
OF SELF OR OTHER?

About the time that Amir Habibullah of Afghanistan had his picture taken with fourteen of his consorts, Uncle Gus had his picture taken, too, posing as “Sultan for a Day” in Bennington, Vermont (fig. 2). The images are twins in a sense, though not quite identical ones. Each shows a single male figure surrounded by women; both ensembles invoke issues of gender and sex, although with different codes and connotations. In both cases, the women wear clothing that departs from normative custom in their own societies but relates in some way to fashions elsewhere. Amir Habibullah’s women wear clothes ordered or copied from European catalogues, while the women in Uncle Gus’s photograph sport costumes rather than fashions, each outfit suggesting pastiche and charade. Both images document private experiences, and, in a sense, both have a peepshow quality because neither would have been intended for public consumption when they were taken. In retrospect however, both also betray the larger “cultural imaginary” in which they were produced, a system of representation specific to time and place.

The medium in which these created worlds are rendered—photography—works to substantiate that cultural imaginary and make it credible, in part and ironically, because the requisite verisimilitude entails diverse fabrications, distortions, and even accidents. Some of these contrivances seem unremarkable or at least familiar, reflecting widely disseminated conventions of studio photography. In the Afghan photograph, for example, an outdoor garden is evoked by a pictorial backdrop combined, in turn, with an indoor carpet; thus living, breathing people occupy a fake space bounded by the picture frame as determined by the photographer behind the camera. Another kind of artificiality occurs in the American photograph. There, a real interior and costumed charade substantiate fantasy. Both images are fabricated, then, but not exactly duplicitous. Both photographs serve up mundanely mendacious “truth”—posed moments in which alternative selves or morphing values are projected.

There are differences, of course, between the sober aspirations of modernizing Afghans and the cavalier assumptions of modernizing Americans, but the general similarity between these images points to social change.
under way in both societies in which diverse boundaries are breaking down—boundaries between man and woman, public and private, self and other, but also document and wish. In order to isolate constituent strands in these increasingly tangled patterns of seeing and being seen, it is useful to begin in one of the two centers of cultural gravity and then incorporate other storylines contrapuntally. First, I will consider American notions about Afghanistan after the demise of the polygamous Amir Habibullah, during the reign of King Amanullah. In 1921, newly enthroned and just a few years prior to his own European tour described above, this young Afghan ruler sent a surrogate diplomatic entourage to Washington, D.C., led by Muhammad Wali. The visit prompted avid journalistic coverage, while ancillary information also proliferated about a place that was even more exotic than the Ottoman empire for the American public, one that increasingly epitomized the ever-receding “Orient.”

Typical of this discourse of broadening horizons is a story entitled “Every-Day Life in Afghanistan” which appeared in a respectable, even scholarly magazine, National Geographic (January 1921). The content was credited to one “Haji Mirza Hussein,” a European observer (Oscar von Nierdemeyer) traveling incognito on a mission of “political and military significance” in the guise of a “Persian pilgrim.” His field notes had been edited by a former United States consul in Baghdad for publication and dissemination to American readers. Thus the article had the imprimatur of governmental accuracy as well as the allure of exotic intrigue. So legitimized, the “buffer state” was characterized by a “Keep Out” sign at the border, its “splendid isolation,” and its “brooding, suspicious” capital, Kabul. This “unfriendly realm of fanatic tribes” was home to “the last of the despots, a sort of modern Oriental patriarch on a grand scale” who wielded “a far-reaching influence throughout the Mohammedan world.” “Afghan women are not taught to read or write” and the deceased Amir Habibullah “had a harem of over 100 women and among these, strangely enough, were a few Europeans.”24 Such rhetoric worked to consolidate familiar orientalist tropes, linked to a particular and, ultimately, paradigmatic place.

However, it would be a mistake to reduce National Geographic’s coverage to hackneyed stereotype, for there is (grudging) nuance therein as well. For example, it was noted that the Afghans “have found, to their dismay, that polygamy is nowadays more expensive than exciting…. The present Amir, Amanullah Khan, has but one wife … and the Amir loves pictures and is a good amateur photographer.”25 Such commentary sounds condescending, but it also betrays recognition and self-validation, wherein quandaries, fantasies, and enthusiasms current in the United States were projected for consideration at a comfortable distance on the most exotic of screens. Imagine, for example, fireside conversations (or silent ruminations) prompted by this well-illustrated magazine: “Multiple wives?? Cough, snicker, harumpf… I wonder what they look like … too bad there are no photos of them…. I wonder why … photography is everywhere these days…. Clearly the Afghan king enjoys it, though I doubt he owns one of those new Kodaks or has been to the movies!”

Obviously, my purpose is not to declare such conjured responses factual, but simply to point to the ephemeral, seemingly inconsequential (but not!) mutterings and labelings that coalesce as personal opinion and, when expressed, may eventually generate collective convictions. Only incrementally are the partialities of individual experience knit together into broader patterns of representation; only in retrospect is this incremental genesis of global visual culture legible. But setting aside conjured conversations, one does have the photographs themselves and the words that are intended to explain them. Together they point to dual processes of othering and identification. On the American side of the story, a resilient template of representation for Afghanistan gradually coalesced, in which the erotic exotic and the seductions and perils of “image” consistently figured, often in gossipy tone. Newspaper coverage of Muhammad Wali’s diplomatic mission to the United States demonstrates, for example, that polygamy, jewels, and mystery were key variables in public perceptions of the nascent country. The New York Times’s coverage of July 13, 1921, is relatively measured, with headlines noting that “Two Royal Afghans are not Acquainted … Prince Muhammad Wali Khan and Princess Fatima exchange no visits here … Envoy off for
Washington ... Seeks Recognition of his country’s Independence—Princeess would sell Diamond for $500,000." At stake here is the very legitimacy of the envoy; how (a staunchly monogamous reader might wonder) could two members of Afghan royalty not know each other? While journalistic sleuthing mapped out the extended family tree, determining that the prince was in fact a reputable envoy and the princess was actually a legitimate but distant relative resident in India, a section on “Afghan home life” remained the site of curiosity and further questions. The prince, "a swarthy smiling man of about 40," was asked if the amir had “the usual four wives” and was told that “the Ameer has but one wife and is not in favor of polygamy.” When asked if he was "surprised at the skirts of American women when you arrived in this country?” he replied, “We have been in Paris ... and his answer seemed final enough to end the subject."26 So whose perspective is dominant here? If American expectations revolved around harems and mystery, the fashion world still revolved around Paris, and in the face of it all, Afghans were capable of cosmopolitan condescension.27

Meanwhile, as the official entourage proceeded toward Washington, diplomatic process unfolded at the top levels of government. Charged to establish an official presence on American soil for the fledgling Afghan nation, the envoy duly submitted his request to Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes and ultimately enjoyed a respectful audience with President Warren G. Harding on July 26, 1921, but the matter of a formal mission, he was told, “must be reserved for further consideration.” This decision reflected careful respect for British interests in regard to the former protectorate: that Italy had formally recognized Afghanistan had generated some “sensitiveness ... some feeling,” whereas “in France, the Mission was received but no promises were made.” It was also noted that Afghanistan had signed a treaty with the Soviet government guaranteeing Afghanistan a yearly monetary subsidy along with personnel and technical expertise. State Department efforts to investigate the commercial potential of affiliations concluded that “there is little or no opportunity for trade, aside from the products of the sapphire and of the lapis lazuli mines.”28 Precious stones apparently held multifaceted appeal in the American arena, but not enough to dictate foreign policy.

If Americans viewed Afghanistan in self-serving bits and snippets, others viewed the diplomatic dance diversely around the globe. The transnational migration of news and image consolidated familiar themes of polygamy, jewels, and fashion, but varied audiences framed the encounter in localized perspectives. For example, the “Mysterious Afghans” were newsworthy as far away as New Zealand, where an Ashburton Guardian columnist noted that Princess Fatima had attracted “considerable attention by her wonderful native costume. She wears a white sapphire embedded in the side of her nose.” The prince professed “ignorance of her existence,” while the princess returned the patronizing castigation, pointing out that he was “related to the Royal Family of Afghanistan and not of it.” The subsequent commentary is more regionally specific: “People are inclined to suspect the machinations of an enterprising cinema director, and take note that the princess’ name is also that of a popular brand of cigarettes” (fig. 3).29 Here the snarky New Zealand journalist invokes the requisite gems, dress, and complicated family trees, but the innuendos point not simply to “the Orient” but to a different erotic exotic place—the land of moviemaking and cigarette-smoking flappers otherwise known as the United States.

Having acknowledged (however briefly) this multicentric arena of image and representation, let us return to the localized viewing dialect current in America. There, information about the Afghan mission worked in transitive resonance with contemporaneous larger-than-life individuals prominent in that particular cultural domain—one an enigmatic figure of the Great War, Lawrence of Arabia; the other a sex symbol of the silent screen, Rudolph Valentino (alias “The Sheik”).30 Both heroes operated in “exotic” terrain, and the personal charisma of each one was projected beyond his immediate surroundings by widely disseminated images. Predictably, Hollywood was the key variable, and “The Sheik” was both deterministic and indexical of American attitudes. Arguably the first real movie “star,” Valentino exercised his cat-like grace and complicated sexual appeal in a distant ostensibly North African setting, offering audiences vicarious sex in the desert. He
The same year in which *The Sheik* was released—1921—the first Miss America pageant was staged in Atlantic City. The winner, as yet unchallenged to be articulate, creative, or socially conscious, was chosen purely on appearance: Margaret Gorman was 16 years old and measured 30-25-32. In 1922 and 1923, Mary Campbell won and then won again because she scored the highest on a scale that awarded points for physical attributes: 15 for the construction of the head, 10 for eyes, 5 each for hair, nose, and mouth, and 10 each for facial expression, torso, legs, arms, hands, and something called “grace of bearing.”

While the contest grew quickly in popularity, it was discontinued five years later amid moralist complaints about revealing bathing suits and the discovery that one contestant was married while another had an infant child. Apparently, wholesome (virginal) beauty was one thing, but sexually active contestants flaunting their appearance was quite another.

Clearly there were limits to how visible and how sexual women could actually appear in polite American society, but for present purposes, it is most pertinent to flesh out the larger commercial context in which this recalibration of female “beauty” and visibility transpired. The Fatima cited above offered cigarettes from behind a diaphanous veil, and the product sold, but the advertising business was mushrooming rapidly and it was doing so in lockstep with Hollywood. In a precedent-setting strategy of entrepreneurship, Valentino the idol and impresario of sensual experience was deployed in a thinly disguised promotional tour for a beauty aid called Mineralava. This sequence of dance performances around the country culminated in a beauty contest in Madison Square Garden judged personally by Valentino. A film produced by David Selznick, *Rudolph Valentino and His 88 American Beauties*, documents the concluding program of the tour, a major public event; in it, the star is presented as a discriminating connoisseur of beautiful women, viewing and judging the enviable contestants. Perhaps for some it was a performance of that titillating exotic practice, polygamy; for others it offered a springboard for fantasy about that more domesticated idol known as Rudy. Certainly, the

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Fig. 3. Fatima Cigarettes magazine advertisement, lithograph, ca. 1910. (Photo: courtesy of private collection)
entrepreneurial campaign advanced this general ethos by yoking the product with a charismatic movie star would become perennial strategy for the burgeoning advertising business.

Obviously, these are but snapshots from a much larger process by which the United States came to be emblematized by Miss America, Hollywood, and consumerism. With this modest foil, however, I turn now to the promotional campaigns that were waged by Afghan iconophiles in which women also figured prominently. Efforts were made throughout the reign of King Zahir Shah (r. 1933–73) to project a national identity in the international arena by disseminating images. For example, a large format magazine entitled simply Afghanistan Ariana, published in English in 1961, is indicative of Afghan desire to be seen by the outside world. Picture and text document indigenous industry, education, and daily life, and women are prominent therein (fig. 4). While a close reading of this Soviet-tinged publication and its encoded political agendas is beyond the scope of this article, the entrepreneurial, propagandistic tenor of the magazine is inescapable. Clearly ratified by the Afghan government, it presents a nation in which work, women, and image are seen as the tools and evidence of social change and even revolutionary advance.

Concomitantly, tourism and the culture industry were actively sponsored, and the campaign to promote the country in transnationally legible terms culminated in the 1970s. This campaign is evident in a series of glossy calendars produced collaboratively by Ariana Afghan Airlines, Afghan Tourist Organization, and Bakhtar Afghan Airlines. Images of Afghan countryside, monuments, flora, and crafts complement each month’s page, and women figure centrally in this advertising campaign, representing different regions, dressed in colorful “native dress.” In one 1973 production, each month is graced with a single female figure posed in distinctive dress before a recognizable landmark or landscape (fig. 5). While some calendars are rendered in Pashto or Dari for local consumption, others cater overtly to the tourist market and international audiences. In one sample dating to 1977, Afghanistan is dubbed (in English) “Haven of Peace and Tranquility” and it includes a carefully posed shot of the “inflight service personnel” of Ariana Airlines, lined up on the tarmac next to a plane.

Fig. 4. Feature story on “Women and Work” from Afghanistan Ariana, June 1961. The magazine was designed and edited by Mohammed Khalid Roashan and published by the Royal Afghan Government, Department of Press and Information. (Photo: courtesy of private collection)
Fig. 5. Page for Mizhan (September–October) from a calendar produced by Bakhtar Afghan Airlines and the Afghan Tourist Organization, 1973. (Photo: courtesy of private collection)
HOLLY EDWARDS

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(ﬁg. 6). Dressed in colorful local attire, these women would have been responsible for making airline passengers comfortable en route, thus actively engaged in professional lives outside the normative privacy of traditional Afghan home life, previously the focus of avid American armchair travelers.

In general, such publications demonstrate the extent to which Afghanistan was engaging in the sites and modes of cross-cultural exhibition and promotion at mid-century, a campaign that entailed relaxed standards of gender construction. Even more telling, perhaps, is the crowning of Zohra Daoud as Miss Afghanistan in 1973, the ﬁrst such contest to transpire in echo of the then-well-established American equivalent; her story is a revealing index of attitudes about the visibility and agency of women in a modernizing tribal, Muslim nation-state.38 It is not without irony, for example, that the standards of evaluation in the Afghan contest differed considerably from the bluntly physical scrutiny of the ﬁrst Miss America contests. Chosen from a pool of hundreds of contestants nationwide, Zohra Daoud was declared the winner, having been judged for her academic accomplishment and social comportment. Clearly, at that particular moment in time, enterprising Afghan women (and their image proxies) enjoyed respectability when they were seen playing respectful roles, reinforcing the operative balance of powers among tribe, state, and Islam in the process of modernization and engagement with other countries in the global arena. In effect, women and photography had been mobilized on acceptable terms, to serve local purposes and simultaneously broaden horizons. Images offered passports to the spaces between other localized visual cultures, and photography remained licit for indigenous audiences and subservient to stable political processes.

MEN, WOMEN, AND WAR

Even after the Soviet invasion of 1979 and during the subsequent decades of civil war, photography continued to serve both militant and therapeutic purposes
among diverse internal constituencies resisting outside interference. The most obvious function was propaganda. This sort of visual exhortation, rendered in the gaze of the portrait photograph, served to transmit the charisma of group leaders from a distance, proclaiming party affiliation and galvanizing men under fire (fig. 7). More modest images operated not at the level of commanders, political parties, or battle zones, but rather at the level of personal loss, sometimes in the context of inexpensive magazines devoted to individuals slain in the struggle. Such faces “look back” across the boundaries between life and death with grinding force. Meeting that gaze sustained private memories even as some photographs were put to more public purpose. One such magazine, called Sima-yi Shahid (The Visage of the Martyr), shows the face of a fallen student on the cover; inside, other biographies and pictures are presented (fig. 8). Image and encomium combine to document the resistance and legitimate grief and ongoing suffering. The suggestive title and the nearly hagiographic tone of such a publication point to strongly held spiritual convictions, visually rendered.

As the resistance to communism and Soviet encroachment acquired a more charged and institutionalized religiosity, the instrumental relationship between looking at images and strengthening religious community took other public forms as well. At once modest and monumental, the poster in figure 9 commemorates Ghulam Muhammad Niazi, founder of Jamiat-i Islami, professor of theology at Kabul University, and mentor of such important younger men as Burhannuddin Rabbani and Abdul Rasul Sayaf. Imprisoned in 1974 by Muhammad Daoud Khan and executed in 1979 by the Khalq, Niazi had argued for a modern, Muslim Afghanistan even as the country was careening through its short-lived experiment in socialism. Surrounding his face are the portraits of students and followers during the tenure of the Russian-backed government in the 1980s. On one level, the poster replicates the original pedagogical relationships; on another level, hanging
from a tree in an open-air classroom in a sunlit glade, the poster defines a commemorative site, dedicated to important individuals, staking visualized claim to the land in their names. Here an image actually defines a sacred space for the consolidation of the Muslim resistance.

**SEEING IS (NOT?) BELIEVING**

Even this small selection of images demonstrates that the Afghan nation-state in the 1980s and 1990s—tribal, Muslim, and still aspiring to independent integrity—was (as before) a nation fashioned and a terrain contested by men and their images, working as record, honor, and exhortation. Just looking at pictures helped to constellate and confirm the world around fighting men within the boundaries of the contested nation. Disseminating such images beyond the borders held the promise of worldwide attention. Whereas King Amanullah and Queen Soraya had welcomed photography as a means to project a “modern” Afghanistan, publicizing and documenting the war entailed a much wider array of vested interests. The resistance itself was atomized, and the superpowers were involved, and the story was not getting out to everyone’s liking. As armed conflict and Soviet influence ground on, an American effort was launched to fund and train Afghans to document the war from the inside. The Afghan Media Resource Center was established in 1987 and active up through 1992.
and beyond. The staff, recruited from political parties based in Peshawar, Pakistan, was made up of educated but unemployed Afghans who traveled in teams throughout their homeland, gathering news for international distribution. They were locals, but they were schooled by outsiders—professionals from Boston University, funded by the Department of State—in photography, video, and the principles of “objective journalism” congruent with American media. Periodically during their internships, the trainees were urged to operate tactfully against the grain of traditional Afghan culture in order to document indigenous struggles more effectively for the evening news abroad. Interviewing and photographing women were encouraged, and appropriate strategies were coached and scripted. More specifically, Afghan journalists were advised to simply treat women as “sources,” nothing more.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this was also the very time that a woman’s face personified the nation abroad. Just as images of Queen Soraya figured in the earlier representation of Afghanistan in the international arena, “The Afghan Girl” (arguably, the green-eyed girl needs no introduction, but her name is actually Sharbat Gula) played a critical ambassadorial role for her country, albeit in counterpoint to indigenous cultural norms. She did not choose this role. An American photographer, Steve McCurry, saw her in a refugee camp and took her picture. She was twelve at the time, and her face appeared on the cover of National Geographic (June 1985) although she was neither identified by name nor consulted about the use of her portrait. Indeed, she did not see her own image until seventeen years later, when National Geographic launched a search for the girl who had become iconic and even ubiquitous in global visual culture.

While I have dealt with the veritable metastasis of the Afghan Girl image elsewhere, for the present purposes it is important to articulate the mechanics of representation by which power and celebrity accrued to these two women, unveiled and operating forcefully in the public domain, and to acknowledge the benefits that ultimately resulted. Soraya was photographed both at home and abroad, and some of the images migrated, albeit slowly by modern standards, to varied audiences. Sharbat Gula was photographed by an outsider, and her image had no roots at all in her own culture; her picture was “taken” and used elsewhere without permission. Both women were photographed so as to conform to canons of contemporary beauty or fashion in the countries in which they gained their greatest fame. Soraya’s image (fig. 10) resonated with those of young British debutantes (fig. 11); Sharbat Gula’s echoed those of cutting-edge American fashion models. Thus both women could be welcomed, trusted, and desired even as they retained a charged political affiliation. Furthermore, the celebrity of each of the women transpired initially in the context of a publication (the Illustrated London News and National Geographic, respectively) that represented the highest standards of truth, accuracy, and reportage, a status deriving in large part from the aura and impact of the photographs disseminated therein. In a sense then, each had international backers and sponsors, and the benefits were reciprocal: images granted power and power legitimized image.

Pictures of both women also returned to the region from which they came, but by the end of the twentieth century, the stakes and implications differed radically. The green-eyed girl had become the poster child for humanitarian philanthropy to refugees and Afghanistan more generally, with the result that considerable philanthropic aid flowed from abroad. Even locally produced posters advertised the suffering that was endemic in the traumatized nation, and Sharbat Gula’s image was captioned to stand for the country and its devastation more generally. While this use is arguably congruent with localized, collective need, there were ironies as well. The same image that legitimately generated aid money was sold illegally in the bazaar near the camp where she had originally been photographed. There, in bootlegged copy, it was displayed along with images of Bollywood stars and other items of consumer culture. Such are the myriad powers of a versatile image in a globalized visuality.

Clearly, the boundaries of the Afghan nation were fragile and porous, perforated by people as well as by image proxies. Society was in radical flux as a result of armed invasion and civil war, and political power was atomized and tenuous. Sightlines were very, very tangled. But who was looking, and what boundaries were crossed? In the face of such chaos, and perhaps
of war, founded on a well-tuned appreciation of the power of images, congruent with contemporary global practices.51

Here again is the arc of licitness noted earlier: images were collectively accepted, forcefully deployed, and then summarily proscribed. This trajectory was the result of a morphing balance of factors and forces, only one of which was Islam. Similar stories abound in other contexts; indeed, iconoclastic episodes punctuate many monotheistic traditions, although each one is inflected in historically and culturally specific ways.52 Afghanistan simply offers a prismatic case in point that might be diachronically summarized as follows: In the 1920s, the medium and the message were conflated and condemned in certain sectors of Afghan society for reasons arising out of normative tribal, religious, and political practices. Eventually, new canons of visual propriety emerged as processes of globalization and modernization escalated. Over time, women operated

inevitably, the terms of visual propriety inside Afghanistan became protective indices of cultural identity rather than accepted sites of social change. Women’s rights and visibility were subject to standardization and censure, and, by extension, the licitness of images became a variable in the conflict as political control eluded any faction as well. At century’s end (from 1996–2001), the Taliban were faced with armed insurrection but also with visual artillery—images in the service of individual memories of the past and contested aspirations for the future. The edict to ban photography, rhetorically camouflaged as a return to pure Islam, should not be reduced to a performance of piety, although that was the dominant explanation at the time. It was also an act

Fig. 10. Cover of the Illustrated London News, March 10, 1928, showing Queen Soraya.

Fig. 11. “Some Débutantes of the Season,” Illustrated London News, April 21, 1928, 696.
more independently and images proliferated, serving an ever wider range of purposes without censure. By century's end, however, a global crossfire of image-making was under way, and visible women and rampant pictures were incendiary agents in the spaces between and among Afghans, and between the Taliban and outside interests.

Portrait photographs, in particular, were able to operate across boundaries and transcend differences because of their gendered and generic appeal, sustaining myriad meanings in diverse cultural imaginaries. Articulating the versatility of these portraits is, on some levels, to state the obvious—pictures of beautiful women are endlessly capable of eliciting desires and inspiring projections. In contemporary entrepreneurial parlance, this might be termed their brandable character,53 but such agency between local and global constituencies is not just a matter of a pretty face; that agency is advanced and complicated by applied captions, encoded narratives, and viewing contexts, all of which are generated and even forced by the broad dissemination of compelling pictures. Once encountered, those faces demand engagement and elicit explanation, over and over again.

Viewed close to home, such photographs often do not generate unanimous response, precisely because they manifest indigenous social and cultural norms and provoke corollary conflicts with maximum nuance and intensity. As they migrate across the boundaries between diverse communities or cultures, however, universally legible photographs also wield power, but they carry less baggage, enjoying diplomatic immunity from censure as they erase, break down, or simply disregard social differences. Glib and cosmopolitan, they oversail and underplay cultural norms, functioning as compelling if somewhat duplicitous diplomats. Liberated from their own worlds, they seem to perform the agendas and values of their various host countries more than their own. Afghan elites, English imperialists, Turkish republicans, and American humanitarians have all found women like Queen Soraya and Sharbat Gula gratifying company, their beauty enhanced by the corollary stories of power—erasure and exposure. Soraya emerged from gendered seclusion to public acclaim, while Sharbat Gula became famous and then disappeared into segregated isolation, only to be sought out again by National Geographic and rephotographed for the cover to the April 2002 magazine. Thus Sharbat Gula was found and reexposed as a mature woman, holding the original picture of her virginal self. With such freighted narratives paraded in modest guise, these pictures offer implicit titillation to countless viewers—lifting the localized veil from distance to reveal what is hidden. But they also encode responsibility for that action. Such is the covert potential, the glancing blow, of an unruly image transgressing homegrown stricture in favor of foreign freedoms. In effect, such images feed appetites, demand attention, and instigate change all at once.

Soraya’s celebrity, of course, transpired early in the twentieth century, and her fame was relatively circumscribed; hers was a campaign of collusion and self-fashioning, and photojournalism worked on her behalf in the diplomatic arena. There were perks and costs to her choice for such exposure, all of which redounded to her personally. The Afghan Girl, by contrast, still works hard in a globalized marketplace, irrespective of boundaries, subject to the advertising industry, humanitarian zeal, and digitized communications. Indeed, she is a useful “type,” and she has held many jobs, not all of which benefit Afghan women directly, if at all.54 While her iconic status has undeniably metastasized worldwide with considerable ramifications, that is not my present point. Rather, it is important to reframe Queen Soraya and Sharbat Gula in a different local-to-global narrative, one that concerns an increasingly institutionalized gaze, manifest as the commodification and consumption of “beauty” in the spaces between cultures.55 A few benchmarks in the history of beauty contests tell the tale. American modes of viewing women were incrementally globalized and the corollary terms of spectatorship were increasingly politicized in the transnational arena: Miss America was captivating viewers in the 1920s, and Zohra Daoud was crowned Miss Afghanistan in 1973. There were no subsequent contests inside Afghanistan due to political unrest and unremitting upheaval, but that competitive arena attracted a displaced Afghan living in Los Angeles for its activist potential. In 2003, Vida Samadzai entered the Miss Earth competition as the Miss Afghanistan contestant, generating censure in her troubled homeland but acclaim elsewhere. Indeed, she
Such is contemporary reality: that female beauty is political ammunition and negotiable currency in the world market and rendering female beauty visible is a site and strategy of complicated power in the spaces between local and global. But who wields the real power: the maker of the photograph? the viewer of the photograph? the publisher of the photograph? or, the viewer in the photograph? With regard to pictures of Afghan women, answers must be carefully contextualized. Scholars have argued that in a beauty-obsessed, image-conscious world, women are victims of dictatorial fashion trends and endless scrutiny, even as they are active agents of self-fashioning. Such ambivalence may be amply evident in the United States, but echoes of it may now undergird the choices open to Afghan women as well, albeit in different ways. How, for example, shall we think about the relational aesthetics encoded in a cover photograph of Time magazine for August 16, 2010? The headline reads “What Happens If We Leave Afghanistan?” but the photograph (taken by South African photographer Jodi Bieber and awarded the World Press Photo Award for that year) is a portrait of Bibi Aisha, a woman brutally deprived of her nose by Taliban disciplinarians. So disfigured, Aisha is no longer “beautiful,” but she looks right at us and we gaze at her, stunned. Consider her choice and her celebrity. Like Queen Soraya decades earlier, Aisha opted to go public and reveal herself, a courageous act that went against the grain of her own culture. Admittedly, she was not acting alone. She was prompted by opinionated activists, her sponsor was a high-profile news organization, and it is certainly clear whose photograph and iconic beauty her portrait was referencing as she traded local humiliation for global honor. Her pose and her expression clearly mimic those of the more famous girl from Afghanistan. Like Soraya and Sharbat Gula, Aisha deployed cover-girl charisma, but not as a pretty face deserving acclaim; rather she was a victim demanding witness. 

Not unlike the Taliban destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, this choice was a pointed act of image-making in global visual culture, a radical, transgressive one. Even in retrospect, it is deeply shocking viewing precisely because it violates widely accepted canons of beauty and visual propriety, obliging us to look at something we would otherwise avoid. Indeed, this agonizing...
photograph might be termed iconoclastic. Disseminating Aisha’s disfigurement, unveiled and effectively enshrined, is a provocative, even destabilizing campaign of advocacy, undertaken by a major news organization across political boundaries. But that is the nature of the image wars that embroil us. In this face-off, she is not the only victim; we are all implicated. Welcome to trauma culture.

LOOKING BACK AND GOING FORWARD

The multivalent photographs considered here operate among tangled sightlines, occupy spaces between disparate cultures, and transcend boundaries with diverse consequences. Their impact is not confined to Afghanistan or the United States, nor is the unifying narrative propounded here simply about two discrete centers of cultural gravity. Considered in the moment, individual images may generate divergent and even contradictory meanings among disparate audiences. Over time, those same images may be agents of change, homogenization, and collective understanding. However, the speed of their production and the palimpsest of their afterlives may simply foster a benumbed, chaotic glut. As images cascade endlessly around us, only a few come to anchor broad patterns of representation and prompt informed action; the Afghan Girl is such a one. She is a formidable presence to whom others defer and aspire. She is not powerful because of what she represents, for that is not fixed. Rather, her peculiar force arises from seeing and being seen. She is a ubiquitous but silent witness, surfacing and resurfacing as other images come and go. She looks back relentlessly, and we are respectful when she does, for she is ageless and unflinching. She is the projection of our own desires and needs, and now, like any good icon, she has us in thrall. Held and humbled in her gaze, we face ourselves and all our appetites, looking, buying, judging, gapping, enshrining, even as we continue to point at others, sometimes in judgment and sometimes in recognition. Clearly, much can be learned in the company of Afghan women, but having traced the helix of visuality between Queen Soraya’s diplomacy and Aisha’s challenge, questions linger. Is this story about global culture, global civility, or simply global consumption? Or, should we instead be wondering, do we control our images, or is it actually the other way around?

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NOTES


13. For a general overview of this era, see Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan* (Stanford, 1969).
17. The images from the *Illustrated London News* are reproduced in Edwards, “Photography and Afghan Diplomacy,” figs. 6–10.
18. These images are reproduced in ibid., figs. 8, 11.
24. Frederick Simpich and “Haji Mirza Hussein,” “Every-Day Life in Afghanistan,” *National Geographic*, January 1921, 85–110. It is not without significance that this article was chosen for excerpt in a 2001 compilation of the magazine’s articles in which the writers and photographers were described as “literally the eyes of the Western world.” Don Belt, ed., *The World of Islam* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 14, 50–59.
32. Ibid., 35–42.
36. Information provided on the inside cover of the magazine credits Mohammed Khalid Roashan with the design and editing and describes the publication thus: “A pictorial representation of Afghanistan’s developments in educational, technical industrial and social fields published once every two months by the Publicity Section of the Royal Afghan Government Department of Press and Information.” I have not located subsequent issues to date.
37. Bakhtar Afghan Airlines was formed in 1967 to cover domestic routes, complementing Ariana Airlines. In 1988, the airline reverted to Ariana and the name of Bakhtar disappeared.
39. For a selection of such photographs, see Fazal Sheikh, The Victor Weeps: Afghanistan (Zurich and Berlin, 1998).
43. The Afghan Media Resource Center (AMRC) was founded in 1987 with the assistance of the College of Communication at Boston University. The goal of the collaboration was to train Afghan journalists to cover the war inside their country. At the time, few Western reporters or film crews were willing to risk the hazards and travails of working in Afghanistan. In 1980, world attention was focused on the Soviet invasion, and for several years thereafter, reporters made the trek into Afghanistan to cover guerrilla operations against the Soviets. But by the mid- to late 1980s, reportage on Afghanistan had become increasingly dangerous and therefore scarce. AMRC was established to rectify this situation, providing in-depth coverage on the war and its consequences for the people of Afghanistan. From 1987 until 1992, AMRC dispatched video cameramen, photographers, and print reporters throughout Afghanistan, including to regions in the far north of the country that took a month or longer to reach and had never before been visited by journalists. Videos produced by AMRC were broadcast by the BBC, CNN, and other major media outlets and syndicated internationally for broadcast in more than 120 countries around the world, while its photographs were published by Time and other magazines and newspapers. In the course of the war, AMRC accumulated an archive of approximately 3,000 hours of videotape, 100,000 negatives and slides, and 1,600 hours of audio tape. Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, currently hosts the archive as a website, The Williams Afghan Media Project, http://contentdm.williams.edu/wamp/web/information.htm (accessed October 26, 2014).
44. Obviously notions of objectivity are time- and culture-specific.
45. In the wake of 9/11, I was part of a curatorial team that mounted an exhibition, titled Through Afghan Eyes, at the Asia Society in New York, drawn from AMRC archive. One video clip displayed therein recorded a class under way.
47. This argument is indebted in many ways to Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy (Chicago, 2007).
48. See Holly Edwards, “Cover to Cover,” 82, figs. 5–6.
49. Steve McCurry’s image is reproduced and fully credited on a poster produced by Breshna Cards Company, Kabul. The caption beneath the bold title “Afghanistan” reads as follows: “Tattered clothing and fear-filled eyes of an Afghan reveal war zone truma [sic].”
50. Further details are available in Holly Edwards, “Cover to Cover,” 90–91.
51. The text of the edict is included along with other perspectives on these events in Finbarr Barry Flood, “Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm and the Museum,” Art Bulletin 84, 4 (December 2002): 1–47.
52. There is a vast discourse on idolatry, iconoclasm, and monotheism. One new assemblage of perspectives is Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Yugendaft (eds.), Idol Anxiety (Stanford, 2011). That attitudes to image in the Islamic sphere are complex and variegated is increasingly the focus of scholarship. See Jamal J. Elias, Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam (Cambridge and London, 2012).
54. Most obviously, the image has been used to advertise Sharbat Gula’s institutional sponsor, National Geographic, and she continues to be a flattering attribute of the photographer, but other iterations are too numerous to list. Along the way, she has become a critical benchmark in scholarship. See, e.g., Stephanie L. Hawkins, American Iconographic: National Geographic, Global Culture, and the Visual Imagination (Charlottesville, Va., and London, 2010), 1–7. Most recently, the image graces the cover of National Geographic again, in “The Photo Issue” (October 2013).
56. Peiss, Hope in a Jar, 268.
An Islamic aesthetics, and the modes of visuality to which they appeal, can be characterized by the use of haptic space and abstract line, terms that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari derived from the work of late nineteenth-century art historians including Alois Riegl, Wilhelm Worringer, and Heinrich Wölfflin. Haptic space and abstract line deploy form fluidly in a way that, even when figurative, privileges movement over figure and invites a relatively embodied response from the beholder. These aesthetics markedly counter the more prevalent aesthetics of optical vision that lends itself to depictive representation and a disembodied point of view. The contrast between these two modes, haptic-abstract versus optical, is not between nonfigurative and figurative but lies in different ways of treating figure and line in space: one relatively mobile and abstract, one relatively static and representational.

European artists adopted an aesthetics of haptic space and abstract line from Islamic objects at numerous historical points, including the Italian Renaissance, eighteenth-century Rococo, and late nineteenth-century painting. This essay examines how abstract line and haptic space traveled in ceramics on the Iberian Peninsula and in the western Mediterranean basin. I examine how Andalusian ceramics engage haptic space and abstract line, how Christian clients took up these designs, and how, in Spanish and Italian adaptations, haptic space and abstract line gradually deepened out and thickened up into optical representations. Again, this is not a shift from nonfigurative to figurative but a shift in the way figure, line, and space are deployed. These changes occur not slowly but in cascades, in negotiations between the ceramists and their markets in the course of several centuries of shifting political and economic conditions on the Iberian Peninsula.

In addition to the travels of forms, this essay deals with the travels of concepts: in this case, between art history and cinema studies. The conference “Gazing Otherwise” and this resulting volume have expanded on a growing body of scholarship of Islamic art that uses a concept very well developed in my home discipline of cinema studies: gaze theory. In turn, I borrowed into cinema studies a concept from art history, namely Alois Riegl’s concept of the haptic image (as adapted by Deleuze and Guattari). In both cases, the concept in question had been thoroughly worked over and finally more or less abandoned in its discipline of origin before it was transformed and taken up in another discipline. Thus we have a case of what Mieke Bal calls “traveling concepts.”

TRAVELING THEORY: CONCEPTS OF VISUALITY BETWEEN ART HISTORY AND CINEMA STUDIES

Bal argues that a concept is a useful third partner in the dialogue between a critic and an object “when the critic has no disciplinary tradition to fall back on and the object no canonical or historical status.” Yet she cautions that a concept is useful only to the degree that it illuminates an object of study on the object’s own terms. Implied an impossible hermeneutic, this caution suggests we need to have a hunch of what our object of study is trying to tell us—what we might learn from it—in order to select the appropriate concept.

When concepts travel between disciplines, Bal writes, “their meaning, reach, and operational value differ.
These processes of differing need to be assessed before and after each ‘trip.’ A concept’s itinerary enriches it. The pressing question is, when a concept ceases to be useful in one discipline, need that undermine its relevance when it travels to another? Following Isabelle Stengers, Bal points out that the role of concepts in the sciences is not to represent the facts truthfully but to organize phenomena in a relevant manner that allows observations of the phenomena to be interpreted (concepts’ de facto role) and to do so in a way the field recognizes as adequate (concepts’ de jure role). In both cases concepts are not disinterested but act to focus interest. Concepts function similarly in the humanities: they can innovatively reorganize a field of study focused around certain objects in response to certain interests. Let us apply these ideas in the context of the subject of this volume and consider the reasons why theories that fell out of use in one field made their reappearance in another.

What is called "gaze theory" developed from a selective reading of particular concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Central among these, for the purposes of image studies, was Jacques Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage. The young child, who feels uncoordinated and disunified, identifies with its flat, unified image in the mirror with a flutter of jubilation. The mirror stage, Lacan wrote, has an orthopedic effect; it "situates the agency of the ego in a fictional direction." This concept in turn relied on Lacan’s refinement of Sigmund Freud’s conclusion that the ego itself is based on an illusion, a fundamental lack. According to Lacan, we identify with, or are constituted by, a gaze upon us from outside, like the eye of God. Like the jubilant misrecognition that occurs in the mirror stage, this identification with an outside power is an attempt to cover our own powerlessness.

Cinema studies quickly adopted some of these concepts in order to characterize the cinema as a set of figurative representations that give rise to (largely subconscious) psychic responses. Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry, and others, writing in French in the 1960s, described cinema as a machine that mimics the psychological apparatus. In this model, cinema reproduces deeply desired psychic pleasures. The combination of Lacanian psychoanalysis and apparatus theory gave film scholars in the 1970s powerful tools to argue that certain spectators could be fooled into the pleasurable belief that they possessed the gaze (which, by definition, can belong to no one). The cinematic apparatus—that is, the complex of camera, projector, and point of view—allowed spectators to align themselves not only with the look of characters (secondary identification) but also with the unattributed, God’s-eye view of the camera itself (primary identification). However, according to Lacanian psychoanalytic film theory, only male spectators could enjoy this fiction. Male spectators could enjoy the fiction that they were not, in fact, castrated—as female spectators knew themselves to be—and could identify (mistakenly) with the capacity for desire that the gaze alone possesses. Yet according to apparatus theory, the spectator is interpellated willy-nilly by the ideology of the film—an ideology assumed to be regressive, which indeed often is the case of Hollywood film. The spectator thus privileged becomes the dupe of ideology. Another important characterization of the fictional gaze of mastery is that it is necessarily disembodied.

Yet let us not forget that individual looks are "propped" on the gaze.

Part of the difficulty of Lacanian psychoanalytic film theory, of course, lay in the fact that you had to embrace the entire ball of wax in order to deploy it. If you did not believe that human subjects lose their individual powers upon the entry into language, at which time they became “castrated”; that this lack was necessarily gendered because patriarchy functioned as the very most fundamental ground of culture; that the ego is a fiction created to shelter the Imaginary from both the Symbolic and the Real; and, again, that that fiction is sold to men alone—then you could not deploy the valuable currency of film theory. Even the simplest concept, such as identification, relied on this entire theoretical edifice. Another reason film scholars started to turn away from Lacanian psychoanalysis is that it is so damnably difficult and complex.

But in the 1970s and 1980s psychoanalytic film theory was the only game in town in my home field of cinema studies. This meant, of course, that people made mistakes in applying it. The most notorious mistake was to forget that the apparent power some spectators gain from primary identification was a fiction. Hence the
term “male gaze” was born. The term was identified with Laura Mulvey’s landmark article of 1975, even though Mulvey herself clearly stated that she wished to destroy the source of male pleasure that lay in occupying that fictional position. People started to confuse the individual look with the inaccessible gaze and to think that men actually possess the gaze. This development constituted a film-theoretical disaster, as students started writing about films that were bad because they “gave” men the gaze, or good because they “gave” the gaze to women or other people excluded from power, when strictly speaking, these were looks (or glances), not gazes.

Uneasiness began to rumble in the discipline in the late 1980s. Scholars became uncomfortable with the ideological rigidity of gaze theory; plenty of male scholars complained that they preferred to have an individual look, even if it meant relinquishing the fictional power of the gaze. The concept of an oppositional look arose, to account for individual looks that did not align ideologically with the gaze. Queer theory grappled in a most refined way with psychoanalytic film theory before abandoning it altogether: Douglas Crimp’s resignation from the editorial board of October in 1990 turned on this rift. At the same time, film historians and scholars of popular culture began to pay attention to actual audiences rather than to the refined psychoanalytic “spectator.” Audiences vary greatly. Scholars of African American moviegoing, Indian audiences, queer film festivals, and all kinds of nonmainstream cinematic experiences discovered a proliferation of looks, each with its own history, and nary a gaze. Also at this time, some critiques of Lacanian psychoanalysis began to ask, what is so wrong with not having a coherent ego? Psychoanalytic feminism, existential phenomenology, and the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari all pursued this direction fruitfully. So gaze theory dwindled in my home field of cinema studies, to be replaced by a diversity of other approaches.

Yet some aspects of gaze theory remain generally relevant and useful. In cinema studies, gaze theory has retained explanatory power—if one is willing to accept its psychoanalytic premises—for certain objects of study. Hollywood movies, web browsers, and social-media sites, for example, work skillfully to give viewers the illusion that they are sovereign subjects in a way that “sutures” them ideologically, or simply makes them willing consumers.

So how might the concept of the gaze usefully inform studies of Islamic art? Moreover, how might its itinerary through one field, cinema studies, and visual culture studies more broadly, heighten its relevance to studies of Islamic art? Theories of the gaze that attribute it to an outside power, rather than to the viewer, do seem to help think about certain aspects of Islamic art and architecture. Combined with Michel Foucault’s concept of panopticism, gaze theory does convincingly account for the way people are constituted as objects of the gaze, not subjects. Spectacular art and architecture render the viewer a fragmentary and embodied object of a Subject who is elsewhere. They may attribute a gaze of mastery to the state or the ruler. And, of course, religious art that points to a deity beyond comprehension, whose gaze upon mortals constitutes or annihilates them, and religious architecture that seeks to seduce and terrify by reminding worshippers of their utter dependency on God—these bring the Lacanian theory of the gaze back to its cult origins. Thus gaze theory can shed light on the power relations of looking in religious, courtly, and state architecture in the Muslim world. Some of these ideas are examined in other contributions to this volume. In addition, a theory of the gaze could account for Islamic practices of protecting things from vision: if to be visible is to be subject (whether in fact or fictitiously) to the power of the beholder, then to be hidden deflects the power of the gaze.

In short, although gaze theory became less useful in cinema studies, the lessons learned in that field may have shaped it in a way that makes it relevant to other fields. Furthermore, new approaches to gaze theory untied by cinema studies may be developed in other fields, including the study of Islamic art.

TRAVELING THEORY: FROM ART HISTORY TO CINEMA STUDIES

Now let us consider the concepts traveling in the other direction. At the founding of art history as a systematic discipline in the late nineteenth century, scholars were
very much influenced by the new psychology of perception and wanted to suggest that art-historical periods could be characterized by the ways they perceptually evoked space. Robert Vischer, Wilhelm Worringer, and others proposed theories of empathy whereby a perceiver experiences an embodied similarity to the forms she or he perceives. Adolf Hildebrand distinguished the fashion in which distant and near vision apprehend space as though touching it rather than the distant and space that invites a close look, the eyes moving over the surface as though touching it rather than the distant and disembodied look solicited by optical space. Similarly, adapting Worringer, Deleuze and Guattari called a line that is not tamed into a contour an abstract line, or “nomad line.” Unconstrained by the need to depict a form, the abstract line travels freely, “precisely because it has a multiple orientation and passes between points, figures, and contours: it is positively motivated by the smooth space it draws, not by any striation it might perform to ward off anxiety and subordinate the smooth.”

Haptic space and abstract line became subsets of Deleuze and Guattari’s category of smooth space, a space that is contingent, close-up, short-term, and inhabited intensively, free of an immobile outside point of reference. They opposed it to striated space, which is constituted extensively in reference to fixed coordinates: striated space is thus the space of representation. Haptic space and abstract line established a kind of visuality that corresponded to the open, nonunified, and non-mastering subject Deleuze and Guattari privileged.

The theory traveled again when the 1990s film theorists were looking for ways to argue that vision need not occupy the distance and mastery ascribed to it by the Lacanian-influenced “gaze theory.” The concept of haptic space, both Rieg's original and Deleuze and Guattari’s adaptation, contributed to this revision. Noël Burch and Antonia Lant adapted Rieg to describe the haptic look of shallow relief in early and experimental cinema. I argued that haptic images in cinema close the distance between image and viewer and encourage an embodied and multisensory relationship to the image. I developed a theory of cinematic spectatorship in which the viewer, rather than seeking a distant mastery over the thing viewed, merges with it, pressing too close to the screen to even notice the film’s narrative and ideological meanings. The theory of haptic visuality was welcomed with interest in cinema studies and traveled to other fields as well. Rieg's concept, adapted by Deleuze and Guattari and imported to cinema, innovatively reorganized cinema studies and gave us a fresh set of perspectives on our objects. By this time, in fact, the terms have been taken up with such enthusiasm in cinema studies that new caveats are in order to prevent a new orthodoxy from settling in to the field. For example, Grant Kester offers a pointed critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s (as well as other poststructuralists’) radical
bias against representation, pointing out that representation is necessary for practical political engagement.\textsuperscript{22}

In Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art (2010) I argued further that haptic space and abstract line characterize many works of Islamic art and that Islamic art provides one of the sources whereby these forms came to inspire Western art.\textsuperscript{23} My theorizing drew on formalism and perceptual psychology, approaches from the beginnings of art history. To apply them to Islamic art hearkens back to the now-questionable regional and ethnic formalisms that characterize the work of Worringer, Riegl, and their colleagues. So for me to introduce these concepts to Islamic art is to bring a seemingly outmoded—though, I would argue, alluringly reinvented—set of art-historical concepts to an art-historical culture that has long since abandoned them. Furthermore, it is a speculative, theoretical approach at odds with the empirical, social art history currently favored by most historians of Islamic art.

These gloomy portents in mind, let me suggest in the rest of this essay that haptic space and abstract line might nonetheless be useful concepts with which to approach Islamic art.

HAPTIC SPACE AND ABSTRACT LINE IN ISLAMIC ART

Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari turned Riegl’s value system upside down. While Riegl is rare in his attention to craft and ornament, he nonetheless maintained, in Problems of Style (1893) that art with narrative content is superior to ornament. The depiction of illusionistic space is necessary for representation, that is, to promote a cognitive response to form that will give rise to meaning. Thus he argued that artworks need to have a proper balance of “argument” and “ornament”—which might be as simple a pairing as a pictured scene, the argument, and its frame, the ornament.\textsuperscript{24} Ornament lacks the figure-ground distinctions necessary for representation. As Margaret Olin notes, Riegl held that in Islamic art and other abstracted motifs, “to rid the motif of its significance is to veil the relation between pattern and ground.”\textsuperscript{25} Yet Riegl maintained an interest in visually ambiguous patterns, such as counterchange, in which alternating figures serve as the ground for the figures that border them. Olin notes that Riegl wrote an 1892 article on counterchange patterns in sixteenth-century Spanish appliquée.\textsuperscript{26} Counterchange patterns, such as the reciprocal trefoil in a border, are a common motif in Islamic art, as Ernst Gombrich notes: “The supreme masters of counterchange were no doubt the Islamic designers who modified their grid patterns till figure and void corresponded in the most surprising way.”\textsuperscript{27} But in Riegl’s thinking, a pattern that confounds figure-ground relations cannot produce a meaningful representation.

This privileging of discrete form, and its service to representation, is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari wanted to overturn. They argued that ideology penetrates to the most fundamental levels of perception, so that the recognition of form as signifying something is already vulnerable to ideology and control. Hence Deleuze and Guattari valued the way haptic space and abstract line refuse to be subordinated to meaning by delineating forms; they refuse to represent. Instead, they elicit perceptual and rhythmic embodied responses that occur prior to or in excess of meaning, for these are moments of freedom.\textsuperscript{28}

Abstract line engenders haptic space. In the beveled pattern of ninth-century Samarra and other kinds of overall ornament, line multiplies, branches, and doubles back on itself until it takes on an additional dimension, fractal style, suggesting the possibility of infinite growth. And when space has multiple access points, vision has a great deal of choice, as Gülru Necipoğlu has argued;\textsuperscript{29} the eye itself draws abstract lines.

I suggest that these qualities of abstract line and haptic space solicit a tactile gaze. This understanding corresponds with the extromission theory of vision, circulating in the intellectual world of Islam during the formative period of Islamic nonfigurative aesthetics, wherein the eye sends out rays that touch the object of vision. But we can also consider that abstract line and haptic space align well with the later optics of Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen, d. ca. 1040), in which the intromission theory of vision combined with the nonfocusing lens to place a great deal of visual freedom and responsibility with the viewer. Nonfigurative form, seen in terms of the faculties of judgment and imagination posited by Ibn al-Haytham, gives rise to a visuality in which
form and meaning are not imposed on the beholder but, rather, discovered and invented by the beholder in subjective acts of looking. Ibn al-Haytham’s theories do not seem to have had much influence in the Muslim world in the two centuries after his death, not until the scholar of optics Kamal al-din Abú’l-Hasan al-Farisi (d. ca. 1320) rediscovered them. However, as Jamal J. Elias argues, Ibn al-Haytham’s scientific optics broadly accord with understandings of perception among theologians, jurists, Sufi metaphysicians, and poets during this time and attest to a general scholarly interest in perception. This argument suggests that Ibn al-Haytham’s conception of an embodied and contemplative beholder was “in the air” at the time he made his experiments, as is often the case with scientific discoveries.

In these ways the haptic space and abstract line of Islamic art tend to undo representation and appeal to an embodied perception. Phenomenology supports this understanding in that it shifts the focus away from meaning and toward sensory experience. A phenomenological approach allows a beholder of our time to come up with an embodied approximation of how historical Islamic artworks may have appealed to their contemporary beholders. Valérie Gonzalez developed such a phenomenological approach to Islamic art in Beauty and Islam (2001). In her analysis of the Hall of Comares at the Alhambra, she demonstrates that an existential, embodied, and performative analysis of Islamic architecture suggests what a building may have meant to its contemporary visitors, in a way that iconic analysis cannot. Like Gonzalez, I offer embodied analyses of Islamic artworks in order to try to reconstruct others’ experience of them, mindful (as existential phenomenology demands) that no single embodied response is normative.

The concepts of haptic space and abstract line avoid the figurative prejudice of art-historical discourse, typified in the term “horror vacui” coined in 1979 by Richard Ettinghausen to characterize the Islamic manner of diminishing the difference between figure and ground. Ettinghausen’s term has fallen out of use, perhaps because scholars recognized its ethnocentric tone, but not before Ernst Gombrich thoughtfully reversed it to “amor infinity.” These designs indicate no horror of anything but rather a creative interest in exploring space intensively, for example by multiplying abstract lines to engender a haptic space.

HAPTIC SPACE AND ABSTRACT LINE IN ANDALUSIAN CERAMICS TO THE NASRID SULTANATE

Finally we are prepared to take up the travels of haptic space and abstract line within the aesthetics of Andalusian ceramics during the rise of Christian powers and the gradual repression and final expulsion of Muslims.

First let me contextualize the migration of ceramics and ceramists among the eastern Muslim world, the Mediterranean basin, and al-Andalus. A ninth-century innovation by Abbasid ceramists, tin and lead glazes, allowed potters to make shiny, opaque white surfaces on which ornament could play. (The opaque-glaze technique would come to be called maiolica, an Italian word based on either the production center of Málaga or the shipping port of Mallorca.) Also in the ninth century, potters invented metal-oxide glazes that, when burnished, resembled gold. Scholars cannot determine with certitude whether the lusterware technique was first developed in Iraq, Iran, or Egypt, but they agree that it traveled widely. In the itinerary that Anja Heidenreich has pieced together, beginning in the mid-tenth century Eastern potters emigrated to wealthier countries, mostly westward to North Africa, bringing the technique with them. Traffic in North African ceramics increased during the Fatimid caliphate (909–1171): its dramatically figurative ceramics were imported through and to Andalusian ports. In the eleventh century, North African ceramists emigrated or were invited to centers in al-Andalus; Heidenreich recounts that Abu’l-Walid b. Jnah, a doctor from Córdoba, wrote that in the eleventh century immigrant potters arrived from the East and taught the local artisans new techniques. There is evidence of lusterware production during the eleventh and twelfth centuries and of the export of Andalusian lusterware from these periods to Fustat and as far as Prague, as well as the import of Fatimid lusterware. Later, ceramists emigrated from Kashan and Ray in Persia after the Mongol invasion in 1260.
Andalusian cultural commerce with North Africa multiplied greatly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the rule of the Almoravids and Almohads (1130–1269), as the rulers and their entourages traveled between their courts in al-Andalus and Marrakesh. Luxury lusterware produced during the Nasrid caliphate (1230–1492) was largely for export, not only to European markets but also to North Africa. Adriana Fábregas García demonstrates that, from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, a Granadan merchant fleet operated in the western Mediterranean and a Maghribi fleet followed the same route as Genoese, Venetian, and Catalanian-Aragonian trade ships, carrying ceramics as well as sugar, silk, and other commodities. Granadan merchants sold Andalusian ceramics in Cairo, Fez, and Tunis.

However, it was not until the Nasrids that the lusterware industry was thoroughly established, centered in Málaga. Lusterware was costly to produce, given the expense of metallic oxides and the fuel needed for multiple firings (the metallic glaze is applied before the third firing), and it had a high failure rate; thus it needed heavy capitalization, which the Nasrid treasury provided. In addition to the smaller dishes that this article discusses, Granadan ceramists produced massive and ambitious works in lusterware, including the luster tiles for the Alhambra and the Alhambra vases. Ibn Battuta (d. 1368–39) famously attested in 1350, “At Málaga is made the wonderful gilded pottery that is exported to the remotest countries.” Besides the North African destinations mentioned above, these export markets included the United Kingdom, France, and Italy. Mariam Rosser-Owen notes that Eleanor of Castile received a gift of what was probably Málaga lusterware in 1289 and that, according to the Nasrid vizier Ibn al-Khatib, “all countries clamor for it, even the city of Tabriz.” This boast suggests that Nasrid lusterware was as good as the luster ceramics made where the technique was first developed; Anthony Ray notes that later Valencian lusterware might have inspired Safavid potters to revive the luster technique.

Lusterware is an ideal medium to play with haptic effects, as its metallic shimmer confounds vision, making it difficult to distinguish patterns or the shape of a figure in a single glance. A viewer needs to physically move, or (if lucky enough to be able to hold it) to turn the dish in his hands, in order to get a sense of what he is looking at. Thus the shimmer of lusterware demands a more embodied and temporal engagement. This effect is sometimes amplified by *sgraffito* patterns, scratched into the wet luster glaze in order to reveal the light glaze beneath. *Sgraffito* embeds a pattern in the shimmering luster, sometimes confounding the clarity of the image further and inviting the beholder to move in order to get a sense of the motif. Sometimes, however, *sgraffito* has the opposite effect, breaking up the shimmer of the luster and making it easier to take in at a single glance.

It is clear that for several centuries Christians in the region appreciated the aesthetics of Islamic ceramics. Spanish Christians received Islamic ideas and images in many ways, from assimilation to rejection, and sometimes both at once. Jerri Lynn D. Dodds and María Rosa Menocal have written extensively about this ambivalent reception of Islamic culture on the Iberian Peninsula. Dodds, Menocal, and Abigale Krasner Balbale argue that a common culture developed from the interactions among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Some of the forms of this shared culture persisted in sixteenth-century mudéjar (that is, Arabized Christian) practices even after the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain, as we will see in the case of some seventeenth-century ceramics. An emphasis on lived experience rather than ideology also informs Francisco Prado-Vilar’s concept of the Gothic anamorphic gaze that characterized the intercultural relations of thirteenth-century Castile, which he argues was “informed by experience and direct knowledge of culture and religious diversity, rather than by dogma and ingrained stereotypes of alterity.” An anamorphic approach would be open to ideas and images from another religious culture yet interpret them in terms of its own: it would be seduced by another culture’s images and repress that seduction in order to fit those images into a more familiar context.

My focus in what follows is on the way the shape of the figure at the center of a dish and its interaction with the background motifs give rise to haptic space. The concave surface, often flattened in the center, of plates and bowls offers interesting creative challenges for ornament. The figure in a circular composition has plenty of precedents in Sasanian and Byzantine ceramics and metalwork, as well as in Late Roman and Coptic textiles,
and this heritage is evident in both Syrian and Andalusi-Umayyad art. However, ceramists in the Muslim world from the Abbasid period on devised ways of filling the field with a human or animal figurative motif that depart from Syrian Umayyad representational conventions. In the new compositions, humans were depicted in postures that distributed their figure within the circular field, holding musical instruments, weapons, wine cups, or other props in ways that further filled the field.

Almoravid and Almohad caliphates. (It is notable that the Almohads, despite their doctrinal austerity, had no objection to human figurative decoration in textiles, caskets, and ceramics.) For example, a bowl from the second half of the tenth century, that is, the Taifa period, at the Museo Nacional de Cerámica Gonzáles Martí in Valencia, features a plump prancing gazelle with a slim bough in its mouth (fig. 2). The elegant creature’s bending legs differentiate the space of the lower part of the dish, its long ears the upper part, while the bough branches into two flowers on slim stems that curve about its body. The contour delimiting the creature gains freedom at the expense of naturalism, so that the liveliness of the line itself imparts life to the gazelle. The ground is unadorned.

Animal figures in a circular composition are often abstracted further by bending their limbs, ears, antlers, and tails to minimize empty ground, creating a sense of lively movement. The animal combat motif, in which two fighting animals circle each other in a closely reciprocal relationship, provides another satisfying way to distribute figures in the field. Willy Hartner and Richard Ettinghausen demonstrate that the ancient motif of a lion attacking a bull occurs in Sasanid art and was taken up in Umayyad art, as in a mosaic on the walls of the Khirbat al-Mafjar Palace depicting a lion attacking a gazelle. The motif occurs in Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, and Fatimid ceramics of the twelfth century.

Techniques abstracting figures to distribute them in a circle became newly emphasized in Andalusian ceramics through exchanges with Egyptian and Maghribi artists during the Taifa period and especially the

Fig. 1. Fragmentary earthenware bowl, painted in reddish-brown luster over an opaque, white ground. Egypt, eleventh century–first half of twelfth century. David Collection, Copenhagen, inv. no. 4/1992. (Photo: Pernille Klemp, courtesy of David Collection)
Matteo, a seafaring scene occupies the entire decorative field. The sails and mast of the round-bottomed sailing ship curve to fit the circular dish, while below it a longboat with oarsmen fills the bottom part of the frame. Guillermo Rosselló Bordoy states that it is a typically Majorcan eleventh-century work, whose detail makes it possible to identify the ship as a sophisticated vessel from the Balearic islands. Since these islands were under Islamic control until 1229, this identification suggests the dish portrays a Muslim Andalusian merchant ship.

My next examples are not of human or animal figures but of ships. Andalusian potters treated ships as they did creatures, taking advantage of their curves and projections to creatively fill the circular space. On a bowl from the Taifa period, now at the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa, a seafaring scene occupies the entire decorative field. The sails and mast of the round-bottomed sailing ship curve to fit the circular dish, while below it a longboat with oarsmen fills the bottom part of the frame. Guillermo Rosselló Bordoy states that it is a typically Majorcan eleventh-century work, whose detail makes it possible to identify the ship as a sophisticated vessel from the Balearic Islands. Since these islands were under Islamic control until 1229, this identification suggests the dish portrays a Muslim Andalusian merchant ship.

On the splendid thirteenth-century Nasrid bowl at the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 3), the curving prow and sails, flags, and mast of the ship fit elegantly into the roundness of the bowl and manage to depict the figure without distortion on the steep-sided bowl when you look at it straight on. Hair-like lines incised in the luster-brown sails and hull of the ship add realistic detail and also emphasize the curves of the dish, especially in the prow and sail that curve to the left and invite the
eyes to move clockwise.58 Four big fish, the leftmost leaping to the left and the others leaping rightward, fill the space under the massive curving ship while also directing the look in both directions around the bowl. Rounded lozenges holding interlace motifs buffer the bowl’s remaining edges and gently push the gaze back toward the middle. Between these forms, the painter has filled the ground with fine curls and flowers, so that while sgraffito lightens the dark luster figures, the background pattern diminishes the lightness of the ground, relieving the difference between figure and ground. The overall effect is of an equilibrated, abstract composition in a circle, which sends a beholder’s gaze in spiraling paths from the figure in the center to the edges and back, springing from dark to light forms; when one looks closer at any part of the dish, its interior curving patterns invite the look to focus in on their detail and then send it spiraling back out. This work may have been commissioned by a Portuguese maritime merchant, as the ship bears the Portuguese royal arms.59

A Nasrid dish from the late fourteenth century, painted with dark brown luster and showing St. George slaying the dragon, demonstrates that ceramists were capable of incorporating Christian Gothic figures into a circular composition that is well balanced and diminishes the difference between figure and ground. The dragon’s body curls around half the rim of the dish, framing St. George’s horse, its head rising at the left side of the dish, while the horseman bends toward the creature, his spear angling from the top of the rim. At the right of the dish a soldier holding a curved shield adds both narrative and compositional support. Additional spaces are filled by plants with large flowers and leaves. A stipple of dots minimizes the whiteness of the remaining background, while the hair, clothing, and armor of the men, the horse’s mane, spots, and saddle, and the dragon’s scales are indicated with sgraffito.60

VALENCIA: FROM 1308 TO THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY: HAPTIC SPACE AND ABSTRACT LINE NEGOTIATE WITH OPTICAL IMAGES

In the early thirteenth century, when all of Muslim Spain except the Kingdom of Granada had fallen to Christian rule, craft maintained a fair degree of continuity despite the political upheaval. Castilian ceramists had little technical knowledge because their region habitually imported pottery from Muslim manufacturers, so they continued to rely on Muslim ceramists.61 Muslim craftspeople living in Christian Spain continued to be valued for their skill, but for the most part they had little power or recourse. The decree by Alfonso X (r. 1252–84) in 1261 that the former Great Mosque of Córdoba (by then the Church of Santa Maria) be restored indicates a respect for this Islamic building the decree called “noble.” However, as Heather Ecker points out, the fact that Alfonso commanded all Muslim craftsmen to devote two days a year to working on it, threatened with imprisonment if they did not comply, in labor that continued for forty years, shows that the valued Muslim craftsmen could be treated as indentured laborers.62

In Valencia, unlike the rest of the peninsula, Muslims remained the majority after the 1258 conquest, and they appear to have constituted the majority of the population in the fifteenth century. Moreover, Muslims in Valencia continued to speak Arabic, unlike their fellow Moriscos (Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity) elsewhere.63 Muslims in Valencia lived separately and had their own legal bodies. And, since Manises in Valencia is a port, they were in communication by sea with other Muslim communities.64 So we can imagine that for some time the Muslims of Valencia lived autonomously and were under little pressure to adapt to Christian customs. But as L. P. Harvey shows, Muslims in Valencia from the thirteenth century on suffered from vacillating policies of the Crown of Aragon: they were alternately pressured and prohibited to emigrate, as their labor was required but their religion was despised.65

Muslim craftsmen were already producing lusterware in Valencia in the thirteenth century before James I (r. 1213–76) conquered the city. James promised Patera and Manises to the nobleman Artal de Luna, who in 1304 sold them to Pedro Boil, a man intent on making a fortune from the pottery trade.66 Upon negotiating peace after the siege of Almería in 1308–9 that led to the end of the first Nasrid dynasty, Boil retained the right to sell Nasrid lusterware. It may be his son Felipe who, after losing his father’s lucrative prerogative, encouraged
Muslim potters from Málaga to settle in Valencia and produce “Málaga-style ware”; the first reference to Valencian lusterware occurred in 1325. At the same time there was an exodus of Muslim craftsmen from Murcia, some of whom emigrated to Valencia. Boil arranged to promote the mudéjar potters’ wares for export, keeping 10 percent of the profits. Potters in Paterna, across the river from Manises, made similar but less sophisticated wares. Organized trade passed from Manises, port of Valencia, to Pisa, port of Florence, through the transshipment point of Majorca. The Boil lusterware empire soon eclipsed that of the Nasrids for two reasons: Manises potters obtained a high-quality gold-colored luster that surpassed its Granadan counterpart; the Boil enterprise focused on quantity while Nasrid ceramists focused on quality, producing a small number of fine objects, including the Alhambra vases, for royal consumption. This trade advantage evidently brought massive profits to the Boil family: in 1372 Felipe Boil petitioned the king for a monopoly on Manises ware; the king’s response is not known. After 1450 some Old Christians joined the Muslim potters. The Boil enterprise follows the general pattern of Christian lordship over the Muslim inhabitants of Valencia, in which Muslims formed the majority of agricultural workers on Christian-colonized land.

Valencian ceramics from this period of almost two centuries vary widely in design and style, although initially they were so similar to Málaga ware that early works can be distinguished only by the different colors of the clay underbody. Initially many decorative elements had precedents in Nasrid lusterware from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but the styles of lusterware from the two regions (Andalusia and Valencia) begin to diverge in the second half of fourteenth century as Marinid (1269–1465) potters brought new styles to Granada while Valencian potters developed their own repertoire. Let us keep in mind that the artisans were under pressure to produce in volume for Boil’s business. Skill was necessary to paint the dishes quickly while maintaining their quality. Figures in circular compositions are often depicted with a few bold marks shaping the figure of a hare, deer, bird, or other creature, still balancing the suggestion of a figure with a sense of abstract design. It seems that initially figures were on the front of the dish only, but later ceramists began to paint them on the back of the dish as well. For example, on the back of a luster-painted deep dish, probably made in Manises (1435–65), in the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a deer stands alertly, legs stick-straight but flanks and long neck curving, antlers streaming back from its head like long flowing locks (fig. 4). Three large light spots break up the dark form of the deer’s body. A few remarkably lively vines make large, loose spirals around the creature, terminating in graceful brushy flowers almost the size of its head. The effect again, I would argue, is less a figurative representation than a rhythmic composition.

New aesthetics entered as Valencian potters produced works for the changing demands of European customers, sometimes on commission from Spanish, French, and Italian royalty and nobility. In fifteenth-century ceramics it is evident that Manises potters, while continuing to develop new styles from the Islamic repertoire, increasingly produced works whose motifs and styles would appeal to a European, Christian clientele. They incorporated Latin text and Gothic motifs of knights, ladies, and monks. New background motifs occur that sometimes interact with the figure so as to emphasize the figure-ground distinction. In some dishes Islamic motifs fill the space around Gothic lettering spelling “Ave Maria,” biblical quotations, and the Christian monogram IHS (fig. 5). Coats of arms dominate the center of dishes commissioned by noble families (fig. 6); many examples depict the Florentine lion rampant. Shields and monograms are symbols that can be easily read rather than experienced as plastic forms.

Interestingly, Valencian lusterware, with its more European style, was exported not only to European customers but also (like the earlier Granadan ceramics) across the Islamic Maghrib and to Egypt, succeeding the Nasrid export market. Fábregas García remarks that even in the Islamic markets—where we might assume a ready acceptance of Nashir stylistic models as the result of a related decorative culture—we find the same phenomenon that is common in the European markets: that is, the substitution from the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century of Granadan lustreware by the new blue and lustre products of Valencia. These Valencian products not only show signs of a considerable increase in the volume of consumption, but also of a typological and, above all, stylistic
development, introducing decorative motifs from the Latin and Western European tradition, which are—perhaps curiously—also accepted into the Islamic markets.78

The explanation she posits is that Italian merchants dominated the trade and thus were able to dictate the nature of the exports.79 North African Muslim customers perhaps did not have much influence on the looks of Valencian lusterware and had to accept works designed with a Christian clientele in mind.

Dishes with heraldic motifs are especially interesting to examine, for often the obverse of the dish features bold lions, eagles, bulls, and other animals, "masterpieces of ceramic decoration in their own right"80 in compositions that maintain relations of haptic space and abstract line that are constrained on the front of the dish. Rosser-Owen writes that these animal figures are Gothic motifs, such as the griffin,81 but some are also common in the Islamic repertoire. Several pieces from Manises dated to 1450–75 with a heraldic shield on the front of the dish show a large animal on the back that fills the space, as in traditional Islamic designs. For

Fig. 4. Back of a luster-painted tin-glazed deep dish. Manises, 1435–65. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1956, accession no. 56.171.71. (Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Fig. 5. Luster-painted tin-glazed bowl. Manises, 1430–70. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Salting Bequest, museum no. C.2046-1910. (Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum)

example, a dish circa 1435–60 features a heraldic shield bearing a thistle plant in which five blossoms spring on slender vines with large, pea-like flowers fill the remaining space, one vine-scroll inhabiting each of the recesses left by the bird’s appendages, with smaller leaves occupying the spaces between its tail feathers, so that the overall effect is a rhythmic composition of color with little void. The composition invites the eye to follow the large swoops of the wings, be caught in a loose ringlet of vine, spring on to the bird’s curved head, and so move around the dish in a looping alternation between figure

Fig. 7. Luster-painted tin-glazed dish with arms of Cardona family. Manises, ca. 1435–60. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, museum no. 14-1907. (Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum)

Christian contexts but unbound by a framing shield (fig. 8). The bird spreads its wings, which fill the sides of the dish; its splayed legs and claws reach to the edge of the bottom third of the dish, and its broad tail fills the bottom. Each feather and leg is painted with one broad stroke, as are the head, curving beak, and darting tongue. Slender vines with large, pea-like flowers fill the remaining space, one vine-scroll inhabiting each of the recesses left by the bird’s appendages, with smaller leaves occupying the spaces between its tail feathers, so that the overall effect is a rhythmic composition of color with little void. The composition invites the eye to follow the large swoops of the wings, be caught in a loose ringlet of vine, spring on to the bird’s curved head, and so move around the dish in a looping alternation between figure
and “ground” (although as this description suggests, the ground is once again not subordinated to the figure but equally visually engaging). In this looping mobility of vision, a beholder who turns the dish over experiences a somewhat more embodied visuality, which perhaps extends to feeling the curving movements in her head and neck as her eyes make the circuit of the dish.

It is tempting to interpret a metaphor in these potters’ decision to depict the requested motif on the front of the dish and to indulge in more free and expressive—even aggressive—abstract figuration on the back. Did the painters obey their patrons’ wish to depict a constrained heraldic animal on the front of the dish, and on the back paint it in a way that appealed more to their sense of plastic dynamism? Was there a more subversive intention, given the fierce appearance of some of the creatures? Rosser-Owen points out that some of the dishes have holes for hanging on the wall, and they might have hung with the reverse facing out. So perhaps their owners prized the animal figure. On the other hand, Ecker suggests the animals painted on the back signified the potter, the workshop, or the batch, indicating they meant more to the maker than they would to the owner. Or were the painters simply demonstrating their ease with simultaneous modes of image-making, one more legible, one more painterly?

Also in the fifteenth century, new background motifs appeared that resemble the flora of Gothic miniatures: bryony, parsley, thistle flowers, and roses, as well as “disk flowers,” a circle surrounded by disk-shaped petals. These floral motifs have a neutral quality, less obviously Islamic than the abstracted vegetal motifs and interlace, while initially filling the same function as a background motif. Italian as well as Spanish clients

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Fig. 8. Back of dish in figure 7.
figure-ground distinctions and generate a visual rhythm begin to give way to distinct figures on a field. As a result, many later Manises ceramics appeal less to an embodied, temporal response and more to a narrative or cognitive understanding.

We can see the process of becoming figurative in a plate from Manises (ca. 1450) in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (fig. 10). In a motif that suggests love’s archer, a smiling lady in stylish European dress has just drawn her bow, wounding a smaller male figure, also smiling, who clutches at the arrow through his neck. The figures, new to the repertory of figurative composition within a circle, sit rather awkwardly in the field of bryony flowers. The lady’s skirts billow a bit to fill one edge of the circle, but the rest of her figure and the male figure float awkwardly in the space in a way that is quite different from the graceful filling of space in earlier works. This motif is also more narrative than most figures on Andalusian ceramics, suggesting a series of specific events that play out in time more than does an image of an animal or a musician.

In a similar work, a plate in brown and blue luster attributed to Valencia or Catalonia (ca. 1525–75) at the Hispanic Society of America, the figure of a horseman in Spanish costume, probably inspired by Italian majolica, floats on a background of large-leaved vines (fig. 11). As in the Louvre plate, reciprocity between figure and background pattern is largely ignored, although both are painted with a sure hand. The rider’s bonnet squashes into the top edge of the plate, while plenty of space remains below his horse’s hooves in the lower half of the dish, suggesting that the painter was trying out a new motif.

In Granada in 1499 and Castile in 1502, edicts forced Muslims to choose between conversion and expulsion, and, in some cases, enslavement. Ferdinand of Aragon (r. 1479–1516) encouraged entry permits for Muslim refugees from the Granadan War of 1489 and promised to protect the morerías (segregated mudéjar...
neighborhoods) and not to force Muslims to convert, promises his successor Charles V (1516–56) repeated in 1518. All these measures served the financial interest of the nobility of Aragon, who relied on Muslim labor—mostly agricultural but also evidently in the lucrative ceramic business. But finally in 1525, in part due to pressure from the Christian laboring class, Charles retracted his promise. All mosques were converted to churches. The Moriscos continued to practice their religion secretly, supported by the compassionate provisions of the Oran fatwa of 1504. Despite the conversions, in the early years of the sixteenth century a series of royal decrees from Ferdinand II and his daughter Joan of Aragon sought to strip Moriscos even further of their culture and their remaining economic power. These include the prohibitions, in 1526, on using written or spoken Arabic, bearing arms, and moneylending, among other professions. Yet the Christian rulers blocked emigration, again because they needed the Muslim labor and taxes.

Fig. 10. Luster-painted tin-glazed plate. Manises, ca. 1450. Musée du Louvre, Paris, Legacy of Antonin Personnaz, 1937, inv. no. OA 9001. (Photo: Laura Marks)

Fig. 11. Tin-glazed earthenware dish with cobalt and luster. Valencia or Catalonia, ca. 1525–75. Hispanic Society of America, New York, inv. no. E688. (Photo: courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America)
The forcibly converted Muslims of Aragon were also increasingly vulnerable to violence by Christian mobs. In 1581, Diego de Arce y Reinoso (d. 1665), inquisitor of Valencia, calculated that if the Moriscos were expelled, Valencia would lose one-third of its population and two-thirds of its income and would suffer food shortages and a decline in the incomes of nobles. But he figured these problems could be dealt with by bringing in settlers from elsewhere in Spain. How it was calculated that Christian potters would be able to take over the ceramic industry remains a matter of speculation. Manises records from around 1500 give the names of twenty-five potters, half Muslims, half Old Christians. It is unknown to what degree Christians participated in the making of lusterware, but the names of Old Christians include two who would found pottery dynasties: Eximeno and Requeni.

So it is in this context of the official eradication of Muslim identity and autonomy, and profound insecurity for the Morisco inhabitants of Valencia, as well as changes specific to the ceramics industry, that Islamic aesthetics went into a final retreat. In the early sixteenth century, the demand for armorial lusterware began to fall because, with precious metals now imported from the new colonies in the West Indies, the wealthy could use gold- and silver-plated dishes instead of the lusterware that had substituted for them. Accordingly, potters began to make lusterware imitations of gadrooned and ribbed metalware. Works from this period often feature small, fussy, rather mechanical patterns, such as the dot and stalk or solfa (because it looks like a musical note, sol-fa) and the chainlike spur band, developed from an Islamic motif. For example, on a bowl from Manises, circa 1475–1500, the repetitive solfa motif surrounds a squat little rabbit (fig. 12). On the back expands a freely painted fern motif, quite common in Valencian ceramics of this period (fig. 13).

How to account for these changes not only in style but also in finesse without resorting to essentialism, that is, a notion of a “Muslim hand” at work? We might characterize the change as a shift from mudéjar to Morisco style, that is, from a style that displays its Islamic sources even as it adapts to Christian taste, to one that conceals them. Some ceramics made after the Expulsion clearly demonstrate a lack of practice. For example, a
Italian interest in Islamic ceramics is evident as early as the eleventh century, when Italy was importing bacini (painted bowls) from North Africa, Andalusia, Sicily, and Egypt to set into church façades. \(^9^5\) (The large-figured Fatimid dishes that inspired innovation among the ceramists of al-Andalus also show up in Tuscan churches.\(^9^6\) In the period under discussion here, Italian ceramists copied and adapted Valencian designs: see, for example, the fifteenth-century dish from Faenza with simple vegetal motifs spiraling around what might be a coat of arms (fig. 15). By the fifteenth century these copies developed into indigenous products, as in the Tuscan figurative zaffera or oak-leaf ceramics, produced in quantity for hospitals and pharmacies, that clearly adapt the Valencian motif of animals romping on a field of bryony flowers (fig. 16). \(^9^7\)

In the later fifteenth century, decoration on Italian ceramics grew more typically Italian, as Catherine Hess notes. \(^9^8\) Relinquishing the Valencian influence, they came to depict coats of arms, busts, emblems, and narrative scenes and adopted the new pictorial techniques of chiaroscuro, volumetric modeling, and linear perspective. New Renaissance motifs appealed to a new creative interest in clear figuration and, in the case of the complex biblical and mythical narratives, deep space. W. D. Kingery notes that technological advances allowed Italian ceramic painters to draw with precision, shade figures, and even use impasto. \(^9^9\)

In sixteenth-century Italian ceramics, Islamic motifs such as arabesques and overlapping scallops maintained their presence among a host of decorative options. Often the arabesque enlarges and gets its own contour line, so that it becomes a figure in itself, as in the Deruta dish with a lance man, 1520–50, from the workshop of Giacomo Mancini (fig. 17). Similarly, a dish from Deruta, circa 1500–1525, at the British Museum, shows an unidentified coat of arms surrounded by firmly outlined arabesques. \(^1^0^0\) The play of haptic space and
abstract line diminishes, although these motifs never entirely disappear. But the ceramics of Deruta and Faenza had an irresistible new élan that spoke to emergent European sensibilities. They quickly developed a deep perspectival space in which figures could be represented, narratives enacted, and the psychology of characters developed. For example, a tin-glazed dish from the workshop of Giacomo Mancini in Deruta, dated 1545, depicts a scene from Canto IV of Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (1516) (fig. 18). The composition is crowded, but fore, middle, and rear ground are clearly delimited by the outlines of low hills, the sea beyond them, and mountains on the horizon at the far edge of the sea. The painter has taken advantage of the new painting technology to crisply describe the figures of Bradamante, armed, preparing to fight the sorcerer riding the flying hippogriff, while Brunello, tied to a tree, watches helpless, and in the background Rinaldo and his esquire ride off with the rescued Ginevra. Cross-hatching gives the figures’ limbs volume. This complex depiction of a narrative
scene occurring in deep space is all the more remarkable because it is adapted from another medium, a woodcut, that does not require the speed of execution that ceramic painting does. The plate is certainly sensuously appealing in its juicy colors and gold luster, but I would suggest that it appeals more to a cognitive recognition akin to reading. Here, interestingly adapted to ceramics, is practiced the Renaissance optical space that had come to dominate European painting. It is the space for narrative and identification that centuries later cinema would import and that the theory of the gaze would scrutinize.

The Renaissance influence entered Spanish ceramics, especially in Seville, after Italian ceramics entered the Spanish market. In 1484 Ferdinand and Isabella encouraged Italian and Flemish artisans to emigrate to Spain by granting them a ten-year tax exemption, likely in the hopes of building an industrial base no longer reliant on Muslim expertise. Spanish potters studied with Italian and Flemish masters. The Italian Renaissance influence is more evident in tile production than in hollowware, especially in the works of the Italian ceramic painter Francisco Niculoso (d. 1520). Niculoso’s style was not followed until fifty years after his death, when Spanish potters began to take up both his and the Della Robbia family’s Renaissance techniques.

Florence Lister and Robert Lister write that the Renaissance influence inspired a “shift in popular attitude, which would culminate in an incredible artistic flowering at Sevilla. Southern Catholics somewhat reluctantly began to realize that handwork could be accomplished proudly by Christians.” This statement is a bit difficult to parse. Does it imply that previously Christians had been willing to let Muslims retain the expertise in ceramics (as in other crafts) because they felt it was beneath them? That the entry of Renaissance figurative and narrative imagery into ceramics elevated the craft into an art? If so, it implies a distinction between fine art (figurative and narrative) on one hand, and craft (decorative and minor) on the other—a modern attitude characterized by Riegl’s distinction between “ornament” and “argument.”

But it may be that the practice came first and the attitude appeared later.

Anyway, the practice did change. In sixteenth-century Manises, Old Christians now dominated the industry, constituting more than half of master potters. Mudéjar traditions declined. New large motifs appear: big marguerites, passion flowers, shield-like forms. Sometimes, as earlier, the graceful abstract animal figures still fill the circular frame and interact with a swirling population of background motifs, maintaining a tactile rhythmicity. But many Valencian dishes from 1525 to 1560, though technically polished, look neat and static: they are crowded with small motifs that are often framed by square and shield shapes (a method termed “in reserve”).

In September 1609 the Royal Council (having dismissed the notion of slaughtering or castrating adult Muslims or drowning them at sea) issued the Edict of Expulsion. This Castilian decree was initially opposed in Valencia and Aragon, where many Muslims lived. In 1609 the lords of Valencia, where Muslims still constituted 35 percent of potters, sent two representatives to plead with the king against the expulsion, to no avail.
But between 1609 and 1614, Spain expelled 300,000 Muslims, of a total of 330,000, from Aragon, Murcia, Catalonia, Castile, Mancha, and Extremadura. In L. P. Harvey’s cautious estimate, this constituted 4 percent of the Spanish population. The evidence of Inquisition trials suggests that most converted Muslims (Moriscos) really did leave the peninsula. Morisco cases were the majority in tribunals of Saragossa, Valencia, and Granada in the second half of the fifteenth century, but between 1615 and 1700, only 9 percent of Inquisition judgments were against Moriscos.

The Expulsion was catastrophic for agriculture and crafts. It seems that few Christian potters had attained all the skills of their Muslim colleagues. The quality of Valencian pottery declined precipitously. Yet it appears that Old Christian potters well versed in Islamic aesthetics continued to practice. For example, a very Valencian-looking hare leaps across a footed dish (tazza) from Teruel on which large floral motifs release spiraling tendrils that fill the ground (fig. 19). Ray writes that this work maintains the “horror vacui” of the mudéjar style; again, I contest the use of this term and suggest instead that the painter succeeded in relating figure and ground in a rhythmic harmony.

In many post-Expulsion ceramics, background motifs continue to get larger and leave more white space; they harden up, stop moving, and become stand-alone figures. The motifs lose their connection to each other and to the central figure, and there is far less sense of movement. For example, on a (nonfigurative) dish from mid-sixteenth century Manises at the Victoria and Albert Museum, whose central fourfold symmetry doubles to eightfold symmetry at the rim, fairly large motifs, evenly distributed on the ground, maintain their distance from each other (fig. 20). Eight shell-like motifs in reserve are distributed around the edge, echoing the
Fig. 20. Luster-painted tin-glazed deep dish. Manises, mid-sixteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, museum no. 379-1893. (Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum)

rosette on a square in the center. The painting is accomplished, so the static and boxy effect is likely what the painter was after.

Landscape begins to organize the space, and the horizon line, something extremely rare in Islamic figurative ceramics, enters. A fascinatingly hybrid lusterware dish from Valencia, 1625–1700 or later, features a crowned lion that stands on hilly ground marked with crosshatches, in a nod toward Renaissance naturalistic depictions of space (fig. 21). At first glance it resembles the fifteenth-century Valencian dishes that placed European figures onto a ground of vegetal motifs without a great deal of attention to figure-ground relationships. However, in this case the figure and ground relate with a vengeance! Extremely lively and busy plant motifs crowd the surface of the dish, mimicking the lion’s tail, curling eagerly into the spaces under its legs, and encroaching on its every contour. Yet the illusion of deep space that the ground line creates causes these plant motifs to seem to be floating in space, like giant flying insects, creating a fevered, hallucinatory quality.

Later sixteenth-century Spanish lusterware, now made largely for a local market, tends to be simply painted with large figures, often based on the Italian portrait profile. The figure-ground relationship in Spanish ceramics reached a détente, figure having pretty much won.

**RESURGENCE OF HAPTIC SPACE AND THE ABSTRACT LINE**

Thus the abstract line of Andalusian ceramics lost its independence and became more obedient to the contour, while its haptic space, in which figure and ground commingle rhythmically, gradually gave way to an optical space in which they are clearly distinct. In post-Ex-pulsion Spain, the earlier Christian openness to Muslim culture was supplanted by what Prado-Vilar calls a “gaze of disavowal,” capable of ignoring the latent traces of Islamic aesthetics in European art. This whitewashing of Islamic presence from art occurred in the context of ethnic cleansing as Spain invented itself as a Christian nation. Islamic aesthetics went decisively out of fashion in the country where Muslims had governed for centuries, as though the Spanish could not bear to be reminded that their sangre lacked limpieza, that the Muslim presence had shaped their culture irrevocably.

Yet looking at the way these objects changed over a few centuries allows us to reconstruct the paths by which Islamic culture survived in Europe. The haptic space and abstract line went underground in Western art, appearing for centuries only as ornament, as background. In the visual territory that art staked out for narrative and psychological meaning, haptic space and abstract line were reduced, for some centuries, to perceptual vacation spots. Not until the late nineteenth century did Western artists rediscover them and, wittingly or not, bring Islamic aesthetics back into Western art.

I have argued that the concepts of haptic space and abstract line, in contrast to their companion form of optical space, usefully describe the ways in which Islamic aesthetics substitutes rhythm and embodiment for representation. I hope that these concepts, enriched by their long itinerary from art history to philosophy to
cinema and back to art history, eventually find a bit of traction as concepts, de facto or de jure, for the study of Islamic art as well.

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NOTES


4. Ibid., 24.


11. See, for example, bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992).


19. Ibid., 496–97.


23. Marks, Enfoldment and Infinity, chaps. 2–5.


26. Ibid.


28. In addition to the previously cited section of Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, see Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).


30. See the discussion in Marks, Enfoldment and Infinity, chap. 2.


34. Gombrich, Sense of Order, 80.


36. Anja Heidenreich posits that the lusterware technique started in Samarra in the early ninth century and was taken up in Iran and Iraq. Anja Heidenreich, “Early Lustre Wares in the Mediterranean and Implementing the New Techniques in the Iberian Peninsula: An Approach,” Acts of the First International Congress of the European Network of Museums of Islamic Art (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, 2013), 404–20. However, Balbina M. Caviró posits equally Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia, and argues that the lusterwares found in Samarra were not made in Samarra. Balbina M. Caviró, “Golden Earthenware


39. Ibíd., 415.


43. The possibility remains that Nasrid lustreware was produced in Granada and Almería, but the center of production was without a doubt Málaga. Kilns existed in Granada but their purpose is not known. During the Taifa period lustreware production took place in several cities, including Almería. But workshops in Almería were destroyed between 1147 and 1157 during the Christian occupation, and it is not known whether the production revived. See Yvan Coquinot, Christel Doublet, Anne Bouquillon, Claire Deléry, and Isabel Flores Escobosa, “The Production of Lustreware in al-Andalus during the Nasrid Period,” in Acts of the First International Congress of the European Network of Museums of Islamic Art, 424–28.

44. Rosser-Owen, Islamic Arts from Spain, 64.


46. Yvan Coquinot, Anne Bouquillon, Christel Doublet, and Claire Deléry, “Reflections on the Manufacturing Techniques and Production Locations of a Selection of Lustreware from the Nasrid period Preserved by the Museo de la Alhambra, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Louvre,” in Acts of the First International Congress of the European Network of Museums of Islamic Art, 335.

47. Quoted in Rosser-Owen, Islamic Arts from Spain, 67, 69.


52. This is the Persian “scarf in the wind” motif; see Caviro, “Golden Earthenware and the Alhambra Vases,” 282.


54. Rosser-Owen, Islamic Arts from Spain, 30.

55. Discussion and image in Roselló Bordoy, in Al-Andalus, ed. Dodds, 236, pl. 29.


57. Guillermo Roselló Bordoy, catalogue note, in Al-Andalus, ed. Dodds, 238, pl. 31.

58. On the sgraffito, see Guillermo Roselló Bordoy, catalogue note, in ibíd., 361, pl. 114.

59. Rosser-Owen, Islamic Arts from Spain, 70.

60. Pictured in Los Jarrones de la Alhambra, 204, fig. 32.

61. Lister and Lister, Andalusian Ceramics in Spain and New Spain, 72.


63. L. P. Harvey, Islamic Spain, 1250–1500 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 119, 7, 14.

64. L. P. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1700 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 119, 15.

65. Ibid., 134–35.


69. Mack, Bazaar a Piazza, 98; Lister and Lister, Andalusian Ceramics in Spain and New Spain, 92; Ecker, Caliphs and Kings, 151.

70. Ray, Spanish Pottery, 50.

clients took up these designs, and how, in Islamic aesthetics engage haptic space and abstract line, how Mediterranean basin ceramics on the Italian adaptations, haptic space and abstract line grad-
t modes of visuality to which they appeal can be charac-
t. by records of debts that Christians owed them, which the Crown hoped to collect upon their expulsion. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 252–35.

Ecker, Caliphs and Kings, 9. That some Moriscos did grow rich by lending money, banking, and speculating is attested by records of debts that Christians owed them, which the Crown hoped to collect upon their expulsion. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 252–55.

Harvey, Muslins in Spain, 298.

Ray, Spanish Pottery, 90.

Ibid.

Ray, Spanish Pottery, 83.

Ecker, Caliphs and Kings, 159.

Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 48, 86.

Ibid., 93–94.

Ibid., 60–64.

Ecker, Caliphs and Kings, 9. That some Moriscos did grow rich by lending money, banking, and speculating is attested by records of debts that Christians owed them, which the Crown hoped to collect upon their expulsion. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 252–35.

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Ecker, Caliphs and Kings, 159.

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Ecker, Caliphs and Kings, 9. That some Moriscos did grow rich by lending money, banking, and speculating is attested by records of debts that Christians owed them, which the Crown hoped to collect upon their expulsion. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 252–35.

Harvey, Muslins in Spain, 298.

Ray, Spanish Po{}tery, 90.

Ibid.


Harvey, Muslins in Spain, 12–13.


Lister and Lister, Andalusian Ceramics in Spain and New Spain, 150.

Ray, Spanish Pottery, 209.

Prado-Vilar, “Gothic Anamorphic Gaze.”