THE MIHRAB IMAGE: COMMEMORATIVE THEMES IN MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

The mihrab raises a number of cultural, linguistic, and architectural questions. Primary among these is the question of meaning. Today, the mihrab is conventionally defined as a functional space, as an orientational device, or as a reminder of the Prophet and sign of something that is past and invisible. These definitions, some of which appear in medieval dictionaries and are accepted by a majority of Muslims and Islamicists, apply to mihrabs as niches that perform specific functions. The basic element of mosque mihrabs, an arch on columns, is common to a number of flat and two-dimensional mihrab types, each of which should be interpreted according to its iconographic details and the contexts in which it appears. Nevertheless, the formal similarity between niche and flat mihrabs has led scholars to connect one mihrab type with the other, without first testing for the possible presence of dissimilarities. Instead, a specific type of flat mihrab has been used to provide a definition for the niche mihrab, not as a functional object or tool, but as a symbol of the Divine in the context of the mosque.

The idea of mihrabs as symbols rests primarily on interpretations of motifs that appear on one particular kind of mihrab, that is, mihrabs that are usually, but not always, flat or two-dimensional. These mihrabs frequently incorporate depictions of lamps, often flanked by candlesticks, and suspended beneath an arch. The composition is usually framed by inscriptions (figs. 2, 3, 4). Variations of this composition occur in many parts of the Islamic world, including Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Yemen, and are known from the late eleventh century onward.

Because these flat mihrabs are sometimes located in the same position that niche mihrabs occupy in the qibla wall of a structure, scholars have associated them with the sacred focal point of the faith and hence with the act of submission in prayer. The lamps that are represented on them are assumed to be mosque lamps, also implying connections with prayer. References to the mysticism of Ghazâlî’s Mishkât al-Anwâr (The Niche of Lights) and to the Ayat al-nûr (the Light Verse, Qur’an 24: 35) project a symbolic relationship between these compositions and the Light of God in the mosque. This relationship is based on the occurrence of the Light Verse on numerous actual lamps and on the supposition that flat mihrabs are representations of niche mihrabs in which such
lamps are hung. Aside from an assumed symbolism, these interpretations disregard important differences in the forms, iconographic details, and contexts particular to each type.

A close examination of the flat mihrab compositions, and especially of the lamps and inscriptions that appear on them, indicates that they are one of a number of distinct types of mihrabs, and are not related to mosque niche mihrabs. The contexts in which these particular flat mihrabs most often appear — in mausolea and on tombstones, cenotaphs, and a variety of shrine-related objects — suggest an interpretation that is connected with death and eschatology. This interpretation is confirmed by texts that codify rules pertaining to death, burial, and commemoration. Finally, these mihrabs will be seen to be representations that are related to a specific type of architecture — the centrally planned mausoleum in which they frequently occur and which corresponds to a specific definition of the word “mihrab.” Mausolea and shrines thus form a second major type of commemorative mihrab that is represented in the flat mihrab type. Because they act primarily as illustrations, as opposed to the functional mihrabs that are found in mosques, and because they are referred to as shakl mihrāb (mihrab shape) and sūrat mihrāb (mihrab image) in a medieval description of the type, I will refer to the flat mihrab compositions as “mihrab images.” Mihrab images are signs of commemoration which indicate different types of commemorative acts through variations in their own forms, inscriptions, and motifs.

Three iconographic details — two-dimensionality, the nature and function of the represented lamps and candlesticks, and the iconographic connections between these motifs and their associated texts — are critical for
understanding the function and meaning of mihrab images. Since the lamps are often regarded as distinguishing features for mihrabs, their identification, placement, and significance will be dealt with first.

The notion that mihrab images are synonymous with niche mihrabs is based on the assumption that the lamps on them represent mosque lamps suspended in a niche. Lamps are frequently incorporated in representations of architecture, including the well-known tile plaques with depictions of the Ka'ba, manuscript illustrations of Mecca and Medina,9 and the fragmentary painting of a mosque which was discovered in San'a.10 In these two-dimensional representations objects are confined to a single plane. When the represented niches and arches with suspended lamps are extracted from the larger illustrations, they appear identical. Single arch-lamp units, therefore, do not necessarily denote niche mihrabs but can be representations of arches or, as has been suggested for some prayer rugs,11 abbreviated versions of arcades. The lamps that appear in such architectural illustrations can be legitimately identified as mosque lamps and related to actual mosque lamps on which the Light Verse is frequently inscribed.

The Light Verse is not part of the standard epigraphic program that accompanies mihrab images. In the one case that includes a portion of the verse, the inscription is carved on the body of the lamp itself (fig. 1).12 This occurs in a marble slab from the Budayriya Madrasa in Cairo (built in 1357 and no longer extant) that has lost its framing inscriptions, but which carries a lamp decorated with the words: Allāhu niyru al-samawāt wa al-ard (“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth”). This is a standard quotation on similar fourteenth-century Syrian and Egyptian glass lamps.13 The Budayriya lamp appears to copy both the form and decoration of actual lamps.14 That the decoration of this carved lamp does not bear on the meaning of the entire composition can be demonstrated through reference to earlier examples of inscribed representational lamps.

The lamp images in the frescoes of the seven keel arches at Kharraqan's Tomb Tower I (1067–68)15 are inscribed with the invocation baraka li sāhibihī (“blessings to its owner”). The statement is anomalous in the funerary context of a tomb. It is commonly used in Iran in the eleventh and later centuries, however, for the decoration of utilitarian objects in different media. In both the Cairo and Kharraqan examples connections can be made between the inscriptions on the represented lamps and those on lamps actually manufactured at the time, but none seems to exist between the lamp inscriptions and their mihrab compositions.

Inscribed lamps on mihrab images are rare, but two relatively late examples serve both to accentuate and expand the relationship between the lamp inscriptions, mihrab images, and actual lamps. The lamp represented in the mihrab image of the tomb of Mehmet I in Bursa (ca. 1421) is inscribed Allāhu waliyyu al-tawfiq (“God is the guardian of success”);16 a sixteenth-century example in a tile composition placed in the courtyard of the Darwishiyah in Damascus has the word “Allah” on the neck and a portion of the shahāda formula on the body.17 Both these examples find counterparts in a specific type of lamp produced during the Ottoman period. The first inscription appears on an Iznik ceramic lamp from the Dome of the Rock, now in the British Museum.18 The second and more common one appears in a variety of formulations on a number of similar ceramic lamps.19 In these cases the actual lamps are made of opaque materials, and so they pose additional problems of function and meaning.

The four examples of mihrab images mentioned so far are drawn from a period of about five centuries, originate in different parts of the Islamic world (Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Iran), and are executed in different materials and techniques. The survival of the composition in different areas over a long period of time suggests interpretations that are relevant to a range of pietistic and social structures, and not ones that are confined to exclusive or esoteric sensibilities. The longevity of the compositions further suggests possible developments and changes in the initial meanings of the representations. A closer look at a number of additional examples from different areas clarifies the contexts and uses of mihrab images.

Following the earliest known occurrence of mihrab images, those at Kharraqan, a number of examples can be found in Iran and Iraq. Five hanging lamps are carved in the five facets of the central niche of the mihrab of Panja ʿAli at Mosul (1287–88).20 The hood of the central niche (fig. 2) is filled with muqarnas, and the arch frame is inscribed with the Ayat al-kursī (the Throne Verse, Qurʾān 2: 255).21 The larger composition is a tripartite mihrab; the two small side niches are inscribed with references to imprints of the hand of Imam ʿAli and the hoof of his horse.22 The three recesses are framed by one graduated band inscribed with the names of the Prophet and the Twelve Imams, and the whole group is surmounted by a horizontal inscription of the Qurʾānic verses 5: 58–59 speaking of the awleya Allāh (the friends of God).

The same themes appear at an earlier date in the
maqām of Sitt Zaynab at Sinjar (1239–59) where a single lamp occupies a niche that is framed by the Throne Verse (fig. 3). A number of other shrines with mihrabs decorated with hanging lamps and the Throne Verse occur in Mosul. They include the mausolea of Imam Bahir (13th century), Yahya ibn al-Qasim (1240), and Awn al-Din (1248), among others. In cases where 2:255 does not appear on the mihrab compositions, it appears on the walls of the tomb chambers. While a number of these shrines that have pointed references to Shiʿi imams and their descendants may have played a propagandistic role in Badr al-Din Luṭluṭ’s campaigns, the basic iconography of their mihrabs is not restricted to the Jazira.

A number of mihrab images, without the candlesticks, come from thirteenth-century Iran. Examples are the two luster mihrabs of Imam Riza at Mashhad, one of which is dated 612 (1215). These mihrabs are composed of several inscribed rectangular frames within which are a series of inscribed and slightly recessed arches. The smallest and innermost of these arches is a trefoil inside a slightly keel-shaped arch beneath a stepped muqarnas arch. The image of a small hanging lamp appears at the innermost point of this architectural composition, beneath the trefoil arch. The Throne Verse is inscribed around the lamp.
A similar treatment appears in thirteenth-century mihrabs from Qum and Nejef, with variations in the forms of the innermost arch and the suspended lamp. The arches in these examples are composed of epigraphic devices that also appear on mihrabs and tombstones of the early fourteenth century. The same arrangement appears on a luster mihrab at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 4), where the Throne Verse is inscribed on the wide margin framing the composition and completed in the space below the lamp.

Related to these examples are a large number of smaller mihrabs and plaques that survive in more or less complete form. Three closely related pieces bear a variety of inscriptions and date to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Similarities between these mihrabs and a group of mausoleum mihrab fragments at the Louvre suggest that they also come from mausolea and were once part of larger compositions similar to the one at Mashhad. Small plaques may also have been set in actual niches in the manner of the mihrab of Masjid ʿAli at Kuh-i Rud. The survival of small molded pieces (fig. 5) with lamps, muqarnas arches, and epigraphic frames containing sura 112 attests to this possibility.

Mihrab images whose original locations are known and documented all belong to shrines and mausolea, and a few are overtly connected to cults of relics, as is the case of the mihrab of Panja ʿAli whose inscriptions refer directly to the imam’s handprint. Cultic associations also appear in the ceramic plaque of the Darwishiyya where the lamp and candlesticks are near a depiction of the Prophet’s sandals. These examples illustrate special devotional uses and values of mihrab images.

The iconography of the lamp and arch is equally appropriate to objects that are classified as mihrabs and ones that are classified as tombstones. Two-dimensional objects that carry these motifs are considered mihrabs if they carry pious inscriptions, tombstones if their inscriptions contain funerary allusions. These classifications are, however, artificial, especially since a large number of mihrabs perform memorial functions. An example from the David Collection that is classified as a “tombstone with mihrab” serves to illustrate the point. The framing band of this ceramic mihrab image is inscribed with a portion of the Throne Verse beginning with al-qayyûm (“the Eternal”) and ending with the words wa huwa al-ʿalîyyu al-azîm (“and He is the Exalted, the Immense”) which complete the verse. The missing basmala and first few words of the verse indicate that the object once belonged to a larger composition. A memorial inscription appears in the arch, hadhâ marqad mawlânâ al-imâm al-saʿîd ... Abû ʿAli Muhammad bin al-imâm al-maghfîr al-fâḍîl al-mashhît Nâr al-Dîn (“this is the resting place [or tomb] of the blessed imam [a religious scholar according to the remainder of the inscription] Abu ʿAli Muhammad ...”). Despite its funerary references, the piece resembles other ceramic shrine mihrabs and is most likely to have been placed in a shrine or mausoleum. It also carries the same motifs that appear on the mihrabs of shrines which do not contain tombs. All these objects then, whether described as “mihrabs” or as “tombstones,” belong to a single category, that of commemorative object whose primary function was not to mark a grave, but to indicate the presence of some special quality of sanctity associated with a place or a person. The basis for designating this mihrab image a tombstone is limited to its commemorating an identifiable person. The confusion of these commemorative mihrabs with tombstones is also in part due to their two-dimensionality.

There is yet a third group of mihrab images that is sim-
ilar to the others in its visual vocabulary, but different in both use and intent. This third type is exemplified by a piece at the Metropolitan Museum (fig. 6) which has been identified as a mihrab because it is devoid of funerary connotations and because the major theme of its inscriptions is prayer. It contains a series of recessed arches, the smallest of which holds a lamp. A historical inscription specifies that the piece was commissioned by the Khatun Fatima bint zahir al-Din (amarat bhi al-Khatun Fāhima bint zahir al-Din), indicating that the stone, whether intended for a shrine or for a mosque, was inspired by the lady’s piety.

Other examples of donations come from Mosul where, in the thirteenth century, a lady Jumā’a commissioned two plaques for the shrine of Shaykh Fathī (fig. 7). Neither piece carries the usual lamps and candlesticks. The word “Allah” appears immediately beneath the arch and the remainder of the space is filled with a geometric pattern containing the names Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. The frames contain Qur’anic verses, sura 112 on one piece and 10: 26 on the other. One of the pieces has a historical inscription stating mā taṣawwa’at bi ʿamalīth jumā’ah bint Amīr Allāh rahima allahu man tarahhma ʿalāyhi āmin (“donated by

Fig. 6. Iran. Mihrāb of Fatima Khatun, 12th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y., Macy Fund 31.50.1. (photo: courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.)

Fig. 7. Mosul, Shaykh Fathī. Mihrāb of Lady Jumā’ah, 13th century. (illustration from: Archäologische Reise, vol. 2, fig. 273)
the lady Jumā... God’s mercy upon those who invoke [His] mercy for her, amen”).

The intent of these pieces is similar to that of the Iranian Khutun’s gift as well as of other flat mihrabs that are donated to already existing structures, for example those added to the mosque of Ibn Tulun at various times. They constitute a distinct sub-group of donations to shrines or religious institutions and belong to the same general category as those mihrabs that are used for memorial or commemorative purposes. However, they are also ex-votos whose primary intention is to commemorate the donor, whose name often appears on them. Their inscriptions, which refer to prayer, the Prophet and the Caliphs, tend to be of a more generalized nature than those of objects made to commemorate a saint or imam.

Despite these differences the essential vocabulary of commemoration is a common factor shared by all three groups, blurring the distinctions between mihrabs, tombstones, and plaques intended expressly as gifts. These functional distinctions should then be understood as variations within a larger commemorative system that comprises an assortment of mihrab images. This system overrides formal and terminological nuances and operates in a number of related locations.

The same vocabulary of commemoration is manipulated in different ways so as to signify the presence of a memorial shrine or mausoleum. The images of lamps on the façades of the Ulu Cami at Malatya and of al-Aqmar Mosque in Cairo (1125) indicate specific memorial functions for the structures. The frieze of carved stone arches and lamps above the portal of the Mashhad al-Husayn at Aleppo, now destroyed, once signaled the presence of a tomb or shrine. The connections between lamp images and shrines are strengthened by the use of lamps in the decoration of cenotaphs.

A frieze of lamps and arches occurs on a ceramic cenotaph fragment attributed to thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Iran. Two Syrian polychromed wood examples from the thirteenth century also survive, one in Aleppo, the other in Hims. A series of recessed and polylobed arches runs around the perimeter of the Hims cenotaph, commissioned by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars for the shrine of Khalid ibn al-Walid in 1268. In each recess is an arch with a large suspended lamp that is flanked by candlesticks. Another small lamp hangs on each side of the large one. Aside from this new detail the composition is essentially the same as those seen in various shrine mihrabs.

Yet another variation occurs on the marble cenotaph of Imam ʿAli al-Hadi in Mosul. The Throne Verse appears on the side of the cenotaph above a carved arcade with no lamps. A large lamp in high relief is suspended on a single chain that hangs on the upper horizontal surface of the cenotaph. The composition re-creates the old arrangement, giving it a new disposition, but preserves the same theme encountered in mihrab images. The use of the iconography on cenotaphs and shrine façades detaches the motifs from the general functions of mihrabs.

Unlike mosque mihrabs, mihrab images often have no connection with the qibla orientation. In mausolea, cenotaphs follow the disposition of the burial in which the face of the deceased must be turned toward Mecca, and so are set parallel to the qibla. The east-west orientation of tombstones at Akhat has the same effect — headstones and footstones are perpendicular, not parallel — to the qibla, which is to the south. Because the lamp and arch motifs have long been associated with orientational mihrabs and prayer, their appearance on tombstones is sometimes considered “anomalous”. However, since the primary implications of the iconography are commemorative, the use of the lamp motifs on tombstones is a natural extension of the iconographic system to which they belong.

Mihrab images can be found on tombstones in many locations, including Yemen, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, Syria, and Egypt. In Egypt, where the record is most complete, the earliest extant example appears on a columnar marble tombstone dated 573 (1178), and is followed by two rectangular slabs from 576 (1181) and 579 (1184). Except for the earliest example, the Throne Verse is inscribed on all these tombstones, and it appears together with the lamps and candlesticks on the typical tarkība cenotaphs used by the Mamluks, particularly in the fourteenth century.

Mihrab images are also found in Caïrene mausolea. A lamp and candlesticks are carved in shallow relief on the columnar marker attached to the cenotaph of Faraj ibn Barquq (d. 1412) (fig. 8), and on the restored headstone of the cenotaph of Sultan Hasan (d. 1361) (fig. 9). The motifs are painted on the wall of the crypt in the mausoleum of Tatar al-Hijaziyya (1347). The appearance of the composition in an underground burial chamber where it could not have had any suggestions of prayer reinforces its commemorative and funerary applications.

The use of these compositions on Egyptian tombstones of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries corresponds to their appearance and use elsewhere. The earliest Egyptian Islamic tombstones are simple
inscribed stelae. These are followed by basic arch designs which begin to appear early in the ninth century. Motifs derived from elsewhere, for instance from Coptic sources, are relatively late and did not affect the initial development of the Islamic iconography of death. Even though similarities can be found in later tombstones, the meaning of mihrab images must be sought within the systems and beliefs about death that were developed by Islam. These beliefs should, then, be reflected in the most common motifs of mihrab images: the arch, the lamp, and the Throne Verse.

The Throne Verse expresses two major ideas that can be applied to the interpretation of commemorative compositions. The first is the notion of God’s Throne as the organizing principle of the Universe and the location where believers’ souls are gathered at Resurrection. The second is the idea of intercession expressed in man dhā al-ladhi yashfā’u ‘indahu illā bi idhnihī. The shafā’a of the Prophet, and often of his descendants (the awliyā’), is of primary importance on Judgment Day. This privilege is also extended to specific martyrs (shuhādi’), particularly those who die in actual jihad.

Many Islamic eschatological and hagiographical traditions originate in beliefs associated with the fate of martyrs. Although martyrdom was later expanded to include death in different ways, it was with the first martyrs of the battle of Uhud (625) that certain burial rites were codified and around whom certain traditions evolved.

One of the rewards of purification through shahāda is the right to intercede on behalf of Muslims on Judgment Day. Judgment is omitted for martyrs, both in the grave and on Judgment Day, and their souls are transported to the highest sphere of Heaven, the Firdaws, immediately upon death. They spend the interval between death and final resurrection (the barzakh) in a state of bliss in proximity to God. Hadith accounts assert that these ideas are expressed in verse 3:169, which was revealed following the battle of Uhud and which the Prophet was asked to explain. His response is recorded in several versions of hadith. Abu Dawud’s version states,

When your brothers were killed in the battle of Uhud, God deposited their souls inside green birds that drink of the rivers of paradise and eat of its fruit, then take shelter in gold lamps (qanādıl) that hang in the shadow of [God’s] Throne.
The *qanādīl* of the hadith are special objects, vessels of light or reliquaries with a specific terminology and specific functions. As containers or images of souls, they derive their luminosity from their contents, and not from external factors. Since they exist beyond human experience, operating on a higher or supranatural spiritual and intellectual level, these *qanādīl* can be represented, but they cannot be seen. Their associations with mystical light, a reflection of the baraka of a saint, makes the *qanādīl* fundamental motifs for representing miraculous phenomena that occur in tombs and shrines.

Interpreted literally, the martyrdom hadith provides an archetypal motif of death and commemoration. Read from the perspective of this tradition, mihrab images become representations of the soul in the *barsakh*. They also imply the condition of the soul in a blissful paradisiacal state, in proximity to the epigraphic depiction of the Throne. These ideas also appear in the inscriptions of tombstones from different locations.

Inscriptions found on Islamic tombstones vary greatly in length and content. Qur'anic references to paradise, to the ephemeral nature of life, and to the eternity and unity of God are common motifs, as are references to the Prophet. Certain Qur'anic verses and pious formulas appear frequently in Shi'i epitaphs and were obviously chosen because of their special connotations. A number of terms are used to mean "the deceased," such as *al-marhum*, *al-maghfur lahu*, and *al-faqīd*. The dead person is often referred to as *al-shābbā* (the youth) followed by the epithets *al-sa'īd(a)* *al-shāhid (a)* (the blessed, the martyred) for both men and women. The conventional use of these epithets as indicated by their frequency reflects the same democratization of the ideas of martyrdom that is found in religious discussions and comments on the Qur'an and hadith that eventually accorded every true believer the status of a martyr.

The idea of light as a cardinal companion in the tomb and beyond is expressed by the formula, *qaddasa Allāhu rīḥahu wa naawara ḍariḥahu* ("May God sanctify his soul and illumine his grave") which appears both in literature and in shrines. This phrase implies illumination that occurs without human intervention. The lighting of graves and shrines, however, is a widespread practice.

The conventional use of lamps as part of the imagery of death and of shrines also appears in miniature painting. The illustration of the bier of Alexander from the Demotte *Shahnama* (fig. 10) represents an interior that is divided into three units. A large jewel-encrusted gold lamp hangs above the bier in the central unit, and smaller gold lamps hang in the lateral arches. Candlesticks at the four corners of the bier complete the set-up, providing all the elements of a commemorative mihrab image. The motifs and organization of the composition parallel those of tripartite mihrab images that include a large central unit and two subsidiary ones. At the same time, the central unit by itself resembles the compositions of single-unit mihrab images that are used particularly on tombstones. The motifs employed here form an iconic portion that enhances the narrative of the illustration and reiterates its main subject. Were the figures in the miniature to be removed, its basic commemorative subject matter would remain clear by virtue of the arches, lamps, and candlesticks, and the application of specific organizational principles. These principles and motifs effectively transform the structure into a commemorative mihrab.

The illustration of Alexander's bier presents a strong case for the affinities that exist between architecture and two-dimensional mihrab images. While it represents the interior of a mausoleum, the illustration can also be read as a tombstone or flat mihrab. The compositions and motifs employed in tombstones and flat mihrabs may also be derived from architectural sources.

The convention of employing mihrab images and compositions for expressing death and commemoration survives into the twentieth century. In a series of etchings executed by an Egyptian artisan to illustrate the history of Bayt al-Kreitiyya in Cairo, only one, "A Saint on the Premises," employs the mihrab image motifs (fig. 11). The scene depicts the burial of Harun, the patron saint of Bayt al-Kreitiyya, in a mausoleum adjacent to the house. This mausoleum is represented as a simple domical structure in other illustrations, but in this specific case it is opened up to reveal the cenotaph. A lamp is suspended from the arched portal and a tall candlestick is visible to the side.

The use of these motifs in the illustration is dictated by the narrative; the composition is a direct response to the demands of the subject matter and forms the iconic portion of the representation. The functional nature of the structure as a *maqam* is also brought into operation through the application of the well-known motifs. The structure would be understood as a mausoleum or shrine with or without mourners and identifying inscriptions. As in the miniature of Alexander, the image conforms to the spatial arrangement of a mausoleum, but it also corresponds to the organization of commemorative mihrabs and tombstones.

The depiction of the *maqam* or *tura* as an open structure corresponding to the arrangement of mihrab
images occurs in many examples of architectural representations of tombs and shrines. Two examples are found among the miniatures of the *Tarikh-i Sultan Süleyman* of 1579–80. In the illustration of Süleyman’s burial, an octagonal structure contains a gold lamp which appears as if suspended from the center of the arched open portal. In an illustration of a royal visit to the tomb of Eyüp Ensari, Süleyman himself stands in prayer in front of a similar portal from which a gold lamp is suspended. In this, as in the preceding examples, the iconography can be understood as a code for the subject matter or a metaphor for sanctification. However, the illustrations can also be read as realistic representations of shrines and tombs in which lamps and candles were an essential part of the furnishings.

The lamps in the Ottoman miniatures have actual counterparts from the same period. Two silver *qanādīl* in Istanbul resemble those in the miniatures in both form and function. One is inscribed as a waqf for the shrine of Eyüp Ensari, and was donated to it on the accession of Osman II (r. 1618–22). An earlier Mamluk example, in brass inlaid with silver and gold, shares the formal char-
acteristics of these lamps and bears inscriptions that include the Throne Verse.\textsuperscript{96} The opaque ceramic lamps already referred to also correspond in use and iconography to those depicted in miniatures. Others include inscribed references to the Prophet and the Caliphs, some exclusively to 'Ali (fig. 12).\textsuperscript{97} These lamps were not meant as objects of illumination, but were used as votive offerings and as commemorative and royal gifts. Their primary function is not to provide illumination, but to imply it.

References to \textit{qanādīl} survive from the Fatimid period when al-Amir (1101–31) commissioned two pairs each of gold and silver lamps as gifts for al-Mashhad al-Husaynī in Ascalon and the Turbat al-Za'farān in Cairo.\textsuperscript{98} Nasir-i Khusraw saw many Fatimid silver lamps at the Dome of the Rock, but singled out a large one that was suspended above the rock itself; a similar arrangement can be seen in a sixteenth-century pilgrimage scroll.\textsuperscript{99} In the same account, Khusraw describes huge candles, annual gifts from the “Sultan of Egypt” whose name was inscribed on them in gold. Large candles can also be seen flanking the Prophet’s tomb in a stylized representation from a \textit{Dālā'il al-Khayrāt} manuscript.\textsuperscript{100} Ibn Battuta mentions gold and silver lamps in Mashhad, and describes three silver \textit{qanādīl} above the cenotaph of Qutham ibn al-

![Fig. 12. Turkey, Iznik. Ceramic \textit{qanādīl}, 16th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y., H.3. Dick Fund 59.69.3. (photo: courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.)](image)

Abbas in Samarqand.\textsuperscript{101} Collections of \textit{qanādīl} have survived at major shrines in cities like Cairo and Nefzef.\textsuperscript{102}

Waqf documents demonstrate that these donations were made at a more popular level as well. A wealthy thirteenth-century lady in Jabal Qasyun not only built a turba for a shaykh, but provided for keepers of the turba and her own adjoining tomb, and funds for oil, candles, and incense.\textsuperscript{103} Oil lamps, candles, and oil are common shrine offerings. Donating oil for the lamp of a particular saint in exchange for favors (\textit{naḍhr}) was a practice so widespread that “oiling someone’s lamp” became a medieval idiom for bribery.\textsuperscript{104} Representations of lamps reflect these practices, particularly with regard to the early tombstones with realistic images of glass lamps.\textsuperscript{105} These practices and beliefs led to the establishment of an artistic idiom pertaining to the iconography of shrines and mausolea.

Mihrab images can be read in two ways. A first, metaphorical, interpretation relies on descriptions of death and relates to eschatological beliefs. Accordingly, the
representations can be read as depictions of the soul in its reliquary. The second interpretation is of these mihrab images as realistic representations of shrines and tombs. In this interpretation the lamps are shrine objects that are illustrated on the mihrabs and tombstones, just as they are illustrated in the stylized depictions of mausolea.

Mihrab images show that shrine mihrabs, tombstones, and shrines all use the same visual vocabulary. Some of them, such as the Iranian mihrabs with their continually receding arches that give the illusion of leading to an innermost area where the burial-soul-qandil is located, or the Iraqi and Anatolian mihrabs with muqarnas hoods that resemble the tall muqarnas funerary domes, also hint at the architectural sources of the compositions. The presence of the arch in mihrab images is not a fortuitous detail; it underlines the origins of the design in the centrally planned mausoleum.

Mihrab images occur in shrines and mausolea such as those of Kharrarqan and Mosul that accompanied the spread of various cults of saints. The creation of various architectural types of memorial structures and the popularization of the individual mausoleum in the eleventh and later centuries correspond to the spread of mihrab images. The frequent use of these images on tombstones of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in particular indicates a transfer from the more formal and monumental setting of the shrine to the individual tomb. Thus the architectural iconography of the tomb with the corresponding standardization in patterns of piety established a formula that was adapted, in abbreviated form, to non-architectural memorial contexts. The single arch-lamp unit, therefore, is not a representation of niche mihrabs, but illustrates the interior of a specific type of architecture.

The close relationship between mihrab images and memorial structures underlines the existence of two main types of commemorative mihrab. One is representational and exhibits internal paradigms pertaining to tombstones, flat mihrabs, and commemorative plaques. It is distinct from niche mihrabs, which occur and operate in the context of the mosque. This representational type derives from the traditions and motifs associated with a second type of commemorative mihrab. This second type is architectural. Architectural mihrabs are the spatial, three-dimensional domed monuments which best display and exploit the language of commemoration developed by Islam.

Mihrab images and their motifs are major signs by which shrines, tombs, and mausolea can be immediately recognized. They emerge as part of an architectural, religious, and behavioral system reflected in concepts that are related to death and commemoration. The image of the suspended lamp beneath an epigraphic depiction of God’s Throne is meant to convey a message and to provide content for its immediate context. The particular architectural contexts in which these messages appear shape the disposition and overall organization of the compositions and are, consequently, also reflected in them.

Subtle variations in these depictions do exist: permutations in arrangement, design, and choice of additional or supplementary inscriptions individualize compositions which can then be identified with particular political, sectarian, pietistic, and philosophical attitudes. The general use of the basic details of mihrab images, however, keeps them from becoming attached to any single esoteric Muslim perception and places them within a more universal eschatological and cosmological Islamic vision. Neither meaningless ornaments nor invented symbols, mihrab images are coded signs within a wide-ranging medieval Islamic discourse on death, resurrection, and commemoration.

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

NOTES


2. For a recent interpretation of mihrabs as symbols, Walter B. Denny, “Reflections of Paradise in Islamic Art,” Images of Paradise in Islamic Art, ed. Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom (Hanover, N.H., 1991), pp. 33-43, esp. 36-38, where the niche “can be seen literally as the niche mentioned in the Koran and symbolically as the gateway to Paradise” (p. 37); and see entries 22a, 22b as well as those on prayer rugs. The proof for this symbolism consists solely of the Light Verse (Qurʾān 24: 35).

3. In two cases, both in Mosul, flat mihrabs are set at angles to conform to the correct orientation, see Najāt Muhammad al-Tūtūnchi, al-Māhirīb al-Ṭāriqīyya (Baghdad, 1976), figs. 58, 59; pls. 33, 34; Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, Archäologische
THE MIHRAB IMAGE


5. See Eva Baez, “Notes on the Iconography of Inscriptions and Symbols in the Ulu Camii of Eski Malatya,” Ars Turcaea: Akten des VI. Internationalen Kongresses für Türkische Kunst, München 1979 (Munich, 1987), pp. 136–43. “In the upper centre of the inscriptions one notes a pointed arch with a hanging lamp, two candlesticks and three stars, a composition which almost certainly wishes to convey the idea of a mihrab” (p. 137).

6. Although niches and flat mihrabs share the basic motif of an arch on columns, they are not necessarily related in function and meaning. Flat and two-dimensional mihrabs also fall into several categories, some of which are ornamental, while others have specific meanings related to their settings and particular iconographies.


8. The reference is so far unique and occurs in Ibn Battuta, Tuhfat al-nasiriz fi ghariib al-amsār wa az-jīh al-asfir, ed. Ahmad al-‘Awamī and Muhammad Ahmad Jād (Cairo, 1953), vol. 1, p. 46, surat mihrab in the grotto at al-Khalil; p. 48, shakl mihrāb in reference to the mihrab in the cave beneath the Dome of the Rock. The majority of the sources use the terms ḥajar manqūsh (engraved/inscribed stone) to denote tomb and shrine markers. A particularly relevant example is Ibn Taymiyya, who argues against the authenticity of the Mashhad al-Husayn at Ascalon partly on the grounds of the absence of such a marker (ḥajar manqūsh) or sign (‘alamah); see Ibn Taymiyya, Ra‘is al-Husayn in Majma‘ul rasā‘il, shaykh al-islam Ibn Taymiyya, ed. Muhammad Hāmid al-Faqi (Cairo, 1949), pp. 3–37, esp. p. 8.

9. Several examples in Edwin Binney, 3rd, and Walter B. Denney, Turkish Treasures from the Collection of Edwin Binney, 3rd (Portland, Ore., 1979), nos. 70, fol. 135r; 78, fols. 144r; 143r; 100, fols. 18r, 39r.


13. Gaston Wiet, Lampes et bouillottes en verre émaillé (Cairo, 1929), see no. 264. Examples also in Atul, Renaissance, pp. 134–37, nos. 52, 53.


17. Ibid., fig. 58b. The mosque of Darwish Pasha, later known as the Tekkiye Darwishyya, was founded in 1574 and incorporates the founder’s tomb.


19. Compare Atul, Sülüman, 166, 195, and fig. 12 here.


21. “God, there is no God but Him./The Living, the Eternal One/Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him/His is what the Heavens and the Earth contain/Who can intercede with Him except by His permission?/He knows what is before and behind men/They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills/His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth/And the preservation of both does not weary Him/He is the Exalted, the Immense one.”

22. The historical inscription on Panja’s mihrab states that the
work was done in hope for the šafāʾa (intercession) of the patron’s ancestor, Ismaʿīl ibn ʿAli ibn Muhammad ibn Ṣayd. For the inscriptions, *Archäologische Reise*, 1: 24-25; Bashir Francis and Nāṣir al-Naqşbandi, “al-Maḥārib al-qadima fi maṭḥal al-qṣur al-abbāšī bi Baghdād,” *Sumer* 7 (1951): 217-18, fig. 5; Tariq Jawad al-Janabi, *Studies in Medieval Iraqi Architecture* (Baghdad, 1982): 176-78, figs. 44a-b, pls. 166-68, considers the niches purely ornamental, used only to hold oil lamps. For a similar reference to the cult of ʿAli and the hoof of his horse, see Chahriyar Adle, “Un diptique de fondation en céramique lustre, Kāšān 711/1312,” *Art et société dans le monde iranien* (Paris, 1982): 199–218; and for a comparable tripartite mihrab, also with connections to ʿAli, see Géza Fehérvári, Az islám Múrvész története (Budapest, 1987), fig. 124, and note electric and lantern lamps in the niches.


26. The mihrab was restored in the fourteenth century, and it is possible that the lamp plaque dates to that time.


28. Much is the case, for example, of Imam Bāhir for which al-Suyūṭī (d. 1901), Mamlûk al-kitābât al-muḥarrarrah fi abnāyat al-Mosul, ed. al-Dawdawachi (Baghdad, 1956), pp. 141–47, signaled the survival of fragments of the verse on the four walls of the chamber, with the prayers for the holy family of Shiʿism on the qibla wall. These inscriptions were no longer visible when Francis and Naṣ̤ibandī carried out their study (pp. 216-17). The Throne Verse is a common choice in mausolea, particularly in the domes, Dood and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, 2: 10 f.


30. The candlesticks are not consistently used in Iraq either. They usually appear with a single lamp within a flat framework in contexts that are more immediately funerary.


34. For the tombstones and a comparative study of Ilkhanid uses of this motif, see George C. Miles, “Epitaphs from an Iṣṭahān Graveyard,” *Ars Islamica* 6 (1939): 151-57. The arch is composed of the word fasayyikohum, with “Allah” after it, a portion of 2: 137.

35. Rogers Fund 09.87. Color reproduction in Marilyn Jenkins, *Islamic Pottery: A Brief History,* *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 40, no. 4 (1983), fig. 29, where the object is related to a counterpart in the collection of the Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, dated 710 (1310-11). On the Metropolitan piece the date is almost completely effaced, but begins with nine (fi sanat tis‘ wa) is still visible). Comments on the epigraphic device of this object in Melikian-Chirvani, “The Lights of Sufi Shrines,” pp. 110 f. and n. 10; its stylistic characteristics are discussed in Miles, “Epitaphs,” p. 156.

36. The inscription includes most of the following verse (2. 256). The narrow margin around the frame is composed of several short suras suitable to the context and including (in sequence from right to left, after the Fatihah) 97, 110, 112, 113, 114, 105, 107.


39. Fehérvári, *Islâm*, fig. 124. These plaques can be compared to the setting of the lamp units in other large niche mihrabs, such as that of Panja Ali.

40. No. 1955.89, Sackler Museum, Cambridge, Mass. A rough and blank back indicates that the piece was embedded in a surface. A practically identical piece at the Louvre, MAO 439 (*L’Islam* 226, height 34 cm.; *Récue de Louvre* 23 [1973]: 42-43, fig. 3) is attributed to 12th-13th-century northern Syria. A molded piece without lamp or inscriptions is in R.H. Pinder Wilson, *Islamic Pottery 800-1400 a.d.* (London, 1969), fig. 178, attributed to Iran, 14th century. A number of mihrabs with long epigraphic repertoires and a variety of interior arches, but without the lamps, survive from Iran. See for example, the mihrab of the mosque of Maydan in Kashan (623/1226), *Survey*, vol. 10, pl. 704.

41. For a discussion of the tiles and brief descriptions, see John Carswell, “Two Tiny Turkish Pots — Some Recent Discoveries in Syria,” *Islamic Art* 2 (1987): 203-16, esp. 205, figs. 8, 9, 14, 15. There are two panels in the courtyard, at the left and right of the entrance, one of which has candlesticks and one of which bears the date 982 (1574-75).

42. This problem is explored by Fehérvári, “Tombstone or Mihrab?” pp. 241-47. The two functions are certainly distinguishable; nonetheless, the mihrabs, tombstones, and other objects using this iconography fall into one commemorative system or one large functional group by virtue of their memorial contexts and interpretations.


44. The verse begins “Allah la îlā aš-šūra al-hayy,” The bāmsa is standard at the beginning of these inscriptions. The same may be indicated by the use of the word marqād (resting place) rather than qabr (tomb).

45. The mihrabs associated with the imams, for example, cannot
be confused with tombstones, whereas the mihrab of a religious scholar, whose name is inscribed on it in the manner of the piece in the David collection, can be.

46. The piece was originally considered a "tombstone with mihrab design," and has been identified as a mihrab by Fehérvári, "Tombstone or Mihrāb?" pp. 241–47, where it is also attributed to the latter half of the 12th century. The piece is also published in Blair and Bloom, Images, p. 96, cat. no. 32, as "Stele in the Form of a Prayer Niche or Mihrāb," but with the interpretation: "In a typically Islamic layering of symbolism, the possible function of a grave marker takes the form of a mihrab, itself not only a literal niche, but also figurative gateway into Paradise and to the presence of God, symbolized here by a hanging lamp."

47. The inscription is on the lintel above the innermost arch: Fehérvári, "Tombstone or Mihrāb?" p. 245 and n. 40, reads: amr rabbat al-Khāṭirī Fāṭima, "ordered the mistress al-Khāṭirī Fāṭima . . ." and suggests (n. 40) al-Khatun as the family name.

48. Archäologische Reise, vol. 2, fig. 273; and for the inscriptions vol. 1, pp. 27–28. Obviously, mihrabs without lamps are just one of the categories that appear in Mosul. They have been chosen here to demonstrate that variations in the motifs do not affect the general functions of flat mihrabs.

49. The invocation of mercy at the end of the inscription is generally used for people who have already died. Either the inscription was added to the pieces after the lady had died or the mihrabs were made from funds deeded for the purpose. However, the possibility that this invocation may have been used for living individuals must not be discounted, particularly since many donors expected such a return in the form of invocations of mercy and blessings for their piety.

50. Lajin was the second person to add a flat mihrab to the structure, following the model of the Fatimid al-Afdal. For the mosque, see Maqrizi, Khitaq, 2: 265 f., and for Lajin's work, pp. 288–69; K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1940), 2: 348 f. The number of examples of such acts can be multiplied. For the moment, however, it is sufficient to note the circumstances in which the objects are used and that they often omit the lamps, as in two grotto mihrabs whose inscriptions remain unclear; Géza Fehérvári, "Two Early Mihrabs outside Shiraz," Bulletin of the Asia Institute of Pahlavi University, Shiraz 1 (1960): 3–16.

51. Baer, "Notes," figs. 2, 2b. Although, strictly speaking, this is a mosque, further investigations might reveal connections with the memory of a charismatic personality, as in the case of al-Aqmar mosque. Compare also the uses of the imagery in the niches of Anatolian mosques and shrines, for example, Özür-Bakır, Onuő ve endõrndõncõ yázılıarda Anadolu mihrâblari (Ankara, 1976), figs. 65, 66; pls. 149, 150. In late, particularly Ottoman, contexts, the composition can sometimes be found in the niche mihrabs of mosques. This location indicates a later transfer, not an original setting.


53. Jean Sauvaget, "Deux sanctuaires chites d'Alep," Syria 9, fasc. 3 (1928): 224–37, fig. 3. Sauvaget correctly identified these lamps as "qandîl" que la piéte musulmane allume encore aujourd'hui au-dessus des tombeaux vénérés, et qui se trouvaient logiquement à sa place à l’entrée d’un Machhad, assimilable dans une certaine mesure à un mausolée" (p. 229). However, he distinguished between these lamps and those that appear in mihrabs which he interpreted through reference to 24: 35 (228–29). Herzfeld, on the other hand, understood the façade lamps as "an illustration of mosques illuminated during Ramadan"; Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture, II," Ars Islamica 10 (1943): 13–70, esp. 70.

54. Hetjens-Museum, Islamische Keramik (Berlin, 1973): 133–54, no. 178. The authors associate the fragment with shrines of the "holy family" in Iran, Central Asia, and Transoxania, and further relate it to Soghdian ossuaries.


60. Both the literature and the number of tombstones are vast. Here reference is made only to a number of studies and examples specifically bearing on the composition. For obvious reasons, certain areas in which the motifs appear (for example, India) are left out of the discussion.


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66. Catalogue, vol. 6, pl. 39, no. 3792.

67. Ibid., vol. 6, pl. 40, nos. 6738 and 6739.

68. The early column is further distinguished by the concomitant use of cursive and Kufic. When Wiet studied the column, however, he did not express any doubts that the inscriptions and the image were not contemporary.

69. Some tarkhās omit the candlesticks, but in general the composition appears on the headstones above the historical inscriptions, and the Throne Verse usually runs around the perimeter; see for example, Catalogue, vol. 6, pl. 48, nos. 9767, 10952, both dated 662 (1263); pl. 49, nos. 11142, dated 667 (1269) and 6892, dated 674 (1270), the last having lost its Qur’ānic inscription; pl. 52, no. 13079, dated 684 (1285).

70. In the khanqāh begun by Barquq in the Qarafa (1399–1412); a second column with a lamp but no inscriptions is inset in one side of the niche mihrāb.

71. Built in 1556–59; Maqrīzī, Khitaṭ, 2: 316–18. The cenotaph was added in 1384 and, like many others, has undergone some restorations, most recently at the turn of the century by the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe. The iconography of the present headstone, which dates from the recent restoration, is consistent with earlier mihrāb images in Cairo.


73. As they are elsewhere; the absence of the Throne Verse in Aswan’s early tombstones has been noted by Rogers, "Calligraphy," p. 107. The simple inscribed marker continues in use in many areas unaffected by the iconographic developments of major centers; see, for example, Hamdi Nubani, "Mamilla Cemetery," Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan 3 (1956): 8–14.

74. Catalogue, 2, no. 10838, pl. 24, dated 245 (859), and the first chief arch, no. 2953, pl. 26, dated 246 (860), compare ʿAbād al-Tawwāb, no. 120, dated 253 (867).

75. The idea that Coptic art influenced Islamic tombstones and mihrābs is largely due to Creswell; see for example, Feherivai, "Tombstone or Mihrab?" pp. 243, 252; direct relationships, such as what appear to be portions of a Coptic cross at the top of the stelae, appear at a relatively late period in particular areas; see for example, the first such sample in Catalogue, vol. 2, no. 3160, pl. XXI, dated 347 (862), and ʿAbād al-Tawwāb, no. 97, dated 249 (861), no. 124, dated 254 (868), no. 145, dated 255 (869) none with the Throne Verse. For the commemorative Armenian khachkan and their connections to 13th-century Akhlat tombstones, Rogers, "Calligraphy," 114–15.


77. The battle was the first major defeat suffered by the Muslims. Regulations on the burial of martyrs (group graves and prayers, burial in blooded clothes, escaping the "squeeze" of the grave, and the omission of the questioning of the angels of death, Munkar and Nakir) were formulated at this time, as were the explanations offered by the Prophet with regard to Qur’ān 5:169 and the fate of the martyrs. For a summary of general burial rites as well as the exceptions applicable to martyrs, see Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albānī, ʿAbkām al-jaṃaʿa wa bidʿaʿuḥa (Beirut, 1969), esp. pp. 138 f. for martyrs.

78. A list of privileges is in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Kitāb al-ʾarūḥ, 3rd ed. (Hyderabad, 1357 H.), pp. 98–99, where each shahīd is allowed to intercede on behalf of seventy relatives.

79. Traditions pertinent to the position of martyrs are collected in al-Suyūṭī, Ṭumhīd al-فارش, pp. 119 f., with extensions to martyrs other than those killed in battle.

80. The verse states, "wa la tāhawabba al-ladhihi qitul fi sabili Allāhi amawātan bal ayyaʾun "Inda Rabbihum yurazgin.""

81. The tradition occurs with slight variations in most of the major collections, the exceptions being al-Nasaʾī and Bukhari who only mention the birds. It is repeated by later commentators, including such strict historians as al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn al-Hajj, and occurs also in the writings of Ibn Qayyba and al-Sihnī among others, and is so restricted to any single esoteric sensibility. For an example referring to different types of birds, see Kitāb al-ʾarūḥ, pp. 114 f., 120. The concept of barakah is studied in Ragnor Ecklund, Life between Death and Resurrection according to Islam (Upplands, 1941).

82. Lamāa usṭa ibhūw kinnukum bi uḥud jaʾalā Allāhu arwaḥallahum fi jaufi ṯayriy khudrin taridu anārā al-jannati, taʾkulū min thimārīḥa, wa taʾwa ila qandaḷīna min dhahabin muʾallaqātīn fī ḍhilibi al-ʾarsh. This version is from Kitāb al-ʾarūḥ in the Sunan of Abu Dawūd; see Abu Dawūd Sulaymān ibn al-ʿAshʾī ath ibn Ṣaḥāq al-ʿAzī di al-Ṣaḥīstānī, Sunan Abī Daʿūd, ed. Ahmad Saʿād ʿAli (Cairo, 1952), vol. 2, pp. 14–15.

83. As with many other details, certain differences exist in the exact understanding of this change. In some versions, the souls are not "deposited" inside the birds (sometimes also specified as white instead of green, sometimes with no color specification), but they undergo literal transmutation and assume bird forms (yauwār ʾayr) or alternatively become like birds (ka ʾayr); an ancient concept relating to the survival of the soul, Kitāb al-ʾarūḥ, p. 120. Other faithful believers spend the barakah in a micro-paradise in the grave, but there is some disagreement on the forms they take. Some traditions compare their souls to birds as well; see for example Ibn Mājā’s Sunan, ed. Muhammad Fuʿād ʿAbād al-Bāqī (Cairo, 1972), vol. 2, p. 1428: innama nasmatu al-muʾminīn jāʾirun yābquipu fi shajari al-jannati hatta ʾayrīʾi a ila jasadiyya yawma al-bāʾr ("the soul of the believer is a bird that eats from the trees of paradise, until he is returned to his body on the day of resurrection").

84. Apart from the cosmological associations of the throne, its shadow also provides protection on Judgment Day, see al-Suyūṭī’s Ṭumhīd al-فارش; the same concepts and privileges are described by Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn al-Husayn ibn ʿAlī al-Bayhaqī, Kitāb al-ʾasmaʾ wa al-ṣifāt, ed. Muhammad Zahir al-Kawtharī (Beirut, 1358 H.), pp. 370 f.

85. The term is technical with regard to martyrology and eschatology. It does not occur in the Qurʾān where instrīf and maṣīḥā must be used. Reference has already been made to Sauvaget’s connection between the ṣanāḥi and Islamic piety. Comparisons can also be made with the Byzantine tradition of "icon
lamps," late examples of which are in Treasures of the Orthodox Church Museum in Finland (Kuopio, Finland, 1985), nos. 68, 69, 70. Ioli Kalavrezou informs me that such special lamps, called candelions, were also used on special occasions and feast days. Similarities in the visual depictions of the martyr's illuminated soul can be found in Gospel illustrations at Sinai, for example, Yanni Mimarisi, Katalog al-makhtuṭat al-‘arabiyya al-muḥtashafa hadīṭan bi Dāy Sūrī Kattrīn al-muqaddas bi Tūr Sūrī (Athens, 1985): 24, no. 14; and compare the figure of Christ-martyr between two tapers on the lid of a silver pixis in the Vatican, illustrated in The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art, ed. John O'Neill (New York, 1983), no. 859 of the Museo Sacro, Biblioteca Apostolica Sacra collection.}

113. Numerous instances are recounted in pilgrimage books; the guiding light of the qandil of Shaykh Qudīb al-Bān, visible only at a distance, al-Umari, al-Mawṣil, 2: 122, cf. the miraculous lighting of the mashhad of Sayyida Zaynab in Cairo, Fu‘ād Māher, Karāmat al-aṣwa‘a (Cairo, 1971): 125, Shams al-Dīn Abū Abdullah Muhammad bīn Nāṣr al-Dīn al-Ansārī (Ibn al-Zayyāt), al-Kawwāb al-sayyāra fī ma‘rījat al-sīyāra (Baghdad, n.d.), p. 3, compares the torches to lamps and describes a "column of light" at Mashhad al-Nur near the Great Qarafa, p. 184. Other traditions relating to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at al-Khalīl speak of the preservation of their bodies, each with a gold and silver lamp on his head; Abī al-Ḥasan ʿAllī Ibn Abī Bakr al-Ḥarawi, Kitāb al-ḥarārāt ilā ma‘rījat al-sīyāra, ed. Janine Sourdrel-Thomine (Damascus, 1953), pp. 30–31 (but with qandil corrected by the editor to manādil (kurchiefs); however the same event is copied by Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Iyās, Bāda‘ī fī al-zahhār fī waqā‘āt al-dhūrāk 5 vols. (Cairo, 1982), vol. 1, part 1, p. 244, using qandil; Shi‘i interpreta- tions of the imams as the "Lights of the Faith" are in Tabrizī, Kunūz al-sa‘āda, p. 70. The theme of light in connection with miraculous or otherworldly events persists in contemporary literature.

114. The qandil as the temporary barzakh and not as the perma- nent abode of martyrs is a specification that can be found in Ibn Qayyim, Kitāb al-rub, p. 120–21.

115. A representative discussion of Sunni-Shi‘i differences is in Daḥkhāl, I: 25 f.

116. The phrases appear on the Egyptian stones and on ones from Daḥkhāl, Schneider, Daḥkhāl, nos. 219, 237; for instances in Syria, Heinz Gaube, Arabische Inschriften aus Syrien (Beirut, 1978), p. 24, nos. 29, 31, p. 50, nos. 80, 81. The terms al-shab al-sa‘ād al-shashid need not always occur together. Daḥkhāl no. 237, for example, is for al-shakh al-sa‘ād al-shashid, while no. 219, which belongs to a woman, states ḥādhab qarī al-shashid al-shashida al-tāhira al-ṣaffa (the pure). For an Imami interpreta- tion of the terms al-sha‘b al-sa’ād al-shashid, see Tabrizī, Kunūz al- sa‘āda, p. 95. When they appear with the youth the phrases reflect the belief that martyrdom is awarded to all who die prematurely. Comparisons to martyrs can also be indirect, expressing hope of being with the martyrs in ʿibāyīn, Daḥkhāl, nos. 1, 11, 60.


119. For a discussion of the lamps and candelsticks, as well as the reading of the miniature space as the interior of a royal mau- soleum, see Melikian-Chirvani, "The Lights of Sufi Shrines," p. 122.


121. The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, 413. Reference is here made to fol. 38a and fol. 115b, illustrated in Atul, Sūleymān, figs. 43a and 43b respectively. Fol. 38a (Sultan Sūleymān Praying at the Mausoleum of Eyyūb Ensari) also in L’Art décoratif ottoman, no. 207. The examples can be multiplied; see, for example, the miniature in the Kef Collection depicting the death of Shirin from Nizami’s Khamsa, illustrated in A.M. Kervorkian and J. P. Sirc, Les jardins des dieux: sept siècles de peinture persane (Paris, 1983), p. 42.

122. Both at the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Mûzesi and both from the reign of Osman II; illustrated in L’Art décoratif ottoman, no. 29, museum no. 177, ca. 1620; no. 52, museum no. 293, dated 1618 and inscribed as a waqf for the shrine of Ensari.

123. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, 15123; illustrated in Atul, Renaissance, pp. 98–99, no. 32; cf. Gaston Wiet, Album de Musée Arabe du Caire (Cairo, 1930), no. 53.

124. See Atul, Sūleymān, nos. 166, 191. The first bears the words "Allah," "Muhammad," and "Ali," the second has Allāhu nūri al-samatawāt wa al-aṣf. References to the Prophet and the Caliphs as the "lights" of the mosque are frequent in Ottoman times. The poetry on the Davrīshīya plaque, for example, refers to them as cheriṣh.

125. The qandil of the 'urūb were located during the Turkish insur- rection; see Maqrīzī, Khāṭāt, I: 407–8.


127. Binney, Treasures, no. 76, fol. 143r; dated 1201 (1786–87). The entire structure is composed and treated like a mihrāb image without lamps.


129. For the lamps in Nejef, see Su‘ād Māhir, Masḥhad al-Imām ʿAllī fi al-naṣaf (Cairo, 1388 H.): 132 f.

130. Gaube, Arabische Inschriften, p. 116. Nawwarā Allāhā darbāhha is part of the turba’s inscription. A later waqf (pp. 104–5), dated 1164 (1751), provides for cleaning a bura, putting oil in its qandil, and its lighting. Needless to say, these acts were condemned by some authorities; Ibn Qayyim, Ighātha, I: 129.

131. Abū Mansūr ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Muhammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Thu‘ālībi al-Nāṣibī, Thīmār al-qandil fī al-mudāf wa al-man...
At this level, the mihrab image can be read as a *mishkāl*, but in the very literal sense of the blind-niched recess meant to hold lamps. This definition occurs regularly in the Arabic lexicographical collections, where the word is considered an Ethiopian derivation that means “small niche” (*kwamna* or *juwariq*). In certain cases the word is given the meaning “lamp” as in al-Isfahani’s *Mufradāt*, a meaning which is also current in contemporary Arabic, but which the lexicographers derive from the concave shape of the lamp. Serjeant notes the South Arabian use of the terms *tāqqatāq* as a niche for holding lamps; the most concise statement occurs in M. J. Kister, “‘A Booth Like the Booth of Moses . . .’: A Study of an Early Hadith,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24 (1962): 150–55, esp. 153, n. 1.

See, for example, the graffito of a tomb tower with suspended lamps in Beyhan Karamağaralı, “Anadolu’da tarikat ve tekke sanatı,” *İlāhiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 21 (1976): 247–54, fig. 23. A fragmentary painting on paper at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (AI 82.1), places the lamps in a niche in which a cenotaph is also represented. A mortar at the Victoria and Albert Museum with lamp representations on its exterior has been interpreted as a “mausoleum turned inside out,” A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World 8–18th Centuries* (London, 1982), pp. 161–62, no. 70.

As such, they lead to an agreement with the definition of the mihrab as tomb, as suggested by Ghul, “Arabian *MDQNT,*” and accepted by Fehervari, “Tombstone or Mihrab?” However, the types of tomb-mihhrabs in question are different in the setting discussed by Ghul and the Islamic Middle Ages. More important, the evidence presented here as well as further exploration of the etymology of the term mihrab suggest that architectural mihrabs are not always tombs.