Any attempt to survey the development and significance of portraiture in the Persian pictorial tradition requires the synthesis of scattered and often contradictory materials. Earlier efforts to analyze the role of portraits in the visual culture of the Islamic world have confronted seemingly insoluble problems. Textual and pictorial evidence attests that at certain times portraiture flourished, particularly in Iran, Central Asia, and India. On the other hand, religious scruples evidenced in Koranic commentaries that circulated among both Sunni and Shi'a scholars, concerning the impropriety of a person seeking to usurp the creative role of God by producing images of animate beings appear to preclude the production of individualized portraits. Attempts to amalgamate this conflicting evidence into a coherent whole have been hampered by the absence of any theoretical model for evaluating the relative significance of its constituent elements. Little attention has been paid either to reconstructing the functions served by portraiture or even to defining what constitutes a portrait within the Persian cultural sphere. The aim of this essay is to create a historical and conceptual framework for analyzing the role of portraiture in the pictorial tradition of pre-modern Iran and related regions and thereby lay the foundations for a more satisfactory resolution of these complicated questions.

Investigations into the role of images in various regions of the Islamic world have reached different and sometimes intrinsically contradictory conclusions. Some studies refer tangentially to the question of portraits in the course of a broader consideration of attitudes toward representational art among Muslims. They often link portraits with other kinds of images belonging to different periods and places into a continuum without regard for the circumstances surrounding their creation or use.

A few scholars treat the question of portraits in Islamic art in greater, if somewhat confusing, detail. These contradictions are exemplified by T. W. Arnold in his *Painting in Islam*, where he devotes an entire chapter to evidence about the popularity of portraiture, but prefaces his remarks with the caveat that portraiture came under the Islamic theological condemnation of the pictorial representation of “living beings.” Without establishing any criteria for defining what constitutes a portrait, he compares depictions of individuals from the several periods of Islamic history in media ranging from wall paintings to coins and manuscript illustrations. He also collects textual references which describe wall paintings and manuscript illustrations that are said to portray specific individuals. By the end of the chapter he concludes that portraiture had a long history in the Islamic world, particularly at princely courts, and that the examples which have survived must form only a small part of the total that once existed. Nevertheless, Arnold underscores the ambivalent status of portraiture in the Islamic community with accounts of how during the eighteenth century the elite of the Ottoman world both commissioned their own portraits from European painters and were fearful lest the existence of such depictions become known to their compatriots.

Papadopulo presents a more negative interpretation of portraiture’s significance to the Islamic world, when he states, “There were never to be portraits in Muslim art, neither painted nor sculpted; their introduction would mark the end of a Muslim aesthetic.” He bases this conclusion on his view that this aesthetic followed the “principle of inversimilitude,” so that “the artist did not seek to imitate animate beings and their natural appearances, nor above all, make any attempt to individualize his subjects.” Although he admits the existence of depictions which commemorated revered personages, including “folk-style ‘portraits’ of all the saints and heroes of Islam” which were widely available in Turkey, he states that these should not be considered portraits because they depict “the idea of man as embodied in the type of saints.”

In their approaches to the role of portraiture in the
pictorial traditions of the Islamic world, Arnold and Papadopoulo took opposite paths and reached very different conclusions. Arnold identifies almost any representation of a princely figure as a portrait and therefore considers portraiture to have been common, whereas Papadopoulo insists that true portraiture had no place in the "Muslim aesthetic," and defines it as the desire to create a "real" image through the application of a range of pictorial techniques, including the use of modeling and the creation of depth by means of perspective, all of which he claims had been "abandoned" by the Muslim painter in his quest for "inverisimilitude."  

Although the logic of Papadopoulo's equation of portraiture with the mode of verisimilitude used in European art of recent centuries suggests that "true portraits" could only arise in the Middle East and India under "European influence," the force of this argument is dissipated by the general aura of uncertainty which surrounds the subject as a whole. In dealing with portraiture in Islamic painting, scholars appear caught between an acceptance of the theory that its best known example, Mughal portraiture, is the product of a European catalyst, and an unease that this formulation does not fully correspond with the evidence in hand (fig. 1).  

Although Richard Brilliant's recent book is devoted to the study of portraiture in Western art, his theoretical framework provides a useful platform for a consideration of the portrait in the Perso-Islamic tradition as well. He stresses that portraiture is a cultural construct linking a subject, a creator, and an audience. He defines it broadly as follows: Portraits are works of art, intentionally made by artists in a variety of media, depicting living or once living people.  

In a portrait the relationship between its maker and the person portrayed is fixed at the moment of its creation, but a work's potential audience is virtually unlimited, a circumstance that often leads to new appraisals of portraits by persons removed in time and space from their moment of production. The power and attraction of portraits spring from the fact that they are "an intensified form of the general nature of the picture." The portrait's power to evoke the presence of a specific person stimulates a deeper and more personal engagement and response from the viewer than is usually encountered when examining other kinds of images. Despite possessing this emotional immediacy, portraits are intrinsically idealized and can be highly variable in their mode of execution. Brilliant's views recall Gombrich's earlier definition of a portrait: "It is not a faithful record of a visual experience but the faithful construction of a relational model ... such a model can be constructed to any required degree of accuracy."  

These analyses situate the portrait in socially structured human relationships because both the artist and the subject participate in the value system of a given society and portraits thus exemplify "the interface between art and social life." The notion that a portrait is "a relational model" gives greater prominence to the artist's intentions than to the methods by which he reaches this goal and also provides for the dynamic character of a viewer's response. These views are compatible with the findings of anthropologists about the nature of artistic traditions in various societies. Those studies have established that the definition of what constitutes art and how it is viewed in a given society is largely a "local matter." The exploration of an artistic tradition, therefore, requires recognition that it is a "collective formation" as well as a "primary document" of the culture in question.  

These observations open new avenues for the investigation of portraiture in the Perso-Islamic tradition and suggest it could have included portraits that were neither highly individualized nor executed in a "Western style" but which would nevertheless have been recognized by contemporary viewers as the depiction of a specific person and which could have evoked in a spectator a memory of that person. When "local tradition" describes something as a "portrait," the goal should be to understand how that type of portraiture functioned and to establish which aspects of the culture might have nurtured and encouraged its development. Although cognizance must be given to the role of religious values in shaping attitudes toward portraiture, other cultural factors need to be considered in order to create a more balanced understanding of the question. Textual descriptions which testify to the "intensified power" of portraits to evoke the presence of an individual are also admissible in such a reconstruction.

Images created in Iran at the Qajar court and those produced for the Mughal rulers of India have been considered examples of "true" or "Westernized" portraits because of the veristic technique in which they are executed, and they are thus assumed to arise from a rupture with an artistic tradition that had previously sh unned portraiture (figs. 1-3). A closer examination of contemporary sources raises questions about
Fig. 1. Mughal prince with falcon. Akbar period, 1600–5. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Nasli and Alice Heeramanick Collection, Museum Associates Purchase 83.1.4.
whether, in fact, Mughal and Qajar portraits constituted a fundamental break with earlier regional cultural traditions. The large-scale images of the Qajar rulers that were the focus of a recent exhibition fitted easily into the definitions of portraiture proposed by art historians, because they clearly depicted a specific person and aroused in their audience the memory of that person. As Layla Diba has shown, portraits of Fath 'Ali Shah were venerated almost as if they were doubles of the ruler himself, a reaction which led her to compare such attitudes with the devotion accorded to religious images. What is especially relevant to this discussion, however, is her suggestion that far from being the product of foreign concepts, this genre of large-scale painting springs from a "local tradition" of pre-Islamic origin which was revived as early as the middle of the seventeenth century after being "only briefly interrupted by Islamic attitudes toward imagery."17

Statements about the use of portraiture by the Mughal dynasty in India found in contemporary texts suggest that, although their painters may have used veristic techniques borrowed from contemporary European art, the patrons' goals can be linked to earlier intellectual traditions in Perso-Islamic culture. One of the most widely repeated statements about Mughal art is Akbar's defense of painting recorded by his biographer, Abu'l Fazl:

There are many that hate painting; but such men I dislike. It appears to me as if the painter had quite peculiar means of recognizing God; for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individuality on his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the giver of life, and thus will increase in knowledge.18

This statement speaks generally of the depiction of living creatures but his comments must have encompassed portraiture, because one of Akbar's most important commissions was of an album containing portraits of "all the grandees of the realm."19 Abu'l Fazl appears to concur with Akbar's opinions because he observes that the "making of likenesses" of objects can be "a source of wisdom" for "the regulated mind."20 The depiction of the young man holding a falcon and dressed in an elaborately patterned garment is typical of early-seventeenth-century Mughal court portraits (fig. 1).21 Although at first glance Akbar's comments may seem to be "modern" or even "Western," his statements carry the strong imprint of ideas about the nature of art and representations promulgated by Plotinus (ca. 204-79 C.E.) and amplified in the teachings of later Neoplatonists. Although Plotinus is said to have refused to sit for his own portrait because it could only be "an image of an image," his views on the nature of art and the process of representation provide a rationale for the elevation of artistic production to the plane of an intellectual and even spiritual experience.22 The stress which Plotinus placed on the visual arts in his discussions about beauty and its connection to the creative powers of the universe provided a foundation for many later elaborations of aesthetics.23 Akbar's view that the act of painting can be construed as a devotional gesture because it reminds the painter of the superiority of God's creative powers is strikingly parallel to this passage on the value of artistic representation in the Enneads of Plotinus:

The arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation natural objects, for to begin with, those natural objects are themselves imitations; then, we must recognize that they give us no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own, they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking.24

This belief that a work of art is an enhanced version of nature and derives much of its power from the manner in which it provides a glimpse of the central creative force of the universe had important implications for portraiture. It suggests that under the proper conditions a portrait could express such an "inner reality," revealing significant aspects of the subject's personality, especially those with connections to underlying universal principles.

Many centuries and numerous missing links separate statements on the value of representational art by Plotinus and Akbar, but the congruity in their views is probably no accident; the challenge lies in discerning whether there is a path which connects one to the other. If such a continuity could be demonstrated it would help to establish the aspects of Perso-Islamic culture which supported and encouraged the creation of portraits and thus possibly identify, within it, the roots of Mughal and Qajar portraiture.

Modern scholars have demonstrated that many Hellenistic treatises were the subject of intense scrutiny by scholars active in Islamic regions, particularly from the eighth to tenth centuries. Texts dealing with
a variety of scientific and practical subjects were carefully translated and analyzed by generations of scholars and ultimately used as the foundation of new scholarship. It is generally believed, however, that Islamic culture was "by and large hostile" to the artistic heritage of late antiquity.25.

This view seems to be confirmed by the often tortuous paths through which writings by Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, including those dealing with art and aesthetics, were transmitted to the Islamic world. Identifying the sources of Neoplatonic concepts that gained currency in the Islamic world is complicated by the fact that many texts circulated "in disguise" through their attribution to other authors, ranging from Aristotle to an anonymous "Greek sage" (al-shaykh al-yfnandn). Thus portions of the last three sections of the Enneads of Plotinus, edited by his student Proclus, were known as the "Theology of Aristotle." Ideas by later Neoplatonists such as Porphyry were conveyed in a similarly anonymous fashion.26 The anonymity or incorrect attribution of a text's authorship did not, however, preclude the circulation of its contents, and the deep impress of Neoplatonic concepts on certain aspects of Islamic culture such as its mystical tradition is widely acknowledged.

Investigations into the manner in which Greek texts were translated have also demonstrated, however, that this process was dynamic. Such texts were edited and even augmented in accordance with the views of the translators. This process is particularly evident when the text treated questions of religious significance.27 Thus it would require a detailed comparison of Plotinus's own text to its translated versions in order to ascertain how completely his ideas about aesthetics were transmitted to Islamic culture. Once this has been established, it is also necessary to trace how this edited version of his ideas was used by Islamic scholars.

In the case of Akbar, any acquaintance with Neoplatonic concepts was certainly indirect. The list of books which he is reported to have studied includes works by Ghazali and Jalal al-Din Rumi, both of whom were much concerned with the relation of outward appearance and inner essence, a topic central to the theory of portraiture.28 Thus as a preliminary measure it is possible to compare the views of Ghazali and Rumi with those of Akbar with respect to the value of artistic representations in general and of portraiture in particular.

The relationship between outward form and inner essence is treated directly in the writings of Ghazali (1059–1111) on the nature of beauty. He discusses several types of beauty and the manner in which they are perceived by the senses, in an ascending progression that moves from the beauty of man to that of the creation and finally focuses on how to define God's beauty. The faculty of sight and the related skill of visual imagination are important aspects of this process. The eye is attracted to beauty and takes pleasure from its perception.29 Only the weak focus exclusively on external appearances because the essential beauty of man's creations such as poetry, painting (al-naqsh), and architecture reflect the inner qualities of the poet, painter (al-naqqash), and builder.30 The degree of the pleasure derived from the contemplation of beauty is proportional to the love it arouses. Thus the more attractive a face, the greater one's pleasure in contemplating it. Given the superiority of sight over smell, it is logical that examining a handsome face (or portrait) (surat jamila) is more pleasurable than the scent of a perfume.31

Al-Ghazali, however, stresses the limited value of visible beauty. He reserves the highest place for a kind of beauty that can only be comprehended by an inner perception (al-bastra al-batin). The beauty of important religious figures such as the Companions of the Prophet, the noted jurist Imam Shafi'i, and particularly of the prophets themselves can only be apprehended by this inner sense. This is because either they are no longer alive or their outer appearance was not indicative of their true inner qualities.32 The key example of this superiority of inner beauty over its visible counterpart comes with the qualities of a prophet: "What a difference there is between someone who loves a painting on the wall because of the beauty of its external appearance and someone who loves one of the prophets because of the beauty of his invisible qualities."33 Al-Ghazali does not indicate what kind of wall painting he is comparing to the beauty of a prophet, but the logic of his discussion suggests that he may have been comparing the depiction of a person to the mental apprehension of the qualities of a prophet.

Comments on painting are scattered throughout the poetry of Mevlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–73), but the clearest indication of his opinions about figural painting in general and portraiture in particular are contained in two anecdotes from his biography composed by his disciple Aflaki. One concerns a Byzantine icon, and the other describes a painter's attempt to make Mevlana's portrait. The principal actor in both
instances is the same person, one of Mevlana's disciples named Ayn al-Dawla al-Rumi, who was both a painter and a Christian. Another painter and Christian named Ayn al-Dawla about an incomparable image of Maryam and Isa (Mary and Jesus) in an Istanbul monastery which no painter has ever been able to duplicate. Seized with a desire to see it, Ayn al-Dawla goes to Istanbul and takes up residence in that monastery. After some time, he steals the image which he takes back to Konya and shows to Mevlana. The latter admires the painting but claims that the Maryam and Isa depicted in it are complaining that they have been mistreated by Ayn al-Dawla. When the artist protests that paintings cannot talk, Mevlana rebukes him for loving an inanimate object rather than admiring the design of world and all of its animate creatures which God has created. Ayn al-Dawla then sees the error of his ways and converts to Islam.3

The other incident concerns a portrait Ayn al-Dawla paints of Mevlana himself at the request of one of the holy man's ardent admirers, Gurji Khatun, wife of the Seljuq ruler of Anatolia. She wishes to have a painting of Mevlana as a memento to console her when she is separated from him. To please her, her husband commissions Ayn al-Dawla to draw and paint such a portrait on a sheet of paper. Mevlana gives the painter permission to draw him. The artist puts his pen to the paper and produces an exquisite image, but when he compares it to Mevlana, the latter's appearance seems to have changed. He then takes a second sheet and makes another sketch, but each time that he captures Mevlana's image the latter seems to change. Finally after making twenty sketches he abandons his attempt to re-create an accurate likeness of Mevlana. On seeing the result of Ayn al-Dawla's efforts Mevlana compares himself to the limitless, ever-changing sea which cannot be immobilized. Gurji Khatun, however, accepts the paintings and takes solace in their contemplation.3

These anecdotes both acknowledge the power of images and stress their inherent limitations. An icon, however beautiful, should not be the focus of the veneration which is due to God as the Creator of the Universe, a message which echoes the fundamental prohibition of idolatry enunciated in the Koran. This theme must have had a particular relevance to the competition between Christianity and Islam in the Anatolian environment of Rumi and Aflaki. The second story provides an ambivalent evaluation of portraiture. It stresses that Mevlana's spiritual essence cannot be reduced to an image, or even a series of images, yet acknowledges a portrait's value as a memento. Mevlana's reaction to Ayn al-Dawla's efforts recalls Plotinus's rejection of a request for his own portrait on the grounds that it is only "the image of an image." At the same time, Aflaki's description of Gurji Khatun's desire for a portrait to assuage her intense longing for Mevlana's presence is couched in the language of love and is reminiscent of the many accounts in Islamic, especially Persian, literature about portraits that inspire love.35 These literary accounts of the power of portraits recognize the particular emotional intensity that they arouse, and can also provide a circumscribed justification for their production and use. Aflaki's anecdotes, however, also demonstrate that in thirteenth-century Anatolia both the making of portraits and veneration of icons are activities associated with "Rum," that is Christians and/or Greeks.

Ghazali's views on the superiority of inner experience over sensate experience appears to devalue sensual perception in the context of religious experience, but it does accord painting and possibly portraiture a place in the lesser realms of beauty. His text also reflects an awareness of ideas about physiognomy which are linked in other sources to portraiture. One of the examples that he uses to demonstrate the dichotomy between a person's external characteristics and his inner merit is that of the jurist al-Shafi'i, whose physical person was not attractive despite his high religious merit.37 This contrast is reminiscent of descriptions of Socrates as outwardly ugly but inwardly beautiful contained in translated Greek aphorisms that circulated in the Islamic world.38

As Franz Rosenthal has demonstrated, statements appreciative of the representational arts were included in collections of Greek aphorisms. Translations of these texts were widely circulated in the Islamic world due to their practical or moral value and because of the witty manner in which those sentiments were conveyed. One of the favored themes of this literature was the harmony or consonance between a person's external appearance and his personality or moral stature. These collections contain numerous examples that explore the correlation or discordance between beauty and goodness or ugliness and depravity. Included among them are instances where a person's character is revealed by an examination of his portrait.39

In the Greek tradition, the idea that a person's character and behavior could be deduced and even
predicted from either his appearance or his portrait was codified in the study of physiognomy, a discipline that combined aspects of medicine, psychology, and divination. The widespread interest of the medieval Muslims in this analytical and predictive technique is signaled both by their translation of Greek texts on physiognomy and by their composition of new treatises on this subject. Ibn al-Nadim knew of a text on physiognomy by the second-century author Polemo and of another attributed to Aristotle which indicates that translations of these works circulated in tenth-century Iraq.40

The wide appeal of physiognomy, or ‘ilm al-firāsa, to medieval Muslims is also indicated by the eminent scholars who composed works on this subject. The polymath Ya’qub b. Ishaq al-Kindi (ca. 802–66), who is said to have written over 250 treatises, composed a Risāla al-Firāsa of which a manuscript survives. Al-Kindi is best known for his study of philosophical texts including those of the leading Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus. He also wrote on optics, pharmacy, and astrology.41 Physiognomy was also among the interests of the physician and theologian Fakhr al-Din Muhammad b. Zakariyya al-Razi (ca. 1149–1209) whose treatise Kitāb al-Firāsa provides instruction on the principles which underlie this discipline. He describes the impact of the humors on temperament and behavior, although a person’s age, sex, diet, ethnic type, and geographical origin must also be considered.42

The detailed physical and psychological descriptions of important persons found in the physiognomic literature were also incorporated in other texts. The description of Aristotle found in the history of Bar Hebraeus is an example of this diffusion. Aristotle, who is said to have “loved the truth,” was handsome in stature, fair in complexion with a neat beard, broad nose, and blue eyes.43 This description is an abbreviated version of Aristotle’s characterization in Mubashshir ibn Fātik’s Mukhtar al-Hikam, a compilation of maxims based on Greek sources composed in 1048–49. This text adds comments about the way Aristotle walked, his love of reading, his deliberate manner of speech, and his habit of moderation.44 These descriptions of Aristotle are closely parallel to the characterization of “a scholar” in the physiognomic treatise of Polemo: a man who loves scholarship has a well-proportioned, straight figure, reddish-white complexion, wavy, reddish-brown hair which is smooth and not curly or thick. He possesses a well-proportioned figure and strong shoulder blades. His tendons and

thighs are full, his shanks strong, his upper arms full and strong. He possesses a wide, not a pointed forehead, is not very corpulent, and has moist blue-gray eyes.45

These physiognomic characterizations are in fact verbal portraits, so it is not surprising that in some Greek texts such descriptions were interspersed with portraits of the individuals described. In the late-antique period, it was also common practice for a book containing the text of a given author to be prefaced by his portrait, and the Arab translators of such texts were aware of this practice. Eva Hoffman has suggested that the inclusion of author portraits in Greek texts was an important catalyst for the addition of portraits to thirteenth-century Arabic manuscripts. Some of the earliest such portraits are located in texts dependent on Greek sources, and understandably those images also reflect a classical model. Gradually, however, the manner in which classical authors were portrayed in Arabic manuscripts began to conform to the conventions of dress and posture prevalent in the milieu in which they were produced.46

The practice of linking an author’s portrait with his text was subsequently applied to the works of Muslim authors. In an anthology of poetry compiled in 1184 at Isfahan for the Seljuk Sultan Tughrīl, the portrait (sūra) of each poet introduced the section containing his verses. An early-fourteenth-century anthology of Persian poetry now in London continues this tradition of prefacing a text with the author’s portrait.47 A late-thirteenth-century historical text describing the Mongol invasion also opens with a portrait of its author Juvayni, who is shown writing his text.48

The practice of placing a portrait on the opening pages of a book continued to be popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and appears in both Arabic and Persian manuscripts, but the person depicted is more likely to be the manuscript’s patron than its author. Especially in the Persian cultural sphere, portrait-like paintings on the opening pages of a manuscript had a particular popularity in the fifteenth century. Some of them are quite generic, but those in manuscripts produced for princely patrons meet the criteria of a true portrait, since a contemporary viewer would have recognized in them the depiction of a specific person. Some of the best known of these depictions portray a member of the Timurid family engaged in a characteristic activity. The setting in which they were depicted was an important part of their portrayal because it allowed the viewer to link
the image with a specific person and sometimes even with a particular event in his life. Thus Timur is shown holding court, and Baysunghur imbibes wine. Although such portraits probably do not depict these individuals at any particular moment, some Timurid examples are more specific in their focus. An example is the double-page battle scene in which Ibrahim Sultan, on the right, is shown confidently leading his troops toward a Turkman force, on the left, headed by Iskandar b. Kara Yusuf, who turns back biting his finger in consternation (figs. 3-4). This image is the frontispiece for a copy of Firdawsi’s Šāhnāma and is thus not accompanied by any explanatory text, but it does correspond to descriptions of a battle that occurred on April 1429 which are contained in Timurid historical sources. Although neither of these key figures is labeled, each of them would have been recognized by a contemporary viewer because of this event’s notoriety.

Interest in portraiture seems to grow as the fifteenth century runs its course. The last effective Timurid ruler, Sultan Husayn Mirza (1470–1506), was portrayed in several different contexts—as a youthful ruler showing his deference to religious authority, relaxing with the women of his household, and experiencing the inter-related intoxications of wine and love. These contextual or situational portraits may seem to be completely removed from the tradition of physiognomic portraiture exemplified both by classical author portraits and by their descendants in Islamic manuscripts, but both sets of paintings are based on an assumption that a person’s outward appearance reveals his character and personality. In the Persian tradition the setting in which a figure is placed, or
the action in which he is portrayed, provides external clues to aid the decoding of his image. Whether the manner in which rulers were depicted is in any way linked to a continued interest in physiognomic principles remains to be determined. The Mughal emperors were avid collectors of fifteenth-century, particularly Timurid, manuscripts and paintings. The knowledge that Timurid paintings contained portraits may have been one of the things that encouraged Akbar and his descendants to have themselves and their courts memorialized through portraiture.

As the popularity of portraiture grew, there appears to have been a parallel evolution in writing about it that explored the connection between an image's external appearance and its inner significance. By the late sixteenth century the Safavid poet and painter Sadeghi Beg can claim that the outer form (ṣūra) of his portraits had almost been able to portray a person's ma'nī or inner essence. He also claims that some paintings are so lifelike that all they lack is speech. Abu'l Fazl also comments on the connections between exterior appearance and inner meaning. He stresses that "form leads us to recognize a body; the body itself leads us to what we call a notion or an idea." He adds that through their skill some painters have managed to create images "of mental states" so clearly that "people may mistake a picture for a reality." The existence of texts which explore the relationship between the practice of painting and its historical or philosophical foundations is also a signal of the medium's growing respectability at princely courts in both Iran and India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although it is not yet possible to reconstruct all the stages by which Neoplatonic concepts and ideas from the science of physiognomy were adopted by Islamic authors to explain and justify the nature of pictorial representation in general and portraiture in particular, the Mughals inherited a cultural tradition which clearly helped to shape their own ideas about portraiture and made them favorably disposed toward its use.

This discussion about the development of figural portraiture has, however, largely set aside the issue of the impact of religious concerns on modes of portrayal. Although the ideas contained in al-Ghazali's discussion of the invisibility of prophetic beauty would seem to preclude the development of any portrait genre with a religious focus, a tradition developed of using a verbal description of the Prophet Muhammad, known as a hilya or ornament, as a devotional aid. Descriptions of the Prophet's physical appearance were embedded in hadith from an early date. One of the most widely used is reported on the authority of 'Ali b. Abu Talib and was contained in a late-ninth-century text, the Shama'il al-Mustafaviyah of Muhammad b. Isa al-Tirmidi. It describes the Prophet from head to foot and comments on the manner in which he moved, spoke, and behaved. The wealth of concrete detail in this text about his height, hair, eyes, complexion, torso, and limbs would permi a person to imagine the Prophet in his "mind's eye" or by using what al-Ghazali calls "inner perception."

A statement attributed to the Prophet alludes to the hilya's evocative character as well as to the religious benefits that could result from its contemplation: "For him who sees my hilya after my death it is as if he had seen me myself, and he who sees it longing for me, for him God will make Hellfire prohibited." Calligraphic renditions of this text are said to have circulated as early as the ninth century, but its widest use appears to have occurred from the seventeenth century onward, and examples prepared as independent panels that could be framed and hung on a wall became particularly popular in the Ottoman Empire. Sometimes the text of the hilya was combined with other visual signs of the Prophet's mission such as his birthmark known as the "seal of prophecy" or the impression of his sandals or feet.

Both the Prophet's verbal portrait and the depiction of his footprint or birthmark to evoke his memory appear related to the traditions of firāsā. His portrayal in words has literary parallels to descriptions in physiognomic treatises and the schematic reproduction of other aspects of his person recall even older Arabian traditions which stressed the importance of a person's feet and birthmarks for predicting his destiny. It is even possible to consider either the text of the hilya or such emblems as a special form of physiognomic portrait. They would fit within Gombrich's definition of a portrait as a "relational model" that can be constructed to "any required degree of accuracy." The popularity of panels containing the hilya in Ottoman Turkey probably indicates that the region's cultural traditions were less favorable to the use of pictorial portraiture than were those of either Iran or India.

There is still much to learn about the factors which led to a development of pictorial portraiture in the Persian tradition, but this survey suggests that, despite reservations in religious circles about its propriety, there were other aspects of Perso-Islamic culture which
encouraged its use. In their analysis of painting and portraiture, there is common ground in the views of Akbar, Rumi, and Ghazali. All emphasize the intrinsic and inescapable limitations of man-made images when compared to the larger framework of God's creation. This subordinate status nevertheless allowed artists in the Persian cultural sphere to create portraits which were appreciated for their evocative power.

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NOTES

3. Ibid., p. 132.
4. Ibid., pp. 39, 131.
6. Ibid., p. 57.
7. Ibid., pp. 55-56.
8. Ibid., pp. 30-32, 140, pl. 93.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 17.
13. Ibid., p. 19.
15. Brilliant, Portraiture, p. 11.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 114.
23. M. Baraeh, Theories of Art from Plato to Winckelmann (New York, 1985), pp. 34-44.
30. Ibid., p. 23 (Arabic), p. 53 (French).
31. Ibid., p. 34 (Arabic), p. 71 (French).
48. Priscilla P. Soucek, "Armenian and Islamic Manuscript Paint-


55. Annemarie Schimmel, And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985), p. 36.
