MUQARNAS
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The lighthouse of Alexandria, classified among the seven architectural wonders of the ancient world, has a long and turbulent Islamic history. Erected by Alexander’s successor Ptolemy Philadelphus (286–246 BC) and designed by the architect Sosastros of Cnidus, it continued to fulfill its function as a lighthouse until the second quarter of the fourteenth century. It stood on the small island of Pharos opposite the eastern harbor of Alexandria, where Qaytbay’s fort stands today. The Ptolemaians connected the island to the mainland with landfill so that it formed a peninsula.1

Whereas pre-Islamic literary descriptions of the lighthouse are scarce, Muslim authors provide, along with various legends, valuable accounts of its configuration throughout the medieval period. As one of the marvels of the ancient world, the lighthouse occupies a prominent place in Arabic geographic and cosmographic literature. It has been attributed to various founders: a pharaoh, Cleopatra, Alexander the Great (identified as the Qur’anic Dhu ‘l-Qarnayn), and, correctly, a Ptolemaic successor of Alexander. The mythology of the lighthouse associated it with talismanic powers as well as with a treasure concealed in its base and a mirror (mir’âh) at its summit. This mirror was believed by some to offer a view as distant as Constantinople, and by others to focus the sun’s rays to burn hostile ships.2 Geographic and cosmographic literature was not concerned, however, with the actual appearance of the lighthouse.3 Likewise, medieval Egyptian chronicles showed little interest in the contemporary architecture and topography of Alexandria and continued for centuries to repeat earlier texts, occasionally reporting damage to and restoration of the lighthouse. The most valuable information on the material history of the structure proves to be travel literature, mainly by authors from al-Andalus or the Maghrib. While perpetuating the old traditions and legends, their texts include fresh eyewitness descriptions.

Only two modern historians have dealt so far with the lighthouse. Herrmann Thiersch’s monumental opus, Pharos, Antike, Islam und Occident, published in 1909,4 is still valuable, although important Arabic accounts published since then were unknown to him. It includes several reconstruction drawings of the lighthouse at various stages of its history with details of its interior composition (fig. 1). Thiersch’s documentation of the Islamic period is based on notes and a bibliography provided by Max van Berchem.5 Two decades later, Miguel Asín Palacios compiled Arabic accounts relevant to the lighthouse and, most important, discussed Balawi’s description, which is the most detailed ever written by an Arab medieval eyewitness.6

While adding some recently published material, the following essay reconsiders and reevaluates the most important Arabic texts dealing with the lighthouse in the period between the Arab conquest and its collapse in the fourteenth century. It will focus on accounts selected for their eyewitness or contemporary testimony and present new conclusions concerning the history and architectural transformation of the lighthouse under Muslim rule, adding a reconstruction of the lighthouse as it looked in 1165, based on an analysis of Balawi’s survey.

ARAB MEDIEVAL ACCOUNTS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

Mas’udi

Mas’udi (d. 956)7 is the earliest substantial source on the lighthouse. He wrote two accounts of different character and origin, which were repeated by subsequent authors. His Murūj al-dhahab (“Meadows of Gold”) of 944 includes the earliest version, which is of a rather mythological character.8 He describes the lighthouse as resting on a foundation of glass in the shape of a crab. Crowning its summit were copper statues, one of which would roar to warn of approaching enemies, and another that represented a man pointing to the
sun and following it with his finger. Yet another statue functioned as a clock, emitting different sounds at each hour. Whereas later authors sometimes omitted the reference to the statues, the most characteristic ancient feature of the lighthouse, mentioned by Mas'udi and all later sources, was the mirror at the summit, used as a watching device. Mas'udi also speaks of precious stones at the bottom of the sea beneath the lighthouse—stones that had been captured by Alexander from the legendary king Shaddad b. ‘Ad and concealed there in a secure treasury.

In the Murāj Mas'udi describes the lighthouse as having lost its upper structure due to its demolition by the caliph al-Walid (r. 705–15). According to this tradition, the Umayyad caliph was tricked by the Byzantines who, anticipating his reaction, made him believe that the lighthouse concealed a treasure. By removing the upper half of the structure along with its mirror in search of this treasure, al-Walid deprived the Muslims of the strategic advantage of the lighthouse, to the great satisfaction and triumph of the Byzantines. The population was angry, and the man responsible for misleading the caliph ran away.

In this account, Mas'udi indicates that the original height of the lighthouse was one thousand dhira’ (cubits) before al-Walid demolished the upper half. His statement that the lighthouse had remained in this ruined condition until the present (933–34) suggests that he was relying on an old text that did not take into account the reconstruction work done in the meantime by Muslim patrons, as will be shown below.

In another book, al-Tanbih wa'l ishrāf, which he wrote at a later date (955–56) while residing in Egypt, Mas'udi discusses the lighthouse in very different terms. This text, which has a realistic character and seems to be based on more reliable sources and on contemporary eyewitness description, is of greater interest to us. Here he correctly attributes the foundation of the lighthouse to a Ptolemaic successor of Alexander. He also reports that it was traditional for Christians at that time to carry their food to the lighthouse on Maundy Thursday, to picnic and spend the day on its premises.

In this version, Mas'udi describes the lighthouse in its current form as a restored tower, 230 dhira’ high, composed of three superposed structures. Its lower section consisted of a rectangular masonry shaft ca. 110 dhira’ high, above which was an octagonal shaft about 60 dhira’ in height and made of brick and stucco, and a third, circular story. There was a Greek inscription in lead on the eastern wall. Mas'udi adds that the lighthouse had originally measured almost 400 dhira’.

Assuming that one dhira’ is equivalent to 50 cm, as is generally agreed, Mas'udi’s figures indicate that the lighthouse in the mid-tenth century was ca. 115 m high, with a rectangular shaft of ca. 55 m. Its total
height would have been slightly more than half that of the original, which he estimated at 200 m.¹⁴ His measurements of each section indicate that the cylindrical third story must have been as high as the second, i.e., 60 dhirā’, or 30 m. These proportions diverge from those provided by later accounts.

According to Mas’udi, the rectangular shaft, which presumably had maintained its original height, would initially have formed only one-quarter of the entire tower, which is very unlikely. His estimate of the original height of the lighthouse therefore appears exaggerated.

The Tanbih refers to the mirror but not to the statues mentioned in the Murūj, nor, significantly, to al-Walid’s demolition story. It rather attributes the deterioration of the lighthouse to natural causes, earthquakes, and Alexandria’s severe weather. The demolition story reported in the Murūj seems therefore to belong, as does the rest of the account, to the realm of myth, although it may have been created to explain the configuration of the lighthouse in the early Islamic period, after it had lost its original stone upper stories.

In the Tanbih, Mas’udi indicates that the lighthouse had been restored a century earlier; he writes that Ibn Tulun (r. 868–84) built a wooden cupola¹⁵ at the summit, which he describes with the words mabsūta wa-mūraba (shallow and flaring); its profile must therefore have resembled an umbrella or a mushroom. It had no staircase. According to the Tanbih, Ibn Tulun’s son Khumarawayh (r. 884–96) had to consolidate the western wall of the lighthouse (it is not clear in which section), part of which had collapsed. (In contrast, in the fifteenth century Ibn Iyas [see below] mentions an earthquake during the reign of Khumarawayh’s son Harun [r. 896–905] that damaged the top of the lighthouse.¹⁶ It is not clear whether Mas’udi confused Khumarawayh with his son Harun or there was indeed a series of damages and restorations in the Tulunid period.)

Finally, Mas’udi reports that in Ramadan 344 (December 955–January 956), an earthquake led to the collapse of about 30 dhirā’ of the lighthouse.¹⁷ At this time he was in Egypt, where he died shortly afterward.

Muqaddasi

Three decades later, Muqaddasi,¹⁸ who visited Alexandria in 985, adds interesting information not included in Mas’udi’s texts. He described the interior of the rectangular shaft as broad enough to allow a horseman to climb it, and he mentions numerous chambers in its interior, which many later authors confirm. The lighthouse, he reports, was reached by a causeway, and its western wall was hit by the sea.

Nasir-i Khusraw

Nasir-i Khusraw,¹⁹ who spent three years in Egypt in the late 1040s, says little about the lighthouse except that he saw it in good condition. He adds that someone had suggested to the caliph al-Hakim (r. 996–1021) that he reinstall a mirror at its summit, but that the caliph discarded the idea as unnecessary given his good relations with the Byzantines.

We know that the caliph ordered maintenance work in Alexandria, re-digging its canal and in 1013 rebuilding the Mosque of ‘Amr, having demolished it in 1004.²⁰ He may have restored the lighthouse as well, which could have prompted the suggestion that he crown the reconstruction with a new mirror.

al-Bakri

Although al-Bakri (d. 1094)²¹ was not an eyewitness, his compilation of accounts with concrete details complements our image of the early medieval lighthouse. He refers to a cavity carved out by the waves in the lower part of the shaft that had been filled in with ancient columns by some emir.²² In general, however, the rectangular shaft was in good condition, unaltered by time. He reports that the inner ramp, wide enough for two mounted men to climb simultaneously, led to 366 apartments. There were twenty-two openings on the outside to diminish the force of the wind. The northern wall had an undeciphered inscription in copper, and the shaft had an iron door “of unknown date.” The lighthouse was still used for sending fire signals to the ships from the first platform, a task performed by Christians.²³

Al-Bakri’s measurements do not seem trustworthy. He reports that the rectangular shaft measured 320 dhirā’ in height, the receding octagonal section 80 dhirā’, and the upper structure, which consisted of a rectangular tower surmounted by a well-constructed mosque, 50 dhirā’. Unless he was using a different measurement for the dhirā’, the total height he indicates for the lighthouse, 450 dhirā’, exceeds the estimates of other authors, even Mas’udi’s exaggerated one.
In 1117–18, Abu Hamid al-Gharnati visited the lighthouse several times and depicted it in a simple drawing showing a tower surmounted by a receding second story carrying a domed pavilion (fig. 2). A ramp carried by an arcade led to the elevated entrance of the lighthouse, which, he writes, was 20 dhirā‘ above the ground. The author repeats the demolition story but instead of al-Walid names ‘Amr Ibn al-‘As, the Arab conqueror of Egypt, as the treasure seeker.

Gharnati mentions a multitude of chambers (sing. bayt) to the left of the viewer climbing the ramp to reach platforms (sing. majlis) at different levels. The fact that the ramp was on the right and the rooms on the left suggests a clockwise ascent. His description of the chambers as communicating with one another so that they could be accessed from only one initial entrance-and-exit door must refer to the platform of each story.

Al-Idrisi, the famous geographer from Ceuta, saw the lighthouse in 1154. He admired its height and sturdiness and noted its signaling ships by fire, without which they would have become lost. He reports that lead was used to consolidate the masonry, a detail already mentioned by Ibn Hawqal in 977 and reiterated in subsequent sources. Idrisi also mentions the chambers (bayt) and openings in the walls on all sides to introduce light. The waves, he writes, hit its northern wall. He indicates the height of the lighthouse in three different measurements: its total height was 300 dhirā‘ rashāsh, which he equates with 100 qāma. The tower measured 96 qāma up to the dome, which itself was 4 qāma high. The rectangular shaft was 70 qāma and the upper structure 26 qāma high. Thus he describes not a triple composition but rather a rectangular shaft carrying a receding upper structure crowned with a dome. He reports that the staircase of the rectangular shaft included a wide ramp (daraj) similar to that used in minarets (sawwāmi). Indeed, the Giralda in Seville has such a slightly graded ramp. The measure of the dhirā‘ rashāsh being established beyond serious doubt, the total height of the lighthouse, according to this author, would be equivalent to about 162 m, with the rectangular shaft measuring about 113 m.

Balawi inspected the lighthouse equipped with paper, pen, and ink as well as a rope to which a stone was attached, to measure the building. He found it recently restored and in good condition, and he described it as a marvel.

The causeway (rasif, mamsāh), which connected the island of the lighthouse with the port, would be submerged when the sea was high (idhā hāja al-bahr). The
The lighthouse stood at the tip of the island, surrounded on four sides by a platform. On its northwestern side this platform sloped down to the sea like a hill.

The platform was a sturdy construction, lead and iron having been used to connect the blocks of limestone (kaddān). These stone blocks, which were larger than those employed in the rest of the building, belonged to a recent reconstruction, better in quality than the original. The rectangular shaft had a tapering profile; a stone dropped from its top hit the wall before reaching the ground.

Balawi mentions a monumental inscription on the southern wall of the rectangular shaft, which he says was not in ordinary script but consisted of images (ashkāl)—probably hieroglyphs—one dhīrāʿ high, made of hard stone inlaid in the masonry of the shaft. The corrosion of the stone around the characters raised them in relief.

Having reached the first platform, Balawi dropped his rope to measure the height of the rectangular shaft. He then repeated this procedure at the top of the octagonal and the circular sections and measured their respective heights—a combined total of 53 qāma.
Balawi is the only author to give measurements of the width of the lighthouse. His description of the interior of the rectangular shaft is detailed and also documented with measurements. The inner ramp (zuqāq) of the rectangular shaft was roofed with a masonry vault and was 7 shibr wide, allowing two horsemen to pass simultaneously. The ramp was bordered on the climber’s left by rooms that communicated with one another. This and the fact that Balawi found the interior of the shaft hollow show that the ascent must have been clockwise.

Balawi counted four stories before the top platform. He could not enter the rooms of the first story, but he counted eighteen, fourteen, and seventeen rooms respectively in the second, third, and fourth stories. He also counted the steps of the staircase in the upper structures and measured the thickness of their walls.

Balawi confirms that the function of the lighthouse was to guide ships with fire signals emitted from its summit. It is not clear, however, in which part of the shaft the fire was lit.

I next consider the measurements taken by Balawi and the calculation of their metric equivalents. The causeway along the peninsula leading to the lighthouse was 600 dhira‘ long, 20 dhira‘ wide, and 3 dhira‘ above sea level. A platform 12 dhira‘ wide surrounded the lighthouse on four sides. A ramp (mamshā) about 100 bā‘ long, carried by an arcade of sixteen vaulted bays of increasing height, led from the causeway to the entrance of the lighthouse.

Each of the sides of the lighthouse measured 45 bā‘ at the base of the rectangular shaft, which was 31 qāma high from ground level. The octagonal section was 15 qāma high and the circular upper structure, including the domed oratory, 7 qāma; the domed oratory itself was 3 qāma high. The total height of the lighthouse was 53 qāma from the ground and 58 qāma above sea level.

The platform of each story was surrounded by a parapet (sitāra). The parapet of the rectangular shaft was one qāma high, and 7 shibr plus 9 ashkil (?), which, according to our calculations below, is equivalent to 250 cm and 154 cm, respectively. The parapet of the second story was only 2 shibr thick.

Between the octagonal shaft and the parapet Balawi measured a distance of 15 shibr. Each side of the octagonal section measured 10 bā‘. By mathematical calculation, the width of the octagonal section between two parallel sides would therefore have measured 24.1 bā‘.37

On the second platform he measured the circumference of the cylindrical section as 40 bā‘, which indicates a diameter of 12.73 bā‘. On the third platform stood the oratory, open on four sides and “like a dome,” with a circumference of 20 bā‘, which corresponds to a diameter of 6.4 bā‘.

In converting these measures to meters, we face the problem that Balawi used five different measures: shibr, dhira‘, qāma, bā‘, and ashkil. The dhira‘ is generally estimated to be approximately half a meter. The length of the qāma and the bā‘ are controversial. I am unable to find the size of the ashkil, which must be a fraction of the shibr.

Balawi’s shibr is beyond doubt equivalent to 22 cm, because it is the unit of measurement he used to indicate the circumference of Pompeii’s Pillar in Alexandria, which he recorded as 38 shibr. By modern measurement, the diameter of the still-extant pillar is known to be 2.70 m at the base, or, multiplied by pi, 8.48 m in circumference. Hence Balawi’s shibr equals 22 cm, the conventional conversion of this measure.

We can thus calculate the length of the bā‘ by comparing the figures given for the length of the base of the lighthouse by ‘Abdari in shibr and by Balawi in bā‘—140 shibr and 45 bā‘, respectively. The resulting length of the bā‘ is 3.11 shibr, which is equivalent to 68 cm. By this estimate the width of the octagonal section of the lighthouse would be 16.4 m, that of the cylindrical section 8.7 m, and that of the oratory 4.3 m.

The height of the lighthouse is indicated by Balawi in qāmas, the qāma generally estimated to be about 2 m. According to this, the lighthouse would have been 106 m high. However, a comparison between Gharnati’s and ‘Abdari’s measurement of the distance between the entrance of the lighthouse and the ground suggests a slightly greater length for the qāma. The distance indicated by Gharnati as 20 dhira‘ is given by ‘Abdari as 4 qāma. This results in a qāma equivalent to 5 dhira‘, i.e., 2.50 m. As all three authors, Gharnati, Balawi and ‘Abdari, originate from the western Islamic world, their units of measurement are likely to have been similar. In this case the height of the lighthouse should be 132.5 m.

In terms of proportions these measurements indicate that the width of each of the three upper sections, including the oratory, was approximately equivalent to half the width of the section below. A similar relationship obtains between the section heights: 31, 15, and (4 + 3) qāma.
To calculate the sloping angle of the rectangular shaft we need to compare the width of its upper and lower ends. At the top, the width of the shaft was equal to the width of the octagonal shaft plus the distance between it and the inner wall of the parapet (7 shibr and 9 ashkil) plus the thickness of the parapet of 15 shibr. The resulting equation is: \(24.4122 \times 0.68 + 2 \times (7 \text{ shibr and } 9 \text{ ashkil } + 15 \text{ shibr})\). On the basis of a b\(\text{a}'\) equal to 0.68 m and a shibr equal to 0.22 m, and omitting the unknown ashkil, the top of the rectangular shaft was about 26.3 m wide—i.e., 16.60 m + 2 \times (1.54 m + 3.30 m)—whereas the base was 30.6 m wide. The deviation from the perpendicular line would be 1.6\(^\circ\), which is a slight slope.

As noted above, Balawi estimated the thickness of the parapet atop the rectangular shaft as 7 shibr (1.54 m); he reported that it was equal to the width of the inner ramp. The total length of the inner ramp was 239 b\(\text{a}'\), or about 162 m, which is plausible in relation to the height.

**Ibn Jubayr**

Ibn Jubayr visited the lighthouse in 1182 and was impressed by the quality of its masonry and its dimensions. He himself measured one side of the rectangular shaft at the base and found it more than 50 b\(\text{a}'\) long, and he was told that the whole tower was 150 q\(\text{a}'\)ma high. He also refers to the numerous chambers.\(^{39}\)

**‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi**

‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi wrote about the lighthouse in 1195; although his observations on other ancient monuments are among the most interesting ever written in Arabic literature, he has little to say about this one, justifying his brevity by noting that the lighthouse was famous enough to make description superfluous. He writes that several authors had estimated its height at 250 dh\(\text{i}'\)a but adds that he had read the notes of an inquisitive and thorough person who had measured it himself and found the actual height to be 233 dh\(\text{i}'\)a, the rectangular shaft being 121 dh\(\text{i}'\)a high, the octagonal section 81.5, and the cylinder 31.5 (together 234 dh\(\text{i}'\)a, a discrepancy of one dh\(\text{i}'\)a from the reported height).\(^{41}\) The mosque, 10 dh\(\text{i}'\)a tall, is not included in his calculation; adding its height to the individual measurements produces a total height of 244 dh\(\text{i}'\), or 122 m.

**al-Harawi and Yaqut**

The next two eyewitnesses, al-Harawi and Yaqut, convey a different picture of the lighthouse. Al-Harawi (d. 1214), from Aleppo, wrote that it was not a marvel but rather had the appearance of a watchtower.\(^{42}\) Yaqut, who wrote around 1227, criticized the descriptions provided by his predecessors as full of exaggeration and lies.\(^{43}\) The lighthouse, according to Yaqut, looked like any other ordinary tower (hisn, sawma'a). He climbed it accompanied by other scholars, who were equally surprised by the difference between what they had read and the reality they saw. He even denied the existence of multiple chambers and contradicted those who pretended that one might get lost in its interior. At this time the lighthouse was not accessible by land and consisted of a rectangular tower with a parapet, which ended in a platform surrounded by crenels and supporting a receding structure with a dome, resembling a watchtower (qubbat al-didab\(\text{u}'\)). Yaqut describes the second story as rectangular, not octagonal. One of the sides of the lighthouse had collapsed and had been restored by the Fatimid vizier al-Salih Tala'i b. Ruzayq, (d. 1161), a restoration recognizable by the superior quality of its masonry. Yaqut made a simple drawing corresponding to his description (fig. 4); he also mentions the ramp leading to the entrance.
Although he wrote in the late fifteenth century, long after the lighthouse had collapsed, Suyuti (d. 1505) provides information not mentioned by the others, which he attributes to the unnamed Mamluk author of a book called *Mabāḥīj al-fikr*. According to this source, the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Kamil (r. 1218–38) had replaced the mosque at the summit of the lighthouse after it was carried away by the wind. This seems to confirm that a deterioration of the structure had taken place between the last decade of the twelfth century, after al-Baghdadi saw it, and the first decade of the thirteenth century, when Harawi arrived. The same source adds that Sultan al-Zahir Baybars rebuilt the causeway and the northern facade, which had almost collapsed (*wa-kādā yanhadīmān*).

*Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir and al-'Abdari*

*Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir* (d. 1292), a contemporary of al-Zahir Baybars, reports that the sultan restored the lighthouse in 1273–74 because it was in a dilapidated state (*tadā‘a* [sic] *arkānuhā*), having been neglected by the rulers of the past. Baybars ordered the restoration of the shaft from bottom to top (*wa-rattaba al-binā‘* *min ‘alā ‘l-mamshā alladhī hawlahā* [sic] *min asfal wa-hum tālī‘ūn*). This is confirmed by al-'Abdari, who described the lighthouse in 1289, more than a decade after Baybars’s restoration. He climbed to the summit and found it higher than it appeared. The sea hit its corroded walls on the east and west sides. It was consolidated up to the upper part (*wa-dū‘ima minhā bi-binā‘* *wa-thiq ittasala ilā a‘lāhi*) and at the socle (*dakākīn muttas‘a wa-thiqqa*), which rose 3 *qāma* above the sea and reached down under the water. The entrance of the shaft was 4 *qāma* above the ground and could be reached only by a bridge made of wooden planks connected to another structure erected next to it. The vestibule, where a guard was posted, was spacious; the inner ramp was 6 *shibr* wide. The inner chambers were closed. Each side of the lighthouse measured 140 *shibr*, and the thickness of its parapet at the top of the rectangular shaft was 10 *shibr*. It had a great finial (*jāmmūr*) surmounted by a smaller one. At the summit there was a nice domed mosque, reached by an open staircase.

At this stage the access ramp had disappeared, the triple composition also seems to have been lost, and the rectangular shaft itself was heavily restored. By the time of Baybars, therefore, the monument had become an unpretentious, merely functional lighthouse and watchtower. The next decades witnessed its final stage.

*Baybars al-Mansuri*

Baybars al-Mansuri (d. 1325), a contemporary of the event, reports the violent earthquake of 1303, which destroyed a substantial part of Alexandria’s walls along with its minarets and the lighthouse. The emir Baybars al-Jashnakir, who was also in charge of rebuilding the upper structures of al-Hakim’s minarets after the quake, undertook the restoration of the lighthouse.

*Ibn Battuta*

On his first passage through Alexandria in 1326, Ibn Battuta saw the lighthouse in a dilapidated condition, but it was still recognizable as a rectangular tower with an elevated entrance accessible only over a bridge of wooden planks connected to another structure. According to him, it measured 140 *shibr* (30.8 m) on each side, and its inner passage was 9 *shibr* wide. On his way back in 1349, he found the structure in ruined condition, its shaft now inaccessible. He reports that Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad had set out to build a new lighthouse near the old one but died (in 1341) before achieving his scheme. After the collapse of the lighthouse its stones were taken away and the site remained empty until Qaytbay founded his fortress on its foundations. This was completed in 1479.
saw the lighthouse in its full Hellenistic shape, this
could have been only for a short period that left no
recorded memory.

Mas'udi provides the earliest description of the
lighthouse in contemporary terms, long after the origi-

nal top stories of the structure had disappeared. He
relies on an earlier source when he refers to its los-
ing its upper part during al-Walid’s reign. Although
Muslim rulers were often reported to have demolished
ancient monuments in search of treasure,55 the tale
of the demolition by the caliph does not seem trust-
worthy. The texts referring to treasure in the light-
house usually relate that it was hidden in the sea
beneath it; the Arabs would thus have tried to search
the base, which is reported to have been refilled with
stone blocks, rather than dismantle the upper part.
The story should rather be interpreted as an a poste-
riori explanation of the missing original top, and per-
haps also of an Umayyad reconstruction in brick that
produced a structure of different material designed in
an Islamic style. Whether the upper stories collapsed
prior to or shortly after the Arab conquest is a mat-
ter of conjecture. If al-Walid did restore the truncated
lighthouse, this would be the earliest restoration of
the Islamic period.

Thiersch considered the earthquake of 796 to have
inflicted the initial damage to the upper structure of
the lighthouse. Although this is the first earthquake
explicitly reported to have affected the summit (ra’ās),
earlier cataclysms might already have decapitated it.56
A series of earthquakes was recorded to have shaken
Egypt between the foundation of the lighthouse and
al-Walid’s reign, and late antique sources vaguely refer
to restorations. The top being the most fragile part
of a tower, as we know from minaret architecture, it
is most unlikely that the upper part of the lighthouse
would have remained intact for nine centuries while
consolidation works had become necessary at the base.
Restoration work was undertaken by the Tulunids,
and following Ibn Tulun’s addition of a wooden dome
at its summit, if not even earlier, the lighthouse was
crowned by an oratory.

After the earthquake of 950 and the collapse of 30
dhirā’ of the structure in 956, the Fatimids, who are
reported to have renewed Alexandria’s fortifications,
must have thoroughly renovated the lighthouse.57
This would explain how Nasir-i Khusraw found it in
good condition, and why the idea came up to restore
its former glory by replacing the ancient mirror. The
fact that al-Hakim’s southern minaret58 had a com-
position comparable to that of the lighthouse, with a
rectangular shaft carrying an octagonal, receding sec-
ond story that must have been surmounted by a cylin-
drical structure,59 suggests that the form of the mina-
ret might have been inspired by a recent restoration
of the lighthouse.

The Fatimid vizier al-Salih Tala’i (d. 1161) is cred-
ited by Yaqut with having undertaken a masterly res-
oration of the lighthouse. This is confirmed by the
account of al-Balawi, who saw the lighthouse shortly
after the vizier’s death. Idrisi must have seen an older
version in 1154, predating the period of al-Salih Tala’i’s
power, which began during the reign of the infant
caliph al-Fa’iz (r. 1154–60) and expanded under al-
‘Adid (r. 1160–71).60 This may explain the discrep-
ancy between Idrisi’s description and that of Balawi
eleven years later.

The decline of the lighthouse began in the early
thirteenth century. In 1227, at the time of Yaqut’s visit,
the causeway along the peninsula no longer existed.
The mosque had to be rebuilt between 1218 and 1238
by Malik al-Kamil.61 and Sultan al-Zahir Baybars had
to consolidate the rectangular shaft itself, which until
then seems to have resisted time. Baybars al-Jashnakir’s
restoration following the earthquake of 1303 was the
last attempt to rescue a lighthouse that had already
lost its tripartite configuration. Three decades later
it no longer stood.

THE PROPORTIONS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

In spite of its association with myths and legends, the
lighthouse of Islamic times has been described on the
whole in a plausible manner, mainly by travelers from
Spain and North Africa.

Balawi’s measurement of the base of the lighthouse
as 45 bā’ (30.6 m) is not far from those of Ibn Jubayr,
who measured 50 bā’ (34 m), and Ibn Battuta, who
mentioned 140 shibr (30.8 m). This length corresponds
to the side of Qaytbay’s fortress as it was surveyed by
the scholars of the Description de l’Egypte, prior to mod-
ern restoration work.62

Ibn Iyas’s text leaves no doubt that Qaytbay built
his fort in 1479 on the foundation of the lighthouse.63
The Egyptian authors could not have been mistaken
about the site, which continued to be marked by debris,
as Qalqashandi and Khalil al-Zahiri indicate
in the early fifteenth century.64 It is evident that Qayt-
bay would have made use of the valuable asset of the
Ptolemaic foundations to save labor and costs on his fortress, which took over the watchtower function of the lighthouse.

As has been calculated above, Balawi’s measurements of the lighthouse in 1165 indicate a height of about 132 m, 10 m more than the height attributed by Baghdadi to the survey by an anonymous “inquisitive and precise person,” who also reports a different relationship between the height of the rectangular shaft and the rest of the structure.

A height of 132 or even 122 m was gigantic in the premodern world, if we recall that with its socle the minaret of the Great Mosque of Samarra, the Malwiya, measures 53 m, and that the minaret of Sultan Hasan rises 80 m above the ground.

Considering the height of the rectangular shaft in relation to the total height of the lighthouse, Mas’udi in the Tanbih shows a proportion of 47.8%. This is the only account that shows the height of the rectangular shaft as less than half the total height.

According to Idrisi (1154), the height of the rectangular shaft was 70% of the total height; al-Gharnati’s drawing (1181) showed it as about 58%; Balawi’s measurement (1165) gave it 58% and Baghdadi’s (1190) close to 50%;65 and Yaqut’s drawing (1227) indicated that it took up 53.9% of the total height.

Assuming that the height of the rectangular shaft corresponded to its original Ptolemaic size, it is unlikely that the original tower would have been much higher than that of the medieval one. A taller lighthouse would imply that the height of the combined upper structures would have dwarfed that of the rectangular one, giving the lighthouse an awkward profile. Since the structure was tapered, with each section narrower than the one below it, the second and third stories should also have been successively shorter.

This is confirmed by the representations of the lighthouse on numerous Roman and Byzantine coins published by Thiersch (fig. 5).66 The vast majority of these coins present the structure as a massive, slightly tapering rectangular tower with an elevated entrance connected to a ramp or staircase and surmounted by a much smaller upper structure carrying a monumental statue. Without the statue the profile of this lighthouse recalls the Giralda of Seville. The proportion of the height of the shaft to the total height—between 70% and 80% of the total height without the statue—visibly exceeds that documented in the Islamic period. On these grounds, and assuming that the rectangular shaft maintained its original height until the late twelfth century, the Islamic lighthouse must have been at least as tall as the one documented on Roman and Byzantine coins—not, as Mas’udi writes in the Murūj, a much shorter structure.

A comparison of the descriptions of Balawi and others with the coin iconography strongly suggests that the articulation of the triple composition was an Islamic contribution. The Muslims might have used the rectangular shaft as the base for their tower, as al-Mu‘ayyad’s minarets were built atop the Fatimid gate of Bab Zuwayla.

Despite the problem of converting and reconciling different measurements and descriptions, Arab testimonies coincide in many points. They all agree that the lighthouse, between the Umayyad period and the thirteenth century, consisted of an Islamic brick construction built on top of the Ptolemaic masonry shaft, that its two upper stories had an octagonal-cylindrical configuration and included individual staircases, and that a domed oratory was at its summit. They also agree that the rectangular shaft had a broad ramp running clockwise and multiple chambers on each story that communicated with each other.

Until the thirteenth century there seems to be consensus that the rectangular shaft had remained unaltered since Ptolemaic times. The sources also agree that the lighthouse was used to send fire signals to the ships and functioned as a watchtower. This explains why Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad planned to replace it: Nuwayri writes that during the sack of Alexandria a tower, which he calls both hisn and manār, was built...
by the governor of Alexandria ‘Ala’ al-Din b. Iram during the reign of Sultan Sha’ban (1363–76). The lighthouse was—and under Islamic patronage continued to be—a colossal and stunning construction. This explains Muslim authors’ fascination with it and their obsession with its measurements, despite the fact that dimensions or even precise descriptions of contemporary architecture are rare in Arabic literature.

THE STYLE OF THE ISLAMIC LIGHTHOUSE

Creswell refuted the idea, presented by Butler and Thiiersch, that the lighthouse influenced the tripartite composition of Cairene minarets, arguing that this composition developed gradually from a separate Cairene tradition. Thiiersch made a further association between lighthouse and minaret architecture that is more difficult to refute. In his reconstruction of the lighthouse as it may have looked following each restoration in the medieval period, he gave it the appearance of a huge minaret. Egypt’s rulers, regularly having had to restore the upper structures of the lighthouse, would not have tried to rebuild them in their original Hellenistic original style, which would have implied erecting a huge statue.

Besides, as mentioned, the Arab authors give no precise description of the original appearance of the lighthouse. Thiiersch had to rely on the visual material provided by Roman coins and other images of late antiquity. However, Muslim patrons maintained and reinterpreted the tripartite composition from the earliest reconstruction down to the late thirteenth century. The use of brick instead of masonry and the replacement of the gigantic statue documented on the coins with a domed mosque implied a new design for the upper structures. The architecture of the upper stories must have been analogous to the contemporary style of tower architecture, i.e., of minarets. This is not surprising considering the practice of medieval Islamic reconstruction, with the exception of the restoration of the Ka’ba. In the late thirteenth century, Sultan Lajin rebuilt the top of the minaret of Ibn Tulun in contemporary style, as Baybars al-Jashnakir did al-Hakim’s minarets after the 1303 earthquake. The style of the upper structure of the lighthouse would therefore have evolved with every restoration. This was a practical rather than a conceptual approach, determined by the abilities of the builders who erected towers according to the methods and patterns with which they were familiar, and which allowed only a certain extent of variation. However, as most Cairene minarets were not freestanding towers, but rather emerged from the roof of a mosque, their proportions would have to be different. Moreover, the extraordinary monumentality of the lighthouse imposed exceptional structural precautions. Al-Hakim’s southern minaret, having lost its original top, cannot be compared with the lighthouse. In the minaret of Qawsun (1337), which is today freestanding, the rectangular shaft makes up about 60% of the total height, and in that of Tankizbugha (1362) about 58%. Although both structures have a rectangular–octagonal–circular configuration, they could not have been directly influenced by the lighthouse, which was already a ruin at the time of their construction. The heyday of the lighthouse in the Islamic period must have been rather during the Fatimid period, when the last ambitious restoration took place.

The fact remains, however, that Egyptian minarets, like the lighthouse, were characterized by a composite and tapering configuration. It should perhaps be recalled that the Arabic word for lighthouse, manār, also means “minaret” in Egypt.

THE MEMORY OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

The memory of the lighthouse was perpetuated in Arabic literature because the same texts continued to be copied and transmitted until the eve of modern time. In 1510, more than a century and a half after the collapse of the lighthouse, Sultan al-Ghawri, who had a great interest in history, commissioned a gypsum model of the city of Alexandria. Mu’allim Hasan b. al-Sayyad represented the city with its fortifications and towers in what seems to have been a monumental replica, since al-Ghawri rode out of Cairo to view it. It included the representation of “the lighthouse, which was there”—obviously a historicizing interpretation based on literary descriptions.

The scenario for a shadow play, copied in a manuscript dated 1119 (1707) but based on an earlier text, is dedicated to the lighthouse of Alexandria. It is a patriotic, rhymed text that deals with the Alexandrian resistance against the Christian raids that continued to harass the Egyptian coasts for two centuries following the eviction of the Crusaders from the Holy Land. The lighthouse, the protagonist of this play, is the venue where the action takes place and where the fighters
watch for enemy ships and brace themselves for battle. This play continued to be performed until the nineteenth century. A shadow-play figure published by Kahle and dated 1289 (1872) (fig. 6) shows that five and one-third centuries after the disappearance of the monument and only thirty-seven years prior to Thiersch’s publication, an Egyptian artist could create a fairly good reconstruction of the lighthouse.

Although literary tradition associated the lighthouse with Alexander the Great, a venerated figure in Islam, the fact that it was the only pre-Islamic monument in Egypt to have been continuously restored by Muslim rulers was less a matter of religious or political symbolism than of the strategic imperative to watch the Mediterranean frontier and guide ships into the harbor. As in its classical past, however, the lighthouse could not have been devoid of religious associations. In the seven centuries of Islamic history that appropriated its function and adapted its form, it became a beacon of Islam.

NOTES

2. Hermann Thiersch, *Pharos, Antike, Islam und Occident* (Leipzig, 1909), 91ff., interprets this mirror as a kind of camera obscura based on Greek optics that allowed a distant view of the sea.
4. Henceforth *Pharos*; see note 2, above.
8. Ibn Khurdadhbih (846–96) refers to a description given to him by eyewitnesses about the wide ramp, the presence of 366 chambers, and the mosque at the top of the lighthouse. Ya‘qubi (891–92) indicates its height as 175 dhirāq.
9. Henceforth *Pharos*; see note 2, above.
11. Cf. Suyuti’s account, which follows.
13. It is believed that the Ptolemaic structure was built entirely in stone and marble.
17. al-Māṣūdī, Taṣbīḥ.
22. According to Thiersch, the emperor Anastasius had already ordered such an operation: Pharas, 33.
23. Ya’qūbi (in 891–92) and Benjamín de Tudela (1168) also mention the fire signals to the ships: Asín Palacios, “Descripción,” 274.
24. al-Gharnāṣī, Ṭuhfāt al-albāb, 70–72, and Riḥlat al-Gharnāṣī, 70ff.
25. Kībat thamar al-albāb wa-zuhar al-‘ābāb, undated manuscript, Bibliothèque nationale, Ar. 2168. This is the same text published as Ṭuhfāt al-albāb.
28. Muqaddasi and ‘Abdārīti mention the waves hitting the western wall, and Balawi’s description indicates that the northwestern corner was close to the water.
29. A measure equivalent to 54 cm according to Hinz, Islamische Masse, 60ff.
30. This does not conform with Hinz’s estimate of the qūma and the ḏhārā’ rashāshi. According to Hinz, the qūma measures 2 m; see Islamische Masse, 54, 63. But there are also various other evaluations of the qūma.
31. This makes a total of 100 qūma.
32. Hinz, Islamische Masse, 60ff.
35. According to al-Bakri, the inscription was of inlaid copper.
36. Here he changes from ḏhārā’ to bā’. Hinz equates the bā’ with the qūma, but this is impossible according to this and other texts.
37. Or, to more decimal places, 24.142135 bā’. This figure results from the multiplication of the constant (1 + √2), i.e., 2.4142135, by the length of one side of the octagon, 10 bā’.
38. See the subsequent text of this article about the bā’.
40. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdādī, al-Huda wa l-tīmār fī ‘l-‘umūr al-mushāhada wa āl-mu’ayyana bi-arid Misr (Cairo, 1879), 183.
41. al-Maqrizi, Khitat, refers to these measurements, in addition to Mas‘ūdī’s, without indicating his source.
44. Suyuti’s account also includes the episode of al-Walid, which slightly differs from Mas‘ūdī’s version. According to Suyuti, al-Walid removed two-thirds of the tower, which was replaced by the brick construction.
47. This is a Maghribī term.
53. Thiersch, Pharas, 33ff.
65. Here the mosque has been included.
68. The recent archaeological works in Alexandria, carried out by Jean-Yves Empereur, brought to light in the sea gigantic statues from this area, with predominantly Egyptian features, conforming to the tradition of Ptolemaic art. The lighthouse, according to Balawi, had a hieroglyphic inscription.
70. Manār and ma‘dhana are simultaneously used in Egyptian medieval texts.
This blessed cenotaph was made for the Imam (al-Shafi’i)…by 'Ubayd the carpenter, known as Ibn Ma’ali, in the months of the year five hundred seventy-four. May God have mercy on him; may he [also] have mercy on those who are merciful toward him, those who call for mercy upon him, and upon all who worked with him—the woodworkers and carvers—and all the believers.

—Inscription on the teak cenotaph at the grave of Imam al-Shafi’i

For at least ten centuries, in a city replete with holy sites, the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi’i (d. AD 820) has been perhaps the most beloved and popular of Cairene shrines. Like the humble woodworker Ibn Ma’ali, whose entreaty for himself and his fellow carpenters has sealed the scholar’s grave since the end of the twelfth century, pious visitors have continuously gathered at this site to pray and petition the saint’s intervention. Crowds of supplicants still press against its iron grille each Friday to deposit small tokens, requests, and letters; to sit and read in the cool darkness of the tomb under its high dome; and to visit with friends and family, pray, and receive the saint’s baraka (blessing). The mausoleum is a solemn and moving space, sobering in its hushed vastness, a beloved center for the popular religious life of the city.

Two buildings have stood at this site, located in the Qarafa al-Sughra cemetery south of Cairo (fig. 1). The first was built by the Ayyubid Sultan Salah al-Din (known in the West as Saladin) in 1180. The second—the extant building—was endowed by his successor, al-Malik al-Kamil, in 1211 (figs. 2 and 3). Only three physical elements remain from Saladin’s construction: a marble column at the head of the grave,1 the teak cenotaph mentioned above, and the foundation inscription, now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.2 Although the original construction is gone, the mausoleum, expanded by al-Malik al-Kamil, remains the largest freestanding mortuary chamber in Egypt, its dome only slightly smaller than that of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.3

Despite the limited physical evidence for Saladin’s building, medieval travelers’ accounts, topographical works, and chronicles provide considerable primary evidence about its foundation, constitution, and structure. We know, for example, that it was the first building Saladin completed after the fall of the Fatimids in Cairo.4 We also know that adjacent to the mausoleum Saladin built a massive complex that included a magnificent madrasa for the study of Islamic sciences. Based on these facts, it is often assumed that this building embodied the Ayyubid ambition of ihya al-sunna, the reinvigoration of Sunni orthodoxy, following two centuries of Shiite Fatimid rule, and that al-Shafi’i’s mausoleum thus played an important symbolic role in the revival of Sunnism in Egypt. But the story of how and why this pious complex was created and the possible reasons for its expansion just thirty years later under al-Malik al-Kamil are complicated and intriguing. Although the restoration of Sunnism could have been part of what motivated the construction of a madrasa at the grave of this important Sunni jurist, a statement against Shiism does not seem to have been the primary incentive for either Saladin’s building or that of al-Malik al-Kamil. Indeed, a close examination of the history, inscriptions, and decorative programs of these buildings suggests no direct evidence that the mausoleum at the grave of Imam al-Shafi’i was part of an effort to combat Shiism. Rather, if we can discern any ideological focus to the construction of the mausoleum, it appears instead to have been a bitter intra-Sunni conflict, one between Shafi’i Asharites and their rivals, the Hanbalis.

In addition to its ideological significance, there are at least two reasons the Shafi’i complex is important for our broader understanding of the architecture of medieval popular piety: First, its initial construction by Saladin instigated the creation of a new ritual center by sparking a general shift northward in cemetery construction. Thus this complex alone transformed the urban landscape of the city of Cairo in a
Fig. 1. Map of southern Cairo, showing the location of the Citadel, the Qarafa al-Sughra (Lesser Cemetery), and the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi’i. (After Egypt, Maslahat al-Misāḥa (Survey of Egypt), General Map of Cairo [Cairo, 1920])
Fig. 2. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shaf‘î, 1211. (Author’s photograph)
Fig. 3. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi’i, elevation. (After K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, vol. 2, fig. 31)
The mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i was crowned by one of the largest domes in the Islamic world, an issue that is perhaps also connected with the movement of the cemetery northward. Why was there a need to build such a large dome? What was it about the city of Cairo, or the grave of this scholar, that required monumentalization to such a degree? Was it merely the prestige of al-Shafi'i, or was this building meant to make a statement with more complex associations? The evidence suggests that al-Kamil’s monumental reconstruction was principally intended to provide a dynastic mausoleum for himself and his family. If so, it was probably concerned only secondarily, if at all, with doctrinal matters. Indeed, its architecture and decoration seem to express little in the way of universal ideology, for as we shall see, al-Kamil’s building is first and foremost a testimony to the strength and tenacity of local style in Ayyubid Cairo. Given the reputation of the mausoleum as a symbol of Sunni revival in Egypt, however, the presence or absence of any sectarian semiotic charge is significant for our understanding of the building itself, its history, and its historiography, and also for our knowledge of sectarian and interconfessional conflict in this period.

ARGUMENTS FOR A SEMIOTICS OF ISLAMIC ORNAMENT

In the past two decades, the field of Islamic art history has seen the publication of several studies presenting semiotic interpretations of architectural forms. These studies argue for political or ideological interpretations of the meaning of Islamic sacred space and its ornament, and are focused primarily on Syria and Egypt from the tenth through the twelfth century—a pivotal period during which the Islamic world was divided politically between two competing caliphates, the Fatimid Isma‘ili Shiites in Egypt and the Sunni Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad. The Abbasid cause was subsequently strengthened under the Seljuqs, Zangids, and Ayyubids.

This political division was also an ideological one, and the period is often described as one in which Sunnism, threatened by the appearance of a powerful Shi‘i dynasty on its western front, formulated a clearly defined, state-sponsored program of doctrinal counterpropaganda, with the aim of strengthening Sunni orthodoxy. For the arts, the implications of this program may have been far-reaching: one recent author asserts that it was “the primary motivating force behind many of the cultural and artistic changes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.”

According to this argument, the main tool of this anti-Shiite program, usually termed the “Sunni revival,” was the sponsorship of the madrasa for the teaching of Sunni legal theory. Building on this claim, recent research argues that certain forms, such as cursive writing, muqarnas (stalactite vaulting), and some types of vegetal or geometric decoration may have been consciously exploited by eleventh- and twelfth-century Sunni partisans as potent carriers of symbolic—specifically Sunni—meaning. Other research suggests that the appearance and spread of these forms, which particularly proliferated in areas ruled by Sunni dynasties acknowledging the suzerainty of the Abbasid caliphs, may be interpreted as visual expressions of allegiance to the Abbasid capital at Baghdad. Some have further interpreted this phenomenon as an organized response to an even more overtly propagandistic visual agenda formulated by the Fatimids, who, it is proposed, had exploited symbols of Isma‘ili esoteric doctrine and the Shi‘i practice of the visitation of tombs to publicly proclaim the dynasty’s Shiite allegiance. Politically speaking, the ultimate victors in this struggle were the Sunnis, and the sweetest moment of that victory is traditionally reserved for Saladin, who defeated the Fatimids in 1171. As noted above, following this success, the first architectural project that Saladin completed was the mausoleum and madrasa at the grave of al-Shafi‘i.

In view of the assumptions that have been made about this building and its meaning, it is notable that, subsequent to K. A. C. Creswell’s architectural survey of some forty years ago, there has never been a careful study of the building itself. Considering the importance of its interpretation in the historiography of Ayyubid architecture, and its centrality in the world of medieval popular piety—for, as noted above, it was and remains among the most beloved of Cairene shrines—such a study seems overdue. As we shall see, the Shafi‘i complex provides an opportunity to investigate the evolution of popular practice in Egypt and to explore many of the recent semiotic arguments about the political and ideological use of the sacred.
THE SALAHIYYA MADRASA AT THE GRAVE OF AL-SHAFI’I

In the year 1178, the carpenter 'Ubayd b. Ma’ali completed work on his extraordinary teak cenotaph. Commissioned by Saladin, it is still considered a masterpiece of medieval woodcarving, an exquisite and fitting tribute to adorn the mausoleum of the revered Sunni jurist. In its original form, however, al-Shafi’i’s mausoleum was only one part of a larger complex focused on a madrasa and attendant structures. This college, known as the Salahiyya Madrasa, became the most prestigious in Egypt during the Ayyubid period. In addition to its size, two features assured that prestige: its location at the grave of al-Shafi’i, and the extraordinary salary that was endowed for its rather singular professor, a pious and ascetic sheik named Najm al-Din al-Khabushani.

But al-Shafi’i’s grave was a potent holy site long before the arrival of the Ayyubids. Indeed, it had even been an object of pilgrimage for some Shiites. However, we know little about the appearance of previous structures on the site, by the time Saladin constructed the Salahiyya complex there, the grave of al-Shafi’i was already established within the sacred landscape of the cemetery as an important locus of blessed emanations, or baraka. Numerous stories are told of the people’s love for the grave. In the eleventh century, when building the Nizamiyya madrasa in Baghdad, the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk had wanted to transfer al-Shafi’i’s bones to Baghdad to be reinterred as the centerpiece of his new school. He wrote to the Fatimid vizier Badr al-Jamali, who was willing to grant his request. When the vizier went to the grave to begin the exhumation, however, there was an immediate demonstration of protest from the population of Cairo, which got a bit out of hand and culminated in the assembled crowd throwing rocks at the vizier. The uprising was brought under control, and the vizier told of the people’s love for the grave. In the assembly there seems an obvious choice.

The earliest Arabic source to describe the madrasa complex was the Spanish pilgrim Ibn Jubayr, who visited it in 1182–83, shortly after its dedication. He writes:

> The mashhad (shrine) of Imam al-Shafi’i—may God be pleased with him—is among the most magnificent, celebrated, and expansive that there is. Facing it (bi-izá‘ihi) was built a madrasa the like of which has never been constructed in this country, there being nothing more spacious or more lavishly built. He who walks around it will believe that it is a separate town (annuhá baladun mustaqillun bi-dhátihá). Facing it (bi-izá‘ihi) are a bath and other fine public facilities. Construction continues to this very hour, and the expenditure on it is measureless. The shaykh, imam, ascetic, and man of learning called Najm al-Din al-Khabushani is personally responsible for it. The sultan of these lands, Salah al-Din, generously pays for all of this, saying: “Increase in splendor and elegance; we shall provide for all.” Glory to Him who made him “salíh dínáhi,” like his name. From this text, we learn several things about the physical constitution of the buildings. First, the madrasa complex was of extremely large size. Ibn Jubayr’s assertion that it resembled a separate town, though likely an exaggeration, still leaves little doubt about the foundation’s impression on its contemporaries. It seems that Saladin spared no expense in ensuring that his madrasa would be among the finest Egypt had ever seen. Furthermore, the use of prepositions such as izá‘a indicate that the tomb and the madrasa were very close or even attached to each other, and there could well have been direct communication.
between them. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the original entrance to the mausoleum on the northwestern side (today a window) is on an axis that does not correspond to that of the central mihrab (fig. 4). Rather, the entrance is somewhat unusually situated to the left of center, such that it corresponds directly with al-Shafi‘i’s cenotaph. It is a modest entrance for such an imposing structure, a small door with a wooden lintel bearing an inscription so worn it is now unreadable. Such an entrance makes sense if al-Kamil, in the process of expanding the mausoleum, were attaching it to the already extant madrasa of Saladin. It thus seems likely that the college was originally on the northwestern side, in direct communication with the tomb. If so, the Imam’s cenotaph would have been visible to one facing the qibla wall of the adjoining madrasa.

Ibn Jubayr’s description is augmented by a later one from al-Maqrizi, who adds that in addition to the baths, the complex was provided with an oven opposite the madrasa that produced sixty rats of bread a day—enough, according to one estimate, to feed at least a hundred students—and a large number of shops attached to the building. Income was provided
from the shops and from the cultivation of an island in the Nile. Al-Maqrizi also tells us that in addition to the professor, the endowment provided for the support of ten mu’ālāb, or teaching assistants. It seems a reasonable guess that this madrasa was large enough to accommodate between 100 and 150 residents.

Furthermore, the location of Saladin’s project would only have accentuated its already considerable size, for in the late twelfth century this area of the cemetery was relatively empty—not yet the “great medium of divine blessing,” in the words of Ibn Battuta, a veritable city of the dead that to this day plays a rich role in the lives of the inhabitants of Cairo. Although the Fatimids had built extensively in the Qarafa al-Kubra to the south, when the Shafi’i complex was built, that cemetery, as well as much of Fustat, still lay in ruins after being intentionally burned by the Fatimids in 1168. Thus, the domes of Saladin’s foundation would have been the most visible markers on Cairo’s southern horizon; indeed they are likely to have been the only ones.

This supposition is bolstered by the fact that the construction soon attracted other buildings, instigating a northern shift in the development of the cemetery, away from the older Qarafa al-Kubra and toward what now became known as the Qarafa al-Sughra. This movement echoed the migration of the general population from Fustat to Cairo proper. This shift in construction indicates that the focus of building activity was, at least for a time, not on the repair and restoration of ruined buildings in the old cemetery but rather on new construction in the northerly area. Indeed, al-Maqrizi confirms that the development of the new quarter proceeded in tandem with the decline of the older cemetery area.

Al-Maqrizi further records that the area between the tomb of Imam al-Shafi’i and the Bab al-Qarafa below the Citadel was, at the time of the building of Saladin’s complex, the location of a spacious maydān, or hippodrome. This open area existed well into the fourteenth century when, during the third reign of al-Nasir Muhammad b. Qalawun (r. 1309–40), it was extensively built up, apparently for the first time. Thus, when the Shafi’i complex was built, the view of the mausoleum and madrasa from the city of Cairo would have been wholly unimpeded by other construction, and its situation would have remained so for at least the first 125 years of its existence.

This careful attention to the siting and location of the madrasa, and later to the mausoleum of al-Kamil, is significant for our understanding of the visual effect intended by the patrons of these buildings. Most particularly, they may have considered the view from the Citadel; perhaps, on a clear day, Saladin could have seen the crowds of legal students and pious supplicants from its walls. Furthermore, unlike his predecessor Saladin, al-Kamil actually took up residence in the Citadel in 1207. Four years later, in 1211, he decided to expand the mausoleum. When it was completed, with nothing but a wide maydān between the Citadel and the madrasa complex, the image of the soaring dome on the horizon must indeed have been inspiring (fig. 5).

**THE SHEIKH AL-KHABUSHANI AND INTRASUNNI COMPETITION IN MEDIEVAL CAIRO**

There is evidence to suggest, however, that Saladin was not the primary force behind the remarkable nature of the appearance, size, and location of the madrasa. Returning to Ibn Jubayr’s account, we find that his description of the madrasa is followed by mention of the executor of the funds of the foundation, the ascetic shaykh Najm al-Din al-Khabushani. It is also here, in the biography of this shaykh, that we may first begin to discern a possible ideological motivation behind the building of the expansive madrasa.

Al-Khabushani, who according to Ibn al-Zayyat was buried “under the feet of Imam al-Shafi’i,” was a well-known scourge of religious innovation, and he particularly targeted the Hanbalis. Ibn Jubayr certainly knew who al-Khabushani was and eagerly called on him after visiting the new madrasa, “to be blessed by his prayers, for we had heard of him in Andalusia. We found him at his mosque in Cairo, in the closet in which he lives…and what a narrow closet it is! He prayed for us and we departed. Of all the men in Egypt, we saw no one else like him.” Indeed, Ibn Jubayr probably hadn’t seen the likes of him anywhere, for the shaykh was apparently a singular character, with a reputation as an arrogant, stubborn, and pugnacious enforcer of piety. It seems likely that the instigation for the building of the complex was al-Khabushani’s own, and that Saladin merely provided the funds. The strongest evidence for this assertion is in the foundation inscription for the madrasa itself. It reads:

This madrasa was built at the urging (bi-istidā’) of the shaykh, jurisprudent, imam…[and] ascetic Najm al-Din,
the pillar of Islam, exemplar of mankind, the mufti of the sects, Abu ‘l-Ba[rakat b.] al-Muwaffaq al-Khabushani—may God perpetuate his success—for the jurists who are disciples of al-Shafi‘i—may God have favor on them—who are characterized by their firm, unified, Ash‘ari doctrinal foundation [against] vain reasoners (al-‘ashwiyya) and other innovators." 34

A remarkable aspect of this inscription is that there is no mention of Saladin as the true patron of the building. This is in vivid contrast to virtually every other foundation inscription by Saladin, and indeed completely goes against what was by then the well-established Zangid and Ayyubid practice of emblazoning founders’ names, and their seemingly ever more elaborate titles, on the exteriors of buildings.

Here, the only person ostensibly to be credited for building the madrasa and mausoleum is the shaykh al-Khabushani, and we are specifically informed that it was built at his urging (bi-`istid′al-shaykh), presumably meaning his urging of Saladin. This vague implication is the closest one may come to understanding that someone besides al-Khabushani himself was behind the creation of the complex, and indeed, if not for the textual sources, we would likely have no clue as to the identity of its actual patron.

Other sources confirm that it was certainly within the power of the shaykh to instigate such a project. Not only had he pressed Saladin to build the madrasa next to the grave of al-Shafi‘i, but he had also issued a legal opinion sanctioning the execution of the last

Fig. 5. View of the cemetery from the citadel, with the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi‘i visible at center. (Author’s photo)
Fatimid caliph (who passed away before such action became necessary) and the pronouncement the *khutba*, the Friday sermon, in the name of the Abbasid caliph. Saladin apparently hesitated in enforcing this, and according to some sources al-Khabushani of his own volition ascended the minbar and, threatening the preacher with his cane, ordered him to pronounce the sanctioned *khutba*. Al-Khabushani was a bold and colorful figure who seems to have had a strong influence over the sultan. Many anecdotes told about the shaykh illustrate the respect Saladin had for him, and the extraordinary license he was allowed. One day, when Saladin was preparing for battle, al-Khabushani went out to wish him off and used the opportunity to ask the sultan to abolish some taxes he felt were unjust. When Saladin refused, the shaykh became enraged and, disregarding all propriety, began to beat the illustrious sultan violently on the head, shouting, “May God not grant you victory!” and causing his headgear (*qalansuwa*) to fall to the ground. Shocked and speechless, Saladin left for the battle, in which he was defeated. Upon his return, he rushed straightway to al-Khabushani and kissed his hand, begging for forgiveness, for “he knew it had been because of [al-Khabushani’s] curse” that he had lost.

Who was this powerful shaykh, who clearly had both the ear and the purse strings of the sultan? We will focus here on one aspect of his biography, his strict devotion to Shafi’i Asharite theology and his consequent blind hatred of the Hanbalis. The main aspects of the debate between the Sunni legal schools revolved around a number of key doctrinal questions, including the createdness of the Qur’an and the nature of divinity. The traditionalist Hanbalis advocated a strictly literal reading of the Qur’an; to use the most famous example, they held such Qur’anic imagery as the “Throne of God” to entail that because God could sit on a throne He must therefore have corporeal form. For the Asharites, this literalism was the basest of heresy. Asharism—integrated with the Shafi’i school by al-Ghazali in the eleventh century—represented the compromise between the traditionalist view on one hand and the radically rationalizing tendencies of groups such as the Mu’tazila on the other. For the Shafi’i Asharites, the overly literal readings of many traditionalist Hanbalis could only lead to *bid’a*, or innovation, particularly the *bid’a* of giving God attributes, which was to their way of thinking tantamount to anthropomorphism (*tashbîh*). Asharism proposed a middle ground, adopting some aspects of Mu’tazilite rationalism, particularly the use of *kalâm*, or rational argument, but also introducing the concept that some theological points could not be fully understood by humans and must be accepted *bi-lā kâyf*, without speculation. Thus, because of the Hanbali insistence on only the most literal readings, the Asharites branded them the worst sort of innovators: “anthropomorphists.”

These debates were not merely academic, for there exists more than one report about bloody riots in the streets of Cairo over theological issues. These were so disruptive that Saladin’s successor, al-‘Aziz, went so far as to try to have the small but troublesome Hanbali community of Cairo expelled. The roots and organization of such factional discord, sometimes called *‘asabiyya* or simply *fitna* in the Arabic sources, are not clearly understood. For Baghdad we have a fairly complex picture, but for other cities the phenomenon is only beginning to be explored. We do know that such conflict was limited temporally and spatially: it appeared sometime toward the end of the tenth century in the eastern Islamic lands and never seems to have spread beyond Egypt into North Africa. By the Ottoman period, it had all but died out.

Within these four to five hundred years, however, intra-Sunni confessional discord was a profound force shaping Islamic society and urban life—a force at least as powerful and perhaps even more immediately disruptive than the schism between Sunnism and Shiasm; given the weakness of the later Fatimids, the Sunni-Shi’i conflict had perhaps ceased to be a true threat even before Saladin quietly put the Shiite dynasty to rest at the end of the twelfth century. Indeed, most cities accommodated at least two warring Sunni factions. As Richard Bulliet has demonstrated for Nishapur, such violent differences had the potential to rend the fabric of society, at times devolving into outright intra-urban war. In Nishapur, this strife escalated throughout the eleventh century, ultimately leading to the destruction and abandonment of the city. Similarly, when a large population fleeing the Crusaders and Mongols entered Damascus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a series of *fitnas* erupted between these mostly Hanbali refugees and resident Shafi’i elites over theological issues. The schism could also take a more subtle but no less pointed form: in thirteenth-century Damascus, for example, a Shafi’i founded a madrasa with a waqf that specified that “no Jew, Christian, Magian, or Hanbali” could enter, a juxtaposition implying an
animosity so great that the Shafi’i is hardly considered the Hanbalis to be Muslim.\textsuperscript{47}

Further, this internal Sunni conflict was an essential feature not only of medieval urban life but also of the Sunni revival, which was concerned as much with eliminating erroneous Sunni confessional adherences as with responding to the threat posed by the Shi'i Fatimids. Thus Makdisi repeatedly insists that the Sunni revival was “not merely a Sunni revival, but a Traditionalist Sunni Revival…a religious revival in which the forces of Traditionalism fought against the forces of Rationalism of all shades,” including Ash’arism. Indeed, the most famed document of the Sunni revival, the \textit{visāla al-qādiriyya}, or Qadiri Creed, was not directed against the Shi’a alone but was “anti-Shi’i, anti-Mu’tazili, and anti-Ash’ari.”\textsuperscript{48} Issued in 1018 by the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir bi’llah (r. 991–1031), the creed was a profession of faith that defined official Abbasid doctrine. Inspired by Hanbali ideas, it condemned all forms of Shiism but also, as noted above, took aim at Mu’tazilism and Ash’arism, doctrines that had been embraced by certain Sunnis and that were now unambiguously placed outside the realm of “official” Sunnism. The Qadiri Creed, Makdisi writes, “was a Sunni creed, because it opposed Shi’i doctrines; but it also opposed rationalist Mu’tazili and Ash’ari doctrines; and for this it may rightly be called a Traditionalist creed, and the religious triumph it symbolized, a Traditionalist triumph.”\textsuperscript{49} Thus we see that from its inception, the revival was concerned with the reform of Sunnism as much as the condemnation of Shiism.\textsuperscript{50} This official stance undoubtedly encouraged intra-Sunni competition, and as it evolved, the revival indeed became a complex and much-contested phenomenon.

The Asharite shaykh al-Khabushani certainly did his part in opposing the “anthropomorphist” Hanbali traditionalists. One of his exploits took place before the building of the Salahiyya complex. A few years before al-Khabushani’s arrival in Cairo, a certain Ibn al-Kizani, a scholar infamous among the Ash’arites for his alleged anthropomorphism, died and was buried next to al-Shafi’i. When al-Khabushani arrived and heard of this, he was enraged. Unable to contain himself, he went to the grave, dug up the unfortunate Ibn al-Kizani, and, while flinging his bones in all directions, shouted, “a \textit{siddiq} [righteous man] and a \textit{zindiq} [heretic] should not be [buried] in the same place!” The Hanbalis immediately “attacked al-Khabushani!” and rallied against him, and there occurred between them warlike attacks and riots.\textsuperscript{51} i.e., they promulgated a \textit{fitna}. Clearly, al-Khabushani had a close relationship to Saladin not only as a legal and doctrinal advisor but also as a scholar with a very particular anti-Hanbali ideological agenda, which he wasted no opportunity to demonstrate. Thus it would seem that these preferences put him at the center of the intra-confessional conflict that plagued Cairo in the late twelfth century.

With this in mind, we return to the building’s foundation inscription, the text of which, as mentioned above, credits only al-Khabushani for the construction. There is another notable aspect of this inscription: it makes no mention of the relation between Sunnism and Shiism, and in fact its only reference to doctrinal orientation is a clear declaration of allegiance to Asharite theology. But a closer reading reveals its message to have been even more pointed, for the word used to describe the group to which the Asharites were opposed, \textit{al-hashwiyya}, translated literally above as “vain reasoners,” actually had a deeper meaning. \textit{Al-hashwiyya} was an insult with specific connotations; it was commonly used by medieval polemicists as a nasty epithet for the Hanbalis. As stated in the \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam} entry on the term, it was “used by some Sunnis of extremist traditionists…[and] in a narrower sense, of the \textit{Ashab al-Hadith} who, uncritically and even prompted by prejudice, recognize as genuine and interpret literally the crudely anthropomorphic traditions.”\textsuperscript{52} Given that the Isma’ili Fatimids were about as removed as a theological school could be from the literal interpretation of God’s word, it is impossible that the term referred to them. Here, in this most important of documents from the original building, is strong evidence that if Saladin’s foundation had a doctrinal component, it had little to do with any statement against Shiism, and was instead apparently focused on the intra-Sunni conflict between the Hanbalis and the Asharites.\textsuperscript{53}

The specificity of the message in the foundation inscription of the madrasa can be appreciated more fully when it is compared with Saladin’s inscription on the western portal of the Citadel, under construction at precisely the same time as the Salahiyya complex. This reads:

The foundation of this brilliant citadel, next to the well-guarded city of Cairo, was ordained in accordance with the resolution that unites utility with beauty and [as] the space for protection for [those] who would take refuge in the shadow of his kingdom, by our lord al-Malik al-
This is the sort of foundation inscription one might expect to find on the exterior of a madrasa designed to proclaim Sunni identity in the face of Shiism. It names the founder Saladin as the reviver of the sphere of Sunni authority by making explicit reference to the “Commander of the Faithful,” the Caliph in Baghdad. Furthermore, as Nasser Rabbat has argued, its use of the title muḥyī dawlat amīr al-mūʾīnīn had no precedents, although it would appear as a feature of many of Saladin’s later inscriptions. The deliberate use of the word muḥyī is perhaps significant, considering Saladin’s reputation as a leader particularly committed to the iḥyā’, or revival, of the faith. The Citadel inscription is a proclamation of the triumph of Saladin as a Sunni ruler, emphasizing reunification and revitalization of Sunni political authority after a prolonged period of Fatimid rule. Clearly, had it been Saladin’s intention to promulgate such a message through the foundation of the madrasa at the grave of al-Shafī’i, the means and ideological language were available. The issue then becomes why he did not do so.

MADRASAS IN EGYPT DURING THE FATIMID PERIOD

So far we have seen that the evidence of the foundation inscription for the Salahiyya Madrasa, against the backdrop of conflict between various Sunni groups in medieval cities throughout the Islamic lands, complicates the assumption that the complex was conceived primarily as an ideological instrument against Shiism. But to what degree may we say that the particularities of this building are representative of a wider phenomenon? George Makdisi argued almost forty years ago that the madrasa in general was not to be seen primarily as a tool of Sunni revival. In the 1970s one of Makdisi’s students, Gary Leiser, surveyed the first 150 years of madrasa construction in Egypt, finding that the first madrasa in Cairo was built in 1096–97, long before Saladin arrived there in the late twelfth century. Leiser concluded that the foundation of religious institutions such as the madrasa had more to do with the consolidation of Sunnism than the elimination of Shiism. His conclusions have been reiterated recently in the new Cambridge History of Egypt, where Michael Chamberlain argues,

The Ayyubids were undoubtedly attached to Sunni Islam and exerted themselves to see it flourish. However, the relationship between this general commitment and their patronage of religious institutions is more intricate than the notion of Sunni revival can account for...insofar as we can discern an ideological objective in Ayyubid religious policy, it seems to have been directed at Sunnis as much as Shi’is...There is little evidence that the foundation of madrasas was an anti-Fatimid policy, or that Sunnism, the religious affiliation of the majority of the Muslim population, required new institutions to flourish on the levels of belief or communal identity. Madrasas existed in Egypt well before Salah al-Din, some sponsored by Fatimid wazirs.

Indeed, it seems that the first madrasa in Egypt was founded sometime around 1096 by an Andalusian immigrant, a Maliki faqīh (jurisprudent) named Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Turtushi. This scholar traveled extensively after leaving his native country in 1083, eventually making his way to Baghdad, where he came within the orbit of the great Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk. He was greatly impressed with the educational and religious facilities the vizier had constructed in Baghdad, reserving special admiration for the Nizamiyya. After spending some years studying in the city, al-Turtushi traveled to Syria, from which he set sail for Alexandria, arriving around 1096. The people of the city were greatly taken with him and encouraged him to settle in Alexandria permanently. He acquired, and shortly thereafter met a pious and affluent woman whom he married. He converted her large, two-story house into the first recorded madrasa in Egypt, using the upstairs as the living quarters and the lower floor with its large reception hall (qā’ā) to teach fiqh and Hadith.

At least some students were lodged there, and the income from al-Turtushi’s wife provided for the maintenance of the building. The number of students may have been rather large; one account says that when al-Turtushi went for walks, during which he often discoursed on legal matters, he was sometimes accompanied by hundreds of students. His fame and stature grew, and during his nearly thirty years there, many luminaries studied with him. Al-Turtushi’s foundation, though not purpose-built, meets the basic requirements for a madrasa: an independent Sunni residential college supported by private funds, with a live-in professor of fiqh. It seems likely
that many early madrasas were of this somewhat informal character.

Following this precedent, and perhaps in reaction to the adherents that this Spaniard—with whom he had a longstanding quarrel—had attracted in his city, the Maliki qadi of Alexandria, Ahmad b. ’Abd al-Majid b. Hadid, erected the first purpose-built madrasa, also at the end of the eleventh century. It was still in existence in the thirteenth century, and is therefore likely to have been endowed. Ibn Hadid’s title, Makin al-Dawla, granted to him by the Fatimid caliph, gave the madrasa its name; the Makiniyya. At about the same time, a third madrasa, cited by al-Safadi in his biography of a student who studied there, was founded by Abu ’l-Husayn Yahya b. al-Mufarrij al-Maqdisi, the Shafi’i qadi in Alexandria. As his name implies, al-Maqdisi was an immigrant from Jerusalem, and he established a college for the Shafi’i’s that seems to have been transitory but probably helped to prepare the way for future Shafi’i madrasas in Egypt. There is little information about the physical form of these two schools, but their founders’ stature as judges appointed by the Fatimid caliph suggests they may have been reasonably significant architecturally.

The fourth madrasa, however, had inarguable presence. It was founded in Alexandria in 1137–38 by a Sunni Fatimid vizier, Ridwan b. al-Walakhshi, who expended considerable energy in strengthening his ties to the Sunni community; this may have been his motivation for constructing a madrasa. The first, though not the last, Fatimid vizier to establish a madrasa, al-Walakhshi was by then the de facto leader of the country, given the limitations of the later Fatimid rulers. The foundation document still exists and, in perhaps the strangest turn of events in the history of the institution of the madrasa, is written in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz. Although this is likely to have been a mere formality, the document goes so far as to state that the caliph, rather than the vizier, decided to construct the madrasa and even gives its name as al-Hafiziyya. It seems likely that Ridwan had hoped to gain support from the Sunnis of Alexandria, and that al-Hafiz would also have found this politically expedient. This madrasa became the most famous in Egypt until the construction of the one at the grave of al-Shafi’i, in no small part due to the fame of its mudarris (professor), the imam Sadr al-Din Abu Tahir Isma’il b. ’Awf, a student of the above-mentioned al-Turtushi. In the end, the madrasa came to be named after Ibn ’Awf, who, after al-Turtushi’s death, became the best-known Maliki in twelfth-century Egypt. He taught for fifty years and had hundreds of students, the most famous of whom were Saladin and his sons al-‘Aziz, al-Zahir, and al-Afdal. Although a great deal is known about the teachers and students at this madrasa, there is again little information about its constitution or physical appearance. It was, however, a fully endowed residential college sponsored in part by the Fatimid caliph, and its longevity—it lasted for well over a hundred years before being eclipsed by grander institutions—indicates that it was a school of considerable consequence.

A fifth school was founded in 1151 for the Shafi’is, by yet another Sunni vizier for the Fatimids, Ibn Sallar. It was called the ‘Adiliyya after Ibn Sallar’s title “al-Malik al-‘Adil” but was soon nicknamed “al-Silafi” after its mudarris, Abu Tahir al-Silafi. He too was a famous and well-respected teacher, who taught in Egypt for sixty years. In 1177, Saladin and his sons paid him a visit in his madrasa, where they studied Hadith. Once again, we know little of the physical structure of the madrasa, but from its staff we may speculate that it was a substantial foundation: it had a muezzin and two or three mu’ids, one of whom was in charge of forty young men. Al-Silafi also kept his large library there.

All told, at least eight madrasas are known to have been established in Egypt in the Fatimid period, and there may have been more. Most of these were in the Sunni stronghold of Alexandria, but one was also established in Fustat. Thus Saladin did not introduce the institution of the madrasa to Egypt; rather than being forcibly implanted by a single ruler, this institution seems to have followed a natural model of dispersion, spread by scholars who had studied or taught in the East as they made their way west. Thus we see that the Nizamiyya in Baghdad was built in 1067 and the first madrasa in Damascus in 1097–98. If the first Sunni legal school was indeed the one built in Alexandria by al-Turtushi shortly after his arrival in Egypt in 1096, then the madrasa arrived in Egypt at about the same time it arrived in Syria: nearly eighty years before the advent of Saladin. While Saladin’s foundations were undoubtedly more sumptuous and architecturally significant than preceding ones, the introduction of the institution itself cannot be credited to him. Rather, he seems to have been astutely capitalizing on popular support for an already existing institution.

Still, the paradigm of Sunni revival and its Egyptian genesis in Saladin’s foundation at the grave of
al-Shafi‘i has a long genealogy and has played an important role in scholarship on the Ayyubid period.71 Given the above discussion, one may well ask how the idea of the madrasa in Egypt as an Ayyubid import has become so important historiographically?

Modern authors are not solely responsible for linking this building with the Sunni revival. Given Saladin’s subsequent fame and numerous achievements, medieval writers tended to credit him retroactively with the introduction of the madrasa into Egypt. Leiser, too, was puzzled by this phenomenon and offered the following explanation for it:

After all, he became the great Sunni hero of his time and the madrasa was a Sunni creation. In this respect, some authors even contradicted themselves in an attempt to add more glory to the Saladin legend. For instance, in his biography of al-Silafi Ibn Khallikan clearly states that Ibn al-Sallar built a madrasa...in 1151–52, some twenty years before Saladin became vizier.... In spite of this, when he comes to the life of Saladin, he feels compelled to declare that there were no madrasas in Egypt when Saladin took over the country. Al-Maqrizi does the same thing...[reporting that Ridwan built a madrasa in 1137–38]. But then for the year 1170–71, in the same work, he mentions Saladin’s first madrasas and states that until they were built, there was not one madrasa in all of Egypt....Modern writers also frequently attribute the madrasa to Saladin. This is because they usually rely, indirectly or directly, on Ibn Khallikan’s life of Saladin or the Khitat [of al-Maqrizi].72

Thus, because Saladin was the great reviver of Sunnism in Egypt and the idea of building madrasas is historiographically associated with Sunni revival, seeing Saladin’s foundation of the Salahiyya as the first Egyptian example of the type seems to have its own internal logic and momentum. This conventional misapprehension of course does not rule out the possibility that a madrasa built by Saladin after his conquest of Egypt was part of a Sunni program to combat Fatimid influence, or that such concerns were part of the implicit mandate for its foundation. We may at least be certain, however, that there is no specific information in the history of the Shafi‘i complex or its foundation inscription to support the proposition that these concerns were foremost in the minds of its founders.

SEMIOTIC INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS AND
THE MAUSOLEUM OF AL-MALIK AL-KAMIL

The building that now stands on the site of Saladin’s original foundation dates to 1211 and, as mentioned above, was built by Saladin’s eventual successor al-Malik al-Kamil, who was buried there along with his mother (figs. 2 and 3). It is remarkable to note that the foundation of al-Kamil—though constructed at what is often regarded as the high point of Sunni revival in Egypt—does not bear signs of an overtly Sunni orientation. This fact is significant in light of the research by art historians on the semiotic dimensions of the architectural programs of both the Fatimids and the Ayyubids. We will now look more closely at these arguments and their implications for the Shafi‘i mausoleum, for this subject has by now generated considerable literature.

Caroline Williams and Irene Bierman (for the Fatimids) and Yasser Tabbaa (for the Ayyubids) have presented evidence for the symbolic function of certain building types, decorative elements, writing styles, and architectonic forms. These, they have argued, were deployed on the facades and interiors of buildings in programs of ideological propaganda for the strengthening of their respective doctrinal orientations and the consolidation of political hegemony. According to Williams, the Fatimids’ patronage of a “cult of Alid saints” was a key “adjunct of state policy.” This cult was promulgated through a campaign of constructing tombs for Shiite martyrs and saints, with the intent of generating support and loyalty for the Imam Caliph.73 Williams was the first to elaborate the idea that the Fatimids, following a series of crises in the latter half of their rule, had consciously appropriated the Cairene cult of saints in an orchestrated effort to appeal to local groups and interact with their largely Sunni population. In two studies, one focused on the iconography of the mosque of al-Aqmar and the other on a series of tombs constructed in this period, she argues that the Fatimids were trying to reach out to their subject population through the use of architectural forms and symbols with Isma‘ili meanings. Following Williams, Doris Behrens-Abouseif has proposed that Fatimid ritual was the impetus for the placement and iconography of Fatimid buildings. In an article on the Aqmar Mosque, she demonstrates that the buildings in the Bayn al-Qasrayn, the main street between the Fatimid palaces in Cairo, were conceived almost as elaborate stage sets for ritual and procession.
Bierman has subsequently argued that the Fatimids made use of a variety of artistic media to promulgate their message of Shi‘i identity, particularly that of “writing signs”—propagandistic messages on coins, *tiraz* fabric, and architecture. The Fatimids’ ability to communicate these messages was dependent on a central aspect of Isma‘ili doctrine: *ta’wil*, or interpretation. This system was used to manifest the esoteric meaning of phenomena hidden within certain external symbolic forms. The most common of these symbolic forms consisted of concentric circles, symbolizing Fatimid cosmological understanding, that were displayed on coins and architecture. Writing style is another key element of Bierman’s argument: the Fatimids, like almost all other architectural patrons before the eleventh century, wrote their public inscriptions in Kufic script, and particularly in floriated Kufic, a difficult-to-read style that would have obscured the overt meaning of messages—a kind of deliberate ambiguity particularly resonant with Fatimid esoteric doctrine.

Tabbaa argues for a similar kind of symbolic meaning for certain types of ornamental, formal, and stereotomic innovations of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries in Syria and Egypt. He builds on the work of Gülru Necipoğlu, who, in *The Topkapı Scroll*, assembles an eloquent case for the semiotic content of Timurid and Turkoman architectural ornament, particularly the two-dimensional *girih*, or “knot” mode, subsequently defined by Tabbaa as interlacing vegetal forms and interlocking geometric shapes, and its three-dimensional counterpart, the muqarnas. Unlike Necipoğlu, who argues for the general unifying role of the Abbasid capital for succeeding Sunni dynasties, rather than proposing a direct correlation between the geometric mode and a specific school of Sunni theology, Tabbaa suggests that these forms, like their Fatimid counterparts, may have been the bearers of specific sectarian meaning—in this case Ash‘ari Sunnism as expounded by Nur al-Din’s chief apologist, al-Baqillani. This theologian generated an atomistic theory of the universe and argued for an all-powerful, all-knowing God who controls everything, in opposition to the Mu‘tazili theological rationalism favored by the Isma‘ili Fatimids, which, though accepting God’s absolute sovereignty, nonetheless validated the autonomy of independent causes and the free will of human beings.

This program, Tabbaa argues, also included the adoption of *naskhi* (cursive) script, the elaboration and transformation of vegetal arabesque and the *girih* mode, and the use of muqarnas vaulting. These signs proclaimed the Sunni orientation of the Zangids and Ayyubids in much the same way that Fatimid forms had expressed hidden aspects of Isma‘ili doctrine. The change in writing style is perhaps the most important of these symbolic markers: Bierman is in accord with Tabbaa when she maintains that “the style of writing, a cursive script, visually signaled the contrast with earlier practice.”

However, Williams, when describing the mausoleum of Shafi‘i, writes that the Ayyubids “did not efface the cult places of the ‘Alid dead. Instead, the Ayyubids themselves, in a triumphant assertion of their own orthodox rule, built in the midst of the ‘Alid tombs the largest single-domed mausoleum in the Qarafa…which was architecturally, decoratively, and functionally a successor to the Fatimid mausolea.” This introduces a paradox, for if we accept Tabbaa’s argument that certain forms had come to be associated with Sunni revival in Syria, it seems contradictory that the Ayyubids in Egypt would pronounce orthodoxy using the same visual signals that, according to Williams, Behrens-Abouseif, and Bierman, had recently been associated with heterodoxy. Nevertheless this borrowing of Fatimid forms is among the most pronounced features of Egyptian Ayyubid architecture generally. Why, if the Ayyubids were invested in asserting ideological difference from their Fatimid predecessors by symbolic means, would they choose to build in Egypt in a style that was in almost every regard derived from Fatimid buildings?

Indeed, a careful look at the mausoleum built by al-Kamil shows that this building has more in common with the Fatimid mosques and mausolea that preceded it than with any Sunni Ayyubid architecture in Syria. The one way it seems to have diverged from its Fatimid predecessors was in sheer size: even today, its brooding presence towers over the tombs that surround it. It has the largest freestanding dome in Egypt; at 29 m in height and more than 15 m in diameter, it is, as mentioned above, only slightly smaller than that of the Dome of the Rock. In plan, the building is a square with sides measuring over 15 m internally and 20.5 m externally, its stone walls almost 3 m thick (fig. 4). Just off center, marking the grave of the Imam, and on a direct axis with the original entrance to the north, is the extraordinary wooden cenotaph commissioned by Saladin, made of teak imported from India. Also buried within the tomb, near the grave of al-Shafi‘i, are the patron, Sultan al-Kamil, and his
mother. To the side of the Imam’s grave facing the mihrab is the tomb of Abd al-Hakam, the historian in whose graveyard al-Shafi’i was interred in the ninth century.

Though the interior has been renovated repeatedly, one feature is original to the construction of al-Kamil: carved wooden brackets that support a wooden octagon for the hanging of lamps and that bear, on fields of scrolling vegetation, inscriptions in an archaizing form of floriated Kufic (fig. 6), a style that would be perfectly at home in a Fatimid building.

The exterior elevation of the mausoleum (fig. 3) consists of two stories, the first approximately 10 m high and surmounted by a parapet 1 m in height.
Below the parapet, from the springing of the decorative blind arches downward, the building is constructed of large ashlar blocks. This lower story is divided in two by a torus molding that runs around the building at a height of 6.03 m. The beveled corners of the lower story taper to a point above the torus molding, and the niches formed under these chamfered corners are decorated with muqarnas. On each side, four blind arches rest on the molding, arranged in pairs around a single window at the center. From the springing of the blind arches upward, the building material is brick.

Above them begins the parapet, which is surmounted by the second story, 6.16 m in height. The parapet rests on a band of simple interlaced geometric ornament and consists of four rectangular brick panels on each side, also decorated with geometric interlacing executed in stucco. Interspersed irregularly between these panels are five brick piers or posts (fig. 2). Each of these is decorated with one of two types of stucco frieze, the end and center piers bearing Kufic calligraphic ornament on an arabesque field (fig. 7), and the intervening two featuring vegetal arabesque contained within a frame (fig. 8). On the second level, above the parapet, the decoration consists of a series of keel-arched blind niches with...
ribbed hoods. Between these niches are rosettes or lozenges (fig. 2).

Virtually every element of the exterior decorative scheme is derived from earlier Fatimid constructions; a systematic comparison of the most important elements demonstrates the imitative nature of this ornamental program and its strong perpetuation of local style.

Proceeding from the bottom of the elevation, the tripartite, keel-arch-shaped muqarnas crowning the chamfered corner above the torus molding (visible in fig. 3), has its closest parallel in the mosque of al-Aqmar of 1125 (fig. 9), where we find precisely the same feature, although with its muqarnas decoration in better repair. Similarly, the flat and pointed blind arches on the first story of the mausoleum, resting directly on the torus molding, are reminiscent of those on the al-Aqmar facade (fig. 10), and one of the pointed arches, on the far right in Creswell’s drawing (fig. 3), retains its ribbed hood after the manner of the arches there. Further, the two flat arches on either side of the central window of the mausoleum (fig. 3) are each decorated with a miniature arcade of trilobed arches. This is another typical Fatimid form, to be seen, for example, in a window from the mausoleum of Sayyida ‘Atika of 1120 (fig. 11).

The interlacing stucco parapet crowning the first
Fig. 9. Mosque of al-Aqmar, 1125, facade. Chamfered corner crowned with keel-arched muqarnas. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3890)
Fig. 10. Mosque of al-Aqmar, facade. Detail of ornament near the entrance. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3885)
story of the mausoleum is also a common feature of Fatimid buildings. Perhaps the most obvious parallel, though simpler in design, is the star-interlace pattern of the parapet of the mosque of al-Hakim (990–1018) (fig. 12). Furthermore, the friezes on the posts of the al-Shafī‘i parapet (figs. 7 and 8), as Creswell remarked, are most closely related to a number of late Fatimid mihrabs, including those of the mausolea of Sayyida ‘Atika (fig. 13) and Ikhwat Yusuf (1125) (fig. 14), and the mashhad of Sayyida Ruqayya (1133) (fig. 15). The strongest correspondence here is in the pattern of scrolling palmettes and half palmettes contained within a frame, powerfully reminiscent of the stucco decoration from the mihrab of Sayyida ‘Atika. Furthermore, in the stucco decoration surrounding a window at the northeast end of the sanctuary in the ca. 972 mosque of al-Azhar (fig. 16), palmettes scroll in compact circles, growing out of a central “vases,” themselves fashioned of leaves, in composition nearly identical to the friezes on the posts of the al-Shafī‘i parapet.

To the upper story, with its sequence of fluted, keel-arched niches resting on engaged colonnettes, interspersed with circular saucer and lozenge forms (fig. 2), the courtyard of the mosque of al-Azhar also offers a direct comparison. The primary features of the decoration along the internal facade of the mosque courtyard, which belongs to the 1138 renovation by Caliph al-Hafiz, are virtually identical to the exterior decoration of the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafī‘i, producing a strong visual parallel between the mausoleum and the most prestigious of Fatimid buildings. Furthermore, in the mausoleum, just as in the courtyard of the mosque, this sequence of motifs is crowned by step crenellation on the cornice. Another instance of blind arches combined with fluted saucer forms is to
Fig. 12. Mosque of al-Hakim, 990–1018, parapet. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

Fig. 13. Mausoleum of Sayyida 'Atika, mihrab. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3849)
Fig. 14. Mausoleum of Ikhwat Yusuf, 1125, detail of mihrab. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3863)
Fig. 15. Mashhad of Sayyida Ruqayya, 1133, detail of mihrab. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3904)
be found in the courtyard of the mosque of al-Salih Tala’i’, built in 1160 (fig. 17).

More interesting still, in light of the semiotic arguments previously cited, is the fact that the ribs of the blind arches in the Shafi’i mausoleum emanate from a central motif strongly reminiscent of what Bierman has suggested was the essential Isma’ili motif of concentric circles, such as are found in the mihrab of Sayyida Ruqayya and on the facade of the al-Aqmar mosque. Although the concentric circles have been replaced by vegetal ornament, from afar—the only way these motifs, located very high on the elevation, could have been viewed—this small distinction was probably not clearly apparent. The overall visual effect is that encircling the facade of this Ayyubid building are what appear to be Fatimid mihrabs, bearing whatever associations they may have had for twelfth- and thirteenth-century Cairene visitors.

Such a program calls into question the degree to which this decorative language was associated with Fatimid esoteric doctrine, at least by the early thirteenth century. Certainly if it were, al-Malik al-Kamil would not have used it to adorn the grave of the founder of one of the most prominent Sunni law schools. At the same time, if there were an Ayyubid architectural language fully developed in Syria that was clearly associated with the Sunni revival, why wouldn’t elements of that architectural style have been employed here? In the end, two conclusions suggest themselves: either that language was not seen as necessary, at least by the early thirteenth century, for the expression of Sunnism outside Syria, or this building was not the monument to Isma’ili defeat it is often argued to be. From the comparisons noted above, it is at least

Fig. 16. Mosque of al-Azhar, ca. 972, stucco decoration surrounding window at the northeast end of the sanctuary. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3064)
clear that the iconography of this building is a demonstration of the primacy of local style over universal ideology in Ayyubid Cairo.

So what, if anything, is original in this building? Is there any trace of a political or ideological message in its iconography? As mentioned previously, its one remarkable innovation was its extraordinary size. Perhaps for this reason alone it was, in its day, the “most famous mashhad built on the cubical domed plan.”

With the exception of the Dome of the Rock, at the time of the building of the al-Shafi’i mausoleum there was simply no other dome of comparable scale anywhere in the region; no surviving Fatimid building comes close to attaining its span or height. It inspired imitations: al-Maqrizi relates that in 1269, when the Mamluk Sultan Baybars al-Bunduqdari built his congregational mosque north of the city of Cairo, he specified that the dome was to be “the same size as the dome of al-Shafi’i.” Indeed, the al-Shafi’i mausoleum might have been the largest freestanding domed structure that had ever been seen in Cairo. Is it possible that this extraordinary dome was itself the message?

Although we lack enough evidence regarding al-Kamil’s specific motivations to draw clear conclusions, two points about the al-Shafi’i dome are suggestive. One is its resemblance to that of the Dome of the Rock, whose scale it approaches, and whose construction technique—two wooden shells, covered on the exterior with lead—it moreover imitates quite directly. Although the current al-Shafi’i dome dates to

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Fig. 17. Mosque of al-Salih Tala’i’, 1160, courtyard façade. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 228)
a restoration begun in 1480 by the Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay, its resemblance to the pointed profile of the Ayyubid dome of the mausoleum of al-Salih, of 1250, suggests that the fifteenth-century restoration followed Ayyubid precedent.

This parallel is notable considering that, along with the elimination of the Fatimids, Saladin’s other great victory was the eviction of the Crusaders from Jerusalem in 1187. Al-Kamil’s father, al-Adil Abu Bakr b. Ayub (r. 1200–18), repulsed another German incursion in 1198. The particulars of the scale and construction of the Shafi‘i dome, given the recent capture of Jerusalem, suggest a dialogic relationship of this building to the third-most holy of Islamic sites, now once again restored to Muslim hands. If so, it would not be the last time a Cairene building made reference to Jerusalem: just over sixty years later, the octagonal plan of the complex of Sultan Qala‘un (1284–85) would consciously echo that of the Dome of the Rock. Is it possible that the Dome of al-Kamil was to be seen, not as a victory monument to the eviction of the Shiite Fatimids from Cairo, but rather to the eviction of the Christian Crusaders from Jerusalem? The evidence at this point is only suggestive.

The second possibility, however, is easily confirmed by the textual sources, as well as by evidence from the building itself. It is immediately apparent that al-Kamil’s building was intended to function not only as a mashhad for al-Shafi‘i but also as a dynastic mausoleum for al-Kamil, his mother, and perhaps others of his family. The one unambiguous indication of al-Kamil’s intentions comes from al-Maqrizi, who tells us that “…when al-Malik al-Kamil…buried his son [sic] in the year 608 [1211] next to the grave of the Imam… [he] built the great qubba over the grave of al-Shafi‘i and brought water to it from the Birkat al-Habash by means of an aqueduct leading to it.” As both Creuwell and Wiet have observed, the word “son” (ibnahu) is an obvious copyist’s error for “mother” (ummahu), “for it was al-Kamil’s mother (the Princess ‘Adiliya) who died on 25 Safar of this year (8th August 1211), and it is her cenotaph which is the second most important in the shrine.”

The fact that al-Kamil’s mausoleum was built the year of his mother’s death suggests that the sultan’s motivation for the expansion of the mausoleum was a desire to commemorate his mother and provide a dynastic mausoleum for his family at the grave of a saintly figure. In that sense, it is a building that fits directly into the Cairene practice of burial close to a holy person’s tomb. The steady stream of supplicants to al-Shafi‘i’s grave and the proximity of the adjoining madrasa would assure perpetuity of memory for the sultan and his mother. Indeed, al-Kamil’s mausoleum foreshadows the intensely competitive late-Ayyubid practice of private foundations by individuals. The building is thus among the first examples of the architecturally dazzling monumental dynastic mausolea favored by members of the ruling house in the later Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

In this context, its Fatimid-inspired decorative vocabulary was perhaps meaningful simply as an expression of pious princely opulence, utilizing the already extant and highly developed local stylistic idiom. Here, however, the Fatimid idiom is reconfigured and reinvented to serve new and individual functions. Carved stucco adorning the interior of the prayer hall of the mosque of al-Azhar is now enclosed in small panels high on the exterior of the imposing al-Shafi‘i facade, as if they were tiny mnemonic devices—decorative quotes—elicitng memory of the tradition as whole. The keel-arch and saucer decoration of the interior courtyards of public, congregational mosques such as al-Azhar or al-Salih Tala‘i‘ becomes the exterior surface treatment of a building devoted to the memory, glorification, and sanctification of a few individuals. All of these elements were positioned on the surface of a building of enormous scale. Though the mausoleum of al-Shafi‘i may have been among the first to employ such a method, this process of borrowing, reconfiguring, and investing with new meaning was to be a hallmark of architectural style in Cairo throughout the Ayyubid period. It is remarkable that al-Kamil built this building before he became sultan, while he was viceroy under his father, al-Malik al-Adil. The year of his formal investiture as viceroy, 1207, is the year he moved into his new residence in the Citadel. Four years later, the expansion of the mausoleum was completed. From his residence in the citadel, across the wide maydan, al-Kamil’s view of his mother’s lofty resting place at the grave of al-Shafi‘i would have endured until he too was laid to rest there.

The evidence presented here—including the backdrop of intra-Sunni competition in Cairo; the details of the shaykh al-Khabushani’s biography and particularly his doctrinal conflict with the Hanbalis; the close reading of the foundation inscription for the madrasa, with its unambiguous condemnation of Hanbali theology and lack of anti-Shi‘i polemic; the presence of the institution of the madrasa before the arrival of
Saladin; and finally the Ayyubid borrowing of Fatimid style in al-Kamil’s mausoleum—suggests that, rather than being a statement against the vanquished Isma’ili Fatimids, Saladin’s intent in his foundation of the madrasa and mausoleum at al-Shafii’s grave had to do with gaining the control and allegiance of particular group of Shafii Sunnis in the context of a highly competitive medieval polemical environment.

It is unclear whether he pursued this goal for purely ideological reasons, as did the shaykh al-Khabushani, or for more earthly ones: the Shafii’s were more numerous, and he must have seen them as more easily controlled than the troublesome Hanbalis, who always remained a tiny though vocal minority. Perhaps, as Chamberlain has suggested, the “overall pattern of relations between ruling households and the warriors and shaykhs upon whom they depended was more significant than the direct importation of institutions [such as the madrasa].”107

What is clear is that there is little in the remaining evidence from Saladin’s complex, or in the architecture or decoration of al-Malik al-Kamil’s mausoleum, to argue for the symbolic role of this building in a campaign of Sunni revival against the Isma’ili Fatimids. These conclusions do not, of course, necessarily mean that such forms, in other times or more distant lands, were not evocative of the associations attributed to them by the semiotic arguments cited above. Nor does it mean that the al-Shafii’s mausoleum itself was devoid of symbolic associations: as has been shown above, it simultaneously communicated a polyvalent network of such associations, ranging from the proclamation of intra-Sunni polemic to the visual expression of pious princely opulence. In fact, the virtue of semiotic theory is its very flexibility as an interpretive framework, and the borrowing, reconfiguring, and investing with new meaning of Fatimid forms in this building illustrates nothing less than such a semiotic process at work. The al-Shafii’s mausoleum is a product of a distinct moment and location in Islamic history: an early-thirteenth-century building in Cairo. As such, it cannot prove or disprove semiotic theories about buildings more distant in time or space. The evidence here suggests, however, that such symbolic associations were limited both temporally and spatially—mutable, fluctuating, and subject to change and intervention over time.

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NOTES

1. Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe (hereafter RCEA), 18 vols. (Cairo, 1931–), vol. 9, no. 3333, 91–92. This marble column bears a straightforward funerary inscription giving al-Shafii’s name, titles, and birth and death dates, as well as blessings. It is possibly an Ayyubid re-inscription after the original, which was noted by several medieval observers: see K. A. C. Creswell, Muslim Architecture of Egypt (hereafter MAE), 2 vols. (Oxford, 1952–59), vol. 2, 64, n. 2.


4. The construction of the citadel was undertaken two years previously but not completed until 1207. See Nasser Rabbat, The Citadel of Cairo (Leiden, 1995), 75–75.

5. For a clear and insightful summary of the “Sunni revival,” see Yasser Tabbaa, The Transformation of Islamic Art During the Sunni Revival (Seattle, 2001), chap. 1. Its elements are familiar to most students of Islamic history; for two examples that deal with the revival in Cairo, see Ira Lapidus, “Ayyubid Religious Policy and the Development of the Schools of Law in Cairo,” in Colloque international sur l’histoire du Caire (Cairo, 1972), 279–86, and André Raymond, Le Caire (Paris, 1993), 106–12.

6. Tabbaa, Transformation, 8.


10. Aside from Creswell’s work, there have been only two studies relating to this building: one on the inscriptions (Wiet, “Inscriptions”) and the other about the small boat atop the shrine: J. M. F. van Reeth, “La barque de l’Imam ‘Al-Saff,” in Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk Eras: Proceedings of the 4th and 5th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1995 and 1996 (Leuven, 1998), 249–64. Van Reeth gives a survey of the history of the building and some of the inscriptions.

11. A Cairene friend once confided that he thought of al-Shafii’s
as a kind of "patron saint" for the city. Perhaps the best index of Egyptian devotion to the Imam is to be found in the thousands of letters that are continually deposited in the grille around his cenotaph and even mailed through the regular post, often simply addressed to "Imam al-Shafi’i, Cairo." In the 1970s these letters were the subject of a sociological study: see Sayyid ‘Uways, Rasā’il ilā al-Imām al-Shāfi’i: Zahrat irsāl al-rasā’il ilā darb ilā al-Imām al-Shāfi’i (Cairo, 1978).


13. Saladin brought this woodworker from Syria, most likely from Aleppo, where his family was already renowned for their skill. His father was probably Ma‘ali b. Salim, who in 1165 carved the now-lost mihrab of the Maqam Ibrahim in the citadel of Aleppo. ‘Ubayd was thus likely the brother of Salmon b. Ma‘ali, the woodworker who made one of the most extraordinary examples of this technique of mortice-and-tenon construction: the minbar of the mosque of Jerusalem, finished in 1168–69. See Wiet, "Inscriptions," 496–497/1101–1249 (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976), 213.

14. According to al-Maqrizi, the sultan "paid [the professor] every month a salary of forty dinars for tadrīs (instruction)": al-Maqrizi, Muawwiz wa l-trāhir fi dhahir al-khitwat wa l-trāhir, 2 vols. (Bulaq, 1270 [1853]), vol. 2, 400. This was a remarkable sum, nearly four times that paid to the mudarris of the Suwyfiya Madrasa, founded by Saladin in the same year; the latter professor received only eleven dinars per month. See Gary Leiser, "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisat, 495–467/1101–1249" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976), 213.


16. According to the medieval pilgrimage guide written by ‘Ali al-Harawi (d. 1215), who in the opinion of Sourdel-Thomine was probably a Shi‘ite: Janine Sourdel-Thomine, Guide des lieux de pélerinage (Damascus, 1957), xx–xxii. Many pilgrimage places—though in theory belonging to one sect or another—were visited by Muslims from across the religious spectrum. Shi‘ite visitation of nominally Sunni shrines, and vice-versa, should probably be interpreted in the context of the essentially ecumenical character of popular religious devotional practices, a subject that deserves further exploration. For examples of how Muslims and Jews shared popular pilgrimage sites in the medieval period, see Joseph Meri, The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria (Oxford, 2002).


22. This is assuming that al-Kamil’s mausoleum preserved a plan resembling Saladin’s original. In any case, Saladin’s madrasa was still in existence when al-Kamil enlarged the mausoleum, and the irregular orientation of the door must indicate that there was some preexisting building on this side of the tomb.

23. al-Maqrizi, Khi‘at, vol. 2, 400. For the estimate, see Leiser, “Restoration,” 228–229: "The rawl was almost the same as today’s American pound.”


26. The fire was set in a futile attempt to deter the imminent Crusader attack by Amalric, Crusader king of Jerusalem.


32. Ibn Jubayr, Rihlat, 21; idem, Travels, 41.

33. This has also been suggested recently by D. S. Richards, s.v. ‘Salāḥ al-Dīn, ‘Encyclopaedia of Islam, new ed. (henceforth E2), (Leiden, 1960–2004).

34. RCEA, vol. 10, no. 3682, 60. Also see Wiet, "Inscriptions," 179.


36. al-Suhbī, Tabāqat al-Shāfi‘iya al-kubrā, 10 vols. (Cairo: 1964–76), vol. 7, 15. G. Wiet suggests that it was al-Khabushani himself who pronounced the khutba in the name of the Abbasid caliph a few days prior to the Fatimid caliph al-‘Adīd’s death: EI2, s.v. “al-‘Adīd li-Dīn Allāh.”

37. al-Suhbī, Tabāqat, vol. 7, 16.

38. For a more detailed explication of these debates, see Necipoju, Tophäps Scroll, 96–97.


41. As Bulliet has demonstrated, the term ‘asabiyya had two meanings: a positive one denoting a fundamental bond of social solidarity (as such, the word was made famous by Ibn Khaldun’s usage), and a negative one implying factional strife or fanaticism. A person called mūtā‘aṣib was a fanatical devotee of a particular group, in this period usually a legal school, or madhhhab. See R. Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 31–32.

42. George Makdisi, Ibn ‘Aqil and the réussure de l’Islam traditionniste au XIIIe siècle (Damascus, 1963), 69–164, elucidates how this factionalism was manipulated by the eleventh-century caliphate in Baghdad, which managed to skillfully mobilize the Hanbalis in support of its cause.

43. Bulliet, Patricians, 28.


45. Bulliet, Patricians, 32.

46. L. Pouzet, Dams au VIIe/XIIe siècle: Vie et structures religieuses d’une métropole islamique (Beirut, 1988), 80–90.

47. Michael Chamberlain, Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350 (Cambridge, England, 1994), 169, and see 167–74 for an insightful analysis of the role of fitna in
the social and religious life of medieval Damascus. Like the Hanbalis, Christians and Magians were also often accused in medieval polemic of anthropomorphism or even polytheism (shirk). Perhaps this explains their being grouped together by the building’s patron, although it is not then clear why Jews should be placed on this list of forbidden entrants.

48. George Makdisi, “The Sunni Revival,” in D. S. Richards, ed., *Islamic Civilization 950–1150* (Oxford, 1973), 155–57. Most legal scholars identified not solely with their madhab but also with diverse theological schools, for example, Rafidi, Mu‘azzili, or Ash‘ari; see Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqiil*, 294–97. For a discussion of the complicated and shifting relationships between the various Sunni creeds, see Y. Ishih, *The Political Doctrine of al-Baqillani* (Beirut, 1966), 54–83. The seeming inconsistencies generated by these allegiances often seem bewildering; for example, the theologian al-Baqillani (d. 1013), who was the chief Maliki qadi in Baghdad, is nevertheless buried at the grave of Ibn Hanbal. An ardent defender of Sunnism against Shiism and the Mu‘azzili, he would therefore have been in agreement with the anti-Shi‘i provisions of the Qadiri creed, but at the same time he is Ash‘ari and wrote the famous Ash‘ari treatise on the imamate entitled *al-Tamhid*.


50. The Sunni revival seems to have been an extremely complex and shifting phenomenon, and its means and ends as initially formulated under the Abbasids in Baghdad developed considerably—sometimes in very different directions—over time and distance. Thus, although the revival began under a traditionalist caliph, later—perhaps as a result of al-Ghazali’s synthesis of opposing doctrines—it was carried on in twelfth-century Syria and Egypt under the banner of the largely Shi‘i Ash‘ari Ayyubids, whose tolerance for traditionalist Hanbali troublemaking in Cairo or elsewhere was rather limited. 


52. *EI2*, s.v. “Hashwiyya”; see also “Nabita” and “Sunna.”

53. This, of course, does not prove that a desire to eliminate remaining traces of Shiism was not also part of the intention behind the founding of the madrasa. Certainly the intransigent shaykh al-Khabushani would have been no more tolerant of Shiism than of what he perceived as deviant forms of Sunnism. But this seems not to have been his most pressing concern when building the madrasa. Because the remaining elements of Saladin’s original construction are so few, the evidence of his intent is partial, but fortunately the foundation inscription, perhaps the most important indicator of the patron’s intentions, is among the surviving evidence. Its statement against the Hanbalis cannot, of course, confirm the absence elsewhere in the building of contemporary anti-Shi‘i polemic, but the failure to mention or even allude to Shiism in the foundation text is striking. And, I would argue, constitutes strong evidence that the expression of such sentiments was not the founder’s immediate priority.

54. *REÄ*, no. 3380; Tabbaa, *Transformation*, p. 68 invokes this cursive (naskh) inscription and those on the wooden cenotaph in the tomb of al-Shafi‘i as further evidence of Saladin’s propagandistic intentions in his foundations in Cairo (see n. 80, below). He also remarks on the naïve quality of the cursive of the Citadel inscription, arguing that it is suggestive of the “inexperience of local calligraphers in the new calligraphic style.” None of these inscriptions, however, seems visually prominent enough to have been intended as a true counterweight to the bold inscriptive programs on Fatimid buildings. In fact, the only visible inscriptions on the exterior of the al-Shafi‘i mausoleum are Kufic. We will return to this point below.


57. Leiser, “Restoration,” 118.


59. The history of the madrasa in Egypt has been meticulously documented by Leiser (“Restoration”), but since his dissertation is unpublished some of his findings are summarized here. The following section is based on his work.

60. Leiser, “Restoration,” 115.

61. Ibid., 119.

62. Ibid., 129.

63. Ibid., 131.

64. As did Jews and Christians, Sunnis functioned in important roles in the Fatimid administration, several as Fatimid viziers. Always the majority in Egypt, the Sunnis, in the later years of weakened Fatimid rule, had a great deal of freedom. This is why when Saladin arrived there may have been little need to actively stamp out Shiism, which had long before ceased to be a real political or ideological threat. See above, Chamberlain, “Crusader Era,” 232.

65. Leiser, “Restoration,” 133.

66. Ibid., 135.

67. Ibid., 150.

68. Ibid., 159.

69. Ibid., 178.

70. A chronological list of pre-Mamluk madrasas can be found in Leiser, “Restoration,” appendix 5, 471.

71. The monument is nearly always discussed in terms of its role in instigating, representing, or embodying the Sunni revival in Egypt. For example, Gaston Wiet, in his description of the Shafi‘i complex, wrote that Saladin introduced the madrasa into Egypt, reasoning that it was the logical outgrowth of his “Sunnite reaction”; see Wiet, *Cairo, City of Art and Commerce* (Norman, OK, 1964), 53–54. According to Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo* (Cairo, 1989), 85, Saladin’s complex “can be considered as symbolic of the reinstatement of Sunni Islam in Egypt.” Williams, *Islamic Monuments*, 137, states, “it was here that Salah al-Din founded the first madrasa in Egypt as part of his effort to combat the Fatimid Shi‘a.” This reading of the building and its meaning is so well established that it has become a commonplace when discussing Ayyubid architecture.


74. Ibid., 57.


THE MAUSOLEUM OF IMAM AL-SHAFI’I


81. Tabbaa, Transformation, 8–9. Tabbaa also notes that the al-Shafi’i cenotaph and the foundation inscription from the madrasa are the earliest instances of naskhi writing in Egypt (Transformation, 68). Though this is certainly the case, the most notable feature of the cenotaph is the fact that it bears historical inscriptions in both Kufic and naskhi; see Wiet, “Inscriptions,” 172.

82. Irene Bierman, “Art and Architecture in the Medieval Period,” in The Cambridge History of Egypt, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Eng-

83. Ibid., 372.

84. The Dome of the Rock is approximately 30 m. in height and 29 m. in diameter.

85. Creswell, MAE, vol. 2, 65, points out that this is quite sufficient to support a dome of brick or stone and adds that it is thus surprising that the dome is built of wood. This raises the possibility that the original was indeed built of more durable material. The present wooden dome dates to a restoration by Sultan Qaytbay, begun in 1480: idem, MAE, vol. 2, 73. It seems originally to have been covered with green tiles, some of which Creswell saw when the lead coating was removed briefly during repairs in 1951: MAE, vol. 2, 71.

86. Williams, Islamic Monuments, 123.

87. However, al-Kamil is also said to have been buried in the Citadel; see EE2, s.v. “al-Kamil.”

88. Creswell, MAE, vol. 2, 68–69. As far as I am aware, these inscriptions have not been published.

89. Ibid., 65–66.

90. Ibid., 66.

91. Ibid.

92. The combination of Kufic with interlacing uprights on a field of vegetal arabesque, visible on the al-Shafi’i’s post in fig. 7, appears in the mosque of al-Hakim, on a small window to the left of the mihrab. Creswell argues that this window grille shows Maghribi influence, which made itself felt in Cairo around the middle of the thirteenth century; he therefore concludes that the window of the mosque of al-Hakim dates to a thirteenth-century restoration: MAE, vol. 1, 82, n. 2. The presence of the same motif at the mausoleum of al-Shafi’i, however, suggests a slightly earlier date for the appearance of this style in Egypt. It is perhaps the sole element of the mausoleum façade that is not directly derived from Fatimid precedents, although it is nevertheless notable that the inscription is in Kufic and not naskhi.

93. Tabbaa proposes that this style of scrolling vegetal ornament declined in popularity in Syria under the Ayyubids in favor of a more highly rationalized vegetal arabesque that, he suggests, was more expressive of Sunni revival: Tabbaa, Transformation, 80–81. Another example of decorative continuities can be found on the walls of the citadel, near Saladin’s naskhi inscription discussed above. Despite the presence of this inscription, the decorative ornament, like that of the mausoleum, is again essentially Fatimid. This is particularly true on the Burj al-Zafar, which, according to Lorenz Korn, “seems to indicate the survival of Fatimid decorative traditions under the reign of Saladin.” For this and further elaboration of the long survival of Fatimid motifs in Ayyubid architecture, see Korn, “The Façade of as-Sālish Ayyūb’s Madrasa and the Style of Ayyubid Architecture in Cairo,” in Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras III: Proceedings of the 6th, 7th, and 8th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven (Leuven, 2001), 191–21, esp. 107. For the images from the Citadel, see Creswell, MAE, vol. 2, pls. 18 and 19.


95. The same is true of several Fatimid buildings, for example the mihrab of Sayyida Ruqayya, which has at the center of its ribbed hood a six-pointed star on a field of vegetal arabesque (fig. 15).

97. To my knowledge, the only other domed mausoleum anywhere that exceeded it in dimension at that date was that of Sultan Sanjar at Merv, built in the 1140s. Another possibility is the *qubba* at Bab Ibrahim in Mecca (destroyed), built in the tenth century and also praised for its extraordinary height. It was said by Ibn Jubayr to be “almost as high as the adjacent minaret”; see Jonathan Bloom, “The Introduction of the Muqarnas into Egypt,” *Muqarnas* 5 (1988): 27.

98. The one Fatimid possibility, which although destroyed by the Ayyubids would certainly have been alive in memory, was the famous tomb of the Fatimid caliphs, the *turban al-za’farân*, which had been built in the Western Palace around 973. Though we do not know its exact dimensions, the building was extolled for its height. However, the *turban al-za’farân* was not a freestanding mausoleum, since it consisted of a separate room incorporated within the fabric of the palatial complex; see *EI2*, s.v. “Turba,” 674.

99. Maqrizi, *Khitat*, vol. 2, 299–300. Creswell has translated this passage in full; see *MAE*, vol. 2, 155. See also Jonathan Bloom “The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdâr in Cairo,” *Annales Islamologiques* 18 (1982): 54, 64. Bloom has shown that like the al-Shafi‘i mausoleum the mosque of Baybars was the focus of an intra-Sunni dispute. According to Shafi‘i law, only one congregational mosque could be used for the Friday *khutba*, and the Ayyubids had designated the mosque of al-Hakim for that function. During the reign of Baybars, however, an attempt was made to reinstate the *khutba* in the Mosque of al-Azhar. The Shafi‘i qadi reacted strongly in opposition. Bloom argues that the building of the mosque of Baybars was an attempt to placate Shafi‘i opposition to the pronouncement of the *khutba* in al-Azhar by providing a new congregational mosque for those adherents of other legal schools who were not bound by the Shafi‘i restriction, and who therefore wished to give the *khutba* elsewhere. Baybars’s well-known decision, in 1264, to elevate the qadi from each of the four schools of law to the rank of *qadi al-quḍūt*, a position held since Ayyubid times only by the Shafi‘is, was also the cause of conflict; see Bloom, “Mosque of Baybars,” 62–64.


103. This is a phenomenon eloquently explored by Taylor, *Vicinity*.


The manuscript of Ibn al-Sufi’s *Risālat al-Sũfî fi ’l-kawâkib* in the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran,\(^1\) which has only quite recently come to the attention of Western scholars, is of great importance for the study of early Arabic manuscript illustration. Specifically, its frontispieces and line drawings of the constellations present very close similarities with the frontispieces and miniatures of the Ibn Bakhthishu’ū *Kitâb Na’t al-hayawān* in the British Library\(^2\) and other well-known manuscripts dated or datable to the early thirteenth century. They thus provide a welcome addition to a small but crucial body of work, and add a further significant element to the comparative study of the evolution of Arab painting.

Although the prime concern here is with the art-historical issues raised by the illustrations of the Reza Abbasi Museum (henceforth RAM) manuscript, clarity requires that reference be made to textual evidence relevant to the identity of its author.

The text is the poem that sometimes follows the major astronomical work of al-Sufi. Although the term *qaṣīda* is also used to describe it,\(^3\) it properly belongs to the *urjūza* “genre”—a type of didactic poetry used for expository and mnemonic purposes in a wide variety of technical fields, from mathematics and medicine to grammar, history, and music.\(^4\) Although the Ibn al-Sufi *urjūza* follows the order of presentation of the al-Sufi text, it reflects al-Sufi’s work only in part. Not only does it ignore all the technical data, it also downplays the “classical” description of the constellation figures, concentrating instead on the Arab element. Nevertheless, the illustrations in the RAM *urjūza* reflect the al-Sufi manuscripts iconographically: for example, following the Greek tradition, Cassiopeia is portrayed as a woman on a chair, even though, apart from an initial reference to *dhāt al-kursī* the *urjūza* text only deals with the Arab equivalent, a female camel.\(^5\)

Given the close relationship of the *urjūza* miniatures to those in other early-thirteenth-century manuscripts, we would expect the RAM *Risālat al-Sũfî fi ’l-kawâkib* to be datable to ca. 1220–25. It is therefore surprising that on page 4 we find an inscription giving a date of 554 (1159); were this the actual date of the manuscript, it would require a drastic reappraisal of currently accepted views on the chronology of stylistic evolution.

There are, however, good reasons for thinking it a later interpolation. The first concerns its position. Most reliable dates occur as straightforward statements in manuscript colophons, written in the same hand as the preceding text. In this case the inscription occurs, unexpectedly and oddly, at the very beginning of the text, immediately following the *basmala* (fig. 2). (The colophon, on page 76, consists only of blessings and unfortunately provides no information about scribe, date, or provenance [fig. 27].) The inscription also appears odd in the context of the partitions of the text by red lines. Within the same partition as the *basmala*, it requires two lines of text even though it is written in smaller characters. Were one to assume that it was written contemporaneously with and in the same hand as the rest of the text, one would be entitled to wonder why the scribe did not place it beneath the *basmala*, perhaps in a separate partition, for even had he compressed the *basmala* the space left after it would not have been sufficient for the inscription to be completed on the same line and remain within the frame.

However, it is clear that here, as elsewhere, the thin red partition lines were added later, as is shown by the fact that the two internal middle lines terminate neatly (without having been rubbed off) to accommodate a diagonal inscription, later than the main text, which gives the full name of the author (fig. 3). If we visualize how the text would look without the parti-
Fig. 1. Opening page with title. From an Ibn al-Sufi *Risālat al-Sūfī fī ’l-kawākib*, ca. 1220–25, North Jazira(?). Tehran, Reza Abbasi Museum, M. 570, page 1. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 2. Opening text: RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 4. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)

Fig. 3. Detail of the added inscription with the date 554 (1159). RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 4. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
tions, the dimensions of the basmala cease to appear odd: there are many manuscripts in which it is not stretched to fill the line, and we need not assume that its length was determined by the need to accommodate the inscription that follows it, which seems all the more to be a subsequent interpolation.

The second reason for doubting the inscription concerns the script in which it is written. Close examination reveals that it is in a different hand from the main text, and furthermore that the ink used to write it is also different. 6 This points strongly to its being a later addition and further reinforces the conclusion that it was not conceived as part of the original disposition of the page.

The third point of contention is the wording: nasakha minhu Abu ’l-Hasan ‘Ali b. Ahmad fis sanat arba’ wa-khamsin wa-khamsimi’a. This, it is important to note at the outset, is not a standard copyist’s formula, and, partly in consequence, its precise import is unclear. The particular difficulty concerns the inclusion of min. Without it, the meaning would be “Abu ’l-Hasan ‘Ali b. Ahmad copied it (nasakha) in 554”; but with it the sense shifts, and two possible interpretations might be proposed: either “In 554 Abu ’l-Hasan ‘Ali b. Ahmad copied something from this manuscript,” or “In 554 Abu ’l-Hasan ‘Ali b. Ahmad made a copy of all or part of the same text.”

Linguistically, considered purely as statements, these two alternatives seem equally plausible, the suffix pronoun presumably referring in the first case to (hadhâ) al-makhtût or al-nass, and in the second to (hadhâ) al-nass or al-maqlûl. Where they crucially differ is in their temporal implications: according to the first, if a further copy was made in 554, the RAM manuscript itself must itself date from 554 or earlier, whereas according to the second, 554 refers to an act of copying from which one can infer nothing with regard to the date of the RAM manuscript. As for the reason behind this added comment, one might conjecture in the first case that Abu ’l-Hasan ‘Ali b. Ahmad was sufficiently famous as a scholar or copyist for the mention of his name, right at the beginning of the text, to lend prestige to this manuscript and, by implication, validate it as a faithful copy of the original. Rather more prosaic, but at the same time more likely, is the supposition, relating to the second interpretation, that the inscription was added by a librarian or later owner who wished to cross-reference a different manuscript in the same collection, dated 554, that contained all or part of the same text.

The full name of the great astronomer and author of the treatise to which the urjûza relates is Abu ’l-Husayn ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ’Umar al-Sufi. Born in Rayy in 903, he died in Baghdad in 986, and it was during his time as tutor to the Buyid Sultan ’Adud al-Dawla Fakhr al-Dinraw (r. 949–83) that he wrote for him the Kitâb Suwar al-kawâkib al-thâbita, which dates from 965. 8 As to the identity of the author of the urjûza, there has been some disagreement among scholars, despite the inference that Abu Ali najî (metri causa for “ibn”) Abu Husayn al-Sufi was the astronomer’s son. Brockelmann9 dismissed this identification, suggesting instead an Ibn...
al-Sufi who was a mathematician active in 1135–36 in the service of the Artuqid ruler of Hisn Kaifa, Qara Arslan (Fakhr al-Din, fl. 1143–44), with whom he equated the Fakhr al-Din mentioned in the poem. However, in the 1125 al-Sufi manuscript now in Qatar (see endnote 3), the text of the poem is headed by an inscription (folio 162r) stating that it was written by a son (walad) of al-Sufi, and later scholarship has preferred this identification. The colophon of the Bodleian library copy, dated 400 (1009), of the main astrological text by al-Sufi names al-Husayn b. ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Umar b. Muhammad as the scribe of the manuscript, and this has been interpreted as the name of al-Sufi’s son, while the present text includes a later diagonal inscription added above li-‘Abi ‘Alî (fig. 3) that gives a fuller version of the alleged author’s name: Abu ‘Ali al-Husayn b. Abu al-Husayn ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Umar al-Sufi. The 1125 Qatar manuscript appears exceptional in having a prose introduction that mentions the father-son relationship; in other copies, the RAM manuscript included, the only evidence is that provided by the line citing Abu ‘Ali najl al-Husayn al-Sufi. Unless it is considered an interpolation, however, this identification is difficult to ignore, especially as meter and rhyme offer a certain defense against tampering. Thus the son seems the most likely authorial candidate.

Regarding the patron, here again more than one candidate has been put forward, for in place of Qara Arslan, Aziz-zada suggests a double homage to Buyid amirs, the title shâhînshâh being a reference to Fana Khusrav Abu Shuja’ ‘Adud al-Dawla (the pupil and patron of the astronomer al-Sufi), and Fakhr Din Allah being his younger brother Fakhr al-Dawla Daylami. This appears ingenious but is unconvincing: the presence of ma’âli between akh and the following name severs the connection. In addition, it would be most unusual to combine references to two patrons, and it would be a curious poetic license that converts Fakhr al-Dawla into Fakhr al-Din. (Furthermore, if we are to have a Fakhr al-Dawla, there is yet another chronologically possible Buyid candidate, Fakhr al-Dawla ‘Ali.)

Inscriptions and seals testify that the manuscript was owned by various private individuals from the fourteenth through the nineteenth century. The oldest inscription, probably datable to the early fourteenth century, is found on the title page, page 1 (fig. 1). In Arabic, the substantive part reads as follows:

\[
\text{min kutub al-abd al-da’isf al-naﬁf al-rājī ilā rahmat al-malik al-majid} / \]

Muhammad b. Yahya b. Fadallaḥ al-khattb al-ma’rūf bi-Khwurd(?) al-Mu‘arrif

(One of the books of the feeble and wretched servant who hopes for the mercy of his glorious Lord, / Muhammad b. Yahya b. Fadallaḥ, the preacher known as Khwurd(?) al-Mu‘arrif.

Two other inscriptions, in Persian, are found at the bottom of the same page, in ta’liq script. The owners belonged to the same family, and their inscriptions are possibly to be dated, according to Aziz-zada, to the early fifteenth century. There are also three seal impressions—two at the bottom, not completely legible, as the margin of the page is damaged, and another higher up on the left-hand side of the page. It is possible to establish that they contain ownership inscriptions, although unfortunately without dates. Two more such inscriptions, one a seal impression and the other written in shikasta, are found on the last page of the manuscript, page 76, and possibly belong to the late Safavid period (fig. 27).

As a stamped inscription on the flyleaf reveals, in the nineteenth century the manuscript was in the hands of Fakhr al-Din Nasiri Amini, a collector and dealer of manuscripts, and was no. 156 in his library. After that, it passed to the Mahboubian family, also collectors and dealers of manuscripts, and the urjaza is in fact mentioned in the catalogue produced by Mehdi Mahboubian in 1970. Mahboubian sold many items to Queen Farah Diba for her royal collection, including, we may safely assume, this manuscript, as the Queen eventually donated her collection of ancient and Islamic Iranian art to be part of the Reza Abbasi Museum, established in 1976.

The manuscript has thus passed through many hands before arriving at the museum, and the plausibility of the inscription with the date having been added as part of a library check is reinforced by the fact that there was obviously great interest in this classical text throughout the centuries, as demonstrated also by the existence of a Qajar copy of the RAM manuscript. It is also interesting, when considering the inscription, to note that the manuscript has been in other ways “tampered with” on different occasions. For example, some diacritical marks have been added later, in blacker ink, and some of the letters have been re-outlined: one instance of this is the first hâ’ of shâhînshâh, in the shape of an 8, on page 4 (fig. 2). In the margins there is a Persian commentary, undated but certainly added later—sometime in the sixteenth or
seventeenth century (or possibly later), judging from the nastālīq script. In addition, as stated above, the thin red lines that frame the text are not original; they were most probably added when the Persian commentary was written in the margins, as the red ink in which they are written is the same as that used for the rubrics in the commentary but different from that of the rubrics of the main text. Further confirmation is provided by the fact that in certain places they accommodate the Persian commentary, e.g., on pages 6, 16, 23 (fig. 14), and 48 (fig. 16), where they are either drawn at an angle or interrupted. In addition, as also mentioned, the two internal middle lines on page 4 are neatly interrupted to accommodate the later, diagonal inscription that gives the full name of the author (fig. 3). Furthermore, the letters alongside various stars and the numbers that appear within the constellation titles are also later additions, again in the same red ink as the frames of the text. The catchwords at the bottom left corner of the pages were also added later, as they are in a darker ink and a different hand.

In one instance the painter has made a mistake in the iconography of the constellations. The title of Hercules, al-fāṭiḥa ‘alā rukbatayhi, which appears on page 19, is followed (on the other side of the folio, page 20) by a picture of Orion, while the picture of Hercules appears on page 60, preceded, on 59, by Orion’s titles, al-jabbār/al-jawzā’. Elsewhere, incorrect sequences result from the order of the folios having been disturbed. For example, a picture and the end of the text (two lines) of al-Sulayq (Lyra) appears on page 22, while the preceding text of Lyra, together with the title, is to be found on page 61. Finally, at some stage after the catchwords were added, a number of folios were detached from the manuscript. The section devoted to Perseus, with one miniature, should come between pages 24 and 25 as they are now numbered; missing between pages 56 and 57 are the constellations Capricorn and Aquarius and the beginning of Pisces (but not its picture, so just two images are lacking from this group); and between pages 63 and 64 should appear Canis Major and Canis Minor, together with their pictures. In all, then, five pictures are missing.

THE QAJAR COPY

As reported by Aziz-zada, a Qajar copy, dated 1312 (1894), of the RAM Ibn al-Sufi is found in the Majlis Library in Tehran. The manuscript now in the RAM may have appealed to a Qajar patron or copyist because it included illustrations of all the constellations, which is not often the case. The copy follows the text and the iconography of these illustrations very closely and reflects the state of the original manuscript prior to the loss of some of its folios and the disruption of its order. For example, the whole section of Lyra appears in correct sequence (on pages 12 and 13), while of the five missing constellation drawings, Perseus (Birshāwush) is found in the Qajar copy on page 14, where it is represented with a rather dramatic picture (fig. 10 left), and Aquarius occurs on page 27 (fig. 11)—evidence that the folios containing these two miniatures were taken out of the manuscript after the copy was executed. The other three miniatures, however, are missing from the copy, probably indicating that they were detached from the manuscript at some earlier stage. To judge by the example of Hercules and Orion, the illustrations of which are now correctly placed, the Qajar copyist had sufficient knowledge of both text and iconography to rectify such blunders.

A more intriguing case is presented by the illustration of Andromeda. Apart from the few cases, like Cygnus and Cancer, in which constellations are represented as if seen from above and therefore do not have a “direction,” the copies follow the original drawings in facing left. But in the depiction of Andromeda (fig. 19) the Qajar artist has reversed his drawing, so that she now has the fish across her left arm and not, as in the RAM manuscript—in which the fish is slightly effaced—across her right (fig. 20). In the absence of outline marks, this cannot be explained simply by the reversal of a model, and although an explanation is hard to come by, it may be hypothesized that it has something to do with the fact that in the al-Sufi treatises the constellations are usually represented in mirror-image pairs. The Qajar copyist, being familiar with this tradition, may in this instance have simply preferred the alternative view. In any case, the copyist appears to have had knowledge of both text and images, and this copy is valuable testimony to a continuing interest in classical scientific knowledge in the Qajar period.

The two manuscripts have the same number of folios (38) and an almost identical format (RAM ca. 24 x 16 cm; Majlis 25 x 16.5 cm); the drawings are also very similar in size (for example, Ursa Minor measures 6 x 9.5 cm in the RAM original and 5.5 x 8.5 cm in the Majlis copy). In the RAM manuscript the
constellation drawings have been drawn in a thin red line before being outlined in black ink, a feature common to early-thirteenth-century manuscripts, but such preliminary red outlines are not present in the Qajar copy. In fact, the Qajar illustrator seems to have made his copies freehand rather than by standard means of mechanical transfer: in the Reza Abbasi Museum manuscript there is no trace of prickling or of the indentations left on the page by a sharp tracing tool such as are so often found around the drawings of al-Sufi manuscripts. The Qajar copy likewise shows no sign of the outline of the drawings having been marked on the page prior to execution.

Unfortunately, there are no frontispieces in the Qajar copy, and the manuscript is also unfinished to the extent that the spaces for certain titles, including the one at the top of the first page, have been left blank.

THE CONNECTIONS WITH EARLY-THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ARAB PAINTING

The frontispieces of the RAM manuscript, on pages 2 and 3 (fig. 4), each portray a figure sitting on a throne; the one on the right holds an astrolabe and the other a book. The left-hand figure is white-bearded and wears a turban, while the dark-bearded one opposite wears what looks like a hairband and seems to sport an earring. The rest of his costume is similar to that of his companion on the left, however, and both have gold haloes around their heads. The two figures face each other, the one on the left in profile and the other in three-quarter view.

About these figures, Aziz-zada has advanced two hypotheses. According to one, the figure on the right could be the ancient authority Ptolemy, whose star table in his Almagest is the basis for al-Sufi’s treatise, and the white-bearded figure on the left the author of the book, reading it to Ptolemy.20 But although this conforms to the common representation of pre-Islamic sages without turbans, it runs counter to the usual hierarchy of authority coded by beard color. For example, although arabicized and wearing a turban, Aristotle is represented in an al-Mubashshir Mukhtar al-hikam wa-mahasin al-kalim21 as a white-bearded ancient authority holding an astrolabe in front of a crowd of students with books (fig. 8). Moreover, unless the author of a work derived from al-Sufi’s treatise could reasonably be expected to seek the approval of Ptol-

emy rather than al-Sufi himself, the reference would have to be not to the author of the present text, but to the tenth-century astronomer. Similarly, if it were proposed that the figures represented are al-Sufi, who would have to be the older figure on the left, and his son, the likely author of the urjuza, we would have to accept a flouting of convention whereby the reader of the book is not the author but the font of wisdom imparting knowledge to the (presumably prospective) author.

Aziz-zada’s other hypothesis proposes that the figure on the right is the patron of al-Sufi, ‘Adud al-Dawla (the earring would then prefigure later Persian representations of princes), and the figure on the left al-Sufi himself, reading his text to his prince.22 This interpretation accords partially with Aziz-zada’s proposal that the dedicatory inscription in the text could be a double homage to Buyid amirs. In both cases the representation is anachronistic, but for this there is the possible defense that it is a deliberate attempt to give prestige to the book by affiliating it with illustrious personalities. But one could equally well propose a non-anachronistic alternative, namely, that the figure on the left is the author of the urjuza, and that on the right his patron, the Fakhr al-Din referred to in the text. Indeed, while the figure on the left is definitely an old sage absorbed in his reading of a book, the one on the right conveys a slightly irreverent attitude: he sprawls and looks curiously at the astrolabe he is holding. Princely status is suggested, again, by his earring; and he has a golden bowl of fruit at his feet, which also seems to be associated with author-70

ity, whether intellectual or political. For example, the 1244 Dioscorides Khawass al-ashjar (The Properties of Plants) in Bologna has a full-page miniature of Dioscorides seated on a throne in the center, picking a fruit from a gold bowl held by Aristotle, on the left; and in one of the Ne’f frontispieces the figure identifiable as the possible patron of the text is again seated on a throne and has a fruit-filled golden bowl at his feet.23

However, it is also perfectly possible to read the frontispieces as embodying a general iconographic theme, found in many scientific manuscripts, of the “transmission of knowledge.” According to this view the figures do not need to be identified with any particular personage; they serve, rather, as a reminder of the general concept of the importance of knowledge, of how it is imparted from teacher to student, and, perhaps, of the vital role of the book itself as a record of the successful completion of this task.
In iconographical terms, the two frontispieces are very similar to two of the four in the *Naṭ*, those on folios 3v and 4r (figs. 9a and 9b), which also depict two enthroned figures, the one on the left turned slightly towards the other, who, in frontal position, represents royal authority. There are striking similarities between the thrones, which have high, decorated backs with slightly flared shoulders, thickly molded legs, and seats covered by carpets with inward-folded corners, on top of which are cushions. The RAM frontispieces each have as background a gold canopy patterned with blue vine scrolls, which descends from the ceiling and widens to cover the back of the throne. Although the two aforementioned frontispieces in the *Naṭ* (folios 3v and 4r) have solid gold backgrounds, the other two (those on folios 2v and 3r) have gold backgrounds covered by very similar vine scrolls. The arches at the top corners are also similar architectonic references, while the textile designs in the Tehran manuscripts—for example, the checkered pattern of the two throne carpets, each with a row of gold roundels near the border—are practically identical to those in the *Naṭ* frontispieces. Furthermore, the clothing type—long tunics with white, baggy trousers underneath—is identical in the two manuscripts, as is the tunic decoration and rendering of folds: in these details one may compare the RAM figures not only to two of the *Naṭ* frontispieces already mentioned (folios 3v and 4r), but also to the figures on folios 101v and 96r in the *Naṭ* (figs. 5, 6). In addition, the pseudo-calligraphic tiraz bands represented on folio 101v are identical with those of various constellation figures in the *urjūza,*
for example, those on pages 12, 24 (fig. 26, Cassiopeia), 37 (fig. 20 left, Andromeda), and 72 (fig. 22, Centaurus with Lupus). With regard to posture and facial traits, the figure on the left in the RAM frontispieces has a marked resemblance to the one also on the left in the miniature of Ibn Bakhtishu’ and a student on folio 101v (fig. 5). Finally, one may note that the position and nature of the bowl of fruit in the right-hand frontispiece is identical to that on Na’t folio 4r (fig. 9b).

Other striking similarities are apparent in the depiction of animals, for example, the lions and the leopard on Na’t folios 208r (fig. 17) and 100v, as compared to the constellation Leo on page 49 (fig. 16) and, for the face, Delphinus on page 32 (fig. 18) in the urjüza. In general, the animals’ bodies are treated in a very similar manner: they are rather large and fleshy, with curved lines to mark the folds of the skin, as in the constellations of Ursa Minor on page 5 (fig. 12) and the bear in the Na’t on folio 174v (fig. 13); Centaurus with Lupus on page 72 (fig. 22) and the onager on folio 151v (fig. 23); Aries on page 41 and the ram on folio 111v; Cygnus on page 23 (fig. 14) and one of the domestic pigeons, second from the right in the upper row on folio 14r (fig. 15); Pisces on page 57 (fig. 24 left) and the mullet on folio 74v (fig. 25);
Fig. 7. Erasistratos and a pupil. From a Dioscorides Khawās al-ashjār, dated 621 (1224), North Jazira(?). Washington, Freer Gallery of Art, F1947.5. (Photo: courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC)
Fig. 8. Aristotle, holding an astrolabe, and students. From an al-Mubashshir, Mukhtār al-hikam wa-mahāsin al-kalim, Syria (?), early thirteenth century. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayi Library, Ahmet III, 3206, folio 90r. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Topkapı Sarayi Library, Istanbul)
Figs. 9a (right) and 9b (left). Double-page frontispiece from the British Library Na’l, folios 3v and 4r. (Photo © the British Library)
THE IBN AL-SUFI MANUSCRIPT IN TEHRAN AND ITS ART-HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS
Another striking feature that relates the urjūza drawings to thirteenth-century manuscripts is the already-mentioned red outlines of the constellations, which have been drawn over in black ink. This is typical of early-thirteenth-century Arab painting, but less so of al-Sufi manuscripts (even if they belong to the thirteenth century), which more often have incised outlines, a feature absent from the RAM manuscript (and, incidentally, from the Majlis Library copy).

These close resemblances suggest, if not that the same artist worked on both the RAM Ibn al-Sufi and the Naʿt, then that the two manuscripts were illustrated by artists in a master-pupil relationship, or working in the same atelier, or both. Also consonant with such a conclusion is the similarity between the script of the RAM manuscript and that of the Naʿt. Unfortunately, the delineation of a historical style-map of naskh, especially of the early periods, still lies in the future. We lack adequate criteria for situating a manuscript in time and place with any accuracy on the basis of its script; indeed, we even lack a sufficiently objective conventional vocabulary to define script features for comparative purposes. But despite this situation, we can still reasonably claim a broad family resemblance among the scripts of the various manuscripts of this group, and especially strong similarities between these two manuscripts in particular.
Because of these various parallels the conclusion is virtually inescapable that the RAM Ibn al-Sufi forms part of a strongly profiled group of early-thirteenth-century manuscripts, and if, in the light of the dated inscription, further argument is needed, one need only point to the absence of such parallels with the surviving illustrated manuscripts of the twelfth century, including al-Sufi manuscripts. Those that were made close to 1159, whether from an Artuqid, Zangid, Abbasid, or Fatimid environment, all exhibit a different style of depicting human figures, and the line drawings in the al-Sufi and urjūza manuscripts from this period also differ in style from those in the RAM urjūza.25

Accepting the RAM manuscript as a further addition to the thirteenth-century group, we can logically assign it a date close to that of the Naḥṭ. On the basis of stylistic similarities with other dated manuscripts, in particular the above-mentioned 1224 Dioscorides (fig. 7)26 and Christian Syriac manuscripts—especially the 1220 Gospel book in the Vatican Library, produced in the monastery of Mar Mattai,27 and the 1216–20 Gospel book in the British Library, most probably also produced in Mar Mattai28—the Naḥṭ can be confidently assigned to around 1220–25.29 Given the extremely strong iconographical and stylistic similarities between it and the RAM manuscript, it is logical to suppose that the latter, too, was produced at that time.

The other members of the group consist of two
Fig. 12. Ursa Minor. RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 5. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 13. Bear. British Library *Na’t*, folio 174v. (Photo © the British Library)
Fig. 14. Cygnus. RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 23. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 15. Domestic pigeons. British Library Na’t, folio 14r. (Photo © the British Library)
manuscripts of the *Magāmāt*, one dated 634 (1237) and another, now in St. Petersburg, that closely resembles it (figs. 28, 29). The latter is unfortunately undated, but it is reasonable to assume that it is the earlier of the two, its miniatures showing experimental features that are then handled more confidently in the 1237 manuscript. Accordingly, it has been assigned to ca. 1230–35.

As for provenance, the 1237 *Magāmāt* is usually attributed to Baghdad, on the rather dubious grounds that its compiler and painter has the *nisba* al-Wasiti, on which basis he is assumed to have worked in Baghdad. The case is strengthened somewhat, however, by the sumptuousness of the miniatures in this manuscript and the high quality of its calligraphy, which are consonant with a royal commission and increase the likelihood of production in a capital city. Because of the close resemblances between it and the St. Petersburg *Magāmāt*, the latter is also usually thought to have been produced in Baghdad. But other manuscripts in the early-thirteenth-century group have a different provenance: the Mar Mattai Gospel book was produced in the monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul; for various reasons the *Naʾt* too can be confidently attributed to a North Jaziran environment to which the 1224 Dioscorides, because of its strong similarities to the *Naʾt*, can reasonably be assigned as well. Thus, although the possibility of a Baghdad provenance cannot be completely excluded for the Reza Abbasi Museum *urjūza*, it is clear that the particularly close relationship of its visual components with those of the *Naʾt* point to the greater likelihood of a center of production in the North Jazira, probably in the Mosul region.
Fig. 17. Lions. British Library Na‘î, folio 208r. (Photo © the British Library)
Fig. 18. Delphinus. RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 32. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
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Fig. 20. Pegasus (right) and Andromeda (left). RAM Ibn al-Sufi, pages 36–37. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 21. Unicorn. British Library Na’t, folio 197v. (Photo © the British Library)
Fig. 22. Centaurus with Lupus. RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 72. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 23. Onager. British Library Na’t, folio 151v. (Photo © the British Library)
Fig. 24. Sagittarius (right) and Pisces (left). RAM Ibn al-Sufi, pages 56–57. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 25. Mullet. British Library *Naʿt*, folio 74v. (Photo © the British Library)
Fig. 26. Cassiopeia. RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 24. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 27. Colophon. RAM Ibn al-Sufi, page 76. (Photo: Anna Contadini, courtesy of the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)
Fig. 28. Abu Zayd before the governor of Rahba. Al-Hariri, *Maqâmât*, dated 634 (1237), probably Baghdad. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. arabe 5847, folio 26r. (Photo © the Bibliothèque nationale de France)
APPENDIX

CONTENTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE REZA
ABBASI MUSEUM IBN AL-SUFI URJUZA

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NOTES

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1. Tehran, Reza Abbasi Museum, M. 570. For this manuscript, see M. Mahboubian, Treasures of Persian Art after Islam: The Mahboubian Collection (New York, 1970), introduction and no. 913, where a brief description and a list of the miniatures are provided and five images are reproduced in black and white. The manuscript has been the subject of a general article by G. Aziz-Cara, “Urjaza y Risalat al-Sufi fi ‘l-Kawkib,” Muqarnas 31 (n.p., 10), 1381/2002): 12–14 (Persian text), where a more detailed description and a discussion of the date, author, and patron of the manuscript are found. A number of color images from this manuscript are published with discursive captions in N. Pourjavady, ed., The Splendour of Iran, 3 vols. (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2001), vol. 3, 267–73. (This reference was brought to my attention by Moya Carey while she was my research assistant; for her work on al-Sufi manuscripts, see notes 3 and 8, below. She has also started building up research material on the Ibn al-Sufi tradition.) Although the captions of the Pourjavady book carry a general attribution of the manuscript to the twelfth century, one of them (269), which accompanies a reproduction of one of the frontispieces, a portrait said to be of al-Sufi, describes the figure’s profile as being “characteristic of the Baghdad School” of the early 13th century.


3. The term qasida is used on the last page of the RAM manuscript, in the title of the colophon: nāẓat al-qasida al-falakhiyya (“The poem of the heavenly spheres is completed”); it also appears in the 519 (1125) manuscript now in the collection of the National Museum of Qatar, MI-02-98-80, which consists of the Kitāb Suwar al-kawākib al-thābita following it. See Sotheby’s, Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures (London, sale L8256, Apr. 29, 1998), lot 34, 32–48 (a long and comprehensive entry by D. A. King, B. Brend, and R. Hillenbrand). The title page of the urjaza (fol. 162r) reads hādhāh qasīda qulakāh wadāl Abī l-Husayn / al-Sufi naṣama fihā mā natharrahu abīhu li-yashal / hif dhōlik a‘lā man rāmah (“this qasida has been composed by the son of Abī l-Husayn al-Sufi, who has put into verse what his father had written in prose, so that for those who wish it should be easier to memorize”). Moya Carey has written an entry on this manuscript for a forthcoming catalogue of the collection of the Qatar museum.


5. There seems to be no tradition of illustrating exclusively the Arab forms of the constellations, although in exceptional cases the Greek and the Arab forms are conflated in miniatures. For example, in the 1171 al-Sufi manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Ms. Hunt 212, fol. 40v, we find a picture of Cassiopeia as a woman seated on a chair and a camel figure drawn across her. See E. Savage-Smith, “Celestial Mapping,” in J. B. Harley and D. Woodward, eds., The History of Cartography: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1987–), vol. 2, bk. 1 (1992), 52, fig. 2.34. I am grateful to Dr. Colin Wakefield of the Bodleian Library for recently showing me again this fragile manuscript.

6. The ink has a tone of brown different from that of the main text and is also of a lesser quality, as it has rubbed off in some places.

7. Abu l-Husayn ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sufi, Suwaru‘l-Kawākib or (Uranometry) (Description of the 48 Constellations): Arabic text, with the Urjaza of Ibnu’s-Sufi, Edited from the Oldest Extant Manuscript and Based on the Ulgah Beg Royal Codex (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Arabe 5036) by M. Nizām-u’d-Dīn (henceforth Hyderabad ed.) (Hyderabad 1373/1954). 3. This edition, made in Hyderabad, is mainly based on the Oxford manuscript Marsh 144, dated 400 (1009), and that of Ulgah Beg, Bibliothèque nationale, Arabe 5036, datable to the fifteenth century.


10. Brockelmann, GAL, vol. 1, 253; idem, GAL/s, vol. 1, 398; Stern, "al-Sūfī," which cites the previous literature as well.


13. This is also the reading in Aziz-zada, "Urjūza," 13. The duxsus suggests al-Hasan, but what seems at first sight to be a tashhid belonging to al-Rahmān on the line below is better read as the dots of the yā‘ in Husayn.

14. I am grateful to Charles Burnett, who made this sensible point to me during our discussions on the manuscript.


18. Ibid. The manuscript is no. 5099 of the Majlis Library in Tehran, and the date is found in the colophon on page 76 (or folio 37 left); for this manuscript, see also C. Brockelmann, GAL/s, vol. 1, 398, no. 11; Y. Fūsāmī et al., Fihrist-i Kitābkhānā-i Majlis-i Shāhār-ī Miḥlī (Tehran, 1933–), vol. 1, 109, no. 198.

19. This is because al-Sufi wanted to represent one figure (that on the right) as seen from inside the celestial dome and the other (on the left) from the outside, as seen in celestial globes. See the explanation and passage from al-Sufi’s text in Wellesz, “An Early al-Sūfī Manuscript,” 1–26 and pls. 1–27, on 4–5.


The Ibn al-Sufi Manuscript in Tehran and Its Art-Historical Connections


(Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1940); H. Buchthal and O. Kurz, A Hand List of Illuminated Oriental Christian Manuscripts (London, 1942), 21–22, no. 63; J. Leroy, Les Manuscrits syriques à peintures conservés dans les bibliothèques d’Europe et d’Orient, I, (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1964), 280–302, pls. 70–92, 94–99, and color pl. between 4 and 5; Etinghausen, Arab Painting, 98 and color pl. on 94; Hunt, “Manuscript Production,” 160. The date of this manuscript has been disputed at times, but no convincing argument has yet been put forward for a revision of the 1220 date.


IS THE BEARDED MAN DROWNING? PICTURING THE FIGURATIVE IN A LATE-FIFTEENTH-CENTURY PAINTING FROM HERAT

In the study of Persian miniature painting and its development through the fifteenth century, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the illustrations in the 1487 manuscript of the *Manṭiq al-ayr* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Three of the illustrations in this manuscript are among the earliest specimens of the “new style” of painting ushered in by the artists at the famed atelier of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the last Timurid prince in Herat. Over the years, aside from the usual debates about attribution, these enigmatic paintings have enticed art historians’ curiosity and generated a number of largely inconclusive interpretations. The general tendency to explain their content symbolically is ostensibly due to the designation of the *Manṭiq al-ayr* as “mystical poetry.” Translated into English under such titles as *The Speech of the Birds* or *The Conference of the Birds*, the *Manṭiq al-ayr* was written by Farid al-Din ʿAttar in rhyming couplets some three centuries before this manuscript was copied and illustrated. ʿAttar’s twelfth-century work was indeed an explicit contribution to the discourse of Sufism, which like its counterparts in Jewish Kabala and medieval Christian mysticism, sought a direct, individual experience of God. Advocating the pursuit of the real—as opposed to the phenomenal—truth, ʿAttar’s work is an allegorical tale presenting the various stages that a seeker of truth must go through in his or her quest for unity with the divine. The paintings in the Metropolitan Museum manuscript have for the most part been understood as literal depictions of events from a handful of ʿAttar’s numerous parables, which elaborate the importance of these stages on the path to Sufism.

Of the eight illustrations in the Metropolitan Museum manuscript, the first four are early seventeenth-century additions. Of the four original illustrations, one does not display the characteristics that distinguish the other three paintings as early examples of the new style. Rather, this fourth painting, “The Beggar before the King,” has been characterized as depicting a “court scene, which has been an integral part of the art of Iran from the Sasanid dynasty onward and appears in all schools of all periods of Persian miniature painting.” My concern here is with “The Bearded Man Drowning,” one of the other three fifteenth-century illustrations, which are stylistically similar enough to one another to be attributed to the same artist or group of artists. According to Priscilla Soucek, the advice given to students of calligraphy by Qazi Ahmad in the sixteenth century reveals the conservatism of artistic education in Iran, which justified two basic mechanisms of continuity in manuscript illustration: literal reproduction and selective adaptation. Taking into account this tradition-bound artistic practice, I have assumed the content of the “Bearded Man Drowning,” and, except for the court scene, of all the paintings original to the manuscript, to have been provided by ʿAttar’s text. Nevertheless, although all three adhere to the convention of depicting the events of the accompanying text, half of each of these three paintings contains images that do not appear to bear any direct link to that text—at least not on the literal level.

I will use the images in the foreground of “The Bearded Man Drowning” (fig. 1) to specify the nexus between ʿAttar’s verbal imagery and the painter’s pictorial play on Sufi discourse, which connects the poetical allusions to the visual signifiers particular to specific Sufi practices popular in contemporary Herat. I believe that the content of the enigmatic foreground of “The Bearded Man Drowning” is best understood in terms of the practices of the vastly influential contemporary Sufi order, the Naqshbandiyya. I will also briefly discuss the two other stylistically similar paintings from 1487, but only in order to corroborate the nexus between text and image in the “Bearded Man Drowning.”

The upper half of “The Bearded Man Drowning” literally illustrates the events described in the first four verses of ʿAttar’s text:
Fig. 1. The bearded man drowning. Folio 44r from an illustrated manuscript of the *Mantiq al-‘ayn* of ‘Attar, 1487. Ink, opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1963.210.44. (Photo © 1998 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art)
thing depicted in the lower half of this painting is the

A fool who had a very large beard,
Suddenly found himself drowning in the waters of the
sea.
From the dry land only a sincere man saw him.
He said, “Throw off that feed-bag from round your
head.”

Accordingly, we see a man standing on the edge of the
river, gesturing toward another figure, who is strug-
gling in the water.

In the lower half of the painting accompanying this
anecdote, the artist or artists have depicted the fol-
lowing, much to the confusion of many who have
attempted to understand it: a man is sawing a branch
off a small, leafless tree. To the right of this another
man, white-bearded and dressed in blue, sits on a rock;
his knees are pulled together and he is positioned so
as to have a direct view of the sawing action taking
place before him. Three figures—a donkey and two
men—crowd the lower right corner of the painting.
One of the men strains to pull a load of firewood
onto the back of the beast. The other, standing to
the right, behind the donkey, is dark-faced and has a
white beard and a ring in his ear. He seems motion-
less but attentive.

Rachel Milstein’s analysis of one of them, commonly
referred to as “The Funeral Procession” (fig. 2), sheds
light on the esoteric meaning of what is depicted,
mostly by relying on verses from Sufi poetry. Mil-
stein’s overarching claim that iconographic and sty-
listic elements in Persian miniatures are not mere
crowded decorative embellishments is well established today.
Although the physical elements in “The Funeral Pro-
cession” may lack outward iconographic significance,
Milstein states, these elements nevertheless have sym-
bolic meaning that stems from literary similitude. Her
observations have contributed to a better understand-
ing of the link between the explicit theme of this par-
ticular episode in ‘Attar’s text—death—and certain
elements depicted in the upper half of the painting.
In the foreground, the image of a coffin borne in a
procession, the wailing relatives, the bystander, and
the admonishing Sufi standing in front of an open
gate are more than adequate representations of the
events as related in ‘Attar’s text:

The son was walking before his father’s coffin
Shedding tears, saying “O, father!
Fig. 2. Funeral procession. Folio 35r from an illustrated manuscript of the Manṭiq al-tayr of ʿAttar, 1487. Ink, opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1963.210.35. (Photo © 1988 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art)
Such a day as this, which has shredded my life,
Has never occurred before in all my days.”
A Sufi said, “The one that was your father
Never had such a day either.” (131, 2354–56)

As in the lower half of “The Bearded Man Drowning,”
which I will consider in more detail below, what is
depicted in the upper half of “The Funeral Procession” also refers to 'Attar’s text, but to its thesis of
death, not its literal meaning:

The misery that has befallen the son is nothing.
The matter is much more much for the father.
O you who have come to the world not knowing your
head from your toes,
Miserably traversing the wind,
Even if you rule the nations
You will gain nothing but the wind in the end.
(131, 2357–59)

There is an unmistakable note of pessimism in 'Attar’s
proclamations about our transient life and its inevi-
table end.13 The theme of death in this passage, in
contrast to many other Sufi verses, is not entirely
about the death of carnal desire or one’s extinction
in the union with the Divine Beloved. For ‘Attar,
death here is primarily natural death—an inexplicable,
inescapable phenomenon facing all the living.14 The
absolute universality of this event makes obvious, as
the Hoopoe points out, the futility of any long-term
measures against it.15 This is how the Herati artists of
“The Funeral Procession” seem to have grasped ‘Attar’s
presentation of death in this passage. His notion of
mortality is acknowledged in the scene of a cemetery
in the upper half of the painting, where laborers are
depicted as busily engaged preparing burial places,
which are in various stages of completion. The centrally
placed image of two men, one pouring water from a
clay jug and the other mixing mortar with a shovel, is
an innovative insertion by the artist, a clear reference
to God’s creation of man out of clay in the Qur’an
(e.g., 6:2: “It is He Who created you from clay then
determined a term [of life] for you…”) and to the
old and widely utilized trope in Persian poetry, known
best to readers of English from Edward Fitzgerald’s
rendition of Khayyam’s Rubā’iyāt:

And strange to tell, among that Earthen Lot
Some could articulate, while others not:
And suddenly one more impatient cried—
“Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?”16

or, as Rumi writes, praising the Almighty,

أب را و خاک را برهم زدی
أب و گل نفیش تا ام دزدی

You mixed water with dirt
You gave the shape of man to water and dirt.17

Before Rumi, ‘Attar too had maintained that there is
no part of earth that has not been previously a human
being, and that every speck of the earth’s dust is a
deceased person’s body.18

آرزومی نکنت ای مشت خاک
تا شود این مشت خاکت جان پایک

Your hope will not come to pass—you, handful of
dust!
Until the handful of dust that you are becomes a pure
life.19

‘Attar refers to Qur’an 32:7, “Who made all things He
created excellent; and first fashioned man from clay,”
in the introduction to the section of the Mantiq al-tayr
that deals with the subject of death, a few anecdotes
after which we read about the funeral scene. In the
introductory passage on death ‘Attar has the Hoopoe
chastise a hesitant bird who, afraid of dying, is content
to forego the journey to the ideal king:

تو اگر الوه گر پاک آدمی
قطره آبی که با خاک آدمی

Whether you came here impure or pure,
You are a drop of water that came mixed with dirt.

Although it is demonstrably true that the text of the
anecdote accompanying “The Funeral Procession”
makes no literal mention of a clay pot or jug of water,
we can see that the artist’s depiction of the clay pot
and the image of water being mixed with dirt is nev-
ertheless a deliberate but oblique means of connect-
ing the painting to what ‘Attar’s text alludes to—our
lives and death in “the wind”—rather than what it
literally says.

The artist reinforces ‘Attar’s understanding of nat-
ural death and its fearsomeness by inscribing two
Qur’anic passages, “God is sufficient for us, and the
best of protectors,” and “How excellent a helper, and
how excellent a protector is He!” at the center of the
white flag held by the weeping man on the lower left side of “The Funeral Procession.” The context of both proclamations (from Qur’an 3:173 and 8:40) has to do with increased faith in God when one is faced with the fear of annihilation, as if in answer to ‘Attar’s warning words at the beginning of the section on death:20

Don’t you know that whoever was born died, Was buried in the dust, and wind took away whatever was his?

Sufism or no, the notion that death is not the final end of man is perhaps the most fundamental doctrine for the faithful. This notion of death as merely a passage into the next world is announced by the artists through the inscription over the door that opens into the cemetery: “The tomb is a door though which everyone passes.”21 As Rumi repeatedly emphasizes in his Masnavi, death is the beginning of the life that really matters:

Your intellect lies; look upon yourself in reverse. It is this life that is death, O fool!

and

There is no dead man who regrets his death; He only regrets his lack of provisions.22

Attitudes towards “spiritual devotion and death,” the predomiance of Sufi trends at the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the influence of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, and the particularity of Naqshbandi practices are also reflected in certain details in the upper half of “The Funeral Procession.”23 The oil lamp and the “guardian” cat lying in front of a tomb monument at the top left are related to Sufi literary tropes as well as to contemporary popular Sufi beliefs.24 The turbaned man sitting next to a grave on the right side, for example, is clearly not another one of the laborers in the cemetery, nor is he facing the grave, as would a relative of the deceased. Rather, as the direction of the grave itself indicates, both he and the deceased are facing the direction of the qibla. The visiting man is gesturing as though addressing the buried person, a practice that in the context of the contemporary Herat and the immediacy of Naqshbandi influence at the time is reminiscent of the teachings of ‘Alaud-din al-‘Attar, who as the Naqshbandi spiritual leader (d. 1400), is supposed to have said, “To be near the graves of pious people has a good influence, but it is better to direct yourself to their souls.”25

As Annemarie Schimmel and Milstein have pointed out, the equation of soul with birds is an old trope (used by, among others, Avicenna and ‘Attar), and the Herati artists’ depiction of the birds among the branches of the ancient tree at the top center of the painting alludes to the same metaphor.26 The particularity in the painters’ depiction of details, such as the inclusion of crows (evoking the material world) among the generic birds, or of a snake (representing carnal appetites) sliding up toward an unprotected nest, reflects ‘Attar’s equivocal understanding of death, in the face of which one’s fear ought to be predicated on how one has lived.27 Although death is a difficult road through which all must pass, ‘Attar’s Mantiq al-tayr clearly indicates that it is also a road where the grave is only the first stop:

Look at death to see what a difficult road it is In this path, the grave is only the first stage.

The notion that illustrations of the manuscript should be understood via the text they illustrate should hardly need justification. Art historians in the field have by no means shunned textual analysis as a means of understanding the illustrations from Persian literary texts. Cynthia Robinson and Oleg Grabar have recently undertaken comparative text-and-image studies and called for others.28 Lisa Golombek, writing in the early 1970s, demonstrated the significance of a tree stump in a painting from the Great Mongol Shāhnāma simply by examining the accompanying text.29 As M. Glüüz observes, it is more likely that Sufi poetry aims to instruct rather than to “obscure things by making ambiguous statements.”30 If anything, the fact that these Herati illustrations are for a Sufi text should...
make reliance on the text for their analysis even more crucial. A more detailed look at “The Bearded Man Drowning,” will better demonstrate the links between them and ’Attar’s text. But before discussing the nexus between painting and text, it is important to consider the particular passage that was chosen for illustration in the context of the literary work as a whole.

The  *Mantiq al-tayr* is an allegory describing the difficulties faced by a group of birds in their journey to the Qaf Mountain in search of their rightful king, the mythical bird Simurgh. This allegory is mostly a dialogue about the “trip,” its various stages, and whether it should be undertaken at all. The actual journey itself is relayed only briefly, near the climactic end of the story. The birds’ journey as a framing story allows ’Attar to accommodate numerous possible questions or concerns that a Sufi seeker might have about an analogous journey toward truth and unity with God. The birds’ discussion unfolds in various didactic tales (hikayat) and parables addressing thinly veiled questions about the path to becoming a Sufi.

The Hoopoe, who in the Qur’an (27:20) is King Solomon’s messenger, here serves as the closest thing to a protagonist, the most assiduous seeker, who rallies and leads the other birds. Metaphorically, the Hoopoe may be seen as the Sufi master who guides the other seekers. The cycle of questions and answers, followed in each case by a few didactic anecdotes meant to reinforce the point already made in the answer, is the structural trope ’Attar uses to present his thesis on the necessary process through which one can achieve perfection and an intuitive knowledge of the divine truth. Simply put, different sections of the narrative refer to the stages involved in becoming a Sufi. The successive repetitions of “another one said to him” or “he asked” (digari gufullash or pursid) to introduce a question and of “he said” (guft) or variations of this to mark the beginning of the Hoopoe’s reply divide the text into separate units, each addressing a separate concern, as recognizable to a listener as to a reader. The process of achieving a state where the carnal self (nafs) is eliminated—a key goal if one is to achieve perfection (kamal)—and the difficulties and sacrifices involved in the process constitute a recurrent theme. “The Bearded Man Drowning” belongs to a unit entirely devoted to expounding the necessity for eradication of one’s carnal self.

Like all the other separate units of the narrative, the segment begins with a question asked of the Hoopoe and ends with the posing of another question on a different issue. To present his thesis on the folly inherent in the presumption of “perfection,” ’Attar relates seven parables, which are introduced according to the formal structure of the  *Mantiq al-tayr*: a bird asks a question and a response containing the parable follows. The reply acquaints the reader with the proper (Sufi) perspective on the essence of the raised concern and can serve as the key to deciphering the moral of the parables that follow. In this case, the reply unequivocally condemns and warns the “arrogant one” about any presumption of kamal before offering words of advice about the need to curb one’s “carnal self” by abandoning all worldly concerns and possessions. The intended addressee could as well be an adherent of orthodoxy as a follower of any number of Sufi orders; he could, in fact, be anyone conceited enough to presume sufficiency in his devotion to the Divine Beloved.

The first of the parables that follows Hoopoe’s chastising reply is about Shaykh Abu Bakr of Nishapur, who is affronted by a donkey breaking wind. The next parable is an exchange between Satan and Moses; in reply to the prophet’s inquiry, Satan warns him against putting too much stock in his ego. Then a man of pure faith (pach dun) opines that it is better for a neophyte to be completely in the dark at the beginning of his journey lest he be beguiled by any (har chiz) false ray of light and become an unbeliever. The fourth story is about a shaykh who does not shun a dog that “defiles” him, for reasons that have to do with the appearance of purity as opposed to the condition of one’s soul: the dog is “unclean” on the outside no more than one’s carnal self is so on the inside, so there is no need to pretend that the dog is going to cause any more harm than what one possesses within one’s heart. The next two parables both involve men with beards—a supposed sign of piety. It may plausibly be argued that they are the same man in both anecdotes, which certainly convey the same idea. Significantly, the first bearded man is no “fool” (ablah), but rather a devout person (‘abid) who lives during the time of Moses. He inquires from the prophet about his own lack of inspiration and inability to achieve the ecstasy that comes only through unity (suhadat). The archangel Gabriel also makes an appearance, and reports back on the reason for the bearded man’s lackluster achievements in spirituality: he is too vain—too preoccupied with his beard, which is an insidious contradiction of his presumption about being detached from worldly cares. The last couplet of this parable
warns that with such a beard “you will be at sea” (dar daryā shavī). After this comes the story of the “fool” with a “very large beard,” who is presumably already in the water when he is introduced to the reader. The precise nature of the difficulty he is having there is not clear. His exchange with the man on the shore implies that the beard is hampering his ability to swim or perhaps has wrapped around his neck and might choke him. Regardless, the implications are that the beard may well cost him his life, for which reason he should “wash his hands clean” of such earthly concerns. 41

Among these seven parables, it was the text of the sixth tale, about the bearded fool, that was selected for illustration. It reads as follows:

A fool who had a very large beard
Suddenly found himself drowning in the waters of the sea.

[2975] From the dry land only a sincere man saw him.
He said, “Throw off that feed-bag from round your head.”
He replied, “This is not a feed-bag, it is my beard.
It is not this ‘beard’ that causes my trepidation.” 42
The other said: “Bravo! This is your beard, and this is what it does for you!
Having succumbed to the body in this way will kill you wretchedly!”
You, who like a goat, have no shame about your beard,
Who are captivated by it without ignominy:
So long as you have the carnal soul and Satan within you,
There will be a Pharaoh and a Haman in you.
[2980] Distance yourself from the raucous world as Moses did,
Then take this Pharaoh by the beard.
Seize the beard of this Pharaoh and hold tight.
Wage war like a man, fight one-on-one.
Step forward, abandon that beard of yours.
How long will you keep this beard? Be on your way!
Though your beard brings nothing but anxiety,
You have not, even for a moment, concerned yourself with your "injury." 43

On the road to faith, the one who will be sagacious
Is the one who has no comb for his beard—
[2985] Making himself aware of his own "beard,"
Spreading his beard for the feast upon the Path.
He will find no water but tears of blood,
He will find nothing but a charred heart.
If a washer, one who never sees the sunshine;
If a farmer, one who never catches sight of water.

The upper half of “The Bearded Man Drowning” depicts the events from lines 2974 to 2976 of 'Attar’s poem. Most studies of this manuscript cannot avoid approaching its paintings by way of ‘Attar’s text, but no analysis I am aware of has considered the remaining verses of the parable. Even a formalist approach to the text, however, would demand a reading of the entire segment. If a parable is a short narrative about humans that stresses a tacit analogy, which, according to M. H. Abrams, has a “general thesis or lesson that the narrator is trying to bring home to a potential audi-
ence,” then not only is this passage a good example of a parable, but it is also clear that the short narrative about the bearded fool is, literally, only the half of it. The “general thesis,” or tacit analogy—in fact, the very raison d’être for the short narrative about the drowning man with a beard—is in the verses that follow. That some verses in this manuscript run onto the following page does not make them any less relevant to the parable or, for that matter, to the illustration of it. It is on line 2979 that the thesis or explication of the short narrative commences. The two previous verses—the couplet immediately following the main anecdote (i.e., line 2978)—serve as a salutation of sorts, where the narrator turns from the tale to directly address the reader (the original questioning bird, as it were), who expects the anecdote to have a moral point but may be uncertain whether he is going to find out more about the fate of the bearded man. The first word—Ay (O, you!)—used in the “salutation” couplet (2978) ostensibly addresses the reader/listener, who is having a similar problem:

آی چو بز از ریش خود شرمیت نه
بر گرفته ریش و آزمیت نه

You who, like a goat, have no shame about your beard.
Who are captivated by it without ignominy:

This couplet leads to the actual thesis of this segment; the “moral” of the story about the drowning man with a long beard who, as will be revealed in the verses that follow, has only his own pride and vanity to blame. The moral of the story has, of course, everything to do with this stage on the path of Sufism and serves as a warning to all those arrogant enough to presume that they have truly overcome their egos and succeeded in abandoning all worldly concerns.45

Written in the second person, the couplet establishes, through pejorative epithets, that the moral of the tale just recounted applies not merely to the drowning fool but to anyone who is shamelessly negligent in restricting his wants. The conditions and symptoms presented in the anecdote are here summarized, just as an apothecary (‘attār) who, after hearing the account of a malady from a patient, might chas-
tise the sufferer for his carelessness—So you’ve been acting like a goat…?—and goes on to summarize the causes and the effects of the malady, the “thesis” of the parable:

This is a summary statement of the problem that is under discussion in this passage; indeed, this is the theme of this entire unit of the Mantiq al-tayr: so long as you concern yourself with your carnal self, you will not be free from the qualities of the damned (e.g., Pharaoh and his servant Haman) and will likewise deviate from the true path. Until evidence to the contrary is presented, we can do no better than to assume that any pictorial depiction of this passage must on some level contain at least its main thesis, which these lines encapsulate. It is exactly at this point, in the very verse that explicates the thesis or the moral of the anecdote, that we may begin to follow what is pictorially represented in the lower half of “The Bearded Man Drowning.”

The three focal points in the foreground of the painting are, clockwise, a man sawing the last branch off a tree; a bearded man in blue sitting on a rock, apparently watching the sawing action of the man to the left; and two men, one of them loading firewood onto the back of a donkey standing between them. I will have more to say about the seated man in blue later on. Of the others, two figures gain prominence due to their animated state: the one sawing and the other loading the beast. Their prominence seems further reinforced by their direct involvement with the element that is emphasized pictorially more than any other: firewood. To rephrase Lisa Golombek’s question, which was prompted by the prominence of a tree stump in a painting from the Great Mongol Shāhnāma, why should firewood be given such prominence in “The Bearded Man Drowning”?46

Whether firewood (hizum) is representative of some word or concept in ‘Attar’s text or not, the artists of “The Bearded Man Drowning” have clearly chosen to emphasize it pictorially. It is presented on the ground in two separate clusters, one of which is further distinguished by its placement in the horizontal center of the illustration, in front of the man in blue. A larger mass of it is also being loaded onto the back of the donkey at the lower right. Although there is nothing in the text that directly refers to firewood, branches, or kindling, the depiction of firewood pictorially is
related, indeed pivotal to, the theme of this section of the *Mantiq al-tayr*, and in fact central to the entire discourse on Sufism in general. Firewood, as fuel, is a substitute for temptations or stimuli in the discourse on the carnal self (*nafs*) and is one of the numerous ways in which the appetites and passions of the body have been figuratively conceptualized in Persian verse throughout the centuries.

The use of the Arabic word *nafs* in Persian might be rendered into English simply as “ego,” but depending on the context it can also mean self, soul, essence, life, carnal desire, passion, or—literally—penis. Writing in the fourteenth century, 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani described *nafs* as “a phrase defining the pure, vapor-like essence that carries the power of life, senses, and motor-skills...called animal spirit.” Ultimately a Neoplatonic concept, *nafs* could be understood as an essence contained in all things—from rocks to angels—with an intrinsic worth that increases with closer proximity to God, so that the human soul is inherently worthier than that of a cat, and a cat’s soul worthier than that of a beetle, which is in turn of a higher rank than that of a plant, and so forth. As already mentioned, at this stage of the journey the seeker must be wary of the “carnal soul,” the part of man that is shared by lower life forms. In the context of 'Attar’s text, the complete subjugation of *nafs*, as a proto-id, is essential if one is to have any hope of proximity or union with the Divine. The explicit use of the word *nafs* in the poem (2979) makes it clear that 'Attar’s emphasis is on clarity, not mystification. Constrained as he is by the conventions of rhyme and meter, he plays with the language and emphasizes this explicit reference by stringing the word together with those like essence that carries the power of life, senses, and motor-skills...called animal spirit.” Ultimately a Neoplatonic concept, *nafs* could be understood as an essence contained in all things—from rocks to angels—with an intrinsic worth that increases with closer proximity to God, so that the human soul is inherently worthier than that of a cat, and a cat’s soul worthier than that of a beetle, which is in turn of a higher rank than that of a plant, and so forth. As already mentioned, at this stage of the journey the seeker must be wary of the “carnal soul,” the part of man that is shared by lower life forms. In the context of 'Attar’s text, the complete subjugation of *nafs*, as a proto-id, is essential if one is to have any hope of proximity or union with the Divine. The explicit use of the word *nafs* in the poem (2979) makes it clear that ‘Attar’s emphasis is on clarity, not mystification. Constrained as he is by the conventions of rhyme and meter, he plays with the language and emphasizes this explicit reference by stringing the word together with those for Satan, Pharaoh, and Haman, all standard allusions in Persian (2980) as one of Pharaoh’s men, like his master refused to accept Moses’ God-given authority and accused him of being a lying magician. In light of all this, ‘Attar’s use of Moses as a metaphor (2980) is a fitting antonym that neutralizes what’s tolerated, as it were, by the Pharaoh and Haman of one’s *nafs*. In short, the text of the *Mantiq al-tayr* is as explicit as can be in stating the thesis for this whole section: *gār tū rā nafsī...būvad* (if you have [any] *nafs*...remaining [in you]), then it follows that *dār tū fir‘awnī...būvad* (you [still] have some [qualities of the infidel] Pharaoh in you). After this diagnostic statement encapsulates the “problem,” the text continues its explication by offering the “prescription” for the sufferer. The prescriptive, as will become clearer presently, is exactly what animates the images in the foreground of “The Bearded Man Drowning.”

It is clear, then, that the nexus between the text and the image is the carnal soul: the word itself—*nafs*—and the metaphors alluding to it—Satan, Pharaoh, and Haman—all appear in ‘Attar’s text to help him state the thesis of this particular parable. The image of the firewood, an extension of the Pharaoh metaphor, strewn about the lower half of the miniature in bunches and piles, is the pictorial representations of *nafs* in the painting. The conventions of Sufi poetry corroborate this link. The use of the phrase “firewood of Pharaoh” is common enough in Sufi literature to warrant its own entry in literary lexicons, where it is defined as “carnal cravings.”

Having already dealt with several attributes of carnal desire earlier in his narrative, ‘Attar is now addressing worldly desires of a more complicated sort. Aside from ignorance, lust, and envy, our carnal souls will also be lured by a phenomenal world that can co-opt and subvert the disciplinary mechanisms we adopt to restrict it. In this case, the supposedly religious man’s conceit is exposed when his beard, while evincing the extent of his devotion, itself becomes a problem, unknownst to him, until it is perhaps too late. A seeker (sāliḥ) must be ever so vigilant, making sure that all concerns with the phenomenal world and worldly possessions are eliminated from his or her soul. Seen in this light, the image of the dead trunks and branches about to be hauled away on the back of a donkey begins to take on a new meaning. Rumi’s *Mānavâv* abounds in similar metaphors, even with verses that pair “Pharaoh” with “firewood”:...
How ruined a cursed ego would make you,
Would throw you off course fast and far.
Your fire lacks the firewood of the Pharaoh;
Otherwise it would blaze like the Pharaoh’s.56

Despite the nuances in reception of such verses by various readers over time—as is obvious from numerous works of commentary on Rumi’s Masnavi—the referent for Pharaoh and firewood almost always remains intact.57 The same tropes with the same connotations vis-à-vis the carnal self had been used by Attar in the Munajatnāma:

Then I also have a pharaoh in my soul,
Which has nothing left but to profess the faith.58

In the Mantiq al-tayr ‘Attar uses imagery that is suggestive of a variation on what is depicted in the foreground of “The Bearded Man Drowning.” It comes after the prologue, when the birds have begun to gather. As Francolin is being welcomed, we read the following lines:

Burn the carnal self, like the donkey of Jesus that it is,
Then, like Jesus, ignite your spirit for the Beloved.59

Referring to the beast that carried Jesus to Jerusalem, “the donkey of Jesus” has allowed Sufi poets to oppose the negative attributes of the donkey to the positive attributes of its rider, who exemplifies a perfect soul.60 Rumi is fond of contrasting the two.61

Conventionally in Sufi poetry, if the seeker is not vigilant the carnal self will attempt to fulfill its passions. Moses, the Pharaoh, Jesus and his donkey, or the “fire of Pharaoh,” with their respective positive or negative connotations, all can be traced back to the teachings and stories of the Qur’an. Grasping and enjoying such literary allusions, of course, depends very much on the reader or listener’s knowledge of Sufi tropes (talmū‘āt). As Glünz points out, “To an outside observer who does not share the doctrinal background and basic beliefs of the Sufi authors, this kind of interpretation of poetry might seem forced and arbitrary,” but it is clear from ‘Attar’s text that tropes like Pharaoh, Moses, and Haman—unlike, for instance “a big beard”—need no further explication to the initiated, so none is provided.67 Not just the poetry but Sufi discourse as a whole is predicated on figurative use of language; allusive language (ishāra) has been essential to Sufi discourse since at least the tenth century, and its collateral importance in Persian Sufi verse, as evidenced by ubiquitous symbolism and allegorical constructs in works of poetry, has been the subject of many studies.69 Since the familiarity of the artists at the Herat atelier of Sultan Husayn Bayqara with Sufi literature has also been acknowledged,70 it is safe to presume that the late-fifteenth-century artists responsible for illustrating ‘Attar’s Mantiq al-tayr read-
ily took advantage of the imagery available in these literary sources.

So the abundant appearance of firewood in the painting is directly related to the overarching issue being addressed in the textual passage, namely that of the carnal soul. But what are we to make of the tree, or what seems to remain of one, whose branch is being sawed off in the lower half of “The Bearded Man Drowning”? Although visually it is linked to the firewood—it is the source of at least one pile on the ground, if not both—there is no mention of any tree in the text, at least not literally.

Unlike the Pharaoh or Moses, “the tree” is not an allusion or metaphor developed within Persian poetry as it evolved throughout the centuries; rather it is a direct reference to verse 35 of the sura al-Nur in the Qur’an. Kashani understands the “blessed olive tree” (shajarat al-zaytuna) mentioned in this Qur’anic passage, which is the most pivotal template of Sufi ideology, as a specific reference to the kind of nafs possessed by humans: an intermediary between mind and body. Sometimes this “blessed olive tree” is also understood as the “tree of humanity.”

As mentioned above, other than the carnal soul, which signifies passions such as lust, the concept of nafs also includes the idea of the soul in the medieval Christian sense—that is, the undying spirit of man, which other animals lack, and which in us is worth saving (or damning). ‘Attar’s counsel on the need for curbing one’s carnal desires in this passage does not concern an absolute beginner, who first and foremost must bring his or her unregenerate (ammara) soul under control. Several attributes of this state are addressed in the earlier question-and-answer episodes of the Mantiq al-tayr, where an anecdote about copulating foxes, for example, rebukes one of man’s baser drives (112, 2023–26). Didactic poetry often advocates “killing” this particular carnal desire altogether, a trope that ‘Attar himself uses on occasion. At a later station (maqam), the seeker must contend with his or her reproachful (lavwama) soul, one that is desirous of a whole array of worldly needs that remain even when the baser desires are eliminated. At a later stage still, the soul is in a state where all becomes tranquil (mutma’in). What we encounter in the episode about the drowning fool and his beard is an explication and rebuke aimed at a Sufi devotee who has become complacent and presumptuous. At this stage, it is the censuring soul (nafs-i lavwama) that is of concern. In the text, the beard is a stand-in for frivolous worldly preoccupations. ‘Attar, playing with the double meaning of rish as “beard” and “lesion,” advocates warring against it (2981), abandoning it (2982), or making it one’s concern (2983), but never, either directly or implicitly by the use of common tropes such as rishkan (uprooting), does he suggest eliminating it. It is by overcoming this stage that the soul will achieve, in turn, tranquility, content, subtlety, and finally perfection. The end goal of drowning in the “sea of unity,” often conveyed through the image of the drop of water merging with the ocean, is, of course, the ideal ultimate desire, but such a drowning is metaphorical. The “fool” in ‘Attar’s anecdote may not be drowning literally, but he is certainly not going to achieve annihilation in the “ocean of oneness” unless he abandons his worldly concerns. The fool’s problematic drowning is a variation on the prototypical Qur’anic story in which Pharaoh, who did not listen to Moses’ call to faith, drowned in the Red Sea.

For Sufism the human soul is perfectible, and it is in this sense that the tree mentioned in the Qur’an often symbolizes that soul. The allusion to the Almighty as “gardener,” though not very common, does occur in Sufi poetry. Such an analogy is predicated on the idea of the human soul as a tree in need of care. Rumi’s figurative language, as we have already seen in another example above, at times seems to describe more of what the Herati painters may have had in mind:

The gardener cuts off the harmful branch
So that the tree can gain height and fruit.

Elsewhere Rumi even combines the metaphor of firewood with our carnal bodies and the need for removing from ourselves this fuel, which serves no purpose except to feed the fires of hell:

Firewood of hell is the body: trim it,
And should more firewood sprout, remove it.

The verse of the poet ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami, who was a contemporary of the artists at the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, and whose works had a great influence...
on their artistic imagination, also utilizes the concept of carnal needs as branches or firewood:

> O you, who like the branch of a plant are attached to yourself,
> You who are moved by the wind of carnal desires

and

> What is a branch without leaves on a fruit-bearing tree?
> If it does not bear fruit, it is nothing but firewood.

Related to all this is the dark-skinned man standing behind the donkey on the lower right, whose earring suggests that he is a slave (ghulâm or hindû). Anecdotally, such a stereotypical character in Persian literature (e.g., the story in Rumi’s Magnavî of the hindû slave who secretly lusted after his master’s daughter) is often used to signify a person with base morals or an outright infidel in need of conversion. By his depiction next to the firewood and the donkey, the slave is clearly implicated and no doubt expected to exit the picture leading the mule and its load (see line 2982, above).

The depictions of the donkey, the slave, the tree being trimmed, and the firewood in the lower half of “The Bearded Man Drowning” can indeed be described as a gloss, earlier studies of this painting have suggested, but it is a gloss not of the image from the upper half of the painting but rather of Attar’s own complex system of imagery. Intertextually, Moses and the Pharaoh as well as firewood and the donkey are all part of the discourse of Sufism. Just as in Attar’s figurative language, the lower half of the painting is meant to advocate resolve, in order that the seeker eliminate all traces of earthly desire associated with the carnal soul.

Perhaps due to the striking blue color of his robe, the final figure in the lower half of “The Bearded Man Drowning” draws greater attention than the rest. This man, with a gray-white beard and a skullcap, is shown sitting on a rock just to the right of the vertical center of the painting. In the context of contemporary Herat, he represents not just any man but rather a dervish, or Sufi master.

A common ritual performed by virtually all Sufi orders during the late fifteenth century was zîkr, or remembrance and recollection of God. As a form of meditation, zîkrs typically require that the pupil or spiritual disciple (murûd) repeat at least part of the profession of faith (lä ilâha illâ Allâh) a specific number of times throughout the day, and in a particular manner. The Naqshbandi order, to which many members of the court and the leading artists of Herat belonged, is almost unique in having the silent zîkr at the center of its pupils’ training; members of almost all other Sufi orders engaged in the loud zîkr, sometimes accompanied with music. Isenbike Togan points out that Naqshbandi insistence upon the silent form of zîkr for its murûds can be traced back no further than the second half of the fifteenth century, and was mainly due to growing emphasis on the authority of the Sufi shaykhs (sing. murºd) over their pupils. In fact, however, the gradual shift towards sanctioning the silent zîkr appears not to have taken firm root until nearly a century after the execution of “The Bearded Man Drowning.”

The point of all this, relative to “The Bearded Man Drowning,” is that the seated shaykh in the blue robe and the younger man to the left engaged in sawing off the tree branch are manifestations that signify the kind of meditation practiced by Naqshbandi initiates called the “sawing meditation” (zîkr-i arra). This ritual, named after the heavy sounds made by its practitioners, is a type of loud zîkr that later became associated with the Rifa’i dervishes. The saving zîkr was allegedly begun by Ahmad Yasavi (d. 1166), who studied under Yusuf al-Hamadani, a shaykh in the chain of leadership of what later came to be called the Naqshbandi Sufi order. Yasavi became one of Hamadani’s leading disciples (khalîfah), and his vocal sawing seems to have had a lasting influence over the Naqshbandis, the order to which he originally belonged, even though he formed his own Central Asian Yasa-viya order. Togan, citing Joseph Fletcher and the sixteenth-century Naqshbandi Sufi Khoja Ahmad Kasani,
suggests that although the Naqshbandi leaders preferred the silent *zikr*, the sawing *zikr* was still both acceptable and practiced more than fifty years after the Herati images were painted. Apparently, the use of vocal *zikr-i arra* was deemed especially helpful for new initiates.

It is important to emphasize that the dervish in blue is not engaged in *zikr*. His particular pose is unlike those associated with the rituals of meditation. Both he and the younger man who is sawing are depicted open-eyed and directly in each other’s line of vision, as though gazing at each other. The eyes of the dervish suggest that he is occupied solely with watching the young man who is sawing a branch off the tree in front of him. Baha’ al-Din Naqshband himself is supposed to have taught that the pupil “must not turn his face to anything in this world except to the master who will take him to the Presence of God.” According to him, there are three ways that “those who know” (i.e., Sufi masters) attain their knowledge: contemplation, vision, and reckoning. The permission for the *zikr* must be given by the master, and the seeker must direct his heart toward the spiritual master.

Perhaps the most authoritative source on this point is the leading figure of the Naqshbandi order in Herat, the poet Jami. The influence of Jami’s literary imagination on the court painters of Herat, as exemplified by the depiction of Zulaykha’s palace in an illustration of the Büstän of Sa’di, may also help explain the depiction in the foreground of “The Bearded Man Drowning.” In the first book of his *Silsilat al-dhahab*, Jami explicates his opinions on orthodox rituals as well as types of conduct associated with Sufism, such as asceticism, solitude (*khalwat*) and meditation (*zikr*)—both the "manifest" *zikr* (*jali*), and the silent *zikr* (*khaft*). Writing on the virtues of these two methods of meditation, Jami seems to be an advocate of silent meditation (*zikr-i khaft*):

> [zikr] is a treasure, and a treasure is better kept hidden. Make an effort, do justice to the hidden *zikr*. Be dumb in your tongue, silent in your lips; One’s ear is not a confidant in this transaction.

After expounding on the benefits of *zikr*, including the orthographic significance of *la ilaha illa Allâh*, which the initiate is required to recite repeatedly during *zikr*, Jami condemns noisy public meditations, characterized by singing (*âvâz*) and dancing (*raqs*). He does this by devoting a whole section to “reproaching” those who organize and partake in such exhibitionism in what he entitles:

> در منمنت انان که به جهت اجتماع عوام و استفاده منافع معاش از ایشان مجالس أرایند و به سبيل جهر و اعلان به ذکر حق سباحان و تعالی استغال نمایند

On the reproach of those who, in order to gather common people and gain another means of livelihood, populate their assemblies with them and openly and publicly engage with *zikr* of the Almighty, Glory be to His Highness.

This is followed by an illustrative anecdote in which the term “saw” (*arra*) is itself implicated in Jami’s condemnation:

> حلقات از صوت پر خراش درد
> گردن نیز را به اره برده

His throat gets torn by the harsh sound; He cuts the neck of joy with a saw.

However, a bit further on (line 514), Jami also censures those who place their heads on their knees in a sitting position and do not make sounds or noises with their breath.

> ...those who claim to conduct their *zikr* in their hearts and assume the outward appearances of such practice and consider it to be silent [*khaft*] *zikr* but don’t know that it also has the same command as the public *zikr*, and in fact even public *zikr* would be better than this, because at least in public *zikr* the essence of meditation is investigative...unlike the silent *zikr*.

Finally (lines 575–617), Jami explains that his real intention is to condemn neither the silent nor the loud *zikr* but only to reproach those who abuse such practices for carnal pleasures, and that to be delivered from self-involvement and selfishness is impossible except in the service of a *murshid* (a spiritual guide, shaykh, or *murshid*, but literally an old man).
What we see in the lower half of “The Bearded Man Drowning” alludes to a seeker who is engaged in the “saw” meditation: he is “rejecting evil whisperings and the ego’s insinuations” under the supervision of his Sufi shaykh, his pir.\(^{114}\) In other words, what we see is the young (beardless) pupil or seeker (murid), who is in effect performing the “saw meditation”—literally and figuratively, that is, manifestly and metaphorically—under the gaze of his Sufi shaykh; all the while, he does not turn his face to anything in this world except his master. As mentioned earlier, this is exactly what ‘Attar’s text prescribes. The image of the young man sawing the last branch off the tree is a pictorial allusion both to the concerns raised by ‘Attar’s text and to a contemporary practice that addresses such concerns—the sawing \(z\)ikr.

Seen in the historical context of late-fifteenth-century Herat, where the practice of composing elaborate riddles such as acrostics, chronograms, and enigmas was an obsession, it seems only appropriate that the artists of this and the other two miniatures in the \(Mantiq\ al-tayr\) would also indulge in a bit of pictorial riddle-making.\(^{115}\) In fact, contemporary accounts reveal that Mir ‘Ali Shir Nava’i—the friend, confidant, and “foster brother” of Husayn Bayqara, who may well have been the patron of this manuscript—coveted riddles, especially enigmas (\(mu\’amm\)\(\)at).\(^{116}\) Whoever the patron and whatever the particulars of the commission, the general disposition favoring riddles at this “center of literary and artistic life” would be perfectly in line with the composing of enigmatic illustrations.\(^{117}\)

The notion of pictorial riddle also comes to mind given certain depictions in the last original painting in the manuscript, the nexus between whose enigmatic elements and ‘Attar’s accompanying text corroborates the analogous relationship in “The Bearded Man Drowning.” This miniature, “Shaykh Mahna and the Old Peasant”\(^{118}\) (fig. 3), illustrates ‘Attar’s anecdote about the two named characters but again contains unexplained figures and details that begin to make more sense in relation to the content of ‘Attar’s text. Here too we have a divided picture, half of which—in this case, the lower half—depicts literally the events described in the anecdote about Shaykh Mahna:

Shaykh Mahna, in great sadness, Went to the wilderness, with anguished heart and eyes bloodshot with tears.
He saw from a distance an old peasant Driving a cow: he shone with light. The Shaykh went toward him and said hello and Explained to him the condition of his great sadness. (184, 3303–5)

This story about Shaykh Mahna is one among several anecdotes used by the protagonist (the Hoopoe is no longer mentioned by name) to describe the first of the seven valleys on the way to Mount Qaf.\(^{119}\)

The Herati painters of “Shaykh Mahna and the Old Peasant,” have depicted melons clustered in the upper half of the painting, not unlike the firewood in “The Bearded Man Drowning.” To the left, behind the seated man in green, we can see one mass of them; they are of the variety identifiable as \(khar\)\(buza\). More of the same variety can be seen piled into a pan of the scale held by the standing man in the upper center. The seated man in green is also holding one such melon in his hand. This image of country people weighing and apparently selling melons bears no apparent relation to ‘Attar’s anecdote about Shaykh Mahna.

Again, any comprehensive approach to deciphering this painting must consider the theme of ‘Attar’s anecdote. At this point in the narrative, the cycle of questions and answers deals with the details of the actual journey to Mount Qaf. The story of Shaykh Mahna belongs to a section in which ‘Attar, having enumerated the seven valleys through which the birds must travel, uses parables and anecdotes to explain the first of them, the Valley of the Quest (\(tal\)ab). The problem under discussion here is the need for volition on the part of the seeker to seek, to know, and to become one with the Beloved. In this first stage on the path to Sufism, through the Valley of the Quest, the seeker must be eager in his pursuit; as ‘Attar writes:

\[
\text{سرطلب گردید ز مشتاقی خویش} \\
(181, 3244)
\]

Your head will turn to the quest from your own eagerness.

and

\[
\text{مرد باید کژتطلب در انتظار} \\
(183, 3285)
\]

\text{هرزما نی چان کند در ره نتار}
Fig. 3. Shaykh Mahna and the old peasant. Folio 49v from an illustrated manuscript of the *Mantiq al-ayn* of 'Attar, ca. 1487. Ink, opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1963.210.49. (Photo © 1986 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art)
In anticipation of the quest, a man must
Bequeath his life on the path at any time.

However, the anecdote about the old peasant giving advice to Shaykh Mahna is specifically about a concern that is collateral to the quest, namely, patience (sabr). The tālibān, or seekers, must possess limitless patience if they want their quest to come to fruition. As the enlightened old peasant tells Shaykh Mahna:

طالبان را صبر می یابد بسی
طالب صابر نه افتاد هر کسی

(185, 3311)

Much is the patience that seekers need;
Not every one can be a patient seeker

The necessity of patience, repeated by mystics and poets in thousands of homilies such as “Only through patience does the fruit become sweet,” is well known to the students of Persian and Sufi poetry. The word for patience, sabr, also designates aloe, a plant known for its bitter taste. The compound name for the kind of sweet, white-fleshed melon depicted here (kharbuza) is formed of the words khar and buza, the first meaning “big,” and the second meaning “tasty,” i.e., great- or sweet-tasting melon.

As a motif in Persian literature, kharbuza has been used as an antonym for both sourness and bitterness. Sa’di in his Gulistān satirizes corrupt judges who reward a bribe of cucumbers with sweetness worth a whole field of kharbuza melons. Rumi exalts the sweetness of this melon, especially when it is offered by the bounty of the Beloved:

مانت ته می‌گفت از این خورم
تاجه شیرین خریده است این بنگم

A melon slice remained; he said, I will eat this,
To see how sweet a melon it is.

In his supplication for patience as a stage on the path to the Truth in Subḥat al-‘abnār, Jami, addressing God, writes,

قبر یافته وفات آسیب کن
تلخ صبر برای شیرین کن

Grant patience to be the creed of his poverty and annihilation;
Sweeten the bitterness of patience for him.

Patience, even though it is like poison,
In the end is sweet like sugar.

The image at the upper right of a third man, who holds a large, empty bag, may help us understand the painters’ own sort of wordplay with bitter “patience” (sabr) and the sweet taste of kharbuza melons. It is easy to accept that this man is depicted as either waiting or seeking (tālab): leaning slightly forward, he holds the bag open, as though ready for it to be filled. Without taking into account the significance of other details in the painting and their relations to the text—such as ‘Attar’s specific reference to idols (185, 3318) and its relation to the Buddha-like figure seated under the tree next to the leashed dog—we may construct the following narrative involving the image of the three men in the upper half of “Shaykh Mahna and the Old Peasant”: a man is waiting patiently for his fill of “sweet taste” (as kharbuza could be translated literally), or until the bitter (sabr) taste of waiting with patience (sabr) is recompensed with a bag of sweet melons (kharbuza). One can imagine that the depiction of melons and what they allude to would have been much more pleasant to decipher for residents of Herat, a city closer in proximity to Bukhara and Khwarazm, regions supposedly known for cultivation of this particular melon.

Alternatively, we can see the waiting man as a seeker (tālib), seeking (tālab) cantaloupes (tālib) in the Valley of the Quest (tālab), for the Herati painters have, in fact, depicted at least two varieties of melon in this painting. Among the cluster of melons on the left, behind the seated man in green, the uppermost melon visible is decidedly different from the rest. This round, beige, corrugated melon resembles a variety of cantaloupe, the Persian word for which—tālib— is a homonym of that for “a seeker.” Three anecdotes earlier in this same section of the Mantiq al-tayr, when ‘Attar describes the Valley of the Quest, we read, این چین باید طلب گرطالی
then, that is, “You must seek thus, if [you are] a seeker [tālib]” (182, 3271). In Persian this pun sounds indistinguishable from, “you must seek thus, if [it is] a cantaloupe.” The addition of this kind of melon to the pile may have been a pictorial pun: the fact that tālab, tālib, or tālibān (quest, seeker, or seekers)
occurs eight times in the story about Shaykh Mahna may well have caused the artists to make an association with “cantaloupe” (řâibí), leading to yet another pictorial play in the depiction of the text. An account of a banquet attended by dignitaries and artists in contemporary Herat at which the local literati engaged in flights of ribaldry and bawdy rhetorical exchanges is replete with verbal examples of such sophisticated repartees and puns. It is clear, at any rate, that word association lurks behind the iconographic program for “Shaykh Mahna and the Old Peasant,” just as it does for “The Bearded Man Drowning.”

Maria Eva Subtelny has traced the evolution of literary genres and tastes that culminated in verbal puzzles of various types becoming “something of the rage” in Herat during the last decades of the fifteenth century. If “riddle-like verse forms,” such as the enigmas presented at court banquets or other forums for rhetorical exchange, were so complicated “that the solution was often provided beforehand,” then the allusions made by the images in the lower half of “The Bearded Man Drowning,” and the upper half of “The Funeral Procession” and “Shaykh Mahna and the Old Peasant,” must have seemed delightful and comparatively easy to decipher. Certainly these images were an acceptable form of “pictorial acrobatics.”

The selective adaptation of the received Timurid painting conventions that led to the appearance of the “new style” in Persian miniatures without disturbing the basic mechanisms of continuity in Persian manuscript illustration seems ultimately linked to Sufi literary discourse in late-fifteenth-century Herat. The poetic genealogy of Sufi verse is a rich tradition of metaphorical and figurative language from which, as I have argued, Herati artists, consciously or otherwise, seem to have appropriated certain tropes for pictorial depiction. I have also suggested that the practices of the vastly influential contemporary Sufi order, the Naqshbandiyya, inspired the painters’ imaginations, notably in their proclivity for details. In particular, my close study of the images in the foreground of “The Bearded Man Drowning” confirms what the cursory analysis of the other two contemporary paintings also indicates: that the three paintings in the Metropolitan Museum Maníq al-Táyr contain pictorial wordplays analogous, but not identical, to the verbal allusions of the text they accompany. That a similar approach to images in other manuscripts will affect the ways we understand the iconography of Persian manuscript painting during subsequent decades is an exciting prospect awaiting future studies.

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NOTES

1. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 63.210. The date specified by a formula in the colophon of the manuscript has been variously interpreted as 888 (1483) and 892 (1487); see Ebadullah Bahari, Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting (London: I. B Tauris, 1996), 48–49.


5. Accession no. 63.210.44, fol. 44r.


7. Unless otherwise stated, all verses from the Maníq al-táyr are quoted from ’Attá’, Maníq al-táyr, ed. Sayyid Sadiq Gúharín (Tehran: Intísárát-i ‘Ilmi va Farhangi, 1381/2003), followed by the page and line numbers. English translations are mine unless otherwise noted. For an excellent English translation, see that of Darbandi and Davis (cited in n. 3, above), 152–53.

8. This verse is worded exactly as it appears on the upper left side of the painting.

9. Rish can mean either “beard” or “wound, injury.”


12. Accession no. 63.210.35, fol. 35r. Milstein states that the artists of such illustrations have abandoned “the narrative event” and painted “scenes irrelevant to the progression of the actual story but reflecting a spiritual condition or stage on the Sufi path.” However, as I argue here, ’Attá’’s narrative, including all the various anecdotes, is about spiritual conditions and stages on the Sufi path. See Rachel Milstein, “Sufi Elements in the Late Fifteenth-Century Painting of Herat,” in Studies
14. As Bādī’ al-Zamān Furgūznfar points out, the Hoopoe’s answers to the questions about the Path are sometimes “defective and unacceptable.” Here, for example, it is unclear whether the questioner, who uses the excuse of death to forgo the journey, is afraid of natural death or of a metaphorical death related to the required abandonment of the mundane ways of life. It is unclear why the risk of natural death is any greater for a Sufi initiate than a layperson, yet both Furgūznfar and Hellmut Ritter treat ‘Attār’s reference to death in this passage literally, not metaphorically. See Bādī’ al-Zamān Furgūznfar, Sharh-i akhva  va naqda va tabī'ī  ā'zam-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Muhammād ‘Attār-i Nishabūrī (Tehran: Dīlkhūsā Publishers, 1355/1974), 317 and 374; Hellmut Ritter, The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World, and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 42.


21. Ibid.
22. Rūmī, Ma‘nawī Ma‘nawi, bk. 5, ll. 1764 and 1766.
24. ‘Attār in his Mubāṭānāma associates oil lamps with life: می ترسمی کاین جراحی زود میر زود میرد گر تویایی زود گیر گریماند یی چراگیت تاکه ره بسی نابردنه افی درچیم جون چراگ یبی بمیرد یبی بی خبر نه نشان مادت آزمو ینه اثر

See ‘Attār, Mubāṭānāma, 89. Schimmel observes that cats are associated with miracles, and that convents kept cats as guard- dents. See Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 290. Togan relates the stories of Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqbānd, who at night visited the tombs of saints, where light was visible: see İshenike Togan, “The Khafī–Jahrīx controversy in Central Asia Revisited,” in Naqbāndis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity, ed. Elsbith Ozdalga (İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1994), 27.


تنت دامیست جان مرغی عزیز
نام دانی نه نان تا خود جامگیز

27. Schimmel cites crows as symbols of the material world: see Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 307–8. Regarding snakes, Rumi writes: "Begin by killing the serpent of desire" (lest it turn into a dragon): Rūmī, Ma‘nawī Ma‘nawi, bk. 2, 1. 3472.
33. Furgūznfar, Sharh-i akhva, 317.
34. Sa’īd Naqshbānd, Sar chashma-tasavvuf dar Ḵᵛān (Tehran: Fürūghī, 1343/1965), 32–42. Regarding ma‘rifā, or gnosis, see Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 130.
38. Furgūznfar, Sharh-i akhva, 387.
40. Ibid., 164, ll. 2953ff.
41. Ibid., 167, l. 2993.
42. Rīsh can mean “heard” or “wound,” a verbal pun (ishāb) by ‘Attār.
43. Pardī means “care,” “fear,” or “concern.”
45. See Ritter’s rendition of this anecdote in Ritter, Ocean of the Soul, 355.
46. Golombek, “Classification of Islamic Painting,” 27.
47. Sīrūt Shamsās, Farhang-i isharāt-i adabiyāt-i Parsī: Asār, sunan,
ta'arqoshud dar 'ab feroxoni haw
feroxoni mohna aste feroxonideh

Until this pharaoh of lust drowns in the water
Give my "Pharaohness" to the Pharaoh.

Until this pharaoh of lust drowns in the water
Give my "Pharaohness" to the Pharaoh.


See Sajjād, Farhang-i īslāhāt, 381. W. C. Chittick points out that in the theophany of Ḫūnl Arabī, and thence of Ḫamī, the [perfect] individual as an example of a manifestation of God is symbolized by the tree: see William G. Chittick, "The Perfect Man As the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Ḫamī," Studia Islamica 49 (1979): 155.


78. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 113.


80. The gardener is also used as a metaphor for the sorrowful Sufi in need of seeing his "garden," as in this couplet by Ḫamī, "O God, please do not hold so much back from the gardener, so that I can have one look at the newly blooming garden of mine": see Sajjādī, Farhang-i īslāhāt, 692, Ḫamī, especially in his Subḥat al-abnār, makes repeated references to trees and uses the expression shajara-id (tree of the heart), apparently with the idea that the Beloved should, as the gardener or otherwise, tend to his heart: see Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān Jam‘ī Khurāsānī, Maḥnawī haft awrang, ed. Murtażā Mu‘addarī Gīlānī (Tehran: Kitābūrūshī-i Sa‘dī, 1361/1982), 462, 467.

81. Parenthetically, the poet Ḫamī, who was an influential Naqshbandi leader and a friend of Mir ‘Alī Shir Nava‘ī as well as of the Timūrid sultan, is recorded on one occasion to have been mistaken specifically for a hizam-kash (firewood carrier) due to his clothes and personal appearance. See ‘Alī Shir Nava‘ī, Dīvān-i Amir Ni‘mat al-Dīn ‘Alī Shir Nava‘ī-yi fāmī, ed. Rūkhn al-Dīn Humayūn Furrūkh (Tehran: Kitābkhwāna Ibn Snān, 1342/1964), 31–33.

82. Rūmī, Maḥnawī Ma‘nawī, bk. 1, l. 3869.

83. Ibid., bk. 5, l. 1998.


86. Ḫamī, Haft awrang; see Sālmān wa aḥvāl, 444, l. 1045.


88. Rūmī, Maḥnawī Ma‘nawī, bk. 6, l. 249–352.
90. It is possible to see in almost any image what Melikian-Chirvani, "Khwâjâ Mirak Naqqâsh," calls "the perishable character of life in the transient world." This observation has been repeated by others, as most recently, Eleanor Sims, Peerless Images: Persian Painting and Its Sources (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 168. Regarding the artist of these illustrations, Melikian-Chirvani writes, "Il témoigne de la connaissance approfondie qu’a l’artiste de l’œuvre d’Attâr et de sa démarche dans la voie soufie. Comme les choix précédents, celui-ci confirme son indifférence foncière à l’égard du contenu narratif": "Khwâjâ Mirak Naqqâsh," 126–28, 132.

91. As Meisami writes, "Analogical symbolism...goes beyond sim...[and constructs], through the use of recurrent images, larger and more inclusive figures, creating a complex system of imagery." See Julie Scott Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez," Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 168. Regarding the artist of these illustrations, Melikan-Chirvani writes, "Il témoigne de la connais-

92. For other depictions of Sufis in a similar pose, see "A Seated Sufi Hugging His Knees," Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 57.51.30, reproduced in Sims, Peerless Images, 259, fig. 174. Also see reproductions in Muhammad Khazâ‘î, Elksir of Painting: A Collection of Works by Masters of Islamic Painting and a Review of the Schools of Painting, from "Mongol" to "Safavid" (Tehran: The Art Bureau of the Islamic Propagation Organization, 1989), 424, fig. 286; 323, figs. 284, 285.


94. Tringham, Sufi Orders in Islam, 194.


96. Netton, Sufi Ritual, 266; Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 366.


98. By 1550, but even then "also giving a place to the vocal one": ibid., 32.

99. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 176; Tringham, Sufi Orders in Islam, 197.

100. Tringham, Sufi Orders in Islam, 54, 58–60.


102. Ibid., 97, n. 33.


107. Jâmî, Haft awrang; see Silsîlat al-dhâhab, 80, ll. 405–6.

108. Jâmî refers to the tâ’ in the Profession of Faith as "two sappings," conjuring the image of what is being sawed in the painting. See Jâmî, Haft awrang: Silsîlat al-dhâhab, 78, l. 369.

109. Ibid., section heading on 82.

110. Ibid., 83, 464.

111. نفس از حروف صوت بگم کنیم and پایه دامن کننده سردوزیج

112. Ibid., 90, l. 611.


114. Lenitz and Lowry, Primarily Vision, 284, render mîvashshâh as "acrostic," târikh as "chronogram," and mu’ammâ as "enigma."


118. In earlier centuries it was held that there were seven stations (maqâmât) on the path of Sufism, in addition to ten states (ahvâl). The names and numbers of these varied and changed over time. See ‘Attâr, Manîq al-taylor, ed. Guhartin, 333, n. 3225.


120. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 124.


123. Ibid., 669.

124. Rûmî, Maânavî-i Mu‘navî, bk. 2, l. 1517.


126. Ibid., 613, l. 1161.


Calligraphy is concealed in the teaching method of the master; its essence is in its frequent repetition, and it exists to serve Islam.¹

These words by ʿAli b. Abi Talib, traditionally regarded as the first master calligrapher of Islam, lie at the heart of siyāh mashq, or calligraphic exercise pages. Siyāh mashq pages have yielded some of the most visually stunning examples of later Persian calligraphy. Their bold forms and harmonious compositions are truly captivating. Yet this art form and its historical development have received little attention from scholars and art historians. Thus, in this study, I focus exclusively on the development of siyāh mashq in Iran: its visual and aesthetic characteristics, its role in the transmission of skills from master calligraphers to their pupils, and its spiritual dimensions as presented in the primary sources of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I also examine the evolution of siyāh mashq into an independent art form and its subsequent flowering in the nineteenth century, as well as its relevance in modern and contemporary Iranian art.

Siyāh mashq, literally “black writing,” refers to the calligraphic preparatory practice sheets executed by traditional calligraphers and scribes (fig. 1).² An integral part of the system through which calligraphers moved from apprenticeship to master status, the copying and repeating of individual letters or combinations of letters were intended to strengthen the hand and instill the concentration and discipline necessary to become a master calligrapher (fig. 2).

The late-fifteenth-century calligrapher Sultan ʿAli Mashhadi aptly describes the objectives of and processes involved in calligraphic practice:

Whatever you wish to copy (naqš), try not to hammer the iron when it is cold. Be very patient over each letter and not just cast a glance and proceed carelessly. Look at the “strength and weakness” of the letters, and put before your eyes the shape (tarkūb). Watch their “ascent” and “descent” rather than being distracted by this or that. Be aware of the flourish (šahr) of the letters, so that it be clear, clean, and attractive. When your writing has made progress, seat yourself in a corner and do not idle about; find some small manuscript of good style and hold it before your eyes. In the same format, ruling, and kind of writing, prepare yourself to copy it. After that, write several letters; do not indulge in egotism. Try not to be careless with regard to your copy, not even a little bit. One must give full attention to the copy, completing one line of it after another.³

Practice allowed the calligrapher to determine the size of the script to be used, to try out the pen, to judge whether or not the ink was of the correct consistency, and to map out the overall visual impact of the composition. It also enabled him to refine the shapes of the letters and overcome any unsteadiness or stiffness in the hand. This was achieved by the repetition of individual letters or groups of letters on different areas of the page. In order to use all available space on the sheet when practicing, the calligrapher often rotated the page several times (figs. 3 and 4). The typical result was a heavily worked, dark sheet with little white ground showing through. The process is analogous to a painter executing sketches before starting on the final version of a painting. Thus, according to master calligrapher Mohamed Zakariya, “Close observation of mashq can, at times, tell us more about the art of calligraphy than a formal, highly finished piece.”⁴

These practice sheets were not confined to the Persianate realm, but are also found in the Western Islamic world and Ottoman Turkey. In Arabic they are called musawwada (blackened), while in Turkish they are referred to as karalama, a verbal noun from the Turkish kara (black). Furthermore, siyāh mashq were not limited to one particular script but are found in a wide array of them. In Iran, those in the nastālīq (“hanging”) and shikasta (“broken”) scripts are found in greater numbers, due in part to the popularity of these two scripts at the time siyāh mashq emerged as an art form, as well as to their distinct visual attributes, which perfectly suited the compositional requirements of siyāh mashq. Such attributes included the unique
Fig. 1. The calligrapher’s implements: reed pen, ink, inkwell, and a page of mashq. (After M. Uğur Derman, Letters in Gold: Ottoman Calligraphy from the Sakıp Sabancı Collection, Istanbul [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998], fig. 7)

Fig. 2. Page of mashq by Muhammad Riza Kalhur. 11.4 x 19.1 cm. Private collection, Tehran.
practice makes perfect: the art of calligraphy exercises

The balance between the thickness and thinness of the individual letters and the flexibility of these scripts to move freely above and beyond the base line.

Mashq is, of course, integral to teaching calligraphy. Teaching was usually done one-on-one, teacher to student, or in very small groups. The teacher or master would write the *sar mashq* (model) while the student watched. The student would practice the *mashq*, and then take it to the teacher for correction and advice. He would cover page after page, or wooden slate (*lawha*) after wooden slate, with *mashq*, which either had to be discarded once both sides of the paper were entirely covered or washed off again and again from the slate. The student would then move on to learning how to form words and lines by studying and writing compound exercises. After these were successfully completed, the master issued the student a license (*ijaza*) authorizing him to work as a professional scribe or master. This process took anywhere from three to ten years. In Iran, in contrast to the Ottoman Empire, there was no tradition of producing *ijazas* as finished works of art with elaborate illumination and fine calligraphy. Thus hardly any Persian *ijazas* survive, creating an obstacle to their study.

It is widely held that the thirteenth-century calligrapher, Yaqut al-Musta‘simi (d. 1298) was instrumental in codifying the six major scripts of Arabic calligraphy. A number of *mufradat* albums said to be in his hand remain. *Mufradat* (elements), which were a beginning calligrapher’s first group of lessons, consisting of single letters and then letters in pairs, were intended to teach control, proportion, and shape and are characterized by their simple horizontal and linear formats. In a page from a *mufradat* album in *muqfaq* script by Yaqut (fig. 5), the top panel consists of a single line showing the Arabic letter *sin* in combination with seven other letters in alphabetical sequence. The panel below shows the letter *jim* in combination with other letters, also in alphabetical sequence. The script is surrounded by gold cloud-forms on a red-hatched ground and is framed by a decorative border, which was probably added at a later date. *Mufradat* albums such as this one give physical form to a chain of transmission from master to student, which stretches from earliest times to the present. Such pages were occasionally illuminated and included in albums (fig. 6). These were compiled by masters who were at the height of their careers, implying that calligraphers, no matter how advanced or well known, considered themselves to be in a continual process of learning. Thus accomplished masters would sign their album pages using expressions like *sawwada* (made a rough copy), *mashaqahu* (copied or practiced it), *raqamahu* (wrote it with correct vocalization), *warharahu* (composed it), *naqala* (copied, implying interpretation), or *nammaqa* (copied out or wrote elegantly), rather than simply *kataba* (wrote); most calligraphers were only allowed to use these terms after they had received their license to practice (*ijaza*) from a master. These albums thus testify to both the skill of the master and his continual search for perfection.

The symbiotic relationship between mysticism and calligraphy has been examined extensively by scholars, most notably Annemarie Schimmel. Many calligraphers were also devout Sufis for whom the very act of performing *mashq* was equivalent to contemplation.
ing divine beauty. According to the late-sixteenth-century master calligrapher and poet Baba Shah Isfahani, mashq is a contemplative practice and a vehicle through which the luminous sparks of the real beloved’s beauty appear in the scribe’s vision. True mystical concentration is at the heart of performing mashq. This undivided focus is akin to the mesmerizing meditation of the Sufi mystics as they repeat the name of God in the zihr, or remembrance ceremony, and the rhythmic repetition of the letters on the page is a visual analogue to the mystics’ metrical reiteration of the name of God.

**SIYĀH MASHQ IN PRIMARY SOURCES OF THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES**

We find a wealth of information about siyāh mashq in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises on calligraphy and painting and in album prefaces. These sources enable us to understand such works more fully and place them within their cultural and historical contexts.

In his treatise *Adab al-Mashq*, Baba Shah Isfahani discusses at length the spiritual commitment, discipline, and rigor required in performing mashq. He states that there are three levels of competence in calligraphic practice. All stages are equally important, and each must be mastered in sequence. The first is “visual mashq” (mashq-i nazart), in which the apprentice studies the master’s writing and observes its spiritual characteristics. The second is pen practice (mashq-i qalam), which entails copying from a master’s writing. The student begins by copying isolated letters (mufradat) or words in the master’s hand, so that he understands the form of every letter in the style in which it was written. After that, he may be assigned short compositions. In mashq-i qalam it is of utmost importance that the student pay no attention to writing that is in conflict with the model to be copied.
The apprentice must contemplate the elements of the master’s model seeking help in concentration (himmat) from the departed spirits of the masters of calligraphy. This takes at least one year. Finally, it is possible to attempt the third stage, “imaginative practice” (mashq-i khayālī), for a day or two at a time. “Imaginative practice” goes beyond mere copying and requires that the calligrapher use his imagination as the backdrop against which the forms of beauty appear. In “imaginative practice” the scribe uses the power of his own nature exclusively to write every composition that appears to him. The advantage of this type of practice is that it makes the scribe a master of spontaneity (tasarruf).

Sultan ‘Ali Mashhadi, Baba Shah’s master, gives the following instructions about the appropriate manner of copying the work of a master:

Collect the writings of masters;
Throw a glance at this and at that.
For whomever you feel a natural attraction,
Besides his writing, you must not look at others
So that your eye should become saturated with his writing
And because of his writing each of your letters should become like a pearl.13

He adds that single-minded devotion, sacrifice, and the suppression of all other (worldly) desires are essential to achieve the inner discipline necessary for a scribe, and he advises young calligraphers to abandon peace and sleep, even from their tender years.14 His younger compatriot Mir ‘Ali Haravi also stresses the importance of hard work and complete dedication:

...The tip of calligraphy’s tresses did not easily come in my hand. If one sits leisurely for a moment without practicing, calligraphy goes from his hand like the color of henna.15

Practice is thus a selfless, painstaking, and highly structured process that requires extraordinary discipline and lies at the very core of the master-pupil relationship.

Fine penmanship was considered a prerequisite to and a symbol of refinement for princes and cultured courtiers associated with the Timurid court, and executing mashq became an occasional princely social pastime. One example of mashq (fig. 7) by the early-fifteenth-century Timurid prince Baysunghur and his companions reflects the central role calligraphy played in Timurid cultural and social life. Here, the Arabic proverb “Through gratitude, favors continue” was cop-
ied by Ahmad al-Rumi in riqāʾ script, then repeated by Baysunghur and thirteen others, including members of the royal workshop and the prince’s personal companions. Each writer signed and circled his name at the end of the proverb. Although we are not sure of the purpose of the page, scholars have suggested that it may have been no more than a simple contest in manual dexterity or possibly a souvenir of a convivial social gathering, or majlis. According to David Roxburgh, the work demonstrates how calligraphers gathered to meditate on a model and how their imitation of it produced differing degrees of relation to it. Manipulations of balance between successive letter shapes, the situation of the letters on the line, and the positioning of diacritics offered avenues for individual expression. Subtle modifications and deviations show how calligraphers were able to move beyond a model. The mashq also illustrates the collaborative nature of artistic patronage at the time. The range of ethnic and professional backgrounds of the calligraphers represented here—painter, poet, paper cutter—demonstrates the artistic prowess, inclusiveness, and versatility of the Timurid princely workshop.

THE BEGINNINGS OF SIYĀH MASHQ AS AN ART FORM

In the sixteenth century, examples of siyāh mashq acquired an added dimension as they began to attract the attention of patrons and lovers of art and culture, who perceived them as collectible items. Produced as individual pages, or qiṭās, intended for inclusion—along with paintings, drawings, and finely penned verses of poetry—in royal or non-royal albums, siyāh mashq pages, which were now often signed and sometimes dated, were regarded for the first time as works of art rather than mere exercises. The gradual evolution of the siyāh mashq from a practical tool into an independent art form in its own right also required that the sheets have a finished look. Thus many were lavishly illuminated and set into elaborate borders for inclusion in albums, the compilers of which made every effort to embellish them in accordance with each album’s distinct aesthetic (fig. 8).

The first extant “artistic” siyāh mashq pages were produced by the late-sixteenth-century master of nastaʿlīq script, Mir ‘Imad Hasani (d. 1615). Siyāh mashq as an art form was introduced in Iran only after Mir ‘Imad made a trip to the Ottoman Empire in 1594–95 and encountered the Ottoman art of karalama (literally “black scribblings,” the Turkish equivalent of mashq) in the provincial cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Baghdad (figs. 9 and 10). Before this, siyāh mashq in Iran had served only a practical purpose.

Turkish karalama have a distinct musical quality. The letters can be interpreted as the visual manifestations of musical notes flowing into infinity, with intermeshing and superimposed lines. Ottoman calligraphers signed, illuminated, and saved their karalama, recognizing them as independent art works long before their Persian counterparts accorded the same status to siyāh mashq.

In addition to Mir ‘Imad’s trip to the Ottoman
Empire, what appears to have served as a catalyst for the transformation of the meaning and function of *siyah mashq* in late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iran was a more general shift in taste among patrons of art and a broadening of the patronage base. Artists grew increasingly independent from royal patronage, and changing economic conditions along with the immigration of artists to India and the Ottoman Empire led to the decline of manuscript painting and the ascendancy of single-page paintings, drawings, and calligraphy. Furthermore, when ‘Abbas I succeeded to the throne in 1587, the Qizilbash nobility, who had set up their own libraries in the provinces, came to dominate the patronage of the arts of the book that had traditionally been centered at the royal court. Although some artists remained in Qazvin, many gravitated towards the provinces, where they found ready support among the Qizilbash. For example, Farhad Khan Qaramanlu, the governor of Azarbaijan and later of Fars, was a leading Qizilbash patron whose workshop and library included the celebrated calligraphers Mir ‘Imad and ‘Ali Reza ‘Abbasi. The role of the *ghulāms*, or converted Christian slaves, in the patronage of single-page paintings, drawings, and calligraphy also deserves attention. The emergence of a new class of patron who could afford to buy individual pages prompted artists and calligraphers to adjust to the needs and requirements of this clientele. It is likely that the rise and proliferation of single-page art works gave impetus to the introduction of *siyah mashq* into the sphere of commodity. Arbiters of taste now viewed these pages as aesthetic equals of, and welcome additions to, the repertoire of individual paintings, drawings, and calligraphic specimens already present in albums, or as objects worthy of being owned and exchanged.
In the eighteenth century, a group of *siyāh mashq* pages by Mir ‘Imad was incorporated into a famous album, now in the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg (figs. 11 and 12), that consists of Persian and Indian paintings, drawings, and calligraphic pages dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. In color and style, the illuminated borders of the *siyāh mashq* pages visually complement those of the other folios in the album. The beauty of the *mashq* pages in this album lies in the purity of the letters and the balance and clarity of the compositions, even in cases when they are heavily worked. The arrangement and repetition of letters create a sense of rhythm as they appear on the page. Letters overlap or appear upside-down; in fact, many of these pages can be viewed from any direction and do not follow a linear sequence with a beginning and end. Thus they can be appreciated as much by a small gathering of people grouped around them as by a single person.

As seen in these pages, the technique and form of *siyāh mashq* triumph over content, the text having either negligible meaning or none whatsoever. These works have a strikingly abstract quality; the bold forms of the individual letters and their arrangement on the page are what provide the medium of communication between calligrapher and viewer. In many cases, the dots over or under letters are omitted, so as not to distract from the letters’ shapes. These examples of *siyāh mashq* are the calligrapher’s most candid and personal artistic expression and represent his direct presence or imprint on the page as he wrestles with perfecting the forms and shapes of the letters and experiments with new compositional elements. They represent a union between the calligrapher and his work and can be viewed as the embodiment of his very
Fig. 12. Siyāh mashq page by Mir 'Imad, late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. 23.4 x 36.3 cm. From the St. Petersburg muraqqa', fol. 97v. (Courtesy of the Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg)
moral essence. These finished works of art are closest to what Baba Shah Isfahani called mashq-i khayâlî or imaginative mashq, whereby the calligrapher uses his imagination as his primary tool. Spontaneity and intuition are the distinguishing attributes of mashq-i khayâlî. Here, the calligrapher pushes the boundaries of the canon while still working within it, creating a tour de force of calligraphy. These pages do not follow any particular set of compositional rules but reflect the whim and spiritual needs of the calligrapher at a given time. As masterpieces of improvisation, they require the viewer to penetrate beyond letters or words to essence, which distinguishes them as works of art of a high aesthetic caliber.

THE REEMERGENCE AND PROLIFERATION OF SIYÄH MASHQ IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

After a hiatus of about a century, the art of siyâh mashq reemerged in Iran in the early 1800s.25 One of its most avid practitioners was Fath ‘Ali Shah, the second ruler of the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925). Like many rulers and princes, Fath ‘Ali Shah (r. 1789–1834) was trained in calligraphy as a youth and later became a practitioner of notable ability, choosing as his model the calligraphy of the sixteenth-century master of nastâlîq Mir ‘Imad.

In one example of his work (fig. 13), the shah has repeatedly penned a single line (the text of which he himself may have composed), “My reed pen shames Jupiter and Mercury,” and then signed his name. The shah obviously considers himself a scribe of note, since Jupiter (Birjûs) is the lord of the planets and Mercury (Tûr) the scribe of the heavens.26

There are several other extant pages of mashq by Fath ‘Ali Shah, all of which follow a similar format of a single line in nastâlîq script repeated several times, surrounded and set off by an almost identical style of fine illumination. (While the calligraphy is in the shah’s hand, it is highly unlikely that the illumination is his.) In a second example (fig. 14), the repeated line reads, “This is the product of the pen of the King of the Times.”27 Members of the shah’s sprawling court, such as ‘Abbas Nuri (d. 1839), the secretary of the army, also produced mashq pages of high quality in the style of Mir ‘Imad (fig. 15).

The mid- and late nineteenth century witnessed a further surge in the popularity of this art form. Finished siyâh mashq pages were produced in unprecedented numbers and were circulated not only in courtly circles but also in lower echelons of society. These works were prized to such an extent that Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar (the fourth Qajar ruler, r. 1848–96) produced mashq pages for his court officials and ministers as gifts of gratitude, or pîshkash, for services rendered.28 Such pages, often referred to as “dast-khatt-i humayûn” or “specimens in His Majesty’s hand,” offered his most esteemed court officials tangible imprints of the shah: by giving them mashq pages, he was giving them “pieces of himself” to keep and cherish, a practice akin to bestowing robes he had already worn (tanpûsh) or autographed pictures of himself.

These gifts of royal calligraphy were reportedly distributed with great pomp and ceremony. In his travel journal, Jakob Polak, Nasir al-Din Shah’s Austrian court physician, reported that, conversely, when an official fell from grace the shah asked him to return his calli-

Fig. 13. Page of artistic mashq by Fath ‘Ali Shah Qajar, first half of the nineteenth century. 25.4 x 19 cm. Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 2005. 01 [CAL012-290], formerly in the collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan. (© Aga Khan Trust for Culture)
The shah is also said to have kept a close record of such “exchanges.” He penned two mashq pages based on the theme of love and friendship, one in shikasta and the other in nastalq, specifically as Nawruz (New Year) gifts for his court treasurer and master of the mint, Dust ‘Ali Khan Mu’ayyir al-Mamalik (figs. 16, 17). In each one, the repetition of strokes makes for a pleasing and melodious composition. Both pages have richly illuminated borders crowned with painted images of Nasir al-Din Shah’s imperial seal. In the mashq in nastalq script, the shah expresses the hope that the piece will be kept and cherished by his court treasurer.

The shah is also known to have sent illuminated pages of calligraphy as diplomatic gifts to foreign rulers. This practice is exemplified in a fine and elaborate page containing a poem in nastalq signed by the eminent late-Qajar calligrapher, Muhammad Husayn Katib al-Sultan, which the shah sent to the Ottoman ambassador on the occasion of the birth of his son, ‘Ali (fig 18). During this period, however, the calligrapher most responsible for reinvigorating artistic mashq, or mashq-i tafannuni, and popularizing it beyond court circles was Mirza Ghulam Riza Isfahani (1829–86), known as Khushnivis (figs. 19 and 20). A master of nastalq in the style of Mir ‘Imad, he dedicated much of his life to training young calligraphers and members of the royal household, in particular the son and grandsons of Nasir al-Din Shah’s court treasurer, Dust ‘Ali Khan. A first-hand account by the grandson of Dust ‘Ali Khan (the above-mentioned recipient of Nasir al-Din Shah’s Nawruz greetings) provides a close glimpse of Mirza Ghulam Riza’s practices and working habits.31

The following story from this account vividly illustrates the multifaceted role of fine calligraphy in Qajar elite circles. Shortly after entering the household of Dust ‘Ali Khan, Mirza Ghulam Riza was imprisoned for his alleged involvement in Babi activities.32 While in prison, he spent his time tirelessly practicing calligraphy and managed to produce a number of fine pages, which he sent to Dust ‘Ali Khan. In an effort to secure Ghulam Riza’s pardon, Dust ‘Ali Khan took one of these pages to the shah. Himself a lover of calligraphy and a calligrapher of note, the shah was so impressed with the page that he ordered that the prisoner be released immediately. After that, Ghulam Riza lived in the household of Dust ‘Ali Khan until almost the end of his life, training his sons and grandsons. According to this account, when performing mashq Ghulam Riza would go into a trance, covering every piece of paper in sight with exercises. The trance was apparently so deep and intense that it took him a while to return to a normal state. He is also known to have frequently gone without sleep for nights so that he could perform mashq. Mirza Ghulam Riza is said to have produced more mashq pages in his lifetime than finished pages of calligraphy.

During the late Qajar period, many prominent calligraphers produced mashq pages and single-page calligraphies as demand for them increased. The sheer number of extant examples serves as evidence for this proliferation. Like other single-page calligraphies, mashq pages were often created for commemorative purposes and given as gifts at births, major holidays, and official occasions and following military victories and diplo-
Fig. 15. Siyāh mashq page by ‘Abbas Nuri, Fath ‘Ali Shah’s secretary to the army, Tehran, dated 1246 (1830). 24 x 37 cm. Haj Atiqi Collection, Tehran.
mantic meetings. Numerous extant signed or unsigned pages of siyāh mashq by renowned calligraphers such as the aforementioned Mirza Ghulam Riza, members of the Vesal family of Shiraz (fig. 21), Asadollah Shirazi (d. 1889) (fig. 22), Muhammad Riza Kalhur (1829–92) (fig. 23), Muhammad Kazim (d. 1916), Darvish ʿAbd al-Majid Taleqani (1737–72), Mirza Kuchak Khan (d. 1813), Muhammad Husayn, known as ʿImad al-Kuttab (d. 1886), and ʿAli Akbar Gulistaneh (1857–1901) (fig. 24) attest to the popularity of the art form at this time. It is not certain, however, whether these pages were directly commissioned or made as luxury objects for future sale to interested individuals; probably both forms of production were prevalent.

When studied closely, most artistic siyāh mashq demonstrate a lineage back to such great masters of calligraphy as Mir ʿAli Haravi, Mir ʿImad al-Hasani, Ahmad Nayrizi, and Darvish ʿAbd al-Majid Taleqani. In fact, mashq pages by Mir ʿImad were so valued in the second half of the nineteenth century that they were professionally photographed and used as models (sar mashq) for training aspiring calligraphers. 33 The mechanical duplication of the originals through photography made them available to a greater number of aspiring calligraphers.

A page of calligraphy in nastāʿīq by Mir ʿImad was photographed at the request of Nasir al-Din Shah by the court photographer, ʿAbdallah Qajar, at the Dar al-Funun (Polytechnic College) in Tehran in the 1860s (fig. 25). The approximately 252 calligraphy pages
by Mir ‘Imad in the St. Petersburg album were also reportedly photographed at the request of Nasir al-Din Shah. These photographs were collected by lovers of calligraphy; often given illuminated borders, they were included in photograph albums (muraqqa‘ khāṭṭī), enjoyed individually, or exchanged as gifts.34

The rise in popularity of siyāh mashq in the nineteenth century was in part due to the Qajar kings themselves and to the active role of the court as the arbiter of taste. Kings, princes, and statesmen not only collected siyāh mashq pages but also executed and distributed them as official gifts; others followed suit. By virtue of their spontaneity, these pages were perceived as treasured gifts and collectibles of the most personal and intimate nature. Inscriptions on them suggest that their exchange was considered a gesture of deepest friendship and loyalty.

The demand for these pages was not limited to the ruling elite of the late nineteenth century but also extended to those more casually connected to the sprawling Qajar court. No longer just a courtly prerogative, these works were now available on the market and sought after by interested individuals. Nasir al-Din Shah’s court physician, Jakob Polak, commented that pages by celebrated calligraphers were in great demand, and that cultured collectors who were able to distinguish the hand of a noted master were willing to pay handsomely to purchase such works, fram-
ing and hanging them on the walls of their homes. Polak adds that foreigners also admired and collected these works. Although he does not mention artistic siyāh mashq specifically, his observation serves as evidence of the popularity of single-page calligraphies in general.

Studying the history of siyāh mashq reveals its transition from a practical tool for aspiring and master calligraphers to an artistic means of representing the sure hand and spiritual commitment of a recognized calligrapher like Mir ‘Imad, and, finally, to a commodity valued as a collectible object or potential gift. Such a study raises questions regarding the reasons for the various permutations in the meaning and function of this art form through time. Theories set forth by contemporary social anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff aid the understanding of the specific trajectory of siyāh mashq and its development. In his book, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Appadurai argues that the meaning that people attribute to objects derives from human transactions and motivations, particularly from how those objects are used and circulated. Focusing on the culturally defined dimensions of exchange and circulation, his theory illuminates the way in which people find value in objects and objects give value to social relations. Objects are made somewhere; they often do something; some move from place to place; their meaning and function change in different contexts. Value is never inherent in an object and is determined in a process of exchange and desirability. Objects have “ages” or periods in their lives; their uses change with time. “Fashion” and “taste” are among the dominant forces responsible for endowing something with value and making it desirable and worthy of exchange.

Other explanations for the increase in production and proliferation of siyāh mashq pages during this period may be related to the process of modernization. In the nineteenth century, Iran became a pawn in the hands of the two superpowers, Western Europe and Russia. Threatened by constant foreign intervention and encroachment on its borders, the country was forced to experiment with notions of modernity in order to protect itself. The wide array of Western innovations introduced into Iran at this time included photography and lithography, both technologies of duplication that had a lasting impact on the arts. One may ask whether the presence of methods of mechanical reproduction created new expectations among patrons, and whether the general desire for quantity and quick reproduction created greater demand. Were siyāh mashq pages considered less labor-intensive economic commodities that could be produced fairly rapidly in quantity for a large clientele? If so, had the original objectives of siyāh mashq been compromised? These are questions whose answers can only be partial and lie within the realm of speculation.

THE LEGACY OF THE ART OF SIYĀH MASHQ

Aside from issues of commodification, further questions arise regarding the extent to which siyāh mashq influenced the development of later Persian callig-
Fig. 21. Page of *mashq* by Muhammad Shafi Vesal, Shiraz, dated 1258 (1842). Private collection, Tehran.
Did any new scripts emerge as a result of the prevalence of this art form? Did it give rise to specific innovations in Persian calligraphy or contribute to the standardization of existing conventions? My research has led me to believe that the art of siyāh mashq did in fact make a lasting mark on later Persian calligraphy by reinforcing the idea of irregularity as a prized feature. Traditionally, regularity was one of the calligrapher’s prime objectives. Calligraphic specimens generally followed linear formats, whether horizontal, vertical, or diagonal; compositions were highly structured, systematic, and sometimes compartmentalized; and letters rarely overlapped or appeared upside-down or at different angles.

I propose that siyāh mashq influenced the compositional quality of later calligraphy, particularly that of shikasta script, which was developed in Iran in the seventeenth century and reached its peak in the eighteenth and nineteenth. This script had little currency beyond the borders of Iran and was created to fill a need for quick and efficient yet beautiful writing that would be used primarily for private correspondence and administrative documents. Although the art of siyāh mashq may not have affected the shapes of the letters in shikasta, it certainly influenced the compositional characteristics of the script, in which horizontal regularity is not the norm; instead, words fluidly rise and fall, emphasizing delicate grace, movement, and artistic whim. Three examples reproduced here (figs. 24, 26, and 27) illustrate this: the first is a siyāh mashq composition by the master of shikasta ‘Ali Akbar Gulistaneh, while the second and third are documents written by Mirza Kuchak Khan and ‘Abd al-Majid Talijani (d. 1771), both clearly exhibiting a taste for the irregular and erratic.

Siyāh mashq may also have given impetus to the popularization of other conventions of irregularity, such as reverse writing, or vāṟūna-nivāsi (fig. 28); bilateral writing (fig. 29), in which one has to rotate the page completely in order to read the text; the use of an unprecedented range of unusual colored inks and papers; and the calligraphic representations of humans and animals—all of which reflect the fact that forward-looking Iranian calligraphers were taking extraordinary liberties and constantly going beyond the boundaries of traditional canons.

Siyāh mashq is a living art. Today, traditional calligraphers, most of whom reside in Iran, regularly produce artistic mashq pages along with other kinds of finished calligraphy. Mashq pages are regarded with esteem equal to if not greater than that in which they were held in the nineteenth century and earlier. Contemporary calligraphers working in the traditional mode, such as Ghulam Husayn Amirkhani (b. 1939), ‘Ali Akbar Kaveh (b. 1894), Kaykhusrav Khoroush (b. 1942), Jalil Rasuli (b. 1941), and Muhammad Ehsa’i (b. 1939), all graduates of the Anjuman-i Khushnivisan (Center for Calligraphic Arts) in Tehran, have worked for decades to keep the art of calligraphy alive in Iran, training numerous students in the traditional canon. The enrollment in the Anjuman, currently more than 400 students per year, serves as evidence of the vital spirit of calligraphy and its popularity among the younger generations in Iran. According to students...
of the Anjuman, young calligraphers so cherished the sar mashq of their masters that during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war they buried many of these specimens in the ground for fear that they might be damaged in the bombings.38

Parallels to this art form also exist in modern and contemporary Iranian art. Iranian artists have continuously drawn inspiration from their rich artistic heritage, particularly calligraphy (fig. 30). As pioneers of modernism in the 1960s and 1970s, such artists as Hossein Zenderoudi (b. 1937) (figs. 31 and 32), Parviz Tanavoli (b. 1937), and the above-mentioned Mohammad Ehsa'i (fig. 33) celebrate the versatile shapes and forms of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. In their works, often referred to as naqqashī khatt, the letters are transformed beyond recognition and are reduced to pure forms. As in the siyāh mashq pages, the calligraphy in these works is abstract and largely devoid of literal meaning. The compositions are rhythmic and appear in kaleidoscopic colors in a variety of techniques including oil on canvas, a medium not traditionally used for calligraphy. The letters float weightlessly or appear superimposed in layers of rich texture on the surface of the canvas. In “A‘yn + A‘yn” by Hossein Zenderoudi (fig. 32), the painter repeats ad infinitum, in horizontal rows, the wide loop of the body of the letter A‘yn. The work captures the way calligraphers manipulate the reed pen as they struggle to produce the desired shape and thickness of the letter. The result is a rhythmic composition with sharp contrast between the black and brown “ink” and the exposed canvas.

The work of Mohammad Ehsa’i, active since the 1970s, also explores the pure forms of the letters of the alphabet. Ehsa’i is a calligrapher trained in the traditional mode; his paintings “create compositions that look to the future, as well as to past tradition.”39 In his “Mījmar-i Gulvāzhahā” (“Sunburst of Flowering Words”) (fig. 33), the bodies of the letters are closely intertwined like the warp and weft of a carpet, forming a circle that culminates at the center and has an undefined outer border.

Likewise, Pouran Jinchi, a New York-based Iranian artist, alludes to siyāh mashq in her use of letters in nasta’līq script as her preferred means of expression. With the precision and sure-handed discipline of the traditional calligrapher, she renders these letters on a background of heavily incised markings and scribbles, creating richly textured compositions (fig. 34). She transforms the letters until they are beyond rec-
Fig. 25. Photograph by 'Abdullah Qajar of a mashq by Mir 'Imad, Tehran, 1860s. Private collection, London.
ognition by an ingenious method of layering and juxtaposing forms and colors. Her complete immersion in the artistic process is revealed in the way she writes, rewrites, layers, inscribes, etches, and engraves the letters and markings on the surface of the canvas, deconstructing the verses and words she uses: breaking them down, reducing them, and subsequently (re)presenting them in a remarkably innovative way. In addition, Jinchi has the ability to create her calligraphic compositions in sizes ranging from miniature to monumental.

Looking at the trajectory of siyāh mashq and its various permutations throughout history, we see a new art form emerge and develop, an art form increas-

ingly prized for its aesthetic and compositional attributes. Artistic siyāh mashq demonstrates the calligrapher’s need and desire to supersede the canon by improvising (gurūz) and allowing his or her spirit to roam more freely on the page. These works of art, both traditional and contemporary, stand as testimony to the ingenuity of Iranian calligraphers and artists, and to the versatility and visual appeal of the letters of the Arabic alphabet and the endless possibilities they offer.

NOTES

2. Some calligraphers make the distinction between siyāh mashq and mashq-i siyāh, using siyāh mashq to designate artistic mashq, and mashq-i siyāh to refer to mashq executed solely for practice.


5. Calligraphers commonly practiced on paper or on wooden slates. When entirely covered, the slates were washed and reused, since the ink employed was soluble in water: see Schimmel, Calligraphy and Islamic Culture, 42.

6. An ijâza is a license to practice, which would allow a pupil to teach. A pupil often had to complete a presentation piece of several lines in order to earn the ijâza.

7. For examples of ijâzas, see M. Uğur Derman, Letters in Gold: Ottoman Calligraphy from the Sahîh Sabancî Collection, Istanbul (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998); Muhammad ’Ali Karimzâda Tabrîzî, Ijâzat nâmeh = Ijâzet name: The Most Unique and Precious Document in Ottoman Calligraphy (London, 1999); see also Safwat, Art of the Pen, 40–44.


9. Ibid., 40.


11. This treatise has been attributed by some scholars to Mir ’Imâd Hasanî.

12. This discussion has been drawn from Ernst’s translation of Adab al-Mashq in “The Spirit of Islamic Calligraphy.” The manuscript used by Ernst, written in Baba Shah Isfahani’s hand, is in the library of Punjab University in Lahore.

13. Qâdir Ahmad, Calligraphers and Painters, 117; see also Anthony Welch, Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World (New York: Asia Society and Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 34.

Fig. 30. Page of *siyâh mashq* by Sina Goudarzi, Minneapolis, MN. Gouache on paper, 40.6 x 18.4 cm. (Courtesy of the artist)


18. Siyāh mashq always remained the primary method of practice for experienced calligraphers as well as young and aspiring ones, even when it acquired different meanings.

19. The custom of adding practice sheets to albums existed in earlier historical periods, though these sheets were composed in a manner different from siyāh mashq and were not prized for their artistic and compositional attributes but rather intended to document part of a process. Examples date to as early as the time of Ja‘far Tabrizi and continue to the sixteenth century, when calligraphers like Muhammad Mu‘min copied out all the cursive scripts on a single page to show his dexterity in the canon. See Roxburgh, Persian Album, 200, 260.


23. Ibid., 174; Babaie et al., Slaves of the Shah, 114–16.

24. After Shah ‘Abbas I replaced Qizilbash governors with slaves, or ghulāms, appointing them as governors of economically and strategically important provinces of Khurasan, these ghulāms began to play an important role in the patronage of the arts; see Babaie et al., Slaves of the Shah, 114.

25. Although the reasons for this hiatus are unclear, the waning production of siyāh mashq may have been a result of a decline in patronage and interest on the part of royal and non-royal patrons.


27. For an example, see Christie’s, London, Islamic Art and Manuscripts (Tues., 10 Oct., 2000), 81, lot 94: an album of calligraphy by Habibullah b. ‘Abdullah Qajar, dated 7 Rabi‘ II, 1311/18 October, 1893, which opens with a calligraphic page in the hand of Nasir al-Din Shah endorsing the calligrapher’s skill.

28. For more information on pishkash, see Ann Lambton, “Pishkash: Present or Tribute?,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 57, 1 (1994): 145–58. Pishkash was usually a gift from a subordinate to a king, governor, or member of the ruling elite. In the late Qajar period, the word came to be used more generically to refer to any official gift.


30. Aboulala Soudavar, Art of the Persian Courts (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), fig. 163.


32. Ibid. Bābism started in Shiraz in 1844, when Mirzā ‘Ali Muhammad, influenced by Shī’ite theology, which viewed the Twelve Imams as incarnations of the Divine, pro-
claimed himself the Bab (báb), or gate to divine truth—a concept that clashed with the Islamic belief that Muhammad was the “Seal of the Prophets” (khatam al-anbiyá’). ‘Ali Muhammad sent missionaries throughout Iran, and in 1848 the movement declared its complete secession from Islam and all its rites. Upon the accession that year of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96), the Bab’s followers rose in insurrection and were defeated. Many of the leaders were killed, and the Bab was executed at Tabriz in 1850. Persecutions continued throughout the 1860s, and after 1868 there occurred a schism, one group following the leader Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Nuri (known as Bahaullah), the originator of Bahaism, who declared himself the Bab.

34. Ibid., 138.
35. Polak, Persien, 266.
37. Ibid.
38. Story recounted by a calligraphy pupil training at the Anjuman-i Khushnivisan in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war.
This article concerns both the major discourses on art and artistic production in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution; its aim is to define the emergence of neo-traditionalism in the art of the 1990s. To do this, I will examine the major artistic trends and discourses within the socio-cultural context of postrevolutionary Iran, including art exhibitions held in the country. I will consider the impact of the Islamic Revolution on the formation of the discourse of muta‘abhid (“committed,” i.e., revolutionary) art and will analyze the intellectual and governmental discourses and their role in the development of new postrevolutionary artistic trends, among which I will emphasize neo-traditionalism. Throughout this discussion, I will explore the revival of the intellectual and artistic preoccupations of the prerevolutionary generation, mainly from the 1960s, and will examine the relationship between their works and those of particular neotraditionalist artists active in the 1990s.

As Peter Chelkowski remarks, “The Revolution in Iran was an event of universal significance in the modern history of the Middle East”; it was not just a backward-looking fundamentalist phenomenon but also a modern one, yet one “whose message was steeped in localized imagery demanding an idealized return to the past.” Therefore, it is not surprising that a synthesis of the traditional and the modern inherent in the Revolution gradually emerged in Iranian culture and in the art that we call neotraditionalism.

In accord with revolutionary aspirations, certain profound transformations occurred in various domains of Iranian life, politics, and culture, and these had a marked effect on the formation of Iranian postrevolutionary art. “Modernism,” transferred to a sort of art based on Islamic cultural traditions, was initially popular among the masses who were the main supporters of the Revolution. The 1979 event, however, brought to a sudden end the official artistic policies of the previous regime, which had been based on the promotion of modernism on the one hand and of nationalism on the other. Both of these were challenged by the Revolution as elements of Pahlavi (1925–79) policy. As a result, as noted by Ruyin Pakbaz, a prominent Iranian art critic and historian,

...with the denial of the existence and function of the official art pursued under Mohammad Reza Shah, many artistic administrators and a number of artists left the scene. A young, inexperienced force came to the fore and, in a hasty and radical reaction, rejected all that had been done by the previous generation of artists.

The most problematic issue for artists in the first years after the Revolution was their suddenly being prevented from interacting with the world outside Iran: they were unable to show their works to an international audience or participate in the global discourse that was modern art. Nevertheless, a few of the most established artists, as well as a significant number of dynamic young ones, chose to stay in Iran. The activity of the prerevolutionary artists of this group, however, was not legitimized in the official coteries until the early nineties. In that milieu, anything that could be associated with a monarchical system was condemned. Haggai Ram argues that: “...revolutions are [...]—perhaps principally—struggles over memory,” that is, they wage war upon memories of the old order. In the Iranian Revolution, as Ram maintains, “the commitment to break with the past [the monarchical system] provided a foundation upon which to build a new society.” Accordingly, the revolutionaries “set out to eradicate the hegemonic historical narrative of the Pahlavi monarchy by creating a counter-historical narrative that was ideally structured to fit the new teleology of the Revolution.”

Initially, the anti-Western nature of the Revolution and the slogan of political and cultural independence also fostered a clash with and halt to the growth and promotion of modern art in Iran. In the years following the Revolution, a new definition of “modernism” was suggested, one that mainly implied a kind of Western product consisting of different artistic forms, styles, and movements, from Impressionism to
Abstraction. Common to all of these, it was believed, was their contrast with a kind of realistic and representational demotic art that could convey meaning to the public. “Modern” art was not approved in official circles; rather it was regarded negatively because it lacked any political, religious, social, or ethical message to “direct” the viewer. In those early years after the Revolution, not only was modern art not supported by the government and other sectors including ministries, banks, corporations, and the press (who had favored it during the prerevolutionary period), it was met with indifference or even active opposition. In its place, art officials eagerly proposed the creation of a kind of Irano-Islamic art that would possess its own characteristics distinct from those of Western art and that would convey traditional cultural values. Basically however, Islamic and revolutionary values remained largely uncodified during the transition period and were subject to local or expedient interpretations, and they did not specify any theoretical or practical principles or patterns for visual art. This resulted in a situation that was, at best, uncertain for Iranian painting during the late 1970s, throughout the 1980s, and into the early 1990s. When one looks at the formal exhibitions held in the period after the Revolution, even the First Iranian Painting Biennial in 1991, one can readily observe this uncertainty.

The most significant artistic shift just after the Revolution focused attention on traditional Islamic arts and on the production of a particular kind of popular painting: the term hunar-i mardumî (demotic/collective art) in revolutionary terminology referred to realist (and sometimes expressionistic) art that dealt mainly with political and revolutionary subjects in which lower-class and ordinary people played the main role (figs. 2–4). The principle of hunar-i mardumî lay in the belief that art was a tool for propaganda, about which Chelkowski writes:

A particular delivery of the rhetorical images of convictions—the art of persuasion, the ability to move the individuals in a mass—is designed to make legitimate claims on political obedience, on measures of mass mobilization. To the degree that such rhetoricals [sic] of images are rooted in deep and surviving cultural paradigms, they expose a wide angle of vision on the dominant moral matters of a political culture. The purpose, whether or not self-conscious, of aesthetics in any art of persuasion is to transform the experience of rhyme and reason, shape and beauty, into elements of mobilizing conviction.9

This kind of art was approved, encouraged, and supported by the artistic section of the new revolutionary government, especially in the first decade after the Revolution.10 In 1983, the Minister of Islamic Guidance,11 Sayyid Mohammad Khatami, announced:

We ought to introduce art as one of the important branches of human culture and history, and as a way to conceive of and enhance the pious and grand human spiritual character for people, who are the symbols and embodiments of those values, and whose characters are mixed with the Islamic Revolution’s values and aspirations. [Exposing art] in any other way would be a disloyalty to both art and human beings …12

The idea that modern art could not connect with ordinary people’s beliefs seemed to be the other main

Fig. 1. Habibollah Sadeghi, Kullu yawmin ‘Ashūrā wa-kullu darīn Karbala (Every Day is ‘Ashura and the Whole Earth is Karbala), early 1980s. Poster color on paper. Hawza-i hunarî-i Sâzmân-i Tablîghî-i Islâmî (Artistic Center of Islamic Propaganda Organization). (Photo: courtesy of the Center)
Fig. 2. Hossein Khosrowjerdi, *Hayyi `ala `rafalah* (Come to salvation [part of the call to prayer]), 1977. Oil on canvas, 200 x 500 cm. Artistic Center of Islamic Propaganda Organization. (Photo: courtesy of the Center)

Fig. 3. Kazem Chalipa, *Guards of the Anemone Field*, 1980. Oil on canvas. Artistic Center of Islamic Propaganda Organization. (Photo: courtesy of the Center)

Fig. 4. Kazem Chalipa, *Rūz-i buzurğ* (The Great Day), 1984. Oil on canvas, 160 x 115 cm. Artistic Center of Islamic Propaganda Organization. (Photo: courtesy of the Center)
Fig. 5. Nasser Palangi, *Kūch* (Migration), 1980–82. Oil on canvas. Artistic Center of Islamic Propaganda Organization. (Photo: courtesy of the Center)

Fig. 6. Habibollah Sadeghi, *Tashy′-i qulāb* (Funeral of Hearts), 1983. Oil on canvas, 112 x 170 cm. Artistic Center of Islamic Propaganda Organization. (Photo: courtesy of the Center)
reason for ignoring any form of it. It was argued that modern Iranian painting, despite its expanding growth in the 1960s and 1970s, had lost the public. The postrevolutionaries also criticized the situation of Iranian artists and intellectuals working simply for themselves, and they found fault with prerevolutionary artists because of their preference for formalism over content and meaning in their works. One of the theoreticians of the postrevolutionary group of “committed” artists, Abdolmajid Hosseini-Rad, claims:

During the years before the Revolution, formalism was the dominant aspect of Iranian painting, attracting almost all the attention of modernist painters. In those days formalism was so dominant that even the search for a new visual language complying with national and local demands was entirely affected by a formalistic outlook.

Although revolutionary art first condemned or repudiated all kinds of prerevolutionary art, the works of artists after the Revolution, when carefully considered, show some resemblance to the 1960s works by artists of the Saqqākhāna movement, at least in so far as they used popular religious pictorial elements and motifs even in formalist constructions. These had already appeared in the early Saqqākhāna-period (1962–64) works by the movement’s main founders. In the various forms of revolutionary art, especially posters, stamps, and murals, calligraphic forms and Shiite iconography were dominant features, mixed with figuration and a promotive quality (figs. 1 and 2) inspired by other twentieth-century revolutionary art, especially that from the Soviet Union, Mexico, and Cuba. Despite the clear and fundamental difference between the Islamic Revolution of Iran and other major revolutions of the twentieth century—the others future-oriented and based mainly on socialist beliefs and aspirations, and the Islamic Revolution focused on the Islamic past in order to redefine the future—the form of artistic production, based on revolutionary and propagandist ideas, was similar. In their use of symbolic elements, the Iranian artists tried to reflect such concepts as the Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, martyrdom, and gnosticism by a form of realist expression that was a familiar language in other revolutionary art. Social commitment and storytelling that conveyed a religious or political message were among the most important features of these works and further increased their popularity and acceptance among the masses, since they were simple and understandable in both form and execution (figs. 1–6).

In terms of theory, however, the frequent use of such pompous expressions as “spiritual identity” and “elevation of forms” for Iran’s postrevolutionary art, along with the absence of principles and accurate methods for its analysis, only intensified problems of its definition. For example, a message that Ayatollah Khomeini addressed to artists in September 1988 urged that revolutionary art be conceived as “the gnostic challenge,” “the rejection of uncommitted art and art for art’s sake,” “the revolt against violence,” “the illustration of martyrdom,” and the “dedication to Islamic values.”

In what proved to be one of the major official postrevolutionary exhibitions, held in 1983 at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the aim of the exhibition was explained as follows:

We should esteem the impulse to organize these exhibitions as an earnest and meaningful attempt, because the main reason for holding them is clearly to enshrine the spiritual as well as the committed content, the sincere and eloquent language of artists. [...] The dominant atmosphere of the works shows a united message of artists who have created their art with sincerity, faith, and seriousness in accordance with principles of the Islamic Revolution, posing the messages of the Revolution and, more important, creating a committed, eloquent art. We should believe that after an interval of doldrums in the formation of postrevolutionary art, especially visual art, caused by the initial conflicts of the Revolution, we can now see in these exhibitions the flowering and growth of talent; [these are] artists whose art does not originate in dilettantism but is full of message, faith, and sincerity.

This situation continued and was even exaggerated during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88): wall painting, panel drawing, and poster design on epic, religious, and political themes flourished. Furthermore, “popular beliefs and rituals were converted into stamps, banknotes, and chewing gum wrappers, and directed towards mass mobilization for the Revolution and war.” The eight-year war with Iraq was to create crucial problems in Iran for years, but it led to an increasing sense of nationalism throughout the country. Chelkowski writes of “the Museum of Furious Art” that is the Iran of the 1980s, a nation engaged in revolution and war, relentlessly remaking itself in images and forms, shapes and colors, frames of angers and anxieties. This situation lasted throughout the
1980s, although things began to change after the end of the war: in 1988 the production of art as propaganda significantly diminished. From the end of the 1980s and increasingly during the 1990s, a neotraditionalism started to develop among artists. The neotraditionalist artists were committed to creating a synthesis, both conceptual and stylistic, of indigenous and historical art forms and contemporary art. One can find in their works a quest for a mode of modern artistic expression that might achieve an equilibrium between the historical past and modernism.

By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the Iranian artistic scene seemingly required a comprehensive exhibition in which various postrevolutionary artistic activities and tendencies would be aired. After the destruction of the war, Iranian society had begun reconstruction in different domains, including sociocultural and economic life. During the period after the Revolution, the population had greatly increased, and now consisted mostly of young people, a large number of whom gravitated towards the different arts, especially visual art. At the same time, a new middle-class and technically educated stratum of the Iranian population was being formed, and a large number of the younger members of this class became enthusiastically involved in art. Hence, the number of artists, art lovers, and applicants to study or practice art, according to a reliable estimate, increased tenfold over what it had been in the 1970s. By the end of the 1980s, private galleries that had hitherto been inactive or closed were reactivated, while many new ones were opened, and they again began to exhibit non-political and non-propagandizing art.

Nevertheless, the constant presence of government in directing art in modern Iran should not be ignored. Both before and after the Revolution the governmental cultural sections played a significant role in creating a kind of official art led and supported by state cultural policies. Despite the fact that, in the initial postrevolutionary years, different exhibitions—held in particular on anniversaries of the Islamic Revolution—had been mounted in various public spaces, especially the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, these were affected by the politicized and propagandizing atmosphere dominant at the time. The central core of these...
exhibitions comprised the works—both paintings and posters—of revolutionary or “committed” artists, and a range of traditional arts including calligraphy and miniature painting (nigârgârī).27

Following several years of haphazard activity, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art began organizing regular biennials and triennials, among which the painting biennials were the largest and seemingly the most controversial.28 The First Iranian Painting Biennial opened in the autumn of 1991, twelve years after the victory of the Revolution. (Before that exhibition, as mentioned above, both the Museum of Contemporary Art and other public artistic centers29 had held many exhibitions on various occasions; these did not affect contemporary Iranian art, however—largely because of their lack of organization and comprehensiveness.)30 The catalogue of the First Iranian Painting Biennial announced a clear and very ambitious goal: the exhibition, organized by the Artistic Deputy of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, was intended to “improve the art of painting in both quantity and quality, establish a true atmosphere of competition among artists, and explore and support young talent.”31

Although the 1991 biennial was in actuality the sixth, since there had been five others held in Tehran before the Revolution,32 the organizers justified its title with the logic that …due to deep transformations in different aspects of Iranian life, including politics, society, and culture, this Biennial, which also was a product of the postrevolutionary period, could not have many affiliations with those of prerevolutionary ones! And since it was the first official comprehensive exhibition in the period after the Revolution, it had to be called “The First Iranian Painting Biennial.”33

In the words of the manifesto presented at the First Biennial:
Hamid Reza Noori Seresht, Áæz-i par-i fibrâ’îl (Song of Gabriel’s Wing), 1995. Mixed media on canvas, 110 x 90 cm. (After Naqqâsh-i mu’âsir-i Írán, barguzîda’t az âsîr-i sîvûmın nimâyishgâh-i du-sâlama-i naqqâsh-i Írán = Iran Contemporary Painting, A Selection of Works from the Third Iranian Painting Biennial [Tehran, 1376/1997], published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)

Abdolhamid Ghadirian, Gul-i âghâz (Creation Flower), 1999. Oil on canvas, 150 x 100 cm. (After Ru’yâ-yi frishtagân: Bayân-i tamsîlî dar naqqâsh-i nau-girâ-yi Írán = The Dream of Angels: Symbolic Expression in Iranian Modernist Painting [Tehran 1379/2000], published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)

Sharareh Mahdood, Untitled, 1995. Acrylic and gouache on canvas, 80 x 60 cm. (After Naqqâsh-i mu’âsir-i Írán, barguzîda’t az âsîr-i sîvûmın nimâyishgâh-i du-sâlama-i naqqâsh-i Írán, published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)

Vali Fattahzadeh, Attack, 1993. Oil on canvas, 74 x 102 cm. (After Naqqâsh-i mu’âsir-i Írán, published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)
Fig. 15. Alireza Mahram-Nia, *Rābī‘a-i Rabbānī* (Divine Connection), 1995. Mixed media on canvas, 50 x 60 cm. (After *Naqqāsh-i mu‘āsr-i Īrān, barguzadā‘ī az āsr-ī sīvūmīn nimāyishgāh-ī du-sālānā-ī naqqāshī-ī Īrān*, published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)


Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, there has been a development in the art of painting as well. Influenced by the social and political developments of their society today, the vanguard of “committed” and independent artists are determined to regain the religious and national identity that the walls of imitation have destroyed, letting the unpolluted, pure, independent, and dynamic atmosphere dynamize the talents of the young.34

A survey of the paintings shown in this biennial reveals that a small section of the exhibition was devoted to the works of the muta‘āḥhid artists. The major part of the exhibition, however, consisted of works showing a tendency to use pre-Islamic Persian forms, traditional Islamic motifs, and elements of folkloristic art as references (figs. 9–11 and 15–18). Some works sought to achieve an artistic identity by the inclusion of musical instruments, scenes of Sufi dancing, details of traditional architecture, and so on (figs. 7, 8, 10, 11).35 features now apparent in the works of many young artists. Apparent from prize-winning works in the biennial is that a major criterion of their selection was their resemblance—formal as well as aesthetic—to so-called Irano-Islamic art, including their use of decorative motifs and calligraphy, their representation of religious traditions and rituals,36 and so on.37 The First Biennial also featured the works of different traditional genres, including Qahva-khâna (coffeehouse) and miniature painting. Among others, works of some prominent Naqqâshi-khâtt (calligraphy-based) artists were also exhibited.38

Put forward as one of the key issues of the First Biennial was the question of cultural identity.39 As the introduction to the Biennial catalogue put it:

Revision of values and authenticities is neither an artistic and mental reaction nor a weakness regarding modernism. Rather it is a strong attempt to achieve an artistic identity that is appropriate and understood based on visual and subjective frameworks originating from our […] cultural authenticity. […] With reliance on the specificity of Iranian revolutionary society, and with the purpose of supporting a dynamic and valuable pattern, the Center of Plastic Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance employs all its ability to amplify the growing and comprehensive “Art of the Islamic Revolution.”40

(“Valuable pattern” referred to the part of the biennial entitled “Palestine,” as if the organizers still needed a political ingredient to justify the component of...
the exhibition that was independent and non-political.\textsuperscript{41}

During the 1991 biennial, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art hosted a conference entitled “The First Conference of Iranian Plastic Arts,” in which there were colloquia, debates, and lectures by Iranian artists and art scholars. As is suggested by the title of the conference proceedings, \textit{Huviyyat-i farhang\º va hunart} (Cultural and Artistic Identity), the main issue considered was national identity in art and how it could be preserved.\textsuperscript{42} The introduction to the publication frames the issues thus:

What response have we contrived against the mighty storm of recent centuries that has blown from the West and has assumed different shape and emphasis in every period? Is there any way to preserve our culture and art [from that storm]? What is the responsibility of the young generation of revolutionary artists? These questions and tens of similar questions were the motivations for holding this Conference.\textsuperscript{43}

Considered carefully, the contents of the debates and arguments of the conference bear a close resemblance to the major artistic and intellectual preoccupations in the period before the Revolution, in particular the 1960s. Cultural and artistic identity were topics that had already been propounded then, but that now showed new emphasis on the revolutionary aspect of Iranian culture and on Islam as an integral part of that culture. Generally speaking, however, the new discourse did not essentially differ from what had been advocated before the Revolution, although the main emphasis now was on the content of traditional values.

In the 1960s the issue of cultural and artistic identity had been addressed not only by officials of the cultural establishment but also by innovative artists. In 1991, about thirteen years after the Islamic Revolution, the subject of the identity crisis in Iranian art had again emerged, this time primarily emphasized by the officials,\textsuperscript{44} who seem to have hoped that the First Biennial could represent in both form and content a kind of new national or Islamic art, or a so-called independent art (which no one really believed could be achieved).

The Second Iranian Painting Biennial, in 1993, had some of the same atmosphere, but with more flexibility: this time there was no particular restriction in subject matter or content of the exhibition. Although the selection criteria as stated bore similarities to those of the previous biennial and earlier exhibitions,\textsuperscript{45} it was clear that the nature of Iranian painting was now tending towards modernism, the dominant approach towards which was the attempted synthesis of traditional and modern known as neotraditionalism. In this Second Biennial, most of the trends in contemporary Iranian painting were represented, with the exception of miniature painting, which as of 1993 was given separate biennials.

Organizers of the Second Biennial again suggested as a solution to the artistic identity crisis that more attention be directed to national and Islamic arts, although no one now proposed a “national school of art.”\textsuperscript{46} As one member of the selection panel suggested, “The essence of new thought exists in our national and Islamic art, but it has covered itself over. We must find it and expand it into other artistic and cultural domains.”\textsuperscript{47} Since it was difficult to find any comprehensive tendency in the works exhibited in the first two biennials, the crisis of artistic identity was still the main topic for debate in the Second Conference of Plastic Arts, held during the 1993 biennial. One of the proposed solutions was that art works refer to the “principal structures” of past Iranian art—a reference that was not to be formal, however, but that should instead concern the content and meaning of the traditional arts. At this second conference, Mohammad Ali Rajabi, an artist and art critic, suggested,

> We face various discourses in our country, such as identity, cultural aggression, and so on, which are [in fact] unprecedented and different from what we have previously encountered. The point we must be aware of is that we should not deal with [those discourses] superficially. In this year’s biennial, different groups [of artists] have tried to display [a sense of] identity in their works. Certainly, their attempt should be appreciated. We also saw a group whose motto was: “If we use colors such as lapis lazuli and gold, or make our work flat [omitting perspective], we will achieve an identity in our work.” [We see] how that issue is becoming commonplace. Another group pronounces that “a work of an Iranian is Iranian in any case [and there is no need to be sensitive and anxious about lack of identity in it].” […] The fact is that we have become fixed in the same place and are turning around ourselves. […] I call this a bogus identity.\textsuperscript{48}

Another important ambition (or temptation) stated at both biennial conferences was participation in the international art scene,\textsuperscript{49} which would later become a preoccupation of both artists and art officials; as an anonymous author in a leading official art quarterly wrote, “We must be active in the contemporary (inter-
discernable among the intellectuals of the time were similar signs of sensitivity to the issue of identity, both artistic and cultural, and to the situation of Iranian society in a fast-changing world. This sensibility was usually accompanied by criticism of the structure of Iranian society and reflections on the conjunction of modernity and tradition. In an essay titled “On the Mental Distortions Afflicting Those Civilizations That Have Remained on the Sidelines of History and Played No Part in the Festival of Changes,” Daryoush Shayegan underlines how enriching the situation can be if one accepts the ambivalent challenge consciously, lucidly, and without resentment. But Faraj Sarkouhi, a famous Iranian author, maintains that,

Since the period of the Constitutional Revolution [1905/6–11], and especially since September 1941, our ancestors and we have lived in a society in which all the economic, political, social, and cultural events of all various periods of history, simultaneously and with a complicated and united texture, but not alongside each other or in a parallel way, have had an active, effective, and animated presence. In our society, one can find anything from the ideologies of primitive man to ultramodern interpretations, from the oldest social relationships to the most advanced way of life. From the other side of the globe, the phenomena and changes that are happening in different economic, technological, social, and cultural domains of the world have affected us. Our situation, here, is that of a “man of the border zones.” A man who carries all the relations and cultural baggage of his ancient past with him has not solved the inconsistencies and problems of societal life either in scope of thought or in range of aesthetics and form; he is carrying with him his entire past and present, with all their contradictions and contrasts.

Sarkouhi’s conclusion, nevertheless, traces a kind of neotraditional synthesis that, as he remarks, is to be seen in Iranian vanguard art and literature:

In a society in which one can see primitive tribalism engaged with modern industrialization, and primitive culture based on superstition and magic with modernity, in a society that has not yet solved its traditional problems,
while involved with advanced modern forms of technology and telecommunications, a variety of styles and artistic and literary structures is natural. That is because the various layers of our society have neither grown simultaneously nor been shaped in a single layer. [...] According to our vanguard art and literature, taking into consideration this historical situation, have tried and are trying to break the fences of this situation, to transcend this “border-zone” in which they have been sentenced to stay, and to connect the past and the present.62

Intellectuals now discussed more ardently the use of modernity both in art and culture, maintaining that through an organic approach to contemporary life, artists could creatively combine the modern language of art with any traditional materials that were still functional. Nevertheless, from their point of view, contemporary culture, life, and interests had to play the main role in this kind of art. At the same time, these intellectuals criticized the insufficiently informed imitation and acceptance of modernism, which might result in a superficial modishness. They also opposed a meaningless return to the past by the mere reproduction of the traditional image.63

At this time, the phrase “creating a modern Iranian plastic language” was used to explain the approach of the modernist or neotraditionalist artist, whose goal was described as an effort to establish an independent identity for Iranian art that took into account the efforts of the previous generation. Because in art the final answer is always present during the process of creation, any kind of question—including the connection between past and present, or between pictorial tradition and the modern language of art—had to be answered in the “form” and “structure” of the work of art itself. In neotraditional art, then, the question of “form” or “visual language” could be considered the most important issue. In art as in other areas of human culture, however, there are other concepts underlying the question of form that may originate in social and cultural conditions.

The regeneration of modern Iranian art occurred at the beginning of the 1990s, about a decade into the postrevolutionary period, and coinciding with the painting biennials in which various modernistic approaches were exhibited and rapidly developed. During the late 1970s and 1980s, as Sarkouhi maintains,

It was proved that traditionalism and strict attention to tradition in art, as in other cultural and social realms, would not convey any positive result. The two tendencies of traditionalism—the reproduction of traditional images and revolutionary social realism—affect the politicized atmosphere of the initial years of the Revolution, increased the crisis of contemporary Iranian painting. They in fact revealed their limitations and paved the way for self-denial.64

Thus it was not strange that in the following years considerable attention was directed to the problem of artistic identity, as mentioned above. As the issue of identity had been much emphasized in the sphere of politics and culture, nobody could claim that Iranian art had achieved the ideal. Furthermore, the Revolution and its precepts had created a gap between the new and the prerevolutionary generations of neotraditionalist artists, in particular the Saqqā-khāna artists, and their achievements; the older generation and their works were ignored because they were construed as part of prerevolutionary culture and art and hence depicted as tag ūtt and gharb-zada (“Westoxicated”), reminiscent of the same discourse argued mainly by Iranian intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s. It seemed, however, that the young artists of the new generation might repeat the pattern; the biennials and other major exhibitions after the Revolution witnessed the revived use of symbolic motifs; of both black-and-white elements and colored ones including tilework motifs marked by tints of gold, lapis lazuli, and azure; of seals and gold sheets pasted to the canvas (as in the works of some Saqqā-khāna artists); and of arabesque designs and patterns taken from calico tablecloths. Illumination, miniature paintings (now executed in oil color), and portraits of women with joined eyebrows reminiscent of the Qajar manner all made a reappearance, in combination with modern styles (figs. 10–17).

That these characteristics reflected a discontinuity in the development of modern Iranian art was frequently discussed in the mid-1990s, when the works of prerevolutionary neotraditionalist artists were again exhibited. This observation does not apply to all artists of the 1990s, however, since there were also innovators whose works reveal systematic preoccupation with artistic identity, their own past and present, and neotraditionalism, and who clearly understood what the Saqqā-khāna artists and their followers had been attempting, the ideas they had propounded, and their successes and problems. It was believed that, for the first time in twentieth-century Iranian art, a generation had the chance to experience two important periods of Iranian history, pre- and post-Revolution, and to assimilate practically and intellectually both
the positive and the negative aspects of those experiences. This generation could play a key role in leading the next one, which, because of the sudden surge of the Revolution and its aspirations, was not aware of what had been achieved by the prerevolutionary generation in various realms of Iranian culture and life, especially art.

Iranian painting during the late 1980s and 1990s can be generally classified in three main groups: traditionalists, modernists, and neotraditionalists. Among these the neotraditionalists were dominant. The situation is similar for Iranian poetry and fiction, which, in 1990, Sarkouhi believed to be flourishing more than at any time in the recent past.65

Among other factors in the mid-1990s that caused the development of art in general and of neotraditionalism in particular, we may again note the important role of the art officials of the country; now, however, these officials had greater flexibility and discernment and a more systematic organization. In particular, after the presidential election of 1997,66 the Plastic Arts Center of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance67 was extraordinarily active, as was the most important organ of the Center, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Highly effective, the museum tried to play a distinguished role in supporting, presenting, and encouraging various kinds of contemporary Iranian art with systematic programs that included the continuation of more comprehensive biennials, the mounting of thematic exhibitions of contemporary art both Iranian and European-American, and the hosting of seminars, conferences, and academic discussions on different aspects of contemporary art and culture. Although the museum had already started these programs as early as 1990–91 by organizing different national and even international biennials (such as the Cartoon and Illustration Biennials), its activities took fuller form after 1997. After this, the works of numerous Iranian artists active before the Revolution, including the best Saqqā-khāna paintings, and also of Western contemporary artists, were systematically exhibited. Although many of these works, drawn from the museum’s rich collection, had previously been shown, the organization and quality of the post-1997 exhibitions were unprecedented, and the Saqqā-khāna artists and their works began to be reintroduced and analyzed in artistic circles. Eminent Iranian artists such as Charles Hossein Zenderoudi (b. 1937), who had left the country and cut their ties with the Iranian art scene after the Revolution, perhaps because of lack of attention to their works, were now invited to participate in solo or group exhibitions accompanied by serious discussions: “Pioneers of Modern Iranian Art,” a series of exhibitions that included the works of such Iranian neotraditionalists as Zenderoudi, Massoud Arabshahi (b. 1935), Mohsen Vaziri Moghaddam (b. 1924), Mansureh Hosseini (b. 1926), and Parviz Tanavoli (b. 1937) is an example. Meanwhile, the museum increased its activities outside the country through exhibitions in Europe, America, and Asia. As a result, the number of Iranian art publications and public venues for exhibiting the visual arts grew dynamically. The Plastic Arts Center also began to support private galleries in Tehran and other cities with funding and collaboration. The result was a period of artistic flourishing in which the presence of neotraditionalism was central.

Although due to their variety it is difficult to characterize the neotraditional genres in the 1990s, their main characteristics can be distinguished. Neotraditional artists of this period assimilated trends in Western art, synthesizing them with the psychological characteristics and underlying principles of the iconography of tradition and heritage. Some concentrated on exploring their local traditions of Iranian folk art, while others used concepts of ancient Iranian mythol-
Fig. 20. Nosratollah Moslemian, *Untitled*, 1992. Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm. Artist’s collection. (Photo: courtesy of the artist)


Fig. 22. Mostafa Goudarzi, *Untitled*, 1998–99. Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm. (After *Ta’m-i ru’yā: Ašār-i ʿanjamīn nimāyīshgāh-i du-sālāna-i naqqāsh-i Irān*, published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)
Hamid Keshmirshekan

The use of forms taken from traditional architecture (both pre-Islamic and Islamic) and calligraphy, as well as the borrowing of visual aspects of classical Persian painting such as the interpretation of natural phenomena, attention to color balance and distribution, the creation of simultaneous dynamism and unity of different areas throughout the two-dimensional space of the painting, and the inclusion of symbolism in both figurative and abstract forms (figs. 8–21). Ancient Persian myths, legends, and literary works frequently appear as subject matter, whose forms show a tendency towards symbolic and allegorical expression (figs. 19–23). Also characteristic are surface textures influenced by traditional Iranian building materials, such as mud, straw, and colored tiles.

Work of the 1990s neotraditionalists may be classified in three groups: figurative, abstract, and a third, more conservative and diverse, category. The figurative artists have mainly been interested in contemporary social and philosophical concepts and have tried to represent these concepts in the particular context in which they find themselves as artists. Modernist in attitude, they draw from the conceptual and pictorial aspects of their past; although their language is taken from the vocabulary of contemporary art, they have benefited greatly from their pictorial tradition. Their use of the pictorial characteristics of classical Persian painting is exemplified by such aspects of their work as color scheme, spatial composition, two-dimensional image structure, and the inclusion of symbolic elements and concepts. Experimenting with different modern styles, such as Symbolism and, especially, Expressionism—perhaps because of its affinity with the dominant atmosphere of Iranian society and the experience of such events as the Revolution and the war—has made it possible for them to express their feelings. More recently, they have also addressed ancient Iranian myths or Islamic mysticism; the representation of mythological and epic subjects from traditional sources such as the Shāhnāma of Firdawsi has emerged as one of their tendencies (fig. 19).68 The use of modernist language is deliberately emphasized by these artists; in their view, the past can be revisited and resurveyed by contemporary artists and during this process can be restored via a contemporary and innovative interpretation.

Among the most active and distinguished figures of the group are Nosratollah Moslemian (b. 1951), Ahmad Amin-Nazar (b. 1950), Mostafa Goudarzi (b. 1960), and Jamshid Haghighat-Shenas (b. 1963) (figs. 19–23).
19–23). Particularly exemplary are the works of Nosratollah Moslemian. While continually reexamining and reinterpreting traditional artistic genres, Moslemian’s art concerns contemporary socio-cultural realities, especially those of his own society. It at once takes modern aesthetics into account and breathes in the environment of Persian classical art. Although his forms do not directly imitate those of Persian classical painting, they contain some of its pictorial metaphors, synthesizing the dichotomous characteristics of past pictorial tradition and contemporary artistic language and social concerns. For Moslemian, the process of painting encompasses all aspects of his life and work; he believes, for instance, that elements of suspense in his painting are influenced by the paradox and suspense in his society and life:

...my personality consists of three paradoxical parts, including modern, traditional, and also the mixture of these two. These factors that are there in my “self” have resulted in the formation of my works.69

About the work of the preceding vanguard neotraditionalist artists and their achievements and failures in dealing with the problem of artistic identity during the past decades, Moslemian declares:

I am aware that previous generations of Iranian artists sacrificed their talents and innovativeness in order to deeply understand and then internalize the achievements of contemporary art while considering their own cultural situation. It seems that they carried out, more or less, their artistic responsibility within their own context. What has been the outcome of their attempts and experience for us? Is it possible to have an artistic identity and to play a role in the formation of contemporary Iranian art without consideration of our roots, pictorial traditions, or other experiences of previous generations?70

He does not consider identity as fixed and constant, but rather as “viable”—capable of growing or developing—a quality that changes according to socio-cultural changes. He continues: “We—in our life and artistic creation at the same time—are continually forming our identity. I am thinking deliberately about this “viable” identity in my painting.”71 He believes such deliberation is necessary for societies such as Iran’s where the tension still exists between tradition and modernity, requiring the artist to critically rethink both.

Moslemian also elaborates his reference to the cultural past:

...There is no doubt that we possess an ancient cultural
background, and any Iranian artist should eventually refer to this background in accordance with his own point of view and knowledge. My reference to [it] includes the use of symbols, motifs, color, and myth.72

Having selected his visual vocabulary from Persian poetry, painting, and mythology, Moslemian then transforms these images through a modernistic approach in which the identity of their origin is nevertheless retained, and reuses them in a lyrical mode in the composition of his paintings. In one of his paintings, for example, the elements of moon and mirror are juxtaposed in abstract fashion, removed from their ancient relationship in which the moon is always seen reflected in the mirror. In other paintings, gazelles and cypress trees—familiar metaphors in Persian painting and poetry—are lyrically evoked (fig. 24).

The importance of pluralism and the parallel reflection of different viewpoints—ancient and new, concrete and abstract—can be considered a manifest speciality of contemporary art in general, and permeates even philosophy, science, and social life. Such pluralism, albeit differently perceived, continues to play a role in Moslemian’s recent paintings, which remain within the context of his own tradition. From its origin, neofigurative painting in general can be said to have been based on multiplicity of meaning and common human experience; it has more recently profited by drawing not only on mythology but also on
Fig. 28. Zia al-Din Emami, Mi’râj, 1986. Gouache and watercolor on paper, 60 x 40 cm. (After Ru’û-yi firishtagân, published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)

Fig. 29. Homayoun Salimi, Untitled, 1990. Mixed media on paper, 21 x 16 cm. Artist’s collection. (Photo: courtesy of the artist)


sciences such as the new psychology, an approach visible in the artist’s work (fig. 25).

Declaring, “My ideology is my style,” Moslemian adds,

So my tragic mind views my surrounding realities in disjoined condition. I have attempted to achieve my individual aesthetic structure in accordance with my own perception of the world. This structure should have some similarities with the pictorial tradition of my past, and should express contemporary existence.73

In contrast to the neotraditionalists practicing figurative art, a second group has dealt in abstraction. In many of their works the decorative quality manifest in Saqqâ-khâna art appears to have been eliminated; they rely instead on the abstract characteristics of Irano-Islamic art, favoring mystical and spiritual concepts—Eastern and Iranian mysticism and gnosticism—over social issues. Another genre, what might be termed
a neocalligraphic approach—involves the use of calligraphy as the sole compositional element.

Distinguished members of this group are Jafar Rouhbakhsh (1941–96), Homayoun Salimi (b. 1948), Zia al-Din Emami (b. 1922), Mohammad Ebrahim Jafari (b. 1940), and Mohammad Ehsai (b. 1939). Salimi, who gained his artistic reputation in the postrevolutionary period, can be considered representative of this group. Even though he is Western-educated and his art was cultivated in the West, it is also rooted in the Irano-Islamic past. In his case, this is the result of his interest in the artistic and cultural heritage of Iran, which—once he was at a distance from it—stimulated his unconscious towards it and resulted in its nostalgic representation in his works.

Salimi does not merely repeat traditional motifs and patterns but innovatively utilizes the geometric structure of Irano-Islamic art and architecture. Forms in his painting are not thematic; rather, they are independent entities, free of any narrative or symbolic meaning. The implication and structure of the picture are both created through abstraction, which results in pictorial metaphor and poetic feeling without reference to a literary text.

Salimi has expressed his admiration for such pioneer neotraditionalist artists as Charles Hossein Zenderoudi (fig. 27), whose paintings, which he saw when he was very young, impressed him even then. In Salimi’s own work, however, there is an obvious difference from *Saqqâkhâna* abstract works, particularly Zenderoudi’s, in the omission of decorative characteristics. Nevertheless, there are obvious similarities in
the two artists’ geometric compositional structure and employment of the stylized elements of Irano-Islamic art, as well as in their mutual benefit from abstract art. Even though there are no elements of calligraphy or religious folk art in Salimi’s painting as there were, for instance, in the work of Zenderoudi and Pilar, one cannot ignore Salimi’s constant use of Irano-Islamic motifs, including hexagonal and tetragonal forms that originally had a decorative function. Salimi, however, has employed those sources with more flexible, freer application of the brush (figs. 29, 32, 33).

At first interested in purely abstract art, Salimi started to utilize the geometric forms of motifs found in the details of Persian classical paintings and then began to structure his works on the basis of their formal organization, such as the differing sizes of their various spatial divisions (fig. 32). Stylized motifs and forms are simplified and enlarged to become a main element of the picture, rather than the ornamental or decorative detail of the original image (see fig. 29). As Salimi himself mentions, his use of the visual elements of Persian paintings—initially illumination and motifs within these paintings—was a bridge that later led him to exploit other elements of Persian art, including architectural form, structure, and decoration (figs. 33, 34), as well as the designs and colors of carpets, rugs, and kilims. At one stage in his career, mainly between 1985 and 1990, he based the structural frameworks of his works on squares and rectangles with, of course, some modifications to their strict geometrical shapes (fig. 33).

More conservative and committed to conventional styles such as Realism and Surrealism, or even to Persian classical painting, is the third group of artists: Aydin Aghdashloo (b. 1940), Ali Akbar Sadeghi (b. 1937),
Fig. 36. Shahla Habibi, *Niyāyish* (Praying), 1995. Mixed media, 60 x 100 cm. (After *Naqqāsh-i muʿāṣir-i Irān*, barguzida’ī az ʿāẓār-i sicwumūn nimmāyishgāb-i du-sālāna-i naqqāsh-i Irān, published with permission of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)

Fig. 37. Mohammad Ali Taraghijah, *Harmonious*, 1993. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 30 x 22 cm. Present location unknown. (Photo: courtesy of the artist)

Fig. 38. Parvaneh Etemadi, *Pūshish-i asb* (Horse Blanket), 1997. Collage and colored pencil on paper, 120 x 80 cm. Private collection, Tehran. (Photo: courtesy of the artist)
Shahla Habibi (b. 1945), Mohammad Ali Taraghi Jah (b. 1943), Parvaneh Etemadi (b. 1947), and Farah Ossouli (b. 1953) (figs 35–39). As has become clear, the neotraditionalists’ main intention has been to achieve, in both formal construction and content, a new framework for art that, although modern and familiar in its use of visual language, does not adhere to a specific style or school of modern European-American art, but instead creates unique forms by stylizing and reconceptualizing various contemporary artistic achievements. Furthermore, if a major preoccupation of neotraditionalists is the issue of artistic identity and the benefit to be gained from their traditional pictorial heritage, they have avoided direct and literal copying of this heritage. The approaches of the artists in this third group therefore seem not to fit comfortably with the definition of neotraditionalism we proffer. Nevertheless, because their work in various ways suggests the intentional mixture of traditional material and modern Western art, we feel justified in including their names in the neotraditionalist category.

Emphasis on the Iranian artistic heritage, even in its interaction with the contemporary art scene, continues into the new millennium. For instance, with regard to the Fifth Iranian Painting Biennial, held in 2000, we read:


It would seem that attending to the national, artistic, and social heritage is the only way to develop Iranian art. Even if we wished to proceed in global contemporary art movements, keeping a distinctive character that originates in the specific values and traits of Iranian art would be the only successful method; otherwise, in overall contemporary art, which is still governed by modernism, contemporary Iranian art would appear inferior.  

Neotraditionalism has recently appeared even in new media, including the works of Iranian conceptual artists who have recently been actively exhibiting. The use of Iranian mysticism and the Islamic/Shiite pictorial tradition was manifest in the first exhibition of conceptual art, held in the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in 2001 (fig. 40). Not only in these new guises but also in its principal forms, neotraditionalism lives on vigorously in present-day Iranian art.

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NOTES

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1. Considering the pluralist nature of the postmodern era, in Iranian society as in others, one cannot specify as dominant any single school or movement; although neotraditionalist art in the 1990s is discussed as an important discourse of this period, it does not constitute a school or even a coherent group of artists.


4. Prevalent in these state policies was promoting awareness of the contemporary artistic scene, mainly with reference to European-American art, and of “national” and “Iranian” identity.


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.


10. In addition, works such as those of Kamal al-Mulk (1847/8–1940) and his school, which had almost disappeared from the contemporary Iranian art scene after the ascendance of modernist art in the 1940s and 1950s, were again included in official exhibitions and promoted, mainly because of their naturalism. Consequently, Kamal al-Mulk’s works were published and a surprising revolutionary and anti-monarchical ethos even ascribed to his art and character.

11. Later named the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, this ministry in fact performed the same duties as the Pahlavi-era Ministry of Culture and Art.


14. Ibid.


16. Sâqqah-khâna was a movement characterized mainly by the works of such artists as Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, Faramarz Pilaram, Parviz Tanavoli, Massoud Arabshahi, Jazeh Tabatabai, Nasser Ovissi, and Sadegh Tabrizi. It first emerged at the Third Tehran Biennial in 1962 and was developed in the works of many artists, especially in the 1960s. The movement was defined as an attempt to establish a national school of art that synthesized modern and traditional approaches. The main feature of early works of the Sâqqah-khâna, in particular those of Zenderoudi, Pilaram, and Tanavoli, was the use of Persian literary elements presented in abstract form. For further study of this movement, see Hamid Keshmirihekan, “The Sâqqah-khâneh School in the 1960s,” Iranian Studies 38, 4 (Dec. 2005): 607–30.

17. Nikki Keddie, however, argues that “the Islamic state included many features of parliamentarism, nationalism, socialism, and a “Third Worldist” reaction against the West […] while at the same time retaining the Islamic identity that was still crucial to most Iranians.” (N. R. Keddie and E. Hooglund, The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic [New York, 1986], 11.) It was therefore this fundamental mixture of traditional and revolutionary ideas, rather than “fundamentalism,” that formed the essence of the Islamic Revolution.


20. The earlier Islamic universalist tendency—pan-Islamism echoed in such themes as export of the revolution and denunciation of Persian nationalism—had contributed to the Islamists’ vulnerability regarding patriotic values. Nevertheless, running a complex modern state and coming to terms with a wide range of domestic and foreign issues, especially the eight-year
war against Iraq, strengthened the regime’s other political tendency, its nationalism; the Islamic Republic increasingly adapted its universalist Islamic ideology to the national context.


22. After the war, wartime murals and posters on the untended walls of Iran were fading away, while others were whitewashed outright.

23. The same had already been attempted by the artists of the previous generation, especially during the 1960s by the aforementioned Naqqash movement (see n. 16, above). About a decade into the postrevolutionary period, the effort was revived, but in this new synthesis more attention was directed to meaning and content in works of art than to their form.

24. In less than fifteen years after 1979, the Iranian population almost doubled, reaching nearly sixty million.


26. As the most active artistic center of postrevolutionary art, the museum has been at the heart of contemporary Iranian art promotion since 1991.

27. The word ngâgvari came into use because “miniature” was considered a Western term that could not express the unique character of Persian painting.

28. Other biennials and triennials included works created by graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, cartoonists, ceramicists, and sculptors.

29. Among these, the major ones are the Reza Abbasi Museum and the Niavaran and Azadi Cultural Centers.

30. None of these exhibitions was sufficiently wide-ranging to cover much of contemporary Iranian art, and none was organized according to set principles and rules. Perhaps the most comprehensive was the exhibition “Views of Contemporary Iranian Art,” held in 1990 at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.


32. After the Fifth Tehran Biennial in 1966, several national exhibitions were held in prerevolutionary Iran, but none of them except the 1976 “National Art Exhibition” had the organization and planned quality of Tehran Biennials.


34. First Iranian Painters’ Biannual, 1.

35. Except for Shi’ite pictorial content, the use of motifs and architectural forms has parallels in the art of many other Islamic countries. In the works produced by this generation of Iranian artists, one can see disorientation caused by the transitional situation in the postrevolutionary era.


37. The use of such motifs continued in the two subsequent biennials, in 1993 and 1995.

38. These neotraditionalist artists were followers of the Naqqâkhâna movement in the period before the Revolution. They were able to continue their artistic activity in the postrevolutionary era, however, due to the close relationship of their work with classical calligraphy and to its meaningful content, which now became mainly religious or political.

39. It should be noted that there was no standard definition of literature regarding the term “cultural identity” in this period; rather it was largely a rhetorical device that referred mainly to Irano-Islamic history.


41. The First Biennial consisted of two sections: the main part was entitled “The Free Subject,” and the second part “In Advocacy of the Palestinian Islamic Revolution.” By this, M. Mohajer later (1998) noted in “Avval nimâyishgâhi-du-sâlânâi-naqqâshân-i Írân,” 120, the biennial secretariat wished to emphasize its allegiance to the revolutionary aspirations and problems of the Islamic world.


43. Ibid.


45. The judging panel announced its criteria for selecting works thus: “Having considered the valuable subjects (Islamic Revolution; spiritual thought; mystical subjects; social, political, and cultural issues)...the formal aspect of works...should be inspired by the [Irano-Islamic] cultural and artistic heritage, with an innovative and creative approach”; see anonymous, “Dusvumnimâyishgâhi-du-sâlânâi-naqqâshân-i Írân,” Mâh-nâmeh-i hunarh-yi ta’assum 4 (1372/1993): 1.

46. Achieving a national school of art was a great desire of Iranian art custodians and artists in the period before the Revolution, especially in the early 1960s; the Naqqâkhâna movement, in fact, resulted from that desire.


49. The first Iranian arts and crafts comprehensive exhibition, called “A Festival of Iranian Art,” was held from Sept. 12 to Oct. 13, 1991, in Düsseldorf, Germany. Launched to introduce Iranian art in the West, this exhibition comprised 150 works, most of them by traditional Iranian artists and craftsmen, including miniature paintings, carpets, calligraphy, Qahvâkhâna (coffeehouse) paintings, ceramics, tiles, etc.


51. During the biennials, a number of foreign artists and art critics (most of them from France or Russia) were invited by the Museum of Contemporary Art, although their presence played no role in the biennial judging process.

52. It should be noted that the Iranian Caricature Biennial had already (in 1991) become an international exhibition that included works both executed and selected by Iranians and foreigners.

53. These suggestions came primarily from experienced artists of the prerevolutionary generation or from Western-educated artists and art critics. Examples of such opinions appear in the articles or interviews published in the issues of Naqsh devoted to the Second Biennial exhibition and conferences (see note 47, above).

54. A. Koshroo, “Sukhanrân-i-aghâ-yi muhandis Abu’l Qâsim
55. The cultural atmosphere of Iranian artistic gatherings and the art literature of the 1950s and, especially, the 1960s, e.g., the introductions to the Tehran Biennial catalogues, generally focused on two main topics: contemporary artistic achievements in accordance with international art movements, and the formation of national or Iranian art.


60. The year that Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi shah, was dethroned and exiled and his son Mohammad Reza came to power. In 1941, during the Second World War, British military forces occupied Iran, leaving shortly after Iran officially joined the Allies in the war against Germany in 1943. During these years Iran was essentially governed by Allied troops, which brought about more contact between Iranians and the West and a period of greater self-expression in Iranian literature, art, and the press.


62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., 67–68.


66. Sayyid Mohammad Khatami, previously Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, who had a cultural bent and was famous for his high regard for art, was elected president in 1997. Among others, the Iranian artistic community, who had favorable memories of Khatami’s policies as minister, benefited from an unprecedented relaxation of the rules.

67. In addition to the Barg Gallery and other major official galleries affiliated with the Tehran Municipality, more than sixty galleries in Tehran and many more in other Iranian provinces are now active.

68. One of the successful group exhibitions, “The Epic of Kings (Shāhnāma) and the Contemporary Iranian Artist,” was held in 1990 to honor the thousandth anniversary of Firdawsi’s Shāhnāma. Participating artists included Nosratollah Moslemian (see fig. 19), Mir Ya’qoub Ammanepich, Sara Ivani, Massoumeh Mozaffari, Soghra Zareh, Abbas Saranj, Touran Ghadiri, Hossein Gharagozlou, Parastou Frouhar, Arya Eghbal, Amin Nourani, Fatemeh Etemadi, and Davood Mozaffari.


74. Although Rouhbakhsh began his professional career in the years before the Revolution, his most fruitful artistic period was in the postrevolutionary years, especially the 1990s, during which he was an active and influential artist. His paintings during the late 1980s and 1990s are closely related to early Sāqqār khāna works (cf. figs. 26 and 27).

75. Salimi obtained his doctorate in aesthetics and the science of art from the Sorbonne, Paris, in 1990.


77. For better understanding this argument, cf. figs. 27 and 32.


Although most of Iran is denuded of forests, this was not always the case. Many parts of the country that now are deserts or treeless plains were forested during the first millennium BCE. Even now, some areas are still reasonably well endowed with forests that traditionally have given rise to local woodworking crafts. The use and working of wood required craftsmanship that over time developed into a variety of specialized arts. The artisans, the tools they used, and the motifs and forms that they developed and applied were not peculiar to Iran alone. In fact, the motifs were not restricted solely to woodworking but were also used in other ornamental building crafts such as plasterwork (gachkārī), tilemaking (kāshī-kārī), mirrorwork (ā’ina-sāzī), and stone masonry (hajjārī). Much of the woodcarving and carpentry of Iran therefore is very much like such work in India, Central Asia, Turkey, and the countries of the Arab Middle East, and consequently the tools used were in most cases also similar if not identical. This is what one would expect in areas that have a shared history and culture dating from pre-Islamic times, in which woodcarvings, murals, and wooden ceilings were normal architectural decoration. The similarity in design and motifs of woodcarvings and carpentry objects during the Islamic period was fostered by the common cultural and religious context of Islam, which begat a large range of geometric ornamental patterns, a development facilitated by the progress made in mathematics in the Abbasid Empire. Finally, the working methods and forms of organization of the various woodcrafts were also very much more alike than not. It is against this background that, in the first part of this study, I discuss what is known about the woodworking craftsmen of Iran, and in the second part I review some of their major products. Before doing so I shall briefly consider the kinds of trees that were used as the raw material for construction and woodworking.

Trees that supplied timber were generally large, although in many places they were cut at increasingly younger ages due to a timber deficit. Hans Wulff has collected a list of species preferred for various uses by carpenters around 1950. Most of these are indigenous, but certain kinds of expensive hardwoods have always been imported, because they never grew in Iran. Under the Achaemenids, for example, rosewood (Pterocarpus and Dalbergia) was imported and made into chairs and bedsteads; other imported woods included ebony and sandalwood. In the tenth century, the Hudūd al-‘alam recorded the importation of teak (sāj), sandalwood, ebony (ībanūs) and a variety of other woods, some of which, such as camphor and Brazil wood, were aromatic. In the same period, al-İstakhri noted the sale of cypress timber from Afghanistan throughout Khorasan. Timber also came from Pushang, where juniper (‘ar‘ar) trees grew, as well as from Samarqand, while Khwarizm mainly imported East European timber. Teakwood, used in the construction and decoration of the homes of the wealthy in Baghdad, was imported from India. This expensive wood was also used to build residences for rich merchants in Siraf; one such multi-storied house allegedly cost 30,000 dinars, a fortune in those days. Erica wood (khalanj) and boxwood (shamshād) trees from Mazandaran supplied the raw material for furniture and utensils. Samarqand supplied other towns not only with timber but also woodworking: the maqsūra (screened area), minbar, and mihrab of the Great Mosque in Bukhara, for example, were ordered around 1000 from Samarqand, where they had been carved and decorated.

Timber was so expensive that old houses were often taken apart in order to reuse their beams and planks. Ahmad b. Nuh b. Ahmad b. Isma’il Sam’ani (tenth century) brought to Bukhara the timber from a palace his grandfather had built at Varakhshā “and used it to build a mansion which he made at the gate of the fortress of
Bukhara.” Around 1100, the governor Tughril Beg bought the mosque of the village of Sharq, destroyed it, and “brought its wood to Bukhara and built a religious school….” The doors of the Friday mosque of Bukhara had been taken from villas of rich people living outside the city who had refused to become Muslims. In eleventh-century Fars, Abu Ghanim, son of ‘Amid al-Dawla, similarly reused timber from the house that the late ‘Azud al-Dawla had built in Shiraz to construct the fortress of Pahan-Diz. This kind of recycling activity continued until modern times, for even when peasants moved they took the doors, rafters, and windows of their old homes with them. During the medieval period various kinds of wood were supplied from Georgia and Tabaristan, in particular the hard khalanj wood. Timber from Taraq (?) and Jurjaniya near Isfahan also was used. In the early fourteenth century, walnut boards (takhta-i girdigân) were ordered for one of the royal buildings in Azerbaijan, while timber from Tabaristan was sold in the bazaar of Isfahan. In the fifteenth century and earlier, timber for the construction of houses of the rich in Herat came from Badqeys (Badgish). The wood used was from the juniper tree (avirs), which yielded a light but hard wood, and which the peasants of that region found it to their advantage to plant. The shoots of the arghavân, or Judas tree (Cercis soliquastrum), were sold at the head of the Bazar-i Malik in Herat and were used for basketry and the making of ladles and the like. Although in some regions there were important local stands of wood, the main forested region of Iran was (and remains) the Caspian provinces. However, due to the inaccessibility of those provinces, with their lack of roads and swampy terrain, their timber resources were hardly used, apart from providing the materials to construct housing for area inhabitants and to make woodcarving and carpentry products. It is not clear whether Shah Safi I (r. 1629–42) had timber transported from these parts to Shamakhi to build ships; more likely, given the proximity, he procured it from Georgia, northwestern Azerbaijan, or the Talish region. A century later, in 1736, Nadir Shah indeed had timber transported all the way from Mazandaran to Bushire to build his Persian Gulf fleet—a huge and very expensive undertaking and also an exception to the rule. In the nineteenth century, Shushtar cornel wood (kunør) was used to make doors, sashes (‘urus) windows, middle parts (miyâna) of water pipes, and the like. The plane tree (chinâr) more than any other was used for doors, lintels, struts, and sometimes roofing. The wood of the tâghun or tukhm (Celtis caucasia) was considered valuable for household furniture, but mainly for spoons and bowls. The wood of the walnut tree (jâwz) was highly valued for the manufacture of the commonly used large wooden dishes and platters. According to Ernst Hölztzer, writing around 1890, these kinds of wood [walnut and plane] are most suitable for that purpose [i.e., the making of furniture]. Plane wood is very solid and long lasting. They [carpenters] therefore prefer to use it for pieces that are exposed to the elements, such as doors, windows, and pillars. Old plane trees generally display beautiful grain. Because of its low cost, poplar is commonly used. Plane and walnut wood is becoming rarer and more expensive, because every year these have to be taken from more remote places, and because the newly planted trees are cut when very young.

Other types of popular wood, such as oak, walnut, and boxwood, were exported in relatively large quantities from the Caspian provinces after 1870. Who crafted the wood just discussed? The category of woodworkers has always extended beyond carpenters: the texts mention woodcutters, sawyers, carpenters, turners, box makers, several kinds of woodcarvers, makers of a variety of specialized items, and inlayers. Woodcutters—those who cut the trees that provided the raw material for all woodworking needs—were not the same as firewood cutters (hayzum-kash), who generally were interested only in brushwood. Woodcutters transported the timber to rural or urban sales points in various ways. Those who engaged in this activity in the forested Caspian regions were not professionals but rather peasants or carpenters from nearby towns, who did this as a sideline to make additional money.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Afzal al-Mulk, a government official, observed the situation in Sari: Everything is expensive here. For example, they buy forest timber from these parts, and in addition they pay the cost of transportation of a ten-day journey (manzil) to have it
reach Tehran, where carpenters make doorsills, tables, and other items from it. The carpenters here cut the timber free of charge in the forest and take it to Sari and make planks from it that they turn into very bad doors and tables, because they make them from uncut (ghayr majzum), warped, and crooked planks. In this condition they sell them for more than in Tehran, although the Tehrani carpenters transport the boards and planks over a ten-day journey. They also pay a large amount for the wood and boards and make really good, elegant, and solid doors and sell them cheap.

Elsewhere in Iran, too, carpenters themselves usually felled and sawed the trees in addition to working the resulting planks and boards (fig. 1). This held true in particular for urban locales: not only was timber brought in from the rural areas, but trees in the immediate vicinity were cut by local carpenters. Until recently Persian towns did not look like heaps of brick and concrete; as late as the 1930s, a visitor’s first impression of a Persian town was of a large conglomeration of trees interspersed with houses. Trees in and near towns and villages were privately owned; for example, when carpenters in Shamiran wanted to cut more trees than they had bought, the owner called the police. Because tree felling was not a true profession, the manner in which timber was obtained was rather wasteful. According to Höltzer, writing about 1890 in Isfahan, “Sawmills do not exist, nor do woodcutters who know how to fell trees. The carpenters do the sawing and felling themselves, but they do not cleave [the wood]. For that job there are wood splitters, who rather than cut the wood with their heavy axes, tear it forcibly and split it apart using an inserted wedge, in a way that is a shame to see.” The large Caspian forests were mainly government property, but they were difficult to penetrate, so that their timber resources were hardly exploited until recent times. It was only after 1870 that foreign concessionaires started to mine them for their oak, walnut, and boxwood. As has occurred elsewhere in the world, bad management...
and easier access to these forests have led to their degradation and reduction in size.\

Sawyers

As mentioned above, the sawyers (arrih-kash, chūb-bur) were also woodcutters and carpenters. In teams of two, they came with their equipment—sawyer’s jack, two-handed saw, adze, and marking tools—to wherever their services were needed and cut the client’s timber on the spot into beams, planks, or boards. If required, they then proceeded to make whatever the client wanted. The French mission at Shush, for example, had a group of sawyers come to cut planks; the sawyers then transformed themselves into carpenters and wheelwrights and made the oxcarts to transport archaeological finds from Shush to the coast for shipment to the Louvre in Paris.\

Nowadays, of course, planks, beams, and boards are produced in sawmills that deliver their products via wholesale and retail dealers to the woodworkers (fig. 2). The first sawmills were introduced into Iran at the beginning of the twentieth century; their number grew in the 1930s and thereafter. By 1920 there were already three specialized timber supply shops in Tehran that sold planks, boards, and similar items. These shops, known as chūb-sāz, each employed a master, an apprentice, and a boy. Special types of wood were and are still imported.

Carpenters

The term “carpenter” (najjār, durūdgār) denotes a range of woodworking activities. As mentioned above, the carpenter also oftentimes was woodcutter and sawyer as well, in which case he usually made rather mediocre and coarse products. This certainly held true for village carpenters, who at harvest time received a fixed

Fig. 2. Lumberyard at Tabriz. (After Thomas Gaskell Allen, Jr. and William Lewis Sachtleben, “Across Asia on a Bicycle,” The Century: A Popular Quarterly 48, 3 [July 1894]: 393)
fee, known as najjārī, for any needed repairs performed throughout the year.  In addition, there were also village woodcarvers or nomadic gypsies who made bowls, pitchers, combs, canes, pipes, ladles, and spoons.

In urban areas in particular, carpenters could be called upon to make builders’ joinery, furniture, wooden locks, frames for weavers’ looms, agricultural implements, and, in modern times, carriages for motorized or animal-drawn vehicles. The more adept were at once carpenters, joiners, and cabinetmakers. Different craftsmen sometimes performed these functions, however, since making joinery and furniture, for example, required more skills than being a construction carpenter. Höltzer observed that the craft of carpenter and joiner

is a many-sided and flexible one, for these people here are very skilled and make both the coarsest and the finest [items]. Today they make a broom, tomorrow the scaffold of a very large porch. The next day you see them working at windows and doors or at the difficult and delicate [task of] inserting glass pieces and arabesques.

If a Persian householder needed a table or bench, the carpenter took his workbench and tools with him and crafted the item at the client’s house, right under his eyes, rather than in a shop. The carpenter’s job included making planks, boards, and beams. To measure where to cut, he used a string and chalk or red oxide. His main tools were saw (arrih), plane (randa), chisel (muqar), heavy wooden chisel (iskana), hammer (chakūš), and adze (tīsha), which is why those involved in the construction business also were referred to in the sixteenth century as ahl-i tīsha.

Wulff’s detailed description of carpenters’ practice in the mid-twentieth century also reflects how they worked in earlier times. However, there is older documentation that sheds new and interesting light on the carpenter’s working methods. Raphaël du Mans, who lived in Iran from 1647 until his death in 1696, recorded that the work of the carpenters of Safavid Iran was

...not that bad, in particular their large windows in compartments, such as windowpanes, window panels, and window frames. The most beautiful wood that they use is plane wood or tchenar [sic: chinär], which is hard and marbled; walnut, oak, service-tree [Sorbus domestica] and pear wood are hardly used. They all work seated, without a workbench, without a clamp to hold the plank that they want to plane, and without a peg to hold it when they plane it. They hold it with their legs and hands. [...] With the right hand they push the plane, which is not open in the middle like ours, but on the side, like the rabbot-plane in France. Their handsaw is better than ours; it is made like our pilot handsaw. They do not have the adze here, [nor] the sawhorse, etc., but they use a tool called tīche [sic: tīsha], which is made almost like a small adze, the head of which they use as a hammer.

When engaged in joinery (ittisāl), the Persian craftsman performed this task differently from his European counterpart. According to Justin Perkins, “Joiners, in Persia, always sit when they work, like tailors in America, holding their work in the lap; and in place of a workbench and vise, they support their boards and mouldings, while planing and jointing them, with their feet.” S. G. W. Benjamin, the first US ambassador to Iran, noted that the Persian carpenter “draws the saw towards him in cutting wood.”

Of particular interest is the 1842 report of the Scottish engineer James Robertson, who had been involved in various mining and factory schemes in Iran in the 1830s:

The art of carpentry, as understood in this country [Great Britain], can scarcely be said to exist in Persia, the greatest efforts in this department being therefore confined to the construction of flat roofs of inconsiderable span; and this might be expected, from the circumstance of timber being there exceedingly scarce.

For forming roofs a species of poplar is generally employed, but for other purposes, oak, chestnut, plane, and the other kinds of hardwood are used. The hard timber, as sold in the bazaars, is all of small scantling, as it has been brought from the forest on the backs of mules or camels.

In accordance with the invariable custom of all Eastern artisans, the carpenter sits upon the ground while at work. Instead of a bench, a strong stake is driven down before him, leaving about 10 inches above the ground, and upon this he rests his work, and keeps it steady with his feet. The facility with which the work is executed, in such a disadvantageous position, has always been a subject of surprise to European workmen. In the royal arsenals, however, English tools are used, and a better system of working has been introduced, under the superintendence of British officers; but in the native workshops, the workmen are still to be seen squatted on the ground; and, when it is considered that they have been accustomed to this position from their infancy, and that their tools are of such a nature as to act with efficiency when used in this way, it is scarcely to be expected that any alteration in their mode of working could be effected by mere example.
One of the principal tools is the frame-saw. This is somewhat like the English pit-saw, but less in size, and it is used by drawing backward and forward; the timber being supported at one end. In using the hand-saw, the board to be cut up is placed against the stake already noticed, and kept steady with the foot; and as the teeth point backward towards the handle, the weight of the body assists in giving effect to the instrument. These saws are thin and light, as they have not to resist a thrust like ours. The adze is a most useful tool, and I have noticed English workmen in Persia using it in preference to the axe or paring-chisel for light work.

The planes used, are depicted in the annexed figures. As the plane-irons have no covers, the planes are used across the grain of the wood.

The hammer is represented on the margin. The nail, instead of a head, has part of the thick end beat out thin, and this is turned over with the hammer as the nail is driven down. The bow and drill is a good instrument, and is used as a brad-awl, gimblet, and brace-and-bit.

To this list many smaller tools might be added. Those represented, are drawn on a scale of one inch to the foot.48 Robertson, who was a careful observer and a man knowledgeable about woodworking, clearly recognized the advantage of some of the Persian carpenters’ tools (fig. 3) over those of the Europeans, and the effectiveness, given their circumstances, of Persian carpenters’ different working methods.

Nevertheless, in general, Europeans did not think much of the expertise of Persian cabinetmakers, viewing their work as shoddy and coarse. In the 1670s, Chardin opined, “The Persians have but indifferent Carpenters; the Reason of it is, because, of the little Wood there is in Persia, and of the little Timber they commonly use in Building.”49 Della Valle related that when, in June 1618, he wanted to obtain a litter for his wife Maani, so that she might travel more comfortably than on the stretchers women customarily used for travel by camel, he was unable to find any carpenter who knew how to make one. He therefore was obliged “to make a paper model of a litter, and to attend diligently to the work itself [being done], as much the making of the wooden frame with its iron fittings, as later of the furnishings. It was eventually made, and it turned out to be very commodious and pretty.”50 In the mid-seventeenth century, and undoubtedly also in earlier times, the royal court boasted among its many workshops a carpentry studio (najjār-khana), which was under the najjār-bāshī, the chief carpenter. During the reign of ʿAbbas II (r. 1642–66) this function was occupied, exceptionally, by a European-trained Armenian, Jacob Jan, who had also introduced an Armenian printing press to Persia. The position of najjār-bāshī continued to exist under ʿAbbas II’s successors.51 However, in contrast to the wood-related guilds of Ottoman Istanbul, which were prominent participants in the annual parade, showing off their products and tools to the royal court and the public alike, the guilds of Safavid Iran did not play such a public role.52

At the end of the eighteenth century, G. A. Olivier observed that Persian furniture “is neither so beautiful nor so complex as in Europe; nevertheless you see quite nice pieces of joinery, cabinet-work, and marquetry.”53 Although Persians too were aware of the qualitative difference between European and Persian carpentry, they were not yet interested in acquiring European
skills. For example, Robert Mignan noted the presence in Tabriz of an Italian carpenter whose main occupation, despite his craft, was producing excellent wine. The reason may have been that there was as yet no great demand for chairs, tables, and other pieces of European furniture. It was nevertheless the realization of qualitative difference and need for modernization that made Mirza Taqi Amir Kabir (prime minister of Nasir al-Din Shah [r. 1848–96]) decide to send Haydar ‘Ali to Paris in 1852 to be trained as a carpenter and turner (najjār va kharrāt). On his return to Iran about a decade later, Haydar ‘Ali was appointed chief carpenter of the royal court (najjār-bāšī). Like other students who had returned from their studies abroad, he founded a workshop (kārkhanā-i najjār), which was built next to the newly opened Tehran Military High School, or Dār al-Funūn.

The results of this transfer of technology were judged in various ways. Persians and some Europeans lauded Haydar ‘Ali’s work and that of his trainees. An Austrian observer opined, the Persians undeniably possess great manual dexterity and a notably pronounced talent for imitation. A certain Haidar Ali learned the art of cabinetmaking some years ago in Paris and became court carpenter after his return. Many of his apprentices, since he taught them his craft, have set up their [own] shops. After the example of European pieces, or even drawings, they now make sofas, chairs, desks, sideboards, etc., that, notwithstanding the defects that these pieces of furniture display, arouse admiration.

These were carpenters who had received training in new techniques and tools, however; carpenters who had not continued to work in the traditional way. With the latter group, Benjamin was not at all impressed: To-day the average Persian artisan has neither rule, compass, nor spirit-level. He is commonly ignorant of the fact that the diameter is the third of the circumference; his gimlets and augurs are prods turned by a bow-string; he has no hatchet, but only an adze, and no carpenter’s bench. If he desires to plane a board he puts it on the ground; and if he would saw a block of wood he squats on the ground and holds it between his toes, drawing the saw towards him. Wood is scarce, and with such tools hard to work. If pillars are to be constructed, the trunks of poplars are raised, simply stripped of their branches and bark. They may be crooked, but that matters not; the master workman tells his subordinate to shape the post into an elegant pillar with gatch [plaster]. Depending only on his eye and the skill of his hand, this simple artisan moulds the plaster round the trunk into a fluted shaft and crowns it with a graceful capital and cornice, showing a lively inventive fancy.

This may be the reason that some European craftsmen settled in Tehran to cater to the needs of the Persian elite and the European community. For example, a certain Kriyanov, a Russian, had a cabinetmaker’s shop near the Park-i Dawlati in Tehran in the mid-1880s.

Contrariwise, Höltzer and C. J. Wills, both living in Isfahan, had a rather favorable opinion of Persian carpentry. Höltzer wrote, “When I came to Iran seventeen years ago, they could not make a chair, a table, or a similar item; now these same people turn out already quite well-made inlaid furniture of walnut or plane wood.” This did not mean, however, that Höltzer was uncritical of the carpenters’ working methods. He noted, A serious enemy of the carpenter is the heat. Everything splits that has not been lying in an aerated and shady place to dry slowly. Woe to the furniture that is imported here from Europe. You all of a sudden hear a loud noise and find, when assessing the damage, that the piece of furniture that has been used with much care has a large crack. My own various trials show that poplar wood needs about four to five years [of drying]. An American method is said to use an artificial technique.

It may also be surmised that distance from Tehran affected quality: the farther away a locale from Tehran, the less likely it was to have craftsmen who had been exposed to, let alone trained in the use of, European methods and tools. In one of his consular reports, Percy Sykes commented, A capable Indian carpenter would make a good living and would probably find openings for other Indian artisans. It is extremely difficult to get even the roughest table or box constructed, while chairs are quite beyond the Kerman carpenter. To take another trade, every khan and merchant possesses a watch, but there is not a single competent or even fairly competent individual to mend watches or clocks.

The same seems to have been the case in Yazd, the largest town near Kerman. The British missionary Napier Malcolm observed, Tables in Yazd are made in the roughest fashion, but the legs are nicely turned, the Yazd carpenters being greatly inferior to the turners, who are entirely distinct from them, and who produce very good work with the simplest class.
of hand-lathe worked with a bow. The carpenter, on the other hand, is incapable of putting up a shelf straight. He never dovetails, and he disguises the inaccuracy of his joints with plentiful deposits of clay.63

That there were no good carpenters in Sari, according to Rukn al-Dawla, writing around 1906, seems to contradict the idea that distance from Tehran was the determining factor for shoddy work. Sari had much exposure to Russians and regular commercial contact with Tehran, apparently without positive impact on the working methods of the carpenters there.64

Data on the number of carpenters and other woodworkers are scarce. In Isfahan around 1890, there were 122 carpenters and joiners and eighty turners. In nearby Julfa there were ten carpenters and joiners, who had fifty assistants.65 Twenty years earlier the number of carpenters in Isfahan had been at least twice as high; according to Mirza Husayn Khan Tahvildar, writing in 1877,

The guild of carpenters (najjär): in comparison with former times they have declined to half [their number]. Because it is of simple construction [sarham-bandí] and easy to make [sahilat-i amr], non-European (nî-firangî) work is now commonly used. Some of the fine work (nâzuk-kârî) does not exist any more. The old mosaic work (murassa-sâz) is still very solid and in good condition and can be found in sashed (‘urusi) and normal windows. The framework (ustukhvân-bandî) that they make today does not differ much from the old work. They have adopted the modern European style for color and lacquer and grace of geometrical form. Nowadays [the importance of] their craft has increased.66

There were probably carpenters in every town, forming one of the larger groups of craftsmen. In the 1820s Erevan (in eastern Armenia) had five Muslim and seventy-three Armenian carpenters, of whom sixty-four were immigrants. In the mahalls (districts) of Erevan there were one Muslim and 234 Armenian carpenters, of whom 181 were immigrants.67 In nearby Tabriz, some 252 carpenters were recorded in 1867.68 Around 1870 there were nineteen carpenters in Qum.69 In 1883, there were thirty-six carpenters in Maydan-i Gusfand, one of the seven quarters of Qazvin, where the total number of carpenters was clearly higher.70 In Tehran in 1886, eighty-six master carpenters employed 415 apprentices (shâgird), and the total number of workers was 498.71 However, not every carpenter was a cabinetmaker (mubl-sâz). Ayn al-Saltana recorded in his diary in 1898, “Previously the making of pieced curtains (parda-dûzi) and cabinetmaking (mubl-sâz) was limited to one young Armenian; now more than twenty shops have opened.”72 By 1920, Tehran had 413 master carpenters, who employed 424 apprentices and 275 errand boys (pâdû), the increase in numbers due to the growth of the capital.73 At that time there were 110 master carpenters in Isfahan as well as thirteen so-called European-style carpenters or cabinet-makers (najjûr-i firangî-sâz).74 Like other trades and crafts, the carpentry business was usually a family affair, where sons followed in the footsteps of their fathers. In Ardakan, for example, H. G. Migeod, quoting the unpublished notebooks of F. Stolze, observed that a number of carpenters had been engaged in this craft for at least three generations (fig. 4).75

Turners

For specialized components of the items he made, the carpenter turned to other craftsmen, such as the woodcarver and the turner (kharrû), whose craft had existed from before the reign of Darius (522–486 BCE). The first written appreciation of the turner’s craft, however, is from Chardin in the 1670s:

The Turner’s Trade is one which the Persians understand very well. They have no Frame for Turning, as we have; their way consists only in a Trendle, to which they fasten whatever they intend to Turn, and a Thong that goes twice round the Trendle, and which a Boy holds with both Hands, pulling now one end of it, then another end, turning the Piece about. But when they have but small Pieces to Turn, the Workman needs no help, for with one Hand he stirs the Axis with a Bow, and with the other Hand he holds the piece of Wood. They use no Wimbles as we do, but they use Gimblets of several Sizes, which are instead of them, and which they turn with the same Instrument as they do Wood; ‘tis a piece of Iron flat and sharp at the End, shaped like a Rib, that it may cut the better, hafted in a round Handle filled with lead to make it weighty, about which they put a Strop that goes quite round it. They hold fast the Gimblet with the left Hand, on the piece of Wood they intend to bore, and turn it with the Right Hand. That is their mechaniack way of Turning and Boring. [...] They make Children’s Cradles extraordinarily well. The Persian Turners, are unskill’d in the turning of an Oval; ‘tis a Figure, the working whereof they are utterly unacquainted with.76

The turners, according to Du Mans, used the bow as in Spain (fig. 5), but not the lathe (marche à pied) as
in France; he also confirmed that they did not know how to turn ovals, nor did they have the screw, nor could they achieve equilateral, rose-shaped, or wicker-worked figures. Du Mans further noted,

They cover columns very well with lacquer that resembles Chinese varnish by moving their wooden piece rapidly and without interruption over the poppets by means of the bow, while holding lacquer or Spanish wax above it; it becomes hot, and while turning it gets covered unequally; then, with a piece of porous palm tree they spread it out all hot as it is, and then, to give it the shine that it displays, they polish it with a bit of oil on a piece of skin.77

There also was a chief turner (kharrāt-bāšti) at the court of the Safavids.78 According to Hölzter,

Everything in woodwork that needs to be round goes to the turner. The carpenters have no clue how to do that, or they feel awkward doing so, because the turning is done with hand and feet. The turning contraption is the same everywhere; it consists of a small rectangular frame as horizontal foundation and a spindle. On this frame two movable chocks have been fixed with iron pins, so that everything has to be turned between these pins. The turner, who sits in front of his contraption, centers the designated piece of work using his eye, drills it deeply, and clamps it between the pins. Then he takes his fiddle bow, usually too long, which consists of a 1 or 2 cm wide piece of leather and a crooked piece of ash; he turns the leather, which can be held fast and loosened from the bow, one time around the work piece. In this way he makes it turn round as he likes, to and fro; only he must not forget to keep the belt tight, which is not too difficult, because he has both hands available for that. With the toes of his right foot, the other leg crooked as support, or also with both feet, the master holds the chisel. This is either hollow or pointed and must have a short point. In this manner are achieved beautiful coarse pieces, and fine ones whereby the work is not fast and swift, nor very precisely performed. Once I had one of the most expert turners take on the task of making some skittle balls, and both of us had a difficult time making them in this way both round and of equal size.79

Tahvidar, when describing the turners’ guild (kharrāt), wrote: “Apart from the middle part of the water pipe, which is better made in particular in Rasht, turners’ wares are better made in Isfahan than in the rest of the country. Most of the Isfahani turners are now working in Tehran.”80 There were fewer turners than carpenters in the towns. Erevan had only four Muslim turners and no sawyers and filers.81 In 1883, there were eight turners in Maydan-i Gusfand, one of the seven quarters of Qazvin.82 In Qum there were seven turners around 1870 and fifteen by 1886.83 In 1920 or thereabouts, there were fifteen master turners in
Isfahan, and twenty-four in Tehran; the Tehran masters employed nine apprentices and eleven boys. The turner, in addition to making the legs of tables and chairs, made anything that had to be round or curved, including “such articles as penholders and potato mashers.” A turner would also make wooden utensils (lades, bowls, pitchers, cradles, spinning wheels, etc.) both for the population of the town where he resided and for the villages in its hinterland. In Kirmanshah, many of these products were made by a group of wandering gypsies who were locally referred to as kharrāt (turner), although their products were allegedly not as good as those made in Kurdistan.

Carvers

The branch of woodworkers engaged in carving included a variety of craftsmen, of whom the embossers (munabbat-kār) were probably the most important. The products they made ranged from dervish bowls (kashkul), chests (sanduq), and frames for chess or draught boards (takhta-i shatranj and takhta-i nard) to wooden spoons (qāšuq), printing-blocks (qālib), Qur’an stands, and lattice panels (girih) on doors and windows (fig. 6). Most of these crafts were both rural and urban, the major exception being the spoon carvers, who were probably all rural. Woodcarving likely grew out of the making of wooden bowls and figurines: wooden implements have been found in the Pazyryk tombs as well as in the so-called Timber Grave culture of the Bronze Age, on the shore of the Caspian Sea. In the tenth century, Amul produced wooden implements such as ladles, combs, plow handles, scales, bowls, platters, deep plates, and the like. In the same period, the forests of Tabaristan supplied wood from which vessels and platters were made in towns such as Qum and Rayy. During the Ilkhanid period, Rayy remained the main center for furniture production, for which wood from Tabaristan (including highly prized khalanj wood) and from the Isfahan region was used.

The craft of the qāšuq-tarāsh, or wooden spoon carver, also existed in Safavid times. In the nineteenth century and earlier, ornamental sharbāt spoons were one of the specialties of village woodcarvers. Carved with a common knife, these spoons were thin and fragile with long, broad handles ornamented in a variety of fine network patterns by means of small files. According to R. B. Binning, “the only woods used for these spoons are the goolabee (pear) and shimshad (box[wood]).”

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Fig. 5. Persian hammer, bow, and drill. (After Robertson, “Mechanical Arts of Persia,” 52)
Fig. 6. (a) Much-used carpentry pattern; (b) typical carpentry pattern, Golestan Palace, Tehran; (c) common carpentry pattern. (After Javād Shafā‘ī, Hunār-i gīsh-sāz dar mi‘mārī va durūdgārī [Tehran, 1356/1977], 32, 39, 43)
The same village woodcarvers also made carved wooden boxes (ja’ba), which were as beautifully executed as the spoons. Wills mentions only the use of pear wood for both spoons and boxes.95

The best-known production center, probably already recognized in medieval times for its woodwork, was that of Abadeh, situated north of Shiraz on the road to Isfahan.96 In the mid-nineteenth century, an anonymous source recorded that “Abadeye Sournierree, n. of Shiraz... is celebrated for the manufacture of wooden spoons.”97 In 1878, Migeod, citing Stolze, reported that in Abadeh several families of spoon carvers (qäshuq-tarâsh) had been engaged in this craft for at least three generations.98 Wills, referring to the same time period, wrote that “The Abadeh carvings... are still to be had; but the work is deteriorating, and the attempt to copy European drawings is destroying its originality.”99 I’timad al-Saltana mentions Jaz, one of the villages of Abadeh, as a producer of spoons and boxes and also notes that people in the Bavanat district made spoons and boxes (ja’ba).100 According to Binning, spoons “cut of wood, nearly as thin as paper, the long handles of which are carved in a variety of patterns [...] are made in numbers at Sabunat, a village some leagues distant from Sheerauz,” as well as in Qumisheh.101 E. Orsolle reported that the children of Kawsar, on the road to Gulpaygan (northwest of Isfahan), made exquisite wooden spoons that were much used in Iran.102 Abadeh, Gulpaygan, and Rizayeh are still known for their thinly carved pear wood sherbet spoons. Another center was Rasht, which still produces all kinds of wooden implements. Wooden pitchers (julla) and measuring ladles with side handles are ubiquitous in the Caspian seaboard and the Elburz communities, in particular the village of Alash.

Another group of woodcarvers specialized in making blocks for the printing of cotton or chintz (qalamkær). The three most ancient molds in the block-printed cotton industry of Iran are engraved on stone and, together with pottery of the tenth and eleventh centuries, were among archaeological findings in the city of Nishapur.103 These three molds are different in size and form from the wooden ones that later came to be used exclusively. In 1877, Tahvildar mentioned “... the guild of the woodcarvers (qälib tarâsh): they are embossers (munabbat-kær) who engrave flowers and butas (shrub designs) on wooden molds for the calico workers (qalamkær-sæz).”104 Among its many workshops, the Safavid court had one headed by the chief embosser (munabbat-kær bâshî), which is an indication of the artistic importance of this craft.105 In 1886, there were eighteen master block carvers in Tehran, who employed seventy-two apprentices, thus totaling ninety workers.106

**Trunk makers**

Another specialized form of carpentry was that of the trunk makers, of whom there were different kinds. Trunks were already being made in the seventeenth century and doubtless much earlier. According to Chardin,

> The Trunk-makers Work is likewise perform’d very Slowly; their Trunks, which stand on four Feet of white Wood, are very light, and are overlaid with black Skins, both within and without, the Fore-Part of them is adorn’d with Figures, cut out in Leather of several Colours; they put them in Sacks of Goats hair, the bottom whereof is lin’d with Leather, and so load their Horses easily with them. All their trunks are Padlock Trunks, for they have no other Locks.107

According to Du Mans, the wooden frames of these trunks were so flimsy that if kicked they would fall apart. Therefore the frames were covered with leather that was fixed to them with glue made from a pulverized plant. Apart from trunks, or sandûqs, the Iranians also made travel cases, or yakhdañs.108

Although leather trunks, some of them withfigural representations, were still being produced in the Qajar period, newer materials such as tin had made inroads by that time. This is reflected in the variety of trunk-making craftsmen. Tahvildar, writing in 1877, described the various groups making trunks or boxes in Isfahan:

> The guild of trunk-makers (sandûq-sæz): they are a group in Isfahan that makes big and small chests in the European style. For coating they use many-colored figured tin. It is elegant, neat, and solid and much better than the latest European work.

> The guild of the makers of small boxes (mijrî-sæz): the same description as above.

> The guild of tin-box makers (qûfi-sæz): the same description [as above]. Sugar boxes, tea caddies, workboxes with many compartments (hazär bishæ), and others are made of real plane-tree wood here. They gild with a paintbrush around the defects (jawharhæ) in the wood; the surface is painted with fish-glue color (šarîshkâm), saffron color, and varnish (rawghan-i kamân), which give [the boxes] solidity and splendor, and their price is [accordingly] high.109
In 1890 or thereabouts, there were ten makers of small boxes (mijrā-ṣāz) in Isfahan but only eight around 1920.\(^{110}\) In Isfahan around 1920 there were sixteen master trunk makers (sandūq-ṣāz), while in Tehran at that time there were thirty-seven, who employed thirty apprentices and thirty-two errand boys.\(^{111}\) Because of the lack of timber, not only were trunks and boxes made of leather and other materials, but wooden boxes were also imported.\(^{112}\) Nowadays, of course, large and small metal boxes abound.

Other woodworking crafts

There existed quite a few niche woodworking crafts—for example, cane making—that were not practiced everywhere. Cane makers (ʿasā-ṣāz)\(^ {113}\) also made canes to order from wood brought by prospective clients. ʿAyn al-Saltanah, for example, mentions that when he bought three sticks from Sayyed ʿAsa-saz, he also took him some that he had picked up in the Alamut region to be turned into proper canes.\(^ {114}\) In some parts of the country there was a preference for canes made of certain types of wood. According to Aitcheson, “Throughout Afghanistan, not so noticeable in Persia, the priests carry a rod or staff of the almond [Prunus amygdalus] as a sort of emblem; these rods, with those of the tamarisk, are made into handles or hafts for whips, as a protection against snakes.”\(^ {115}\) Around 1920, some six masters (chatr-ṣāz and ʿasā-ṣāz) in Tehran employed four apprentices and three errand boys (pādū).\(^ {116}\) Rayy was known for its production of fine combs during the Ilkhanid period.\(^ {117}\) Comb makers, or shāna-tarāš, also were noted in the Safavid period.\(^ {118}\) Around 1890 there were as many as twelve comb makers (shāna-ṣāz) in Isfahan.\(^ {119}\) Because Islamic law considers horn impure and thus not to be used, combs were made from wood, in a primitive manner. With an iron adze, the body of the comb was cut from pear or boxwood; then it was placed in a jack, sharpened, and rounded at the edges. The teeth were made with saw and file, after which the comb was polished somewhat with a scraper or shell; it was then ready for sale.\(^ {120}\)

Other wood craftsmen included the makers of musical instruments (tūr-ṣāz).\(^ {121}\) Around 1920 no fewer than twenty-eight masters (tūr-ṣāz) employed nineteen apprentices and eight errand boys in Tehran.\(^ {122}\) In the nineteenth century, the craft of carriage making was relatively new (fig. 7). The carriage maker made the frames, coachwork, and wheels of simple farm carts as well as wagons and carriages for the elite. The wheel had been known since ancient times, shown not only by statuettes of animal-drawn carts but also by the finds at Pazyryk of actual carts—“primitive affairs mounted on solid wheels hewn out of tree trunks”—and others made of birch wood that “could be dismantled and slung on pack animals for transporting across unsuitable ground.”\(^ {123}\) Carts were rare in Islamic Iran prior to the 1880s, however, and were mainly concentrated in Northwest Azerbaijan, although they were also used near Isfahan.\(^ {124}\) The army had used wheeled conveyances known as ‘arrāba for trans-
porting cannons since the early Safavid period. In 1884 I’timad al-Saltanah writes that during Nasir al-Din Shah’s first thirty years of reign the craft of carriage making (kâlîskâh-sâzî) was introduced into most of Iran, and the use of droshkies and carriages became general. Consequently, wagon making also became part of the urban economic scene. By 1920 or thereabouts, there were six master wagon makers (kîlkîska-sâzî) in Isfahan and sixteen in Tehran, the latter employing twenty-four apprentices and six errand boys.

Inlay work

Inlay work (khatam-bandî or khatam-sâzî), a veneering process in which small pieces are set on a base and glued or nailed into place, was applied to a large variety of wooden implements, such as doors, ceilings, windows, boxes, and mirrors. Dawlatshah first mentions inlay work in reference to Sultan Ahmad b. Avi (ca. 1382), whom he describes as “a master in several branches of art [including] khatam-bandî.” At about that time, Timur had Dilgusha, his palace in Samargand, equipped with inlaid doors. Other early examples include a carved wooden box of Ulugh Beg with inlaid polychrome marquetry (ca. 1420–49); walnut doors overlaid with bone and various woods by Habib Allah in 999 (1591), now in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin; a panel from Bukhara with polygonal panels and floral ornaments in the Victoria and Albert Museum; and a cedar pulpit with polygons and silver detail, dated 1114 (1702), in the Lamban Mosque in Isfahan. Inlay work also prospered in Safavid and Zand times. Around 1811, Sir William Ouseley wrote, “mosaick-work ... ensured considerable profit to many artists of Shiraz and Isphahan.” Some forty years later Binning opined that inlay work “is much used in ornamenting boxes, mirrors and other knickknacks; and its manufacture is, I believe, peculiar to Sheerauz.” Polak also mentioned that sometimes inlay work was applied to chairs and tables of the nobles.

As an art form, however, inlay slowly but surely fell into disuse due to the changing taste of its main consumers, the elite, who came to prefer fashionable European implements to traditional Persian ones. This had serious consequences for the craftsmen. In 1877, Tahvildar, referring to the situation in Isfahan, which with Shiraz was the only producer of inlay work, wrote, The guild of the makers of inlay work (khatam-sâzî): [the members of] this guild used to be very numerous. What has remained of the khatam work of the old masters on jewelry boxes, lecterns, chairs, mirrors, frames, and doors of rooms and buildings attests to their art. Most of the old items have been collected and taken away. The Europeans still buy some. This guild has become less important compared with former times. Their work is of inferior quality, because it is not much in demand. As the situation is now, khatam is only marketable in villages in Iran and in small quantity in Turkey (Rûm va İslâmâbîd). Wills, who stated that khatam-sâzî was practiced in Shiraz and Isfahan, further remarked that “love and handkerchief boxes are made for the European market, and tables, chairs, chess, backgammon boards, and mirror frames for the wealthy Persians. The Shiraz work is the best.” Benjamin waxed enthusiastic about what he considered a Persian art par excellence:

No object seems too singular and difficult in shape to be attempted by these clever artificers; and the amount of surface covered with minute designs in mosaic is equally remarkable. Chairs, tables, sofas, boxes, violins and guitars, canes, and picture-frames may be found overlaid with an exquisite casing of inlaid work, so minute sometimes that thirty-five to forty pieces may be counted in the space of an eighth of a square inch. Sometimes, especially in the old inlaid work of Persia, the mosaic is even more delicate. I have counted four hundred and twenty-eight distinct pieces in a square inch on a violin which is completely overlaid in this exquisite detail of intricate geometric designs in mosaic.

Inlay workers also settled in Tehran. They were probably from Isfahan, whence many other craftsmen had come. In 1886, there were in Tehran thirteen master “Makers of inlaid Ivory and other Boxes,” who employed twenty-seven apprentices, for a total of forty workers. Radimsky, at the beginning of the twentieth century, observes that the main center of production of inlay work was Shiraz, while some work was also done at Isfahan and Tehran. He further notes that Persian inlay work was not only done on flat surfaces, but also on curved ones such as candelabras, chairs, and tables. Like Tahvildar, Radimsky opines that the quality of the work left much to be desired. The downturn of the Persian economy and the unsettled state of politics after 1906 were not propitious for the inlay workers, who saw their market shrink even further. By the 1920s, only six master inlay workers remained in Isfahan, in addition to three in Tehran, who employed ten apprentices (shâgîrd). Unfortunately,
there are no statistical data available for Shiraz to gauge decline there.\textsuperscript{139}

Riza Shah (r. 1925–41) brought the craft back from the brink of extinction when in the 1930s he employed seventy of the remaining craftsmen to decorate his newly built Marble Palace as well as much of the furniture therein. Members of the elite predictably followed his lead, and the tradition of inlay decoration continued under his son, Muhammad Riza Shah (r. 1941–79). The inlay-ornamented rooms in the Sa‘adabad and Marble palaces in Tehran are masterpieces of this art. As a result, the craft of \textit{khatam-s\={a}z\={u}} has rebounded, and with renewed demand from a middle class that has experienced rising incomes, its future seems assured.\textsuperscript{140}

\section*{WOODWORKING PRODUCTS}

In the foregoing I have surveyed the crafts of the carpenter and his specialized colleagues. In this section I review a selected number of these to shed more light on the relevance and role of the woodworkers in Persian society. I feature the following three groups based on Tahvildar’s description of the carpenter’s range of techniques: \textit{n\={a}zuk-k\={a}r\={u}} (fine ornamental work) as applied to chairs, tables, and bedsteads; \textit{ustukhv\={a}n-band\={u}} (framework) as demonstrated in ceilings, and \textit{mura\={a}s\={a}-s\={a}z\={u}} (mosaic work) as realized in windows, doors, pulpits, and tombs.\textsuperscript{141} The reason for this choice, apart from the availability of remaining material,\textsuperscript{142} is also the fact that all three groups required similar skills.

\subsection*{Chairs and tables}

Chairs predate the Achaemenids. The best-known Persian example is depicted in the reliefs in the throne hall, council hall, and treasury of Persepolis: the legs of the wooden throne shown there are very well turned and have leaf-wreath \cite{embellishment} and torus-and-scotia molding.\textsuperscript{143} Assyrian and Urartian models inspired the style of Achaemenid thrones and stools.\textsuperscript{144} Elsewhere in the Persian Empire chairs were also used; on many Kushan and Gupta coins, for example, the goddess of plenty sits on a high-backed chair.\textsuperscript{145}

Although the texts tell us little about chairs and stools for some 800 years from the early Islamic era until the Safavid period, they were present during this time. In the tenth century, stools (\textit{kurs\={u}}) made in Qum were well known and were copied in Kerman.\textsuperscript{146} The caliph at Baghdad and local rulers sat on chairs (\textit{kurs\={u}}).\textsuperscript{147} Chairs and stools have been depicted in a variety of Persian miniatures, the oldest appearing to date from 1386 and 1396; both are found in manuscripts made in Baghdad under the Jalayirids.\textsuperscript{148} Another chair is pictured in a manuscript made in Mazandaran in 1446.\textsuperscript{149} Stools are more frequently represented than chairs, and quite a few appear in Persian manuscripts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{150} The English merchant Jenkinson was offered a stool to sit on when received by Shah Tahmasp I in 1562.\textsuperscript{151} The type of chair prevalent at the time probably was “a wooden X chair, a Savanarola chair such as were common in contemporary Renaissance Europe, particularly in Italy.”\textsuperscript{152} Both stools and chairs are also depicted in seventeenth-century Safavid manuscript paintings,\textsuperscript{153} one of which, by Muhammad Zaman, shows a European lady seated in a delicate chair with low arms and a low back. In another miniature by the same painter, the chairs have high backs and arms\textsuperscript{154} and are similar to the ones presented to Russian czars. Shah ‘Abbas I sent a wooden throne-chair, gilded and jewel-studded, to Czar Boris Godunov in 1604. According to Vladimir Loukonine and Anatoli Ivanov, “The form of the low back passing into the downward-sloping armrests and […] the openwork side-walls that blend into the decoratively shaped legs” were characteristic of Iranian furniture of that period.\textsuperscript{155} Zakhary Sadarov presented another painted, gem-studded, and gold-and-silver-chased wooden throne-chair to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich on behalf of a group of Armenian merchants from Julfa in 1660. Different from the 1604 model, it had a high back and arms and a footrest. Like the earlier chair, however, it was partly covered with velvet. Both chairs were used for enthronements of the czars until the end of the nineteenth century and are now in the Kremlin Armory.\textsuperscript{156}

Chairs and stools were also present in seventeenth-century Iran at the royal court, where European envoys were customarily given them to sit on during official audiences. In 1651, for example, the Dutch ambassador Cuneaus was offered a stool or small chair,\textsuperscript{157} and in 1701, the Dutch ambassador Hoogcamer was seated during his royal audience on a small chair inlaid with mother-of-pearl,\textsuperscript{158} probably of the type described by Englebert Kaempfer, on which the Swedish ambassador and his suite were seated: “A wooden stool, artfully inlaid with pearls… which was hardly one span high, proved to be even more uncomfortable than sitting
on the floor, had we been able.\textsuperscript{159} Chairs were used in Armenian monasteries and churches, for example at Ejmiatsin in Armenia, New Julfa (Isfahan),\textsuperscript{160} and the Church of Saint Stephanos in the now-abandoned village of Dar-i Sham, in the Poldašt section of Maku (West Azerbaijan), which has two inlaid Safavid chairs, as well as a wooden door with wrought iron details.\textsuperscript{161} Stools or chairs were also used by preachers and panegyrists in Safavid times,\textsuperscript{162} and in the 1740s Jonas Hanway was offered a chair when he was received by the governor of Astarabad.\textsuperscript{163} A painting of the second half of the eighteenth century shows a princess sitting on a tall chair with a curved back.\textsuperscript{164}

The use of chairs persisted during the Qajar period. In Isfahan, reported James Justin Morier, “Chairs of an old fashion, like those in the sculptures at Persepolis, were prepared for us....” and Ouseley described such chairs as “much (resembling) those...fashionable some centuries ago in France and England.”\textsuperscript{165} In 1817, prior to the arrival of the Russian embassy, Moritz von Kotzebue recorded that “Chairs covered with red velvet had been expressly made for the Embassy. [...] His Majesty requested the Ambassador to seat himself on a chair, which was placed opposite the throne, an honour which, as well as the permission to wear boots, has never yet been shown to any other person.” (The British translator of Von Kotzebue’s narrative pointedly notes that “Sir Hardford and Sir Gore both sat in chairs opposite the shah’s throne.”)\textsuperscript{166} Furthermore, when the Russians were invited to dinner by one Mirza Ja{far}, probably a minister, he did not allow them, all wearing boots, to tread on the carpet on which he was sitting, “and, consequently, they did not enter within the inner walls of the tent, but sat outside on chairs, while the British, in cloth boots, were seated close to the prime minister, on the carpet.”\textsuperscript{167} After the protocol treaty with Russia, a great diplomatic victory, all ambassadors henceforth were accorded the honor of being allowed to sit on a chair in the shah’s presence.\textsuperscript{168}

The introduction of the chair did not change the rules of etiquette. According to Benjamin, “When the host and guest are of equal rank, chairs or cushions are arranged in corresponding position opposite the refreshment table.”\textsuperscript{169} Nevertheless, chairs were not yet important in Persian life, because ordinary people sat on the floor. It was only among the elite who had come into contact with the West that chairs were used, mainly for the comfort of visiting Europeans.\textsuperscript{170} In Urmiyyeh, for example, the use of chairs remained restricted to American missionaries, who had come there in 1835. According to Mary Jewett, one of these missionaries since 1873, “One day some American ladies were entertaining a company of Muslim ladies. Polite[ly] the rocking chair was offered. They did not know how to sit on it, one sitting too much on the edge so the chair tipped forward, another sitting too far back so the chair tipped backward. They were frightened and went away to tell that we had a machine for making christians [sic].”\textsuperscript{171} Persian men as well as women had trouble sitting on chairs; C. J. Wills wrote that chairs were “only used by the rich, great, or Europeanised, and it is a common thing for a visitor, if on familiar terms, to ask to be allowed to sit on his heels, as the unaccustomed chair tires him.”\textsuperscript{172}

It became fashionable, however, for Iranians to be depicted with chairs and, later on in the nineteenth century, to be shown actually sitting on them,\textsuperscript{173} which demonstrates that chairs and other European furniture had slowly made inroads into Persian high society. This also meant that Persian carpenters had to change their ways. According to Jewett, “Formerly chairs were imported; now native carpenters have learned to make chairs, tables, cupboards, desks, bedsteads, many necessary things and things ornamental.”\textsuperscript{174} These newly developed skills were doubtless also due to the presence in Urmiyyeh of the missionaries among whom Jewett counted herself, and the fact that they had established a vocational school there.

Tables also became popular among the modernizing elite of Iran towards the end of the nineteenth century. Tables had existed in the early Islamic period,\textsuperscript{175} in Iran, tabourets, sideboards, and refreshment tables were used to hold drinks and the like that were to be handed out to the lord of the household and his guests. However, tables still were felt to be an intruder in households whose occupants lived in traditional fashion, sitting on the floor. Malcolm, a British missionary, nicely described this dilemma for the upper crust of Yazd society around 1900:

Many of the Yazdis use little tables about three feet by two, and standing about twelve inches high. These are used only for tea-things. But tea is generally made by an inferior, standing at a tall table in the corner of the room. These tables are rather larger, not less than four feet by two. They stand as high as an English sideboard, and have a rough border of curved or dog-tooth pattern falling down from the slab, so that they very much suggest a rough dressing-table. They are often brought in and out of the rooms as they are wanted. People who wish
to be thoroughly European in their manners sometimes have a larger table of the same kind permanently in the room, surrounded by a few bentwood chairs, which are brought from Bombay, or folding-chairs with cane seats, which I think they bring from Isfahan, and about which the less said the better. Such a table is always covered by a white cloth, the most fashionable variety being a Turkish bath-towel. These chairs and larger tables are real part of Persian plenishing, while the tea-tables are being constantly carried backwards and forwards, and are not necessary to the equipment of the room.¹⁷⁶

Although many tables and chairs fell short of what Europeans considered good craftsmanship, there were nevertheless Persian carpenters who produced excellent tables, which knowledgeable Europeans were honest enough to draw attention to. Some of the best specimens, preserved in the Hermitage, are indeed a testimony to the skill of those who made them.¹⁷⁷

The increased interest in European carpentry technique and furniture brought into being not only European-style carpenters but also cabinetmakers (mubâl-sâz). Around 1920, there were eight master cabinetmakers in Isfahan and fourteen in Tehran, who employed twenty-three apprentices and ten boys.¹⁷⁸ In Safavid period Isfahan the cabinetmakers and carpenters had a section in the bazaar that still bears their name. Nowadays, among many kinds of woodworkers, makers of modern furniture predominate, but there are still carpenters who cater to less affluent rural and urban markets, making doors, window frames, ladders, traditional bedsteads, etc. Their clientele has maintained a mostly traditional lifestyle, using kilims, cushions, carpets, and mats as their main furnishings. Consumers of modern furniture—tables, chairs, upholstered furniture, and other European-style items—mostly belong to modernizing urban groups. Those who buy chairs usually first purchase folding metal ones. Cabinetmakers often contract out such work as carving and turnery.¹⁷⁹

**Ceilings**

Although wooden beams have been used in Persian architecture since at least 6000 BCE, the use of carved and ornamented wood began at a much later date. In the more wooded Persianate regions, timber was more freely used in construction. In Panjikent (Tajikistan), for example, entire houses were built of wood, while in Azerbaijan, in eleventh-century Oren-Kalla, only the ceilings of houses were of timber.¹⁸⁰ In general, however, because of the scarcity of wood, ceilings of public buildings were not made of wooden beams but rather of brick. Wood usually was used only “in a structural or semi-structural fashion…to knit the fabric closely together…[and] to support portions of the structures.”¹⁸¹ One of the buildings constructed by Ulugh Beg in Samarqand was known as the Masjid-i Muqatta’ (Carved Mosque) because its ceiling and walls were covered with *islâmî* (traditional vegetal scroll patterns) and chinoiserie pictures formed of segments of wood.¹⁸²

Some surviving ceilings, such as the ceiling over the porch in the Chihil Sutun, have elaborate mosaic compositions of stars and polygons, often highlighted with paint and gilding (fig. 8).¹⁸³ The making of paneled ceilings was the province of the joiner and was usually referred to as *qâb-sâz* or *qâb-kâb*.¹⁸⁴ Chardin described the joiners’ manner of working as follows:

> The Joyners: they are very skilful, and very ingenious in composing all sort of Inlaid-work and Mosaic-work, and they make noble Ceilings in that Kind; they fit them all on the Ground, and when they are done, they raise them up over the top of the Building, on the Columns, that are to bear them up: I have seen a whole one of fourscore Diameter, rear’d up, with the help of a Machine, like the draught I present you with on the other side, not knowing whether our European Workmen have any such; the Persians use no other, and they raise every thing with a Pully; they make also Lattices and Rails very well. The Joyners sit on the Ground at their Work, their Planes are not like ours, for they thrust the Shavings out of the Sides; and not out of the Top, which seems to be a more expeditious way; their ordinary Wood is a white Wood, very soft, and without Knots; and therefore very easy to be wrought; they have excellent Wood, that comes out of Hercania, in long Boards, like the Norway Deal Boards.¹⁸⁵

But this was not the normal way to construct ceilings; ordinarily, it sufficed to span the walls with beams or poles, which were then covered with mud.¹⁸⁶ Only palaces and mansions of the rich boasted ceilings covered with painted or plaster ornamentation. Even fine residences were not all finished thus. According to Benjamin, for example, a villa named Arajib, occupied by the first American Legation in Persia in 1884, was “a very fair example of the average country villa of a Persian gentleman.” As its first resident, Benjamin commented:

> Strange to say, the ceilings of all these apartments were of the rudest character, the undressed timbers of the flat roofs being covered by neither lathing nor plastering;
and both for looks and in order to prevent insects from dropping on our heads we were obliged to cover them with chintz nailed from one end of the room to the other. The custom of leaving ceilings in this unfinished state is very common in the rural districts of northern Persia. It is alleged that the rains and snows of winter and spring in the neighborhood of the mountains are so liable to cause the flat roofs to fall in, that it would only be a useless expense to add a finished ceiling to them.\textsuperscript{187}

Ceilings that were finished were covered with plasterwork, painted and lacquered beams (juvak-kārī) (fig. 9), or mosaic panels composed of hexagons, stars, and other geometric shapes made with wood of different colors, generally known as girih-sâzī. This last technique is known from the fourteenth century but undoubtedly existed prior to that date.\textsuperscript{188}

\textit{Windows}

The technique used for ceilings was also employed in making windows (\textit{\textsuperscript{`}urusī}) and pulpits and hence involved the same craftsman (qāb-sāz). To facilitate his work, the carpenter relied on a cardboard model of the window with paper replicas of the glass pieces glued to it.\textsuperscript{189} Such models were based on pattern books in the form of scrolls (tūmār) widely used by architects and builders in Iran and the Ottoman Empire; these contained ground plans, patterns, muqarnas vault plans, and the like, as is clear from a few surviving samples.\textsuperscript{190} The window carpenter filled the wooden lattices with clear or colored glass. Rectangular window frames were usually fitted with pointed arches, and large ones were made up of three or more moveable panels. Over time lattices became more intricate and pieces of glass thinner, yielding denser and more complex compositions of stars and polygons. During the Qajar period, curvilinear and floral patterns became popular, and mirror-mosaic (āˈ\textsuperscript{i}na-kārī) was added to heighten the decorative effect (fig. 10).\textsuperscript{191} W. R. Holmes described how the window was then put into place:

\begin{quote}
Windows in Persia are generally made of stained glass put together in very small pieces, of different size and
\end{quote}
Fig. 9. *juvak-kārī* ceiling in the pavilion of the Bagh-i Naranjistan, Shiraz. (Photo by Gholam Reza Vatandoust)
colours, and forming what we should call a kaleidoscope pattern. The manner of putting them up is curious. The wood-work, having been already made of several hundred small pieces, corresponding with each other in the desired pattern, is fixed in its place before the glass is put in. This is not done with putty; but the glazier, beginning from the bottom of the frame, takes it to pieces, and then joins it together again, inserting, as he goes on, each bit of glass into the particular groove formed in the wood-work for its reception. When finished, these windows are sometimes very beautiful; but as the glass does not fit tightly in every place, if there be any wind, it makes a continual jingling noise, and the air passes through the crevices. Europeans generally admired the visual artistry of these windows. Edward Eastwick, for example, remarks: “These painted windows are exceedingly tasteful, but, as there is no such thing as putty in Persia, the glass soon falls out, and is continually rattling with every wind.” Benjamin, who also much admired such windows, remarks on the windowmakers’ working methods:

Everything is open to the public. The carpenter, finding his shop too contracted for the window-sash he is framing, lays it on the pavement on the shady side of the street, heedless of the passers-by. These carpenters of Tehran are a curiously independent guild, requiring so little for a livelihood that much of their time is spent in smoking and sleeping; and these habits are encouraged by the custom that allows them to claim an advance for a job, ostensibly to pay the cost of the materials. If lazy, which is doubtless the case, they spend this money in smoking; and after that they are forced to make shifts to purchase the needed wood and nails, which adds to the already long delay in completing the work in hand. Because a large window often took up the whole side of a room, it was necessary to support the wall
Fig. 11. (a) 'urusī window of the Amini house, Isfahan; (b) 'urusī of the tomb of Aqa, Tehran. (After Shafā’i, *Hunar-i girih-sāzi*, 286, 193, 128, 102)
above it with a substantial beam immediately over the window. Usually the center of the window consisted of larger panes, either plain or colored, framed by the latticework areas. The patterns used were similar to those used in woodcarving, stucco, and tile work (fig. 11). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the making of this kind of windows waned: “The Persians are giving them up for what they imagine are French windows, which, being made of wet wood, never shut properly. The only way to buy the old windows is to pick them up second hand, when some khan (or great man) is Europeanizing his house, or at least de-orientalizing it.”\textsuperscript{195}
Woodcarving: columns, doors, pulpits, tombs

Woodworking may have found its pinnacle in minbars, and joinery in window grillwork and tomb shrines (nakhl). The dār-sāz or alāt-sāz was a carpenter expert in making door and window joinery and other similar woodwork. However, it was not he who gave these objects their lasting appeal, but rather the woodcarver, fretter, and marquetry maker (fig. 12).

The combination of plasterwork with woodwork is an artistic tradition that predates Islam, as is evident in the carved wood found in the Zarafshan Valley (Tajikistan). The columns of Kurut, Obburdon, Fatmev, and Urmitan, the mihrab of Iskudar and the wooden frieze from Obburdon, all in Tajikistan, are representative of this tradition during the early Islamic period. Most of these columns date from the Samanid period (ninth and tenth centuries), although those from Urmitan, and the mihrab from Iskudar, are of later date. These wooden decorations present images of living beings interlaced with floral, geometric, and epigraphic motifs. The capitals of the columns include representations of animals, fish, and birds as well as floral ornamentation. Geometric and epigraphic motifs dominate the Iskudar mihrab.

Excavations of the palace of the afshūn (rulers) of Usturushana, which dates from the seventh to the ninth century, produced, among other things, about 200 fragments of charred carved wood. Among them were several sculptures in the round of people and birds, as well as numerous friezes and panels depicting humans, sirens, animals, and birds. Other friezes represented the heads of humans belonging to various ethnic groups, and a unique tympanum represented the struggle between the forces of good and evil embodied in the images of the prince Faridun, the blacksmith Kava, and the evil shah Zahhak with two serpents on his shoulders. One of the better-preserved ninth-to-eleventh-century palaces is located in Khulbk (now Kurban-Shahid), the capital of the Southern Tajikistan province of Khuttal. Its main halls were decorated with plaster and wood fretwork and murals. In the wooden Hazrat-i Baba Mausoleum (eleventh to twelfth century), archaeologists found oddly shaped columns displaying fantastic birds and images of snakes harking back to pre-Islamic art traditions. The Hazrat-i Baba fretwork bears a clear resemblance to the decorations of the tenth-to-twelfth-century columns in the Upper Zarafshan, the wooden mihrab from Iskudar, and the clay mihrab in Asht.

It would seem that none of these forms of woodwork were as yet utilizing the panel technique of girih-sāz, the basis of which is a lattice frame either left plain or filled with wooden insets, colored glass, or other materials. Although this technique, as mentioned above, undoubtedly was used prior to the fourteenth century, there are no wood examples surviving from before that time. Among the earliest examples are the balustrade of the pulpit in Na’in, dated Rajab 711 (October–November 1311), and the side panels on a pulpit from Fars dated 771 (1369), now in the Iran Bastan Museum. Girih-sāz remained a popular decorative technique for palaces, mosques, and private homes in the centuries thereafter. Other carved decoration occurs in particular on the wooden doors, cenotaphs, and grilles (zuvāṛhū) of shrines, usually combining strapwork (qa’b-bandī) and painting and displaying either geometric or floral designs. The same types of designs also can be found on cenotaphs inscribed with Qur’anic texts, the name and genealogy of the deceased, and the names of the founder and the carpenter. Shrines in the Gilan and Mazandaran regions, some dating back to the fourteenth century but most to the first half of the sixteenth, are particularly rich in such decorative woodwork (fig. 13). The oldest carved wooden door, dated 706 (1306–7) is in the Imamzada Qasim (in Do Hazar, Gilan); it features strapwork and knots (qa’b va girih).

Carpenters are mentioned several times in connection with construction or renovation of buildings in the early fourteenth century. Timur captured many craftsmen, among them carpenters whom he put to work decorating his palaces and other buildings and the furnishings therein. In particular the many carved wooden doors, panels, and wooden Qur’ān stands made during that period stand out for their excellent artistry. Olearius marveled at the woodwork of the Talar-i Tavila, a typical example of a Safavid public palace. The tradition of adorning houses with all kinds of woodwork, sometimes displaying the full array of woodworking techniques, was continued under the Qajars. Many of the surviving palaces and villas in Tehran, Shiraz, Kashan, and other cities are a testimony to the skill of Persia’s woodworkers (fig. 14).
Fig. 12. (a) Entrance door of the Amini house, Isfahan; (b) common motif; (c) pattern much seen in places of pilgrimage; (d) common pattern. (After Shaf’a’, Hunar-i girih-səzə, 254, 199, 225, 233)
CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that Iran was and continues to be relatively poor in forest cover, the craft of woodworking achieved a high level of artistry throughout the centuries. Although due to the perishability of the material relatively few wooden objects have survived, those that remain demonstrate that wood played an important role in decorating buildings and providing people with necessary household utensils. Much attention was paid to enhancing the innate attractiveness of wood through woodcarving, inlay, fretwork, turning, and marquetry. Woodworkers were either general craftsmen or specialists in a particular aspect of the craft. While not all were outstanding, some left their names on masterpieces. Given their limited range of tools, it is amazing that they were able to turn out so much that still evokes our admiration. Contemporary masters of the craft continue to make wonderful products. In Sanandaj, Kurdistan, for example, woodworkers make outstanding backgammon boards using fine-grained walnut. In Rizayeh, in northwestern Azerbaijan, they produce excellent carved and inlaid works. Craftsmen in Gulpaygan excel at carving and fretwork, while in Abadeh they still make fine low-relief carving. In Rasht, on the shore of the Caspian Sea, as well as in Dizzful, Khuzestan, woodworkers make beautiful lathe-turned items. Traditional inlay work (khatam) is still being produced in Shiraz, Isfahan, and Tehran. All these centers of excellence attest to the lasting heritage of the Persian woodworking tradition.

NOTES

Author’s note: I thank Gülru Necipoğlu for her useful suggestions, which I have taken into account in the final version of this article.

Fig. 14. (a) Pattern of the entrance door, teahouse of the Haram of Imam Riza, Mashhad; (b) pattern in the Madrasa-i Chahar Bagh, Isfahan; (c) pattern of a window in the Naraqi house, Kashan. (After Shafā‘ī, Hunar-i girih-sāzi, 293, 49, 50)
4. It is beyond the scope of this study to develop a comparison between the woodworking crafts of Iran and of its neighboring countries, but such a worthwhile undertaking is long overdue, and I hope that this study will contribute to its realization.


11. Ibid., 14.

12. Ibid., 49.


20. Adam Olcarius, *Vernehme neue Beschreibung der moscowetienschen und persischen Reyse*, ed. D. Lohmeier (Tübingen, 1791, orig. pub. Schleswig, 1656), 417. The Holstein ambassador used some of the timber to mount his cannons despite being told that if he did so the shah’s ship could not be built due to the resultant shortage.


43. Shahrī, *Tāhkhī*, vol. 2, 63–68; Wulff, *Traditional Crafts*, 81–88, for a more detailed discussion of the tools used. For pictures of carpenter tools collected by Feilberg in 1935, see
44. R. G. Mukminova, Ocherki po istorii remesla v Samarkande i Bukh- 
are v XV-VI vekh (Tashkent, 1976), 173 (jami‘at-i mi’mar va naghár 
va abhā‘-tishā).

45. Raphaël du Mans, Estat de la Perse, ed. Charles Schefer (Paris, 
1890), 199–200. Persian texts also mention carpenters; see Mehdi Keyvani, Artisans and Guild Life in the Later Safavid 
Period (Berlin, 1982), 270–71.

46. J. Perkins, A Residence of Eight Years in Persia (Andover, 1843), 
n. on 230; Mary Jewett, My Life in Persia (Cedar Rapids, 
1909), 48: “The carpenter sits on the floor when using saw 
or plane.” For a picture, see Hermann Norden, Under Persian 

47. S. G. W. Benjamin, Persia and the Persians (London, 1887), 
87.

Practical Mechanic and Engineer’s Magazine 2 (Nov. 1842): 
51. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Voyages en Perse et description de ce 
royaume (Paris, 1680), 244; Engelbert Kaempfer, A Winter 
Journey through Russia, the Cauca-

siän Alps, and Georgia 
(Tubingen, 1977), 120; Francis Richardson, Raphaël du Mans, missionaire en Perse au XVIIe 
Gemelli-Careri, Voyage du Tour du Monde, 6 vols. (2nd ed., 
Paris, 1727), vol. 2, 381; Muhammad Hashim Asaf, Rustam 
al-tawārīkh, ed. Muhammad Mushirî (Tehran, 1348/1969), 
100.

49. For a contemporary picture of the 1582 parade in Istanbul 
showing the various guilds, including woodworkers, their 
tools, and examples of their work, see Nurhan Atasoy, 
showing the various guilds, including woodworkers, their 
tools, and examples of their work, see Nurhan Atasoy, 
Tools, and Examples of their Work, see Nurhan Atasoy, 
Traditional Crafts in Qajar Iran 
(Costa Mesa, CA, 2003).

v. 2, 182. (The text also provides a detailed description 
of how the litter looked. It may have been the origin of the 
tabhta-ravan that was used to transport women when travel-

ing.)

51. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Voyages en Perse et description de ce 
royaume (Paris, 1930), 224; Engelbert Kaempfer, Am Hofe des persischen Grosskönigs 
1682–1685 (Tubingen, 1977), 120; Fran-

çois Richard, Raphaël du Mans, missionaire en Perse au XVIIe 
Gemelli-Careri, Voyage du Tour du Monde, 6 vols. (2nd ed., 
Paris, 1727), vol. 2, 381; Muhammad Hashim Asaf, Rustam 
al-tawārīkh, ed. Muhammad Mushiri (Tehran, 1348/1969), 
100.

52. For a contemporary picture of the 1582 parade in Istanbul 
showing the various guilds, including woodworkers, their 
tools, and examples of their work, see Nurhan Atasoy, 
1582 Surnameh-hāmāyun: An Imperial Celebration (Istanbul, 1997). 
For guilds in Iran, see Willem Floor, Traditional Crafts in Qajar Iran 
(Costa Mesa, CA, 2003).

53. Sir John Chardin, Travels in Persia (New York, 1927), 264– 
67.

54. Michael Egeziarov, “The Inhabitants of Meydan-Gusfand, 
Tehran,” Ocherki po istorii remesla v Samarkande i Bukh-
are v XV-VI vekh (Tashkent, 1976), 173 (jami‘at-i mi’mar va naghár 
va abhā‘-tishā).
88. For some stories regarding this craft, see Shahri, *Tārīkh*, vol. 4, 245–49.
92. See Willem Floor and Gholamreza Vatandoust, “Notes,” 21, 30, 44, 134–35.
93. For more albeit limited information on this craft, see Shahri, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2, 73–78.
95. Talbot Rice, *Seythians*, 120–21 (fig. 30).
98. Wills, *In the Land*, 332.
102. Wills, *In the Land*, 352.
108. Public Record Office, FO 60/337 (June 24, 1886).
ants in Persia, which explains why relatively little wooden material has survived from ancient times; see Aitchison, “Notes,” 207.


145. John M. Rosenfield, The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), figs. 84, 90. Chairs were also known to the Scythians; see Talbot Rice, Scythians, pl. 30.


148. North M. Titley, Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts (London, 1977), nos. 324A (2) and 251 (9).

149. Titley, Miniatures, no. 127 (8).

150. Titley, Miniatures, nos. 317 (21) [1474]; 316 (20) [1490]; 341 (fifteenth century); 315 (4) [1540]; 312 (7), (15) [1550].


153. Titley, Miniatures, nos. 114 (18) [1628]; 109; 127 [49]; 202.


156. Loukonine and Ivanov, Lost Treasures, 225, fig. 232. See also Pope and Ackerman, Survey of Persian Art, vol. 3, 2651 and vol. 6, pls. 1478, A–B and 1479, A–C.


166. Von Kotzebue, Narrative, 219 n., 251 n.


169. Benjamin, Persia, 66.


171. Wills, In the Land, 318 (italics in the original).

172. Loukonine and Ivanov, Lost Treasures, 263, fig. 284. See, for example, the increasing number of men sitting on chairs in paintings and photographs in İraj Afshâr, Gânjvânâ-i aḵẖâ-yi İrân (Tehran: Farhang-i µr¸n, 1371/1992). For an early Qajar example depicting Muhammad ‘Ali Mirza Dowlathshah seated on a tall chair, see Soudavar, Art of the Persian Courts, 390 (159).

173. Jewett, My Life, 56–57. For pictures of Qajar chairs and tables, see Hülitzter, Persien, 224, 290–34. For the occurrence of chairs in a wall painting in the bazaar, see Friedrich Rosen, Persien (Berlin, 1926), 191.

174. Talbot Rice, Scythians, 136; Upton and Ackerman, “Furniture,” 2628–58; Lentz and Lowry, Timur, 66, 105, 110 has miniatures dating to 1429 and 1436 showing low refreshment tables.

175. Malcolm, Five Years, 23–24.

176. Two published examples, painted and lacquered, are 52.5 cm and 57.5 cm in height; one has a circular cobalt-painted tile on its top; see Loukonine and Ivanov, Lost Treasures, 264–65, figs. 285–86.


178. Soltani-Tehrani, Handwerker, 45, 51.


183. Wulff, Traditional Crafts, 81, 87.


185. Floor, Agriculture, 134–37.

THE WOODWORKING CRAFT AND ITS PRODUCTS IN IRAN

188. Wulff, Traditional Crafts, 87 (for a description of this technique), 135; Floor and Vatandoust, "Juwak-kari."
190. For a discussion of the use and significance of these scrolls as well as illustrations from them, see Gülru Necipoğlu, The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture (Santa Monica, CA, 1995), 14–20, 45–49.
193. Edward B. Eastwick, Journal of a Diplomat's Three Years' Residence in Persia, 2 vols. (London, 1864), vol. 1, 310; see also Benjamin, Persia, 65. For pictures of Qajar windows, see Hölzer, Persien, 2, 7, 8, 10, 14 (old ones), and 25, 85, 186 ('urus'), in the Persian part of the book. Benjamin, too, admires these windows greatly; see Persia, 52.
194. Benjamin, Persia, 94.
195. MacLean and Browne, Catholicos, 58.
196. Wulff, Traditional Crafts, 81.
197. Veronika Leonidovna Voronina, Narodnye traditsii arkhitektury Uzbekistana (Moscow, 1954), 47–48; idem, Srednevekovyy gorod arabskikh stran (Moscow, 1991); idem, Narodnaia arkhitektura Severnogo Tadzhikistana (Moscow, 1959).
200. Manuchehr Sittada, Az Astarāt tā Astarābād, 10 vols. (Tehran, 1374/1995, orig. pub. 1349/1970), vol. 3, 73–75. Like eminent painters, the carpenters who signed their work wrote 'amal-i X ("the work of X") or 'amala X ("X made..."), which indicates that they too were highly appreciated craftsmen. For a discussion on how these wooden panels and other implements were installed in buildings, see Eugenio Galdieri, Esfahān, ‘Ali Qāpū: An Architectural Survey (Rome, 1979), 58–73.
ELIZABETH LAMBOURN

BRICK, TIMBER, AND STONE: BUILDING MATERIALS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY IN GUJARAT

...because there is no stone in the Country [of Gujarat]; seeing they are forc’d to make use of Brick and Lime, a great deal of Timber is employ’d, which must be brought from Daman by sea.¹

—Jean de Thevenot

The central place of materials in architecture and the subsequent construction of architectural history is so obvious that it is easily taken for granted. The idea that architectural traditions are conditioned by the materials available for construction is axiomatic, as is the notion of hierarchies of materials, determined both by the economics of supply and demand and by cultural factors. We all recognize too that architectural history’s documentation and interpretation of architecture is largely dependent on what survives, with materials playing an essential role in patterns of survival. Differing rates of material decay, and susceptibility to different threats, determine the longevity of structures. Different forms of human intervention—decisions to repair, rebuild, abandon, or even destroy structures—have an equally fundamental effect on patterns of architectural survival, but here again materials, or more specifically culturally determined hierarchies of material value, also play a part in the making of these decisions. Structures employing expensive or rare materials may be better preserved and maintained than those built in materials perceived as having low value, though they may also be more liable to appropriation. Obviously a structure that is no longer standing, or even an entire building type with no above-ground examples, is not necessarily completely lost to architectural history; nevertheless, written and visual records are not always available, and archaeological excavation is only rarely possible, meaning that architectural history is still dominated by the “standing,” the “above ground.” Since the birth of architectural conservation as a professional sphere in the nineteenth century, this area of human intervention has had an increasing role in determining what is listed for protection, documented, and conserved, and can thus be written into architectural history. Here again, hierarchies of material value, even if mingled with other agendas, are always operative.

Awareness and understanding of materials do not simply make for a more “holistic” architectural history, one that includes and can be limited to a history of building materials and technologies. The linked notions of hierarchies of material value and patterns of survival foster an understanding of why what is there remains there and, just as important, an awareness of what is no longer there, and why. These notions enrich a variety of agendas within and beyond architectural history: at their most primary level they contribute to the decoding of meaning within architecture through the very fabric of construction and to a more critical reading of extant literature in the field; beyond this, they help integrate architectural history with facets of economic and social history as well as geography.

Historians of Western architecture have already engaged with these debates to varying degrees: there is a massive literature on building materials and their sources, circulation, and meaning in the Roman and Byzantine worlds, based in large part upon archaeological research, while various European archives have allowed for explorations, sometimes detailed, of building materials and processes during the medieval and Renaissance periods. The architectural history of the Islamic world, in contrast, seems still to be on the cusp of this area of investigation, particularly for regions beyond the so-called Central Islamic lands.

This article reexamines the Islamic religious architecture of Gujarat in western India from the perspective of building materials: their availability and circu-

¹From the Description of the Mughal Empire by Jean de Thevenot, 1657.
Fig. 1. View of the mosque of Rani Rupavati, Mirzapur, Ahmedabad, ca. 1500, showing the facade of the prayer hall with the bases of the characteristic centrally placed paired minarets. (Author’s photograph)

Fig. 2. View of the mosque and tomb of Rani Sabrai, Ahmedabad, early sixteenth century. (Author’s photograph)

Fig. 3. View of the collapsed facade of the Alif Khan Mosque, Dholka, mid-fifteenth century. Constructed of brick, with a total height of over 115 feet. (Author’s photograph)
ulation, the impact of this availability and circulation on local hierarchies of material value and patterns of survival, and the consequences of these patterns of survival for writing the architectural history of the area. More specifically, this article suggests that brick and/or timber construction actually constituted the norm in most of the region, aided by the availability of hardwoods imported from South India by sea. The article reviews the Islamic religious architecture of the region against this background and supports this review by presenting two previously unpublished seventeenth-century brick-and-timber mosques. The focus on Islamic religious architecture is largely a result of the author’s research specialization and interests but poses a model that applies across the architecture of the region, irrespective of faith or function. As is increasingly recognized, the Islamic architectures of South Asia cannot be artificially cut off from the indigenous architectural traditions within which they grew up; for the sake of focus and with the particular audience of *Muqarnas* in mind, however, discussion will focus primarily on construction for Muslim patrons.

The Islamic architecture of Gujarat is probably one of the most famous regional traditions of Muslim architecture in South Asia. Numerous mosques, mausolea, step-wells, and even palaces have survived throughout Gujarat State, and no Gujarati city has a greater concentration of Islamic architecture than Ahmedabad, the capital of the region under the Ahmad Shahi Sultans and later the Mughals. The vast majority of these surviving structures are built in stone, with profuse external decoration and finely carved mihrabs, jalis, and inscriptions (figs. 1 and 2). Visiting the numerous stone mosques and mausolea of Ahmedabad and reading the extant literature on this regional building tradition, one may all too easily assume that stone was readily available, the natural and principal building material of Gujarat. The few brick structures that do enter the current architectural history are there, I would argue, because they are simply so massive that they cannot be ignored. The Alif Khan Mosque at Dholka, dating to the second half of the fifteenth century, is a brick structure with an original facade height of over 115 feet (fig. 3); its height dominates the surrounding town even today (fig. 4). Yet as de Thevenot’s quote cited at the opening of this article shows, a far more complex array of materials was used in the region.

**THE AVAILABILITY AND CIRCULATION OF BUILDING MATERIALS IN GUJARAT**

Geology and geography obviously exert a primary influence on the building materials available in any one region. The modern-day state of Gujarat is geologically and geographically diverse and is consequently home to several distinct building traditions. This first section explores the parameters that influenced architecture in the region.

The heart of Gujarat is a large, flat alluvial plain, traversed by the Sabarmati and Mahi rivers, that stretches from the southern reaches of the Aravalli hills in the north down to the Gulf of Khambhat (Cambay) in the south and is bounded on the east by the early risings of the western Ghats (fig. 5). In this central plain, sand and alluvial silts make brick the only building material available in abundance, though the plain is ringed to the north and east by ranges of mountains or hills that provide outcrops of stone. The alluvial character of the central plain of Gujarat in many ways makes it a miniaturized version of the large delta of the Indus that lies to its west, and for many centuries Khambhat was indeed believed to lie on one of the mouths of the Indus. In spite of the untruth of this belief and the differences in scale, the parallels between the two areas in terms of naturally occurring building materials deserve to be remembered.

By contrast, Saurashtra, the central region of modern Gujarat State, is rich in building stone including granites, sandstones, limestones, and marbles, which are even found at coastal sites (figs. 5 and 6). Stone is so abundant that it is even used for domestic architecture. District gazetteers as a whole pass over the presence or exploitation of stone, and the first general survey of sources of stone in the region was made by Burgess and Cousins in 1903, as part of their survey of the architecture of northern Gujarat. They observed that at the time of writing grey sandstone was quarried in north Saurashtra, around Dhrangadra, and often used in the northern plain of Gujarat. Other sources of sandstone were around Ahmadnagar in Idar, in the east of Gujarat, while white marble came exclusively from the Aravalli range that extends between the north of the state and southern Rajasthan. The authors specifically mention that marble was still being quarried at Chandravati in northern Gujarat. The situation in Rajasthan is particularly complex, since the Aravalli hills provide outcrops, ridges, and plateaus of marble that are often not large enough to feature on most
geological maps but that may have been exploited at different periods. Finally, Kutch, the westernmost part of the state, actually belongs geologically to the Indus Delta, and there also brick is the main building material. Nevertheless, certain hilly ridges may have created micro-traditions, and it is believed that the stone structures at the site of Bhadresvar were built of stone from just such a local outcrop.\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{Stone}

The absence of stone in the central plain is especially significant because it is this area that was home to most of the important towns of the preconquest and Muslim periods. Anhilawad Patan, the capital of Gujarat under the Solankis, Khaljis, and Tughluqs, is situated in the north of this plain; Asawal, the later site of Ahmedabad, lies at its very center; while Dholka and the ports of Kambhat, Bharuch, Rander, and Surat lie on its furthest southern edge (fig. 5). We are therefore not looking at building traditions of a remote and peripheral region but at the factors that dictated building traditions in Gujarat’s capital cities, major towns, and ports.

Though stone clearly was brought to the central plain of Gujarat, as the many stone temples, mosques, and tombs there testify, the distances over which it had to be carried made it an expensive building material. When the British official James Forbes saw the large volume of marble and carved stone that had survived at Kambhat, he immediately “read” it as evidence for the port’s former wealth. Forbes remarked that “from the quantity of wrought stones and scattered relics of marble at Kambhat, we may judge of its former wealth and magnificence, the charge of transporting them thither must have been immense, the mountains from whence they are hewn being very distant.”\textsuperscript{6} Indeed, the finest white marbles found at Kambhat must have been brought there during the Solanki period from quarries in the southern Aravalli range, some two hundred kilometers away (see fig. 5).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_4.jpg}
\caption{View of the Alif Khan Mosque from the outskirts of Dholka. (Author’s photograph)}
\end{figure}
Although documentation of the stone trade across Gujarat in the medieval period is practically nonexistent, we do find occasional statements that testify to the difficulties in obtaining stone. The author ‘Ali Muhammad Khan, an official in Gujarat under the later Mughal emperors, appears to have been acutely aware of these obstacles, since his description of Ahmedabad includes information about how the kings and nobles “procured stones from distant places and built mosques.” This is corroborated by an inscription on a temple pillar which was reused in the construction of a mosque in the citadel at Ahmedabad in 1414, under the patronage of Ahmad Shah. The inscription records how an individual named Pethada contributed a jali screen to the temple of Uttareswara at Mahisaka in the year 1308 Vikrama Samavat (henceforth abbreviated as VS) which is equivalent to 1251-52 CE. Mahisaka is to be identified with the present village of Mahisa in the Kaira district, which is some fifty kilometers from Ahmedabad. In this example, by making use of spolia the patron economized considerably on the costs of quarrying and transporting fresh stone, even though the task of dismantling the structure and transporting the stone more than fifty kilometers overland by bullock cart would itself have been costly. Earlier patrons, however, would have had to bear the full costs of quarrying and transport to the building site.
No Gujarati sources so far give information about the infrastructure needed to obtain stone, but later documents provide insight into such issues. Quite exceptionally, three firmāns have survived that detail arrangements for the quarrying and transport of white marble for the construction of the Taj Mahal in Agra between 1632 and 1637. The marble quarries were situated at Makrana in Rajasthan, in the territory of Raja Jai Singh of Amber, and the quarrying therefore necessitated his permission and cooperation. The correspondence makes clear that the whole production of the quarries was made over to supply the Taj, and that every stonecutter in the region was employed in the quarrying, while over 230 carts were arranged on hire to transport the marble to Agra.11 While the Taj was undoubtedly one of the largest-scale projects of all time, these firmāns are useful reminders of the infrastructural and political factors involved in any acquisition of stone.

There is in fact a growing body of evidence to suggest that stone architecture may have come to the central plain of Gujarat comparatively late. The Prabandhacintāmani, a Jain text of the early fourteenth century, states that the Chalukyan rulers of Gujarat in the twelfth century were the first to build stone temples in Gujarat, earlier temples and buildings being of wood and brick.12 This statement also fits with the political history of the Gujarat area.13 Until the ninth century, what we now see as the “natural” area of Gujarat was in fact split between a number of competing kingdoms. Between the seventh and ninth centuries the Chalukyas of the Deccan gradually extended their control of the southern coast up from Bharuch towards the central plain, pushing against the Gur-
Brick, timber, and stone

The jara-Pratihara clans of north Gujarat, north Saurashtra, and Rajasthan, and against other stake holders such as the Valabhi dynasty in southern Saurashtra, the Kalachuri dynasty of central India, and finally the rulers of Thaneswar in the Gangetic valley. In the mid-tenth century the Gujarat branch of the Chalukyas—generally known as the Solankis—was founded, and under Mularaja Solanki (r. 998–1053 VS/942–97 CE) extended its rule as far as Anhilawad Patan in northern Gujarat and asserted control over south Gujarat at the expense of former kinsmen, the Chalukyas of the Deccan. The main point is that for an extended period the southern coast and central plain of Gujarat were separated territorially from Saurashtra and from northern and eastern Gujarat with their sources of stone (figs. 5 and 6). There seems little doubt that these political divisions affected the circulation of building materials in the region and perhaps delayed the extensive use of stone in architecture. By contrast, natural geology and a long coastline offered alternative materials and contributed to a distinctive local architecture.

Brick and timber

As one would expect of an alluvial region, there is plentiful evidence for a long tradition of brick architecture in the central plain of Gujarat. The earliest brick structure is a tank at Lothal, the site of a large city of the Harappan period, about forty kilometers west of Khambhat. Brick structures spanning the first to ninth centuries have also been excavated at the early port site of Nagara, now located three kilometers inland from Khambhat. The massive brick mausolea of Darya Khan and A’zam and Mu’azzam Khan in Ahmedabad and the Alif Khan Mosque at Dholka provide examples of a tradition of monumental, domed brick construction during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that has to date barely been explored (figs. 3 and 4). Brick manufacture continues to be a major industry in central Gujarat to this day.

The massive mausolea and mosque do not appear to be typical of brick architecture in Gujarat, however. Instead, the majority of brick architecture in western India seems to have been intimately tied to the use of timber. While brick could be used alone for the construction of tanks or foundations, Gujarat does not appear to have employed the technology of dome or vault construction until comparatively late, possibly as late as the fifteenth century, and the majority of brick structures in the region appear to have depended upon wood for their roofing and internal supports. For larger structures, a supporting timber frame maximized the capabilities of non-vaulted brick. A late but particularly complete description of this building method is provided by the mid-eighteenth-century author of the *Mir’āt-i Ahmadi*, who states that “walls of houses are built of baked bricks. The roof is covered with teakwood and clay tiles” and that “teakwood is used for roofs and pillars of buildings.” The same technique is described a century earlier by de Thevenot in his description of the use of brick, lime, and timber for house construction at Surat (see the opening citation).

Brick-and-timber construction appears to be far more ephemeral than construction in stone—more easily burned down and far more simply stolen—and very few structures older than the seventeenth century have survived. Thus the history of this type of construction has mainly been traced through later domestic architecture, physical evidence such as the imitation of wooden construction in stone structures, textual references, and rare visual evidence. This important task was begun by V. S. Pramar, who gathered descriptions of the different building materials used in Gujarat going back to the first century. These references are often oblique, however, and even descriptions of structures are not always as complete as one would hope. Thus the sixteenth-century *A’in-i Akbar* relates that “the roofs of houses [in Gujarat] are usually of tiles and the walls of burnt brick and lime.” Though the author describes only the outward appearance of structures, it seems likely, on the model of the *Mir’āt-i Ahmadi*, that their roofing and internal supports would have been of timber, but this is not explicitly stated. In a similar fashion the twelfth-century Arab geographer al-Idrisi limits himself to describing the exterior of houses, remarking that Bharuch was “a large handsome town, well built of brick and plaster.”

Timber

There is also considerable literary evidence for the existence of pure wooden construction in certain parts of Gujarat. Both Jain and Muslim sources record that the early-eleventh-century temple at Somnath Patan was built of timber. Details of the temple destroyed by Mahmud of Ghazna in 1026 are supplied by Muslim authors in the context of their accounts of his campaign in Gujarat. Ibn al-Athir in his *Kāmil fi al-tārīkh* records that “this temple of Somnath was built upon
fifty-six pillars of teak wood covered with lead," twenty-one while Ibn Zafir adds that the floor was also made of planks of teak, the interstices filled with lead. twenty-two No further details are available about the Somnath temple before Mahmud’s raid, but it appears to have been reconstructed in wood afterwards. A passage in the Prabandhacintāmani of Merutunga records a discussion between the Solanki ruler Kumarapala (r. 1200–29 VS/1144–73 CE) and the Jain scholar Hemachandra, in which the latter exhorts his sovereign to “restore the wooden temple of Somesvara, which is almost destroyed by the neighbouring sea, owing to the showers of ocean spray that fall over it.” twenty-three This passage suggests that, for the temple to be so vulnerable to seaspray, the roof and large parts of it must have been of timber. Again, these passages fail to clarify whether the temple was built entirely of teakwood or whether it employed the mixture of timber and brick found in contemporary domestic architecture, although presumably an important temple would be a pure timber construction.

Other passages in the Prabandhacintāmani refer to yet other wooden temples in Saurashtra. Again, one may question whether these temples were constructed entirely of wood or also employed brick for walls and foundations. One passage set during the reign of Jayasimha (r. 1150–1200 VS/1094–1144 CE), recounts how in 1128 CE a governor of Saurashtra named Sajjana “devoted the proceedings of the taxes for three years to building on the holy mountain Ujjayanta [Girnar] a new stone temple to Neminatha [Girmar] a god’s wooden temple in place of the wooden one which he took away.” twenty-four Yet another anecdote, set during the reign of Kumarapala (r. 1144–75 CE), describes the restoration of a wooden temple at the site of Vimala Mata, or Satrunjaya, in Saurashtra. Merutunga relates how an official named Udayan, on campaign in the region, “was afraid that the temple would be destroyed [by fire]… [and] conceived a desire to restore the dilapidated temple.” This was finally achieved in 1211 VS/1154–55 CE, although the text does not make clear what material was employed for the reconstruction. twenty-five

The use of timber in Gujarat is not without its paradoxes, however, since timber, like stone, was not always a naturally occurring building material. Pramar has argued that Gujarat did not have large viable forests for the provision of structural timber such as sal (Shorea robusta) or teak (Tectona grandis), the two Indian trees that yield the best structural timber. Although several areas—such as the Gir forest in Saurashtra, the Dangs in southern Gujarat, and the hilly eastern fringes of the modern state—are potential sources of timber, Pramar’s research has established that these areas yielded wood poor in either quality or quantity, insufficient for a regular and reliable production. twenty-six To make matters worse, in many periods these areas were under the control of tribal chiefs and therefore inaccessible to large-scale exploitation. By contrast, reliable supplies of structural timber were available from further down the western coast, from Konkan and Malabar.

Transport costs: sea versus land

As de Thevenot’s analysis of building materials in seventeenth-century Surat makes clear, the final choice of materials was conditioned not simply by availability but also by the transport costs involved in acquiring them. He writes:

…and because there is no stone in the Country [of Gujarat]; seeing they are forcé’d to make use of Brick and Lime, a great deal of Timber is employ’d, which must be brought from Daman by sea, the wood of the Country [i.e., Gujarat] which is brought [from] a great way off, being much dearer because of the Land-Carriage. twenty-seven

Daman is a port on the extreme southern border of the modern state of Gujarat, on the border with Konkan. De Thevenot’s statement explains that local timber sources (in the Gir forest in Saurashtra and in the hilly eastern fringes of Gujarat) were too expensive to exploit because of the high cost of land transport. It was cheaper to import the required timber by sea than to exploit Gujarati timber sources inland. Though de Thevenot cites Daman as the source of this timber, it was probably only a transshipment port for wood originating even further south in Konkan or Malabar. De Thevenot’s data are confirmed by his contemporary, Stavorinus, who remarked that at Surat, “most of the wood for fuel, and all that is wanted for house and ship building, is brought thither from Daman, by water-carriage.” twenty-eight This situation even continued into the nineteenth century, when numerous sources describe the shipment of timber from the Malabar and Konkan coasts to carpenters at Ahmedabad and Bhavnagar in Saurashtra. twenty-nine

Both de Thevenot’s and Stavorinus’s observations also point to the determining factor in all these equations, namely that sea transport was considerably cheaper than transport by land. Though we have no precise figures available for preindustrial South Asia,
some idea of the relative cost of these means can be
gauged from data evolved for Europe before the inven-
tion of steam or combustion engines.

Table 1. Ratio of transport costs by sea, river, and land

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<th>sea :</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eighteenth-century UK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>22.6</td>
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<td>Roman Empire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roman Empire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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Since Gujarat has an extensive seacoast but only one
navigable river, the Narmada, water transport in Gujar-
at equaled sea transport. With land transport at least
twenty times more expensive than sea transport—and
up to sixty times more expensive in the worst sce-

One aspect of the circulation of building materi-
als that de Thevenot and Tavernier do not mention
is that of the transport of stone by sea. Although evi-
dence for this is at present extremely scant, the avail-
ability of stone at coastal sites in Saurashtra makes
movement of this type at least theoretically possi-
ble. In this connection, one passage from Merutun-
gi’s Prabandhacintamani is highly relevant. Merutunga
relates an incident that occurred during building work
at the Nandisvara Temple on Mount Satrunjaya in Sau-
ashtra in the year 1277 VS/1220–21 CE, reporting
that:

Sixteen excellent pillars of Kantheliya stone were being
brought by water from the mountain, and when they were
being landed near Samudra-kantha one pillar sank into
the mud in such a way that, though diligently searched
for, it was not recovered. A pillar of a different kind of
stone was substituted in its place, and the temple was
fully completed according to the size designed. During
the next year, owing to the change produced by the
tide of the sea, that very pillar, that was lost in the mud,
became visible.”

The location of the mountain where the pillars were

carved before transport to Satrunjaya is not certain
but may correspond to the site of Kanthkot or the
region called Mahi Kantha, hence Kantheliya, on the
border between north Saurashtra and the Rann of
Kutch (see fig. 6). Similarly, the site of Samudra-kantha
where the pillars were unloaded corresponds to no
known site, though the term samudra suggests a coastal
site, and since they were destined for the temple at
Satrunjaya it seems likely that they were landed some-
where close by. Whatever the current confusion, this
passage clearly describes an incident during the early
thirteenth century in which pillars were precarved
and then transported by sea to the vicinity of their
final destination.

The identification of the mountain and the Kantheliya
stone with Kanthkot or Mahi Kantha is corrobo-
rated by what we know of Saurashtra’s geography at
this period. The Imperial Gazetteer of the Bombay Presi-
dency of 1909 makes clear that until the nineteenth
century Saurashtra was separated from the mainland
of Gujarat by a belt of salt lands and a long lagoon
called the Nal (see also fig. 6). During the monsoon
the Nal formed a connecting link between the Gulf
of Khambhat and the Little Rann of Kutch and for six
months of the year turned Saurashtra into an island.

This phenomenon ceased only as a consequence of a
violent earthquake that shook western India in 1819
and raised the Saurashtran peninsula, thus terminat-
ing the annual flooding. It is mentioned by several
reliable authors, namely de Varthema, Baldaeus, and
Alexander Hamilton, and is also confirmed by con-
temporary maps of India, such as that illustrated in
Herbert’s 1665 volume, Some Yeares Travels into Divers
Parts of Asia and Afrique (fig. 7). Even more than now,
therefore, this part of western India was intimately
linked to the sea, and pillars quarried at Kanthkot
or in Mahi Kantha would have been shipped around
Fig. 7. Map of Gujarat in 1665, showing Saurashtra as an island off the coast of Gujarat. (From T. Herbert, *Some Yeares Travels into Divers Parts of Asia and Afrique*, reprinted in Susan Gole, *A Series of Early Printed Maps of India in Facsimile*, map 11b)
either the western or the eastern half of Saurashtra and unloaded at a port site close to Satrunjaya.

Although this is only an isolated notice, it seems likely that more details of this type might be found in other texts of the period. With its massive reserves of stone and its status of a near-island, Saurashtra may have been in an ideal position to supply stone to other parts of western India. A sea trade in Saurastran stone certainly existed in the early twentieth century, since the Imperial Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency mentions that “near Porbandar a valuable description of building stone is extracted from the hills and sent to Bombay in large quantities.” Since Porbandar and Bombay are both ports, it seems logical to infer that this trade took place by sea. The building stone of the region would also have been especially accessible to towns in the central plain of Gujarat such as Khambhat and perhaps even Ahmedabad. The quarries at Dhrangadra are situated on the very “coast” of the Rann of Kutch, offering direct contact by water with Khambhat and easy access to other major towns such as Dholka and Ahmedabad. In this new geographical context, Briggs’s rather dismissive comment that certain persons believed the stone employed in the construction of the Friday mosque at Ahmedabad (fig. 1) to be a “grey-wacke procured from the contiguity of the Rann of Katch” may in fact have some basis in fact. This said, it seems unlikely that these seaborne sources of stone radically altered the balance of materials in Gujarat. The most prized stone of the day, white marble, was available only from inland sites in southern Rajasthan, and, as our many sources show, stone was generally brought to the central plain of Gujarat by land.

Overall, our understanding of the circulation of building materials in coastal Gujarat in the seventeenth century provides a useful overview of the parameters that conditioned building traditions in Gujarat from the earliest times until the advent of rail transport and the combustion engine revolutionized the economics of transporting materials. If we are to trust the Periplus Maris Erythraei, which states that “teakwood, and beams, saplings, and logs of sissu and ebony” were exported from Barugaza [Bharuch] to the Iranian coasts of the Persian Gulf, Gujarat appears to have been a transhipment area for South Indian timber from as early as the first century. It is then possible that imported timber was used to expand the possibilities of local brick in the central plain of Gujarat, and especially at coastal sites, at least from this early period. While the political unification of Gujarat under the Solankis in the tenth century would have facilitated the circulation of stone from Saurashtra and northern Gujarat down to the central plain and the coast, the patterns of survival in these regions suggest that stone remained rare and costly. Brick and timber then, rather than stone, would have constituted the principal high-status building materials in the central plain of Gujarat and along the coastal plain in the east.

RECONSTRUCTING THE ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE OF GUJARAT

Materials and patterns of survival in Gujarat

The fact that so many stone structures survive today in Ahmedabad and other cities in Gujarat is due in part to the natural durability of stone as opposed to wood and brick, as well as to the technical complexities of making off with heavy stone blocks. However, it must also go back, to a large degree, to a more or less unspoken hierarchy of building materials in which stone was considered a more “worthy” material than either wood or brick. If it is difficult to document for the precolonial period, this bias towards stone is very evident in the work of the Archaeological Survey of India in its colonial and postcolonial forms. There is no doubt that religious architecture in stone was listed, conserved, and restored more than buildings of “lesser” materials. In case of Khambhat, for example, the stone Tughluq Friday mosque of 1325 and the port’s many marble inscription slabs were listed and published relatively thoroughly from 1885 onwards. By contrast, at least two early and important brick-and-timber mosques—the mid-seventeenth-century Masjid-i Fath and the fourteenth-to-eighteenth-century Sad-i Awwal Mosque and its minaret—were extant in the late nineteenth century but were almost completely ignored and certainly never protected. The 1961 Census of India, which assembled a great deal of data on construction in brick and timber in Gujarat, equally neglected to include mosques and certainly omitted these two examples, which cannot have been the only extant brick-and-timber structures at Khambhat in the late nineteenth century; countless loose foundation inscriptions in the port testify to the many other mosques and mausolea, very probably of brick-and-timber construction, that also existed. They are simply the two buildings that survived long enough for me to be able...
to document them during fieldwork at Khambhat in the 1990s. This bias towards stone construction has led to a very skewed perception of the character of Islamic architecture, not only at Khambhat but across Gujarat.

**Brick-and-timber mosques of Gujarat**

Though most of the descriptions of brick and timber structures cited so far concern domestic architecture, we could perhaps just as easily replace “house” by “mosque.” A few later sources do indeed refer to mosques of this type. A footnote in the *Bombay Gazetteer* of 1899 includes a description of a typical Gujarati mosque as a structure with brick walls and floors and a stone gateway. As the *Gazetteer* suggests, more ambitious projects or wealthier patrons probably included some stone for focal areas such as the foundation inscription, the mihrab, the minbar or, as mentioned above, the entrance gate. Although the author of the *Gazetteer* does not specify the manner in which such mosques were roofed, the text of the *Mi’rāt-i Ḥamadī* and de Thevenot’s description, both cited earlier, suggest that these would have been of timber, even if the precise form and finish of the roof—whether flat, pitched, or marked by domes—is unclear, since to date no original roofs have been identified.

Perhaps more surprisingly, a few structures have survived. A late though not particularly fine example is the nineteenth-century wooden extension to the fourteenth-century Tanka Mosque at Dholka. The amount of covered prayer space was increased by building across the courtyard; in this area, construction is entirely in wood, with stone used only for the pillar bases and paving (fig. 8). The roof here is flat with plain, undecorated ceilings.

More interesting are two seventeenth-century brick-and-timber mosques that have recently come to light at coastal sites in Gujarat. The Masjid-i Fath at Khambhat is almost invisible from the street, and a quick glance through the bars of the entrance gate on the north side suggests nothing more than an empty space enclosed by four brick walls. From the inside, however, traces of a fine mosque are still visible. Although no roof or pillars have survived, the qibla wall is still substantially intact (fig. 9). Built of brick with a plaster finish, it has three white marble mihrabs and a minbar, all finely carved and some still bearing traces of inlay.
Most important, the qibla wall carries three inscriptions relating to the construction of the mosque (fig. 11), which together establish that the Masjid-i Fath, or Mosque of Victory, was built in 1056 (1646–47) by a certain ‘Ali Akbar, an Iranian horse and jewel trader who in 1646 was appointed by Shah Jahan to administer the ports of Khambhat and Surat. ‘Ali Akbar’s career and patronage provide a late but fascinating example of the merchant patronage that had driven architectural activity at Khambhat for centuries and, most significantly, produced one of the earliest brick-and-timber mosques known to survive in Gujarat. While the building currently lacks any internal supports or roof, a short description in James Burgess’s Revised Lists of the Antiquarian Remains in the Bombay Presidency records that in the late nineteenth century the mosque still “[had] a marble arch and [was] sup-

Fig. 9. Qibla wall of the Masjid-i Fath, Khambhat, 1646–47. (Author’s photograph)

Fig. 10. Detail of the central mihrab and minbar, Masjid-i Fath, Khambhat. White marble, inlaid with carnelian, dated 1056 (1646–47). (Author’s photograph)
Fig. 11. Detail of inscriptions recording the foundation of the Masjid-i Fath, Khambat, by 'Ali Akbar Isfahani in 1646–47. (Author’s photograph)

Fig. 12. Reconstructed ground plan of the prayer hall, Masjid-i Fath, Khambhat. (Author’s plan)
ported on 32 wooden pillars." The Masjid-i Fath therefore had brick walls, wooden pillars on stone bases, and marble furnishings—the mihrabs, minbar, and foundation inscriptions. In all probability, the pillars and roof of the Masjid-i Fath were constructed with teak imported from Malabar or Konkan. Indeed, the letters of the English factory at Surat specifically mention that 'Ali Akbar was issued twelve passes for ships from Malabar to trade at Khambhat, indicating that he traded directly with this area. From Burgess’s account and the surviving stone pillar bases, the ground plan of the mosque can be reconstructed with some certainty (fig. 12).

Given the use of wooden supports it also seems likely that the mosque would have had a trabeated wooden roof, though, as mentioned earlier, the exact form of the roof remains open to debate. If mosque architecture of this type followed domestic models, then we might reconstruct a pitched roof covered by tiles as described in the earlier *A'in-i Akbari and the slightly later *Min'āt-i Ahmadī. If this is the case, brick-and-timber mosques would have had a very different exterior profile from stone-built mosques, where domes are the norm (see the small open mosque to the left of the mausoleum in fig. 2). However, it may be that these brick-and-timber mosques had some form of flat roof or a system of plaster-covered wooden domes. For the moment we can only speculate.

More recently, substantial traces of a second brick-and-timber mosque, possibly some fifty years earlier than the Masjid-i Fath, have been identified at Bharuch. The mosque is the object of a separate article in course of preparation, but given the rarity and fragility of brick-and-timber structures, its presence seems worth signaling even at this early stage. The foundation inscriptions of the Qazi Mosque at Bharuch were first published in 1933–34 with the specification that they were inscribed on the wooden beams of the mosque (fig. 13). Together they record, in Persian verse, the construction of a mosque by one Murtazz Khan Muzaffar Ghazi in 1018 (1609). Remarkably enough, the mosque has never been published but still stands today within the precincts of a private home inside the old city walls (fig. 14). The inscriptions are no longer in situ on the beams, and it is clear that the mosque has undergone substantial alterations, notably including a
reroofing, since the 1930s. However, substantial parts of the original structure do survive. Here, a pattern of survival opposite that of the Masjid-i Fath appears to have operated, with the original exterior walls being lost but fine wooden pillars, numerous stone bases, and a superb pair of carved wooden doors surviving instead (figs. 15 and 16).

Unfortunately, in Gujarat these survivals are the exception rather than the rule. The leitmotif of my fieldwork in Khambhat was to be shown a brand new mosque with, at best, only a few remains of the wooden original in the courtyard, awaiting disposal. The one area that preserved a few wooden mosques, at least as late as the mid-1990s, was Patan, in northern Gujarat, though these were rapidly being replaced by concrete structures funded from the revenues of migrant workers in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. The Sad-i Awwal Mosque at Khambhat illustrates this pattern of failed listing and documentation inevitably followed by enthusiastic modernization.

The Sad-i Awwal Mosque is one of a number of mahalla, or small neighborhood mosques, at Khambhat. As its name suggests—sad-i awwal means “first hundred” or the first century of the Hijra—it is believed to be one of the first mosques founded at Khambhat. Though a date in the first century AH seems highly unlikely, the mosque does preserve a number of important old inscriptions and marble carvings going back at least to the fourteenth century.

I in fact first visited the mosque in 1998 as part of a survey of inscription slabs at the port;Unfortunately, I arrived after the most recent of many renovations, this one quite drastic. The prayer hall of the mosque had been completely rebuilt and was now a simple concrete box without internal supports (figs. 17 and 18). However, the fine marble pillar bases built into the floor (fig. 18) and the piles of old timber stacked in the courtyard for disposal suggested that it had formerly had a timber roof supported on timber columns placed on marble bases. The timber was too damaged to establish any firm date, but the pillar bases and inscriptions still preserved in the mosque provide enough information to reconstruct a possible history of the structure before its renovation.

The earliest foundation inscription (fig. 19) records the reconstruction of a fallen mosque in 827 (1423) by Sultan Ahmad Shah of Gujarat. Generally at Khambhat it is extremely difficult to prove that an inscrip-
tion slab is in situ, since loose slabs were often moved between structures for safekeeping, and the inscriptions are rarely detailed enough to identify a mosque in a particular locality, let alone location. However, in this case, the date of the inscription and the name of the patron can be inferred from the elaborate stellate pillar bases that have been preserved in the floor of the mosque (fig. 20, a and b). These finely carved white marble bases recall similar stellate bases and pillars placed at the openings of the prayer hall screen in the 1414 Bhadrak Mosque and the 1424 Friday mosque at Ahmedabad (fig. 21), both erected under the patronage of Ahmad Shah, and in the mosque of his successor, Qutb al-Din Shah, built at Ahmedabad in 1449. While it is impossible to prove absolutely, the cluster of stellate pillar bases in mosques built under royal patronage at Ahmedabad and the presence of similar bases alongside a foundation inscription of Ahmad Shah at Khambhat suggest that the two groups of material may be associated, and that the foundation inscription and pillar bases in the Sad-i Awwal are survivals of an early stage of the mosque. Although the Sad-i Awwal Mosque does not go back to the first century of the Hijra, it was at least rebuilt in the early fifteenth century under royal patronage and had a fine marble inscription along with elaborate pillar bases. The absence of any other stone remains in the vicinity of the mosque and the fact that the mosque was never listed or protected suggest that these bases supported a wooden superstructure. A second foundation inscription in the mosque specifically names the Sad-i Awwal Mosque and states that it was rebuilt again in 1186 (1772–73). The timber stacked in the courtyard may well have come from this later, eighteenth-century reconstruction.

The evidence from the Sad-i Awwal Mosque is not as solid as that provided by the Masjid-i Fath but nevertheless suggests the existence of brick-and-timber mosques at Khambhat at least as far back as the fifteenth century. More important perhaps, its inscriptions seem to confirm that such mosques generally deteriorated more rapidly than their stone counterparts and tended to be almost entirely rebuilt, rather than restored, when this happened. Since the nineteenth century, unlike stone structures, they have also tended to be ignored in listings of monuments and so were never recorded, let alone protected or sensitively preserved. The story of the Sad-i Awwal Mosque has unfortunately grown even sadder: on my last visit, in early 2004, the pillar bases had been removed from the prayer hall, where they obviously impeded prayer, and were stacked in the courtyard for disposal.

The enthusiastic renovation of the mosque had also extended to its earliest part, the brick staircase minaret on its southeastern corner. In this discussion of brick-and-timber mosque architecture, I have paid little attention to ancillary structures such as minarets. The east wall of the mosque courtyard carries an open flight of stairs that leads up to a small domed chattri, or small, open kiosk, at the southeast corner of the
building, above a former entrance to the mosque. As seen in 1998 and documented in previous photographs by the American Institute of Indian Studies, the _chattrī_ is built of brick covered with plaster and carries a band of turquoise tiles around the base of its dome (fig. 22). The four walls of the _chattrī_ are chamfered at the corners to lead into the octagonal zone of transition and then up to the circular dome. The whole has a prismatic or faceted effect quite different from the angular stone _chattrī_ s seen atop other mosques in the region. The southern side of the _chattrī_, that directly above the gateway, has a small balcony supported on brackets. Many surfaces preserve traces of decoration: the dome is lobed and sits on a band of blind arches each decorated with a turquoise-glazed ceramic inset in the shape of a lamp; its octagonal base carries a row of bud-shaped merlons; and, finally, the exterior face of the balcony is decorated with the traditional Gujarati frieze of mango leaves.

The _chattrī_ has no inscriptions and there are no structures with which to compare it directly; nevertheless, various details suggest a date in the four-
Fig. 17. Exterior of the recently rebuilt Sād-i Awwal Mosque, Khambhat, showing remaining pillar bases, possibly remnants of an earlier wooden or brick-and-timber mosque. (Author’s photograph, taken in 1999)

Fig. 18. Interior view of the recently rebuilt Sād-i Awwal Mosque, Khambhat, showing remaining pillar bases built into the new floor, possibly remnants of an earlier wooden or brick-and-timber mosque. (Author’s photograph, taken in 1999)
Fig. 19. Foundation inscription in the Sad-i Awwal Mosque, Khambhat, recording the reconstruction of a fallen mosque by Sultan Ahmad Shah in 1423. (Author’s photograph)

Fig. 20, a and b. Marble pillar bases of different shapes, possibly early fifteenth century, Sad-i Awwal Mosque, Khambhat. (Author’s photograph, taken in 1999)
teenth or fifteenth century. The crown of merlons is too generic for comparison, but similar turquoise-glazed tiles, square this time, are built into the exterior wall of the Begumpur, or Jahanpanah, Mosque built around 1343 in Delhi. The closest local parallels are with the decoration of turquoise tiles on two fifteenth-century mosques, the Shams Khan and the Ek Minar ki Masjid, at Nagaur in Rajasthan. Since both mosques display heavy Gujarati influence in their ground plans and minarets, their decoration may also

Fig. 21. Detail of one of the stellate pillars within the prayer hall of the 1427 Friday mosque at Ahmedabad. (Author’s photograph)
reflect contemporary Gujarati fashions largely lost in the region.

Unfortunately, during the latest phase of renovation of the Sadi-i Awwal Mosque, which saw the pillar bases dug up from the prayer hall, the entire chattri has been covered with what can only be described as bathroom tiles (fig. 23), completely obliterating any trace of the original turquoise tiling (though I continue to hope that these may simply lie under the modern surface).

There seems little doubt that the chattri was intended to function as a place for the call to prayer. Contemporary parallels in stone are known in Gujarat, but the Sadi-i Awwal is the only brick example so far documented. The Friday mosque at Bharuch (1321) is an open hypostyle mosque of relatively modest proportions: it seems clear that the call to prayer was given from the roof, reached by means of an open flight of stairs in the north boundary wall. The Ravali Mosque, at Mangrol in Saurashtra (1386–87), is also a simple, open hypostyle mosque, and here again the staircase is built into the south wall. In contrast to Bharuch,
the stairway of the Sad-i Awwal leads up directly to a small, square chattri, or pavilion for the shelter of the muezzin. In terms of architectural genealogy, the chattri follows clearly in the line of so-called staircase minarets or mi‘dhanas (literally “place for the calling of the adhān,” rather than that of tower minarets. The roofs of mosques were frequently used for the call to prayer, and in certain cases this use was formalized by the construction of a staircase leading up to the roof, sometimes with a small pavilion or structure at roof level to protect the muezzin from the elements. The earliest surviving physical example of the type is
and Kambaya,” all large port sites along the Gujarati coast. As we have seen, at this period the presence of “Friday mosques at Famhal, Sindan, Saimur, and Kambaya,” all large port sites along the Gujarati coast, indicates that an Islamic religious architecture already existed in these areas; thus al-Mas’udi (d. 956) writes that in the kingdom of the Balhara (the Arabic rendering of Chalukya) “Islam is honored and protected and the Muslims dispose [themselves] of monumental mosques and Friday mosques, frequented for the five prayers.” A slightly later source, Ibn Hawqal’s *Kitāb sūrat al-ard* (finished in 976) also mentions the presence of “Friday mosques at Famhal, Sindan, Saimur, and Kambaya,” all large port sites along the Gujarati coast. As we have seen, at this period even the local Chalukya rulers may have built more frequently in brick and timber than in stone. Thus, although we have no descriptions or traces of these early mosques, it seems highly probable that they would have followed the dominant local building traditions of brick-and-timber or timber construction, with brick staircase minarets. The only real chance of definitive proof lies in the archaeological excavation of early Islamic quarters, and specifically mosque sites, something that the religious tensions and politics of Gujarat render almost impossible any time in the near future.

Nevertheless, the above discussion clarifies important aspects of the Islamic architecture and epigraphy of Gujarat. Contrary to generally held assumptions that the Islamic architecture of Gujarat is a stone architecture, it appears that of the three building materials available in Gujarat—brick, timber, and stone—stone was the most costly and least easy to obtain, and consequently that brick and timber, used singly or in combination, were the primary means of construction. Although timber was also an expensive raw material and was not available locally, it could be imported cheaply by sea and could be combined with the brick available locally to maximize its capabilities. Particularly at a site such as Kambhat, situated on the furthest southern edge of the central alluvial plain, using a mixture of timber and brick was the most natural method of construction and never appears to have been seriously rivaled by the use of stone. The large numbers of inscriptions on stone and architectural carvings in marble from Kambhat demonstrate that small quantities of stone were used for especially important areas of buildings, such as foundation inscriptions and mihrabs, and for other inscriptions that were required to survive as enduring records, such as grave memorials.

Significantly, this pattern of material use and circulation brings the architecture of coastal Gujarat firmly into the ambit of Islamic architecture around the Persian Gulf and along the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula. Though common materials by no means dictate common stylistic or technical traditions, this shared basis suggests a closer examination of architectural traditions around the western Indian Ocean. The presence of staircase minarets in western India at least as early as the fourteenth century illustrates the close ties between the Islamic architecture of Gujarat and the building traditions of the Islamic heartlands.

The relative fragility of brick and timber compared to stone construction explains why so few Islamic buildings of this type have survived, since it is considerably more difficult to destroy a stone structure than one built in brick and timber. Burn or take away the timbers, make off with the bricks, and the only durable remains of a structure such as the Masjid-i Fath or the Sad-i Awwal Mosque will be the areas of carved stone—that is, its architectural carvings and foundation inscriptions. This is exactly the pattern of Islamic survivals at Kambhat, where we have a mass of detached foundation inscriptions and mihrabs, the earliest foundation inscription dating as far back as 1218, but few standing structures of any age. The only two complete Islamic structures at Kambhat are both stone constructions: the Friday mosque of 1325 and the adjacent tomb complex of ‘Umam al-Kazaruni (d. 1333). Otherwise the port has preserved a few solitary stone gateways and a brick staircase minaret, all of the four-
teenth century, which now are attached to modern concrete mosques or simply stand alone.

Excluding Ahmedabad, the exception to the rule, other towns in Gujarat present a pattern similar to that of Kambhat, with only a handful of monumental stone structures. Stone-built mosques survive at Bharuch (1321), at Dholka (the Mosque of Hilal Malik [1333]), the Tanka Mosque [1361], and the current Jami’ Mosque dating to the fifteenth century), and at Kapadwanj (1370–71). A further two mosques, one at Mandal and the other at Baroda, are undated but can probably be dated on stylistic grounds to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Survivals are slightly better in Saurashtra, in the western part of Gujarat State, and even to some extent in Kutch, where adequate supplies of local stone appear to have made stone construction far more common. The site of Bhadresvar in Kutch has preserved three stone-built mosques in addition to the so-called Shrine of Ibrahim, all dating to the mid-to-late twelfth century. In Saurashtra, a late-thirteenth century mosque, the Mosque of al-Iraj, has survived at Junagadh, also the site of a fifteenth-century mosque; another early mosque, so far unpublished, survives at Vanthali. The ports of Saurashtra also preserve a significant number of mosques and mausolea built in stone from the fourteenth century onwards. Somnath Patan has a Jami’ Mosque dated 732 (1331) and the Maipuri Mosque of possibly fourteenth-century date; only recently, Mehrdad Shokoohy has mentioned the existence of two more unpublished early mosques there.60 Three stone mosques survive in Mangrol alone: the Rahmat Mosque of 1382–83, the Jami’ Mosque probably dated 785 (1383–84), and the Ravali Mosque of 1386–87. Mehrdad Shokoohy has also recently identified a medieval-period stone mosque on the island of Diu.61 All locations also preserve masses of stone foundation inscriptions detached from the buildings to which they once belonged. Although Saurashtra and Kutch preserve Islamic structures in greater quantity and from a far earlier period than do the eastern coast and central plain of Gujarat, the numbers still do not compare to Ahmedabad’s wealth of stone architecture.

Awareness of the geological and physical parameters that conditioned building traditions in the plain of Gujarat corrects our often skewed view of Islamic architecture in the region. It is too easy to visit Ahmedabad and take its many stone mausolea and mosques for granted. But they do not constitute the “norm” of Islamic architecture in Gujarat; quite the opposite, their material testifies to the amazing wealth of the Ahmad Shahis and their passion for architecture. When the author of the Ḍīn-i Akbār praised Ahmedabad for its thousand stone mosques, he was probably marveling as much at their material as at their number.62 Similarly, we should take with us some of this awe when we visit and judge the stone architecture outside Ahmedabad. Just as the ready availability of images has now robbed us of the ability to feel their power, so too the internationalization of the stone industry has deprived us of an understanding of the power of stone in architecture. The other architectural traditions touched on here need to find their place in the broader picture of Islamic architecture in Gujarat, but for this research to take place they also need immediate documentation and conservation.

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NOTES


3. Unfortunately, there have been no studies of quarries and sources of stone in western India. The following discussion has been based on modern geological handbooks, tangential references in other publications, and the study of surviving buildings. One of the best sources is Burgess and Cousens, Architectural Antiquities of Northern Gujarat, 28–29. The appendix on building material in H. D. Sankalia, The Archaeology of Gujarat (Including Kathiawar) (Bombay, 1941) still relies on these basic data for its short paragraph: see 81. See also Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series: Bombay Presidency, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1909, repr. New Delhi, 1985), vol. 2, 356.


5. Mehrdad Shokoohy suggests that the stone used for the mosques and other structures, as well as for the Jain temples there, was taken from a nearby outcrop: Shokoohy, Bhadresvar.


8. The Vikrama Samvat, or Vikrama Era, came into common use in Gujarat during the Solanki period, i.e., from the mid-tenth century onwards, and has been the regional system ever since; it starts in roughly 56–58 BCE. For this and other systems, see B. K. Shelat, Chronological Systems of Gujarat: From Early Times up to 1304 AD (Ahmedabad, 1987), 5–10.


13. For a detailed history of the Chalukyas of Gujarat, see A. K. Majumdar, Chalukyas of Gujarat: A Survey of the History and Culture of Gujarat from the Middle of the Tenth to the End of the Thirteenth Century, Bharatiya Vidya Studies 4 (Bombay, 1956), still the most comprehensive history of this dynasty. For the rise of Muslim power in the region, see S. C. Misra’s aptly named The Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat: A History of Gujarat from 1298 to 1442 (Bombay, 1963, 2nd ed. New Delhi, 1982).

14. S. Roa, Lothal and the Indus Civilization (Bombay, 1973); there are various references to brick throughout Roa’s text, but no specific discussion of construction materials.

15. See references throughout R. N. Mehta and D. R. Shah, Excavation at Nagar (Baroda, 1968).

16. Their presence in the canonical accounts of Gujarati Islamic architecture seems to be explained by the fact that they are simply too big to be ignored. For the mausolea in Ahmedabad, see Burgess, Muhammedan Architecture of Ahmedabad, vol. 1, 58–59 and vol. 2, 78. For the Alif Khan Mosque at Dholka, see Burgess, Muhammedan Architecture of Bharoch, Cambay, 34–36 and plates.

17. Khan, Mir‘āt-i Ahmad, 12.

18. Pramar’s study, Haveli, is essentially concerned with the surviving half-timbered houses of the seventeenth to the twentieth century and is a sociological study of the organization and structure of the house. But the author also provides valuable documentation of the history of such half-timbered construction in the region, working back from the present day.


24. For the translated English passage, see Merutunga, Prabhandhacintāmani, 95–96; for the original Sanskrit, see idem, Prabhandhacintāmani, ed. Jinarājya Muni (Sanitikhetan, 1933), 64–65. An inscription from Gīrnr dated 1119 CE confirms Sajjana’s appointment to the region: see Imperial Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, 26 vols. (Bombay, 1882–96), vol. 1, 127. This anecdote is repeated in other Jain sources of the period.

25. Merutunga, Prabhandhacintāmani, 134–35. Udayana’s career is well documented in contemporary Jain sources; for a summary, see V. K. Jain, Trade and Traders in Western India: AD 1000–1300 (New Delhi, 1990), 236–37.


33. de Thevenot, *Voyages*, 22.


35. Ibid., 346.


40. For example, a map of Cambay by Petrus Bertius from the *Caert Thresoor* of 1612 shows Khambhat situated on one of the branches of the Indus; another map of India from T. Herbert’s *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Asia and Africa of 1665* shows Saurashtra as an island off the coast of Gujarat. These maps are reprinted in Susan Gole, *A Series of Early Printed Maps of India in Facsimile, Collected by Susan Gole*, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi, 1984), title page and map 11b, respectively.

41. Imperial Gazetteer of India, *Provincial Series, Bombay Presidency*, vol. 2, 340 and n. 1; 356. While visiting Chorwad, further down the coast of Saurashtra, in 1996, I was also able to observe clear signs of stone quarrying along the shore, although we have no documentation at present to confirm that this was not simply for local use.


45. Burgess, *Muhammadan Architecture of Bharoch*, Cambay, 32–34 and pl. 36. This wooden section does not appear to be much more than a hundred years old, since Burgess referred to it in 1896 as “a modern wooden erection.” The main body of the Tanka Mosque is stone built and dated by inscription to 762 (1361).


50. Ibid., inscription no. 3422, 32–33 and pl. 19(b); inscription no. 3421, 33 and pl. 19(c). The language and epigraphic style of these inscriptions correspond perfectly to the date given in the chronogram.


54. Ibid., 32.


57. Ibid., 32.


60. Ibid.

Once a year, the North Indian city of Lucknow is overcome with grief as thousands of Twelver Shi‘i Muslims ritually mourn the martyrdom in 680 of the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Husayn. Along with people of other faiths, they gather in processions that wind through the city during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar and the month in which Husayn died, and attend concomitant religious assemblies (majlis, sing. majlis). Every year, the processions stop by one of Lucknow’s largest complexes of historic monuments; at its heart stands the Great Imambara, an extraordinary monument completed in 1791 to accommodate the mourning rituals and assemblies of Muharram. The Great Imambara is a striking instance of how Twelver Shi‘i religious practice, political intrigue, monumental vision, and local craftsmanship converged to produce one of the most ambitious engineering endeavors in Islamic architecture.

The Twelver Shi‘a are the next-largest group of Muslims in the Islamic world (second only to the Sunnis) and are currently concentrated in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon, with significant numbers in the Gulf states, Central Asia, Pakistan, and India. Collective, ritualized grieving is a defining feature of Twelver Shi‘i Islamic practice, and for centuries, this has taken place in the open, under tents, in homes, and in communal buildings. In Iran and Central Asia, buildings dedicated to the purpose of hosting mourning rituals are known as takya khāna, ta‘ziya khāna, and Husayniyya. In Andhra Pradesh in South India (the Deccan), they may be called ‘ashūrā khāna, but in the North Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana (the Mughal provinces of Bengal, Awadh and Shahjahanabad) they are termed majlis khāna, ‘azā khāna, imāmbārā, and imāmbārhā. In modern-day Pakistan they are called imāmbārgāh, and contemporary Twelver Shi‘i immigrant communities in Africa, the United Kingdom, Europe, North America, Australia, and the Caribbean continue to build facilities in this tradition.\(^1\) The designs of these facilities may vary, but together they form a genre of practice-centered architecture that dates as far back as the late sixteenth century, if not earlier. Surprisingly, these types of buildings are generally not mentioned in the survey literature on Islamic architecture.

Amidst these Muharram ritual centers, the Great Imambara (fig. 1) stands out due to its grand scale, and it should form an important part of any future study of the genre. The center is located in the city of Lucknow, which is the capital of the present-day northeastern state of Uttar Pradesh in India and is just over 400 kilometers southeast of New Delhi. Prior to the emergence of modern India, Lucknow was part of the Mughal imperial province of Awadh.\(^2\) Set within an elegant urban composition, the Great Imambara was not conceived in isolation, but rather as a building inseparable from the architectural complex and social context to which it belongs. Indeed, the Great Imambara complex marks a vital transitional moment in the rule of its patron, Nawwab-Wazir Asaf al-Dawla (d. 1799; r. 1775–99), the religious practice of the Twelver Shi‘a of the region, and the urban history of the city of Lucknow.

The Great Imambara is nestled within a series of three impressively vast, arcaded enclosures linked by monumental gateways and culminating in several significant works of architecture (fig. 2). The first forecourt (jilaw khāna), no longer enclosed, is distinguished by its highly unusual gate, known in historical texts and common conversation as the rūmī darwāza (fig. 3).\(^3\) With its arched profile, large leafy ornament, and radiating stone-rose flourishes, the elaborate rūmī darwāza cuts a unique profile. Midway through the court stand two tall, triple-arched gates, closely mirroring each other. One of them is known as the Drum House (naqqar or nawbat khāna), while the other is unnamed. The unnamed gate leads to a second court, rectangular and arcaded, that encompasses a circular lawn (fig. 4). On the same axis as the two preceding gates, a third gate, even more elab-
orate, leads to an irregular third court, arcaded and bounded on the right by a Friday mosque (fig. 5) and straight ahead by the Great Imambara (fig. 1), which are joined by a dramatic, continuous staircase. On the left, the court also incorporates a modest entrance to a charming arcaded stepwell once known as the Stepwell Palace (havelî or ʿimārāt bāolt) or Assembly Hall (dīwān khāna) (fig. 6).

The masjid, with its eleven-arched facade, three turnip-shaped domes, and towering, engaged minarets, has six interconnected chambers, all whitewashed on the interior, and an unusual sunken mihrab. The facade of the Great Imambara comprises an unassuming, rhythmic series of thirteen arches, and its interior consists of nine eclectically painted chambers. The central one incorporates an awe-inspiring, pillarless vault with resounding acoustics; spanning 50 m in length, 17 in width, and 15 in height, it is one of the largest preindustrial masonry vaults ever built (fig. 7). At the center lies the oddly skewed, canopied grave of the patron of the Great Imambara and its complex, Nawwab-Wazir Asaf al-Dawla, who was officially the vizier of the troubled Mughal Empire and the Twelver Shiʿi governor of the wealthy North Indian Mughal province of Awadh. The Stepwell Palace of the final court is centered on a broad, descending, tiered staircase that collects the monsoon rains and is surrounded by multiple levels of arcaded chambers that were once inhabitable (fig. 6). An octagonal well completes the building.

Altogether, the Great Imambara complex forms a pleasing architectural composition built mostly from broad, thin baked bricks, resilient mortar, and pliant, formerly white stucco. Constructed between 1786 and 1791, it was even more impressive then than now, since it adjoined a palace compound named the Five Palaces (panj mahāl) that was part of an elaborately fortified area known as the House of the Fish (machi bhawan) (fig. 8). Most of this was destroyed after the historic rebellion of the city’s British Indian troops in 1857, divorcing the Great Imambara complex of the present from its original urban context. Lucknow was
Fig. 2. Plan of the Great Imambara complex. (Drawing: Hussein Keshani, 2002)
Fig. 3. Northwest exterior of the first forecourt of the Great Imambara complex. Right to left: riči darwāza, unnamed gate, and naqqar khāna. (Photo: Hussein Keshani, March 2002)

Fig. 4. Second forecourt, with circular lawn. Top to bottom: Awrangzib’s mosque, naqqar khāna, unnamed gate. (Photo: M. R. A. Khan, ca. 1998)
one of the most vibrant centers of architectural activity in the Islamic world of the late eighteenth century, and the Great Imambara complex was the city’s most spectacular undertaking.

Despite the tattered condition of the stucco finishes, which today appear yellow and blackened, heavily whitewashed in places, and patched with red cement, the complex lends the city a striking profile. Over the past centuries, more than one visitor to Lucknow has remarked on its impressive cityscape. Perhaps the most complimentary are the words written by the English war correspondent William H. Russell, who visited Lucknow in 1858 to cover the Rebellion. He wistfully described the embattled city as

A vision of palaces, minars, domes azure and golden, cupolas, colonnades, long facades of fair perspective in pillar and column, terraced roofs—all rising up amid a calm, still ocean of the brightest verdure. Look for miles and miles away, and still the ocean spreads, and the towers of the fairy-city gleam in its midst. Spires of gold glitter in the sun. Turrets and guilded spheres shine like constellations.5

SCHOLARLY TREATMENTS

Though individual buildings of the Great Imambara complex have been included in several surveys, the complex as a whole has never been the subject of study.6 Art-historical discourse, steeped in the Anglo-European tradition and encompassed by colonial and postcolonial political frameworks, has restricted itself to debating the aesthetic merits and stylistic features of the Great Imambara complex in comparison with Mughal and Anglo-European architecture. It has avoided the political and religious dimensions of the site, generally portraying the complex as a collection of unrelated objects and not as an integrated whole. The Great Imambara itself has often attracted the most notice, mainly because of its monumental vault—an accomplishment once celebrated but now largely overlooked.

The British historian Henry Keene (1825–1915), an ardent imperialist and sceptic of Indian self-rule, discussed the complex in his guidebook to Lucknow published in 1875, one of the earliest works to consider the site. He included an often-cited but questionable version of the Great Imambara’s history, namely, that during the drought of 1784 the Great Imambara was conceived as a famine-relief project by Nawab-Wazir Asaf al-Dawla; that it was built, in part, by an impoverished nobility for a million pounds sterling (roughly ten million rupees); and that its design was determined through an architectural competition, won by Kifayat Allah. Overall, Keene saw the complex as substandard when compared to the monuments of Agra, Delhi, and the Deccan and reflective of a period of decline. In his view, the buildings’ “vast size,” “striking style,” and “origin” were their “claims to notice.”7

At roughly the same time, James Fergusson, a successful British-Indian plantation farmer and erudite enthusiast of world architecture, included the Great Imambara in his survey A History of Architecture of All Countries, which published the first plan of the building. He thought its scale compared favorably with Sultanate and Mughal precedents, and that it was one of the last examples of “Muhammadan” architecture in India untainted by European influence. He wrote,

There are some buildings into which the European leaven has not penetrated, and which are worthy of being mentioned in the same volume as the works of their ancestors. Among these is the Great Imambara, which, though its details will not bear too close an examination, is still conceived on so grand a scale as to enable it to rank with buildings of an earlier age.8

Fergusson valued the technology behind the Imambara’s roof construction and noted its superiority to European techniques. In his view, the Great Imambara had a “more durable form of roof than our most scientific Gothic vaulting; certainly far cheaper and far more easily made, since it is literally cast on a mud form, which may be moulded into any shape the fancy of the architect may dictate.”9

The British Archaeological Survey of India paid little attention to the Great Imambara complex, briefly noting it in an 1891 survey of monuments and inscriptions for the Northwest Provinces and Awadh. The author, Alois Führer, admired Lucknow’s architectural profiles, if not its “detestable” details, calling it “one of the most beautiful and picturesque large cities of India.”10 The mosque was, in his view, “noble” and imperial in dimensions and he considered the Great Imambara “the architectural glory of Awadh,” that could not, however, “compare with pure examples of Mughal architecture.”11 In the same vein, Percy Brown, an art-school administrator and instructor in British India who in 1942 published a widely read survey of ancient and Islamic Indian architecture, still
saw the Great Imambāra as an important example of a late Mughal architectural style verging on stagnation, notable more for its scale than its "mediocre" decoration.\textsuperscript{12}

Following Indian Independence, scholarly attitudes deemphasized notions of cultural purity and shifted away from aesthetic criticism to appreciation. Hermann Goetz for one, in keeping with the reassessment by Anglo-European art-historical scholarship of previously scorned, heavily ornate Baroque European art, urged a reconsideration of Indian art and architecture. Goetz only briefly considered the Great Imambāra complex, but he unlike Fergusson saw it as indicative of the spread and intermingling of European architectural ideas in India. He wrote, "In the Great [Imambāra] of [Asaf al-Dawla], Western Baroque models and South Indian forms evolved from the [Awrangzib] style are mixed with late North Indian traditions."\textsuperscript{13}

The Archaeological Survey of India under an independent Indian government made detailed surveys of the site in the 1970s, which were later included in Banmali Tandan’s 1979 thesis, a valuable catalogue of Awadh architecture. In Tandan’s eyes, the eastern and western facades of the \textit{rūmī darwāza} are stylistically distinct, and he hypothesizes that the gate was either intentionally built in two phases by one patron or by Shujaʿ al-Dawla and then Asaf al-Dawla. He views the Great Imambāra as a “structural tour de force” and central to defining later \textit{imānbārā} design, spawning imitations throughout Lucknow; he writes, “The Great Imambara is of central importance in the evolution of Nawābī architecture, as it led to the widespread adoption of an \textit{imānbārā} type.” This has been made evident in Neeta Das’s 1991 architectural study of Lucknow’s \textit{imānbārās}, which identifies a number of smaller \textit{imānbārās} patterned after the Great Imambāra. With respect to the congregational mosque adjacent to the Great Imambāra, Tandan suggests that it likewise served as a template for later mosques in the city.\textsuperscript{14}

Also appreciative of Awadh architecture, particularly its later nineteenth-century Anglo-European-Indian hybrids, the historian Rosie Llewellyn-Jones sees these buildings as an expression of Indian occidental exoticism mirroring British oriental exoticism.\textsuperscript{15} She comments little on the Great Imambāra but clarifies Lucknow’s urban evolution and the layout of the Five Palaces complex prior to the building of the Great Imambāra complex. More recently, the historian of Mughal architecture Catherine Asher, taking a more neutral approach to architectural aesthetics, has included late Mughal architecture in her survey of the tradition. She sees the unusual design of the \textit{rūmī darwāza} as a highly creative experiment with Mughal architectural vocabulary and the Great Imambāra as a unique technological achievement whose plan and ornamental program were rooted in the Mughal architectural tradition, in particular in its domestic architecture.\textsuperscript{16}

Outside the art-historical discourse, scholars in the fields of anthropology, history, and Islamic studies, including Keith Hjortshoj, Richard Barnett, S. A. A. Rizvi, Michael Fisher, and Juan Cole, have successfully investigated religious and political developments in Awadh.\textsuperscript{17} Rizvi and Cole in particular have unearthed significant evidence pertaining to the Great Imambāra complex. In the eyes of these writers, the commissioning of the complex was an extraneous, indulgent activity and evidence of Asaf al-Dawla’s withdrawal from active rule into pleasurable pursuits.\textsuperscript{18} Alternatively, it has been seen as a means to express the Twelver Shi‘i communal identity of the Awadh elites and as a superficial display of authority and power.\textsuperscript{19} The Great Imambāra has also been portrayed as a typical \textit{imānbārā} facilitating Twelver Shi‘i ritual mourning practice and social statements of piety and wealth.\textsuperscript{20}

Overall, the site has generally been deemed noteworthy but not of major significance for representing and interpreting the political or religious currents of the time. In actuality, however, the development of Lucknow’s Great Imambāra complex was a highly significant event in late-eighteenth-century Awadh.

**NORTH INDIA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

The eighteenth century in North India was a tumultuous period: the fortunes of the British East India Company, based in Calcutta (present-day Kolkata), were rising, as was the Company’s control over the economy and military forces of the region. Its military strength was now gauged by its decisive victory over the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the more ambiguous victory over Nawab Shujaʿ al-Dawla of neighboring Awadh at the Battle of Baksar in 1764. In contrast, the French presence was waning, but officers remained to advise local rulers on Anglo-European warfare and to impede British progress. Shahjahanabad, the epicenter of Sunni-leaning Mughal imperial power, was increasingly vulnerable,
being attacked by surrounding Jat tribes, Iranian and Central Asian forces—led first by Nadir Shah and later by Ahmad Shah Durrani—and the Hindu Marathas of the south, from Maharashtra. The Sikh religious movement flourished in the Panjab, paving the way for Sikh rule in the region, and nearby, the Sunni Afghan Ruhilas also carved out an independent region and mobilized a dangerous army.

While the prestige of the Mughal emperors continued high, state revenues declined. No longer could the Mughals independently determine South Asia’s future, and even the affairs of their own court were often beyond their control. Court rivalries festered, as Twelver Shi’i Iranian and Sunni Turanian soldier-aristocrats vied with one another for power, and the Twelver Shi’i governors of Awadh and the Deccan competed to be principal protector and vizier of the empire. Yet the swelling numbers of immigrants from Iran, the heartland of the Twelver Shi’i tradition, in religiously diverse North India showed where stability and opportunity lay. Iran was still reeling from the collapse of the Safavid empire in 1722 and from being overrun by the likes of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Durrani, though it eventually witnessed the rise of the Zand and Qajar tribal dynasties, the latter gaining dominance in the late eighteenth century.

In the midst of this tumult, the province of Awadh emerged as a pluralistic oasis of stability and prosperity. While the imperial Mughal treasury veered towards bankruptcy, Awadh’s coffers overflowed; its revenues, primarily from agriculture and trade, doubled in the first half of the eighteenth century.21 It was arguably the most affluent region in South Asia at the time, eventually attracting many nobles, poets, and craftsmen from Shahjahanabad. In the Awadh court the cultural splendor and sophistication of the Great Mughals was given a new lease on life.

Awadh was formally a province (sūha) of the Mughal imperium; its borders were bounded by the Himalayas to the north, the province of Bihar to the east, Manikpur district (sarkār) of the Allahabad province to the south, and the Kanaūj district to the west. It was divided into five districts named after their principal cities: Haveli Awadh (later Ayodhya/Faizabad), Gorakhpur, Bahraich, Lucknow, and Khairabad. The city of Lucknow bore some reminders of the Mughal imperium with a few modest buildings dating to the time of Akbar and a compact Awrangzib-era Friday mosque that adorned the city’s highest point. Nearby was the Five Palaces complex of the shaykhzādas, descendants of an early shaykh who had led Muslim settlement in the city. Along with the landowners of the province of Awadh, the shaykhzādas boldly challenged the Mughal emperor’s authority by withholding their revenues, which prompted the deputation of the Iranian soldier-aristocrat Mir Muhammad Amin (d. 1739) to subdue the region. His arrival would sow the seeds for the emergence of the semi-independent dynasty known as the Nawwabs of Awadh.

Mir Muhammad Amin of Nishapur—later Sa’adat Khan Burhan al-Mulk—had followed his father and older brother to Hindustan in 1708–9 seeking employment at the Mughal imperial court. He progressed steadily, and his most important success was the subduing of Awadh’s rebellious landowners and the shaykhzādas of Lucknow. As a result, Sa’adat Khan assumed ownership of the Five Palaces of the shaykhzādas but chose to make his principal base in an undeveloped area named Bangla near the city of Haveli Awadh (Ayodhya), which later evolved into the Awadh capital of Faizabad. Sa’adat Khan’s nephew from Persia, Safdar Jang, succeeded him and was officially designated the Mughal emperor’s deputy in Awadh. Following the emperor’s death, he unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of Shahjahanabad and the Mughal throne but was forced to withdraw to Awadh. He returned to the capital only to be buried in the city’s last monumental Mughal garden tomb. His son, Shuja’ al-Dawla, reversed the family’s fortunes: with the advice of a French colonel named Jean-Baptiste Gentil he mounted a modern army that emerged as a major North Indian force, although it was not strong enough to overcome the British at the Battle of Baksar in 1764. Without the resources to administer Awadh, the British negotiated Shuja’ al-Dawla’s return to power in exchange for concessions and reparations that were financed by his astute wife Bahu Begam. Shuja’ al-Dawla retreated to Faizabad to covertly rebuild his army, thereby reinvigorating the city and attracting people from Kashmir, the Deccan, Shahjahanabad, Persia, and elsewhere. But in 1775 he died, leaving his unpopular son Mir Amani, later known as Asaf al-Dawla, as his successor.

The Nawwabs of Awadh all professed the Twelver Shi’i faith, which was integral to Safavid rule in their native Persia, where it had been installed as the normative Islamic tradition. Twelver Shi’i beliefs were centered on three key points: the historical truth of the claim that the Prophet Muhammad endorsed ‘Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, as his rightful successor to
the role of religious and political leader of all Muslims; the concept of twelve divinely illumined hereditary leaders (sing. imām) descended from ‘Alī, with the last one entering a period of concealment; and ritual mourning during the month of Muharram for ‘Alī’s son, Imam Husayn, martyred at the hands of those who rejected the rights to succession of ‘Alī and his appointed descendants.

Under the Safavids, Sufis and Akhbari scholars of the Twelver Shi‘i tradition were superseded by the Usuli tradition, in which trained individuals could depart from traditional scholarly judgments and set new religious policy even in the absence of the Imams. One effect of this intellectual shift was a change in attitudes regarding Friday congregational prayer. In early Safavid Persia, Twelver Shi‘i men did not widely observe Friday congregational prayers, since the authority to lead congregational prayers was perceived, in keeping with the Akhbari tradition, to rest with the concealed Imam. In the mid-sixteenth century, however, religious scholars influenced by Usuli thought, which argued that there were living representatives of the Imams with the authority to lead communal prayers, successfully led efforts to institutionalize congregational Friday prayers. Similarly, the Twelver Shi‘i men of Awadh, who, like those in early Safavid Iran, were under the influence of the Akhbari tradition, also did not observe Friday congregational prayers until efforts to institutionalize them began in the late eighteenth century.

In Safavid Iran, public mourning during Muharram was observed by processions, and similar ones occurred in the cities of North India and the Deccan that had significant Twelver Shi‘i communities. Common to most processions was the parade of miniature tomb models made with materials ranging from impermanent to durable. In Iran, the procession and mourning rituals were known as ta‘ziya (mourning for the dead), but in South Asia, the term referred specifically to the tomb models used in the processions to symbolize both the actual tomb and the spiritual presence of Imam Husayn and often of his older brother, Imam Hasan. Models made of impermanent materials were usually buried or immersed in water, while those constructed from durable materials were carefully stored and reused. In eighteenth-century South Asia, groups of various faiths often observed and participated in one another’s religious processions, and Sunni Muslims and Hindus routinely took part in Twelver Shi‘i mourning processions. The public practice of Twelver Shi‘i ritual in the cultural milieu of eighteenth-century North India was a departure from its longstanding private presence in the Mughal empire, fueling a surge in Sunni-Shi‘i polemical discourse among religious scholars and sporadic communal conflict. Even in Awadh, no ruler before Asaf al-Dawla had commissioned architecture to support it; the Great Imambara complex thus signaled the sharper definition of a public yet distinct community.

The Twelver Shi‘a in Awadh never seem to have exceeded five percent of the population in the most populous cities such as Faizabad and Lucknow, and there were even fewer to be found elsewhere throughout the province. Muslims as a whole, including the more established Sunnis, likely never surpassed fourteen percent of Awadh’s total population, and most were concentrated in villages and cities. Awadh’s nobility was essentially a set of interconnected Twelver Shi‘i families centered on the Nawwabs of Awadh, although select Hindus rose to the ranks of nobility, particularly under Asaf al-Dawla’s rule. In the area of Islamic religious scholarship, Sunni Muslim scholars from Lucknow’s widely respected Farangi Mahal (Palace of the Foreigners [Europeans]; see below, note 50) were relied upon, prompting the Twelver Shi‘i community to develop its own religious scholars versed in Twelver Shi‘i scholarly discourse. Awadh’s Twelver Shi‘i elite also relied heavily on Sunni Muslims to man their armies and run their governmental institutions.

CHAMBERS OF MOURNING

Certain key examples preceding the construction of the Great Imambara indicate the breadth of the phenomenon of Twelver Shi‘i Muharram mourning ritual centers, which surfaced in the cities of Iran, the Deccan, and the provinces of Bengal, Shahjahanabad, and Awadh and date as far back as the late sixteenth century. The Badshahi ‘Ashura Khana, in the present-day Deccani city of Hyderabad, was completed in 1596 under the patronage of the Twelver Shi‘i ruler Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shahi V. Around 1642, during the rule of Prince Shuja‘ over the Mughal province of Bengal in northeastern India, an individual named Sayyid Murad commissioned in the city of Dacca (Dhaka) the Husayni Dalan, a building that was used for Twelver Shi‘i mourning assemblies. As part of his palace complex in Murshidabad the Twelver Shi‘i
Nawab of Bengal Siraj al-Dawla (d. 1757) erected a masonry and wood building called a madina (the Arabic word for “city”) to accommodate mourning assemblies, but in 1842 and 1846 it caught fire and burned down. It was replaced with a vast masonry structure, which still stands. Imámbarás were operating in smaller Bengali centers as well: in 1774, for instance, one is recorded in the town of Naryanpur in the district of Monghyr.31 Between 1737 and 1741, mourning rituals were conducted in the major market squares of Shahjahanabad, such as the Chowk of Sa’ad Allah Khan, the area between the Shahjahanabad Friday mosque and the Delhi Gate of the Royal Fort. Numerous private mourning halls, termed āshūrā khānas by a Deccani observer, were erected in the city.32 In the southern suburbs, a shrine center known as the Dargah-i Shahi Mardan, which housed an impression of the foot of Imam ‘Ali, was built in 1750–51 and incorporated a small hall to accommodate mourning assemblies.33 A tā’ziya (grieving) hall of a takya khāna (Sufi lodge) dated 1201 (1786) was also built in the Qajar-controlled Iranian city of Astarabad.34

Twelver Shi‘i mourning facilities proliferated in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Studies by Tandan, Das, Siddiqi, and Abbas document several extant imámbarás in Awadh built in this period, particularly in Lucknow, which was thought to have had up to 2,000 imámbarás and 600 smaller tā’ziya khānas.35 The small Awadhi towns of Zaydpur and Tanda had seventeen and thirty-four imámbarás respectively, and Jaunpur and Salon too each had an imámbara.36 In the Bengal commercial port of Hughli, Hajee Muhammad Mohsin commissioned a structure completed in 1806 called an imámbara, and its endowments were specified in an endowment document, or waqfna ma.37 Some time after 1873, the Qajar ruler Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96), who was impressed by London’s Albert Hall, commissioned the monumental Takya Dowlat, a state mourning theater designed as a cylindrical brick amphitheater with a stage and a domical canvas roof.38 The facility marked the evolution of mourning rituals from the storytelling of Imam Husayn’s tragedy into a form of Anglo-European theater performed by male actors, a practice introduced in Awadh but never accepted.39 Michael Bonine’s study of the Iranian region of Yazd, which may suggest the early evolution of mourning facilities, shows that in various towns the term Husaynīyya applied to public central town spaces that accommodated annual Muharram processions (not unlike those described in mid-eighteenth-century Shahjahanabad); to rudimentary storage shelters for Muharram procession ritual objects in the town spaces; and to more elaborate Muharram facilities set off from the central town spaces.40 As provocative as these examples are, the genre of Twelver Shi‘i Muharram ritual centers still awaits further study.

**ISSUES OF PATRONAGE**

Nawwab-Wazir Asaf al-Dawla was the patron of the Great Imambara, according to the historical text that is foundational for the study of his reign, the Tafzīh al-Ghāfīlīn. The author of the text, Abu Talib Isfahani, a disgruntled Awadh courtier employed by the British, discussed the entire Great Imambara complex as Asaf al-Dawla’s enterprise.41 After criticizing Asaf al-Dawla’s building mania, Isfahani described the complete complex, leaving no doubt about the patron’s identity but providing little explanation for why the commission was undertaken. Set in historical context, it could be argued that the commission was Asaf al-Dawla’s primary response to two major developments: his resurgent political autonomy after a decade of crisis, and the formation of an agenda by two prominent Awadh men, Hasan Riza Khan and Sayyid Dildar ‘Ali, to institute Friday congregational prayers for Twelver Shi‘i males in Awadh.

Asaf al-Dawla’s ascension to power in the Awadh capital of Faizabad in the year 1775, following the death of his father, was initially marked by dissent. He had a reputation as an incapable prince, and along with the British some of Shuja’ al-Dawla’s courtiers schemed to place his half-brother Sa’adat ‘Ali Khan on the throne instead.42 Asaf al-Dawla’s abrupt seizure of power prior to the conclusion of his father’s funeral proceedings further diminished his reputation. In addition, his own mother, Bahu Begam, undermined his inherited authority by refusing to turn the Awadh treasury over to him.43 He subsequently relocated Awadh’s capital to Lucknow and, in collusion with the British, extorted funds from her in retaliation.44 The fractured relations meant that Faizabad became semi-autonomous under Bahu Begam, who controlled a vast personal fortune, had extensive revenue-generating landholdings, and employed her own military forces. The acrimony took a decade to subside, but in 1786 Bahu Begam was in
Lucknow to attend the marriage of Asaf al-Dawla’s daughter, signaling not only a reconciliation between mother and son but also a consolidation of Asaf al-Dawla’s authority in Awadh. 45

During Asaf al-Dawla’s uncertain first decade of rule, Awadh’s debts to the British East India Company, largely for military services and weapons, escalated to the point that John Bristow, the British Resident in Lucknow, boldly proposed that the Company seize control of Asaf al-Dawla’s household expenditures in the same way they controlled the expenses of the Nawwab of Bengal. 46 But Asaf al-Dawla and his advisors managed to circumvent Bristow by dealing directly with his Calcutta-based superior, Governor-General Warren Hastings (appointed 1773–84), accelerating their payments, and refinancing Awadh’s debt with the aid of Hindu bankers, all during a period of sustained famine in Awadh and diminishing revenues. 47 Despite popular beliefs to the contrary, Asaf al-Dawla showed little concern for the impact of the famine on the people of Awadh and Lucknow and resented British admonitions. 48 Fortunately, Bristow was recalled and the office of the British Resident of Lucknow was suspended, freeing Asaf al-Dawla from the intense scrutiny of the British East India Company. 49

While Asaf al-Dawla was strengthening his position in Awadh, Hasan Riza Khan, a senior deputy who had also served under Asaf al-Dawla’s father, nourished a desire to develop a Twelver Shi‘i ulema in Awadh in place of Lucknow’s entrenched Sunni ulema community, known as the Farangi Mahal (Palace of the Foreigners/Europeans), and to introduce Friday congregational prayers for Twelver Shi‘i men. 50 Inspired by a 1785 treatise extolling the virtues of Friday congregational prayer that was composed for and dedicated to him by Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali “Padshah” Kashmiri of Faizabad, Hasan Riza Khan invited the religious scholar Sayyid Dildar ‘Ali Nasirabadi to lead congregational prayers at his palace compound, which took place for the first time on 13 Rajab 1200 (May 12, 1786). 51 Dildar ‘Ali proclaimed himself a mujtahid (high-ranking Shi‘i cleric) in the Usuli scholarly tradition, assuming the right to make reasoned doctrinal judgments, and became an effective advocate for Friday prayers as well as an aggressive critic of Sufi and Sunni beliefs and practices. Both Hasan Riza Khan and Dildar ‘Ali generated momentum for transforming Twelver Shi‘i religious practice, manufacturing a need for a monu--

Fig. 5. Eastern exterior facade of the Friday mosque. (Photo: Hussein Keshani, March 2002)
mental Friday congregational mosque for the Twelver Shi'i male community. Their agenda was a curious one that encouraged conformity with Sunni ritual practice while advocating a more distinct separation between Shi'i and Sunni communities. Ultimately, they were so successful that Asaf al-Dawla commissioned a Twelver Shi'i Friday mosque as part of the Great Imambara complex (fig. 5). Sayyid Dildar 'Ali was appointed its first prayer leader (*pishnamaz*).52

If preceding events help explain those that follow, then Asaf al-Dawla’s newfound political autonomy after a decade of rule, combined with the newly manufactured need for a Friday congregational mosque, explains to a large extent why the Imambara complex was commissioned and evolved the way it did. The development of the complex, with its immense scale and its Friday mosque, was simultaneously a monumental visual affirmation of Lucknow as the capital of Awadh under Asaf al-Dawla’s unencumbered rule and an endorsement of the practice of Friday congregational prayer. The two were somewhat consistent, since an integral part of Friday congregational prayers was the reading of the *khutba* (sermon), which generally incorporated a declaration of the ruler’s name. In a city filled with émigrés from chaotic Shahjahanabad (Delhi), the mosque evoked the majesty of imperial Mughal rule, a useful association for Asaf al-Dawla. In form rather than material, the Lucknow mosque most closely resembled the prayer hall of Shah Jahan’s Friday mosque in Shahjahanabad, since both incorporated three widely spaced domes, tall engaged minarets, and a facade of eleven cusped arches. Given the close proximity of the two cities and the ongoing commercial, diplomatic, and cultural exchanges between them, the resemblance is not surprising. However, these explanations for Asaf al-Dawla’s patronage of the Great Imambara complex do little to account for the commission of the Great Imambara itself.

Given the absence of the Great Imambara from Hasan Riza Khan and Sayyid Dildar ‘Ali’s agenda, and Asaf al-Dawla’s subsequent intensive use of the facility, the building was arguably Asaf al-Dawla’s own initiative, stemming from his personal religious practice as well as one that augmented the Friday congregational prayer agenda. The annual Muharram processions, in which the veneration of *ta’ziya* predominated, were the preeminent form of Twelver Shi'i male congregational religious practice and had been part
Fig. 7. Central hall of the Great Imambara, with the grave of Asaf al-Dawla in the center. (Photo: Hussein Keshani, March 2002)
of Asaf al-Dawla’s early religious experience in Faizabad, where his father actively participated in them. 53 After the Great Imambara complex was completed, Asaf al-Dawla’s court accounts portrayed him visiting the Great Imambara during the Muharram majlis, listening to the day’s popular lamentation poetry (marsiya) there, and tending to the administration of the building. 54 Furthermore, he enthusiastically collected ta’ziya to be stored there and ultimately chose to be buried there himself (fig. 7), reinforcing the notion that the Great Imambara was integral to his religious beliefs and practice in a way that the Friday mosque could never be.

LUCKNOW BEFORE THE GREAT IMAMBARA COMPLEX: THE FIVE PALACES

In the early eighteenth century, Lucknow’s cityscape was dominated by a compact stone mosque, white-plastered and three-domed, built on the highest ground of the city as part of a regional program by the Mughal emperor Awrangzib (fig. 4). Prior to the development of the adjoining Great Imambara complex, the Five Palaces complex was the largest building in the city. It was owned by the Sunni shaykhzadas of Lucknow, who claimed to be descended from a shaykh named Abd al-Rahim. 55 He had settled in the area during the reign of Akbar, after being granted Lucknow as a landholding (jagir), and apparently built the first version of the Five Palaces, which consisted of five interlocking enclosed courts. Under the Nawabs of Awadh, Shuja’al-Dawla modified the complex, as did Asaf al-Dawla, who added the Stepwell Palace before construction on the Great Imambara complex began. 56 At some point, probably during Asaf al-Dawla’s reign, the area including the mosque of Awrangzib, the Five Palaces, and the location of the Great Imambara complex was encompassed by contiguous fortifications (fig. 8).

The Five Palaces complex was described and drawn in the most detail by Anglo-European travelers visiting Lucknow in official and unofficial capacities. Joseph Tieffenthaler, a Jesuit missionary in the city in 1765, wrote about the Five Palaces resting upon a high elevation with walls and high towers overlooking the Gomti River, which ran through the city, and noticed a large forecourt with a Drum House gateway. 57 He also made diagrammatic drawings of Lucknow and
the Five Palaces (fig. 9). 58 The French traveler Louis Laurent de Féderbe (Comte de Modave) was unimpressed with the city in 1775 but described the Five Palaces as “a great building composed of many different parts without any order, which do not correspond to each other.” 59 In 1782, the British artist William Hodges visited and described the Five Palaces as incorporating large courts and an arcaded royal reception (darbār) hall with a gilt ceiling, in a flower garden made up of square plots. He drew the complex from a high bank overlooking the Gomti River. 60 The Daniell brothers, also British artists, rendered the Five Palaces from across the Gomti River, as well as a gateway into the first forecourt. 61 As informative as they are, these accounts at best provide only an impression of the Five Palaces when compared to a highly detailed textual description made in 1785 by a British Orientalist scholar, Francis Gladwin. 62

Gladwin noticed that the Five Palaces had five courts: The first had a Drum House (nawbat khāna), as Tieffenthaler had already mentioned, and was used by attendants for equipage. The second, the Stepwell (bāūdī) Court, was an arcaded enclosure surrounding a square garden and incorporating the Stepwell Palace on one end and an arcaded hall with fountains on the other. An adjacent third court included a flower garden and fountains, a small mosque, ladies’ swings, and, at the center on an expansive terrace, a large arcaded building called the Stone Hall (sangīdālān) surmounted by five copper-covered domes. The fourth court, the House of the Fish (machī bhawan), incorporated a garden and public offices. 63 The fifth and final court—the Women’s or Palace Court (zanāna or mahāl savāy)—incorporated three buildings with high walls and latticed screens known as the Palace of Glass (shīsh mahāl), the Palace of Color (rang mahāl) and the Palace of the Lesser Wives (khurd maḥāl). A street separated these five interlocking courts from an enclosed flower garden named the Garden of Husayn (Ḥusayn bāg) located on the banks of the Gomti River. It had bastions surmounted by pavilions with copper-covered domes; inside, there were fountains, baths, and dressing rooms.

The clearest documentation of the Five Palaces complex—provided, ironically, by those who destroyed most of it—was made after the Great Imambara complex was built. During the failed 1857 rebellion of British-employed Indian troops stationed at Lucknow (a historic precursor of the struggle for Indian independence), the fortress of the House of the Fish, which included within it the Great Imambara and Five Palaces complexes, had become a battle zone. In the aftermath, the British leveled most of the Five Palaces and the surrounding fortifications with explosives, but before doing so they surveyed and photographed the war-torn site in 1860 (figs. 8, 10–12). In the photographs, the Five Palaces gate, which the Daniell brothers had depicted, and the small mosque
of the Stone Hall court and the Stepwell Palace, noted by Gladwin, were all clearly visible, as were the fortifications that demarcated the fortress of the House of the Fish. A full reconciliation between texts and images awaits further study, but at present, they provide a clearer idea of the urban context in which the Great Imambara complex was erected.

DATES OF CONSTRUCTION

Though 1784 is often cited as the year the Great Imambara was built as a famine relief project, and is tacitly assumed to be the date of other structures in the complex as well, this is highly questionable. There was indeed a famine in 1784, which Governor-General Warren Hastings witnessed and wrote about, but Hastings, who also visited Lucknow in 1784 and resided in the Stepwell Palace, just meters away from where the Great Imambara complex was built, made no mention of any major construction activity. Following Hastings's stay, Asaf al-Dawla's mother, Bahu Begam, and grandmother, Sadr al-Nissa Begam, resided at the Five Palaces complex until 1786; Sadr al-Nissa Begam, who stayed at the Stepwell Palace, left on 27 Rajab (May 26) of that year. The Friday mosque was not completed by 1784, since its impetus—Kashmiri’s treatise advocating Friday prayers—was not completed until 1785; Gladwin, who visited the city in the same year, made no mention of it. Moreover, as mentioned above, on 13 Rajab 1200 (May 12, 1786), Sayyid Dildar {Ali, the future prayer leader of the Friday mosque, led prayers at Hasan Riza Khan's palace compound, not at the new mosque, a clear indication that it was not yet complete.

The only secure date for the complex is given by Abu Talib Isfahani in his history of Asaf al-Dawla’s reign; under the heading for the year 1205 (1790–91) he records, “In this year the Imambara was completed and ta’zias began to be deposited here.” Isfahani proceeds to describe the rest of the Great Imambara complex, including the rium darwiza and the Friday mosque, suggesting that the entire complex was completed at the same time. The complex, then, was most likely started in 1786 and completed in 1790–91, a short five years. The speed was probably facilitated by Asaf al-Dawla’s appropriation of construction materials from demolished buildings. The rapid pace of construction was consistent with that of other building projects in Awadh, since, according to a contempo-
the redevelopment of Shuja’ al-Dawla’s tomb complex at the Rose Fort, which was reluctantly financed by Asaf al-Dawla.70

As for the technical planning of buildings, tarh, or grid-like plan drawings, initially sketched on erasable tracing boards and then transferred to paper, were employed by the Mughal, Rajput, and Persian Qajar courts, but their use in building practice in Awadh still needs to be demonstrated.71 Watercolor drawings were completed for personal enjoyment, as is demonstrated by the Gentil album, a collection that includes paintings apparently completed by an indigenous architect.72 Jean-Baptiste Gentil was a French military advisor and friend to Shuja’ al-Dawla who assembled the album to help convey his experiences back in France. He included elevation drawings of Shuja’ al-Dawla’s palace in Faizabad and other palaces in Shahjahanabad, one of which is annotated in French as being drawn by an architect of Shuja’ al-Dawla, a clear indication that Awadh architects were proficient in architectural drawing.

Under Shuja’ al-Dawla, Faizabad attracted people from diverse regions, causing Fayzbakhsh to comment, “Artisans and scholars flocked hither from Dhaka, Bengal, Gujrat, Malwah, Haidarabad, Shahjahanabad, Lahaur, Peshawar, Kabul, Kashmir, and Multan.”73 As Lucknow prospered during Asaf al-Dawla’s reign, it not only inherited the talent concentrated in Faizabad but saw a sophisticated building and supplies industry flourish.

Large-scale construction in Awadh used broad, thin, fired bricks, layered with mortar and faced with directly applied stucco. Building project coordinators in Awadh relied upon a network of small-enterprise producers, specialized suppliers, skilled craftsmen, and laborers; all are separately described in an 1880 survey of North India’s trades by William Hoey, who was also the translator of Isfahani’s history.74 Land up the Gomti River was rented to entrepreneurs who used laborers to excavate clay, which was transported by mule owners to brickfields and kilns where bricks were molded and fired. Other entrepreneurs specialized in lime excavation and refinement and the production of quicklime wafers in kilns. Closer to Lucknow, suppliers created made-to-order batches of stucco of various grades by hydrating the quicklime wafers and

mixing in various additives, such as crushed shells for smooth finishes or crushed brick for coarse ones. In addition to being newly manufactured, bricks were attained by demolishing existing buildings, according to Isfahani, who criticized Asaf al-Dawla for destroying people’s homes to sustain his building mania. It is worth noting that on many points regarding brick and lime manufacture, Hoey’s survey corresponds closely with Abu ’l-Fazl’s famous sixteenth-century survey of the Mughal emperor Akbar’s court, the Ṣan‘i-i Akbar, and with Hans Wulff’s detailed World War II-era study of Iranian trades, demonstrating the geographical and chronological breadth of the techniques being employed.75

THE CHANGING COMPLEX

The Great Imambara complex has been significantly altered since its original construction. While the most dramatic change was the British destruction of the adjoining Five Palaces complex following the Great Rebellion or Mutiny of 1857, which resulted in the fragmentation of the once-enclosed first forecourt of the Great Imambara complex, more significant alterations would follow.

In the court of the Great Imambara and Friday mosque, the striking monumental staircase that currently joins the two was not part of the original design. Several paintings, drawings, and black-and-white photographs show that the two structures originally rested on separate platform foundations.76 For example, a ca. 1848 panorama of Lucknow’s major monuments by an anonymous painter shows that the masjid had an arcaded platform foundation with internal stairs, and that the Great Imambara had a broad staircase with an integrated ablutions tank (figs. 13–14). The accuracy of this representation of the Great Imambara is corroborated by Isfahani, who noted, “In front of it [the Great Imambara] is a very broad terrace, and in the middle of it a reservoir.”77 The current conjoining staircase minus the tank (see fig. 1) was apparently part of the restoration financed by the Husaynabad Trust in 1884, when the British ended the occupation of the site that had begun during the 1857 Rebellion.78
Like other paintings of the site, the panorama shows that the exterior finishes of the Great Imambara complex and the Great Imambara interior were originally gleaming white, and that the small dome at the summit of the *rūmī darwāza*, the domes of the Friday mosque’s minarets, and the small domes of the Great Imambara were covered with copper. The interior of the Great Imambara, currently painted in blue-and-gold and green-and-white color schemes, was rendered as white around 1816 by an artist named Sita Ram, suggesting that the current color scheme was a later addition (fig. 15). Ram accompanied the newly appointed Governor-General, the Marquess of Hastings Francis Rawdon (appointed 1813–23) and documented his tour of the regions central to British interests, which included a visit to Lucknow in 1816. No original inscriptions have been found at the site of the complex, but according to Viscount Valentia George Annesley, who visited the building shortly after Asaf al-Dawla’s death as part of a British mission in 1802, Qur’anic inscriptions then surrounded the ruler’s grave. Annesley also noted that the grave, which is now covered with stone fragments, was overgrown with vegetation, as is illustrated by Sita Ram’s painting of the Great Imambara interior.

There were significant changes to the original landscaping of the complex as well. One drawing by Henry Salt, made around 1803 and published by Cole, indicated that the court of the Great Imambara and Friday mosque was subdivided into square flowerbeds in the Persian and Mughal *chahār bāgh* (four-part garden) tradition, not unlike those that appear in vari-
ous near-contemporary Lucknow paintings. Given the prevalence of this style of landscaping, the striking circular lawn of the second forecourt was highly inconsistent and is more likely to have been implemented after the Mutiny than as part of the original design. The post-Mutiny introduction of a metaled (i.e., paved with broken stones) road through the first forecourt raised the ground level and transformed the site significantly as well.

ARCHITECTURAL VOCABULARY

The architectural vocabulary of the Great Imambara complex, like that of much architecture of the Islamic world, featured arcaded functional enclosures interconnected with arcaded gateways, creating hierarchies of access. The *rūmī darwāza*, with its arched exterior profile, marked a curious departure from the conventional rectangular profiles used in the other gateways (fig. 3). Asaf al-Dawla’s Friday mosque bore greater resemblance to the older Shahjahanabad mosque than to Lucknow’s more recent Awrangzib-era mosque. With its elaborate open arched facade (*dālān*), long lateral rectangular chambers, and flanking rooms, the Great Imambara likely expanded upon domestic (*havelī*) architecture.

A well-planned and consistent ornamental program of recurring geometric and vegetal motifs molded and cut out of stucco was employed throughout the Great Imambara complex, and areas were emphasized with progressively denser ornament. Intricately
nested, smooth, pointed-and-lobed elliptical arches and features such as cypress-bodied baluster columns patterned after late Shah Jahan-era architecture were widely used. The complex differed from Mughal antecedents, however in the extent to which smooth and lobed arches were nested and miniature ornamental domes used, and in the larger scale of the vegetal motifs employed, for instance, on the exterior of the rūmī darwāza, the exterior of the mosque domes, and the interior of the Great Imambara (fig. 16). In addition to the large acanthus leaf, which surmounted the apogee of most arches in the complex, the signature ornament of the complex was the fish (fig. 17), which was used in the spandrels of the principal arches in all gateways except the rūmī darwāza. Along with its astrological allusions to the sign of Pisces, the fish was symbolic of the rank of māhīmarātib (Honor of the Fish), or command over 7,000 troops (haft hazār) within the Mughal imperial power structure, and in Awadh it was used to distinguish members of the ruling class and their families.81 Princes and nobles typically distinguished their elephants with ensigns featuring fish and balls.82 The extensive use of the fish undoubtedly played a part in the emergence of the term machī bhawan, which literally means “House of the Fish,” to refer to Great Imambara complex and the surrounding fortress.

The masonry structural systems used in the complex consisted of well-integrated pillars, walls, pointed arches, and vaults. Double shell domes with turnip-shaped exteriors and hemispherical interiors were used for the Friday mosque, single shell domes with non-visible exteriors in the central flanking chambers of the Great Imambara, and sail vaults throughout the complex, including large-scale vaults in the forechambers of the Friday mosque and, most dramatically, in the central chamber of the Great Imambara.

THE SAIL VAULT OF THE GREAT IMAMBARA

The Great Imambara was planned as three parallel, interconnected, rectangular halls, each with flanking side chambers, totalling nine chambers in all (fig. 18).
Fig. 16. Interior of the eastern side chamber of the central hall of the Great Imambara. (Photo: Hussein Keshani, March 2002)
Fig. 17. Detail of fish spandrel ornaments on the north facade of the gate leading to the court of the Great Imambara. (Photo: Hussein Keshani, March 2002)

From the outside, three entrances led to the first hall, which gave way onto the central hall through seven archways. The third hall, termed the shah nashin (seat of honor: literally “the shah’s place”), was elevated and accessible through two arched stairways at the ends of the hall. The side chambers of the shah nashin hall were also elevated and, like those of the first hall, were rectangular, but the chambers at the ends of the central hall were square (figs. 16, 19). Large hemispherical domes visible only from the interior surmounted these chambers, but the rest were covered with sail vaults. A broad staircase was built on one end of the Great Imambara, leading to the roof and providing access along the way to a network of passageways and balconies integrated with the vaults. The central hall was designed with a low post-and-lattice balcony of red sandstone just below the large muqarnas cornice; together these surrounded the perimeter of the sail vault.

The architectural historian Fergusson justifiably assessed the massive pillarless sail vault covering the central hall of the Great Imambara as an unparalleled work of preindustrial engineering, and it was truly one of the most significant achievements in Islamic architecture as well as the architecture of South Asia. Despite the apparent flatness of the roof’s interior, the geometry of the vault can better be described as three-dimensional translations of two perpendicular elliptical sections, resulting in a shape similar to a billowing sail; hence the applicability of the term “sail vault.” The double curvature of the Great Imambara vault made it possible for it to bear significant compression loads, and its low rise meant that minimal building materials were needed. For the form of the sail vault, indigenous building vocabulary employed the term bangla, after the northeast region where the roofs of vernacular buildings were similarly shaped, although commonly made from reed and straw. The form was rendered in stone or brick in Shah Jahan-era and late Mughal architecture, but never on the
The tomb of Asaf al-Dawla’s grandfather Safdar Jang, in the southern suburbs of Shahjahanabad, provides good examples of small-scale, shallow sail vaults, since they were used in the perimeter chambers of the platform foundation. The deteriorating stucco has now exposed the underlying brickwork, in which bricks bound by mortar were oriented perpendicular to the ground on their thin edges and laid in an elliptical-spiral helical pattern. Exposed patches of brickwork on the interior and exterior of the Great Imambara central vault, and especially on the interior of the shah nashin side chamber (fig. 20), confirm that similar methods were used, but precisely how the sail vault was built remains unclear.

Alois Führer, the Orientalist philologist who worked for the Archaeological Survey of India in the late nineteenth century, was in a position to observe residual building practices. He held the opinion that a centering mold of mud and bricks in the negative shape of the roof was first made, and that over this several feet of rubble or coarse concrete were poured and allowed to set for one to two years. The idea that interlocking bricks were used in the vault has also gained popular currency, but there is no evidence to support this, and the structure was achievable without this technique.

Encompassing the exterior of the sail vault and the two flanking domes is a network of groin-vaulted and arched passageways that give access to the interior balconies of the vaults and create curious acoustic effects. Though these passageways are now popularly regarded as a maze and are part of the Great Imambara’s appeal to tourists, there is a clear order to them, and they probably allowed servants to access the vault balconies in order to place lighted torches for illuminating the spaces below. The passageways also help to form a structurally sound surface over the curved vaults, creating large, flat, usable open spaces on the roof of the Great Imambara.
COSTS OF CONSTRUCTION

Documents detailing the cost of the entire Great Imambara complex may not have survived, but given that the project accountant of the Great Imambara and congregational mosque, if not of the whole complex, reportedly put its cost at twenty million rupees, the annual costs over five years would have been roughly four million rupees a year. In 1784–85 Awadh’s annual revenue was 20,098,263 rupees and in 1801 it was 13,523,474 rupees. Accordingly, the construction costs of the complex were roughly thirty percent of the annual gross revenue the Nawwab-Wazir received from Awadh, a considerable but still plausible amount.

Along with the large expenditures on buildings, considerable sums were spent on public celebrations and processions on occasions like the Hindu festival of Holi, the Nawwab-Wazir’s carnival, marriages, and Muharram. Isfahani thought that over one million rupees were spent on such events each year and even more on the maintenance of the Awadh court, which employed thousands. The annual expenses for the decorations for the Great Imambara alone, which included the costly lamp oil for illuminating the building, were estimated to be at least 400,000 rupees. Asaf al-Dawla went as far as to order two glass chandeliers from England, at a total cost of 100,000 rupees, to enhance the building’s splendor.

ENDOWMENT PROVISIONS AND GIFTS

The historian Henry Keene was under the impression that no provisions for the operations of the Great Imambara had been made, which would have been highly unusual. In various Islamic societies, patrons typically ensured the maintenance and operations of the public religious institutions they built by endowing cash or revenue-generating properties, which were specified in legal documents. In Arabic, these religious endowments are termed waqf. It would be surprising if no provisions had been made for the vast Great Imambara complex, and this was clearly not the case.

Annesley, who stayed in Lucknow from March 21 to July 25, 1802, noticed that Asaf al-Dawla’s half-brother and successor, Sa’adat ‘Ali Khan, had reduced the number of appointed Qur’an readers tending to Asaf al-Dawla’s grave from forty to ten. More concrete evidence surfaces in the form of a petition submitted in 1860 to the British government in Lucknow by a group who had once held hereditary, salaried positions at the Great Imambara complex, funded by the rents of the shops in the first forecourt. When the shops and forecourt were ravaged by battle during the Rebellion of 1857, they became destitute. The shops were appropriated by the British following the rebellion and given over to Sehat al-Dawla, a wealthy landowner and opportunist, who soon failed to continue paying the salaries, thus prompting the petition.

The petition lists the names of at least thirty former employees, their duties, and their salaries. Among them were a kitāb khwān (30 rupees per month), a marsiya singer (30.12 rupees per month), a marsiya khwān (10.12 rupees per month), a fātiha khwān (20 rupees per month), ten Qur’an expositors (9–9.12 rupees per month)—a number that agrees with Annesley’s account—a muezzin (5.12 rupees per month), a perfume bearer (15.12 rupees per month), four oil bearers (7.12 rupees per month), and a chandelier lighter (4.12 rupees per month). The functions of the other employees are not clearly ascribed but probably included administration, cleaning, and more lamplighting. Given that only ten Qur’an readers were mentioned in the petition, in contrast to the original forty employed by Asaf al-Dawla, the list of employees most likely represents a scaled-down number of the original employees affiliated with the site.

Some of the most highly paid staff were employed primarily to implement the Twelver Shi‘i mourning majlis ritual in the Great Imambara during the first ten days of Muharram. The kitāb khwān’s principal duty was to read the fifteenth-century Rawdat al-Shuhada’ (Paradise of the Martyrs), by Husayn Wa‘iz al-Kashifi (d. 1505), which had become the canonical text used in Twelver Shi‘i Muharram majālis. Each of the first ten days of Muharram was marked by episodes leading up to the tragic execution of Imam Husayn on the tenth day, known as ‘āshūrā. Muharram majālis also featured marsiya singers and reciters, experts in the new genre of Urdu poetic elegies on the martyrdom of Husayn known as marsiyas. Since principal majālis were held at night, there was a great need for interior lighting, which had to be tended by oil bearers and lamplighters. Lighting was undoubtedly the most significant operating expense of the Imambara, if not of the whole complex.

The largest contingent of employees listed in the petition was associated with the grave of Asaf al-Dawla, which was located in the center of the Great Imam-
bara hall. The *fātiha khwān* was responsible for reciting the opening chapter of the Qur’an for visitors paying homage to Asaf al-Dawla’s grave. The expositors were responsible for sustained whispered readings of the Qur’an to ensure Asaf al-Dawla’s peace in the afterlife. Few employees were specifically attached to the mosque, since only the muezzin, who was responsible for issuing the call to prayer, was listed on the petition. But the oil bearers and lamplighters would have serviced any lighting needs of the mosque, the gateways, and other places in the complex.

A glimpse of the employees at the Great Imambara was provided by Sita Ram around 1816 (fig. 15). In this earliest known image of the interior of the central hall of the Great Imambara, a *kitāb khwān* sits atop an ornamented minbar and eight Qur’an readers sit on a sheet near Asaf al-Dawla’s grave performing their duties. Men seated and standing on the right and left look on. Rather than depicting an actual scene, the image seems to be an assemblage of various activities occurring at the site at different times.

Ram’s painting documents the extensive use of illumination in the Great Imambara and the need for oil bearers and lamplighters. The central chamber is shown ablaze in light, with red and green niche-lamps around the ceiling perimeter accessed by the red sandstone balcony, as well as suspended glass chandeliers and freestanding candelabras on the floor. The multiple iron rings still embedded in the Great Imambara’s interior ceiling testify to the numerous chandeliers that were once suspended there (fig. 7). Several of the chandeliers are preserved in Lucknow’s Husseinabad and Shah Najaf *imāmbārās*, which were built after the Great Imambara complex.

Annesley, just over a decade before Ram made his painting, commented on the illumination:

The [Imambara] itself is built on an elevated terrace, which on this occasion gave still more splendour to the innumerable lights placed upon it; yet even these could not diminish the effect of the thousands of girandoles, filled with wax-candles, which were suspended from the roof at different heights, and were reflected by the different coloured cut glass, which composed them. The floor was covered with candles likewise in glass branches, leaving only sufficient space for the crowd to pass.92

What amazed Annesley annoyed Abu Talib Isfahani, who complained about the lavish expenditure on lighting fixtures, which among other things crowded the floor and inconvenienced the public:

The number of glass chandeliers, with and without glass shades, plain and coloured, and candelabra of gold and silver and glass, with drum-shaped and bell-shaped shades, which are purchased defies computation. The halls, large as they are, have their floors and ceilings filled with them, so that the care-takers can with difficulty perform their duty [...] So the public look on from a distance sitting on the roofless terrace.93

In addition to endowing the site with shop revenue and perhaps other revenue streams that are not in the historical record, Asaf al-Dawla bestowed on the Great Imambara expensive gifts called *ta’ziyas*, which generally referred to the miniature models of tombs imagined to be replicas of the tombs of Imams Hasan and Husayn.

As with the illuminations, Isfahani complained that Asaf al-Dawla used the building to collect “hundreds of [ta’ziyas], big and small, [...] made of gold and silver [...]” and that the main floor was cluttered with them.94 Asaf al-Dawla’s court records showed that on the evening of the first of Muharram 1210 (July 18, 1795), gold and silver *ta’ziyas* were installed in the Great Imambara. Annesley described the *shāh nashīn* area filled with *ta’ziyas*. He wrote,

The third apartment was filled from one end to the other with a range of silver temples or cenotaphs, raised on platforms about three feet from the ground, in which were placed the supposed tombs of the two brothers [Hasan and Husayn]. These were brilliantly illuminated from the ceiling, and by candles placed around in branches. I think they were at least twenty in number and were worth from 50,000 to a (*lakh* 100,000) of rupees each.96

However, Sita Ram’s painting of the interior of the Great Imambara shows no *ta’ziyas* in the archways of the *shāh nashīn*. Instead, one large gold and seemingly immovable *ta’zīya* is shown in the main hall. Tall and narrow, it consists of a series of successively smaller square segments stacked upon each other and surmounted with a lotus-bud dome common in late Mughal architecture. At some point, fourteen tombs of silver, representing each of the twelve Imams, the Prophet, and Fatima, were installed in the Great Imambara, and it appears that Sa’adat ’Ali Khan melted down some of Asaf al-Dawla’s *ta’ziyas* made of precious metal.97 The earliest interior photograph of the Great Imambara, taken in the early 1900s, shows two smaller, canopy-covered *ta’ziyas* in the main hall, as well as suspended glass chandeliers (fig. 21).

The *ta’ziyas* transformed Asaf al-Dawla’s chamber...
of light into a chamber of tombs and a center of perpetual grief and giving. It was custom to visit a ta'ziya as though one were visiting the actual tomb of Imam Husayn and to make cash donations as expressions of piety and charity. When encountering the ta'ziyas of his noblemen, his wives, or the poor in their respective homes or in the streets, Asaf al-Dawla would make donations ranging from one hundred to five hundred rupees, and presumably visitors to the ta'ziya of the Great Imambara did so as well.98

THE GREAT IMAMbara COMPLEX IN OPERATION

During Asaf al-Dawla’s lifetime, the complex as a whole evolved from being a nexus of administrative power centered on the residence of the ruler to one centered on Twelver Shi`i religious institutions and monuments, and the site was transformed into a semi-private campus for governance and communal religious practice.

Asaf al-Dawla’s father, Shuja’ al-Dawla, had enlarged the Five Palaces complex to include an administrative center referred to as the machi bhawan (House of the Fish), a name that later came to be used to refer to the entire fortress in which the Five Palaces and Great Imambara complexes were located.99 During Asaf al-Dawla’s reign, the Awadh court’s administrative functions were also located in the Five Palaces complex. Courts of law were newly established in 1782–83.100 Petitioners would enter the complex to have their complaints heard at the hall of justice, and among other facilities the police office was located there. When the British Resident Bristow requested facilities in which to base his office, Asaf al-Dawla decided to place him in this portion of the palace complex, showing that he regarded the office of the British Resident as a department within his administration.101 Asaf al-Dawla constructed the Great Imam-
bara complex mainly over this administrative section of the Five Palaces complex, and, according to Isfahani, the large forecourts accommodated offices, a hospital, and rest houses.

Asaf al-Dawla used the Great Imambara for diplomatic, court, and religious purposes. He twice received the British Resident of the East India Company, Mr. Cherry, there to satisfy his curiosity and impress him. Asaf al-Dawla’s visits to the Great Imambara, usually during Muharram, were prefaced with elaborate processes and attended by his most valued courtiers, creating altogether conspicuous displays of religiosity. At the Great Imambara, gifts of ta’ziya ornaments as well as robes signifying rank, turbans, and jewels were exchanged, and people of lower rank remained outside on the broad platform in front of the Great Imambara. Inside, Asaf al-Dawla would inspect the ta’ziya, conducting himself as though he were visiting a grave, circumambulating the ta’ziya and reciting the opening chapter of the Qur’an and, on some occasions, ritual greetings (durūd). He also listened to martyrdom narratives and marsiyya recitals, and performed ritual self-flogging (mātām). On the tenth of Muharram, when it was time to take impermanent ta’ziyas from Lucknow’s imāmbara in large, mournful processions to burial grounds known as karbalās and to perform burial rites on them, Asaf al-Dawla would join in, accompanying the ta’ziyas held in the Great Imambara to a nearby karbalā. Following Asaf al-Dawla’s death in 1797 he was buried, apparently without much forethought, in the Great Imambara, extending the funerary character of the building. While Asaf al-Dawla used the complex to buttress his authority and for personal religious practice, Sayyid Dildar ‘Ali, the Friday prayer advocate, became the site’s custodian of religious practice, ensuring the candles of the Great Imambara were lit every night at dusk and conducting the congregational prayers every Friday.

CONCLUSION

Until now, the Great Imambara complex has been viewed in a number of ways: as a fragmented series of buildings; as a reflection of the moral, aesthetic, and political decline of Asaf al-Dawla’s reign; as a famine-relief measure completed in 1784; as a competition-winning design of Kifayat Allah; as an exorbitantly costly endeavor without the provision of financial endowments; or as a project peripheral to the central events of the day. All these views are questionable if not provably false.

Contemporary sources indicate that Asaf al-Dawla’s ambitious vision was built from 1786 to 1790–91 at a cost of 20,000,000 rupees, but the identity of the architect still remains unknown. Clearly the Great Imambara’s purpose and operations were interwoven with the adjacent Friday mosque, the forecourts (especially the outermost court with shops generating rental revenue for the Imambara), and the Five Palaces, Awadh’s formal royal residence and administrative center. Far from being an indication of political decline, the complex marked the highest point of Asaf al-Dawla’s autonomy. Not simply a charitable or pious endeavour, it was a part of Asaf al-Dawla’s successful bid to assert his authority while under the shadow of his mother and British Indian imperialism and in reply to the agenda of introducing Friday prayers to Awadh’s Twelver Shi‘i male community.

The Great Imambara complex was both a response to a political crisis and an effective instrument in transforming public perception to make Asaf al-Dawla appear more autonomous. It was also an independent response to a religious agenda and a means of amplifying forms of religious practice like congregational prayer and the Muharram majlis. The complex was part of an attempt to establish the Usuli Twelver Shi‘i tradition as normative Islamic practice in place of the Akhbari, Sunni, and Sufi traditions.

In form, the site was steeped in imperial Mughal architectural metaphor, complementing Asaf al-Dawla’s ambitions while exhibiting indigenous tastes for profuse vegetal motifs and the ability to erect bold structures. Local aesthetics were discounted by earlier, influential Anglo-European writers, with their enigmatic cultural perspectives and politicized views on the merits of South Asian culture. As a result, they underestimated the system and rigor of the complex’s ornamental program and the sophistication of architectural thought required to build it. This explains in part the absence of the complex from the canon of Islamic architecture, even though, as Ferguson noted years ago, the sail vault of the Great Imambara was no ordinary accomplishment, and by any measure it was a major technological achievement.

The complex and the Great Imambara in particular also mark a high point in the still-unstudied genre of Muharram ritual centers. As the Great Imambara shows, such a center could innovatively combine multiple architectural traditions—domestic, funerary,
tial, and religious—and function as a royal monument, a sacred storehouse, a religious assembly hall, a concert hall, a private ritual center, or a tomb, but never simply one of these. Purpose-built buildings mark an important step in the evolution of Muharram ritual practices, a crystallization of religious practice with strong symbolic resonance. The Great Imambara was more than a center of ritual practice. It was, in some respects, a monumental throne hall for innumerable ta’ziya—a hall that helped transform Lucknow’s cityscape and that served as a continuous reminder of the spirit and authority of Imam Husayn, the deeply felt tragedy of his martyrdom, and the vitality of Twelver Shi’i tradition in Awadh.

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NOTES

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1. For example: Bara Imambaragh, Kharadar, in Karachi, Pakistan; Dar es Salaam Jamaat Imambara in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Mohamadi Imambara KMCC in Paris, France; Hujjat Islamic Centre (Imambara), in Stanmore, Middlesex, London; the Husseini Imambara in Los Angeles, California; Az-Zabra Islamic Centre (Imambara), in Richmond, B.C., Canada.

2. Awadh, written as Oudh, Oude, Avadh, Audh, etc., overlaps with the present-day states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in northern India.

3. No satisfactory explanation behind the naming of the gate has been proposed. Rūm in Arabic and Persian literature literally means “Rome” and is widely used to refer to the Byzantine empire of Anatolia, reflecting the understanding that Byzantium was the successor to the Roman Empire. According to a popular story, Asaf al-Dawla intended the gate to resemble those found at Constantinople/Istanbul, though no similar gate has been identified. See George Ansnes [Viscount Valenta] [1769–1844], Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt in the Years 1802–1806, 3 vols. (London: Printed for W. Miller, 1809), vol. 1, 156.


9. Ibid., 329.


11. Ibid.


16. Asher, Architecture of Mughal India, 325–26. Also see P. C. Mookherjee, Pictorial Lucknow (Lucknow, 1885), 238–39. Asher gives credence to Mookherjee’s assertion that the rûmi darwâzah may have spouted water from its floral ornaments, which finds no corroboration in texts or in the inspection of the building.

36. Ibid., 76, 86, 157.
47. Report of Mr. Russell, the Board of Directors of the East India Company Solicitor, 28 Nov. 1785, on Vizier’s complaints against Mr. Bristow with a Precis and an Appendix, Home/Misc./344, fols. 583–585, India Office Records, Oriental and India Office, British Library.
For a collection of essays on the Farangi Mahal, see Francis Robinson, The ‘Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001). Early European merchants in Lucknow inhabited a compound named after them, the Farangi Mahal (Palace of the Foreigners/Europeans). During Awrangzib’s reign, the compound was given to local Sunni scholars, but the name was retained and applied to them.

Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, Roots of North Indian Shi’ism, 129.

Ibid., 151.


Anonymous, Insitkhâb akhâbâr-i nawa’ib wa’iz al-mamâlik bâhadûr wa inîtikhâb-i akhâbâr-i darbâr mu’âalla wa atrîf, 1208–1209/1794–1795, Royal Asiatic Society, no. 92, MP Cat. No. 93; Box 43. For a useful summary, see Rizvi, Isinâ ‘Ashari Shi’îs in India, vol. 2, 309–16.


Tiefenthaler’s elevation and partial plan of the Five Palaces is reproduced in Tandon, Architecture of Lucknow, figs. 10, 14.


William Hodges, Travels in India, during the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1783, 4 vols. (London, 1793), 100–101. For a reproduction of Hodges’s rendition of the Five Palaces, see Tandon, The Architecture of Lucknow, fig. 13.


The court of the House of the Fish (mâchî bhawan court) within the Five Palaces (ponji mahâl) is not to be confused with the much larger fortress of the House of the Fish (mâchî bhawan complex), which included the Five Palaces, the Great Imambara complex, and the Awrangzib mosque. The name for the court came to be applied to the whole fortress.

Isfâhânî, Tâjiz al-Ghâfîlîn, 60; Fayzbakhsh, Târîkh-i Farahbakhsh, vol. 2, 212.

Fayzbakhsh, Târîkh-i Farahbakhsh, vol. 2, 221.

Colc, Roots of North Indian Shi’ism, 129.

Isfâhânî, Tâjiz al-Ghâfîlîn, 72.


Early renderings showing separate foundations and the absence of the current joining staircase include Henry Salt’s ca. 1803 rendition of the Friday mosque (The British Library, WD1300, reproduced in Colc, Roots of North Indian Shi’ism, 134, fig. 4); an anonymous watercolor of the Friday mosque held in the Victoria and Albert Museum (reproduced in Sharar, Lucknow, fig. 8); an anonymous watercolor of the Great Imambara (The British Library, Add. Or. 3215, reproduced in Sharar, Lucknow, fig. 9); and Sita Ram’s ca. 1814–15 watercolor of the Friday mosque and Great Imambara (The British Library, Add. Or. 4757, reproduced in Keshani, Architecture of Ritual, 395, fig. 111). Early photographs of the site corroborating these renderings include those of Felice Beato (The British Library, Photos 1007/14[543D] and 254/1[47]); Samuel Bourne (The British Library, Photos 11/1[50] and 992/1[25]); the British Army ca. 1860 (Panorama of Great Imambara complex and Machi Bhavan, Picture Library, National Army
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77. Isfahānī, Tafṣīḥ al-Ḡāfīlīn, 73.
78. Anonymous, extracts from “Husainabad Annual Administration Reports” showing certain items expended contrary to the directions of His late Majesty Muhammad Ali Shah, as declared in the Deed of Trust, Box 44, 130A, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow; Keene, Hand-book for Visitors to Lucknow, 103.
79. Annesley, Voyages and Travels, vol. 1, 157. Siddiqi, Voyages and Travels, 41, asserts that Asaf al-Dawla’s wife was buried by his side, but there is no textual or visual evidence of any other graves.
80. Salt’s drawing is reproduced in Cole, Roots of North Indian Shi‘ism, 134, fig. 4.
83. Führer, Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions, 266.
84. For a discussion of the roof passageways of the Great Imambara, see Tandan, Architecture of Lucknow, 32.
85. ʿAbd al-Latif Shūshṭārī, Tuhfat al-ʿālam [Gift to the World], Add 23,533, fol. 194a, Persian Collections, Oriental and India Office, British Library, London; Isfahānī, Tafṣīḥ al-Ḡāfīlīn, 80; Cole, Roots of North Indian Shi‘ism, 95 n.13; Keene, Hand-book for Visitors to Lucknow, 112. After briefly describing the Great Imambara and the congregational mosque, Shūshṭārī says that he heard from the project accountant that two crore rupees were spent (“shanīdam ki az du krur ṭrupiyā sīyāda khājī an shuda ast”). Cole believes that Shūshṭārī, an Iranian, had in mind an Iranian crore, one of which equaled 500,000 units. Consequently, he concludes the Great Imambara cost 1,000,000 rupees. However, the passage appears to refer to both the Great Imambara and the congregational masjid. The number appears as a record of a conversation with knowledgeable officials, who probably thought in terms of Indian crore, one of which equaled 10,000,000 units. Also, Shūshṭārī’s account was a retrospective one completed in 1802, after he had spent at least a year in India and had most likely adopted the local numbering system. I have decided to take Shūshṭārī’s figure of two crore to mean that 20,000,000 rupees was the cost of the Great Imambara and the congregational masjid, and possibly of the entire complex, over a period of roughly five years, the project’s estimated length of construction.
86. Ibid., 30.
87. Ibid., 73–74.
89. Annesley, Voyages and Travels, vol. 1, 158.
90. Carnegy to Abbott, 23 May 1860, file no. 2693: List of attendants on the tomb of Asafud Dowlah [Asaf al-Dawla], Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.
91. The Iranian Mulla Muhammad Shushtari was appointed by Asaf al-Dawla to recite elegies in the Great Imambara. Shūshṭārī, Tuhfat al-ʿālam, fols. 197b–198a; Cole, Roots of North Indian Shi‘ism, 97.
92. Annesley, Voyages and Travels, vol. 1, 158.
93. Iªfah¸nº, Taf¾º¥ al-Gh¸filºn, 73–74.
94. Ibid.
95. Rizvi, Isn¸ {Asharº Shº{ºs in India, vol. 2, 314.
96. Annesley, Voyages and Travels, vol. 1, 158.
97. Cole, Roots of North Indian Shi‘ism, 103.
98. Rizvi, Isn¸ {Asharº Shº{ºs in India, vol. 2, 309–16.
100. Isfahānī, Tafṣīḥ al-Ḡāfīlīn, 55.
102. Isfahānī, Tafṣīḥ al-Ḡāfīlīn, 72.
103. Rizvi, Isn¸ {Asharº Shº{ºs in India, vol. 2, 310–11.
In the light of both the vast archival documentation (construction dates, texts on ceremonies, account books, construction correspondence, price-setting registers) and the intact structural evidence, the stone used to build the Süleymaniye in Istanbul holds a unique place in the history of Ottoman architectonic science and technology. In this essay, this stone and its acquisition in the mid-sixteenth century are considered in micro-scale by making use of archival materials, recent research, and extant structural clues. A major problem has been interpreting the terminology in the archival materials, which are mainly building accounts and correspondence written by accountants and scribes rather than by architects. Analogies between the Süleymaniye and other large imperial complexes with account books shedding light on their structures have been used here to solve this problem.

Dominated the skyline of the historic Istanbul peninsula, with its minarets and hundreds of domes cascading down to the Golden Horn like “bubbles on the surface of the sea,” the Süleymaniye complex (imaret-i īmire, modern külliye), situated on the third hill of the city, is the most ambitious Ottoman building ever built. Besides its spiritual and charitable functions, its basic purpose was education. Comprising a congregational mosque, an elementary school, a Qur’an school, a Hadith college, four law colleges, a school of medicine, a university hospital, a pharmacy, a hostel, a hospice, a caravanserai, a soup kitchen, a single hammam, rows of one-man shops and rooms, and the tombs of both Sultan Süleyman I (known in Ottoman historiography as “the Lawgiver”), r. 1520–66, and his wife Haseki Hürrem Sultan or Roxelana (Kadın Efendi in the endowment deed of the Süleymaniye), the complex is almost entirely a university city.

As one of the preeminent enterprises of the Ottoman architecture that sprawls from Budapest to Cairo, the Süleymaniye was considered to be as sacred as the Ka‘ba and the al-Aqsa Mosque, as beautiful as the Seven Wonders of the World, and as large as Belgrade. No other mosque is adorned with so many precious columns that once stood in Roman temples and Byzantine churches. In this respect, the Süleymaniye constitutes a symbolically significant collection of stone, in which ancient civilizations such as Roman and Byzantine and their sacred memories survive. The chief architect Sinan notes that each stone was famous worldwide and reminiscent of a land, and that some came from Solomon’s palace. Not only did the Süleymaniye represent the common heritage of humanity, but it also translated the past into the future through Ottoman architectonic knowledge, synthesizing the legacies of Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe.

Preceded by the pioneer Fatih complex of Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451–81), the Süleymaniye assumed a substantial role in enhancing the Ottoman educational system. It was commissioned by the imperial council, and its construction was presided over by Sultan Süleyman. Not counting the unrecorded cost of its platform, 26,251,938 akçe (asper, an Ottoman silver coin), of which 25,802,000 akçe were provided by the Sultan, were spent on its construction between 1553 and 1559 (the period for which expense records have been preserved). The total cost, according to the autobiographical essays that Sinan dictated to his poet-and-painter friend Mustafa Sa’i Çelebi, was 53,760,000 akçe. On September 18, 1547, the sultan had gained victory over the Austrian empire. With his new annual budget increasing from four million ducats to about seven or eight million, he conceived the idea of constructing a new complex, to be built after the completion of the complex (1543–48) of his late son, Şehzade Mehmed.

Land acquisition was not an issue for the Süleymaniye, which was to be sited on a plot removed from the burned-out Old Palace (the Saray-i Atik or Eski Saray) at Bayezid, damaged by a devastating fire on February 7, 1540. One of the most prominent spots on the peninsula’s skyline, this site was also...
selected to reduce costs and avoid expropriation elsewhere. Expropriation was the most crucial issue in this crowded and expensive commercial area of the city, as would be documented in the later cases of the Nuruosmaniye and Sultan Ahmed mosques. That the Süleymaniye, with its relatively larger program, could be erected on such narrow, sloped terrain demonstrated the genius of Sinan, architect-in-chief to the sultans for half a century (1538–88). Sinan knew how to use the site adeptly and how to employ its building materials left in situ from the burned-out palace, which had itself been built on the ruins of a Franciscan monastery.

According to the foundation inscription of the mosque, Sinan’s autobiographical treatises, and the chronicle of the contemporary historian Mustafa b. Celâl, the cornerstone of the Süleymaniye was consecrated and laid in the foundation of the mihrab by Shaykh al-Islam Ebussuud Efendi on Friday, June 13, 1550. The architectural project and its model must have been designed between September 18, 1547 and March 29, 1548, before the sultan went on his second Persian campaign from March 29, 1548 to December 21, 1549.

Sinan first erected a great platform on vaults to level the mosque, add to its height, and establish its qibla orientation. In addition, the vaults could accommodate an array of one-man shops. Furthermore, to avoid loss of space at the construction site and maximize the ease of stone use, Sinan had the stone finished to ready-to-use blocks in the mason yards of the quarries. Almost all the building supplies of the empire were commandeered for this project by order of the imperial council; during construction, even the prefect of the capital, who was charged with meeting the needs for imperial buildings such as palaces, hammams, kitchens, bakeries, and military edifices, had to get permission from the council to obtain any stone. The foundation was completed around December 1553, and the last work was finished by January 15, 1560. According to the copy of Tegikretül-bünyân from the Revan Library, the mosque had already welcomed the first Friday procession on Friday, July 30, 1557. At its inauguration, the sultan honored Sinan with a golden key, paid for, according to an account book, between August 28 and September 2, 1557.

The available archival documents related to the Süleymaniye are account books (defter) and their summaries (iemâl), which record wages and salaries (icârât) and wholesale purchases (mübâyâ’ât) and were evidently presented to the sultan, and imperial correspondence such as edicts, decrees, and court orders (kaviînên, ahkâm ve evâmîr-i hümdâyên). These documents were published by Ömer Lütfi Barkan in 1972 and utilized by J. M. Rogers in 1982 and more recently by Stephanos Yerasimos. Besides recording wages, salaries, and wholesale purchases, the account books also reflect the assignments of construction team members, their concentration in one or more different sections of the building during the work, and ceremonies such as the slaughtering of animals and the giving of alms, gifts, and tips to teams in celebration of the completion of certain structures; this information allows us to deduce unknown dates and construction processes. One can also extract from the account books substantial information on the organizing, managing, monitoring, obtaining, and transporting of teams, and on sixteenth-century building supplies: stone, iron, steel, lead, brass, copper, logs, timber, brick, tile, terracotta pipes, powdered and crushed horasan (mortar of lime and powdered bricks), fine sand, lime, flax, and gypsum, along with mosque furnishings and ornaments (pendant globes, tile revetments, oil lamps, flat and curved mirrors, pigments, gold leaf, ostrich eggs, carpets, and straw mats).

In addition to the Süleymaniye records, archival documents related to other large imperial complexes, such as the Sultan Ahmed, the Nuruosmaniye, and the Ayazma, combined with recent research, constitute a fairly concrete database for further analyses.

PROVISION OF STONE

There exist a considerable number of documents on stone provision for the construction of the Süleymaniye, giving information on the search for appropriate spolia, work at the quarries, transport of stone, stone ateliers, and costs. For the superstructure of the complex, 7,905,910 akçe (30.1% of the total cost) were spent on building supplies (mübâyâ’ât). The building stone used in the Süleymaniye included spolia from private properties, which were purchased if owners permitted; otherwise, the harm caused by collection was determined and the owners compensated.

According to the registers, the collection of spolia in the provinces was mainly commissioned by the imperial council through the provincial courts and
councils and their high-ranking officials such as governors-general (beglerbegi), sub-governors (sancak begi), magistrates (subas), and fieh holders (sipahi). In the cases of Ivgadi, in Ic-II (present-day Mersin) province, and Bozcaada (Tenedos), the task involved fortress commanders (hisar dizdar, kale dizdar) as well, because hinterland fortresses contained stocks of precious building stone and architectural elements that elsewhere had been ruined or removed by attacking crusaders. The beglerbegi of Anatolia and Egypt, Ahmed Pasha, and Ali Pasha, as well as their sancak begi and kadis, were routinely and personally ordered to collect and store stone in their domains. Whether executive or judicial, those who ignored these duties would be permanently discharged from office (‘azl ve reddi edildi). In gathering or quarrying, they worked with the assistance of a nucleus staff comprising the imperial architects (either masters or journeymen in charge of technical matters), fiduciaries in charge of financial affairs, and the subas and yayabas in charge of commanding the conscripts of local Janissary corps. The provincial kadis were the guarantors of harmonious cooperation between the high-ranking soldiers and the nucleus staff. According to the registers, in 1551–52 the beglerbegi, sancak begi, and kadis of Anatolia, and in 1552 the beglerbegi of Egypt, were ordered to search for stone and sternly warned to do their best. In Anatolia, emphasis was put on such Cilician cities as Alaiye (present-day Alanya), Ic-II, Adana, Sis (present-day Kozan), and Tarsus. The chief architect prepared detailed request orders, which specified stone types in terms of formal appearance, dimensions, and place of use. The comptroller (binm emni) submitted the orders to the imperial council together with a decree. Issued in two days, the orders were delivered with funds through imperial messengers (cavus), fiduciaries, or architects to the pertinent provincial officials. The kadis were mainly responsible for the tasks of searching for, gathering, and dispatching the stone. If they made the same mistake twice, they would be not merely discharged but put to death. They were to let the dispatched royal architects know about stone finds in their territories, submit a report on the distance to the nearest port and its condition, enclose samples of the stone along with their specifications, and finally, if the council found these appropriate, send the stone itself. Stone to be delivered to Istanbul was recorded at its original location by scribes or bookkeepers, and the lists of stone were registered by the accountants of the local kadis in order to be considered legally valid. To avoid wasting money the court did not transport gigantic, costly blocks and columns without first considering their specifications and the details of their highly expensive and difficult transportation: for example, 100 akce were paid for a one-ton column to be transported a single kilometer. Shipping from a place such as Eregl or Kavak required the construction of a jetty. Later, for the construction of the Nuruosmaniye Mosque (1748–55), the dragging of twelve columns from Pergamon to Dikili required the construction of roads and bridges, the hiring of about six hundred oxcart drivers and workers, and the procurement of thirty-five yokes of oxen. With its architects and supplies, the naval corps significantly contributed to stone removal, transportation, and placement. These made the Suleymaniye a success.

Treadwheels and tripod hoists, mechanical marvels of the time, lowered and raised the blocks by means of systems of pulleys consisting mainly of iron or wood spools and organic or metal tackles. A capstan driven by slaves or animals helped turn the treadwheel, which was a gigantic spool powered by numerous slaves who, hamster-like, tramped inside it. According to the registers, for the removal of the Virgin’s Column (Kizta) in Istanbul the chief architect Sinan called for a tripod hoist (saban or sapan), a treadwheel crane (dolab), 2½ tons of hawser (tel, resen-i yoma, or, in Sinan’s naval terminology, palamar), rope (urgan, resen-i isparcina, isparcina urgan, resen-i saban), towrope (resen-i yedek), a ring ( halka) and hook (sengel) to attach the ends of the ropes to the column, numerous iron and ninety-seven wooden spools (bekre), and ship timbers with which to construct a frame to hang the spools and scaffolding around the column. These materials were procured from the Galata shipyard through the grand admiral (kaptan pasa). The column, weighing more than 30 tons, was removed on April 1, 1551. At Thessaloniki, for the removal of a column weighing 5½ tons and lying in a pit 3 m deep, six ropes and ten spools were requested. At the height of stone collection between January 28, 1552 and June 21, 1553, 30,000 akce were spent on hawisers in coils weighing 4 kanlar (225.798 kg) each; these included ropes from Samson, which was the hemp production center of the empire. Çubuk-i Karadeniz or çubuk-i Bahri Siyah (timber of the Black Sea), a type of all-purpose timber 12 gri (9.08 m) in length; situn, or timber 6 gri (4.54 m) in length from the Thracian coasts of the Black
Sea; \(^71\) and 9 m timber from Üsküdar \(^72\) were used for the wooden frame of the capstan. The wooden spool of hornbeam (gürgen) cost 7 akçe. \(^73\)

A wrapping of rags (paçavna) helped to protect the stone from getting damaged during removal, transportation, and placement. Saddle blankets (teğeltü), felt (keçe), nomadic felt (keçe-i yörük), cotton cloth (kirpas), and sailcloth (tente-i kadırga, bâd-bân, yelken) are the rag materials mentioned in the registers.

In the sophisticated and expensive task of procurement, the kadi was expected to submit detailed preliminary feasibility reports \(^74\) with affordable solutions, and to offer financial assistance supported by the tax farm (mukāta‘a) and sheep tax (‘ādet-i ağnâm) incomes of the territory in his domain. \(^75\) For example, in the case of Aydınçık (modern Edincik), the total quarry expenses for four and a half months in 1555 were 45,391 akçe. \(^76\) If cavalrymen could not find the money locally, the comptroller, through his fiduciaries, would have it sent in. \(^77\) In the case of Gemlik, the gypsum quarry had not been registered in the vilâyet defteri (provincial account book) by the local cavalryman and for two years had illegally been run by local non-Muslim quarrymen. It was appropriated by the state, and the violators’ fine (the two-year income) was spent on quarrymen. It was appropriated by the state, and for two years had illegally been run by local non-Muslim quarrymen.

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On their round trips through the Marmara (Pro- ponitis) and Aegean seas, the ships and boats picked up the stone blocks destined for Istanbul from the quarries of Izmit (Nicomedia), Kavak, Aydınçık (Cyzi- cus), Eski Istanbulbuluk (Alexandria Troas), Bozcaada (Tenedos), and Sakiz (Chios) and delivered them to the main port districts of Istanbul, such as Eminönü (İskle-i Emin, the ancient port of Neorion) and Unka-pani (İskle-i Kapan-ı Dakyk, ancient Porta Platea) on the south bank of the Golden Horn at the edge of the historic Istanbul peninsula, whose third hill was being crowned by the Süleymaniye. Stone was first stored at the seaports and then, when needed, dragged or carted from the seaports to the construction site. \(^85\)

The Unkapani seaport, which was closer to the construction site, was more popular than that of Eminönü; 10,518 oxcarts of stone blocks were unloaded there, as opposed to 7,314 at Eminönü. \(^86\)

For sea transport, specially designed ships and boats were used, \(^87\) classified as galleys for stone (kadarga-i seng), vessels for stone (sefine-i seng), wheel-powered heavy vessels for stone (sefine-i seng-i büzürg hâ-dolab), and wheel-powered light vessels for stone (sefine-i seng-i küçük hâ-dolab). \(^88\) In addition, some flat-bottomed barges belonging to the Ottoman navy, such as cannon vessels (sefine-i top) and horse vessels (sefine-i esb-i hassa), were used. \(^89\) Correspondence from Alexandria, \(^90\) for instance, provides information that a custom-made vessel was built at the Galata navy base—then the center of the shipping industry, with 125 docks—in a remarkably short time following two in situ inspections of the columns to be shipped. Ships with capacities of 250 čeki (62.5 tons), 700 čeki (175 tons), and 1,100 čeki (275 tons) \(^91\) carried 191 shiploads of stone from the quarries of İzmit and Kavak and 115 shiploads of stone from Aydınçık and the Aegean Islands. \(^92\) (A čeki is a unit of weight that equals four kantîr, or 225.798 kg.) All three ships were well equipped with weapons in case of a sea battle. \(^93\)

Apart from these imperial ships and boats (mirî gemiler), private barges (navlun gemileri, rençber gemileri) were occasionally hired, at a cost of 41,774 akçe (0.16% of the recorded construction costs). \(^94\) Transportation costs were high: in the case of Eski Istanbulbuluk, for instance, 157 blocks of pink granite gathered from the ancient quarries of Ezine were shipped for 1600 akçe (4 akçe per kantîr), whereas the cost of collection was only 666 akçe. \(^95\) As a comparison, 151 blocks of marble from Chios were shipped by private boat for 2820 akçe. \(^96\)

The stone blocks brought to the construction site from various corners of the empire were kept in the imperial storehouse (hâssa anbân \(^97\) or hizâne-i ‘âmire, \(^98\) literally, imperial treasury), which was also intended to hold such precious and rare spolia as columns, bases, capitals, entablatures, casings, steps, pavements, slabs, veneers, and roundels originating from various Aegean, Anatolian, and Egyptian sites. It was in
the Topkapı Palace and had a temporary branch at the construction site on the plot of the Old Palace at Bayezid. Other branches of the storehouse were at the quarries, ancient sites, and ports—all mainly the Eminönü and Unkapanı seaports of Istanbul. On August 8, 1552, a remarkable amount of timber, nails, and roofing material was dispatched to the construction site of the Süleymaniye to build the sheds where the quarried blocks would be stored and dressed, the barracks where the laborers would be housed, and the ateliers. The ateliers, which accommodated groups of workers from various professions and corners of the empire brought together for the project, were located near or adjacent to the corresponding storehouses in which the relevant building materials were kept.

**TYPES OF STONE**

The three main types of building stone used in the complex were *küfek* (limestone), *ad taş* (firestone), and *mermer* (Proconnesian marble), which was procured primarily from the Marmara region. Limestone and firestone were quarried, while the marble was simply gathered, in the manner practiced since the Byzantine era, using the same equipment and teams in an enormous effort to acquire appropriate stone components. From 1549 to 1557, an abundant supply of rare and precious colored architectural elements—columns, entablatures, voussoirs, facings, veneers, pavements, and jambs—were collected both from ancient cities and from contemporary buildings in which ancient materials had been reused. Sources included a mosque in Nicaea (İznik) and houses in Istanbul, even ones belonging to statesmen. In Neandria (Ezine), columns abandoned in the ancient quarry were collected.

The present archival registers of the Süleymaniye note the following ancient cities as sources of stone (see fig. 1): Constantinople (Kostantaniyye, İstanbıl), Chrysopolis (Üsküdar), Chalcedon (Karye-i Kadı, Kadiköy), Perinthos/Heraclea (Ereğlı, modern Marmara Ereğlisi), Viza (Vize), Adrianople (Edirne), Nicomedia (İznikmad, the capital of Bithynia, modern Kocaeli), Nicea (İznik), Cius (Gemlik), Cape Triton (Bozburun), Myrtlea (Mudanya), Miletopolis and Lopadion (Mihaliç), Cyzicus (Aydınçık, modern Edincik), Alexandria Troas (Eski İstanbulluk), Neandria (Ezine), Pitane (Candarlı), Miletos (Balat), Mytilene (Midilli), Chios (Sakız), Tenedos (Bozcaada), Thessaloniki (Selanik), Corcession (Alaüye, modern Alanya), Cilicia (İç-İli, modern Mersin), Seleucia (Silifke), Danianclus (Mud), Celendis (Selendi), Tarsus, Adana, Misís (Sis, modern Kozan), Alexandria (İskenderiye), Ascalon (Ashkelon), and Heliopolis ("city of the Sun God," Baalbek).

In Istanbul and its hinterland, a widespread and arduous stone-gathering project was pursued in the ruins of Constantinople, Chrysopolis, and Chalcedon. Thus, various sorts of stone from the Old Palace, the Kızılağaçı (Virgin’s Column), the seventeen white columns of the Peripatos of the Sphendone in the Hippodrome, the sixteen columns and the pavements of the former church of St. Irene, then the armory (cebehane), the marble plates recording Manuel I’s conciliark edict of 1166 in the Hagia Sophia Mosque, 154 cart-loads of stone of the Church of St. Peribleptos (the Sulu Manastır) in Samatya, two or more columns of the Church of St. Euphemia, the pavements of the Mosque of Mahmud Pasha, a red antique Egyptian porphyry column (*sere gözî*) in the courtyard of the Kissa Khan, opposite the fortress of Yoroz (ancient Hieron) at the Black Sea entrance of the Bosphorus, and a red Aswan granite column from Çengelköy (Çengar) on the Bosphorus were removed.

The earliest work was carried out in Ezine and Eski-İstanbulluk, where pink Neandrian or Kestanbol granite was procured between November 24, 1549 and July 5, 1550, while the work of longest duration was in Aydınçık, where Proconnesian marble was procured from April 4, 1550 to July 7, 1554 (see fig. 3). The stone specifications in the registers indicate size, form, dimension, and color qualities. Terms used include *yek pürer* (monolithic), *pürer* (piece, fragment), *a’lā* (first-rate), *alaca* (Turkish: colored), *reng-amız* (Persian: colored), and *ablak* (Arabic: black and white). *Ablak* evidently refers here to both pink Neandrian granite and Tenedos marble.

**Siyâhla ak benek benek** (black and white spotted) refers to gray Armutlu granite, notable for its black specks. *Sûrîh* (red) is the name given to all red stone including Aswan granite. *Sûrîh-i ablak* (red, black, and white) designates the multicolored, veined Chios limestone called Portasanta. *Sûrîh-i alaca* (with red specks) evidently designates Kestanbol granite. *Kızıl kemer taşı* (red voussoir) is evidently Hereke conglomerate. *Sere gözî* or *kızıl sere gözî* (literally, red sparrow-eye) designates red antique Egyptian porphyry, or *rosso antico*, with reference to its solid red color.
Fig. 1. Location of the stone resources for the Süleymaniye complex in Istanbul.
Fig. 2. Relative sizes of the limestone blocks quarried at the Haznedar state quarry and sent to the construction site of the Süleymaniye complex: (a) seng-i büzürg; (b) seng-i kabı; (c) seng-i zıra; (d) seng-i pehlü.

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Fig. 3. Timetable of the stone acquisition for the Süleymaniye complex.
The name given to all green-colored stone, including Greek porphyry and breccia.

In 1551, the imperial architect Bali classified the Alexandria stones he dispatched as beyaz (white, probably white Halayeb granite), siyah (black, probably black Aswan granite), sebz (green, probably green Greek breccia or porphyry), fistaki (pistachio-colored, probably green Egyptian marble), zerda-cilli (yellow-spotted, presumably the Egyptian marble of Galala, or giallo antico of Algeria), mersini (myrtle-colored), yasemin (jasmine-colored, presumably the beige-colored Egyptian marble of Samah), zururi (gray, presumably the magnificent gray Egyptian granite, granito del foro), gazali (Egyptian Ghazal granite), kohli (navy blue), mahazza (probably the world-famous Egyptian alabaster), and newvaril-fuad (literally, heart-rejoicing; designation uncertain). Red or green stone was the most respected, since, in terms of ancient meaning, red demonstrated the power of both the earth and the emperor, and green represented both the Garden of Eden and celestial power.

Individual stone blocks were defined by numeric (kt’a), linear (zira’ and kor), and cubic (araba or acele, and hamil or yuk) units of measurement. The zira’, or mason’s cubit, is a unit of length, 0.757 m, divisible into twenty-four thumbs (parmak) of 31.54 mm each. The kor (masonry course) is another unit of length, 7.5 zira’ (5.68 m), used by the builders to measure the length of stone courses. The araba, or oxcart, is a unit of cubic measure that refers to an oxcart load, while the hamil (burden) refers to a two-pannier load on a packhorse.

1. Black stone (karatas, seng-i siyah)

Karatas or seng-i siyah, a type of black, calcareous stone, was used for the foundation blocks, which were placed atop compacted soil. It was acquired both from the ruins of the Old Palace and from the foundation excavation of a mosque situated on the rock of the third hill of Istanbul, thereby avoiding costly transportation expenses. In addition, on September 27, 1550, during the foundation excavation of the hammam of the Edirne Palace, an ancient edifice was unearthed, and an immense amount of karatas from its foundation and upper structure was sent to Istanbul. In two of the registers, the word giru is used for stone. In one document, giru tas (gray stone) is mentioned together with firestone as a foundation material; in another, there is mention of a giru kahreng (gray quarry) at Izmit. However, there is no giru tas listed among the stone dispatched from Izmit between May 8 and July 2, 1550.

2. Firestone (od tas, seng-i ates)

Firestone, a coarse, heat-resistant sandstone, is the earliest stone type to have been quarried for the Suleymaniye, and the second main building stone used there. It is called od tas or seng-i ates (literally, fire stone) in the registers. Since it is not durable against atmospheric effects, it was used mainly in the foundations, directly above the horasan concrete layer, which was a 20 cm-thick mixture of lime, crushed brick, and brick powder, reinforced by a hattul (crosstimber).

Firestone was both quarried and collected in Chalcedon from January 30, 1550 to May 23, 1553; in Perinthos/Heraclia from March 5, 1550 to February 21, 1552; and in Nicomedia from March 29, 1550 to May 17, 1554. In Nicomedia, the ruins of the ancient city and the quarry of Kavak Iskelesi (modern Karamursel) were used; the extraction there lasted from March 29 to July 2, 1550. Moreover, firestone was collected from the ruins of the Old Palace and the Edirne Palace. The blocks gathered from the Edirne Palace were 55 x 100 x 160 cm and 58 x 100 x 169 cm.

The foundation of the Suleymaniye Mosque, 5.9 m high, rises atop three firestone courses, 2 m high in total; on average, each course is 66 cm high. Kavak firestone was cut from parent rock in two sizes: either as kalib-kucuk (small blocks) 1 x 1.5 zira’ (75 x 113 cm), tooled for 20 akce; or as kalib-kibir (large blocks) 1.5 x 2.5 zira’ (113 x 189 cm), tooled for 60 akce. The third dimension was left open. Tooling was to be perfect so as to be approved by the chief architect.

Kadikoy firestone, notable for its red, yellow, and gray mineral deposits, was quarried from the ancient Kadikoy firestone quarry, whose location is unknown today. The quarries that met the demand for firestone in the furnaces and foundations of imperial and military buildings in Istanbul—foundries, palaces, kitchens, and hammams—also provided the Suleymaniye with its early blocks of firestone. Stone called seng-i Karye-i Kadi (Kadikoy stone) and seng-i temel der
Kârîye-i Kâdi (foundation stone from Kadiköy) in the registers was first dispatched on January 30, 1550, and again, after the quarry had been enlarged, on October 6, 1550. About 2,700 blocks were ready for dispatch on January 19, 1551.139 The shipments continued until May 23, 1553.140

The location of the Ereğli firestone quarry is unknown today. According to the available registers, its operations started on March 5, 1550; on May 8, 1550 the wooden structure at the foot of the quarry was constructed with four pile drivers sent from Istanbul, and labor and supplies were sent from June 6 to July 16, 1550.141 Thus, after June 6, 1550, quarrying and collection in the ruins of Perinthos were underway. In June 1550, 1000 akçe was given by the kadi of Çorlu through the paymaster Hayrülüs to cart quarried blocks to the foot.142 By February 21, 1552, the quarry was expanded to the foot of Çorlu through the paymaster Hayrülüs being operational until 1975, it is the only one among the thirty ancient quarries in the Marmara region to have remained in continuous use since the Roman era.143 The quarry is called Kavak Iskelesinde od taş kârîhengi (firestone quarry in the Kavak quay) in the registers, was in Karamürsel.144 Its underground galleries being operational until 1975, it is the only one among the thirty ancient quarries in the Marmara region to have remained in continuous use since the Roman era.145 Kavak firestone is called seng-i Kavak (Kavak stone), seng-i âtes ’an Kavak (firestone from Kavak), and seng-i âtes ’an iskele-i Kavak (firestone from the Kavak quay) and can measure from 2 zirâ’ and 12 thumbs x 1 zirâ’ and 16 thumbs x 20 thumbs (190 x 126 x 63 cm) to 3 zirâ’ x 1 zirâ’ and 11 thumbs x 18 thumbs (227 x 110 x 57 cm).146 Extraction was initiated in March 1550, continuing from March 29 to December 15, 1550; on February 8, 1551, and June 7, 1553, laborers summoned from all over the empire were dispatched to Kavak.147 In order to cart the blocks to the foot of the quarry, the quarry was provided with 100 ox carts on June 15, 1550 and with 2000 akçe to rent oxen on January 28, 1551.148 According to the registers, the Kavak firestone was shipped to Istanbul between May 17, 1553 and March 29, 1554 and carted to the construction site from January 27 to May 17, 1554.149

Among the documents there is a category of firestone called seng-i âtes ’an yed-i Körez Nikola (firestone bought by Körez Nikola). Körez Nikola (also known as Kiriz Nikola),150 who is identified in one of the documents as istâde (probably ʿustad, master),151 was an architect who, as an assistant of Sinan, was assigned to choose the appropriate stone for construction in the vicinity of Nicomedia, Mihalic, Iznikmid, and Aydincik. The firestone he had gathered was in gigantic blocks of two sizes:152 5 zirâ’ and 20 thumbs x 4 zirâ’ and 4 thumbs x 5 zirâ’ and 4 thumbs (438 x 315 x 240 cm), or 13 zirâ’ and 10 thumbs x 7 zirâ’ x 6 zirâ’ and 20 thumbs (1015 x 529 x 517 cm), the latter being the largest block used in the construction (fig. 2, A).153 Nikola’s blocks were shipped to Istanbul and carted to the construction site between January 20 and March 22, 1554.154

3. Limestone (kâşfe)

Kâşfe, or Bakirköy mactra (mollusk-shell) limestone, the main building material of the Süleymaniye, varies in color from cream to gray and is used in various parts of the building—walls, piers, buttresses, columns, arches, pendentives, domes, finials, roof tiles, facings, veneers, pavements, steps, balustrades, window frames, jams, and sills—as well as in the foundation.155 The limestone used in the foundation was a kind of rubble and therefore called pârehâ-yi seng-i beyzâ berây-i temel (white stone pieces for the foundation).156 According to the registers, limestone was mainly quarried from the state limestone quarry at Haznedar (seng-i kâşfe kârîheng-i mûrî, kârîheng-i mûrî der kurb-i kârîve-i Haznedâr) that stretched from the farm of Mehmed Pasha in Davudpaşa to the farm of Lütfi Pasha in Haznedar.157 However, a small amount of limestone was also gathered from Perinthos, the Old Palace, and Edirne Palace. Extant since the Roman era, the Haznedar quarries are now covered by residential areas and are no longer in use. Judging by both the soil profile of Haznedar and the mounds formed by pit excavations, visible until 1955,158 the limestone was quarried from a depth of 6.5 m in order to obtain large, high-quality building stone without cracks. After quarrying (kat kerden), initiated on March 12, 1550, and preliminary dressing (hamtaraas kerden), the blocks were carted to the construction site between December 30, 1553 and April 12, 1554, for the subsequent phases of finer dressing (tvâsîden), laying (binâ kerden), and smoothing and polishing (perdaht kerden), which took place from March 17 to May 17, 1554.159 Some unfinished moldings on the facades give clues about the final tooling.
Specified by the chief architect’s wooden templates, the blocks (see fig. 2) were hewn into nearly finished, pre-shaped form (kalb) at the quarry’s masonry yards to avoid both unnecessary weight in transportation and wasted space on the construction site, as had been customary since Roman times. The quarry was used for the second time on January 29, 1558, to provide stone for the construction of the third and fourth madrasas; the only stone dispatched between August 14 and 19, 1558 was seng-i helik, rubble stone.  

Throughout the registers, limestone blocks are classified as seng-i büzürg or dergâh (free stone), seng-i kalb (stone of large dimension), seng-i çap (minaret stone), seng-i zirâ (ashlar course stone), seng-i helik (rubble stone), kemer tabani (impost), seng-i pehlu (jamb stone), seng-i ğartpıste (capstone), seng-i minare (minaret stone), seng-i kaldırın (pavement stone), doşeme-i yûfa (thin pavement), and seng-i kapat (sewer-cover stone). While seng-i zirâ, seng-i helik, and seng-i kaldırın were for the most part provided by the state quarry at Haznedar from July 28 to August 3, 1554, blocks for sewer covers, minarets, and capstones were purchased in accordance with the chief architect’s templates and valorizations, and extra-dimension stone, jams, ashlar course blocks, and paving stones were purchased by the contractors. In terms of its shape and size, limestone was defined by piece (kiﬁ’a), length (zirâ and kor), and cubic measure (araba or ‘acele and hamil or yûk).  

Seng-i büzürg or dergâh, approximately 5 zirâ (3.78 m) long, is freestone that was easily worked in each direction to extract an appropriate block of seng-i kalb. Vousoirs and blocks for the dome and pendentives were extracted from the seng-i büzürg in the masonry yards of the construction site. However, two large limestone vousoirs (kemer-i büzürg) were procured from Cyzicus on August 26, 1550, along with fourteen dergâhs measuring 2 zirâ and 13 thumbs x 3 zirâ (192 x 227 cm) or 1 zirâ and 13 thumbs x 3 zirâ (116 x 227 cm); thirteen seng-i büzürgs measuring 6 zirâ x 2 zirâ x 15 thumbs (454 x 150 x 47 cm); and four large, square bases (kürst-i büzürg şahr köše).  

Like Kavak firestone, seng-i kalb (large-dimension stone), was 1 zirâ wide and 18 thumbs thick (75 x 56 cm), with a length of 2 to 7.5 zirâ (151–568 cm). According to a comprehensive survey of the present intact structures of the complex, seng-i kalb measuring 63 x 100 x 150 cm and 61 x 75 x 260 cm are the largest limestone blocks of the Sûleymaniye; they were used for the main piers of the mosque. Thirty-three blocks plus six oxcart seng-i kalb were quarried between March 17 and May 17, 1554, while ninety-one blocks were purchased between July 28 and August 3, 1554. Blocks of seng-i çap (possibly stone dressed to a specific dimension) totalling 417 zirâ (315.6 m) in length were purchased from eighteen private stone ateliers between July 28 and August 3, 1554.  

Seng-i zirâ designates a block of ashlar course stone defined by the zirâ unit. (During collecting and setting, however, builders used kor instead of zirâ.) According to the survey, these ashlar blocks are 42 to 190 cm long, 19 to 43 cm wide, and 29 to 63 cm high. The longest block, with a length of 244 cm, is in the south courtyard wall. After the blocks were removed from the quarry between March 17 and May 17, 1554, additional blocks with a combined length of 2538 zirâ (1.9 km) were purchased between July 28 and August 3, 1554.  

Seng-i helik (wet mortar stone) is rubble limestone, a by-product obtained during quarrying. It was used together with horasan mortar mix in the cores of walls, confined between the two facings formed by course stone, seng-i zirâ. In rubble walls, stone used for facing was cut to larger dimensions. For instance, the only stone dispatched from the state quarry to the third and fourth madrasas was seng-i helik, used with gallets (stone flakes used for filling the spaces in the rubble core) in their body walls. According to the survey, the facing stones are a maximum 50 cm long, 20 to 25 cm wide, and 17 cm high. The dispatch lasted from March 17 to April 26, 1554, and from August 14 to 19, 1557, and was accompanied by fine sand (riyg), lime (kireç, gece), brick (tuğla), tile (kremid), and coal (engist) needed to construct layered brick-and-rubble walls. Because of its mass, seng-i helik was specified in units of cubic measurement such as araba and hamil.  

The seng-i ğartpıste is the capstone block. According to the survey, in both the forecourt and the courtyard of the mosque the capstone blocks are 28 to 120 cm long, 89 cm or 98 cm wide, and 43 cm high. In one register, the width given for a certain block is 1 zirâ and 4 thumbs (88 cm, according to the standard calculation). This measurement must correspond to the width (98 cm) of the wider blocks, which would have been cut down to make the narrower ones. Thus (dividing 98 by 1/16), the length of the zirâ in August 1554 must have been approximately 84 cm. However, no other register allows a precise cross-check of this measurement. Dressed according to the specifications of a template produced in the quarry and dispatched to the construction site between March 17 and 22,
Judging by the accounts of the Aynalækavak Kiosk, the Ayazma Mosque, the Sultan Ahmed complex, and Sinan’s templates and valorizations in the registers of the Süleymaniye, the seng-i pehlü (side stone) is a flat, linear block used for window frames, door jambs, and pavements. The dimensions given in the Süleymaniye registers indicate that these stones were 1 to 3 ẓīrā’ (75–227 cm) in length, 1 to 2 ẓīrā’ (75–151 cm) in width, and 4 to 8 thumbs (12.6–25.2 cm) in thickness—dimensions compatible with those of the frames and jambs of the complex (fig. 2). In the case of Byzantium, a marble jamb is called sōvā (jamb) rather than pehlū, which is used for limestone jambs. Twenty-one blocks of pehlū were carted from the quarry to the construction site from March 17 to May 17, 1554, while 139 blocks were purchased between July 28 and August 3, 1554, in accordance with the chief architect’s templates and valorizations.

The seng-i mināre, 2 ẓīrā’ long and 16 thumbs high (150 x 50 cm), is the step-block of the spiral stairs in the minarets. Like the superimposed drums of a column, the newels of the minaret stairs were formed by the projections of these steps. Like the seng-i ẓīrā’, the seng-i mināre was specified in ẓīrā’ 2. According to two templates designed by the chief architect for the two types of minarets in the complex, the blocks were carted from the quarry between March 24 and May 17, 1554 and dressed on the construction site.

The seng-i kaldırım, a limestone pavement block, was procured mainly from the state quarry in Istanbul from May 12 to 17, 1554, and paid for between March 4 and 9, 1559; like seng-i helik, it was defined by arabā due to its shape. In addition, some thin limestone slabs, dösem-i yufka, had already been collected from Cyzicus on August 26, 1550.

Multiple seng-i kapak, or sewer-cover blocks, with a combined length of 383.5 ẓīrā’ (290.3 m) were purchased between July 28 and August 3, 1554. It should be noted, however, that seng-i kapak, in reference to Proconnesian marble, designates latrine blocks, which sit directly over the sewers as do the limestone sewer covers.

4. Proconnesian Marble

Proconnesian marble, the third main building stone of the Süleymaniye, was gathered from April 4, 1550 to July 25, 1555. Due to the abundant marble supply of the ancient city of Cyzicus, on the southern shore of the Propontis (Marmara Sea), it was not quarried. Within easy reach of the sea, Cyzicus was covered with monumental Roman edifices built of marble quarried from the island of Proconnesus (modern Marmara Adası). No register refers to the use of any quarries on Proconnesus for providing marble to the Süleymaniye. Instead of quarrying, the Ottomans followed the Byzantine practice outstandingly demonstrated in the Hagia Sophia, simply collecting the Proconnesian marble of Cyzicus. This practice was abandoned by the time the Sultan Ahmed complex was being built; its marble was quarried from Proconnesus.

Cyzicus, a Mysian colony flourishing at the turn of the seventh century BC, is south of Artakio (Erdek). In the registers, it is called Aydancık (modern Edincik). Its Temaşalik district houses the ruins of the Hadrian temple recorded in the late Roman period as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. In 1431, the Italian antiquarian and traveler Cyriacus of Ancona depicted the temple as having thirty-three monolithic columns; by 1444, there remained only twenty-nine, measuring 2.66 m in diameter and 21.35 m in height. Today, only the foundation and a column drum remain in situ.

In the registers, Proconnesian marble gathered from Cyzicus is called mermer-i Aydancık (Aydancık marble) and seng-i mermer-i Aydancık (Aydancık marble stone). According to the documents, from April 4, 1550 to February 11, 1554, in order to obtain columns, jambs, and pavements, 30,000 akçe plus labor and supplies were dispatched to Temaşalik. The first order, dated July 15, 1550, requested the collection of thirty jambs, 250 large voussoirs, and 600 small voussoirs. The second order, dated three years later—July 13, 1553—requested columns, pavements, and jambs. These are recorded as having been shipped to Istanbul from June 28 to November 24, 1550 and from January 20 to July 7, 1554 and carted to the construction site between January 27 and May 17, 1554. They were used mainly for the interior elements of the mosque and included capitals, bases, voussoirs, balustrades, jambs, window frames, steps, facings, veneers, and pavements. Astonishingly, no column was dispatched from Cyzicus.

Cyzicus Proconnesian marble blocks and architectural elements are classified in the registers as sütün or direk (column, shaft), ser-sütün or direk başı (capital), kürş (base), kemer or mermer-i kemer (marble voussoir), kemer-i küçük (small voussoir), kemer-i vasat (medium
of the Sphendone in the Hippodrome were collected; in 1540, the seventeen columns of the Peripatos pavements, of which nineteen large, three small (for the mosque), and twenty-one medium voussoirs were shipped; twenty-three large and 381 medium ones followed between March 17 and 24, 1554. Between June 23 and July 7, 1554, nineteen large, three small (for the mosque), and twenty-six hospice voussoirs were shipped. Seventy-five large and thirty-one small voussoirs were shipped on November 24 and 25, 1554. These were then carted to the construction site.

The word söve designates collectively such window components as esik (sill) and söve (jamb). Söve-i kürde (unfinished or damaged jamb), was used to make the smaller upper-story window frames of the mosque. On June 28, 1550, two sills were shipped to Istanbul. From January 20 to 25, 1554 some thirty-six jambs were shipped; from March 3 to 17, 1554, eighteen large, ten medium, and fourteen small jambs with sills, plus thirty upper-story window frames with eight sills, were shipped. Between March 17 and 24, 1554, 246 medium jambs were shipped; between June 23 and July 7, 1554, two jambs with sixteen sills and three mosque window frames with twenty-three sills were shipped and then carted to the construction site.

Dösemê, or pavement, is classified in the registers as dösemê-i buzûrû (large pavement) and dösemê-i cedid (new pavement). Nine paving stones on June 28, 1550, some twenty-two from May 12 to 17, 1554, and fifty-four from June 23 to July 7, 1554 were shipped to Istanbul and then carted to the construction site. In addition, from July 27, 1551 to February 21, 1552, eighty-three pavements were collected from Viza and Perinthos; from June to September 27, 1550, twenty-seven were obtained from Adrianople; on January 3, 1553, thirty were collected from Mytilene; and on May 15, 1552, some were gathered from the St. Irene.

Fifty-four kademe, or step blocks, arrived at the construction site between March 24 and May 17, 1554. In addition, the steps of the Hippodrome must have been removed when its columns were collected. Kademe, or step blocks, refers to blocks of ashlar course stone. Between March 24 and May 17, 1554, approximately thirty-six blocks were brought to the construction site. In addition, on May 5, 1550 four ship-
loads of these blocks were removed from Perinthos;\textsuperscript{213} in June 1550, 200 blocks were taken from Adrianople;\textsuperscript{214} and between May 8 and July 2, 1550, twenty-eight blocks were collected from Nicomedia.\textsuperscript{215}

The dergah, like the seng-i buçürg in Haznedar limestone, is a gigantic, multipurpose stone. From May 12 to 18, 1554, some twenty-two dergahs in four sizes—3 zir\textsuperscript{a} x 2 zir\textsuperscript{a} and 13 thumbs (227 x 192 cm); 3 zir\textsuperscript{a} x 1 zir\textsuperscript{a} and 13 thumbs (227 x 116 cm); 6 zir\textsuperscript{a} and 15 thumbs x zir\textsuperscript{a} nim (half a zir\textsuperscript{a}) (501 x 37 cm); and 6 zir\textsuperscript{a} x 2 zir\textsuperscript{a} x 15 thumbs (454 x 150 x 47 cm)—were brought to the construction site. On December 9, 1551, two blocks were dispatched from Cyzicus, and on January 29, 1554, twenty-five more blocks followed; they were shipped to the stonecutting plant in İzmit, which is described in detail by the German traveler Hans Dernschwam, who was there on March 13, 1555. Along with the blocks collected from the ruins of Nicomedia, these dergahs were either sliced into slabs for use as veneers, facings, pavements, and balustrades, or cut into blocks to make sills, steps, and capitals.\textsuperscript{216}

In addition, the marble plates inscribed with Emperor Manuel I’s conciliar edict of 1166 were removed from the Hagia Sophia Mosque and used in the ceiling panels of the entrance to Sultan Süleyman’s tomb.\textsuperscript{217}

5. Hereke conglomerate

In the registers, red Hereke conglomerate is called seng-i Mihaliç (Mihaliç stone), mermer-i Mihaliç (Mihaliç marble), or seng-i mermer-i Mihaliç (Mihaliç marble stone); simply because it came from Mihaliç (modern Karacabey, west of Bursa), where the ancient cities of Miletopolis and Lopadion had once stood. No quarry in Mihaliç provides appropriate building stone, however;\textsuperscript{218} the conglomerate quarries are located in nearby Hereke.\textsuperscript{219} Collected between April 12, 1552 and May 12, 1554, this stone was the only material used for the voussoirs of the mosque and the courtyard of the hospice; it was also used for the pavement of the mosque forecourt and the window frames of the qibla wall. The only columns of Hereke conglomerate, a pair 36 cm in diameter and 2.56 m tall, stand in front of the entrance of the sultan’s tomb, although according to the registers no columns were removed from Mihaliç.

The Hereke conglomerate procured from Mihaliç is also called huzul kemer taş,\textsuperscript{220} or red voussoir stone, since it was mainly used for voussoirs. Sengha-i mermer-i Mihaliç kemer (voussoirs of Mihaliç marble) are further classified by size: seng-i mermer-i Mihaliç kemer-i kükêk, seng-i mermer-i Mihaliç kemer-i vasat, or seng-i mermer-i Mihaliç kemer-i buçürg (respectively, small, medium, or large voussoir of Mihaliç marble).

Seng-i mermer-i Mihaliç kemer-i kükêk measuring 2 zir\textsuperscript{a} and 2 thumbs (156 cm) in length was used, according to the survey, for the lateral mosque arches measuring 35 to 40 x 75 x 150 cm. On April 12, 1552, 468 large voussoirs were dispatched to Istanbul; from March 17 to 22, 1554, thirty-three more followed, and from May 7 to 12, 1554, twenty-four more were sent.\textsuperscript{221}

Seng-i mermer-i Mihaliç kemer-i vasat measuring 18 thumbs (56 cm) in length was used in the mosque galleries in 23 x 23 x 45 cm pieces. On April 12, 1552, 387 small voussoirs were dispatched to Istanbul, followed by seventy-three between January 27 and February 2, 1554.\textsuperscript{222}

Seng-i mermer-i Mihaliç kemer-i buçürg measuring 1 zir\textsuperscript{a} and 8 thumbs (100 cm) in length was used in 23 x 30 x 100 cm pieces in the mosque forecourt and the hospice courtyard. On April 12, 1552, 580 medium voussoirs were dispatched to Istanbul; between January 27 and February 2, 1554, twenty-six more followed.\textsuperscript{223}

Söve (window frame and jamb) were used in the twelve windows on the qibla wall. The window specifications called for forty söves (vertical elements) and forty esiks (horizontal elements) to be taken from Mihaliç.\textsuperscript{224} According to the survey, the vertical elements on the qibla window are 33 cm long, 24 cm wide, and 2.80 m high, and the horizontal elements are 2.15 m long, 24 cm wide, and 33 cm high. The remainders of the collected elements were cut and used for the borders of the forecourt floor. Some chips, rectangular and hexagonal in shape, were used to fill the hoisting holes of the Proconnesian marble floor slabs of the forecourt.

The döşeme, or pavement, consists of decorative floor slabs. On April 12, 1552, eight slabs measuring 1 zir\textsuperscript{a} to 2 zir\textsuperscript{a} and nineteen thumbs (75–210 cm) by 1 zir\textsuperscript{a} and 1 to 15 thumbs (78–122 cm) were shipped from Mihaliç.\textsuperscript{225} They were used in the mosque forecourt, as twenty floor plates of 50 to 102 x 146 to 202 cm, and as floor borders 25, 34, and 38 cm in width. Leftover pieces of döşeme were also used to fill the rectangular or hexagonal hoisting holes on the pavement slabs. The southwestern corner of the forecourt lacks the slabs, voussoirs, and large Proconnesian marble blocks.\textsuperscript{226}
6. Aswan granite and rossano antico porphyry

Red Aswan granite (aklu siyâhlu serçe gözi, somaki)—an eruptive rock consisting mainly of quartz and feldspar and usually containing hornblende or mica with large orthoclase crystals 7.5 or 10 cm in diameter—and rossano antico porphyry (serçe gözi or kizil serçe gözi)—porphyritic diorite—come from the quarries of Mons Claudianus and Mons Porphyreticus (the Dokhan Mountains in Upper Egypt, near ancient Syene). According to Mustafa b. Celâl, the four main Aswan granite columns of the Süleymaniye, 1.20 to 1.26 m in diameter and 9.10 m tall, were gathered from various ancient sites in Constantinople and Alexandria. Evliya Çelebi reports that each one cost ten times the Egyptian Treasure (i.e., the sultan’s annual income from Egypt).

Erected by Emperor Justin II (r. 565–78) and topped with a sculpture of Aphrodite, the Kıztaşı, or Virgin’s Column, situated on the fifth hill of Istanbul about 800 m to the northwest of the Holy Apostles church and, by the mid-sixteenth century, in the yard of a house, was moved to the Süleymaniye between April 1, 1551 and December 30, 1551. In addition to the Virgin’s Column, some of the porphyry columns buried in the yard of the Fatih complex, where the Holy Apostles Church had once stood, may also have been gathered. (Since the removal of the original Virgin’s Column, the Column of Marcianus located in the same area has been called Kıztaşı.) According to Tekiretülhünyâ, with the sultan’s permission the Virgin’s Column was shortened to match the other three main columns of the mosque. Due to its larger diameter, 1.269 m at the bottom, it is easy to tell that it is the southwestern column; furthermore its greater top diameter makes the column incompatible with its capital, which matches the dimensions of the other three.

According to the registers and Mustafa b. Celâl, two of the four main columns, each 2 arsun (1.5 m) in diameter and 17 arsun (12.87 m) tall, were brought from Alexandria between September 14, 1550 and August 30, 1552. Four columns, of which two later sank, were requested on September 14, 1550. Their removal called for piercing a hole in the Alexandrian city wall so that they might be dragged to the quay. On February 30, 1552, after acknowledging that there were just two columns remaining in Alexandria, the imperial council ordered that a custom-made barge be constructed in the Galata shipyard, the most technically developed naval base, under a captain named Said or Sat, who double-checked the columns in Alexandria before constructing the barge. Constructed in a very short time, the barge set sail for Alexandria on June 9, 1552. The columns arrived at the seaport of Unkapani in Istanbul on November 19, 1552 and, according to Evliya Çelebi, were dragged to the construction site via Vefa Square, up a steep slope. In terms of their almost identical size, the southeastern column, with a diameter of 1.229 m, and the northwestern column, measuring 1.238 m, are most likely the pair removed from Alexandria.

The fourth, northeastern, column is the thinnest of all, with a diameter of 1.203 m. Sinan records that it was already on hand at the Saray-ı ‘Amire, the storehouse of the Topkapı Palace. It was probably used in place of a column ordered from Baalbek, the last column for the mosque to be delivered, which had been intended as one of the four main columns.

Distinguished by their huge diameters, the two columns at opposite ends of the north portico must be the “two” red granite columns recorded as having been taken from the temple of Jupiter at Baalbek, one of the most stone-giving temples in history. Costing tremendous labor between July 18, 1552 and May 17, 1553, as well as the loss of an architect’s life, these were shipped between November 7 and December 9, 1553. Considering that six three-drums columns approximately 2 m in diameter and 20 m tall remain in situ at the temple, it can be surmised that just two drums of one column were removed. Four yokes of oxen dragged the column, or rather two of its drums, on about 160 wooden rollers from the Eminönü seaport to the construction site between January 27 and February 1, 1554. The column, or drum pair, was very late in arriving, however; the lateral arches resting on the four main columns had already been erected when it was delivered. The drums were presumably transformed into the north portico end columns, which are thick (1.12 and 1.14 m in diameter) but short (4.25 m tall).

Also in the north portico, flanking the main entrance to the mosque, sits a pair of Aswan granite columns (87.8 cm and 88.4 cm in diameter and 6.2 m tall), each cut to eliminate damaged ends and topped with a drum 70 cm in height. Even though not monolithic, these two columns were, in terms of their prominent
position, most likely gathered from Ashkelon\(^{246}\) in the aftermath of the imperial council's correspondence of February 15, 1553. A second pair of columns in the north portico is monolithic and constitutes the second-largest red Aswan granite pair of the Süleymaniye (85.9 and 89.7 cm in diameter and 6.2 m tall). These two columns, recorded as 8 and 9 žirā‘ (6.05 and 6.81 m) tall, correspond to the ones taken from a church ruin at Bozbürün after July 19, 1553.\(^{247}\)

The medium-sized Aswan granite columns of the mosque forecourt (64 and 68 cm in diameter and 4.25 m tall) were either brought after January 11, 1551 from Silifke, from which columns of 1 žirā‘ (75.7 cm) diameter and 7 žirā‘ (5.29 m) height are recorded to have been taken, or between November 24, 1552 and March 12, 1553 from Sidrekapsi, 40 km east of Thessaloniki, from which were taken columns recorded as 21 thumbs (66 cm) in diameter and 7.5 žirā‘ (5.67 m) in height.\(^{248}\)

Of the small Aswan granite columns (29 to 38 cm in diameter and 2.34 to 2.64 m tall) used in the mosque, six are in the side galleries, one under the royal tribune, and two in the outer minaret canopies. There are also four more (37 cm in diameter and 1.87 m tall) in the courtyards of the third and fourth madrasas.

The Egyptian *rosso antico* porphyry columns of the Süleymaniye stand at the main entrances of both the mosque forecourt (a pair, 80 cm in diameter and 5.90 m tall) and the courtyard of the hospice (another pair, 53 cm in diameter and 3.62 m tall) as well as under the royal tribune (a third pair, 38 cm in diameter and 2.34 m tall). According to the survey, porphyry column fragments were sliced into roundels approximately 1.5 cm thick and inlaid in the Proconnesian marble facades and floors.

The registers investigated heretofore show that small granite and porphyry columns 8 and 9 žirā‘ (6.05 m and 6.81 m) tall were gathered from Bozbürün after January 11, 1551; others about 1 žirā‘ (75.7 cm) in diameter and 5.5 to 7 žirā‘ (4.16–5.29 m) tall came from Silifke; and still others about 1 žirā‘ (75.7 cm) in diameter and 6 žirā‘ (4.54 m) tall were collected from Selendi. Before May 7, 1552, still more columns came from Istanbul, having been removed from the churches of St. Irene, St. Euphemia, and St. Peribleptos, and also from the Kissa Khan (1 arsun and 3 thumbs [85 cm] in diameter and 7.5 žirā‘ [5.67 m] tall) and from Çengelköy (20 thumbs [63 cm] in diameter and 7 žirā‘ [5.29 m] tall).\(^{249}\)

The Egyptian slabs were collected in Alexandria and procured from the imperial building-material storehouse there, part of a lot of precious stone that had been collected throughout the Egyptian dominions before 1547, during the tenure of the *gülerbeği* (governor-general) of Egypt, Davud Pasha.\(^{255}\) One hundred ten chests and seventy-one bundles of precious Egyptian stone, including four discs, twenty slabs, and eleven small and fifteen large blocks of red Aswan granite and Egyptian porphyry, were dispatched to Istanbul.

In addition to the Egyptian shipments, between 1550 and 1551 a sarcophagus from Mudanya serving as a fountain reservoir (1.26 x 2.46 m, with a lid 1.50 x 2.77 m) was dispatched;\(^{256}\) on April 6, 1552, a pair of discs from Mihaliç (1.766 m in diameter and 12.6 cm thick) was sent;\(^{257}\) on May 15, 1552, the pavements of the St. Irene were taken;\(^{258}\) on December 14, 1553, one floor disc was removed from the Hayrıddin Pasha mosque at Nicea;\(^{259}\) and finally, on January 11, 1556, the 41 žirā‘ (31 sq. m) pavements from the Mahmud Pasha complex in Istanbul\(^{260}\) were taken.

The only pair of large floor discs (sense) in the Süleymaniye (3.12 m and 2.65 m in diameter) is of Egyptian *rosso antico* porphyry and is used in the geometric floor pattern of the main entrances of the mosque and its forecourt. These discs were most likely procured from any of the places mentioned above excepting Mihaliç and Mudanya.

The sole pair of large floor slabs (1.24 x 2.08 m, and 1.41 x 2.38 m) is again in Egyptian red porphyry and is used at the side entrances of the forecourt.\(^{261}\) Their sizes suggest that the two slabs were parts of the sarcophagus taken from Mudanya.

7. *Kestanbol Granite*

Ezine, 13 km east of Eski İstanbulluk, is on a pink granite mountain, Ezine Dağı (modern Çığri Dağı).\(^{262}\) According to the registers, the pink Ezine granite columns used in the Süleymaniye were gathered from the ancient quarry on the mountain, Ezine Dağı *kârânesi* (the quarry of Ezine Mountain, modern Yeditaşlar quarry), taking advantage of the countless abandoned columns there.\(^{263}\)

Abundantly used in Istanbul and in Eski Istanbul, this pink Kestanbol granite is called *mermer-i sârî-i alaca* (red marble) and *sârî-i abla* in the registers.\(^{264}\) The columns, 827 in total, were collected from November 24, 1549 to July 5, 1550, and their dispatch continued until May 26, 1557.\(^{265}\) Six (62 to 79 cm in diameter
and 4.25 m tall) were used in the forecourt; a pair (26 cm in diameter and 1.50 m tall) was employed in the upper side galleries and another pair (53 cm in diameter and 3.62 m tall) in the iwans of the hospice. A few were left at the eastern corner of the outer precinct for future restorations.

8. Armutlu Granite

Notable for its large specks of dark green and black hornblende, pink Armutlu granite was substituted for Kapdağ granite (see 10. Other Stone, below) because of its proximity.266 On January 3, 1553, a black-and-white speckled, polished column (siyahla ak benek benek müellâ direk) was found in Candarlı (modern Çandarlı, ancient Pitane).267 The only Armutlu granite column in the Sûleymaniye, it stands at the western entrance to the forecourt; it measures 64 cm in diameter and 4.25 m in height.

9. Serpentine breccia and verd antique porphyry

Serpentine breccia (verd antique marble), an altered rock consisting of a hydrous silicate of magnesia, and verd antique porphyry (marmor Lacedæmonium viride), a porphyritic diabase, are from Laconia in southern Greece.268 In the Sûleymaniye, serpentine breccia was employed mainly as columns, but, sliced vertically or horizontally, it was also used in voussoirs, floor discs, floor and façade borders, and the mosaics at the bottom of window cases. Green porphyry columns, probably all fragmentary, were gathered and used to make roundels approximately 45 cm in diameter that were inlaid into the Proconnesian marble facing of the mosque facades. In the registers, although serpentine breccia and green porphyry columns are generally called sütün-i seh, or yeşil direk (green column), serpentine breccia alone is called lüceverd ablağî because of its large, dark bluish-green crushed gravel component.

Twenty-nine serpentine breccia columns were used in the complex, including a pair (44 cm in diameter and 2.16 m tall) placed before the main gateway of the outer precinct; four (51 cm in diameter and 2.64 m tall) before the public side entrances of the mosque; fourteen (29 and 38 cm in diameter and 2.34 and 2.64 m tall) in the outer lower galleries and under the royal tribune, and five (26 cm in diameter and 1.50 m tall) in the outer upper galleries. In addition, a pair (36.9 cm in diameter and 2.56 m tall) stands before the Sultan’s tomb and another pair (53 cm in diameter and 3.62 m tall) in the courtyard of the hospice.

Serpentine breccia was also used in the voussoirs of the forecourt gateway and the Qur’an recitation school at the far end of the qibla axis as well as in the forecourt floor and façade borders (25 cm wide) and the floor discs (25 cm in diameter) at the main entrance to the mosque.

According to the registers, serpentine breccia and green porphyry were found in the ruins in Alexandria, Cilicia, and Thessaloniki. Between September 14, 1550 and March 4, 1551, a pair of slabs and some columns were sent from Alexandria; between January 11, 1551 and October 19, 1552, ten columns from Silifke and five from Mud almost 1 zarai (75.7 cm) in diameter and 6 zarai (4.54 m) tall were sent. Two columns, from the village of Isbid and the Meyhane Gate in Mud, were gathered between November 24, 1552 and March 12, 1553; collected from Sidrekapsi was a pair of columns 14 thumbs (44 cm) in diameter and 4 zarai (3.02 m) tall, along with ten column fragments of which five were 5 thumbs (19 cm) in diameter and 2 zarai (1.5 m) tall, and the rest 3 zarai (2.27 m) in diameter and 1.5 zarai (1.13 m) tall.269 According to the registers and the survey, those column fragments were cut up for the voussoirs,270 borders, and discs. In the case of columns themselves, however, it has proved difficult to identify their provenance by matching register with survey dimensions.

10. Other Stone

Some types of stone used in the Sûleymaniye are not mentioned in the registers. Kapdağ granite is found in a pair of columns (38 cm in diameter and 1.90 m tall) in front of the classrooms of the third and fourth madrasas. A column of Vezirhan breccia (42.3 cm in diameter and 2.34 m tall) is situated under the royal tribune. Bandırma breccia is used in the forecourt; in five arch voussoirs on the western side, and in the floor borders (38 and 51 cm wide), it is substituted for the Hereke conglomerate of Mihalic. Red argilaceous limestone from Gebze is also found in the floor borders of the forecourt and in the mosaics at the bottom of mosque window cases. Gebze calcareous stone with rudist (bivalve mollusk) fossils, used since the Roman era, is found in a column (29 cm in diameter and 2.34 m tall) in the western inner gallery, in a pair of columns (43.6 cm in diameter and 3.42 m tall) at the entrance to the inner colon-
nade of the Sultan’s tomb, and in the mosaics at the bottom of mosque window cases. A column (29.6 cm in diameter and 2.34 m tall) of calcareous stone from Gümüşbâne is in the eastern inner gallery. And finally, Ergani calcareous stone constitutes the six columns (11.4 cm in diameter and 1.50 m tall) of the gallery at the eastern pier.

CONCLUSION

In its sophistication and grandeur, the Süleymaniye complex in Istanbul, a 450-year-old structure, is a vivid testimony to Ottoman endeavors in architectural science and technology. It has proved its technology through the centuries, meeting the challenge of countless disasters, including earthquakes. To guarantee its durable structure, architectural engineers and building craftsmen knew how to choose and use stone as its most significant building material. As imperial architect-in-chief, Sinan made considerable use of existing building supplies in the Süleymaniye. Not only eternalizing Süleyman’s brilliant conquests but also adding Roman and Byzantine reminiscences, the Süleymaniye is a tribute to Ottoman architectural practice.

In the light of available account books, which provide a scattered but cumulatively considerable body of information, the complex allows scholars to explore the unknowns of architectural science and technology in the Ottoman period.

In this study, available archival data together with a comprehensive survey of the Süleymaniye complex have revealed aspects of Ottoman stonebuilding practice of the mid-sixteenth century. Emphasis has been put on the mosque, since the majority of documents concern that part of the complex, where most of the precious stone was utilized.

We hope that the tantalizing results of this study, reached by synthesizing scattered bits of information in the sources, may encourage further research in the field of Ottoman building history. Sinan’s Süleymaniye remains a marvel of stunning wisdom, containing invaluable information in its every telltale stone.

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NOTES

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5. Şefanos Yerawimos, Konstantiniye ve Ayasophya efsaneleri [Istanbul and Hagia Sophia Legends] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1993), 248.


10. Ibid.


16. Josef von Hammer-Purgstall, Osmanlı tarihi [Ottoman His-
81. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 83.
82. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 71, 110.
83. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 81.
84. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 31.
86. TKSM Archive, D. 45/A.
88. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 113.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 27–29.
91. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 114–19.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 109.
94. TKSM Archive, D. 45/A.
96. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 112.
97. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 83.
98. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 347.
100. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 351.
101. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 235.
105. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 48, 49.
108. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 64–68.
109. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 92.


158. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 138.

159. Barkan, *Süleymaniye*, vol. 2, doc. nos. 100, 102, 121–23, 125, 127–33. For phases, see also doc. no. 576.

160. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 544.


162. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 63, n. 1.

163. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 125, 127, 139.

164. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 128.

165. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 127.

166. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 76, 84/a.


169. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 139.


171. *Helik* is wet mortar; see Çafer Çelebi, *Risale-i mi’āriyye*, fol. 80v.


174. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 125, 130–33.

175. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 125.

176. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 125, 139.


179. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 129.

180. Ülkü Kulaç, “Yeni topografik gözlemler ve terimleri” [Spiral Stairways in Turkish Masonry Minarets and the Functions of Their Metal Tie Elements in Counteracting Lateral Forces], *I. International Congress on the History of Turkish-Islamic Science and Technology*, vol. 3, 235–40, figs. 1–3.


182. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 125, 129, 142.

183. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 84/a.

184. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 138.


191. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 61, 77.

192. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 76, 79, 84/a, 114–18, 125–29. Discrepancies in dates are likely due to the incompleteness of construction documentation.

193. For these columns, see Peter Coeck von Aelst, *The Turks in MDXXIII: A Series of Drawings Made in That Year at Constantinople* (London, 1873), pl. IX. According to Clavijo, in 1403–5 there were thirty-seven columns remaining in situ, 1.5 m diameter and 8 to 9 m tall; Kuban, *İstanbul: An Urban History* (İstanbul, 1996), 84. In a Panvinius engraving of the fifteenth century there were seventeen columns: see Cyril Mango, *Byzantine Architecture* (London, 1979), 31. In 1529, according to Gyllius, there were seventeen columns, 1.2 m in diameter and 8.5 m tall; they were removed in 1540 to be used in the Süleymaniye, and some of them, most likely after March 23, 1555, were sliced up and used in the ham-mam as pavement: see Petrus Gyllius, *The Antiquities of Constantinople*, trans. J. Ball (London, 1729), 1, 42, 43, 110–12, 201; P. G. Incicivan, 18. asırda İstanbul [İstanbul in the Eighteenth Century] (İstanbul: Bahar Matbaası, 1976), 63; W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbulus* (Tübin- gen, 1977), 68; a Maıtraçı Nasuh miniature of 1533 shows eight columns: see H. G. Yardaydin, *Beş-ı menzilli sefer-i Trâkây-i Sultan Süleymân Hân* [Statement of Halting Places on the Iraq Campaign of Sultan Süleyman] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basmevi, 1976), fol. 8b.


195. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 40–42.

The column as it appeared between 1547 and 1551 is shown in Gyllius, Antiquitates of Constantinople, pl. 2, 219.


Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatnâme, vol. 1, 10.

Sâ'i, Tezkiretü'l-bünyân, fol. 10a.


Sarây-ı ʿâmirede hâzâr bulundu (“It was on hand in the royal palace”): Sâ'i, Tezkiretü'l-bünyân, fol. 10a.

Barkan, Süleymaniye, vol. 2, doc. no. 36.


TKSM Archive, D. 43, bk. 6, fol. 10a, 15b; Barkan, Süleymaniye, vol. 1, 342.

TKSM Archive, D. 45/a, bk. 1; Barkan, Süleymaniye, vol. 1, 80, chart no. 2.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 37.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 47.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 34, 40–42.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 33, 34.

Two sütn-i büzûn (large columns) were extracted from the armory (cebehane), formerly the church of St. Irene: TKSM Archive, D. 43, bk. 168. On May 7, 1552 (16 Jumada I 959), sixteen columns and the pavements of the former church of St. Irene church were extracted for the Süleymaniye: Barkan, Süleymaniye, vol. 2, doc. no. 46. See also n. 196 above.

Two red porphyry (serçeğisi) columns were removed from Kadıköy: TKSM Archive, D. 43, bk. 168; see also n. 197, above.


Barkan, Süleymaniye, vol. 2, doc. no. 59.

Ibid.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 16, 17, 24.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 58; and TKSM Archive, D. 43, cited in vol. 1, 32.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 82.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 46.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 48, 49.

Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 209.

According to the survey, the little porphyry discs are 45 cm in diameter and 1.5 cm thick, and are set in fine horasan mortar by means of a lead agent.

Akurgal, Anadolu, 322.

Barkan, Süleymaniye, vol. 2, doc. nos. 54, 56.


Ibid., vol. 2, doc. nos. 54–56, 92, 111–12.
266. Sayar and Erguvanlı, *Türkiye mermeleri*, 82, 84.
270. Ibid., vol. 2, doc. no. 35.
Ottoman poetry, that is, poetry written in the Ottoman territories between the fourteenth and the nineteenth century, is primarily structured around three main figures: the lover (most often either the poet himself or a poet-persona), the beloved (the sultan, a person in a higher position, or an actual beloved), and the rival (a person or a thing attempting to obstruct the relationship between the lover and the beloved). Almost every genre of Ottoman poetry is replete with subtle descriptions of the emotions of the lover (the poet) aroused by interactions with these other characters. In the course of describing their emotions, Ottoman poets utilized a variety of metaphors, originating not only from their imaginary world but also from the material world that surrounded them. These metaphors were also the criteria by which poets’ artistic creativity and success were measured. To devise them, poets drew on such themes as religious beliefs and practices, local customs, eating habits, sartorial fashion, entertainment, and architectural monuments. In this article, I will demonstrate how sixteenth-century Ottoman poets utilize architectural imagery to create metaphors describing the physical properties of the beloved, and, with particular emphasis on the poetical genres of ghazal and qasida, I will analyze how architectural elements are represented.

My main literary sources are the divans (poetry collections) of Tacizade Cafer Çelebi (d. 1515), Zati, Fevri, Baki; Tezkiretü’l-ebniye (Memoir of Buildings) of Sa’i (d. 1595); Evsâf-i Istanbul (Characteristics of Istanbul) of Latifi (d. 1582); and Hadikatü’l-cevâmi (Garden of Mosques) of Ayyarsarayi (d. 1787). Among these, two versions of Zati’s qasidas in manuscript form are in the Süleymaniye Library. The rest have been published.

In this article, I will argue that the beloved and the lover in the sixteenth-century poet’s imaginary world were often depicted by means of metaphors derived from architectural monuments, with reference both to physical resemblances and to abstract qualities—beauty, attractiveness, or the inspiration of awe. The reason for this, as Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar observes, is that the architectural sphere was where the zenith of artistic creativity and production was achieved in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in Istanbul in particular and the Ottoman Empire in general. The power of classical Ottoman architecture (ca. 1450–1680) also affected the common people and, as Victor Hugo noted, played an important role in the development of architecture elsewhere in the world.

The intention to create a strong impact on the population, one that would highlight the power and magnificence of the state, greatly influenced the forms of classical Ottoman architecture. Sultans, sultans’ wives and daughters, and viziers and pashas built vast numbers of mosques, palaces, schools, dervish convents, fountains, and imarets (charity soup kitchens) throughout the empire. The many poems, stories, and legends about those architectural works confirm how inspiring and thought-provoking the buildings were for those who viewed them. Not only Ottoman but also Byzantine buildings affected the imaginary world of contemporary writers. In sum, the sixteenth century was a century of architecture for the Ottomans. In poetry, metaphoric usage, in which qualities of one concept are “borrowed” to represent another, were influenced by the architectural grandiosity of the time. For example, the beloved was metaphorically associated with sacred and well-proportioned monuments. Physical properties of the beloved, which are often the starting point in Ottoman poetry, resemble elements of the mosque complex in shape and meaning. His or her face resembles a mihrab with golden inscriptions on it. His or her body is tall and grand like a minaret. Likewise he or she is a hospital that provides healing for those who are sick with love, etc. The lover, too, is
likened to architectural objects: his eyes, like a fountain, never cease flowing; his heart is a palace in which the sultan (the beloved) lives. By bringing together the beloved, the lover, and architectural objects in a metaphorical context, the Ottoman poet provides us with rich information about Ottoman architecture and its meaning for Ottoman society.

To date, Ottoman literature and poetry have been studied primarily from two perspectives. First, the Ottoman literary corpus became the subject of ahistorical textual and linguistic analysis. The primary examples of this acontextual approach assume that the meanings of the poetic mazmûns (conceits) remained static over time. Second, the corpus became the target of certain historians of Ottoman literature who utilized collections of poetry as repositories of information, detaching the information from the literary and artistic components of the poetry and avoiding any reference to the larger cultural and historical significance. There are also works limited to the analysis of one divan only. For example, within the studies known as divan tahlilleri (divan analyses)\(^{14}\) divans are examined and their contents classified according to subject matter extracted from individual couplets, without analysis of the couplets themselves. Instead, a few couplets are used as examples of both the subjects selected for classification and the literary arts they demonstrate. In this study, I intend to adopt a different approach, which I will apply broadly to several divans. I think of Ottoman poetry as resembling painting—the work of Salvador Dali, for example—in which one may see several different layers of meaning each time one looks.

My method will be to examine both the external referents and the internal, artistic elements of the poetry at the same time, without privileging one over the other. For example, when the poet speaks of the beloved’s tall body, he (or she) will use one or another figure of comparison (simile, metaphor, metonymy). Where the body is compared to an architectural object—say, a tall, slender minaret—I will attend not only to what this comparison says about the physical characteristics of the minaret (and the beloved) but also to how the artistry of the comparison itself makes the object and the person meaningful in a new way in order to represent a more general societal view. I will do this in the context of the work of several poets.

In my previous work I implemented this methodology in a detailed analysis of the ghazals of Zati and argued that Ottoman poetry reflected both the artistic and the material life of society.\(^{15}\) In other words, every metaphor derives not only from the poet’s literary or artistic imagination but also from that imagination applied to the materials of the concrete, physical world in which the poet lived. In one part of my work on Zati, I approached the relationship between poetry, art, and architecture by examining poetic imagery, manuscript painting, and other artistic materials in combination. I showed that Zati used his poetic imagination in describing different characteristics of public architectural units, such as palaces, mosques, schools, hospitals, fountains, libraries, and the like. In some couplets architectural elements are mentioned together with references to their social functions, whereas in others purely architectural values or features are cited. The following couplet can be given as an example of the way I examine the poetry:

\begin{quote}
Bahâr-i hüssünî itmiş ëy ërë händli divâne
Aña şerbet virûb ëğêddâm-i câmi’ çekdi zencîre
\end{quote}

O fairy! The spring of your beauty made the oil lamp crazy! The servants of the mosque gave it a draft (of sherbet) and chained it up! (See appendix [11], below. Subsequent bracketed numbers following translated couplets also refer to Turkish transcriptions in the appendix.)

As is well known, in the Ottoman period mosques were lit by oil lamps hanging from long chains. In this couplet, the oil lamp in the mosque is likened to a lover driven mad by love. Traditionally, people with violent mental disease were wrapped in heavy chains, which were thought to both calm and restrain them. The oil is likened to a medicinal draft used to treat the excessive secretion of black bile, one of the humors of premodern physiology and the source of melancholia (sevda), which was thought to cause madness, especially in the spring.\(^{16}\) The poet in effect is saying, “The beloved is as beautiful as springtime, and that beauty has made the mosque’s oil lamp burn madly, just as a lover burns, crazed by springtime melancholy. So the mosque attendants bind the lamp with chains the way one treats crazy people.” Thus, the poet uses both simile (teşbih) and metaphor (istiare) to describe details of the decoration of a mosque interior.

Conversely, one could argue that Ottoman architects, belonging to the same cultural and material world, would read poets’ descriptions of various buildings and derive inspiration from these descriptions. For example, Baki, who is one of the eminent poets of the sixteenth century, may have inspired the great
Ottoman chief architect Sinan during the construction of the Süleymaniye Mosque complex, in which Baqi lived for a time, serving as bina emini (project superintendent).

As Jale Nejdet Erzen has written, for the Ottomans, discourse on art was an art in itself, and it was usually produced in a poetical form. In social gatherings held in public places such as taverns, artisans’ shops, or the palaces and pavilions of the Ottoman elite, artists developed their skills and displayed their talents. As the bureaucrat and intellectual Mustafa Ali (d. 1600) relates, the poet and royal companion Şemsi Pasha (d. 1581), who was one of Sinan’s patrons, regularly held literary conversations at his house. The grand vizier Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, after giving his guests a tour of his new pavilion in Istanbul, asked them to recite from memory the poems decorating its walls. These examples show how people from different circles gathered to carry on cultured conversations in which they shared ideas about art and literature.

Literary texts intensify and immortalize architectural works by adding literary and spiritual dimensions to material ones. The aim of an architect, whose role is indisputably central in creating monuments, is not only to create a functional building that serves the immediate purposes of the patron and the people who will use it, but also to create an aesthetically pleasing object that affects both the bodily senses and the spirituality of its spectators. Literary texts are among the ways to express patrons’ and architects’ desire to attain immortality. For example, the autobiography of Sinan describes how and why the Süleymaniye Mosque was decorated with verses and other texts after its completion:

Hasan Karahisari, the qibla of scribes, inscribed in müsennâ [i.e., monumental thuluth] script the blessed verse “God keepeth the heavens and earth” from beginning to end on the skylike dome, and he composed appropriate inscriptions for each paradise-like door, designing many a heart-attracting written line, which stonecutters and painters drew on the pages of Time, thereby attaining fame and repute.

Before I delve into concrete examples of architectural images in divan poetry, I will dwell briefly on the shared mentality and worldview of poets and architects, in order to elucidate the idea behind their works.

**GOD AS THE POET-IN-CHIEF AND ARCHITECT-IN-CHIEF**

In the sixteenth-century Ottoman poetic imagination, God is the architect and author of the universe. The creation of the universe is the ultimate architectural production, and the tablet of God’s decrees (la`ah mahfûz) is the ultimate literary work. The sultan, as the shadow of God on earth, aims to attain a God-like excellence and hence imitates Him in all endeavors. In his Evsâf-ı Istanbul (Characteristics of Istanbul), Latifi describes God as the chief architect of the “eighteen thousand” worlds (‘âlem):

> See the One Who created the eighteen thousand worlds at a breath,
> The Almighty Avenger Who, as quickly, destroys as many created things.
> See the Architect Who, from the letters kāf and nīn, Built these nine muqarnas vaults, this palace of six directions.

In Islamic thought, it is believed that God created everything from nothing by His one order, kun (“be!”). Since the Arabic word kun is formed by the letters kāf and nīn, the author states that God created the universe from these two letters. This belief is based on a Qur’anic verse that reads, “When He intends a thing, His Command is, ‘be,’ and it is!” According to the poet’s description, this universe resembles a palace with nine muqarnas vaults (tāk-i mukarnes) and six directions: north, west, east, south, up, and down.

God’s image as an architect appears in another couplet:

> That the angels might perform the holy-day prayer in heaven
> The Architect of Glorious Works constructed a mihrab of gold.

In the eyes of the poet and the architect the true object of art was a single one: praising the ultimate power of God. It was understood that God created the world as a sacred realm in order to provide people a place to worship Him. The poet and the architect were to imitate God’s work in this world.

An architect could decorate his monuments by inscribing on them various literary texts such as quotations from the Qur’an and the Hadith, proverbs, or
poetic couplets in order to enrich their beauty, immortalize them, and enhance their spiritual character. A poet, on the other hand, could liken his poems to well-structured buildings. Both architects and poets, in a sense, tried to combine body and spirit in their works in order to use them as reflections of their worldviews:

O my eye, the Almighty so built the mosque of his beauty
That ever so many Sufi masters beg to be its overseer. [3]

God operates in this world through his vicegerent, the caliph (haltfe) or the sultan.
As the representative of God, the sultan is expected to build or rebuild the country. In addition to providing security, justice, peace, and welfare, he is expected to erect buildings:

You are its Sultan, grief for you razed and ruined the land of the heart.
Good health befits the sultan, that he might rebuild the ruins. [4]

Here the heart is a country and the beloved is its sultan. While the sultan is away from the country (i.e., from the heart), the country is destroyed and needs to be reconstructed, since he is supposed to keep his land well maintained and prosperous. As Suraiya Faroqhi notes, buildings help legitimize the ruler, above all in the eyes of the upper class of his empire, but also in the eyes of foreign Muslims. By the same token, the following couplets portray the sultan as the protector of architecture:

The image of the beloved friend built up the dominion of my heart.
Whichever land had a sultan in it was not [left] in ruins. [5]

Any heart is in ruins that does not have love as its halting place.
In the end, a land without a sultan is a land in ruins. [6]

Having discussed the role of the architect and the poet, I will now examine elements of the architectural monuments that are represented in poetry through comparisons to images of the beloved. Although references to almost all sorts of architecture occur in poetry and other literary works, here my main focus will be on mosques, churches, palaces, pavilions, bathhouses, schools, dungeons, bridges, and fountains.

THE BELOVED AND THE LOVER IN ARCHITECTURAL BUILDINGS

1. Mosques and churches

Mosques
There are two words used for “mosque” in Ottoman poetry: mescid and cami. Mescid derives from the Arabic word that literally means a place of prostration (sujūd). Cami, from the Arabic root j-m- (to gather), means “gathering place.” Alfêmi (the Gatherer) is also one of the ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names (Asmā al-Husnā) of God. Mosques are not only places of worship but also public spaces where different social activities such as meetings and weddings may be held. Since mosques are so central in the formation of the Islamic city, they are often named after their founders, and neighborhoods are often named after the mosques located in them.

Rich members of the Ottoman ruling elite, including the sultan and his family, built mosques in different parts of the empire, often sited in the most visible places of a city. The magnificence of the Ottoman Empire is reflected on the hills of Istanbul, where the many minarets become part of the city’s skyline. For example, in his Hadikatul-cevâm (Garden of Mosques), Ayvansarayı mentions the existence of 821 mosques in Istanbul in the eighteenth century.

Building a mosque is perceived as one of the most important good deeds (ṣadaqa-yi cārīye) in Ottoman culture, since it was believed to be a service both to God and to the people. Latifi, an early-sixteenth-century literary man and biographer of poets, dedicated a chapter in his description of Istanbul to the features of some of the mosques there, starting with a poem about the importance of building a mosque in order to be remembered until the Day of Judgment:

Fortune is his who leaves one good work in this world.
You see, the wind blows in place of him who has no works.
He is clever who, when he takes carnal pleasure in this world,
Intends to please his soul by (doing) good.
He whose work is lasting amid this transitoriness
Is immortal like Huzir and lives ‘til the resurrection. [7]
In addition to their religious and social uses, mosques also have political functions. As is seen in the following couplet, the sultan is honored as the shadow of God when his name is recited in the mosque during the Friday sermon (Arabic: *khutba*):

What the sweet-voiced nightingale recites in the rose-bed mosque
Is praise and gratitude to the sultan of the rose[.] [8]

Mosques also have symbolic values; there is a clear relationship between Ottoman mosque architecture and the garden. As Walter Andrews puts it,

The great mosque is often flanked by an actual garden or gardens and the interior has many recognizable links to garden symbolism. There is a definite microcosmic character to...the dome decorated in star-shaped patterns, which underscores [its] resemblance to the dome of the heavens, and beneath the dome the trees and flowers of the earthly and paradisical gardens reflected in a field of floral carpets surrounded by garden-motif tiles and stained glass.33

In addition, both mosque and garden are gathering places for believers.

In the Ottoman poetic tradition, the mihrab and dome of the mosque are often likened to the sky in terms of decoration. In Zati’s words,

O Zati, in the mosque of his power, the domes of heaven
Are nine brilliant decorated balls, one inside the other. [9]

As explained in the *Ma‘rifet-nâme* (Book of Knowledge) of Ibrahim Hakki (d. 1780), it was believed that nine concentric celestial spheres roofed the entire world.34 In the couplet above, the mosque, in which small mirror-balls are hung, is likened to a nine-domed sky. As the stars decorate the sky, those balls decorate the superstructure of the mosque. As we saw in previous poems, Latifi refers to the nine domes as *‘okuz ‘¸_-æ mu_arnes* (nine muqarnas vaults).

Mosques were illuminated with oil lamps, and in order to enhance the amount of light and create a beautiful setting, decorations such as mirror-balls, ostrich eggs, tasseled porcelain balls, and glass balls with horseshoes were added.35 In poetry, the heart is said to resemble a small ball in its shape and an egg or a porcelain or glass ball in its fragility. The following distich refers to the pendant globes in mosques:

When the zealot of the city saw my heart in the decorated mosque of his beauty,
He hung mirrored balls in his neighborhood mosque. [10]

Oil lamps are also comparable to the heart in their shape and burning interiors:

They saw I bound my heart to the arch of the beloved’s brow
They were envious and hung a lamp from the vault of the mihrab. [12]

This clearly refers to the common practice of hanging oil lamps from the arches of mihrabs. The poet also uses one of the literary arts, *hüsün-‘ü ta‘lîl* (assigning a beautiful reason for ordinary and natural things), by presenting the jealousy of others as a reason for hanging lamps in mihrabs.

Among the main elements of mosque decoration, oil lamps were made from ceramic, glass, or metal; the large chandeliers in mosques were called *kandîl*.36 To provide nighttime lighting, glass oil lamps, suspended from the dome by chains, were used; to maximize illumination they were hung not high up but rather slightly above head height. Each lamp contained a wick and oil, sometimes colored; when light reflected from the colored oil at the bottom of the lamp, it increased the brightness of the flame and created a pleasant environment. Latifi’s *Evâﬁ Istanbul* (Characteristics of Istanbul), describes the illumination of the mosque of Mehmed II:

Oil lamps burn, as many as the stars,  
Heaven-like, its interior is all candles and torches:  
A building, the image of a mosque like Mount Qaf the great,  
Or itself a mighty mountain without peer. [13]

Another example from Zati makes the heart an oil lamp:

It is understood that I should enter the mosque of love and hang  
The oil lamp of my heart on [its] sublime arch once again. [14]

**Minarets and domes**

Different parts of the mosque are also subjects of the poetic imagination: mihrabs, minbars (pulpits), minarets, and domes are often compared to the physical
features of the beloved. The Arabic word *manār* literally means “place of light,” and according to some art historians, the architectural features of the minaret are derived from the lighthouse. The appellation “minaret” therefore identifies the word of God with His light. The minaret is also called *miżana*, which means a place in which the call for prayers (ezan) is held. In towns, mosques are monumental buildings that dominate the neighborhoods with their domes and minarets. Minarets also function as a sign of the holy month of Ramadan, during which they are adorned with ornaments and lights.

In the Ottoman poetic tradition, minarets are often compared to the beloved, especially to his or her body. In the following couplet, for example, the body of the beloved resembles a minaret in slenderness; the brightness of his or her face resembles the divine light of the Prophet Muhammad on the top of the minaret:

> O Zati, light flashes always above the minaret of his body
> The lantern of Osman’s cheek is lit from the divine light of Muhammad. [15]

Another couplet talks about the fire in the heart of the lover. In this case, its smoke rises straight up, resembling the minaret:

> The smoke of my burning breast is the mosque of affliction’s minaret
> O Zati, the oil lamps in it are sparks from the fire of my sigh. [16]

While minarets are known to have been illuminated during the month of Ramadan, it is unclear whether this practice was implemented during the rest of the year. These couplets suggest that torches, lanterns, or oil lamps illuminated minarets at other times as well; perhaps these structures functioned in the manner of lighthouses, giving direction to visitors or passersbys.

Like minarets, domes are also a distinguishing feature of mosques. In the following couplets, the poet refers to the universe as a mosque with nine domes:

> The heavens are a nine-domed mosque in the city of love for you.
> The smoke of the fire of my sigh rose high and became its minaret. [17]

According to the poet’s imagination, the entire universe, consisting of nine dome-like layers, is a city of love, with all kinds of buildings. Within this vast city, there are heavens that are conceived of as a nine-domed mosque.

**Mihrabs and minbars**

The mihrab and minbar are inner liturgical elements of mosques. Whether an actual recessed niche or the two-dimensional image of one, the mihrab indicates the direction of the qibla (the direction of Mecca) and gives the impression of a door or a doorway with a curved arch. Mihrabs and minbars are held to resemble the elements of the beloved’s beauty both in shape and in sacredness.

After capturing new lands, the Ottomans converted most large churches into mosques; such mosques are also called “church mosques.” *Kâfir* (infidel) mihrabs were added to these converted churches, and they are often positioned at an oblique angle to the axis of the structure, in order to correspond to the direction of the qibla. The following couplet shows that there are “infidel” mihrabs in some mosques:

> Let your perfumed locks hang down disheveled over your eyebrows,
> For infidel mihrabs are the right place for crosses. [18]

Here, the poet asks the beloved to let his or her [black] hair hang between his or her [black] eyebrows. (In Ottoman poetry, the beloved’s hair and brows are presumed to be black.) The color black, worn by monks and priests, symbolizes blasphemy (*kufr*) in poetry; hair hanging down between two brows resembles a cross. One could even say that the beloved here is a seductive non-Muslim who is, in the way of infidels, very cruel.

In another couplet, the poet likens the beloved’s face with its curved eyebrows to a two-mihrab mosque, focusing on the beloved’s eyebrows rather than on mosque architecture:

> Those who see the curve of his eyebrows in the sanctuary of his beauty
> Say, o Lord, what mosque is this that has two mihrabs? [19]

Mosques usually have only one mihrab, but there are exceptions. When a small mosque has insufficient room to hold a growing congregation, it is enlarged; during the renovation, a new mihrab may be added to
the right or left side of the old one. These mosques are called “double-mihrab” (iki mihrablâ) mosques. 40 According to Ayvansarayi, there was also a three-mihrab mosque near Unkapani in Istanbul. 41 In the following couplet from his qasidas, Cafer Çelebi talks about the ornamentation of the mihrab:

Your door is the qibla of people in need.
The reason I prostrate myself there is the gilding on
the mihrab. [20]

According to the couplet, the door of the sultan (the
beloved) is the qibla towards which needy people
turn for grants of gold (the gilding). The lover is
among those who come to express their needs, show
their respect, and prostrate themselves in front of the
mihrab. Moreover, in the Ottoman poetic tradition,
lovers are recognized by their pale (“yellow”) faces,
which resemble the gilding on the mihrab. The couplet
also hints at the poet’s plea for monetary reward.

Other examples liken the beloved’s eyebrows to the
mihrab in shape and holiness:

The mihrab saw your eyebrows in the mosque and
bowed
That it might do a prostration of thanks to God. [21]

and

That one who does not bow his head to the vault of your
brow as to the mihrab
Should turn from the qibla; my qibla is the one whose
face resembles the mihrab. [22]

Minbars—the raised structures from which Friday ser-
mons are preached and important announcements
made42—are mentioned in Ottoman poetry in terms
of their resemblance (because of their right-triangle
shape) to the nose of the beloved. Poems often refer
to minbars of marble, wood, or tile; a minbar made
of wood may be likened to a rosebush. Minbars in
poetry can even be gilded with silver:

His nose is a silver minbar, his chin an oil lamp, his
eyebrow a mihrab
Today Hatiboğlu is like a mosque in the dominion of
elegance. [23]

Here the poet is referring to a specific beloved and
making a word play on the beloved’s name. He employs
a form of the popular rhetorical device, tenasûb
(congruence), using vocabulary related to features of a
mosque in the context of a proper name, Hatiboğlu43
(son of the khatib, or preacher), which contains a
reference to the sermon (khuṭba) without actually
mentioning that word. The specific rhetorical device
used here is therefore iḥam-i tenasûb (insinuation of
congruence). The couplet that follows this says that the
beloved’s nose is like a minbar made of ivory, without
referring to any actual minbar. This device is hyperbole
(mûbalağa), meant to indicate how unusually precious
the beloved’s nose is: in its luminescent white color, it
resembles the the ivory of the imagined minbar.

That the Friday sermon is always preached in
the name of the ruler is seen in the following couplet:

So what if the sermon is read in your name in the domin-
ion of elegance?
In the mosque of your beauty, that nose is a silver min-
bar. [24]

In another example, a victory announcement is deliv-
ered from a minbar:

On the pulpit of the rose branch, the preacher night-
ingale
Recites a sermon of praise for the victorious Shah. [25]

Here the nightingale is the preacher on a rose branch,
or wooden minbar, reading a sermon in the name of
the victorious sultan. When his army captures a city,
the sultan announces his victory through a sermon
in the mosque. The following couplet also refers to
royal announcements made from minbars:

Your vicinity is the most gracious of mosques, your door
the mihrab of power.
All minbars are honored by your glorious name. [26]

Poetry has many layers of interpretation. These cou-
plets remind us that mosques, as part of the worldly
public sphere, were where important announcements
were made, including proclamations of victory and
change in rule.

Churches

Istanbul, or Constantinople, had been the most impor-
tant religious center for the Eastern Church since the
fourth century, when Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity as the state religion. The city remained the center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity until it was captured by the Ottomans in 1453, and its religious importance continued even after it was converted to an Islamic capital. In the sixteenth century almost half the population of Istanbul was Christian, and churches were everywhere evident; hence the Muslims in the city were well acquainted with Christian customs and rituals. Churches and monasteries, and especially their decoration, were a source of inspiration for poetic imagery. In the following couplets, we learn that they were full of beautiful statues and wall paintings:

If you wish to find an image in the monastery of this world
Look always into the mirror of that moon’s beauty. [27]

The beloved here is cast as an aloof and cruel person. Although aware of the lover’s feelings and expectations, he does not change his behavior and attitude towards him: he acts, in other words, like a statue or wall painting. According to the poetic tradition, only an infidel could be so cruel, and in this the infidel is like a statue. Being a statue or a wall painting also means being unreachable:

O sun, you do not resemble the idols of China and Cathay
In truth you are a lovely painting in the monastery of the sky. [28]

What did you find in the monastery of this world but loving a faithless beloved?
What meaning results from loving a painting on a wall? [29]

In saying that there is no use in loving inanimate wall paintings that, like the disloyal beloved, bring no benefit, the second couplet contains an implicit critique of Christian rituals. In the following couplet, the poet puts the Sufi and the monk in the same category, both of them easily distracted from prayer by the beauty of the beloved:

If you show your face in your neighborhood, o idol,
The Sufi will turn from the mosque, the monk from church. [30]

2. Palaces and pavilions

The palace (saray) is where a ruling sultan lives; rather than a single structure, it is a splendid complex of buildings large and small, as exemplified by the Topkapı Palace. The dwelling places of the Ottoman elite are also called palaces and are mentioned in poetry. Poetically, the heart of the lover is known as a palace, since the sultan of love (the beloved) lives there. In the following couplet the poet praises God, saying that even a few pieces from His heavenly palace are enough to decorate this world:

One of them became the moon, another the world-adorning sun.
Two windows from the palace of Your power fell onto the sky. [31]

The poet of these lines praises God by mentioning His loftiness. According to his poetical imagination, God has a heavenly palace above the universe, and the shiny glass windows fallen from it are the sun and the moon. If even these small pieces of God’s palace are enough to light up the world, one can imagine the magnificence of the whole edifice.

Mirrors were very important decorative objects in Ottoman palatial buildings; especially in the seventeenth century, palaces and houses throughout the Ottoman Empire were decorated with them. The Ottomans did not hesitate to import them from Venice, where the most beautiful ones were produced. In divan poetry, the mirror has rich symbolic as well as material value. It is mentioned in connection with the reflection of truth, the heart, brightness, polishing, and beauty, as in the following couplet:

Take care, don’t look at yourself and become damned like Satan.
Beware, don’t hang distorting mirrors in the palace of your heart. [32]

Köşk (kiosk or pavilion) and Kasr (mansion) refer to single, richly designed buildings. Although smaller than palaces, they were luxurious structures built for the sultans or the wealthy Ottoman elite. People of nobility all live in sublime mansions;
Today this one is incapable of paying the rent of a room. [33]

Apparently the poet thinks that he is a virtuous person who deserves to reside in a kasr but is unable to afford
even a room therein: this is clearly a plea for patronage.

At times the kâses and kiosks of grand viziers and pashas could compete with the sultan’s palace in their ostentatious display of wealth, allowing the architects and artists of the time to display their talents. According to Latifi, these buildings were surrounded by high walls like the garden of paradise and had colorful, ornamented walls and ceilings like a bridal pavilion; they were often perfumed with incense.

The following couplets refer to the interior design of kâses and kiosks whose inner walls were decorated with inscriptions, tiles, and paintings. Needless to say, such kâses provided open windows into the private life of the Ottoman elite:

If it dies, my heart won’t beg for a mansion in paradise
Unless the image of my heart-holder is painted in it. [34]

My heart was a leaf in the rosette (şemse) of the mansion of affection
O Zati, the Eternal Designer has written it in the broken style. [35]

The element of decoration called a şemse (sun disk) is a roundel with radiating straight lines. Kâses also had fountains (şâdârvân) and pools:

The heavens are a lofty mansion in the city of love
The moon and its halo are its pool and fountain. [36]

The moon and its halo are its pool and fountain
O Shah, the sky is a humble mansion in the garden of your power. [37]

The best feature of the kâses, however, was their fine views, since they were built either by the water or in a choice part of the town that commanded spectacular vistas:

My two eyes, placed in the window of the mansion of affection,
Are, to me, two moist carnations in the flower pot of my skull. [38]

In order to watch the assembly of all the angels at dawn,
The sky, impassioned, opens a window in the azure mansion. [39]

The kâses had complementary outbuildings (tetümât) such as barns, stables, or gardeners’ houses:

Love placed a spacious mansion in the heart,
For which the nine-story heavens could not be an outbuilding. [40]

Called ʿtdgâh, the outdoor site allocated for great religious festivals resembles the kâse of paradise. Beauty in this world is a copy of the ideal beauty of paradise:

O Zati, I have never seen its like in the palace of this world:
What if I call the festival ground the garden of paradise? [41]

The following couplets refer to a binâ-yi ʿtd (festival building), which could be either a tent or a more substantial structure:

It would not be destroyed by the earthquake of time’s vicissitudes
If the festival building were constructed of the clay of his concern. [42]
O Prince, it would not be razed and gone in three days
If the festival building were founded on his wisdom. [43]

Metin And, citing the Sûrnâmé-i Hûmâyûn of 1582, notes that temporary buildings such as kiosks and mansions were built for the festival celebrating the circumcision of the sons of Murad III. Likewise the couplets above indicate that there were temporary buildings—perhaps tents—built especially for festival days and destroyed after the festivities were over. In praising the patron, the couplets seem to be saying that even the flimsiest temporary building, if constructed by the sultan, would be as lasting as the most solid, permanent structure. The poet, on the other hand, resembles the weak and temporary festival buildings destroyed within three days.

The commoners of Istanbul had ordinary houses. The poet says that it is better to have a house (ḥâne) in Constantinople than a palace in Egypt. In the comparison is concealed another plea for reward:

Better for this miserable pauper than being ruler of Egypt
It would be if you grant him a house in Istanbul. [44]
3. Bathhouses

Bathhouses or hammams are either independent structures or dependencies in mosque complexes; they are public places used not only for cleansing but also for socializing. These buildings were quite common and were often endowed with an annual income to provide for their maintenance. An Italian traveler of the early sixteenth century, Luigi Bassano da Zara, estimates that the number of mosques, baths, and Greek churches in Istanbul and Galata numbered in the thousands.\(^5^2\)

In the Ottoman poetic imagination, hammams are representations of lovers who burn inside and cry all day (that is to say, drip with moisture). Poets’ descriptions of hammams mostly concern the feelings aroused by seeing their loved ones there. The following couplet mentions the existence of a hammam with nine private hot rooms (\(hâlvetêhâne\)), another reference to the idea that the sky is built of nine domes:

\[
\text{The heavens built a bath with nine private rooms in the city of your excellence,} \\
\text{O prince, and there the sun and moon set its bubbles flying.}\ [45]
\]

According to this comparison, the sun and the moon scatter light on the shiny soap bubbles that are the nine domes of the heavenly hammam. In the Ottoman poetic imagination, domes and bubbles on a surface resemble each other.

Double baths (\(çifte hammâm\)) had two separate entrances, one for men and the other for women.\(^5^3\)

\[
\text{Zati lies there like a hammam, with his eyes fixed on the sky,} \\
\text{Burning inside like the bath-furnace with the fire of separation.}\ [46]
\]

In this couplet, the poet pictures himself and the hammam in both emotional and physical terms by constructing a simile. In their roofs, hammams have round, projecting glass windows (\(câm\)), which let in the sunlight equally\(^5^4\) and thereby resemble the eyes in the face. The poet is like the hammam: inside him the fire of love burns like the furnace in the hammam, and his eyes are like two glass windows facing the sky.

In the following couplet the poet again creates an imaginative connection between a hammam and his emotional state, comparing the tears of the lover to steam condensing on the glass and dripping down:

\[
\text{Since the steam of love went to my head, like a bath,} \\
\text{My eyes constantly drip moisture as do the windows.}\ [47]
\]

Another couplet refers to the fountains of the hammam:

\[
\text{O fairy, the tears of my eyes are flowing for love of you} \\
\text{One might think them two fountains flowing in a bath.}\ [48]
\]

Here the never-ending tears of the lover resemble the two bath fountains, one for cold and the other for hot water,\(^5^5\) that flow continuously.

4. Colleges and elementary schools

Ottoman medreses (madrasas or colleges) and mektebs (elementary schools) were either part of mosque complexes or independent buildings. Madrasa students lived in dormitories adjacent to the classrooms, and their expenditures were mostly covered by pious endowments. Walls usually isolated an elementary school from the surrounding neighborhood, so that the students within would be protected and free from distraction. In the following couplet, the poet awaits his beloved in the shadow of the school wall:

\[
\text{Where I wait with desire, like the shadow of a wall} \\
\text{Is one side of the school of my sun-faced, cypress-bodied one.}\ [49]
\]

In this couplet are two descriptions: one of the physical and psychological situation of the lover and poet, and the other of a structural feature of schools in his time. Schools were also called \(mu'allim-êhâne\), meaning “house of the teacher.”

\[
\text{Whenever my cypress is freed from the house of instruction} \text{[\(mu'allim-êhâne\)],} \\
\text{His shadow lines the path he takes end to end with boxwood.}\ [50]
\]

The tall body of the beloved is emphasized through use of the figure tenasûb (congruence of vocabulary) in which the poet uses a group of related words: cypress (\(serv\)), boxwood (\(şimşad\)), and shade or shadow (\(sâyê\)). The cypress here represents both the beloved’s body and the trees of the schoolyard. Boxwood is a shade tree that lines the school road. When the cypress is \(âzâd\)\(^5^6\) (free or swaying), the lover is comforted by
the beloved’s passing as though he (the lover) was in a street lined with boxwood. The word ¸z¸d is an equivoque (tevriye) that means “free (from school)” when “cypress” refers to the boy’s body, and “swaying with the wind” in reference to the tree itself (and, by extension, to the way the boy walks on his way home from school).

5. Dungeons (zindân)

Some military buildings, especially fortresses, were used as prisons or dungeons. Criminals might be put into dungeons in local fortresses such as Rumelihisarı and Yedi Kule (the Seven Towers) in Istanbul or exiled to those in the far corners of the empire. The following couplet mentions nine dungeons, which could be visualized as a dungeon- or prison-like world covered by nine domes:

That you might see his essence in what lies behind [this world]
Come and, by grace, pierce these nine dungeons. [51]

Zati gives us a clue about the structure of a dungeon, suggesting that some were built underground:

If I give up my life by longing for the pit of your chin
I [will] have endowed a dungeon with all my worldly goods. [52]

In the Ottoman poet’s imagination the dimple in the beloved’s chin resembles a dungeon in which the lover’s heart is imprisoned. The couplet also refers obliquely to the story of the prophet Joseph, a paragon of male beauty imprisoned in a pit by his brothers.57

6. Bridges

Bridges are another type of structure referred to in Ottoman poetry. These structures, often built with pious intent, accommodated both military and civilian transport and pedestrian traffic. Building bridges was regarded as a charitable deed, which the wealthy were encouraged to perform. In Ottoman poetry, bridges generally are associated with the eyebrows of the beloved, in that the shapes of the spans resemble brows; in addition, because a span was called a göz (eye) in architectural terminology, there are many poetic similes between bridges and eyes.58 Since the lover is often hopeless and weeping because of the separation from his beloved, his eyes, like the spans of a bridge, flow continuously with a “river” of tears:

O beloved, in separation you have made my tears a flowing river
And my eyebrows a bridge with two spans (eyes) over it. [53]

The image of the vault of [my] beloved’s eyebrow is a picture
In my weeping eyes like a bridge built over water. [54]

CONCLUSION

Reading poetry from perspectives that consider both its artistic and its documentary value can furnish us with means for understanding peoples’ lives and mentalities in a given period. By incorporating the study of Ottoman poetry into the history of art and architecture, I hope that I have demonstrated the inseparable relationship between poetry and architecture in the Ottoman artistic imagination. Although poetical references to architectural elements increased in later centuries, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century poetry set the parameters for the later conceptualization of architectural structures. In other words, architectural elements have been a subject of Ottoman poetry since its beginning.

In conclusion, it can be said that the two main characters of Ottoman poetry, the beloved and the lover, were depicted by means of metaphors in the sixteenth-century poet’s imaginary world, and that these metaphors were often inspired by both the actual and the abstract qualities of architectural monuments.

APPENDIXES

[1] Bir nefesde oñsekizbiñ ’ålemi vår eyleyen
Bunca vår yok eden ol Kâdir-i Kahhâra bak
Bu tokuz tâk-i mukarnes bu serêyi şeş-cihât
Kâf u Nûn’dan buñlarê bûnyad eden mi’mâra bak (L)59

Yapdh bir mihrâb-i zer mi’mâr-i sun’un-i Zü’l-celâl
(G Ç K 7/9) 60

[3] Cemâluñ câmî’în şöyle ’imaret eylemiş Kâdir
Ne süﬁ şeyler olmak dîler ’aynum aña nûzîr
(Z G 302/1)
[4] Sultansun dil mülküni yıldı harab itdi gamuñ
Virâni ma’mür itmege sultana sifhat yarañur (C Ç K 41/2)

Her ne yir kim anda sultan oldi virân olmadı (C Ç G 235/4)

[6] Her ne dil kim menzili ‘ışk olmaya olur harâb
‘Akbet virân olur şol yir ki sultânsuzdur ol (C Ç G 119/4)

[7] Devlet anuñ ki cihânda eşeri-î hayr kodu
Eşeri olmayanîn gör ki yerinde yel eser
‘Âkil oldur alcak dünyede ten lezzetin
Rûhunun hayr ile şad olmasmu kasd eyler
Bu fenâ içre anûn kim eşi eberdûr
Ölmez ol Hûz-status zinde dürür tâ mañşer (L)

[8] Her câmii-i gülsende yine bûblû-li hosh-han
Sultan-i güle okudugu medûh ü şenâdur (Z G 154/2)

[9] Câmii-i kadrinde eflak ol nigarûn Zâtîyâ
Birbiri içre tokuz garrâ musanna’ topdur (Z G 187/3)

Aşt top âyneler mescidi-î âzinesine (C Ç G 172/4)

Aña şerbet virûb hûuddâm-î câmî-î çekdi zencire (Z G 1331/4)

[12] Gördiler dil bağladum yarûn  hamstring-erõsüna
Reşk idûp kandil aşalar tâk-î mihrâb üstine (C Ç K 6/24)

[13] Yaçar ençüm hesabınca kanândil
Felek-îr içi bir şem’ ü meçâîl
Binâ resminde câmii-î Kâf-î a’am
Veyâhûd yeğpare bir kûl-i mu’azzam61 (L)

[14] Añlanan bu ki gûrûb mescidi-î ‘isk içre asam
Ben bu kandilî dili tâk-î mu’llâdâ ýene (Z G 1303/2)

Çerâği nûr-î Ahmed’den yakar ruhsâri Osmânûn (Z G 763/1)

[16] Duğân-î suz-i sinemdür menâr-î câmii-î mihnet

Aña Zâtî kanâdil âteşi-î âhum şirârdur (Z G 247/5)

[17] Feleklar şehr-i ‘ışkuñ içre tokuz kubbeli câmî
Dûhân-î âteşi-î âhum çûkub aña menâr oldi (Z G 1758/2)

[18] Kaşlarûn üzre perîşan it mu’tarrâ turreni
Kim çelîşalar yirîdîr kâﬁri mihrâblar (C Ç G 23/3)

[19] Hüsnü harîminde gören eydûr  ham-î ebrûlarßen
Yâ Rab bu ne mescid dürûr k’olmuş aña mihrab iki
(C Ç G 243/2)

Veçhi budur kim olur tezhib mihrâb üstine (C Ç K 6/38)

[21] Gördi mescidde kaşuñ itdi rûkû’
Secde-i sükr kilmaga mihrâb (Z G 65/3)

[22] Tâk-û erbûna şu kim bâş egmeye mihrâb-vâr
Kûbleden dönsüñ benim kûble yüzü mihrâb-veş (Z G 592/3)

[23] Gümûş minberdûr ol bini zekan kandil ü kaş
mihrâb
Hatibogh bugûn mülk-i melâhat içre câmî’dür
(Z G 250/3)

[24] N’ola mülk-i melâhatde okünsa aduña  DataTypes
Cemâlûn câmii’inde bir gümûş minberdûr ol bini
(Z G 1688/2)

Hatbe-i tahsin okur Sâh-î zafer-yâb üstine (C Ç K 6/8)

[26] Tapuñ eltâf-î câmî’dür kapuñ mihrâb-î devlet-düür
Müşerrefdûr senûn nâm-î şerifûne kamû minber
(Z K F 13b)

[27] Deyrî ‘âlem içre sûret bulmak isterson eger
Hüsni mihrâtna ol mahuñ nazâr kîl dâ’îmâ
(Z G 32 /4)

[28] Ol bût-î Çin ü Hûta’ya beñizemezsin ey gûnûş
Gercî kim deyrî-î felekde bir gûzel tasvirsin
(Z G 1024/3)
[29] Ne buldun deyr-i dünyâda vefâsuz yâr sevmek
den
Ne ma’ni hâsil olur sûretr-i divâr sevmekden
(Z G 1197/1)

[30]  ‘Arz-ı didîr eyleseñ kûyunda varmaz ey sanêm
Söfi mesciddenden yaña rûhbân kîlsâdân yaña
(Z G 45/3)

[31] Birî mâh olmuñ anûn birî hûrûh-ı cihân-îrâ
Serây-ı kadînûn düșmûn felek üzre iki câmû
(Z K F 7b)

[32] Sakn kendûn görûb şeytân gibi olmayasın
merdûd
Sarây-ı kalhûnîe mir’at-ı kalbî asmâgîl zinhâr
(Z G 146/6)

[33] Fazî ehlî kamû kasr-ı mu’allâda olurlar
Ol oda kirâsında bugûn ‘âciz ü kâsr (Z K F 20b)

[34] Ölürse eger kasr-ı cinânî dilemez dil
Tasvîri meger dil-berümûnî anda ola naqûş
(Z G 611/2)

[35] Şemse-i kasr-ı mahabbetde gönûl yapräg imiş
Zâtî Nakkas-ı ezel yazmiş imiş ani şikest
(Z G 74/8)

[36] Şehrî ‘ışkı iççe bir kasr-ı mu’allâdurdur felek
Hâle ile mây anûn hâvzî vû şadîrvândur
(Z G 285/4)

[37]  Hâleyile mây anûn hâvzî vû şadîrvândur
Bâg-ı kadründê şeha bir kasr-ı kemter âsumân
(Z K F 11a)

[38] Manzar-ı kasr-ı belâya konmuş iki gözlerûm
Bu sîfâlî serde iki ter karanfûldür baña (Z G 41/3)

[39] Subhêm divânûnî seyr itmege cümle sûrunûn
Kasr-ı mâzadân acher şevk-ile manzar âsumân
(Z K F 11a)

[40] ‘Ish vaz’ eyledî dilde yine bir kasr-ı firâh
Olmaz aña tetûmmât sipih-i nûh-kâh (Z G 1071/)

[41] Zâtîyä dünyâ sarâyında nazîrîn gûrnûdûm
Nola dîrsem ‘id-gâha kasr-ı Firdevs-i berin
(Z G 10205/)

[42] Bozulmaz idi zelzele-i inkilâbdan
Ger tën-i himmettye yapûsa binâ-ûn ‘id (Z K F 12b)

[43] Üç günde serverâ yûklup gitmez idi ol
Ger desti râyûnda ürûla binâ-yi’ûd (Z K F 12b)

[44] Ol eksiklû fakirî şâh-ı Misr olmâkdan artuku-
dur
Eger Kostantûniyye iççe eyleseñ aña ‘atâ hâne
(Z K F 17a)

[45] Uçurûdî mihr ü mây anda hâbûbîn serverâ yap-
dî
Feleklîr şehr-ı fazînda tokûz hâlvetli hâmâmûm
(Z K L I 6b)

[46] Yatar hâmâm gibi gözlerûn gûkê dikûb Zâtî
Derûmû nâm-ı hecr ile yarû nâmêndî tûn olmuş
(Z G 602/5)

[47] Çâkalû ‘ısk buhûrî başa hâmâmûm gibi
Dem-be-dem yaş akdur didelerûm câm gibi
(Z G 1552/1)

[48] Ey peri ‘ışkuında eşi-i dide-i gîrîân akar
San ki bir hâmâmûm içinde iki şadîrvân akar
(Z G 315/1)

[49] Şevk ile beklediûm sâyê-i divâr gibi
Ol yûzî gün boyû servûn taraf-ı mektebidûr
(Z G 398/2)

[50] Her kaçan servûm mu’allîm-hânenden azâd olur
Sâyësinden reh-gûzûri ser-be-ser şîmad olur
(Z G 297/1)

[51] Mâverâsinda bûnuñ özune temâşa gûresin
Yetiş himmetle del bu tûkûz zîndânî (Z K F 42b)

[52] Cân virûrsem hasret-ı cäh-ı zenahtdâmûnla ger
Eyledûm bâki kalan emlâkûmî zîndânî vakf
(Z G 636/2)

[53] Nehr-i cûr eyledûn fûrkatde cânâ yaşumû
Üstine bir iki gûzlû köprü itdûn kûsumû (Z G 1522/1)

[54] Resm olup durur âyâlî-tâk-êbrû-ûn nigûr
Çeşm-i gîryûnumda ab üzre yapûlmû şûl gibi
(C Ç G 236/4)
NOTES

Author’s note: I presented an earlier form of this article in October 2003 at Harvard University, where I was an Aga Khan postdoctoral fellow. When writing my dissertation, “Zati’nin gazeliyati’na göre 16. yüzyıldan sosyal hayat” (Social Life in the Sixteenth Century as Reflected in Zati’s Ghazals), I realized that Ottoman poetry had the potential to reveal various aspects of social life, such as social characterization and beliefs, the culture of food and eating, medicine, methods of communication, and architecture. Thanks to the Aga Khan Program, I pursued the last topic. I especially wish to thank Professor Gülru Necipoğlu, who read an earlier version of this paper and made valuable suggestions. I also thank Julie Scott Meisami, who shared her ideas, and Walter G. Andrews, who made special contributions to the writing of this article at various stages.

1. That is, a character addressed by the poet in a taballus (pen name) couplet as if he were a different person.


12. Stéphane Yerasimos, La Fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques: Légendes d’empire (Paris, 1990), cited in Faroqui, Osmanlı kültür ve giyimde yaşam, 142, which also discusses the reasons why architecture became the most eminent art in the sixteenth century, 143–63.


23. Sâ’î, Yapılar kitabı, 152. Cited in Necipoğlu, “Qur’anic Epigraphy in Sinan’s Imperial Mosques.” Also see Crane and Akın, Sinan’s Autobiographies, 124 and 150, for a slightly different English translation and the transcribed text of this passage.

24. The word ‘âlem (Turkish: âlem, world) in the Qur’an is interpreted in different ways by commentators. Wahb b. Munabbih argued that there are fourteen or eighteen thousand âlems in the universe, while others say one thousand, forty thousand, or eighty thousand; see İskender Pala, Ansiklopedik Divan şiir sözlüğü, 2nd ed. (Ankara, 1989), 29.

25. Qur’an 36:82.

26. According to Walter Andrews, in the Ottoman era, art in general is communal and primarily exists to confirm the values and the worldview of the society in which it is created. It does not seek new truth; instead it tries to reach the wholeness and the worldview of the society in which it is created. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic Art and Spirituality (Albany, 1987), 40. Imitatio Dei (imitation of God), in the terms of historians of religion.

27. Suraiya Faroqui, Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire (London, 1996), 139.

28. For the naming practice of neighborhoods in the Ottoman Empire, see Çiçek Kafescioğlu, “The Ottoman Capital in the Eighteenth Century” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1996); for the general concept of the Islamic city, see Turgut Cansever, Van, and Akın, Sinan’s Autobiographies, 124 and 150, for a slightly different English translation and the transcribed text of this passage.

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30. See İstanbul Ansiklopedisi (Istanbul, 1944–49), s.v. "Camı."
32. The fourth chapter of Latif’s Evsâf-ı Istanbul is dedicated to features of Istanbul mosques such as Ayasofya and the mosque of the conqueror, Mehmed II.

33. Andrews, Poetry’s Voice, 158. About the representation of gardens in eighteenth-century Ottoman poetry, see Shirine Hamadeh, “The City’s Pleasures: Architectural Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul” (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), chap. 4. Hamadeh thinks that garden imagery changed between the sixteenth century and the eighteenth, when the garden became a locus of contemporary urban life within which social changes were articulated.


35. A. A. Şentürk, Divan şiiri antolojisi (Istanbul, 1999), 134.


38. In pre-Islamic and early Islamic times the word mihrâb “was… used for a special place within a ‘palace’ or in a ‘room’; it was the ‘highest,’ ‘the first’ and ‘the most important’ place. At the same time it denoted a ‘space between columns’ and was equally used for ‘burial place’…”: Encyclopaedia of Islam, new ed. (Leiden, 1960–2004) (henceforth EI2), s.v. “Mihrâb.”

39. Onay, Eski Türk edebiyatında mazmunlar ve ızah, 255.

40. Ibid., 320.

41. See “Üç mihrâbî mescidî,” in Ayvansaraylı, Hadîkatü'l-ceevâmi, 93.

42. The word “minbar,” from Arabic but probably borrowed from Ethiopic, originally meant “seat, chair”; the minbar “was in early times used as a seat by the ruler or his governor, from which he addressed the Muslims at the Friday worship.” The change in the use of the minbar from ruler’s seat to religious pulpit occurred towards the end of the Umayyad period. See EI2, s.v. “Minbar.”

43. One of the professors in Sultan Mehmed II’s medrese.

44. As Necipoğlu has eloquently shown, the Ottoman palace was more than a residence for the sultan: it was a beautiful architectural monument where the sultan performed his ceremonial duties and exercised his power at the same time. For the architectural structure and its use for ceremonial, see Gülru Necipoğlu, Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapî Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries (New York, 1991); see also her The Topkapî Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture: Topkapi Palace Museum Library MS H. 1956 (Santa Monica, 1995).


46. Arseven, Sanat ansklopedisi, s.v. “Ayna.”


49. Latif, Evsâf-ı Istanbul, 44. The culture of the kâşr was highly developed in eighteenth-century Istanbul: see Shirine Hamadeh, “The City’s Pleasures,” 231.

50. Sözen and Tanyeli, Sanat kavram ve terimleri sözlüğü, 226.

51. Sûrûnâmî-î Hümâyûn, 6a–6b, cited in Metin And, Osmanlı şenliklerinde Türk sanatları (Ankara, 1982), 75. For the details of these buildings, see idem, 40 gün 40 gecce Osmanlı şenlikleri şenlikleri geçit alayları (Istanbul, 2000), 79–81.

52. For details of public baths in the sixteenth century, see the description by the Italian traveler Bassano cited in Metin And, Istanbul in the 16th Century: The City, the Palace, Daily Life (Istanbul, 1994), 242–43.


55. In Bassano’s description, “All these small rooms were beautifully walled with marble, and in each, hot and cold water flowed from two pipes into a marble basin.” Cited in And, Istanbul in the 16th Century, 244. The room for boiling the water is called külhan. Steam and smoke pass through pipes under the marble floor and are conducted out via small ceramic chimneys. The fire heats both the water and the floor, so the floor of the bath is always warm.

56. In neighborhood schools in the Ottoman era, recess and holiday periods were called âzîd (free): Onay, Eski Türk edebiyatında mazmunlar ve ızah, 125.

57. See Pala, Ansklopedik divan şiiri sözlüğü, s.v. “Yusuf”; Onay, Eski Türk edebiyatında mazmunlar ve ızah, 504.

58. Sözen and Tanyeli, Sanat kavram ve terimleri sözlüğü, 197.

59. Latif, Evsâf-ı Istanbul, 5. Henceforth, (L) refers to this work.

60. (C Ç) refers to the divan of Cafer Çelebi and (Z) refers to the divan of Zati; (F) and (LÎ) indicate two versions of manuscript of Zati’s divan in the Süleymaniye Library. (G) indicates ghazal and (K) qasida; a number before the slash refers to the ghazal or qasida number in the published divan, and a number after the slash is the couplet number.

61. Latif, Evsâf-ı Istanbul, 32.

62. Uçurdu mîhrû um anda habîb severâ Vănîd Felekler şehrî fazlinda tokuz ½avletli hâmâmû (Z K F 7b)
Rulers of the Islamic world considered it an honor to send contributions of money and food to Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad and site of the Ka’ba, and Medina, the locus of the house, mosque, and tomb of the Prophet and the city from which Islam was spread. The Ottoman sultans followed this tradition, sending by pilgrimage caravan not only money and provisions but also precious gifts. Monetary donations were packed in bags (Arabic sing. صرارة; Turkish şurra or kese) for transport to the holy places; the pilgrimage caravan hence came to be called şurra throughout the Islamic world. The term махмал (from Arabic همالة, to carry) is also used, particularly in Egypt, in reference to this holy voyage; written mahmel in Turkish, it is defined as “two small rooms covered with cloth, with a pyramidal top like a tent, placed on a camel, in each of which [rooms] a man may sit...[and] travel protected against the sun, and in [which] precious goods may be carried.”¹ In Ottoman times, mules and camels formed the caravan that carried monetary donations of the sultans, other precious gifts, and members of the ruling family. Set atop a decorated camel, the mahmel-i serif, which carried only the Qur’an and, in later times, the keys of the Ka’ba, had special symbolic meaning. Its covers were ceremonially renewed each year at the time of the Hajj.

Sending the şurra to the Ka’ba on camels adorned with decorated tents is a tradition that dates back to the Prophet; a sixteenth-century painting depicts Muhammad transporting his own family from Mecca to Medina in such a tent.²

The year 1517 marks a crucial turning point in the history of the Ottoman state: the Hijaz, until then under the governance of the Mamluks, became Ottoman territory as a result of the Battle of Ridaniye, led and won by Sultan Selim I (r. 1512–20). As a result, Selim and his successors adopted the title of Ḥadīmū ’l-Haremeyn-i serifeyn (servants of the two holy sanctuaries [Mecca and Medina]): for example, in a letter in which Mahmud II (r. 1808–39) lists the countries and cities over which he rules,³ he refers to himself as, “I, who am the servant and the ruler of Mecca the Blessed, Medina the Radiant, and the shrine of Masjid al-Aqsa and Jerusalem the Holy...” (Bu ki, [...] ve Mekke-i Mükereyye ve Medine-i Munevre ve Harem-i Mescid-i Aksa ve Kudüs-i Şerifi Mubahere’in hâdim ve hâkim...).

After conquering Egypt, Selim I openly pronounced that the mahmel would from then onwards be sent by the Ottoman sultans: “To arrange for the peoples’ livelihoods and to assume the duties of preparing the Bayt al-Haram mahmels has henceforth become a binding duty that I swear to uphold, by the neck of my unrestrainable horse” (Halkân yazarımca düzen vermek ve de Beyt-ül Haram mahmellerini hazırlamak bundan böyle dursunulmaz atımnın boyununa borç olmuştur).⁴ After issuing this statement, Selim appointed Khayr Beg governor of Egypt, asking him to prepare the mahmel-i serif and assigning him the duty of procuring supplies for the pilgrimage troops going to the holy lands.⁵ At the same time, the sultan sent a similar decree to Damascus, ordering that the Damascus mahmel be prepared.⁶

The tradition of regularly sending şurra processions to the Haramayn (Two Sanctuaries, i.e., Mecca and Medina) before the Ottoman conquest dates as far back as the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir Bi’llah (908–32). The Fatimids (r. 909–1171) sent money in hopes of reconciling the Hijaz to their rule; the Mamluks (1250–1517) sent yearly allotments of grain and set rules for the ceremonial dispatch of the şurra. The tradition continued throughout the Ottoman period until 1915, the amount of money sent by the Ottomans after the conquest always exceeding that donated by other states.⁷

While various sources record that the first Ottoman sultan to send a şurra procession to the Haramayn was Mehmed I (r. 1413–21), M. Atalar argues that the first was actually Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402), Mehmed’s father, although the practice was not yet an...
official duty.8 The chronicler Aşıkpaşazade mentions that Mehmed I had hospices (imarets) built in Mecca and Medina and sent monies to the two cities. The surre was sent during the reigns of Murad II (1421–51) and Mehmed II (1451–81) as well, and during the reign of Bayezid II (1481–1512) amounted to 14,000 gold ducats.9 Sending it became an official duty of the Ottoman state from the reign of Sultan Selim I (1512–20) onwards;10 200,000 gold pieces (fılıri) went to Mecca and Medina during Selim I’s reign.11

One of the economic consequences of Ottoman rule in the Hijaz, therefore, was the transfer of substantial amounts of money to the pious people living in these sacred places.12 Money sent with the surre was distributed to the inhabitants of Mecca and Medina, the needy, the Bedouins of Mecca, the envoys who delivered the gifts, and the pilgrims who came to visit the Haramayn. These expenditures were covered by the revenues from various pious endowments; the amount was decided by the sultan himself. S. Faroqhi draws attention to the fact that an endowment in the town of Konya Ereğlisi established for the purpose of raising money to be sent to Medina already existed during the reign of Mehmed II. In the fifteenth century, most such endowments were located in Egypt; however, by the sixteenth century they began to appear on the Balkan frontiers of the Ottoman Empire as well.13

H. Tezcan estimates that the Ottoman tradition of sending textile covers to the holy lands started during the reign of Süleyman I (1520–66). She bases her argument on the fact that the earliest extant door curtain and band for the Ka’ba carry his name.14 Süleyman had manuscripts illustrated with miniatures depicting the Ka’ba and had the irrigation system of Mecca, and of the Ka’ba itself, repaired. Although there exist no documents referring to a surre during the reign of Süleyman’s son Selim II, surres are recorded to have been sent by Murad III (1574–95), Mehmed III (1595–1603), Ahmed I (1603–17), Mustafa I (1617–18, 1622–23), Osman II (1618–22), Murad IV (1623–40), Mehmed IV (1648–87), Ahmed II (1691–95), Mustafa II (1695–1703), Ahmed III (1703–30), Mahmud I (1730–54), Mustafa III (1757–74), Abdülhamid I (1774–89), Selim III (1789–1807), Mahmud II (1808–39), Abdülmecid I (1839–61), Abdüllaziz (1861–76), Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), and Mehmed V (Reşad) (1909–18). This documentation suffices to prove that the Ottoman state meticulously carried on the surre tradition through 1915. Sultan Mehmed VI (Vahdeddin) (1918–22) had one sent even though the Arabian peninsula was no longer under Ottoman control during his reign.16

With the annual Surre-i hümayun (imperial surre procession), the Ottoman state sent donations of textile covers and money. The most precious among the covers were the kiswa that clothed the Ka’ba, the embroidered curtain for its door, and the surrounding band that carried the name of the donating sultan. Each year the surre processions brought new covers to Mecca (for the Ka’ba) and to Medina (for the Prophet’s tomb, known as the Ravza-i Mutahhara, and for the graves of the Companions of the Prophet). These covers were adorned with Qur’anic verses and prayers arranged in stacked chevron, or zigzag, rows, with inscriptions sometimes supplemented with sprays of flowers. Some of these textiles, once used, were brought back to Istanbul; others were distributed as holy relics to the pilgrims, in keeping with the traditional words of ‘A’isha (Muhammad’s youngest wife): “... you [shall] sell those covers and spend the money you earn for the poor and the travelers who are on their way to Allah.”17

**RAVZA-I MUTAHHARA TEXTILES IN THE TOPKAPI PALACE MUSEUM**

The Topkapi Palace Museum collection of over six hundred religious textiles dating from the sixteenth to the twentieth century—intact or in pieces, dated or not—is material evidence of this tradition. Since there are no extant surre textiles from previous eras, those in the Topkapi collection are of unique documentary value. They may be classified and examined under three categories: “Mecca the Blessed” covers, “Medina the Radiant” covers, and the reused forms of both types.

This article primarily concerns the “Medina the Radiant” covers and their reuse. These zigzag epigraphic weavings are depicted in many illustrations of the Ravza-i Mutahhara.18 In reference to the covers woven for Medina, S. Faroqui notes,

In 1577–78, the şaykh al-haram [Governor of Medina] pointed out to the central administration that the door curtains and the coverings over the Prophet’s tomb and the graves of his associates all were in urgent need of renewal. A list of all the textiles currently in the mosque was forwarded to Istanbul, where it possibly may still be found in one of the less accessible corners of the archives. In 1594–5, the covering for the Prophet’s grave...
was manufactured in Istanbul, while the curtains and other items were ordered from Egypt. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether in the intervening years the old decorations had continued in use or whether this was already the next renewal of the set.\footnote{19}

The textiles classified as of the “Medina the Radiant” type, since they were woven for the tomb of Muhammad in Medina, display horizontal zigzag rows containing Qur’anic verses and prayers. Patterning of their designs follows what is known as a straight repeat, with technical repeat units (for these textiles, the technical repeat unit is the minimum pattern area that contains no repetition) placed directly side by side and one above another. Warp and weft are of silk, and the weave is lampas\footnote{20} or kemha,\footnote{21} with satin ground and twill patterning. The green-ground textiles of this type may be divided into eight groups, primarily on the basis of elements in their design schemes: (I) palmette group; (II) pear-shaped medallion group; (III) metal thread group; (IV) dated group; (V) hanging lamp group; (VI) unflowered dark green group; (VII) metal thread dark green group; and (VIII) Jacquard-woven group. There are also red-ground “Medina the Radiant” textiles, which are classified here as follows: (IX) pot-shaped medallion group; (X) extra-band group; (XI) dominant metal thread group; (XII) pink-ground group; (XIII) orange on pink-ground group; and (XIV) Jacquard-woven group.

Green-ground Ravza-i Mutahhara textiles
I. Palmette group
An example (24/365: figs. 1 and 2) of the first green-ground group in the Topkapı Palace Museum collection is one of eight fragments\footnote{22} of what was once the background cloth to which was sewn an embroidered panel with a mihrab design. (The embroidered panel—see below—and the palmette-group fragments show considerable independent deterioration, indicating that they have long been separated.) On the fragment, following an unpatterned 8 cm at the lower end, a row of palmettes appears on an open, dark brownish-green ground (2a), followed by an inscription in Kufic script within a narrow zigzag band (2b), a taller, cursive zigzag inscription (2c), another narrow Kufic-inscribed band (2d), and a final row of inverted palmettes (which are actually pendants to the next narrow zigzag band, the beginning of the next technical repeat unit).\footnote{23} The palmettes are cream-colored and outlined in red. The wider zigzag band contains the shahīdā (profession of faith): lā ilāha illā Allāh wa Muḥammad rasūl Allāh (There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is the Prophet of God); the narrow band below it is inscribed ṭariqa Allāhu ta’ālā ‘an Abī Bakr wa-‘Umar wa-‘Uthmān wa-‘Alī wa-‘an baqiyyat al-sahāba ajma‘īn (May God the Mighty be pleased with Abī Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, ‘Alī and all of the rest of the Companions) and the one above it with Qur’an 9:33 or 61:9, “It is He Who has sent His Apostle with guidance and the Religion of Truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the pagans may detest it.”\footnote{24} The large inscription is cream-colored and outlined in red. The selvages, of cream-colored satin, are quite broad (0.7 cm).

The embroidered panel (not illustrated here) once appliquéd to the palmette-group textile of which 24/365 is a fragment provides clues for dating the palmette-group textiles.\footnote{25} It contains the following inscriptions: in a cartouche at the very top is Qur’an 33:45: “O Prophet, truly We have sent thee as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner.” Within an arch supported on columns is a hanging lamp, flanked by cartouches inscribed ṭariqa Allāhu ta’ālā ‘an Abī Bakr wa-‘Umar / wa-‘Uthmān wa-‘Alī wa-‘an baqiyyat al-sahāba ajma‘īn. Beneath the hanging lamp, flanked by lighted candles, is a pear-shaped form enclosing the inscription ya rasūl Allāh mawlānā al-sulṭān Muḥammad yātūb al-shaf’a. Hūdā bāb al-shāmī (O Messenger of God, our lord Sultan Mehmed asks for intercession. This is the Syrian Gate [one of the gates to the city of Medina: according to the inscription, the site where the curtain was hung]). Although this panel is undated, thus offering no clue as to which Mehmed is referred to, Hülya Tezcan suggests that he is Sultan Mehmed III (r. 1595–1603), since the angular script and palmettes of the textile to which the panel was sewn are hallmarks of a Mamluk style still in use during his reign.

Some examples from the palmette group are woven on grass-green grounds.\footnote{26} On such textiles, which feature the same design and inscriptions, the script and the outlining of the zigzags are cream-colored, and the woven selvages are yellow.

II. Pear-shaped medallion group
Members of the second group, those displaying pear-shaped medallions, show certain variations among themselves. On the first example illustrated (24/343: fig. 3),\footnote{27} inscribed medallions surrounded by rich split-leaf (rûmî) ornament are surmounted by a narrow zigzag band, a wider band, another narrow band, and a
second row of medallions; the series is then repeated, starting from the first Kufic-inscribed band. Placed on the open, dark brownish-green ground, the medallions are red, decorated in cream. The inscriptions within and outside the pear-shaped medallions read (top to bottom): ... wa-kafā bi’llāh shahīdan (“And enough is God for a witness,” the end of Qur’an 4:79) and Muhammad rasūl Allāh (Muhammad is the Prophet of God). In the wider band is inscribed the shahīda. The lower Kufic band reads ṭariqa Allāhu ta’ālā ‘an Abī Bakr
Fig. 4. Mihrab-i Nebi curtain. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/2001. (Author’s photo; used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
wa-'Umar wa-'Uthmân wa-'Alî wa-'an baqiyyat al-sahâba ajma‘în, and the upper one contains Qur’an 9:33/61:9 (see above). The letters of the large inscription are of cream, outlined in red; the cream-ground zigzag bands are likewise outlined in red; the wide, woven selvages are yellow.

The dating of the group is again made possible by reference to Mihrab-î Nebî curtains. On the embroidered mihrab-design panel of one such example, 24/397 (not illustrated), appears an inscription, al-sultan Murâd ya‘lub al-shafa‘a yâ rasûl Allâh. Hâdhâ bâb al-shâmi (Sultan Murad seeks intercession, o Messenger of God. This is the Syrian Gate). Tezcan suggests that the sultan named is Murad IV (r. 1623–40). The said inscription appears in an arched niche from the top of which hang three lamps. Above this niche appears a hadith that begins, Qâla ‘aleyhi al-salâm (So said [the Prophet], peace be upon him). On the lining of the panel is written bâb al-shâmi. The embroidered panel remains stitched onto a textile belonging to the pear-shaped medallion group, suggesting a date for the group as well.

The mihrab-design panel of another curtain (24/2001) bordered by pieces of a pear-shaped medallion group textile has the same compositional scheme (fig. 4). In the uppermost cartouche above the niche appears Qur’an 16:123, “So We have taught thee the inspired [message], ‘follow the ways of Abraham the true in faith, and he joined not gods with God.’” The inscription in the central section reads Allâh, al-sultanî Murâd ya‘lub al-shafa‘a yâ rasûl Allâh. Hâdhâ bâb al-hanîfî (God. Sultan Murad seeks intercession, o Messenger of God. This is the Hanifi Gate). As on 24/397, the pear-shaped medallions on the surrounding textile are woven in red and cream and inscribed either Allâh or al-Baqqî (the Everlasting). In the wide zigzag band appears the shahâda; in the lower narrow band is radiya Allâhu ta‘âlâ ‘an Abî Bakr wa‘Umar wa‘-Uthmân wa‘-Alî wa‘-an baqiyyat al-sahâba ajma‘în, and in the upper band appears Qur’an 9:33/61:9 (see above). The letters of the wide band are woven in cream and outlined in red.

There is also a textile of the same design scheme woven on a grass-green ground (24/647-155). In some cases (e.g., 24/343 [fig. 3] and 24/348 [fig. 5]) but not all, the centers of the pear-shaped medallions inscribed Allâh or al-Baqqî are red. The fact that the palmettes have been transformed into medallions and that the inscriptions in the narrow bands are no longer so angular indicates a transition from Mamluk to Ottoman style.

III. Metal thread group

Members of the third group include both green- and brown-ground textiles. Furthermore, there are also textiles with four colors that show characteristics of the group. For the dating of these textiles, we may again refer to the Mihrab-î Nebî curtains, one of which belongs to the era of Sultan İbrahim (1640–48), and the other, dated 1131 (1718), to that of Ahmed III (1703–30). The embroidered panel of the former curtain (not illustrated) includes a column-supported arch from the top of which hangs a lamp; beneath this is a pear-shaped enclosure bearing the undated inscription yâ rasûl Allâh mawlânâ al-sultan İbrahim ya‘lub al-shafa‘a. Hâdhâ ghiytâ al-mushaf (O Messenger of God, our lord Sultan Ibrahim seeks intercession. This is the cover of the Qur’an). In the cartouche above the niche is inscribed Qur’an 33:45 (see above). Above the lit candles within the niche appears radiya Allâhu ta‘âlâ ‘an Abî Bakr wa‘-Umar wa‘-Uthmân wa‘-Alî wa‘-an baqiyyat al-sahâba ajma‘în. The embroidered panel is sewn onto joined pieces of four-colored kemha belonging to the metal-thread group. The selvages of some pieces are cream, while others are red—an indication that they were woven on different looms. The cloth is coarse and of low quality.

In the later example (fig. 6), from the reign of Ahmed III, the top cartouche of the embroidered panel likewise contains Qur’an 33:45. Within the column-supported arch again appear a hanging lamp and a pear-shaped compartment, here inscribed yâ rasûl Allâh mawlânâ al-sultan Ahmad ya‘lub al-shafa‘a. Hâdhâ li

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Fig. 5. Technical repeat unit of Topkapı Palace Museum 24/348. (Author’s schematic rendering)
Fig. 6. Mihrab-ı Nebi curtain. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/271. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
mīrāb al-nahawī sana 1131 (O Messenger of God, our lord Sultan Ahmed seeks intercession. This is for the mīrāb of the Prophet. Year 1131 [1719]). Within the cartouches on either side of the hanging lamp again appears rādiyā Allāhu taʿālā ‘an Abī Bahr wa-‘Umar wa-‘Uthmān wa-‘Ali wa-‘an baqiyat al-sahāba ajma’in.

The pieced, green-ground textile surrounding this embroidered panel is an example of the metal thread group also represented in the Topkapı Palace collection by a length of fabric of full loom width (13/1659) (figs. 7 and 8 left).32 This group is characterized by technical repeats with heights of eight zigzag rows. The first row contains Allāh and Muhammad on an open ground (8a); in the narrow zigzag band above this (8b) is inscribed Qur’an 9:33/61:9 (see above); in the following wide zigzag band (8c) appears the shahāda; and in the next narrow band (8d) is Qur’an 33:40, “Muhammad is not the father of your men, but [he is] the apostle of God, and the seal of the Prophets, and God has full knowledge of all things.” Allāh and Muhammad again appear on an open ground (8e), and above this, in the next narrow zigzag band (8f), is inscribed rādiyā Allāhu taʿālā ‘an Abī Bahr wa-‘Umar wa-‘Uthmān wa-‘Ali wa-‘an baqiyat al-sahāba ajma’in; the wide band above (8g) repeats the shahāda; and the repeat unit ends with Qur’an 33:56 (“God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet; o ye that believe, send ye blessings on him, and salute him with all respect”) inscribed in the last narrow zigzag band (8h). Inscriptions within the wide bands are outlined in red. The loom width of the textile has four repeat units—four chevrons or zigzags. That the Qur’anic verses in the narrow bands make particular reference to the Prophet is an indication that the textile was woven for the Ravza-æ Mutahhara.

Brown-ground textiles of the metal thread group likewise feature zigzag epigraphic designs that repeat after the eighth row (figs. 8 right and 9).33 Examples from this group are woven in kemha technique, with metal-wrapped silk thread used locally to highlight Allāh and Muhammad. After the appearance of these words on an expanse of open ground (8a), there follows rādiyā Allāhu taʿālā ‘an Abī Bahr wa-‘Umar wa-‘Uthmān wa-‘Ali wa-‘an baqiyat al-sahāba ajma’in in a narrow zigzag band (8b), the shahāda in a wide band (8c), and Qur’an 33:56 (see above) in the next narrow band (8d). Allāh and Muhammad are repeated on an expanse of open ground (8e), followed by a narrow band with Qur’an 9:33/61:9 (8f), a wide band (8g) with the shahāda, and a last narrow band (8h) with most of Qur’an 33:40 (see above). The loom width again comprises four repeat units. The selvages are blue. Terminating the dāl in Muhammad in the Allāh-Muhammad rows is a split-leaf, or rūmû, motif; such combining of script and vegetal ornament is characteristic of seventeenth-century Ottoman calligraphic art.

Certain textiles woven on a four-colored background without metal thread also have the characteristic eight-row epigraphic scheme of the metal-thread group. On one example (24/360), an inscription, sāhib al-khayrāt Amina Khatun (the benefactor Amina Khatun), embroidered on the textile in metal thread, implies that the fabric was donated by a charitable lady.

IV. Dated group

Two members (24/286, 24/288) of the fourth group of “Medina the Radiant” textiles have woven inscriptions that contain dates (figs. 10, 11, and 12 left). Both read as follows: al-rāji‘un shaфи‘at al-nabi Muhammad Rāshid bin Mustafā wa-‘Abū Bahr bin Husayn wa-Husayn bin Sulaymān, 1206 (Those who hope for intercession by the Prophet [are] Muhammad Rashid b. Mustafā, Abu Bakr b. Husayn, and Husayn b. Sulayman, 1206 [1791]).34 These inscriptions, contained within baroque frames, are repeated side by side across the width of the two textiles; they probably name the three usās (masters) who wove them. Floral motifs between the lines of script add a decorative touch. On the back of one of the two textiles (24/288) is an oval, gray-colored stamp, so rubbed that it is unreadable. Elsewhere there are two lines of script and three names written in fine reed pen, also illegible, as well as three circles drawn by the same pen. These circles appear on the back of the second dated example (24/286) as well. The woven inscriptions on the two textiles repeat as follows, reading upwards: (12a) Qur’an 112 (“Say: He is God the One and Only; God, the eternal, absolute; He begetteth not nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him”); (12b) Allāhumma sallī wa-sallim ‘alā ashraf al-anbiyā‘ wa ‘l-mursalīn (O God, bless and grant peace to the noblest of the prophets and messengers); (12c) the last lines of Qur’an 28:88, “To Him belongs the command, and to Him will ye be brought back”; (12d) Allāh wa-lā siwāku Allāh (God: there is none equal to Him. God); (12e) Qur’an 33:56 (see above); and (12f) the shahāda, after which Qur’an 112 recommences. On the back of another textile belonging to this group (24/1183) is written in pen Ahmed, Mustafa, Ibrahim hediyesidir (“a present from Ahmed, Mustafa, Ibrahim”), probably also a reference...
Fig. 7. Ravza-ı Mutahhara cover. Topkapı Palace Museum, 13/1659. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
Another textile (24/1643), categorized in this group since it is decorated with flowers and resembles the examples described above, is woven on a green ground and has a six-part repeat consisting of three wide and three narrow zigzag bands (figs. 12 right and 13). The epigraphic content of the bands is as follows: (12a) Allâhumma 'ašrâ’ Allâh al-‘aqq al-mubûn; Muhammad rasûl Allâh al-mâlik al-mâlik (There is no god but God, the Sovereign, the Truth, the Apparent; (12f) ‘Alî, Allâh, Abî Ablu’l-Walad, ‘Ilâ Allâh, ‘Abû-‘Abdûr Râzîq (Abraham, the Servant of Allâh, the Father of the Prophet, Allâh, the Father of the Servants of Allâh)).

Included in this dated group are two more examples, which also bear resemblance to a black kiswa textile in the Topkapî Palace Museum collection (24/997); all are ornamented with flowers between the inscriptions. Even though they exhibit the same design scheme as the other members of the group, one of them (24/2228) is wider (92 cm) than the rest, while the other (24/389) is woven on a pistachio-green ground. As a whole, this group shows characteristics of Ottoman decorative arts of the eighteenth century.

V. Hanging lamp group

The fifth group includes images of inscribed hanging lamps (figs. 14, 15). Three remaining examples from this group are now found in the form of large lengths of loom-width fabrics in the Topkapî Palace Museum collection. The epigraphic scheme repeats after the fourth row and, starting with the wide row of alternating lamps and circles, consists of yâ kârim yâ ghafrî ya râhîm yâ ghafrî (O Generous One, o All-Forgiving One, o Ever-Forgiving One) (15a); yâ bîn ‘Abbas twâsîlî bîn bîn ‘Abbâs (O, Ibn Abbas, as the son of the uncle of the Beloved [Prophet], who is the master of the sons of Adnan, and as the teller of hadith and the interpreter of the Qur’ân, we plead of you to transmit our prayers and our requests to our Prophet) (15b); Allâhumma lâ khayrî illâ khayra al-‘âkhirah (O God, there is no benevolence other than that of the other world) (15c); and finally (15d), lâ ilâha illâ Allâh al-mâlik al-‘aqq al-mubûn; Muhammad rasûl Allâh ‘âdiq al-wâdî ‘âdiq (There is no God but God, the Sovereign, the Truth, the Apparent; Muhammad is the Prophet of God, faithful to the sure promise.) This group differs from the others in design scheme. The example illustrated, apparently a special length woven to honor Ibn ‘Abbas, is unusual in bearing no Qur’ânic verses. A similar textile is preserved in the Textiles Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum.
Fig. 9. Ravza-i Mutahhara cover. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/358. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
VI. Unflowered dark green group
Members of the sixth group of Ravza-ı Mutahhara textiles display inscriptions without floral decoration on dark green grounds. Some include the words wa-lā siwāhu (and there is no equal to Him); others do not have this formula but follow the same organization. The inscription program of the example illustrated, 24/386 (fig. 16), begins after 2 cm of unpatterned cloth and repeats after the fourth zigzag band. The zigzag pattern unit occurs twice across the loom width. The epigraphic program is as follows: the first wide band is inscribed Allāh rabbī wa-lā siwāhu, Muhammad habīb Allāh (God is my Lord and there is no equal to Him; Muhammad is the beloved of God); the narrow zigzag band above it reads rādiya Allāhu ta‘ālā ‘an Abī Bakr wa-‘Umar wa-‘Uthmān wa-‘Alī wa-‘an baqīyyat al-salāhāba ajma‘īn; the second wide band reads al-salātu wa ‘l-salāmu ‘alayka ya rasūl Allāh (Blessings and peace upon thee, o Messenger of God); and the final narrow band is inscribed Allāhumma ‘alāsallim ‘alā ashraf jamāl al-anbiyā‘ wa ‘l-mursalin (O God, bless and grant peace to the noblest of all the prophets and messengers). Textiles of this group including wa-lā siwāhu are quite numerous in the Topkapı Palace Museum collection.

A second example, (24/382), has different inscriptions that nevertheless follow the same scheme (fig. 17), including two zigzags width-wise and four rows of inscriptions per repeat unit. In the wide lower band (17a) appears Qur’an 33:40, followed by the
Fig. 11. Ravza-i Mutahhara cover with dated inscription. Topkapi Palace Museum, 24/286. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapi Palace Museum)
shahada (17b), Qur'an 33:56 (17c), and finally (17d) Allahu salli 'alai Muhammad wa 'alihi wa sahabihin wa sallim (O God, bless Muhammad, his family, and his Companions).

VII. Metal thread dark green group
The seventh group comprises coarser textiles with designs woven in metal thread on dark green grounds. One of the examples in this group (24/298) carries a design scheme that starts with an open triangular area below a wide zigzag band between two narrower ones (fig. 18). In the triangular area (18a) is inscribed Allah Muhammad Allah rabbi (God, Muhammad, God. My Lord); in the following narrow band (18b) is radiya Allahu ta'alii 'an Abi Bakr wa-Umar wa-Uthman wa-Alwi wa-an bajiyat al-sahaba ajma'in; in the wide band (18c) appears the shahada; and in the final narrow band (18d) is part of Qur'an 2:144, "We see the turning of thy face to the heavens: now shall We turn thee
to a qibla that shall please thee. Turn then thy face
in the direction of the sacred Mosque: wherever ye
are, turn your faces in that direction...." This kind of
cloth, with its coarse texture and relatively careless
calligraphy, dates from a later period and was not
frequently used for the Ravza-i Mutahhara.

VIII. Jacquard-woven group
The last group of green-ground textiles comprises those woven on the Jacquard looms of the imperial Izmit-Herce factory. One example (24/631), in the form of an unused roll of cloth (figs. 19 and 20 left), typifies the late-nineteenth-century production on these mechanized looms. The epigraphic program is as follows: Allahu rabbi wa-lisiwah, Muhammad habib Allah (20a); wa-radiya Allahu ta'alii 'an Abi Bakr wa-Umar wa-Uthman wa-'Ali wa-an bajiyat al-sahaba ajma'in (20b); al-salatu wa-l-salamu 'alayka ya rasul Allah (20c); and finally Allahumma salli wa-sallim 'alai ashraf jamii' wa la-anbiya' wa-l-mursalin (20d). A second example from this group (24/1198) is in the form of a panel framed by another textile (fig. 20 right).

Red-ground Ravza-i Mutahhara textiles
As stated above, among the textiles woven for the Ravza-i Mutahhara are also examples woven on red grounds.

IX. Pot-shaped medallion group (and X. Added-band group)
Among red-ground textiles, those belonging to the pot-shaped medallion group (as well as to the added-band group, examples of which are not illustrated here) exhibit the shahada in one of the wide bands, with narrow bands below and above containing Qur'an 112 (see above) and 108, "To thee have We granted the fountain; therefore to thy Lord turn in prayer and sacrifice, for he who hateth thee will be cut off," respectively. The second wide band contains rumi-embellished pot-shaped medallions with Allah and Muhammad inscribed within and above or below them. In the Topkapı Palace Museum collection, two fragments (24/452 and 24/453—see fig. 21) are part of the same textile. A second example of the group (24/647-90, not illustrated) has the same pattern and epigraphic scheme but exhibits more simplified outlines and lower weaving quality. A third example (24/481, not illustrated), also of lower quality, has blossoms resembling multi-armed stars between the
Fig. 13. Ravza-i Mutahhara cover. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/1643. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
Fig. 14. Textile invoking Ibn ‘Abbas. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/2153. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
inscriptions. Two cords stitched onto this textile indicate that it was used as a curtain. It is made up of four pieces of similar type.

Another example (13/1647) has the same composition as other members of the group, including six zigzag-repeat units across the loom width (fig. 22). Since both the calligraphy and the outlining are no longer as meticulous and the silk texture is of lower quality, we may consider this an example of early-eighteenth-century production.

XI. Dominant metal thread group
The example representing this group (24/528) displays zigzag designs woven entirely in silver-wrapped silk thread on a red ground; the technical repeat unit comprises six rows of inscriptions, and appears twice across the loom width (fig. 23). In the lowest narrow band is Qur’an 112; in the wide band above it appears Allâhumma salli wa-sallim ‘alâ ashraf al-anbiyâ’ wa ‘l-mursalin; following this in the narrow band is the end of Qur’an 28:88 (see above). The next wide band is inscribed Allâh wa-lâ siwâhu Allâh; above this is Qur’an 33:56; and in the top wide band is the shahâda. This example is one of eight extant pieces of a single unique textile; that it contains so much silver and was processed for firmness after weaving suggests that it was a special commission.

XII. Pink-ground group
This group is represented by a textile approximately 4 m in length (24/482). Two zigzag-repeat units are placed width-wise; there are six bands of inscriptions per repeat unit. The epigraphic program, proceeding upward from the first wide band, is (1) Allâhumma sallî wa-sallîm ‘alî ashraf al-anbiyâ’ wa ‘l-mursalin; (2) Qur’an 28:88; (3) Allâh wa-lâ siwâhu Allâh; (4) Qur’an 33:56; (5) the shahâda; and (6) Qur’an 112. In disposition of inscriptions, this example resembles the dated group of green-ground textiles (24/286 and 24/288).

XIII. Orange on pink-ground group
From the end of the nineteenth century onwards there are signs of an accelerated search for innovation in inscribed fabrics. There is no longer adherence to the accustomed colors: in one example (24/516), unique in the collection, orange designs are woven on a pink ground. This textile is in two pieces, with bright green satin lining and edging. The epigraphic scheme on the cloth is as follows: (1) wa râdiya Allâh ta’âlâ ‘an Abî Bakr wa ‘Umar wa ‘Uthmân wa ‘Ali wa ‘an baqiyyat al-sahâba; (2) al-salâtu wa ‘l-salâm ala yâ rasûl Allâh; Allâhumma sallî wa sallîm ‘alî ashraf al-anbiyâ’ wa ‘l-mursalin; (3) râbi‘ Allâh wa-lâ siwâhu Muhammad habib Allâh.

XIV. Jacquard-woven group

Of the epigraphic textiles made for Mecca or Medina, those woven on green grounds are generally associated with Medina and those on red grounds with Mecca. There are, however, red-ground textiles that bear Qur’anic verses related to Medina; hence it is incorrect to infer the intended destination of these textiles solely on the basis of their color. More relevant in their differentiation is the content of their Qur’anic verses—whether they refer to the Ka’ba or the Prophet.

Regarding disposition of these textiles after their
Fig. 16. Ravza-ı Mutahhara cover. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/386. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
use in the Haramayn, these sacred silks were traditionally distributed among the sharif (ruler of Mecca), the Banu Shayba (gatekeepers of the Ka’ba), and other Meccan notables, who cut the textiles into pieces and sold them to rich pilgrims, in compliance with the above-mentioned tradition.\(^50\)

During the reign of Sultan Murad IV, for instance, a certain Ridwan Bey of Egyptian origin undertook the restoration of the Ka’ba, and in return for his service was offered a Ka’ba cover at the time it was to be replaced; apparently, however, he refused this gift. Due to this practice of distribution (which was similar for the Medinan textiles), the black *kiswa* that clothed the Ka’ba, the red epigraphic zigzag covers used in its interior, and the green silken covers for the *Ravza-i Mutahhara* came into widespread possession and are now in museums and private collections. Gold-embroidered religious textiles such as the curtains woven for the Ka’ba door or the Ka’ba belt itself unfortunately did not fare as well: many were taken apart and the gold they contained melted down.

Other such textiles, however, were forwarded to Istanbul and kept in the imperial palace. Uzunçarşılı reports:

> It was set by code that the *kiswa* for the Ka’ba in Mecca and the *Ravza-i Mutahhara* in Medina were to be renewed and that the used *kiswas* were to be brought back to Istanbul by the Emir of Mecca at the time of the accession ceremonies of the Ottoman sultans (cülus). These *kiswas* traveled back by land until they reached Üsküdar, where they were taken up ceremoniously and brought to Eyyub by sea to the tomb of Halid. From there, a cortege led by the ulema, shaykhs, sayyids, and high officials, accompanied by repetitive choral pronouncements affirming the greatness and uniqueness of Allah (*tekbir* and *tehlil*) brought the religious textiles to the palace following an itinerary that passed through Edirnekapi. Since [the historian] Selaniki records such a procession in his chronicle of 1005 (1556), it appears that this tradition may be of a much earlier date.\(^51\)

The upkeep of the covers brought back to the palace was among the duties of the *Avadancalar*,\(^52\) supervised by the Treasury Steward (*Hazine Kethüdası*). Incidentally, a rumor once spread that Mehmed Bey, who in 1855 was a Keeper of the Privy Purse in the sultan’s household, had stolen the jewels on the Holy Relics and had some of the *sure* textiles thrown into a well in the palace and the rest into the sea off Sarayburnu. He was arrested in the palace, all the viziers were called to court and shown the Holy Relics, and it was
Fig. 19. Textile length (unused roll) made for the Ravza-i Mutahhara. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/631. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
confirmed that nothing was missing. What had actually happened was that Mehmed Bey, in his efforts to tidy up the Imperial Treasury, had inquired of the Saray Hocası (sultan’s advisor) about “what to do with the religious covers and their wrappings brought back to the palace, since they formed a large bulk,” and in accordance with the hoca’s reply he had them thrown away. This defense notwithstanding, Mehmed Bey was exiled to Cyprus, where he served his sentence as a prisoner in the castle (kalebend).53

The religious textiles we have been considering, which have survived in relatively well-preserved condition, are now registered in the Holy Relics Department of the Topkapı Palace Museum, having previously been kept in the Hırka-i Saadet (Holy Mantle) Department of the Armory Treasury (Silahdar Hazinesi)54 and then transferred to the creamery (yağhane) of the Palace Kitchens after it was restored and transformed into the Costume and Textile Depot of the museum (1959–60).55

The duty of sending the sârre procession, which had originally been given to the Darüssaade Ağalari (Chief Black Eunuchs) and financed by the Haramayn endowments of the Enderun (inner court of the Imperial Palace) from 1587 onwards, was transferred to the Haremeyn Evkaf Nezareti (Secretary of Haramayn Endowments) in 1836.56 Hence there are covers and documents related to the sârre in the archives of the Turkish Republic Prime Ministry, the Topkapı Palace Museum, and the General Directorate of Pious Endowments. It is not only the covers that are widely scattered and found in pieces; the same is true of the documentation relating to them. For example, a Ka’ba curtain and belt are kept in the Pious Endowments Calligraphic Arts Museum in Beyazıt, Istanbul, whereas there are materials for another Ka’ba curtain, some kiswa, and bands for separating curtains in the Pious Endowments Directorate in Ankara, in the form of unused rolls.57 If we take into consideration the pieces distributed to mosques and mausoleums as well as those in private houses and museums of various countries, the total number of these covers must be much greater than we have so far been able to record.58

Reuses of the Haramayn textiles

Some of the covers brought back from the Haramayn are intact, while others are in pieces. During the month of the Great Pilgrimage (Hacca Ekber), when the Friday sermon was delivered in Istanbul at the same time as on Mount Arafat near Mecca, the covers were kept

Fig. 20. Technical repeat unit of Topkapı Palace Museum 24/631 (left) and 24/1198 (right). (Author’s schematic rendering)
whole, while later they might be torn or cut up and distributed to pilgrims, mosques, and tombs, or framed and hung, or reused as *puside* (coffin covers). 59

Their most frequent form of reuse was as coffin covers: they were placed either at the head of coffins or fully covering them. Coffin covers now in the Topkapı Palace Museum deserve attention for the labels on their linings, which allow us to decipher that they came from the coffins of, e.g., Murad and ‘Abdullah, sons of Süleyman I, and Hatice Sultan, daughter of Selim I (24/401, 24/403, 24/404). These coffins are in the Şehzadeler Türbesi (Tomb of the Royal Princes), built in 1522–23 in the courtyard of Selim I’s mosque in Istanbul. 59 There are many other religious textiles in the Topkapı Palace Museum that are likewise classified as coffin covers but that lack labels. 61

Manuscript paintings in various private and museum collections provide visual evidence of the reuse of Haramayn textiles as coffin covers. In the *Tartf-i Sultân Süleymnâ of the Suleymanname* of Lokman, for instance, there is a depiction of the funeral of Süleyman I, showing the cortege to his türbe in the courtyard of the Süleymaniye Mosque, where the sultan is to be buried. The coffin is covered with a piece of a black kiswa and a red textile of the sort used in the interior of the Ka’ba. 62 A similar reuse of Haramayn textiles as coffin covers is shown in numerous other late-sixteenth-century illustrated manuscripts. 63

In addition to coffin covers, the Topkapı Palace Museum collection also includes coffin sheaths—made to wrap coffins rather than simply covering their tops—that feature zigzag textiles. One such coffin sheath (24/900) includes three different fragments of zigzag design, all dating from the sixteenth century, with black, red, and brown grounds. The label of the sheath indicates that it was made for the coffin of one of the
Fig. 22. Ravza-ı Mutahhara cover. Topkapı Palace Museum, 13/1647. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
Fig. 23. *Ravza-i Mutahhara* cover. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/528. (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
Fig. 24. Qur’an case made from a Ravza-ı Mutahhara cover. Topkapı Palace Museum, 24/648 (Author’s photo: used with permission of the Topkapı Palace Museum)
two sons of Muhyyiddin al-‘Arabi (the renowned Ibn al-‘Arabi, d. 1240), who with their sister are buried in their father’s türbe in Salihîyya, Damascus. 64

The next most frequent reuse of these religious textiles is in the form of pieces cut into either rectangular or square shapes, lined, bordered in silk satin, and hung on walls (13/1637).

A short kaftan made of a textile woven for the Ravza-æ Mutahhara (13/1658) is unique in its design scheme, consisting of pear-shaped medallions, a narrow zigzag band with a Kufic inscription, a wide zigzag band, and another narrow zigzag band, repeated in order on a dark brownish-green ground. The pear-shaped medallions are decorated in cream and red and richly outlined in rım; inside the medallion is inscribed woo-ka'f bi’llah shahidan Mu¥ammad ras¢l All¸h (and God is sufficient as a witness [the end of Qur}an 4:79]; Muhammad is the Prophet of God). The wide zigzag band contains the shah¸da; in the narrow band below is radiya All¸hu ta{¸l¸ {an Abº Bakr wa-{Umar wa-Uthm¸n wa-Ali wa-an baqiyat al-sahaba ajma‘in; and in the band above appears Qur}an 9:33/61:9. The shah¸da is woven in cream outlined in red, as are the zigzag bands bordering the inscriptions.

Among the other reused religious textiles in the collection is a cushion woven on red-ground silk (24/646); a key bag made from a textile of the palmette group (I) on a dark brownish-green ground (24/2005);65 a skull-cap from red-ground cloth of the pot-shaped medallion group (IX), to which has been added a narrow zigzag band (13/972);66 and a Qur’an case (24/648) from fabric of the dated group (IV) (fig. 24).67 Such items enrich the Topkapæ Palace Museum collection alongside Haramayn textiles in their original form.

CONCLUSION

The textiles considered in this article, prepared for and sent to the Haramayn in the name of the Ottoman state, can be of a quality equal to that of textiles woven for the palace. In function, however, they belong to a separate category: their carefully chosen inscriptions—consisting of prayers, hadith, and Qur’anic verses—relate to the holy places where they were used. The Qur’anic texts we have encountered in the collection holdings of Ravza-æ Mutahhara textiles are as follows:

Qur’an 2 (Baqara): 144
Qur’an 4 (Nisā‘): 79
Qur’an 9 (Tawba): 33, identical in wording to 61:9
Qur’an 61 (Saff): 9
Qur’an 16 (Nahl): 123
Qur’an 28 (Qisá‘): 88
Qur’an 33 (Ahzâb): 40, 56
Qur’an 48 (Fatih): 28
Qur’an 55 (Rahmán): 26, 27
Qur’an 108 (Kawthar)
Qur’an 112 (Ikhlás)

The scripts used include Kufic, naskh, thuluth, and monumental thuluth. The inscriptions were probably prepared by the calligraphers of the era and passed on to the textile designers for incorporation into the zigzag format; empty spaces in the inscriptions were often filled in with smaller floral patterns to balance the writing, in keeping with considerations of full and void space characteristic of all Ottoman decorative arts. The decline of Ottoman weaving in general from the eighteenth century onwards—the decrease in weft and warp counts, design deterioration, loss of color consistency, and lessening of silk quality—is reflected in these textiles. The use of Jacquard looms to weave nineteenth-century examples both increased and accelerated their production.

While the presence on earlier examples of palmette motifs and Kufic script reflects Mamluk influence, the introduction of floral ornamentation and cursive inscriptions, the increase in the number of technical repeat units, and the elongation of the designs are characteristically Ottoman developments.

In conclusion, the religious textiles considered here, some of them, according to the documentation quoted above by Faroqhi,68 woven in Egypt, and others in Istanbul and eventually Hereke, reflect imperial Ottoman taste from the sixteenth century onward—an indication that their designs were prepared by the nakka×hane (court designers’ workshop) before being sent elsewhere to be woven. Consideration of the designs, patterning, and content and distribution of the inscriptions allows us to trace the artistic development of these religious covers from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

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NOTES

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5. Ibid., 337.


11. Atalar, Osmanlı devleti’nde sure-ayaları, 22.


13. Faroqhi, Pilgrims and Sultans, 76.


16. Ibid., 89.


19. Faroqhi, Pilgrims and Sultans, 121. The documents to which she refers are the registers entitled Mühidime Defterleri (MD) and Mühidime Zeyli (MZ) in the Başbakanlık Arşivi, Istanbul: MD 31: 83, no. 212 (985/1577–78); MZ 3: 265 (984/1576–77); MD 73: 562, no. 1226 (1005/1594–95).

20. Lampas is a compound weave that consists of two weave structures, each with its own set of warps and of wefts, that are interconnected to form one fabric. The preferred Ottoman Turkish lampas structure combines a 4/1 satin weave (in which the warps dominate to form the ground of the textile) with a 1/3 twill weave (in which the wefts dominate to form the pattern) interlaced in the Z direction.


22. Inventory nos. 24/1152, 24/1153, 24/1189, 24/1192, 24/365, 24/366, and 24/647-154 are also pieces from the same textile.

23. 24/365: 29.5 x 81 cm (length x width: dimensions appear in this order throughout the notes), selvages included; right selavage 0.7 cm, left selvage 0.4 cm. See Hülya Tezcan, Astar al-Haramayn al-sharîfîyân, trans. Tahir Ömer Tahtaoğlu (Istanbul: IRCICA Yayınları, 1996), 115.


25. 24/241: 185 x 126 cm. For an illustration, see Tezcan, Estatal Harameyn-i serifîyân, 115.

26. E.g., 24/647-102: 32 x 82 cm, selvages included; both selvages 0.4 cm.

27. 24/343: 21 x 84 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.5 cm. For a kaftan made of this textile, also in the Topkapı Palace collection (13/1658), see Nurhan Atasoy, et al., İpek: Osmanlı dokuma sanati (London: TEB Yayınları, 2001), 20 (published in English as idem, İpek: Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvets [London: Aizmuth Editions Limited, 2001]: see 20, fig. 9 [detail] and 296, fig. 281).

28. 24/397: entire curtain 356 X 260 cm; embroidered panel 143 x 88 cm. The importance of this curtain, which is not illustrated here since it is very dilapidated, is in the name it bears; following Hülya Tezcan’s suggestion I have therefore discussed it.

29. 24/2001: entire curtain 209 x 146 cm; embroidered panel 140 x 87 cm.

30. 24/272: entire curtain 345 x 266 cm; embroidered panel 195 x 130 cm. For an illustration, see Tezcan, Astar al-Haramayn al-sharîfîyân, 117.

31. 24/271: entire curtain 336 x 243 cm; embroidered panel 190 x 124 cm. For an illustration, see Tezcan, Astar al-Haramayn al-sharîfîyân, 124.

32. 13/1659: 240 x 68 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.4 cm; technical repeat unit 82 x 17 cm. For another illustration, see Tezcan, Astar al-Haramayn al-sharîfîyân, 71; Hülya Tezcan, “Padişah kaftanları, kumaşlar, halâlar ve kutsal örterüler,” in Filiz Çağman and Hülya Tezcan, Topkapı Sarayı (İstanbul: Akbank Yayınları, 2000), 304.

33. 24/358: 83 x 77.5 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.4 cm; technical repeat unit 81 x 20 cm. For similar examples, see Hülya Tezcan, “Costumes and Textiles,” Arts of Asia 31, 6 (2001): 75.

34. Generally the names of Ottoman weavers are not found on their work; these examples are exceptional.


36. There are also pieces found under inventory nos. 24/2153, 24/2151, 24/2152.

37. Acc. no. 1064/1990: 67 x 67 cm; right selvage 0.3 cm; left sel-
vage 0.4 cm; 3 cm unpatterned area at bottom.

38. 24/386: 125 cm x 66.5 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.5 cm; technical repeat unit 59 x 33 cm. Other examples with the same design scheme in the Topkapı Palace Museum collection are 24/377, 24/385, and 24/384. For pieces of similar design, see Savas ve bars (catalogue of an exhibition held at the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi, June 29–Sept. 20, 1999) (Istanbul, 1999), 127 (a textile in the Cracow National Museum, inv. no. XIX-7261).

39. 24/382: 142 x 66 cm (selvages included); selvages 0.6 cm; technical repeat unit 58 x 32 cm.


41. 24/630: 250 x 68 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.4 cm; technical repeat unit 55 x 33.5 cm. During the part of my research carried out at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, I recorded twenty-one examples of these red or green chevron-design textiles, three of which were on display.

42. 24/481: 212 x 310 cm (total composite width, selvages 0.5 cm; technical repeat unit 50 x 14 cm.

43. 24/482: 383 x 67 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.4 cm; technical repeat unit 88 x 33 cm. There is a textile (24/647-86: 71.5 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.7 cm; technical repeat unit 58 cm x 32 cm).

44. 24/483: 27 x 63 cm) of the same design scheme as this example but technical repeat unit 24 x 12.5 cm.

45. 24/484: 27 x 63 cm (selvages included); selvages 0.3 cm; technical repeat unit 48 x 12.5 cm.

46. 24/485: 34 x 75 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.6 cm; technical repeat unit 24/412, 24/413, 24/414, 24/415, 24/416, 24/417, 24/418, 24/419, 24/420, 24/421, 24/422, 24/423, 24/424, 24/425, 24/426, 24/427, 24/428, 24/429, 24/430, 24/431, 24/432, 24/433.

47. 24/486: 34 x 75 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.6 cm; technical repeat unit 24 x 12.5 cm.

48. 24/487: 34 x 75 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.6 cm; technical repeat unit 24 x 12.5 cm.

49. 24/488: 34 x 75 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.6 cm; technical repeat unit 24 x 12.5 cm.

50. 24/489: 34 x 75 cm, selvages included; selvages 0.6 cm; technical repeat unit 24 x 12.5 cm.

51. ~smail Hakki Uzunçarşılı, 119; also see n. 17, above.


53. Ibid., 76; also see n. 17, above.


58. In the painting of the funeral of Ibrahim Pasha, from vol. 2 of the Hürremâne, Topkapı Palace Library, H. 1524, fol. 165b; and of the funeral of Valide Sultan Nur Banu, from vol. 2 of the Şehîsvâhîne, Topkapı Palace Museum, B 290, fol. 146a; and see also And, Minyatür, 233, 235.


60. See, e.g., the Chester Beatty Library Tarihi Sultân Süleyman, CBL T.413, fols. 113b–114a. Also see Metin And, Minyatür, (Istanbul: Türkçe İş Bankası, 2002), 232; Atasoy et. al., Ipek, 24.


62. See, e.g., the Chester Beatty Library Tarûf-i Sultan Süleyman, CBL T.413, fols. 113b–114a. Also see Metin And, Minyatür, (Istanbul: Türkçe İş Bankası, 2002), 232; Atasoy et. al., Ipek, 24.

63. E.g., in the painting of the funeral of Ibrahim Pasha, from vol. 2 of the Hürremâne, Topkapı Palace Library, H. 1524, fol. 165b; and of the funeral of Valide Sultan Nur Banu, from vol. 2 of the Şehîsvâhîne, Topkapı Palace Museum, B 290, fol. 146a; and see also And, Minyatür, 233, 235.


68. See n. 19, above.
SO DESPICABLE A VESSEL: REPRESENTATIONS OF TAMERLANE IN PRINTED BOOKS OF THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

Of all the great warriors who swept across Central Asia and the Middle East in the medieval period, Tamerlane is arguably the one who had the most enduring impact on the culture of Renaissance and early modern Europe. The achievements of Tamerlane seem to have both fascinated and horrified European audiences and, from the middle of the fifteenth century to the early nineteenth, he appears in numerous histories and biographical encyclopedias, as well as in plays by the likes of Marlowe, Racine, and Rowe; operas by Vivaldi, Scarlatti, and Handel; and even a ballet.

In addition, representations of Tamerlane are to be found in paintings, tapestries, prints, and drawings. That this fearsome ruler was invoked as a kind of "bogeyman" is indicated by a passage in an essay of Michel de Montaigne (d. 1592), Of Repentance:

The value of the soul consists not in flying high, but in an orderly pace. Its grandeur is exercised not in greatness, but in mediocrity. As those who judge and touch us inwardly make little account of the brilliance of our public acts, and see that these are only thin streams and jets of water spurting from a bottom otherwise muddy and thick; so likewise those who judge of us by this brave outward appearance draw similar conclusions about our inner constitution, and cannot associate common faculties, just like their own, with these other faculties that astonish them and are so far beyond their scope. So we give demons wild shapes. And who does not give Tamerlane raised eyebrows, open nostrils, a dreadful face, and immense size, like the size of the imaginary picture of him we have formed from the renown of his name?

Montaigne’s comments suggest that there existed a popular notion of the physical characteristics of the Asian conqueror, but his brief notes do not allow us to reconstruct exactly how Tamerlane was represented in the visual and dramatic arts of Renaissance and early modern Europe. In this article I will focus on the ways in which Tamerlane was depicted in printed books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although not an exhaustive survey of the available printed material, the present selection provides a representative sample of the images found in the historical treatises, biographical dictionaries, plays, and accounts written by travelers to the Middle East and Central Asia. While these woodcut “portraits” of Tamerlane vary considerably in their quality of execution, they are important because, with the possible exception of the public performance of plays, it was through the medium of printed books that visual representations of Tamerlane were most widely circulated among the literate society of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. This level of circulation may be contrasted with the much smaller audiences that would have seen paintings or tapestries in private houses and palaces.

The article argues that this group of printed representations provides important evidence for the prevalent beliefs concerning the ethnicity and character of Tamerlane. Much of this information is communicated to the viewer by means of costume, facial features, and facial hair, and the article seeks to identify the potential sources for these details. The images are designed to complement texts, but, in most cases, they do not function as direct illustrations of specific passages of writing. Significantly, those sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books that contain illustrations of Tamerlane do not tend to provide written descriptions of the physical appearance of the man. Indeed, few European authors from the fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth furnish their audience with anything but the briefest information on this issue, preferring instead to focus upon the presentation of Tamerlane’s life and accomplishments. What does appear in these texts, however, is a discussion of his origins and an assessment of the ways in which...
his deeds—both good and bad—reflected the essential qualities of his character. In the last section of the article, the representations of Tamerlane are considered in the context of physiognomic treatises and Renaissance and early modern scholarship on the history and peoples of Asia.

TAMERLANE AND EARLY EUROPEAN SCHOLARSHIP

The biography of Tamerlane can be briefly sketched out. He was born into the Barlas clan in the region of Samarqand in the 1320s or 1330s. The clan formed part of the ulus Chaghatay, a confederation formed around the family of the second son of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan (d. 1227) that occupied an extensive but loosely defined area east of the Oxus River. The Barlas claimed descent from an important amir during the reign of the great thirteenth-century conqueror Chinggis but had no royal ancestry. Allegiance to the Chinggisid legacy remained a central component of Tamerlane’s political identity, and even at the zenith of his power he scrupulously avoided using the Mongol title of khan (i.e., ruler).5 Tamerlane first came to prominence in the 1360s, possessing a following of powerful figures in both the Barlas clan and other tribal groups of the ulus Chaghatay. Having established his overall command of the ulus Chaghatay by 1379, Tamerlane set out on a series of campaigns of conquest that took him beyond his native Transoxiana to the areas southeast of Lake Balkash, west into Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia, north into the lands around the Aral sea, northwest into Khwarazm and the lands of the Golden Horde, and south into Afghanistan and northern India. His last major victory was over the forces of Ottoman sultan Bayazid, at Sivas in August 1400, reached London in February of the following year. According to the merchants who carried the story to England, the Turkish sultan had been killed and the victorious Asian king had, with 60,000 of his people, accepted Christianity.10 This curious revival of the legend of Prester John,11 the mythical Christian king beyond the borders of the Islamic world, also brings to mind the numerous thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century European accounts of the apparent conversion of the Mongol khans to Christianity. The belief that a powerful Asian Christian ruler might aid in the eradication of Muslim rule in the Holy Land had prompted a flurry of diplomatic activity between Europe and the Mongol khanates.12 In a similar manner, information about Tamerlane made its way to the courts of Europe as the result of diplomatic missions sent east in the decade before the great conqueror’s death in 1405. Charles VI of France had sent Dominican emissaries to Tamerlane in 1396, while Ruy Gonzalez di Clavijo, the representative of Henry III of Castille, arrived in the imperial capital Samarqand in 1403–4.13 For all its value to modern histori-
ans, Clavijo’s account of his meeting with Tamerlane enjoyed a relatively limited readership in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.\textsuperscript{14}

It is worth asking, therefore, how an informed European reader of the sixteenth or early seventeenth century would have gained an understanding of the biographical details of Tamerlane. Modern scholarship on the historical Timur makes use of primary written sources, particularly in Persian and Arabic, but these did not become available to European writers before the second quarter of the seventeenth century;\textsuperscript{15} the first translated editions of the key historical sources, Ibn ‘Arabshah and Sharaf al-Din Yazdi (d. 1454), were not published in Europe until 1636 and 1722, respectively.\textsuperscript{16} Accounts of Tamerlane, and particularly of his dealings with the Ottoman sultan Bayazid I, also appear in the works of Turkish chroniclers.\textsuperscript{17} A handful of sixteenth-century European scholars exploited such sources directly,\textsuperscript{18} but for the remainder information from the Turkish histories was mediated through the works of Byzantine authors,\textsuperscript{19} most importantly Laonikos Chalkokondyles (d. ca. 1490). His history was printed in a Latin translation by Conrad Clauser in 1556,\textsuperscript{20} but it is possible that the émigré Greek Theodore Spandounes (Spandugino) consulted the original Greek text in manuscript form before this date. The history of Doukas (d. 1462) remained in manuscript form until it was edited by I. Bullialdus in Paris in 1649.\textsuperscript{21} It is not known whether George Phrantzes’ (or Sphrantzes, d. 1477) history was read by any Italian, German, French, or English authors of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{22}

There are also important accounts left by Europeans who had direct experience of the Middle East and Central Asia in the early fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{23} For instance, Johannes Schiltberger (d. after 1427) was held as a captive by Tamerlane’s army between 1402 and 1405, and this episode forms part of his travel account, which was first published in Ulm in ca. 1473.\textsuperscript{24} The audience for Schiltberger’s writings remained restricted to readers of German and, as far as I have been able to ascertain, is not cited by historians working in Italy, France, and England. Other potential sources of information were also neglected.\textsuperscript{25}

Two writers with first-hand knowledge of the Ottoman Empire did influence the development of European historical writing. Giovanni Angiolello had served from 1470 as a slave of Mehmed II and then in the Ottoman army. He escaped in 1481 and later composed his \textit{Historia turchesca}, which deals with events from 1300 to 1514. This text remained in manuscript form until the twentieth century but was probably consulted by several scholars in early-sixteenth-century Italy.\textsuperscript{26} Niccolò Sagundino (d. 1463 or 1464) had been captured by the Turks in Thessalonika in 1430 and held captive for thirteen months. In 1456 he composed the \textit{Liber de familia Autumanorum id est Turcarum liber} (also known as \textit{De origine et gestis Turcarum liber}) for Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II, d. 1464).\textsuperscript{27} Although this work was not printed until 1551, Piccolomini used the manuscript in the composition of his influential \textit{Asiae Europaeae elegantissima descrip-tio} (first published in 1509).\textsuperscript{28}

The main elements of the biography of Tamerlane were codified in Italy in the first half of the sixteenth century. By the middle of the century authors in other parts of Europe made their own contributions, either as new compositions or as translations of the Italian histories. This European “biography” of Tamerlane has very little to do with records of events found in the Middle Eastern or even Greek sources, and Italian, French, German, and English historians also made limited use of the first-hand accounts provided by countrymen who actually spent time in the Middle East or Central Asia from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{29} Instead, these authors relied upon a small body of shared information, freely borrowing one another’s ornamentations to the basic narrative. In addition to Piccolomini’s text, they also utilized brief accounts of Tamerlane provided in other Italian sources.\textsuperscript{30} Seen from the perspective of the modern scholar of Central Asian history, these often-fanciful works have almost no merit, but they are of much greater importance for the understanding of how Tamerlane was perceived and the ways in which he was given visual form in plays, paintings, tapestries, drawings, and printed books.

The sixteenth-century literature on Tamerlane has been reviewed in greater detail elsewhere,\textsuperscript{31} but some of the main points can be summarized here. Perhaps the most important of the early printed histories is that of Andrea Cambini (d. 1527), \textit{Della origine de Turchi}, published in Florence in 1529,\textsuperscript{32} for it brought together almost all the elements of the European biography and influenced the development of most later works. Cambini takes details from Palmieri and Piccolomini but adds several more that are his own invention. His account forms the basis of descriptions of the life of Tamerlane written by such authors as Pierre de la Primaudaye (d. 1542), Pedro Mexia (d. ca. 1552), Caelius
Curio (d. 1567), Christopher Richier (fl. sixteenth century), and Petrus Perondini (fl. sixteenth century). Although the bishop and historian Paolo Giovio (d. 1552) is known to have made use of a wide range of oral testimony and written sources in the composition of his writings on Turkish history and the biographies of Ottoman sultans, he relied for his treatment of Tamerlane upon the Italian histories of Cambini and his predecessors and provides little that is novel. The mid-sixteenth century also saw the publication (or republication in revised form) of older works by Saghirdino and Spandugino. Later authors who make use of the traditional account of the life of Tamerlane include André Thevet (d. 1590), Philip Lonicer (d. 1599), Jean Boissard (d. 1602), Jean du Bec (d. 1610), and Richard Knolles (d. 1610).

What emerged from these works was a vision of Tamerlane that continued to have a pervasive influence even after the publication of more reliable historical works in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Greek. The “European-version” Tamerlane was a Scythian or Tartar, born of poor parents, who spent the early part of his career as a shepherd (or sometimes as a sheep rustler or soldier). Through his courage, energy, military genius, and sheer force of personality, he was able to assemble an army that set out on a series of military conquests. While he was able to instill a rigid sense of discipline within his army, his campaigns were marked by acts of barbarous cruelty, including the slaughter of unarmed women and children. His most famous victory, over the Ottoman army, led to the capture of Bayazid I. The sultan was kept in chains (some accounts claim these were made of gold) within an iron cage, and was forced to feed like a dog on scraps under the table. Many accounts claim that Tamerlane used Bayazid as a block when he mounted his horse. Tamerlane was able to use slaves and the riches from his conquests to construct the magnificent city of Samarkand. In his later life he became accustomed to luxury and debauchery and, on his death, his empire fell into ruin.

REPRESENTATIONS IN PRINTED BOOKS

“Portraits”

The first group of images can be classified under the general category of portraits, in that their focus is the appearance of Tamerlane without any attempt to introduce a narrative component. Of course, none of the images can be considered to be a portrait in the sense that it offers a realistic likeness of the person it purports to represent (not least because all such images were composed well over a century after his death and in parts of the world geographically distant from Central Asia). In only one case—that of Paolo Giovio’s image—is there even the possibility that the “portrait” was based on a prototype believed to have been made in the presence of Tamerlane himself. Thus the value of the portraits resides less in the likenesses they provide than in what they reveal about the attitudes of the people who commissioned and composed them. In this sense the images of Tamerlane are a visual projection of European beliefs concerning his ethnicity and the ways in which details of his physical appearance (particularly his face) expressed his character. These “portraits” were created to perform different functions in the books discussed below, and it is evident that there is considerable variation in the amount of research and creative thought put into them. For this reason, they are not discussed in chronological order; rather, the least significant (from the works of Marlowe, Schedel, and Rouillé) are dispensed with first, and the others are analyzed according to thematic categories.

In the two parts of Tamburlaine the Great, Christopher Marlowe (d. 1593) presents a compelling psychological portrait of a man who rose from humble origins as a “Scythian shepherd” to become the great conqueror of Asia. In a conversation between Cosroe and Menaphon, the latter even provides a brief account of the ruler’s physical appearance, noting his height, sinewy strength, pale complexion, and lofty brows about which “hangs a knot of amber hair wrapèd in curls, as fierce Achilles’ was.” Most important of all are his eyes, which Menaphon describes thus:

…”Twixt his manly pitch  
A pearl more worth than all the world is placed,  
Wherein by curious sovereignty of art  
Are fixed his piercing instruments of sight,  
Whose fiery circles bear encompassèd  
A heaven of heavenly bodies in their spheres  
That guides his steps and actions to the throne  
Where honour sits invested royally.

The piercing, even fiery, eyes are a feature of printed portraits and written descriptions of Tamerlane from the mid- and late sixteenth century that are discussed later. Given the richness of Marlowe’s text, it is somewhat surprising that the early editions of the play did not attract much illustration. This was probably largely
a matter of cost, as plays of this sort were issued in relatively cheap octavo editions unlike the more luxurious large-format volumes made for authors such as Paolo Giovio and André Thevet (see below). An engraved portrait, identified in the legend as “Tamburlaine, the great,” is to be found facing the first page of the second part of Marlowe’s play in the first and second editions (London, 1590 and 1593). His appearance is that of an English nobleman, though perhaps his high brow and fair complexion lend him a certain similarity to Marlowe’s account of the physical characteristics of his Tamburlaine (fig. 1). There is little reason to devote serious attention to this image, however, because the engraved plate had already been used on the title page of a pamphlet published in London in 1587 and entitled A Short Admonition or Warning, upon the Detestable Treason wherewith Sir William Stanley and Rowland Yorke have Betrayed and Delivered Monie to the Spaniards. Richard Jones was the printer of this pamphlet and both editions of Tamburlaine, and it is probable that he arranged for the insertion of the old portrait in its new location. This is not the first time Tamerlane had been represented as a European knight: another armored figure, identified as Tamerlane, “great Tartar king over Parthia,” appears a century earlier in Hartmann Schedel’s world history (fig. 2).

The Promptuarium iconum, published by Guillaume Rouillé in Lyons in 1553, is a biographical encyclopedia best known today as the earliest printed work to contain a complete set of portraits of the Ottoman sultans. Representatives of the Mamluk and Safavid dynasties are notably absent, but Rouillé did choose
to include the figure of Tamerlane (fig. 3), the presence of which is explained by its placement on the same page as the portrait of the fourth sultan, Bayazid I. The rather haggard Ottoman sultan is depicted in profile, while the more energetic figure of Tamerlane appears in three-quarter view and identified as TAM-BEBL (presumably the second B should be read as R). The portrait of Bayazid—like those of the remainder of his dynasty—displays some level of concern for costume and headgear appropriate to a Turkish ruler, but it is difficult to detect any such scruples in the representation of his Central Asian counterpart. Although the second half of the abbreviated inscription running around the head makes some reference to his ethnicity in the words TAR IMP (i.e., “emperor of the Tartars”), and the accompanying text notes his origins in the Scythian regions and his dominion over the regions of Parthia and Soghdia, everything about the face, hairstyle, and clothing appears to be Western European in character.

There is an obvious disparity in the treatment of the two emperors, one a Western gentleman and the other clearly signaled as a Muslim. The circumstances of production of the *Promptuarium* suggest an explanation. The book was a vast undertaking, containing 828 portraits ranging from Adam and Eve to current-day figures. For some of these the publisher, Rouillé, expediently plagiarized other historical and biographical works. The similarity between the portraits of the Ottoman sultans in the *Promptuarium* and the *Sommario et alboro delli principi Othomani* (engraved by Niccolò Nelli with captions by Francesco Sansovino, and published in Venice in 1567) has led scholars to propose that the two works drew on a common source, presumably located in Venice. An alternative hypothesis places the original date of the publication of the *Sommario* prior to 1553. Rouillé’s Venetian connections probably allowed him access to images of the Ottoman rulers, but his decision to include Tamerlane evidently presented a problem. It seems likely that, in the absence of a suitable prototype, Rouillé either borrowed from an unidentified work or commissioned the production of a generic middle-aged male figure.

Of greater interest than the previous examples is the portrait of Tamerlane that appears in the biographical encyclopedia entitled *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium*, compiled by the Italian bishop and scholar Paolo Giovio (d. 1552). An unillustrated version appeared in Florence in 1551, and more than two decades passed before the publisher, Peter Perna, produced a fully illustrated version of Giovio’s text, with woodcuts by Swiss artist Tobias Stimmer (d. 1584). The portrait of Tamerlane, “emperor of the Scythians,” is placed at the beginning of the chapter dealing with his life and achievements in Book II of the 1575 *Elogia* (fig. 4). Giovio provides a brief account of his subject’s physical qualities, including his stern countenance, threatening eyes, and vigorous, muscular frame. Aspects of this written description can be correlated with the woodcut depiction. Stimmer’s Tamerlane is an imposing middle-aged man depicted within a landscape setting. His knotted brow is accentuated by prominent eyebrows and wrinkles of skin at the top of his nose, which is notable for its broad bridge and large nostrils. He has extravagant moustaches and a trimmed beard that leaves his cheeks and the upper part of his chin exposed. On his head he sports a tall felt hat with a fur brim and what may be a series of large pearls set into a diadem. The ornate inhabited frame surround-
ing his image is one of a small repertoire of similar devices used repeatedly through the book.48

Paolo Giovio is a significant figure in European Orientalist scholarship of the sixteenth century, but he seems to have garnered greater acclaim in his own time for another activity—assembling a collection of more than 400 portraits of literary and military figures from the past, each painting provided with a label on which Giovio wrote a summary of the person’s character and achievements.49 His wide-ranging interests were reflected in this portrait collection, which included figures as diverse as Attila the Hun, the Safavid shah Tahmasp, and the Turkoman ruler Uzun Hasan. Housed at his residence in Rome and his villa in Como, the collection was widely admired: during his lifetime, arrangements were made for the paintings to be copied for Cosimo de’Medici, while in the decades after Giovio’s death further sets were commissioned by Archduke Ferdinand II von Tyrol, Isabella Gonzaga, and others.50

The portrait of Tamerlane in the 1575 Elogia was based on a painting in the Giovio portrait collection; during a visit to the Giovio family’s palazzo between 1557 and 1560, Lorenz Schrader (d. 1606) reports having seen paintings of Tamerlane and Hannibal.51 Stimmer made his preparatory drawings during a visit to Giovio’s residence on Lake Como sometime between 1570 and 1572. The original painting of Tamerlane from the Giovio collection does not survive, but a copy probably made for Cosimo de’Medici by Cristofano dell’Altissimo (d. 1605) exists in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence.52 Assuming that the Uffizi painting is a faithful copy of Giovio’s original, then it is evident that Stimmer introduced a number of innovations, including minor adjustments to the pose, outfit, weapons, and format, and the exaggeration of some of the facial features to create a more dramatic effect (although some of this may be attributed to the more schematic mode of representation required by the woodcut). More significant, however, is the inclusion of a rocky landscape with ruined buildings. Landscape backgrounds are not a common feature of the portraits in the 1575 edition of the Elogia, and it is worth examining what it adds to the portrait of Tamerlane.

In a general sense, this scene of sterility and destruct-
tion finds a parallel in the background details within *Ravages of the Turks*, engraved in 1532 by Erhard Schoen (d. 1542), and can be read as a means to illustrate, in a simplified manner, the barbarity of Tamerlane’s conquests. The abbreviated quality of the features in the background of the Stimmer portrait may also derive from the simplified landscape, human, and animal vignettes that appear in sixteenth-century printed atlases. For instance, the three tents in Stimmer’s image may be compared to a similar composition seen in the map of Russia and Moscovie from Abraham Ortelius’s *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (Antwerp, 1570). Parallels with book illustrations and paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries leave little doubt that the caged figure on the cart in the upper right-hand corner of Stimmer’s print should be identified as the Ottoman sultan Bayazid I.

In her thesis devoted to the portrait collection, Linda Klinger argues that paintings commissioned by Giovio are not to be judged by the psychological insights and technical virtuosity that are the hallmarks of more gifted portraitists. Rather, the value of each

Fig. 4. Tamerlane. From Paolo Giovio, *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium* (Basel, 1575), 102. The Bodleian Library, Oxford: F.5.2 (1). (Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library)
portrait lay in the belief, shared by Giovio and his contemporaries, that it was derived ultimately from an image made in the presence of that individual. The wide range of sources from which these likenesses came, including coins, medals, paintings, and drawings, naturally placed significant constraints on those entrusted with the task of producing oil paintings. The challenges of obtaining reliable images of non-European figures were also considerable, and Giovio went to great lengths to obtain the likenesses of the Muslims who appeared in his portrait collection. For instance, an image believed to represent Saladin was obtained from Donado de Lezze, a Venetian stationed in Cyprus. In addition, Giovio managed to locate a number of depictions of the Ottoman sultans.56

The visual sources used in the Giovio portraits of Tamerlane are unknown, though it is possible that he may have been able to obtain examples of fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Persian miniature paintings. There are some intriguing similarities with representations of Tamerlane in Timurid manuscript painting: a Shirazi manuscript of Yazdi’s Zafarnāma (Book of Conquests) made for Ibrahim Sultan in 839 (1436), for example, contains numerous images of Tamerlane that consistently depict the conqueror with moustaches extending beyond his upper lip and a relatively short-cropped beard that does not cover his cheeks.57 The illustration of the feast following the conquest of Dehli in this manuscript (fig. 5) provides further parallels in the shape of the headgear, the close-fitting jacket, and the orientation of the head. A Zafarnāma manuscript dated 872 (1467–68) also gives Tamerlane a similar pattern of facial hair,58 while paintings made for later Timurid rulers invite similar comparisons.

A portrait of Tamerlane appears in a second sixteenth-century biographical dictionary, André Thevet’s Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres Grecs, Latins, et Payens (Paris, 1584).59 Chapter 138 of Book VIII is devoted to “Tamerlan, empereur des Tartares,” a man Thevet describes as not only the most powerful prince of the Orient but also “le plus grand brigand et detestable vilain.”60 The chapter begins with a half-length portrait (fig. 6). Although it lacks an ornate frame, its significant parallels with the representation of Tamerlane in the 1575 edition of the Elogia suggest that Thevet instructed his artist to use that portrait as the principal model for his own print. The transformation of the hat into one made entirely of fur may reflect the influence of costume depiction in broadly contemporary publications; for example, a similar tall fur hat is worn by a Russian Tartar soldier in an illustration of costumes in Abraham de Bruyn’s Omnium pene Europae, Asiae, Africæ atque Americae gentium habitus (Antwerp, 1581).61 The face of Tamerlane in Les vrais pourtraits nevertheless differs from the Stimmer image in that the nose is more elongated and without the prominent nostrils, while the beard is longer and fuller. The Elogia portrait conveys a sense of menace through the facial expression and tilt of the head, but Thevet’s Tamerlane threatens through explicit gesture, by drawing his sword from its sheath. The rather short...
arms and diminutive hands of this image suggest it is the work of a less skilled artist.

An abridged version of Thevet’s dictionary was translated into English by George Gerbier under the title *Prosopographia or, Some Select Pourtraitures and Lives of Ancient and Modern Illustrious Personages*, the first edition printed in London in 1667 and another in Cambridge in 1676. Both versions of the text include a section devoted to the life of “Tamberlain.” There is an obvious reliance upon the model provided by the French edition of 1584, though the end result in the 1676 edition (fig. 7) lacks the sense of contained energy in the original woodcut. A more skillful adaptation of the Tamerlane in *Les vrais pourtraits* can be found in the 1662 Paris edition of Blaise de Vigenère’s translation of the history of Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *L’histoire de la décadence de l’empire gré et establishment de celuy des Turcs par Chalcocondile Athenien* (fig. 8). The basic pose of this portrait follows the one in *Les vrais pourtraits*—albeit, in reverse—though the cruder modeling lends this image a less naturalistic quality than the Thevet portrait.

A striking feature of the 1662 portrait is the addition of the sun and moon on either side of Tamerlane’s head. While the Byzantine accounts of the life of Tamerlane include references to one cosmic event—the appearance of a comet that illuminated the night sky—the sun and moon in the background of this portrait have no direct relevance to the text of Chalkokondyles. This celestial pairing is found in medieval and Renaissance art, most commonly in association with representations of the Apocalypse. Most significant in the present context are the sets of woodcut illustrations made for the book of Revelation by Northern European artists including Albrecht Dürer (in 1498), Hans Burgkmair (1523), Sebald Beham
(1539), Matthias Gerung (1544–48), and Gerhard van Groeningen (ca. 1565–71). The conjunction of the sun and moon appears in representations of the breaking of the Sixth Seal (Revelation 6:12–13) and, less frequently, the sounding of the trumpet by the Fourth Angel (Revelation 8:12). Though the precise significance of the motifs in the 1662 portrait is not entirely clear, it seems likely that the widespread understanding of Tamerlane as a “scourge of God” and as one of the “people of Magog,” or Massagetae (see below), made the apocalyptic imagery appropriate to this image.

An equestrian portrait appears in Philip Lonicer’s Chronicon Turcorum (Frankfurt, 1578). Identified in the caption as “Tamerlanes Scytha” (fig. 9), it is perhaps the most ambitious of the portrait images, showing the ruler mounted on a sinuous horse within a shallow landscape space. Sitting in a high-fronted saddle, the ruler is made more impressive by his preternatural scale in relation to his mount. Although the concept of the equestrian portrait was well established in Europe by the last quarter of the sixteenth century, Lonicer’s Tamerlane is not a typical example of the genre, in that his weaponry includes a bow and arrows (the standard accessories of a Turco-Mongolian warrior). His clothing and headgear suggest that the designer of the woodcut in the Lonicer image may have employed diverse sources, including representa-
tions of Russian Tartar soldiers66 and equestrian portraits of the Ottoman sultan Süleyman I. A number of printed images of the sultan exist from the mid-sixteenth century, but perhaps the most relevant are the one from the 1575 edition of Giovio’s Elogia67 and the set of seven woodcuts, printed by Pieter Coecke van Aelst in 1553, depicting an imperial parade in Constantinople.68 Between the Coecke van Aelst and the Lonicer prints there are important points of similarity: Each shows the large turban wrapped around a tall cap (the Ottoman tøj), though Tamerlane’s turban is ornamented by a series of straps.69 The faces are not identical, but both include the hawkish profile, long moustaches, and clean-shaven chin (whereas Süleyman is often seen with a full beard in other printed images from the 1550s and 1560s). The most striking difference is in the pose and attitude of the two figures. Where Süleyman is depicted in stately procession, Tamerlane and his mount are full of dynamism, as if standing on the edge of the battlefield.70

Narrative images

The images that appear in an edition of Het’um’s Sensuyuent les fleurs des histoires de la terre dorient (Paris, ca. 1530) are among the earliest printed representations associated with Tamerlane.71 Les fleurs has a curious history, having been dictated by Het’um, also known as Hayton and Heythoum (d. ca. 1311), to Nicole Falcon de Toul in Poitiers in August 1307.72 In its original form Het’um’s work was probably divided into four parts—the first concerned with the geography and peoples of Asia, the second with the history of the Middle East from ancient times to the development of the Arab and Turkish polities, the third with the history of the Mongols (concentrating on their relations with the kingdom of Armenia), and the fourth with a proposal for a new Crusade to capture the Holy Land, involving the collaboration of the Mongols and the Armenians. Het’um cannot, of course, have been responsible for the fifth part of the work, dealing with the life of Tamerlane, that appears in the printed edition of ca. 1530.73

Of relevance to the present discussion are two small woodcuts in part five of the ca. 1530 edition (figs. 10 and 11), the first illustrating a monarch supervising building work (sig. Qii r), and the second with a monarch in an outdoor setting standing in judgment in front of three men (sig. Rii v). It should be noted at the outset that both woodcuts also occur elsewhere in the book; in other words, these images were not designed specifically for inclusion in part five of Les fleurs, and the monarch seen in the woodcuts cannot be considered an attempt to represent the figure of Tamerlane himself.74 Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the illustrations occur in the chapters dealing with the Mongols (in part three of the text) and with Tamerlane.75 It can therefore be assumed that the compilers of the text wanted these images to complement the issues dealt with in those parts of the text, and to function as a means for readers to visualize peoples of Central Asian origin.

The woodcut of the monarch standing in judgment (fig. 11) is the less assured of the two images. The dress and hairstyles of the figures are consistent with the fashions of early-sixteenth-century Europe, while
the full beard of the king and the shape of his crown only confirm his European origin. The other woodcut (fig. 10) certainly contains numerous European features, including the style of the architecture and the costumes of the workmen, but the ruler is given some unusual details in his overall appearance. He is bearded but lacks a moustache, and most of his facial hair seems to grow below his chin. His headgear is not the conventional crown but rather what seems to be a combination of a turban (or perhaps a raised cap) and a diadem, while his topcoat is tied by a cord or sash that hangs down on his right side. Another significant feature is the “pearled” border running around his cuffs and the hem of his topcoat. These clothing features are also found in an illustration from the edition of Johannes Schiltberger’s travel journal, *Ein wunderbare lycke vnd kurtzweilege History*, published in Frankfurt in ca. 1549 (fig. 12). It may be that the details in these woodcuts function as a form of visual shorthand to locate the scene in a non-European setting.

This first image of Tamerlane in the ca. 1549 edition of Schiltberger’s travels (fig. 12) is set in the vicinity of a fortified structure. The central scene comprises a young woman kneeling within a fire and being beaten by two men wielding cudgels. The diabolic nature of this incident is emphasized by the darkened sky above and the presence of two demons. The malevolent quality of the image is further intensified by the diagonal shading that partially covers the faces of Tamerlane and other two figures. The second image (fig. 13) represents Tamerlane being entertained at court. The ruler rises slightly from his chair and gestures toward a group of three musicians seated on a camel and a diminutive elephant. The faces of the musicians appear rather bestial, though it is difficult to ascertain whether this detail is meant to have any significance.

Neither of these woodcuts is a direct illustration of the accompanying text, but both may be interpreted as representing European notions of the Oriental tyrant. One depicts a scene of barbarous cruelty, while the other attempts to give a sense of the opulent lifestyle enjoyed by Asian rulers. Manuscript painting of the fifteenth century contains comparable images. For instance, the image of an Oriental king witnessing a man being burnt at the stake appears in the account of Marco Polo in the *Livre des merveilles* of Jean Duc de Berry (painted by the Boucicault Master). The same manuscript also contains other rather fanciful images, such as “Baptism of Zagatai in the Church of the Baptist at Samarkand” and “Feasting in the court of the Great Khan.” Another image of Oriental entertainments is to be found in a late-fourteenth-century manuscript in the British Library entitled, *Tractatus de septem vitiis*. The painting, depicting the sin of gluttony, has an identifiably Mongol ruler presiding over the festivities in his court. Unlike the paintings by the Boucicault Master or the woodcuts in the edition of Schiltberger’s travels, the paintings in the British Library manuscript reveal their artist’s clear awareness of how a Central Asian ruler should look. One of the ca. 1549 woodcuts (fig. 12) is probably making a generalized reference to the account of the capture of Isfahan, and to associated stories about the siege of Damascus. Schiltberger writes that the conquest of Isfahan was accompanied by the mas-
sacre of the children of the city. The act seen in the woodcut may refer to the story found in many other sources that Tamerlane ordered the murder of the virgins and children sent by the people of Damascus to plead for clemency. Demons are sometimes also found in representations of Ottoman sultans in printed books of the sixteenth century.

Philip Lonicer’s *Chronicon Turcicorum* contains a second image of Tamerlane (fig. 14) on the page prior to the equestrian portrait. This composition is more crowded than its companion, depicting the central figure of the Central Asian ruler accompanied by attendants to either side and a kneeling figure by his feet. Tamerlane’s facial features in this woodcut include a hooked nose and a beard that covers his chin and the sides of his jaw. The apparel of the standing attendants can be divided into two categories: the first group wears turbans with feathers arranged at the top, while the second group sports tall caps with ornamental bands around the rims. The kneeling figure wears a different turban, reminiscent of that worn by Bayazid I in Rouillé’s *Promptuarium* (fig. 3) and Sansovino’s *Sommario*.

This woodcut represents one of the humiliations that European historians believed had been meted out to the Ottoman sultan Bayazid I following his capture after the battle of Ankara in 1402: that he was employed as a mounting block whenever Tamerlane climbed onto his horse. (Lonicer also includes an illustration of Bayazid confined within a cage, on fol. 12v.) I will address the numerous representations of the humiliations of Bayazid in a future article, but here I want to focus on the representation of Tamerlane and his entourage. Again, it is apparent that much of the influence for the costumes and facial types comes from European representations of Ottoman imperial ceremony. The flap of material seen on the cap of the soldier at the right in the Lonicer woodcut also appears on Janissaries’ caps in the Coecke van Aelst woodcut of 1555. Even closer associations may be drawn with Domenico de’Franceschi’s 1563 woodcut representation of Sultan Süleyman riding to Friday prayer. In this case, the Janissaries wear two types of tall cap (börk)—one with the flap of material and the other without—and turbans wrapped around a high-crowned cap, or tāj. The principal difference between

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Fig. 12. Tamerlane witnessing a scene of brutality. From Johannes Schiltberger, *Ein wunderbarliche vnnd kurtzweilege History* (Frankfurt, ca. 1549), sig. Gii v. The Bodleian Library, Oxford: Vet.D1 e.67. (Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library)
the types of headgear found in the 1563 woodcut and those in Lonicer’s image is in the added feathers. The practice of attaching feathers onto fur or felt caps is associated with Mongol, Timurid, and Turkman royal processions, though comparison might also be made with attached features on top of the helmet-crown in the famous profile portrait of Sultan Süleyman. Attendants at Ottoman imperial ceremonies were also provided with ornamental feathers, which can be seen in Ottoman miniatures and European drawings of parade helmets.

The differences in Tamerlane’s clothing in the two images in Lonicer’s Chronicum Turficorum can be partially explained by the functions—military versus ceremonial—the ruler is performing. It is strange, however, that his facial features—straight nose or hooked, clean shaven around chin and jaw or fully bearded—should also be different in the two woodcuts. It would appear that the chief source of inspiration for the second representation came from European images of the Ottomans. The Domenico de’ Franceschi woodcut provides a model of a sultan, with a full beard and moustaches, riding in an imperial procession—an image that also includes similarly patterned textiles. Comparable profile images of the bearded Süleyman are likewise found in Sansovino’s Sommario and in a woodcut produced by Matteo Pagan in ca. 1550.

ETHNICITY AND CHARACTER IN TEXT AND IMAGE

Reviewing the portraits of Tamerlane in European books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals that there was little consensus about his physical appearance or even his ethnicity. There is little to indicate that the creators of most of the representations discussed in this article thought very deeply about the actual appearance of the historical Tamerlane. Schedel, Rouillé, and the printer Richard Jones opted to represent the great conqueror as a European gentleman. The illustrators of Het’um’s Les fleurs adopted different approaches, creating one image of “Tamerlane” as a European monarch and the other with a few Orientalized attributes in his apparel and face. The two woodcuts in Schiltberger’s travels make use of established
conventions in the depiction of eastern rulers drawn from earlier manuscript illustrations, while Lonicer’s *Chronicon Turcicorum* employs visual devices seen in the representations of the Ottoman sultan Süleyman I, adding some details of costume and weaponry to suggest the origins of Tamerlane among the warriors of the Russian and Central Asian steppes.

The portraits found in the works of Giovio and Thevet provide more fertile ground for further study. Their biographical publications included portraits of Safavid shahs and Ottoman, Mamluk, and Ayyubid sultans. It is evident, however, that both authors instructed their artists to distinguish Tamerlane from these Muslim rulers by means of his facial features, hair, and costume. One reason for this distinction is that the historians of the sixteenth century seem to have been unaware of the fact that Tamerlane himself was a Muslim. Thus there was little reason to assume that this “heathen” ruler would have adopted the manners and customs of the Muslim sultans further west. Indeed, the details of his dress appear to be a means to signal that Tamerlane’s origins were in the steppes of Asia. His padded jacket and pointed cap with its fur brim both appear in representations of Turco-Mongolian peoples in paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One of the most striking European images of a “Tartar” is the drawing of an archer made by Pisanello (d. 1455) as a preparatory sketch for his fresco of St. George and the Princess of Trebizond in the Pellegrini chapel of the Church of Sta. Anastasia in Verona. This work was clearly based on first-hand observation and correlates well with the description of the appearance of Mongol men given by John of Piano Carpini in the thirteenth century. He writes:

...in appearance the Tartars are quite different from all other men, for they are broader than other people between the eyes and across the cheekbones. Their cheeks are rather prominent above their jaws; they have a fat small nose, their eyes are little and their eyelids raised above their eyebrows...Hardly any of them grow beards, although they have some hair on the upper lip and chin and this they do not trim.

Mongols are occasionally identified in printed books
by their facial types and clothing. One example is Johannes von Thurocz’s *Chronica Hungarorum* (Brünn [Brno], 1488), in which the broad, flat faces of the horsemen, and the pointed hats that several of them wear, contrast with the faces and apparel of the Hungarian villagers. To some extent, the Giovio/Stimmer portrait bears similarities to John of Piano Carpini’s description, as well as the visual representations of “Tartars” found in European paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The eyes are set wide apart, the nose is broad (particularly around the nostrils) and the beard appears relatively thin. As noted above, some of these characteristics can also be found in Persian miniature paintings of Tamerlane and other members of the Timurid dynasty. That said, the large eyes and overall proportions of the face in the Giovio/Stimmer image (and the painting on which it was based) seem more European in character. Thevet’s Tamerlane does not look at all Mongol, even though the author describes the man as “empe- reur des Tartares.” Despite the efforts made by the Timurids to associate themselves with the Chinggisid dynasty, it is striking that most European historians failed to make any link between Tamerlane and the dynasty, it is striking that most European historians failed to make any link between Tamerlane and the dynasty.

The confusion over Tamerlane’s origins is apparent in the terminology employed by European authors. Many describe him as a “Scythian,” and others—such as Piccolomini, Cambini, Richier, and Jean du Bec—note that he was born in a region called Parthia. The use of these anachronistic terms suggests a desire to distinguish Tamerlane from the earlier Mongol emperors, but the designation “Scythian” had also developed a distinct set of meanings in the intellectual culture of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. The term has an ancient pedigree, appearing in the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides. The second-century CE geographer Ptolemy suggests that the savagery of the Scythians was a product of their harsh, cold environment, and this climatic interpretation of human nature is followed by many other writers of antiquity and the Renaissance. For Italian writers of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the most important figure of antiquity to have emerged from the shadowy region of Scythia was the fearsome fifth-century conqueror, Attila the Hun.

Predictably, most of the coverage of Attila and his conquests in Europe is profoundly negative in character. His tyrannical rule and indiscriminate pil- lage earn him the title in many sources of “scourge of God” (*flagellum Dei*) or “terror of the world,” while in the *Divine Comedy* Dante (d. 1321) places him in the seventh circle of Hell. Piccolomini claims that the Huns had been brought forth from the union of women and demons, and this concept is given a startling visual manifestation in the profile portrait in Giovio’s 1575 *Elogia* (fig. 15). Comparable images of Attila as a satyr are known earlier in the sixteenth century. In the same period, however, scholars in Hungary were giving Attila a more positive image; the commonly held belief that the Hungarians were the descendants of the ancient Huns can be traced to the eleventh century. This reinvention of Attila ranged from praise of his military skill to the implausible claim that, following a vision of Christ, he turned his energies to fighting heretics. Such an elevation also occurs in the panegyric poetry written by Giovanni Marliani to celebrate the marriage of Bianca Maria Sforza to the Hungarian Johannes Corvinus in 1487.

Just as Renaissance authors occasionally described the Ottoman Turks as descendants of the ancient Trojans, so the description of Tamerlane as a Scythian placed him into a cultural context that would help explain his character and actions. The “Scyth- ian” Huns and Tamerlane were at times also equated with the Massagetae, or “people of Magog” (*Ézékiel* 38:1–23). Like Attila, that earlier product of Scythia, Tamerlane was both praised for his military and organ- izational skills and reviled for his spectacular cruelty and godlessness. Events in their respective Euro- pean biographies exhibit certain correspondences, and these are picked up in the writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Tamerlane’s slaughter of the innocents of Damascus finds a parallel in Atti- la’s notorious killing of St. Ursula and her ten thou- sand virgins. Both conquerors employed strategies of destruction and indiscriminate massacre following the siege of cities. One might even associate Tamerlane’s supposed veneration for the Byzantine Empire with Attila’s retreat from Rome without sacking the city, due, according to Marliani, to his respect for Pope Leo. Most importantly, both Attila and Tamer-
lane were believed to function as “scourges of God,” the instruments of divine will sent to test the faithful and to punish both individual and collective sins. This theme is well developed in the literature about Tamerlane and forms part of the explanation for his rapid ascent from his supposedly humble origins. It may be that the staring eyes, a common feature of the Giovio and Thevet portraits, are meant to function as a visual reference. The exaggerated irises and pupils seen in the Thevet portrait bring to mind Marlowe’s description of Tamerlane and, more pertinently, the oft-quoted episode of the Genoese merchant who questioned Tamerlane about his cruelty toward the inhabitants of Damascus. According to the account given by Fortescue in *The Foreste* (London, 1571), the ruler...
...answered in most furious wrath and ire, his face red and firy, his eyes flaming with burning sparkles, as if blasing out on euery side. “Thou supposest me to be a man, but thou do much abuseth me, for none other am I, but the wrath and vengeance of God, and ruine of the Worlde.”

This quote seems to have particular relevance for the apocalyptic imagery seen in the sky behind Tamerlane in the 1662 edition of Chalkokondyles. We have already seen how Montaigne used the reports of Tamerlane to construct for himself a demonic form of the conqueror; presumably, the Thivet and Chalkokondyles portraits would have satisfied Montaigne’s mental image. Other visual inspiration could have been drawn from the works of historians and dramatists: writers such as Cambini, Giovio, and Mexía provided vivid descriptions of the combination of human characteristics that formed the man, and also compared him with other famous military figures. For instance, Cambini remarks, “Those that have seen Tamerlano living, have said that he resembled much, both in face and manners, Anibal of Carthage, according to the opinion of diverse ancient writers.” In his oration of 1487, Marliani also compares Hannibal to Attila the Hun. In this sense, the resultant visual images act as exemplars of the martial virtues and barbarous cruelty rather than as an accurate record of a specific ethnic type.

Paolo Giovio Lomazzo (d. 1600), a follower of Leonardo, takes this idea further by suggesting that specific historical figures embody certain emotional states. The author writes that the faces of cruel men never possess “gratious mildnesse of countenance.” His list of those who were “most famous for crueltie” includes figures such as Cyrus, Herod, Medea, Attila, Barbarossa, Selim I, and Tamerlane. Concerning the qualities of “roughnesse,” Lamazzo opines that this personality trait leads a man to slow and graceless movement, perversity, and obstinacy. He notes that these characteristics were shared by the Tartars, Scythians, Goths, Vandals, and Lombards (the Lombards originating, according to the author, in the deserts of Scythia). Lomazzo regards these tribes as “void of pittie, or respect of humane or diuine affaires.” He concludes that they were rude men, bare-legged, fierce, without military arte, without furniture of warre, or horses, of sauge behauiour, with warlike countenances, dreadfull &c. as they write of Tamberlane that cruell Tartarian, of the Lestrigones whome Ariosto describeth, and of Polyphemus.

These ideas are also found in a later physiognomic text by John Evelyn (d. 1706) that concerns the characters of famous men. The author remarks of Sultan Süleyman I that he had, “all the Signs of Haughtiness and Cruelty; such repugnant Strokes, and Figures there are Ingraven in the Countenance.” In an earlier passage Evelyn lists other tyrants, including Nero, Bayazid I, Tamerlane, and Charles, Duke of Burgundy, whose faces reflected their evil characters. His comments about specific facial features are of relevance to the portraits of Tamerlane in Giovio and Thivet. Of nostrils, he writes, “if wide, Generous, Bold, and sometimes Pertinacious and Cruel.” The wrinkles of the forehead also attract his attention, and he notes, “if curv’d and bending, of Wrath and Displeasure. If rising Arch-Wise, Pride and Disdain.”

Comparable observations are made in general physiognomic texts of the seventeenth century. For instance, Marin Cureau de la Chambre (d. 1669) argues that it is possible to find evidence of courage in a man by comparing his features with those of a lion. He remarks that lions have “large mouths, a harsh and thick hair, the forehead full of folds and contractions between the eyebrows, the extremities large and tough, the flesh hard and musculous, the voice big and resounding.” The reference to folds and contractions on the forehead and between the brows is particularly noticeable in the Giovio/Stimmer portrait. La Chambre also observes that, among other physical qualities, the brave man possesses “openness of nostrills and greatness, or wideness, of mouth.” Similar themes can be found in later physiognomic treatises. Clearly, caution should be exercised in associating these works with images produced much earlier, but they perhaps give some clue as to how the faces in biographical encyclopedias were designed to be read by their audiences.

CONCLUSION

Demetrius Cantemir (d. 1723) provides an interesting account of Tamerlane commissioning a portrait from a Persian prisoner. According to Cantemir, the Painter, observing that Prince to be lame in his right thigh and blind of his left eye, drew him with this right leg bent or inclining, his left eye shut and a bow apply’d to the other, as if he had been shooting at game. Temurleng admiring the ingenuity of the Painter pardon’d him and set him at liberty.
While Cantemir was certainly better informed than most European historians of the sixteenth century about the origins and life of Tamerlane, his account of the portrait should not be viewed uncritically. Tamerlane was lame in his right leg and had arrow wounds in his right arm, but there is no evidence that he was blind in his left eye. Cantemir’s description of the portrait is not mirrored in surviving Timurid and Mughal paintings of Tamerlane, but it makes sense in the context of conventions employed in Renaissance portraiture to conceal facial wounds and deformities.123 This example illustrates the central problem in the interpretation of the “portraits” reviewed in this article. With the possible exception of the Giovio/Stimmer woodcut, these representations tell us very little about how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European artists reacted to the visual cultures of Iran or Central Asia. Unlike the appearance in Europe of “Tartar” imagery in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, or the portraits of Ottoman sultans produced from the sixteenth century onward, the representations of Tamerlane possess only the faintest connection to Eastern prototypes. Neither do they make use of such written descriptions or visual representations of “Tartars” as existed in Europe at this time.124 That Giovio may have owned a Persian (or perhaps Turkish) painting he believed was a depiction of Tamerlane is less significant than the function of the Giovio/Stimmer image, and of those occurring in other books and visual media, in relation to the textual examination of the Central Asian conqueror.

The uncertainty over the ethnicity and religious affiliation of Tamerlane is a product of both the limited sources of information and the selective approach to sources employed by European scholars from the mid-fifteenth century. For instance, Piccolomini’s influential vision of Asian history and geography drew significant inspiration from authors like Strabo and Ptolomy, and, like many who came after him, Piccolomini tended to favor the interpretations of antique authorities over the observations of those late medieval travelers who possessed first-hand experience of the Middle East and Central Asia. In addition, sixteenth-century scholars seeking out data on the life of Tamerlane in Chalkokondyles, or the works of other Greek historians, would have discovered an Asia of the imagination, where recognizable ethnic or tribal groupings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—Arabs, Turks, Armenians, Persians, Circassians, Chaghatay, and so on—coexisted with peoples of an ancient or mythic past, such as the Massagetae, Scythians, Hycanes, and Cadusians. In this context, it becomes easier to understand the common failure to apprehend the connection, admittedly somewhat complex, between Tamerlane and the great Mongol conquerors of the thirteenth century. (By contrast, the genealogical links were both understood and celebrated by Mughal rulers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).125 European historians were more comfortable comparing Tamerlane with such figures from the classical past as Cyrus, Darius, Alexander, Hannibal, and, most importantly, Attila the Hun.

The considerable scholarly and artistic interest in Tamerlane in the period up to the end of the seventeenth century also needs to be understood in the wider context of the evolving relations between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. It is instructive to compare the description of Tamerlane in Edward Gibbon’s The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (London, 1776–78) with those found in the works of earlier historians.126 The greater accuracy of Gibbon’s account stems not only from the access he enjoyed to translated editions of Ibn ‘Arabshah, Sharaf al-Din Yazdi, and others, but also from his critical stance regarding his sources.127 In this latter respect, Gibbon has much more in common with modern historians than with those working in the previous two centuries. Another important factor contributing to Gibbon’s handling of the subject is historical. The Ottoman threat to Europe diminished significantly in the decades following the failed siege of Vienna in 1683, and by Gibbon’s time it was possible to view earlier events in Islamic history in a relatively dispassionate manner. By contrast, earlier treatments of Tamerlane were composed in the shadow of Turkish expansion. Aside from first-hand accounts written by the likes of Clavijo, de Mignanelli, and Schiltberger, the earliest attempts to place Tamerlane into the political history of Asia occurred in the mid-fifteenth century. This scholarly enterprise only increased in intensity during the following century. While Piccolomini was writing in the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, later scholars such as Cambini and Giovio must have been acutely aware that the fall of Belgrade and the island of Rhodes in 1521 and 1522 and the siege of Vienna in 1529 did not represent the limit of Ottoman imperial aspirations in Europe.

It can be seen, therefore, that the study of Tamerlane represented more than scholarly whim or a simple fascination with Asiatic exoticism. European schol-
ars were searching for ways to understand and combat the rise of Turkish power. The battle of Ankara in 1402 offered a rare example of a victory over the Ottoman Empire, and a comforting vision of divine punishment meted out to a Muslim ruler by a godless barbarian. Tamerlane’s role as a “scourge of God” lent some logic to the fact that, according to the prevalent European view, he suffered no setback during his military career. European readers could reassure themselves that on his death this scourge was cast into the fire of damnation.

Some authors sought out figures who had opposed the Turks and compared their relative merits. For instance, an anonymous text, The Conduct and Character of Nicholas Serini (London, 1664) discusses Tamerlane, George Scanderbeg, and Nicholas Serini, stating, “the first an heathen born to punish Infidelity; the second a Papist born to vindicate Christianity; the third a Protestant, born as some think to reform the world.” Of Tamerlane the author continues, “we must needs confess that it is scarcely possible, lesse credible, that so despicable a vessel should contain so great a stocke of admirable actions, and thence a branch should have sprung, which did subvert the Turkish monarchy, and several other potentates.”

Tamerlane develops a complex personality in European literature, and this personality is shaped to meet different requirements. In one of his earliest manifestations in Europe, he is depicted as a pagan converted to Christianity. The reference to the medieval legend of Prester John is clear, but by the second half of the fifteenth century a new theme is developed. The recasting of Tamerlane as a Scythian is a means to locate him within an antique tradition of barbarian conquerors. It is striking, however, that there are relatively few illustrations of Tamerlane in the considerable body of printed books of the period, although the costs of book production may provide some explanation for this. The woodcut illustrations discussed in this article consist of portraits and a narrow range of narrative scenes. Many of the potential narrative themes go unexplored in the woodcuts. Certainly, concepts such as “scourge of God” are not easily transferred into visual form, though some artists convey at least a sense of menace in their portraits. It is the text, however, that carries the main burden of informing and entertaining; images can be jettisoned, leaving the reader’s imagination to fill the space. From the latter part of the seventeenth century the European approach to Tamerlane divides into two branches. On one hand, scholars begin to assemble an increasingly accurate reconstruction of the origins and life of the historical Temür, using the testimony of primary European sources and translations of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish chronicles. On the other hand, the Tamerlane of Western imagination lives on in increasingly fanciful form in plays, operas, ballets, and popular expressions. Faint echoes of this mighty empire builder are even to be found in Victorian Christmas pantomime.

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NOTES

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1. “Tamerlane” is used throughout this article, though European sources of the fifteenth to seventeenth century employ a wide range of variant spellings. This European name derives from the Persian, Timur-i Lang (Timur the Lame), referring to the lameness on his right side. His Turkic name is more correctly rendered as Aqsaq Temür. See Beatrice F. Manz, The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1. For Central Asian personal and place names I have generally adopted the spellings employed by Manz.

2. For a discussion of this cultural phenomenon, and the details of the different types of dramatic performance, see David Bevington, “Timur and the Ambivalent Vision of Heroism,” Asian Art 2, 2 (Spring 1989): 6–9; Walter Denny, “Images of Turks in the European Imagination,” in Walter Denny et al., Court and Conquest: Ottoman Origins and the Design for Handel’s Tamerlano at the Glimmerglass Opera (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Museum, 1999), 3–18 (esp. 6–9). I would like to thank Walter Denny for sending me a copy of his publication. For the ballet, see Henry R. Bishop, Tamerlane et Bajazet, the New Grand Heroic Ballet as Performed at the King’s Theatre, Haymarket with the Most Enthusiastic Applause (London, 1806).

3. For the paintings by Andrea Celesti in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, see Anton Maria Mucchi and C. Della Croce, Il Pittore Andrea Celesti (Milan: “Silvana” Editoriale d’Arte, 1954), 86, fig. 29. For one of the paintings in Schloss Eggenberg, Graz, by either Carl Franz Caspar or Andreas Raemblmayer, see Denny, “Images of Turks,” 6, fig. 6. For tapestries, see E. Neumann, “Tamerlan und Bajazet: Eine Antwerpener Tapisserien-Serie des 17. Jahrhunderts,” in Jozef Duverger,
11. For Prester John, see C. Beckingham, 10. This event occurred during the visit to London of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II. For discussion of these events, see J. Michael Rogers, trans., “V. V. Bartol’d’s Article O Pogrebestni Timura (‘The Burial of Timur’),” Iran 12 (1974): 84–86; Manz, Rise and Rule, 18–19.


13. Nicol, Last Centuries of Byzantium, 314. The Byzantine emperor John VII and possibly also Manuel II made diplomatic contact with Tamerlane. For Clavijo’s embassy, see Narrative of the Spanish Embassy to the Court of Timur at Samarkand in the Years 1403–1406, trans. Guy Le Strange (London: Routledge, 1928).

14. This text was first published in Spanish in Madrid in 1582. I have been unable to locate evidence that any of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historians discussed in this section consulted Clavijo. The text was again published in Madrid in 1782, under the title Historia del Gran Tamerlan; this edition contains an introduction by Gonzalo Argote de Molina as well as additional sections taken from the writings of Pedro Mexía and Paolo Giovio.

15. Jean du Bec’s claim, made on the title page of his Histoire du grand emperour Tamerlanes (Rouen, 1590), that his writings were “tirée des monuments antiques des Arabes,” has been widely rejected. It is intriguing, however, that he makes some comments concerning the origins of Tamerlane that are not found in the works of other historians of this period. It has also been suggested that Het’um, Sensuyunt les fleurs des histoires de la terre dorrient (probably first printed between ca. 1501 and 1510; I have used an edition in the Bodleian Library printed in Paris in ca. 1530) may have made use of non-European (or perhaps Byzantine Greek) sources. See Una Ellis-Fermor’s introduction to Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine the Great in Two Parts (London: Methuen, 1930), 17–18, 27; Ethel Seaton, “Fresh Sources for Marlowe,” The Review of English Studies 5, 20 (Oct. 1929): 399–401. Both authors, however, were unaware that Het’um’s original text contained only four parts. Het’um, who died about 1311, cannot have written the section dealing with Tamerlane (part 5). Beatrice Manz (“Tamerlane’s Career and Its Uses,” Journal of World History 13, 1 [2002], 12, n. 26) notes that part 5 is the work of the Dominican Jean of Sultaniya, who returned from the court of Tamerlane to France in 1403, though it is evident that the text of the 1530 edition of Les fleurs, at least, contains interpolations by other authors. For instance, one passage cites Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (available in a printed edition in Paris in 1509): “Le Pape Pie Second qui estoit bien pres de ce temps la dit en ses histoires que Tamburlanes fust enchaeynt ledict turc de chayne dor; et le faisoit menger sous la table avecques les chiens. Et toutes les foys qu’il vuloit monter a cheval il falloit que ledict turc se miet la terre sur les piedz et sur les mains: et qu’il suy dedict [?] le dos pour mettre le pied desus pour avoir avantage pour monter sur sondit cheval.” See Het’um, Les fleurs, fol. R ii r.


17. For instance, Mehmed Neshri (d. ca. 1520), Tursun Bég (d.


5. He did, however, employ the grandiose but largely symbolic title Šáhib Ḥārīn, or “Lord of the Fortunate Conjunction.”

6. For the career of Tamerlane, see Manz, Rise and Rule; Hilda Hookham, Tamburlaine the Conqueror (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964).


10. This event occurred during the visit to London of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II. For discussion of these events, see Donald Nicol, The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 313–15.


13. Nicol, Last Centuries of Byzantium, 314. The Byzantine emperor John VII and possibly also Manuel II made diplomatic contact with Tamerlane. For Clavijo’s embassy, see Narrative of the Spanish Embassy to the Court of Timur at Samarkand in the
22. Phrantzes has been credited as the first author to record
21. For a modern translation, see Doukas,
20. Johannes Leunclavius (d. 1593) is known to have made direct
18. Leunclavius also produced a Latin translation of Chalkokondyles,
entitled Laonici Chalcocondylae Atheniensis historium libri decem; Historiarum de origine ac rebus gestis Turcorum (Paris, 1650).
20. Leunclavius also produced a Latin translation of Chalkokondyles, entitled Laonici Chalcocondylae Atheniensis historium libri decem; Historiarum de origine ac rebus gestis Turcorum (Paris, 1650).
21. For a modern translation, see Doukas, Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks, trans. Harry Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975). Doukas (xvi, 12, 95–96) claims that Bayazid was held in iron chains and mance-roles following a failed escape attempt.
22. Phrantzes has been credited as the first author to record the fallacious story that Tamerlane had Bayazid imprisoned in an iron cage. See Louis Wann, “The Oriental in Elizabethan Drama,” Modern Philology 12 (1915): 176–77; Ellis-Fermor, Tamburlaine the Great, 24, n. 1; Samuel Chew, The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 469–70. It has been suggested that this legend has its origins in a misunderstanding of the Turkish word kafes (Ottoman: qafes, deriving from the Arabic qafas), which can mean either “litter” or “cage.” See Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches, 4 vols. (Pest: C. A. Hartleben, 1827), vol. 1: 317–23, esp. 319–320. As noted by Von Hammer, kafes/qafes can also refer to the ritual seclusion placed around an Ottoman sultan or amir. My thanks to Ruba Kana’an for confirming this information. For a modern translation, see The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Phrantzes, 1401–77, trans. Marios Philippides (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). It should be noted that this edition contains no mention of the imprisonment of Bayazid in an iron cage. The iron cage only appears as an interpolation in Makarios Melissenos’s sixteenth-century redaction of Phrantzes. I am grateful to Theodora Antonopoulou for confirming this observation.
23. Some accounts did not surface before the twentieth cen-
25. Marshal Bouicault, governor of Genoa until 1409, gathered oral reports of the events in the Ottoman Empire, but his writings were not published until much later. His account of the defeat of Bayazid contains no mention that the sultan was humiliated by Tamerlane. See Histoire du Maréchal Bouicault, ed. Guillaume de Vosy (La Haye, 1711), 107–9. A later work that may reflect a knowledge of earlier Turkish sources is Constantine of Ostrovia (d. 1563), Historia nev Kronyka Turecka od Michała Konstantinow z Ostrowice (Litomyšl, 1565). Constantine had been captured by the Ottomans and served in their army. For an English translation, see Konstantin Mikhailović (Constantine of Ostrovia), Memoirs of a Janissary, trans. Benjamin Stolz with historical notes by Svät Soucek, Michigan Slavic Translations 5 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), see introductory notes for details of other early publications on Turkish history by George of Hungary and Felix Ragusinus.
26. Paolo Giovio seems to have gained information from Angi-olello (either through personal acquaintance or through the mediation of Donado da Lezze). See Verm Parry, “Renais-
sance Historical Literature in Relation to the Near and Mid-

dle East (with Special Reference to Paolo Giovio),” in Lewis and Holt, eds., Historians of the Middle East, 285. For Donado da Lezze’s edition of Angiòelle’s text, see Historia turchese, 1300–1514 (Bucharest, 1909).
27. Sagundino’s text was first published in Venice in 1551. See Nicol’s introduction in Spandounes, Originus, xxi.
28. Cosmographia Pii Papae in Asiae et Europaeae elegantis descriptiones (Paris: Geoffroy Tory and Henri Estienne, 1509). Other editions appeared in the sixteenth century. I have consulted the version of this text found in Pope Pius II, Opera quae extant omnia (Basel 1571). See particularly, 359–62, 382–84, 395. For the use of Sagundino’s work by Piccolomini, see Nicol’s notes in Spandounes, Originus, xix–xxi. The observations of the merchant Niccolò de’Conti (as recorded in Pog-gio Bracciolini’s, De varietate fortunae, 1447) were also used by Piccolomini in his writings on Asia. For a detailed dis-
cussion of Piccolomini’s sources and methodology, see Marg-
29. For instance, European readers could acquaint themselves with accounts of Mongol culture written by John of Piano Carpini, Het’um, and Marco Polo because they had been incorporated into Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum historiale. See Juliet Vale, Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and Its Context, 1270–1350 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1982), 72. The Speculum historiale was printed in the late fifteenth
century (for instance, Strasbourg, 1478), and further editions were printed in the sixteenth century.

30. For instance, the continuation by Matteo Palmieri (d. 1475) of the Chronicon of Eusebius and the life of Pope Boniface IX by Bartolomeo Sacchi (d. 1481). Other potential sources included Andrea Biglia’s writings on Mongol history in his study of Eastern Christendom (1432); Francesco Filelfo’s oration before the Council of Mantua in 1459; Flavio Biondo’s oration to Alfonso of Aragon in 1453. See Ellis-Fermor, Tamburlaine the Great, 26–27; Meserve, “Samarkand to Scythia,” 31–34. For an English translation of Bartolomeo Sacchi, see Paul Rycaut, Lives of the Popes from the Time of Our Saviour Jesus Christ to the Reign of Sixtus IV (London, 1685); for Tamerlane, see esp. 335.

31. Most of this work has concentrated on the sources employed by Marlowe in Tamburlaine the Great. This research is brought together in Ellis-Fermor, Tamburlaine the Great, 17–50. It should be noted that Ellis-Fermor fails to grasp the significance of the fact that Piccolomini’s text predates Cambini’s in both the date of composition and the first printing. The comments on Het’um should also be revised in the light of recent research: see my notes 15 and 72–73.

32. I have consulted the English translation by John Shute of Andrea Cambini, Two Very Notable Commentaries, The One of the Original of the Turks and the House of Ottoman… and thother of the Warre of the Turkes against George Scanderbeg (London, 1562, repr. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1970).

33. The editions of these authors I have consulted are: Pierre de la Primaudaye, The French Academie wherein is Discoursed of the Institution of Menars, trans. T. B. (London, 1589); Pedro Mexía, Diverse leçons (Paris, 1572). Mexía was also translated by Thomas Fortescue. The Foreste or Collection of Histories, No Lese Profitable, then Pleasant and Necessary (London, 1571); Caélus Curio, A Notable History of the Saracens, trans. Thomas Newton (London, 1575, repr. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1977); Christophe Richier, De rebus Turcicari ad Franciscanum gallorum Christianissi, 4 vols. (Paris, 1540), see bk. 3; Petrus Perondini, Magni Tamerlanis Scythiarum imperatoris vita (Florence, 1553).

34. For an evaluation of Giovio’s historical method and his publications on Islamic history, see Parry, “Renaissance Historical Literature,” 281–89. For an English translation of Giovio, see A Short Treatise upon the Turks Chronicles, trans. Peter Ashton (London, 1546).

35. The editions I have consulted are: André Thevet, Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres Grecz, Latins, et Payens (Paris, 1584); Jean Boissard, Vitae et icones sultanorum Turcicarum (Frankfurt, 1596); Philip Lonicer, Chronicon Turcicorum (Frankfurt, 1578); Jean du Bec, Histoire du grand empeur Tamerlanes (Rouen, 1590); Richard Knolles, The General History of the Turkes, from the First Beginning of That Nation to the Rising of the Ottoman Famille (5th ed., London, 1638). It should be noted, however, that these authors do not slavishly follow earlier accounts and that they include novel details, some based on research or acuity and others simply invented.

36. To some extent, these terms are synonymous in the literature of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The significance of the Scythian designation is discussed in greater detail later in the article.

37. The full title of the 1590 edition is Tamburlaine the Great, Who, from a Scythian Shepherd, by His Rare and Wonderful Conquests Became a Most Puissant and Mighty Monarch, and for His Tyranny and Terror Was Term’d the Scourge of God.


39. That the earliest productions of the play by the Lord Admiral’s Men also found means to emphasize the incandescent qualities of the central character is suggested in the references made to a coat edged with copper lace and breeches of crimson velvet. See Philip Henslowe, Henslowe Papers: Being Documents Supplementary to Henslowe’s Diary, ed. Walter Greg (London: A. H. Bullen, 1907), 119–20. For a discussion of color symbolism in the stagings of Tamburlaine, see Marie Channing Linthicum, Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 26; William Armstrong, Marlowe’s Tamburlaine: The Images and the Stage (Hull: Hull University Press, 1966), 16.


43. Promptuarium iconum insigniorum a seculo hominum subiectis eorum vitis, per compendium ex probatissimum autoriis desumptis (Lyons, 1551), 190. The work was reprinted in the same city in 1581. Rouillé’s depiction of the Ottoman sultans is discussed in greater detail by Julian Raby in the exhibition catalogue The Sultan’s Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman (Istanbul: Iσbank, 2000), 138–41.

44. In the short text beneath the images, Rouillé quotes Paolo Giovio to the effect that Bayazid was placed in golden chains within an iron cage.

45. These arguments are summarized by Raby in Sultan’s Portrait, 140.

46. Elogia vicorum bellica virtute illustrium (Basel, 1575, repr. 1596). See also the discussion of the 1575 edition by Raby in Sultan’s Portrait, 141–50.

47. Giovio, Elogia, 102.

48. For instance, the same frame surrounds the portraits of Ata-xerxes, Emperor Frederick I, Carmognola, Gattamelata, and Cardinal Ascanius Sforza.


50. Klinger, “Portrait Collection,” vol. 1, 79; Raby in *Sultan’s Portrait*, 143–44.


54. Illustrated in Ethan Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 173, fig. 88. The three tents are a reference to the story, found in numerous sixteenth-century histories, that during the sieges of cities Tamerlane was in the habit of pitching tents of different colors—white, red, and black—as messages to the defenders. See Cambini, *Two Commentaries*, fol. 5r. This theme is also picked up in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*. For a discussion of the symbolic dimensions of the colored tents, see Channing Linthicum, *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 26; Roy Battenhouse, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*: A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1941), 137.

55. For instance, a comparable image of the sultan in a cage on wheels is to be found in Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographiae universalis* (1628, repr. in 4 vols., Lindau: Antiqua Verlag, 1984), vol. 2, woodcut on 1457. He is also depicted in the same way in one of the paintings from Schloss Eggenberg attached to the belt is also seen in a representation of a Tar- tar soldier from an engraving showing Russian costumes in *Abraham de Bruyn’s 1581 publication, Omnium pene…* (see above). Note also similarities in the facial hair (large moustaches and clean-shaven chin) and the form of the topcoat. Illustrated in Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel*, 173, fig. 89.

56. Raby in *Sultan’s Portrait*, fig. 28k.


59. This theme is also picked up in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*. For instance, woodcuts by Dürer of the Lamentation of Christ, the Crucifixion, and Christ showing his disciples the heav- ens also include them. See Willi Kurth, *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. Silvia Welsh (New York: Arden, 1956), pls. 87, 88, 154. Other examples include prints by Hans Schäufflein (Christ on the Cross with the Virgin and St. John, ca. 1516) and Michael Ostendorfer (Lamentation, 1548). See Geisberg, *Single-Leaf Woodcut*, vol. 3, 920–21, 955 (G. 964–65, G. 1044).


61. Illustrated in Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel*, 173, fig. 89.


63. According to Doukas, *Fall of Byzantium*, vol. 16, pt. 3, 91–92, the comet, a portent of evil, remained visible in the sky from the spring to the autumn of that year.

64. The paired sun and moon also appear in some other scenes. For instance, woodcuts by Dürer of the Lamentation of Christ, the Crucifixion, and Christ showing his disciples the heav- ens also include them. See Willi Kurth, *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. Silvia Welsh (New York: Arden, 1956), pls. 87, 88, 154. Other examples include prints by Hans Schäufflein (Christ on the Cross with the Virgin and St. John, ca. 1516) and Michael Ostendorfer (Lamentation, 1548). See Geisberg, *Single-Leaf Woodcut*, vol. 3, 920–21, 955 (G. 964–65, G. 1044).


66. For instance, the arrangement of the bow case and quiver attached to the belt is also seen in a representation of a Tar- tar soldier from an engraving showing Russian costumes in Abraham de Bruyn’s 1581 publication, *Omnium pene…* (see above). Note also similarities in the facial hair (large moustaches and clean-shaven chin) and the form of the topcoat. Illustrated in Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel*, 173, fig. 89.

more schematic representation of mounted warriors in Abrah-
ham Ortelius’s 1570 map of Russia and Moscovie. See Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel*, 173, fig. 88.

71. An earlier image of Tamerlane can be found in Schedel’s *Liber chronicarum* of 1493 (see n. 42, above). Editions of Schiltberger’s travels from ca. 1478 onward contain woodcut illustrations, but these volumes are all extremely scarce. The only one of this early series I have consulted was printed in ca. 1549. For details, see Buchan Telfer in Schiltberger, *Bondage and Travels*, x–xi.

72. The text was composed at the request of Pope Clement V. It was subsequently translated into Latin by Falco de Toul and into Spanish by an anonymous scholar. The true identity of the author—sometimes known as Het’um, prince of Korikos—has yet to be resolved, though his detailed knowledge of events in the kingdom of Cilician Armenia in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries indicates that he was an important member of the Armenian royal family. The text, in Latin and French versions, proved popular around Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was printed in numerous editions. Strangely, it was not until the nineteenth century that an Armenian translation of *Les fleurs* was published. For the history and authorship of *Les fleurs*, see David Bundy, “Het’um’s *La Flor des estoires de la Terre d’Orient*: A Study in Medieval Armenian Historiography and Propaganda,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 20 (1986–87): 225–35; Robert Thomson, *A Bibliography of Classical Armenian Literature to 1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), 139.


74. Stylistic differences in the modeling of the draperies and the treatment of the faces, architecture, and vegetation suggest that different craftsmen completed the two plates.

75. The illustration on sig. Qi i (pt. 5, between chaps. 9 and 10) appears in pt. 3, chap. 25 (concerned with battles between Tartars and Saracens) in the ca. 1530 edition. The illustration on sig. Rii v (pt. 5, chap. 15) appears in pt. 3, in a chapter about “Mango Caan” (i.e., Mngkhe Khan).

76. A similar feature is seen later in the painting of Tamerlane in the collection of Paolo Giovio, and the engraving of it by Tobias Stimmer in the 1575 edition of Giogio’s *Elogia*.


78. This illustration is reproduced in Robert Irwin, “Islam and the Crusades, 1096–1699,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 253. The author notes that the painter must have had access to a Persian miniature.

79. For Schiltberger’s account of the siege of Isfahan, see Bondage and Travels, chap. 18, 27–28. For one of the numerous versions of the slaughter of the virgins of Damascus, see Cambini, *Tuo Commentaries*, fols. 4v–5r.

80. For instance, see the frontispiece of a book published in Venice (n.d.) entitled *Lamento et ultima disperatione di Selm Gran Turco*. In this case, however, the demon appears to be tempting the sultan to commit suicide. See Nebahat Avcioğlu, “Ahmed I and the Allegories of Tyranny in the Frontispiece to George Sandys’s *Relation of a Journey*,” *Mugarnas* 18 (2001): 207–8, fig. 8.

81. Raby in Sultan’s *Portrait*, figs. 27d, 34d.

82. Sultan’s *Portrait*, cat. no. 21 and comments by Meyer zur Capellen and Bağcı, 103.


84. Necipoğlu, “Süleyman the Magnificent,” figs. 1–4, 10, 17, 22, 25. Some comparison may be made between the cap of the right-hand soldier and the headgear worn by Osman Gazi in the 1575 *Elogia*. See Raby in Sultan’s *Portrait*, fig. 28a.

85. Meyer zur Capellen and Bağcı in Sultan’s *Portrait*, 100–102, fig. 22.

86. For instance, see comments in Giovio, *Elogia*, 104. Cambini claims that Tamerlane had driven the “Saracens” from his native Parthia; see *Tuo Commentaries*, fol. 3r. Marlowe even has his Tamburlaine order the burning of “…the Turkish Alcaron and all the heaps of superstitious books/ Found in the temple of that Mahomet” (*Tamburlaine the Great*, pt. 2, act 5, scene 1, ll. 171–73). See also comments in Chew, *Crescent and the Rose*, 472.

87. For the appearance of “Tartars” in Italian painting, see Leonardos Olshchki, “Asiatic Exoticism in Italian painting of the Early Renaissance,” *Art Bulletin* 26 (1944): 95–108. That the idea of a “Tartar” facial type was well established in Europe in the fourteenth century is indicated by the example of a procession organized by William Montague before a royal tournament in Cheapside, London in 1331; the crowds were entertained by the sight of sixteen men dressed in “Tartar clothes” and fur hats and with their faces covered by masks in the likenesses of Tartars. See Vale, *Edward III*, 62, 70, 72. For the impact of the Mongols on European culture, see Felicitas Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden: Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abenlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters, vol. 16 (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1994).

88. Illustrated in George F. Hill, *Drawings of Pisanello* (New York: Dover Publications 1965), pl. 15, no. 18. For the painting, see Paolo Marini, *Pisanello* (Milan: Electa, 1996), figs. 136, 175. Olshchki, “Asiatic Exoticism,” 104–6, notes that Turco-Mongolian slaves were relatively common in fifteenth-century Italy, and male slaves were often employed as archers. Pisanello also represented the Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaeologus in a pointed Tartar-style hat in his famous portrait medal. Julian Raby notes that this became part of the standard depiction of despotic rule. See Raby, *Oriental Mode*, 2, nn. 4, 5.

tained peoples of many regions and ethnicities, but the commanding officers were all of Turco-Mongol descent. The accurate observations of John of Piano Carpini would have allowed European armies to target these most important soldiers on the battlefield. I am grateful to Ian Higgins for this observation.

90. See Horst Kunze, Geschichte der Buchillustration in Deutschland: Das 15. Jahrhundert, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Insell-Verlag, 1975), vol. 1, 244. Note, however, that in the equivalent illustration (on 245) in the edition printed in Augsburg in the same year, the Mongol soldiers are given a distinctly Turkish appearance.


92. Thévet, Les vrais pourtraits, fol. 630v; Jean du Bec, Histoire, 8–9. Jean du Bec also mentions that his ancestors came from the land of Sachetay (i.e., the ulus Chaghatay). See also comments of the fifteenth-century humanist Andrea Biglia, discussed in Meserve, "Samarkand to Scythia," 31–32.


98. For the illustration, see Giovio, Eloquia, 10. Part of the text reads, "Haec facies inhumano luridoque pallor, ac essetir oris monstruo ductu, et tora ocularum nictatione terribilis, immanem hundorum Regis Athile saeuiitem spirat."


101. By comparison, in 1459 Francesco Filelfo claimed that Christ had sent Tamerlane and his armies to rescue the Byzantine Empire: see Meserve, "Samarkand to Scythia," 33.

102. D'Elia, "Genealogy," 977–82.


104. Maenchen-Helfen, World of the Huns, 2–5. The author notes that the Huns were demonized in Latin sources of the fifth and sixth centuries, often being associated with the Massagetae, and the Goths with the "people of Gog." Flavius Josephus in the first century CE makes a link between Magog and the Scythians (while Jerome is perhaps the first to suggest that the Scythians discussed by Herodotus were to be identified with the Huns). For further translations of primary Latin sources on the Huns, see C. D. Gordon, The Age of Attila: Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), chap. 3, 57–111. Chalkokondyles makes an association between Tamer-lane and the Massagetae, though his account stops short of stating that this was the conqueror's ethnicity: see Nicolai Nicolaidou, ed. and trans., Laonikos Chalkokondyles: A Trans-lation and Commentary of the "Demonstration of Histories" (Books I–III) (Athens: Historical Publications St. D. Basilopoulos, 1996), 264 (Greek), 265 (English). For Filicso's use of the title, "Thomyris the Massagete" to describe Tamerlane, see Meserve, "Samarkand to Scythia," 33 (perhaps a confusion with Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae in the time of the Persian king Cyrus, as discussed by Herodotus). For a differ-ent view on the relationship of Tamerlane with the Mas-sagetae, see Thévet, Les vrais pourtraits, fol. 631r.

105. Perhaps the most explicit comparison between Tamerlane and Attila can be found in Losy Le Roy, De la vicissitude ou variété des choses en l’univers, et concurrences des armes et des lettres par les premiers et plus illustres nations du monde (Paris, 1757), fols.108r–109r. See also Hallett Smith, "Tamburlaine and the Renaissance," in Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays in Honor of George F. Reynolds, vol. 2, no. 4 (Boulder, 1945), 126–51.


107. For Tamerlane and the Byzantine Empire, see Meserve, "Samarkand to Scythia," 33–34; Spandounes, Origenes, 23–24; Demetrio Cantemir (Kantemir), The History of the Growth and Decay of the Ottoman Empire, 2 pts., trans. Nicholas Tindall (London, 1734), pt. 1, Containing the Growth of the Ottoman Empire, from the Reign of Othman the Founder, to the Reign of Mahomet IV, That Is, from the Year 1300, to the Siege of Vienna, in 1683, 53, n. 18. For Attila and Pope Leo, see D’Elia, "Genealogy," 981. Marliani’s claim can also be found in the works of late antique authors such as Priscus of Panium. The relevant section of Priscus’s account is translated in Gordon, Age of Attila, 108.

108. For a discussion of the concept in relation to the Ottomans, see Kenneth Setton, “Lutheranism and the Turkish Peril,” Bal-
109. For others, the rise was attributed to his character. For instance, see George Whetstone, The English Mirror (London, 1586, repr. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1973), 97. He remarks, “Tamburlaine being a poor labourer, or in best degree a meane soullidour, descended from the Part-"
110. Cambini, A comparison may be drawn with Piccolomini’s diabolic description of Mehmed II in Orazio Aeneas de Constantino-" politanus clade et bello contra Turcos congregando. He writes that Mehmed, “with his terrified face, black eyes, terrible voice, [and] wicked nods commands murders, demands the slaughter of now one and now another, and washes his hands in the blood of Christians. He defiles and pollutes everything.” (Translation from D’Elia, “Genealogy,” 988–89.)
112. Cambini, Two Commentaries, fol. 5v. See also Thetvet, Les vrais pourtraits, fol. 630v. Tamerlane is also compared to Alexander the Great for Fortescue in The Foreste (presumably following Mexía): see Battenhouse, Renaissance Moral Philosophy, 165.
114. On Tamerlane as the embodiment of martial prowess, self-" discipline, industry, and liberality, see Battenhouse, Renaissance Moral Philosophy, 139–43. For a discussion of Marlowe’s use of Machiavellian notions of virtù in Tamburlaine the Great, see 208–10. See also the discussion of the complex iconography of tyranny in printed books of this period in Accioğlu, “Ahmed I.”
115. I am citing from the English translation of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, Trattato dell’arte de la pittura, scultura, et architet-
116. Lomazzo, Curious Paintings, bk. 2, chap. 9, 37.
117. John Evelyn, Numismata: A Discourse of Medals Ancient and Modern (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1697), 306. (This and the following quotes appear in chap. 9: “A Digression Concerning Physiognomy,” 292–342.) For his comments on Tartars and Scythians, see 311–14.
118. Evelyn, Numismata, 296, 297, 305.
119. La Chambre, The Art of How to Know Men (London, 1665), 20. Cited in Peter Harrison, “Reading the Passions: The Fall, the Passions, and Dominion over Nature,” in The Soft Underbelly of Reason: The Passions in the Seventeenth Century, ed. Stephan Gaukroger (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 57. In writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, animals are commonly associated with specific passions. While lions are linked to courage, tigers and domestic cats are often believed to embody cruelty. A follower of Jacob Boehme notes that the Tartars are like cats and dogs because they remain blind for five days after birth. See Harrison, “Reading the Passions,” 55.
120. La Chambre, How to Know Men, 25, cited in Harrison, “Reading the Passions,” 60.
121. For instance, Lavater observes that foreheads with knots, protuberances, and angles denote qualities including vigor, harshness, oppression, and perseverance. His comments on the nose also bring to mind aspects of the Giovio and Thetvet portraits. He writes, “Wherever I have seen a nose with a broad back, whether arched or rectilinear, I have found it [to] appertain to an extraordinary man.” See Johann Caspar Lavater, Physiognomy, or the Corresponding Analogy between the Conformation of the Features and the Ruling Passions of the Mind, trans. Samuel Shaw (London, 1800), 51, 61.
122. This passage is quoted according to the English translation. See Cantemir, Growth and Decay (London, 1734), 53, n. 17.
123. For instance, Piero della Francesca’s profile portrait of the one-eyed Federigo da Montefeltro (1465).
124. Though note the similarities of costume between some of the Tamerlane portraits and the images of Russian Tartar soldiers: see, for instance, Kaivaler, Pieter Breugel, 173, fig. 89.
127. For instance, note his rejection of the legend about Bayazid and the iron cage (he also remarks that Voltaire was sceptical about this), and his comment that Eastern sources should not be read uncritically because they often flatter their subjects. See Gibbon, Decline and Fall, vol. 6, 352–54.
128. C. O., The Conduct and Character of Count Nicholas Serini, Protestant Generalsissimo of the Auxiliaries in Hungary, the Most Prudent and Resolved Champion of Christendom (London, 1664). The latter quote is, in fact, a free translation from Thetvet, Les vrais pourtraits, fol. 630r. The phrase “so despicable a vessel” does not appear in the French edition of Thetvet, though it is introduced into the English translations (Prospopografia) of 1667 and 1676.
130. Though the modern historical assessment of his life and achievements might well be colored by nationalistic or other cultural concerns. On the treatment of Tamerlane by Soviet historians and in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, see Manz, “Tamerlane’s Career,” 15–24.
131. Vassilios Baboules has related to me that the epithet “Tamerlanos” was still being used in rural Boeotia (Greece) into the mid-twentieth century to describe men of physical ugliness and criminal character.
132. For instance, A. Henry, Timour the Tartar, or Harlequin and the Beautiful Princess of Mingrelia, and Fair Circassian: A Christ-

marcus milwright