

NUR

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SPECIAL
ISSUE:
ISLAMIC
ART &
DIVERSITY

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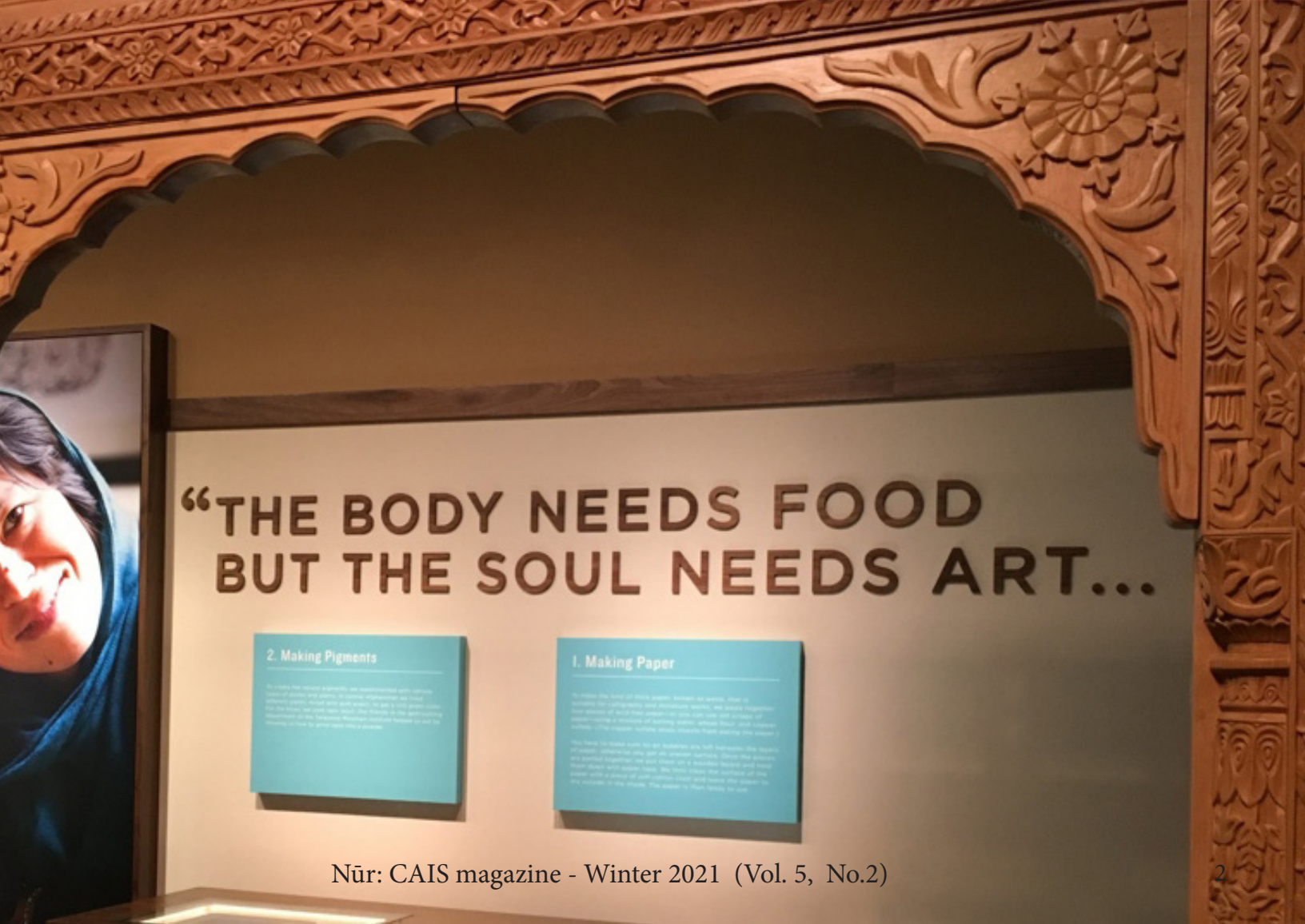
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From the Director's Desk

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Director, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies



Four years ago, in December 2016, I was at the Freer and Sackler Galleries for an exhibit on the art of the Qur'an which featured a large collection of Qur'ans from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul (see *Nūr*, v. 2, no. 2, Spring 2017). At the same time, there was another exhibit on view: "Turquoise Mountain: Artists Transforming Afghanistan," highlighting the work of a new generation of Afghani artists dedicated to preserving and reviving their country's artistic tradition in woodwork, calligraphy, ceramics, and other crafts.

Having just seen the Qur'an exhibit, I was particularly struck by the work of Sughra Hussainy, a woman trained in the traditional arts of calligraphy, miniature painting and illumination. On the wall above the case displaying her work was a quote from the artist: "The body needs food but the soul needs art." Her words are the inspiration behind this issue of *Nūr*.

We have now been living under the shadow of a pandemic for the better part of a year. Even with the news of vaccines, there is still suffering and loss in so many ways amid the heroic acts of healthcare professionals and many others in public service. The COVID-19 pandemic has driven us indoors, away from one another, and unable to travel. Tensions between nations, races, political parties, and religious communities have been strained anew.

In this issue of *Nūr*, we hope to provide a little food for the soul by focusing on the beauty that results from human interaction, the dazzling diversity that is expressed by the arts and architecture of Islam. Out of the vast artistic output from Islamic cultures over the centuries, we highlight fifteen works drawn from museums across the United States and from around the world that express diversity, the rich diversity that has characterized Islamic societies for more than a thousand years — diversity in terms of geography, religion, race, ethnicity, language, gender and sexuality. The universal appeal of Islamic poetry is seen in the reflection by Rev. Amy Water Peterson, an American Lutheran pastor for whom the Persian poetry of Hafiz (1320-1389 CE) has become an important part of her faith formation as a Christian. Victor Edwin, a Jesuit priest, discusses the threat to religious diversity in India exemplified by the Ayodhya Mosque controversy; and "From the Bookshelf" highlights several new books on Islamic art and topics of diversity in Islamic societies.

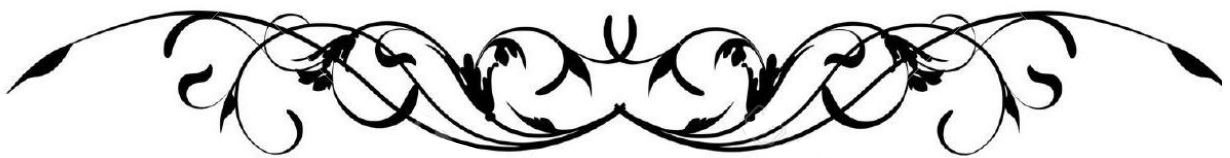
Islamic art is certainly not a cure for a deadly virus; but by reflecting the beauty of human diversity, it may indeed serve to heal what afflicts our souls.

السلام عليكم

Dazzling Diversity



Art and Architecture from Islamic Lands



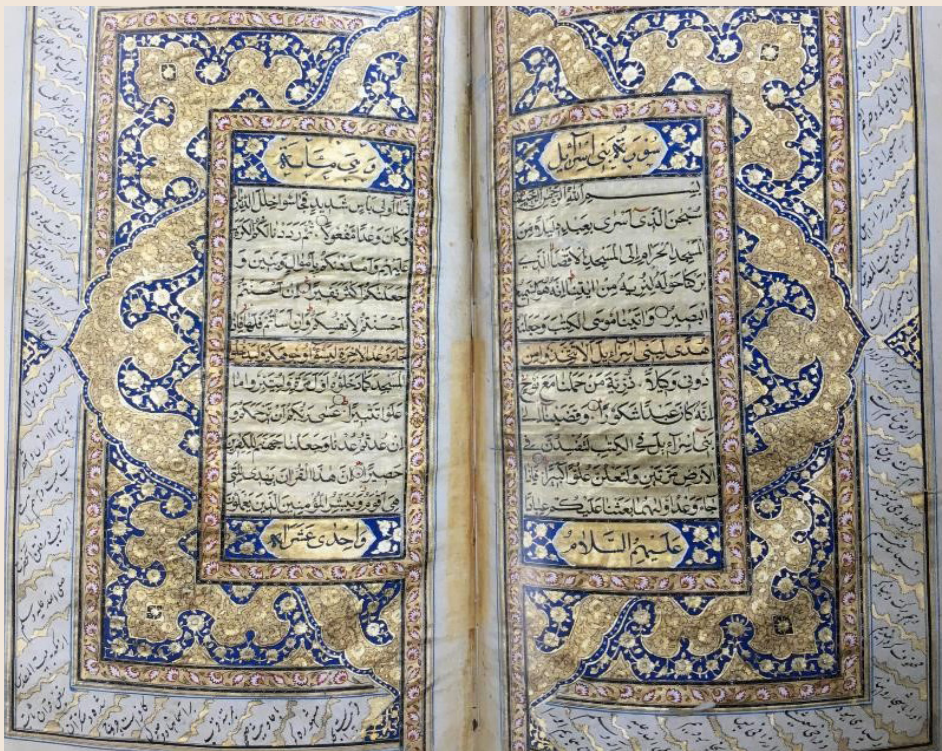
A Mother's Gift

Single-volume Qur'an. Northern India, before 1659. 27.2 x 15.5 cm. Black, red and blue ink and gold on paper. Khalili Collection (Qur61).

This single-volume Qur'an bears an inscription dated 1 Ramadan 1069 (23 May 1659) indicating that the Qur'an was formerly used for recitations "in the presence of the queen of the world, Mumtaz Mahal, known as Taj Bibi." Mumtaz Mahal is well known to historians as the beloved wife of the emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658). Tragically, she died giving birth to their fourteenth child in 1631, just two and a half years after Shah Jahan ascended the throne. He honored her memory with the splendid mausoleum known to us today as the Taj Mahal.

The inscription also tells us that because her eldest son Dara Shikoh greatly admired the volume, she "bestowed it upon her beloved son with special pleasure." At an early age, the prince had demonstrated a particular interest in Islamic spirituality and mysticism and, in time, authored

a number of works on these subjects. The Qur'an was inscribed just months before he was executed by his brother in a struggle for their father's throne.



The Qur'an that bears the names of Mumtaz and Dara Shikoh is a particularly luxurious volume, rendered in the 'Kashimiri style,' with solid gold grounds used for the text throughout, multiple polychrome floral frames of gold on each page, and highly ornate 'hasps' with floral

scrolls of gold-on-gold and gold-on-blue. Although Arabic is the language of the Qur'an and Islamic prayer for all Muslims, Persian was the language of the Mughal court, scholarship and the arts. Thus, the lines of commentary in the margins of this Qur'an, radiating out from the elaborately framed Arabic text, are written in Persian. During the early modern period, Persian served as the lingua franca among the three great Islamic empires: Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal, as well as in the Deccan Sultanates, that is over an area more than three thousand miles long, from Istanbul to Hyderabad.

See: Manijeh Bayani, Anna Contadini and Tim Stanley, *The Decorated Word: Qur'ans of the 17th to 19th Centuries*. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, vol. 4, part 1 (1998), cat. 72.

The Nurse's Qur'an

Bifolium from the "Nurse's Qur'an" (Mushaf al-Hadina) A.H. 410/ A.D. 1019–20. Tunisia, probably Qairawan
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on parchment H. 17 1/2 in. (44.5 cm). W. 23 5/8 in. (60 cm)
Metropolitan Museum of Art (2007.191)

In Ramadan 410 AH (January 1020 CE), a woman named Fatima, the nurse of the governor of Tunisia, commissioned a Qur'an that she endowed to the great mosque of Kairouan. Already by the end of the eighth century, Kairouan's mosque had become a prominent Sunni center of learning where the Qur'an and jurisprudence were taught alongside grammar, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. The Qur'an she commissioned is an impressive and monumental work.

When opened, the double parchment pages (bifolios) measure approximately 17.5 inches by 23.5 inches (44.5 x 60 cm). With only five lines of text per page, the whole Qur'an would have comprised some 3200 folios (or 1600 bifolios). The text is written in brown ink, with vowels marked in red, and other diacritics in blue and green. Titles and numbers of sūras (chapters) are inscribed in gold, enclosed in gold frames decorated with palm-leaf motifs. Variations in the calligraphy and the sheer scale of the project suggest that several calligraphers were employed. The bold variation of kufic writing employed for Fatima's Qur'an, termed "broken cursive" or "new style," combines thick strokes for the bodies of letters with sharply angled thin descending strokes for the "tails" of letters.



In addition to providing the name of Fatima as the patron of the Qur'an, the colophons tell us that: "Ali ibn Ahmad al-warraq ("the copyist") wrote (kataba), voweled (shakala), marked (rasama), gilded (dhahhaba), and bound (jallada) this Qur'an manuscript for the exalted nurse under the supervision of Durrah al-kātiba ("the lady scribe")." Thus, not only did a woman commission the Qur'an, but also the entire project, although executed by a man, was under the direction of a woman.

Today, the pages of "the Nurse's Qur'an" are dispersed among several museums, including the Museums of Islamic Art (Raqqada and Kairouan, Tunisia), the Bardo (Tunis), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), and the David Collection (Copenhagen).

See: Michael D. Calabria, "By the Book: Women as Calligraphers and Patrons of the Qur'an," in: *Making Gender in the Intersection of the Human and the Divine*. Cambridge Scholars, 2019. Pp. 161-184.

Maryam D. Ekhtiar et al., *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York, 2011. Pp. 60-61.

A Buddhist Bowl in the Ottoman Court

Once part of the Ottoman treasury of the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, this porcelain bowl originated in the Buddhist context of Ming China (1368-1644) as evidenced by the images on the interior surface. The cavetto is decorated in relief with some of the symbols of the Eight Treasures of Buddhism, including a lidded jar, conch shell, parasol, wheel of the law and canopy, resting on 'lingzhi' (fungus) and with other auspicious plants. The lidded jar signifies perfect wisdom; the conch shell, the call to prayer; the parasol shades all medicinal herbs; the wheel symbolizes the prayer wheel of the law taught by Buddha, and the canopy protects all living things. Sometime later, the bowl made its way to the Ottoman



court where, it was embellished with gold and precious gems as was common practice, not only for ceramics, but for items made of jade and crystal as well.

Over the turquoise roundels on the bowl's convex surface, six rubies are arranged around a central ruby, and set into leaf-shaped gold fittings with raised borders around the stones to keep them in place. Connecting the stones are interlaced gold lines. In between the roundels are two single rubies set in gold leaf-shaped mounts, the upper one with connecting arches to the roundels on either side. Like the formulae on Islamic ceramics, this bowl is intended to convey blessings to the one who uses it. Its inscription reads: "May ten thousand blessings gather together."

Bowl. Jingdezhen, China. Ca. 1540-90. Jiaging porcelain. Height 6 cm, diameter 12 cm. Ottoman embellishments: gold, ruby and enamel, ca. 1570-1600. British Museum (1904,0714.1)

See: Ladan Akbarnia et al., *The Islamic World: A History in Objects*. London: British Museum, 2018. Pp. 158-9.

Diversity in a Doorknocker

Doorknocker. Southern Italy. Late 11th to early 12th century CE. Cast and engraved bronze, partly inlaid with niello. Diameter 44.3 cm. David Collection, Copenhagen (50/2000).



Due to its central location in the Mediterranean, Sicily served as a major conduit for cultural exchanges between Europe and Islamic North Africa in the Medieval Period. An Arab Aghlabid army seized control of the island in 827 CE after Byzantine rule of Sicily had become divided. Successive Muslim powers ruled the island until it was conquered by the Normans in 1061. Thus, medieval art and architecture from Sicily often combines elements of Byzantine, Arab and Norman origin.

This metal doorknocker is similar in design to others from Romanesque churches on the Italian mainland, although the religious inscription in Arabic on this example indicates that the lively lion head once greeted visitors to a mosque or Muslim residence. Reading clockwise from the bottom, the inscription contains the basmala – “In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful” – followed by the shahada

– “I testify there is no god but God. I testify Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”

It is likely that this doorknocker comes from the decades after the Norman conquest. Arabic was one of the languages of the Norman court in Palermo, and Muslims served in the Norman administration.

See: Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom. *Cosmophilia: Islamic Art from the David Collection*, Copenhagen. Chicago, 2006. Pp. 42-43; 183.

A Bicultural Brooch



Brooch, c. 700-900. Northwest Europe (brooch) and the Middle East (seal). Gilt copper alloy with black glass setting. Height 4.4 cm, width 4.5 cm. British Museum (1875,1211.1)

This cruciform brooch was discovered in a bog close to the town of Ballycotton near Cork, a major Viking settlement in 8th-9th century Ireland. Although the brooch is similar in design to others from the Carolingian period (ca. 714-911), this example bears an unusual element: a center glass seal inscribed in Arabic: *tubna lillah* – “We have turned in repentance to God.” It is unlikely that the wearer of the brooch would have been able to read the inscription, but perhaps admired the piece for its exotic origin. The close fit of the setting to the glass seal suggests that the brooch was designed specifically to hold it. Similar seals inscribed in Arabic were set into Viking finger rings discovered in Sweden and Russia. It is known that Viking traders crossed Russia on the Volga to the Caspian Sea, and from there overland to Baghdad and other cities of the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258).

See: Ladan Akbarnia et al., *The Islamic World: A History in Objects*. British Museum, 2018. P. 86.

A Multicultural Carpet

Carpets serve important functions in Islamic societies, not merely as floor coverings or wall hangings, but as clean surfaces on which to pray. Prayer carpets often convey images of the entrance to paradise, as in this example where a triple-arched gateway is lit by a lamp evoking the presence of the Divine. Paradise is suggested

by the floral elements, the blossoms that sprout between the columns and the light blue border with its rosettes and white tulips, carnations, hyacinths, and curved, serrated leaves. In the parapet above the arches, four small domes are indicative of the carpet's Ottoman origin. Yet, other elements of design and manufacture suggest a more complex cultural context. As has been noted, the S-spun wool, dyes, and asymmetrical knot are native to Cairo which was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire when Selim I conquered Egypt in 1517. It is known that Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-95) brought a number of Egyptian carpet weavers and raw materials to the Ottoman capital in 1585. Moreover, the slender, paired columns reflect the culture of Islamic Spain before the fall of Granada in 1492. Walter Denny concludes:

The motifs may have migrated from that region to Istanbul via artifacts that accompanied Sephardic Jews, who in the early sixteenth century were invited by Turkish sultans to settle in

Istanbul and thereafter formed a sizeable element of the population of the city. Our prototype carpet is, therefore, a paradox: a quintessentially Ottoman creation that synthesizes artistic elements from Egypt, Spain and the Ottoman Capital.¹



Carpet with Triple-Arch Design, ca. 1575–90. Turkey, probably Istanbul. Silk (warp and weft), wool (pile), cotton (pile). L. 68 in. (172.7 cm) x W. 50 in. (127 cm) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.51)

¹ Walter B. Denny, *How to Read Islamic Carpets* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 45-47.

The Long Journey of a Begging Bowl



Kashkul. Iran, 1880-81 CE. Coco-de-mer shell and brass chain 10 1/4 x 5 7/16 x 4 9/16 in. (26.0 x 13.8 x 11.6 cm) Brooklyn Museum. Henry L. Batterman Fund (47.203.5).

As in other religions, Islam produced holy men and women who undertook a life of voluntary poverty and itinerancy, stripping themselves of base thoughts, actions and desires, and directing their hearts, minds, and bodies to the remembrance of God. These itinerants (dervishes) met their physical needs by collecting alms in a begging bowl or, *kashkūl* in Persian. Kashkuls were produced in a variety of materials, including metal, ceramic, wood and coco-de-mer shell, as is this example. The shell encloses the large nut of the coco-de-mer palm which grows in the Seychelle Islands in the Indian Ocean. The shells are carried by ocean currents over two thousand miles to the shores of southern Iran. For Sufis, the long and difficult journey of the shell, tossed about on the ocean's waves, took on spiritual significance as a symbol of the dervish's quest for spiritual knowledge. In all media, kashkuls are often elaborately decorated and inscribed with Qur'anic inscriptions, poetry, and depictions of dervishes. This example from the Brooklyn Museum bears the following unattributed verses:

Whoever has a pure soul as I do is welcome to the solitude of the dervishes;
An example of virtue even tames animals;
This is due to the deeds of the dervishes.
Whoever speaks of the radiance of the dervishes deserves the goblet of wine;
I will be among the dervishes, for all eternity, away from evil.

See: Laban Akbarinia with Francesca Leoni, *Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam*. Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, 2010. P. 28.

An Andalusian Astrolabe

Planispheric Astrolabe. Spain (al-Andalus), 14th century CE. Bronze inlaid with silver. Diameter 13.5 cm. Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (AKM 611).

Due to their far-reaching commercial activities, Muslims used and developed directional and navigational devices such as the astrolabe to determine the position of the sun and stars relative to the ground. Devices like the astrolabe allowed Muslims to determine their geographic position and pray at the proper time and in the proper direction no matter where they were in the world – on land or at sea. Although the astrolabe was invented in Hellenistic times, and used by the Byzantines, those produced in the Islamic world were of exceptional craftsmanship. In this 14th-century astrolabe, the multicultural and multi-confessional society of Islamic Spain (al-Andalus) is strikingly apparent as evidenced by its multilingual inscriptions. When first made,

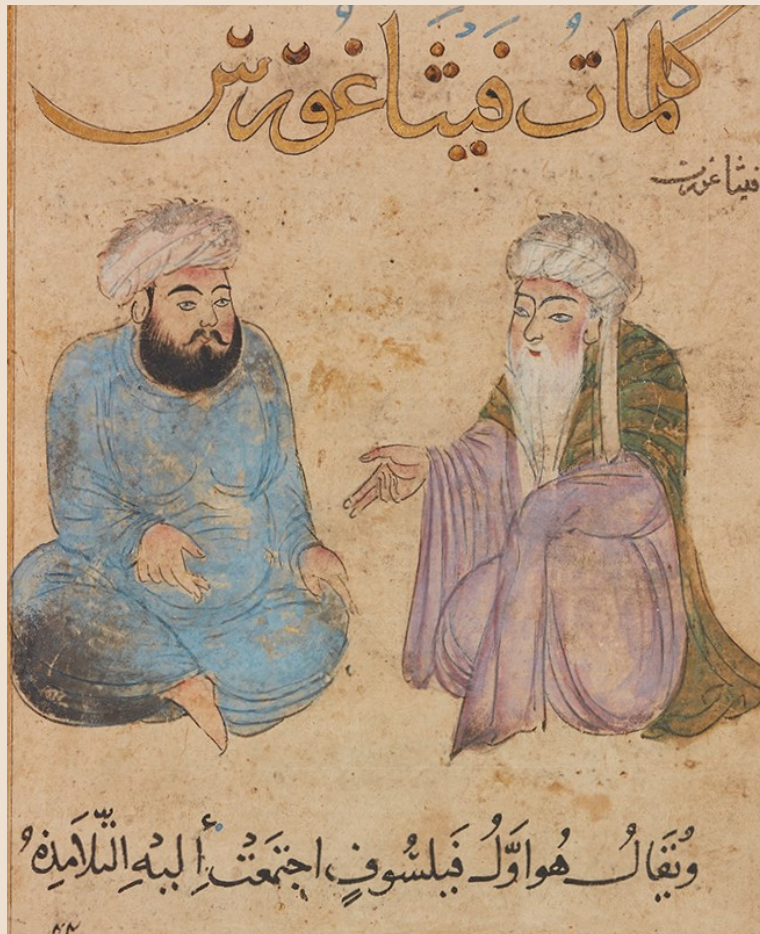
the astrolabe was inscribed in Latin and Arabic, reflecting its intended use by Christians and Muslims. Later Hebrew words were scratched on, indicating use by a Jew, a member of the third religious community comprising Andalusian society. A century later that learned, cultured and opulent world of Muslims, Christians and Jews of Andalusia would come to end when Isabella and Ferdinand expelled first Jews and then Muslims from their Catholic kingdom.



See: Henry S. Kim et al. *Pattern and Light: Aga Khan Museum*. New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2014. Pp. 94-95.

Greek Philosophy in the Muslim World

Spiritual Words from Greek Philosophy: with the Sayings of the Philosophers and Their Portraits. Baghdad, Iraq. Late 13th century. Opaque watercolor, ink and gold in paper. 20.6 x 15 cm. Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (AKM 283)



This manuscript presents collected maxims in Arabic attributed to Greek philosophers and notables. Its colophon is signed with the names of the celebrated Abbasid/Ikhanid calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta'simi (d. 1298), as well as an artist named Mahmud b. Abi al-Mahasin al-Qashi who illustrated the volume. Sometime between the 16th and 18th centuries, the volume was rebound, probably in the Ottoman world. At least six copies of this text are found in the Sülemaniye Library in Istanbul, attesting to the popularity of the work. In this illustration from al-Musta'simi's edition, the white-bearded figure on the right is identified as the philosopher Pythagoras (d. ca. 495 BCE) who is conversing with a disciple.

Muslim interest in Greek philosophy dates back to the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258). In Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate, the Abbasids collected Greek manuscripts and had them translated into Arabic, often with the assistance of Christians and Jews. The seventh Abbasid caliph, al-Ma'mun (r. 813-33), founded the Bayt al-Hikma ("The House of Wisdom") specifically for this purpose. For this reason, this Abbasid period is often referred to as the "Golden Age of Islam" as learning in philosophy, mathematics, medicine, engineering and many other fields of learning flourished.

See: Pattern and Light: Aga Khan Museum (Skira Rizzoli, 2014). Pp. 92.

A Jain Ascetic

Basavana (Indian, active c. 1560-1600). Ink and color on paper. Image: 14.7 x 9.8 cm. Millikin Collection, Cleveland Museum of Art (1967.244).

Jainism is one of the ancient indigenous religions of India. Adherents of Jainism revere *jīnas* (“conquerors”), also known as *tirthankaras* (“ford-makers”), religious teachers who are believed to have achieved enlightenment and thus provide a way of crossing (ford) from *samsara* (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth) to liberation (*mokṣa*). This path is characterized by nonviolence (*ahimsa*) towards all living beings – in thought, word and deed – and asceticism.

This painting of a Jain ascetic comes, probably from the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605 CE) who showed great interest in the various religious traditions of his realm, and periodically forbade the slaughter of animals in consideration of Jain beliefs. The man depicted here may be Shantichandra, a Jain monk whom Akbar greatly admired. Tucked under the figure’s left arm is a short broom or brush used to sweep insects away so as not to tread them underfoot. The book (also tucked under his arm), walking stick and water pot are the symbols of an itinerant ascetic.



See: The Indian Portrait, 1560-1860. Edited by Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jairwala. Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2010. Pp.72-73.

A Cross-cultural Chasuble

Chasuble. Fabric: Iran, 16th century. Shoulders: Russia, 17th century. Silk, silver threads. Length, 1236 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (IR-2327).



For centuries, textiles from Islamic lands were highly sought after and played an important role in international trade and cultural exchanges. Fine quality linens, cottons and silks – woven with inscriptions in Arabic, geometric and floral designs, and animal and human figures – were prized not only for fashion and furnishings, but for use in Christian religious contexts to wrap relics or to be worn as vestments.

The body of this chasuble, worn by Russian priests during the celebration of the liturgy, is an Iranian textile

woven with a repeating scene from the story of Layla and Majnun. Rendered in Persian verse by poets such as Nizami Ganjavi (1188 CE), Amir Khusrau Dehlavi (1299) and Nūr ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī (1484), the love story of Layla and Majnun serves as a mystical metaphor for divine longing. Majnun, prevented from marrying Layla, wandered the desert as an ascetic, accompanied only by the wild animals who find peace with him. In the scene depicted on the textile, Majnun cradles a deer in his arms while other animals look on. Russian Christians perhaps understood this motif as a representation of Christ, the Good Shepherd.



See: Heavenly Art, Earthly Beauty: Art of Islam. Mikhail B. Petrovsky and John Vrieze, ed. London, 1999. Catalog no. 79 (p. 135).

The Descent from the Cross

Plate fragment. Egypt or Syria, late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. Ceramic; slip and painted decoration under transparent glaze. L: 31 cm. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (13174).

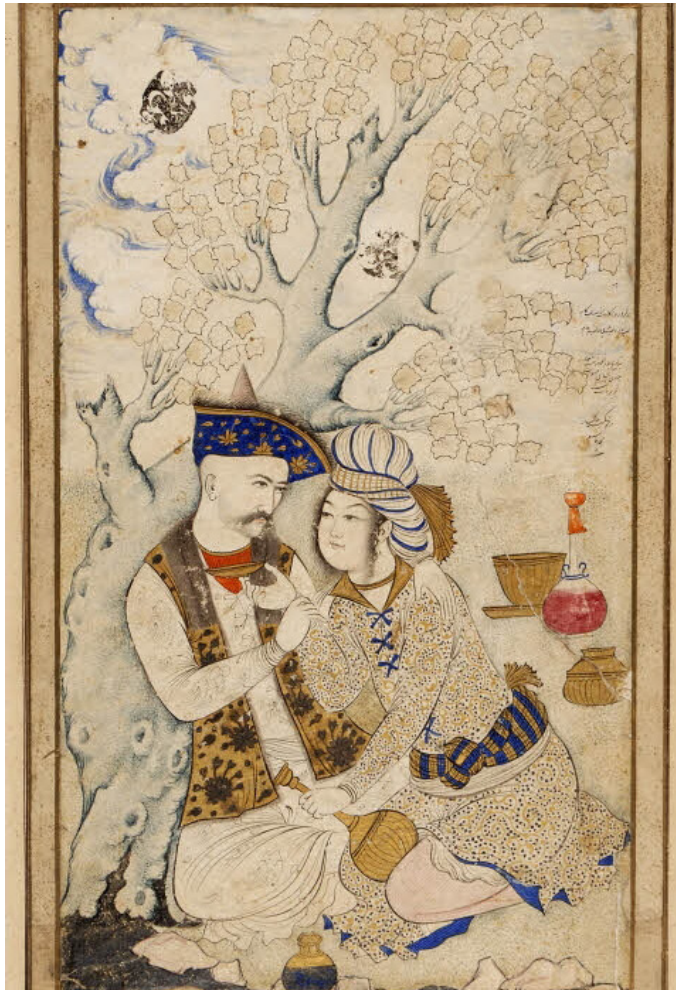


This fragment is a part of a plate other fragments of which are in the Benaki Museum in Athens and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. Together they depict the removal of Jesus' body from the cross. The plate probably served as a paten during the celebration of Christian eucharist.

In this shard, Mary, draped in a deep blue cloak, receives the body of Christ, her faced pressed against his, and her hands tenderly clutching his body. The other fragments depict weeping angels above, Joseph of Arimathea, three women and the Apostle John. Although the theme is derived from Byzantine iconography, the technique reflects Syro-Egyptian Islamic art, along with stylistic elements and motifs derived from central Asian Ilkhanid Art in the period (1256-1353) following the Mongol conquests.

See: The Treasure of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo. Edited by Bernard O'Kane. Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2006. No. 127.

A Sensual Shah



Shah 'Abbas and a pageboy. Muhammad Qasim. Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper. 25.5 x 15 cm. Isfahan, 24 Jumada II 1036 (12 March 1627). Louvre (MAO 494).

Although Islamic law forbids illicit sexual activity of any kind, nevertheless art from Islamic lands, especially painting and poetry, is not devoid of erotic and homoerotic elements, whether intended to be understood literally or symbolically. This intimate portrait depicts the Safavid Shah 'Abbas I ("the Great," r. 1588-1629) leaning against a tree by a stream, closely embracing a male servant, staring intently into the young man's eyes. The servant, whose gaze is likewise fixed upon the Shah, raises a cup of wine to his sovereign's lips. The subject of the painting reflects well the two-line poem inscribed on the right side of the painting above the wine flask:

May the world fulfill your wishes from three lips:

The lips of the beloved, the lips of a stream and the lips of a cup.

Same-sex attraction and wine are common motifs in classical Sufi poetry in which the desire for a beautiful youth symbolizes the soul's longing for union with the Divine, and wine signifies the intoxicating love flowing between God and humanity. As the Persian poet Hafiz wrote:

Give me some wine so I can pass on news of the mytery

Of Fate, and whose face it is with whom I have fallen

In love, and whose fragrance has made me drunk*.

*The Angels Knocking on the Tavern Door: Thirty Poems of Hafez. Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn, trans. Harper, 2008. P. 43.

See: Sheila Canby, Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran. London: British Museum, 2009. Cat. no. 123, pp. 250-1.

A Hindu Painting from Mughal India

Chitarman II (Indian, about 1680-1750). Tiered court scene. Ca. 1735. Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Michael de Havenon (1973.237).

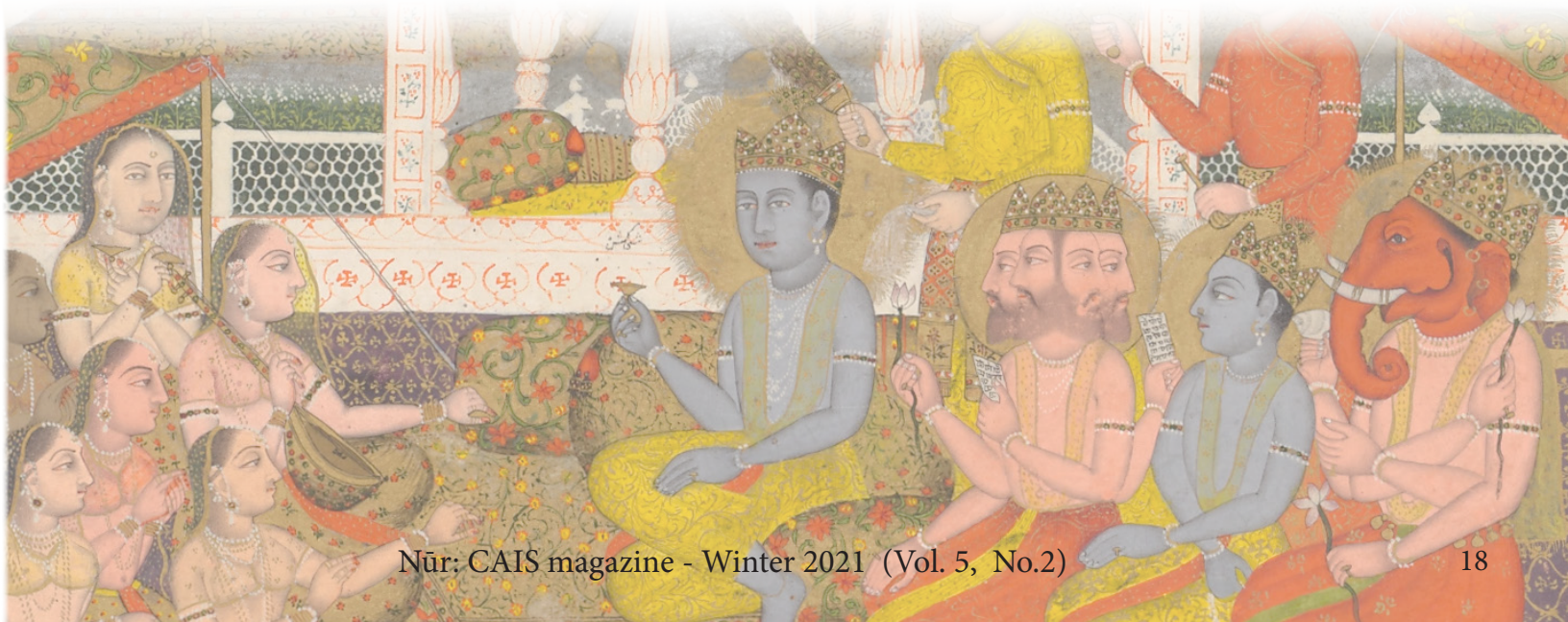


Not unlike his ancestor Akbar, the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1848) was interested in Hindu tales and traditions. He commissioned this

painting that depicts the acts of Rama, hero of the great epic the Ramayana. In the upper left corner, Rama slays the demon of the golden city of Lanka. In the middle sections of the painting, various Hindu deities enjoy music, kite-flying and boating. Previously, in 1594, Akbar had commissioned a translation of the Ramayana into Persian accompanied by lavish illustrations several of which may be seen in the Freer and Sackler Galleries (Washington, DC) and the David Collection (Copenhagen).



See: Sonya Rhie Quintanilla et al., *Mughal Paintings: Art and Stories*. Cleveland Museum of Art, 2016. Pp. 258-262.



An Ethiopian in India

A Portrait of Farhad Khan. Ca. 1680. Golconda, Deccan India. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Painting: H: 21 cm X 12.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2019.237).



The subject of this exquisite portrait from Deccan India is a man of Ethiopian origin identified as Farhad Khan. Although little is known about him, his rich attire and accessories indicate a man of distinction: a fine white jama with a floral sash (patka), a gilded punch dagger (katar) at his waist, a shawl striped with gold, and a sword with a golden hilt. He holds a rose to signify his refined taste.

Between the mid-fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, Ethiopian (habshi) slaves were brought to the Deccan sultanates of South Asia to satisfy the demand for military labor. Although Christian Ethiopians were not permitted to enslave other Christians, they did raid neighboring pagan communities and sold them to Arab Muslim brokers in exchange for Indian textiles. Once in the Deccan, the habshi were converted to Islam, educated, and trained for service in elite military units, not unlike the janissaries of the Ottoman Empire or the ghulam of the Safavid Empire. On the death of their masters, the habshi slaves gained their freedom and then

often rose in rank to become military commanders (amirs) and persons of great political influence. The most famous example is that of Malik Ambar (1548-1626) who became the prime minister and “king-maker” of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate, commanding a prodigious military force that challenged the persistent incursions of the Mughal Empire.

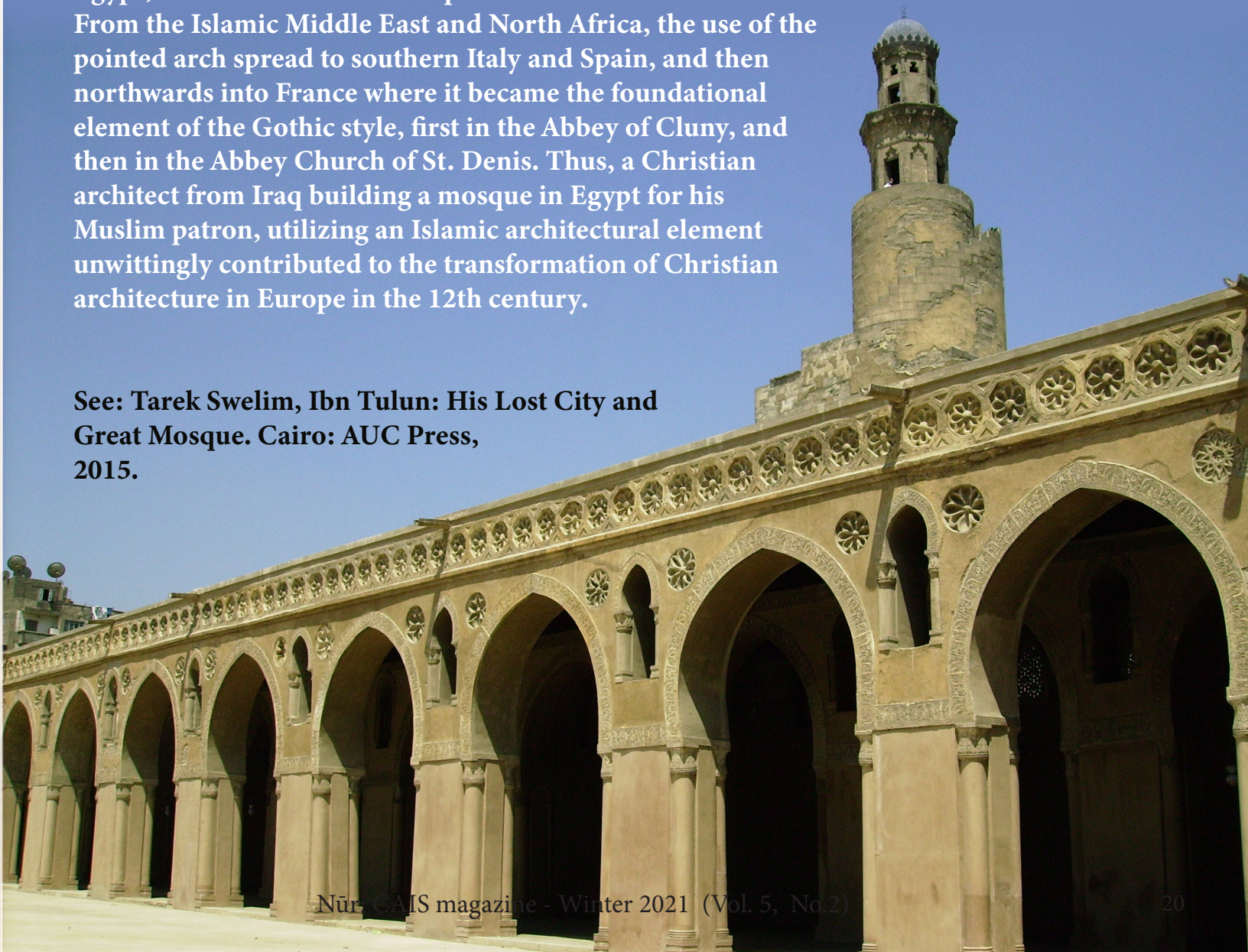
See: *Slavery and South Asian History*, Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Eaton, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2006.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN A CAIRO MOSQUE

Cairo's Ibn Tulun Mosque is the earliest extant mosque in Egypt. It was constructed between 876 and 879 CE by Ahmad Ibn Tulun, a Central Asian Turk, who was born and raised in Samarra, Iraq, and served as the governor of Egypt, then part of the Abbasid Caliphate. It remains one of Cairo's largest and best known of historical mosques, yet, authors often fail to mention that, according to Balawi's 10th-century biography of Ibn Tulun, the mosque's architect was a Christian, known simply as al-Nasrani ("the Christian"), who was possibly from Samarra like Ibn Tulun.

Perhaps inspired by Abbasid mosques in Samarra, the Christian architect of Ibn Tulun's mosque utilized gently pointed arches, used here for the first time in Egypt, one of the earliest examples in all of Islamic architecture. From the Islamic Middle East and North Africa, the use of the pointed arch spread to southern Italy and Spain, and then northwards into France where it became the foundational element of the Gothic style, first in the Abbey of Cluny, and then in the Abbey Church of St. Denis. Thus, a Christian architect from Iraq building a mosque in Egypt for his Muslim patron, utilizing an Islamic architectural element unwittingly contributed to the transformation of Christian architecture in Europe in the 12th century.

See: Tarek Swelim, *Ibn Tulun: His Lost City and Great Mosque*. Cairo: AUC Press, 2015.



Women & Architecture in Istanbul

Throughout much of Islamic history, Muslim women of ruling families used their financial resources for charitable enterprises. The cities of Cairo, Istanbul, Isfahan, Lahore, Agra and Delhi among others would look very different today without the mosques, madrasas, libraries, baths, sabils, gardens and caravanserais commissioned by women. Surveys of Islamic art and architecture often fail to mention female patronage in Muslims societies, or discuss the structures that were built and sustained with their resources – creative, intellectual and financial.

One such patroness was Mihrimah Sultan (1522-78 CE), daughter of the Ottoman Emperor Suleyman I. She commissioned two mosques of her own in Istanbul designed by the great architect Mimar Sinan (1490-1588 CE) and supervised the construction of the mosque of her husband, the vizier Rüstem Pasha.





Theseccondofhermosques(1563-1570)occupiesaprominepositiononahillnexttothecity's western walls and adjacent to gate that led to Edirne (Erdirnekapi'), the first capital of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman architectual historian Gülru Necipoğlu has observed that this mosque was "a revolutionary monument for its time, hailed as one of the chief architect's most imaginative works, pushing the technological limits of his age."

See: Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*. London: Reaktion, 2011. Pp. 305-314.



Course Announcement



Spring Semester 2021

**HISTORY OF THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST
(HIST 365.01)**

Tuesdays & Thursdays 10-11:15am

This course treats the emergence of the modern Middle East, focusing on the period from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 until the present day. It will address the impact of European colonialism, reformist attempts to meet this challenge, the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of nationalism, Zionism, pan-Arabism, and Islamism. Particular attention will be given to American involvement in the Middle East since the mid-20th century.

Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM

Exhibit Announcement

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Between Sea and Sky: Blue and White Ceramics from Persia and Beyond

The enduring appeal of blue and white ceramics stretches across the centuries and around the world. This exhibition tells the story through the lens of the exceptional Hossein Afshar Collection of Persian ceramics, on long-term loan to the MFAH. These works of art—exhibited here together for the first time—open the door to a new and more nuanced understanding of the monumental contribution of Persian blue and white to the world history of ceramics and the extensive commercial connections and cultural resonances from East Asia through the Middle East and Western Europe.



Now through May 31, 2021

WWW.MFAH.ORG

The Mystic and the Minister

By the Reverend Amy Walter Peterson

Shams al-Din Muhammad, known more commonly as Hafiz (ca. 1320-1389 CE), is one of the most renowned and beloved Persian poets, who has gained universal appeal over the centuries for his ardent expressions of divine longing. In this reflection, Lutheran minister Reverend Amy Walter-Peterson describes how Hafiz has given expression to her own Christian faith and spirituality. Ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 2003, she has served in a variety of ministries at the local, synod and national levels. Reverend Amy has served a pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Fairport since 2017, and a frequent teacher in the summer English program at St. Leo's Coptic Seminary in Cairo Egypt since 2007.



December 2011 marked the end of a turbulent year in my vocational life as a Lutheran minister. After a significant professional transition, a diagnosis that would eventually take the life of a dear friend and mentor, my sense of spiritual fire had been reduced to a few stray embers. The texts, music, and activities that had always re-kindled my spirit were not available or simply not working for me at this point. My spiritual life felt like the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones. There was a lot of rattling and not much breath.

A trip to Bethlehem, PA brought me to the Moravian Bookstore where I paged through *A Year with Hafiz*.¹ I turned to January I and read:

I am a hole in a flute that the Christ's breath moves through—listen to this

music.

I am the concert from the movement of every creature singing in myriad chords. And every dancer, their foot I know and lift. And every brush and hand, well, that is me too, who caresses any canvas or cheek.

A spark shot from ashes. That spark signified more movement of the Spirit than I had experienced in months as I dutifully worked myself through the pages of theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1946), Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), and other Christian reflections centered on scripture that had been my go-to daily readings. I bought the book and started turning to its pages each morning. This was not traditional Christian devotional and spiritual reading of any kind, but what kept me returning each day were the insights that Hafiz, a 14th-century Persian Muslim-Sufi poet, opened into my own Christian faith.

Continued—>

The final verses in the text that first sparked my curiosity, provided another way to think about the movement of the Holy Spirit active in and around me.

We are a hole in a flute, a moment in space, that the Christ's body can move through and sway all forms—in an exquisite dance—as the wind in a forest.

Other verses invited new ways of thinking about the incarnation of Christ or Saint Paul's writing of the limited vision that we hold on this side of eternity:

Even the shadow of God is brilliant, so brilliant, so much so even God has trouble looking at Himself as that . . . unless He is more disguised, hidden in illusion, hidden as he can be, in us.

Through the writing of Hafiz, I heard a voice doing what the poet Emily Dickinson commends, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant." In these writings, I recognized truth and wisdom that resonated with Christian teaching I had encountered elsewhere, including Christian mystics. But Hafiz came at this truth slant – that is, from a different time, a different worldview, a different faith practice – that opened to me a fresh way of accessing my own faith. Hafiz's insights called me out of the intellectual pursuit of faith, firmly grounded in my Lutheran heritage which had become my norm, and into a more embodied and sensual exploration. Through the spiritual re-awakening that began with Hafiz, I expanded my repertoire of spiritual writers to include other poets and spiritual writers and returned again to the rich poetic writings that fill the Psalms and other parts of scripture.

In the years since my first encounter with Hafiz, I continue to be drawn to his words

and increasingly I share his insights in my own teaching and preaching. What continues to draw me back is Hafiz' clear-eyed vision of common humanity that embodies the image of God, binds us to one another, and calls us into a life of abundance. This same vision lies at the heart of the Jesus story which grounds my Christian faith. Hafiz wrote:

I have come into this world to see this: the sword drop from men's hands even at the height| of their arc of anger



Anthology of Poetry by Hafiz
Iran, 17th century.

because we have finally realized there is just one flesh to wound and it is His—the Christ's, our Beloved's.

I have come into this world to see this: all creatures holding hands as we pass through this miraculous existence we share on the way to even a greater being of soul, a being of just ecstatic light, forever entwined and at play with him. I have come into this world to hear this: every song the earth has sung since it

was conceived in the Divine womb and began spinning from His wish, every song by wing and fin and hoof, every song by hill and tree and woman and child; every song of stream and rock, every song of tool and lyre and flute, every song of gold and emerald and fire, every song the heart should cry with magnificent dignity to know itself as God; for all other knowledge will leave us again in want and aching—only imbibing the glorious Sun will complete us.

I have come into this world to experience this: women and men so true to love they would rather die before speaking an unkind word, women and men so true their lives are His covenant—the promise of hope.

I have come into this world to see this: the sword drop from men's hands even at the height of their arc of rage because we have finally realized, we have finally realized, there is just one flesh we can wound and it is our own.

I want to live in this slant vision of this “kindom” of God that Hafiz illumines. I continue to invite Hafiz of Shiraz to nourish my spirit, feed my soul, and ground my faith in Christ.

¹All Hafiz references in this essay are drawn from *A Year with Hafiz: Daily Compilations*, Daniel Ladinsky; Penguin Books, 2011 (ISBN 978-0-14-311754-4). In all texts, I have removed the line formatting that appears in the original for the sake of space. ² Listen To This Music, 3 ³ Ibid. ⁴ Hidden, 155 ⁵ I Have Come Into This World To See This, 358-9



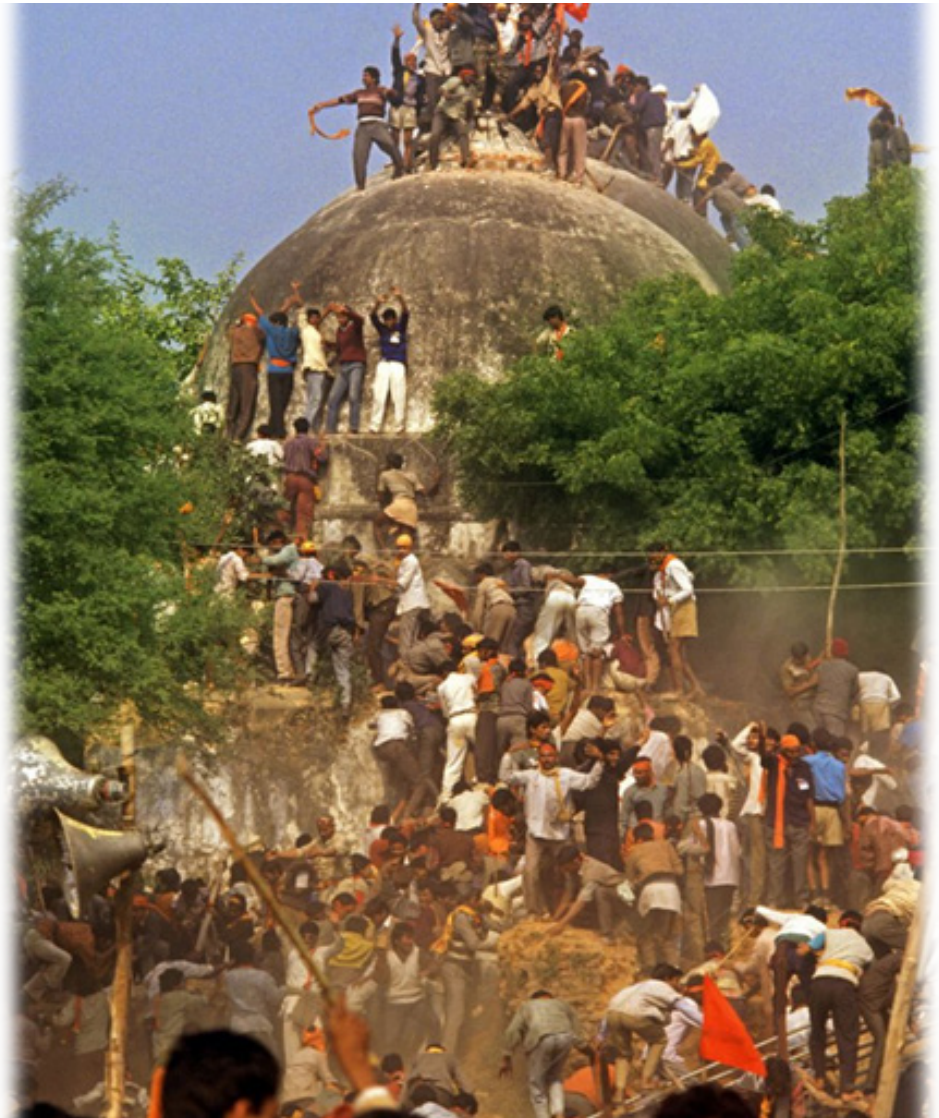
Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper.
Metropolitan Museum of Art (89.2.2153)

More than a Mosque: The Assault on the Babri Masjid and Democracy in India

Joseph Victor Edwin, SJ

The cold evening of 6 December 1992 is frozen in my mind-frame. I was sipping my evening tea and turned the radio on to listen to the Hindi news bulletin. The news reader announced to my horror that the several thousand volunteers who gathered in Ayodhya attacked the masjid (mosque) and destroyed the structure. The destruction of the mosque shocked the nation. The 'critical-mass-moment' for the final push came about after relentless 'right-wing political mobilization' of the communal forces in the country. What was destroyed on 6 December 1992 was not just a mosque that was built by Mir Baqi, commander of Mughal emperor Babur in 1528 CE, but the 'shared sense of oneness' was profoundly desecrated. The destruction of the mosque and the riots that followed damaged the secular fabric of our nation.

The right-wing nationalists continued to press the demand for a grand Ram temple to be built on the very place, where the masjid stood, which is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram. The legal disputes continued in the prolonged court battles for the past twenty-seven years. On November 2019, the Supreme court of India cleared the ground for the construction of the grand Ram temple by granting the land to deity Ram Lalla. Following the Supreme court decision, in August 2020, Mr. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India conducted 'bhoomi puja' (blessing of the land) and launched the construction of the temple. On September 30,



2020, a special judge acquitted all who were accused in the mosque demolition case. Is it an end to the deeply distressing episode in the life of the nation or a new beginning for an intense struggle to the save the civic notion of our India democracy that is founded on equality, liberty and justice?

This essay is neither a historical overview of the events nor a discussion on the political alignments around the dispute over the years. It is a reflection on the deeper malice that destroys the nation from within.

India is witnessing to an intense conflict between 'civic nationalism' and 'majoritarian nationalism'. The 'Mosque-Temple' saga is a symptom of what happens deep within: a tectonic shift from an 'idea of India' that is rooted in pluralistic conception of the nation as a nation of diverse peoples and another 'idea of India' that chases ever elusive homogeneous India. There are two key words here: 'nationalism' and 'idea of India'.

Mukul Kesavan, a historian with Jamia Millia Islamia, an Islamic university in New Delhi, in order to highlight the specificity of Indian nationalism, contrasts it with European nationalism that considers nation as a home for a homogenous people. In contrast to European nationalism, Indian nationalism considers nation as a home of diverse peoples: culturally, religiously, and linguistically. This original pluralistic conception of nation is rooted in the legacy of national independence movement. This idea of nation is 'territorial nationalism' and is represented by diverse people. Indian nationalism considers all who live within the territory of this great nation as equal citizens. Diverse people represented a diverse nation seeking to build the nation democratically. This idea of India is founded on two solid pillars: patriotism and commitment to liberty, equality and justice to all people. According to Shashi Tharoor, a member of the Indian Parliament, this civic notion of nationalism which respects multiple identities without negating any sections of people within its overarching nationalism must be defended in order to defend the unity of Nation. See his recent book: *Why I am a Hindu* (2018).

According to Romila Thapar, one of the eminent Indian historians, this idea of India is challenged by two other ideas of India. In her conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, she pointed out that in the 1920's the idea of Independent movement was challenged by two other notions of 'idea of India'. The Muslim League challenged this idea with a separate nation for Muslims, Pakistan. Hindu Mahasabha on its part

articulated its own 'idea of India'. The RSS that was formed on 25 September 1925 framed India in terms of Hindu Rashtra. Hindu Rashtra will be a majoritarian Hindu State where the plight of 200 million Muslims, 30 million Christians would be relegated into second-class citizenry. RSS's 'idea of India' denies the values of 'liberty, equality, and justice' to a large section of people. While 'civic nationalism' respected multiple identities within the overarching nationalism, the 'majoritarian nationalism' subjugates other identities and merges Hindu identitarianism with citizenship. The idea of India of the national freedom movement was an inclusive one, whereas, the idea of India of both the RSS and the Muslim League were exclusive.

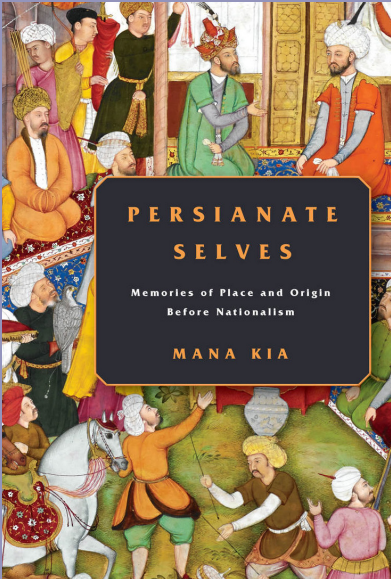
The 'composite nationalism' of the freedom movement that got strengthened through the Constitution of India was put into practice by the successive government at least in the first three decades of Independent India. However, over the years Constitutional democracy was weakened by successive governments. With Mr. Narendra Modi at the helm of affairs for the last six years, the ideology of the ruling dispensation is firmly founded on the RSS ideology and the nation is increasingly pushed into 'majoritarian nationalism'.

We are standing at a crisis point. The struggle is more than about the Temple or the Mosque. The moot question is how to deactivate the Hindutva ideology that powers the governance (misgovernance) that subjugates minorities, Dalits and Tribals and derails, weakens and destroys our Constitutional democracy? How are we going to defend the unity of our great nation? It must be affirmed that return to the word and spirit of the Indian Constitution is the only way to save our nation from further decadence.



Fr. Victor is a lecturer of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Vidyajyoti College of Theology (Delhi) and Secretary of the Islamic Studies Association in India

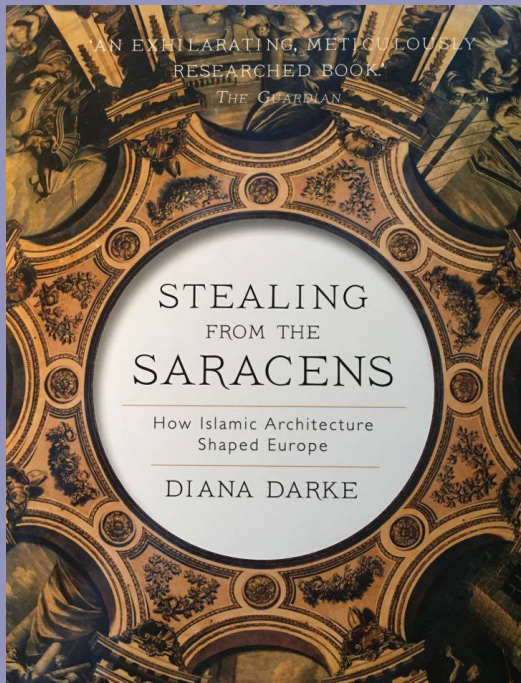
From The



Mana Kia. Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism.

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020.

At a time when nationalist ideologies have become common throughout the world, this book argues against equating “Persian” with “Iranian,” and demonstrates that in the early modern period, being Persian signified the sharing of an educational, literary, and linguistic foundation with peoples in Central and South Asia that transcended modern distinctions of ethnicity and nation.



Diane Darke. Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe.

London: Hurst, 2020.

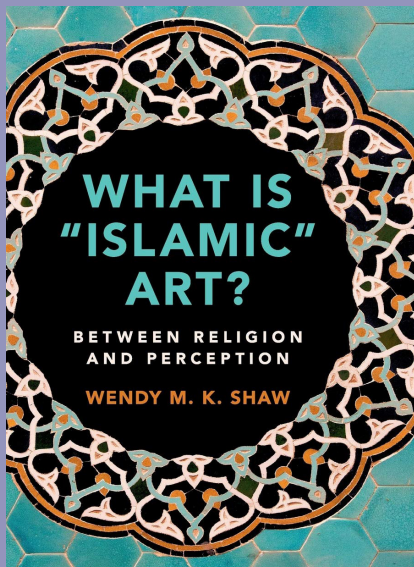
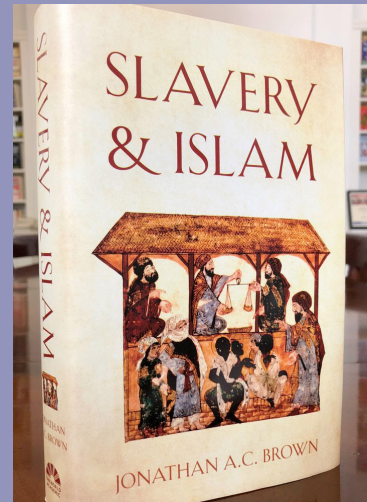
A provocatively titled but extensively researched study that documents the Islamic origin of many architectural elements associated with Gothic architecture, or what famed architect Sir Christopher Wren termed “the Saracen style.” Darke provides an important correction to the old and inaccurate saying: “East is East, and West is West...”

Bookshelf

Jonathan Brown. Slavery and Islam. London:

Oneworld Academic, 2019.

While wrestling with the historical ambiguous term “slavery,” Brown expertly addresses the issue (broadly defined) in the Shariah and Islamic civilization as well as contemporary thought and practice. Readers will be delighted and/or disturbed depending upon one’s cultural, religious and political context.



Wendy M.K. Shaw. What is “Islamic” Art: Between Religion and Perception.

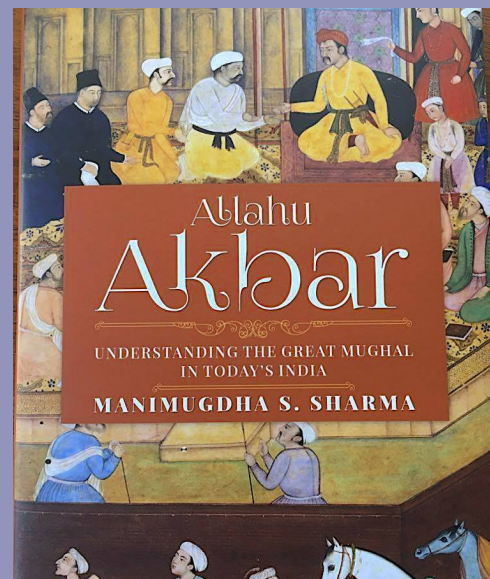
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Through a series of scholarly self-standing chapters, the author explores the question of “Islamic art” through a variety of media, and demonstrates that it “can do much more than indicate a shared humanity,” but can break through preconceived boundaries of “us” and “them.”

Manimugdha S. Sharma. Allahu Akbar: Understanding the Great Mughal in Today’s India.

New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Since the 1990’s anti-Islamic rhetoric has increasingly become part of India’s political and popular culture. Sharma corrects the historical distortions and refutes the false charges made by Hindu nationalists against the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) who remains a compelling figure of tolerance in an increasingly intolerant world.



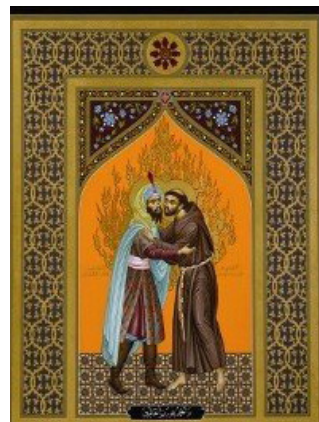
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