Key Themes for the Study of Islam

Edited by

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ART

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ON CONTEXTS LOST AND FOUND

I began writing this essay while conducting research in Berlin, Germany. I thought about the subject of Islamic art and its history as I walked through the gates of the Mshatta façade (a palace originally in Jordan), and while gazing at the monumental Diez albums (consisting of drawings and paintings from the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ilkhanid period in Iran). The decontextualized objects in the Pergamon Museum (Museum of Islamic Art) and the State Library of Berlin, respectively, were potent reminders that much of the modern discourse on the arts of the Islamic world is situated in the Western hemisphere.[1] My sense of Babylonian confusion was not just owing to the experience of passing through the Assyrian Ishtar gates (also in the Pergamon Museum), nor through the negotiations undertaken in English, German, and Turkish that were part of my daily routine as I studied a Persian manuscript. The displacement in time is certainly one that most historians suffer, but the frustration of handling illustrated pages ripped out from books and of trying to read signatures and seals smudged and erased in the process of being sold to collectors and museums, makes the disjunction all the more difficult. It is particularly difficult when today the places where these works of art and architecture were originally made are in varying degrees of political apathy and self-destruction. Thus this essay was conceived through a disjunctive condition, one that forces me to question the role of language, culture, and modernity in the writing and studying of art in the Islamic world.

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A definition of terms is immediately necessary. The question of what is Islamic art has been considered frequently and there are as many "sets" within which it can be placed as there are scholars writing about it. I consider the subject to contain works of art and architecture created by communities that identified with the religious praxis of Islam or were under the political influence of Muslim governments.[2] Thus one could include in such a comprehensive survey Hindu artists working in Mughal ateliers in Lahore, as well as contemporary mosques commissioned by Muslim communities in London. In the interest of economy I use an umbrella term, "Islamic Art," to include the arts of depiction, calligraphy, and architecture in a variety of media.[3] However, academics and practitioners at the beginning of the twenty-first century remain at a loss to define with any clarity, let alone unity, what may be the best strategies for understanding the multiple phenomena that may be gathered under the aegis of an Islamic art and its history.

The aim of this essay is to present Islamic art, but not through generalizations or overarching theories. Rather I would like to comment on certain issues that may be considered as exemplary. As previous scholars have noted, among the most interesting features of Islamic communities is their appropriation of forms and ideas from the various political and religious others with whom they came in contact. While searching for sources for Islamic art is an important exercise, it can sometimes be as esoteric a task as looking for uniqueness in the very subject. Another aspect that has been commonly noted is the diversity of the Islamic world and, by extension, the cultural artifacts produced in varying regions and at different historical periods. The contention of this essay is that works of art must be viewed not through generalizations alone, but through the particularities of their contexts, such as history and patronage, as well as on their own terms, that is through considerations of materiality and artistic intentionality.

SOME TRUISMS

Artistic production, by an individual or a group, is determined by numerous factors ranging from the practical to the arcane. Its definition is never static and neither are the categories that are meant to limit or characterize it. In the case of a religion spanning almost two

millennia and encompassing almost every part of the globe, the question of "what is Islamic art" is particularly problematic. At the risk of contradicting myself, I would like to point to some truisms, with the caveat that their vagueness may render them anecdotal. Nonetheless, the following observations may serve as bases for the discussions that follow in which I will turn to more detailed critiques.

For most pre- and early modern societies, the arts of calligraphy were given the highest attention, at least in their representation in historical texts and literary anthologies. Starting with works attributed to 'Ali bin Abi Talib (d. c. 661), the calligraphy of great masters such as Ibn Bawab (d. 1022) and Yaqut al-Mutasami (d. 1298) was studied, imitated, and emulated. Scholars have written on the importance of textual representation in Islamic art, owing to its associations with the divine words of God collected in the Qur'an.[4] In addition, the intellectual climate of many of the courts that supported this art was one that valued literary excellence – thus poetry as well as Qur'anic verses were inscribed by the most esteemed calligraphers. Writing skillfully was considered by some as an act of devotion that brought the practitioner closer to God. Beautiful handwriting was also equated to high moral standing, the handwriting acting as an index of the practitioner's character.

Calligraphers would compose illustrated manuscripts as well as design monumental epigraphy to be placed on buildings commissioned by the patron. The writing of calligraphy was a nuanced and complex undertaking in which shifting scales and functions defined the manner in which the works would be used and perceived. The artifacts on which the art was displayed, be they books or buildings, were valued for their beauty and for the skill of the master who had designed them. Yet, although often praised for technical finesse, the calligraphy was not simply a stringing together of words, but a well-thought-out endeavor in which the interaction between the reader, the calligrapher, and the object itself was one of intricate cultural negotiations and aesthetic choices.[5]

Works of art are powerful reminders of social complexity and caution us to look more closely at the objects themselves for clues to unraveling dogmatic ideologies and too-simple assumptions about religiosity. An obvious example is the existence of figurative art, despite discouragement in the form of prophetic traditions, or *hadith*. Although the traditions were often evoked in periods of aniconism and used to make the case for the destruction of works of

art and science, the existence of a multitude of examples – from the earliest years of Islam until the present day – is a forceful argument for a more nuanced view of polemics and popular tradition.[6]

Illustrated manuscripts were important sources of knowledge and visual pleasure. Subjects such as astronomy and medicine, inherited from the Greek classical traditions, were followed by political, religious, and epic history in which the world was represented through the lens of imperial patronage. The complex nature of book production was evidenced in the manner in which calligraphers, painters, embellishers, and binders, among other skilled men, came together in what would be the imperial atelier or workshop (*kitabkhana*).[7] In every book a conscious dialogue was underway with past masters, texts, and images. Although art historians often look for archaism or innovation in such works, it is perhaps more useful to move beyond simply recognizing these attitudes to discussing the motivation behind the choices made. The criteria of judging manuscripts, whether illustrated or not, were thus dependent on the particularities of the court and the historical moment in which they were produced.

Architecture is the most visible and widespread of the Islamic arts. Owing to the functional nature of its program and its rich symbolic potential, it incorporates simultaneously the idiosyncratic as well as the stereotypical. That is, a *madrasa* may be similar to others of its type in formal terms, but given the particularities of the piety that was enacted therein, it could be distinguished through numerous subtle and obvious ways. For example, it may be courtyard-centered like others in the region but its size and embellishment could convey important information about its significance to the community for whom it was built. The texts above the doors, windows, portals, and cornices would be inscribed with Qur'anic verses, some referencing its role as a place of study while others pointing to the specific school of theology espoused by the teachers. The texts may also include the names of patrons and builders, literally framing the structure with their ambitions and aspirations. These same facets could speak of social and religious exclusions, while at the same time making use of forms and techniques shared by other buildings of the time, be they secular or religious.

While deluxe books and precious wares were often restricted to courts and treasuries, architecture was built with a broader mandate. Palaces that were enclosed in citadels or situated in remote pastoral landscapes were themselves miniature cities that needed a diverse

support system; in and around them would be incorporated mosques and mausolea, as well as large kitchens and housing for servants. Thus while the patrons of imperial architecture were from elite and wealthy circles, those who used the spaces were not always as privileged. Interestingly, it is not the palaces that have survived over time, but rather buildings made explicitly for public use, such as mosques and commemorative shrines. The practice of *waqf*, or perpetual endowment, that is at the heart of Islamic charity, assured that such institutions (for they were complex social and spatial aggregates) would enjoy prosperity and longevity.

Religious belief and practice defined much of what we identify as Islamic art. Yet seldom is Islamic art studied in relation to Islam – as practice or philosophy. Rather, it is seen as an intellectually edifying project, to be studied through post-European Enlightenment criteria of valuation and judgment. Such criteria, which include the individualism of the artist and the originality and authenticity of the work itself, are not always relevant to objects and buildings created for and in Muslim communities. It is rarely questioned why a historic building, for example, that is in constant use since its foundation and thus rebuilt every few years is seen as less of a work of art than an empty, if well-preserved, structure that has not been in use for centuries. The pre-eminence given to the "age-value" of objects, regardless of their value for the populations that use them today, defines one of the deep limitations of the scholarship on Islamic art.[8] The point is not to state that older artifacts should not be preserved, but rather to suggest that the parameters for valuation be extended to include contemporary works of art that are responsive to current issues in both elite and populist public spheres.

What follows is a review of some of the methods that have been employed over the course of the last century, highlighting the most recent scholarship and offering some suggestions for further developing the study of Islamic art. Interspersed in this discussion will be consideration of works that best define the issues at stake, an approach that, I hope, will provide insight on the subject of Islamic art as well as the ways in which it has been studied at the time of production as well as in the present day.[9] Recent scholarship attests that studies conducted through varied disciplinary locations add and enrich the whole complex of what may be considered the history of Islamic art. A primary concern for those writing about Islamic art in recent years has been to find a site where the material may have the

most suitable intellectual companionship; that is, owing to the multidisciplinary nature of much of art historical inquiry, does the subject belong in departments of history, religion, or anthropology; or Near Eastern and South Asian cultures and civilizations; or in departments of the history of art and architecture?[10] As the discussion in this essay hopes to attest, inclusions and dialogue between fields are sources of intellectual and methodological enrichment that serve as models for future scholarship.

ON DIVERSITY IN SPACE AND TIME

Entry into the subject of art in Islam could be found through various means – the discussion could begin with the texts of Plato or Ibn al-'Arabi or Mohammad Arkoun; the architecture cited could include the citadel in Cairo or the Taj Mahal mausoleum in Agra or the Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin; the visual arts could be linked with Manichaean manuscripts from the ninth century, Jesuit art of the seventeenth century, or poster art of the Cuban revolution of the twentieth century. Bred into the study of Islamic art is the uncertainty that such a field exists, as witnessed by recent articles and books that profess to give hints to what it is and the many ways that it may be categorized and studied.[11] The setting of limits has traditionally been the way in which Islamic art has been characterized, based primarily on temporal and geographical exclusions. For example, although most surveys celebrate the regional breadth and historical depth of Islamic art and culture, major centers of production, say in Africa and South East Asia, are omitted. Furthermore, the histories of those that are included end in the eighteenth century, suggesting that modern colonial and nationalist art cannot be included in the more "traditional" categories.

There is an unquestioned and implicit belief in a unity in Islamic art, earlier manifested through the study of forms, and more recently in the assertion of a shared cultural heritage. What, one may ask, is the common thread between a brocade fashioned for a Fatimid caliph (tenth-century Egypt) and an Anatolian prayer rug (nineteenth-century Turkey), other than the shared medium? Taken further, what would be the connection between either of these objects and an illuminated Ilkhanid Qur'an (fourteenth-century Iran)? How can one

begin to describe a history in the absence of a focal point in which to begin the writing of that history? Whose manner of writing shall I adopt; whose voice shall gain precedence? Should I write of the Andalusian poet who described the great palace of Alhambra or the Iranian chronicler who described the miracles enacted at the thresholds of a shrine's kitchen? Shall I, too, describe the great domes of Ottoman mosques or the water cascading through a Mughal garden? What would be the effect of these ruminations?

The aim is not to find parallels between any regionally and historically disparate works of art (some may even question whether the term art is appropriate), but to begin by questioning why they could all simultaneously allow us access into a world breaching almost two millennia and five continents. There are certainly moments in history when one *can* assert a common language of Islamic culture – for example, the thirteenth century onward in the lands encompassing Turkey, Iran, and South Asia was a time when the Persian language provided a unifying court culture, with direct implications for artistic production. Yet the local particularities are far greater and make the general observations banal, if necessary.

As the diversity of the regions and works of arts produced therein attest, finding homogeneity in Islam and the arts is an elusive goal. In fact the very idea of an "Islamic" qualifier in the context of such a history is itself not unproblematic. If we assume that works of art are primarily products that are made in response to the particularities of history and geography, religious and social identity, patronage and individual creativity, it is important to acknowledge a similar dynamism in the very notion of "Islam" itself. Even if taken within a particular geographic and historical timeframe, it is not necessarily the case that any one interpretation of Islamic culture could be put forward. Take for example, early seventeenth-century Lahore, one of the capitals of the Mughal Empire, where the architecture of the imperial palace simultaneously echoed sites of Hindu worship and imitated Catholic devotional imagery.[12] Later in the century, the largest mosque would be built across from the palace, a symbolic presence in the city made famous by the shrine of the eleventh-century mystic Hujwiri, as well as the nearby temple for the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak (d. 1539). Heterogeneity and ambiguity is at the heart of what is understood to be Islamic art and the cultures that produced it.

A BRIEF EXCURSION THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The assumption of a cultural, religious, or artistic homogeneity in Islam has its roots in Orientalist scholarship from as early as the eighteenth century, when European writers sought to understand the religion of their close neighbors through the lens of Enlightenment rationalism.[13] Political rivalries and religious ideologies often collapsed into a single discourse that simultaneously admired and denigrated the religion of the "Mahometans."[14] It was not until the nineteenth century, however, that the arts were studied on their own terms, paralleling the development of an autonomous field of art history in European academies.[15] The close association of the discipline with issues of connoisseurship was well timed, for it was also the peak of European colonialism which gave the rulers' historians and archeologists access to sites in the Middle East and South Asia, as well as unlimited power to displace and document them. The frenzy for collecting Islamic art was supplemented by weakened political structures and the increasing influence of European (and later American) museums and collectors.[16]

The modern study of Islamic art, mostly observed from outside the centers where the cultures flourished, was developed in the early twentieth century by European academics and museum curators who published extensive surveys and catalogs documenting paintings, architecture, and "minor" arts such as ceramics and textiles. The inclusion of ritual objects such as ewers, candlesticks, and prayer rugs into these catalogs was unquestioned, as was the designation "art" to objects where it was never intended. It was not simply for lack of knowledge alone – historical texts in indigenous languages were seldom consulted – that the hierarchies within particular cultural entities were ignored. Islamic art was simply overlaid with the categories of Western art, no matter how ill-fitting the match may have been; that is, it was divided into disciplinary categories that did not reflect values established within the cultures that produced the work.

The difficulty modern scholars have had in studying Islamic art has been primarily through a reluctance to discard an outlook based on the Western canon.[17] Thus the bemoaned absence of treatises on architecture, such as by Alberti (d. 1472), although numerous literary texts exist that provide insight into the evaluation of architectural forms; hence also the bemoaned absence of an "art historian" of

the likes of Vasari (d. 1574), although the tradition of anthologizing poets and literati had existed from the earliest years of Islamic rule. Calligraphers, painters, and architects were included in such lists, the most well known one being that of the Safavid courtier Qazi Ahmad Qummi, compiled in 1606.[18] Comparison with the attitudes toward art by Italian humanists such as those cited above are not entirely fruitful (often even within the context of pre-Renaissance European) as they presume a singular method for understanding and appreciating all art – regardless of religious, intellectual, and social differences. In comparison with European standards of art making, Islamic art also suffers on formal terms. Scholars in the earlier years of the twentieth century noted the lack of perspective in paintings and the corresponding flattening as signs of a "primitive" and "simple" visual aesthetic – the architecture was one of decorative surfaces but not "sophisticated" planar design, the epitome of Renaissance architecture; the "Islamic city" was a disorderly hodgepodge of buildings, reflecting the "irrationality" of the inhabitants.

Just as Arabic, Persian, Ottoman, and Urdu poetry builds on precedents, the arts of calligraphy, painting, and architecture relied on previously established forms. There may be similar illustrations of events such as the enthronement of a monarch or the meeting of Layla and Majnun in the desert, whether the manuscript was illustrated in the fifteenth century or the seventeenth; or whether it was commissioned in Herat or Istanbul. Rather than being static repetitions, they were ever-changing permutations that remained in dialogue with past and present works. Yet, in the hands of Orientalist scholars, such works were studied for their beauty but damned for their dependence on precedents and seen as lacking in individuality or creativity beyond the skillful manipulation of techniques.

Lavish exhibitions and monumental survey catalogs were often underwritten by governmental entities. *Early Muslim Architecture* by K. A. C. Creswell (1932–1940) and *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present* by A. U. Pope and Phyllis Ackerman (1938–1939) were both dedicated to their patrons, King Fu'ad of Egypt and Riza Shah Pahlavi of Iran, respectively.[19] The case of Iran is of particular importance as the construction of a "Persian" art history was undertaken with great vigor by numerous scholars and politicians in a way that had an enormous impact on the valuations of all works of Islamic art. Arthur Upham Pope was the foremost proponent of the idea of an Iranian artistic heritage that spanned millennia, from

the dawn of civilization until the twentieth century. In theses proposed with his collaborators on the *Survey*, this history was evidence of an unbroken, if sometimes compromised, cultural identity, which was a cut above that of its neighboring Arab, Turkish, and Indian counterparts. European, American, and Iranian scholars and politicians saw the potential in propagating a "national" identity through cultural and artistic artifacts.[20] Ideas of Iranian racial and ethnic superiority, founded in nationalist ideologies, would influence the manner in which Islamic art was conceived, a tendency that has currency up until the present day.[21]

Two parallel representations of Islamic art history had emerged by the mid-twentieth century. The first was constructed through the methods of nineteenth-century formalist art historiography and the second served in the making of nationalist discourses in the early twentieth century. A third representation, a consequence of changes in the field of art history as well as the growing corpus of material evidence, has been to look at Islamic art from within its own social, historical, and religious contexts. Although access to languages such as Arabic and Persian had been available to many earlier scholars, it was not until the 1970s that texts were utilized in sophisticated ways to gain insight into the cultures within which Islamic art was produced.

ON TRENDS THEREAFTER

Over the course of the twentieth century numerous points of view have been expressed in the study of Islamic art, ranging from nationalist arguments of authenticity, academic searches for origins and typologies, histories of patronage, and investigation into the corporate nature of art production (such as workshops and guilds). Many of these methods are interspersed with assertions of the "spiritual dimension" of Islamic art through the invocation of universalist philosophy, Sufi mysticism, and visual abstraction. Three primary methods define these studies, namely the materialist/formalist, spiritualist, and historical approaches to art history. The following discussions focus on representative issues that exemplify these approaches and on the particularities that distinguish them from each other.

The materialist/formalist approach is one in which the object (be it architecture, painting, or portable ware) is studied through its

material properties and modes of manufacture. Styles are classified and particular "hands" categorized, often in order to evaluate and authenticate the works analyzed.[22] Recent scholars have continued this method of viewing Islamic art by now focusing on themes that purport to create newer, if not more effective, systems of classification.[23] For example, a recent book on "Persian" art includes works of "Pre-Islamic Painting of the Iranian Peoples" as well as the nineteenth century, and focuses on recurrent themes, such as "Fighting and Feasting" and "Figural Types."[24] Such a study reduces the paintings to sets of affinities and approximations without providing insight on any one of them.[25] Would it not be more useful to consider a story or even an image within the culture and time period it was created?

For example, the story of Layla and Majnun, originally written in Arabic, has been popularly illustrated in different poetic manuscripts and in varying sites and time periods. The story revolves around the unfortunate Layla and her cousin Qays, who fall in love, yet are kept separate from each other by their families. Qays is filled with grief and longing, to the extent that he retires to the desert as a crazed hermit (hence his title *majnun*, Arabic for "madman"). Among the most renowned literary renditions is in the *Khamsa* (quintet) of Nizami Ganjavi (d. 1207), who describes the tragedy in verses filled with pathos and longing.[26] Nizami's *Khamsa* was very popular during the Timurid period, as a source of imitation by other prominent poets (such as Abd ar-Rahman Jami, d. 1492), but also as a richly imagined text appropriate for visual interpretation.

Illustrated versions of the *Khamsa* focus on events related to the stories, such as Layla and Majnun at school, Majnun's wandering in the desert, and the death of the two lovers. The episodes are depicted in starkly different manners in, for example, a manuscript from 1494 painted in the Timurid court of Herat and one painted for the Mughal court in 1595. The 1494 image is a sparsely composed page, the right margin of which appears to wander off, following the contours of a stream that flows down from the top of the page.[27] It illustrates Majnun meeting his uncle Salim in a desert, the setting depicted by the golden-yellow background and the sparse vegetation on the fringes of the stream. Wild beasts such as lions and antelopes cover the larger portion of the picture surface. There are three couplets on the top right-hand corner of the page, the text inscribed in a rectangular box that sets them apart from the image. The verses describe Salim laying down food for Majnun – who does not eat a single morsel – and asking him how he survives despite tormenting his body through such starvation. Majnun's emaciated state is apparent in his gaunt figure, with bare chest and thin arms sticking out from a simple blue cape. In contrast, Salim is well appointed in a bright red coat and a large turban. The contrast between the figures is clearly evoked, as is the interesting relationship between their postures, which are mirrored. The text and image complement each other in this example, illustrating a moment in the narrative that depicts Majnun's self-denial and spiritual purity.[28]

The second example was produced in 1595 for the Mughal emperor Akbar, in India.[29] Here the artist shows Layla and Majnun together, yet their long-awaited meeting is an overwhelming and painful one. There is no text on this page, but the drama is intense, as the lovers swoon away from each other, the picture plane itself cleaving as though to reflect their agony. The painting is divided in half by a massive and verdant tree under which the lovers have met. At its base are two intertwined cypresses (representing paradisal themes), symbolic of their love and also the esoteric dimensions of the story. Rich with references and fecund with life, the painting literally crawls with creatures of the earth, the air and the sea. This is not the desert of Arabia, the original setting of the story that the earlier painting evoked, but the jungles of India. Art historians have acknowledged that paintings from Akbar's reign were often inspired by Indic tales and modes of representation, whether Hindu or Muslim, and are imbued with action and drama. The sympathetic inclusion of local elements was in keeping with the *Zeitgeist* of the time, in which experiments were being made in social and political hybridity, as well as in the arts of depiction. As these examples show, although given the same "theme" and within the broader iconography of Persianate painting, close analysis reveals enticing and important details that situate the paintings in very different historical and artistic contexts.[30]

The study of complete manuscripts, or what has remained of them, has borne fruit through the labors of recent scholars. An important and early example is the collaborative work by the art historian Stuart Cary Welch and the historian Martin B. Dickson, in which the authors focused their individual expertise on the *Shahnama-yi Shahi* (*Imperial Epic of Kings*), the text composed in 1010 by Abul Qasim Firdawsi.[31] The manuscript they focus on was completed during the reign of the Safavid Shah Tahmasb (d. 1576) and comprises of paintings by some

of the most interesting artists of the time, such as Mir Sayyid 'Ali and Abd al-Samad, both of whom migrated from Iran to the Mughal court in India later in their careers. The Welch and Dickson compilation, while useful in bringing together all the paintings, pays little attention to the text or to the contexts within which the manuscript was commissioned. In 1568 it was gifted by Shah Tahmasb to the Ottoman Sultan, Selim II, a move that has been interpreted by art historians as reflecting the Shah's public vows of repentance, even though the arts of depiction were not included in these prohibitions.[32] A close examination of the political relationships between the Safavids and Ottomans at this moment in history would shed light on Tahmasb's motivations, as would a theoretical analysis of gifts and gifting during the early modern period itself. That is, what were the implications, cultural and political, not only of the making of the grand *Shahnama-yi Shahi*, but of its role as an imperial gift?[33] What was the response and reception of the book in the new setting, and how would it be seen by rival Ottoman courtiers and artists?[34]

More successful than the 1981 monograph was a study produced sixteen years later by Marianna Shreve Simpson, with contributions by Massumeh Farhad. This book is a study of the *Haft Awrang* (*Seven Thrones*) of Jami (a poem composed between 1468 and 1485), copied and illustrated for the Safavid prince Ibrahim Mirza over the years 1556–1565, and known as the "Freer Jami."[35] In an attempt to move away from the previously employed method of connoisseurship to evaluate the paintings, the authors attempt to understand the multiple contexts of its making,

> including [its] relation to other deluxe manuscripts of the Safavid period, in relation to other codices owned by or associated with Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, in relation to other works made by the artists to whom the prince entrusted the Jami commission, and in relation to other illustrated copies of the *Haft Awrang*. As with the examination of the Freer Jami [manuscript] itself, the study of these and other relationships depends on a combination of codicological, literary, historical, and art-historical methods.[36]

Thus, what we get in this study are intricate and thoughtful layers that point to the multivalent nature of a complex project in which literature and art are skillfully combined.

The spiritualist approach has its roots in the works of Orientalist philosophers like Henri Corbin and Titus Burckhardt.[37] Their

successors, such as S. Hossein Nasr, look to mysticism as a source for understanding aesthetic and esoteric aspects of art and architecture.[38] In this approach the object is considered as representative of religious and philosophical dimensions of Islam, regardless of their historical or cultural specificity. The studies focus on the complexity of geometric form, for example, in order to indicate parallel complexities in the intellectual climate that produced them. Spiritualist approaches, while often rooted in pre-modern texts, tend to apply theories from outside art history on to the works of art, regardless of their relevance. As one recent scholar, Samer Akkach, has written, he aims to

> *use* [emphasis mine] architecture to make the reader aware of certain patterns of thought within the pre-modern Islamic tradition, instead of the normal scenarios where conceptual patterns are constructed to explain the nature and particularity of architecture. This has two advantages: first, shifting the focus away from architecture itself liberates architectural forms from the burden of historicity and causal interpretation, that is, finding causes (including meanings) to explain formal qualities; second, it enables one to access a wider spectrum of literary material, breaks disciplinary boundaries, and unfolds new interpretations. This approach tends to emphasize the cogency and significance of the constructed narratives, whereby architecture becomes a suitable tool to understand the working of a pre-modern spatial sensibility and its coherent cosmology.[39]

Beyond the problematic disregard for historical or formal specificity, the main difficulty in such an approach is its disregard for the medium itself, be it architecture or any other form of Islamic art. By removing the role of the patron or the maker, that is, by assigning them a "will" that is generic, generalized, and undocumented, the spiritualist approach provides little insight into what gives life to any work of art – that is, human creativity. For example, Akkach focuses on "the architectural order" of space by analyzing the circular form, which he finds in the roof of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, and the ablution fountain of the mosque of Sultan Hasan in Cairo.[40] The dome has been considered a powerful symbolic feature by numerous architectural historians studying other cultures and geographic regions, many of whom have drawn parallels with the "Dome of Heaven" in the Christian and Roman traditions.[41] Thus one may ask what is specific about the form in the context of Islam? What, one may wonder, are the parallels between the three domes, but for their form? Choosing buildings associated with religious praxis is

particularly deceptive, since some of the best-known domes belong to palaces, such as the Hasht Behest pavilion in Isfahan.

The historical approach is one in which the object is studied within a chronologically determined timeframe and viewed as responsive to political and social dynamics. Multiple factors shape the patronage and production of the arts, such as economics, technology, and perhaps even fashion. In studying art and history in synchrony with such factors highlights its role as a cultural product, through the study of which one may gain insight into a society at a particular moment in time. Thus, a focus on historical specificity characterizes this work, but does not exclude considerations of form, culture, or religion. The "burden of history" is one borne with great efficacy by Oleg Grabar, who wrote the introduction to the inaugural volume of the journal *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World*, of which he was the editor.[42] In this essay, he outlines some obligations for the historians of Islamic art, which include the use of primary texts, the perusal of which "brings out questions or information pertinent to the history of the arts." He continues that "still another obligation of art-historical research is to set up problems and pose questions for cultural and literary historians," an important point in which the author situates art alongside disciplines that put emphasis on material and literary culture.[43] The following examples take as a starting point Grabar's historical approach and may be seen as representative of current methods in the scholarship.

ON SOME METHODS THAT SHED NEW LIGHT ON OLD WORKS

A sophisticated engagement with texts distinguishes the work of numerous scholars, exemplified by the work of Oya Pancaroğlu, who has analyzed the philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of Islamic art by focusing on what has been an oft-neglected corpus relegated by most surveys to the "minor arts." Her study of tenth-century epigraphic pottery sheds light on the social dynamics of Samanid (819–1005) courtly culture by closely "reading" both the objects and the contexts that produced them. The Samanid elite based in Bukhara is credited with the revival and enhancement of the Persian language, yet the artistic environment around them was one that also drew inspiration

from older Arabic art and literature. As Pancaroğlu has pointed out, the metaphors and aphorisms written on the Samanid pottery served the purpose of extolling "aesthetic pleasures and ethical precepts," while simultaneously making references to ideas prevalent in other contemporaneous disciplines, such as philosophy and alchemy.[44] The texts guide not only the [be]holder's eyes, but her mind as well, thereby initiating an intense dialogue between the user and the object.

Reception of Islamic art and architecture within the societies that produced them is an aspect that has been often neglected, although there is ample evidence to understand its role in varied cultural environments and historical moments. Two points are necessary to consider regarding sources for the valuation of art; the first is that the status of different media changed over time, an aspect determined by changes in taste, technology, and demand. For example, as the example of Samanid pottery shows, ceramics were very highly valued in eastern Iran in the tenth century, a trend that would continue up until the Safavid period, but with different forms and materials that drew direct inspiration from contemporary Chinese Ming wares. The same longevity was not enjoyed by objects from Fatimid Egypt, which, unlike Samanid objects that were distinguished by their beautifully articulated texts, were decorated with figural motifs that may be understood to reflect the complex urban life of tenth-century Cairo. Separated spatially, yet connected through the mobility of technological knowledge, Fatimid and Samanid wares were distinct from each other and responsive to the different needs of their users and makers.

Islamic art must be studied on its own terms, that is, the social, historical, and material contexts that provide categories for its study and evaluation. The literary genre of describing objects, paintings, or building, called *wasf*, is one significant source for art historical enquiry.[45] In Safavid Iran, for example, the encomiastic poetry of 'Abdi Beg Shirazi (d. 1581) in praise of palaces and shrines sheds light on the role of buildings in the construction of an imperial iconography of power by reporting on structures built for Shah Tahmasb.[46] However, the poems are not simply lists or literal descriptions of buildings, but constructs that represent the poet's imagination as well as the aesthetic principles of his times.[47] The poetry of architectural description, as exemplified by 'Abdi Beg Shirazi, also provides insight into features of design that were utilized by builders in the sixteenth century. In contrast to the planar representation of architecture, which is often employed by modern architects, 'Abdi Beg's poetic

descriptions reveal the "elemental" approach through which Safavid buildings were designed. That is, through the varying combinations of discrete architectural forms these buildings – be they palaces or shrines – were distinguished by the economic use of recognizable architectural forms and embellishments that marked them as imperial commissions.

The concept of economy is one that also characterizes the arts of depiction, in particular, that of manuscript illustration. Repetition of themes and iconography (for example the enthronement of rulers) had been in practice since the earliest years of book illustration, yet it is the beginnings of the Timurid period in the fifteenth century that witnessed the codification of sophisticated conceptual frameworks for the arts of calligraphy and painting.[48] Sketches and fragmentary works by renowned masters were collected in albums (*muraqqa'*) compiled for the princely elite.[49] The albums were an integral part of the gathering (*majlis*) that typified social practice in the Timurid court, as well as its successors in Safavid Iran, Ottoman Turkey, and Mughal India. This setting, comprised of princes, poets, painters, and calligraphers – among other literati of the time – was the site for the appreciation and critique of art and literature.[50] The compiler of the album, usually a high-ranked bureaucrat or scribe, was also the author of a prefatory essay in the opening pages of the album, which served to introduce the patron, the author, and the artists of their era.[51]

The role of the album was akin to that of a picture gallery or museum, one in which the highest ideals of painting and writing were displayed. In the mind of the "curator" of this two-dimensional gallery, the collection was simultaneously an encomium to the patron, evidence of the compiler's knowledge and literary prowess, and a compilation of great works of art. The past was evoked through the genealogies of paintings, where older themes and images were repeated and "improved" upon. Similarly the lineages of painters and calligraphers were asserted through references to great masters, some going back to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Albums were thus used as visual treatises on the history of art, whose analysis sheds crucial light not only on the makers of the art, but their patrons as well.

The albums functioned as design books for other artists and calligraphers to learn from and imitate. Compiled in the imperial ateliers, the pages were scrutinized by students and copied by their teachers. Pounce marks show that many pages, comprising of figures and

designs, were used and reused many times before finally coming to rest between the pages of the album. In the prefaces of the album, the authors list previous masters of calligraphy and painting and insert the works collected in the album into a broader history of art making. The lineages defined herein do not distinguish artists as individuals per se, but as parts of collective histories, whose works are similarly connected despite the centuries that may separate them. The ideal thus was not to find aberrations, but rather conformity within a dynamic set of visual and semantic expectations.

Perhaps the most interesting innovations in Islamic art took place in the realm of architecture, in particular when seemingly disparate cultures came into contact. Avoiding the issue of "influence" as a factor of dominance or superiority, one may suggest that a characteristic of Islamic art is its relationship with its own past, and importantly, its appropriation and assimilation of art from neighboring, often non-Muslim, entities. As has often been noted, it is an art of affiliation with other cultures, be they neighbors in war or peace.[52] Although this truism would apply to all periods, examples from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries are perhaps the most well documented, both in contemporary texts and their secondary interpretations. Take for example the marked shift in the form of imperial mosques after the conquest of the former Byzantine capital Constantinople/Istanbul in 1453 by the Ottoman ruler Mehmet II (d. 1481). Moving away from more modest, regionally determined forms (themselves likely inspired by local Christian architecture), Ottoman imperial mosques in Istanbul were clearly responsive to the great churches of Byzantium that marked the landscape of that ancient capital city. The famed church of Hagia Sophia, completed in 537 for the Byzantine emperor Justinian (d. 565), was the epitome of "great" architecture for the Muslim rulers. Soon after the conquest by Mehmet II, the church was converted into a mosque with the addition of a *mihrab* niche and Qur'anic invocations on the interior, and minarets on the exterior. Subsequent mosques would imitate its massive, centralized composition, despite its anomalous form for a mosque that requires linear directionality toward Mecca. However, here as in other instances of appropriation, functionalism wasn't necessarily the goal; rather the new forms were manifest attempts at sharing in the prestige and cognition associated with their predecessors. In the Ottoman case, the prestige of the Hagia Sophia was continuous, even for the great master architect Sinan (d. 1588), who wrote of it as a masterpiece "without equal in the world."[53] The goal, as stated by

Sinan, was not to build a new formal vocabulary, but rather to improve on the "original" work of art.

The study of Islamic art, be it paintings, portable wares, or architecture, requires the constant recontextualization of intellectual and disciplinary boundaries. Not only must such a study unite religiously and politically distinct entities (such as Byzantium in the case of Ottoman art), or geographically distant countries (such as China, in the case of post-Mongol art), but also different fields (such as literature, in the case of Samanid pottery or Safavid architecture). It is precisely this type of creative interplay that defines Islamic art; the role of the historian is to be similarly creative in his or her manners of investigation. New areas of study must be opened up and intellectual risks taken to enrich further the study and making of Islamic art.

ENDING WITH OPENINGS

Conventional surveys of Islamic art end with the eighteenth century, as though the concept of an art defined through religious identification ended with the Enlightenment. Within art historical discourses such assumptions have been suspect for many years, nonetheless, works from the contemporary cultures of the Middle East and South Asia are relegated to the margins both of modern and Islamic art. The idea that the modern history of Islamic art or the practices of architecture and art-making are somehow separate from the artifacts prior to the eighteenth century is a strange vanity displayed by the academies where the "classical" periods are studied. It is without doubt that the rupture that cleaved two sides of a historical moment (call it colonialism, the end of empire, rise of modernism, call it the nineteenth century) had tangible repercussions on the manner in which academic scholarship and the political rhetoric of nation-building was developed. Yet continuing the division of the histories of Islamic art according to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periodization deprives them of historical autonomy. As Anthony King wrote:

> by irreversibly tying up their histories with "the West," [this periodization] replaces the signifiers of their own indigenous, and multiple, periodizations by others imposed from outside; it imposes an implied historical linearity which fixes, temporarily and geographically, the colonial experience as the principal event, simultaneously privileging the political and social elite created by colonialism over the subaltern population, and displacing indigenous histories by those constructed by the metropolitan core.[54]

It is necessary to view Islamic art within a set of discrete, yet historically and conceptually connected, events. Only when we can situate and study this art as part of continuous trajectories can the study of Islamic art become accessible and central to contemporary discourses.

It is a fair assumption that the citizens of countries that have traditionally been grouped together under the banner of Islam no longer identify solely with religious institutions. Ethnicity, nationalism, gender, and sexuality are but a few additional markers in the fashioning of contemporary selfhood. Artists from Islamic republics practice in New York and Amsterdam, some distancing themselves from their artistic heritage while others embrace it; Americans who grew up speaking English and practicing Christianity are among the most skilled calligraphers of the Arabic language; multinational architectural firms build mosques and cultural centers throughout Europe and the Middle East. It is necessary therefore to broaden rather than limit the parameters for an inclusive and dynamic definition of Islamic art that looks beyond religious and regional classifications.

Islamic art, as any creative project, regardless of its origin, is ultimately concerned with questions of representation: that is, who and what is being represented, and, most importantly, how does the work of art inform that representation? A phenomenological approach helps to understand better both the intentions of the makers and the reception of the work of art, through an active and empathetic engagement on the part of the viewer and the historian. As the examples have demonstrated, most studies combine the particularities of history and ideology within the cultural contexts that produced the artwork. Thus access to the mentalities of a community, be it comprised of artists, patrons, makers, or users, can be achieved by studying representations in the texts that described the art as well as the objects themselves. Toward that goal one may call for contemporary art that connects the past with the present, informal works of art that draw upon a wider constituency, and scholarship that involves discourses from multiple disciplinary sites. In such polyvalent environments, Babylonian disjunctions can provide sites of emancipation for those who make and study Islamic art.

I will here give a few titles that have extensive bibliographies that can be used to go further into the study of the Qur'an. I will confine myself to studies in English. A good summary of the debates about the study of the Qur'an is Neil Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2004). This is an excellent summary of the history of the study of the Qur'an in Europe and a detailed exposition of the most important school in the study of the Qur'an, the German school. The standard English introduction to the Qur'an is still W. M. Watt's reworking of Richard Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991). For a feeling of the language of the Qur'an see Michael Sells' *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, 2nd edition (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2006). The volume on the Qur'an in the series *Books that Shook the World* is written by Bruce Lawrence, *The Qur'an: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic, 2006). For easy access to the scholarly debates on the Qur'an, see Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006).

I would also like to draw the attention of the reader to a gem of a book written on the myth of the Golden Bough in Islam, which deals extensively with the Qur'an and its mythical world, written by one of the leading literary critics of Arabic literature: Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). The works of François Déroche deserve a special mention, especially his *The Abbasid Tradition: Qur'ans of the 8th to the 10th Centuries AD* (New York: Noor Foundation in Association with Azimuth Editions, 1992).

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

CHAPTER 1: ART, KISHWAR RIZVI

1 The Western hemisphere is itself not a homogenous whole, however; in general, methodological differences are discernible between the academies of Europe and the United States. This difference has more to do with general trends in the field of art history itself and is not restricted to the case of Islamic art.
2 I amend my description to include artists and political systems that are not Muslim, which is different from the definition given in the *Grove Dictionary of Art*: "The art made by artists or artisans whose religion was Islam, for patrons who lived in predominantly Muslim lands, or for purposes that are restricted or peculiar to a Muslim population or a Muslim setting. This article deals with the arts produced from the 7th century to the 19th in the Islamic lands from the Atlantic to western Central Asia and India." *Grove Art Online*, http://www.groveart.com (Oxford University Press, accessed August 2007).
3 In them would be included works on paper, parchment, canvas, metal, glass, ceramic, ivories, and the forms and structures of building.
4 Most recently, Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).
5 On the social gatherings within which such interaction would take place see Lisa Golombek, "Discourses of an Imaginary Arts Council in Fifteenth-Century Iran," in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelny (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).
6 For an important discussion of iconoclasm, studied through the contemporary context of Afghanistan, see Finbarr Barry Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum," *The Art Bulletin*, 84:4, 2002, pp. 641–59; Jamal J. Elias, "Un/Making Idolatry: From Mecca to Bamiyan," *Future Anterior*, 4:2, 2007, pp. 2–29. A complementary essay would be O. Grabar and M. Natif, "The Story of Portraits of the Prophet Muhammad," *Studia Islamica*, 96, 2003, pp. 19–38, VI–IX.
7 See, for example, Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Persian Poetry, Painting and*

Patronage: Illustrations in a Sixteenth-Century Masterpiece (New Haven; London: Yale University Press in association with the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1998).

8 "Age-value" was a term employed by the art historian Alois Riegl (d. 1905) in his 1903 essay, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin," trans. Kurt Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions*, 25, Fall 1982, pp. 21–51.

9 Although questioning the categories within which scholarship has traditionally been undertaken, I will not attempt to add to the burgeoning classifications of Islamic art, least of all through temporal, spatial, or geographical exclusions or through attempts at being comprehensive, as is the tendency in the field. Important resources, such as *Grove Art Online*, provide essays on numerous topics on Islamic art, in a survey form that is accessible, if overwhelming. However, problematic classifications exist, such as the culmination of the survey in the nineteenth century, with the implication that there cannot be a discussion of Islamic art after the period of colonialism. The subject is then taken up in entries under country names, such as Iran, India, and so on. This strategy is not applied throughout, however, as entries on Germany will bring up the history of art from "Before 1400" until "After 1900."

10 I am here considering the Aga Khan Programs at the Department of Architecture at M.I.T. and the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University.

11 Such as Oleg Grabar's essays starting in 1983 with "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," in *Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*, 1, 1983, pp. 1–14, and continuing through 2003 with "Editorial: What Should One Know about Islamic Art?" *RES*, 43, Spring 2003, pp. 5–12.

12 As in the famed *jharoka-i darshan* (viewing alcove) installed by the ruler, Akbar, where the king would appear every morning at sunrise and sunset to be greeted and viewed by his courtiers and the public. See J. F. Richards, "The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir," in *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, ed. J. F. Richards (Madison, W.I.: University of Wisconsin, 1978). His son, Jahangir, ordered one of the towers in the Lahore fort to be painted with depictions of St. Gregory and Christian angels.

13 See for example, Rebecca Joubin, "Islam and Arabs through the Eyes of the Encyclopedie: The 'Other' as a Case of French Cultural Self-Criticism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32:2, May 2000, pp. 197–217.

14 For a discussion of the visual and textual representation of Islam in the early eighteenth century see Kishwar Rizvi, "Persian Pictures: Art, Documentation and Self-Reflection in Bernard and Picart Representation of Islam," in *The First Global Vision of Religion: Bernard Picart's Religious Ceremonies and Customs of All the Peoples of the World*, eds. Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt (Getty Research Institute, 2010).

15 Elizabeth Mansfield, *Art History and its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2002). Figures such as the German historian and archeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann (d. 1768) are considered the founders of the discipline of art history.

16 A comprehensive documentation has been initiated by S. Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections 1850–1950* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000).

17 The hierarchies established in European academies were applied to rank, in descending order, architecture, arts of the book (painting and narrative illustrations), calligraphy, and "minor" arts (metalwork, glass, ceramics, textiles). This is in contrast to, say, sixteenth-century Iranian society, in which emphasis was placed on the arts of writing, then those of depiction and architecture, the last through its relationship to imperial or religious authority. In the sixteenth century the production of art was a cooperative activity in which the processes of making were much more intertwined than the Western perspective will allow. Workshops were places where books were repaired and manufactured, as well as sites for the dissemination of texts and images for different media.

18 Qazi Ahmad Qummi, *Gulistan-i hunar* (Tehran, 1980); translated from the Persian by V. Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Aḥmad, Son of Mir-Munshi (circa A.H. 1015/A.D. 1606)* (Washington, 1959).

19 K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932–40); A. U. Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press, 1938–9).

20 Kishwar Rizvi, "Art History and the Nation: Arthur Upham Pope and the Discourse on 'Persian Art' in the Early 20th Century," proceedings from the symposium "Historiography and Ideology: Writing the History of the Ottoman Architectural Heritage," *Muqarnas: Journal of Islamic Art and Architecture*, 24, 2007, pp. 45–65.

21 As witnessed in surveys focusing in particular on the post-Mongol period; they give centrality to Iranian regions and those within the Persian-language sphere while marginalizing works in India and North Africa.

22 Any number of books could fall into this category, most of them in regard to manuscript painting. An example would be the work of the collector/scholar F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th century* (London: B. Quaritch, 1912). On Martin's collection practices, see David J. Roxburgh, "Disorderly Conduct? F. R. Martin and the Bahram Mirza Album," *Muqarnas: Journal of Islamic Art and Architecture*, 15, 1998, pp. 32–57.

23 Unfortunately, such exercises attempt at being comprehensive surveys, which diminishes the insights that they provide by dissipating them through generalities. Examples would include John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993) and Eleanor Sims et al., *Peerless Images: Persian Painting and its Sources* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002), which provide two examples of this recent tendency, albeit of different disciplinary points of view.

24 These are select chapter headings from Sims et al., *Peerless Images*.

25 If connoisseurship in the arts of the book often reduced the works of art down to a series of styles and attributions, typology and formalism are methods that have been employed to document and categorize Islamic architecture. Although very helpful in buildings – or paintings for that matter – that may be dated or signed, typology or style do not provide satisfactory answers regarding the use, manufacture, or meaning of a work of art. See, for example, Attilio Petruccioli, ed., "Exoteric – Polytheistic – Fundamentalist Typology: Gleanings in the Form of an Introduction," *Typological Process and Design Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1998).

26 A recent translation is given by Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Layli and Majnun: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizami's Epic* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
27 Nizami, *Khamsa*, painted by a pupil of Bihzad, Herat (1494) British Library (Or. 6810), f. 128v.
28 The story of Layla and Majnun is often seen as an allegory describing the unrequited love of the mystic on the spiritual quest of finding union with his beloved, God.
29 British Library; reprinted in Barbara Brend, *The Emperor Akbar's Khamsa of Nizami* (London: British Library, 1995), p. 32, fig. 21.
30 The limits of this essay preclude a comprehensive study of any of the manuscripts described and their texts/image cycles. Further study would compare the placement of the textual narrative, the "density" of paintings, and an analysis of the effect of the text and image on the reader/viewer. In fact, it may be more useful to study any one of the manuscripts in its entirety, relating the images to each other, rather than to randomly selected paintings that echo themes or styles witnessed in an isolated and decontextualized single-page painting.
31 Comprising originally of 258 paintings, the *Shahnama-yi Shahi* was dismembered and the painted folios sold to a variety of individuals and institutions. It was more commonly known for the collector and American industrialist who undertook this dismemberment, Arthur R. Houghton. Although many of the pages have been dispersed, the authors gathered images from national collections in Iran, museums in the United States, and private collections to attempt a recomposition of this magnificent book. Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1981).
32 Shah Tahmasb mentions this vow in his memoirs, Shah Tahmasb, *Tazkira-i Shah Tahmasb: Sharh-i vaqayi va ahvalat-i zindigani-yi Shah Tahmasb biqalam-i khudash*, ed. Abd al- Shukur (Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1964), p. 23. There are a number of illustrated manuscripts that have survived from his reign, including manuscripts illustrated by the Shah himself in his youth.
33 An essay written fifteen years later attempts to answer some of these questions: Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanindi, "Remarks on Some Manuscripts from the Topkapi Palace Treasury in the Context of Ottoman-Safavid Relations," *Muqarnas: Journal of Islamic Art and Architecture*, 13, 1996, pp. 132–48.
34 It is also interesting to note that the *Suleymanname*, an illustrated history of the reign of Sultan Suleyman, was compiled in 1558 in Istanbul, some years before the imperial Safavid gift arrived there. See the facsimile copy by Esin Atıl, *Süleymanname: The Illustrated History of Süleyman the Magnificent* (Washington: National Gallery of Art; New York: H. N. Abrams, 1986).
35 Also known as the Freer Jami for the museum where it is housed. Marianna Shreve Simpson with contributions by Massumeh Farhad, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Awrang: A Princely Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1997).
36 Ibid., p. 3.
37 Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (World of Islam Festival, 1976).
38 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987). It is difficult in the case of some writing on the subject of Iranian art to separate out nationalist tendencies seeking essentialist truths in diverse work that spans millennia; for example Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. Mehdi Amin Razavi, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1996).

39 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. xxiii.
40 Ibid., chapter 4, "Architectural Order," p. 149.
41 The notable article was by Karl Lehmann, "The Dome of Heaven," *The Art Bulletin*, 27:1, March 1945, pp. 1–27. In the case of Islamic art, one may find a response in Oleg Grabar, "From Dome of Heaven to Pleasure Dome," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 49:1, March 1990, pp. 15–21.
42 *Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale; Leiden: Brill). Grabar was the editor of the journal from its inauguration in 1983 until 1992.
43 Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," pp. 10–11.
44 Oya Pancaroğlu, "Serving Wisdom: The Contents of Samanid Epigraphic Pottery," *Studies in Islamic and Later Indian Art from the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002), pp. 58–68; same author, *Perpetual Glory: Medieval Islamic Ceramics from the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
45 Numerous studies have dealt with this topic in terms of Arabic poetry, most relevantly by Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi, *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Wasf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
46 Paul Losensky, "The Palace of Praise and the Melons of Time: Descriptive patterns in 'Abdi Beg Shirazi's *Garden of Eden*," *Eurasian Studies*, 2:1, 2003, pp. 1–29.
47 Studied for its documentation by M. Szuppe, "Palais et jardins: Le complexe royal des premiers safavides à Qazvin, milieu XVIe-debut XVIIe siecles," *Res Orientales*, 8, 1988, pp. 143–77.
48 Such as the *Kitab al-diryaq* (*Book of the Theriac*) of 1199 and the *Kitab al-aghani* (Book of Songs) of 1216–20. They are mentioned briefly in Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2001).
49 David J. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2005).
50 Lisa Golombek, "Discourses of an Imaginary Arts Council in Fifteenth-Century Iran," in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelny (Leiden: Brill, 1992).
51 David Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
52 As Oleg Grabar writes, "the Islamic world is the only cultural entity in the history of mankind to have borders or boundaries with almost all the cultural entities known before 1492: India, Southeast Asia, China, northern Eurasia, West and East Africa below the Sahara, southeastern Europe, northern Europe, western Europe; Japan alone escapes such direct contacts with the Islamic world." Grabar, "Editorial: What Should One Know about Islamic Art?" p. 9.

53 Cited by Gülrü Necipoğlu, "Preface" in *Sinan's Autobiographies: Five Sixteenth-Century Texts*, trans. Howard Crane and Esra Akin (Leiden, Brill, 2006), p. x. See also Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005). Until Necipoğlu's work, Sinan's masterpieces were primarily studied through formalist criteria in which the cubic forms were seen as proto-modernist.

54 Anthony King, "Rethinking Colonialism: An Epilogue," in *Forms of Dominance on the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise*, ed. Nezar Alsayyad (Aldershot, U.K.: Avebury, 1992), p. 340.

CHAPTER 2: AUTHORITY, DEVIN DEWEESE

1 Hamdullah Mustawfi Qazvini, *Tarikh-i guzida*, ed. 'Abd al-Husayn Nava'i (Tehran: Amir-i Kabir, 1960, 2nd printing 1983), pp. 610–11.

2 See William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 111–14. Though he focuses on orality, Graham notes the "difficult problem" of "religious meaning that may exist apart from rational, discursive meaning – and, indeed, apart from mystical or esoteric meaning as well." He also notes the essential agreement between "orientalist rationalism" and Muslim "literalism" in ignoring or rejecting such meaning.

3 See Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

4 See the discussion in Yohannan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

5 See, for example, Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Dale F. Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1995), pp. 255–72.

6 See the discussion of the authoritative character of juridical interpretations themselves in Brannon M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

7 For considerations of the impact of modernity on issues of authority more nuanced than the stock frameworks of "liberal" vs. "conservative" or "modern" vs. "traditional" still often employed, see Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

8 See Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

9 From al-Ghazali, *Faysal al-tafriqa*, trans. Bernard Lewis, in *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, Volume II: Religion and Society*, ed. and trans. Bernard Lewis (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), pp. 20–21; and see now the full translation by Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's Faysal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 120–21.

CHAPTER 3: BELIEF, R. KEVIN JAQUES

1 Most discussions of non-anthropological method in Islamic Studies have come out of Political Science and the Sociology of Religion. The focus of these studies has tended to be on "political Islam" or on class, social strata, and issues of class mobility. Discussions of method have largely focused on different applications of statistical methodologies to economic and polling data. For an overview, see Mansoor Moaddel, "The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, 2002, pp. 359–86. Many of these studies also emphasize the application of theory to Islamic phenomena but rarely say anything about how we are to collect information or even specific methods of interpretation. The best example of this kind of approach is Bryan Turner's *Weber and Islam: A Critical Study* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

2 The exception to this general rule is Marshall Hodgson's masterful *The Venture of Islam*. The first ninety-nine pages of the first volume remain one of the most authoritative and explicit statements on method in the historical and textual study of Islam. For several generations of scholars of Islam, Hodgson's work has been the staple of doctoral exams and generally required reading, although his dense and what many younger members of the field consider to be "dry" prose have begun to erode his impact; a fact that should be lamented and corrected. See his *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civililization, The Classical Age of Islam*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University Press, 1974). Also see Edmund Burke, "Islamic History as World History: Marshall Hodgson, 'The Venture of Islam,'" *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 10:2, May 1979, pp. 241–64.

3 Clifford Geertz, "'Thick Description': Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–18.

4 R. Kevin Jaques, review of *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 17:3, 2006, p. 359. The Makdisian emphasis on attention to Arabic linguistics can be seen in Devin Stewart's criticisms of Michael Chamberlain's social historical critiques of the *Rise of Colleges*. See his "The Doctorate in Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria," in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam*, eds. Joseph Lowry, Devin Stewart, and Shawkat Toorawa (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), pp. 45–90.

5 The author would like to thank Devin Stewart and Christopher Melchert, two of Makdisi's students, for their insights into Makdisi's teaching and methodology.

6 See George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1981). For criticisms of Makdisi's method and approach, see, among others, A. L. Tibawi, "The Origin and Character of 'al-Madrasah,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 25:1/3, 1962, pp. 225–38.

7 Diane F. Halpern, *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), p. 145.