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The magazine Hadeeth Ad-Dar of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) is intended to share the wealth and beauty of Islamic culture contained within the extensive and comprehensive al-Sabah collection of Islamic art and the variety of scholarly and artistic activities associated with the collection.

The collection itself, ranging from early Islam to the 18th century, is organized according to both historical periods and geographical regions, and the reference library and the publications of the Dar are closely related to the collection.

The Dar has sponsored archaeological excavations in Bahnasa, Upper Egypt that date to the Fatimid period, and before the invasion, the art school associated with the Dar promoted skills in the various artistic genres that are represented in the collection. At present, our annual lecture series has been revived and is a focal point for historians and other specialists, featuring talks by prominent international scholars on various topics of Islamic art, archaeology and architecture.

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**The Magazine of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah**

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Beit al Qur'an is a unique institution, planned and conceived to serve the Holy Qur'an. It was established partly in response to the realisation that, in the recent past, the Arab and Islamic worlds had lost much of their written heritage, in particular manuscripts and records of the Holy Qur'an. Relatively recently, collectors outside the Arab and Islamic worlds have been acquiring many important manuscripts in the international markets, thereby limiting access by the general public to this important heritage.
The concept of Beit al Qur’an was proposed and vigorously followed up to establish an institution to serve the Holy Qur’an in the widest meaning of this word and to contribute to addressing the issue of lost heritage through acquiring and preserving Qur’anic manuscripts for future generations. Beit al Qur’an was financed by donation from people of good will from all walks of life in our region. The people of Kuwait were leading contributors in bringing this dream to reality. The exceptional design of Beit Al Qur’an and other consultancy and supervisory services were provided by the Kuwaiti firm: Pan Arab Consulting Engineers and their partners Hamid Abdul Salam Shuaib and Sabah al Rayyes, while the construction was conducted by a Bahraini firm, thus emphasising the partnership of goodwill between Bahrain and Kuwait in raising this important project.

The institution serves the Holy Qur’an through its five components: the Hayat Museum, the Mohammed Bin Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa Lecture Hall, the Furqan Library, the Yousef bin Ahmad Kanoo School of Qur’anic Studies and the Abdul Rahim Jassim Kanoo Mosque. All these elements combine to offer services to visitors from all parts of the world who come to see Beit al Qur’an and its magnificent collection of Holy Qur’anic manuscripts and attend other exhibitions, seminars and lectures. The latter are arranged on a regular basis to foster Islam, Islamic culture and Islamic heritage. Beit al Qur’an has a busy annual cultural schedule culminating in Ramadan with a series of lectures by eminent scholars from all parts of the Islamic world. In addition, well-known reciters of the Holy Qur’an are invited for recitation sessions during this very special month. A number of exhibitions have also been staged to celebrate Ramadan, the last of which this year was for the original work of the celebrated 20th century master calligrapher, Hashim al Baghdadi.

The Beit al Qur’an Collection.

The Beit al Qur’an collection of Qur’anic manuscripts began with Dr. Kanno’s private collection of manuscripts which he presented to Beit al Qur’an before its opening by H.H. Sheikh Isa Bin Salman al Khalifa, the Amir of Bahrain, in March 1990. This initial collection was thereafter substantially expanded through active acquisition, to become the great collection it is now. Al Hayat Museum’s collection of Qur’anic manuscripts, whether handwritten or printed, is one of the finest of its type, encompassing examples from the earliest periods of Islam to the present, in a variety of media. The collection, part of which is on permanent display, illustrates the nobility and finesse of Islamic calligraphy as it related to the writing and recording of the Holy Qur’an.

There are several unique examples of famous early manuscripts highlighting the different styles of this noble art on public display. However, scholars and researchers have special access to this unequalled resource since Beit al Qur’an is very keen that its collection of manuscripts should be kept under the best possible conditions, and should be catalogued, academically researched and published internationally. Although restricted by limited resources, the institution is trying to develop the best scientific approach to maintain and preserve the collection.

A rare manuscript from the Beit Al Qur’an collection on blue parchment. This manuscript comes from a group of other sections dispersed in international museums, but the majority of sections are now found in the Tunisian National Library in Qairawan. Most probably of Fatimid origin, this beautiful manuscript dates from the late 9th, early 10th century. The calligraphy is executed in gold in the extended eastern Kufic style. Marginal devices and Ayat endings in the form of small rosettes are drawn in silver.
Parchment Manuscripts

The Beit al Qur'an collection is particularly strong on parchments with exceptionally fine and unique examples from the first 350 years of Islam, illustrating the finest traditions of the diverse Muslim areas. The collection includes some fine examples from the eastern sections of the Islamic world, particularly early manuscripts from Hijaz (Central Arabia) and later works from Iraq and Iran. These superb manuscripts illustrate the development of Kufic calligraphy from the simple beginnings of the Makki/Medani scripts to later refined decorative Seljuk examples from Iraq and Iran. The collection illustrates the subtle changes and transformations in the Kufic scripts, the evolution of diacritical annotations (tashkeel) and the vocalisation and identification techniques of the different Arabic letters with similar shapes.

Our early studies reveal that the collection includes all the major changes in the art of Kufic calligraphy, presenting in detail the stylistic changes in the shape of letters over the course of Kufic development and the subtleties of individual works. Fascinating examples from the collection show how the calligraphers of early Kufic treated each individual page as a work of art in its own right by the careful stretching and alignment of the letters on the page in order to create balanced compositions of extreme abstract beauty. The development of the western styles of Kufic calligraphy of North Africa and particularly those from Qairawan are also represented in the collection's holdings of unique early parchments from that area. In addition, the collection includes rare later examples of the complete Holy Qur'an on parchment from 12th/14th century Andalusia. The strength of the collection lies in its ability to trace the development of the Kufic styles of North Africa from their early eastern Kufic roots to the refined examples of Andalusian scripts, with their lacy decoration.

The parchment collection of Beit al Qur'an reveals intact the development of the art of illumination and use of colour in the decoration of early Holy Qur'ans. Some aspects of the development of text subdivision at Sura headings and Ayah stops can be recognized through designs in the collection from the eastern and western areas of the Islamic world. A number of folios in the collection illustrate the early use of pure colour with the predominance of ochre reds, greens and yellows and the later elaborate use of gold for the decorative panels at Sura headings and sectional subdivisions. Careful study of the Beit al Qur'an parchment collection also reveals refinements in the production and use of parchments and inks, and the use of specialised colours for diacritical annotations. The use of gold in outline lettering is amply illustrated within the collection in some very fine examples from the 9th and 10th centuries. Overall, the Beit Al Qur'an parchment collection is a treasure which we hold with pride for future generations. It reveals the various developments of early calligraphy and the importance given by our forefathers to the writing and recording of the Holy Qur'an.
The exclusive Mamluk privilege of carrying arms and riding horses elicited surprised remarks from European travellers of the 14th, 15th and early 16th centuries. They saw that the autochthonous, Arabic speaking, Muslim population was barred from this right. According to their observations, violators of this unwritten law were severely punished. For some European witnesses, horseman and Mamluk even became synonymous terms.
This judgement of the foreign visitors accords with contemporary Arabic sources which also stress the horse as a symbol of the highest rank and prestige. The Cretan traveller Emmanuel Piloti, who came to Egypt in the 1440s, declares the sword the distinctive feature of the Turco-Circassian élite. Only the Mamluks, not the two other ‘nations’ of Egypt, i.e. the Arabs (Bedouins) and the Saracens, may bear it. The German monk Felix Fabri, one of the most valuable European sources on the Mamluk sultanate under al-Ashraf Qaybari (1468-96), uniquely alludes to both privileges, sword and horse, simultaneously: the Mamluks do not permit the Saracens to serve as soldiers, nor do they allow them the carrying of arms.

How did the non-Mamluk native Muslims of Egypt and Syria view this discrimination directed against them? Besides the chronicles, biographical dictionaries, belles-lettres and related narrative materials, another type of historical source offers answers to this question. This is the copious contemporary literature on furusiyya literally the crafts to be mastered by a faris, a mounted archer. The term furusiyya encompassed the whole realm of warfare and of weaponry. Mamluk and non-Mamluk authors of diverse backgrounds contributed to this genre, which has not received the scholarly attention it deserves, considering the riches these texts contain for military, economic and art historians.

The first group of furusiyya authors were professional military writers with a Mamluk background or with close bonds to the Mamluk institution. They often quote pre-Mamluk military works, yet basically seem to describe the situation from the mid-thirteenth century onward, when the Ayyubid Sultan al-Salih Ayub began to recruit Mamluk military slaves in large numbers and trained them systematically for a military career. These manuals, in Arabic, and less frequently in Turkish, aimed to teach Mamluk trainees their job. Some were in verse so cadets could easily memorise, in proper sequence, the numerous steps, grips, and postures to be mastered in riding, in charging with the lance, and in shooting with the crossbow. In the late Mamluk period, Minqur al-Halabi wrote a four-hundred verse urjuza on the art of shooting with arrows. Hasan the Greek wrote an ode on the Mamluk crossbow. The best-known versified furusiyya author was the Mamluk Taybugha al-Baklamishi, another Greek.

Subjects of furusiyya treatises were fairly uniform, although individual authors emphasised particular issues. The Mamluk Bakut al-Ramni (d. 1311), for example, stressed the close ties between the military and the veterinary aspects of furusiyya, which in this particular context means ‘horsemanship’. Only he who knew how to tend to his sick horse could become a seasoned faris. Bakut carefully studied the question of which riding beasts were suitable for the mujahid lancer.

Other authors concentrated on the maydan (hippodrome), where equestrian games and tournaments were held. The famous contemporary Italian political writer, Niccolo di Machiavelli, praised the Mamluk’s perpetual military exercises. Sophisticated lance-games with special targets, that were either placed on the ground or to be lifted by a mounted faris, or on wooden poles the height of the horse, formed the core of these dangerous exercises. The titles of two works, “Gift for God’s Warriors on the Hippodrome” and "Design for those who wish to excel in the Hippodrome", speak for themselves. Their authors were Lajari al-Husami al-Tarabulsi (d. 1337-8) and his son Muhammad.

Perhaps the best known Mamluk furusiyya work, however, is Muhammad bin Eissa b. Ismail al-Hanafi al-Aqsa’i’s “Nihayat al-su’al wa-al-ummayya fi ilm al-furusiyya”, written in the middle of the fourteenth century.
Its supposed author was not a Mamluk, but one of numerous immigrants to Egypt from Anatolia, the Caucasus and Persia who, as Hanafites and Turks, enjoyed the special favour of the Mamluks, who themselves had originated from those regions. If one divides the furusiyya authors into two distinct groups according to their social loyalties, these latter writers should be counted with the Mamluks, and not with the local Egyptian civilian elite.

However, this division into two clearly-delineated ideological camps is even more difficult with those men mentioned in Arabic biographical works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries who, as native Egyptian or Syrian civilians, although often of Turkish descent, acquired expertise in furusiyya.

Only a few names can be presented here. The well-known historians Ibn Aybak al-Dawadari (d. after 1336) and Abu Al-Mahasin Ibn Taghrîbidî (d. 1467) were proud of their prowess in archery. According to his biographer, Ibn Taghrîbidî had mastered all the different disciplines of furusiyya, including polo, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani’s grandson, Yusuf b. Shahin (d. 1493), who wrote a condensed version of his grandfather’s history of the Egyptian judges and who held high offices in the administration of pious endowments, also practised furusiyya exercises. Muhammad b. Yusuf b. Bahadir, one of the most respected personalities in the history of Mamluk Ghaizza (d. 1448), not only knew law and linguistics, but also all kinds of furusiyya techniques. Muhammad b. abi Bakr b. Aydughînî (d. 1440), known as Ibn al-Jundî, wrote works on Arabic grammar, inheritance and rhetoric, but also mastered the use of the lance and the club. The popular Yahiya b. Yashbak (d. 1471/2), a grandson of Sultan al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh (who had done so much for the restoration of Mamluk military traditions), not only became an expert on the Qur’an but excelled in every conceivable branch of furusiyya. Ahmad al Bîjuni, a scholar of fifteenth century Cairo, studied archery and the handling of heavier weapons with one of the masters of the time.

Among these, mainly foreign, masters or teachers, is the pious Anatolian Turk, Ali al-Arzînîni al-Usta, who had left the services of the Qaraqoyunlu Turcoman ruler and, during the sultanate of al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh, went to Cairo to give lessons in both the practice and theory of archery. His son, Ya’qub-shah (died around 1500), emulated his father’s twofold practical and theoretical excellence and remained an admired expert in the heavy crossbow, the lance game, wrestling and military tactics, well into advanced old-age.

Among the native Egyptians and Syrians credited with this double competence in archery is Muhammad b. Ali b. Qutluqâb (d. 1454), better known as Ibn al-Sughâyîr, upon whom the public conferred the honorific title, al-Mu‘allîn, because of his acumen both in handling and teaching the use of the crossbow. Another name is Ibn al-Atar, who is credited with having mastered the various theoretical and practical branches of furusiyya in a fashion unmatched in his days, according to his respectful biographer, al-Sakhawi.

In general, the legal scholars of the time were critical of Mamluk lore, particularly their monopoly of horsemanship and weaponry. These jurists faced a dilemma: they despised the barbarian Mamluks on cultural grounds, yet knew that only they could guarantee security and tranquillity in the cities and villages of Egypt and were the sole active defenders of Sunni Islam against infidel and sectarian foes. Abu Hamid al-Maqqîsî (d. 1483) is one of the few to break the silence
that was customary among the ulama concerning these unwelcome truths.

It is interesting, now to see how different religious scholars of the era, in their respective books on furusiyya, tried to cope with this dilemma. It was not easy for these members of the local elite to justify the reality of the Turkico-Circassian hegemony on arms.

My analysis is based on three works written by noted scholars. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (Ibn al-Qayyim) (d. 1350), the great Hanbali theologian and disciple of Ibn Taymiyya, wrote a book titled "Kitab al-Furusiyya". The Shafi'i polymath, al-Sakhawi (d. 1497), focused his work "al-Qawl al-tammi fi fadhl al-ramy bi al-silham" on archery. Al-Sakhawi quoted Ibn al-Qayyim's older treatise, although not uncritically since they belonged to different legal schools. The third writer is Jalal al-din al-Suyuti (d. 1505), who composed a brief epistle, "Gharar al-anshab fi al-ramy bi al-nushshab", but which was devoid of any major original material.

All three works are explicitly concerned, not with practical aspects of fighting and sports, but with the religious foundations of furusiyya, as is shown by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's title: "On the Prophetic, legally-binding Furusiyya." Quoting the famous Seljuk vizier, Nidham al-Mulk, al-Sakhawi emphatically praises the superiority of the weapons of imams and scholars, through which the Muslim community's legal foundations were laid over the weapons of soldiers.

The three treatises abound in information on the use of arms in the age of the Prophet and the Companions and the practice of sports like racing, swimming, and shooting in early Islam. The names quoted are primarily those of the Prophet, Umar, Ali, Khalid b. al-Walid and the founders of the legal schools. With what attitude did the Prophet follow competitions and athletic activities? How did he, the epitome of bravery, use arrows, thus establishing an unimpeachable Sunnah? At the battle of "Uhud", Muhammad fought with the bow and he is reported to have used three different types. Al-Sakhawi carefully lists the Sahaba known to have shot with the crossbow. The Companions, "the warriors of Islam and knights of religion" were the perfect and insuperable furusiyya masters. Archery was particularly valued since it could bring three people into Paradise: the producer of the arrow, whoever kept the bow ready, and the Bowman himself.

Yet there are profound differences in the varying importance the three authors grant to current problems. Unlike Ibn al-Qayyim a century earlier, al-Sakhawi and al-Suyuti almost totally neglect contemporary issues, at least explicitly. In Sakhawi's Qawl there is only one direct, but marginal, reference to the Mamluk period.

In his table of furusiyya subcategories: riding, archery, and fighting with lances (Ibn al-Qayyim adds swordcraft), al-Sakhawi judiciously reproduces Mamluk tournament and battle activities. In another passage he questions whether certain sports - polo, chess and crossbow shooting, the preferred pastimes of the Mamluks - are permissible. The great jurists of early Islam are cited as legal authorities on these activities, although some of them were introduced to the Middle East only after the formative period of the Sharia. This anachronism does not disturb al-Sakhawi. Legitimising controversial practices of his own time with proper reference to the old masters was apparently his main design here.

Like Taybugha, the famous expert on practical aspects of archery, Ibn al-Qayyim discusses the fundamentals of archery as they are said to have been instituted by the Prophet Muhammad. He also mentions bunud (lance exercises), an intricate subject on which military experts such as Bakut al-Rammah concentrated. The metaphors and similes Ibn al-Qayyim employs in his technical memorandum for the ramnah betray his intellectual background. Fighting with the sword and spear is like fighting with proofs and arguments, hitting the target in tournament or battle is like scoring points in a dispute. There are two furusiyyas, that of knowledge and elucidation, and that of shooting and thrusting. Both were practised perfectly by the Companions. So Ibn al-Qayyim elegantly profers military prowess and scholarly acumen as equally exemplary modes of behaviour, appropriate for those jointly in charge of society: the Mamluk Umar, and his own group, the civilian Ulama.
cussion of whether or not righteous Muslims may employ the Persian bow. The context is a discussion of rules to observe when judging racing or archery competitions. If a bow breaks accidentally in a contest, can it be replaced only by one of the same type or can totally different bows be substituted? Only the first option guarantees comparability of the archers’ achievement and is therefore acceptable. One may trade a crossbow of olive wood for one fitted with a “wheel” (a stirrup, qaws al-jarkh), customary in the Maghribi, since both are drawn by foot and are therefore compatible. One must not substitute a cross (foot) bow for an ordinary hand bow, just as it is illogical to have a horse and a donkey run against each other.

There are two basic types of crossbows: the qaws al-jarkh and the Turkish bow, and two hand bows: the Arab and Persian bow. Arab bows were either Bedouin or a regular variant called either muntasaqa, or disjoined (because the bow consists of clearly separate pieces), or wasitiya (because of its middle - waisti position between the traditional nomadic type and the Persian bow). The Turkish bow resembles the Persian bow, yet is much heavier and has a stirrup-type drawing device, so is counted among the foot bows. Whereas crossbows and mangonels are the right weapons in siege warfare, the hand bow is the bow proper, our author emphasizes. Its users are the real archers.

In Ibn al-Qayyim’s day, the military used only the Persian and Turkish bows. The (Persian) hand bow’s advantages are superb reliability and lightness, plus the possibility of changing arrows at battle in high speed. The (Turkish) crossbow is much more powerful. Ibn al-Qayyim adds that it enjoys particular prestige because of its enormous speed and impact, although the Persian bow, which the Turks had to know and adopt, fits the military exigencies of the day much more.

The predominant problem is the legality of the Persian bow, the Mamluk army’s standard weapon. Hanbali scholars disagreed on this. The Prophet is said to have told the user of a Persian bow to throw it away, “because it is cursed and because you must use the Arab bows and . spears; for it is through them that God supports the religion and grants you power on earth.” The authenticity of this tradition can be contested, as Ibn al-Qayyim makes clear. Even if it is authentic, one must judge its historical context, our author muses in a refreshingly historical, almost modernist way. In Muhammad’s time, being Arab meant being Muslim, and being Persian meant being hostile to Islam. The Muslim army was all Arab. But today, the situation is virtually reversed: Persians and Turks, and no longer Arabs, carry the burden of jihad for Islam. Nowadays the bows of the army of Islam are of the Persian and Turkish type, even if the language, the equipment, and the spirit (furusiyya) of the fighters continue to be Arabic and Arab. If one were to prevent the Mamluks from using their proper arms, the world would deteriorate, the market of the Holy War would be shut down and the unbelievers would triumph over the Muslims. Change and innovation in military technology must be accepted and applied if it is to benefit the Muslim community. This holds true for the powerful qaws al-jarkh, but also for the manjanje (sling engine) which is far superior to conventional arrows in conquering the fortresses of the enemy. For this will always be the prime objective: subduing the foes of Islam, whatever means are needed and available. He closes this important, highly political passage: “If today’s Muslim (i.e. Mamluk) army were to fight successfully with its Persian bows for God and His Prophet in the presence of the Prophet, we could be sure that he would praise and commend these (weapons) and not prohibit their use."

Our three texts help us better understand the attitude of educated contemporary civilians towards the Turkish monopoly on riding and fighting. Divergent feelings and convictions had to be harmonized: obligation toward the Mamluks without whom Islam would be imperiled, and irritation at being excluded from activities and privileges which, in the golden past, had been intrinsically Arabic.

A very comprehensive furusiyya concept seems to have harmonized these contradictory attitudes. In our texts, furusiyya essentially denotes the Sunnah of the Prophet and his Companions in battle, on the race track and on tournament grounds. This archetypal furusiyya lives on in two distinct manifestations. One is furusiyya in the strictly technical and down-to-earth sense of horsemanship and military proficiency. Under this meaning it has passed, according to our authors, into the hands of aliens, at least for the time being. The Persian bow epitomizes this Mamluk furusiyya from which non-Mamluks were excluded. However, furusiyya also seems to have retained a more basic and elusive second meaning: the continuing ethos of manly endeavour of early Islam, the persistent, indelible Arab furusiyya hallowed by the Prophet himself. Qualities like generosity, mental awareness and vigilance are associated with this. No Mamluk overlord could ever take this prestigious attribute away from the Arabs and arrogate it to himself and his group. It consists of many small sunan (ritual practices), most of which were to form the basis of the new Turkish-Mamluk, furusiyya, in a historical process. Its pivotal characteristic is the spirit of sacrifice and jihad, which takes us unexpectedly close to the meaning of Western chivalry.

Unlike al-Suyuti and al-Sakhawi, Ibn al-Qayyim addresses these issues unequivocally. He does not hesitate to concede to the Mamluks their uncontested merits for Islam and their corollary title to social dominance. This is the message of his discourse on the Persian bow. In another work, he shows fairness towards the Mamluks, defending them against unfounded and vicious accusations connected with their slave origin. Al-Sakhawi and al-Suyuti are less outspoken, remaining silent on the exigencies of a genuinely Mamluk furusiyya. One reason for their reticence could have been their deep irritation with Mamluk special rights. Fifteenth-century Mamluk rule had become more authoritarian than in the times of the dawla turkyya. Also, al-Suyuti and al-Sakhawi were in close personal contact with representatives of the Mamluk ruling class, and therefore taciturn on the perpetual Mamluk violations of the civilian population’s established rights and traditions. These were highly sensitive issues. We know of at least two leading Mamluk emirs, the learned Qayyum al-Mahmudi (d. 1485) and Yashbak al-Faqih (d. 1473), who wrote against the Mamluks in his treatise on archery with the author himself, while al-Sakhawi himself gave a copy of his work as a gift to his ruler, Sultan Qaytbay.

But this deficit is offset by the detailed yet lively and detailed reports of Western visitors to Egypt. From them we learn that the local population, the ‘Ulama included, suffered badly from Mamluk autocracy and elitism. An itinerant foreign visitor could risk describing these social tensions freely because he did not face the wrath of those in power. Yet it was only recently that their colourful, often pensive, and always informative travelogues, written in Latin and vernacular European languages, reached an Arab audience as an indispensable counterpoint to local historiography.
Examples of Early Islamic Rock Inscriptions from Makkah and Madinah

Abridged from a lecture by Prof. Dr. Sa'ad A. al-Rashid

Makkah and Madinah are the focal points of Islamic culture and religion, being part of greater Arabia, the land where the religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism originated. Even before Islam, Makkah and Madinah were major urban centres of the Arabian Peninsula and had trade connections with Yemen in the south, Mesopotamia and Syria in the north, Persia and India in the east and Egypt and Africa in the west.

Kufic Inscriptions from Makkah al-Mukarrama, probably from the 4th Century A.D.
During the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period, caravans used to come to Makkah from various parts of Arabia for trade and pilgrimage. At the camp sites, near wells and on hills and rocks all along these routes are memorial inscriptions in various ancient Arabian scripts. The Rock Art and Epigraphic Survey of the entire Kingdom conducted by the Department of Antiquities and Museums during the last decade has located over 3000 early Arabic inscriptions in various parts of Saudi Arabia, usually on the pilgrimage and trade routes. I will focus on the early Arabic inscriptions which I, myself, found near or around the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, most of which are from the early Islamic period and were not published prior to my books on these inscriptions in 1986 and 1993.

Although pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions are located in Syria, there is no evidence of pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from the Makkah and Madinah area. In the entire Arabian Peninsula, the presence of pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions is almost negligible. So far, only one such inscription, located at Madain Saleh, could possibly be attributed to the pre-Islamic period. Even in Syria, the three inscriptions which are considered pre-Islamic, located at Zabed and Harran churches, are dated 512 and 568 AD respectively. Another pre-Islamic Arabic inscription located at Umm al-Jimal is attributed to the 6th century AD.

The earliest evolution of Arabic script from Nabataean, as indicated in the al-Nimara inscription, dates back to 328 AD, but there is no other evidence of early Arabic inscription between 328 AD and 568 AD. Thus, there is a gap of 240 years between the al-Nimara and the Harran inscriptions. I think this was the period when different ancient Arabian scripts were in use by various people in different parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Although they were speaking a common language i.e. Arabic, Al-Musnad al-Janubi was used by people in Yemen and southern Arabia, Nabataean mostly by the people of north-western Arabia and Al-Musnad al-Shamali mostly by the Bedouin tribes. Very likely the early Arabic writing system was used by the people of Makkah and Madinah during the Jahiliyyah period just before Islam. Although our surveys have so far failed to find any early Arabic inscriptions which could be attributed to the Jahiliyyah period in the Makkah and Madinah area, records reveal that Arabic script was in use there in the early Islamic period. All these early Islamic period inscriptions which have reached us are carved on rocks, and it is very likely that inscribed material like skin, cloth, leaves, wood and bones etc. has perished.

The early Arabic inscriptions so far found in the Makkah and Madinah area can be divided into various phases based on the style and the form of the alphabet. It is now agreed that Arabic script originated and evolved from the Nabataean script somewhere in northern Arabia or in Syria, but was not commonly in use in the pre-Islamic period. The pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from Al-Nimara, Harran and Umm al-Jimal etc. present an early, crude form of script. Those located on the hills and rocks near or around the Holy cities of Makkah and Madinah show this early developmental form, suggesting that Arabic script developed after the revelation of Islam. It would appear that before Islam, Arabic was a spoken language not commonly used for written communication.

The earliest Arabic inscriptions found near Makkah on the ancient pilgrimage road are dated 40 AH and 56 AH respectively. Others located in Makkah are dated 78, 84 and 87 AH. Nearly sixty years ago, Mohammed Hamidullah, a well known scholar, described the earliest Arabic inscriptions discovered in the heart of Madinah, dating them to the 5th year of Hijra. Hamidullah was one of the pioneers who introduced Arabic epigraphy from the Madinah area to the outside world, publishing the notable
early Arabic texts in 1939. Although these were crude and hardly readable, he attempted to date and decipher them. His work was later followed by several scholars from both inside and outside Arabia.

Since all the early Arabic inscriptions predating Islam or from the early Islamic period, whether from Syria or from Makkah, use obscure and difficult-to-read characters, it appears that not many people in Makkah knew reading and writing at the time of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an and that the Arabic script was at its initial stage of development then. However, after the revelation of the Holy Qur'an in the Arabic language, real attention was paid towards the development of Arabic writing. The early Arabic inscriptions from around Makkah and Madinah are short and hardly decipherable, but inscriptions after 35 AH are more developed and easily readable. The real development of Arabic writing started during the period of the Caliph Uthman, when a school was created to collect all the verses of the Qur'an and record them in written form. People coming from Iraq, Syria and Egypt for pilgrimage and trade learned Arabic in Makkah and, as it was the script of the Qur'an, it also became the official script. Thus, the Arabic inscriptions all along the ancient trade and pilgrimage routes show a chronological sequence from the earliest to the later Islamic period. Those near or around the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah are the best examples. Some of the ones near Makkah provide us with valuable information. For example, on two rocks it is mentioned that the al-Bi'ya mosque in Muna was built in the year 144 AH during the reign of the Caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansoor. Three inscriptions in the open courtyard of the Ka'aba indicate that the Mosque was extended during the period of Al-Mahdi al-Abbass in the year 167 AH. Most of the inscriptions located around Makkah contain verses from the Holy Qur'an and prayers seeking God's forgiveness, in addition to many texts containing the inscribers' names.

Most of the early Arabic inscriptions near Madinah al Munawwara provide the earliest examples of the crude, early form of Arabic script, some dating back as far as the first and second centuries AH. The highest concentration of early Arabic inscriptions is usually found on or near the ancient caravan, trade and pilgrimage routes. One such example is at Rawawah, a camp site on the pilgrimage route located about 50 km south of Madinah al Munawwara, where dozens of early Arabic inscriptions dating between 76 AH and 246 AH are carved on the hard but darkly-patinated granite rocks. Thus, one single site shows the chronological development of Arabic script over a period of 200 years. Several inscriptions at Rawawah are dated and contain the inscribers' names along with prayers seeking forgiveness and pardon for deceased relatives. The majority of names are related to the third Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab. Out of the nine dated inscriptions, five belong to the Ummayyad period and four to the Abbasid period.

About 3000 early Arabic inscriptions have so far been discovered on the ancient trade and pilgrimage routes in the Arabian Peninsula, such as Darb Zubaydah, the Egyptian-Syrian route and the ancient trade route between Yemen and Makkah. They provide a record of contemporary Arabic inscriptions in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula and show the influence and rapid spread of Arabic writing in Arabia after the revelation of Islam. However, the comparative lack of early Arabic inscriptions throughout almost the whole Arabian Peninsula in contrast to their widespread distribution just after the rise of Islam does not mean that Arabic writing was not in use in Arabia before Islam. On the contrary, we think that trade documents which have not survived or have not yet been found were written in Arabic.

Also, early Arabic poetry must have been written in Arabic. At the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an, many believers wrote verses on camel hides and skins, which are perishable objects. During the early Islamic period, peace treaties between the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and his opponents were written in Arabic, while the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) sent messages to foreign kings and rulers in Arabic, and the texts of some of these are available to us. However, Arabic being the script of the Qur'an, it became not only an official script but the most popular form of writing, spreading rapidly not only in Arabia but, through the Arab conquests, in other parts of the world.

Although the development of Arabic writing was slow and gradual in the beginning, with the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, it rapidly developed into a highly-sophisticated literary script. The early Arab theologians, historians, geographers, astronomers, physicists, and chemists wrote books in Arabic, whose impact can still be seen to-day. Arabic calligraphy has no artistic parallels in any of the known writing scripts. It became part of Islamic architecture, art and culture, with Arabic letters being used as decorative motifs on religious monuments and other buildings. The earliest records of Arabic writing which I have presented here are, in fact, the foundations of one of the most sophisticated and beautiful scripts of the world.
A Glimpse into a Princely World:

Some Newly-Discovered Mongol Textiles

Abridged from a lecture by: Niels von Tilsch

Many people believe there is a prohibition against images in so-called Islamic art though it is not mentioned explicitly in the Holy Qur’an. Compared with Buddhist, Hindu or Christian art, non-figurative patterns and inscriptions, abstraction, even colour are very important in Muslims’ art, whereas figurative and narrative elements predominate in the artistic expressions of surrounding cultures.

However, if one spends time in museums displaying Islamic art - to use this somewhat misleading expression about art produced within the cultural sphere of Islam - one realises that many objects are adorned with figurative elements or complete images. One explanation is that the objects represent the artistic achievements of many different Muslim peoples from various cultures, spanning more than a thousand years. Another explanation is that what we see is often Princely Art, or reflects its aesthetics.

Though in principle the rules of the Holy Qur’an, Holy Bible and other laws apply to prince and beggar, rich and poor, we know from history that in the real world there is a difference between what is acceptable within court circles and what is allowed in the rest of society. The reasons for the special status of rulers are understandable.

For millennia, man has accepted the power of a prince to guarantee a stable social order under which he could live in peace and security. To defend the interest of his subjects, the prince had military power, and the right to collect taxes to maintain it. The prince and society were dependent on one another, and the power and splendour emanating from the prince and his court generally reflected the wealth of the area he ruled. In order to inspire both locals and foreigners with respect, it was seen as the prince’s duty to surround himself with splendour and symbols of power.

In the early days of Islam this was not so. As God’s spokesman, the Prophet Mohammed had a natural authority that led believers to follow him in both religious and secular matters. This authority was, to some extent, transferred to the first four caliphs, but soon the practical organisation of society, conquests and more secular tasks became increasingly important for the rulers, while Islamic scholars (ulama) largely took care of religion and religious law (sharia).

The Umayyad caliphs acted and lived like princes elsewhere - a pattern followed generally ever since. Islamic princes in their habits, palaces, appearance and artistic programs were as much part of an international fraternity of royalty as they were of Islamic culture. This explains why princely art and its middle-class imitations did not always accord with Islamic ideas proper. The paintings and sculptures of Umayyad Qa’iara and Khatib al Mafjar, the carved ivories of Umayyad Spain (Louvre), and two fountain figures from the Abbasid palace in Raqqa and a stone relief from a palace in Ghazna (in the David Collection) are examples of this.

Besides architecture, weaving was the art which probably attracted most princely attention. The prestige and importance of high quality textiles were only equalled by outstanding jewels, cut rock crystal objects, carved ivories, high quality calligraphy and lavishly illustrated manuscripts. Accounts of different textile types in written medieval sources are numerous. Great technical skill was needed to produce the most complicated types. The costly materials and the time it took to produce them made them unbelievably expensive, and precious textiles were among the most prestigious gifts a prince could bestow on his subjects or foreign ambassadors. Recently, some magnificent textiles from Mongol Il-Khanid times have found their way to Western museums, including the David Collection. Most of them had been preserved in Tibet, mainly monochrome lamps-woven silk textiles enriched with strips of gilded animal membrane, wound around a silk core or woven flat,
to obtain different reflections of light in the once-shiny gold.

Chingiz Khan founded the Mongol Empire in the early 13th century. His grandsons Mongke Khan and Kublai Khan ruled China as Great Khans and Emperors of the Yuan dynasty, and their younger brother Hulagu conquered much of the Islamic West. Baghdad was sacked in 1258 and the conquerors were only stopped in 1260 by the Mamluk forces of Egypt and Syria. Hulagu's empire consisted of large parts of Anatolia, Iraq and Iran. He took the title Il Khan (territorial Khan), and his successors the Il-Khanids converted to Islam under Ghazan around 1300. The last ruler of distinction of that dynasty was Abu Sa'id, who died in 1335 leaving no direct heirs.

As explained in the David Collection's 1993 textile catalogue, the lampases were probably woven around 1250 in eastern Iran, and display an incredible mixture of western and eastern aesthetics. Most of them consist of a large, uniformly-repeated pattern, and have a frieze near the top with a pseudo-calligraphic decoration. One has a readable inscription: "Salghur Sultan Abu Bakr bin Sa'id", doubtless the Salghurid ruler of Fars, who was active from 1226 to his death in 1260. Abu Bakr was a vassal of the Khwarazm Shahs and later of the Mongols and Il-Khanids. The textile was probably a gift from his Mongol overlords. This general layout with a top border and large uniform area implies that they were probably wall hangings, canopies or tent hangings. We know from Rashid al-Din's History of the Mongols in Persia that, when Hulagu passed near Samarqand and Balkh in 1255 and 1256, he received two tents made from "cloth of gold on gold", a description which perfectly fits this group with its two types of interwoven gold.

The museum's latest lampase acquisition further confirms this use. A lengthwise complete panel 226 cm. long is one of several identical pieces, and must have been made for an imperial tent or canopy. Though missing an "inscription" frieze, it is completed by an arch design at the top. We see the curious mixture of archaic and modern, Islamic and Chinese design elements, probably a trait of any truly imperial art, arising from inspiration from many different cultures in a huge area. Arabic calligraphy or pseudo-calligraphy is mixed with Chinese lotuses and fungi, opposed lions and cockerels in medallions, and double-headed eagles beside dragons and phoenixes of a definite eastern type. No one can doubt that, with their lavish use of silk and gold and fierce heraldic beasts, these textiles belong within a princely context.

When first shown one of these textiles, a silk-tapestry rounded measuring 69 cm. in diameter, I could not believe it was genuine. It looked like a well-executed, late 19th century forgery. I had never seen any Islamic textile remotely like it. However, on closer examination I realised that the large areas I had taken for brown thread were actually gilded animal membrane, from which most of the gold had disappeared. I could not think of one forgery with gold thread consisting of membrane. Details of the central scene with its Mongol clad soldiers and modest chinoiserie details would date the piece within the Il-Khanid period, an assumption supported by four carbon-14 tests dating it to between 1325-1395. The rounded is woven of black and white silk with at least 18 different shades of green, blue, red, brown and beige plus gold applied to animal membrane or gut, and wrapped around an unbleached cotton core. Additional colour shades are obtained by mixing two colours in one thread. In several areas the black or very dark brown silk has disintegrated due to high iron content.

Tapestry-weaving was a well-known technique within Islamic culture. In so-called Tulunid textiles, figurative roundels recalling Byzantine and Sassanian silks are found, but of much coarser type. Fatimid Egypt, very delicate tapestry tiraz was produced, but never with figurative scenes as complex as in this piece. This is also the case with a few surviving Spanish tapestries from the mid-13th century, like a famous pillow-cover from Queen Berengaria's tomb in Burgos. For tapestry of comparable quality and complexity, one must look further east into the Uighur areas of Chinese Turkestan and China proper in the Mongol period. A fine example is an approximately two and a half meter high mandala which must have been produced in the Yuan imperial workshops, datable from a portrait of emperor Wenzong (ruled 1328-1332). Pictorial weavings like the imperial portrait and probably the entire mandala were woven reproductions of paintings.

The rounded is made with a technique and skill which, in the late 13th-14th century, probably came from lands east of the Islamic world. However, cotton - the core for all metal thread in the roundels - has never been observed in any eastern tapestry-woven textiles. This could indicate that the piece was woven in the west. Not a single textile from the world of Islam looks like this one, yet all the details, and even the layout, look familiar, at least to me. We know the iconographical details from other groups of princely and high society art. Some elements are quite archaic and can be found in 13th century art and earlier, while others are from the 14th century.

Many metal trays could be compared to the rounded. One from the British Museum attributed to late 13th century Iraq or Iran illustrates my point. The main scene is an enthroned prince surrounded by courtiers, encircled by friezes containing calligraphy, running animals and medallions. Running animal sequences occur in nearly all medieval Islamic artistic media, especially the Griffin Pursuing a Sphinx as seen in the roundel's inner frieze. While all the beasts in the friezes are well known from pre-Mongol Islamic art, this is not so with the crane/heron or turtle. Though Chinese-looking cranes or herons are abundant in later Persian miniature painting, the only 14th century one I know is a white heron in the Istanbul Kalfia wa Dimna, probably painted for the Il-Khanid court in Abu Sa'id's time, 1317-35.

Neither is the turtle permanent stock within the pictorial zoological garden of Islam, but it has a role in Kalfia wa Dimna. In China the turtle was much more prominent, symbolised the universe and was associated with longevity, strength and endurance. It is probably no coincidence that on another Il-Khanid object, a domed incense burner in the David Collection, we find a turtle.

Though no miniature painting looks exactly like the central scene, virtually all the elements can be found in the
two most prestigious Il-Khanid illustrated manuscripts, Rashid al-Din’s Jami’ al-Tawarikh, and the so-called Great Mongol Shahnama or Demotte Shahnama, both produced in Tabriz, a very important Il-Khanid centre. In one picture, the king wears a crown like the one in the roundel, a type also seen in earlier works of art. Like our king, he holds a handkerchief (mandil) in one hand and in the other a wine beaker. The beaker has disappeared in the textile because it was placed in the exact centre, which has been destroyed by repeated folding. In front of the royal couple is a fish pond like the one seen in the textile. In a picture showing Shah Nushirvan, we see a throne like the one in our roundel, with the king sitting on two cushions with tassels. His head is accentuated by a nimbus or halo, which is rather unusual. Here, as in many other throne-scenes from this period, the courtiers and soldiers wear Mongol dress, while viziers and others representing the locals wear Persian or Arab garb.

On a page about 20 years earlier from the Jami’ al-Tawarikh about King Manucher, the throne is closer to Chinese models than those in the Demotte Shahnama and to the roundel. The Mongol guards, however, are very similar to those on the textile. Both soldiers to the right have the same unusual type of spear, and tassels attached to their swords like the six little warriors with sun shields in the medallions. Again we have Mongols and locals and, a little out of place, the Persian hero Rustam. Once again on this page, the courtiers are Mongols, while the more Semitic-looking turban-clad locals clearly represent advisors and administrators. The seated men are using tabourets of the type seen to the right in the roundel. Quite often, kings are depicted under canopies or arches in the two manuscripts, but not sitting under a proper parasol. This is, however, the case in a scene engraved on a fragmentary brass bucket in the Hermitage made in 1333 AD. In China the parasol was a sign of dignity, as in Mughal India. In another medallion on the bucket, the prince is flanked by two peacocks, resembling the phoenix-like birds on the textile. Together with eagles and other birds of prey, the peacock with its diadem and jewel-studded tail has always been a royal bird. The people and animals in the central scene have a floral background not much different from that of numerous lustre-painted dishes from 13th century Iran. However, in the textile, Chinese lotuses are quite prominent, as everywhere in the Middle East after the advent of the Mongols.

All decorative and pictorial elements in this textile can be found in contemporary Islamic art, not least from the Il-Khanid empire. Many details, including the throne scene itself, have a considerably longer history in Islamic art tradition. Though the tapestry most resembles eastern textiles of the period, the presence of cotton, the readable Arab inscription, the traditional Islamic layout and details found in other Il-Khanid works of art, point to western, probably Iranian, provenance. The Mongols are known to have transported thousands of Muslim craftsmen to the East and could as easily have brought Chinese or Uighur weavers to Tabriz or Sultanugh.

As Linda Komaroff has pointed out, the design for figurative scenes on a candlestick, probably produced in Fars between 1341-1356, must originate from drawings made by trained artists. Inlaid with silver and gold this master-piece, preserved in a Kuwaiti private collection, is nearly as colourful as a painting. The design for a work of art as complex as this textile most likely originated from a drawing in a princely atelier producing illustrated manuscripts - a Kitabkhana. The artist knew how to create a balanced figurative composition. He also knew the traditional artistic vocabulary of Islamic art and the new elements brought in by the Mongols.

The purpose of such a costly textile can only be guessed. When acquired by the museum, the piece was applied to two similarly shaped pieces of cloth, of which one was carbon-14 tested. It turned out to be of the same date as the pictorial tapestry-weave, so the present shape is probably the same as it had in the 14th century. Could it have been made for a royal cushion or was it placed on a metal tray or table at court? The motif is certainly a royal one, even more explicitly than in the silks with confronted beasts we saw earlier. In the Jami’ al-Tawarikh and the Demotte Shahnama, we have noticed how Mongols and locals, be they Arab, Persian or Jewish, are constantly seen together, even though the story related was one from the history of ancient Iran. This must be deliberate, due to the fact that the Mongols used locals to administer conquered lands. Maybe it was also a deliberate policy of collaboration by the later Il-Khanids. Though they were aware and proud of their Mongol descent, they became Muslims and allowed themselves to be depicted together with the former enemy, Pax Mongolica was a fact.

The roundel could be seen as a general representation of Pax Mongolica, or as a representation of kingship as such in a more cosmological context. The king is on his throne in the centre. Below and above him are fishies, quadrupeds and birds, flanking him are different human races. How do we explain this partial lack of understandable symbolic meaning? Are the animals placed at random in a purely decorative way, as they seem to be on many inlaid metal vessels? Is there a hidden message not understood by modern man? Or are we looking at a work of art resulting from the fruitful encounter of western and eastern culture where new decorative and iconographical details have been added and others have disappeared or lost their original meaning?
The Painted Ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo

Abridged from a lecture by Ernst J. Grube

On 29 June 1143, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Philagatos Kerameos, Archbishop of Taormina, delivered a homily in front of King Roger II of Sicily and his sons, in a ceremony inaugurating the Cappella Palatina in the Palazzo Reale of Palermo. The chapel was recognised immediately as one of the wonders of the Christian world, and the Archbishop referred to it with admiration and awe.

Drinkers, musicians and fantastic animals such as harpies and griffins decorate the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina. These pictures show Fatimid and North Africa influences.

He commented on the great beauty of the building and its decoration, especially the painted wooden ceiling over the central aisle. Philagatos spoke of its wondrous appearance, like the evening sky in which an army of golden stars shines brilliantly in the clear night air. Ever since then, anyone who could make a visit did so, and commented on it. The accumulated literature on the building and its unique decoration is immense, although nobody appears to have been fully conscious - or willing to recognise - that the decoration of this chapel is the work not only of Christian, but also Muslim, artists. This was not publicly acknowledged before the mid-9th century.

While the mosaics decorating its walls are in the Byzantine style which flourished in Norman Sicily, the paintings on the chapel ceiling stand in an entirely different tradition. Perhaps this curiously foreign element, and its inaccessible position, high above the floor of the dimly-lit chapel and painted on a complex, multifaceted surface,
prevented contemporary and later visitors from taking proper notice.

Though greatly admired for the beauty of its general effect, the ceiling was not (until recently) seriously considered as an independent, significant, or even meaningful work of art. Although fully-accessible since the elaborate publications of the late 19th century, to which a complete photographic record was added almost fifty years ago, thanks to the indefatigable enterprise of renowned Italian historian of Islamic art, Ugo Monneret de Villard, no full description of these images has been published. This contrasts greatly with the chapel's mosaic decoration, which has been thoroughly documented and studied.

These paintings are unique, the sole survivor, on a monumental scale, of a long tradition now almost entirely vanished. The most immediate parallels for such wooden ceilings must have been the two Fatimid palaces in Cairo of which only small parts have survived. Although they are technically rather different, they must have closely resembled the central ceiling of the Cappella Palatina. There may have been more immediate precedents, in the decoration of Zirid and Aghlabid palaces of Ifriqiya, but nothing remains of them. The close contact between North Africa and Sicily, the conquest of Mahdiyya in 1147 and subsequent establishment of a North African Norman Kingdom, and the well-recognized affinity of much Siculo-Norman architecture to the architecture of that region, all make it logical to see the Cappella's wooden ceiling as the direct result of these contacts.

Even a superficial study of the Cappella paintings shows that, in style, they derive from a long tradition harking back to 3rd-century hellenized Central Asia. In the city of Minan, in the Tarim basin of Chinese Turkestan, are wall-paintings datable to the 3rd century, which display Central Asian and Hellenistic traditions. This eastern, late-classical style appears to have been adopted by Central Asian Turks of the Turfan region, who carried it westwards to the Mediterranean, where its first reflections can be seen in paintings of early 8th-century Umayyad palaces in Syria and Jordan. The style predominates in paintings decorating palaces and residences in Samarra, the 9th-century Abbasid garrison city on the Tigris. From there it migrated to Egypt.

Two different styles of painting were practised in Egypt in Fatimid times: a late-Hellenistic impressionist style inspired by local late-classical traditions; and an eastern classical style from hellenized Central Asia carried westwards by Central Asian Turks. This latter style is executed in a basically graphic manner. A precise outline-drawing done with a full brush, decisive in its definition of forms and dominant in its specific, graphic quality, determines the appearance of the entire painting and gives it a substructure that is never disguised nor altered even after colour is applied. Although the graphic element was intensified in Umayyad paintings, it can already be recognised as a prominent feature in Central Asian wall paintings, and survives almost unaltered into the 12th century in Egypt and Sicily. The general form of the facial features - round face, large eyes with enormous pupils generally hanging from the upper eyelid, straight nose and small mouth, and such typical elements as the scalloped hairline running across the forehead, and long sidelocks falling from both temples in front of the ears - are features in Central Asian painting, Fatimid painting, and also in the Cappella Palatina ceiling paintings. There can be little doubt where the artists who worked in Palermo ultimately derived their inspiration.

Monneret de Villard was the first to postulate that while the forms of Christian art in Sicily hark back to contemporaneous eastern Christian traditions, the paintings on this ceiling could not be explained and understood in that context. Monneret identifies the Muslim art of Fatimid Egypt as the principal source for these paintings. While this is generally accepted today, the question that remains unanswered is whether the paintings should be attributed to artists brought from Egypt to Sicily for the purpose, or artists who
continued to work in a local tradition already well established in Sicily. Another major example of contemporary monumental painting survives: parts of the wooden ceiling of Cefalù Cathedral ordered by Roger for what was to be his mausoleum. This would indicate that the Cappella Palatina paintings were not a singular, isolated phenomenon but part of an official program of royal patronage.

An even stronger reason to assume the presence, in Norman Sicily, of painters who worked in this Fatimid style is the ample production of ivory caskets in Sicily. These are painted with various decorative and figurative subjects close to the style and iconography of the Cappella Palatina paintings. One of the finest pieces, preserved in the Treasury of the Cappella Palatina itself, has such close affinities to Fatimid painting as to suggest that the painters of many of these pieces must have been familiar with the Fatimid pictorial tradition. The hunting scenes on the sides of the casket, especially an elephant and giraffe on its cover, have needlessly been connected with the obsession of Frederick II (1194-1250) to establish a royal collection of exotic animals, including an elephant. But elephants and giraffes appear already on Fatimid lustre-painted pottery, wood-carvings, and ivories. Giraffes also appear on 11th century Sicilian ivory carvings. Elephants with riders are also represented in the Cappella Palatina paintings, on the ceiling of the cathedral of Cefalù, on Siculo-Norman carved ivories, and in Romanesque sculpture. The entire repertoire of figurative representations on these caskets corresponds closely to that on both the Cappella Palatina and Cefalù ceilings.

A rapid survey of the images on the chapel ceiling discloses several features: there is considerable repetition, there seems to be no focal point, the images do not appear directed towards one or other end of the ceiling, or the centres of either of the long sides, nor does there seem to be any area dedicated to specific imagery.

A duel scene (A1) is followed by a pair of heraldic lions (A2), followed by another duel scene (A3). The next image is a replacement, then comes a man hovering over a large, golden Kufic inscription (A5); another replacement; a scene of a (naked) camel rider followed by his lady seated on the howdah of her camel (A7); a pair of heraldically arranged lions (A8); a frontally seated lion-strangler (A9); another heraldic lion-pair (A10); a rider fighting a snake-dragon monster (A11); followed by three pairs of heraldic lions (A12-14); a man astride a lion, rending apart the beast's jaws (Samson?) (A15); another rider fighting off an attacking lion (A16); a pair of large falcons with their prey (A17); a rider, perhaps escaping from a huge, fire-splitting (?) lion (A18); a man carrying an animal on his shoulders, perhaps the hunter's prey, and behind him a rider fighting off an attacking bear (A19); another pair of heraldic lions (A20); a man riding a lion (A21); another pair of heraldic lions (A22); a second rider fighting with a snake-dragon monster (A23); yet another pair of heraldic lions (A24); a rider (A25); an almost totally-redone pair of heraldic lions (A26); a replacement; and though redone, possibly replacing an original painting, a final pair of heraldic lions (A28).

One might see in these paintings renderings of one of the basic themes of princely iconography: the hunt, but neither the duel scenes, the camel riders, nor the multiple heraldic lions appear to fit strictly into such an interpretation.

One does not fare much better with the images in the next set of larger paintings, in the centre of the B formations (B4). Running down the list of subjects, the images form no logical continuum of a theme, nor a succession of interconnected themes. Falcons, peacocks, wrestlers, a man riding a strange monster; seated figures, mainly drinking or playing musical instruments; two frontally depicted eagles with human figures inscribed on their bodies; and a variety of lions, some struggling with snake-like dragon monsters that twist and wind themselves about their bodies; all follow one another haphazardly.

The next group of large pictures, on the bent surfaces in the second tier of the A-formations (A5&6), contains some more specifically significant images, but it again seems that no successive or accumulative theme is developed. This is the zone with the seated ruler figures, the sun- and moon-chariot pictures, and other images suggesting identification with "imperial", or at least princely, themes that might provide a clue to the overall significance of this pictorial cycle. Once again, there are too many generic images of drinkers and musicians (the large majority here). But there are images with more "meaning" or signification: elephant riders, a monastery and its adjacent church (perhaps the Palace and the Chapel), which may indicate a developed theme. There are even more curious lion figures struggling with dragon-snakes, and scenes like a group of men beside a fountain, at a well, playing chess, or eating a meal; and others struggling against monsters: all in apparently incoherent succession. That most of these images belong to the well-established princely iconography is obvious, but a number of repetitions, once again, do not entirely fit, especially those of lions being virtually strangled by snake-like dragons. Most of these images, if not surrounded by drinkers, musicians, entertainers and dancers, are framed by repetitive floral motifs or heraldic motifs of lions, griffins, and falcons.

Paintings of frontally-seated kings with attendants, of
which there is a pair (A23.5&6) and a single example (A26.5), a rider fighting a dragon snake (26.6), and two paintings of a single seated ruler without attendants (A28.5, and B28.4) are also located in this area. While his way of looking at the Cappella Palatina paintings does not seem to yield the impression of a systematic frequency, or programme, there are other ways to look at these images, namely, as individual units or groups of units. The first unit on the west side of the ceiling directly above the image of Christ enthroned and flanked by Saints Peter and Paul, above Roger's throne-seat in the chapel, is too badly damaged to be much use for interpretation, but the next unit, in the centre of this area, has in its second tier the two images of the Sun and Moon-Chariots (A2.5 & 6). They could, perhaps, be allusions to the king's position as universal ruler.

One does not fare much better with the other units along the other sides of the ceiling. The upper registers, with the exception of A23 to 27, are almost exclusively filled with images of drinkers and musicians surrounded by attendants, and other musicians and dancers. Among the numerous Siculo-Arabic and Siculo-Norman objects and monuments, clearly painted ivory offers the most varied and ample material for comparison. Very little precise evidence, either for their dates or their attribution to specific ateliers, appears to exist, although much discussion has taken place in the literature; but they are now, it seems, safely attributed to Sicily.

The frontalised ruler, generally with a drinking beaker in his hand, flanked by attendants who hold weapons, wine bottles, or other paraphernalia of royal ceremony, appears frequently on these ivory boxes and caskets, as do musicians, dancers, and other figures. All these find close parallels in the Cappella Palatina paintings. There are representations of riders, especially with falcons, but also hunters on foot using falcons and hounds (both also in the ceiling paintings), and bows and arrows to fell their prey. The iconography, and in most cases also the style of painting seen on these ivory caskets, provide clear and indisputable parallels to the Cappella Palatina paintings. There is also other evidence for an active local community of artists and artisans that could have worked on the ceiling.

There are, first, carved ivories which Ernst Kühnel attributes to Sicily. They have a curiously flat, angular style in contrast to the typical manner of Fatimid carved ivories, which is best represented by the set divided between Berlin and Paris, deeply cut with relief of a softly swelling and receding quality. The set of carved ivories in Florence (from the Corsini Collection), although generally attributed to Egypt as well, is executed in a similar flat, angular manner, and one is tempted to see it, too, as belonging to the Sicilian rather than the Fatimid school. Both groups of ivories share iconographic schemes with parallels in both the Cappella Palatina paintings and the ivory and wood carvings of Fatimid Egypt. If one adds the flat-surface ivories, the famous carved elephants, and a number of high-relief but closely related ivory boxes to this corpus of work, one finds a considerable body of material supporting the hypothesis that the painted ceilings of Palermo and Cefalù are the work of local artists, removing them all from what once appeared to be a sphere of isolation. Sicilian and North African painted pottery seems to have been largely produced in workshops by artists practising a different, non-Fatimid style, although a number of pieces survive, suggesting the presence of the Fatimid figure-style in North African painted pottery as well. The artistic traditions of Umayyad Spain, both in ivory carving and pottery painting, could have offered models, and possibly artists, to the Siculo-Norman ateliers. Given the close contact between Sicily and the Maghrib, a North African background could easily be imagined for Norman Sicilian work in the field of the so-called decorative arts.

Much decorative art of all kinds: stucco, sculpture, pottery, woodwork, goldsmith's work, rock crystals, has come down to us, testimony to the extraordinary material culture of Siculo-Arabic and Siculo-Norman Sicily, that impressed even visitors from Constantinople, and rivalled the splendour of the courts of Cairo and Cordova. No comprehensive study of this material has yet been made, although the key to proper understanding of the Cappella Palatina and Cefalù paintings lies, undoubtedly, in the interpretation and understanding of much of this material.

Little information is so far available concerning other forms of decorative arts in 12th-century Norman Sicily, like textile production, although Roger II's renowned crown robe testifies to a major textile industry at that time. There is evidence for an official silk factory in the palace itself, and a number of important silk brocades and embroideries have now been attributed to Norman Sicily. However, much further study is needed before attribution of silk-weavings and embroideries to Sicilian workshops of the 12th century can be certain and an assessment can be made of its significance within the context of Siculo-Arabic and Siculo-Norman art, and consequently its relationship to the Cappella Palatina and Cefalù paintings. From the little that we know, both stylistic and iconographic parallels do emerge.

The same is true for figuratively-decorated Siculo-Arabic, Norman, and North African pottery. However, the most significant results of any specific iconographical investigation of the ceiling paintings demonstrate one point very clearly: that much of what appears on the painted ceilings not only partakes of the general iconography of the medieval Muslim world, but can also be found, in almost equal measure, in the iconography of the western medieval Romanesque world as well. Although it would take more space and time than that at our disposal here to interpret the often puzzling images of these paintings, a first review of this common ground yields astonishing results. The juxtaposition of images from East and West with the images of the Sicilian 12th-century ceilings indicates the complexity of the task of interpreting the paintings, if not as a cycle, then at least as individual images, or sets of images. With a fuller interpretation of these single images, some of which are more than obvious (such as the Enthroned King and His Attendants, although why in multiple form?), the fundamental question of the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, namely why these images are present and what they may have meant at the time they were placed on the ceiling of Roger's royal chapel, can perhaps be answered.

However, the most important result of this brief and very summary investigation is the fact that the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, far from being a foreign, imported element within the context of the Norman art of Sicily, testifies to an extraordinary, indeed unique phenomenon: the true fusion of eastern Muslim, and western Christian, art and culture. While, of course, it has long been recognised that Muslim culture and its traditions were a highly important element of Norman Sicilian culture, the fact is that the true integration of these two cultures, unfortunately too often in opposition to each other, was achieved culturally. The painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina is its supreme testimony.
In Europe, carpets have retained their popularity as luxury household items since the 15th century, but what was the demand for carpets in Ottoman society? What was the role of carpets in the interior decoration of palaces, Topkapi Palace in particular, and of upper-class Ottoman houses? What was their value from the economic point of view and in comparison with other valuable goods in the Ottoman Empire?
Carpets and their use in the Ottoman Empire

Their use in palaces and private houses in the Ottoman lands is a matter which requires further research because the only carpets which have survived to the present day in Turkey are those found in religious buildings. This is unlike Turkish carpets in Europe, which have been passed down from generation to generation in private families, or at least are known to have existed in private homes through their appearance in paintings. The estate records from different regions of the Ottoman Empire give us useful information. Published probate inventories dating from the 16th to 19th centuries list all household effects owned by the deceased person together with their value. In the long lists of household effects owned by viziers, daughters of the Sultans, provincial governors, and other people of the wealthy classes very few carpets and kilims appear, and their values are extremely low compared to other items.

Another point of note is that, in lists of gifts presented to the Palace or sent to foreign countries, Turkish carpets are mentioned after Egyptian carpets, Persian silk carpets and fabrics. The Topkapi Archive includes treasury lists, but most useful of all is the documentation offered by the miniature painters, whom we may regard as the photo reporters of their time. Ottoman miniatures from the 15th century onward clearly show carpets (or at least some kind of floor- or ground-covering). While these frequently contain compositions reminiscent of book bindings, this may simply be because the artists who rendered the images were more versed in the art of book illumination and miniature-painting than in weaving. The borders, however, clearly display the Kuic-calligraphy braid typical of Holbeins. In some miniatures, one catches glimpses of what look like medallion carpets and of carpets with geometrical patterns but it is impossible to say for certain whether these are knotted carpets or embroideries.

In the light of these documents it appears that among the Ottomans, carpets and kilims were largely used in religious buildings and to cover the floors of campaign tents by the military classes. One explanation could be that, as products of local manufacture, they were not considered as valuable as those made abroad, or alternatively that their use in religious buildings caused them to be classified separately from items used in the domestic context. In the countryside, on the other hand, carpets and kilims were multifunctional items of primary importance in domestic interiors, and valued as such, but they were made for use by the families and not as commercial items of trade.

The wealth of carpets from mosques and tombs contrasts sharply with the lack of material from the Ottoman palaces. The question of what happened to these rugs has never been satisfactorily answered. Today there is no carpet collection of any importance to be found in Topkapi Saray - a place from which for centuries the Empire was ruled and in which the Imperial family lived and foreign emissaries were received. This is not to say that references to carpets and other furnishings are lacking in the records. For example, Document d-8274 in the archives is the text of a law governing how Kurbehati (the chamber in which the viziers convened in council) was to be furnished. Forty-seven items are listed, including draperies of velvet brocade and pure silk, jewelled cushion-covers, jewelled pendants, and carpets of various sizes and richness. Elsewhere in the same law is a description of how the Privy Chamber is to be furnished during religious celebrations attended by the Sultan. Fifty-seven items are specified, including twenty "small carpets of gold brocade". In yet another place we read: "On occasions when sundry other parts of the palace are not to be furnished with velvets but rather with Cairene carpets, thirteen medium-sized carpets and forty prayer rugs shall be issued." None of the places referred to in this law is particularly large yet the number of items specified for the furnishing of each is lavish by any standards and suggests that the volume of material available to hand for such purposes must have been enormous. Yet where it has got to be a mystery. Topkapi Saray was never looted, never suffered from an overwhelmingly disastrous fire, while theft on such a scale hardly seems likely. We are left with the conclusion that carpets that were worn out in the course of centuries of use were simply discarded.

The small collection of carpets found in Topkapi Saray to-day consists entirely of 19th-century Persian and Caucasian works and of late-Ottoman carpets that were woven at the imperial mills in Firenze. The only singular example is a Semai-knotted prayer carpet dating to the late 16th or early 17th century and brought into the collection from the tomb of Selim II. Palaces other than Topkapi Saray, on the other hand, are late 19th-century buildings. The carpets to be found in them reflect, for the most part, the tastes and fashions of the period during which the structures were originally built and furnished.

Ottoman Carpets as National Legacy

When one attempts to study the carpet collections existing in Turkey to-day, it immediately becomes apparent that all those that survive are carpets that were bequeathed to mosques and tombs. There are many reasons for this but the chief one is that, under the Ottoman legal system until the later period, pious foundations and endowments made to religious institutions were one of the few ways that such goods could accumulate at all.

The Sultan was not only the heir of last resort; in theory, he was the absolute owner of everything in his domains. All properties belonged to him and were granted by him under dispensation until such time as he wished to reclaim them. One of the effects (not to say the aims) of this system was to prevent the accumulation of wealth in the hands of powerful local families in the outlying provinces of the Empire. Since one could never be absolutely certain of passing one's properties on to one's heirs, there was little reason to build up vast collections of anything, carpets included. The only way out of this was to bequeath one's properties to a foundation or endowment - in effect a mortmain estate. The Ottoman great and humble alike had mosques built, and made charitable endowments in an effort to prevent their goods from reverting to the throne. In this, it was effective because even during times of war and economic crisis, when the Ottoman Treasury was ransacked for anything that might be of value and turned into cash money, when even the court's copper, silver, and gold utensils were scrapped, melted down, and coined into money, the vast treasures locked up in the hands of the foundations were never touched.

In this respect, therefore, mosques and tombs were of particular importance. The tombs of the Sultans and their kin, or the mosques endowed by them, were like small private museums that were built and decorated by some of the leading artisans of the day, and whose "collections" includ-
ed precious tiles, carpets, silver candlesticks, silver lecterns with ivory Qur’an boxes, and other goods that had either belonged to the deceased during his lifetime or had been specially ordered for the structure. The library that was included in the complex was a trove of priceless manuscripts. The deed of trust specified agricultural properties whose revenues were to be used for the upkeep of the endowment. In the course of time, many of these miniature "museums" were further enriched by new bequests.

This system survived largely intact and worked reasonably well until the 19th century, when the economy of the Empire was crippled by the steady loss of many of its most prosperous territories. Economic and military decline were augmented by a parallel surge in demand for works of Islamic art in Europe. Pilgrimage had always been a problem and even during the Middle Ages there was a trickle of

and gathering of objects began in 1910 and led, in 1914, to
the establishment of the Museum of Islamic Foundations, which was originally housed in a building within the grounds of the Suleymanie mosque complex. When the Republic was founded, it was renamed the Museum of
Turkish and Islamic Art, and it is housed today in the Grand Vizier’s Palace of Ibrahim Pasha.

Among the works taken into the museum were a vast number of rugs and carpets of every conceivable size, provenance, and condition. This collection continued to be enriched in the years that followed. The carpets in the museum’s collection were brought there from many different sources. Istanbul accounts for the largest batch but the inventory also includes pieces from Konya, Sivrihisar, Manisa, Erzurum, Erzime, Antalya, Eskisehir, Biga and Aydın.

![A part of the interior of the Topkapi Sarayi](image)

works out of the Muslim world headed for the west. However, this was nothing like the wholesale looting that became rampant during the last years of the Empire. Newspapers and detailed official police reports of this time provide information about robberies from mosques and tombs all over the country.

Osman Hamdi Bey, the founder of the Imperial Archaeological Museum, mounted a campaign to have this priceless cultural heritage removed from the tombs and mosques, where it clearly was not being protected properly, and to collect it in a single institution. The inventorying

The bulk of the earliest additions to the Museum’s collection are from tombs or mosques that are associated with the members of the Seljuk or Ottoman imperial dynasties. The list includes: the Alaeddin Keykubad tomb in Konya, the tombs of Celbi Sultan and Prince Çom in Bursa, the tombs of Osman Gazi, the tombs of the Ottoman princes on the grounds of the Ayasofya mosque, Suleymaniye mosque, the tombs of Süleyman I and his wife Hürrem (known as Roxelane), the tomb and mosque of Ahmed I, the tomb of Sultan Mahmud, the Mihrimah (daughter of Sultan Süleyman) mosque, the tomb of Nakşı bil Sultan
I became interested in the arts of the Bahmani period during a trip to the Deccan plateau in Central India with Dr. Michell in 1991. I was puzzled but also fascinated by the idiosyncratic bearing of the monuments. They conveyed a visual vocabulary abounding in words originating in different languages yet what they communicated was coherent and appealing. I thought that if one could unravel the origin of these words one could perhaps better understand the arts and the culture of the Bahmanis.
It had been generally accepted that after shedding the Tughluq vestiges that characterise the monuments of the early period, the art of the Bahmani period was indebted to Persian traditions. A more complex picture is emerging affected by the social configuration of the Deccan at that time, distinguished by a multinationalism on one hand and on the other, embracing a royal iconography first systematised at the court of the Timurids. The name Deccan derives from the Dakhinis or Southerners, who were early settlers of the southern region of the Indian subcontinent.

I. Building types pertaining to secular and religious buildings that are found in the three urban centres of the Bahmani kingdom: Gulbarga, Firuzabad and Bidar

II. Jami’ Masjid in the citadel of Gulbarga

III. Funerary monument of Ahmad Shah (who was responsible for the transfer of the capital from Gulbarga to Bidar and whose tomb still stands outside his capital at the suburb of Astur.

A. Political and social context

Nasir-ud-Din Ismail Shah became the first independent Sultan of the Deccan, following a revolt against the Tughluq dynasty by a group of powerful amirs in 746/1346. Two years later his kingdom was claimed by Zafar Khan, one of the strong men of the revolt. Taking the title Ala-ud-Din Hassan Bahman Shah, Zafar Khan founded the Bahmani dynasty that ruled the Deccan from AH 748-934/1347-1527 AD. Albeit fictional, Bahman invoked a royal Persian ancestry.

The Bahmani adopted tolerant policies towards the Hindu majority, and other religious minorities, such as Jews and Nestorian Christians. Their non-discrimination policies encouraged the migration of Abyssinians, Arabs, Turks and even Franks to the kingdom. Their diplomatic and political isolation from the other dynasties of the subcontinent encouraged them to develop relations with their contemporaries the Mamluks, the Timurids, the Aq Qoyuni and the Qara Qoyuni, as well as the ascending Ottoman dynasty.

At its height the kingdom extended from the Arabian sea to the Bay of Bengal and from the Tapi river in the north to the Tungabhadra and the Krishna river in the south. After the fall of the Tughluqs, the Bahmanis were a powerful dynasty in central India in competition with the Hindu Rajas of Vijayanagar. With Bahmanii controlled ports in both the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, they commanded a powerful trading position.

The first capital of the state was the city of Gulbarga. Two capitals from c.802/1400 to 825/1422: Gulbarga and Firuzabad, 20 miles to the west. Firuz Shah brother, Ahmad, transferred the capital to Bidar in about AH 827-830 (1424-1426 AD).

Of the three Bahmani cities Bidar is the best preserved, Firuzabad is a pleasure of ruins, and in Gulbarga, only the mosque inside the citadel, a bazaar street and a few other structures have survived.

The palatial complex of Bidar is built next to the Sunah Khamb mosque (pre-Bahmani). The famous Takhti Firizada or Turquoise Throne was placed in the columned Diwan-i-Aam (Hall of Public audience) where the accession of the Bahmani kings was celebrated. The inlaid tilework in greenish-blues, yellows, whites and reds is reminiscent of Timurid examples. Set within black stone frames. This type of decoration is typical of the Bidar period from c.1450.

Decorating the spandrels are two tigers with raised paws, an iconic theme we will return to shortly. rulers private quarters with its loutus pool, a monumental gateway resembling a pishtaq without the minarets. Tigers in the spandrels of the arch are an emblem probably introduced by Firuz Shah in Firuzabad c. 1400.

The lion with the sun however makes its first appearance on Seljuq Anatolian coins. In an Iranian context it is introduced much later probably around 1500 alluded by the presence of this pattern on Qazvin's "Ajab al Malihulqar" pointed in Herat in 909/1503. We therefore have a Seljuq-Anatolian symbol that passed to India either via the Il-Khanids or via the "Afaq" Turks. In Persian the word for lion is shir; in India shir means tiger. The fact that the Bahmani represented a tiger might imply that their knowledge of this emblem might have derived from literary sources rather than images, explaining the transposition of shir lion by shir tiger.

It is possible that this theme was introduced to the Bahmani kingdom via the "Afaq" Turks of Persian education. The presence of this symbol on the entrance of the rulers' private quarters could imply a royal or astrological symbolism.

The royal city of Firuzabad is a dense concentration of dilapidated tapering walls, arched gateways, domes abandoned structures that epitomize the pleasure of ruins. The best preserved buildings are the mosque, a bazaar street and the baths, the first bath structure in India. It is in the Bath and the bazaar street that we first encounter the pyramidal dome or vault where we notice the variations in the height of the walls and domes and thirdly the juxtaposition of hemispherical and pyramidal forms which we will also see on the buildings of Gulbarga. Other features that are first recorded in Firuzabad are the fluted or ribbed dome and trilobed or stilted arches, the latter with vertical angled profiles. These are some of the elements that define early Bahmani architecture together with plain un-adorned walls and mostly stark interiors. It is also in Firuzabad that we notice the presence of roundels on the spandrels of the arched windows or doors. Undecorated to start by the Bidar period of the 1430's, roundels bear elaborate geometric and arabesque designs.

Pyramidal vaults as mentioned earlier cover the shops of the bazaar streets in both Firuzabad and Gulbarga. In Firuzabad, the bazaar street is outside the city walls and was situated on the road leading from the city to the dargah of Khalifat al-Rahman, the local spiritual advisor to Firuz Shah. In Gulbarga it is inside the citadel. Both share the same features. At the Firuzabad bazaar, small rectangular or square shops are covered by a pyramidal roof, providing an interplay of heights similar to the Hamam of Firuzabad.

Pyramidal vaults are found in funerary as well as secular monuments. It is therefore obvious that Firuz Shah tried to forge a new visual language for Bahmani art by introducing a number of innovative ideas.

Domes of conical or pyramidal shape are known from the 11th century from Central Asia, Iran, Syria, and Anatolia and can also be seen on Maqrhibi marabout while the earliest are the early Christian examples from Syria dating, from the 5th century A.D.

With Anatolian antecedents is also the juxtaposition of different types of domes or vaults set at different heights to create an interesting interplay of volumes. One could link the appearance of the trefoil lobed arch first found in Firuzabad) and recessed black stone columns supporting the arched doorways to the introduction of Hindus in the
Bahmani administration and the interest, Firuz Shah showed in Hindu traditions. Arches of similar sweeping calligraphic movement inscribing deep lobes that can be three or more are known from Warangal and other pre-Islamic sites and the same is true of the shape and colour of the columns that in the Islamic context usually support the arches of the doorways.

From the monuments, we have examined so far, we note that the decorative patterns and techniques of the Bidar palatial complex relate to Persian techniques.

The lion and the sun iconography, pyramidal vaults, and the interplay of differing heights point to Anatolia while the trilobe arch and the colonettes that support the arches copy Hindu models.

Let us now examine the religious architecture and in particular the mosque inside the citadel of Gulbarga and the designs that embellish the interiors of the tomb of Ahmad Shah.

The date of the only surviving madrasa of this period is in a chronogram, the numerical value of which is 877/1472. The madrasa built by Mahmud Gawan in Bidar closely resembles the famous Timurid madrasa of Ulugh Beg.

Four monumental iwans end in hexagonal recesses, the latter covered by domes on high drums thus closely resembling Timurid originals. The façade was decorated with three rows of arched windows surrounded by black stone bands and framed on both sides with tall minarets a rare sight in the Deccan. The division of the surface into parallel arched bands is introduced in the tomb of Firuz Shah, the great innovator of Bahmani architecture, while as mentioned earlier the use of different coloured stone to frame arched or other shaped panels is first recorded on the tomb of Ala ad Din Shah at Astur, the funerary complex of the Bahmani rulers of Bidar where we also see polychrome tiles, a decorative technique that has also been used on the madrasa though very little has now survived.

The beautiful calligraphic band executed in tiles is signed at the end of the inscription with the name of Ali As-Sufi whose name occurs at the end of the inscription.

Mahmud Gawan was from Gilan and entered the service of the Bahmani kings under Ala ad-Din to become Prime Minister in 1461. He was an accomplished mathematician who kept in touch with the learned men of Khorasan during his life time, which might explain the transposition of a Timurid architectural model and decorative techniques to the Deccan.

Minarets were not favoured by the Bahmani and none can be found in the mosques they built, which are essentially of two types.

Type A - a large courtyard and a prayer hall are surrounded by an enclosure wall to which entrance is permitted via a domed entrance on the western side of the wall. Examples are the Shah Bazaar mosque in Gulbarga (built between 1358-1375) and the Jam' mosque in Firuzabad (dated to 1390-1406). The walls of the courtyard in Firuzabad have deep arched recesses in rectangular frames and were once covered in plaster while decoration is confined to the roundels in the spandrels. Merlons that follow a stepped sequence marked by gudastias, finials with fluted sides and bulbous tops, crown the walls of the courtyard in both mosques and are a distinctive feature of early Bahmani architecture unknown in the Tughluqid monuments of Delhi. From the prayer hall in Firuzabad, only remains the enclosure wall. On the middle of the qibla wall is the mihrab and stone steps indicate the place of the minbar as in almost all Indian mosques. Other features characterising the early Bahmani mosques are the domed bays that form the aisles, the sloping walls and the undecorated exterior and interior surfaces.

Type B is exemplified by the Jam' Masjid in the citadel of Gulbarga, where a totally new concept is explored, but one that will be stillborn.

Inside the fort and built on a raised platform, thus continuing 12th century Hindu traditions, the Jam' Masjid stands in splendid isolation. This is the only mosque in India without a courtyard. It has seventy five bays of equal size covered by shallow domes on faceted pendentives.

Dominating the skyline of Gulbarga, and a reminder of its past glories.

During the 14th and 15th centuries it must have been surrounded by the palace complex and the other administrative buildings which have since disappeared.

The earliest known mosque without a courtyard is the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. As it has to be viewed in conjunction with the Dome of the Rock one could argue that the courtyard is the open area that separates the two buildings. It is in Bakhchisarai the masjid-i-nih Gumbad and at the Bu Fatata mosque in Tunisia both of which date from the 10th century, that we find the earliest mosques without a courtyard. Though this type seemed to be rare at the time, it was none the less known in both eastern and western Islam.

From the 12th century to c.1400, mosques without courtyards are well attested from Sejyuq, Bevilacqua, and Ottoman Anatolia, denoting a continuous tradition.

Our Gulbarga mosque would therefore seem to continue local traditions that are further strengthened by Anatolian and possibly Ottoman connections. Trade records and correspondence document relations between the Bahmani and the Ottomans. It is therefore possible to imagine that Anatolian forms might have inspired Deccani buildings. However, until further evidence is made available the architectural relations between the Ottomans and the Bahmani can only be plausible speculation.

The innovations introduced during the Gulbarga period, are all credited to Firuz Shah, a ruler interested in all branches of knowledge who encouraged the presence of gifted men from all parts of the world to contribute to the creation of a versatile visual language. He was also a devout Muslim well versed in the Qur'an, who sought the approval of holy men such as Sayyid Gisu Dara who settled in Gulbarga and Khalilf al-Rahman in Firuzabad.

The imposing tomb and the highly venerated complex of Gisu Dara and other holy men testify to that. His tomb follows the architectural ideas first set out in the tomb of his estranged disciple Firuz Shah breaking away from the square domed type with sloping walls and undecorated surfaces modelled after Tughluqid originals. Towards the end of the 14th century, the double tomb type is introduced but instead of sloping walls we have straight undecorated ones. Double tombs that is two domed mortuary chambers next to each other connected by a small corridor the width of the walls are rare in the Islamic world but they do exist in Damascus in the Farukhshahibey Mausoleum while, in Cairo, the mausoleum of Sayyidat Atia has two chambers side-by-side with no corridor to join them.

The undecorated stark style continued till c.1422 at which point a new aesthetic is introduced, as can be seen in the tomb of Firuz Shah, where lofty domes and decorat-
ed exterior and interior surfaces replace the austerity of the previous centuries.

Now, the exterior walls are embellished with two rows of double pointed arched recesses in rectangular frames that divide the surface vertically and horizontally. The arched windows of the first floor are covered with jalis of geometric designs while the triple arches of the doors are supported by black stone columns recalling Hindu models. Roundels decorate the spandrels of the arches. The interior of the tomb is decorated with double arches, some of which are quatrefoil instead of trefoil, while the niche is ribbed - elements familiar to us from Firuzabad and the Jami of Gulbarga.

The tomb of Ahmad Shah at Bidar displays a further development in the history of the square type of mausoleum. The squat appearance of the Gulbarga tombs gives way to a lotter look.

It is, however, the interior decoration of this tomb that is impressive. Painted with elegantly executed calligraphic, geometric and floral designs in bright shades of gold, vermillon-green, and bluish-purple, terracotta and jet black, they echo both Ottoman and Timurid styles.

The cloud collar is a motif found in Iran from the 14th century onwards and in the arts of the Ottoman period from the first half of the 15th. Thus, one theme relates to Ottoman concepts while the cloud collar common to both Iranian and Ottoman traditions is also an identifiable Turkmen symbol.

The unusual motif of this band is the star shape, while elliptical medallions are known from Mamluk, Timurid, and Ottoman examples. The star shape is a theme that became famous thanks to the so-called Star-Ushah carpets credited to the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, a pattern that can also be seen on bookbindings attributed to the same ruler.

The composition is focused on an oak leaf we know well from Timurid and Ottoman manuscripts, bookbindings and carpets.

The oak leaf was probably a creation of the Timurid nakkashane. Later during the first half of the 15th century, it was adopted by the Ottoman court painters, thus becoming part of the royal cycle of images in both dynasties.

Under Firuz Shah, the great innovator of the early Bahmani period, a new vocabulary is established based on the synthesis of local and, at that time, mostly western Islamic traditions. The internationalism introduced by Firuz Shah will become more evident under his brother and successor Ahmad Shah, where we notice the use of designs and themes belonging to the royal iconography of the time. This iconography was born at the nakkash-khanah of the Timurid court and disseminated through the artists and painters of these workshops that were freed under Ulugh Beg in 1411 but also through the exchange of gifts between monarchs and the movement of craftsmen.

Bahmani art is not solely of Persian derivation. It appears that until the 1430's, Anatolian-Turkish traditions together with those of the Deccan contributed to the formation of early Bahmani art. The period of Bidar after 1430 produces a more complex picture. During the early centuries of this period Ottoman and Timurid ideas converge perhaps because both belong to the same royal iconographic cycles developed at the court of Timur and adopted by all the royal houses of the time. To this royal iconography each dynastic nakkashane added its own theme and the Bahmani, eager to be part of this international elite, adopted designs from both.
The Architectural Remains
Of Old Kuwait Town

Abridged from a lecture by:
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The transformation of Kuwait from an intact, traditional, walled, Arabian Gulf port little influenced by Western architectural and planning trends to the modern metropolis of today began in the early 1950s. It was the consequence of a government decision to plan urban development in Kuwait according to internationally accepted planning principles.

The critical factor affecting the preservation of the vernacular town was the decision at that time to erect the modern state capital within the physical framework of the existing old town. This meant that vast sections of the historic urban fabric had to be torn down to open up areas for the new road network, facilities and services required by a modern metropolis.

The destruction of everything that was old was swift, uncontrolled and permanent in spite of the prudent but never implemented - 1960 Law of Antiquities. This law was intended to safeguard all movable and immovable cultural property within the state and to register, document and preserve the wealth of vernacular buildings still existing at that time.

Under the oil boom pressure to develop, within the last five decades the old mud town has almost totally disappeared. It has been replaced by Kuwait City's central business district with its modern government, commercial and residential complexes surrounded by large razed areas, the result of urban clearance. Gone are the dense concentrations of traditional buildings and the naturally-evolved urban spaces. Gone forever are many old landmarks and reference points such as neighbourhood mosques or the old pedestrian link between the port, the market, the public square and the town wall.

What does remain is a scattered handful of old structures and urban spaces in mixed public and private owner-
ship, numbering just over 120 properties in all. These are 19th and 20th century courtyard houses and walled cemeteries, the five gates of the 1920 defence wall of Kuwait; early-to-mid-20th century government buildings; mid-20th century renovations of pre-existing mosques, two hus-sainiats, a handful of old diwanis and chancellies along the sea front; two traditional clusters within the old bazaar (souk) and three foreign clusters: the British Embassy, the old British Political Agency and the American Mission Hospital compound.

These buildings were located and surveyed in a Kuwait Municipality study in 1988. The Kuwait Historical Preservation Study of Old Kuwait Town identified all of the preservation-worthy heritage buildings within the confines of al-Soor Street and the sea, i.e., the old town.

Identification however was not a safeguard against their extinction. As the Kuwait Historical Preservation Study pointed out, 72% of the surviving vernacular buildings were affected by committed or proposed government planning schemes for the city centre or were threatened by unregulated private re-development of heritage sites. Within the coming two decades, the study warned, the majority of Kuwait’s surviving heritage buildings would be demolished as planning commitments were successively honoured.

The immediate threat, therefore, to the preservation of indigenous architectural heritage was not so much building deterioration due to age, neglect or lack of funds for restoration, although those were also significant factors. The real threat was the consistent absence of history-conscious planning at all government levels for decades, reaching a climax by the late 1980s.

Through the efforts of concerned individuals, and as a result of the awareness initiated by the Kuwait Historical Preservation Study, the situation has changed significantly within the last ten years. Major new government projects such as the Abdullah al-Ahmed Street Area Development, the new Dar al-Ahm al-Islamiyah Headquarters at the American Mission Hospital site, the National Library, the proposed First Ring Road extension through downtown Kuwait, the Kuwait Souk Study and even the new city master plan in KMPR3 are committed to the preservation and rehabilitation of the heritage buildings within their domain. The Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation has initiated a program for the architectural recording, preservation and rehabilitation of all historic mosques in Kuwait. The Municipal Council has authorised the compilation of the Kuwait Heritage Building Register which grades heritage buildings and groups them into action categories. These buildings will eventually be registered with UNESCO.

Controlling heritage buildings still in private ownership continues, however, to be a problem. It is hoped that, through the just compensation policy proposed in the Kuwait Heritage Building Register, private owners may be encouraged to take pride in their heritage buildings and care for their maintenance and proper use.

There has been great progress in the realm of the preservation of the historic built environment in Kuwait. We hope that the government and private sectors will continue to co-operate for the salvation of the few remnants of Old Kuwait Town which are so vital for national identity and awareness.
The Seasonal rains have been plentiful the last few years in Kuwait. Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah has also enjoyed a similar deluge in the form of gifts for the library. Our many friends have made these thoughtful gestures, and they are truly appreciated. Their kind consideration for the restoration and improvement of the library will be of benefit to many scholars, now and in future.


The American Federation of Arts: Exhibitions Program 1998 (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1997.) Gift of Prof. Walter Denny, Department of Art History, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA. ISBN not found


(wife of Sultan Abdülmecid I and mother of Sultan Mahmud II), the Selimiye mosque (built by Architect Sinan for Sultan Selim II) in Edirne, the mosque and tomb of Sultan Mehmed II, the Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan (wife of Sultan Mahmut II and mother of Sultan Abdülmecid) Pertevniyal Valide Sultan (mother of Sultan Abdülaziz), and Yildiz Hamidiye mosques (at the Yildiz Palace, the last palace of the Ottoman dynasty), the Çeşme mosque, and so on.

Another important source are the tombs and mosques of religious leaders (e.g. Şeyh Baba Yusuf in Sivrihisar) and there are also a number of carpets from the tombs or mosques of prominent members of the Ottoman court and military leaders (e.g. Admiral Pirale Pasha in Istanbul). The inventory also includes carpets brought from Tripoli and Mosul.

With about 1,700 entries in its inventory, the Museum's collection is one of the richest and most famous of its kind in the world. What makes these carpets additionally valuable is the existence of detailed records and documentation concerning where they came from. Because of this extraordinarily rich collection, the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts was, for many years, referred to as "The Carpet Museum", even in the earlier international literature.

The carpet treasures in the historical mosques and tombs did not consist only of Ottoman carpets. Caucasian and Persian carpets are also important, with early Caucasian pieces, Dragon, Vase and Garden carpets, carpets with floral design from the Safavid period and even some Moghul multiple-niche prayer carpets. Many other important carpets from mosques found their way to museums in the first years of the Republic. The best known are in the Mevlana Museum of Konya and the Ethnographical Museum in Ankara, which contain fine early works from the mosques and tombs of their surrounding areas.

In 1979 the Istanbul Valiklar Carpet and Kilim Museum was founded to house materials brought in from mosques that had been passed over during the earlier campaigns.

The carpets from only one mosque (Sheikh Baba Yusuf Mosque, Sivrihisar-Eskişehir, 1492) and one tomb (that of Sultan Aleddin Keykubad, Konya, 2nd half of the 12th century) are enough to provide us with almost the best examples illustrating the entire history of carpets. We feel great respect and gratitude to our ancestors for this legacy and are proud to share it with the rest of the world.