About the journal

Hadeeth ad-Dar is a publication of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. Every year, the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah organises a series of lectures known as the Cultural Season. Hadeeth ad-Dar was created to share these lectures with academic and cultural institutions and Friends of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah around the world. Cultural Season 19 will get underway in September 2013 and, as with previous years, will present scholars in a wide variety of fields related to arts and culture in the Islamic world.

The Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) is a government cultural organisation based on a Kuwaiti private art collection. Since its inception in 1983, DAI has grown from a single focus organisation created to manage the loan of the prestigious al-Sabah Collection of art from the Islamic world to the State of Kuwait to become an internationally recognised cultural organisation.

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LNS 1785 J
Fabricated from gold, worked in kundan technique and set with rubies and emeralds
Height 9 mm; diameter 100 mm
India, Mughal, c. 1st quarter 17th century AD
The Journey to the Centre

Aly Gabr

Presented in English
18 April 2011

“What is Islam?”
“Islam is a way of life.”

We have all heard too many times this phrase explaining Islam as a way of life. Do we really understand what it means? Islam, to me, is an intensity of God; consciousness that expressed itself in a rational acceptance of all God-created nature, a harmonious pairing of intellect and sensual urge, spiritual need and social command.

By examining Medieval Islamic chronicles and texts describing the activities of Muslim traditional societies, we are at once struck by the fact that the major part of the life of a typical traditional Muslim was spent primarily in the mosque and his home. The very terms dividing religious life from social/secular traditions and society.

Arguments related to the reasons behind religious and social life patterns have been initiated by scholars who have done laborious research, deriving evidence from the Shari’a, the Islamic law, to back up their hypotheses. I strongly believe that this is unnecessary. By just consulting one verse from the Qur’an on the reason behind the creation of man and the world, we find that God says: “I have only created jinn and mankind so that they worship Me.”

Then our first task is to understand the meaning of Islamic worship. We should not be immediately misled by our modern terminology of this word, which only implies ritual prayers, because in the teachings of Islam it encompasses a much larger scope. The role of the Muslim in Islam is to recognise Allah in every step and action of his or her life. This recognition is manifested in the way we live, in such a manner, that it is necessary to “see God everywhere and in everything.” Thus the soul of the Muslim is composed of Qur’anic formulae which determine the framework of his/her life.

On this basis we can say that Islamic worship can mainly be divided into two categories: the first I shall refer to as direct worship meaning the ritual worship of God through the Five Pillars of Islam. Prayer being the most important of the five after Tawhid (Unity of God) is carried out in a specific set canonical ritual. Prayer is highly recommended to be performed in congregation in a mosque although the whole earth that we know is a potential place for the performance of that daily activity. This notion makes the earth a potential vast mosque.

I am sure that the question arises in some of your minds: does God really expects us to show Him our devotion by repeated bowing, kneeling and prostration; would it not have been better only to look into oneself and to pray to Him in the stillness of one’s heart? Why all these movements of the body? In Islam, we believe that God created us body, soul and spirit. Thus man should pray with his body as well as with his soul and spirit. We turn towards the Kaaba, knowing that the faces of all Muslims wherever they may be, are turned in prayer, and we are like one body, with Him at the centre of our thoughts.

The second category of Islamic worship, what I shall refer to as indirect worship, encompasses the rest of the Muslim’s daily conduct. This can be in his place of work, in the street, the market, and mostly in his private domain. Having established this, I shall move on to the basic criteria which differentiate a modern Muslim from a traditional one as far as world views are concerned.

Modern man looks at the world from a materialistic perspective, meaning that he employs rational logic to whatever he deals with on earth through his five senses. We can say that he sees himself as a body with a set of organs performing certain assigned functions. Thus the level of existence we are talking about here is that of a physical realization. On the other hand, traditional man looked at the world from a spiritual perspective as opposed to a physical one, meaning that he employed his intuition with what he dealt with. He saw himself as a tripartite being composed of body (jism), soul (nafs), and spirit (rouh). Without the union of these three parts he believed he/she would be demeaned in his/her existence and unbalanced. To the traditional Muslim, earth alone is meaningless, as he saw himself on the first earth that lay between the seven Heavens and the seven earths in the cosmos all connected together vertically by an axis that runs through these seven Heavens and earths. Thus, one can say that the traditional level of realisation was a cosmological one as opposed to physical.

If one can accept that the built environment as well as man’s artefacts is nothing but a reflection of his views of the world, then it would follow that the traditional Islamic built environment was nothing other than the reflection of the cosmos and its unity on the buildings produced by the Muslim society. It would be infantile to claim that the sole purpose behind the production of these Islamic buildings was to symbolically reflect the cosmos in a form of a microcosm, because it is obvious that these buildings were produced primarily to be used. I believe that any traditional piece of art or architecture that would serve the spiritual aspects without first fulfilling the utilitarian aspects to their full extent would have been rejected as a valid artefact by the societies for which it was produced. But at the same time, I strongly believe that to that same traditional society, if that piece of art or architecture was just limited to the utilitarian dimension and did not fulfill the spiritual function it would not have been perceived as an original traditional product. By originality in the traditional sense, I mean “authenticity” – that is to say what conforms to the tradition itself and truly reflects it because it is derived from it.

Then the real question that arises at this stage of the argument is “what were the criteria that this balanced traditional man use to create architectural spaces that conveyed Unity by recalling the Divine and placed man in a position in the cosmos to maintain his psycho-spiritual centering and Unitarian way of life?” In other words, what was the patron, builder (mu’allim), and craftsman (hirafi) thinking of when they were laying out a mosque or a house? There are no ready answers to these questions, but we can obtain hints of these by examining the predominant views and ideas
in the Islamic tradition and see how they had implications on the production of both the mosque and the house.

To sum up these Islamic views, we find them to consist of the belief that God is One and Eternal. He is the Creator of the Universe, all beings, time, life and death, and to Him is the End of all. He has created man in order that he/she might worship Him, to search for Him and to submit oneself unto Him. He has provided man with a mind and senses. He has sent him the message explaining the purpose of His own creation and provided him with the evidence and the free will to choose between accepting or rejecting the Truth. For this, God gives a life time to man to make his choice and to act accordingly. The choice he makes determines the consequences in an eternal life in the hereafter. Man by his choice and conduct in his earthly transitory existence decides his/her own fate.

Besides these views, there are three main prevailing ideas in the Islamic tradition; these are the ideas of centrality, verticality and horizontality.

Although in the first instance they appear as independent ideas they are in fact all related to one another. Many scholars such as Mircea Eliade, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, and Titus Burckhardt have discussed these ideas and have arrived to the following assumptions.

Firstly, that traditional societies tend to look at the idea of centre as to position oneself in the cosmos in relation to the origin and source of creation. The origin of the cosmos and existence in the Islamic context is Allah, residing on His throne above the Seventh Heaven. In the Holy Qur’an God the Almighty says: “It is He who created the Heavens and the earth,” and completes this statement by saying: “To God belongs the dominion of the Heavens and the earth.” In fact, all emerges from the centre, revolves around it, and returns to it in and cars; people shuffling, do they not recall the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) who taught us not to shout inside mosques? But after all, has not the whole earth been made a mosque to us Muslims? People just don’t listen!

Passing through the bazaar, I found in the industriousness of the artisans, in the arcades and loggias full of bales and goods; the absence of all tension, a restfulness which embraced the passer-by and made him wish that his own life was rooted there. I thought out loud: “Even though I make this journey every day, this mood around me is always the same, seemingly unaltered – it is like the inexhaustible, vibrating changelessness of an ocean wave, which always alters its forms but keeps it substance unchanged.”

As I gazed up to the towering minarets, while turbaned men appeared on the galleries, raised their hands and began the call for prayer (‘adhan); I perceived that it was fervour and not art that made it so beautiful. “This solemn mingling and parting of voices is unlike any other chant of man,” I thought inwardly. And as my heart pounded up to my throat in excited love for this city and its sounds, I felt that all my wanderings had always had but one meaning: to grasp the meaning of this call. At this precise moment, I realized that the ‘adhan sounded the same everywhere; in spite of all the differences of dialect which were evident in the people’s daily speech. This was a unity of sound which made me understand how deep the inner unity of all Muslims was, and how artificial and insignificant were the dividing lines between us.

“I have a longing to find my own restful place in the world, if I understand it rightly; it is this longing for inner discovery.” With every step I took towards my destination, I felt nearer to tranquility. I found myself before the grey stone façade of the building erected a few hundred years ago. “This façade is so expressionless,” I thought to myself, “I cannot relate to what is behind it, but, it is all the same that it is built in this manner, for the truth lies in the heart and not in the surface. The Prophet (PBUH) narrated the Hadith Qudsi which asserts that God does not look at one’s image or fortune but at one’s heart and deeds. It thus makes sense to concentrate one’s
effort to express what is within rather than what is outward.” In the traditional setting, the Modernist slogan “Form follows function” had no sense or meaning whatsoever.

Looking at the exterior, I realized how sensitive the mu’ālim was, to regard the inward looking face of the building as the main one, yet left the external facades to show a distinctive verticality, that of ascendance towards the sky. He even emphasised the doorway to give a feeling of verticality as if a finger was being pointed upwards. This reminded me of another hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) who met a slave and asked her: “where is God?” She answered by pointing upwards to the sky. Her reward was well worth it, for she was freed from her slavery. The Prophet (PBUH) told her master: “free her, she is a believer.” No wonder that from our effort to express what is within rather than what is our forefathers who devised it, it must be for the outward.”

As I approached the rising steps of the building, I recalled how Allah considers mankind to be above other earthly creatures; Allah says, “I have elevated, honoured and distinguished mankind.” As I stepped into the building I could not help but appreciate the ability of the mu’ālem to derive from the tradition, the device of the majaz. Insert 5 here These horizontal wind-ing tube-like passages, besides creating a visual barrier from the inside, were a wonderful opportunity to discard one’s materialistic garb that one entered with. I thought out loud, “I don’t know if I didn’t pass through this transitory shadow atmosphere if I would have another chance to recall my world views. It is a definite shock to my visual senses to adapt from the outside glare to this immediate darkness, I do not feel comfortable with this sudden change, but after all, since it was our forefathers who devised it, it must be for the good of my existence.”

The cool breeze that was stirred in the majaz body, “It never fails. At that point, I had begun to feel an impatience to reach the end of the journey. What end? To see what? I had been so often and knew it so thoroughly that it no longer held any promise of new discoveries. Or was it perhaps a new kind of discovery that I was anticipating? “If must be so.” I said to myself, “Ah at last, I see a glimpse of the centre, I am nearer to it than ever. For I am being drawn by a strange personal expectancy, as if this spiritual centre were a kind of promise, a gateway to a wider world than the one in which I am living. This is the internal world to me, now I feel contained not just in any space, but in a place of inviting silence, one that has transcendental qualities.”

As I entered into the central space I thought: “This is an abstraction of Paradise to me, the mu’ālem has obviously derived it from the Qur’anic description of these gardens, having water elements, shading trees, orchards, and having a general atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. The mu’ālem thoughtfully placed a water fountain at the centre, although we do not use it very often, and it is not always filled with water, it reminds me of God’s creations. Did not Allah say that He created from water everything that is alive? And did He not say that His Throne lay on the waters? Yes, the mu’ālem once again chose the appropriate tool to make me see the Almighty in everything and in every place, and what better place than at the centre.”

Looking around me at the boundaries of the space I smiled reassuringly, “of course I know why the mu’ālem chose the quadrangular shape of this courtyard as opposed to any other shape. Did not the Prophet (PBUH) describe the first centre of the earth as resting on four pillars topped by a dome? In this context, the mu’ālem discarded the dome which embodied Heaven, for what better Heaven could be represented other than the true one. I hear that in other regions with less fortunate climates, there mu’ālimmeh have resorted to the dome as the hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) asserts that Heaven is vaulted over the earth like a dome and even indicated with his finger the likeness of a dome. Ibn Abi Hatem quoted the Prophet (PBUH) explaining God’s word “Heaven He Built” and said: “the edifice of Heaven spans over the earth like a dome; it is a roof over the earth.”

As I looked up, I saw the building still wanting to maintain its grip with the sky by means of the crestings joining this central space to the Heavens. I remembered a discussion that had occurred between me and the mu’ālem who had been trained by his father and his father before him. I remember his very words, he told me, “man is made up of physical and spiritual attributes, so are these crestings. The balance between both the seen crestings and the felt spaces between which give their inverse image are another reminder of our existence and our destiny.” But I frankly thought that I tend to appreciate more the soaring pointers that lead the eyes upwards; after all our aim is to achieve spiritual transcendence.

Moving onwards, I thought, “Now I am ready to go deeper inside with these newly acquired feelings, proceeding into the haram that is the uttermost sacred space in this building. One should not take this venture lightly. The mu’ālem derived the canons of enforcing the recognition of a transition from tradition and used the change of ground level, again elevated, to emphasize the sanctity of the place. Change of light was more subtle this time as it was captured either by reflected light from the centre, meaning the courtyard, or through clear-story lighting in the zone of transition of the dome. The positioning of the dome varied; normally the choice was that of the centre of the space. “Centre here,” the mu’ālem had explained, “is not the actual geometric centre of the space, it is that point of tension between the horizontal and the vertical in relation to the centre which is regarded as the focus. The very shape of the dome recalls the celestial dome encompassing the Heavens and the earth.” He did not stop there, but said that the builders further accentuated the vertical in relation to the centre by making it a pointed dome.

The mu’ālem went on to explain that they usually built these domes to be structurally dependent on zones of transition that changed the square base of the dome to the circle by means of an octagon. “There is no need to explain the meaning of the octagon as we all know its significance. The Prophet (PBUH) told us after his mi’raj or Night Journey to the Heavens that he saw the ‘Arsh, the Throne of the Almighty on the Kursi, that Footstool carried by eight Angels known as the Bearer of the Throne.”

Going on I noticed that the interplay of colours, textures, materials, and decorative motifs in this place must have been made so as to instigate a profound feeling of awe. I could imagine that if I had to speak I would have to whisper and even then, there would be an echo. I noticed that what moved me deeply in such a place was the incorporation of the Word to the overall effect of the interior. Calligraphy as the visual body of our Divine Revelation is sacred in both form and content. The verse on the wall read: “In the creation of the Heavens and the earth, and the alteration of night and day, these are signs for those who understand.” Of course, God is urging man to look into and think about creation and the wonders of the universe. Is not the whole object of the message but to think and consider as well as to comprehend the reality of existence and to understand the phenomena of life and death in the light of the ultimate purpose? The atmosphere was enough to create a momentum to carry on whatever type of worship whether direct or indirect as best as possible.

Again I moved forward leaving the centre behind, but conscious of the coming tension created by the intersection of yet another vertical axis with a horizontal one. The vertical was evident by the exaggerated ratio of height to width, while the horizontal by my movement within the space. I walked on and on, the minutes passed, I became
part of a circular stream – was this the meaning of what I was doing? To become aware that one is part of a movement in an orbit? I contemplated: “Is this perhaps all confusion’s end?” And the minutes dissolved, and time itself stood still, and this was the centre of the universe. I felt that this place was the receptacle of my soul; facing it, being in it, was the ultimate seclusion. I felt that this place was home, nearest to the final centre of my journey. I was now unconsciously being driven towards a readiness of mental state to perform whatever physical and spiritual deeds that would help in the spiritual ascent mi`raj of my soul.

This fictional reconstruction shows my point of view of how a traditional Muslim would have experienced, perceived and conceived a traditional building that was designed, built and used by a society that understood what a prototype should be and acted accordingly. The mosque was the place designated for direct worship, while the house was assigned the indirect. While the house represented the individual’s private home, the mosque represented the public house. They were, designed, built and decorated to reveal these societal roles.

Both Mosques and houses stressed unity, the Oneness of God, the Oneness of the Ummah or Muslim populace at large, living in just a small part of the Oneness of the Cosmos. Although the levels of sacredness were quantitatively different in the mosque and the house, they were qualitatively similar. We saw that the sensed abstract movements towards the different centres in both of these types of buildings, and along the different directions followed the same process and resulted in identical implications.

The power of Muslim traditional architecture lies in its dual role as a reflection and protection of culture and of nature. It communicates silently but insistently that the cultural order in which the individual is embedded is a natural one and that the world is indeed in order as it should be. We have seen that to the traditional Muslim, nature and the universe, in general, were the only logical proof of the unity of all things, as that link between the society, its artefacts and the Creator. Thus, traditional Muslim architecture and the entire built environment were seen as an extension of the Divine Order of things. Achieving the order of the built environment in accordance with the order of the cosmos, not only placed traditional man in the cosmos, but also guaranteed him a sane balanced life.

There remains one vital point which needs clarification; it is neither credible to believe nor is it useful that every architect or craftsman be conscious of the spiritual and cosmological dimensions inherent in forms. Actually, he will know only certain aspects of it, or certain applications that arise with the limits and rules of his craft through his intuition. These rules will enable him to design and construct a building without its being necessary for him to know the ultimate significance of the symbols he is working with as long as he believes in what the tradition dictates.

It is tradition that transmits the sacred models and the working rules, and thereby guarantees the spiritual validity of the forms throughout time. Tradition has within itself a secret force which is communicated to an entire civilization and determines even arts and crafts the immediate objects of which include nothing particularly scared. This force creates the form of a traditional civilization a form that could never be limited. What has just been mentioned does not diminish the uniqueness and individuality of the forms in traditional architecture; on the contrary, it is the meaning in eternity that is the fundamental ingredient to the success of that architecture.

A frequently quoted proverb says: “Seek for knowledge though it may be as far away as China”. This saying addresses an issue that is still little explored, namely the exchange of knowledge and technology between China and the Islamic world. Especially if one seeks information about the pre-Mongol period, that is to say the period before the middle of the 13th century, only a little research seems to be at hand. Most of the systematic investigation of sources and materials concentrates on the relations of Far East and the Islamic world during or after the Mongol period. In the following I will try to elucidate some aspects of pre-Mongol exchange of knowledge and technology between China and the Islamic world and to show what art historical research can contribute to this rather neglected issue.

The starting point of my considerations is the treatise on mechanics and ingenious devices authored by Ibn al-Razzaz al-Jazari. Al-Jazari worked between 1174 CE and 1200 CE as court engineer at the Artukid court in Northern Syria. His treatise on automata, which has been preserved in several copies dating from the 13th century onwards, confronts us with technical and iconographic details that suggest knowledge of Chinese mechanical instruments and technical processes on the side of al-Jazari.

This first impression is corroborated by a closer look at the history of mechanics and ingenious devices, particularly the monumental water clocks with figural jack-work. This gives rise to a chain of questions related to the mechanisms of intercultural dialogue and artistic exchange. What were the avenues, nature and range of this encounter? Was it restricted to the exchange of material objects or are there any clues that indicate an exchange of ideas, technical knowledge and technologies between East and West? With regard to the post-Mongol period this question has been dealt with in a comprehensive way. We are well informed that in the field of astronomy – to mention one case in point - theoretical and observational knowledge traveled in both directions. Thus Chinese sources mention that in 1267 a certain

Thanks to Professor Gabr for the images included with this lecture.
Jamaladdin presented models or pictures of astronomical instruments and a globe to Kublai Khan. Conversely Chinese astronomers were brought to Ilkhanid Iran to work in the Maragheh observatory.

The major incentives for cross-cultural interaction were economics, trade and market-places. Archaeological and written evidence indicate that the seaborne trade with India and East Asia that flourished in pre-Islamic Sassanian Iran continued under Islamic rule. The same holds true for contacts via the land route. Throughout the Tang period, that is to say between 618 CE and 907 CE, merchants from the Middle East were travelling to China via the Silk Road or the sea route. The major centre of trade in China was the city of Chang-an, next to present-day Xi’an. Here the foreign merchants lived in separate quarters and were free to practise their religion and the life-style of their homeland. According to written sources the city had a Zoroastrian temple and several Nestorian churches. Some of the Persian merchants even became permanent residents. Their descendants were sinified and some of these ethnic Persians won great fame as scholars. In addition to a well-known alchemist, the physician Li-Mi I, who wrote a book on pharmaceuticals in the 8th century, that was exported from China to the Islamic world. Conversely Chinese astronomers were leading in the medical sciences. Several of the most famous physicians were active in the academy of Gondeshapur – like the family Bukhtishu’ (8th – 9th c.), Ibn Masawaih (8th c.) and Shapur ibn Sahil (9th c.) were Nestorian Christians. Whereas spices, perfumes, drugs, precious stones and pears were the major commodities that travelled from West to East, conversely spices, silk and ceramics were the major merchandise that was exported from China to the Islamic world. One archaeological evidence from Siraf, the major port in the Persian Gulf, indicates that Chinese ceramics were already being imported in the 8th century and that this trade increased considerably after 825 CE.

The relevance of these imports for the development of Islamic ceramic production has been realized quite early and discussed extensively. However, this discussion about the technical and stylistic exchange between China and the Islamic world is dominated by a tendency to overestimate the Chinese influence on Islamic ceramic production and to neglect the reverse look. The model of artistic exchange applied treats China as the centre and the Islamic world as the recipient. Thus the development of tin glazed white wares with painted decoration in cobalt-blue has traditionally been interpreted as a copy of cream-coloured Tang porcelain. Only recently the discovery of a shipwreck sunk about 826 CE off Belitung island in Indonesia has inspired a revision of evidence.

Whereas the construction of the vessel points to an Arab or Indian origin the cargo is entirely Chinese in origin. The shipwreck contained large amounts of ceramics, mainly Changsha ware and a small quantity of green glazed Yue type ceramics, as well as Xing/Gongxian white wares with green splashes or blue painting. Compared to contemporary Chinese ceramics the latter were experimental in nature. This suggests that the mutual relation of Chinese and Iraqi-Iranian ceramics should be re-interpreted. Instead of interpreting the evidence in terms of a unilateral process of reception one should rather pay attention to the dynamics of supply and demand, consumption and diffusion. Chinese manufacturer responded to demand by the production of wares that conformed to the taste of the Persian Gulf clientele. That means that fashion trends from the Islamic lands played a major role in shaping the innovations that revolutionised 9th century Chinese ceramic production.

Next to trade, embassies and the exchange of diplomatic gifts acted as intermediaries of cross-cultural artistic interaction. Since the early days of Islamic rule missionaries from the Eastern Islamic world were sent to China, either to establish commercial relations or for political reasons. The frequency of these missions increased continually. Thus in 719 CE a mission from Tokharian, that is present day Afghanistan, was sent to the Chinese court. According to the sources the delegation included an astronomer whose knowledge should be tested by the Chinese emperor. Seven years later, during the rule of the Umayyad caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik a certain Sulaiman was sent as ambassador to China. In 798 CE Harun al-Hashid sent a mission to Chang-an to negotiate for a coordinated strategy against the Tibetans. In 984 CE an embassy from the Samanids arrived at the Chinese court. In the 11th century, finally, the sources mention more than eleven embassies.

The direct artistic and industrial impact of foreign gifts exhibited at the court, however, was clearly limited. The foreign objects were used as models for court-workshops that reproduced or adopted their stylistic or technical features. This process of appropriation was restricted to high-quality objects and reserved to the needs of the court. As a case is point for this kind of artistic exchange one might refer to an incident mentioned by David Jacoby. He reports that after the Chinese emperor Wen-Ti received a gift of silk and gold textile from Hormizd IV of Persia he ordered an expatriate silk-weaver from Samarkand to reproduce the fabric.

The increase of diplomatic contacts in the 11th century was followed by a period of intensive trade relations under the Chinese Song dynasty. Following the defeat of the Northern Sung dynasty by the Mongols in 1127 CE the dynasty moved their court to Hangzhou to rule a smaller empire in the southern provinces. Under the emperors of the so-called Southern Song dynasty that reigned from 1127 CE to 1279 CE a number of major changes occurred in the economic sphere. The emperors encouraged trade on an unprecedented scale to raise revenues to defend their borders. This resulted in a considerable expansion of internal and overseas trade.

Whilst travelling along the silk-route became more and more dangerous, maritime trade was to increase dramatically. Under the Southern Song maritime commerce yielded about a fifth of the total cash revenue of the state. As a consequence a new class of merchants evolved. The foreigners amongst them, the majority of which were Muslims from the Middle East, enjoyed a considerable measure of extraterritoriality. Their wealth became proverbial. They dressed in clothes of silk, wore jewellery and dined of gold and silver plate. One of the most colourful of these foreign merchants was an ethnic Arab who served as superintendent of merchant shipping and was the most influential official on the south-east coast.

The growth of seaborne trade went hand in hand with modifications of its organisation. Whereas under the Tang-dynasty long-distance sea-going vessels were operated by foreigners under the Song dynasty, Chinese ships became active in South- and Southeast Asian waters. Another major change occurred with regard to the maritime trade routes. During the 11th century the flourishing trade in the Persian Gulf was severely curtailed for a variety of reasons. In Persia Buqid rule had come to an end and the Seljuks invaded the lands from the East. Additionally the Egyptian Fatimids tried to appropriate the monopoly on the India trade previously held by the Abbasids by pushing Ismaili propaganda in Yemen, Baluchistan and Northern India. It was only in the 12th century, after the decline of the Fatimids, that the Persian Gulf regained its position as leading entrepôt of the India trade. Under the rule of the caliph an-Nasir (1180 CE - 1225 CE) Abbasid authority extended to the Gulf and the city of Kish replaced Siraf as the major port in the Gulf.
The range of commodities that travelled in both directions was vast and varied. A Chinese inventory of 1141 CE lists 339 items of import. As regards Chinese exports to the Islamic world, ceramics were one of the major commodities. The export of porcelain was encouraged by the government and new kilns were established near the coast in order to meet export needs. Parallel to this, technological and stylistic innovations evolved. In the Islamic world, particularly in Egypt and the Iranian cultural sphere, the import of large amounts of Chinese wares available on the open market inspired a series of stylistic and technical innovations in the field of ceramic production.

In the present context it is of particular interest that the dynamics involved in the adoption and adaptation of Chinese ceramics in the Islamic world remained unchanged in the 9th and the 12th centuries. Exchange was limited to the adaptation of features that could be reconstructed from the available evidence, that is, by visual inspection of the original. The vehicle of artistic exchange was obviously neither the craftsman nor manuals, but the object. This becomes very clear from a close look at the preserved vessels. Thus in 9th century Iraq the potters developed the technique of tin-glaze to recreate the haptic [touch/feel] and visual attributes of contemporary Tang pottery, which is not tin-glazed. Later, the delicate, thin-walled bowls from 12th century Iran show the external features of the high quality wares of Song China, namely Ding or Qingbai ceramics. Even details like the unglazed rim that resulted from stacking the bowls in the kiln were copied by the Iranian craftsmen. Whereas in the case of the potter’s art it was the object that served as the vehicle of artistic exchange, in the case of silk – another major commodity of the East Asia trade – the mechanism of cross-cultural artistic interchange was more complex. As early as the first century CE silk was traded as bales of silk-textiles, yarn spun from wild silk, and cultivated silk thread. Contrary to ceramics, which were objects of daily use, silk was endowed with considerable prestige which extended to all strata of the society. As a result, the silk market became highly competitive; it responded to demand and created new fashions by the adoption of stylistic and technological features from foreign models. Moreover silks produced in the Islamic world and in neighboring Byzantium were of the same high quality as the Chinese silks. As a consequence high quality silk textiles were traditional products of Central-Asia. Stylistically they show a creative blend of Chinese and Sasanian features. Despite this rather complex evidence some general observations on the nature of the artistic and technical interaction of silk manufacturing centres become clear.

Contrary to ceramics, with silk the interaction was not limited to the adoption of visual elements. "Borrowings" and transfers also included the appropriation of foreign technologies. Thus in the 7th century Chinese workshops experimented with a particular type of twill which was used by Byzantine silk manufacturers. They achieved high-quality results but in 771 CE the emperor Daizong forbade the production of Western-style twill and the production declined. This transfer of technology must have been partly achieved by experienced craftsmen who were able to determine the nature of the weaving process by the examination of the fabric. This is indicated by written sources, which report that the experiments with this special type of Byzantine weaving-technique were preceded by the exchange of silk textiles.

In addition evidence suggests that sometimes merchants might have acted as carriers of technological knowledge. Thus David Jacoby mentions an incident with regard to the transfer of weaving-technology between Byzantium and Italy that suggests that merchants transmitted knowledge of weaving technology. This makes sense. Merchants have a marked interest in the transmission of specialised knowledge to their home countries and they have the possibility to acquire this kind of knowledge about workshop organisation and production processes during their stay in foreign countries.

Another factor that entailed technical borrowing was the mobility of highly skilled craftsmen, either spontaneous or enforced. It is commonplace that the shared culture of the Islamic world facilitated the spontaneous migration of craftsmen, even though the extent of this labour mobility is difficult to trace. The written sources only mention those movements that occurred as a consequence of enforced deportations. The most well known incident of this kind is the transfer of the case of paper making, which in the Islamic world became known through the mediation of Chinese prisoners of war. Less well known is the account of a Chinese craftsman Tou-Houan who was captured together with some colleagues after the Battle of Talas in 751 CE and taken to Kufa where they stayed for eleven years. He reports that he and his fellow craftsmen taught the Abbasid craftsmen silk weaving techniques as well as the art of silver and gold-smithing and painting. It was particularly under Mongol rule that forceful resettlement of skilled textile workers was practised in an unprecedented scale. Thus in 1221 – to mention just one case in point – thousand households of weavers from Herat were settled in the Mongol capital Besh-Baliq.

Returning to the general issue of cross-cultural artistic interchange we may summarise the preceding discussion by saying that demand and consumption were major incentives that stimulated and formed cross-cultural artistic interchange and that trade was the major avenue of this exchange. At the same time the commercial diffusion of foreign objects involved the borrowing and appropriation of visual and technical elements. The primary actors of these dynamics were the objects proper, the migration of labour, and, to a lesser extent, accounts given by travellers or merchants. Manuals are not mentioned as mediator nor are there any references to the usage of explanatory treatises. Considering the organisation of production and craftsmanship in the medieval Islamic world, this result is not unexpected. The formal form of production was a little shop run by a single craftsman or a family and the relevant skills were passed from master to apprentice. Knowledge and skills were not appropriated from or transmitted by written manuals.

There are, however, exceptions to this rule and this is the point where we get back to al-Jazari. There was a group of specialized craftsmen who worked closely with scientists and to a certain extent also used manuals, namely those artisans that produced scientific instruments, such as astrolabes, globes sundials and the like. In my treatise on
Abd al-Rahman b. Mansur al-Khazini who flourished on the skills of an experienced craftsman to realize their theoretical concepts, other scholars were excellent artisans themselves. Abu Mahmud Hamid b. Khidr al-Khujandi for instance, who worked in the 10th century under the protection of the Buyid ruler Fakhr ad-Daula was famous as mathematician, astronomer as well as an instrument maker. The remarkable astrolabe with zoomorphic starpointers and an intricately shaped handle (kursi) with two confronted lion-heads preserved in The al-Sabah Collection testifies to his outstanding skills as a metalworker.

Thus the tenth century astronomer and mathematician Ibrahim b. Sinan gives a highly interesting account of his collaboration with an artisan which demonstrates the difficulties of translating theoretical concepts into comprehensible speech. Referring to his book about gnomons on spherical surfaces he reports that he:

"...passed it to one of the artisans in a language different from the one he had used for his own book. The reason for this was that he [the artisan] was executing for us the ring with which we performed our observations. It was a ring that I did my utmost to widen and to subdivide precisely. Its diameter being three cubits, and I used it for measuring the solar altitude. I had already demonstrated, in my book on the sun and its motions, the reasons why observing with this ring was necessary. I liked his craftsmanship and found him to be technically clever in his work. So I dictated to him the descriptions of the instrument, demonstrating how to set up on a spherical surface a gnomon whose shadow falls on the spherical surface during the whole day for all days of the year. I made my description for him of the type that befitted those who work with their hands (al-sunnā’ al-talā’ī = ma’aluna bi’l-yad)."

Another account of a scholar who describes his collaboration with artisans and his difficulties to translate his ideas to them is given by Abu’l Fat’ab al-Rahman b. Mansur al-Khazini who flourished in the second half of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th centuries. Referring to his construction of self-rotating celestial globe he writes that he made it although it was difficult to find workers that were able to put into practise what he described to them:

"I became weary in this matter for a long tedious time – until God (be he exalted) made it easy for me through the hands of a carpenter, whose name was Ali Saraheli. He followed what my senses and mind portrayed to him; and so I completed the sphere."

Whereas Ibrahim b. Sinan and al-Khazini relied on the skills of an experienced craftsman to realize the construction of a monumental door for the ruler’s palace at Amida assembled from an unspecified quantity of brass polygons. At the present state of knowledge an identification of the sources al-Jazari consulted is complicated by the fact that the whole corpus of Graeco-Arabic writings is far from being known and properly classified. Al-Jazari himself mentions only a few names. Thus he refers to Archimedes and to a certain Apollonius, which is probably Apollonius of Perga, a Greek geometer and astronomer. Next to the Greek precursors he also mentions the Banu Musa, well known as mathematicians, astronomers and engineers at the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Mamûn and a certain Hibatallah b. Husain al-Asturlabi, a prominent instrument maker of 12th century Baghdad. Given this rather limited evidence the application of art historical methods of analysis can give us at least some further clues as to the general origin of his sources. A close inspection of the function of the devices, their iconography, manufacturing processes and the terminology used to describe parts of the devices seems to suggest that al-Jazari drew inspiration from Greek, Byzantine, Eastern Islamic and, perhaps, Chinese models.

That he consulted Greek sources is indicated by his description of the construction of two bleeding machines. One of these constructions shows the figure of a Syriac monk in full dress which points to a scale that measures the volume of blood drawn from the patient. To the best of my knowledge, the construction of bleeding machines did not belong to the range of problems discussed in the mechanical treatises composed by Muslim authors up to the 12th century. Interestingly enough the construction of devices that serve medical purposes is described in the first century by the famous mechanic Heron of Alexandria. In the 3rd century Herophilos of Alexandria describes several such devices. This might indicate that in 12th century Syria a tradition of mechanical devices for medical purpose was still alive that got lost at an unknown later date and that al-Jazari was aware of this tradition.

Al-Jazari is just another representative of this group of artisans that worked at the interface of both, mathematical and natural sciences and their application. The title of his treatise expresses clearly that he conceived of himself as someone who brought concepts from potentiality into real actualisation. The title is: al-Jamī‘ bā’in al-lum wa al-amal al-nafī‘ fi sināʿat al-hiyal = “A Compendium of theory and useful practice in the art of mechanics”. Moreover he states in his introduction that he first learned his craft from books and then “reached the state of witnessing”. Even if one can question whether this description is in accordance with the facts – as Michael Rogers does – the statement is nonetheless interesting because it illustrates that al-Jazari and his contemporaries perceived mechanical engineering as a science based on theoretical knowledge.

At least fifteen copies of al-Jazari’s treatise have been preserved, three of which aredatable to the early 13th century. Rachel Ward convincingly ascribed them to a court workshop, which was active in the Artukid realm. These three early copies are richly illustrated, the illustrations range from simple line drawings of constructional details to complex, brightly coloured illustrations of the devices described in the text. Since al-Jazari mentions in his introduction that he inserted 174 illustrations to his autograph and it is argued that the illustrations of the preserved Artukid copies are based on those in the autograph.

As regards the content of the treatise it is obviously a compilation from several sources. Its six chapters describe the construction and function of monumental water clocks and candle-clocks, vessels and automata for drinking-devices, devices for bloodletting and ablations, fountains and water-raising-constructions. Moreover al-Jazari describes the operational aspects of astronomical observatories, astronomical instruments, water clocks and astronomical clocks. One of these constructions shows the figure of a Syriac monk in full dress which points to a scale that measures the volume of blood drawn from the patient. To the best of my knowledge, the construction of bleeding machines did not belong to the range of problems discussed in the mechanical treatises composed by Muslim authors up to the 12th century. Interestingly enough the construction of devices that serve medical purposes is described in the first century by the famous mechanic Heron of Alexandria. In the 3rd century Herophilos of Alexandria describes several such devices. This might indicate that in 12th century Syria a tradition of mechanical devices for medical purpose was still alive that got lost at an unknown later date and that al-Jazari was aware of this tradition.

That al-Jazari also made a draft on Byzantine mechanical treatises was already suggested by Francis Maddison in his exploration of the strongbox with combination lock that is described by al-Jazari and preserved – as already mentioned – in several examples. Maddison bases his argument on a reference given by the 6th century prose writer al-Jahiz of Basra who mentions unbreakable locks...
“From China come perfumes, woven silks, plates and dishes, paper, ink, peacocks, good spirited horses, saddles, felt, cinnamon, and unadulterated Greek rhubarb.

“From the Byzantine domains come vessels of gold and silver, qaisarani-coins of pure gold, brocaded stuffs, spirited horses, slave-girls, rare utensils in red copper, inviolable locks, and lyres. Besides these Byzantium sends hydraulic engineers, agricultural experts, marble workers and eunuchs.”

Generally speaking this passage is of considerable interest because it refers to Byzantium as the place of origin of strong locks. In the present context, however, it is central because Charles Needham, the historian of Chinese technology, mentions it in his discussion of Chinese locks' inventions. He remarks that “It was just during the Tang-period in China also that safes or strong-boxes sufficiently unbreakable began to facilitate the development of banking houses.”

Next to the function the iconography of the figural jackwork of the automata and clocks provides information on the sources al-Jazari consulted. Whereas some of the constructions show a repertoire that was clearly derived from Hellenistic traditions such as the singing birds driven by pneumatics, others seem to combine motifs from different sources in a rather eclectic style. This is indicated by the so-called elephant clock. It combines iconographic elements that are known from descriptions of earlier Islamic clocks with jackwork figures such as the birds that throw balls or the revolving bird on top of the construction with innovative features like the elephant with his mahout. In his chapter on the construction of this clock al-Jazari mentions explicitly that in this very complex construction he combined several elements that else were made separately. Still other devices show designs that point to Byzantine origins. The motif of the peacock for instance, has no forerunner in the repertoire of Hellenistic mechanical devices but rather in Roman and Byzantine fountains, which used peacocks in combination with pinecones and dolphins as spouts. Byzantine and Early Christian ablution fountains adopted the combination of water flows from different parts of a fountain. The motif of the revolving bird on top of the construction with dolphin spouts. Byzantine and Early Christian fountains, which used peacocks in combination with pinecones and dolphins as spouts. Byzantine and Early Christian ablution fountains adopted the combination of water flows from different parts of a fountain. The motif of the peacock as a spout. Byzantine and Early Christian ablution fountains adopted the combination of water flows from different parts of a fountain. The motif of the revolving bird on top of the construction with dolphin spouts was rather widespread but in his times there are almost none preserved. Considering that al-Maqrizi might be helpful. Describing the markets of Cairo he mentions that the people used to sell bowls made of painted paper, which were imported from China. From his description it seems obvious that the bowls he describes were made from paper-maché. He adds that in former times these bowls were rather widespread but in his times there are almost none preserved. Considering that al-Maqrizi flourished in the 14th century his description is congruous with al-Fuwati’s note and al-Jazari’s use of the material.

Next to paper-maché high-tin bronze is another material used by al-Jazari that requires some commentary. High-tin bronze, Persian isafīdruy or isifīdruy, is a copper alloy with a tin content of about 12% to 24%. High-tin bronze was widespread in Syria, and Damascus preferred to use brass. Al-Jazari, however, suggests the use of isafidruy twice, while describing the construction of gongs that mark the passage of one hour. In the present context it is interesting to note that the only preserved object of Syrian provenance that consists of high-tin bronze is an astrolabe made in 1226-27 CE for the Ayyubid ruler of Northern Mesopotamia, al-Ashraf Musa. The usage of the alloy might be explained by the fact that the maker of the astrolabe, Abd
al-Karim al-Madrazi, originated from Merw in Eastern Iran. In the present context this detail is interesting because it indicates that technological transfer was achieved by the migration of artisans specialized in mechanics and the construction of astronomical instruments. This observation is corroborated by the fact that the monumental water clock with figural jackwork erected in the Great Mosque of Damascus by order of the Zengid Nur al-Din was constructed by a certain Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Rustam al-Khuransari. His son, who authored a treatise on the construction of this waterclock tells us that his father originated from Khurasan and took up residence in Damascus in 1154 CE. Still another piece of evidence for the migration of specialized craftsmen is the astrolabe kept in Nürnberg (Inv. no. W 120), which was made by a certain al-Sahl al-esturlabi al-Nisasburi for an Ayyubid prince of Hama.

Another manufacturing process that points to the transfer of technology between East and West is described by al-Jazari when he explains the casting of the lattice work ornaments for the palace doors at Diyar Bakr. Instead of piece moulds made of clay that have to be destroyed when the workpiece is finished he uses the technique of casting in moulds with green sand. This technique of casting metal has been associated with Chinese origins. The advantage of sand casting lies in the fact that the moulds can be used several times and that the green sand used for making the moulds doesn’t require any heating or drying before molten metal is poured into it. The technique of green sand moulding was already used in China from the 2nd century CE and is described in a Chinese treatise almost contemporary with al-Jazari. The description of this new technique by al-Jazari coincides with the sudden appearance of a fairly large amount of objects that were most probably cast in open moulds: circular mirrors with relief decoration.

Prior to about 1100 CE a type of mirror prevailed in the Islamic world that continues Graeco-Roman traditions. It was made from copper alloy and consisted of a handle attached to a circular disc. From the 11th century onwards, however, a new type of mirror appeared. It consists of a circular disc with relief cast decoration and a protruding knob on the back. Relief cast, circular mirrors of this type were widespread in China since the period of the Warring states. That the Chinese examples actually served as model for the Islamic circular mirrors is indicated by finds of large quantities of Chinese mirrors in Central Asia in contexts dating about 1100 CE. Further examples of Chinese mirrors were found during archaeological excavations in Iran, in Siraf and Susa. The same sites revealed also small numbers of Persian or Transoxanian circular mirrors with relief cast decoration. Apart from technical parallels their decoration indicates that they were modelled after Chinese examples. They show a very similar composition of the back, which is divided into several concentric friezes that frame a central motif. James Allen suggested that the sudden appearance of this new type of object in comparatively large numbers might be explained by the introduction of a technique that enabled the metalworkers to reproduce large numbers of identical objects, that is green sand casting.

Outside the scope of al-Jazari’s treatise we may find still another type of object that seems to suggest that the 12th century witnessed the transfer of technology between East and West, namely globular incense burners with cardan suspension.

In China the principle of cardan suspension – that means the combination of a set of rings to keep an object in equilibrium - was known as early as the 2nd century, when written sources describe that perfume balls with cardan suspension were placed on the main drive of the clocks. In the 7th century an unknown artisan presented to the empress Wu Hou “wooden warming-stoves which though rolled over and over with their iron cups filled with glowing fuel could never be upset.” The earliest preserved examples of Chinese perfume balls were made from silver and date to the Tang period. In the Islamic world globular brass incense burners with cardan suspension were produced at least since the 12th century. The earliest preserved example is ascribed to Herat and dated about 1200. Between the 13th and the 14th centuries globular incense burner were produced in Syria in large numbers and exported to Europe. The principle of cardan suspension, however, was already described in an Arabic translation of the 5th book of the Pneumatica of Philo of Byzantium dating to the early 9th century. Some authors, however, have doubted the authenticity of this copy and cautioned that the passage on the cardan construction might be an interpolation of a later Arabic compiler of the 13th century. Hence at the present state of knowledge we can only state that the principle of the cardan suspension is another indicator that testifies for the cross-fertilization between China and the West.

Finally, I would like to introduce a last group of objects that suggests that in the pre-Mongol period the relations between China and the Islamic world were not restricted to the exchange of material objects, but that there existed a shared culture of courtly representation. The devices I am referring to are monumental water clocks.

Chapter one of al-Jazari’s treatise contains details of six water clocks with jackwork figures marking the passage of time by a variety of movements and audible or visible signals. The main drive of the clocks was provided by the rise or falls of a float in a reservoir and was transmitted by pulleys and gear wheels. Similar constructions were already known in Classical antiquity. Vitruvius, the Roman architect and engineer living in the 1st century BCE, gives the most complete and earliest description of their construction and development. In his “de Architectura” he mentions clocks with moving statues, turning obelisks, sounding trumpets and pebbles that are thrown. From his description it becomes clear that the moving force of these clocks was a sinking float. In the 6th century the Byzantine historian Procopius gives a detailed description of a monumental water clock that was erected in a public square in Gaza:

“...There was a Gorgon, whose eyes rolled fearsomely at the end of each hour, and two rows of twelve doors each. The upper row was for the night, one being illuminated each hour by a moving light, which travelled in front of the doors. The lower row was for the daytime; each door had two leaves. At the end of the first hour an eagle above the first door unfolded its wings and moved forward. The door opened, while the figure of Hercules emerged from the door carrying the spoils of his labours.”

Under Islamic rule the Classical tradition for making water clocks with figural jackwork continued. In the Great Mosque of Damascus a monumental water clock was situated above the bab al-sa’a located in the southwest of the prayer-hall. About 807 CE the sources mention a water clock with moving figures that was presented to Charlemagne by the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid. The 11th and 12th centuries, however, seems to have witnessed a veritable vogue for the construction of water clocks and automata. Whereas historical writings describe existing constructions like the new water clock in the Great Mosque of Damascus erected by Nur al-Din Zengi, monographical treatises like the treatises of al-Muradi, Ridwan al-Sa’ati, al-Khażari and al-Jazari explain their mechanisms and operation.

It is striking that about the same time the Chinese astronomer and mathematician Su Sung presented to the Chinese emperor a comprehensive treatise that described an astronomical clock tower with figural jack work. The construction, which was erected in 1088 in Kaifeng in Honan, was something of a cross between astronomical instrument and clock. The height of the tower must have been between 9 and 12 meters. It consisted of a lower part with a pagoda like façade with five superimposed storeys and doors at which time announcing figures appeared at regular intervals. Above this was a closed chamber that contained a celestial globe. This chamber was topped by a platform with an armillary-shere, which means a model of objects in the sky consisting of a spherical framework of rings. A great waterwheel carrying 36 scoops and measuring some 3.50 metres in...
diameter drove the clockwork, celestial globe and the armillary sphere. The movement of the wheel was controlled by a sophisticated escapement mechanism. As regards its constituent elements and driving mechanism the astronomical clock of Su-Sung was an extended version of the instrument made about 723 CE by the learned monk I-Hsing.

Both instruments were driven by great water wheels and a complex system of gears and the movement of the waterwheels was controlled by an escapement mechanism. In his examination of the evolution of Chinese water clocks David Needham argued that whilst the Arabic clocks are driven by a sinking float mechanism, the idea of using an escapement controlled waterwheel is exclusive to the Chinese constructions and that there is no evidence of cross-fertilization between Arabic and Chinese traditions of clock making. In the meantime, however, additional evidence has come to light that suggests that Needham’s statement needs to be qualified. The 11th century treatise of the Andalusian writer Ahmad or Muhammad ibn Khalaf al-Muradi describing 31 clocks and automata includes at least one model that was moved by a full-sized waterwheel. Al-Jazari, on the other hand, describes a construction that is similar to the escapement mechanism used by Su-Sung. Admittedly this does not necessarily imply that there existed a relation between both traditions of clock making in the sense that one was derived from the other. The Su-Sung type of clock is not identical to the Arabic waterclocks both as regards its functions and its construction. But the additional evidence reduces the exclusivity of Needham’s argument and paves the way for further research on possible relations between traditions of clock making in China and the Arabic world.

In the preceding survey I compiled information from different sources that suggest that in the centuries prior to the Mongol invasion the artistic transfer between China and the Islamic world was not restricted to the unidirectional movement of ceramics and silk. Pieces of evidence indicate some kind of dialogue or exchange between the Syro-Mesopotamian region and the East – to say the least - are the introduction of relief decorated mirrors and green sand casting, the principle of the cardan suspension, the usage of paper-mâché, the mechanical boat described by al-Jazari and the concurrent vogue for monumental water clocks with figural jackwork in China and the West. The usage of high-tin bronze and the comparatively great number of specialised artisans originating from eastern Iran active in the Syro-Mesopotamian region complete the picture.

As regards the dynamics of this exchange, evidence suggests that it occurred in a spatial and temporal framework where many actors interacted together. The case of the Chinese mirrors found in Transoxania or the Chinese paper-maché bowls mentioned by al-Maqrizi indicate that trade created networks of circulation that cut across political and cultural boundaries, “opening up vistas of intra- and intercultural encounters and interactions”. As regards the mechanical boat and the concurrent vogue for monumental water clocks with figural jackwork it seems more likely, however, that these striking parallels are the product of verbal transmission or accounts of travellers like the merchant Sualaiman or the Persian captain Buzurg b. Shahriyar who described in their accounts the wonders of China, like the garden of silk-flowers in Canton, vehicles moving by themselves or the luxuries of the Chinese elites lifestyle. Finally the usage of a traditional Eastern Iranian alloy, high-tin bronze, and the comparatively great number of specialised artisans originating from Eastern Iran active in the Syro-Mesopotamian region indicate that transfer of technology must have been partly achieved by migrating craftsmen who originated from the Eastern regions of the Islamic world. It is this last point that might be crucial for further exploration of the subject. Until today art historical as well as historical research has failed to pay much attention to the fact that in the 12th century considerable parts of central Asia were ruled by a non-Muslim dynasty originating from North-eastern China, the Kara-Khitai or Western Liao, as the Chinese sources term them. Starting in about 1125 CE the Kara Khitai migrated into Eastern Turkestan. In September 1141 CE they defeated the Seljuk sultan Sanjar near Samarkand and occupied the major trade centres of Transoxania, Samarkand and Bukhara. Shortly afterwards the Khwarezm-Shah became a vassal to the Kara Khitai. Throughout their rule the Kara Khitai continued to adhere to their former religious traditions and both their administrative practices and their representative self-fashioning preserved Chinese features. Muslim writers often refer to the Kara Khitai rulers as “the Chinese” and authors like Nizami Arudi Samarkandi or Djuzdjani praise their ruler, the Gürkhan, for his justice and the respect he paid his Muslim subjects. The tolerant and impartial atmosphere of Kara-Khitai rule permitted non-Muslim minorities to flourish in the countries under their rule. Wealthy communities of Jewish merchants prospered in Khiva and Samarkand and the Nestorian church witnessed a period of intense missionary work. In 1137 the patriarch Elias III established a metropolitan seat in Kashgar, in addition to the one already in existence in Samarkand. In the present context this fact is of considerable interest because Northern Mesopotamia and the metropolitan provinces of Mosul and Nisibis were the heartland of the Nestorian church. This opens up another possible pathway of contacts and interaction between the Syro-Mesopotamian region and the East. Another piece of evidence that gives further weight to the conclusion that the nomadic dynasties of Central Asia acted as an important connecting link between East and West are traveller reports that mention Chinese artisans working in Samarkand in the 12th century. Michel Biran, one of the few scholars who dealt with this neglected period of Silk Road studies, emphasizes that Jin and Song artefacts found their way to Samarkand and Balasaghun and that Khitai robes were highly appreciated among the Seljuk and the Khwarezm Shahs.
Holy Coverings in the Tareq Rajab Museum

The origin of the tradition of covering the Ka’aba with cloth is lost in the mists of time but it is certainly a practise that has existed for hundreds of years and there is evidence that it has been ceremoniously carried out at least as far back as the beginning of the Islamic period. Whilst the actual style and colour of the Kiswa (cloth covering the Ka’aba) has been in the recognisable black form for many centuries, there have been variations in the past with different materials of different colours being used.

The reasons for covering the Ka’aba with the Kiswa is also the subject of much discussion but whatever the reason, over the centuries, the annual honour of providing the Kiswa to cover the Ka’aba in the month of Dhul Hijja has been seen as a symbol of predominance often demanded by the supreme Muslim leader of the time. This was especially so when new Dynasties arose and wanted to make their influence and dominance known.

The practise of covering important or holy buildings or structures is not unique and in Middle Eastern legend, one of the earliest structures to be mentioned as having been covered was the pyramids. In one of his essays, Professor Alexander Fodor deals with various legends relating to the pyramids and analyses the work of the Arab geographer and cartographer al-Idrisi, who, in around 1238 CE dedicated an entire work to the pyramids, for his patron the Ayyubid Sultan al-Malik al-Adil. In this work he mentions three legends about the building of the pyramids; one that they were built by an antediluvian king of Egypt, another for the quality of its textiles which were made in Yemen and lastly for the financial need of the Egyptian Pharaoh, it is said the king was in debt and needed funds to pay off his debts. In this version, the king asked his architect to build him a pyramid. This was done and he covered it with a cover embroidered with gold and silver.

The interesting thing here is that writers at that time, quoting ancient sources, say that, “when the pyramids were finished, the king covered them in coloured brocade from top to bottom.” Another version states that the “pyramids were covered in silks.” Dr Fodor states that the Arab descriptions about the covering of the pyramids reveal surprising parallels to the stories which record the covering of the Ka’aba in Makkah. Fodor mentions, as others have, that this event was attributed to the Yemeni Himyarite king Tuba’ba’ As’ad.

The event was narrated in a story by Nashwan ibn Sa’id al Himyari who said that “As’ad was the first to cover the House. It happened that when he was returning from one of his campaigns, he passed by the House and covered it with gilded Yemeni leather mats. He then saw someone in a dream telling him: ‘Add to the covering of the House.’ So he covered it with a type of cloth called ma’alif. In another dream he heard the same message again, so he covered it with another type of cloth called washy. He sacrificed many animals, performed the circumbulation and the running and made a door and a key for it which were not there before and he said about this:

*We covered the House which God declared sacred with a cover embroidered with gold and silver.*

Various other narratives exist and these mention the types of textiles that were used to cover the Ka’aba in pre-Islamic times. This included straw, silk, striped Yemeni cloth, Yemeni shawls, and Coptic Egyptian cloth. The coverings were on top of each other.

While the Prophet (PBUH) forbade the practise of removing one’s garments, it was common before the advent of Islam. When this practise was carried out in pre-Islamic times, the garments one stripped off were then often placed on the Ka’aba itself and the fabrics then varied according to the wealth of the person who placed them there, so one can imagine the mix of textiles on display.

At one point, the coverings accumulated to such an extent that the weight was so great the Ka’aba was in danger of collapse. When the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mahdi performed the pilgrimage in 775 CE, he ordered that all coverings be removed except one and that became the normal practise.

As to the covering of the Ka’aba in the Islamic period, there are several sources, indicating that prior to the time of the Prophet, the Ka’aba was draped with covers of disparate sorts but that the Prophet himself covered it with a special Yemeni fabric. Yemeni in pre-Islamic times was renowned for the quality of its textiles which were made in workshops established by the Yemeni kings. The Ka’aba was a substantial export market and it is from these workshops that the pre-Islamic coverings for the Ka’aba are supposed to have come from.

The actual colour of the Kiswa has also changed and during different periods, different colours were sometimes used. Colour always played a significant role in the life of various dynasties and different dynasties adopted different colours. The colour adopted by the Abbasids was black and during their rule black was adopted as the colour of the robes of high ranking officials and scholars. In contrast, the Fatimids chose white as their colour. Yellow was the dynastic colour of the Mamluks in Cairo, as it was during the Ayyubid period although, during the presence of the Abbasid caliph in Cairo (after the Mongols sacked the Abbasid capital, Baghdad in 1258), black was seen at court and the investiture robe given by the caliph to each new sultan was black. At this time, black silk with white, yellow, or black embroidery was introduced as the colour for the Kiswa sent by the Egyptian sultan to Makkah but an exception to this was during the reign of Barsbay (15th century) when red silk was used.

In the 7th century, the first Umayyad caliph Muawiya I, had the Ka’aba draped twice a year, with the help of Abd-Allah ibn al-Zubayr and Abd al-Malik, with white linens and brocades, but then changed the covering to striped Yemeni cloth. In the 9th century, the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mamun changed the coverings three times a year. The first covering being of red silk brocade, placed a day before Arafat Day, the second covering a Coptic linen on the first day of the month of Rajab and finally a white fabric towards the end of the month of Ramadan.

In 1075 CE the Fatimid ruler in Cairo exerted strong pressure, in the form of written messages and lavish presents, on the sherif of Makkah to persuade him to display signs with the name of al-Mustansir on the Holy Sites in Makkah. The sherif complied, erasing the titles of the Abbasid
Caliph al-Qāʾiʿ and removing the covering for the Kaʿaba sent by the Abbasid Caliph, replacing it with the white linen Kiswa which displayed the names and titles of Caliph al-Mustaʿṣir. During the time of the Abbasid Caliph al Nasir (1158 – 1225), the Kaʿaba was covered in green at one point but the caliph then had this changed back to black.

While the Kiswa at different periods might come from Baghdad, Damascus as well as Cairo, for most of its history, the Kiswa has been made either of Egyptian material brought for that purpose or actually made as a Kiswa in Egypt and sent to Makkah. Cairo quickly became the customary source of the Kiswa. The writer, de Gauzy, quoting Arab sources, states that in 1269, the Mamluk King of Egypt, Al Dhahir Baybars Bundukdari, made the pilgrimage to Makkah with an immense following. He left behind a Wali in Makkah who presented a Kiswa on behalf of his master. The Kiswa was embroidered with the King’s name.

De Gauzy wrote that this was the event that established Egypt as the source of the Kiswa and that later, the income of an entire village was acknowledged the political dominance of the donor. The Kiswa or a khila’ denotes honouring someone and the Kaʿaba receives this honour with the Kiswa.

A ruling sheriff could affirm that he might receive it without having placed himself in a position of vassalage. However, the fact that it was customarily sent by the ruler of Baghdad or Egypt or Constantinople immediately on accession, and was always accepted, came to mean that without this investiture, something of a sheriff of Makkah’s authority was lacking.

During the Mongol period leaders often made attempts to gain influence in the Hijaz and, in particular, to send a Kiswa for the Kaʿaba as, for example, Ghazan and later Shahrukh, tried to do. During the early Mongol period, the Mamluks positioned themselves as the protectors of Islam within the Middle East. This claim had not been challenged by the pagan Ilkhans, but an Islamic Mongol dynasty could not let it go unchallenged. Ghazan, when he turned Iran back into a Muslim power, ended the division of the Middle East into Muslim and non-Muslim spheres, but instead of bringing peace with the Mamluks, he opened up a new theatre of conflict in the Hijaz. In 1303 CE, just before his final invasion of Syria, Ghazan issued a decree in favour of the guardians of the Kaʿaba and prepared a magnificent caravan with a large guard and a cover for the Kaʿaba. This expedition was attacked and never arrived, but the Ilkhans continued to sporadically to push their claims in the Hijaz and their right to contribute a cover.

At the very end of his life Timur, according to Mamluk sources, sent a caravan to the holy cities with orders to measure the Kaʿaba for a cover, which his troops would install the next year (Darrag, 1961, p. 162). Shahrukh pursued this ambition publicly and with vigour through most of his reign. In 828 CE, he wrote to the Mamluk sultan expressing his desire to send a Kiswa in fulfillment of a vow. Relations with the Mamluks were tense at this time since the sultan refused to install himself a vassal of the Timurids, and Shahrukh’s request was not well received. Nevertheless, or because of this, Shāhrukh continued to assert his interest in the affairs of the holy cities. Although Shāhrukh repeated his request to send a Kaʿba cover several times and often adopted a threatening attitude towards the Mamluks, it was not until 847 CE, after the accession of the more conciliatory sultan Khairat, that his request was finally granted. A magnificent cover and equipage were sent off, but it is not certain that the cover was actually installed.

After the conquest of Cairo in 1517 CE, the Ottoman Sultan, as Caliph, had the honour of dressing the Kaʿaba. Although there was one attempt to transfer its manufacture to Istanbul, this was unsuccessful and it continued to be made in Egypt up to the early 20th century CE.

It is not known if there are any artistic evidence of the Kiswa in a colour other than black however all known depictions that exist are in the familiar black. There is of course a wealth of artistic work from the 15th century onward, depicting Makkah and the Kaʿaba. Many depictions of the Kaʿaba and its Kiswa exist in the books know as the Dalʿaʾ al Khairat, which discuss the attributes of the Prophet, as well as in pilgrims guides to Makkah that have been produced for hundreds of years.

Once the Kiswa was ready to install, a large ceremony and procession was arranged for it to be transported to Makkah and this procession was called the Mahmal. Mahmal is the name of the litters and entourages that were, since the 7th century, sent by rulers and princes on Hajj to Makkah. The Mahmal was carried on a camel that was led at the head of the expedition. Rivalry between princes led to the Mahmal being adorned with gold and precious stones and the Mahmal palanquins and entourages became political symbols of prestige and importance. The oldest Mahmal that still exists is one dating to 1517 and which is at the Topkapi in Istanbul.

Ever since the transfer of the Abbasid Caliphate to Cairo, after the Mongol invasion, the Mahmal has, as with the Kiswa which was mentioned earlier, been sent from Cairo, with certain exceptions. The Mahmal from Egypt were wooden and, as the photographs show, pyramid in shape with, at the top a gilded ball surmounted by a stem a star and a crescent. There were two coverings, the first in rich brocade which was used in towns and for parade, and the second which was of a simpler green material. The brocade was embroidered with Ayat al Kursi and with the name of the sovereign.

The Mahmal were not necessarily to carry the Kiswa however and countries were sending the Mahmal empty as a symbol of their existence and influence. When the Mahmal arrived in Makkah, it was placed in a prominent position to be seen easily. Other countries such as Yemen and Iraq continued to try to rival Egypt and there were sometimes altercations which turned violent. The First World War put an end to the Mahmal from Syria and there were a few disruptions of the Egyptian Mahmal by the Wahhabis.

The Kiswa Today
In 1927 King Abdul Aziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud ordered the building of a special factory in Makkah for making Kiswas. In 1943 the late King Faisal decreed that the factory be renovated. Since then, the factory has undergone much development. The first black Kiswa and first green internal Kiswa were made in the factory in 1962. The new building with modern machinery was inaugurated in 1977 to aid in the production of the Kiswa, while at the same time continuing the artistic tradition of making the more ornate parts of it by hand.

Today, the Kiswa costs almost $5 million to make. The cloth is made of 670 kilograms of pure silk, imported from abroad as raw material and dyed black in the factory. After weaving the 658 square
Purity (gold and 50 kilograms of silver go into its finishing. The Kiswa is 14 meters high and on the top third of the cloth is a ‘hizam’ or belt that surrounds the Kiswa on all sides. The belt is embroidered in the Thuluth style of Arabic Script. Under the belt are written. Everything written under the belt is in Thuluth, embroidered in protruding designs and intertwined with silver threads covered with gold. These designs were introduced during the Saudi reign.

**The Tareq Rajab Museum**
There are various holy covering and textiles in the Tareq Rajab Museum. There are, for example, four drapes that were used to cover the entrance to the Ka’aba. These are the most ornate sections of the entire Kiswa. There are also covers from the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina as well as wall covers and door curtains from the interior of the Ka’aba. All these artefacts are Ottoman as Kiswas from before the Ottoman period have not survived mainly because textiles are hard to preserve but also due to the fact that the Kiswas was often in the past cut up into small sections and sold to pilgrims or gifted to individuals.

Since its inception, the history of the Ismaili sect has been surrounded with enigmas. If it wasn’t for the serious efforts of contemporary researchers, many aspects of this history would have been lost forever in the darkness of ignorance and negligence; under the veil of satr (occultation) and taqiyya (dissimulation).

Since the death of al-Hussain and prompting them to follow his half-brother Mohammed ibn Al-Hanafiyya.

After Mohammed ibn Ali ibn Abi Taleb’s death (81 AH/699 CE), his son Abd Allah, known as “Abu Hashim”, claimed the Imamate while keeping it secret. Abu Hashim worked very hard to establish contacts with all strata of the civil society and all political factions; according to historical references, he was even in contact with the Umayyads in Damascus. Despite the Umayyad court’s suspicions, they received Abu Hashim cordially as a guest. Most historical sources claim that Abu Hashim met the Umayyad Caliphate Suleiman ibn Abd al-Malik in Damascus.

On his way back, Abu Hashim fell very sick and, afraid he was about to die, he changed his route and went to Al-Humaima, a small town in Palestine. There he met with Mohammed ibn Abd Allah ibn al-Abbas with whom he shared the secret organisation. He also gave him a list of the members. Abu Hashim died in 98 AH/716 CE at which time the Abbassids started to run the underground organisation. Under the Abbassids, the organisation grew to include an army which toppled the Umayyad dynasty in the battle of Zabb in 132 AH/750 CE.

Perhaps the main reason for the delay in uncovering the early writings of this sect is the difficulty in understanding their contents. Thus the circle of the masters of this sect grew smaller, generation after generation, until it was hidden even from its own followers. If the case is such, you can imagine the difficulties researchers today face in their studies of the Ismaili history. This could also be attributed to the extreme sensitivity of the Arab and Muslim people when writing about the intellectual history of the Ismaili, the spread of its Da’wa and other more complex topics in the philosophy of the Ismaili faith, including the importance of philosophy in building states.

The secretive nature of the Ismaili Da’wa occurred in the aftermath of the martyrdom of Al-Hussain (61 AH/680 CE) and the demise of al-Mukhtar Ibn Obaidullah Al-Thaqfi (67 AH/686 CE). After the defeat of the Tawabeen (the Repentants) revolution, an underground missionary group was born under the leadership of Kaysan, who was pro Al al-Bayt. This underground missionary group (Da’wa) was mainly composed of the vanquished leaders of al-Mukhtars’ army, who called for the Imamate of Mohammed ibn Ali ibn Abi Taleb known as “Ibn Al-Hanafiyya”. Kaysan sent his dua’ts (missionaries) to spread his message across the cities, reminding people of the death of al-Hussain and prompting them to follow his half-brother Mohammed ibn Al-Hanafiyya.

Adel Salem al-Abdul Jader
Presented in Arabic
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The Alids felt that their Da’wa was taken over by the Abbasids, especially when major dua’is like Abu Salamah al-Khallal and Abu Muslim al-Khurasani were killed during the era of Abu Ja’far Al-Mansur. Al-Mansur put the Alids under surveillance – spying on them (as clarified: 18 AH/765 CE). Nevertheless, Imam Ja’far Al-Sadiq was not tempted by the pleasures of life and politics, and despite insistent requests from his followers to confront the oppression of the Abbasids, he did not respond. Consequently, they presssed his son Ismail Ibn Ja’far Al-Sadiq to adopt the caliphate title to be their Imam and leader and they began to lay down the foundations of their revolution. However, Ismail died in 136 AH/754 CE, causing a rift among his adherents. The period split into: the Imamah, the period of occultation “Dawr al-Satr” and Allah. Abd Allah (Ubayd Allah) Al-Mahdi, who shall pave the way for the Fatimid Caliphate. He was consecrated the Imam of the Fatimid Caliphate, who continued for nearly one and a half centuries, from AH/754 CE, otherwise at which time Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq had hidden him from the tyranny of Abu Ja’far Al-Mansur who passed the Imamah to the descendants of Ismail. There is yet another group who turned on Ismail and followed Mousa al-Kazim.

The period of occultation “Dawr al-Satr” and the disappearance of the Imam

Most Ismaili sources claim that Ismail had transferred by will - before disappearing - the Imamah to his son Muhammad. The doctrines of Ismailia call this period, when the Imam disappears from his opponents, the tyrants and enemies, Dawr al-Satr (the period of Occultation). This concealment continues until God decides otherwise at which time Dawr al-Kashf (the period of manifestation) begins. During this period, the Imam would support the Da’wa of rightness and justice against injustice. The period of concealment continued for nearly one and a half centuries, from 136 AH/754 CE until 286 AH/900 CE. The Imams of this period were Mohammed ibn Ismail, Abdullah ibn Mohammed, Ahmed ibn Abdullah al-Hussaini ibn Ahmed. The unveiling period started with Imam Abd Allah (Ubayd Allah) Al-Mahdi, who shall pave the way to the resurrection, the proclamation of the state, and the declaration of the executor of Allah’s orders: Mohammed al-Qa'im (the Riser) ibn Abd Allah.

The Early Ismailis, “The Qarmatians”

It is quite difficult to understand the confusing and perplexing events that took place during the period of Satr; as incidents overlap and diverge, and, according to Ismaili beliefs, the Imams of each period crisscross the realities of place and time. The early Ismailis, the “Qarmatians,” were based in what is now Iraq. They were led to believe that Mohammed ibn Ismail had lived amongst them for 200 years, but when the language of the letters between them and the Imam changed, they suspected that something might have happened to him.

They sent a messenger named Abdan to “Salamiyya” in the Levant where their secret Imam was based. Abdan did not meet the secret Imam but someone else who claimed to be the current Imam and said that Mohammed ibn Ismail had died long time ago. Abdan went back to Iraq to inform Iraq’s head the Qarmatians’ leader, then Hamdan Qarmat, of the news. Hamdan was furious and he sent his army to Salamiyya thinking that the Imam was imprisoned there.

Imam Ubayd Allah Al-Mahdi, along with two of his dais, fled Salamiyya intending to go to Yemen. A short break at al-Ramla in Palestine, Ubayd Allah changed his mind and insisted on going to Morocco, despite the objection of one of his companions, FAYruz. Ubayd Allah went to Egypt, Tripoli and Tunisia (lFtqiyya) accompanied by his servant Jafar, while Fayruz continued to sink away to Yemen.

With the declaration of al-qiyama (resurrection), the beginning of the al-Kashf (manifestation) period and the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate, Ubayd Allah Al-Mahdi got rid of his dais in different regions, including Hamdan and Abdan who disappeared from Iraq, Abu Abd Allah Al-Shi’i and his brother Abu al-Abbas who were killed in Maghrib, Fayruz and Ali ibn al-Fadl who were killed in Yemen and Abu Sa’id al-Janabi who was murdered in Bahrain.

The Fatimid Caliphate

The only way for the emerging Caliphate in Tunisia (lFtqiyya) to survive was to safeguard its intellectual system. With the help of Berber tribes it started to establish the foundations of the new state. The Fatimid Caliphs did not hesitate to buy followers and use power to intimidate its enemies. This policy was successful amongst Arabs and Berbers. As soon as their rule settled domestically, external dangers started to emerge.

At this time they began a plan to move their capital and the centre of their state from al-Mehdiya to al-Mansoriyya, and then to Cairo. After building Cairo as their capital, the Fatimid Caliphate rule settled with advent al-Moez Li Deen Allah, whose era was marked with prosperity in all aspects of life: social, economic and intellectual. Cairo became the focus of attention for scientists, intellectuals and poets from all walks, religions and doctrines. During the era of the Caliph al-Aziz bi Allah, security and stability continued to prevail and science and arts flourished. However, this state of affairs did not last as things started to change during the era of al-Hakim bi Amr Allah whose rule was marked with increasing strife and schemes. This caliph is considered one of the most sorrowful and controversial characters in history. While his followers considered him perfect, even infallible Imam, others saw him full of contradictions and even imbecile. Perhaps one of the main events in his era was the appearance of a religious minority who called themselves the Monotheists (al-Muwahhidun) or the so-called Druze which continues to this date.

Politics is known for its playing on allegiances. Therefore, after the death of the caliph al-Mustansir bi Allah, the Fatimids split into two groups: one supported Nizar, the older son of al-Mustansir bi Allah, and the other group supported al-Musta’li bi Allah Ahmed. The dispute escalated and ended with the victory of al-Musta’li bi Allah and the imprisonment and later the execution of Nizar. Upon the demise of Nizar, his supporters formed a revolutionary wing led by Al-Hassan Ibn al-Sabbah against the al-Musta’li bi Allah, and was based in the fortress of Amlam in Iran.

After many years of confidentiality, a lineage of Imams descending from Nizar appeared with the last one the current Imam Agha Khan 4th Shah Karim al-Hussainy. It is worth mentioning that the chain of Nizari Imams are currently in the period of manifestation, whereas the Musta’lIan Fatimid Imams went into the period of occultation by hiding the 21st Imam Al-Tayyeb ibn Al-Amir bi Akharn Allah who was adopted secretly by Arow bint Ahmed al-Sulayhi. All al-Tayyeb’s descendant Imams are still in the hide from their followers (Bohra and Sulaimanis of Najran). Only the head of his dias, also known as “the Absolute da’i” (da’i mutlaq), knows the identity of the Imam, a fact that adds more to the importance of the role played by him, as his holiness is derived from the holiness of the Imam and his teachings.

The Ismailis Today

As we mentioned above, the Ismailis split into Nizari and Musta’lIs. Nizari had also split into Mu’miniyya and Qasim-shahiya; while Musta’lIsa split into Hafiziyaa (Majidiyya) and Taybiyya. However, the chain of Imams of both Nizari Mu’miniyya and Musta’tIan Hafiziyaa (Majidiyya) was interrupted and the Hafiziyaa mingled with Taybiyya while Mu’miniyya followers joined the Qasim-shahiya, who are the followers of Agha Khan today.

The majority of Nizari are based in Salamiyya and Misyaf in Syria, with some in Pakistan, while a minority of them lives in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Many of the Nizari moved from India to Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya in Eastern Africa as well as in South Africa. There is also a small minority scattered in Europe, Canada and USA.

On the other hand, there are two parallel lines of dais of Taybiyya that can be identified “metaphorically” as the Indian line and the Yemeni (Arab) line, taking into consideration that a minority of Arabs who follows Dawood Borhan al-Deen (Indian) are still in Yemen, and another minority of Sulaimanis who follows the deputy of the Arab da’i in Yemen who is known as “al-Mansub” lives in India and Pakistan. Both da’i’s hold the position of the “Absolute da’i” in the hierarchy of Da’wa.

In the beginning of 1960s, the Bohras intellectuals demanded reforms of the financial institutions of Bohras in western countries. They formed a movement called Pragaty Mandal. However, the 51st “Absolute da’i” Taher Sayf Al-Din (1358 AH/1965 AD) rejected all the demands of those intellectuals. However, they continued their demands but Taher Sayf Al-Din suppressed the movement by declaring himself the infallible Absolute da’i confirming his individuality in taking decisions. Nevertheless, there is still a group of Bohras intellectuals living in Canada, USA and Western Europe who have formed a front called Progressive Dawoodi Bohras. It is also worth mentioning that the Bohras Supreme Da’i is the deputy of the Occulted Imam of the Taybi line known to his followers as the “Sultan” or “Mawlana”.

Today, the Bohras are led by Dr Mohammed Borhan Al-Din Ibn Tahir Sayf Al-Din who received his honorary doctorate from Al-Azhar, Cairo, in 1966 in recognition of the services of Bohras in the field of culture and education. The
Sultan of Bohras runs his activities from his office in Mumbay, India, which is also considered the center of this sect. The Bohras take pride in the fact that they exist in 470 different societies in 40 countries around the world.

As for the Sulaimanis, it is led by Sheikh Husayn Ismail al-Makrami who took over after a dispute with Muhsin ibn Ali over the will of the previous da‘i al-Hasan ibn al-Husayn al-Makrami (1413 AH/1992 AD) in which he stated the name of his successor. As the previous da‘i, Husayn ibn Ismail, was always on the move between Makkah and Madina, whereas the previous da‘i and Muhsin ibn Ali resided in Khushaywah which is the headquarters for the Sulaimani diya in Najran, it is probable that he had entrusted Muhsin ibn Ali with his will because of the close relationship between them. Husayn ibn Ismail was not able to be the leader of the da‘wa until Muhsin ibn Ali would show the will; he had hid it and claimed the position for himself but was eventually compelled to submit it reluctantly after long negotiations in which he amassed large fortunes - according to Sulaimanis. Husayn ibn Ismail became the leader and settled in Najran, but there seems to be a new change in the position yet to be revealed. The Ismaili Sulaimanis are concentrated in Najran, but they have also a presence in other parts of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

The Sultan of Bohra announced that nearly 30,000 of his followers are residing in Kuwait, while the followers of Sulaimania are between 40,000 and 50,000, and they are mostly Kuwaiti citizens.

The Sana’a Branch of the German Archaeological Institute has undertaken research work on the Kingdom of Saba, including two urban centres and oases Marib and Sirwah. The Sana’a Branch was founded in 1978, and since 1996 has been a part of the newly-formed Orient Department. Its work covers archaeological, architectural, philological, and art historical research in Southwest Arabia and for the last three years also in Ethiopia.

When exactly the Kingdom of Saba came into existence has not been completely clarified to date, but it appears to have formed from 12th century BCE onwards. Likewise it is still strongly disputed in South Arabian archaeology as to how the origin actually came about. Whereas some researchers on the epigraphy and archaeology of the Yemeni highlands tend to presume an indigenous, autochthonous development, German research sees distinct impulses from outside of South Arabia that led to the genesis of Saba. This social and cultural process of origin is related to the immigration of new groups of peoples from the area of today’s Levant, with which a cultural and technical transfer came into being. This led to a fairly fast acculturation of the foreign sections of the populations with the local people. From this a very independent Sabaean culture arose that not only becomes visible in a general change in the social structures and the material legacies, but was formed as the southwestern branch of the

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Semitic languages, which was written in an alphabetic script with 29 letters common to all of them. The oldest witness so far of this South Arabian literary language is a wooden stick, which served as a holder for scripts and can be placed at the time between 1150 and 900 BCE, thanks to C14 dating.

Whereas in the Bronze Age (3rd/2nd millennium BCE) in the South Arabian region oval and round buildings with simple quarry stone walls were typical, later rectangular mud buildings on stone foundations were constructed, evidence of which could be found in the Early Sabaeans settlements of the Wadi Yala and the Wadi Ghufaina in the Oasis of Marib. The image of these societies that were at first organised purely agriculturally changes at the latest around 900 BCE: now monumental structures are being built in an extremely precise stone masonry that bears witness to an already highly differentiated social system. In the case of the oldest of these structures, there are buildings of mainly sacral functions such as, for instance, the Five-Pillar structure in the Sabaean town of Sirwah and the technically highly developed water management systems in the Oasis of Marib. These monumental buildings of public character already reflect the result of a longer development in the art of building and engineering.

As early as the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, Saba will have organised and controlled long-distance trading. Although the wealth of Saba was due in the first instance to its trading activities, its foundations formed the generation of an expansive territorial state. In Islam the hoopoe contrives to tell the story of the great campaigns. In fact, the role of Saba in mind when the Roman praefectus Aegypti praefectus Aegypti Aelius Gallus set out in the year 25 BCE with 10,000 men to gain control over incense cultivation and the trade with the Arabian and Indian goods by the coast of the Gulf of Aden. As Strabo reports, the project failed after the Sabaean capital Marib is besieged without success for 6 days. Even if there is no documentation whatsoever of this occurrence, only the tombstone of a legionnaire that was discovered in Baraqish to the northwest of Marib, it is possible that the disappearance of the Minaeans who controlled the overland trade can be connected with the campaign. In fact, the role of the Minaeans was taken over by the Nabateans who likewise participated in the campaign.

It is now possible to prove, for the first time, that there was a Nabatean presence in South Arabia via a Sabaean-Nabatean bilingual inscription that was discovered in the Almahq Temple of Sirwah. This inscription devoted to the Nabatean Kings Annas and King Aretas IV is named. The inscription therefore dates to the year 7/6 BCE and provides evidence of the presence of Nabatean traders in the Sabaean Kingdom.

Saba lies at the end of the largest closed sandy desert in the world, the Rub al-Khali, “The Empty Quarter”. Rain – if at all – only falls extremely episodically. Agriculture was and is completely reliant on irrigation. Despite the adverse conditions, it is exactly here, in the eastern foreland of the Yemeni highlands, at the outlets of the wadis at the end of 2nd millennium BCE, that great oases come into being and form the centres of the so-called caravan kingdoms – of the kingdoms whose politics are very strongly influenced by the securing of trading routes for the transport of particularly incense and myrrh and the lucrative trade with these fragrances. Saba with the capital Marib formed the most significant caravan kingdom from an economic and political point of view.

When exactly irrigation in Marib exploiting the Sai! el, the waves of water that occur in the Wadi Dhana as a result of the rainy season in the Yemeni highlands in spring and summer, began cannot be said with any certainty so far. In order to trace the potential natural resources in the region of Marib and Sirwah in ancient times, geomorphological examinations are being carried out at the University of Tübingen within the framework of our research. This central question arises as to what the Sabaean found in their environment in the way of ground resources and how they exploited these. Dating methods and organic samples from the ground show that in this region during the period from 8000 to 4500 BCE one can presume various humid periods. The data therefore confirm other research results on the early and middle Holocene humid phases in the Arabian territory. These are distinguished by higher quantities of precipitation than today which led to a denser vegetation and more intensive earth formation. The archaeological surveys in Marib and Sirwah also make it clear that before the great irrigation buildings were constructed, there must have been natural resources that secured the nutrition of the growing population. As the Arabian region became extremely dry at the latest as from 1500 BCE, the people needed alternative nutritional sources in addition to their nomadic animal herding and hunting. Consequently, towards the end of the Bronze Age, in view of continually decreasing precipitation and therefore the thinning natural coverage of vegetation, the population was reliant on supplementing its food chain – for example through the cultivation of crops.

With the aim of an optimal exploitation of the water and ground, at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE Saba had already created the economic conditions not only to feed the local population, but also to guarantee supplies to the caravans travelling on the incense road.
But how was it possible for the Sabaeans to create such a flourishing landscape? Here we come to the third point associated with Saba, the fertility of the gardens and the highly developed water management technology that reaches its peak at the latest in the 6th century BCE with the Great Dam of Marib. It says in the 34th surah, verses 15/16 of the Qur’an:

“There was for [the people of] Saba’ in their dwelling place a sign: two fertile gardens on the right and on the left …… But they turned away refusing, so we sent upon them the flood of the dam, and we replaced their two fertile gardens with gardens of bitter fruit, tamarisks and something of sparse lote trees.”

The two sluice buildings founded on the rock of the Jabal Balaj and constructed of stone at the north and south banks of the Wadi Dhana supplied the “two fertile gardens on the right and on the left”, i.e. the North Oasis and the South Oasis of Marib. The principle of this irrigation technology is as follows: The water flowing down from the mountains during the rainy season is held back by a great dam that stretches over the whole valley, until it floods the high level of the sluices. From there it was fed directly via a widely ramified water management technology that reaches its peak at the latest in the 6th century BCE with the Great Dam of Marib. It says in the 34th surah, verses 15/16 of the Qur’an:

The temple complex is regarded as one of the most monumental buildings, which still characterise the landscape of Saba today. It is the pillar architecture that reveals to us that here was a monumental structure – mostly a temple – once stood. We continually meet up with these monumental pillars in our excavations in Saba and they are always the subject of intensive restoration work. This also applies to the largest and most important archaeological project currently run by the Sanaa Branch which has been promoted on an interdisciplinary basis since 2001 in the Sabaeans city complex and the Oasis of Sirwah, 40 km to the west of Marib.

As far as surface area is concerned, Sirwah with only 3 hectares is counted as one of the small towns in Saba, however, extensive building programmes were carried out by the Sabaeans rulers at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE. This included the construction of the oldest temple site in Saba - a five-pillar building, dating at around 900 BCE which is also the oldest timber-stone framework building in Southern Arabia.

The large number of these chronologically parallel-existing sacred buildings bears witness to the fact that cultic rituals played a decisive role in urban life. Thus, the whole infrastructure of the city appears to be concentrated on the maintenance of cultic activity. Large areas (intra muros) which also lie along the main development axes, are taken up by sacred buildings. The temples were allocated to an urban priesthood based locally and played an important role both economically and as the legal organisation of the community of the city and the surrounding territory allocated to it. According to current research, residential and craft sectors appear to have been incorporated exclusively in the casemates of the city wall. In the spatially restricted, not yet excavated intra muros, there are presumably further sacred buildings or representative buildings of public character which the remains of monumental podiums suggest today. These buildings could have served as living quarters for the priesthood and higher-ranking pilgrims or even as the headquarters for administrative requirements.

The lack of larger residential areas and the dense concentration of sacred buildings within the city complex suggest that Sirwah had functioning as a religious centre for the Sabaeans rulers. With its correspondingly high number of sacred buildings, Sirwah forms an excellent example of the outstanding pillar architecture of Saba. Originally the individual pillars were connected with the gateway and the rising wall. Due to earthquakes or other forms of destruction, only the limestone pillars produced from one single stone and weighing tons have been preserved. These stand without anchorage, supported solely by their own weight, on the bases that today are partially very crumbly.

For this reason in Sirwah, parallel to the excavations, we have also been carrying out restoration measures since the beginning of our work. These measures are extended in particular to the main sanctuary of Sirwah. This sacred building is dedicated to the Sabaeans state god Almaqah and the main building phase dates to the middle of the 7th century BCE, the height of the Sabaeans kingdom. However, this is not the oldest temple, a previous building from the early 1st millennium BCE also existed on this spot, as remains of the mighty surrounding walls indicate.

The main entrance to the temple was through a monolithic pillar propylon. Doors with several leaves closed the entrance. In front of the main entrance there was a large, representative forecourt that was surrounded by high walls and separated from the city area by lockable doors. This forecourt formed not only the vestibule to the Almaqah Temple but also served as the access area for several other temples that were located in the south-eastern part of the city.

The priesthood, apart from accepting offerings and other temple treasures, – according to the inscriptions temple plunderings were no rarity – must have placed great importance both on the control of accessibility to the temple as well as on the insightfulness into the cult building. It appears that the principle of entrance control is reflected here and certainly also entrance restriction. Thus, the close distance between the entrance pillars can be explained not only optically and statically, but also the entrance only allowed single persons to pass through one at a time, behind each other. Larger groups – be these the dedicating persons or even participants in a procession – could only therefore enter the temple under strict control. In certain religious ceremonies, during which the cult participants bear the cut-off hands of their enemies, or the holding of ritual banquets, a large number of cult participants would have been present.

Thus the results of the excavations in the interior of the temple with hundreds of votive gifts and inscriptions and various cultic installations allow us to reconstruct a complex picture of the...
Sabean cultic practices. Besides the priests, the Sabean ruler as a political man of power but also in his function as the highest priest was responsible for carrying out the most important religious ceremonies. These included, for example, the organisation of ritual banquets, which took place on certain festive days at tables and benches in the interior of the sanctuary. Around 400 cult participants banqueted here at the same time in honour of the gods: thousands of sheep and goats were eaten, selected bones, such as the hocks of the animals, were carefully stored afterwards in a room specially built for the purpose.

At the same time the temple also provided a backdrop for the political self-manifestation of the early Sabean rulers. This setting was purposely designed in many different ways in order to emphasise the monumentality of the buildings and their cultic-religious statement. Furthermore, just like in classical antiquity, the colour scheme played a great role in enhancing the optical effect. In particular reddish and ochre-shaded colour pigments made from hematite or clay minerals enriched with iron (hematite or limonite) can be found with increasing frequency in the sanctuary. Not only did the inscriptions chiselled in snow-white limestone have a coloured background, but also there were the remains of colours to be found on pillars and walls.

With certainty the hundreds of votives discovered also formed a part of this composition that was targeted on representation. Thus one can truly speak of an inundation of the temple with votive gifts from the middle-Sabaean period - from 2nd century BCE onwards – if we only regard what was still preserved after the plundering. The picture confronting the cultic community must have been splendid if one completes the bronze plaques with dedicational inscriptions that were also affixed to the walls and pillars, the statuettes and figurines ornamented with precious stones such as agate and carnelian, the appliances and furniture adorned with faience ware and ivory, and the no longer preserved gifts of perishable materials such as textiles. The interior of the temple must have been filled with statuettes and figurines made of bronze, alabaster, limestone and partly of clay. The animals represent symbols of the god Almaqah such as ibex and bull – Sabean gods are not anthropomorphously, but as astral deities in the form of symbols. Of the bronze zoomorphous and anthropomorphous figurines, which were affixed to the inscription bases usually made of alabaster, 30 have at least been preserved. Here it is easy to recognise various styles that range from rather local productions of Sabean character to figurines with strongly Hellenistic-Roman formal language. Discs of agate possibly served as apotropaic symbols. The pearls and other pieces of jewellery may have adorned the dedicated statuettes. One example from the Vorderasiatisches Museum (Near East Museum) in Berlin shows the ear piercings but also pierced holes for arm and foot rings. The fact that the sculptures of the gods i.e. the cultic images, were decorated with jewellery during processions, is so far only known from inscriptions, in fact from a text originating from the 2nd century CE: "...And anyone removing any of those items of inventory shall be subjected to the "Directive (concerning) Theft", except in the case of the jewellery with which he takes the sculptures from temple to temple."

The focus of the cult activities and rituals in the Almaqah Temple of Sirwah was formed by two monumental inscription stones that bordered cultic shrines and altars for sacrificial rituals and were probably flanked by bronze bulls. On the left side of these cult installations an over 7-metre-long limestone monolith towers up, in which the inscription dating to 715 BCE by the Sabean ruler Yitha’amar Wataris bin Yakrubmalik is chiselled. This is the largest and, with 49 metres of text, the only two chronological fixed points of the early period of Saba as both rulers can be dated exactly thanks to their being mentioned in the annals of the Mesopotamian Kingdom of Assyria. After mentioning the cultic rituals, the inscriptions both report on the militant and civil deeds of these rulers, including the building of water management systems.

There are differences in the content of both inscriptions. If one takes a look at the military activities of the two rulers, it becomes clear that the older of the two, Yitha’amar Watar, was still engaged in extending Saba to become a powerful territorial state. His campaigns were targeted at the immediate neighbours of the kingdom. The situation is different in the case of Karib’il Watar 30 years later. The latter described in his 20-line inscription eight campaigns that geographically speaking extend even further than those of Yitha’amar Watar. During his rule the area of Saba includes the largest part of South Arabia from Nagran in today’s Saudi Arabia to the coast of Aden and distant parts of the southeast. During this time Saba is a powerful, expanding territorial state, recognised beyond its boundaries, that controls the incense road not only within South Arabia but also on the whole of the Arabian peninsula.

The associations mentioned at the beginning, that are evoked when one mentions the Kingdom of Saba, do not relate to any fiction. In the research work that the Sanaa Branch of the German Archaeological Institute has been carrying out for more than 30 years, we repeatedly encounter these aspects of Sabean culture: the extraordinary wealth, the monumental architectural design of the buildings in an arid landscape in which one could only survive with extreme physical effort and the development of complex irrigation technology, can be discovered time and time again. However, we are still lacking any scientific evidence of the existence of the famous Queen!
The Oriental Pearl in the Maritime Trade

The pearl trade is a special way of showing how the maritime trade was organised. As a specific trade object in the Gulf area, the Red Sea and Ceylon, one can ask: what was the importance of the natural pearl in world economies at different periods?

The late French historian Fernand Braudel noted that the sphere of action and the development of the maritime trade did not start with the European presence in Asian waters. After the 11th century CE a new trend in the commercial activities took form, impacting both trading and trade routes. The establishment of large-scale trade between the Gulf and Asia (especially India and Ceylon) existed before the coming and the presence of the Portuguese, who were followed by the Dutch and the British.

The pearl trade has been part of the modern world economy since the 16th century CE, when it was one of many regional products actively traded. At that time, horses and dates were traded on par with pearls. However, in the second half of the 19th century European demand for pearls increased dramatically which had significant impact on the Gulf economies, especially in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Dubai. Thanks to records kept during this period, we have more details about the organisation of the trade, especially the prominent part played by the brokers, mostly Indians (baniyan), Jews and Armenians.

In 1976, when I began my anthropological research on pearl diving in the Gulf, I met many former pearl divers and merchants of pearls (tawash, tujâr lu'lu') who recounted stories of diving and trade. Recently I found new data concerning the trade relations between the Red Sea, Mumbai and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), including the discovery of the linguistic origin of the unit of value used for oriental pearls: the chaū.

First, it is important to note that historical research on the pearl trade is difficult for many reasons.

Pearls are small and precious and for that reason they were often hidden in order to avoid paying taxes. I found amazing descriptions of Persian shahbandar [harbourmasters] who use to search travellers to see if they had anything precious on them. Also, in some places, when a diver found a large pearl it was the custom to deliver it to the local shāīkh. Some tried to escape this obligation by hiding the pearls. I studied British administration reports and archives and regularly found notes saying that the annual value of the pearl trade should be higher since pearl traders did not declare everything they carried in Bombay. The same situation appears reports related to Red Sea ports. Finally, in the field economic history historians deal with large quantities of goods that allow them to identify the primary trends in activities, percentages, etc. For instance we have good knowledge on the merchandise like coffee, spices, cotton, grain, horses, according to time and place. As noted above, pearls are small and precious, and solid information in is always difficult to find.

As Fernand Braudel (1979, III:419) put it, for a long time we had an image of the Asian traders as individual prestigious peddlars carrying highly valuable merchandise like spices, pepper, pearls, perfumes, drugs, and diamonds, in small baggage. In reality, the truth is quite different. From Egypt to Japan the commercial activity was undertaken by capitalists, large traders, and thousands of support personnel including agents, messengers, brokers, money-changers. Even the use of a bill of exchange as a secure tool was comparable to equivalent European traders. When the Europeans appeared in Asia, the trading activities are already very active.

High sea trade could be considered as the first European capitalist economy. However, wrote F. Braudel (1979, II: 498), it followed the emergence of trading in the Islamic world. He reported that merchants in the Islamic region were always well considered and respected by political authorities, which was not the case in Europe. He mentions, as an example, that in 1288 the Mamluk government in Syria and Egypt dealt with merchants from Sind [a province in what is now Pakistan], India, China and Yemen.

Among the known business practices and accountability of the day was a kind of bill of exchange (the sutfaya), which was used to allow the transfer of money over great distances. This system may have had an effect on Italian traders from whom the bill of exchange was taken by other Europeans.

Another ancient practice probably taken from the Muslim world was the commenda, which is a merchants’ association. It was useful for trading operations as a way to reduce expenses and risks. We know they had been introduced in Italy in 11th-12th century, then in other European places at different times (Braudel, 1979, II: 496-497).

To Braudel, extensive trading, by land and sea, with regular caravans and long shipping routes, promoted an active and effective form of capitalism. He wrote that while things were already well organized in the Muslim world, with corporations and guilds, a change for the worse was descending on Europe, with new forms of hierarchy and the development of a monetary economy (ibid:497-499).

The fact of long distance trade in the Gulf is now well known, based largely on the discovery of written sources and archeological evidence. A good example is the Chinese porcelain discovered...
During the period mentioned by Braudel, between 1000-1200 CE, two ports dominated the sea lanes of the Gulf: Siraf and Kish (Whitehouse, 1983: 328). It seems that the collapse of Siraf came after the economic decline caused by events in Iraq and Iran and by the diversion of trade from the Gulf to the Red Sea (Whitehouse, 1983: 328). As a result, the port of Hormuz was selected by the rulers of Hormuz in 1229 CE, who shifted trade there, making Hormuz the leading port of the Gulf during the 14th and the 15th centuries.

The prosperity of Hormuz came from its independence and from its merchants who were very active in the inland regions of Iraq as well as in the maritime trade. It became renowned in all Asia. Marco Polo wrote: "Merchants come thither from India, with ships loaded with spicery and precious stones, pearls, cloths of silk and gold, elephant’s teeth, and many other wares, which they sell to the merchants of Hormuz, and which these in turn carry all over the world to dispose of again" (Poter 2009:96). Among the merchandise coming from the Gulf coast was wheat, barley, dates and horses; from Bahrain and Juffar (today Ras al-Khaimah), all sorts of pearls, and Arabian and Persian horses. The products that were transported between Iran and India via Hormuz included foodstuffs, aromatic and medical drugs, mineral water, different metals, textiles, jewelry, African and Indian slaves. The surplus of Indian goods was sent to the Red Sea via Aden and then to Europe (ibid : 97).

Marco Polo, in 14th century, provided very detailed and precise descriptions of the vessels and states: “… they are so large that they carry quite 5000 baskets of pepper and thousands others… (one basket being 225 kg). Another traveller of the 14th century, Ibn Battutá, gave statements on maritime trading practices and high-seas navigational techniques. When the Europeans appeared in the Indian Ocean, we know from Portuguese evidence that they encountered large local trading vessels (Ray, 2002: 24).

Because comprehensive records were kept by Portuguese and the Dutch traders working in Asia we have extensive information on their main trading activities. The 17th century shows the glory of the companies’ commercial activities in trading between Europe and India (Subrahmanyan, 1999: 264). It seems that pearls were one possible export commodity but the pearl trade faced technical and political problems. The technical problems related to the diving itself. Many travellers’ statements and reports mentioned the difficulties related to diving for pearls and the poor profit-earning capacity (Floor, 2007: 333-337). The political difficulties came when the traders understood the existing competition between local powers (mostly Persian and Muscati). In Ceylon the clash was more direct between Portuguese and Dutch, when the Dutch arrived at the island in 1602 with the intention of taking over the lucrative trade in cinnamon and pearls. The detailed history of the area during this period, written by Willem Floor and B.J. Slot, is interesting because it gives a comprehensive look at how the port authorities made competition between themselves to entice the merchants to visit their ports by offering reduce duties and other incentives. Thus, we can see that Basra remained thriving as the main port for the upper part of the Gulf until 1775, and Bandar Abbas gradually lost its leading commercial role in the lower part, after 1750. On the Arab side Muscat and Zubara (Qatar) had an increased role, profiling of the trade of the other declining places. (Floor, 2007: XI). Even smaller ports saw temporary increases in their commercial activities. As Willem Floor wrote, any important changes appearing in the Gulf area resulted from the involvement of European companies in local conflicts (Dutch and English), even if they would have preferred to remain neutral in order to protect their profitable activities.

One of the best traveller reports comes from a French jeweller who worked in pearls and precious stones: Jean Baptiste Tavernier. Tavernier made 6 trips to the area over the course of 30 years. He travelled with a few French and Armenians partners to Turkey, Persia, and the Indies during the 17th century. His trade in pearls brought him in contact with royal and imperial courts and he offered a good knowledge on the selection, valuation of pearls. In fact, the pearl industry of Mannar Bay was not so profitable for the Portuguese according to the study published by a Sri Lankan historian (Kingsley M. De Silva, 1978). For the Portuguese, the most important source of income was the tax on pearl divers, the rent on the shops and a duty for the right to trade. Compared with the large land revenue of the local kings or communities or indeed of the profits the Portuguese made from the monopoly on Sri Lankan cinnamon in the 1630s, the annual revenue derived from the pearl fishery appears trifling.

The peculiarity of the pearl banks in the sea around Mannar Bay, which is in a passage between southern India and the west coast of Sri Lanka, was the vanishing of the oysters from season to season, sometime for decades. British maritime biologists researched the problem and concluded that the shifts may result from monsoon turbulence and biological maritime diseases.

The tendency of the historians of Asia is to argue that the impact of the Europeans, at least in its initial stages, did not lead to immediate and far reaching changes. The Portuguese were more tax gatherers than innovators. No changes in the methods of fishing or in the organisation of fisheries occurred under either the Portuguese or the Dutch. The British, to my knowledge, introduced changes in the sanitary conditions because they understood the effect of epidemic outbreak on the trade.

It seems, from De Silva’s research, that the main success of the Portuguese was converting some indigenous people to Roman Catholicism. To accomplish that they offered a reduced tax to Catholic fishermen. This was the time when many Christian missionary groups started coming and settling in Asia. For example in Basra in the 18th century one priest was in charge of the warehouse (khán) where all the European merchants passing by could rest and deposit their goods. This priest was also the French consul, spoke several languages, like Spanish and Arabic, and dealt with the Ottoman authorities in cases involving any European merchants.

In 1658, the pearl fishery of Ceylon fell to the Dutch, ending the Portuguese connection. From a document written by a British officer in 1876, the Dutch had only four good years of pearl diving in 140 years of occupation. The primary trade products were elephants, cinnamon, and areca-nuts (betel nuts).
Like the Portuguese before them, the Dutch never succeeded in taking over the intense trade that occurs between India, the Gulf and the Red Sea (Subrahmanyam, 1999: 265). They mostly followed the system of “travel-concession” (cartazé) which allowed local captains to sail with their shipment after paying a concession fee.

The breakdown of the central government in Persia in 1722 and resulting four decades of warfare (Floor, 2007: XI) meant that the 18th century was one of great upheaval, affecting the Gulf area, from the Ottoman Basra to Oman. In its wake it left poverty, insecurity, oppression and war.

In the 19th century (mostly between 1830 and 1860) the principal Gulf area need was grain (wheat and barley). The regional merchants from the Ottoman provinces exchanged basic foodstuffs and animal products for textiles, wood, sugar and tea from British India. The merchants from the Gulf exchanged mostly pearls, rice, horses, and dates (Fattah, 1997: 139-157).

In fact foodstuffs were always the main need for the local population in the Gulf region. But the situation was so often at unstable because of the resistance to defend regional trade against British efforts to capture part of it and export bans on grain reserves in Muhammara in 1870, for example. Also the imposition of grain monopolies in Iraq after 1865 by the Ottoman authorities contributed towards the misery of the population and of the regional merchants. In consequence the mid-nineteen century saw growing resistance movements, starving peasants and petty traders, and finally, regional traders from Baghdad and Basra left their place of origin and relocated to Kuwait, Bahrain, and Muscat. Above all, many instances of drought, plagues, and epidemic outbreaks cause damage and persuaded merchants to move their business from place to place.

The example of the grain trade may help explain the complexity of studying the pearl trade. We know that the struggle for supply and control in lower Iraq and the Gulf was worse in the period from 1877 to 1898 (Fattah, 1997:159). But this period was also the best for the export of pearls from the Gulf to India (Bombay), where the European pearl dealers use to get their supplies.

By 1860-1865 we know (after Co. Lewis Pelly and W. Palgrave) that the Kuwait’s merchant fleet had become the largest in the Gulf, bigger even than Bahrain’s, and Kuwait was the most active port on the Persian Gulf (Al-Hijji, 2010:8). As Fernand Braudel (1979, I:143) put it, each country, each period of time had its “royal goods” that make exchanges more profitable.

A recent book written by a British historian (Onley, 2007: 44), provides a good analyse of the maritime problems after the British took hegemony in the Gulf in 1819-20. For him “British India’s initial interest in Eastern Arabia grew out of a need to protect its ship and subjects in Arabian waters. In the late 18th and early 19th century, the Strait of Hormuz was controlled by the Al Qawasim family of Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah. Much of the Al Qawasim’s revenue came from tolls, which they levied on all shipping in and out of the Gulf. Partly out of understanding, partly out of arrogance, the British refused to pay these tolls... In response, the Al Qawasim raided British shipping, an act the British considered piracy”. As always, trade suffered from these conflicts.

But modern statistics show an increase of the pearl trade after the second half of the 19th century, created by more demand from the Gulf and Ceylon for the European market. The world economic crisis and the introduction of cultured Japanese pearl bring its collapse in the 1930s (Montigny, 1999; 2007).

The exchange of goods had other effects in many aspects like social and cultural one. As the very good example, is the word chau, from Tamil origin, still in use today for the valuation of the oriental pearl (Montigny, 2009).

Raili and Reima Pietilä are the best known Finnish architects, with the exception of Alvar Aalto. In 1969 the Pietiläs and three other international architecture groups were to participate in an architectural competition related to the improvement of the Kuwait City Old Town area. Raili and Reima Pietilä were also invited to take part in the international competition for planning the Sea Corniche area in Dubai 1974. In the latter part of the 1970s architectural planning and building had become a relatively remarkable part of the Finnish export trade.

The disputed position of Pietilä’s work within the narrow field of Finnish architecture has led, in his home country, to a long period of silence surrounding the work – while international interest has grown steadily. It is mostly foreigners who have written about Pietilä, the best known being Malcolm Quantrill and Roger Connah. However, a seminar organised by the Architectural Society in autumn 2005 brought forth a range of views and experiences regarding the architecture of Pietilä, this time mainly Finnish ones.

For many years the architecture of Raili and Reina Pietilä has proved difficult to build and to understand. Starting in the late 1950s, Reima tirelessly wrote and developed much of the morphological thinking and genius loci philosophy associated with their work. Landscape inseparable from forest and lake held a hunter’s instinct for survival. They made, from this literal approach, an architecture all their own by balancing the rational with an organic and cultural expressionism. Only now, at the beginning of 21st century, with so little civic courage around and so little encouragement for diversity, is the Pietiläs’ approach to architecture,
their tectonics and robust material poetics, beginning to invite re-assessment. Lakes, trees, rocks, ice, animals, clouds - the metaphors of natural forms are seen more often in Pietiläs’ texts than cultural associations – though these are found there, too. Did Pietiläs’ architecture represent something very Finnish or rather something very universal, romantic or rational? How in the design and building process did speech and words turn into lines and eventually buildings? In the following there is a choice of some examples of their public buildings and their thoughts and views for giving these a special character and identity through a proper architectural solution.

In the Universal Exhibition Brussels, the young architect amazed the public with “a modular pavilion in wood” that immediately captured international attention 1957. The pavilion was appraised from two completely different points of view: one founded on national and local features and the other seeing it as a purely abstract composition. Pietilä says the architecture is in fact double based; of a universal form and of special character, at the same time. Pietiläs’ orginal experiments with shape were taken one step further in the Dipoli Congress Center in Otaniemi, Espoo, close to Helsinki in 1966. “Was it possible to design a surrealist building that is functionally adequate”? Dipoli defends the right to be different, yet it is architecture. It opposes the view that architecture is only good if it is deadly serious.

“How to create a dignified church space by means of new architecture – and with the concept of art as architecture?”, asked the Kaleva Church, Tampere. Pietilä has said, that he did not know the rules for designing a correct modern church. But what he knows is that in good modern architecture the exterior and interior spaces form a constructive union. An architectural imagery emerges and communicates there.

Finnish Embassy, New Delhi 1963/1985. “In terms of expression, the masses form two long elements - the roofs – which are the main element of the building: one large spatial sculpture that looks like snow which has been driven into ridges and grown into mountain peaks by the wind”. The irregularly cut roof ends resemble the snow sculptures in the winter ice around the Gulf of Finland. It is winter art of the wind.

Suvikumpu, Tapiola, Espoo 1967-69. The Suvikumpu residential area is linked with the final phase of building the Tapiola garden city in Espoo. The line of buildings consists of 140 homes. The colouring of the walls – from white to green – imitates surrounding nature at different seasons. The arrangement of the mass of these buildings is isomorphic to the topography of the place. The masses are split downward an irregularly eroded rock, responding to the isomorphy of the rock.

Sief Palace Area Buildings, Kuwait, 1969/1982. This is a building complex “that reflects local architecture and history, and some of the characteristics of a boarder Arabic culture interpreted at a new general level. The buildings used the latest technology and allowed for local requirements in relation to light, temperature and wind”. The planning task consisted of the extension of the Old Sief Palace, built in Arab style in 1963, and the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs buildings. Avoiding monumentalism was given as an important guide line.

All the competitors were asked to visit Kuwait for 3 – 4 weeks. Pietilas accepted the invitation and stayed the agreed time in 1969-1970. Reima Pietilä had often written about the significance of locality, the genius logi, in architectural design. According to his thinking, the shape and aesthetics...
of the building begin to grow on the history and culture, which always are manmade and thereby local. Following this ideology and guidance the Pietiläs familiarised themselves with the traditional handicrafts – textiles, red carpets and tent partitions. This was important as Reima moves his ideas forward through thinking, drawing and talking. Listening to the local music helped

The extension to the Old Palace followed the Islamic style. For the new building complex Reima wanted to find its own genuine expression architecturally. Climate and history provided inspiration; old Uruk city walls and pre-historical findings also influenced their thinking. The arcades – sun-protecting shelters – provide an ample opportunity for a poetic imagery of shape and shadow. The ceramic tiles follow the local colouring, the fountains look like coral flowers.

The colours were also used informatively. The building complex was completed in 1982. The total floor area was 27 300 m2. When the building began Kuwait was living a change. The real building boom began and the first tall buildings were built. Among the foreigners Scandinavian architects were

favoured: Dane Jorn Utzon designed the National Assembly (1972-82), Swede Sune Lindstrom the Kuwait Towers (1976) and Dane Anne Jacobson the Central Bank of Kuwait (1973-76).

Deira Sea Corniche, Dubai, 1974. This is a five kilometre sea wall, a ribbon like zone, created to house marinas, sports grounds, cultural buildings, museums, housing and commercial activities, and Al Rashid Tower Plaza with large covered areas. At the other end of this long spiral development a new university town was to be located, with the student campus situated on the shore like a small fishing village. “Traditional solutions on shoreline towns on the Arabian peninsula were used by tunneling the sea winds into urban structure along narrow alleyways, and by covered pedestrian ways sheltered from the sun”. This proposal for the competition was not realized.

Hervanta, Tampere, 1975-79. This project combined “a creative and theoretical approach with topical theme the relationship between Modern and Post-Modern. This is, on one hand, a line of individual buildings and on the other, a series of indoor and outdoor spaces, which lead residents from one building to another”. The series of axial buildings must be sociable, enlivening and pushing people to walk, and they will attract, awake curiosity with their wall surfaces leading onwards. What is there on the other side.

Lieksa Church, Finland, 1979-84. The new church was built to replace the old cruciform wooden church which had burnt. The plan of the new church followed the same, older form. Looking at the central dome from outside, without the four classical temple gables, which give it height, the new building looks low. The cruciform skylight brings in a new idea. The modernistic narrow sidelight-roof light strips are also something new. The result is a church which is both modern and Lutheran and a continuation of Orthodox and Classical tradition. The building place on the church island has much history. It was a highway of cultural communication between the forest Finns of the east and west. The first church was an Orthodox tsausona, followed by the first Lutheran church which also burnt down. This church, now, is the fourth one. Pietiläs asks: Does this chain or sequence of devaluation and rebuilding on the same place signify anything culturally, in a way that a historical influence could emerge from the lower layers to the upper ones.

Särestö Gallery, Lapland, 1972. This building was ordered by Reidar Särestöniemi, a painter, was built near where he lived. “In the earlier days at Särestö, together with Reidar, I tried to formulate an idea of the building that had to be a painting gallery, sauna and swimming pool from dead arctic logs. The artist felt that we had not yet found the right architecture for the building. Then a tractor moved a pile of this dead wood for more that one and a half kilometres to the yard – the pile rose to the height of a house. We passed the pile and Reidar stopped to look at the stack and its form and said: “To my mind this is already beautiful.” Thus the design was born.

Metso Library, Tampere, 1978-86. This library offers plethora of spatial experiences, starting with the main entrance canopy, which is reminiscent of a bird’s peak (“Metso” Capercaillie) continuing to the titled cupola over the foyer, and to the huge volume of the main collection area supported on arches. Metso represents a cultural institution with its own supreme identity. “I attempt to reintroduce a metaphorical context into modern design”.

Mäntyniemi, (Mica Moraine), Official Residence of the President of Finland, 1983-93. The diverse design resembled labyrinth but appeared to be distinctly functional. It united the building with its surroundings beautifully, attaching itself firmly with the ground with its high stone base and reaching upwards to tree branches like a simple, delicate glazed lantern. The early sketches for this building lack hard-structured exteriors. Thus the design could be developed as a complete interior.
the meaning of creativity, improvisation and meditation. They ignored prejudices and strict notions of style, making their work full of originality. While these works are not numerous, all are full of identity.

Raili Pietilä and the daughter Annuukka donated the office’s archives containing thousands of drawings, sketches and photos, and even 40 architectural models to The Museum of Finnish Architecture 2002. All the drawing data has been catalogued electronically and the catalogue will be available to researchers at the Museum of Finnish Architecture. The museum presented a large exhibition on their works based on this material and developed a teachers’ guide for use at schools.

To conclude with some lines about the architect’s approach to architecture, from Reima’s lecture delivered to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1970. I confess that I approach architecture along my own subjective path. I have my own means by which I can picture the architectural task using complex verbal and pictorial material. I use for example what I can content transporters which interact throughout the long development of a project. They can be prototype landscapes of Finland seen much as a National Romantic photographer would see his native country. Or they may then be imaginary shapes designed to represent the Finnish landscape. There are also abstract forms that one can imagine as fictitious spaces and finally some diagrams or graphs simulating environmental space characteristics. When assimilated within my own design process these factors become more advanced image concepts and gradually from these come the first primary sketches of a building.

The Pietiläs, Reima (1923-1993) and Raili (1926 - ), have been challenging modernism in architecture through their views. In their planning they stressed

Islamic heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kenan Musić
Presented in English
9 January 2012

Bosnia and Herzegovina (abbreviated BIH) is a southeastern European country, situated on the western Balkan Peninsula. Bordered by Croatia to the north, west and south, Serbia to the east, and Montenegro to the southeast, Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost landlocked, except for the 26 kilometres (16 miles) of coastline on the Adriatic Sea surrounding small town of Neum. The capital of the country is Sarajevo. Today, Bosnia is independent state, with a population of approximately 4 million. In the central and southern interior of the country the geography is mountainous, in the northwest it is moderately hilly, and the northeast is predominantly flatland. The inland is a geographically larger region and has a moderate continental climate, bookended by hot summers and cold and snowy winters. The southern tip of the country has a Mediterranean climate and plain topography.

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The country is home to three ethnic groups and in the same time three religions: Islam, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians. Bosniaks are the largest group of the three, with Serbs second and Croats third. Regardless of ethnicity, a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina is often identified in English as a Bosnian. The terms Herzegovinian and Bosnian are maintained as a regional rather than ethnic distinction, and Herzegovina has no precisely defined borders of its own. Moreover, the country was simply called “Bosnia” (without Herzegovina) until the Austro-Hungarian occupation at the end of the nineteenth century.

Bosnia has been inhabited since at least the Neolithic age. The earliest Neolithic population was defined by hot summers and cold and snowy winters. The southern tip of the country has a Mediterranean climate and plain topography.

Mr. Kenen Musić is a lecturer and Chair of Hadith on the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo. He earned both an Ijaza in Hizb al-Qur’an and in Hadith. Mr. Musić’s publication Radost gazija: Mustafa Pruščak, život i djelo [The Joy of Ghazis: Mustafa Pruščak, His Life and Work] was published in Sarajevo in 2011. Other works include two articles for the Journal of the Faculty of Islamic Theology in Sarajevo.

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started in 3rd century, but Rome did not complete its annexation of the region until 5th century. Following the split of the Roman Empire between 337 and 395 CE, Dalmatia and Pannonia became parts of the Western Roman Empire. But by the 6th century, Emperor Justinian had reconquered the area for the Byzantine Empire. The Illyrians were conquered by the Avars in the 6th century. Modern knowledge of the political situation in the west Balkans during the Early Middle Ages is unclear. The Slavs, tribes from east, brought with them a tribal social structure which probably fell apart and gave way to Feudalism. The Slavic tribes also brought their mythology and pagan system of beliefs. Along with the Slavic settlers, the native Illyrians were Christianized. Thus, Slavic Bosnian tribes remained pagans for a longer time, and finally converted to the Bogumil Christian faith.

The Ottoman conquest of Bosnia marked a new era in the country's history and introduced changes in the political and cultural landscape. The Ottomans allowed for the preservation of Bosnia's identity by incorporating it as an integral province of the Ottoman Empire with its historical name and territorial integrity — a unique case among subjugated states in the Balkans. Within Bosnia the Ottomans introduced a number of key changes in the territory's socio-political administration; including a new landholding system, a reorganization of administrative units, and a complex system of social differentiation by class and religious affiliation.

The four centuries of Ottoman rule also had a drastic impact on Bosnia's population make-up, which changed several times as a result of the empire's conquests, frequent wars with European powers, forced and economic migrations, and epidemics. A native Slavic-speaking Muslim community emerged and eventually became the largest of the ethno-religious groups. The Bosnian Christian communities also experienced major changes. The Bosnian Franciscans (and the Catholic population as a whole) were protected by official imperial decree, while the Bosnian Church disappeared altogether.

As the Ottoman Empire continued their rule in the Balkans (Rumelia), Bosnia was somewhat relieved of the pressures of being a frontier province, and experienced a period of general welfare. A number of cities, such as Sarajevo and Mostar, were established and grew into regional centers of trade and urban culture and were then visited by Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi in 1648. Within these cities, various Ottoman Sultans financed the construction of many works of Bosnian architecture such as the country's first library in Sarajevo, madrasas, a school of Sufi philosophy, and a clock tower (Sahat Kula), bridges such as the Stari Most, the Gazi Husrev-beg's Mosque. Furthermore, some Bosnians played influential roles in the Ottoman Empire's cultural and political history during this time. Some of them were admirals and army generals such as Isa-Beg Isaković, Gazi Husrev-beg and Telli Haan Pasha; administrators such as Ferhat-paša Sokolović and Osman Gradaščević; and Grand Viziers such as the influential Mehmed Paša Sokolović. Some Bosnians emerged as Sufi mystics, prominent scholars; and poets in the Turkish, Arabic, and Persian languages.

At the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister obtained the occupation and administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although an Austro-Hungarian side quickly came to an agreement with Bosnians, tensions remained in certain parts of the country (particularly the south) and a mass emigration of predominantly Slavic dissidents occurred. However, a state of relative stability was reached soon enough and Austro-Hungarian authorities were able to embark on a number of social and administrative reforms which intended to make Bosnia and Herzegovina into a “model colony”.

Within three years of formal occupation of Bosnia Herzegovina, Austria-Hungary, in 1881, obtained German, and more importantly, Russian, approval for the annexation of Bosnia. With the aim of establishing the province as a stable political model that would help dissipate rising South Slav nationalism, Habsburg rule did much to codify laws, to introduce new political practices, and to provide for modernisation. The Austro-Hungarian Empire built the three Roman Catholic churches in Sarajevo in short period after occupation.

Political tensions culminated on 28 June 1914, when Serb nationalist youth Gavrilo Princip assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo – an event that proved to be the spark that set off World War I. Although some Bosnians died serving in the armies of the various warring states, Bosnia and Herzegovina itself managed to escape the conflict relatively unscathed.

Europe is not exclusively a Christian entity. European identity includes essential Muslim components and neither Christianity nor Islam is by origin a European religion. The earliest spread of Islam dates centuries before the completion of the spread of Christianity in a large part of Europe. In the Iberian Peninsula as well as in southern France, parts of Switzerland and all Mediterranean islands, Islam spread during eight century and remained the main creed until the end of fifteenth century. In the Balkans, Islam began to spread as early as the eight century; and on great scale remained the prevailing religion until the mid-nineteenth century. The case of Islam's European identity, specifically in the Balkans, and the affirmation of Europe's Islamic identity is of utmost importance for integration of modern Europe, and as such it presents the key factor of its historic, cultural, and spiritual unity as well as for stability in future.

Culture is a tangible manifestation of the values that are based upon values. For centuries Bosnia was place of interaction between religions and cultures. Unfortunately, this interaction has been burdened with wars that are often motivated by faith. That is why many historians, in their description of the relationship at that time, cannot describe exactly how skewed the perceptions of the time were. They had difficulty based on the desire to have a description which keeps alive the spirit of war.

Bosnia is now called live Andalusia. The historical fact that Islam was present in South-Eastern Europe for such long period imposes dilemma: What is behind this presence? How did diversity survived and in what value system? Can we make Chorillo any relationship between culture, as material part of identity, and intellectual foundation for heritage in Bosnia in specific period? The influence of Islamic values on social life, life of Muslims and life of Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Jews form a unique picture of civilization on European soil. The Jews settled in Bosnia after being expelled from Spain. It happened with the consent of the Ottoman sultans.

Three core values of Islamic teaching, in my point of view, gave this cultural diversity power to survive so long. First value is freedom of belief, second protection of life and third is the principle of good deeds. Human civilization can be treated as a unique building founded from range of cultures, and it is based on the values of each culture in total.
The presence of Islam in this part of Europe has left an indelible mark on virtually all aspects of social, political and economic life. The formation of cities, the establishment of market covered bazaars, educational institutions, and public life was founded on these values. Not only houses of worship, but endowments to support their work were established in this period.

School examples are many, as schools were established in concert with foundations (endowments) to guarantee the intellectual freedom (endowments) to guarantee the intellectual freedom of teachers. Almost every major city in Bosnia had a school of this kind. Human life, freedom and good deeds made coexistence possible. The impact that these schools had on the public life in Bosnia is witnessed by numerous examples. Mustafa Pruscaj, professor at one of these schools, wrote a piece titled: "Mercy and compassion toward all creatures in Arabic, addressing it to all Muslim scholars of his 18th century.

When we know that the wars of that time were motivated by faith and fact that this scholar served as a judge and Mufti (religious authority) then his discourse confirms thesis mentioned earlier. In addition, he wrote a comprehensive book of more than two hundred pages which deals with war and conflict situations and how to deal in such situations according to Islamic teaching.

In an era of globalisation it is necessary to know the past in order to build, on positive experiences, a more beautiful future for the next generation. When the discourse clash of civilizations is dominant, each example of cohabitation is precious. Without the protection of human lives as core value of Islam and freedom of faith culture cannot develop.

Bosnia epitomizes a partial centuries-old struggle against outside influences combined with the absorption of these influences into one of the most diverse cultures in Europe. Indeed, few places on earth feature an Orthodox church and a Catholic church, a mosque and a synagogue under easy walking distance of each other. If there is any city in Europe that effortlessly straddles east and west, it is Bosnia. Here the Byzantine and Ottoman empires of the east and the Roman, Venetian and Austro-Hungarian empires of the west left an indelible mark through culture, traditions and religions. A walk through Sarajevo Bosnian capital is a walk through its past.

Concerning the core values mentioned, we can find in Balkans’ history a positive image and strong argument that a life of diversity is possible. To recognize Islamic heritage and legacy in southeast Europe, for the Balkans Muslim population and others, means the quest to understand the past and regain the values upon which culture rests. In light of this, the example of the Balkans would have tremendous spiritual, psychological and cultural implications on people who want to explore the positive experiences of human civilization.

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describes the value of each example.

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Kim Kyung-Sik
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Linda Komaroff

Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih
International Prize for Arab Fiction's [IPAF] 2013 Excerpts from 'The Shortlist’

Marilyn Jenkins-Medina

Saud Soudavar

Thanks to Mr Music for the photographs for this article.
Sheikha Hussah and a delegation from Kuwait travelled to Jodhpur, India from 8 – 10 March 2013 to participate in the Jodhpur One World Retreat. The event was organised and hosted by His Highness Maharaja Gaj Singh II to raise money for the Indian Head Injury Foundation, which he and the Maharani founded.

HH the Maharaja created the organisation after his son, Yuvraj Shivraj Singh, suffered a traumatic brain injury and he discovered that India is known in medical circles as the “Brain Injury Capital of the World.” Today, the foundation has three primary objectives: to reduce the number of head injuries in India; to improve the outcome of head injury treatment; and to enhance the lives of head injury survivors.
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