About the journal

Hadeeth ad-Dar is a publication of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. Every year, the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) organises a series of lectures as part of the cultural season. Hadeeth ad-Dar was created to share these lectures with academic and cultural institutions and Friends of the DAI around the world. Cultural Season 22 will begin on 26 September 2016 and, as in previous seasons, will present scholars in a wide variety of fields related to the arts and culture of the Islamic world.

The Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) was created in 1983 to support the loan of objects from The al-Sabah Collection to the State of Kuwait and operates under the auspices of the National Council of Culture, Arts, and Letters. Over time the mission has grown to include promoting the fusion of people, cultures and ideas both in Kuwait and in countries hosting DAI exhibitions and loans from the collection.

Contents

02
11 February 2013
Medium and Message in the Monumental Epigraphy of Medieval Cairo
Bernard O’Kane

08
23 September 2013
Treasures from the Islamic World in the Tareq Rajab Museum
Ziad Rajab

15
30 September 2013
“The History Book of Majorca” by Ibn Amira Al Makhzoumi: Historical Literature, or Literary History?
Nicolás Roser Nebot

18
10 February 2014
Defining an Early Islamic Phenomenology: The Experiential Dimension of Umayyad Art and Architecture
Theodore Van Loan

23
10 March 2014
The Falcon and the Preacher: Middle Eastern Journeys of the Emperor Frederick II and St. Francis of Assisi
Valerio Cappozzo

28
12 January 2015
Orientalism
Mansour Ahmad Aboukhamseen

This publication is sponsored in part by:

Burgan Bank

LNS 1072 C
Ceramic dish
Iran, circa 16th century
D: 41.5 cm in diameter, H: 8.4 cm
Medium and Message in the Monumental Epigraphy of Medieval Cairo

Bernard O’Kane

Presented in English
11 February 2013

We have in Cairo an unbroken sequence of inscriptions on major monuments from the 9th century onwards. Given the hundreds of monuments and thousands of inscriptions that have survived, this permits us to analyse them in a variety of ways, such as the visual aesthetics of texts, their relative lengths, the sizes of the scripts used, issues of legibility or the lack of it, and the exploration of the make-up and design of the inscriptions from their textual contents to the non-literary uses that they served.

A striking example of the power and importance of the written word in this context is demonstrated by the inscription on the façade of the mausoleum fronting the khanaqah complex of Baybars al-Jashinkir (1309). At the right hand corner most of the writing in the initial cartouche has been scratched out, although the part that remains begins with the name of the founder of the institution, Rukn al-Din Baybars. Just before the khanaqah was erected, Baybars had usurped the throne from the previous reigning Sultan, al-Nasir Muhammad. The historian Maqrizi, so often the key to our understanding of monuments in Cairo, informs us that when Baybars abdicated, the sultan al-Nasir Muhammad, having returned to power in 1310, had Baybars executed, closed his khanaqah and effaced his name from the inscription band on the façade above the windows. Since his name is actually still on the façade, the most likely interpretation is that his royal titles of al-malik al-muzaffar were effaced, leaving the legal requirement of Baybar’s ownership of the building intact, but obliterating his pretensions to royalty.

One major problem today in assessing the impact that inscriptions had on the viewer is the extent to which their legibility would originally have been much greater. In addition to the degradation caused by natural abrasion, wind erosion, and layers of dust, we should remember that the originals would have been enhanced by the application of colour. Painted inscriptions on flat wooden surfaces have this as an essential ingredient, but it is not usually realized, that probably almost all stone and stucco inscriptions were also painted. The recent restoration of the Mamluk complex of Umm al-Sultan Sha’ban shows this clearly. Remains of gold painted letters on a green background were found on the large inscription band that goes around the courtyard. The

Bernard O’Kane is Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at the American University of Cairo, a sought-after speaker and noted participant in international conferences. He is also the author of numerous books, the latest being “The Illustrated Guide to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo”, and articles.
same colour scheme was found on the inscription on the base of the mausoleum domes. This inscription was accessed only by placing scaffolding from floor to ceiling. It is unlikely that this was done at any other time after the mausoleum’s foundation, therefore ruling out possible later interventions.

Ibn Tulun’s own mosque (figure 3) is the only part of his urban foundation of al-Qata‘i that still stands. According to legend, the mosque had all of the Qur’an inscribed on the wooden friezes that run throughout the mosque under the ceiling. Much of this has disappeared, but the space available can be divided by the length of the remaining part, which shows that there would have been room for only a third of the Quran. Nevertheless, this would still have been a striking display of the word of God; the remaining text displays the same simplicity as that of the Nilometer inscriptions, but now lacks the paint that would have made it more conspicuous.

The monumental size of its Qur’anic inscriptions is in stark contrast with its original foundation inscriptions. Parts of three identical copies of the foundation inscriptions that survived earlier were published in the Description de l’Égypte; now just half of one of the lone surviving panels, found in repairs in the 19th century, has been erected on a pier in the main prayer hall. Their original location is not known, but they would have needed to be at a low level to be legible.

The letters and background of the script on the Nilometer and the mosque of Ibn Tulun were unadorned. A major development in script came in the next century, with the introduction of floriated Kufic. This is seen first in a mid-ninth century funerary stele, although whether it might have appeared first on earlier no longer extant architectural examples cannot be known.

The arrival of the Fatimids signals major changes in the use of monumental inscriptions. Although the mosque of Muhammad ibn al-Khayrun at Qayrawan (252 AH/866-7 CE) is the earliest known Islamic monument to display a foundation inscription on the exterior of the building, this quickly became standard on Cairene examples (figure 4). The mosque of al-Azhar no longer has its original portal, but the mosque of al-Hakim had inscriptions on its portal and, for the first time, on its minarets. All are in the new floriated style. Those on the minarets are particularly interesting in their content and locations. The minarets are of different shapes, both from each other, and in having tiers that change from square to circular in the case of the northern one, and square to octagonal in the case of the southern. The lowest inscriptions visible on the northern minaret were in two circular medallions containing the word “Allah”. Further up the northern minaret, were two other circular medallions on the west and north face. Only that on the north
side is legible; it contained Qur’ān 5:58, arranged anti-clockwise on its perimeter, and the phrase: “from the darkness into the light,” which occurs in several Qur’ānic verses, in two horizontal lines within the circle.

Both the content and design of these inscriptions are worth examining in more detail. Whereas the outer Qur’ānic inscription mentions pan-Islamic concerns of prayer appropriate for a mosque, the inner displays a concern with light that is an abiding subject of Isma’ili ta’wil, as evidenced, for instance, by the epithets related to light for their major mosques: al-Azhar (the resplendent), al-Anwar (the shining; the original name of the mosque of al-Hakim) and al-Aqmar (the moonlight).

These inscriptions are the first surviving in Egypt to include the name and titles of the founder, which are situated on large friezes both on the northern and western minarets. That on the northern is 68cm tall, and located around 10m from the ground. It is angled slightly outwards, and it has been suggested that this was to make it more legible. On the western minaret there were two foundation inscription friezes; a smaller one 40cm in height, located 8m from the ground, and another, almost twice as tall, about 12m above the ground. It is indeed likely that these were designed to be read and to advertise the founder’s generosity, a factor that may well have hastened the decision, extraordinary as it was, to hide the minarets behind bastions in the year 1010. The only rational explanation for this action is that the minarets, being more than one, and built in tiers of different shapes, where specifically designed to remind viewers of those of the Hijaz, and when al-Hakim’s relations with the rulers in Makkah soured, he wished to cover-up this association.

The inscription on the western bastion (the only one that remains) is smaller, only 43cm high, than the largest on the minarets, but since it is solely Qur’ānic and reasonably close to the ground it still could probably have been read without great difficulty. A word of caution should be mentioned here: the interpretative weight that some previous authors brought to bear here upon the choice of Qur’ānic verses was based on a mistaken attribution.

The inscriptions on the gates of Cairo have floriation that was manipulated to highlight certain parts, particularly those with the name of the patron. Another related example is on the mihrab added by al-Mustansir to the mosque of Ibn Tulun. Here, there are inscriptions of varying sizes on six different locations. Only the three largest are elaborately decorated, but the letters of the inscriptions themselves are no longer floriated, instead they attract attention by, for the two largest, a foliated scroll that weaves behind the letters, or by a geometric background. The name of the patron, al-Mustansir, appears in the first place a viewer’s eye is likely to rest on, at the beginning of the vertical portion of the frame of the mihrab at the top right. Another interesting feature of this inscription is its departure from the classical canons of Kufic that usually have a constant baseline: here words or parts of words are superposed on two or even three levels, as in the case aba’l’hī at the end of the line.

At a later Fatimid neighbourhood mosque, that of Al-Aqmar (519 AH/1125-6 CE) we have the most comprehensive scheme of inscriptions on the façade to date (figure 5). The largest, runs all the way along the façade, just below the top, another, slightly smaller, is just above mid-height. Surprisingly, both are virtually identical, consisting of foundation inscriptions in the name of the Fatimid Caliph al-Musta’il and his vazir al-Ma’mun, although variety is provided by the style, with the upper being floriated, and the lower plain with a foliate scroll behind. Here too care was taken with the placing of the name of the caliph: on the top line, it was at the beginning of the panel on the top right of the pishtaq; on the lower band it is right in the middle, immediately above the entrance doorway. Directly above the caliph’s name is the roundel.

The use of different levels on the Kufic on the mihrab of al-Afdal in the Ibn Tulun mosque was a sign of the next major change in Cairo’s epigraphy, the introduction of naskh. The earliest monumental datable example of this is the cenotaph from the shrine of al-Husayn, now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. It was formerly considered, solely on account of the presence of naskh, an Ayyubid work, but Caroline Williams has convincingly demonstrated that a Fatimid date is much more likely. It has been argued that the rejection of naskh of the Fatimids was an ideological reaction to its promotion as a sign of Sunnism by the Zangids, but these examples, as well as other in Fatimid decorative arts, show that this was not the case.
Figure 4  

A more even distribution of naskh and Kufic is seen on the slightly later cenotaph that Salah al-Din provided (in 574 AH/1187-9 CE) for the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i. The rectangular base contains Kufic only, the pyramidal top naskh only. Both the upper and the lower parts have Quranic verses followed by the full name and genealogy of the deceased al-Shafi'i, but significantly, this is followed in the upper part by this sentence: "(It is) the workmanship of Ubayd the carpenter known as Ibn Ma'ali. He made it the months of the year 574/1178-9, may God have mercy upon him and upon whoever prays for mercy for him and upon all those who have worked with him of carpenters and designers, and all believers." This is one of the earliest examples of a craftsman's signature, commonplace in many other parts of the Islamic world, but a rarity in Cairo. The craftsman came from an Aleppan family, where it was more common to find craftsmen's signatures. In the context of the inscription as a whole, more attention is called to the craftsman's achievements by the lengthy phrase after his name calling for blessings upon him and his co-workers, and it is therefore no surprise to find that he used the more legible naskh for his name.

More evidence for the slow change from Kufic to naskh, and its lack of ideological underpinnings, is seen in a recently found inscription of Salah al-Din relating to construction of the eastern wall in Cairo, the earliest known Ayyubid inscription in Egypt (573 AH/1177-8 CE). It is in a Kufic unchanged from late Fatimid examples.

But, naskh quickly replaced Kufic as the default script for monumental inscriptions, with the latter usually reserved for easily readable religious phrases. The most noticeable advance took place almost exactly a hundred years later, on the façade of the complex of Qalawun (683 AH/1284-5 CE). Two aspects, both of which contributed to greater legibility, are prominent: size and location. Firstly, it is at the height of roughly one third that of the façade, making it much closer to eye-level. Secondly, it is just over one meter high, and runs the whole length of the façade.

While it is true that the foundation inscription of Al-Aqmar also ran across the whole façade, that was a length of c. 20m; Qalawun’s façade is c. 72m. The content is also remarkable, for apart from the basmala at the beginning, it consists almost entirely of the Qalawun’s titles, advertising his prowess in ringing phrases such as "the king of the two continents and the two seas...king of kings of the Arabs and non-Arabs...possessor of the Egyptian lands, the Syrian territories, the Euphratian districts and the Hijazi provinces...treasure of the poor and dispossessed..." However, the disconnect between boast and reality in the last phrase may have been apparent to those unfortunate passers-by, who were press-ganged into joining the workforce, as a result of which some jurors even advocated the monument’s boycott. One slight miscalculation may also be noticed: the name of Qalawun is to be found not on the carved marble section over the main entrance, as one might expect, but on the limestone of the bay of the mausoleum before it.

The letters themselves of Qalawun’s foundation inscription are simply carved with a flat upper surface, as is the case with most Mamluk stone inscriptions. They were originally painted in gold which would have added to both their legibility and opulence, but occasionally we come across some inscriptions where much greater care was taken in the design and execution of the carving. The ensemble of inscriptions on the complex of Aslam al-Silahdar (745-6 AH/1344-5 CE) is worth examining in this respect. There are two portals, the lowest inscription of each having an inscription on which particular care was taken with the carving. That on the southern portal is Qur’anic; it has a spiral foliate scroll behind the letters. It also has a flat upper surface, but this is further engraved with scrollwork. The northwest portal has a foundation inscription; it too has a foliated spiral behind the letters, but in this case the letters themselves are curved in the round, and the finials of the uprights are delineated with a double border and further carving of spirals at the end.

The reason the lower inscription on the southern portal is Qur’anic, is that there is a separate inscription in a panel of three lines, just below the most eye-catching decoration of the whole ensemble, the intricate inlaid panel consisting of a radiating circular pattern within a square. The monument has recently been restored, and the restorers have called attention in the mausoleum to a common feature of Cairene epigraphy: its illegibility. Despite the great height of the mausoleum relative to its width, an inscription was placed at the inside base of the drum, where it is all but invisible to anyone standing within the mausoleum. A plaster cast of a quarter of the inscription was placed on the floor of the mausoleum to enable the beginning of the Qur’anic verse to be appreciated. The “symbolic
affirmation” of inscriptions, particularly Qur’anic ones, is a feature that has been commented by earlier scholars, and is much in evidence in Cairo, where height must have been an insuperable barrier to legibility before such visual aids as binoculars and telephoto lenses.

The single most impressive Mamluk building in Cairo is the complex of Sultan Hasan (1356-63), which also contains some of its most unusual inscriptions. Prominent among them is the Qur’anic inscription on the qibla iwan, that starts at the southwest corner of the courtyard, runs through the three walls of the iwan, and ends at the southeast corner of the courtyard. The inscription is in a style variously known as Eastern Kufic or broken cursive, that was common earlier as a script used for the main body of Qur’ans, but which by the Mamluk period was normally relegated to the script of choice for Qur’anic headings only. It is also found running around the courtyards and single iwans of the four madrasas in the complex. On the inscription in the Hanafi madrasa courtyard the name Muhammad ibn Bilik al-Muhssini is found, identifying him as the calligrapher (katabahu) and the supervisor of the construction (shadd ‘imaratih).

Muhammad al-Muhssini was a well-known member of the awlad al-nas, who had served first Sultan Hasan’s father, al-Nasir al-Muhammad, before becoming a prominent member of Sultan Hasan’s administration. Muhammad al-Muhssini’s brother, Ahmad, was an author, a poet and a calligrapher, who signed a copy of the Qur’an in 739 AH/1338-9 CE that has Eastern Kufic headings. Muhammad al-Muhssini himself, is also known to have calligraphed this Qur’an with Kufic headings, and it has been noticed how much of the stone-carved ornamentation of the complex resembles that of contemporary Qur’anic illumination. The beginning of the inscription in the courtyard, before the Qur’anic verse itself starts in the iwan, has the phrase, unusual in Mamluk epigraphy, a’udh bi’llah min al-shaytan al-rajim (I take refuge in God from Satan the accursed). It has been suggested astutely, that the inscription was originally designed to surround the whole of the courtyard, but because of the patron’s untimely death, this was an attempt to frame it in a more satisfactory manner. At the very beginning of this introductory phrase is a much smaller inscription written vertically, attributing the work to one ‘Abd Allah Muhammad al-Yamani, another example, rare in Cairo, of a craftsman’s signature.

The interior of the funerary chamber also has a large inscription, identifying it as a gubba, this time in naskh of carved and painted wood that runs around all the walls above dado height. Given the high quality of the inscriptions elsewhere in the building, the surprise here is that legibility seems to have won out over aesthetics, as the letters seem too large for the space they occupy within the frame, lacking the elegant uprights that are normally present.

A building complex that borrowed much from that of Sultan Hasan and its near neighbour, that of Qalawun, is Sultan Barquq’s (1384-6), situated on the main artery of the medieval city. Sultan Hasan’s portal, surprisingly, does not have a foundation inscription, but we have seen the use that Qalawun made of the whole façade to advertise his name and titles. So too did Barquq, and this time the layout of the inscription was more carefully planned to accommodate the name of the sultan on the visually most important part of the façade, the right-hand side of the projecting portal - a feature that both the complex of Qalawun and the intervening complex of his son al-Nasir Muhammad also lacked. This also meant that, like the southern portal of Aslam al-Salahdar, the inscription at the lower level could be Qur’anic, and like that of Aslam, this is also one distinguished for its unique aesthetic qualities. The uprights and the ends of letters are braided into a repeating knotted medallion that forms the upper border of the inscription.

Another form of inscription, whose primary concern was aesthetic, was a form of Kufic that appeared first the late 15th century on top of dadoes, usually employing bitumen inlaid in marble. The letters are uniformly thin, which allows for deep projections both below and above the baseline; they are also often accompanied by decorative motifs such as knotting of the stems and by floral or spiral elements in the upper margin. The closest parallel is the decorative headings of contemporary manuscripts.

**Decorative scripts**

Yet another variety of script prized primarily for its aesthetic qualities is square Kufic, first seen in Cairo in the mausoleum of Qalawun, where it is used on panels of semi-precious inlaid stone displaying the word Muhammad four times in a square; several squares are then superposed. Because the letters are geometricized and without diacritical marks, many forms can be read as more than one letter, making it difficult to read. Because of this, the content was usually reserved for common religious words or phrases, such as the shahada, Allah, and sometimes for Qur’anic verses. In one building, the late Mamluk complex of Abu’l-‘Ila, the shahada in square Kufic on a panel at the base of the minaret is unsurprisingly followed by the name Husayn ibn ‘Ali, although since he is buried within the building and was its dedicatee, the name would have been familiar to those in the neighbourhood.

Two other more complicated square Kufic panels are known from the Ottoman period century, one in the extension by ‘ Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda to the mosque of al-Azhar (1751); the other, now in the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art, originally from the Shrine of Sitta Nafisa. In a stunning example of design they display inlaid within an octagon in black and white stone, the names of God, of Muhammad, and the
ten companions of Muhammad, who were promised paradise, those who were amongst his earlier followers.

Content

The most common type of inscription by far that has survived on Cairo’s monuments is Qur’anic. This is to be expected on religious buildings, but even on secular buildings they are very common. Another text with religious connotations that was also common, first in religious and later in domestic architecture, was al-Busiri’s Burda; although composed in the 13th century, it was especially popular in the Ottoman period. Waqf inscriptions are rare; one notable exception is that of the complex of al-Ashraf Barsbay within the walls of the old city. Its waqf inscription begins in one of the most prominent places in the building, on a band running around the qibla iwan at the mid-height, which continues in the west iwan. It lists in great detail the major properties that were endowed to the complex, including wakalas, shops, markets, baths, apartments, mills, and land in many provinces. We are not informed about any prior problems in securing the revenue that may have inspired setting out the waqf in stone in this instance, but the inscription makes it clear that the beneficiaries included not just the madrasa personnel, but also the sultan’s descendants, who, in a case like this, may well also have been appointed overseers of the endowment.

There is one example of a non-religious, literary inscription, written on two stucco bands within the mausoleum of the amir Sunqur al-Sa’di (1315-21). They are extracts from the Maqamat of al-Hariri, one of the most popular medieval Arabic texts, and that which most frequently illustrated. The passages are eloquent admonitions to turn away from worldly pleasures before it is too late to repent, and they are evidence of the refined literary taste of the patron.

One other unique example may be mentioned, a hilya, which is a description of the physical features of the Prophet Muhammad. The earliest monumental example known is probably one from 14th century India. One is found on the sides of the cenotaph of ‘Abd al-Rahman Kahkhuda, dated 1190 AH/1776-7 CE, adjoining the mosque of al-Azhar. Only in the early Ottoman period did hilyas become common in Islamic art, in the form of calligraphic versions on paper.

Conclusions

The material on inscriptions on Cairo is so rich that it has been possible, in the time available here, only to summarize some of its outstanding features. It is clear, first of all, that inscriptions really mattered in medieval Cairo. They could convey information in many ways, directly by their content, indirectly as indicators of prestige or even as assurances that God’s word was being proclaimed from on high.

Leaving behind a building for fellow Muslims after one’s death was one of the surest ways to earn spiritual benefit, and the inscriptions on them announced the generosity of the patron, proclaiming his name and honoured titles, and ensuring that the endowments he set up for the building would be honoured.

Attention could be drawn to them in various ways, through their size, through repetition, and through the care taken with their calligraphy and their decoration. However, a large number of inscriptions high up on buildings, would have always been difficult, if not impossible to read. Most of these are of God’s word, the Qur’an, and they had another purpose, that of sanctifying the building on which they were placed. With regard to foundation inscriptions, however, most were meant to be read and were accordingly placed in locations which made this easier.

Another way of attracting attention would have been through colour, which brings us back to one of the chief caveats mentioned at the beginning of this paper, namely, that evaluations of what was legible and what was not are risky on the basis of today’s evidence, especially given the lack of these painted colours that would have affected so many inscriptions on stucco and carved stone. Even in their monochromatic form today they provide a feast for the eye, so we can be sure that their impact in earlier times was much greater.
Why do people visit museums and what is it one hopes to get out of a visit to a museum? Does one go to a museum to see a famous object? Some people certainly do. Many people go to the Louvre just to see the Mona Lisa (while other people will go to the Louvre and actively AVOID seeing it). Or does one go to a museum to see a beautiful object and to appreciate the skill and artistry that went into that object without actually knowing much about the object, where it came from etc. Or does one go to a museum to learn about a culture or a particular aspect of history? Sometimes people visit museums because they have nothing better to do.

As for visitors to the Tareq Rajab museum, I have come across all kinds of people. I have met people who have spent hours on end, examining details and wanting to know as much as they can about what they were seeing. I have also met people who were interested in knowing the value of a particular artefact, or how much money was spent on a particular object. I have met people on tour groups, and also visitors who have been there on numerous occasions. I have met many people who were just passing through Kuwait and had a very limited amount of time to tour the whole museum. I have often wondered how one should visit a museum if time was limited and again of course, this depends on what the person prefers. For a lot of people however, I have thought that a tour that focuses on a selection of items might perhaps be enlightening in that one could learn a little about various artefacts and thus build a picture of what, in the case of our museum, Islamic art is all about.

In this tour, I am not necessarily taking you on a tour of the most valuable or the most sought after artefacts although some very important artefacts have of course been included here; rather, I have included some objects which we have noticed are always of interest to visitors to the museum.

19th century Isfahan rug depicting historical figures

Next on one’s route into the museum proper is a very interesting and very unusual Persian silk and wool rug (figure 1). This rug is often missed by visitors, but the ones who spot it spend ages deciphering the historical characters depicted in it. This is an Isfahan rug from the 19th century and depicts 54 historical world characters and each character is identified in the border area, with a number and the character’s name. The characters, as can be seen in the image, range from the Prophet Moses to King Solomon, Confucius, Socrates, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Haroun Al Rashid, Genghis Khan, Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama and so on. The writing at the top of the rug says: “Images of great world characters who are famed for their works or minds. The second part says “Long life to the eternal names of those who lighten the world”. While we do not have a complete history of the rug, we believe it was probably made with a European
market in mind as so many of the characters depicted are European, including many kings and figures up to the 18th century, and with less focus on middle eastern characters, except for the few exceptionally famous ones such as Salah al-Din (Saladin). We acquired this rug from an Indian Maharaja who had had it in his family’s possession for over a hundred years, but prior to that, the provenance is not really known.

Arabic writing and calligraphy

*Kufic* is considered to be among the oldest of the Arabic scripts and a wide range of early Arabic scripts have been classified as *Kufic* although the knowledge of these early scripts is patchy and incomplete. *Kufic* dates to the early Islamic period, around 622 CE to the 9th century and as time passed, skilled and influential calligraphers developed new scripts and the first of the classical new scripts such as *thuluth* and *naskh* were developed in Baghdad by the great calligrapher ibn Muqlah (d. 939 CE). Then came *muhaqqaq* and *rayhan* which are attributed to ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022 CE).

---

**A very early Hijazi Qur’anic folio – Western Arabia, The Hijaz (7th/8th centuries CE)**

This folio is a very fine and extremely important example of a Qur’an written on parchment. (figure 2) This is because this manuscript is one of the earliest existing writings of the Qur’an to survive. The calligraphy is sometimes called the „bent style“ or „Ma’il“, in Arabic. Hijazi script is generally difficult to read (it is an early form of the Kufic-Abbasid script) as it usually lacks dots and other diacritical marks. The calligraphy on this piece is outstanding for its time and so this folio is of exceptional significance. It is interesting to note the form of the letter *alif*, which from earliest times had the anti-clockwise turn at the bottom.

This folio dates from the late 1st or early 2nd century AH and illustrates the earliest progression of Arabic writings of the Qur’an. This folio is from *Surat al Maidah*.

**A rare Qur’an written by Yaqut Al Musta’asami, Baghdad, 1282 CE**

Abu’l-Majd Jamal al-Din Yaqut, was known as Yaqut al-Musta’asimi, because he was a slave of and served the Caliph al-Musta’asimi, the last caliph of the ‘Abassid dynasty in Baghdad (r.1242-1258). He studied calligraphy with an excellent woman calligrapher named Shuhda Bint Al-‘Ibari, a student in the direct line of Ibn al-Bawwab, one of the earliest master calligraphers in
refining the six scripts set down by Ibn al-Bawwab. He gave the letter shapes new dimension by emphasizing the slanted cut of the pen. He also further systematized the method of proportional measurement with dots. He is known for developing the school of calligraphy that Turkish and Persian calligraphers later followed.

Al Musta’asimi was so committed to his work that during the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258, he took refuge in the minaret of a mosque so he could finish his calligraphy practice, while the city was being ravaged below. He survived the Mongol invasion and was taken into Mongol custody and patronage where his career flourished further. He was a prolific writer and made 364 copies of the Qur’an, several of which still exist and are highly prized by collectors.

This is a rare Qur’an written in Baghdad in 1282 CE (681 AH) in the now obsolete rayhan script (figure 3). This Qur’an represents one of the most definitive examples of the rayhan script. Verse endings are marked by small gold rosettes and diacritical marks are written with a very fine nib. Other markings are in red. The book ends with a colophon which reads: “Written by Yaqut Al Musta’asimi during the sixth month of the year 681 AH in the City of Peace (Baghdad”).

Ceramics

The museum contains pottery and ceramics from all regions and across all periods of the Islamic world, including Mesopotamia, Persia, Transoxiana, Syria, Turkey and Egypt. While there is some information on the development of pottery in the region during the early period of Islam, this is hampered by a lack of archaeological evidence. With the rise of Islam, the new Islamic world inherited pottery techniques and practises from the old worlds of Persia, Mesopotamia, Egypt and North Africa. It is also known that the Chinese ceramics industry played a major role in influencing the shapes, styles and decorations of Islamic pottery from the early Abbasid period onwards. These external influences inspired potters to develop their own styles and techniques, using the resources available to them in their own lands. Lustreware, however, was a technique which was developed indigenously (there is argument over whether it was developed in Egypt or Mesopotamia, although the earliest known piece is from Fustat and dated 773 CE).

For many centuries, Islamic pottery existed as a bridge between East and West, borrowing many techniques from the Chinese and in turn passing them on to Byzantium and Europe. Early ceramics of the 9th and 10th century Abbasid period were related to T’ang wares, especially the splashed, green and white wares, which were imported into the region as well as made there, of which there are many fine examples in the museum. Whilst the influence of the Chinese ceramics industry is indisputable, there were many inventions in the Islamic world, in the early days principally in Mesopotamia (Baghdad and Basra), that were passed on later to the rest of the world. Examples of this are stone paste ceramics, tin glazing, lustreware, and fritware, which later led to the development of Iznik pottery. Slip ware, Sari ware and Sgraffito wares were advanced in the Islamic regions and such wares are also on display in the museum. Through the various periods were developed other wares such as minai and lajvardina in Persia, as well as techniques during the Ayyubid, Fatimid and Mamluk periods.

I have selected for this discussion lustre ware pottery, as this was a unique technique derived during the very early Islamic period from the glass makers of the region and was popular for many centuries in most regions. The technique then spread throughout
the Islamic region including Spain and Italy. It is believed to have been used in the courts, because of the metallic sheen which gave the impression of gold. Tin glaze is used to stabilize the metal oxide and it is fired twice at different temperatures. Different regions had their own distinct coloured lustre ware, such as ruby lustre during the Fatimid period and the olive-green Abbasid lustre.

Lustre and cobalt blue painted bowl, Malaga, Spain ca 1400 CE

It is often thought that lustre manufacturing in the western Islamic world, began with the construction of the Great Mosque at Qayrawan and the nearby Fatimid palace of Raqqada. The potters here then moved to Algeria and when Qayrawan and other cities in Tunisia and Algeria were ransacked in the 11th century by tribes, the potters were known to have taken refuge on the Mediterranean coast. It is considered most likely that the descendants of these potters then moved across to Spain and became founders of the lustre industry there. The major production centre of lustreware in Spain during the Moorish period was Malaga and it remained as such until the end of the 14th century. It is believed that the foundation of a lustre industry in Malaga coincided with the establishment of the Nasrid dynasty in Granada in 1230 CE and with the import of cobalt ore at that time. There were other lustre centres in Spain including in Murcia and Almeria and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the provenance of an item. However, bowls resting on strong foot rings are a distinctive feature of Malaga ware. The provenance of this bowl is Malaga and it has the hallmark of the Malaga workshops on the bottom. The shape of the bowl also positively defines it as Malaga (figure 4).

Metalwork

When the Arabs conquered vast territories during the 7th century CE, they encountered and inherited well established metalworking centres. In the very early centuries of Islam, materials, shapes and decoration hardly differed from what was inherited and the distinct Islamic identity took some time to emerge. It is thus often quite difficult to distinguish a pre-Islamic metal object from an Islamic one. When changes came, they were in materials. For example the previously favoured gold and silver vessels were replaced by the preferred bronze. Decoration changed and human and animal figures were supplanted by geometrical and floral patterns and epigraphic bands.

Major metalworking centres during the early Islamic period were based in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Although Syria and Egypt continued to be influential centres for centuries to come, Iraq became less important, while metalworkers in northeastern Iran (Khurasan) and Central Asia really came into the limelight.

One of the earliest Islamic objects in the Tareq Rajab museum is an Umayyad Syrian bronze incense burner, very Byzantine in shape, dating to the 7th/8th century CE (figure 5).

Ghazni Lion - 11th century incense burner signed by the master

The representation of lions can be traced back to Mesopotamia in the 2nd millennium BCE and they continued to be used through the Islamic period.

This is an extremely large lynx-shaped incense-burner, which is over half a meter in height and half a meter in length. The artist’s signature is on the breast of the animal, reading amala Ali. The openwork decoration of this large vessel with its series of five-lobed palmettes betrays its close relationship to
the decorative motifs of the tile and marble work of the royal palace of Ghazni (figure 6). But there is another very unusual and peculiar feature of this large animal, namely on its face, flanking the mouth, there is a pair of fish in relief. Exactly the same head and face appears on a similarly large lynx-shaped incense burner in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. It was also signed by an Ali, but giving his full name as Ali ibn Muhammad al-Taji. Whether we are dealing with the same Ali or perhaps one of his relatives, is impossible to say. Nevertheless both of these large feline figures can be dated to the 11th century and attributed to Ghazni. It should also be added here that the Hermitage lynx was exhibited at the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah in 1990.

This large “lion” was acquired in 2004. Its original function, it is quite clear, must have been an incense burner. Our lion is undated but a sample of the material was sent to the Research Laboratory for Archaeology at the University of Oxford and the result confirmed the date proposed by Dr Geza Fehervari, namely the second half of the eleventh century. There are several interesting features on the lion including between and behind the ears, a so-called “Solomon’s seal” also known as the “Buddhist eternal knot”. A similar motif is found on the lower part of the body, which is otherwise plain.

The extensive epigraphic bands deserve special attention. Certain parts are easily readable but others are corrupt, indicating that the maker of this large object must have been an illiterate person and most likely was copying, dividing words or leaving out letters. Nevertheless it appears that the inscription is a benedictory one, as certain words are clear: salāmat, barakat, yumn and these are repeated several times. The inscription starts above the left hind leg and ends above the right hind leg, clearly showing the words salāmat li-sāhibihi.

The most possible provenance is Ghazni, the capital of the Ghaznavid Empire has already been put forward. Scholars, including Prof. Geza, state that the evidence for such possible provenance are provided by the decorative details of both of objects. Examining the decorative details on the body and neck on both, we find that the dominant feature is the five-lobed palmette enclosed in down-turned heart-shaped panels or in hexagons. The same type of five-lobed palmettes played a prominent role in the decoration of the 11th century royal palace of Ghazni in which almost identical five-lobed palmettes can be observed on the stone carvings and tiles which surrounded the courtyard of the palace or decorated its floors.

The style of the inscriptions, written in archaic and foliated Kufic, indicate an 11th century date, most likely at sometime during the latter half of the century. Silver and copper inlays appear and were applied to earlier examples of Islamic metalwork but it was only during the second half of the eleventh century that inlaying became more popular and began to be used more frequently. Silver and copper inlay certainly made a bronze object much more attractive and colourful. It is perhaps logical to propose a date during the last quarter of the 11th century for the Hermitage and a somewhat earlier date for the Kuwaiti feline. Indeed the result of the chemical examination of the small sample taken from the Tareq Rajab Museum’s feline substantiates this assumption.

Jewellery

We have an enormous collection of jewellery in the museum and it is impossible to discuss all this in a few minutes, so I have chosen just a few items including one item which is actually a collection of jewellery, a beautiful Mughal piece, plus an Omani piece with an interesting story. Mughal jewellery might in fact be considered the epitome of jewellery technique and beauty in the Islamic world and this jewellery was the result of a successful interaction and combination of Islamic and Hindu goldsmithing skills.

A gold necklace set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and pearls and with an enamelled back, Jaipur, India 18th century

One item you should look at, is an 18th century Jaipur necklace, which shows a range of styles and techniques as well as being an extremely fine example of enamelling skills of that period. Jaipur
was considered one of the most important centres of enamel working and many consider that the best work came from there with close rivalry from Varanasi and Lucknow. The “Sonar” or Indian goldsmiths were extraordinarily inventive and creative and their techniques have survived to this day. Pearls, many of which came from the Arabian Gulf were an important aspect of the jewellery of this period (figure 7).

An Omani/Zanzibari Necklace 19th century

The next piece I would like to show you is interesting in its history as well as its beauty as a piece of jewellery (figure 8). This item was acquired from an English family who claim that it was presented to their ancestor by the Sultan of Zanzibar and Oman for services rendered in the 1870s. We believe that this necklace was at one time the property of Princess Salma who was born in 1844 and who was the sister of Sultan Barghash.

Princess Salma was born in 1844 the daughter of Sultan Said. She was born and brought up in Stone Town between various palaces and homes including that of her brother Majid bin Said of Zanzibar, the later sultan. When her father died in 1856, she was declared of age, twelve years old, and received her paternal inheritance. This consisted of a plantation with a residence as well as money. After her father’s death, her brother Sayyid Thuwaini bin Said al-Said became Sultan of Muscat and Oman, while her brother Majid became Sultan of Zanzibar.

From 1859 onwards, Princess Salma became involved in a serious of disputes for power between her favourite brother Majid and her other brother Bargash bin Said. Despite her favouring her brother Majid, her sister coerced her into siding with Bargash. With the intervention of the British, Bargash lost and was sent to exile in Bombay. She eventually made up with her brother Majid, which caused a split between her, Bargash and her sister.

While living in Stone Town, she became acquainted with her neighbour, a German merchant, Rudolph Heinrich Ruete and in 1866 eloped with him to Aden. She and her husband settled in Hamburg. They had a son and two daughters. Her husband died in 1870 after a tram accident, leaving Princess Salma in difficult economic circumstances because the authorities denied her inheritance claims. Partly to alleviate these economic problems she wrote Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar. The book provides the first known autobiography of an Arab woman. The book presents the reader with an intimate picture of life in Zanzibar between 1850 and 1865, and an inside portrait of her brothers Majid bin Said of Zanzibar and Barghash bin Said of Zanzibar, the later sultans of Zanzibar. After the death of her husband, she was caught up in the colonial plans of Otto von Bismarck. There were speculations that Bismarck wanted to install her son as Sultan of Zanzibar. She revisited Zanzibar in 1885 and in 1888. Between 1889 and 1914 she lived in Beirut, Lebanon and Jaffa. She died in Jena, Germany, at the age of 79, from severe pneumonia.

Uzbek jewellery that belonged to the Emir of Bukhara’s jewellery, 19th century

This collection of jewellery, which consists of various sets, as well as some sets of cups and saucers, once belonged to the Emir of Bukhara and would have been worn on festive occasions such as Eid (figure 9). The only jewellery worn by Uzbek men would have been belts, jewelled daggers and swords
and rings so in this collection, the belts would have been the only items worn by the Emir himself. The silver belts worn by the men distinguished their rank as did their robes. Less prosperous citizens would have worn embroidered belts. The Emir of Bukhara is thought to have awarded silver belts as a token of appreciation for services rendered and these would have had some prestige attached to them and were a symbol of rank.

While the jewellery here is from an Uzbek family, the large necklace here, appears to be Kazakh rather than Uzbek. Kazakh jewellery is distinguished by its fine filigree and granulation. Turquoise enamel inlay is an important feature and a speciality of Bukhara craftsmen and some scholars believe that apart from Indian and Persian influences, Russian enamel workers had much influence on Bukhara craftsmen. It was customary in Bukhara in the past for clients to have an enamel worker/silversmith come to stay with them to execute any jewellery requirements and orders they had and the Emir of Bukhara would undoubtedly have had a jeweller at court.

We have two portraits painted by the German artist Carl Haag. These paintings are of course not “Islamic Art”, they are Orientalist, but they are hanging in the entrance to the museum and they are always of especial interest to Europeans. The first and main portrait is of Lady Jane Digby, who was an English aristocrat who married an English Lord by whom she had one son. Due to his neglect of her, the marriage did not last and there was a divorce that caused a great scandal in England. She married the Austrian Prince, with whom she had been having an affair and following that, she married a German baron and had affairs with the King of Bavaria, a Greek count and an Albanian general. She finally ended up in Damascus at the age of 50 where she met and married a Bedouin whom she married and lived the rest of her life with. She is buried in Damascus and this portrait is of her standing with Tadmor, Palmyra in the background. Palmyra is where she spent many of the happiest days of her life (figure 10).

Figure 10: Portraits of Lady Jane Digby and Midjuel El Mezrab by Carl Haag 1859

We have two portraits painted by the German artist Carl Haag. These paintings are of course not “Islamic Art”, they are Orientalist, but they are hanging in the entrance to the museum and they are always of especial interest to Europeans. The first and main portrait is of Lady Jane Digby, who was an English aristocrat who married an English Lord by whom she had one son. Due to his neglect of her, the marriage did not last and there was a divorce that caused a great scandal in England. She married the Austrian Prince, with whom she had been having an affair and following that, she married a German baron and had affairs with the King of Bavaria, a Greek count and an Albanian general. She finally ended up in Damascus at the age of 50 where she met and married a Bedouin whom she married and lived the rest of her life with. She is buried in Damascus and this portrait is of her standing with Tadmor, Palmyra in the background. Palmyra is where she spent many of the happiest days of her life (figure 10).
"The History Book of Majorca"
by Ibn Amira Al Makhzoumi:
Historical Literature, or Literary History?

Nicolás Roser Nebot
Presented in Arabic
30 September 2013

“The History Book of Majorca” is a valuable work written by Abu Al- Mutarrif Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Amira Al-Makhzoumi, born in Ramadan 582 AH/1186 CE in Shaqra island, 50 miles south of Valencia, Spain, which was then called the east of Andalusia. He died in Tunisia in the month of Dhu Al- Hijjah in 658 AH/1260 CE. “The History Book of Majorca” presents the course of events that led to the fall of Majorca Island - the largest Balearic Island in the east of the Iberian Peninsula, the eastern islands of Andalusia, under the command of the Iberian Christian Kingdom of Aragon. It explains how it was retaken by the Moors (Muslims) who ruled it for three hundred and twenty-eight years.

The life of Ibn Amira, which was full of events and travels, can be divided into several stages:

- Foundation: between 582-608 AH/1186-1211 CE.
- Employment as a writer and judge in Andalusia between 608-637 AH/1221-1239 CE.
- Employment as a writer and judge in al-Adwa, Morocco (Kingdom of Morocco currently) between 637-646 AH/1239-1248 CE.
- Teaching in Bèjaïa (under African authority - Tunisia in those days and Algeria nowadays) between 646-649 AH/1248-1251 CE.
- Writing and consultancy in Tunisia 649-658 AH/1251-1260 CE.

Ibn Amira’s writings provide an important source of documentation of the history of Andalusia during the era in which the author lived: the era of Almohad Caliphate (al-Muwahhidoun), its apogee and decline, and everything related to society and politics in Andalusia at the time of writing his books. These writings comprised Ibn Amira’s private letters as well as those which were written on behalf of the authorities which he worked for as a writer during the course of his life. There is another book by Ibn Amira, albeit still

Nicolás Roser Nebot is a professor of Arabic language at the University of Malaga, Spain, a researcher specialised in Islamic political theory and teaching Arabic as a foreign language, translation of the Qur’an, Hadeeth and Arabic manuscripts. Dr. Nebot was head of Abdul-Aziz al-Babtain’s Chair at the University Of Malaga from 2008 - 2012. He is a member of Sindibar journal specialized in translation theories at Granada University.
missing, entitled “A Concise History of the Committed Ones” (the Muridins).

In all his works, Ibn Amira recorded valuable historical information shedding light on the events of the first half of the 7th century AH/13th century CE. For example, they include explanations and analysis of the state of affairs in Andalusia that led to the collapse of the Almohad State, and the emergence of the second phase of the kingdoms of Tawaili. They also recorded how North Iberian Christian Kingdoms took over a large area of the territory of Andalusia. Ibn Amira’s books recorded in details the reasons that led to these events and the resulting political and personal situations. In a letter addressed by Ibn Amira to Said Ibn Hakam, the ruler of Minorca Island during Ibn Amira’s residence in the city of Bêjaïa, east of Algeria, he says:

“There is no doubt that it came to the attention of your blessed Premiership, may God protect it, the catastrophes that struck our country, which wiped away conscience, honesty and high mindedness…

Oh what a misfortune wreaked our islands, and an era that has come to a disastrous end. In our country, I had a sister and her children waiting to be relieved, until they decided to leave along with those who left. On the road she fell sick and died upon her arrival to Orihuela, may her soul rest in peace. Her two sons and two daughters are still here waiting to be relieved, and I could not find anyone better than your blessed Premiership to find a way out. I heard that you are preparing a canoe in that quarter and I hope that you would give your orders to bring them over to our quarter. If God facilitates this to happen, then grace will come, if God wills.”

“The history book of Majorca” comes in 26 pages, hand written on both sides. He writes in a very fine literary style, using assonance, which can be described as “inimitable simplicity” (simple yet impossible). It is apt to adopt the Moroccan Professor Mohammed bin Sharifa’s description of the Ibn Amira as being the most important Arab writer in 7th century AH/13th century CE.

Ibn Amira wrote “The History Book of Majorca” for two purposes. The first one is of literary nature in that he was earnest in teaching high standard literary styles; and the second purpose was of a documentary nature, in that he wanted to record historical events in Majorca and the rest of Andalusia. He stated the two reasons in the introduction of the book:

“This book is for two persons; a student who is learning literary styles and a one who’s suffering from what happened. The latter seeks refuge from the ill fate; the former seeks the command of language and to learn how to write in the best possible style. The book can likewise fill the two needs; one gets the learning of literary style and at the same time can be educated about situations and events that took place.”

Based on this statement and the unique characteristics of the text, “The History Book of Majorca” can be described as literature of history or history recorded in literary style. It turned into a reference for Arab scholars who came after Ibn Amira, such as Lisan al-Din Ibn Al-Khatib Al-Ghurnati and Ibn Khaldun. There is yet another measurement that makes “The History Book of Majorca” significant from both literary and historical points of view: It is possible that Ibn Amira’s “The History Book of Majorca” had some bearing on history books on the Kingdom of Aragon, written in the Catalan and Latin languages. There are similarities in historical events recorded in Ibn Amira’s book, especially those regarding the fall of Majorca at the hand of King James I of Aragon.

In any case, “The History Book of Majorca” was written 82 years before the Latin history book on the seizure of Majorca Island, and 111 years before the Catalan history book of the same event. As a matter of fact, historians and specialists in the history of Aragon did not mention these facts due to the sensitivity of the issue. These facts put “The History Book of Majorca” as the main chronicle and abstract wellspring of the early Catalan books dealing with the historical backdrop of one of the Iberian Christian kingdoms. This discomfits some historians because it proves (if logically attested) that history books written in Iberian languages, especially Catalan, have been modelled on the documentation and literature written by an Arab author.

Moreover, in terms of the history of Andalusia and its documentation, “The History Book of Majorca” is the only account remaining about the fall of one of the largest cities of Andalusia. The book contains unprecedented and extraordinary details and analysis of the history of Andalusia, and what was written about the fall of the capital of Andalusia subsequently was based on this book, including the one written by Ibn Amira on the recapture of Valencia by King James I six years later.

Ibn Amira mentioned the objectives of his writing this book as well as what motivated him to write it. He says:

“I intended to write this book because one of our brothers who lived there had come back from the land of exile... and I want to please him by documenting the catastrophes he had faced ... and reporting the information about this matter ...”

The book is written as a novel in sections, introducing the persons and people who were involved in those events in minute details, portraying their positions and attitudes in the most accurate, but succinct and eloquent manner. He analyses the attitudes of those people and fairly judges their deeds and the consequence, in a sharp contrast to Christian historical sources dealing with the fall of Majorca at the hand of James I, King of Aragon. The exception is Catalanian sources, which derived their information from “The History Book of Majorca”, albeit with a
huge difference in the literary style, which is fine in Ibn Amira’s book and primitive in the Catalanian sources.

On the notable qualities of “The History Book of Majorca” is the author’s command of literary style in describing battles and fighting, especially the marine battle, something that is rare in Arabic texts. Another unique quality of the book is Ibn Amira’s knowledge of psychology, and his capability in describing human nature and behaviours briefly but accurately, using examples and analogies.

“The History Book of Majorca” is rich with valuable historical information; it tells us for example, about the groups and the social classes in Islamic Majorca; the commercial relations that existed between Muslims and non-Muslims and amongst Muslims themselves; the types of ships and marine navigation in the Mediterranean Sea; and fighting methods in that era. It also provides us with useful information about the control systems adopted in the coastal lines and the lands in Majorca Island during the Muslim rule. In addition, “The History Book of Majorca” tell us about the recruitment system on its territory (a chief and a superintendent on each part of the island) and contains accounts of the nature of the Almohad Regime, especially after the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 609 AH/1212 CE.

However, “The History Book of Majorca” does not make any reference to the biographies of the persons mentioned in the book. Rather, it remarks on their attitudes, views and sayings in an unmatched creative style. This is obvious in the depictions of Almohad’s wali (governor) Abu Yahya Mohammed bin Ali bin Mussa Altanmoli and King James I’s characters.

One of the most important qualities of the book is its consistency with the later Christian historical sources concerning the fall of Majorca, a fact that proves the credibility of “The History Book of Majorca”. It also indicates that the transfer of information between the Christian and Islamic civilizations verbally or in writing was quite possible. “The History Book of Majorca” is a case of composing history in artistic style, a novel, which was unknown to the Spanish language until early 16th century and to the Catalan language until the 18th/19th centuries. The last reference to the book was by the great historian of Andalusia Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Maqqari in his book Nafhu el-Tib Min Ghusn al-Andalus al Ratib (The Breath of Fragrance from the Green Branch of Andalusia) in early 11th century AH/17th century CE.

Hence, “The History Book of Majorca” is considered a literary and historical masterpiece that was well known during its time and was a famous source of history of Andalusia, although it was lost for more than four hundred years. The manuscript of the book was discovered in the city of Tindouf in Western Sahara, Africa, thanks to the Emirati researcher Juma’ al-Majid. It was reviewed by Professor Mohammed bin Mu’ammad from the University of Oran, Algeria.

I translated “The History Book of Majorca” into Catalan and Spanish languages in ten months, and both translations received record popularity in Spain. They are still widely acquired and read with passion. Thanks to all those who contributed to the revival of the heritage of Andalusia, by bringing to light this valuable book, and hail to all those who read and studied the book and benefited from it. My commendations go to Ibn Amira Al-Makhzoumi who left this great legacy of the history of Andalusia, a history shared between Arab Islamic civilization and Western civilization. These two civilizations constitute our history and our identity as a culture and a nation. Thanks to Ibn Amira Al Makhzoumi, the genius man of letter who left us with a wealth that has changed my life and the lives of others forever.

---

Figure 1: Arab baths in Majorca old city  Figure 2: Majorca map
Defining an Early Islamic Phenomenology: The Experiential Dimension of Umayyad Art and Architecture

Theodore Van Loan
Presented in English
10 February 2014

To understand the phenomenological dimension of an architectural tradition is to engage with its primal elements, without the intermediaries of meaning or stylistic analysis. It is to think through the process by which a viewer comes to experience a given space considering both its physical presence and the passing of time as one traverses this space, in other words considering the viewer as existing in both space and time. When considering the architectural monuments of the Umayyad Dynasty in this fashion, what emerges is a view of Umayyad patrons as possessing a complex understanding of these phenomena. From monumental complexes built during Umayyad times, such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Mshatta Palace in Jordan, we come to understand the Umayyads as skilful building practitioners who took into active consideration the visual experiences of their viewers.

Umayyad art and architecture is most frequently understood as being a product of the visual traditions of the late classical world. These traditions include those of Byzantium and the Sasanian Empire, but also those found in Coptic Egypt, various Central Asian polities, and other locations. It is thought that the Umayyad reconfiguration of these traditions constituted the basic parameters by which Islamic art began. Unaccounted for in this story is any consideration of how a contemporary viewer would have experienced the monumental and visually stimulating architecture of the Umayyad period. Here we will consider the visual programs of the Mshatta Palace and the Dome of the Rock in this fashion. Doing so will enable us to develop new parameters by which to consider Umayyad architecture at large, and in turn lead to new ways of understanding the beginnings of Islamic art and architecture.

The palace of Mshatta fits into a building type prevalent in the Levant during the Umayyad period, the so called ‘desert castle,’ of which there are numerous examples extant in Jordan, the West Bank, and Syria. When compared to the other desert castles, the plan of Mshatta is actually fairly unique (figure 1). The entire monument is enclosed by outer walls forming of a square of 144 meters on each side. Towers round each exterior corner of the square. Between these corner towers, smaller tower-like forms punctuate the outer walls in a regularized fashion. Within the complex, all the structures align to the central axis running from the entrance portal in the south to the triconch throne room in the north. Immediately apparent from the plan...
is the presence of a great deal of empty space both in between the entrance complex and the reception hall, and to the eastern and western sides of the enclosure. This is due to the fact that the monument remained under construction at the time of its abandonment.

The palace is best known for its magnificent southern façade, now prominently featured in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (figure 2). From a distance the great band of ornately carved flora and fauna, which spanned both sides of the entrance portal, located in the centre of the southern outer wall, meld together into a textured surface akin to an ornate textile pattern.

As the viewer steps closer, individual forms emerge from within the series of seemingly repetitive vegetal roundels. One can plainly see birds of various kinds nesting within the flora and large felines drinking from a fountain. Other than as a testament to the high quality of workmanship, this visual experience would not be worthy of note, but for one remarkable irregularity: that the fauna, birds and other living beings, only appear on the side of the façade to the left of the entrance portal. The side to the right of the façade lacks such motifs (figure 3). The meaning of this discrepancy is only made clear by knowing that the fauna-free side of the façade is also the outer wall of a small mosque. Seen on the plan, the mosque sits on the eastern side of the entrance complex. The patrons and/or makers of the structure deemed it inappropriate that the mosque be in adjacent proximity to depictions of living fauna.

The Mshatta façade would appear to be an affirmation, in physical form, of early Islamic tenets that speak unfavourably towards the act of representing living beings. This message is a very straightforward premise, but it is how the message is disseminated to the viewer, which is of crucial importance. After having been drawn in to examine the façade at a close proximity, the viewer would not have realized the implications of the differences between the left and the right side of the façade, as they would have had no way of knowing that a mosque was present behind the wall on the right. It is only after having entered the monumental complex, and becoming familiar with the functional layout of the spaces inside the walls, that upon revisiting the outer façade, they would then come to understand why it was that all depictions of living things were kept at a distance from the mosque wall. That understanding would have come from the viewer’s interaction with his or her own memory.

What we see in the design of this façade is a very complex interplay between close looking, the memory of the viewer, and the duration of time. The manner in which the makers transmitted, their, albeit fairly straightforward, visual doctrine, is not straightforward at all, but shows a sophisticated understanding of the nature of visual memory, and the powerful synergetic energy that it creates when the viewer experiences a spark of understanding. We can speak here of narrative time as being the dominant mode in which the visual space engages the viewer. The viewer follows a path that begins as soon as the monument appears on the horizon, and as the viewer is drawn closer to the façade and eventually into the confines of the complex enclosed by those outer walls, the visual program gradually reveals its nuances. Essential to this experience is the viewer’s faculty of memory as they are driven to remember various aspects of the program as they progress through it.
We will now turn to the Dome of the Rock, and examine the phenomenological, dimension of the structure along the same lines as with the Mshatta palace. The building is made up of thick exterior walls forming an octagon with four entrances symmetrically placed along the sides that approximately correspond to the cardinal directions (figure 4). Between the outer walls and the exposed rock is an inner octagon defined by sets of piers and columns and an inner circle, defined in the same way. The interior space is richly adorned in various materials and motifs (figure 5). Keeping in mind that this structure has been continuously occupied since its construction, only a selection of what we see is original to the Umayyad phase of the building. These components include the columns, the mosaics located on both sides of the inner octagonal arcade, and the marble revetment on the interior side of the outer walls, and on the piers of the inner arcade. The mosaic program is made up of two parts: an epigraphic band that runs along both sides of the arcade and various floral and jewel-like compositions that fill the remainder of the spandrels and the bottoms of the each of the arches. The mosaics that adorn the inner octagonal arcade are dated to the time of Abd al-Malik, by virtue of a statement of foundation within the epigraphic program.

Upon ascending to the large enclosure of the Haram al-Sharif from any of the number of entrances that provide access, a viewer would have encountered what is still to this day a relatively sparse and open platform, in ready contrast to the narrow streets that make up the old city of Jerusalem to the platform’s west. The Dome of the Rock sits on an elevated inner platform that is accessible by sets of stairs on all sides (figure 6). Upon ascending to reach the inner platform the viewer would have approached the Dome of the Rock much in the same fashion as the Mshatta façade: in a relatively linear way. However, here, in contrast to the flat approach from the horizon to the palace, one also gains in elevation to finally reach the inner platform and enter one of the four doors into the space under the Dome.

Upon entering the building, the viewer would have seen a mosaic program illuminated by both natural light and lamps, perhaps suspended from the crossbeams under the arches. The visual and architectural programs both encourage the viewer to circumambulate the rock situated under the dome. Thus the viewer, in rotation around the interior, would have discerned numerous motifs in the mosaic program, illuminated by light. These motifs, that at first would appear to be fairly uniform, would then betray their idiosyncrasies, perhaps indicating that they are meant to represent specific objects, but more on that later.

At some point during this circumambulation, the viewer would have then descended into the cave via the stairs on the southeast side of the inner drum (figure 7). At the bottom of the stairs, they would have turned to the right and seen a black stone set into a flat mihrab. In such a small space, viewing the black stone shimmering in the lamplight must have...
been an intensely personal experience. It cannot be stressed enough that this experience would have been almost diametrically opposite from what the viewer experienced above on the ground level. This space would have been incredibly dark, intimate, and on a much more personal scale, in stark contrast to the extreme openness that characterizes the experience of circumambulating the rock. The viewer would have then exited and returned to the ground floor, once again in a space of circumambulation.

Let us now turn with a closer eye to the mosaic program that was mentioned above. As stated earlier, at first the mosaics appear to be multi-textured and relatively uniform, but then begin to display their discrete forms and motifs. Chief among these are the large forms, variously described as crowns and angels that appear in the spandrels of the arches on the inner octagonal arcade. At first glance, these compositions that combine a kind of floral framing and embellishment with crown-like shapes adorned with pearls in the centres, appear to be relatively uniform; especially if the viewer was engaged in circumambulation of the rock. However, upon viewing these forms for a sustained period of time, their idiosyncrasies come to light. When looking closely at two of these compositions, one sees that each iteration differs in the details: crowns, or whatever they may be, are arranged in different manners, and the very expressive floral forms frame them in different ways.

In an attempt to explain the meaning behind these, the art and architectural historian Nasser Rabbat cites a rather insightful historical source: “during the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, there was hanging on the chain above the rock under the Dome the Yatima pearl, the horns of Abraham’s ram, and the crown of Kisra (Khosrooe, the Sasanian Shah). When the Banu Hashim (the Abbasids) took over the caliphate, they sent them to the Ka’ba.” This account is taken from Abu Bakr al-Wasiti’s *Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqqadas*, a text chronicling the merits of Jerusalem, composed sometime before 1019 CE. The isnad preceding this particular passage attributes the tradition to Thabet ibn Estiniabah, who was said to have been in charge of the maintenance of the complex in the Umayyad period. If we are to imagine that these precious objects mentioned in the text were part of the same visual program as these mosaics, then we have within the same visual space both objects and their representations. As the viewer circumambulated the space they would have had ready visual access to the crown, suspended in the air under the dome, and within the same visual field, would have oblique views of these crown-like forms in the mosaics. The subtle differences in the individual compositions, would have produced an affect akin to animation: these crowns would have been put into motion. The abundant use of gold mosaic tesserae, which were actually placed into the plaster of the wall at oblique angles, would have added a shimmer effect in conjunction with the lighting scheme, and would have added further animation to these figures.

Above these spandrels at the apexes of each of the arches of the inner arcade, is another motif much smaller than the aforementioned crown: a black disk with an inscribed gold-coloured star. Like the set of “crowns,” these disks, as we view them at different points in the process of circumambulation, they appear to be uniform. However, this is not the case, upon careful viewing one can detect variations in the number of rays of the stars (figure 8).

Also like the crown motifs, these stars might also be embedded within a mimetic relationship with an original referent also present within the visual program, and here I speak of the aforementioned black stone disk with the star carved into its surface set into the flat mihrab in the cave beneath the rock. The black stone disk would have been illuminated by lamplight, thus reflecting the golden glow of the lamp’s flame from its highly polished dark surface. It is this golden glow that the makers of the mosaic disks chose to depict. It is also important to note that the makers of the mosaics inclined each of the gold mosaic tesserae at an angle of 30 degrees, enabling them to reflect the ambient light, thus creating a shimmer-effect, not unlike the flickering glow of a lamp. Also, if one looks closely at some of the better-preserved mosaic disks, one can see thin horizontal ribs, both within the central circle and the rays of the star. I believe this is an attempt to convey a sense of depth to the viewer, effectively mimicking the star carved into the surface of the black stone.
In the case of the crowns and the black stone, we have objects and their various representations within the same visual environment. The process by which the viewer would have come to understand this is quite similar to what we saw with the Mshatta façade, in the sense that the viewer is taken along a narratological journey where the visual program gradually reveals its nuances and idiosyncrasies. While the underlying structure of the Dome of the Rock’s narrative dimension is fundamentally different than that of Mshatta, involving circumambulation, ascent, and descent, it is equally conscious of the viewer’s cognitive faculties of memory and recognition, especially in the case of the star motif, where the viewer comes to recognize it upon re-entering the ground floor from the cave below. What we see in the Dome of the Rock’s mosaics are motifs that, in semiotic parlance, are unstable signifiers that are put into a kind of animation, where the variation in the still images allies itself with the motion of circumambulation as enacted by the viewer.

Developing an understanding of the Mshatta façade and the Dome of the Rock mosaics in this way enables us to set some basic parameters for early Islamic phenomenology. We see that the viewer’s experience is shaped primarily, as we would expect, by both the topographical circumstances of the landscape in which the monuments are located, as well as the built forms themselves, to the extent that they dictate movement through their spaces. At Mshatta, the viewer takes a long horizontal approach that culminates in close visual engagement with the façade. The approach to the Dome of the Rock is one of ascent circumambulation followed by descent, and finally repeated circumambulation. These spaces and the movements they dictate constitute the underlying physical structure of the phenomenological experience.

Overlaid above this are the entwined variables of time and memory. As the viewer traverses the spaces of Mshatta and the Dome of the Rock, they are called upon to employ their faculties of memory to recognize certain forms and certain nuances in the visual programs. This process of recognition is narratological, in that the viewer, over time, gains a progressively deeper understanding of the visual programs.

The complexities exposed through this analysis demonstrate that the Umayyad patrons and makers who were responsible for composing these visual programs thought deeply about how viewers would have experienced them. They not only display a consciousness and intimate awareness of how to shape the viewer’s experience of these monuments, but also come to articulate, through their works, a phenomenology of architecture involving the presence of a viewer within a built space and within temporality itself. Pursuing a study of this material along these lines, giving due consideration to the phenomenology of Umayyad art and architecture, serves to emancipate it from the rigidity of considering its forms and meanings as only a product of the late antique visual tradition, and will thus generate new understandings of the formation of Islamic art.

---

**Figure 1:** Mshatta palace

**Figure 2:** Southern façade of Mshatta palace, now prominently featured in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin

**Figure 3:** The side to the right of the façade

**Figure 4:** Dome of the Rock

**Figure 5:** Dome of the Rock – interior space

**Figure 6:** The Dome of the Rock sits on an elevated inner platform that is accessible by sets of stairs on all sides

**Figure 7:** The cave on the southeast side of the inner drum

**Figure 8:** Black disk with an inscribed gold-coloured star
The 13th century is certainly a very unique and interesting moment within the history of the Middle Ages. It represents the foundations of modern culture, which established a renewed view of man, liberated from biblical dogmas and moving towards a personal interpretation of the Holy Texts. ‘Personal interpretation’ is the key-word that brings us to prophecies, that just like dreams, play an essential role in history, for the fact that they have to be fully understood, in order to decipher the revelation. The same happens in literature, when poetry becomes the vehicle of a mystical or philosophical message. Thus, we will look at poetry as a revelation of the author’s message, as we can look at dreams as transmissions of the Holy word. In that regard, we will start from the prophecy of Joachim of Fiore, which foresaw a radical spiritual and political change.

Joachim of Fiore was born in 1145 in Calabria, in southern Italy. Traveling between Constantinople and the Holy Land, he learned the arts of mysticism and acquired the ability to prophesize. When he returned to Italy, he retired in hermitage and he founded the Florense order thanks to support from Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI and Constance of Altavilla, parents of Frederick II. He produced several texts in which he proposed, in accordance with the teachings received in the Middle East, an allegorical interpretation of the Holy Text in the place of the more common literal approach. Instead of believing the writings as they are, the faithful, according to Joachim of Fiore, needs to seek a more personal interpretation fostering a more intimate relationship with God. Of central importance is spiritual reform and criticism of a society that had become too materialistic and lost its knowledge of salvation along the path.

In his works, Joachim divides the history of mankind in three different eras: the Father’s era, prior to the coming of Christ and the Scriptures; the Son’s, marked by the coming of Christ and the Church along with the New Testament; the third one, the Spirit’s,
would have arrived, as in the prophecy, during the 13th century with the advent of two key figures: a perfect religious order, and a prestigious Antichrist. These circumstances lead contemporaries to find two men referred to in Joachim’s prophecy in the figures of Saint Francis and Frederick II. The Franciscan order was immediately recognized as the chosen one since, in accordance with Joachim’s predictions, it centred on the virtue of poverty in opposition to material wealth. At the same time, the Emperor Frederick II was excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX, and was defined as the Antichrist by the Church.

Sometimes the greatest proof of the existence of a strong link between Joachim of Fiore and these two great personalities is not found within history books, but carved on the walls of churches. It is in stone that the most accurate page of a society’s history is often forged, revealing with clarity the tendencies of an era. In the Cathedral of Saint Rufino in Assisi, Umbria, where both Francis and Frederick were baptized, it is possible to notice that on the side of the church we can see the sculpted image of Joachim with two of his disciples. Several theories, far too complex for the scope of this lecture, see a summary of Joachim’s prophecies in these sculptures. Moreover, the top of the portico is adorned with the effigies of the Emperor’s parents, Henry VI and his wife Constance of Altavilla. (figures 1 & 2)

The same happens in the Cistercian abbey of Casamari near Rome, where Joachim lived for a year and a half, and where Frederick II spent time and financial resources for its renovations. Here it is believed that the capitals are adorned with the figures of the Emperor and of Joachim. Back to Assisi, we find again in the important Papal Basilica of San Francesco Superiore, designed by Francis’ follower Elias, the figure of Frederick II on the exterior walls, while the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore are depicted in the interior of the church. We can conclude that it was common at the time to associate these three charismatic figures under the sign of the Prophecy that would then see in Saint Francis and the Emperor Frederick II the personifications of the hope for renewal.

Francis of Assisi was born in 1181-2. He dedicated the entirety of his life in promoting the value of living in poverty. He also founded the Order of the minor Franciscan friars. He was sanctified in 1228, two years after his death. As a young man, as every men of his age, Francis desired to become a knight and leave for the Crusades. In fact, in 1205 he joined the Crusade army. A dream that he had, pushed him towards this decision, and as soon as he undertook his journey, he was stopped on his path by another dream: God revealed to him that he was making a mistake and that by fighting this war he would be serving the slave instead of the master or, in other words, man as opposed to the will of God. Once home, he decided to forsake every material possession and live in poverty, becoming *Milites Christi*, a soldier of Christ and not of man.

In 1212, now a friar, Francis tried to return to the Holy Land with a new mission, that of spreading the Gospel according to Franciscan precepts. In 1217 the Franciscan order was expanding, and his teachings started spreading outside of Italy. It was now time for the founder of the order to participate in the Crusade and establish a dialogue with the Muslims in order to put an end to the bloodshed. The Fifth Crusade, as the Sixth, were attempts by the Catholic army to regain Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land by first conquering the powerful Ayyubid state in Egypt. After occupying the port of Damietta, an attack by Sultan al-Kamil resulted in the surrender of the Catholic army.

What is associated in the record of Francis’ middle-eastern journey is a thirst for martyrdom, a mission of peace, and imprudence. Unfortunately, we are not aware of any story of Arabic origins that offers insight on the encounter between Francis and the Sultan al-Kamil. In fact, we know very little of Francis’ biography. Besides the two *Rules* he wrote, in which he established the principles upon which the order was built, every biography and non-official record was destroyed by the Church after 1266. Subsequently, the biographies written by Thomas from Celano and Saint Bonaventura became the official ones. Some records that escaped destruction describe the life of the friar in much more realistic terms compared to
the ecclesiastic documents that contain legendary descriptions that are forcefully symbolic. But it is from this legendary tone that we must start our investigation and then proceed backwards towards the historical data, because it was from those legends that the extraordinary art of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Benozzo Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio and others, took inspiration. (figure 3)

One of these chronicles describes the encounter between Francis and the Sultan. Francis would have proposed to ignite a fire that he would cross, along with other courtiers, to prove his Christian honesty and good intentions. When all the courtiers refused to undergo such a trial, Francis volunteered to proceed alone. The Sultan, impressed, did not need further proof and stopped him before he could act. In this specific case, we can stop and analyse the legendary element of fire.

It is not uncommon in the Middle Ages to adorn reality with allegory in order to confer a deeper meaning to the story. In order to look at the event from a truthful perspective we must proceed carefully as we unfold the allegory to rebuild reality and preserve the strong symbolism that derived from the metaphor. The concept of passing through fire, or baptism by fire, is a recurring one throughout the Bible and Christian literature, and is intended as an act of purification and passage to a superior mystical level. The act of presenting oneself to the sultan during the fifth crusade, during which the crusaders kept Egypt under siege without ever being able to breach Damietta, was already a trial by fire by itself, without any need of creating an additional one to prove one’s intentions. The chronicles written by James of Vitry, who took part in both crusades as well as the encounter with the sultan, together with another anonymous record, do not report the fire scene. It gives however, a more objective description of the event that sees the encounter between the two figures as characterized by a positive attitude that favoured dialogue without forcing the concept of a martyr’s mission that the church insistently attributed to the voyage undertaken by the Franciscan. Moreover, the official chronicles reported the encounter in a much more symbolic way, as can be read in “The Little Flowers of St. Francis”, chapter XXIV titled: “How St. Francis Converted to the Faith the Sultan of Babylon”, written by an anonymous author in the 14th century:

St. Francis standing before him, inspired by the Holy Spirit, preached most divinely the faith of Christ; and to prove the truth of what he said, professed himself ready to enter into the fire. […] From that moment he listened to him willingly, and begged him to come back often, giving both him and his companions leave to preach wheresoever they pleased; he likewise gave them a token of his protection, which would preserve them from all molestation. After receiving that generous permission, St. Francis […] went to an inn where he had to rest overnight. And there he found a certain woman who was very beautiful in face and body but very foul in mind and soul.

The temptress is another legend that was created around the encounter between Francis and the Sultan. This event, as the fire, is also highly symbolic; it is connected with reality only through metaphors. Interestingly, the same exact test was given to Francis according to other contemporary records at the court of Frederick II who was convinced of the holiness of the man for his ability not to succumb to the temptations of flesh. The temptress, as the fire, was a commonly acknowledged symbol of moral strength and frequently found in all Mediterranean religions, and literature. For example in Dante’s Divine Comedy we find both symbols - fire and temptress - associated with lust. In his second dream of Purgatory, Dante sees a woman who transforms from a monstrous creature into a seductive one, placing Dante in great danger. Right after, Dante has to cross the fire of lust in order to purify himself and enter the Earthly Paradise.

Beyond the legends that were transmitted about the Saint, what interests us today is that once he returned form the crusades, Francis wrote the First Rule or Rule Without a Papal Bull, in which he added a significant text thanks to the experience he had during his Middle Eastern travel (chapter XVI: “Those Going Among the Saracens and Other Nonbelievers”):
As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and other believers [...] not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human being for God’s sake.

As opposed to Francis’ journey, which was focused on spirituality, Frederick II’s travel to the Holy Land was essentially political, but ultimately brought, as did Francis, dialogue and peace. Frederick II was the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, of Germany, King of Sicily, and soon to be King of Jerusalem. In his childhood, after the death of his mother, Frederick II, who was also called stupor mundi (The wonder of the world), was assigned to the care of Pope Innocent III who supervised his education. Frederick however never showed interest or willingness to participate in a Crusade, a fact that aroused suspicion in the new Pope, Gregory IX, who decided to excommunicate the Emperor. It was, in fact, Pope Gregory IX who envisioned Frederick as the Antichrist.

In 1225 when the Sultan al-Kamil learned that the Emperor had married Yolanda, daughter of John of Brienne, acquiring therefore the title of King of Jerusalem, he decided to send a delegation headed by the emir Ibn al-Shaykh, who remained astonished when he arrived in Palermo:

Yes, everything they said about Frederick was true. He spoke and wrote Arabic perfectly, he felt unconcealed admiration for the Muslim civilization, and he had nothing but contempt for the barbarous West, especially for the Pope of Rome. His closest collaborators were Arabs, and so were the soldiers of his palace guard [...]. This man of inquiring mind, who had spent his entire youth in Sicily, then a major center of Arab sciences, felt that he had little in common with the dull and fanatical Franj (Franks). The voice of the muezzin rang out across his kingdom unimpeded.

On his side, Frederick II was curious to encounter the Sultan, who had already had constructive encounters with westerners, such as with King Richard and with Saint Francis. (figure 4) Frederick also had political aims in Jerusalem, which he intended to pursue - going there personally. Even with the burden of excommunication, Frederick decided to depart to the Holy Land without the blessing of the Pope, not for battle however, but rather in order to crown himself King of Jerusalem. Once there, the Emperor started his negotiations with al-Kamil regarding the fate of Jerusalem. Indeed Frederick II refused to return home except on certain conditions, which included the surrender of Jerusalem and of part of the area conquered by Saladin.

However al-Kamil was by no means prepared to yield him these territories. It was finally agreed that Frederick may obtain the city of Jerusalem on the condition that he did not attempt to rebuild its walls. Moreover nothing outside the city should be held by the Franks, and all the other villages within its province should remain Muslim, with a Muslim governor. The sacred precincts, with the Dome of the Rock were to remain in Muslim hands, even if the Franks were welcome to visit them. The Sultan knew that the Muslims could not defend themselves in an unprotected Jerusalem, so he understood that it was better to satisfy the Franks with a disarmed city, while making a temporary truce with them.

The emir Ibn al-Shaykh, who already had been to Palermo, conducted the negotiation with Frederick II for the Sultan. The ambassador Ibn Wasil, from the court of the Sultan, wrote:

Any conversations and discussions took place between them, during which the Emperor sent to al-Kamil queries on difficult philosophic, geometric and mathematical points, to test the scholars at his court. The Sultan passed the mathematical questions on to his scholars who answer them all. The sultan and the Emperor swore to observe the terms of the agreement and made a truce for ten years, five months and forty days from February 24th, 1229.

In this way they arranged matters between themselves, each side feeling secure in its relations with the other.

Frederick II moreover had already demonstrated a strong interest in the sciences, the arts, mathematics and Islamic philosophy. He had sent the famous Sicilian questions to the Sufi philosopher Ibn Sab’in [Abu Mohammed Abd el-Hakih Ibn Sabin] on the eternity of the world, on the divine science, on the
Frederick was deeply impressed by the architecture of his hunting grounds. During his visit to Jerusalem, he had built, constructed in proximity of the most fascinating and mysterious among all of the castles, Castel del Monte in Apulia, also considered the most exhaustive manual of hunting with birds of prey, and heir Manfred, the Emperor wrote the first and through Arabian manuals, and together with his son Falconry was imported to the West by Frederick. Hieroglyphs, for example, the falcon meant god. Just as Francis spoke to the birds, proving to know a slightly different meaning, where falconry seemed to have played a pivotal role. In fact, four of the most famous troubadours, Giraut de Bornelh, Pierre Vidal, Bertran de Born and Rigaut de Berbezilh, used the falcon as both a symbol of pride and control over a man’s love relationship with the woman. Love here is a trained hunter that hunts perfect ladies with the discipline and accuracy of a bird of prey, descending from above like a falcon onto worthy lovers. Frederick was exposed to these falconry-inspired poems, but he never perfected the art of falconry hunting, until he travelled to the Middle East and encountered the Sultan al-Kamil.

In Frederick’s court, love had the same philosophical meaning, even if its main source of inspiration was Provençal poetry of the 12th century. Here love had a slightly different meaning, where falconry seemed to have played a pivotal role. In fact, four of the most famous troubadours, Giraut de Bornelh, Pierre Vidal, Bertran de Born and Rigaut de Berbezilh, used the falcon as both a symbol of pride and control over a man’s love relationship with the woman. Love here is a trained hunter that hunts perfect ladies with the discipline and accuracy of a bird of prey, descending from above like a falcon onto worthy lovers. Frederick was exposed to these falconry-inspired poems, but he never perfected the art of falconry hunting, until he travelled to the Middle East and encountered the Sultan al-Kamil.

Just as Francis spoke to the birds, proving to know the language of universal dialogue, so did Frederick II learn to exert his control over nature through nature itself, a bird, which represented a link between the terrestrial and celestial worlds. The falcon was indeed a symbol of liberty and victory; in early Egyptian hieroglyphs, for example, the falcon meant god. Falconry was imported to the West by Frederick through Arabian manuals, and together with his son and heir Manfred, the Emperor wrote the first and most exhaustive manual of hunting with birds of prey and ornithology: De arte venandi cum avibus. “The Art of Hunting with Birds”.

One of the Emperor’s last building campaigns was Castel del Monte in Apulia, also considered the most fascinating and mysterious among all of the castles that he had built, constructed in proximity of his hunting grounds. During his visit to Jerusalem, Frederick was deeply impressed by the architecture of the Dome of the Rock because it united the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions in a sacred place for all three cultures. It is probably for this reason that Frederick’s II castle is an octagonal tower at each corner, the only example in Italy. (figure 5) The number 8 represents the spiritual day after the seven days of creation and, according to the Islamic religion, there were eight angels carrying the Throne of God in the heavens. The octagon is an intermediate symbol between a square, representing the earth, and a circle, representing the infinity of the sky. Like the falcon, the number eight is the connection between the terrestrial and the celestial worlds. Castel del Monte was designed by Friar Elias, who had also designed the Basilica Superiore in Assisi; Elias had been the first successor of Francis, and he was subsequently excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX. Among the reasons for his excommunication, there was the accusation of having become an advisor to the Antichrist. The trustful relationship between Frederick II and Friar Elias makes us ponder on the relationship with Francis of Assisi and reconnect these three key figures of the thirteenth century.

Until now, we have seen many elements that intersect each other in this entangling web of connections, which are hard to keep together. We can only hope that future studies will allow further exploration. For now we can only hope to have the right attitude toward these studies, having our eyes and mind open and ready to see connections even if they are hidden under a veil of ideology and historiographical distortion. For now we can notice the true spirit of reform through the encounter between Saint Francis, the Emperor Frederick II, and the Sultan al-Kamil, underlining the spirit that brought dialogue and sharing of knowledge, an event that was new in the history of the crusades; an event that opened a horizon of peace.

Figure 1: Cathedral of St. Rufinus, 11th-13th centuries, Assisi, Italy
Figure 2: Cathedral of St. Rufinus, 11th-13th centuries, Assisi, Italy
Figure 3: Benozzo Gozzoli, The Conversion of Sultan Melek-el-Kamel, fresco, 15th century, Church of Saint Francis, Montefalco, Italy
Figure 4: Arabic, Greek, and Latin scribes in the Norman court of Sicily, 12th century, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 120 II, f. 101r
Figure 5: Frederick II reaching an agreement with the Sultan of Jerusalem, miniature from the Chronicles of Giovanni Villani, manuscript, Italy, 14th century
Orientalism

The term Orientalism refers to two different, albeit related subjects. The first is an academic one, where Orientalism is defined as the study by Europeans, of the area of the Middle East and North Africa, its typography, culture, history and civilization. It is a tradition that extends from the 16th century up to the 20th century. The second definition of Orientalism refers to a visual art genre that thrived in Europe especially during the 19th century, mainly in France and England, but also in Austria, Italy, Poland and Russia.

The first discipline of Orientalism produced extensive works of fiction, poetry, translation and research in the subjects of history, geography, religion, archaeology and other academic disciplines. Among those who participated and excelled in this domain are Karl Marks, Max Weber, Eileen Eder, Edward Henry Palmer, Carl Brockelmann, Peter Forsskål, Max Müller, Joseph Freiherr Von Hammer-Purgstall, William McGuckin de Slane (Baron de Slane), Victor Romanovich Rosen, Max Meyerhof, Maurice Gaudfroy-Demombynes Renan, Ignác Goldziher, etc.

The second discipline is represented by a number of painters who created works of art in the form of tableaux, sketches, water colour, and oil paintings that ranged from genius to mundane and vulgar. These works of arts shared a great deal with the co current painting school of that time, (Romanticism) but used the Orient - its landscape, seascape ruins, scenery, people, cities, market place, and oriental legends and history - as its subject.

There is no denying that, Orientalism produced massive volumes of information, opinion, knowledge and creativity. However, the word today evokes a multitude of conflicting reactions to this tradition, and I must venture to say that, most of it has been negative.

In this paper, I will not pass judgment on this tradition, but what I would like to do, is discuss the two fields of Orientalism, and place both in a slightly different context.

Orientalism as an academic discipline, has always been a target of criticism by scholars from the Orient, i.e. Islamic and Asian countries. Just look up the word استشراق in any Arabic reference book or a search engine in Arabic, and you will find a massive volume of criticism, ranging from insult and accusation to plain rejection. But it was a single book that focused, elucidated, and structured the attack on Orientalism as a scientific discipline. That book was “Orientalism” by Edward Said.

Edward Said was a Palestinian scholar who taught comparative literature in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1978, he published his book “Orientalism”, in which he examined the tradition of Orientalism in the historical context of the relationship between Europe and the Middle East and Asia. It was a well written, articulate, heavily documented, and full of anger. He criticized the whole tradition and described it as a tool through which the Occident justified and legitimized its domination of the Orient. He linked it to events that extend deep in history, as far as the Persian - Greek war in the 4th century BCE.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the book came out shortly before the Iranian revolution, a period during which many members of the American public were trying to understand the reasons behind the anti-American rhetoric that was coming from the Middle East. The book was reviewed in 1980 by Time Magazine and it became an immediate success. It had a remarkable negative impact on the Orientalist discipline; the word is no longer used to define studies of the Middle East or Asia.

Dr Mansour Ahmad Aboukhamseen is a specialist in the history of Europe since the French Revolution, a member of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters and the managing director of Kuwait Energy Company. He is also a member of the editorial board of the “Journal of World Culture” and of the Kuwait – Japanese Cooperation Committee. Dr. Aboukhamseen is a respected author and his latest publication on French-Algerian relations in 1830, is in the press.
Said based his theory on the conclusions and findings of the French author Michel Foucault (figure 1). Foucault is a versatile, prolific, and highly intelligent scholar. He carried to his credit three academic disciplines, psychology, philosophy, and history.

In a series of books, Foucault examined the history of mental illness and the treatment of the mentally ill in historical context, and published his findings in books such as “The Birth of the Clinic”, “Mental Illness and Personality”, “Madness and Humanity”, “History of Madness in the Classical Age” and his most important book in this field was “Madness and Civilization”. He also examined the way prisoners were treated in Europe from the Middle Ages to the 20th century in his book “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the prison”. His most important book, however, was “The Order of things: An Archaeology of Knowledge” in which he put together, his theories regarding how science, art, and literature were used to discipline and dominate Modern Europe.

All three disciplines [psychology, philosophy, and history] are very clearly manifested in Foucault’s work, and came together in a detailed and extensive description of how Europe moved from the Middle Ages to modern times, by studying and describing the development of medicine, the treatment of the insane, mental health, punishment and prison reform, education, and discourse. Foucault was actually trying to answer a fundamental question relating to what made Europe make the leap from the Middle Ages to modern time, from a traditional agrarian, feudal society, into modern Europe that dominated the modern times. His answers actually can be found in his psychological training specifically from the theory of Sigmund Freud elaborated in his book “New Introductory Lectures and Psychoanalysis”. Freud traced the development of the Human personality into three stages.

1. The Id is the original core of an individual’s personality. The Id is primitive and unchanging, because it has no contact with the outside world (primarily unconscious). The Id wants its impulses satisfied and does not care how this happens.

2. The Ego is the external restraint that is placed upon the Id to restrict its behavioural instinct and its disregard for the others. It comes from the parental authority and the outside restraints that others and society put upon the Id. The ego must satisfy the impulsive demands of the Id while obeying the standards of the superego.

3. The Superego develops out of the ego; this structure serves as the conscience, which can develop both standards of conduct and inhibitions on prohibited behaviour. The superego can be both conscious, and unconscious (as in extreme guilt feelings which the individual cannot trace). Our superego is modelled after our parent’s superego.

This theory and explanation of the human personality, and its development, have always fascinated many historians. Freud himself dabbled in that line in his two books, “Civilization and Discontents” and “Moses and Monotheism”. Many German historians used psychology and psychoanalysis, to try to understand or explain German history in the first half of the 20th century, specifically the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era. They studied the way children were reared and brought up to the smallest details.

Other historians such as Erik Erikson, a student of Freud, who wrote “Childhood and Society”, in which he examines historical subjects as diverse as Sioux tribes to Hitler’s Germany, using basic Freud’s theories. Another outstanding historian is Leo Rogen, who wrote about the American President, Andrew Jackson, and Peter Gay, who wrote “Freud for Historians”. Today there is a recognized discipline labelled psycho-history.

Foucault took this theory and used it to explain the development of Europe from the traditional agrarian Middle ages to the modern industrial era. According to Foucault, Europe during the Middle Ages was living in what was the blessing of the Id, where mad people roamed the street and instinct behaviour was tolerated and basic needs were met. He identified the introduction of the Ego with the rise of the mercantile bourgeoisie that rose to power during the age of discovery, and the commercial revolution, and started dominating and disciplining European society. He equates the rise of the middle class, the introduction of the new science, the central nation state, the new educational system and the evolving penal system with the effort of the Ego to rein in and discipline the Id, the same way that paternal discipline, authoritarian, restraints, and punishment managed to dominate the Id in the individual. The bourgeoisie with its new institutions, dominated Europe and disciplined it. The 19th century, was the age, when Europe internalized the Ego of the bourgeoisie and turned it to its own Superego.
In this process scientific discourse was crucial. Foucault repeatedly linked “Savoir et Pouvoir” (Knowledge and Power). He sees knowledge as an instrument of power, an instrument of domination, an instrument of subjection, he sees the bourgeoisie extending its domination over things, by introducing the scientific order. Theories, classification, description and cataloguing stratification and stereotyping are all tools to bring the outside world into order. Science is not an end in itself, but rather a tool of authority to be used in the subjection of society. From here, Edward Said took his clues. Said saw Orientalism as a means for Europe to dominate the East. He sees the scientific and academic products of Orientalism as tools, designed and used to justify and help implement the subjection of the Orient. He actually expands on the theory by lumping literature and art in the same category. He used evidence from the material to generate what he calls the stereotyping of the Orient, which is an enforcement of Foucault’s emphasis on how order and standardization was necessary to dominate.

Turning to art, I will briefly examine the orientalist art genre and try to place it in its European context (figure 2).

During the 19th century, a multitude of work was produced in Europe which took the Middle East and North Africa as its subject. The genre was called Orientalism and the painters were called Orientalists. This art form was more common and prevalent in France, and many art critics identified its debut with an outstanding painter called Eugene Delacroix, who with two other artists: Eugene Formentin and Theodore Chasseriau produced numerous work of art dedicated to the subject of the orient. These three artists were emulated by many others in France, England and Austria. The first work that ushered the Orientalist period was “The Death of the Sardanapalus”, which was a huge success in Paris Salon in 1827. The work included many elements that will dominate such genera in years to come. It had thoroughbred horses, semi-naked white and black bodies, bearded men and strewn treasures. The surprising thing is that Delacroix at that time, had not visited the Orient, his whole creation was an interpretation of a poem by Lord Byron, the English poet. He later did travel to North Africa; the other two companions lived for a longer period there.

When we examine the background of these orientalists, we find these painters more influenced by poets than scientists. It is hard to see discipline or desire for discipline in these painting; it is actually the opposite. There is a desire to escape from what Europe has become. It was a revolt against the discipline Europe had adopted after the industrial revolution. In a way, it was akin to Romanticism, despite having outlasted it.

Orientalism and the Orient in general, were escape routes. They gave some European adventures, aristocrats, rebellious souls, and interpreters, and others, a way out of a growing powerful disciplined and overwhelming European state. The subject of Orientalism is a loaded subject. I do not think we can easily dismiss the work of so many scientists and artists out of hand; there is no denying that, any work produced, be it art or literature, represents the worker as much as the object of his work. The monograms and the studies, the novels, and the poetry that were written about the Middle East and Asia by Europeans, tell us as much about Europe as about the Middle East or Asia. The paintings that were produced by European Orientalist, tell us as much about those Europeans as they do about the Orient, but this is the case in any genre especially when that genre cross borders between two cultures. The work of the old Muslim geographer, who travelled to Europe and Asia tells us as much about the Muslim world as it does about the area they visited.

The products of Orientalist academics, authors and artists say as much about Europe as they do about the Orient. For humans, the “other” is important. The “other” actually helps humans define themselves. The “others” are what we are not. It could be what we want to be, or what we do not want to be, but what the “others” are, is always about what we are.
إهادات كتب لدار الأثار الإسلامية

د. خالد السلطاني
منة عام من عمارة الملاذ. دارالمدى للثقافة والتٌّنشر، الطبعة الأولى - 2009

د. فيصل الحيفان
التراث العلمي والعربى. معهد الخطوطاطعات العربية، القاهرة - 2000

ترجمة اليود ورو دي لابنيا
المدن الإسلامية. مركز الملك فهد للبحوث والدراسات الإسلامية. الطبعة الأولى - 2003

د. سعد بن عبد العزيز الراسد
دراسات في الأثار الإسلامية المبكرة بالمدينة المنورة. الطبعة الأولى الرياض - 2000

د. عبدالمالك خلف التميمي
الكويت والخليج العربي، المؤسسة الشرعية العربية، الكويت. الطبعة الأولى- 1992

د. جورج صليبا
سلسلة تاريخ العلوم عند العرب(2)تاريخ علم الفلك العربي. مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية بيروت

د. م. عبدالوهاب السيد الرفاعي
رسائل الخوف - قصص مذهلة تدور أحداثها بالكويت. نوفا بلس للنشر والتوزيع، الطبعة الرابعة - 2016

د. م. عبد الوهاب السيد الرفاعي
متحف الأرواح - أسرار عائلة كويتية. نوفا بلس للنشر والتوزيع، الطبعة الثالثة - 2016

د. محمد جواد عبد الجاسم
القاسم مدينتي. توزيع دار الحجة البيضاء، لبنان، الطبعة الأولى 2011