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## BOOK REVIEWS

Ahmad Muhammad Issa. *Painting in Islam. Between Prohibition and Aversion*. Istanbul: Waqf for Research on Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1996, 137 pp., text in English (pp. 1—56), text in Arabic (pp. 80—137), colour plates (pp. 57—75).

The work under review here is an example of a popular Muslim publication which is also of scholarly interest. The ban on the depiction of living things seems to be an inexhaustible topic in the history of Islamic art. However, this is the sort of problem that is never likely to be resolved. The appearance of the work under review here is linked to the periodically renewed discussion on the possibility of figurative depiction as such. This topic has once again become current in connection with the polemics that have arisen in fundamentalism Muslim circles.

Despite the fact that the edition is intended primarily for a broad readership, its appearance is quite indicative and deserves attention from specialists. The book "Painting in Islam: Between Prohibition and Aversion" was published with the aid of the Waqf for Research on Islamic History, Art and Culture foundation, in Turkey, one of the first countries to undertake a search for solutions to the problem of a radical renewal of Islamic principles in cultural and everyday life. The greater the successes of the Turkish experience have been in this area, the more resistance they have encountered in recent years from Turkish Islamic fundamentalism as a political and cultural force.

The book is bilingual, it is published in English and Arabic. The material is supported with references not only to the Torah, Bible, Qur'ān, and *ḥadīth*, but also by vivid, colour illustrations presenting a broad chronological and geographical view of the objects under discussion, from depictions on Byzantine coins and fabrics to traditional book miniatures.

The author formulates his conclusions on the basis of extant written sources which convey the views of Muḥammad's contemporaries on the possibility of depicting living things which do not cast a shadow (p. 19) and on the basic possibility of creating such works as long as they are not used as objects of religious worship, which would entail a return to paganism.

The Islamic rejection of figurative art was the consequence of a general tendency which arose in the Mediterranean in the sixth century. This manifested itself in the ever greater disapproval with which Judaism and Christianity viewed the worship of divinity with the aid of hand-created representations. The latter gradually came to be viewed as a concession to paganism.

In the author's opinion, the danger that such representations would arise and that faith in idols which represent di-

vinity would replace faith in divinity, and the struggle with this phenomenon as a reflection of the struggle with polytheism came to Islam from Christianity in the eighth—ninth centuries (pp. 32—3). Since the Qur'ān does not contain explicit prohibitions on representation, the basic source for the author's conclusions are the *ḥadīths*. In accordance with their affiliation with this or that circle of the Prophet's companions, the *ḥadīths* not only ranged from the categorical to the tolerant, but sometimes contradicted one another. The author cites, for example, the *ḥadīth* which states that "Those who will be most severely tormented on the Day of Resurrection are those who make representations" or "The angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog or in which there are representations". These *ḥadīths* can be regarded as most intolerant. At the same time, one can find in a *ḥadīth* from 'Ā'isha: "The Prophet never left in his house anything which bore a *ṭaṣalīb* without destroying it". From Mālik b. Anas comes a *ḥadīth* which tells of how Muḥammad asked 'Ā'isha to rehang a curtain in her home in such a way that the representation on it was not visible from where he usually prayed, as the drawings distracted his thoughts during prayer: "Draw it back away from me, for its representations keep occurring to my mind while I am praying" (p. 25). And, finally, a *ḥadīth* ascribed to 'Ā'isha contradicts the others cited here, as it tells of how the Archangel Gabriel brought Muḥammad a portrait of her in green clothes with the words "Here is your wife for this and for eternal life".

The author attempts to render even the intolerant *ḥadīths* in such a way that suggests the possibility of reinterpretation. In this regard, it is appropriate to cite the author's complaints against the editorial policy of the journal *Majallat al-Azhar* in relation to letters they receive with questions on this issue. Their position differs little from the utterances found in the works of early medieval authors. It lacks independent consideration or unbiased reflection. In the author's view, instead of presenting an original, contemporary, and authoritative commentary, the journal usually limits itself to citing the views of the Committee on *Fatwās* or to a comment by a companion of the Prophet, ending with the words "God only knows" (p. 42).

In his conclusion to the work, the author insists that Muḥammad, seeking to guard the faithful against the sin of idolatry (Sūra 6, verse 74), objected only to those representations which were created with the aim of substituting them for the true God as an object of worship (Sūra 19, verse 42). In the author's view, the debate on the permissibility or impermissibility of reproducing living things in art — painting, graphic art, sculpture — is beside the point. He also holds that the very arguments which arise on this issue

merely discredit Islam by shunting believing Muslims off to the hinterlands of cultural development and civilisation (p. 48).

Taking into account that the book under review here is not a scholarly edition, we do not undertake a critical discussion in the context of the scholarly literature. Still, one can only welcome works such as "Painting in Islam", which testify to a profound respect for the ancient humanist tradi-

tions of true Islam. The support of such a prestigious Waqf foundation in the publication of this work is the best recommendation not only of the Waqf's position, but also of the views of a significant part of the Muslim religious community which protests against a return to societal norms frozen at the level of the middle ages.

F. Abdullaeva

E. Balicka-Witakowska. *La Crucifixion sans Crucifié dans l'art éthiopien. Recherches sur la service de l'iconographie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive.* — *Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica*, No. 4, herausgegeben von P. O. Scholz. Warsaw: 1997, 1888, 108 pp.

This monograph by E. Balicka-Witakowska, which concerns the complex iconographic issue of crucifixion scenes in Ethiopian art where the crucified Christ is not depicted, is her doctoral dissertation, written under the direction of Professor Karl Otto Nordstrom. The work was defended at the University of Uppsala (Sweden) on May 20, 1993. The study has appeared as an independent book in the series *Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica* with the help of the Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

The author has analysed an extremely broad array of both written and non-written sources from the Christian East and Latin West, including not only appropriate passages in the synoptic gospels but apocrypha as well, commentaries by the Church fathers, liturgical texts, and spiritual poetry. In determining the place in Eastern art of Ethiopian manuscripts with miniatures which depict the crucifixion scene in a particular iconographic way, the researcher structures her work with an eye to the following three basic questions: (i) what were the sources which led to the emergence of such an original composition; (ii) what is the ideological import of such a scene; and (iii) how could such an iconographic variant arise?

The book is divided into five chapters and presents in an appendix a catalogue of Ethiopian manuscripts with miniatures the author deems noteworthy. Chapter 1 contains a description of manuscripts which belong to the category of illuminated Gospels. They are all decorated in accordance with the same principle. First come canonical depictions and the "Source of Life"; portraits of the Evangelists precede the texts of the corresponding gospels. The placement of the Crucifixion scene is not linked directly to the text, but remains in keeping with the chronology of events.

Typologically, Balicka-Witakowska places the miniatures into three stylistic groups. The division is based on the forms of the Golgothan cross, its ornamentation, differences in the personification of the Sun and Moon, and in the depiction of the lamb against the background of the half-sphere. In her opinion, the dates in the colophons relate to the texts, not the miniatures; one must date the latter by their stylistic features. The author admits that attempts to link manuscripts with specific scriptoria and centres have not yet borne fruit.

The second chapter deals with the ideological sources of the depiction of crucifixion scenes without the crucified Christ. Having analyzed the contents of numerous apocrypha in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Arabic and Ethiopic, which speak of Christ's death on the cross and his immunity from suffering, the author concludes that one should seek a theological explanation not in heretical treatises, but in works by Christian apologists, primarily Tertullian and Origen. Also, the absence of Christ in crucifixion scenes is not linked to the teachings of the medieval Ethiopian sects of the Michaelites and Stephanites. Ethiopian miniaturists copied early Byzantine sources before the Council in Trullo in 692, which banned the symbolic depiction of Christ. The decrees of the Council were not accepted by the monophysite Church in Ethiopia as well as by the Latin West.

Specific sections of chapter three in the book under review here present an iconographic analysis of crucifixion scenes and their various components — the lamb, the caged bird, the Sun and Moon, the good and evil thieves, the soldier with a spear and the soldier with a sponge, and people standing at the foot of the cross. She does not neglect the form of the cross or the ornamentation of engraved stones which covers its surface. The latter feature is viewed in the context of the stones and their attendant symbolism. The explanations draw not only on familiar medieval treatises, but also on more specialised materials which were especially popular in Ethiopia and provided the basis for local versions. Among them is the "Book of Heavenly and Earthly Secrets", where sapphire symbolises the legs of Christ and topaz his wounds.

In the analysis of each of the components enumerated above, Balicka-Witakowska provides varied and worthwhile observations which in a number of cases lead the author to original conclusions. To enumerate only a few, the lamb — a symbol of Christ, the human nature of the Saviour and the Eucharist — is in Ethiopian miniatures linked exclusively with the idea of sacrifice, such as the lamb which replaced Isaac in the "Sacrifice of Abraham". The horns of the lamb reveal themselves to be full of hidden meaning — a symbol of the cross. The same is true of the hide destined for removal, which symbolises the very act of crucifixion. Other associations are found in the rod which the lamb bears: it is, like the rod of Moses, a symbol of the cross. The bush or tree near which the lamb stands is a prefiguration of the cross; the cross itself is the tree of life.

In Ethiopian miniatures, the connection between the lamb and the cross is always direct — it stands on the upper horizontal beam of the cross and is conceived as crucified and imbued with radiance, for as we find in the Book of Revelation (21, 23), heavenly Jerusalem is sanctified by the

glory of the Lord, and his torch is the lamb. The caged bird, which in early Christian and Byzantine art signified the soul of man encumbered by material existence, is treated in Ethiopian art as an image of the suffering Christ abandoned by his disciples. Furthermore, if the bird is depicted with its wings spread, it becomes a symbol of the crucified Christ. Basing her analysis on written sources, Balicka-Witakowska explains the simultaneous appearance in miniatures of the bird and the lamb as an original feature of the ancient Church's iconographic language, where the juxtaposition expressed the dual nature of Christ. The depiction in Ethiopian miniatures of the Sun and the Moon on both sides of the cross is identical to other Eastern Christian depictions, with the sole difference that the heavenly bodies are presented as turning away from the Crucified Christ. This device underscores the absence of Christ on the cross, as the averted Sun and Moon signify the darkness which concealed the body of Christ.

Balicka-Witakowska makes two observations on the iconography of the thieves. These observations are of importance both for theologians and for art historians. Firstly, of the two basic forms of the crucifixion — the Jerusalem, in which the bodies of the crucified and their hands are extended along the beams of the cross, and the Eastern, in which their hands are held behind their backs along the vertical beam — Ethiopian miniaturists preferred the second. The miniatures included in the catalogue give only one example of the Jerusalem form. Secondly, the depiction of an angel receiving the soul of the good thief and of a demon receiving the soul of the evil thief goes back to apocryphal texts of the Revelations of Peter, Paul, the Virgin Mary, and Gregory; such depictions are attested for Western iconography of the fourteenth century, whence they likely were adopted by contemporary Ethiopian miniaturists.

In the positions of the soldiers alongside the cross and in their actions — where the offering of a sponge soaked in vinegar and the blow with a spear take place simultaneously — the author sees the prevalence of a symbolic, not historical, principle of depiction. Moreover, in the author's opinion, the location of the soldier with the spear on the right side of the cross betrays the influence of Gnostic ideas, according to which the right side was linked to the spiritual and the eternal, whereas the left side represented things earthly. Regarding the figures arrayed at the base of the cross, Balicka-Witakowska gives grounds for rejecting current hypotheses which view them either as Roman soldiers casting dice or pilgrims. The author of the monograph proposes that we see here a symbolic representation of the peoples of the ecumen to whom the cross brings the light of the true teaching.

Landscape in Ethiopian miniatures is viewed by the author primarily through the prism of art history. Miniaturists used a traditional, three-coloured paradigm which goes back to the Syriac Gospel of Rabbula: yellow for earth, blue for mountains, and rose for the sky. In certain instances, miniaturists used only two colours, depicting a blue sky which shades into mountains of the same hue.

Chapter four is an essay on one relic — a marble ciborium held in the San-Marco Cathedral in Venice. It is

the only artifact outside of Ethiopia which represents the crucifixion of the lamb. The final fifth chapter contains a collection of materials from late antiquity and the early Byzantine period, primarily the fourth—seventh centuries, which depict the crucifixion without Christ. They are classified according to chronology, location, and iconography. This section of the work provides answers to questions posed in the introduction about the ideological import of what is depicted and about the means by which the aforementioned iconographic recensions made their way to Ethiopia.

The thrust of the arguments brought to bear by Balicka-Witakowska suggests to the reader that the depiction of the Crucifixion without the crucified Christ, that is, without the cross — the tree of life, called “angelic and victorious” — is an expression of Theophany. The appearance of this iconographic schema in Ethiopia was made possible through the mediation of Syrians and Copts, who brought with them pilgrims' eulogies. At the same time, the author rejects the thesis that the sources of such a composition go back to pictorial decorations in the Holy Land temples, since there is no direct evidence of precisely which biblical episodes adorned those places of worship and the existence of various versions of the same episode excludes the possibility of a single prototype. Nor does the author accept that the craftsmen who prepared the pilgrims' eulogies could have copied the representations found on medallions specially produced in Constantinople in the fifth—seventh centuries. Such craftsmen would hardly have had access to valuable jewelry from the capital of the empire, even if such objects made their way to the Holy Land. In all likelihood, Palestinian craftsmen employed various sources for their depictions and could have combined them as they saw fit in what they placed on the surfaces of the small objects they produced. In turn, Ethiopian miniaturists copied the eulogies which came to their country from the holy places.

Balicka-Witakowska's book deserves recognition as a profound, careful, and thorough study of medieval Ethiopian miniatures. The abundance of sources the author employs, both written and non-written, renders her work a valuable reference guide of the sort so essential to historians, art researchers, and specialists in religious archaeology. The collection of artifacts which depict the crucifixion without the crucified Christ is not only imposing, it is nearly exhaustive. The author has omitted only a bronze cross with an engraved depiction of the bust of Christ Emmanuel held in the Museum of the city of Aquileie<sup>1</sup> and tesseras, found in many numismatic collections, which depict the bust of Christ the Almighty above a cross-shaped monogram venerated by angels. One can see this same scene on a seventh-century gold signet-ring (the British Museum)<sup>2</sup> and on a twelfth-century Italo-Byzantine cameo cut on sardonyx (the Hermitage)<sup>3</sup>. One should note that the work under review was carried out in accordance with the most demanding scholarly standards. The text is accompanied by a list of sources and a bibliography which includes publications on the topic up through 1993.

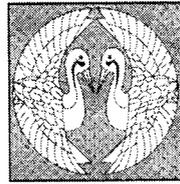
V. Zalesskaya

<sup>1</sup> C. Cechelli, “Una figurazione gnostica”, *Studi Aeuileieci offerti a Giovanni Brusin* (Aquileie, 1953), pp. 245—52.

<sup>2</sup> D. Beuto, (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections* (London, 1994), p. 99, No. 107.

<sup>3</sup> V. N. Zalesskaia, *Prikladnoe iskusstvo Vizantii IV—XII vekov. Opyt attributsii* (Applied Art in Byzantium in the Fourth—Twelfth Centuries: an Attempt at Attribution) (St.-Petersburg, 1997), p. 41, illustration 40.

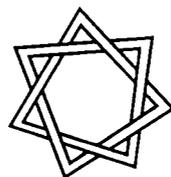
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**Front cover:**

"The hunter sits atop a lion which has sunk its teeth into his elbow", miniature from manuscript A 448 in the holdings of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, fol. 24 b, 7.5×6.5 cm.

**Back cover:**

**Plate 1.** "A hunter stands with his hunting dog which grips in its teeth a cat it has dragged out its burrow", miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 5b, 8.0×7.5 cm.

**Plate 2.** "A dog licks blood off a wounded rabbit", miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 66a, 7.5×7.0 cm.

**Plate 3.** "The lion devours one of the two bulls", miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 57a, 7.0×6.5 cm.