PAINTING IN ISLAM

A STUDY OF THE PLACE OF
PICTORIAL ART IN MUSLIM CULTURE

SIR THOMAS W. ARNOLD

Unlike Christianity and Buddhism, which have traditionally exalted the pictorial arts, Muslim orthodoxy has been hostile to the painter and his handiwork. Representation of the human figure and of living things is deemed imitative of the creative activity of God, and is thus condemned by Sacred Law. Nevertheless, since the time of even the earliest caliphs, painters have practiced their art, though usually within palace confines.

Not a history or an aesthetic analysis of Muslim pictorial art, this volume puts Islamic painting in its social and religious context and examines its relation to Islamic civilization in general. Written by one of the greatest of British orientalists, the book is a classic in its field, indispensable to all students and scholars.

The author discusses the bases of theological opposition to the representational arts and also the general disregard of these religious prohibitions in the great courts of history. He then describes the untold destruction of art treasures by centuries of warfare and pious iconoclasm; methods and environment of painters of the past; influences of Christian, Manichean, and Chinese schools; and the media and range of subject matter covered by Muslim painters, from miniatures of Persian epics and poetic romances to frescoes of secular and religious scenes. Arnold also discusses the Muslim artist's concern with decorative beauty, line, color, and form rather than with the depiction of the expression of emotion, and in the final chapter investigates the scanty literature on the lives of painters. 65 full-page plates illustrate the text and give outstanding examples of Islamic art.

This study made use of a wealth of primary material and previously scattered and unavailable manuscripts and illustrations, and it set a standard of scholarship for subsequent researchers to follow. This new edition should be welcomed by all art historians, those in oriental studies, and all others interested in one of the world's richest artistic heritages.


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The Prophet Elias rescuing Prince Nūr ad-Dahr, who had been thrown into the sea by a demon.

PAINTING IN ISLAM
A STUDY OF THE PLACE OF PICTORIAL ART IN MUSLIM CULTURE

By SIR THOMAS W. ARNOLD, C.I.E., F.B.A., LITT.D.

With a New Introduction by B. W. ROBINSON, M.A., B.Litt.
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DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
NEW YORK
INTRODUCTION TO THE DOVER EDITION

THE study of Islamic painting is hardly older than this century. In 1928, when Sir Thomas Arnold’s _Painting in Islam_ was first published by the Oxford University Press, the literature on the subject was virtually confined to the sumptuous pioneer folios of Martin (1912), Marteau-Vever (1913), and Schulz (1914), and the later and more modest volume of Kühnel (1922). In all these works the illustrations far outweigh the texts in which, indeed, the authors were feeling their way like explorers in unmapped territory. A number of articles and monographs on Islamic painting had also come from the pen of M. Blochet of the Bibliothèque Nationale, but his views, always individual and often paradoxical, became quite irresponsible as time went on.

The present republication of such a classic in this field as _Painting in Islam_, in recognition of the centenary of the author’s birth, should be widely acclaimed; it makes generally available once again a major work of scholarship, and is also an act of what the Romans called _pietas_—honour to the illustrious dead. We pay Arnold this honour not only for the high place he holds in the distinguished ranks of British orientalists by virtue of his wide learning, his exacting standards of scholarship, and his originality of research, but equally in recognition of his great gift of teaching and his outstanding qualities of enthusiasm, modesty, and humanity.

Thomas Walker Arnold was born on April 19, 1864, the third son of a Devonport businessman. He gained a scholarship to Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he read Classics, but was soon drawn towards oriental studies. At the age of twenty-four he was appointed teacher of philosophy at the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh (some sixty miles south-east of Delhi), a post which he held with conspicuous success for ten years, forming a very strong bond with Indian Muslims and working devotedly in the cause of reform in Islam. In 1898 he was made Professor of Philosophy at Government College, Lahore, returning to England in 1904, where he became Educational Adviser for Indian students. From 1921 until his death on June 9, 1930, he was Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at London University. He was knighted in 1921.

Thus by 1928 Sir Thomas Arnold could look back on more than forty years’ scholarship in Arabic and Persian and a long and honourable career of university teaching at Aligarh, Lahore, and London, in the course of which
he had steeped himself in every aspect of Islamic culture. It was not until 1921, when he collaborated with Laurence Binyon on *The Court Painters of the Great Moguls*, and contributed a valuable article on the *Khusraw u Shirin* manuscript with miniatures by Rizād ŢAbbāsi (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1694–1886) to the *Burlington Magazine* that his flair for Islamic painting began to show itself. In 1924 his first individual publication on the subject appeared: a modest but highly original and suggestive paper, *Survivals of Sassanian and Mamluk Art in Persian Painting*, which he had delivered as the fourth Chatlon Lecture at Armstrong College, Durham University, two years previously. In 1926 he collaborated with F. R. Martin in the publication of three outstanding Persian manuscripts in limited editions with plates by Max Jaffé of Vienna: the *Diwan* of Sultan Ahmad Jalair, now in the Freer Gallery, Washington; the British Museum Nizami of 1490 (Or. 6816); and the *Shah-nama* of Hilali which had passed from Martin's own collection to the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. *Painting in Islam* was followed in 1929 by *The Islamic Book*, a comprehensive work of profound scholarship written in collaboration with the distinguished Austrian Arabist, Dr. Adolf Grohmann. *Bibyad and his Paintings in the Zafar Nama MS* (the celebrated manuscript dated 1407, formerly in the collection of Schuyl) appeared in the year of Arnold's death, and *The Old and New Testaments in Muslim Religious Art*, the Schweich Lecture he delivered before the British Academy in 1938, two years after his election as a Fellow, was published posthumously in 1932. His great catalogue of the Mughal miniatures in the Chester Beatty Library was not published until 1936.

But of all Arnold's works *Painting in Islam* is of the greatest value to the student of Muslim, and particularly Persian, painting. It set a new standard of scholarship in the subject, for Arnold's long apprenticeship in Arabic and Persian gave him free access to original sources; his deep interest in the religion and culture of Islam enabled him to see Islamic painting in its proper setting and proportion; and at the same time his humanity makes the book an eminently readable account of a somewhat abstruse subject. He went to previously untapped sources for many of his illustrations and examples—the Bodleian Library, the Royal Asiatic Society, and the India Office Library (where he had been Assistant Librarian from 1904 to 1909)—and thus widened the field of research for his successors. In his Preface he emphasizes that he has not attempted to write a general history of Islamic painting; the "purpose of the book is rather to indicate the place of painting in the culture of the Islamic world, both in relation to those theological circles which condemned the practice of it, and to those persons who, disregarding the prohibitions of religion, consulted their own tastes in encouraging it." Thus *Painting in Islam* has been in no way superseded by later works such as Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray's monumental *Persian Miniature Painting* (1933), or Stchuikine's admirable treatments of Persian painting under the Abbasids and Mongols (1926), the Timurids (1934), and the Safavids (1930 and 1964), but is complementary to them. Arnold was first and foremost a Persian and Arabic scholar; other writers on Persian painting have usually been art historians whose knowledge of the background of Islamic literature, tradition, and thought may be comparatively superficial, and whose acquaintance with the languages and script seldom stretches beyond the more or less laborious reading of a colophon or chapter-heading in a manuscript.

I hope I may be permitted to close on a personal note. I developed a love of Persian painting at a very early age; *Painting in Islam* appeared when I was halfway through my public school, but my parents, perhaps wisely, felt that four guineas—a very considerable sum in those days—was too much to lay out on such a book for a boy of sixteen. However, during my last year at school I managed to win a prize for a paper on Greek sculpture, the prize being £5 worth of books at the school bookshop. Thus, in 1931, I acquired my copy of *Painting in Islam*, and when I went on to Oxford it was Arnold's reproductions and descriptions of Persian miniatures in the Bodleian Library that gave me the idea of presenting a thesis on the Bodleian collection for the degree of B.Lit. This I did in 1936, and twenty-two years later this thesis was published, after much rewriting and expansion, as *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Paintings in the Bodleian Library*. Thus, though I was never privileged to meet Sir Thomas Arnold, I can truthfully claim him as my preceptor, and his book as the progenitor of my own. It has, in fact, been a great honour and satisfaction to write the introduction to this most admirable book, which has been my companion and guide for over thirty years. I am quite sure that in its new form it will prove equally valuable to younger amateurs and students in the same field for many years to come.

B. W. Robinson
THE present work makes no claim to be a history of Muslim painters, either of Persia or of any other country, though a chapter has been added, giving from hitherto untranslated historical sources the scanty materials available for the biographies of the most famous Persian painters. The purpose of the book is rather to indicate the place of painting in the culture of the Islamic world, both in relation to those theological circles which condemned the practice of it, and to those persons who, disregarding the prohibitions of religion, consulted their own tastes in encouraging it. A chapter on landscape has purposely been omitted, since it was recognized that an adequate account of this aspect of the subject would require a separate treatise.

The author desires to express his grateful thanks to the following institutions for the use of photographs from their respective collections: the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the University Library, Edinburgh; the British Museum and the India Office Library, London; the Staatsbibliothek, Munich; the Ashmolean Museum and the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the Accademia dei Lincei and the Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome; the Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. To Mr. A. Chester Beatty he is indebted not only for Plate XXV but also for the number of prints required for the present edition, and for Plate XXXVII a; to Miss Jessie Beck for Plate XLVII; to Mr. Bernard Berenson for Plate XL; and to Professor Dr. Friedrich Sarre for Plate XVI. More examples would have been added from the collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale, had not the condition been imposed that two copies of the published work should be presented in exchange; it has been thought proper to resist the imposition of such a fine upon scientific work, and accordingly use has been made of pictures already published, for Plates VIII, XXXIV (the block of which was kindly lent by M. Paul Geuthner), and XXXV b.
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Frontispiece. (British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings 13270–1.) This is a page out of the enormous MS. of the Dastūr-i-Amir-Hamzah, begun for the Mughal emperor Humāyūn and completed in the reign of his son, Akbar. It bears on the back, in the lower part of the text, the number 86 in red letters. The young prince, Nūr ad-Dahr, was the grandson of the eponymous hero of the romance, Hamzah. (See Die indischen Miniaturen des Hamza-Romans im Österr. Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Wien und in anderen Sammlungen, von H. Glueck, 1921.)

I. (Bodleian Library, Douce 348 (Ethé 196), fol. 99 b.) The Haft Paykar by Nizāmī, copied at Samarqand in A.H. 980 (A.D. 1572–3). This picture illustrates the story told to King Bahram Gur by the princess in the green pavilion.

II. (British Museum, Add. 16561, fol. 60.) This MS. contains a collection of Ghazals from the Divans of twelve Persian poets of the 8th and 9th centuries of the Hijrah. The inundation of the city of Baghdad, depicted in this picture, occurred during the reign of Shāykh Uwais (1356–74), the son and successor of the founder of the Jalā’ir dynasty, and was referred to in a poem by Nāṣir, a dervish from Bukhārā, who at the time was on a visit to a famous poet, Salmān of Sāwa, the court-poet and panegyrist of the Sultan. As the date of the MS. is 1468—a whole century later than the disaster represented in the picture, and after the destruction caused by Timūr when he sacked Baghdad in 1401 and destroyed many of its public buildings—the picture is of no historic value, and merely represents what the painter thought the great capital of Islam ought to have looked like. The MS. is of interest, as having been produced in Shirvān, in one of the most northerly of the provinces of Persia, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea.

III. (British Museum, Or. 7695, fol. 253 b.) From a MS. of the Mathnavī of Jalāl ad-Din Rūmī, dated A.H. 593 (A.D. 1195–6).

IV. (British Museum, Or. 1173, fol. 16.) This picture, taken from an Album of pictures and specimens of calligraphy, bears no signature; the painter probably belonged to the school of Rizā ‘Abbāsī.

V. (British Museum, Or. 2265, fol. 203 b.) This picture is one of those referred to on p. 149, as having been painted by Muḥammad Zamān, in the MS. of the Khamshah of Nizāmī, belonging originally to Shāh Tahmāsp.

VI. (Bodleian Library, Elliot 215 (Ethé 493), Shāh Nāmeh, dated A.H. 899 (A.D. 1494), fol. 7.) Prince Bahysunqur, a grandson of Timūr, is credited with having prepared a recension of the Shāh Nāmeh, to which he prefixed a preface, giving an account of the historical sources of the epic, &c. In this picture the prince is represented as having a copy of the completed volume brought to him.

VII. (India Office Library, Persian MSS. No. 1129 (Ethé 982), fol. 29.) This MS. of extracts from the Khamshah of Nizāmī is dated A.H. 982 (A.D. 1574–5); no evidence is available as to the date of the mutilation of the picture. See pp. 46–7.
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VIII. Examples of similar types in Christian and Muslim MSS.: a. (from the Schefer MS. of Ḥaṭrī [reproduced here from P. A. Van der Lüth's edition of 'Ajīb al-Fārī]) and b. (from an Arabic Gospel in the British Museum, Add. 12816, fol. 95 b.) illustrate the convention of indicating the outline of the nose by a line of white paint; c. is from a MS. of Ḥaṭrī in the British Museum, Or. 1200, fol. 172 d. is from a Lectionary of the Jacobite Church (British Museum, Add. 7170, fol. 145); and e. is from the same MS. (fol. 148 b) as c.

IX. Examples of similar types in Christian and Muslim MSS.: a. is from the same MS. (fol. 100 b) as VIII c; b. is from the same MS. (fol. 7) as VIII d; c. is from the same MS., as VIII a; and d. is from the same MS. (fol. 143) as VIII d. (See pp. 38-9)

X. (British Museum, Add. 7293, fol. 285 b.) This illustration—a drawing in red ink—is taken from a MS. of the Maqāmāt of Ḥaṭrī, copied in A.H. 733 (A.D. 1332). The composition of the picture appears to have been suggested by some Christian representation of Christ discoursing with the doctors, though the original passage which it illustrates describes how a rascally boy takes advantage of the effect produced by the exhortations of a preacher, who had urged his hearers to atone for their past transgressions by acts of piety and charity to the poor, and entreats them to make him the object of their benevolence, and so goes off with his bountiful father to spend the plunder in a wine-shop.


b. Mechanical boat, with musicians and a drinking party (id. id., fol. 61 b). See E. Wiedemann und F. Hauser, Über Trinkgärten und Tafelgärten nach al-Gazari und den Berichten der Islam (Der Islam, viii. 73). (See p. 80.)

XII. (Bodleian Library, Marsh 458, Maqāmāt of Ḥaṭrī, dated A.H. 738 (A.D. 1337).

a. (fol. 36.) A drinking party (Maqāmāt xiv).

b. (fol. 42.) Abū Zayd, after receiving from his host a camel as a reward for his clever sayings, goes off when the rest of the guests are still asleep, without having explained to them the ambiguities in his various sentences (Maqāmāt xlvii).

c. Abū Zayd listening to the poetical exercises set by a teacher in Enma to his pupils (Maqāmāt xlvii).

XIII. From a MS. of the Khamsah of Jamālī, copied in Baghdad in A.H. 870 (A.D. 1461), in the India Office Library (No. 138 (Ittār 1284), fol. 101 b).

XIV. (British Museum, Or. 2834, fol. 79 b.) From a MS. of the Khamsah of Nizāmī, dated A.H. 895 (A.D. 1490).

XV. (Bodleian Library, Or. 133, fol. 45.) This picture of Sīnbad and the old man of the sea occurs in a MS. of Abū Maʿṣār al-Tīrāz on the influence of the planets.

XVI. The symbols of the four Evangelists, from a MS. of Qazwīnī's 'Ajīb al-Maḥbūbātī, copied about A.D. 1400, belonging to Professor Friedrich Sarre of Berlin. (See p. 84.)

XVII. These fragments of frescoes from Sāmarrā are from the collection in the British Museum; a. and b. show portions of female heads, and c. illustrates the method of superimposing one layer of plaster over another. (See pp. 85-6.)

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XVIII. (Edinburgh University Library, Arabic No. 161, al-ʿĀthīr al-Bāṣṭībī by al-Berzīlī.) (A.H. 707 (=A.D. 1307−8)).

a. fol. 121 b. Adam and Eve are seen to have mounned so consolately after the death of Abel, that God took pity upon them and allowed their son to return to earth and remain with them for a space of twenty-four hours; he is here represented as sitting with his parents, who have prepared for him a generous feast.

b. fol. 7 b. Muḥammad preaching his farewell sermon on the occasion of his last visit to Mecca.

XIX. (Edinburgh University Library, Arabic No. 20, ʿĀṣir al-Tamārībī by Rashīd ad-Dīn, dated A.H. 710 (A.D. 1310−11)).

a. fol. 45 b. When Muḥammad was a boy, he accompanied his uncle on a trading journey into Syria, and there a Christian monk, named Baḥīrā, is said to have recognized him to be a prophet. See p. 94.

b. fol. 47. When Muḥammad was about thirty-five years of age, the building of the Kaʿbāh was so seriously damaged by a flood of rain, that it had to be rebuilt. A dispute arose as to who should have the honour of putting the Black Stone back in its old place. Upon Muḥammad's appearance on the scene, he was selected for the purpose. See p. 94.

XX. (id. fol. 47 b.) a. The angel Gabriel is represented as delivering to Muḥammad the divine message. See p. 94.

(id. fol. 65.) b. Muḥammad and Abū Bakr. See p. 94.

XXI. (Rawdat al-Safā, by Mirkhwān, belonging to Messrs. Luzac & Co.)

a. (fol. 85 b.) One of the first acts of Muḥammad on his commission into Mecca (A.H. 8, A.D. 606) was to visit the Kaʿbāh and destroy the idols there. He is here represented as lifting Ali on his shoulders, so that he may throw them down to the ground.

b. (fol. 97 b.) This incident is said by the Shiʿahs to have occurred at Ghadir al-Kūmāh, when the Prophet was on his return from his farewell pilgrimage to Mecca. The fact that Ali is depicted with a flame halo of exactly the same type as that of the Prophet would seem to indicate that the painter was a Shiʿah, and desired thus to glorify the special object of Shiʿah veneration. See p. 96.

XXII. (Bodleian Library, Elliot 287 (Ethb. 2116), fol. 7.) See p. 97.

XXIII. (Edinburgh University Library, ʿĀṣir al-Tamārībī, fol. 44.) See p. 99.

XXIV. (id. fol. 44.) See pp. 99−100.

XXV. (Qisas al-Anbiyāʾ, fol. 225, belonging to Mr. A. Chester Beatty.) See p. 100.

XXVI. (Bayān of Saʿdi, belonging to Mr. Gazdar, Bombay.) Jesus and the Pharisee. See p. 101.

XXVIIa. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Supplement persan 1111, fol. 102.) See p. 102.

b. (British Museum, Add. 6613, Khamsah of Nizāmī, fol. 19 b.) See p. 102.

XXVIIb. (Bodleian Library, Elliot 192 (Ethb. 587), fol. 22 b., Khamsah of Nizāmī, dated A.H. 906 (=A.D. 1500), fol. 22 b.) See p. 102.
XXIX. (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, A. F. 50 (143), fol. 8.) The upper figures represent Alexander the Great (on the left) and Zacharias (on the right); the lower figures, Jesus (on the left) and St. John the Baptist (on the right). See p. 103.

XXX. (Bistrița of Sa'dî, belonging to Mr. Gazdar, Bombay.) See p. 105.

XXXI. (India Office Library, No. 737 (Ethê 1342), Jâmi’s Yâni u Zulayjkheh, fol. 9 b.) Dated A.H. 1007 (A.D. 1599). Abbâsî to sacrifice his son. (See p. 105.)

XXXII. (Bodleian Library, Elliot 129 (Ethê 898), Jâmi’s Yâni u Zulayjkheh copied about the middle of the 16th century.
   b. fol. 198. See p. 108.

XXXIII. (Bodleian Library, Ouseley Add. 24 (Ethê 1271), fol. 127 b.) See p. 108.

XXXIV. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Supplément persan 1539, fol. 10 b.) From a 17th-century MS. of Majalis al-Urshâb by Sultan Husayn Mirzâ. The painter of this picture probably sympathized with the defence put forward by some Muslim mystics for Satan’s refusal to bow down before Adam, in that, by maintaining that worship was due to God alone, he had upheld the Unity of God, and they concluded that he would thereby be justified on the Day of Judgement, in spite of his disobedience to the divine command. (La Pasion d’al-Husajî, martyre mystique de l’Islam, par Louis Massignon, p. 864 sqq.) See p. 109.

XXXV. a. See p. 110.

XXXVI. (Edinburgh University Library, Jâmi’-at-Tawirîk, fol. 25 b.) See p. 110.

XXXVII. a. (From MS. of Qaswinî’s ‘Ajlîh al-Makhlûqûn, in the collection of Mr. A. Chester Beatty.) Mûsâ ibn-al-Mubarak visiting the queen of the island of Wâqquâq.
   b. (Bodleian Library, Elliot 192 (Ethê 587), Nizâmî’s Ihsânânât-nâmâh, fol. 333 a.) Dated A.H. 970 (A.D. 1561). See p. 110.

XXXVIII. (Bodleian Library, Ouseley Add. 176 (Ethê 501), fol. 311 b.) A late 15th-century MS. of the Shâh-Nâmeh. In the course of his wanderings, Alexander comes to a talking tree, which rebukes him for his lust of conquest and prophesies his death in a country far from his native land.

XXXIX. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.) A mystic meditating in a garden.

XL. (Collection of Mr. Bernard Berenson.) The mystical poet Jâmi and his friends, attributed to Bihzâd.

XLI. (Bodleian Library, Douce Collection.) A group of Indian saints.

XLII. (Formerly in the possession of Mr. E. N. Adler.) A Turkish representation of the religious dance of the Mevlevis in Constantinople. (See p. 114.)

XLIII. (Bodleian Library, Elliot 339 (Ethê 2120), fol. 93 b.) Copied for Badi’ az-Zâmî, son of Sultan Husayn Mirzâ, in A.H. 890 (A.D. 1485). Mystics discoursing in a garden.

XLIV. (British Museum, Stowe 16, fol. 36.) A group of Indian ascetics. This picture is interesting as indicating the friendly relations that sometimes existed between Hindu and Muhammadan mystics, for this group is made up of examples of either class.

XLV. (Bodleian Library, Ouseley Add. 24 (Ethê 1271).) From a MS. of Majalis al-Urshâb by Sultan Husayn Mirzâ, copied A.H. 919 (A.D. 1512).
   a. See p. 112. The incident in the life of Jalâl ad-Dîn here represented is that one day the saint, passing by some gold-beaters, fell into an ecstasy at the sound of the striking of the hammers and began to dance. Another mystic, Sulâm ad-Dîn, who had formerly been his fellow pupil and had been compelled by poverty to take to the trade of a gold-beater, perceiving the saint rushed out of the shop and embraced his feet; and afterwards became his disciple.
   b. See p. 115.

XLVI. (id.) See p. 112.

XLVII. (From the collection of Miss Jessie Beck.) Dervishes dancing, by Muhammed. (See p. 113.)

XLVIII. a. (Bodleian Library, Ouseley Add. 24 (Ethê 1271), fol. 119.) See p. 114.
   b. (Bodleian Library, Douce Or. b. 2, fol. 47.)

XLIX. (Bodleian Library, MS. Pers. b. 1, fol. 33.) Ibrâhîm ibn Adham. See p. 112.

L. a. (Musée du Louvre.) A saint crossing a river on his prayer-mat.

LI. (Bodleian Library, MS. Or. 153, fol. 42.) The rival saints. See p. 115.

LII. (India Office Library, No. 1097 (Ethê 2197), fol. 3 b, 6.) From a MS. of the Akhlaquí-Muhammadî, copied about A.D. 1600.

LIII. (Edinburgh University Library, Jâmi’-at-Tawirîk, fol. 72 a.) See p. 119.

LV. Prototypes of Burâq a. Ivory carving from Nimrud (British Museum, No. 11886); b. Bronze bowl from Nimrud (id., No. 11504); c. Wading cow with female head, forming base of a column (id., No. 90954); d. Clay plaque from Eastern Crete (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, No. G. 488). (See p. 119.)

LV. Prototypes of Burâq a. Painted bowl from Rayy (British Museum, Ceramic Department 15370–5); b. Drinking vessel from Rayy (Musée du Louvre); c. Metal plate, made (about A.D. 1210) for the Atâbeg Badr ad-Dîn Lu’în of Mosul (Musum für Völkerkunde, Munich) (see p. 120); d. Late representation of Burâq, from MS. of Bistrița of Sa’dî, dated A.H. 1171 (A.D. 1757), (India Office Library, No. 1779 (Ethê 1142).) (See p. 99.)

LVI. a. Muhammed on Burâq passing through the heavenly spheres, with the earth in the centre (British Museum, Add. 6613, fol. 3 b).
   b. 18th-century representation of Burâq, with a Persian crown on her head and a peacock’s tail (from a MS. of Layâl wa Majnûn by Nizâmî in the Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, Collezione di Don Leone Caetani. A. b. 12, fol. 4). (See pp. 121–2.)
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LVII. (Kuscezr 'Amra, von Alois Mosil. Vienna, 1907.)
   a. (Tafel xxvi.) See p. 124.
   b. (Tafel xv.) See p. 125.

LVIII. (British Museum, Or. 2265, fol. 195.) See p. 121.


LX. (British Museum, Or. 2265, fol. 26 b.) See pp. 135–6.

LXII. (India Office Library, Johnson Collection, xxvili, fol. 14, 15.) Drawings by Muhammad.

LXIII. a. (Bodleian Library, Pococke 4000, fol. 97 b.) From a MS. of Kalilah wa Dimnah, dated A.H. 755 (A.D. 1354).
   b. (British Museum, Add. 18539, Anvur-i-Suhayli, dated A.H. 1019 (A.D. 1610), fol. 146. The animals in council. (See p. 81.)

LXIV. a. (India Office Library, Johnson Collection, xxii, p. 8.) A dervish, by Rizâ 'Abbâsi. (See p. 141.)
   b. (British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, 1920–9–17–027.) A picnic party, by Rizâ 'Abbâsi.

I

THE ATTITUDE OF THE THEOLOGIANS OF ISLAM TOWARDS PAINTING

MUHAMMADAN art may well claim a place among the greatest achievements of man's artistic activity. Its supreme expression is in architecture, in which the followers of Islam or the architects they employed worked out a scheme of building construction and of decoration in harmony with the austerity and dignity of their faith and adapted to its ritual and forms of worship. The great courtyard of the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, or of Akbar's mosque at Fatehpur-Sikri; the massive structures of the mosque of Hassan in Cairo, the great mosque of Qayrawan, the mosque of the Imam Rizâ in Mashhad, are among the noblest houses of worship in the world; and the mosque of Cordova, the Sulaymaniyyah mosque in Constantinople, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, are unsurpassed for richness of colour decoration. The monumental tombs of monarchs and saints are also among the great achievements of Muhammadan architecture. In many other artistic expressions of civilized life, the achievements of the art of the Muhammadans are of the highest order; their carpets are among the finest in the world, and their silks in the Middle Ages were so highly prized in Europe that they were chosen above all others as wrappings for the relics of the saints; their metalwork and pottery have been distinctive and second to none; the very word 'arabesque', which has passed into most of the languages of Europe, bears testimony to the characteristic nobility of Muslim ornament.

But the art most highly valued by the Muhammadans themselves was that of calligraphy. This they were proud of cultivating themselves, and they did not call in the aid of foreign artists, as they were so frequently in the habit of doing in the case of other arts. Even kings did not think it beneath their dignity to compete in this art with professional calligraphists, and sought to win religious merit by writing out copies of the Qur'ân.1 The following

1 By this term is meant those works of art which were produced under Muhammadan patronage and in Muhammadan countries; the artists themselves were of diverse nationalities and were not always adherents of the faith of Islam. Mr. M. S. Briggs has put in a plea for the word Saracenic (Muhammadan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine, p. 3), but this is open to the objection that it is not distinctive of the Muhammadan period, since the word Saracenic had a long history before the rise of Islam. Still more objectionable is the term Arabic art, as the Arabs themselves contributed to the sum total less than any other Muslim people; equally misleading, because of its restricted reference, is the Persian word 'Musalman' so commonly used by French writers, since it is unknown in Arabic-speaking countries.

2 The Ghaznavid Sultan Ibrahim ibn Mas'ud (dk. 1099) used to send a Qur'ân copied out with his own hand every year to Mecca (v. Appendix A).
first of God's Prophets, Adam. The profession of the calligrapher was one of honour and dignity because he was engaged in copying the Qur'an, and his labours thereby received a religious sanction. The importance of this connexion becomes obvious when it is remembered that the Muhammadan state was by theory a religious society, that the only citizenship it knew was acceptance of a particular creed and observance of the ordinances it prescribed. The supreme function of the ruler was the defence of the faith, and the national army was the body of true believers. The members of non-Muslim religions were indeed tolerated, but by theory they could not take part in Jihad, the holy war for the defence of Islam and the extension of its dominion, nor was their evidence accepted in the Muslim courts of law.

These considerations make clear the basis for the difference of status assigned to the calligraphist and to the painter in Muslim society, for the art of the latter was condemned by religious authority while that of the former was exercised in the service of religion. Accordingly we find that most extravagant sums were sometimes paid for the handiwork of the expert calligrapher, and no expense was spared in the preparation of MSS., especially those of the Qur'an; it is probable too that the arts of colour decoration and of gold illumination, as well as the whole craft of bookbinding in the Muhammadan world, derived their origin and attained their rich development from the fact that they were first employed in the perpetuation of the Word of God. Calligraphy even influenced the work of the painter, and his draughtsmanship has sometimes been described as a 'calligraphic art', because it suggests the flowing, rhythmic lines of the beautiful Arabic characters. The art of the gilder likewise attained dignity as being exercised upon MSS. of the Qur'an, and was quite distinct, as in the Middle Ages in Europe, from that of the painter, though there were times when they might both be practised by the same artist, and many of the painters who append their signatures to their paintings describe themselves as 'Muqattathib', 'gilder', obviously with the desire of claiming for themselves respectability.

1 One calligrapher is said to have received 10,000 pieces of gold for 5,000 verses (A. Spengler, Catalogue of the Libraries of the King of Oude, Vol. I, p. 25, Calcutta, 1844). A single line in the handwriting of Mir 'Umar ibn Hisham (d. 1615) was sold for a gold piece, even in his lifetime (Ghulam Muhammad Dihlawi, Tashkhiro-eh-Shahinat, p. 49, Calcutta, 1910). An Indian calligrapher, Mir Muhammad Sibth (d. 1615), once presented Sihih Shihab, the second son of the Emperor Shihtphihin, with some verses he had written himself, but made out that they were in the handwriting of Mir 'All Mashhadi, the reward he received was 1,000 rupees, and the prince increased this sum when he learned that they were in Sibth's own handwriting (Muhammad Baqir, Mirat-eh-Jami'at, vol. 199, I.O., no. 1497). 1

2 Herein is found the explanation of one of many foolish blunders of Kasa'beh, when he attempted to find a Persian inscription in the loose ends of a turban-clerk (J. von Kasa'beh, Zur orientalischen Altertumskunde, III, p. 17, Wien, 1912).

On the other hand, it was the very lack of this religious sanction which lowered the status of the painter in Muhammadan society. For of the three great missionary religions of the world—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—each striving for the mastery of the world and endeavouring to win the allegiance of all men by various devices of propaganda, Islam alone has refused to call in the aid of pictorial art as a handmaid to religion. Any observer who has lingered in one of the great monuments of Christian architecture—some gorgeously decorated cathedral belonging to the Orthodox Eastern Church or to the Roman Catholic Church—and has thence passed into a Muhammadan mosque, must at once be struck with this fundamental difference of attitude in Islam as contrasted with the rival faith. The first may be filled with brilliant paintings and frescoes representing scenes of sacred history or individual saints, or even some pictorial adumbration of the Deity, in which the highest attainments of artistic skill have been placed at the service of religion and have obviously been inspired by devout feeling, and may even have been superintended in the course of their execution by ecclesiastical guidance; while the mosque is characterized by austere simplicity and by the absence of any kind of pictorial presentation of religious doctrine or history. Colour in marble or in paint, decorative design of a geometric or a floral character, may indeed be present in abundance, but what immediately strikes the Christian visitor is the absence of any imagery of 'Martyr or King or sacred Eremite' or any pictorial symbol of divine truth. This hostile attitude on the part of Islam to pictorial art has given to the whole history of its propaganda, and to the organization of its devout life, a complexion fundamentally diverse from that of either Buddhism or Christianity, both of which have made use of paintings in order to attract fresh converts or to instruct and edify the faithful.

This theological objection to pictorial art has been operative from an early period in the history of Islam, and has effectively prevented the admittance of painting into any part of the religious life of the Muslim world. In no mosque nor in any other religious building are there to be found either statues or pictures, and orthodox religious sentiment has always been active in the destruction of pictorial representations of human beings wherever such destruction has been possible.

It is proposed now to consider this Muslim attitude of mind in some detail. It has sometimes been stated that the painting of pictures is forbidden in the Qur'an; but there is no specific mention of pictures in the Word of God, and the only verse (Qur. v. 92)--"O believers, wine and games of chance and statues and (divining) arrows are abomination of Satan's handiwork; then avoid it!"—which theologians of a later generation could quote in support of their condemnation of this art makes it clear that the real object of the prohibition was the avoidance of idolatry. The theological basis of the condemnation of pictorial art must therefore be sought for elsewhere.

A more distinct utterance upon this subject is found in the Traditions of the Prophet, and it is from this theological source that the hostile attitude prevailing throughout the Muhammadan world derives its sanction. In the formation of Muslim dogma the Traditions of the Prophet have not been of less importance than the Qur'an itself; they are held by Muslim theologians to proceed from divine inspiration, though unlike the Qur'an, which is the eternal, uncreated Word of God, they are held to be inspired only as to content and meaning, but not in respect of actual verbal expression. Accordingly the Traditions enjoy an authority commensurate with that of the precepts of the Qur'an itself and are equally binding on the consciences of the faithful. On the subject of painting the Traditions are uncompromising in their condemnation and speak with no uncertain voice, e.g. the Prophet is reported to have said that those who will be most severely punished by God on the Day of Judgement will be the painters. 1 On the Day of Judgment the punishment of hell will be meted out to the painter, and he will be called upon to breathe life into the forms that he has fashioned; but he cannot breathe life into anything. 2 The reason for his damnation is this: in fashioning the form of a being that has life, the painter is usurping the creative function of the Creator and thus is attempting to assimilate himself to God; and the futility of the painter's claim will be brought home to him, when he will be made to recognize the ineffectual character of his creative activity, through his inability to complete the work of creation by breathing into the objects of his art, which look so much like living beings, the breath of life. The blasphemous character of his attempt is further emphasized by the use in this Tradition of the actual words of the Qur'an (v. 110) in which God describes the miraculous activity of Jesus—"Thou didst fashion of clay as it were the figure of a bird, by My permission, and didst breathe into it, and by My permission it became a bird."

The making of forms by the painter could only be justified if he possessed such miraculous power as was given by God to His divinely inspired Prophet, Jesus, the Word of God.

2 Id., p. 106 (no. 97).
3 I. Goldzweig, "Zum islamischen Bilderverbot" (ZDMG, Bd. 74, 1920, p. 288).
The Arabic word for ‘painter’, which has passed from Arabic into Persian, Turkish, and Urdu in the same sense, is ‘muṣawwar’, which literally means ‘forming, fashioning, giving form’, and so can equally apply to the sculptor. The blasphemy in the appellation is the more apparent to the Muslim mind, in that this word is applied to God Himself in the Qur’an (lxix. 24): ‘He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner’ (muṣawwar). Thus the highest term of praise which in the Christian world can be bestowed upon the artist, in calling him a creator, in the Muslim world serves to emphasise the most damning evidence of his guilt.

It is of interest to note what other sinners are condemned in company with the painter. A certain ‘Awn b. Abi Juḥayfah relates:

‘I saw my father buy a slave who was a cupper (i.e. a phlebotomist), and he ordered his cupping instruments to be brought and broken to pieces. When I asked him the reason for this, he said: “The Prophet forbade men to take the price of blood, or the price of a dog, or the earnings of a maidservant, and he cursed the tattooing woman and the woman who has herself tattooed, and the usurer and the man who lets usury be taken from him, and he cursed the painter.”’

The same contemptuous association of the painter with other abominations is expressed in the Traditions:

“The angels will not enter a house in which there is a picture or a dog.”2 Those who will be most severely punished on the Day of Judgement are the murderer of a Prophet, one who has been put to death by a Prophet, one who leads men astray without knowledge, and a maker of images or pictures.” 4 A head will thrust itself out of the fire and will ask, Where are those who invented lies against God, or have been the enemies of God, or have made light of God? Then men will ask, Who are these three classes of persons? It will answer, The sorcerer is he who has invented lies against God; the maker of images or pictures is the enemy of God; and he who acts in order to be seen of men, is he that has made light of God.”

There is little doubt that these utterances, placed in the mouth of the Prophet by later writers, give expression to an intolerant attitude towards figured art which Muhammad himself did not feel. He had been so severe in his judgement of such objects as his followers in succeeding generations undoubtedly became, it could not possibly have happened that during his last illness his wives, sitting round his bed, should have discussed the pictures they had seen in a church in Abyssinia; two of them, Umm Salmah and Umm Habibah, had been to that country and had been struck with the beauty of its ecclesiastical art. Muhammad joins in the conversation and explains that it is the custom of the Abyssinians, when a holy man dies, to build a house of prayer over his tomb, and paint such pictures in it; and though he is careful to add (or the traditionist puts the remark into his mouth) that such people are most wicked in the sight of God, still such a conversation is inconceivable by the death-bed of a Muslim saint of a later generation.

Strangest of all, in view of the condemnation of such paintings by succeeding generations of Muslims, is the story that when, after his triumphal entry into Mecca, Muhammad went inside the Ka’bah, he ordered the pictures in it to be obliterated, but put his hand over a picture of Mary, with Jesus seated on her lap, that was painted on a pillar, and said, ‘Rub out all the pictures except these under my hands’. The same narrator adds that it was not until years later, in 683, when the anti-Caliph ‘Abd Allah ibn Zubayr was being besieged in the Holy City by the Umayyad troops, that these pictures perished in the fire which destroyed the Ka’bah.4

Further, the Prophet does not appear to have objected to the figures of men or animals on the woven stuffs with which his house in Medina was decorated, so long as they did not distract his attention while engaged in prayer, and so long as they were in their proper place, being either set upon in cushions or trampled underfoot in carpets. When he found that ‘A’ishah had hung up a curtain with figures on it at the door of her room, he exclaimed that those who thus imitated the creative activity of God would be most severely punished on the Day of Judgement; but he was quite satisfied when his wife cut up the offending fabric and made cushion covers out of it.5 The great danger to be avoided was idolatry, any deviation from the absolute loyalty due to the One and Only God. Similarly, the Prophet does not appear to have taken exception to the dolls which ‘A’ishah, who is said to have become his wife at the tender age of nine, put into the house; on one occasion he asked her what she was playing with, and she replied, ‘The horses (or, the horsesmen) of Solomon’6. Similar laxity is recorded of the Companions of Muhammad, for when, after the death of the Prophet, the loot of half the civilized world poured into Medina, they apparently felt no hesitation in retaining in their possession vessels of precious metals, adorned with figures, such as the workmen of Arabia were incapable of fabricating. Even the rigid Caliph ‘Umar used a censer, with figures on it, which he had brought from Syria, in order to perfume the mosque at Medina.7

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2 The authority for this story is Azaqiti (66 A.H. 858), who wrote the earliest extant history of Mecc (Die Chroniken der Staat der Medek, Vol. I, pp. 115-12).
3 Bukhari, Vol. IV, pp. 87-8 (no. 91).
5 The word ʿism may have either meaning.
6 Id., Vol. VIII, p. 42 (I. 17).
tendentious Traditions, which generally only refer to such matters in order to draw a moral, the Companions are described as mutually upbraiding one another for keeping such illicit objects in their possession. A certain Miswar ibn Makhrumah was paying a visit to Ibn ‘Abbās (one of the authorities most frequently cited in support of the authenticity of the Traditions of the Prophet) and was reproached by his host for wearing a robe of silk brocade with figures on it. Miswar made the lame excuse that the Prophet’s prohibition was only intended to serve the purpose of keeping pride and vanity in check, vices of which he himself was innocent, and then he retorted on his host by drawing attention to some figures decorating a chafing-dish that he had in his room. Ibn ‘Abbās was so taken aback, that the only excuse he could make was to ask: ‘Don’t you see that I have burnt them in the fire?’ The story has an edifying sequel in that Miswar determines to sell his robe, after cutting off the heads of the figures embroidered on it, despite the protests of his friends, who warn him that in such a damaged condition it would fetch less money. Figures were also to be seen in the house of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, at one time governor of Medina.2

Another tradition describes the horror of Abū Hurayrah on seeing an artist at work, painting pictures in the upper story of a house in Medina; he tells his companion that he had heard the Prophet say: Who is more wicked than a man who sets to work to imitate the creative activity of God? Let them try to create a grain of wheat, or create an ant!3 Another Companion of the Prophet, one of the earliest converts, Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, appears to have been untroubled by any such scruples, for when after the capture of Ctesiphon in 637 he held a solemn prayer of thanksgiving in the great palace of the Sasanian kings, it is expressly stated by the historian that he paid no heed to the figures of men and horses on the walls, but left them undisturbed.4 Indeed, these decorations appear to have survived the iconoclastic zeal of the Muslims for more than two centuries, judging from the description that Būṣīrī (d. 897) gives of the pictures in the ruined palace.5

Primitive Muslim society, therefore, does not appear to have been so iconoclastic as later generations became, when the condemnation of pictorial and plastic art based on the Traditions ascribed to the Prophet had won general approval in Muslim society. The genesis of these Traditions is obscure, but by the second century of the Muhammadan era compilations of them were being made, and they were certainly by that time beginning

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3 Bukhārī, Vol. IV, p. 104 (no. 90).
5 See p. 63.

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I. A rest by the wayside.
to mould orthodox opinion, and in regard to plastic art in particular the laxity of the first generation of the faithful was giving way, except in the atmosphere of a pleasure-loving court, before the severer attitude that had found expression in the Traditions quoted above. It is significant of this hardening of opinion that a governor of Medina in A.D. 783 had the figures of the censer which 'Umar had presented to the mosque of that city erased; he apparently could not tolerate what the most devoted Companion of the Prophet, the revered model for later generations, had regarded with indifference. When in the third century the Traditions took permanent and authoritative form in the great canonical collections connected with the names of Bukhārī, Muslim, and others, no further doubt was possible for the faithful as to the illegality of painting and sculpture, and the same condemnation was embodied in the accepted text-books of Muslim law and was thus enforced by the highest legal opinion. A great legist of the thirteenth century, Nawā witty, summed up the accepted doctrine of his own time in the following passage, and it may be taken as representing the orthodox view of succeeding generations also:

'The learned authorities of our school1 and others hold that the painting of a picture of any living thing is strictly forbidden and is one of the great sins, because it is threatened with the above grievous punishment as mentioned in the Traditions, whether it is intended for common domestic use or not. So the making of it is forbidden under every circumstance, because it implies a likeness to the creative activity of God, whether it is on a robe, or a carpet or a coin, gold, silver or copper, or a vessel or on a wall, &c. On the other hand, the painting of a tree or of camel saddles and other things that have no life is not forbidden. Such is the decision as to the actual making of a picture. Similarly, it is forbidden to make use of any object on which a living thing is pictured, whether it be hung on a wall or worn as a dress or a turban or is on any other object of common domestic use. But if it is on a carpet trampled underfoot, or on a pillow or cushion, or any similar object for common domestic use, then it is not forbidden. Whether such an object will prevent the angels of God from entering the house in which it is found is quite another matter. In all this there is no difference between what casts a shadow and what does not cast a shadow. This is the decision of our school on the question, and the majority of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate followers and the learned of succeeding generations accepted it; it is also the view of Thawrī, Mālik, Abī Hanīfah, &c. Some later authorities make the prohibition refer only to objects that cast a shadow, and see no harm in objects that have no shadow. But this view is quite wrong, for the curtain to which the Prophet objected was certainly condemned, as everybody admits, yet the picture on it cast no shadow; and the other Traditions make no difference between one picture and another. As-Zahiri holds that the prohibition refers to pictures in general, and similarly to the use of them and to entrance into a house in which they are found, whether it is a case of a design on

1 Ibn Rustah, loc. cit.
2 i.e. the Shafi'i school.
THE ATTITUDE OF THE THEOLOGIANS OF

a dress or any other design, whether the picture hangs on a wall or is on a robe or a
carpet, whether in common domestic use or not, as is the clear meaning of the
Traditions.  

The historian is therefore faced with the problem of attempting to deter-
mine whence this fanatical attitude towards plastic and pictorial art derived
its origin. Some have looked for it in a reaction against the naturalism and
verisimilitude of Hellenic art, which had been manifesting itself in the
Nearer East for some time before the rise of Islam. A more plausible
solution, seeks in the influence of the Jewish converts to Islam the explana-
tion of this violent antipathy towards pictorial representations of the forms
of living beings. The city of Medina contained a large Jewish population
at the time of the Hijrah of the Prophet, and a number of Jews were among
his early converts. The influence of the Jewish converts on the develop-
ment of thought and ritual in the early generations of Islam has recently been made
the subject of more than one profound study. Professor Mittwoch has
suggested that the obscure origins of the Salā'ah, the liturgy of Muslim public
worship, with its ordered arrangement of prayer, responses, and ritual
movements, can be traced to the synagogue. In regard to Jewish influence
upon many of the Hadīth, the Traditions of the Prophet, there can be no
doubt whatsoever. A large number of these Traditions reproduce almost
verbally the precepts enunciated in the Talmud, and it seems more than
probable that the Jewish converts to Islam carried over into their new faith
the hostility to plastic and pictorial art which had been impressed upon them
from childhood. The Jewish origin of the unkindly judgement of the
painter seems distinctly to be indicated by his being associated with the pig
and the Christian bell (or clapper, which the oriental Christians used for the
purpose of calling the faithful to prayer) in several of the Traditions.

The hatred of idolatry, common to Islam and Judaism, caused a statue or
a picture to be regarded with suspicion, through apprehension of the possible
influence it might exercise on the faithful by leading them astray into the
heresy most abhorred by Muslim theologians, shirk, or the giving a partner
to God. Legend declared that a disciple of Idris (whom the commentators
generally identified with Enoch) unwittingly introduced idolatry into the

2 H. Lamon, L'attitude de l'Islam primitif en face des arts figurés, pp. 274–91 A. J. Wensinck, The
Second Commandment (Mededelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afde. Letterkunde,
Deel 16, Serie A, no. 6, Amsterdam, 1933).
3 See especially Professor A. Guillaume, The Influence of Judaism on Islam (The Legacy of Israel, pp. 129
4 Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des islamischen Gebets und Kalms (Berlin, 1911).

ISLAM TOWARDS PAINTING

world by making copies of the portrait of his dead teacher, in order to
perpetuate his memory; some of these survived the Flood and became objects
of idolatrous worship.  

Having once been promulgated, this theological prohibition found a ready
acceptance in minds obsessed by the superstition common in the East,
that an image is not something apart from the person represented, but is
a kind of double, injury to which will imply corresponding suffering to the
living person. This fear of thus placing themselves in the power of male-
volent enemies made such people refuse to have their portrait taken—or in
more modern times, to be photographed—because such a process was
regarded as the taking away of a part of their own person.  

Another question in regard to the condemnation of the painter demands
consideration here. It has frequently been asserted, in explanation of the
absence of the contribution made by the Persians to the history of painting,
that the Shi'ahs, because they did not accept the Traditions set forth above by
Sunni theologians, were unhampered by any such ecclesiastical condemnation,
and could therefore practise the art of painting undeterred by the fear of hell.
Thus, one of the ablest living authorities on Muslim art writes in reference
to the Traditions quoted above:  

'Damit wäre nun freilich in unzweideutiger Weise der Entwicklungs in die Richtung
des Figurlichen ein Riegel vorgeschoben, wenn nicht von einem grossen Teil der
Müammedaner die orthodoxe Tradition (Sunna) abgelehnt und dem Koran andere
Überlieferungen zur Seite gestellt würden. Zu den Anhängern dieses sogenannten
schäbischen Bekennnisses gehören vor allem die Perser.'  

A typical example of this widespread misconception is found in the follow-
ing extract from the Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
(iX, p. 159), in which the writer, speaking of representations of animate art
in Muhammadan painting, says:

'Such an art became possible only with the rise to power of the Shites, the more liberal
of the two great sects into which Mohammedianism was divided, and the downfall of the
opposing and orthodox Sunnites. The latter sect had long ruled the Nearer East

1 O. von Schlechta-Wischedolt, Bericht über die in Konstantinopel erarbeiteten orientalischen Werke (Kaiser-
3 Cfr. above, pp. 5–6.
THE ATTITUDE OF THE THEOLOGIANS OF THE Fatimid Sultans in Egypt and the glittering Caliphs of the Abbasid line at Baghdad: but when these two great dynasties entered on their period of final decay about the end of the twelfth century, and the rise of new and less orthodox monarchies became inevitable, the artists and artisans of those regions began to disregard the ancient prohibitions, and to make their first essays in the pictorial art which they were later to bring to such perfection.¹

A rectification of all the errors in this passage would require a separate treatise, but as emanating from the treasure-house into which have passed some of the finest examples of Persian painting that have survived to the present day, it is noteworthy as embodying the common error of the freedom of the Shi'ahs from the ordinary Muhammadan dislike of figured art.

The fact is that the Shi'ah theologians condemned the representation of living objects just as severely as ever their Sunni co-religionists did. They warn him, in the Sunni traditions quoted above, of the manner in which he will be convicted of the enormity of his offence by being bidden on the Day of Judgement to breathe life into the objects of his creation: 'but he will not be able to breathe life into them.'²

One of the most eminent of Shi'ah legists, al-Hilli, who died about 1275 and was the author of a standard work on Shi'ah law, included pictures among the articles which could not be bought or sold, because the making of them was an act intrinsically unlawful.³

Those modern writers who have ignored this stern judgement of the Shi'ah theologians upon the painter have also failed to notice that a Shi'ah government was not necessarily more favourable to the growth of a school of painting than was a Sunni one. The Umayyad prince who had his bath-house in Qusayr 'Amra painted for his delight, and the Abbasid Caliph who had the walls of his palace in Sámarra similarly adorned, were both Sunnis. The Seljuqs of Asia Minor and the Ortnjids and Zangids of Mesopotamia and Northern Syria, who were all Sunnis, showed their disregard for the theological prohibition by stamping on their coins heads which they borrowed from antique and Byzantine coins, or astrological emblems, such as centaurs, and beasts. The Timurid princes who did so much for the encouragement of Muhammadan art, under whose patronage Bihzâd created the finest school of painting that Persia has ever known, were all Sunnis, as were also the Mughal emperors in India and the Ottoman Sultans in Turkey. That the

³ See pp. 19-51.

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Fatimids in Egypt (969-1171) encouraged painters, as well as other artists, is no more due to the Shi'ah doctrines they promulgated than is the Abbasid or Timurid patronage of art the result of their Sunni form of belief. There have been several Shi'ah kingdoms that have been in no way distinguished for encouragement of the arts; for no particular school of painting is connected with the ascendency of the Buwayhidids, who during the second half of the tenth century kept the Abbasid Caliphs in subjection and divided Persia and 'Iraq between them, nor of the less powerful Shi'ah dynasties that had risen to power in Northern Persia before them; least of all the Zaydî Imāms of the Yaman, whose dynasty has had a longer life than that of any other in the history of Islam.

The common misconception in this matter is no doubt largely due to the fact that modern Persia is known to be a Shi'ah kingdom, but it is forgotten that Shi'ism did not become the state religion of Persia until 1502, with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty; moreover, only a few of the Safavid Shahs appear to have been distinguished as patrons of art, and the decline of Persian painting set in when Shâh 'Abbâs (1587-1629) withdrew his patronage from the court painters. What painting was left in Persia by the eighteenth century was as actively practised under the Sunni rule of Nâdir Shâh (1736-1747) and the rest of the Afshârîds up to the end of that century, as had been the case under their Shi'ah predecessors.

The explanation of these facts is that the condemnation of the painting of living figures was a theological opinion common to the whole Muslim world, and the practical acceptance of it largely depended on the influence of the theologians upon the habits and tastes of society at any one particular time. Stern and uncompromising as this opinion generally showed itself to be, it could on occasion relax some of its severity. It was probably respectful remembrance of 'A'ishah, as one of the Mothers of the Faithful and therefore a model to her sex, that caused even the theologians to allow little girls to keep their dolls, though it was one of the miscellaneous duties of the Muhtasib to add to his weightier obligations the task of seeing that the dolls of little girls were of such form and design as suitably to serve the purpose of encouraging the maternal instinct, but not of such a verisimilitude as to serve as temptations to idolatry.

Another concession was made to popular usage by the theologians in

¹ He was a kind of police officer and censor of morals, whose function it was to deal summarily with cases of crime for which the ordinary processes of the law-courts might prove too dilatory (e.g. he had to see that the city walls were kept in proper repair, to prevent encroachment on the public highway by traders who thrust their shops out into the street, to arrange suitable marriages for widows, &c.).
his puppets. After Saladin had made the scrupulous theologian stay to the end of the performance, he asked him what he thought of it; al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil answered, ‘What I have seen carries with it a weighty lesson; I have seen kingdoms come and go, and when the curtain was rolled up, lo! the mover of all was only One.’

The shadow play has succeeded in retaining its popularity in a still more remarkable manner in another part of the Muhammadan world, namely Java; in this case it is national sentiment that has kept alive this remarkable survival from the heathen period of Javanese civilization, for the wayang (as the shadow play is here styled) has never been Islamized, and still continues to put before admiring audiences the adventures of the heroes of the Mahābhārata. The explanation of this remarkable phenomenon is to be found in the gradual character of the conversion of the Javanese to Islam, for the new faith was not violently forced upon them, and their adoption of it was not (as happened in so many other parts of the world) accompanied by a violent breach with their ancient civilization. So the shadow play in Java continues to be cultivated as a part of the national life, and orthodox opinion appears to require no apology for it.

But these exceptions are trivial in comparison with the prevailing hostile opinion which has succeeded in keeping out pictures entirely from the public religious life of Islam and from the greater part of Muslim society; and in view of the distinct prohibition of pictures by the accepted exponents of the faith of Islam, many writers have expressed surprise at finding any pictures at all in Muhammadan countries, or have considered the phenomenon to call for some extraordinary explanation. Such surprise is somewhat naive on the part of European authors, as though they expected the daily practice of the members of a religious community other than their own to invariably conform to the prescriptions of the authoritative exponents of their creed. Such divergence between creed and practice has been common enough in Christian countries, and it would be strange indeed if Islam, which possesses no priesthood or any organization for enforcing uniformity in belief, should have succeeded where Christianity, with its powerful hierarchy and its more efficient systematization of the religious life, has so often failed.

1 G. Jacob, op. cit., p. 11.
3 G. Jacob, Geschichte des Schattenstücks, p. 49 (Hannover, 1921).
The ecclesiastical annals of Christendom present such conspicuous examples of the disregard of the Christian virtues in the exalted persons of Pope John XII and Pope Alexander VI. When Pope John XXIII was arraigned by the Council of Constance, ‘the most scandalous charges were suppressed; the vicar of Christ was only accused of piracy, murder, rape, sodomy, and incest’; neither Louis XIV of France, nor Charles II of England, nor Philip II of Spain can be considered patterns of Christian chastity, but they were scrupulous in the observance of their religious duties, and their orthodoxy was unimpeached.

Similarly in the Muslim world, there have been plenty of kings and nobles who, in spite of their general fidelity to the dogmas of their faith, have unhesitatingly disregarded the protests of their theologians whenever inclination pointed the way. The drinking of wine was even more distinctly prohibited in the Qurʾān than the painting of pictures, and was enforced by the authority of the Traditions of the Prophet, but the Muslim monarchs who have abstained from wine have attracted attention rather by their singularity, and throughout the whole of Muhammadan history and literature the drinking of wine has been a common practice and a subject of laudation, at least by the poets. Even such a staunch upholder of the faith as Ḥārūn ar-Rashīd (786–809) drank habitually, though for decorum’s sake he indulged in this vice in private or in the company of only a few chosen friends. Music was sternly condemned by the theologians, but Arabic literature is full of stories of musicians and singers, and of the liberal patronage which was bestowed upon them by Muslim princes. In many other respects the practice of royal persons was in contradiction to the precepts set forth in the Traditions. In almost every Muhammadan country Sultans have sought to leave to posterity some memorial of themselves by the erection of a stately tomb; yet this practice is condemned along with painting in one and the same prohibition in a Tradition traced up to the son-in-law of the Prophet, as follows: ‘Ali said, Shall I not give you the orders which the Prophet gave me, namely, to destroy all pictures and images, and not to leave a single lofty tomb without lowering it within a span from the ground?’

Similarly, the Traditions condemn the prevailing practice of making eunuchs, and exclude any one guilty of this practice from the community of the faithful, thus: ‘Muḥammad said, He is not of my people who makes another a eunuch or becomes one himself.’ The very existence of a Muhammadan court in most periods of the history of Islam is unthinkable without the

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2. *ibid.*, v. 92.
4. *Id.*, p. 61 (Il. 3 a. 1).
eunuch, and among this class have been found statesmen and generals and benefactors of learned men and founders of pious endowments, together with at least one reigning monarch, Āghā Muḥammad Ḵān of Persia (1779–1797).

An interesting parallel could be instituted between Christendom and the Islamic world in respect of the failure of both of them to break free from the past and establish a culture that should have been wholly penetrated with the spirit of their particular religion; for just as the culture of the Christian world was mainly derived from the heathen literature of pre-Christian Greece and Rome, so in the Muhammadan world it was the heathen pre-Islamic poetry that was held up to admiration as being the supreme expression of literary excellence, and has consequently been continuously studied by the learned throughout the thirteen centuries of the Muhammadan era, though in sentiments and ideals it is the very antithesis of the teaching of the founder of Islam. The young Muslim student is set to read the great pre-Islamic poems full of the spirit of self-glorification, of licence in love and wine, and other forms of self-indulgence condemned by the theological literature that he has to study at the same time. For this and for other reasons there has been continuously from the outset of the Muslim era an internal conflict between the Islamic ideals of asceticism, humility, self-deprecation, and piety, on the one hand, and those of pride, lust, and the joy of life, on the other—each set forth in a literature simultaneously held up to admiration. The ‘ulamā—the learned—the guardians and exponents of the dogmatic teaching of Islam and of the rules of the devout life, the only equivalent of a priesthood that Islam has ever had, have been largely themselves to blame for the results of their encouragement of the study of a literature so alien in spirit to the ideals of their own faith.

Added to this has been the common self-assertiveness of the possessor of power and wealth, who rides rough-shod over the dogmatist and the moralist. The theologians have no more succeeded in imposing their point of view upon the men of the world in Islam than in Christendom, and Muhammadan history is full of examples of the authority of the learned being flouted by the rulers of the state. Two examples may be given in illustration: Qirwâsh ibn al-Muqallad, belonging to the ‘Uqaylids, one of the oldest tribes of Arabia, who was Prince of Mosul from 1000 to 1050, being reproached for having taken to wife two sisters at the same time—a practice expressly forbidden by the Qur’ān (chap. iv, v. 21)—made the following reply: ‘Tell me what thing we ever did that was permitted by law?’ He added, ‘I have nothing on my

conscience except the death of five or six inhabitants of the desert whom I slew; as for the townsfolk, God takes no account of them"—another flagrant disregard of clear Qur'ānic teaching (chap. iv. vv. 94-5).

The other example is taken from the history of one of the most energetic of the Sultans of the Khalji dynasty in Dihlī, Ḍalāl ad-Dīn (1295-1315), who was notorious for his disregard of the injunctions of the Sacred Law of Islam, for, having made up his mind that the Sharī'ah had no concern with practical administration or policy, he was not in the habit of consulting the 'ulamā'. But he once told one of the Qādīs of Dihlī, Qādī Mughfīlī ad-Dīn, that he had some questions to put to him. The unfortunate Qādī replied: 'My appointed time has come, since Your Majesty wishes to consult me on matters of religion; if I speak the truth, you will be angry with me and put me to death.' The Sultan reassured him and replied that all he wanted of him was true and correct answers to his questions. But as the conversation went on, the Qādī became more and more alarmed, and when the Sultan inquired what rights he and his children had upon the public treasury, the Qādī exclaimed: 'The hour of my death is at hand,' and when the Sultan asked him what he meant, said: 'If I answer your question in accordance with the truth, you will be angry and will put me to death, and if I give you an untrue answer, I shall hereafter go down into hell.' The Sultan tried to encourage him, saying, 'Tell me what is the ordinance of the Sacred Law, and I will not kill you'. But when the theologian would not budge an inch from his uncompromising attitude and denounced the illegality of every administrative measure in regard to which the Sultan consulted him, the monarch lost patience and exclaimed: 'Do you mean to declare that the whole of this is contrary to the Law and finds no place in the Traditions of the Prophet or in the expositions of the 'ulamā'?' The Qādī then rose and going to the end of the room placed his forehead on the ground, and cried out in a loud voice: 'O king, whether you send me, poor wretch, to prison or whether you order me to be cut in two, all this is unlawful and finds no place in the Traditions of the Prophet or in the expositions of the learned.' The Sultan restrained his anger at this outburst and went away into his palace, while the unfortunate Qādī made his way home, bade farewell to his family, and performed his ablutions in preparation for death; but the next day the Sultan was generous enough to give him credit for his courage and bestowed upon him a liberal reward, saying: 'Though I am not a man of learning or erudition, still I am a Muslim by birth and come of Muslim stock. To prevent rebellion, in which thousands might perish, I issue such orders for each occasion that arises as are for the good of the state and for the good of the people. If men are troublesome and remiss and disobey my orders, I set matters right and make it clear to them that they must obey. I know not whether this is in accordance with the Sacred Law or not, but whatever I consider to be for the good of the state or to be suitable for the occasion, I give orders accordingly.'

If, therefore, the prince, confident in the security of his position and power, cared to show his contempt for the prohibitions of religion, he might make light of the frowns of the theologians and even of the displeasure of the general mass of his subjects; but, with few exceptions, such disregard of the Sacred Law found expression rather in the interior of the palace than under the public eye, and the instances given below of kings and nobles having cultivated a taste for the plastic and pictorial arts have reference to their private rather than to their public life. The Muslim state being founded on a religious basis and held together largely through the acceptance of a common faith, the feeling of Muslim loyalty tended to link together obedience to God and obedience to the sovereign, and legal theory at least released the subject from his oath of fealty to a ruler who had apostatized or proved faithless to religion. The Muslim monarch, therefore, generally kept his indulgence in forbidden tastes concealed from all except his intimates.

In the Umayyad period, if the historians may be believed, the majority of the Caliphs and the members of their court were notorious for their neglect of the prohibitions of religion, and the frescoes of Qusayr Amra may be taken as typical of the lengths to which they would go in their encouragement of pictorial art. From what we know of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid (680-683), it is not surprising to find in the palace of the man whom he appointed viceroy of Kufah, Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, figures of fierce lions, barking dogs, and butting rams—to the great scandal of the faithful. Whether these objects were plastic or pictorial is not clear, but such representations were probably more common than the paucity of record of them would at first suggest. There was so much in the social life of the Umayyad period which was contrary to the ideals and clear precepts of Islam, that little hesitation would be likely to be felt in contravening also its laws regarding art. Even during the pilgrimage to the Holy House in Mecca, the Umayyad poet, Umar ibn Abi Rab'ah (678, 719), could find in the tent of a princess of the royal house a curtain of red brocade, embroidered with figures of gold. Whether these figures were of men or of animals, the poet...
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decoration of the tent, erected for the reception of the victorious prince, is as follows:

Here are gardens that no rains have vexed,
And great tree branches where no doves have sung;
A string of pearls that none with thread have pierced
Runs round the border of the double ply;
The forest boasts you here together find;
Though foe fights foe, they yet in peace do dwell;
Whene'er the tent-side billows with the wind,
The horses ramp and lions outride their prey.
Here the crowned Roman crushed, dejected, stands
Before his haughty, turbaned conqueror,
Whose carpet lips of humbled monarchs kiss
But dare not touch his fingers or his sleeve.
His branding heals the fever of their pride,
Between their ears each chieftain bears his mark.
In awe they hold their pommels 'neath their arms;
His purpose wins its way, though still unheathed.¹

From this description it is not clear whether the picture was painted on the canvas of the tent, or whether it had been woven into a curtain or worked in some form of embroidery. Whether such elaborate pictorial decoration was typical of tents intended for occasions of state, it is not now possible to say, but enormous sums of money were undoubtedly at times expended on their construction and figures were certainly sometimes employed in the decoration of them; such a sumptuous work of art was the tent made for Yázūrī, the minister of the Fatimid Caliph Mustanṣir (1035-1094); it took one hundred and fifty workmen nine years to make it, and it cost Yázūrī 30,000 pieces of gold; all the various animals of the world were included in the scheme of decoration, together with a number of other designs.²

It is in connexion with this art-loving Wazīr, who held office from 1030 to 1038, that the well-known story is told of the contest between the two rival painters. Attention was first drawn to this isolated incident in the annals of Muslim painting by H. Lavoix in 1875,³ but as he somewhat embellished the simple narrative of Maqrīzī, and as many others who have derived their information from him have added variants of their own, it may be of interest to the student to have a literal translation of the original passage. After describing a cleverly executed painting of a rainbow, which

³ See p. 31.
⁴ Quæwîlî, op. cit., pp. 210-11.