Islamic manuscripts: Differentiating the sacred, religious & non-religious

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Abstract

The people of the faith, and the followers of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), have a special connection for the word 'sacred' as the first concrete experience. At the beginning there was the Word. In Islam, the script (the visual body of the word), and the act of writing is believed to have divine origins for it was 'He (Allah) Who taught (the use of pen, taught man that which he knew not ('The Quran 16:95-9)).

According to an Islamic 'tradition' (hadith), seeking knowledge is a religious duty of all Muslims regardless of their sex. Manuscripts therefore, regardless of their subject matter - religious or otherwise - have always been treated with care and respect by Muslims, not only as sources of knowledge but also as a means of fulfilling a religious duty.

Countless manuscripts that are designated 'Islamic' are preserved in museums and personal collections the world over. One thing that must be understood here is that the term 'Islamic' in this context, or any art related context for that matter, is not synonymous with 'religious'. In fact, many of the so-called 'Islamic' art may be enjoyed and appreciated by non-Muslims, especially in the Western world. It is important to note here that for a Muslim anything done with sincerity and good intention is a step towards performing his duty to his Creator and therefore 'Islamic'. This applies to art as well. An exquisite piece of Mamluk candle stand, a fine piece of 19th century here, an ornamental censer (the traditional weapon of the Mahay hermaphrodite) or a fine piece of calligraphy of Persian poetry are all equally recognized as Islamic art.

For a museum curator or a conservator of Islamic art it is essential to know the nature of the work he deals with, for the artifacts are part of a 'religious heritage'. Religious heritage is not confined to tangible items, but extends beyond the physical properties of the object to a wider and deeper realm; the intangible reality from which the artifacts and the whole religious culture issue. A true preservation is therefore one that preserves both the body and the soul. The sacred boundaries must be maintained, and for this, the curator/conservator needs to distinguish between the realm of 'sacred', 'sacred' and 'non-religious' within the Islamic art tradition.

In this paper I will be introducing the differences between the concepts of 'sacred', 'religions' and 'non-religious' from the Islamic point of view. I will also be dealing with the question of 'Pollution and Purification' in a religious context.

The art of Islam, like its multifaceted culture, is not always about religion, although in many cases it is.

Domain of transcendental presence

We live in many worlds, not just one; yet the two main worlds that we live in simultaneously are the 'world of unity' (the world of spirit) and the 'world of multiplicity' (the world of matter). In fact, one may rightly argue that it is not we that live in the two worlds, but rather the two worlds dwell in us. Our attitude towards life depends, to a great extent, on the venge of one of the two. The triumph of the domain of matter – according to this logic – would indicate the failure of the spiritual force, and vice versa. The above discourse, however, is founded upon a philosophical duality that in itself rejects the notion of fundamental unity, for in a world of fundamental unity, there is no place for duality or multiplicity.

The Islamic notion of sawahl (lit. oneness or unity), on the other hand, refers to the single origin of all beings, living or otherwise. In this worldview, God is not viewed as an architect who withdrew after creating the world, rather as an ever present Active Being that all beings are but manifestations of His presence. According to this perspective the entire existence is but a miracle, i.e., `an amazing or wondrous occurrence manifesting a superhuman or supernatural act of God'.

In the art of Islam, the absence of a barrier between the two realms of sacred and secular prevails. As a result, we have a vast body of diverse works with religious and non-religious themes, and a multitude of applications and functions produced by different people of various cultural backgrounds, all consisting under the banner of Islamic art. This view is expressed by the famous Prophetic hadith (tradition): 'God has inscribed beauty upon all things'. Moreover, the notion of beauty in Islam, transcends the physical appearance of phenomena, for it is regarded, according to another hadith, as a divine attribute: 'God is beautiful and loves beauty'. In fact, one of the ninety nine names of Allah that are stated in the Quran in 'Al-Mudawwar which means 'The Art师.

'Beauty' in Islamic terminology does not merely imply a pleasing appearance, but a harmony and balance among the elements within and without. This harmony (al-tawwak) manifests in a variety of forms that all become meaningful and correlated in the language of symbols. Symbolism is based on the analogy between the different degrees of

Being; since being is one (al-wujud al-wasil), everything that is or exists, must in some way reflect its eternal source, for there is not a thing but celebrates this primacy (Quran 74:14).

This transcendental view unites the entire existence within a worldview based on sawahl, the very principle foundation of Islam. It is this view that finds manifestations in the kind of art and architecture that are not religious by definition yet 'Islamic' by all means.

Preservation of the intangible

It is important to note that the perception of the universal unity is meaningful only at an esoteric or philosophical level. However, while facing the issue of handling certain artefacts of religious reverence, all those who deal with them (worshipers as well as curators and conservators) are face some boundaries. This is to ensure that the 'sanctity of the faith'; i.e., the indivisibility of Religious Heritage, is preserved.

Obviously, a religious heritage does not only include tangible items; it also covers, in a wider and deeper sense, the intangible reality from which the artefacts and the whole religious culture issue. The intangible religious reality is that powerful force that lives in a religious person, gives meaning to his life, signifies his place in the universe and defines the relationship of the universal element to him and to others in accordance with the divine law.

The many layers of religious artistic heritage that have developed so colourfully since time immemorial, emenate from a single divine source or the unseen universal reality, without which the whole world of religious culture would be but a facade without a behind – a body without a soul.

In order to maintain the sacred boundaries, one must be able to distinguish between the realms of 'sacred', religious' and 'non-religious' within the religious culture.

Sacred, religious and non-religious

Before we carry on with our discussion, we need to distinguish between the meanings of 'sacred' and 'religious'.

Sacredness is a quality that transcends the material domain of religion and associates itself with the Divine; it 'gives birth to' (corresponds to the essence, the focus) and all important element in religion. The function of sacred art is not a descriptive in nature but a transforming one; it is a form by which the worshipper is exposed to the formless; a gateway on the confluence of heaven and earth through which the divinity manifests. A sacred space, on the other hand, is 'a means of communication with God and a place of divine power that serves as a visible icon of the world and thereby imparts a form to itself as organization to its inhabitants'. When the attributes 'sacred' is used for particular places, objects, performing rituals or works of art, it implies that they possess certain transforming qualities that take part in the act of worship, as the medium through which, man – the worshipper –

detaches his self from the mundane world and experiences a selfless spiritual union with the ultimate 'Self - the God.

Works of sacred nature

Miracles have always been considered an important aspect of religion, for they represent the presence of the supernatural in the natural domain or the embodiment of metaphysics in physical forms. In Islam, the issue was introduced in a different light; the Prophet rejected every request to pose as a miracle worker. In contrast to Moses and other Hebrew prophets, as well as Jesus, who all worked miracles, Muhammad made no attempt to advance his religious authority by performing miracles. When people, as mentioned in the Quran, complained that 'Why does he not bring us a Sign from his Lord?' (12:13), the Prophet refers them to the Quran, and explained that the existing things in the universe are the Signs (fayy) pointing to the reality of God in action.

The divine elements embodied in the holy Quran are considered most holy by the Muslim community. Though everything that exists, according to the Quran, is sacred, but as God spoke man through revelation, and since the Book is the carrier of such sublime soul-saving words, it occupies a distinct position. This sacredness is stressed upon by denying the right to the unclean (impure) to come in touch with it. 'This noble Sura [Quran 33:43]' is most honorable; In a Book well-guarded. Whose none shall touch but those who are clean: A Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds' (56: 77- 80). The state of cleanliness of those who touch the Quran may be understood in two levels. The Quran has a manifest aspect (qadar) and an occult one (khayal). At the first level of exposure, which derives from the literal interpretation of the verses, the practicing Muslim finds a religious command with regard to the proper ritual treatment and handling of the sacred Book. In this respect, cleanliness of the body having abstained in a ritual clean state before handling the Quran – especially while touching the pages that carry the holy verses physically – is observed. The second level of elucidation, however, goes beyond the literal appearance of the same verses and aims at disclosing the inner (khayal) aspect of the verses it explains the expressions 'clean' and 'touch' in a rather spiritual symbolic manner. As such, those who have not gained spiritual purification, and are therefore not qualified as 'clean', shall not 'touch' the essence of the Divine Words.

Quranic calligraphy, as the carrier of the sacred Words, occupies the highest status among all other modes of artistic expression in the entire Islamic civilization. The Quranic verses, whether within the framework of a manuscript of Qur'an or when presented individually as signs and symbols that evolve the divine, are of the sacred (Figures 1 & 2). Therefore all items carrying the Quranic verses over them, regardless of the material (i.e. carved inscriptions, woodwork, metalwork, textile pieces, etc.) must be treated and handled in a 'ritually clean' state.
Decorations of the Qur'anic manuscripts are usually confined to geometric and, in instances, floral designs. Nonetheless, in certain occasions, we come across paintings of scenes – especially those of the holy sites – in close proximity with the Qur'anic verses. A good example is the manuscript known as Inshaf-i-Sharif, popular among the Ottomans. Such manuscripts usually contain the Qur'anic chapter Inshaf (Surat al-Inshaf, Chapter 6) followed by other frequently recited chapters, such as Yathrib (56), Al-Baqara (25) and Al-Mulk (67), along with some prayers for the Prophet called Daghiliya yasir. Beginning in the 10th century, it became the custom to add miniatures of Mecca and Medina to the Inshaf-i-Sharif manuscript (Figure 3).

Works of religious nature

Though all sacred objects are – in one way or another – religious, not all religious items fall under the category of 'sacred.' The term 'religious art' may be applied to any form of art related to the manifested body of religion, be it a painted depiction of an event in the history of religion, or a visual description of a religious subject; this subject may be of an earthly nature like a painting of a religious ceremony or it may have emanated from the super natural and the metaphysical realm referred to in the holy scriptures, like scenes of creations, paradise, day of judgement, etc. Objects of ritual importance such as prayer carpets, prayer screens, portable minbars, robes, belts, swords, portraits of the saints and the like also fall under 'religious art.' Although such works are obviously categorized as examples of Islamic art (in a religious sense), they may not be – linguistically speaking – designated as 'sacred,' for they are not meant specifically to evoke the spiritual experience of the worshipper and do not take part in the act of worship.

Treatise on theology, Islamic law and jurisprudence (shahada), and books on hadith (sayings or actions of the Prophet or his companions), Islamic philosophy, Sufism etc. are not regarded as sacred. However, as they often contain direct quotations from the Qur'an (the sacred element), they are to be handled with reverence and in a state of ritual cleanliness. The 'sacredness' in such sources is easily identified, this is due to the clear and direct connection of such manuscripts to the body of religion. Conversely, such works, unlike the Qur'anic manuscripts, have not been subject to much aesthetic enhancement, for they are mainly regarded as 'reference sources,' and their users are generally confined to scholars and students. Some of the books on the history of religion and sources narrating the stories of the prophets, have been treated differently. Many such manuscripts have been embellished with colourful illustrations – an issue that is both interesting and thought-provoking. Much has been said and written about Islam's prohibition of imagery, and yet we encounter many examples of books 'of a religious nature' in which human images along with those of angels and animals, have been depicted (Figures 4 & 5). The abundance of such illustrated manuscripts sends a clear message with respect to the way

the Muslim communities – scholars and commoners alike – categorized and treated books of different degrees of religious reverence. While imagery almost 'never' entered the sacred domain of the manuscripts of the Qur'an, it was permitted, encouraged and was widely accepted, when it came to other religious books. This flexibility seems to have its root in the distinct place of education in Islam, as the purpose of such images was, first and foremost, contribution to a tradition of effective education. Had there been serious concerns about the permissibility of such representational arts, the Ulama (religious scholars) would have taken strict measures against it.

This paper does not aim at establishing an Islamic legal position in support of or against the permissibility of imagery, what is meant here, is to provide a realistic historical overview of Muslims attitude towards art. In order to develop a clear understanding of the subject, one has to realize that sensitivities expressed towards representational arts varied, depending on the nature of the manuscripts and artefacts. For instance, even the most decorated manuscripts of the Qur'an, as stated earlier, have always kept their distance from figurative imagery while in other religious texts the art of painting was adapted with few restrictions.

In the case of non-religious texts, on the other hand – as we shall see – it appears that such sensitivities were not prominent at all.
A mention should also be made here of a certain category of documents that are very interesting and even unique. In them the presence of the "sacred" is significant, yet their sphere of application is not confined to a certain social/intellectual class. Creatively laid out, beautifully ornamented and skillfully penned, the historical "Marriage Contracts" are perfect examples where a social act (marriage) is transformed into a performance of a sacred nature. In their ornamented literature, Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions combine with poetry and prose to introduce marriage as a sacred institution. Visual symbolism further enhances the aesthetic aspect of such legal documents and grants them an undisputed position in the domain of "art." Among the Muslim societies, according to my studies, Iran has the longest history of producing "Marriage Contracts." The tradition can be traced all the way back to the Persian society of the pre-Islamic era. The production of contracts of artistic significance, however, has a history of not more than four centuries.

The greatest preserved body of the historical hand-produced marriage contracts belongs to the Qajar dynasty (1781-1925 CE). The ornamentation of such documents often resembles those of the Qur'anic manuscripts. This resemblance may lie in the root that in fact marriage in Islam is referred to as an act of sacred nature: "God of My signs that He created for you, of yourselves spouses, that your might repose in them, and He has set between you love and mercy, surely in that are signs for a people who consider." (The Quran, 30:20). The Quran even introduces marriage as an eternal reward in the life of the hereafter. (The believers) shall be admitted to gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever, and spouses purified" (The Quran 115: 4-5). A hadith narrated from Prophet Muhammad indicates that among all established assemblies in Islam, no assembly is as loved and favored by the Glorious and Dignified God as the "marriage," while another hadith refers to marriage as an act that "saves half of one's faith." Such connotations provide a religious status to these rather legal documents. Moreover, the definite appearance of the Qur'anic verses in such manuscripts is in itself an indication that they should be handled with care, and that those who deal with their restoration must be cautious in their choice of tools and materials, and observe the Islamic cleanliness rules while working on such documents. (Figures 6, 7, 8).

The literature of these charming pieces comprises the following sections:

A: Tahmid-e-faqih (Vote of Praise): This section is always in Arabic. It starts with God's remembrance, often in a mystical/romantic manner: "He is the One Who brings together the hearts and the eyes" followed by a vote of praise and thanks giving to the Lord for blessings on the couple of marriage, e.g. "Praised be the Lord Who pronounced marriage a means for fortune and prosperity." Praised be the Lord Who declared marriage legitimate (according to the divine law) for us and prohibited adultery and fornication by His justice."

B: Pish-navehshtar (Preface): This section usually appears in Persian and Arabic languages, complementing each other and creating a dual literature. Pish-navehshtar is the longest part of the text, describing the aims and objectives of marriage in a most beautiful manner. The following hadith is quoted in the majority of the contracts—it stresses upon the act of marriage as performing a religious duty.

C: Introduction of the marrying couples: It is in this part that we have the names and other personal information of the bride and groom and their respective parents rather than praises and prayers. Marriages were, and are still, conducted mostly on dates that are considered auspicious. These include dates of religious festivity, and such information is included in many contracts. Figure 7, for example, indicates that the ceremony was held on the auspicious anniversary of Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

D: Bride's dowry: In this part, there is no trace of the literal language and the poetic literature, as the issue is purely financial in nature. A detailed description is presented in this section, of the items included in the bride's dowry. We read about silver, gold, money, land, real estate, carpets, kitchenware, furniture, streams, walnuts, tomatoes, and even male and female servants, as part of the bride's dowry.

Figure 6 The opening pages of a Persian Marriage Contract (booklets type), dated 1303 AH (1888-89 AD), the collection of the University of Melbourne Library. The illumination around and above the text is identical to those of the Qur'anic manuscripts.

Figure 7 Pages from a Persian marriage contract, dated 1303 AH (1888-89 AD), the collection of the University of Melbourne Library. The text on the left page of this marriage contract indicates that the Nikah ceremony was held on the auspicious occasion of the birth anniversary of the Prophet (Mawlid-an-Nabi). On the margin of the pages appear four seal impressions and some remarks from the witnesses.

Figure 8 Pages of a blank type marriage contract dated 1295 AH (1880-81 AD) but not specifically for the witnesses' remarks and seals. From the collection of the late Hesseuddin Khromov.

Figure 9 Detail of 1 page of an illustrated manuscript of Ramayana (a Hindu scripture), from the National Museum, New Delhi. This manuscript is a translated version of the scripture from Sanskrit to Persian by Abd al-Qadir Badii. The text is in Nasta'liq style and the illustrations belong to Bignor School. In the treatment of perspective and division of space, Persian influence is apparent.
Non-religious works

Art, in most Middle Eastern traditions, has been an inseparable part of life, like daily bread; and that is why one can find its manifestation in all aspects of life, from jewellery to weaponry, from liturgical objects to daily utensils. The distinction of fine arts from crafts is not a meaningful or valid distinction within the sphere of traditional societies of the region, for artefacts have always been produced to take care of certain demands. Regardless of the context in which the art is produced, a product needs to serve both the material and spiritual needs of the people who use them. Unlike the Western art, in which painting and sculpture are pre-eminent, in Islamic cultures, objects of daily use are refined with aesthetic qualities and elevated to the status of highly refined forms of artistic expression. Manuscripts are perfect examples where a text of historical, scientific or spiritual nature is transformed into a piece of art of skilful craftsmanship that take care of man's material, intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic needs.

The question may remain as to why a manuscript of no religious significance should be addressed as Islamic and therefore attributed to a certain religion? This question may be discussed at two levels: 1. religious & 2. historical.

1. A famous hadith commands Muslims to seek knowledge even if it requires the hardship of travelling 'as far as China.' Another hadith states that 'seeking knowledge is a strict religious duty of every male and female Muslim.' The two prophetic traditions are clearly indicative of a broad perspective that transcends the stereotyped notions of religion. The knowledge that is referred to in the said examples obviously does not merely mean 'religious knowledge', but knowledge in general. A survey of Muslim scholarship reveals a great emphasis on learning. They were pioneers in studying, translating and writing commentaries on the works produced by non-Muslims in the east and west. Alongside this, they contributed to the fields of philosophy, science, medicine, astronomy, and engineering. Such high motivations were a result of many factors: socio-economic conditions, personal interests and individual talents, to name a few. Devotion to a faith that gave such scientific endeavours a spiritual dimension, and provided the seekers of knowledge with the boon of performing a sacred duty, was, undoubtedly, a forceful inspiration that added to the vigour of such endeavours. Many museums and public and private collections are homes to illustrated Islamic manuscripts that display the use of creative imagery as an educational tool (Figure 10).

2. Many manuscripts are classified as Islamic due to the use of certain scripts associated with Islam or Muslim communities. This is because the change of script is among the most prominent cultural manifestations of acceptance of Islam by the masses. With the acceptance of the new faith, the need to read and understand the words of revelation in the original language motivated masses to study Arabic as the script of religion. Many scholars from non-Arabic communities started writing in Arabic. Some very old civilizations, like Egypt, gave up their language and script altogether and adopted Arabic as both language and script. Persia (ancient Iran) kept her language but shifted to a newly invented writing that was developed from Arabic script. A much later development of 'Islamic script' took place in Asia Minor and Indian Subcontinent: Turkish and Urdu were adopted by Ottomans and Mughals respectively, both as a result of long-Islamic influence. The span of such influences spread to smaller branches of languages such as Sindhi, Pashto, Kashmiri, etc. The mentioned language-scripts had all developed among communities who had embraced Islam; for them the ability to read and write Arabic characters (that were adopted by their own language) was an important tool that kept them within a closer range of the words of revelation – the Qur'an. The Jawi script played the same religious role for the Muslims of Southeast Asia. The limitations of this essay do not allow a deeper and wider elaboration of the subjects, even this brief historical account can display the underlying principle that connects certain scripts to a specific religious culture.

After this brief introduction we are going to introduce a non-religious Arabic epic, the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, as an outstanding example of 'non-religious Islamic Art.'

Shahnameh (The Book of Kings) is an enormous poetic opus written by the Persian Poet Ferdowsi. It is the national epic of the Persian speaking world. The Shahnameh tells both

Moreover, the Persians, after embracing Islam, altered their script from the ancient Pahlavi to a new form of writing that adopted Arabic script. In fact Iran's contribution to the advancement of Islamic calligraphy is as important, if not more prominent, than their Arab brothers. Hence the Persian language and script is in itself imbued with an Islamic identity and is rightly classified, along with Ottoman Turkish, Urdu, Jawi and others as 'Islamic scripts.' Having been compiled by a Muslim poet and inscribed in a script affiliated with the Islamic culture, the Shahnameh manuscripts (that are often beautifully illustrated and illuminated) – though not a 'religious text' are categorized as examples of Islamic Manuscripts.

The mythical and historical past of Iran from the creation of the world up until the Islamic conquest of Iran in the 7th century. Thus, it is part mythology, part history. (Figures 11 & 12)

This voluminous work, regarded by Persian speakers as a literary masterpiece, also reflects Iran's history, its cultural values, its ancient religion and its profound sense of nationhood. It took Ferdowsi more than 30 years to complete the Shahnameh, starting after 975 AD and finishing around 1001 AD. It has 62 stories, 990 chapters, and contains 60,000 rhyming couplets, making it the longest poem ever written in any language. It is more than seven times the length of Homer's Iliad.

Modern Persian has existed as a living language for around 1100 years and the Shahnameh, despite being over a thousand years old, is read by Persian speakers throughout the world in its original form. This makes the Shahnameh difficult than other epics which are written in languages that are now dead. Because it is a living language, and because it has sustained Persian poetry throughout the centuries, the Shahnameh has had a tremendous influence in shaping the modern identity of its Iranian, Afghan and Tajik readers.

Many of the episodes of the Shahnameh have existed for thousands of years within the Iranian world's oral tradition. However Ferdowsi's Islamic piety is reflected in his 'Book of Kings' through the whole epic takes place in a mythical or, in many cases, historically pre-Islamic era. Ferdowsi expresses his reverence towards Prophet Muhammad and his household, the Ahl al-Bayt. In this sense the Epic acts as a link connecting the pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran and creates a comfortable balance between the glorious pre-Islamic heritage of Persians and their Islamic identity.

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Figure 10 Page from KQ26 Shaur al-Kawakib al-Makhtas (Treatise on the Fixed Stars), Morocco, collection of Belkacem Apostolico, Vatican.

Figure 11 Pages of an illustrated Shahnameh in Isfahan school, Iran, (1217/1216 CE, from the collection of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (IIITAC), IBU, Kuala Lumpur.

Figure 12 Symbol is proved innocent as he voluntarily steps into the flames and comes out unharmed. Single leaf of Shahnameh, 16th or 17th century, Iran, Collection of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Concluding remarks

True preservation of religious heritage can only take place when both the tangible and intangible aspects of preservation are taken into account. In fact, it is the intangible spirit of religion that constitutes the very core of the religious heritage; this invisible root gives birth to the branches, leaves and fruit – the tangible. The primary challenge is to reconcile between values of the religious community and the scientific requirements of the conservation community. In doing so, one has to keep in mind that the conservation requirements may only deal with the body of a ‘religious object’ while the religious values and codes of conduct aim at preserving the spirit. Increasing awareness about issues such as liturgical and functional needs, competing needs of co-existing faiths and awareness of the growing secular pressures upon religious
values could help in laying out a wise plan in preserving the tangible as well as the intangible.

Manuscripts are among the most important sources that carry in them, in a recognizable fashion, the body and the spirit – the form and the content. Their content carries the teachings of a faith, intellectual discourses, scientific findings and/or individual elaborations, while the forms exhibit the aesthetic values and the artistic refinement of the cultures in which they were produced. Together they form our history, give us identity and, to a great extent, make us who we are.

Understanding the domains of ‘sacred’, ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ within the Islamic tradition will help in recognizing the sensitive areas. It will also provide insight with respect to the choice of material for restorating them in accordance with the rules laid out by the scripture. Moreover, gaining knowledge of the traditional worldview, learning about the pure and impure substances, understanding the sensitivities of the religious community and their codes of conduct with reference to the objects of religious reverence, and benefiting from the local skills and techniques, can help in developing better strategies in preservation of religious heritage in general, and the manuscripts in particular.

In the Ease of Eden
In that timeless zone
At the time of creation
When the trumpet was blown
From emerald waters
A garden was grown
As a gift of mercy
From Divine throne

(Amir H. Zelegho)

Notes
1. نوشته‌ی زیبای ترجمه‌ای از زبان عربی
2. نوشته‌ی سوییسی نوشته‌ای از زبان فارسی
3. دو دویی نامه‌ها همچنین نامه‌ای از زبان فارسی
4. کتاب جهانی گرافیک در زبان فارسی
5. سایت مرجعی در زمینه‌ی تاریخ و فناوری
6. مرجعی در زمینه‌ی تاریخ و فناوری


11. بی‌پی‌پی و نوشته‌ای از زبان فارسی

12. The bullet of the works dedicated to the stories of the Abrahamic prophets is tremendous. Examples of such pieces are scattered in the Islamic Art sections of various museums throughout the world. In 1992 the Israeli Museum, Jerusalem, published a book entitled Biblical stories in Islamic painting. The book (exhibition catalogue), as can be clearly reflected in its tiles, presents a collection of works paintings originated from India, Turkey, and particularly Iran. The stories behind the works come from Jewish sources and also include stories of the prophets from the New Testament.


14. سازمان: هistoiry and culture of Susansamh


16. For a very long time, Western writers have addressed art forms – other than painting and sculpture – as ‘Minor Arts’. This classification, on the one hand, reveals a medium oriented mentality that dominated the art of the Western world, and, to a great extent, is still widely accepted. On the other hand, a survey of the quality of the arts produced in countries with western artistic tradition reveals that painting and sculpture were truly superior, and that the preference was a substantial one: An overview of Western art through the ages – from ancient Greece to the contemporary Europe, America and Modern Australia confirms the accuracy of the classification. The problem began when the Western art historians extended their classification to the arts of the rest of the world. This extension was completely inaccurate and resulted in a widespread misunderstanding of the essence and meaning of most traditional arts. The later division of artistic products to art forms or ‘fine arts and applied arts’ were similarly wrong, as the categories made sense only within the Western world view. Extension of such divisions, especially to the domain of Islamic art, was a result of lack of understanding of the philosophical and cosmological foundations of such arts.

Author Biography

Dr. Amir Zelegho has held the post of Professor of Islamic and Oriental Arts at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, since 2001. His previous academic posts include: Professor of Eastern and Oriental Arts at the University of Art, Tehran (1993-2000), Chief Editor, Honors Names, Quarterly Journal of Arts Research (1997-2001) at the University of Art, Tehran, and he was the founder and Director of the PhD programme in Arts Research at the University of Art, Tehran (1997-2000).

Dr. Zelegho is an Art Historian, Indologist and artist, specializing in painting and photography. His areas of expertise include Islamic calligraphy, Islamic Philosophy of Art; Sacred arts of the Silk Roads; Hindu and Buddhist Art, Iconography and mythology. Languages studied include Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Hindi and Sanskrit.

Dr. Zelegho has written six books and over one hundred articles. His most recent publications include: Water, The First Element (Malaysia, 2003); The Sacred Art of Marriage; Persian Marriage Certificates of the Qajar Dynasty (Malaysia, 2003); and Symbolism in Indian Art (Iranian Academy of Arts, forthcoming). His previous positions and Awards include: Member of Ist International Buddhist Route Expedition (Unesco), Fellowship Award for the Silk Roads Studies (Unesco), Member of Iran Academy of Arts, Member of Iran Academy of Sciences and Member of All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society.