

**Hadeeth ad-Dar**  
Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah  
State of Kuwait

Volume 40, 2016

دار الآثار الإسلامية  
Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah | The al-Sabah Collection

حديث دار



## About the journal








*Hadeeth ad-Dar* is a publication of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. Every year, the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) organises a series of lectures as part of the cultural season. *Hadeeth ad-Dar* was created to share these lectures with academic and cultural institutions and Friends of the DAI around the world. Cultural Season 21 began on 28 September 2015 and, as in previous seasons, will present scholars in a wide variety of fields related to the arts and culture of the Islamic world.

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

This publication is sponsored in part by:



# Contents

- 02**  **16 April 2012**  
Henri Pharaon's House  
**May Farhat**
- 
- 07**  **12 November 2012**  
Moesgård Museum's Investigations of the History and Culture of Kuwait 1958 - 2012  
**Flemming Højlund**
- 
- 12**  **10 December 2012**  
Muslim Artists, Christian Patrons and the Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina (Palermo, Sicily, circa 1143 CE)  
**Jeremy Johns**
- 
- 17**  **28 January 2013**  
America and China: Reflections on Culture and Civilisation  
**Thorsten Botz-Bornstein**
- 
- 19**  **6 May 2013**  
Old Buildings, New Understandings: the restoration of Egypt's medieval and early modern architectural heritage  
**Jere L Bacharach**
- 
- 23**  **13 May 2013**  
Exhibiting the Middle East in the West  
**Linda Komaroff**
- 
- 27**  **4 November 2013**  
Sufi Romances of the Deccan: The illustrated Traditions of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* (Flower Garden of Love)  
**Navina Najat Haidar**
- 



**LNS 10 R**  
Carpet  
North-west or Central Iran  
Early 18th century  
Warp and weft of cotton, pile of wool  
Length 925 cm; width 380 cm

# Henri Pharaon's house



**May Farhat**

Presented in English  
16 April 2012

***The collector Henri Pharaon (1898 - 1993) was a man of great wealth and political clout who contributed to the shaping of the Lebanese nation state during the French Mandate period (1920-1943) and after Lebanon's independence in 1943. His wealth and hospitality were well-known, and his opulent house, which acquired a wondrous reputation, became the embodiment of Lebanese refinement and high culture. Conceived in the crucible of Lebanese nation building, the house stands as a significant witness to Lebanon's modern history.***

Henri Pharaon belonged to a prominent Greek Catholic family that traces its origin to the region of Hawran in Syria. After moving to Damascus in the 17th century, many members of the family, along with other coreligionists, relocated to several Ottoman and European cities, such as Haifa, Cairo, Alexandria, Venice, Trieste, and Paris. In addition to being entrepreneurial and business oriented, the family was cosmopolitan, speaking French and easily moving back and forth among Europe, Egypt, and Lebanon. It built its wealth in the silk and textile trade with Europe at the turn of the 20th century. This was further consolidated with the establishment of the first private bank in Beirut, in partnership with the Chiha family, with whom Pharaons had close alliance through marriage.

Born in 1898 in Alexandria in his grandfather's house, Pharaon moved with his parents to Beirut in 1900. He was educated in French missionary schools there before he left for Switzerland during World War I. He then joined the faculty of law at the University of Lyon, a choice determined by the strong commercial, financial and cultural ties that existed between the weaving industry of Lyon and the bourgeois Christian milieu of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Upon the death of his father in 1922, Henri Pharaon returned to Beirut to assume the presidency of the family bank.

During the Ottoman period, Beirut had emerged as a provincial capital, a major entrepot on the Mediterranean and the gateway to the Syrian interior. Its port and a vast network of trans-Mediterranean exchanges with Europe were the main vectors of its transformation. Beirut's highly effective and powerful mercantile class was connected to all the major centres of the Ottoman Empire and to other European cities. It prospered by means of its wide-ranging financial activities, its banks, and its credit and real estate investments, which significantly distinguished it from the traditional class of notables.

In 1920 the establishment of the French Mandate in the former Ottoman provinces created the new political entity of Greater Lebanon. It was composed of the Christian Mount Lebanon to which were annexed territories parcelled out from the former provinces of Damascus and Beirut. The French created an entity that ensured the numerical supremacy and guaranteed the political privilege of one confessional group, namely, the Christian Maronites of Mount Lebanon. This was done to the detriment of local Muslims and Druze, who felt coerced into joining this invented nation. A nationalist narrative, advocated by Christian intellectuals, traced the historical presence of Lebanon to ancient Phoenicia and underplayed the Arab and Islamic past, placing the nation's

---

**Dr. May Farhat** is an Assistant Professor of Fine Arts and Art History at American University of Beirut. She held various positions at Harvard University, including interim director of the Arabic Language Program and teaching fellow. Dr. Farhat has completed extensive research on Henri Pharaon's 'Treasure House of Arab Art', writing a book and presenting several professional papers on the subject.

historical and geographical boundaries exclusively within a Mediterranean culture. The dichotomy that resulted between Muslim and Christian, and conflicts over Lebanon's national identity, became sources of discord in the checkered history of that nation.

Upon his return to Beirut, Henri Pharaon immediately entered the political fray and remained an important power broker, and a behind-the-scenes influential presence, until the outbreak of the Lebanese war in 1975. His extraordinary wealth, vested in banking, major real estate holdings, horse racing, and a monopoly over the management of the port of Beirut, gave him the freedom and autonomy to support the political causes that served his personal and business interest. It is the mansion and the extraordinary collection of the antique objects collected within its walls, however, that best define his public image.

The house was built in 1901 by Philippe Pharaon, Henri Pharaon's father, a prominent banker and a businessman, and was located in the neighbourhood of Zuqaq al-Blat (the paved road) that developed outside the walls of Beirut. There, many aristocratic families and members of the mercantile bourgeoisie built houses surrounded by gardens and overlooking the scenic bay of Beirut. It combined a central hall plan, a type common in the residential architecture of the region during the 19th century, along with an Italian Gothic exterior that agreed with the architectural eclecticism dominant in turn-of-the-century Beirut.

The style of the house replicated architectural fashion popular in coastal cities around the Mediterranean, and it profiled the Pharaon family's connections to a European and cosmopolitan world. Marble floors and unadorned walls painted in a light green color formed the original décor. Pillaged during World War I - which the Pharaon family waited out in Alexandria - the house was briefly used as a residence for the French governor in 1924. Five years later, in 1929, Henri Pharaon began to restore and refurbish his house. Pharaon originally intended to incorporate one "Arab Salon" (*salon arabe*) into his



Figure 1

mansion, following an established fashion in Lebanon elite houses.

The vogue of Arab Salon had originated in the nineteenth century European interiors, where they were designated as "smoking rooms" (figure 1). These were found in many aristocratic residences and summer homes not only in France, England and the United States, but also in Cairo, where they became integral to the bourgeois house. The passion of many French and British collectors for Middle Eastern objects is well known. In France, in particular, many collectors were engaged in assembling large holdings of such artefacts around the turn of the century.

In Beirut, General Henri Gouraud, who served as French's High Commissioner from 1919 to 1923, added an Arab Salon to the French official residence, and there is no doubt that the Lebanese aristocratic classes adopted this fashion by way of French Orientalism. By his own account, two factors spurred Pharaon's passion for collecting architectural interiors. His travels to Syria, in search of purebred Arabian horses that he raised, took him into the homes of Damascene and Aleppine notables, where he was impressed by the intricacies of the decoration and the marble floors.

Pharaon's visit to the Azem Palace in 1929 furthered his infatuation with Syrian interiors. Built



Figure 2

by As'ad Pasha, governor of Damascus in the mid-eighteenth century, the Azem Palace was acquired by the French government in 1922, and it became the location of the French Institute of Archeology and Islamic Art as well as the residence of the High Commissioner. During an attack by rebels in the 1925 insurrection, part of the palace was burned down and its collection pillaged.

Restored by the French, the Azem Palace functioned as a catalyst for Pharaon's imaginative recasting of his father's European inspired mansion in Zuqaq al-Blat, and it meditated his interest in Bilad al-Sham's historical visual culture. Although the Pharaon family originally came from Syria, Henri Pharaon's multiple displacements among Cairo, Beirut, Switzerland and France established a physical as well as cultural distance from what he knew to be part of his family history. The splendid and seductive Damascene houses and Aleppine interiors came as a revelation to Pharaon. If Aleppine and Damascene houses spurred the aesthetic appreciation and covetousness of Pharaon, it is the Azem Palace in its splendour and riches that he often boasted later in life saying that he owned the best palace in the region.

Ironically, the order by the French to bomb Damascus in 1925 in an effort to quell the insurrection resulted in the destruction of a significant number of old houses, which infused the antiquities market with discarded interiors and architectural fragments. Helped by old craftsmen, Pharaon collected ceilings, wainscoting, crumbling walls, tile pavements, mural revetments, isolated cornices, fragments of

fireplaces, and fountains, which were photographed in situ, numbered, and transported overland with great care. The architectural elements were restored in ateliers and incorporated into various rooms of the house. Old techniques were revived as a way to restore the painted woodwork, and disused marble quarries were rediscovered in order to complete the marble mosaics. The cost of restoring and refitting the various elements in the mansion was far greater than all the previous costs incurred by their purchase and transportation.

Concomitantly, Pharaon collected objects from throughout the region. Many of them found their way to his doorstep by way of antiquarians who knew of his acquisitiveness. This resulted in the accumulation of large quantities of objects that belonged to the diverse material culture of the region: carved stone capitals, ceramics, metalwork, glass, carpets, vases, sarcophagi, statues, manuscripts and icons. The presence of French archaeologists at the French Institute of Archaeology in Beirut provided the expertise and the scholarship that bolstered the drive to acquire works of art that Pharaon and other Lebanese collectors shared.

Pharaon displayed many of these objects, Phoenician and Byzantine statues as well as architectural fragments of Syrian provenance, in his walled garden, amidst fountains, lawns, and flower beds. Stone capitals lining the garden alleys present dizzying variations on the acanthus leaf motif, dating from the Roman to the early Islamic period (figure 2). An enigmatic Phoenician anthropomorphic sarcophagus dating to the fifth century BCE and found in Sidon, marks the axis of the main entrance door and signals the primacy of Phoenicia.

To renovate his house, Pharaon engaged Lucien Cavro (1905 -1973), a French architect and a graduated of the Ecole des Beaux Arts de Lille, who was participating in the restoration of the Azem Palace, mosaics of the Umayyad mosque of Damascus, and other archaeological digs in Syria. The house's main entrance leads to a central space around which are organised many reception rooms and a grand dining room. Between 1929 and 1963 fourteen reception

rooms were recreated inside the mansion from fragments collected through assiduous searches in the old palace of Damascus and Aleppo.

Based on Cavo's account, which was published in the pamphlet *Portrait d'une Maison* (Portrait of a House) that included essays written by friends of Pharaon, the major reception rooms were refitted with wood ceilings, panelling, hard coating on the walls, and marble floors from 1929 - 1932. Work proceeded slowly. The dining room was finished in 1957 - 1958, and the rooms of the upper floor were not completed until 1963. Pharaon was constantly working on his house, and the death of Lucien Cavo in 1973, a loss Pharaon felt deeply, probably put a halt to his restoration mania.

The eclectic yet harmonious combination of disparate decorative elements and the careful blending of styles can best be admired in the dining room, a stately and light-floored room that frames the elongated and simple dining table at its centre (figure 3). In the absence of a traditional Ottoman house to emulate, the dining room reveals a blending of styles and objects that was not present in the central salons, which had been restored earlier. The wooden ceiling with geometric patterns came from an Aleppo house, while the carved and painted marble panels that carry Arabic religious inscriptions and are offset by smaller Dutch tiles painted in shades of cobalt blue display the same motif of vases holding bouquets of flowers.

Inside the tympanum of the entrance arch, a desacralized iconostasis (which is an altar screen in an Orthodox church that separates the sanctuary from the nave) is framed on either side by marble panels with floral motifs and Arabic religious inscriptions. Furthermore, two bronze lion heads were inserted on either side of the arcades.

Unlike museums, which are constrained by specific organizing principles and taxonomies, private holdings are defined by the collector's imagination and are perceived as the extension of self. In her insightful



Figure 3

book on collections and souvenirs, Susan Stewart highlights important aspects of the act of acquiring works: "whereas the souvenir's role or purpose is the remembering or the invention of memory, the point of collecting is forgetting, or starting again, in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of their combination, an infinite reverie".

This evocation of an infinite reverie finds expression in the many essays included in the pamphlet *Portrait d'une Maison*. For French archaeologist Maurice Dunand and others, the Pharaon house epitomizes the enchantment of a palace of the Orient, with its opulence and splendour. It preserves past traditions that were being effaced by modernity. It is an oasis of calm and beauty, a world of the imagination, where the accumulation of the riches of the Orient provokes feelings of wonder and rapture. The juxtaposition of objects, the thick layering of Turkish and Persian

carpets muffling the sound of footsteps, the Dutch tiles from Delft, and the delicate decoration of the wood panels create a sheltered world of harmony and order.

Much of this leads us to think that Henri Pharaon was staging his own imaginary Orient while he was rejecting the noisy, messy, modern world that was developing right outside his garden enclosure. A more subtle reading is suggested, however, in a concluding paragraph by Camille Aboussouan, a bibliophile, collector, and like Henri Pharaon, an eminent member of the Lebanese Christian elite.

*A house is the reflection of the moral and intellectual order of a man. It is the country of his spontaneous creation, the motherland of his intelligence. When a seemingly austere aesthetic order enlivens with water jets and colours, with flowers and drawings, the interior frame of a daily life, when this order brings Arab and Lebanese art together with remembrances (souvenirs) of the magnificence Phoenicia, of Greece, and of Byzantium, it testifies in an admirable way to Humanism, to this Civilization of Thought and Art that is every man's honour, and without which Lebanon cannot conceive itself.*

Pharaon did not wish to write his memories, nor did he leave much writing behind; an archive of his personal papers has yet to surface. He did, however, give many interviews late in his life. He spoke about his house and the desires and wishes he invested in it. In an interview given in 1985, he commented, "I wanted to make of this place a house for brotherly co-existence among religious sects\confessions (*tawa'if*). Thus, you see Qur'anic verses, crosses, icons and Islamic manuscripts all gathered together. I wanted to make this house, my first homeland, what we wanted to make of Lebanon." This vision, he elaborated, was shaped by his experience as a student in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he witnessed peaceful coexistence among different nationalities (French, German, and Italian) and religious denominations. This idea of Lebanon as the Switzerland of the East, which had wide currency among Lebanese intellectuals, was often repeated but not thoroughly examined.

The house, conceived by Henri Pharaon as an amalgam of many cultures and religions, is the visual expression of a "Mediterranist ideology" expounded

by Michel Chiha (1891-1954), Pharaon's brother-in-law and business associate, and the attitude was shared by many other Lebanese intellectuals in their circle. Chiha, a successful businessman as well as a political thinker, was instrumental in drafting the Lebanese Constitution of 1926 that was commissioned by the French Mandate authority. He is held responsible for the confessional system of government that established a power-sharing arrangement among the different religious groups. In the series of books and articles, Chiha articulated a nationalist ideology that advocated Lebanon's Mediterranean identity, which goes back to Phoenician times. He argued they were neither Phoenician nor Arab but simply Lebanese, a people of distinct characteristics comprising a mixture of ethnic and religious communities tied together by a common history and geographical location. This approach embodied Henri Pharaon's strong belief that Lebanon is an entity with historical depth. It was not an artificial construct made possible by historical conjecture, mediated by French colonial power, and shaped by the Christian minority's interests in a predominantly Arab Muslim milieu.

Henri Pharaon's mansion was never set up as a private museum in his lifetime, but it was visited and admired by prominent foreign visitors, kings, rulers, and governmental officials who left enthusiastic comments in a golden book that Pharaon treasured. With the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 - and the fracturing of the nation - the house was caught in a no-man's land between the two warring sides of the city. Miraculously, it survived looting and destruction, which was probably achieved at great expense by paying off the various warring factions. Following the tragic assassination of Pharaon in 1993, the house was sold by his only surviving son to Robert Mouawad, who transformed it into a private museum where the house's staggering riches could be seen by the public.

With its European exterior and Ottoman interiors, the house's hybridity defies categorization and often puzzles its visitors. Without Pharaon, whose consuming passion, single-mindedness, and imagination animated its spaces, the house stands as a relic of a not-so-distant past, in a country where questions of national identity and belonging remain unresolved, contested, and mercurial.

**Figure 1:** Interior view of the Arab Salon

**Figure 2:** View of Garden with Capitals

**Figure 3:** A view of the dining room in the mansion

# Moesgård Museum's Investigations in the History and Culture of Kuwait 1958-2012



**Flemming Højlund**

Presented in English  
12 November 2012

*Moesgård Museum is housed in an old mansion lying in a forest outside the city of Århus in the western part of Denmark. It was built in 1778 by Baron Christian Frederik Gyldenkrone. In the 1960s the city of Århus acquired Moesgård and made it into a museum for Danish prehistory. In addition, the buildings house departments of Aarhus University with a thousand students of prehistoric archaeology and ethnography, and nearly a hundred scholars.*

Moesgård is a popular place, and for many years people living in the nearby city of Århus have used the beautiful forest and the beach for recreation, especially on the weekends. The museum is building on the popularity of the place and organises exhibitions that attract the average family with children. Every summer there is a Viking market on the beach where one can buy Viking food, Viking clothes and Viking jewellery. Many people arrive dressed in Viking clothes and live for a week in tents on the beach. On the weekend, battles are fought with spear and sword which attract a huge number of people.

The old mansion has long become too small for the museum and university purposes, and a new building of 16.000 m<sup>2</sup> is being constructed next to the old one (figure 1). It is paid for by private Danish foundations, by the Danish government, the city of Århus and by some Arabian Gulf countries.

The setting of the new museum is quite spectacular, and the building is designed by the *Danish Henning Larsen Architects*, famous for making the Foreign Ministry Complex in Riyadh and the Copenhagen Opera. It has been important that the new building does not harm the beautiful landscape and the atmosphere around the old mansion, and therefore it is almost hidden in the green hill. Inside this building there will be exhibitions on Danish prehistory, on



Figure 1

world cultures, and on the first floor there will be a separate hall, focussing on the traditional cultures and the prehistory of Kuwait and the other Gulf countries, Bahrain, Qatar and Abu Dhabi.

Now why should this museum lying in a small, much too wet and green country in northern Europe have an exhibition about the traditional cultures and the ancient history of the hot and dry Gulf countries? This is what this paper is trying to explain.

The answer begins with two gentlemen, P.V. Glob and T.G. Bibby (figure 2). In 1949 Glob (1911-1985) became Professor of Archaeology at Aarhus University and Director of the museum in Aarhus. Glob was fascinated by cultural elements,

---

*Dr. Flemming Højlund is a noted archaeologist, the head of the Oriental Department at Denmark's Moesgaard Museum, and the director of the Kuwait –Danish excavations at Tell 6 in Failaka since 2008. He has published extensively and most recently the book Failaka/Dilmun. The Second Millennium Settlements vol.3. The Bronze Architecture 2010.*



which show connections between cultures around the world, and he was determined not to become embedded in his own local Danish environment, but to strike out into the world and connect with people across geographical and cultural divides. That he finally decided in 1953 to go to the Arabian Gulf was due to Geoffrey Bibby (1917-2001), an Englishman who had worked for an oil company in Bahrain in 1947-49, just after the Second World War.

In 1949 Bibby began excavating for the museum in Aarhus. One night at Glob's house Bibby talked about the small island of Bahrain, which was covered by 100,000 burial mounds. Historians thought that these burials belonged to people who had lived in the countries around the Gulf and not in Bahrain itself.



Figure 2

Glob did not believe in this theory and decided to go to Bahrain. During his first five months in Bahrain in 1953/54 he found the cities and temples of an ancient kingdom. We know that the name of this kingdom was *Dilmun*, because it is mentioned in texts written 4000 years ago in cuneiform on clay tablets in Mesopotamia, present day Iraq. Generally, in those days archaeologists in the Middle East focussed on Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran, and it came as a big surprise that there could be anything of interest in the harsh environment of the Arabian Gulf countries.

The news of the discoveries in Bahrain was spread widely, for example in the magazine *London Illustrated News*, which was much read in the Gulf. The news was noted with particular interest in the neighboring Gulf countries, and led to Glob and Bibby being invited to do archaeological work in Qatar in 1956. In 1958 the Ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Shakhbut invited them to begin in Abu Dhabi. In 1958 investigations began also in Kuwait. In Saudi Arabia they began in 1962, and in 1972 they started out in Oman.

It is worth mentioning that Denmark was a poor country when all this started! Denmark had been occupied by Nazi Germany during 1940-45, and in the early 1950s a lot of things were still scarce, for example the museum could not afford to buy new tables and chairs for their offices and got all their furniture second hand from the Danish Railways.

But nothing could stop Glob, and the fact that he had been cooped up in Denmark during the five years' war, just made the urge to get out in the world stronger. The first direct contact between the Danish archaeologists and Kuwait took place in early 1957 at Muharraq airport in Bahrain, where Glob met the Kuwaiti Director of Education, Mr Abdulaziz Hussein.

In September the first official application for an archaeological investigation was sent to Kuwait. It contained a proposal for a five-man expedition with a budget of 70,000 Rupees. Sheikh Abdullah Jaber Al-Sabah, who was president of the Department of Education, gave the green light.

On 7 January 1958 a telegram came to Århus with the final permission, and 3 weeks later Glob and Bibby arrived in Kuwait. They were warmly received by the Emir Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Sabah and by Sheikh Abdullah Jaber Al-Sabah.

Firstly, they surveyed the mainland of Kuwait, and then they sailed to the island of Failaka. At that time Failaka was inhabited by a few thousand people, most of them living in the village of Zor.

On the southwest corner of Failaka Glob and Bibby noticed four low mounds [Editor's Note: known as "tells"] which they suspected covered remains of ancient settlements. Four years later, extensive excavations had proved beyond doubt that two of the tells belonged to the Bronze Age, and the other two tells belonged to the Hellenistic period (figure 3).

The excavations were a huge undertaking with Glob ultimately responsible, and with Poul Kjærum as field director assisted by up to 16 archaeologists and up to 185 labourers. Failaka could not supply all this manpower, and people came from as far away as Iran, Pakistan and Yemen.

The settlement in Tell F3 consisted of small private houses with 4-6 small rooms, undoubtedly for a family. The houses were between 25 and 60 m<sup>2</sup>, so actually very small. The houses were built of beach rock set in clay and the roofs were flat, much like houses were built on Failaka traditionally. Close to the house was a subterranean cistern which caught the rain water from the flat roof and stored it. Water was never plentiful on Failaka, and it was carefully kept.

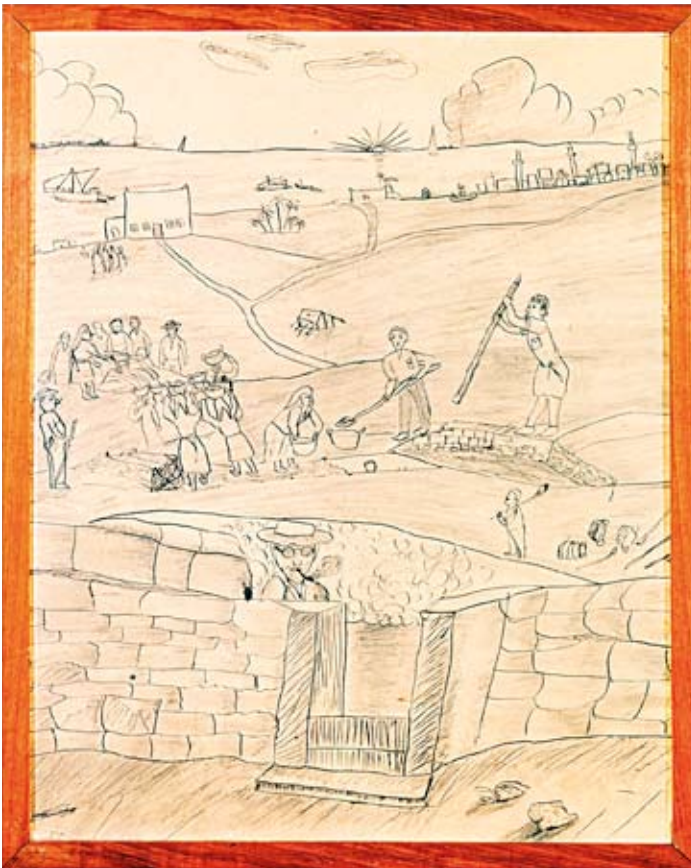


Figure 3

Compared to the small houses in Tell F3, the building in Tell F6 was very large, about 400 m<sup>2</sup>. For that reason, it was for that reason called a “Palace”, even though we do not know exactly what was going on in this building. Some of the rooms were full of storage jars when excavated and in one corner below the floor was a water-proof cistern which may have contained some kind of liquid, perhaps date juice. Dates were definitely grown in this period; we find date stones in the excavation, and the *madbasa*, an installation to produce date juice, is probably one of the oldest inventions in Arabia.

The Danish archaeologists normally wore the Arab head dress, and Glob often dressed in *dishdasha* and the *bisht*, which he received as a present from the Ruler of Bahrain, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. Today it may perhaps seem strange that these Europeans wore traditional Arab clothes. It was partly because it was practical it was good protection against the sun and the hot weather. And it was partly a sign of respect for the local customs of the Gulf. Glob always stressed that he and his colleagues were guests in the Gulf countries.

Similarly, in Bahrain Glob did not stay in air-conditioned hotels with swimming pools and refrigerators. He built a traditional *barasti* type camp far away from the European compounds and lived there under very simple conditions. It was cheap,

it was practical and it was, at the same time, a statement of solidarity with the local population.

Besides archaeological research, traditional cultures were also studied and recorded. It was a kind of rescue work. In the 1950s and 1960s the revenue from the oil was rapidly changing the Gulf communities, and traditional culture was disappearing at an alarming rate.

An ethnographer, Klaus Ferdinand, and a cinematographer, Jette Bang, lived with the Murrah and the Naim Bedouins in Qatar in 1959 and this resulted in both a book and a film. In Bahrain, a female anthropologist, Henny Harald Hansen, lived in 1960 in a small village and wrote several books about her experiences.

In 1958 a musical anthropologist, Poul Rovsing Olsen, was on Failaka and recorded a lot of music. Today, these audio tapes are stored in an archive in Copenhagen, where they can be studied. Rovsing Olsen also bought a number of music instruments that are now in our museum storeroom and in the Musical Instrument Museum in Copenhagen. Poul Rovsing Olsen wrote a book on Gulf music that was edited a few years ago and published with three CDs with a selection of the traditional music of the Gulf.

Additional footage was made by Glob and Bibby on 16 mm cameras and by a professional film photographer, Svend Aage Lorentz, in 35 mm. The films are now lying in the store, waiting to be properly digitized. Around 5 hours of footage from Kuwait around 1960, including an interview with His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Sabah, when he was Minister of Social Affairs.

Around 1975, after 25 years of field work, surveys and excavations in all the Arabian Gulf countries, Moesgård Museum decided to reduce the field work and instead focus on studying and publishing the results of the many investigations. The Danish Carlsberg Foundation and the Ministry of Culture have supported the very time-consuming preparation of publications. So, since the 1970s our museum has turned out a series of scholarly publications dealing with the history of the Gulf countries from the Stone Age, 8000 years ago through the Bronze Age and well into the Islamic period. Still, some volumes are being prepared with the support from the Secretary General of the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters, Mr Ali Hussain Al-Youha.

Around 2002 Moesgård Museum had finished the major publication burden and was ready to begin new

investigations in the Gulf. In 2004 Moesgård Museum received a visit from the Director of Museums and Antiquities in Kuwait Mr Shehab Shehab, and he suggested that Moesgård Museum began new excavations on Failaka in cooperation with the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters. So in November 2008, 50 years after the first Danish digs on Failaka, the new Kuwaiti-Danish excavations were started, and they have now been going on for five years.

Failaka is a very pleasant place. It is quiet, there is the sea, the big sky and the sand and buried in the sand a long history. This makes it ideal as a centre of research into the ancient history of the region. The Failaka research station is an international community. Apart from the staff of the Kuwait National Museum, the Danish mission in 2012 consists of twelve people, eight Danes, one English, one Canadian, one Polish and one German. On the island at the same time was an independent French team with French, German and Syrian scholars.

The main objective that Mr Shehab and the present writer decided to focus on is understanding the two great buildings that have been excavated in the Bronze Age Tell F6, the "Palace", a large building of c. 400 m<sup>2</sup>, excavated by the Danes around 1960 and a temple of approximately the same size, excavated by a French mission in the 1980s. There is no doubt that these two buildings were the centre of the Bronze Age settlement on Failaka, it was here that the power resided. The problem is that we did not know how to date these two buildings, and we did not know what the relation between them was.

After five years of excavation we have a series of radiocarbon dates that place the construction and first use of the "Palace" to c. 1800 BCE. This was the period of King Hammurabi of Babylon, who conquered most of Mesopotamia, i.e. present day Iraq and Syria, and turned a number of small kingdoms into one polity. He integrated the economy of this great area, and this may have stimulated the economic development, and provided the Dilmun merchants with a great market and possibilities of profit. This may perhaps explain why the "Palace" was built at this particular time.

The temple seems to have been constructed perhaps a hundred years earlier than the "Palace". The area between the two buildings shows evidence of activities related to the temple. Just outside of the "Palace" a long kiln has been excavated which was full of ashes and white burnt bones, especially the horns of male goats (figure 4). This is a type of find that we never see in the excavation elsewhere, and it is not unlikely that this kiln was used to burn the uneatable remains of the temple sacrifices. We know that the Dilmunites sacrificed sheep, goats and oxen upon altars, i.e. they cut the throat of the animals. This is, actually, how one sacrificed to the gods on the Arabian Peninsula up to the spread of Islam.



Figure 4

After the blood had covered the altar, the meat was cooked and eaten by the worshippers. The heads of the sacrificial animals may have been put up to decorate the temple, such heads (bucrania) are sometimes seen to decorate stamp seals. Eventually, these remains were destroyed in the kiln. The remains of sacrificed animals were after all dedicated to the gods and could not just be thrown on the general rubbish heap. A similar kiln

was excavated at the Barbar temple in Bahrain, which shows close parallels to the Dilmun temple on Failaka (Højlund 2012).

It has long been thought that the first people to colonize Failaka were Dilmunites coming from Bahrain c. 2000 BCE. But in 2009 we found below the Dilmun temple the corner of a wall, maybe for a courtyard, lots of animal bones and pottery of a very particular kind that comes from one of the cities in South Mesopotamia. The pottery dates to c. 2100 to 2000 BCE, a period where Mesopotamia was a big centralized state with a ministry of foreign trade. This ministry had big boats built that sailed to the coast of present day United Arab Emirates to get tons of copper and many other precious things such as ivory, carnelian, lapis lazuli etc. It seems likely that the Mesopotamian ministry of trade was responsible for the first settlement on Failaka and that the purpose of this settlement was to service the trade through the Gulf.

There is evidence of trade with the East, in the shape of a ladle of shell from the Indian Ocean and pottery from the Indus civilization in present

day Pakistan. And we have found two genuine pearls which were not pierced, in a layer with a lot of oyster shells, showing that pearl diving was carried out from here. That this was not just a poor fisherman's house, is shown by several Mesopotamian cylinder seals with cuneiform inscriptions, giving the Sumerian names of the owners (figure 5), and mentioning the profession of one of them as scribe.

Failaka has had a very dynamic history, and a lot can be learnt about how cultures and civilizations develop through history from studying this small island, especially about how dependent all areas are on the neighbouring polities. Today, the countries along the Arabian Gulf are well-known throughout the world, primarily because of the tremendous modern development caused by the oil riches. That this area has a fascinating ancient history and a richness of traditional cultures has only been communicated to a minor extent, but will, we hope, be evident to the visitors of the exhibition in the new Moesgård Museum, which is scheduled to open in 2014 [Editor's Note: opened in October 2014].



Figure 5

**Figure 1:** The new Moesgård Museum opens in 2014 a permanent exhibition on the ancient history and traditional cultures of the Arabian Gulf countries

**Figure 4:** New excavations in Tell F6. Background the SE corner of the "Palace", in the foreground the kiln to burn sacrificial remains

**Figure 2:** P.V. Glob (right) and T.G. Bibby (left), who directed the Danish expeditions to the Arabian Gulf countries

**Figure 5:** Impression of Mesopotamian cylinder seal found in Tell F6 on Failaka

**Figure 3:** On this fine drawing made by a school child from Failaka, you see all the excavations, Sheikh Ahmad's house, Zor village, the sun setting in the west, and all the archaeologists smoking pipes, cigars, and cigarettes

# Muslim Artists, Christian Patrons and the Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina (Palermo, Sicily, circa 1143 CE)



**Jeremy Johns**

Presented in English  
10 December 2012

*The island of Sicily was conquered by Arab and Berber troops from North Africa during the 9th century. For the first hundred years, Muslim Sicily was a military base from which the Aghlabid emirs of Ifriqiyya launched successive attacks against mainland Italy. However, after 949, when the Fatimid caliph installed the Kalbid family as governors of Sicily, the capital of the island, Palermo, developed into a centre of Islamic culture and learning. By 973, the geographer Ibn Hawqal describes Sicily as the richest and most developed island held by the Muslims in the Mediterranean, and could even compare it to Umayyad Cordova. But Kalbid Sicily flourished for only about a century and, during the 1040s, the emirate disintegrated into several warring principalities, and the surrounding Christian powers took the opportunity to invade.*

In 1060, a force led by two brothers of the de Hauteville family from Normandy, who had established themselves in southern Italy, crossed the Straits of Messina. The Norman conquest of Sicily lasted for more than thirty years and caused massive damage to the island. So much so that in 1093, Count Roger de Hauteville wrote: 'Who, seeing the huge and widespread destruction of the castles and cities of the Muslims, and observing the vast destruction of their palaces, built with such great skill ... could not consider this to be a great and manifold disaster and an incalculable loss'. The damage done by the Norman conquest to Muslim Sicily and, in particular, to Palermo was left unrepaired until, in 1130. That year, Count Roger's son, who was also named Roger, Roger II, had himself crowned king, and founded the new kingdom of Sicily.

King Roger II and his ministers set about rebuilding Palermo in order to create a royal capital for the new monarchy. The art and architecture of the new kingdom was carefully designed to proclaim that,

through Roger's beneficent, but firm rule, the three cultures of his kingdom - Latin, Greek and Arab - had been forged into a single Sicilian people, the so-called *populus trilinguis* or 'three tongued people'. Of all of the monuments built by the Norman kings, that most eloquently expresses the policy of *populus trilinguis* is the Cappella Palatina, or palace chapel, which combines a Latin basilical plan, with mosaics in the Greek or Byzantine tradition, and a unique Islamic wooden painted ceiling.

The most recent studies of the painted ceilings of the Cappella Palatina have arrived at the following series of, what it is probably best to consider for the moment to be, working hypotheses. The ceilings were commissioned by King Roger II and his ministers to roof the space to the west of the sanctuary of the chapel, which was originally intended to serve as a royal hall. Both the wooden structure of the ceilings, and their painted decoration, were executed by an itinerant workshop of carpenters and painters who had clearly collaborated in the construction of similar

---

**Prof. Jeremy Johns** is Professor of the Art and Archaeology of the Islamic Mediterranean, University of Oxford, Director of the Khalili Research Centre, and a Fellow at Wolfson College. He is a prolific writer, who has three publications in press, including an article on "Arabic Inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina: Performativity, Audience, Legibility and Illegibility".

ceilings over palatial halls in the Islamic Mediterranean and beyond.

No comparable wooden ceilings have survived, but the construction of the *muqarnas* ceiling of the nave demonstrates that the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina belongs to a tradition that was already widespread throughout the Islamic Mediterranean. The closest surviving comparanda [Editor's Note: comparisons] for the *muqarnas* units in the ceiling of the nave are to be found in the mosques of Almoravid and Almohad Morocco and Algeria, where they are built not of wood but of brick and plaster. This may indicate that the *muqarnas* forms employed in the Cappella Palatina originated in the Maghrib. On the other hand, it may rather reflect a chance pattern of survival because the principles underlying such *muqarnas* structures were demonstrably widespread throughout the Islamic world by the mid – twelfth century.

As to the paintings, a mass of evidence demonstrates that the style of the painting in Palermo is most closely paralleled in Fatimid Egypt. Approximately 600 panels in the *muqarnas* zone are painted with scenes including figures of humans and animals. There is almost complete agreement amongst scholars that, except for a small and hotly debated group of about twenty panels, the unifying theme of the paintings of the nave is a celebration of a royal court, which is imagined as a *majlis* or semi-formal assembly of the ruler and his cup-companions or *nudamā'*.

The ruler presides, crowned, and sometimes enthroned, wine-cup in hand, with attendants to keep his cup full, entertain him with music, and to whisk away the flies. He is surrounded by his *nudamā'*, his cup-companions. There are more than 150 images of *nudamā'* in the ceilings. No other figural subject is more numerous nor more widely distributed. The ruler and his *nudamā'* are entertained by musicians who play a variety of instruments, as they accompany dancing girls. Servants carry useful things to the *majlis*, while security - guards and armed attendants - hover in the background. The *nudamā'* seem to entertain the company with stories of war and the hunt that are illustrated in the ceiling, and there also seem to be allusions to popular tales.

The ruler is also surrounded by royal and auspicious beasts, especially lions and birds of prey. Other exotic beasts, both real, such as an elephant and a peacock, and imaginary, such as a griffin and an '*anqā'* or bird-siren, seem to refer both to the ruler's command over '*ajā'ib*, the wonders and marvels of God's creation. The images also reference

to the geographical reach of his power, in much the same way as did the living animals in the palace menagerie, in that was called in Latin the *Genoard*, from the Arabic *Janat al-Ard* or 'Paradise on Earth'.

The Arabic inscriptions in the ceiling also celebrate the ruler in his court. All are compiled apparently almost at random from the same highly conventional and repetitive repertoire of invocations or supplications (*ad'iya*) - blessings, qualities and virtues - that are invoked of God upon the king. The Muslim painters, and the palatial cycle with which they decorated the ceiling, were not part of the indigenous culture of Islamic Sicily that the Normans inherited on their conquest of the island, but, on the contrary, were imported to Sicily from the Islamic Mediterranean, probably from Fatimid Egypt or the Maghrib, by King Roger and his ministers after his coronation in 1130.

It has long been recognised that a small number of scenes in the ceilings - less than 10% of those involving human figures - do not belong to the traditional repertoire that constitutes the princely cycle. Scholars have attributed these to a variety of Christian sources, from Byzantium, to East Christian Mesopotamia and Syria, to Coptic Egypt, and to north-western Europe. And it is upon the latter-sources that may be traced to north-western Europe, what I am loosely calling Romanesque models.

For example, the architecture and mosaics of the crossing of the chapel are replete with Solomonic references. The western arch of the cupola rests upon a pair of spiral pillars that evoked the pillars of *Boaz and Jachin* at the entrance of the Temple. On the eastern face of that arch is represented in mosaic the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. King Solomon is figured on the western side of the drum of the cupola, and King David on the eastern. The ceiling joins with the architecture and the mosaics, adding in the most visible panels in the precise centre of the east end of the ceiling over the apex of the arch, a pair of lions in combat with serpentine dragons, which carry a reference to the two lions that stood beside Solomon's throne.

Now, in the adjacent north-eastern corner of the ceiling are two panels that also carry Solomonic references. One shows a musician (figure 1). Although the style and the general composition of the scene are at one with the rest of the ceiling, three elements set it apart from the other musicians depicted. First, the instrument that the musician holds is a triangular harp-psaltery, which is completely different from the rectangular *qānūn* played for the *qiyān* or dancing girls depicted in the ceiling. Second, he is shown not playing, but rather tuning his instrument

with his right hand turning the peg of the shortest string with a tuning lever, while his left hand plucks the fourth string. This is a feature of many Romanesque depictions of David. And third, he is depicted sitting on a curule chair (*sella curulis*) - a type of chair rare in Arab painting, but extremely common in Romanesque art. This figure is one of only two in the painted ceilings to sit on such a chair. Immediately to the north of the first panel, the second shows a male figure, again sitting on a curule chair, who is indicating with the forefinger of his right hand a long scroll (figure 2). The fact that the two images form a pair in the northeast corner of the ceiling adjacent to the crossing with all its Solomonian references, leaves little room for doubt that the first represents *David the Harpist*, the other the scribe who indicates the words of the psalms. The pairing of *David the Harpist* and his scribe is familiar from many Romanesque representations.



Figure 1

Nabī Dāwūd [Editor's Note: Prophet David] is mentioned several times in the Qur'ān, and three passages refer to the revelation of the *zabūr* or psalms. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'ān of course is never illustrated, but Dāwūd also figures largely in the Arabic *Qīṣāṣ al-anbiyā'*, or 'Tales of the Prophets', where he is celebrated as a musician and singer of miraculous power. But, in the illustrated copies of these tales, the episodes from the life of Dāwūd that are most commonly represented are those relating to *Uriah* and *Bathsheba*, and Dāwūd is never depicted as a musician.

Moving to another example, the axis that runs north-south through the centre of the ceiling associates another series of royal images. To the south, a pair of seated rulers with attendants, is juxtaposed in the north with a pair of panels representing the royal palace and the chapel within it - the Cappella Palatina



Figure 2

itself. In the southern unit, the large panel at the base of the *muqarnas* depicts a mounted dragon-slayer, modelled on an icon of St Theodore - to which we shall return. In the northern unit, the equivalent panel shows a male figure seated between two seated lions, which he appears to be holding by the neck (figure 3). It is tempting to identify this scene as *Daniel in the Lions' Den*, and to speculate that it may have been inspired by a Romanesque model. On the other hand, a similar scene was interpreted by Muslims as a representation of Nabī Daniyāl in the Lion's Den. The following tradition, reported on the authority of Ibn Abī I-Dunya (d. 894), appears in a variety of

popular collections: 'A ring was seen on the hand of Abū Burda 'Āmir b. Abī Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. circa 722). The gem was carved with two lions with a man between them, whom they were licking. Abū Burda said: "This is the ring of that man whom the people of this town say is Daniyāl." Although no such representation of Daniyāl between two lions has yet been identified in Islamic art, this tradition demonstrates that as early as the 9th century the image of a man between two lions was recognised as representing Daniyāl. It is by no means impossible that this image in the Cappella Palatina is the sole surviving example of an early Islamic tradition of representing the Prophet Daniyāl. After all, in the Book of Daniel, God shuts the mouths of the lions, while in the Islamic tradition the lions open their mouths to lick Daniyāl, just as one of the lions in this scene would seem to be doing.

I now wish to explore further the impact of Christian models upon the Muslim painters of the ceilings. We have already seen that, on the royal axis that runs north-south through the centre of the ceiling, on the south side, below the pair of seated rulers with attendants, the large panel at the base of the *muqarnas* - the equivalent panel to that depicting *Daniel in the Lions' Den* on the north side - is



Figure 3

occupied by a mounted dragon-slayer, modelled on a Byzantine icon of St Theodore. The choice of image reflects the well-known love of the Norman kings for warrior saints, so amply documented in the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina and of the other royal churches of Cefalù and Monreale.

In all, four panels in the ceiling depict a mounted horseman fighting a serpentine dragon. Three are modelled on an icon of St Theodore, a 4th-century Greek military saint who is depicted as a mounted dragon-slayer from at least the 7th century, long before St George began to be represented in the same manner. The icon always shows the moment of triumph over the dragon, symbolising the victory of good over evil, giving the symbolic meaning of the icon priority over its narrative content.

In the fourth image of a horseman fighting a dragon, the Muslim artist responsible went much further in assimilating the Christian image of the dragon-slayer into his repertoire (figure 4). The scene occupies one of the large square panels in the *muqarnas* and is located to the right of the throne platform in the west end. None of the details which were transferred from the icon of St. Theodore to the other three scenes - the saint's physiognomy, his short military cloak, his spear impaling the dragon's neck - reappear in this image. Still more significantly, here it is the narrative that predominates over the symbolic and, rather than symbolising the triumph of good over evil, this scene represents a combat very much in progress. While the icon and the paintings that it inspired emphasise the distance and superiority of the saint, high on his horse over the dragon lying dead on the ground by interposing the long shaft of the spear, here the artist has raised the two combatants to the same level, placing them eyeball-to-eyeball. They are equally matched foes, both in the act of attacking, neither yet victorious. The uncertainty of the outcome strengthens the narrative charge of the scene by adding an element of suspense, and thereby dilutes its symbolic significance. While the

holy dragon-slayer always symbolises the triumph of good over evil, this combat seems to hang in the balance, and the viewer is left wanting the end of the story. Although icons of a saintly dragon-slayer surely had some influence upon the early development of this composition, it carries no Christian charge and is wholly assimilated into the repertoire of *'ajā'ib*, of marvels and wonders that were traditionally part of the Islamic princely cycle.

A similar interaction between the Muslim artist and his Romanesque model may be seen in my final example. In this case the model was Samson slaying the lion of Timna (Judges 14:6). The lion is forced to the ground by Samson, who sits fully astride its shoulders, with his legs wrapped tightly around its neck. He uses both hands to force apart the lion's jaws. The Muslim artist has followed the Christian model with unusual care and attention, but while the model was indisputably European, and very probably French, the style of painting is wholly at one with the rest of the paintings of the ceilings, and exhibits not the slightest trace of having been influenced by that of the Romanesque model.



Figure 4

An image of Samson slaying the lion of Timna clearly inspired the artist to compose the scene of a *Man slaying a griffin* (figure 5). The man sits fully astride a long-necked griffin with his legs wrapped tightly around its neck and both hands pulling apart its jaws exactly as does Samson. Griffin-riders are known from Sasanian art and were thence transmitted to early Islam, Byzantium and the west, but in these





Figure 5

images the human peaceably rides the griffin, while hunting or playing a musical instrument, and is never shown in combat with the beast. The artist was so stimulated by his encounter with the unfamiliar Romanesque model of *Samson rending the lion of Timna* that he immediately adapted it in order to add new drama to the traditional scene of the griffin-rider that he carried in his repertoire.

In conclusion, I wish to stress three points in particular.

First, although a strong case can be made that the Muslim painters of the ceiling drew upon a range of Christian models, the explicitly Christian content was always lost in the process. Although the models were Christian, the artists were not and, consequently, the final images had none of

the Christian charge that their models would have done.

My second conclusion is that the artists are most unlikely to have been motivated by religious hostility towards Christianity in removing the Christian charge from these images. The same artists also painted a variety of explicitly Christian scenes - including the image of the Cappella Palatina itself - and dozens of Christian crosses. Purely artistic concerns, not religious hostility, lay behind the de-Christianisation of these images.

My third and final conclusion is that we can see the artistic impact upon the painters of the Christian models that they incorporated into the ceiling. Images such as St Theodore slaying the dragon, or of Samson rending the lion of Timna, provided the artists with wonderful material that they immediately recycled, transforming the Christian iconographic formulae into images of new *'ajā'ib*, fresh marvels and wonders that they stored away in their repertoire ready for use in the next palace ceiling that they would be asked to paint.

No ceiling descended from the Cappella Palatina has survived in the Islamic world, but we can see the impact of the Cappella Palatina elsewhere in Sicily. For example in the roof of Cefalù cathedral, which probably dates from late in the 12th century, we see exactly the opposite process of Islamic scenes, such as the *nadīm*, being Christianised by the replacement of the cup with the cross. Here, I suspect that the Christian painters at Cefalù may well have been motivated by religious hostility. The period in which the Norman kings fostered a policy of multiculturalism in Sicily lasted only from 1130 until the fall of their dynasty in 1189, less than sixty years, scarcely two generations. And it is a sad fact that, during the late 12th and 13th century, religious wars between the Christian rulers and the Muslim rebels of Sicily dominate the history of the island. But the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina survives as the most eloquent witness to what was possible when Muslim artists and Christian patrons joined together in a unique artistic enterprise.

**Figure 1:** The first panel of the north-eastern corner of the ceiling shows a musician holding a triangular harp-psaltery

**Figure 2:** The second panel of the north-eastern corner of the ceiling illustrates a male figure sitting on a curule chair and is indicating with the forefinger of his right hand a long scroll

**Figure 3:** A male figure seated between two seated lions, which he appears to be holding by the neck

**Figure 4:** The image of a horseman fighting a dragon occupies one of the large square panels in the muqarnas and is located to the right of the throne platform in the west end

**Figure 5:** The scene of a Man slaying a griffin

# America and China: Reflections on Culture and Civilization



**Thorsten Botz-Bornstein**

Presented in English  
28 January 2013

*This is a lecture on Chinese and American hyperrealism and its repercussions on both countries' self-perceptions and their respective cultural identities. Hyperreality describes the state in which any distinction of reality from fantasy has become impossible. Such a state is common in technologically advanced cultures where virtual reality has made possible the endless reproductions of fundamentally empty appearance. It is, however, also possible to speak of hyperreality in terms of cultures or civilizations. The mythical and pseudo-historical past on which many Chinese philosophical discourses are built leads to a quasi virtual timelessness whose effects remain significant in China's contemporary political life.*

China produces a hyperrealist version of its *culture* through devices that are peculiar to the Confucian treatment of history. China's traditional self-enclosedness will be examined in the light of the "dark side of Confucianism" that includes some undesirable parts of Chinese history, such as social and political oppression and extends into the contemporary world.

American hyperrealism, on the other hand, is present in its *civilization*. Very often American civilization has been described as a materialized utopia excelling in simulations like Disneyland, Las Vegas or an aseptic, dishistoricized culture that authors like Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco have classified as hyperreality, and that permeates large parts of American life like an underlying structure.

## **Culture and Civilization**

China has developed a hyperreal culture and America has developed a hyperreal civilization. In other words, American *civilization* can be perceived as an uncanny conceptual mirror image of Chinese *culture*. This lecture is not an exercise in cultural studies or political theory, but rather a non-pragmatic analysis of concepts intending to philosophically question elements that are otherwise taken for granted. It will be shown that both the Chinese and the American strategies lead to assumptions about their own country

being the centre of the world, assumptions shared, to such an extent, by no other nation in the world. Further analyses developed in the present lecture lead to a comparison of Chinese and American nationalism.

The present lecture does not intend to re-state the truism that China and America are different. Instead, it intends to show that the mentioned intellectual model that opposes culture and civilization leads, paradoxically and just because it has been handled so differently by China and the US, to unexpected *parallelisms*. More precisely, the parallel between China and the US are the outcomes of a symmetrical inversion of the system of culture and civilization. The paradoxical nature of this inversion makes possible the study of discrepancies next to similarities, all of which are linked to unique constellations within the historical and geographical developments of both countries. These parallels have often been anticipated or felt, but never been spelled out in a clear way by any analyst. In 1970, the distinguished anthropologist Francis Hsu wrote in his book "Americans and Chinese, Passage to differences" that:

*America, like China, for many years rejoiced in its isolation from the rest of the world. Insulated from warring Europe and chaotic Asia by two great oceans, Americans were free to shape their own destiny in their own way. The Great Wall psychology was true of America as it was of China. Then, almost without*

---

*Thorsten Botz-Bornstein is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait. He has worked in universities in Japan, China, the United States, Russia and Korea and published on topics as varied as the aesthetics and politics of space in Russia and Japan, films and dreams, and virtual reality.*

*warning, the walls crumbled, the oceans were reduced to ponds, and geographic distance no longer meant security. Neither people were able to ignore the world any longer; complete freedom of action disappeared forever...* (Hsu 1970 : 405).

Hsu does not stay there, but passes to the description of a development which comes very close to the “reversal of a system” that this presentation attempts to grasp: For China, the *past* became the only hope which, propelled through Confucianism, engendered China’s dream to return to a glorious *époque* while America adhered to the dream of complete self-reliance and unbridled free enterprise (Hsu: 405).

Most recently, other analysts have overcome the democracy vs. tyranny opposition and detected parallels between America and China when writing: “We have been struck - sometimes it seems serendipitously - by the resemblances of China and the US, but particularly by both nations’ habit of exempting themselves from judgment according to international standards” (Jensen & Weston 2007 : 14).

The present lecture examines these parallels by concentrating on the Confucian Chinese input, which conserves the past in the form of *culture*, and the utopian American input which develops the future in the form of *civilization*. Both approaches are extreme and unique in the international landscape and they can be interpreted as opposite points of an entire system that a centuries old philosophical tradition has described as the opposition of culture and civilization.

### **Bo Yang and Baudrillard**

The centrepieces of the present research are Bo Yang’s *The Ugly Chinaman* and Jean Baudrillard’s *America*. Yang’s leading concept, with the help of which he tries to come to terms with the Chinese past and present, is that of the Chinese *soy paste vat* as a metaphor for Chinese culture. According to Yang, Chinese culture develops through fermentation and an infinite process of indiscriminate adding-ons of cultural components, which resembles the production of soy paste in a vat. Yang’s thesis is that, because in the 5000 years old vat of Chinese culture the cultural elements have never been churned around, the thick paste of Chinese *culture* has prevented the development of Chinese *civilization*.

Though a great deal of my analysis concentrates on Confucianism, the main focus lies not on Chinese history but on everyday life in contemporary China. A non-academic book like *The Ugly Chinaman* has been chosen because Yang’s lively and unpretentious description of a concrete Chinese present, establishes a link between my relatively abstract thesis about hyperreality and the relationship between culture and civilization and the concrete world.

To Yang’s soy paste vat theory of Chinese culture I juxtapose a vision of America that has been

elaborated on by several authors, most famously by Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco. It is the hyperreal America that can best be encountered in simulated places like Disneyland and Las Vegas, but which is perceptible on many different levels within American civilization. In *America*, Baudrillard experiences the new world through an exoticizing lens of estrangement that has been shocking for many Americans because the country appears here as distant and culturally removed as if the author would write about China. Hyperreal America is the “Desert America” most present in California and in the Midwest, it is the America of cleanliness, politeness, and happiness settled in a utopian future, which is unquestionably civilized but which foreign visitors most often find “culturally empty.” Baudrillard draws a picture of American civilization that is interesting for the present study: a naive, straightforward, and predominantly utopian affair, indefatigably preoccupied with turning things into material realities and unable to ironize upon the future because American civilization is supposed to be the future by definition.

While Bo Yang criticizes China’s excess of culture and lack of civilization, Baudrillard criticizes the American excess of civilization. Baudrillard’s vision of an American “paradise materialized” is diametrically opposed to Yang’s “hell” of the Confucian soy paste vat. In spite of this, both paradise and hell are driven by identical systems because both rely on the mechanics of a self-enclosed and auto-productive reality. Both systems are radical. America materializes a utopian future as the highest state of civilization, able not to fight culture, but to *ignore* it; the Chinese project ends with the establishment of an absolute, Confucian past of a Middle Kingdom unreachable by any outside civilizatory critique. To the Chinese soy paste vat, filled with familyism, poetry, religious beliefs, superstitions, irrelevant names, quotations, and legendary kings, can be opposed the American vat filled with highly marketed consumer goods, media images, aesthetic surgery, Oprah-style quick fixes, superhuman enemies, and other fakes. Both the American and the Chinese vats create an almost religious form of hyperreality leading to unrealistic self-perceptions that can easily lead to conflicts with the rest of the world.

Both China and America engage in cultural/ civilizational simulations of the highest degree. China’s Confucian simulation of *culture* and America’s utopian simulation of *civilization* suggest identical copies of either culture (China) or civilization (America) for which no original has ever existed. Baudrillard’s “concrete mythology of America” that is entirely made of civilization finds its counterpart in the Confucian myth of Chinese culture produced by the soy paste vat. What both countries lack is the organic interplay of culture and civilization because historical constellations prevented them from developing such strategies. The concept of civilization as the spoon that churns around the soy paste of culture in order to keep it alive remains alien to both countries.

# Old Buildings, New Understandings: the Restoration of Egypt's Medieval and Early Modern Architectural Heritage.



**Jere L. Bacharach**

Presented in English  
6 May 2013

*All buildings decline over time. Neglected, they will decay or be demolished, occasionally leaving remains for future archaeologists and art historians. In the Islamic world the possibility of the maintenance and preservation of buildings with a religious association was enhanced by the use of endowment deeds whose income was supposed to be used for the religiously related activities which took place in the building, and by extension, the building itself. Even the existence of these financial resources did not guarantee what the future of the building would be.*

Up to the late 19th century any restoration work in Egypt was focused on single buildings. Overall, Egypt's Islamic architectural heritage was in a very bad state when in December 1881 a fundamental shift in the philosophy of preserving Egypt's cultural past, particularly its Muslim one, took place. The Khedive Tawfiq created the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe, known by all as the Comité, for the purpose of identifying and preserving Egypt's Islamic and to a lesser extent Coptic monuments. Although the Comité always included Egyptian members for most of its history, it was dominated until 1952 by Europeans. Its functions and responsibilities were absorbed by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization a decade later.

One place of interest to the Comité was the area around Bab Zuwayla, the southern gate to the Fatimid al-Qahirah area, built in 1092 by the defacto ruler of Egypt, Badr al-Jamali al-Juyushi. Jumping ahead three centuries, the Mamluk al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh was imprisoned in a jail next to Bab Zuwayla. He promised himself that if he ever got free and was able, he would demolish the prison and replace it with a mosque. His dream was realized when he became sultan in 1420. He then destroyed his former "residence" and created the large mosque known as the al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh mosque. To give his minarets greater visibility and to house them on a foundation stronger than his mosque's walls, he put two of them on top of the Fatimid Bab Zuwayla. To aid the mu'azzim who used

the twin minarets for the call to prayer, he built houses on the platform on the northern side of Bab Zuwayla. This allowed them to walk only one short flight of steps to the entrance to the minarets rather than from the street level significantly lower. When the Comité decided to restore Bab Zuwayla, they removed these houses as they felt they were not consistent with their image of what the Bab should look like from the al-Qahirah side. By the time the Comité was working on the Bab, the original tops of al-Mu'ayyad's minarets had disappeared. They therefore built new ones which they felt were appropriate for a Mamluk minaret. They took many other steps to ensure the stability of the Bab and to enhance its visibility.

Across the street from the Bab on the southern side was the last mosque built by the Fatimids, the mosque of al-Salih Tala'i'. Al-Salih Tala'i' was a wazir and the mosque is dated to 1160 with the end of the Fatimids in 1171. Over the centuries, this mosque had also decayed and during the Ottoman period a minaret had been added. In the 1920s the Comité decided that the Ottoman minaret was inappropriate and had it removed. They also rebuilt most of the mosque as they thought it should look as a Fatimid monument.

The next major wave of restoration work in Cairo is associated with the Dawoodi Bohras. The importance of the Dawoodi Bohra movement in the late 20th century is that they set about to create an architectural history for a community which had never had one.

---

**Professor Jere L. Bacharach** is the director emeritus of the University of Washington Jackson School of International Studies and a distinguished scholar of Middle East studies. He has served in leadership positions in both MESA (Middle East Studies Association) and ARCE (American Research Center in Egypt) and as guest curator for exhibitions in three of Washington State's leading museums. Bacharach has spoken at professional meetings and universities internationally and has published extensively.

Whatever means they used, they were successful in that both the governments of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak gave them permission to undertake massive restoration projects in Cairo for buildings associated with their history, which meant Fatimid era buildings but, as I shall note in a moment, not all of them.

They began with the mosque of al-Hakim and turned it into a sparkling, bright new sanctuary. The courtyard, the walls, the piers and the mihrab area were all redone. Where ever possible the old was replaced by the new with inscriptions in a fake Fatimid Kufic script painted in a bright gold color. Their influence was so effective that the mausoleum of Qurqumas, which was built in 1511 outside the al-Hakim walls, suddenly disappeared and was moved to another part of the city since it didn't date to the reign of al-Hakim .

The list of buildings they remade included the al-Aqmar mosque built in 1125, the original Fatimid mihrab in al-Azhar mosque, the Lu'lu'a mosque in the southern cemetery area and the Badr al-Jamali al-Juyushi mausoleum, both built in the 11th century. What they didn't touch was the Fatimid al-Salih Tala'i mosque because it was built after the Bohra movement split from the Fatimid rulers of Egypt.

What the Bohras did not do is publish records of what any of the buildings looked like before they started their work nor what they did at each site and why. While I am critical of the work of the Bohras in terms of their restoration policies, local Sunni Muslims seem to have favored it. They were now very proud of their new, bright, shiny mosques with their marble floors and white walls. More and more Egyptians wanted their local mosques to look as new and clean as the Bohra restored ones, an unanticipated consequence of granting the Bohras permission to work on certain mosques.

On October 12, 1992 Cairo experienced a major earthquake of 5.8 on the Richter scale. It was unusually destructive with over 500 killed, thousands injured and tens of thousands made homeless. In addition to the human tragedy, a large number of historic monuments suffered light to severe damage. Suddenly the preservation of Egypt's historical past became a front page issue. Egyptians and foreign missions were all concerned and what emerged was a massive effort led by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, which would become the Supreme Council for Antiquities and is now the Ministry of State for Antiquities. Over time foreign missions became involved, including the Agha Khan Trust for Culture and the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE). Up to this time ARCE had never been involved in the conservation and restoration of buildings other than as a secondary part of their sponsored archaeological work. What created a totally new situation was that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

was suddenly authorized to spend millions of dollars on the conservation and preservation of Egypt's cultural heritage including all historic periods and religious groups. ARCE won the contract to coordinate and oversee those activities. It is because of my long association with ARCE, including serving as an interim Director, that my remarks focus on the work done under contract to ARCE by Egyptians and others as I know it best-including unpublished material.

Because the American charge was to investigate all periods and all religious communities, a whole series of sites in many parts of Egypt and for many historical eras were subject to conservation projects. For this paper I will mention one Coptic site outside Cairo and an Islamic one within Historic Cairo, half the number I gave in the oral presentation.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The Monastery of Saint Antony is located in the eastern desert about 334 km southeast of Cairo and inland from the Red Sea. It claims to date from the 3rd century and parts of it may, but the main church dates to the 12th and 13th centuries. It was known that a major renewal of the church had taken place in 1232 but what the wall paintings actually looked like was unclear because they were covered with incense, smoke and dirt (figure 1). When work began in the 1990s the walls were blackened, with only hints of what lay beneath. An Italian team of paint restorers including some who worked in the tomb of Nefertiti in Luxor, the

finest New Kingdom painted tomb in the world, took on the job of removing the grime and protecting the revealed layer, which was not the earliest. The results were spectacular (figure 2).

In addition to all the Christian themes found on the walls, it was clear that a second if not a third painter had worked in the late 13th century on the ceiling of the *khurus*, the area between the public area and the restricted sanctuary. A close examination of the ceiling's paintings demonstrated that they were part of a general Eastern Mediterranean style which could be found in Islamic and Christian lands and with the removal of certain Christian symbols, some of the same designs could be found in mosques in Cairo from the same era. Another example of the impact of the dominant Muslim artistic tradition on the minority Coptic population was found on the clothing of many sacred figures and on the capitals of some painted columns. Imitating the Muslim *tiraz*, which was very important as part of Muslim clothing, there were "tiraz"-like designs on sacred Christian figures where the Arabic for "The Savior" (*al-fidan*) was written in a repeating pattern which was visually impressive and for those who could read it, still carried a Christian message (figure 3).

I have chosen Bab Zuwayla as my Islamic example, because the restoration work was also an archaeological study of the monument. The most recent additions included a small boat which hung from the interior ceiling just behind the eastern door leaf. It was the boat of a popular local saint named al-Mitwalli who could travel anywhere to aid those in need and who asked his help. Many gates have saints associated with them even when there is no tomb, as in this case. The popular practice was to place a tooth in the massive eastern door leaf to ask al-Mitwalli's help with a health issue. Large numbers of teeth and notes were found in restoring the door and are on display.

Massive amounts of broken pottery were found in removing material related to the 17th and 18th centuries including wares from China. The Bab had been the location of ceramics repair shops whose remains were part of the archaeological record and confirmed the Red Sea underwater archaeological evidence that Egypt was importing large quantities of Chinese ware during those centuries. In addition to the changes mentioned above undertaken by Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, he carved out a large viewing area on the west side of the interior of the gate from where he could watch the annual pilgrimage to Mecca highlighted by the *mahmal*, and also secret doors so he could go directly from

his mosque to the viewing platform. While cleaning this area a Mamluk heraldic device was found below the level of al-Mu'ayyad's work indicating that a sultan whose name included the title al-Mansur had sat in the same area before al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh



Figure 3

had instituted his massive changes. Unfortunately the al-Mansur can be one of two possible sultans.

Working down to the original ground level of 1092, it was discovered that the entrance used a massive Pharaonic slab as the flooring, creating the slippery surface on which the horse of the Ayyubid Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil had slipped leading al-Kamil to cover it and make the incline less steep. Finally, the door leaves, each weighing four tons, were lowered to saw off the bottoms so they could once again open and shut, as they had sunk a few meters into the ground and were only held in place by the dirt around them. It was then discovered that each door rested in an elaborate copper shoe and on the underside there was a half-cup which then turned on a semi-sphere in the ground. In the groove around the lower semi-sphere were ball bearings. In 1092 engineers in Cairo had invented ball bearings to ease the opening and closing of these massive doors. Unfortunately, these same technicians had made the ball bearings as two semi-spheres soldered together. Studying them it was apparent that the weight of the doors had broken the soldering and the ball bearings did not make opening and closing easier. The experiment failed and it would be another 400 years before Western Europeans re-invent ball bearings.

**Figure 1:** St. Antony's interior apse before restoration. With permission of ARCE

**Figure 2:** St. Antony's interior apse after restoration. With permission of ARCE.

**Figure 3:** Portrait of a saint in the Monastery of St. Antony with tiraz. With permission of ARCE

# Exhibiting the Middle East in the West



**Linda Komaroff**

Presented in English  
13 May 2013

*Perhaps it is no surprise that there has been an increased interest in all facets of Islam and its associated history, culture, and societies since the events of September 11, 2001, one that continues to be reflected in and further perpetuated by widespread mass-media coverage. Insofar as Islamic art is concerned, perhaps the first and certainly most dramatic headline was that accompanying an article by Holland Cotter that led the Arts & Leisure section of the Sunday New York Times on October 7, 2001. Set beneath a large colour image of a 16th-century Persian miniature painting of a picnic-like feast depicted in a lush and dreamily pretty landscape, the headline proclaimed “Beauty in the Shadow of Violence.” The article suggested that art and the museum could play a constructive role in creating a conversation between the West and the Islamic world.*

Ten years on, in a review dated October 27, 2011, again in the *New York Times*, Holland Cotter extolled the Metropolitan Museum’s newly renovated galleries, this time under the headline “A Cosmopolitan Trove of Exotic Beauty.” He noted that the galleries also newly renamed “Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Later South Asia” could now reveal the multifaceted nature of Islamic art and presumably by extension the diverse peoples for whom it was created; he concluded by noting that “if we could ask for only one lesson learned from the decade since the Sept. 11 attacks, surely freedom from essentialist thinking would be the necessary one,” and one that he suggests the Metropolitan Museum’s installation personifies. If by this Mr. Cotter meant that we need to free ourselves from stereotyping one another-I would certainly concur. But something I found disconcerting was the idea that in changing the name of the galleries, and thereby removing the word “Islamic,” that the art itself and perceptions of it are somehow transformed; for me, such a notion is just another form of stereotyping.

I will return to the issue of nomenclature later on. What I would like to consider first is how the new realities of this post- 9/11 world, along with evolving scholarship and critical thinking, have impacted the ways in which curators in the West present Islamic art, as demonstrated by the reinstallations of galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in 2006, the David Collection, in 2009, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 2011, and the Louvre, in 2012. On-going events have caused many curators to reconsider and rethink the narrative structure of how we tell the story of Islamic art. Given the traditional mission of the art museum, which has to do with displaying, explaining and contextualizing art, can and should an installation of Islamic art respond to the new political exigencies and if so what should be the nature of that response? Can Islamic art as it is displayed in the West help to mediate between what the media has so often dubbed a “clash of civilizations”? This paper will explore such potentially loaded questions in relation to the reinstalled galleries for Islamic art in London, Copenhagen, New York, and Paris.

---

*Dr. Linda Komaroff is a curator of Islamic Art Los Angeles County Museum of Art and department head at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). She is the winner of the Annual Publication Prize for Outstanding Exhibition Catalogue for Gifts of the Sultan, an exhibition for which she was also the curator. Other publications include The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, Metalwork of Timurid Iran, and, most recently, The Gift Tradition in Islamic Art.*

What was collected, in the Middle East and in the West, in the past and up to the present day, is closely tied to the history of the field of Islamic art and its maturation as a scholarly discipline. The two have in fact developed a kind of reciprocal relationship: what was collected initially dictated what was studied, and what was studied has helped to refine collecting patterns. But the two together have an important impact on museum installations of Islamic art. I will not repeat the long and often greedy story of collecting in 19th and early 20th century Europe and America, but will rather just skip to the early 21st century and assume that this audience is already somewhat familiar with the reinstalled collections here under consideration.

### **Victoria and Albert Museum (2006):**

The collection has a strong emphasis on decorative arts and architectural decoration extending from Spain to Central Asia, from the Late Antique to ca. 1900. The installation represents a very different conception, though in the identical space. It presents some 400 works of art from a collection of more than 10,000 (not counting ceramic shards) arranged chronologically/dynastically and to some extent geographically, but also thematically and in a fairly free form manner since the space is not truly subdivided. Other works from the Islamic collection are displayed elsewhere in the V&A in two different settings based on medium, where they can be viewed in an intercultural context with other decorative arts in related media. In terms of the main installation, it is more like the experience of flipping through a book and reading at will rather than reading a text page by page through the end. The wonderful result provides a fresh look at the collection and Islamic art in an open space that allows visitors to see visual affinities between sections (calligraphy, geometry, arabesque) and to gauge how much there is to see.

An introductory section includes shallow display case-almost like shop windows that allow the entering visitors to easily take in visually what is meant even without resorting to reading the short texts. Other deeper vitrines help to explicate the transition from Late Antique to Islamic art, for example. Labels are kept short and to the point and are some of the best I have seen. Groupings of objects are visually coherent and inviting and never overwhelming. Some sections-Iznik ceramics, for instance-are deeper than others and are displayed more like a study collection.

The late Victorian space is skillfully integrated with the sleeker, more contemporary aesthetic of the casework. Much better displayed than in the

past when it was hung sideways behind a discolored plexiglass, the Ardabil carpet is now shown flat, in a giant vitrine with its own microclimate. Throughout, the emphasis is on the visual-on seeing Islamic art. There are wonder relationships set up among different objects to delight, provoke and engage the visitor, helping to diminish distance and differences.

### **David Collection (2009):**

The collection covers all media from Spain to India, with some Chinese material, extending from Late Antiquity to the early 20th century. The David Collection today occupies not one, but two historic 19th-century townhouses, so while the space devoted to Islamic art has doubled in size, much of the physical space itself could not be radically transformed. Instead, the biggest changes are in the new casework, lighting, and reorganization. Approximately 1,600 works of art fill the galleries, which are divided among two floors or at present three, as there is a temporary exhibition drawn from the collection. Nearly the entire collection is accessible through the use of open storage and a section on the uppermost floor for a cleverly installed study collection.

The bulk of the collection is organized historically and geographically in a logical sequence of galleries, starting on the top floor with introductory gallery and progressing downward, although some of this organizational sense is difficult to follow due to the preexisting configuration of the spaces and the necessity of moving between floors. The scale and configuration of the galleries are still more like a home than a conventional museum setting, which allows for a greater feeling of intimacy with the objects as does the consistently low light levels. In fact, one small drawback is that some of the rooms are so filled with treasures that spill into the floor space that navigation becomes a bit of a challenge. Extensive text labels in Danish, most available in English on the collection website, emphasize a scholarly rather than a more popular approach, which is matched by the traditional, historical methodology to displaying and interpreting the collection.

### **Metropolitan Museum of Art (2011):**

Looking back from the future, I think the greatest significance of these galleries perhaps will be the very thoughtful and well-intentioned act of the reinstallation itself almost exactly ten years after September 11, 2001, and the fact that it has been so popular with the public, with over a million visitors. The new galleries are intended to dazzle, but also



to reclaim the humanity and humanism of a religion and culture in a city still traumatized and polarized by the attacks of 9/11. About 1,200 works of art of a collection of 12,000 are on display in 1,900 square feet and presented in a series of fifteen contiguous galleries of varying sizes, which progress through time and place in a fixed manner. Some displays are thematic emphasizing a single medium—such as enameled glass, something the Met’s collection is well able to do, or, for example, the arts of astronomy and astrology.

The single greatest strength of the installation is the depth of the collections. The excavated material from Nishapur is now more accessible, and for nerdy visitors like myself there is a wonderful array of low tech information alongside the high tech. There are numerous vitrines, where one can contemplate and delight in the implied relationships among the objects. The galleries are for the most part spacious and well-laid out. There is an extensive use of didactic materials lengthy labels and text panels as well as digitized information with multiple flat-screen monitors. Some galleries, such as the one with the famous Mamluk (Simonetti) carpet and spectacular Spanish ceiling, which are set alongside examples of Ottoman art demonstrates that the otherwise strict geographic or dynastic or even chronological boundaries adhered to elsewhere could be left more mutable and perhaps more dynamic. The display of manuscript illustrations, which allows for an easy and comfortable viewing that more closely approximates the experience of looking at a book, is now used in more systematic and attractive fashion than in the earlier version of the galleries. Although the galleries look wonderfully attractive, I was disappointed at the lack of innovation in the approach to the installation. For me, the new galleries demonstrate the same types of divisions as before, but now without the central corridor or spine, the visitors’ path is more rigidly enforced.

Writing in 1976 about the then new Islamic art galleries at the Metropolitan Museum, which when they opened in 1975 were a watershed in terms of the quantity and quality of the display and the scholarship behind it, Oleg Grabar attempted to explain the significance of bringing together, often within a single vitrine, such large numbers of related objects. He suggested that works of Islamic art perhaps are not best understood within “a setting that excerpts them from their purpose, and that they are in fact to be seen as ethnographic documents, closely tied to life, even a reconstructed life, and more meaningful in large numbers and series than as single creations.” Grabar went on to discuss his belief in the need for an architectural context noting that it is the “real or fantasized memories of the Alhambra, of Isfahan or of Cairene mosques [that] provide the objects with

their meaning.” (“An Art of the Object,” *Artforum* 14 (March 1976): 36–43, 39).

Grabar’s notion of a real or fantasized architectural context seems to have been taken to heart in the Met’s new galleries, as in the newly made Moroccan Court. This may provide visitors with the types of fanaticized settings proposed by Grabar but, I think, at a great cost. Few visitors recognize that the Moroccan courtyard is a modern creation or that the mashrabiyya, at times shown in the same space as an historical one, are lately made copies. Does this detract from the historicity of works of art and architectural elements in the collection? In an age when digitally constructed computer-simulations continue to alter our sense of reality and redefine the meaning of the word “genuine”, the one great constant the art museum has to offer is authenticity.

### **Louvre (2012)**

Drawn from the Louvre’s collection of 15,000 objects as well as some 3,400 transferred from the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, the resulting installation offers an in-depth view of nearly every aspect of Islamic art, with over 2,500 works of art on view, an impressive number given that ten percent is the more typical ratio of a museum’s collection on exhibition at any one time. The space newly created for the Islamic galleries encompasses over 30,000 square feet on two levels, of which the lower was excavated beneath the Visconti Court, while the upper one, within the courtyard proper, is enclosed by glass walls and covered by an incredible glass and steel roof. The case work and interiors are as contemporary as the architecture; apart from one long floor-to-ceiling wall on the lower level, the exhibition space is entirely open. Indeed, apart from the ingenious beauty of its architecture, the most exceptional feature is the overall openness of the installation combined with the sheer magnitude of objects on display.

As fantastical as the space may sound, it works wonderfully well for the display of the collection, while the glass walls of the upper level mediate between old and new, revealing and visually integrating the carved stone façade of the nineteenth-century Visconti courtyard. Perhaps in an attempt to create a link between the architecture and the collection it houses, the undulating roof has been variously described as a veil or even a sand dune. But, refreshingly, there is no recreated, regionally-inspired architectural or design concept at work; rather the multitudes of first-rate objects on view, including some exceptional architectural elements, help to contextualize one another while the lightly imposed but skilfully realized curatorial narrative provides the historical and cultural overlay.

Divided between the two floors, the installation is organized loosely along chronological lines, with the earliest material on the upper level. On entering the space, the visitor is greeted by a pair of large, coloured drawings mounted on canvas, part of a group of full-scale replicas of the mosaic panels from the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Made on site in 1929, the drawings preserve the pre-conservation state of these justifiably famous mosaics, which here serve as a kind of didactic prelude emphasizing the Late Antique roots of much of Umayyad art. This level also includes a large amount of archaeological material, much of which was excavated at the southwest Iranian city of Susa. In particular, the ceramics wares help to delineate the early history of this important medium in Islamic art in much the same way as the pottery excavated at the site of Nishapur does at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The lower level covers the three periods from 1000-1800, which are further divided according to region (ranging from North Africa to northern India) or at times by medium. Much of this space is arranged in a series of “pathways” loosely defined in part by the casework and by the installation of large-scale architectural elements. For instance, grouped around the previously noted stone vestibule are related Mamluk objects such as the famed Baptistère de St. Louis, along with a brilliant array of enamelled and gilded glass, carved and inlaid wood doors, and a section of an inlaid stone fountain.

From a curatorial perspective, perhaps the main drawback of the new galleries is also one of its greatest beauties, the use of extensive natural light on the upper level. However attractive, the glass roofing and floor-to-ceiling windows preferred by contemporary architects and the directors and boards of trustees who hire them to create novel museum spaces are incompatible with a great deal of Islamic art such as carpets, textiles, manuscripts and miniature paintings, all of which are highly sensitive to light. The fixed nature of the natural lighting in about half of the gallery space renders it less flexible, providing no place for textiles and works on paper or parchment among the earliest material shown on the upper level. Below, a single long and cramped vitrine serves for the display of manuscript and album paintings as well as calligraphy and illumination. Perhaps because the installation of the lower level is denser and covers a much greater time span than the upper one, this section by comparison is somewhat more difficult to penetrate. The objects, however, are so superb and so numerous that it may be best, for those with a limited schedule, including the specialist, to simply allow their eyes to lead them. Like the Louvre itself, whose best-known masterpieces are

embedded within a complex of galleries, the Islamic installation does not quickly or easily reveal its chief treasures. But the lack of physical barriers in the Louvre’s galleries renders less insistent the types of demarcations that art history engenders. This is not only a possible boon for the general public for whom the finer points of organization by date and provenance are not so urgent but for scholars as well as it allows us to see Islamic art in its entirety without the strict enforcement of all the usual categorizations and linear sequences.

Like the V&A’s installation, the Louvre’s Islamic galleries are in fact very much about the process of observation and discovery. While there are didactic materials, they are non-intrusive; labels are brief and text panels are kept to a minimum. There are digital monitors scattered about, but significantly, one gets the sense that the visitor is expected to look rather than read. One particularly pertinent use of recorded didactic materials has to do with the inscribed texts that pervade so much of Islamic art. Within the installation are several auditory stations that supply recitations of the Arabic, Persian or Ottoman Turkish inscriptions on nearby objects serving to remind that this is an art with something to say for those who are willing to take the time to listen.

All four of these installations have a vital role to play in training a new generation of scholars and in introducing novice audiences to the art and culture of Islam. All are organized along roughly the same lines, with temporal or dynastic considerations providing the main framework, although at the David Collection and the Metropolitan Museum this traditional narrative is reinforced by the more conventional configuration of the galleries into adjacent rooms. All were specifically and thoughtfully conceived in a post-9/11 world with the partial or the explicit aim of helping to diminish western misconceptions about the Muslim faith through Islamic art.

Finally, returning to the issue of nomenclature, while I am certainly open to the possibility of renaming this art in order better to explicate for the general public its nature, breadth and scope, I cannot at present, especially given current concerns in the West that this art can be used to enhance intercultural understanding, think of a more effective adjective for something so endlessly beautiful and intellectually engaging as ISLAMIC [art]. What I look forward to are the types of new narratives that will come from future generations of curators, perhaps working outside of western museum traditions, who will redefine not only that which we call Islamic art, but the very ways in which we view it.

# Sufi Romances of the Deccan: The Illustrated Traditions of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* (Flower Garden of Love)



Navina Najat Haidar

Presented in English  
4 November 2013

**Many of the allegorical tales of India termed as Sufi romances are in fact re-workings of far more ancient narratives overlaid with Sufi mysticism. Characterized by highly emotional and romantic plots, a variety of human and supernatural characters, and vivid imagery and descriptions, this substantial body of literature, going back to as early as the thirteenth century, has provided rich material for illustration to artists working at a wide variety of Indian courts. While the literary genre of Sufi romances has been recognized as self-referential in many aspects, with texts, developing from and referring to one another, it can be argued that in the artistic sphere the illustrations of romances, which share certain stylistic characteristics, are often interrelated in a similar way. Unlike better known illustrated texts of the Indo-Persian tradition, such as the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsi or the *Khamsa* of Nizami, the genre of Sufi romances is only just being drawn out as a thread within painting traditions and the relationships between text and image, or overall structure, or illustration cycles now beginning to be analyzed.**

My paper will discuss one such artistic tradition of the Deccan, that of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* or *Flower Garden of Love* of Mulla Nusrati, particularly focusing on a lavishly illustrated copy in the Philadelphia Museum of Art attributed to Hyderabad and dated 1742-3. This manuscript is of high courtly quality and artistic merit, appears to be complete and provides a key to understanding and identifying many of the fragmentary *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* pages from other manuscripts that are now dispersed. Indeed, its importance as a piece of dated evidence for early Hyderabad painting in general is considerable in light of the paucity of dated and inscribed material from this period. There will be several in this essay: first to provide a general overview of the artistic tradition of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* through an examination of the Philadelphia manuscript. By outlining its overall narrative structure through a selection of its 97 folios, this essay will aim not only to give a sense of the story which is thus far not translated, but also to demonstrate how the paintings work to draw out key aspects of the central theme. This is achieved through the

pervasive use of floral and garden imagery, in keeping with the title of the composition, and one of its main metaphorical elements, a marked colour symbolism, as well as highly imaginative compositions which not only closely reflect the actual text but also intensify the mood and spirit of the narrative.

The *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* was composed in 1657 by Mullah Nusrati at the Bijapur court of Ali Adil Shah II and takes the form of a *mathnawī*, or narrative in rhymed couplets in Dakani Urdu. Considered to be a reworking of an earlier Awadhi poem, the *Madhu-Mālatī* by the medieval poet Sayyid Manjhan Rajgiri, the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* is a symmetrically woven allegorical tale on the theme of divine love, through the story of Prince Manohar's quest to attain Madhumalati, with whom he fell in love in a dream. Belonging to a family of interrelated narratives, the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* follows in a series of related illustrated manuscripts, such as the *Chandāyan*, written in 1379 by Mulla Da'ud. This in turn is considered to have been the model for Jaisi's *Padmāvat* of 1520 and for Shaykh

---

**Dr. Navina Najat Haidar** is the curator of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) in New York. She is also teaching in MMA and New York University education programmes. 'Visual Splendor, Embellished pages from the Metropolitan Museum's collection of Islamic and Indian manuscripts', for *Arts of Asia*; and *Sultans of the South: Art of India's Deccan Sultans: conference proceedings*, are included among her notable publications and she is currently working with the Archaeological Survey of India on 'Highlights of the Red Fort museum, Delhi'

Qutban's *Mrgāvātī* of 1503. The *Madhu-Mālatī* of 1545 by Manjhan was the immediate model for the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* and a Persian version, *Mihr wa Māh* by Aqil Khan Alamgiri also exists. The text of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq*, numbering more than 4,500 double verses, remains un-translated, as mentioned earlier; however the Philadelphia Museum of Art has kindly provided a fairly detailed synopsis of the content which gives a good general sense of the overall structure and also many interesting descriptions contained within.

In the Deccan the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* appears to have been a consistently popular text for illustration for about one hundred and fifty years and can be associated thematically with several other romances that were illustrated in the region, including the *Nal-Daman* and the *Pem Nem*. In a more extended way, the whole tradition can be related to classical Persian texts and tales, such as that of Layla and Majnun or Khusraw and Shirin, which have also traditionally been read as Sufi allegories.

An initial survey of collections has shown a fair number of *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* manuscripts, not all necessarily illustrated, but those that are tend to be fairly plentiful in the number of painted folios. The Salar Jang Museum is understood to have eight copies, including the earliest manuscript, dated 1669. The Prince of Wales Museum holds an illustrated manuscript dated 1711. Also in the sequence comes a widely dispersed copy of about 1710 whose illustrations are found in the Nour Collection, London, the Binney Collection at the San Diego Museum of Art, and others (this attribution date has been made by the late Linda Leach and is accepted here for reasons that will be discussed later). The Philadelphia manuscript under discussion, as mentioned, is dated 1742-3. Two more manuscripts are cited by cataloguers in the British Library and await further study. The Philadelphia Free Library copy is the last in the sequence, dated 1815. And finally, scholars who have worked on editing versions of the text claim to have had access to several unillustrated copies, probably over 25 in number. This survey indicates that in terms of numbers, the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* appears to have been more popularly copied in the Deccan than other texts such as the *Chandāyan*, for example. The fairly wide variation in style, and also quality, of the illustrated manuscripts of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* imply both different levels of patronage as well as different centers of production in the Deccan. The internal artistic or textual relationships between the manuscripts are not clearly apparent,

but in focussing on the Philadelphia copy I will be arguing that the dispersed manuscript of c. 1710 was almost certainly its most direct pictorial model.

While the painting styles in this group of *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* manuscripts differ quite considerably, they remain generally close in the style of the text pages which usually share similar layouts. Two columns of text suited to the *mathnawī* structure are usually executed in large *naskh* script, separated by rulings down the center. The titles tend to be markedly oversized and are not necessarily contained within cartouches as in the popular Mughal manner. The text is normally written in black ink, while coloured inks (usually blue or red) are sometimes seen in headings. The illuminations are sparse with an ornamented frontispiece frequently sufficing as the chief decorative element.

The Philadelphia *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* is a heavy manuscript bound in a handsome red and gold embossed leather binding and contains over 200 pages, each measuring about 14 x 10 inches, of which 97 contain richly pigmented and gilded paintings. Its inner cover contains an early hand-written English notice saying that the book was taken from the *zenāna* of Tipu Sultan by the British in 1799 at the siege of Seringapatnam. The text pages of bold *naskh* calligraphy are divided into two columns by gold rules in the conventional manner of *mathnawīs*.

The colophon (figure 1) contains the information that the writing of the text was completed in 1155 AH/1742 CE and adds that the paintings were completed a year later in 1156 AH/1743 CE. The name of the calligrapher Ahmad ibn Abdullah Nadkar is mentioned, and there is an implication that he may have been responsible for the paintings too, a rare but not unknown phenomenon. So far no further works by this calligrapher/artist (possibly a Maharashtrian from his name) are known, but the investigation has just begun and will hopefully reveal more information with time. The Philadelphia manuscript also mentions the name of the patron - interestingly, a woman, Sajidah Mahtaram, who is not connected with any other commissions. The manuscript's later history is not

known, but it presumably made its way to the United States through the United Kingdom, and eventually became part of the collection of Philip S. Collins, whose *ex libris* is also found on its inner cover. It was accessioned in 1945 by the Philadelphia Museum of Art as part of a larger gift of manuscripts, given by Mrs. Philip Collins in her husband's memory.

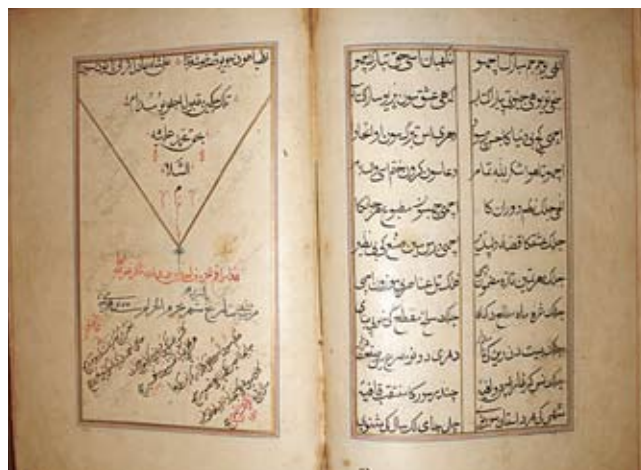


Figure 1

The title of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* reflects one of the central metaphors of the text and an important visual metaphor of its accompanying illustrations - the garden. Quoting Ali Akbar Husain in his recent scholarship on the *mathnawī*:

[Nusrati] considers his *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* to be a garden adorned with flowering trees (*phul jharan*) of a kind... and with variously coloured (*rang birange*) garden plots (*chaman*). He boasts that each episode of the romance he narrates is a choice fruit garden (*bustan dil guzin*); and one may be sure that even if the whole falls short of being a Persian *gulistan* or *bustan*, his work is the choicest garland (*yik khub har*) woven with flowers from an Indian *phulban* or *phulbari* [garden].



Figure 2

Gaeffke's observations on garden imagery in the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* create a typology of gardens in the text and find related parallels in the painted settings.

The opening text pages and illustrations of the Philadelphia manuscript of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* bring

together several important figures associated with its creation or who are important symbols of spiritual or worldly power in the Deccan. Following an illuminated frontispiece, the subsequent folios depict two religious figures; the first is an unidentified *shaykh* (almost certainly a Sufi from his green turban and ostrich egg symbol) but mistakenly labeled in the accompanying rosettes (which identify the subject of each painting in the manuscript) as the major Sufi *shaykh* of the Deccan, Gesu Daraz. He in fact occurs on the next folio, identifiable by his long locks and seated within a floral decorated domed building (figure 2). Sultan Ali Adil Shah II is also invoked among the early painted folios and a small quarter page painting depicts the writer Nusrati, shown writing the text of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq*. On the ground before him is the book, which, in a witty conceit, resembles the red hued outer leather covers of this very copy.

These opening folios also set the tone of the pictorial idiom that is to follow throughout the manuscript: full-page illustrations for the most part, which retain a flavour of late Golconda style in painting while moving towards the stiff, more simplified yet strong idiom favoured at Hyderabad and some of its provincial satellite courts. Throughout the manuscript the images are outlined in a bold line and completed in vivid and opaque colour. They also contain a good deal of gold, which has been pricked, chased and pressed to give the folios a rich texture. Another notable stylistic feature of these paintings is the great interest shown in the depiction of textiles, and in an extravagance of patterning in general, with many of these patterns taken from contemporary textile designs.

The planes of floral pattern seen in the previous folios are further intensified in the opening of the narrative. Here (figure 3), King Bikram, the ruler of Kanakgir, offers alms to a holy man, Rawshan Dil ('Illuminated Heart') who refuses to accept, as the king is childless. To become worthy of the blessing of a son the king has to undergo hardship and seeking, symbolic of the challenges of the soul in search of the divine. The text provides several details which appear in the painting. The queen who personally attended to Raja Bikram every morning on this occasion was interrupted from serving the meal by the cry of the mendicant outside; she is shown within the palace above. Raja Bikram, giving his meal to the holy man, is depicted in the register below. Raja Bikram placing his head at Rawshan Dil's feet is not shown here, but is mentioned in the text and appears in another double frontispiece illustration of the same episode in the Nour Collection, London. The palace walls in the background are decorated with vases filled with floral sprays. While such floral vases are extensively known in Mughal and Deccan manuscript and also wall painting, they are particularly important at Bijapur, where they occur as primary decorative elements within an interior sacred chamber in the Athar Mahal, 1646. The double frontispiece from the Nour collection, London,



Figure 3

has been identified as the opening to the dispersed manuscript of c. 1710 by Linda Leach and certainly constitutes a grand paired composition showing the same subject. Here in a fairly complex arrangement King Bikram is shown on one side offering alms and on the other placing his head at the feet of the holy man. In the margins all around are bucolic outdoor scenes echoing the metaphor of gardens and nature. The similar composition and treatment of the decorated palace point to a relationship between this and the Philadelphia manuscript.

King Bikram, taking on the guise of a yogi, goes into the forest to search for Rawshan Dil after the initial rejection by the holy man. A striking half page illustration shows the Raja in his humble clothing carrying a beggar's bowl, which appears to be a piece of Bidri ware (figure 4).

All around him in a rocky setting reminiscent of the great landscapes characteristic of the Deccan are fierce animals such as the dragon shown below. The



Figure 4

text describes this episode in a highly metaphorical manner:

Hardship was like a rosary around his neck, resignation was his bowl, contentment was the ashes the *yogis* rub on to their bodies, his sighs played the role of the horn; Patience was used as rings in the ear, Humility was the satchel; Worldly comfort was like the deer-hide to be trampled over...

In the painting the interpretation is more literal, with most of these elements having a corresponding element such as bowl and satchel. When comparing with the same subject from the dispersed c. 1710 manuscript, it is evident that the Philadelphia page is an abbreviated version of the earlier composition. The full-page illustration has been reduced in scale, but retains some of the more dramatic elements such as the dragon in the lower right.

Continuing with the narrative, Bikram comes upon a garden where he sees seven fairies bathing in a cistern. Bewitched by their beauty and keen to have their help in finding Rawshan Dil, Bikram gathers up their clothes, returning them only after they agree to help him find the holy man. The verdant garden scene illustrating this episode is a particularly lavish painting, completed with rich colour and detail (figure 5). According to recent scholarship this scene represents a pivotal moment in the text and an important shift of mood in the tale. An illuminating passage from Ali Akbar Husain's *Scent in the Islamic Garden* reads:

Garden descriptions are interspersed throughout the narrative and serve to record and mirror the

moments of joy and despair, of spiritual awakening or the kindling of love... A moment of respite in a forest garden, perfumed with *agar* and *chandan* trees and illuminated by fairies in a pool is suggestive of Bikram's spiritual awakening.



Figure 5

The popular subject of Krishna stealing the bathing *gopīs'* clothes, which was a well-developed theme in Rajput painting by this time, may also have played some part in the development of this composition.

This scene is depicted in both the Philadelphia manuscript as well as in a folio from the dispersed c. 1710 manuscript presently in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. A stylistic comparison of the two images supports Leach's earlier dating of c. 1710 for the dispersed series. This is particularly apparent in the greater refinement of the figural style, the richness of detail and the subdued colour palette of the Minneapolis page.

The distinctive facial type seen in the Minneapolis page as well as in most of the other folios of the c. 1710 manuscript is characterized by a notably receding lower portion, finely etched eye and brow and a refined handling. By contrast, in the Philadelphia folio Bikram's profile is of an entirely different character, executed with a heavier hand, bolder line and with a denser application of colour and shadow. The details of the creeper and fern rising from the rock seem to be features of late Golconda painting and while they are faithfully copied in the Philadelphia manuscript, their handling is more simplified and coarse. Mughal precedent is also seen in the treatment of the faces on the fairies in the Minneapolis folio, whose closeness to the Mughal style suggest a proximity of date. Certain further elements such as the slightly skewed red border fence around the pathways of the quadripartite garden in the Philadelphia folio also indicate its later descent from the original.

The central subject of gardens is further illuminated by a digression into the Free Library 1815 *Gulshān-i 'Ishq*, manuscript which is of a far more provincial character but further underscores the relationship between paintings and textiles within this artistic tradition. As in the Philadelphia Museum, manuscript floral imagery continues to form an important visual element in this book, but in the Free Library version textile motifs or patterns are often adapted without modifications into illustrations. This is seen in the example of a folio showing Chandersen swooning in a garden at the sight of Champavati, characters who occur slightly later in the narrative. Notably the garden here has been abstracted to a series of identical repeating blossoms on a plain ground - almost certainly drawn from patterns seen on block printed and painted textiles of the great *kalamkārī* tradition of the region.

Returning to the Philadelphia Museum *Gulshān-i 'Ishq*, as the narrative continues the fairies direct Bikram to Rawshan Dil's hermitage from where he receives a special fruit to give to his queen in order for them to have a child. Bearing the fruit, he is then transported back to Kanakgir. The episode is shown in a charming composition (figure 6), which is a mirror-reversed and slightly expanded version of the illustration in the folio from the dispersed c. 1710 manuscript.



Figure 6

At Kanakgir, after the magic fruit has served its purpose, Prince Manohar is born. In a skillful change of mood and through the extensive use of white and some areas of silver and green, the painting creates the gleaming palace described in the text. The colouristic sparseness of the folios in this section of the manuscript shows the controlled use of pigments. The silver has been applied specifically to metalwork objects appearing in the composition, including an ewer and basin, spittoon, bedposts, cradle and other mounts, condiments box and another covered vessel. The metaphor of light has been identified as another major symbolic element in the text to which the artist appears to have been sensitive, as demonstrated in this sequence of paintings set in the palace interior.

In a celebrated and imaginative composition, occurring in both the Philadelphia and dispersed copy, nine angels flying overhead are drawn to Manohar's palace below where he sleeps next to his *dāṭ* or nursemaid, an important Sufi symbol of an interlocutor (she is shown asleep on the floor next to the bed) (figure 7). The fairies transport the sleeping Manohar away to the palace of Madhumalati, the eleven-year-old princess of Maharasnagar whom they consider to be his perfect match. Quoting again from Ali Akbar's *Scent in the Islamic Garden*:

To the flying fairies the king's palace in the moonlight is a perfumed mountain (member Jabal) drenched in light. Enveloped in a jewel-encrusted veil, its terraces shimmering like mica (*abrak*), its garden flowers like china cups filled with the milk of moonlight, the palace 'is an illusion more enchanting than the reality of the heavens it mirrors'.

Once transported to Madhumalati's palace, a magical night was spent by the lovers together, who exchanged rings and bedsheets; when he awoke Manohar found himself back in his own palace and, distraught, fell into his father's lap. The striking use of colour (red and white used to great contrasting effect) corresponds to the text wherein Madhumalati's palace is described as red and beautifully decorated. The bedsheet that Manohar brings back with him expresses through its vivid colour, which is intensified against the whiteness around, the intense memory of the princess (figure 8). Associations can be loosely made with the pictorial traditions of Bahram Gur, where colour symbolism is a prominent feature in paintings of the hero's visits to princesses of various climes.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Search parties consisting of 'clever and steady' men, as described in the text, are sent out to look for Madhumalati but without any success. Eventually Manohar decides to take leave of his parents and search for Madhumalati himself. At sea Manohar has terrible adventures, including encountering dangerous sea serpents, depicted in dramatic compositions showing the attack of one monster, and its own subsequent termination by another even more fierce specimen (figure 9). Although his fleet is lost, Manohar survives on a small raft and arrives on land where he enters a dense and mysterious forest where neither sunlight nor moonlight penetrates, called Kajliban.



Figure 9

At the heart of the Philadelphia manuscript lies one of its most striking paintings, which represents an important spiritual moment in the narrative. In the depth of the Kajliban forest Manohar encounters a

dervish who gives him a magic wheel with which to meet challenges when all else failed. This mystical meeting is the subject of an imaginative composition labelled 'Forest of the intoxicated dervish' (*darwīsh sarmast kā mast ban*) in the accompanying label rosette. According to the text synopsis:

After having walked for six months in the wood known as a *Kajli Ban* Manohar saw a light. There was a piece of clearing, circular in shape, over which the sun shone. In that ring of light Manohar could see a hermit sitting who was fully absorbed in meditation. He had, it seemed, reached the zenith of renunciation...

His locks of hair stretched out like hanging twigs in which birds had made their nests. His arms and legs were thin like dry sticks but his body shone like the Moon. Since he was thin he looked like a crescent curved on sides. His eyes twinkled like stars but his lips were tight.

The wizened figure of the dervish is arresting in its emaciated profile and intense and penetrating gaze. Aditya Behl pointed out that the nature of the looks exchanged between the two figures, where the holy man stares directly at Manohar who in turn has an upward and perhaps more inward gaze, may reflect a tradition of Sufi transmission. It is also possible that the treatment of the dervish's figure is partly related to contemporary depictions of an emaciated Majnun surrounded by wild animals from the classic Persian tale. The artist seems to have been sensitive to the textual description of the ring of light within which the hermit appears. Aside from the light colour of his blue-grey body (possibly meant to indicate the smearing of ashes), the ground just beyond the outline of the figure has been skilfully pigmented in such a way as to convey a subtle radiance emanating from the dervish's body. His hair contains what seem to be tiny yellow birds (appearing somewhat snake-like) in keeping with the description in the text. Fierce animals all around appear docile and apparently tamed in the holy man's presence - they include a dragon in the trees above, tigers below, a scorpion and several snakes, some curling around his body. In the lower right corner appears a feline with raised front paw - this unusual element seems to be related to Deccan metalwork, more specifically incense burners, of which several in a similar form are known. It also may be compared to the series of leonine forms appearing on the

cakravartin seven-stepped throne on a well-known folio of the earlier Bijapur manuscript of the *Nujūm al-'Ulūm*. Its presence in the present composition may be to evoke reference to this symbol of worldly power.

Following Manohar's meeting with the dervish, the narrative now introduces Champavati, Madhumalati's friend, who is rescued by Manohar with the aid of the magic ring from a demon who has kept her captive in a garden pavilion. Champavati is destined to marry Chandrasen, rescuer of Madhumalati, who is soon to be turned into a bird by her irate mother. This symmetry of the paired romantic themes and the matching of other elements (such as the corresponding lovers' names sharing the same opening consonants or sounds) has been noted as a characteristic structural features of this and other related texts.

The sequence in the story concerning Champavati and Manohar is set entirely in a garden, the poetic descriptions of which evoke a setting usually depicted thus: a large densely planted garden bisected by water channels with a *citratal* ('picture-house') pavilion in the middle and a water reservoir with a fountain. Several folios in the Philadelphia manuscript are devoted to Manohar's subduing of the demon whose fearsome form is an adaptation of *dīw* iconography from the larger Indo-Persian tradition. His body is massively oversized and covered in spotted dark fur; he is multi-headed with protruding fangs and horns and flaming tongue; he wears bells and carries a mace in his taloned hands. Manohar eventually manages to decapitate all the demon's heads, succeeding with his magic ring where his sword fails. Escaping from the garden Champavati and Manohar don patchwork robes intended to disguise her as a man (and both of them as dervishes) and a final moment in the garden pavilion depicts them thus attired, each pining for their lover and family (figure 10). The barren and dry trees all around reflect the inner desolation of the couple and the setting again conveys the mood and theme of the text through the visual metaphor of the garden.



Figure 10

Through the help of Champavati after she is returned to her kingdom, Manohar and Madhumalati are united in the *Farah Bagh* (the Joy-Bestowing Garden), a lush and beautiful setting appropriate to their long-desired meeting. The lovers are unfortunately discovered by Madhumalati's disapproving mother who in her anger inadvertently uses a spell to turn her into a bird. Several folios in this part of the Philadelphia manuscript are devoted to these events which take place in the *Farah Bagh*; thus a concentration of garden and pavilion scenes occur again, seemingly

reflecting the idealized importance of this particular garden. Ali Akbar Husain further sheds light on the *Farah Bagh*:

The Garden of Union is a garden of light and perfume. Its flower beds (*takhte*) are ablaze with *gind makhmal* (African marigold) and *gul-i awrang* (globe amaranth) with *kalgha-i atishi* (*Celosia cristata*) and *lala* (poppy). The scent of the *madan ban* (*Artabotrys odoratissimus*) bushes is more intoxicating than wine; the hue of the *sankesar* flowers (*Mesua ferea*) brighter than henna-dyed fingers. Its *gul-i chand* (Moonflower) is the envy of the moon, its *gul-i sur* (sunflower) the envy of the sun. The knots of *rayhan* (a species of basil) more enticing than the curls of the beloved, diffuse fragrance in the plots; the spike of *kewra* (screwpine) like a comet's tail sends fragrance aloft. The line of *sawr* (cypresses) along the walks are the line of *houris* in Paradise. In the *phul mandwas* (arbours) flowers spin and weave endlessly; and the blue waterlily filled pool within each *chaman* is a *mina*-filled silver tray. The garden plots dense with trees are green velvet canopies (*mandap*) below which the ground, a page of green, is sprinkled, now with silver, now with gold.

The list of fruit mentioned in the *Farah Bagh* is extensive and detailed, and although the paintings of the garden are rich with details of vegetation they do not entirely reflect the varieties in the text. Among the fruits mentioned are Iranian/Turanian types including apple (*sīb*), quince (*safarjal*), jujube (*bīr*), grape (*angūr*), fig (*anjīr*), mulberry (*tūt*), almond (*bādām*), walnut (*akhroṭ*), pinenut (*chilghoza*). In addition there are mangoes (*naghzak*), bananas (*mawz*), *jāmun* and *jām* (rose apple), oranges (*narangiyan*), citron (*jhambirriyan*), lime (*nībū*), *kamrakh* (starfruit), *phannas*

(jack fruit), *annas* (pineapple), sugarcane (*nayshakar*), *tindū*, *duryan* (durian) and others. Ali Akbar Husain lists sixty-seven types of trees, forty shrubs and numerous scented plants that occur in *mathnawīs* indicating that such richness is also to be found in other sources.

Madhumalati is eventually rescued and restored to her human form with the help of Chandersen, future bridegroom of Champavati. Soon after Manohar and Madhumalati are reunited and all the complications of the plot begin to resolve themselves. The *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* reaches its climactic end with all parties reconciling and each pair of lovers marrying. The last several folios of the Philadelphia manuscript are devoted to renderings of emotional meetings, marriage preparations, processions and ceremonies. A palette of red and gold dominates this last section which is slightly repetitive in its compositional range. Among the very last few images are depictions of the lavishly decorated wedding canopy; the virtuosity with which this subject is depicted deserves comment (figure 11). The lovers are shown within, lying together on their wedding night. Heavy gold brocade with a floral trellis pattern hangs down on each side and the artist manages to convey its lustre and sheerness through which the faces of the lovers can be seen. Floral motifs and flowers are to be seen everywhere and wherever gold is applied, it is lavishly pricked, chiselled and worked.

One of the notable pieces of evidence in the Philadelphia manuscript is the presence of several sheets of very thin, translucent paper placed between illustrated folios which contain tracings of some of the compositions. These appear to have been the means by which these compositions were either derived from another source, or more likely (since these appear largely to be tracings of these very pages) copied for another version of the manuscript. In either case they confirm the well-established tradition of copying entire manuscripts in the Deccan.

In conclusion, the Philadelphia Museum manuscript of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* represents a high point in Deccani painting tradition in terms of its importance as a piece of dated, inscribed and complete evidence, as well as its manifest artistic merit. As demonstrated, the compositions within its folios are closely derived

from an earlier dispersed manuscript of c. 1710. This earlier manuscript can on a stylistic basis be fairly securely placed within the early Hyderabad tradition, an attribution which has traditionally also been extended to the Philadelphia manuscript. The name of the calligrapher/artist and patron invite further study toward investigating its place and circumstances of creation and its later Mysore provenance. It is hoped that this survey of a selection of the painted folios of the *Gulshān-i 'Ishq* has demonstrated the manner in which its compositions employ imagery and colour in keeping with the text's main metaphorical elements; draw an array of decorative elements from wide sources; and intensify the mood and spirit of the narrative through imaginative compositions.

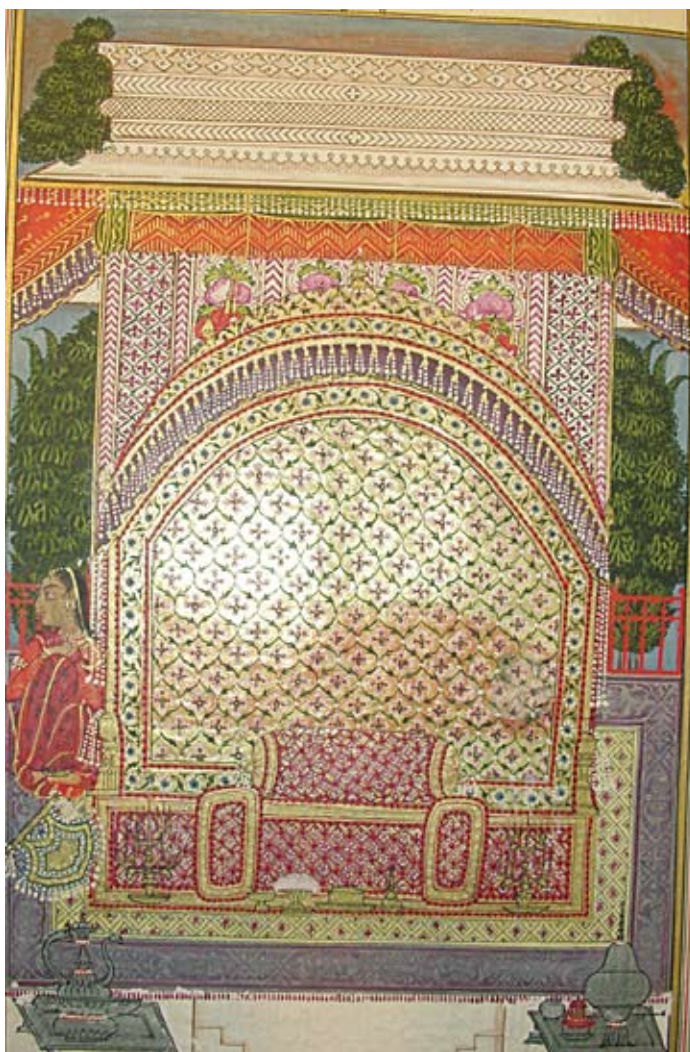


Figure 11

**Figure 1:** *Gulshān-i 'Ishq*. Colophon. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Accession number 194522-65-. Gift of Mrs. Philip S. Collins in memory of her husband, 1945-22-65

**Figure 2:** *Gesu Daraz* enthroned

**Figure 3:** *Raja Bikram's* alms are rebuffed

**Figure 4:** *Bikram* searches the holy man

**Figure 5:** *Bikram* and the fairies

**Figure 6:** The fairies carry *Bikram*

**Figure 7:** The fairies fly down to *Manohar's* palace

**Figure 8:** *Manohar* is distraught without *Madhumalati*

**Figure 9:** *Manohar* encounters sea-monsters

**Figure 10:** *Manohar* and *Champavati* in a barren garden

**Figure 11:** *Manohar* and *Madhumalati* on their wedding night

# Gift Books

*The Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyya is grateful to the individuals and organisations listed below. The books that so generously donated to the DAI library will surely be enjoyed by readers and researchers for many many years.*

## Sulayman al-Bassam

### Director/Playwright, SABAB Theatre

Sulayman al-Bassam. *The Arab Shakespeare Trilogy*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama. New York, New York, U.S.A. 2014.

## Mai al-Khalifa

### President, Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities

Arslander, Kilercick, et al. *Five Hundred Years of Islamic Calligraphy: Masterpieces from Sakip Sabanci Museum*. Bahrain National Museum. Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain. 2014.

*Bahrain National Museum Art Collection (1988-2013)*. Bahrain National Museum. Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain. 2014.

## Mohammed H. al-Mojan

### Author

Mohammed H. al-Mojan. *The Honorable Kabah*. Al-Kawn Center. Mecca, Saudi Arabia. 2010.

## Mubarak al-Sabah

### Friend of the DAI

Yonatan Mendel. *The Creation of Israeli Arabic: Political and Security Considerations in the Making of the Arabic Language Studies in Israel*. Macmillan. New York, U.S.A. 2014.

Pascal Ménoret. *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt*. Cambridge University Press. New York, U.S.A. 2014.

Dr. Alain Baron, Giulio Bernardi, et al. *The Treasures of Islam: Collection of Islamic Gold Coins*. Numismatica Genevensis. Geneva, Switzerland. 2013.

## Yasmine al-Saleh

### Friend of the DAI

Sheila R. Canby. *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: the Persian Book of Kings*. Yale University Press. New Haven, Connecticut. 2014.

## Nezar AlSayyad

### Professor at UoC, Berkeley

Nezar AlSayyad. *Cairo: Histories of a City*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A. 2011.

*Muslim Europe or Euro Islam: Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization*. Ed. Nezar AlSayyad and Manuel Castells. Lexington Books. Maryland, U.S.A. 2002.

## Nezar AlSayyad

*The End of Tradition?* Ed. Nezar AlSayyad. Routledge. London, England. 2004.

*Making Cairo Medieval*. Ed. Nezar AlSayyad, Irene A. Bierman, and Nasser Rabbat. Lexington Books.

*The Fundamentalist City? Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space*. Ed. Nezar AlSayyad and Mejjan Massoumi. Routledge. Oxford, England. 2011.

## George Arbid

### Co-founder and director, Arab Center for Architecture

*Architecture from the Arab World 1914-2014 (a Selection)*. Ed. Dr. George Arbid. Ministry of Culture. Bahrain. 2013.

## Heba Barakat

### Head, Curatorial Affairs Department, Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

Heba Nayel Barakat. *The Timeline of Islamic Civilizations*. Islamic Arts Museum, Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 2012

*Egyptian Diplomatic Club*. Alexandria Bibliotheca Alexandria. Alexandria, Egypt. 2010.

*Al-Tahra Palace: A Gem in a Majestic Garden*. Alexandria Bibliotheca. Alexandria, Egypt. 2009

## Georges A. Bertrand

### Writer, Photographer

Georges A. Bertrand. *Traces: Memoires Musulmanes en Coeur de France*. CHAMAN. Switzerland. 2009.

## Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS)

Dr. Kalpana Desai, Gregory Irvine, et al. *Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya: Treasures*. Niyogi Books. New Delhi, India. 2013.









## Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis

### Author, PhD






Elizabeth Errington and Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis. *From Persia to Punja: Exploring Ancient Iran,*

*Afghanistan, and Pakistan*. British Museum Press. London, England. 2014.

# DIRECTOR'S CIRCLE

		
<b>KHUTAYBA YUSSUF AL-GHANIM</b>	 <b>بيت التمويل الكويتي Kuwait Finance House</b>	
 <b>مؤسسة البترول الكويتية وشركاتها Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and subsidiaries</b>	 <b>الوطني NBK</b>	

# BENEFACTORS

			<b>FAWZI MUSAAD AL-SALEH</b>	<b>INTISAR SALEM AL-ALI AL-SABAH</b>
<b>MARIAM NASER AL-SABAH</b>		<b>NASRALLAH SYED H BEHBEHANI</b>		<b>SHAFIKA ALI AL-MUTAWA</b>
				<b>تمدين TAMDEEN البحرانية</b>