

Finbarr Barry Flood

2 Bodies, Books, and Buildings

Economies of Ornament in Juridical Islam

In his account of a dream that he had in the 1950s, the philosopher Theodor Adorno describes undergoing a verbal examination in sociology. As part of the exam, he was presented with a nineteenth-century passport and asked what was special about it. By way of reply, the dreaming Adorno traced the history of gilding, beginning with the icon:

I went into a long winded exposition on the fact that the use of gold for such purposes dated back to Russian and Byzantine icons. The *Bilderverbot* was taken very seriously in those days, it held true for everything except gold, the purest of metals. Gold then went on to be used in pictorial images on Baroque ceilings, then as inlays on furniture, and the golden writing in the passport was the last vestige of this great tradition.¹

In Adorno's dream, gilding traces a trajectory between religious and secular time, evoked metonymically in the shift from the visual authority of the icon to the textualized authority of the nation state. Functioning as a kind of philosopher's stone, gold negotiates the *Bilderverbot*, effecting the alchemical transmutation of images into words. The conceit invokes a common opposition between imaging and writing, one standard in evaluations of early Islamic religious art, which often assert that the gilded or gold mosaic inscriptions found in early mosques and shrines (figs. 2.1–2.2) functioned as counterparts or substitutes for the icons found in Christian churches.² There are certainly historical instances in which Muslims replaced images with texts, and even cases that make explicit perceived homologies between the content of Christian icons and Islamic scripture. Perhaps the best example concerns the verses from the Qur'an referring to the Virgin Mary in her mihrab (Qur'an 3,37) inscribed around the prayer-niche installed in the church of Hagia Sophia after its conversion to a mosque in 1453. These established a clear homology between the ninth-century apse mosaic featuring the Virgin and child (which remained visible) and the epigraphic content of the mihrab installed far below (fig. 2.3).³ It is, however, doubtful whether one can

extrapolate from these specific historical examples to a generalized theory of the word as icon in Islam.

Just as important is the fact that the shift from image to word assumed to have been occasioned by the rise of Islam is generally imagined as a kind of aniconic revolution, comparable to that which took place in sixteenth-century Europe, when Protestant reformists expelled the images from the churches, replacing them with the divine Word writ large on retable and wall (fig. 2.4), or sometimes even over the surface of existing figurative images.⁴ That the legacy of the Reformation still resonates so strongly in modern Euro-American representation of Islamic attitudes to images and the related understanding of public texts as icons is part of a more general tendency to privilege immaterial content over the materials of mediation. Thus, there is a widespread assumption that the very nature of the Qur'an as a sacred text rendered it an unproblematic substitute for the icon, ignoring questions of materiality and mediality associated with the process of inscription. In short, a disaggregation of meaning from medium that is central to the semiotics of Modernity has been universalized and retrojected to medieval and early modern Islam.⁵

Yet, as a material practice, the significance of inscription(s) cannot be reduced to semantic content alone, to a transcendental meaning located in some immaterial netherworld outside the inscribed text. Rather, both materiality and visibility (including context, medium, scale, script, and so forth) constitute meaning rather than simply mediating it in a passive way.⁶ In a de facto acknowledgement of this, jurists in the Islamic world were acutely attentive to questions of media, mediation, and materiality when it came to texts in general and scripture in particular.

According to Islamic tradition, the Qur'an is comprised of a series of revelations from God transmitted verbally by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca and Medina between roughly 610 and the Prophet's death in 632. The compilation and complete textualization of the revelation only occurred in the decades after

¹ From Theodor W. Adorno, *Dream Notes*, cited in Koch 2001, 158.

² Dodd 1969, esp. 46–47, 54–61; Dodd/Khairallah 1981.

³ Soucek 1998, 39.

⁴ Koerner 2004, 171–320, esp. 289–291; Michalski 2011, 89.

⁵ For a general discussion of the Protestant legacy to conceptions of materiality, mediation and meaning see Greene 1997; Keane 2003; Keane 2005; Squire 2009, 15–89.

⁶ For an exploration of these issues, see Lenoir 1998.



Fig. 2.1: Detail of Qur'anic inscription, glass mosaic, 692. Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock.

the Prophet's death, and was marked by debates about the relative value of oral and textual transmission. The verbal revelation, the Qur'an, is distinguished from its materialization as written text by the Arabic term *muṣḥaf* (pl. *maṣāḥif*), derived from the word for leaf or folio. In other words, questions of materiality inhere in both the nature of the revelation and its historical transmission.

From what is preserved in texts from the ninth century onwards, it appears that early opposition to textualization sometimes focused on the question of ornamentation. These debates cast doubt upon a shibboleth of modern Islamic art history: that the development of aniconic ornament was stimulated by the proscription of representational images in theological Islam; or, that non-figural ornament supplied an easy and universally acceptable alternative to the images rejected in the ornamentation of sacred space and text. A general suspicion of elaboration and ostentation as both deceptive and distracting, and as occasioning a waste of economic resources took on particular resonances in the space of the mosque, where the optical qualities of ornament threatened to distract

the worshipper, attracting his eyes (the organs of perception) and turning his heart (the organ of cognition) from the realm of the transcendental to that of the material and earthly. Not all jurists objected to ornamenting mosques and Qur'ans, but some even went so far as to reject the presence of richly carved or gilded Qur'anic inscriptions in the space of the mosque. On occasion, critics of ornament gained the upper hand, leading to remedial action. Debates about ornament, including Qur'anic inscriptions, continue to have occasional effect until today. In April 2015, for example, the superfluity of ornament was invoked in an edict of the Islamic State ordering the erasure or removal of all ornament from the walls of the mosques of Mosul, including carved or painted Qur'anic texts.⁷

Such opposition builds on a late antique suspicion of ornament that is apparent in the Qur'an, but most clearly articulated in the hadith, the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad recorded after his death in 632.

⁷ Anon. 2015.



Fig. 2.2: Mihrab with glass mosaic and carved marble ornament, 961. Cordoba, Friday Mosque.

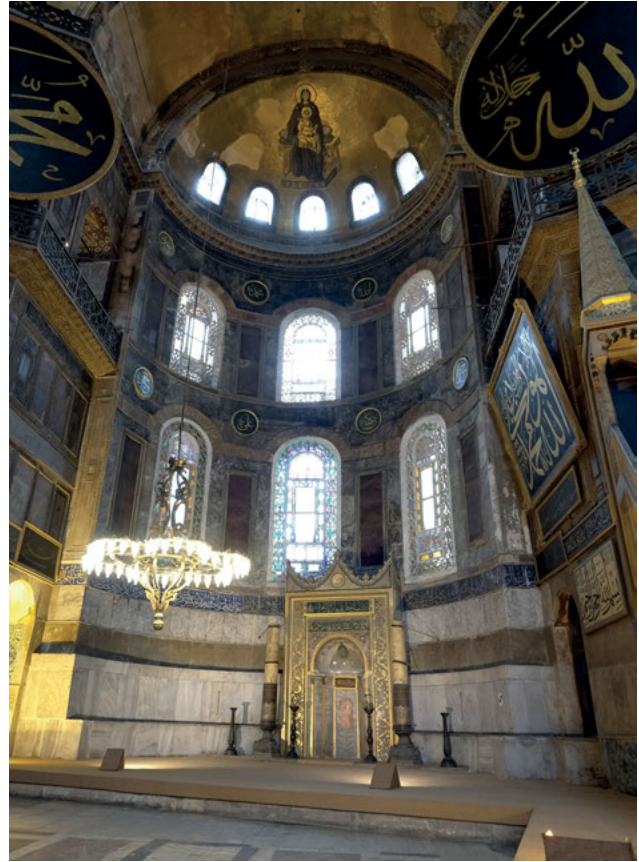


Fig. 2.3: Central apse with a ninth-century mosaic of the Virgin and Child and the Ottoman mihrab installed after 1453 below. Istanbul, Hagia Sophia.



Fig. 2.4: Retable inscribed with the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Supper, 1537. Dinkelsbühl, Spitalkirche.

The attitudes promoted in these traditions were later elaborated in juridical texts that build on their precepts in order to legislate acceptable modes of conduct for those Muslims living in later centuries or in material conditions that differed significantly from those of seventh

century Arabia. There are six canonical collections of Sunni hadith, which are the primary source for discussions of the legality of figural imagery in juridical Islam. One remarkable feature of the hadith concerning figural images is that they do *not* comprise a distinct book within the canonical collections of hadith. Instead, most traditions pertaining to images are, in each collection, found at the end of the *Book on Dress* (*Kitāb al-libās*), where they are sandwiched between traditions rejecting the use of gold and silver vessels, of silks, brocaded fabrics and gold jewelry by men, hair extensions, tattooing and tooth widening, a common cosmetic practice. Questions about the acceptability of images are, therefore, intimately linked to questions about the materiality and permissibility of ornament, although this linkage has been generally ignored in modern scholarship on the *Bilderverbot*.

In addition, the relevant hadith establish a relation between the ornamentation of bodies and buildings. A hadith included in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhari (d. 870), one of the six canonical Sunni collections, explains how the

Prophet frowned upon an artist that he encountered painting images in the upper levels of a house in Medina, explaining that on the Day of Judgment, the walls would need to be cleaned by ablutions (even as the human body is) up to the level of these ornaments (*al-hilyat*).⁸ A hadith included in both the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (d. 874) and the hadith collection of Abu Dawud (d. 889) makes the analogy between adorning bodies and buildings even more explicit. It relates that when Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, hung a decorative or even figurative textile on the door of the Prophet's house, he removed and tore it, explaining that God has not ordered us to clothe stones and brick (*al-hijarat wa'l-labina*). The verb used here, *kasā*, to dress or clothe underlines the point.⁹

As we shall see, the terminology of the Qur'an and hadith establishes a series of negative analogies between ornamenting bodies, buildings, and language, in which fancy forms are rejected in favor of plain, and embellishment opposed to simplicity in a dialectic of truth and falsity. There is nothing about books, but later juridical rulings extended two principles contained in the Qur'an and hadith to the ornamentation of mosques and Qur'an codices. The first was a preference for appearance plain and simple, for the avoidance of elaborate or ostentatious ornament, whether of bodies or buildings. The second was a rejection of precious metal ornaments and of gold and silver vessels, seen as the purview of unbelievers. We will consider the logic for this prohibition later, but it is worth emphasizing that concerns with these two principles are evident in relation to rulings on the ornamentation of mosques and Qur'ans from at least the eighth or ninth century.

It may be relevant that the architecture of the congregational or Friday mosque underwent a dramatic canonization and crystallization between 705–715, when many of the major mosques were rebuilt in a monumental mode that included new formal features and spectacular ornaments of gilding, marble and mosaic at the order of the Umayyad caliph al-Walid (r. 705–715). The jewel in the crown of this building program was the Friday Mosque of Damascus, whose mosaics were considered one of the wonders of the medieval Islamic world (fig. 2.5).¹⁰

Less well known, however, is the reported opposition by prominent members of the early Islamic community to

the adoption of monumental architectural forms, lavish marble and mosaic decoration, and the illumination of Qur'ans in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, despite their aniconic content. According to slightly later sources, this opposition rallied around a hadith, circulating at least as early as the ninth century, according to which the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said to the Muslim community: "When you adorn your mosques and decorate your Qur'ans, then ruin will be upon you." and to have also condemned the elevation of mosques as a practice of the Christians and Jews and a sign that the end of time was near.¹¹ Similarly, the pious second caliph 'Umar I (r. 634–644) is reported to have condemned the ornamentation of mosques as an evil.¹² Such objections were among the factors underlying juridical attempts to regulate both the height and the decorative elaboration of mosques and minarets.¹³

This kind of reported objection was neither new nor peculiar to Islam. Concerns with decorative elaboration and architectural scale are, for example, anticipated in earlier Syrian Christian discourses on architecture, asceticism, and ostentation, which trace an inverse relation between the spiritual heights to which the Syrian stylites aspired and the depths plumbed by their successors in erecting lofty churches and monasteries.¹⁴ Equally, objections to the lavish ornamentation of Qur'ans find precedents in early patristic texts, in the writing of St Jerome (d. 420), for example, who railed against the production of manuscripts written in gold or silver on purple parchment (fig. 2.6), condemning them as burdens rather than codices. Similarly, John Chrysostom (d. 407) highlighted the tension between the referential quality of scripture and the value invested in its materiality through the use of chrysography.¹⁵

Critics of the splendid mosques built by the Umayyad caliphs in the early eighth century contrasted them with the simple mosques of an earlier era, declaring: "We built it in the manner of mosques, you built it in the manner of churches."¹⁶ On occasion, such concerns seem to have inspired remedial action. This was apparently the case in Damascus (fig. 2.5). The Iraqi polymath al-Jahiz (d. 869)

⁸ Bukhari 1997, vol. 7, no. 837.

⁹ Al-Sijistani 2008, vol. 4, no. 4153. The perceived association between ornamenting architecture and dressing the body is not, of course, confined to the hadith or the Islamic world. For analogies from early modern Europe see Jütte 2015, 10–12.

¹⁰ Flood 2001.

¹¹ The tradition appears in many medieval juridical texts. See notes 22 and 30 below and al-Ghazali 1967–1968, vol. 3, 408.

¹² Ibn Majah 1993–1994, vol. 1, 407–408, nos. 739–741.

¹³ See, for example, Serjeant 1953, English text 6, Arabic 15–16.

¹⁴ Vööbus 1960, 149; Brock 1973, 17. See also Siecienski 2008.

¹⁵ For an excellent overview of objections to chrysography see Shell 1982, 191–193. Hieronymus, *Prologue to the Book of Job*, URL: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_preface_job.htm; see also Kendrick 1999, 37, 89–96.

¹⁶ Cited in Bierman 1998, 53.

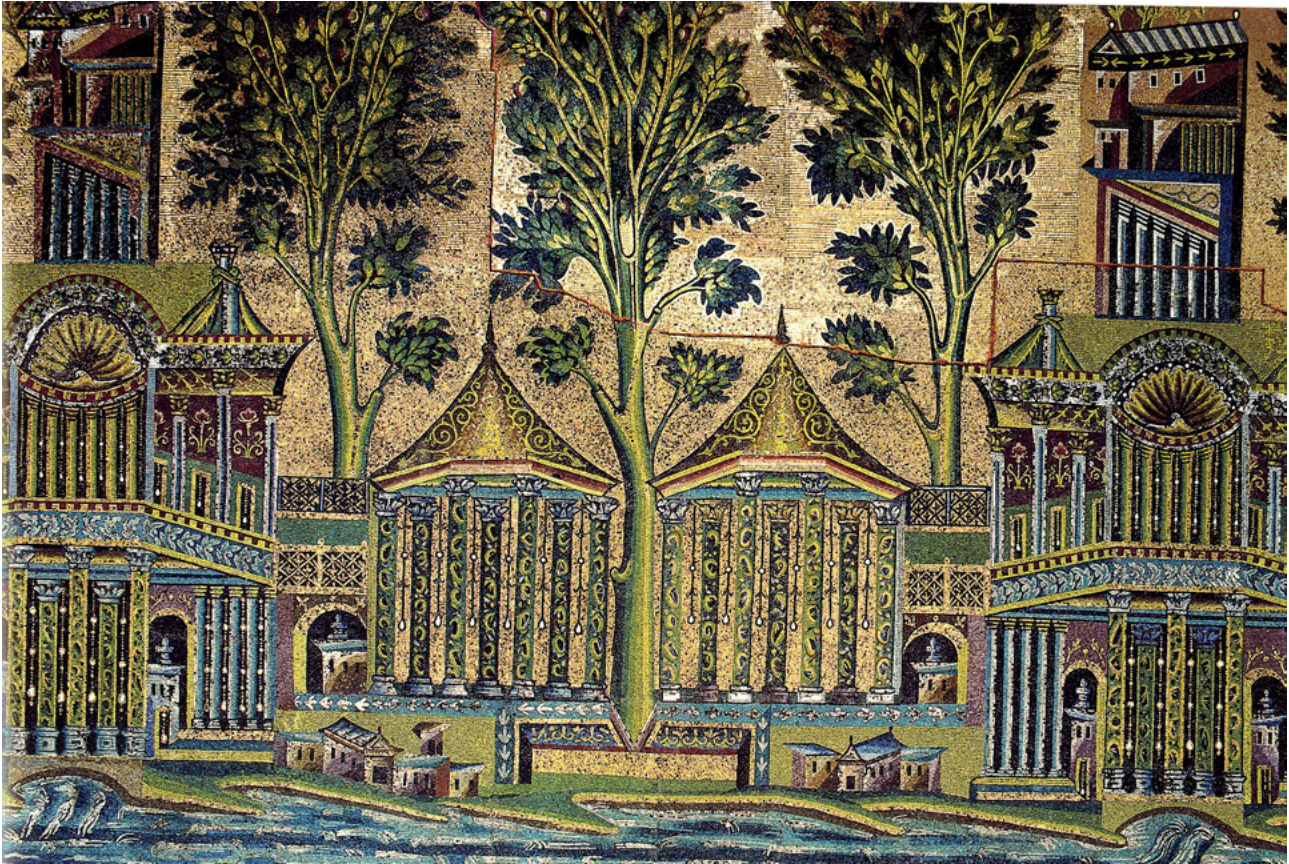


Fig. 2.5: Glass wall mosaics, 715. Damascus, Friday Mosque, courtyard.

relates an incident that occurred just two or three years after the completion of the city's celebrated Friday Mosque, when the pious caliph 'Umar II (r. 717–720) took action that might have permanently obscured its splendors:

I saw the mosque of Damascus when one of the kings of the city gave me the opportunity to see it. One who sees it knows that no other mosque resembles it, and that the Byzantines have great admiration for it. When 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz acceded [to the caliphate], he clothed it with drapes (*jallalahu bi'l-jalāl*) and concealed it with white canvases (*karābis*). He also boiled the [golden] chains of the lamps in order to destroy by this means their luster and glitter and he destroyed by this means that which was alien to the Sunna of Islam [Islamic law], since beauty and arresting delicacy are confusions for hearts and distractions.¹⁷

The metaphor of clothing and concealment that al-Jahiz uses in describing 'Umar II's temporary effacement of

the Damascus mosaics with white drapes is perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the critiques of ornament found in hadith, in which the adornment of architectural spaces is frowned upon, even as artificial ornaments are rejected as inappropriate to the human (especially the male) body. According to other reports, the gold, marble and mosaics attracted the gaze of the worshippers and distracted them from prayer.¹⁸ 'Umar II was a great economic reformer, and several authors also see the caliph's actions as a practical critique of inappropriate expenditure, remedied by carrying off the golden ornaments to the Treasury (*bayt al-māl*).¹⁹

Accounts of 'Umar's alterations to the appearance of the Damascus mosque encapsulate two distinct but related objections already present in embryonic form in the hadith: first, to the optical properties and visual allure of richly worked surfaces and glittering ornaments,

¹⁷ Al-Jahiz 1938–1945, 1, 56–57. For a slightly different translation and an excellent discussion of this passage, see Alami 2011, 159–164. See also Flood 2001, 244.

¹⁸ Ibn 'Asakir 1954, 44; Elisséeff 1959, 66; Ya'qubi 1992, 2, 306.

¹⁹ Al-Hamadani 1885, 108; Massé 1973, 132–133; Ibn Sasra 1963, English 161, Arabic 120.

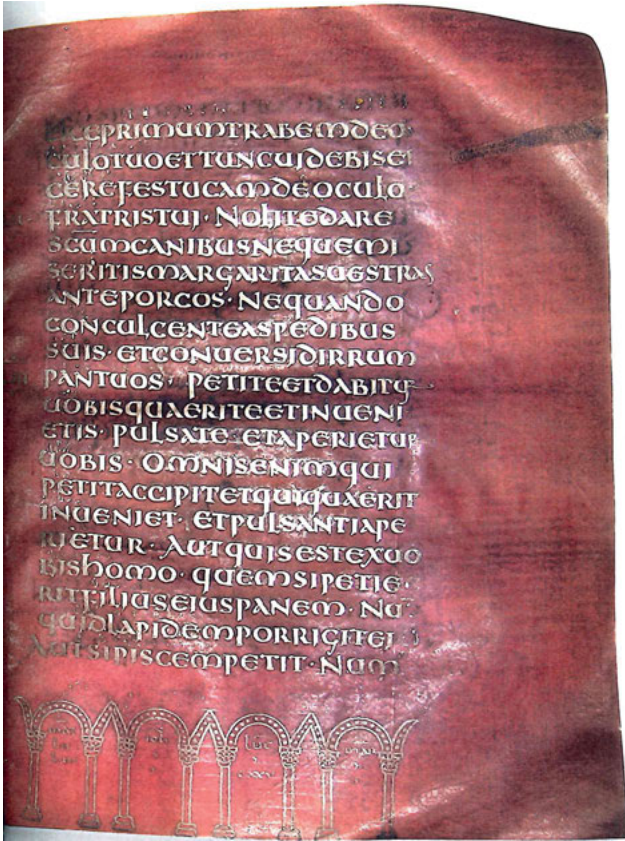


Fig. 2.6: Folio written in silver ink on purple parchment, with arcaded canon tables, Codex Brixianus, northern Italy, sixth century. Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana, unnumbered, fol. 419r.

and their consequent capacity to distract the onlooker; second, concerns with the frivolous or superfluous expenditure that they occasioned. Both themes were elaborated in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) from the tenth century onwards, by which time both al-Walid's decoration of mosques and 'Umar II's attempts to whitewash and remonetize their ornaments were being invoked to establish either negative or positive precedent in judgments on the acceptability of decoration in mosques and Qur'an manuscripts. The case for and against the decoration of mosques is, for example, presented by the Hanafi jurist Abu'l-Layth al-Samarqandi, who includes a chapter on the ornamentation (*naqsh*, a term that can refer to carving, drawing, inscription or painting) of the mosque in his *Bustān al-Ārifīn* (*Garden of the Gnostics*), written before 373/983. In it, al-Samarqandi refers to contemporary debates concerning gilding, decoration (*zukuruf*), ornament (*zīna*) and pictures (*al-ṭasāwīr*) in mosques, citing hadith on the subject, including a tradition in which the Prophet rejects decoration and images as un-Islamic, recommending instead the whitewashing of mosques. It is in this regard that al-Samarqandi cites the objections

of 'Umar II to the rich embellishments of the Damascus mosque as precedent, although as a supporter of mosque ornament, al-Samarqandi also cites those in favor, including Abu Hanifa (d. 150/767) the founder of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, who invoked not only the precedent of the beautiful mosques built by al-Walid in Damascus and elsewhere, but also the rich ornamentation of the Biblical Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, referred to as the Mosque of Jerusalem (*masjid bayt al-mqdis*).²⁰ The decoration of the Solomonic Temple is a transhistorical stalwart in Christian defenses of the image against criticisms of idolatry leveled by both fellow Christians and Jews, but is here cited as precedent along with the Umayyad mosaics in the Friday Mosque of Damascus to permit the lavish but aniconic ornamentation of mosques.²¹

Among the earliest record of the extension of these concerns to the decoration of Qur'an manuscripts is the *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif* (*Book of the Qur'an Codices*) of Ibn Abi Dawud (d. 929), son of a famous hadith transmitter. This contains several variants of the prophetic tradition "When you adorn your mosques and decorate your Qur'ans, then ruin be will upon you," and reports several traditions criticizing the embellishment of Qur'anic texts with gold (the juridical position on silver was more equivocal, as we shall see).²² In his study of early Qur'ans, Alain George offers the plausible suggestion that these concerns with ornamental elaboration may underlie the production of a group of small, plain possibly archaizing early Qur'an manuscripts devoid of decorative and textual elaboration (fig. 2.7).²³

Although seldom noted, medieval juridical rulings on the ornamentation of Qur'an codices and mosques clearly take their cue from the hadith, generally discussing the topic in relation to dress and jewelry. In some juridical compilations, for example, a distinction is made between the use of gold and silver in the ornamentation of the codex. This distinction is rooted in proscriptions of the *Kitāb al-libās* (*Book of Dress*) or *Kitāb al-libās wa'l-zīna* (*Book of Dress and Ornaments*) in the canonical hadith collections, which prohibit the use of gold jewelry and silk by men, while mentioning the Prophet's use of a silver signet ring as a positive precedent. According to the Maliki jurist Ibn Abi Zayd (d. 996), for example, "It is not wrong to use silver to decorate a ring (of leather, for example) or

²⁰ Al-Samarqandi 1982, 413–414.

²¹ For a useful survey see Lawee 2006, 760–768.

²² Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, in Jeffery (ed.) 1937, 150–152.

²³ George 2010a, 91–93, figs. 60–62. See also George 2010b, 103–104.



Fig. 2.7: Undecorated and unilluminated folio from a Qur'an written in Hijazi script, eighth or ninth century (?). Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, KFQ34.

a sword or a copy of the Qur'an, but silver should not be put in a bridle or saddle or a knife or other such things."²⁴

In other compilations of jurisprudence, rulings on the ornamentation of the Qur'an are included in sections on jewelry and dress. These are clearly inspired by a gender distinction extrapolated from hadith in which gold jewelry is permitted to women but not to men, who may nonetheless make use of silver signet rings.²⁵ For example, in the *'Umdat al-sālik wa 'uddat al-nāsik (Reliance of the Traveler and Tools of the Worshiper)*, a compilation of Shafi'i jurisprudence compiled by Ahmad ibn an-Naqib al-Misri (d. 1367) we read that, "It is permissible for both men and women to decorate copies of the Koran and to embellish writing with silver [...]. It is permissible for women to have copies of the Koran decorated with gold, but this is unlawful for men."²⁶

The issue of ornamenting the sacred text also crops up in the sub-genre of Islamic jurisprudence known as *hisba*, which was intended to guide those charged with

regulating public conduct and morality, including commercial activity and markets. In his *hisba* manual, the Egyptian Shafi'i Ibn al-Ukhuwwa (d. 1329), explains that the jurists differ regarding whether ornamenting copies of the Qur'ans with gold and silver is licit.²⁷ As if to underline the point, a near contemporary north Indian Hanafi *hisba* manual contains the more permissive statement that: "One may gild ceilings, oil lamps, censers, Qur'ans, stirrups, saddles, bridles and similar objects."²⁸

As this suggests, despite differences between distinct schools of jurisprudence, and even between individual jurists, the ornamentation of the mosque and Qur'an codex was a standard topic. The theme is especially well elaborated in juridical texts of the Maliki rite of Sunni Islam, which was dominant in the western Mediterranean, and which generally rejected the ornamentation of the qibla wall and the mihrab, the focal parts of the mosque that indicated the direction of prayer and towards which worshippers faced. As early as the ninth century, debates had arisen among jurists in the central Islamic lands not

²⁴ Al-Qayrawani 1988, 156.

²⁵ Juynboll 1985, 111.

²⁶ Al-Misri 1999, f.17.10.

²⁷ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938, English 25, Arabic 77.

²⁸ Sanami 1986, 267; Izzi Dien 1997, 100.



Fig. 2.8: Leather cover of a Qur'an written by the Marinid sultan Abu al-Hasan with applied gold and silver ornament, 745/1344. Jerusalem, Al-Haram Al-Sharif Islamic Museum.

only about ornamenting the *mushaf* or Qur'an codex but also about the permissibility of placing it in the mihrab or against the qibla wall.²⁹ Reflecting the legacy of these early debates, Maliki jurists not only prohibited the decoration of the qibla wall because of its ability to distract the worshiper but, in a telling *mise en abyme*, even rejected the placement of the Qur'an codex within the mihrab, for fear that it might function as an idolatrous object. A similar objection is recorded in the Hanafi law school based on a tradition ascribed to Ibrahim al-Nakha'i (d. 714), one of its major sources of inspiration.³⁰

It is not the Qur'an that is idolatrous (this would be a blasphemy), but the materialized revelation (*mushaf*) deployed in a focal location within the mosque. Here it is not the ornamentation of the individual folios that is

at stake, but the materialization of the revelation as an object capable of eliciting inappropriate investments from the worshippers, whose gaze might be drawn to the visual properties of the *mushaf* rather than its message. It may be relevant that the leather covers of Maghribi Qur'ans were often ornamented with gilded ornaments, including Qur'anic texts that prefigured those contained in the codex (fig. 2.8), in another kind of *mise en abyme*.³¹

However counter-intuitive it may seem, even the practice of inscribing Qur'anic texts in the mosque is condemned by some jurists. A rich subgenre of Islamic jurisprudence here concerns *bid'a* or innovation, something with negative connotations since it implied divergence from established practice. Once again, the Maliki school of jurisprudence is especially rich in relevant

²⁹ Jeffery (ed.) 1937, 179.

³⁰ Al-Jundi 1956, 1, 56; Radscheit 2007, 309.

³¹ Salameh 2001, 66–83.

rulings. In his manual on innovation, Abu Bakr al-Turtushi (d. 520/1126), an Andalusian Maliki who lived in Alexandria, cites a number of traditions that reject the ornamentation (*zukhruf*) of mosques and Qur'ans, for two fundamental reasons: first, it imitates the practices of Christians and Jews; second, it distracts the Muslims from their prayers, and/or contributes to their corruption (*al-fasād*).

Rejecting the inscription of Qur'anic verses on the qibla or Mecca-oriented walls of mosques, al-Turtushi cites Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), founder of the Maliki school of jurisprudence: "It is abhorrent (*makrūh*) to inscribe a passage from the Qur'an on the qibla wall of the mosque or to ornament it."³² The term used here for ornaments is *zukhruf*, which is the most common term used to denote ornament in the Qur'an, and one invested there with a series of negative connotations. *Zukhruf* is the name of the forty-third sura of the Qur'an. It occurs in connection with flowery or ornamented speech and lavishly decorated architecture.³³

The relationship between skill in visual depiction, fine work in brocade or gold, and verbal or poetic representation is a commonplace of early medieval Arabic writings on poetics.³⁴ This common quality of embellishment finds a less positive echo in Qur'anic and juridical usage, in which fancy speech, elaborate ornament and figurative images are equally implicated as over-wrought deceptions likely to lead astray, signs of material excess and worldly vanity. In Qur'anic usage, the connotations of *zukhruf*, are invariably negative; embellishment is a signifier of deception and delusion associated with the practices of those who reject Islam. In two cases, *zukhruf* denotes lavish architectural embellishment associated with or demanded by those who deny the message of Islam. Building on the theme, al-Turtushi writes: "The foundation of ornament (*zukhruf*) is gold. It refers to the embellishment of mosques with gold and the like. Related to this is the expression 'The man ornaments (*zakhrufa*) his speech,' when he adorns and decorates it with vain and futile things."³⁵

Such opinions were not only confined to the western Islamic world, where the Maliki law school predominated, but are also found in Egypt, Syria and Iran, and among jurists who were not Malikis. The Egyptian Shafi'i legal

scholar Muhammad ibn Bahadur Zarkashi (d. 794/1392) discusses the problem of the ornamentation of Qur'ans and engravings or paintings in the mosque distracting the heart by attracting the gaze (*al-naẓar*) of the worshipper to itself, once again citing objections to the inscription of verses from the Qur'an on the qibla wall.³⁶ Similarly, the Syrian Hanbali jurist Yusuf ibn 'Abd al-Hadi (d. 1503) also addresses the question of mosque ornamentation, including worked stones, teak ceilings and silver inlay, citing the opinions of scholars belonging to all the major law schools, including that of the Hanbali scholar Ibn Muflih (d. 1361), according to whom the decoration of the mosque with gold, silver, colors, engravings or inscriptions is forbidden if this is funded from the *waqf* (endowment) of the mosque.³⁷

Even lamps were a consistent bone of contention, especially gold and silver lamps. In an extended eulogy on the lamps in the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, for example, the Shafi'i jurist Taqi al-Din al-Subki (d. 1355) discusses divergent attitudes among the jurists to the ornamentation of Qur'ans and mosques, including the suspension of lamps (both gold and silver), their embellishment with plaster, gilding, marble, teak, carpets and curtains.³⁸ Like gilded ornament, gold and silver lamps bedazzled the worshipper and drew his gaze to themselves, diverting his heart from contemplation of the divine. In addition, like golden ornaments, they took precious metals out of circulation, frustrating the natural function of precious metals to mediate exchange in circulation while also displacing a value rooted in this mediating function onto the metals themselves.

These juridical texts routinely cite earlier, primarily Umayyad, precedents for and against the ornamentation of mosques and Qur'an codices. They may well canonize debates that existed as early as the early eighth century, if one believes accounts of the caliph 'Umar's attempts to destroy the ornaments in the Great Mosque of Damascus and to remove its gilded lamps. They implicate the ornamentation of mosques and Qur'anic texts and the use of such texts as ornament in four interrelated concerns; first, the need to differentiate Muslim places of worship from their Christian and Jewish counterparts; second, anxieties about the vulnerability inflicted by materiality—the danger that the material text might be touched by those considered ritually impure, for example, or that the medium of inscription might fall on the ground and be trampled;

³² Al-Turtushi 1990, 216–226, quotation at 223–224; Fierro 1993, 288–290.

³³ Qur'an 43,35 and 19,33–35.

³⁴ See, for example al-Jurjani 1954, 317–318; Abu Deeb 1979, 264–265; Puerta Vilchez 1997, 312–313, 354.

³⁵ Al-Turtushi 1990, 220; Fierro 1993, 288.

³⁶ Al-Zarkashi 1964, 335–339.

³⁷ Al-Hadi 1943, 166, 170.

³⁸ Al-Subki 1980, 1, 264–284.

third, a concern that the visual properties of gilded ornaments would, by attracting the gaze of the worshipper, distract him from the contemplation of transcendental matters; fourth, a perception that economic investment in such ornaments was inappropriate, since the funds thus invested would be better used for the benefit of the *umma*, the Muslim community, and its poor in particular. I would like to address each of these concerns in turn.

First, concerns about confusion and identity highlight a desire to make difference legible or visible, to inscribe it on sacred space and text. This underlies critiques of architectural ornamentation and ostentation on the grounds that both risk confounding mosques, churches and synagogues. Again, this is by no means peculiar to Islam: similar concerns are apparent in Bernard of Clairvaux's (d. 1153) criticism of the excessive height and ornamentation of churches as a distraction to the worshippers that recall "the ancient rite of the Jews."³⁹ The visual differentiation of sacred space and text was closely related to a desire to inscribe both gender and sectarian difference on the body that is evident in numerous hadith. Gold jewelry is permitted to women, while gold jewelry and clothes dyed in saffron are, for example, forbidden to men who *are* permitted to dye their hair in any color other than black since, according to the relevant hadith, the Jews and Christians did *not* dye their hair.⁴⁰ As we saw, such traditions assume a relationship between the ornamentation of bodies and buildings that was later extended to the ornamentation of scripture. Objections that the ornamentation of sacred space and scripture was a practice associated with Christianity and Judaism highlight a perceived need to differentiate mosques and Qur'an from the sacred spaces and texts of other monotheistic traditions. These concerns may have informed both the ornamentation and the fundamental form of early Qur'an codices, some of which were in fact produced by Christian scribes.⁴¹

Such concerns are not confined to the macro level of architecture, but also find expression at the micro level of textual ornament. The clear preference for micro-architecture as ornament in Umayyad Qur'an codices establishes self-reflexive engagements with the architecture of early mosques, while also continuing a late antique tradition. However, as in the architecture of the mosque itself, continuity with earlier traditions in the illumination of Qur'an manuscripts is qualified by syntactic

reconfigurations. Just as traditional late antique architectural elements are used in novel combinations and contexts in the architecture of the early mosque, so the ornamental vocabulary of arcades and columns that had served to ornament and structure the canon tables of Christian Gospels (fig. 2.9) recurs in Umayyad Qur'ans, where columns are rotated through ninety degrees, subverting their structural logic in order to create horizontal dividers between suras (chapters) of the Qur'an (figs. 2.10–11). These experiments with reorienting architectural illuminations on the page seem to prefigure a radical reorientation of Qur'an codices in their entirety from vertical to horizontal format (fig. 2.12) that may have occurred as early as the eighth century, and which then exerted a near hegemony in the ninth and tenth. This dramatic change may have addressed the sorts of concerns with visualizing difference preserved in contemporary critiques of ornamented Qur'ans and mosques.⁴²

In addition to making difference visible, perhaps even producing it, a further concern was with the materiality of the *muṣḥaf*, the Qur'an codex. Once again, this very quality sometimes featured in inter-sectarian debates and polemics about alterity and identity, including the relative value of words and images, debates in which materiality could function both positively and negatively. In such debates, especially in the east Christian world, the standard riposte developed by Christian iconophiles to rationalize the veneration of icons—that veneration was directed not to the material fabric of the icon but towards what it recalled or represented—was often adapted in order to rebut by analogy Muslim accusations that Christians were idolaters. To give but one example, in the thirteenth century, the bishop of Nisibis in the Jazira explained that:

The Muslims and the Jews venerate the revealed Scripture as well as any material on which the name of God is written. Their exaltation does not go to the material on which it is written, be it paper or parchment, or the pigments and the ink, but to the meaning which is indicated by it, which is the recollection (*dhikr*) of God, the Prophets, and the Saints.⁴³

For pious Muslims, however, the very materialization of the revelation rendered it vulnerable to desecration or pollution if touched by the hands of unbelievers or those in a state of ritual impurity. When, for example, quotations

³⁹ *Apologia* XII.28.12–15; Rudolph 1990, 279.

⁴⁰ See, for example, al-Nasa'i 2007, vol. 6, book 48, hadiths nos. 5072, 5074–5079; *Sahih Muslim*, Book 24, hadiths nos. 5173, 5208–5215, 5241–5245, URL: <http://www.iupui.edu/~msaiupui/024.smt.html>.

⁴¹ George 2010 (a), 52–53.

⁴² Déroche 2002, 616; Déroche 2004; Déroche 2006, 172–173; Flood 2012 (a), no. 89, 253–254.

⁴³ Cited in Teule 2007, 340. The same argument surfaced in the polemics of the Reformation, when Catholics defended their veneration of the crucifix by arguing that it was not the wood that was venerated, just as the paper and materials of the Gospels were not worshipped: Koerner 2004, 163.

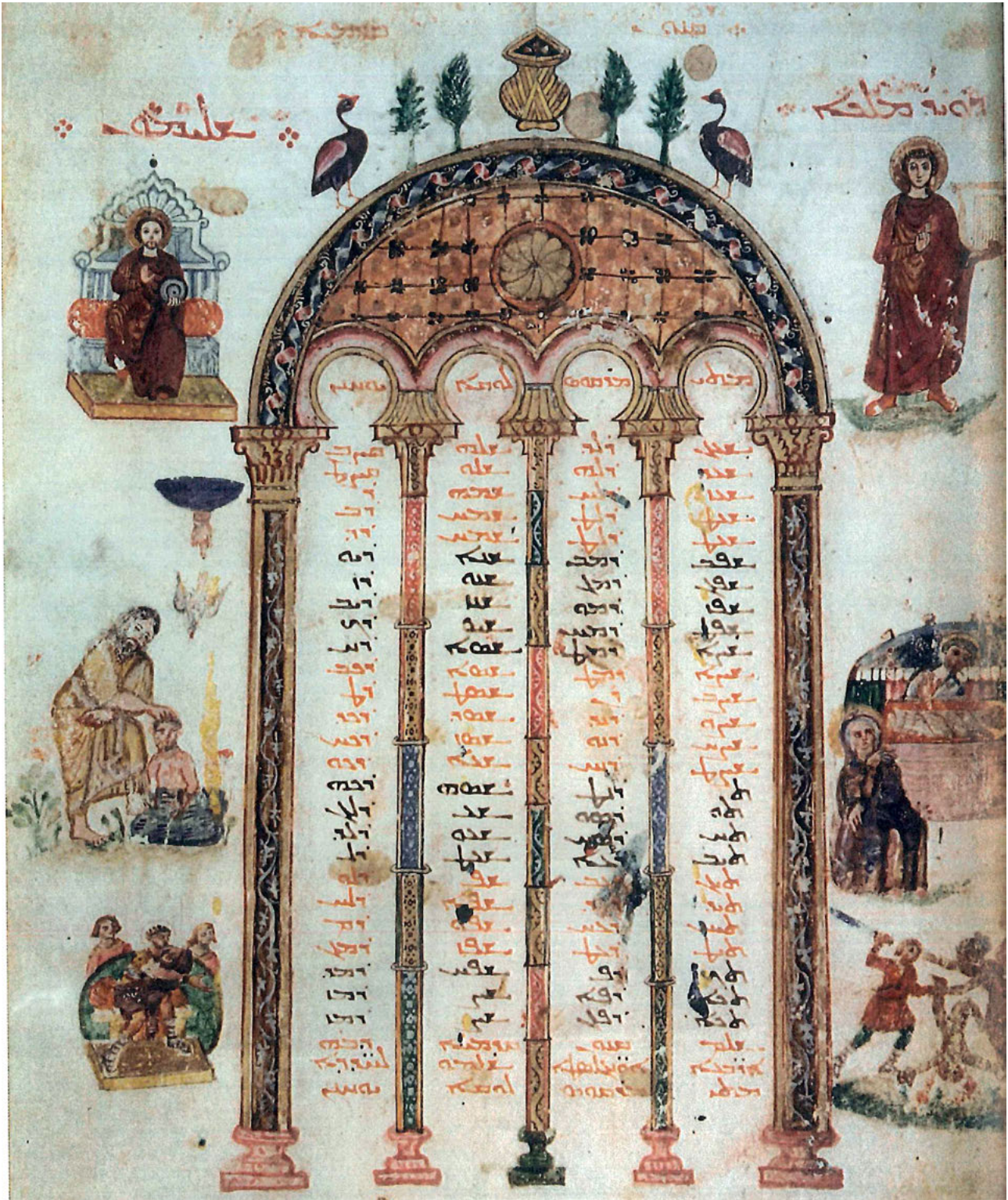


Fig. 2.9: Canon table from the Rabbula Gospels, sixth century. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 1.56, fol. 4b.



Fig. 2.10: Qur'an folio with a chapter divider in the form of an illuminated marble or faux-marble column, ca. early eighth century. St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Marcel 13, fol. 33r.

from the Qur'an were first stamped on coins in the late seventh century, some pious believers objected on the grounds that, as it circulated on the numismatic medium, the sacred text would be polluted by the touch of unbelievers or those in a state of ritual impurity.⁴⁴ Similar concerns underlay objections to inscribing the Qur'an on the walls of mosques, and also the development of juridical protocols for the solemn disposal of worn codices, which were in effect treated as corpses, and subject to ritual washing or burial.⁴⁵

These concerns are reiterated frequently by later jurists. For example, a late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Hanafi *ḥisba* manual from north India insists that coins bearing Qur'anic inscriptions must be treated like the *muṣḥaf* itself and not touched by unclean persons or trampled underfoot.⁴⁶ It was for this reason that Qur'an 55,77–79, which reads “This is indeed a Holy Qur'an, in a book well-guarded, which none shall touch

but those who are pure,” was often cited on the exterior cover of the codex.⁴⁷ A fatwa issued by the Central Asian Hanafi jurist Fakhr al-Din Qadi Khan (d. 1196), and preserved in a seventeenth-century Indian legal manual records that “It is not considered appropriate to write the Qur'an on *mīhrābs* and walls for fear that the inscription may fall and be stepped upon.”⁴⁸ Similarly, the Hanafi jurist 'Ali ibn Sultan al-Qari' al-Harawi (d. 1606), based in Mekka, considered it forbidden (*ḥarām*) or disapproved of (*makrūh*) to write Qur'anic verses or the names of the Prophet Muhammad on the walls of mosques or on cenotaphs, or to touch or lean against those already in place.⁴⁹

Jurists of different Sunni schools of jurisprudence voice analogous concerns in relation to the use of Qur'anic and other kinds of religious inscriptions in mausolea and on tombs. The Egyptian Maliki jurist Ibn al-Hajj (d. 1336) denounces the presence of scripture in such contexts for fear that, when the tomb decays, the inscription will fall to the ground and be trampled or taken for reuse in inappropriate contexts such as a threshold (where it will be trampled) or in a lavatory. Jurists of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence such as the Egyptian scholar al-Suyuti (d. 1505) and the Mekkan-based jurist and theologian Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 1566) repeat these concerns and add to them the anxiety that the fall of inscribed texts into the grave might contaminate them with the polluting touch of decaying remains.⁵⁰

A third objection to ornamenting Qur'ans or inscribing scripture on the walls of mosques relates to its optical properties. It is often claimed the role of ornament is to mediate between the viewer and something else. The idea is typified by Hans-Georg Gadamer's assertion that architectural ornament often avoids the use of representational forms that might be recognized and “read,” thus holding the gaze for longer than necessary for the process of mediation:

Certainly it should not invite us to linger and notice it as a decorative motif, but should have a merely accompanying effect. Thus in general it will not have any representational content, or will so iron it out through stylization or repetition that one's eye glides across it. It is not intended that the forms of nature used in an ornament should be recognized.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Sezgin (ed.) 2003, 195; Bacharach 2010, 1–3.

⁴⁵ A practice that led to the development of store-rooms in Damascus, Sana'a', Fustat and Qairawan, from which many of the most spectacular examples of early Qur'ans now found in European and American museum collections were taken; Sadan 1986, 36–58; Flood 2012 (b), 266 and nos. 188–189.

⁴⁶ Sanami 1986, 163; Izzi Dien 1997, 46, 89.

⁴⁷ Déroche 2006, 176, 179; Zadeh 2009, 443–466.

⁴⁸ Cited in Necipoğlu 2007, 97.

⁴⁹ Al-Makki n.d vol.1, 142; Al-Makki 1966 vol. 4, 76.

⁵⁰ Cited in Schöller 2004, 272–275.

⁵¹ Gadamer 2004, 151. See also Grabar 1992.



Fig. 2.11: Detail of figure 2.10.



Fig. 2.12: Folio from a Kufic Qur'an, Syria or Iraq, ninth or tenth century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.142 (Gift of Philip Hofer, 1937).

However, if the role of ornament is to mediate between the viewer and something else, the danger lies in its ability to usurp the attention of the viewer rather than directing it elsewhere, to impede the smooth glide of the gaze and trap it in the well-worked surface.⁵² In this case, words, even the carved or painted words of revealed scripture, are by no means an easy alternative to images.

Anticipating the problem, some jurists denounce the decoration of mosques, including their inscription with Qur'anic texts, as a distraction (*shugl*) for the worshippers, since lavishly calligraphed Qur'anic citations have the ability to draw the gaze (*al-naẓar*) to themselves, distracting the worshippers by leading their thoughts from contemplation of God to more material and worldly matters.

The theme of distraction has been much in evidence in recent work on visual culture, given impetus by a renewed interest in the work of twentieth-century German theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer and their work on mass entertainment. Distraction for Kracauer involved an abstracted or unfocused mode of relation between the self and the material world, a quality invested with redemptive qualities by virtue of its ability to articulate a kind of fragmented aesthetic experience that resisted “totalizing systems of rationality.”⁵³ By contrast, when medieval jurists spoke about distraction, they envisaged material objects possessed of an allure capable of entrapping the gaze. For theologians concerned with regulating the appearance of the mosque, and through it the gaze, absorption *in* the intricacies of ornament was synonymous with distraction *from* contemplation of the divine. The relationship between the two states is well articulated by Diderot in 1751 in an entry in his encyclopedia that would no doubt have found approval from many medieval Islamic jurists: “[...] one speaks in a figurative sense of being absorbed in God, or in the contemplation of some object, when one gives oneself up to it with all one's thought, without allowing oneself the least distraction.”⁵⁴

The problem was not exclusive to Islam of course, it also preoccupied late antique and medieval Christian and Jewish thinkers. These ranged in their opinions from those, like Abbé Suger (d. 1151), who believed in the capacity of material artifacts to lead the mind to thoughts, and ultimately knowledge, of more immaterial matters, to those like Bernard of Clairvaux or Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg (d. 1293) who criticized ornament in churches and prayer books as distractions from prayer,

while often also condemning the inappropriate expenditure that ornament occasioned.⁵⁵

None of these theologians and thinkers doubted the ability of certain forms and materials to attract the gaze. For similar reasons, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have rejected the use of garments embellished with designs (*a'lām*) when praying, on the grounds that they functioned as a distraction (*shugl*), while the pious caliph 'Umar I is said to have recommended the wearing of white garments by those reading the Qur'an in mosques.⁵⁶ According to some hadith, the Prophet Muhammad was distracted from prayer by a figured curtain hung by Aisha, his wife.⁵⁷ Consequently, the use of textiles bearing figurative imagery was discouraged during prayer for fear that their images might encourage (or be seen to encourage) image veneration. In some cases, the slippage between distraction and idolatry is made explicit, as in a fourteenth-century Indian *ḥisba* manual in which the images on figured textiles used for clothing are rejected as akin to idols, and are therefore especially unsuited to prayer.⁵⁸

It is not the semantic content or semiotic function of immaterial words that is at stake in juridical rulings on mosque ornament, including Qur'anic inscriptions, but their material properties and visual allure. The core problem addressed by these hadith and the jurists is what Alfred Gell has called the “cognitive stickiness” of ornament and well-worked surfaces, their ability to act as human fly-paper, reeling us in by drawing the gaze to themselves.⁵⁹ Their concerns reinforce the late Michael Camille's point that the gaze did not spring into being with the discovery of one-point perspective or (one might add) the invention of the Cartesian subject.⁶⁰ Although focused on the visual properties of ornament, the unornamented plain white textiles and walls opposed by the jurists to ornamented surfaces might even be seen in terms of a quasi-haptic distinction between the sticky and the smooth—in other words, surfaces that entrap versus those that give little purchase to the gaze. It is tempting to relate this distinction to the extramission theory of vision that held sway in the Arab world until the eleventh century,

⁵² On this problem in early modern Europe, see Zorach 2005, 152.

⁵³ Aitken 1998, 125.

⁵⁴ Cited in Fried 1980, 183–184.

⁵⁵ Rudolph 1990; Mann 2000, 110–111.

⁵⁶ Sunan Abi Dawud, Book 34, hadith 33, URL: <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/34>. Sunan al-Nasa'i, Book 48, hadith 5354, URL: <http://sunnah.com/nasai/48>. Malik Ibn Anas (2010), 385, Book 48, Number 48.1.2; al-Fasi 1994, 18–21. I am grateful to Jan Just Witkam for this last reference.

⁵⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhari, Book 77, hadiths 5817, 5959. URL: <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/77>.

⁵⁸ Sanami 1986, 272–273; Izzi Dien 1997, 102.

⁵⁹ Gell 1998, 80, 86.

⁶⁰ Camille 2000, 198.

and which held that vision emanates from the eyes to “touch” the objects of vision and engage them in an almost tactile manner in order to convey their forms to the eye.⁶¹

The terms in which ornament is denounced also highlights a quasi-Platonic distinction between sense perception and intellectual apprehension, between the perceptive function of the eyes, which provide unfiltered access to the material world, and the heart, the seat of understanding and the apprehension of the divine; one can see with the eyes, the organ of perception, without “seeing” truth with the heart, the organ of comprehension.⁶² The distraction that results from inability to move beyond the allure of the visual, and which is addressed by the prescriptions of the hadith and the jurists, is not merely a matter of inconvenience or interruption, but occasions a type of fetishism verging on idolatry.

However, despite the jurists’ ambivalence about the ethical implications of this hypnotic quality, it was recognized that in certain situations it might be turned to advantage. In their awed emphasis upon a lavish materiality characterized by opulent media and ornate forms, including great height, gilded and silvered architectural ornament, brocade curtains, precious metal lamps, glass mosaics, and ceilings and walls decorated with gold and images, descriptions of Christian churches and monasteries in pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islamic Syria that one finds in Arabic geographies and poems from the tenth century onwards provide a mirror to the proscriptions of the hadiths and jurists. One invests the forms and materials of ornament with positive qualities of spectacle and wonder, the other gives them an unrelentingly negative gloss.⁶³ This tension between awe and abjection may provide the context for a well-known passage in the work of the tenth-century Jerusalemite geographer al-Muqaddasi, who attributes the splendors of the Dome of the Rock and Damascus mosque to the desire on the part of the Umayyad caliphs who built them to provide a counter-balance to the beautiful Christian churches of Syria whose ornaments (*zukhruf*) were seducing the Muslims. In order to counter this effect, the Umayyad caliphs provided Muslims with shrines that would attract their attention, making an impression upon their hearts,

the heart being the organ of comprehension as opposed to the eyes, the organ of perception.

Similarly, ‘Umar’s efforts to permanently destroy the ornaments of the Damascus mosque were apparently thwarted by its ability to manifest the power of Umayyad authority to the Byzantines. This suggests that, in situations in which Muslims were a minority, the very allure of the visual that concerned the jurists might be productively used to exert its magic—what the anthropologist Alfred Gell called the “technology of enchantment”—within the space of the mosque itself.⁶⁴

Fourth, if the stickiness of form was one part of the problem with ornament, the materials of its realization and its dissolution by the shimmer of golden matter in particular presented the jurists with another. As Rebecca Zorach put it, writing in another context, “one of the ways in which ornament may “stray” is to be apprehended as matter, in the absence—or *as* the absence—of form.”⁶⁵ Chrysography is generally seen as lending a dynamic, animate quality to the scriptural medium while giving visual expression to the idea of scripture as a medium of divine illumination (fig. 2.13).⁶⁶ This was often the case in the Islamic world, but the use of gold also raised specific concerns for many jurists, according to whom gold and silver are worthless stones whose value derives not from any intrinsic properties, but from their ability to mediate exchange as they circulate, most obviously as coin or specie. The presence of elaborate ornaments in mosques or Qur’an manuscripts thus occasioned a series of misplaced investments, from the visual investment in well-worked or gilded surfaces to the economic investment in precious metals as valued ornaments rather than media of exchange.

Qur’an 9,34 promises punishment to those who hoard gold and silver rather than spending them in the way of God. Consequently, as many medieval jurists make clear, removing gold or silver from circulation through hoarding, casting, or gilding not only frustrated their dynamic function but displaced value from their mediating function onto the mediators themselves. As Marx was to put it later, gold and silver are necessarily the *perpetuum mobile* of the process of circulation.⁶⁷ Value is not therefore located in the metals themselves, rather they represent value while in circulation as media of exchange. The use of gold to create golden objects or glittering surfaces occasions a slippage between natural and unnatural function,

⁶¹ Lindberg 1976, 18–32; Lindberg 1978, 137–159; Russell 1994, 255, 263. Although for a critical reevaluation of the role that extramission has played in modern historiography, see Betancourt 2016.

⁶² Qur’an 22,46.

⁶³ For example, al-Hamawi 1867–1873, vol. 2, 704; Shahid 2002, 161–163. For an excellent discussion of these texts, see Fowden 2007, 4–5. For the general background, see Tohme 2009.

⁶⁴ Gell 1992.

⁶⁵ Zorach 2005, 153.

⁶⁶ George 2010 (b); Thunø 2011.

⁶⁷ Marx 1859.

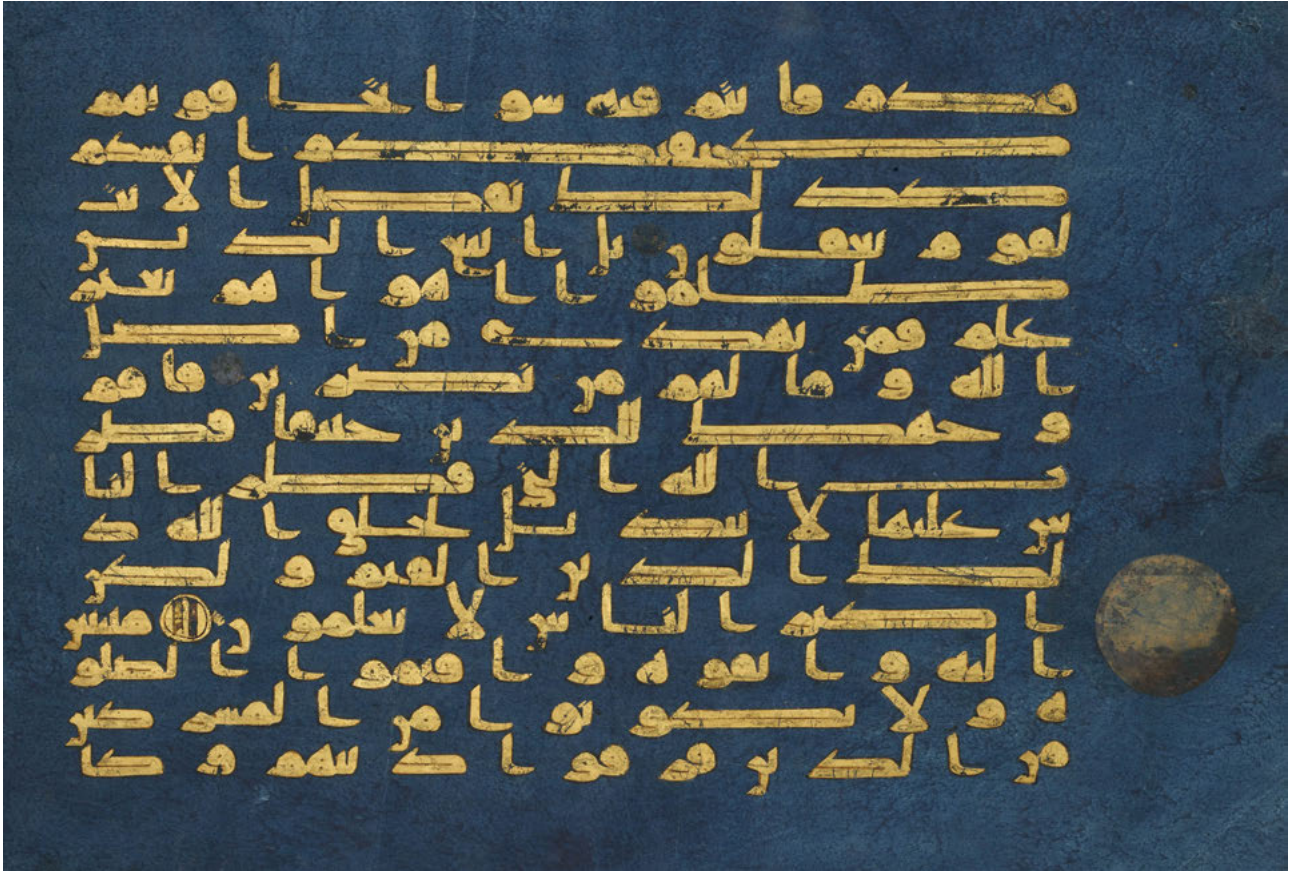


Fig. 2.13: Folio from the Blue Qur'an, gold ink on indigo dyed parchment, Iraq or North Africa, ninth or tenth century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.88 (Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2004).

between precious metals in circulation as the abstracted sign of true value and incarnated as false value in object form. The tension is between gold and silver as mediators that represent a value located outside themselves and precious metals as materials that present or instantiate value in their own right.

Citing Marx's critique of monetary fetishism, the aesthetic theorist Jean-Joseph Goux notes that "the fetishist believes the gold to have intrinsic value, just as the idolater believes the idol in the temple to be something other than the product of human work: a veritable god."⁶⁸ Writing in the eleventh century, al-Ghazali (d. 1111) makes the same point in a different way, invoking the figure of Ibrahim/Abraham, celebrated in the Qur'an and elsewhere as the destroyer of his people's idols:

The Prophet Abraham prayed: "O God, save me and my successors from idol worship" [Qur'an 14,35]. By this he meant the worship of gold and silver, as gold and silver are deities of people. [...] The Prophet said: "The slaves of dinars [gold coins]

are wretched and the servants of dirhams [silver coins] are wretched." [...] So it appears that those who love them and serve gold and silver are among those who serve stones and idols.⁶⁹

Taken out of circulation and cast into object form, gold becomes a signifier that signifies only itself, like the idols and stone images rejected by Islam as material things lacking a referent that would confer a truth-value.⁷⁰

The prohibitions against using gold and silver vessels either as functional objects or as ornaments are reiterated frequently in medieval and early modern juridical texts, which occasionally deal with the recuperation of precious metals from brocaded textiles or even architectural ornament.⁷¹

This explains why 'Umar II reportedly removed golden lamps when he draped the aniconic mosaics in Damascus, and why precious metal lamps are singled out in later juridical texts: according to the Hanbali jurist Ibn Qudama

⁶⁸ Goux 1990, 160.

⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali 1967–1968, vol. 3, 216.

⁷⁰ For an extended discussion, see Flood 2009, 34–36.

⁷¹ See, for example, Lagardère 1995, 51, 127.



Fig. 2.14: Qur'an written in cursive script with gilded chapter headers, Iran or Iraq (?), eleventh century. Cairo, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, QUR284F, fol. 200v–201r.

(d. 1223), gold and silver ornamented lamps donated to a mosque must be smashed, and their precious metals put into circulation to pay for its upkeep and repair.⁷²

It is often said that the rulings of jurists and theologians had little impact on material practice. The proliferation of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosques, or the use of gilding in mosques and Qur'ans (figs. 2.13–2.14) despite repeated objections on the part of many jurists, is proof enough of this. That they could, on occasion, be related to practice can hardly be doubted, however, even if 'Umar II never realized his ambition to permanently white-wash the Damascus mosque. The recent erasure of ornament, including Qur'anic inscriptions, in the mosques of Mosul finds precedents in earlier historical episodes. In the tenth century, for example, the qadi of Sana'a' Yahya ibn 'Abdallah ibn Kulayb (d. 341/952–953), gave orders for the beautiful and wondrous stucco carvings (*naqūsh*) of the Umayyad period around the mihrab of the city's Friday mosque to be destroyed. Since the mihrab was part

of the mosque erected by the Umayyad caliph al-Walid (r. 705–715), it seems that these carvings were of the same vintage as those to which Umar II had taken umbrage in Damascus two centuries earlier. The stucco ornaments effaced in Sana'a' undoubtedly contained inscriptions, which were commonly set around the mihrabs in other early mosques. The reasons given for this effacement are identical to the denunciations of mosque ornament found in tenth- and eleventh-century legal texts: the decoration of mosques was reprehensible (*makrūh*), since it attracted the gaze of the worshippers, distracting them from prayer.⁷³

In the rationalization of such remedial action, as in juridical concerns with the haptic and optic properties of scripture and the materiality of its inscription, anxieties about the ornamented text function in a series of registers that proceed from the micro to the macro level. First, there is the problem of the illumination or ornamentation of the

72 Juynboll 1985, 113.

73 Al-Razi 1974, 86; Finster 1978, 96. The practice of anointing the mihrab with unguents had been prohibited slightly earlier.

text itself, a problem that combines anxieties about ostentation and inappropriate expenditure with an economy of piety in which gilding is frowned upon as displacing value from the mediating function of gold onto the golden matter itself. The second register in which concerns about materialized scripture resonate is the ability of the Qur'an codex as an object in its own right to attract inappropriate investments on the part of the worshipper when placed within the mihrab or near the qibla wall, the wall that indicates the direction of Mecca. Third, there is the problem of monumental Qur'anic texts inscribed or painted on the walls of mosques, with, once again, particular anxieties about their appearance on the qibla wall or around the mihrab, towards which worshippers faced when praying. These occasioned concerns related to both the materiality of sacred text and its consequent vulnerability, and to its visual properties and capacity to distract the worshipper from prayer.

Paradoxically, in light of the widespread perception of Islamic art as an art of ornament, in the traditions discussed here, images and words are equally implicated (both positively and negatively) by virtue of their materiality, their visual properties and the contexts in which they appear. Rooted in the Qur'an and hadith, juridical concerns about ornamenting bodies, books and buildings highlight a series of interrelationships between aesthetics, ethics and economics that structure the perception of graphic forms, visual elaboration, and verbal representation. These interrelationships adumbrate an economy of piety similar to that which Lee Wandel has noted in her study of religious practice in sixteenth-century Zurich. For the Protestant reformists of that city, even non-figurative objects could be identified as idols by virtue of their relationship to a Christian economy in which idolatry was not confined to facture or figuration, but also inhered in the privileging of static accumulation over circulation, or the use of material resources for the embellishment of inert icons rather than the sustenance of living believers. As one iconoclast, prosecuted in Zurich in 1523 for destroying a retable and other church ornaments put it, "such ornaments are the food of the poor."⁷⁴ In sixteenth-century Zurich, as in eighth-century Damascus, lamps ("the idols that eat oil") were a particular target not only for their inherent materiality but for their ability to consume church monies.⁷⁵

There are, in fact, numerous parallels between the economy of piety adumbrated in the Qur'an and hadith

and attitudes to materiality found in early patristic writings, sources upon which Protestant Reformists drew heavily. This may explain the striking parallels between the attempts of medieval Islamic jurists to regulate the visual economy of sacred space and text and the attempts of Protestant reformists to theorize the relationship between consumption, function, materiality, and the visual. Exploring those parallels would, however, be a topic for another venue.

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⁷⁴ Wandel 1990, 138.

⁷⁵ Wandel 1999.

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