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SALEEM AL-BAHLOLY

HISTORY REGAINED: A MODERN ARTIST IN BAGHDAD ENCOUNTERS A LOST TRADITION OF PAINTING

Sometime in 1941, after being forced to return to Baghdad when his study of art in Europe was cut short by the outbreak of World War II, a twenty-one-year-old artist named Jewad Selim came across an article in the French picture magazine, *L'Illustration*.¹ The article reproduced five illustrations from a thirteenth-century manuscript: a copy of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* made by an artist identified in the colophon as Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti. The French article also included a sixth illustration that was misattributed to the manuscript (fig. 1), as well as four images from a copy of the ancient collection of fables, *Kalīla wa Dimna* (figs. 6–7). It was the illustrations from the *Maqāmāt*, however, that drew Selim's attention. Depicted in these illustrations were the following scenes: a sermon being delivered in a mosque in the presence of a governor and his harem; a procession celebrating the end of the holy month of Ramadan; a train of camels herded by an old woman; a ship at sail on the Persian Gulf; and a gathering of literati sitting around a fountain listening to an oud performance (figs. 2–5). All of these illustrations were presented in the article under the title “Le Miroir de Bagdad.”

Through this handful of illustrations, Selim was brought face to face with a history of painting in Baghdad that he had not known existed. That history employed pictorial devices that were likely unfamiliar to the young artist. Human figures were traced in outline, and the delineated shapes, ornamental in their rhythm and regularity, were filled in with luxuriant patterns and colors. The scenes staging these figures were constructed from fragments; for instance, a minbar functioned metonymically to portray a mosque. No attempt was made to disguise the surface upon which these scenes had been illustrated. In fact, the figures appeared all the

more vivid for standing out against the blankness of the page.

These images belonged to a tradition of painting that had vanished and was rediscovered only in the late nineteenth century. But by the time Selim saw them in the pages of *L'Illustration*, the illustrations had been interpreted in ways that rendered them commensurate with the modern picture. As reproduced in the article, the illustrations were isolated from the text of the *Maqāmāt*. In the context of the manuscript, the images would have been encountered alongside the text, such that seeing the pictures was in some sense part of the act of reading; by contrast, in the French article the paintings were framed as if they were meant to be discrete representations of the physical world.

In *L'Illustration*, a short essay accompanied the illustrations and introduced them as “works of Muslim painting” (*la peinture musulmane*) that depicted “the mysteries and singularities of oriental life” in a city that hitherto had been known to the European imagination only through literature, but that could now be seen, as if directly, through painting:

The tales of *One Thousand and One Nights* have preserved for us an image of the East that has outlasted any other representation. For us Baghdad is only the city of the cruel delights of Harun al-Rashid. It is peopled by the marvels of the fable. It appears in such a way that appeals to our enthusiasm for fiction. Of this city of legend, a city much less historic than imaginary, the works of Muslim painting have left us remarkable images where, centuries after the reveries of Shahrazad, we regain the mysteries and singularities of Oriental life. Two works occupy the interest of the inhabitants of Baghdad, entertaining them and satisfying their taste for stories. These books, known everywhere and read passionately by generations of Muslims, were copied, il-

lustrated, and taken as a pretext for the creation of masterpieces by the great calligraphers and painters. They are the most popular works of Arabic literature after the Qur'an. They offer us, as in a mirror, the story of everyday life in Baghdad.²

This introduction was written by a French art historian named Eustache de Lorey, in conjunction with an exhibition he curated at the Bibliothèque nationale in 1938. By his account, the emergence of this "painting" was a kind of accident, a secondary effect of the stories that the inhabitants of medieval Baghdad craved. The "great calligraphers and painters" had simply taken the "most popular works of Arabic literature" as a "pretext" for creating "masterpieces" that offer us, centuries later, another kind of story: the "story of everyday life" in Baghdad depicted with a realism that de Lorey marveled at.

Foremost among such Arabic literary works, de Lorey went on to explain, was the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, a picaresque tale written in the eleventh century. Through the narrative voice of al-Harīth, it follows the wanderings of a middle-aged man named Abu Zayd across the Islamic world as he exploits the power of language to bamboozle and, in some cases, swindle his audiences. The *Maqāmāt* is organized into fifty *maqām* (assemblies or scenes), and each *maqām*, as de Lorey explains to his French reader, consists of a kind of ethnographic portrait; it was this ethnographic aspect of the *maqām*, de Lorey claimed, over against the story itself, that the illustrations sought to render. "Most of the assemblies comprise scenes of the practices of everyday life (*tableaux de mœurs*) which the miniatures vividly render."³ But each *maqām* was already itself a kind of picture of life, and it was everyday life, circumstantial to the narrative of Abu Zayd, that was the focus of the illustrations: "Almost all of the tableaux that the miniatures preserve for us of life in thirteenth-century Baghdad," de Lorey writes, "reveal to us practices (*mœurs*) that are simple, moderate, and pleasant, far from the severity that they are assumed to have and that they acquire much later."⁴ He goes on to offer examples that demonstrate the permissive and indulgent atmosphere of medieval Baghdad: the veils loosely worn by the women in the governor's harem attending the sermon in the mosque; the trumpets and drums that celebrate the end of Ramadan; and the "regular delights" (*les habitudes délicieuses*) that accompany *les jeux de la poésie* held in

the gardens of Baghdad, where poetry is recited and music is played amidst fountains of flowing water. But he also points to examples of a more documentary nature: the sea voyages, camels in desert encampments, slave markets, and caravanserais depicted in the illustrations. "All these paintings (*tableaux*) reproduce the very life of the era, restoring the color and the familiar details, allowing us to conjure, in a setting borrowed from reality, the tastes and preferences of a foreign soul."⁵ To look at the images in the manuscript was not to see illustrations of a text but rather to see pictures of life in thirteenth-century Baghdad.

The rush of color and detail in al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* must have been as stunning to Selim as it was to de Lorey. In a letter to his friend Khaldun, Selim would refer to the brilliant color of al-Wasiti's illustrations, and he would invoke what he understood to be their pictorial concept as a model for his own painting. In fact, over the following years, these five reproductions printed in a French magazine, along with the concept of a medieval tradition of painting life in Baghdad, would provide the basis upon which Selim would lay a new foundation for the modern art that he had traveled to Europe to study.

The tradition of painting Selim had known up until then was very different; it had come into existence in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and consisted of a form of naturalism constructed on an autonomous support, whether paper or a canvas panel, that was set in a representational relation to the physical world. This tradition of painting had been introduced to Baghdad at the beginning of the twentieth century by officers in the Ottoman military, who had been trained in landscape painting at the War College in Istanbul.⁶ The War College was the point of entry for naturalistic painting into much of the empire, not only Iraq. Founded in 1795 as the Imperial Naval Engineering College, in the context of a broad set of educational reforms, the War College incorporated landscape painting into the officers' curriculum in 1842, although it was often modified to accommodate moral norms about the representation of life, derived from the Prophet's injunction against reproducing the likeness of God's creation. Thus, officers would paint from photographs, or would introduce archaizing elements such that the



Figs. 1–7. Eustache de Lorey, “Le Miroir de Bagdad,” *L’Illustration*, no. 4996 (December 3, 1938): n.p. Illustrations by al-Wasiti, reproduced from a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Maqâmât al-Ḥarîri*.



Fig. 2a.



Fig. 2b.



WASITI. — Célébration de la fin du Ramadan.

séances), où sont racontées les aventures d'un vagabond, Abou Zayd, maître dans l'art de tromper, beau parleur, inventeur inépuisable de fictions et, comme le dit l'un des personnages du livre, " père du mensonge, de la malice, de toutes ruses et des rimes choisies ". Cette sorte de Figaro musulman représente à merveille un certain aspect de l'esprit arabe, tel qu'il est figuré sur les miniatures qui illustrent admirablement au XIII^e siècle les *séances* de Hariri; en particulier dans le manuscrit Schefer de la Bibliothèque nationale, il apparaît comme un type inoubliable, fourbe et impudent, avec la lippe effrontée, le regard à la fois découvert et menteur, le visage d'un habléur plein d'assurance. Il invente les subterfuges les plus blâmables, il joue mille

lours; c'est dans bien des cas un vulgaire escroc, vieillard astucieux et pervers, qui mériterait un sort sans honneur. Et pourtant il finit toujours par être pardonné. C'est qu'il est doué d'un esprit étincelant, c'est qu'il sait mettre en valeur toutes les beautés et les finesses de la langue arabe avec une virtuosité et un sens poétique remarquables. Assonances, allitérations, paronomasies, figures de rhétorique singulières, tout lui est facile; il est menteur, mais il est aussi — et c'est presque la même chose — grammairien et poète. Il s'est acquis par la dextérité de son langage le droit de faire des autres hommes ses dupes et ses victimes.

La plupart de ces *séances* composent des tableaux de mœurs que les miniatures nous rendent très sensibles. La première est

Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



WASITI. — Assemblée littéraire dans un jardin des environs de Bagdad arrosé par une noria.

qui prétend avoir trouvé l'idée de son œuvre dans cette scène vécue.

Presque tous les tableaux que la miniature nous a conservés de la vie de Bagdad au XIII^e siècle laissent discerner des mœurs faciles, tempérées, aimables, bien éloignées de la rigueur qu'on leur suppose et qu'elles auront plus tard. Dans telle illustration du manuscrit Schefer, où nous voyons tout le peuple assemblé dans une mosquée, il est plaisant d'apercevoir auprès du gouverneur les femmes de son harem, vêtues, comme les Persanes que nous avons vues jadis à Ispahan, d'un *tebadour* qui les couvre de la tête aux pieds; mais leur voile est transparent et, loin de dissimuler complètement leur visage comme la coutume l'exigera au XIX^e siècle, il laisse deviner des traits, d'ailleurs charmants,

qu'il montre en prétendant les cacher. Telle autre scène fait revivre les habitudes délicieuses qui ont si souvent associé en Orient les jeux de la poésie aux plaisirs de l'eau et à la grâce des jardins. Cette assemblée littéraire dans un jardin des environs de Bagdad qu'a composée le grand peintre du XIII^e siècle, Wasiti, c'est d'abord une fête de l'eau. Les lettrés auprès de la fontaine vivent nonchalamment en écoutant la musique d'un joueur de luth. Leur grande joie est dans le spectacle de l'eau qui coule. Tout est délices, pour eux comme pour tout Arabe, tout Persan quand la source s'empare de la terre et y annonce pour demain l'asile de la verdure.

Fêtes pour la fin du Ramadan avec les hérauts et les porte-bannière, les longues trompettes et les timbales; voyage

Fig. 5.



sur les mers lointaines qu'affrontent des bateaux rudimentaires ; campement dans le désert auprès des chameaux qui cherchent leurs pâturages ; marché aux esclaves ; caravansérail, tous ces tableaux reproduisent la vie même de l'époque, en resituent la couleur et les détails familiers, nous permettent d'évoquer, dans un décor emprunté à la réalité, les goûts et les préférences d'une âme étrangère.

Ce sont ces préférences que nous livre comme un secret un autre ouvrage, incorporé depuis longtemps à la littérature universelle, les fables de Bidpay, devenues dans la version arabe le *Livre de Kalilab et Dimnab*. On y trouve le goût pour les apologues qui s'en-

Fig. 6.



Les fables de BIDPAY. — Les corbeaux mettent le feu chez les chouettes.

chainent par un fil ténu, qui se déroulent comme un récit interminable, histoire recueillie par une autre et sans cesse sauvée par un nouvel épisode. On y trouve aussi le goût pour les bêtes, qui fait de presque tous les artistes musulmans d'admirables animaliers. Nul plus que ces miniaturistes n'a eu le sentiment de ces formes élégantes et de ces vies mystérieuses. Nul mieux qu'eux n'a su rendre l'univers de la fable. A considérer les illustrations si gracieuses qu'ils nous ont transmises, on ne peut s'empêcher de reconnaître comme leur bien ce livre emprunté à un écrivain de l'Inde, comme on ne peut s'empêcher de voir dans notre La Fontaine le seul et divin auteur des fables qu'il s'est appropriées.

EUSTACHE DE LOREY.



Les fables de BIDPAY. — Dinnab faisant sa cour au lion Pingalaka.

Fig. 7.

naturalistic images they created were never actual reproductions of nature.⁷

After the Ottoman empire was dissolved at the end of World War I into the Turkish Republic and a patchwork of Arab nation-states, the officers in the Ottoman military who came from towns that now were part of Iraq relocated to Baghdad. There, the military painters among them—or *asker ressamlar*, as they were known at the time in Turkish—continued to paint. Some of these retired officers taught techniques of perspectival drawing and painting in the schools of the newly established Iraqi state.⁸ Their own painting consisted largely of mannered landscapes, especially of the Tigris—mannered either in the sense that various additional elements were inserted, such as herds of sheep or archaeological ruins, or in the sense that a perspectival construction of space was overlaid with incongruent visual effects, such as shadows cast by the sun or the reflection of the sky in the water (figs. 8–9). In keeping with the modified perspectivalism taught at the War College, the *asker ressamlar* isolated these features and reassembled them into composite pictures.⁹

Jewad Selim was the son of one of these military painters. In 1921, his father, Haj Muhammad Salim, moved the family from Ankara, where Jewad had been born, to Baghdad, where Haj Muhammad found work as a tutor of King Faisal's children.¹⁰ By the time Selim enrolled in school, he was taught by an intermediate generation who had learned techniques of drawing and painting from the Ottoman officers but had not themselves gone to art school, or at least not yet.¹¹ Then, in the early 1930s, Sati' al-Husri, the architect of Iraq's education system, arranged for several students to study art in Europe. The first was Akram Shukri, who left for London in 1931. He was followed by Faiq Hassan, who went to Paris in 1935; 'Atta Sabri, who went to Rome in 1937; Hafidh Droubi, who also went to Rome; and then Jewad Selim, who left for Paris in 1938. They were just a few of the many Iraqis being sent abroad to study a range of subjects. On the one hand, sending artists to Europe to study can be seen as part of a transfer of knowledge that had been going on across Asia for decades. But, on the other hand, the idea of sending Iraqis to Europe to study art in particular was part of a specific ideological project that responded to the new political reality following the collapse of the Ottoman empire.

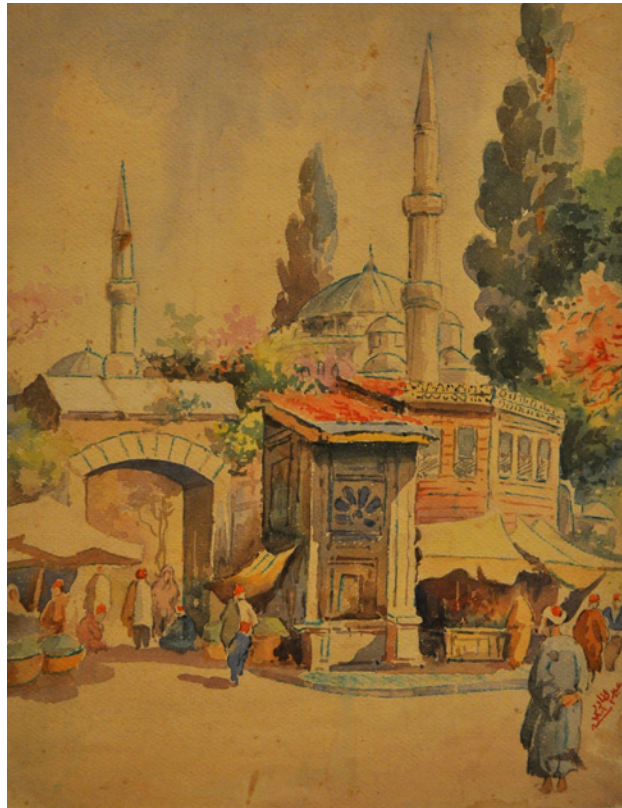


Fig. 8. Abdul Qadir al-Rassam, title unknown, 1901, watercolor on paper, 35 × 27 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

Sati' al-Husri had been a prominent intellectual in the empire and a long-time advocate for the transfer of knowledge from Europe, both in his capacity as a science teacher in Greece and later as director of Darülmüallimin in Istanbul.¹² He had written textbooks that were used throughout the empire, in addition to essays arguing for reform in educational methods. He had also given a number of speeches about the importance of patriotism that were circulated in print. But Husri had been born into a family originally from Aleppo, and like many Ottoman intellectuals of Arab extraction after World War I, he was forced to relocate to Damascus.

In 1921, Faisal ibn al-Hussein was named the ruler of Iraq by Britain, which had taken over administration of the provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. Faisal was one of the sons of the Grand Sharif of Mecca, and he had been the leader of the Arab revolt against the Turks during the war. He invited Sati' al-Husri to Baghdad to serve



Fig. 9. Abdul Qadir al-Rassam, *View of the Tigris*, 1921, oil on canvas, 63.1 × 93.2 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

as the minister of education and later the director of antiquities.¹³ When Husri arranged for Iraqi artists to study in Europe, it was in keeping with his commitment to the transfer of technical knowledge from the West. But he seems to have envisioned that art, as a form of knowledge, would play a particular role in the new state of Iraq by cultivating a historical consciousness that would unify the Arabic-speaking peoples into a nation.¹⁴ Thus, when Akram Shukri returned from London in 1936, he was employed in a laboratory at the Iraq Museum, where he would work to preserve archaeological objects until 1963. Jewad Selim and ‘Atta Sabri, along with other artists such as Khalid al-Rahhal and ‘Issa Hanna, would do the same.¹⁵

However, the knowledge brought back to Baghdad by these art students found an institutional home that had

formed under a different set of circumstances and that would exceed Husri’s designs. In 1936, a musician named Hanna Butros, whose training and work had largely been in the context of the military, first the Ottoman and then the Iraqi, was tasked with establishing a music institute; though for reasons that remain unclear, the administration of the institute was quickly taken over by Muhi al-Din Haidar, a Turkish musician who played both the oud and the cello, and who had spent several years in New York.¹⁶ For a brief period of time, ‘Atta Sabri and another artist, ‘Azra Haya, informally taught painting there. When the institute relocated to the neighborhood of Batawin, a painting wing was officially added, and Faiq Hassan, who had recently returned from Paris, became its first instructor. Upon his own return to Baghdad in 1941, Selim was hired to teach sculp-



Fig. 10. Akram Shukri, *Entrance to the Old Market*, 1943, oil on panel, 36.9 × 33 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

ture, and at the same time was assigned to oversee the restoration of the Abbasid Palace.

As these artists returned from abroad, the unreflexive painting of landscapes and portraits that the Ottoman officers had introduced to Iraq and taught to their students began to give way. It was as if the canvas had peeled away from the world around it, and came to confront the artists as a blank space where a new problem of form posed itself. The emergence of this reflexivity was expressed in a shift in vocabulary—from *rasm*, which refers to a kind of description, to *ṣūra*, which historically denotes form, both in the sense of intelligible and visual form, but came to denote the image.

At first, this reflexivity on the means of representation consisted of an experimentation with different styles. For instance, in a painting of Baghdad's Mirjan Mosque (fig. 10) by Akram Shukri, the first Iraqi to formally study art abroad, the street is laid out in long, unordered strokes. The mosque and the minaret are built up with tight tabs of golden yellow stacked almost like bricks; the blue and white of the sky are applied in short

bursts that appear to rise from the city with the heat and the dust and float up across the canvas. Against the brilliant and concentrated gold of the mosque, and beneath the open sky, people move about as formless shadows. Techniques like these, which Shukri had learned in London, raised questions about representation that had not existed for the Ottoman officers. This new reflexivity about the means of representation opened onto broader questions about art itself, such as what kind of work a modern artist in Baghdad might produce, and what art could be in the absence of any tradition of pictorial art.

It was precisely as this question was arising that, at the behest of Sati' al-Husri, 'Atta Sabri showed Selim the article by Eustache de Lorey about Yahya al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. (Sabri had been Selim's art teacher in middle school, and he brought the issue of *L'Illustration* back to Baghdad from London, where he had studied Islamic art.) In light of the reproductions and de Lorey's commentary on them, the art that Selim had gone to Europe to study now appeared different to him. Painting had a history in Baghdad, and that history, which was available only in these few reproductions and their accompanying interpretation, offered Selim a starting point or a foundation for establishing a practice of modern art.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, practices of modern art developed across the non-European world in response to a similar problem of form, posed on the one hand by the acquisition of new techniques, and on the other by a re-encounter with older histories of art, which took place in the context of new political entities that were forming from the pieces of old empires. That re-encounter was mediated in a variety of ways in order to make such histories available to modern art practice, and often this mediation occurred as part of a vast scholarly endeavor by which Europe had come to seek solutions to its own problems in the thought and cultural forms of the East. It was not only that Selim had discovered a lost history of art, then, in the form of the reproductions on the pages of a French picture magazine; rather, that history had already been discursively reconstructed in terms of the European pictorial tradition and its crisis of illusionism.

This essay examines the re-encounter with al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt* and the ways in which it provided a historiographic basis for the practice of

modern art in Baghdad. It describes how that re-encounter was mediated, both by the context of European modernism and by the political culture emerging in Iraq at the time. The essay unfolds in four parts, each of which can be read as a proposition about the relationship between art practice and the rediscovery of a lost tradition of representation in a postcolonial context: (1) Drawing on two letters Selim wrote to his friend Khaldun, I show how the circumstances of World War II shaped Selim's initial interpretation of al-Wasiti's illustrations for the *Maqāmāt*, and in particular how Selim's conversations with Polish officers stationed in Baghdad during the war brought him to interpret the illustrations in terms of a post-expressionist use of color. (2) I suggest that Selim experimented in his own painting with the use of color modeled by the illustrations of the *Maqāmāt*, but that their primary effect was discursive: they permitted Selim to reclaim the idea of a Baghdad school of painting as the basis for an art group he founded in 1951. Here I point to the role that the historiography of the manuscript played in laying a discursive foundation for art practice, and how that foundation made it possible to situate art practice in the context of an emerging public sphere. (3) I then step back to consider the circumstances in which the *Maqāmāt* manuscript was discovered and in which the historiography of the Baghdad School adopted by Selim was first formulated. (4) Finally, I show how the re-encounter with a lost history of painting made it possible for Selim to locate the modern artwork in the context of a broader cultural renewal taking place in the Arabic-speaking Middle East.

IN THE LAND OF THE DATE PALM

The re-encounter with al-Wasiti's illustrations, and the lost history of manuscript illustration they represent, occurred at a moment when Baghdad had been isolated by the circumstances of World War II. The city's newspapers were reporting daily on the spectacular destruction of Europe, under headlines like "The Fall of the French Republic."¹⁷ Against such a background, the discovery of a lost history of painting in their own country made it possible for artists in Baghdad to conceive of a practice of art that was not centered in Europe.

Selim reflected on the isolation of Baghdad in a letter written near the end of the war to his friend Khaldun

al-Husri—the son of Sati^c—in Beirut, as he was looking forward to resuming his study of art in Europe. Reading the letter now, we can see the historiographic effects of al-Wasiti's illustrations and how they enabled the imagination of an alternative genealogy of art at a time when Europe no longer offered a guiding star for artistic practice:

During those four years when Paris and Europe stopped producing beautiful work, Baghdad did not stop working. It worked slowly and silently. It was poor, ignorant. But it worked during that period of four or five years. The first institute of art was founded, and a government museum for painting and sculpture was opened. And the first strong movement in the fields of theater and classical music arose.

They were few, those who were from all sides faced with the difficulties of creative work and in getting the public to understand and to appreciate that work. As for their work, as the first revival (*bi-ṣifatihim al-ba'ath al-'āwwal*) in five centuries, their attempt to prepare the way for the coming generation was difficult. Their work was limited to composing (*tā'rif*) in the colored dream of this Bedouin (*al-'irābī*) which persists in the books of history and in the ornamentation of Arabic architecture, and going even further back, to working in a way that moved between a man who lived in the heart of Mesopotamia thousands of years ago, and made from the clay of the earth beautiful figurines, and a mode of expression that came from London, Paris, and Rome...

During this limited period of time, many people came to Baghdad. If Europe had stopped their work, Baghdad welcomed them, and opened to the artist in particular a new visual world under the shadows of its domes. These were not students of the Beaux-Arts in Paris or the Slade School in London but rather they were individuals with new ideas and who mixed in their artistic production their contemplations, their studies of the world, their feelings, and their imagination.¹⁸

Almost immediately, the discovery of an earlier history of painting provided a discursive ground for modern art by making it possible for the modern artists of Baghdad to understand their practice as a "revival" (*al-ba'ath*). With this self-understanding, their primary artistic problem was not that of illusionism, which preoccupied European modernism, nor was it a problem of cultural difference, which would preoccupy artists in other parts of the postcolonial world. It was the problem, rather, of a *historical* difference, how they could reconcile a "mode of expression that came from London, Paris, and Rome"

with a history of art that they found themselves inheriting but could not fully identify with, whose nearest point of reference was medieval manuscript illustration and decorative architecture, and which extended back thousands of years to clay figurines made by distant, unidentified “men” in ancient Mesopotamia.

Although World War II isolated Baghdad, it also brought new people to the city, as Selim recounts. In 1941, a group of nationalist officers overthrew the Hashemite monarchy and realigned Iraq with the Axis powers. The coup provoked the British to re-occupy the country, and the British presence brought different contingents of people to Baghdad. Among them were artists, and in particular three Polish soldiers—Jozef Jarema, Jozef Czapski, and Edward Matuszczak—who provided Selim with interlocutors for the six months they were stationed in Baghdad. In those conversations, Selim was introduced to ideas about representation and color that would lead him to interpret al-Wasiti’s illustrations in terms of the way they used color.

The artistic life of wartime Baghdad was largely organized around the Society of the Friends of Art (*Jam‘iyya aṣḍiqā’ al-fann*), and it was through the society’s activities that Selim met the foreigners he mentions in his letter to Khaldun. Several such societies or groups (*jam‘iyyāt*) had been forming over the previous years, constituting the infrastructure for the development of civil society in post-war Iraq.¹⁹ The Society of the Friends of Art had been founded in 1941 at the initiative of the two artists, Akram Shukri and Issa Hanna, and a producer of radio programming for children named Karim Majid.²⁰ The society was formed with the permission of the Ministry of Interior, but it was supported financially by Darwish al-Haidari. It organized lectures and held annual exhibitions in a space that was public and non-commercial. These were Baghdad’s first exhibitions of modern art.

In the winter of 1942, three Polish officers who were stationed in Baghdad showed up at the Society’s second annual exhibition. Although Jarema, Czapski, and Matuszczak remained in Baghdad for no more than six months before moving on to Damascus and Beirut, the three Polish soldiers had a lasting effect on artists in Baghdad. That effect was sometimes understood to be the introduction of impressionism, and the weaning of artists off the naturalistic conventions of academic

painting, as Khaldun himself would later write.²¹ But impressionism would already have been familiar to them from the painting of Akram Shukri. The effect of the Polish soldiers was less stylistic than it was intellectual. Communicating in French, the Poles and the Iraqis each spoke a language that was not their own and managed to reconstruct the atmosphere of artistic life in Paris, a place that had in some fundamental sense ceased to exist. In a letter to Khaldun dated July 23, 1943, Selim writes exuberantly about the Polish officers and the “solid friendship formed among us that offered us the effect of Paris, as much as we could and was possible in Baghdad. I learned things from them that I hadn’t dreamed of, things that will have a very great influence on my life.”

In the same letter, Selim continues:

I’ve started to know now who the impressionists and the post-impressionists are; I know the value of the modern French school. I know what color is. I know color, and how to use colors. I’ve started to understand Cezanne and Renoir and Van Gogh and the paintings (*ṣawr*) of the great artists of the Italian schools, and Goya etc. But I’ve learned something more than this; I know now the sanctity of work. I know the value of time. We would work each day from beginning to end without a break, and in the evening we would get together in the Café Brasilia to drink French coffee and engage in our long debates. We called this café of ours “Café Dome” and we would argue about everything, and we were the last to leave the café.²²

The three Polish officers told Selim that they had studied in Paris with the post-impressionist painter Pierre Bonnard,²³ who emphasized an interpretative use of color in his work. By the time Selim was in Paris at the end of the 1930s, it seemed to him that the method of using color in which the Polish officers had trained had undergone a withdrawal:

In Paris, few people really knew that school and understood its secrets, because painting in those days was dominated by Picasso, Matisse, Braque and Dali. Paris embraced these artists full-heartedly because her heart was sick; she saw in them the best medicine for her tired and enervated nerves. This strong impulse swept everything away, and few continued to paint in the manner of Cezanne, and the greatest among them in France now is Pierre Bonnard who is considered one of the most famous “colorists” of the present era.²⁴

It has been argued that the devastation of World War I did indeed “sweep everything away,” as Selim put it, and that in France in particular the war was followed by a *rappel à l'ordre*, which prompted a return to a more orderly picture, a renewal of classicism, and a repudiation of the way of working with color characteristic of Cézanne and Bonnard, where color was not hemmed in by line or shape.²⁵ The Polish artists, however, had preserved this loose brushwork and interpretative sense of color, and in one of the circuitous paths that veins the cultural history of the postcolonial world, they would pass on to Selim a concept of color that had elsewhere been abrogated.

Up until he met the Polish officers, Selim had worked with color as a property of objects, and not as a component or element of the picture, independent of representation and available to the artist as a material to arrange at will. We can see Selim's earlier conception of color in a sampling of work made between the years 1937 and 1941: watercolors from a summer he spent with the Husri family in Souk El Gharb, a mountain resort in Lebanon, en route to Paris (figs. 11–12); in various drawings and postcards Selim sent Khaldun from Paris; and the kind of plein-air studies made by art students (figs. 13–14).

The idea that the Poles introduced to Selim was that color did not have to correlate to a quality of the physical world but could perform interpretative or compositional functions in a picture. But the Poles communicated something else to Selim that made it possible for him to see al-Wasiti's illustrations in a new light. They explained that this concept of color, released from the obligation of representation, had been inspired by the encounter of European painters with other pictorial traditions. Khaldun had been skeptical about the viability of impressionism in Iraq, because this method was based on recording subtle variations in color and light produced by a European climate that was wholly absent in Iraq.²⁶ So Selim wrote to Khaldun and explained that, in fact, such a use of color had been inspired by the East:

In every country of the world there is color, even in the land of Babam and the Eskimos. My friend, the whole world is color, even in the mud that is in front of our street, it is filled with color.

One of the things which the French painters benefited from greatly was their study of eastern painting (*al-ṣawr*



Fig. 11. Jewad Selim, untitled, 1938, watercolor on paper. Private collection, Amman. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

al-sharqiyya), a deep study into the vivid colors and how to use them. Take all of eastern painting from the Land of the Rising Sun to Africa.²⁷

After Japan was opened to trade with the West by American military force in 1853, Japanese prints circulated widely in Paris and brought about a sea change in European constructions of the picture. They inspired new forms of composition and modeling, but most importantly, the Japanese prints introduced a new concept of



Fig. 12. Jewad Selim, untitled, 1938, watercolor on paper. Private collection, Amman. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

color.²⁸ Pierre Bonnard was one of those European artists influenced by what came to be called *japonisme*.

So, not only did the Polish officers introduce Selim to a method of working with color that had fallen out of favor in the interwar period, they also oriented him according to an artistic geography in which Europe was decentered. The fact that modern artists in Paris had drawn so heavily on an artistic tradition from Asia made it possible for al-Wasiti's illustrations to be summoned into a more robust relationship with modern art. Thus, in his letter to Khaldun, Selim points to al-Wasiti's illustrations as an instance, and even a paradigm, of the use of color that could be identified with post-impressionism.

Take Yahya al-Wasiti, the greatest of the painters (*muṣawwirīn*) to appear in Iraq, which you call devoid of color—the land of the date palm (*bilād al-nakhal*)—he has eternalized it in his pictures (*ṣawrihi*) and his colors, or better yet, eternalized himself, because his pictures were different from what he sees in front of him, because he creates his pictures. I don't think you remember the picture Atta Sabri enlarged of al-Wasiti's from the collection of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. It is a picture that depicts a group of camels, and the camels of Iraq you know very well. Their color does not go beyond the color of dirt. And yet this great genius paints (*ṣawriha*) each camel in a color with regard to the color next to it.²⁹

The picture of camels Selim refers to in the letter had been one of the illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* he had seen reproduced in “Le Miroir de Bagdad” (fig. 4). Arrayed horizontally, the camels are each painted a different color and drawn in a distinctive pose; at the same time, the composition of the camels is patterned—the arch of their backs on the right, their raised necks on the left, and a forest of legs, framed on either end by the heads of two camels bending down to eat grass.

This particular *maqām* from the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* is set in Tayba, where the protagonist Abu Zayd has been posing as a religious scholar (*faqīh*), answering questions about proper ritual and social practice. For his advice, he is compensated with a “string of camels” (*dhaud*) and a singing girl (*qayna*), both of which are depicted in the illustration.³⁰ In the Arabic tradition, it was thought that animals responded to the sounds of poetry, and in fact the poetic genre of the *ḥadā'* supposedly originated in the herding of camels.³¹ What we see in the illustration, then, may be the camels moving to the sounds of poetry recited by the *qayna*.

Selim does not mention the narrative context of the *maqām*; rather, he sees the illustration as simply a picture (*ṣūra*) of actual camels. He focuses on the fact that the camels are painted in a way that is purposively different from their appearance in the phenomenological world of objects, and that difference Selim understands as an integral part of creating images. In painting the camels, al-Wasiti was free to assign whatever color he wanted to the animals, and he did so based on the distribution of color within the picture. What the illustrations modeled for Selim was color released from representation and made available as a free element in the construction of a picture.³²



Fig. 13. Jewad Selim, untitled, 1938, charcoal on paper. Private collection, Amman. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)



Fig. 14. Jewad Selim, untitled, 1940, watercolor on paper. Private collection, Amman. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

Selim's letter to Khaldun documents the consolidation of a certain concept of the picture and its construction in relation to a medieval history of manuscript illustration, framed in modernist terms. That construction, and the use of color it entails, is evident in the paintings Selim produced over the same year, in 1942 and 1943. In a painting of a brothel in Baghdad's red-light district—an area known as *al-Kallachiyya*—the colors are strong, even garish, and although they sometimes record shadow and volume, their overall effect is to create agitation, as if an invisible depth has been stirred and something hidden has been brought to the surface (fig. 15). Many of the girls who worked as prostitutes had run away from their families in the countryside in pursuit of freedom. Inevitably, their brothers would track them down in order to expiate the shame they inflicted on the family honor. In the painting, we look over the shoulder of a man in the foreground. An alley climbs vertiginously up to the left, and on the right we see the girls whose faces are almost blotted out by the very patches of color that give them visibility; rather than portraying the women's appearance, color renders their desperation.

The figure of the prostitute embodies a confrontation between the city and the tribal countryside that characterized the social life of Iraq in the first half of the twentieth century.³³ That confrontation was also embodied by the figure of the tribal sheikh frequenting the cafes of Baghdad, who would look down on the moral laxity of the city but did not hesitate to partake of its pleasures. Selim painted a portrait of this sheikh in half-length as if he were sitting under the light of a café against the backdrop of the city (fig. 16). The folds of his headdress frame his angular face, which is dominated by a long, hooked nose; it is severe, expressionless. The horizon is set high, flattening the picture. It is occupied by a symbolic cityscape composed of a palm tree and the dome and minaret of a mosque or shrine. Below, a field of ornamental shapes surrounds the figure. Some of these shapes, like the diamonds on the left and the triangles on the right, would reappear in Selim's paintings ten years later. There, however, the shapes would be clearly traced, and color would be subordinated to line.

By 1945, Selim came to question color. Writing again to Khaldun, Selim observes:

In a picture I made of Hussein, the office boy, I realized that I am not suited to be a painter, because I see one thing and

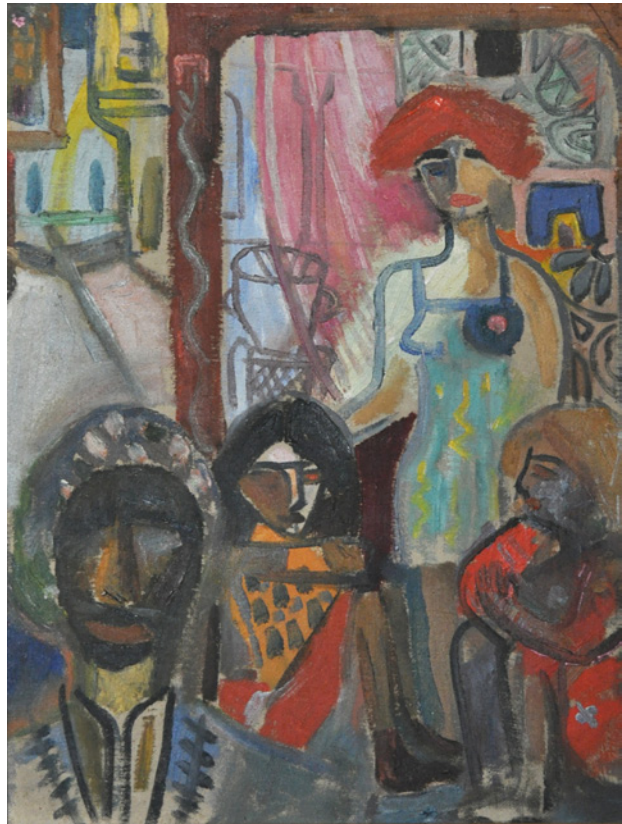


Fig. 15. Jewad Selim, *Ladies in Waiting* (*Nisā' fī al-Intizār*), 1942–43, oil on wooden board, 45 × 35 cm. Private collection, Amman. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

my brush does something else. Many times, I have come to the conclusion that I do not see colors with the strength that is required of a first-rate painter, and I don't want to be a mediocre painter. I think in terms of form and shape more than in terms of colors.³⁴

It was in fact form and shape that would dominate Selim's painting over the next fifteen years.

Even though he doubted his abilities with color, when he traveled to London at the end of the war to resume his study of art, Selim continued to explore the post-impressionist method of using color that he had been introduced to by the Polish artists. He was enrolled at the Slade School to study sculpture, but he was more interested in painting. Because his formal education was in sculpture, Selim pursued painting on his own by studying books and visiting museums.³⁵ He completed the curriculum in two years, and spent his last year in



Fig. 16. Jewad Selim, *The Sheikh*, 1942–43, oil on wooden board, 45 × 35 cm. Private collection, Amman. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)

London drawing and studying works in museum galleries.

Between his return from London in 1949 and his early death in 1961, Selim produced a body of paintings that share a distinct pictorial grammar (figs. 17–20). They are characterized by the flatness or frontality that first appeared in *The Sheikh* and *Ladies in Waiting*, but in Selim's later paintings, the picture plane seems to have been systemically tightened. Volumes are reduced to a simple geometry, and that geometry disciplines the color in the picture. Figures are modeled according to a formula—a teardrop face balanced on triangular shoulders, with a rectangular trunk and elliptical limbs. The surrounding space is never one that the figures seem to

occupy; rather, it is organized or diagrammed into patterns and shapes that may approximate architectural features but inevitably dissolve them into a kind of ornamental grill or lattice. A basic linear structure integrates figuration and composition into a single formal system. This system is governed by line, which traces shapes but never volumes. Not only does line delimit bodies, but it also registers their movements (fig. 17). The surface on which the line is drawn is neither negated, nor is it emphasized in its own right; it functions simply as a stage. This relation of line to paper, or the lack of ground, makes it possible for line to perform the double function of rendering bodies in motion and breaking up the scene into a composition of shapes that can be patterned with different colors. The paintings thus oscillate between the figurative and the compositional—and that oscillation, enabled by the relation of line to surface, imparts to the works a fabular quality.

In 1956, the Beirut-based journal *Al-Adab* asked artists in Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria about the relationship between art and modern society. Selim answered that “any artistic production that is important and good, at any time or in any place, is a *mirror* upon which is reflected the reality as it is lived.”³⁶ In the mirror of Selim's painting, Baghdad does not immediately resemble the city of the miserable that it was at the time—starved by inflation and stagnant wages, governed under emergency law and deprived of civil liberties.³⁷ But that city is nevertheless refracted through the fabular prism that crystalized in his painting.

At an exhibition in February 1957, held under the patronage of the king at the Mansur Club, Selim showed a painting entitled *The Gardener* (*al-Bustānī*) (fig. 18). In this portrait, the fabular construction of the picture is disrupted by the pressure of the real. It is as if anguish has given the face its definition, thickening the paint that traces the figure's eyes. His skin appears to be browned by the sun, whose light falls on the surrounding quadrants, imparting to them a gentle pastel color; and his outsized hands are swollen beyond proportion by manual labor. In a review published in *Al-Adab*, Selim's former teacher 'Atta Sabri recognized that “the dark face is the result of exhausting labor day after day, and his gaze expresses perseverance in the face of hardship, and his furrowed brow is a sign of hard work. With his right hand he makes an entreating gesture, and with



Fig. 17. Jewad Selim, *Baghdādiyyāt*, 1956, mixed media on board, 98.5 × 169 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. (Photo: Saleem al-Bahloly)



Fig. 18. Jewad Selim, *The Gardener (al-Bustānī)*, 1957, oil on canvas, 62 × 52 cm. Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. (Photo: Meem Gallery)

his other hand he holds up a pink flower pot.”³⁸ The headscarf may mark the gardener as a migrant from the south, one of the hundreds of thousands who were fleeing the plantations that had emerged over the previous century, where tribes had been transformed into a population of peasants employed by the sheikh Selim painted in 1943 (fig. 16). They lived in slums on the outskirts of the city, and they were major participants in the protests organized by the Iraqi Communist Party. The enlarged hands in the painting prefigure something that one worker would tell a minister two years later: “Lights are going to be put out tonight in the city...we are going to feel people’s hands, and all those who do not have rough hands are going to be butchered.”³⁹

The pleasures that Selim depicts in paintings like *Two Boys* are a negative image of the hard realities of life in Baghdad (fig. 19). It is because life is bitter that the watermelon tastes so sweet, such that a picture of two boys eating watermelon becomes an image of the ordinary miseries of life. “It is a picture overflowing with compassion,” wrote Ihsan al-Mala’ika in a review. “It arouses noble feelings of sympathy and compassion. Standing in the front are two children, dressed in shabby clothes,



Fig. 19. Jewad Selim, *Two Boys (Ṣabyān)*, 1957, oil on canvas, approx. 60 × 60 cm. Collection of Rifat Chadirji. (Photo: Waddah Faris)



Fig. 20. Jewad Selim, *Girl, Bird, and Cage*, 1958, oil on canvas, approx. 80 × 100 cm. Collection of Rifat Chadirji. (Photo: Waddah Faris)

eating voraciously some summer fruit. The painter made the slices of watermelon in their hands as big as the hunger of their empty stomachs, just as he gave the slices a pink color in order to express the extent of their

delight in the cold and soothing watermelon in the middle of summer.⁴⁰ The fabular character of the painting, produced by the integration of figuration and composition into a single formal system governed by line, functions, it seems, to manifest misery in delight. It is this delight that enables us to see misery. By observing the compassion and sympathy aroused by the painting, Mala'ika's review suggests that the misery of others, in its raw form, is distancing. It is the transfiguration of misery into the delights of the poor, rather than its direct representation, that makes it intelligible to us.

This transfiguration of misery into delight is enabled by the pictorial concept that Selim first encountered on the pages of *L'Illustration* in 1941—a focus on the habits and customs of everyday life, a compositional use of color, and the linear construction of an image. But beyond Selim's own practice, the enduring effect of the rediscovery of al-Wasiti's illustrations was not pictorial; the distinctive integration of the decorative and the figurative that Selim revived from al-Wasiti by way of Eustache de Lorey's commentary, using the models of Picasso and Matisse, was shared only by a few artists—Shakir Hassan Al Said, Selim's brother Nazar, and his sister Naziha. The lasting effect of the re-encounter with al-Wasiti's illustrations was instead to establish a historiographic framework in which modern art could be pursued as a “renewal” of a lost history of painting. The debates and conversations of the wartime years had instilled in Selim a desire to establish an intellectual foundation for the practice of art in Baghdad, and to that end, in 1951, he formed an art group called the Baghdad Group for Modern Art (*Jamā'a Baghdād lil-fann al-ḥadīth*). Thus, the group issued a manifesto that sought to conceptualize art practice for a general public unfamiliar with it, and that invoked the history of painting represented by al-Wasiti's illustrations—a history named the Baghdad School—as a basis for developing modern art in Baghdad. In this way, the practice of art was not organized according to the problem of identity that burdened the practice of art in other parts of the colonial world with the labor of difference, but according to a historiographic logic that related modern artistic practice to a lost history that lay on the other side of a gap or rupture in time.

THE BAGHDAD SCHOOL

During the three years Selim was in London, a new political culture had emerged in Baghdad that re-shaped the world in which Selim would seek to locate the artwork when he returned. The establishment of the Iraqi state in 1920 was accompanied by the emergence of a new space for political argumentation and debate.⁴¹ But the robust civil society that had formed in the 1920s and 1930s was eclipsed by the re-occupation of Iraq by Britain during World War II. After the war ended, the regent Abdullah took steps to resuscitate political life in the country, inviting applications for the formation of political parties and the establishment of newspapers. That invitation authorized a field of political action, but the chain of events that followed—beginning with workers' strikes against the Iraq Petroleum Company in the north, and earth-shaking demonstrations against the renewal of the Portsmouth Treaty that structured Iraq's relationship with Britain—startled the government, which proceeded to limit the field of political action it had initially authorized by imposing numerous restrictions on publications, party activity, and public assembly. Still, that field grew with every demonstration, even as those demonstrations were put down by force.

By forming the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, Selim sought to locate art practice in the new public sphere that was taking shape in Baghdad. Thus, the group announced its formation in the newspaper of the National Democratic Party; and it was in the pages of that newspaper—which was founded by Kamil Chadirji, a family friend and a former mayor of Baghdad—that Selim published an essay giving a name to modern art practice: *taṣwīr*, which he defined as a form of speech addressed to the public.⁴²

After World War II ended, the Society of the Friends of Art gradually petered out until it finally dissolved in 1948. But its organizational form—the *jam'īya*—had inspired the creation of various spaces where artists would come together, though none of these spaces was public in the sense that the Baghdad Group would be. For example, Akram Shukri opened a short-lived atelier, and Hafidh Droubi began holding a “free studio” (*al-marsam al-ḥurr*), which functioned as a salon for writers, artists, and theater directors from 1946 through the

early 1960s. Another group of artists, mostly students at the Institute of Fine Arts, met at the house of Faiq Hassan, a painting instructor at the Institute.⁴³ Selim, himself an instructor of sculpture, frequented Hassan's gatherings.

In 1943, these artists began to take trips on Fridays, at first to the orchards and fields in al-Jadariyya, which was then on the outskirts of the city, where the University of Baghdad would be built a few years later. There, camping in the orchards belonging to a man known as Haj Naji, they would paint, discussing what they saw and sought to reproduce on their canvases.⁴⁴ These excursions continued throughout the 1940s and nurtured among their participants a sense of collectivity, which would crystalize into an identity towards the end of the decade.

One day in February 1947, in light of these painting trips to the pseudo-wilderness, Faiq Hassan referred to the group as “Société Primitive” in a gesture of self-mockery and self-distancing. The activities of the group perplexed onlookers, and at some point, the word *bidā'īyyīn* was used to describe their activities. Thus, Hassan was proposing that the group assume the identity that had been given to them. What started as an inside joke became a name for something that was coming into existence. That October the group of artists ventured beyond the outskirts of Baghdad to the mountains of Kurdistan in the north of the country, where they hiked and painted scenes from the villages around Haj 'Amran in watercolor: bridges over rivers lined with walnut and oak trees, waterfalls, and peasants working in fields of wheat. They took other trips to the north, to towns near the Iranian border. Upon his return to Baghdad in 1949, Selim reconnected with this circle of artists that he had been part of before leaving for London, joining them on one of these trips.

Throughout these years, the artists did not exhibit the paintings they made on their excursions. But in October 1950, an architect who had recently returned to Baghdad from studying at Harvard hung Selim's work on the white walls of his modernist home and opened it to public view for a period of two months. Inspired by that exhibition, the artists of the self-stylized *Société Primitive* decided to arrange a show of their own. So for three days, they showed their paintings at the new home of 'Abd al-Aziz al-Qassab, who had been a minister of

the interior in the 1920s and 1930s and was the father of one of the artists.⁴⁵ In order to provide a framework for the exhibition, the artists presented themselves as “the Pioneers” (*al-Rū'ād*), though they continued to use the designation “SP” as a shorthand.

Despite the fact that many people were invited to the show, the Pioneers' exhibition of one hundred and fifty paintings was nonetheless private, not only in the sense that it was held in the home of a private individual, but also in the sense that the painting itself was private, made without any idea of a public in mind. Since the time painting was introduced by the Ottoman officers, it had been a private practice, even when paintings were exhibited at shows organized by the Society of the Friends of Art during the war. It was in order to move painting into a public space that Selim broke with the Pioneers a few months afterward and founded the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. When the group held its inaugural exhibition in April 1951, it did so not in a private home but at the Museum of National Costumes (*maḥḥaf al-āzyā'*)—an institution under the supervision of the Directorate General of Antiquities, and where there had been plans to build an annex that would house a national collection of work as early as 1941.⁴⁶

While the creation of the Baghdad Group was most likely inspired by the type of art group that emerged among the avant-garde in Europe, it inherited the organizational form of the *jam'iyya* from the Pioneers, and before that, the Society of the Friends of Art. However, the Baghdad Group went beyond these earlier models of associational activity by organizing themselves around the artistic problem of establishing a modern art in Iraq, and by explicitly locating the practice of art in the public sphere that had been taking shape since 1945. Thus the group issued a manifesto that was read aloud at the opening of their inaugural exhibition by a student of Selim's named Shaker Hassan Al Said. As a speech act addressed to an anonymous public, its very proclamation could be seen as clearing a space for the artwork in the public sphere. More than that, the manifesto posited a set of terms for organizing the practice of art. It gave this practice a name, outlined a method, and erected it upon the foundation of a distinct history.

The Arabic word introduced in the manifesto to name the practice of art was *fann al-taṣwīr*.⁴⁷ The word *taṣwīr*

has a long history, with a shifting conceptual grammar; but applied to modern art, it meant something like the creation of an image that does not produce a likeness so much as generate an intelligible form. The manifesto acknowledged that “the public (*al-jumhūr*) here knows nothing of *fann al-taṣwīr*,” and it made an argument for the kind of intervention *taṣwīr* could make in the political context of modern Baghdad, “as a measure of the awakening of the country (*yaqāzat al-bilād*) and its handling of the problem of being truly free.”⁴⁸ The language of awakening (*al-yaqāza*) was in wide circulation during the 1940s and 1950s, and the manifesto adopted it, claiming that “a new trend in *fann al-taṣwīr* will offer itself as a solution to the problem by creating a modern consciousness (*yaqāza 'aṣriyya*).”⁴⁹ Although I translate *yaqāza 'aṣriyya* as “modern consciousness,” the word *yaqāza* refers to the state of cultural awakening triggered by the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the Arabic-speaking peoples' rediscovery of a forgotten history. It was in the context of that historical rediscovery—what is sometimes known as the *Nahda*, and what George Antonius called the “Arab Awakening” in his 1938 book by that name, referring to a poem by Ibrahim al-Yaziji—that the manifesto sought to position the artwork.

In regard to the broader context of cultural renewal, the manifesto explained that the practice of *fann al-taṣwīr* would “follow the path laid out by the artist of the thirteenth century” (i.e., al-Wasiti). This inheritance provided a precedent but also dictated the terms of artistic practice. It meant that “the modern Iraqi artist bears the weight of both the culture of his time (*thaqāfat al-'aṣr*) and the imprint (*tāb'a*) of the local civilization.”⁵⁰ The same problem of how to introduce difference into a modern art form confronted artists throughout the postcolonial world. But in Baghdad that problem acquired a peculiar cast, because here difference had the function of restoring a link to an earlier history that had previously been severed. Thus, the manifesto recognized that, “on the one hand, a modern artistic style is the core of the idea we will realize,” but that, “on the other hand, our efforts will be in vain as long as we have not given it the mark of renewal (*al-tajdīd*) and innovation (*al-ibdā'*).” That mark of renewal could be made, the manifesto proposed, by “introducing new

elements (*'anāṣir*) into modern styles" that would create "the unique character of our civilization (*al-shakhṣiyya al-fadha li-ḥaḍāratnā*)."⁵¹

The manifesto invoked Picasso as a paradigm for the modern artist. To these artists in Baghdad, Picasso demonstrated the capacity of modern art to open itself up to other traditions; he made it possible not only to conceive of difference within the artwork, but also to see difference as an essential component of modern practice.

Picasso, the artist of the time, who has become part of the basis upon which modern art (*al-fann al-ḥadīth*) stands, would not have gotten to where he is without passing through stages which revealed to him how to search for new elements in their sources. It was not for nothing that he sought out the primitive art of Andalusia, then African art, and then the work of impressionist writers as the first steps leading him to what came to be called the Cubist school.⁵²

This interpretation of Picasso was taken from a 1938 book on Picasso by Gertrude Stein. In that book, Stein made a claim about the genealogy of Picasso's art that Selim, so it is said, would repeat.⁵³ Even though Picasso was introduced to African sculpture by Matisse, Stein explained that it was his natural inheritance as a Spaniard:

After all one must never forget that African sculpture is not naïve, not at all, it is an art that is very, very conventional, based upon tradition and its tradition is a tradition derived from Arab culture. The Arabs created both civilization and cultures for the negroes and therefore African art which was naïve and exotic for Matisse was for Picasso, a Spaniard, a thing that was natural, direct and civilized.⁵⁴

She went on to describe a "second rose period" during which

there was painting which was writing which had to do with the Spanish character, that is to say the Saracen character... for Picasso, a Spaniard, the art of writing, that is to say calligraphy, is an art. After all the Spaniards and the Russians are the only Europeans who are really a little Oriental and this shows in the art of Picasso, not as anything exotic but as something quite profound. It is completely assimilated, of course he is a Spaniard, and a Spaniard can assimilate the Orient without imitating it, he can know Arab things without being seduced, he can repeat African things without being deceived.⁵⁵

If Picasso was taken as a model for art practice, it was not just because he had demonstrated how one could

incorporate difference into modern art; it was also because the difference that he incorporated was one that modern artists in Baghdad could in some sense claim as their own, inasmuch as his art seemed to stand within an Arab genealogy. So the manifesto identified "a method (*manhajjan*) that we have to explore, requiring on the one hand that we become aware of current styles and on the other that we discern elements (*'anāṣir*) which will nourish our works."⁵⁶ In Baghdad, the various styles of European modernism appeared outside the specific histories in which they had evolved, and were seen as equally available as devices and means of representation. The task of the modern artist working in Baghdad was to combine devices drawn from these styles with formal elements from the Iraqi context.

Cubism is the name of an art movement that revolves around an analytic deconstruction of the perspectival picture, in which bodies and objects are arranged in geometric space. The lattice of rectilinear lines and sharp angles that Cubism brought to the surface of the picture was understood in Baghdad less as the undoing of illusionism than as a distinctly modern grammar of the image. What the Baghdad Group proposed was to extract motifs—like the triangular patterns of rugs woven in the south of the country (*bisat*), or architectural ornaments like the crescent that crowns the domes of mosques—and fuse them with the Cubist grammar. As employed by Selim and the artists gathered around him, that grammar functioned not to reduce volumes but to diagram the picture plane in ways that collapsed the figurative and the decorative into a linear system. Although the manifesto did not identify specific elements, it organized them in terms of what it called, in a very speculative sense, *al-shakhṣiyya al-maḥalliyya*, or the local character: "We have to demonstrate the extent of our understanding of western styles and then our consciousness of the local character (*al-shakhṣiyya al-maḥalliyya*). It is this character, of which most of us today are ignorant, that will correspond to the place of others on the scene of international thought."⁵⁷ It seems likely that the peculiar language of character (*al-shakhṣiyya*) was adapted from Stein's account of Picasso.

Many years later, the Baghdad Group would be criticized for invoking the "local" rather than the "Arab."⁵⁸ That criticism came as artists responded to the defeat of the Arab states in a war against Israel in 1967 and were

attempting to locate art practice outside the framework of the state, both with regard to their individual practice and by establishing a set of initiatives in an effort to bring together artists from different Arab countries. But the invocation of the “local” in the 1951 manifesto occurred at a time when the Middle East was still transitioning from the imperial order of the Ottoman era to a new system of nation-states. Iraq’s ruling class had been educated in Turkish—Selim himself was born in Ankara—and the history recovered by the *Nahda* was as new as the technologies of modern governance. The word “local” was used to name an identity that was still in the process of coming into existence, and that had a historical as well as a geographic sense capable of joining into a single cultural unit the discontinuous succession of civilizations in Iraq and the concrete forms embedded in everyday life. In this sense, “local” was another term for difference, but one that was organized less by the framework of the nation-state than by the history that al-Wasiti’s illustrations represented.

The manifesto of the Baghdad Group employed the vocabulary of awakening in order to locate art practice in the context of a broad cultural renewal, and it outlined a method to accomplish this renewal. But its most consequential discursive act was to publicize what would become a shared concept for delineating the field of art practice. The manifesto announced “the birth of a new school of painting (*madrasa jadida fi fann al-taswir*), whose origins derive from the civilization of our time, with the styles and doctrines it has brought about, and from the unique imprint (*tāb’a*) of eastern civilization.”⁵⁹ The concept of a school functioned discursively to base the practice of art on a history without it being determined by that history. This proclamation was a call “to re-erect the great field of painting that collapsed after the emergence of the school of al-Wasiti—or the school of Mesopotamia—in the thirteenth century” and “to restore the chain of transmission that was interrupted by the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols.”⁶⁰

But something called the Baghdad School had never existed. There was in fact a practice of manuscript illustration in medieval Baghdad, one that had inherited and evolved from a Byzantine tradition in the pre-Islamic period. The city had been founded in the eighth century by the Abbasid dynasty, and within a period of fifty

years Baghdad became a center of learning, where Greek philosophy was translated into Arabic, providing a platform for scientific inquiry. Many of the Greek manuscripts were illustrated, and as these were translated into Arabic, so were the illustrations reproduced. Thus did the enterprise of translation, inspired by the turn to ancient sciences, give rise to a practice of manuscript illustration, initially to reproduce the illustrations in Greek originals like *De Materia Medica* by the first-century physician Dioscorides, and then later to provide illustrations for new works like *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* written and illustrated by al-Jazari (d. 1206) at the turn of the thirteenth century.⁶¹

The production of illustrated manuscripts in Baghdad remained largely in the Byzantine iconographic tradition, whether because these skills were passed down from father to son, typically within families of Byzantine origin, or because Arab illustrators imitated the models of Greek manuscripts. But in the thirteenth century, formal features began to appear in the illustrations that cannot be reduced to Byzantine precedents. It was at this time that Yahya al-Wasiti, a descendant of a Byzantine family that had converted to Islam some generations before, signed his name to his illustrations of the *Maqāmāt*.⁶²

It is not clear what factors may have ended the efflorescence of art and science presided over by the late Abbasids, but the Mongol conquest of the Middle East in the thirteenth century laid ruin to the city of Baghdad. Though the conquest did not totally destroy Baghdad, and the city even remained the winter capital of the Mongols for some time, it initiated a new political geography. Gradually the city’s manuscript painters dispersed to different parts of Iran, and any memory of a practice of painting in Baghdad faded.⁶³ It was not until the nineteenth century that the history of painting in Baghdad was rediscovered, when the curiosity of a dragoman (or translator) stationed at the French embassy to the Sublime Porte in Istanbul brought to light a cache of manuscripts from their centuries-long repose.

MANUSCRIT 5847

The manuscript containing al-Wasiti’s illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* was one of hundreds of manuscripts

that Charles Henri-Auguste Schefer (1820–98) acquired during the years he spent in the Ottoman empire. Schefer is one of those minor historical figures, called *la seconde* by Raymond Schwab, whose activities, though little known, proved foundational for cultural history.⁶⁴

Schefer's father was from the Duchy of Nassau, in the German-speaking Rhineland, and moved to Paris to work as a kind of accountant under the emperor Napoleon, managing the *liste civile*, or the money that the state doled out to the aristocracy. Charles was born in Paris in 1820 and studied at two schools that had been founded in the context of France's relationship with the Ottoman empire, but whose histories were complicated by the events of the French Revolution. The Lycée Louis-le-Grand—where Charles Baudelaire was a classmate of Schefer's—was a Jesuit college that initially functioned as “a nursery for young men from the Middle East, Greeks and Armenians for the most part, intended to import French ideas to their countries of origin and to serve as assistants to Catholic missions.”⁶⁵ It provided a model for establishing a second school, L'École des jeunes de langues, to train French dragomans intended to replace the Greeks and Armenians as France's representatives in the East. Students would enter this school at the age of nine or ten to study the three primary languages of the Islamic world: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. However, by the time Charles graduated from Louis-le-Grand and entered L'École des jeunes de langues, enrollment at the school had dropped so precipitously due to anxieties stirred by the French Revolution that he was one of only three or four students who were taught by three professors, among them the preeminent orientalist scholar, Étienne Quatremère.

In 1849, Schefer set out for the Ottoman empire, where he worked as a dragoman, translating official correspondence at first in the provincial cities of Beirut, Jerusalem, Smyrna, and Alexandria, and then finally in the capital of Istanbul.⁶⁶ In 1857, he left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an appointment to the chair of Persian, previously held by his teacher Quatremère, at L'École des langues orientales vivantes in Paris, a school founded in 1796 to take over the function of L'École des jeunes des langues. Its establishment was part of what has been called the Oriental Renaissance—the European encounter with the textual traditions of Asia, beginning with Iran and opening up into India, that in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries released European thought from the confines of its Christian history and the legacy of the classical civilizations of the Mediterranean.⁶⁷ L'École des langues orientales vivantes was established under the directorship of Louis-Mathieu Langlès and was subsequently directed by Silvestre de Sacy, and then by Charles Schefer himself. It is within the context of the Oriental Renaissance that the re-discovery of al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* occurred and must be inscribed.

It is not clear where exactly Schefer found the copy of the *Maqāmāt* illustrated by al-Wasiti. He acquired hundreds of manuscripts during his time in the Ottoman empire, and by different means. While serving in Istanbul, Schefer played a key role in negotiating an end to the Crimean War, and out of appreciation for his services, it is said, Sultan Abdülmecid opened up his library to the young orientalist and invited him to take his pick of any number of manuscripts.⁶⁸ Some of the manuscripts in Schefer's collection came from Iran, others from Lahore and Calcutta in India, where he had buyers.⁶⁹ Schefer also seems to have known several locations in Syria where notable manuscripts could be found.⁷⁰

Wherever the *Maqāmāt* manuscript surfaced, it wound up among 790 other manuscripts owned by Schefer in a library of some 13,000 volumes housed in a fourteenth-century castle just outside the town of Chambéry in southwestern France. There it was surrounded by decorative objects from across the Islamic world: copper lamps from Damascus, bronze candlesticks from Egypt, ceramic dishes from Iran, prayer rugs, and even a glass mosque lamp from the fourteenth century. After Schefer died in 1898, his collection of manuscripts was acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale. At the time of the acquisition, al-Wasiti's illustrations were known to a very small circle of scholars; in a letter to the director general of the Bibliothèque nationale, the president of la Société asiatique described them as “the pearl of the collection.”⁷¹

There were, however, no exhibitions at the Bibliothèque nationale between 1908 and 1924. So it was not until 1925 that the *Maqāmāt* manuscript was shown to the public for the first time, as part of *L'Exposition orientale*, an exhibition which showcased a survey of manuscripts, prints, and maps from across Asia.⁷² There,

manuscript 5847 was put on display, opened to a double-page illustration of a sermon being delivered in a mosque—the same illustration that would later be reproduced in the magazine *L'Illustration*. The exhibition catalogue outlined the history of manuscript illustration in the Islamic world, but it offered little more than a cursory trajectory of the practice, running from Syria to Baghdad to a cluster of sites across Iran.⁷³ Eight hundred years of a pictorial tradition were condensed into four pages. The exhibition was criticized for the absence of any formal interpretation that would distinguish the various illustrated manuscripts from each other.⁷⁴ So when the manuscripts were shown again at the Bibliothèque nationale in an exhibition called *Les Arts de l'Iran: L'Ancienne Perse et Bagdad* in 1938, the exhibition's curators, Eustache de Lorey and Henry Corbin, elaborated a typology, grouping the manuscripts into schools—that of Behzad, the Timurid school, the schools at Tabriz and at Shiraz, and the Baghdad school.

Les Arts de l'Iran: L'Ancienne Perse et Bagdad was an enormous exhibition that displayed a variety of artifacts from historical Iran, a geography that extended from the Mediterranean to China, and that, as the introduction noted, was vanishing with the establishment of the new Iranian nation-state. From museums across France, it brought together metalwork, ceramics, textiles, and miniatures dating from the third to the eighteenth century. At the center of the exhibition was the manuscript containing al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Harīrī*, presented as the masterpiece of the "Baghdad School."

This was not the first time that a typology of schools had been proposed for illustrated manuscripts from the Islamic world. In a 1903 article published in *Burlington Magazine*, the librarian in the department of manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale, Edgar Blochet, wrote that "the world of Islam produced schools of which each had its own methods and types."⁷⁵ He singled out al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt* as the "most important of [the Arab] manuscripts" for their "life-like manner," which elevates them "above the conventional commonplace level" that characterizes "Arab manuscripts."⁷⁶ Blochet did not, however, speak of a Baghdad School, and he regarded even al-Wasiti's illustrations as "far from possessing the merit of the miniatures that adorn the Persian manuscripts."⁷⁷ He focused,

rather, on "the three great schools of Persia [Mongolian, Timurid, and Sefevaen]," holding that "the masterpieces of Mussulman painting are to be sought among miniatures executed at Herat and Samarkand in the fifteenth-century."⁷⁸

The idea of a Baghdad School seems to have been first introduced in a book written by Ernst Kühnel in 1922, where it referred to the practice of illustrating manuscripts that emerged in the court of the Abbasids in the ninth century.⁷⁹ Kühnel speculated that that practice had originated in the context of an explosion in book production, and at the conjuncture of two elements in the Abbasid administration: the Nestorian Christians employed as bureaucrats, who were familiar with the pictorial traditions of Greek antiquity; and followers of the prophet Mani, who accorded a special significance to painting. The "school" that formed at this conjuncture was forced to relocate to Cairo before returning to Baghdad in the eleventh century, when it finally came into its own.

Kühnel spoke of a Greek air to the early illustrations "in the choppiness of the clothing and comportment," yet he noted that "in the scarcity of narrative detail, in the vigorous coloring, in the regard for the ornamental and the opposition to conventions, they are already going their own way."⁸⁰ In reference to al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt* in particular, Kühnel pointed to the composition of figures on the page—"the grouping of animals, persons, banners and instruments into a single, closed group"—and to the "brilliant play of color in the folds of the clothing" and "calm surfaces enlivened by decorative detailing."⁸¹ At no point did Kühnel define the Baghdad School by the lifelikeness of its illustrations.

The Baghdad School, as it came to be known both to modern artists in Baghdad and to historians of Islamic art, is largely the invention of Eustache de Lorey, who re-conceived it as part of the typology of manuscript illustration, but with a different basis than anything that came before. Rather than being based on similarity of style or proximity of date, the Baghdad School was conceived within a peculiar historiography of painting, according to which an art form develops linearly towards the achievement of realism and then atrophies into stylized decadence.

In the exhibition catalogue for *Les Arts de l'Iran: L'Ancienne Perse et Bagdad*, de Lorey characterized the Baghdad School as the culmination of a history of painting that had originated in formulae inherited from the artistic traditions of Byzantium and Iran in the seventh and eighth centuries, and that evolved its own artistic profile by overcoming those formulae and attaining a particular kind of realism. This was not simply a history of manuscript illustration but a history of painting that crossed media. Manuscript illustration was thus placed in a genealogy that extended back, not to the tradition of Greek illustrated manuscripts, but to the mosaics that adorn the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque in Damascus, to the frescoes on the walls of a bath complex now in Jordan, called Qusayr Amra, and frescoes discovered on the walls of palaces in the Abbasid capital of Samarra. The Baghdad School marked the moment when the Byzantine and Sasanid conventions adopted in these mosaics and frescoes had been surpassed, and a distinctively Islamic art came into existence: "What appears to us with the miniatures of the Baghdad School is not an art that is still figuring itself out but a perfected technique that has already mastered the different traditions it has been influenced by."⁸² Both the technical mastery of the artistic legacy that Islam inherited, and the surpassing of that legacy, are evident in the "realistic character" of the forms that appear in the illustrated manuscripts of the Baghdad School, amidst the decorative construction that persisted from the Byzantine tradition: "The art that develops there is distinguished by the realistic character of its forms and by the almost ornamental character of the landscape. The composition reflects decorative intentions of great refinement, and the representation of space is purely linear."⁸³

In keeping with Kühnel's historiography, Baghdad here is not the name of a city but a metonym for the civilization and empire where this blossoming of painting occurred. According to de Lorey, "The Baghdad School represents the tendencies of Islamic painting at the moment of its blossoming, with the last Abbasid caliphs, a brilliant civilization with Baghdad at its center. It is at Baghdad that the successors of Muhammad had their capital, that artists, writers, and historians came together, that the culture and intellectual forces of the

time in Islam and Iran find their best representatives."⁸⁴ Thus, the manuscripts belonging to the Baghdad School need not have been made in Baghdad. "Even if the illustrated manuscripts of this period are not all from Baghdad, they all speak to an art that shined brightest in Baghdad. They attest to the success and perfection of the models created by Abbasid workshops."⁸⁵ The Baghdad School was a historiographic construct employed to mark the point at which a painting that could be called Islamic came into existence, beyond its Byzantine and Sasanid origins.

Of the illustrated manuscripts grouped together under the name of the Baghdad School—which included illustrated copies of the fables *Kalīla wa Dimna*, the ancient Greek pharmacological guide *De Materia Medica*, and the engineering treatise *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices*, as well as the Gospels and the Syriac liturgy—de Lorey identified the manuscript containing al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, known by the ascension number *manuscrit 5847*, as "the most remarkable" because, "instead of submitting to traditional formulas, accepting without modification the patterns of Christian or Sasanid art, [al-Wasiti] is inspired by what he sees, he takes as models the familiar scenes of Muslim life that he observes, and he takes from the charming work of Hariri not narrative images (*des images livresques*) but tableaux whose scenes of everyday life provide him with the subject [of his paintings] and their elements."⁸⁶ Although the text may provide the paintings with their subjects, their rendering, de Lorey claimed, was informed by the observation of life. That observation of life included not only an interest in "the customs of Islam in the thirteenth century," but also an attention to the ways in which the human face is animated by an emotional life that is singular to each individual. "Not only is [the art of al-Wasiti] content to construct extremely precise details, not only does it concern itself with apprehending life in all its complexity and according to all its accidents, but it also knows how to interpret and represent the finest psychological nuances, and it makes characters whose proportions are not true to life nevertheless human and extremely animated."⁸⁷ It was by lifting his head up from the text, as it were, and studying the world around him, that al-Wasiti had been able to break through the

inherited formulae. It was inconceivable to de Lorey that the vitality of the illustrations might belong to the rarified world brought into existence by narrative, through the pattern of detail and the reduction and amplification effected by words. Instead, he understood that flicker of life, noted by Blochet before him, as the result of a particular relationship to the world that made the illustrations not miniatures but paintings:

Because of the variety of themes to be met there, because of the importance of the compositions that adjust to a diverse reality, [the illustrations] are proof that they belong less to the art of the miniaturist than to the art of the painter. They are realistic paintings (*tableaux véritables*) that go beyond the book they comment on, because with their soft colors, tonalities that vary subtly, they tend above all to illustrate life itself.⁸⁸

De Lorey had adopted the idea of a Baghdad School, first introduced by Ernst Kühnel, in order to group together the illustrated manuscripts produced in the Abbasid period, reconceptualizing it to name a kind of realism that appeared over against the decorative forms of Byzantine art. Selim had a copy of the exhibition catalogue for *Les Arts de l'Iran* in his studio;⁸⁹ and in his paintings we can identify the same configuration de Lorey identified in al-Wasiti's illustrations—a representation of life erupting amidst an ornamental composition, even if it was only by way of Picasso and Matisse that that distinctive formula which appeared in the thirteenth century could be reactivated in the twentieth.

The historiography of Islamic painting that appeared in *Les Arts de l'Iran*, with its emphasis on the integration of realism and the decorative, had been anticipated by articles de Lorey had written and lectures he had given as early as 1933.⁹⁰ But de Lorey turned to the study of illustrated manuscripts after having spent almost a decade in Damascus, where he had overseen the renovation and excavation of several archaeological sites dating to the first centuries of Islam, when the encounter of Islam with the Byzantine world and its artistic traditions first occurred. After returning to Paris, de Lorey was a regular at the city's galleries, and was sufficiently plugged in to the modern art scene to curate an exhibition of modern French painting in the United States in 1933. It was in that context, between his archaeological career in Syria and his involvement with modern painting in Paris, that

de Lorey's conceptualization of the Baghdad School, with its emphasis on the integration of realism and the decorative, was forged.

Born in 1875, in the town of Évreux, France, Victor Eustache de Lorey's earliest interests seem to have been in music.⁹¹ He studied composition at the Conservatoire de Paris with Émile Pessard, and then at the Conservatorium der Musik in Cologne with Franz Wüllner.⁹² Perhaps at the encouragement of his father, Victor Eustache, an industrialist who had served as the French ambassador to Brazil, he spent two to three years in Tehran as a junior member of the French legation to the Persian court. During his time in Tehran, between 1900 and 1902, de Lorey wrote a few ethnographic essays that were published in French magazines.⁹³ He had by this time decided to adopt his mother's surname—Lorey—but he kept a first initial, signing his writing as “W. Eustache de Lorey.” He later collaborated with the British writer Douglas Sladen on an ethnography of daily life in Iran; by 1907, the year the book was published, he had dropped the W.⁹⁴ It is possible that de Lorey's tendency to see al-Wasiti's illustrations as “tableaux des mœurs” can be traced to his own ethnographic sensibility, nurtured by his years in Iran. In any case, de Lorey's time in Iran seems to have generated an interest in the East that he would develop over the following years.

After returning in Paris in 1903, de Lorey spent his time writing music and moving in the pre-war salon world of aristocrats and artists famously described by Marcel Proust. In fact, at least once, he attended the same party as Charles Ephrussi, the inspiration for Proust's character Charles Swann.⁹⁵ In March 1903, the Baroness du Mesnil de Saint-Front hosted the performance of a song de Lorey had composed entitled *Dans le calme des nuits*—the newspaper *Le Figaro* appraised him as a “brilliant composer”⁹⁶—and in 1905, the baroness hosted the performance of a ballet written and composed by de Lorey in collaboration with Adrien Piazzzi. Entitled *Les Jardin des Roses*, the ballet dramatized in three scenes the story of the Persian poet Saadi's pursuit of Leila.⁹⁷ His compositions were performed not only in aristocratic salons but also in public venues. In June 1904, the tenor Angiolo Bendinelli sang several of his songs at La Salle Hoche.⁹⁸ De Lorey worked with Herman Bemberg on the score for an opera, *Leila*, which set to

music a poem written by Jules Bois, a noted translator of Persian poetry. The score incorporated a number of musical themes derived from popular Iranian music that de Lorey had noted down during his time in Tehran. “These themes,” de Lorey told *Le Figaro*,

have a particular character that we don’t find anywhere else. Certainly, there exists an organization of notes that is Persian (*un mode musical persan*), which is related to an Arab harmony but that is also essentially different, as different as ancient Greek harmonies are from modern Oriental ones. There was someone named El Farabi who, studying Arab tunes, was the father of Persian music, music that, elsewhere, remains at the level of popular tradition and that no one has yet made an effort to notate. Bemberg and I have tried to do that, without wanting to go further than the act of reconstruction required.⁹⁹

The opera was first performed at Bemberg’s apartment in 1911, and later at the l’Opéra de Monte-Carlo in 1914.¹⁰⁰ According to Bois, whose poetry was paired with the music, “Paris has been crazy for all things Persian...the soul of this Orient—refined, ardent, passionate, dreamy—has not yet been revealed, most of all on the stage.”¹⁰¹

De Lorey’s whereabouts during World War I remain unclear, but by April 1921 he was excavating a Phoenician site at Umm al-‘Amad, south of Tyre, as part of an archaeological team sent by the École du Louvre, likely with the financial support of Edmond de Rothschild, whom de Lorey knew from the pre-war salon days.¹⁰² At the end of the war, Syria and other Ottoman provinces were occupied by French and British forces, and in April 1920, the two governments met in San Remo to decide the fate of these provinces. They came to an agreement according to which Syria and Iraq were to be divided into two mandates: Palestine and Iraq would be under British rule, and Lebanon and Syria would be under the French. It so happened that the Higher Commissioner appointed to govern Syria and Lebanon—General Henri Gouraud—had a personal interest in archaeology, and in January 1921 he worked with l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres to create *la Mission archéologique permanente*, which consisted of teams assigned to excavate and renovate sites throughout Syria and Lebanon.¹⁰³ It was as part of one of those teams that de Lorey initially arrived in Syria. In October 1922, when Gouraud

established L’Institut français d’archéologie et d’art musulmans, he appointed de Lorey director.¹⁰⁴

Before arriving in Damascus, de Lorey had read about an extraordinary palace, built in the eighteenth century by As‘ad Pasha al-‘Azm, the governor of Damascus. The writer Pierre Loti, whom de Lorey met in Tehran, had visited the palace and had written about it in his book, *La Galilée*. The palace had been destroyed during the brief resistance mounted in July 1920 against the establishment of the French mandate, and de Lorey convinced Gouraud to renovate the palace as the home of the new archaeological institute.¹⁰⁵ In his capacity as director, de Lorey oversaw the renovation of the Umayyad citadels in Damascus and Aleppo, and the Great Mosque in Damascus, which focused his attention on the juncture of Islam with the Byzantine world. In March 1927, Marguerite van Berchem, a young student from Geneva, discovered that buried beneath the plaster covering the walls of the courtyard of the Great Mosque in Damascus lay the original mosaics described by numerous visitors to the mosque over the centuries.¹⁰⁶ The mosque had once been a Christian basilica, which the caliph al-Walid had sought to transform into a pilgrimage site that would rival the Ka‘ba in Mecca. From a description of the mosque written by a tenth-century geographer, van Berchem knew that the outer walls and the arcade in the courtyard had at one time been covered by mosaics of trees, cities, and inscriptions.¹⁰⁷ Following her discovery, de Lorey acted immediately to remove the plaster. Photographs were taken of the mosaics, and reproductions were made by students of a school he had established in 1926 to revive the decorative arts. The photographs and the reproductions were shown at a widely acclaimed exhibition at the Pavillon de Marsan in Paris in 1929.

It seems that it was the discovery of these mosaics that led de Lorey from archaeology to painting and set in motion a train of thought that would cause him to arrive at the conceptualization of the Baghdad school that Jewad Selim encountered, first in the pages of *L’Illustration* and then later in the catalogue of *Les Arts de l’Iran*. It was not only that the mosaics confronted de Lorey with the interpretative problems posed by an image, but that they documented the emergence of a new artistic tradition at the juncture of an old one. In

the journal *Syria*, the official publication of the French archaeological mission, de Lorey wrote that, on the one hand, the mosaics exhibit the adoption of the Hellenic iconographic tradition by the Umayyad dynasty, insofar as they contain a range of architectural forms that are found throughout the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, these architectural forms were brought together without any organizing principle, and one can identify in the mosaics new motifs—domes and arches, as well as gardens and torches—that are without precedent in the Hellenic tradition.¹⁰⁹ De Lorey explained the presence of these motifs as representations of the ancient metropolis of Antioch, storied for its illuminated streets, and he interpreted their integration with the Hellenic iconography as a form of “realism”:

What strikes one first of all [in the mosaics] is the life, the realism, and also the themes of the surprising compositions. The gardens, the orchards, and the flowing water forming a marvelous complex where a number of different architectural forms unfold; the landscape here is not décor set back...the trees, alongside the river which flows in tight waves, take their place in the front, in the place reserved for human figures.¹¹⁰

De Lorey suggests that this realism was in part invited by Byzantine iconoclasm, which resulted in “the taste for nature, a sense for realism,”¹¹¹ but he traces its origin to the artistic traditions of the pre-Islamic East. “We might conclude that, in regard to the Damascene landscapes, on the basis of their choice of subject and their realism, they are linked to different aspects of the oriental spirit.”¹¹² The encounter of that realism with the Hellenic tradition produced a distinctive “school”: “The Damascus mosaics were the work of a Syrian-Byzantine school with its own traditions and spirit.”¹¹³

Although the mosaics represented the earliest art of Islam, de Lorey saw them as still belonging to the Byzantine world. Over the following years, however, he studied in greater depth that juncture at which the mosaics had appeared, between the Hellenic traditions of the Mediterranean and the pre-Islamic artistic traditions of Iran.¹¹⁴ And it is at that juncture that he first began, in 1933, to reconceptualize the Baghdad School, or what he sometimes called *l'école abbaside*. “This art,” he wrote in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, “which we could not, in the eighth century, separate from Byzantine art,

which we have seen in the ninth barely departing from its origins, appears in the thirteenth, in the miniatures of manuscripts, already far from its birth and complete: it has achieved the tricky but successful integration of distinct traditions.”¹¹⁵ But here what seems to suture the decorative and the realist is an interest in line: “[this art] is passionately concerned with a marvelously subtle feature, a contour that suggests expressive movements or gentle inflections...at times all the resources of the art are devoted to lines and drawing; the artist transforms, without violence, by the simple choice of his subject, the heavy mass of things into an ordered sequence of movements.”¹¹⁶ De Lorey elaborates by pointing to the same picture of camels that Selim referenced in his letter to Khaldun (fig. 4). “In one of the most skilled compositions of the famous manuscript of the *Maqāmāt*...each of the curves generated by the pliant neck of the camel is reaffirmed by another that repeats it, and at the same time, gently alters its slope.”¹¹⁷

De Lorey had not yet come to see al-Wasiti's illustrations as depicting life—the word *la vie* only appears once, and then in reference to *détails*—but during these years he became quite involved in the modern art scene in Paris, and it is possible that his later emphasis on the painting of life—that the illustrations were a “mirror”—was informed by his interest in modernism and its critical deconstruction of naturalism. In 1933, de Lorey curated a show of modern French painting that traveled around the United States as part of *International 1933*, a large exhibition sponsored by the College Art Association, and he worked with Abby Rockefeller, whom he had met during the Rockefellers' visit to the 'Azm Palace, to acquire work for the new Museum of Modern Art. He knew Matisse at least as early as 1929.¹¹⁸ And in his letters to Abby Rockefeller, he reports meeting at different times with André Derain, Raoul Dufy, and Picasso.¹¹⁹ He visited “a good many collections of modern painting” and was sought for his opinions about work by Picasso and Matisse.¹²⁰

On the occasion of a Picasso retrospective at Galeries Georges in 1932, de Lorey published an essay in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* entitled “Picasso et L'Orient Musulman” that explored a *correspondance* between the “Cubist line” and the “play of line” in Islamic art that “has itself as its model.”¹²¹ This correspondence rested on the fact



Fig. 21. Dia al-Azzawi, *Wait for Me by the Surf of the Sea: Youssef al-Sayigh (Intazirini 'inda takhum al-bahr: Yusuf al-Sha'igh)*, 1983, ink on paper and board, 36 × 28 cm (box 39 × 33 × 6 cm), 28 pages (concertinaed). Collection of Tala al-Azzawi White, Bournemouth. (Photo: Anthony Dawton)

that both the Cubist and Islamic lines were born by an act of transfiguration, in which the forms of nature are distorted to the point of misrecognition. In the Islamic case, “by a series of transmutations, a world is born that is inspired by nature but that no longer remembers its origin and where we only see the enchantment of geometric forms.”¹²² “It is remarkable,” de Lorey observes, “that, for reasons that are not as different as they appear, we can make analogous observations about the Cubists,” where “nature is stripped bare and abstracted” and “lines indicate the place and the shadow of the object they become...in the end other forms are born that only represent themselves.”¹²³ The essay moves toward an argument about the formal possibilities archaeology offers modern art, but what is telling is the operative assumption that realism constitutes a kind of baseline from which different forms of art diverge, and against which they are to be assessed.¹²⁴

It seems that, paradoxically, the modernist deconstruction of the perspectival image paved the way for a more expansive concept of realism. Realism, at least as de Lorey employed the term in his writing, did not depend upon the reproduction of physical appearances. It encompassed any relationship of representation to the world, such that it became possible to see al-Wasiti's il-

lustrations as pictures of life rather than illustrations of a text, and then to separate them from the text they accompanied, as he did in *L'Illustration*. It is difficult to connect the dots, but the re-conceptualization of the Baghdad School that de Lorey offered in *Les Arts de L'Iran* was contingent upon circumstances in France in the 1930s—not only the colonial administration but also the coincidence of modernism with the broad rediscovery of Late Antiquity. When General Gouraud presented his new director to L'Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1923, he emphasized “our own interest in being inspired by oriental art.”¹²⁵

That contingency becomes clear in light of the fact that, many years later, in the 1970s and 1980s, when artists from Baghdad traveled to London, Paris, and Dublin to see the manuscripts of the fabled Baghdad School, they regarded the illustrations that appeared on the folios not as paintings of life but as images produced in relation to text. It was this pairing of image and text in the medieval manuscripts that came to be identified as the historical art form of the Arabs, and it inspired a new way of working with text that modern artists like Shakir Hassan Al Sa'id, Rafa' al-Nasiri, and Dia al-Azzawi would pursue, developing a new art form that came to be called the *daftar* (fig. 21).¹²⁶ If, today, you go

to the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, and ask to see *manuscrit* 5847, you will be shown a facsimile made by Azzawi.

THE ARTWORK AND THE ARAB AWAKENING

In the 1940s and 1950s in Baghdad, al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* were significant less for their pictorial concept than because they made it possible to conceive of modern art as a renewal: *ba'ath*, as Jewad Selim put it in his letter to Khaldun el-Hursi in 1941; and *tajdīd*, as he put it on the occasion of the formation of the Baghdad Group in 1951. This interpretation of modern art as a renewal made it possible to locate art practice in the context of the broader cultural renewal that accompanied the creation of new, predominantly Arabic-speaking polities out of the provinces of the Ottoman empire after World War I.

The origins of that cultural renewal lay in the first half of the nineteenth century in the re-encounter with the history of classical Arabic literature, which had in some sense been lost, though not as radically as the tradition of manuscript illustration represented by al-Wasiti. The story of this re-encounter was first told by George Antonius in a book published in 1938. Entitled *The Arab Awakening*, it narrated the circumstances that “set in train a revival of the Arabic language and with it, a movement of ideas which, in a short lifetime, was to leap from literature to politics.”¹²⁷ Antonius's claim that the Arabic language provided the basis for a new political imaginary has since been challenged by historians, but his basic account of the literary revival remains authoritative.

The revival of the Arabic language was enabled by schools established by American missionaries in Syria and Lebanon in the 1830s, and by the introduction of a printing press with Arabic typeface. It would be, in part, through the cultural distance created by modern education that the deep literary wells of Arabic could be re-accessed in order to found a new tradition of writing. In Calcutta around the same time, the schools established by the East India Company had a similar effect, creating the conditions for the emergence of a new class of writers and artists.¹²⁸ However, Antonius claimed that the revival of the Arabic language owed less to the educa-

tion offered by the missionaries' schools than to the encounter of a curious young man named Nasif al-Yaziji with a withdrawn history of literature.

By 1800, the year Yaziji was born in the village of Kafr Shima, in the mountains of Lebanon, the Arabic language had, by Antonius's account, “degenerated.” In the past, the natural divergence of “spoken idioms” in Arabic had been counteracted

as long as Arabic culture remained active and flourishing and the traditions of the classical age alive. But with the decay of Arab power and civilization, which received their death-blow with the Ottoman conquest, those traditions were lost and the live spoken idioms threatened to swamp the standard language and taint it with their own debasement...To make matters worse, the literature of the classical ages had vanished from memory and lay buried in oblivion. The patterns of literary expression were lost and the spiritual influence of a great culture removed; and, however missionaries might exert themselves to teach, minds remained starved and ideas stagnant.¹²⁹

Yaziji was one of these “starved minds” who was driven by his own curiosity to re-discover the literature that had “vanished from memory”:

Books were not available in print, so that his only recourse was to the manuscripts stored in monastic libraries...His exploration of libraries took him into the heart of the lost world of classical Arabic literature, and revealed to him the desolation wrought by the centuries. From that moment, the problem of how to revive the past became his dominant interest. The beauty of the buried literature had awakened the Arab in him and bound him by a spell. He became the apostle of its resurrection.¹³⁰

Yaziji did not attend the missionary schools. He was taught to read by a monk named Mata, and in this way he was able to access the “lost world of classical Arabic literature.”¹³¹

Monasteries on the European model had been founded in Lebanon and Syria in the eighteenth century, and became centers of learning where academic study of the Arabic language was adopted from Muslim clergy.¹³² It was in these monasteries that other pioneers of the revival—e.g., Butrus Bustani and Ahmad Faris Shidyaq—received their education in the Arabic language. Antonius does not specify which works Yaziji found in these libraries, but we know that among the works he

discovered there was the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* because he tried to resuscitate the form and the language of the *Maqāmāt* in his own writing.¹³³ Yaziji's attempt to rewrite the *Maqāmāt*, inspired by contact with a withdrawn literary history, arguably marks the birth of modern Arabic literature.

Most of the books Yaziji wrote, however, were on Arabic grammar and composition. The missionaries employed Yaziji, along with another Christian, Butrus Bustani, to write books for use in their schools. But Yaziji and Bustani's purpose was to revive literary Arabic, and that revival, Antonius claimed, became the basis for the formation of a new kind of community—one not organized by religious tradition. After moving to Beirut in 1840, where he worked as a teacher, Yaziji proposed to establish a society of learning, which materialized as the Society of Arts and Sciences (*Jam'īyya al-funūn wa-l-'ulūm*) in 1847. This provided a model for the creation of other societies, the most important of which was the Syrian Scientific Society (*al-Jam'īyya al-'almiyya al-sūriyya*), which acquired a political character in the aftermath of massacres between Maronite Christians and Druze in 1860, inasmuch as it transcended confessional divisions. The Syrian Scientific Society served as a model for another society, one that was secret, and that formed in Beirut in 1875 "with its varied membership of scientists and men of letters, most of them the pupils, all of them the disciples, of Yazeiji and Bustani."¹³⁴

According to Antonius, these groups, which were inspired by the rediscovery of a lost literary heritage, helped to generate a network of secret societies that arose across Syria in opposition to Ottoman rule, and that constituted the backbone of an Arab movement for autonomy and eventually independence. That movement culminated in the meeting of the General Syrian Congress in Damascus in March 1920. Composed of delegates from all over Greater Syria, the congress declared the independence of the sovereign state of Syria under Faisal ibn al-Hussein, who was named as monarch.¹³⁵ But after the San Remo conference the following month, General Gouraud wrested control of the country from the contingent of Arab officers who had gathered around Faisal. They eventually regrouped in Baghdad, where Faisal became king of the new Hashemite monarchy.

Many leaders of the Arab national movement had been officers in the Ottoman military, and many of those

officers had originally come from Iraq.¹³⁶ Selim's father was not among them, but as an officer in the Ottoman military during World War I, he had been sympathetic to the movement for Arab autonomy, which had predated the war, and to the officers who had taken part in the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule. In fact, following the Ottoman defeat, Haj Muhammad Selim was reportedly sentenced to death.¹³⁷ The story is that he was rescued from the execution squad by his wife, Malika, whose brothers knew the new ruler of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Malika successfully interceded with Atatürk to spare her husband's life. A year after Jewad was born, the family was allowed to flee on foot over the mountains of Kurdistan to Baghdad, where Haj Muhammad Selim was employed as a tutor of King Faisal's children, teaching them art and geography.

Historians have disputed Antonius's account of the relationship between literature and politics, pointing to the formative role of the Ottoman military academy in the intellectual cultivation of the participants of the Arab national movement, and to the effects of a turn by Muslim reformers to the early history of Islam and their emphasis on the place of the Arabs in that history, which helped to generate an Arab national consciousness.¹³⁸ But Antonius was a firsthand witness to the history he described, and language was the basis for the concept of nationalism that took root throughout the Ottoman empire in the late nineteenth century. As suggested by the vocabulary of awakening—which appears in the manifesto of the Baghdad Group—the Arab national movement was a project of self-discovery and reconstruction that went beyond government and encompassed the wider cultural sphere in which the Baghdad Group located modern art.

The cultural revival initiated by Yaziji has another itinerary. In the 1870s, a number of individuals who had been educated at the missionary schools where Yaziji's books were taught, and who had participated in the intellectual life surrounding the societies founded in Beirut, established the earliest Arabic-language newspapers.¹³⁹ To escape the increasingly repressive rule of Sultan Abdülhamid, most of these individuals moved to Egypt, which enjoyed a more liberal atmosphere and a larger reading public. In the course of introducing their readers to new ideas, they performed the critical function of updating the Arabic language, making it capable

of articulating modern concepts and practices by re-signifying Arabic words.

At the inaugural exhibition of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, Selim gave a speech that was subsequently published in the newspaper *Ṣadā al-Āhālī* under the title, “The Renewal of Modern Painting” (*al-Tajdīd fī al-Rasm al-Ḥadīth*), and in that essay he engages in precisely the project of re-signification that characterizes the cultural renewal initiated by Nasif al-Yaziji.¹⁴⁰

The essay made an argument for art practice as a kind of speech, distinguishing modern art from the visual culture proliferated by the photographic image, which in Iraq as elsewhere throughout the postcolonial world had preceded modern art. This argument was made in response to various unnamed critics, who either criticized the artists for practicing a foreign art form or insisted upon a painting that was more transparent. In defining modern art as a kind of speech, Selim modeled the *muṣawwir* on the figure of the writer, and described painting (*taṣwīr*) as an international language (*al-lughā al-‘ālamīyya*).

I am not a writer. The man who writes has as his instrument the pen. As for my instruments, they are colors, lines, form (*fūrm*). Even though we are both men who see (*bashar yanẓar*), the writer sees and feels, if he is a true writer, and in the inner recesses of his mind, wondrous symbols feverishly form, symbols that are words, which he then marks (*yukhaṭṭ*) on a piece of paper and says: Read! And if you were to read, you would follow what he says word for word and you would feel what he wants to say, and you would then come to see, with a new eye, what is going on around you. But if you are unlucky, or one of the 97% of Iraqis, then you are in another world, a world other than that of the writer.

As for me, as a sculptor and a painter (*muṣawwir*), there is no difference between the writer and me. I also see, but what I see does not burst into those wondrous symbols that the writer brings into existence; rather there are other symbols that arise in my mind, and they are lines, colors, and forms: they are my language, which I bring into existence, placing them on a canvas or in a sculpture, and then say: Look, or read my symbols! If you do not want to take the time to look, or if you are among that percentage, then we live in different worlds.¹⁴¹

Modeling the practice of art on writing led Selim to understand the pictorial means of “color, line, and form” in linguistic rather than aesthetic terms, as components of

a mode of signification that functioned according to a combinatorial logic similar to that of words. These elements thus become the symbolization of what the artist sees, and they are intentionally organized into a statement addressed to others. “Art is a language (*al-fann lughā*) and we must get to know this language, if only a little. What is the painter (*muṣawwir*) trying to say with his words, for example, his words that are colors, lines, and shapes?”¹⁴²

This combinatorial understanding of painting—as composed of basic aesthetic elements that are organized into an act of speech—also offered a way to think about continuity and discontinuity in an art form over time. “This language,” Selim went on,

uses the same words but cast in a new mold that keeps with the influences of the modern age. In poetry, for example, it is no longer taken for granted that a poet today writes poetry like the poetry of the pre-Islamic period. Painting (*al-taṣwīr*) in different eras shares a few basic elements—the beauty of color, the beauty of lines, and the beauty of forms—which are combined to sincerely express what the artist of each era perceives. The true artist must know what he paints and why he paints. What does a picture (*ṣūra*) of a date palm mean painted as you would see it in a photograph? Where is the expression in a picture of an apple rendered literally?¹⁴³

Sustaining the analogy between the figure of the painter and the writer, Selim pointed to the more familiar art of poetry as a model for the historical contingency of an art form. At the end of the 1940s, the poets Nazik al-Mala’ika and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab had rethought the conventions of Arabic poetry, abandoning the fixed pattern that had governed the composition of poetry for centuries in favor of verse that was unmetred or in which the meter varied, and addressing new subjects beyond the set repertoire of themes that poets had been returning to again and again.¹⁴⁴ Just as modern life seemed to demand a different kind of poetry, so too, Selim was saying, did painting vary from period to period, requiring a different configuration of color, line, and form. Were it not for the precedent represented by al-Wasiti’s illustrations, Selim would not have been able to make this argument.

Selim was doing what writers had already been doing for almost a century in the Middle East, and that was to establish an Arabic vocabulary for the concepts and practices of modern life. Selim used the word *taṣwīr* to

name the act of modern painting, the word *ṣūra* to name the image produced by this act, and the word *muṣawwir* to designate the modern artist, both in his speech as well as in the manifesto of the Baghdad Group; because he was using words in new ways, their meanings had to be explained to the public. Both *taṣwīr* and *muṣawwir* derive from the root *ṣawwar*, which historically denoted an act of giving form that, in the context of the Qur'an, was an act of divine creation. In the Qur'an, the word *muṣawwir* is an epithet of God as a giver of form. "He is God the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner (*muṣawwir*); to him belong the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise."¹⁴⁵ The Qur'an presupposes a particular concept of form that is not primarily visual. We can shed additional light on this concept by turning to a verse where the creation of form is distinguished from the production of a likeness. This verse describes the unique capacities of Jesus Christ as a prophet. Mary is told that she will have a son whose name will be Jesus the Messiah, and that one of the signs (*bi-āya*) that will announce him as a prophet will be his capacity to create the likeness (*hay'a*) of a bird from clay, and to breathe into it the spirit that will give it life:

He [God] will teach him writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel and make him a messenger to the children of Israel saying, "I came to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create (*khalq*) for you the likeness of a bird (*ka-hay'at al-tayr*) from clay, and then I breathe into it and, with the permission of God, it becomes a bird. I heal the blind and the lame. With the permission of God, I give life to the dead. I can tell you what you eat and what you keep in your houses. Indeed, in that there is a sign for you if you are believers."¹⁴⁶

The fact that producing a likeness is related specifically to the creation of life in this verse, and that the Qur'an does not use words derived from *ṣawwar* to name this kind of production, suggests that the act of giving form denoted by the root *ṣawwar*, from which *muṣawwir* derives, lies over and against the production of likeness (*hay'a*). The disarticulation of likeness and form that we observe here seems to undergird the prohibition of figurative representation in Islam: the falseness of figurative representations lies in the fact that the production of a likeness is not enough to give essence, or form.

While the word *muṣawwir* appears in the Qur'an, the word *ṣūra* does not. It appears elsewhere, in a corpus of

statements attributed to the Prophet Muhammad known as *ḥadīth*, since they were said to be "reported" by those close to the Prophet, and then to have been transmitted orally until they were compiled into written collections in the eighth and ninth centuries. When *ṣūra* appears in the *ḥadīth*, it occurs in relation to the prohibition of figurative representation.

Many of these reports consist of variations regarding the same statement or practice. In the *ḥadīth* collection compiled by al-Bukhari (d. 870), which is perhaps the most canonical of the compilations, several different reports repeat the same judgment made by the Prophet on the *ṣūra* and the *muṣawwir*. This one, recounted by the Prophet's wife 'Aisha, is representative: "The Prophet entered and there was a curtain with *ṣawr* (pl. of *ṣūra*) on it. His face got red with anger, then he took the curtain and tore it apart. She said that the Prophet said the people who make these *ṣawr* are those who will receive the most severe punishment on Judgment Day."¹⁴⁷ In another report it is a pillow 'Aisha herself has made for the Prophet that has *ṣawr*. A third report adds, "Whoever makes (*ṣawr*) a *ṣūra* in this world (*fi al-dunya*) will be asked on Judgment Day to breathe spirit into it, and won't be able."¹⁴⁸ Here, *ṣūra* signifies the production of a likeness that makes a claim to form that it fails to fulfill. That is what the prospective scene of judgment indicates. But the challenge to breathe life into a likeness marks a meaning of *ṣūra* that seems to disappear in the modern period, and that has to do with an assumed separation between likeness and essential form, between how something looks and what it actually is.

In our time, the word *ṣūra*, and its plural form, *ṣawr*, is often translated as "picture," but this introduces an anachronism, as the modern concept of picture only emerged in the sixteenth century, when Johannes Kepler used the Latin word *pictura* to name the image formed on the back of the retina by rays of light entering the eye. As for the word "image," it suggests a visuality that is extraneous to the core sense of *ṣūra*, at least in a theological context, as the distinction drawn between *hay'a* and *ṣūra* in the Qur'an demonstrates. The core sense of *ṣūra* can be glimpsed in the fact that, when Greek philosophy was translated into Arabic in the ninth century, *ṣūra* was used to translate the Greek word for "form," *eidos*.¹⁴⁹ Although other senses of *eidos* were also translated as *ṣūra*, this pattern of translation provides evidence that the semantic range of the word ex-

tended beyond appearance and instead referred to that which makes something what it is. It is possible, then, that the meaning of the word *ṣūra*, as it appears in the *ḥadīth*, may lie beyond the limits of modern comprehension, inasmuch as we tend to relate likeness to identity and the *ḥadīth* seems to claim the opposite: *we are not what we look like, and no appearance that you can see with your eyes is what we truly are.*

In the eleventh century, the renowned polymath physicist Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040) conducted a number of experiments that explored the physical properties of light, and he proposed a new theory of vision on the basis of these experiments.¹⁵⁰ He claimed that the emanation of rays postulated by the theories of vision received from Greek philosophy were in fact rays of light. Those rays of light conduct the color of objects in the visible world to the eye, in a unit he measured and called “the least amount of light,” i.e., the minimum quantity of light and color detectable by the eye. In the course of Ibn al-Haytham’s experiments, the concept of form denoted by the Arabic word *ṣūra* underwent a semantic shift. In Greek philosophy, the word “form” was used to designate the intelligible form of an object and was regarded as a property of that object. In translations of Greek philosophy, that sense had been imparted to the Arabic word *ṣūra*. However, Ibn al-Haytham used the word *ṣūra* in a new way, to articulate a novel concept of form that had emerged out of his experiments.¹⁵¹ He showed that, in the act of vision, physical properties of objects are dissolved into points of color that are conveyed from an object into the eye, where they are configured into an image (*khayāl*). The identity of an object and its properties were no longer understood to be apprehended through pure sensory perception, but instead were seen as being inferred through a process of judgment. Thus, form (*ṣūra*) did not designate an inherent property of an object (*mānū*), but acquired a new sense as a component of a physical image that materializes in the eye. He used the word *ṣūra* to name the points of color that compose that image. Perhaps Ibn al-Haytham was able to use *ṣūra* in this way because the word retained its sense of a form divorced from likeness that we find in the Qur’an. In any case, this redefinition of *ṣūra* in the eleventh century opened new conceptions of form and set in motion an epochal rethinking of the image.

The subtle shift in the signification of *ṣūra* may have at first been obscured by the multiple uses of *ṣūra* in Ibn al-Haytham’s *Kitāb al-Manāẓir* (Book of Optics), but when the theory of light rays was translated into Latin and integrated into the curriculum of European universities as *perspectiva*, this re-conceptualization of form, and the gap between sense perception and intelligibility that it suggested, gave rise to intense philosophical debates about the relationship between how things happen to appear and how they really are, and about the role of sight as opposed to logic in the operation of knowledge.¹⁵² Those debates were the crucible in which the European pictorial tradition of illusionism was forged. And it was in this tradition, which had its foundations in a practice of perspectival painting born out of the European reception of Ibn al-Haytham’s writings, that Selim was training when he left for Paris in 1938.

Despite the circle that can be traced from Ibn al-Haytham to Jewad Selim, when Selim employed *muṣawwir* and *taṣwīr* to describe art practice, he was using these terms in ways they had not been used before. This was not only because he was using these words to designate the production of an image in which form was not a property of an object but a means of intelligibility; it was also because, by identifying the *muṣawwir* with the writer, and *taṣwīr* with writing, he was seeking to position art practice in the public sphere that had formed in Baghdad during the 1940s and 1950s. Although derived from the bourgeois public sphere that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century, this public sphere did not emerge in order to consolidate an autonomous sphere of rationality, nor did it form around the exchange of political opinions. Rather, it was born out of a sense of a revival, a sense of returning to life after the centuries of war, famine, floods, and epidemics that followed the Mongol invasions.¹⁵³

That sense of revival is evident in the remarks Selim made at the opening of an exhibition, in May 1951, one month after the founding of the Baghdad Group. He introduced the show by narrating the development of modern art in Iraq, but he began with the exhibition of al-Wasiti’s illustrations in Paris in 1938, repeating de Lorey’s text almost verbatim.

Before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, an exceedingly important book was exhibited at the National Library



Fig. 22. Mahmud Sabri, *Peasants*, 1958, oil on canvas, 105 × 70 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. (Photo: Meem Gallery)

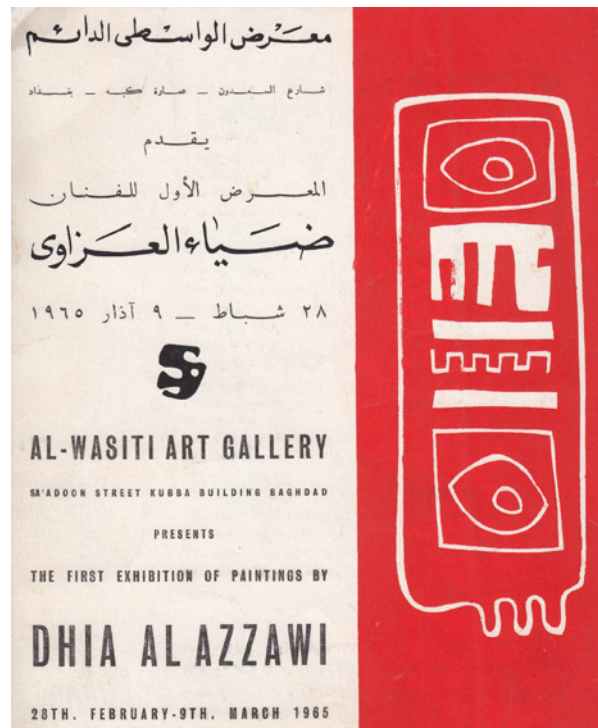


Fig. 23. Exhibition catalogue, al-Wasiti Art Gallery. Archive of Dia al-Azzawi.

in Paris. That book was the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, which narrates the adventures of a vagabond called Abu Zayd. The book was one of the books that satisfied the need of the residents of Baghdad for literature and satiated their interest in stories and pleasure. Successive generations of Muslims read it with interest and love, and over the years it was transcribed and embellished by different transcribers and illuminators, such that the book came to be considered a vast space where calligraphers and painters displayed their artistic genius. The book reflected, with all the faithfulness of a mirror, a living image of the daily life of the people of Baghdad. This book composed by al-Hariri at the beginning of the 1150s contains a story or *maqām*. The copy which the Bibliothèque nationale exhibited was the copy of a great Baghdadi painter, Yahya al-Wasiti, who is considered one of the most prominent founders of the Baghdad School of painting in the thirteenth century...

For five centuries after its fall Baghdad lay in twilight, darkness, and terrible despair, and that continued until the years of the First World War when Iraq became a new country (*baladan jadīdan*) and Baghdad became its pulsing heart. And the first step in the struggle for culture was the development of the arts.¹⁵⁴

Not all artists agreed with the program of renewal outlined by the Baghdad Group. The group of artists that came together at the end of the 1940s through painting excursions to the countryside, and from which Selim broke away in order to found the Baghdad Group—the Pioneers—would focus on symptoms of economic and social transformation and, by the end of the decade, on the struggle for civil liberties (fig. 22). In 1956, Mahmud Sabri, the most celebrated artist of the Pioneers during this time and a member of the underground Iraqi Communist Party, published a historical materialist study of the practice of modern art developing in Iraq. In that study, he dismissed the possibility of rehabilitating any forms from the past, and of al-Wasiti's illustrations in particular he wrote: "As for the few illustrations (*al-taṣwīrāt*) passed down in some manuscripts, because they are rare and do not circulate they have left no noticeable effect on the direction of the art movement."¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, following the persecution of leftists after a coup by the Ba'ath Party in 1963, the paradigm of re-

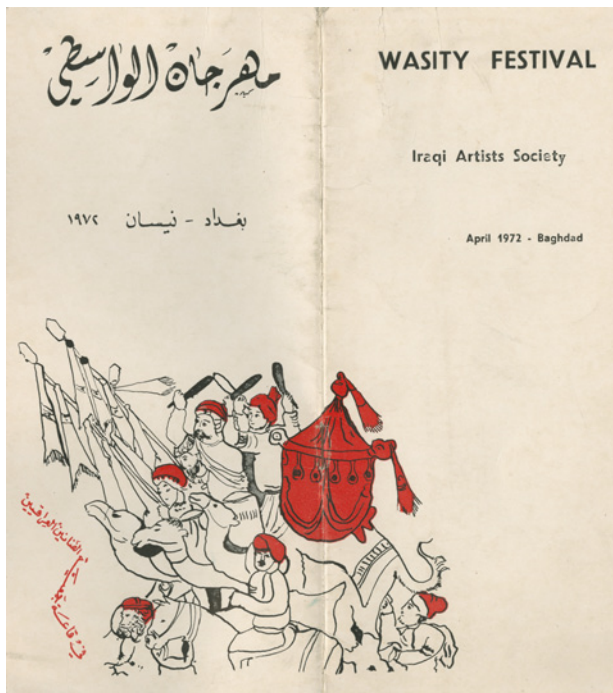


Fig. 24. Pamphlet for the Wasiti Festival, Baghdad, April 6–9, 1972. Archive of Dia al-Azzawi.

newal would be completely replaced by a new set of artistic problems posed by the collapse of leftist politics.

Still, in 1965 al-Wasiti would become the name of the country's first major gallery (fig. 23); and, in 1972, a festival that brought together artists from across the Arab world was named after him (fig. 24). Indeed, the practice of all artists in Iraq, down to our own time, would come to be oriented by the historiography of rupture that resulted from the re-encounter with al-Wasiti's illustrations, of a tradition lost and a yawning gap that set the present off from the past. For some, that gap would render the history of art on the other side unavailable, but for others, it would open possibilities for the past to be re-encountered as an archive of concepts and devices.

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NOTES

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1. Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, *Jawād Salīm wa-Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya: dirāsa fi āthārihi wa-ār'īhi* (Baghdad: Wizārat al-I'lām: Mudiriyyat al-Thaqāfat al-Āmma, 1974), 22–23.
2. Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad," *L'Illustration* no. 4996 (December 3, 1938): n.p. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French, Arabic, and German are my own.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. For a fuller account, see Shākīr Ḥassan Al Sa'īd, *Fuṣūl min tārikh al-ḥaraka al-tashkiliyya fi al-'Irāq*, vol. 1 (Baghdad: al-Jumhūriyya al-'Irāqiyya, Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-I'lām, 1983), 63–76.
7. Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 32–35 and 93–98. In regard to this modification, Shaw points out that the textbook used in the War College at the end of the nineteenth century redefined perspective not as a construction of space but as a transcription of light.
8. Al Sa'īd, *Fuṣūl min tārikh al-ḥaraka al-tashkiliyya fi al-'Irāq*, 28. In addition to Abdul Qadir al-Rassam, these military painters included Muhammad Salih Zaki, Al-Haj Muhammad Salim, Amin Zaki, Hassan Sami, and 'Asam Hafidh.
9. Al Sa'īd, *Fuṣūl min tārikh al-ḥaraka al-tashkiliyya fi al-'Irāq*, 69.
10. Other well-known artists were also the children of *asker ressamlar*: for example, Atta Sabri, the son of Hassan Sami; and Zaid Salih, the son of Muhammad Zaki Salih.
11. Selim was taught by Nasser 'Awni and Qasim Naji at al-Mā'mūniyya Elementary School and Abdul Karim Mahmud and Atta Sabri at Al-Gharbiyya Middle School. In 1938 Qasim Naji would go to the Academy of Berlin, where he studied sculpture for one year, and then to Camberwell School of Arts in London, where he would study painting for another. According to Khalid al-Qassab, the director of al-Gharbiyya, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Charchafchi, allowed Selim, Issa Hanna, and Zaid Salih to use a sports room as a studio and to paint during gym class (Khālid al-Qaṣṣāb, *Dhikriyyāt al-fanniyya* [London: Dār al-Ḥikma, 2007], 61).
12. William Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 16–18 and 29.
13. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist*, 70–73. In 1941, a nationalist coup overthrew the monarchy. As a

- result, the British invaded the country and attempted to eliminate nationalist elements, which forced Husri to leave Iraq and settle in Lebanon.
14. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist*, 141–48.
 15. In fact, the Directorate of Antiquities would oversee the practice of modern art in Iraq throughout the 1950s, and in 1941 began to build a collection of art that would be housed in a future National Gallery. See the introduction by Yusuf Ghanima in the exhibition catalogue, Government of Iraq, *Dalīl qā'at al-rasūm al-waṭaniyya* (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Ḥukūma, 1943).
 16. Khālid al-Qaṣṣāb, *Dhikriyyāt al-fanniyya*, 31–33. The establishment of the music institute and its sudden change of leadership took place in the shadow of a coup led by General Badr Sidqi in 1936. It is unclear what role the political events of that year played in the founding of the music institute.
 17. The newspaper *Ṣawt al-Āhālī* printed a series by D. N. Pritt entitled “The Fall of the French Republic” in an Arabic translation.
 18. November 16, 1944. Reprinted in Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, “Al-Fannān fi shibābihi: mukhtārāt min yawmiyyat Jawād Salīm,” *Al-Riḥla al-thāmina: dirāsāt naqdiyya* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assat al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1979), 172–73.
 19. Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 54.
 20. Khālid al-Qaṣṣāb, *Dhikriyyāt al-fanniyya* (London: Dār al-Ḥikma, 2007), 54.
 21. Khaldun el Husri, “The Wandering: A Study of Modern Iraqi Painting,” *Middle East Forum* 33, no. 4 (April 1958): 24.
 22. July 23, 1943. Jabrā, “Al-Fannān fi shibābihi: mukhtārāt min yawmiyyāt Jawād Salīm,” 159–62.
 23. On the background of the Polish artists, see Silvia Naef, *A La recherche d'une modernité arabe: l'évolution des arts plastique en Egypte, au Liban et en Irak* (Genève: Editions Slatkine, 1996), 220–24; and Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz, *Polish Artists in Lebanon 1942–1952* (Beirut: Polish Embassy, 2013).
 24. Jabrā, “Al-Fannān fi shibābihi: mukhtārāt min yawmiyyāt Jawād Salīm,” 159.
 25. Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 10.
 26. Khaldun Husri, “National Art Progress,” *The Iraq Times* (Christmas 1947): 24.
 27. Jabrā, “Al-Fannān fi shibābihi: mukhtārāt min yawmiyyāt Jawād Salīm,” 159.
 28. See Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Harmony Books, 1985), 8–11, 24, 40, and 221.
 29. Jabrā, “Al-Fannān fi shibābihi: mukhtārāt min yawmiyyāt Jawād Salīm,” 161.
 30. Oleg Grabar has observed that this is only one of a double-page illustration. He did not realize that it was Eustache de Lorey who had originally split up the double-page illustration. See Oleg Grabar, “Pictures or Commentaries: The Illustrations of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri,” in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honor of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (Salt Lake City, UT: Middle East Center, University of Utah, 1974), 85–104.
 31. Sa'dī al-Ḥadīthī, *Jaḍūr al-ghanā' fī al-thaqāfat al-'Irāqīyya* (Freiberg: Al-Kamel Verlag, 2016), 22–24.
 32. Selim passed this concept on to his students. One of them, Shakir Hassan Al Said, would write in a study of al-Wasiti's illustrations that “the artistic importance of al-Wasiti lies in his way of convincing us of the possibility of the existence of a world where reality can be seen without copying it in a naturalistic way” (Shakir Hassan Al Sa'īd, *al-Khaṣā'ish al-fanniyya wa al-ijtimā'iyya li-rusūm al-Wāsiṭi* [Baghdad: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād, 1964], 3–4).
 33. This confrontation was an ongoing topic of study for the sociologist Ali al-Wardi, and was also dramatized in the novel by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (London: Heinemann, 1960).
 34. October 3, 1945. Jabra, “Al-Fannān fi shibābihi: mukhtārāt min yawmiyyat Jawād Salīm,” 177.
 35. Ulrike Khamis, “Lorna Remembers,” in *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art*, ed. Maysaloun Faraj (London: Saqi Books, 2001), 41.
 36. “Al-Fann wa al-ḥayāt al-'Arabiyya,” *Al-Adab* 4, no. 1 (January 1956): 7. Emphasis added.
 37. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 470–75.
 38. ‘Atā Ṣabrī, “Mu'arīḍ Baghdād lil-rasm wa-l-naḥt,” *Al-Adab* 5, no. 5 (May 1957): 79.
 39. Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 12.
 40. Iḥsān al-Malā'ika, “Al-Ma'riḍ al-sādis li-jamā'a Baghdād,” *Al-Adab* 6, no. 6 (June 1958): 24.
 41. That public sphere had a particular configuration, as it emerged in the context of British mandatory rule and in the aftermath of the collapse of Ottoman empire. Prominent Iraqi families had long held a kind of salon called *majālis*, where issues affecting the community were discussed; and at the beginning of the twentieth century, Iraqi officers in the Ottoman military had formed an underground political organization called *al-'Ahd*, which established a space for the exchange of ideas. But the press that was established with the formation of the Iraqi state in the 1920s gave rise to a new kind of discursive space, which would become the site of art practice. See Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 19–121.
 42. The formation of the Baghdad Group was announced in *Ṣadā al-Āhālī* on April 20, 1950.
 43. The group of artists included Zayd Salih, Ismail al-Shaikhly, Khalid al-Qassab, Yusuf Abdul Qadir, Faruq 'Abd al-'Aziz, and Nuri Mustafa Bahjat.
 44. Al-Qaṣṣāb, *Dhikriyyāt fanniyya*, 37–50.
 45. A missile would later destroy the house during the Anglo-American invasion of Baghdad in 2003. Al-Qaṣṣāb, *Dhikriyyāt fanniyya*, 122.
 46. See note 15.
 47. The manifesto was republished in Shākir Ḥasan Al Sa'īd, *al-Bayānāt al-fanniyya fī al-'Irāq* (Baghdad: Wizārat al-Ilām, Mudiriyya al-Funūn al-'Ammā, 1973), 25–27. An

- English translation of the entire manifesto is available in Anneka Lenssen, Sarah Rogers, and Nada Shabout, eds., *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 150–51, but all translations from the Arabic here are my own and at times differ from the MoMA translation.
48. Al Sa'īd, *al-Bayānāt al-fanniyya fī al-'Irāq*, 25.
 49. Ibid.
 50. Ibid.
 51. Ibid.
 52. Ibid., 27.
 53. Jabrā, *Jawād Salīm wa Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya*, 40.
 54. Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1938), 22. In the early 1940s, Selim's younger brother Nizar, along with a classmate named 'Adnan Ra'uf, created an art journal entitled *al-Ṣabā'*. They produced a number of volumes, each handwritten, containing drawings and watercolor illustrations, poems, and essays. One of the volumes included a translation of the beginning of Stein's book on Picasso. The translation is unsigned, but given the fact that Selim contributed a watercolor to the same volume, it seems likely that he knew the book, even if he did not actually translate the text.
 55. Stein, *Picasso*, 33–34.
 56. Al Sa'īd, *al-Bayānāt al-fanniyya fī al-'Irāq*, 27.
 57. Ibid.
 58. Dīā' al-'Azzāwī, "Jamā'at Baghdād ba'd 'ishrīn 'aman: tanāqudh al-fikr wa al-ānjāz al-fannī," *al-Jumhūrīyya*, May 20, 1975.
 59. Al Sa'īd, *al-Bayānāt al-fanniyya fī al-'Irāq*, 27.
 60. Ibid.
 61. George Saliba proposes the fascinating hypothesis that the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic arose out of competition for positions within the Abbasid bureaucracy, at first competition between a cohort of Greek- and Persian-speaking bureaucrats displaced by the Arabization of administration and their Arab successors, and then competition between natural philosophers, on the one hand, and jurists and theologians, on the other. One wonders to what extent Saliba's hypothesis might shed new light on the history of manuscript illustration during this period. See George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 58–64.
 62. David James, *A Masterpiece of Arab Painting: The 'Schefer' Maqāmāt Manuscript in Context* (London: East West Publishing, 2013), 7–8.
 63. Marianna S. Simpson, "The Role of Baghdad in the Formation of Persian Painting," in *Art et Société dans le Monde Iranien*, ed. C. Adle (Paris: Institut Français d'Iranologie de Téhéran, 1982), 91–116.
 64. See Edward Said's foreword in Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), xiv.
 65. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de M. Charles Schefer; lue dans les séances des 3 et 10 novembre 1899," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 27 (1899): 627–68, at 631.
 66. These biographical details are sourced from his obituary. See Henri Cordier, "Charles Schefer," *Chronique des arts et la curiosité* (March 12, 1898): 91–93.
 67. Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*.
 68. Edgar Blochet, ed., *Catalogue de la collection de manuscrits orientaux, arabes, persans et turcs* (Paris: E. Leroux 1900), 11.
 69. Francis Richard, "Quelques collectionneurs français de manuscrits persans au XIX^{ème} siècle," *Luqman: Annales des Presses Universitaires d'Iran Revue semestrielle* 10, no. 1 (fall–winter, 1993–94): 65.
 70. Bouché-Leclercq, "Notice sur la vie," 634n. As Güllü Necipoğlu has pointed out to me, an inventory of the Topkapı Palace Museum Library (Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Török F. 59) dating to 1502–4 lists nine copies of the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. It is possible that the manuscript found by Schefer originated in the sultan's library. The librarian at the Bibliothèque nationale, Edgar Blochet, identified the origin of the manuscript as Ayyubid, and suggested that it could be traced to Syria in particular (Edgar Blochet, ed., *Catalogue de la collection de manuscrits orientaux, arabes, persans et turcs* [Paris: E. Leroux, 1900], 8). David James speculates that Blochet had information from Schefer himself about the manuscript's origin, but this designation fits Blochet's own historiography, according to which a tradition of painting thrived under the Ayyubids, who were not orthodox and thus did not enforce the moral law banning the creation of figurative representations. See Edgar Blochet, "Mussulman Manuscripts and Miniatures as Illustrated in the Recent Exhibition in Paris," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 2, no. 5 (July 1903): 135.
 71. Blochet, ed., *Catalogue de la collection de manuscrits orientaux, arabes, persans et turcs*, iv.
 72. In 1903, there was an exhibition of Islamic art at the Pavillon de Marsan that included a number of illustrated manuscripts and miniatures; but according to the exhibition catalogue, *manuscrit* 5847 was not among them.
 73. Bibliothèque nationale, *Catalogue de L'exposition orientale* (Paris: Éditions de la Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1925).
 74. See the avant-propos by Julien Cain in Henry Corbin et al., eds., *Les Arts de l'Iran: L'Ancienne Perse et Bagdad* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1938).
 75. Edgar Blochet, "Mussulman Manuscripts and Miniatures as Illustrated in the Recent Exhibition in Paris," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 2, no. 5 (July 1903): 135.
 76. Ibid., 136.
 77. Ibid.
 78. Ibid., 144.
 79. Ernst Kühnel, *Miniaturmalerei im islamischen Orient* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1923), 17–22.
 80. Ibid., 20.

81. *Ibid.*, 20–22.
82. Corbin et al., eds., *Les Arts de l'Iran*, 108.
83. *Ibid.*, 109.
84. *Ibid.*, 108.
85. *Ibid.*, 108–9.
86. *Ibid.*, 113.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*
89. Shākīr Ḥassan Al Sa'īd, *Jawād Salīm: al-fannān wa-l-ākharūn* (Baghdad: Dār al-Shū'ūn al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmma, 1991), 244.
90. Eustache de Lorey, "La Peinture Musulmane: L'École de Bagdad," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6, no. 10 (1933): 1–13; "L'École de Tabriz L'Islam aux prises avec la Chine," *Revue des arts asiatiques* 9, no. 1 (March 1935): 27–39. In 1933, de Lorey gave lectures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Worcester Museum in Massachusetts.
91. Claudie Mora, "Un dandy érudit: Victor Eustache de Lorey," *Bulletin annuel de l'association Côte sud mémoire vive* 2 (2010): n.p.
92. Jules Méry, "Tragédie de la Mort, Katje, Leila au Théâtre de Monte-Carlo," *Le Figaro*, March 14, 1914.
93. W. Eustache de Lorey, "A la Cour de Téhéran; Une journée du Chah," *Les Annales Politique et Littéraires* 1002 (September 7, 1902): 149–50; W. Eustache de Lorey, "La Superstition en Perse," *Revue illustrée* (October 1, 1902): n.p.
94. Eustache de Lorey and Douglas Sladen, *Queer Things about Persia* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1907).
95. This was at the *hôtel* of M. and Mme Léon Fould, and it was reported on the society page of *Gil Blas*, May 29, 1904.
96. *Le Figaro*, May 28, 1903. This performance was held at the home of Mme de Verbugge.
97. *Le Monde Artiste illustré*, 43:13 (March 29, 1903): 198; "Mondanités: dans le monde," *Le Gaulois* 10034 (April 4, 1905).
98. *Le Monde Artiste illustré* 44, no. 26 (June 26, 1904): 405.
99. Jules Méry, "Tragédie de la Mort, Katje, Leila au Théâtre de Monte-Carlo," *Le Figaro*, March 14, 1914.
100. "Mondanités: dans le monde," *Le Gaulois* 12485 (December 20, 1911).
101. "Tragédie de la Mort, Katje, Leila au Théâtre de Monte-Carlo."
102. André Blum, "Le Baron Edmond de Rothschild: Amateur d'art (1845–1934)," *Académie des Beaux-Arts* (July 1934): 76.
103. Gaston Migneon, "L'Archéologie française en Syrie," *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (September 7, 1921).
104. Arrêté no. 1626, *Bulletin hebdomadaire des actes administratifs du Haut-Commissariat*, October 14, 1922.
105. André Warnod, "Aurons-nous une 'Ville-Médici' à Damas?" *Comoedia* (October 2, 1923).
106. "Découverte de mosaïques du VIII^e siècle à la grande mosquée de Damas," *Syria* 10, no. 2 (1929): 180.
107. Eustache de Lorey, "Les Mosaïques de la Mosquée des Omayyades," *Syria* 12, no. 4 (1931): 336–37.
108. Eustache de Lorey, "Les Mosaïques de la Mosquée des Omayyades," 333–37.
109. *Ibid.*, 341–44.
110. *Ibid.*, 331.
111. *Ibid.*
112. *Ibid.*, 340.
113. *Ibid.*
114. Eustache de Lorey, "L'Hellénisme et l'Orient dans les mosaïques de la Mosquée des Omayyades," *Ars Islamica* 1, no. 1 (1934): 22–45.
115. Eustache de Lorey, "La Peinture musulmane: L'École de Bagdad," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6, no. 10 (1933): 6.
116. *Ibid.*, 8.
117. *Ibid.*
118. Letter to Abby Rockefeller, January 23, 1933. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers (FA336), box 2, folder 28. I am grateful to Anneka Lenssen for informing me about the correspondence between Eustache de Lorey and Abby Rockefeller.
119. Letter to Abby Rockefeller, May 14, 1935.
120. Letter to Abby Rockefeller, March 17, 1931.
121. Eustache de Lorey, "Picasso et L'Orient Musulman," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 8, no. 2 (1932): 302.
122. *Ibid.*, 304.
123. *Ibid.*, 305–7.
124. Finbarr Barry Flood, describing de Lorey's comparison of Cubism and Islamic abstraction, and in particular his attempt to trace this similarity to the teachings of the prophet Muhammad, articulates the stakes here in striking terms: "the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad... are produced as evidential documents in the history of modern abstraction" ("Picasso the Muslim: or, How the *Bilderverbot* Became Modern (Part 1)," *Res* 67/68 [2016–17]: 47). Flood positions de Lorey's essay at the start of a parade of "pseudomorphic" comparisons between the modern and the Islamic, explored in writing as well as in exhibitions, throughout the twentieth century; and at the end of a long discourse in Europe that, on the basis of the Jewish and Islamic prohibition of figurative representation, erected an opposition between Greek naturalism and Semitic abstraction. But what I have tried to show here is that, for reasons unique to his biography, de Lorey had a passionate interest in the Islamic world for decades, and what fascinated him about Islamic art was not its abstract character but the peculiar form of realism it constructed out of the traditions it inherited. Whatever de Lorey may have inherited from the genealogy of thought traced by Flood, he seems to have encountered the artifacts he wrote about on his own terms. His Picasso essay may be a one-off, and despite its influence on writers like Bishr Farès, it might be less about abstraction than recuperating a stylization of nature so often mistaken for abstraction, as Flood observes. De Lorey seems to have shared Berenson's regard for realism, and, in fact, around this time he stayed with Berenson in Florence, as we know from a letter he wrote to Abby Rockefeller dated July 14, 1930.
125. "Académie des Beaux-Arts: séance du samedi 27 octobre 1923," *Journal Officiel de la République Française* no. 10307, October 29, 1923.

126. See Dia al-Azzawi, "Notes for an Autobiography," in *Dia al-Azzawi: A Retrospective from 1963 until Tomorrow* (Milan: Silvana, 2018), 44–46; and Nada Shabout, *Contemporary Iraqi Book Art* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas School of Visual Arts, 2007), 18–25.
127. George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1946), 37.
128. See, for instance, Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 236n and 267–88.
129. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, 38–39.
130. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
131. Fū'ād 'Afrām al-Bustānī, "al-Shaykh Nāṣif al-Yāzījī (1800–1871)," *al-Mashriq* 26, no. 11 (1928): 834.
132. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 56.
133. Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2004), 119–20.
134. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, 88.
135. *Ibid.*, 304.
136. See Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist*, 50.
137. This account comes from biographical notes made by Haj Muhammad Selim's son, Nizar Selim, and that are now in the possession of his daughter, Ruba Selim.
138. For an overview of the historiography, see Albert Hourani, "The Arab Awakening Forty Years Later," in *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 200–204.
139. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 245.
140. *Ṣadā al-Āhālī*, April 21, 1950. At the time, the paper was the mouthpiece of the National Democratic Party, Iraq's only liberal and progressive political party, but the origins of both the paper and the party can be traced back to the activities of a group of Iraqi students at the American University of Beirut, in the 1920s—which is to say, to the realm of public discourse opened by Nasif al-Yaziji (Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 300–306).
141. The text of the speech was reprinted in Jabrā, *Jawād Salīm wa Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya*, 189–94. The translation I offer here is my own. For a full English translation of the essay, see Annika Lenssen et al., *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 152–54.
142. Jabrā, *Jawād Salīm wa Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya*, 194.
143. *Ibid.*
144. Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800–1970: The Development of Its Forms and Themes under the Influence of Western Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 198–203.
145. Sūrat al-Ḥaṣhr, 59:24. English translation: <https://quran.com/59>
146. Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, 3:48–3:49. English translation: <https://quran.com/3>, modified by author.
147. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6109, Book 78, Ḥadīth 136.
148. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 7557, Book 97, Ḥadīth 182.
149. A. I. Sabra, *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham, Part II: Introduction, Commentary, Glossaries, Concordance, Indices*, Studies of the Warburg Institute 40 (London: Warburg Institute, 1989), 68.
150. For an overview, see A. I. Sabra, "Ibn al-Haytham's Revolutionary Project in Optics: The Achievement and the Obstacle," in *The Enterprise of Science in Islam: New Perspectives*, ed. Jan P. Hogendijk and A. I. Sabra (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 85–118.
151. A. I. Sabra, "Form in Ibn al-Haytham's Theory of Vision," in *Optics, Astronomy, and Logic: Studies in Arabic Science and Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Sabra (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), 115–40. For the resignification of *ṣūra* in particular, see Sabra, "Ibn al-Haytham's Revolutionary Project in Optics," 93–94.
152. David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision: From Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 104–54; Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011), 129–50.
153. For a chronology of the disasters that repeatedly destroyed the city of Baghdad, turning it into a "deathtrap," see Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 15.
154. The speech was originally given in English, but it was translated into Arabic by Dr. Salman al-Wasiti and printed in a special issue of *Āfāq 'Arabīyya* devoted to the plastic arts, under the title "al-Rasm al-mu'āṣir fī al-'Irāq" (1980): 166–67.
155. See Maḥmūd Ṣabrī, "Mushkilat al-rasm al-mu'āṣir fī al-'Irāq," *Al-Adab* 4, no. 1 (January 1956): 12.