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# The Image Debate

*Figural Representation in Islam  
and Across the World*

Edited by  
Christiane Gruber



*This book is dedicated to one of its authors, Mary Nooter Roberts (known to all as Polly), who died before seeing the book in its finished form.*

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Figure 1. Solomon enthroned and accompanied by angels, animals, and demons, al-Tusi, *Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* (The Wonders of Creation), Iran, 16th century. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, W593, folio 220r.

## Idols and Figural Images in Islam: A Brief Dive into a Perennial Debate

CHRISTIANE GRUBER

The turn of the millennium has ushered in its fair share of challenges, from climate change to mass migration. It also has witnessed war and violence across the world, including in Muslim-majority countries. Confrontations over power and authority across the greater Middle East have taken a noticeably visual and material turn, with images serving as both symbolic stand-ins and actual targets of militant actions. Among them, in 2001 the Taliban forced local Hazara inhabitants to dynamite the Buddhas of Bamiyan, a UNESCO world heritage site that brought in substantial income for the minority Shi'i community of Afghanistan. Although these statues were originally protected under the Taliban, the group's leaders reversed their opinion in the wake of international sanctions, purposefully pulverizing these monumental sculptures through a vengeful act of *quid pro quo*.<sup>1</sup>

Fourteen years later, mass killing of humans unfolded in Syria and Iraq once substantial swathes of territory came under the control of militants fighting under the banner of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). An unprecedented destruction of ancient Near Eastern, Greco-Roman, and Islamic art and architecture ensued. Among the many artworks lost or plundered, in 2015 ISIS soldiers took pickaxes and drills to the famous *lamassus* – the winged and human-headed bulls or lions that function as protective deities – flanking the entrance gate of the Assyrian palace at Nineveh. Images of this iconoclastic spectacle spread quickly across the globe, in large part due to the militants' mediatized performance as recorded through a video widely disseminated on the Internet. In the short film, a jihadi speaks on camera as he selectively mines Islamic sources to support his anti-image position. Above all, he argues that the cultural heritage upon which the modern state of Iraq is built must be dismantled in order to symbolically destroy artificial nation-state boundaries and Western colonial presence, thus paving the way for the founding of an Islamic caliphate in the Levant. His theological argument thus provides but a small kernel to the articulation of a larger political manifesto.<sup>2</sup>

These two landmark image-breaking episodes have intersected with several controversies surrounding European caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad that have unfolded over the past two

decades, including the 2005 Jyllands-Posten Danish cartoon controversy and the 2015 assassination of cartoonists at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris.<sup>3</sup> These many dramatic and often violent confrontations have been linked in some fashion or another to figural images, and therefore have precipitated a number of contemporary discourses on 'Islamic iconoclasm' in both Islamic and non-Islamic spheres. Explanations often stress the putative impermissibility of representing animals, human beings, and, most importantly, the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic traditions. This rather simplistic explanation skirts much more complex political, social, and religious issues, while simultaneously altering the image of Islamic art by marginalizing or overlooking a rich and varied corpus of visual and material evidence that provides a much more nuanced and flexible way of exploring historic practices of image-making in Islamic lands.

As a case in point to highlight the problems and even paradoxes behind the so-called 'image problem' in Islamic cultures, one need not look any further than today's Saudi Arabia. Promoting a highly austere Wahhabi or 'Unitarian' theology, a number of Saudi clerics have issued *fatwas* (legal opinions or decrees) concerning both the representational and photographic arts, as well as three-dimensional statuary. The topic of snowmen has also arisen of late, no doubt due to major climatic shifts. For example, in 2015 parts of Saudi Arabia were blanketed in snow: surprised and entertained, individuals staged snowball fights and built 'snow sculptures' of human beings and animals, especially camels. In response to these ludic acts, the prominent Saudi cleric Shaykh Muhammad Salih al-Munajjid issued a *fatwa*, in which he declared that it was prohibited to make figures of living beings out of snow if they included facial features. He justified the prohibition of images of animate beings by citing the Prophet Muhammad's companion Ibn 'Abbas on the subject: 'What matters in the case of images is the head. [...] The image is the head; if the head is cut off it is no longer an image'.<sup>4</sup> One of Munajjid's followers chimed in online with the further explanation: 'It [building snowmen] is imitating the infidels; it promotes lustiness and eroticism'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while many Saudis rejoiced in building snow beings given facial features, others

opined that such acts must remain forbidden for a range of reasons, among them the usurpation of God's creative power, the imitation of non-Muslim practices, and the promulgation of the 'seductive arts.'<sup>6</sup>

Yet even within Saudi Arabia, legal opinions concerning figural images are more discordant and less strict than such proclamations may suggest. Clerics and members of the House of Saud have established mutually beneficial partnerships when it comes to making practical decisions on images and imaging technologies. For instance, some Saudi clerics have highlighted the positive qualities of visual likenesses, including photographic representations of the ruling members of the Saudi family. Neutralizing legal obstacles along the way, they argue that images can be used in a 'correct' manner in order to strengthen social and religious 'public interest'.<sup>7</sup> Such visuals are geared to muster political support, as evidenced by the many large-scale billboards and digital images that visually reinforce the reign of King Salman and his appointed successors (Figure 2). Rather than argue against the legality of such lifelike images, clerics instead encourage their widest possible dissemination via printing and the Internet by citing the Hadith of the Prophet that: 'God will spread Islam until it reaches every house and under every tree'.<sup>8</sup> Thus, even in

today's ultra-conservative Wahhabi context, the question of the figural image meanders across a shifting equilibrium.

For these reasons, this essay aims to reassess some of the questions and debates concerning idolatry and figural representation from the beginning of Islam until today. It focuses on the specific terminology used in the Qur'an and Hadith – in particular the terms *tamathil* (figural likenesses), *asnam* (idols), and *ansab* (sacred stones or betyls) – in order to distinguish the semantic and conceptual categories that have been used by Muslim writers to classify various forms of art-making along with their associated practices. Such terms were further finessed within historical and jurisprudential writings in which the Solomonic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic paradigms concerning statues and idols served to legitimize figural imagery and statuary while simultaneously castigating three-dimensional and even pendent imagery as potentially subject to devotional worship. Moreover, in the majority of texts, images were not understood as prohibited per se. Rather, their modalities of display and use proved of paramount significance within the perennial debates concerned with image-making, as is the case in all global religious cultures. Skirting the broad swathe method, this study aims to pinpoint some of the finer issues raised by the textual corpus as it intersects

with artworks and paintings. In so doing, it will be argued that practices of figural representation in Islamic traditions most often were (and still are) guided by cultural and political expediency rather than religious or legal principle.

#### QUR'ANIC PARADIGMS: SOLOMON, MOSES, AND ABRAHAM

Turning first to the Qur'an, it is important to note that Islam's holy scripture contains few mentions of idols and images – a general silence that is striking in comparison to the repeated berating of other prohibitions, in particular poetry, itself Islam's quintessential form of creative expression.<sup>9</sup> On occasions when the question of the representational arts does arise, the Qur'anic text aims to signal the dawn of a new monotheistic order by castigating pagan disbelief, polytheistic practices, and their associated traditions of idol making and worship.

The Qur'anic accounts of the prophets Moses, Solomon, and Abraham stand out most in this regard. For instance, in its recounting of Moses destroying the Golden Calf, the Qur'an describes Moses as chastising the Israelites for having made the cult idol with the following injunction: 'O my people! Verily, you have sinned against yourselves by taking the calf (*bi-ittikhadhikum al-'ijl*)' (2:54). In this verse, the term for 'idol' is omitted; rather, the emphasis remains firmly focused on the verb 'to take' (*akhadha*). As a result, exegetes have read this Qur'anic verse as inveighing against the Israelites for having taken the calf 'as a deity' or 'for worship' – the sculpted, material *object* recedes to the background while the *act* of venerating multiple deities emerges as the prime caveat in the story of Moses.

The Qur'an also praises Solomon as the quintessential king, capable of controlling the winds, spirits (*jinn*), demons (*divs*), animals, and angels.<sup>10</sup> When listing the ruler's wondrous works, it goes on to note that: 'They [the *jinn*] made for him whatever he wished of sanctuaries, and statues (*tamathil*), and basins as [large as] great watering-troughs, and cauldrons firmly anchored' (34:13). The term of most interest in this verse is *tamathil* (plural of *timthal*): that is, human likenesses. However, these figural images are neither castigated as idols nor subjected to any other form of criticism in the Qur'anic text. On the contrary, they form part of a larger corpus of material objects that confirm the high rank of King Solomon, who is often depicted enthroned and ruling over all earthly and celestial beings in Islamic painting (Figure 1, see page 8).<sup>11</sup>

Over the centuries, Muslim rulers crafted visions of their royal authority in palace quarters by drawing upon and expanding



Figure 3. A moulded plaster statue depicting a caliph standing on two lions, entrance portal of the bathhouse at Khirbat al-Mafjar, Jericho, Palestinian Territories, 724–43 or 743–46. Jerusalem, The Rockefeller Museum. Image courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

the Solomonic model of being surrounded by statues and luxury goods. Such a use of figural likenesses in private, non-devotional contexts was neither prohibited in the Qur'an nor was it contested at the beginning of Islam, although theological debates over this issue accelerated by the end of the eighth century.<sup>12</sup> During the Umayyad period (650–750 CE), desert palaces built in the Jordan Valley by members of the royal family made use of opulent decoration, including statues of humans and animals made of moulded stucco overpainted in coloured pigments. In the palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar, for example, the caliph – possibly Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 724–43) or one of his successors in the guise of Solomon – is shown in the bath's audience hall standing frontally above two



Figure 2. Digital image in support of the Saudi line of succession, showing a winged King Salman (centre), his son Muhammad b. Salman (right), and Muhammad b. Nayef, nephew of Salman (left), all of whom hover above the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudi state flag, the Ka'ba, and the Abraj al-Bayt skyscraper, April 2015. Image in the public domain.



lions, holding a dagger and clad in a red robe ornamented with pearls (Figure 3).<sup>13</sup> The walls and pendentives of the bathhouse likewise displayed painted stucco reliefs depicting animals, grapes, vines, and nude female figures that may have symbolized fertility and abundance. These sculpted visual likenesses honour the caliph, promote his high rank, and praise the prosperity of both fauna and flora in his domains. Within private palace spheres at least, these *tamathil* were not shunned as false deities; on the contrary, they were crafted to enhance a larger Solomonic image of the ruler's power and grandeur.

Due to their potential use in idol-worship, figural sculptures were almost always kept out of mosques and other public arenas – at least until the rise of civic monuments during the nineteenth century, when European urban trends began to influence artistic practices in Islamic lands.<sup>14</sup> For a long time, statuary remained a prerogative of courtly life. Like the Umayyads before them, the Seljuks and Ghaznavids ruling in Anatolia and Greater Iran also outfitted their palaces with figural imagery, especially from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. At least nine near life-size statues made of gypsum plaster are believed to have been made for the Seljuk ruler's court located in or near the Iranian city of Rayy (Figure 4).<sup>15</sup> These figures have been interpreted by a number of scholars, above all Melanie Gibson, as representing elite members of the court or the ruler's personal guard (*ghulamān-i sultānī* or *khassakiyya*), whose placement along the walls of throne halls served to reinforce the king's authority.<sup>16</sup> Acting as symbolic followers and permanent protectors, these three-dimensional figural statues formed part of medieval expressions of royal power in eastern Islamic lands, where traditions of figural depictions in stonework and wall painting stretched back to Sogdian and Achaemenid times.

Like their Umayyad and Seljuk precursors, modern Muslim monarchs have not shied away from ornamenting their court with figural imagery and statuary. For example, during the nineteenth century the Qajar rulers of Iran received officials and dignitaries while seated on the famous Marble Throne (*takht-i marmar*), placed within an audience hall decorated with mirrorwork looking over the palace's courtyard (Figure 5). This throne overtly reasserts the Solomonic paradigm through both its inscriptional and visual elements. The poetic verses encircling the throne cite Saba's 'Book of the King of Kings' (*Shahinshahnama*), in which the marble throne is called

Figure 4. A standing figure made of moulded and painted plaster, possibly included in a Seljuk royal pavilion in or near Rayy, Iran, circa 1050–1150. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 67.119.

the 'Solomonic throne' (*takht-i Sulaymān*) and the Qajar ruler Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834) is referred to by the honorific epithet 'Solomon of the Age' (*Sulaymān-i zaman*).<sup>17</sup> In addition, the throne itself is upheld by animals, demons, and human figures – the latter perhaps intended to represent Solomon's statues as mentioned in the Qur'an.

Seated in this manner on their Solomonic throne, Qajar rulers like Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96) appeared rather statuesque in their formality and elegance. For example, in a photograph by Antoin Sevruquin, the enthroned Iranian monarch is held aloft by creatures carved of stone as well as acclaimed by courtiers made of flesh, who have come to convey their greetings (*salam*) either on New Year's or upon his return from a trip (Figure 6).<sup>18</sup> Once ritually unveiled by the raising of a large fabric cover, the ruler appears to gleam in the sunlight like a newly-installed statue. On the right Nasir al-Din's personal guards and military personnel stand erect and immobile, as

if they too are sculpted entities. Within the refinement and artistry of court ritual, at times it thus becomes difficult to distinguish between reality and artifice, the two blending into a mythic presence that proved particularly effective in promoting an image of divine kingship.

It seems clear that the Qur'anic verse on Solomon's *tamathil* allowed Muslim monarchs (from the first century of Islam until the present day) the possibility of expressing their royal pedigree and power through figural images, including three-dimensional statuary. In the Qur'anic tale of Solomon, such figural representations are praised as wondrous works of regal distinction rather than scorned as objects of pagan worship. As a consequence, these human likenesses and their material iterations essentially function as symbolic tools in the support and protection of God's anointed rulers on earth. Indeed, rather than being equated with idols, these *tamathil* are considered synonymous with *mirabilia* (*'aja'ib*) – an ingenious

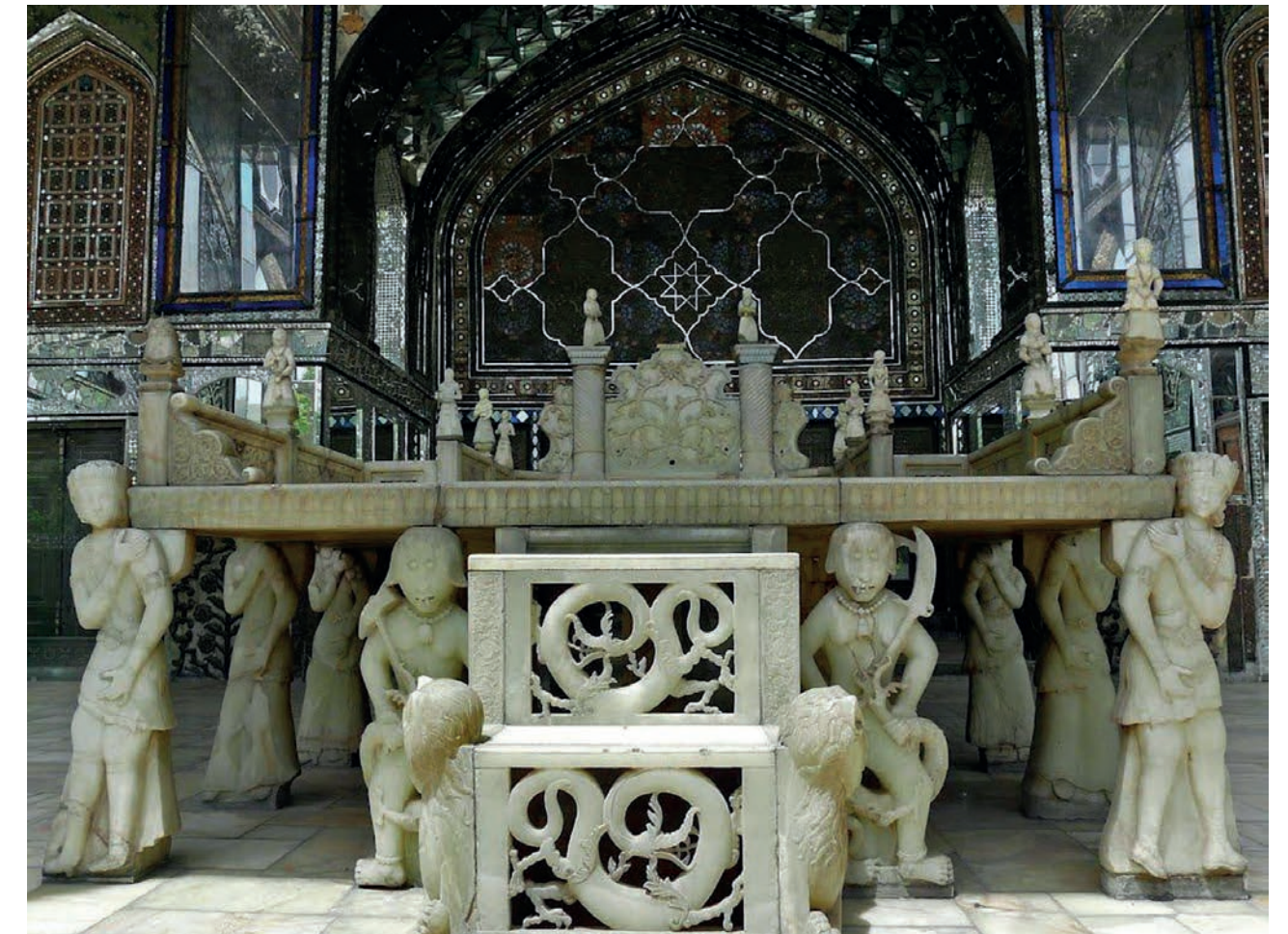


Figure 5. The Marble Throne (*Takht-i Marmar*), Tehran, 1804–7, Gulistan Palace, Tehran. Photograph by the author.



Figure 6. Antoin Sevruguin, photograph showing a greeting (*salam*) ceremony with Nasir al-Din Shah seated on the *Takht-i Marmar* (Marble Throne), Gulistan Palace, Tehran, Iran, 1880s-90s. Myron Bement Smith Collection; Antoin Sevruguin Photographs. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. Gift of Katherine Dennis Smith, 1973- 1985, FSA A.4 2.12.GN.51.10.

equivalence that can likewise be detected in Islamic lustre wares, mechanical devices, and other artworks.<sup>19</sup>

Complicating the matter, the term *tamathil* is also used in the Qur'an to describe heathen cult objects. For instance, the holy text recounts how Abraham destroyed the idols of the Sabaeans, a pre-Islamic people living in the South Arabian land of Saba (Sheba). When he saw the Sabaeans worshipping pagan statues, Abraham questioned his father and people: 'What are these statues (*tamathil*) to which you are so intensely devoted?' (21:52). In this instance, the term *tamathil* – otherwise a non-pejorative word meaning 'likenesses' or 'similitudes' – is used as a synonym for idols. Not merely figural representations, these cult objects were worshipped as deities per se. Abraham goes on to exclaim: 'By God, I shall most certainly bring about the downfall of your idols (*asnamakum*) as soon as you have turned your backs and gone away!' (21:57). He then curses

his people as polytheists: 'Fie upon you and upon all that you worship instead of God! Will you not, then, use your reason?' (21:67).

The story of Abraham destroying the idols of the Sabaeans raises a number of issues, especially insofar as it is often cited as the primary source of Qur'anic support for iconoclastic acts undertaken by the Taliban, ISIS, and other militant groups. First, on the basis of the sequence of the verses, image-adverse individuals or groups are quick to equate figural likenesses (*tamathil*) with pagan idols (*asnam*), overlooking the positive use of the former in the Solomonic tale as well as the fact that, in this instance, the term *tamathil* is most likely used to describe anthropomorphic idols rather than the roughly-hewn sacred stones known as betyls. Second, Abraham gives further meaning to his destructive act by stating explicitly that such idols function as stand-ins for the Sabaeans' polytheistic

beliefs, which, he claims, emerge from the irrational thought that deities reside in three-dimensional objects. Here then, Abraham is not condemning the act of figural depiction *ipso facto*; rather, he takes such objects as material metaphors for a lack of logic. As such, the *asnam* destroyed by Abraham were nothing but the venerated idols of a bygone, irrational age, which had to be obliterated and discarded in order to usher in a more reasonable, monotheistic world order. That medieval scholars such as al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144 CE) argued that the practice of making figures stood 'against reason' (*muqabbahat al-'aql*)<sup>20</sup> reveals that this type of Muslim anti-image position could be couched as a safeguarding and promotion of rational thought.

Over the centuries many Muslim theologians, jurists, writers, and artists did not consider figural representation tantamount to idolatry. In their estimation, these two visual modes of expression differed, both in their ontological status and their practical use, the latter erroneously allowing for the possibility of divine inhabitation and worship. Because depicting sentient beings has never been wholly prohibited in Islamic history, both patrons and artists saw it fit to exploit the figural mode – at times even to excoriate idolatry. As a case in point, a number of Persian manuscript paintings show Abraham destroying the idols of the Sabaeans. One of these, made in Ilkhanid

Iran at the beginning of the fourteenth century, depicts the monotheistic prophet wearing a green robe and white turban, his head framed by a gold halo as he wields an axe to three idols, one of which has fallen to the ground (Figure 7). Intriguingly, these idols do not look like pre-Islamic betyls or anthropoid stones, such as those found throughout the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>21</sup> Instead, they resemble Buddhist statues seated in the lotus position and forming mudra gestures. As has been noted by Priscilla Soucek, this manuscript was made in Iran at a time when Islam was beginning to eclipse Buddhism, and when Buddhist shrines and statues were being destroyed. It is thus 'not difficult to imagine that the story of Abraham's destruction of the idols could be viewed as a vindication of the Islamic point of view over the Buddhist idolaters' of the time.<sup>22</sup> The paradigm of Abrahamic iconoclasm has thus helped to legitimate Islam's ascendancy over other religions, from the Ilkhanid patrons of medieval Iran to the militants today fighting under the banner of ISIS.

Furthermore, the Ilkhanid painting also displays obvious signs of wear. Two of the three seated idols appear to have been smudged by the viewers' fingers, causing the gold or silver pigments to become oxidized. Brown blemishes stretch horizontally across the face of the idol seated on the left, suggesting that it was targeted in this pictorial form of



Figure 7. The Prophet Abraham breaking the idols of the Sabaeans, al-Biruni, *al-Athar al-Baqiyya* (The Chronology of Nations), Tabriz, Iran, 707/1307–8. Edinburgh University Library, Or. Ms. 161, folio 88v.

damnation,<sup>23</sup> while the idol on the ground, already smashed by Abraham's axe, seems not to have needed any further destruction. The damage to the pigments raises two important points: first, the picture's viewers were able to mimic Abraham by adding their own hands to his iconoclastic attack against two of the depicted idols; and second, since Abraham remains in pristine condition, these same viewers obviously did not consider figural likenesses concomitant with idols. Had this been the case, the depiction of Abraham would also show signs of damage, while the painting itself, which clearly fulfilled both pedagogical and religious needs, would not have been made in the first place.

#### IMAGES, IDOLS, AND SACRED STONES

The Qur'an, other textual sources, and archaeological remains offer further information about pagan Arabian idols, what they looked like, and how they functioned during pre-Islamic

times. Beyond the stories of Solomon, Moses, and Abraham, the Qur'an tends to mention idols alongside other materials and practices prohibited to Muslims.<sup>24</sup> Taboo items include the eating of carrion, swine, and other animals slaughtered as offerings to sacred stones or betyls (5:3);<sup>25</sup> the drinking of wine, games of chance, and divining by arrows (5:90);<sup>26</sup> and the telling of lies (22:30).<sup>27</sup> In these lists of rules governing moral behaviour, a variety of terms are used for 'idol', above all *nusub/ansab* and *wathan/awthan*. Noticeably absent from the Qur'anic inventory of banned items is the term *tamathil* or figural likenesses – a semantic omission that, as previous scholars have pointedly noted, proves that the Qur'an censures the worshipping of idols while concurrently showing no hostility to the plastic or visual arts.<sup>28</sup>

As for the idols themselves, further information can be gleaned from extant objects and the literary output of early Muslim writers. Among them, best known as the founder of the history

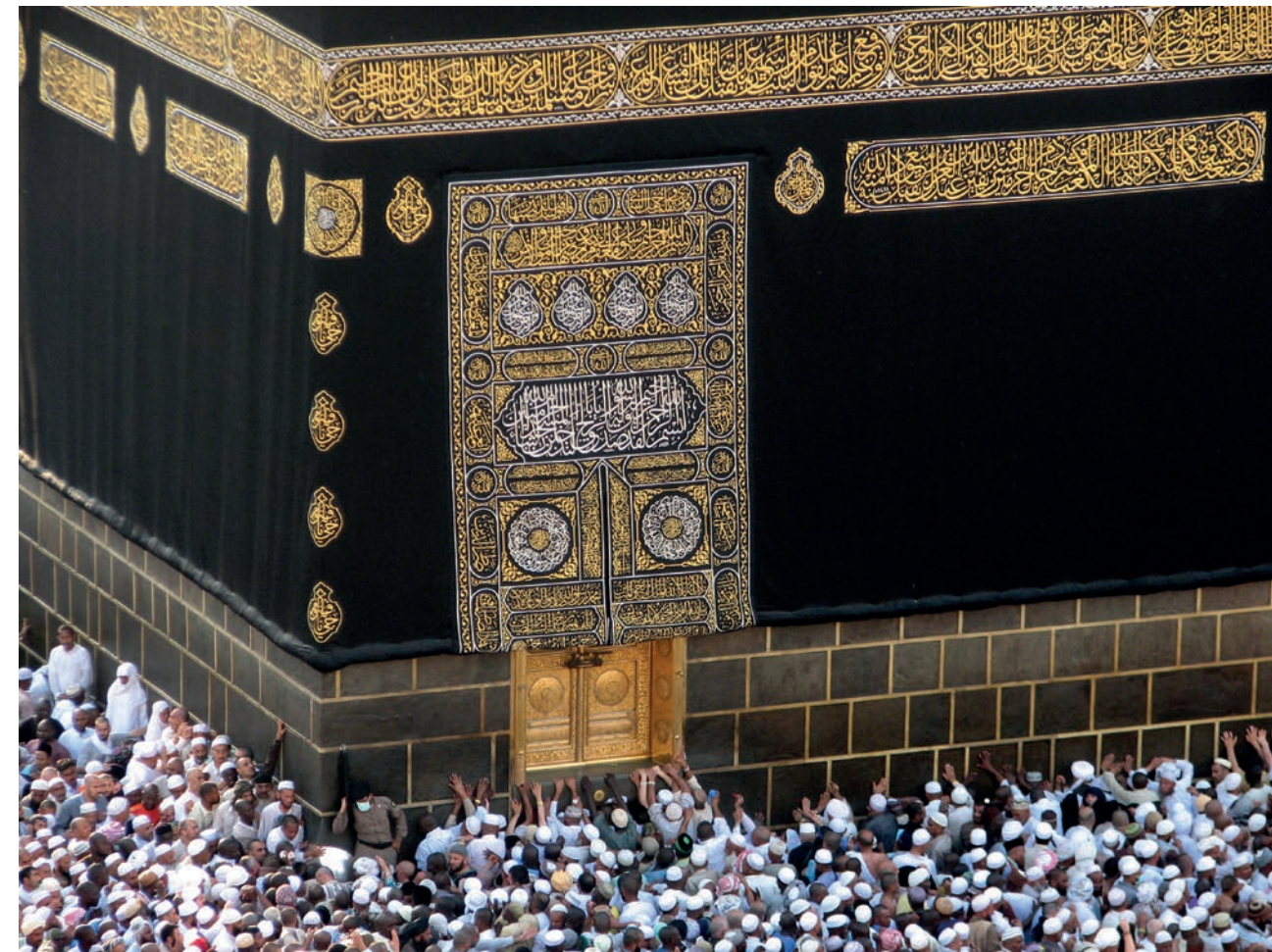


Figure 8. Pilgrims circumambulating the Ka'ba as they try to touch and kiss the Black Stone lodged in its corner, Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Stock Photo.

of Arabian paganism is Ibn al-Kalbi, who composed his *Kitab al-Asnam* (Book of Idols) prior to his death in 821 CE. In his oeuvre, Ibn al-Kalbi provides his readers with a plethora of details about pre-Islamic pagan idols, the tribes and locations to which they were attached, and the ritual practices centred around them. He also offers a linguistic explanation for the terms used for various idols. He specifies for example, that the *ansab* are betyls – that is, sacred stones endowed with life. These stones were neither figural nor anthropomorphic; rather, they were uncut or chiselled stones, positioned upright, and they included long rocks, hewn quartz or even black meteorites, sometimes placed within a temple known as a *bayt*.<sup>29</sup>

Particularly germane to Ibn al-Kalbi's discussion of *ansab* is the Black Stone (*al-hajar al-aswad*) lodged in one of the corners of the Ka'ba in Mecca. This black meteorite appears to have served as the Muslim community's very first direction of prayer (*qibla*) before Muhammad and his followers migrated to Medina, at which time Jerusalem and then Mecca replaced the Black Stone's central position in communal prayer.<sup>30</sup> There is no doubt that this black stone is a holdover from pre-Islamic times, when pagan Arabs performed circumambulation (*tawaf* or *dawar*) around the Ka'ba while touching a number of stones, which collectively were known as the '*ansab* of the Ka'ba'.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the practice of walking around and rubbing a sacred stone, the Ka'ba's honorific appellations *al-Haram* and *Bayt Allah* also point to the pre-Islamic Arabian practice of enclosing a sacred rock within a designated sanctum dedicated to a deity. In an Islamic register, however, the Black Stone is neither a deity in petrified form nor is it alive in some fashion or another.<sup>32</sup> Rather, it is said to be a piece of the temple or throne of God located in the celestial spheres, a fragment or copy of which is preserved in the earthly Ka'ba, itself dubbed the 'house' or 'temple' of God (*bayt Allah*). This meteorite is touched and kissed by pilgrims to the present day (Figure 8), even though Saudi officers attempt to curb the practice and some members of ISIS go so far as to call the Ka'ba a centre of stone worship that must be razed to the ground.<sup>33</sup> Such anxieties surrounding the Ka'ba's litholatric origins are not new or unfounded, however. They stretch all the way back to 'Umar, the Prophet Muhammad's companion and one of the first four rightly guided caliphs, who himself expressed concerns over the Muslim community's continued attachment to a black stone.<sup>34</sup>

Besides such sacred, non-anthropoid stones, Ibn al-Kalbi also records other types of idols in his *Book of Idols*. Most prominent among them are the types of idols mentioned in the title of his treatise: namely, *asnam* (sing. *sanam*). As our early historian of

Arabian paganism specifies, *asnam* are statues in human form and usually made of wood, gold, or silver, whereas *awthan* (sing. *wathan*) are images of humans (*tamathil*) made in stone. In other words, *awthan* are in essence figural *ansab* carved from stone, whereas *asnam* are shaped or constructed from non-lapidary materials, including precious metals.<sup>35</sup> This, in turn, suggests a differentiation in size and purpose as well: one may hypothesize that stone *awthan* encompassed larger and more public statuary, whereas *asnam* were smaller in scale and kept either in secured sanctuaries or private homes. Last but certainly not least, it should be emphasized that in his text Ibn al-Kalbi uses the term *tamathil*, or figural likenesses, as a neutral descriptor for material representations of living beings rather than a pejorative synonym for idols at the centre of polytheistic worship.

That Ibn al-Kalbi mentions a number of idols made of wood burned within pagan homes during the rise of Islam, points to a cult of hearth gods, some of which were affiliated to specific tribes and families.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, *asnam* were roughly anthropoid and functioned as depictions of dead kin.<sup>37</sup> For these reasons, a number of ancient Arabian funerary stelae and anthropomorphic statues – including a Sabaeen female figurine (Figure 9),<sup>38</sup> which somewhat recalls the Sabaeen idols illustrated in Figure 7 – not only served as grave-markers but also as embodiments of ancestors. At the height of the emergence of Islam, the destruction of such idols was not begotten from a fear of their potential to come alive or return from the dead. Rather, their burning and shattering heralded the overthrow of ancestor worship, balkanized tribalism, and overt signs of class in favour of a larger faith community (*umma*) aiming for equality and unity in its devotion to one single God.<sup>39</sup> Whether in the seventh century or today, it can thus be argued that the act of idol-breaking serves as the ultimate manifestation of breaking with the past while concurrently taking an oath of loyalty to an emergent Islamic polity.

#### PENDENT PROBLEMS: HANGING AND CLOAKING

While idols – that is, images meant for religious devotion – remained prohibited in all spheres of Muslim life, the question of 'figural images with souls' (*suwar dhawat ruh*) nevertheless proved problematic over the centuries.<sup>40</sup> Various anecdotes about figural images are recorded in Hadith collections, which were compiled from the second half of the seventh century onwards (that is, after the Prophet's death). Much like legal texts, the Hadith contain conflicting opinions about images of animate beings. Such contradictory information must have reflected presentist religious and political concerns among religious scholars and jurists, which could be projected



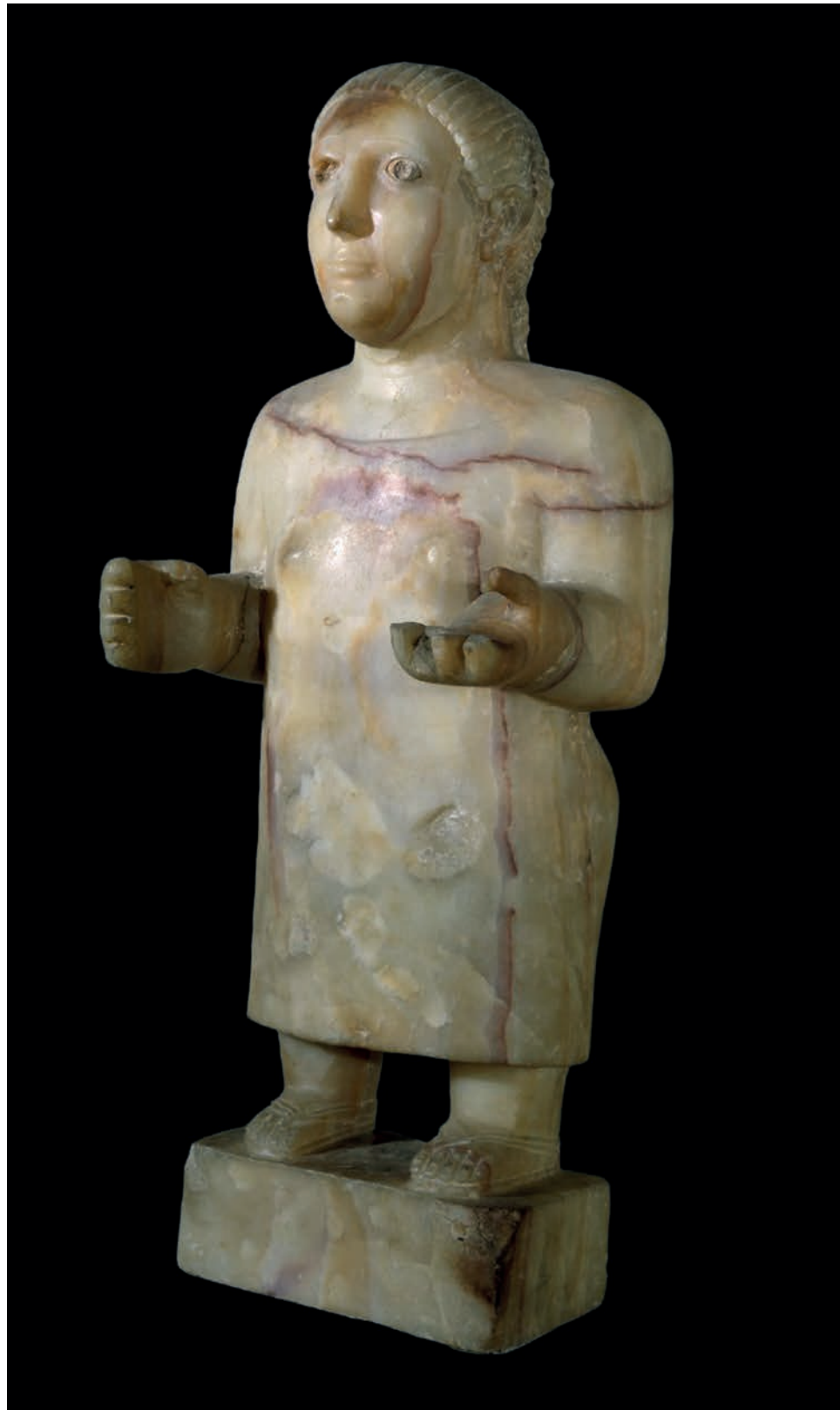


Figure 9. Sabaean statue of a standing woman made of calcite, Yemen, 1st–2nd century CE. British Museum, London, 1965,1011.1.

backward in time via the collecting of Muhammad's sayings or the establishing of legal precedence. Such texts thus highlight how figural imagery in Islamic (and other religious) cultures was subjected to perennial debates of interpretation, with a reservoir of foundational texts that could be marshalled to support at times highly conflicting positions.

Within the Islamic tradition, statements found in Hadith compendia and legal texts span the spectrum when it comes to the image issue. The Hadith contain clear anti-image invectives, including the Prophet's oft-cited warning that makers of images (*musawwirun*) will be punished on the Day of Resurrection, at which time God will dare them to breathe a soul into their works.<sup>41</sup> In light of this particular Saying, some Muslim writers go on to specify that images (*suwar*) in the pre-Islamic period were used in lieu of God. Ergo, their use raised fears of a potential relapse to pagan practices and beliefs, especially during the first century of Islam.<sup>42</sup> However, with the passing of time and increased security in the faith, elite Muslim patrons, writers, and artists – including the sixteenth-century album compiler Dust Muhammad (d. 1564 CE) – reassured artists that painting/portraiture (*tasvir*) 'is not without justification, and the portraitist's conscience need not be pricked by the thorn of despair'.<sup>43</sup>

As in the Qur'an, images tend to appear in longer lists of other so-called 'abominations' within the Hadith corpus. For example, at turns we read that angels do not enter a house containing an image, a bell, or a dog. In such cases, representations of 'figures possessing a soul', which might be put to use in pagan devotions, are aligned with two other symbols: that is, the bell, a substitute for the public presence and proclamation of Christianity, and the dog, an animal allegory for contamination and uncleanness.<sup>44</sup> Yet, we also find this stringent Hadith mitigated in both practice and theory: in practice, by the fact that the Prophet is recorded as having allowed the use of cushions ornamented with figural imagery in his house, and, in theory, via statements by scholars – including the Sunni jurist and Hadith scholar al-Nawawi (d. 1278 CE) – specifying that only the angels Gabriel and Michael refuse entry into the Prophet's house and hence this particular Saying is only applicable to Muhammad, and not the wider community.<sup>45</sup>

To a certain extent, figural textiles highlight several intersecting problems when it comes to the parameters involved in determining the permissibility of depicting animate beings in Islamic traditions. These parameters include several variables, most notably the textiles' mode of use and their specific location. In this regard, the Hadith include several

noteworthy statements regarding a figural fabric that belonged to Muhammad's wife, 'Aisha. This textile, we are told, was decorated with images (*tamathil*) or a figure (*raqm*) of a bird or winged horse, and that it was acquired by 'Aisha while the Prophet was away on a trip.<sup>46</sup> Upon his return, he saw the hanging cloth (*qirām*) affixed to a door or wall and ordered it taken down. While some Muslim writers have interpreted this Hadith as evidence for a prophetic ban on figural images, other Sayings record the exchange in greater detail and reveal a more nuanced position. These tell us, for example, that Muhammad ordered the hanging cloth pulled down, upon which he commanded 'Aisha to: 'Remove it from my sight, for its pictures (*tasawir*) keep occurring to my mind while I am praying'.<sup>47</sup> The images thus proved a distraction to the Prophet in his pious contemplation of a formless, all-encompassing God. Rather than jettison the cloth hanging, however, 'Aisha pulled it down and cut it into pieces with which she made figural cushions (*numruqa*). Another Hadith takes the exchange one step further by recording 'Aisha stating that: 'God has not commanded us to clothe stones and clay. We cut it [the curtain] and prepared two pillows out of it by stuffing them with the fibre of date-palms and he [the Prophet] did not find fault with it'.<sup>48</sup>

This episode in the Hadith is instructive in several respects. First arises the problem of pendent figures: that is, images that are suspended or hung in some fashion or another. Enlivened by rays of light and gusts of wind as well as facing the beholder at eye-level or higher, such representations may be perceived as glorified (*mu'azzam*),<sup>49</sup> as well as possessing a soul. In such a case, these dangling simulacra of animate beings may accidentally become the subject of devotional attention and prostration – and thus slip from the field of pictorial representation into the tabooed terrain of idol-worship, a particular anxiety that pervaded Byzantine Christian cultural spheres as well.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of the religious tradition or practice, the problem essentially involves ontological imagination, whose onus falls squarely on the beholder's conceptual thinking and mode of conduct.

The second problematic issue is that of cloaking. In pre-Islamic pagan ritual, simple upright stones and carved rocks were clad in textiles, coated in clay and lime, and circumrotated by pious visitants who declared their presence to the deity with the vocative '*Labayka*' (Here, I am!).<sup>51</sup> During the seventh century, when confronted by Muslim forces, pagan Arabs issued battle cries by swearing upon sacred stones and [their] veil (*al-ansab wa'l-sitr*).<sup>52</sup> As a result, it can be deduced that the veil or curtain not only enlivened the embroidered or woven figural image, but could also camouflage the potential presence of a deity.

That which lies beyond the veil, after all, remains a matter of speculative seeing and believing in divine presence – and such a disposition carried over into Islamic praxis via the *kiswa* (literally, ‘dress’) enwrapping the Ka’ba,<sup>53</sup> itself God’s earthly temple and a sacred architectonic reliquary of the Black Stone.<sup>54</sup>

The third issue concerns the *subject* of figuration, the modality of its use, and its particular religious and cultural valences. Returning to the Hadith, we are informed that ‘Aisha’s hanging curtain possibly included a depiction of winged horses. This motif is commonly found on Sasanian seals, silver dishes, and figural textiles, in which the fantastical creature acts as an emblem of Persian royalty or the star constellation known as Pegasus (Figure 10).<sup>55</sup> For both political and religious reasons, this marker of Sasanian rule and/or symbol of astral worship could prove doubly problematic in an early Islamic context, especially if placed on display as a pendent image. Prohibiting the figural representation of a winged horse or fantastic creature, however, did not prove to be an immutable instruction. More crucially, the circumstances of the prohibition had to be deduced by taking into account the theme, location, meaning, and use of the depiction. It is for these reasons that, as another Hadith informs us, when Muhammad witnessed ‘Aisha on a different occasion playing with a doll in the shape of a horse with wings made of rags, he did not scold her for having made an idol-like, mobile image. Quite to the contrary, he asked her in jest: ‘A horse with wings?’ To which she responded with the rhetorical question: ‘Have you not heard that Solomon had horses with wings?’ The Prophet delighted in ‘Aisha’s witty reply and laughed so heartily that she said she could see his molar teeth.<sup>56</sup>

Textual sources provide a rich resource for the staking out of diametrically opposed stances on figural imagery, each of which can be construed as theologically grounded in the Prophet’s *sunna* or tradition. On the one hand, written texts can easily be mined to support the assertion that an individual must abstain from the making and viewing of beings that potentially can be endowed with life. On the other, the very same sources can serve to endorse the human production and enjoyment of figural likenesses. The Islamic visual corpus, for its part, is not in the least wanting in this area: indeed, there exist plenty of two-dimensional depictions of fantastical beasts and three-dimensional renderings of animals that have been made from the earliest centuries until today.<sup>57</sup> Among them are hybrid human-animal creatures such as harpies, the Prophet Muhammad’s human-headed flying steed named al-Buraq (Figure 11),<sup>58</sup> and even images of the Saudi king Salman digitally enhanced with wings as if he were an airborne

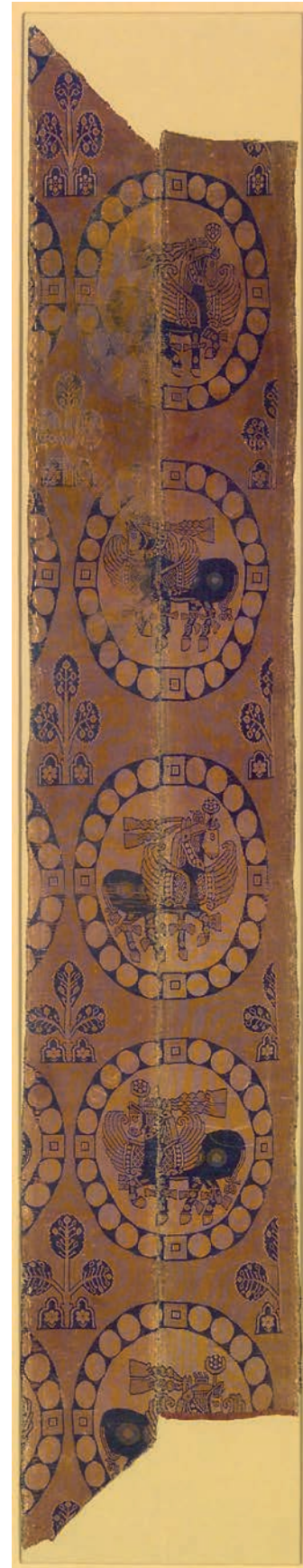


Figure 10. Sasanian silk textile fragment decorated with winged horses, Central Asia, 5th–7th century CE. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.255.



Figure 11. Sculpture of Buraq, painted wood, Mindanao, Philippines, early to mid-20th century. Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore, 2010-00780.



Figure 12. Small bone-carved figurine, Fustat (Old Cairo), Egypt, 9th–10th centuries. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 1969.2.93.

angel (see Figure 2). One might assume that this last pictorial flight of fancy should not exist in light of Saudi government-sponsored Wahhabi *fatwas* that specifically prohibit imaginary pictures of winged horses and men with wings, an argument based on the sole citation of the Hadith in which Muhammad asks ‘Aisha to take down her curtain.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, as the visual evidence so clearly shows, such a ‘legalist-supremacist’<sup>60</sup> conception of Islam does not explain the varied driving forces when the time comes to crafting charismatic images in support of both religion and state within Muslim-majority countries.

#### ‘METAPHYSICAL STIRRINGS’: FROM DOLLS TO EMOTICONS

The Hadith also pay attention to ‘Aisha’s female dolls (*banat*), which we are told were brought into the Prophet’s household upon his marriage to her when she was nine years of age. Not only did Muhammad not prohibit these playthings, but he sat at her side while she amused herself with them.<sup>61</sup> In later centuries, the issue of dolls also emerged in Islamic legal texts concerned with depictions of living beings. While some jurists (such as Ibn Hanbal, d. 855 CE) considered all images abominations and thus impermissible (*haram*), others (such as Ibn Hazm, d. 1064 CE) not only allowed the manufacture and use of dolls but even considered them a ‘permissible good’ (*halal hasan*).<sup>62</sup> While one jurist might rely on anti-image declarations in the Hadith, another could quarry the same corpus to accentuate the Prophet’s approbatory behaviour instead. More simply put, opposing viewpoints are grounded within the very same textual roots. Ranging over the centuries across a wide spectrum from idol incarnate to educational tool the doll has highlighted vastly divergent Islamic attitudes toward the depiction of human beings, among them three-dimensional figuration.

Although the exact appearance of ‘Aisha’s dolls remains uncertain, it is possible that they resembled the carved bone and ivory objects found in excavations at Fustat (old Cairo). These medieval Islamic juvenalia include carved limbs and facial features as well as punctured holes that could enable the affixing of fabrics and jewels (Figure 12).<sup>63</sup> Still others had a cross-shaped infrastructure, into which the head was pinned and around which the body was moulded with clay as well as covered in rags and other materials.<sup>64</sup>

These diminutive statues must have allowed children to engage in the imaginative play of dress-up, which continues unabated to the present day. As Charles Baudelaire notes in his seminal essay on the ‘Philosophy of Toys’, such playthings essentially activate the child’s ‘metaphysical stirrings’<sup>65</sup> as they seek to investigate the sculpted image’s inner life or spiritual



Figure 13. ‘Deeni Doll’ named Romeisa, United Kingdom, 2014. Image in the public domain.

‘innards’.<sup>66</sup> Thus, through the power of human imagination, these objects may seem to garner a semblance of sentience – that is, to exert life itself. This type of coming-into-being or ‘incarnational aesthetic’<sup>67</sup> is prompted by an object’s outward appearance as well as projected by its viewers into its very core. Therefore, both the visual qualities of figuration and the delimiting of sight come together to yield a figural product which often operates within a larger religious and cultural ambit.

In this regard, the example of the doll again proves fascinating: While medieval carved toys always include chiselled facial features, some contemporary dolls are made without any facial traits whatsoever. Such dolls include the so-called ‘Deeni’ (Religious) Doll named Romeisa (Figure 13).<sup>68</sup> Although marketed to British Muslim parents as ‘shari’-compliant’, Romeisa is in fact indebted to Amish dolls that are also faceless and provided with head covers.<sup>69</sup> Whether in Muslim or Christian ultra-conservative spheres, statements

from the Hadith and the Bible are selectively brought to the fore to support a child-friendly product. The absence of a face prevents the doll from becoming a graven image or idol, either from a spirit emanating from its human likeness, or from the imaginative vision of the children – who, it should be added, not infrequently reach for a black pen in order to fill in these most inviting blank slates. The conundrum thus continues to loom large while the blank doll’s face invites the inscription of life itself.

A number of pre-modern visual materials highlight other strategies adopted by artists. For example, some figural fabrics made in sixteenth-century Iran have woven or knotted into their structures depictions of crowned young men, whose faces are left entirely blank – much like contemporary ‘Deeni’ dolls – or whose facial features are turned upside-down, as if an early harbinger of today’s smiley faces and emoticons (Figures 14 and 15).<sup>70</sup> These pictorial stratagems in part appear to follow the guidance of some scholars, including Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240 CE), who stressed that, albeit abhorrent, embroidered figures on cloth could be permitted if executed with defects.<sup>71</sup> Such plays were thus carefully considered and executed from the artwork’s inception in order to ensure its theological defensibility on the one hand, and to protect it from subsequent manipulation and destruction on the other. As Finbarr Barry Flood has shown, such later manipulations include most prominently the smudging of facial features and the insertion of a black line across the throats of human beings that were depicted in manuscript paintings of the pre-modern period.<sup>72</sup>

Returning to smiley faces and emoticons, these, too, have proved a contentious subject, especially in today’s Saudi Arabia. With the advent of social media and texting, such emoticons provide non-verbal clues to viewers, to some degree serving as shorthand visual embodiments of their writers and their associated expressions and emotions.<sup>73</sup> For Shaykh al-Munajjid, the graphic signs can be both acceptable and impermissible. He reasons that: ‘The majority of *fuqaha*’ [legal scholars] are of the view that if something is cut off from an image without which it could no longer live, then it is not a *haram* image’. Thus, the emoticon, as a disembodied head, is permitted since it does not run the risk of being inspirited through a (here, non-existent) corporeal casing. Leaving aside the ontological nature of figural imagery, Shaykh al-Munajjid continues with the following caveat: ‘A woman should not use these images when speaking to a man who is not her *mahram* [family member], because these faces are used to express how she is feeling, so it is as if she is smiling, laughing, acting shy and so on, and a woman should not do that with a non-*mahram*



man. It is only permissible for a woman to speak to men in cases of necessity, so long as that is in a public chat room and not in private correspondence'.<sup>74</sup> The anxieties surrounding images – in this case, the ones sent and received within digital networks of social relations – also pertain to the larger question of regulating gender relations, especially as women face increasing opportunities to interact virtually with males outside the family orbit. Unlike the child's toy, then, the emoticon raises social and religious fears that it may catalyse 'stirrings' more sentimental than metaphysical.

#### CRAFTING IMAGES, FROM THE SACRED TO THE SELF

In November 2017, the Saudi Arabian government banned another image-making practice: namely, the *hajj* selfie (Figure 16). The official prohibition came on the heels of clerical discontent over the course of several years, peaking most especially in 2015 and 2016. News articles posted online stressed that the pilgrims' practice of creating these photographic self-portraits undercut the sanctity of the sacred sites, caused confusion among the large crowds attempting to walk in unison, and interrupted and irritated worshippers.<sup>75</sup> In these state-sponsored statements as well as in electronic *fatwas*,



Figure 14. Decorative embroidered panel, Kashan, Iran, late 16th to early 17th century, Sarikhani Collection, I.TX.1017.

Figure 15. Detail of Figure 14.

concerns over the potential inspiring and worshipping of these photographic self-images fell by the wayside. In their stead, clerics excoriated pilgrims' performance of piety only for the sake of its photographic commemoration. As Shaykh al-Munajjid stressed: '... People take pictures to show to others that they have done Hajj. Hence, [...] they raise their hands in supplication when they are not actually offering supplication; rather it is only for the purpose of taking the picture'.<sup>76</sup> As the *shaykh* remarks, the human behaviour of contrived piety intersects with the equally human tendency towards boastfulness and narcissism – all of which must be curbed, even eliminated, to ensure that pilgrims remain in a proper state of purity (*ihram*) and that the holy sites of Mecca and Medina remain unsullied.

In this and many other cases, the crux of the matter therefore appears a rather simple one, and it is this: the creation of an image of a human being must not be conflated with the worshipping of an idol. While there may be instances in which figuration and paganism might overlap, there exist many more cases in which they diverge substantially. For example, painterly depictions of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad confronting pagan objects and practices reveal how the

pictorial mode can offer a positive form of argumentation against idolatry per se. In addition, the existence of figural depiction, statuary, fantastical beasts, figural textiles, dolls, emoticons, and photographic selfies display a creativity and playfulness around image-making that has thrived in Islamic lands over the centuries, enduring until the present day.

This said, as in all religious cultures, certain anxieties prove tenacious. Both textual proclamations and visual materials shed light on both the problems and possibilities as these relate to the depiction of figural images. As for today's problems, the lure of the seductive arts, the imitation of Christian traditions, and the rise in imagistic self-centredness transcend obsolete fears of lapsing into paganism, even if the latter may be leveraged for rhetorical purposes within situations of contraposition or conflict. While for the more promising possibilities, one thing remains certain: figural images are here to stay and will be endlessly multiplied across the media. Their power will continue to cause both dread and delight, revealing the extent to which figural imagery emanating from both Islamic and non-Islamic cultural spheres will continue to stimulate lively discussion and debate for years to come.



Figure 16. A Muslim pilgrim couple take a selfie on Jabal Rahma (The Mountain of Mercy) near Mecca, Saudi Arabia, 2015.

Photograph by Mosa ab Elshamy/AP and in the public domain.

## NOTES

- For a general survey of the subject, see Llewelyn Morgan, *The Buddhas of Bamiyan*, London 2012; for a discussion of the Buddhas' destruction as an evolving discursive process, see Jamal Elias, '(Un)Making Idolatry: From Mecca to Bamiyan', *Future Anterior* 4/2 (Winter 2017), 12–29; on the sculptures' relationship to 'Islamic iconoclasm', see Finbarr Barry Flood, 'Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum', *The Art Bulletin* 84/4 (December 2002), 641–659, especially 655 for the Taliban's *fatwa* (legal opinion or decree) on the Buddhas; on the forcible conscription of Hazara men to dynamite the sculptures, see Peter Eichstaedt, *Above the Din of War: Afghans Speak About their Lives, their Country, and their Future—and Why America Should Listen*, Chicago 2013, 203–7.
- For a discussion of the instrumentalised iconoclasm and visual culture of ISIS, see Christiane Gruber, 'The Visual Culture of ISIS: Truculent Iconophilia as Antagonistic Co-Evolution', in *Nähe auf Distanz: Eigendynamik und mobilisierende Kraft politischer Bilder im Internet*, eds. Isabelle Busch, Uwe Fleckner, and Judith Walzmann, Berlin 2019, 113–142; Ömür Harmanşah, 'ISIS, Heritage, and the Spectacles of Destruction in the Global Media', *Near Eastern Archaeology* 78/3 (2015), 170–177; Wendy Shaw, 'Destroy Your Idols', *X-TRA Contemporary Art Magazine* (September 2015), 73–94; Finbarr Barry Flood, 'Idol-Breaking as Image-Making in the "Islamic State"', *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 7 (2016), 116–38.
- For an overview of the Danish cartoon controversy, see in particular Jytte Klausen, *The Cartoons that Shook the World*, New Haven 2009; Finbarr Barry Flood, 'Inciting Modernity?: Images, Alterities and the Contexts of "Cartoon Wars"', *Images that Move*, eds. Patricia Spyer and Mary Steedly, Santa Fe 2013, 41–72; Finbarr Barry Flood, 'From the Prophet to Postmodernism?: New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art', *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield, New York and London 2007, 31–53. For a discussion of the 2015 Charlie Hebdo assassination and depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, see Christiane Gruber, 'Images of the Prophet Muhammad: Brief Thoughts on Some European-Islamic Encounters', in *Seen and Unseen: Visual Cultures of Imperialism*, eds. Sanaz Fotouhi and Esmail Zeiny, Leiden 2017, 34–52.
- See Shaykh al-Munajjid's ruling on making snowmen (no. 226557) at <https://islamqa.info/en/226557>, which reads in part: 'If the snowman does not have clear facial features such as eyes, a nose and a mouth, and it is merely a three-dimensional figure with no features, like the scarecrows that farmers set up to scare away birds, and signs that are put on roads as a warning of roadworks or construction, then there is nothing wrong with any of that. [...] But if the snowman has clear facial features, then the majority of scholars are of the view that it is prohibited, because of the general meaning of the prohibition on making images'. Munajjid also cites Ibn 'Abbas on the head as an essential component of an 'image'; for Ibn 'Abbas' statement and its relationship to the putative 'prohibition of images' (*Bilderverbot*) in Islam, see Rudi Paret, 'Textbelege zum islamischen Bilderverbot', in *Das Werk des Künstlers: Studien zur Ikonographie und Formgeschichte*, Stuttgart 1960, 46.
- Reuters in Dubai, 'Saudi cleric issues fatwa on snowmen', *The Guardian*, 12 January 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/12/saudi-arabia-snowmen-winter-fatwa>.
- Marshall Hodgson, 'Islām and Image', *History of Religions* 3/2 (Winter 1964), 243; James Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence, and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam*, London 2013, 177; Ahmad Muhammad 'Isa, 'Muslims and Taswir', *The Muslim World* 45/3 (July 1955), 254.
- On the beneficial use of visual likenesses, the neutralization of legal obstacles, and the promotion of public interest in Saudi image-related discourses, see Muhammad al-Atawneh, *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity: Dar al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State*, Leiden and Boston 2010, 115–20.
- Al-Atawneh, *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity*, 119 (citing al-Bukhari).
- On the Qur'an showing no hostility to the plastic or visual arts and instead railing against poetry, see Hodgson, 'Islām and Image', 229.
- For a summary of the Qur'anic description of Solomon, see Priscilla Soucek, 'Solomon's Bath/Solomon's Throne: Model or Metaphor?', *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), 109.
- For a discussion of sixteenth-century Persian manuscript paintings depicting Solomon and Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba), see Serpil Bağcı, 'A New Theme of the Shirazi Frontispiece Miniatures: The *Divan* of Solomon', *Muqarnas* 12 (1995), 102–11. Moreover, as Rachel Milstein has argued, one Ottoman painting appears to depict Sultan Süleyman in the guise of Solomon, accompanied by groups of theologians and scientists, and hence visually embodying the Ottoman concept of the sultanate; see her 'King Solomon or Sultan Süleyman?', in *The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage: Politics, Society and Economy*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi et al., Leiden 2016, 15–24.
- For a discussion of the central role of figural imagery in the vying for power between Umayyad theologians and caliphs because the latter were depicted as divinely ordained, see Mika Natif's contribution to this volume, 32–45, and her 'The Painter's Breath and Concepts of Idol Anxiety in Islamic Art', in *Idol Anxiety*, eds. Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft, Stanford 2011, 41–55.
- Soucek, 'Solomon's Bath/Solomon's Throne', 119; Robert Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley*, Oxford 1959, pls. LV-LVII; Robert Hillenbrand, 'La Dolce Vita in Early Islamic Syria: The Evidence of Later Umayyad Palaces', *Studies in Medieval Islamic Architecture*, London 2001, vol. 1, 76–8, and fig. 10.
- On the rise of modern statuary in Islamic lands, see Klaus Kreiser, 'Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt, 1840–1916', *Muqarnas* 14 (1997), 101–17. There existed some public statues in Islamic lands during the pre-modern period, however. For example, a wind vane in the shape of a horse-rider capped the dome of the 'Abbasid palace in Baghdad, see Oya Pancaroglu, 'Figural Ornament in Medieval Islamic Art', in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, eds. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, Somerset 2017, 505.
- See Sheila Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, New York City 2006, 40–47 (entry by Michael Falcatano); and Stefan Heidemann, Jean-François de Lapérouse, and Vicki Parry, 'The Large Audience: Life-Sized Stucco Figures of Royal Princes from the Seljuq Period', *Muqarnas* 31 (2014), 35–71.
- Melanie Gibson, 'A Symbolic Khassakiyya: Representations of the Palace Guard in Murals and Stucco Sculpture', *Islamic Art, Architecture and Material Culture: New Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Graves, Oxford 2012, 81–91. For related images and sculptures, see Estelle Whelan, 'Representations of the Khassakiyah and the Origins of Mamluk Emblems', *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World: Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen*, eds. Carol Bier and Priscilla Soucek, University Park 1988, 219–43.
- Verses cited in Soucek, 'Solomon's Bath/Solomon's Throne', 120 and footnote 145.
- For a brief discussion of this photograph, see Soucek, 'Solomon's Bath/Solomon's Throne', 121, and fig. 7.
- On the notion of the wondrous in early Islamic ceramics, see Matthew Saba, 'Abbasid Lusterware and the Aesthetics of 'Ajab', *Muqarnas* 29 (2012), 187–212; on Islamic mechanical devices as 'ingenious', see al-Jazari, *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices*, Dordrecht and Boston 1974; on al-Qazwini's 'Wonders of Creation' (*Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat*) and other wondrous cosmological imagery, see Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*, New Haven 2011.
- Ahmad Ghabin, 'The Quranic Verses as a Source for Legitimacy or Illegitimacy of the Arts in Islam', *Der Islam* 75 (1998), 213.
- See the Arabian idols, statues and steles illustrated in Ute Franke and Joachim Gierlich, eds., *Roads of Arabia: The Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia*, Berlin 2011.
- Priscilla Soucek, 'An Illustrated Manuscript of al-Biruni's Chronology of Nations', *The Scholar and the Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abu'l-Rayhan al-Biruni and Jalal al-Din al-Rumi*, ed. Peter Chelkowski, New York 1975, 118.
- For a further discussion of picture-based forms of damnation in Islamic illustrated manuscripts, see Christiane Gruber, 'In Defense and Devotion: Affective Practices in Early Modern Turco-Persian Manuscript Paintings', in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture*, ed. Kishwar Rizvi, Leiden 2017, 95–123; and on Islamic epigraphic erasures as forms of *dammatio memoriae*, see Finbarr Barry Flood's essay in this volume, 46–71.
- For a general discussion of lawful and forbidden foods, the avoidance of the uncleanness of idols (*awthan*), and the devotee's total devotion to the one single God, see George Marçais, 'La question des images dans l'art musulman', *Byzantion* 7 (1932), 166.
- Qur'an 5:3: 'Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than God, and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision through divining arrows'.
- Qur'an 5:90: 'O you who believe! Wine (*al-hamr*), games of chance (*al-masir*), raised stones (*al-ansab*), and divination arrows (*al-alzam*) are but an abomination of Satan's doing. Shun them so that you might be successful!'
- Qur'an 22:30: 'Shun, then, the loathsome evil of idols (*awthan*) and shun every word that is untrue'.
- Inter alia, see Hodgson, 'Islām and Image', 229; Oleg Grabar, 'Islam and Iconoclasm', in *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, vol. 1: *Early Islamic Art, 650–1100*, Burlington 2005, 43; and G.R.D. King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48/2 (1985), 269.
- Ibn al-Kalbi, *The Book of Idols: Being a Translation from the Arabic of the Kitāb al-Asnām*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris, Princeton 1952, 15, 28, and 46; ed./trans. into French, Wahid Atallah, *Les idoles de Hicham ibn al-Kalbi*, Paris 1969, 27. On the quartz idol Dhu'l-Khalasah in particular, see Ibn al-Kalbi, *The Book of Idols*, 29.
- Uri Rubin, 'The Ka'ba: Aspects of its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986), 108.
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- For 'Umar's anxieties, see Hawting, 'The Literary Context of the Traditional Accounts of Pre-Islamic Arab Idolatry', 35; on litholatry as an 'unbroken Arabian continuity', see Serjeant, 'Haram and Hawtha', 53.
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- Lecker, 'Idol Worship', 342–3.
- For a discussion of this subject, see Houari Touati, 'Le régime des images figuratives dans la culture islamique médiévale',

- De la figuration humaine au portrait dans l'art islamique*, Leiden and Boston 2015, 1–30; Finbarr Barry Flood's forthcoming book *Islam and Image: Polemics, Theology and Modernity*, 2019; and 'Images Incomplete: Prescriptive Piety and Material Practice in Islamic Art', keynote lecture delivered at the Historians of Islamic Art Biennial Symposium, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 20 October 2016.
41. See al-Bukhari 7/541, no. 835; and Muslim 3/160, no. 5268.
42. 'Isa, 'Muslims and Taswir', 254; G.R.D. King, 'The Prophet Muhammad and Breaking of *Jahiliyyah* Idols', *Studies on Arabia in Honour of Professor G. Rex Smith*, eds. John Healey and Venetia Porter, Oxford 2002, 117.
43. Wheeler Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters, Studies and Sources in Islamic Art and Architecture*, Supplements to Muqarnas, vol. 10, Leiden, Boston, and Cologne 2001, 12: 'Therefore, portraiture (*taswir*) is not without justification (*niz bi asli*), and the portraitist's conscience need not be pricked by the thorn of despair'. For a further discussion of Islamic portraiture traditions, see David Roxburgh, 'Concepts of the Portrait in the Islamic Lands, c. 1300–1600', in *Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century, Studies in the History of Art* 74, ed. Elizabeth Cropper, Washington D.C. 2009, 119–37.
44. For a discussion of the problem of representations of the cross in early Islam see King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine', 269; Stephen Gero, 'The Legend of the Monk Bahira, the Cult of the Cross, and Iconoclasm', *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, eds. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, Damascus 1992, 47–58; Sidney Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times', *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, ed. Canivet and Rey-Coquais, 121–38, and especially 134 on the cross as the 'unadorned likeness of Jesus'; Christian Sahner, 'The First Iconoclasm in Islam: A New History of the Edict of Yazid II (AH 104/AD 723)', *Der Islam* 94/1 (2017), 5–56, and 30 on the destruction of crosses and the killing of pigs.
45. 'Isa, 'Muslims and Taswir', 255–7.
46. See al-Bukhari 7/542; Muslim 3/1158, no. 5256; and Muslim 24:5255.
47. See al-Bukhari 7:72:842; 'Isa, 'Muslims and Taswir', 257; Paret, 'Textbelege zum islamischen Bilderverbot', 41; and Daan van Reenen, 'The Bilderverbot, a New Survey', *Islam* 67 (1990), 42–4.
48. See Muslim 24:5254.
49. For example, the jurists Shirazi (d. 1083 CE) and Ibn Qudama (d. 1344 CE) opine that figural images on the ground are permissible. However, they must not be depicted on walls, doors, or hanging cloth. In such cases, the images of animate beings run the risk of being elevated/glorified (*mu'azzam*) and thus turned into an idol (*sanam*) by its viewers. See Paret, 'Textbelege zum islamischen Bilderverbot', 42; Touati, 'Le régime des images figuratives dans la culture islamique médiévale', 20; on treading upon images, see 'Isa, 'Muslims and Taswir', 253.
50. For an overview of the topic, see Alicia Walker's contribution to this volume, 86–103.
51. Touati, 'Le régime des images figuratives dans la culture islamique médiévale', 28.
52. Ibn al-Kalbi, *The Book of Idols*, 25; *Les idoles*, 35.
53. On the history of the *kiswa*, see in particular Avinoam Shalem, 'The Body of Architecture: The Early History of the Clothing of the Sacred House of the Ka'ba in Mecca', *Clothing the Sacred: Medieval Textiles as Fabric, Form, and Metaphor*, eds. Mateusz Kapustka and Warren Woodfin, Berlin 2015, 173–87; Venetia Porter, 'Textiles of Mecca and Medina', *The Art of Hajj*, ed. Venetia Porter, London 2002, 65–75; Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 'Le voile de la Ka'ba', *Studia Islamica* 1954 (2), 5–21.
54. On the Black Stone as the most important of the four corners or 'pillars' (*arkan*) of the Ka'ba, which in pre-Islamic times may have displayed betyls affixed to the walls of the structure, see G. R. Hawting, 'The Origins of the Muslim Sanctuary at Mecca', in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll, Carbondale 1982, 38–39.
55. Jean Evans, 'Textile Fragment', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 63/2 (Fall 2005), 8.
56. See Abu Dawud 41:4913–4914; G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith*, Leiden and Boston 2007, 196.
57. See Eva Baer, 'The Human Figure in Early Islamic Art: Some Preliminary Remarks', *Muqarnas* 16 (1999), 32–41; Eva Baer, *The Human Figure in Islamic Art: Inheritances and Islamic Transformations*, Costa Mesa 2004; Joachim Meyer and Kjeld von Folsach, *The Human Figure in Islamic Art*, Copenhagen, 2017.
58. Alan Chong et al., *Devotion & Desire: Cross-Cultural Art in Asia*, Singapore, 2013, 96, cat. no. 95.
59. See for example Shaykh al-Munajjid's 2017 fatwa against fantastical imagery at: <https://islamqa.info/en/34522>
60. For the call to challenge the perceived supremacy of prescriptive legalism in Islamic cultures, see Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? On the Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton 2016.
61. Muslim 2:8:551, no. 3311; Muslim 4:29:1005, no. 5981; Abu Dawud 1769, no. 4914 (on her horse with wings); and van Reenen, 'The Bilderverbot, a New Survey', 51.
62. Touati, 'Le régime des images figuratives dans la culture islamique médiévale', 19, 23.
63. Christiane Gruber and Ashley Dimmig, *Pearls of Wisdom: The Arts of Islam at the University of Michigan*, Ann Arbor, 2014, 14, fig. 18, and 52–53, figs. 28–29.
64. Elzbieta Rodziewicz, *Bone Carvings from Fustat – Istabl 'Antar*, Cairo 2012, especially 456, pl. 106.
65. Charles Baudelaire, 'The Philosophy of Toys', in *On Dolls*, ed. Kenneth Gross, London 2012, 20.
66. Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, 'The Soul of the Toy', in *Childish Things*, ed. David Hopkins, Edinburgh 2010, 55.
67. Aura Satz, 'Attacks on Automata and Eviscerated Sculptures', in *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms*, ed. Stacy Boldrick, Aldershot 2007, 36.
68. The doll is offered for sale at the website 'Mini Muslims' with the slogan 'Bringing up our children the Islamic way', <https://www.minimuslims.co.uk/shop/romeisa-doll/>
69. See the discussion and my interview with Claire Levenson in 'Des musulmans ultra-conservateurs veulent des poupées sans visage pour leurs enfants. Tout comme les Amish', *Slate*, 16 December 2014: <http://www.slate.fr/story/95821/musulmans-poupees-sans-visage>.
70. Elisa Gagliardi Mangilli, *The Sarikhani Collection: An Introduction*, London, 2011, 105; and for a general discussion of Safavid figural textiles, see, among others, Carol Bier, *Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart: Textile Arts of Safavid and Qajar Iran, 16th–19th Centuries*, Washington D.C. 1987; the various essays included in Sheila Canby, ed., *Safavid Art and Architecture*, London 2002; and Jon Thompson et al., eds., *Carpets and Textiles in the Iranian World*, c. 1400–1700, Oxford and Genoa 2010.
71. Cited in Ghabin, 'The Quranic Verses as a Source for Legitimacy or Illegitimacy of the Arts in Islam', 214, footnote 107.
72. Flood, 'Between Cult and Culture', 646–8, and figs. 4 and 6; on the practice of 'removing the head' (*qa't al-ra's*), see Flood, 'Images Incomplete'; Paret, 'Textbelege zum islamischen Bilderverbot', 45–6; Touati, 'Le régime des images figuratives dans la culture islamique médiévale', 21.
73. For a study of emoticons and other non-verbal communication, see Andrea Scala, *Emoticons*, Italy 2014; for a discussion of 'Islamic emojis', see Andrea Stanton, 'Islamic emoticons and religious authority: emerging practices, shifting paradigms', *Contemporary Islam* 12 (2018), 153–171.
74. See Shaykh al-Munajjid's ruling no. 110504 on drawing smiley faces when chatting on the internet, <https://islamqa.info/en/110504>
75. 'No more Hajj selfies: Photography banned at holy mosques in Mecca, Medina', *Egypt Independent*, 15 December 2017, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/no-more-hajj-selfies-photography-banned-at-holy-mosques-in-mecca-medina/>
76. See Shaykh al-Munajjid's ruling no. 109232 on pilgrims taking photos in the holy places, <https://islamqa.info/en/109232>