

Once more Cosmophilia: Facing the truth, later

Simon O'Meara

[The minaret decorators] firmly maintained that there was no symbolic significance to the patterns they chose, but rather they were simply a part of the aesthetic heritage of their city.

Trevor Marchand, *Minaret Building and Apprenticeship in Yemen*

With this epigraph, my allegiance to Blair and Bloom's understanding of ornament, as well as to their neologism, *cosmophilia*, is clear. Like them, I see no reason to think that ornament, when taken as the sum of its parts, is denotative.¹ I see no reason to think it is a syntagmatic symbolic system: a language. If it is a language, then it is a private language and thus, as per Wittgenstein, not a language at all, there being no such thing as a *private* language.² As per Blair and Bloom, thus, ornament is meaningless. The matter is otherwise at the connotative level, however, such that the recent claim that late-sixteenth century Ottoman ornament helped define the empire's territorial borders is plausible, even though the absence of proof for this claim means that it is also conjectural.³ An historical record confirming the interpretation is required.⁴

For Blair and Bloom, ornament serves 'to stir appreciation and pleasure in the eye of the beholder and encourage him or her to linger, think and delight'.⁵ Although some scholars have imputed to Blair and Bloom a functionless, purely aesthetic view of ornament, manifestly, on the basis of these words alone, that is not their position.⁶ Ornament functions to invite contemplation and delight. Might it function in other ways, too? This contribution to the *Festschrift* argues that, in Islamic art at least, one of these other ways is the deferral of the moment when a beholder's sight attains its object.

To make this argument requires moving from the hermeneutic grounds of Islamic art history, where the final arbiter of the interpretative act is primarily textual (what historical records can be made to show regarding this or that artistic work), to the grounds of Islamic visual studies. Here, the final arbiter is vision and, especially, vision's equally historical, discursive counterpart, visibility. This modern term, and the even more modern term, visual studies, merit further discussion.

Islamic visibility

The term, *visuality*, is of relatively recent coinage, first found in a work by Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881).⁷ It has sometimes been used by Islamic art historians, but without their giving a definition.⁸ In one or two of these usages, it would seem to be a synonym of the term, *visual culture*, a parallel that would echo the usage of one of the foremost students and theorists of *visuality*, W.J.T. Mitchell.⁹ This leaves us, then, with the meaning of *visual culture*.

As explained by Mitchell, the study of *visual culture* is the equivalent of 'ordinary language philosophy [in that] it looks at the strange things we do while looking, gazing, showing and showing off, such as hiding, dissembling, and refusing to look'.¹⁰ For Mitchell, this explanation means at least two things. First, that the study of *visual culture*, what is often called *visual studies*,¹¹ entails, *inter alia*, 'a meditation on blindness, the invisible, the unseen, the unseeable, and the overlooked'.¹² Second, that this study cannot be limited to the 'study of images or media, but extends to everyday practices of seeing and showing, especially those that we take to be immediate or unmediated'.¹³ Attempting to encapsulate this capacious field of study, Mitchell offers the chiasmic aphorism that *visual studies* has for its remit, or object of study, *the social construction of the visual field and the visual construction of the social field*.¹⁴ *Visuality* and *visual culture* are the two interchangeable names for this object of study; *Islamic visibility* and *Islamic visual culture*, the names for when the object pertains to Islam. Because it names this object of study, there is no plural: there are not *Islamic visualitys*, for example, which is not to say that the *visuality* in question cannot comprise a number of different, historical scopic regimes. The *visuality* of the modern West, for example, is substantially informed by the scopic regime of what Martin Jay calls Cartesian perspectivalism, but it is not limited to it.¹⁵ Speaking quickly, one might conjecture that two equivalent historical regimes informing *Islamic visibility* would involve the culturally deep-rooted concepts of modesty and the evil eye. Scopic regimes such as these act on the human organism's physiological drive to see: its scopic drive.

The benefit of pursuing *Islamic visual studies* in addition to *Islamic art history* remains to be widely accepted. The present paper endeavours to help achieve such acceptance, and to open up ways of thinking about *Islamic visibility*.

Face to face

If Mitchell is a major voice in visual studies, there are others, including Nicholas Mirzoeff, editor of the *The Visual Culture Reader*. More obviously political than Mitchell, Mirzoeff nevertheless agrees with him that at the heart of visual studies lies a concern with the transverse look between seer and seen: the face-to-face encounter with the Other.¹⁶ As Mitchell expresses this concern: 'Visual culture [...] find[s] its primal scene, then, in what Emmanuel Levinas calls the face of the Other (beginning, I suppose, with the face of the Mother): the face-to-face encounter'.¹⁷

In the present attempt to explore the topic of Islamic visuality with regard to ornament, it is fortunate that this primal scene is well treated in the literature of Islam, being ultimately the beatific vision.

The face of God

In the Quran, the expression, 'seeking the face of God', is applied to those who act piously without any thought of personal gain. It occurs eight times, and is the equivalent of an earlier, Old Testament expression.¹⁸ In the Hadith, it occurs with even greater frequency.¹⁹

Although the Quran once states that seeing God is something the elect will experience on Judgement Day (Q 75:22-3), nowhere does it state that seeing the face of God is a possibility for humankind, whether in the next world or, especially, this world.²⁰ This usage is followed in the Sunni Hadith, too;²¹ but as we shall shortly see, one also finds there the vision of God's face offered as one of Paradise's greatest rewards. For the Sufis, for whom seeing God's face in this life was sometimes accepted as humanly possible,²² from approximately the end of the tenth century even they tended to agree that, if such seeing occurred at all, it did so via the perception of the heart, not the vision of the eyes.²³

As just noted, according to the Hadith, in Paradise the eye is unrestricted, taking in everything, including God's face.²⁴ A particularly developed narrative of this beatific vision is recounted in a work attributed, probably erroneously, to the Egyptian scholar, al-Suyuti (d. 1505), who attributes the traditions it comprises to the Prophet's cousin, Ibn 'Abbas (d. 668).²⁵ All but one of these traditions also feature in the course of two versions of a slightly differently ordered but otherwise almost identical narrative recorded in a work entitled, *The Eyes' Delight*. This work is attributed, probably erroneously, to the tenth-century preacher and moralist, Abu al-Layth al-Samarqandi (d. 983?).²⁶ Below is an abridgement of the version

attributed to al-Suyuti. Even abridged, the excerpt is still long, but as I shall be referring to it again, I need to quote it in some detail.

[First,] the reception is preceded by a procession of the Blessed, led by Adam, Muhammad and the other prophets. In the blink of an eye, the procession traverses the span of a silver palace (*qasr*) the length of 1000 years' march, and then that of a golden palace of the same dimensions. Just as instantly, the procession next traverses the 3000-year span of an emerald palace; the 4000-year span of a ruby palace; the 5000-year span of a sapphire palace; the 6000-year span of a chrysolite palace; and lastly four more palaces of various precious stones, each up to 10,000 years long. The procession then glimpses, at a distance of 10,000 years, the lights of the divine enclave which, when reached, proves to be a green meadow 1000 years by 1000 years, with innumerable palaces, each with the name of one of the elect inscribed on its door. Finally, the procession reaches an even larger meadow, with two rows of trees, each tree bearing 70,000 palaces; within each palace are 70,000 couches of gold, each 300 yards long [...]. [Second,] a most sumptuous banquet then proceeds [...]. [Third,] the Lord says to them: My worshippers, have you any other wishes? And they say: Yes, it remains for us to see your gracious Face. The Lord then says: O Cherub, lift the greatest veil between me and my worshippers! When this is lifted [the worshippers] remain looking at the Face of Truth for three hundred years.²⁷

The face of the king

In the present life, the closest one could come to seeing with one's eyes the face of the absolute Other, God, was at the royal palace: the face of the ruler. One gets a sense of the societal drive to experience this regal vision in Benjamin of Tudela's (fl. mid-12th c.) account of a pre-Hajj ceremony that he witnessed in Baghdad. He relates how pilgrims would annually gather below a palace window in order to petition the caliph to show them 'the effulgence of [his] countenance' and to bestow on them his blessings. The pilgrims' petitions were rewarded with the sight and touch of the ruler's robe only: its lowered hem.²⁸

The issue of the divine, semi-divine or sacrosanct nature of rulers in the Muslim world throughout history is beyond the scope of the present paper.²⁹ Instead, I would like to focus on a feature shared by these rulers, namely, their otherness, even in the cases where a dynasty's ceremonial practices involved the ruler mixing closely with their subjects, as in Safavid Iran, for example, not separating and secluding themselves, as in Ottoman Turkey, for example.³⁰ Seeking to experience and somehow participate in this otherness, the subjects set their faces in the direction of the ruler's face, the face being a person's essence, at least in the

Quran and for the Arabic speaking world.³¹ In the case of the ruler's face, it was often more than that, but a source of divine effulgence (*farr*) and/or grace (*baraka*), too.³²

This desire to witness and somehow share in these regal emanations resulted in a ceremonial theatrics of royal revelation,³³ inspired in no small part by Byzantine and, especially, Sasanian practices.³⁴ Sometimes the royal revelation was full, sometimes it was partial; commonly, it was mediated by windows, broadly understood (viz., framed, often decorated openings unintended for bodily traversal).³⁵ Once again, the Safavids are no exception to this assertion, as evidenced by the large windows of Isfahan's ceremonial palace, the Ali Qapu, from which the shah would appear before his people gathered below him on the city's main square.³⁶

Precisely because a ruler's residence was expected to have windows from which he could reveal or half-reveal himself, the painter of a Persian miniature located in a Shahnama manuscript copied in Safavid Isfahan in 1628 has counterfactually added one to God's House, the Kaaba (Fig. 1).³⁷ From it, one of Iskandar's military retinue, a beardless youth, distributes largesse to the formerly oppressed descendants of Ismail.³⁸

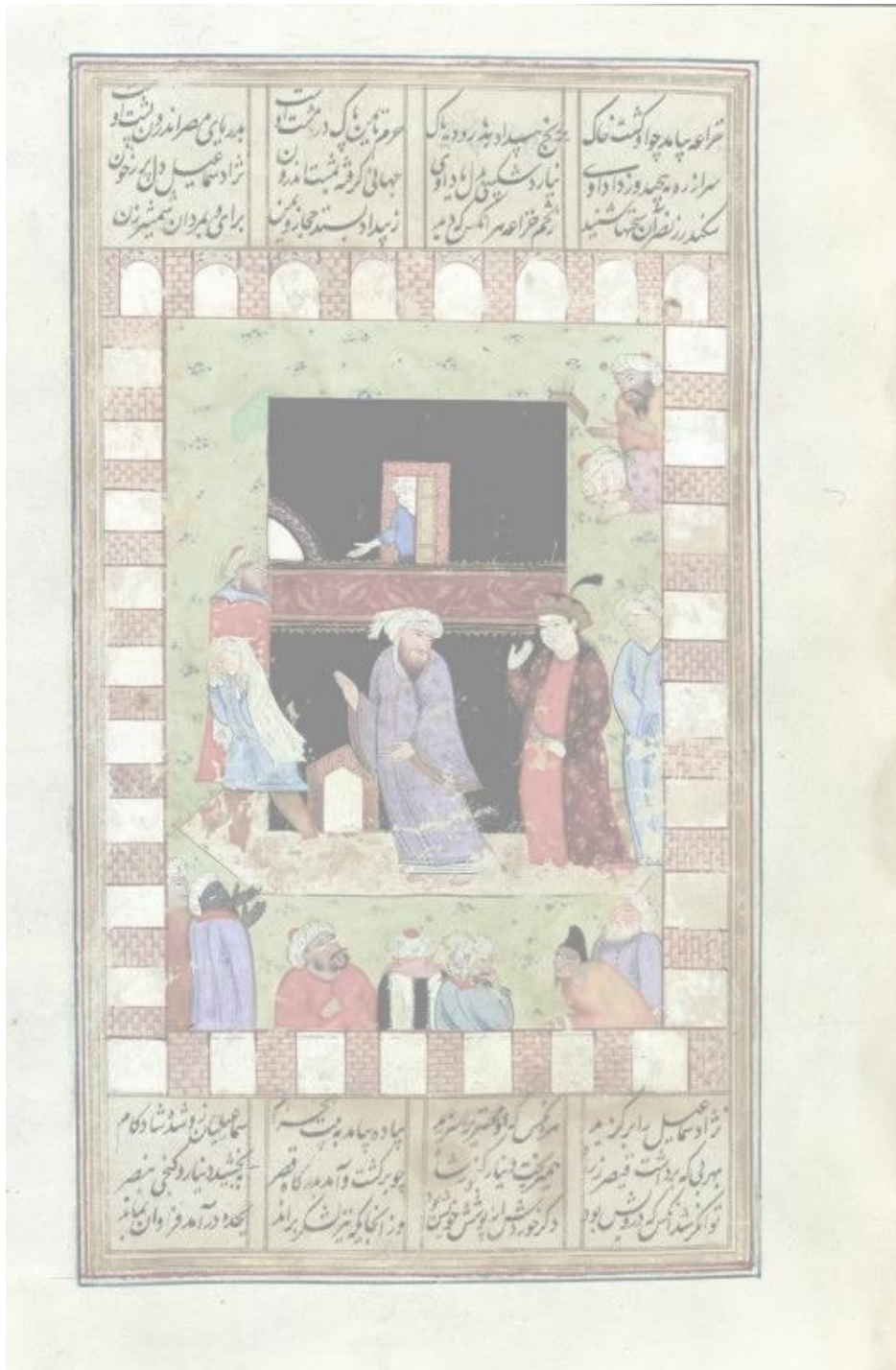


Fig. 1: Iskandar at the Kaaba. From a copy of Firdawsī's *Shahnama*, produced in Isfahan in 1628. Gold, gouache, and ink on paper; 11.7 x 15.5cm. Courtesy: British Library. Add. 27258, fol. 446r.

This play between a subject's seeking the ruler's face in his residence and seeking God's face in His residence, as just illustrated by the miniature, is further highlighted by the following historical fact. The term, *qibla*, or sacred direction, which early in Islamic history came to signify the Kaaba alone, was used as an honorific for some Muslim rulers, from the Umayyads

to the Qajars.³⁹ Indeed, if we accept pre-Islamic poetry as authentic, a similar usage occurred before Islam, too: as an honorific for the Sasanian emperor, Khusraw I (r. 531-79), ‘the *qibla* of the ambassadors’.⁴⁰ Some of these *qibla*-referenced rulers even went so far as to render the honorific architecturally apparent, situating their throne-rooms on the axis diametrically opposite to the Kaaba.⁴¹ As this phenomenon has been interpreted for the Abbasid period, facing the caliph meant facing away from the Kaaba, presenting it one’s bottom.⁴²

A Byzantine progress

As noted above, unlike seeking God’s face, seeking the ruler’s face was in principle achievable during one’s lifetime. The stage-managed progress to the curtain-closing denouement might have been a lengthy, convoluted affair, but a full view of the enthroned ruler’s face was frequently possible, even for a provincial soldier.⁴³ After enduring delay, sight could attain its object; just as, after enduring a different delay, that of life, and then a second delay, that of the procession to the site of the beatific vision, in Paradise sight could attain it again.

Regarding this latter procession, it is my contention that the earlier-cited narrative recounting the paradisiacal progress is modelled on the processions of dignitaries to the audience halls of the vast, seemingly sprawling Abbasid palaces of Iraq. The parallels between it and, say, the celebrated account of the tenth-century Byzantine ambassadors’ seemingly interminable progress through the numerous palaces comprising Baghdad’s city-sized caliphal residence, the Dar al-Khilafa, for an audience with al-Muqtadir (r. 908-32) are too many for this contention to be dismissed as fanciful.⁴⁴ Short of reproducing the account in its entirety, I present an extract attentive to the spatial transitions the ambassadors experienced en route to the audience hall, but disregarding the astonishing spectacle each transition gave onto:

[Having waited two months, the ambassadors were finally led to al-Muqtadir’s residence.] They were conducted over the threshold of the great Main Gate to a palace called the Cavalry House [...] and then led through corridors and passageways [...] to a palace where there were four elephants [...]. They were then led to a palace containing one hundred lions [...]. Next, they were taken to the New Pavilion [...]. From here, they were conducted to the Tree Palace [...]. They were then led to a palace known as Paradise [...]. After touring twenty-three palaces, they [...] arrived at the presence of al-Muqtadir in the Crown [Palace] [...]. He was seated upon an ebony throne [on which were] the most splendid jewels, the largest of which eclipsed the daylight with its brightness.⁴⁵

As noted by Oleg Grabar and others, across the Islamic world Abbasid palatial architecture became a byword for scale and much more besides, informing, for example, the description of the City of Brass in the *Thousand and One Nights*.⁴⁶ Does it tax credence to aver that this architecture, and the ceremonial staged via it, informed religious narratives, too? If not, the type of connection I suppose to subtend the material and immaterial spheres of Islam, and which is exemplified by the two foregoing procession narratives, is accounted for by scholars of material religion as follows: 'A materialized study of religion begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something *added* to a religion, but rather [are] inextricable from it'.⁴⁷

With this explanation in mind, I would further argue that the connection between the material face of the king and the immaterial face of God, which we have seen at play in this paper, is mythically first effectuated by another material item: the veil. The imposition of this veil transforms the horizontal, earthly vector of an eye seeking the king's face to the vertical, heavenly vector of an eye seeking God's face. The veil in question belongs to Khadija, the Prophet's first wife; the moment of transformation, to a pivotal event recorded in the Prophet's biography, the *Sira*, as identified and interpreted by the Tunisian-born psychoanalyst, Fethi Benslama. The event concerns an early moment in Muhammad's prophetic career when he was unsure if the being visiting him with words to recite was an angel or a demon. He feared demonic insanity; by discarding her veil (*khimar*), Khadija recognised the angelic truth. The visitor was Gabriel.⁴⁸

The dynamics of sight related in the event are complex, but at their core is what Benslama provocatively notes: '[Khadija] founds the truth of the founder [of Islam]'.⁴⁹ Khadija opens the angelic heavens to Muhammad's eyes, simultaneously closing to them the abyss of demonic insanity; look heavenwards and trust, she implies. The heretofore horizontal, earthbound vector of the Prophet's sight is vertically transformed: God is welcomed in. Khadija's veil mediates this transformation. With it discarded and Khadija exposed (*tahassarat*), Gabriel, modest, disappears from the Prophet's sight, and his truth is thus revealed. No demon would have so withdrawn. However, having established the truth of the angel in this way, and thus also having founded the truth of Muhammad as God's messenger, Khadija and her veil simultaneously render the primal scene of visuality, the face-to-face encounter with the Other, an otherworldly affair. In Islam, thus, the primal scene of visuality is not just marked by byzantine delay but, ultimately, deferral, too.⁵⁰

Cosmophilia

All the while remembering that this paper is written in terms of visual studies, not art history, we can now take the findings regarding the primal scene of Islamic visuality and relate them to the frequently observed phenomenon of the ubiquity of ornament in Islamic art. Oleg Grabar's observations of this phenomenon serve well. He writes:

From [...] the Dome of the Rock, all the way to Safavid mosques, the walls of Islamic monuments and the surfaces of its objects have been covered with motifs distinguishable by the fact that they so rarely reflect the physical world of men and animals. [...] This tendency to overwhelm surfaces at the expense of emphasizing specific topics can properly be called ornamentation.⁵¹

Reflecting on this observation, Grabar immediately adds: 'Why Islamic culture developed this particular tendency is still an unresolved matter'.⁵²

In the same year that Grabar published this observation and reflection, he also published additional observations and reflections on the same theme. Still tackling his conundrum as to why Islamic culture developed a tendency to overwhelm surfaces with abstract ornament, he remarks: 'Either there was a striking cultural agreement on the modalities of visual creation, or visual creation was secondary to the realities of life, or else we are simply unable to decipher the forms of the tradition'.⁵³ In view of the foregoing treatment of Islamic visuality, I would argue that Grabar's first answer to his conundrum was the correct one. I would additionally assert that this cultural agreement was marked by delay and deferral. That is to say, the tendency to overwhelm surfaces with non-denotational ornament in Islamic art serves to delay the moment when sight realises its goal. The 'observer [...] is rarely led from the decoration of an object to its uses', Grabar notes in the same second article.⁵⁴ That is because, I would suggest, the eye is held back and realisation postponed.

It would be essentialist to suppose that what defines the primal scene of Islamic visuality is the sole explanation for the ubiquity of ornament in Islamic art. Alfred Gell, for example, talks of decorative patterns in general as 'sticking-points', places that are tacky to the eye and so slow it down, even halt the eye – above all, the evil eye.⁵⁵ This apotropaic quality of ornamentation is said to be at play in the domestic architecture of Nishapur, for example.⁵⁶ Clearly, then, the scopic regime referenced by the concept of the evil eye must be considered as a second visuality-based explanation for the ubiquity of ornament in Islamic art. And

Grabar's memorable description of the effect of this ornamentation as a 'sheath of propriety [cast] over strife, passion and the visible world' must be considered as a third;⁵⁷ for his description invokes the scopic regime referenced by the concept of modesty. Even so, the argument that delay and, ultimately, the deferral of the face-to-face encounter is an important factor in this explanation remains. This argument can, additionally, be tested: by finding the exception that proves the rule.

The exceptional Kaaba

The Kaaba's exterior is free of ornamentation, free of a 'sheath of propriety'. If the tendency to overwhelm surfaces with non-denotational ornament in Islamic art is ubiquitous, what explains the Kaaba's absence of the same? To answer this question, first one must dispel the notion that the perfectly legible, thoroughly denotational *kiswa* that robes the Kaaba is this sheath. I have dealt with the *kiswa* at length elsewhere, but in brief the purpose of the *kiswa* is not to cover the Kaaba. Although, technically speaking, the *kiswa* does indeed cover the Kaaba, this act of covering is similar to that of the skin that 'covers' the body. The *kiswa* traces and thus reveals the Kaaba's form; it does not cover it, in the sense of hide it.

What explains this exceptional absence of ornamentation on the Kaaba? The Quran explains it, when it says: 'Turn, then, thy face towards the [Kaaba]. Wherever you all may be, turn your faces towards it' (Q 2:144). The Kaaba is the one object believers are told to face, the one object that must be faced, and can be seen, without delay.

1. On the distinction between denotation and connotation regarding visual imagery, see Barthes, Roland, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), pp. 31-52.
2. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Gertrude Elizabeth Anscombe, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1967), pp. 88-9.
3. Necipoğlu, Gülru, 'L'idée de décor dans les régimes de visualité islamiques', in Rémi Labrusse (ed.), *Purs Décors? Arts de l'Islam, regards du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2007), p. 19.
4. As also noted in Blair, Sheila, and Jonathan Bloom, 'Cosmophilia and its Critics: An Overview of Islamic Ornament', in Lorenz Korn and Anja Heidenreich (eds), *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie 3* (Wiesbaden, 2012), p. 46.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
6. See, e.g., Necipoğlu, Gülru, 'The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches', *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012), p. 8 n. 14.
7. Mirzoeff, Nicholas, 'On Visuality', *Journal of Visual Culture* 5:1 (2006), p. 57
8. See, e.g., Ruggles, D. Fairchild, 'Making Vision Manifest: Frame, Screen, and View in Islamic Culture', in eadem and Dianne Harris (eds), *Sites Unseen: Landscape and Vision* (Pittsburgh, 2007), p. 134; Necipoğlu, 'L'idée de decor', *passim*; Gruber, Christiane, and Sune Haugbolle (eds), *Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East: Rhetoric of the Image* (Bloomington, 2013), pp. ix-xi, xxiii; and Marks, Laura U., 'The Taming of the Haptic Space, from Málaga to Valencia to Florence', *Muqarnas* 32 (2015), pp. 253-78. I, too, use the term in the proceedings of a conference of 2009, and although I define it there, my understanding of visuality has developed since. O'Meara, Simon, 'Muslim Visuality and the Visibility of Paradise and the World', in Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson (eds), *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, 2 vols (Leiden, 2017), vol. 2 pp. 555-65.
9. Mitchell, William John Thomas, 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture', *Journal of Visual Culture* 1:2 (2002), pp. 166-7.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
11. See Elkins, James, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (London, 2003), pp. 1-30.
12. Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing', p. 170.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 171. By the second part of the aphorism, he means: 'It is not just that we see the way we do because we are social animals, but also that our social arrangements take the forms they do because we are seeing animals'. *Ibid.*
15. Cf. Jay, Martin, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, 1988), pp. 3-23.
16. Mirzoeff, Nicholas, 'The Subject of Visual Culture', in idem (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed. (London, 2002), p. 18.
17. Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing', p. 175.
18. Rippin, Andrew, '"Desiring the Face of God": The Qur'anic Symbolism of Personal Responsibility', in Issa J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond, 2000), p. 120.
19. See Baljon, Johannes Marinus Simon, '"To Seek the Face of God" in Koran and Hadith', *Acta Orientalia* 22 (1953), pp. 257-9.
20. Q 10:26 has been taken by some exegetes as a possible exception.

21. See Goitein, Shelomo Dov, 'Beholding God on Friday', *Islamic Culture* 34:3 (1960), p. 166. Note, however, that in some very early, non-canonical hadiths, it is reported that the Prophet Muhammad saw God's face here on earth. See, most recently, Coppens, Pieter, 'Seeing God in This World and the Otherworld' (PhD dissertation: Utrecht University, 2015), pp. 196-204.
22. See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 198, p. 263, p. 265.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-204, pp. 280-2.
24. On the unrestricted gaze of the (male) inhabitants of Paradise, see O'Meara, 'Muslim Visuality', pp. 560-3.
25. Al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Durar al-hisan fi al-ba'th wa na'im al-jinan* (Cairo, 1870), pp. 36 ff. According to Christian Lange, this under-studied work was probably not authored by al-Suyuti. *Idem, Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 105-6 n. 65. The edition of the work used in the present paper is, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Janna wa al-nar wa faqd al-awlad*, ed. Muhammad 'Azab (Cairo, 1993).
26. Al-Sha'rani, 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Mukhtasar Tadhkirat al-Qurtubi* (Cairo, [1939]), pp. 87-125. According to Lange, this work was probably authored in the twelfth century. *Idem, Paradise*, pp. 106-7.
27. Al-Suyuti, *Janna*, 61-9; trans., al-Azmeh, Aziz, 'Rhetoric for the Senses: A Consideration of Muslim Paradise Narratives', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26:3 (1995), pp. 228-30 (modified).
28. Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. and trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (London, 1907), p. 36. This societal drive is given monumental expression in the epigraphic inscription on the eave of the Alhambra's so-called Comares Hall façade: 'I await his face (*tal'a*), like the horizon that will manifest dawn'. García Gómez, Emilio, *Poemas árabes en los muros y fuentes de la Alhambra*, 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1996), p. 93.
29. For a primer, see al-Azmeh, Aziz, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Politics* (London, 1997).
30. For a succinct treatment of the sometimes theophany-minded Safavid dynasty's approach to kingship practices, see Babaie, Sussan, 'The Palace', in Margaret S. Graves and Benoît Junod z(eds), *Architecture in Islamic Arts: Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum* (Geneva, 2011), p. 188.
31. Chelhod, Joseph, 'La face et la personne chez les Arabes', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 151:2 (1957), p. 237; and Lange, Christian, "'On that day when faces will be white or black" (Q 3:106): Towards a Semiology of the Face in the Arabo-Islamic Tradition', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127:4 (2007), pp. 431-3; and cf. Q 17:7.
32. See, e.g., Bada'uni, 'Abd al-Qadir, *Muntakhabu-t-tawarikh*, ed. and trans. George Ranking et al., 3 vols (Calcutta, 1898-1925), vol. 1 p. 573 (*farr*); Sanders, Paula, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994), p. 28 (*baraka*); and Mukhia, Harbans, *The Mughals of India* (Oxford, 2004), p. 46 (*farr*). Regarding the relationship between *farr* and a ruler's face, see especially Soudavar, Abolala, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa, 2003), pp. 41-8; but also Asher, Catherine B., 'A Ray from the Sun: Mughal Ideology and the Visual Construction of the Divine', in Matthew T. Kapstein (ed.), *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 170-85.
33. Cf. '[C]atching a momentary glimpse of the omnivoyant but invisible monarch became the propelling motive of the whole ceremonial'. Necipoğlu, Gülru, 'Framing the Gaze in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Palaces', *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), p. 306.
34. For an overview of Muslim dynastic ceremonial regarding the theatrics of royal revelation, see Necipoğlu, Gülru, 'An Outline of Shifting Paradigms in the Palatial Architecture of the Pre-Modern Islamic World', *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), pp. 3-24. Note, however, that Necipoğlu's assertion that the Umayyad caliphs were 'relatively accessible and visible' needs to be limited

to the earlier Umayyad caliphs; and even then, one must question its validity, as the use of curtains separating an Umayyad ruler from his audience is first attributed to Mu'awiya (r. 661-80). See al-Ya'qubi, *Ta'rikh al-Ya'qubi*, ed. Martijn Theodoor Houtsma, 2 vols (Leiden, 1883) vol. 2 p. 276 (lines 8-9); and cf. Grabar, Oleg, 'Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court' (PhD dissertation: Princeton University, 1955), pp. 95-6, p. 309.

35. See below and Necipoğlu, 'Framing the Gaze', pp. 303-42.

36. Babaie, Sussan, *Isfahan and its Palaces: Statecraft, Shiism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran* (Edinburgh, 2008), pp. 143-4, p. 237.

37. Space does not allow me to enumerate the reasons why it is an imaginary window and not the Kaaba's actual door that is represented, the least of them being the youth's legs, which are invisible because below the casement. (With thanks to Manijeh Bayani and Barbara Brend for their input on this image and surrounding text.) Although the Kaaba has five skylights set within the double ceiling of the Kaaba, these are for illumination only.

38. This is also contrary to the facts: those related in the text.

39. See, e.g., Jamil, Nadia, 'Caliph and Qutb: Poetry as a Source for Interpreting the Transformation of the Byzantine Cross on Steps on Umayyad Coinage', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and Early Islam* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 43-4 (Umayyads); Mason, Herbert, *Two Statesmen of Medieval Islam: Vizir Ibn Hubayra (499-560 AH/1105-1165 AD) and Caliph an-Nasir li Din Allah (553-622 AH/1158-1225 AD)* (The Hague, 1972), pp. 115-32 (Abbasids); Ibn al-Khatib, Lisan al-Din, *Nufadat al-jirab fi 'ulalat al-ightirab: [al-juz' al-thani]*, ed. Ahmad Mukhtar al-'Abbadi (Casablanca, [1985]), p. 101 (line 9) (Marinids); Moin, A. Azfar, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012), p. 34 (Timurids); Bada'uni, *Muntakhab*, vol. 2 p. 266 (Mughals); and Amanat, Abbas, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (London, 1997), p. 107 (Qajars).

40. Ibn Shaddad, 'Antara, *Sharh diwan 'Antara ibn Shaddad*, ed. 'Abd al-Mun'im Shalabi (Cairo, n.d.), 171 (line 8).

41. This phenomenon, sporadically recurring until at least the seventeenth century, is first observed in the late Umayyad or early Abbasid palace of Mshatta, Jordan. See Enderlein, Volkmar, and Michael Meinecke, 'Graben, Forschen, Präsentieren: Probleme der Darstellung vergangener Kulturen am Beispiel der Mshatta-Fassade', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 34 (1992), p. 141. Ebba Koch does not reference this and other early instances of throne-rooms situated on the counter-Kaaba axis when she writes of the Mughal concept of *qarina*, or counter-image, as deployed especially by Shah Jahan for the counter-Kaaba axis of his audience hall at Agra. Eadem, 'Diwan-i 'Amm and Chihil Sutun: The Audience Halls of Shah Jahan', *Muqarnas* 11 (1993), p. 155.

42. Ali, Samer, 'Praise for Murder? Two Odes by al-Buhturī surrounding an Abbasid Patricide', in B. Gruendler and L. Marlow (eds), *Writers and Rulers: Perspectives on their Relationship from Abbasid to Safavid Times* (Wiesbaden, 2004), p. 9.

43. Lapidus, Ira, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2002), p. 73.

44. This account has been much reproduced and discussed, but see especially Grabar, Oleg, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1987), pp. 159-64. My discussion of it is based on al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh Baghdad*, 14 vols (Cairo, 1931), vol. 1 pp. 100 ff.; trans., Lassner, Jacob, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages: Text and Studies* (Detroit, 1970), pp. 86 ff. Maribel Fierro observes a similar parallel (but supposes the paradise narrative to be the model) in eadem, 'Pompa y ceremonia en los califatos del occidente islámico (siglos VIII-XV)', *Cuadernos del CEMyR* 17 (2009), p. 139.

45. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1 pp. 101-4; trans. pp. 88-91 (modified with reference to Grabar's translation).
46. Grabar, *Formation*, p. 164; and Necipoğlu, 'Outline of Shifting', p. 10. Cf. 'Abbasid architectural innovations were felt across the Islamic world, [creating] a new paradigm of exorbitant consumption and opulence'. Ruggles, D. Fairchild, *Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain* (University Park, 2000), p. 87.
47. Meyer, Birgit, et al., 'The Origin and Mission of *Material Religion*', *Religion* 40:3 (2010), p. 209 (italics as marked in the original).
48. Ibn Hisham, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (London, 1955), p. 107. Cf. the account in al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, Volume 6: Muhammad at Mecca*, trans. William Montgomery Watt and Michael V. McDonald (Albany, 1988), p. 73.
49. Benslama, Fethi, 'The Veil of Islam', *Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 2 (2009), p. 18.
50. One might object that deferral must also mark the biblical faiths in which the concept of seeking the face of God likewise figures. As Rippin notes, however, unlike these faiths, in Islam, God's face does not turn away. Idem, 'Desiring the Face', pp. 120-3.
51. Grabar, Oleg, 'What Makes Islamic Art Islamic?', in idem, *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, Volume 3: Islamic Art and Beyond* (Farnham, 2006), p. 249.
52. Ibid.
53. Grabar, Oleg, 'An Art of the Object', in idem, *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, Volume 3: Islamic Art and Beyond* (Farnham, 2006), p. 16.
54. Ibid., p. 15.
55. Gell, Alfred, *Art and Agency* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 74-90.
56. Flood, Finbarr B., 'Animal, Vegetal, and Mineral: Ambiguity and Efficacy in the Nishapur Wall Paintings', *Representations* 133:1 (2016), pp. 33 ff.
57. Grabar, 'Art of the Object', p. 16.