

## A Survey of Prohibition of Painting in Islam

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### Abstract

The proscription of illustration and painting in Islam is a topic often discussed by researchers and artists. Most orientalists have suggested that Islam generally opposed art, especially painting and illustration, thus resulting in a number of limitations. A survey of different prophetic sayings on this subject (hadith singular, hadis plural), verses of the *Qur'an*, and artworks in the era of the caliphs has been perused in this article. It seems that a core factor for the restriction was the possible reversion of newly converted Muslims to polytheism and idolatry. This was a genuine concern in early Islam. Today it is generally unknown, unheard of or simply ignored in the world of Islam. Islam has not prohibited painting rather it does emphasize beauty and aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Painting, Prohibition, Islam, Hadith, *Qur'an*, Caliphs.

### Introduction

When Islam appeared in the Hejaz region of the Arabian peninsula, polytheism and idolatry went into marked retreat. As a prophylactic measure the art of painting too, underwent certain limitations because of what over time was thought to be a proscription in Islamic tradition. Muslim artists focused their attention on calligraphy, geometrical shapes and floral arrangement.

They promoted their works by exploiting aspects of the created world in a variety of decorative ways.

Arabs were primarily nomadic in the pre-Islamic era and had not developed the dynamics of civilization in which the arts and its techniques could emerge and develop. Yet it is undeniable that before Islam, Arabs worked in a limited sphere of painting and sculpture, as

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at the very least they fashioned figures from wood to create their gods. When Islam appeared, it prohibited statuary too, as these objects insinuated polytheism and a reversion to the old idols.

Gradually, while the boycott on painting and illustration remained in place, the prohibition witnessed a relaxation particularly in the court of the caliphs. Illustration even attracted royal support especially during the Umayyad, Abbasid, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid dynasties. Herein we look briefly to the *Qur'an*, prophetic sayings (hadith) and the works of art created in the era of the caliphate.

### Hadith

Poetry in Arab culture played an essential role in the early Islamic periods. In fact it left no creative space for the plastic arts. Arabs were quite unfamiliar with this type of expression. The pre-Islamic Arabs were renowned as idol worshippers and the emergence of Islam in their peninsula brought with it prohibitions on illustrating animal and human figures, as well as sculpture. As mentioned, it was a legitimate fear that the new practitioners of the faith would be encouraged to revert to idolatry. Previously they revered hand-hewn figures as gods. Then too, their scripture told the story of the Jews of Moses' time having recourse to idol worship through the casting of a calf from gold.

Many works and hadis (plural of hadith and some of these being of dubious authority on the subject at hand) about portrait have been written in Islam. Most of them hold that Islam rejected illustration of animate beings. Al- Nawawi says:

The great authorities of our school and of the others hold that painting of an image of any and all animate beings is strictly forbidden and constitutes one of the capital sins because it is threatened by the punishments cited above as mentioned in

the traditions, and this is regardless of whether it be for a domestic use or not. Thus, such fabrication is forbidden in any and all circumstances because it implies a copy of the creational activity of God, whether it be on a robe, a tapestry, a coin, in gold or silver or copper, or on a plate or on a wall. On the other hand, the painting of a tree or a camel saddle or other objects without life is not forbidden. (Papadopoulos, 1980, p.53)

Azraqi lived in Mecca in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and authored works of historical events of that time. He has written that among illustrated pictures, distinction was made concerning what was considered for the faithful. The writer noted that when the prophet (PBUH) went to Mecca and ordered Shaaban ibn Ottoman to destroy all the idols except the image of Mary and Jesus Christ, the prophet (PBUH) covered it with his palm.

This event has been cited elsewhere in this ways:

At the time of the conquest of Mecca by the Muslims, the holy prophet ordered the destruction of all idols made by the polytheists in front of the Ka'aba. Then he stepped into the holy shrine. Byzantine artworks decorated its walls. One such picture was the image of Prophet Abraham and the Virgin Mary with the holy child. The prophet covered the last picture with his two hands and ordered to destroy the rest (Burchhardt Titus, 1990, p. 131).

Another narrator says:

Strangest of all, in view of the condemnation of such painting by succeeding Mecca, Muhammad went inside the Kabah, he ordered the pictures in it to be obliterated, but put his hand over a picture of Mary, with Jesus seated on her lap, that

was painted on a pillar, and said, 'Rub out all the pictures except these under my hands' (Papadopoulos, 1980, p.54).

The same narrator adds that it was not until years later, in 683 when anti-Caliph, Abdullah ibn Zubayr was being besieged in the holy city by Umayyad troops, that these pictures perished in the fire which destroyed the Kabah (Arnold, 1965, p.7).

The clear inference of that action is that the prophet was not totally against painting, only the type that might inspire idolatry. Hence if art is in line with religion, like the painting, on the walls of the Ka'aba, it was accepted or at least not rejected.

Dr. Zaki Mohammad Hassan says,

... Since drawing living beings is unlawful from the Islamic point of view, Muslims didn't draw any human or animal figures and they neglected it" (Zaki, 1993, p.18).

Thus, eliminating polytheism and idolatry is the pivotal reason for limiting painting. As mentioned, the abiding interest of the Arabs in poetry and their life were elemental to their ignorance of plastic arts. For the Arabs of the pre-Islamic era, sculpture and painting were religiously and spiritually significant and not looked upon as art for art's sake.

The rejection of painting pictures in Islam is related entirely to the act of fashioning a god. The outstanding commandment for worshipping of the one God, which Islam vigorously propagates, gives pride of place to this concept. As in Abraham's era, the worship of God was a direct contradiction and challenge to polytheism and idolatry. As a result, any God-based imagery even of a historical nature is seen as a sign of wrong thinking about the Creator or knowing the Creator through the works of the creature.

The destruction of such work is akin to the acceptance of the Muslim formula "there is no God except Allah"<sup>1</sup>

and conceiving Islam as the all-encompassing basis of the world.

In general any examples of art that portrays a partner for God are forbidden. Thus one major stream for the ignorance of plastic arts and its limitation was the creation of an intellectual system intended to eradicate ignorance and polytheism in the centuries after Islam. The religion accepted arts that avoided painting the image of God. It rejected any picture or image of God because there is nothing akin to God<sup>2</sup>. Making an image of God or some thing like that is the worst form of idolatry as Islam emphasizes God's worship.

From an Islamic point of view depicting God is forbidden. Thus, Islamic art is distinct from other art, as it tries to develop spiritually based inspiration in the world without resorting to the image of God.

The Prophet (PBUH) apparently did not object to depictions of men or animals on the woven stuffs that decorated his house in Medina. His insistence was that the items not distract his attention while he was engaged in prayer and were in their proper place, being either sat upon a cushion or walked on carpets. When he found that Aishah had hung a curtain with figures on it at the door of her room, he exclaimed that those who thus imitated the creation of God would be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment. Yet he was pleased when his wife cut up the same fabric and made cushion covers out of it. The great danger to be avoided was idolatry, any deviation from the absolute loyalty due to the one and only God.

In another hadith, it is said that angels don't enter a house in which there are pictures and dogs. Those who are condemned to the most difficult retribution in the afterlife are the murderers of prophets, those who were killed by the prophets, those who led people based on fables out of ignorance and the illustrators (Grabar, 2000, p. 93).

The some contempt for the painter and other

abomination is expressed in the following traditions: Angels will not enter a house in which there is a picture or a dog. Those who will be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment are the murderers of a prophet, or one put to death by a prophet. Included is the person who leads men with a story while having no knowledge, and a maker of images or pictures. A head will thrust itself out of the fire and will ask, where are those who invented lies about God, or have been the enemies of God, or have made light of God? Then men will ask, who are these three classes of persons? It will answer, the sorcerer is he who has invented lies against God; the maker of images or pictures is the enemy of God; and he who acts in order to be seen of men, is he that has made light of God (Arnold, 1965, p. 6).

Obviously then there was a ban on depictions connected with the destruction of the idols in the Ka'aba and the destruction that tradition attributes to the Prophet on that occasion plus the notion that angels will not enter a house (bayt) where there are images (tamathil) (Papadopoulos, 1980, p. 8 ). Surely, this was because images in a temple, for the Arabs of Mecca whose immediate background was pagan, could only mean idols.

Some of above hadith can be seen in other places: A head jumps out of the fire and asks where are those who accused God? Or disagreed with him and degraded him? People will ask who are these three groups? And that head will answer those who accused and lied are witches. The illustrator is God's enemy and those who degrade God (Grabar, 2000, p. 93).

As we see in the above mentioned narration, it's the painter who is to blame because a painter is an illustrator and when he creates some thing that is potentially alive, it is as a rival to God. In many hadith the fashioner is challenged to bring their creatures to life. The holy Prophet (PBUH) says:

God asks the person who draws a figure

to make it alive. Naturally he can't and will be punished (Pope, 1930, p.162).

Another narrator has mentioned the same: Those who will be most severely punished by God on the Day of Judgment will be the painters. On the Day of Judgment the punishment of hell will be given to the painter, and he will be called upon to breathe life into the forms that he has fashioned, but he cannot breathe life into any thing. The reason for his damnation is that in fashioning the form of a living being, he becomes the partner in usurping the creative function of the Creator and thus is attempting to assimilate himself with God (Arnold, 1965, p. 5). The reason for the condemnation of painters is that the creation of a living entity whether human or animal needs to usurp Gods duties and place themselves on the same level as God. It has been said that Abu Hurairah, one of the prophets' companions said he heard the Prophet say, "I heard the voice of the angel Gabriel that said, there is no one more vicious than those who give life to things as I did for human beings. Ask them if they can give life to a seed or an insect?" (Arnold, 1965, p.164).

In the third chapter of Allameh Majlesi's' book, *Helliyat-ol Mottaghin* it is said that drawing portraits on walls and clothes is unlawful. It recommends not to draw faces or the image of trees and things like that and especially the face of the human being. If one desires to draw face, it should be incomplete i.e., with one eye or a portion of it not showing (Majlesi, 2000, p.295).

Although the accuracy of these hadith are uncertain, it seems that opposition to animate pictures has two aspects in Islam. One is to maintain the eternal dignity of man, created in God's likeness, not to be designed as a work of art which is necessarily limited and may be even relatively and temporarily standing between man and God. What is immutable among all views is what Islam says, "There is no God except Allah" and this sentence cancels all other views on human depiction.

## The Holy Qur'an

In the *Qur'an* there are no verses opposing portraiture and illustration directly, though the proscription on worshipping handmade idols is both powerful and serious, many more verses speak of beauty and aesthetics<sup>3</sup>. Basically, religion in general and Islam in particular never opposed art that is a necessary complement to human life. Human being is considered a masterpiece that is created delicate, ordered and complex. God is the outstanding artist in the universe because He is the creator of external artistic attributes and the fashioner of the outstanding works in creation<sup>4</sup>. In the Quranic verses God is referred to as the Creator, Dignified, and the Illustrator<sup>5</sup>.

"The infinitive "bor" in Arabic means measurement that is the beginning of illustration and painting. If we look to the *Qur'an* for a clue to this key problem of Muslim art, it comes as a surprise to find that there exists no single interdiction against images, paintings, or statues of living beings. The only references of any kind concern the idols worshipped by pagans, and these constitute no more than three passages which happen to be concerned with other prohibitions as well" (Papadopoulos, 1980, p.48).

The *Qur'an* considers illustration of the works of God, who has created beautiful faces, especially the animate beings and in particular human beings, "He is God who shapes you in your mothers' womb in the forms He wants."<sup>6</sup>

In another verse, the *Qur'an* says illustration is one of God's attributes.

The title "illustrator" has been mentioned in this verse: "It is God who designs the universe, and the illustrator who has perfect names."<sup>7</sup> The *Qur'an* mentions the word *tamathil* (sculpture) in two places.

When Abraham's relatives consider images of idols and worship them, Abraham rejects this action and asks:

"What is the benefit of these statues you worship"

They reply, "We are but following the ways of our forefathers." In verse 6:74 Abraham reproaches his father Azar for adoration of idols (al-asnam).<sup>8</sup> "Verily I look on thee, as on thy people, as being in manifest error" (Papadopoulos, 1980, p. 48).

In the second instance the Quran uses the term as an adjective and a gift for Solomon when He subjugated the winds for him and put the jinn at his service to work for him.

"They provided Solomon with whatever he wanted, such as huge temples, statues... boilers built into the ground, be grateful O people of David!"<sup>9</sup>

It's very difficult to interpret these verses. Apart from introducing Solomon as a prophet-king, we can discuss three points here. First, statues were expressly made for this prophet. The term that is used however is a cause of ambiguity. It probably does not mean three-dimensional statues as we use these days. But undoubtedly the purpose is its similarity to animate beings. Second, apparently here the statue refers to anything that is common place and has utility, like a pot. Third, the topic of this verse is that God has presented verses in line with defining the succession of the prophets as a means to get rid of evil.

In these verses many pieces of advice have been given to the pagans from the past to the present and future. Therefore, direct reference to the statuary does not mean definitively that they are man made, but they are important signs of God given in order to describe the specific circumstances of Solomon.

In other verses, God's power is clarified. "God creates whatever he wants. He only says 'be' and it is." God taught Jesus Christ, the Torah and the Gospel and appointed him as the prophet of the tribe of Israel [He said] "I am here with a miracle. I can make bird from mud and give it life. I cure those who were born blind and by God's permission I give life to the dead."<sup>10</sup>

“... the blasphemous character of his attempt is further emphasized by the use in this tradition of the actual words of the *Qur'an* (v.110) in which God describes the miraculous activity of Jesus “thou didst breath into it. And by my permission it became a bird” (Arnold, 1965, p.5). The creation of forms by the painter can only be justified if he possessed such miraculous power as was given by God to a divinely inspired prophet, Jesus, the word of God.”

Here there is more emphasis than before that God is the creator of the value given to pictures and these pictures belong to the verses that God has sent to the human being. In addition, the picture of a bird is valuable only when it's alive, and it is only God that can perform that.

The *Qur'an* also says “O ye who believe! Wine and idols and divining arrows are an abomination, works of Satan all of them; avoid them and you will prosper in happiness.”<sup>11</sup> As we have mentioned already in Sura Al-Anam, verse 74, Abraham blames his father, Azar for worshipping idols. The terms which are used in these verses for idols are as following: (*al-ansab*) and (*al-asnam*). These two define statues that were used for worship. Here the *Qur'an's* opposition to the worship of idols is real, but is not a rejection of art. However, these verses were later used for opposition to images.

“In 22:31 Muhammad (PBUH) recommends avoiding the impurity of the *qutan*, a word that according to H. Lammens stands equally for “idol” “fetish” and “image,” though within the context of the epoch it must surely apply to idols or fetishes. As that same scholar has stressed, nowhere does one find a formal injunction against making idols, and we read of Muslim Arabs under Muawiya who exported idols to India and China” (Papadopoulou, 1980, p. 48).

The *Qur'an's* message is God's uniqueness and power. It is only God who is the creator, and portraitist= painter is the term that is used for what a painter does. God as

the unique creator, doesn't accept any rival, thus He opposes idols, and this same opposition can be considered from the context in which it appears as basic disagreement with representation of animate beings.

### **Era of the Caliphs**

Arab domination of a large part of the world afforded them familiarity with art. The nomads, who lived in woolen tents, suddenly found themselves as rulers of big cities. Under the influence of sedentary civilization, they established palaces and decorated them with pictures and human forms. It seems that the prohibition of illustration, personal creativity and interest led Muslim artists toward decorative arts. “The first thing we notice in decorative work is that this art is the result of a clear understanding of the world and the human being. This is based on the fact that God is the essence of this world. Everything begins and ends with God. He is the first and the last” (Okasheh & Tahami, 2001, p.12).

Muslims had a tendency to create new and beautiful patterns and followed them. These forms were not animate pictures. They were geometric and based on plant designs. Decoration became the signature of Islamic arts. Muslim artists thus sought the spirit of the human, nature and objects. They attempted to illustrate the essence of nature, and have not imitated it. In many cases they resort to abstraction and express themselves through decoration (Figure 1). From the second half of 7<sup>th</sup> century to the 10th century, kings paid more attention to painting. In the Umayyad period, mosaics, wall paintings, even statues were numerous and were the pride of dwellings of caliphs and princes.

According to Abdul-Malik, “In the holy-city, and even during time of pilgrimage, the tents of the wealthy pilgrims were adorned with images of persons.” It seems that some of the paintings in the palaces of the caliphs were influenced by Sassanid art, for instance, the paintings of the Al-Heir palace in Syria and the Alhambra in the Umayyad era (Figure 2). In Al-Heir

palace, pictures of horse riding, captive kings, dancing parties, and constellations appear in Sassanid relief style. The subject matter of paintings in the Moshatta castle and Touba palace are plants and birds. Also the paintings in Jowsaq al Khakani palace in Samarra belonging to the 9th century, which have human and animal figures and plants (Figure 3). All have been created as the result of the changing theory on the prohibition of painting. Painting used only for decoration, is lawful.



**Figure 1** Detail, Tiling, Kaboud Mosque, Tabriz, 15<sup>th</sup> Century



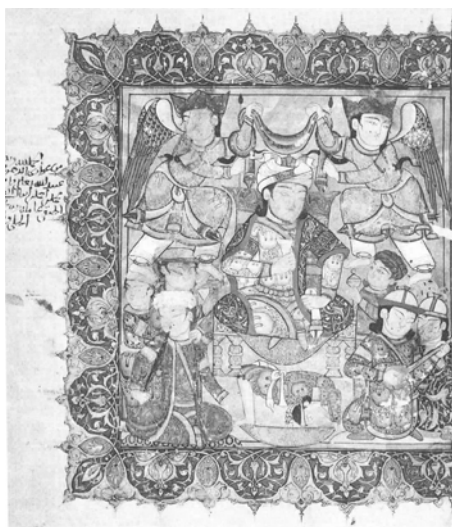
**Figure 2** Detail of fresco, Qasr al-Hair, 725 c

“According to what has been said when Mansur the Abbasid caliph established Baghdad, he ordered placing the image of a warrior on horseback on the dome of his palace which moved when the wind blew. Such works in Samarra and Egypt have been discovered brimming with animal pictures (Zaki, 1993, p.8). In Mansur's time the walls of the palaces of Baghdad and Samarra were painted, and these are but a few among many examples.

In Mesopotamia, attempts were made to illustrate stories, fables and scientific books in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Attempts to advance these arts were made by artists to illustrate books such as *Maqamate Hariri* (Figure 4). In Syria and Egypt at that time many works were done to illustrate manuscripts, which later emerged in Persia.



**Figure 3** The courtly ethos, Mural painting, Jawsaq al-Khaqani palace, Samarra, 836-9 (Abbasid era)



**Figure 4** Frontispiece to al-Harriri, Maqamat, Syria, 1334, 37x25.5 cm. Vienna, Nationalbibliothek

In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, Ilkhanid miniature painting developed in Persia. Ahmad Musa is one of the initiators of this style. In 1330, he served in the court of Abu Saeed and established the art of miniature painting, and set up special schools for it. It's obvious that there was no painting prohibition in the days of Ahmad Jalayer's government in Baghdad and Tabriz.

Sultan Ahmad Jami, was an art devotee. He was also a poet, calligrapher, and painter. During his government many styles of hand-writing appeared the source of which was the court. These writings were indebted to the Ilkhanid dynasty. This was in line with the tradition and culture at that time. Therefore painting entered government circles and it became a Muslim tradition.

"Despite the fact that Illkhanids, successors of Chengiz in Persia, established a strict Sunni government, for the first time depiction of Prophet Muhammad's image was permissible. The Illkhanids tendency to glorify themselves was influenced by the fact that most books that authors were encouraged to write were those in which biography and copious praise and gratitude of the royal patron was given (Okasheh, 2001, p. 31).

During the Timurid dynasty, there was an upsurge in painting through illustrating the literary works of Attar, such as *Manteq-o Tayr* and *Tazkarat-ol Olia*. They

reflected the actual meaning of the text and emphasized its religious values. Moreover, many other texts and paintings appeared later praising sufism.

The evolution and development of sufism led to the development of Shi'a spirituality at the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the advent of the Safavid era, when people were inclined to Shi'ism. Qazi Ahmad lived in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. He authored works on calligraphers and painters. Ahmad wrote that during that time there were many art proponents who were active, as painting was lawful. According to him painting is related to the pen, in fact a consequence of it. The pen was praised in the early chapters of *Qur'an* (see Al-Qalam the 68<sup>th</sup> chapter) since played an important role in writing that holy book. In this regard Imam Ali is famous as the innovator of the sacred style of calligraphy.

The pen, the writer who followed the pen of Imam Ali and what he wrote and drew represent good deeds. This train of thought removed impediments in producing portrays. But this change failed to persuade Shah Tahmasb in 1550. He obeyed the conservative religious reading and the severe laws and principles related to it. In 1556, in a letter known as 'Honest Consideration' he denied "unlawful things" and included painting in this category.

Qazi Ahmad doesn't explain the sudden halt to painters' work. Yet it is understandable the religious rules persisted on painting and forced them to do that. Qazi Ahmad was aware of Shah Tahmasb's severe attitude toward the art. But when he writes about the king's activities regarding painting, he remained silent. He pointed to the era of Tahmasb's kingdom several times and described those days as "the days when painters and calligraphers were supported and valued." So we can suppose he was discussing his earlier reign.

Chardin in his book *Journey to Persia* discusses what Qazi Ahmad digressed from. One chapter of this book is an explanation and description of painting in Persia. Chardin says painting was forbidden and "Shi'ite theologians"



didn't condone either human figures or pictures of animals. He explains that the painting of this era is distinguished from other times because of its low quality. The Safavids began their rule from 1502 in Persia and continued till 1722. During that time, painters and artists presented and developed valuable works of art as illustrated pages in manuscripts, painting and mural.

In this period, the art of painting reached its peak in the Muslim world (Figure 5). The most important painter was Kamal ed-din Behzad (Figure 6). Before that he was an artist at the Timurid Court. He relocated from Herat to Tabriz during the time of Shah Ismail (Figure 7). He was put in charge of the royal library. "It is related to Shah Ismail that, during a battle he feared to lose; so he hid the painter Behzad who was among his escort in the cave, lest that valued personage fall into the hands of the foe" (Papadopoulos, 1980, p. 25).



**Figure 5** The Ascension of Prophet Mohammad, Khamseh Nezami, 1529-1543, The British Museum Library London



**Figure 6** Construction of the Castle of Khawarnaq, Behzad, 1494, British Museum, London



**Figure 7** Shah Ismail in Battle against The Ottomans, Mural painting, Chihil Sutun palace, Isfahan, 1647-1650

In Shah Ismail's era, another type of painting emerged, characterized by and known as dervish scenes. Their subject matter surrounds the event of Karbala (Figure 8). Missionaries displayed these scenes to people in villages and the bazaar. This was done to arouse people's religious emotions and encouraged

them to fight the Ottoman government. In the time of Shah Abbas (1600) Isfahan was the capital of Persia. Many calligraphers and professional painters were attracted to the city. Shah Abbas paid great attention to pictures and decoration of buildings and palaces. From those works some pictures have remained in two royal palaces in Isfahan.



**Figure 8** Battle of Karbala, Abbas al-Musavi, Late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> c, Oil on Canvas, 182.9x299.7 cm, Collection of K.

Thomas Elghanayan

In this era, Persian painting fell under the influence of European art. These effects are clear especially in the works of Mohammad Zaman who traveled to Europe and Riza Abbasi, the famous painter of that time. Reflecting the ordinary life of people is the most important effect of European art on Persian painting.

In fact, the painters in this era paid little attention to laws and religious prohibitions and in addition to traditional motifs, there was a tendency to retelling and showing emotion in the form of pictures, even sometimes including sexual affairs. This rekindled the emergence of religious limitations in drawing human figures.

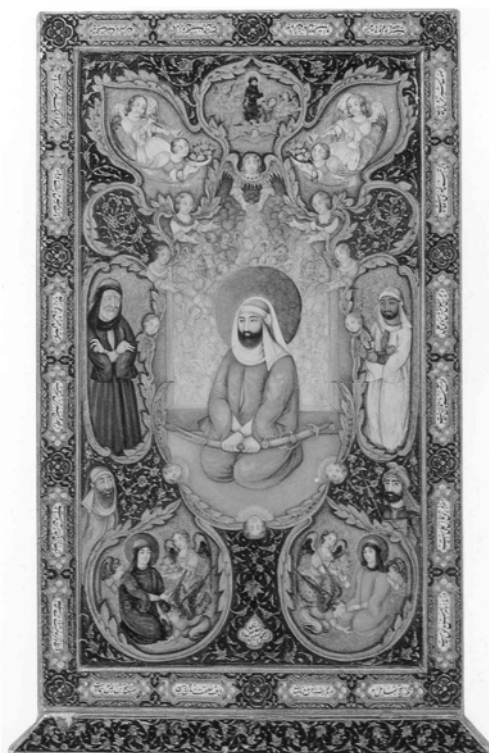
In the era of Shah Abbas, there was a gap between clergymen and officials. Shah Abbas was trying to undermine clerical power. It's interesting that in line with this activity in Persia, Christian preachers appeared and found many followers.

During the Zand and Qajjar eras, the process of transferring European art both in style and technique

increased and in line with it, freedom of action in painting also rose. In the reign of Fath Ali Shah, such art works reached their peak (Figure 9). The most important style of painting at that time was royal iconography. Another style of painting and public art emerged that focused on the dervish and coffee-house painting. The theme of these paintings are the epic heroes in *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) and the depiction of the events of Ashura and Karbala. Although religious painting was ignored in Islam, it had many adherents and supporters in Persia. To do a charitable deed, or better to say, gain heavenly reward, dervishes displayed these scenes to people. Here shrouded martyrs were presented in public. Imam Ali's portrait was widely used for their illustration. But Ali's face was hidden in a halo while he was embracing his sword (Figure 10).



**Figure 9** Portrait of Fath Ali Shah Standing, Mihr Ali, 1809-10, Oil on Canvas, 253x124 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg



**Figure 10** Mirror Case with Portrait of Imam Ali (Pbuh), Muhammad Ismail, Pasteboard, Opaque water colour and gold under Lacquer, 27x17.3 cm.

By the end of the Qajar era, Persian painting suddenly reverted to European painting in terms of theme and technique under the influence of Mohammad Ghaffari, known as Kamal Al-Molk (Figure 11). His students carried on his style through the Pahlavi era. Under the Pahlavi's, Persian painting went in the same direction as western painting (Figure 12). Under the influence of modernism, traditional and religious themes lost their power and popularity.



**Figure 11** The Hall of Mirrors, Mohammad Ghafari (Kamal al-Molk), Tehran, 1888, Oil on Canvas, Gulistan Palace Collection



**Figure 12** Miniature, Bahman Mohases, Oil on canvas, Tehran, 1961

Following the Islamic Revolution however, society reverted to Islamic culture and tradition (Figure 13, 14). Not only was there no prohibition on painting, artists were supported and encouraged. Nowadays in the Islamic world illustration and painting are increasingly well endowed. This plays an important role in developing Islamic and international culture in societies.



**Figure 13** Portrait of Imam Khomeini, Mural painting, Tehran, 1981

## Conclusion

To sum up, although oriental scholars have written

profusely on painting and illustration in Islam as that painting and sculpture was made unlawful by the Qur'an, apparently has been viewed incorrect, as we never encounter any prohibition on painting and sculpture in the scripture. However, there do exist hadith labeling these things unlawful. The most important factor for the condemnation of pictorial art with the advent of Islam was the eradication of ignorance needed for the acceptance of the divine inspiration to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

As previously stated, the prohibition of painting animal forms was a result of the concern over newly converted Muslims returning to their former idolatrous ways. In the age of caliphs and kings painting became commonplace and popular. Islam was firmly established



**Figure 14** Bloody Friday, Author, Mural painting, Oil on canvas, Tehran, 400x600 cm, 1987

and there was less fear of a return to pagan ways. By applying these rules and incorporating the art of invaded lands, Muslim artists created a glorious art intermingled with their own interest and creativity. Basically, Islam is not against painting and illustration but does prohibit the representation of God's image. Pictorial art is not

forbidden in the Islamic world and Persian Islamic painting has had an important influence on modern painting.

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