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The Evolution of Persian Thought regarding Art and Figural Representation in Secular and Religious Life after the Coming of Islam.

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This paper argues that, although Islam never succeeded in completely wiping out the use of figural representation in Persian arts, it did manage to have a significant effect on Persian artistic forms and their appreciation. The Islamic prohibition on figural representation resulted in a shift from artistic emphasis being placed almost solely on figural representation (as was the case in pre-Islamic Persia) to a greater emphasis being placed on abstract, geometrical vegetal and floral art.

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Islam is often regarded (and according to traditional Islamic law and teachings, quite rightly so) as an anti-iconic religion which prohibits the painting, sculpting, owning, patronizing, buying or selling of art which involves figural representation. However, contrary to the anti-iconic teachings of the Islamic faith, objects of art bearing figural representations continued to be produced, owned and patronized in Persia even after the Islamization of the region. In this paper I will evaluate the impact of Islam on Persian art and examine the reasons behind the continuation of the use of figural representation in Persian art. In doing so I will attempt to gauge the attitude of the Muslim Persians regarding iconography in the arts, and the development and evolution of their views regarding figural representation and/in religion. I will argue that although the coming of Islam to the region affected the attitude of the Persian regarding the interplay of religion and the arts and more specifically figural representation, the latter's lure and appreciation was too engrained in Persian culture, and hence, too strong, for figural art to be completely abandoned. I will also argue that the influence of the Arab form of Islam on Persia was never really strong enough for the doctrine of iconoclasm to take effect fully in the region, and thus it was never fully enforced, realized or even understood. For my research and arguments I will be examining art pieces from the seventh century till the twelfth century.

To begin examining the influence of Islam on Persian art, and in particular that which involved figural representation, it is important to be aware both of the Islamic teachings regarding figural representation, as well as early Muslim thought and its evolution with regard to this issue. Almost from the very beginning of Islam there has been an active opposition to (the permission of using) figural representation in religious teachings.

Although there is no specific mention of figural representation/ painting in the Quran, the following verse:

> *O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination,– of Satan's handwork: eschew such (abomination), that ye may prosper.*[73]

has been interpreted by many theologians to include a ban on the drawing, painting or sculpting of figures.[74] From this verse itself, it appears to be quite clear that what is being emphasized is the avoidance of idolatry, not figural representation. However, in the *hadith* (the recorded sayings) of the Prophet Muhammad, there are much clearer references to the prohibition of figural representation and painting. It is these *hadith* which are utilized by the theologians to support and elaborate on the meaning and intent of the above Quranic verse, and, it is from them that many Muslims derive legitimacy for their arguments against figural representation.

According to one such *hadith*, A'isha, the wife of the Prophet reported that on seeing a curtain embellished with pictures of animals, the Prophet was enraged and tore the cloth to pieces, declaring, *"Such people as paint these pictures will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection ."*[75] On another occasion Muhammad is supposed to have said, *"Verily the most grievously tormented people on the Day of Resurrection would be the painters of pictures."*[76] Muhammad is also reported to have said, *"Angels do not enter the house in which there are portrayals or pictures."*[77]

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[73]Momin Internet Technologies, Missouri, USA. http://www.equran.org [5 :90, Yousaf Ali's transaltion]

[74] Arnold, Sir Thomas W. 1965. *Painting in Islam: A study of the place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture.* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 5.

[75] Muslim Students Association, University of Southern California, initiated on 12/27/98. http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/073.sbt.html#008.073.130

[76]

http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/024.smt.html#024.5268

[77]

http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/024.smt.html#024.5272

The reason behind this condemnation of the sculpting or painting of figures was the belief that by fashioning the image of a living being, the painter or sculptor was attempting to place himself on par with God by taking on the role of creator (a role intended to be God's alone).[78] This reason was considered to be specially apt since in the Arabic language, as it is used in the Qur'an, "the word for "to fashion or form" (*sawwara*) is synonymous with the word for "to create" (*bara'a*) and God himself is not only called a creator (*al-Bari'*) but also a *Musawwir*, which is the common word for "painter"."[79] A *hadith* of the Prophet, concerning painters who, on the Day of Judgment, will be asked by God to breathe life into their creations and on being unable to do so, will realize the ineffectuality of their creations, further elaborates on this Islamic doctrine of iconoclasm.[80]

However, in the early years of Islam, we see quite a clear dichotomy between the acts condemned by the literal interpretations of these *hadiths* and the customs of the time. At least during the first couple of centuries after the advent of Islam, we do not see these traditions being adhered to completely and literally. This is evident by the fact that in early Islamic Arabia, we find numerous examples that clearly indicate that it was the idolatry associated with images that was condemned, and not the pictures themselves. At the conquest of Mecca, when the Prophet is said to have ordered that all pictures/idols in the Ka'ba be wiped out, Muhammad is reported to have put his hand on the picture of Mary with the baby Jesus, and to have stated that that image be left untouched.[81] Similarly, Muhammad did not appear to have any objection to the dolls/figures that his wife A'isha used to play with when she was a little girl.[82]

In the same way, we see that for the early Muslims, it was "the underlying religious meaning attached to what was represented, [that] was of greater importance than the fact of

[78] Arnold, Thomas. 1928. S*ymbolism and Islam.* The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs, Vol. 53, No. 307., pp. 154-156, 155.
[79] Ettinghausen, Richard. 1977. *Arab Painting.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc, 13.
[80] Arnold. 1965, 5.
[81] Arnold. 1965, 7.
[82] Arnold. 1965, 7.

representation as such."[83] The idols in Arabia were destroyed because of what they stood for and not because they were figures. Likewise, the early Muslims did not care much about the way that the Christians represented Jesus - what they cared about more was the way in which they regarded him. Thus, the crucifix, which was a symbol representing the Christian belief in the death, ascension and resurrection of Christ was much more objectionable to the Muslims, (because of what it stood for and depicted), than any picture.[84] Hence, objection to, and destruction of, the cross as well as statements condemning Christian theology was much more prevalent in early Islamic Arabia than the enforcement of iconoclasm and the destruction of pictures (religiously representational or otherwise).

However, after the *hadiths* were compiled and put into readily available sources ready for circulation, the number of individuals who could reliably claim knowledge of the *hadith* dwindled and Islam spread to new regions, which in turn necessitated the reification of this "text," (this occurred around the second half of the ninth century). In due time, the prohibition on figural representation began to take root in Islamic societies and its effects began to be felt in the Islamic world.[85] I will go on to prove this later in my paper by examining the evolution of Persian art.

Having looked at Islamic teachings and early Muslim perceptions (and their evolution) with regard to figural representation, I will now examine how this played out in Persia – a region which came into contact with Islam very shortly after the advent of the religion. At this juncture it is important to clarify that although when conducting such an examination I employ terms such as "Islamic influence", "Islamic nature", "Islamic orientation" etc. I use such terms in quotation marks in an attempt to avoid essentialism. I am hopeful that the use of such quotation marks throughout this paper will prevent the reader from falling prey to the latent stereotyping of Islam.

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[83] King, G. R. D. 1985. *Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine.* Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 48, No. 2., pp. 267-277, 269.
[84] King. 1985, 269.
[85] Arnold. 1965, 8.

Islam was first introduced in Persia in 642 AD during the caliphate of Umar (the third rightly guided caliph). When the Persian conquest took place, only the explicitly religious images of the region were destroyed and all other figural representations were left unharmed.[86] Also, since this was the first large-scale Muslim encounter with Zoroastrianism (the state religion of Persia at the time), a number of Zoroastrian symbols and figures were not recognized as being religiously influenced and were left untouched. Thus, it was basically only the Zoroastrian places of worship and the objects and art within them that were destroyed by the Arab invaders.[87]

Although Islam's initial impact on Persian art was neither profound nor broad-reaching, over the centuries the religion's influence became increasingly obvious, both in the ways that the Persians began to regard and appreciate art and figural representation and in the way that they began to practice and condone its creation. To fully understand the impact of Islam on Persian art, especially with regard to figural representation and religion, it is important to examine the cultural, artistic and religious background of Persia before the introduction of Islam in the region.

Even a perfunctory look at the art of pre-Islamic Persia shows that in that era figural representation was widely used and appreciated, in both secular and religious life. By the time of the Sassanians, the dynasty that ruled Persia until the Muslim conquest, figural representation was used on objects ranging from wall-paintings to pottery, coins and sculptures etc. During their rule, the Sassanians encouraged a revival in, and possibly a re-appropriation of, Iranian culture in Persia in an attempt to wipe out any remaining vestiges of Greek influence in the region.[88] Therefore, under Sassanian rule, a strong emphasis was placed on the development of native art and on the patronage of artists, painters and sculptors by the rulers. Also, under the

[86] Arnold. 1965, 7.

[87] Boyce, Mary. 1979. *Zoroastrians Their Religious Beliefs and Practices.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 147.

[88] Before the Sassanian conqured Persia, the land was being ruled by the Greeks.

Sassanians, Zoroastrianism was declared the state religion and the art of this period often depicts this religious influence.

Since the Sassanian rulers were the patrons of the arts, the figural representation on the great majority of that time's artistic pieces portray scenes of royal and courtly life. The figures in the arts of this period are engaged in scenes depicting acts of royalty such as hunting, feasts and grand ceremonies.[89] Many pieces also bear figural depictions of dancing, nude girls and female musicians, [90] both of which suggest opulence and leisure and indicate patronage by the rulers. Also present in the art of that time are figural representations of a religious nature. [91] A number of artifacts also display illustrations of the fire altar (a Zoroastrian religious symbol), being guarded by priests. This image is especially common on coins of the Sassanian era.[92] On several occasions, in the art of this period, we also see figural representations of the Zoroastrian God, Ahurda Mazda.[93]

Yet another significant historical association between religion and figural representation in this region is the association of Mani (the founder of the religion of Manichaeism) with painting. Mani is said to have been an exceptional painter himself and to have often advanced and illustrated his message and teachings with the use of paintings.[94] The Manichaean religion gained a substantial following in the eastern provinces of Persia during the fourth century and the religion retained its influence and followers in the region until Abbasid persecution in the tenth century forced the community's leaders to relinquish their power.[95]

Thus, at the time of the arrival of Islam in the region, art, especially that involving figural representation, was an integral part of the culture and was utilized for both religious and courtly expression. As mentioned earlier, the initial impact of Islam on the arts of the region was limited. The Zoroastrian and

[89] Refer to the figures on page 75, 87 and 88.
[90] Refer to figures on page 90 and 91.
[91] Refer to figures on page 92, 93 and 94.
[92] Refer to figure on page 94.
[93] Refer to figure on page 92.
[94] Irwin, Robert. 1997. *Islamic Art in Context.* New York: Harry N. Abrahams, Incorporated, 20.
[95] Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "*Manichaeism*". copyright 1994-2000.

Manichaean places of worship and the art and objects within them were destroyed.[96] However, in line with the early Muslim attitude towards figural artistic representation, all other art pieces depicting figures were left untouched.[97] In comparison, Islam's initial impact on the religious life of the Persians was much greater and the influence of the new religion continued to gain strength even after the initial blow had been struck. Zoroastrians and Manicheans were persecuted and the conversion of the Persians to Islam was encouraged and, on occasion, even forced.[98] Over time, as religious persecution continued and intensified, many Zoroastrians fled to India in order to preserve their religion, while the vast majority of the ones who stayed behind eventually but steadily converted to Islam. Zoroastrian and Manichaean conversion to Islam continued to take place systematically and continuously, so much so that by the beginning of the tenth century almost all of the Persians had accepted Islam.[99] This conversion of the region to the Islamic faith and its doctrines is reflected in the arts of the time which gradually began to evolve to express a more "Islamic orientation."

The influence of Islam on figural representation in religious art in Persia was immediate and profound. Despite Persia's strong history of figural representation in religious art, [100] the Persians were influenced by the anti-iconic doctrine of their new faith to adhere to it in their religious practice. The decoration/art of the new religious sanctuaries (in this case, mosques) was kept strictly in-line with the anti-iconic doctrine of the new faith. And, at least from the seventh century till the twelfth century, no pictures, sculptures or any other sort of figural representations of an "Islamic nature" were produced in the region. This was a drastic change from the practices of the previous tradition which was characterized by the production and appreciation of figural representation of a religious nature.[101] However, (as my examination of secular art objects will go on to

[96] Boyce. 1979, 147.
[97] Arnold. 1965, 8.
[98] Boyce. 1979, 147.
[99] Boyce. 1979, 156.
[100] Refer to images on page 92, 93 and 94.
[101] Refer to images on page 92, 93 and 94 as examples.

show), in Persian minds there existed a clear distinction between religious and non-religious art, and thus, the rules of representation that they applied to the two differed greatly. After the coming of Islam, figural representation was immediately wiped out from religious places and practice but this effect was not immediate in the secular art of the Persians. The anti-iconic teachings of the new faith began to manifest themselves only gradually in secular Persian art works, and as I will go on to show, the religious prohibition on figural representation was never embraced wholeheartedly and art pieces bearing figures continued to be produced in Persia despite the region's conversion to Islam.

As stated earlier, the examination of Persian art pieces in this paper goes to prove that it was not until the mid-ninth century that the religious doctrine concerning the prohibition of figural representation began to influence Muslims' secular artistic appreciations and affect the embellishments of secular art forms. One of the manifestations of the evolution of Muslim thought in Persia regarding figural representation is apparent in an examination of the changes undergone by the art on Persian coins. Pre-Islamic Sassanian coins (see images, page 76), in the vast majority of instances, were engraved with depictions of figural representations either of the busts of Sassanian kings or of scenes of a religious nature.[102] After the coming of Islam, the influence of the religion on the art on the coins steadily manifested itself to an ever-increasing degree. Post-Islamic coins/medallions discovered in Persia (see attached images), show depictions of figural representations of pre-Islamic Sassanian themes. However, even then, the development of a new "Islamic orientation" is made apparent by the band of calligraphy surrounding the figural representation. In one of the figures the Arabic inscription read the declaration of the Islamic declaration of faith ("There is no God but God", see page 77). Thus, it is apparent that by the mid-ninth century Islam was beginning to influence even the secular art of the region. As I shall go on to show, with the passage of time the influence of Islam and the anti-iconic doctrine of the faith imposed themselves to an even greater extent on secular Persian art. In fact, one of the figures

[102] Refer to figure on page 76.

(page 74) shows the tenth and eleventh century Islam's impact on the secular Persian art was so great that coins, bearing decorations only of engraved calligraphy of a religious nature, had begun to be produced. Thus, as detailed above, the "Islamic influence" on the art of Persian coins led to a gradual but significant shift in coin decoration from figural representation to a mixture of figural representation and "Islamic text" and finally into a fully "Islamic text."

A similar trend is apparent in the infiltration of an "Islamic orientation" in the decoration and art of the metal crockery and ceramics of Persia. As mentioned earlier, in pre-Islamic Persia the rulers were the patrons of the arts and the vast majority of figural representations depicted scenes from the lives of the rulers[103] or objects of their appreciation such a nude dancing girls and female musicians[104]. Such figural representations were especially evident in the decoration and art of the ceramics and metal plates, bowls, cups and drinking vessels of pre-Islamic Persia. Almost all the Sassanian crockery pieces depicted scenes of courtly life, such as hunting and feasting. Historically, such artistically decorated crockery pieces (specially the ones made of precious metals), were regarded as important status symbols that added to the prestige of their owner. In fact, such crockery pieces were sent to rulers and allies from other regions in order to impress them.[105] As in the case of the Persian coins, the effect of the Islamic religion and its doctrines was not immediately reflected in the artistic embellishment of the region's crockery. To be able to evaluate the depth of the impact of Islam on Persian crockery and ceramics and to gauge the attitude of the Muslim Persians regarding iconography in the arts, it is important to have a good understanding of the history of ceramic art in the region. It is also essential to be well-informed of the Persian political situation of the time, since following in the pre-Islamic pattern, the patronage of the arts was performed by the rulers and nobility even after the Islamization of the region.

[103] Refer to figures on pages 75, 87 and 88.
[104] Refer to figures on pages 90 and 91.
[105] Bloom, Jonathan and Sheila Blair. 1997. *Islamic Arts.* London: Phaidon Press Limited, 114.

After the initial conquering of Persia by the Arab Islamic armies in the mid-sixth century was over, political power in the region soon changed hands and by 750 AD the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad was in command of the region. However, their hold on the region was tenuous, and did not last for long. Their power soon decreased and by the ninth century local Iranian dynasties began to return to power. The Saffarids and Samanids established themselves in the east while the Buyids took power in the center and the west. In addition, from the eleventh century onwards, the Ghaznavids also established themselves in the region.[106] All the above mentioned dynasties were either purely Iranian in their heritage, or had greatly adopted or assimilated themselves into the Persian culture. Thus, for these rulers, the lure and appreciation of the arts, as well as their patronage, were both strongly engrained in their cultural tradition and were an integral part of their heritage. And, as my examination of the art of the five centuries that fell after the arrival of Islam in Persia elucidates, these Persians found it difficult to depart from their historically and culturally engrained love and appreciation of figural representations.

As the figure on page 82 illustrates, the depictions of scenes of royal and courtly life (in this specific case, a hunting scene involving a prince on his horse surrounded by prey) were still being used in the eighth century to embellish metal dishes and ceramics. This trend continued even into the tenth century, as is demonstrated by the image on page 83, (a bowl made in the tenth century in Nishapur), which shows a prince/warrior heading out on his horse on a hunting expedition. The art and figural representation on both the above mentioned pieces is strikingly alike to that found on similar pieces[107] in pre-Islamic times. This striking similarity makes it obvious that the art on these later pieces draws its inspiration from earlier Sassanian art, the latter of which was inundated with depictions of scenes from royal and courtly life, especially acts of hunting, fighting and feasting.

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[106] Grabar, Oleg. 2000. *Mostly Miniatures: An Introduction to Persian Painting*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 36.

[107] Refer to figures on pages 75 and 88.

Although art mirroring Sassanian art continued to be produced in Persia even till the tenth century, eventually the art in Persia began to bear witness to a break from the Sassanian artistic style of figural depiction in favor of the adoption of a more "Islamic orientation". This is evident in the image on page 84, (a Persian dish from the mid-eleventh century), which is embellished with a royal scene in which the ruler is wearing a turban, (an Arab/Islamic addition to the garments of the Persians), instead of a traditional Sassanian crown.[108] The image on page 85 (a silver ewer from the eleventh century) presents an example of an even greater impact of Islam on the embellishment of crockery. The decoration of this piece consists of a band of calligraphy in Kufic[109] script. The writing seeks to invoke God's blessings on the noble owners, whose names and princely titles are part of the writings. Thus, we witness that the long-standing Persian historical tradition of figural imagery of the royals has given way to the verbalization of royal aspirations.[110] This piece shows the impact of Islam on crockery and ceramic art not only with regard to the practice of the anti-iconic doctrine, but also with regard to the great emphasis placed on writing and literature and the power that is attributed to them.

However, only a few pieces similar to that on page 85 exist. Art pieces depicting such a strong "Islamic orientation" during this era are an exception. Most art pieces of this time bear witness to a considerably weaker "Islamic influence". This is elucidated by the fact that quite a few ceramic art pieces embellished with figural representations akin to those present on Sassanian objects of a similar nature, continued to be produced in Islamic Persia till the twelfth century. However, even though figural representations in the arts continued, the growing "Islamic influence" on them was apparent. One such manifestation of "Islamic influence" is the cessation of the

[108] Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987. *The Art and Architecture of Islam* 650 – 1250. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 236.
[109] An angular form of the Arabic alphabet. It might be helpful here to contrast Kufic with another script such as thuluth or nasta'liq, just to give the reader more of context.
[110] Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987, 240.

production of figural representations of nude women. Islam places great emphasis on modesty and proper clothing, especially in the case of females, and the manifestation and influence of this emphasis is apparent in the elimination of the production of nude or scantly clad female figures in Persian art pieces. Another such manifestation, as was discussed earlier, was in the "Islamization" of the garments of the figures being produced.

Thus, although the figural representations of the time began to reflect an increasing "Islamic influence", the production of art pieces bearing such representations was not discontinued. This continuation of figural representation in art pieces was, as I have argued, a direct result of the unwavering existence of a strong cultural identity among the Persians: the lure and appreciation of the arts and figural representation was strongly engrained in Persian history and culture and since the population continued to hold on firmly to their heritage, they were unwilling to let go of their traditional artistic forms and styles of embellishment. In addition, I argue, the strong sense of cultural identity among the Persian population kept the influence of the Arab form of Islam on Persia to a minimum and hence the Islamic doctrine of iconoclasm never really took full effect in the region. The support of the historical Persian form of arts i.e. figural representation in the arts, was further bolstered by the fact that from the ninth century onwards there was an increase in ethnic awareness among the Persians, as during this time the region was witnessing the birth of the modern Persia. In this period Persian poems were being written for the first time and the epic tradition of Iran was being written and compiled. Thus, the cultural life of the time was dominated by the somewhat contradictory influence of Pan-Islamic Arab culture (which was closely tied to Baghdad) on the one hand and increased ethnic awareness and appreciation of Iranian culture on the other hand.[111]

Although this increase in ethnic awareness had an effect on the continuation of figural representation in Persia, over time the "Islamic orientation" of the arts became increasingly apparent. This is made evident by the new styles of ceramic and crockery embellishment that cropped up after the ninth century.

[111] Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987, 209.

These new styles signified a very significant break from the pre-Islamic mono-thematic ceramic and crockery art which was used for depicting only scenes from royal and courtly life. By the ninth and tenth centuries the influence and effect of the Islamic doctrine prohibiting figural representation began to manifest itself in the artwork and decoration of Persian ceramics. The images on page 88 and 89 bear testimony to this and exhibit the development of a new mode of ceramic decoration in Persia, which seems to have resulted, at least partly, from the anti-iconic doctrine of the Islamic faith. Both the above mentioned ceramic pieces are decorated solely (or almost solely) by splashes of color and very little iconography of any kind (not even abstract or geometric) can be seen on them. This period was also marked by the evolution and development of another similar mode of ceramic art decoration in which the decoration of art pieces was mostly geometrical, abstract, floral and vegetal in nature. The image on page 90 (which depicts somewhat abstract vegetal plant), and the image on page 91 (which is decorated with a very geometric large flower petal-like images), are prime examples of ceramics belonging to the above-mentioned genre.

One other significant "Islamic influence" on the ceramic and crockery art of Persia was the introduction of calligraphy (done in the Arabic script, but usually in the Persian language) as a method of decoration. Many of the ceramic bowls and platters produced in tenth century Iran[112] were decorated solely with "bold Kufic inscriptions in black on a white ground, usually applied in [a] circular fashion around the walls."[113] The texts on these pieces included proverbs and adages, and although the writings were not of a strictly religious nature,[114] some of them clearly reflected knowledge and propagation of Islamic teachings.[115] In addition, the use of proverbs and calligraphy on these pieces is a clear indication of the influence of the literary character of Islam on the embellishment of ceramics.

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[112] Refer to the figure on page 86.

[113] Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987, 230.

[114] Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987, 230.

[115] Such as, "modesty points out the actions of a noble man" (Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987, 230.); and "Generosity is the disposition of the dwellers of Paradise." (Irwin. 1997, 167.)

Another significant impact of Islam on the arts of Persia is evident in the illumination of manuscripts. Surprisingly, in this case Islam's influence resulted in an increase in figural representation instead of a decrease. The "Islamic emphasis" on acquiring knowledge and appreciating literature resulted in an increase in the literary character of the Persians and infused in them the thirst for knowledge. An intellectual climate began to prevail in the Persian and Central Asian regions and as a result many Greek and Syrian astronomical, medical and scientific manuscripts were copied and translated between the ninth and twelfth centuries in an attempt to learn from them.[116] On a number of occasions, such texts (specially the medical and scientific ones) were illustrated with human and animal figures which were intended to supplement and explain the texts. And, quite often when copying and translating these manuscripts, the Persian Muslims copied the illustrations present in the original compositions into the translated versions. This was evident especially in literary and scientific works, where the illustrations were particularly important for explaining the text and were sometimes even necessary for doing so.[117] However, even though the Islamic doctrine prohibiting figural representation was violated, a number of "Islamic influences" are still evident in these depictions.

The images on pages 89 and 95 are illustrations of the Persian Muslims' rendition of the Greek mythical astronomical figures of Virgo and Andromeda. These illustrations were part of a manuscript entitled *Treatise on the Fixed Stars* which was composed by 'Abd ar-Rahman as-Sufi in Persia in the late tenth century. The manuscript's text and illustrations were based on the *Almagest* – the work of the classical Greek astronomer Ptolemy.[118] Both these figures, as well as the rest of the figures in as-Sufi's composition illustrate a transformation from their original classical themes.[119] Since on most occasions the mythology and legends associated with the Greek origins was not clearly known, the Muslim illustrations of these figures depict

[116] Ettinghausen. 1977, 15.
[117] Ettinghausen. 1977, 15.
[118] Ettinghausen. 1977, 52.
[119] Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987, 250.

them as less mythological, and in most cases simply as normal humans.

The "Islamic influence" on these figures is especially significant with regard to their clothing. As mentioned earlier, Islam places a strong emphasis on modesty and proper clothing, especially in the case of women. This "Islamic influence" clearly manifests itself with regard to the attire of the females illustrated in the images on page 89 and 95. Andromeda (the female figure on page 95) is depicted in classical Greek texts as "either half-nude or clothed in a chiton, with outstretched arms chained to a rocks on either side."[120] While, Virgo, (the female on page 89), is also often illustrated in traditional Greek texts as half-nude.[121] However, in the Persian illustrations both figures are fully clothed, have Oriental features and are adorned with Oriental jewelry. This change of attire, from the Greek to the Persian versions of the illustrations is consistent throughout this compilation. Thus the "Islamic influence" on the illustrations is apparent by the fact that all the females are fully clothed and most of the male figures wear turbans.[122]

As all the examples in this paper have depicted, the coming of Islam brought about a gradual but significant change on the arts of the region. Historically pre-Islamic Persia had been a very artistically inclined region, producing painting, sculptures, ceramics and pottery etc. Many of these objects were embellished with figural decorations depicting either scenes from the lives of the art patrons (the rulers) or scenes associated with religions life. However, with the introduction of Islam in Persia, the concept and appreciation of different art forms began to evolve to reflect a more "Islamic influence", while still retaining its distinct Persian flavor. The Islamic prohibition on figural representation made its influence felt, immediately after the conquest of Persia, by putting an end to the depiction of figures in places of worship or any other aspects of religious life. However, as this paper has proven, because of the long-standing history and appreciation of figural representation in the arts of

[120] Ettinghausen, Richard and Oleg Grabar. 1987, 250.
[121] Ettinghausen. 1977, 52.
[122] Ettinghausen. 1977, 52.

the region, the dwindling of figural representations in secular arts was gradual and the production of art pieces bearing such representations was never completely eliminated.

Islam's influence on Persian secular art, as examination of art pieces in this paper has proven, only became significant after the first half of the ninth century, since it was only at this point that the *hadith* of Mohammad, and in this case particularly those prohibiting figural representation, were put into ready circulation in all parts of the Islamic world. During this period, most of the pre-Islamic Persian art forms, such as coin art and the embellishment of ceramics and crockery were retained, but their decorations were adapted to better fit in with the anti-iconic and literary doctrines of the Islamic faith.

One of the main reasons for the continuation of figural representation was the distinction that existed from the very beginning in the lay people's mind, (as opposed to that of the strict theologians'), with regard to the religious and secular spheres of action. Thus, although a layperson would adhere completely to the prohibition on figural representation in his religious life, he would often disregard it, (at least to a certain extent) in his secular life.[123] Also, as this paper has proven, another reason for the continuation of figural representation in the Persian arts was the continuation of the tradition of Persian royalty and nobility being patrons of the arts: their love and appreciation of figural representation resulted in the production of artistic pieces embellished with figures even after their acceptance of Islam. The continuation of such artistic productions was only assisted by the fact that Islam did not support the establishment of any sort of clergy or ecclesiastical organization, since the lack of any such order resulted in very little (if any), organized religious resistance to such actions of the rulers.[124] However, even in cases where figural representation in the arts continued, the "Islamic influence" on the figures was apparent not only in their attire but also in the choice of scenes or figures being depicted. Such an impact was especially profound with regard to the depictions of female figures.

[123] Ettinghausen. 1977, 14.
[124] Ettinghausen. 1977, 14.

Thus, as this paper has illustrated, although Islam never succeeded in completely wiping out the use of figural representation in Persian arts, it did manage to have a significant effect on Persian artistic forms and their appreciation. The Islamic prohibition on figural representation resulted in a shift from artistic emphasis being placed almost solely on figural representation (as was the case in pre-Islamic Persia), to a greater emphasis being placed on abstract, geometrical vegetal and floral art. The literary character of the new religion also had a significant two-pronged impact on Persian arts: on the one hand it resulted in the production of manuscripts containing figural representations and on the other hand it resulted in the advent of the use of calligraphy as an art form, which, over time, began to be used quite extensively in the embellishment of almost all forms of Persian art. Thus, due to the anti-iconic and literary doctrines of the Islamic faith, the Persian artistic drive began to be increasingly channeled towards avenues other than figural representation and the love and appreciation of calligraphy and art forms lacking figural representations increasingly gained importance.

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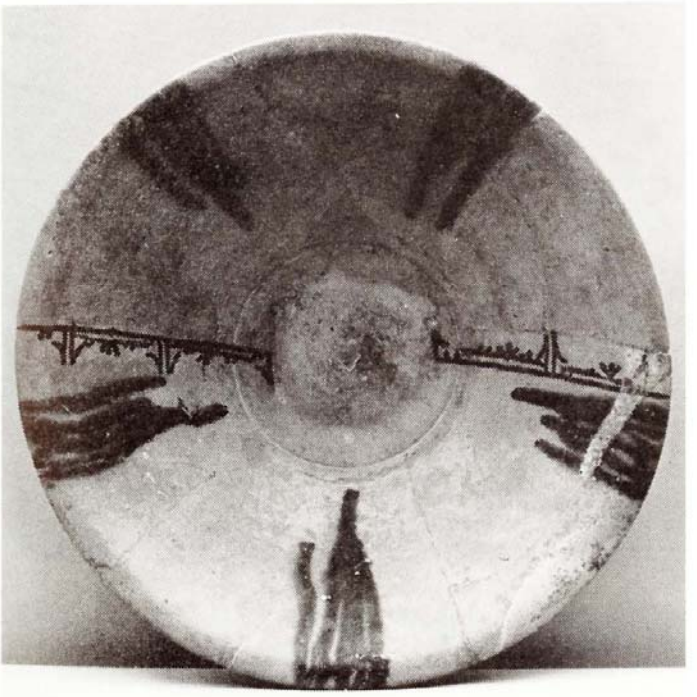
Coins from Eleventh Century Persia

Persian Dish showing a scene from a royal hunt: 310 to 320 A.D


315 - SHAPUR III (383-388)
316 - YAZDGARD I (399-420)
317 - BAHRAM V (420-438)
318 - PEROZ (457-484)
319 - KAVAD I (488-496, 499-531)
320 - VALASH (496-499)
321 - CHOSROES I (531-578)
322 - THE FAVOURITE? (REVERSE OF 321)
323 - HORMIZD IV (579-590)
324 - CHOSROES II (590-627)
325 - FIRE ALTAR (REVERSE OF 324)
326 - ARDASHIR III (628-630)

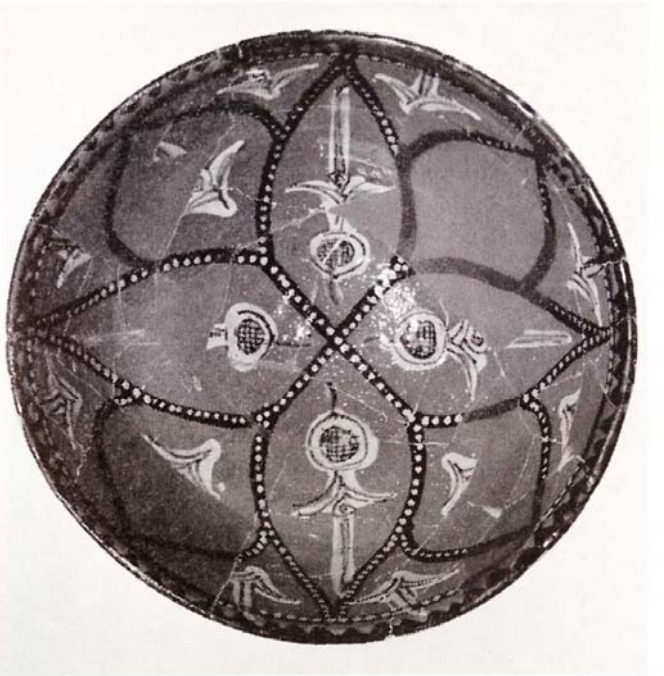
253. Medallion of Izz al-Dawlah and al-Ta'i (obverse and reverse), possibly Iran, 975–6. Gold. *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzesi*

232 and 233. Slip-painted bowls, Nishapur, tenth century.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



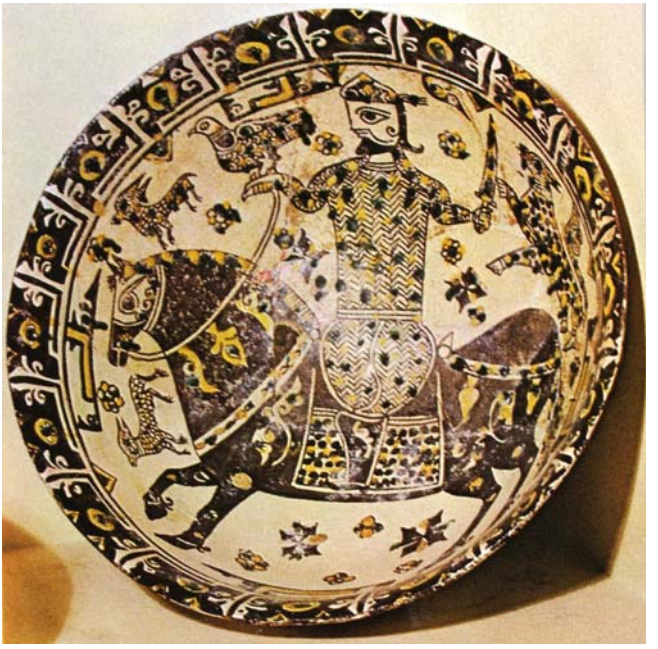
Earthenware dish covered with a white slip, incised and glazed, excavated at Nishapur, Iran, 10th century

Earthware dish with vegetal decoration painted in four colors



232 and 233. Slip-painted bowls,
Nishapur, tenth century.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Dish with representation of a king hunting boars and lions, Iran, 7th - 8th century



Pottery bowl from Nishapur, Iran, 10th century

249. Dish (central field), Iran, mid eleventh century. Silver. *Formerly Leningrad, Musée de la Société pour l'Encouragement des Beaux-Arts*

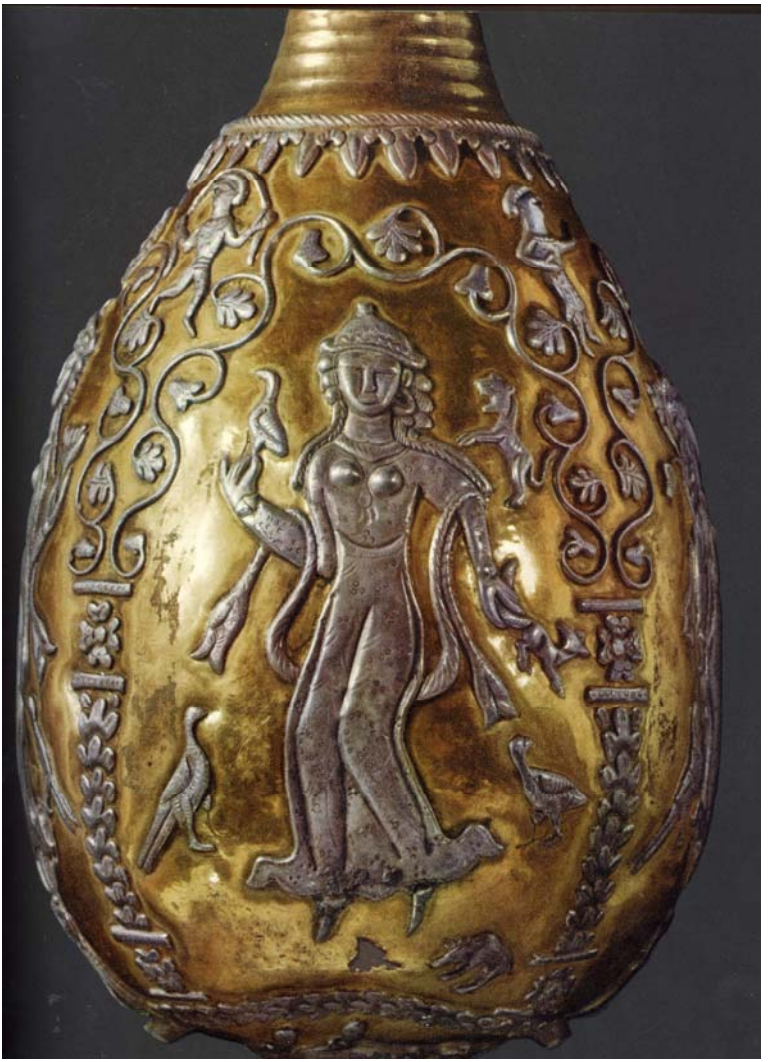
258. Ewer of Valkin, Iran, late tenth/early eleventh century. *Tehran, Museum of the Gulistan Palace*

Bowl from Nishapur, Iran, 10th century. Kufic script reads:
"Generosity is the disposition of the dwellers of paradise."

Bowl depicting royal banquet, 6th - 7th centuries A.D

Drinking bowl depicting a hunting scene with a king, 5th - 6th century A.D

Teatise on the Fixed Stars of as-Sufi: Virgo, 1009



Jug with dancing girls, 6th century

Nude dancing girl, 6th - 7th century A.D

King standing between two gods, 4th century A.D

God above a Fire Altar

Fire Altar

268. Andromeda, MS. Marsh 144, f. 165, probably Fars, 1009–10.
Oxford, Bodleian Library