

## Theoretical contradiction between the prohibition of portraying holy religious figures and the artistic representation in the Islamic miniatures

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### Abstract:

The issue of prohibiting the portrayal of holy religious figures is a thorny subject due to the conflicting opinions and ideas concerning it. Miniature art embodies a natural human order, while holy religious figures embody an unnatural phenomenon, which cannot descend to the level of human standards. Hence, the research problem was identified in the study of the theoretical contradiction problem between the prohibition of portraying holy religious figures and what was actually accomplished in the Islamic miniatures. The research objective was to discuss the real motives behind the portrayal of the holy religious figures as a social reality in the Islamic miniatures, despite the religious prohibition of figurative representation in general, the apostles, the Prophets, their families, their companions, and the angels in particular. The importance of the research lies in revealing the reasons for the continuation of the attitude of most Muslim scholars concerning the figurative representation and the holy religious figures imaging prohibition during the Islamic times, which affected the current era. The researcher used the historical descriptive, analytical deductive, and questionnaire method in studying this phenomenon. Furthermore, the study concluded that the attitude of the artist of Islamic miniatures in terms of the portrayal of the holy religious figures has not been constant throughout the ages. This was governed by a set of political, social, cultural, and ideological factors.

### Keywords:

**Islamic Miniatures;  
Holy Religious Figures;  
Portraying Prohibition;  
Theoretical  
Contradiction;  
Artistic Achievement.**

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### 1-Introduction

Portrayal of holy religious figures in Islamic miniatures, has been the subject of an intense ideological conflict (Muhammad, 2009, p.337). Indeed, we have seen that throughout history religion has always been an obstacle to the progress of art, through strict measures such as proscription, or defining the frameworks in which art moves. Hence, artists often try to rebel in pursuit of their independence or the tendency to aesthetic expression far from the specified purposes by the clergy. However, this conflict reveals a change in the position of the artist from the portrayal of holy religious figures throughout the Islamic ages as this was controlled by the political circumstances, the rulers' positions, the relationship of the Islamic state with its Jurists, as well as the circumstances of the countries that were invaded and their relationship historically to art (al-Ṣabbāgh, 2003, 60-61, 95), and based on jurisprudential provisions according to the Prophetic Hadiths concerning the image in Islam, regardless of discussing its validity before the lack of crucial prohibition in the Quranic text (al-Kahlāwī 2010, 177).

Most of the studies that have been exposed to the representations of the messengers and prophets in Islamic miniatures, especially Muhammad, have dealt with the methods of their depiction and the artist's ability to express them. In 2001, Wejdan Ali studied the development of Prophet Muhammad's

portrayal from the Ilkhanid miniatures in the thirteenth century to Ottoman art in the seventeenth century. Where she searched for the motives behind the transformation of Muhammad's face depiction into a written word, but did not address the artistic methods and aesthetic values visible in miniatures. In 2009, Christiane Gruber provided a preliminary discussion of the textual and visual descriptions of the Prophet Muhammad, focusing on Persian miniatures, in her research titled *Between logos (Kalima) and Light (Nūr): Representations of The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Painting*. Furthermore, in 2016, Ibrahim Al-Assal studied the veiled faces of the prophets in the sixteenth century Islamic miniatures in the Konya Museum in Turkey, providing a scientific explanation and artistic analysis of their types and forms and the differences between the painting schools in drawing veiled faces.

Hence, the problem of the research was determined in an important question: what are the intellectual and aesthetic aspects and the political and social circumstances that influenced the change of the Muslim artist's position from portraying the holy religious figures in the Islamic miniatures. The aim of the research was to answer many questions, most notably: why did the Muslim artist portray holy religious figures despite the common prohibition of Islamic law? Did an element of a doctrine emerge at the time of the formation of Islamic civilization and its different ages that directly or indirectly

affected the art of Islamic miniatures. The research importance lies in uncovering the real reasons behind the change in the artist's position in portraying holy religious figures. The researcher has applied the historical descriptive and analytical deductive method through a powerful measurement tool such as a questionnaire to study this phenomenon.

## 2-Features of the aesthetic theory that shaped the miniature artist's position

The geographical location of the Arabian Peninsula and the interaction with neighboring civilizations played a pivotal role in shaping the vision of the Muslim artist. This is in addition to making idols in Mecca and the images inside the Kaaba, the cultural influence of commercial convoys and markets, and circulation of illustrated currency. Moreover, the depiction of Islamic miniatures was based on artistic sources. In Syria and Egypt, Hellenistic style with its concept of modelling in figures drawings, Christian, Byzantine, and Coptic styles with their symbolic and iconic approach prevailed, as did Sassanid and Manichaean art in Iraq and Iran, as well as ancient art styles that prevailed in the Chinese Turkestan region and Central Asia. Therefore, Muslim miniatures were influenced by the skill of the Chinese artists in portraying figures and superstitious animals (Farghalī 2000, 15-19, 31-41). These ancient cultures provided Islamic miniatures with new tributaries as they conveyed the legacy of the historical area with its religions (Lū'aybī 2002, 24). Otherwise, the established concepts of monotheistic religions, as the situation problem concerning figurative portrayal originally appeared with Judaism in the form of prevention and prohibition, and spread to Christianity and then Islam, in what is now known as Aniconism. The issue of their prohibition has been related to perception of the divine self in terms of its being an abstract self-free from every analogy.

### 2-1 The attitude of Islam concerning Figurative portrayal

As for the presence of the Christ's and Mary's images inside the Kaaba, it is mentioned in the Prophet Muḥammad's Hadith that he ordered Shaybah b. Othman: "*Ya Shaybah imhū kl sura fih ilā mā tḥt yadī thuma raf'a yadhū 'an surat 'Īsā ibn Mariam wa-ūmhū*". Then he looked at the image of Abraham and said: "*qātalāhūm Allāh j'alūh yastasqīm bi-l-azlām, wa-mā-li-l-Ibrahim wa-li-l-azlām*". In Surat Al-Maidah, the verse (90) states: "O believers! Intoxicants, gambling, dedication to stones, and divining arrows are but abomination of Satan's handwork, so shun" (al-Kaḥlāwī 2010, 155,

186). The researcher believes that this is the real reason behind erasing the images in Kaaba, because they have portrayed Ibrahim inappropriately and not because of the principle of the portrayal prohibition, which necessitated the erasure of the image of Mary and her son.

But naturally, the opposition to idolatry necessarily will be followed by association, and duration, an opposition to figurative portrayal (Grabar 1973, 1987, 81). The French philosopher Etienne Souriau (1892-1979) believes that Arab-Islamic art tends towards abstraction to overcome the physical world based on a counter position of art and in submission to the opinions of jurists and the fall under the influence of the Bedouin interpretation of a religion coming from an area which did not enjoy a stable civilization with sophisticated art (al-Ṣabbāgh 2003, 90). The attitude of Islam concerning figurative portrayal was due to doctrinal positions and opinions that were based on the Prophet's Hadiths which forbade portrayal. Some of which stated that the angels did not enter a house with images, including condemning the painters stating that they are the most severely punished on the Day of Resurrection. Numerous verses have mentioned the attribute of the painter as a name of God, e.g., Surat Al-Hashr, verse 24, and Surat Al-A'raf, verse 11, from which we conclude that portrayal is a divine act in the sense of creation and divine breath of life that limited human capabilities cannot achieve. There is one fact that Quran does not contain any reference to the prohibition of figurative art based on the fundamentalist jurisprudential rule, "the origin of matters is permissibility unless there is a text stipulating prohibition" (al-Kaḥlāwī 2010, 173-181).

The idea of simulation of animated objects that move by their will is abomination because it implicitly involves competition with the Creator. Undoubtedly, depicting things without life is not prohibited. There is nothing to prevent the artist from portraying the concept, distinctive acts, and species. The type can be defined by a set of actions characteristic of his status and profession. In this sense, the Muslim artist follows the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC). Therefore, a warrior is the one who strikes the neck of his enemy and a prince is the one who sits on his throne. In the thirteenth century, the jurist Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥya b. Sharaf al-Ḥazāmī al-Nawāwī al-Shāfi'ī (1233-1277 AD) wrote that the depiction of any object and every moving object is strictly

forbidden and constitutes one of the major sins. Similarly, it is forbidden to use anything that depicts any moving object on it, except for rugs, pillows, or the like in household use.

The first two centuries of migration, there was no objection to images. However, we cannot claim that the Muslim artist of that period is completely unrestrained. On the other hand, we did not find any figurative representation of any Caliph or prince and their military victories, although there is a legitimate reason to glorify their achievements. This humility is evidence of ambiguous prohibition of portraying people realistically. In that period of Islam there were no representations of living beings inside the mosques, although they were present in subsequent periods. It seems that this is associated with the Prophet's order to destroy idols and erase images in the Kaaba. Naturally, the clerics known to the Mu'tazila, who adapted from the life and actions of the Prophet models to be simulated, should not recognize the representation of living beings at places of worship. Especially that the house of the Prophet in Medina did not contain any image. On the contrary, we found in the palaces of the caliphs and princes a set of murals and mosaics in the Umayyad period and the tents of the rich pilgrims decorated with images, indicating that the powerful and the rich are not subject to the policy of prevention.

The legislative character of Islam became important when the Hadiths were compiled in the ninth century by the imams known as traditionalists such as Al-Bukhārī, Muṣlīm, Al-Tirmidhī, etc., who were of Persian origin, and influenced by the spiritual imperatives of Greek culture, the mystical Arab thought of Islam, and their need for purity and abstraction, which forced them to interpret the actions and words of the Prophet in this sense of prohibition. Thus, this period became the true beginning of the portraying living beings' prohibition in all sects and doctrines - Shiites and Sunnis alike – Muslim social classes and groups. The writer Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881-1954) pointed out that “early Islam not only tolerated but loved representations of living beings with the exception of a Muslim religious value”. Therefore, in the first Islamic centuries we did not see any representation of the Prophet Muḥammad or his companions or even of the angels, but they later emerged so severely that the British orientalist Thomas Walker Arnold (1864-1930) stated: “there was not a single prophet or saint of Islam who had escaped the

(sacrilegious brush) of the Persian painters” (Papadopoulo 1979, 48-55).

## 2-2 Movement of Thought in the Islamic Community

We mean by the movement of thought here the ideologies, faith doctrines, and genres of literature that influenced the art movement and intellectual backgrounds of miniature painters. The juristic difference between the Islamic doctrines is basically influential at the religious, political, and social level. The difference emerged in terms of the number of imams who the Shiite sects believe in and the sanctification of some companions. Sects were divided into three: Sunnis, Sufis, and Shiites. Among the most famous of the doctrines under the Sunnah are the doctrines of the four imams: Al-Shāfi'ī, Al-Mālikī, Al-Ḥanafī, and Al-Ḥanbalī. It is meant by the Sunnis those who followed the approach of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's Hadiths. As for The Shi'a sect, the Shiites believe that 'Alī b. Abi Ṭālib, the cousin of the Prophet, (599-661AD) was more deserving of the imamate, according to the Prophet's command. Many sects and divisions appeared within it such as Zaydiyya, Ismailism, etc. Sufism is a method followed by the worshipper to reach ranks of charity, trying to explore the truth of human and happiness associated with prayer and asceticism. Under the Sufism are several schools and methods, the majority of which belong to the Sunni sect, some to the Shiite sect, and some are independent. Moreover, the speech schools have multiplied such as: Ash'arism and Mu'tazilah (Mahdī, et, al 2019).

However, these doctrines and methods influenced the thought of the Islamic miniatures, what we have seen from the philosophy of the vision angle elevation in many of the Persian miniatures that refer to the Ash'arite theology theory, which emphasizes that everything is in the hands of God and God is the reality of the central universe. We will see this clearly in the miniature Figure (4) (Papadopoulo 1979, 44, 107-109). It is noteworthy that most of the Iranian world converted to Sunni doctrine until the Safavids occupied Iran in the early sixteenth century; therefore, most of the manuscript sponsors in Iran were Sunnis, and so were the Ottomans who were against the Shiites in Iran (Wellfleet press, 1985, 21). Mu'tazila is considered a rational school of Islamic theology that appeared in the eighth century and played a major role at the religious and political level (Kamāl 2003, 27).

On the other hand, many Arabic texts explained the artist's spiritual and economic plight, as their miniatures which were void of human and animal were less attractive for patrons and customers. This is in addition to the hadith of the revered Companion 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalīb b. Hāshīm (619-687) in his dialogue with a painter who asked him: "Should I abandon the representation of animated beings?" He replied: "Yes, you can always cut the heads of animals; subsequently, they would not look alive, and you can do your best to make them look like flowers". This hadith opened the door to imagination and to the artists who invented new values of Islamic painting to solve their problems, as we will see in dealing with the ends of the angels' wings with animal heads and hybrid form of Al-Burāq. Some of the artists have implemented the provisions very professionally, by cutting off the figures' heads through a symbolic style by drawing a line around and above the neck.

The ninth century was filled with numerous political and cultural circumstances that inspired imams and clerics to have the thought of figurative portrayal prevention that extended to the life aspects of society. If we follow the view of Iraqi Imam Abū Abdullāh Ahmad b. Ḥanbal al-Shaībānī al-Dahlī (780-855 AD) when he went in his interpretation of the Hadith saying that "the angels will not enter a house where there are images ...." adopting the most comprehensive sense of the word "statues" as "a figure" in the worship place vicinity, it is then a god, replacing the term "statues" by "images" to mean living beings' feature. He also did not explain the specific meaning of Muḥammed house as a place of worship; rather, he took the most comprehensive meaning of any house. The clerics continued to prohibit figurative portrayal, fearing the exaggeration in decorating palaces and tombs, using leather, fur, etc., which is not consistent with what the Prophet urged concerning austerity life. They were convinced, especially the traditionalists, that expanding the meaning of a sentence mentioned by the Prophet, and not the Quran, is not detrimental (Papadopoulo 1979, 51, 54F).

Jurists may differ concerning the same Hadith, which created a controversy about figurative portrayal and its ruling in Sharia. Hence, some explained that the angels refraining from entering a house with an image, like Imam Abū Hātim Muḥammad b. Hibbān al-Bustī (884-965), meant to be the Prophet and not the audience of believers, explaining that the house

here is the worship place. On the other hand, Imam Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839-923) believes that what is meant by painters is those who depict what is worshiped other than God ('Īsā 1996, 13-15). Few clerics were convinced that only the representations of God were not permitted, not those of secular significance. However, this view was not accepted in religious literature, as a limited number of Persian authors saw an exemplary value in the religious view of figurative portrayal. This permissive interpretation of the prohibition law later helped to create an atmosphere that allowed for the portrayal of figures and animals. In addition, the pattern of sponsoring artists and art works in the Islamic community was a tyrannical pattern subject to the supervision of religious organizations and the clerics. At first, there was no sufficient support for the artists by caliphs; however, the Muslim community quickly overcame all these excesses of its rulers who thought that opposition was better, although the ruler's order was implemented even if it were against Islamic law (Ettinghausen 1962, 14). Naturally, the people's repetition of what is included in Sunnah led to the mixing of the primitive thought's myths with the religious thought in the Middle Age and the irrational perception that prevailed in the Arabian Peninsula, due to the weakness of intellectual life, and the absence of the guidance role of jurists and clerics in the field of painting. Therefore, the policy of prevention and cancellation was the basis of the situation. Moreover, the traditions of the Arabian Peninsula people, the nature of arid life, and the control of poetry as an art were all reasons for refusing dialogue with artists and establishing rules regulating their work (al-Ṣabbāgh 2003, 100F). The matter turned into self-censorship restrictions that assumed a hard line that continued throughout periods of history and accumulated and established itself in the individual and collective unconsciousness (al-Kahlāwī 2010, 182F).

As for literature, the translation movement of the scientific Greek books reached its climax in the thirteenth century. This opened the door to literary books that required miniatures in the fourteenth century, where artist played a major role in integrating the ancients' ideas into the fabric of Islamic culture. There was also a common division between law and custom and the unconsciousness of this division which means here figurative portrayal. The fact that Ibn Khaldun did not mention painting in his

book "Ibn Khaldūn's Introduction" in 1377 is evidence of a lack of awareness of this phenomenon, which is due to the iconic trend in the Arabic-speaking countries (Papadopoulo 1979, 90F; Bloom and Blair 1997, 193, 'Alī, 2001, 3; Ettinghausen 1962, 15). The Greek science and philosophy and their Sufi concepts are among the main sources that influenced Islamic thought, especially Platonism and Aristotelianism, where the Greek philosopher Aristotle and his teacher, Plato (428?-327/228 BC), who hold the principle of art, are represented not with the aim of emulating nature, but by considering nature as a system in which they sought a concept or idea. The mathematical spiral is also attributed to Plato's philosophy and the theory of the Greek scientist Pythagoras (570-495 BC), as it is used as a construction of functional organization in figurative portrayal within a miniature. It also corresponds to the Platonic and mathematical concept of the universe and symbolizes the mystical movement that descends from God to man and comes back ascending from man to God. The spiral movement as called by the Greek philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (15th century BC) is similar to the movement of Dervishes and circumambulation of the Kaaba (Papadopoulo 1979, 34, 45).

Here we must refer to the Sufi literature and prominent figures in Persian, Indian, and Turkish poetry and mysticism, for example, the Persian poet and Sufi Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (1207-1273 AD), the Turkish mystic Yūnus Imrī (1240-1321 AD), and the Indian poet Abū al-Ma'ālī Mīrzā 'Abdul Qādir Bīddal al-Dahlāwī (1644-1720 AD). Sufi literature, in terms of its poetry, revolves around the Prophets' stories. However, storytelling in this context was not treated with its religious origin, but rather to demonstrate a philosophical intent, or an educational goal. Sufism was derived from the Quran and the Prophet's Hadith and went out of its cloak to many Sufi collections of poems and epics. An impressive production of combining Sufi art and literature emerged, resulting in a remarkable array of miniatures ('Abdū 2019, 1F).

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the Mongol rule in India, the principle of religious commentary developed by the emperor and painter Jalāluddīn Muḥammad Akbar (1556-1605). He believed that the artist in his execution of a sketch of living things, in its division and dismemberment, cannot grant his work the characteristic of uniqueness. We conclude from his views that life is a concept.

Furthermore, the artist will imitate the general distinctive characteristics of portraits, but he cannot imitate them in the strict sense of the term or blow spirit into them. Hence, he becomes aware of the ability of God to create a person. Based on this logic, the emperor permitted the artist to portray faces as it metaphorically leads to the Lord, applying the perspective and embodiment and all the features abandoned by Muslim artists. Thus, this new method of painting moved to Iran starting from 1670 with painters such as Muḥammad Zamān al-Ṣafawī (1680-1700). However, the nineteenth century came with a human need to leave the individual's image to future generations. A strict and Sunni country like Ottoman Turkey was not expected that its Turkish writers would mention that there is a popular style depicting the faces of holy religious figures in the form of puppets without embodiment. Judges condemned what the attackers of beliefs and ignorant revolutionaries ordered and the damage they incurred to miniatures in which faces were obliterated or scrapped in the belief that they were against religious laws.

It was revealed that Islamic culture did not possess a doctrine of arts, nor was there a deliberate rejection of certain types of creative activities, nor positive concepts about potential aesthetic or educational values of the various art techniques that existed. The individual may assume that the doctrines and ways of life that characterized the structure of Islamic civilization in the early period and the resulting doctrines and other methods throughout the ages may have led the culture to challenge and confront its artistic activities in certain directions. The Shiite was more lenient than Sunni Orthodoxy. Thus, there have been many reactions among Muslim scholars, and this has affected artists of the Islamic miniatures, each according to his society and opinions of his jurisprudence.

We must take into consideration the artistic schools that have emerged in the Islamic society, each characterized by its own style in figurative portrayal, such as the Baghdad school. The beginning of the thirteenth century witnessed a significant increase in figurative portrayal in a simple realistic way in its miniatures (Papadopoulo 1979, 56F, 72, 89). The Mongol school that emerged in Iraq in 1258. Its miniatures reflected the appearance of holy religious figures in their entirety without bearing any symbol except sometimes a round halo or a veil draped over the turban. After the fall of the Mongol state in Iran, the emergence of the Timurid School began in Shiraz. There

has been an evolution in the representation of holy religious figures in the shadow of the firmness of the Shiite ideology that surrounded the heads of the Prophets with a burning luminous halo of Chinese or Buddhist origin. The portrayal of Muḥammad was concerned with covering his face with a white veil in the sixteenth century in the shadow of the Safavid School in Tabriz (Okasha 1981, 53F). In India, we saw the Indian painting school and the Rajput school which both were concerned with figurative portrayal and stories of the Prophets. The poets led by these stories a religious movement influenced by the Iranian and European way of painting. As for the Ottoman school, its artists preoccupation of the Prophets' lives, especially Muḥammad under the Sunni thought of the Ottoman court are our concern here. In its representation of the holy religious figures, the school's style was more characteristic of displaying them being surrounded by a tall, conical, flame-halo (Muḥammed 2009, 401-408).

### **3-Theoretical and applied conflict in portraying the holy religious figures in Islamic miniatures**

We need here to clarify the method by which holy religious figures were depicted despite the belief that the juristic prohibition had eliminated any serious possibility to develop the art of figurative portrayal in the Islamic world. Although, the Arab Muslim community must resolve its position on this issue, especially since this will deepen the disputes among its religious sects and intellectual doctrines. Indeed, figurative portrayal is considered as a rigid and artificial representation which cannot express its reality of linking existence with the painter Creator (al-Kaḥlāwī 2010, 181F). The simulated image being void of soul makes it a static body whose existence is merely a trick and a craft (al-Zahī 1999, 121). Before the thirteenth century, prohibition was applied to all images of a religious nature (Papadopoulo 1979, 52). However, the issue of representing holy religious figures extended no more than the restrictions imposed on their portrayal inside mosques only, and that because of the Muslim Prophets' images will easily become objects of reverence, which is considered as a status of polytheism (ʿĪsā 1996, 24). Moreover, there is no physical simulation that can actually represent the inherent qualities of such holy religious figures (ʿAlī 2001, 8F).

In the Middle Ages, the Apostles and Prophets were portrayed extensively at a great level when Islamic miniatures liberated from the trends that called for prevention of representing holy religious figures in the light of the Shiite influence on the artistic

activity in Islamic civilization. Twenty Apostles and Prophets mentioned in the Quran were represented in the Islamic miniatures. From the fourteenth century onward, they were treated historically or poetically more than describing them as religious figures. Most of their descriptions have been illustrated within the manuscripts of the sixteenth century, the golden age of religious painting. Thus, a stream of leniency began despite the rejection of the Ecclesiastical priesthood. The patrons were able to hide these manuscripts in their own rooms, while the rulers were able to own them and ordered to execute them without objection from anyone. Therefore, miniatures recorded wars and became evidence of kings' power (Lewis 1980, 62; Elassal 2003, 92). The distinctive characteristics of Islamic miniatures' depiction were features with new aesthetic values that broke the rules, to present a legitimate image in the eyes of the Muslim artist that confirms the idea of the prohibition of representing holy religious figures not to stop portrayal them; but rather to get around the prohibition (Papadopoulo 1979, 53). Hence, the Islamic miniatures in their representing of holy religious figures deviating from the origins of anatomy, resorting to fairy animals, and unleashing imagination as a kind of distancing from reality (al-Ṣabbāgh 2003, 92).

#### **3-1 Changing the portrayal styles of Muhammad representations in Islamic miniatures**

The permissibility issue of portraying Muḥammad is controversial. No other descriptions except verbal and written ones were accepted in the Islamic tradition (Gruber 2009, 249-252). The life of the Prophet Muḥammad after his death required a legendary attribute, which became a connotative feature of the Islamic doctrine, but not assumed a formal religious character (Grabar 1973, 1987, 80). In the thirteenth Century, the Muslim artist perceived the whole human form and facial features of the Prophet Muḥammad based on descriptions in some Sufi texts. There are a few examples indicating this; such as, a miniature of "Varqa Va Gulshah" manuscript of the Persian poet Ayyuqi (10th century), which was executed between 1200-1250 AD in Konya, and the sacred halo appeared above his head (Gruber 2009, 235). However, there is a miniature depicting Muḥammad carried out under Mongol rule in Iran in the early fourteenth century from the manuscript "Al-Āthār Al-Bāqiyah" (Antiquities of the Remains) by the traveller Al-Khwarizmī Abū al-Rayhān Muḥammad b. Ahmad al-Bīrunī (973-1048 AD) dating back to 1307-8 AD during the period of the Shiite ruler

Muḥammad Khūdābandā Ūljeytū (1280-1316) slightly influenced by the Chinese style. Muḥammad appears in a white robe and black cloak, with a turban clad with pleated fabric on his head, and appointing 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib his successor. It is strange that he did not have a sacred halo, contrary to what happened when dealing with 'Alī and his followers, unlike the rest of the miniature manuscript, though the shape of the halo differed, and non-sacred characters such as Ahriman, who embodied Satan in the Zardāštī tradition, participated in it. What the artist meant here is to give importance to 'Alī, expressing a Shiite trend during the period of the Sunni domination, see Figure (1) (Okasha 1981, 43-46; Gruber 2012, 18). In general, this non-distinctive pattern of the round halo has gradually ceased to be associated with sanctity and became a kind of meaningless decoration (Arnold 1965, 96).



**Figure 1.** The investiture of Ali by the Prophet Muhammad at Ghadir Khumm, from the manuscript *Al-Āthār Al-Bāqiyah* by Abū al-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, Tabriz or Maragha, A.H. 707/1307-8 AD., Edinburgh University Library, Arab Ms. 161, folio 162r. (photo: EUL)



**Figure 2.** Muḥammad receives the message from the angel Gabriel from the manuscript of *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* by Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlullāh al-Hamadānī, Tabriz, Iran (1314-15 AD), (41.5 x 31.2 cm). Edinburgh University Library, Arab Ms. 20, f. 55r. (Photo: EUL)

The manuscript of “*Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*” (Compendium of Chronicles), executed in the early fourteenth century (1314-15 AD) in Tabriz by the Jewish historian Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlullāh al-Hamadānī (1247-1318 AD) (Okasha 1981, 45F), is included eight miniatures showing Muḥammad in full with a thin and tall figure occupying a prominent position in the miniature. As Muḥammad was regarded as a human being unlike the Christ, the son of God, we have not observed in these miniatures, the concept of the sacred halo which was previously known in Christian manuscripts raising his head, but a turban with two long braids. These Miniatures expressed the history of the world, beginning with 'Adam, and the Life of Muḥammad in full according to the age and time of the writer (Arnold 1965, 93F). In other words, the miniatures of the book largely turned to religious subjects and dealt with many sacred personalities that appeared in the Old Testament. They were executed in a style derived from the Chinese tradition, especially in seeing trees and

landscapes, Central Asian style, Sassanid style, and Christian painting. The English historian David Talbot Rice (1903-1972) believes that the executors were Persians and pointed out that most of the costumes and some faces were stamped with the Mongol character in most miniatures (Okasha 1981, 47F), but the great influence of the Christian miniatures' composition is a reason to believe that the executors are Christian artists, or it may be the Muslim artists have copied models of Christian religious paintings based on the directions of the writer (Arnold 1965, 93-95). In the miniature of “Muḥammad receives the message from the angel Gabriel,” Muḥammad appeared in an interview with Gabriel, Angel of Revelation, who wore a sophisticated crown and appeared with wings growing along his arms. In addition, the vision of the Mount Hera was depicted according to the tradition and customs of the Chinese landscape. Here we see the Byzantine Christian tradition in seeing the composition clearly, which we saw previously in many

Christian manuscripts that expressed the same dialogue, but between the Virgin Mary and Gabriel in the event of the Annunciation, see Figure (2) (Okasha 1981, 50).<sup>1</sup>

We cannot finish this manuscript without going through a central miniature to deal with the sacred creature of Al-Burāq. However, we must first mention the nature of Al-Burāq how his conception came about with this strange hybrid. It is mentioned earlier in books of Genesis and the Saints that early Prophets, such as Abraham and Jesus, were carried by a donkey; therefore, the artists could not ignore this. They were appalled by the possibility of a cynical disregard for the humble view of this animal. They did not wish either to describe Al-Burāq as a mere donkey, but they had to admit it in the end. In the old book "Sīrat- i-Nabī" (The biography of the Prophet) by the Arab historian Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār b. Khiyār al-Madanī (703-768), revised by the historian Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mālik b. Hishām b. Ayyūb al-Ḥimyarī al-Baṣrī (8th century-833 AD), where the Prophet's descriptions of Al-Burāq state that it is a winged, white-coloured animal, mediating between the mule and the donkey.

In early novels, it was not mentioned that it had a human head, but it was the portrayal feature of the Al-Burāq's representation. The first to grant it such human nature was the Nīsābūrī scientist Abū Ishāq Aḥmed b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Th'alabi (10th century – 1035 AD). Moreover, a description of it was included in the writings of the Persian historian Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Muḥammad Khwāndamīr (1475-1534 AD) that it has the face of a man, ears of an elephant, crest of a horse, neck and tail of a camel, chest of a mule, the feet and hooves of a bull, and two wings covering its feet. However, the Muslim thinker Muḥammad b. Sa'd b. Manī' al-Baghdādī (784-845 AD) in his book "Sīrat- i-Nabī", written seventy years after the book of Muḥammad b. Ishāq, pointed out that Gabriel gave Al-Burāq a female dress. Accordingly, it became widespread among artists to portray Al-Burāq with a woman's head.

In the miniature of "Muḥammad during the Mi'rāj", Al-Burāq was depicted as a woman's body with head topped by a crown, arms carrying the Quran, four legs of an animal, and a tail rolled upward ending with the head of another Burāq woman holding a sword in her right hand and a shield in the left hand topped by a crown on her head. The Prophet is portrayed riding on it in his full form. It is said that the artistic origin of the caudal trailing had come from winged-lion statues in Western Asia (Arnold 1965, 117-119), and the influence of Pharaonic and Assyrian civilization that were

conquered by the Islamic invasion, also it may be an affirmation of the impossible portrayal idea that Islamic miniatures applying when portraying animals, exotic creatures and winged angels in human form, to move away from the idea of the real simulation of a living creature in accordance with Islamic law, see Figure (3). Perhaps the artist intended that Al-Burāq carried a shield and a sword to protect the back of the Prophet from demons of jinn, mentioned in al-'Isrā' and al-Mi'rāj that one of them had meant the Prophet with a flame of fire.

From the miniatures of the Mongol rule and the Ilkhanid dynasty (1256-1335 AD), we turn to the miniatures of their successors from the Timurid dynasty in the fifteenth century in Iran, where we see an evolution of the usual symbolic method of portraying Muḥammad figuratively. As we have previously seen he did not carry any symbol of his own, except that he occupied a distinctive position inside the miniature or the veil dropping from above his turban. Sometimes in other miniatures the Prophet is seen surrounded by a circular sacred halo which is a symbol shared with others. Nevertheless, in the Timurid period, he was depicted and other Prophets, as well as the followers of the Shiite doctrine, i.e., 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, with a large light halo that replaced the circular nimbus in the Persian miniature in particular. Some believe that this was the influence of the Chinese tradition and Buddhist origin. In fact, Muslim painters used this metaphorical artistic tradition due to some Quranic texts, hadith Al-Bukhārī and many texts of poets and Sufism writers like the Azerbaijani poet Al-Nizāmī Ganjavī (1141-1209 AD), who described Muḥammad as illuminating torch (sirājan munīran). Likewise, we see the circular nimbus again in Indian miniatures symbolizing sovereignty and power and adorning the heads of emperors and members of the royal family and some saints and patrons.

In the manuscript of Nazm al-Jawāhir (Arrangement of Gems) by the Syrian jurist Abū Zakariyyā Yahya b. Sharaf al-Ḥazāmī al-Nawāwī al-Shafī'i, which was carried out in Herat, in 1485 AD, i.e., fifteen years before the victory of Communism in Iran, we see 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the miniature entitled "Muḥammad sitting among his companions" not taking his position next to or behind the Prophet. Muḥammad appeared in the centre of the group with a full face surrounded by a halo of light resembling a flame of fire and the headscarf. His entourage included Abū Bakr al-Siddīq on the right and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb on the left, whom were known of being hated by Shiites, and next to them, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān and 'Alī b. Abī

Ṭālīb. Further to the left, Bilāl, the Abyssinian mu'azzin of the Prophet, is seen. We should not forget the height of the viewing angle in the scene as if God looked upon them from the top

of that Persian tradition, which is derived from the aforementioned 'Ash'arī doctrine, see Figure (4).



Figure 3. Muḥammad during the Mi'rāj from the manuscript of *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* by Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlullāh al-Hamadānī, Tabriz, Iran, 1314-15 AD, Miniature illustration on vellum, page (27.6 x 13 cm).  
Edinburgh University Library. Arab Ms. 20, f. 55r. (Photo: EUL)

This is in addition to numerous miniatures portraying the journey of al-'Īsrā' and al-Mi'rāj and the Prophet moving in hell and paradise on the back of Al-Burāq. However, the most famous miniature portraying the journey of al-'Īsrā' and al-Mi'rāj is the miniature of al-Mi'rāj executed by the Persian painter Sultān Muḥammad (1470-1555) of the Shāh Ṭahmasāb Ṣafawī (1513-1576 AD) in Tabriz, between 1539 and 1543 AD. It depicts Muḥammad on Al-Burāq preceded by Gabriel, in a human form with two wings, surrounded by a burning halo, an angel carrying a burner emitting a flame of gold. Next to him from the bottom is another angel holding a dish filled with a burning fragrance and on top of his head are angels pouring dishes of pearls and rubies and angels offering him gifts, food, and fruit (Okasha 1981, 53-57; Gruber 2009, 230, 236, 247).<sup>i</sup> What is new here is that the face of the Prophet was

covered with a white veil from the front of the head to the chin, which led to the disappearance of his features. This is a graphic tradition established from the sixteenth century onwards. This concession of the fanatic view occurred also in the representation of other Prophets such as Abraham and Muslim patrons such as 'Alī and his descendants, see Figure (5) (Arnold 1965, 98). This white veil sometimes included textual inscription such as "Yā Muḥammad" or "Yā 'Alī" which appeared from below and above it, as a mystical and conceptual approach to represent and recall pictorially the facial features and presence of Muḥammad or 'Alī and to express religious significance associated with the orientation of the Shiite or Sunni artist. It is an artistic practice dating back to the fifteenth century and continued in the sixteenth century in Persian and ottoman miniatures (Gruber 2009, 230, 241-247).

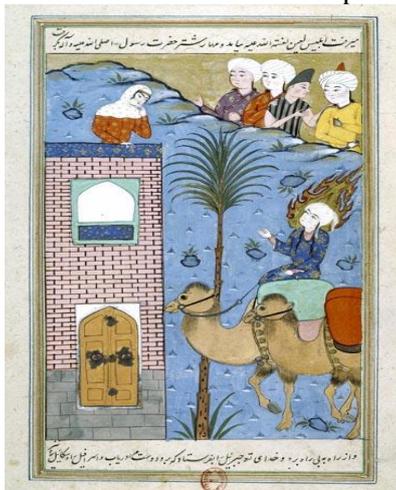


Figure 4. Muḥammad sitting among his Companions from the manuscript of *Naẓm al-Jawāhir* by Abū Zakariyyā al-Nawāwī, Herat, Iran, 1485 CE. (Arnold 1965, plate. XXII, p.94)

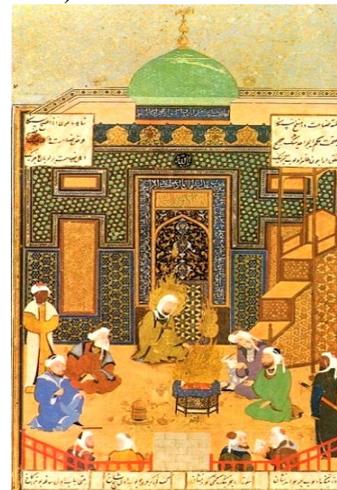


Figure 5. Al-Mi'rāj from the manuscript of *Khamsa* (Five Poems) of Nizāmī, Shāh Ṭahmasāb Ṣafawī, the painter Sultān Muḥammad, 1539-43 AD, gouache & ink on paper, (28.7 cm x 18.6 cm).  
British Library, Or. 2265, fol. 195a. (Photo: BL)

In the Persian manuscript “Qīṣaṣ al-‘Anbiyā’” (Accounts of the Prophets) by the historian Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nīsābūrī al-Th‘alabi, executed in Iran in 1581 AD, a controversial treatment of Muḥammad came without a white veil in the light of the aforementioned sixteenth century tradition in the miniature “Muḥammad's arrival in Mecca”. Khadīja, the wife of the Prophet, appears with her face at the top of the house, seen by Muḥammad as he is coming riding a camel in a worldly poetic vision. It is worth noting that the large portrayal of Khadīja in Persian miniatures

was a kind of reverence for her person associated with being the mother of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the grandmother of Al-Ḥassan and Al-Ḥussein. In contrast to what happened with ‘Ā’ishah, among the most important wives of the Prophet, as she was the daughter of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (573-634 AD), the first caliph, whose authority was a subject of conflict and dispute of the Shiites. It was less appropriate for Persian painters to portray her in their miniatures, especially during that era of extremist Shiites, see Figure (6).



**Figure 6.** Muḥammad's arrival in Mecca from the manuscript of Qīṣaṣ al-‘Anbiyā’ by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Th‘alabi, Iran, 1581 AD, (21 x 34.8 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France, 54 f. 187. (Photo: BNF).

As for the Ottoman court, its trends were Sunni, unlike the Persian Shiite, where Turkish artists were, in the same period, preoccupied with illustrating the biography of the Prophet in an Ottoman version based on the Arab origin. The Ottoman miniatures were distinguished in their treatment of the Prophet’s image by covering his face with a white veil and surrounding his head with a burning luminous halo, sometimes coming from the front of the neck to the top of the head, known by its towering cone, which sometimes extends from the bottom of the body to the top of the head (Okasha 1981, 60F).<sup>1</sup> We will notice this in the miniature of “The angel Gabriel reveals to Muhammad sūra 8 of the Quran” from the manuscript of “Sīrat- i-Nabī” executed in 1594-5 AD by the Turkish Sūfī Mūṣṭafa b. Yūssīf, who lived during the reign of the Mamluk Sultan al-Zāhir Seif al-Dīn Barqūq



**Figure 7.** The angel Gabriel reveals to Muhammad sura 8 of the Quran from the manuscript of Sīrat i-Nabī by the Sūfī Mūṣṭafa b. Yūssīf, commissioned by the Ottoman sultan Murad III, Turkey, 1594-95 AD, (18.5 x 29.4 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris. (Photo: Musée du Louvre).

(1382-1389 then between the years 1390-1399). In the same miniature we see Gabriel descending on Muḥammad during his assembly in a human body, with the crown on his head carrying four wings on his back, see Figure (7) (MIA 2019). As a result of the great reverence of Muḥammad, Muslim artists were led to portray him just as a flame, as was the case in the manuscript of the Ḥamlah-i-Ḥaydarī (Haidari Campaign), which dates back to 1632 AD. (Arnold 1965, 99).<sup>1</sup> Figure (8) shows a miniature of “Muḥammad's entry into Macca and his destruction of idols,” from the manuscript copy, which was executed in 1808 AD in Kashmir, India, where Muḥammad was not represented in those miniatures in his human form at all. Rather he was expressed as a flame over a white horse (MIA 2019).



**Figure 8.** Muḥammad entering Mecca and destroying idols from the manuscript of the Ḥamlah-i-Ḥaydarī, Kashmir, India, 1808 AD. (32 x 20 cm), Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, Manuscrits, suppl. persan 1030 f. 305v-306. (Photo: BNF)

In the seventeenth century, portrayal of Muḥammad reached a mystical and spiritual climax with the emergence of Calligraphic style in Istanbul or what was known as the *Hilye*, a written description of the personal and physical nature of the Prophet, in the form of multiple texts on embossed marble paper according to the narration of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. It was believed that this *Hilye* prevents bad luck (‘Alī 2001, 7). We also see another miniature carried out in the nineteenth century between 1823-1830 AD in Delhi or Lucknow, the centre of the Shiites in India, in watercolour gouache on golden paper. It is a picture of Muḥammad in full shape and features with his head surrounded by the sacred circular halo, adapted from the Christian tradition, riding on Al-Burāq in the form of a mare with the head of a lady crowned by a golden crown, the tail of a peacock, and surrounded by three winged angels and all of them dressed in clothes and decorations of an ancient Mongol style, see Figure (9) (MIA 2019). It must be made clear that the intellectual, social, and political trends that influenced the depiction of Muḥammad, also affected the rest of the holy religious figures.

### 3-2 Representation of the Jesus Christ in Islamic Miniatures

Christ had a special place in Islam, his miniatures accompanied the works of the Persian poets such as al-Nizāmī Ganjavī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī and Sa‘dī al-Shīrāzī, and others, and his stories formed their topics. Moreover, many Muslim painters and artists also knew what Christian iconography was through the numerous Churches of the East and Christian manuscripts. Among the stories of the Prophets were the story of the Virgin Mary, and the

famous Annunciation event represented in several Islamic miniatures as the above-mentioned manuscript of “Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh” (Okasha 1981, 68-72). It is worth noting that the Muslim artist did not have models to follow in depicting the life of Christ, as the Islamic story differed from the Holy Gospels. Therefore, in “The Nativity” miniature of the manuscript “Qīṣaṣ al-‘Anbiyā’”, which was implemented in the middle of the sixteenth century, he was forced to innovate his own styles and models, as the Virgin Mary is depicted without a sacred halo like a typical woman leaning on the trunk of a wilted palm tree and when she touched it, it spurts out fruits, leaves, and a stream of water burst from its roots. Christ appeared lying on the floor, wrapped with swaddle, surrounded by a flame-halo of gold as if it were his own cradle, a Persian vision of the Quranic story, see Figure (10) (Arnold 1965, 100; CBL 2021).



**Figure 9.** The scenery of the Mi‘rāj Muḥammad rides Al-Burāq and surrounded by angels, Delhi, India, (1823 and 1830 AD.), (w10.9 x h17.7 x d6.6 cm) Art Gallery of South Australia, 20093P21. (Photo: Google Arts & Culture)

In the miniature “Christ brings a heavenly dining table to his disciples” from the seventeenth-century manuscript “*Rawḍat al-Ṣafā*”, Christ appears with his face covered with a white veil and next to him are six of his disciples. His head is surmounted by a luminous conical flame-halo over his head, which is a

tradition of Ottoman painting, it was the same case as when the Muslim artist obscured the face of Muhammad and a luminous flame-halo on his head, starting from the sixteenth century as a kind of veneration and discernment of the Prophets, see Figure (11) (Okasha 1981, 76).



Figure 10. The Birth of Christ from the manuscript of *Qīṣaṣ al-ʿAnbiyā*, by Ishāq bin Ibrāhīm al-Nīshāpūrī, Iran, Qazvin, 1570, (31.7h x 20w cm), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, No. Per 231.227. (Photo: CBL)

### 3-3 Representing the Prophets of the Old Testament in Islamic Miniatures

Among the most important Prophets who were depicted from the Old Testament Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Solomon. As for Adam, he was portrayed in the Christian tradition usually accompanied by Eve in a state of complete abstraction of clothing. Due to Islam reverence of the Prophets, this has formed a barrier in the way of the Muslim artist because of the existence of fanatical currents at the time. However, this problem was overcome by portraying them as semi-nude (Arnold 1965, 104). In other miniatures they were depicted in their full clothes, as we see in the miniature “Adam and Eve and their Thirteen Sons” of the Ottoman manuscript, “*Zubdat Al-Tawārīkh*” (Butter of the Histories), which was executed for Sulṭān Murād III b. Salīm II (1546-1595 AD) in the sixteenth century in Turkey, that manuscript that narrated all the stories of the Prophets. In this miniature we will see the story of Adam and Eve, who were represented in the Ottoman style and accompanied by their thirteen twins. Furthermore, the miniature also illustrated the problem between Cain and Abel because of the former's sister, whom Adam wanted to marry his



Figure 11. Christ brings a heavenly dining table to his disciples from the manuscript of *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā*, 17th century. (Okasha 1981 Fig. 32, p.76)

son to, Abel, and that Cain wanted her for himself, see Figure (12).

As for the story of the father of Prophets, Abraham, it was employed with the poems of the Persian poets. In the same previous manuscript, Abraham appears inside a large flame of fire, and on top of the miniature he is shown preparing to slaughter his son Ismail, while the luminous flame-halo, the symbol of sacredness, is over their heads, while an angel suddenly intervenes and brings a sheep that he slaughtered as a substitute for his son. On the right side of the miniature, King Nimrod, the devil, and the magician stood waiting anxiously for what was happening, see Figure (13) (Renda 1978).<sup>v</sup> The Persian miniature “The Flood or Canaan refuses to climb on the ship” from the manuscript “*Qīṣaṣ al-ʿAnbiyā*” by the Iranian writer Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbdullāh al-Ḥakīm Nīsābūrī (933-1012 AD) was executed especially for the Safavid Shāh ʿAbbās I (1571-1629 AD) in the last decade of the sixteenth century. In this miniature, a scene is depicted of the Noah's Ark story; Noah is portrayed surrounded by a flame-halo with an unveiled full face unlike the tradition of that period. The miniature portrays how his son sank into the

water. The clouds appeared expressing the movement caused by the wind speed, showing the furious sea. The ship is like a swan's head,

and on its board is Noah looking at his son with sorrow.



Figure 12. Adam and Eve and their Thirteen Sons a miniature from the Ottoman manuscript *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh* executed by Sulṭān Murād III, Turkey, 16th century, (21.08 x 30.98 cm). Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul, Inv. No.1973. (Photo: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/384354149448633130/>)



Figure 13. Abraham sacrifices his son Ismail; Nimrod throws Abraham in the fire from the Ottoman manuscript *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh*. 16th Century, dedicated to Sultan Murad III in 1583, (14.9 x 24.1 cm). Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul. (Photo: Renda 1978)

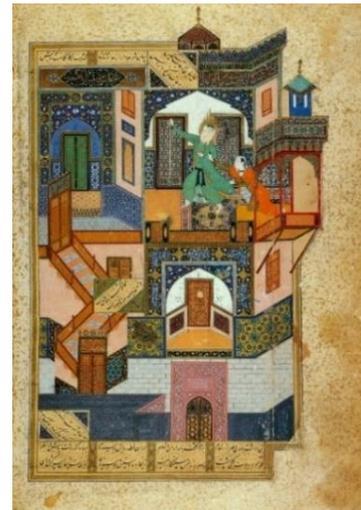


Figure 14. Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, *Seduction of Joseph* from the manuscript of *Al-Bustān* by Sa'dī al-Shīrāzī, Herat, 1488 CE, (30.5 cm × 21.6 cm), Egyptian National Library, Cairo, *Adab Fārsi* 908, fol. 3v. (Photo: *Feminae Medieval Women and Gender Index* 2014)

The Persian artist Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, depicted Joseph in the “Seduction of Joseph” miniature one of the *Al-Bustān* manuscript’s miniatures of the Persian poet Abū Muḥammad Muṣliḥ b. ‘Abdullāh Sa’dī al-Shīrāzī, which the artist executed in ink and watercolours in 1488. His head was surrounded by the flame-halo and the facial features disappeared. This may have been done intentionally or due to some intellectual, cultural and mystical trends that shaped the artist's views or may have been distorted later to conceal the features of the face. Actually, it is strange for a Shiite society to hide the face. Apart from this, there was a figurative representation with an emphasis on the actions and behaviour of figures, and the increase in realism and naturalism despite retaining the imaginative composition style, in addition to enhancing emotional tension, which arose from Zūlaikha's (Potiphar's wife) chasing of Joseph through the seven gates of her palace, see Figure (14) (Okasha 1981, 100F).<sup>v</sup> This is how Sufi thought found its way in the poems of Persian poets and their expression of love was Platonic. It is a clear influence of the Platonic philosophy, which turned into a symbol of the Sufi man's love of God (Papadopoulo 1979, 40F).

As for Solomon, he was one of the Prophets who were a rich material for Islamic painting and literature, especially the tales about him and

the Queen of Sheba, and the erected palace and how to mock the wind and the bird and the Jinn. In the Miniature of 'Solomon and the Queen of Sheba' from the manuscript of “*Majālis al-‘Ushshāq*” (the Councils of lovers) in 1552 under the patronage of Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā Mīrzā (1438-1506), we see the types of representations starting from Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba, and how water covered her feet contrary to the story that the palace was made of smooth glass and Bilqīs imagined that it was water, so she exposed her legs because of this. The painter did not distinguish her by anything, and printed a state of surprise on the women attendees' faces, Solomon and the jinn accompanying him, through the gesture of putting the thumb in the mouth. As for his representation of Solomon, it came complete without hiding the features of his face or putting on a veil; his head is topped by a turban and surrounded by the flame-halo to distinguish him as a prophet. As for the category of the jinn who were strange beings in the service of Solomon, some of them were believers, and others non-believers. They were beings between angels and human creation. In this miniature, their heads were topped by horns and they took on shape similar to that of corpses, see Figure (15). This was often uncommon in Islamic miniatures, unlike angels, and we mean here depictions of

devils and the Jinn. The first historical appearance of demons was as a rebel against God when God ordered the angels to prostrate to Adam except for Satan who refused and was haughty. We have seen many Persian miniatures that illustrate this scene, in some of them Satan appears as a bearded, venerable man. Other than, Jinn and demons were more represented in the Indian miniatures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with a hideous shape, perhaps this is due to the science of studying Hindu demons, and we also saw abundance in the study of monsters.



Figure 15. Solomon and the, Queen of Sheba from the manuscript *Majālis al-'ushshāq*, by Ḥusayn ibn Ismā'īl Gāzurgāhī, Iran, 1552, (29.6 x 42.7 cm), Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, MS Ouseley ADD24 Folio 127b. (photo: BL)



Figure 16. Alexander the Great Builds a Barrier Against Yā'jūj and Mā'jūj, from the *Shāhnāmā of Firdaūsī*, Shiraz & Timurid schools, 1460, (26.7 cm x 17.8 cm) University of Michigan Museum of Art. (Photo: UMMA Exchange 2020)

As for the images of Paradise and Hell in the Islamic miniatures, they were also rare, such as

the Persian manuscript “Mi'raj Nāmāh”, which was depicted in the fifteenth century in Herat for Shāh Rūkh b. Tamerlane (1377-1447). Its miniatures showed Muḥammad's advancement throughout Heaven and Hell. In the scenes of Hell, we see shapes of creatures in human form and darkened faces expressing keepers of Hell who are in charge of torturing the infidels. It is the same manuscript that included numerous miniatures narrating Muḥammad's encountering many Messengers and Prophets represented with their entire shapes with their heads surrounded by the bright flame-halo. The painter distinguished Muḥammad with a larger halo that starts from the waist to the top of the head, other than his appearance alone. Both the Arabic and Persian literatures described al-'Īsrā' and al-Mi'raj journey through the worlds of the Creator, which provided the Muslim artist with a rich subject matter. Furthermore, as a rule, these types of books were not considered an integral part of the scope of theological theory, and thus they were protected against the touch of artists' brush desecrating the holies as a result of the hostile attitude of art by seekers of this type of literature.

However, among the holy figures, whom some considered as a prophet or one of the pious worshippers of Allāh is Thul-al-Qarnaīn who was named Alexander the Great, whose story was known in the East for centuries before the advent of Islam. Muslim artists derived their simulations from their Syriac versions (Semitic language derived from the Aramaic language) and Pahlāvī (Persian language). Persian poets such as al-Nizāmī Ganjāvī added many adventures that were not mentioned in the Quran and whose sources were Christian, Jewish and Pahlāvī. In the miniature “Alexander the Great Builds a Barrier Against Yā'jūj and Mā'jūj”. From a manuscript written in Bukhara to the Persian poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Firdaūsī (935-1020 AD) in 1553, Thul-al-Qarnaīn or Alexander the Great is shown dressed as a Turkish prince watching the construction of the wall between the two sides of a mountain passage. In the foreground of the miniature, there are workers for cutting iron ingots, while others work with a huge blower to supply the furnace with air flow, see Figure (16) (Arnold 1965, 108F, 111).<sup>v</sup>

Therefore, we saw that avoidance of the portrayal of the Apostles and Prophets has come as a result of two important reasons: first to prevent the idea of making their images objects of worship. Second, there is no physical

simulation that can actually represent the inherent qualities of such holy figures ('Alī 2001, 8F). The faces covered by a veil or the head surrounded by the flame-halo in the figurative representation of Prophets and Messengers indicated sanctity and represent a translation of the prohibition idea in Islamic art (Elassal 2003, 112), and circumventing of artists to achieve their creative thinking.

Among the types of religious figures is that which appeared with the interest of Islamic literature in the biographies of the Sufis, members of religious systems, martyrs, and pious worshippers, which transferred the art of Islamic religious miniatures to a new stage. This is evident in the manuscript miniatures of the above-mentioned "Majālis al-'Ūshshāq" of the aforementioned Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā Mirzā, who had a group of painters who greatly influenced subsequent generations of miniaturists. The manuscript includes a collection of miniatures depicting numerous mystical clerics of the second century A.H, and the story of each of them in his love for God. You can see that many members of the royal court of the Indian city of Delhi, especially the Mongol Emperor Shāh Jahān (1592-1666) and his family are distinguished by their interest in religious clergymen and saints, including Muslim and Hindus.

We will see in the miniature of 'Dancing Dervishes' from the Mongol Emperor Shāh Jahān's album, which was executed in India between (1515 and 1610 AD) by the Persian calligrapher Mīr 'Alī Hīrāvī (1465-1544), the mystic Muḥammad Ṭabakānī (died in 1486) dancing in ecstasy with his followers and disciples. This miniature represents a larger group of worshipers and mystics, that included among them a group of white bearded viewers, one of whom fell to the ground in ecstasy, while the other with a gray beard is supported by a person to prevent him from falling, see Figure (17) (Arnold 1965, 111, 114; MMA 2000-2021). It should be borne in mind that the Persian thinker Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī is the one who founded the Dervishes movement and made them turn and flow in a simulation of the movement of the Sufi mystical sky which played a major role in the Islamic miniatures (Papadopoulo 1979, 102). It is worth mentioning that the Persian painter Rizā 'Abbāsī (1565-1635 AD) executed a group of miniatures depicting several portraits of Dervishes, which dates back to the Safavid period in Iran during

the second quarter of the seventeenth century (PX 2019).

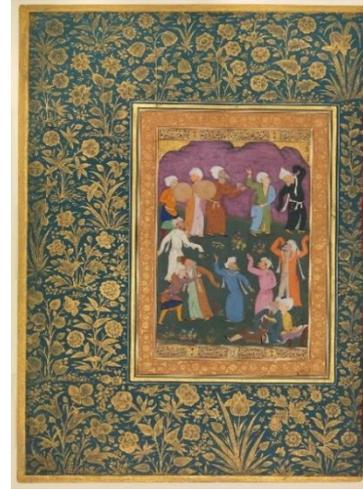


Figure 17. *Dancing Dervishes* from Shāh Jahān's album of calligrapher Mīr 'Alī Hīrāvī, India, 1530/50-1610 AD., (25.9 x 38.6 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo: MMA 2002-2021)

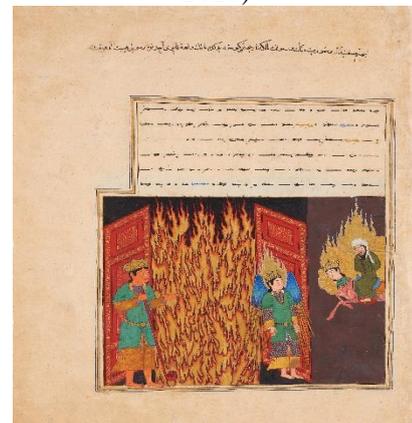


Figure 18. Muḥammad meets Mālik at the gates of Hell a miniature from the Timurid manuscript, *Naḥj al-Farādīs*, Herat, Iran, 1465, (41.1 x 29.7 cm). photographer: Pernille Klemp. (TDC 2014)



Figure 19. *Isrāfīl* from the manuscript 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt by Zakariyyā' ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283), Iraqi painter, (1370 – 1380), (20.5 × 16.8 cm), Iraq or Eastern Turkey, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC. F1954.51. (FGA 2021)

### 3-4 Representation of Angels in Islamic Miniatures

Generally speaking, the art of Islamic miniatures is based on being contrary to nature, which gave the Muslim artist an opportunity to create new forms that are unparalleled in reality. Thus, the distinctive character of it is the absolute abstraction concluding to elements that have no similarities in nature in accordance with the Almighty God saying: “And He creates what you do not know and He adds to Creation as He wills”. Hence, from this expression and the former concept of distortion, we conclude another criterion represented in the depiction of the impossible or imaginary creatures such as angels (al-’Alfī 1998, 19-21). They are creatures of light that have two wings, triple or more. Almighty God says: “Praise be to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Maker of the angels messengers with wings-double, triple, and quadruple...”, as well as, the companion Al-Makkī Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abdullāh b. Mas‘ūd al-Hudhalī mentioned that (594-653 AD), (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, V. 4, Book 54, N.455): “*Ra’a Muḥammad Jibrīl, fī līlāt al-’Īsrā’ wa-l-Mi’rāj, lahū stūmā’at Jināḥ.*” They are creatures that cannot be seen by human, and have the ability to assume shapes other than their appearance and images, characterized by their speed and order. They inhabit heavens, and their duties are varied and many of them are mentioned in the Quran. Among the most important of them was Gabriel (Webster 2009, 96F). We have seen him in many of the above mentioned miniatures accompanying Muḥammad throughout Paradise and Hell and in his assemblies and in the cave of Hira...etc., Before entering any area that the Prophet would go to in ‘Īsrā’ and Mi’rāj, Gabriel used to ask permission from the guardian angel of that area, as happened in the miniature of “Muḥammad Meets Mālik at the Gates of Hell” from the Persian manuscript “Nahj al-Farādīs” (The Paths of Paradise), which was executed in Herat in 1465, where Muḥammad appeared on Al-Burāq, together surrounded by a larger flame halo. We see that he does not raise his eye at Mālik, the keeper of Hell, who carried a Cudgel and his head is topped with a golden crown, but without the flame sacred halo, standing at the gate of Hell and Gabriel with his wings in human form and a golden crown on his head standing waiting for Muḥammad to enter from its gate on the right, see Figure (18) (TDC 2014).<sup>v</sup>

In a Persian miniature whose author and artist are unknown executed in Sirkka in 1500 AD, an angel with four wings and a human body without a sacred halo appears, unlike what happened with Gabriel. This indicates that this angel does not have the same rank as Gabriel, blowing in a woodwind instrument, executed in opaque watercolour and ink. However, Gabriel himself also appeared in some of the miniatures with four wings, as we saw in Figure (7). The former angel reminds us of Isrāfil blowing the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection. Furthermore, in the miniature from the manuscript of “‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt” (the Wonders of Creatures) by the Persian writer Abū ‘Abdullāh Zakarā b. Muhammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī (1203-1283), Isrāfil appeared blowing the trumpet in a human form with two wings merging as one wing ending with the head of an animal. It was carried out according to the late Mongol style in its drawing of animals and the style of clothes and turbans of figures. The miniature reflects a dynamic force as a result of foot movement. This miniature is executed by an Iraqi painter in watercolour and inks on paper between 1370-1380, see Figure (19) (Britannica 2019).<sup>i</sup> Many of the angels mentioned in the Koran and handled by the Muslim artist with unique technical artistic treatment with the particularity associated with the angels' rank and their importance to the Creator.

Thus, we have seen from the above-mentioned how the miniatures reflected in its expression of a subject matter the representation of holy religious figures, a mixture of artistic, religious values and the prevailing social custom. In other words, the art of Islamic miniatures included aesthetic norms and values that were subjected to changing tendencies and trends whose basis was derived from religious belief and its origins of specific utilitarian or political, or moral values. However, in the end, the art of Islamic miniatures dominated by the sacred character that expresses the spirit or Sufi religious tendency in society (al-Khafājī et, al 2018, 219). Lastly, what Muslim artists have left of manuscripts and miniatures throughout ages accompanying their pages portraying the holy religious figures, their families, and their accompanying creatures in the context of a narrative of historical events and in the form of epic poems, not out of religious logic, was not a departure from religion. Since man in general is the main element in nature as the basis of Islamic philosophy, the heritage of people cannot be destroyed without a clear, divine text of prohibition and rejection based on human views, differences,

x

and controversies in the views of religious scholars and prophetic hadiths that are not characterized by being accurate.

#### 4-Questionnaire on:

- the prohibition of portraying the holy religious figures in the Islamic miniatures.
- An electronic Questionnaire has been created on Google Drive, Link of questionnaire: <https://forms.gle/ykhLUvNSQjSFUG1A>.
- The questionnaire was distributed to a group of specialists, from various Egyptian and Saudi Arabian Universities, in the fields of publishing illustrations, graphic design, and visual arts in general.
- Number of samples: 38 samples (teaching staff members from specialized universities).
- Discussion of the Questionnaire Results: The questionnaire included eight questions to gather information about the research problem raised to achieve the objectives of the research.
- **Question No. 1:** Do you think that the lack of a Quranic text concerning prohibition or permission is one of the factors causing the problem of portraying Islamic miniatures of the holy religious figures?

**Answer:** The pie chart has indicated that the number of responses that said "Yes" was 44.7% and the "No" responses were 23.7%, while those that answered "Probably" were 31.6%. Thus, the absence of a Quranic text expressing prohibition of portraying holy religious figures has led to the emergence of conflicting opinions (fatwas) interpreting this phenomenon, see Figure (20).

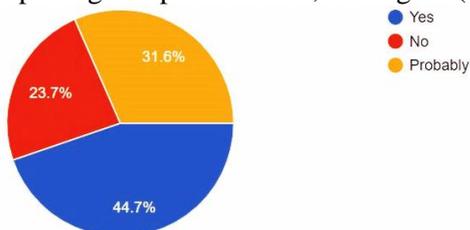


Figure 20. Responses of question no. 1.

- **Question No. 2:** To what extent did the cultural shift that the Arab-Islamic society experienced following the Islamic conquests affect the portrayal of the holy religious figures' miniatures?

**Answer:** The columns in the drawing have illustrated the responses indicating that the cultural shift had a strong impact of 36.8% on the miniatures' depiction of the holy religious figures. On the other hand, the responses that said that they influenced under other factors were 26.3%, those that reported that they affected to some extents were 18.4%, and those which affected but were hit by the hard-line jurisprudence were 10.5%. Finally, those

that had no effect were 7.9%. Therefore, it is revealed that the Arab Muslim artist was strongly influenced by the arts he saw in the countries invaded during the Islamic conquests, which confirms that he was isolated in the Arabian Peninsula, preserving his simple Bedouin arts under the absence of the establishment of the Islamic call pillars, see Figure (21).

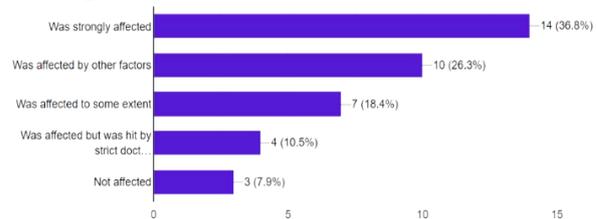


Figure 21. Responses of question no. 2.

- **Question No. 3:** Did the artistic heritage which is rich in images, the non-establishment of Islam, and the distance from the place of revelation play a role in the performance of non-Arab artists to represent the holy religious figures in their miniatures?
- **Answer:** The pie chart shows that the responses that chose "Yes" were 52.6%, those that indicated "No" were 7.9%, while those that answered by "Probably" were 39.5%. This means that the cultural inventory of non-Arab artists and their lack of belief in the faith have played a crucial role in the trend towards the representation of holy religious figures, see Figure (22).

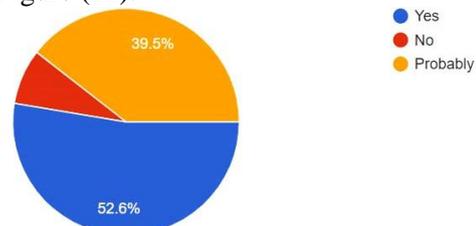


Figure 22. Responses of question no. 3.

- **Question No. 4:** To what extent do you think that hard-line jurisprudence and fanatic religious trends have been able to subject artists of miniatures to their teachings?

**Answer:** The columns in the chart have illustrated the number of responses that answered "Yes, subjected them strongly" was 10.5%, those that answered "subjected them to some extent" were 36.8%, while those who answered "subjected them in the long run" were 18.4%, and those who answered by "subjected them a little" were 18.4%, and finally those with "they did not subject them at all" were 15.8%. This means that submission to fanatic religious trends and hard-line jurisprudence has been relative, in the long-term, and linked to the trends of the artist who

circumvented to satisfy his aesthetic desire and this has been associated with other factors in

the surrounding society, see Figure (23).

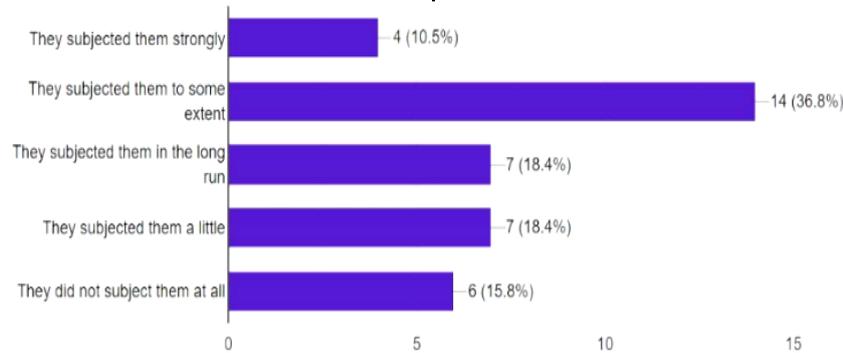


Figure 23. Responses of question no. 4

- Question No. 5:** Did doctrines and jurisprudence views cause to create the problem of the theoretical contradiction between the prohibition of portraying holy religious figures and what was applied in the Islamic miniatures?

**Answer:** The pie chart has showed that the number of responses asserting that the doctrines and jurisprudence that strongly caused the problem of the theoretical contradiction between the prohibition of the portrayal of holy religious figures and what was applied in Islamic miniatures were 23.7%, those which indicated "caused to some extent" were 31.6%, while those which stated "caused beside other factors" were 36.8%, and those which reported "Never caused" were 7.9%. This means that they represent a factor within an array of other influencing factors Figure (24).

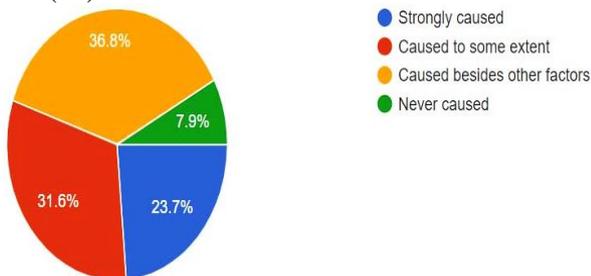


Figure 24. Responses of question no. 5.

- Question No. 6:** Did the representation of the holy religious figures in the Islamic miniatures stem from satisfying an aesthetic desire of the Muslim artist?

**Answer:** The pie chart has indicated that the number of responses with "Yes" was 65.8%, while those that answered with "No" were 34.2%. This proves that the artist's representation of the holy religious figures was derived from satisfying an aesthetic desire, see Figure (25).

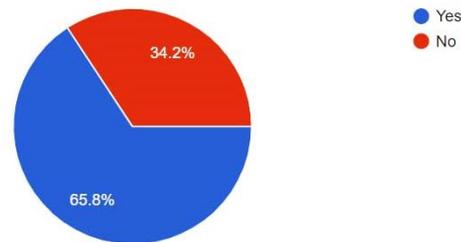


Figure 25. Responses of question no. 6.

- Question No. 7:** What is the most influential factor in the development of the portrayal of the messengers and prophets, especially Muḥammad, from full representation to total disappearance?

**Answer:** The pie chart has revealed that the number of responses that reported that the development of the movement of religious jurisprudence and literature was the most influential factor in the evolution of the representation of the messengers and prophets from full representation to complete disappearance was 21.1%, those who stated that the most influential factor is the emergence of many artistic schools and trends were 10.5%, while those who said that "the cultural movement in the Islamic community in general" was the most influential factor came were 68.4%. This means that there are several factors within the fabric of the Islamic society that have combined with all its constituents, trends, religious sects and political and social currents to ensure the existence of this development, see Figure (26).

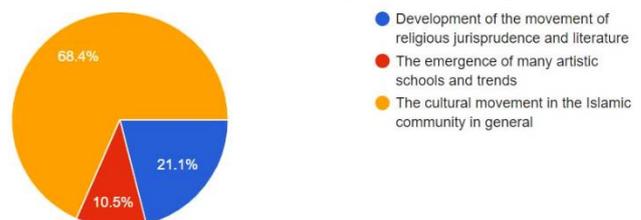
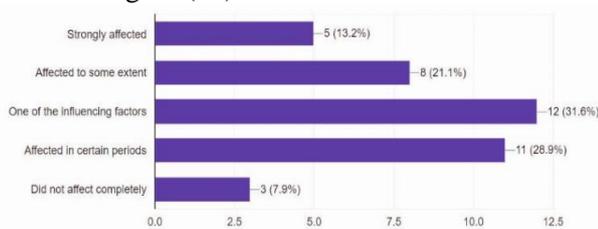


Figure 26. Responses of question no. 7.

- **Question No. 8:** To what extent did the manner and trends of patronage affect the representation of the holy religious figures in Islamic miniatures?

**Answer:** The columns in the drawing have illustrated the number of responses that believed that the manner of patronage "strongly affected" the representation of holy religious figures was 13.2%, while the number of other responses which reported that the manner of patronage "affected to some extent" was 21.1%, and the number of other responses which stated that the manner of patronage was "one of influencing factors" was 31.6%, those who said "affected in certain periods" were 28.9%, and finally other responses believed that it "did not affect completely" were 7.9%. In fact, the pattern of patronage; that is the caliphs, princes, and rulers in general, has played a fundamental role in this. However, it has also been associated with the strength and weakness of the Islamic State, the relationship of its jurists with its rulers, the attitudes of artists, the movement of culture, and several factors mentioned in the preceding questions, see Figure (27).



**Figure 27.** Responses of question no. 8.

## 5-Conclusion

It has been found that there are many factors that have led to the creation of the representation climate of holy religious figures, despite the position of Muslim Jurists towards this subject. First, the Quran did not come up with an explicit text indicating the prohibition or permissibility of depicting holy religious figures. Secondly, some hadiths dealt with figurative portrayal in general and its rulings. Moreover, the contact with the flourishing artistic civilizations before and after Islam, the cultural and artistic backgrounds of non-Arab miniature artists and the Arabs practice of manufacturing idols and paintings in pre-Islamic period. This is in addition to the emergence of some doctrines, jurisprudential opinions, permissive fatwas, and principles that did not find any embarrassment in the portrayal of holy religious figures and attitudes of the patrons.

It has been shown that hard jurisprudence and fanatic religious trends have not been able to limit the achievements of the Islamic miniatures artist in portraying the holy religious figures. In

fact, it is a social and artistic reality that the artist intellectual and critical arguments were used in defence of the sincerity of artistic vision and satisfaction of aesthetic needs. Furthermore, the tendency to imagination and avoiding realism paved the way for artists to invent new values for figurative portrayal of the prophets and the creatures that accompany them to solve their creative problems. Thus, the situation of the holy religious figures portrayal in the Islamic miniatures has not been one, but has witnessed many changes over the Islamic ages, governed by the social, historical, and political circumstances, the direction of the ruler and the state, its conditions and civilization, its relationship with its jurists and art historically. In general, the movement of thought in the Islamic community, which means the emergence of many doctrines and religious mystical literature and painting schools, played a major role in crystallizing the aesthetic vision of the Muslim artist in keeping with the teachings of Islamic law.

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## Notes

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