

Cover Story

JEW IN MUSLIM EYES

The representation of the Jew
in the Arab-Islamic world from
colonialism to World War II:
deconstructing antisemitism.

A Magazine on Islamic art

Winter 2018 Vol. 4 - N.1

*IN A WORLD WHERE MORE IS AVAILABLE
THAN CAN BE KNOWN AND UNDERSTOOD,
THE REASONS WHY WE CHOOSE TO KNOW
ONE THING OVER ANOTHER
ARE CONSCIOUS OR UNCONSCIOUS
MORAL CHOICES.*

Oleg Grabar

This is the Start, a Brand-New Friend

We are finally headed to 2018 and it's now time to take stock of the past years of activity for IWA. 2017 has been a very special year for our magazine: New challenges, an ambitious project for the future, the launch of the crowdfunding, the decision to go on print and start to sell the magazine online and offline, the new website, a renewed social media approach. We decided that it's crucial for us to take IWA outside of the internet and physically promote our project participating in specific fairs and events. We will invest part of the money raised with the crowdfunding in this new venture.

For all these novelties in progress for 2018, I want to thank my great founder-mate and friend Giulia, who personally took over the research and development operations to take this project to the next level, something that I couldn't do with the same engagement for many reasons. I am so grateful to her and happy to keep running this motivating project together.

In this issue, we deal with a thorny topic, concerning how Shoah is seen, discussed, considered and transmitted in the Islamic world. Unfortunately, we found that there is not much to reflect on when taking into account Shoah from an Islamic point of view.

Simply, the Jews persecution during WW2 is considered not historically relevant nor completely demonstrable as a horrible mark and crime against humanity. This is not only disappointing, but also daunting and discouraging. Specifically, what happens in the Arab world is that people deny the gravity of this atrocious

genocide and this has consequences on a social, anthropological and political level.

The most common rhetoric in many Arab-Muslim countries, for example, is based on the idea of a "Palestinian Shoah" which has as much importance, dignity and right to be recognized than the historical Holocaust. That's why the attempt to deconstruct the common Western idea and concept of Shoah, building a new one where Palestinian people are at the center, reflects the long-standing fight and competition for cultural and social hegemony between Jews and Palestinians, but also an extreme attempt to bring the Palestinian cause to world attention.

The concept of "Palestinian Shoah" is indeed more a claim for rights, equality and identity rather than a provocation. However, we must point out that in Arab countries, Holocaust is generally not taught at school nor is it part of educational programs. So this shows the idea of how rooted the avoidance of such a tragic part of human history is.

In our cover story, we try to reconstruct the concept of Shoah in the way it has been tackled throughout history in the Arabic-Islamic culture and its leverage on today's society.

This is the first issue for 2018. The first issue to be printed, sold and distributed. A new era is coming for IWA. An era where we grow, together with our readers' consciousness and desire for information.

Let's stay connected on our new 2018 project!

COLOPHON

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with the support of
Mehnaz M. Afridi

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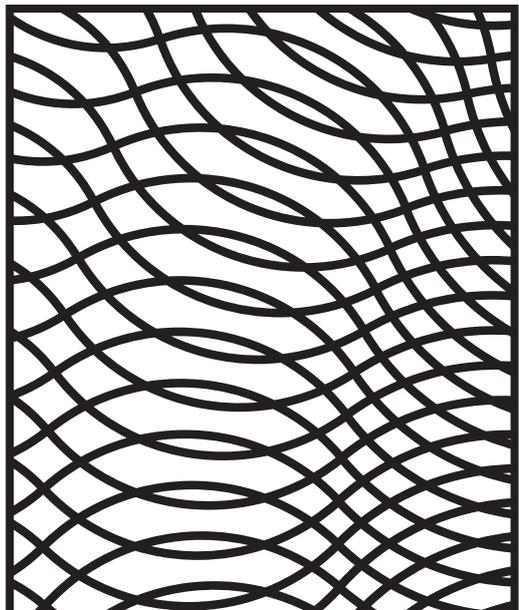
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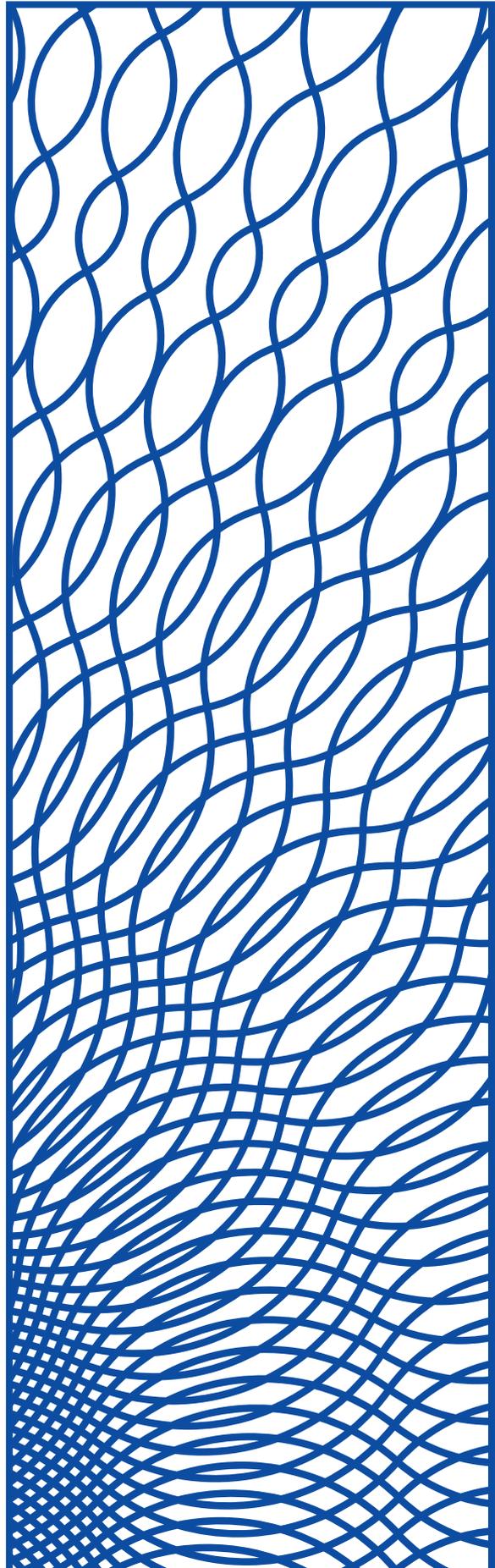
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Indo-Persian Miniature Painting

The Indo-Persian miniature painting, the mathematical principles ruling it, and how this traditional art is a source of inspiration for contemporary artists.

by **Fatima Zahra Hassan**

Visual artist, trained in Indian, Mughal and Persian miniature painting.

The golden period of Indo-Persian miniature painting is seeing a renewed resurgence of interest. Originally began as artwork adorning text, such illustrations came to represent the narrative itself, even as the crux of the story to inspire the imagination of the reader. The beauty of these paintings from the golden period lies in their animated and theatrical composition and context, which uniquely defines this special genre of painting. Within the confines of a small space, artists had to portray many complex topics, characters and stories such as historical encounters, battle scenes, mechanical devices, mystical experiences and poems of love.

The illustrated manuscripts also laid down the foundations for modern book design and literary artwork. From the paper, binding and calligraphy to the illustrations, all was carefully designed.

There exist several references or clues to indicate that there was a widely used system of modular proportion in the art of Indo-Persian miniature painting. It has been shown in the study of particular manuscripts such as the *Fotuhāt-Homayūni* (meaning *Calligraphers-Painters*) by Qadi Ahmad, that a module was used for arranging the text and the illustrations of manuscripts. Other systems were also used for planning compositions, however no constant or definitive means of modular proportion for the production of such manuscripts is known of today.

**THE ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS
ALSO LAID DOWN THE FOUNDATIONS
FOR MODERN BOOK DESIGN AND
LITERARY ARTWORK**

The particular study of the modular system and principles of layout cannot be fully understood without a systematic study of a wide range of paintings from different schools and different periods. Clearly modular expression was and still is considered an important starting point in painting.

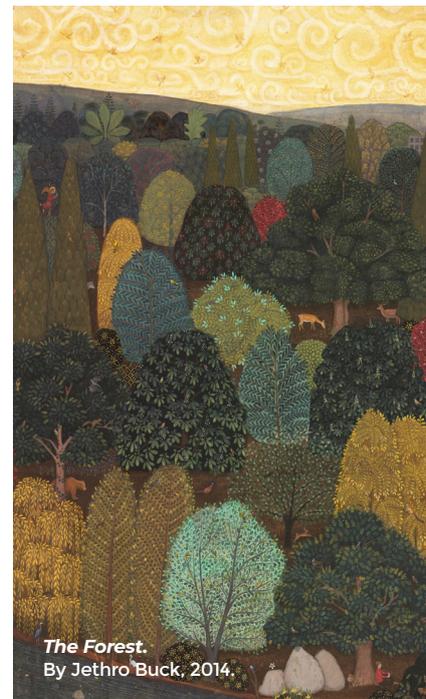
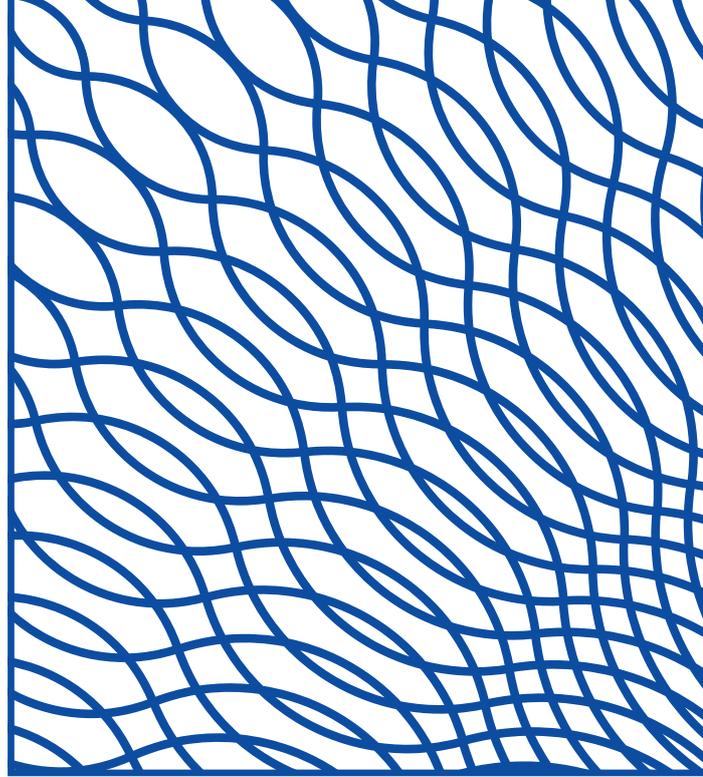
Once the paper is stretched, sized and burnished then the framework for the layout of the composition is set-up. Setting out several guidelines helps determine the composition of the painting and establishes the spacing of the objects and figures as well as the position of the text in the painting.

Traditionally, this process of setting out the painting was known as *master*, from the Arabic *mastara* (ruler), which is the basis of *tarah*, or the layout of the composition.

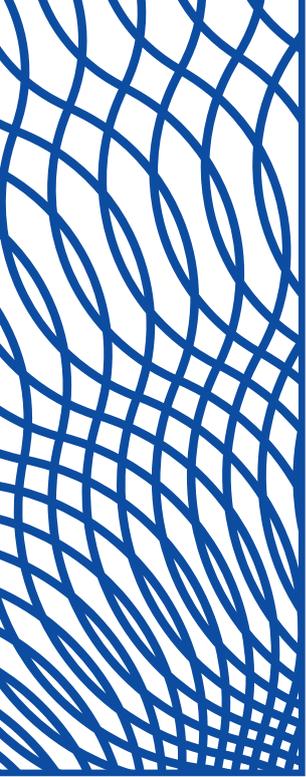
Indo-Persian miniature painting relies on a combination of different drawing and denotation systems. Such drawing methods did not rely on perspective because the nature of miniature painting is two-dimensional, portraying three-dimensional space as a two dimensional surface. This is a deliberate effect, which has its roots in the principles of Islamic art, for it is not concerned with the figural or accurate portrayal of the physical world, but with the representation of a higher dimension, which reflects the primordial principles behind the physical world. These paintings, however, did rely on orthogonal (straight ray) projection, horizontal and vertical oblique projection and isometric and axonometric projections. All these systems of representation transfer the three-dimensional spatial relationships onto a two-dimensional picture surface. The Indian and Persian miniature painters frequently mixed oblique projection that is characteristic of Chinese painting with a vertical, oblique projection

There was a very fluid cross-cultural exchange over an extended period in time, and it has never been possible to formalise the individual impact of each cultural exchange

that is perhaps derived from indigenous Indian painting. Even more extraordinary is the way in which one part of the picture was often enclosed by a frame or border while another section "leaked out" into the surrounding field. No doubt these mixtures initially came about as a result of the interaction between different cultures, although the specific contributions made by these various influences have so far as we know never been duly chartered. There was a very fluid cross-cultural exchange over an extended period in time, and it has never been possible to formalise the individual impact of each cultural exchange. This combination of different representative systems is quite logical if analysed along the practical terms of pictorial composition. One reason for using



combinations of representational systems might have been that some of these systems are better than others for showing particular shapes. Oblique projection is a very suitable method for drawing rectangular objects like doors, windows, arches, etc., but is inappropriate for showing round objects. The miniature painters thus showed rectangular buildings and objects in oblique projection but round



hexagonal or octagonal pools etc. in vertical, oblique projection. Another reason for using mixed systems might have been to serve compositional purposes. Multiple drawing systems allow the artists to tell a compelling story with action, drama and many activities in a small space creating a theatre-like atmosphere which is often mesmerising for the viewer who finds it enthralling.

MULTIPLE DRAWING SYSTEMS ALLOW THE ARTISTS TO TELL A COMPELLING STORY WITH ACTION, DRAMA AND MANY ACTIVITIES IN A SMALL SPACE CREATING A THEATRE-LIKE ATMOSPHERE WHICH IS OFTEN MESMERISING FOR THE VIEWER WHO FINDS IT ENTHRALLING

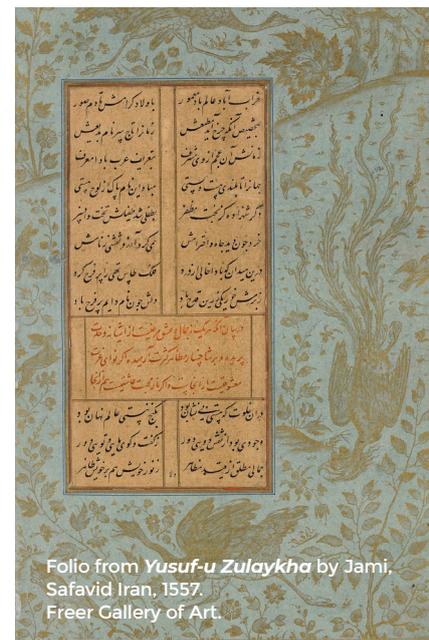
The tradition of book-making continued even after the West started to colonise the Muslim world in the early 18th-century, but gradually it vanished due to printing facilities originating out of Europe. One element of traditional manuscript design persisted however, and that is the painting or the illustration, which took on a new life.

After the fall of the Mughal Empire in 1857, artists started to work for small courts until the independence and partition of the Indian Subcontinent took place in 1947. In Iran, artists began to work for printing presses that were printing books. During the 19th and 20th centuries the world saw many changes including within in the field of art. Modern Turkey under Ataturk made certain drastic changes and the script changed, and with that, the tradition of writing Arabic and Ottoman Turkish became less practiced and less widespread. Central Asia became part of the USSR and the traditional arts and crafts of the Islamic period were nearly forgotten past. The legacy of Samarkand and Bukhara was no longer celebrated and only existed in history books for future generations to merely glance upon and imagine the golden times. Afghanistan emerged as a country and the Timurid and the Safavid periods of Herat disappeared in the ashes of time as the centre of the Book Arts.

These illustrated manuscripts shaped modern Europe, and foundations were laid down in the fields of science and mathematics, as well as other relevant aspects of knowledge being recorded meticulously with detailed illustrations including historical accounts and personal chronicles of famous rulers and nobles of the Muslim World. These manuscripts travelled through ambassadors of various Muslim empires and traders to the non-Muslim World mostly on the Silk Route. From China to South Asia, from the Middle East to the West. Also, different artistic influences from Chinese civilisation arrived in the Indian subcontinent, to Iran,

Turkey, Egypt, Syria and to Muslim Spain, from which it spread to the rest of the Europe.

Many modern artists and painters from South Asia, Iran and Turkey have used traditional references from this art form, especially in relation to colour palettes and the naive method of painting. Some made appropriations of famous paintings. Those who have been trained traditionally in the technique of Indo-Persian painting have used such methods in their own practice to this day. Modern artists have also taken



Folio from *Yusuf-u Zulaykha* by Jami, Safavid Iran, 1557. Freer Gallery of Art.

the expression of traditional arts to another level by experimenting with size and subject via expansion into new media, including the incorporation of such traditional references into animation, video and film. This succeeds in making miniature painting more relevant for the observer in the 21st century. One contemporary miniature painter whose work has that beauty and at the same time the power to move the public is that of Khadim Ali, born in Quetta, Balochistan, in a Hazara refugee family who migrated from Afghanistan during the cold war. He belongs to the Hazara tribe, which faced persecution for decades, forcing his family to flee from Afghanistan during the cold war as refugees. Ali got into the well-known National College of Arts Lahore, Pakistan

in its prestigious Miniature Painting programme and studied under the auspices of a leading master artist Ustad Bashir Ahmad, who also taught many painters from the region (including the author herself).

Khadim spoke Dari and Farsi and learnt the art and craft of miniature painting along with calligraphy. He

These manuscripts travelled through ambassadors of various Muslim empires and traders to the non-Muslim world mostly on the Silk Route, from China to South Asia, from the Middle East to the West

visited Iran in the 90s and got to hear the Iranian artists who were working there at the time. His work was immediately noticed by the international art world when he depicted the protagonist Rostam, a famous hero from the *Shahnama* in the form of a demon.



His Rustam became so famous that he continued to paint a series of paintings and large-scale tapestries showing demon-like Rustam, who portrayed his tribesmen being treated like demons by the Taliban through persecution and killings.

Contemporary trends in South Asian painting particularly found in Pakistan and within the Pakistani community in the USA have received world-wide recognition. Visual artists like Khadim Ali, as well as Shazia Sikander, Ambreen Butt, Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid, Saira Wasim have trained in Pakistan and are now established names. Then we have Desmon Lazzaro from the UK, who now resides in India, Michal Gilikson from Australia who paints beautifully on scrolls, emerging artists like Alina Gallo based in Italy and Jethro Buck from the UK. They are all taking this beautiful traditional art form, making it relevant to a global society. How encouraging and heartening is the premise that interest in this "living tradition" is growing every day.

For further reading:

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The background is a solid blue color. There are several decorative elements: a white horizontal line near the top left; a white square in the top right corner containing a black geometric pattern of overlapping circles; a white square on the left side containing a white geometric pattern of overlapping circles; and a white rectangular box in the lower right containing text. The title 'JEWS IN MUSLIM' is written in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters, with the 'J' and 'M' partially overlapping the white square on the left.

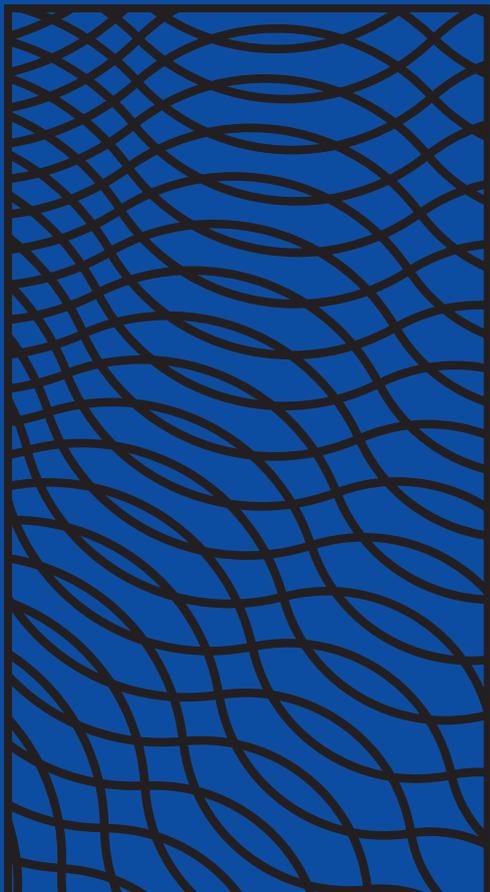
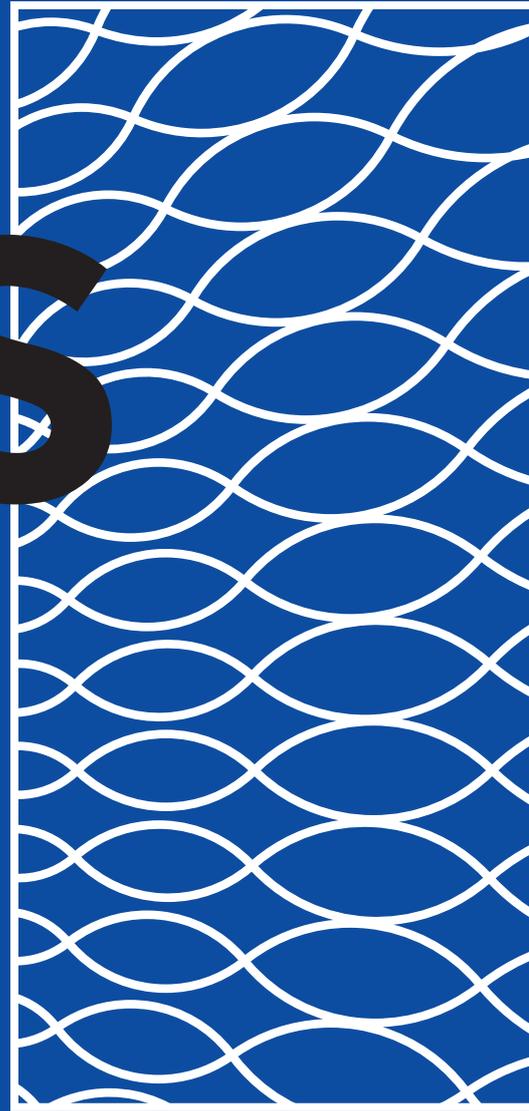
JEWS IN MUSLIM

The representation of the
Jew in the Arab-Islamic
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with the support of **Mehnaz M. Afridi**

Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center, Manhattan College

NEW MONEY EYES



Speaking about Muslim-Jewish relations today is challenging. Relations between the two religious groups are tense and problematic: in the Middle East, as well as in Europe the shadow of the Shoah and the Israel-Palestine conflict interfere with the creation of a mutual understanding between the two groups.

The Muslim world has demonstrated various degrees of antisemitism on multiple occasions during the past century. In the first decade of the 21st century, Iranian president Ahmadinejad repeatedly denied the historicity of the Shoah and warned against a Jewish-Israeli plot to rule the world. Before him, in the 1990s, the leaders of Hamas cited the fabricated book *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as an authoritative text and in the 1970s, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia distributed copies of that same text to foreign guests. The book is the milestone text of antisemitic hatred promoting the idea of a Jewish plan for global domination.



Yet relations between the two religions have not always been so challenging: Golden Ages once existed between the Jewish and Muslim communities. Take the example of, medieval Spain and Turkey.

'protected people'. The *dhimmi* could profess his or her own religion but had certain restrictions in society, such as a lower social status, as well as a particular tax, the *jiziyā*. Though relations between the two communities had never been completely relaxed, Jews had nevertheless known security and wealth in Muslim lands, particularly during period of economic growth and stability. General political and economic destabilization can be named as primary causes for a deteriorated relationship between Muslims and Jews.

IN EUROPE THE SHOAH HAS BEEN STUDIED AND ANALYSED THOROUGHLY, MAINLY AFTER THE 1970S

Traditionally, however, the status of non-Muslims living under Islamic rule was regulated by the *dhimma* contract: Jews and Christians, among others non-Muslims, acquired the status of *dhimmi*, meaning

The 19th century marked the end of the Muslim world as it existed historically. The decline of Arab-Islamic rule coincided with the growth and the increased power of the Western Christian world.



Soldiers of the 13th Division of the SS "Handschar" read the handbook *Islam and Judaism*. Summer 1943, Southern France. German Federal Archives, accession number Bild 101III-Mielke-036-23.

elements that would later influence and characterize the relations between Muslim and Jewish communities.

Some of the traits of European antisemitism started to permeate Muslim lands when Christian-rooted antisemitism found fertile ground in the local Muslim population who had witnessed the status of the Jews improve upon the arrival of European powers. The spread of European antisemitism within Muslim lands is exemplified by the arrival of the myth of the blood libel.



With colonialism arrived a whole new set of ideas in the Middle East that critically destabilized the society. The major change brought by new colonial rulers was in many cases the abolition of the *dhimma* system, causing deep destabilization in the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Christian and Jewish former *dhimmi*s sought the protection of European powers to improve their own situation, with many managing to acquire higher status in society. Some colonials were motivated to come to the aid of native Jews via romantic ideology: philo-semitism. On the other hand, Europeans also instilled into Muslims negative feelings towards Jews. During the colonial era, Europeans exported to Muslim lands a set of antisemitic

The blood libel was a fabrication propagated during the Christian Middle Ages. According to this myth, Jews sacrificed a Christian child at Passover to obtain blood for unleavened bread. Previously unknown in Middle Eastern Muslim communities, the superstition emerged in the 1840s during the Damascus affair.

In Damascus in 1840 a Capuchin friar disappeared together with his Muslim servant. The Capuchin community started to spread the rumor that the friar and his servant were ritually murdered by the Jews for their blood at Passover. As a result, thirteen Jews were arrested and subsequently liberated when they were cleared of the crime. However, rumors continued to circulate that they were released for political reasons or because of bribery.

If the libel of blood can make some theological sense in Christianity, it is harder to define it within an Islamic context.

If the base of the Christian religion is the murder of Jesus, the innocent son of God, who sacrificed himself to save mankind, no such deicide can be found at the core of Islamic doctrine, making the blood libel theologically alien in that context.

Another notorious element of European antisemitism that entered the Islamic world was the fabricated text called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Printed for the first time in Russia in 1903, the book traveled Europe and in the 1920s a first edition appeared in Arabic.

The motifs of the book are still to be found in the antisemitic rethoric of Middle Eastern leaders and politicians: the political and economic conspiracy, the interference of Jews in the media and the alleged masonry devoted to disrupt the world as it is.

Such ideas, along with the spread of nationalism, the emergence of the Zionist movement, and socio-economic destabilization caused by colonization, Muslim communities in North Africa and the Middle East became ripe for absorbing antisemitic Nazi propoganda, which exacerbated the tension between Muslims and Jews.

The Nazi propoganda machine aimed to depict Germany as a patron and liberator of Islam. This policy to promote an alliance between Nazi Germany and the Muslim world first targeted the Muslim populations of North Africa and the Near

DENIAL AND RELATIVIZATION OF THE SHOAH IS JUST ONE ASPECT OF TODAY'S ANTISEMITISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

East, then soon after in the Balkans and the Soviet Union.

Even if Hitler and Nazi high-ranking officials showed an appreciation or fascination for Islam as a religion, the most obvious obstacle of this policy was Nazi racism itself.

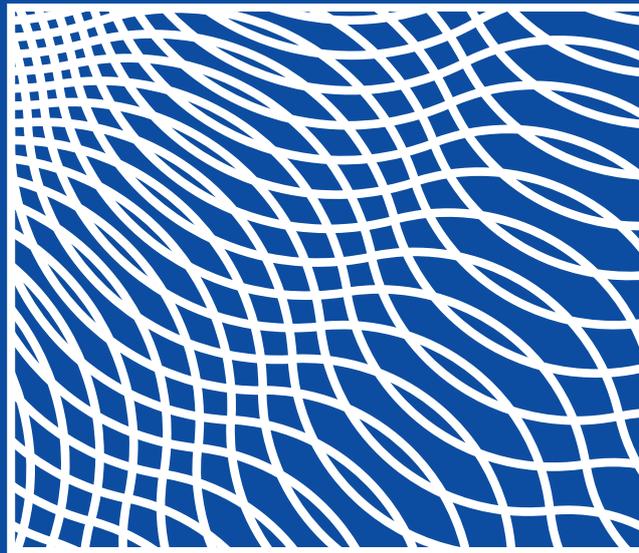
Disregarding the fact that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* postulated the racial inferiority of non-European peoples, German officials were more pragmatic: as early as 1935, Goebbel's Propaganda Ministry instructed the term *anti-Jewish* be used instead of *anti-semitic*. This was to avoid offending Arab sensibilities; as Walter Groß, head of the Nazi Office of Racial Politics, wrote to Iraqi collaborator Rashid Ali al-Kilani, Jews had to be "strictly distinguished" from the peoples of the Middle East. He also added that the Nazi government "recognizes Arabs as members of a high-grade race, which





The Damascus Affair: Rabbi preparing his defence from the Talmud, a capuchin distant in the doorway.

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim
(1800-1882), oil on canvas, 1851.



looks back on a glorious and heroic history". What the Nazi regime wanted to underline here was that their fight was against Jews, and not all Semites.

Nazi Germany began a mobilization campaign targeting Muslims, who were declared as being the only viable force against such common enemies as "the Bolsheviks, England, and America, who were all constantly driven by the Jew", as Himmler described. Many Muslims joined the German army simply due to opportunism and out of a mirage of better life conditions, however many were also driven by Nazi ideology. The "final solution" was brought by the Nazis to Muslim lands, too. Under the collaborationist government of Vichy, Arabs were aware of the presence of concentration, slave labor, and military camps. Also Muslims themselves experienced the reality of concentration camps: in French North Africa, Muslim prisoners were tortured and persecuted

alongside their Jewish fellow-interns, and with even more cruelty if they were nationalists. From what we know of survivor accounts, officials tried to exploit the differences between Muslims and Jews in order to create distress in the prisoners.

Despite the fact that part of the Muslim population colluded with the Vichy government, there are also examples of Muslims helping Jews, inside and outside of internment camps. However, the majority of the population stood by in apathy, similar to European citizens in Germany, France, Italy and Poland.

Even if Muslim countries were aware of concentration camps and anti-Jewish sentiment during World War II, little to no public discourse or analysis of the topic emerged in the Arab world following the war. **In Europe the Shoah has been studied and analysed thoroughly, mainly after the 1970s.** This is mainly due to the emergence of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The creation of Israel has been linked to the *Shoah*: the state

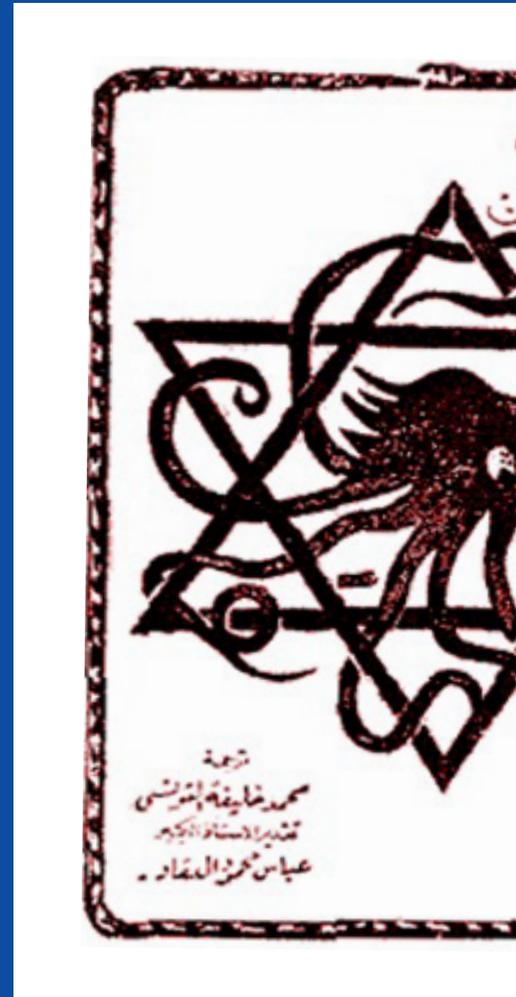
of Israel is depicted as a result of the persecution of Jews in Europe. With the geo-political conflict being cast increasingly in religious terms, anti-Jewish propaganda continues to thrive, fueled by the same misconceptions and rhetoric that permeated Muslim lands from the colonial era onward. Denial and relativization of the Shoah is just one aspect of today's antisemitism in the Middle East. Anti-Israeli propaganda today is similar to the anti-Jewish propaganda of the 1940s that ruled the newspapers in Europe. The Jew is depicted as a conspirator, secretly plotting against the Muslim world and obscurely interfering with world politics. The fact that the Shoah and Jewish persecution are missing in history books within Arab-Islamic lands demonstrates popular misconceptions

THE FACT THAT THE SHOAH AND JEWISH PERSECUTION ARE MISSING IN HISTORY BOOKS WITHIN ARAB-ISLAMIC LANDS DEMONSTRATES POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS IN SOCIETY

in society. Discourse concerning antisemitism among Muslims is confined to academia, with little being done in practice to discourage mischievous propaganda in popular culture or in politics. The problems afflicting the Middle East today and Palestinian- Israeli relations are far more complicated than this however, and cannot be solved simply by studying the Shoah or the origins of antisemitism. The situation is further complicated by Zionism, the Israeli colonies, the separation wall and general anti-Muslim discourse within Israel.

ISLAM IS NOT INTRINSICALLY ANTISEMITIC

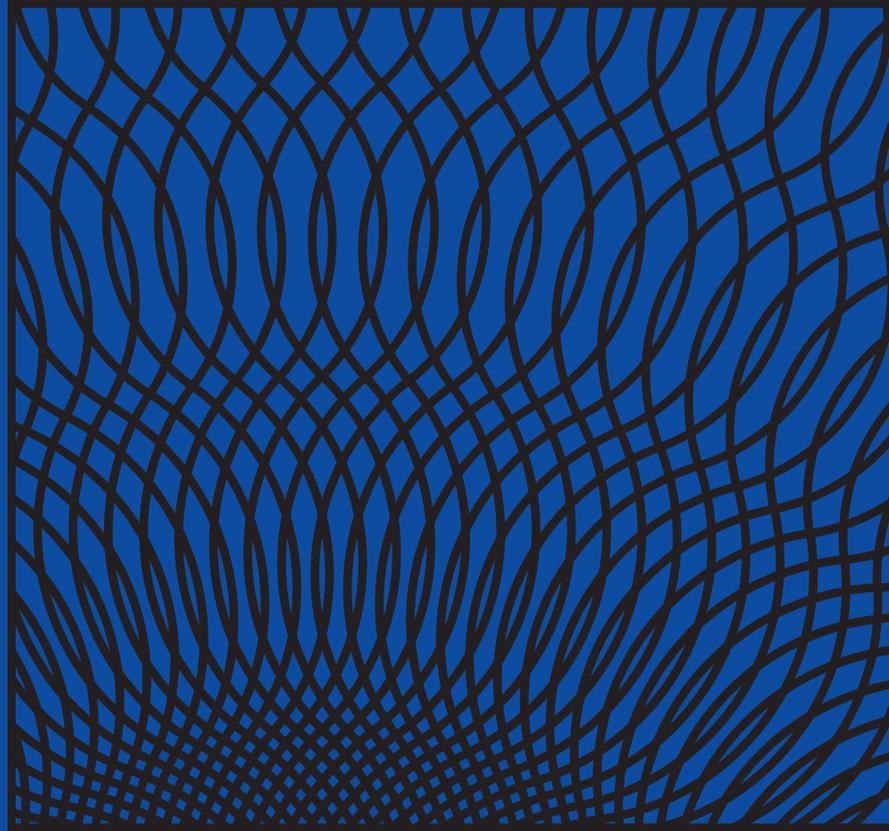
When Zionism was born in Europe during the last decades of the 19th century, its nature was political since it was influenced by nationalist movements shaping the Old Continent. Theodor Herzl conceived "the Jewish question" as a problem requiring an international response: the creation of a Jewish state for the Jewish people. Even though the end product, the Jewish state of Isreal, was the result of secular nationalism, with time, Zionists have emphasized to a larger and larger degree the religious importance of the state, not least in order to appeal to a larger, non-Zionist religious community for political and monetary support. In turn, Palestinians have increasingly emphasized the Islamic connections to the Holy City, once again to gain the support of a wider religious and political community. The merge of political and religious spheres also has created a more global conflict, resulting in deep polarization and a general sense of distrust and hatred, currently found embedded in the two religious groups. This, once again, offers fertile ground for the development of antisemitic discourse among Muslims worldwide. What emerges from an historical perspective is that Islam is not



intrinsically antisemitic, and that the roots of today's antisemitism are found within Europe's influence on Muslim lands from the 19th century onwards. Such antisemitic sentiment has been sharpened by current Israeli politics and therole of Zionism within the state of Israel. For this reason, it is undeniable that acknowledgement of antisemitism's origins in Arab countries is necessary in order to positively affect relations between Muslims and Jews in today's world, on both sides.



Al-Tunisi's translation of
the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.
Cover of the 1961 edition.



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The *Militat Omnis Amans* Effect

For Selim Nassib, the author of the book “The Palestinian Lover”, the love between the Zionist *pasionaria* Golda Meir and the Palestinian businessman Albert Pharaon is almost impossible. This great romance opens to general considerations on the feasibility of finding a solution to the Israeli-palestinian Conflict.

Every lover is a soldier. In love, as in war. All is fair in love and war. Love is a losing game. We could continue mentioning many other sayings borrowed from literature and life that associate love with war. In a similar way, the book written by the Lebanese writer Sélím Nassib in 2004, originally published in French by the Parisian Éditions Robert Laffont, deals with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the eyes of two lovers: The *pasionaria* of Zionism Golda Meir – she is at the center of the political rise of the Jewish community in Palestine and her ideals are so strong and powerfully deployed that she soon becomes the pioneer of the future State of Israel – and the rich and bored Lebanese banker Albert Pharaon, the Palestinian lover. The story takes place between 1920 and 1950, in a prolonged period of time where the reader can sympathize with the protagonists and see the evolution

of their dramatic romance, always interlaced with the early history of the birth of the State of Israel. In fact, these are crucial years for the definition of the landscape of the whole area, where current political and sociological assets start to be rooted as we know them today.

The secret love between Golda and Albert becomes the mirror for the Palestinian society of the time, blurred by British Mandate and the arrival of hordes of Jews looking for a land for themselves that they could call home.

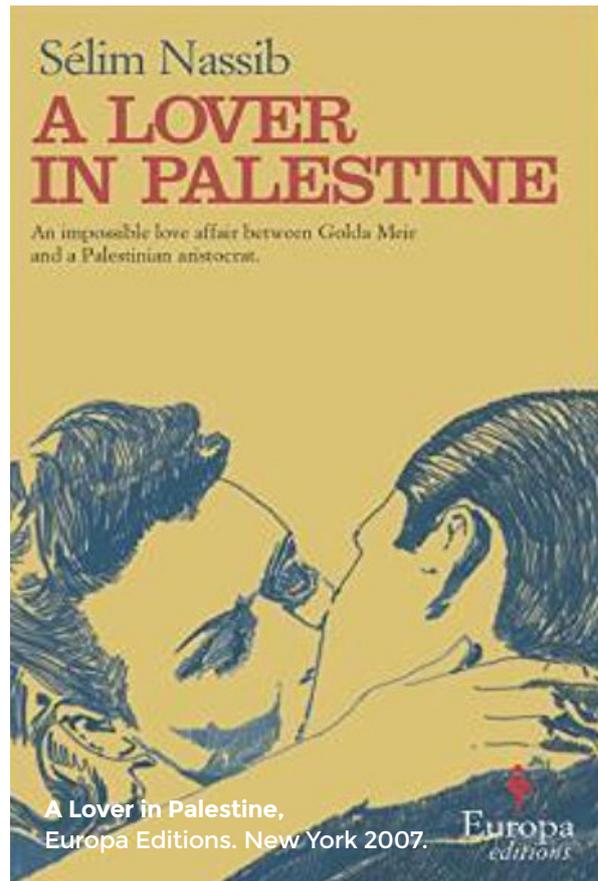
Soon enough, we understand that the *almost impossible* love between Golda and Albert, as Sélim Nassib himself defines in his prologue, is nothing more than the *almost impossible* coexistence of European Jews and Arabs in the country.

If we go further and state that Nassib's final point could be that there is no resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, would it be realistic or cynical? After all, this would be true even today, after years of wars and attempts of negotiation, mediated by the most powerful states on Earth, like the United States of America.

Another fact, is that reading the book you are led to naturally empathize with Albert and disregard Golda, even though she is a fascinating character, with great ideals and a strong personality.

You can immediately understand that she is devoted to the cause of Zionism more than to the man, albeit she – an Ukrainian Jewish woman, unfaithful wife and mother of two children, who lived in the US and emigrated to Palestine to see the dream of Eretz Yisroel come true in front of her eyes and with her own contribution – will abandon herself to a forbidden love with the "enemy".

As Sélim Nassib later declared, this is apparently the true story of Golda Meir's secret love with the Lebanese banker Albert Pharaon. This affair – that lasted 20 years – was revealed to Nassib by one his closest friends, who was Pharaon's grandson. As we all know, Golda Meir is not a fictional character but she was the first stateswoman to be elected as Prime



Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974. For her inflexible temperament, she was assimilated to Margaret Thatcher and called the "Iron Lady" of Israel. On the other hand, what do we know of Albert Pharaon? He was a wealthy and lazy banker from a prestigious Arab family, and passionate about horses. When the secret and captivating affair with Golda begins, he decides to quit his house and leave behind his wife and children, to move to Haifa and live closer to his beloved.

At a first glance, Golda's character overwhelms Albert's one, and if we go ahead with parallels between the story narrated and the history of Israel, this would suggest that Nassib here is depicting the superior power of Israel over Palestine. However, this doesn't bring justice to the essence of the relationship between the two characters and to the force of their love, "stronger than they are".

This is a very powerful concept that opens to a world of positive interpretations of life and possibilities for human beings. We started from an *almost impossible* love, transporting this idea to an almost impossible resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Then, we landed on love, the strongest force on Earth, even stronger than human nature.

So, what's the good news? This book opens up to hope. It's not too late to look for a fair end of the conflict in the area. Love is the strongest force. A great metaphor, isn't it?

Venice and Islam: a Story of Architectural Influence

Many scholars have discussed the influences of Islamic art and architecture on Venetian building. How and why were Venetian architects influenced by that heritage? A deep dive into medieval geo-politics can help answer these questions.

by **Enrico Bonamano**

Ca' Foscari graduate in Islamic studies and art history

Almost everyone knows Venice, the city built on the water. Even those who have never visited Venice or live on opposite sides of the world can conjure up a one-of-a-kind city with unique art and architecture. The architecture of Venice is cosmopolitan, merging the most diverse inputs: the purest Gothic influence from the north, Romanesque typical of medieval Italy, the Byzantine, and of the most interest to us here, the Islamic.

Since the mid-nineteenth century there have been relatively few detailed attempts to discuss the influence of Islamic architecture on Venice apart from a few hypothetical studies and speeches. For a geopolitical powerhouse like Venice, the main trade center linking the Adriatic and the Mediterranean seas to Constantinople and even to Mamluk, Egypt and Syria in the 14th century, Islamic influence is a given.

Some architectural elements in Venice remind oneself of mosques and caravanserais. Take the pointed arches of the St. Mark's Basilica façade, the crenellations of the most famous civilian palaces such as Doge's Palace, Ca' d'Oro and the *fondacoes*, translated directly from the Arab *funduq*, which were residences welcoming traveling merchants.

TO WHAT EXTENT CAN WE DESCRIBE SUCH ISLAMIC INFLUENCE?

Is it possible to describe in more detail the influence of Islamic architecture on Venice, a city that during the Middle Ages and Renaissance bridged the East and West? Isolated forms of original Islamic architecture appeared in Venice and later merged with Venetian architecture.

This created a unique and typical style, commonly known as Venetian Gothic that Otto Demus defined as having Saracen taste integrated with Gothic themes. Prior to John Ruskin and his analysis of the architectural element of the arch, it was assumed that Gothic pointed arches coming from the North and those from the Islamic world were practically identical and nearly impossible to distinguish. However, such discourse on Islamic influence cannot be limited to a single architectural element since a broader historical and geographical context can be explored for more thorough understanding of cause and effect over this period in history. Over decades, the geography and chronology of Islamic influence touching Venice has been narrowed especially to Fatimid 'Saracen' Egypt.

Deborah Howard's work was of paramount importance for reconstructing the relational network between Venice and Islamic territories, including the relevant geopolitics involved. Venice has always been a mercantile city, as trading center for goods and merchandise from the East through the maritime routes of the Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean. Since the 19th century, hypotheses have been made about the possibility of Venetian merchants importing and imitating foreign and Islamic architectural elements at home, a likely occurrence since the 13th century. With the conquest of Constantinople in 1204 the introduction of oriental elements in Venice were looked upon favourably. This brought in changes to Venetian art and architecture, accentuated by a new awareness of building styles found in the far reaches of Venice's trade routes going as far as Egypt and Syria. Venice needed and wanted to legitimize its supremacy in the Mediterranean, and therefore imported eastern marbles, columns and capitals of reuse, including

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Alexandrian elements in the Marcian area, which would also serve the purpose of creating an authentic background for the relics of the new patron Saint Mark, smuggled from Alexandria in the 9th century at the very beginning of trade with the Egyptian city. Trade continued even following the Crusades and the partial occupation of Constantinople:

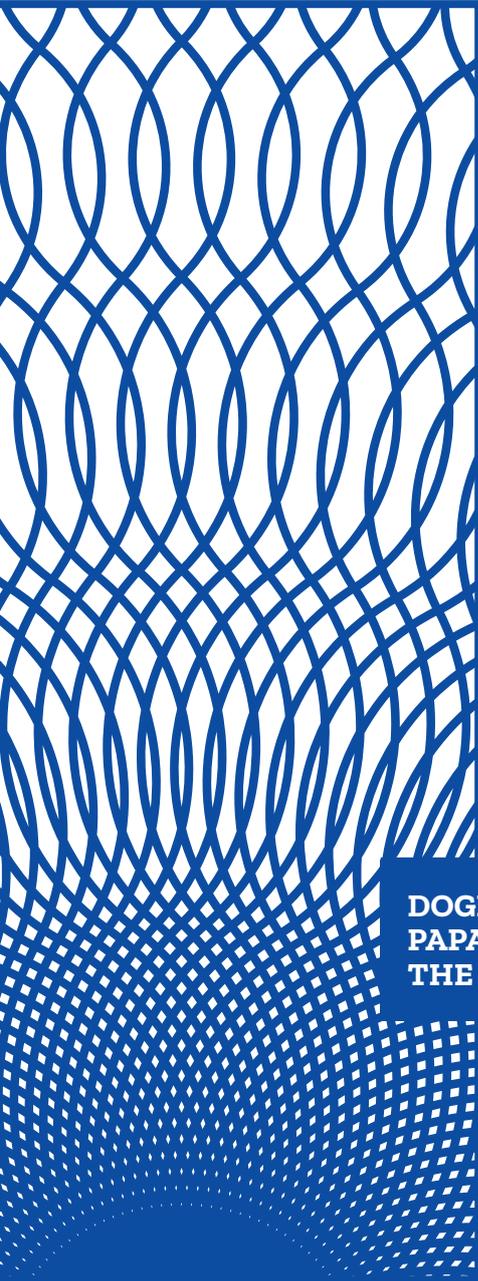
THE VENETIANS ADOPTED ARABIC ELEMENTS MOSTLY IN ITS CIVILIAN ARCHITECTURE

the Byzantine capital became the Venetian base for trade with the East, particularly with Mamluk, Egypt. In the first phase, between the 10th and 12th centuries, Constantinople would have transferred the same architectural influence to both Venice and to the Islamic world, so Venetian architecture would have shared similar patterns



as in Egypt. After 1180, this style became more slender introducing Egyptian and Persian features that evolved into what is known as typical arabesque style. The Venetians adopted Arabic elements mostly in its civilian architecture. Typical elements of mosques appeared, like the parapet crenellations, already described by John Ruskin as ornamentation and as an adaptation to light. The continuous journeys to the East and back had created efficient channels of communication that made Venice open to Eastern values and culture. Stories told by returning travelers from the colonies would have created common knowledge tied to the East that may have even been linked to architectural elements that were also imported from the East. Deborah Howard pays particular attention to how Islamic elements may have been transmitted and spread in Venice. The author references Vladimir Goss, who believes that the transmission of artistic elements from abroad is the result of the combination of three





factors: the traveler's eye, which must be able to recognize the peculiarity of the foreign form and its eventual applicability; the presence of an artist within the traveling group, who had to remember that idea and reproduce it back home; and finally, the presence in the homeland of informed spectators who could grasp and accept the symbolic and historical values of the elements imported from abroad. Such elements would be filtered through oral narratives, travelers' writings, and from human memory that modifies and transforms what passes through our pre-established cognitive plot to create a set of pieces that overlap in an architectural transmission channel. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that the Venetians were able to seize such references in a special way, since that society, dominated by merchants, was led by a large number of individuals as protagonists of trade beyond the Adriatic, selling their eastern goods almost exclusively in the Rialto market. The heart of the city thus became a hub of influence and Middle Eastern flavors, contributing to the creation of a link between commercial reality and architecture.

DOGE'S PALACE, THE PAPAL EMBARGO AND THE ISLAMIC ELEMENT

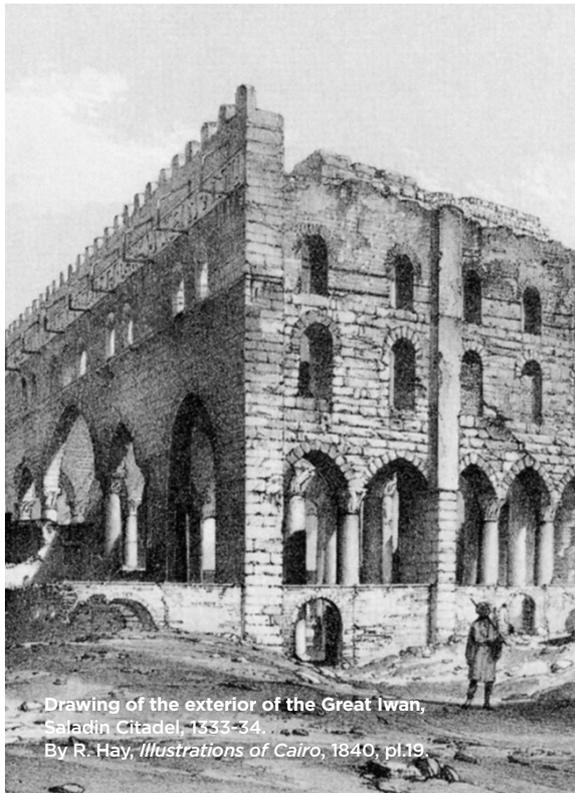
Doge's Palace, prominent symbol of Venetian civil architecture and one of the most famous buildings in Venice along with

St. Mark's Basilica and the bell tower, includes numerous elements that presuppose at least one deep look at Islam: the lozenges-pattern façade, portico and the crenellations that seem to repeat infinitely in their multiplicity. The designer is a mysterious figure, and if he corresponds, as hypothesized, to a single individual we could speak of a character aware of the architecture of his time, near and far, with remarkable geometric and conceptual abilities in design, including an expertise in building construction. The possible symbolic references to the geopolitical context of the time are manifold. The process of absorption of eastern elements in medieval Venice was already largely dependent on trade, commerce and on the relocation of relics of martyrs and saints.

Such sum of eastern references had shaped the image of Venice as a great eastern emporium and a holy city. The reconstruction of Doge's Palace in the 14th century made it necessary to symbolically recall the commercial routes to celebrate the merchantile power of Venice in the East and the figure of the merchant as a new elite, in an emulation of the architecture of power and magnificence of the Mamluk Sultans. From the beginning of the 14th century, Venice was organizing trips to the East on a regular basis, in a dense network of exchange with Mamluk, Egypt. Reproducing Islamic architectural elements at home, along with references from Middle Eastern governmental buildings, could reflect a will to showcase Venice's power, both from a commercial and political viewpoint. Thus, the new 14th century Doge's Palace had to emerge as a symbol of commercial affiliation and representation of the mercantile elite's political hegemony, which was already rooted in trade with Egypt since 1291. Another opportunity that the reconstruction of Doge's Palace offered was the celebration of an important victory against the papacy-imposed

embargo. Venice had a difficult relationship with the pope; the Serenissima was crushed between its own reality and a Christian legacy opposed to trade with Islamic territories. The concept of "architectural orientalism" that applied in Venice can help us understand such a dilemma. 19th century Orientalism was based on a fascination of and exchange with the East, but also on colonialism, on ideological Eurocentric positioning and on an imperialist predisposition. This can also be applied earlier to architecture in Venice, albeit mitigated by a Venetian mentality less Eurocentric and more open to the East at the dawn of the 14th century during a historical period in which

DOGE'S PALACE, PROMINENT SYMBOL OF VENETIAN CIVIL ARCHITECTURE, INCLUDES NUMEROUS ELEMENTS THAT PRESUPPOSE AT LEAST ONE DEEP LOOK AT ISLAM



Drawing of the exterior of the Great Iwan, Saladin Citadel, 1333-34. By R. Hay, *Illustrations of Cairo*, 1840, pl.19.

the concept of Europe was not yet as defined as the contrast would become between the Christian West and the Islamic East culminating at the Crusades. But how could medieval Venice perceive itself as a "European" or "Western" state opposed to "the others" of an East that was still a vague concept, lacking any distinction between Middle and Far East? Such a dilemma came to light in the political and commercial life of the Serenissima. The papacy strongly opposed trade between a Christian state like Venice and the Islamic world, which fueled contradictions and paradoxes in the relationship through continuous self-justification for the trade partnership. In 1320 the papacy imposed an embargo of any kind of commercial exchange with an Islamic institution. The Venetian economy was severely affected while Venice's paradoxical

perception of itself and its relationship with the Islamic world was enhanced in that the city was heavily dependent on trade and diplomatic contact with the Middle East, yet it remained proud of its Christian legacy. In 1344, after more than 20 years of tribulation, Venice finally persuaded the pope to grant permission to send a limited fleet of ships to Egypt in exchange for special concessions to the papacy. The Venetians visited the Mamluk Sultan and succeeded in restoring the privileged exchanges. As we know, it is precisely at this time that the project for the new Doge's Palace was conceived with its Islamic allusions that would have wanted to convey this important political victory to those who were aware of the controversy with the papacy and were able to grasp the symbolic meaning of an Islamic architectural tradition rooted in Venice.

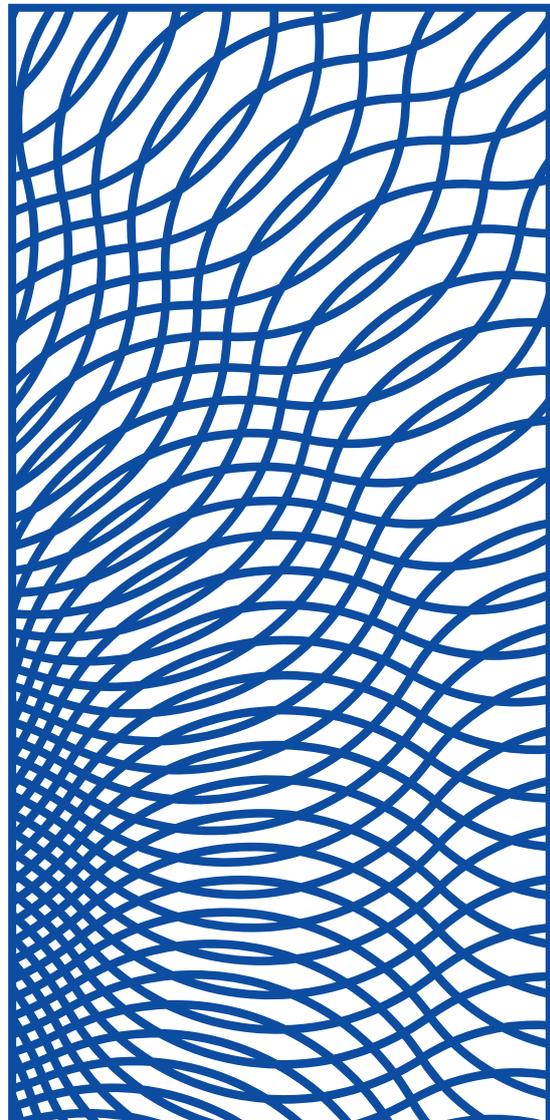
In the concrete, the Islamic elements found in the St. Mark's area can be explained through themes involving multiplicity, repetition and infinity, traditionally used in Islamic architecture to decorate in abstract composition lacking any portrayal of the human figure. Venetian and Islamic architecture shared a concept of space conceived as two-dimensional and fluid. Some currents of thought state that the two-toned lozenge motif of such façades originates from even further East, from the palaces of Ilkhan and Mongolian architecture and from direct Seljuq influence in northern Iran. This influence could be easily grounded in new Venetian trading routes along the Silk Road during the papal embargo.

Further allusions to Islam are found in the internal courtyard of Doge's Palace, built around a large cistern and well-curb accessible to the public, which recall the courtyard of a mosque and its fountain for ablutions. The Palace, along with its crenellations and its view of the Basilica's domes, evoke the great religious complexes of the Sultans. The allusion to Mamluk architecture in the color, size and delicacy of the crenellations would have been obvious to anyone familiar with the Egypt of that period. between a Christian state like Venice and the Islamic world, which fueled contradictions and paradoxes in the relationship through continuous self-justification for the trade

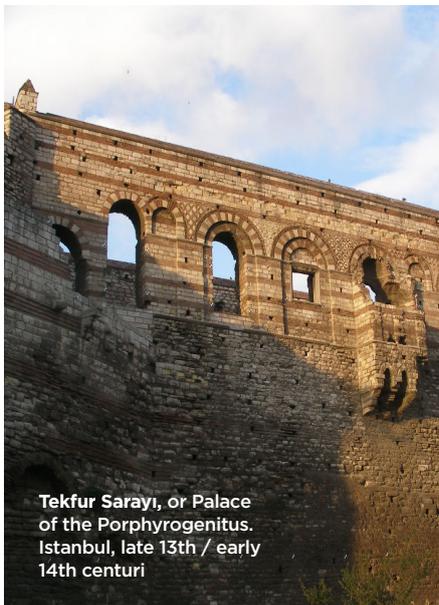
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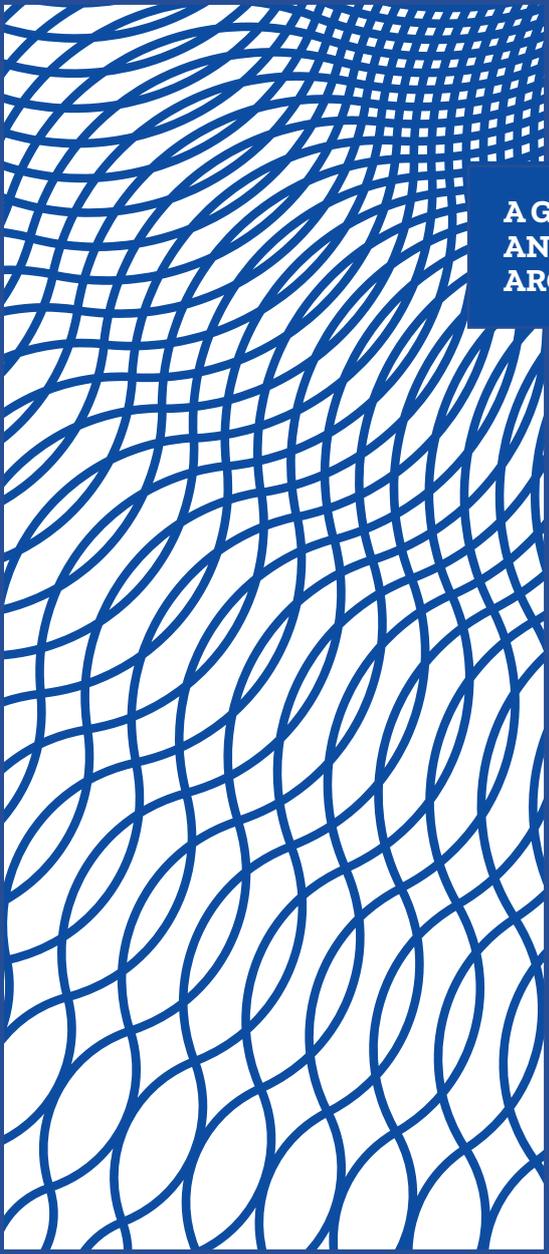


Tekfur Sarayı, or Palace of the Porphyrogenitus.
Istanbul, late 13th / early 14th century



Doge's Palace,
1400. Façade on the square.
Photo by Kaz Ish.

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A GLOBAL AND SYMBOLIC ARCHITECTURE

Although it is possible to narrow down the chronological and geographic influences of the Islamic world on Venice to Fatimid and Mamluk, Egypt, usually explained by

Venice's commercial routes to Egyptian harbors, more justification for the Islamic influence on architecture in Venice requires further research. Architectural elements were on loan, imports from Egypt thanks to the presence of artists able to reproduce them once back home. If we think about the crenellations of Doge's Palace, which immediately recall those of Egyptian mosques, there seems to be a missing link between the 14th century Mamluk crenellations and those of the Ducal building, a blank space in an evolutionary tale. Further complicating matters is the difficulty of separating Byzantine elements from Islamic ones, since it is very likely that Byzantine architecture of the 11th and 12th centuries was influenced by Islamic architecture, transmitted to Venice only after being filtered through Constantinople. Regardless of such origins of influence, what is certain is that the skill and fantasy of the mysterious personality who reconstructed Doge's Palace in the 14th century contributed to the construction of a unique Islamic-style building in the world and to a special Venetian fusion of architecture that melts various different global influences and architectures unique to Venice alone.

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