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Some Characteristics of Islamic Art

WESTERN ART HISTORIANS have shown much interest in Islamic art, though in general they have remained content with dating artifacts and ascribing art objects to various schools and traditions. Such work is surely important, but it gives little or no insight into what makes Islamic art *Islamic*. It leaves opaque the meanings of these artifacts as expressions of a community in which religion and art are intimately joined. Titus Burckhardt is the happy exception who, in addition to historical expertise, has made important contributions to the beginnings of an aesthetics of Islamic art.¹

Until recently Muslim writers also have been of little help to the interested Westerner. Knowing the intimate way that his art expresses Islamic commitments, he supposed it hopeless to make anyone outside the Islamic community genuinely understand and appreciate the symbolism of Islamic art. In recent years, however, they have changed their tack and are trying to make clear to anyone with sufficient imagination and sympathy the main thrust of Islamic art and thereby to open to the Western mind new avenues of aesthetic appreciation.² This paper is an effort toward achieving that same goal.

The plan of procedure will be this: 1) to apply briefly the concept of traditional or religious art—made familiar by the excellent writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy, René Guenon, and Titus Burckhardt—specifically to the Islamic context; 2) to distinguish carefully and analyze in some detail the constituent elements of the classical Sunni Islamic

tradition and to contrast them frequently with Christianity as an aid to the Westerner's understanding; 3) to investigate various elements of Islamic decorative art and show how they express and symbolize the constituent elements of Sunni commitment; and 4) to point out various pitfalls and mistakes in symbolic interpretations so that they may be avoided in future discussions.

I.

Islamic art is the expression of a whole culture, intimately intertwined with religious, theological, and legal commitments. It is a way of expressing and celebrating the defining ideology of a community. It is always social and traditional, never idiosyncratic or wholly self-expressive. The search for new artistic patterns is never great; the repetition—or, better, improvement and refinement—of classic forms is always prized, and skill in it constitutes the essence of art, whether it be literary, architectural, or decorative. The thought that he was expressing *himself* would seem idiosyncratic to a Muslim artist. Since Muslim artistry is communal and traditional rather than self-expressive, it is never dated or faddish the way contemporary Western art is. Novelty for its own sake rather than a new way of expressing old truth is totally foreign to any traditional religious community.

Islamic art makes no essential distinction between fine arts and crafts. For the Muslim, art is skill in making things well whether the thing be a poem, a painting, a rug, a mihrab, or a mosque. The poet, the painter, the weaver, the carver, the carpenter, the architect, and the mason are all artists and their

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products works of art; they are good artists and artifacts depending upon whether the required skill was forthcoming. In parallel fashion Muslims do not distinguish between fine arts and minor arts. The well-proportioned and well-carved mihrab is just as much a work of art as the whole well-done mosque; the expertly woven rug as much a work of art as the well-designed and executed madrasah or palace. Moreover, in Islamic art there is no distinction between fine arts and decorative arts. Decoration is fundamental to all art; it is never something added as a flourish.³ The infinite pattern, the arabesque, stylized kufic and naksh script, and stylized floral and vegetal patterns all have integral symbolic functions wherever they occur, be they wrought in colored tiles on the dome of a mosque, cut or molded into the stone or stucco walls of a mosque, carved into the sides of the mihrab, or woven into a patterned rug. Decoration becomes merely ornament only when its communal symbolism has been lost. To the outsider it becomes peripheral, or merely ornamental, because the point of it within the framework that gives it meaning has been lost.

It is a corollary of these views that the traditional Muslim artist rejects the Western "museum" view of art. Art objects are not things set apart from everyday affairs to be collected together in a special place but are part and parcel of the everyday life of the community and the individual. Art objects are found in the ordinary rounds of life: the mosque and mihrab, public gardens and fountains, rugs on the floor of the mosque and house, the drinking glass on the table, the illuminations of the book being read, and so on. To be sure, there is a Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, but Muslims do not often frequent it. It is mainly for the use of Western tourists and art historians. Why should a Muslim go there to see rugs, fountains, sections of carved ceilings, tile work, mosque implements, and accoutrements when he sees these things in his daily round of living? It is true that if he is interested in historical or period pieces, if he wants to see an example of a Fatamid glass carving, an Abbasid tapestry, or an Omayyad fountain, the Muslim will go to the Museum of Islamic Art. In this case, however, he realizes that he is interested in

some aspect of the history of art rather than responding to the artifacts per se. The Muslim, like any person in any traditional society, does not confuse knowledge about art with what art is about.⁴

II.

Without the foregoing we cannot understand the nature of Islamic art; it is necessary for any adequate characterization. It is not, however, sufficient for such a characterization. What we have written is true of all traditional, communal, religious art—of Hindu, Buddhist, Byzantine, and Western Medieval Christian art as well as of Muslim art. What we need now is a delineation of those beliefs and commitments which form the distinctively Islamic communal framework and which are reflected in the dominant artistic motifs of Muslim art.

Islam is at once very straightforward and yet complex. The five pillars of the faith are these: belief in Allah as the one and only God; five daily communions with, or prayers to, Allah; benevolent care of the needy and disadvantaged; fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan; and a pilgrimage, if possible, once in a person's lifetime to the holy city of Mecca. Islam is complex because from the main, orthodox Sunni tradition, there have splintered off a number of smaller, competing traditions: Kharijite, Shia, Ismaili, and Druze, to name only the most important. Most of these splinter groups are to be accounted for on personal and political grounds, at least at their inception, though doctrinal difference also emerged eventually.

Within the Sunni tradition itself complications arose, the main one being a tension between the legal traditionalists, who emphasized the sufficiency of the Koran and the Hadith (recorded traditions of what the Prophet and the Companions said and did), and the Sufi mystics—themselves quite diverse and complex. Mystics like Al-Ghazali emphasized that legalism must be supplemented with a personal communion with Allah and that the law must not be followed blindly but from proper motives. (Certainly many of the legalists included these notions from the beginning.) Many Sufi mystics were more

radical, however, emphasizing, as they did, special mystical avenues to truth, and even the heretical pantheistic claim that true union with Allah involves loss of individual being—that Allah, in short, is the only reality. Sufism often became a popular religion co-existing in a sense along with the Sunni tradition. Messiahism and worship of Sufi Masters as saints became prominent in this popular religion.

The crucial point, then, for anyone discussing “Islamic Art” is to say what they mean by the term “Islamic.” By it I mean the synthesis of legalism and Al-Ghazali’s sensible “mysticism,” minus all the trappings of Messiahism and Sainthood of the popular religions particularly from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. It might be called the classical Sunni tradition and is exemplified as the “official” view of most of the crucial Caliphates and dynasties until the fourteenth century: the original Caliphs, Omayyads, Abbasids, Seljuks, Ayyubids, Almohads, Mamluks, Ottomans, and so on. (There were varying elements of “popular” religion already present among lower classes during these Caliphates and dynasties.)

What is required now is a characterization in some detail of this classical, Sunni tradition so that we will be able in the next section to see how the beliefs and commitments of this tradition are reflected in the artifacts of these periods.

All Islam is theistic: Allah is all-powerful, omniscient, all-compassionate and merciful, distinct from contingent being and responsible for it. In addition, the classical tradition emphasizes the infinity of Allah: as necessary being, Allah has no beginning or end and in this sense is infinite. Moreover, however we characterize Allah, as compassionate, merciful, powerful, or whatever, we are characterizing him by finite predicates and the point of the added “omnipredicates” is to indicate the infinite and hence not literally understandable degree to which Allah exemplifies these properties. Also, in characterizing Allah, even by omnipredicates, we are only approaching him nonessentially. The defining character, the essence of Allah, is never even statable—His essential nature is infinite in the sense of being transcendent, uncharacterizable.

The classical tradition is also ruggedly

monotheistic: There is no god but God; He is a *unity* amidst all diversity and all senses of infinity. However many ways he may appear he is essentially, as necessary being, one and indivisible. The notion of God Incarnate is, for the Muslim, either an inconsistency or the abandonment of monotheism. This notion of *at-tawhid*—the unity of Allah—is not only a negative one of denying Incarnation but expresses a deep credal and emotional commitment to God’s true being.⁵

From these commitments certain corollaries follow that are crucial for understanding the nature of Islamic art. I shall put them negatively because it is easiest to do so linguistically. That fact is itself instructive, because the Western way of talking is geared to Christianity and has no good words for putting the Muslim point of view positively. The classical Sunni tradition, unlike Christianity, is nonhistorical, nondirectional, nondevelopmental, nondramatic, and nonpersonal. What does all this mean?

There is a certain sense in which both Islam and Christianity are historical religions. The Revelation in each case is dated; the Christian Revelation is scattered through time, and the Islamic Revelation occurred within the compass of a few years. However, there is also a sense in which the former is historical and the latter not: dated “facts” and propositions about them form part of the Christian Revelation but not the Islamic. That Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, lived and died at a given time and that he sacrificed himself then for the atonement of the sins of mankind are propositions that form part of the corpus of Christian belief and commitment. There is nothing comparable to this in classical Sunni Islam. Dated facts and propositions about them form no part of its corpus of belief and commitment. Allah is “everywhere” but does not appear in any special guise at a given time or place.

Islam is nondirectional and nondevelopmental. Christ’s Incarnation is the focal point of Christianity. All history looks forward to his advent; all that follows afterward must be understood by looking back to this focal point. The Prophet Muhammad plays no similar role. He was the vehicle of the Islamic Revelation, but he is not an essential part of it. The seventh century is crucial to the Muslim

because his Revelation occurred then, but there is nothing crucial about that point in time that figures as part of the Revelation. Hence what came before the seventh century A.D. does not simply anticipate it, and what happened since is not explained by what happened then. The whole of time is conceived *seriatim* and any part of it is to be explained and understood by the universal, infinite, transcendent, and unified Allah. To be sure, the Islamic world has its own calendar, and an event in the seventh century—namely, the move of the Prophet and the Companions from Mecca to Medina—is the point for “before” and “after.” This fact, however, does not run counter to my claims. The Hejira was causally crucial in the ultimate triumph of Islam and hence was taken as a focal point for the calendar, but the Hejira itself forms no part of the Islamic Revelation and plays no role in the ultimate Muslim belief and commitment.

Islam is also nondramatic and nonpersonal. The advent of Christ is the denouement of Christian history. Previous centuries set the stage and introduced various players in the Christian drama; what happened after Christ is the unwinding of all that is implied in his Incarnation. There is, however, no climax in the Muslim view of life or history; everything is seen symmetrically, linearly, and cyclically. It is no accident that drama, or theatre art, is not only not a prominent Muslim art but is practically nonexistent.⁶ To be sure, skits and sketches were given at tea houses, but they scarcely constituted drama in the Western sense. In poetry the Islamic genius is invariably lyrical, in a broad sense, rather than epic or dramatic.

The classical Sunni tradition, finally, lacked the personal element of Christianity and other Islamic traditions. There is no savior or messiah concept as there is in Christianity, in Shia Islam, and many of the Sufi brotherhoods, and no intermediary saints that can be appealed to as surrogates of an infinite and transcendent God. This classical Sunni tradition was too austere for many of the faithful themselves and hence it was that popular religion, via Sufism, introduced messiahs and turned the Sufi masters into saints. In later years the classical Sunni tradition and Sufism, in its degenerate, superstitious form, formed

an uneasy allegiance, the two elements of which were in a constant state of tension. For a while, the tradition would accept informally the popular accretions and then would react negatively against them in a reform movement, and then back again. The Wahhabi movement is a particularly striking instance in pre-modernist times of an especially fundamentalist purging of superstitious Sufi tendencies.⁷ If I were asked to choose a person who represented the classical Sunni tradition at its best I would certainly choose the man who is to many Muslims, and to an increasing number of outsiders, “*al-batal al-khalid*”—Salah-al-Din.⁸

III.

We are now clear about the classical Sunni tradition and are ready to see how the commitments that constitute this tradition are reflected in the art objects produced in the previously mentioned great caliphates and dynasties. The way that brings the quickest result is to concentrate on decoration. It will be recalled that in any traditional society decoration is not simply ornament, a peripheral flourish, but is symbolic of the communal commitments which provide the framework of that society. What, then, are the specific decorative motifs of our carefully delineated Muslim community?

First, there is the “infinite pattern” which consists of an interlaced line passing over and under itself forming intricate geometrical patterns. The line is continuous, it has no beginning or end, and it also exhibits unity in its simplicity. It is at once symbolic both of Allah’s infinity and his unity and at once expressive both of His transcendence and the concept of *at-tawhid*. The infinite pattern draws attention away from the local and parochial to the universal, from the limited historical point in time to continuous Necessary Being.

The infinite pattern appears either in separate decorative plaques as in the Great Mosque of Cordoba or in overall wall decorations, either internal or external, as on the lintel of one of the entrances of the Great Mosque of Damascus. The infinite pattern is doubly expressive when it is spread around the inside or outside of a mosque dome or

cupola, for in this case the infinity of the pattern is seconded by the circular rendition that again, in another dimension, has no beginning or end. It is interestingly paradoxical that the infinite pattern was apparently introduced into Islamic art by the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt where in general there was more genuinely secular art than in almost any other epoch of Islamic history.⁹

Second, geometrical figures are fitted together in one pattern or another and repeated numerous times; stylized floral and vegetal designs are likewise fitted together in one pattern or another and repeated many times. These repeated geometrical, floral, and vegetal patterns form the famous arabesques which are rightly closely associated—though the reason is little known—with the Islamic culture. The arabesques, having either geometrical figures or stylized flowers and plants as elements, are aggressively nonrepresentational. Why? The answer usually given is that the Koran and Hadith prohibit any representational art because of its use in pagan religions. This negative answer is part of the truth, but it is often exaggerated. There is representational art of a secular sort in Muslim societies even though it is not widespread.¹⁰ In non-Sunni traditions there are even occasional figures of the Prophet. A positive answer is more significant. The general preference for abstract art in all Muslim societies, and its virtual universal preference in traditional Sunni societies, is that only by abstractions can one hope to symbolize the universal, transcendent, unity in multiplicity, and necessary Being.¹¹ Or, making this point in a different way, we can see that it would be impossible to draw attention away from the limited, the historical, and the parochial by using pictorial icons. In addition to suggesting the transcendent or nonhistorical by being abstract, the arabesque also achieves this purpose in the repetition of the basic design. It is as if any given arabesque were simply an arbitrary part of an infinite series of such repetitions. It is also crucial to see that in an arabesque there is absolutely no emphasis on any given figure or any given pattern. No individual part of an arabesque is ever accentuated or emphasized; every part is subordinated to the pattern which exhibits unity in multiplicity.

In this way the Muslim artist both expresses the fact that his religion is independent of any historical happening or occasion and exhibits the universal character of the God he worships.

It has been suggested that the infinite pattern and the arabesque should be interpreted as symbolizing Allah's infinity and transcendence in an absolute sense.¹² On this view, any ascription of characteristics of Allah is anthropomorphic and to be avoided. God's nature is beyond man's power to know or portray; it is inexpressible. In his use of the infinite pattern and arabesque, the Muslim artist must be interpreted as making this very point; the nature of Allah is inexpressible and all one can do is to worship him rather than characterize him. While there is an element of truth in this view, it may well be exaggerated. In the first place, this claim is a sophisticated theological one, as distinct from a religious one, and is not likely therefore to be one expressed by artists in a consistent fashion throughout the various Sunni caliphates and dynasties. Second, it is a specific theological claim that is most characteristic of the Mutazalite theology that was dominant during only a part of one of the Sunni caliphates.¹³ Third, this claim does not distinguish between the properties of Allah which can, in a fashion, most theologians thought, be expressed, and the defining characteristics of the nature of Allah which cannot, which are forever beyond the comprehension of man. Surely Allah is all-powerful, all-compassionate, and unified in his infinity—surely these properties apply to him whatever his defining characteristics, always beyond the ken of men, might be.

Third, Arabic calligraphy is an omnipresent decoration in all Islamic art.¹⁴ Two scripts are particularly prominent in symbolic decoration, the angular and older Kufic and the later, curvilinear *naksh*. Excerpts from the Koran in either script adorn the walls of mosques, the domes of mosques—both inner and outer surfaces—the sides of minbars, etc., and the writing is stylized and often repetitive. When wrapped around the dome of a mosque, either inside or outside, it is especially presentable in a unitary or continuous fashion. Calligraphy thus functions effectively in two ways: it both states the will of Allah and

symbolically *expresses* certain of his properties. Again, expressively Allah is a unity in his multiplicity, infinite, and transcendent, and Islam is universal, unlimited, nonparochial, and a-historical.

The symbolic function of Islamic art is apparent in numerous other ways in addition to decorative motifs, of which the following instances are particularly instructive. The original mosque structure, which was retained in many of the later caliphates and dynasties, was on a rectangular plan with either the short or long side roofed over as a sanctuary, and the remaining part a courtyard surrounded on three sides by arcades and one side by the facade of the sanctuary. The sanctuary contained the minbar, or pulpit, from which the imam spoke during services on Fridays, and the mihrab, a prayer niche in the kibla wall which the Muslim faced when praying and thereby faced toward Mecca. The mihrab, however, unlike the Christian altar, is no focal point in a mosque.¹⁵ It is often not in the center of the kibla wall and there are frequently more than one mihrab. The minbar is often movable and, in any case, placed where the imam can be most effectively heard during Friday services. This lack of a focal point again symbolizes that Allah is unlocatable in any fashion at any given historical point of time, but is, on the contrary, present everywhere and at all times. It emphasizes the unimportance of any given historical event to the essence of Islam, just as it emphasizes the nondirectional, non-dramatic, and nonpersonal dimensions of the Muslim's faith. Not only is there no counterpart of the altar and the Eucharist, but there is also no counterpart of the cross or crucifix.

The horizontal design of mosques in the earlier years suggests similar points.¹⁶ They had no upward thrust; they imparted no feeling of motion in any direction. The effect of the great mosques of Cordoba, Qayrawan, and Damascus rather is that of timelessness, eternity, and infinity which excludes all things temporal and historical—even that little bit of temporality necessary for motion. Later Mamluk and Ottoman style mosques, it is true, might be said to have an upward thrust, though the use of enormous domes and the dissolving effects of dazzling light minimize the thrust. Never is there the feeling of

literally reaching upward that is the effect of most Christian cathedrals.

The lack of directionality, dramatic denouement, and epoch and emphasis on universality, eternity, and transcendence is symbolized most strikingly perhaps in the organization—or lack of it—of the Koran itself, the ultimate in Islamic art.¹⁷ It makes no difference to the Islamic Revelation in what order the surahs are arranged, since the Revelation of the Unity, Infinity, and Compassion of Allah is present throughout. There is no dramatic development, no denouement, so any arbitrary order of presentation will do. The one in fact chosen was length: the surahs are arranged in order of length, the longest generally coming first and the shortest last. Putting the longest ones first might be taken as the ultimate rejection of a cumulative view of the cosmos.

IV.

There are certain mistakes in the symbolic interpretation of traditional, communal art which must be made clear in order that they may be avoided. First, there is no point in trying to find symbolism everywhere; such interpretations become vacuous. We are told, for example, that the mosque courtyard which is inward looking and upward looking, and shuts out the immediate surroundings, is symbolic of renunciation of this world and turning attention to Allah and to the state of one's own heart. A much better interpretation of the courtyard is that it cuts off noise, provides a place for a fountain for ablutions, and insures fresh air. Again we are told that the pillars of the arcades represent Allah's foundational wisdom and the arches the supplicating arms of the faithful.¹⁸ A much better interpretation would be that they symbolized nothing but were simply holding up the roof.

Second, there is no point in trying to give a *religious* interpretation to every symbol. Entranceways in earlier mosques were often lovely indeed, as they are in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, without being large or grand. The portals of the Mamluk Mosques of Cairo, on the other hand, are impressively grand; the portal of the Sultan Hassan Mosque, Mausoleum, and Madrasah is, in fact, breath-

taking in its immensity. We are told that the enormous portals are to suggest the immensity and power of Allah, but the far more likely interpretation is that they portray the wealth and power of the Mamluk emperors who had them built and whose palaces already contained the prototypes of such portals. There are no doubt many aspects of traditional art—be it Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, or whatever—which must be interpreted in terms of social, political, and economic rather than religious or ideological symbols.¹⁹

Third, there is some symbolism which is perfectly legitimate but not very helpful, since it does not reveal anything unique about the Islamic Revelation. It is often said that a fundamental principle of Islamic style is the use of various techniques to achieve “the dissolution of matter.”²⁰ Solid walls are made to appear ephemeral by the use of plaster and tile decoration, while vaults and arches have their functions masked by floral and calligraphic ornament and the use of Mukkarnas niches. Lustre painting helps also to create a thorough-going illusion of insubstantiality. The Alhambra is often used as a good example of these points: it creates the illusion of a building “floating above the ground,” the architecture is as “insubstantial as a cloud,” woven out of “vibrant rays of light,” with an interior of “light gaiety.” It is true, no doubt, that mosque decoration is intended to lighten the heaviness of stones and plaster and to carry one’s thought to the realm of spiritual values, but such efforts are scarcely unique to Islamic art but occur in much religious art. That such efforts were carried over to secular buildings may show that Islamic spirituality, more than in most religious communities, carried over into the everyday business of living, but on the other hand the carry over may simply show that as a matter of taste most people in any society prefer a lightsome effect to a pile-of-stones effect.

Finally, religious symbolism is not necessarily unique. The arabesque and Arabic calligraphy are, but the infinite pattern, for example, is not. There are numerous interesting uses of the infinite pattern in pagan Western art, as we have come to realize as a result of the discovery of the “Sutton Hoo Ship Burial.”²¹ There are also crucial uses of the infinite pattern in Celtic Christian art.

In the portrait of John in the Book of Kells (before 814 A.D.) there are elegant examples of the infinite pattern inside the four Greek crosses that form part of the border.²² In the “Crowning of Mary” painted by a Florentine Master (latter part of the fourteenth century), which hangs in the Oskar Reinhart “Am Römerholz” Collection, one figure holds a Bible with an infinite pattern on its cover. The infinite pattern is useful Christian symbolism also, since the Christian God is also conceived as infinite and transcendent. However, the symbolism is domesticated differently in the Christian tradition. The Incarnation, an historical occasion, is the central thrust of this tradition, and hence the symbols of infinity must be inscribed *within* the crosses and contained *within the borders* of the Bible. There could be no better or more revealing symbolism of Christianity than that provided by the artist in the Book of Kells and the Florentine Master.

The multi-usefulness of the infinite pattern for religious symbolism takes on added interest if one considers its use in Monophysitic Christian traditions, of which the Armenian, Coptic, and Syrian Orthodox Churches are examples. In senses upon which there is no space to elaborate at the present time the Monophysitic Christian Churches are intermediate in their conceptions of Deity between the main stream of Christianity and Sunni Islam. In the Monophysitic tradition the dual perfect nature of Jesus as man and God combined in one person is rejected, and the divine nature of Christ, one and undivided, is emphasized. It is fascinating to see this view reflected in the symbolism of innumerable Armenian stone crosses where the cross is inscribed *inside* the borders and interior lacework of the infinite pattern.²³ Here the Incarnation takes on a different meaning and is subordinate to the Infinite and Omnipresent Deity.

Indeed the symbolism within Islam itself is not wholly unique either, since Sufi, Shia, and Ismaili monuments, as well as Sunni, exhibit the infinite pattern, arabesques, and calligraphic decoration. The question is whether the symbols in these contexts have the same or different meanings as in Sunni contexts. Certainly there would be nothing to prevent, say, even the pantheistically inclined

Sufi from taking the symbol of unity as meaning that Allah is the *only* Reality or the symbol of transcendence as meaning that the Divine Message must be sought beyond and behind the literal Revelation in the Koran. Gnostic moves of one sort or another are at the heart of most Sufi movements, so it is not unlikely that there are concealed meanings of the standard Sunni symbols involved in many of them and that the nature of the concealed meanings varies from movement to movement. The prototype here would be the hidden meanings and multiple use of a symbol exemplified in the innumerable "teaching stories" of the various Sufi Masters. Much research remains to be done to clarify fully this complex issue.

Gnostic and messiah elements also pervade the Shia and Ismaili traditions, so the same question arises in these contexts. No doubt the Shia and Ismaili symbol interpretations are not identical with those of the classical Sunni tradition and they may be quite different. However, if it could be shown that the Shia and Ismaili interpretations are similar to the latter, such similarity would show, quite interestingly, that their messiah concepts are not at the heart of their doctrine but are more like accretions around the universal core of Islamic doctrine and hence are quite different from the counterpart Christian concepts of Incarnation and related notions.

In any case, the universal core of the classical Sunni tradition is clear and highly significant: God is One, God is Indivisible, God is Infinite and Transcendent, and God is Omnipresent and not Historically Manifest. These are the themes which are reflected in the main stream of Islamic Art and which must be well understood to make sense of the concept of Islamic art itself.

¹ Cf. Titus Burckhardt, "The Spirit of Islamic Art," *Islamic Quarterly*, 1 (1954), 212-18, and "Perennial Values in Islamic Art," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 1 (1967), 132-41.

² E.g., Zuheir Al-Faqih, "Islamic Art—Submis-

sion to Divine Will," *The Arab World* (July-August, 1970), pp. 16-25; I. R. Al-Faruqi, "Misconceptions of the Nature of Islamic Art," *Islam and the Modern Age*, 1 (1970), 29-49, and "Islam and Art," *Studia Islamica*, XXXVII (1973), 81-109.

³ Ananda Coomaraswamy makes this important point in the context of his discussion of Christian and Hindu art. See his *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (New York, 1956), pp. 19, 79.

⁴ That we must always avoid this confusion is one of Coomaraswamy's main themes in his discussion of Christian and Hindu art.

⁵ This point is emphasized by Al-Faqih, Al-Faruqi, and Burckhardt in their articles already cited.

⁶ Cf. Al-Faruqi, "Islam and Art," pp. 98-99.

⁷ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Garden City, 1966), Anchor Books Edition, 1968, pp. 237-60.

⁸ Philip K. Hitti, *Makers of Arab History* (New York, 1968), pp. 116-420.

⁹ Ernst J. Grube, *The World of Islam* (New York, N.D.), pp. 68-69.

¹⁰ Grube conclusively establishes this point.

¹¹ Burckhardt is one of the few Western writers to appreciate this point.

¹² Al-Faruqi, "Islam and Art," pp. 90, 96.

¹³ Rahman, op. cit., 99-104.

¹⁴ Al-Faqih, op. cit., 21-22; Al-Faruqi, "Islam and Art," 103-09; Grube, op. cit., pp. 8, 66; and Derek Hill and Oleg Grabar, *Islamic Architecture and Its Decoration* (London, 1964), p. 80.

¹⁵ Titus Burckhardt, "Perennial Values in Islamic Art," p. 136, and Al-Faqih, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁶ Ernst Kühnel, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, tr. K. Watson (London, 1966), p. 25. Yet cf. p. 100. The best answer may simply be that Mongol architecture is atypical of Islam.

¹⁷ N. J. Dawood in his translation of *The Koran*, Third Revised Edition (Baltimore, 1968), orders the Surahs in a way he hopes will make it more understandable to a Western reader.

¹⁸ Al-Faqih, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁹ R. Stephen Humphreys, "The Expressive Intent of the Mamluk Architecture of Cairo: A Preliminary Essay," *Studia Islamica*, XXXV (1971), 69-119.

²⁰ E.g., Grube, op. cit., pp. 11, 71, 111, 129, 138; Kühnel, op. cit. p. 136; and John D. Hoag, *Western Islamic Architecture* (New York, 1963), p. 28.

²¹ R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial, A Handbook* (London, 1968).

²² *Irish Illuminated Manuscripts of the Early Christian Period*, Introduction by J. J. Sweeney (New York, 1965), plate 26. For the frequent occurrence of this motif see the rest of this volume and Francoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period*, Rev. Ed. (London, 1965).

²³ Karekin Sarkissian, *The Witness of the Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Beirut, 1968), plate of an Armenian "Khatchkar" opposite p. 35.