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The Lure of the Exotic: The Byzantine Heritage in Islamic Book Painting

In the visual arts, the interplay between the Byzantine and the Islamic worlds in the Middle Ages is a vast theme, with many surprising ramifications. For the most part, the Islamic world was the beneficiary, although ideas, themes and motifs travelled a two-way street. A brief discussion of the Byzantine response to Islamic art may, however, help. It is obviously a subject best tackled by Byzantinists, and then in penny packets, at least in the early stages of the enquiry. Certainly the subjects that have most substantially furthered understanding of this interplay have been for the most part doggedly detailed – Flury's analysis of Islamic ornament in a Greek psalter[1], Miles' exemplary account of Kufesque decoration in mid-Byzantine churches[2], Buchthal's examination of Muslim figure types and motifs in Syro-Jacobite book painting[3], and Otto-Dorn's bold interpretation of the major upper figural band on the church of Aght'amar as an evocation of Abbasid court life[4]. Of a rather different nature is an important early article by Oleg Grabar which attempts a broader-brush survey of this topic; its centre of gravity, however, is the Umayyad period[5]. An article by André Grabar devoted to the impact of Islamic art at the Macedonian court does have implications beyond the tenth to eleventh centuries on which it focuses, but is no substitute for a bird's-eye view of the entire subject. Among the wide range of connections that he cites, he focuses especially on the crown of Constantine Monomachos made between 1042 and 1050, and attributes an Islamic origin to the image of female dancers that it bears[6]. Despite a yawning gulf of misunderstanding and distrust in matters of theology that began very soon after the advent of Islam, which persisted[7], this was a period that saw turbans[8] and tiles with Islamic features become fashionable in the Byzantine capital[9], and the construction of a »Persian House« with a *muqarnas* ceiling in the palace of Manuel I in Constantinople[10]. But there has been no book-length study of this complex process. Indeed, a few tantalizing remarks made long ago *en passant* by Gervase Mathew in a booklet on Byzantine painting suggest how much still remains to be discovered about this elusive topic[11]. Happily, a recent major exhibition on Byzantium and Islam has re-focused scholarly attention on the matter, though its scope is firmly anchored in the seventh to ninth century[12], which still leaves the subsequent centuries understudied[13]. The most recent survey of this same theme in the period 843-1261, by Priscilla Soucek, offers several pointers for future research[14].

Literary evidence does little enough to clarify the matter, for the crucial details are often missing. The garden of Arab type laid out by the emperor Theophilos in the Bryas palace around 843 is a case in point[15]. No contemporary or earlier Arab garden survives in the Islamic world, but this Byzantine reference provides evidence that is especially valuable because it is unconscious – that a particular kind of garden was associated with Arab culture at this time, and that it was different enough from Byzantine gardens (and desirable enough) to be worth reproducing in a royal palace at Constantinople. It is mere speculation that the readiness to copy Islamic modes was reinforced by the presence in the capital of actual Islamic artefacts. But it is hard to avoid the conclusion, given the circumstantial evidence of the Islamic treasures that found their way to Venice in the wake of the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204[16], to which one should add the Byzantine treasures with Islamic elements[17], that the Byzantine emperors, like other European and Islamic monarchs, kept a *Kunstkammer* of exotic treasures[18]. The scale and range of such treasuries may be judged from the detailed accounts of what was looted during the sack of the Fatimid palace at Cairo in 1068[19].

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[1] Flury, Ornamente, especially 157-170, where the analytical drawings of small individual details form the basis of the argument. Kufesque inscriptions appear at least a century earlier in Byzantine manuscripts, as in a copy of the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. grec 660, f. 350, probably of the 960s (Miles, Byzantium 32 and fig. 94); cf. Grabar, Influences 124-135. Kufesque inscriptions are also common in mid-Byzantine pottery found in Athens and Corinth (Miles, Byzantium 31 f. and figs 91-93).

[2] For a detailed examination of a single case, see Grabar, Décoration 15-37; cf. Ettinghausen, Kufesque 28-32 and 43. Ettinghausen identifies the eleventh and twelfth centuries as »a critical period for the Muslim world« for this Byzantine-Islamic interface (ibidem 37).

[3] Buchthal, Painting 136-150.

[4] Otto-Dorn, Bildgut 1-69. But cf. Jones, Aght'amar 54-65, who ingeniously suggests that this iconography, while indeed copying these images of Abbasid court life, refers to the Armenian king Gagik who built the church, rather than to the Abbasid caliph. The matter remains open.

[5] Grabar, Islamic 69-88.

[6] Grabar, Succès 32-60. For the Monomachos crown, see ibidem 42-47; repr. in Grabar, Art 1, 275-280 and 3, figs 59a-b. The rest of the article covers silk, other enamels, metalwork, manuscripts and architectural decoration (ibidem 1, 265-275, 280-285 and 2, figs 57 f.; 59c-d; 60-63a). For the dancers, see also Cat. New York 1997, 210-212 no. 145 (H. Maguire). Grabar also dealt with the theme of the interface of East and West in the field of art in Grabar, Éléments 312-319 and figs CLXIV- CLXXVI (= Grabar, Art 2, 663-668 and 3, figs 158d-163b).

[7] Meyendorff, Byzantine, comes to the dispiriting conclusion (ibidem 131) that »as we look at the over-all picture of the relations between the two religious worlds, we see that essentially they remained impenetrable by each other«. Cf. the furious anti-Muslim polemic described by Kazhdan/Epstein, Change 186 f.

[8] Ibidem 181.

[9] Ettinghausen, Byzantine.

[10] For a compelling analysis of Mesarites' text on the Moukhroutas palace, see Hunt, Comnenian 41-43. Hunt's article examines at length the links between Byzantine and Islamic palaces, which extended even to the use of lattice screens, apparently of *mašrabīya* type, for example in a bishop's palace at Naupaktos and the palace and church known as the House of Botaneiates in Constantinople (ibidem 56 f.).

[11] Mathew, Painting 5; Matthew, Aesthetics 127-129.

[12] Cat. New York 2012.

[13] But see Hoffman, Pathways. For a briefer survey, see Soucek, Exchange 15 f.

[14] Soucek, Byzantium 403-411; see also ibidem 422-424 and 426-428.

[15] Keshani, Abbasid; Eyice, Palais. For a more detailed account, see Bier, Bryas; cf. Littlewood, Gardens 19. For the wider context, see Maguire, Court.

Then there are those grey areas where it is too simplistic to speak either of the Byzantine impact on Islam or the reverse process. What of that pan-Mediterranean *koinē* of certain luxury arts which made little of distance or religion or politics[20]? Its power can be traced in figured silks with fabulous beasts[21], or the group of ivory oliphants[22], or even the Hedwig glasses[23]. It is no accident that such objects have long eluded the attempts of scholars to pin them down to a specific time and provenance. Sometimes the mixture of ideas and themes is so promiscuous that it is virtually impossible to disentangle their origins, as in the case of the Innsbruck enamelled plate in the name of a twelfth-century Artuqid prince[24]. What of the secular mosaics in the palaces of Roger II and William II in Palermo[25]? The craftsmen may well have been Greek, but could one say the same of some of the motifs that they used? When teams of craftsmen of different origins and even cultures worked together on the same project, as for example on the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, more might be expected than the mere juxtaposition of different styles[26]. What of the well-nigh simultaneous appearance of sgraffiato wares in Byzantium, Georgia, Anatolia and Iran[27]? Or of other ideas which the Muslims might have inherited directly from the Roman and Early Christian culture which surrounded them, rather than borrowing them from contemporary Byzantine sources? The concept of automata might be one such case[28]; that of the centralized commemorative building might be another[29], and indeed only one of many in the field of architecture.

It will be seen that, with the exception of the last example, the objects just cited are all secular in character, and are thus of secondary importance in Byzantine art. This suggests unmistakably that the Byzantine and the various Islamic courts had a great deal in common, and that interchange in this secular sphere was natural. It was in religious art that each culture set up barriers. Such images were loaded. They triggered Pavlovian reactions in adherents of the opposing faith. Moreover, the fact that certain luxury goods, and perhaps on occasion even those who made them – as at Trebizond[30] and Cordova[31] – travelled freely in both directions across the cultural divide was no substitute for becoming familiar in daily life with the other culture and its ways. Most of the Byzantine frontier with the Islamic world was maritime and thus excluded such contact[32]. And with minor exceptions, of which Digenes Akritas is a famous example[33] and some of the Cappadocian rock frescoes[34] or Armenian book painting[35] are less familiar ones, such regular contacts along the land frontier – which must have occurred, since it is a feature of most pre-modern frontier societies – left little trace in the visual arts. Moreover, the actual mechanics of how ideas travelled are often obscure. Nevertheless, one must reckon with the presence of Muslim craftsmen, even teams of them, working in Byzantine territory[36]. The presence of Kufic, as distinct from Kufesque, inscriptions in Byzantine territory is a pointer in that direction[37].

For all that it is indeed possible industriously to root out the various scraps and orts of Islamic elements in Byzantine art, there is no getting round the fact that their sum total is negligible in quantity and impact alike. Yet after the rise of Islam not a single Byzantine emperor could have failed to realize what a sinister threat the Islamic empire posed to the security of his own much-reduced territories. The Byzantines must have realized, too, that the Islamic world was not just a powerful neighbour but a global empire. Their persistent and well-founded fear was that the long-term aim of the Muslims was to conquer Byzantium and to impose the Islamic faith upon its people. It does not take much imagination to work out the probable reaction to prolonged psychological pressure of this kind. The Byzantines seem to have been almost hysterically determined to keep Islamic culture and religion at bay, while also taking care not to give their bellicose neighbours grounds for aggression.

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[16] Shalem, Islam 76-78.

[17] Such as the celebrated ruby glass cup with pseudo-Kufic lettering; for a discussion of this inscription, see Cutler, Bowl 238 f.

[18] Book of Gifts 175-178, 182-184, 187, 190, 194-196, 199, 202 (Umayyad state treasuries in Kūfa and Wāsiṭ); 203 (probably Damascus); 205 *bis* (treasury of al-Wālid b. Yazid); 206 (treasuries of various Abbasid caliphs); 207 f. (a very detailed account of the contents of the treasury of Hārūn al-Rašīd); 210, 214 f., 219-221, 223 f. Cf. 208 f. for a similarly detailed account of how the vast fortune of al-Mutawakkil was spent.

[19] For a full account, see Kahle, Schätze.

[20] Bloom, Arts 42-44, 189-197; Ettinghausen / Grabar / Jenkins-Madina, Islamic 213.

[21] Perhaps the best-illustrated survey of this material is von Falke, Silks. For the Byzantine material, see Muthesius, Byzantine.

[22] Shalem, Oliphant 67-79.

[23] Allen, Hedwig; Carboni / Whitehouse, Glass 160 f.

[24] Redford, Innsbruck; Steppan, Artuqiden-Schale; Cat. New York 1997 no. 281 (P. Steppan).

[25] Meier, Königspaläste; Demus, Mosaics 180-183 and figs 113-119.

[26] Johns, Artists.

[27] For the Byzantine material, see Rice, Pottery; Sanders, Byzantine; Maguire, Ceramic 255 f., 259-271 and figs 181-192. For Georgia, see Maisuradze, Keramika; Beridze et al., Treasures; Xuskivadze, Treasures 228 f. For Iran and Anatolia, see Allan, Incised Wares.

[28] Ǧazarī, Book of Knowledge 8-11 and figs I, III-VIII, X-XXIX and XXXI; Book of Ingenious Devices 19-24 and fig. 78; Contadini / Camber / Northover, Beasts 68 f., 72 f. For the wider context, see Price, Automata; Duggan, Sculptures; Duggan, Automata, esp. 117-122; Schmidt, Automata.

[29] Écochard, Filiation 13-40, 109.

[30] Rice, Decorations 102, 119.

[31] Stern, Mosaïques.

[32] Masʿūdī tells an exciting story about how Muʿāwiya (who ruled from 661 to 680) exacted revenge on a Byzantine noble who had insulted a Muslim. He had him kidnapped and given a taste of his own medicine. The story reveals *en passant* the Byzantine taste for Islamic luxuries of all kinds: cut glass chalices, scents, jewels, splendid clothing, and a Susangird carpet with cushions and pillows (Masʿūdī, Meadows 320-324).

[33] Hunt, Comnenian, esp. 43 f. and 53-56.

[34] Rodley, Monasteries.

[35] Durnovo, Armenian; Der Nersessian / Agémian, Painting; Mathews / Wieck, Treasures.

[36] Cutler, Exchange 254 f.

[37] Kanellopoulos / Tohme, Inscription 139.

From this perspective the opaqueness of Byzantium to Islamic art is not difficult to fathom. It is the result of ingrained fear and hostility. Islamic culture would all too readily be suspect as an infection, a harbinger of political and military aggression associated with a deeply alien faith. Such thinking no doubt contributed to the inward-looking nature of mid-Byzantine and later Byzantine art, and to its obsession with the sunlit uplands of the classical past[38]. The potent nostalgia for days that were never to return, when the Mediterranean was first a Roman and then a Byzantine lake, surrounded by Christian territories controlled from Constantinople, kept the Byzantines from coming fully to terms with Islam. They fashioned a political accommodation with their Islamic neighbours but shied away from any contact closer than this. At no period of Byzantine art, and not even in any one medium, were Islamic ideas or motifs allowed to exert a consistent and crucial impact. For that reason the history of the interplay between Islamic and Byzantine art is a history of bits and pieces on the Byzantine side.

The reverse process is a very different story indeed. The Byzantine impact on Islamic art is too frequent, too varied, too disparate in time, space and even medium to encourage generalizations. Even works of art produced at the same time and in the same area may betray very different attitudes to the Byzantine models that are being imitated. One has only to compare the architecture of the Dome of the Rock with that of the bath hall at Ḫirbat al-Mafǧar to realize this: the first is a continuation in spirit and intent of a Byzantine model which itself goes back to Roman times[39], whereas the latter employs a church plan for a building dedicated to the pleasures of the flesh[40]. Similarly, one might compare the Damascus mosaics with the standing caliph coin: the first carefully removes the figures that were the *raison d'être* of the Byzantine model being copied, while the latter retains the figure, merely adding some specifically Arab sartorial colouring[41]. It might therefore be more revealing to trace the varying role of Byzantine elements within a single medium, such as mosaics or coinage, or within a single period. The latter option will be the one adopted in this paper.

The period to be investigated here is the thirteenth century, the area is Syria and Iraq, and the medium is book painting. Although this is by no means unexplored territory, it is nevertheless still somewhat under-researched so far as the Byzantine elements in these Islamic paintings are concerned[42]. In order to control the rich material available, it will be convenient to look in turn at four areas of interchange, using them to discuss how Byzantine modes and motifs are adapted to Islamic purposes, and finally to attempt to explain some of the underlying motives which governed the Islamic uses of Byzantine material. The four areas of interchange treated here (though at varying length) are the book cover; the author portrait; paired angels or genii; and the depiction of the ruler or patron. Discussion of these topics will necessarily entail references to other Byzantine elements *en passant*, such as haloes, the symbolic content of certain gestures and poses, drapery conventions, furniture and so on.

Book Cover

The first topic, then, is the book cover. This pitchforks us at once into the heart of the subject under discussion. It demonstrates very clearly how disinclined the Arabs were to accept Byzantine models at face value. To avoid doing so, they practised a simple sleight of hand, utterly transforming a familiar motif by transposing it into an unfamiliar context. For several centuries Arab books had contented themselves with dark leather covers discreetly tooled with polygonal networks or sunken central medallions and corner-pieces of vegetal or geometric design[43]. Faced with the much more showy and obviously precious book covers of Byzantium, heavy affairs made of elaborately carved ivory or of wood set with jewels and enclosed in a silver or gilt silver sheath, they must have recoiled, for apparently not a single medieval Islamic book cover of this kind is known. Yet certain Byzantine ivory book covers, including ones that were six or seven hundred years old at the time, must have set them thinking. Some of the grander specimens of early Byzantine ivory carving travelled far afield, also to the west, as evidenced by the Carolingian ivory book covers modeled on them[44], and they are of special interest in this context. They improved on the standard diptych form inherited from late antiquity, in which a single, vertically rectangular slab of ivory was carved with a depiction of the consul in majesty, with imperial figures, victories, tyches or Christ and the angels or putti above and scenes of the *sparsio*, the consul's largesse to the populace, below. These narrow slabs were used in matching pairs (**fig. 1**)[45]. But in more ambitious larger-scale ivories the artists, debarred by the nature of the elephant's tusk from working on a single

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[38] For a typical example see Cat. New York 1997, 230f. no. 153 (A. Cutler, with the key earlier bibliography).

[39] Creswell, Architecture 1/1, 101-123; Grabar, Dome of the Rock 98f.

[40] Ettinghausen, Byzantium 51-53.

[41] Miles, Gold; Bates, Numismatics; Bates, Umayyads 206; Treadwell, Mihrab 10f.; Treadwell, Reforms 369.

[42] Note particularly Ettinghausen's brief but extraordinarily illuminating remarks on this topic in the chapter entitled »Byzantine Art in Islamic Garb« in Ettinghausen, Painting 67-80. Here – as so often – he defines and then goes far to solve a problem, all in a few well-chosen words. Since then the principal work in this field has been done by Eva Hoffman. See Hoffman, Emergence, and Hoffman, Author.

[43] For typical examples, see Bosch/Carswell/Petherbridge, Bindings; Haldane, Bookbindings figs 1-7, 9f., 13-16.

[44] Such as the front cover of the Lorsch Gospels; see Schutz, Carolingians 283.

[45] Cameron, Diptychs; Gaborit-Chopin, Ivoires 42-45; Cat. New York 1979 nos 45-51 (J. C. Anderson). The fullest publication remains Delbrueck, Consulardiptychen.

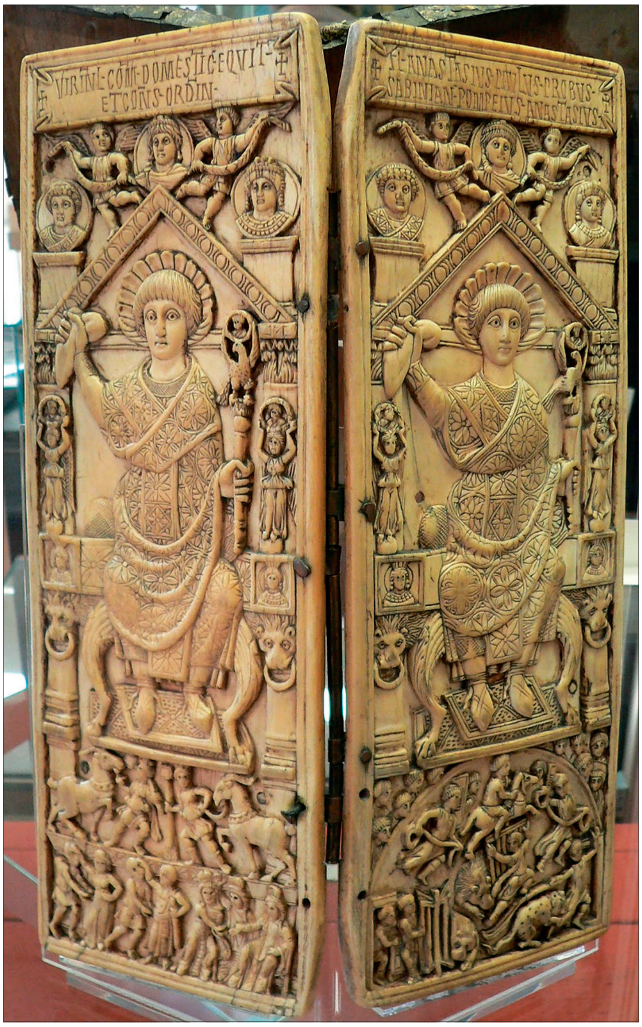

Fig. 1 Consular diptych of Flavius Anastasius Probus, 517. – Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, Inv. 55 n° 296. – (Foto Clio20, Wikimedia Commons CC 3.0).

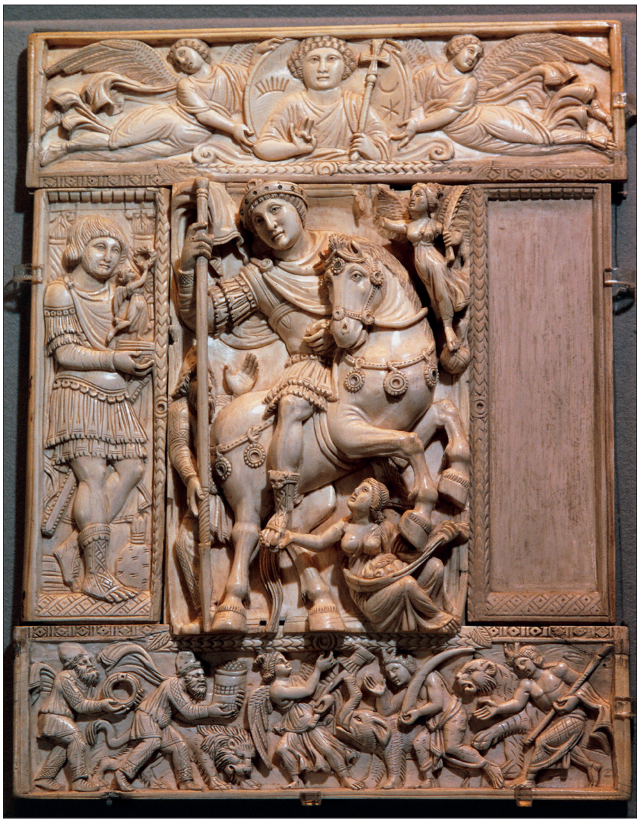

Fig. 2 Barberini polyptych, Paris, Louvre OA 9063, early sixth century. – (After Durand, Byzantine Art 56).

large slab of ivory, fitted together a succession of three or five smaller slabs to create a polyptych[46]. In a 5-piece polyptych the largest and central section would depict the consul, the emperor or Christ; the smaller vertical rectangles flanking it would carry narrative scenes in one register or two, while the frieze above would contain heavenly beings or symbols, and the predella below would illustrate further but earthly narratives (**fig. 2**). Such polyptychs, like the earlier diptychs, once their original function as up-market visiting cards had lapsed with the abolition of the consular office in 541, were pressed into service by later Byzantine artists as book covers, especially for books of religious content. This was an entirely natural development, given the fact that their interiors, coated with wax, had earlier borne incised messages – so that they had already served as envelopes, and thus in some sense as containers of the written word or book covers.

It is to the credit of the Arab painters of the thirteenth century that they recognized what their Byzantine predecessors had not, namely the potential of this format for painted frontispieces. Accordingly they transferred this schema from the outside to the inside of the book – an impressive example of lateral thinking – and used it for the flyleaf. At one stroke, therefore, they gave this time-honoured format a new lease of life. Among several Islamic examples of this practice the Vienna *Kitāb ad-Diryāq*, conventionally dated to c. 1250, is the most smoothly designed (**fig. 3**). It employs the largest and most central space, now imaginatively transformed from the primitive sixth-century schema (essentially a pair of columns supporting a pediment)[47] into a recognizably Islamic architectural façade[48], for a picture of the ruler with attendants. It fills up the flanking boxes with courtiers in two tiers, each courtier bearing an attribute which refers to his rank, and

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[46] Cat. New York 1979, 403 fig. 59.

[47] In these diptychs severe abstraction is dictated by the limited space available, but even this skeletal formula admirably fulfils the purpose of framing the figure of authority.

[48] It takes the form of a screen subdivided into large and small compartments, a popular device in thirteenth to fourteenth-century Islamic painting. See Barrucand, Représentations; Barrucand, Architecture. But this is unmistakably fantasy architecture, for the artist has depicted a pronounced horseshoe arch on the left but not on the right, and similarly the left-hand beginning of a segmental arch which does not continue to the right and therefore remains incomplete. Horseshoe arches of this kind were a Maghribi and Andalusian form unknown in Iraqi architecture at this time. The geometric ornament applied to the screen, however, is authentic enough.

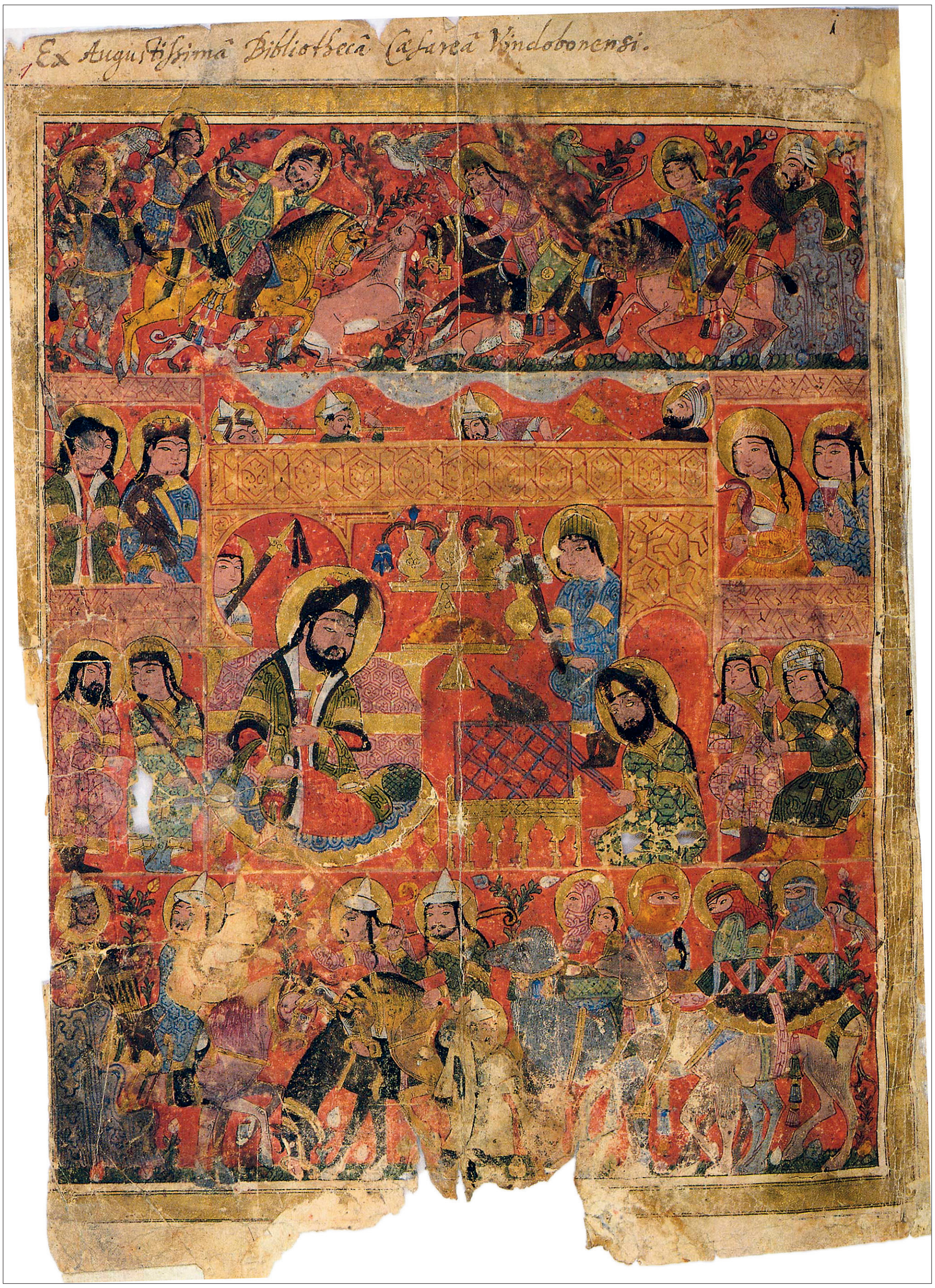
Ex Augustissimâ Bibliothecâ Caesareâ Vindobonensi.

Fig. 3 Frontispiece, *Kitāb ad-Diryāq*, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Cod. A. F. 10, fol. 1^r, c. 1250. – (After Ettinghausen, Painting 91.

reserves the long strips at top and bottom for hunting and processional scenes respectively. Such a frontispiece, though unmistakably derived from a Byzantine polyptych, is in no sense a clone of it. It is not simply a question of substituting an enthroned Muslim ruler for an enthroned Christ, Muslim courtiers for the disciples of Jesus, and so on. Instead, the artist has recast the entire ensemble along Islamic lines. It is unlikely that he invented it all from scratch, since hunting and processional scenes are known in slightly earlier Islamic metalwork and pottery, where they were an established element in the cycle of princely pleasures. Moreover, the direct borrowing of a Byzantine model for an image of crucial importance, such as this – especially when it is seen in the context of a host of other borrowings from Byzantine art in early thirteenth-century Arab book painting – provides cumulative evidence that Arab book painting was still at an early stage of its evolution at this time. It is a repetition, on a much smaller scale, of the remarkable openness to ideas and motifs taken from other cultures that characterizes Umayyad art but which had already palpably diminished under the early Abbasids.

A significantly less successful variation on the polyptych theme is to be found in one of the *Kitāb al-Aġānī* frontispieces in Cairo, datable c. 1217. This depicts a large group of women and a waterwheel (**fig. 4**). It might be argued that, in cramming the central space with seven women and half a water-wheel – the other half reaches down into the predella – the artist has managed to squander the distinctive advantages of the central panel; no single lady stands out from the

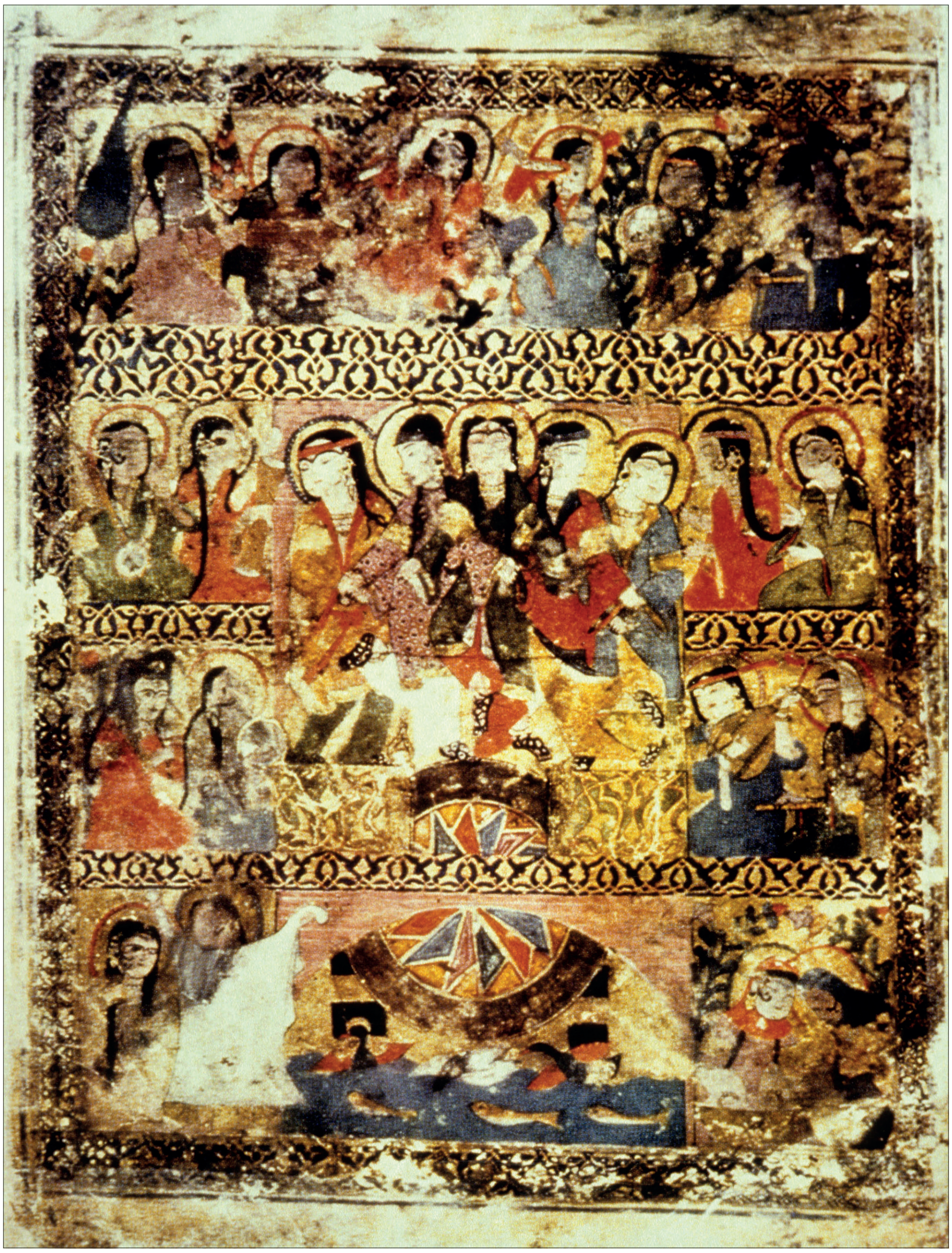

Fig. 4 Frontispiece, *Kitāb al-Aġānī*, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub Ms. Adab 579, 1216-1220. – (After Hillenbrand, Frontispiece title page).

others. Yet he has devised an arrestingly new way of linking the central and lower sections. Indeed, his decision to cram still more women into both the upper frieze and the two panels flanking the central block results in a general breaking down of the linear divisions of the page, even though they are technically still there. In yet other frontispieces of the *Aġānī* set, the lines have disappeared altogether, but their ghostly presence may nevertheless be sensed: the quintuple division of space still obtains. Indeed, the artist sedulously avoids any serious overlap of figures from one such space to another. Thus the impact of the Byzantine polyptych – both three-piece and five-piece – extended considerably further than might at first be thought. It triggered the imaginations of Muslim artists rather than dominating them.

One might argue that the new use of the polyptych form was merely a somewhat mechanical adaptation; that once the artist had had his flash of inspiration, the rest followed in relatively straightforward fashion. But the second major theme to be discussed today, the fate of the author portrait in Islamic hands, is quite another matter. Curiously enough, there is not a single example of the direct transfer of the obvious Byzantine prototype, namely the evangelist figure, but there is no reason to doubt that such east Christian images inspired Islamic author portraits. The connection is particularly clear in the Oxford Dioskorides frontispiece of 1239 (**fig. 5**)[49].

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[49] For an excellent colour plate, see Cat. New York 1997, 402.

It is equally curious that this idea made no permanent appeal to the Muslim imagination, since the author portrait dies out in Arab painting during the course of the 13th century. But in that brief period, it had a very good run for its money[50]. Nor, incidentally, did it travel to the Iranian, Indian or Turkish worlds. Hence, for example, the absence of any isolated portrait of Firdawsī as a frontispiece to illustrated *Shahnama* manuscripts. The nearest approach to this is the popular scene of the four poets in the garden at Ġaznī[51], where narrative trumps portraiture. Such an image is a long way, both in outer appearance and in spirit, from the traditional author portrait. But it was only in the Iranian world that the frontispiece was seriously developed[52].

Perhaps the ancient association between the author portrait and the depiction of the Evangelist at the beginning of a Gospel manuscript – and by the later Byzantine period such images were the commonest version of author portrait in Byzantine book painting – acted as a positive deterrent to developing this aspect of traditional book painting. Here, too, one may conclude from the alacrity with which Islamic painters jettisoned this borrowing that they only adopted it in the period before they came of age. Its presence in early thirteenth-century Islamic manuscripts is therefore a further indication that the Arab tradition of book painting was still in its infancy at this time.

Author Portrait

What form, then, does the author portrait take in these early manuscripts? It will suffice to confine the discussion to images of Dioskorides, apparently an intellectual hero of the time. The variety of types encountered speaks of a tradition in flux, or more likely in the process of formation. Moreover, none of the images is really close to a specific Byzantine source, except possibly the Oxford Dioskorides of 1239, which slightly reworks the standing Byzantine evangelist figure in that he faces left, not right, is in profile rather than three-quarter view and holds a closed rather than open book. In most of these manuscripts, elements of Byzantine origin have been borrowed, but the effect of their modification by Islamic detail, and above all the impact of unexpected innovations, results in an image that is essentially Islamic even though it is executed in a Byzantine manner.

In the double frontispiece to a copy of the Arabic translation of the *De Materia Medica* of Dioskorides in the Topkapı Saray Library in Istanbul (**fig. 6**), that image so penetratingly analysed by Ettinghausen[53], the chair, the physician's robe, the sandals, the faces and hands, and the gold background are all authentically Byzantine. So, in a more general sense,

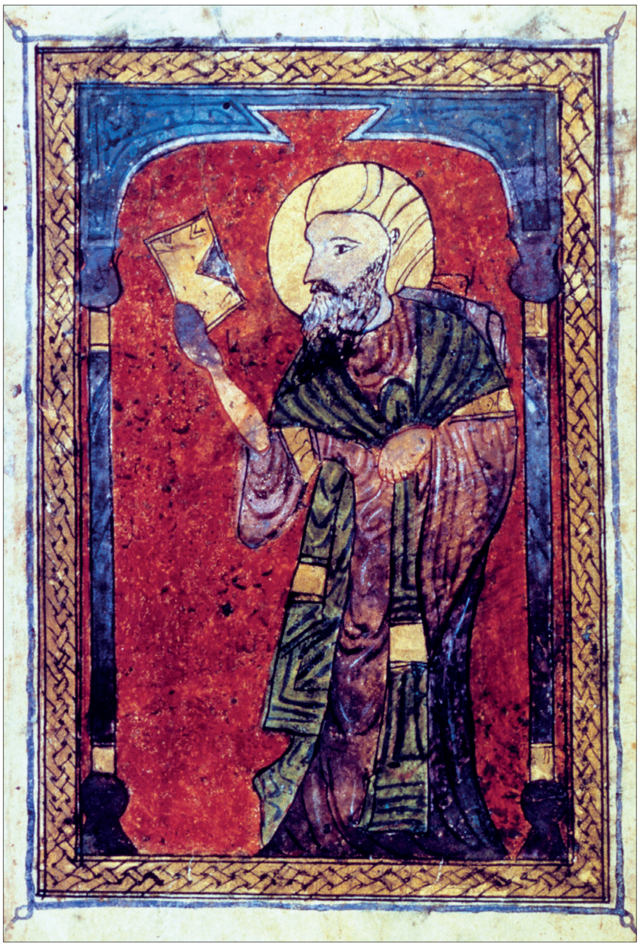

Fig. 5 Frontispiece, *De Materia Medica*, Oxford, Bodleian Library Ms. Arab. D. 138, fol. 2ᵛ, 1240. – (After Cat. New York 1997, 402).

is the notion of a single dominant figure silhouetted against a plain background. On the other hand, the turban, the shouldered segmental arch and the redundant halo are both emphatically Islamic in flavour. But what really removes the image definitively from the Byzantine sphere is the fact that the author is not doing what a classical or Byzantine author would be doing. He is not bent over a desk writing busily; nor does he even have a book or roll in his hand. As for a female personification to inspire him, perish the thought. Instead, the world of learning evoked here is a distinctively Islamic one, and is corporate rather than individual. Is he dictating to the students? Or – more likely – is he beckoning them to come to him so that he can give them an *iǧāza* validating the accuracy with which they have transcribed the text which he has dictated to them, and which is presumably contained in the book that each of them holds[54]?

Dioskorides, that same intellectual giant of antiquity, who is presented in quite different incarnations in the two images previously discussed, turns up in the frontispieces of three

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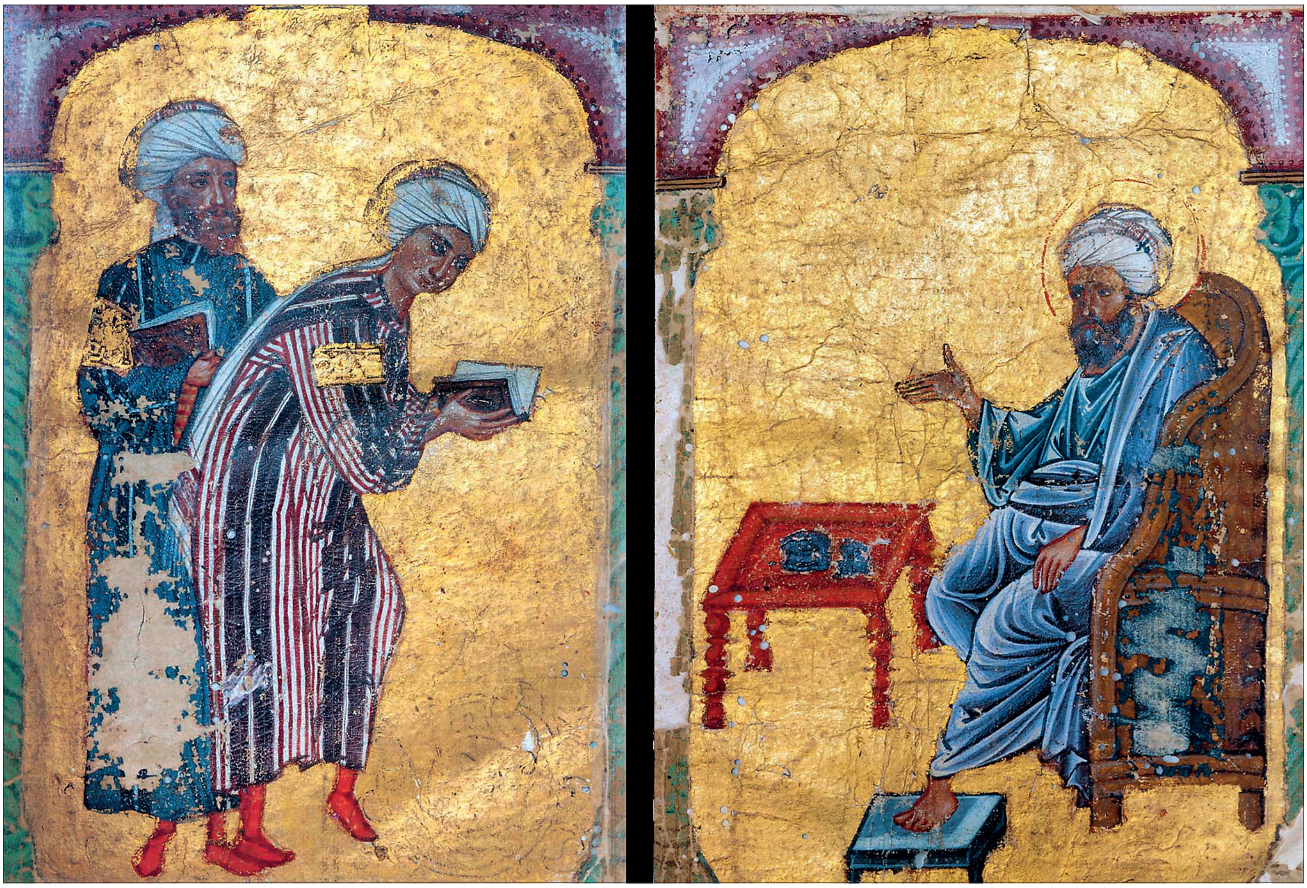
[50] See Hillenbrand, Author.

[51] e.g. Brend, Shahnamah 50-53.

[52] See Simpson, Frontispieces, for the early stages of this development.

[53] Ettinghausen, Painting 67-70.

[54] For further discussion of this image, see Hoffman, Emergence 255, 261-276 (an admirably full account); Hoffman, Author 8f. and 12; Cat. New York 1997, 429-433 no. 288 (L. Komaroff, with further bibliography); and Hillenbrand, Classical 52f.



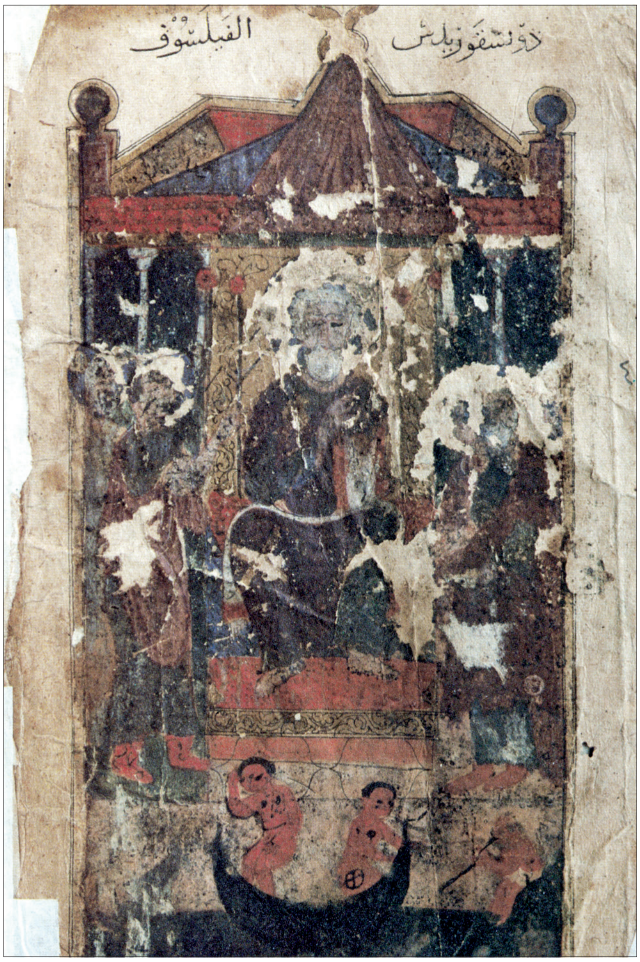


Fig. 6 Frontispiece, *De Materia Medica*, Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi. Kütüphanesi Ahmet III 2127, fol. 1^v-2^r, 1229. – (After Ettinghausen, Painting 68 f.).

Fig. 7 Frontispiece, *De Materia Medica*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Ayasofya 3704, fol. 1^v, 13th century. – (After Brandenburg, Islamic fig. 33).

other surviving Arab manuscript versions of his great text produced in the thirteenth century, and each time he appears in yet more varied guise. In one case, a manuscript in the Ayasofya library in Istanbul (**fig. 7**), his huge size dwarfs the secondary figures in the painting, and he is not seated on a mere chair, but placed frontally on a throne in *contrapposto* pose, staring us down imperiously and displaying his book within an impressive architectural backdrop and under a canopy. A pair of students flanks him like bodyguards; they are set appreciably lower than he is. The damaged lower section suggests that there was a Nilotic scene below. The resemblance to a late classical consular diptych is striking. Indeed, he is more monarch than author, and is approaching heroisation.

In a somewhat similar image of rather more muted tone in Bologna (**fig. 8**), unfortunately damaged by iconoclasts, the setting is altogether more abstract and acquires an Islamic flavour by virtue of its frame of interlaced octagonal and hexagonal stars. But the Bologna image tells essentially the same story as the Ayasofya library manuscript just discussed, with Dioskorides himself, again identified by the inscription above, again placed centrally in a dominating frontal pose and now seated on a golden throne with an extravagantly

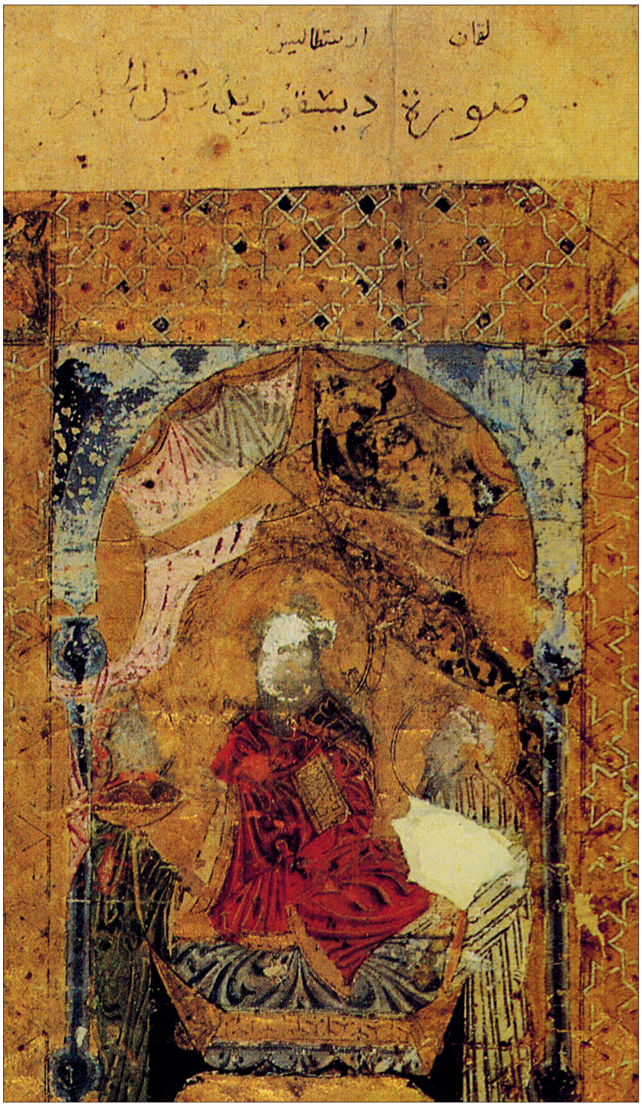


Fig. 8 Frontispiece, *De Materia Medica*, Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria Cod. arab. 2954, fol. 141ʳ, 1244. – (After Brandenburg, Islamic fig. 90).

flounced grey bolster, again in an imposing architectural setting. He is set well above the standing robed figures (Luqman and Aristotle) turning towards him from either side and thus leading the viewer's gaze towards him. He is richly dressed in a vermilion robe hemmed in gold and holds a large book with a decorative gilded binding. A huge halo outlines his head and he is further framed by an arch from whose apex flutter swathes of drapery. Once again, then, the setting is full of pomp and circumstance and presents the author as a figure of majesty – intellectual authority personified. This is not some wandering scholar; clearly it pays to be an academic, in status as well as in cash. He is placed well back, at a respectful distance, with other great intellectuals presented as if they were deferential research assistants on either side ready to do his slightest bidding.

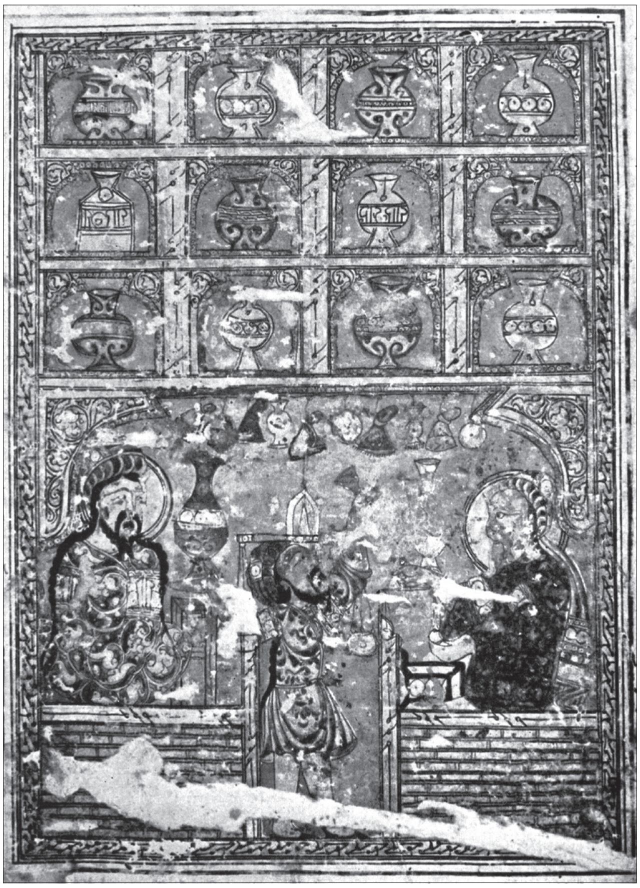


Fig. 9 Frontispiece, *De Materia Medica*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Ayasofya 3703, fol. 2ʳ, 1224. – (Nach Grube, Materialien 171 fig. 1).

The fifth image (**fig. 9**), a frontispiece and so not lightly to be dismissed as a mere genre scene, takes a totally new direction, although it lacks the identifying inscription of the previous two. It appears to demote Dioskorides by showing him looking after his shop, serving a customer and helped by an assistant who stands in the middle of the picture, his lowly status underlined by his very short tunic. The image serves as a reminder of the business aspects of pharmacology. The setting (within an ornamental frame which of course somewhat distances it from reality) is a working pharmacy shown in section, with jars, flagons and alborellos neatly stacked on three shelves. Assorted bottles hang below[55]. Dioskorides himself, if indeed it is he, is shown in profile weighing a substance while his customer looks on. His turban has a fashionably long tail; both he and his customer (but not the assistant) are shown with haloes, and the schematic setting, redolent of so many contemporary *Maqāmāt* images, features the same shouldered arch of Islamic type as the Oxford and Topkapı Saray frontispieces.

Altogether, then, these five images, four of them frontispieces, are notable above all for their variety. They take the frankly tired Byzantine iconography of the author portrait

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[55] Grube, Materialien 173 states that the two figures shown seated on each side are customers, but this cannot be the case since the one on our right is using a pair of scales. See the reconstructed coloured drawing of this image by A. Süheyl Ünver in Brandenburg, Islamic 115 fig. 43.

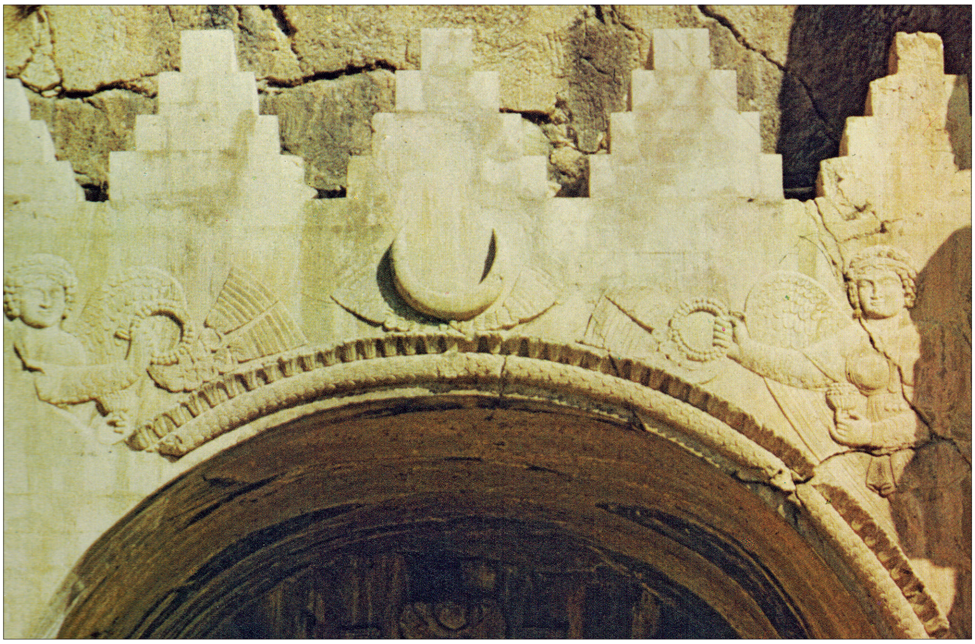

Fig. 10 Angels, Ṭāq-i Bustān, late 7th century. – (Pope/Ackerman, Survey fig. 159B).

into totally new and unexpected directions; and they were all produced, it seems, at more or less the same time. It is in sum a striking testament to the sheer vitality and energy of Arab painting at this period.

Paired Angels

And so to the third topic for discussion here. What of the angels found flanking the ruler's head in thirteenth-century Arab frontispieces? At first sight they are thoroughly familiar – they are the lineal descendants of the winged victories in the spandrels of many a Roman triumphal arch, and of their christianised successors flanking the apses of Byzantine churches. A collateral branch to the east must also be taken into account. This produced the implacable granite-jawed matrons of Ṭāq-i Bustān (**fig. 10**), from whom all vestiges of Hellenic grace have been relentlessly eradicated[56]. The accessibility and legendary prestige of that site, however, assured its images a certain popularity from one generation to the next. Closer examination of the paired angels in thirteenth-century Arab painting, however, establishes beyond reasonable doubt that their source was not in monumental art, whether Roman, Byzantine or Sasanian (for there, such victories or angels flank only an empty, if honorific, space), and not even in Byzantine book painting, where their role tends to be narrative, but rather in mid-Byzantine ivories and, even further back, in the consular diptychs – later often re-used as book covers, which gave them a new lease of life – whose influence has already been demonstrated in the compartmentalized layout of the Vienna *Kitāb ad-Diryāq* frontispiece. Only in the ivory panels and diptychs do these winged figures have a direct association with a figure of power. Thus their presence in Islamic painted frontispieces is a relatively direct calque of the late antique model, probably mediated through mid-Byzantine ivories. As is so frequently the case in Umayyad art, then, the model that is chosen for imitation may indeed reflect contemporary art, but through the prism of much older models – unless, indeed, the artist has gone directly to those models even though they are already many centuries old.

This decision to go beyond the obvious option of copying what is readily at hand and to take account of a much more ancient model naturally involved the Islamic painter in rather more radical adjustments than would have been required had he chosen a contemporary Byzantine source. Figural style had of course altered considerably since the sixth century, so that faces, bodies and draperies all had to be re-interpreted from scratch. The end product has little enough in common with Byzantium in the matter of style. Yet it is the compositional and iconographic changes that are really significant, since it is these that transform the early Byzantine model and lend it an Islamic colouring. It will be convenient to deal with each of these changes in turn.

First, the angels in early Byzantine diptychs occupy a well-defined and strictly segregated space at the top of the panel (**fig. 2**). This space was closed off at the bottom by a bar that divided it from the panel below. This physical separation is in accordance with their role as heavenly beings. Probably the background against which they were placed was painted blue in acknowledgement of that fact. Since the predella of many consular diptychs was taken up by servants, often occupied in pouring out the consul's money in front of the waiting populace, the layout bespoke a clearly defined hierarchy, with the consul sandwiched, as it were, between higher and lower beings (**fig. 1**). In none of the Arab thirteenth-century frontispieces is this divide maintained with comparable emphasis. The angels remain at the top of the painting, but for the most part they occupy the same space as the other figures, without devices such as ground lines or different colours to set them apart from the rest of the figures. Thus in some sense heaven has come down to earth. The Paris *Maqāmāt* of 1237[57] is the exception that proves the rule; here the angels are set against a red ground while the principal figures below stand out against a blue ground, and strongly profiled arches drive home this sense of separation. In many major frontispieces of the time, however, the norm is for the angels to be integrated into the main body of the painting, not sundered from it; and this is a momentous change.

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[56] Herzfeld, Tor 72-75 and figs XXXIII, XXXVI and XXXVII; Fukai/Horiuchi, Taq-i Bustan I and II.

The significance of this change is explained by another and even more important reworking of the Byzantine model. In many consular diptychs the whole *raison d'être* of the angels was to flank a bust of Christ within a medallion, his face frontal, his hand raised in blessing. His presence above the rest of the panel validated the office and activities of the emperor or enthroned consul below. In the Muslim frontispiece there was, of course, no question of depicting Christ. In order to fill the iconographic vacuum thus created, the Muslim painter quietly dropped the explicit religious element, simply removing the all-important barrier between the angels and the ruler figure and bringing them together so that the angels unmistakably honoured him. Accordingly, just as their relative positions within the composition had shifted, so too did the significance of the image as a whole. It lost the sanctity conferred by the presence of Christ, and interestingly enough the Muslim painters did not try to replace the figure of Christ by the Islamic equivalent, namely a religious inscription. Thus they diminished the intensity of the image to an appreciable degree and made it more obviously secular. The lesser sanctity associated with the angels themselves was now transferred to the ruler. The Islamic ruler in these frontispieces is therefore depicted as a more imposing and numinous figure than the consul ever was. This would of course have been entirely appropriate had he been a caliph, whose office combined secular and religious authority; but it is doubtful whether a single one of the Arab frontispieces of the thirteenth century depicts a caliph. For instance, the patron of the *Kitāb al-Aġānī* frontispieces, in which angels loom large (**fig. 11**), was an atabeg and thus held a theoretically subordinate office; flanking angels were scarcely appropriate for him. At all events, by arrogating the angels to himself the Islamic ruler was helping to create a symbolic icon of power. This formula, in suitably reduced guise, even made its way onto roughly contemporary Islamic coinage in the area, for example the coins of Mawdūd b. Zangī, Sayf ad-Dīn Ġāzī II and Nāṣir ad-Dīn Maḥmūd, where the ruler's bust is flanked by angels[58].

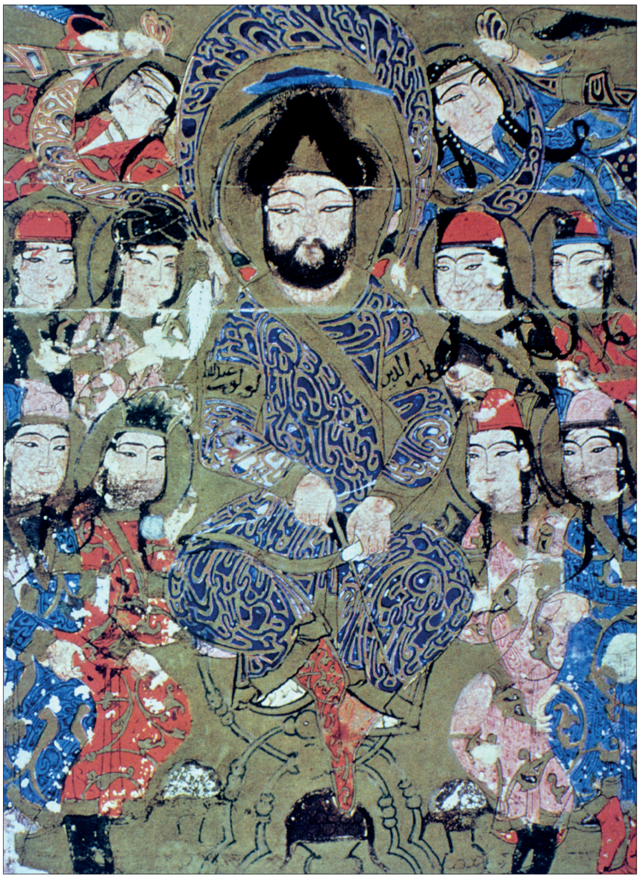

Fig. 11 Frontispiece, *Kitāb al-Aġānī*, Istanbul, Millet Kütüphanesi Feyzullah Efendi 1566, fol. 1^{r}, 1216-1220. – (After Ettinghausen, Painting 65).

A third diagnostic change concerns what the angels are doing. On Roman triumphal arches[59], on Byzantine diptychs and at Ṭāq-i Bustān (**fig. 10**) the victories or angels present a wreath – military triumph in the Roman and probably also Sasanian context, spiritual victory in a Christian one. In the Arab frontispieces under discussion – with the usual exception of the 1237 *Maqāmāt* – the angels carry a canopy between them which they hold in a parabola over the ruler's head. This is yet another bold conflation of disparate ideas. Angels carrying drapery positioned above the head of the key figure in a composition occur on mid-Byzantine ivories[60], and angels to right and left in the upper register were a standard element in mid-Byzantine art, especially in ivories[61]. Drapery billowing outwards to form an arch over a figure was already a popular device in Roman art – witness its use in floor mosa-

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[57] For a colour illustration see Hillenbrand, Hariri figs 1a-b.

[58] Spengler/Sayles, Turkoman 4, 7-9, 31, 156.

[59] Kähler, Triumphbogen. See also Kleiner, Study.

[60] Cat. New York 1997, fig. opposite 113 and nos 91, 95, 101, 354.

[61] Cat. New York 1997 nos. 30, 37, 40, 72 f., 80, 82, 87, 92, 96 f., 105, 151, 245, 304, 323, 326, 329 and opposite 186. Cf. also the theme of angels in the upper register of a composition holding a medallion enclosing a figure of majesty, placed centrally (Cat. New York 1997 nos 62. 98).

[62] For a Roman version of this theme, see Dunbabin, Mosaics 98 fig. 97.

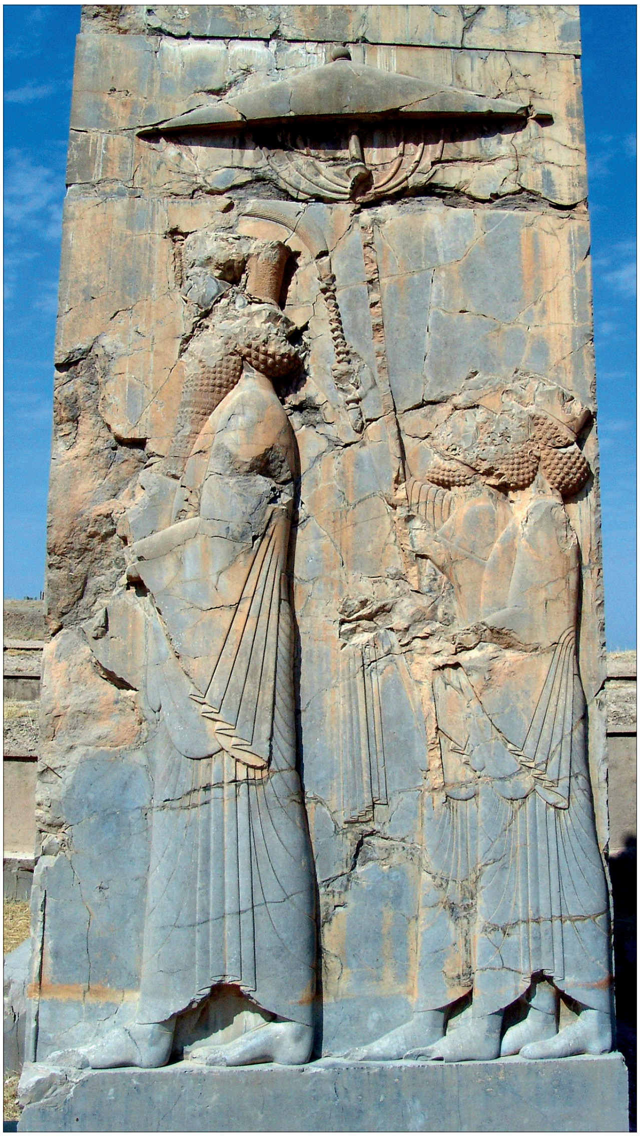

Fig. 12 Ruler with *čatr*, Persepolis, Palace of Xerxes, 5th century BC. – (After Curtis/Tallis, Empire 36 fig. 20).

ics to frame Europa as she reclines on the bull's back[62] – and thence made its way into the Byzantine sphere[63]. Sometimes it had precise iconographic significance – for example, when it frames the personification of Night[64] – but at other times it seems to be no more than a piece of redundant stylized rhetoric, as in the scene of the Virgin Mary's First Seven Steps on a fourteenth-century mosaic in the Kariye Camii in Constantinople[65].

As depicted in these Arab frontispieces, however, this feature irresistibly recalls a halo, accentuating in its outline the actual halo around the ruler's head. Nor is this the only intensification of meaning added by the Arab painter, for the fact that this sumptuously patterned cloth is held by two angels brings to mind the canopy or *čatr* which for millennia had been a royal attribute in the Near East[66]. It signified at one level merely the comfort of shade in a hot climate; but at a deeper level it was one of the prerogatives of kingship and expressed the legitimacy of the ruler thus shaded. Usually it took the form of a parasol held by an attendant, as in Achaemenid Iran (**fig. 12**)[67]; but here its significance is deepened by the fact that angels carry it, and thus by implication confer heavenly, that is divine, legitimacy on the ruler. In the case of the Paris *Kitāb ad-Diryāq* frontispiece of 1199, where they are present in fourfold symmetry (**fig. 13**)[68], one may perhaps recognize a talismanic intent, with protection offered at all four corners and – to make assurance doubly sure – in a double frontispiece of identical design[69]. Could such a figure perhaps be intended to represent a genie – the Arabic *ǧinn* – in such images[70]?

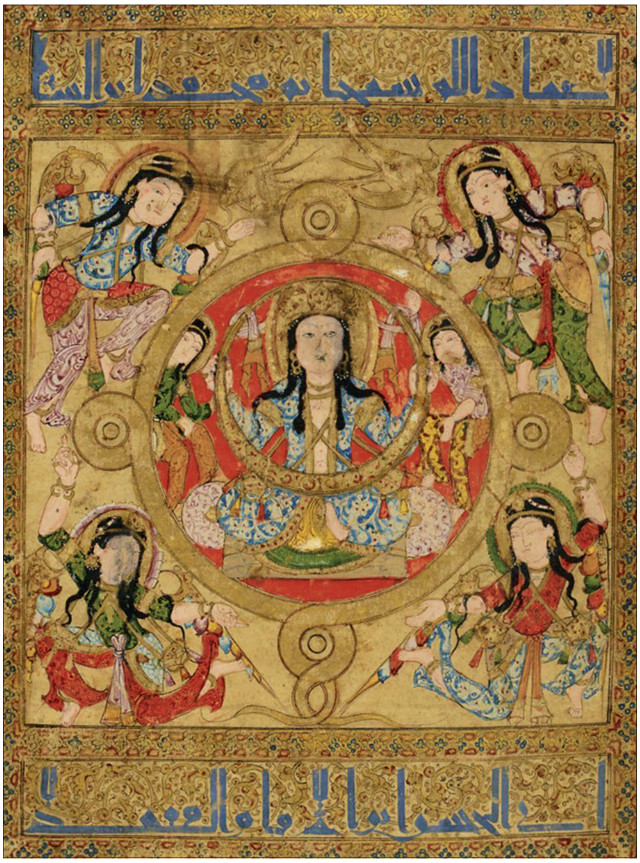

Fig. 13 *Kitāb ad-Diryāq*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. arabe 2964, 1199. – (After Grube, World fig. 27).

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[63] Notably on the lid of the tenth-century Veroli casket (Beckwith, Veroli 1-4, 6 fig. 5).

[64] This occurs twice in the Paris Psalter, probably produced in the mid-tenth century in Constantinople; for good colour plates, see Grabar, Painting 169 (Crossing of the Red Sea); Rice, Byzantium 23 (the Prayer of Isaiah).

[65] Underwood, Kariye 1,68 f. and 2, fig. 105.

[66] Sims, Garrett 263; L'Orange, Studies 134-138.

[67] Curtis/Tallis, Empire 36 fig. 20.

[68] Melikian-Chirvani, Matériaux 14, suggests that this image has a Shi'ite and Sufi flavour and that the four figures represent the archangels Mīḫāʾīl, Ǧabrāʾīl, Isrāfīl and ʿAzrāʾīl.

[69] Farès, Thériaque figs III-IV.

[70] Chabbi, Jinn; Chelhod, Structures 67-92 (on *ǧinns*, demons, and angels); Chabbi, Seigneur 185-232; Fahd, Anges 155-213.

In each of these three significant respects, then – their integration into the whole composition, their use as adjuncts of the ruler and their function as bearers of the royal canopy – these paired angels play a role significantly different from that allotted to them in Byzantine art. In all three respects it could be maintained that the image is enriched. The result is far removed from simple copying.

At the same time, some of the traditional associations of angels in Byzantine art have been lost – for example as warriors, as bodyguards, as bearers of a specific divine message. It might be thought, too, that in these Arab paintings they have become unduly trivialized in size and that their aura of sanctity and other-worldliness – expressed in Byzantine art by colouring their faces differently from those of earthly beings[71] – has diminished. They have become thoroughly Islamised in their faces, their stocky bodies, their clothing (once again the Paris 1237 *Maqāmāt* is an exception); in these respects they follow the convention of moon-faced beauty which dominated the contemporary Iranian world. They are now firmly subordinated to the ruler, essentially just airborne courtiers. The fact that they can fly does not quite succeed in making them other-worldly; they are as much a part of the earthly action as the personifications in classical and Byzantine art, and could indeed in some sense be viewed as their descendants.

One last »angelic« innovation introduced by the Arab painters remains to be noted. The sexlessness that characterized the Byzantine angel struck no answering chord among the Arabs. The angels in thirteenth-century frontispieces are for the most part female (except in the 1237 *Maqāmāt*), and often ostentatiously so, rejoicing in diaphanous pantaloons, painted fingernails and toenails, beauty spots galore, multiple bracelets, necklaces, diadems, pearl-incrusted plaits and even bare arms and décolletés (**fig. 13**)[72]. Such whole-hearted devotion to the arts of feminine adornment emphasizes the worldly luxury of the court rather than the spiritual dimension of monarchy, and clinches the essentially secular nature of these icons of kingship. The atmosphere created by such pictures has little in common with the refined, austere spirituality that pervades so much Byzantine book painting.

It remains to determine how these angels, usually paired though they also occur in threes or fours, vary from one manuscript to the next. They are by no means uniform. Their position can be asymmetrical, as in some of the *Aġānī* frontispieces. The colour of their clothing varies. Sometimes their faces are turned to the ruler in three-quarter view, sometimes they face each other in strict profile, and on yet other occasions they look outwards, their faces turned away from the ruler. Quite different from all of these are the angels in the 1237 *Maqāmāt*. They are by far the smallest figures in each scene, and their clothing is that of slaves or prisoners – bare torso with a short fringed skirt and anklets. This seems to be a solecism, and perhaps the same could be said for their presence flanking not just the ruler portrait but also that of the author. They present no gifts and seem devoid of defining attributes, but instead reproduce a gesture familiar from early Christian art, each with one arm outstretched and the other pointing to the ground as if they were holding a huge roundel. They are all in strict profile.

These numerous differences suggest that no set iconography had been developed for such figures, and indeed, as soon as frontispieces ceased to be merely symbolic icons of power, and began to take on genre or anecdotal detail, they vanished altogether. Probably one of their last appearances is in a detached double frontispiece of awesome scale mounted in one of the Topkapı Saray albums and datable to c. 1300 (**fig. 14a**), where so many courtiers have muscled in on the scene that the angels have been elbowed into a subordinate position on the upper periphery of the picture. Out of sight, out of mind.

Royal Portrait

Finally, what of the fourth theme for discussion, the royal portrait? It was here that the most radical departure from Byzantine models occurred. Only the most basic elements of the Byzantine original were retained: its presence at the beginning of the book, as a mark of ownership, and the concentrated focus on the figure of the ruler. Several types of royal portrait are to be found in the frontispieces of Byzantine books, and apparently not one of them recommended itself to Islamic taste. Examples are the standing frontal ruler, dressed in the full panoply of office, and flanked by saints or angels[73]; the warrior monarch in full armour, similarly attended[74]; full-length double portraits of the ruler and his consort[75], or of the ruler as emperor and monk[76] – with the figures in all four cases depicted frontally and standing, with a gold background and thus no context whatever; or of the emperor(s) and Christ[77]; the dignitary sitting in a chair and

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[71] Grabar, Painting 179.

[72] As in the *Kitāb ad-Diryāq* of 1199. For a conveniently accessible colour plate, see Grube, World fig. 27. For the deeper resonances of this image, see Azarpay/Kilmer, Dragon; Kerner, Art 207-222.

[73] e. g. Nikephoros III Botaneiates in the frontispiece to the Sermons of St John Chrysostom, datable between 1078 and 1081 (colour plate in Grabar, Painting 179).

[74] Such as Basil II; here the angels, flying above him and facing each other, invest him with spear and crown respectively, while his defeated enemies prostrate themselves in a cowed huddle in the predella (colour plate in Rice, Byzantium 27).

[75] Such as the portrait of Constantine Komnenos and Euphrosyne Dukaina Palaiologina of c. 1400 (colour plate in Rice, Byzantium 79) or of Michael VII Doukas and Mary of Alania, c. 1071-81 (Cat. New York 1997, 182 [colour]). Nevertheless, there may be a faint echo of the Byzantine double portrait, with its underlying idea of showing the ruler in two quite distinct capacities, in the many double frontispieces in later Islamic painting that depict the ruler enthroned in majesty on one side and a totally different scene on the other, such as the arrival of an embassy or the ruler hunting.

[76] Such as the emperor John VI Kantakouzenos, an image which accompanies the book of his homilies, datable between 1347 and 1354 (Grabar, Painting 184).

[77] Cat. London 2008, 118 no. 59 (colour) and 395: Christ blesses John II Komnenos and his son Alexios. The theme recurs on several ivories (Cat. London 2008 nos 68 [Constantine VII] and 70 [Otto II and his consort Theophanou]).

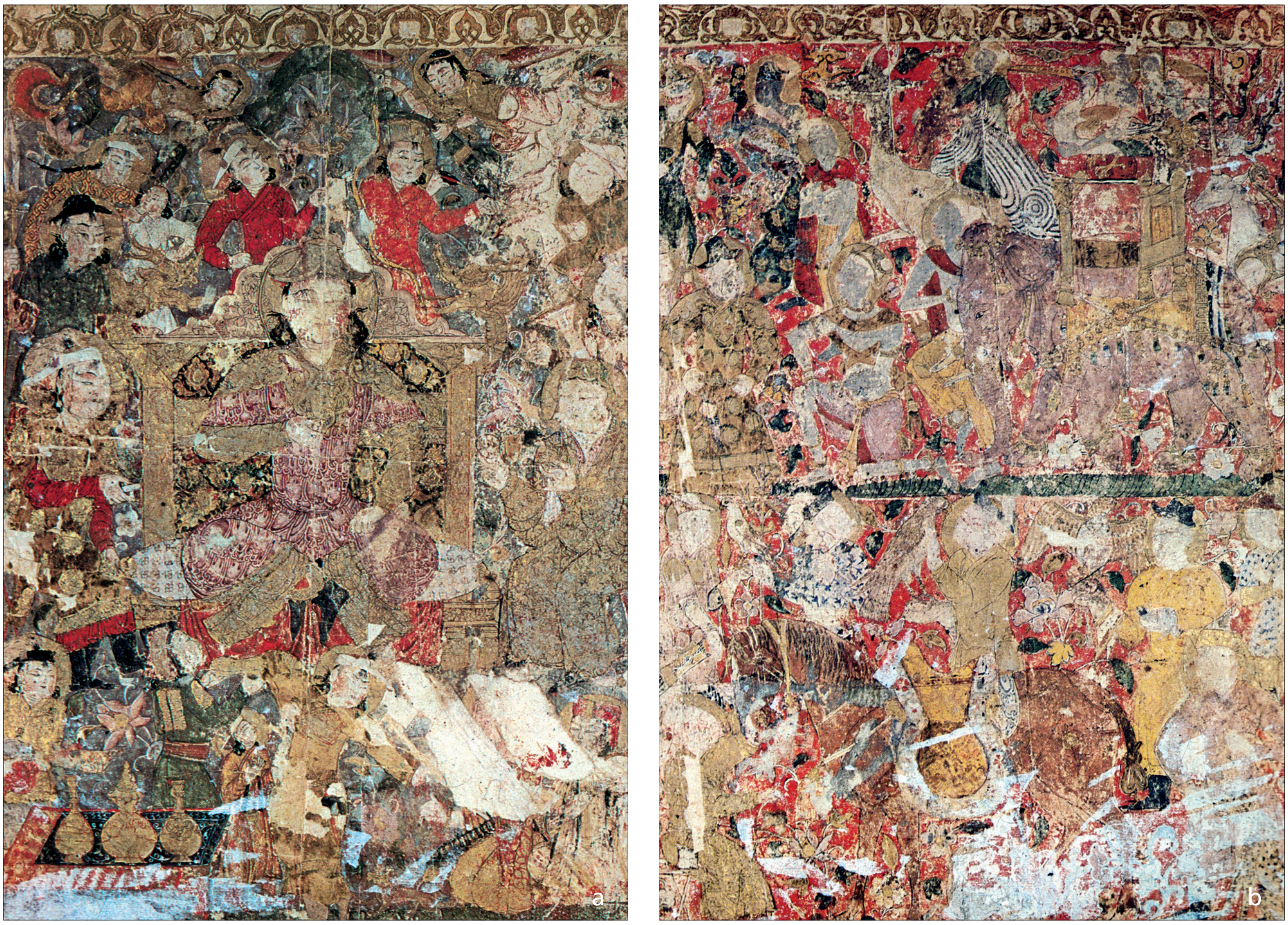

Fig. 14 Frontispiece, Album, Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Hazine 2152, fol. 60ᵛ-61ʳ, c. 1300. – (After Ipşiroğlu, Bild figs 23-24).

»caught« just as he turns towards the viewer[78]; and the emperor enthroned presiding over a synod[79].

In toto these portraits provided a rich range of visual references, and it would be easy enough to cite a host of further variants. It seems fair to assume, given the incontrovertible evidence of strongly marked Byzantine elements in many different guises throughout thirteenth-century Arab painting, that the many Byzantine manuscripts seen by the painters who produced the frontispieces of Arab manuscripts did include examples of such portraits and perhaps of still other types that have vanished without a trace. None of them, it seems, corresponded to the Islamic concept of a ruler portrait, and this is a quite remarkable finding. Perhaps the saints, clergy and angels were too quintessentially Christian to be taken seriously as a possible model. And indeed, when studied as a group, these Byzantine royal portraits have a pronounced religious flavour which could not fail to repel Muslim taste. The presence of the emperor's consort, depicted moreover in terms of full visual equality, was scarcely less objectionable. Only in the fourteenth century, and under Mongol influence, was this innovation introduced[80]. Thus the principal legacy of such a picture to a Muslim artist was the basic idea of a royal portrait at the beginning of a book. The spiritual and for that matter the intellectual dimension of his model held little appeal for him.

If none of these models would suit, where was the Islamic painter to look for inspiration? It seems that once again he turned for help to the faithful consular diptychs, now fully launched in their rich afterlife as the book-covers of Christian manuscripts, and then set about enriching that already rich model. The changes that he introduced betray a totally different way of seeing. Gone, of course, are the personifications which so frequently flank the figure of authority; gone too, as noted above, the bust of Christ and the reference to the consul's generosity, and the sense that a particular instant has been captured, namely the moment when the consul opens the games, is also lost. Instead, the artists charged with illustrating these Islamic manuscripts chose one of two solutions: either a formal icon of kingship, divorced from space and time; or the ruler presented in the context of a

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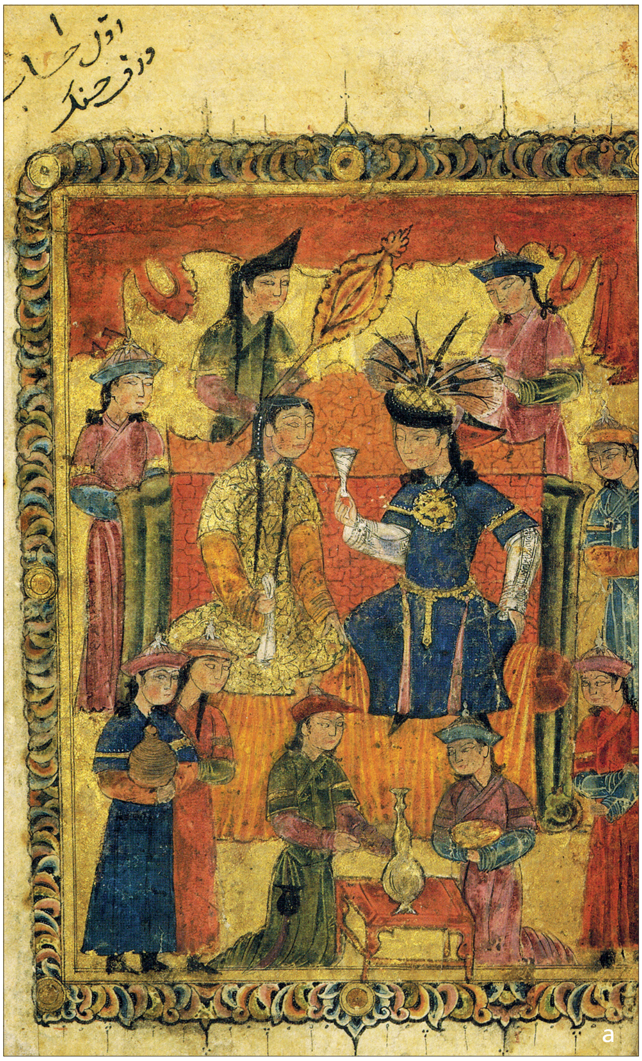
[78] Such as the portrait of the High Admiral Alexios Apokaukos of c. 1342 (colour plate in Rice, Byzantium 67).

[79] Nichol, Reluctant, colour image on cover.

[80] Swietochowski / Carboni, Poetry 12 f., 24.



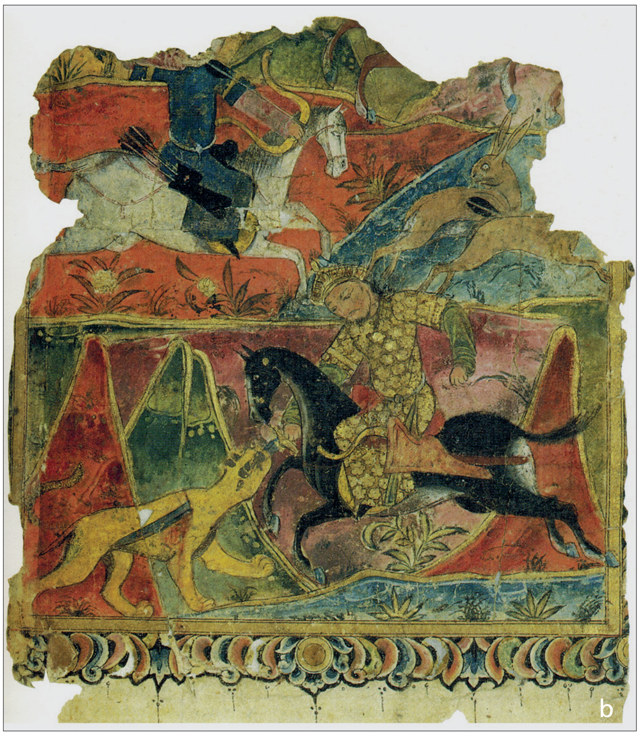


Fig. 15 Frontispiece, *Mu'nis al-ahrār*, Kuwait, Dar al Athar al-Islamiyya LNS 9 MS, fol. 1^{v}-2^{r}, 1341. – (After Swietochowski/Carboni, Poetry 24f.).

specific activity or, more generally, accompanied by a set of references to his lifestyle.

The first type is well illustrated by a well-known *Aġānī* frontispiece in Istanbul (**fig. 11**)[81], which projects the authentic Byzantine flavour of cold, remote majesty, but does so with unmistakably Islamic detailing. It could be described as a fusion of the consular dipych and a later Byzantine royal frontispiece. The Islamic ruler is seated and his pages crowd around him on both sides, banked in pairs two feet deep. A gold background removes the scene from the everyday world; but since eleven figures are crammed into the available space, there is no room for that gold background to assert an otherworldly atmosphere, as it so often does in Byzantine art. The relative proportions of the figures also exceed Byzantine norms by a substantial margin; the ruler, though seated, towers above his pages. Like them[82], his face – the only bearded one – has a Far Eastern cast, corresponding to the contemporary Persian ideal[83]. An Islamic touch is provided by the *ṭirāz* bands that identify him as Badr ad-Dīn Luʾluʾ[84]. In at least three other respects his attributes attest a strong Turkish or nomadic flavour. First, he holds a bow and arrow, the weapon of choice for the mounted nomad warrior, rather than a sword, and one that for centuries had figured as an emblem variously interpreted as denoting sovereignty, authority, a clan or tribal mark, or even a brand[85]. Second, instead of a crown he wears a *šarbūš* or fur hat, perhaps of sable. It is a form of insignia taken from the world of the Eurasian steppe, and more suitable for the cold winters of that region than for the climate of Iraq[86]. While in Baghdad in 1184, the Spanish traveller Ibn Ǧubayr saw the caliph an-Nāṣir wearing »a gilded cap encircled with black fur of the costly and precious kind…. that of the marten or even better. His purpose in wearing this Turkish dress was the concealment of his state; but the sun cannot be hidden even if veiled«[87]. Third, with icy aplomb he

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[81] Ettinghausen, Painting 65.

[82] One page alone sports not the arched eyebrows meeting over the nose that are such a signal of beauty in contemporary taste, but horizontal eyebrows with affronted right-angled terminations. A similar form is used in a contemporary Christian context to express sorrow; see a fragmentary glazed dish depicting the Deposition, Syria, late thirteenth to early fourteenth century; note the affronted weeping angels in the upper exergue (Cat. London 2008, 350f. no. 306; 457-458 [A. Ballian]). See Melikian-Chirvani, Matériaux 17f. for further commentary on eyebrow conventions.

[83] Melikian-Chirvani, Matériaux 17.

[84] For the controversy about this, see Farès, Vision 99; Farès, Art 643-654, 657-659; Rice, Aghani 130, 133; Stern, Aghani 503. Subsequent conventional wisdom has decisively emphasized the authenticity of these inscriptions.

[85] For its use by the Seljuk sultans, see Kucur, Study 1603 and Shimizu, Bow. It is especially prominent in the coins of Ṭoġrıl I Beg; see Bulliet, Evidence.

[86] Cf. Mayer, Costume 27f.

[87] Ibn Ǧubayr, Travels 237.

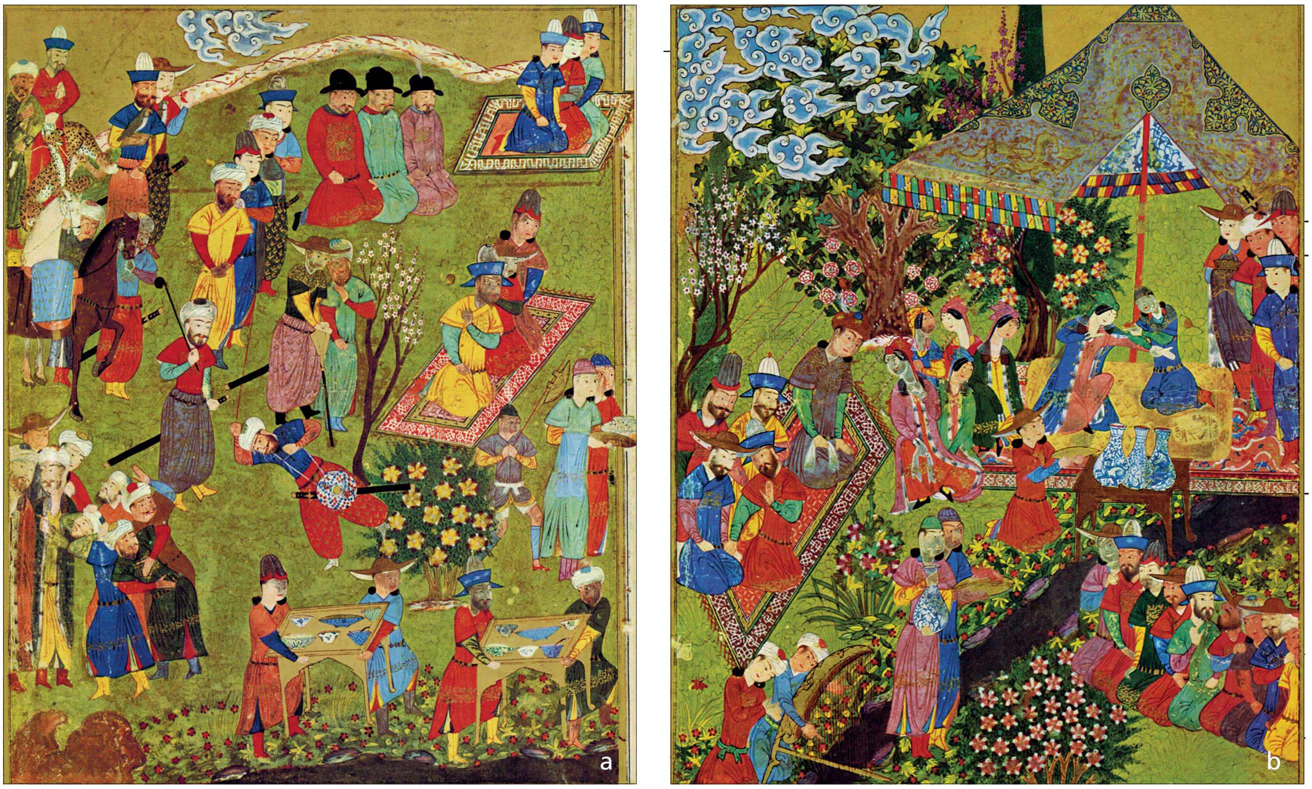

Fig. 16 Frontispiece, *Shahnama*, Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art 1956.10 and 1945.169, c. 1444. – (Gray, Persian Painting 102 f.).

perches on a foldaway camping stool (despite appearances, this is surely not a distant relative of the Roman *sella curalis*) rather than sitting comfortably on a throne. Piles of fruit heaped into vases or bowls are set before him[88].

Further details of this frontispiece also seem to derive from Byzantine sources. Chief among these is the way that no other figure is permitted to encroach upon the monarch's space. Thus he spreads himself at the expense of others in a way reminiscent of Justinian at San Vitale in Ravenna[89]. The cordon of empty space is incidentally much more pronounced in other frontispieces of this type; what is interesting here is that it asserts itself even in the context of gross overcrowding. His costume also has Byzantine connections. The red boots, for example, were known in the Islamic world as a royal prerogative in Byzantium (though here one of the pages also has red boots, admittedly less grand than those of the ruler)[90]. As for his robe, it is an imaginative reworking of the celebrated Byzantine chrysography – literally »writing in gold« – a technique perhaps best exemplified in mid-Byzantine enamels, which have the self-same colour scheme of lapis and gold, the celestial colours. There, of course, the gold lines had a practical function in keeping different colours from running into one another during the firing process. Here the outward Vienna *Kitāb ad-Diryāq* frontispiece with its courtiers whose attributes identify them as polo-master, butler, cup-bearer, chamberlain and the like, or by narrative friezes depicting the hunt, musicians, or a procession of ladies. It is hard to imagine any Byzantine dignitary sitting calmly by while kebabs are cooked for him in full public view, with a quartet of gardeners hard at work in the background. The more detail that is crammed into such images – with a corresponding variety of viewpoints and competing centres of attention – the further the Islamic artist is moving from a Byzantine original, in which the ruler is the sole focus of attention. In that respect, it is highly significant that the ruler in the Vienna *Kitāb ad-Diryāq* frontispiece is seated off-centre and is depicted in three-quarter view. Icon has become narrative, and the temperature drops accordingly.

The end product of this process was reached when a single page could not comfortably hold the amount of detail crammed into it, and the composition spilled over into a continuous double frontispiece – rather than two roughly symmetrical single frontispieces so to speak glued together. The detached double frontispiece of c. 1300 in the Topkapı Saray illustrates an intermediate stage in this evolution (**figs 14a-b**)[94]. The ruler is enthroned in godlike remoteness at the still centre of the turning world, positively besieged by a motley band of characters including a dancer, standard-bearer, dowager, archer, chamberlain, rebec-player, tambouriniste and yet others offering him flowers and food. All compete busily for his attention. Meanwhile, in the wings – actually in the other half of the frontispiece – a procession of exotic animals paces sedately towards him. From such a frontispiece it was only a short step to extended images which depicted court life in obsessive anecdotal detail (**figs 15-16**) and within a much more freely conceived composition, and in which there was psychologically no place for a super-human monarch. At long last the ruler was cut down to size. He had it coming to him.

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[88] This motif has Sasanian antecedents: see Overlaet, Splendeur, text and colour fig. on 211.

[89] Best seen in close-up; for a colour plate, see Cat. London 2008, 24.

[90] Book of Gifts 197.

[91] Melikian-Chirvani, Matériaux 17-19. He notes a similar wealth of connections in landscape, composition, calligraphy and vegetal ornament (ibidem 19-21).

[92] Ettinghausen, Painting 91.

[93] Hayes, Genius 51 (colour plate).

[94] For a colour illustration, see Ipşiroğlu, Bild figs 23 f.

It would have been interesting and instructive to consider some of the many other ways in which Byzantine art impacted on the arts of the Islamic book. The majority of these ideas were destined to have no significant progeny, like the choice of dyed vellum for sacred texts, as in the case of the celebrated Blue Qur'an, or the adoption of a vocabulary of somewhat histrionic gestures loaded with meaning, as in *The Choicest Maxims of al-Mubaššir*[95], or the use of an overall monochrome gold background. Among the Byzantine themes discussed in detail in this paper, it must be conceded that the polyptych format, the author portrait and the paired angels had only a brief *floruit*, though in each of these cases the painters of Arab manuscripts substantially enriched and diversified the Byzantine models which they had inherited. Only the royal portrait was to have a real future in Islamic painting – and it may be no accident that it was this theme that was most thoroughly transformed in its Islamic context. Other Byzantine motifs were taken over intact but then misapplied, like the halo, which became standard issue for virtually all figures and thus inevitably lost its connotations of sanctity. Presumably this was a deliberate move. Similarly, the carefully coded distinctions in Byzantine iconography between the frontal, three-quarter and profile view were not observed in Arab painting, although all three of these views were freely employed. It cannot be gainsaid that this readiness to adopt the letter but ignore the spirit of certain key Byzantine conventions drained the intensity from the Islamic versions of some Byzantine themes. The tendency to load the picture space with figures had much the same effect. At base, these reworkings of Byzantine ideas reflect the different function of the two sets of images. The Byzantine ones for the most part served religious purposes, and the perennial need to make the images work in this way kept certain conventions firmly in place – the lavish use of severe frontality, empty space and plain gold background, for instance, all of them devices which encouraged viewers to devote their full attention to the contemplation of the image. The secular context of the Islamic image left little room for such devices. In the visual arts, then, the two images were essentially oil and vinegar. When thoroughly mixed together, they proved to be a successful combination; but their innate tendency was to separate.

And so to conclude. With the hindsight of history, the intense Byzantine impact on Islamic art in the thirteenth century, like the same process in the Umayyad period half a millennium earlier, stands revealed as no more than an episode. It is if those who produced the paintings in Arab manuscripts were happy at first to use Byzantine ideas as a crutch, but once they had found their feet they threw that crutch away. Their path led them in a different direction, and it turned out to be a dead end. For as it happens, Arab painting was destined to have only a very brief flowering. The sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258, while it did not put an absolute end to manuscript painting in Iraq, caused a fundamental displacement westwards. When Mesopotamian painting was transplanted to the Mamluk cities of Syria and Egypt, it withered, eventually petering out in pale reflections of the illustrated scientific manuscripts of the thirteenth century. Byzantium was no more than a ghostly presence in such paintings. It was in Iran, not in the Arab Near East, that the future of Islamic book painting lay – and Iran looked for inspiration not to Byzantium, which by that time was a spent force, but to China.

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[95] Ettinghausen, Painting 75.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

The Lure of the Exotic: The Byzantine Heritage in Islamic Book Painting

In the visual arts, the medieval interplay between the Byzantine and the Islamic worlds has many surprising ramifications. Islam was the usual beneficiary, although Byzantium drew on Islamic ornament, iconography, and calligraphy for buildings and textiles, crowns and psalters. As for Muslim artists, they drew freely on the classical and Byzantine heritage in the Umayyad period (661-750) and then again in the 13th century. Their unexpected reworkings of the theme of Christian evangelists writing their Gospels is the focus of this article

Die Verlockung des Exotischen: Das byzantinische Erbe in der islamischen Buchmalerei

In der bildenden Kunst hat das mittelalterliche Wechselspiel zwischen der byzantinischen und der islamischen Welt viele überraschende Auswirkungen. Der Islam war gewöhnlich der Nutznießer davon, obwohl Byzanz islamische Ornamentik, Ikonographie und Kalligraphie an Gebäuden und für Textilien, Kronen und Psalter verwendete. Was muslimische Künstler anbelangt, so nutzten sie das klassische und byzantinische Erbe in der Umayyaden-Zeit (661-750) und dann noch einmal im 13. Jahrhundert. Ihre unerwarteten Überarbeitungen des Themas der Evangelisten bei der Verfassung der Evangelien stehen im Mittelpunkt dieses Artikels.