The Draped Universe of Islam

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ALTHOUGH many of Richard Ettinghausen's articles dealt with specific groups of objects and have become classics in art-historical literature, his last work showed a return to those broader but elusive questions that were first raised by such individuals as Strzygowski and Riegl at the turn of the century.[1] In his article "Taming of the Horror Vacui," which seeks an explanation for the alleged "fear of empty spaces" so characteristic of much of Islamic art, Ettinghausen resurrected the concept of Weltanschauung.[2] In recent years few scholars have attempted to publish their ideas about the nature of Islamic art; there has been a tacit moratorium on such questions. As a reaction against the racist doctrines that surfaced during World War II, the topic of "national style" became virtually taboo. Rather, in the postwar information explosion the emphasis has been on documentation. But this new body of information has of itself brought about greater sophistication and sensitivity. The time may be ripe to return to these questions and follow Ettinghausen's lead.

What is presented here is the working hypothesis that textiles in Islamic society fulfilled far more than the functions normally expected of them in other societies.[3] This obsession with textiles, if one may call it so, can account for some of the major characteristics of Islamic art in general. Many of the details in this hypothesis will take time and new information to work out, and what follows is an attempt to sketch it only in broad strokes.

It is difficult to understand how such monumental sites as the excavated palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar could have represented the ultimate in luxury living in the early eighth century, with its bare, cold stone walls and its nondescript quarters affording little privacy beyond the open doors. Even when buildings have remained intact and are elaborately decorated, such as the Alhambra, something seems to be missing.

When we study Islamic architecture, we tend to forget that doorways were hung with curtains;

that hangings made the open colonnade a private place; that the bare floors, sometimes unpaved, were laid with carpets and mats; and that through these halls marched a continual procession of richly clothed personages (fig. 1). Outside in the gardens, royal spaces were created by spreading a cloth or rug and erecting over it a tent of brocade, or a baldachin (fig. 2). We are struck by the fact that textiles played not only a large role in the life of Islam but perhaps even an exaggerated one.

Data for evaluating the role of textiles in Islamic society can be gleaned from various sources: numerous medieval texts, representations in illustrated manuscripts and on objects, the surviving archaeological textiles, and certain ethnographic information. The bibliography on each of these sources is extensive and will not be discussed here in detail. It is essential, however, to assess the value of each type of source for the specific purposes of this study and to touch on some of the precautions that must be taken in using them. Already in 1845, when Dozy published his dictionary of Arab costume, the problem of correlating these different sources in order to form an idea of the history of costume was apparent.[4] Under each heading Dozy had no choice but to reproduce several differing and sometimes contradictory meanings. Yedida Stillman's recent catalogue of Palestinian costume makes it clear that fashions change faster than the terminology on which they are hung.[5]

The medieval texts have been gathered by Serjeant according to geographical region.[6] His material is presented in a raw state with little attempt to analyze the data or to reconcile contradictions. Since his publication, new sources have come to light, such as the *Book of Gifts and Treasures* by Ibn al-Zubayr,[7] a source used by Maqrīzī. For the most part the medieval sources speak of the use of textiles by the court and the production of certain textiles in specific locales. The account is balanced, however, by the documents of the Cairo *Geniza,* which are a rich fund of information about the life of the bourgeoisie.[8] Despite the quantity of detail that comes from all these textual sources, they are not very helpful for the study of costume and textiles per se, for there is little description of the individual garment.

More elusive than costume is the vast terminology used to distinguish types of cloth. A few attempts have been made to match the terms with surviving textiles, by Dorothy Shepherd and others,[9] but there is little likelihood that much further progress can be made in this direction. Certain terms that describe the technique of manufacture can with some certainty be identified with actual textiles. For example, the *ikat*-dyed cottons of Yemen, achieved through the process of tie-dying the warps, are described as *'aṣb,* or "bound (thread)" cloths.[10] Further complications are introduced by the use of geographical terms to describe textiles coming from particular regions. This information is of no help in matching the text with the textile, though it is, of course, of interest for other purposes.

First, the terminology tells a great deal about the movement of textiles as objects of trade, and second, the sheer quantity of the terminology is significant. Following the axiom that a society will invent an extensive vocabulary to distinguish variations in areas that are most important to it, one may conclude that textiles were of primary importance to the average resident of the medieval Islamic world. The Islamic use of textile terminology may be compared with the Eskimo's differentiation of some forty types of snow, or the Bedouin's insistence on multiple terms for the camel.

It is the quantity of terms rather than the specific terms themselves that is of central interest here. What motivated this society to distinguish so finely between one type of scarf and another, between one type of cushion and another? What were the considerations necessitating such a wide variety of textile objects?

The representational arts of Islam comprise wall paintings, for the pre-Islamic, Umayyad, and Abbasid periods (with a few later examples); objects with figural imagery, from the twelfth and

thirteenth centuries; and the arts of the book, from the thirteenth century on.[11] Not all of these sources are of equal value for this study. Some representations, such as the striped garment worn by men on a minai bowl (fig. 3), are too generic to be useful, whereas the costume on the man in the Dioscorides frontispiece is so accurately depicted that the gusset under his arm is shown (fig. 4). The fact that his *ṭirāz*[12] arm bands do not fully encircle the upper arm is most interesting; few representations bother to show this detail when depicting such bands. *Ṭirāz* bands on the turban ends have been tucked in. It would be fair to conclude that this is an accurate description of a type of garment actually worn by a scholar living in Syria or Iraq in the early thirteenth century. Later Persian paintings are a rich source for costume and textile study and are particularly important because they illustrate the manner in which contemporary furnishings were used.

Archaeological textiles themselves pose many problems.[13] Because of their fragmentary nature, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine to what kind of garment most of the fragments once belonged. The bulk of the fragments come from Egyptian burial grounds, where their use as shrouds may not have been anticipated when they were first produced. Because the find-spots of these textiles were never recorded in detail, we do not even know who finally used them as shrouds. Was it the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie? The textiles themselves do give some information. As a group they convey a picture of a highly developed and complex industry, producing for a diversified range of tastes and functions. Many contain inscription bands like those in the Dioscorides painting, which identify them as products of the *Dār al-Ṭirāz,* the royal textile workshops, under the control of the caliph. Some inscriptions record a place and date of manufacture.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the ethnographic data mentioned above, it can be most enlightening to look at some of the more traditional cultures of the Muslim world today. Westernization has introduced new habits, but traditional attitudes toward dress and codes of behavior are still evident in such areas. Anyone visiting more traditional Islamic societies, such as those of North Africa or Uzbekistan, will be struck by the quantity of clothing an individual wears. Women appear to be bandaged in scarves, cloaks, and headdresses. Each of these items is of a different fabric, weave, and color, appearing haphazardly chosen. The fact that historically many garments were worn simultaneously may have stimulated the development of many terms for clothing. The use of many layers of clothing appears to have been most popular in regions where garments were not tailored. Many were worn just as they had come off the loom, with little or no sewing. They were draped over the body and held in place by pins. Insulation was achieved by adding more layers beneath loosely fitting outergarments.

Following the assessment of the sources that can be employed to study the uses of textiles in Islamic society, these functions can be enumerated. Some are utilitarian, whereas others were the result of the values attached to textiles by the people who used them. I shall deal first with garments and then with furnishings.

The preference for loosely draped clothing was evident in the Mediterranean region before the advent of Islam, although the turban appears to be an Islamic innovation. The preference for draped garments appears then to have gradually spread to more eastern areas during the Islamic period, a diffusion that has yet to be investigated. In pre-Islamic Iran, textiles were woven on a loom of smaller format than that used in the Mediterranean area, and tailored garments were favored. With fitted garments multiple layers were not needed, especially when the outermost layer, a coat, was padded, as was frequently the case. In the Islamic era fashions changed. Clerics and scholars adopted the flowing gowns popular in Arabia, and women acquired the face veil and body envelope. Later, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, fitted garments had a renewed popularity through the influence of peoples from the east, another phenomenon that deserves further documentation.

According to the evidence from the *Geniza* documents and other texts, the clothing in wide use during the medieval period was much the same as that still used in North Africa today.[14] It consisted of four elements: headgear, undergarments, gowns, and a wide variety of mantles, wraps, and veils. For women, some of these outer garments were for insulation, others for modesty. Because the garments did not conform to the body's shape, they were to some extent interchangeable. One gets the impression from the *Geniza* letters of traders that the larger garments were sold as a form of bulk goods that could be modified by the purchaser.[15]

Certainly one of the functional considerations behind the elaboration of the garments was the change of seasons. The archaeological evidence suggests that the wide range of weights and variation in fineness of weaves distinguished fabrics used for winter and summer apparel. Numerous texts confirm an almost ritualized change of clothing from winter to summer. For example, in May the Mamluk sultan discarded his woolen clothing and put on white, including a white silk *ʿabā'* (a one-piece mantle that enveloped the body and was closed at the shoulders). He returned to his woolen garments in November.[16] A semiannual change was also the practice in Spain, until the musician Zaryāb came from Baghdad in 821–822. He introduced a spring costume, a *mulḥam* or colored silk *jubbah,* and marked the arrival of autumn with a *minsha* (cloak) from Marv.[17] These refinements no doubt had as much a psychological significance as they had functional value, much as pastel colors are still favored in summer.

Another category of costume tied to specific functions consisted of garments that were to be worn only out-of-doors, such as the modesty veils of women.[18] Certain activities demanded garments designed especially for them, particularly those requiring freedom of movement, such as the *jūkānīyah,* presumably a polo costume.[19]

Apart from these functional considerations were the many facets of social behavior in which textiles played an important role. Textiles could reflect social values and codes of behavior, but they might also be actual tools of the social system.

Wealth was measured in terms of one's textile possessions, and certainly the largest wardrobes were to be found at court. An inventory of the Caliph al-Amīn for the year 809 lists 8,000 *jubbahs* (coats), half of which were silk lined with sable, fox, or goat hair, and the other half figured cloth (*washshī*); 10,000 shirts and tunics; 1,000 pairs of pants; 10,000 caftans, 4,000 turbans; and 1,000 cloaks.[20] It is difficult to surmise how many people this wardrobe would have served. If one assumes the allotment of two pairs of pants per person, it would clothe 500. The caliphal wardrobe was obviously larger, so perhaps the figure of 100 wearers is more likely. That would still provide each with some 40 outer coats for winter and another 40 for summer, with 100 caftans to rotate through the year. These figures should not be taken as definitive, but a study of such lists together with the trousseaux lists could give some idea of the quantity of each type of garment needed by the various classes of society. A wealthy Jewish middle-class bride had in her trousseau a mere 18 dresses, while a more modest trousseau included only eight.[21]

"Clothes made the man," and uniforms identifying rank in the court and bureaucracy certainly focused attention on costume (fig. 5). The conspicuous consumer invested heavily in headgear; as Goitein has remarked, "Luxury in turbans was the passion of the medieval Oriental."[22] Not all wearers of luxurious turbans achieved the status they had sought, as this poem indicates:

> O, you who covers your empty head with a beautiful
> white turban of Marv fabric, everything which is beneath
> is hideous: It (meaning the turban) is as a light
> shining in the darkness.[23]

Many of the luxury fabrics were intended for special occasions. The wedding costume was perhaps the most elaborate of these. The *Geniza* letters often convey the personal concern of the client or merchant with regard to such orders. The urgency of the merchant of Fez writing to Spain on behalf of a certain Abraham whose wedding was imminent demonstrates the importance of having the proper garment for the occasion.[24] In this case the merchant was ordered to buy a custom-made garment if none was available on the market. Time was an important factor.

Funerals also called for specific dress—not garments made for the occasion but rather a different mode of wearing one's ordinary garments. Ibn Baṭṭūṭah observed that people had put their own clothing on inside-out and covered it with coarse cotton robes.[25] In Samarqand the population put on *jāmah*s of black and blue for the mourning of Tīmūr's son Jahāngīr.[26]

Religious holidays for all faiths required special garments. A *Geniza* document records an order for such a costume for the Day of Atonement. White was worn during Ramaḍān.[27] It should also be borne in mind that the preparation for the spiritual change that was to come with the pilgrimage to Mecca was effected through a change in costume. The discriminatory sumptuary laws, dictating the types and colors of garments to be worn by minority groups, were yet another example of how textiles were used as instruments of the social system.[28]

The use of textiles to confer as well as identify status is also well known. Robes of honor, often inscribed with the name of the caliph, were bestowed on officials of the court, prominent visitors (including ambassadors), and private individuals whom the caliph wished to honor. Although referred to as "robes," these gifts often included full sets of clothing as well as numerous other items.

In the art-historical literature there has been a tendency to view the large body of very fragmentary archaeological textiles that bear the *ṭirāz* of a caliph as "robes of honor."[29] A review of the relevant texts, however, has suggested that these textiles, with some exceptions, do not fit the descriptions. The texts that speak of "robes of honor" generally mention fine materials—silks, brocades, and furs—although the very fine linens, *sharb* and *dabīqī*, or *qaṣab*, woven with metallic threads, were also suitable as gifts. The archaeological examples are primarily linen or cotton, some quite coarse, with wool, silk, or linen wefts, embroidered or tapesty-woven. Some of the cottons are painted or stamped.

One is therefore led to conclude that this large body of material, found in museums all over the world, should not be identified as the so-called robes of honor mentioned in texts. The surviving textiles appear to belong to the standard wardrobe of the court, such as the one described above, and represent the numerous undergarments, and perhaps some of the lighter summer mantles. That they were widely used as shrouds may possibly be accounted for by a distribution of court garments to the general populace from the looting of the Fatimid treasury in the years following 1060.[30]

It is most curious that among the large number of such textiles now in Toronto there are numerous fragments of ornaments cut in the shape of rectangular panels and sewn as insets into coarsely woven linens, often with the inscription reversed (fig. 6). The stitching is also sometimes crude. Some occur below distinguishable necklines and appear to be chest panels like those depicted on a *Coronation of the Virgin* by Paolo Veneziano (fig. 7). These panels may be the forerunners of the *qabbah* on nineteenth-century Palestinian wedding dresses.[31] The reuse of precious stuffs is also attested to in texts and in the *Geniza* documents, where "old" garments are considered the "best."[32] This appreciation of textile antiques was applied to furnishings (discussed below) as well as garments.

To sum up: in addition to their functional value, garments were the means by which an individual identified his changing status. Clothing reflected not only his public state (that is, his religion, his occupation, and his rank within society) but also his private state (that is, his passage through the life cycle). Clothing provided the opportunity for an individual to emphasize any chosen aspect of his inner or outer state at any given moment.

The utilitarian and social aspects of furnishings in the Islamic world have recently been treated in great detail by J. Sadan.[33] According to his study, the Islamic world developed a set of behavior patterns concerning sitting and reclining that precluded the creation of a wide variety of movable, rigid furnishings: chairs, tables, and beds. Although these existed, they were always supplemented by cushions, pillows, spreads, and carpets. More often, these ad hoc furnishings sufficed alone. Most activities took place on or close to the floor. Cushions served as seats and propped up the back, the head, and even the elbow. Carpets and cloths spread on the floor served as tables. Trays set on tripods or on the floor bore vessels containing food and drink.

It could be argued that the climate in the Mediterranean required warm floor coverings in the winter to insulate against the cold of stone floors. Many Roman mosaics, as well as their Umayyad successors, have tassels depicted around their edges.[34] These tassels have generally been taken as evidence that the beautiful mosaics were replicas of floor coverings that have not survived. The level of textile technology at the time does not make this possibility very likely, but the tassels may well be an allusion to winter mats of less ambitious design that would have covered the mosaics until spring.

One can also argue that the origin of textile furnishings should be sought in the nomadic life. Although floor coverings and wall hangings are associated with both indoor and outdoor space, one could say that the indoor use of carpets is a tautology. A house already has a floor and walls. Outside these must be created. It is therefore in the use of textiles out-of-doors that one must seek the origins of rugs and drapes for the interior.

Various forms of nomadism have persisted within and around the Islamic world since its beginnings.[35] When one reads the history of the Mongol or Timurid princes, it is never clear whether the change of quarters has a military or an ecological objective.[36] The sultan moves between city and country, often taking his whole household with him. The setting of the "encampment" has been a celebrated theme of many painters.[37] In these encampments textiles are used not only for furniture and decoration but even for the domicile itself, the tent. The carpet is the floor. The curtain is the door. An ambiguity of intention on the part of the Persian painter can be seen in a sixteenth-century painting (fig. 8). Is he depicting a seasonal dwelling or a summer holiday? Descriptions of the great tents of Tīmūr, both in texts and in paintings, indicate that tents eventually came full cycle. In every detail—crenellations, porticoes, silver cords imitating metal grilles—they simulated real architecture.[38]

Sadan has also suggested that the ascetic strain in Islam may have reinforced the existing Oriental tradition of close-to-the-ground living, just as it had rejected vessels of precious metal.[39] Whatever the cause, it is clear that textile furnishings were a very important concern for both indoor and outdoor life.

The well-to-do sitting room, according to al-Azdī, writing in the early eleventh century, had four different kinds of floor coverings, three types of cushions, and at least two expensive textile draperies, such as *sūsanjīrd* or *būqālimūn*.[40] The royal precincts were, of course, totally draped and spread with textiles.

Paintings illustrate well the ways in which textile furnishings were used. Curtains could be hung, knotted, or drawn aside. They served primarily as temporary room dividers, providing privacy where needed. In Abraham's tent, depicted in the Rashīd al-Dīn manuscript of 1314, a

curtain blocks the visitors' view of his wife, as would be expected in the normal Muslim domicile.[41] In later Persian paintings one cannot fail to appreciate the importance of textile elements in the interior setting: the drapery, the cushions, and the floor coverings (fig. 1).

Like costume, furnishings were appreciated for various reasons. As purely functional objects, they provided insulation and comfort. They were also a means of transforming the character of a space without altering its structure. But they could do far more. They could create an ambience through the quality of the material, and this ambience could be changed at will. Changes might entail a mere seasonal rotation of fabrics. The Fatimid Caliph had brocade curtains for his *majlis* in the winter and fine linen ones in the summer.[42] Floor coverings were likewise suited to the season.

The need for a change in scenery might arise in anticipation of a special occasion; furnishings were chosen to impress and delight the individual guest. Visits of ambassadors to the court provided an opportunity to display the choice objects of the royal textile collection, which was itself symbolic of the empire's wealth. When the Byzantine ambassadors made their famous visit to Baghdad in 305/917, some 38,000 curtains were hung in the palace.[43] On the occasion of the reception of the Emperor Basil, the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākim ordered his keepers of the treasury to find something remarkable for covering the entire *īwān*. They discovered twenty-one textiles of brocade stippled with gold, brought by al-Muʿizz from Qairowan. With these they covered the whole floor of the *īwān* and draped all of its walls.[44] When the sovereign of Ferghana paid a call on his vassal in Bukhara, the entire city was repainted and draped with rich stuffs, banners, and silk tents to impress him.[45]

Guests were impressed not only by the normal luxury fabrics but also by curiosities. As al-Ḥākim's preparations indicate, antique furnishings were particularly cherished. Among the 38,000 curtains displayed in the palace at Baghdad were 12,500 bearing the names of five earlier caliphs dating back a hundred years. Another curiosity were the textiles with recognizable images. The Baghdad palace was also hung with curtains of brocade bearing "representations of goblets, elephants, horses and camels, lions, and birds."[46] This category of furnishing is most interesting because it relates to a series of other unique textiles, both carpets and curtains, on which were depicted themes belonging to royal iconography, including historical or quasi-historical narratives.

The tradition of iconographic textiles which begins with the first century of Islam had roots in the Byzantine and Sasanian past. According to Ibn Rustah, the tent of the Prophet was made of a woolen textile decorated with fabulous beasts, eagles, confronted lions, human figures, and Christian crosses.[47] The tent commissioned by the Fatimid vizier, al-Yazūrī, portrayed all the animals in the world.[48] Another tent, made for the Hamdanid prince Sayf al-Dawlah and celebrated in an ode by Mutannabī in 947, had all this and more. It was erected to receive Sayf al-Dawlah after his capture of the Byzantine fortress of Barqūyah. Inside was a scene depicting the Byzantine emperor paying homage to Sayf al-Dawlah, surrounded by a pearl-lined border containing images of wild and tame beasts and vegetation. The poet refers to the border as a garden, which is animated by the fluttering of the tent walls.[49]

Tents with images of animals and vegetation can be related to two traditions, Sasanian and Early Christian. These images can be found in the Sasanian Paradise theme as it occurs as part of the royal hunt, for example, at Tāq-i Būstān. The hunt also appears contemporaneously in the imperial imagery of Byzantium and in the Early Christian iconography expressing the Triumph of Good over Evil. The Western version, studied by Veronika Gervers in the series of Coptic linen curtains with tapestry-woven images of huntsmen and wild beasts,[50] suggests a close parallel for the Prophet's tent, which may itself have come from the furnishings of a church.

The second theme occurring in the Hamdanid tent—human figures identified as historical personalities—relates these textiles to images found in wall paintings, such as the painting of the six kings at Quṣayr ʿAmrah.[51] A similar example would be the famous *sūsanjīrd* carpet on which the Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil was murdered; this had a border of compartments enclosing portraits of the Sasanian and Umayyad rulers, all identified by Persian inscriptions.[52] This was probably an heirloom from the Umayyad dynasty. An equally extraordinary silk curtain was found in the Fatimid treasury on which were depicted all of the nations of the world, their rulers, years of reign, and remarks on their state of affairs.[53]

Textile furnishings could therefore be used in two ways by a person wishing to impress his visitors. The costliness of the fabric or its rarity testified to the sheer wealth of the host, whereas the textile itself might be the bearer of a more specific message through its imagery. Iconographic textiles have the obvious advantage of versatility over wall paintings since textile display could be varied according to the intended message.

The selection of draperies and floor coverings, just as seating arrangements for guests, reflected a host's assessment of his visitors. Protocol as reflected in seating arrangements is a matter of grave importance in all societies, but in the Islamic world, because the seating was on the floor, the focus was again on textiles. Sadan has demonstrated that the social rank of a guest was indicated by the placement of his mat within a room, especially in relation to other persons present, and by the size and quality of the cushions assigned to him.[54] The variations possible with a range of cushions is far greater than can be imagined for a dining hall with table and chairs. (In the European tradition guests could be honored or offended only by their placement; the furnishings remained uniform.) Using a mat or carpet for definition of personal space was a tradition so ingrained in the life of the Middle East that it could not fail to be of continuing symbolic importance under Islam. Pre-Islamic Central Asian paintings show a group of nobles, seated on small mats arranged to reflect the social hierarchy, just like the courtiers of later Persian miniatures. Even the monster-deities in a Manichaean illustration are seated on a carpet according to protocol.[55] Given the strength of this symbolic aspect of carpets, it is not surprising that the earliest ritual object in Islam was the prayer rug.

Curtains also had symbolic as well as practical functions. As in the Byzantine world, the ruler was to be kept aloof from his subjects, and this ideal was expressed tangibly through the presence of a curtain placed between them. Such curtains concealed the thrones of the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid caliphs and were placed around the *miḥrāb* in the mosque.[56] On certain occasions the curtain was used as a means of attaining dramatic surprise. The caliph, dressed in his regalia, made a sudden appearance as the curtain was drawn. The visitor was devastated by this splendor.

A unique use of curtains to both honor and protect a structure is the *kiswah,* the veil draped over the Kaʿbah at Mecca.[57] Although one tends to think of the *kiswah* as a drab black veil with gold inscriptions, it was not always so. When Ibn Jubayr visited in the late twelfth century, he saw the Kaʿbah clothed in varicolored silk.[58] The four sides were draped in a set of thirty-four curtains of green silk that had cotton warps. It was inscribed in its upper part with the Koranic verse 3:90, invocations to the Abbasid caliph al-Nāṣir, and the image of a colonnade of *miḥrābs*. It was customary for the old *kiswah* to be cut up and sold as relics to pilgrims.

The last item to be mentioned here, the *mandīl,* or napkin, was used both as a garment and a furnishing. According to F. Rosenthal's fascinating study, the *mandīl* was used for drying the hands and face, wiping tears, blowing the nose, for massage, for covering things, wrapping things, and was worn as various garments, such as loincloth, apron, belt, turban, and kerchief.[59]

The *mandīl* was remarkable for being an instrument of communication, so closely was it

associated with the sensual organs—the mouth, the eyes, the nose, the ears, and the hands. Messages were inscribed on *mandīl*s, such as,

> I am the *mandīl* of a lover who never stopped
> Drying with me his eyes of their tears.
> Then he gave me as a present to a girl he loves
> Who wipes with me the wine from his lips.[60]

A number of such verses are recorded by al-Washshā' in the early tenth century, but to my knowledge no actual fragment of such a textile has survived. To these inscribed textiles may be added the *mandīl* or *dastār* with the lover's portrait. Most famous is the portrait of Khusraw sent to Shirīn in the *Khamsah* of Niẓāmī.[61] The motif recurs in many Persian stories.

As a background, one may consider the pre-Islamic traditions of Central Asia. Manichaean paintings on silk have survived, and the wall paintings at Kutscha show such a textile depicting the life of the Buddha, being held by a woman.[62] The notion that images and even inscriptions on textiles could have magical power—that is, the ability to make happen what is portrayed or foretold—is reflected in the story of the silk inscribed by the Sasanian king Anūshīrvān with the prophecy of the execution of Hormizd.[63] These iconic and magical uses of textiles prefigure the mystique that was later attached to the writing of invocations in the *ṭirāz* of Islamic textiles.

In this essay I have attempted to evoke a world submerged in textiles, where textiles played a role in every facet of life, for everyone, rich or poor. They served far more than a purely functional role and were incorporated into codes of social and religious behavior at every level of society and in every phase of human existence. The important role textiles played in the economic life of the Middle Ages is revealed in the *Geniza* documents. S. D. Goitein has demonstrated that textiles were the primary object of trade, the cash-in-hand, negotiable anywhere in the world. The economic and political role of textiles in the Islamic world has long been studied. The government often controlled textile production, which constituted a large sector of the economy. The inclusion of the ruler's name in textile inscriptions was an acknowledgment of suzerainty tantamount to the inclusion of his name on coinage, and in the Friday *khuṭbah* (sermon).[64]

Not only was the social, economic, and political life of the Islamic world caught up with textiles, the individual himself was fully cognizant of the technical aspects of textile production even though he was not a weaver. The medieval client was far more conscious of the technology involved in manufacturing goods than the consumer today. Textiles were so vital that the average man could not afford to be without some knowledge of their manufacture. A merchant could expect his client to provide detailed instructions regarding the choice of threads.[65] In one documented case, the client had sent a merchant linen and cotton threads to make a set of clothes. But the merchant discovered, after the garments were partially completed, that not enough of the finer threads remained to make the other garments. The leftover linen threads were too coarse to weave with the cotton. He wrote to his client asking whether to buy more threads to go with the linen or finer linen to go with the cotton. This inquiry reveals that a surprising degree of expertise was expected of the client. Expertise in textiles comes from another unexpected quarter, the eleventh-century historian of Isfahan, al-Māfarrūkhī. He expresses amazement that some 1,000 inhabitants of a *bidonville* on their way to the *muṣallā* to celebrate the *ʿīd* were "wearing fine turbans of gold-embroidered linen, *Tūzī, Bamī* and *Baqyār* cloths, Egyptian wool and garments of *Siqlātūn* and *ʿAṭabī* . . ." —that is, all of the normal luxury textiles.[66] This historian's ability to identify and differentiate between the various luxury fabrics as they paraded by is characteristic of the middle-class concern and familiarity with textiles.

Color-consciousness is yet another aspect of this obsession with textiles that has been documented. No doubt the size of the textile vocabulary is in part due to a heightened sensitivity to colors and patterns. The *Geniza* speaks of pistachio green, iridescent peacock, chick-pea, wax-, tin-, pearl-, and sand-colored. There is a pomegranate red, a flame-colored, a lead-gray, and many varieties of stripes and ornaments, such as *muṭayyar* (ornamented with birds).[67] Color preferences seem quite pronounced in the personalized orders recorded in the *Geniza*. The archaeological textiles also exhibit a wide range of colors and motifs, although it must be remembered that the most elaborate overgarments are, for the most part, missing.

It was on the strength of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's comparison of luster pottery to *būqālimūn* textiles that Grabar concluded: ". . . much of the contemporary world acquired its aesthetic judgement through textiles."[68] I would like to carry this idea further by suggesting that a "textile mentality" was responsible for the development of certain characteristic idioms in Islamic art. In other words; if textiles penetrated so deeply into all aspects of life, can they not be expected to have had some impact on the formation of aesthetics as well? My conclusions are presented here as a series of six cases.

The first case concerns the transfer of the term *ṭirāz* from garment ornamentation to the ornamentation of other things. Maqrīzī often refers to the inscription band on the façade of a building as a *ṭirāz*.[69] The term came to be used metaphorically. Learning and culture "embroidered" a person's character, as a *ṭirāz* band gave class to a fine piece of cloth.[70]

The next case demonstrates that the compulsion to drape everything is implicit in certain art objects. Animals had to be dressed, like the rooster aquamanile with its medallion copied from garment types (fig. 9), such as the so-called Veil of St. Anne *'abā'* in Apt Cathedral, or like the goat from a Samarra painting (fig. 10). An incense burner in the form of a cheetah is robed in a textile pattern, bordered with *ṭirāz* bands, and even has the rectangular chest panel, or *qabbah,* discussed above (fig. 11). There was something in the nature of a "textile-reflex"—whatever could be draped should be draped.

The third case refers to architecture. If one studies the evolution of surface decoration, it becomes increasingly clear that the practice of hanging the walls with textiles led to the development of mosaic faience and polychrome painted panels. The walls were broken up into small rectangular panels, as if they were products of the loom (fig. 12). The pattern changes abruptly from one panel to the next, as if the eye were moving from fabric to fabric. Many of the large tile panels reproduce carpet designs, and their large expanse may be a reflection of the increasing size of carpets. A corner column in the Mosque of Yazd (fig. 13), revetted in mosaic faience in a chevron pattern, appears to be imitating the *ikat*-dyed cottons of Yemen, even with regard to the brown, blue, and white color scheme (fig. 14). The lacy quality of the deeply carved stucco ornament in Western Islamic monuments such as the Alhambra may not be fortuitous.

The final three cases show the imprint of the technique of weaving itself. One is the use of decorative brickwork in eastern Iran, first popular in the tenth century (fig. 15). Brick patterns had much in common with textiles, in that they conform to some kind of grid involving a vertical and horizontal axis (fig. 16). In weaving, these are the warp and weft. The warp, or vertical element, is static. The weft moves and makes the pattern by changes in color and variations in the number of warps covered. In brickwork, the horizontal axis dominates. The design is always worked in the vertical. One of the terms used to describe this kind of decoration is *hazār-bāf* (a thousand weaves). This woven decoration allowed the architect to virtually swathe his forms (fig. 17), and thereby bring out the volumetric quality of the architecture, as if it were, in fact, draped with textiles.

The fifth case concerns Samanid epigraphic pottery of the tenth century.[71] On one class of this pottery the only decoration is a band of Kufic writing (figs. 18, 19). The absence of any further decoration on the stark white background caused Ettinghausen some alarm because it seemed to be an exception to the rule of *horror vacui*. A plate from the Freer Gallery (fig. 18) poses still another problem. The majority of bowls and plates in this class have inscriptions encircling the rim—that is, respecting the circular character of the object. This one violates it outright. The calligrapher simply ignored the shape of the object. Or did he?

One is struck by the resemblance of this format to the archaeological textiles with their *ṭirāz* bands (fig. 20). The plate is like a pure-white linen cloth across which runs a thin *ṭirāz* band. This comparison may seem farfetched, but not if one considers the custom of covering serving objects with napkins (*mandīls*). Consider the following scenario. (Although this reconstruction is a fantasy, there are numerous texts describing the serving of beverages from covered vessels.)[72] A servant brings his master a goblet of water or other drink carried on an inscribed plate. The goblet is covered by a *ṭirāz*-ornamented linen *mandīl*. The servant removes the goblet and gives it to the master. The inscription on the plate is now visible. The napkin is then replaced, but directly over the plate. The inscriptions on the napkin and the plate spatially coincide.

The final case, which consists of two parts, illustrates ways in which the very grammar of ornament was affected by weaving technology. The dynamic in question is the interlace—the basic over-and-under process whereby loose threads become bound together. The early history of Islamic ornament shows an increasing interest in ever more complex geometric compositions. By the middle of the ninth century, the lines of the geometric grid took on a life of their own and became more important than the compartments they delineated.

At the same moment, in the Yemen, a strange form of calligraphy began to appear on the famous *ikat* cottons (fig. 14):[73] The Kufic letters of the inscription became knotted. The horizontal bars in the letter *dāl* of Muḥammad are twisted around each other like threads of a chain stitch (fig. 21). Vegetal ornaments erupt amid this chaos. The textile mentality has triumphed.

When I first began to study plaited Kufic Samanid pottery, I came to the conclusion that it had been invented by the potters and exported westward to the Yemenite weavers.[74] This conclusion was based on two observations: the earliest dated examples were to be found on the coins of Rayy and Khurasan (fig. 22), and the plaited Kufic alphabet appeared in monumental art in the East at least a century before it did in the West, where it never became as popular. However, in the light of the present evidence, the reverse now seems more plausible. Such an idea was more likely to have been the brainstorm of a weaver than a potter. Textiles are more portable than pottery, and no Samanid wares appear to have been exported to the Red Sea, to judge from excavated examples.[75] We know from texts, however, that the *ikat*, or *ʿaṣb* of Yemen, was exported to Iran, and that it was in fact imitated at Rayy,[76] where the earliest coin with plaited letters was minted in 324/936.

This love for interlace even penetrated architecture, for it is seen in the arched screens that cordon off the bays at the entrance to al-Ḥakam's additions to the Mosque of Cordova and in front of its *miḥrāb*s (fig. 23). Whether the metaphor can be carried further is debatable, but it might be suggested that the architects saw in these compositions a vertical, stable "warp" in the form of the arches. The surface produced is more like a woven textile than tracery, for, as Ewart's study has shown,[77] many of the spaces between the arches are blocked to provide a surface for a different pattern on the reverse. A most bizarre version of interlacing arches occurs in the Aljaferia Palace at Saragossa a century after Cordova.[78]

Interlace dominated the *Grammatik* of ornament of the tenth-eleventh centuries, if one may

borrow Riegl's expression. It provided a means of penetrating two-dimensional space and opened the way for the development of the multilevel arabesque, which Ettinghausen compared with "polyphonic music" in his article on the *horror vacui*.

It would seem that the origins of this love for the interlace may be found in the "textile mentality" that in certain ways possessed the society. The heightened importance of costume and the preference for soft furnishings made the development of textiles practically a cult in itself. The preeminence of textiles also helps to explain why it was possible, and perfectly acceptable, in Islamic art for different media to share the same decorative treatment—why it is that bookbindings, wood carving, architectural faience, and Koran pages all look like carpets.

NOTES

1. A. Riegl, *Stilfragen, Grundlegnungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik,* Berlin, 1893; Riegl, *Historische Grammaktik der bildenden Künste,* post. ed. K. M. Swoboda and O. Pacht, Graz-Köln, 1966; J. Strzygowski, *Asiens bildende Kunst,* Augsburg, 1930 (hereafter, Strzygowski).

2. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* CXXIII, no. 1, 1979, 15–28.

3. I owe my introduction to textile studies to my dear friend Dr. Veronika Gervers, who was curator of the Royal Ontario Museum Textile Department from 1968 until her death in 1979. Her enthusiasm, generosity, and insight will always be remembered.

4. R. P. A. Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms de vêtements chez les Arabes,* Amsterdam, 1845 (hereafter, Dozy).

5. Y. K. Stillman, *Palestinian Costume and Jewelry,* Albuquerque, 1979 (hereafter, Stillman, 1979).

6. R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest,* Beirut, 1972 (hereafter, Serjeant): collection of articles originally published serially in *Ars Islamica,* IX–XIV, 1942–51 (hereafter, Serjeant, *Ars Islamica*).

7. Aḥmad b. al-Rashīd b. al-Zubayr, *Kitāb al-Dhakhā'ir wa-al-Tuḥaf,* ed. Muḥammad Ḥamīd Allāh, Kuwait, 1959 (hereafter, Ibn al-Zubayr).

8. " 'Cairo *Geniza* documents' refers to material dating from the 10th through the 13th centuries A.D., written mostly in Hebrew characters but in the Arabic language, and originally preserved in a synagogue, and partly also in a cemetery at Fustat." S. D. Goitein, "Cairo: An Islamic City in Light of the Geniza Documents," *Middle Eastern Cities: A Symposium,* Berkeley, 1969, 80. See also Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society,* Berkeley, 1967. Among the documents are official, business, and private correspondence, contracts, accounts, receipts, and inventories.

9. E.g., D. G. Shepherd and W. B. Henning, "Zandanījī Identified?" *Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel, Aus der Welt der Islamischen Kunst,* Berlin, 1959, 15–40.

10. C. Lamm, *Cotton in Mediaeval Textiles of the Near East,* Paris, 1937, Class 9, 144ff. (hereafter, Lamm); A. Bühler, *Ikat-Batik-Plangi: Reservmüsterungen auf Garn und Stoff aus Vorderasien, Zentralasien, Sudosteuropa und Nordafrika,* Basel, 1972; L. Golombek and V. Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics in the Royal Ontario Museum," *Studies in Textile History in Memory of Harold P. Burnham,* ed. V. Gervers, Toronto, 1977, 82–125 (hereafter, Golombek and Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics").

11. A. von Le Coq, *Chotscho, Königlich-Preussiche Turfan-Expedition,* Berlin, 1913; Le Coq, *Bilderatlas zur Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Mittel-Asiens,* Berlin, 1925 (hereafter, Von Le Coq, *Bilderatlas . . .*); E. Herzfeld, *Die Malereen von Samarra,* Berlin, 1927; M. Bussagli, *Painting of Central Asia,* Geneva, 1963 (hereafter, Bussagli); illustrations on objects in Pope, *SPA*; A. Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery,* London, 1965; E. Atıl, *Ceramics from the World of Islam,* Washington, D.C., 1973; numerous illustrations in *Islam and the Arab World,* ed. B. Lewis, New York, 1976.

12. "*Ṭirāz* bands" refer to the narrow strips of ornament (serving as arm bands or borders) that often bore inscriptions. The term *ṭirāz* is borrowed from the Persian word for embroidery but was used for other techniques of decoration as well. On the manufacture of such textiles for the court, see below.

13. For bibliography, see N. P. Britton, *A Study of Some Early Islamic Textiles in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,* Boston, 1938; E. Kühnel and L. Bellinger, *Catalogue of Dated Tiraz Fabrics: Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C.,* Washington, D.C., 1952; Golombek and Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics."

14. Y. K. Stillman, "The Importance of the Cairo Geniza Manuscripts for the History of Medieval Female Attire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* VII,

1976, 579–89 (hereafter, Stillman, 1976); Stillman, "The Wardrobe of a Jewish Bride in Medieval Egypt," *Studies in Marriage Customs,* Folklore Research Center Studies, Hebrew University, IV, 1974, 297–304 (hereafter, Stillman, 1974).

15. S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* Princeton, 1973, nos. 11, 64 (hereafter, Goitein, 1973).

16. L. Mayer, *Mamluk Costume,* Geneva, 1952, 18, no. 2.

17. al-Maqqārī, cited by Lamm, 246.

18. Stillman, 1974, 304.

19. S. D. Goitein, "Two Arabic Textiles," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient,* XIX, part 2, 1976, 221–24,

20. Ibn al-Zubayr, no. 302.

21. S. D. Goitein, "Three Trousseaux of Jewish Brides from the Fatimid Period," *Association for Jewish Studies Review,* II, 1977, 77–110.

22. S. D. Goitein, "Sicily and Southern Italy in the Cairo Geniza Documents," *Archivio storico der la Sicilia orientale,* LXVII, 1971, 14.

23. *Kitāb Yatīmat al-Dahr,* cited by Lamm, 199.

24. Goitein, 1973, 265.

25. Lamm, 210.

26. Sharaf al-Dīn ᶜAlī al-Yazdī, *Ẓafar-nāmah,* Tehran, 1336 s./1957–58, I, 199.

27. Goitein, 1973, 141.

28. Stillman, 1976, 582; Dozy, 28.

29. Numerous references in Serjeant, see *khilᶜa.*

30. The importance of this event for the history of Fatimid art has been suggested by O. Grabar in "Imperial and Urban Art in Islam: The Subject Matter of Fatimid Art," *Colloque International sur l'Histoire de Caire,* Cairo, 1972, reprinted in *Studies in Medieval Islamic Art,* London, 1976, no. VII (hereafter, Grabar, VII).

31. Stillman, 1979, 32–33.

32. Goitein, 1973, no. 11.

33. J. Sadan, *Le Mobilier au proche orient mediéval,* Leiden, 1976 (hereafter, Sadan).

34. E.g., in the "Dīwān" of the Bath at Khirbat al-Mafjar, cf. R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting,* Geneva, 1962, 39 (hereafter, Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*); mosaics as substitutes for textiles, Strzygowski, 441.

35. On nomadism in the Mediterranean, see F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II,* London, 1972–73; on Iran, see the works of V. Barthold, C. Cahen, J. Aubin, and on a specific dynasty, J. E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation and Empire,* Chicago, 1976.

36. Seasonal movements of Timurid princes were recorded by the Spanish envoy, Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlaine,* trans. Le Strange, London, 1928 (hereafter, Clavijo).

37. E.g., found especially in illustrations of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, in Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting,* 112; and in scenes from Niẓāmī's *Laylā and Majnūn,* e.g., L. Binyon, *The Poems of Nizami,* London, 1928, pl. 12; and E. Grube, *The World of Islam,* New York, 1966, 127.

38. Cf. Clavijo, 238; D. Wilber, "The Timurid Court: Life in Gardens and Tents," *Iran,* XVII, 1979, 127–33.

39. Sadan, 7ff.

40. Lamm, 185.

41. B. Gray, *Persian Painting,* Geneva, 1961, 25.

42. M. Canard, "Le cérémonial Fatimite et le cérémonial Byzantin," *Byzantion,* XXI, 1951, 360 (hereafter, Canard, 1951).

43. J. Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages,* Detroit, 1970, 88–99 (hereafter, Lassner); Ibn al-Zubayr, 134.

44. Ibn al-Zubayr, 150–51.

45. Ibid., 141–45; other "scenery changes" are described in A. Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam,* Oxford, 1937, 65.

46. Lassner, 88–89.

47. Lamm, 78.

48. T. Arnold, *Painting in Islam,* Oxford, 1928, rpt., New York, 1965, 21 (hereafter, Arnold); al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāᶜiẓ wa-al-Iᶜtibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār,* Būlāq, 1854, I, 419 (hereafter, al-Maqrīzī).

49. Arnold, 21.

50. V. Gervers, "An Early Christian Curtain in the Royal Ontario Museum," *Studies in Textile History,* 56–81 (see note 10 for the complete reference).

51. O. Grabar, "The Six Kings at Qusayr Amrah," *Ars Orientalis,* I, 1954, 185–87.

52. al-Masᶜūdī, cited in Pope, *SPA,* 2276–77; Lamm, 57.

53. Ibn al-Zubayr, 254.

54. Sadan, 14–17.

55. Bussagli, ill. frontispiece.

56. On the ceremonial role of curtains, see D. Sourdel, "Questions de cérémonial Abbaside," *Revue des Études Islamiques,* 1960, and Canard, 1951. For curtains placed around the *miḥrāb,* see Canard, 1951, 376.

57. See "*Kiswa,*" *EI*¹, s.v. The custom of covering idols and shrines may be traced to ancient Semitic usage (cf. Bosworth, 42, al-Thaᶜālibī, text discussing "first persons" to cover Kaᶜbah, see note 76 below).

58. *Riḥlah,* Leiden, 1907, 83.

59. F. Rosenthal, *Four Essays on Art and Literature in*

Islam, IV: "A Note on the Mandīl," Leiden, 1971 (hereafter, Rosenthal).

60. Ibid., 93.

61. E.g., Niẓāmī, *Khamsah*, Brit. Mus. Add. 27261, ill. F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey*, London, 1912, pl. 53; also Niẓāmī, *Haft Paikar*, trans. C. E. Wilson, London, 1924, 175, 198.

62. Von Le Coq, *Bilderatlas . . .*, fig. 157 (Kutscha), fig. 63 (actual painting on silk).

63. al-Thaᶜālibī, *Histoire des Rois des Perses*, ed. and trans. H. Zotenberg, Paris, 1900, 640.

64. Serjeant, *Ars Islamica*, IX, 71ff.

65. Goitein, 1973, 134.

66. al-Māfarrūkhī, Pers. trans. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Abī al-Riḍā' Āvī, *Maḥāsin Iṣfahān*, ed. A. Iqbal, Tehran, 1327, 75.

67. Stillman, 1974, 302.

68. Grabar, VII, 45.

69. E.g., al-Maqrīzī, II, 79.

70. Examples cited in "*Ṭirāz*," *EI*[1], s.v.

71. L. Volov (Golombek), "Plaited Kufic on Samanid Epigraphic Pottery," *Ars Orientalis*, VI, 1966, 107–33.

72. Rosenthal, 81, 83–84, 86.

73. Lamm, 144ff.; Golombek and Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics."

74. L. Volov (Golombek).

75. I have been informed by George Scanlon that no Samanid wares have been found in the excavations of Fustat.

76. al-Thaᶜālibī, *The Book of Curious and Entertaining Information* (*Latā'if al-Maᶜārif*), trans. C. E. Bosworth, Edinburgh, 1968, 129.

77. C. Ewart, *Spanisch-Islamische Systeme sich Kreuzender Bögen*, Berlin, 1968.

78. R. A. Jairazbhoy, *An Outline of Islamic Architecture*, London, 1972, pl. 31.