



## 3D *Ziyarat*: Lenticularity and technologies of the moving image in material and visual piety

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**3d *ziyarat*: lenticularity  
and technologies of the  
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and visual piety**  
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## Abstract

Images *in* movement and images *of* movement take a central place in iterations of Islamic material and visual piety. Yet the still image remains the default object of inquiry in most studies of devotional visuality. Taking movement rather than stasis as the prerequisite for engagement, many popular decorative items and technologies that share the status of “moving images” evoke the affective experience of pilgrimage. In what follows, close analysis of a repertoire of one such image technology, the lenticular print, formed through its circulation in Pakistan, provides insights into the kind of engagement expected from images whose efficacy is governed by their mobility. By testing the application of some significant theories on the phenomenology of film experience, combined with ways of understanding the forms of presence elicited by virtual pilgrimage, this essay attempts to better grasp the kinds of engagement invited by devotional objects characterized by their evocation of movement.

**Keywords:** Islam, pilgrimage, visual piety, film, affect, presence.

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Many objects of popular visual piety in Pakistan can be said to promise movement; either to represent a pilgrimage intended or achieved, or by simulating the mediatory journey of meeting, and being met halfway between the temporal mundane and divine presence. In the first category, we can count static evocations of mobility: posters, postcards, and lithographs featuring views of mosques, saints, and shrines around the world and their sacred connection to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. In the second, we can take as an example a certain category of optical or mechanical toys or three-dimensional transplane images such as lenticular prints. In these instances, lenticular prints provide a surrogate for travel between local shrines and the holy sites of Islam by manifesting a startling sense of depth spread – contained, almost – across the surface of holographically printed images. Lenticular prints are different from the pre-cinematic “stereoscopy” technique, in which two photographs viewed through a framing device give the impression of three-dimensionality, in that they are actualized by bodily movement. Through a gentle tilt of the print, they are operated more than they are gazed upon. Whether they animate a short vignette of the *mise-en-scène* of religious intercession or perform looped highlights of a travelogue as a transformation between two or more viewpoints, Islamic lenticular prints largely express a worldly transformation. This stands in contrast to the Catholic Christian canon of lenticularity which sees miracles enacted and apparitions reproduced.<sup>1</sup> Instead, Islamic lenticular prints perform and embody a desire to make, or evoke the experience of making, pilgrimage, and in some instances, simulate the technics and techniques of the body and mind engaged in the act of asking for and receiving intercession.

In Pakistan, lenticular prints are displayed in shops, tailors, food and beverage stalls, beside shrines and within smaller mausolea, within homes, and in smaller forms as dangling decorations hung on the rear-view mirrors of cars and rickshaws. Due to the plastic ridges that both contain and cause the transplane images to interact, lenticular prints are more resistant to patina and desecration than paper images. For this reason, they are priced similarly to the cheaper ready-framed devotional images sold at markets surrounding Muslim shrines. Their technical and illusionistic trickery makes them seem like a kind of adult toy, something that evinces concentrated devotion at the time as indexing play (Figures 1 and 2). Popular images include multi-planar journeys from the shrine of the patron saint of Lahore, Data Ganj Baksh, to the grave of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina in Saudi Arabia, or multi-perspective views of a single shrine, such as the mausoleum of Imam Ali in Najaf, Iraq (Figure 3). This expansive horizon provides a corporeal appeal to the possibility of travel or transformation on a global Islamic axis around which a transnational body circumambulates. Wholesalers in Lahore’s historic publishing and paper-goods district, Urdu Bazaar, occasionally refer to them as “3D ziyarat,” a term that



**FIG 1**  
The Kaaba and Green Dome of Medina embedded in an oyster overflowing with pearls. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. May 2013.

situates their efficacy in providing an illusion of movement that evokes the felt conditions of pilgrimage through concentrated mental and bodily connection. An Arabic root-word used commonly in Persian and Urdu, *ziyarat* is a form of pilgrimage which describes the act of visitation to the shrines associated with the Prophet Muhammad, the *ahl-e-bayt* [the family of the Prophet], the Shi'i Imams, and other venerated personages, saints, holy men and women. Describing devotional technologies in this way operates on the assumption that the forms of visitation activated by *ziyarat* can be done in a number of different ways. For example, when Shi'i Muslims in the Walled City of Lahore take out processions on the Day of Ashura and the days approaching it, they describe doing so as performing *ziyarat*, an act of both commemorating a theological event and manifesting the sacred within their own neighborhoods. Yet, even while associating such objects with important religious events, those buying, using, or adorning their domestic or professional spaces with lenticular images often speak of them ambivalently. For some, they can be three-dimensional pilgrimage or objects that aid in requests for intercession, while others find them merely superficial gadgets.

Between 2017 and 2018 I conducted a year of ethnographic fieldwork in the Pakistani city of Lahore exploring the relationship between audio-visual media technologies, popular piety, and ethical attunement that become imbricated in the marketplace trade in Pakistani film. I spent much of this time learning



**FIG 2**  
A lenticular print sold by a street seller on Lahore's Hall Road, Pakistan. February 2018.

about practices associated with the guardianship and mediation of Pakistani popular culture from sole traders in large media bazaars. Providing the backdrop to my conversations about the ethical and affective force of moving image media, I gathered data on the use of images in religious settings. I came to realize the constitutive influence of this ethnographic residue on my work on film experience, media technologies, and ethical environment. This essay is an attempt to engage with a range of lenticular prints and moving image objects collected during fieldwork in Pakistan and beyond as a way of calling for a greater understanding of the distinct character of devotional moving images. By engaging with markets and bazaars as spaces conducive to the production, distribution, and dissemination of pious affect and popular religious sentiment, this essay acknowledges a substantial debt to studies of material religion and visual



**FIG 3**

A lenticular print, imported from Iran, of Imam Ali's mausoleum, sold at the market of Shah Chan Chiragh, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. April 2018.

culture in local and transnational marketplaces (Pinney 2004; Frembgen 2006; Jain 2007; Elias 2009, 2012, 2018; Khosronejad 2012; Saeed 2012). Yet the still image remains the default object of inquiry in most studies of devotional visibility. This essay proposes understanding the devotional moving image as an object of engagement on its own terms, as a technology of affect and ethical attunement. I propose to do this by drawing upon phenomenological approaches to the moving image and affective approaches to the intensity of simulating pilgrimage. The essay concludes by commenting on the utility yet partial inadequacy of both theoretical approaches for accounting for the affections and ambivalences that moving images invite. Instead, I propose to understand such devotional moving images as oscillations between presence and absence, as tuned environments or sites of transit that act upon their users as much as they are acted upon through technologically mediated play.

### **Theologies of the Moving Image in Pakistan**

In the contemporary repertoire of visual representations among the various instantiations of Islam in Pakistan it is indexical signs pertaining to the personage of the Prophet Muhammad that are, at present, most agreeable for broad dispersal in the public sphere. The Prophet's green turban, and the flowing outline of its folds, or a silhouette of the Prophet's simple sandal, are frequently seen rendered in flashing LED lights or adorning bunting strung across streets for religious celebrations such as the two

Eids, as well as Milad-un-Nabi, and Lailat-ul-Qadr. Such popular visual piety has been shaped by the influence of Sunni Bareilvi<sup>2</sup> religious-political groups, combining their ambition for populist appeal with an all-embracing love for the personage of the Prophet. The broad consensus it is possible to glean from the various contributors to the remarkable compendium of Pakistani material and visual culture, *Mazaar Bazaar*, edited by Saima Zaidi in 2009, is that a certain homogenization and de-syncretization has taken place over the last four decades in the realm of material and visual manifestations of popular piety in Pakistan. Some scholars and journalists have ascribed this change to a wanton “Arabization” or the “Saudification” of the country, perhaps initiated through the gradual entanglement of the country in the economic prosperity (and often military defense) of the oil-rich Gulf states. Middle-class Pakistanis engaged in large-scale – and almost always temporary – experiences of expatriate labor in the Gulf are said to have brought back with them a taste for the non-representative imagery, gleaming marble, and green neon lights that typify the visual and architectonic culture of public religiosity in countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Others describe it as the legacy of General Zia-ul-Haq, whose decade of military rule in Pakistan between 1977 and 1988, tinged with a populist theocratic bent, is often cited as the reason for the perceptible visual and material transformation.

As I have shown elsewhere, in Pakistan, as in other places that grapple with the problem of defining the public place of majoritarian faith in relation to the practices of religious minorities, sources of religious authority are often called upon to deal with a wide repertoire of questions over image permissibility and the public morality of film experience (Cooper 2018, 2020). In the instances in which image technologies are questioned, answers often refer to the ontology of the apparatus rather than its contextual dispensation. Depending on one’s adherence to widely divergent sources of juridical authority or social consensus, the permissibility and social place of an image-object can be judged either by attempting to situate its ontology (in relation to a static picture) or by the practices associated with its engagement. Far from finding its discursive origins in a total aversion to images or aniconism, these debates wrestle with what Christopher Pinney has termed the politics of “imageology” and its circulation through personal and public contexts, namely the forms of knowledge relating to permissibility that circumambulate images in an attempt to fix them as moral facts (Pinney 2015b). Taking one example, anxieties over the particular ontology and materiality of the film image – rather than the built and social space of the cinema – have often centered upon the extent to which the movement of the image allows it to evade ontological categorization as a picture (*tasveer*). One Pakistani religious scholar from a scholastic background in Sufi doctrines, Mian Shafi, who attempted to counter the discourse of political Islamisation in the early stage



of General Zia's rule, critiqued the transformation of Syed Abul A'la Maududi's (1903–1979) approach to the permissibility of moving images ([1954] 2000). Maududi, founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami movement in India before Partition and later a prominent public figure and theologian in Pakistan, continues to exert great influence over Pakistan's political culture. Shafi narrated how, in the early years of his political-religious writings, Maududi displayed a more open mind toward film experience, in which he felt that due to its ontological mobility, the moving image does not manifest into the fixity of *tasveer*. Countering the negative view Maududi had taken toward images by the time of the completion of his Urdu commentary of the Quran, *Tafheem-ul-Quran* in 1972, Shafi argued that the ontology of idol-worship (*shirk*) that Maududi decried should not be seen to originate in objects themselves. Counter to Maududi's view that the quality of idol-ness is inherent in the thing, he argued that the transformation of an object into an idol comes from engagement with the viewer or perceiver (11). For Shafi, images are figures that supply and run parallel to discourse. He explains, "If we still feel that making or possessing pictures is "shirk" or "haram," we have to declare all persons on earth as *mushrikeen* [polytheists] since everyone who listens, talks or thinks pictures, in mind, of everything heard, spoken or thought" (12). Shafi's view is closer to what Jamal Elias finds to be the importance of the social place of images evident in the early history of Islamic jurisprudence and aesthetic practice. In the instructive tradition that gives its title to Elias' recent monograph *Aisha's Cushion* (2012), the Quran narrates how the Prophet Muhammad's young wife hangs a tapestry on the wall of their home, only to be rebuked by her husband. The offending image was then taken down, cut up, and turned into cushions that were put around their home. In this instance, it is content and context that dictate permissibility, not the ontology of the image itself. When they are recycled into items of everyday use, different meanings can be teased out in different locations.

Despite the often-puzzling contradictions of the strictures against the employment of figurative representation in the living traditions of the Prophet Muhammad as historicized in the Hadiths, Elias argues in this early history it was a case of "what belongs in the bath does not belong in the bedroom, does not belong in the audience hall, does not belong in the mosque" (Elias 2012, 37). This notion of belonging is instructive as a different regime of value to taste, an aesthetic order that operates spatially and contextually. The efficacy, influence, and permissibility of images of human manufacture have long been a common object of study for religious scholars, historians, and anthropologists alike. Those working on understanding the contours of visual piety have argued for the agential power of images, particularly their ability to act upon the body (Morgan 1998, 2014, 83) and their operation as interfaces of pious practice. Within this overarching frame, largely monotheistic anxieties

over idolatry can be seen not only as a result of theologies of aniconism or as the result of an anxiety over depicting physical forms, but of fears of what David Freedberg calls “enlivening” (1989, 325) as a process as intrinsic to political accession as to idols. For those communities of pious sentiment who consider the divine unable to survive human manufacture or figurative depiction, devotional craftwork has long been steered into modes of signification, such as calligraphic or iconic signs.

In the twentieth century, various forms of mass-produced Islamic bazaar art, souvenirs, talismans, and commodities have become a visual and material form seemingly less likely to enflame sources of conservative orthodoxy. Ammara Maqsood (2014) has produced ethnographic insights into the rise of the so-called “middle-class” Islamic shop in Lahore. These are shops that do not just sell commodities conducive to worship but also things that help perform a distinct Muslim identity connected to broader Islamic commodity chains, forms of travel, prayer economies, and to technologies for absorbing blessings (Bhatti and Pinney 2011). Gregory Starrett’s earlier study of this vast community of objects tracked the emergence of Islamic commodities in Egyptian marketplaces and the coexistence of mass-produced and artisanal trinkets (1995b). Starrett found the emergence of mass reproduction went hand in hand with a change in the viability of showing sacred text and circulating religious literature in the Egyptian public sphere (55). Emblematic of such a change, Starrett noticed that the *dua al-safar* – the prayer for travelling – had begun to be sold inscribed on a range of mobile, rotating, or kinetic objects that were designed to be suspended from car rear-view mirrors (53). As the composure point at the beginning and end of a journey, the rear-view mirror was taken as an efficacious place that seemed to resolve anxieties over permissibility by transforming the display value of the commodity into the use value of a reminder to pray. In Pakistan today, rear-view mirror decorations are the most commonly seen Islamic devotional moving image. They tilt, shimmer, and move with the driver and the passengers, responding to the rattle of the roads and the changing light of day.

### **The Architectonics of Pilgrimage**

Another popular moving image commodity, the lenticular print, arrives into Pakistan from the southern port of Karachi as container ship cargo most often originating from China. Large editions of unlettered prints currently in manufacture are ordered wholesale from Chinese manufacturers of devotional items. In these instances, they conform not to a specifically Gulf-imported image of Islam, but to specific depictions and arrangements perceived from outside to be likely to align with prevailing consensus over the suitability of the object for religious consumption. A small number of other designs featuring Urdu-language text are manufactured bespoke from Chinese suppliers in smaller quantities. In Islamic shops around the world, lenticular prints are

sold alongside perfumes, toys, educational literature, and learning tools. While most lenticular prints are vehicles of imagined travel, others move imperceptibly; they shimmer on the surface of the image. This perhaps explains the name sometimes given to them in Pakistan, *shade-wali* (shade-ones). This designation refers more to an aesthetic of reflectiveness; single planed pictures can also be *shade-wali* as long as they are slightly glossed or reflective. Theirs are not a journey but a flickering presence, a provocation for *zikr*, or remembrance, like the bobbing *dua al-safar* on rear-view mirrors. Many two-dimensional *shade-wali* feature the numbers "786," the numerical value of the opening phrase of the Quran, "Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim," as per the Abjad decimal numeral system. This devotional practice is used most prominently in South Asia, where banknotes found with the number set are framed and prominently displayed as a serendipitous omen in the impersonal flow and circulation of wealth. 786 is also used as shorthand to write on disposable surfaces considered an unfit site for a Quranic verse in light of their potential for degradation or soiling. While conducting research in Lahore, the way that I was communicated the difference between two-dimensional glossy images and "3D" lenticular prints was not done semantically but gesturally, through a movement of the hand connoting a change of angle that corresponds to a perspectival difference. In contrast to *shade-wali*, which I found able to be easily described with recourse to terms like light and movement, lenticular prints were at once both evasive images to describe in words yet remarkably easy to evoke gesturally.

This kind of difference between optical and corporeal engagement in the experience of the moving image has been explored at length by Laura U. Marks, who, writing on film experience, finds moving image media characterized by the "contingent and contagious circumstances" (2000, xii) of bodily engagement. Building upon the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Marks argues that perception expresses itself through the surfaces of sensory events, for which "the image is connective tissue" (xi). Evident in the lenticular prints that circulate in Pakistan is an acknowledgment of the importance of the event of mediation either through connection to the personages of Muslim saints, their mausolea and grave-sites, or through an interface of materialization such as the print itself. To take one example, in [Figure 4](#) we see the mediatory connection between Ajmer Sharif in India and the sites of Mecca and Medina. Simulated by the interlacing of the lenticular print's changing surface, this rapid journey appears at a glance like a product of long-exposure photography.<sup>3</sup> In the print, Ajmer Sharif, the shrine of Moinuddin Chishti, founder of the Chishtiyya order of Sunni mysticism, backed by the squat rooves of the neighborhoods adjacent to the shrine in the town of Ajmer, segue into the blurred bodies of those circumambulating the Kaaba. In the bottom right of the image, most proximate to the viewer (dimensionally speaking) is the open doorway to the foot of the saint's shrine, garlanded with rose petals. For many of

those consuming this print in Pakistan, the prospect of visiting Ajmer, although only 350 miles as the crow flies from Lahore, would constitute a near impossibility owing to the difficult visa regimes for pilgrims that exist between the two countries.

Evident from those prints that arrive in Pakistan is a residual syntax of Islamic lenticular images that has developed through their historic circulation on postcards. Appearing around the 1960s, and once largely of Japanese manufacture, postcards were once the common medium on which lenticular images were to be found, and to which the possibility of actual geographic travel was added to their evocative simulations. Today, they are sold most commonly in a size slightly larger than a piece of standard printer paper. A popular recent design features a globe bearing the name of Allah, which segues into kneeling masses in prayer before the Kaaba, their uniform stance melding into a grid-like pattern which delineates the formless universe beyond the globe (Figure 5). The use of a non-figurative grid over a distinct landscape or topography evokes an architectural or, in this case, a sacred terrain yet to be ordered or known. In the domain of architecture, Rem Koolhaas called the grid “a conceptual speculation... [which] claims the superiority of mental construction over reality” ([1974] 2014, 174). That these dimensions evoke some of the orthodoxies of architectural modernism suggests, in secondary analyses, we might suggest the surface of the image as the location through which the bearer may find the efficacy of the lenticular print. It is composed of surfaces rather than depths; speculative, tentative, and superficial. But unlike the surfacism of modernist art, the



**FIG 4**  
Lenticular print showing Ajmir Sharif. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. February 2013.

lenticular print functions through what Pinney calls an aesthetic of “submersibility” (2015a, 36) that captures the without from within, rather than the depths of an interior depicted from the outside.

Lenticular prints are a product of the historical development of stereoscopic technologies and a prevailing nineteenth-century interest in spatial and pictorial verisimilitude. Normal photographic prints were said to depict three-dimensional materials in the sense that they only “record *volumes* in an *area*” (Judge [1926] 1935, 1). The stereoscopic image, on the other hand, functions through the materiality of vision, thus explaining the etymology of the word as it is formed by *stereo* (solid) and *scopeo* (I view) (2). In the early twentieth century, engineer and technology writer Arthur Judge attempted to reconcile, without the aid of an apparatus for viewing, how the difference between the binocular vision of stereoscopic imaging and the monocular vision of photographic prints could be united in two dissimilar images so as to create a three-dimensional illusion of depth. Yet almost a century later, in his history of the transplane image, Jens Schröter mourns how lenticular prints, a once-revolutionary step in pictorial technology, have been consigned to a gimmick used by advertisers or manufacturers of cheap toys (Schröter 2014, 177). While lenticular imagery has been easily commodified, their aesthetics have also been used to other ends, namely in the creative practice of Kinetic artists such as Yaacov Agam. Schröter also neglected their extensive application in religious iconography. They have enjoyed particular

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**FIG 5** Lenticular print showing a grid system that segues into kneeling adherents at the Kaaba. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. April 2013.

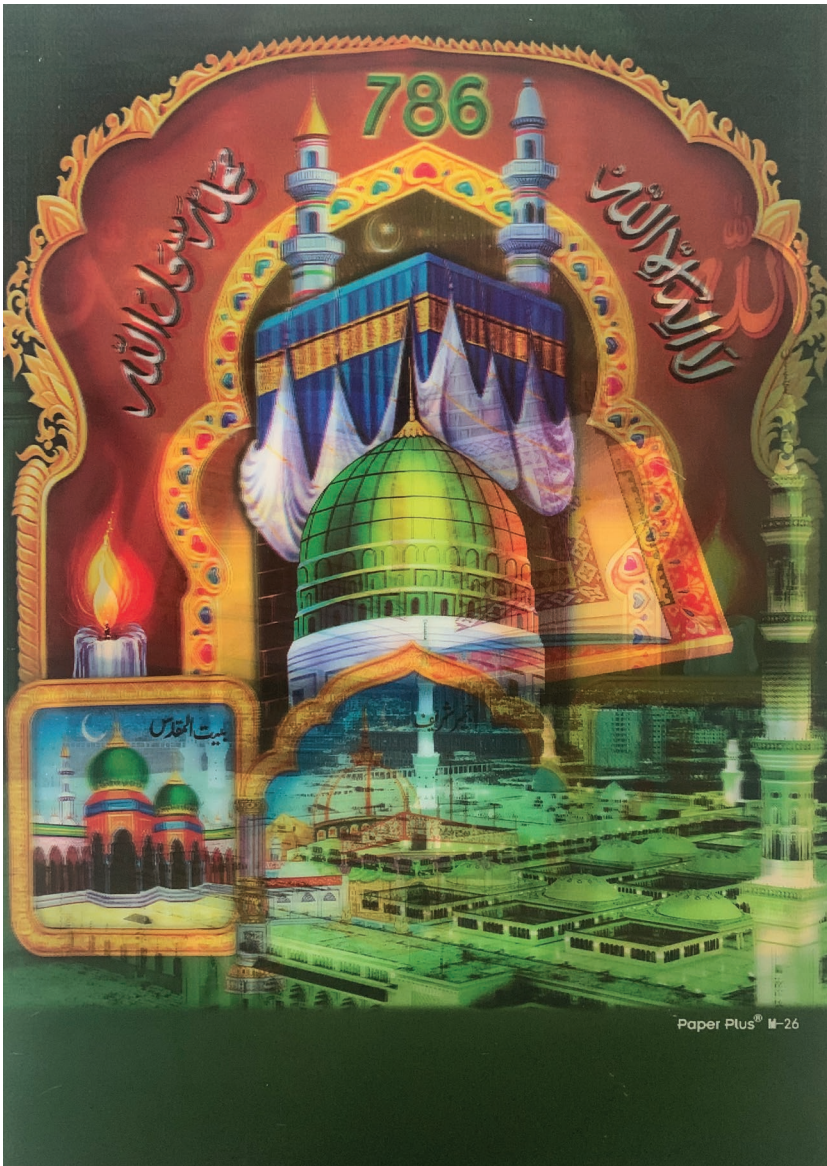
popularity in Hindu devotion (Pinney 2017) and in varied Christian expressions of miracles, apparitions of saints, and images evoking the transubstantive corporeality of Jesus Christ. Lenticular postcards of the Turin Shroud, for example, shift the image plane from a modern portrait of Christ to the facial features believed to have been imprinted on the shroud. Rarely, however, are they used in Orthodox Christianity, whose own technology of the icon appears to have been unsuited to an aesthetics of “submersibility,” or in Jewish popular devotion.

Lenticular prints can also act as a point of orientation or an axis. Commonly recurring axes are Baghdad Sharif, the mausoleum of Abdul Qadir Gilani, the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order and Ajmer Sharif, taking the form in one lenticular print of medallions that appear underneath an open Quran or hover in front of the minarets of Mecca (Figure 6). Most lenticular prints are delicately balanced so as to not offend the sentiments of others but attuned enough to popular denominational diversity that varied users might place themselves within and cohabit a sacred geography. As Allen and Mary Nooter Roberts have shown in an essay on visual images representing the Muslim saint Sheikh Amadou Bamba, leader of a Sufi movement in Senegal known as the Mouride Way, the lenticular print is an ideal format through which to pursue a, “more active involvement with the image” (2008, 21). For my interlocutors in Lahore who consumed and decorated their spaces with lenticular prints, this active element can be found in the ways in which lenticularity foregrounds not only movement, but the interstitial place of mediation and intercession. A key recent example, having come into the marketplace only a few months before I began fieldwork in Lahore, features the commonly used phrase “Mashallah,” a term both of appreciation and gratitude to Allah and one with the agency to ward off the evil eye caused by jealousy (Figure 7). Unlike other lenticular prints, which commonly feature only the Kaaba or the green dome of the Prophet’s grave in Medina, this print was unusual for featuring a human figure, a young girl in a headscarf looking up to the sky and clasping a Quran. The print featured an extensive caption in Urdu, reading,

All Muslims would like to see the inside of the Kaaba but very few can undertake the pilgrimage. We are very thankful to Allah for giving us the privilege to print this picture of the inside of the Kaaba. We pray that Allah gives all Muslims a chance to go on pilgrimage to Medina and the Kaaba. Amen.

Contained within this print is a toolkit for long-distance mental travel, a surrogate for pilgrimage, and the promise of movement. The print signals intention yet serves as a reminder for the potential of its actualization.

The performative promise of pilgrimage enacted by Islamic lenticular prints inhabits the world of inner movement, quite



**FIG 6**

Lenticular print showing Baghdad Sharif [the mausoleum of Abdul Qadir Gilani in Baghdad], Ajmer Sharif in India, and Bayt al-Maqdis [Jerusalem]. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. March 2013.

contrary to the influential analysis of Victor and Edith Turner ([1978] 2011) that pilgrimage can be defined by the pilgrim's estrangement from everyday life. While moving images such as lenticular prints are identified by their connection to the circulatory and circuitous routes that they enact and embody, they draw their efficacy as reminders and interfaces of experience in users' homes, vehicles for daily travel, and places of work. Anthropologists of Islam have long drawn attention to the ways in which the circulation of objects and persons is undergirded by the importance of travel as a form of religious and social action (Eickelman

and Piscatori 1990, 5). Yet in spite of this sensitivity to the forms of mobility that characterize Islamic subjectivities, Surinder Bhardwaj (1998) rightly observed the need for a greater understanding of *ziyarat*, as pilgrimages other than the Hajj and Umra journeys to Mecca, as a crucial typology of circulation in Islam. Forms of *ziyarat* in South Asia see devotees undertake journeys to sites and shrines as a means of self- or communal fulfillment through the contagious blessings of a holy person, or to mark the anniversary of a birth, death, or martyrdom of the saint in question. In their exploration of movement and the placement of persons and things in the popular visibility and locality of shrines in South Asia, Yousuf Saeed and Christiane Brosius describe how “shrines, though physically immobile, are connected by agents, images, media, and practices, and thus shape a certain kind of spatial fluidity” (2013, no page). In short, in some instances the need to physically travel to receive intercession or a request for mediation (from a shrine and all this entails) can be substituted by a material object, which can physically move or evoke movement in the place of the person, or at the interface of an image as “connective tissue.” Like Saeed and Brosius, Babak Rahimi refers to devotional practices as partly constituted by “material ambience” through which “devotees seek a spiritual mode of life” (2019, 207) through literature, prayer books, and prayer media. Visitation and participation in pilgrimage to shrines is increasingly facilitated or mediated by the Internet to both local and transnational communities of shared sentiment. Rahimi argues that for Iranian Shi’i Muslim adherents, the religious experience of shrines can even be digitally mediated in ways that are not subordinate to corporeal visitation. In these instances, technologies of mediation do not just provide a simulation of access but both contribute to the emotive and ambient dimensions of a broader ecology of prayer and construct new ways of participating in those atmospheres and ambiances.

During fieldwork in Lahore I learned that, despite its popularity over the last few decades, the lenticular print was becoming an increasingly rare sight in the marketplace. The last wholesaler to supply it ceased ordering new designs after a large batch from various stockists proved to be unprofitable. Admittedly, this batch was visually disorientating, crammed with angles and images overlapping within the same dimensional plane, even before a tilt of the print tangled them further. One design featured the cloak, staff, and turban of the Prophet Muhammad at the center, with explanatory text –legible as writing but too small to read – that evokes their status as museum objects (Figure 8). Another disorientating design featured a kaleidoscopic series of sites and centers of global Islam; the Dome of the Rock, the Kaaba, the green dome of Medina, and other shrines associated with the heads of Sufi orders (Figure 9). With no clear demarcation between them, the images blur into one another with no clear contours. One could not approach it but was required to wheel around it, to come at it from an angle, to bend it, shake it, or flip it right around. The





**FIG 7**  
 A lenticular print showing the inside of the Kaaba, captioned in Urdu. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. September 2017.

wholesaler stopped dealing in lenticular prints shortly after, likely making them the last in Lahore's Urdu Bazaar to do so. One of the last designs featured what, with the benefit of hindsight, appears to me now as almost akin to a parting message, a quotation from Mustafa Raza Khan Qadri, former leader of the Sunni Barelvi movement, etched deeply into the frame.

You are beloved, beloved unto God  
 Every lover of yours is beloved of God.  
 If you want connection with God, find a mediator.  
 Without a mediator, you will not find the connection! Certainly, you  
 won't meet God.

Like the "Mashallah" design mentioned earlier, this print was different from what often takes the form of a whistle-stop tour through the sights of the Hajj or other kinds of *ziyarat*. This hurried and disorientating freefall through objects, places, and itineraries of intercession, seemed almost to be posing a question to itself. Is the evocation of movement enough to support intercession? Can this work be done on the surface of the image or must one look further, beyond its transplane technology? As interfaces of a certain degree of materialization and intensity, do the affective propositions provided by the lenticular print have a threshold point, after which it passes into overload?



**FIG 8**  
 A lenticular print featuring the cloak, staff, and turban of the Prophet Muhammad at the center, with small text labels that evoke their status as museum objects. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. October 2017.



**FIG 9**  
 Another design featured a disorientating picture series of a kaleidoscope of sites and centers of global Islam. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. October 2017.

### Mobile Engagement

Writing about popular Pakistani poster art, Jamal Elias argues that popular visuality is instructive and “affective” only in so far that it leaves in its wake active responses that are derived from emotional stimulation (2018, 154). Where does this leave the affective dimension of such moving images if they are merely the mechanical response to certain triggers? Similarly, Victor and Edith Turner’s work on pilgrimage can also be read as an exploration of how world religions make affective experiences into pious infrastructures. Yet their conflation of inner and outer experience – supposing a smooth translation ([1978] 2011, 7) – leaves too little space for ambiguity, ambivalence, and superficiality to creep into the anthropology of pilgrimage and its changing interfaces. The “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences, following the influence of affect theory in literary, media, and cultural studies, has instead highlighted the essential in-between-ness of affect as a force that retains the traces of both acting and being acted upon. Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg argue that the bleeding edges and ambiguities that constitute affective encounters operate through both the inner world of emotions and at the interfaces of bodily experience. In this way, to study affect is to study potential (2010, 2) rather than the forces of intention that might supply presupposed triggers. For Brian Massumi, the problem of studying affect is that so many ways of thinking

through signification are based on stasis rather than movement (2002, 3). Inspired by attempts to do away with subjectivity from the study of human experience, writing on affect has drawn criticism for building speculative theories on experimental neuroscientific or psychological research (Martin 2013, S155). Studying the efficacy of dreams in an Egyptian Sufi community, Amira Mittermaier shows how the role of affective experience challenges the paradigmatic focus on self-cultivation in the anthropology of Islam (2012). Mittermaier focuses on how a community engages with the divine and social agency of dreams and visitation, and the role they play in visiting upon individuals or communities effects which they are not able to bring about themselves. As Mittermaier argues, being acted upon does not efface subjective agency but rather “constitutes her or him as a moral being and witness” (258). Her focus on being acted upon is useful for explaining the kind of affective interactions that lenticular prints elicit. In the study of the material and visual culture of religious phenomena, few objects or images stand for themselves as mediators; they either represent divinity or directly attempt to bridge the gap from memory to affect. Lenticular prints, however, are reminders more of the importance of mediators than of the agency of the divine, in which the agency of intention is surrendered to the potential of having one’s prayers answered.

In her exploration of the parallels between Islamic art, design, architecture and contemporary new media art, Marks similarly finds the affective encounters elicited by artworks characterized by “embodied perception” (2010, 61); that is, a sculptural intensity to an image that unfolds toward the body or bodies of associated constitutive agents, such as the viewer. For some, such as Gregory Starrett the role of the body has been overemphasized. Arguing that prostration, whirling, and rocking during prayer appeared to nineteenth-century colonial eyes as the outward signs of superficial pious practices that excluded cognitive depth (1995a, 957–958), Starrett warns against understanding Islamic ritual or devotional engagement through bodily habit. However, as evocations of travel or pilgrimages performed in surrogate, lenticular prints must maintain a superficial surface so as to remain porous to mobile engagement with their users. If the image is “connective tissue,” in the words of Laura U. Marks, the task of the user is not to interpret but to uncover its continuity, “to unfold, to increase the surface area of experience” (2002, vi). Marks argued that by remaining pressed against the surface it is possible to derive knowledge from objects themselves rather than project meaning upon them. As an interface of acting – by animating the print through its movement – and being acted upon, lenticular prints invite engagement as much as they engage with the bearer. This is also instantiated in the community of objects among which lenticular prints thrive. Those circulating in the marketplace are often sold in stationery or

home décor stores, alongside what are called “decoration pieces,” and occasionally alongside other kinds of devotional “moving images.” This includes simulated flatscreen televisions which, when plugged into a wall-socket, revolve around like a moving-image display, literally taking the viewer on a travelogue around the holy sites (Figure 10). Other items include both traditional binocular slide viewers (Figure 11) and those housed in a small operating device shaped like a television (Figure 12). By imitating other modes of viewing, a slide viewer and a moving panorama in the shape of a television create a community of objects common in their efficacy.

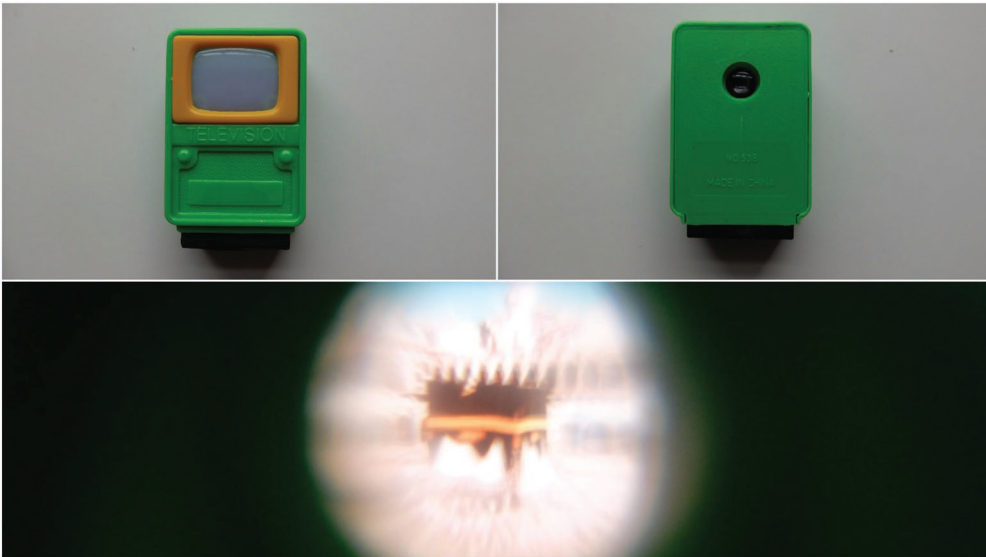
Taking this relationship with pre- and post-cinematic modes of moving image entertainment further, I argue that by applying some theories on the phenomenology and corporeality of film experience it is possible to further nuance the kinds of engagement elicited by lenticular prints. Research at the intersection of religion and film studies has proved to be a rich area of inquiry, instantiating systems of mediation in which religion and film act upon on another (Hughes and Meyer 2005, 149) and comparing the affective and immersive abilities of cinematic and religious “worlds” (Plate 2017). Equally instructive is Giuliana Bruno’s work on pre-cinematic technologies, which attempts to trace a “genealogy for a filmic architectonics” (2002, 16). Bruno studies the production of space through motion and the concurrent structuring of emotional engagement by the mapping of a perceptual and observational realm that, in one instance, culminated in film exhibition by means of panoramic displays, architectural embodiments of active space, and other visual “sites of transit” (17). She traces how, in the nineteenth century, technologies and displays of embodied travel blended the proto-cinematic with existing forms of



**FIG 10**  
A revolving display in the shape of a flatscreen television. Bought in Lahore, Pakistan. May 2018.



**FIG 11**  
Three slide viewers featuring views of global Islamic sites. Top images bought in Meknes, Morocco, 2017. Bottom images bought in Sarajevo, Bosnia, 2015.



**FIG 12**  
Slide viewer in the shape of a television. Bought in East Ham, London, UK, 2014.

entertainment. Film arrived as a pastime closely linked to its predecessors; “architectures of transit” (76) such as panoramas, world fairs, and postcard photography. Inherited from pre-cinematic modes of entertainment, the invention of cinematic montage built an emotional practice of movement through space that challenges the perceived immobility of the spectator. Bruno compares the materiality of the surface of the image to a kind of patina or sediment, in the surface tension of which can be found both a locus of circulation and a repository. Also

owing much to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Bruno describes how “the tensile surface of the screen is an archive. It contains several “sheets” of the past” (Bruno 2014, 6). In a similar way as film experience creates an architectonic screen, it is on the surface of the image that lenticular pilgrimages are made.

By tracing a trajectory from the architectonic elements of film’s origins as a simulation or evocation of travel to what fellow phenomenologist of film, Vivian Sobchack called “mobile engagement” (1992, 62), it is apparent that the surface of the Islamic devotional moving image provides an ambient space that can be occupied both as a superficial site of simulation and as a surrogate of mediation. To understand such engagement is to first accept the superficiality through which surface effects are grasped and the ways in which the superficiality of impressions belies the porosity of their surfaces. By applying theories of the moving image rather than notions of embodied visual piety, it is possible to see lenticular images invite users not to interpret them but to engage with them like the rear-view mirror *dua al-safar*; as fellow-travelers. Yet I think what Marks and Bruno’s reliance on phenomenological frameworks strives toward is not only an awareness of the body but also an understanding of the evocation of a sense of affective presence in the moving image as something less than divine spirit and yet more than mundane. Perhaps most integral to recent scholarly work on presence is Birgit Meyer’s argument that, contrary to genealogies of how religion has been taken as a subject of anthropological study, such as the Euro-American Protestant view of religion as inward and individual, religion can be elemental and environmental, formed of complex feedback loops, mediations, and demarcated by atmospheres that include some and omit others. Meyer’s material approach is anchored by the study of mediation and what she calls the “genesis of presence” (2014, 206). This idea understands perception as culturally framed and reliant on what has been described in this essay as interfaces of materialization. The idea of “visual piety” is not one that operates on the simple dynamics encoded into the engagement between viewer and viewed but one that operates through the pulse of presence, in which the image mediates relations that already exist and brings them about with greater affective force.

### **The Moving Image and Ethical Environment**

How does our understanding of visual piety change when we take a mobile, transformative object, rather than a static image, as the medium through which religious mediation takes place? Instead of arguing for the moving image as an image-space of purely affective intensity or for an essentially limpet-like tendency for achieving bodily attachment, I believe that the deployment of technologies of the moving image in popular worship engage their users by evoking the processual

elements of pilgrimage. While the static image might be uniquely tooled to facilitate the contemplative piety of self-cultivation or direct access to divinity, devotional moving images echo the conditions of bodies in transit. Sites of transit, such as the journey from the everyday toward the site of pilgrimage or the manifestation of sacred time in secular space that characterizes surrogate pilgrimages, are spaces of productive liminality which pilgrims strive to suffuse with an ethical ambiance that does not necessarily take a tangible, material form.

The key characteristic of “belonging,” so central to Jamal Elias’ view of the place of the image in Islamic art history, is as much a sensual syntax of pious ambiance and moral atmosphere as a regime of clearly delineated rules. Less-than-material, atmospheric orientation has long played a central role in architectural aesthetics. In Bruno’s genealogy of pre-cinematic technologies of the moving image, “sites” or “architectures of transit” were key precursors to the mechanical reproduction of filmic space and time. While, for Birgit Meyer, the sense of presence embedded in religious images is contingent on what they conceal as much as what they reveal, the absences and hidden powers they evoke, as an interface of what can and cannot be seen (2011, 1051). Presence is, as a perceptible sensation, largely reliant on its inverse, felt absence and the void. Perhaps in this tradition of looking to the built environment for clues to the efficacy of the moving image we might consider Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s (1972) essay on the significance of the void in Islamic architecture. Instead of looking at the filigree of Islamic calligraphy and design, as Marks did in her genealogy of new media art, Nasr focused on the sudden opening into sublime architectural space. In Nasr’s interpretation of Quranic materiality, in the order of created things the material is both the most transient and the most efficacious. The expression of the void is manifested by the use of negative space in Islamic architecture, with clustered streets leading to an expanse of open space, puncturing courtyards and public squares. Such spaces are designed for the mobility of bodies rather than bodily attachment. They provide the architectural infrastructure for what German philosopher Gernot Böhme has described as “tuned spaces” (2017, 162) as agents of harmony or dissonance.

In order to take the devotional moving image seriously on its own terms, it is important to be open to these kinds of interdisciplinary genealogies of pre-cinematic forms of embodied vision, emotional cartographies, affective elicitation, and arguments borne of film studies’ own dialogues with historians of space and architecture. However, while reading the experience of the moving image through the lens of phenomenology or through the dynamics of affect are instructive ways of exploring their efficacy, the extent to which the former relies on subjectivity and the latter’s claims of



non-subjectivity complicates their applicability. In the examples explored in this essay, lenticular prints see mobile engagement proffered as an ethical environment that evokes the character of being attuned to the dynamics of mediation. In their operation as objects that move sculpturally in space and time and in the ethical regimes through which they circulate, lenticular prints simultaneously mediate the “tuned spaces” they occupy and the sites of transit toward which they gesture. Uniquely tooled to act and be acted upon, the devotional moving image can be a weathervane for ethical orientation.

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# notes and references

<sup>1</sup>Popular instances include prints animating the statue and apparition of the Lourdes shrine in France. Suzanne Kaufman’s study of the mass culture of Lourdes (2005) shows that a trade in holy water, statues, and more recently, lenticular prints, has been imbricated in Lourdes as a pilgrimage site since its efficacy was first instantiated in 1858. Such popular devotion has aroused anxiety over the authenticity of religious experience so readily manifested and materialized in mass culture. Yet, Kaufman argues that commercial reproduction actually serves to legitimize the site rather than undermines its holiness.

<sup>2</sup>From the Sunni Hanafi school of jurisprudence, Barelvis make up the majority of Muslims in Pakistan. They practice great personal devotion to the Prophet Muhammad and are passionate defenders of the ability to reconcile Islamic law with the veneration of saints.

<sup>3</sup>By their very nature, lenticular prints are difficult to render in a two-dimensional form that might

evoke their surfaces, depths, and moving effects. As such, I have attempted to photograph the prints in their moments of transformation so as to hint at the journey they evoke. This necessarily entails many details to be lost in reproduction.

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