

## BETWEEN LOGOS (*KALIMA*) AND LIGHT (*NŪR*): REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD IN ISLAMIC PAINTING

Notwithstanding the long-held assumption that Islam forbids the representation of figural images, including the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad—a widespread belief underlying the furor that broke out following the September 2005 publication of a series of caricatures in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*<sup>1</sup>—there nevertheless exists a notable corpus of images of Muhammad produced, mostly in the form of manuscript illustrations, in various regions of the Islamic world from the thirteenth century through modern times. A good number of these paintings, however, underwent later iconoclastic mutilations in which the facial features of the Prophet were scratched or smeared (fig. 1),<sup>2</sup> thus compromising the body of pictorial evidence. Besides cases in which an image was mutilated, further surviving materials underscore the diverse and sometimes conflicting understandings of the permissibility of image-making in Islamic traditions, whether such understandings emerged as cultural constructions or reflect personal preferences.

Variant approaches and responses to images unfortunately render the examination of Islamic pictorial production quite speculative in nature. Despite these impediments, it is possible to explore some of the main iconographic developments and various symbolic implications of representations of Muhammad in a number of Islamic artistic traditions. However, it is not feasible to offer here a complete coverage of this complex subject. Rather, this study attempts to provide a preliminary discussion of textual and visual descriptions of the Prophet by concentrating principally on Persian materials. Although select Arabic and Ottoman Turkish texts and images are considered as well in order to highlight a particular theme or motif, there are two reasons for emphasizing Persian sources: firstly,

because illustrations of the Prophet flourished in Persian lands, especially during the Ilkhanid (1256–1353), Timurid (1370–1506), and Safavid (1501–1722) periods;<sup>3</sup> and secondly, because these depictions are often embedded within Persian illustrated historical and biographical texts, as well as illustrated “Books of Ascension” (*Mi’rājnāmas*) and encomia to Muhammad and his heavenly ascension (*mi’rāj*) included in poetic texts produced as illustrated manuscripts from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Examining first how scholarship has approached the concept of visuality in Islamic pictorial traditions and in representations of the Prophet more specifically, this study then attempts to sketch out the ways in which the Prophet Muhammad has been represented, how such depictions developed over the centuries, and some of the possible reasons behind the gradual move from “veristic” representation (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) to techniques of abstraction (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries). In this development, three principal kinds of “portraits” of the Prophet stand out, namely, veristic, inscribed, and luminous.<sup>5</sup> These divergent pictorial trends at times overlap and therefore reveal that one particular iconographic tradition did not necessarily belong to one time or place.

Verism or veristic representation is defined here as the manner in which an artist attempts to depict the human form as it is visible to the human eye, by including such details as facial features, bodily limbs, and other physical characteristics. The adjective “veristic” is used interchangeably with the terms “mimetic,” “naturalistic,” and “realistic” as a suitable means to describe visually what is essentially not a “real” person but rather a “memory image.”<sup>6</sup> The painter’s technique therefore involves the desire to represent the depicted subject’s



Fig. 1. The Prophet Muhammad's ascension (defaced), from Amir Khusraw Dihlavi's *Maṭla' al-anvār* (The Rising of the Lights), located in an anthology of Persian poetry, Yazd, 810 (1407). Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul, Ms. H. 796, fol. 4v. (Photo: Christiane Gruber)

physical reality in a natural manner, even if the subject (like the Prophet Muhammad) is no longer alive and thus exists not in the flesh but rather in recollection—a process of memory-building that can depend on iterations emerging from both culturally circumscribed mnemonic cues and an artist's own system of visual associations.

Inscribed depictions of the Prophet contain inscriptions either below or above a painted surface—usually the Prophet's white facial veil—and thus reveal the painter's processual approach to image-making and / or the viewer's active reception to it. In general, inscribed

“portraits” highlight the affective power of images of the Prophet, and suggest a relationship to personal invocation and prayer (*du'ā'*) practices, which tend to call forth the Prophet through a combination of verbal prayers and mental picturing. In such representations, a written text serves to buttress a visual construct, while the declarative mode helps to realize the demonstrative mode.

Luminous paintings adopt the metaphorical language of the golden aureole to convey the Prophet's sacred, primordial, and creative light, called the “light of Muhammad” (*nūr Muḥammad*).<sup>7</sup> This pictorial technique seeks to transcend the restrictions of mimetic description in order to herald the Prophet as a cosmic entity freed from temporal boundaries and corporeal limitations. His body, just like the rest of the existential world, was widely believed to have been created by the sensible touch of primordial irradiation, a sensate yet empyreal substance. Artists interested in conveying the Prophet's preexistent luminescence purposefully stressed this more avataristic element by including golden blazes and halos in their paintings. In other words, the pictorial technique of representing Muhammad's numinous qualities engages with abstract thought (as it pertains to the prophetic body) and transfers the process of intellectual allegory to artistic production by deploying certain choice motifs, including the flaming nimbus.

What these three principal genres of depiction disclose is that the Prophet could be imagined in multiple ways and that this variety reveals a complex and nuanced approach to describing Muhammad by writers and artists alike. Similarly, the emergence of methods of abstracting the prophetic body from circa 1400 onward in paintings frequently attached to texts of mystical inclinations suggests that images of the Prophet were, at least to some extent, influenced by various mystical ideas and practices, which themselves became further ensconced within Persian spheres under the royal auspices of the Sufi-Shi'i Safavid dynasty.<sup>8</sup> Displacing the veristic mode, pictorial techniques that abstract the prophetic body appear to have emerged at this time much more from the allegorical desire to represent a more “metaphorical Muhammad” than from attempts to prohibit or eradicate his depiction—the latter being only one facet of a distinctively modern phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

The imaginative attempts to recollect the Prophet's body and being in mystical milieus find intriguing parallels in the visual arts as well. For these reasons, it appears that depictions of the Prophet were reflective of pre-modern mystical and popular sentiments calling for a visualization of Muhammad through the twin procedures of remembrance and evocation. Sufi writers discussing the subject in particular believed that the Prophet had both a human (*nāsūt*) and superhuman (*lāhūt*) nature united into one being,<sup>10</sup> and that his corporeal form occurred only after the physical appearance of his primordial light. Therefore, Muhammad's physical manifestation *in corpore* can be understood as an ongoing process of theophany, oftentimes beyond the visual reach of the believer's eyes.

In order to convey the antipodes of disclosure and exposure, artists likewise seem to have experimented with various motifs and techniques to communicate visually the Prophet's exceptional status. In turn, such explorations crystallized into specific pictorial traditions that could be given new meanings in different contexts, be these Shi'i, Sunni, Sufi, or some combination thereof. Although it remains difficult to determine the exact character and changing meanings of images of the Prophet, an analysis of pictorial details and an exploration of text-image relations—anchored in a historical but not historicist framework—can offer some preliminary suggestions as to the various symbolic and interactive mechanisms through which representations of Muhammad came to be formed and received during the pre-modern period.

#### MODES OF VISUALITIES AND THE PROPHETIC CORPUS

Scholars have examined portraiture practices in Islamic traditions and how such traditions tend to embrace either non-naturalistic or abstract modes of representation. Two particular theories attempt to explain artists' quests to go beyond the mimetic imitation of forms, which is itself based on the scientific mechanisms of visual perception. One hypothesis, put forth by Alexandre Papadopoulo, proposes that artists purposefully utilized certain forms (bodily topoi) and shunned others (linear and aerial perspective) in order to achieve inver-

similitude.<sup>11</sup> Papadopoulo argues that the lack of optical naturalism in Islamic art hints that artists attempted to capture something beyond the physical world. Rather than representing a likeness bound by the parameters of physiognomic verisimilitude, artists indeed seemed to acknowledge the possibilities of identifications existing above and beyond the restrictive limitations of physical mimicry. Although suffering from limited credibility, Papadopoulo's point of view attempts to provide one way of explaining why Islamic systems of portraiture-making did not evolve from flat and frontal to natural and three-dimensional, as in the case of Western traditions of portraiture.

A second commonly held belief contends that in Islamic practices the total negation of physical form and the predilection for verbal description displace more conventional methods of portraiture, due to the putative (and often transgressed) prohibition of figural imagery. This hypothesis is borne out most especially by traditions of representing the Prophet Muhammad through the non-figurative verbal description known as a *ḥilya* (fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> Primarily produced in Ottoman spheres from the seventeenth century onward, the *ḥilya* (or Ottoman Turkish, *ḥilye*) could mediate a visual recollection of the Prophet through verbal expression. However, the *ḥilya* represents only a modern development of practices concerned with conveying an "image" of the Prophet—in this case, a later artistic tradition whose text-based aniconicity reflects only one possible culmination of abstracting tendencies in the figural arts of Islam.

Beyond inverisimilitude and the negation of form, methods of visualizing and depicting persons as rich and complex entities blending presence and essence—and not just material fact<sup>13</sup>—have been central to practices of portraiture in a variety of cultural traditions.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the general shift from understanding a portrait as a simple likeness to perceiving it as a procedure that aims to describe an individual's entire character has led to new discussions that highlight the deep divide between *vision*, as the scientific mechanism linked to the production of sight, and *visuality*, which encompasses the many culturally contingent modes of seeing. Although vision has traditionally been understood in terms of artistic production and *visuality* in terms of viewer reception, it can be argued that both are inseparable and can serve as complementary channels for





Fig. 2. Verbal description (*hilya*) of the Prophet Muhammad, Istanbul, 1130 (1718). Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 1-88-154.13. (Photo: courtesy of the Library of Congress)

individual contemplation. As a consequence, most traditions of portrait-making and portrait-viewing utilize optical depiction, sight, gaze, and mental imagination in an attempt to achieve a total visionary experience.<sup>15</sup>

Ofentimes experiential confrontations in pictorial form come to fruition through the phenomenology of seeing in religious contexts. While art history's methods of analyzing compositional forms as historically and symbolically significant provide one venue for understanding religious painting, other approaches (iconographical analysis, text-image relations, etc.) may illuminate how a representation can act as an effective medium for the stimulation of affective piety, thus

functioning as a meditative or devotional image—in other words, what historians of medieval European art have called an *Andachtsbild*.<sup>16</sup>

Even though methodological tools from Western art history have been adopted to explore traditions of icon-making and depictions of the sacred in a variety of cultures, these have rarely been utilized to examine the practice of making and viewing pictures in an Islamic context, due to the prevalent belief that traditions of “religious iconography” simply do not exist in Islamic artistic practices.<sup>17</sup> Despite such impediments to exploring the role of images in possibly religious or devotional contexts, scholars such as Priscilla Soucek have broken new ground by examining how painters and viewers

might have envisioned and engaged with images in Islamic traditions.

Soucek has pursued questions of audience reception, using this methodological approach as a basis for exploring theories of visual perception as they pertain to practices of Islamic portraiture.<sup>18</sup> For instance, based on Persian textual sources, she demonstrates that a pictorial image can be engendered by the viewer's mental activity of imagination (*khiyāl*).<sup>19</sup> A number of Persian writers in fact contend that portraits are expected to lead their audiences from the formal image (*ṣūrat*) to its more elevated meaning or inner reality (*ma'nī*), that is, from the phenomenal world to a visionary encounter with the unseen.<sup>20</sup> This process may itself cause the viewer to engage in other forms of encounters as well, some of which may be religious or spiritual in nature.

This visual approach, which uses the formal mode to hint at an elevated meaning, appears eminently suited to images of the prophets, themselves understood as visual epiphanies of being (*tajalliyyāt al-wujūd*)<sup>21</sup> whose outer forms are only fully appreciable through the viewer's inner perception (*al-bāṣira al-bāṭina*).<sup>22</sup> For these reasons, representations of prophets in Islamic traditions—much like a number of philosophical and mystical texts describing the bi-substantial prophetic condition of presence (*wujūd*) and essence (*dhāt*)—must extend the boundaries of mimetic description, both at the moment of the artist's production and, later, at the time of the viewer's reception. In other words, both the maker and beholder of an image can be dared to rise above the creation or perception of an "outer form" in order to engage with an "inner form." This challenge therefore involves abstract thought put into artistic practice through the supple lexicon of symbolic form.

The Prophet Muhammad, as a mortal man and as the collective prototype of all humanity, is defined in a variety of Islamic mystical, theological, and philosophical writings as both existential being and pre-existential reality. The widely held belief in the Prophet's bi-substantial nature has permeated Islamic literature and popular piety from the beginnings of Islam to the present day.<sup>23</sup> This twofold approach, adopted by biographers, historians, exegetes, philosophers, and mystics alike, coalesced into the "Doctrine of the Person of the Prophet Muhammad,"<sup>24</sup> which promotes its protagonist

as Mensch and Urmensch, as corporeal and transcendent, and as phenomenal and primordial all at once. Bearing in mind this widespread belief, should not attempts to depict the Prophet as a human organism and cosmic being arise in the visual arts as well?

This study builds upon the answers that emerge from this fundamental question in order to demonstrate that a number of pictorial strategies were adopted to convey the compound nature of the Prophet Muhammad. These techniques, which were used especially after circa 1400 and were applied to illustrations accompanying mystical and poetic texts, displaced earlier veristic methods of depiction deployed largely within narrative contexts and henceforth became "normalized" within the pictorial arts of Islam.

In early texts within or deriving from the hadith (Sayings of the Prophet) genre,<sup>25</sup> attempts at thoroughly describing the Prophet Muhammad's physical traits and personal characteristics—both of which are encompassed under the literary rubric of *shamā'il* (features or character)—form the main impetus for envisaging the Prophet. Texts on the Prophet's *shamā'il* composed by well-established authors such as al-Tirmidhi (d. 880),<sup>26</sup> al-Baghawī (d. ca. 1117),<sup>27</sup> and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373)<sup>28</sup> are expository, and thus bear a strong resemblance to veristic portraits of the Prophet Muhammad that otherwise shy away from techniques of physical abstraction. In this case, images and texts are both explanatory in nature and devoid of verbal and pictorial embellishments that seek to overly abstract or conceptualize the prophetic corpus. The stress on legibility in textual sources parallels the emphasis on the Prophet's visibility in paintings produced between circa 1200 and 1400.

On the other hand, philosophical works and Sufi manuals, particularly those composed by famous mystics like Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240),<sup>29</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1408),<sup>30</sup> and Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad al-Jazūlī (d. 1465),<sup>31</sup> among many, reveal a shift in popular practices related to the devotion of the Prophet Muhammad. In these kinds of works, the Prophet is praised as the perfect or complete man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), as well as a vehicle or channel (*wasīla*), an isthmus or boundary point (*barzakh*), and a medium or intermediary (*wāsiṭa*) between God and man.<sup>32</sup> Sufi writers such as al-Jīlī also point out that the Prophet's nature continuously

fluctuates between the phenomenal world (*al-ḥadath*) and everlasting being (*al-qidām*).<sup>33</sup> Sufi texts stress that through mental contemplation and meditation the devotee can achieve total union (*tawḥīd*) and self-annihilation in the Prophet (*fanā' fi'l-Rasūl*).<sup>34</sup>

These mystical methods of communion with the prophetic corpus necessitated the development of an ideational vocabulary that tended quite often to divest the Prophet of his human attributes and transform him into an emblem of superhuman proportions. Forming a particular process of intellection, these abstracting tendencies find intriguing parallels in the obscuring pictorial details found in depictions of the Prophet. Such paintings, which include inscribed prayers or portray the Prophet as the elemental and luminous *nūr Muḥammad*, likewise seek to convey the sum total of the Prophet's spiritual and material makeup. It appears that the rise of mystical practices and Sufi poetry were guiding factors in elaborating new concepts of the prophetic persona and hence its representation after circa 1400. Armed with an "equipoise between poetry and painting,"<sup>35</sup> artists appear to have wanted to shed the kind of pictorial didacticism found in bio-historical texts in favor of more abstract visual forms derived from poetical expressions that could facilitate an aesthetic experience.<sup>36</sup> By 1500, abstracting visual forms gained such prevalence in both Sunni and Shi'i milieus that they formed a particular pictorial "canon," amenable to various adaptations and interpretations.

#### THE VERISTIC MODE: PORTRAYING THE PROPHET'S *SHAMĀ'IL*

The earliest extant paintings of the Prophet Muhammad depict him as a fully visible corporeal figure, whose facial features or *shamā'il* are neither hidden beneath a veil nor engulfed by flames. These sorts of realistic depictions of the Prophet are included in the earliest surviving illustrated manuscripts produced from the period of Anatolian Seljuk (1077–1307) and Ilkhanid rule to the beginning of the Safavid reign. The texts themselves belong largely to the historical and biographical literary genres, and thus are primarily concerned with conveying important information about

Islamic history and explaining the life and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

When closely examined, however, expository texts and images do not seem to abrogate spiritual encounters. The close connection between textual exposition and spiritual contemplation is best illustrated in the literary genre known as *Shamā'il al-Rasūl*, or the Features of the Prophet. These kinds of works were produced as early as the ninth century and describe the physical traits and personality of the Prophet. They are closely associated with other texts that describe his physical attributes and personality as manifest proofs of his prophecy (*dalā'il al-nubuwwa*).<sup>37</sup> The *shamā'il* genre can be classified as "explanatory hadith," because each text presents a compendium of Sayings about the Prophet's features and character, as transmitted by his companions and other eyewitnesses. Each hadith is then followed by a clarification of its meaning: for example, al-Tirmidhi collected over 397 sayings on the Prophet's *shamā'il* and divided them into fifty-five discrete chapters describing, to name just a few, Muhammad's facial features, complexion, hair, shoes, and turban.

Although burdened by the close attention paid to each hadith's chain of transmission (*isnād*) and characterized by a matter-of-fact rhetoric, it is clear that works in the *shamā'il* genre were intended to provide a spiritual blueprint for commemorating and visualizing the Prophet Muhammad long after his death. As al-Tirmidhi states in the introduction to his *Shamā'il al-Rasūl*:

To draw a pen-picture of his appearance is beyond one's capacity, but the companions have endeavored, according to their capabilities, to preserve what little they could, of which some is written here... They have done the community an immense favor by conveying the perfect intrinsic knowledge, as well as the perfect conspicuous elegance and beauty of the Prophet. When an unfulfilled lover is deprived of meeting the beloved then he stands in front of the beloved's house remembering the features of his beloved in an attempt to gain some solace. It is from habits and features that the heart is appeased.<sup>38</sup>

Al-Tirmidhi describes how a pictorial representation fades in comparison to the Prophet's companions' attempts at describing the facial traits and character of their "beloved." Thanks to collections of such descriptions, the author further notes, he who has not had the opportunity to see or meet Muhammad in person can





Fig. 3. The Prophet Muhammad, accompanied by the King of Sham and the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, resurrects Varqa and Gulshah from their tomb. From ‘Ayyuqi’s *Varqa va Gulshāh*, Konya, ca. 1200–1250. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul, Ms. H. 481, fol. 70r. (Photo: courtesy of the Topkapı Palace Library)

find comfort through the continual recollection and celebration of the Prophet’s character and physical traits, themselves forming “memory images” capable of soothing an aspirant.

Since only one generation of believers saw the actual physical body of the Prophet, many thereafter had to try to perceive his form through verbal and visual methods of sustained contemplation.<sup>39</sup> This notion, as put forth in Arabic-language *shamā’il* texts of the early period, also infiltrated Persian works by the early thirteenth century at the latest. For instance, the historian Najm al-Din Abu Bakr Mahmud b. ‘Ali al-Ravandi, best known for having written a history of the Anatolian Seljuks, composed a *shamā’il*-like text entitled *Sharaf al-Nabī* (The Nobility of the Prophet), which he began in 1202 and completed in 1211.<sup>40</sup> Written in Persian, his *Sharaf al-Nabī* is based on and expands an earlier text in Arabic written by Abu Sa’d ‘Abd al-Malik b. Abi ‘Uthman al-Wa’iz, a Sufi *shaykh* who composed treatises on mystical thought and practice. In his introduction, al-Ravandi tells us that he translated al-Wa’iz’s *Sharaf al-nubuwwa* (The Nobility of Prophethood) so that it could be useful and instructive to Persian speakers; this remark is then followed by sixty-one chapters describing Muhammad, his character and physique, and his prophetic mission, as well as the merits of visiting his tomb, directing prayers towards him, and contemplating him

through the imaginative faculty (*khiyāl*) and in dream (*khwāb*). Al-Ravandi’s work and others like it helped spread knowledge in Persian lands about the Prophet’s physical features while also contributing to a more notional envisaging of the prophetic persona by mixing expository writing with conceptual thought.

At the same time as al-Ravandi finished his *Sharaf al-Nabī* in the early thirteenth century, an illustrated manuscript of ‘Ayyuqi’s tragic story of the lovers Varqa and Gulshah was completed in Konya between circa 1200 and 1250. The manuscript contains the two earliest surviving representations of Muhammad, one of which depicts him resurrecting the two dead lovers upon the Damascene Jews’ conversion to Islam (fig. 3).<sup>41</sup> In this scene, the Prophet sits cross-legged in the center of the composition; much like the other characters, he is depicted with facial features and a halo. Only his long black outer cloak (*burda*), which partially covers the top of his turban, along with his central location in the composition and his seated position, sets him apart, thereby suggesting a moment of authority and solemnity—namely, the ultimate triumph of Islam within the salvific context of redemption and resurrection.<sup>42</sup> In this painting, the Prophet remains rather undifferentiated from the other protagonists; such a lack of pictorial focus on Muhammad might be traceable to ‘Ayyuqi’s text. Originally composed between circa 1000 and 1050 during

the early Ghaznavid period (975–1187), ‘Ayyuqi’s *Varqa va Gulshāh* places emphasis on the moralizing aspect of the episode, rather than on affective attachment to the persona of the Prophet. Such a narrational—rather than devotional—approach is rather typical of Islamic texts produced in Persian lands during the early period.

The drive to present the Prophet in narrative terms in ‘Ayyuqi’s text, as well as in descriptive detail in al-Ravandi’s *Sharaf al-Nabī* and in other texts in the *shamā’il* genre, also infiltrated other writings in Persian, most notably prologues praising Muhammad initiating larger works in the belletristic (*adab*) genre. For example, another extant representation of the Prophet appears in the encomium to Sa’d al-Din al-Varavini’s collection of didactic fables entitled *Marzubānnāma* (Book of the Margrave), executed in Baghdad in 1299 (fig. 4). In this painting, the Prophet sits cross-legged and enthroned, wearing his large white head shawl over his blue robe. Two flying angels, whose faces have been scratched out, hover above him holding a fluttering drapery. The angel on the right appears to offer Muhammad a branch or to pour rays of light upon him, while the angel on the left appears to anoint him with a heavenly liquid or scent. Other figures sit or stand around the Prophet; however, like the other two paintings in the manuscript, their faces, and in particular their eyes, were damaged at a later date.<sup>43</sup>

The Persian text immediately above and below the image describes the Prophet as emitting radiance much like a torch of light (*mash’ala-i nūr*) and his two sandals (*na’laynash*) as exuding the minty smell of the pennyroyal or black poley herb (*kaisū-i ḥūr*).<sup>44</sup> The angels above Muhammad imbue him with the dual synesthetic attributes of numinous brilliance and fragrant aroma, adding a layer to the Prophet’s features not otherwise visible upon first glance. The petalled flowers and leaves in the foreground, moreover, may represent two pennyroyal flowers, thus offering a more olfactory evocation of Muhammad’s prophetic aroma, itself praised in al-Varavini’s text as a “perfumed earth” (*turbat-i mu’aṭṭar*).<sup>45</sup>

Even though the painting’s composition and corresponding text suggest that the Prophet’s inner essence, perfumed and radiant, can be a subject of praise and mental picturing, it also pays heed to his more observable features. Indeed, Muhammad’s *shamā’il* are



Fig. 4. The Prophet Muhammad enthroned, from Sa’d al-Din al-Varavini’s *Marzubānnāma* (Book of the Margrave), Baghdad, 698 (1299). Archaeological Museum Library, Istanbul, Ms. 216, fol. 2v. (Photo: courtesy of Marianna S. Simpson)

extolled in the two lines of Arabic poetry below the painting, which read:

*Salāmu Allāh kulla ṣabāḥi yawmin ‘alā tilka’l-ḍarā’ibi  
wa’l-shamā’il*

*Salāmu murannaḥin li’l-shawqi ḥattā yamīlu min al-  
yamīni ilā’l-shamā’il*<sup>46</sup>

Peace of God every morning of a day upon those characteristics and features

Peace upon a frenzied one who, in longing, rocks from the right to the lefts

The poem exalts the noble character of the Prophet’s features (*ḍarā’ib* and *shamā’il*) and the mystic’s swaying upon contemplating them. By using a double entendre based on the plural of the word “left” (sing.



*shimāl*; pl. *shamā'il*) and the term regularly used to describe Muhammad's personality and physical features (*shamā'il*), the author al-Varavini equates the ecstatic reflection upon the Prophet's personal traits with the visionary's bodily oscillations.

Based on the Persian text and the Arabic poem in honor of the Prophet inserted into it, it is possible to suggest that the painting in the *Marzubānnāma* is intended to depict the Prophet's companions, sitting or standing around him as they meditate on his non-corporeal attributes (scent and light) while simultaneously recalling his facial traits (*shamā'il*). The men's postures hint that they are engaged in spiritual reflection and in active prayer: all look upward towards their epiphanized vision of the Prophet and the angels. One man seated to the left of the Prophet raises both hands, palms facing upwards, in a gesture of piety known as the *raf' al-yadayn* (raising of the two hands). Swaying back and forth, seated, or raising their hands in prayer, the onlookers are engaged in a visual and rapturous praise of the Prophet's characteristics. Theirs is a devotional practice that engenders a powerful imagination of the Prophet. The image's large scale and vertical format also force the viewer-reader to a halt, in effect activating a de-narrativized and de-poeticized visual contemplation of the prophetic presence, itself deployed through pictorial form and through the suggestion of scent.

In the background of the composition stands a lone tree, whose branches and leaves caress the upper left corner of the picture's frame. Not simply a landscape feature in the composition, the tree in this particular instance may stand in for the Prophet's totality. A number of mystical texts, such as Ibn 'Arabi's short treatise entitled *Shajarat al-kawn* (The Tree of Being), describe the Prophet Muhammad as a large tree, growing and proliferating in a cosmic fashion. Much like the human and superhuman nature of the Prophet, the Tree of Being's inner core is outwardly visible:

When it became firm and grew taller there came from its upper and lower branches the world of form (*ṣūra*) and idea (*ma'nā*). What came from the outer bark and visible covering was the earthly world (*mulk*). What came from its inner core and the quintessence of its hidden meaning was the angelic world (*malakūt*). What came from the sap running in the passages of its veins, from which come its increase, its life, its splendor, which causes the

flowering and its fruitage, was the exalted world (*jabarūt*), which is the secret of the word "be" (*kun*)... Whenever anything happens in this tree, or whenever anything descends from it, such things raise humble hands of entreaty.<sup>47</sup>

Like the Tree of Being, the Prophet bears an outer form (*ṣūra*),<sup>48</sup> or bark, that is visible, and an unseen inner essence (*ma'nā*), or sap, that nourishes the world. It is this Muhammad, as the quintessential Tree of Being, who links this world with the otherworld and forms the target of the devotee's prayers. As a symbolic stand-in for the Prophet's everlasting bi-substantial existence, the tree evokes his ever-expanding being. Similarly, the pennyroyal flowers in the foreground visually fill the composition with Muhammad's prophetic redolence, itself a frequent subject of praise in Islamic literature.<sup>49</sup>

Although the Prophet's facial features are now missing, the artist may have represented Muhammad's visage in a manner similar to a painting included in the laudatory preface to another collection of didactic fables entitled *Kalīla va Dimna*, produced as an illustrated manuscript in Iran between circa 1350 and 1400 (fig. 5).<sup>50</sup> In the painting, the Prophet rides his human-headed flying steed Buraq, while accompanied by the angel Gabriel on the left and another angel on the right as he embarks on his *mi'rāj*. He wears a blue robe with inscribed decorative bands (*tirāz*), as well as a white turban with its end flap (*shamla*) wrapped around his neck and folded over his left shoulder. Although his facial features have sustained some damage, his black beard, arch-shaped eyebrows, round cheeks, rosy lips, and two long hair plaits are still visible, as is the flaming nimbus radiating from his head and turban.

The tales of *Kalīla va Dimna*, which describe the adventures of two jackals, were composed in Arabic around 750 by 'Abdallah ibn al-Muqaffā', who drew from the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* and its Pahlavi (Middle Persian) translation. Around 1145, the Persian writer Nasrallah Munshi—who, like 'Ayyuqi, was in the service of the Ghaznavids—translated Ibn al-Muqaffā's Arabic text into Persian, adding his own introduction, which he called "the translator's preface" (*dībācha-i mutarjim*), and a new conclusion, which he entitled "the translator's close" (*khātima-i mutarjim*).<sup>51</sup> The introduction, which praises God and the Prophet Muhammad, provides a pious prolegomenon to *Kalīla va Dimna*, in effect



Fig. 5. The Prophet Muhammad's ascension, from Nasrallah Munshi's *Kalīla va Dimna*, possibly Shiraz, ca. 1350–1400. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Suppl. Persan Ms. 376, fol. 2v. (Photo: courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France)

folding these moralizing tales into the larger framework of Persian Islamic literature produced from the ninth to the twelfth centuries and illustrated during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries at the latest.

After praising God in his introduction, Nasrallah Munshi pays homage to Muhammad, the seal of the prophets (*khātām al-nabiyyīn*), whose evident miracles are visible even to disbelievers.<sup>52</sup> These miracles, the author continues, appear in a number of verses in the Qur'an. One such verse, as quoted immediately above the painting, reads: "Indeed, God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. O you who believe, send your blessings on him and salute him with respect!"<sup>53</sup> This excerpt encourages the faithful to praise and honor Muhammad, much as God and His angels do on the occasion of his miraculous ascension to the skies. This invitation is particularly appropriate within the context

of a eulogistic preface that stresses the wondrous nature of the Prophet's heavenly ascent.

Nasrallah Munshi's text and its Qur'anic excerpts command the believing viewer-reader to send prayers to the Prophet in Arabic, which functions as a sacred language in contraposition to the text's Persian "vulgate." By extension, the image serves as a pictorial guide for the directing of such prayers, adding a level of blessing above and beyond a textual template.<sup>54</sup> In this case, as in the *Marzubānnāma*, the author's preface and the attendant image combine effectively to promote the praising and visualizing of Muhammad through an opening pictorial accolade embedded into a larger illustrated work of a didactic and propaedeutic nature.

In the painting of the Prophet's *mī rāj* from Nasrallah Munshi's *Kalīla va Dimna*, Muhammad's slightly round face (*wajh al-tadwīr*), his black eyes and long



eyelashes, his beautiful wheat-colored complexion and radiant color (*azhar al-lawn*), his long and very dark hair (*shadīd sawād al-sha'r*), his full and dense beard, and the slight turn of his body are depicted much as they are described in the *shamā'il* texts composed by al-Tirmidhi, al-Baghawi, and Ibn Kathir.<sup>55</sup> The inclusion of his long cloak, robe, turban, and hair plaits, moreover, provides the indexical properties required to signify his identity, a common practice of portraiture utilized to distinguish a person by his associated accoutrements and memorabilia.<sup>56</sup> This essentially detail-oriented tradition of representation lends the painting an aura of naturalism and spontaneity, while helping the acculturated viewer to identify the Prophet Muhammad through readily recognizable visual cues.

Although these kinds of portraits of the Prophet tend to fade around 1500, there nevertheless exist a few later Persian paintings that continue veristic traditions of depiction. For example, one unusual painting probably executed in Bukhara (Uzbekistan) around the middle of the sixteenth century also conveys the notion that a contemplative viewer can observe the entirety of Muhammad's *shamā'il* (fig. 6).<sup>57</sup> Located in the introductory section in praise of the Prophet in the *Bustān* (Fruit Orchard) by Sa'di (d. 1292), the composition depicts Muhammad's *mi'rāj* above three meditative men kneeling in an enclosed space. Above the building's entrance door, on the far right, appears the *shahāda* (the profession of faith, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is His Messenger"), inscribed on a horizontal frieze of blue panels. In a niche in the background, the smoke of a brazier appears to engender a luminous vision of the Prophet, above whom angels hover in the skies. Here, Muhammad is again represented in a naturalistic manner: facial features such as his beard, his two long tresses, and his almond-shaped eyes are fully visible.

Sa'di's encomium to the Prophet provides the textual vehicle for praising Muhammad, his many names (*asmā' al-nabī*), and the *nūr Muḥammad*. The author describes him with various honorific epithets and adjectives, such as intercessor (*shafī'*), prophet (*nabī*), and generous (*karīm*).<sup>58</sup> The author invokes the Prophet directly as God's creative light:



Fig. 6. The Prophet Muhammad ascends over three Sufis, from Sa'di's *Bustān* (Fruit Orchard), text calligraphed in 920 (1514) and painting added ca. 1550 in Bukhara. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1974.294.2. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)

*tavāṣul-i vujūd āmadī az nukhust*  
*digar har cha mawjūd shud far'-i tūst*<sup>59</sup>

You, from the first became existence's continuance  
All else existent is a branch of you<sup>60</sup>

The expression *tavāṣul-i vujūd* (existence's continuance) describes the organic conduit of Muhammad's light, as primordial and productive flux,<sup>61</sup> while also calling to mind the analogy of the Prophet to the *Shajarat al-Kawn* or Tree of Being.

At least twice in his tribute, Sa'di overtly encourages the reader to give praise (*du'ā'*) to the Prophet.



For example, towards the start of his encomium, he asks himself how he might best laud the Prophet:

*cha na't-i pasandīda gūyam turā?*  
*'alayka al-salām, ay Nabī al-warā'*<sup>62</sup>

How shall I eulogize you acceptably?  
Peace upon you, o Prophet to humanity<sup>63</sup>

And then the author concludes:

*Cha vaṣfat kunad Sa'dī-yi nātamām*  
*'alayka al-ṣalāh, ay Nabī wa'l-salām'*<sup>64</sup>

How can an imperfect Sa'dī describe you justly?  
Prayer and peace upon you, o Prophet<sup>65</sup>

The author wishes to extend a fitting laudation to Muhammad but bemoans the fact that his text cannot provide a perfect or complete description (*vaṣf*) of his larger-than-life being.

Transcending the author's limitations, the complementary painting offers a tangible representation of devotees fully engaged in visualizing the Prophet, his physical form, and his heavenly light through the medium of oral praise. The three figures may well represent the companions of the Prophet and the first three caliphs, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman, who personally knew the Prophet and described his *shamā'il*.<sup>66</sup> The man on the left with the white beard (possibly Abu Bakr) holds prayer beads, thus suggesting that he is engrossed in contemplating Muhammad and his prophetic form. In a dialogic manner, one could also interpret the three men as devout viewer-readers engaged in reflective prayer as prompted by Sa'dī's preface, while the brazier in the background generates a reified image of the Prophet Muhammad.

Much like the earlier "featured" portraits discussed previously, this rare sixteenth-century painting reveals a great indebtedness to its accompanying text, as well as to *shamā'il* literature, which formed the basis for describing the Prophet's attributes as integrated in subsequent laudatory prefaces included in illustrated Persian manuscripts. In these contexts, Muhammad is depicted in a veristic or expository manner, not only as an individual but, more importantly, as the most perfect prototype (*nuskha*) of humankind.<sup>67</sup> The representation of his physical features and garments, moreover, provides a means to conceptualize and praise his prophetic

corpus, through the symbolic mechanisms afforded by the formal idioms of the pictorial mode.

Veristic representations of Muhammad embody a particular trend in prophetic iconography in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with very rare exceptions of the genre (as in the painting in Sa'dī's preface) dating from after 1500. The reasons for this trend are many and may include the following: the influence of descriptive *shamā'il* texts translated into Persian, the selection of biographical and historical (rather than poetic) texts for illustration, and a general ease with the figural arts during this period—an ease and directness that, due to a constellation of cultural and artistic factors, would eventually give way to more abstract methods of representing the prophetic corpus.

#### KALIMA PORTRAITS: INSCRIBING AND INVOKING THE PROPHET

Although veristic portraits sometimes appear after 1400, they were largely displaced by renditions of the Prophet that combined figural form with textual inscription. The earliest examples of such hybrid compositions are best called "graphical" or "word" (*kalima*) portraits because Muhammad's facial features are removed and replaced by the vocative statement *Yā Muḥammad!* (O Muhammad!). Inscriptions that replace his eyes, nose, and mouth literally deface him, rendering his visage an "imagetext," that is, a representation that is neither image nor text alone but a synthesis that is either viewed or experienced as both.<sup>68</sup> This two-pronged approach to the creation and reception of the Prophet's image suggests that artists and viewers turned to epigraphic details (the graphic mode) to explain and expand upon the Prophet's physical representation (the pictorial mode).

Inscribed portraits of the Prophet from circa 1400 onward seem indebted to the steady spread of Sufi thought, which developed the religious belief that God's divine word or logos (*kalima*) manifested itself in the person of Muhammad rather than just in or through the Qur'an. At the heart of this idea lies the conviction that God transmitted His revelations through His messenger, and that these revelations, much like men's destinies, had been inscribed with His divine pen (*qalam*)

on a tablet (*lawḥ*) since time immemorial.<sup>69</sup> Mystics and esoteric philosophers equated this primordial tablet with the occult knowledge of God, hidden from human comprehension, but perceptible by the mystic through sudden flashes of inspiration. This idea, in turn, applied to the Prophet Muhammad, with whom Sufis attempted to communicate through the devotional practices of recollection, oral worship, and invocation. With their predilection for the oral and the auditory, devotees venerating the Prophet transformed the object of their affection into a highly symbolic “soundspace,” in which a vision of the Messenger could be induced through pious utterances.<sup>70</sup>

The earliest extant representation of the Prophet that visually expresses the conceptual notion of Muhammad as God’s concretized *kalima* dates from circa 1400 (fig. 7).<sup>71</sup> It appears in the form of a tinted sketch that depicts the Prophet Muhammad on Buraq’s back and accompanied by the angel Gabriel, while a number of other angels in a rocky landscape present the Prophet with various offerings. This sketch includes the foundations of the painterly process: red highlights are applied to Gabriel’s hair, Muhammad’s turban top, Buraq’s saddle and crown, the angels’ hair and crowns, and the stars in the sky.

The artist has sketched out the faces of the angels, Gabriel, and Buraq. The Prophet Muhammad, on the other hand, is neither provided with facial features such as a mouth, nose, or eyes nor is his face left blank, to be covered later with a painted veil. Rather, the oval of his face is inscribed with a written vocative statement reading: *Yā Muḥammad!* (O Muhammad!). This inscribed portrait contains an infra-inscription, that is, an inscription not meant to be seen in the finished product. This kind of representation portrays the Prophet as a bodily shell containing verbal components, giving him volume and presence through two very dissimilar techniques of depiction: that of physiognomic form combined with inscribed verbal enunciation.

Although this sketch may be pushed aside as a solitary example of a hermetic practice peculiar to one artist active at the turn of the fifteenth century, other inscribed portraits occur in later centuries, thus indicating that this particular procedure was at the center of a long-lived albeit overlooked pictorial tradition not only



Fig. 7. The Prophet Muhammad on Buraq and accompanied by Gabriel. Sketch with brown wash, red paint, and gold highlights, possibly Shiraz, ca. 1390–1410. Pozzi Collection, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Geneva, 1971-107/406. (Photo: Christiane Gruber)

in Persian spheres, but in Ottoman circles as well.<sup>72</sup> For example, a Safavid painting depicting ‘Ali, the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law, storming the Khaybar fortress reveals a similar kind of underpainting (fig. 8).<sup>73</sup> The composition, which is included in a manuscript of al-Nishapuri’s *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Stories of the Prophets) executed probably in Qazvin between circa 1570 and 1580, has suffered some wear through the centuries, and the pigments have flecked off partially to reveal the underpainting. Just like the sketch from circa 1400, Muhammad’s face, which appears in the background





Fig. 8. The Battle of Khaybar, from al-Nishapuri's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets), Qazvin, ca. 1570–80. Keir Collection, London, Ms. III.234.90, fol. 306r. (Photo: Christiane Gruber)

surrounded by a gold, flaming nimbus, is inscribed with his name in the vocative, while 'Ali's face is inscribed with the vocative *Yā 'Alī!* (O 'Ali!). 'Ali's attendant, who is holding a horse, however, bears facial features marked in red and black ink on a gray ground, showing that he is not worthy of being named or exclaimed.

The juxtaposition of Muhammad's and 'Ali's facial imprints with the attendant's facial features substantiates the hypothesis that the inscribed names do not constitute mere labels helping the artist determine the figures' placement in his composition. This is not an instance of an Islamic *cartolino* or name tag. Rather, the inscribed names carry with them other qualities of religious importance to the artist, who purposefully and consciously decided, either by personal faith or by inherited artistic custom (or both), to portray sacred

faces by means of emblazoned forenames. The inscribing of 'Ali's name in particular suggests that, even if it is unclear whether this artistic practice emerged from within a Sunni or Shi'i milieu, it could be adapted and applied to representations of 'Ali, and not just images of Muhammad.<sup>74</sup>

These *kalima* portraits—consisting of facial traits made up of letters calling out names in the vocative—become activated by the pen and the voice of the artist, who either seeks to invoke a form through words or performs an oral prayer directed towards Muhammad and, in some cases, 'Ali. It shows a clear connection between orality, faith, and portraiture, where the pious, written, and uttered word helps to bring about the presence of an individual. An aspirant's desire to see the Prophet usually through oral, but here inscribed,



invocation gives these particular kinds of representations the potential to transform into a communion—visual, graphic, and oral all at once—between the artist and the object of his affection. In fact, when the mimetic technique of *shamā'il* remains insufficient, the artist opts for speech and its epigraphic rendition, both of which bear the potential for capturing a deeper meaning, itself written into the infrastructure of the painting proper.

These underpaintings reveal the private, undercover world of the artist, who uses verbal and pictorial topoi to call forth the presence of the Prophet by means of his inscribed portrait, and by means of an infra-inscription meant to remain buried under paint. Such depictions of the Prophet go far beyond the boundaries of mimetic description by including the artist's otherwise camouflaged invocation, furtively evoking the Prophet's persona through the graphic mode. The sketch and painting therefore exemplify some of the unpremeditated conceptions of personhood within Islamic traditions, which manifest themselves upon close scrutiny at the pictorial level. These conceptions include the artist's metaphysical imagining of the Prophet's visibility as made manifest via the combination of figural depiction, verbal inscription, and oral invocation.

This practice of combining prayer with mental imagining, by which an individual may envision the Prophet's spirit inhabiting the vessel of the image, finds strong echoes in Sufi devotional texts from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. For example, in his *Qāb qawsayn* (The Space of Two Bows),<sup>75</sup> al-Jili describes how a mystic can use visual aids to continuously recall the Prophet's image and therewith reach spiritual realization. He notes: "I have only described for you his [the Prophet's] physical form to enable you to picture it in your mind... If you cannot do this constantly, then at least summon this noble image in all its perfection while you are blessing him."<sup>76</sup> Al-Jili describes the beckoning of an image through the unremitting oral prayers characteristic of Sufi practices. In the two *kalima* compositions, just as in Sufi thought, the active *vox* of the painter likewise transforms Muhammad's cognomen into a praise name, by which the artist spells out, commemorates, and ultimately visualizes the Prophet.

Ibn 'Arabi also describes how a life form can materialize through contemplation. He states in his *Fuṣūṣ*

*al-ḥikam* (Bezels of Wisdom) that "prayer brings about the emergence of non-being (*'adam*) to being (*wujūd*)" by the activation of a mental image through devotional worship.<sup>77</sup> That is, when a man's desires are so intense, the utterance of a pious sound can generate a visual counterpart, itself concretized through an imagetext. Whether in mystical writings or visual materials, the consensus appears clear: the statement of a desire or the optative expression of an agent's wish can initiate a series of material images bound by the parameters of pious personal imagination. In such cases, representations of Muhammad can achieve completion through the creative force of the artist's oral praise and his furtive inscription below the painted surface of his composition, a practice which bears intriguing similarities to Sufi practices of orally imagining the Prophet's form and presence.

These verbalized figures of the Prophet represent the portraitists' intentions and are not meant for the beholder of the picture. On the other hand, other paintings bearing supra-inscriptions, that is, the Prophet's name written above his facial veil, suggest that an artist could use visible verbal proclamations of the Prophet as vehicles for visualizing the entirety of his being. In such cases, the picture's viewer is forced to conceive of the prophetic corpus through the double agency of visual and verbal expression, using his imaginative faculty (*khiyāl*) to symbolically expand and complete the picture before his eyes.

The Prophet's ascension continues to serve as the thematic medium for *kalima* representations, as seen in a Safavid painting included in the *Kulliyāt* (Compendium of Poems) by Amir Khusraw Dihlavi (d. 725), produced in Iran circa 1580 (fig. 9). Here, Muhammad sits on Buraq with his palms outstretched in a position of prayer, while Gabriel, holding a green banner with inscriptions invoking God, Muhammad, and 'Ali, accompanies him on the left. Unfortunately, Buraq's face has been scratched out. On the other hand, Muhammad's white facial veil has not been defiled; rather, it seems that the manuscript's owner, or perhaps the painting's artist, thought it unwise to erase the Prophet's form, especially his head. Instead, an inscription written on top of his facial veil praises him by calling forth his name in the exclamatory "*Yā Muḥammad!*".



Fig. 9. The Prophet Muhammad's ascension, from Amir Khusraw Dihlavi's *Kulliyāt* (Compendium of Poems), Yazd or Shiraz, ca. 1580. The British Library, London, Ms. Add. 21104, fol. 317r. (Photo: courtesy of the British Library)

The Prophet no longer exists as a being defined through a form, but takes on fuller dimensions through an additive verbal veneration. His facial veil transforms into a blank slate for the expression of piety, and his "portrait" thus becomes the record of a written and oral tradition of invocation couched in verbo-pictorial terms. The inscribed portrait of the Prophet here emerges from—as well as incites—oral prayer on the viewer's, rather than the artist's, part.

In a similar manner, Ottoman artists, who also were active in including or adding supra-inscriptions to the Prophet's and other figures' veils, continued the practice of eliding facial traits into inscribed prayer. This practice is used in a painting of the Prophet and 'Ali visiting their own graves in Medina at night with their companions, as included in a Persian manuscript of the Ottoman Turkish-language poem by Fuzuli (d. 1556) entitled *Ḥadiqat al-su'adā* (Garden of the Blessed) (fig. 10).<sup>78</sup> The Prophet's (now barely visible) name, in the vocative case, is inscribed over his veil immediately below his green turban, in a similar manner as 'Ali's name. Unlike the Prophet and 'Ali, other persons such as 'Uthman and 'Umar in the lower right corner have their names simply labeled on their turbans, rather than proclaimed with the exclamative *yā!* on their faces.

In other copies of Fuzuli's text that fell into Ottoman hands, pictorial manipulation and textual editing show that sectarian concerns could play out on the picture plane, in some cases reaffirming the Shi'i cause by stressing 'Ali's high rank through pictured oral invocation while, in other cases, advancing the Sunni cause by crossing out prayer formulas directed to prominent Shi'i figures.<sup>79</sup> Within the context of Sunni-Shi'i power struggles over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *kalima* representations of Muhammad therefore appear to have been deployed and used as visual tools by both sides to assert their competing claims to religious and political legitimacy as well as prophetic legacy.

The practice of adding a vocative statement above Muhammad's facial veil proves that the evocation of a prophetic presence does not just constitute part of the inceptive procedures of artistic creation but also makes a strong case for the active response by the beholder of the image, whether artist or owner, operating within particular religio-cultural circumstances. In other words, the picture's viewer forges a dynamic and discursive relationship based on the following principles: the painting tells a story in pictorial terms buttressed by its laudatory text, while the viewer inscribes pious, and at times even sectarian, meaning into its pigments.

The vocative *yā!*, which calls to mind *Ave Maria* salutations included in a number of fourteenth-century





Fig. 10. The Prophet Muhammad and Imam ‘Ali visiting their graves with their companions, from Fuzuli’s *Ḥaḍīqat al-su‘adā’* (Garden of the Blessed), text transcribed possibly in Shiraz ca. 1550–1600 and painting dated 1118 (1706). The British Library, London, Ms. Or. 12009, fol. 66v. (Photo: courtesy of the British Library)

paintings of the Virgin Mary, likewise prompts the viewer to read the words aloud, thereby educating an interactive response.<sup>80</sup> The prayer formula, or *obsecratio*, by which the human aspirant implores a prophetic entity to make itself manifest, translates, at least at the pictorial level, into a verbal desideratum of optical visibility written over and replacing the Prophet’s facial features. As Peter Parshall has noted with regard to

similar images in European pictorial traditions, “[t]he object or idea to be remembered is privately overwritten with an image that absorbs and subordinates its prototype, a case of the signifier overwhelming the signified.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, the viewer’s interaction—his overwriting—gives the prophetic body new significance and subsumes the imagetext within new systems of meaning. In the context of the early modern period,



these systems of meaning are linked to textual presentations of prophetic praise, at times combined with other elements clearly indicative of a Sunni or Shi'i *parti pris*.

The viewer's or artist's inscribing of Muhammad's name onto his facial veil suggests that the written word, especially in its vocative form, has the conceptual potential of converting a physical frame into a live body imbued with spirit and presence through the medium of the participant's animated response. Such a phenomenon bears parallels in mystical texts as well. For example, al-Jazuli notes in his popular prayer manual *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* (Proofs of Good Deeds), itself a text of immense popularity in Ottoman lands,<sup>82</sup> that a certain man felt the transfigurative intensity of writing down Muhammad's name. The man admits: "As soon as ever I wrote the name of Muhammad (peace be upon him) in a book, I spoke a blessing on him, and my Lord granted me what my eye had not seen nor ear heard, nor has occurred to the heart of a mortal man."<sup>83</sup> In both the painting and al-Jazuli's text, the written word, coupled with a blessing or oral prayer, transforms an epigraphic symbol into an experience of the totality of the Prophet's being. In other words, letters have the ability to transmute into the graphic mediators of personhood.

Beyond sectarian concerns, methods of inscribing the Prophet's name, either hidden under his facial veil or inscribed upon it, reveal man's need to give material form to a more metaphysical or emblematic Muhammad. The idea of an "all-inclusive" Muhammad appears in a number of Persian poetic texts as well, whose figurative language oftentimes migrates into the visual arts. For example, the celebrated poet Nizami (d. 1218) provides several introductory eulogies (*na'at*) to the Prophet and his ascension in his poem entitled *Makhzan al-asrār* (Treasury of Secrets). Inserted into the encomium to Muhammad's ascension belonging to a Persian manuscript copy of Nizami's text produced in 1441,<sup>84</sup> a painting omits the winged steed Buraq and the Prophet's body, replacing the latter with a flaming gold disk inscribed in its center with Muhammad's name (fig. 11).

Why is it that, in this particular instance, the Prophet's body disappears entirely from a depiction of his own ascension? The question can be answered at least in part by examining Nizami's complementary text, which describes the Prophet's ascent as a release from



Fig. 11. The Prophet Muhammad as a gold disk ascending through the heavens, from Nizami's *Makhzan al-asrār* (Treasury of Secrets), western India, 844 (1441). Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul, Ms. H. 774, fol. 4v. (Photo: Christiane Gruber)

terrestrial boundaries and physical restrictions. The author states:

He departed from this world with the prison of his body  
And it was the spirit of his heart that reached God's abode.

His heavenly spirit jumped out of its cage  
His body became heavier than his heart.

The First Tablet received from *mīm* and *dāl*  
The circle of the empire and the line of perfection.

Describe a circle with your finger,  
So that whatever exists may be bestowed upon you.

The source of the sun, dependent on him  
Is but half the crescent moon on the night of his ascension.<sup>85</sup>

In his poem, Nizami describes Muhammad's ascension through the skies and into the domain of the Lord as a casting off of physical being and as a spiritual and devotional escape from a bodily cage (*qafas*). He also equates the letters of Muhammad's name—particularly the *mīm* (m) and *dāl* (d)—with the primordial Tablet (*lawḥ*) containing God's decrees: the initial, spherical *mīm* of Muhammad's name corresponds to the shape of the globe and the sun,<sup>86</sup> while the incised, linear *dāl* represents the descent to earth of God's creation.

Through the image of a circle, both poet and artist attempt to embrace Muhammad as a creative force, as an all-encompassing disk, and as a life-giving epigraphic carving of God's primordial laws, that is, His divine *kalima*. The Prophet dematerializes into an allegorical stand-in for sacred creation, the entirety of the cosmos, and the "source of the sun"—a poetical image that the artist has attempted to convey by depicting the Prophet as God's inscribed, encircled, and radiant disk. As in other inscribed or graphic renderings of the prophetic corpus, this depiction of Muhammad appears indebted to the metaphorical language that developed under the aegis of Persian poetry.

#### THE *NŪR MUḤAMMAD*: DEPICTING THE PROPHET'S PRIMAL RADIANCE

As Nizami describes in his *Makhzan al-asrār*, the Prophet is deemed the luminous "source of the sun" and the primal cause for the existence of all living beings. The idea that God created Muhammad as the light source of the entire physical and spiritual world pervades a large number of Islamic texts penned from the first centuries of Islam until today. The Qur'an itself mentions in several places a glowing light or lamp that writers understood as a metaphor for Muhammad. In two Qur'anic verses (5:15 and 33:46), for example, it

is stated that God sent a light (*nūr*), or an illuminating torch (*sirājan munīran*), and a book (*kitāb*) to his people to lead them out of darkness.<sup>87</sup> Exegetes interpreted these verses as evidence that God communicates with humans through His Book (the Qur'an) and His Prophet, who himself crystallizes into a luminous substance indicative of divine revelation.

Many Sayings of the Prophet further elaborate upon the concept of the *nūr Muḥammad*. For example, the famous hadith compiler al-Bukhari (d. 870) states that, "whenever he went in darkness, [the Prophet] had light shining around him like the moonlight."<sup>88</sup> In a similar manner, biographers of the Prophet such as the thirteenth-century Andalusian judge (*qāḍī*) al-Yahsubi (d. 1149) and the blind Turkish author al-Darir (fourteenth century) often included eyewitness accounts in their texts to illustrate the Prophet's blinding luminosity. For mystical writers like al-Tustari (d. 896) and Ibn 'Arabi, Muhammad symbolized the prime matter of light from which all beings issued,<sup>89</sup> thus linking pre-existence with post-existence, or creation with manifestation.<sup>90</sup> Finally, thirteenth-century Persian poets such as Nizami and Farid al-Din 'Attar (d. 1230) further elaborated upon the notion of the *nūr Muḥammad* in their eulogistic compositions to the Prophet, in order to describe him as a primal man freed from temporal space. In all of these texts, Muhammad is described as the cosmic and luminous prototype of all humanity.

Through the authority of their own particular literary genres, exegetes, biographers, and poets helped to fashion the pervasive belief in Muhammad as a primordial light and luminous body derived from God's incandescent essence and emitted as creative substance into the world. These sustained efforts gave rise to the notion of the *nūr Muḥammad*, or the "light of Muhammad." This conceptualization of the prophetic corpus stipulates that God epiphanized Himself as light, which then manifested itself as the light of Muhammad, from which the entire universe came into existence prior to the Prophet's later physical manifestation on earth.

Using terms derived from the Qur'an and tinting them with poetical expressions, Persian Sufi poets in particular developed new concepts about Muhammad's physicality and God's substance, alongside related visionary experiences. In his *Haft paykar* (Seven Icons),





Fig. 12. The Prophet Muhammad's ascension, from 'Attar's *Mantiq al-tayr* (The Speech of the Birds), probably Herat, 860 (1456). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, Ms. Oct. 268, fol. 13r. (Photo: courtesy of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)

for example, Nizami describes Gabriel commanding the Prophet to traverse the celestial spheres (“for you’re the moon” [*māh tū’ī*]),<sup>91</sup> and illuminate them with his own light. Further, Muhammad, whose luminescent quality is compared to a lamp (*charāgh*), must also “give the stars blooms of light.”<sup>92</sup> To the stars, he gives his colors and his own light, cloaking the firmament with his radiant attributes.

While writers such as Nizami attempted to depict the sum total of the Prophet Muhammad’s being as a compound of pre-existential time and its encounter with the temporal universe, artists appear to have drawn inspiration from texts describing the *nūr Muḥammad*, following suit with their own compositions. They, too, considered the Prophet both numinous and luminous, as well as immaterial but not disembodied. This hybrid concept of the Prophet—as a dual substance, or a combination of physical body and non-physical being—necessitated the development of one principal pictorial

strategy: the prophetic blaze (*ghurraṭ al-nubuwwa*),<sup>93</sup> a symbolic manifestation of God’s creative light emanating from and sometimes wholly enveloping Muhammad’s corporeal self.

One of the earliest extant paintings utilizing the prophetic blaze to emphasize the Prophet’s physical self appears in the ascension encomium included in a Timurid manuscript of ‘Attar’s *Mantiq al-tayr* (The Speech of the Birds), completed in Herat in 1456 (fig. 12).<sup>94</sup> The painting represents the Prophet sitting atop Buraq in the center of the composition. Muhammad’s face is covered by a rectangular gold veil—most likely added at a later date—and part of his left cheek remains visible, suggesting that his facial features were depicted before being camouflaged by gold paint. From under the veil appear his two long black hair plaits, which extend down to his waist. He wears a white turban and bears a flaming gold halo around his head as he lifts both hands in a gesture of supplication. Around Muhammad



and Buraq, five angels fly on gold swirling clouds that hide their bodies from the waist down. The angels carry a number of offerings, including a gold dish, a blue jug on a gold platter, a blue-green cushion, a gold platter with two cups, and a gold and white crown. Located on a blue sky with no other details suggestive of time and space, the painting has been elevated to an emblem of mystical worship.

The gold veil may have been added after the painting's original production for one of two reasons: either post-1500 pictorial traditions of representing the Prophet with a facial veil prompted *a posteriori* emendations of pre-1500 representations of the Prophet;<sup>95</sup> or a subsequent artist may have attempted to create a pictorial correspondence between the image and 'Attar's text in order to bring it in line with the widespread concept of the *nūr Muḥammad*. If the latter, then how did the artist draw upon the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* or, rather, what is the relationship between the author's text and the altered image?

In the introductory section entitled "In Praise of the Prophet" (*dar na't-i haẓrat-i Rasūl*), 'Attar turns the story of the Prophet's ascension into a vehicle for praising the *nūr Muḥammad*. The Prophet's luminous qualities are described in the following verses:

Sun of the Divine Law and Ocean of Certitude  
Light of the World, a Mercy for the Worlds,  
Lord of Creation and Sultan over all,  
The Sun of the Soul and the Belief of All.

Describing Muhammad as primordial light and substance, the author continues:

The purpose of his light was created beings,  
It was the origin of inexistences and existences.  
That which appeared from the Invisible of the Invisible  
Was his Pure Light without a doubt.  
His light since it was the origin of existences,  
His essence since it was the bestower of every essence.<sup>96</sup>

In 'Attar's exordium, the Prophet Muhammad appears as Pure Essence (*zāt-i pāk*), Light of the World (*nūr-i 'ālam*), Pure Light (*nūr-i pāk*), and Majestic Light (*nūr-i mu'azzam*). He also glows like the moon (*māh*), the sun (*āftāb*), or a candle (*sham'*), and his primordial luminence gives birth to all things seen and unseen. The author's conceptual description of the protagonist's radiant quintessence supersedes any attempts at merely

reporting his physical characteristics—a technique that reverberates strongly in the original painting's heavy use of gold.

For 'Attar and other mystical poets, seeing the Prophet in all his dimensions had very little to do with an optical experience. They believed that real sight occurs not through ocular perception, but by means of the eye of the heart (*dīda-i dil*) or the eye of the soul (*dīda-i jān*). For instance, in his exordium on the Prophet's ascension, 'Attar states: "For the eye of the soul, meeting with you [Muhammad] is sufficient."<sup>97</sup> To grasp the essence of the Prophet, it appears that the "eye of the soul" must levitate through the upwards movement of communal prayer. Here, the author concludes with the following declaration:

From the orisons of the Light of that Ocean of Mystery  
For the whole community prayer became obligatory.<sup>98</sup>

The Prophet as the Light of that Secret Ocean (*nūr-i ān dariyā-yi rāz*) is the ultimate goal of his community's prayer (*namāz*). Even though his essence appears as a large and enigmatic numinous body, the believer can attain this higher, formless realm through the catalyst of prayer. As a result, it is possible to suggest that the accompanying painting inserted in 'Attar's exordium was intended to fulfill a similar role: it could have served as a visual prompt for imagining the Prophet through prayer, not form. The orison's terms are couched in allegorical figures of speech, whereby the Prophet's persona is called forth by his primordial *nūr*. Such methods of abstracting the prophetic body as deployed in poetry and the pictorial arts were not just linked to prohibitory impulses; they could also elevate the viewer's vision beyond the realm of form while simultaneously overcoming the disloyalty of mimetic depiction.

These textual and pictorial ways of giving preeminence to the Prophet's cosmic, primordial essence over his human qualities and physical characteristics appear in other illustrated texts as well. For example, the idea that Muhammad exists as primordial light and creative flux is further developed in al-Yahsubi's much loved biographical work, *Kitāb al-Shifā' bi-ta'rif huqūq al-Muṣṭafā* (Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of the Chosen One).<sup>99</sup> In his text, al-Yahsubi records various eyewitness reports about the Prophet's luminous nature in a section he calls simply "The *Nūr Muḥammad*."

In a manuscript copy of al-Yahsubi's text dated 1759, the section on the "Light of Muhammad" includes an image of the Prophet with his hands upraised in a position of prayer, squatting frontally on a bed of flowers and creating a florid explosion of colors below his person—a pictorial adaptation of the philosophical precept that Muhammad serves as an ever-flourishing "Tree of Being" (fig. 13). Muhammad's face is not veiled but swallowed up by the radiance of his prophetic *nūr*, which turns into a large blaze above his turban. Behind a hilly landscape, three men look at him in awe and enter into discussion with one another. In the text immediately before and after the image, the Prophet's companions discuss Muhammad and his superhuman attributes.

Al-Yahsubi records three companions speaking about the luminous qualities of the Prophet Muhammad. For example, the Prophet's companion Ibn 'Abbas states: "When he laughed and his teeth showed, it was like a flash of lightning or they [his teeth] seemed as white hailstones. When he spoke, it was like light issuing from between his teeth."<sup>100</sup> The second companion, Abu Hurayra, follows suit by stating: "I have not seen anything more beautiful than the Messenger of God. It was as if the sun were shining in his face. When he laughed, it [his light] reflected off the wall."<sup>101</sup> And finally, the third companion, Ibn Abi Hala, simply notes: "His face shone like the moon."<sup>102</sup>

For Ibn 'Abbas and his friends, Muhammad is the possessor of the face of light (*ṣāhib wajh al-nūr*),<sup>103</sup> whose effulgent luminescence overwhelms and overtakes the whole of his facial features, transforming them from physical matter into shooting rays of light. It is this visible, yet primordial, illumination that is elevated to the rank of cosmic entity and heralded as the universal source of revelation, life, and existence. The late Ottoman artist of this painting—guided, it seems, more by allegorical expression than by a putative ban on figural imagery—here attempts to convey this complex idea of the *nūr Muḥammad* through his composition, in which the Prophet's flaming nimbus entirely subsumes his face, turning even his facial veil into golden light.

Biographers of the Prophet after al-Yahsubi continued to transmit information about the *nūr Muḥammad*, and artists who illustrated biographies even as late as the



Fig. 13. The Light of Muhammad (*Nūr Muḥammad*), from al-Yahsubi's *Kitāb al-Shifā' bi-ta'rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* (Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of the Chosen One), possibly north Africa, text dated 1172 (1759) and painting from ca. 1900. The New York Public Library, Spencer Collection, Turk Ms. 4, fol. 101r. (Photo: Christiane Gruber)

eighteenth century had to confront these texts, paying close attention to their highly symbolic contents while folding them within the norms of their own pictorial traditions. One such text is the *Siyer-i Nebī* (Biography

of the Prophet), originally written in 1388 in Anatolian Turkish by the author al-Darir. Al-Darir's biography of the Prophet was executed for the Mamluk Sultan Barquq (r. 1382–89 and 1390–99), who wished to have a biography of the Prophet written in the Turkish language. Abiding by the Mamluk ruler's wish, al-Darir composed his text by freely translating into Anatolian Turkish the version of Ibn Ishaq's *Sīrat al-Nabī* (Biography of the Prophet) composed by al-Bakri (fl. thirteenth century).<sup>104</sup> The *Siyer-i Nebī* became well regarded in Ottoman lands during the sixteenth century, at which time a number of works were translated into Turkish from Arabic and Persian, in order to strengthen the Ottoman Sunni cause.<sup>105</sup> Its popularity, moreover, was further solidified thanks to its production as an illustrated, five-volume manuscript completed in 1595–96 by the order of the Ottoman Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–95).<sup>106</sup>

Artists in the Ottoman royal book atelier in Istanbul were faced with certain iconographic choices deriving both from the text's descriptions and from their own pictorial traditions as they created the most extensive surviving program representing the Prophet at all stages of his life. Although the white facial veil was applied systematically to depictions of Muhammad in the illustrated *Siyer-i Nebī* of 1595–96, Ottoman artists nevertheless could have turned to al-Darir's text for further inspiration, thus making the issue of prophetic representation not just one of strict prohibition but of image-text interaction as well.

In his text, al-Darir pays particular attention to the idea of the *nūr Muḥammad* with reference to Muhammad's parents. The author describes the transference of the Prophet's primordial *nūr* from his father 'Abdallah to his mother Amina until she herself became radiant while pregnant with Muhammad. Al-Darir further describes Muhammad's luminosity as the "light of prophethood" (*peygamberlik nūri*) in an autonomous section entirely dedicated to the subject.<sup>107</sup> In his discussion of the *nūr Muḥammad*, the author states that God's primordial light, from which He created all lights, spirits, and prophets, consisted of the Prophet's illumination, itself made of white light that remains hidden (*gizli*) from all human beings.<sup>108</sup> The Prophet Muhammad, the author then concludes, exists as a cosmos

unto himself, as a "world of lights" (*nūrlar 'ālemi*) and a "world of secrets" (*esrār 'ālemi*).<sup>109</sup> Al-Darir's emphasis on the Prophet's light as a concealed and invisible substance—itsself indicative of an undisclosed and sacred universe—can explain at least in part why artists confronting this text saw the necessity to veil the Prophet's face while simultaneously attempting to convey his ineffable luminosity by means of the prophetic blaze (fig. 14). Such procedures of pictorial abstraction as linked to the prophetic body appear to be more than just a roundabout way to avoid figural representation; rather, they disclose a complexity and nuance that emerge from sustained efforts in the domains of literary production and of artistic practice to describe and imagine the Prophet Muhammad beyond the restrictive boundaries of mimetic description.

The concept of the *nūr Muḥammad* as developed in these many texts and paintings reveals a number of attempts over a vast period of time to describe the Prophet Muhammad as an immaterial substance too brilliant to behold but nonetheless contained in a corporeal vessel perceptible by the human eye. Representations attempt to convey the diametrically opposed forces at work in such procedures of depicting the Prophet—procedures that are caught between the wish to disclose Muhammad's mortal physical presence and the drive to veil his immortal luminous nature. The visual antipodes of exposing and concealing are negotiated here through the intermediary of the flaming nimbus and the facial veil. Muhammad's primordial irradiation transforms him into a supra-sensory life form and yet discloses the powerful conjunction of opposing forces that consist of light and its encounter with matter.

In paintings representing the Prophet as primordial light, artists utilized the incandescent medium of the prophetic blaze not only to describe Muhammad's primordial nature but also as a means of demonstrating, and potentially activating, the pious remembrance of the Prophet of Islam. One can imagine that viewers, in their turn, responded to such paintings in an interactive fashion, much as with the portraits containing vocative supra-invocations.

Pious responses to paintings are unfortunately not recorded in textual sources; thus, it is difficult to determine how a viewer may have reacted to such paintings.





Fig. 14. The Prophet Muhammad's revelations at Mount Hira, from al-Darir's *Siyer-i Nebī* (Biography of the Prophet), Istanbul, 1003 (1595–96). Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul, Ms. H. 1222, fol. 158v. (Photo: courtesy of the Topkapı Palace Library)

In at least once instance, however, we are told how onlookers were brought to tears when gazing upon a “light” image of the Prophet. The anecdote describes how a number of the Prophet’s companions visited the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41), who brought in a box, called the “box of witnessing” (*ṣandūq al-shahāda*). This box included a number of drawers or compartments containing pieces of silk with painted

images of the prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Muhammad. We are told that when the Prophet’s portrait (*ṣūrat*) was taken out, it was as luminous as the sun and better than any beautiful form. When the companions looked at this portrait, “teardrops streamed like stars from their eyes, and a longing for the Prophet was renewed in their hearts.”<sup>110</sup> This story not only serves to prove that “portraiture (*taṣvīr*) is not without justification,”<sup>111</sup> but also provides evidence for the affective response that an audience might have experienced upon contemplating a concretized light image of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>112</sup>

#### FROM LOGOS TO LIGHT

Representations of the Prophet Muhammad depicting the totality of his physical characteristics—as the resultant presence of an inscribed vocative and as primordial light—attempt to convey his multifaceted makeup as both existential body and atemporal presence. They hover in an intermediary visual zone between mimetic representation and the total abstraction of form in an attempt to define the elusive nature of the prophetic corpus. For these reasons, artists’ creative output resulted from their drive to capture Muhammad’s inner reality, divorced from accidental matter and temporal concerns and yet entirely derived from both. Through pictorial metaphors and such hybrid “memory images,” artists primarily working within Persian and Turkish cultural spheres from circa 1200 to 1800 sought to portray the Prophet in the full sum of his life form, as celestial essence and human being.

Although some paintings can be circumscribed in part by prohibitive impulses, or burdened by iconoclastic practices within Islamic traditions, many others, particularly those produced in Persian lands until the present day (fig. 15), prove that a putative ban on figural imagery has not historically constituted the principal driving force behind the nonfigurative elements used in representations of the Prophet. To the contrary, the overwhelming belief in a metaphorical Muhammad—as a unity of being, a primordial flux, a perfect man, and an eternal prototype—compelled artists to engage in conceptual thought and, as a consequence, to experiment with a wide variety of visual abstractions.



Fig. 15. The Prophet Muhammad with a radiant halo holds the Qur'an. Postcard purchased in Iran in 2001. (Photo: Christiane Gruber)

Persian writers and artists in particular understood that the Prophet's likeness entails not just a process of physical identification but also a figurative approach to his singular properties, which could not be captured by mimetic or expository means. More specifically, paintings that seek to create "images" of Muhammad that do not conform to the expository genre or do not condense his physical presence entirely to a graphic construct reveal a careful attention to distinguishing between the Prophet's outer appearance and inner essence, a conceptual dichotomy also developed in Persian historical and biographical texts, as well as in Sufi treatises and poems, during the pre-modern period.

Between 1200 and 1600, a few broad lines of pictorial development are clearly discernable: veristic depictions of the Prophet mark the period between circa 1200 and 1400; inscribed portraits develop circa 1400 at the latest; and light and veiled representations eventually dominate from around 1500 onward. Although it is difficult to untangle the exact forces behind each one of these "movements" in prophetic representation, a few preliminary suggestions can nevertheless be offered.

First, the placement of veristic representations in historical and biographical illustrated texts follows the expository mode, itself used to explain the life and deeds of the Prophet. Narrative textual and visual clarity dominates in this early period, and serves as an effective mechanism to teach Islamic thought in Persian lands from the Ghaznavid to the Timurid periods. Drawing upon Arabic and Persian *shamā'il* texts, artists created recognizable "portraits" of the Prophet by representing his specific physical (e.g., large eyes, long hair plaits) and vestmental (e.g., the *burda*) attributes. The concern with recordkeeping and knowledge transmission, along with a general ease with figural imagery, typifies this particular period of artistic activity.

In subsequent centuries, hybrid images emerge in illustrated poems. Such images appear indebted at least to some extent to mystical thought—especially the belief in an oral prayer's ability to conjure up a vision of the prophetic body. They also bear witness to the application of allegorical imagination (*khiyāl*) to visual production. Inscribed portraits in particular can disclose sectarian concerns and thus prove to be one of the many battling grounds for political and religious authority.

Veiled portraits emerged around 1500 in an early Safavid context, probably due to a constellation of factors linked to the newly emergent Sufi-Shi'i synthesis. Nevertheless, Ottoman images of the veiled Prophet produced during the last quarter of the sixteenth century may also be seen as a culmination of "sacralizing" procedures of iconography linked to a general growth in Ottoman-Islamic piety. In this period of "turning inward," images of the veiled Prophet reached their peak while simultaneously acting as a direct challenge to, or a visible differentiation from, European pictorial traditions.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the conjectural nature of understanding the various mechanisms by which images of the Prophet



changed over the course of several centuries, veristic, inscribed, and light portraits reveal that images of Muhammad are not only changeable but purposefully destabilizing. They necessitated active negotiation between the world of forms and the realm of the supraformal, and thus force us to further explore the symbolic roles played by images, especially those of the Prophet, in Islamic traditions. As Oya Pancaroğlu has previously demonstrated, such images could be used “as instruments in ethical instruction rather than traps leading to idolatry.”<sup>114</sup> They also provide evidence for artists’ and viewers’ personal pietistic relationship with the Prophet, while also serving as sites of remembrance that bear witness to varied attempts to express and convey Muhammad’s dual nature through the abstraction of visual form.

Rhetorical and visual strategies aimed at allegorizing the prophetic body are ubiquitous in Islamic traditions because Muhammad was understood as a hybrid entity, a literal personification of the encounter between the realms of the natural and supernatural. For these reasons, writers and artists seem to have wanted to draw a clear and visible distinction between his physical body (*khalq*) and his interior form (*khulq*).<sup>115</sup> In many texts and images, therefore, the Prophet’s body is described as bi-substantial and transmigratory. Ultimately, the language of metaphor dominates, particularly in pre-modern Persian literary and artistic traditions, in which the Prophet is described in word and in form as being simultaneously polymorphic and pictographic, visible and unseen, logos and light.

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#### NOTES

*Author’s note:* I wish to thank Renata Holod, David Roxburgh, Shreve Simpson, Paul Losensky, and Gülru Necipoğlu for their thoughtful feedback and criticism on various drafts of this paper. All remaining shortcomings and mistakes are my own. The materials presented in this study comprise preliminary findings from the international research project entitled “Crossing Boundaries, Creating Images: The Prophet Muhammad in Literary and Visual Traditions,” Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, Max-Planck-Institut, 2007–12 (<http://www.khi.fi.it/en/forschung/projekte/projekte/projekt21/index.html>).

1. The controversy over the cartoons was so immense that it became an entry (“Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoons Controversy”) in the popular online encyclopedia Wikipedia. The Wikipedia entry includes all twelve original cartoons published in the *Jyllands-Posten* and provides a concise overview of the controversy. It also discusses freedom of the press, censorship, and (briefly) Islamic pictorial traditions. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten\\_Muhammad\\_cartoons#Islamic\\_tradition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten_Muhammad_cartoons#Islamic_tradition). For an artistic evaluation of the cartoons, see Art Spiegelman, “Drawing Blood: Outrageous Cartoons and the Art of Courage,” *Harper’s Magazine* 312/1873 (June 2006): 43–52.
2. In his research, Finbarr B. Flood points to the “waves” of iconoclastic practices in Islam, which waxed and waned over the centuries in a manner similar to other iconoclastic moments in early Christian, Byzantine, and Protestant Europe: see Finbarr B. Flood, “Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum,” *The Art Bulletin* 84, 4 (December 2002): 641–59.
3. Cycles of illustrations depicting the Prophet Muhammad emerged in Ottoman lands as well, and for these reasons are discussed in some detail subsequently in this study.
4. For an overview of ascension paintings produced during this period, see Christiane Gruber, “The Prophet Muḥammad’s Ascension (*Mi’rāj*) in Islamic Art and Literature, ca. 1300–1600” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2005); idem, “L’Ascension (*Mi’rāj*) du Prophète Mohammed dans la peinture et la littérature islamiques,” *Luqman: Annales des Presses Universitaires d’Iran* 39, 1 (Fall and Winter 2003–4): 55–79; idem, *The Timurid “Book of Ascension” (Mi’rajnama): A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context* (Valencia, Spain: Patrimonio Ediciones, 2008), 254–56; and idem, “Me’rāj. ii. Illustrations,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranica.com>.
5. Although other pictorial techniques exist, only three methods are discussed here. A fourth, namely, the facial veil, is too complex to be discussed in detail within the scope of this study. For a detailed examination of the Prophet’s facial veil, see Christiane Gruber, “When *Nubuvvat* Encounters *Valāyat*: Safavid Paintings of the Prophet Muḥammad’s *Mi’rāj*, ca. 1500–1550,” in *Shi’ite Art and Material Culture*, ed. Pedram Khosronejad (London: I. B. Tauris, forthcoming 2010). This study shows that the first original (rather than a *posteriori*) facial veil emerged during the time of Shah Isma’il’s I reign (1501–24) and that it was used as a purposeful means of associating the ruler’s persona with that of the Prophet. In paintings produced for Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76) and certainly in late sixteenth-century Ottoman paintings, the facial veil appears to have lost its initial religio-political associations with the first Safavid ruler. Instead, it appears to have been used as a means to inhibit a viewer’s full witnessing of the Prophet. The reasons for the facial veil’s “codification” over the course of the sixteenth century in both Persian and Ottoman lands is a complex issue, which remains to be further analyzed in light of religious developments (Sunni-Shi’i contentions, the delineation of



- Twelver Shi'ism in Persia, the rise of Sunni "orthodoxy" in Ottoman lands, the expansion of Sufism, etc.) and their potential effects on pictorial traditions.
6. The term "memory image" is borrowed from Peter Parshall, "The Art of Memory and the Passion," *The Art Bulletin* 81, 3 (September 1999): 456–72. Here, Parshall describes the "memory image" as a picture produced in the mind through a kind of memory that is "artificial," namely, through man's innate capacity to cultivate and control his memory in the service of a particular task (such as remembering Christ's passion).
  7. Throughout this study, the phrase *nūr Muḥammad* will be used as such since it appears most frequently in this form in Islamic texts: see Uri Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), 62–119. However, the expression can also appear as *nūr Muḥammadī*: see U. Rubin, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (henceforth *EI2*) (Leiden, 1954–2004), s.v. "Nūr Muḥammadī"; other variants include *al-nūr al-Muḥammadī* and, in Persian, *nūr-i Muḥammad*.
  8. For a discussion of the Safavids' synthesis of Sufi and Shi'i ideas, see Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27, 1–4 (1994): 135–61, further developed in idem, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
  9. For example, in 1997 the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) requested that the sculpted representation of the Prophet Muhammad in the north frieze of the "Great Lawgivers of History," located in the courtroom of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, be removed or sanded down. CAIR expressed offense at the medium (a sculpture) and the belligerent content (the Prophet holding a sword), to which Chief Justice William Rehnquist responded that the depiction was a "well-intentioned attempt by the sculptor Adolph Weinman to honor Muhammad." Further stressing that the figure of the Prophet was not intended as a form of idol-worship, that physical injury to an architectural feature in the Supreme Court building was unlawful, and that the sword in the iconographic program of the Supreme Court friezes represented a symbol of justice and not of war, Chief Justice Rehnquist rejected CAIR's request to remove the sculpture (two-page letter from Chief Justice William Rehnquist to Nihad Awad, Executive Director, and Ibrahim Hooper, Communications Director, of the Council on American-Islamic Relations dated March 11, 1997; provided to the author by Kathleen Arberg, Public Information Officer, Public Information Office, Supreme Court of the United States). Based on the input from a number of Muslim groups such as the American Muslim Council, however, Chief Justice Rehnquist, agreed to change the Supreme Court's literature on the depiction of the Prophet on the north frieze to include a concluding sentence stating that "Muslims generally have a strong aversion to sculptured or pictured representations of the Prophet." (*Ibid.*, 2.) In agreement with Chief Justice Rehnquist, Taha Jaber al-Alwani issued a fatwa in favor of retaining the sculpture, noting that: "What I have seen in the Supreme Courtroom deserves nothing but appreciation and gratitude from American Muslims. This is a positive gesture toward Islam made by the architect [Cass Gilbert] and other architectural decision-makers of the highest Court in America": Taha Jaber al-Alwani, "Fatwa Concerning the United States Supreme Courtroom Frieze," *Journal of Law and Religion* 15, 1–2 (2000–2001): 1–28. With the persistent division of opinion on this sculpture alone, it becomes evident that modern Muslim views on representations of the Prophet Muhammad are not always in accord or monolithic.
  10. Earle Waugh, "Following the Beloved: Muḥammad as Model in the Sufi Tradition," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1976), 77.
  11. Alexandre Papadopoulo, *Islam and Muslim Art*, trans. Robert E. Wolf (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1979), 56–57; and Priscilla Soucek, "The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 97.
  12. On the layout and text of Ottoman *hilyes*, see Nabil F. Safwat, *The Art of the Pen: Calligraphy of the 14th to 20th Centuries*, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, ed. Julian Raby, vol. 5 (Oxford: The Nour Foundation, in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1996), 46–50. For a discussion of Ottoman *hilyes* as Sunni visualizations of the hadith, which symbolically place the Prophet Muhammad between the realm of the sacred and that of humankind, see Tim Stanley, "From Text to Art Form in the Ottoman Hilye," in *Studies on Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Filiz Çağman* (Istanbul: Topkapı Palace Museum, forthcoming). For comparative *hilyes* on wooden panels, see Safwat, *Art of the Pen*, 54–55; Ali Alparslan, *Osmanlı Hat Sanatı Tarihi*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 133–34; *In Pursuit of Excellence: Works of Art from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul* (Istanbul: Ahmet Ertuğ, 1993), pl. 38; and numerous examples included in Faruk Taşkale and Hüseyin Gündüz, *Hat Sanatında Hilye-i Şerife: Hz. Muhammed'in Özellikleri = Characteristics of the Prophet Muhammed in Calligraphic Art* (Istanbul: Antik A. Ş. Kültür Yayınları, 2006).
  13. Joanna Wooddall, "Introduction: Facing the Subject," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Wooddall (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 12.
  14. Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991). New paradigms for practices of portraiture and modes of visibility in non-Western traditions have been analyzed in Richard Brilliant and Jean Borgatti, *Likeness and Beyond: Portraits from Africa and the World* (New York: Center for African Art, 1990); and Robert Nelson, ed., *Visibility Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). However, these studies do not take into consideration Islamic practices of portraiture, an unfortunate

- albeit noted omission: see Nelson, *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, 10.
15. Nelson, *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, 2. The question of the gaze in religious art (i.e., the “sacred gaze”) has been examined recently by David Morgan in his *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2005). Much like Robert Nelson, David Morgan argues that the sacred gaze, as a visual medium of belief, encompasses a visual network that constitutes a social act of looking and is therefore a practice that includes the image, the viewer, and the act of viewing: Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, 3–6.
  16. For a review of devotional images (*Andachtsbilder*), which typically represent scenes from the Passion of Christ, and their use in devotional practices in medieval European art, see Nigel Morgan, “Andachtsbild,” *Grove Art Online* (accessed 28 February 2008).
  17. David James, “Qur’ans as Works of Art,” in *The Master Scribes: Qur’ans of the 10th to 14th Centuries AD*, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, ed. Julian Raby, 2 (New York: Nour Foundation, in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1992), 11. James contends that religious art in Islam consists solely of Qur’ans and calligraphy, while illustrated manuscripts depicting the Prophet Muhammad, such as Sultan Murad III’s *Siyer-i Nebi* of ca. 1595–96, are not “true works of religious art, although they may, and often do, have a spiritual element.” On the other hand, scholars such as Ernst Grube, J. M. Rogers, and Priscilla Soucek take the position that illustrated religious narratives begin early and continue in their new cultural milieu, whether these are Persian or Turkish, and therefore reveal that “religious painting” is a relevant category in Islamic art: see J. M. Rogers, “The Genesis of Safawid Religious Painting,” *Iran* 8 (1970): 126; article republished based on idem, “The Genesis of Safawid Religious Painting,” in *Vth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology, Tehran-Isfahan-Shiraz, 11th–18th April 1968*, ed. A. Tajvidi and M. Y. Kiani, 2 vols. (Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 1968), 2:167–88.
  18. Priscilla Soucek, “Nizami on Painters and Painting,” in *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Richard Ettinghausen (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), 9–21; and idem, “Theory and Practice of Portraiture.” Although Soucek examines a wide range of portraits in her two articles, she does not address images of the Prophet Muhammad *per se*. In another study, however, she discusses apocryphal (written) portraits of Muhammad in Persian illustrated manuscripts produced during the fourteenth century: see idem, “The Life of the Prophet: Illustrated Versions,” in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World: Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2–4 April 1980*, ed. Priscilla Soucek (University Park, Pa., and London: published for the College Art Association of America by Pennsylvania State University Press 1988), 193–218.
  19. Priscilla Soucek, “Nizami on Painters and Painting,” 12.
  20. Yves Porter, “La forme et le sens: À propos du portrait dans la littérature persane classique,” in *Pand o Sukhan: Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, ed. Christophe Balag et al. (Tehran: Institut français de recherche en Iran, 1995), 219–31.
  21. *Ibid.*, 222.
  22. Soucek, “Theory and Practice of Portraiture,” 102 (quoting al-Ghazzālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* [The Revival of Religious Sciences]).
  23. This concept finds a parallel in the Christian conviction that Jesus Christ is both divine and human. In Islamic thought, however, the Prophet Muhammad is considered to be a mortal man bearing “sacred” qualities, rather than being divine *per se*.
  24. Arthur Jeffery, “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*,” *Studia Islamica* 10 (1950): 43–77. The process of idealizing the Prophet Muhammad in biographical works and, later, in mystical sources reveals a series of sustained attempts at promoting the Messenger of Islam in popular piety, thus yielding a veritable veneration of the Prophet, or a “Prophet-cultus.” *Ibid.*, 45.
  25. Many hadith compendia include chapters providing a description of the Prophet (entitled *ṣifat al-Nabī*), in which Muhammad’s physical and moral characteristics are enumerated. These chapters in turn gave rise to the *shamā’il* genre.
  26. Muḥammad b. ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī’s work on the Prophet Muhammad’s features bears a number of titles, including *al-Shamā’il al-sharīfa* (The Noble Features), *al-Shamā’il al-Muḥammadiyya* (Muhammadan Features), *al-Shamā’il al-Nabawiyya* (The Prophetic Features), and *Shamā’il al-Muṣṭafā* (The Features of the Chosen One). It also is simply referred to as *Shamā’il al-Tirmidhī* (al-Tirmidhī’s Features) and is best rendered in English as The Virtues and Noble Character of the Prophet Muhammad. There exist a number of Arabic editions of al-Tirmidhī’s text, including *al-Shamā’il al-Muḥammadiyya*, ed. Sayyid ‘Umrān (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1996). It is available in French as *Les qualités caractérielles de Mohammad: As-shamā’il al-Mohammadiyah*, trans. Marjan Jardaly (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2004); and in English as *The Virtues and Noble Character of the Prophet Muhammad*, at <http://www.inter-islam.org/hadeeth/stmenu.htm> (accessed April 5, 2009).
  27. al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣ’ūd al-Baghawī, *al-Anwār fī shamā’il al-Nabī al-mukhtār*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Ya’qūbī (Beirut: Dār al-Diḥya, 1989).
  28. Ismā’il b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Shamā’il al-Rasūl wa-dalā’il Nubuwwatihi wa-faḍā’ilihi wa-khaṣā’iṣihi*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Wāḥid (Cairo: ‘Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967).
  29. The Andalusian mystic Ibn ‘Arabī provides his theosophical elaboration of a pantheist world principally in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Illuminations) and *al-Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom). In both works, as in a

- number of others, Ibn 'Arabi argues that spiritual oneness can only be achieved through the abolition (*fanā'*) of the self and the existential world.
30. For biographical information on al-Jili, see H. Ritter, *EI2*, s.v. "Abd al-Karim al-Djili"; Titus Burckhardt's introduction to 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, *Universal Man: Extracts*, Engl. trans. Angela Culme-Seymour (Sherborne Stables, England: Beshara, 1983), i-xiii; and Yūsuf Zaydān, 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili: *Faylasūf al-Şūfiyya* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1988). The date of al-Jili's death is still disputed. However, it seems most probable that he died in 1408: see Valerie Hoffman, "Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of a Sufi Practice," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31 (1999): 366 n. 6.
  31. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūli (also spelled al-Juzūli) is best known for his popular prayer manual entitled *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* (The Proofs of Good Deeds), which circulated widely from the fifteenth century onward, especially in lands under Ottoman rule.
  32. For a description of the Sufi doctrine of the "Complete Man," see 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī'l-Islām*, 2nd ed. (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1976); and al-Jili, *Universal Man*. For the use of the term *wāsiṭa*, see 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, *al-Kamālāt al-ilāhiyya fī'l-ṣifāt al-Muḥammadiyya*, ed. Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ (Cairo: Maktabat 'Ālam al-Fikr, 1997), 44 (*wāsiṭa bayn Allāh wa-bayn adam*). Muhammad is also described (ibid., 46) as the intermediary between God and created beings (*wāsiṭa bayn Allāh wa-bayn al-khalq*). On the mystical concept of *barzakh*, see Salman Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).
  33. al-Jili, *al-Kamālāt*, 42.
  34. The annihilation (*fanā'*) of one's separate personhood while contemplating the Prophet has been a central motif of Sufi piety since Ibn 'Arabi. For a general discussion of Sufi *fanā'*, see Valerie Hoffman, "Annihilation in the Messenger of God."
  35. Teresa Fitzherbert, "Khwaju Kirmani (689–753/1290–1352): An *Ēminence Grise* of Fourteenth-Century Persian Painting," *Iran* 29 (1991): 149.
  36. See Lisa Golombek, "Toward a Classification of Islamic Painting," in Ettinghausen, *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 23–34; and Sheila Blair, "The Development of the Illustrated Book in Iran," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 266–74.
  37. The *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* genre is best represented by Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, ed. Muḥammad Rawwās Qal'ahji and 'Abd al-Barr 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1419 [1999]), and Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī's *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa wa-ma'rifat aḥwāl Šāḥib al-Sharī'a*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Saqr (Cairo: n.p., 1960).
  38. Text in English available at: <http://www.inter-islam.org/hadeeth/stmenu.htm> (accessed July 15, 2008). Translation slightly adapted by author.
  39. Hoffman, "Annihilation in the Messenger of God," 360.
  40. Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth BnF), Paris, Ms. Pers. 82. This unstudied manuscript is quite lengthy at a total of 206 folios (measuring 31 x 23 cm), and it is meticulous in its descriptions of the Prophet's various body parts, which include: his head, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, eyelashes, nose, mouth, teeth, breath, face, beard, hair, neck, shoulders, shoulder blades, back, chest, stomach, navel, hands, fingers, forearms, legs, heels, feet, and joints; his size, skin color, and beauty; and, finally, his sweat and spit (whose olfactory and curative powers made them highly sought after). After describing these physical traits and bodily excretions, there follows the author's disquisition on the Prophet's moral and spiritual makeup. For further information on this manuscript, see Edgar Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans*, 4 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1905–34), 1:249–50, cat. no. 371. On Ravandi's life and works, see ibid., 1:276–77, cat. no. 438.
  41. See Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, "Le roman de Varqet et Golshah: Essai sur les rapports de l'esthétique littéraire et de l'esthétique plastique dans l'Iran pré-mongol, suivi de la traduction du poème," *Arts Asiatiques* 22 (1970): 5–262, especially pl. 64 (Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul, Ms. H. 481, fols. 69v–70r) and verses 2169–2238. For an analysis of the text, see Ahmed Atesh, "Le récit de Warqah et Gulshah," *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961): 143–52.
  42. The inclusion of the Prophet's *burda* suggests a moment of utmost solemnity or prayer. For example, two Ilkhanid paintings executed during the first half of the fourteenth century portray the Prophet wearing the *burda* during particularly critical moments in his prophetic career: 1) in a painting depicting Muhammad's investiture of 'Ali at Ghadir Khumm included in al-Birūnī's *al-Āthār al-bāqiyya 'an al-qurūn al-khāliyya* (copied in Tabriz, Maragha, or perhaps Mosul in 1307–8) (Edinburgh University Library, Ms. Arab 161, fol. 162r); and 2) in a composition showing the Prophet receiving a vision of Jerusalem upon his prayer to God as a means of verifying the miracle of his ascension, included in a now fragmentary illustrated *Mi'rājnāma* most likely produced in Tabriz ca. 1317–35 (Topkapı Palace Library, Ms. H. 2154, fol. 107r). For the painting in al-Birūnī's text, see in particular Robert Hillenbrand, "Images of Muhammad in al-Biruni's *Chronology of Ancient Nations*," in *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars: Studies in Honour of Basil W. Robinson*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 134, and pl. 13; and for the *Mi'rājnāma* painting, see in particular Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı, *The Topkapı Saray Museum: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts*, trans. J. M. Rogers (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 69, fig. 47.
  43. The painting of the enthroned Prophet is one of only three paintings included in the *Marzubānnāma*. The other two paintings, also placed at the manuscript's opening, depict the author's composition of the *Marzubānnāma* (fol. 5r) and the work's patron (fol. 7r). These paintings correspond respectively to the textual praises of the Prophet, as well as



- of the work's author and its patron, a structure of eulogy typically found at the beginning of Persian didactic, moralizing, romantic, and heroic texts. For a discussion of these paintings, the *Marzubānnāma* manuscript, and Ilkhanid painting produced in Baghdad, see Marianna S. Simpson, "The Role of Baghdad in the Formation of Persian Painting," in *Art et société dans le monde iranien*, ed. Chahryar Adle (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1982), 91–116.
44. A member of the mint genus of herbs, the poney herb (*kaisū*), also known as pennyroyal or perennial mint (*mentha pulegium*), has small blue or violet flowers with small aromatic leaves that exude a minty aroma. Essential oil of the poney herb was frequently used in folk medicine, and today it is used in aromatherapy.
  45. Sa'd al-Din al-Varāvīnī, *Marzubānnāma*, Baghdad, 698 (1299), Archaeological Museum Library, Istanbul, Ms. 216, fol. 1v; idem, *Kitāb-i Marzubānnāma*, ed. Muḥammad Qazvīnī (Tehran: Furūghī, 1984), 1; and Simpson, "Role of Baghdad," fig. 47.
  46. al-Varāvīnī, *Marzubānnāma*, fol. 2v, bottom two lines; and idem, *Kitāb-i Marzubānnāma*, 1. (The first line of Arabic poetry in the published edition of the *Marzubānnāma* reads: *salāmu al-ṣabbi kulla...* The term *ṣabb* means "enamored" or "ardently in love.") The encomium to the Prophet in al-Varāvīnī's text is omitted from the English translation *The Tales of Marzuban*, trans. Reuben Levy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959). Instead, the English translation begins immediately with the author's introduction and reasons for writing the *Marzubānnāma*, a section that typically occurs only after an exordium, first, to God and, then, to the Prophet Muhammad.
  47. Jeffery, "Ibn al-'Arabī's *Shajarat al-Kawn*," 67–68. The imperative *kun* (be) is borrowed from the famous verse in the Qur'an (2:177) that describes God's creation of the heavens and earth: "When He decreed a matter, He said to it: 'Be, and it is' (*kun fa-yakūn*)."
  48. The term *ṣūra* can mean "image, form, shape, face, or countenance": see A. J. Wensinck, *EI2*, s.v. "Ṣūra."
  49. Much like the *nūr Muḥammad* and the veil, authors and poets extolled the ethereality of Muhammad's scent. For example, the historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) reports in his historical encyclopedia that Anas b. Malik stated that he "never encountered any scent, not even the scent of a bride, more fragrant than the skin of the Messenger of God": al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī = Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, vol. 6, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 80. Likewise, the theologian al-Ghazzālī reports that the "beads of sweat on his face were like pearls; they were more fragrant than the most pungent musk": al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn = Revival of Religious Sciences*, trans. Leon Zolondek (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 42. Persian poets often described the Prophet's scent (*bū-yi Rasūl*) and its power over humans. For instance, Nizāmī (d. 1218) addresses Muhammad directly, saying: "Your scent is the elixir of our lives": Aḥmad Ranjbar, ed., *Chand Mī'rājnāma* [Several Books of Ascension] (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1372 [1952]), 31; and Nizāmī, *Makhzanol asrār: The Treasury of Mysteries of Nezāmī of Ganjeh*, trans. Gholām Hosein Dārāb (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1945), 104, verse 209.
  50. The painting is included in a manuscript of Naṣrallāh Munshī's *Kalīla va Dimna* that was calligraphed in Baghdad (*Madīnat al-Salām*) in 678 (1279–80). This manuscript was completed just two decades before the *Marzubānnāma*, and therefore provides another piece of evidence for the production of manuscripts in Baghdad during the Ilkhanid period. However, its paintings seem to have been added later, most probably during the Jalayirid or Muzaffarid periods, that is, ca. 1350–1400. On the paintings' probable date of execution, see Francis Richard, *Splendeurs persanes: Manuscrits du XIIIe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1997), 69.
  51. For the Persian text, see Naṣrallāh Munshī, *Tarjuma-i Kalīla va Dimna*, ed. Mujtabā Mīnuvī (Tehran: Dānīshgāh-i Tīhrān, 1924–25).
  52. Naṣrallāh Munshī, *Tarjuma-i Kalīla va Dimna*, 2–3; and idem, BnF Suppl. Persan Ms. 376, fol. 2r.
  53. Naṣrallāh Munshī, *Tarjuma-i Kalīla va Dimna*, 3; and idem, BnF Suppl. Persan Ms. 376, fol. 2v, lines 2–4; and Qur'an 33:56.
  54. The addition of the Qur'anic prayer and the image of the ascension, as argued by Bernard O'Kane, bestows a blessing (*baraka*) on this book: see Bernard O'Kane, *Early Persian Painting: Kalīla and Dimna Manuscripts of the Late Fourteenth Century* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 50.
  55. al-Baghawī, *al-Anwār fī shamā'il al-Nabī al-mukhtār*, 141–47 (on the Prophet's white, rosy, and brilliant complexion), and 148–153 (on his hair); Ibn Kathīr, *Shamā'il al-Rasūl*, 9–14 (on the Prophet's complexion, his hair, and his round face), and 23–28 (on his hair, its length and color, and his hair plaits); and al-Tirmidhī, *Les qualités caractérielles de Mohammad*, 5–16 (on the Prophet's physical appearance).
  56. Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 26.
  57. A small inscription in the lower left corner of the upper right gold text panel attempts to attribute the composition to the famous painter Bihzad, active in Herat during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. It is not atypical to find later attempts to ascribe paintings to the master painter, even if certain paintings (like this one) do not relate to his style. Based on stylistic grounds, the painting appears to have been made ca. 1550 in Shaybanid Bukhara, on which see M. M. Ashrafi-Aini, "The School of Bukhara to c. 1550," in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Basil Gray (Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala Publications, 1979), 248–72.
  58. Muḥammad Khazā'ī, *Sharḥ-i Bustān* (Tehran: Sāzmān-i Intishārāt-i Jāvidān, 1984), 48.
  59. *Ibid.*, 52.
  60. Sa'dī, *Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned: The Bustan of Sa'dī*, trans. G. M. Wickens (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 8, lines 95–96.

61. Khazā'ili, *Sharḥ-i Bustān*, 52 n. 10. The term is inspired by two famous hadiths, in which the Prophet states that “the first thing God created was my light” (*awwal mā khalaqa Allāh nūrī*) and “I am [made] of God’s light and all created beings [are made] of my light” (*anā min nūrī Allāhi wa’l-khalqu kulluhum min nūrī*).
62. *Ibid.*, 51.
63. Sa’dī, *Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned*, 7, lines 85–86 (with slight changes in my English translation).
64. *Ibid.*, 53.
65. *Ibid.*, 8, lines 101–2 (with slight changes in my English translation).
66. Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Ali are mentioned in Sa’dī’s encomium (*ibid.*, 51). However, only three, not four, figures appear in the painting. If one accepts the attribution of the composition to Shaybanid Bukhara (1500–1598), then it is possible that the artist purposefully omitted ‘Ali, the figure-head of Shi’i Islam and thus a figural stand-in for the Sunni Shaybanids’ Shi’i enemies, the Safavids of Iran.
67. Hoffman, “Annihilation in the Messenger of God,” 354. The term *nuskha* also can be translated as “copy” or “replica.”
68. Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, 65. David Morgan applies the term “imagetext” to Jewish artifacts and Islamic calligraphic panels that create animal or human forms (*ibid.*, 67, fig. 16).
69. The term *lawḥ* appears five times in the Qur’an, and the “well-preserved” tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) is used to describe God’s revelations or the archetypal Qur’an (85:22 and 97:1). It also stands for the tablet of destiny, on which the fate of mankind is inscribed. See A. J. Wensinck and C. E. Bosworth, *EI2*, s.v. “Lawḥ.”
70. Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, 64. David Morgan describes a “sound-space” as a location in which prayer looms large and defines an area, such as a mosque or dervish lodge. It is here argued that the term “sound-space” can also describe the calling forth of the Prophet’s presence through oral traditions of prayer.
71. On the painting’s style and date, see Basil Robinson, *Jean Pozzi: L’Orient d’un collectionneur* (Geneva: Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, 1992), 110, 221 (cat. no. 20).
72. Although it is difficult to illustrate this technique in Ottoman painterly traditions through published reproductions, it is clear that illustrated manuscripts depicting the Prophet Muhammad, such as Sultan Murad III’s *Siyer-i Nebī* of 1595–96, include a similar procedure. When one holds paintings of the Prophet from the *Siyer-i Nebī* up to natural sunlight, an inscription below his white facial veil is clearly visible. It is hoped that in the future images taken using infrared photography will show the longevity of this tradition in both Persian and Turkish pictorial traditions.
73. The episode depicts ‘Ali’s storming of a Jewish stronghold about one hundred miles from Mecca in the seventh year of the *hijra* (628). According to historical chronicles, Muhammad entrusted the attack to ‘Ali, whose ophthalmia (inflammation of the eyeball) was cured immediately after the Prophet spit into his eyes. ‘Ali proceeded to kill the Jewish chieftain and, after losing his shield, lifted the fortress’s door from its hinges and defended himself with it against a variety of propelled weapons like arrows and rocks. He then used the door as a bridge to gain access to the redoubt. It later took eight men to put the door back on its hinges, thus confirming the superhuman strength of Muhammad’s valiant relative: C. E. Bosworth, *EI2*, s.v. “Khaybar.” Al-Nishāpūri’s *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Stories of the Prophets) describes this and other events in the lives of the prophets, including Adam, Moses, Alexander, Mary, Jesus, and Muhammad. This text was frequently illustrated during the sixteenth century in Safavid Persian and Ottoman Turkish lands: see Rachel Milstein et al., *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1999).
74. Another sketch representing ‘Ali with his name in the vocative (*yā ‘Alī!*) inscribed on his face appears to form a series with the tinted sketch of Muhammad: see Robinson, *Jean Pozzi*, 110, 221 (cat. no. 21). In these paintings, we can hypothesize that the inscribed vocative of ‘Ali’s name provides evidence for the Shi’i practice of proclaiming his name aloud (the so-called *nād-i ‘Alī*) in order to muster his presence and support.
75. The title of al-Jili’s work, *Qāb qawsayn* (The Space of Two Bows), is taken from Sura *al-Najm* (The Star), the fifty-third chapter of the Qur’an (verse 9). Verses 1–17 of Sura *al-Najm* narrate the Prophet’s ascension, and his proximity to God is described as a space of two bow arcs or even less. In Sufi thought and poetry, the expression *qāb qawsayn* is indicative of the mystic’s ability to become intimate with the Lord and thus reach the ultimate “station of proximity” (*maqām al-qurba*), in which he realizes a fullness of spiritual knowledge.
76. Hoffman, “Annihilation in the Messenger of God,” 356.
77. Ronald Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur’anic Prophets: Ibn ‘Arabī’s Thought and Method in the Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 199.
78. British Library (henceforth BL), London, Ms. Or. 12009. Although the text seems to have been written around 1600, all paintings (except for fol. 19v) bear the date of 1118 (1706). On fol. 66v, the date 1118 is written in light blue ink immediately below the gold cenotaph in the center of the painting. Despite these dates, G. M. Meredith-Owens attributes the paintings to Shiraz, ca. 1550–60, based on stylistic grounds: see G. M. Meredith-Owens, *Turkish Miniatures* (London: British Museum, 1963), 29. Although the paintings may have been executed at this time, some overpainting and the date (1118) on the compositions themselves strongly suggest that an artist, perhaps working in Ottoman lands at the turn of the eighteenth century, retouched the paintings.
79. For example, another copy of Fuzūli’s *Hadiqat al-su’adā’* (Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, Istanbul, Ms. 1967), whose paintings are closely related to those in BL Ms. Or. 12009, reveals distinctly Sunni Ottoman alterations: the images and text have been carefully manipulated to omit honorific prayers to the *ahl al-Bayt* (members of the Prophet’s household) and the imams. For example, on fol. 92v, the

- praise formula *'alayhi al-salām* (peace be upon him) after 'Ali's name has been crossed out.
80. *Ave Maria* inscriptions appear in paintings of the Annunciation, such as in Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi's *Annunciation* in the St. Ansanus Altarpiece dated 1333. Gabriel's angelic salutation to the Virgin inscribed on the surface of the painting served as a visual clue for the popular fourteenth-century devotional practice of praising the Virgin Mary. These inscriptions elicited the painting's viewer to say the words aloud, thereby provoking a devotional response from the pious onlooker. In this instance, however, the salutations provide additional commentary upon the painting and never replace the Virgin's facial features, as they do in the case of the Prophet Muhammad. See Ann van Dijk, "The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery," *The Art Bulletin* 81, 3 (September 1999): 420–36; and Roger Tarr, "'Visibile Parlare': The Spoken Word in Fourteenth-Century Central Italian Painting," *Word and Image* 13 (1997): 223–44.
  81. Parshall, "Art of Memory and the Passion," 458.
  82. For a discussion of Ottoman illustrated copies of the text, see Jan Just Witkam, "The Battle of the Images: Mecca vs. Medina in the Iconography of the Manuscripts of al-Jazuli's *Dalā'il al-Khayrat*," *Beiruter Texte und Studien* 111 (2007): 67–82.
  83. al-Jazūlī, *Guide to Happiness: A Manual of Prayer*, trans. Rev. John B. Pearson (Oxford: printed for private circulation, 1907), 10; and 'Abd al-Majīd al-Sharnūbī, *Sharḥ Dalā'il al-khayrāt wa-shawāriq al-anwār fī dhikr al-ṣalāh 'alā al-Nabī al-mukhtār* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1994), 6.
  84. This painting was published (in black and white) in Basil Robinson, *Fifteenth-Century Painting: Problems and Issues* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 68–69, fig. 22. Robinson correctly states that this painting has no parallel in the history of Persian painting. However, he neither addresses the reasons behind the painting's iconography nor its relationship to Nizami's text.
  85. Nizāmī, *Makhzanol asrār*, 97–109; and Ranjbar, *Chand Mi'rājnāma*, 24–25.
  86. For al-Jili and other mystics, the letter *mīm* also represents the transcendental spirit of the Prophet, because the empty space within the circle of this letter provides the area in which the "Secret Treasure" resides while the circle itself is the reality in which the "Secret Treasure" becomes manifest. In other words, there is a mutual relationship between the circle and its empty space, or between manifestation and essence. As al-Jili concludes: "The *mīm* represents existence, it is the reality that incorporates both worlds, the visible and the invisible... In the *mīm* of Muḥammad, there appears the eternal being and the created being." Ridha Atlagh, "Le point et la ligne: Explication de la *basmala* par la science des lettres chez 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili (m. 826 h.)," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 44 (1992): 176–77. Al-Jili and other mystics describe the round shape of the "Muhammadan *mīm*" as a suture between the primordial and created worlds: see Annemarie Schimmel, "The Primordial Dot: Some Thoughts about Sufi Letter Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 355–56.
  87. Some Sufi exegetes also claimed that the "verse of light" (*āyat al-nūr*), Qu'ran 24:35, describes a tabernacle (*mishkāh*) believed to represent the Prophet Muhammad and a torch (*misbāh*) contained within it as the "light of Muhammad" (*nūr Muḥammadi*): see M. K. Hermansen, "The Prophet Muḥammad in Sufi Interpretations of the Light Verse (24:35)," *Islamic Quarterly* 42, 2 (1998): 218–27.
  88. Uri Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," 62, quoting al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. and ed. Muḥammad M. Khān, 9 vols. (Medina: Dār Ihyā al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya, n.d.), 4:229.
  89. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 67–68.
  90. Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl At-Tustarī* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 150.
  91. Nizāmī, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, trans. Julie Scott Meisami (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6, verse 7; and Ranjbar, *Chand Mi'rājnāma*, 47.
  92. Nizāmī, *Haft Paykar*, 6, verse 14; and Ranjbar, *Chand Mi'rājnāma*, 48.
  93. The Prophet's earliest biographer, Ibn Ishāq (d. 768), describes in his *Sīrat al-Nabī* (Biography of the Prophet) the emergence of the prophetic blaze (*ghurrat al-nubuwwa*) on Muhammad's father 'Abdallah, which then passed to the Prophet's mother Amina before finally resting with Muhammad: see Rubin, "Nūr Muḥammadi."
  94. The painting measures 9 x 8 cm. Folios are 15.5 x 24.9 cm, and the written surface measures 9 x 15.7 cm. The text is executed in black *nasta'liq* script at twelve lines per page in two columns.
  95. For example, the nine paintings from a fragmentary Ilkhanid *Mi'rājnāma* dated ca. 1317–35 (Topkapı Palace Library, Ms. H. 2154) arrived in Istanbul sometime over the course of the sixteenth century, at which time the Prophet's facial features were covered with white painted veils added by artists active in the Ottoman royal book atelier. These facial veils were recently removed by conservators: see Rogers, "Genesis of Safawid Religious Painting," in Tajvidi and Kiani, *Vth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology*, 178. They appear to have been added in order to render the Ilkhanid paintings consistent with sixteenth-century Ottoman pictorial traditions of representing Muhammad with a white facial veil. These traditions, which remain to be examined in greater detail, appear to have emerged over the course of the sixteenth century. They may have been linked to a growing "sacralization" of the prophetic body in Ottoman Sunni biographical writing and philosophical thought (on which, see Gottfried Hagen, "The Emergence of a Pietas Ottomanica," lecture delivered at the 2nd Great Lakes Ottoman Workshop, DePaul University, Ill., September 23–24, 2005).



96. Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ed. Aḥmad Khūshnīvis ‘Imād (Isfahan: Intishārāt-i Sanā’ī, 1978), 23–25; and idem, *The Speech of the Birds: Concerning Migration to the Real, the Manṭiqu’-t-ṭair*, trans. Peter Avery (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998), 25–29.
97. ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 29; and idem, *Speech of the Birds*, 37, verse 398.
98. ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 24; and idem, *Speech of the Birds*, 27, verse 289.
99. Qāḍī ‘Iyād b. Mūsā al-Yaḥṣūbī, *Kitāb al-Ṣhifā’ bi-ta’rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Cairo: ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1977); and idem, *Muhammad, Messenger of Allah: Ash-Shifa of Qadi ‘Iyad*, trans. Aisha Abdarrahman Bewley, 2nd ed. (Granada, Spain: Madinah Press, 1992).
100. al-Yaḥṣūbī, *Muhammad, Messenger of Allah*, 34. This statement is also reported in al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, 74. Al-Tirmidhī also describes the Prophet’s smile in his *Shamā’il*: see al-Tirmidhī, *Les qualités caractérielles de Mohammad*, 140–45.
101. al-Yaḥṣūbī, *Muhammad, Messenger of Allah*, 34. This hadith is reported in a number of other works; see, for example, Yūsuf b. Ismā’il al-Nabhānī, *Wasā’il al-wusūl ilā shamā’il al-Rasūl*, ed. Ḥasan Tamīm (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1970), 43.
102. al-Yaḥṣūbī, *Muhammad, Messenger of Allah*, 34. Also see al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, 68; Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. Eduard Sachau and Carl Brockelmann, 9 vols. (London: E.J. Brill, 1904), 1: pt. II, 125; and al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:229, in which the author states: “Whenever he [the Prophet] went in darkness, light was shining around him like the moonlight.” A number of accounts also compare Muhammad’s luminosity to the moon on the night of Badr, when he and his forces defeated the Meccan forces in 624. Such statements include most notably: “Muhammad was the most handsome and luminous of men. No one described him but that he likened him to the moon on the night of Badr”; see *inter alia* al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, 42 and 48; and Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā’il al-Nubuwwa*, 227.
103. Ibn ‘Abbās, *Le voyage et l’ascension nocturnes du Prophète Muḥammad / al-‘Isrā’ wa-l-Mī’rāj*, trans. Ali Druart, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2002), 14.
104. The text is available in Muṣṭafā al-Ḍarīr, *Kitab-i Siyer-i Nebī: Peygamber Efendimizin Hayatı*, ed. and trans. Mehmet Faruk Gürtenca, 3 vols. (Istanbul: n.p., 1977).
105. On the sixteenth-century Ottoman trend of translating Arabic and Persian texts, including biographies of the Prophet, into Ottoman Turkish, see Gottfried Hagen, “Translations and Translators in a Multilingual Society: A Case Study of Persian-Ottoman Translations, Late Fifteenth to Early Seventeenth Century,” *Eurasian Studies* 2, 1 (2003): 95–134.
106. On the Ottoman illustrated copy of al-Darir’s text, see Zeren Tanındı, *Siyer-i Nebi: İslam Tasvir Sanatında Hz. Muhammed’in Hayatı* (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1984); Garrett Fisher, “A Reconstruction of the Pictorial Cycle of the *Siyar-i Nabī* of Murād III,” *Ars Orientalis* 14 (1984): 75–94; and Ernst Grube, “The *Siyar-i-Nabi* of the Spencer Collection in the New York Public Library,” *Atti del Secondo Congresso Internazionale di Arte Turca* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, Seminario di Turcologia, 1965), 149–76.
107. al-Ḍarīr, *Kitab-i Siyer-i Nebi*, 31–37.
108. *Ibid.*, 31–32.
109. *Ibid.*, 35.
110. This anecdote is included in the preface to the Bahram Mirza album of calligraphies and paintings written by Dust Muhammad in 1544–45. See Wheeler Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 11.
111. Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 12. For further discussions of this episode and the *ṣandūq al-shahāda*, see David J. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 274–76 and 301–2; David J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 170–74; Oleg Grabar and Mika Natif, “The Story of the Portraits of the Prophet Muḥammad,” *Studia Islamica* 96 (2003): 19–38; Oleg Grabar, “Les Portraits du Prophète Mahomet,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2002 (2004): 1431–45; and Nadia M. El-Cheikh, “Muḥammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 19. The same anecdote is reported in a variant version in al-Ṭūsī’s Persian-language *‘Ajā’ibnāma* (Book of Wonders), written in Persian and dedicated to Tughril b. Arslan (r. 1176–94), the last ruler of the Great Seljuks. In his text, al-Tusi informs us that the Byzantine emperor (Heraclius) secretly swore by Muhammad, either because he consciously accepted Muhammad and Islam or because he simply swore by the last of the portraits of prophets in the “chest of witnessing,” thereby inadvertently embracing the Islamic faith: see Oya Pancaroğlu, “Signs in the Horizons: Concepts of Image and Boundary in a Medieval Cosmography,” *Res* 43 (Spring 2003): 34, 37. In this twelfth-century variant of the narrative, it is interesting to note how a portable image of the Prophet Muhammad serves as a vehicle to foretell the ultimate triumph of Islam. In his *‘Ajā’ibnāma*, al-Tusi also reports two other anecdotes related to images of the Prophet, stressing both their didactic and affective potential: the first describes how a portrait of Muhammad was used by an Iranian king’s diviner to foresee the victory of Islam (Pancaroğlu, “Signs in the Horizons,” 33), and the second describes a copper statue of the Prophet held in Constantinople, which—much like two other statues representing Bilal and ‘Alī—were believed to prevent natural disasters from occurring (Pancaroğlu, “Signs in the Horizons,” 34, 37).
112. al-Jilī, *al-Kamālāt*, 257: “God created Muḥammad from the light of His Essence in order to epiphanize His Own Essence.” So as to describe the primacy or primordial-

- ity of the “Muhammadan light” (*awwaliyyat al-nūr al-Muḥammadi*), al-Jili also argues that the Prophet is the locus of the epiphanies of God’s essence (*mazhar tajalliyāt dhāt Allāh*) in the world (*ibid.*, 8–11).
113. For a discussion of Ottoman-Islamic cultural self-awareness and the codification of classical visual culture (in particular architecture) from ca. 1550 onward, see Gülru Necipoğlu, “Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of the Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry,” *Art Bulletin* 71, 3 (September 1989): 425–26.
  114. Pancaroğlu, “Signs in the Horizons,” 40.
  115. For a discussion on the differences between *khalq* and *khulq*, see Denis Gril, “Le corps du Prophète,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 113–14 (November 2006): 39.