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**IN THE
NAME
OF THE
IMAGE**

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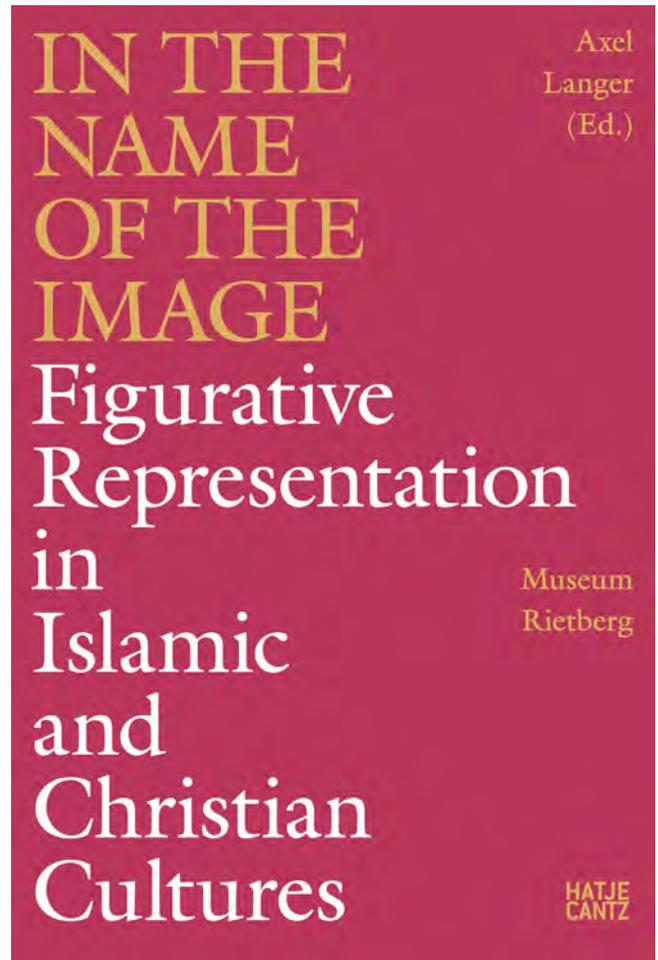


Im Namen des Bildes

Die figürliche Darstellung in den islamischen und christlichen Kulturen

Hrsg. Axel Langer, Museum Rietberg, Text(e) von Doris Behrens Abouseif, Dieter Blume, Christophe Erismann, Finbarr Barry Flood, Beate Fricke, Christiane Gruber, Tobias Heinzelmann, Ahmad Milad Karimi, Axel Langer, Hans Georg Majer, René Schurte, Daniel Spanke, Friedericke Weis, Gestaltung von Claudio Barandun

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In the Name of the Image

Figurative Representation in Islamic and Christian Cultures

Ed. by Axel Langer, Museum Rietberg, text(s) by Doris Behrens Abouseif, Dieter Blume, Christophe Erismann, Finbarr Barry Flood, Beate Fricke, Christiane Gruber, Tobias Heinzelmann, Ahmad Milad Karimi, Axel Langer, Hans Georg Majer, René Schurte, Daniel Spanke, Friedericke Weis, Design by Claudio Barandun

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IN THE NAME OF THE IMAGE

Imagery between Cult and Prohibition in Islam and Christianity

The idea for this exhibition arose from the often-asked question of the Islamic prohibition against images. Many museum visitors often react with surprise at the wealth of figurative representations in the art in Islamic books and on ceramics, textiles, and metal vessels. They are perplexed: How can it be that Islam prohibits painting living creatures and yet there are so many works of art that actually violate that prohibition?

But one could ask the same question about Christianity with the same justification. Here, too, on one side stands a religious prohibition against images, codified in one of the Ten Commandments of Moses and on the other a rich production of paintings and statues.

OBJECTIVE OF THE EXHIBITION

For that reason, the museum is dedicating an exhibition to the question of the image in both Islam and Christianity for the first time. This comparative look makes it possible to explore differences and similarities: Is Islam as hostile to images, and Christianity truly as friendly to images, as is often assumed? What theological, political, and historical factors have shaped the approach to the image and decided what is permitted and what is not permitted? How has the question of images been handled across different epochs and cultural spheres?

TEMPORAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE EXHIBITION

The discussion of the image was most intense in the period from Late Antiquity to the beginning of the modern era—a time we commonly call the Middle Ages. Accordingly, most of the 136 works shown here date from the sixth century to 1500. Geographically, they coincide with a space that extends from Latin Western Europe (the kingdom of France and the Holy Roman Empire) across the eastern Mediterranean (Byzantine Empire and later Ottoman Empire) and western Asia (Persia) up to South Asia (Indian Mughal Empire).

WHAT IS THE EXHIBITION EXPLORING?

At the center of the exhibition is the question of which strategies were developed that allowed a visual culture to emerge despite the prohibition against images. There is not one answer to that question.

Islamic and Christian religious authorities developed distinct views, already on the basis of different formulations in the Qur'an and the Bible. In the West there were, on the one hand, the Latin Church in Rome and, on the other, the Byzantine Orthodox Church in Constantinople,

which dominated theological discussions. In the East there were the religious scholars (*'ulama'*) of the four Sunnite and Shiite schools of jurisprudence, each of which formulated its own interpretations.

Other factors were the historical circumstances and the political interests of the religious and secular decision makers. They determined the limits within which the prohibition against images was valid or where the use of images could develop. Yet the reality of life—above all of the elite—did not always coincide with the theological standpoint. Moreover, in the early phase of Christianity and that of Islam the situation was different than in the times of greatest expansion and consolidated power relationships. Finally, legacy of antiquity came into play as well, leaving its traces in the both Christian and Islamic cultures.

Ultimately, it becomes clear that the question of approaching the image is being renegotiated and answered again and again.

AND TODAY?

Never have images been so numerous, determined our perception as much, and been accessible to everyone at all times. In a secularized society in which religion is a private matter, the prohibition against images seems outmoded. But a look at the past can be helpful in question or own approach to the image. How do we relate to images today? Do we not also cling to our own cultural traditions that regulate what can and cannot be depicted?

STRUCTURE OF THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition has four sections:

- O. Introduction
- I. Image and Theology
- II. Cult Image, Spiritual Image, Narrative Image
- III. Image and Power

Between the first section and the second, "Dialogue of the Objects" invites visitors to follow the theme of the exhibition in the form of a audio play.

Touchscreens at five stations ask questions to encourage reflection on one's own attitude about the (digital) image today.

In the Name of the Image is an exhibition of art and cultural history. It explicitly takes a historical approach to the theme of the prohibition against images. Religious subject matter is treated from a secular vantage point.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF IMAGES

The texts quoted on the wall reproduce the statements that theologically justify the prohibition of images. In addition to the Second Commandment, there are corresponding verses from the Qur'an and the so-called hadith, that is, the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad as they have been handed down.

Reading (and listening to) the quotations makes it clear that a forbidden image was understood to mean different things in each case: On the one hand, the Old Testament speaks of an image of God, which as a rule is equated with a statue. On the other hand, however, it includes every "likeness" of the things around us. The Qur'an, by contrast, speaks only of altar stones and images of gods being prohibited.

Christian theologians and scholars of Islamic law interpret the concept of the image differently. In Christianity, this evolved into an image theology with the cult image at its center. Islam rejects the cult image. In other respects, a certain scope of variation reigns: for the Hanbali (one of the four Sunnite schools of jurisprudence), images in general are "unlawful"; for the Hanafi, they are "blameworthy" but not prohibited.

DIFFERENT FACTORS DETERMINE THE APPROACH TO THE IMAGE

From a theological perspective, the approach to images is also regulated. This point can be examined more closely using the example of two works on the theme of the picture within a picture. This makes it clear that the question of the image is considerably more complex in practice than the theological standpoints would lead one to suspect.

The Persian miniature **01** is an illustration for a royal manuscript. It describes the conversation between Queen Nushaba of Barda' and Alexander the Great. In the center is the portrait, which Alexander is holding in one hand.

The icon **02** next to it depicts four saints of the Russian Orthodox Church looking reverently and adoringly at an icon of the Virgin. According to tradition, it is one of three portraits of her by the evangelist Luke.

Although in both cases the theme is the image within an image, the two works differ fundamentally:

- They derive from two antithetical spheres: on the one hand, the courtly manuscript illumination of Iran; on the other, the Orthodox Christian painting.
- They are intended for different viewers: in the case of the miniature, an elite; in the case of the icon, the broad masses of the faithful.
- Finally, how figurative representation is dealt with differs: in one case the image is an object of secular discussion; in the other, it is worshipped religiously.

Finally, there are three questions to ask when placing an image within the debate: What function did the image have? Who viewed it? Who commissioned it?

IMAGE AND RELIGIOUS SPACE

In the religious space—that is, the place of prayer or services—the different theological attitudes towards the image are revealed most clearly. These two installations are representative of Islamic and Christian sacred space. They form the greatest possible antithesis.

In Islam and in Christianity, many believers feel the need to perceive the presence of God. The mosque complies with the wish using the symbolism of light; the church with liturgical actions (sacraments) or the statue.

The decorations of mosques are the same from northwest Africa to Indonesia, regardless of the dominant religious orientation. The central element of the prayer room is the prayer niche, called the *mihrab* in Arabic, which shows the direction of prayer, facing Mecca. In Friday mosques, there is (not shown here), to the right of the niche, the *minbar*, or pulpit, from which the Imam preaches. There are no figurative representations. The decoration consists of—in accordance with the hadith—either geometric patterns or plant motifs. As Muhammad demanded, nothing here distracts from prayer, one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Roman Catholic sacred space, by contrast, evolved over the course of the Middle Ages into a “vessel” richly decorated with images and sculptures. Its heart is the altar with an altarpiece or retable at its back. From the fourteenth century onward, the latter became the most important carrier of images. The faithful face it throughout the mass. The priest conducts the most important liturgical actions in front of it.

I. IMAGE AND THEOLOGY

As becomes clear in a mosque or church, dealing with the image in sacred space is the result of a longer evolution. The path to a practice of the faith that is either free of images or worships images is outlined in this first section.

WORD AND VISUALIZATION

In principle, Islam and Christianity are religions of the book, in which the word has primacy. God revealed himself in it. God created everything but is not himself part of the world. Therefore, he cannot be depicted. Nevertheless, the need was felt early on to make the content of the faith visible in other forms as well. One alternative to the written word that was acceptable from a theological perspective was the symbol, another the relic.

FEAR OF IDOLATRY

The prohibition against images is directly connected to fear of idolatry— that is, the worshipping of other gods. “Idolatry” was understood to mean two different things: first, worship other gods in the form of idols or statues; second, worshipping one’s own God in the form of a cult image, whether painting or statue. The destruction of such unlawful images, known as iconoclasm, was therefore a legitimate act.

Islam knows no cult images of God. It addresses only the worshipping of idols as practiced by other, non-Islamic religions.

DEBATE OVER THE CHRISTIAN CULT IMAGE

In Christianity, the situation was different: a cult of images developed early on, with the icon of Christ’s face at its center, venerated by the faithful. This practice was harshly criticized and in the eighth and ninth centuries led to Byzantine iconoclasm—that is, the destruction of images. At its core the conflict was about whether Christ as an incarnation of God could be depicted and the question whether the likeness of Christ and Christ himself were identical. Both parties agreed that God himself could not be depicted.

Interestingly, the Umayyad Empire, which adjoined the Byzantine Empire to the south, was debating the permissibility of images at the same time.

A SPECIAL CASE: THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL CULT IMAGE

The Christian statue occupies a special position. While Byzantine iconoclasm ended with the reintroduction of the icon, the first sculptures since antiquity were created a little later in Western Europe, in the area of the Holy Roman Empire. They represent the greatest contradiction to the prohibition against images. Accordingly, their existence was justified by a subtle image theology.

The three possibilities to visualize the most holy without violating the prohibition against images (word, symbol, relic) are the subject of Object Groups I.1–3. The theme Idolatry and Iconoclasm are treated in Object Groups I.4–5. Christian sculpture is the theme of the final group, I.6.

THE PRIMACY OF THE SACRED WORD

Both in Islam and in Christianity, the utmost importance is attributed to the word of Holy Scripture—of the Qur’an and of the Old and New Testaments, respectively. The most sacred is revealed in the word. Accordingly, writing, the faithful transmission of the word, is regarded as the most direct approach to the most sacred.

This importance is demonstrated by copies of both the Qur’an and the early Gospels. The greatest effort has been invested in their production.

Although the word had a high standing in both religions, in the long term the two cultures took different paths. In Islam, calligraphy, beautiful writing, came to be the highest genre of art. Calligraphy was used not only for manuscripts but also on other surfaces. It decorated vessels and the walls of mosques and could be tiny or as large as a human being.

In Christianity, by contrast, illumination, the decoration of the pages of the manuscript, dominated from the outset. The brilliant ornaments, painted with valuable pigments, were indispensable companions to the written word. From early on, the image was an integral feature of illuminated manuscripts.

SYMBOLS AS INDICATIONS OF THE SACRED

As central as the word is to Islam and Christianity, however, in its written form it was not accessible to all, because very few of the faithful could read. Great importance was therefore attached to symbols.

Early Christians avoided figurative representations and developed a series of symbols to represent the content of their faith. Even when they were replaced by the veneration of the icon of Christ from the sixth century onward, they did not disappear. The cross retained its dominant position. Great importance was therefore attributed to the Instruments of the Passion like, for example, the crown of thorns or the lance, the so-called *Arma Christi*.

Islam is also familiar with symbols. The most important ones are forms based on the imprint of Muhammad's hand and foot.

RELICS: THE PRESENCE OF THE SACRED

Unlike symbols, that only indirectly refer to the sacred, relics convey to the faithful its immediate presence. That explains their great importance.

Relics are usually *physical* relics, that is, the skull or bones of a saint. There are also *contact* relics. That refers to objects and items of clothing that came into contact with Muhammad, Jesus, saints, or martyrs.

For the Christian church, relics played a prominent role from very early on. In the fourth book of his *Expositio fidei* (Exposition of the Faith), John of Damascus (650–754 CE) dedicates a chapter to “the veneration of the saints and their relics.” There he writes that saints are “pure habitations of God.” God resides in them—both spiritually and physically. For that reason, the bones of saints possess this grace beyond their physical death. From the eighth century onward, relics were the most important sacred objects in churches. They did not lose their significance even when the presence of paintings and sculptures increased.

As in Christendom, relics were also collected in the Islamic world. In the beginning, they included not only foot- and handprints but also Muhammad’s hair and nails as well as personal effects. In comparison to Christianity, however, relics in the Islamic world were much less important. They were rejected by strictly Orthodox Muslims in any case. The largest collection of contact relics was held by the Ottoman sultans.

IDOLATRY AND ICONOCLASM

As monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam reject any form of idolatry—that is, the worshipping of other gods. Christianity appeals to the First Commandment, which states: “Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.” In Islam, it is the Shahada, the profession of faith, which is spoken during the daily prayers. It begins with the testimony “There is no god but God” and is based on two verses from the Qur’an.

In both religions, there is a close connection between the prohibition against idolatry and that against images. The First Commandment is thus followed by the imperative not to make graven images. The Qur’anic prohibition against worshipping images of gods is also cited by several scholars as evidence against images.

Idolatry is also closely associated in all three religions with the faith practices of “others,” of infidels and the misguided. The prohibition against idolatry served to demarcate “us” from “them”.

In Christianity, the prohibition against images twice led to great unrest: In the eighth and early ninth centuries, iconoclasm shook the Byzantine Empire in the east. It also involved the destruction of portraits. In the sixteenth century, over the course of the Reformation, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, there was also iconoclasm. Sculptures and paintings were removed from churches, damaged, demolished, or burned.

THE COIN REFORM OF ‘ABD AL-MALIK IN 696–97

In the year AH 77, according to the Arabic calendar (696–97 according to the Christian one), the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 CE) had a new coin minted that broke with all earlier traditions. Neither the obverse nor the reverse had images or symbols; instead, the word dominated.

Scholars long associated his reform of coins with the prohibition against images. Scholars such as Rudi Paret even regarded this imageless coin as proof that the Islamic prohibition had been generally accepted by the end of the seventh century.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL IMAGES: A SPECIAL CASE

The question of whether Christ could be depicted was clarified for the church as a whole by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 CE. The decision applied equally to the Eastern and Western Roman Church. Orthodox image theology distinguished between the person to be venerated for religious reasons and his or her two-dimensional likeness (*imago*).

Three-dimensional representation was a special case however, and it was not unproblematic. The Eastern Church did not have any sculptures: whereas the cult image in the form of the icon established sufficiently distance between this world and the beyond, the physicality of the statue is too reminiscent of the forbidden idol.

In contrast to the East, in Western Europe the first large sculptures since antiquity appeared over the course of the tenth century. The oldest is thought to be the Saint Faith of Conques in France, followed a little later by the Golden Madonna of Essen (53 in the next room), both of which are still ritually venerated today.

These first full-length statues often concealed relics. There seems to have been a connection between the cult of relics and the emergence of statues.

II. CULT IMAGE, SPIRITUAL IMAGE, NARRATIVE IMAGE

As began to become evident already in the first section, the debate over images can be reduced to two fundamental types of images: the cult image (*imago*) and the narrative image (*historia*). Although the terms *imago* and *historia* are Christian concepts, their significance can be applied, with provisos, to the Islamic East as well.

CHRISTIAN CULT IMAGE AND NARRATIVE IMAGE

According to Orthodox image theology, the *imago* is a likeness of a prototype. If the icon depicts Christ, for example, its essence is not identical to Christ but only similar. It is not the icon itself that is venerated but the “prototype,” in other words, Christ. The foundation for the Orthodox image theology is the neo-Platonic philosophy of Late Antiquity.

The second Latin term, *historia*, refers to another function of the image: an image that narrates an event, such as murals and illuminated manuscripts. Such narrative images with scenes from biblical stories had already been defended and approved by Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604 CE) as a “book for the illiterate.”

SPIRITUAL IMAGE AND NARRATIVE IMAGE IN ISLAM

In the Islamic world, the cult image is simply inconceivable. Here too, however, the faithful needed to “form an image” of Muhammad. Normally, this need has been served since the ninth century by al-Tirmidhi’s *The Good Qualities of the Prophet*, where the appearance and the character of Muhammad are described. From that, the calligraphic form of the *hilye* evolved in the late seventeenth century.

Narrative images with Muhammad as an active figure were also widespread in the eastern part of the Islamic world. They illustrated chronicles, historical, and literary works. If they were not part of a religious act, most considered them largely unproblematic. However, owning—and so also viewing—images was a privilege of a rich, educated elite.

SIGNIFICANCE OF NEOPLATONISM

As in Byzantium, Neoplatonic philosophy also formed the basis for book illustration in the Middle East. The philosopher and Sufi mystic Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) disseminated Neoplatonic ideas in the Persian-speaking world. According to his view, pictures do not depict the world in an illusionary, imitative way; they instead reveal superordinate, universal principles.

The cult image—as well as the devotional image derived from it—and the *hilye* are the subjects of the first group of objects [II.1]. The second group of objects is devoted to images of the various roles that Muhammad and Christ played over the course of the Middle Ages [II.2]. It concludes with a comparison of the different strategies Muslim and Christian painters used to render stories from the life of Muhammad and of Jesus [II.3].

FACE TO FACE

The *Mandyllion* and the *hilye* both help the faithful to visualize the appearance and hence the presence of Christ and Muhammad, respectively. Both were hung, and both were supposed to protect against harm.

The Mandyllion is a portrait of Christ “not made by human hand” but by divine act. It is the epitome of the icon, a cult image that is viewed by and prayed to by all the faithful. The Mandyllion was made in the sixth or seventh century and shows the face of a bearded, middle-aged man on a cloth. Often it is held by angels.

In the case of the *hilye*, by contrast, the portrait of the Prophet is evoked by the description inside the circle. The *hilye* is a calligraphic portrait that enables the believer to imagine Muhammad’s appearance.

The pictorial form of the *hilye* goes back to Ottoman calligrapher Hafiz Osman (d. 1698). The composition characteristically features, along with the central round field, four corner medallions with the names of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs who immediately succeeded Muhammad. The central field is framed above by a cartouche with the *Basmala*, the Qur’anic formula of evocation (“In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy”). A verse from the Qur’an is cited below it, usually: “It was only as a mercy that We [God] sent you [Prophet] to all people.” The description of Muhammad’s appearance in the central circle follows the *Characteristics of Prophet Muhammed*, a text compiled by Al-Tirmidhi in the ninth century.

CHANGING ICONOGRAPHY: RULER, SUFFERER, HERO, FAMILY MAN

In the Christian Middle Ages, two forms of representing Christ crystallized: Christ enthroned as ruler and as the crucified Christ.

The oldest of these show Christ as *Pantocrator*, or “Ruler of All,” and come from Coptic Egypt. Christ as *Pantocrator* became very important in the Byzantine Empire.

Only centuries later did the image of the crucified Christ come to the fore. For a long time, it was considered inappropriate to depict Christ dying on the cross. But his sacrificial death and his sufferings were of great importance to late medieval piety (from the thirteenth century onward).

The oldest known representations of Muhammad also date from the thirteenth century. Initially, they were primarily illustrations in chronicles; in the sixteenth century they also began to appear in descriptions of the Prophet’s life. In Persia especially, the depictions of Muhammad’s ascension to Heaven were particularly widespread in epics such as Nizami’s *Quintet* and Ferdowsi’s *Shahnama* (Book of Kings).

In Islamic courtly tradition, Muhammad is depicted differently according to the role he adopts: he could be shown as a ruler, as a hero, as a leader of his followers, or, in Iran from the nineteenth century onward, with ‘Ali and his family.

PRIVATE DEVOTION

In the thirteenth century in Western Europe, a lay piety evolved that had a strong influence on the image. The faithful outside the church hierarchy demanded more active participation in religion. They desired new texts and above all new images that illustrated the sacred with psychological empathy. The devotional image arose from these demands.

“Devotion” is generally understood to mean a spiritual “vow” or promise (*devotio*). It can be offered to God, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary. In a private context, it is about “religious meditation” in individual prayer. It also exists in the form of the prayer service, in which several believers participate.

The devotional image was in the beginning, in the thirteenth century, a small painted panel painting. A hundred years later, there were also illustrations in books of hours and prayer books. An even more intense experience of participation was offered by sculptures, such as Christ-John groups, which were found most commonly in nunneries.

THE LIVES OF MUHAMMAD AND JESUS: LIKE CONTENTS— LIKE VISUAL RHETORIC

In addition to monotheism and the prohibition of idolatry, Islam and Christianity also share stories such as that of Abraham's sacrifice. Moreover, followers of both faiths inhabited the same geographical space in the Near and Middle East.

Against this backdrop, it is not perhaps surprising then that one can find events in the biographies of Muhammad and Jesus that can be comparably depicted. More than that, the cultural proximity led to both cultures having similar narrative images (*historiae*). Again and again, a transfer of iconographic traditions occurred, and Christian motifs found their way into western Asian manuscript illumination.

III. IMAGE AND POWER

In the Middle Ages, there was no area of life in which religion did not play a role. This holds true for cultural spheres shaped by both Christianity and Islam.

The third part of the exhibition is thus dedicated to the secular ruling elite's relationship to images. Their pictures reveal how they themselves perceived and wanted to see the world. With images, what they ultimately created was an identity.

PROXIMITY OF IDEAS IN THE ISLAMIC AND CHRISTIAN WORLDS

The iconographic foundation was provided, on the one hand, by antiquity—pre-Islamic and pre-Christian models—and, on the other hand, by contemporaneous literature with its exemplary heroes and heroines and love stories.

The group of objects in the center of the room [III.1] sheds light on courtly self-portrayal in general.

On the outer walls, the focus is on three case studies: the rule portrait in Persia in the age of the Safavids in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from Nadir Shah (r. 1736–1747) and the Qajar ruler Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834) [III.2], in the Ottoman Empire since the conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmed II in 1453 [III.3], and in Mughal India during the reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan from 1605 to 1658 [III.4].

The three Islamic empires each developed their own portrait culture with different focuses. First, interest in (ancient) physiognomy and dynastic self-presentation were decisive. But contact with Europe and its portraiture also played a role. That is particularly true of the period of increasingly close contacts between West and East from the sixteenth century onward. That was also the time when the Muslim elite increasingly distanced itself from the theologically grounded critical stance against the image.

A brief look at the Islamic West, which, in contrast to the three above-mentioned regions in the East, never developed a visual culture, closes the exhibition [III.5].

COURTLY SELF-PRESENTATION

Courtly self-presentation in the Islamic and the Christian cultural sphere had three main themes:

- Throne scenes and the staging of the ruler's power;
- Life at court (social gatherings, battle scenes and hunting);
- Themes from literary works such as love poetry and—in Iran—heroic epics or—in Europe—courtly novels.

The early Islamic caliphs oriented themselves toward the iconography of Late Antiquity when portraying life at court: the Umayyad caliphs (r. 661–750) drew on the art of their Byzantine neighbors in particular, before finding their way to their own form of expression. Following Islamization, the Iranian rulers took up the heritage of the Sasanian dynasty (224–651). The Sasanians (also known as Sassanids) remained a repeated reference for later generations and dynasties, just as Roman antiquity was for Central Europe.

A secular visual culture also developed among the Carolingians in Christian Western Europe in the eighth and ninth century. However, in contrast to the Islamic East, this culture did not stand in the shadow of religious art for very long. At the beginning, it was expressed particularly in wall paintings. Their existence is, however, for the most part only vouched for in the literature. Sumptuous containers and precious objects were created at a relatively late point in time.

PORTRAIT OF THE RULER IN PERSIA: FROM PRIVATE IMAGE TO PROPAGANDA

In the Persian cultural sphere, portraits of rulers were for centuries an exception. Only a few individual rulers had themselves portrayed in an idealized way. The most common forms were portraits on the frontispiece of a manuscript or in the role of a particular literary figure in a manuscript illustration.

The first individual portraits were created starting in the fifteenth century. In them, the individuals portrayed can be recognized based on particular features like the shape of the head or beard. This was due to an interest in physiognomy (*'ilm al-firasa*), which goes back to ancient sources. According to physiognomy, a person's character can be read from her or his appearance. Portraits nevertheless remained rare in Persia.

A change can first be seen after 1600. The first lifelike portraits that have been passed down are thus those of Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1587–1629) and some of his successors. Contact with Indian and, to a lesser degree, European portrait painting was one reason for this increased interest.

Portraits of rulers nonetheless played a subordinate role in Persia until well into the eighteenth century—very much in contrast to the practice in the neighboring Ottoman and Indian Mughal Empires. The Qajar ruler Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834) was the first to develop the large-format portrait into a picture for public display and propaganda around 1800. This was related, on the one hand, to intense diplomatic contacts with France and England and, on the other hand, to the rediscovery of ancient Sasanian rock reliefs and their monumental depictions of rulers.

RULER PORTRAITS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: WEST-EAST EXCHANGE AND DYNASTIC SERIALITY

Unlike in Persia, portraits of rulers were of central importance to the Ottomans (1299–1923) from the sixteenth century. They expressed the continuity of a divinely inspired dynasty that held power without interruption for 600 years. Contact with European portrait art repeatedly provided new impulses.

The beginning of this West-East exchange is almost legendary: at the behest of Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople (r. 1444–81), the Italian painters Gentile Bellini and Costanzo da Ferrara came to his court. They created oil portraits and drawings as well as two medallions. With Mehmed's death, however, the interest in naturalistic portraits in Istanbul lapsed.

At the close of the sixteenth century, the *Şema'ilname* of Seyyid Lokman established the tradition of series of dynastic portraits. The work commemorated each sultan with a short biography and a portrait. In the early eighteenth century, another text, the *Silsilename*, superseded the older series of likenesses. In both cases, the interest in physiognomy was crucial.

The first large-format oil paintings in which the sequence of generations was presented in the form of a tree were created just before 1800. At this time, the look of the portraits also changes as the two artists, Rafael and Konstantin Kapıdağlı, had been educated in Europe.

PORTRAITS OF RULERS IN THE MUGHAL EMPIRE: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES TO ELIZABETHAN PORTRAIT MINIATURES

Portrait miniatures of members of the royal family and nobility were a central component of court culture at both the Mughal court in northern Indian and the English court of the Stuarts in the early seventeenth century.

Both forms developed independently from each other from the tradition of book illumination. They were the work of a few specialists who worked for the rulers. The two traditions met in India at the time of Jahangir (r. 1605–27) when agents of the East India Company came to the Mughal court.

The beginnings of portrait painting in India go back to the time of Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Abu'l Fazl's passage in his *A'in-i Akbari* (The Administration of Akbar) is well known—and frequently cited. In it he reports that Akbar “sat for his portrait and also ordered that the likenesses of all members of the high nobility of the empire should be painted. A very large album was assembled in this way: those who had died were thus given a new life, and those who were still alive, were promised immortality.” — In Europe, portraiture was based on a similar concept.

The two traditions nonetheless differ in some points.

As at the Ottoman court, *ilm al-firasa*, the “science of physiognomy,” also played an important role in the development of portrait painting at the Mughal court after 1600. Unlike in Turkey, the portraits of rulers are rendered in a naturalistic way. The focus, however, was not on the entire body, but rather on the profile picture. This “biometric profile view” makes it still possible today to clearly identify the individuals portrayed.

In contrast to these aloof portraits in profile, the English miniature portraits were supposed to capture the individuals portrayed directly and with all their vitality.

In England, portrait miniatures were given primarily to close friends, lovers, or political allies. At the Mughal court, in contrast, miniature portraits played an important role in the administration. They were collected by the emperors but also presented as diplomatic gifts, awards for service, or an expression of particular loyalty.

ROYAL SELF-PRESENTATION UNDER THE MAMLUKS

In the western Islamic regions around the Mediterranean, figurative depictions were considerably rarer than in eastern Islamic regions, such as in Persia, Central Asia, Turkey, and India.

In Morocco, for instance, no illustrated manuscripts were produced. There were also no wall paintings of figurative scenes there, and few figurative motifs on ceramics and textiles.

This may have been connected with a stricter religious orientation. In any case, external factors may also have influenced this reserve: the Christian rulers of Spain and Portugal repeatedly threatened the Maghreb. They were known as admirers of religious pictures. The abstention from the figurative in the Maghreb possibly expressed an intentional demarcation from Christians, a particular form of Islamic identity.

The situation in Egypt and Syria at the time of the Mamluks (1250–1517) was different. The Mamluk sultans, once military slaves, had taken over power from their former employers. They were recruited from Turkish-speaking regions of Central Asia, and later from the Caucasus as well.

Among the artworks commissioned by the Mamluk elite, metalwork held a special place. In this metalwork, it is striking that figurative decoration initially dominated, but heraldic and epigraphic ornamentation such as blazons and decorative text subsequently prevailed.

Several factors were responsible for this change. The Mamluks initially adopted the figurative style of their predecessors, the Ayyubids (1171–1254), thus legitimizing their rule by means of cultural continuity. The blazon subsequently became part of the decorative repertoire as a result of contact with crusaders from Europe. Finally, however, personal interests—or disinterest—as well as considerations about the appropriate function also influenced the appearance of metal vessels.