

Pardis Eskandaripour

Dealing with Rose and Romance: Challenges in the Exhibition of Islamic Objects in Ethnological Museums

1 Introduction

The GRASSI Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig¹ (MVL) has collected around 200,000 objects, of which over 3,500 originated from West Asia and North Africa. The pieces were bought, donated, or bequeathed, and some were added to the museum during the colonial period. By acquiring and receiving donations from private collections, and purchasing objects from world exhibitions – such as those held in Vienna in 1873, and Paris in 1897 and 1900 – the MVL has brought together a wide array of objects from many countries. The MVL does not focus on a particular region or religion. Indeed, the museum's diversity of focus stands in noticeable contrast to other specifically themed museums. The West Asian objects in the permanent exhibition are not displayed under this regional-geographical classification, as in other sections of the museum, but rather in a section titled 'Orient'. My paper highlights the challenges and problems of presenting objects and materials from the various cultures displayed in the so-called Orient Department of the permanent exhibition of the MVL. Discussing the current restriction of Islamic items to forming only part of the generalising 'Orient' section, this paper notes a possible alternative of a presentation in either a special exhibition or a larger section of the permanent exhibition. This would be in line with the MVL's treatment of Buddhism and Hinduism in the Asian section. I will address the curators' task of exhibiting specific religions in the museum, as well as how visitors interact with those specific religions.

In exhibiting religious objects, museum staff and researchers have to process objects identified both as religious and as non-religious. This raises the question of what 'religion' and 'religious' mean. At first glance, this question may seem trivial, but it is the subject of one of the most intense debates in the study of religion, and proves to be extremely difficult to answer in a museum context. This is exactly the situation in the MVL, where I conducted my research on the presentation of religion(s), especially Islam, in an ethnological museum context. Here, the question arises as to how Islam should be defined, delimited, and placed as

1 GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig. Hereafter, this will be abbreviated to MVL.

a religion next to other religions and beliefs, without either losing the claim to adequate representation of inner-Islamic diversity, or insulting the beliefs of the faithful. This challenge is what distinguishes the presentation of Islam in the MVL from that in a museum specifically for Islamic art or culture. Ethnology comprises research on human existence, and on the combination of human material and spiritual life. Lambek “stresses the extent to which religion is interconnected with all aspects of human existence. Religion is embedded in human life because it explains human existence”.²

2 Presenting religion(s) in an ethnological museum

Neubert poses the question: “What antagonistic opposites to religion can be found?” His response includes categories such as secularity, science, spirituality, magic, sects, fundamentalism, and “‘pseudo-’, ‘quasi-’ and other ‘not-so-true-religions’”.³ This discourse may initially appear to be somewhat abstract, but it nonetheless has a concrete influence on (the treatment of) material culture. It is reflected in how visitors approach objects in ethnological museums, especially those objects pertaining to ancestor worship, spirits, and magical powers. Such objects have religious significance to some, but perhaps not to others: a belief in spirits, or in other hidden powers in the objects, is not universal.

We can assume that people in certain historical periods associated specific objects with particular spiritual meaning or symbolism. For various reasons, however, this association might disappear, leaving the objects without meaning other than their secular or aesthetic functions. For example, in the course of Christian missions in Africa, objects, which had been used in ritual ceremony, lost their original meaning and function⁴. But when these objects were delivered to Europe, they were labelled as religious-like ancestor and god figures, and ritual objects, of the various peoples to which they had belonged. While they had lost their religious meaning in their place of origin, they thus maintained a religious significance in Europe. Should they still be considered religious in the museum, even though their original cultural context has been lost? Do the curators still have to show the

2 Michael Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) quoted from Tamsin Bradley, *The Relationships between Religion and Development: Views from Anthropology*, Working Paper Series 5, Department for Applied Sociology (Department for Applied Sociology (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2007), 8.

3 Frank Neubert, *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion* (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2016), 114ff.

4 See Michel Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, trans. Brent Hayes Edwards, originally published as *L'Afrique fantôme (De Dakar à Djibouti, 1931–1933)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934; Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2020).

sacredness and religious significance such objects once had? This raises the question of how to deal with religious objects in the museum. How should religion be defined in an ethnological museum, and how should religions be classified and placed relative to one another? Should the curators distinguish so-called world religions from local religions and faiths? Considering these questions, I start by describing the journey of religious objects into the MVL. Afterwards, I consider how Islam, as a religion, might best be treated there.

2.1 Restoration of religious objects

After their arrival in any museum, objects are categorised, prepared, and, if necessary, restored, after which they are either stored or made ready for an exhibition. Although my research concerns objects categorised as Islamic-Oriental,⁵ the particularities of housing and restoring religious objects in museums are perhaps most readily illustrated with *Vaishravana*, a Tibetan Buddhist figure. During the precautionary treatment and thorough cleaning of the object, it was discovered to contain amulets made of paper and wool. These materials can cause damage over time. For reasons of conservation, it was therefore necessary to remove them from the statue. From a religious viewpoint, however, the sacredness of the statue is based on consecration through a ritual filling. Did the removal during restoration put an end to the sacredness of the object? If so, is it appropriate to change the sacral meaning of an object in a museum?

2.2 Recognition of the sacredness of objects

Central scriptures, such as the Qur'an and the Bible, and figures of Buddha or Hindu gods are commonly recognised as religious symbols or material. Although religious significance may be perceived in various ways by different people, there is a consensus that Buddha, Shiva, and certain scriptures are considered sacred by their respective believers – despite others seeing sacredness elsewhere. Muslims, for example, believe visualised figures of God, or the existence of other deities besides God, to be *shirk*,⁶ and thus Muslims see no sacred property in Hindu figures.⁷ But this does not contradict the attribution of these objects as sacred by

5 These terms are discussed in the following.

6 In Islam, *shirk* directly translates as 'share' and is used to refer to idolatry, polytheism, or the association of God with other deities. In The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Shirk," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/shirk>.

7 See Peter J. Bräunlein, "Shiva und der Teufel – Museale Vermittlung von Religion als religionswissenschaftliche Herausforderung", in *Religion und Museum: Zur visuellen Repräsentation von Religion/en im öffentlichen Raum*, ed. Peter J. Bräunlein (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2004), 55–76.

their devotees. Therefore, the exhibition of these objects will play an important role in providing information on this religious tradition. A further illustrative example comes from the Australia and Oceania section of the MVL, in the attempt to display the primal crocodile's sacred significance to the people of *Iatmul* (New Guinea). To the museum curators or academic researchers, the mediation of the sacredness of the crocodile⁸ and the rituals and initiation ceremonies with the memory of the primordial crocodile may seem similar to the mediation of the sacredness of Jesus Christ and church initiation ceremonies. These may nonetheless be incomparable for visitors with different views or religious beliefs. The need to recognise religious qualities from extinct cultures and past local traditions makes the exhibition of such objects and the mediation of their religious meaning more difficult. Having presented the methods used by the MVL and some of the issues inherent to exhibiting religious objects, I now return to the topic of Islam, West Asia, and the challenges behind exhibiting those cultures and religions.

3 Problems associated with the terms 'Islam' and 'Islamic art' in the presentation of Muslim material culture and religious objects

In the relevant literature, Muslim material culture that is discussed under the title 'Islamic art' is usually limited to regions in which Islam is dominant. This masks the social changes and cultural movements resulting from migration. Research in an ethnological museum, with new perspectives and without prejudice, should consider Islam as a global phenomenon, stretching beyond the borders of Islam-dominated countries. Muslim material culture and cultural heritage appear in other regions of the world too. "Most scholars tacitly accept that the convenient if incorrect term 'Islamic' refers not just to the religion of Islam but to the greater culture in which Islam was the dominant – but not sole – religion practiced."⁹ An ethnological museum is directly concerned with the culture, in particular the material culture, of groups of people. The continued overlapping of the concepts of Islam and certain regions cause other religions and faiths in these regions to be overlooked in ethnological analysis. From my own experience in the MVL, I noted visitors' surprise when I spoke about the Jews in Iraq or Christians in Iran.

8 See Jürg Schmid and Christin Kocher Schmid, *Söhne des Krokodils: Männerhausrituale und Initiation in Yensan, Zentral-Iatmul, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea* (Basel: Wepf, 1992).

9 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *The Art Bulletin* (New York: CAA) 85, no. 1 (2003): 153.

4 The regions 'Orient' and 'Arabic'

In the post-colonial period, scholars have attempted to reflect critically, and leave behind the term 'Orient' as a descriptor for regional and cultural phenomena, following the successful book by Edward Said from 1978. Still, a regurgitation of the concept is evident in newer literature, exhibitions and the academic field in general, with the use of terminology like 'the Near and Middle East', or 'Anatolia', ignoring that these are analogous to 'Orient', sharing many of the same problems. Instead of speaking of west Asian and north African regions, publications often use the phrase 'Arab cultural space', as people in these areas speak Arabic more commonly than other languages. The terms 'Islamic', 'Oriental', or 'Arabic' all inadequately reflect the diverse ethnic and Muslim historical backgrounds. They obscure the colourful ethnic-linguistic culture of Muslims, as well as the region's non-Muslims, making clarification of the different identities of Muslims in various countries difficult.

For museum visitors, Christian or Jewish cultural heritage is related to the religious art, relics, and ritual objects of these religions. Usually, visitors do not also think of the splendour and beauty of baroque and rococo style in French and Prussian palaces. Equally, scholars do not read about the curtains, vases, ceramics, glasses, and carpets of the Bourbon or Habsburg families in books on 'Christian art'. Can the same be said of Islamic art? In a museum, one can deal more effectively with research topics that are limited to a particular region or tradition. It would be preferable to talk of Islamic art only when focusing on religious objects, and to study other, non-religious terms separately within their appropriate subjects, grouped geographically by their origin.

5 Three artistic bowls and the problems of categorisation

How do Islamic cultures differentiate secular and religious objects, places, and concepts? When can an object be called Islamic-religious?

In Muslim material culture it is hard to recognise the borders between the sacred and the secular, though "in the colonial era, new distinctions and differentiations between religious and non-religious spheres gained shape within inner-Islamic discourses, partly as a product of encounters with Western knowledge".¹⁰ One person may view a particular painting, building, garden, or the binding of a book

¹⁰ Markus Dressler et al., "Islamicate Secularities in Past and Present," *Historical Social Research* 44, no. 3 (2019): 9.



Figure 1: Bowls viewed from above. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs00535-WAs00536-WAs00538).

as a secular piece of beauty, but for another, it may enshrine a message from the divine and contain meaning and significance inseparable from their faith. Religious art is what realises and diffuses the goal of religion.¹¹ Therefore, such artefacts can be decorated with religious symbols and signs without the intention of religious function and meaning. Some non-religious objects can also have a religious function. For example, an incense burner could be considered a religious object when used in a mosque, but may have a non-religious function and meaning in its use in everyday life in the home, or in the past, in the harem (private rooms of palaces). However, in Islam, some objects are nevertheless considered sacred. The relics of Muhammad exhibited in the Turkish Topkapi Palace Museum are an example. While the difference between sacred, religious, and non-religious items is clear, all three are found categorised under the title 'Islam'. To illustrate this point, I highlight three small bowls with different motifs, from the

11 Fatemeh Darjvar, "Study of the Folk Painting of Qajar Period (Based on Religious Terms)," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal of Islamic Art Studies*, no. 24 (2016): 12.



Figure 2: Undersides of the same bowls. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs00535-WAs00536-WAs00538).

MVL's Phillip Walter Schulz Collection. Two of the bowls (WAs535 and WAs536) are inscribed with religious verses, and therefore may be considered religious, whilst the third (WAs538) depicts a woman and a man in love, and could thus be seen as secular. The two religious objects might be placed in the showcase for displaying Islamic religious objects. These two bowls, inscribed with forty *duas* (invocations),¹² were used for bathing or as vessels for drinking water. There was a belief, that *djinn* (spirits, demons) and *pari* (fairies) lived near water sources and bathrooms, and that such bowls were able to remove their negative powers. After

12 Majid Sarikhani, "Analytical Research on the Flaunts of Quran Verses on Iranian Metallurgy during Safavid and Qajar Era according to the Metal Works of National Museum of Iran, PAZHOESH-HA-YE BASTANSHENASI IRAN," *Archaeological Researches of Iran Journal of Department of Archaeology* (Hamedan: Bu-Ali Sina University) 3, no. 5 (2014): 160 and Majid Sarikhani and Hasan Hashemi Zarjabad, "The Comparative Study of Ghesas Al-Anbia in the Holy Quran and Memoir of Prophets in Context and Images of Jame Al-Tavārīk," [in Persian] *Journal of Negarineh Islamic Art* (Birjand: University of Birjand) 1, no. 3 (2014): 77. Such bowls are often referred to as 'incantation bowls' or 'magic bowls', though the latter designation is not without controversy.

a birth, the mother and newborn baby would take a bath with the bowl, to protect them from evil spirits and death. The third bowl (WAs538), from the *Saqqa khane* tradition, served as a private drinking bowl (*parshali*) for drinking water from public drinking fountains. Rituals concerning the drinking of water have a connection with Shiite faith. Water houses, located in highly frequented places such as bazaars, mosques, cemeteries and in the streets, create blessed spaces for the drinking of water. Among Shiite Iranians they are places of remembrance of Hossein Ibn Ali and his companions who, according to Shiite tradition, were not allowed to go to the watering-place on the Euphrates and were driven to death by thirst. The bowls symbolically carry these religious events within themselves.

The above examples show that curators cannot judge solely from the appearance and objective quality of an object whether it actually has a religious connotation. It is vital to consider the object's hidden subjectivity and meaning, as well as its function and origin. The use of these objects as souvenirs or decorative antiques supplements their original function. Objects might have different functions in their social and cultural context, and these functions are subject to change. According to verses of the Qur'an, humans cannot see God, they can but see his drawings everywhere.¹³ This kind of illustration and decorative art can be used for both religious and non-religious purposes.

I have shown with these examples that the religious meaning or subjectivity of Muslim material culture cannot be easily recognised. The existence of religious texts or symbols does not definitely mean that the object has a religious function. In line with Hodgson and Dressler, I label these groups of 'in-between' objects as 'islamicated': "The term Islamicate could be employed to describe things that would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims [...]".¹⁴ To recognise the religious meaning of the objects, it is necessary to consider their context, such as their origin, ethnicity, etc. If one only uses the categorisation of Islam and the Orient, how can one recognise the context, history, and artistic heritage behind the objects?

13 The Qur'an, Sure 7:143, and Sure 6:103.

14 Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, The Classical Age of Islam, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 59 quoted from Dressler et al., "Islamicate Secularities in Past and Present," 12.

5.1 Lacquer artworks as examples of transformation of meaning

Objects from the collections of the MVL show further the transformation of their connotation, and of categorisation under the titles Islam and Orient. To evidence this, I have selected lacquered pen cases from the West Asian Collection. One group has a floral and bird motif, another has human motifs in portraits or groups of people in scenes of battles, lovers, hunting, etc.

One can gather useful information about the history and background of the Persian lacquered art in the reports of travellers, scientists, and collectors. For example, Consul-General Arthur S. Hardy wrote in 1899 about paper manufacturing in Persia: "The only special use to which paper (waste paper) is applied in Persia is in the preparation of a kind of papier-mâché for making pen cases, book covers, and a few other ornamental articles."¹⁵ His report from a mission in Iran, one year before the collector Phillip Walter Schulz's donation,¹⁶ makes it possible to understand the importance and high interest in this art in Iran. He wrote:

A New Testament, which printed in a foreign language costs a dollar, is sold for ten cents, but this latter sum is a day's wages for a laborer. They at times offer to exchange hay or chickens for it. [...] One at least cast the Bibles into wells and sold them to be ground into pulp for the manufacture of papier-mâché, and covers to bookbinders. Purchasers have destroyed other volumes or used the paper to cover windows. The agent estimates that perhaps five thousand copies have been destroyed [...]¹⁷

It is difficult to make concrete claims as to where this art originated and to thus present its country of origin. Susan Bayani argues that it is possible to see the remains of lacquer technique and material from every historical period since pre-Islamic times. She argues that the word lacquer, in connection with the lacquer beetle and its red colour, is found in ancient Iranian texts.¹⁸ In any case, what survives into the present is lacquer artwork with different motifs and qualities.

15 Arthur S. Hardy, *Reports from Consuls of the United States: In Answer to Institutions from the Department of State, Special Consular Reports, Paper in Foreign Countries*, Vol. XIX (Issued by Tehran: Bureau of Foreign Commerce 2, February 1899; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), 413.

16 Philipp Walter Schulz was a researcher and collector who travelled to Iran between 1897 and 1899. He donated his collection to the GRASSI Museum in 1900. The collection is shared between the GRASSI Museum of Ethnology and the GRASSI Museum of Applied Arts.

17 Arthur S. Hardy, *Reports from Consuls of the United States: In Answer to Institutions from the Department of State*, 413.

18 Susan Bayani, "History of Lacquer Work: The Importance of Working with Lacquer and Varnish," [in Persian] *Museha Research Journal* (Tehran: Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization), no. 13–14 (1993): 3.

5.2 Flower and bird (Gol-o- Morq) motif

Some scholars recognise the origin of the flower motif in pre-Islamic Sasanian art, on ceramics, mosaics, and silver tableware. The Manicheans painted the motif to decorate religious texts. It was then used in Iran for bookbinding and book ornamentation in the style of the School of Baqdad. In the beginning, this motif had a secular aesthetic meaning in Iranian art, but later adopted a gnostic one.¹⁹ The flower and bird motif can be observed in an art historical perspective in the works of Reza Abbasi in the Safavid period (1501–1722). “He connected this motif with the gnostic principles from the time of Sufism and Islamic Gnostics.”²⁰ During the Zand (1751–1794) and Afsharid (1736–1796) dynasties, lacquer artwork became popular despite the troubled political and social conditions. Gholam Reza Imami, the famous painter from the Qajar period,²¹ and Lotf Ali Suratgar worked with the flower and bird motif until the zenith of this artwork. Mohammad Zaman mixed this motif with European rococo flower and bird designs. The gnostic meaning of this motif can be traced back to Islamic gnostic philosophy. In the works of Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi (12th cent.), as well as in gnostic poetic works such as those of Attar of Nishabur (12th cent.), *Sufi* (adherents of Sufism) and *Arif* (learned gnostics) were depicted through the symbolism of a bird on a journey to their *maqsud* (goal): reaching God in heaven.²² The fulfilment of this aim is also seen to signify the attainment of ultimate truth. In later works, the flower was added as a symbol of the beloved, and the bird being thus calmed on its arrival at a flower was symbolic of nearness to the destination. Sometimes the flower is considered the symbol of the mortal world and the birds as symbols of the people who become dependent on this world. However, the flower blooms only for a few days and then dies. The significance here is that one is not allowed to be dependent on the material world, as everything it contains is temporary and unstable. These aspects are also found in Persian gnostic poems, which have a double meaning, as in the poems of Molana (13th cent.) or Hafez (14th cent.), with the implication

19 Hana Jahanbakhsh and Hanieh Sheikhi Narani, “Research on the Role of Flowers and Birds and their Application in Traditional Iranian Art (Zandieh and Qajar Eras)”, [in Persian] *Tarikhe No, Quarterly Journal* (Tehran: Tarbiat-Modarres University), no. 16 (2016): 130–62.

20 Malihe Hosseini Motlaq, “A Search about the Gol o Morq Painting in the Works of Agha Lotfali Suratgar Shirazi, Naqsh Maye,” [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal* (Tehran: Islamic Azad University-Ray Branch), no. 17 (2014): 28.

21 See Naser D. Khalili et al., *Lacquer of the Islamic Lands (Part 2)*. The Naser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, vol. 22 (London: The Nour Foundation in Association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

22 Tayyebeh Sabaghpour and Mahnaz Shayestefar, “Searching about the Symbol of the Bird Pattern in Qajar and Safavid Carpets, Tehran, Naqsh Maye,” [in Persian] *Scientific Research Journal* (Tehran: Islamic Azad University-Ray Branch), no. 17 (2010): 40.



Figure 3: Pen cases with flower and bird motif. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs00429-WAs03393).

that the interpretation of God or the divine concept can also be applied to human love. It is also possible to contemplate the motifs of flowers and birds in this regard. The romantic stories are about the time that they spend together in peace. Sometimes, a bitter tragedy occurs and the beloved one dies, as a flower does. Bahar Mokhtarian researched the origins and myth of flower and bird; she pointed out that the theme is a myth shared between cultures, which lives on in the form of poetry, paintings, tragedies, fables, etc. in many cultures.²³ It is interesting to consider the importance of this motif in terms of religious art, as in the book-binding of the Qur'an, pages of the holy book are decorated with these motifs.

23 Bahar Mokhtarian, "Wandering Nightingale: A Semiotics Research on Bird and Flower Paintings, Name Farhangestan," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Journal* (Tehran: Academy of Persian Language and Literature (APLL), no. 44 (2010): 110–26.

5.3 Portrait of the lovers

In addition to the flower and bird motif, motifs on lacquer also included popular scenes from Persian literature, such as Ibn Al-Muqaffa's 'Kalila va dimna', Jami's 'Haft Awrang', Nizami's 'Khamsa', and Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh'. The same can also be appreciated in paintings, scripts, and wall paintings, which were sometimes combined with calligraphy, however "the pen cases were favorite pieces for European guests and travelers in the 19th century".²⁴ Though they are forbidden in Islam and Islamic art, motifs of love scenes were common in Persian art in the Qajar period. These were often bordered by the aforementioned flower and bird motifs, and were taken from both real life and Persian tales. Some pen cases depict erotic scenes; however, these were likely special works, ordered by individuals with an interest in these motifs, and were part of individual collections. I have not found any literature describing such motifs being produced for the market or as artists' main products. Women were portrayed on pen cases in three ways: Iranian women in traditional styles of Qajar fashion, Iranian women wearing European styles, and, finally, European women wearing European styles. Their male counterparts were portrayed as princes and courtiers.²⁵ These portraits were impressive for their use of perspective, their realism, and designs that included a detailed background.²⁶

In its own time, Qajar art, with its own modernisation and development, was also a new wave in society.²⁷ One must not forget that in this period, art no longer belonged only to the royal class and royal court but also to the populace, who brought painting into the tea and coffee houses, and combined it with theatre and storytelling. While art in general became very secularised in this period, the religious art in the special iconography of the Shiite saints also became very popular.²⁸ This divergence in themes highlights the need for care in the classification of such objects. Just as much as the label 'Oriental' is problematic, it would be

24 Ali Naderi Alam and Kazem Chaliba, "Study of the Development of Painting, especially Landscape Design in the Safavid period until the End of the Qajar Period, Negareh," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal of Faculty of Art* (Tehran: Shahed University), no. 16 (2011): 47.

25 Such as the Khalili Collection.

26 Ali Naderi Alam and Kazem Chaliba, "Study of the Development of Painting, especially Landscape Design in the Safavid period until the End of the Qajar Period, Negareh," 47.

27 See Behnam Pedram et al., "The Importance of Painting in Qajar Dynasty Based on the Sociology Point of View," *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* (Karabuk: Karabuk University) 6, no. 3 (2017): 985–6.

28 Sara Shadrokh and Hadi Rahmati, "Reflection of Folk Art of Qajar Period in the Paintings on the Holy Shrines of Lahijan," [in Persian] *The History of Islamic Culture and Civilization Quarterly Research Journal* (Qom: Islamic Knowledge University) 8, no. 27 (2017): 86.



Figure 4: Pen cases with portraits of the lovers. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs01018-WAs01430).

overly simplistic to label all the items described here as ‘Islamic’. The examples of the flower and bird, and portrait of lovers, encapsulated in my title ‘Rose and Romance’, show that Islamicate objects in ethnological museums can provide an important point of reflection in understanding the dynamic intertwining of different cultures.

6 Conclusion

In discussing the ways museums deal with ‘Islamic’ and ‘Oriental’ objects, I argued that care must be taken when clearly identifying objects as Islamic, and that it is important to reflect carefully on these categories. I demonstrated that both the terms ‘Islamic’ and ‘Oriental’ lead to confusion when describing and categorising Muslim material culture in different countries. Before the curators categorise an object, it is necessary to know the definition of the categories. What is the definition of the terms ‘Islam’ or ‘Orient’? Why do some objects belong to Islamic art?

My suggestion in this article is that consideration should be given to the spatial and temporal context, because some objects can be considered religious at one time, but lose their perceived religiosity in another time or space. I criticised the choice of several museums to present a dichotomy between religious and non-religious objects. In particular, I observed this issue with objects from Muslim art: If an object displays Quranic verses, it is perceived as Islamic-religious, whereas if not, or if it has secular decoration such as love or erotic scenes, the portrait is marked as non-religious, and is treated as Oriental because of the existing cliché. I have highlighted the importance of considering the background of museum objects, especially Islamicate items. The lacquered pen cases (as Islamicate objects) are particularly useful for illustrating the dynamics and interdependencies, which characterise both the forms of the exhibitions and the communicative role of the museum. Although it is primarily for their beautiful appearance that the objects, now in a permanent exhibition at the MVL, regularly attract visitors' attention, I have established that the meaning behind the objects' motifs has undergone a complex series of changes and transformations, which also merit appreciation and understanding. For this reason, I assert that the objects should be viewed in their own timelines, as this enables visitors to follow their history, whether artistic or technological, and the ethnic and social context of their origins. It is essential for the exhibitions of an ethnological museum to transmit this information.

References

- Bayani, Susan. "History of Lacquer Work: The Importance of Working with Lacquer and Varnish." [in Persian] *Museha Research Journal* (Tehran: Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization), no. 13–14 (1993): 2–21.
- Blair, Sheila S., and Jonathan M. Bloom. "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field." *The Art Bulletin* (New York: CAA) 85, no. 1 (2003): 152–84.
- Bradley, Tamsin. *The Relationships between Religion and Development: Views from Anthropology*. Working Paper Series 5. Department for Applied Sociology, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2007.
- Bräunlein, Peter J. "Shiva und der Teufel – Museale Vermittlung von Religion als religionswissenschaftliche Herausforderung." In *Religion und Museum: Zur visuellen Repräsentation von Religion/en im öffentlichen Raum*, edited by Peter J. Bräunlein, 55–76. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2004.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Shirk." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/shirk>.

- Darjvar, Fatemeh. "Study of the Folk Painting of Qajar Period (Based on Religious Terms)." [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal of Islamic Art Studies*, no. 24 (2016): 7–20.
- Dressler, Markus, Armando Salvatore, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr. "Islamicate Secularities in Past and Present." *Historical Social Research* 44, no. 3 (2019): 7–34.
- Hardy, Arthur S. *Reports from Consuls of the United States: In Answer to Institutions from the Department of State, Special Consular Reports, Paper in Foreign Countries*. Vol. XIX. Issued by Tehran: Bureau of Foreign Commerce 2, February 1899; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900.
- Hodgson, Marshall G.S. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. The Classical Age of Islam, vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Hosseini, Motlaq Malihe. "A Search about the Gol o Morq Painting in the Works of Agha Lotfali Suratgar Shirazi, Naqsh Maye." [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal* (Tehran: Islamic Azad University-Ray Branch), no. 17 (2014): 23–35.
- Jahanbakhsh, Hana, and Hanieh Sheikhi Narani. "Research on the Role of Flowers and Birds and their Application in Traditional Iranian Art (Zandieh and Qajar Eras)." [in Persian] *Tarikhe No. Quarterly Journal* (Tehran: Tarbiat-Modarres University), no. 16 (2016): 130–62.
- Khalili, Naser D., B.W. Robinson, and Stanley Tim. *Lacquer of the Islamic Lands (Part 2)*. The Naser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, vol. 22. London: The Nour Foundation in Association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Lambek, Michael, ed. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
- Leiris, Michel, *Phantom Africa*. Translated by Brent Hayes Edwards, Paris: Gallimard, 1934. Originally published as *L'Afrique fantôme (De Dakar à Djibouti, 1931–1933)*. Reprinted by Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2020.
- Mokhtarian, Bahar. "Wandering Nightingale: A Semiotics Research on Bird and Flower Paintings, Name Farhangestan." [in Persian] *Scientific Research Journal* (Tehran: Academy of Persian Language and Literature (APLL), no. 44 (2010): 110–26.
- Naderi Alam, Ali, and Kazem Chalipa. "Study of the Development of Painting, especially Landscape Design in the Safavid Period until the End of the Qajar Period, Negareh." [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal of Faculty of Art* (Tehran: Shahed University), no. 16 (2011): 60–76.
- Neubert, Frank. *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion*. Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2016.
- Pedram, Behnam, Madhi Hosseini, and Gholamreza Rahmani. "The Importance of Painting in Qajar Dynasty Based on the Sociology Point of View." *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* (Karabuk: Karabuk University) 6, no. 3 (2017): 985–98.

- Sabaghpour, Tayyebeh, and Mahnaz Shayestefar. "Searching about the Symbol of the Bird Pattern in Qajar and Safavid Carpets, Tehran, Naqsh Maye." [in Persian] *Scientific Research Journal* (Tehran: Islamic Azad University-Ray Branch), no. 17 (2010): 39–50.
- Sarikhani, Majid. "Analytical Research on the Flaunts of Quran Verses on Iranian Metallurgy during Safavid and Qajar Era according to the Metal Works of National Museum of Iran, PAZHOSHESH-HA-YE BASTANSHENASI IRAN." [in Persian-English] *Archaeological Researches of Iran Journal of Department of Archaeology* (Hamedan: Bu-Ali Sina University) 3, no. 5 (2014): 155–68.
- Sarikhani, Majid, and Hassan Hashemi Zarjabad. "The Comparative Study of Ghesas Al-Anbia in the Holy Quran and Memoir of Prophets in Context and Images of Jame Al-Tavārīk." [in Persian] *Journal of Negarineh Islamic Art* (Birjand: University of Birjand) 1, no. 3 (2014): 70–79.
- Schmid, Jürg, and Christin Kocher Schmid. *Söhne des Krokodils: Männerhausrituale und Initiation in Yensan, Zentral-Iatmul, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea*. Basel: Wepf, 1992.
- Shadrokh, Sara, and Hadi Rahmati. "Reflection of Folk Art of Qajar Period in the Paintings on the Holy Shrines of Lahijan." [in Persian] *The History of Islamic Culture and Civilization Quarterly Research Journal* (Qom: Islamic Knowledge University) 8, no. 27 (2017): 85–106.