

Towards an Understanding of Islamic Ornament: Approaching Islamic Ornament through Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*’s Notions of the *Zāhir-Bāṭin* Interplay and the *Ṣūfī Ḥayra*

Abstract

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology, *ḥayra* ›perplexity‹ is an unceasing movement between the outward (*zāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*), or the created world (*al-Khalq*) and the True God (*al-Ḥaqq*). Only this dynamic link is the truth itself, interlocking both sides of the universal order as mutually necessary and presupposing each other. It is important to bear in mind that this link is something other than the two interlocked sides, as it is a third thing that we arrive at after transcending the first two. Such an understanding of truth as a dynamic link, which transcends the interdependent and interlocked sides but is impossible without their interrelation, is basically different from a Platonic vision of truth as a static, unchanging idea independent of its material embodiments.

This understanding of truth as a dynamic link between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* and of the ›technology‹ of arriving at it by bringing the two to their unity by transcending them is projected in this paper onto the issue of Islamic ornament and its aesthetic and epistemological value. The paper argues that Islamic ornament is a visualisation of *zāhir-bāṭin*-relation. If viewed correctly, it permits the two sides to be transcended to their unity not depicted on media but nevertheless constituting the truth and the aesthetic value of the ornament. In this *zāhir-bāṭin* interdependence of the displayed (outward) picture and its hidden (inward) meaning the latter is by no means a Platonic idea ›materialised‹ by the artist. Here too, the aesthetic and epistemological effect is produced by the interrelation and dynamic link between the two sides which is arrived at by transcending them to their unity.

Keywords

Islamic art, miniature, ornament, *zāhir*, *bāṭin*, *ma‘na*, *ḥayra*, Ibn ‘Arabī.

1 Introduction

This paper attempts to apply the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm to interpret Islamic ornament. In the following section, I am going to offer a sketch of the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm developed into a basic epistemological scheme in a number of Islamic sciences. I will begin with the Qur’ān and culminate my sketch with Ibn ‘Arabī (Section 2). This will provide a necessary background for my query: Can the epistemological strategy of arriving at truth using the *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic be meaningfully deployed to understand at least some cases of Islamic ornament? I will not try to read the Ṣūfī meaning into Islamic ornament, or draw parallels between Ṣūfī ideas and technical specificities of Islamic art, as it has been done in numerous works (see, for example, Nader, and Laleh 1973; Akkach 2005).¹ Instead, I will attempt to test the applicability of the said *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic with one example. I will thus work to show that it accounts for at least some of typical traits of the *zāhir-bāṭin* relationship and can thus aid in understanding at least some aspects of its aesthetic meaning (Section 3). Finally, I am going to address the question whether the *zāhir-bāṭin* interpretation paradigm may be extended in Islamic aesthetics beyond the examined test case (Section 4).

2 The *zāhir-bāṭin* Relationship

In the Qur’ān, the terms *zāhir* and *bāṭin* and their derivatives are used on several occasions.² On four occasions, those two words come together and are clearly used as opposites. On all those occasions *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are consistently translated by Arberry as ›outward‹ and

¹ A. Nader, and B. Laleh, *The Sense of Unity: the Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973; S. Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*, Albany: SUNY, 2005.

² They mostly occur as the ordinary words to which any technical meaning can hardly be ascribed, for example, »We gave power to those who believed, against their enemies, and they became the ones that prevailed« (*aṣṣāḥibū zāhirīn* – 61:14), or »and support (others) in driving you out« (*zāharū ‘alā ikhrāji-kum* – 60:9) (*The Glorious Qur’an, Translation and Commentary*, A. Y. Ali, Beirut: Dār al-fikr, n.y.). All sources cited in Arabic are my translations.

inward³ which is, to my mind, the most successful rendering. Firstly, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are divine names: »He is the First and the Last, the Outward (*al-zāhir*) and the Inward (*al-bāṭin*)« (57:3, *ibid.*). Next, we find that sins and blessings can be outward and inward: »Forsake the outward sin, and the inward« (6:120, *ibid.*). »He has lavished on you His blessings, outward and inward« (31:20, *ibid.*). And finally, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* come as topological opposites: »And a wall shall be set up between them⁴, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement« (57:13, *ibid.*). Twice we find the opposition with a similar meaning between the verbs of the same roots, *zahara* (was or became outward, apparent, visible) and *baṭana* (was or became inward, invisible): »[...] and that you approach not any indecency outward (*mā zahara*) or inward (*mā baṭana*)« (6:151, *ibid.*); »Say: My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the inward and the outward« (7:33, *ibid.*).

But what is the pivotal meaning of the *zāhir-bāṭin*-opposition that we find in the Qurʾān? Perhaps the best answer will be to say that it is the visibility-invisibility antinomy. To substantiate this hypothesis, I will provide some examples from Arabic lexicography and *tafsīr* (Qurʾānic exegesis) literature.

The *Kitāb al-ʿayn* (»The Book beginning with letter ʿayn«), the first comprehensive dictionary of Arabic compiled by al-Khalīl (died after 776), one of the two illustrious co-founders of the Arabic grammar tradition, defines the inward as the opposition (*khilāf*) of the outward, denoting the first by three synonyms (*baṭn*, *bāṭin*, *biṭāna*) and the latter by their counterparts (*zahr*, *zāhir*, *zihāra*).⁵ This definition suggests that *zāhir* and *bāṭin* not only oppose, but also presuppose each other, coming together so that whenever we find *zāhir* we may expect to discover *bāṭin* as well and vice versa, and thus their unbreakable opposition (like that of *zahr* and *baṭn*, literally: back and stomach) constitutes the basic meaning of those terms. The examples found throughout the *Kitāb al-ʿayn* testify to that. *Zāhir* and *bāṭin* denote the visible and invisible (front and rear, or front and bottom) sides of hand and foot (1:356, *ibid.*), shin (3:312, *ibid.*), hoof

(3:97, *ibid.*), ear (3:229, *ibid.*), eye's pupil (3:41 *ibid.*⁶), eyelid (3:178, *ibid.*), teeth (1:52, 3:212, *ibid.*), and the like. In all those cases, we have two sides of something which are normally not seen simultaneously, though they can be reversed. We can turn the hand upside down making the palm, which is normally hidden from the eye, visible. Hereby, the back of the hand, which is usually open to the eye, gets hidden. Visibility, being open to the eye is what the term *zāhir* and its derivatives imply (see 2:255, 2:266, 5:179, *ibid.*). *Bāṭin*, on the contrary, is what is hidden from the eye and invisible.

Zāhir and *bāṭin* may be understood more generally (or abstractly), as the outward and inward, or visible and invisible sides of »something« (*al-ʿamr*, »certain case«). Explaining the verb *tabaṭṭana* of the same root (*b-ṭ-n*), al-Khalīl says that if someone *tabaṭṭana fī al-ʿamr* it means that he »entered inside it« (*dakhala fī-hi*), that is, learned its *bāṭin* »inward«.⁷ One can speak about *biṭāna min al-ʿamr* »the inward of something« (it is called *dakhla* – *ibid.*: 4:230) or about *bāṭin* »inward« of some person (*ibid.*). *Zāhir* and *bāṭin* of a person may stay in accord or display discrepancy. If someone sees in a dream that he sowed wheat and reaped barley, it means that his *zāhir* is better than his *bāṭin*, says Ibn Sīrīn (died 728), the author of the famous dream-book (n.y.: 549; see also 388–389, 407).⁸ The *zāhir-bāṭin*-balance (or misbalance) is used by al-Sulamī (died 1021) as a classificatory vehicle to explain and systematize some of Qurʾānic terminology; thus, *zālim* (»evildoer«, according to Arberry's translation – 2:35, 2:51, etc.) is explained as »the one whose outward (*zāhir*) is better than his inward (*bāṭin*)«, *muqtaṣid* (»just«, also »lukewarm« – 5:66, 31:32, 35:32) as »the one whose outward equals his inward«, and the *sābiq* (»outstripper« in good deeds – see 35:32, 56:11 etc.) as »the one whose inward is better than his outward«⁹, thus exhausting the logi-

⁶ In the outward (*zāhir*), it is the black dot (*sawād*) of the eye and in the inward it is the opening (*khurza*) in the eye.

⁷ Al-Khalīl, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, Maḥdī al-Makḥzūmī, Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (eds.), Dār wa Maktabat al-hilāl, n.y., 7:441 [8 vol.s.].

⁸ Ibn Sīrīn, *Muntakhab al-kalām fī tafsīr al-aḥlām*, Beirut: Dār al-fikr, n.y.

⁹ Those three terms come together in 35:32: »Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our Servants as We have chosen: but there are among them some who wrong (*zālim*) their own souls; some who follow a middle course (*muqtaṣid*); and some who are, by Allah's leave, foremost (*sābiq*) in good deeds« (Ali n.y.). They are used separately in other verses as well.

³ See A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York: Macmillan, 1955, 6:120, 31:20, 57:13, etc.

⁴ That is, between hypocrites and believers.

⁵ Al-Khalīl, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, Maḥdī al-Makḥzūmī, Ibrāhīm al-Sāmāl-Sāmarrāʾī (eds.), Dār wa Maktabat al-hilāl, n.y., 7:440 [8 vol.s.].

cally possible modes of *zāhir-bāṭin*-balance (Al-Sulamī 2001: 167; see also Al-Nīsābūrī 1996: 517, and Ibn ‘Ādil 1998: 139).¹⁰

Beyond the Qur’an, the *zāhir-bāṭin*-opposition was utilized as a sort of basic paradigm in linguistics (*lafz-ma‘nā* – opposition), in Islamic ethics, and law (*niyya-fi‘l* – opposition). The ›word‹ (*kalima*) is generally understood as ›expression‹ (*lafz*) which ›points to‹ (*dalāla*) the ›sense‹ (*ma‘nā*). The *lafz-ma‘nā* opposition is the opposition of *zāhir* and *bāṭin*: the ›expression‹ is something ›spoken out‹ (the verb *lafaza* means ›to spit‹), which has become external to the speaker and can be accessed by everyone. The ›sense‹, on the contrary, is something basically internal, invisible and inaccessible to anyone else, something rooted in the soul and never externalized¹¹. *Lafz* and *ma‘nā*, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are linked, however, by *dalāla* (›pointing to‹) – the relation which, as al-Taftāzānī explains, makes us know the thing pointed to (*madlūl*) provided we know the thing that points (*dāl*) and the ›linkage‹ (*‘alāqa*) between them (Al-Taftāzānī 21879: 149–150).¹² This theory explains why language operates as a meaning-conveying vehicle. To master a language means to possess the ›linking‹ mechanism between ›expression‹ and ›sense‹, so that whenever we hear the ›expression‹ (*lafz*, the *zāhir*), the ›sense‹ (*ma‘nā*, the *bāṭin*) is actualized in our soul. We can never access the soul of the other and comprehend the ›senses‹ that flood it; however, the other can speak out ›expressions‹ which the person links to the intended ›senses‹, and whenever we hear the ›expressions‹, the linkage mechanism works the reverse way and invokes the ›senses‹ in our soul¹³. This is the basic trait of the *zāhir-bāṭin*-relation: it runs both

ways, and the *bāṭin* leads to the *zāhir* just like the *zāhir* leads to the *bāṭin*¹⁴.

A whole range of Islamic sciences uses the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm. In his groundbreaking *Structure of Arab Mind*¹⁵, al-Jābirī delineates three ›epistemological structures‹ (*nuzum ma‘rifiyya*) in classical Arabic culture: *al-bayān* (displaying, revealing), *al-‘irfān* (mysticism) and *al-burhān* (logical demonstration, proof). The third one is of Greek origin and is rooted in the Aristotelian paradigm (al-Jābirī 2009: 383), while the first two are native Arabic Islamic. Both are based on the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm, though they differ in the way they treat the *zāhir-bāṭin*-dynamic. The first moves from *zāhir* to *bāṭin*, that is, from *lafz* to *ma‘nā*, while the second travels in the opposite direction, from *bāṭin* to *zāhir*, or from *ma‘nā* to *lafz* (*ibid.*: 291). Since the *zāhir-bāṭin*-relation is basically reversible, the opposition between the *bayān* and *‘irfān* epistemological structures is relative and superficial rather than essential. This is why a reconciliation (*muṣālaḥa*) between them took place in the late classical age, when the *‘irfān* paradigm merged with the *bayān* and adopted the *zāhir-bāṭin*-balance idea (*ibid.*: 293). The first epistemological strategy (*bayān*), according to al-Jābirī, is that of grammarians, Qur’ān commentators, Mutakallimūn and *fuqahā’* (Islamic law doctors), while the second (*‘irfān*) is characteristic of the Sūfīs and the Shī‘ites. Thus the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm is in fact presented by al-Jābirī as the initial basis of all native Arab Islamic (not Greek-inspired) epistemology covering all the Greek-independent theoretical knowledge.

¹⁰ Al-Sulamī, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, Sayyid ‘Umrān (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2001, vol. 2. See also: Al-Nīsābūrī, Nizām al-Dīn al-Qumī, *Tafsīr gharā’ib al-Qur’ān*, Al-Shaykh Zakariyā ‘Umayrān (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1996, vol. 5; Ibn ‘Ādil, Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥanbalī, *Al-Lubāb fi ‘ulūm al-Kitāb*, Al-Shaykh ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd, al-Shaykh ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwid (eds.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1998, vol. 16.

¹¹ See, for example, al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, (‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 75–76), where this celebrated *‘adīb* and Mu‘tazilite thinker (died 869) speaks with his characteristic eloquence about the *lafz-ma‘nā* relation. This *lafz-ma‘nā* relation of *dalāla* as constituting the word (*kalima*) and the speech (*kalām*) is elaborated throughout the Arabic grammar tradition starting with the Sibawayhi’s *Kitāb*.

¹² Al-Taftāzānī, *Tajrīd al-‘allāma al-Bannānī ‘alā Mukhtaṣar al-Sa‘d al-Taftāzānī ‘alā matn al-Talkhīṣ fi ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*, Second Part, Būlāq, 21879.

¹³ It follows that we cannot stop understanding the ›senses‹ once we hear the ›expres-

sions‹, for the linkage mechanism operates irrespective of our will – a thesis corroborated by our everyday experience of hearing a speech in a language we know: we comprehend the meaning of it regardless of our wish to do or not to do so.

¹⁴ This marks a point of difference with the semiotic relation of designation: generally speaking, we cannot say that it works both ways and the designated designates the sign just as the sign designates the designated (street signs designate traffic rules though it would be unexpected to say that traffic rules designate street signs). It is not by chance that Arabic theory excluded the *‘alam* (›sign‹, ›proper name‹) from the relation of *dalāla* understood as *zāhir-bāṭin*-linkage, because the *‘alam*, though designating the thing, does not correspond to any ›sense‹ (*ma‘nā*) in it (Ibn Ya‘īsh, *Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal*, Cairo: Idārat al-ṭibā‘a al-muniriyya bi-miṣr, 1938, Vol. 1, p. 27, [10 vol.s.]).

¹⁵ This is the second volume of al-Jābirī’s four-volume series *Naqd al-‘aql al-‘arabī* (Critique of Arab Reason), the first being the ›Formation of Arab Reason‹, the third ›Arab Political Reason‹, and the fourth ›Arab Ethical Reason‹ (Al-Jābirī, *Bunyat al-‘aql al-‘arabī: Dirāsa taḥlīliyya naqdiyya li-nuzum al-ma‘rifa fi al-ṭhaqāfa al-‘arabiyya*, Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya, 2009).

The idea of *niyya-fi'l* balance and interdependence is the basic idea of Islamic ethics. *Niyya* ›intention‹ is explained by Islamic authors as a steadfast determination of the soul to reach a certain goal through a certain act, while *fi'l* ›act‹ is any movement performed by the parts of the body, including tongue. The ›deed‹ (*ʿamal*) is not just a bodily act (*fi'l*), but necessarily the act called for life, backed and coupled by intention (*niyya*) which should never part with the act as long as it is performed. The act (*fi'l*) is *zāhir*, evident for everyone, while intention (*niyya*) is only internal, *bāṭin*, rooted in the soul and unknown to anyone but the soul itself (save God, of course). It means that no other human being except the agent himself can testify to the existence or absence of *niyya*, its correctness (*ṣiḥḥa*), or corruption (*fasād*). *Niyya* as *bāṭin* in principle can have no ›objective‹ or ›formal‹ confirmation, it can be endorsed by nothing but has to be taken on a person's word. And yet *niyya* is the *conditio sine qua non* for the deed (*ʿamal*), just like the bodily act (*fi'l*) is: if, for example, the *niyya* gets corrupted during prayer (which can be testified to only by a praying person), the prayer as a deed becomes futile though all the required actions (*fi'l*) are performed as they should. This *niyya-fi'l* balance and interdependence, based on *zāhir-bāṭin*-paradigm, is a general rule for all *ʿibādāt* (relation of man to God) deeds and apply to as many *muʿāmalāt* (relation of man to other men)¹⁶ deeds as possible, thus extending itself to Islamic ethics and fiqh spheres.

Now, if *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are divine names and if *zāhir-bāṭin* relation displays a certain logic, being developed into a basic paradigm, as al-Jābirī pointed out¹⁷, then how do divine attributes fit into that paradigm? Can they be comprehended following the same logic? This is not an easy question, because Islamic doctrine insists on the invisibility of God¹⁸ proceeding from the basic idea of *tawḥīd* – God's

having absolutely nothing in common with anything created. Then what does it mean for God to be *zāhir* – displayed, evident, open to the eye?

Al-Thaʿlabī (died 1035) provides in his commentary on the Qurʾān a long list of opinions about the meanings that could be attached to those two Divine names (al-Thaʿlabī 2002: 227–230),¹⁹ and al-Māwardī (died 1058) brings different explanations into three classes of non-Ṣūfī and three classes of Ṣūfī (*aṣḥāb al-khawāṭir* ›people of insights‹) opinions. As for the first group, *zāhir* is explained as ›overtopping everything‹ because of God's highness, and *bāṭin* as knowing everything because of His closeness to anything. Secondly, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* mean that God ›subdues‹ (*qāḥir*) everything evident and hidden. Finally, those two names mean that He ›knows‹ everything evident and hidden. As Ṣūfī explanations run: firstly, God is *zāhir* because He makes His arguments (*ḥujaj*) evident (*iẓhār*) for minds, and *bāṭin* because He knows the inner side of everything. Secondly, because He is ›evident‹ (*zāhir*) for the hearts of His friends (*awliyāʾ*) and ›hidden‹ (*bāṭin*) from the hearts of His enemies. And finally, He is ›evident above‹ (*zāhir fawqa* – overtopping) everything apparent (*marṣūm*) and ›inward‹ (*bāṭin*) knowing everything unexpressed (*maktūm*) (Al-Māwardī n.y.: 469).²⁰ The famous Ḥanbalī faqīh Ibn al-Jawzī (died 1201) gives a similar explanation saying that *zāhir* (outward, evident) could mean that He is evident because of His shining arguments pointing to His uniqueness, or that He is elevated (*zāhir*) above everything because of his might, or His outwardness (*zuhūr*) could mean His highness (*ʿuluww*), or His dominance (*ghalaba*), while *bāṭin* (inward, hidden) means that He is veiled from the sight of the creatures having no quality, or His outwardness and inwardness (*zuhūr wa buṭūn*) could mean that He is veiled from the sight of the watching (*abṣār al-nāẓirīn*) but manifested to the inner sight of the contemplating (*baṣāʾir al-mutafakkirīn*), or that He

¹⁶ *ʿibādāt* and *muʿāmalāt* is the most general division of human deeds and, accordingly, of the fiqh (Islamic law theory).

¹⁷ Jūrj Ṭarābīshī launched a fierce attack on al-Jābirī when he published his four-volumed *Critique of the Arab Reason* (*Naqd Naqd al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*; see Ṭarābīshī, Jūrj, *Naqd Naqd al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*. Vol. 1: *Nazariyyat al-ʿaql*. Vol. 2: *Ishkālīyyāt al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*. Vol. 3: *Waḥdat al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī al-islāmī*. Vol. 4: *Al-ʿAql al-mustaḥqīl fī al-islām?*, Beirut: Dar al-sāqī, 2010) to match the four-volumed *Critique* of al-Jābirī. However, Ṭarābīshī is mainly occupied with al-Jābirī's thesis of an ›epistemological break‹ (*qaṭʿa mā ʿrifiyya*) between the Mashriq (›East‹) and the Maḡrib (›West‹) and not with the views that we speak about here.

¹⁸ A vision of God will become possible in an afterlife according to a well-known tradition acknowledged as authentic (see Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhta-*

ṣar, Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā, ed., Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, al-Yamāma, 1987, 1:277, hadith n.773, and others. Also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, ed., Beirut: Dār ihyaʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī. n.y., 1:167, hadith n.183). An explanation of this thesis presented the commentators with serious difficulties.

¹⁹ Al-Thaʿlabī, *Al-Kaṣḥf wa-l-bayān*, al-Imām Abū Muḥammad b. ʿĀshūr (ed.), Beirut: Dār ihyaʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 2002.

²⁰ Al-Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn* (*Tafsīr al-Māwardī*), Al-Sayyid b. ʿAbd al-Maqsūd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, n.y., vol. 5.

knows all the evident (*zāhir*) things and all the hidden (*bāṭin*) mysteries (Ibn al-Jawzī 1404 H.: 161)²¹.

Such explanations of *zāhir* and *bāṭin* as divine names shift the focus of discussion from God per se (from his *dhāt* ›Self‹) to his relation to created beings, or to the relation of created beings to Him, and the *zāhir-bāṭin*-logic of outwardness and inwardness as the two necessarily coupled and interchangeable sides of a single thing (or ›af-fair‹ – ›amr‹) is hardly detectable here. Moreover, the *majāz* (metaphorical) explanation, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (died 1209), was given by those who said that »the meaning of those expressions is like when somebody says: this person is the first and the last in that affair, he is the outward (*zāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*) of it, which means that it is driven and accomplished by that person« (Al-Rāzī 2000: 186).²² Ibn al-ʿArabī (died 1148), the famous traditionist, says that the four names (the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward) are different but the First is exactly the Last, the First is exactly the Inward, and the Last is exactly the Outward, and so on in all combinations, because He ›as such‹ (*bi-ʿayni-hi*) is One (Ibn al-ʿArabī: n.y.: 177), thus refusing to apply those names to the Divine Self in direct (*ḥaqīqa*) sense.²³ The discussed verse (57:3) is mentioned as one of the *maqālid al-samāwāt wa-l-ʿarḍ* (›the keys of the heavens and the earth« – 39:63, 42:12) among other formulas that point strictly to the Divine Self and to nothing else.²⁴ Al-Thaʿlabī mentions that ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Yaḥyā²⁵ said that the conjunctions between those four names are ›extraneous‹ (*muqḥama*) and they should be read as a single name, not as four separate ones, because ›we‹ cannot be at once outward and inward, the first and the last: this clearly signifies the difficulty of explaining the outwardness and the inwardness of God in the way we can do it with anything that belongs to the world (Al-Thaʿlabī 2002: 228).

²¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr*, Beirut: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1404 H., Vol. 8.

²² Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Mafātīḥ al-ghayb)*, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2000, vol. 29.

²³ Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (ed.), Lebanon: Dār al-fikr li-l-ṭibāʿa wa-l-nashr, n.y., vol. 4.

²⁴ See, for example, al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-tanzīl*, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī, ed. (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, n.y.), Vol. 4, p. 143.

²⁵ This is most likely ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Yaḥyā b. Maymūn al-Kinānī al-Makkī (died 854), the famous pupil of al-Shāfiʿī.

Against this background, all the more impressive is the position of the author of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* ascribed to al-Fārābī²⁶, of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and of Ibn ʿArabī (died 1240), the celebrated »Greatest Shaykh« (*al-Shaykh al-akbar*)²⁷, for they apply the *zāhir-bāṭin* dialectics to the Divine Self without digressing into metaphors, doing so on the basis of the *wujūd* (existence) category. We shall leave the question of influences aside, though they do not look improbable, and concentrate instead on the crux of the matter.

God is, in the interpretation of these authors, necessarily-existent-by-itself (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhāti-hi*), according to the author of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* (this is a generally accepted thesis of the *Falāsifa* – Hellenizing philosophers), and this self-necessity is the most evident (*zāhir*) thing. It is so because to possess existence (*wujūd*) means to possess necessity (*wujūb*), and this necessity is transmitted to every thing by its cause. The cause, in its turn, has to borrow its necessity from its own cause, and so on until we arrive at the initial cause having no cause and possessing its necessity by itself. The world of ›existent‹ (*mawjūd*), which means ›necessary‹ (*wājib*), things demonstrates the existence of the necessary-by-itself First Cause (the God), whose Self (*dhāt*) is evident (*zāhir*) by virtue of that necessity-transmitting mechanism:

Necessarily existent is devoid of substratum and accidents, so there is no confusion (*labs*) in Him; so, He is unobscured (*ṣurāḥ*); that is, He is evident (*zāhir*) [...] He is the True; could it be otherwise, as long as He is necessary? He is inward (*bāṭin*); could it be otherwise, as long as He is outward (*za-*

²⁶ R. Walzer (1991: 780) says that it belongs most probably to Ibn Sīnā, referring to the opinion of celebrated Semitist S. Pines (R. Walzer, »Al-Fārābī«, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Volume 2, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

²⁷ As W. Chittick has pointed out, »Western scholarship and much of the later Islamic tradition have classified Ibn ʿArabī as a ›Sufi‹, though he himself did not; his works cover the whole gamut of Islamic sciences« (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>; last accessed on 30 May 2015), and al-Shaʿrānī (d. 1565) says in his »Red Sulphur« that Islamic law doctors, Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* commentators, grammarians, Mutakallimūn, and so on and so forth would find abundant knowledge for themselves in Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Al-Shaʿrānī, *Al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar fī bayān ʿulūm al-Shaykh al-akbar*, ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Muḥammad ʿUmar, ed., Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2005, pp. 7–8). Ibn ʿArabī's texts present himself as an interpreter of the whole of *Sharīʿa*, which he understands as all the Islamic texts and sciences. *Sharīʿa* represents the *zāhir*, which Ibn ʿArabī supplies with a necessary *bāṭin* counterpart, thus accomplishing the message of Islam. This mission certainly surpasses any given science.

hara)? He is the Outward (*zāhir*) inasmuch as He is the Inward (*bāṭin*), and He is the Inward inasmuch as He is the Outward. So move from His inwardness to His outwardness: He will become evident (*yazhar* ›become outward‹) and become hidden (*yabṭun* ›become inward‹) for you (al-Fārābī 1381 S.H.: 55–56).²⁸

The evidence of the invisible Divine Self is the meeting point for *Falsafa* and traditional Arabic Islamic theory of *dalāla* (›pointing to‹, demonstration). As the *lafz* (expression) points to the *maʿnā* (sense), so does the *naṣba* (›state of affairs‹): it also points to its sense (*maʿnā*)²⁹. This unbreakable linkage between *naṣba* and its ›sense‹ possesses a demonstrative force for the mind: once we have the *naṣba* pointing to its sense, we cannot but admit the sense itself as proven by *naṣba* that points to it. Now, the *naṣba* is the whole world of created (*makhḷūq*) things, and the sense it points to is its Creator (*khāliq*). It is absurd to speak about recipient without an actor, and once the recipient (the world) is before our eyes, the actor (God) is ›proven‹ (*dalīl* ›pointed to‹) for our mind. Both the world itself and its existence are evident (*zāhir*), yet the existence of its creator is no less evident by that logic, though the Creator Himself (as *al-dhāt* ›the Self‹) is hidden (*bāṭin*). Thus the Divine Self is both evident and hidden, outward and inward, *zāhir* and *bāṭin*: its existence is absolutely evident, though the Self as such is hidden. And yet, the Self and its existence are strictly identical! This is what causes perplexity (*ḥayra*) of human mind, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: the one splits into two, though there is, of course, no split in the Divine Self.

As for His being ›the Outward and the Inward (57:3)‹, you should know that He is Outward (*zāhir* ›evident‹) because of the existence (*wujūd*), for any emerging (*kāʾin*) and possible (*mumkin*) thing, as you can see, inevitably points to (*dalīl*) His existence (*wujūd*), fixedness (*thubūt*), truth (*ḥaqīqa*) and immutableness [...] The most evident thing (*aẓhar al-aṣḥā*) for the mind is that He is the Creator of all those created things and that He precedes them, and you have learned that the mind is perplexed (*ḥayra*) and bewildered (*dahsha*) by the knowledge of that firstness (*awwāliyya*). So what we have exposed above testifies that the Holy Lord ›is the First and

the Last, the Outward (*al-zāhir*) and the Inward (*al-bāṭin*) (57:3)« (Al-Rāzī 2000: 185–186).³⁰

Coming to Ibn ʿArabī (21980: 72), we discover that in the third chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* he says that the ›perplexity‹ (*ḥayra*) is caused by ›multiplication of the One by facets (*wujūh*) and correlations (*nisab*)«.³¹

Ḥayra ›perplexity‹ is with no exaggeration the pivotal epistemological concept for Ibn ʿArabī. It is important to bear in mind that for him ›perplexity‹ is a positive, not a negative, notion. That is, to be ›perplexed‹ does not mean ›to be deprived‹ of something, let us say, to be deprived of certainty, or to be deprived of truth. Rather, to be perplexed means ›to possess‹. The question is: to possess what?

Let me expand the context of quotation a little. Ibn ʿArabī comments on the Qurʾānic verse ›They have already misled many« (71:24). He explains that those words of Nūḥ mean: ›They have perplexed them in the multiplication of the One by facets and correlations (*ḥayyarū-hum fī taʿdād al-wāḥid bi-l-wujūh wa-l-nisab*)« (*ibid.*). The preposition ›in‹ (*fī*) – not ›by‹ (*bi-*) as one could expect – is used here on purpose. Ibn ʿArabī does not speak exclusively about epistemology, he means ontology as well. *Ḥayra* indicates not just ›perplexity in one's knowledge‹, *ḥayra* implies as well ›perplexity in one's being‹. As Ibn ʿArabī puts it: ›The [Universal] Order is perplexity, and perplexity is agitation and movement, and movement is life (*al-ʿamr ḥīra wa-l-ḥīra qalaq wa-ḥaraka wa-l-ḥaraka ḥayāt – ibid.*: 199–200; see also 73).«

I read the Arabic word حيرة here as *ḥīra* not *ḥayra* following Ibn ʿArabī's intention to identify ›perplexity‹ and ›whirlpool‹. حيرة ›perplexity‹ can be read as *ḥīra* as well as *ḥayra*, Arabic dictionaries tell us, and ›whirlpool‹ (*ḥīra*) is one of the favourite images of universal life and order in Ibn ʿArabī's texts. The *ḥāʾir* ›perplexed‹ human being finds himself in constant movement. He cannot gain a foothold at any point, he is not established anywhere. This is why Ibn ʿArabī says that he is ›perplexed in the multiplication of the One‹: this ›multiplication‹ is not just epistemological, it is ontological as well, and the perplexed human being is moving in the whirlpool of life and universal Order and at the same time realises that he is in that movement.

²⁸ Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma wa-ṣharḥu-hu li-l-sayyid Ismāʿīl al-Ḥusaynī al-Shanb Ghāzānī maʿa ḥawāshī al-Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir al-Dāmād*, ʿAlī Awjabī (ed.), Tehran, 1381 S.H. (faṣṣ 9, 11).

²⁹ There are three other kinds of ›pointing to‹ a sense: *khaff* (›written expression‹, to match *lafz* ›oral expression‹), *ishāra* (gesture) and *ʿaql* (fingers configuration standing for numbers).

³⁰ Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Maḥāṭib al-ghayb)*, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2000, Vol. 29.

³¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 21980.

Now, can we grasp this movement, this onto-epistemological *ḥayra* by any philosophical concept? I think the answer is positive. *Ḥayra* is the movement between the two opposites which presuppose each other and make sense only in conjunction; this is why the movement from one to the other is endless since those two opposites can be only together, and by this constant transition from the one to the other is the Universal Order constituted. The Universal Order is dynamic, not static; it is a process, not a substance.

Those two opposites are God and the world, *al-Ḥaqq* (The True) and *al-Khalq* (The Creation). Those two notions are perhaps the most general ones, and the *ḥayra*-like transition between them is exemplified by many other, more particular, pairs of opposites, for example, *ʿabd* 'slave' and *rabb* 'lord' (*ibid.*: 74), and the movement and transition between them. This is why *ḥayra* is the very truth itself, since this movement is the basic principle of the Universe.

Let me take another step and make another generalisation. *Al-Ḥaqq* and *al-Khalq* are the 'inward' (*bāṭin*) and the 'outward' (*ẓāhir*) aspects of the Universal Order. *Ḥayra* means constant movement from the outward to the inward and visa versa with no final stop point. This fundamental ontological principle accounts for Ibn 'Arabī's theory of causality, his ethics, and anthropology (to name only some aspects of his teachings). Taking up any being (any *ṣūra* 'form', to use Ibn 'Arabī's terminology), the Greatest Shaykh treats it through the logic of *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-correlation and transition. He thus discloses meanings otherwise not evident in it.

Let me summarise. The question was posed above: to be in *ḥayra* means to possess what? Now we can answer it. It means to be capable of transition between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects of the Universal Order and the ability to place any being in this *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-transition. Thus the ultimate truth of the thing in question is disclosed: it boils down to the stability of the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* dynamics, that is, the unchanging, though dynamic, linkage of its outward and inward, its visible appearance and invisible meanings.

In this section, I have attempted to develop a framework to understand the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* relationship. But what light does this framework shed on Islamic ornament, and by implication, Islamic aesthetics? Within the scope of this paper, I will apply this framework on one ornamental art piece as a test case.

3 Applying *ẓāhir-bāṭin* paradigm to Islamic ornament: A Test Case

Now let us move on to Islamic ornament³². Can the idea of *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-transition further our understanding of what Islamic ornament is? Al-Jābirī did not touch upon Islamic aesthetics in his *Critique*. If he is right in saying that the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* paradigm lies at the core of Islamic sciences, then we are justified in putting the question in the following way: does this paradigm explain anything in the realm of Islamic art? Is it relevant for understanding what it is about? Of course, within the scope of this paper any such treatment would have to be cursory. However, I think that this paradigm can at least in part be meaningfully applied to this subject.

Let us have a look at the coloured cover page of the Qur'an created in Maghrib in the eighteenth century (Illustration 1). This is simply one example of an intricate and charming geometrical ornament. It is no exaggeration to say that such designs are plenty across the vast lands of Islam³³.

This ornament is composed of coloured veins changing their colour after each intersection. I shall argue that such ornaments are based on the *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-paradigm of construction and perception.

Its distinct multi-colouredness makes it very clear that the ornamental pattern is not apparent *at once*. It is not grasped, so to say, *at a glance*. Had we been seeking such an overall pattern, an overall image to be perceived right away in this ornament, our efforts would have fallen short of this goal. There appears to be no complete figure (circle, triangle, or the like) in this pattern³⁴. Indeed, no vein retains its

³² As Eva Bayer has observed, »the problem begins [...] with the definition of ornament itself«, whether it refers only to non-figural and aniconical art or the term has a broader sense, and whether ornament has to be understood as mere ornamentation and embellishment or it »tells us something comprehensible« (Bayer 1998: 1). I think the last is true and will provide my answer with reference to geometrical kind of ornament (E. Bayer, *Islamic Ornament*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

³³ For further examples of similar patterns which incorporate epigraphic elements and vegetable motifs, see Addendum, Illustrations 2–4.

³⁴ Such patterns have a strict and precise initial geometrical design consisting of circles and straight lines, of which only some sections are painted out to produce patterns in which this geometry stays hidden, not manifested. This is another way of interpreting the geometrical ornament through *ẓāhir-bāṭin* paradigm, where the initial complete design plays the part of the inward, and the manifested pattern is the out-



Illustration 1: Central part of the Qu'rān created for Moroccan prince in 1729, National Library, Cairo (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 114).

colour as it intersects with another one; emerging after some time of running beneath, it changes its colour as if suggesting an interruption of this successive movement. Noticing it we cannot but recall Ibn 'Arabī's words: »The one who follows the stretched path is biased and misses the desired goal« (Ibn 'Arabī 1980: 73).

The Greatest Shaykh speaks about *ḥayra* as opposed to the »stretched path« of discourse and argument organised according to

ward. Then the sensual perception would be a transition from the manifested pattern to its hidden complete geometrical design and vice versa, which the trained spectator is supposed to accomplish.

Aristotelian principles of rationality. This ornament appears to be an illustration of this idea. The colour contrast seems to be aimed at splitting the image into the domain of evident and manifested, and the domain of veiled, covered, and hidden. The first appears as *zāhir*, standing in front before our eyes, while the second seems to step behind, hiding beneath and constituting the *bāṭin* of the image. This *zāhir-bāṭin*-contrast is underpinned by a colour distinction. However, it is no less important for the other ornaments as well, and the multi-colouredness is only an additional means to stress and accent this *zāhir-bāṭin*-structure.

Such interrupted-colour strapwork ornaments were famous in Islamic culture. A special term was coined to denote such kind of workmanship. It was called *mujazza'* »of interrupted colour«. The word *mujazza'* is explained in *Lisān al-ʿarab* (n.y.: 48)³⁵ as *muqatta' bi-alwān mukhtalifa* »cut by different colours«, where, for example, white is interrupted by black, and its origin is *jaz'* which means cutting a rope or a stick into two halves or two parts (but not pinching off the end of it). This explanation agrees nicely with the nature of the interrupted-colour strapwork ornament constituted by coloured veins which look as if they were cut in two.

»Cutting in two« seems to be the basic meaning of *jaz'*, and examples provided by Ibn Manẓūr testify to that: *kharaz mujazza'* »two-coloured beads« (usually black and white), *lahm mujazza'* »red-and-white meat« (meat of partially altered colour), or metaphorical *jaza'* used for *ḥuzn* »misery« because misery »cuts« the human being off his concerns (*ibid.*). Though mostly associated with colour interruption and colour discontinuity, *mujazza'* may mean as well any splitting into two parts irrespective of colour or any sensual perception.

»Interruption« and »discontinuity« are negative terms implying only the absence, the lack of something (lack of integrality, lack of continuity). I argue that they are therefore inadequate for understanding what the *mujazza'* ornament *does* convey to the spectator, rather than saying what it *does not* do. The positive content of *tajzī'* »cutting into two« is, to my mind, represented by the procedure of building up the *zāhir-bāṭin* structure for sensual perception. The col-

³⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.y., vol. 8. *Lisān al-ʿarab* (»Tongue of the Arabs«) is the most comprehensive dictionary of classical Arabic compiled by Ibn Manẓūr (1233–1312).

our change in the vein, paralleled by the vein's hiding beneath the other one, hides the cut-off piece from the view, turning it into the *bāṭin* (hidden, inward) in relation to the vein which the view follows until it gets interrupted and which is manifested (*zāhir* ›outward‹) to the immediate perception. Then the linkage of the two differently coloured veins is constructed, and reconstructed in ever new combinations, in the process of sensual perception by the educated spectator.

This two-layer structure, I suppose, is perceived as *zāhir-bāṭin*-correlation, and the movement between those two layers, the *zāhir* and the *bāṭin* one, and transition from the one to the other and backward, constitutes, so to say, the ›content‹ of ornament perception process and the aesthetical meaning of *mujazza* 'ornament'.

Thus continuity is brought into the perception of the ornament. It is the continuity of *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition movement, and the more intricate and multi-optional such transition is, the more beautiful the ornament appears to perception rooted in the aesthetics of Islamic culture³⁶.

The *mujazza* 'ornament' was distinguished in Islamic thought from other kinds of decoration and embellishment, and especially from imported mosaic (*fusayfisā* 'or *mufaṣṣaṣ*). A special term, as we have seen, was used to denote the *mujazza* 'ornament' and to convey the meaning of its two-layer composition. The more intricate the relation between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* is, the deeper will be the aesthetic pleasure and delight the ornament brings to the spectator.

Let me quote a couple of evidences for such kind of ornament perception the classical Islamic literature provides us with. Giving account of *al-Ḥijr* (a location near Ka'ba inside the Mecca mosque), Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217)³⁷ mentions marble of interrupted colour (*rukhām mujazza* 'muqatṭa') which covers some parts of the walls and the yards. He does not spare a word to express his rapture and admiration of it:

³⁶ That kind of *zāhir-bāṭin*-linking and the perception has to be differentiated from the ambiguity and flip-flopping involved in Gestalt images. The *zāhir-bāṭin* kind of perception is complete when the new, third entity is perceived as a linkage between the two, the manifest (*zāhir*) and the hidden (*bāṭin*). The transcendence to that third entity is the transcendence to the beauty and to the truth. There is no figure-background ambiguity involved here.

³⁷ Ibn Jubayr was a famous traveller and author of the »*Rihla*« (»The Travel«), who depicted the lands of Egypt, Arabia, Iraq and Syria.

It was put together in amazing order (*intizām*), miraculous arrangement (*ta'rif*) of exceptional perfection, superb incrustation (*tarṣī'*) and colour discontinuity (*tajzī'*), excellent composition and disposition (*tarkīb wa rasf*). When one looks at all those curves, intersections, circles, chess-like figures and the other [patterns] of various kinds, the gaze is arrested by this beauty (*ḥusn*), as if it sends one on a journey (*yujīlu-hu*) through the spread flow-ers of different colours (Ibn Jubayr n.y.: 75)³⁸.

The word *ijāla* which I render here as ›sending on a journey‹ means also ›to send around‹, ›to put in a circular movement‹. Once again, we cannot but recall Ibn 'Arabī's explanation of *ḥayra* as an endless circular movement. In both cases, in the highly sophisticated theoretical discourse of Ibn 'Arabī and in the account of immediate sensual perception of *mujazza* 'ornament' by the traveller Ibn Jubayr, the circular movement is the movement between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects, and its endlessness, expressed by its circularity (but not caused by it), is grounded in the logic of *zāhir-bāṭin*-correlation, as *zāhir* and *bāṭin* make sense only together and only due to mutual transition, so that the movement from the one to the other and back is, so to say, the core of their life and being.

If *zāhir-bāṭin* structure is complicated enough, contemplation of the ornament becomes not just pure sensual perception and delight, it grows into a contemplation similar to theoretical meditation worthy of a sage. Speaking about *al-Jāmi* 'al-*ʿUmayyī*, the famous Omeyyad mosque in Damascus, al-Muqaddasī, the greatest geographer of the tenth century, leaves his dry and barren style of technical survey of dimensions, positions and directions and suddenly expresses sincere feeling of admiration:

The most amazing thing there is the arrangement of interrupted-colour marble (*rukhām mujazza*'), each *shāma*³⁹ to its counterpart (*kull shāma ilā 'ukhti-hā*). If a man of wisdom goes to visit it for a whole year he would derive from it a new formula (*ṣiḡha*) and a new knot (*'uqda*) every day (Al-Muqaddasī 1980: 146).⁴⁰

The *'uqda* (›knot‹) is the *zāhir-bāṭin*-interlacing point. This interlacing is, so to say, an apex of *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition movement, since it

³⁸ Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, Beirut, Miṣr: Dār al-kitāb al-lubnānī, Dār al-kitāb al-miṣrī, n.y.

³⁹ *Shāma* means ›mole‹ or any colour spot contrasting the surroundings.

⁴⁰ Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* (*Mukhtārāt*), Damascus: Wizārat al-thaqāfa wa-l-irshād al-qawmī, 1980.

is a place where *zāhir* and *bāṭin* meet immediately and directly. It is no wonder that such a place is perceived as a sort of a generating centre for the new *ṣiġha*, as al-Muqaddasī puts it. The word *ṣiġha* is usually rendered into English as ›formula‹. Perhaps it is not the best translation in this case, since ›formula‹ is associated with ›form‹, while *ṣiġha* is not *ṣūra* (Arabic equivalent of ›form‹). Speaking of *majazza* ornament, Ibn Jubayr and al-Muqaddasī use *shakl* and *ṣiġha*, whereas, according to Arabic authors, *fusayfisā* ›mosaic‹ presents us with *ṣuwar* ›forms‹⁴¹. The difference between the two is the difference between perception through *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition-and-movement – and perception ›at a glance‹, perception of the evident, of the manifested form only.

Al-Muqaddasī speaks of ›the man of wisdom‹ (*rajul al-ḥikma*). This takes us again to the concept of truth. Genuine truth, in this reading, can hardly be detached from the genuine beauty, that is, they do not exist separately, there is a very close relation between the two. Now we can see how exactly such a relation is perceived. The *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition discloses the truth of the thing in question when we, transcending both the outward and the inward, elevate ourselves to their linkage, which is the third entity (as is case of *al-Ḥaqq-al-Khalq* correlation in Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy, as well as in many other cases in non-Ṣūfī thought). A deep aesthetic feeling arises out of this endless *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition movement which constitutes the sensual perception of a beautiful ornament. Thus truth and genuine beauty meet and become – in a sense – the same.

It is well known that the Qur’an and sunna criticise *zukhruf* (›gold adornments‹), and, in a wider sense, *zakhrafa* (›embellishment‹). *Zakhrafa* is associated on a number of occasions with *tamwīh* (›concealment‹), *tazwīr* (›distortion‹), and *kidhb* (›lie‹)⁴². However, this well-known position expressed in classical texts of Islamic religion does not mean an outright and absolute denial of beauty and beautiful. What is denied and denounced, I argue, is the lack of *zāhir-bāṭin*-concord and adequacy. In the *muzakhraf* thing, be it a wall or a speech-act, the evident and manifested (*zāhir*) does not comply with the inner (*bāṭin*); or, we can say, it is not possible to transit from

such a *zāhir* to its *bāṭin* because the natural and normal correlation between the two has been ruined by *zakhrafa* of the *zāhir*. It is because of this disassociation between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* that *zakhrafa* is called ›concealment‹ and ›lie‹. However, the lack of *zāhir-bāṭin*-conformity is incompatible with true beauty as well.

4 Extending the *zāhir-bāṭin* Interpretation Model Beyond the Test Case

Zāhir-bāṭin-transition may be used as a good explanatory model for different ways of describing the distinctive traits of Islamic ornament. Eva Bayer says that its

richness and variabilities stem from subdivisions and linear extensions of the geometric network and from continuous interlocking and overlapping of forms that *bring about new sub-units and new shapes* (Bayer 1998: 125–126).

This observation reminds us of what al-Muqaddasī said about ›the man of wisdom‹ who derives ever new designs when contemplating interrupted-colour ornament, and my hypothesis is that this kind of perception is rooted in the habit of perceiving the *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic. Oleg Grabar puts forward one of the principles of Islamic ornament saying that

the ornament can best be defined as a *relationship between forms* rather than as a sum of forms. This relationship can most often be expressed in geometric terms (Grabar 1987: 187).⁴³

This observation agrees well with the *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition principle and may be derived from it, if we interpret the ›relation‹ as a *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic movement. Moreover, it helps clear up some age-long misreadings of Islamic ornament in Western scholarship, such as the ›horror vacui‹ principle presumably characteristic of Islamic ornament. Nasr’s (1987: 186–187) argument against this presumption is more than persuasive, as he stresses that ›the arabesque enables the void to enter into the very heart of matter‹ (*ibid.*: 186)⁴⁴. Islamic ornament is perceived and contemplated *not* as a figure against back-

⁴¹ See al-Khalīl, *Kitāb al-‘ayn*, Maḥdī al-Makḥzūmī, Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrā’ī (eds.), Dār wa Maktabat al-hilāl, n.y., 7:203.

⁴² See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.y., 9: 132–133). The other meaning of *zakhrafa* is ›perfection‹ (*kamāl*) and ›beauty‹ (*zīna*).

⁴³ O. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

⁴⁴ S. H. Nasr, ›The Significance of the Void in Islamic Art‹, in S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1987.

ground, which is in fact a goes-without-saying-presumption for the Greek-rooted artistic tradition. Nasr's argument may be with full right considered through the *zāhir-bāṭin*-interpretation model, so that the void, the material, the opposite of the Divine is taken as a counterpart of the figural, the spiritual, or the Divine: the two come interlocked together, and the ornament as such a *zāhir-bāṭin*-construction is a complete *dynamic* unit which lacks nothing. To understand Islamic ornament we have to delve into it and realize its inner *zāhir-bāṭin*-movement, instead of looking at it as a complete *static* unit, as a figure against background.

Logic is something that provides access to the truth, and the truth is something for the wise to seek. As we have seen, Ibn 'Arabī's *ḥayra* is a constant, unceasing *zāhir-bāṭin*-movement which is the truth: Truth is dynamic by its nature, and it is only the dynamic involved in the *zāhir-bāṭin* mutual correspondence that provides unchanging stability to it (like the stability of a bicycle rider whose movement stays stable in spite of her weaving back and forth or from side to side). Building up more *bāṭin* layers of meaning results in providing a greater dynamic and therefore more truth and stability: a real thing to do for a wise man. If European culture and history of art in general sees in Islamic ornament nothing more than embellishment, it is only because it is looking – by default – for *vorgêndes bilde*⁴⁵, pre-existing eternal and *static* idea and therefore misses its rhythm, its *dynamic zāhir-bāṭin*-transcendence-to-the-truth nature.

Several authors have noted that the unity of Islamic art cannot be explained by uniformity of style or continuity of some pre-Islamic tradition.⁴⁶ Then by what should it be explained? According to Burckhardt, 'Islamic-Arab art' is produced by a

marriage between a spiritual message with an absolute content and a certain racial inheritance which, for that very reason, no longer belongs to a racially defined collectivity but becomes a 'mode of expression' which can, in principle, be used universally (Burckhardt 2009: 43).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ E. Panofsky observes that for the European medieval artist »art was nothing more than the materialization of a form that neither depended upon the appearance of a real »object« nor was called into being by the activity of a living »subject«; rather this form pre-existed as *vorgêndes bilde*« (E. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art History*, J. J. S. Peake (transl.), Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968, p. 52).

⁴⁶ See for example Nasr (1987: 3–4).

⁴⁷ T. Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, Commemorative Edition, World Wisdom, 2009.

But what exactly is the 'mode of expression' and does it really boil down to a mere technical media for dissemination of religious ideas? Is it something specifically religious, as Burckhardt and Nasr (and many others) claim? Or does it transcend the realm of religious ideas; does it encompass Islamicate (related to Islamic civilization but not necessarily dependent on Islam) as well as Islamic? Fadwa El Guindi (2008: 137) speaks of »the rhythmicity of interweaving spatiality and temporality«, claiming that »a Muslim feels and lives Islam and experiences time and space in interweaving rhythm« and, moreover, »this is what immigrants in an adopted homeland must miss [...] despite regular praying at home and in mosque, fasting, participating in Islamic community life« (*ibid.*: 123).⁴⁸ This suggests that this interweaving rhythm is something beyond the specific and unchanging content of Islamic liturgy or community life, something other than it – and yet in a sense more important than it, for it represents the core of Islamic life and the unity of Islam (*ibid.*: xi–xii). Burckhardt and Nasr present to us a sort of 'essence' as something that answers the question 'what it means to be Islamic?', while El Guindi refers to a certain kind of dynamics which is not confined to any fixed 'essence'. Of those two types of answers, I would opt for the second. The *zāhir-bāṭin* interplay which I proposed in this paper to examine as an interpretation paradigm is not an 'essence' in any sense of the word. If it is true that it extends itself from the Qur'ānic text throughout Islamic sciences, then it is the logic supposed by that paradigm, and not any kind of 'essence', be it religious or secular, that explains at least some of the recurrent traits of what is referred to as Islamic and Islamicate.

To conclude: In this paper, the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm was traced back to the Qur'ānic text. With the development of Islamic sciences it became, as al-Jābirī argued, the basic structure for building knowledge not dependent on Greek legacy, which accounts for a vast body of epistemic production in the Islamic world. I suppose that this paradigm extends itself onto non-verbal sphere as well and explains the specificity of a certain type of Islamic geometrical ornament. If the arguments developed in the paper are sound, the positive test case examined here seems promising for Islamic aesthetics in general.

⁴⁸ F. El Guindi, *By Noon Prayer: the Rhythm of Islam*, Oxford: New York: Berg, 2008.

Addendum

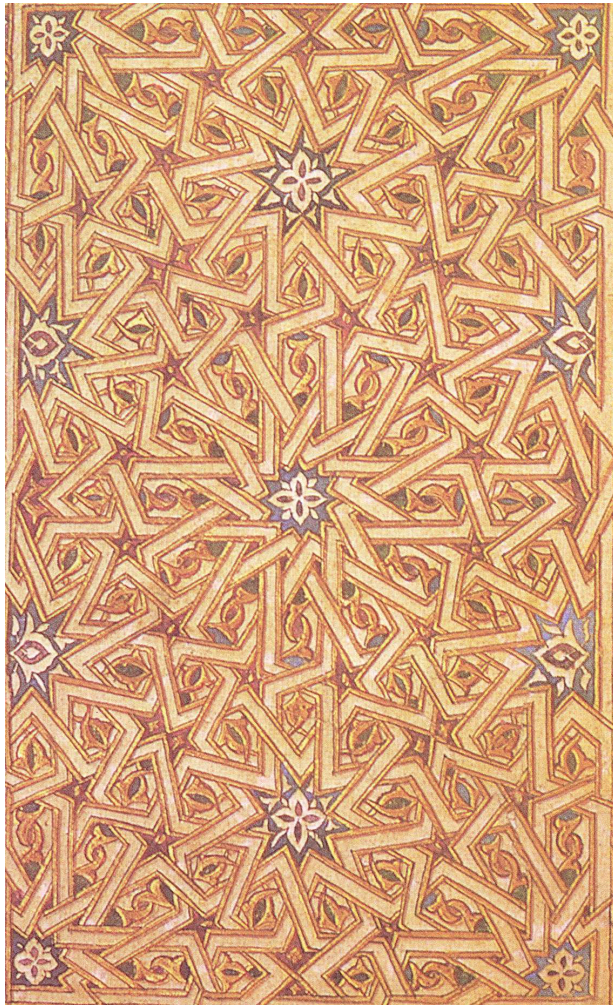


Illustration 2: Central part of the last page of the Qu'rān created in Morocco in 1568, British Library, London (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 109).

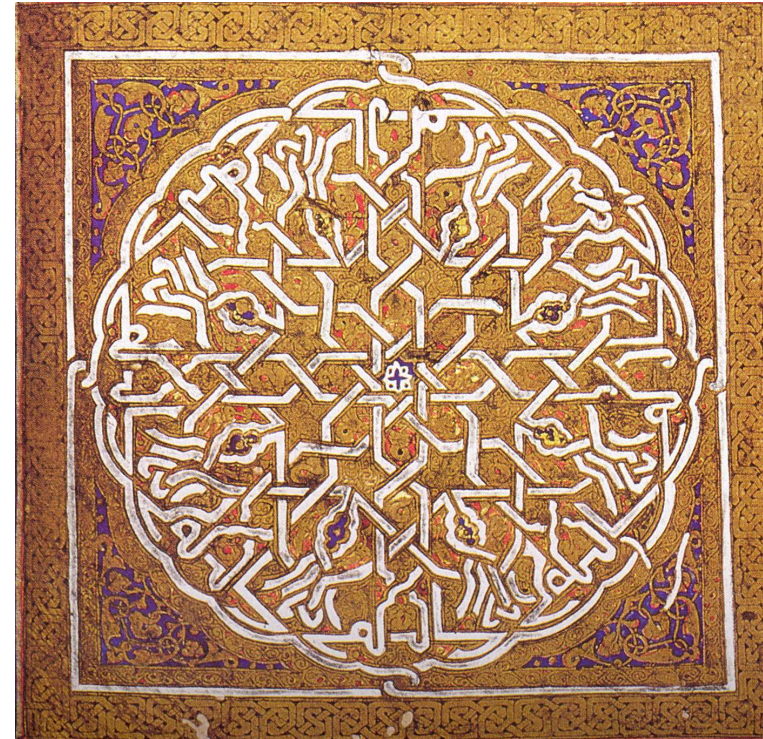


Illustration 3: Central part of the last page of the Qu'rān created in Valencia in 1182/83, Istanbul University Library (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 100).

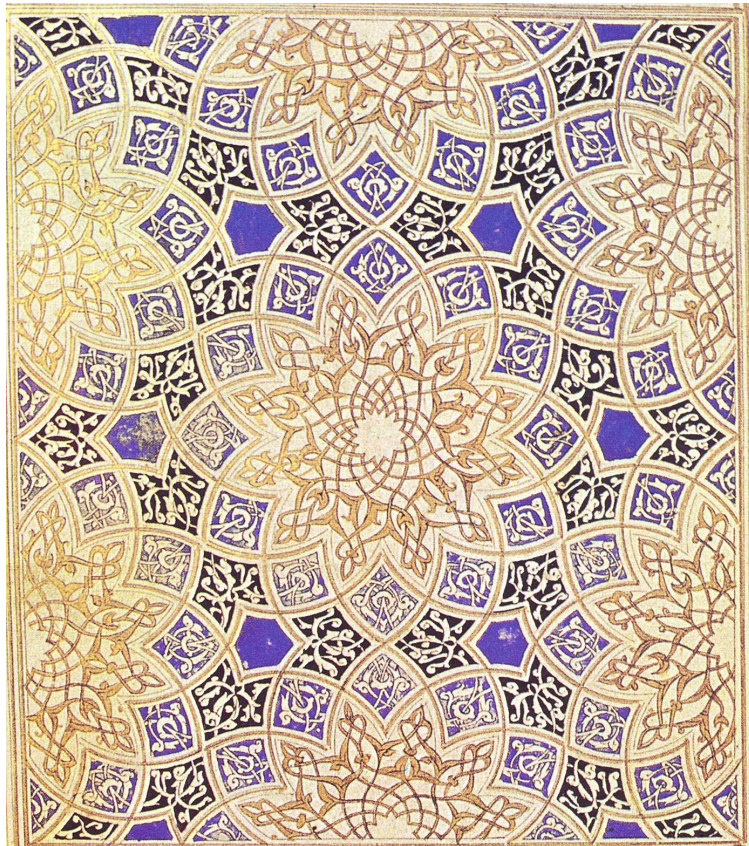


Illustration 4: Central part of a page from the Qu'rān produced by Abdallah Ibn Muhammad al-Hamadani in 1313, National Library, Cairo (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 54).

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Relationships Between Early Modern Christian and Islamicate Societies in Eurasia and North Africa as Reflected in the History of Science and Medicine

Abstract

During the last two decades, it has become fashionable not merely to write about issues concerning the exchange of knowledge between Jesuits and China or the acquisition of goods and knowledge in the Iberian colonial empires, as was previously the case. Historians of science now direct their attention also to other areas of the globe, where such processes took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Depending on their specific expertise, they focus on Dutch trade in what is called today Southeast Asia, networks of knowledge in the Mediterranean or in the Transatlantic world or on colonial institutions in the western parts of the Spanish colonial empire. The actors relevant to these broader historical explorations are mostly men from a selected number of states in Christian Europe. The exclusion of most parts of the world, among them many parts of Europe, from these new narratives continues to be their most glaring deficit.¹ In this paper, I will highlight the continued, even if at times submerged, existence of Eurocentric views and attitudes as expressed in some highly appreciated publications of the last twenty years.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, methodologies, knowledge cultures, Asia, North Africa, history of science, Pietro della Valle, Garcia da Orta.

¹ S. J. Harris, «Networks of Travel, Correspondence, and Exchange,» in L. Daston, K. Park (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Science*, Volume 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 341–362; H. J. Cook, «Medicine,» in *ibid.*: 408–434, in particular pp. 416–423; K. A. Vogel, «European Expansion and Self-Definition,» in *ibid.*: 818–839.