Haft Aṣl: The Seven Modes of Ornamentation in Islamic Art

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Abstract

There are specialists for dating Persian paintings but it is surprising that such precession is missing in the field of Islamic non-figural ornament which isstrange because from the second half of the sixteenth century there are several treatises that provide the names for the major "motifs" – the *haft asl* (the seven modes). Although several modern scholars have suggested meanings for one or more of the seven terms – *islīmī, khatā'ī*, *band-i rūmī*, *dāgh*, *nīlufer*, *abr*, *faṣṣālī* and *firangī*– no one heretofore has presented an explanation for them that intergrades the wordsinto a comprehensive statement of Islamic design. This research includes a new historical sequence for the motifs. Beginning in the ninth century with the mis-named "arabesque", now rightfully termed the *islīmī aṣl*; the first combination occurs in the tenth century with the addition of the "*band-irūmī"* a process for knotting and braiding vines taken from Byzantine art. In the eleventh to twelfth century, with the invasions of the Seljuqs into Persia and Turkey, the *wāqwāq asl* was joined to the previous two. Wave of Chinese influence supplanted the *wāqwāq aṣl,* with cloud bands (*abr)* and *khatā'ī*, another type of more delicate vine with flowers, buds and leaf motifs. Combination of *islīmī* with *khatā'ī* generated the *aṣl, faṣṣālī.* Lastly, *firangī* the Persian word used to indicate the Franks or Europeans in general, is a type of design organization with larger motifs overlapping smaller ones, deriving from designs on Venetian textiles of the fourteenth century popularly imported into Islamic cities. Not only does this research, which was carried out on both a theoretical level – tracing the meanings of terms through the centuries -but also on empirical basis with interviews of contemporary craftsmen in Pakistan and Iran, add clarity to descriptions of Islamic ornament but also aids art historian in verifying dates and schools of Qur'an illumination and so forth.

Keywords*:islīmī, khatā'ī*, *band-i rūmī*, *dāgh*, *nīlufer*, *abr*, *faṣṣālī*,*firangī*, motifs, decoration, patterns, Islamic, ornamentation.

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Introduction

My quest for definitions of the *haft aṣl* (the seven modes) began during a visit to the *Mūzeh Āstānā-e Quds-e Razavī* (Museum of *Āstānā-e Quds-e Razavī*) in Mashhad where I first encountered the word *islīmī*. It was used to describe a curvilinear decorative design on an Islamic object, a type of decoration that I had always known as "the arabesque." The hunt for a definition of the term '*islīmī* leaded me to other words describing Persian decoration, namely, *khatā'ī*, *band-i rūmī*, *dāgh*, *nīlufer*, *abr*, *faṣṣālī* and *firangī*. These terms describe the bases of Islamic ornamentation. Although referred to as the seven modes, there are, in truth, more, from which various authors have selected seven, not necessarily the same seven. They appeared gradually over a period of some seven hundred years.

The *haft aṣl* are collectively mentioned in the several Persian sources of the second half of the sixteenth century: in 1556-1557, by Qutb al-Din Muhammad Qissa Khvan in a preface to a lost album as quoted by Yves Porter (Porter, 2000, Roxburgh, 2001) in 1559, by 'Abdi Bayg Shirazi in a metaphoric reference in *Rawḍāt aṣ-ṣifāt* (Descriptions of Gardens) (Porter, 1994); in 1564-65, by Mir Sayyid Ahmed in a "preface to Amir Ghayb Bayg's Album" (Thackston, 1989); in 1596-1606, by Qadi Ahmed Qummi in *Gulistān-e Hunar* (Garden of Art) (1952; Tākistānī, 2002; Porter, 1994, 2000), and in 1597 by Sadiqi Bayg Afshar in his *Qānūn as-ṣuwwar* (Canon of Forms) (Dickson and Welch, 1981; Tākistānī, 2002; Porter, 1994). Even though the decorative terms listed in these sources refer to painting, they obtain for every field of Islamic ornamentation, including Qur'an illumination, tile-work, stucco, metalwork, glassware and ceramics.

All of the authors cited above are connected to the Persian court either in Qazvin or Isfahan. Sadiqi Bayg Afshar, who himself is the unique artist in the group of authors and head of Shah Abbas' painting atelier (Roxburgh, 2005; Gülru Necipoğlu, 1995; Dickson and Welch, 1981) and addresses the reader in verse saying that if one wants to succeed as a painter he must know all the modes (implying there are more) but that the seven dictated by his Master Muzzaffar 'Ali, are the most important: *islāmī*, *khatā'ī*, *abr*, *dāgh*, *nīlufer*, *firangī* and *band-i rūmī*. If these are mastered, he asserts, it won't be difficult to grasp the variations, which he calls *fer* (Porter, 1994; Khwānsārī, 1952; Dickson and Welch, 1981; Tākistānī, 2002).

These interrelated modes have been misunderstood usually because the reader was thinking they were all patterns rather that a mixture of motifs and processes. Their existence in fifteenth

and sixteenth century textual records does not signify that they were new at that time because most of them can be identified visually in previous centuries. Necipoğlu (1995) is of the view that the names of the seven *aṣl* were probably Timurid-Turcoman taxonomies, that is, the seven came together in the fifteenth century. However this assertion can be questioned. No known textual record states when the terms were devised or gives an etymology for them; our only surviving sources are visual ones. By explaining these seven terms as they correspond to each other, historically as well as technically, valuable information regarding the evolution of the major styles of Islamic ornamentation can be found.

Among the *haft aṣl* (or more) *islīmī* is one of the earliest to develop and became the major component of Islamic ornamentation (fig. 1). The original meaning is a design mainly comprised of split leaf and vine motif arranged in diverse continuous combinations, which enables a designer to cover both field areas and borders. *Islīmī* is a vernacular word developed from the word "*islāmī*" literally meaning 'one that affirms Islamic ideology' (Tākistānī, 2002, p.27) Both *islāmī* and *islīmī* are found together in fifteenth and sixteenth century texts (Thackston, 1989; Necipoğlu, 1995).

The word *islīmī* is mentioned individually in an *Arzadasht*, a progress report of the Timurid atelier addressed to Baysunghur Mirza of 1427-28. In this report Ja'far Tabrizi, head of Baysunghur's atelier, mentions the term *islīmī* describing the decoration of the margins of a *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings) by Maulana Qiwamuddin Mujallid Tabrizi (Thackston, 1989). Mirza Muhammad-Haydar Dughlat (1500-1551) in his *Tārīkh-i Rashīdī* (Chronicles of Rashidī) discusses Mawlana Mahmud's outstanding drawings of *islīmī* (Thackston, 1989). Dost Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Haravi in the preface of an album he made for the Safavid prince Bahram Mirza in 1544-45 (Roxburgh, 2001) and Mir Sayyid Ahmed Mashhadi, in his preface to another album compiled in 1564-1565, says that the first Shi'ite Imam 'Ali Ibn-e-Abi Talib was the inventor of *islāmī* (Thackston, 1989). Mir Sayyid Ahmed relates a versified tale in which he associates *islāmī* as an Islamic design that was executed by the Shi'ite Imam and which surpassed the Chinese floral designs called *khatā'ī* (Thackston, 1989, 2001).

The foundations of *islīmī* rest on Sassanian and Byzantine decorative vocabulary as found at the Dome of the Rock of 691 C.E (figs. 2-4). There one finds half palmette, full palmettes, winged motif, stylized floral shapes, vine, and vine leaves. Such semi-naturalistic motifs were transformed, simplified and finally abstracted, to form in novel designs by the

ninth century. The transformation appeared early at Hira after the commencement of Abbasid rule (fig. 5), then at Raqqa in Syria, in the last quarter of the eighth century and the first decades of the ninth century and in the Mosque of ‘Amr of 827 at Fustat (figs. 6-7). The designs of the stone capitals from Raqqa culminated in the style at Samarra in mid-ninth century stucco reliefs (figs. 8 and 9). Early scholars usually called this the beveled style or Style C (Creswell, 1958; Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1987). Here the half palmette transforms into a kidney-shaped motif, the lotus are schematized and vine leaves transform into fleurons or circular motifs. Oleg Grabar believes that Style C is the first and in certain ways the purest and most severe example of the ‘delight in ornamental meditation and aesthetic exercise’ and that ‘it is necessary to refer to it as an independent Islamic design’ (fig. 10) (Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1987). The new Islamic style rapidly spread from Samarra to other Islamic centers, at Fustat (fig. 11) and Nishapur (figs. 12 and 13) where it again progressed towards a refined and established form and appears in the tenth century in book illumination.

New illuminations added to Qur’ans aided *islīmī* in achieving an established form by the eleventh century. Qur’anic illumination motifs derived from several sources: Coptic and Hebrew manuscripts, Sassanian minor arts, and of course, the previous Islamic designs as evolved at Samarra and elsewhere. The format for the illumination of the Qur’ans developed from these earlier Coptic and Hebrew sources too (Tanindi, 2010; Ettinghausen,1962; Petersen, 1954; Dimand, 1944; Flood, 2012).

The new Qur’anic frontispiece (*sar-i lauḥ*), marginal palmette-shaped medallion (*shamsāh*) and surah title (‘*unwān*) had field and borders to be filled with designs, not representational ornament, in accordance with Islamic precepts. One of the early variant forms of *islīmī* known as *toranj* appears during the tenth century in Quranic illumination (fig. 14). The *toranj* is a triangular unit composed of two leaves with the empty inner space filled with a blossom (fig. 15) (Tākistānī, 2002; Aghamiri, 2004; Arab, 2007, Interview). The prototype of this design can be identified in the Aqsa Mosque at Jerusalem (Creswell, 1940, Plate 26) on wooden panels and its similarities in architectural decoration.

Mustafa ‘Ali speaks of the *toranj* in his sixteenth century Ottoman treatise *Manāqib-e Hunarwān* (Virtues of Artists) but does not describe it (Kivanç, 2011). In Persian *toranj* is a word that means to place or draw together, but is also the word for a sour orange or orange-shaped ornamentation. According to illuminators today, the word describes two-paired split leaves of *islīmī* joined back-to-back with the inner shape resembling a lemon (Arab, 2007,

Interview; Steingass, 2000, s.v. "*toranj*").

Another pre-Abbasid subordinate element— the interlace began to develop during the second half of the ninth century, as can be observed on the stone carved niche in the spandrel of an arch under the dome at the Great Mosque of Qairawan of 862-863 (fig. 16) and on a carved stucco mihrab at the Mosque of Al-Azhar of 970 in Cairo (fig. 17). Interlace and overlay became prime features of *islīmī* by the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, and can be seen on a wooden panel probably made for the Tomb of the Shi'te Imam 'Ali ibn-e Abi Talib at Najaf in 973-74, and also in the border illumination of the famous Ibn-al-Bawwab Qur'an of 1000-01 (figs. 18 and 19). Both of these Buyid objects feature braiding of fleurons and split leaves. This feature is termed *band-i rūmī* even by illuminators today and is one of the seven sixteenth century modes of ornamentation (Necipoglu, 1990; Thackston, 1989; Kanbūh, 1960). *Band* means to "join" in Persian and *rūmī* refers to a person from *Rūm* but this is a confusing term as in Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages *Rūm* can refer to the Romans, the Byzantines or the Christian Melkites (Cheikh, 1995, s.v. "*rūm*"). The word appears in the ninth to eleventh century Arabic geographical literature, as a term for Byzantium only, but later for the Seljuks and Ottomans of *Rūm* (Cheikh, 1995, s.v. "*rūm*"). Stylistically *band-i rūmī*or *rūmī* knotting refers to a vine that creates several meeting point by knotting, interlacing or braiding, either vertically or horizontally (fig. 20) (Tākistānī, 2002; Arab, 2007, Interview).

When we consider the *band-i rūmī* historically it was especially from the tenth to the twelfth centuries that the interlace mode flourished, both in curvilinear and geometrical forms. Three types of interlocked, knotted, and interlaced styles that belong to Byzantine art served as prototypes for the Islamic artist (figs. 21a-c). The first type is the braided vine with half palmettes as seen in one of the arched panels on the drum of the Mosque of Qairawan of 862, the second is a complex knotted band added to some of the earliest illuminated ninth-tenth centuries Qur'ans, and the third form is the interlocked geometrical shapes as found in the trellises of the Great Mosque of Damascus of 706-714/715 and Mosque of Ibn-e-Tulun of 876-879, sharing the "same network of hexagons," for which Creswell suggests a "Syro-Roman" inspiration (Creswell, 1932; 1958). A comparison of early Islamic interlace modes with Byzantine examples (figs. 22a-c) shows that the source for the knotting and braiding of *band-i rūmī* was Byzantine as the several examples presented here pre-date the Anatolian Seljuk Period. Thus the *band-i rūmī* is not an "Anatolian pattern," as usually stated, but is a mode of interlacement to be associated specifically with earlier Byzantine knotting and braiding (Devellioğlu, 2007, s.v. "*rūmī*).

By the late eleventh and early twelfth century *band-e- rūmī* mode is ubiquitous, found in different regions of Iran (fig. 23), and spread widely, with the Ghurid invasion in eleventh century of Central Asia and India and are witnessed in the ornamentation of the first Sultanate Mosque in Delhi, the Quwwat al-Islam Masjid of 1210-1229 (fig. 24).

Another one of the *haft aṣl* that took root during the eleventh century was the *wāq wāq*. During the ninth and tenth centuries animate motifs taken from pre-Islamic sources appear, often amidst half palmettes (fig. 25). Gradually the vegetal growth around the animal or bird motif became denser, sometimes even growing from one or more of its body parts. This kind of inhabited vegetal growth has a parallel in the foliated and then floriated Kufic script of the tenth and eleventh century in which fleurons and split leaves grow from the *hastae* of letters (Blair, 1998). *Islīmī* became a secondary mode of ornamentation with the primary one the animate subjects. Scholars note that the depictions of harpies and fantastic animals popularly appear on objects of domestic use at this time (Baer,1965; Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1987). Towards the late twelfth century a novel blend of these animate subjects, primarily the heads of beasts, humans and monsters, with non-figural *islīmī* occurred. Modern art historians call this mode *wāq wāq* (fig. 26) (Baer, 1965).

The term *wāq*, *waqwāq*, *wāqwāq* or *al-waqwāq* are mentioned in the thirteenth century *Al Baheth al-Arabi* (*wāk*, n.d.) the modern *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Tibbetts and Toorawa, 2002, s.v. "*Wāḳwāḳ*.") and *Lughat-nāmeh Dehkhudā* (*wāk*, n.d.) with very similar meanings. In The *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, G. R. Tibbetts and Shawket M. Toorawa (2002, s.v. "*Wāḳwāḳ*.") describe *wāq* as: a name, possibly onomatopoeic, of uncertain origin, found in medieval Islamic geographical, zoological and imaginative literature." *Wāqwāq* may refer to a group of Islands or an Island with dark-skinned inhabitants speaking a different language, with a mythical talking tree which blooms in the morning and withers at evening. The tree has human and animal heads as its fruit, which produce the sound *wāq wāq* when they are ripe. *Wāqwāq* can also, mean 'howling', the magical voices of birds' especially the cuckoo, the croak of a frog, the crowing of a crow, or the barking of a dog (Tibbets and Toorawa, 2002, s.v. "*Wāḳwāḳ;*" *Al Bāḥeth al-'Arabī*, n.d., s.v. "*waqwāq;*" *Lughat-nāmeh Dehkhudā*, n.d., s.v. "*Wāqwāq*" "*Wāq*;" Steingass, 2000, s.v. "*Wāq*" and "*Wāq wāq*).

The earliest citation to *wāq* or *wāqwāq* occurs in the famous *Thousand and One Night Tales of Arabia*, and afterwards "it is widely found in manuscripts of the "*Wonders of the World*"

genre, like the works of al-Qazwīnī's (ca. 1203-83)" *Ajā'ib al-Makhluqāt wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjudāt* (The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence) (Tibbets and Toorawa, 2002, s.v. "*Wāḳwāḳ;* Abbott, 1949)". When Medieval Muslim travelers, seafarers and geographers encountered new lands and their mythical stories and folklores, they mixed up the accounts and sites. This in turn inspired the fantastic literature (Tibbetts and Toorawa, 2002, s.v. "*Wāqwāq*"; Baer, 1965).

The design from a Khurasani Ewer of 1181 shows well the intermingling of *wāqwāq* and *islīmī.* A lion's head is placed in the center of two scrolling vines with smaller heads of geese, hares, goats and probably dog heads surrounding cartouches with human figures (fig. 26). The lion's head in the Khurasani ewer or elsewhere is similar to the head of Hindu deity *Kāla* and the scrolling vines ending with probably dog's heads are quite similar to *makārās* (sea-creature in Hindu mythology), both found in Hindu and Buddhist art (*See* for *makārā).* "*Makārā* is employed with the *Kāla* head to serve as a framing for the entrance of temples"(Marchal, 1996) which may have inspired the Muslim artists as an ornamental theme for his own repertoire. Scholars believe that the *wāqwāq* motifs are due to the influence of Eurasian animal style introduced by the Anatolian Seljuk where "concepts originating in Central Asian shamanism merged with ancient mythologies of the Middle East" (Ward, 1993; Frick, 1993).

The *wāqwāqaṣl,* flourished up to the fourteenth century, when it went out of fashion, largely supplanted by a Chinese ornamental vocabulary. It was, however, revived in the fifteenth century (Lentz and Lowry, 1989). Even though we find few examples of it in fifteenth and sixteenth century Islamic art, the *wāqwāq* still is enumerated as one of the seven modes of Islamic ornamentation in the second half of sixteenth century (fig. 27).

In the thirteenth century, the *wāqwāqaṣl* was superseded by a new mode called *khatā'ī* as a result of new Chinese influence after the Mongol conquests. *Khatā'ī* is a word derived from the word Cathay in Arabic for northern China (fig. 28). It was at this time that the Chinese lotus, peony, Chinese dragon, *sīmurgh* (a mythical flying creature), and cloud motifs entered the Islamic decorative repertoire. The standard form of *khatā'ī* only developed after an experimental phase lasting from the thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century. A stylized floral motif resembling a lotus, as found in the illumination of Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an of 1000-01 and on Uljaitu's mihrab at Friday Mosque of 1310 at Isfahan in stucco (figs. 29a-b) was replaced by a Chinese flower called the *nīlufer* or water lily (fig. 30). It's sometimes identified as one of the seven modes and

becomes a major floral motif of *khatā'ī* style. During the second half of the fourteenth century *khatā'ī* appeared as a refined floral spray. A new variation of *islīmī*, inspired by the Chinese dragon and called *islīmī -e-azdharī* (the dragon *islīmī*) also appears during the same period (fig. 31a) (Tākistānī, 2002; 'Arab, 2007, Interview). Although devised by the Timurids during the last quarter of the fourteenth century a medallion composed with the dragon *islīmī* remained one of the favorite medallions of Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal artists (figs. 31b-d).

Attempts by Timurid artists to add these newly acquired *khatā'ī* motifs to the prevailing decorative vocabulary were resolved in the second half of fourteenth century, a time when both motifs first appear together. This combination generated another mode called *faṣṣālī* (fig. 32). *Faṣṣālī* is a process related to the binary term *islīmī-khatā'ī*, a term mentioned by the Ottoman historian Mustafa 'Ali in *Manāqib-e Hunarwān* in 1580s but most Western scholars have misinterpreted it (Kivanç, 2011, Facsimile 45a). The word '*faṣṣālī'* comes from *faṣl'*, which means division or separation. According to Ardashir Mujarrad Takestani and contemporary Persian and Turkish illuminators I have interviewed (Tākistānī, 2002; 'Arab, 2007, Interview; Salmān, 2007, Interview) the word describes the combining of *islīmī* and *khatā'ī* with the two types of vines superimposed, overlapping or interlaced with each other. In the course of application the two vine systems are kept separate but may seem joined together when the design is seen from a distance. In this new layout a *toranj*—the unit with two split leaves joined together—discussed previously, acts as a point from which the *islīmī* and *khatā'ī* vines generate. This separating mode is known as *faṣṣālī* (Tākistānī, 2002). Usually *islīmī* was superimposed on the *khatā'ī* vine and, in most instances, the *khatā'ī* vine is the more delicate vine (fig. 32). *Islīmī-khatā'ī* became a very important Timurid form of decoration. Some modern illuminators claim that the laying of *islīmī* on *khatā'ī* is to show the supremacy of *islīmī*, and may symbolize the imagined association of the Timurids with the Chinese Ming court (Canby, 2013, discussion). Whatever the meaning, it brought in a fresh wave of decorative ideas during the second half of the fifteenth century. It was at this time that *abr* or the Chinese cloud motif, another of the seven modes, was formally included among the *islīmī* vocabulary and a variation of the split-leaf palmette also appeared called *changdārislīmī* (a split leaf with curling flaps that gave a more ornamental look) (Āghāmīrī, 2004; Tākistānī, 2002; 'Arab, 2007, Interview) (fig. 33).

An especially confusing aspect of the *haft aṣl* is that some of the words apply to motifs while other applies to processes. Another process, dating from Timurid period, was a composite design in which two motifs, one relatively double the size of the other, are combined. They were

arranged in two ways: either by placing one motif entirely within the other or one motif overlaps another, the smaller then only half shown (figs. 34-37). When this idea of placing one motif within the other was applied to *islīmī* it was enlarged and filled with *khatā'ī* that is known as *guldār* (floral) *islīmī* by Iranian artists and called *hurdeleme* by Turkish illuminators (Tākistānī, 2002; Arab, 2007, Interview; Birol and Derman, 1995) (fig. 38). The *guldārislīmī* is seen on the façade of Masjid-e-Gauhar Shad in Mashhad of 1416, a combination that was also popular in the sixteenth century (fig. 39).

The origin of this design lies in fourteenth-century Near Eastern silks that copied earlier Italian silks with such overlapping motifs. Although examples of it are somewhat rare, it does occur in a tile mosaic panel at the Tomb of Shaykh Ahmed ibn Abul-Hasan of 1440-43 at Torbat-e-Jam associated with a different leaf form (fig. 40). An elongated serrated leaf, which is different from the stout pointed Chinese leaf of Yuan and Ming ceramics (fig. 41), is paired as *islīmī* split leaves and is filled with *khatā'ī* motifs. Such lanceolate leaves are detected on the façade of Masjid-e Gauhar Shad of 1416-18 (fig. 39) and in the unusual illumination of a Qur'an of 1427 (fig. 42) from Shiraz made for Ibrahim Sultan (1394-1435). In the latter the similarity with the serrated leaf motif on Italian silks of the last third of fourteenth century is remarkable (figs. 43) (Wardwell,1987, see plates 35 and 37; Reath, 1927).

This mode is termed *firangī*, the seventh mode of the *haft aṣl*. Another new feature of both components of the *firangī* mode is a composite flower with a smaller motif inserted within a larger one (figs. 34-35 and 37). A similar practice is found in *siyah qalam* (black pen) drawings of the first half of fifteenth century from Iran or Central Asia (Roxburgh, 2002, figure 3; Lentz, and Lowry, 1989, cat. 76 and 90). The *siyah qalam* drawings have a lotus within a grapevine leaf with flaming contours (figs. 34-35), whereas a composite flower found in Ibrahim Sultan's Qur'an of 1427 has a pomegranate inserted in the centre of a flower (fig. 44). Again, the grapevine leaves and pomegranate-flower arrangements are of Italian origin (figs. 45-46) (Wardwell, 1987; Cavallo, 1950-1951). Italian silks and brocades of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Italy frequently have these sorts of composite motifs. This analysis shows how the Timurid artists skillfully created new motifs inspired by the Italian mode of superimposition.

Firangī, an Arabic and Persian word for the Franks, became a generic term used by medieval Muslims generally for Europeans (Lewis, 1986, s.v. "*Ifrandj"*). Historians have noted the frequent trade of Italian merchants between Persia and Europe and cultural linkages

in the fourteenth and fifteenth century; these were undoubtedly the sources for the Italian designs (Bloom and Blair, 2009, s.v. *Siyah Qalam*; Bernardini, 2000, s.v. Genoa; Peter, 1993, s.v. Crusades; Cereti, 2007, s.v. Italy; Casari, 2012, s.v. Italy ii) Diplomatic and Commercial Relations;Knobler, 1995; Howard, 1991). According to Takestani (2002) and modern illuminators a *firangī* pattern consists of large leaves (usually serrated leaves) covering or overlapping small blossoms that appears as half-shown floral motifs. This *aṣl* developed during the second half of fifteenth century and reached its climax in the sixteenth century, at the time the four Persian treatises were written. However, the illumination in Sultan Ibrahim's Quran of 1427 and the carved wooden doors from Samarqand of the late fifteenth century show developing phases of the *firangī* pattern.

Due to the diversity of design origins Timurid decorative style is sometimes referred to as "the International Style" (Blair and Bloom, 1995; Brend, 1991). It served as the prototype for Ottoman Safavid, and Mughal decoration of succeeding years. The principles devised for the art of *islīmī-khatā'ī* during the Timurid Period to which are related all the other *aṣl*, are still followed by illuminators and craftsmen as traditional rules for Islamic ornamentation today in Iran, Turkey and India-Pakistan. It is only when seen in their historical context—as furnished by the many date objects I have shown— that the sixteenth century *haft aṣl* and their variants can make sense to the modern viewer.

Haft Aṣl: The Seven Modes of Ornamentation in Islamic Art

Images (All designs are drawn by the author)

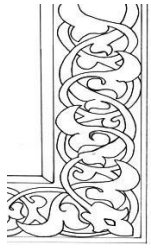


Fig. 1. After *Design and Color in Islamic Architecture,* by Sonia P. Seherr-Thoss, 1968, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, plate 118. Madina, 2001, New Haven:

Fig. 2. After *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250,* Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 18.

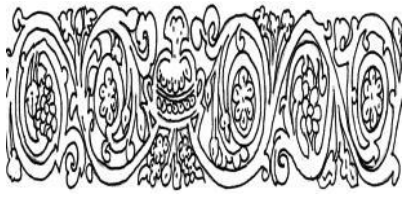


Fig. 3. After *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250,* by Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins –Madina, 2001, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 60.

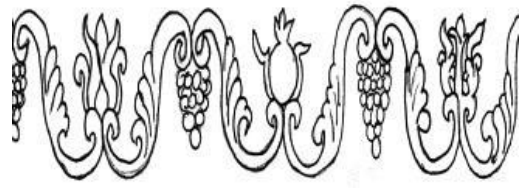


Fig. 4. After *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture,* by K.A.C Creswell, 1958, Baltimore: Penguin Books, University Press, p. 60.

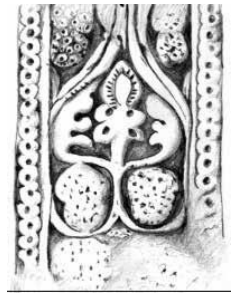


Fig. 5. After *Early Muslim Architecture: Umayyads, Early Abbasids & Tulunids Part II,* by K. A. C. Creswell, 1940, London: Clarendon Press, plate 34b.

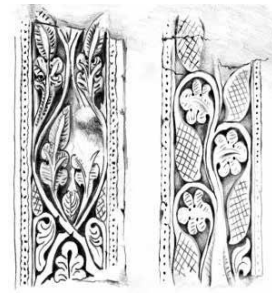


Fig. 6. After *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition,* by G. Marcais, 1995, Leiden: Brill, s.v. "Al-Raḳḳa" plate XXVII, p. 2 and 3.

Fig. 7. After *Early Muslim Architecture: Umayyads, Early Abbasids & Tulunids Part II*, by K. A. C. Creswell 1940, London: Clarendon Press, plate 42b.

Fig. 8. After late eighth century Alabaster Capital, probably from Raqqa, Syria in the Collections of Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number 36.68.3

Fig. 9. After Alabaster capital of ninth century in the Museum fuer Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Image reference ART425487, Art Resource, NY.

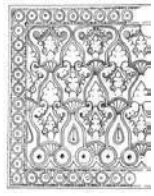


Fig.10.After *A World History of Art*, by Honour Hugh and John Fleming, 2005, London: Laurence King Publishing, p. 342.

Fig. 11. After *Ornamentation and Decoration in Islamic Architecture*, by Dominique Clevenot, 2000, London: Thames & Hudson, p. 87.

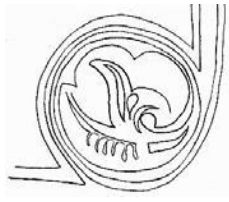


Fig. 12. After *The World of Islam*, by Ernst J. Grube, 1966, London: Paul Hamlyn, p. 45.

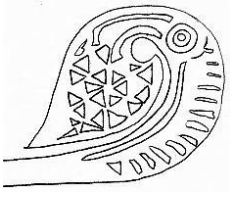


Fig. 13. After *The World of Islam*, by Ernst J. Grube, 1966, London: Paul Hamlyn, p. 45.

Fig. 14. After a *Folio from a Quran Manuscript* from the Eastern Islamic Lands of second half of tenth century in the Metropolitan Museum of Art NY, Collections, accession number 62.152.6.

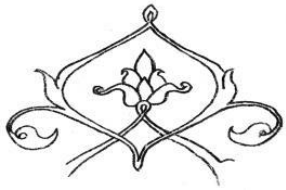


Fig. 15. After a *Mihrab Tile with niche design* of 1322-23, Iran in the Metropolitan Museum accession number 1983.345.

Fig. 16. After *Early Muslim Architecture: Umayyads, Early Abbasids & Tulunids Art,* NY, Collections, Part II,by K. A. C. Creswell, 1940, London, Clarendon Press, fig. 237.

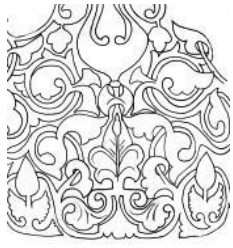


Fig. 17. After Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North *Africa and Egypt* by Jonathan M. Bloom, 2007, London: Yale University Press, p. 50

Fig. 18. After *The Illustrated Guide to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo Room,* by Bernard O. Kane, 2012, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, p. 15a, Inv. No. 9774.

Fig.19. After *The Unique Ibn Al-Bawwab Manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library* by Talbot Rice, 1955, Dublin: Emery Walker, plate VII.

Fig.20.After"Art of the Ottoman Court" by Walter B. Denny in *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art,* eds., Maryam D. Ekhtiar, Priscilla P. Soucek Sheila R. Canby, nd Navina Najat Haidar, 2011, New Haven: Yale University Press, cat. No. p. 216

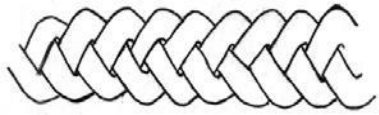


Fig. 21a. After *The Treasures of Coptic Art In the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo,* by Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, n.d., New York: The American Press, p. 106, fig. 71.

Fig. 21b. After *The Treasures of Coptic Art In the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* by Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, n.d., New York: The American University in American University in Press, p. 90, fig. 60.

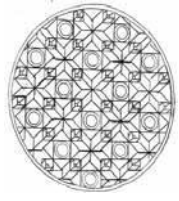


Fig. 21c. After *The Treasures of Coptic Art In the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo,* by Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, n.d., New York: The American

Fig. 22a. After *Early Muslim Architecture: Umayyads, Early Abbasids & Tulunids Part II,* by K. A.C. Creswell, 1940, London Clarendon Press, plate 84a.

Fig.22b. After *The 1400th Anniversary of the Qur'an (Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art Qur'an Collection Exhibition operation and organization),* by Seracettin Şahin, 2010, Istanbul: Antik A.S. Cultural Publication Picture 7.

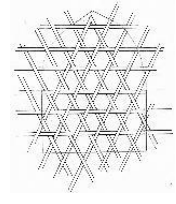


Fig.22c. After *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture,* by K. A. C. Creswell, 1958, Baltimore: Penguin Books, plate 72b.

Fig.23. After *Fragment of a Frieze* from Nishapur, Iran in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Collections, accession number 39.40.84.

Fig.24.After *Ornamentation and Decoration in Islamic Architecture,* by Dominique Clevenot 2000, London: Thames & Hudson, plate 175.

Fig. 25. After *Bowl* from Nishapur, Iran in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Collections, accession number 65.15.

Fig. 26. After *Ewer* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Collections, accession number 44.15

Fig. 27. After *Divan of Sultan Husayn Baiqara* dated 1500 from Herat, present-day Afghanistan in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY Collections, accession number 1982.120.1.

Fig. 28. After, *Epic of the Persian Kings: The Art of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh,* by Barbara Brend and Charles Melville, 2010, New York: I. B. Tauris, p. 102, plate 30.

Fig. 29a. After *The Unique Ibn Al-Bawwab Manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library,* by Talbot Rice, 1955, Dublin: Emery Walker, plate VIII, folio 40 recto.

Fig. 29b. After *Ornamentation and Decoration in Islamic Architecture,* by Dominique Clevenot, 2000, London: Thames & Hudson, p. 182.

Fig. 30. After *Star-Shaped Tile* of Fourteenth century Iran in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collections, accession number 20.120.25.

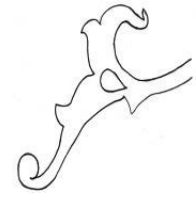
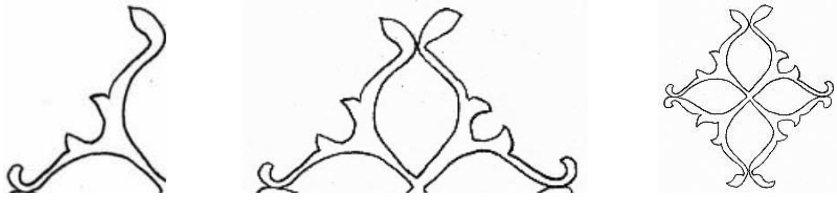


Fig. 31a. After *Mihrab (Prayer Niche)* dated 1354-55 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Collections, accession number 39.20.



Figs. 31b-d. After *Islamic Art and Architecture: From Isfahan to the Taj Mahal*, by Henri Stierlin, 2002, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 64.

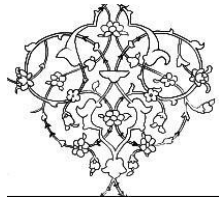


Fig. 32. After *Epic of the Persian Kings: Illumination,* by Ardashir Mojarrad Tākistānī Brend and Charles Melville, 2010, New York: I. B. Tauris, p. 72, plate 9.

Fig. 33. After *Shiva-e- Tazhib: The Art of The Art of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh,* by Barbara 2002, Tehran: Soroush Press, figure 27.

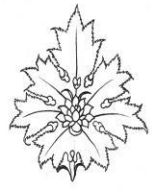


Fig.34. After *Timur and the Princely Vision Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, by Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry,1989, Los Angeles Los Angeles County Museum of Art, p. 182, cat. No. 77.

Fig.35. After *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, by Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry 1989, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, p. 218, cat. No. 115.

Fig. 36. After *Carved Door Panel* of late fifteenth century, Samarqand, present-day Uzbekistan in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collections, accession number 23.67.

Fig.37. After *Fragment* of fourteenth century, Iran or Iraq in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Collections, accession number 1926.509.

Fig.38. After *Shiva-e-Tazhib: The Art of Illumination,* by Ardashir Mujarrad Tākistānī, 2002, Tehran: Soroush Press, fig. 49.

Fig.39. Photo: by the Author dated July 8, 2014.

Fig. 40. After *Colour and Symbolism in Islamic Architecture: Eight Centuries of the Tile Make's Art,* by Michael Barry, 1996, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 103.

Fig. 41. After *Bowl* with Peonies, Narcissus, and Pomegranates in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collections, accession number 1982.294.

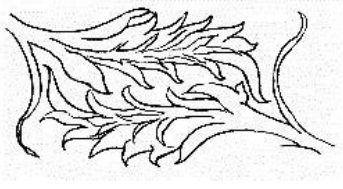


Fig. 42. After *Qur'an of Ibrahim Sultan* of 1427 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collections, accession number 13.228.2.

Fig. 43. After *Textile* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collections, accession number 4615629a

Fig. 44. After *Qur'an of Ibrahim Sultan* of 1427 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collections accession number 13.228.2.

Fig. 45. After *Velvet Fragment* of fifteenth century, Italy in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Collections, accession number 1918.274.

In brief, the first is *islīmī* a style with split leaf and vine motif. Then *khatā'ī* is composed of Chinese style floral, bud and leaf motifs. *Abr* is the Chinese cloud motif and *nīlufer* is the Chinese lotus. *Firangī* does not refer to a "foreign" motif but rather is a type of design organization where larger motif overlaps smaller one. *Band-i rūmī* is a method of knotting and braiding vines with split leaves. *Faṣṣālī* is a mode too, that occurs when *islīmī* and *khatā'ī* generate from a single source but are also kept separate. Lastly *wāq* is a style with scrolling vine and animal heads. Occasionally one finds the terms *islīmī* or *islīmī -khatā'ī* used to indicate all seven modes.

Porter (2000) quotes Khadivjām (1967); Roxburgh (2001) states that Mīr Sayyid Aḥmed al-Ḥusaynī al-Mashhadī "artfully reworked Qutb al-Din Muḥammad's 1556-57 preface composed originally for a project of Shah Tahmasp album."

Both Lameï (2001) and Porter (2000) have quoted the Persian verses of 'Abdī Bayg Shirazī which do not list the names of the seven modes.

Thackston (1989) of the Persian sources before 1587 are associated with the Qazvin court.

Porter (1994) says that these seven terms "were known well before the middle of the sixteenth century"; Khwānsārī (1952) and Thackston (1989) refer other historical texts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries where one can find these terms used individually.

A famous painter at the court of Shah Tahmasp (1523-1576) (Dickson and Welch, 1981).

There are some differences among Qutb-ud-Din Qiṣṣa Khvān, Mīr Sayyid Aḥmed, and Qāḍī Aḥmed Qummī from Ṣadīqī Bayg on the names of the seven *aṣl*. Ṣadīqī Bayg mentions *dāgh* and *nīlufer* instead of *wāq* and *gireh*. Occasionally one finds the terms *islīmī-khatā'ī* used

to indicate all the seven modes (Porter, 1994; Khwānsārī, 1952; Dickson and Welch, 1981; Tākistānī, 2002).

Porter says that ‘Abdī Bayg Shirazī in his *Rawḍāt aṣ-ṣifāt* of 1559 may have originated the concept of the *haft aṣl* (Porter, 2000).

As limited and insufficient scholarship was only available to comprehend these terms and their worth for Islamic art it was necessary to conduct a contemporary survey of Islamic ornamentation by interviewing Iranian, Pakistani, Turkish and few Arab artists and craftsmen to explore the existence and technical application of these terms: *islīmī*, *khatā'ī*, *band-i rūmī*, *dāgh*, *wāq*, *nīlufer*, *abr*, *faṣṣālī* and *firangī*. My findings are that apart from practicing Iranian artists and craftsmen, few terms or their replacements were known by Turkish illuminators and none by the Arab and Pakistani illuminators and painters. The seven *aṣl* are used but without the prior knowledge to what rich heritage these styles possessed. Local artisans of almost every field, especially in Pakistan, admitted the existence of such terms but they now have faded from their memories. Unfortunately scholars who have attempted to describe and differentiate these terms from one another only give definitions, which are a historical and mostly misleading. There is an absence of contextual clues in historical literature regarding the variations for and technical details of these seven terms.

According to contemporary Iranian illuminators and Tākistānī (2002) the word was initially *islāmī*, which became *islīmī* in vernacular language. However, in Necipoğlu (1995) and Thackston (1989) *islāmī* is a corrupted form of *islīmī*, which was modified in accordance with *khatā'ī*.

Thackston and Necipoğlu (1989; Necipoğlu, 1995) say that Central Asian builders mention geometric designs as *gireh* and curvilinear designs as *islīmī*.

Thackston (1989) says that Maulanā Qiwāmuddīn Mujallid Tabrizī was brought to Herat from Tabriz.

According to Thackston (1989) Muḥammad-Ḥaydar Dughlat was the maternal cousin of Mughal emperor Babur.

Thackston says that Mīr Sayyid Aḥmed was a calligrapher of Shah Tahmasp’s atelier (Thackston, 1989).

See, *Folio from a Quran Manuscript* from the Eastern Islamic Lands of second

half of tenth century. (2015, January 29). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Collections, accession number 62.152.6. Retrieved from http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/451681?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=62.152.6+&pos=1.

Ettinghausen (1962) believes the sources of inspiration for the structure of the earliest Qur'ans were derived from Roman *tabula ansata* (Roman inscription panel).

Creswell (1940, Plate 26) gives the date "780/163 AH?"

However, Tākistānī (2002) thinks that the inspiration for this form is from old-fashioned hanging lamps, which may be possible due to the outline of the unit significant as a representational addition in the margins though similar forms can also be traced in tenth century Hebrew illumination. Whatever the source, the design unit was to be exploited to the fullest in the coming centuries in diverse combinations.

Necipoğlu (1990) says that Ca'fer Çelebi refers to *rūmī* in his poem composed in 899 (1493-94); According to Thackston (1989), Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥaider Dughlat in his *Tāriīkh-e Rashidī* dated mid-fourteenth to mid-fifteenth century appreciates "the joints of the *band-i rūmī*, each of which may be half a chickpea in size" intricately executed between "fifty *islīmī* tendrils" by Mawlanā Maḥmūd. Kanbuh (1960) has praised the finely executed *band-i rūmī* of the royal *ḥammām* in Shahjahanbad at Delhi.

Mazot (2010) states that there is Romano-Byzantine and Umayyad influence in the decoration of the dome and marble panels of the mihrabs of Great Mosque of Qairawan.

Necipoğlu (1995) says that the Central Asian builders classify the geometrical patterns and curvilinear designs with these terms: *gireh-sāzī* and *islīmī*. According to my interview with Nuṣrat 'Arab at The Cultural Centre of Iran, Lahore (2007) illuminators today differentiate knotted curvilinear vegetal patterns from interlocked geometric designs. For these they employ the terms *gireh-sāzī* and *gireh-bandī* (Devellioğlu, 2007, s.v. "*rūmī*"; Salmān, Interview, 2007).

The modern Turkish dictionaries and illuminators present another modern confusion, which is between *rūmī* and *islīmī*. Modern Turkish illuminators employ the term *rūmī* as an alternative of *islīmī*. Thus *rūmī* became a motif for the Turkish illuminator who is not familiar with the term *islīmī*. Modern Turkish dictionaries list *rūmī* not *islīmī*, but Redhouse (1890, s.v. "*Islīmī*") defines *islīmī* as an ornamental style. Whereas Redhouse (1890, s.v. "*Rūmī*") defines *rūmī* in terms of geographical association "one from the lower Roman Empire, Seljuk

or Ottoman" but does not explain *rūmī* in its modern definition perhaps indicating that the modern Turkish illustrator has introduced the confusion. These authors (Aytürk, 2004; Perry, 1985; Fortna, 2000) mention that dictionaries written before and after Mustafa Kemāl Atātürk's reform movement and the "establishment of the Turkish Language Institute (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) in 1932" have differences. The mission of "*Türk Dil Kurumu* was to replace the Perso-Arabic words with more familiar native equivalents" of Turkish words.

Wāq has been mentioned by two of our authors Qutb al-Din Qiṣṣa Khvān and Qāḍī Aḥmed Qummī but not by Ṣadīqī Bayg who refers to another *aṣl*, *dāgh* which means design transference (Dickson and Welch, 1981).

The geographical location of *Wāqwāq* Island or islands is also disputable. The thirteenth century dictionary *Lisān al-ʿArab* mentions *wāqwāq* as a land beyond China whereas the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Tibbetts and Toorawa, 2002, s.v. "*Wāḳwāḳ*.") suspects Madagascar, Sumatra, and Southeast Asian locations (*Al Baheth al-Arabi (wāk,* n.d.).

Abbott (1949) says that the Pehlavi *Hazār Afsanāh* was translated during the early Abbasid Period probably ninth century into Arabic. Abbott quotes Ibn-Nadīm's *Fihrist* describing the literary formation of *the Thousand and One Night*.

The scrolling vine represents the *wāqwāq* tree is similarly seen in another early thirteenth century tray from Khurasan, which shows harpies flanking braided vine with split leaves (Baer, 1965). These harpies called *murgh-i ādamī* by Baer (1965) are human-headed birds with a crown similar to the Hindu and Buddhist deity *kinnārī*. According to Rachel Ward (1993) contact between Ghurid Khurasan and India and probable presence of Indian craftsmen at local workshops may be one of the sources for *wāqwāq* designs.

See Wilman-Grabowska (1996) figure 5 for *makārā* in relief carving.

Marchal (1996) says that the "Hindu deity *Kāla* is an emanation of *Shīvā*, personifying time with a full face, bulging eyes, enormous nose, thick eyebrows, very conspicuous fangs, and no lower jaw." According to him *makārā* is a "marine monster similar to a crocodile with tremendous jaw, whose snout is elongated into a trunk." Both these were imported from India in Javanese art (Marchal, 1996).

Frick (1993) says that the lion's head placed on the scrolling vines is related to the one found in Buddhist stone reliefs. Frick brings to attention the presence of Buddhists during the

early Abbasid Period and "periodic evidence of exchanges of ambassadors and of Chinese artists at Muslim courts between the tenth and fourteenth century" and more specifically after the Seljuk's arrived in Persia; Ölçer (2005) also mentions that royal palaces "from the Qarakhanid to the Ghaznavids" were "decorated with reliefs influenced by Buddhists culture."

According to Sheila Canby, the claim of modern illuminators that *islīmī* 's superimposition on *khatā'ī* shows symbolic supremacy of *islīmī* is "a historicizing fantasy" (Discussion with Sheila Canby in the Department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY on April 01, 2013).

Wardwell (1987 figures 17 and 28) believes that the grapevine and its leaves are an Italian influence but placing a rosette within a leaf is not observed in Italian silks. However Italian textiles, often do present combination of two or three motifs.

According to Lewis, (1986, s.v. *Ifrandj*) this term in medieval times is not normally applied to the Spanish Christians, Slavs or the Vikings."

Wardwell (1987) says that Clavijo, the Spanish Convoy ambassador brought Florentine textile as a gift for Emperor Timur when he visited his court in Samarqand; According to Asimov and Bosworth (1998) items were imported from Europe.

Tākistānī (2002) believes '*fìrangī'* should not be used because nowadays this Persian word is used for the English but earlier it meant just "foreign;" Steingass (2000, s.v. *firangī*) is a large branch lopped off, in order that smaller ones may shoot forth.

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