

هنر اسلام و مسلمانان؛ سطوح مواجهه و تعامل

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در یک نظرسنجی که مسئله اصلی آن ارزیابی چگونگی درک فردی متعلق به سنت گفتمانی اسلام از اشیاء هنر اسلامی در دنیای معاصر است، پنجاه نفر شرکت کردند. اکثریت شرکت کنندگان را مسلمانانی تشکیل می دادند که یا مقیم کشورهای اسلامی هستند، یا اصالت آنها به کشوری اسلامی باز می گردد و یا ساکن کشورهایی با یک اقلیت بزرگ مسلمان هستند. هدف اصلی این نظرسنجی که شیوه آن مبتنی بر طرح پرسش هایی باز بود، شناسایی و تعریف چگونگی تعامل یک فرد با اشیایی است که می توان آنها را متعلق به دایره هنر اسلامی شمرد. تحلیل کیفی داده های به دست آمده ما را به این نتیجه رساند که تعامل یک فرد با آثار هنری و ادراک اشکال بصری آنها منجر به توسعه فرآیندهایی در ذهن وی می شود که نتیجه آنها نه تنها به فعلیت رسیدن معانی عمیقی است که ذاتی وی است، بلکه تبلور ایده ها و تصاویر خاصی در سطح آگاهی اوست. بر اساس یافته های این پژوهش، چهار سطح مختلف که یک فرد (مسلمان) در قالب آنها با آثار هنری (اسلامی) تعامل می کند، نیز شناسایی شد.

واژگان کلیدی:

ادراک هنر اسلامی، هنر اسلامی و مسلمانان، سطوح درگیری با هنر اسلامی.

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The second, Community level, reflects the feeling of belonging to a group: here art serves to remind a person of his/her religious affiliation and of his/her ethnic origin. Thus, art helps a person to maintain his/her identity, being a reminder of it; it helps answer the question of “who I am”, as an individual, as part of a community and a particle of the Universe, since a person sees there a reflection of himself/herself, recognize himself/herself, receiving or confirming from works of art information about himself/herself.

At the third, Ingroup-outgroup level, we become witnesses of the relationship of a person with representatives of the outgroup. According to the results of the survey, we can conclude that, in comparison with the relationship with members of one's own group, the relationship with others is ambiguous. We can assume that Islamic art is an important factor in uniting Muslims of different origins, despite their differences, since it represents unity in its many regional types. Invoking the great past of Islamic civilization helps Muslims to define their place among others both in the past and today: in the past as an example to follow, and in the present as a source of both nostalgia and hope.

All these levels are intertwined with each other, the individual level connects with the others, because the personality of a human being consists both of religion and ethnicity and the relationship with the “others”. Thus, art helps a person to see himself/herself, to know himself/herself, to find his/her identity again if it was forgotten, while s/he was distracted by his/her concerns. Reflecting in a person, art reflects the person and his/her spirituality, as a mirror. Thus, art reveals, forms and stimulates the spirituality of a human being.

Generating emotions, feelings and associations, art evokes in a person a string of thoughts that go one after another, like an arabesque going into the distance. Art takes a person into reflection, evokes insights, and sets him/her up for contemplation. Art leads a person to witness the limitations of a human mind, the limits of his/her knowledge. Thus, art brings a person to the perception of the transcendent. At this level, a man and the Transcendent, a person is aware of the presence of the Creator, His incomprehensibility and infinity, while art accompanies a person in these intense experiences.

This article is the result of our research, which is preliminary; at this stage we conclude that Islamic art serves a Muslim as a way of comprehending his/her self; reveals the existing ways of relations both with the representatives of same religion and same ethnicity, and with the “others”; and contributes to person's approximation towards understanding of the Transcendent.

Islamic art is a kind of mediator between a man and the Transcendent: it tries to bring a human being closer to understanding of the divine essence. "To grasp fully the significance of Islamic art is to become aware that it is an aspect of the Islamic revelation, a casting of the Divine Realities (ḥaqā'iq) upon the plane of material manifestation in order to carry man upon the wings of its liberating beauty to his original abode of Divine Proximity. Islamic art was the means whereby the spirit of Islam penetrated into all these types and modes of activity, into all the moments of man's life reminding him wherever he was of the Divine Presence".²⁰

CONCLUSION

The art of Islam has a great significance in the life of a Muslim. S.H. Nasr notes that "even a modernized Muslim experiences deep down in his heart the sense of peace and joy, even a kind of psychological 'assurance', when sitting on a traditional carpet, viewing a piece of calligraphy, or hearing classical poetry of his or her language, not to speak of hearing the Quranic psalmody or praying within the confines of one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture which dot the Islamic world from the Pacific to the Atlantic".²¹

Our research is based on the results of a survey that was conducted among Muslims from around the world. The purpose of the research was to find out what happens during the interaction of a Muslim with the Islamic art' objects, the answers of the participants contributed to the discovery of four levels of this engagement.

Looking at the objects of Islamic art, a person feels a response in his/her soul: and this feeling is something living, moving, which, starting from a certain point, develops in different dimensions. The art objects respond in a person, awaken something in him/her consciousness, evoke certain associations, activate feelings; a person does not remain indifferent, the internal activity occurs. The objects evoke certain emotions and moods in a person, generating ideas, leading to the emergence of intentions for action; actualizing the available information, they activate certain processes leading a person to reflection, which in turn gives rise to other mental and physical activities.

At the first, Individual level, we see personal feelings, emotions, inclinations, interests, impressions, the level of emotionality, sentimentality, personal attitude to the topic, a deep connection with religion, the desire for knowledge, as well as references to the personal biography.

20. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, p. 13, 198.

21. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, p. 196.

write, otherwise I started crying. - I don't know how to put it correctly, but I tried to convey all the excitement, all the awe of them (F., II, Kyrgyzstan, 1).

Thus, we have seen that the art is the background against which the worship takes place, in connection with this we will cite one of the respondents: "I would also like to say what Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (pbuh) said in his supplications to God: "My God, I did not worship You out of fear of Your punishment or desire for Your reward, but I found You worthy of worship, so I worshiped You." These are the true values and balances of Muslims" (M., I, Iraq, 2).

The respondent from Uzbekistan makes an important observation: "People go to the mosque or visit the sights, visit the graves of saints with some requests. And what each person can see in the images will depend on this; it depends on the specific goal, on the specific time, on the mood of the person" (M., II, Uzbekistan). A person turns to God in search of salvation and peace: "I feel comfortable and reassured because these places are linked in my mind to my belief in the existence of God, and they are the first places I think to go to when any problem occurs to me, because God is the first refuge for us as Muslims" (M., I, Egypt, 2). Another respondent says, that when a person "sees these objects, he will perceive that not everything is lost in this life, not everything is as bad as in his soul, he will perceive this wealth thanks to these masters, they made it so that such people also understand that they are not alone in the world, that there is hope in Allah Almighty in everything" (M., II, Dagestan). A person can expect a miracle and pray for it to happen: "The children are waiting for the jinn to emerge from this studded cup, so he rubs it and waits, but the wise man reads words and meanings in it, that miracles are the work of the Creator and that he must work and pray for that" (M., II, Syria/Russia).

While waiting for an answer to his/her prayers, a person is able to feel humility, hope for the all-encompassing mercy of God, and the art can serve as a reminder of God's justice:

And heavenly justice has fairness for the right holder, even if he is weak.... God's justice always restores things to their proper place. And when I read on the walls of Alhambra, "There is no victor but God," I realize the eternal justice of heaven in spreading goodness on this good earth, and that evil will inevitably be defeated, no matter how high and oppressive it is, even after a while. And when the light penetrates from the windows of Alhambra into its semi-dark halls, I always remember the light of the heavens and the earth that illuminates the darkness within us. And when I read on the facade of the mihrāb of the Mosque of Cordoba, the verse of the Qur'an (59:23), I feel reassured and psychologically comfortable in the bosom of this sacred place (M., II, Palestine/Spain).

Islamic art is capable of conveying to a human being the idea of predestination and the omniscience of divine knowledge: "Like an all-encompassing light that can penetrate into all corners of the world, countries, souls, into all, all places that we are trying to hide, which are not visible to the eye, but they exist, and this light, it is such a divine light; this semicircle, this arch - this penetrating light comes from it, and these arches, these curly arches, they seem to worship this light... I see an all-seeing eye or a third eye that sees everything, knows everything" (F., I, Dagestan).

Contemplating the greatness of God, a person experiences intense feelings: «This graceful, powerful, formidable place of worship has a profound effect on the spiritual state of a person. I feel insignificant before such greatness of creation and Creator. This feeling of the greatness of God and obedience to his will unconditionally» (M., II, Tajikistan/UK); "They remind of the greatness of the Almighty and my insignificance before the Creator and this Universe. That is, my identity as a believing Muslim is manifested here" (M., II, Bashkortostan/Turkey).

We have already seen that the art can calm the mind of a person, however, in addition to this, the ornaments have a psychological effect of a different kind: "The ornament gives some kind of hypnotic effect, if you look at it for a long time, all these small images seem to hypnotize" (M., I, Azerbaijan/Ukraine); "If you look at it for a long time, then it feels like they are moving, the waves" (M., I, Dagestan, 3).

Several respondents describe enormous impact of art on human's consciousness: "I look and feel the mystery and majesty. We have the word "möhtəşəm/magnificent" in the Azerbaijani language - it's like majesty, but even deeper" (F., II, Azerbaijan); "I feel overwhelmed and in awe. Such grandiose. It is very impressive so I am very impressed" (M., II, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

S.H. Nasr writes: "If any extrinsic proof be needed of the relation of Islamic art to Islamic spirituality, it can be found in the role of support that this art plays in the induction of ḥāl or spiritual state, which is itself a grace from Heaven, and in the attitude of those closest to the heart of Islamic spirituality to this art in its manifold manifestations".¹⁹ A person feels strong emotions while thinks of the transcendence: even looking at the images, a person comes into a state of trembling:

The first thing that comes to my mind when I see these pictures is my life, my inner world, Islam, closeness to Allah, the Prophet Muḥammad ... (right now I have goosebumps), this is very exciting ... I see, I feel them in myself, I see myself in them, as I already said, this is my life (it's somehow very exciting to express what is happening inside me right now) ... I'd better

19. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, p. 11.

light itself, for such an ideal... As if this is about how different everything is, but there is an ideal that is worth striving for, that among all this diversity, imperfection, sinfulness, there can be an ideal on earth too" (F., I, Dagestan).

Consistency and thoughtfulness, logic and expediency of Islamic art, according to respondents, reflect the world order: "I definitely think it's a reflection of the Universe" (F., I, Turkey); "As if it is a human attempt to imitate the creative organization of space with an engineering formation. Of course, it is much simpler, but art and science are combined in it" (M., II, Syria/Russia). According to Brend, the sense of order is rooted in the Islamic notion that everything exists by the will of God, taking its rightful place in the divine order.¹⁸ The respondent from UK notes in this context:

It seems to me that this is an image of the Universe with many bright particles or galaxies organized by some kind of logic, arranged harmoniously, in a geometric form. Above, apparently, the source of the Universe is depicted, Allah himself or the Universal Intellect, from which all creations in the world appear. Below, inside the dome, the personification of what we see above is also depicted. I think this image personifies a human with his spiritual and physical qualities, his ability to create, as God creates heaven. Man is considered the most perfect form of the creation of God, according to Islam, and therefore has a particle of divine qualities (M., II, Tajikistan/UK).

The philosophical understanding of the structure of the Universe as it is reflected in Islamic art is also mentioned in answers:

In Islamic theology it is called occasionalism - the idea that Allah constantly creates. The idea of atoms - the constant creation of everything by Allah, that He holds this world - is shown in muqarnas, this beehive, as if all these particles are suspended in the air and they have no support, nothing holds them together. The visual effect is created, and the fact that Allah holds it all creates a unique perception for people (F., I, Azerbaijan/Germany).

One more observation should be made, in which one can find that a person is able not only to catch the "harmonious vibration" emanating from the ornaments, but also to discern a certain predetermining direction of their design, to which they are subject: "On the whole, I like them because there is a harmonious vibration, symmetry is noticed, at the same moment there is the seriousness of the fact that there are no drawings or patterns that deviate from their outline, their trajectory" (F., I, -). This allows us to make an assumption that

18. Brend, *Islamic Art*, p. 305.

manner the Unity of the Divine Principle, the dependence of all multiplicity upon the One. This art makes manifest, in the physical order directly perceivable by the senses, the archetypal realities and acts, therefore, as a ladder for the journey of the soul from the visible and the audible to the Invisible which is also Silence transcending all sound".¹³ Through its abstraction and geometry, "through continued and prolific use of Qur'anic expressions and passages, the art objects of the Muslim peoples were to be constant reminders of tawhīd".¹⁴ Our respondents are aware of it: "When I looked at the works, I thought about the effect of Islam on art and how beautifully they rendered the belief of tawhīd in an aesthetic way" (F., I, Turkey).

Many scholars consider the symbolic nature of Islamic art: Brend says that, the details-symbols in Islamic art are often endowed with a meaning that cannot be fully comprehended.¹⁵ Al-Fārūqī takes a different view: "The mystical, literally symbolic interpretations of recent writings are in opposition to the abstraction so deeply imbedded in the aesthetic consciousness and production of the Muslim peoples".¹⁶ As for our respondents, they like to immerse themselves in reflections on the symbolism of Islamic art:

Muqarnas is a unique element inherent in Muslim art. Small cells of muqarnas superimposed on each other - as a symbol of the unity of the Universe - each cell reinforces the other and is the support and foundation. Wisdom of the Creator. The lamp as a symbol of nūr/light, which is much spoken about in the Qur'an, nūr as the truth of Islam, which spreads in space. For me the arches symbolize the borders to other dimensions - in this case, to the space where God is worshiped. I think the gates to Paradise will also be bordered by similar arches (M., I, Russia, 1).

"When I look at the vault of the dome, I feel like under the sky" (M., I, Tajikistan) – says another respondent, while Piotrovsky affirms that "these both elements (stalactites and dome) create the illusion of the vaulted sky, attracting and bemusing the eye of mankind, yet at the same time allowing people to glimpse the vastness of the unending".¹⁷ Personal symbolic interpretation is made by another respondent:

It evokes a feeling of some kind of gift from above, as if there is something so great and powerful in the sky above, and below - as if something so imperfect and diverse. There are some sins there, and this diverse and imperfect - it strives for the best, for the good, for the

13. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, p. 7.

14. al-Fārūqī, *The Arts of Islamic Civilization*, p. 18.

15. Brend, *Islamic Art*, p. 305.

16. al-Fārūqī, *The Arts of Islamic Civilization*, p. 27.

17. Piotrovsky, *Earthy Art – Heavenly Beauty. Art of Islam*, p. 70.

can display divine beauty through art and architecture” (M., II, Albania); “The grandiosity, beauty, grace greatly affects people, one might even say that this beauty lures” (M., II, Uzbekistan).

The beauty of art objects is not just the beauty of the material world, it is a reflection of the beauty of another reality, the beauty of Islamic art refers to the beauty of Paradise: “Almost all Islamic art in some way or another tells a story about Paradise, alludes to it, refers to it”.⁸ According to the respondents, the art assures people of the afterlife, helps them imagine the beauties of paradise: “Thanks to this beauty, one can understand that Muslims are confident in life after death; it is richly shown here that the beauty that they created here, in this world, will be repeated many times more in the next world; this is a temporary world, after death, the world continues, in which Allah Almighty gave us more wealth and more beauty” (M., II, Dagestan).

The means of expressing religious truths in artistic language is the ornament: “floral ornament tells about paradise, and geometric - about order; but, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that any ornament is capable of generating a whole string of thoughts associated with these ideas; many elements of Islamic art are turned beyond the visible world - to the eternal world”.⁹ Abstraction and geometry, symmetry and repetition, arabesques and calligraphic inscriptions – “all these calm and make one think about the infinite” (M., I, Azerbaijan/Russia). It would be appropriate to cite here also a few quotes from scholars of the art of Islam: “geometric ornamentation is the best expression the abstract concept of Allah, for it suggests a wealth of ideas”;¹⁰ “the arabesque generates in the viewer an intuition of the quality of infinity, of that which is beyond space-time; through contemplation of these infinite patterns, the recipient’s mind is turned toward the Divine, and art becomes a reinforcement and reminder of religious belief”¹¹; “the arabesque has two inner meanings. It expresses the eternal movement and multiplicity of form; it is pride in and love for the world which Allah has created for people”.¹²

Leading one’s thoughts towards infinity, the ornaments, as well as the grandiose forms of the architecture, remind of eternity: “Endless patterns, infinity, eternity, solemnity” (F., II, Russia, 1); “The inner part of the dome as a symbol of the endless sky” (M., I, Russia, 1).

“Islamic art is the result of the manifestation of Unity upon the plane of multiplicity. It reflects in a blinding

8. Piotrovsky, *Earthy Art – Heavenly Beauty. Art of Islam*, p. 93.

9. Brend, B. (2008). *Islamic Art*. Moscow: “FAIR”. (In Russian). P. 307-308.

10. Piotrovsky, *Earthy Art – Heavenly Beauty. Art of Islam*, p. 70.

11. al-Fārūqī, *The Arts of Islamic Civilization*, p. 5.

12. Piotrovsky, *Earthy Art – Heavenly Beauty. Art of Islam*, p. 69.

mundane and earthly matters, it helps a person to have a glance into another dimension. The rhythms of the ornaments fascinate a person's imagination, pointing to infinity, and the abstraction serves as a reminder of tawḥīd, unity of God. Reflecting on the images a person finds himself or herself closer to understanding the images of otherworldly reality, which lies beyond the limits of his or her knowledge. "Islamic art has a goal similar to that of the Qur'an – to teach and reinforce in mankind the perception of divine transcendence".⁵ "Every Islamic work of art contains a reference to the overall immanence and deeply felt indivisibility of God. The abstract art of Islam relates with artistic means a story about Allah, the eternal Creator of everything. And this helps people to experience His presence, to perceive the ineffable beauty of His majesty and mercy".⁶

As we have mentioned above, Islamic art accompanies a person in his/her everyday life, but it has a special effect on him/her during the performance of religious rituals, providing the environment within which a person is immersed in communication with the Creator. The first association of a respondent from Iraq when answering the question "What do you think and feel when you see these pictures?" was "Azān sound.... A special place for Muslims... Friday prayers" (M., I, Iraq, 1); for the Turkish respondent "it symbolizes faith (ināncı) and worship (ibadet)" as well (M., I, Turkey, 2). Another respondent from Turkey says that "the architecture in Islamic civilization is important and rooted. It also means that Islam is not a religion which only consist of a set of religious rules to be obeyed and ignore the art and architectural aesthetics of human being. We can understand that Islam is religion that constructs your both this world and hereafter" (M., I, Turkey, 1).

Islamic art scholars emphasize its "contemplative nature".⁷ The art creates a special atmosphere for a person, which helps to concentrate, not to be distracted, and sets up for contemplation and reflection: "These circles go to the center, this allows one to visually concentrate and focus, for example, on the center" (F., I, -). A person feels the presence of God: the rhythms of the ornaments are synchronized in unison with zikr, and finding harmony, a person comprehends something that lies beyond the limits of rational knowledge: "The mosque for me is a place where I feel calm (sakīna) and contentment. The desire to repeat zikr or read the Qur'an increases" (M., II, Bashkortostan/Turkey).

Most of the respondents first of all talk about the beauty of Islamic art: "The first thing that comes to mind: it is beautiful!" (F., II, Kyrgyzstan, 2); "The beauties of Paradise mentioned in the Qur'an are precisely what led Muslims over the centuries to create buildings with beautiful and aesthetic motifs, giving views of the beauties which Almighty Allah Himself has mentioned in the Qur'an. Also, the famous saying of the Prophet Muḥammad that "Allah is beautiful and loves the beauty", prompted Muslims to think more about how they

5. al-Fārūqī, I. R. (2013). *The Arts of Islamic Civilization*. London-Washington: IIIT. P. 6.

6. Piotrovsky, *Earthy Art – Heavenly Beauty. Art of Islam*, p. 70.

7. Nasr, S. H. (1987). *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. New York: State University of New York Press, Albany. P. 4.

Dagestan).

These numerous optimistic statements are contrasted by the response of the respondent from Dagestan, whose answer probably reflects the difficult history of Muslims and their regions in the era of Western powers' colonial hegemony:

They (objects) tell me: they left us, they left us alone, we were orphaned, we were not built for this, as a museum, but as a place of worship, for Muslims. The best, most beautiful beauty is when these temples, which serve to worship the One God, the Creator, when there are believers inside, without believers such beauty, even though it is at the highest level, still it is like it lacks special chic... As if they are asking for salvation, being in captivity (M., I, Dagestan, 2).

Thus, analyzing the answers of the respondents, we conclude that, of course, being representatives of Islamic civilization, Muslims legitimately feel themselves to be part of it, and the memory of the past responds differently in each of them. Some feel proud and intend, while maintaining their identity, to approach the spiritual ideals of Islam in order to repeat and reproduce the former glory, while others, filled with nostalgia, mourn the golden age. In this admiration and in this sadness, one sees what unites Muslims again, regardless of their nationality and country of origin, it is noteworthy that the contradictions between Muslims themselves are not mentioned anywhere, and this is the advantage of the art as a unifying factor. With regard to interaction with representatives of the outgroup, in the responses, we can trace a clear line of the need for dialogue between groups, patronage of religious minorities, the transfer of achievements, we also see a desire to demonstrate the achievements of Muslim civilization for some supposedly compensation for the centuries-old feelings of inferiority and oppression. Also, in some answers, a reproach can be read in relation to the actions committed in the past by Western powers aimed at the colonization of Muslim regions.

4. A man and the Transcendent

Islamic art is inseparable from religion, it bears the imprint of Islamic ideals and reflects its tenets and predispositions, Islam is its foundation and guides its content and essence. Interaction with Islamic art produces a strong influence on a person because it is the background against which communication with the transcendent takes place. So, for example, the objects (mosques, praying rugs, Qur'anic manuscripts) are associated with the performance of Islamic rituals. In their answers, the respondents indicate the features inherent in Islamic art, such as abstractness, geometricity, rationality. The beauty inherent in the objects of Islamic art points to paradise and serves as a reminder of a different reality, symbolically denoting objects of a different being. The engagement with Islamic art helps to go beyond the level of everyday life, of the usual,

Arab and Islamic civilization dominated the world. With all its art, beauty, diversity, and control, these forms and images have always made me feel the extent of the decadence we are currently living in when comparing the two eras" (M., II, Egypt, 1). The response of the participant from Dagestan is full of regret and despair: "There were good times, which, unfortunately, you will not return" (M., I, Dagestan, 1).

The admiration for the past of the Islamic civilization, which existence contributed to the progress in the sciences and arts in non-Muslim regions, which impressed others with its sophistication and refinement, and which, according to Piotrovsky, passed "the baton" of progress and development to other civilizations, is expressed by the participant from Syria: "It reminds of the golden age of the Arab-Islamic civilization that reached al-Andalus, and the distinctive arches as if they were bridges on which civilization of Damascus and art crossed to al-Andalus to flourish and rise to higher domes, and move through new arches and new bridges to other civilizations" (M., II, Syria/Russia).

As in the distant past, so today, not only Muslims, but also non-Muslims, are impressed by the former grandeur of the Islamic civilization, as a respondent from Albania reports us: "Not only Muslims are amazed, but also non-Muslims who see them even after many centuries, are amazed by the artistic spirit embedded in the souls of Muslim artists who created such works, making us feel that those creators must have had a very high faith within their soul" (M., II, Albania).

Therefore, causing delight in a Muslim, Islamic art makes him/her feel proud, and s/he is proud of the achievements of Islamic civilization in front of non-Muslims: "The greatness and history of the Islamic civilization, the architectural and artistic aspect of which is very great, which causes pride in front of other civilizations" - says the respondent from Iraq and further continues on the peaceful nature of Islam - "Islam is a religion of peace, Islam is a wonderful religion that does justice to everyone, man and woman, old and young, and even non-Muslims, because the Islamic religion has legislated laws to preserve the rights of everyone" (M., I, Iraq, 2). Another participant further discusses this topic, emphasizing the good intentions of Muslims, and the good that, thanks to Islam, the Muslims strive to bring to the world:

People will understand that these drawings, these ornaments belong to the Islamic world... Muslims wish everyone good and peace, show beauty, show the kindness of Muslims, and they try to leave this beauty everywhere. The masters, creating this art, put their soul into this beauty, they put good, they made it clear to people, regardless of belief, that good is above all in this world, that it will save the world. They showed the goodness of the Islamic world, people will understand that these drawings, these ornaments belong to the Islamic world, and thanks to this we can say with confidence that Islam always leads on the way to good (M., II,

religious principles, where the region provides techniques and materials, and the religion sets the direction of movement, ideas, tasks, goals. And as in a person, whose identity is formed both by belonging to a religion and to a nation, in art, a similar thing is observed. We have seen that at this level, two types of a person's identity are revealed: the religious identity of a person, as a Muslim, who belongs to the global Muslim community, and the ethnic/national identity, which is associated with the region of origin, ethnicity, country, nationality. The survey involved representatives of different nationalities who come from various countries; in the answers of the respondents, we saw both arguments about religious identity and statements related to national identity. Thus, we can say that "the religious principle is always closely intertwined with the ethnic element, their synthesis is an integral phenomenon, sometimes not amenable to differentiation within the framework of personal identity".⁴

3. Ingroup-outgroup level

This level echoes the previous one due to the reference to identity, but here the sense of self comes to the fore in comparison with others, thus belonging to a certain group is emphasized in contrast to others, a person feels himself different from the representatives of the outgroup. In the responses, we witness an attitude towards the history, we see both admiration for the past, and sadness from the fact that "the golden era" and the lost splendor cannot be returned. At the same time, there is an understanding of the importance of relationship with the others and establishing dialogue and coexistence with them based on historical experience (al-Andalus, Ottoman Empire).

The glorious past of Islamic civilization is certainly attractive to the minds and thoughts of modern Muslims. It is often appealed to by those who complain about the current state of the Muslim umma, both by those who nostalgically indulge in suffering about the impossibility of returning to "the golden era", and by those who see in it a source and inspiration for Muslim's today aspirations. In this context, according to responses, we observe the attitude of Muslims towards non-Muslims, as the representatives of the outgroup: we can witness Muslims' purported opposition to the modern (Western) world since some responses allude to the fact that the Muslim world "lags behind" the West, meanwhile some participants recall the previous glory of Islamic civilization being example to follow for the West. Thus, in the answers, we find ambiguous connotations, different narratives, where delight is replaced by despair, sadness gives way to hope.

We see nostalgia for the great past of the Islamic civilization in the words of a survey participant from Egypt: "This picture makes me feel an urgent desire to live in the past in all its details, nostalgic for a time when

4. Iuljusheva, A. (2023). *The Perception of Islamic art by Muslims of the post-Soviet space* (in Russian)//Muslims of Central Eurasia Since the 19th Century: Daily Life, Identity, Intellectual Thought and Education / ed. E. Muratova and E. Akhmetova. Baku: IDRAK, 2023. P. 322.

then, of course, in a sense, yes, unity in plurality, as if you feel yourself a part of the Islamic umma" (F., I, Azerbaijan/Germany); "I feel myself related to these elements of art and consider it as my heritage, I consider myself as a part of the Muslim world and thus, this image for me is as part of my culture, my identity and my history. But it depends on knowledge, I guess" (F., II, Tatarstan/Turkey); "pride that this is Muslim art. You feel as if you are one with this... And you imagine these centuries... If you stay here and there is no one around, you can imagine that you are also, like a particle, that you also belong to this art" (F., II, Russia, 1).

For another respondent, the images remind of the greatness of Islamic civilization: "They reflect my religious identity and they remind me on the grandeur of the Islamic civilization" (M., II, Bosnia and Herzegovina). In the context of connection with identity, the awareness of belonging to the Islamic civilization and knowledge of its great achievements makes a person feel self-confidence. At the same time, the respondents emphasize the need to celebrate this identity and the importance of preserving it: "The images reflect the Islamic identity that represents our Islamic society, which inspires pride (fakhr, i'tizāz) and self-confidence, as a society that has no identity and history is a society with a weak structure" (M., II, Qatar); "The sense of these places, in addition to causing a feeling of comfort, supports the cultural concepts, the social and cultural relations of our society in a specific place, and makes me remember past experiences and achieve identity" (M., I, Iran, 1). And in preserving of this identity, the art plays a decisive role: "These works make us think about the great importance that Islamic art and architecture has had and should have as an important part of Islamic civilization, because without that civilization, Islam itself as a system of life would be incomplete" (M., II, Albania).

As mentioned above, at this level, the belonging to ethnic/national and religious identity is revealed. In the response of the survey participant from Yemen, we can see the reflection of this interaction of identities, and we understand which of them is given priority in this case: "My identity is religion and then the homeland. And the pictures link me to Islamic architecture as an Arab Muslim" (M., I, Yemen). In the same vein, a survey participant from Russia expressed the following opinion: "I think they (the images) talk about religious identity as supranational, suprasocial" (M., I, Russia, 2).

"Any sacred art is a language of symbols reflecting the philosophy of a particular religion. Therefore, of course, it reflects the identity of its adherents", - discussing the topic of art and identity, the respondent from Russia continues, - "Muslims create space around themselves through art, especially in temples, to feel at home, to focus on the remembrance of Allah and worship him, they should not be distracted by anything except the language of Islam, this is the part that reflects the identity of Muslims" (M., I, Russia, 1).

The respondents note that Islamic art was shaped by "the influence of Islam on decorative arts and architecture" (F., II, Iraq). The language of Islamic art is a harmonious combination of ethnic forms and

these images as we know that they are inspired by the same faith that prompted their creators to make such works of divine beauty” (M., II, Albania).

The respondents speak enthusiastically of the great past of Muslim civilization: “It reminds me of the great Muslim Empire times when Muslims had a lot of positive impact on a world in regard of intellectuality, scholarship, politics, social life, economics, architecture, everything, the great past of Muslims in wholistic way. They (images) give me an impression “wow”” (M., I, Ethiopia/Germany). The respondent of Palestinian origin from Spain, looking at the images suggests the following: “My admiration for the history of our Muslim ancestors increases, and how we dazzled the world with our fine Islamic art, which extends from East Asia to al-Andalus. This art reflects our Islamic civilization, whose impact and legacy continues to this day” (M., II, Palestine/Spain). Another respondent notes: “These pictures talk about the greatness of Islam and Muslims, the shrines of saints and the righteous, and the greatness of the Holy Quran” (M., I, Iraq, 2).

Islamic art reflects the Islamic identity of a person: just as Islamic religion shapes art, it constructs a person's identity: “They (art objects) say that Islam builds our identities, that it is the only way we can return to our essence” (F., I, Turkey). A deep involvement in religion is manifested in the feeling of an inseparable connection with Islamic art and the forms through which it conveys the religious truths: “I have a feeling that this is a part of my soul. Why? Because these pictures are directly connected with Islamic architecture and also with Arabic script, since I am a Muslim” (F., I, Kazakhstan); “Only the Word of Allah Almighty can give beauty to any ornament, any thought, any action! That's why they are dear to me, close to me!” (F., II, Kyrgyzstan, 2).

Looking at the images, the respondent is aware of his/her belonging to the Islamic civilization and feels himself/herself a part of it: “Like it's a part of Islamic culture. Like I'm inside the mosque or I'm back to the Islamic epoque” (M., II, Egypt/UAE). The participant from Lebanon feels same:

The golden period of the Arab Islamic state. These pictures are a mirror that reflects the culture and civilization of the period that witnessed its construction. They tell us about the high level of culture, architecture and art at that time. It is also evidence of the length of the “golden period” and the breadth of its geographical area, as evidenced by the diversity of the patterns shown by the pictures. Yes, I see this as a reflection in myself, first because I am part of this civilization, of the country that produced it and speaks its language (M., I, Lebanon/Russia).

The same attitude was expressed by other participants: “if you consider yourself a part of Islamic civilization,

Other participants also speak about this non-contradiction to sharī'a: "I see in it the extent of the ingenuity of the Muslim artist and architect in the past, as he was able to innovate many artistic and decorative methods, and he was keen to fill all the empty places with decorations, and he stayed away from human and animal drawings due to his hatred of their use in the Islamic religion, and from here came the artistic creativity" (M., I, Egypt, 1); "Elaborate architecture... an art for decoration to compensate for the prohibition of icons, statues and painting" (M., I, Iraq, 1).

Studying the answers of the respondents, we come to the conclusion that the national/ethnic identity of the survey participants is manifested primarily in their recognition of techniques, skills, motives, even materials and colors, that were traditionally used in their regions of origin. Looking at images of objects representing their region, the respondents note that these objects are close to them in a very special way: "Especially with regard to the drawings, where there are light blue and dark blue shades, this is part of Asian culture, specifically Asian architecture, therefore, probably, these paintings are the closest to me" (F., I, Kazakhstan); "We call it "shebeke/şəbəkə" this pattern is especially close to me, we have the Sheki caravanserai and all the windows are like that" (F., II, Azerbaijan).

On the other hand, some participants express their indifference to samples belonging to other regions. It becomes clear that these objects do not evoke any response in them, thus a strong connection with the region of origin becomes manifested: "The portal at the top evokes pride of the past of Central Asia. The hall of the mosque in the style of Byzantine architecture is not very close to me. I see my identity only in the architecture of our region. The Iranian portal, the Turkish mosque are simply beautiful and that's it" (M., I, Tajikistan). A respondent from Morocco says that when she looks at images of the monuments located in the Arab region or one that has experienced Arabic cultural influence, she feels "my Arab identity, Arabism (al-'urūba) and belonging. Arabism, al-Andalus, civilization and creative Cordoba" - at the same time, speaking of other monuments, she notes: "It's beautiful, but I didn't feel anything" (F., I, Morocco/Spain).

Having adopted and adapted the artistic traditions of ancient civilizations, using the achievements of previous masters, Islamic art has developed its own unique language, which makes it recognizable throughout epochs and regions. The Quranic message underlying the art has served to ensure that all the forms and techniques of this art reflect the fundamental concepts of religion. Just as Islamic art brings together objects from different regions, stretching from West to East, Muslims belonging to different ethnic groups and nationalities are united by a common religion. Thus, despite regional differences in motifs and techniques, colors and patterns, the representatives of Islam see their identity in samples of Islamic art, wherever they come from. A respondent from Albania commented on this: "We as Muslims certainly find ourselves easily in

interweaving of Islamic art and national culture is very strong" (M., I, Azerbaijan/Russia); "The Arabic writing is combined with some national ornaments, patterns and colors very well chosen" (M., I, Russia). This is how the respondent of Syrian origin describes this feature of Islamic art:

The color of the soil and the material used in the decoration, as if it represents the mixing of Islamic civilization with the local heritage; the blue and azure colors of the ceramics resemble the clear starry sky of Central Asia, and between the decoration and the Quranic verses, the mind wanders between the creativity of the artist and the miraculousness of the Creator (M., II, Syria/Russia).

In the same way speaks the respondent from Turkey: "Depending on the timeframe and geography in which they flourished, they reflect different architectural styles and types. The Islamic design and architecture are mixed with the characteristics of the desert in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Its Islamic design is knitted with desert yellow. In Alhambra Palace the Islamic architecture carries both Islamic and European architectural aesthetics with its style" (M., I, Turkey, 1).

Two of the most frequently repeated words in the answers are "pride" and "admiration", they are the feelings experienced by our respondents who are proud both of the past of their regions and of the past of the great Islamic civilization, they admire the work of the masters who made these objects. Here are some of the answers: "this is history, I am proud of it, I am pleased to look at it" (F., II, Uzbekistan); "when I look, I just admire" (M., I, Kyrgyzstan); "I admire the skill of the people who made them" (M., I, Kazakhstan); "beauty, greatness, pride, the rise of civilization, professionalism, leadership, light, brightness, motivation, I think about the renaissance, rebirth, primacy, excellence and greatness" (M., I, Uzbekistan); "I am overwhelmed with a sense of pride, as these objects are the part of our religion" (M., I, Dagestan, 1); "pride for the past of Central Asia" (M., I, Tajikistan); "the high level of art of the masters of the Muslim East" (M., II, Bashkortostan); "the greatness of Islam, the beauty and work of the creators" (F., II, Russia, 2); "very beautiful, it usually doesn't leave people unimpressed" (F., I, Azerbaijan/Germany).

Sometimes respondents emphasize the important peculiarity of Islamic art, which, constitutes in its consistence with sharī'a, and point to "strict monotheism as the ideological cornerstone for artistic creation"³: "This is the wealth of Islam, I am proud that there is art in Islam. In Islam, we know that portraits of people and animals are not used, but flowers, colors, different patterns are used, and it is the pride of Muslims and Islam that, without contradicting sharī'a, we use such beauty of art in our architectural buildings" (M., I, Kyrgyzstan).

3. Piotrovsky, M. (2000). *Earthy Art – Heavenly Beauty. Art of Islam*. Saint Petersburg: Slavia. P. 83.

in the subconscious finds a way to the consciousness of a person, we can understand how the modern Muslims see and recognize themselves in/through these objects, which can also reflect their spiritual and moral qualities. The thoughts in reference to the identity (both religious and ethnic) also find their expressions, thereby connecting this level to the others.

2. Community level

At this level, the sense of communion is actualized, the belonging to certain ethnic and religious group is revealed. Here association and affiliation occur: the person thinks in the categories like “others are like me”, “I am the same as them”. Being a Muslim, s/he finds himself/herself in fraternal bonds with his/her co-religionists, regardless of national and ethnic belonging. At the same time, we notice the expression of belonging to a certain nation or ethnic group. In general, these layers overlap with each other, so sometimes they are not easily distinguished and discerned.

In Islamic art, ethnic motifs and national traditions are harmoniously intertwined with the fundamental principles of Islamic doctrine, which seems obvious to the respondents. In their responses, survey participants mention their adherence to both religious and regional/national identities. As we know, in the course of its formation and development, the art of Islam absorbed regional traditions, preserved and developed them in line with the direction of the Islamic message. The variety of regional motifs in the art of Islam is imbued with the Quranic worldview, which served as a source of inspiration for the masters on the way to the formation of the basic principles of Islamic art, which is based on the concept of monotheism (tawḥīd). Thus, while maintaining a significant variety of forms, artistic techniques and skills, all works of Islamic art are united by the message of Islam, which contributes to a unified reading and understanding of this wealth of forms. Similarly, the representatives of different nationalities are united by a common religion, into a single community-umma. The statement of our respondent reflects this phenomenon: “I see in them a manifestation of the concept of unity in plurality, how we understand Islamic civilization, as the unity of Muslims, as one umma, but at the same time a huge number of different opinions, different people, different identities” (F., I, Azerbaijan/Germany). Thus, Islamic art contributes to the expression of the unity of the umma and the equality of all its members: “Such harmony, peace, such confidence comes that everything will be fine, such comfort, such good... I feel some kind of equality there, some kind of unity, such a great unity, as if everyone is equal” (F., I, Dagestan).

The art reveals to the respondents their religious and ethnic identity simultaneously: “I think that this is a product of a common religion and culture of which I am a part. I feel close to myself” (M., I, Turkey, 2). Many of them speak about the interweaving of ethnic and religious motifs in the art of Islam: “The

art are distinguished by their expediency and harmony: "The works are not only aesthetic, but also useful and functional". Thus, art allows a person to feel a sense of belonging to something greater, allows him/her to find a deep meaning in his/her existence: "The images tell me that the unity, subtlety and repetitive motifs of the multitude are actually parts of a single whole, and that each of us, even every creature, is a part of the overall picture" (F., I, Turkey).

One's own identity is seen reflected in works of art, and this identity can be, like a mosaic, made up of various components, it can absorb many cultures and civilizations, like Islamic art itself, which has accommodated the traditions of various regions where Islam has spread: "You can find a reflection of yourself. In the 7th-8th centuries, the Arabs encountered the culture of other countries; the ancient culture of Greece, Rome and Byzantium merged with Iranian culture. The interweaving of cultures is like a huge empire; several styles, skills, abilities and customs of other cultures are combined within a person" (M., I/high school, Palestine-Russia/Russia).

The interaction with the objects of art is a dialogue during which the respondent suddenly discovers that these objects directly address him, and only him alone: "I feel a sensation within me moving, a beautiful feeling, these inscriptions, I feel that they are addressing me through the words engraved on them, for me and me alone, with it comes a sensual, emotional dialogue between us that is more than rational" (M., II, Palestine/Spain).

During his/her interaction with Islamic art, a Muslim also testifies to the limitations of his/her rational mind and acknowledges the limit for human knowledge; a person comes to the comprehension that s/he is not able to know and understand everything, and it helps him/her to feel humility and get rid of those excessive aspirations, which can only harm without bringing any benefit or result: "The miniatures on the windows allow some light to penetrate to illuminate some of the geometric forms that the artist drew on the walls, as if saying that it is difficult to see everything, and if you see something, it is difficult to fully understand its meaning, and this applies to the creativity of the artist and the creation of the Creator" (M., II, Syria/Russia). Therefore, in the course of interacting with art, it is so often difficult for a person to explain what exactly s/he feels, since his/her feelings are so strong that they can neither be defined nor described: «Grand. Pure. Serene. It makes me feel nostalgic too. Like something from the past represented through art. It also relates to structure, patterns and design that is coherent, disciplined and colorful at the same time. It alludes to infinity and some sort of never-ending painful beauty. I am lost in the depth of it, overwhelmed with its essence but it's hard to define» (M., II, Bangladesh/UK, 2).

Thus, in the answers of respondents, we can see a reflection of their inner world, and when the hidden

feel such power, and even though I know that it is cold, I feel warmth from it and I feel it's like a fortress, as if it's something very strong, this power spreads to everything around, it is so covering, it is so pleasant, it is so strong and soft at the same time, and there is a lot of knowledge and depth" (F., I, Dagestan). But sometimes the responses reflect confusion, perhaps caused by the purported lack of coherence of all this diversity, which, as it expressed in the art object, could be a reflection of the historical problems that the survey participants are certainly aware of. Probably they find the reflection of these contradictions in the images, and the same respondent from Dagestan says the following about it: "I have such conflicting feelings when I look at the top and bottom, as if different people did it. There are a lot of contradictions, because there are different figures, a lot of different things are combined together, it's kind of beautiful for the eye, but there is definitely some kind of anxiety" (F., I, Dagestan). Perhaps in this regard, we can also cite here such a response, which seems to stand out from the rest, and, can be associated with social and economic processes that concern many people today: "Grandeur, splendour, *iṣrāʾ*" (M., II, Bangladesh/UK, 1).

Reflecting the contradictions of the modern life and the ambiguities of the previous eras, Islamic art suggests that attempts must be made to bring into consonance the contradictions that in fact may only seem so. The works of Islamic art allow a person who may have experienced some kind of identity crisis to find his own place in the umma, to establish a solid place in his religion among his fellow brothers, and although more on this topic will be considered below, however, the expression of the personal identity includes these components, so it was appropriate to indicate them here citing the following response:

Looking at the images, I don't think about typical Arab and Turkish world, because I grew up thinking or believing that Muslims are mostly Arabs and Turkish people – as it is the case in Western world or in Germany at least, also when I was traveling mostly to Arab countries. When I went to Central Asia, to Russia, I saw, wow, ok! I know that Islam was presented in the past of these countries, that it was a part of the history of lot of countries: Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkestan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran. In regards of identity of course, it gives me a completely different understanding of identity. If you grew up having an understanding that Muslim identity is mostly ruled by Turks and Arabs, you don't feel included because I'm not Arab and not Turkish guy. Seeing these different countries including architecture, helped me to feel more included into Muslim community, to understand the unity in diversity. Since that, I feel much more like being a part of, like a Muslim being (M., I, Ethiopia/Germany).

It should be added in this context that the art of Islam not only declares that there is a place for every Muslim in the umma, but also helps a person to see his/her connection with the Universe, since the works of Islamic

humanity, which is reflected in myself and reflects what is in myself to others" (M., I, Iraq, 2).

The psychological component and the interpretation of images associated with it, finds its expression in the following response:

I can feel my identity here: I take something from the world all the time, take-accumulate-digest... I create something of my own in it, and then distribute it back, and this process is very close to me... I feel such a breath of this picture (as in osteopathy - extension and flexion), as if there is an expansion and contraction, as if it constantly gives something and takes something – it does not take, but accepts - accepts, concentrates, turns into something good, something valuable, and distributes, it gives peace, it saturates (F., I, Dagestan).

Sometimes a person can find the reflection of his/her individual characteristics and their expression in Islamic art, especially in its artistic features, such as ornament, abstraction, geometricity: "As for my identity, perhaps what I am describing now is a reflection of everything that I see in these paintings: concentration, symmetry, focus and also detail" (F., I, post-Soviet region²). We suppose that in answers we can find an expression of person's current mental state and its needs: "The combination of architecture with nature. The green of the forest and the blue of the sky and sea. I feel fresh and I feel freedom" (M., I, Iran, 2).

The respondents directly connect the artistic features of Islamic art with spirituality, which is inherent in religion: "When I look at these images, I see in them symmetry, richness of colors, saturation, and along with it necessarily beauty - and all this is associated with spirituality, the spirituality of man, with the spirituality of Islam, these pictures give warmth, show beauty" (M., I, Kyrgyzstan). At the same time, the spirituality of art is associated with the spirituality of a human being who is guided on his/her life path by religious truths:

If I am a kind person, if I strive for goodness - I can see beauty in them - and in this, myself too; every person in his soul should have peace, goodness, wish the other what you wish yourself. As in a mirror you see a reflection; in the mirror every person has what is in the soul. If a person has some kind of negative inside, he can change this negative for good thanks to these drawings, he seemed to look in the mirror, after looking at these objects, he will already perceive the beauty, kindness of the world around him, he will know that everything around is beautiful, and if he has evil in his soul - this is not true, this is not fair (M., II, Dagestan).

Viewing images in most cases causes a person to feel trust, inner power, confidence, optimism and hope: "I

2. The respondent preferred not to mention the country of origin.

In the answers of survey participants, we can see the individual preferences of a person, which can indicate to us his/her inclinations and interests: "I feel happy, first because I see that the prevailing public taste was elegant and because I am a fan of this style of decoration and architecture" (M., I, Lebanon/Russia). We can also find out the dreams of a person, while s/he discovers his/her desires looking at the images: "They inspire, give you wings, this beauty, I want to make the interior of the house in oriental style" (F., II, Russia, 1). The images make a person want to get to know the original works of art better, stimulating the pursuit of knowledge and curiosity: "I want to go on a journey there, to look and absorb the beauty" (F., II, Russia, 1); "There is a desire to take a closer look at the objects of architecture, to go where they are with interest to get to know the Middle East better" (M., I, Bashkortostan/Russia). The interaction with objects also contributes to strong desire to study their history in more detail stimulating to seek knowledge: "Traveling around different countries and cities, we come across various buildings and structures that are world heritage sites, and when we see buildings on which the texts of the Holy Quran and the names of the prophets are written, being Muslims, it is interesting for us to study these objects and their history" (M., I, Dagestan, 1). The images remind a person of his/her interest in the constant study of the history and culture of the Muslim world: "I may be interested in distinguishing the styles used in ornaments and trying to determine their age and cultural significance" (F., II, Tatarstan/Turkey).

In the respondents' answers, we see the references to their personal history, their memories of childhood, their family and ancestors: "This picture reminds me of my grandmother's house in Tetouan, the roof is somewhat similar; reminds me of Ramadan and childhood days» (F., I, Morocco/Spain); «It could reflect my identity, my origins, my ancestors" (M., II, Egypt/UAE).

The individual history of a person, directly related to religion, is reflected in the response of the participant from Kyrgyzstan; we can assume that this woman sees her personality through the prism of her religious experience, and her religious experience passes through her personality, informing it with harmony and spirituality:

The connection with the history of Islam, with the history of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), with the history of our mosques, the sound of the Quran and my whole life, which is connected with all this. The whole path of the Prophet passes before my eyes... The huge mosques... the sound of azān... as Bilal reads it... the Companions of the Prophet are before my eyes... I see the whole history of Islam in these pictures (F., II, Kyrgyzstan, 1).

The respondent from Iraq also sees the reflection of religion in his personality: "These images reflect the true beauty of the true Islamic religion and what the Messenger Muḥammad brought from God to all

At this level we meet with people's personal impressions and their individual perception of Islamic art. The respondents convey to us their emotions and feelings that arise when they look at the images, they also indicate the associations that these objects evoke in them: "These pictures show elements of a unique architectural style that amazes and delights" (M., I/high school, Palestine-Russia/Russia). Looking at the art objects, a person is imbued with deep respect and admiration for the skill of those people who made them, and is able to feel the intentions of the masters and their faith: "This elegant lamp was made with great difficulty to depict the power of the Almighty through art. It makes you feel the depth of faith of its creator, who makes every effort to create an incomparable and deeply impressive piece of art" (M., II, Tajikistan/UK).

Most of the respondents noted the amazing feature of Islamic art to evoke in them a sense of calm and peace: "Immediately, when I looked at this picture, before my eyes appears the picture of how I am in the mosque: inner peace, a feeling of lightness, spiritual enrichment, closeness with the Almighty. The colors are very calming, as the recitation of the Qur'an calms, and the melody of stringed musical instruments" (F., II, Kyrgyzstan, 1). Thus, we can state that the respondents gain tranquility and serenity interacting with the objects of Islamic art: "They give me an impression of comfort and harmony" (M., I, Egypt, 1); "I certainly felt at home when I saw these pictures, because wherever I find these places, I feel that I am in my own place, and they give me reassurance (ṭam'anīna) and my soul possesses serenity (sakīna)" (M., I, Egypt, 2).

As we have seen, the objects of Islamic art give a person calm and serenity, they become a kind of haven and give a human being support, making people feel at home, in security. Two girls of mixed origin (Lebanon/Russia) tell us their stories:

From childhood, my father has told me about Islam, I have visited mosques and admired the ornaments, inscriptions and the beauty of geometric shapes on the walls. I studied Arabic and from early childhood I felt attached to this religion. The beauty of Islamic buildings inspires me. In the ornamentation of works of Islamic art, I see harmony. Viewing works of Islamic art inspires me, I am filled with strength and it always becomes good inside. I feel my unity with the faith of Islam and Islamic art (F., I (University student), Lebanon-Russia/Russia).

Her sister says:

These images evoke feelings of warmth and comfort. I feel affection looking at the ornament and Arabic script on the walls of Islamic buildings. Passing by the mosque or being in it, I get a feeling of calm and security. When I look at works of Islamic art, I am filled with inner warmth. I feel an identity with Islamic art and the people who follow this religion (F., I (high school), Lebanon-Russia/Russia).

- What do you think and feel when you look at these images?
- What do they tell you?
- Do you see yourself reflected in them, and them reflected in you?
- What do they say about your identity?

The respondents replied in Arabic, English, Russian and Turkish, and in written and through audio messages.

Our main goal was to identify and define what can be revealed and discovered from the process of the interaction of a person with Islamic art objects. We were interested in what directions each person's narrative would lead, while he or she is putting into words all the images and associations that fill his/her consciousness and is trying to convey feelings and emotions that overwhelm him or her while looking at the images.

A qualitative analysis of the data made it possible to conclude that when a person interacts with art and perceives its visual forms, the processes are activated in the inner world that actualize deep meanings inherent in him or her and bring certain ideas and images to the surface of his/her consciousness. Based on the findings of the survey, the following four levels were identified on which a (Muslim) person interacts with (Islamic) art:

- Individual level;
- Community level;
- Ingroup-outgroup level;
- A man and the Transcendent.

ISLAMIC ART AND MUSLIMS: THE LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

1. Individual level

At this level, we witness a person's conversation with himself/herself, which brings us closer to understanding the inner world of a person, his/her spiritual searches and aspirations, hopes and regrets. In his/her answer to the questions of the survey, a person describes his/her personal inner experiences of varying intensity, we learn about his/her thoughts and emotions and discover how self-awareness and self-determination occur in each specific case. Resonating with an external object (the images of art objects), something that is of particular importance for a person (whether at the present moment, or on an ongoing basis) comes to the fore. In the course of voicing out his/her impressions or writing answers, the individual characteristics of a person, as well as his/her unique preferences, become apparent. Interaction with objects of art helps a person to better understand himself or herself, to define his/her ideals, and probably to find answers to his or her own questions or to start asking new ones.

an object of art, during which a person comprehends certain religious and spiritual meanings that art tries to transmit to him/her; through its material forms, art actualizes and activates those ideas and notions that are already present in person's consciousness and subconscious and at the same time it can give a person an idea of what s/he does not yet know, pointing him/her to the infinity of the process of cognition.

THE SURVEY AND ITS OBJECTIVES

Islamic art, being a kind of background for both religious and everyday manifestations of human life, contributes to the actualization of the discursive tradition, one can say that it accompanies it, being to some extent a part of it, a part which constructs a person's identity, helps his/her self-determination and self-awareness, and also stimulates the manifestation of this identity, helping its formation and preservation. Interacting with the objects of Islamic art, a person is thus in constant contact with the Islamic religion, with its meanings and truths, which are sense-organizing for his/her Muslim identity.

In order to understand how a person belonging to the Islamic discursive tradition (Talal Asad's concept) perceives the objects of Islamic art today, a survey was conducted in which participants were asked open-ended questions. 58 people took part in the survey, they are Muslims residing in/originated from Muslim countries and those with significant portion of Muslim population, including Albania, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, Turkey, Yemen; the countries of the post-Soviet space, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan; Russian Federation, including Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Tatarstan; some of respondents grew up or currently reside in other countries, such as Germany, Malaysia, Spain, Turkey, UAE, UK and Ukraine.

The professional backgrounds of the participants of the survey include history, philology, Islamic and Arabic studies, culturology and sociology, pedagogy, law, social activities, psychology (including psychosomatics and energy therapy), art, architecture, economics, medicine, engineering, journalism, theater, etc. In accordance with age, the survey participants were divided into two groups: up to 40 years old – the first group (I), after 40 years old – the second group (II); there are also high school students, undergraduate students and PhD. students among the respondents.

An interdisciplinary approach was applied in this research. Primarily we used the methodological tools developed in cultural studies, art studies, anthropology and psychology. Several images of Islamic art, including fragments of architectural structures and interior items were sent to survey participants. They were asked to respond to the following questions:

INTRODUCTION

Islamic art plays a significant role in every Muslim person's life, whether s/he is conscious of it, or even does not think about its presence in his/her life. Regardless of a person's origin, place of residence, age, profession and occupation, a Muslim can directly interact with the objects of Islamic art in his/her daily life. This interaction occurs for example when a Muslim prays at home on a prayer rug, no matter where this rug was made, or when a Muslim reads the Quran's muṣḥaf, even if it was printed by a modern printing house. On the walls of a Muslim's house, one can often find calligraphic writings, with Qur'anic verses or ḥadīths, as well as the decorative paintings or pictures with Islamic content made by contemporary artists or by mass production. Outside home, if a person lives in historically Muslim region, s/he can meet with the historical examples of Islamic art: walking along the streets of a city, a person sees monumental works of architecture, such as mosques, palaces, mausoleums, with epigraphic inscriptions engraved in stone or made in mosaics. While in a culturally different region, a Muslim may encounter works of Islamic art in the museums' collections, or even while visiting various art exhibitions and festivals of contemporary artists who are inspired by Islamic meanings. Visiting the mosque, whether in order to pray nawāfil staying alone in front of his/her Creator, or on Friday, to pray ṣalāt al-jum'a, when the inner faith takes on a collective expression, a Muslim finds himself/herself surrounded by the presence of different manifestations of Islamic art.

Islamic art objects are filled with deep meaning, they are full of religious content, they convey certain information to a person, causing a certain spiritual state in him/her. Material forms, geometric ornaments, patterns of arabesques, epigraphic inscriptions, serve as a reminder of the religious truths that a Muslim person perceives while being filled spiritually looking at the objects of Islamic art. Thus, for the Muslim, art objects are both a background against which his/her life and religious rituals take place, and a source of religious knowledge that is transmitted to a person, leading to a certain state of mind, causing certain thoughts, feelings and emotions. As for contemporary objects of Islamic art, they are able to broadcast the truths inherent in Islamic faith, perhaps in a different from traditional way, however, they find an opportunity to convey the Islamic message in a way that contemporary Muslims are able to receive. The perception of Islamic art and the interpretation of its material forms depend on person's experience, religiosity, spirituality as well as on his/her psychological characteristics.

What does the art mean for a human being? What kind of relationship has a person with art objects, and how the interaction between them occurs? Islamic art seems to be a background against which a person lives his/her habitual life and performs the rituals of Islamic faith and at the same time the objects can play a role of subjects while they interrupt usual life's routine provoking meaningful inner reflection and leading to a state of mindfulness. Regardless of the depth of perception, there is a dialogue between a person and

Islamic Art and Muslims: the levels of engagement

Adilia Iulgasheva¹

Abstract

In order to understand how a person belonging to the Islamic discursive tradition perceives the objects of Islamic art today, a survey was conducted in which participants were asked open-ended questions. More than 50 people took part in the survey, majority of them are Muslims residing in/originated from Muslim countries and those with significant portion of Muslim population. Our main goal was to identify and define what can be revealed and discovered from the process of the interaction of a person with Islamic art objects. A qualitative analysis of the data made it possible to conclude that when a person interacts with art and perceives its visual forms, processes are activated in the inner world that actualize deep meanings inherent in him or her and bring certain ideas and images to the surface of his consciousness. Based on the findings of the survey, the four levels were identified on which a (Muslim) person interacts with (Islamic) art.

Keywords: Islamic art perception, Islamic art and Muslims, levels of engagement with Islamic art.

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