

FROM THE PRESIDENT

HIAA President, Emine Fetvacı, shares news about the organization as well as upcoming initiatives and events.

Dear Colleagues,

I am hoping this newsletter finds you all well and able to enjoy some quiet in the summer months. I must start by acknowledging that this continues to be an exceptionally trying year for our community. Some of our members in the Middle East face escalating violence and uncertainty due to the devastating war in Gaza following the horrific events of October 7th. The ramifications of the war were also felt on U.S. university campuses, where war related protests were met, in some cases, with violent and unprecedented suppression. Along with our students, we have been placed in the middle of difficult debates about Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and the limits of free speech, which have been weaponized by forces outside of the university. Here is hoping that the coming months bring peace, and that we emerge from these difficult days stronger as a community, with a reinvigorated commitment to our intellectual mission.

In the first half of 2024 we organized a significant number of activities geared towards coming together as a scholarly community. We hosted two extremely successful online workshops. In the previous HIAA newsletter I had already thanked Elizabeth Dospěl Williams who organized the "Researching and Publishing Provenance Information for Islamic Art" workshop and her colleagues who led presentations during the event. The workshop was attended by more than 100 people. This was followed in April by yet another successful workshop, organized by Yael Rice, on "Alternatives to a Faculty or Curatorial Career for the Islamic Art History PhD," which featured a panel of speakers that reflected a number of career trajectories and choices: Nancy Micklewright, Amanda Hannoosh Steinberg, and Wen Wen. The interest in the topic was obvious from the large number of attendees, and the many questions the panelists received from the audience. (continues on page 2).

About HIAA

The Historians of Islamic Art Association (HIAA) is a non-profit scholarly organization dedicated to the study and teaching of the art, architecture, and archaeology of Islamic cultures. We facilitate communication and cooperation among scholars, students, and other professionals in these fields.

HIAA Membership Benefits

Members have access to the Member Directory and recordings of virtual HIAA events, as well as the opportunity to participate in symposia and workshops sponsored by HIAA, and to compete for travel and research grants. Your generous support helps fund the latter, which have proven essential for junior scholars doing exciting new research in the field.

Join or renew your membership here.

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Submissions (2025)

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IN THIS ISSUE

FROM THE PRESIDENT Emine Fetvacı... 1
NEW BOOKS IN ISLAMIC ART Conversation with the author The Brush of Insight: Artists and Agency at the Mughal Court, Yael Rice in conversation with Priyani Roy Choudhury... 4
NEW EXHIBITIONS IN ISLAMIC ART Conversation with the curator Prayer and Transcendence, Sumru Krody in

conversation with Sabiha Göloğlu... 6
NOTES FROM THE FIELD Marie-Laure Derat and Mikael Muehlbauer... 9
Member News... 12
Exhibitions Curated... 12
Recent Publications... 13
Dissertations Completed... 14

*(continued from page 1)* The HIAA Board is grateful to the panel members for their generosity and openness with the participants at the workshop. It was a huge success thanks to their willingness to share their experiences and give generous advice to our attendees. I would also like to thank Yael Rice of course, and HIAA Secretary Emily Neumeier and HIAA Board Student Representative Srinanda Ganguly for their help in organizing and publicizing both workshops. Our members will have seen the call for online workshop proposals that Emily Neumeier emailed to all HIAA members. Please consider taking advantage of this opportunity to create spaces where members can engage in conversations on pressing issues for the discipline and our community.

In between these two workshops, HIAA had a strong presence at the 2024 CAA Annual Conference in Chicago, where we sponsored the well-attended panel "Fashioning the Modern In and Beyond the Middle East: Photography as a Technology of Expression," organized by Mira Xenia Schwerda and Erin Hyde-Nolan. The panel featured excellent papers and a rigorous Q&A session afterwards. Following upon the success of the 2023 Majlis hosted at the IFA, with the help of Prof. Finbarr Barry Flood, the 2024 Majlis was generously hosted by the Art Institute of Chicago. We are grateful to Madhuvanti Ghosh, Leslie Wilson, Yilin Yang, and Salimeh Hosseini of the Art Institute for their generosity in hosting the Majlis, and also for welcoming a small group of HIAA members for an unforgettable object viewing session in their study rooms. The Majlis panel of four papers was followed by a reception attended by about 40 members who continued the enthusiastic discussions in response to the papers, and enjoyed each other's company.

The HIAA Board has also been busy these last six months with administrative housekeeping related to our institutional and legal status. We have been working on formulating the important documents which will all need to be in place before incorporation, such as charters for Finance and Governance Committees, and also a revised Investment Policy, a Whistleblower Policy, and a Conflict of Interest Policy. These will be presented to the membership for approval after they are finalized and the Board has voted on them.

During its Spring 2024 meeting, the HIAA Board decided to make some changes to our usual operations. We have decided that we will only be putting out one newsletter a year, to appear in the early summer. The winter newsletter will be replaced by a more formal annual report which will be shared with all HIAA members. This decision

reflects the HIAA Board's commitment to transparency and institutionalization and will also help to streamline the Board's activities. We also decided to implement a change to the Majlis gathering. When the HIAA Majlis was first introduced, we neither had a regular HIAA-Sponsored Panel at CAA nor did we have the Biennial Symposium. Given that these two events have now become regular parts of HIAA's planning, offering our junior colleagues plenty of opportunities to share their work, we have decided to hold the Majlis only in the years when we do not have a Symposium. At the Symposium, we will pay particular attention to including up-and-coming colleagues, and indeed the 2025 Biennial Symposium's line-up was selected with that in mind. Colleagues have also expressed concern that the Majlis coincides with CAA conference sessions they want to attend, and we would like to have robust audiences at the Majlis. So, beginning this next academic year, we will plan to host not only the HIAA-Sponsored CAA panel but also to organize a reception at CAA the way other learned societies do. This arrangement will give our community a way to get together, and our colleagues whose papers are accepted for the HIAA-Sponsored CAA panel will have a broader audience than they would in an off-site venue.

As always, the publications, exhibitions, finished dissertations and awards listed in the members' news section of our newsletter are a source of great pride for our community. Please continue to share your accomplishments with us, and make sure to take a look at the ones included in this issue of the newsletter.

## AWARDS

The December 2023 Grabar Post-Doctoral Grant was shared between two members. Dr. Matthew Elliott Gillman will conduct research in Venice for his book project "The San Marco Turquoise," an Abbasid era bowl kept in the San Marco treasury. As Dr. Gillman states in his application, the book will focus on three trajectories: "the unusual life of this single object over nearly 1,200 years; the ways in which scientific and connoisseurial knowledge have often stood in opposition, even when they could be allies; and the ambivalent place of glass and gemstones in the hierarchy of art history." Dr. Andrea Luigi Corsi will use his Grabar Post-Doctoral Grant to fund a residency at the University of York and at the Louvre Museum in Paris to further his book project, "Early Islamic Stucco Architectural Decoration in Greater Mesopotamia, Iran and Central Asia, c. 8th-9th century CE," which examines the developments of 8th and 9th-century *(continues on page 3)*

*(continued from page 2)* stucco work through analysis of 15 sites spanning from Northern Syria to Central Asia.

The December 2023 Grabar Travel Award was also split, between Özlem Yıldız (Temple University), who traveled to Lyon, France for the CIHA Conference to deliver her paper titled "Gateway to the Divine: Materiality in the Illustrated 'Tales of the Prophets' from the Sixteenth Century" and Layah Ziaii-Bigdeli (UC Irvine) who traveled to Chicago for the CAA Conference to deliver a paper on Sasanian and early Islamic material culture.

I would like to express my gratitude to the colleagues who served alongside me on the selection committee, Alex Dika Seggerman (Rutgers-Newark) and Alexander Brey (Wellesley College). We have now completed two years serving together on the Grabar Committee, and I gratefully pass the torch to Alex Dika Seggerman who will chair the committee for the next two years. We are also grateful to Sahar Hosseini and Abbey Stockstill who have agreed to serve on the Grabar Committee.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Elections: Our members will have seen HIAA Secretary Emily Neumeier's email calling for self-nominations for the upcoming HIAA Elections—these were due by July 15th to the Nominations Committee Chair Nancy Micklewright. This fall we will be electing members to the following positions:

- Treasurer (3-year term)
- Webmaster & news editor (3-year term)
- Social media manager (3-year term)
- H-Islamart editor (2-year term)

For graduate students and their advisors, note that later in the summer the HIAA Secretary will send a separate announcement calling for applications for the Graduate Student Representative position on the HIAA board, a 2-year term that will also be on the ballot.

As mentioned above, the Nominations Committee is being chaired by Nancy Micklewright, who is joined by past HIAA Board members Fatima Quraishi and Sinem Casale. We are grateful to all three for taking on this important task for our institution. You will receive an email ballot in your inboxes in the fall, so please be on the lookout for those.

HIAA Symposium: The HIAA Symposium 2025 Selection Committee has now selected the individual papers and

pre-formed panels that will be featured at our Biennial Symposium on April 3-5, 2025, to be hosted by Boston College and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The program for the symposium will be forthcoming shortly on the HIAA Website. In the meantime, I am grateful to Laura Weinstein, Nadirah Mansour, Dana Sajdi, Aysin Yoltar-Yildirim, Alexander Brey, and Rami Alafandi for serving with me on the paper selection committee. We received a large number of excellent applications, and look forward to a vibrant symposium.

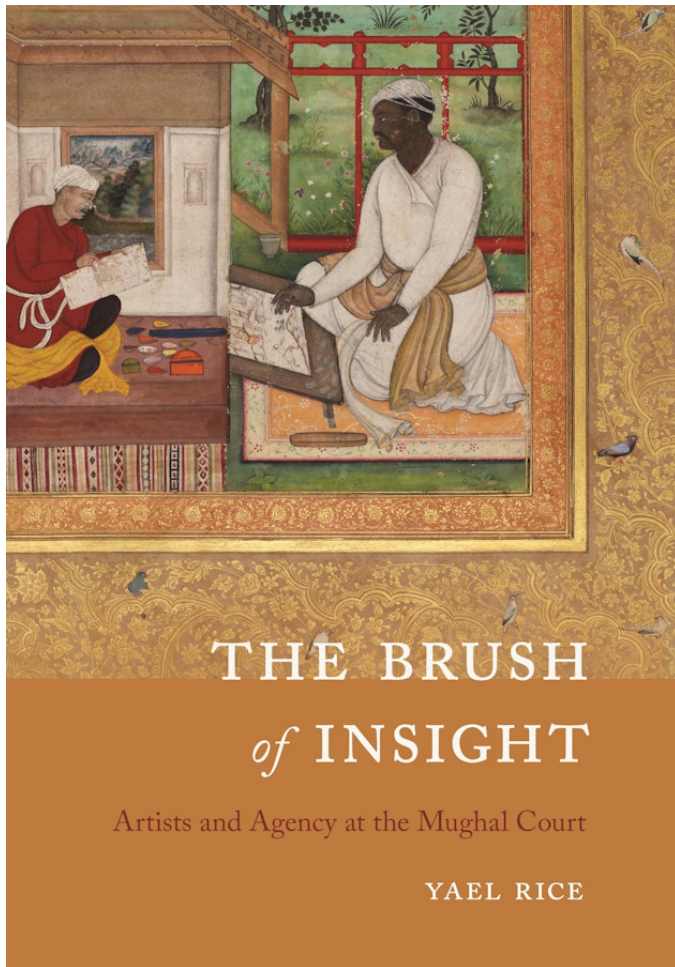
With my warmest wishes, and with thanks for your continued support of HIAA,

*Emine Fetvacı, President*  
*Norma Jean Calderwood University Professor of Islamic and Asian Art*  
*Art, Art History and Film Department*  
*Boston College*

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## NEW BOOKS IN ISLAMIC ART

**Yael Rice, *The Brush of Insight: Artists and Agency at the Mughal Court* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2023).**



**A conversation between Priyani Roy Choudhury (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and author Yael Rice (Amherst College).**

**Priyani Roy Choudhury [PRC]:** Your book is called *The Brush of Insight: Artists and Agency at the Mughal Court*. The title astutely provides some of the key themes of the book—materiality, vision, artists, and their agency. The book presents us with an archaeology of the Mughal imperial manuscript workshop in the late sixteenth-early seventeenth centuries. I use the word “archaeology” deliberately because you not only offer a historical context but excavate the structures of knowledge—the “episteme”. And the result is an incredibly detailed and textured matrix that centers around “process”—of book

making, illustrations, identity formation, the construction of sovereignty, and even style as process. You make a strong case against a top-down approach. Why was it so important to make that case?

**Yael Rice [YR]:** Thank you for that very thoughtful and rich description; it really captures so much of what I was hoping that the book would do. I advocate for a more “grassroots” approach to the study of Mughal illustrated manuscripts and the imperial manuscript workshop, in part to push against the emperor-centric framework that characterizes much previous scholarship. It’s of course easy to credit the emperors as the masterminds behind Mughal painting and book-making for at least two of them—namely Akbar and Jahangir. But we should recognize the rhetorical thrust of these statements; they really tell us much more about Mughal kingship than they do about the Mughal manuscript workshop. *The Brush of Insight* reverses the standard paradigm: rather than show how the Mughal sovereigns forged the manuscript workshop and its painting style, it instead attempts to show how the manuscript workshop and its painting style constructed Mughal sovereignty.

**PRC:** Another “paradigm” that you destabilize is that of the “master painter”. What led you to that?

**YR:** In many ways, the Mughal manuscript workshop lends itself to the “master painter” model. We know, for example, that the emperors singled out individual painters for honorific titles and other distinctions. We also have Abu'l Fazl’s ranking of 17 of the leading late sixteenth-century Mughal painters, preserved in his *A’in-i Akbari* (Regulations of Akbar; completed 1597–8). But the operations of the Mughal manuscript workshop of the late sixteenth century, in particular, relied on the collaboration of painters. This was the case in part because the workshop was charged to produce a very large number of highly illustrated manuscripts; assigning two to three painters to complete each illustration likely served to expedite the production process. The method of collaborative production also ensured that the workshop had a system in place to train newcomers. I argue that these collaborative processes were both technical *and* social, and that they helped to give rise to a collective—one could even say “corporate”—sense of self that runs counter to the “master artist” model that is so central to the foundations of our discipline.

**PRC:** This intervention is crucial in highlighting how Mughal paintings from this period also connected teaching, learning, and creating, as you have demonstrated with

various examples in the book. Through your chapters, the Mughal artist emerges as a negotiator and a mediator within a network of “Vision”, “Knowledge”, “Creation” and “Performance”. For example, you carve out a clear relationality between: Gaze—Perception—Observation—Physiognomy—Portraits—Knowing—Knowledge. “Vision”, like the other themes is multifaceted and as you demonstrate, interconnected. You discuss inner and outer visions, seeing, being seen, and making visible. One of the core philosophies that the Mughals drew upon was Suhrawardi’s Illuminationism. Could you discuss the role that played in the constructions of Mughal sovereignty?

**YR:** Thanks for this question, and for making these very salient connections. As other scholars have shown—here I’m thinking of the late Catherine Asher’s excellent essay “A Ray from the Sun: Mughal Ideology and the Visual Construction of the Divine”—Suhrawardi’s philosophy of illumination enjoyed some popularity at the Mughal court, especially among the emperors’ chief ideologies. Abu’l Fazl, for example, wove some of the key threads of illuminationism into his descriptions of Mughal sovereignty in his *Akbarnama* (History of Akbar). These proclivities are also in evidence in the emperors’ fixation with terminology and imagery dealing with light, which was intended to demonstrate the Mughals’ proximity to the Divine, the ultimate source of illumination. Illuminationism was not perceived merely as an abstract construct, but rather as a political ethic that the Mughal emperors were believed (or were claimed) to embody. It is in part because illuminationism is concerned with the nature of reality and the role that vision plays in obtaining knowledge of that reality that images and the apprehension of images—in the form of manuscript paintings and portrait coins, for example—came to enjoy such prominence within the context of Mughal court ritual at this time.

**PRC:** Thank you for referring to Professor Asher’s essay, because it has been crucial to my own approach to Mughal architecture. You draw out and concretize several threads that were implicit in her essay. That’s one of the reasons why reading your book provided so much satisfaction. Is there anything else you would like to highlight?

**YR:** I mainly want to thank you for these wonderful questions, and to express how excited I am to learn more about your work on Fatehpur Sikri and Mughal architecture more broadly! Although I mainly identify as a “manuscript person,” I seriously doubt the Mughals viewed

the world in such terms. The making of books and the built environment were closely connected enterprises, and I hope that means you and I will have many more conversations in the future!

**PRC:** Those are kind words. Thank you. There are several aspects of your book that have resonated with my research, the concept of novelty that you discuss, for instance. Fatehpur Sikri has often been seen at the end of long arc of Sultanate architecture or at the beginning of a Mughal one. But it was certainly novel and performative. And as you have aptly demonstrated, approaches need to be reimagined to access how several different agents enabled grand Mughal projects, whether manuscripts or architecture and constructed the ways through which Mughal emperors chose to be perceived.

**Priyani Roy Choudhury** is a PhD candidate at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Between 2013 and 2016, she was a doctoral fellow at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin as part of the “Connecting Art Histories in the Museum: The Mediterranean and Asia 400-1650” research program, established by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut (KHI) and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Her ongoing project on Fatehpur Sikri is a close engagement with the fashioning of the imperial city as it unfolds through its architecture, spatial arrangement, and visual program. She is currently based in New Delhi.

## NEW EXHIBITIONS IN ISLAMIC ART - CONVERSATION WITH THE CURATOR

*Sabiha Göloğlu, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellow (Global) at Universität Hamburg and the University of Michigan, talks to Sumru Krody, curator, about "Prayer and Transcendence", George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum, Washington DC, February 18 -July 1, 2023.*

**Sabiha Göloğlu:** Sumru, would you please talk about your area of expertise and the motivation behind this exhibition?

**Sumru Belger Krody:** Textiles from the late antique period and from the Islamic Lands are my general area of research and expertise. My specific research interest is the relationship between textile-making techniques, textile structures created by these techniques, and their relation to the artistic, social, and economic power of textiles. I work at the Textile Museum in Washington DC – a 100-year-old institution – our collections focus on textiles from Asia and Africa as well as indigenous textiles from the Americas.

Because textiles are fragile and light-sensitive, they do not stay on permanent display, which means we share our collections through thematic exhibitions that change every six months or so. We always seek ways to display textiles around meaningful themes that can resonate with our diverse audience. And that is how *Prayer and Transcendence* came about. We wanted to display our prayer carpets, and look deeper into the iconography. The exhibition explored, through design elements seen on prayer carpets, how and why earthbound/tangible imagery became metaphors for transcendental, or spiritual, concepts and how this iconography is interpreted in different artistic traditions over time and across regions. So, prayer carpets were the objects we used to tell the story about prayer and transcendence.

**SG:** *Prayer and Transcendence* included three thematic sections: The Straight Path, Heavenly Threshold, and Divine Light. Would you please explain the underlying logic behind these themes?



Prayer carpet; Türkiye, western Anatolia, Gördes; 19th century. The Textile Museum Collection R34.3.2. Acquired by George Hewitt Myers prior to 1929. Courtesy of The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum.

**SBK:** Each section is related to a Koranic *sura*: “Straight Path” to Al-Fatiha, “Heavenly Threshold” to al-Hajj, and “Divine Light” to al-Nur.

### THE STRAIGHT PATH

*You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help. Guide us on the straight path, the path of those who have received your grace; ... (Al-Fatiha (1:5-7))*

In this section we wanted to discuss Islamic prayer (*namaz*, *salah*), its centrality to the Islamic belief, its practice, and sacred or secular objects associated with it. Because we have diverse audiences, we wanted to be inclusive to those who are unfamiliar with Islam.

We explored the prayer carpet’s universality in terms of its use and certain design aesthetics, but also how diverse Islamic cultures make this textile their own aesthetically.



Photo by Cara Tavor/The George Washington University

This allowed for further exploration of the fact that the Islamic world encompasses many cultures and subcultures. The term “Islam” is commonly used in a monolithic and all-encompassing sense. The truth is that what has existed and still exists are many, many Islamic cultures and Islamic arts.

#### HEAVENLY THRESHOLD

*Allah will admit those who believe and work righteous deeds, to Gardens beneath which rivers flow ... (Al-Hajj 22:23)*

Here, we illustrated the concept of Paradise as a verdant walled garden and its entry as an arched gateway. We discuss how this image can be also interpreted as a niche and by extension as a mihrab in a mosque, thus tying it to the prayer:

Floral and vegetal decorations and arches are the two fundamental design concepts interpreted as literal and symbolic depictions of Paradise and they appear on prayer carpets.

#### DIVINE LIGHT

*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. ... (Al-Nur 24:35)*

The third section focused on the lamp motif as the image of divine light that is represented frequently on prayer carpets.

Some works of Islamic art allude symbolically to the heavenly world in ways that are not always obvious or primary to the work's perceived purpose or function. The object's function may consequently reveal symbolic references to God or to Paradise. Prayer carpets illustrate this point supremely. Besides the arched niche that symbolizes the heavenly threshold to the Paradise, the motif of a glass mosque lamp with rounded belly and flared top signifies the divine light, and by extension the presence of God.

**SG:** What can you say about the iconography of prayer carpets? Also, can you please elaborate on the shared vocabulary between Islamic prayer carpets and Jewish Torah Ark curtains?

**SBK:** We identified the niche/arch, the lamp hanging from the arch, and the water pitcher as three distinct designs. For example, the arch, flower, and hanging lamp motifs found on prayer carpets across cultures form a close visual analogy, but the syntactic organization of this visual vocabulary in each culture remains distinct. Because of that, 17th-century Turkish prayer carpets look different from an Indian Mughal one.

A common vocabulary provided a visual link between the Muslim communities and facilitated comprehensive and transferrable religious communication.

Strong ties between Islamic communities nurtured by trade as well as religious duties, most importantly of the hajj, allowed a common iconography for the prayer carpet to be established, retained, and recognized in varying degrees, in spite of great cultural differences and changes. In the "Divine Light" section of the exhibition we explored similarities in meaning and design between Islamic prayer carpets and Jewish Torah curtains (*parochet*). The *parochet* are placed in front of the Torah ark where Torah scrolls were kept in a synagogue or temple. We included two *parochets* in the exhibition and both have arch designs on them and above it the Hebrew inscription from Psalms 118:20: "This is the Gate of the Lord: Through it the Righteous Enter." Additionally, they have hanging lamps inside the arch, very similar to mosque lamps, not only in their shape but also their meaning as Divine Light. If there were no inscriptions on these carpets, one might have assumed a place in a mosque instead. This points to a fluid iconography in the eastern Mediterranean in the early modern period.

**SG:** What are the different interpretations of the arch/mihrab, tree, lamp, and pitcher motifs in prayer carpets? How can prayer carpets be transcendental?

**SBK:** The imagery is all earthbound, we see it all around us and this was true when these carpets were woven centuries ago. But with people's faith, the images became metaphors for transcendental, or spiritual, concepts. You do not see a lamp hanging in your house lighting your living room as a metaphor for Divine Light, but you do in a mosque or on a textile you are praying on. A pitcher represented on a prayer carpet is a metaphor for your duty to be ritually clean, to do *wudhu*, ablution. All these objects appear in our daily life and we use them for mundane functions, but we also place meanings to them in appropriate times and places that allow us to try to experience Divine being, Allah, beyond the normal or physical level.

**SG:** Historically speaking, carpet studies and collecting have different trajectories than those of other media. Would you please tell us about your target audience and the visitors who eventually made it to the exhibition?

**SBK:** Until now the trajectory of studying carpets in academic circles has been uneven, but that is changing. Both textile studies in general and carpet studies in specific are actually an important part of studying social, economic, and artistic life of humankind. In terms of audiences, anyone who is interested in art and or culture of people across the globe and across time, and anyone who is interested in the textile arts and experiencing how textiles have been an integral part of life is welcomed.

We are situated in Washington DC, so we have a very diverse population, which is enriched by the numerous embassies in the city, as well as numerous NGOs. Some come to experience their country of origin or learn about their heritage. Others come to appreciate art, yet others come to admire the workmanship and technology of these works of art.

**SG:** Many thanks for sharing your insights about this exhibition for the HIAA newsletter.

**SBK:** It was my pleasure and thank you for allowing me to re-live the exhibition. Unfortunately, exhibitions are very often ephemeral: they are up and then they come down in very short succession.

**Sabiha Göloğlu** is a recipient of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship (Global) for her research project at Universität Hamburg and the University of Michigan. She was formerly a postdoctoral university assistant at the University of Vienna's Department of Art History and a CAHIM (Connecting Art Histories in the Museum) fellow of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz and the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin. She holds a PhD in Archaeology and History of Art from Koç University in Istanbul (2018). She received her MA in Architectural History (2011) and Bachelor of Architecture (2009) from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara.



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

*Marie-Laure Derat, director of research at CNRS (Orient et Méditerranée, Paris) and Mikael Muehlbauer, Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellow in Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art discuss Franco-Ethiopian excavations at Maryam Nazret in Tigray, Ethiopia.*

Until 1959, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, that is the Miaphysite Christianity present in the Ethiopian highlands of East Africa since the 4th century, was under the Episcopal See of Alexandria (the Coptic Church). Although, it is well known that Ethiopia's metropolitan archbishops were elected from Egypt, the precise location of the episcopal seat was unknown until the 2014 identification of Maryam Nazret, a ruined building in southern Tigray.

Although not the metropolis for the episcopacy's entire duration, Maryam Nazret has been shown by our excavations to be active from its 1150 CE founding, to its abandonment around the fifteenth century. While the stepped platform utilizes the elite local Aksumite style of the region, the cathedral generally conforms to the prevailing construction style of the Fatimid Caliphate. This is no surprise, since the archbishop was Egyptian, and the church was likely built, in part, by craftsmen from there who accompanied the archbishop. Such exchanges are well documented, as with the Fatimid-era Muslim community buried in the cemetery of Bilet (Kwiha)<sup>1</sup> as well as a fragment of a Fatimid-mosque (likely part of the mihrab hood) held in the church of Wwuro Cherqos until 2013.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas a surface survey of the ruin was published in 2020 by members of the (future) archaeological team (led by Marie-Laure Derat, Francois-Xavier Fauvelle and Hiluf Berhe)<sup>3</sup> the site hosted two seasons of excavation in 2018 and 2020, just prior to the Ethiopian Civil War (2020-2022). With the permission of the Ethiopian federal, regional, and church authorities our two campaigns had the added benefit of employing the local populace.



Francois Xavier-Fauvelle and Romain Mensan assessing the bedrock under Nazret's foundations (Photo by Marie-Laure Derat)

Although the publication of our entire archaeological work is currently under review, this fieldwork note intends to introduce Nazret to a wider North American audience.

The site of Nazret consists of four (out of five) standing sanctuaries that remain from the ancient cathedral, all located on the east end of a raised platform, now buried by debris. Dotted in front (and around the contemporary town) are a number of spoliated monolithic pillars. While the basement clearly utilizes the prevailing Aksumite (Ancient Ethiopian) building style (made of stepped and recessed dressed stones), the chambers that sit atop it are made of small squared ashlar layers layered like mud-bricks in lime mortar. Constructed in a manner identical to then-contemporary Fatimid buildings (mosques, mausolea, churches, etc.), four of the (original five) chambers are domed cubes, consisting of cupolas atop octagonal transitional zones over angled boards. The center chamber, befitting its status as the high altar, is a great apse conch, opened on the west with a great four-center pointed (keel) arch. The Cathedral was once massive, measuring an estimated 22 meters wide and 30 meters long – a nearly unprecedented feat in the late Fatimid period, dwarfing every church in Egypt built after the Islamic conquests. That construction with brick (at Nazret the “bricks” are tiny squared ashlar) in lime mortar beds was (essentially)

<sup>1</sup> Julien Loiseau, “Retour à Bilet: Un cimetière musulman médiéval du Tigray oriental (Inscriptiones Arabicae Aethiopiae I),” *Bulletin d'Études orientales* 67 (2020): 59–97.

<sup>2</sup> Mikael Muehlbauer, “From Stone to Dust: The Life of the Kufic Inscribed Frieze of Wwuro Cherqos in Tigray, Ethiopia,” *Muqarnas* 38 (2021): 1–34.

<sup>3</sup> Marie-Laure Derat et al., “Māryām Nāzrēt (Ethiopia): the 12th-century transformations of a Aksumite site in connection with an Egyptian Christian community,” *Cahiers d'études africaines* 239, no. 3 (2020): 473–507; Independently (with the input and blessings of Marie-Laure Derat), team member Mikael Muehlbauer also published an interpretation of the site in, Mikael Muehlbauer, “An African ‘Constantine’ in the Twelfth Century: The Architecture of the Early Zagwe Dynasty and Egyptian Episcopal Authority,” *Gesta* 62, no. 2 (2023): 127–52.



Workers clearing and excavating the buried pavement of Marvam Nazret (Photo by Marie-Laure Derat)

unprecedented in Ethiopia, only underscores this site's elite Fatimid connections.

Over the course of our excavations, we opened three soundings at Nazret, as well as two at the nearby (slightly later) church of Golgotha. The first, made on the east side of the church platform was to determine the overall height of the substructure. The second, to the immediate west of the standing altar chambers, was to determine both the relationship between the spolia pillars and the underground ruins as well as the elevated sanctuaries. The third sounding was made on the platform's southern edge to evaluate its dimensions.

While the first sounding revealed that the church platform was monumental (some nine steps of megaliths), more surprising was the discovery of lime mortar underneath. Although the platform stylistically conforms to ruins from Late Antiquity, charcoal samples (C14 dated to the 11th-12th centuries), taken from different places, indicate that it was instead built, or reassembled, in the same, Fatimid construction phase as the sanctuaries overtop. Whether the podium was a deliberate revival of Aksumite

styles in the 12th century, or the reconstitution of an ancient podium is unclear – though our excavations yielded no traces of a 4th-7th century settlement phase there. However, yet-unexcavated Aksumite sites nearby may ultimately illuminate its origins – such as the neighboring tell, found on our final day, that was covered in Aksumite potsherds.

The second sounding revealed that the church was indeed a basilica, whose body was inundated with debris after a 15th century demolition, hosting an ad-hoc cemetery thereafter. Whereas the discovery of mortises in the church pavement, confirmed that the church was five aisled (subdivided by screens of pillars i.e. the spolia above), our finding of a transverse wall to the chambers' immediate west was unexpected. While this wall was certainly the *Hijab* (screen) of the church *Khurru* (choir), its construction, hitherto documented only in the Maghrib, wherein stone blocks were submerged in pools of lime concrete rather than stacked in discrete mortar beds, is surprising. This Ifriqiyyan technique may very well indicate



Nazret *qumqum*, documented exogenously in 2018 (Photo by Mikael Muehlbauer)

Fatimid-era connections between Ethiopia and the Maghrib through Egypt.

Apart from our excavations was the singular find of a bronze *qumqum* (perfume sprinkler), unofficially excavated by the villagers in 2017 or 2018 while digging a new building foundation on the site. The Nazret *qumqum*, which consists of a spout welded to a globular base, appears to be the earliest, fully intact (broken sprinklers were found among the Tiberias hoard) metal example known anywhere – and is therefore of keen interest for historians of Islamic art. At Nazret, we can imagine that the sprinkler had a liturgical role in the blessing of the sanctuary curtain on Good Friday, as well as for the distribution and transport of Myron, which was produced there.

Even though our work at Nazret after 2020 was abruptly stopped, at first due to the Covid-19 pandemic and later the Ethiopian Civil War, new hopes arose when in early 2024, Marie-Laure Derat and Hiluf Berhe visited Nazret again. Aside from new interments in the church compound, Maryam Nazret escaped the war somewhat unscathed. The ruins were left untouched, and the somewhat isolated villagers were largely kept apart from the war's (visible) ravages. Going forward we are optimistic that our works at Maryam Nazret will resume in the coming years. As one of the largest Fatimid-era buildings, and a repository of yet unexcavated artifacts, HIAA members should stay alert for our future updates.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Marie-Laure Derat** is director of research at CNRS (Orient et Méditerranée, Paris). A historian, she is a specialist of medieval Ethiopia, particularly interested in the Christian kingdom in terms of the territorial organization of powers, Christianization processes and religious interactions, using a combination of textual documentation and archaeological data. She leads the historical and archaeological mission to the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela. Her publications include, in collaboration with Claire Bosc-Tiessé, Lalibela, *site rupestre chrétien d'Ethiopie* (Toulouse 2019) and forthcoming, in collaboration with Adam Łajtar, Alexandros Tsakos and Robin Seignobos (eds.), *Bishops and bishoprics (Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia, Fourth-Fourteenth Century)* (Warsaw 2024).

**Mikael Muehlbauer**, Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellow in Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is a specialist in Medieval Ethiopian and Egyptian Architecture. His first book entitled *Bastions of the Cross: Medieval Rock-Cut Cruciform Churches of Tigray Ethiopia* was published by Dumbarton Oaks Press in 2023.

**Updates under Member News, Exhibitions Curated, Recent Publications, and Dissertations in Progress were submitted by their respective authors for inclusion in this issue.**

*If you want us to include details about your accomplishments in the 2025 issue, please fill out [this form](#).*

*Entries have been edited for clarity and brevity according to the newsletter's design guidelines.*

## MEMBER NEWS

**Read about new appointments, awards, and other achievements by some of our members for 2024.**

**Heba M. Saad Abdelnaby** was appointed Cultural Attaché and Director of the Egyptian Cultural and Educational Bureau in Washington D.C.

**Kathryn Babayan** received a NEH/Mellon Fellowship for Digital Publication for the academic year 2024-25 for her project "Persian Anthology: Reading along the Margins."

**Suzanne Compagnon** is a Postdoc Researcher in the Dutch Research Council (NOW) Vici project "Rosewater, Nightingale and Gunpowder: A Sensory History of the Islamic world, 1500-1900" at Utrecht University.

**Jaimee Comstock-Skipp** received a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship, 2024-2026.

**Matthew Gillman** was appointed assistant editor of the journal *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* as of May 2024.

**Ruba Kana'an** organized the conference "Arts of the Indian Ocean" in Toronto, Canada on April 27 (online) and May 2-4 (hybrid).

**Yui Kanda** was appointed Assistant Professor in Middle Eastern History (tenure-track), at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in April 2024.

**Nancy Micklewright** received a Fulbright Senior Research Grant to Türkiye for the project, "Dressing the Republic: Women and Fashion in 1920s Türkiye."

**Emily Neumeier** was a research fellow at the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University in Spring 2024.

**Bernard O'Kane** received the World Book of the Year Award of the Islamic Republic of Iran, for Studies in Persian Architecture.

**Abbey Stockstill** was appointed Paul Mellon Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery, for the 2024-2025 academic year.

**Alison Terndrup** started a position as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Delaware.

**Selin Ünlüönen** will start a new position as Luther Gregg Sullivan Visiting Scholar in Art History at Wesleyan University in Fall 2024.

**Lorenzo Vigotti** was awarded a 3-year Marie-Curie Postdoctoral Global Fellowship by the European Union to study double-shell brick domes in Iran in partnership with the University of Bologna and the University of Tehran.

## EXHIBITIONS CURATED

**The following exhibitions were curated by HIAA members in 2024.**

**Péter Tamás Nagy** curated "Colors of the City: A Century of Architecture in Doha" at Design Doha Biennial, Doha, (24 February - 30 April 2024).

**Yael Rice** curated "Painting the Persianate World: Portable Images on Paper, Cloth, and Clay", with Yao Wu, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA (2 February - 7 July 2024).

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The following articles, books and book chapters on Islamic Art and Architecture were published in 2024.

**Boka, Shima, Mohammadreza Rahimzadeh, and Manouchehr Moazzemi.** "The Idea of the Past in Architects' Thinking: Vartan Hovanesian, the Recent Past, the Distant Past." *Journal of Iranian Architecture Studies*, 11, no. 22, (March 2023): 133-154.  
<https://doi.org/10.22052/jias.2023.248732.1151>

**Comstock-Skipp, Jaimee.** "ШОҲНОМАИ ТУРКӢ ДАР ИНСТИТУТИ ХОВАРШИНОСИИ ВА МЕРОСИ ХАТТИИ АКАДЕМИЯИ УЛУМИ ҶУМҲУРИИ ТОҶИКИСТОН ВА ДАСТНАВИСҶОИ ХАТӢ АЗ ХУРОСОН ДАР ОХИРИ ҚАРНИ 16-ҶМ (in Tajiki; 'The Turkic Shāhnāma manuscript in the Center of Written Heritage at the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, and manuscripts from Khurasan in the late 16th century.'" In *A Life Devoted to Science: Collection of Articles Dedicated to the Memory of Mamadwafo Baqoiev (1931-1972)*, edited by Shamsiddin Muhammadiev, et al., 233-242. Dushanbe: Donish, 2024.

**Comstock-Skipp, Jaimee.** "Amending the Origins of 'The Bukhara School': Shibanid (Abulkhairid) Arts of the Book in the 16th Century." In *A Life Devoted to Science: Collection of Articles Dedicated to the Memory of Mamadwafo Baqoiev (1931-1972)*, edited by Shamsiddin Muhammadiev, et al., 278-296. Dushanbe: Donish, 2024.

**Emami, Farshid.** *Isfahan: Architecture and Urban Experience in Early Modern Iran*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2024.

**Golonu, Berin.** "At the crossroads: photography, ecology and heritage in Istanbul." *Journal of Visual Culture* (April 2024).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14704129241238380>

**Göloğlu, Sabiha.** "Multi-, Paraline and Perspectival Views of Islamic Pilgrimage Sites." In *Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage: Essays in Honour Of Nasser David Khalili*, edited by Qaisra M. Khan with Nahla Nassar, 25-44. London: Gingko, 2024.

**Gandhi, Supriya, Vivek Gupta, and Ananya Vajpeyi.** "Open Letter: A Halt to New Delhi's Demolition." *Aroop: An Occasional Journal of Arts, Poetry and Ideas*, 5, no. 61-65, New Delhi: Raza Foundation, 2024.

**Gupta, Vivek.** "Routes of Translation: Connected Book Histories and al-Jazari's Robotic Wonders from the

Mamluks to Mandu." *South Asian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2023): 207-228. (published in March 2024)

**Gupta, Vivek.** "Inscribing Orality: Calligraphy, Layout and the Vernacular Anxieties of the Chandayan Manuscripts." In *The Chandayan*, 42-55. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2024.

**Jackson, Cailah.** *Mevlevi Manuscripts, 1268-c. 1400: A Study of the Sources*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.

**Kana'an, Ruba and Avinoam Shalem** eds. "Approaching Architecture in the Muslim World: Novel Paths of Investigations." Special Issue, *Journal of Material Cultures of the Muslim World*. 4 (2024).

**Kana'an, Ruba.** "Rethinking the Friday Mosque: A Critical Enquiry of an Architectural Paradigm." In "Approaching Architecture in the Muslim World: Novel Paths of Investigations," edited by Ruba Kana'an and Avinoam Shalem. Special Issue, *Journal of Material Cultures of the Muslim World*. Vol 4 (2024): 211-229.

**Kana'an, Ruba.** "An Introduction to Approaching Architecture in the Muslim World: Novel Paths of Investigations," edited by Ruba Kana'an and Avinoam Shalem. Special Issue, *Journal of Material Cultures of the Muslim World*. Vol 4 (2024): 143-152.

**Kanda, Yui.** "Iranian Blue-and-White Ceramic Vessels and Tombstones Inscribed with Persian Verses, C. 1450-1725." In *The Routledge Companion to Global Renaissance Art*, edited by Stephen J. Campbell and Stephanie Porras, 363-77. New York: Routledge, 2024.  
<http://doi.org/10.4324/9781003294986-30>

**Micklewright, Nancy, Sana Mirza, Zeynep Simavi, and Jeffrey Smith.** "Networking a National Collection: Freer's Diaries, Objects, and Photographs." *Museum History Journal* 16, no.2 (2023): 178-199.

**Micklewright, Nancy and Therese O'Malley.** "Annie Lady Brassey's Photographic Albums, Writings and Botanical Gardens in the Creation of Empire and Place", In *Survey Style: Landscape Photography across the Globe*, edited by Erin Hyde Nolan and Sophie Junge, 157-188. London, Routledge, 2023.

**Micklewright, Nancy.** "Mohamed Zakariya and the Practice of Calligraphy," *Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online* (16 November 2023).  
<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/khamseen/topics/2023/mohamed-zakariya-and-the-practice-of-calligraphy/>

**Micklewright, Nancy.** "Ottoman Wedding Dresses East to West". *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Metropolitan Museum of Art* (April 2024).

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mowd/hd\\_mowd.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mowd/hd_mowd.htm)

**Mostafa, Heba.** *Architecture of Anxiety, Body Politics and the Formation of Islamic Architecture*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.

**Mostafa, Heba.** "The Nile as Nexus: The Nilometer at al-Rawda Island between Veneration and Mediation in Medieval Islamic Egypt." In *The Nile Delta: Histories from Antiquity to the Modern Period*, edited by Katherine Blouin, 421–52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

**Nagy, Péter Tamás.** "al-Qarawiyyin Mosque". In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3, 2023/5. Leiden: Brill, 2023, 70-82.

**Neumeier, Emily and Benjamin Anderson, eds.** *Hagia Sophia in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024.

**O'Kane, Bernard.** "István Ormos, *Cairo in Chicago: Cairo Street at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893*," *Bulletin critique des Annales Islamologiques*, 38, 2024: <http://journals.openedition.org/bcai/7315> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/bcai.7315>

**Reichert, Elliot, Josephine Leila and Rachel Winter, eds.** *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*. Munich: Hirmer-Verlag, 2024.

**Rice, Yael.** "The Mughal Imperial Image between Manuscript and Print." In *Routledge Companion to Global Renaissance Art*, eds. Stephen J. Campbell and Stephanie Porras. New York: Routledge, 2024.

**Rice, Yael, and Dipti Khera eds.** *Readings on Painting, From 75 Years of Marg*. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2024.

**Seggerman, Alex Dika.** "Scholarly Rigour in Gelatin Silver: K. A. C. Creswell's Photographs of Islamic Architecture." *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*. 13, no. 1 (2024): 41-73: 13, no. 1 (2024): 41-73: Intellect, 2024. [https://doi.org/10.1386/ijia\\_00129\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijia_00129_1)

**Stockstill, Abbey.** *Marrakesh and the Mountains: Landscape, Urban Planning, and Identity in the Medieval Maghrib*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2024.

**Usman, Muhammad, and Fatima Zahra.** "Concept of Islamic Taxation: Conceptual Perspective of 'The Tribute

Money' by Masaccio." *COMSATS Journal of Islamic Finance (CJIF)* 8, no. 2 (2023).

**Winter, Rachel.** "Halil Altindere's Space Refugee: Martian Modernism, Syrian Resettlement, and Life After Climate Change." *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 13, no. 2 (2024): 411-37.

**Wu, Sylvia.** "Reinventing Sacred Ground Amidst Natural Disaster: The Holy Islamic Tomb in Seventeenth-Century Quanzhou." *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 13, no. 2 (2024): 309–34. [https://doi.org/10.1386/ijia\\_00143\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijia_00143_1).

**Zahra, Fatima, Sophiya Umar, Syedeh Samaneh Fatemi, and Muhammad Usman.** "A Hermeneutical Perspective Towards the Defining Associations of the Term 'Contemporary Art'." *British Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6, no. 1 (2024): 43-48.

## DISSERTATIONS COMPLETED

The following doctoral dissertations in Islamic Art and Architecture have been completed recently.

**Compagnon, Suzanne.** "Clothing and Pictorial Representation in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Painting: The Levni and Buhari Single Figures" (University of Vienna, Markus Ritter and Tülay Artan), 2023.

**Emparán Fernández, María Antonieta.** "Aesthetics of Islamic Cosmoses for a Hermeneutics of the Marinid Zillij" (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Ulrich Rebstock), 2024.

**Grbanovic, Ana Marija.** "Ilkhanid Stucco Revetments in Iran, c. 1256-1335. Function, Meaning and Aesthetic Principles" (University of Bamberg, Lorenz Korn and Scott Redford), 2023. <https://fis.uni-bamberg.de/handle/uniba/90074> DOI: 10.20378/irb-90074.

**Hakimi, Hazwan Ariff.** "The Symbolism of the Ascension (Mi'rāj) in Three Traditional Malay Mosques in Melaka Through Traditional Malay Prose Narratives (Ḥikāyāt)" (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Nik Lukman Nik Ibrahim and Nor Zalina Harun), 2024.

**Şimşir, Hüsamettin.** "Mechanisms of Ottoman Conquest and Expansion in the Balkan Peninsula/Greece in

Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", (University of Notre Dame, Alexander Beihammer), 2024.

**Stewart, Courtney.** "The Multifaceted History of The Brilliant Cut Diamond: From Sacred Solar Motif to Commercial Commodity, 1600- 1750" (Bard Graduate Center, Abigail Balbale, 2024).

**Wu, Sylvia.** "Mosques on the Edge: Tale and Survival of Muslim Monuments in Coastal China" (University of Chicago, Persis Berlekamp), 2024.

**Zahra, Fatima.** "Characteristics and Influences of Mughal Islamic Ornamentation of the 17th Century: A Case Study of Wazir Khan and Badshahi Mosque" (Universiti Sains Malaysia, Safrizal Shahir), 2023.

**Ziaii-Bigdeli, Layah.** "Materiality, Foodways and the Construction of Elite Cultural Identity in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Iranian World (3rd-10th century CE)" (University of California, Irvine, Matthew P. Canepa), June 2024.

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