

# A twenty-year retrospect on 'The Mirage of Islamic Art': polarising Islamic art, consolidating Persian art

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The year 2023 marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of 'The Mirage of Islamic Art' in the first issue of *The Art Bulletin's* eighty-fifth volume, an article that continues to provoke fierce debate.<sup>1</sup> This controversial essay appeared a few years after 9/11, hence in the midst of cultural conflicts, particularly between Muslim-majority societies of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region or otherwise categorically called 'non-Western' world, versus Christian-majority societies of the Euro-American world, i.e. the West. In addition to its timely appearance under the enduring influence of the Huntingtonian paradigm of religio-cultural conflicts, *The Mirage* will be remembered as a noteworthy milestone when the field called Islamic art derailed its development.<sup>2</sup> While opening paths into critical thinking, this essay revealed the polarised state of the field to its irreparable degree. Several questionable statements, particularly on page 176, should be sufficient to grasp how *The Mirage* caused a great deal of frustration among those who identified themselves as historians of Islamic art at that time, merely exposing something fundamentally schizophrenic about the field.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the following passage projects a biased

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The mirage of Islamic art: reflections on an unwieldy field', *The Art Bulletin*, 85:1, 2003, 152-84; reprinted in *Journal of Art Historiography*, 6, June 2012 (<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/blairbloomdoc.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Huntington's influential thesis, *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*, was published in 1996. For a recent reassessment of the Huntingtonian thesis, see the spring 2019 issue of *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 'A quarter century of the "Clash of Civilizations"', guest-edited by Jeffrey Haynes.

<sup>3</sup> 'When we began studying Islamic art in the 1970s, we and our fellow students were virtually all white ... A few of our fellow students had come to the United States as visitors from the Islamic lands, intending to get an education and return home to work. This is not the case today. White non-Muslims are becoming less dominant in the field, and many students are either Americanized descendants of Middle Eastern and Muslim immigrants who are searching out their parents' roots or Middle Eastern and Muslim students from abroad whose plans for the future are uncertain, given the frequent political storms that sweep through this troubled region. This new diversity of experience and expectation is welcome indeed, but it also raises complicated issues about who is doing what for whom... While we admire students' eagerness to understand what they identify as their own heritage and appreciate their willingness to use linguistic skills they may already have, we are concerned that this approach transforms the study of Islamic art, once a branch of the humanistic study of art history open to all, into one of many fields of area and ethnic studies, sometimes organized along national or ethnic lines ... Can one imagine thinking that only French students should study Degas? Or that you have to be Japanese to appreciate Hiroshige' (Blair and Bloom, 'The mirage of Islamic art', 176).

view towards the academic credibility of not only historians of Islamic art but art historians with certain backgrounds and the choice of research subjects that they make: 'Can one imagine thinking that only French students should study Degas? Or that you have to be Japanese to appreciate Hiroshige'. The fact is that anyone can study any subject—French students can certainly specialise in French impressionism painting and Japanese scholars can equally appreciate Hiroshige, not because of their linguistic skills, nationality or ethnic backgrounds, but due to their educational and professional training. Equally American college professors can teach and write about American art. By the same token, both Muslims and non-Muslims, regardless of being religiously observant or not, can scientifically study and teach Muslim visual culture and building heritage.<sup>4</sup>

Although the authors of *The Mirage* have later apologetically stated that they did not intend to offend their colleagues,<sup>5</sup> the havoc that *The Mirage* has caused twenty years ago is still contributing to the widening crisis in Islamic art. Having been provoked by a series of essays by Avinoam Shalem in 2012, exposing its Eurocentric foundation and characteristics, this crisis is now an accepted truth.<sup>6</sup> Coinciding with the passing of the twentieth-century doyen of Islamic art Oleg Grabar (1929-2011) who emphasised the secular dimension of the adjective 'Islamic' in art, as defined in his eponymous book *Formation of Islamic Art* (1973), the year

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the enduring image debate in Islam has just erupted as a result of Hamline University's controversy regarding the university's response to a complaint from Muslim students who felt uncomfortable to see an image of the Prophet Muhammad from a fourteenth-century copy of the *Jami' al-Tawarikh* ('Compendium of Chronicles') of Rashid al-Din in an art history class and its radical decision to dismiss an adjunct professor who showed the image. About this controversy, see <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/academic-is-fired-over-a-medieval-painting-of-the-prophet-muhammad/>, accessed 30 January 2023. The incident happened in October 2022, followed by a call for action at the change.org petition site on Christmas Eve 2022 (<https://www.change.org/p/petition-in-support-of-dr-erika-l%C3%B3pez-prater-the-dismissed-hamline-instructor-wrongly-accused-of-islamophobia>, accessed 12 April 2023). This suggests that it remains difficult, if not entirely impossible, to erase the presupposition of aniconism in Islam among many people, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

<sup>5</sup> See a preface of Blair and Bloom, 'The mirage of Islamic art', reprinted in *Journal of Art Historiography*, 6, June 2012 (<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/blairbloomdoc.pdf>).

<sup>6</sup> Avinoam Shalem, 'What do we mean when we say Islamic art? An urgent plea for a critical re-writing of the history of the arts of Islam', *Journal of Art Historiography* 6, June 2012, 1-18 (<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/shalem.pdf>); Avinoam Shalem, 'Dangerous claims: On the <othering> of Islamic art history and how it operates within global art history', *Kritische berichte-Zeitschrift für Kunst-und Kulturwissenschaften*, 40:2, 2012, 69-86. It should be noted, however, that the concept of Eurocentrism, a term which had been used in Europe (e.g. German adjective *euro-zentrisch*) as early as the early twentieth century, was recontextualised through a North American academic filter and remerged as an ideological term around the 1970s-1980s. For further discussion, see Arif Dirlik, 'History without a center: reflections on Eurocentrism' in Eckhard Fuchs and Benedikt Stuchtey, eds, *Across Cultural Borders: Historiography in Global Perspective*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 247-284. I thank Richard Woodfield for drawing my attention to this study.

2012—a decade after 9/11—therefore marks a turning point in the polarisation of the field.<sup>7</sup> A number of cultural institutions worldwide, too, particularly those with the adjective 'Islamic' in their names, became engaged around the same time in a growing sociological and historiographical debate about the function and meaning of the display genre called Islamic art.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite all of the multimillion dollar projects of old gallery reconfiguration and new museum construction from New York (i.e. Metropolitan Museum of Art, aka MET; completed in November 2011) to Doha (i.e. Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, aka MIA; opened in November 2008), as well as fierce criticisms over the conceptual background of Islamic art in museum contexts, little has changed in terms of actual display modes of Islamic art collections since 9/11. This indicates that the anachronistic, secular and westernised image of Islamic art galleries has been considered a compromise, however at the expense of religiosity, not only in content and context but also in naming.<sup>9</sup>

Having overseen the crisis engulfing the field after years of debates for the past two decades, as well as a growing number of publications in the past few years that concede the ever deteriorating situation of the field,<sup>10</sup> my reflection on *The Mirage* in the year 2023 is not meant to make a further verdict on what happened to the field in the past or to lament on its state of stagnation: rather does it make a plea for a much wider awareness of the west-first mindset about this field that still roils

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<sup>7</sup> Among the obituaries of Grabar, see Robert Hillenbrand, 'Oleg Grabar: the scholarly legacy', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 6, June 2012, 1-35 (<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/hillenbrand.pdf>); Robert Hillenbrand, 'Oleg Grabar, distinguished historian of Islamic art', *Iranian Studies*, 45:1, 2012, 139-44. Grabar's definition of 'Islamic art' is as follows: "'Islamic" does not refer to the art of a particular religion, for a vast proportion of the monuments have little if anything to do with the faith of Islam. Works of art demonstrably made by and for non-Muslims can appropriately be studied as works of Islamic art... The important point is that "Islamic" in the expression "Islamic art" is not comparable to "Christian" or "Buddhist" in "Christian art" or "Buddhist art" (Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973, pp. 1-2).

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion, see a special issue, 'Installing Islamic Art: interior space and temporal imagination', *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 7:2, 2018, guest-edited by Yuka Kadoi.

<sup>9</sup> Among many critiques regarding the MET reinstallation and renaming of Islamic art galleries (opened in November 2011 as galleries without references to 'Islamic' – i.e. 'The Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia'), see Nasser Rabbat, 'The Islamic Art Galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art', *Artforum*, January, 2012 (<https://www.artforum.com/print/201201/the-new-islamic-art-galleries-at-the-metropolitan-museum-of-art-29813>, accessed 4 February 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Among the most recent publications, see, for instance, Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What is "Islamic" Art? Between Religion and Perception*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019; Onur Öztürk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker, eds, *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, London: Routledge, 2022. Fundamentally written as a post-colonial manifesto, Shaw's book, however, causes a controversy, due to poor scholarship in art history (see Valerie Gonzalez, 'What Is Islamic Art? Between Religion and Perception, Wendy M.K. Shaw, 2019, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 366 pp., £29.99 [hardback], ISBN 9781108474658', *Al-Masāq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean*, 32:1, 2020, 110-3).

both academia and museums to this day. In particular, I have growing consternation about a trend to perpetuate its colonial order or in Grabar's words in the early 1980s, 'the old and now much-maligned Orientalism'.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly visible in recent conferences and publications concerning nineteenth-century Islamic art under the rubrics of 'historiography', where little attempt has been made to dismantle the legacy of nineteenth-century Orientalism among neo-Orientalists in the twenty-first century.<sup>12</sup> According to Shaw:

Recent art history has emphasized historiography as a means of recognizing the contingency of the discipline. Yet art historians have not yet worked out how to dismantle and remodel the walls and passages defining the norms and exclusions of its disciplinary episteme under a colonial mindset.<sup>13</sup>

Although *The Mirage* met torrents of criticism at the time of publication, it made a couple of reasonable points, in particular those which are relevant to a historiography of Persian art, a subject to which this special issue is devoted. First, the authors have rightly pointed out the problem of the term 'Islamicate' and its application for emphasising a secular dimension of portable objects and paintings produced in Muslim-majority societies across the globe.<sup>14</sup> This term was, however, not invented as the immediate response to 9/11. By this time some thirty years had already passed, since it was coined by Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1922-1968), an American scholar of Islamic studies, in his posthumously-published three-volume magnum opus *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (1974).<sup>15</sup> While writing over thirty pages from perspectives of post-WW2 defined 'Islamic art', which was meant to refer to the art and architecture of the MENA region (including Spain), plus Iran, after the rise of Islam in the seventh century, *The Mirage* did, on the other hand, not elaborate another key concept at the time of publication—namely, 'Persianate'. This concept had already been discussed by

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<sup>11</sup> Oleg Grabar, 'Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art', *Muqarnas*, 1, 1983, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Among the recent publications on the European superiority of mimesis during the modern period, see Francine Giese, Mercedes Volait and Ariane Varela Braga, eds, *À l'orientale: Collecting, Displaying and Appropriating Islamic Art and Architecture in the 19th and early 20th Centuries*, Leiden: Brill, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Shaw, *What is "Islamic" Art?*, 26. Shaw also elaborates on the problematics of so-called 'Islamic art history' - a term which emerged by combining the adjective 'Islamic' with 'art history' (e.g. German term *Islamische Kunstgeschichte*): 'Islamic art history has often designed a history of objects produced under Islamic hegemony and considered through lenses crafted to define the 'Western' legacy: art, aesthetics, and dynasties. This is a history of objects recognised as art and understood in analytical terms from a vantage point dependent on European intellectual history. This art history has never been Islamic' (Shaw, *What is "Islamic" Art?*, 11). See also the problematics of this term in the context of South Asian art, see Catherine B. Asher, 'Islamic art history: Yesterday, today, and the future', *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, 1:1, 2015, 21-5.

<sup>14</sup> Blair and Bloom, 'The mirage of Islamic art', 153.

<sup>15</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974. For further discussion on the problem of this terminology, see Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam*, where it was meant to set a line between an earlier 'caliphal' phase and a later 'Persianate' phase in a history of the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> Since the 1990s, this concept has been steadily formulated among scholars of Iranian studies, chiefly led by Saïd Amir Arjomand.<sup>17</sup> Generally referring to the cultural traditions on the basis of the Persian language, 'Persianate' was initially defined as being not strictly bound to modern geoscheme or nation borders to divide regions into groups.<sup>18</sup> This stance has not changed, judging by several publications in the late 2010s, where the term Persianate was reaffirmed as a lingua franca in pre-modern Eurasia.<sup>19</sup> As a territorial concept, Nile Green has defined the Persianate world as 'an interregional or "world" system generated by shared knowledge of religiosity, statecraft, diplomacy, trade, sociability, or subjectivity that was accessed and circulated through the common use of written Persian across interconnected nodal points of Eurasia'.<sup>20</sup> This is what is called 'Persographia', and is more than what the late Austrian Iranologist Bert G. Fragner (1941-2021) formulated a language-oriented geography of the Persianate world, 'Persophonia'.<sup>21</sup>

All of such overarching elements are essential to make the Persian world a part of world history. Yet in this special issue, it is historiographically appropriate to opt for the term 'Persian'. It should be noted, first of all, that 'Persian' is by no means an earlier term for 'Persianate' or 'Iranian': it had been for a long time identified not only as a cultural term but also as an indication of the entire territories of Persian dynasties by outsiders, particularly by Europeans. In response to Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878-1944)'s ideological move to opt for Iran rather than Persia for his country's name (formalised in 1935), the latter began to be strictly defined as an exonym of the territory of the Pars tribe in South Iran, but the term 'Iran' as the historical name of the country used by its native people.<sup>22</sup> This ethnocentric stance, in turn, contributed to the evocation of a distinctively 'Iranian' concept of heritage of

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<sup>16</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2, 294.

<sup>17</sup> Arjomand has written an entry on Hodgson in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (<https://www.Iranicaonline.org/articles/hodgson-marshall> the Persianate societies, accessed 21 July 2022). The Association for the Study of Persianate Societies was established in 1996, followed by the issue of academic publications (*Studies on Persianate Societies*, 2003-2005; *Journal of Persianate Studies* since 2008).

<sup>18</sup> See Saïd Amir Arjomand, 'Defining Persianate Studies', *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 1:1, 2008, 1-4.

<sup>19</sup> See Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds, *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, Leiden: Brill, 2018; Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019. See also Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*, Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020. I thank András Barati for drawing my attention to this study.

<sup>20</sup> Nile Green, 'Introduction: The frontiers of the Persianate world (ca. 800-1900)' in Green, *The Persianate World*, (1-71), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Green, 'Introduction: The frontiers of the Persianate world (ca. 800-1900)', 4. See Bert G. Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens*, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> However, 'Persia' and 'Iran' are interchangeably used nowadays. See Ehsan Yarshater, 'Communication', *Iranian Studies* 22:1, 1989, 62-5.

a modern nation, as well as a markedly traditional 'Persian' artistic identity which evolved from pre-Islamic to early modern times.<sup>23</sup> Against this backdrop, this special issue intends to articulate the process of terminological transformation by employing the usage of 'Persian', rather than that of 'Iranian', while encompassing wider geographical and chronological spans than previous publications on related topics. In this regard, this special issue is more ambitious than what the American pioneers of Persian art Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969) and Phyllis Ackerman (1893-1977) envisaged in *A Survey of Persian Art*, a multivolume collection of essays on historical material remains found in modern-day Iran, hence excluding peripheral Persian cultural lands of South Asia, Central Asia and East Asia, as well as disregarding modern chapters of art and architecture that evolved within the country.<sup>24</sup> Another historiographical facet is that this process was interrelated with the creation of connoisseurial and scholarly canons of what we came to categorise as 'Persian' art of mediaeval and early modern periods, before it was merged under an umbrella term 'Muhammadan' (an earlier term for 'Islamic') art, together with other sub-categories of Middle Eastern art after the seventh century, namely the arts of the Arabs and the Turks.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, thanks to its ambiguous status among others, 'Persian' art made its escape from being heavily involved with cultural political debates during much of the twentieth century, while 'Iranian' art began to be closely associated with the cultural heritage of the Iranian nation from ancient times to the present in the second half of the last century. Although both terms were used without particular differences about meaning for a while, 'Persian' art was by degrees replaced by 'Iranian' art from around the 1960s, as exemplified in titles of publications and public events, such as *7000 Years of Iranian Art*, a series of exhibitions that travelled across several countries in the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> This academic stance was firmly established after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, a decisive moment that served to reinforced the importance of the Islamic era as an integral, ethnonational narrative of Iranian history and culture.<sup>27</sup>

As in any art historical narratives, regardless of Western or non-Western, the history of Persian art has been periodised according to a set of dynastic canons. Besides the seventh century, which divides Persian art largely into two—i.e. pre-Islamic and Islamic times, the Mongol invasion of Eurasia in the thirteenth century has often been considered a turning point in the shifting of Persian visual and

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<sup>23</sup> The ideological formation of Iranian national heritage has been well discussed in Talinn Grigor, *Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage under the Pahlavi Monarchs*, New York: Periscope Publishing, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> For recent art historiographical reassessments on Pope, Ackerman and *A Survey of Persian Art*, see Yuka Kadoi, ed. *Arthur Upham Pope and A New Survey of Persian Art*, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Much has been said about historiographical implications on the term Muhammadan around 2010 (e.g. Andrea Lerner and Avinoam Shalem, eds, *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition 'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' Reconsidered*, Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *7000 Jahre Kunst in Iran*, Villa Hügel, Essen, 1962; *7000 Years of Iranian Art*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 1964.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Paul, Ludwig. "'Iranian nation" and Iranian-Islamic revolutionary ideology', *Die Welt Des Islams*, 39:2, 1999, 183-217.

material culture. Curated by Grabar, then Assistant Professor of Fine Arts and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan who also worked on several key subjects of pre-modern Persian art and architecture (e.g. Great Mongol *Shahnama*, Friday Mosque of Isfahan, Sasanian silver and among others), the exhibition, 'Persian Art: Before and after the Mongol Conquest', held at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, 1959, aimed at suggesting 'as far as possible, the changes in style which took place in Persian art as a result of the Mongol invasion during the thirteenth century and to place these changes in their social and economic as well as their specifically art-historical contexts'.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, recent studies have shed further light on several branches of Persian art, particularly that of the fourteenth century under the Ilkhanids (one of the Mongol khanates established in West Asia, 1256-1335) which has by degrees been reappraised as something equivalent to or even surpassing the Italian Renaissance.<sup>29</sup> In the case of South Asian art after the rise of Islam, this periodisation rubric has dangerously traumatised the entire field, not only being divided into pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, but also being marginalised as a peripheral subject – neither 'genuine' (i.e. Mediterranean) Islamic art nor 'indigenous' as well as 'classical' (i. e. Buddhist and Hindu) South Asian art.<sup>30</sup> This frustrating situation has already been well summarised by Partha Mitter in the 1970s, and the following citation serves to illustrate the marginalised position of the Indian subcontinent in the context of Western-defined Islamic art: 'Indo-Islamic architecture or Mogul painting did not present any serious problems of assimilation for the European, as they reflected a taste that could be understood in the West'.<sup>31</sup> Of equal dilemma is that Hindu visual culture has, for a long time, been treated differently among scholars and collectors of so-called 'Islamic' art, although it endured despite Muslim conquests in the Indian subcontinent that took place over a course of centuries with several phases.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, South Asian art after the seventh century may appropriately fit within the framework of Persian art, so does Central Asian art after the seventh century. The same can be true with other branches of non-Western arts, especially East Asian and Southeast Asian arts, a topic which awaits further endeavours of thorough recontextualisation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Oleg Grabar, ed., *Persian Art before and after the Mongol Conquest*, Michigan, MI: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1959, 3.

<sup>29</sup> See Yuka Kadoi, 'The (re-)birth of Ilkhanid art' in Anne Dunlop, ed., *The Mongol Empire in Global History and Art History*, I Tatti Research Series 5, Milan: Officina Libraria / Boston: Harvard University Press, 2023, 239-63.

<sup>30</sup> Asher, 'Islamic Art History: Yesterday, Today, and the Future', 21.

<sup>31</sup> Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, xviii.

<sup>32</sup> For a comprehensive study of Hindu-Muslim visual interactions, see Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> For an attempt to narrate Chinese art as an integral part of 'Persian' art (then the term 'Iranian' was encouraged to use), see Yuka Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

The idea for this special issue occurred following an international workshop, entitled 'Persian Art: The Shifting of Objects, Images and Ideas in Early 20th Century Central Europe', held in Vienna on 29-30 October 2021.<sup>34</sup> While some of the papers presented at that workshop could not be finalised in time for publication or have been published elsewhere, the content of this special issue is enriched by new contributions. Because of its transdisciplinary nature, this collection of essays represents the intersecting themes of Persian art, as an effort to introduce diverse aspects of this field. The article section begins with two essays on aspects of South Asian 'Persian' art. Green's essay offers fascinating insights as to how historical consciousness about the architectural heritage of the Islamic period arose in colonial South Asia, based on hitherto unexplored primary sources. By contrast, Koch takes an academically solid yet personal historiographical approach to the Millionenzimmer, one of the architectural gems in Vienna, by reflecting on the roles that some key researchers of the Vienna School of Art History played out for its rediscovery in the early twentieth century. The opening essays by two of the leading historians of South Asia are followed by two essays on scholars, collectors and dealers. Colburn's essay serves to contextualise—for the first time—the historiographical background of Parthian art. While featuring art historians and their discourses, such as Winckelmann and Rostovtzeff, this essay provides a better understanding of not only the birth of Parthian art but also that of pre-Islamic Persian art as a whole. Szántó's essay focuses on one of the forgotten Austro-Hungarian officials to search for his partially vanished collection of Persian art. The next set of essays by Kagouridi, Grusiecki and Armstrong addresses the carpet studies from multifaceted perspectives, ranging from gender, etymological to transcultural studies. Two essays by Comstock-Skipp and Hillenbrand in the next section revisit the question of 'school' in Persian painting, followed by another essay by Corsi which offers the current predicament of Sasanian silver from a standpoint of provenance research. The final essay by Kurz projects a different dimension of Persian art by making an in-depth analysis of the etymological origin of the term Dashi in pre-modern Chinese sources. A rich selection of the articles are supplemented by documentary biographies on Lamm and Erdmann by Kröger, as well as on Cohn-Wiener by Gierlich, along with a conference report concerning Viollet and his photographic collection in Paris by Aube and Massullo, a research note from Rome by D'Amore and Jung. Lastly, a Persian-English translation of one of the key articles is provided by Barati. In bringing together specialists from different fields, this special issue presents in microcosm unique intellectual alliances which are essential in order to rewrite the history of Persian art. Taken together, it is hoped that the themes and topics in this special issue offer a prism towards a better understanding of a complex and as yet largely unexplored field, a reflection of the

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<sup>34</sup> This workshop was organised by the research project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) / Lise Meitner Programme (M2428-G25) at the Department of Art History, Faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna (<https://persianart.univie.ac.at/research-output/persian-art-the-shifting-of-objects/>, accessed 7 February 2023).



state of scholarship in the field and what needs to be taken into account in the near future.

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