Undercurrents in the Art of Islam

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The art in Islam has been a great source of controversy among the Muslims as well as non-Muslims. While the Muslim insistence on the suppression of idolatory has governed their conception of art, the non-Muslims are unable to appreciate the particular motive that inspired the Muslim artists to paint or to express their emotions in other media. That Muslims took art as an enjoyment and patronized art for the sake of art, and not to serve as a hand maid of religion, is clear from the Undercurrents in the Art of Islam so well narrated in the general background of world art by Mr. Jairazbhoy, an Agakhani scholar who has devoted his life to the study of Islamic art. The Muslims had no hesitation in borrowing motifs from the contemporary art of the world and using them to beautify their monuments.

Abstractions may stimulate the coldly reasoning intellect, but they can scarcely sustain the interest for long, for the most meaningful art is that which relates to human ends and human themes. With this maxim in mind perhaps we might be more disposed to admit that an art such as that of Islam which for the most part excludes access to human themes might well attempt to circumvent in one manner or another the serious curb upon its choice. It can either do this openly or by disguise. Of the fact that it has done this openly no one is likely to deny. The question of disguise however has not so much as been broached up to now, and this must surely mean that the disguise has succeeded admirably in its intent. Once the principle has been established that veiled in the midst of an obvious form there sometimes lies an incipient one, a whole new vista will have been opened up, and the recognition of the undercurrent themes serves as a source of pleasurable surprise. It will reveal also an unsuspected subtlety in the artist's vision, which on the surface seems so direct and naive. The credit is no less his if the insinuated form is effected consciously for the process is to a large extent not an overt one. Undercurrent fancies are brought to the surface and find expression because they can no longer be contained. In modern psychological jargon the process has been described as a "recall of the repressed."[1] The anthropomorphism in Islamic art we are seeking to establish here is largely the result of this repression. But a further cause is that the human mind tends to conceive within the terms of its own entity. The vivid imagination of Ezekiel (i, 26) conjures up the glory of God enthroned and engulfed in fire but after all having "the appearance of a man." That book most averse to iconology, the Holy *Quran* (ii, 109) is compelled to refer to "the Face of Allah." Muslim artists did not dare to imagine His face, but as is well known, the imagery in the Holy *Quran* describing Him as a Lamp in a Niche was fully exploited after the 12th century as seen on carpets, wall tiles and on carved marble slabs.

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1. E. Kris: *Psychoanalytic explorations in Art.* 1953. p. 309f.

The first of the forms which we wish to establish as being based on the human, is, we contend, apotropaic, and therefore not belonging to the category of an unconscious pattern. An Islamic ivory box probably of the late 12th century now in the Treasury of the Capella Palatina in Sicily has repeated scrolls with various naturalistic figures inscribed within them. One set of these consist of hitherto unidentifiable figures somewhat like musical notations posed one upright and the other upside down (Fig., I No. 1). The only remotely comparable figures placed in this manner known to us occur on a Corinthian cup[2], but the alternating appended and upright figures could easily be that of lilies which were sometimes treated in this manner in Greek art. The one reason for regarding the figures on the cup as possibly apotropaic is that the main subject represented on it is of Hercules fighting the Lenean hydra. Hercules was of course noted in Greek art and literature as fighting and triumphing over all manner of evils. On the Temple of Selinus he is represented holding a pair of Cercopes (mischievous gnomes)[3] upside down, and even in Romanesque sculpture he is depicted holding a lion upside down by its heels[4]. The pose and theme is of Sumerian origin where on cylinder seals the hero Gilgamesh is shown holding a pair of lion- upside down by their heels[5] (Fig. 1, No. 2), or he is holding a bull by its heel and wrenching its thigh while his comrade Enkidu holds at bay a rampant lion as on a seal from the reign of Sargon of Akkad, or yet humans are figured alternately appended and upright[6]. There is a strong possibility that what is implied is not only the victory of the hero (victory and defeat being still signalled by thumbs up and thumbs down in our day), but also victory presaged to the owner of the seal. That the type has survived into mediaeval times is suggested by a Byzantine ivory casket representing scenes from the life of David where a helmeted figure holds upside down by his heel a youth, and pierces his belly with a dagger[7]. The identification of our theme on the Islamic ivory box as prophylactic would become feasible if we could show its possible counterpart in Islamic literature. A prominent example that comes to mind is the turning upside down of the Crusader's cross on the Dome of the Rock by the Muslims. If a modern interpreter is correct, this was done "to perpetuate the victory by sympathetic magic".[8] The same meaning may have been implied by the burial or embedding in the ground of foreign gods. Jacob for instance buried the foreign gods of his household at the foot of the sacred terebinth at Shechem[9] and we may cite the well-known instance when fragments of the stone idol of Manat were taken from Somnath in India to Ghazni in Afghanistan and embedded there in the steps of the Mosque in 1023[10]. Stele carved with the symbols of Babylonian deities and a figure of the King worshipping them were actually recovered from the steps of the Mosque of Harran[11], and what is perhaps significant is that these were turned upside down.

2. Perrot and Chipiez: *Histoire de l' art dans l'Antiquite.* ix. Fig. 364.
3. W.P. Perry; *Greek and Roman Sculpture. Fig. 22. c.f. Revue Archeologique.* 6e Ser. XLV Apr-Jun. 1955. Fig. 6
4. Crichton: *Romanesque Architecture in Italy.* 1954 Pl. 38.
5. J. Baltrusaitis: *Art Sumerien, art roman.* p. 65. Fig. 34a.
6. W. Otto: *Handbuch der Archeologie.* 1939. Taf 145.
7. A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann: *Die Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen.* 1931. 1. No. 123.
8. R. Ettinghausen: *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization.* Ed. G. Grunebaum, 1955. p. 118.
9. c.f A. Lods: *Israel from its beginning to the 8th century, 1932.*
10. S.R. Sharma in *Indian Historical Quarterly.* ix. 1933. pp. 935-6.
11. D.S. Rice in *Illustrated London News.* Sept. 21, 1957. p. 466 f.

Our next consideration will be to examine the limits to which early Islamic art went to conceal designs based on the human figure. In a house in 9th century Samarra a stucco wall revetment[12] (Fig. 1, No. 3) has a bas-relief figure which seems to us to be basically a human form with uplifted arms. In degree of stylization the figure is comparable to the hilt of a bronze sword from the necropolis of Halistadt (700- 500 B.C.) in Central Europe (Fig. 1, No. 4)[13]. The gesture may be purely one of bravado or strength as companion sword hilts seem to confirm, but the Samarra figure would have quite another connotation. The figure of a man with upraised arms seen in profile stood as the Egyptian hieroglyphic for "pray, worship, adore, entreat praise[14]. (Fig. 1, No. 5)". The Egyptian Book of the Dead (Ch. CLXV) refers to the god of the uplifted hand over whose figure the words of power were to be recited[15]. Some Babylonian prayers were also recited with arms uplifted[16]. The posture became typical in Coptic sculpture whether in the Virgin "Orante" or Daniel with the lions, or St. Menas flanked by adoring camels[17]. Raised arms seem to have become an early Christian attitude of prayer as evident in the apse of St. Apollinare in Classe at Ravenna. A whole row of such repeating figures is later found in the Romanesque church of St. Symphorien in S. W. France. At Samarra such a figure would not be surprising since the Muslim prayer was opened by raising the bands repeatedly to the sides of the head.

Another form based on the human figure[18] at Samarra is winged with head and body rudely delineated giving in one instance the effect of a sphinx frontally seen (Fig. 1, No. 6). On a second millennium wall-painting from Nuzi north of Samarra a bull with, wings is in this manner frontally depicted (Fig. 1, No. 7)[19]. Moreover the winged figure does not altogether disappear in Islamic art. A version of it occurs as a patterned prolongation of inscriptions at the 11th century Moorish Mosque of Aljaferia at Saragossa (Fig. 1, No. 8)[20], whilst a series of more flamboyant winged figures form a grid over a painted faience Ottoman jar of the 16th century (Fig. I. No. 9)[21]. The first case might only to be a variant of a winged palmette anthropomorphized, but the second one is likely to have been the design of a miniaturist fond of painting angels such as are frequently found in the art of that period. The latter may be conceived as forming a protective net around the jar. This protective aspect is more likely to have been intended of the ghouls and grotesques insinuated in ornament that we shall now examine. With reference to this we have the word of Plutarch that strange or ridiculous forms serve to ward off witchcraft or fascination, and that is why the horrible face of the Gorgon was used as an amulet against the evil eye, as Lucian expressly says[21a].

12. House xii. room7c.g. K.A.C. Creswell: *Early Muslim Architecture, II* Pl. 72e.
13. J. Pijoan in *Summa Artis. VI.* Fig. 372; and cf. Dechelette: *Manuel d' Archeologie.* 1927. III P. 110. Pl. VII. Fig. 280-2, and IV. Figs. 473-4.
14. D. Diringer: *The Alphabet: a key to the history of mankind.*, 1949. P. 60.
15. E.A.W. Budge: *Egyptian magic.* 1901. p. 122.
16. L. W. King: *The prayers of the lifting of the hand. 1896.*
17. J. Pijoan: *op. cit.* CVII. Figs. 206, 207, 209.
18. House XII. N.W. Corner. Creswell: *op. cit.* II Pl. 72b., and cf. Op. 238.
19. H. Frankfort: *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* 1954. Fig. 65.
20. G. Marcas: *Manuel d' Art Musulman.* I. Fig. 235.
21. F. Sarre: *Meisterwerke* II. 115.
21a. F. T. Elworthy: *The Evil Eye.* 1895. P. 158. No. 259.

Strange and astonishing indeed is the result of isolating certain seemingly abstract ornamental forms in Islamic art. The interplay of lobed forms in the decorative soffit of an arch at the entrance gate known as Bab Lalla Rayhana (1293) at Kairowan[23] upon closer inspection turns out to be the schematic representation of a wildly gesticulating man or demon no doubt warding off the evil eye by its own threatening presence (Fig. 2, No. 10) A closely allied figure survives until the 18th century on a Caucasian (Daghestan) silk embroidery on cotton[24] only here the outlining of the figure forming part of a quadrant composition. Is spiny which imparts to it a dessicated look (Fig, 2, No. 11). The nostrills flare, the eyes open wide and again the arms rise in an imperious attitude.

The two volutes of Tonic type capitals often served as the "arms" of grotesque heads. An excellent example of this is to be found in the fragments of a frieze from a sanctuary of the first century A.D. at the Roman forum (Fig. 2, No. 12).[25] A kind of Siamese head with feathered headdress rises over the opposed volutes which whirl over and contain rosettes. This category of design, that is a head between volutes, was revived on lslamic Moorish capitals. In two cases some sceptics would not admit to their being the lineaments of a face on the junction block between the two scrolls of the capitals,[26] but they may be more disposed to accept this if they were to compare them with an 11th century water basin from the Palace of Alamiria near Cordova where the heads between volutes are naturalistically treated and therefore recognizable as being those of antelopes and lions (Fig. 2, No. 13).[27] This at least confirms that the practice of placing heads between Volutes was known to the Muslims. It is therefore not unlikely that a capital with the name of Abdal Rahman II now in the Museum at Madrid is of this class (Pl. 1, No. 14). Here the two eyes are composed of large rosettes and the remainder of the face is symmetrically treated. Another capital of this class from the mihrab of Abdal Rahman It is more subtly disguised (Fig. 2, No. 15): it is more mask-like, more caricatured.[28] But again it is possible to identify it by resorting to comparisons. At the Monastery of Ripoll a capital in the Romanesque cloister (Pl. I, No. 16) has a bearded face intruded between the volutes and the folds of the body and arms carved so as to resemble the drape of a gown. A face remarkably reminescent of this occurs on each of the two wings of an eagle painted within a Persian faience bowl (Pl. 1, No. 17). These faces are so strikingly apparent that it is amazing how they could have been overlooked. But this, alas, is true of a great many examples of which we, in this paper, can instance only a few.

Already in that early Muslim monument the Dome of the Rock (A.D. 691) in Jerusalem, the grotesque face appears through the anthropomorphism of foliage

22. *Symposia.* V. 7; cited by F.T. Elworthy: *The Evil Eye.* p. 143.
23. Marcais: *op. cit.* Fig. 283.
24. Victoria and Albert Museum. No. 401. - 1906.
25. Gusman: *L'Art decoratif de Rome.* Pl. 90.
26. One is a capital of 960 A.D. at the Archaeological Museum at Madrid (E. Kuhnel: *Maurische Kunst.* Pl. 17A.) and the other is a 12th century capital from Tinmal. (Marcias: *op. cit.* Fig. 205. cf. and example in a Carolingian Bible. (A. Boinet: *La miniature Carolingienne.* Pl. XXVII).
27. M. Gomez-Moreno: *Ars Hispaniae.* Fig. 252 A.
28. *Ibid.:* Fig. 51.

motifs. It occurs in the mosaics situated in the intermediate octagon, and could scarcely have teen identified but for the convenient examination made possible by modern photography.[29] The floral form is regarded in profile with the flower bud treated as though in vertical section (Fig. 3, No. 18). The details within the latter have nothing in common with floral forms, and there appears instead a face in a halter and the mouth pursed in a whistle. Later in Omayyad sculpture at the palace of Khirbat al Mafiar naturalistic human Leads are represented growing out of acanthus leaves,[29a] and in English medieval churches human faces rise out of the midst of foliage on bosses at the intersection of ribs.[29b] We are reminded of trees in the Arabian Nights that "bore human heads on stalks of hair instead of fruit".[29c] Painted on the tie-team of the Aqsa Mosque adjacent to the Dome of the Rock occurs another most unmistakeable face (Fig. 3, No. 19) — smiling eyes within a heart-shaped leaf outline.[30] But if this were intended to be disguised it has succeeded in its purpose for another figure carved in low relief on a tie-beam has been partly adzed away because it was the figure of a man.[31]

In the Abbasid capital of Samarra (836-82) on the banks of the Tigris it has been argued that animal or human figures could scarcely have been disguised out of religious scruples since here are to be encountered frescoes painted in a perfectly natural manner.[32] But this argument is not conclusive since it is conceivable that painting of human figures may have been tolerated in the privacy of the royal palace but not in the dwellings of the populace. Carvings in the round would undoubtedly have come under censure immediately after the Leresy of Caliph Mu'tasim's general, Alafsin. In about the year 840 Alafsin was tried at Samarra. And found guilty of clinging to vestiges of the faith of his forefathers. Although he defended himself by claiming that he sought only the wisdom of the Persian scriptures "and ignored the rest," a search in his house revealed "grotesque figures and other things of that ilk along with images and similar things."[33] The fearful end of this idolator must inevitably have had a corrective influence on the citizens of Samarra. But the medium of moulding in stucco for wall revetment was so facile and therefore so tempting to the imagination that disguise in designing was extensively adopted. A reminiscence of the human shape cannot be condemned as idolatrous precisely because it is elusive, apparent only to those who have been admitted to its secret, and in any case incapable of direct proof. Moreover, if recognized, the accused could have cited the cousin of the Prophet who suggested to, Persian artists in a *Hadith* that representations would be permissible if they would truncate the head of animals (to rob them of life) and then to treat them in the manner of flora.[34] Whatever the reason-for dissimulation the disguised grotesque occurs frequently in the stucco revetments of Samarra particularly in the shapes

29. Creswell: *op. cit.* I. Pl. 16. b. cf. also Pl. also Pi. 5a.
29a. *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 1944-46. P. 16. Pl. X.e., g.
29b. G. Grigson interprets the heads as the May King, "the sacrificial victim of the Spring." (*Country Life*. Oct. 21 1954. pp. 1356-7).
29c. *The Thousand and One Nights.* tr. Mardrus and Mathers. II p. 470.
30. R.W. Hamilton: *The structural history of the Aqsa Mosque.* 1949. Pl. XLI.
31. *Ibid,*: p. 87. Pl. XLVI, 2.
32. Aga Oglu in *Art Bulletin.* September 1954. p. 199.
33. Al Tabari: *The reign of Mutasim.* ed. Marin. 1951. pp. 115-23.
34. Cited by C.J. Lamm: "The Spirit of Moslem Art" *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts.* Cairo. III. Pt. I. pp. 1-7.

that come under the category of reciprocal and reversible. Artists sophisticated by long serving a Court could scarcely have conceived populations of such fantastic beings as are encountered in the stuccoes. No doubt at this time the artists were menial types drawn from the lower classes. It has been suggested that Caliph Mamun called his craftsmen vile precisely because they consisted of *mawali* and *dhimmi*.[35] But the art forms to which we refer are by no means vile, for though they are grotesque they are by no means degenerate. Indeed some would consider them vigorous, beautiful in a bizarre sort of way, and striking in every possible sense. The creator of such art must have been "a deeply-stirred and dreaming man whose brain projects impossible shapes to symbolize the perturbations of his spirit".[36] But while the writer of this view denies that Islam could achieve the grotesque since it lacked the deliberate application of humour in this realm, he is at any rate aware of the gigantic proportions achieved by the fantastic in Islam, and he refers to such familiar examples as Jinns, ghouls, princesses transformed into parrots and immense birds brooding over treasures in the wilderness. Another writer has remarked that caricature was disallowed in Islam where historical human beings were involved[36a] and while this is eminently true it does not at all explain those forms in Islamic art which are as comic and as queer as any in the art of caricature. Muslim artists may have been denied the opportunity of taking liberties with their human subjects, but the miniaturists had no compunction against caricaturing the landscape and gave to rocks and scenes distinctly visible human and animal faces.[36b] Art such as this has been described as exemplifying "the principle of fusion," or, "the mobile interpenetration of the animal, plant and mineral world".[37] But this is a late manifestation, and we are here concerned with tracing the strands of anthropomorphism in the abstract art of early Islam.

An interesting pattern attained with an economy of effort at Samarra consists of confronted S — scrolls with a rudimentary face inscribed between (Fig. 3, No. 20)[38] Further between each pair of scrolls the space is filled with an exactly similar inverted face. With the insinuation of an extraneous motif the otherwise quite unexceptional scrolls take on a new interest. The closest analogies to such forming of faces by means of scrolls and filler triangles seems to us to be encountered in the art of the pre-historic north. For instance on an iron scabbard of about the 6th century B.C. from La Tene now in Neuchatel[39] a wolf-like face is formed by seemingly aimless lines (Fig. 3, No. 21). The design in fact appears to us to be a more abstract version of a part of the Maikop belt[40] which, it would seem, represents an owl, perhaps the messenger of death, attacking the head of a man (Fig. 3, No. 22). It may have served as a warning to opponents to beware of the death-dealing wearer of the belt. The design of the La Tene scabbard and that on the Maikop belt may be quite independently conceived, but it is well to remember

35. Aga Oglu: op. cit, p. 192; and G. von Grunebaum: Medieval Islam. p. 182f.
36. John Aldington Symonds: *Essays Speculative and Suggestive.* 1907. pp. 156-60.
36a. E. H. Gombrich: *Caricature.* 1940. pp. 5-6.
36b. e.g. *The Shahnama* of 1371 in the Chester Beatty Collection.
37. L. Bronstein: *Bulletin of Iranian Art and Archaeology* June 1938. p. 227.
38. E. Herzfeld: *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik.* 1923. Abb. 120
39. J. Pijoan: *Summa Artis.* VI. p. 461.
40. E.H. Minns: *The Art of the Northern Nomad.* Pl. XVI A.

that the Celts of the West were beholden to the Scythians and dwellers of the Caucasus for such metalwork objects as ornamental torcs, jug handles, horsetrappings and the use of red enamel inlay on bronze.[41]

To resume our analysis of some of the Samarra stuccoes we may observe here that apart from the last example cited which characterizes the principle of interchange, there are others in which the patterns are dovetailed or interlocked, and in these too the faces form a diaper repeat. In one example[42] the notched arrowhead forms are built up by fitting them together like scales. The parallel lines of their margins keep the forms equidistant from one another; with their faces they are reminiscent of circus clowns (Fig. 3, No. 23). In another rather ingenious example,[43] the enigmatic forms are fitted between rows of rosettes (Fig. 3, No. 24). These rosettes are horizontally conjoined though vertically staggered which results in leaving equidistant interspaces. It is in these residual spaces that the forms are fitted together in mosaic fashion. The forms between the rosettes are upside down and resemble bats in flight, while the forms above each rosette are funny faces with pits sunk into the plaster serving as eyes. The idea of reciprocating forms is nowhere more advantageously worked out as here.

Certainly the facility of working in the medium of plaster may have contributed to the temptation to insert here a pair of eyes or barely identifiable mouth or nose. To the artist's mind the result would be harmless for scarcely any one would be any the wiser. Who would observe one leaf shape in the midst of an intricate mass of floral ornament ? The face at the base of a carved stucco leaf at the Mosque of al-Guyushi (1085) in Cairo[44] could not have been better disguised for it is still difficult to decide whether it was fortuitous or intended (Fig. 3, No. 25). Or might it have been executed by an artist contemplating the carving of a head of a steer such as is found on a monument in the same city dating from only two years later? Conjectures of this nature are not altogether valueless for they reduce the possibilities in lieu of certain answer to a problem impossible of solution.

Where the medium is a more deliberate and arduous one such as textile we can safely discard the possibility that form was accidentally contrived. A case in point is the border motifs in an Islamic Tapiceria del Pirineo.[45] The faces with round oggling eyes (Fig. 4, No. 26) are paralleled only by the creations of Disney, though the purpose of the former may be quite the opposite of amusing. Again the nearest parallel to this facial structure, a frieze in S. Miniato al Monte in Florence, is executed painstakingly in the medium of coloured marble mosaic (Pl. 1, No. 27). Confronted S-scrolls in white outline the schematized faces, and each head is joined to the next at the base curl over which rises a leaf form exactly as in the Tapiceria. It is curious that the animal mosaic pavements of this very church are suspected to have been based on textile motifs and if this is true it may well explain the remarkable resemblance of the two designs.

41. P. Jacobsthal: *Early Celtic Art.* I. pp. 153-60.
42. Herzfeld: *op. cit.* Abb. 120.
43. *Ibid.*: Abb. 128.
44. K.A.C. Creswell: *Muslim Architecture in Egypt.* I. Fig. 80.
45. *Archivio Espanol de Arte.* July-Sept. 1954. Pl. 8.

We hinted that the seemingly comic faces might have had quite a serious purpose. Their grins might be the leer of ghouls such as the Lilith figures of the Assyrian monuments, and their purpose may be to fend off evil by means of their own evil countenance. An inscription on a mosaic of Oceanus represented with large staring eyes states in so many words that his visage was intended to "shatter malevolent hearts and drive the imprudent tongue from this place.[46] The purpose of the beast masks with great protruding eyes on ancient Chinese bronzes has not been conclusively established, but a writer of the 3rd century B.C. reports that the image of the *T'ao-t'ieh* was intended "to warn people that the hour of disaster was at hand".[47] For all we can tell the face with pendulous eyes and teardrop nose among the stuccoes of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (Fig. 4, No. 28)[48] has conceived by the artist as such a forbidding figure. And yet this effigy is not half so fearsome as its counterpart in Iran at the Imam Duvazda in Yazd (Fig. 4, No. 29) executed some considerable time later in 1037.[49] It is a demon that wards off evil from the most sacred spot in the edifice for it occurs in the tympanum over the mihrab niche itself. How a powerful face could have gone undetected in such a hallowed position is most baffling to us. The masterful whirl of lines produces something of the fury of its soul, and in its freely flowing lines calls to mind the so-called "beast" masks on the base of the handle of bronze vessels. One such example at the Museum of St. Germain[50] is beautifully stylized with arching eyebrows and tear drop eyes (Fig. 4, No. 30). On another early Celtic bronze vessel[51] the face at the base of the handle is framed by eyebrows and side curls executed with a fine flourish (Fig. 5, No. 31). Here again the nearest affinity is with an object produced in Islamic workshops. The base of the handle of an inlaid brass ewer from Persia C. 1200 B.C.[52] not only continues the idea of treating it as a beast face, but has round staring eyes (Fig. 5, No. 32) like its Celtic prototype. The "face" of the Persian ewer is however insinuated among arabesque foliage, and there is the bare possibility that the two members rising above its "shoulders" are intended to be arms supporting the handle base. On the forehead appear what might be a pair of horns which suggest that it is intended to be a bovine face. Bull's horns are at any rate clearly visible stemming from the beast head carved on the wooden Ghaznavid door (1030) now at Agra.[53]

Another bovine face cleverly disguised amid palm and the scrolls occurs in the cinquefoil mihrab niche of a Mosque at Mosul, the Jami al Juwayjati (c. 1200) (Fig. 5, No. 33).[54] The flared nostrils, the slanting eyes, and the concave outline of the face are unmistakable. Almost with monotonous repetition we have to go to Celtic art again for this type of animal style. The bull's head on the buffer

46. Inventaire des mosaiques de la Gaule et de l' Afrique. III. No. 318 And P. Friedlander: *Documents of Dying Paganism.* 1945. pp. 23-4.
47. cited by W. Willetts: *Chinese Art. I.* 1958. p. 162.
48. K.A.C. Creswell: *Early Muslim Architecture. II,* Pl. 109d.
49. *Survey of Persian Art.* ed. A.U. Pope. IV. Pl. 273.
50. J. Pijoan: *Summa Artis.* VI. Fig. 550.
51. R. Smith: in *Archaeologia* 79. 1929. P.I.f.
52. D. Barrett: *Islamic Metalwork at the British Museum.* 1949. Pl. 7.
53. J. Strzygowski: Altai Iran. Abb. 173. See also *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.* VIII. 1846. p. 74.
54. R. Ettinghausen: in *Archaeologia Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfild.* Pl. X. 2.

end of a Celtic gold torc might have gone unnoticed, so well is it set in the midst of scrolling forms (Fig. 5, No. 34). The conformation of the face and eyes are clearly close cousins of those of our mihrab. There are no doubt likely to be some marked resemblances wherever an animal head is treated frontally in a stylized and symmetrical manner. Such is the case with a little jewel in the form of a "bucrane" found in the Tomb of Childeric at Tournai (Fig. 5, No. 35), excepting that this has a solar whorl on the forehead[56] and the bull's heads on the Cypriot bowl of the 14th century B.C. incrusted with gold and niello.[57] If it is at all doubted that the sculptor of the Mosul mihrab had a bull in mind as he carved, we cannot allay such a doubt. All we can do is to claim that this was possible since Muslim sculptors had carved bull's heads on monuments in this general region. One example is to be seen in the niches to the right of the Kharput Gate at Diyarbekir which may date from the time of the Abbasid ruler al-Muktadir as suggested by the inscription above (Fig. 5, No. 36).[58] Another bull's head in this city is to be found on an impost block at the Great Mosque of the 12th century.[59] Meanwhile the architects from Edessa had carved another bull's head on a corbel at the Fatimid gate, the Bab al futuh (1087) in Cairo.[60] We cannot be sure that these bull's heads were intended to have any significance, but there can be no doubt that they did have in ancient monuments. The custom of decorating alters, metopes etc. with bucrania is said to have originated from nailing the head of the sacrificial bull to a tree in the holy grove or to the temple wall in Greek times.[61] A rock-cut tomb at Pinara in Lycia has the horned headdress of a bull together with ears above the pointed arched gable over the door.[62] In the Etruscan tomb at Caere two bull's heads are set above the door, and bull's heads are found again on the walls of Sardinian graves.[63] Similarly in the Sahara when ox horns are set over the entrance to dwellings they are held to be for protection.[64] The skulls of animals carved on the friezes of Roman buildings are maintained to have had the same purpose, "the head was believed to contain its life so the skull became a kind of talisman protecting the building from harm".[65]

Another type of disguised face in Muslim Art would, we feel, have the same function provided we can recognize in it the image of an owl. As at Pinara, the monument in question is a mausoleum, this time that of a Persian saint at Pir-i-Bakran (A.D. 1303-12) near Isfahan. Among the slant-cut stuccoes occurs one[66] executed with a bold freedom and vigour wherein the wide staring eyes and beak

55. P. Jacobsthal: *op. cit* No. 70 d.
56. E. Babelon: *Mem. de la Soc. nat. des antiq. de France.* LXXVI. 1922 p. 67 f. The object ornamented "le fronteau de la tetiere du cheval du roi."
57. C.F.A. Schaeffer: *Enkomi Alasia. 1952.* pp. 381-9.
58. Van Berchem and Strzygowski: *Amida.* 1910. Pl. III. p.l.
59. *Ibid:* pp. 55-65.
60. K.A.C. Creswell: *Muslim Architecture in Egypt. 1.* Pl. 66. b.
61. M.P. Nilsson: *Geschichte der griechischen Religion. 1.* p. 79.
62. Perrot and Chipiez: *Histoire de l'art dans 'Antiquite. V.* 1890. p. 378. Fig. 265.
63. F. Altheim: *A history of Roman Religion.* 1938. p. 70.
64. G. F. Kunz: *The Magic of jewels and charms.* 1915. p. 346.
65. F. Granger: *The worship of the Romans.* 1895. p. 242
66. R. Ettinghausen: *op. cit.* Pl. XIII. Fig. 2.

of a bird stand out from the palmette scrolls (Fig. 6, No. 37). There is a remarkable stylistic resemblance with a Celtic chariot ornament in bronze dating from the first century A.D. in Yorkshire (Fig. 6, No. 38).[67] But since the figure is that of a frontally represented horse the wide nostrils and not the eyes are connected with convoluting lines. There is also a general resemblance of the figure at the Persian shrine with animals represented frontally in Scandinavian art [68], a head of a bird carved in basalt (c. 10th century A.D.) from Totonac in Mexico[69] and the griffin corbels from Nagarjunikonda supporting Buddhist reliefs[70]. The closest analogy however is with the early Celtic owl on the head of a broach from Mainz (Fig. 6, No. 39)[71]. There is no need to point to any specific features in common between these two figures, for we believe that their more juxtaposition should be enough to suggest that the shrine face could be that of an owl's. True there is no vestige of wings as there are on the broach, but on another very striking stucco in a tympanum at the same Persian shrine[72]. is an unmistakable schematized bird with wings outstretched (Fig. 6 No. 40). Eagles with outstretched wings had been painted in contemporary manuscripts[73], while an owl carved in plaster was found at the Muslim site of Cabra in North Africa.[74] An owl in the context of a mausoleum would be certainly fitting for in ancient Arabia the owl was traditionally held to be an emblem of human incarnation, and spirits departed from the body in this form [75]. Owls were connected with death at a very early date in Mesopotamia, for a winged female nude goddess with eagle's talons for her feet on a terracotta of the Sumerian Larsa period is represented flanked by a pair of frontally carved owls [76]. The talons suggest that she snatches away the souls of humans to the underworld (or to the land of shade symbolized by these night birds, the owls), and she is therefore the prototype of Lilith. No wonder then that the owl became synonymous with evil, and in one text spirits were identified with owls who hoot over a city[77]. Among the Romans the owl continued to be conveyor of evil portents; on a mosaic representation of the evil eye it is shown perched on the eye-brow and is being attacked by hostile creatures [78]. A Late Roman amulet with the owl on one side has an inscription on the reveres stating that Christ had vanquished the bird of night[79]. Among the pre-Islamic Arabs the soul *(hama)* was represented in poetry as a kind of bird resembling owl.. which flies out of the head of the dead man and hovers about near the grave[79a]. The function of an owl image in a Persian mausoleum might simply be apotropaic: to keep sanctuary from falling

67. Now at the British Museum.
68. Montelius: *Svenska fornsaker.* Fig. 552.
69 National Gallery, Washington: *Indigenous Art* of *America.* 1947. Pl. 99
70. A.H. Longhurst: in *Archaeological Survey of India.* 54. Pl. XXXIX.
71. Jacobsthal: *op. cit.* Pl. 160.
72. Ettinghausen: *op. cit.* Pl. XIII. Fig. 2.
73. M. Dimand: *A handbook of Muhammadan art.* Fig. 14.
74. G. Marcais: *Manual d'Art Musulman.*
75. J. Wellhausen: *Rests arabischen heidentums.* pp. 157, 183.
76. *E.G. Kraeling: in Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research.* No. 67. p. 16.f.
77. R.C. Thompson: *Devils and evil spirits. 1.* p. 50.
78. J. Harrison: *Prolegomena.* 1908. Fig. 35.
79. W.L. Hildburgh: in *Folklore.* LVIII. 1947. p. 209.
79a. A.A. Gevan: in *Journal of Theological Studies.* VI. 1904. P. 2 1.

into neglect and decay. Finally our claim of identifying an animal motif in an Islamic shrine will be less difficult to accept if we bear in mind that after the 16th century animal subjects actually appear in the shrines of Persian saints, and though they are easily recognizable they are by no means as easily spotted[80].

A further extension of the disguise principle is "ambiguity," and this is admitted to be a characteristic of Celtic art. To quote one of the best scholars of this style Celtic artists " 'see' the faces into the spirals or tendrils .... things have floating contours and pass into other things"[81]. Illustrative of this tendency we would cite a Celtic bronze with champleve enamel from Polden Hill now at the British Museum (Fig. 7, No. 41). The linear decoration may seem purely abstract and fanciful at first, but once recognized it is quite impossible to avoid conceiving the object as a face with its mouth pursed in a whistle. But the ambiguity comes when we further recognize a pair of confronted preying eagles above the face. There is of course no direct proof that these are intended to be the heads of eagles, but the hooked beaks are clearly reminiscent of those on a nomadic bronze die from Garchinovo[82] or on a 7th century A.D. gilt and garnet purse lid from Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. In Islamic art similarly in Tulunid woodwork of the 9th century (Fig. 7, No. 42)[83]. and in a Nishapur stucco of the 10th century[84], palmette forms are scrolled into birds with hooked beaks, the latter turning toward its tail as in the Garchinovo bronze. On another Tulunid woodwork of the 9th century the disguise is all but abandoned and the beaks of the confronted birds are rightly prolonged into hooks which merge with scrolling decoration. Armed with these prototypes we are enabled to identify another pair of birds (cockatoos?) drinking from a vase. The feeling evoked by these palmotized birds on a column from Kairowan (Fig. 7, No. 43)[85], brings to our mind a pair of applique adorsed cocks in the art of the northern nomads from Pazyryk (Fig. 7. No. 44), which it would seem to have been the model of Picasso's bronze cock[86]. Thus we may conclude that in temperament Islamic art is akin to styles never before suspected.[87]

We may now proceed to identify yet another type of disguised animal motif in Islamic Art. Within the framing cusp of an arch at the Kutubia minaret (12th century) at Marrakesh[88] are what we believe to be a pair of fused serpent's heads (Fig. 8, No. 45). Their nearest analogies are the two bifurcating eagle's heads ornamenting the page of a mid-9th century Carolingian Bible (Fig. 8, No. 46)[89] the "animal lyre" on a Persian silver bowl from the time of Darius (Fig. 8

80. A.U. Pope: "Representations of living forms in Persian mosques," in *Bulletin of the Iranian Institute.* New York. 1946. VI. pp. 125-9.
81. P. Jacobsthal: *Imagery in Early Celtic Art.* 1941. p.10.
82. E. Minns: *The Art of the Northern Nomads.* Pl. II.
83. G. Marcais: *L'art del'Islam.* Pl. X.
84. M. Dimand: *A handbook of Muhammadan art.* Fig. 54.
85. G. Marcais: *Manual d'Art Musulman.* Fig. 94. B.
86. See in A.H. Barr: *Picasso.* p. 182.
87. The Pazyryk cocks may however go back to Persian prototypes since antithetic birds with reversed heads probably originated in Achaemenid Persia. (A. Roes in *Revue archeologique.* 1950. II. p. 143.
88. G. Marcais: *Manual d'art Musulman.* I. fig. 226. (from water colour by Hainaut)
89. A. Boinet: *La miniature Carolingienne.* Pl. XCVII.

No. 47)[90] and a similar design on a Phoenician silver patera (Fig. 8, No. 48).[91] In the first case the design is purely a piece of decorative fantasy in the gripping-beast style, and in the next two the palmette intrusions between the swan-like necks suggest that the design has become a meaningless ornament. But we have reason to think that the Kutubia serpents are not in the same way meaningless. Our basis. for this belief is that serpents are coupled in certain examples of Muslim architecture evidently for prophylactic reasons. One well known example is the so-called 'Gate of the Two Serpents" at the Citadel of Aleppo (Pl. II, No. 49)[92] and here the threatening dragon-headed double-ended serpents are interlaced on the archivolt, while another example is at nearby- Hama in the mosque of the historian Abul Fida (d. 1331) known as the Mosque of the Serpents, where they are to be found on a colonette of a double window[93]. On a Muslim talismanic cup where a pair of confronted serpents with jaws agape and interlaced tails are depicted (Fig. 9, No. 50) the inscription says "This blessed cup is useful against the sting of a serpent, scorpion, bite of a mad dog.. . . etc.[93a] On the Irish cross of Duleek the pair of serpents interlace in a most puzzling fashion, though again as at Aleppo their tails terminate with suggestions of heads[94]. On the contrary in Islamic art as in ancient Mesopotamia the interlace is always regular and reasonable, and in fact the Aleppo serpents are turning round to bite their own tails in the very manner of the linked serpents on the carved bituminous plaque from Susa. c. 3000 B.C. (Fig. 9, No. 51)[95]. A good example of regularity in Islamic serpent interlace is found on a ceramic plate made in the region of Rakka[96]. Here the bodies of the two serpents are interlooped in oblique S-shapes constituting a sort of knot. The protective snakes on representations of Buddhist stupas e.g. at Amaravati (2nd century A.D.) form simple reef knots (Pl. II, No. 52), and on a vase handle in Rome the bodies of serpents are again formed into such reef knots. It is questionable whether the knotted bodies of the serpents have any significance in the Muslim examples[97] but it is an undoubted fact that knots for the purpose of magic were forbidden by Islam. Nevertheless an Egyptian talismanic plaque is inscribed with those very *surat* from the Holy Quran which are concerned with blowing into knots[98]. Another possible meaning of the interlacing serpents is suggested by ad-Damiri. He says that serpents copulate by twisting themselves round each other[99]. It is biologically true that serpents, especially vipers, copulate by inter-twining themselves, and the intertwined snakes in pre-Sargonid cylinder seals are taken to be the symbol of the god Ningizzida who personifies the generative force

90. P. Jacobsthal: *op. cit.* Pl. b. 14. cf. carved stone dish from Persepolis. (Ghirshman: *Iran.* Fig. 68.)
91. Perrot and Chipiez: *Histoire de I' art III.* Fig. 554.
92. Seirafi and N. Attar: *The Citadel of Aleppo. (Chiraz Press, Aleppo.)* 1954 pl-7.
Moorish writers attest the existence of a Gate of the Serpent. *(babal hanas),* at Valencia. (Makkari: Analectes. 1,102 cited by E. Levi Provencal: in *Annales del'Institut d' Etudes Orientales.* 11. 1936. P. 216).
93. M. van Berchem and E. Fatio: *Voyage en Syrie.* 1914-5. p. 177. Fig. 102.
93a. E. Rehatsek: in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.* 1875. pp. 150-3.
94. F. Henry: *La sculpture irlandaise.,* Fig. 41a.
95. *Memoires de la Delegation en Perse.* XIII. 1912. Pl. XXXVII. 8. p. 63.
96. J. Pijoan: *Summa Artis. Arte Islamico.* Fig. 192.
97. In Sumerian examples precisely such braided bodies of snakes are found as in the Rakka plate though only one snake is involved (Legrain: *Ur. Excavations.* Pl. 197.)
98. Reinaud: *Manumens Musulmans du Ducde Blacas.* II. p. 32 5.
99. *Hayat al Hayawan:* tr. Jayakar. 1. p. 634.

in nature *(Ab-u.)*.[100] The respected Orientalist whose view this was did not know of the interpretation of the Muslim zoologist, nor did he cite the legend reported by Ovid (Met. 6. 114.) that Zeus coupled with Rhea, both in the form of serpents "entwined in an indissoluble knot." Related to this idea might be the Babylonian belief that knots can aid pregnant women[101]. The suggestion that the paired snakes may have been a sexual symbol in ancient Mesopotamia is strengthened by a clay model of a couch in the Iraq Museum [102] on which "serpents are lying side by side with their heads resting on cushions." In one instance on a cylinder seal a *connubium* scene takes place beside Ningizzida who crosses a pair of serpents before his breast[103]. The theme of the entwined serpent which originates as early as the period Uruk IV is thus regarded as "a primaeval symbol of the blessings of fertility resultant upon felicitous marriage."

The intertwined serpent motif is familiar to us from the cadeucus of Hermes, but for the figure itself we have to go back to Babylonia. On the libation vase of Gudea (c. 2130 B.C.) of Lagash the intertwined snakes actually have a pole between them, or it may be said that they are wound round a staff (Fig. 9, No. 53)[104]. Now although this Gudea vase is dedicated to his god Ningizzida and the serpents may be his symbols, they cannot be regarded as his alone. On late Babylonian cylinders eals the goddess Ishtar carries a short staff flanked by curving uraeus snakes[105], and it seems that Simios consort of Atargatis was worshipped in the form of a cadeucus at Hierapolis[106]. The cadeucus staff was often carried by gods at Hatra. Intertwined snakes appear later on in South India. One example of a *Nagakal* found near a tank at Ankal (Mysore)[107] has the figure of a running man within the top interlacement suggesting the figure of Hermes himself (Fig. 9, No. 54). On the other hand the rosettes between the other interlacements have no prototypes other than a prehistoric ivory handle from Egypt, which seems to be quite isolated object in this land. Later the interlace of the serpent survived in the hieroglyphic for Apep or A-P-P, the destroyer and enemy of the gods, written as in Fig. 9, No. 54A. But if the prototype of the actual form of the cadeucus is to be found in Babylonia, that of the staff of Asclepius is to be found in Egypt where the hawk of Horus-Ra tops the staff intertwined with a snake[109]. Now Asclepius, who may have been a Creek hero before he became the god of healing, may have had the snake as his attribute because he was noted for restoring several people from dead to life[110]. Our reason for this view is that the snake was

100. H. Frankfort: in *Iraq.* I. 1932. p. 12.

101. Thureau-Dangin: "Rituel et Amulettes contre Labartu," in *Revue Archeologique.* XVIII. 1921. p. 167f.

102. E.D. Van Buren: "Entwined serpents," in *Archiv fur Orientforschung.* 1935-6. X. p. 54.

103. In one instance on a cylinder seal a *connubium* scene takes place beside Nigizzida who crosses a pair of serpents before his breast. Late cylinder seals portray Ningizzida encircled by serpents or holding a serpent in each hand. (E.D. Van Buren: "The God Ningizzida" in Iraq I. 1934. pp. 71-6. Pls. IXb, Xa-e, Xla, b.)

104. De. Sarzec: *Decouvertes.* Pl. 44; C. Zervos: *L'Art de la Mesopotamie.* 1935. Pl. 200.

105. C. Menant: *Glyptique Orientale. 1.* P. iii. Fig. 99. p. 165, Fig. 102.

106. Frothingham: "The Babylonian origin of Hermes, the Snake-God, and of the Cadeucus, " *in American Journal of Archaeology.* XX. 1916. p. 187. Fig. 8.

107. J. Vogel: *Indian Serpent Lore* Pl. XXX.

108. F. Petrie: "Egypt and Mesopotamia", in *Ancient Egypt.* 1917. d. 34.

109. Wilkinson: *Ancient Egyptians* V. p. 12. Pl. 46. and IV. p. 183. W.R. Cooper *(The Serpent myths of Ancient Egypt.* 1873. p. 11) states that the scepter was transmitted to Greece from Egypt along with 46 hermetic treatises.

110. Appolod. iii. 10 section 3. See E.J. and L. Edelstein: *Asclepius.* 1945.

a symbol of immortality because of its ability to cast its slough thereby renewing its vitality. For instance in the Book of the Dead the deceased pray to become like serpents: "I am the serpent Sata .... I die and am born again."[111] According to Apollodorus (III 3. 1.) it was from a serpent that Asclepius learned the secret of restoring the dead to life. His staff with which he effected his cures was only slightly different from that of Moses which was of brass and the snake was not wreathed round but was situated on top of a pole. It had the specific function of curing snake bites. (Numbers XXI. 4-9).

Tradition asserts that Hermes thrust the rod between two fighting serpents and thus became a symbol of the settlement of quarrels[112]. The fact is that originally Hermes had nothing to do with serpents. He apparently developed out of a post or pillar, and in the earliest representations he is a post with a human head[113]. A phallic post symbolizing renewal of life was called Herm[114], so it must have been a quite natural step to buttress it on either side by related symbols. The staff of Hermes which is only the "willow" or magic staff in Homer, acquired the figure of twisted snakes in the middle of the 6th century B.C., and the name for it, the cadeucus, appeared first in Herodotus[115]. It must have continued to have the same meaning since the cadeucus appears as a charm on magic amulets and on terracotta disks[116]. The interlaced serpents on Islamic monuments have this significance as we have seen.

Another related motif, the serpent with the tail in its mouth, begins its career in Egypt in this very context for it is found on Late Dynastic or Ptolemaic stelae which served to protect against snakes, scorpions, and other noxious creatures[117]. Later the Greek name 'Ouroboros which was given to such a tail devouring snake came to symoblize either the universe[118], or recurring time[119], and in one instance on the base of the Antonine column at the Vatican the figure of the winged genius, the Aion, who raises the busts of Anthony and Faustina towards heaven between two eagles, combines in his hand the symbol of the world joined to that of eternity, for the globe of the world encircled by signs of the zodiac is itself entwined by the cosmic serpent[120]. At the beginning of the 5th century A.D. Claudion described how a serpent devouring its own tail encircled the cavern of the universe and turned eternally on itself with a circular movement[121]. In Egypt where the image arose the encircling serpent was initially conceived as a noose that makes captive all that is inimical. The stelae of the Ethiopian King

111. E.A.W. Budge: *The Gods of the Egyptians.* 1904. II. p. 377.
112. Funk and Wagnall's. *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend.* 1949.
113. J. Harrison: *Themis.* p. 365.
114. G. Murray: *Four Stages of Greek Religion.* p. 74.
115. F.J.M. de Waele: *The Magic staff or rod in Graeco-Italian Antiquity. 1927.*
116. D. Levi: "The Evil Eye", in *Antioch on the Orontes.* ed. R. Stillwell. III. 1914. pp. 227-9.
117. Bonner: *Studies in Magical amulets.* 1950. p. 156f. Pl. XXIV. 5, 6.
118. This symbolism might already be ended by the serpent encircling the Phoenician cup of Palestina of the 7th century B.C. (Perrot and Chipiez: *Histoire de l'Art.* III. p. 759. Fig. 543.) The serpent with the tail in its mouth occurs in Tutankhamen's Tomb. *(Illustrated London News.* Jan. 7th. 1933. p. 3.
119. Bomen *op. cit.* p. 250.
120. F. Cumont: *Textes et monuments figures relatifes aux mysteres tie Mithra* 1896.I. I. p. 80.f.
121. Claudian: *Elopge de Stilicott.* II. p. 424 f.

Piankhi (c. 741 B.C.) tells how the prince of Sais laid seige to the town of Ahnas and disposed his army round it like a serpent with its tail in its mouth.[122]. In the Book of Apophis (c. 312/1 B.C.) the motif is once again alluding to destruction: "your tail is in your mouth, you are eating yourself," says the writer to Apophis[123]. When Horapollo wrote possibly in the 4th century A.D. the Ouroboros may have signified the universe[124], but in Egyptian religion the symbol stood more as one of hell or abyss. For instance the god Beds Pantheos[125] stands on the Ouroboros which encloses within it various animals, as on the serpentine plague from the Kestner Museum in Hanover. Later in Rome the Ouroboros is found on a pedestal on which was a statue dedicated to Mithras[126]. Significantly, the figure of the Mithraic Chronos, usually depicted with wings, lion's head and claws, and enveloped by a snake[127], has been shown in an early example to be iconographically connected with the Egyptian Bes Pantheos in such specific features as lion's head mask on the knees, open eye on chest[128] four arms holding emblems and in the accumulation of divine elements[129]. There is no unanimity in the identification of the Mithraic leontocephalus deity as Zurvan-Kronos for other scholars citing Manichaean evidence have identified the figure with deus Aremanius[130], pointing out further that in the Pahlavi books both lion and snake figure prominently as creatures of Ahriman[131]. If that is true then the Zoroastrian Ahriman is related to, and probably originates from the Assyrian underworld demon with lion's head and eagle claws: Again it would seem that the concept of Zervan-akarana, the Aion, was originally a Median concept introduced into Zoroastrain religion, for a pupil of Aristotle confirms that it was a conception of the Medes[132]. This belief that Ahura Mazda and Ahriman both stemmed from the First Principal, Infinite Time, was adhered to by the Zervanite who were regarded as heretics by those orthodox Zoroastrians, the Sassanids. In the Roman context it is scarcely conceivable that the serpent-entwined, lion-headed god is the principal evil, Ahriman. The serpent is not here a purveyor of evil, but a symbol of Time "which devours and consumes everything." On the one hand the multipally interlaced serpent of Babylonian cylinders might have signified infinity, and on the other the serpent winding round the frame of deities signified eternity.

We cannot here relate in full the history of the serpent-coiled deity, but we may at least point to a few early examples. On one Babylonian cylinder seal the two serpents of Ningizzida coil round his body and then rise from his shoulders.[133]

122. W. Deonna: "Ouroboros" in *Artibus Asiae.* XV. 1952. p. 166.
123. *Ibid.* p. 166.
124. *Hieroglyphica. I.* 2.
125. F. W. Von Bissing: in *Aegyptische Zeitschrift.* LXXV. i. 1939. p. 130. f.
126. Pettazzoni: *Essays in the History of Religion.* 1954. p. 90. Pl. XII. Fig. 12. and Pl. X. Fig. 9.
127. F. Cumont: *Textes et Monuments figures relatifes aux mysteres de Mithras.* 1896. I. p. 74f.
128. However in the Avesta Mithras is described as "the eye of Ahura Mazda" (Yasht. 10.)
129. Pettazzoni: *op. cit.* chapter entitled "The Monstrous figure of Time in Mithraism."
130. Duchesne-Guillemin: *Oermazd et Ahriman.* p. 128.
131. R.C. Zaehner: *Zurvan. A Zoroastrian iilemma.* 1955. p. ix.
132. *Spiegel: Avesta. l. p.* 271. II. p. 119, 125f.
133. W.H. Ward: *Cylinder Seals of Western Asia.* Fig. 368. b; and E. Porada: *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals.* 1948. Fig. 386e.

He is completely borne by them as his weight is supported on their erect tails. Next, the snake twines round a goddess from the Hyksos level (17th-16th century B.C.) at Tell Beit Mirsim[134]. The serpent-entwined female figure survives into the Hellenistic period in a late semi-Egyptian image of the Syrian goddess Athargatis.[135] Side by side with these there survives another category of the serpent-entwined motif, beginning again in Babylonia on a *kudurru* or boundary stone[136], recurring in Greece round the omphalos[137], or navel stone, and culminating in the Orphic divinity Phanes, the beautiful winged youth born from the primordial cosmic egg[138]. The Mithraic figure of Zervan seems to be protected within the embrace of the snake for on the figure from Ostia (A.D 190) the serpent winds six times round the body with its head on the head of the leontocephatic god. Here we have a parallel in the Sanskrit version of the Buddha legend of early century A.D. in which the Naga King Muchalinda winds seven coils round the body of the Buddha to protect him from cold and storm[140].

So much for the theme of the intertwined serpent in its varied manifestations. Our next objective is to show how the process of anthropomorphism invaded Islamic interlaces, vegetable scrolls, and even religious inscriptions. In Sassanian metalwork scrolls sometimes terminate in animal heads.[141] The type is revived in the medieval art of Islam. For example animal-headed s-Pirals are to be found in the stucco frieze at the Qara Serai at the Atabeg Badr al din Lulu (I233-59).[142] Not only animal but human figures develop out of scrolls in the 13th century kursi originally from Hama.[143] An inscription on a metalwork[144] has an interlace developing above and terminating on loving feminine heads placed cheek to cheek (Fig. 10, No. 55). Another inscription from a moulded jar from Nisibin (first half of the 13th century[145] has a letter -forming itself into a rampant serpent (Fig. 10, No. 56) whose form recalls that on a Celtic iron scabbard (Fig. 10, No. 57).[146] In the West, interlacing stylized zoomorphic initials already occur in late 9th century English manuscript) but they have a quite different character. The next step from the anthropomorphizing of single letters in the Arabic script is to make pictures with whole words and formula. For example, in 15th-16th century Turkish miniature the letters form Noah's Ark with the name of Allah inscribed on top of the mast.[147] In other instances a cock or a stork is thus formed, or yet Allah's name is intertwined to form a face.[148] We

134. C. Gordon: *Adventures in the Nearest East.* 1957. p. 56.
135. B. Zimmer: *The Art of Indian Asia.* 1. Pl. 16 b.
136. Eisler: *Weltenmantel und Himmelzelf.* II. p. 390. No. 1.
137. J. Harrison: in *Journal of Hellenic Studies.* XIX. p. 225 f.
138. E. Panofsky: *Studies in Iconology.* 1939. p. 73 Fig. 36
139. *F. Cumont: op. cit. 0.* 238.
140. N.J. Krom: *The Life of Buddha* 1926. p. 11.
141. *Smirnoff: Argenterie Orientaie.* 1909. Pl. 9. Fig. 24.
142. Saree and Herzfeld: *Archaeologische Reise im Euphrat imd Tigris Gebiet.* III. Pl. XCVII.
144. D. Barrett: *Islamic metalwork in the British Museum.* Pl. 6.
145. Victoria and Albert Museum. C. 131. 1938.
146. Jacobsthal: *Early Celtic Art.* Pl. 70.
147. E. Kuhnel: *Islamische Schrifikunst.* Abb. 80.
148. *Ibid.* Abb. 80-81 17; and C.E. Arseven: *Les Arts Decoratfs Turcs.* Figs. 694, 696, 699, 700.

cannot specify an exact moment when the anthropomorphising of Arabic letters took place but one of the earliest examples must surely be the Bobrinsky bucket from Herat (1163) where on an upper inscriptional register the human figures are imperfectly attached to the vertical letters (Fig. 10, No. 58)[149] and in a lower register the tips of the verticals are actually treated as faces, as a closer look reveals. In a metalwork of c. 1230 the apogee of the animated script is reached, for not only the vertical but the whole letter takes on a human or animal form. Difficult as it is to recognize, it may be imagined how much more difficult it is to read![150] It would be extraordinary if the anthropomorphizing of letters became suddenly established without any previous tentative approach toward it, and this leads us to suggest that in the twisted Kufic letters (Fig. 10, No. 59) on the early 11th century maqsura of al Muizzat Kairouan,[151] We have the germs of face formulation already at work. But in this instance it would be useless to attempt to convince the sceptic who is never satisfied unless the last 'i' is dotted and the last 't' crossed.

A renowned Islamic art historian has denied (privately) our suggestion that a pottery jar in an illuminated manuscript the Dioscorides of 1222[152], represents a human face (Fig. 10, No. 60). The round eye may be fortuitous but there is no mistaking the pair of unequal tresses that hang down the belly of the jar. It is to be' remembered that Umar Khayyam refers to the articulating clay population standing in rows, and another poet describes wine jars like a row of men drawn up to a dance[153]. Perhaps there is a suggested connection between the feminine face on the jar and the honey sweet medicines it contained. Elsewhere quite other meanings prevailed. In South America the view was that "the clay vessel is a woman just as the earth itself from which the clay is obtained is regarded as a woman.[154] Neolithic pots with female head and breasts have been found in Cyprus[155], while a woman's head is a characteristic design on the so-called face urns of Anatolia[156]. A vase from the second city of Troy has a schematized feminine form with two round tabs for the eyes overarched by brows that continue into a nose. There are two larger tabs for the breasts, while the jar handles serve as rudimentary arms[157]. The effect is that of a woman carrying a jar on her head. A pot from Chagar Bazar in North Syria found in the Habur level (2000-1700 B.C.) is more subtly contrived for the face is not added on to it, but instead the pot is moulded into a male face. The painted outlines however suggest some sort of mask, and if indeed it were a mask it may have been connected with a ceremony involving ritual libations[158]. It has been argued that the Troy face vase is a development of the protoliterate Ishtar symbol from Erech[159], but

149. See F. Sarre: *Meisterwerke Muhammadanischer* .... II. 143.
150. D. S. *Rice: The Wade Cup in the Cleveland Museum of Art. 1955.* Op. 22f. Figs. 19f.
151. *G. Marcais: Manual d' Art Musulman,* I. Fig. 93.
152. F. Sarre: *op. cit.* I. Taf 5; and cf. M. Dimand: *op. cit.* Fig. 13.
153. Cite by D.S. Rice in *Arabica.* V. 1958. fasc. 1. 0. 27.
154. R. Karsten: *The Civilization of the South American Indians.* 1926. p. 246.
155. R. H. Lang in *Journal of the Anthropological Institute.* XII. p. 187.
156. V. G. Childe: *The Dawn of European Civilization.* 1939. p. 41. Fig. 21; and W. Lamb in *Annual of the British School at Athens.* XLVI. 1951. pp. 75-80.
157. Perrot and Chipiez: *Histoiere del' aridansl'Antiquite VI. Fig. 376.*
158. M.E.L. Mallowan: in *Iraq* IX. 1947. Pl. XL. seep. 186 for affinities with other vaseheads of that category.
159. H. Frankfort: "Ishtar at Troy," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies.* VIII. pp. 194-200.

whether this is true or not we have established numerous examples of female anthropomorphized pots in antiquity to which we wish to add that in the aforesaid mesopotamian miniature. In order to complete our list of anthropomorphized pots we should not omit to mention that important class of dummy Canopic jars from Egypt with removable heads, human and animal, representing the four parts of the human entrails. For though these jars were too small to contain the viscera, they were no doubt used in burials. Similarly the face urns from Pomerania and Silesia made at the beginning of the Iron Age were funerary in purpose and contained the ashes of the cremated dead[160]. The Canopic jars of Egypt appear to have migrated to Etruscan Italy where the terracotta covers of cinerary urns from Chiusi, occurring in well-tombs dating from the 7th and early 6th century B.C., were shaped in human form[161]. Although the term "Canopic" for the Egyptian burial jars is a misnomer, it is interesting in our context to remember that the classical Canopus from whom these vases were named was the pilot of Menelaus, who was buried at Canopus in Egypt and worshipped there in the form of a jar with a human head and swollen body.

We have passed in review a number of forms in Islamic art—ostensibly abstract but ultimately based on anthropomorphic figures. We have adduced parallels from other cultures to show the kinship in stylization, and to substantiate our claim that these forms indeed derive from human or animal sources. Sometimes the meaning of these forms in the Islamic context can only be guessed by referring to its counterpart in another culture. But there is no need to suppose influences, for the similarity is due to a predilection common to them, and in the case of Islam this attitude derives from anti-naturalism which has mainly been promoted by religious prohibition.

160. Frankfort: *op. cit,* p. 194.

161. See *Critica dA'rte* 1. 18f., 82f.

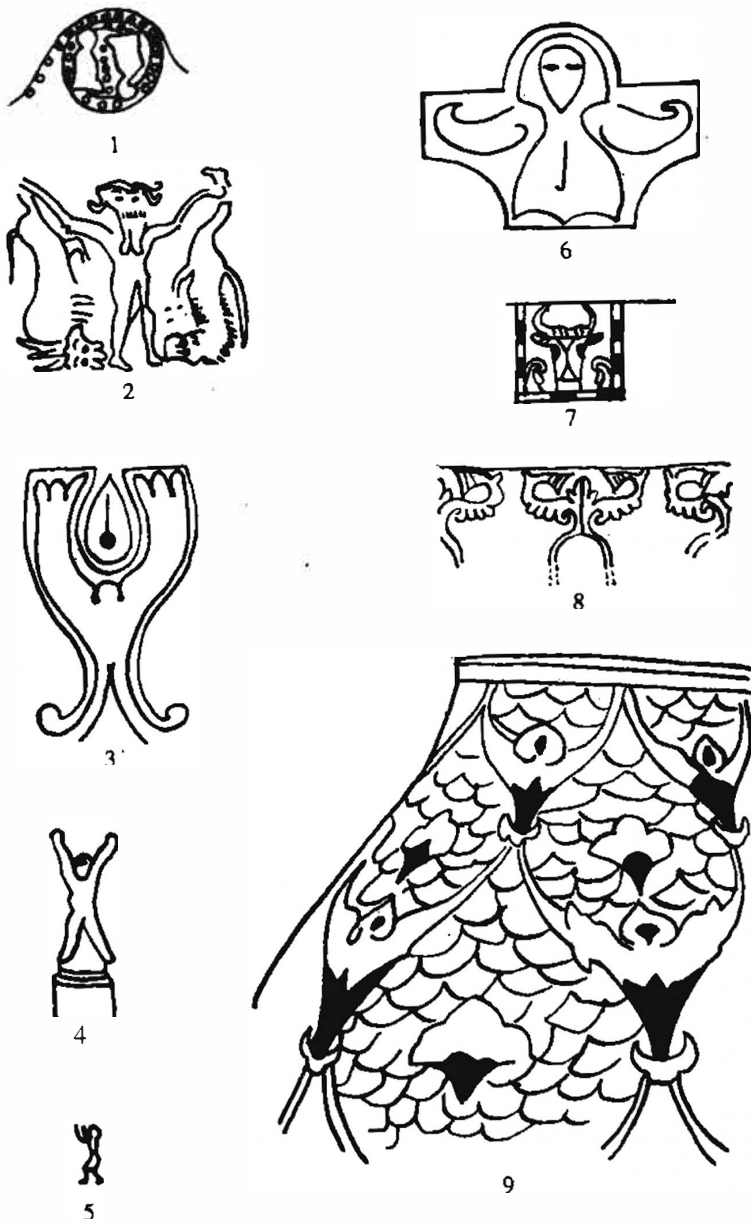
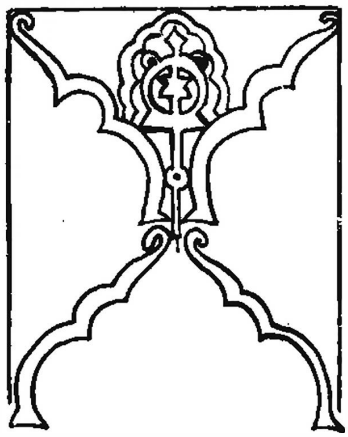


Fig. 1



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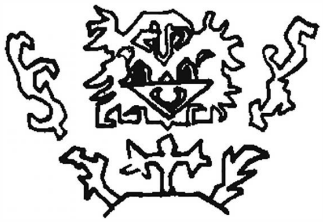

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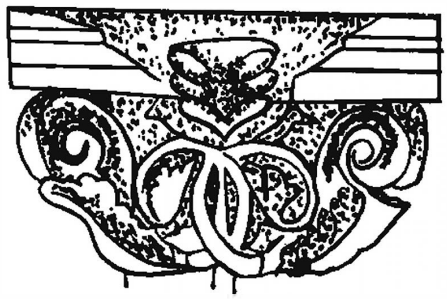

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Fig. 2

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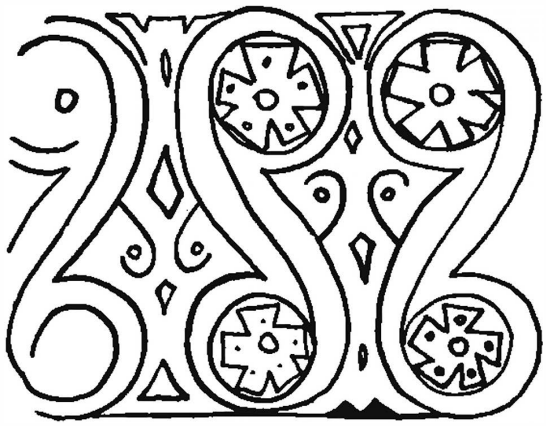

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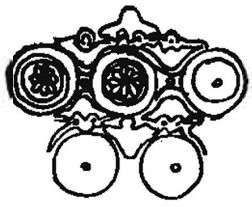

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Fig. 3

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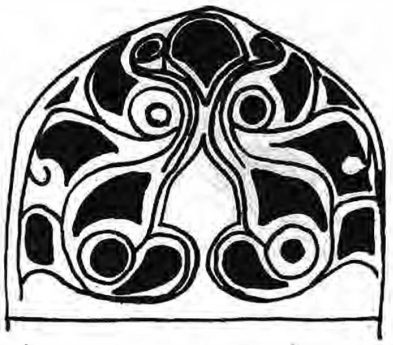

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Fig. 4

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Fig. 5

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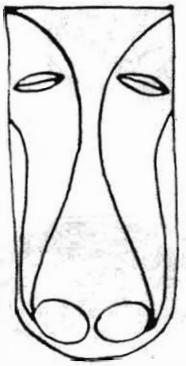

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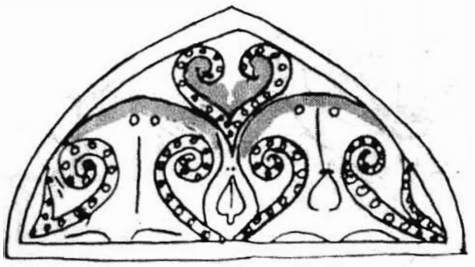

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Fig. 6

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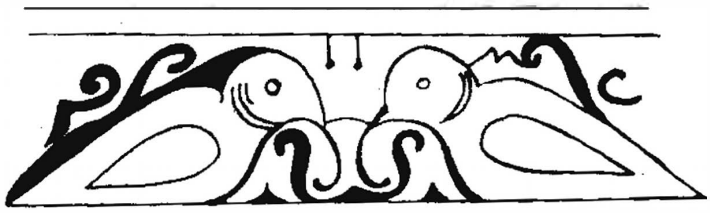

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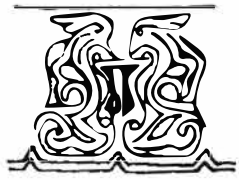

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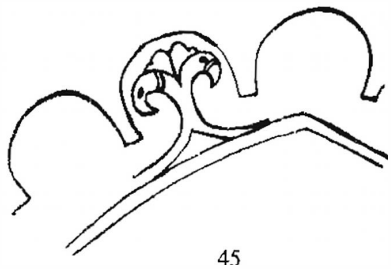
Fig. 7



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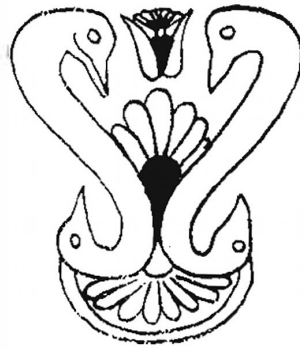

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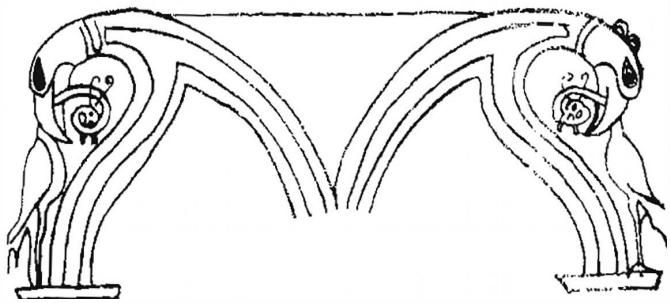

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Fig. 8

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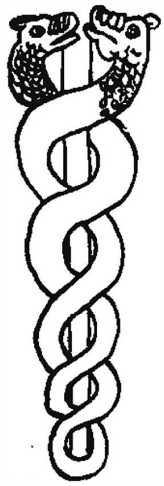

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Fig. 9

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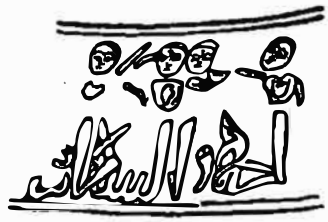

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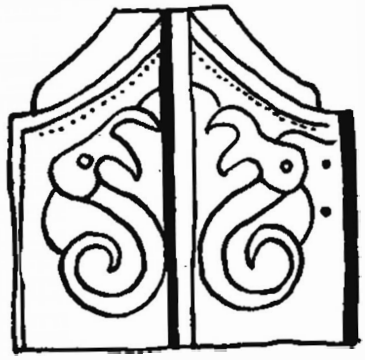

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Fig. 10

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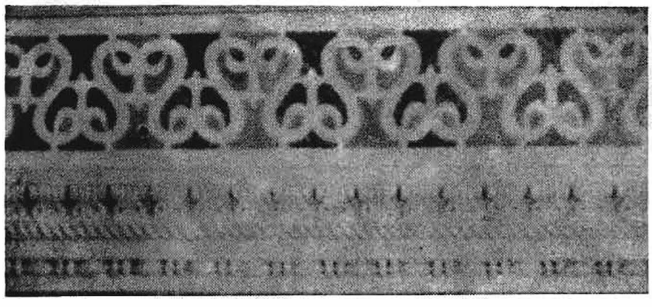

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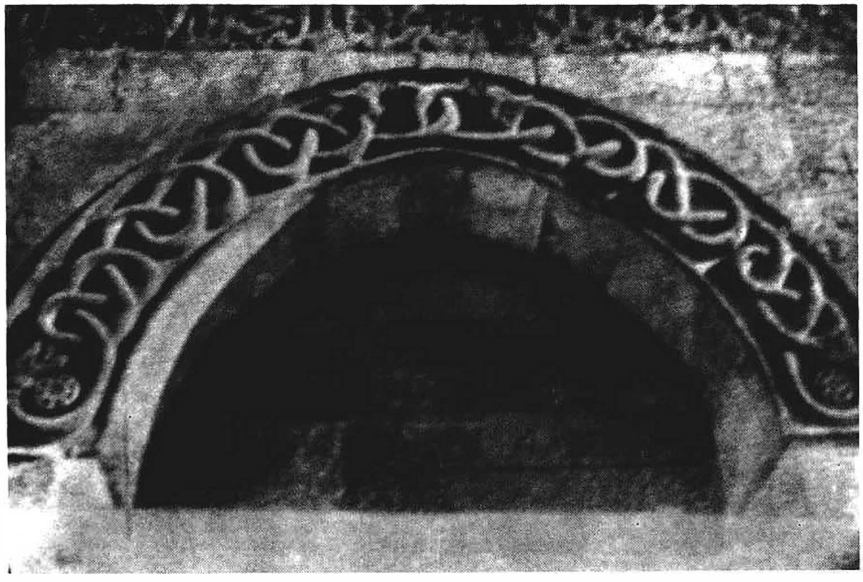

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