

1 Taj Mahal and its garden, Agra, begun 1632

The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning*

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The Nobel Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore called it a "teardrop on the cheek of time"; world-traveler Eleanor Roosevelt felt that its white marble "symbolizes the purity of real love." Both writers

shared the rather widespread romantic notion that the Taj Mahal (Fig. 1), the vast mausoleum built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (1592–1666) for his wife Mumtaz Mahal (1593–1631), is a noble embodiment of

* This article is essentially the documented text of a lecture, presented at various museums and universities over the past two years, that summarizes material to be dealt with at greater length in a forthcoming monograph on the symbolism of the Taj Mahal and its inscriptional program. The major portion of the research was accomplished during 1975–76, as part of a larger study of Mughal architecture during the reign of Shah Jahan, under a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. The nucleus of the interpretation presented here was contained in a paper entitled "The Taj Mahal as a Symbolic Replica of the Throne of God," which I read at the 63rd Annual Meeting of the College Art Association of America, Washington, D.C. (January, 1975). The list

of institutions and individuals who have facilitated my research is too lengthy to be included on this occasion, but I am especially grateful to Professor Richard Ettinghausen and numerous other distinguished specialists in Islamic art who have been extremely generous from the outset in their responses to my persistent queries, but who of course are not responsible for the views expressed here. Due to the unavailability of the type, the diacritical signs for certain Arabic and Persian letters have been omitted. Photographs are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

N.B. A bibliography of sources, cited by author in the notes, follows this article.

unparalleled marital devotion, a monument to undying love.¹ The aesthetic qualities of the tomb are popularly believed to furnish proof of its builder's intense feeling: what else but great Love could have inspired such great Beauty? In fact, this "explanation" of the tomb can be shown to be essentially a myth—a myth which ignores a great deal of evidence to the contrary, that Shah Jahan was less noble and romantically devoted than we thought, and that the Taj Mahal is not purely and simply a memorial to a beloved wife. A serious reassessment of this important monument is long overdue; and in the following pages I propose, first, to trace briefly the background of the myth of the Taj; and second, to present the broad outlines of a new interpretation of its various levels of symbolic meaning.

I

The origins of the notion that the Taj is a sort of love poem in stone may perhaps be traced back to the official accounts of the early years of Shah Jahan's long reign (1628–1658), written in Persian by the court-appointed historians Muhammad Amin Qazwini and 'Abd al-Hamid Lahawri.² Shah Jahan had been emperor for only about three years when Mumtaz Mahal died suddenly in 1631, a few hours after giving birth to their fourteenth child.³ Although she was the second of Shah Jahan's three legal wives, Mumtaz Mahal—as her title implies—was obviously his favorite, being the mother of all (except one daughter) of his living children, as well as his constant companion during the nineteen years of their marriage.⁴ Since portraits were

never made of high-born women, we do not know what Mumtaz Mahal looked like, but she is reported to have been extremely beautiful. The official accounts of her death describe Shah Jahan's grief with the elaborate rhetoric then in fashion in Persian literature. Lahawri, for example, extravagantly claims that the emperor's grief "crumbled his mountain-like endurance," that his beard turned white virtually overnight, and that he did not make a public appearance for one full week.⁵ In a similar vein, the seventeenth-century French traveler François Bernier records that Shah Jahan had been so enamored of his beautiful wife that "it is said that he was constant to her during life, and at death was so affected as nearly to follow her to her grave."⁶

Stemming from these highly exaggerated seventeenth-century accounts of Shah Jahan's grief, the notion of his undying love for his wife apparently assumed its present guidebook form sometime in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, during the heyday of Romanticism when emotion and intense feelings were exalted as ends in themselves. Over the centuries, Shah Jahan's reputation as a devoted husband has increased to the point that it is sometimes claimed that he remained sexually faithful to his deceased wife for the rest of his life. Since he lived to be seventy-four, this would make a grand total of some thirty-five years of supposed celibacy! In 1658 Shah Jahan was imprisoned in the Agra Fort by his rebellious and puritanical son Aurangzeb, and it was from the tower of the Fort that the aging ruler is popularly supposed to have spent the remaining eight years of his life gazing at the white

¹ This interpretation is either implicit or explicit in almost all publications dealing with the Taj, as, e.g., the relatively recent, popular book by David Carroll, *The Taj Mahal*, from which the quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt was taken. Although the literature on the Taj is extensive, only four books are worthy of serious mention: Moin-ud-Din, reissued in 1924 under the title *The Taj and Its Environments*, Chaghtai, which remains the best work on the Taj to date; Dietrich Brandenburg, *Der Taj Mahal in Agra*, Berlin, 1969; and Nath. A number of valuable articles on the Taj have appeared in the last few years, but will not be listed here since they do not discuss the question of the monument's meaning.

² See C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature, A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, 1, London, 1970, 566ff. Qazwini's history of the first ten years of Shah Jahan's reign, which he was appointed to write in the eighth year, exists only in manuscript; the Persian text of Lahawri's history of the first twenty years of the reign has been published by Kabir al-Din Ahmad and Abd al-Rahim, eds., *The Badshah Namah by Abd al-Hamid Lahawri*, 2 vols., Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1867–68. For the historical information contained in this article, Lahawri's as yet untranslated history was consulted, along with Saksena.

³ Lahawri, I-A, 384ff.; Saksena, 309ff. The exact date of death was June 17, 1631 O.S.; it occurred in Burhanpur in central India, where Shah Jahan had been engaged for about a year and a half in a protracted military campaign.

⁴ Although Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal (whose title means "Elect of the Palace") had become betrothed in 1607, they were not married until 1612, or two years after his first marriage, in 1610, to the daughter of Mirza Muzaffar Husain Safavi, a lineal descendant of Shah Isma'il of Persia. Shah Jahan's third wife, whom he married

in 1617, was the granddaughter of the powerful Mughal noble, 'Abd al-Rahim, Khan-i-Khanan. Of Shah Jahan's fourteen children by Mumtaz Mahal, only seven survived infancy, including four sons. Apparently his only other surviving child was a daughter by his first wife, born in 1611. All three marriages were obviously intended to effect alliances with powerful noble families, but Shah Jahan seems to have been romantically attached only to Mumtaz Mahal, who was the granddaughter of the Grand Vizir under Shah Jahan's father, the Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627).

⁵ Lahawri, I-A, 384ff., where it is also stated that the Emperor put on white mourning clothes, abstained from music and other entertainments "for two years," and twice was heard to say that he felt like resigning his throne out of grief. Although Shah Jahan undoubtedly suffered considerable bereavement, it should be noted that the evidence of various surviving portraits does not support the claim that his beard soon turned white. Moreover, the one week of cancelled court appearances hardly seems to betoken excessive grief, when compared to the period of more than four weeks that Jahangir isolated himself from the court on account of his grief over the death in 1616 of his four-year-old granddaughter, Shah Jahan's first-born child by Mumtaz Mahal (see Alexander Rogers, trans., *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, or Memoirs of Jahangir*, New Delhi, 1968, I, 326ff.).

⁶ Bernier, 293. It should be noted that Bernier reached India only toward the end of 1658, and that his assessment of Shah Jahan's grief was therefore either based on hearsay or else inspired, at least in part, by his reaction to the tomb itself, which he felt "deserves much more to be numbered among the wonders of the world than the pyramids of Egypt" (p. 299).

silhouette of the Taj in the distance, seeking solace in the poignant beauty of the mausoleum he had built for his one true love.⁷

Since the early nineteenth century, European visitors to the Taj—particularly the British—have been quite carried away by the sentiments that they felt the tomb expressed. In 1839, while on a tour with her husband, the wife of the government official W. H. Sleeman is reported to have said of the Taj: "I cannot tell you what I think, for I know not how to criticize such a building, but I can tell you what I feel. I would die tomorrow to have such another over me!"⁸ Sleeman does not record his reaction to this emotional outburst, but he must have been deeply moved as well.

In the final analysis, of course, it is the silent and majestic beauty of the mausoleum itself that seems to furnish irrefutable proof of the nobility and intensity of Shah Jahan's affection for his wife. Never before or since has such an extravagant memorial been built by a man for a woman. Within the Islamic tradition, a tomb for a wife on such a scale was entirely without precedent: the only comparable structures anywhere are the pyramids and a few other grandiose monuments built by powerful rulers as tombs for themselves. Although the French traveler Tavernier's estimates of 20,000 workmen and twenty-two years for the Taj's construction are greatly exaggerated (the main structure was actually completed in only about four years), the dimensions of the entire tomb complex are truly impressive.⁹ The domed mausoleum is almost 250 feet high and is placed within a walled enclosure (see Fig. 29) measuring about 1,000 by 1,860 feet and containing an area of some forty-two acres. It is vast enough to include all of St. Peter's, including Bernini's piazza.

The Taj was Shah Jahan's first great architectural project in a long series of monuments constructed during the thirty years of his reign. Some of his other projects, such as the magnificent Red Fort in his new capital Shahjahanabad at Delhi (1639–1648), were more extensive and costly, but none ever surpassed the Taj in splendor.¹⁰ In the popular view, the years of effort and the incredible expense of building the Taj—like its inspired beauty—also furnish proof of Shah Jahan's noble devotion and his great and abiding love.

II

The image of Shah Jahan's supposed nobility of character, however, like his supposed religious orthodoxy, is contradicted by other contemporary accounts of Mughal India, which portray him as arrogant, petty, and ruthless, a man obsessed with power and the emblems of power. Sir Thomas Roe, the first English ambassador to the Mughal court, met Shah Jahan in 1617, and characterized the vain young prince (Fig. 2), then in his twenties, as "ravenous and tyrannical," and possessed of such a pride "as may teach Lucifer."¹¹ Five years after this encounter, in 1621, Shah Jahan apparently had his elder brother Khusrau murdered, and he eventually ordered the deaths of five other close male relatives in his relentless pursuit of the imperial throne.¹²

Other contemporary European accounts also cast serious doubt upon Shah Jahan's reputation as a devoted husband, especially after the death of Mumtaz Mahal. According to the gossipy chronicles of the Italian Manucci, Shah Jahan indulged his sexual appetites with the wives of his officials and others, to such an extent that it seemed "as if the only thing Shah Jahan

⁷ According to a popular legend recorded in an early 19th-century Persian work by Qasim 'Ali Afridi (1771–1827), Mumtaz Mahal on her deathbed extracted two promises from her husband: first, that he not have any more children by his other wives, and second, "that he should build such a mausoleum over her, the like of which was not to be found anywhere else" (cited in Jogindra Nath Chowdhuri "Mumtaz Mahal," *Islamic Culture*, xi, 1937, 379). This account is totally unsupported by the Persian histories of Shah Jahan's reign, and seems to be nothing more than a romantic fabrication.

⁸ W. H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, Karachi, repr. 1973, 317.

⁹ See the translation by V. Ball, *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Baron of Aubonne*, 2 vols., London, 1925, i, 91: "I witnessed the commencement and accomplishment of this great work, on which twenty-two years have been spent, during which twenty thousand men worked incessantly." Since Tavernier (the French edition of whose memoirs was published in 1676) apparently first reached India only in 1640, he could not have seen the commencement of the Taj, which, according to the Persian histories, occurred around January, 1632. The evidence of the histories and the three dated epigraphs on the Taj suggest that the exterior of the tomb was complete by around 1636, and the rest of the complex took approxi-

mately another six to ten years; it was probably finished by 1647 at the latest (see my article, "Amanat Khan and the Calligraphy on the Taj Mahal," forthcoming in *Kunst des Orients*).

¹⁰ For a brief account of Shah Jahan's new capital, see Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (The Islamic Period)*, Bombay, n.d., 111ff. Since proponents of what I have called the "myth" of the Taj maintain that the tomb symbolizes the Emperor's eternal devotion to his dead wife, it is curious that Shah Jahan decided to shift his capital from Agra to Delhi before the entire complex was complete; in fact, until his imprisonment in the Agra Fort in 1658, he was away from the city most of the time.

¹¹ William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615–1619*, 2 vols., London, 1899, i, 424. Roe's negative reaction to Shah Jahan was at least partly due to his inability to secure the trade concessions he had been sent to negotiate.

¹² Saksena, 34ff., where the views of Muhammad Salih Kanbo (the author of another Persian history of Shah Jahan's reign) justifying Khusrau's murder are quoted: "It is entirely lawful for the great sovereigns to rid this mortal world of the existence of their brothers and other relations, whose very annihilation is conducive to the common good."

care for was the search for women to serve his pleasure."¹³ Bernier and other European travelers make an even more serious indictment against Shah Jahan when they report contemporary rumors that he had incestuous relations with his eldest daughter Jahanara for a period of several years following his wife's death.¹⁴ Bernier even states that the Muslim doctors of the law at court sanctioned the relationship on the grounds that "it would have been unjust to deny the King the privilege of gathering fruit from the tree he himself had planted."¹⁵ According to Manucci, Shah Jahan's illness in 1658, when Aurangzeb seized power, and his death in 1666 were both the result of the urinary disorder known as strangury, brought on by overdoses of aphrodisiacs, which the aging ruler utilized out of vanity, to bolster his waning sexual powers.¹⁶

It is curious that critical accounts such as these have been ignored, as the popular notion of Shah Jahan's devotion to his dead wife has assumed mythic proportions. Incidentally, the theory of a second Taj—supposed to be an exact replica, except in black marble—can be shown to be a part of this myth, based only upon a single dubious reference by Tavernier, and totally unsupported by the Persian histories.¹⁷ Moreover, Tavernier only mentions that Shah Jahan had started some sort of tomb across the river; its supposed size and color are elaborations upon this unsupported notion, apparently first introduced in the nineteenth century.

Even in this century, when we have become increasingly skeptical of romantic explanations of anything, no one has effectively challenged the myth, although a few writers have intuitively sensed its flaws. Aldous Huxley, in his book of 1926, *Jesting Pilate*, obliquely struck at the myth by attacking the popular view that the Taj is a supremely beautiful monument. He thought it wasn't.¹⁸ A far more serious critic than Huxley was the German philosopher Hermann Keyserling, who concluded in 1914 that the Taj in the final analysis was an "absolutely purposeless" work of art.¹⁹ While praising its beauty, Keyserling felt that the Taj lacked expressive and spiritual power, stating that "it is not even neces-

sarily a funeral monument; it might just as well, or just as badly, be a pleasure resort."²⁰

At about the same time, the Bengali novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterji was expressing similar doubts about the popular explanation of the Taj. In his novel *The Unanswered Question*, Chatterji's heroine, after pointing out some of the flaws in the myth of Shah Jahan's marital devotion, concludes that the Emperor would probably have built a monument like the Taj even if Mumtaz Mahal had *not* died, that he would have found some other excuse to build it, perhaps "in the name of religion," or perhaps as a "memorial to conquest, after killing hundreds and thousands of people."²¹

I would not go this far in castigating Shah Jahan's character, but obviously some sort of explanation is essential. The Taj possesses the charismatic power to awe almost all its viewers (a few cynics excepted), to instill a sense of greatness, a sense of transcendent majesty. If Love is not behind it all, what is?

III

Keyserling's intuition that the Taj is "not even necessarily a funeral monument" seems to be on the right trail. First of all, in light of what we know of Shah Jahan's excessive vanity, it is clear that the Taj was also intended to symbolize his own glory and not merely his devotion. As he had just achieved his royal ambition, the death of his imperial consort (and the mother of all his living male heirs) must have indeed struck Shah Jahan as a cruel blow of fate, one of his few major disappointments in a long succession of personal triumphs. Disappointment though it was, the death of Mumtaz Mahal acted as a catalyst for the inception of a monument that served as a symbol, as it were, of Shah Jahan's imperial destiny—another coronation jewel added to his already fabulous crown, and a tangible manifestation of his magnificent obsession with his own greatness (Fig. 3).

Could Shah Jahan also have intended the Taj to be his own tomb as well? Although he is presently buried inside the mausoleum, alongside the bier of his wife, this

¹³ Manucci, I, 186ff.

¹⁴ Bernier, 11. Sir Thomas Herbert, Peter Mundy, and Tavernier also report the same rumor, the validity of which is, however, denied by Manucci, *ibid.*; for a full discussion, see Vincent A. Smith, "Joannes deLaet on India and Shah Jahan," *Indian Antiquary*, XLIII, 1914, 239–244. Smith cites the second impression of de Laet's *De Imperio Magni Mogolis*, Leiden, 1631, as evidence that the rumor had reached Europe within about six months after the death of Mumtaz Mahal. For discussion of a painting that apparently depicts Jahanara seated beside her father in an allegorical court scene, executed by the little-known Dutch painter Willem Schellinks around 1650, see Jeannine Auboyer, "Un Maître hollandais du XVIIe siècle s'inspirant des miniatures mogholes," *Arts asiatiques*, II, 251–273.

¹⁵ Bernier, 11.

¹⁶ Manucci, I, 231; II, 116.

¹⁷ Tavernier, I, 91: "Shah Jahan began to build his own tomb on the other side of the river, but the war with his sons interrupted his plan, and Aurangzeb, who reigns at present, is not disposed to complete it."

¹⁸ Cited in Carroll, 157ff. Huxley's frivolous views are discussed by R.A. Jairazbhoy, "The Taj and Its Critics," *East and West*, VI, 1956, 349–352.

¹⁹ Hermann Keyserling, *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher* (cited in Carroll, 153).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Chatterji's novel apparently has not been translated into English; the quotation is from the Hindi version, *Śesh Praśna*, Delhi, 1964, 32.

does not seem to have been his original intention.²² Except for Tavernier's unsupported claim, there is absolutely no evidence that Shah Jahan ever contemplated building a separate tomb for himself either. In any event, Shah Jahan still had no tomb of his own when, in 1658, at the age of sixty-six, he was imprisoned by Aurangzeb in the Agra Fort. The Persian histories are not clear as to whose decision it was to bury Shah Jahan in the Taj when he died eight years later.²³

In the face of such widespread uncertainties, we must fall back upon the evidence that the tomb itself provides, in order to explain why the Taj looks the way it does, and to determine what other meanings it may have possessed for Shah Jahan which led him to create such an extravagant and extraordinary monument. Various other scholars have already considered the form of the mausoleum proper, showing its derivation from the tomb of Shah Jahan's great-grandfather, Humayun (Fig. 4), and its ultimate debt to architectural styles imported from Persia.²⁴ Although the Taj certainly fits into this architectural evolution, the formalist approach by itself cannot shed much light upon the underlying meaning of the monument. There are two important categories of evidence that have been largely neglected by writers on the Taj: the plan of the entire complex, and the inscriptional program of Koranic passages inscribed on

the mausoleum and the gateway. When taken together, these two categories of evidence strongly suggest that the Taj had an allegorical significance going far beyond its literal funerary function, a significance which, as we shall see, is nonetheless appropriate to that primary function.

From the plan of the Taj complex, it is obvious that the garden constitutes an extremely important feature in the overall architectural conception. Unlike all previous Mughal garden tombs, the Taj is placed at one end of its garden, rather than in the center. The quadripartite layout itself, however, is not unusual, being an example of the typical Persian *chahar-bagh*, or four-fold garden. As is well known, Persian gardens in general, and Mughal garden tombs in particular, are often described metaphorically in Persian poetry and inscriptions as being like Paradise.²⁵ Occasionally, the metaphor was carried to poetic excess, as in the Persian passages inscribed on the palatial tomb of Shah Jahan's grandfather Akbar (Fig. 5), which extravagantly claim that its gardens surpass in beauty and magnificence even those of the celestial Paradise.²⁶ The thrust of the entire inscriptional program is summed up in the concluding lines of a couplet inscribed on the entrance gateway (Figs. 6, 7), the last words that one is supposed to read before passing through to the walled garden

²² This is the usual interpretation, based upon the fact that the cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal occupies the exact center of the octagonal screen in the great domed hall (see Fig. 31), leaving barely enough room for Shah Jahan's cenotaph on the west side. Recently, however, R. Nath (p. 76ff.) has persuasively argued that the present arrangement was the one originally intended by the Emperor, since it is similar to the asymmetrical placement of the cenotaphs of I'timad al-Dawla (Jahangir's Grand Vizir) and his wife, in their tomb at Agra, which was completed in 1628, less than four years before the Taj was begun.

²³ The most detailed account of Shah Jahan's death is that given in the contemporary history by Muhammad Salih Kanbo; see Ghulam Yazdani, ed., *Amal-i-Salih, or Shah Jahan Namah of Muhammad Salih Kambo*, 3 vols., Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1912-1939, III, 346ff. Muhammad Salih states that the Princess Jahanara wanted to arrange a magnificent funeral for her father, but did not have the authority to do so. As a result, the body was taken from the Fort by a back stairway from the octagonal tower where he had died, and quietly buried in the Taj without a public ceremony. At the time of his father's death, Aurangzeb was in Delhi. As soon as he heard of Shah Jahan's illness, however, Aurangzeb ordered Prince Muhammad Mu'azzam to go to Agra, but the Prince arrived only after the body was already interred, which apparently took place the morning after the Emperor's death late in the night of January 14, 1666 O.S. Essentially the same facts are reported in the various histories of Aurangzeb's reign, although nothing is said about whether Aurangzeb might previously have authorized the place of burial, if not the manner of it. Only one contemporaneous source implies that

Shah Jahan had constructed the Taj as a tomb for himself, as well as his wife; see Zafar Hasan, ed. and trans., *The Waqiat-i-Alamgiri of Aqil Khan Razi*, Delhi, 1946, 56, where it is stated: "As none of the high princes or exalted *amirs* were present there at that time, a few of the eunuchs and others, contrary to the custom of illustrious kings and practice of his ancestors, placed his coffin early in the morning on a boat and carried it by way of the river to the mausoleum (the Taj Mahal), which he had erected for this purpose." See also Jadu-Nath Sarkar, trans., *Maasir-i-'Alamgiri...of Saqi Must'ad Khan*, Calcutta, 1947, 35; and Anees Jahan Syed, *Aurangzeb in Muntakhab-al Lubab*, Bombay and New Delhi, 1977, 223.

²⁴ See James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, London, 1910, II, 290ff.; cf. Brown, 96ff. See also the important articles by Jairazbhoy and Hoag.

²⁵ Jairazbhoy, 79ff.; Hoag, 240ff. See also the collection of papers on Islamic gardens presented in a colloquium at Dumbarton Oaks, Elizabeth B. MacDougall and Richard Ettinghausen, eds., *The Islamic Garden*, Washington, D.C., 1976, espec. Annemarie Schimmel, "The Celestial Garden in Islam," 11-39; and William L. Hanaway, Jr., "Paradise on Earth: The Terrestrial Garden in Persian Literature," 41-67. The Paradise symbolism of the Taj complex is briefly alluded to in the recent book by Burckhardt, 174-180; cf. also Henri Stierlin, *Ispahan, image du paradis*, Lausanne, 1976.

²⁶ Hoag, 243ff. The full texts of the inscriptions on Akbar's tomb are given in Smith, 29-35 (cf. also my forthcoming article, "Amanat Khan and the Calligraphy on the Taj Mahal").

2 Abu 'l-Hasan, *Portrait of Shah Jahan at Age 25*, 1617. London, Victoria and Albert Museum



3 Abu 'l-Hasan, *Shah Jahan on the Peacock Throne*, ca. 1635. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (after Carroll)



²⁷ See Smith, 35. Altogether, there are three couplets, inscribed in six separate panels, running across the lower calligraphic border of the entrance gateway, the full translation of which is given *infra*. It should be noted that the last line of the third couplet, reproduced in Fig. 7, is in Arabic, whereas all the rest are in Persian.

²⁸ As listed in the Appendix at the end of this article, the Koranic inscriptions on the Taj number twenty-five, but three of these occur twice, making twenty-two different passages in all, of which fourteen are complete Suras. Aside from the two sets of epitaphs on the



4 Tomb of Humayun (1507–1555), Delhi, completed ca. 1570

beyond: “These are the gardens of Eden, enter them to live for ever!”²⁷

Surprisingly, the Taj Mahal, which perhaps comes closer to evoking heavenly visions than any other work of Islamic architecture, makes no such poetic claims, at least not directly. Unlike Akbar’s tomb—the gateway of which is inscribed with a lengthy Persian eulogy composed especially by the calligrapher—the Taj’s numerous inscriptions are drawn almost exclusively from the Koran.²⁸ Incidentally, the calligrapher of Akbar’s tomb and the Taj Mahal was the same man, ‘Abd al-Haqq of Shiraz, given the title Amanat Khan by Shah Jahan.²⁹ As Amanat Khan seems to have been the author as well as the scribe of the Persian eulogy of Akbar’s tomb, so also it appears that he was charged with the responsibility for selecting the Koranic passages to be inscribed on the Taj.³⁰

cenotaphs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, the only other non-Koranic inscriptions are the three dated historical epigraphs on the mausoleum and the gateway, and a few other short pious phrases in Arabic prefixed to some of the inscriptions. In addition to its unprecedented size, the Taj is unique among published Islamic funerary monuments with respect to the number and length of its inscribed Koranic passages.

²⁹ Since ‘Abd al-Haqq, who was a scholar and courtier, as well as a calligrapher, was awarded the title Amanat Khan (meaning “Trustworthy Noble”) only in 1632, shortly after work on the Taj was begun, he of course did not use it in the colophons on Akbar’s tomb, which was finished in 1613. In the colophon dated 1638 inside the Taj, however, the calligrapher used *only* his honorary title. Apparently the first scholar to realize the true identity of Amanat Khan was S. A. Akbarabadi, in his Urdu monograph, *Muraqqa‘-i-Akbarabad ya‘ni Tarikh-i-Agra*, Agra, 1931 (cited in Chaghtai, 129).

³⁰ This is the view argued in my forthcoming article. In effect, Amanat Khan’s earlier work on Akbar’s tomb had elevated him to the status of imperial calligrapher, therefore making him the most appropriate choice to supervise the inscriptional program for the first great imperial monument of Shah Jahan’s reign.

That the choice of these Koranic passages was deliberate, and not haphazard, seems self-evident, as self-evident as the attempt by the Taj's designers to coordinate every single feature of the building, from its overall plan to the smallest decorative detail, into a totally unified architectural conception of flawless visual symmetry. In view of this obvious concern with visual and decorative effect, the content of the inscribed Koranic passages must have been a matter of equal, if not greater, concern to the scholar in charge of the selection.³¹ Furthermore, the content of the passages must have been considered on several levels, for, in addition to purely textual connotations, the overall meaning of each inscribed passage would have been affected by its placement on a specific part of the architectural complex, as well as its contextual relationship to the total ensemble of inscriptions.³² Accordingly, it would seem that all of the Koranic passages were meant to be read and construed together; and that they constitute in effect a thematically unified inscriptional program, analogous in its cognitive significance to the iconographic programs of religious monuments decorated with images.³³

As in the case of Akbar's tomb, the final words of the Taj's gateway inscription also epitomize the symbolic meaning of the inscriptional program as a whole. The

south façade of the gateway (Fig. 8) is inscribed with the entire Sura 89, *al-Fajr*, "The Daybreak," one of the great apocalyptic Suras of the Koran, and one that clearly establishes the eschatological themes dealt with throughout the Taj's inscriptional program. In contrast to the flowery Persian panegyric on the gateway of Akbar's tomb, here the theme is essentially that of the impending doom of the Day of Judgment, when God will punish the wicked with terrible finality.³⁴ Only at the very end of this Sura is the apocalyptic imagery mitigated by the allusion to the Paradise that God has promised as a reward for the faithful (Fig. 9):

"O thou soul at peace,
Return thou unto thy Lord, well-pleased and well-pleasing unto Him!
Enter thou among My servants—
And enter thou My Paradise!"³⁵

The closing words on the gateways of both monuments are equally clear in their implication: namely, that they were conceived as symbolic replicas of the gateway and gardens of the celestial Paradise. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad entered Paradise through its gateway during his miraculous heavenly ascension known as the *Mi'raj*, an event depicted in the

³¹ The widespread popular notion that the role of the calligraphy is purely decorative is, of course, patently absurd. Far more important than their visual qualities, the Koranic passages inscribed on the Taj are imbued with profound religious meaning, which stems not only from the intrinsic content of the passages themselves, but also from the rich aura of cognitive connotations and associations that certain Koranic passages had gradually acquired in Islamic theology and popular beliefs. Even when Koranic inscriptions cannot easily be read, their function is always more symbolic than decorative; see Richard Ettinghausen, "Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, Beirut, 1974, 297–317.

³² Judging from the epigraphical evidence, it seems to have been a practice of long standing in India—as well as in other Islamic lands—to select Arabic and Persian architectural inscriptions that would be appropriate to the meaning and function of the monument as a whole. Unfortunately, very few of these conventional uses of Koranic passages have ever been compiled; for Indian monuments, the only systematic study is Muhammad Ashraf Husain, *Record of All the Quranic and Non-Historical Epigraphs on the Protected Monuments in the Delhi Province (Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, XLVII)*, Calcutta, 1936, which tabulates more than 450 occurrences of some 250 Koranic passages (most consisting of several sequential verses) inscribed on about 100 mosques and tombs.

³³ Cf. Oleg Grabar's similar conclusion, stated in his recent article, "The Inscriptions of the Madrasah-Mausoleum of Qaytbay," in *Studies in Honor of George C. Miles* (as cited in n. 31), 465–468: "For, as

our knowledge of Islamic art progresses, it becomes more and more evident that Qur'anic citations were used in the manner of biblical subjects in Christian iconography." See also Grabar's "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Ars Orientalis*, III, 1959, 33–62; and the important article by Dodd, 35–79.

³⁴ The Sura begins with a series of solemn oaths, next cites previous instances of God's wrath, then summons up a frightening vision of the approaching Day of Judgment (verses 21–26):

*Nay! When the earth is ground to powder—
And thy Lord cometh, and His angels, rank upon rank—
And Hell, that Day, is brought near—on that Day will Man remember, but
how shall the remembrance profit him?
He shall say: "Ah would that I had made provision for this my life!"
For upon that Day, His chastisement shall be such as none other can inflict!
And His bonds shall be such as none other can bind!*

(adapted, with modifications, from the translations by 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary*, Lahore, 1937–38; and Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York, 1955).

³⁵ The expression "And enter thou My Paradise!" (*wa udkhuli jannati*) is unique among all the Koranic references to Paradise in being the only instance in which God utters such a direct invitation. Moreover, among the more than 120 occurrences of the word *janna* (literally, "Garden") in the Koran, this is the only passage in which the Arabic possessive suffix *i* ("My") is attached; see Ahmad Shah, *Miftah-ul-Quran, Concordance and Complete Glossary of the Holy Quran*, 2 vols., Lahore, n.d. (reprint of 1906 ed.).

famous fifteenth-century Persian *Miʿraj-Nama* manuscript now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Fig. 10).³⁶

In the Taj's allegorical scheme, the four water channels of its *chahar-bagh* garden (Fig. 11) are clearly meant to symbolize the four flowing Rivers of Paradise, mentioned in the Koran and the Hadith literature; and the raised marble tank in the center of the garden was probably intended as a replica of the celestial tank of abundance called *al-Kawthar*, promised to Muhammad and seen by him at the time of his bodily ascension to Paradise.³⁷ Various Islamic depictions of the heavenly regions corroborate this interpretation, including an unpublished plan of Paradise (Fig. 12) in an eighteenth-century Indian manuscript, now in the Bodleian Library;³⁸ and the well-known scene of

Muhammad seated beside the *Kawthar* tank (Fig. 13), in a Qajar-period Shi'ah divination album.³⁹ In the Bodleian illustration, the square central tank bears a Persian label identifying it as the *Kawthar*; and the white channels extending from the tank in the Qajar album provide an even more striking parallel with the layout of the Taj's garden.

IV

During the past few years, a few scholars have recognized that Paradise symbolism was consciously employed in the design of the Taj and other Mughal garden tombs.⁴⁰ But so far, no one has specifically addressed the problem of interpreting the domed marble mausoleum of the Taj itself within this general

³⁶ See the recent facsimile edition by Séguy. In the illustration (Fig. 10), Muhammad, accompanied by the Angel Gabriel and the fabulous human-headed mount Buraq (at the left), have arrived at the gateway to Paradise (at the right), through which two angels emerge to greet the Prophet. Above the gateway is inscribed the Muslim profession of faith: "There is no god but God; Muhammad is His prophet." In the landscape behind the figures are three of the four Rivers of Paradise.

Numerous publications treat the theme of the *Miʿraj*: for the translation of the Turkish text of the Herat manuscript of 1436, see Pavet de Courteille; for a critical edition of the important 13th-century Latin and Old French versions of a lost Arabic original, see Cerulli; an exhaustive treatment of the literary theme, with extensive bibliography, is G. Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension* (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift), Uppsala, 1955; see also Qasim al-Samarrai, *The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings*, Baghdad, 1968; and A. Altmann, "The Ladder of Ascension," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to G. G. Sholem*, Jerusalem, 1967, 1-32.

Aside from the lavishly illustrated Herat manuscript, depictions of the *Miʿraj* in Islamic painting are extremely rare, as are religious subjects of any kind. An important though fragmentary group of earlier examples has been collected by Richard Ettinghausen, "Persian Ascension Miniatures of the Fourteenth Century," in *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, XII convegno "Volta"* (proceedings), Rome, 1957, 360-383. For a recent assessment of the problem of religious imagery in Islamic painting, see J. M. Rogers, "The Genesis of Safavid Religious Painting," *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, VIII, 1970, 125-139.

³⁷ There is a vast literature dealing with the topography of the Islamic Paradise, as well as its interpretation within the popular religion, orthodox theology, and esoteric mysticism. The best recent general work is Soubhi el-Saleh, *La Vie future selon le Coran (Études musulmanes)*, XIII, Paris, 1971 (based upon a Sorbonne doctoral dissertation of 1954, whose conclusions were incorporated into the important article by L. Gardet, s.v. "DJANNA," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.). See also: Josef Horovitz, "Das koranische Paradies," *Scripta Universitatis atque Bibliotheca Hierosolymitanarum*, VI, 1923, 1-16; John MacDonald, "Paradise," *Islamic Studies*, V, 1966, 331-383; Lucien Gautier, trans., *La Perle précieuse (ad-Dourra al-Fâkhira) de Ghazâlî*, 450-505 A.H.: *Traité d'eschatologie musulmane* . . . , Amsterdam, 1974 (repr. of 1878 ed.). The Jewish antecedents of Islamic views of the topography of Paradise are discussed by M. Gaster, "Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1893, 571-611. Although there is some ambiguity in the Islamic sources as to whether the *Kawthar* may be yet another river in Paradise, the prevailing view is that it is indeed a Tank, into which (or alternatively, from which) flow the four celestial rivers, which incidentally are considered to be the exalted counterparts of the rivers of the terrestrial Eden.

³⁸ See A. F. L. Beeston, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Pt. III, *Additional Persian Manuscripts*, Oxford, 1954, 81-82. The manuscript (MS Pers. d. 29) consists only of some 67 illustrations of several of the holy places of Arabia, along with depictions of both Paradise and Hell. Although without title or text, the illustrations are mostly accompanied by Persian labels, with other descriptive matter having been added in French, sometime in the 19th century. The style of the illustrations is folkish, and undoubtedly represents a popular and provincial variant of Mughal court painting of the 18th century, perhaps dating to the early part of the century.

³⁹ See M. T. Houtsma, "Bilder aus einem persischen Falbuch," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, III, 1890, 149-150, and pl. XII (from which Fig. 13 was reproduced); cf. Thomas W. Arnold, 110, and pl. xxxva (see also the depiction of the *Kawthar* Tank in the Herat *Miʿraj-Nama*, repro. Séguy, pl. 39). The painting is one of a series in a now dispersed Persian album dating to the early 19th century, illustrating legends of ʿAli, the fourth Caliph and the first Shi'ah Imam. In the painting, ʿAli is shown standing at the left of the *Kawthar* tank, while his sons Hasan and Husain stand behind Muhammad at the right. The names of these saintly figures are inscribed across their veils, preceded by the Arabic word *ya*, or "O"—indicating that the inscriptions are to read as pious invocations: "O Muhammad," "O ʿAli," etc. In the center is depicted the celestial "Lote-tree of the Boundary" (*al-Sidrata al-Muntaha*), with three birds (one with a human head) perched upon its branches, apparently alluding to the well-known Hadith that the souls of the virtuous are transformed into birds in Paradise.

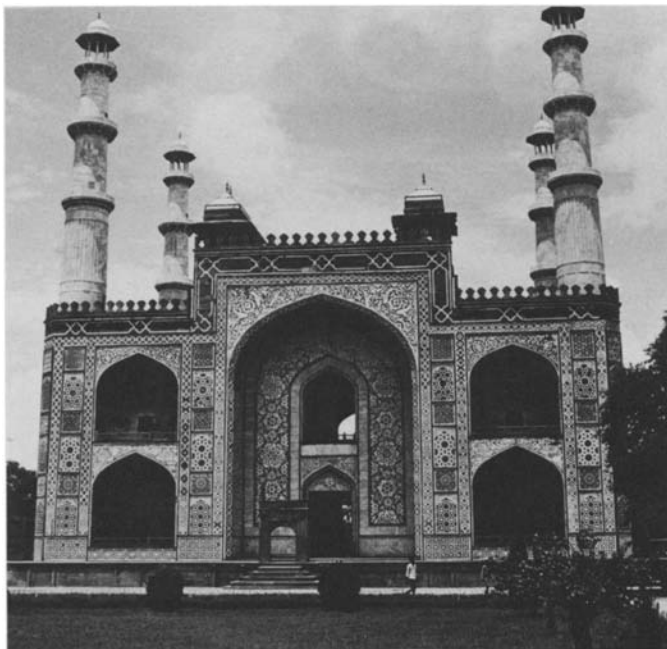
⁴⁰ The suggestion that the Taj and other Mughal structures were consciously intended as symbolic replicas of the architecture of Paradise was first made in my paper cited in the acknowledgement. For earlier discussions of the problem, see Jairazbhoy, Hoag, and Schimmel. Both Hoag and Schimmel discuss the Paradise associations of the plan of the typical Persian *chahar-bagh*, in which the garden is usually divided into four parts by two intersecting water channels, which led Hoag (p. 247) to state that the Taj and its garden "are truly metaphors for Paradise." Similarly, Schimmel (p. 15) suggests that the central tank of Mughal gardens corresponds "to the basin (*haud*) which was also considered part of the heavenly realms." Neither writer, however, has suggested that these correspondences amount to much more than generic metaphors for Paradise; in contrast, I would argue that they form part of a systematic program of symbolic equations, in which every part of the tomb complex is conceived as a specific replica of its celestial counterpart.



5 Tomb of Akbar (1543–1605), Sikandra, completed 1613



8 Gateway of Taj Mahal, south façade



6 Gateway of Akbar's tomb, south façade



9 Detail of Koranic inscription on gateway of Taj Mahal, last few verses of Sura 89



7 Part of dedicatory inscription on gateway of Akbar's tomb, dated 1613 and signed by the calligrapher ʿAbd al-Haqq al-Shirazi, later called Amanat Khan



10 Muhammad and Gabriel at the Gateway to Paradise, from *Mi'raj-Nama*, executed at Herat, 1436. Paris, Bibl. Nat. ms Suppl. Turc 190, fol. 47v (photo: Bibl. Nat.)

metaphorical program. The most obvious explanation of the architectural symbolism of this main structure would be that it allegorically represents one of the sumptuous celestial "mansions" promised to the faithful in Paradise: such as the multi-storied octagonal pavilions represented in the Qajar depiction of Muhammad in Paradise, with alluring houris standing within the arched openings, offering the promise of sensual enjoyment. Although plausible (for there is a tradition of Persian gardens and garden-pavilions being called *Hasht Bihisht*, or gardens of the "Eight Paradises"⁴¹), this interpretation in the final analysis fails to explain fully the magnificence and charismatic grandeur that are unique to the Taj. Furthermore, within the monument's overall allegorical program, it seems more likely that the "mansions" of Paradise are symbolized by the Taj's six octagonal towers, or *burj* (Fig. 14)—since these are at any rate visually closer to the pavilions depicted in the Qajar painting, or to the well-known scene of houris in an octagonal pavilion in the previously mentioned Bibliothèque Nationale *Mi'raj-Nama* (Fig. 15).⁴²

Since the marble mausoleum of the Taj dominates the entire architectural layout, with its metaphorical allusions to Paradise, one wonders if it could be instead that the structure was intended by its designers as a symbolic replica of the heavenly Throne of God, which tradition situates directly above Paradise, and upon which God will sit in judgment on the Day of Resurrection. Although this interpretation would certainly help to explain the vast scale of the monument, and why its designers strived to make it so majestic and awe-inspiring, it is of course contrary to orthodox Muslim theology, which maintains that God and all of his attri-

butes, including his throne, are beyond human comprehension, and therefore absolutely unrepresentable.⁴³

Aside from the vast size of the tomb, we may ask if there is anything about its form that might corroborate this interpretation. After the unusual grouping of four large minarets, the mausoleum's most distinctive architectural feature is surely its large bulbous dome (Fig. 16). Although the shape can of course be explained as having evolved from the domes of Humayun's tomb and other monuments, it is also curiously similar to the shape of Mughal ceremonial crowns, such as the one held by Shah Jahan's father Jahangir in a well-known painting in the British Museum (Fig. 17).⁴⁴ Incidentally, it should be noted that the Persian words *Taj Mahal* literally mean "Crown Palace," although it is usually claimed that the name is a shortened form of the title *Mumtaz Mahal*, meaning "Elect of the Palace." Not only is the domed silhouette of the Taj generally suggestive of a crown, but it also strongly resembles the typical shape of Islamic thrones, as depicted in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Persian and Mughal paintings (Figs. 18, 19).⁴⁵ The Mughal painting shows Shah Jahan receiving the ceremonial crown from his grandfather Akbar, seated in the center, who apparently deliberately bypasses Shah Jahan's father Jahangir, seated at the left.⁴⁶ Although Islamic tombs characteristically have domes, the resemblance of the Taj's dome to actual Mughal throne-backs seems more than coincidental, and seems to have been deliberately emphasized in order to allude to the mausoleum's probable celestial prototype.

Moreover, although Islamic proscriptions against religious images almost completely prevented its depic-

⁴¹ Hoag (pp. 241–42) suggests that the tomb of Humayun also reflects a preoccupation with Paradise symbolism, with its eight gardens and octagonal plan conforming to Persian prototypes that were sometimes metaphorically called *Hasht Bihisht*; for the palace of the *Hasht Bihisht* at Isfahan, see Arthur Upham Pope, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art*, II, Oxford, 1939, 1195–7. Jairazbhoy (pp. 79–80) mentions the symbolism of the Eight Paradises of Humayun's "Floating Palace" of 1532; the source is Baini Prashad, trans., *Qanun-i-Humayuni . . . of Khwandamir*, Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1940, 63ff.

⁴² See Séguy, pl. 42, for an explanation of the houris, see E. Berthels, "Die paradiesischen Jungfrauen (Huris) in Islam," *Islamica*, I, 1925, 263–287.

⁴³ For a discussion of the background of Islamic prohibitions against figurative imagery in general, and images of God or his attributes in particular, see: Arnold, 1–40; Georges Marçais, "La Question des images dans l'art musulman," *Byzantion*, VII, 1932, 161–183; Ahmad Muhammad Isa, "Muslims and Taswir," *Muslim World*, XIV, 1955, 250–268; Marshall Hodgson, "Islam and Image," *History of Religion*, III, 1964, 220–260; cf. Burckhardt, 27ff. See also the article by Erica Dodd.

The theological implications of the Divine Throne, particularly the questions raised by the Koranic references to God's sitting upon it, are discussed in Wensinck, 67ff.; cf. Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, "God's Throne and the Biblical Symbolism of the Qur'an," *Numen*, XX, 1973, 202–221.

⁴⁴ The crown held by Jahangir is usually said to be that of his ancestor Timur; see Ivan Stchoukine, *La Peinture indienne à l'époque des grands Moghols*, Paris, 1929, pl. xxib. Although crowns were not worn by the Mughal emperors, they obviously played an important symbolic role, along with other emblems of sovereignty and dynastic succession.

⁴⁵ For the Persian painting repro. in Fig. 18, see Laurence Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, London, 1933 (repr. New York, 1971), No. 141; for the Mughal painting in Fig. 19, see Arnold and Wilkinson, I, 33, and III, pl. 65. Throne-backs in Persian paintings of the 14th and 15th centuries typically have the form of low, slightly pointed arches; by the 16th century, however, the arch comes to resemble the slightly bulbous shapes of structural Persian domes, as in Fig. 18. It should be noted that, unlike European thrones, Persian thrones frequently have high polygonal sides, making them appear much more architectonic in character.

⁴⁶ Since Shah Jahan was only thirteen years old when his grandfather died, the painting is of course allegorical, with posthumous portraits of both Akbar and Jahangir. As pointed out by Arnold and Wilkinson (I, 33), the figures standing in front of each of the emperors represent their respective Grand Vizir or other trusted minister—Itimad al-Dawla in front of Jahangir; Khan A'zam in front of Akbar; and Asaf Khan in front of Shah Jahan.



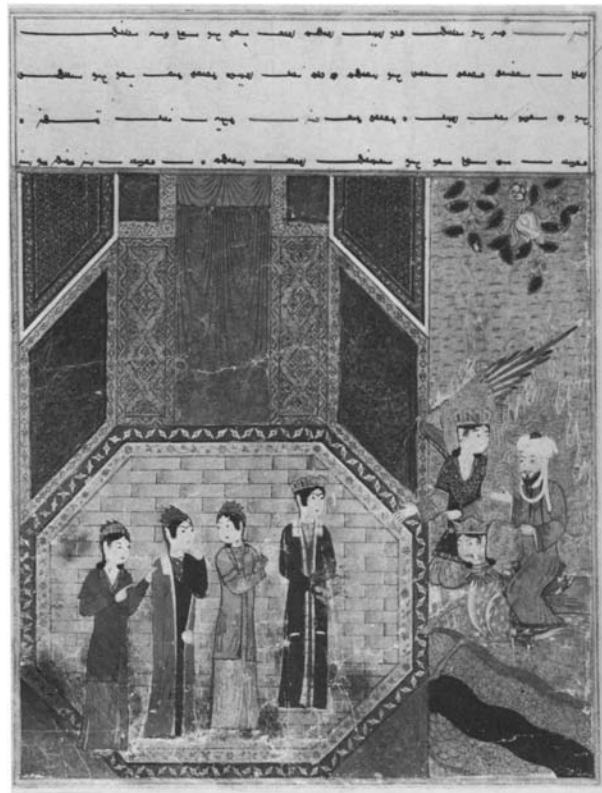
11 Garden of Taj Mahal, looking toward gateway



14 Octagonal pavilion (*burj*) at northeast corner of Taj Mahal complex



12 Plan of the Garden of Paradise, from "Illustrated Guide to Mecca and the Hereafter," India, early 18th century. Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Pers. d. 29, fol. 21r (photo: Library)



15 Muhammad and Gabriel in Paradise, from Herat *Mi'raj-Nama*, 1436. Paris, Bibl. Nat. ms Suppl. Turc 190, fol. 51r (photo: Bibl. Nat.)



13 Muhammad Seated Beside the Kawthar Tank in Paradise, from Qajar-period Shi'ah divination album, Persia, early 19th century. Amsterdam, formerly Ethnography Museum (after Houtsma)

tion in visual form, the Throne of God has often been explicitly "described" in traditional and mystical writings.⁴⁷ In the popular or fundamentalist view, the Divine Throne literally exists, and is not just an allegorical symbol of God's inscrutable majesty. Briefly stated, medieval Islamic cosmology describes the Throne, called *ʿArsh* in Arabic, as an infinitely vast structure situated upon a raised plinth or pedestal called the *Kursi*. Directly beneath the terrace of the Throne, God created the celestial Gardens of Paradise, which are protected by Rizwan—the gatekeeper of Paradise and guardian of the treasure under the Throne—and are filled with beautiful palaces and sensual delights. According to Islamic tradition, on the Day of Judgment, the faithful will enter Paradise and approach the terrace of the Throne, where they will witness the vision of God as radiant and indescribable beauty.⁴⁸

This cosmological conception is fairly frequently rep-

resented in Christian art, but Islamic depictions are extremely rare, although judging from the examples that do survive, they must have once formed part of a distinct, if highly unorthodox iconographic tradition. The earliest Islamic depiction of the Throne of God that I know of is the geometric diagram (Fig. 20) in the Sufi treatise *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, by the great thirteenth-century mystic Ibn al-ʿArabi.⁴⁹ In the diagram the *ʿArsh* is shown as a large square circumscribed within two concentric circles, and the *Kursi* is shown as a smaller square within the first, the place for God's feet being marked at the top. Although his diagram is largely abstract, Ibn al-ʿArabi likens the Throne of God to an actual throne (*sarir*), furnished with four pillars or supports (*qawaʿim*) at the corners, which are usually connected in the popular view with the four angels who serve as the bearers of the Divine Throne.⁵⁰ Ibn al-ʿArabi's conception is an aniconic version of various

⁴⁷ No definitive study of Islamic conceptions of the Throne of God has yet been published, largely because the Arabic sources are so voluminous, and linguistically difficult to deal with. Although a few of the Hadith collections have been translated, none of the extensive multi-volumed works of traditional Koranic exegesis, or *Tafsir*, is yet available in any European language. Both of these categories of Islamic theological literature include extensive discussions of the Throne of God; see, e.g., the excerpts contained in Gätje, 146–150, 164ff.; cf. the detailed descriptions of Paradise and what it contains in the important 14th-century Hadith collection *Mishkat al-Masabih*, trans. James Robson, II, 1196ff.

Many other, mostly non-orthodox literary sources describe Paradise and the Divine Throne with even more explicit detail, apparently reflecting widespread preferences for a more literal cosmology, expressed by Sufi mystics and fundamentalist believers alike. Some of these explicit descriptions are bizarre, as, e.g., the medieval commentator Husaini's statement that "the throne has 8,000 pillars, and the distance between each pillar is 3,000,000 miles" (cited in Thomas Patrick Hughes, s.v. "ʿARSH"); whereas others propose a much more down-to-earth explanation, as in the cosmological and historical treatise attributed to al-Maqdisi: see Huart, trans., I, 152ff. According to the author of this work, certain scholars "disent que le trône ressemble à un *sarir*" (a type of Persian royal throne); and "beaucoup d'anthropomorphistes croient que l'*arch* est une sorte de trône sur lequel Dieu est assis." Although there is disagreement as to the material the Throne is composed of (some commentators maintaining it is made of light, others of emerald or red hyacinth), all are agreed that it is infinitely vast, encompassing all of the created universe within its perimeter.

For other detailed descriptions of the Throne, and of Muhammad's approach to it during the *Miʿraj*, see Cerulli, 82ff.; Pavet de Courteille, 12ff.; cf. Reynold A. Nicholson, "An Early Arabic Version of the *Miʿraj* of Abu Yazid al-Bistami," *Islamica*, II, 1927, 403–415.

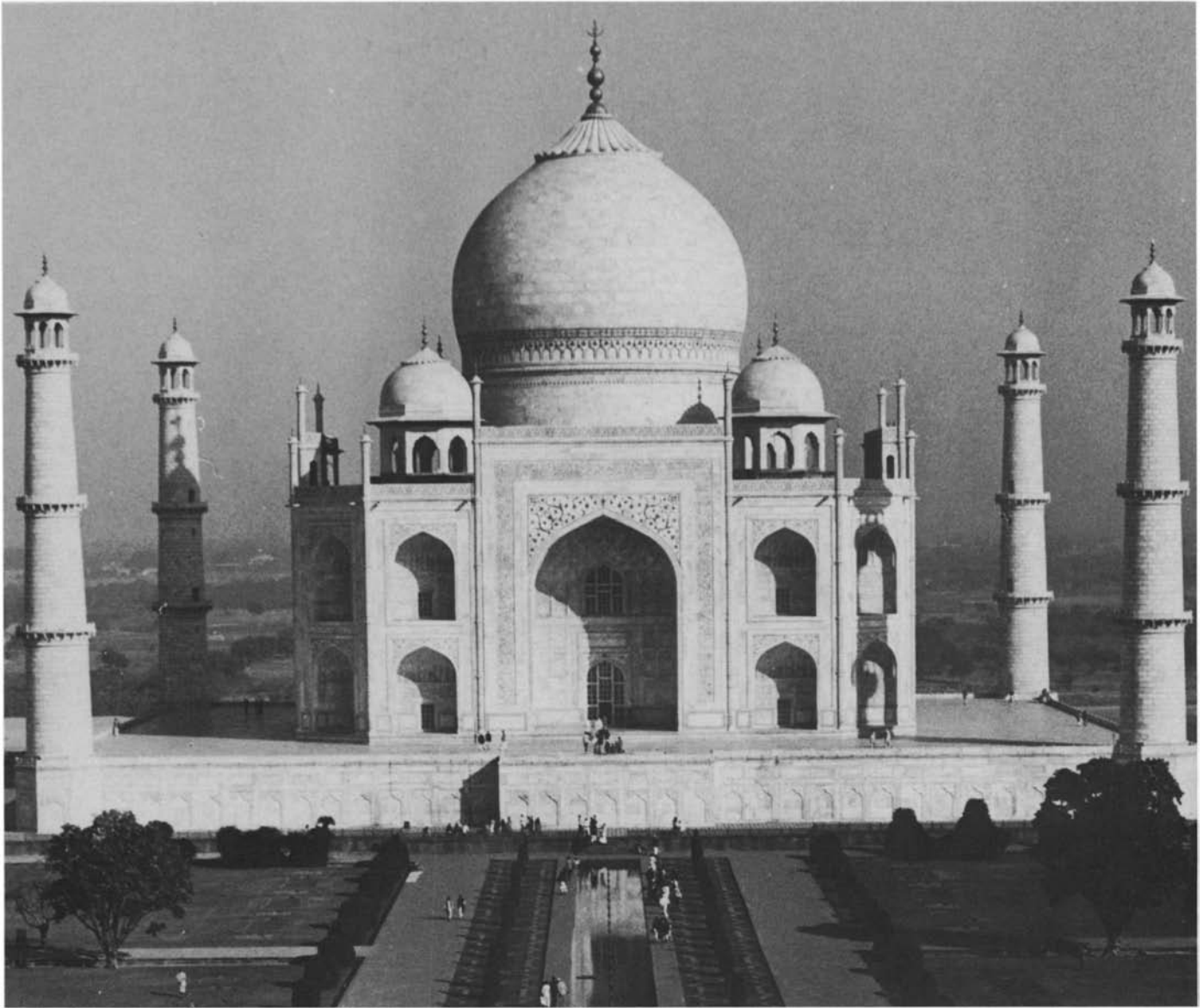
⁴⁸ The Vision of God is regarded by mystics and fundamentalists alike as the ultimate reward of Paradise, although there were (and are) widely differing views as to whether the Vision is real or allegorical; the literature on this subject is too vast to be mentioned

here, but see the introduction in Wensinck, 63ff.; cf. the recent article by Georges Vajda, "Le Problème de la vision de Dieu d'après Yusuf al-Basir," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition, Essays presented . . . to Richard Walzer*, Oxford, 1972, 473–489.

⁴⁹ See *Futuhat*, III, 422. The diagram is one of a series of nine large cosmological designs occurring in chap. 371 of this enormous summation of the author's entire monistic metaphysical system. The diagrams in the printed edition faithfully reproduce Ibn al-ʿArabi's original designs, contained in the autograph copy of his second version of the text, which he completed in 1238, just two years before his death. Formerly in Konya, this uniquely important manuscript is now preserved in the Türk ve Islam Eserleri Müzesi in Istanbul (in 37 vols., Env. Nos. 1845–1881). The first Western scholar to call attention to the existence of the *Futuhat's* diagrams was the distinguished Spanish Islamicist Miguel Asín Palacios, first in his article "Mohidin," and again in his controversial book (1919) in which he shocked the world of medieval scholarship by proposing that Dante's *Divine Comedy* was largely based upon Islamic prototypes, including possibly the *Futuhat*, or at least upon the cosmological concepts reflected in its diagrams.

Asín published only a few of the diagrams, not including the present one. A detailed analysis of the series of nine large diagrams in Vol. III was first made in my paper, "The Cosmological Diagrams in Ibn al-ʿArabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyya* and the Iconography of the Throne of God in Islamic Art," presented at the 187th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, in Ithaca, New York (April, 1977), which is presently being prepared for publication.

⁵⁰ *Futuhat*, III, 430ff., where the Throne diagram and its symbolism are discussed in detail. Although the angels who support the Divine Throne are mentioned in most treatises on eschatology, as well as those dealing with the *Miʿraj*, their names are given only in a few later works, where they are sometimes identified as the archangels Seraphiel, Michael, Gabriel, and Azrael. That these identifications represent a later tradition is indicated by the descriptions of the angels in earlier works as having respectively the form of a man and an eagle, a lion and a bull, an obvious borrowing from the Christian symbols of the four Evangelists (to be discussed below).



16 Taj Mahal



17 Attributed to Bichitr, *Portrait of Jahangir Holding Ceremonial Crown*, ca. 1620. London, British Museum (after Stchoukine)



18 *Kay Kavus in His Flying Throne* (detail), from MS of Firdawsi's *Shah-Nama*, Persia, 1531. Iran, formerly Ardabil Shrine (after Binyon)



19 Bichitr, *Allegorical Portraits of Jahangir, Akbar and Shah Jahan*, ca. 1640. Dublin, Chester Beatty Library (photo: Library)

medieval Christian depictions, including certain Early Christian and Byzantine ones (Fig. 21), which perhaps indirectly served as his artistic sources.⁵¹

Incidentally, in later Persian mystical treatises, the four supports of the Throne of God are said to have as their symbolic counterparts the four *Awtad*, or the four terrestrial “poles” in the Sufi hierarchy of saints.⁵² This cosmological conception probably lies behind the Taj’s unusual grouping of four minarets, since they are metaphorically referred to as the four *Awtad* in Lahawri’s account of the Taj complex.⁵³

Despite its abstruseness, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s treatise was widely circulated throughout the Islamic world, and its diagrams seem to have served as the basis of a more popular cosmological design (Fig. 22) in an eighteenth-century Turkish encyclopedia called the *Ma‘rifet-Name*.⁵⁴ In this diagram, the Ka‘ba occupies the

exact center of the earth, while directly above are the seven heavens and the eight Paradises—here shown as a stepped pyramid, with the branches of the inverted celestial Lote-tree growing downward through its various levels. In keeping with the orthodox view that the ‘*Arsh* and *Kursi* are infinitely vast in size, including both Paradise and Hell within their perimeter, the designer of the Turkish diagram has ingeniously designated the outer frame as the locus of their all-encompassing nature.⁵⁵ Those who bear the Throne are positioned at either side, and the ends of the narrow outer band mark the position of the Throne’s pillars (*qawa‘im*).⁵⁶ Intervening between the outer bands of the Divine Realm and the inner zones of Paradise, Earth, and Hell is a narrow shaded band labeled the Barrier (*Barzakh*); and attached to its inner side are representations of the Guarded Tablet (*Lawḥ al-Mahfuz*) and the Divine Pen

⁵¹ Ibn al-‘Arabi’s diagram is strikingly similar to numerous Christian depictions of the *Majestas Domini*, which he could have seen either in his native Spain, or in Damascus, where he spent his later years, after making the pilgrimage to Mecca. He undoubtedly saw some Byzantine icons somewhere during his travels, as we know from a remarkable passage in the *Futuhat*, in which he writes that “the Byzantines developed the art of painting to perfection because, for them, the singular nature [*al-fardaniyyah*] of our Lord Jesus, is the supreme support of concentration upon Divine Unity” (cited in Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, 30). For a detailed explication of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s theology, see A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibnul ‘Arabi*, Lahore, 1964 (repr.); cf. Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Bollingen Series xci), Princeton, 1969; and S. A. Q. Husaini, *The Pantheistic Monism of Ibn al-‘Arabi*, Lahore, 1970.

⁵² Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 45 and *passim*; see also the study by Corbin in bibliog., I, 121–123, 202ff. According to esoteric Shi‘ah theology, the spiritual order of the world is upheld by the cosmic hidden *Imam*, who is conceived metaphorically as the mystical axis of the entire created universe—called *Qutb al-Aqtab*, or “Pole of Poles.” The spiritual subordinates of the *Qutb*, including the four *Awtad*, are arranged hierarchically around him according to their spiritual rank, like courtiers around an emperor. In many Shi‘ah mystical treatises, the four *Awtad* are equated symbolically with the four archangels, as well as with the four pillars of the Throne of God.

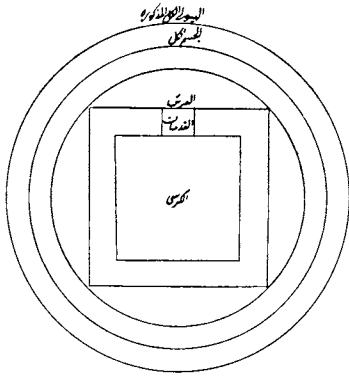
⁵³ Lahawri, *Badshah Namah*, II, 327: “The courtyard of the mosque provides an inspiring setting for worship for the four saintly Pillars of the faith [*Awtad*], and its blissful atmosphere invites the faithful to kneel down before God Almighty.” It should be noted that the Taj’s grouping of minarets is not entirely without precedent; in addition to those on the gateway of Akbar’s tomb at Sikandra, several structures in Timurid Iran may have indirectly served as models: see Jairazbhoy, 69ff.

⁵⁴ Repro. in Ibrahim Haqqi, *Ma‘rifet Name*, Bulaq, 1835–36, 22. Haqqi’s work was completed in 1756–57, and exists in numerous manuscript copies, as well as in various printed editions, of which the edition of 1835–36 appears to be the earliest. The first Western

scholar to note Haqqi’s diagrams was the distinguished French Islamicist Carra de Vaux in “Fragments.” The influence of the *Futuhat*, on later Islamic mysticism was so great that it is entirely possible that its series of nine large geometric designs may have constituted a major iconographic source of the *Ma‘rifet Name* diagrams, either directly or through some as yet undiscovered intermediary. For an important series of cosmological diagrams in a 14th-century commentary on another of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s major treatises, see Henry Corbin and Osman Yahia, eds., *Le Texte des Textes [Nass al-Nosūs], Commentaire des “Fosūs al-hikam” d’Ibn ‘Arabi: Les Prolégomènes* (Bibliothèque Iranienne, xxii), Teheran and Paris, 1975, text, 3–30.

⁵⁵ Haqqi’s design constitutes a remarkable solution to the delicate theological problems involved in attempting such an unorthodox representation, since the Divine Throne and Pedestal obviously could not be depicted in the same “topographical” manner as the other features of the diagram, owing to their exalted religious significance. As in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Throne diagram, the empty band beyond the banded architectural frame is to be construed as the realm of the undifferentiated Essence of God, here specified by an Arabic label at the top reading: “Realm of Divine Essence, where there is neither Emptiness nor Fullness.” Since this “empty” zone is apparently conceived as expanding limitlessly into space, the first cosmic feature to take shape, as it were, within the diagram is the ‘*Arsh* or Divine Throne, symbolized by the outermost of the three bands making up the diagram’s conceptual frame. The innermost band is labeled *Kursi*, or Pedestal. Intervening between these two bands is one inscribed ‘*Alam al-Jabrut*, or “Realm of Power” which, along with the “Realm of Divine Essence” (‘*Alam al-Lahut*) at the top, and the “Realm of Sovereignty” (‘*Alam al-Malakut*) beneath the *Kursi*, make up the three esoteric realms associated with the Divine Throne and Pedestal in traditional Islamic cosmology.

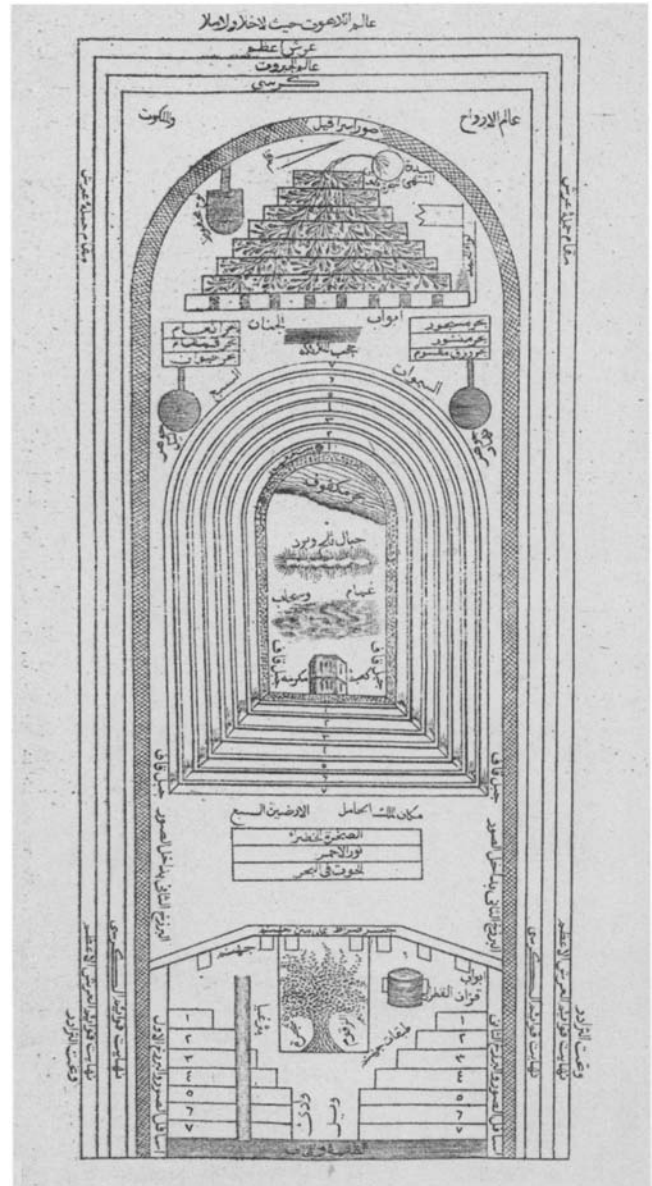
⁵⁶ Both of these sets of Arabic labels occur in the outermost Throne band. It should be noted that the word *qa‘im* (pl. *qawa‘im*), like other Arabic words for “pillar,” also has symbolic connotations; in particular it is the epithet of the hidden *Imam*, who will in effect preside over the events of the Final Day as the *Qa‘im al-Qiyamat*, or “Pillar of the Resurrection”; see references in Corbin.



20 Ibn al-ʿArabi, *Diagram of the Throne of God and Its Pedestal*, from autograph ms of *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, 1238. Istanbul, Türk ve Islam Eserleri Müzesi (after Cairo ed.)



21 *The Holy Trinity Enthroned*, from Greek New Testament codex, 12th century. Vienna, Österr. Nationalbibliothek, Suppl. gr. 52, fol. 1v (after L. von Matt, *The Councils*, London, 1961, pl. 10)



22 *Diagram of the Eight Paradises, the Seven Heavenly and Earthly Spheres, and the Seven Hells*, from Ibrahim Haqqi, *Maʿrifet-Name*, Bulaq, 1835-36

(*Qalam*), which God used to transcribe the subsequent destiny of the world.⁵⁷ It is curious that the Guarded Tablet and Pen are placed *within* the Barrier, since the prevailing view of medieval Islamic cosmology seems to have been that these were the very first “physical

objects” created by God, even before he created the Throne and Pedestal. In Ibn al-ʿArabi’s esoteric cosmology, the Pen stands for the First Intelligence (ʿ*Aql al-Awwal*) and the “Shadow” of God’s own essence; and the Guarded Tablet stands for the “Light” of God’s es-

⁵⁷ The Guarded Tablet is shown as a small escutcheon-shaped device; and the Pen is V-shaped, pointing toward the right. For explanations, see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., s.v. “LAWH”; 2nd ed., s.v. “BARZAKH” and “KALAM”; cf. Carra de Vaux, 29; and Wensinck, 162, where the following Hadith is cited: “The first thing Allah created was the pen. Then He said: Write, and it wrote at that moment all that was to happen till the day of resurrection.”

Both the Pen and the Guarded Tablet, which is equated with the heavenly prototype of the Koran, are said to be infinitely vast in size; one Hadith states that “Allah created the preserved table from a white pearl which is seven times longer than the distance between

Heaven and Earth” (cited in Wensinck, 148; see also Huart, trans., 1, 149ff.).

It should be noted that other sources present a different sequence of Creation, sometimes with the Throne and Pedestal heading the list; and elsewhere, the Throne and the entire heavenly realm are either said to have come into existence simultaneously, or else to be coeternal with God, or with the Divine Radiance that represents the tangible aspect of his otherwise intangible nature; see John MacDonald, “The Creation of Man and Angels in the Eschatological Literature,” *Islamic Studies*, v, 1966, 285-308.

sence manifested as the Universal Soul (*Nafs al-Kulliyya*). But these esoteric notions are not contained in the diagram illustrated, which reflects much more the views of popular Islam.⁵⁸

V

Although diagrammatic representations such as these have been known for some time, it is curious that no Islamic figurative depictions of the Throne of God have so far been published. In my view, figurative images of the Divine Throne grew out of the tradition of illustrations to the sections on angelology in manuscripts of al-Qazwini's famous work *ʿAjaʿib al-Makhlūqat*, or "Wonders of Creation."⁵⁹ Perhaps the earliest surviving copy of this work is the one dated to A.D. 1280 now in Munich, which contains an illustration (Fig. 23) depicting the four angels who support the Divine Throne, in the shape of a man and an ox and an eagle and a lion, an obvious borrowing from the Christian tradition of representing the symbols of the four Evangelists.⁶⁰ From a very early date, the diagrammatic

⁵⁸ For Ibn al-ʿArabi's esoteric theory of Divine Emanation, see Asín Palacios, "Mohidín," 229ff.; an even fuller discussion, tracing the origins of Ibn al-ʿArabi's thought, is found in the same author's *Abenmasarra y su escuela: Orígenes de la filosofía hispano-musulmana*, Madrid, 1914 (cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "IBN MASARRA"). See also T. Burckhardt, *Clé spirituelle de l'astrologie musulmane d'après Mohyiddin Ibn Arabi*, Paris, 1950; cf. below, the discussion of Fig. 38.

⁵⁹ Completed in 1276, the *ʿAjaʿib* is essentially a cosmographical treatise, although it includes sections on popular Islamic cosmology as well. Frequently translated into Persian, the original Arabic version exists in a German translation by Hermann Ethé, *Kosmographie: Die Wunder der Schöpfung*, Leipzig, 1868. For a recent discussion of some Qazwini illustrations in the Freer Gallery, see Esin Atil, *The Art of the Arab World*, Washington, D.C., 1975, 115ff.

⁶⁰ For the description of these angels in the text, see Ethé, 114–155; cf. Atil, 122 and pl. 61. Since the Munich illustration shows all four angels as winged, it is curious that most surviving Qazwini manuscripts preserve the wings for only the angel in human form.

⁶¹ See Carl Nordenfalk, "An Illustrated Diatessaron," *Art Bulletin*, L, 1968, 119–140; cf. Meyer Schapiro and seminar, "The Miniatures of the Florence Diatessaron (Laurentian ms Or. 81): Their Place in Late Medieval Art and Supposed Connection with Early Christian and Insular Art," *Art Bulletin*, LV, 1973, 494–531; and in the same issue, Carl Nordenfalk, "The Diatessaron Miniatures Once More," 533–546.

⁶² This is not the place to present my views on this manuscript in detail, since I plan to do so in a forthcoming article entitled "An Islamic Depiction of the Throne of God in a Christian Manuscript." Suffice it to say here that both Nordenfalk and Schapiro have failed to recognize the specifically Islamic character of the representation, and its probable debt to the diagrams in Ibn al-ʿArabi's *Futuhat* manuscripts, which, as we know, were widely circulated throughout the Islamic world from the 13th century on. In the *Futuhat*, the next diagram in the sequence after the Throne diagram (Cairo ed., 423) depicts the Gardens of Paradise, which the author states in his captions are "framed" by the square shapes of the *ʿArsh* and *Kursi*. Thus the artist of the Florence *Diatessaron* illustration has combined an essentially aniconic diagram of the Throne of God with figurative representations of the four angels who support it. Incidentally, an even closer visual parallel to the crossed lines of the *Diatessaron* Paradise diagram may be found in another diagram designed by Ibn al-ʿArabi and included in one of his lesser works; see H. S. Nyberg,

tradition and the figurative tradition seem to have existed in combinations, judging from an illustration (Fig. 24) in the unique and highly controversial sixteenth-century copy of a thirteenth-century Persian *Diatessaron* manuscript, now preserved in Florence.⁶¹ In this illustration, the angels are displayed around a square, subdivided in the middle by lines symbolizing the four Rivers of Paradise, seemingly an attempt to show Paradise as being encompassed by the Divine Throne.⁶² A much more specific figurative rendering occurs in a late sixteenth-century al-Qazwini manuscript now in Teheran, where the supporting angels uphold a flaming architectonic Throne, only the lower portion of which is depicted (Fig. 25).⁶³ By the early eighteenth century, however, judging from an Indian manuscript in the Bodleian Library (the source of the Paradise plan mentioned earlier), certain artists did not hesitate to show the entire Throne, depicting a sort of stylized trapezoidal base surmounted by a low bulbous dome, being supported by winged angels in human form (Fig. 26).⁶⁴

Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-ʿArabi, Leiden, 1919, Arabic text, 23. Although it is possible that the original 13th-century Persian translation of the *Diatessaron* may have included an illustration similar to the present one, it should be noted that the braided ornamental pattern on the frame of the *ʿArsh* is almost exactly identical to the design on the bottom of the Throne of God illustrated in Fig. 25, done by a Persian artist in the late 16th century, or about fifty years after the manuscript in Florence was executed.

⁶³ This previously unpublished manuscript was exhibited in 1976 at the Hayward Gallery in London, in connection with the World of Islam Festival; see *The Arts of Islam*, London, 1976, 366 (Cat. No. 623). I am grateful to Mr. Robert Skelton of the Victoria and Albert Museum for drawing my attention to this important manuscript, whose Throne of God illustration is apparently unique. At least, no other architectonic depiction of a flaming Throne has so far come to light; neither apparently, have any other Qazwini manuscripts been published that show the supporting angels in human form with animal heads (the Herat *Miʿraj-Nama* may be the ultimate prototype for the flames associated with the Throne; see Séguéy, pls. 34, 37).

⁶⁴ For reference, see above, n. 38. Accompanying the illustration is a Persian label stating that it is an "image of the Divine Throne" (*surat-i-ʿArsh*), and that those who carry it are the source of the apocryphal Hadith that the souls of the virtuous will be transformed in Paradise into birds hovering around the Throne of God. For a discussion of this and similar popular Islamic beliefs, see Ragnar Eklund, *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam*, Uppsala, 1941, 17ff.; see also A. J. Wensinck, *Tree and Bird as Cosmological Symbols in Western Asia*, Amsterdam, 1921; and Corbin, III, 315ff.

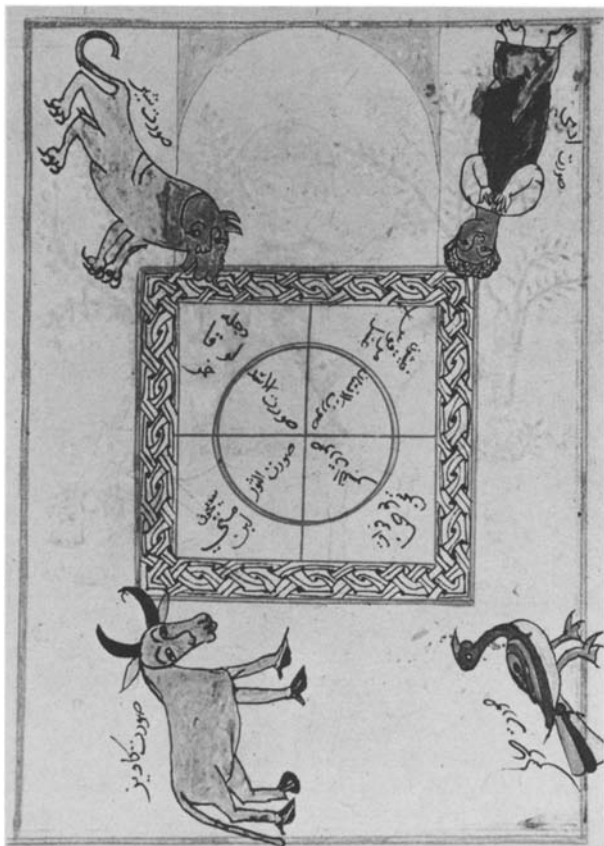
Despite its exalted subject matter, the Bodleian illustration is strangely bland and unpretentious. Only two of the angels lift up their arms as if to support the Throne; two others grasp what seem to be streamers falling from its two front corners, although these are probably intended to suggest the legs of the Throne. Although his rendering is highly stylized, it is obvious that the painter was familiar with other depictions of thrones in Persian and Mughal painting, and that he consciously attempted to make his representation as graphically real as possible, in keeping with the fundamentalist view that the Divine Throne literally exists. The only puzzling feature is the apparent placement of the "dome" in the center of the Throne's base, leaving no place to sit, but perhaps this arrangement was intended to suggest the invisible presence of the Deity within (for a possible literary parallel, see the fable summarized by Franz Rosenthal, "The Empty Throne," *Studia Islamica*, xxxi, 1970, 233–238).



23 *The Four Angels Who Support the Throne of God*, from al-Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat*, executed at Wasit (Iraq), 1280. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ms C. arab. 464, fol. 31v (Photo: Bibliothek)



25 *Four Angels Supporting the Throne of God*, from al-Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat*, Persia, 1595. Teheran, Iran Bastan Museum, ms No. 20342, fol. 30r (photo: Museum)



24 *The Four Angels Who Support the Throne of God*, from a Persian ms of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, Armenia, copied from a 13th-century version ca. 1547. Florence, Laurentian Library, Cod. Orient. 81, fol. 128v (after Nordenfalk)



26 *Four Angels Supporting the Throne of God*, from "Illustrated Guide to Mecca and the Hereafter," ms Pers. d. 29, fol. 66r (photo: Bodleian Library)



27 Jan Sadeler, after a design by Martin de Vos, *The Heavenly Jerusalem*, engraving, 1579. The Hague, Netherlands Institute for Art History (photo: Institute)

If even these few depictions survive, there must surely have been others, a group that would point to the existence of an iconographic tradition of representing the Throne of God, of which the architects of the Taj may well have been aware. In addition to its role in Islamic mysticism and eschatology, the *Arsh* came to be regarded in Persian and Mughal literature as the divine model of architectural perfection. As a result, Mughal court poets often alluded metaphorically to the Divine Throne, as they extolled the magnificence of imperial architectural projects. Thus the inscriptions on the gateway of Akbar's tomb—which seem to have been both composed and inscribed by Amanat Khan, the calligrapher of the Taj Mahal—extravagantly claim that “this lofty palace eclipses the fame of the high Throne of God.”⁶⁵ These words reiterate the imagery of the three couplets inscribed on the entrance façade, the last line of which was mentioned earlier:

⁶⁵ Smith, 32.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 34–35. Although metaphorical allusions to Paradise formed a stock-in-trade of courtly panegyrics of the period, the positioning of the couplets seems deliberate. Whether or not Amanat Khan actually composed the couplets himself, it is obvious that his calligraphic layout reinforces their metaphorical imagery and overall rhetorical effect.

⁶⁷ *Badshah Namah*, II, 323ff. In his flowery description, Lahawri also states that the vast terrace foundation along the river ranks “with the Throne of God in magnificence”; and elsewhere he characterizes the mausoleum proper as “this *Arsh*-like structure.” Interestingly enough, the technical term in Persian for the marble terrace upon which the tomb stands is *kursi*, the same word that is applied to the Pedestal of the Divine Throne.

Hail, blessed space happier than the garden of Paradise!

Hail, lofty building higher than the Divine Throne!

A Paradise, the garden of which has thousands of Rizwans as servants,

The garden of which has thousands of Paradises for its land.

The pen of the mason of the Divine Decree has written on its court:

“These are the gardens of Eden, enter then to live for ever!”⁶⁶

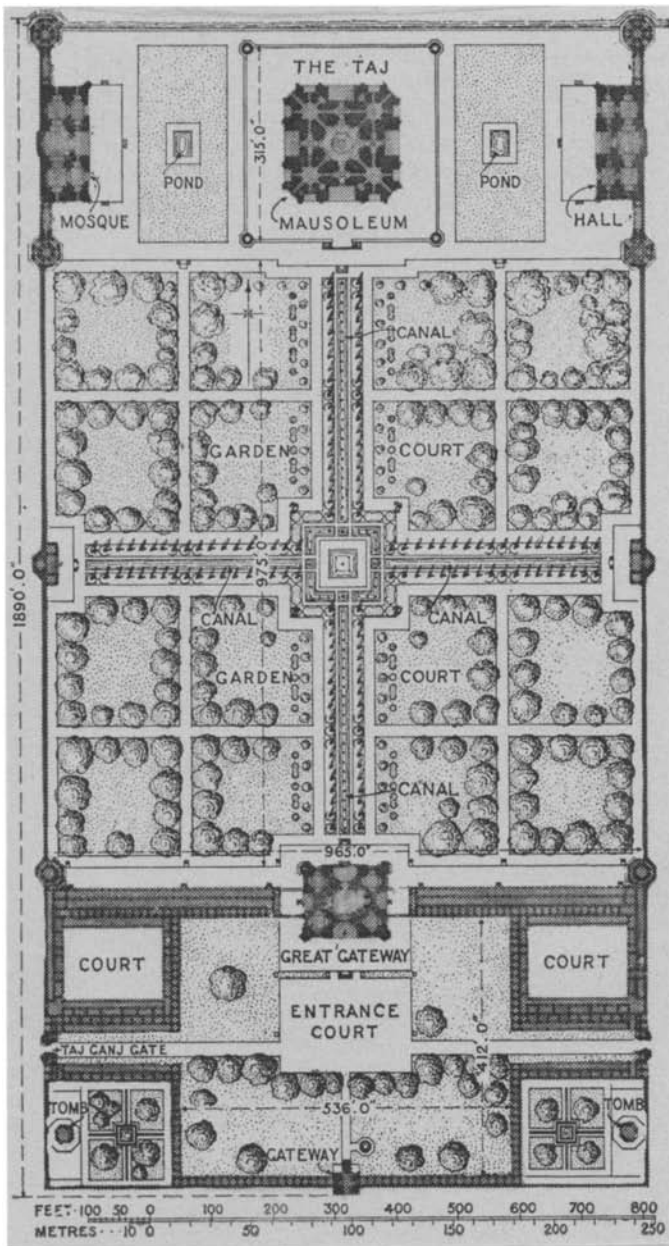
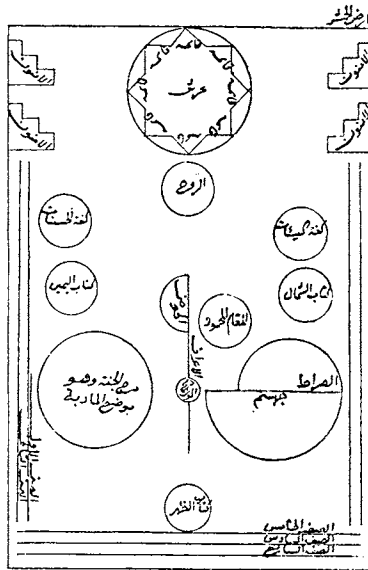
In the official histories of Shah Jahan's reign, the detailed descriptions of the Taj complex also contain similar metaphorical imagery, as in Lahawri's characterization of the Taj's garden as “this replica of the garden of Paradise” (“... in *namudar-i-jannat*”), or his description of the mausoleum as presenting “a vision of the heavenly gardens of Rizwan.”⁶⁷ Although such expressions were highly conventional in the effusive rhetoric of Persian literature, the vast scale of the Mughal garden tombs effectively charged them with a new grandiloquence. In the case of the Taj Mahal, the metaphor seems to have been consciously raised to a special level of symbolic reality.

A view of the Taj, juxtaposed to the Heavenly Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation in a sixteenth-century Flemish print (Fig. 27), is suggestive of the kind of allegory I think the architects of the Taj had in mind. Incidentally, it is entirely possible that a copy of this print, by Jan Sadeler after a design by Martin de Vos, may have reached India and the Mughal court.⁶⁸ Other prints by the same artist are known to have been in the collection of the Emperor Jahangir, who prided himself on his knowledge of Christian iconography and was especially fond of allegorical subjects.⁶⁹ In the print, the Heavenly Jerusalem is shown as a symmetrical walled city, with palaces arranged on streets laid out in a regular grid pattern. In the sky, God the Father

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the influence of European painting and prints upon Mughal painting, see Edward Maclagen, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, London, 1932, 222ff.; for some of the Sadeler prints that reached India, see Milo Cleveland Beach, “The Gulshan Album and Its European Sources,” *Bulletin*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, LXIII, 1965, 63–91; see also Richard Ettinghausen, “New Pictorial Evidence of Catholic Missionary Activity in Mughal India (Early XVIIth Century),” *Perennitas*, ed. H. Rahner, Münster, 1963, 385–396. For discussion of a Mughal manuscript that was sent by Shah Jahan to England in 1638, as a gift for Charles I, see J. V. S. Wilkinson, “An Indian Manuscript of the Golestan of the Shah Jahan Period,” *Ars Orientalis*, II, 1957, 423–425.

⁶⁹ See Richard Ettinghausen, “The Emperor's Choice,” in *De Artibus Opuscula*, XL, *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, New York, 1961, 98–120.

28 Ibn al-^c Arabi, *Diagram of the Plain Assembly (Ard al-Hashr) on the Day of Judgment*, from autograph ms of *Futuh al-Makkiyya*



29 Plan of Taj Mahal (after Fletcher)

sits majestically amid the clouds, which were probably employed by the artist as a substitute for the great white Throne described in Revelation 20ff. The visionary arrangement of the print is paralleled in the layout of the Taj and its garden, with the great domed outline of the tomb appearing almost to float on the horizon, suspended majestically between Heaven and earth—calling to mind the supposed words of Muhammad at the time of his ascension: “I saw there His Throne, which seemed joined to Heaven in such a manner that it appeared that Heaven and the Throne were created together.”⁷⁰

VI

In effect, the layout of the Taj complex and the apocalyptic imagery running through the Koranic inscriptions strongly suggest that the monument was conceived as a vast allegory of the Day of Resurrection, when the dead shall arise and proceed to the place of Judgment beneath the Divine Throne.⁷¹ Although Christian depictions of the Last Judgment were known and copied in Mughal India,⁷² a far closer iconographic parallel to the Taj’s allegorical conception is provided by the diagram of the “Plain of Assembly” (Fig. 28), contained in Ibn al-^cArabi’s *Futuh al-Makkiyya*.⁷³ Incidentally, a copy of this important manuscript is known to have belonged to the Emperor Jahangir, who inscribed it and presented it to a famous Sufi of Gujarat, the father of one of Shah Jahan’s most trusted companions, whom he appointed to an extremely high rank in the

⁷⁰ Cerulli, 82: “. . . ie vi sa chaere que estoit iointe au ciel, en maniere qu’il me sembloit qe li ciel et la chaere fussent creez ensemble.”

⁷¹ In addition to the works of Islamic eschatology already cited, see John MacDonald, “The Day of Resurrection,” *Islamic Studies*, 1966, 129–197; cf. M. Wolff, trans., *Muhammedanische Eschatologie*, Leipzig, 1872; and John Bowman, “A British Museum Arabic Eschatological Fragment,” *Muslim World*, xxxviii, 1948, 198–217.

⁷² See R. H. Pinder-Wilson, *Paintings from the Muslim Courts of India*, exh. cat., London, 1976, 63 (Cat. No. 94a): Nanha and Manohar, *The Last Judgement*, ca. 1605, added to a manuscript of Mir ʿAli Shir’s *Khamsa* (copied at Herat, 1492), now in the Royal Library, Windsor. According to an autograph note by Jahangir, the manuscript was one of his “most treasured books”; even more important for our purposes is the autograph note by Shah Jahan, dated 1627–28, and recording his ownership of the manuscript, which probably came into his possession at the time of his coronation in February, 1628.

⁷³ *Futuhat* (Cairo ed.), III, 425 and 438–440.

Mughal nobility.⁷⁴ To my knowledge, this diagram is unique in all of Islamic art. As a representation of the Day of Judgment, the diagram incorporates numerous eschatological notions about the hereafter: the pulpits for the righteous flanking the Throne—shown as an eight-pointed star inscribed within a circle—on either side; the Tank of Abundance (*al-Hawd al-Kawthar*) in the center; the Praiseworthy Station (*al-Maqam al-Mahmud*) beside it, where Muhammad will stand to intercede for the faithful, who will be allowed to enter Paradise (the circle at the left), while the wicked will fall from the *Sirat* bridge into Hell (the bifurcated circle at right). In marked contrast to the other diagrams we have seen, here the Throne is situated within a clearly defined space, with a measurable relationship in size to its surroundings. In fact, the spatial relationships of all the features of the diagram are so specific that it resembles an actual architectural plan, a plan that is curiously similar to the layout of the Taj and its garden (Fig. 29).⁷⁵

Not only does the Throne have a "measurable" physical relationship to the area of the Plain of Assembly, but Ibn al-^cArabi has also furnished it with explicit, although stylized structural characteristics. Thus, each of the angles of the eight-pointed star is identified by

an Arabic label as the place of a *qa'im*, or "pillar" supporting the Throne. These eight pillars of the Throne apparently allude to the well-known Koranic passage, "and eight will, that Day, bear the Throne of thy Lord above them,"⁷⁶ implying that the usual number of four supports will be doubled on the Day of Judgment. Because of the increase in the number of the Throne's bearers, some mystical accounts of the Resurrection imply that the "architectonic" structure of the Throne will itself be altered, its shape changing from square to octagonal. In any event, the "pillars" on the diagram strongly evoke the image of actual throne structures, like the *sarir* which Ibn al-^cArabi alluded to in his explanation of the diagram of the Divine Throne and Pedestal. Whether or not the architects of the Taj knew this diagram, it is obvious that their decision to place the mausoleum at one end of the garden, rather than in the center (as had been the case in all previous Mughal garden tombs), allowed for a much more specific, one-to-one symbolic equation between the architectural features and their celestial prototypes.⁷⁷

The Koranic passages inscribed on the mausoleum itself (Fig. 30) appear to bear out the allegorical interpretation proposed here: they allude both to the

⁷⁴ See M. Mahfuzul Haq, "A Valuable Manuscript of the Futuhât al-Makkîyya," *Islamic Culture*, xiii, 1939, 215–221. The manuscript, which is bound in five volumes, is presently in the library of the Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta. Although the colophon is missing, there are various autograph notes which allow its ownership to be traced from the late 16th to the middle of the 17th century. The earliest of these is signed by the powerful noble ^cAbd al-Rahim, Khan-i-Khanan (1556–1627), and records his acquisition of the manuscript in 1584. Sometime before 1619, the manuscript passed into the library of the Emperor Jahangir, since in that year he inscribed it to Mir Sayyid Muhammad of Gujarat as a present. Or rather, according to his autograph note, Jahangir (who was then at Agra) deputed Mir Sayyid Jalal al-Din Muhammad, the son of Sayyid Muhammad, to take it to his father, described in the note as a mystic "adorned with the qualities of excellence and rectitude." The third autograph note is that of Sayyid Muhammad, who inscribed the book to his son, possibly soon after he had brought it to Gujarat. In view of the fact that Sayyid Jalal al-Din (1595–1647) was a close companion of Shah Jahan, as well as a Sufi scholar, it is possible that his copy of the *Futuhât* may have been consulted by those responsible for the design of the Taj and the conception of its symbolic meaning. But considering the high regard in which Indian mystics held Ibn al-^cArabi, who came to be called *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, or "The Greatest (Mystical) Teacher," manuscript copies of the *Futuhât* must have been plentiful during the period. (Moin-ud-Din, 94–97, mentions that Sayyid Jalal, called Bukhari, is buried at Agra, a short distance to the west of the Taj; but Haq, 220, states that he is buried in Gujarat, beside his father's grave).

⁷⁵ In the diagram, the space between the *Kawthar* Tank and the Throne is apparently conceived as the location of the Scale of Judgment (*Mizan*), as indicated by the two sets of circles at the left and right sides, which identify the two upper circles as "weighing pans" (holding good and bad deeds respectively); the lower pair are labeled the "Book of the Right" and the "Book of the Left." The centrally placed circle at the very bottom of the diagram is inscribed

the "Book of the Back," referring to the belief that those who receive their record from behind shall be cast straightway into Hell.

According to Ibn al-^cArabi's vivid commentary, the "Plain of Assembly" (which will take the place of the universe obliterated on the Final Day) will be surrounded by seven rows of angels, two on either side and three at the farthest end away from the Throne. The chief of the angelic hosts, presumably Gabriel, will stand before the Throne, at the place on the diagram indicated by a small circle inscribed "The Spirit" (*al-Ruh*). In addition to being an epithet of Gabriel, the term *Ruh* is also employed in the *Futuhât* as an epithet of the First Intelligence (^c*Aql al-Awwal*), as well as of the embodied Pen.

The symmetrical placement of the stylized pulpits (*minbar*) flanking the Throne, designated as seats of honor for the spiritually elect (*al-Aminum*), is strikingly similar to the arrangement of the Taj's mosque and assembly hall, which are identical copies of each other except that only the structure on the west is provided with a *minbar* and a *mihrab* oriented toward Mecca. Incidentally, the architecture of Paradise is supposed to include a mosque, the celestial prototype of the Ka'ba, so that the faithful can continue to worship God in Heaven as they did on earth (for a discussion of the symbolism of the Ka'ba and its celestial prototype, see Henry Corbin, "La Configuration du temple de la Ka'ba comme secret de la vie spirituelle, d'après l'oeuvre de Qâzî Sa'id Qommî (1103/1691), *Eranos Jahrbuch*, xxxiv, 1965, 79–166).

⁷⁶ Sura 69, verse 17. Who or what the eight bearers of the Throne are is uncertain, although in the exegetical literature, they are usually identified as angels, the usual number of four being increased to eight on the Day of Judgment.

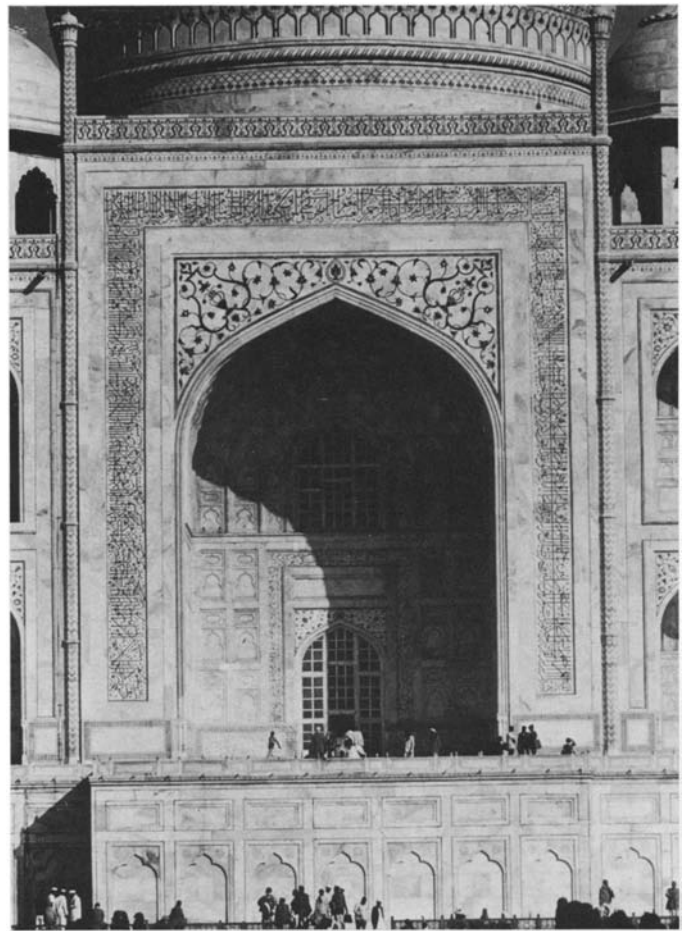
⁷⁷ Thus, whereas all four of the tanks in the garden of Akbar's tomb might be metaphorically likened to the celestial *Kawthar* Tank, only the single tank in the Taj's garden (which is, moreover, larger and more prominent because it is constructed from the same white marble as the mausoleum) could be construed as a replica of the specific one in Paradise.

awesome and terrible finality of the Day of Judgment and to the pleasures of Paradise that God has promised as a reward for the faithful. Some of these passages are of course conventional within a funerary context, but a significant number are not—being totally or partly unique to the Taj. It is well known that the profound *Ya Sin* Sura, which decorates the four vast *twan* arches of the tomb, is traditionally recited at funerals and is popularly regarded as the “heart” (*qalb*) of the Koran.⁷⁸ What is less well known, however, is the fact that the verse that is called the “heart” of the entire Sura, v. 58, directly alludes to the ultimate Vision of God promised to the faithful in Paradise, and this verse is the only place in the Koran where the actual words God will use to address those in Paradise are recorded.⁷⁹

Compared to the solemn grandeur and majestic rhetoric of the *Ya Sin* Sura, the three Suras 81, 82, and 84 (“The Folding Up”; “The Cleaving Asunder”; and “The Rending Asunder”), which are inscribed over the south, west, and north doorways, strike a far more terrifying note, as they summon up a very real vision of the cataclysm of the Final Day—hardly the kind of imagery to be expected on the tomb of a beloved wife. In fact, there is a Hadith to the effect that Muhammad’s hair turned gray from hearing and pondering the fearful words of “The Folding Up” (*al-Takwir*), and other Suras.⁸⁰ As in the case of several of the Taj’s Koranic passages, the question naturally arises as to why these particular passages were chosen to be inscribed in this particular sequence. The answer seems to lie in a tradition recorded in the *Mishkat al-Masabih*, a collection of Hadith that was extremely popular in Mughal India, so popular in fact that it was translated from Arabic to Persian in 1620, by one of the most famous religious scholars of the day.⁸¹ According to the *Mishkat*, the three Suras 81, 82, and 84 are to be recited by anyone “who would like to look at the Day of Resurrection as though it were before his very eyes.”⁸² Since the deviser of the Taj’s inscriptional program was undoubtedly familiar with this tradition, the implications of the choice of these three Suras seem clear: their recitation is capable of summoning up a vision of the Resurrection, along with a concomitant vision of Paradise and the Divine Throne, upon which God will be seated in majesty on the Day of Judgment.

VII

Numerous Koranic passages are also inscribed inside the great domed hall of the mausoleum, in the center of



30 South *twan* arch of Taj Mahal, inscribed with first 21 verses of Sura 36, *Ya Sin*

which an octagonal marble screen surrounds the cenotaphs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan (Fig. 31). It is among the Koranic verses inscribed on top of Mumtaz Mahal’s cenotaph that we find perhaps the most striking evidence for the allegorical interpretation we have proposed. Incidentally, this interpretation may be viewed as an extension of one of the basic conventions of Islamic literatures, namely that all phenomena have both an exoteric, or revealed aspect (called *zahir*), and an esoteric, or concealed aspect (called *batin*); this convention provides a distinction between the literal and the symbolic that may be applied to artistic forms as

⁷⁸ See *Mishkat* (Robson trans.), I, 338ff.; cf. Arthur Christiansen, *Xavass-i-Ayat, Notices et extraits d'un manuscrit persan traitant la magie des versets du Coran*, Copenhagen, 1920, 63–64.

⁷⁹ Christiansen, *ibid.* The verse in question reads: “ ‘Peace!’—such is their greeting from the Lord All-Merciful.” Despite its brevity, however, the verse came to be regarded as textual proof of the literal truth of the ultimate Vision of God promised to the faithful in

Paradise (see the Hadith recorded in Robson’s translation of the *Mishkat*, II, 1208).

⁸⁰ *Mishkat* (Robson trans.), II, 1111.

⁸¹ The scholar was ‘Abd al-Haqq Dihlavi (1551–1642); see M. Ishaq, *India’s Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*, Dacca, 1955, 146ff.

⁸² *Mishkat* (Robson trans.), II, 1172.

well as literary motifs.⁸³ Thus, at first glance, one of the inscribed Koranic passages (Sura 40, verses 7, 8) merely seems to contain an appropriate prayer to be recited on behalf of the deceased:

“O Lord! Thy reach is over all things, in Mercy and Knowledge. Forgive, then, those who turn in repentance, and follow Thy Path; and preserve them from the penalty of the Blazing Fire!

“And allow them, O Lord! to enter the Gardens of Eden which Thou hast promised unto them, and unto the righteous among their fathers, their wives, and their posterity—for Thou art surely the All-mighty, and All-wise!”

The symbolic implications of this passage emerge only when we look at its immediate scriptural context, and discover that the pious prayer quoted in the inscription is being uttered by the angels who support the Throne of God. This crucial information is supplied in the first part of verse 7, which has been omitted in the inscription: “Those who bear the Throne, and those who encircle it, celebrate praise unto their Lord, and believe in Him, and implore forgiveness for the Believers [saying]. . . .” Since omitting parts of verses is a rather rare practice on Indian monuments, the effect of the omission is to focus attention upon it, as in the literary device of ellipsis. The ellipsis in this case seems to have been consciously employed in order to heighten the sense of hidden meaning that underlies the allegorical conception of the monument. The effect of the ellipsis becomes even more striking when we realize that this

is not only one of the very few Koranic references to the angels who support the Throne, but also the only instance in the text when they are said to speak.⁸⁴

In view of this veiled allusion to the Throne of God and the angels who support it, the octagonal marble screen surrounding the cenotaphs suddenly takes on added significance. For its form is also suggestive of the railings of another type of Islamic throne, exemplified by a sixteenth-century Persian depiction of Solomon’s flying throne, now in the Freer Gallery, Washington (Fig. 32).⁸⁵ We know from the Persian histories that this marble screen is a replacement for one originally fashioned in gold and studded with jewels, one whose costly extravagance reinforced its regal throne-like effect.⁸⁶

But how does the cenotaph itself fit into this complex allegorical program? First of all, it should be noted that there is an Islamic iconographic precedent for associating coffins with thrones, as in the depiction of the enthroned coffin of Genghis Khan from a late fourteenth-century Persian manuscript of the *Jami‘al-Tawarikh*, now in Calcutta, in the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Fig. 33).⁸⁷ But this painting only shows the association of a deceased ruler’s coffin with a real earthly throne, not with the Divine Throne. In keeping with the Taj’s overall program of concealed symbolism, it may very well be that the cenotaph itself is also to be assigned an allegorical meaning transcending its literal function. It should be kept in mind that the real grave of Mumtaz Mahal is in the crypt (Fig. 34), therefore *beneath* the symbolic replica of the Throne of God—which, according to tradition, the inhabitants of Paradise will behold on the Day of Resurrection, after

⁸³ See Nicholson, “An Early Arabic Version of the *Mi‘raj* of Abu Yazid al-Bistami,” 414, where the following Hadith is quoted: “There is some knowledge that hath the aspect of a treasure stored away; none recognizes it but they that know God, and none denies it but they that are ignorant of God.” It is of course the quest for the “hidden” (*batin*) Reality as opposed to the “external” (*zahir*), that distinguishes the Sufi from the ordinary believer. The latter performs the prescribed observances and upholds the literal truth of the revealed scriptures, whereas the former frequently departs from accepted ritual and interprets the Koran and the Hadith allegorically, relating its hidden truths to his own personal mystical experiences. The tendency in Persian literature to impart hidden meanings undoubtedly derives from certain schools of Koranic exegesis that traced hidden meanings in every verse; the cabalistic and highly unorthodox Hurufiyya sect, for example, claimed esoteric significance for virtually every letter in the text. For a recent general study of these and other trends within Sufism with an extensive bibliography, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975; cf. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Cambridge, Mass., 1964.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of the two other Koranic passages alluding to the angels who support the Divine Throne, see O’Shaughnessy, “God’s

Throne and the Biblical Symbolism of the Qur’an,” 206–20; for the translation of the exegesis (*tafsir*) of verse 7 of Sura 40 by the famous 12th-century grammarian and exegete Zamakhshari (d. 1144), see Gätje, 164–66. Whereas Zamakhshari raises the question of whether the angels supporting the Throne can see God, Ibn al-‘Arabi, in another of his mystical treatises that may have been known in Mughal India, asks whether even the Throne itself, upon which God sits, can in the final analysis have knowledge of the ultimately inscrutable nature of the Divine Reality; see Arthur Jeffrey, “Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*,” *Studia Islamica*, x, 1959, 43–77, where the author describes the Throne as “trembling with emotion” as it speaks to deny any real knowledge of God’s true essence.

⁸⁵ See Binyon *et al.*, *Persian Miniature Painting*, 136 (Cat. No. 157).

⁸⁶ See *Badshah Namah*, I, 487; II, 326; cf. Chaghtai, 56–57. According to Lahawri’s account, 40,000 *tolas* of gold (about 1,500 lbs. Troy) were employed on the earlier railing, which was installed in 1633, under the supervision of the State Treasurer Bebedal Khan, who also was in charge of the Peacock Throne. The present marble railing, which took ten years to complete, was ordered by Shah Jahan as a replacement for the gold one; the installation apparently took place in 1643.

⁸⁷ See Basil Gray, “An Unknown Fragment of the *Jami‘ al-Tawarikh*’ in the Asiatic Society of Bengal,” *Ars Orientalis*, I, 1954, 65–75.

their graves have opened. As is well known, the cenotaphs of women in Muslim India are conventionally flat, and frequently depict a writing tablet (*takhti*) on top.⁸⁸ In view of this convention, it may be that Mumtaz Mahal's cenotaph in the upper hall, surrounded by the octagonal marble railing, metaphorically alludes to the celestial Guarded Tablet (*Lauh al-Mahfuz*), upon which God inscribed the destiny of the world, along with the original prototype of the Holy Koran.⁸⁹ According to traditional Islamic cosmology, the Guarded Tablet is the same as the "Inscribed Register" preserved in the celestial realm of *'Ilīyūn*—that is, on, or in direct proximity to, the Throne of God.⁹⁰

VIII

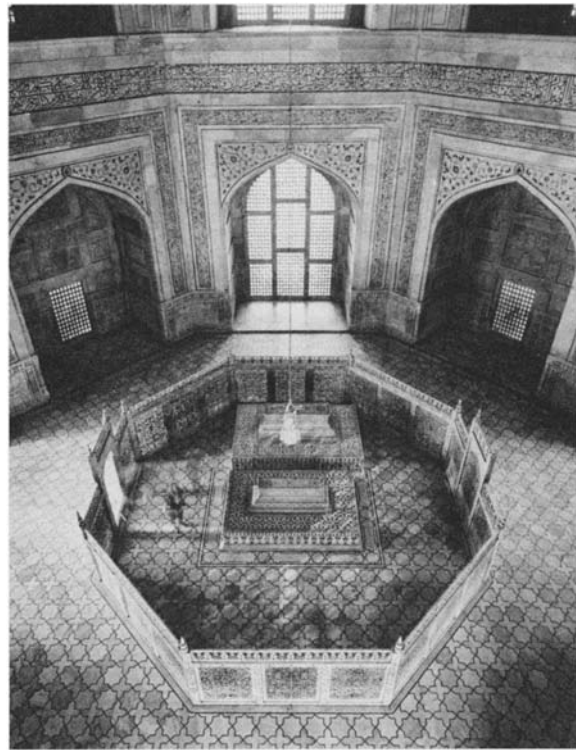
As compelling as the circumstantial evidence seems to be for the interpretation of the Taj Mahal as a symbolic replica of the Throne of God, it does not fully

⁸⁸ See Herklots, trans., 102ff. It should be noted that in Persian, the words for tablet, bier (or coffin), and throne are all virtually identical; the ambiguity between the latter two undoubtedly gave rise to the expression *takht ya takhta*, meaning "Throne or Grave!" (an allusion to the frequently bloody battles for succession in Mughal India).

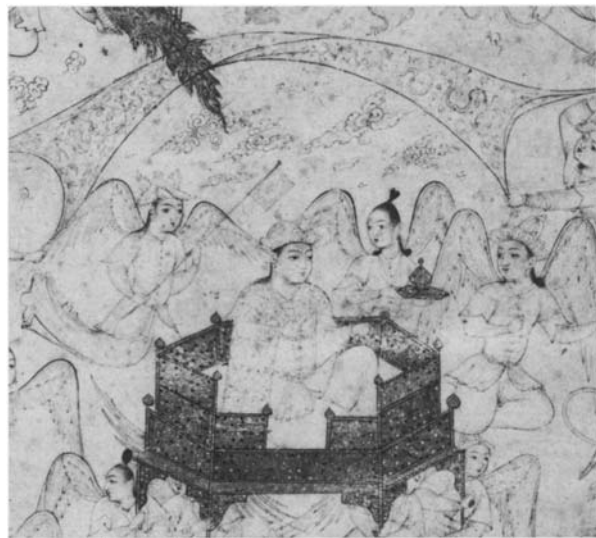
⁸⁹ See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., s.v. "LAWH"; cf. Gätje, 51ff.

⁹⁰ According to the early Koranic exegete al-Tabari (d. 923), the realm of *'Ilīyūn* "may be identified with the seventh heaven or the right foot of the divine throne, or some other place in heaven" (*Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "'ILLIYUN"). The only Koranic reference to this mysterious celestial realm is in Sura 83, verses 18–21, that is, the passage immediately preceding verses 22–28 of the same Sura, which are inscribed on the east side and part of the south end of the cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal in the great domed hall. This passage explicitly describes the joys of Paradise, including drinking from the celestial fountain *Tasnim*, a privilege reserved for those who are "nearest to God." This last expression gradually came to be interpreted by the theologians as a technical term, referring specifically to those who stand so close to the Throne of God (presumably the angels who support it) that they are able to view the "Inscribed Register" (83.20) or Guarded Tablet itself: "To which bear witness those Nearest [unto God]" (83.21). The expression "those Nearest unto God" (the last few words of 83.28) takes on special significance on account of its being inscribed on the south end, or foot, of the cenotaph, combined with the first few words of 41.30: "Verily those who say 'Our Lord is God!' . . ." (for reproductions, see Carroll, *The Taj Mahal*, 60 and 101). In Arabic, these two detached phrases together form a semantic entity, almost as if they were meant to read as a separate, synthetic Koranic verse: "Those Nearest unto God [are] verily those who say, 'Our Lord is God!'" Since it is inconceivable that the calligrapher Amanat Khan would have allowed the last few words of the passage inscribed on the east side of the cenotaph to continue onto the south end without a reason, the arrangement must have had a symbolic purpose, perhaps to epitomize the allegorical meaning of the entire inscriptional program, to imply in effect that Mumtaz Mahal, by her profession of faith, had herself become one of "Those Nearest unto God."

Although the symbolism of these and other Koranic passages inscribed on the Taj will be treated in greater detail in my monograph in preparation, the evidence of one other short passage inscribed on the cenotaph should be briefly mentioned. This is verse 286 of Sura 2 (*al-Baqarah*, or "The Cow"), inscribed on the west side and part of the north end or head. According to tradition, this verse is "one of the treasures of God's mercy from under His Throne" (*Mishkat*, Robson trans., 1, 458).



31 Interior domed hall of Taj Mahal, looking west (after Volwahren)



32 *Solomon in His Flying Throne* (detail), Persia, early 16th century. Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art (photo: Gallery)



33 *Enthroned Coffin of Genghis Khan*, from fragmentary Ms of Rashid al-Din's *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, Persia, late 14th–early 15th century. Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, No. D 31. fol. 90v (after Gray)

explain why Shah Jahan conceived such an unorthodox "iconographic" scheme to begin with. One wonders whether he intended to entrust his wife's mortal remains to Providence. And if so, whether he was inspired out of devotion or for some other reason. And one questions where he intended to be buried himself. Unfortunately, Shah Jahan's personality was too complex and the evidence is too fragmentary to allow us to come up with simple answers.

The allegorical conception of the Taj Mahal must have been at least partially coincidental: the throne-like shape of the mausoleum and the paradisiacal associations of garden tombs derived from earlier developments. These metaphorical associations were undoubtedly well known to the architects of the Taj, who seem consciously to have incorporated them into their design.⁹¹ In fact, certain features of the Taj's architectural conception become explicable *only* when the monument is interpreted as an allegory of Paradise and the Divine Throne. In this process, as we have mentioned, the calligrapher Amanat Khan undoubtedly played an important role, since it was probably he who devised the inscriptional program. In effect, the underlying meaning of this program extends, and makes more literal, the Paradise symbolism of the Persian inscriptions of Akbar's tomb, inscriptions which, as mentioned above, Amanat Khan seems to have composed as well as inscribed. Since, according to Islamic belief, Arabic will be the only language spoken in Paradise, the Taj's

unique assemblage of Koranic passages may be explained as an attempt to devise an inscriptional program suitable to the monument's lofty allegorical meaning. Moreover, Islamic tradition states that various parts of the celestial architecture in Paradise have the words of God written upon them—including the gateway and the Divine Throne itself.⁹²

We may ask, however, what role Shah Jahan himself played in the conception of the Taj. We know that from an early age, he took a keen interest in architecture; ultimately, of course, he surpassed his grandfather Akbar as the greatest builder among the Mughal emperors.⁹³ As mentioned above, we know also that Shah Jahan was interested throughout his reign in the visible emblems of power. He was particularly obsessed with thrones, and one of his first official acts after his coronation in 1628 was to order his artisans to fashion the fabulous, jewel-encrusted Peacock Throne (see Fig. 3)—a task that took seven years to complete.⁹⁴ The completed throne bore a lengthy ode composed by one of Shah Jahan's court poets, which reads in part: "Almighty God who exalted the Heavenly Throne and Pedestal,/Only He can make sure a throne, through His Divine Power."⁹⁵

Thus the poet explicitly compares the Peacock Throne to the *Arsh* and *Kursi*, suggesting, moreover, that the creation of such a throne is properly the province of God, or at least of his august representative on earth, the Emperor (Fig. 35).⁹⁶

⁹¹ The architect of the Taj seems to have been a man named Ustad Ahmad, who also worked on the design of Shah Jahan's new capital, Shahjahanabad, at Delhi, and whose sons and grandsons were both architects and scholars; see M. A. Chaghtai, "A Family of Great Mughal Architects," *Islamic Culture*, xi, 1937, 200-209; cf. the recent article by H. I. S. Kanwar, "Ustad Ahmad Lahori," *Islamic Culture*, xlvii, 1974, 11-32.

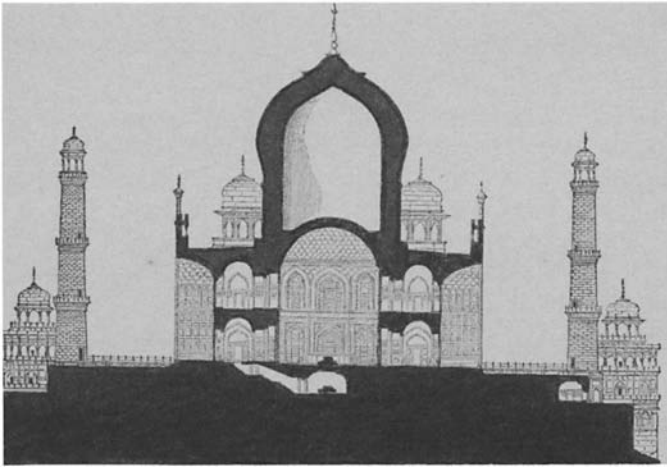
⁹² See, e.g., the tradition stating that various Suras and verses "are hung upon the Throne; between them and God is no veil. . . ." (cited in Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, London, 1961, 115).

⁹³ Numerous references in the Persian histories attest to Shah Jahan's direct involvement in his various architectural projects, approving the plans, ordering alterations on the spot, and so forth; see Saksena, 261-63.

⁹⁴ For the history of the Peacock Throne, see Sanderson, 41ff.; cf. Abdul Aziz, "Thrones, Chairs, and Seats Used by the Indian Mughals," *Journal of Indian History*, xvii, 1938, 181-228. (The Peacock Throne was dismantled in 1739, during Nadir Shah's sack of Delhi.)

⁹⁵ Sanderson, 50. The ode was composed by Muhammad Jan Qudsi, and was inscribed in green enamel-work inside the throne, which was completed in 1634. Similar metaphorical imagery appears in the contemporary Persian inscription at Lahore praising Shah Jahan's construction of a Royal Pavilion (*Shah-burj*), which was completed in 1631-32, only a few months after the death of Mumtaz Mahal: "The king . . . ordered a Shah Burj to be erected which for its immense height/Is like the Divine Throne beyond imagination and conception" (quoted in Nur Baksh, "Historical Notes on the Lahore Fort and Its Buildings," *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report*, 1902-03, 218-224).

⁹⁶ The prototype of the allegorical painting depicted in Fig. 35, which survives in several different versions, was apparently made at about the time of Shah Jahan's coronation. Although the iconography of the ruler standing upon a globe was derived from similar portraits of Jahangir, it was especially appropriate in the case of Shah Jahan, whose Persian title literally means "King of the World." For a similar painting in the Chester Beatty Library, see Arnold and Wilkinson, iii, pl. 63; for a Jahangiri prototype, see Richard Ettinghausen, *Paintings of the Sultans and Emperors of India*, New Delhi, 1961, pl. 12.



34 Cross-section of Taj Mahal (after Fergusson)



35 Inscribed to Hashim, *Allegorical Portrait of Shah Jahan as "King of the World,"* dated 1628-29. Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art (photo: Gallery)

Although Islamic rulers have typically been referred to by exalted titles, those of Shah Jahan and other Mughal rulers take on added significance when considered within the context of the Sufi cosmological doctrine of the Perfect Man (*al-Insān al-Kamil*), especially as it was modified by the esoteric notions of various Indian mystics of the first half of the seventeenth century, with some of whose views Shah Jahan was apparently in sympathy.⁹⁷

The origins of the mystical doctrine of the Perfect Man may be traced back to the medieval period, when a controversy was raging among Muslim theologians over the reality and nature of God's attributes. According to the rational orthodox view, there is no real ocular vision of God or of his throne; rather, these are allegories.⁹⁸ God has no physical attributes, he simply and transcendently *is*. Orthodox theologians found themselves in a quandary, however, when they maintained that creation was real and distinct from God, since the act of creating would be an attribute by definition. Partly to resolve this quandary, certain medieval mystics—of whom Ibn al-ʿArabi was perhaps the major figure—devised the notion of the Perfect Man, whom they conceived as a kind of hypostatization of God's transcendent non-creativity, but who paradoxically serves as the actual instrument, and ultimate goal, of Creation.⁹⁹ In some texts, the Perfect Man is referred to as the embodiment of the Divine Pen—the "Shadow" of God's essence—which writes all that has been, is, and will be. Although generally considered to be the archetype of the *Khalifa*, or vice-regent of God on earth, the nature of the Perfect Man was believed in the final analysis to be cosmic and eternal—the distilled irradiation of God's Divine Essence. Thus, among certain medieval mystics, the Perfect Man was thought to be greater even than the Divine Throne, since it, like the universe and all of created reality, exists only "through

⁹⁷ For a detailed exposition of the Perfect Man doctrine, and its parallels to the Christian concept of the *Logos*, see Nicholson, 77-142; cf. Titus Burckhardt, trans., *ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, de l'homme universel*, Lyon, 1953.

⁹⁸ See, e.g., the chapter on "God and the World" in Wensinck, 58ff. Orthodox theologians accepted the literal truth of the Koranic passages referring to God sitting upon the Throne, but disallowed speculation as to how and why this was so; similarly they accepted the truth of the ultimate vision of God in Paradise, but denied that this would be perceived through normal eyesight.

⁹⁹ According to al-Jili (1365-1428), "the Perfect Man is a copy [*nushka*] of God. . . . As a mirror in which a person sees the form of himself and cannot see it without the mirror, such is the relation of God to the Perfect Man, who cannot possibly see his own form but in the mirror of the name of Allah; and he is also a mirror to God, for God laid upon Himself the necessity that His name and attributes should not be seen save in the Perfect Man" (quoted in Nicholson, 106-07).

and in the cosmic consciousness of the Perfect Man."¹⁰⁰

IX

Needless to say, this mystical doctrine was, and still is, considered heretical by orthodox Muslims, although its advocates recognized Muhammad as the archetypal Perfect Man, and the first in a recurring series. We know that the doctrine was a live issue at the Mughal court, since Akbar himself was heralded by some obsequious theologians as the Perfect Man of that age.¹⁰¹ It seems that Akbar also espoused this view, as he came increasingly close to believing in his own divinity (he founded his own religion and required the ceremonial court use of the ambiguous phrase *Allahu Akbar*, which may mean either "God is Great," or "Akbar is God").¹⁰² The religious and intellectual climate of the reign of Akbar was especially favorable to the revitalization of the medieval doctrine of the Perfect Man. The close of the first millenium of Islam was approaching, causing, on the one hand, widespread fear that the end of the world was imminent, and, on the other hand, widespread belief that a new spiritual leader would emerge.¹⁰³

Among the claimants for this exalted role was Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, who was born in 1564, and who was therefore approaching thirty as the year of the millenium actually occurred in 1592, the very year of Shah Jahan's birth.¹⁰⁴ In his later years, Sirhindi publicly advocated a return to orthodoxy, but his earlier theology was highly unorthodox. He apparently regarded himself as the spiritual leader of Islam for the second millenium, and the culmination of the doctrine of the Perfect Man. It was probably his extreme mystical vanity, rather than orthodox piety, which in 1619 made him

refuse to bow before the Emperor Jahangir, who sentenced him to prison for his effrontery, as well as for the unorthodoxy of some of his mystical claims.¹⁰⁵ One of these claims was that Sirhindi had made a mystical journey to the very presence of God, going beyond even the exalted station of Muhammad, a claim in effect that he was at once a kind of pope and messiah.¹⁰⁶

There is some evidence that Shah Jahan was sympathetic to Sirhindi, as well as a follower of some of his mystical views.¹⁰⁷ Obsessed as he was with his own royal greatness and destiny, however, Shah Jahan may well have utilized these views for his own purposes. He was certainly an independent enough thinker to see that the Perfect Man doctrine constituted a kind of intellectual justification of his own temporal authority as absolute ruler. In fact, the mystical titles and epithets of the Perfect Man were similar and in some cases identical to those applied to the *Khalifa*, as the following selected titles of Shah Jahan attest: Auspicious Lord of the Age; King of the World; Shadow of God; August Representative on Earth of the Divinity. Given Shah Jahan's extraordinary vanity and preoccupation with his royal destiny, it is not implausible to suppose that he saw a special significance in the fact that he was born in the very year of the millenium.¹⁰⁸

In light of the strong possibility that Shah Jahan conceived of himself as the embodiment of the Perfect Man, the reasons for his not building a tomb for himself become clearer. Whatever may have been his original intention, he must have eventually concluded that the only appropriate burial place was in the Taj. In fact, it is entirely possible that he gave instructions to this effect to his daughter Jahanara, who was apparently responsible for making the necessary arrangements to have

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 92. In effect, according to al-Jili, the Perfect Man embodies the primordial substance, or *Prima Materia*, out of which Creation emanates (Nicholson, 106): "The Perfect Man in himself stands over all of the individualizations of existence. With his spirituality he stands over against the higher individualizations, with his corporeality over against the lower. His heart stands over against the Throne of God [*al-'Arsh*], his mind over against the Pen [*al-Qalam*], his soul over against the Guarded Tablet [*al-Lawhu 'l-mahfuz*]. . . ."

¹⁰¹ See S. A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign*, Delhi, 1975, 190 and *passim*; see also Rizvi in bibliog.

¹⁰² H. Blochmann, trans., *The Aqin-i-Akbari*, by Abu 'l-Fazl 'Allami, New Delhi, 1977 (repr. of 1927 ed.), 175ff.

¹⁰³ See the chapter, "The Mahdawi Movement," in Rizvi, 68ff.

¹⁰⁴ See Yohannan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity*, Montreal, 1971; cf. John A. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines*, New York, 1970 (repr.), 275ff.; Rizvi, 203-329.

¹⁰⁵ Rizvi, 286ff.; for Jahangir's own account, see Alexander Rogers, trans., *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, (as cited in note 5), II, 91-93.

¹⁰⁶ Sirhindi's presumptuous mystical claims were made in a series of letters, which were widely circulated in Sufi circles in Mughal India (a number of these have recently been edited by Fazlur Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Sirhindi*, Karachi, n.d.). Following in

the tradition of Ibn al-'Arabi and other great mystics, Sirhindi characterized his religious quest in visionary terms, describing his mystical ascension as if it were a real journey to Paradise. In addition to claiming to be the spiritual *Mujaddid*, or "Renewer," of the second millenium, Sirhindi also gave himself the exalted title of *Qayyum*, or "The Eternal," one of the ninety-nine names of God.

¹⁰⁷ Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors*, Bombay, 1972, 90-91; but cf. Rizvi, 310-11, where, however, it is doubted that Shah Jahan had any close contact with Sirhindi.

¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, we know very little about Shah Jahan's religious views, since he left no memoirs or any other writings that would shed light on the subject. Although a detailed study of the evidence has yet to be made, it is apparent that the present scholarly estimate of Shah Jahan as a relatively orthodox Muslim is simplistic and in need of revision. In view of the predisposition toward mysticism of his eldest and favorite son Dara Shikoh, it seems warranted to assume that Shah Jahan was at least sympathetic to these pursuits, if not actively involved. For a survey of Dara Shikoh's prodigious literary output, with extensive bibliography, see Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Dara Shikoh: Life and Works*, Calcutta, 1953. It is of course a major premise of this article that the artistic monuments patronized by Shah Jahan, both architecture and painting, constitute important evidence for understanding his intellectual and psychological characteristics.

his body taken from the Fort to the Taj.¹⁰⁹ It is tempting to speculate, too, whether Shah Jahan may also have composed the epitaph of his grave in the crypt, which reads as follows: "The illumined grave and final resting place of the Emperor, dignified as Rizwan [the treasurer and guardian of Paradise] residing in Eternity; His Most Exalted Majesty, having his abode in *ʿIlliyun* [where the Guarded Tablet is preserved]; Dweller in Paradise, Second Lord of the [auspicious planetary] Conjunction, Shah Jahan, the King Valiant. May his grave ever flourish, and his abode be in the Gardens of Paradise! . . ." ¹¹⁰

Some of the allusions in this epitaph are so metaphorically specific that it seems almost certain that their author was aware of the concealed allegorical meaning of the Taj. According to Islamic belief, Rizwan is the gatekeeper of Paradise and the guardian of God's "treasure" lying beneath the Divine Throne (Fig. 36).¹¹¹ As already mentioned, the realm of *ʿIlliyun*, described as the abode of Shah Jahan, is the place where the "Inscribed Register" or Guarded Tablet is preserved; hence it is in direct proximity to the Throne of God.

The metaphorical implications of the epitaph in the crypt seem quite clear: Shah Jahan's final resting place is also beneath the Divine Throne.¹¹² Furthermore, like the cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal in the upper hall, that of Shah Jahan could also have been assigned a symbolic

meaning transcending its literal function. As remarked above, the graves of women in Muslim India are conventionally flat on top, and sometimes shaped like writing tablets; the graves of men, on the other hand, are frequently adorned with replicas of pen boxes, or *qalam-dar* (Fig. 37).¹¹³ In the popular view, this symbolizes a hierarchical differentiation between the sexes, and perhaps also reflects the fact that a higher percentage of men than women were literate. To carry the popular explanation one step further, the pen box on the man's grave epitomizes, as it were, his ability, and perhaps his prerogative, to write his decrees upon the tablet of his wife's subordination to his will.

Although the pen-box device surmounting Shah Jahan's cenotaph obviously epitomizes some of these conventional associations, it may also allude to the mystical significance of the *Qalam*, or Divine Pen. In fact, the cenotaph itself seems to have been intended as a symbolic replica of the Pen, paralleling the conception of Mumtaz Mahal's cenotaph as a replica of the Guarded Tablet. Thus the arrangement of the two cenotaphs within the octagonal screen (Fig. 39) evokes the symbolism of another of Ibn al-ʿArabi's mystical diagrams, namely the diagram dealing with the process of Divine Emanation (Fig. 38).¹¹⁴ In the diagram, the process of Creation is likened to God's writing his decrees with the Pen of the First Intelligence (*al-ʿAql al-Awwal*) upon

¹⁰⁹ See above, n. 23.

¹¹⁰ Adapted from the Persian text and translation in Moin-ud-Din, 52-53.

¹¹¹ For the reference to the manuscript from which Fig. 36 is reproduced, see above, n. 38. In the painting, Rizwan stands by the gateway to Paradise, welcoming the faithful who have been able to cross the *Sirat* bridge—shown as a thin, wiry line—without falling into Hell.

Since the Arabic word *ridwan*, pronounced Rizwan in Persian, occurs in the Koran with the meaning of God's "good pleasure," the angel of the same name seems to be a hypostasization and personification of that concept. According to popular Islam, Rizwan is the gatekeeper of Paradise, because without God's *ridwan* (i.e., his "good pleasure"), no one would be allowed to enter (Schimmel, 16). Rizwan plays an extremely important role in Islamic cosmological and eschatological literature, in the various legends of Muhammad's heavenly ascension, and especially in the accounts of the Day of Resurrection. In one treatise, Rizwan is commanded by God to "decorate the gardens," perhaps implying that he is at least partly the "designer" as well as the guardian of Paradise (MacDonald, "The Day of Resurrection," 149).

¹¹² According to Schimmel (p. 18), the four water channels of the *chahar-bagh* plan employed in Mughal garden tombs were intended "to produce a real paradisaical garden beneath which rivers flow, and the deceased prince would foretaste heavenly bliss already in his tomb before the general resurrection and final judgment." See also the article by John B. Taylor, "Some Aspects of Islamic Eschatology," *Religious Studies*, iv, 1968, 57-76, where the following characterization of the esoteric eschatological beliefs of some 12th-century Ismaʿili mystics is quoted (p. 71): "Paradise being the life of the spirit, moreover, it was even claimed that Paradise itself could be attained already before death; at least in a potential sense, which our death will merely actualize."

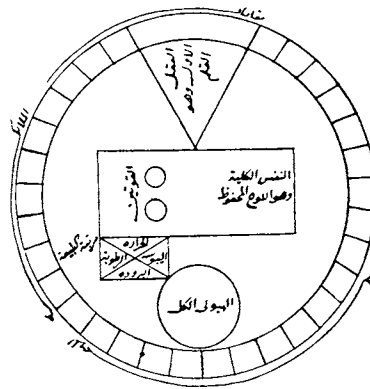
It should be noted that Shah Jahan's posthumous title was *Firdaws-ashiyani*: or "Dweller in Paradise." Similar titles were used to designate most of the other Mughal emperors from Babur on, with Akbar being called *ʿArsh-ashiyani*, or "Dweller upon the Throne of God"—a title whose symbolic connotations seem to underlie the allegorical conception of the Taj.

¹¹³ Herklots, trans., 102.

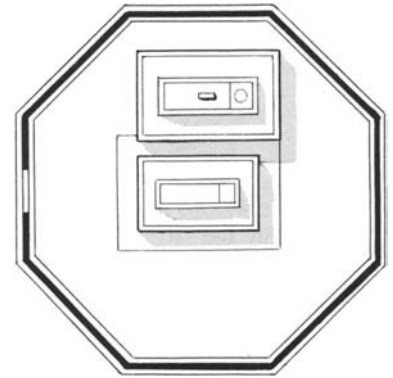
¹¹⁴ *Futuhat* (Cairo ed.), III, 421, and 429-430.



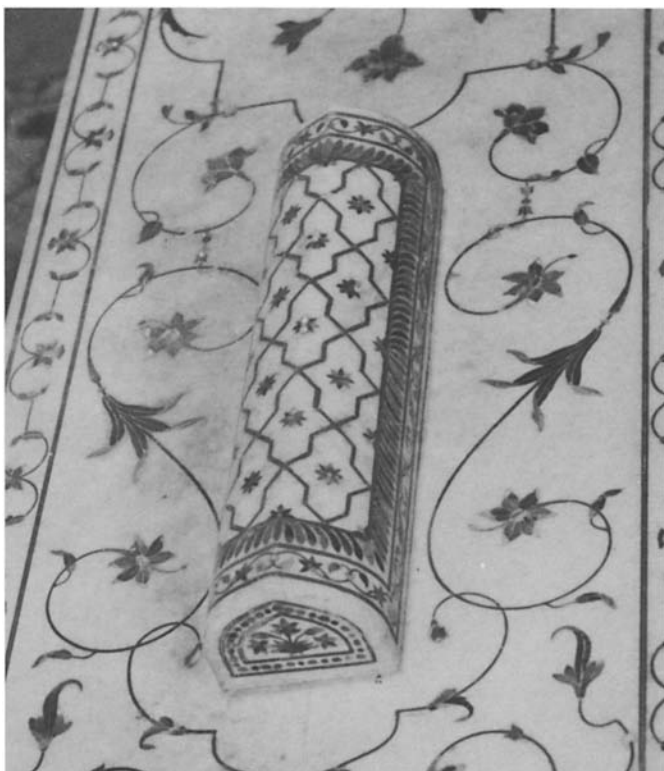
36 The Angel Rizwan Admitting the Faithful to Paradise, from "Illustrated Guide to Mecca and the Hereafter," ms Pers. d. 29, fol. 58r (photo: Bodleian Library)



38 Ibn al-ʿArabi, *Diagram of the Process of Divine Emanation*, from autograph ms of *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*



39 Plan of cenotaphs and octagonal screen inside Taj Mahal



37 Pen-box device (*qalam-dar*), on top of Shah Jahan's cenotaph in crypt of Taj Mahal

the Tablet of the Universal Soul (*al-Nafs al-Kulliyya*).¹¹⁵ This cosmic event is witnessed by myriads of attending

¹¹⁵ For an analysis of a variant of this diagram, which however may also go back to an original design of Ibn al-ʿArabi, see Asin Palacios, 1919, 222–24; cf. Titus Burckhardt, *La Sagesse des prophètes (Fuṣūḥ al-Hikam)*, Paris, 1974, 120.

Although Ibn al-ʿArabi gives his diagram the rather cryptic label "Image of the Obscurity" (*surat al-ʿAma*, literally "Blindness"), he treats the cosmogonic process almost as if it were an actual event, taking place within what might be called the arena of Divine "Irradiation" (*Tajalli*). The undifferentiated essence of God is here to be construed as converging centripetally inward from beyond the rim of the circle of adoring angels, in the form of a triangular wedge symbolizing the First Intelligence, which, according to Ibn al-ʿArabi's esoteric monist philosophy, represents the first seemingly differentiated aspect of Divine Unity. According to the Arabic label, this same shape also represents the Divine Pen, described allegorically as the "Shadow" of the Divine Essence. The "Light" of God's essence is symbolized by the rectangle, serving as the double manifestation of the Guarded Tablet and the Universal Soul. At the left of the rectangle are two small circles bearing the label *al-Qadratin*, and standing for the two differentiated "Powers" of the Divine Essence, namely Potentiality and Actuality, mystically conceived as mirror images of each other.

The interaction of the Pen upon the Tablet brings about the existence of the elemental "Predispositions" of Nature, manifested as the four alchemical principles of Heat, Cold, Dryness, and Humidity, principles represented in the diagram by a smaller rectangle, attached to the bottom left of the Guarded Tablet, and divided into four triangles. Below this rectangle is a circle symbolizing the concept of Primordial Matter (*Hayuli al-Kull*), that is, the existential source material or *Prima Materia*, out of which the created universe is actually fashioned. In Ibn al-ʿArabi's emanatist system, however, *Hayuli al-Kull* is regarded as "coexistent with Being itself," and hence anterior to material, as opposed to spiritual, creation. In any event, it is clear from Ibn al-ʿArabi's diagram that the Pen and Guarded Tablet are even more exalted than the Divine Throne and Pedestal, since they precede them in the cosmogonic process. In fact, as indicated by the label at the top of the author's Throne diagram (Fig. 20)—the second in the series—the outer circle is an enlargement of the smaller interior circle in the preceding Emanation diagram. Since the smaller concentric circle in the second diagram is labeled *fism al-Kull*, or "Universal Body" (representing a closer parallel to the concept of *Prima Materia*), it is obvious that the Throne and Pedestal are to be construed as the first "physical" objects created by God, a metaphysical position that, interestingly enough, closely coincides with the popular Islamic belief in the Throne's literal existence.



40 Throne of Shah Jahan in Hall of Public Audience (*Diwan-i-'Am*), Red Fort, Delhi, completed 1648

angels positioned around the circle of Divine Emanation. As mentioned above, many mystics equated the Divine Pen with the Perfect Man, since both were felt to epitomize the active side of God's transcendent nature. Thus the symbolism of the cenotaphs—and perhaps the entire tomb—seems explicitly designed to reflect Shah Jahan's exalted image of himself as the Perfect Man.¹¹⁶

X

Although extremely esoteric, these metaphysical notions did not exist in a vacuum; indeed they were widely established within Islamic mysticism, especially in Mughal India. It is therefore against the entire background of Islamic religious concepts, as well as the background of Shah Jahan's life and personality, that the Taj must be interpreted. Within this broader context, the Taj seems less a romantic symbol of devotion than a vainglorious, yet profound attempt to define God in Shah Jahan's own terms, perhaps even to rival him. To a certain extent, every great work of art attempts to rival the handiwork of God, indeed to sur-

pass it by achieving a more powerfully felt transcendence than that which we sense in nature. The Taj, although in the final analysis without precedent, is perhaps one of the most powerful images of Divine Majesty so far created. Its architectural beauty constitutes the formal counterpart of our most exalted mental concepts of a formless Deity. Frequently praised as "the most beautiful building in the world," the Taj in its relative beauty seems deliberately intended to mirror God's absolute Beauty.

Of course the beauty and majesty of the Taj also reflect the glory of its earthly creator, who has certainly been immortalized by it, although perhaps for the wrong reasons. Shah Jahan's remarkable building activities throughout his reign clearly reflect his excessive vanity and his apparent desire to create for himself a literal Paradise on earth. Like his younger contemporary, Louis XVI, who became king as the Taj Mahal was nearing completion, Shah Jahan was obsessed with absolute power, particularly with its external symbols. In addition to Shah Jahan's architectural projects, the fabulous Peacock Throne also clearly reveals the degree of this obsession, as does also the magnificent marble throne (Fig. 40) set up in the great Hall of Public Audience (*Diwan-i-'Am*) of the Red Fort at Shahjahanabad, the new capital city created by Shah Jahan. After the Fort was complete, the Peacock Throne was apparently shifted to Delhi and installed in the Hall of Private Audience (*Diwan-i-Khas*). At both ends of this hall is inscribed a famous Persian couplet, which seems to sum up Shah Jahan's view of himself and his empire:

"If there is a Paradise on earth,
It is Here, it is Here, it is Here!"¹¹⁷

It would be gratuitous, nevertheless, to dismiss Shah Jahan's motives for building the Taj as mere impious vanity, just as it would be gratuitous to praise him for his supposed devotion to his wife. In the final analysis, perhaps Shah Jahan's vanity is not so very different from that of our own age, an age in which science attempts to construct its own presumptuous model of the universe, and hence of its Creator. .

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¹¹⁶ Even before the Perfect Man doctrine was formulated, Muslim mystics had devised similar elaborate allegories to express their deeply felt sense that the material world mirrors its celestial prototype, and that Man is truly made in the image of God; for a possible literary precedent for the symbolic parallelisms proposed here for the cenotaphs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, see the answers attributed to the early Persian pantheistic mystic al-Bistami (d. 875), in the following catechism quoted in Hughes, 620

(s.v. "SUFİ"): "Being asked, 'What is the throne of God?' he [al-Bistami] answered 'I am the throne of God.' 'What is the table on which the divine decrees are written?' 'I am that Table.' 'What is the pen of God—the word by which God created all things?' 'I am the Pen. . . I am the true God. Praise to me, I must be celebrated by divine praise.' "

¹¹⁷ Sanderson, 42.

Appendix

List of Koranic Passages Inscribed on the Taj Mahal

Verse numbering follows that given in °Abdullah Yusuf °Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary*, first published in Lahore in 1937-38, and reprinted frequently thereafter; for passages cited in the article, A. J. Arberry's translation was consulted in addition to Yusuf °Ali's.

Inscription No.	Sura No.	Title	Location
GATEWAY			
1.	89	<i>al-Fajr</i> , "The Daybreak"	South Arch
2.	93	<i>al-Duha</i> , "The Brightness"	} _____ North Arch
3.	94	<i>al-Inshirah</i> , "The Expanding"	
4.	95	<i>al-Tin</i> , "The Fig"	
TOMB (EXTERIOR)			
5.	36	<i>Ya Sin</i>	South, West, North, East Arches
6.	81	<i>al-Takwir</i> , "The Folding Up"	South Door
7.	82	<i>al-Infitar</i> , "The Cleaving Asunder"	West Door
8.	84	<i>al-Inshiqaq</i> , "The Rending Asunder"	North Door
9.	98	<i>al-Baiyina</i> , "The Evidence"	East Door
TOMB (INTERIOR)			
10.	67	<i>al-Mulk</i> , "The Kingdom"	Upper Circle, SE Arch
11.	48	<i>al-Fath</i> , "The Victory"	SE, E, NE, N, NW, W Arches
12.	76	<i>al-Insan</i> , "Man"	W, SW, S Arches
13.	39.53-54	<i>al-Zumar</i> , "The Troops"	S Arch
CENOTAPH (UPPER)			
14.	41.30	<i>al-Fussilat</i> , "The Explanation"	} _____ Top
15.	40.7-8	<i>al-Mu'min</i> , "The Believer"	
16.	83.22-28	<i>al-Tatfif</i> , "Short Measure"	East, South Sides
17.	41.30	<i>al-Fussilat</i> , "The Explanation"	South, West Sides
18.	2.286	<i>al-Baqarah</i> , "The Cow"	West, North Sides
19.	59.22	<i>al-Hashr</i> , "The Assembly"	North Side
CENOTAPH (LOWER)			
20.	39.53	<i>al-Zumar</i> , "The Troops"	} _____ Top
21.	3.185	<i>Ali °Imran</i> , "Family of Imran"	
22.	23.118	<i>al-Mu'minun</i> , "The Believers"	
23.	59.22	<i>al-Hashr</i> , "The Assembly"	
24.	—	"99 Names of God"	East, West Sides
MOSQUE			
25.	91	<i>al-Shams</i> , "The Sun"	Around Mihrab
26.	112	<i>al-Tawhid</i> , "The Unity"	Two Disks on West Wall
27.	—	["Allah, Ya Kaf"]	Several Inscribed Disks]
28.	—	[Kalima	Several Inscribed Disks]

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