

The Mythological Utilization of Forms in Islamic Art - The Eastern Island Painting by Al-Wasiti as a Model -

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Abstract. The current research addresses an important aspect of Islamic art, which almost deviates objectively from the stylistic Islamic art that considered the structure of the abstract form primarily as a basis for its constructive elements. The researchers shed light on the role of mythology throughout the ages in Mesopotamia and up to the present day in constructing themes and imbuing them with unique artistic symbolism and mechanisms for employing the reshaping of mythology in an educational artistic format. The research concluded with a question about mythology and form in Islamic painting and its utilization in the painting of the Eastern Island by Al-Wasiti. The study aimed to reveal the interplay between the text (heritage) and its utilization, and the research theoretically addressed the concept of mythology and art before and during Islam. As for the research procedures, they involved analyzing the painting of the Eastern Island by Al-Wasiti, which led to a set of results and conclusions. Among the results:

١. Mythological employment granted the artist imaginative ability by creating an artistic environment where the real world coexists with the abstract world.

٢. Metaphor, transformation, and symbolism were mechanisms of mythological employment adopted by the artist to express the secrets of the universe and creation according to an imaginative mental vision by creating complex forms in the pictorial scene.

Keywords: (Mythology, Myth, Eastern Island, Al-Wasiti, Islamic painting)

Research Framework

Study Problem:

It is certain that the field of art is considered a field of experimentation and creativity, influenced by perceptions, ideas, and imaginations in the mind. Mythology seems to be an endless source of reference for artistic and cultural achievements. The utilization of the visions derived from mythology is closely related to the artist's creativity, as it is based on the objectivity of the images provided by the artist's mind. The Eastern Island painting by Al-Wasiti had a formative and formal anticipation at that time, and Yahya Al-Wasiti's style still embodies modernity, which has made many contemporary artists consider it a reference and emphasize their visual aesthetics. Perhaps mythology played a major role in the artist's imagination, and based on this, the research question is formulated as follows: What is the mythological utilization of forms in Al-Wasiti's Eastern Island painting?

Study Significance and Necessity

The importance of this research lies in its ability to reinterpret artistic achievements in alignment with the cultural heritage of Mesopotamia, starting with Sumer and ending with the Arab-Islamic civilization. It also aims to establish and renew heritage, in addition to benefiting students, researchers, and specialists.

Aims of the Study

The research aims to create an analytical image of Al-Wasiti's Eastern Island painting, along with the utilization of mythology as a source of knowledge.

Study Limits and Boundaries

The current research is defined by studying mythology and its utilization in Al-Wasiti's Eastern Island painting, which is dated ٦٣٤ AH/١٢٣٧ CE and is preserved in the National Library in Paris.

Terms Definition

Utilization: Linguistically: - Employed - It was assigned a function of livelihood, and there are functions and assignments, and every day has a task from work, and he was assigned to work, and he is employed in it, and sustenance was provided for him, - and he provided fodder for his animal (Al-Zamakhshari, ١٩٦٥: ٦٨١). و ج وظائف ووظفٌ Utilization is the assignment of the job, and employment is the agreement, and the appointment, and he was employed, meaning absorbed him (Al-Zawi, n.d.: ٦٢٩).

As a term: It is the specific work performed by the thing or individual in a group of organized and coherent parts, such as the function of the trowel in the art of construction, and the function of the liver in the science of physiology, and the function of imagination in psychology, and functionality is one of the theories of

aesthetics, and it is said that the beauty of the artistic effect is due to its usefulness (Salliba, ١٩٨٢: ٥٨١).

Mythology: It is a science concerned with the study and interpretation of myths, where it defines the myth and studies its emergence, interpretation, and the study of its psychological, intellectual, and social functions (Ne'ama, ١٩٩٤: ٢٦).

Mythological Utilization (Procedurally): The mechanisms of constructing the imaginary form within the virtual space of the artwork and its relationships with the rest of the vocabulary that constitutes mythology as an essential aspect in its formation and the artist's imagination applications on the pictorial surface are embodied in this utilization.

The Eastern Island Painting: A artistic painting considered one of the Islamic miniatures painted by the artist Yahya ibn Mahmoud Al-Wasiti, through which he embodied the events of the thirty-ninth maqamah of Al-Hariri's Maqamat, containing complex shapes.

Theoretical Framework:

Mythology and its Structure in the Civilizations of Mesopotamia

It represents the intellectual excavations that discuss the origin of the universe, the creation of life, the secrets of life and death, and the attempts of humans to define their relationship with the universe and nature through visions that transcend the mind, relying primarily on imagination in interpretation through metaphor, allegory, and symbolism. The artist sought to artistically embody these visions in bizarre forms in order to facilitate the understanding of the mysteries of the universe.

We can consider the emergence of mythology as one of the earliest manifestations when primitive humans faced natural and cosmic phenomena such as thunder and lightning. Due to their lack of knowledge about their causes, they invented and imagined an agent responsible for these phenomena, which they believed to be the cause of everything and the mysterious unknown that their lives were connected to (Armstrong, ٢٠٠٨: ٣١). Despite their spiritual inclination towards the sky, primitive humans focused their attention on their life resources (food). Animals were their strongest means of achieving their goal through hunting, which justified their veneration of animals. This led them to invent a method of controlling animals, adding a magical aspect to it. They believed that by drawing a similar image to the animal's form, they could successfully hunt it. The more accurate the image was of the animal's form, the more successful the hunting process would be. As long as they were proficient in this alternative, they believed

in their ability to control the origin, and the celebratory scene of the hunt, which the hunter and his family and followers held, embodied these tendencies towards magic. They believed that through this celebratory scene, the hidden image of the animal gods would be transferred to humans (Al-Khadim, n.d.). With the transition of primitive humans to the world of agriculture, a new pattern of living was created, leading them to contemplate and find new ways to understand the universe (Al-Shams, n.d.: ١٤-١٥). This led to the creation of new belief concepts in the worship of the mother goddess, which formed the core of agricultural religion. The worship of the mother goddess was based on the belief in the similarity between the earth and women, as women were the fundamental element in the perpetuation of life and carried the characteristics of its continuity. This explains the ancient primitive artist's interest in and emphasis on exaggerating the breasts, hips, and abdomen in sculptures, as these stimulated the continuity of life (Al-Shams, n.d.: ١٥). (See Figure ١)



Figure ١.

However, the visions of ancient humans were plagued by doubt in the ability of the mother goddess due to the observed changes, whether in the quantity of rain, levels of rainfall, or the spread of diseases within one year, along with the stability and lack of change in the sun throughout the year. Therefore, it was seen that offering submission and obedience to the mother goddess was not sufficient to sustain prosperity and revive agriculture. This was a catalyst for them to turn to the worship of celestial powers such as the sun and the planets (Al-Shams, n.d.: ١٥). The sun represents a different model of existence; it does not contribute to the cycle, as it is a constant movement that remains the same in form. The manifestations of solar sanctity translate into religious values of self-reliance,

power, and sovereignty (Mercia, ٢٠٠٩: ١٨٥). It becomes evident that ancient humans believed that divinity was embodied in nature because nature constitutes the unity to which the gods belong: (the god of the sky), (the god of the earth), (the god of rain), and so forth. Thus, ancient humans transferred their mythological concepts from the earth to the sky (Al-Khazaali, ٢٠٠٧: ١٠٤). Upon examining the beginnings of the Mesopotamian civilization, we find that the people of that civilization felt the need for religion as a desire to make their lives secure through the existence of a higher being. They created myths and stories that speak of the origin of creation, the essence of existence, and the hidden forces formulated in epics and poetic myths inscribed in cuneiform on clay tablets. The primary motivation for their actions and beliefs was that divinity was a natural state linked to society and that mythological thought was derived from a continuous awareness of the pulsating relationship between humans and the world of phenomena (Frankfurt, et al., ١٩٨٠: ٢٦٣-٢٦٤). Thus, the mythological concepts of the Mesopotamian humans acquired social dimensions with spiritual characteristics. Figure ٢, the structural nature of Mesopotamian sculptures reflects the connection between art representation and belief through the artistic products of the Mesopotamian artist, who employed these mythological concepts in various forms, including sculptural relief, prominent sculpture, and cylinder seals.



Figure ٢.

Despite the diversity in the mindset of ancient Iraqi thought, the concept of polytheistic unity transitioned into application when Hammurabi adopted the god (Marduk) as the one god of all gods (Al-Khazaali, ٢٠٠١: ١٠٤). As soon as humans began to control nature, the balance of power between humans and nature began to lean in their favour. They made use of their shared strength, as Toynbee sees it, to distance themselves from non-human forces that they previously felt were capable of everything (Toynbee, ٢٠٠٤: ١٥). From this perspective, power was considered a central axis based on the concept of divinity. It was natural for faith in power to become the foundation of the concept of divinity, especially after the wide growth of political authority at that time and its concentration in its hands, leading the ancient gods to retreat away from the life stage and embrace the theological trend towards the sovereignty of the state, which necessitates the unification of religion and the consolidation of civil authorities (Mortcat, ١٩٦٠: ١٥٩).



Figure ٣.

The artist from Mesopotamia translated these new mythological concepts according to his imaginative ability in his discursive text by creating an artistic environment where the real world coexists with the mythical world in an integrative unity that is intriguingly surprising. He granted a sensory dimension to the pictorial surface of the cylinder seal, inspired by the spirit of nature, where

animals struggle for survival, a hero fights for sovereignty and order, and creatures from the other world battle among themselves (Mortcat, ١٩٦٠: ٣٤٨).

Mythology and Religious Beliefs

In the Abrahamic religions, mythology has merged into the crucible of the intellectual conception that leaves a greater spiritual awareness, as the individual identity of the one God is realized, who becomes the principle, purpose, source, and existence of the universe and its system (Khayat, ١٩٥٠: ٣٤). However, the distortions that affected Judaism and Christianity gave rise to mythological concepts that combine the divine and human attributes, forming the idea of a God who becomes human to share divine life through the principle of incarnation.

The proponents of the new Christian doctrine believe that Jesus is the clearest manifestation of God Himself. From this perspective, Christian theology establishes three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As independent as these entities may be, they are united in essence, inseparable from the eternal God (Al-Suwah, ٢٠٠١: ١٠٥). In pre-Islamic Arab thought, idols represented a higher power beyond nature. The ignorant believed that idols possessed hidden power, and they sought to create a physical model through which they could ascend to God. This model embodied a dialectical vision of integration, where the material and the spiritual merged into one, acquiring absolute vitality and sanctity. The idol served as the point of convergence between the hidden sacred and the visible material (Al-Dabbaj, ٢٠١٤: ٢١٤).

In Islamic belief, mythology aligns completely with the thought and beliefs of the religion. Art has become intertwined with the spiritual and material life of Islam wherever it is present. It is also associated with religious doctrine and cultural heritage, characterized by their comprehensiveness in the perception of the material and unseen existence. Islamic thought gains vitality and strength when Muslims contemplate the divine abstract thought.



Figure ٤.

It can be said that Islam has created suitable intellectual and material conditions for Islamic art. An example of this is Arabesque art (Al-Khuzai, ١٩٩٧: ٢٩), where Muslim artists surpass the material surroundings to reach the level of sacred art, seeking to free the artwork from the illusory surrounding world in which we find ourselves. The cautious view of Muslim jurists towards representation has greatly influenced the direction of Muslim artists towards the world of mythology and the determination of their working mechanisms, ensuring their distance from imitating reality and anything that resembles the creation of Allah. This is achieved through innovative solutions that balance the artist's artistic requirements with the requirements of Sharia law, giving the artistic image an ideal character using elements borrowed from the real world (Bertmeli, ٢٠١١: ٥٧٥).

Muslim artists have sought, through mythological visions that do not go beyond the concept of absolute faith and submission to the oneness of Allah, to embody a state of creative manifestations within two worlds: a sacred unseen world represented by angels, and a metaphysical world represented by other created entities, according to the Quranic vision "And He creates what you do not know" (An-Nahl: ١). They express their visions in their visual compositions using themes connected to the supernatural world through intuitive mental visions that lead to the truth of existence and the state of transcendence in divine creativity. They use borrowed elements from the material world, but these elements are characterized by their strangeness. Sometimes they depict angels, and other times they depict complex forms to convey meanings and symbolic connotations of the unseen world. In doing so, they create new images of the unseen world that are hidden behind material appearances (Khayat, ١٩٥٠: ١٩٢) (Figure ٥).



Figure ٥.

In this employment, in step with the Muslim artist, there's a difference between what is fabric and what's abstract, between its artistic manner and its non-diagnostic contents, which have been an illustration of divine creative manifestations and absolute features. Its foremost goal was to reconcile the components of visible and tangible lifestyles with contemplative, unseen lifestyles.

With this reconciliation between the sector of summary snap shots and the precept of religion, among the sector of testimony and the sector of the unseen, the Muslim artist did not restrict his creativity to developing artistic pictures as a method of guidance for religion. Rather, he aimed to deliver art towards religion, spotlight the cultural aspects of the Quran, and improve the spirit of faith via aesthetic evidence (Al-Awadi & Al-Ani, ١٩٩٠: C-D). This may be seen within the Islamic miniatures blanketed within the e-book *Aja'ib al-Makhluqat wa Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat*; via al-Qazwini and the e book "Al-Tir by means of Galen, as well as in the drawings of al-Wasiti, which form the idea of the Baghdad School of Painting.

Previous Studies

The researchers did not discover any preceding studies immediately associated with their research. Therefore, they reviewed studies that intersected with their research in positive ways. The studies are:

Al-Awadi and Al-Ani's Examine (١٩٩٠): Al-Zahr wa Al-Shajr fi Rusum al-Wasiti; (Flowers and Trees in al-Wasiti's Paintings)

This study focused on exploring the connection among technological know-how and artwork in the Abbasid era through al-Wasiti's paintings. The researchers considered those pictures as a melting pot that encompassed the entire tradition of

the era, representing the cognitive components of that generation. The pictures were no longer confined to the characters of the literary textual content but additionally depicted the encompassing nature, structure, decorations, cloth designs, and numerous plant motifs.

The researchers discovered the following from the plant drawings in those pictures:

- A. Al-Wasiti's expertise in medical and technical systems, as well as his conscious connection to the time he lived in.
- B. The Islamic philosophy and its view of plants, culmination, and advantages from Allah.
- C. The nature that al-Wasiti experienced was known for its fertile soil and ample water.

The researchers concluded the following:

- A. Color and its symbolism have been related to meanings and emblems in Arab culture. They were used symbolically to carry spiritual values and were also connected to expertise values in the Quran and the Hadith.
- B. In Islamic art, coloration no longer has a sole decorative feature but is instead a visible and intuitive system. Color expresses cognitive and symbolic houses, in addition to psychological, philosophical, and aesthetic meanings.

Hussein's Observation (٢٠٢٢): "The Symbolism of Birds in the Myths of Mesopotamian Civilization"

This observe centered on exploring the symbolism of birds in Mesopotamian mythology and the way it has been used by Mesopotamian literature to bring vital symbolic pictures and understanding. The observer protected a creation from using animals as symbols by using people to express their highbrow activities, emotions, and behavior. It also discussed the symbolism of birds in diverse historic civilizations and their one-of-a kind connotations. The examine consisted of three sections: the first segment mentioned mythology, the second segment mentioned symbolism in mythology, and the ٣٣ phase discussed the usage of birds inside the myths of Mesopotamia.

The researcher reached numerous conclusions, consisting of:

- A. The foundation of birds became a distinctive part of those myths and emblems, with the hawk and the eagle being amongst the symbols.
- B. The symbolism of birds becomes related to ancient non-secular beliefs and the afterlife.

- C. The use of birds as symbols by way of people represents the near dating among people and those creatures, from time-to-time symbolizing love and power and performing as intermediaries between humans and the afterlife.
- D. This symbolism has persevered in literary and folk history nowadays and isn't always restrained to historic Mesopotamian myths. Birds are also cited in the heavenly books because of their importance.

Discussion of Previous Studies

١. The current study intersects with the study by Al-Awadi and Al-Ani in researching the symbolism and intuitive vision of the achievements of the Muslim artist.
٢. The current study also aligns with Hussein's study of mythology and its impact on artists' approaches throughout history regarding the mechanisms of artistic creation.
٣. Hussein's study differs from both the current study and Al-Awadi and Al-Ani's study in terms of research community. While the current study and Al-Awadi and Al-Ani's study focused on al-Wasiti's paintings, Hussein's research community focused on the literature of Mesopotamian civilization.
٤. The researchers benefited from the previous studies in various aspects, including their methodology and procedures.

Research Procedures

Methodology:

The researchers adopted a descriptive-analytical approach in analyzing the research sample in line with the current research objective of identifying the mythological employment of forms in Islamic art imagery.

Research Community

The current research community included the drawings of Yahya bin Mahmoud Al-Wasiti, totaling (٩٤) drawings, in which he depicted the illustrated events of Al-Hariri's Maqamat, amounting to (٥٠) Maqamat.

Research Sample

The researchers selected the painting of the Eastern Island representing Maqamat (٣٧) from Al-Hariri's Maqamat deliberately, as it contains unconventional forms in its artistic composition and provides an opportunity to showcase the elements of mythology in Islamic art imagery.

Research Instrument

The researchers primarily relied on theoretical framework indicators in analyzing the research sample.

Analysis:

Title: "Al-Jazirah Al-Sharqiyah", Maqamah (٣٦) from Al-Hariri's Maqamat.

Artist: Yahya bin Mahmoud Al-Wasiti.

Date of Creation: ٦٣٤ AH (١٢٣٧CE).

Dimensions: (٢٥٩ x ٢٨٠ mm).

Medium: Colored inks on paper.

Provenance: Shafar Collection, National Public Library - Paris.



**Yahya bin Mahmoud Al-Wasiti - The Maqamat of Al-Hariri
(The Eastern Island)**

Description

Yahya bin Mahmoud Al-Wasiti's artistic rendition invites scholarly scrutiny into the interstices of imagination and mythos. The tableau unfurls with meticulous detail, offering a panoptic vista of fantastical maritime domains. Al-Wasiti's visual lexicon resonates with the folkloric motifs of yore, pulsating with an innate sense of wonder. The aqueous expanse, rendered with allegorical precision, mirrors the ineffable vastness of the sea, enlivened by the undulating presence of piscine denizens. Adjacent terrestrial margins emerge, ensconced within the aqueous embrace, adorned by arboreal sentinels that harbor a myriad of avian and simian species amidst verdant foliar abundance. Concomitantly, mythic beings inhabit the

pictorial periphery - a leonine entity, coupled with an anthropomorphic avian form, coalesce within the pictorial plane, while maritime iconography, personified by a nautical mariner, delineates the terrestrial-aquatic juncture.

Analysis

Al-Wasiti's pictorial discourse transcends mere illustrative convention, epitomizing a nuanced interplay between visual narrative and mythopoetic substratum. By eschewing literalism in favor of allegorical syntax, Al-Wasiti orchestrates a phantasmagoric exegesis, conflating corporeal phenomena with numinous signification. The figural gestalt, enshrouded within the ethereal chiaroscuro, evokes a temporally displaced ontological paradigm, wherein verisimilitude yields to symbolic concordance. Scale modulations, discernible within the pictorial schema, accentuate the ontological hierarchy, enshrining the nautical mariner as a metonymic arbiter amidst the symbiotic coalescence of animate and inanimate forms. Al-Wasiti's preoccupation with linear perspectivalism bespeaks a formalist proclivity, engendering a semantic unity predicated upon chromatic modulations and luminous interstices. In delineating the arcane pantheon of divine immanence, Al-Wasiti proffers a cogent exposition of ontological immanence, epitomizing the sacerdotal aphorism, "And He creates what you do not know." (Surah An-Nahl: ١).

Results

In light of the analysis process, the researchers reached a number of conclusions:

١. The use of mythology in art has been a method of cognitive mobility by being based on the essence of hidden facts and bringing the world's paradoxical image closer to the mind of man.
٢. In his rhetoric, the anthropologist was used as a mirror to translate the religious beliefs and spiritual concepts he believes in.
٣. Methodologic employment has given an artist the imaginary ability to create an artistic environment in which the real world coexists with the abstract world.
٤. The technique of metaphorism, alteration, and symbolism was one of the mechanisms of meth recruitment adopted by the artist to express the secrets of the universe and of creation in a fantasy vision by creating composite forms in his graphic scene.
٥. The use of mythology by an ignorant Arab artist to create new concepts of his worship orientation is the expression of religious optics through the

sensory visual, giving the recipient a symbolic indication of the hidden point of the holy encounter with the visible material.

7. The medium benefited from the methodological employment in his graphic scene to bring art closer to religion, to maintain the spirit of faith in the Muslim human being, and to create a lasting passion for divine creation by giving the thriller his artistic image of the world of the unseen.
٧. The middleman of his painting leads the eastern island through its strange forms of multiple creational worlds, and the physical world is not the only truth and thus has a spiritual trait.
٨. The medium of meth-based employment is reflected in its artistic output by using the transparency method, which gave it the characteristic of penetration of natural ranges and access to depths to show hidden forms of eye contact.
٩. He added the medium of the doctrine of prohibition as a force of pressure for his approach to metholiologism and the use of his symbolic vocabulary to freely express his art in accordance with a vision consistent with the spirit of the Holy Shari.
١٠. The use of the medium of mythology has acquired educational value by describing the universe, life, and the paradoxical world in a way that a common man cannot imagine or touch.

Conclusions:

From the above findings, the researchers conclude that:

١. The medium is a few spiritual expressions that are carried away from the idea of unification and away from everything that is accidental, sensitive, and material.
٢. In his view of the universe, the mediator relied on its intuitive nature, inspired by the spirit of the Islamic faith.
٣. The visual perspective of the medium was consistent with its mental nature, which is based on a holistic view of the universe.
٤. Al-Wasiti attempted to rearrange and reorganize the reality visuals and the living scenes by altering their features and stripping them by changing their composition, format, and shapes, and by moving away from transmission, copying, and analogy in order to avoid matching God's creation and choosing to enter the world of mythology and abstraction with faith and conviction to confirm that beauty is expressed in its absolute form.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following:

1. To attach the utmost importance to the study of spiritual values and the extent to which they relate to other spheres of life, such as literature, art, and philosophy, because they are relevant to these sciences and have a significant role to play in the refinement of human culture and the integration of human personality.
٢. To study Islamic art and make it part of the curricula for advanced stages of the values and indications of high spiritual dimensions that help enrich the spiritual and emotional aspects of students.

Suggestions

The researchers propose to undertake the following studies:

1. The reality of mythology in Islamic arts throughout the ages (comparable study)
٢. The mythology and its impact on philosophical concepts and the value system of contemporary art.

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