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**From the Literal to the Spiritual:**  
**The Development of the Prophet Muhammad's**  
**Portrayal from 13<sup>th</sup> Century Ilkhanid Miniatures**  
**to 17<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Art**

**Wijdan Ali\***

***Introduction***

Human representation in the form of a portrait is considered a taboo among a minority of Muslims who believe that any representation of a living being is banned in Islam. The subject of the Prophet Muhammad's portraiture however, is considered a taboo among the greatest majority of Muslims, including those who do approve of and practice human figurative representation. Yet, there were many illustrations of the Prophet in early Mongol manuscripts from the Ilkhanid Dynasty down to the Ottoman period. This paper will look into these early portraitures and their development from the fourteenth up to the seventeenth century. It will investigate the motives behind the transformation that had occurred on the depiction of the Prophet, which included the development from the open face to the written word. The artistic styles and visible aesthetics of the miniatures are of no concern to our subject.

Throughout its history, Islamic painting was always associated with the main centers of political power. Royal courts, princely palaces and residences of state dignitaries were focal points of artistic creativity, which always suffered when royal patronage was withdrawn.

***Ilkhanid Dynasty 1256-1353***

Founded by Hulagu (1256-65), the descendent of Chingiz Khan, the Ilkhanid dynasty included Persia, Iraq, the Caucasus and Anatolia. His expansion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century consummated in the destruction of the Seljuq capital, Rey, and the Abbasid capital, Baghdad. Yet, despite all the

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destruction and war caused by the Mongols, the Ilkhanid period was a prosperous one from the cultural point of view. The Ilkhanid capitals, first Tabriz and later Maragha, became great centers of learning. The great grandson of Hulagu, Ghazan Khan (1295-1304) was the first Mongol ruler to convert to Islam in 1295, after which he became known as Mahmud Ghazan Khan. Thus he began a reconciliatory process between the Mongol-Turkish ruling class and their Muslim Persian subjects.<sup>1</sup> Pre Mongol traditions from China and Central Asia as well as Seljuq style, were filtered into Ilkhanid painting, forming an essential part in the creation of the new Mongol style in miniature painting that became established in Tabriz before the very end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the predominant elements, which determined all later Islamic painting in the Muslim East developed when the Mongol empire disintegrated into smaller dynasties in the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Tabriz, in Azerbaijan, the principal base of Hulagu, which later became the capital of his successors, was known as the new arts center of the Islamic East. The Ilkhanid capital enjoyed a most prosperous time during the reign of Mahmud Ghazan Khan, his brother Uljaitu (1304-16) and Uljaitu's son, Abu Said (1316-35). Evolving from a nomadic-Central Asian regime into a sedentary Islamic dynasty, the Ilkhanids wanted to establish their legitimacy as inheritors of great dynasties and heirs to a tradition that goes back to the Prophet Muhammad and beyond him to the biblical patriarchs and earlier. Hence, Mahmud Ghazan Khan commissioned his vizier, Rashid al-Din, to head a committee and prepare a work on the history of the Mongol tribes. The work was not yet completed when Mahmud died in 1304. His successor Uljaitu ordered the vizier to proceed and produce a general history of the world under the title, *Jami' al-Tawarikh* (A Compendium of Chronicles).<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Rashid al-Din, who was a scholar and statesman, wrote the text for the manuscript and established a sort of proto-academy, *al-Rashidiyya*, where he installed artists and artistic models from as far away as China.<sup>5</sup>

In 1306/7 the work was completed and presented to Uljaitu in Mongolian with several versions copied in Turkish, Persian and Arabic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties*, Edinburg 1967, pp. 149-50.

<sup>2</sup> E. Grube " Persian Painting in the Fourteenth Century", in *Studies in Islamic Painting*, London 1995, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Grube, "Persian Painting", p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> B. Gray *The World History of Rashid al-Din*, London 1978, pp. 12-3 and M. Rogers, F. Çağman, & Z. Tanındı, *Topkapı: the Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts*, London 1986, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> O. Grabar & S. Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History*, Chicago & London 1980, p. viii.

<sup>6</sup> F. Çağman & Z. Tanındı, *Topkapı Palace Museum Islamic Miniature Painting*, Istanbul 1979, p. 12.

Thus the age of monumental illustrated manuscripts of historical works, religious subjects and epic poems had begun.

The earliest depiction of the Prophet Muhammad that has reached us is from the Arabic version of *Jami' al-Tawarikh* dated 1307, at the Library of the University of Edinburgh. In one of its miniatures the Prophet is shown replacing the black stone in the Ka'ba, an incident that had taken place before he received the Revelation.<sup>7</sup> Nothing distinguishes him from the other 16 figures in the picture except his hair that is made into two braids falling from under his turban on his chest. Nomad men in general including, Bedouins and Mongols, wore their hair plaited for obvious practical reasons, yet in this picture it becomes a distinguishing feature of the Prophet, albeit a mundane one.

There are three more depictions of the prophet found in the copy of *Jami' al-Tawarikh* that belonged to the Royal Asiatic Society and since 1980 is in the Nasser Khalili collection of Islamic art. The second manuscript is dated 1314-5, which could be the date of completion while the earlier one of 1307, the date of transcription. The two manuscripts are believed to be parts of the same book. The first illustration shows *The Prophet exhorting his family before the battle of Badr*,<sup>8</sup> (**Figure 1**) with no special signs to distinguish him from the rest of the personages in the composition and whose features are more Arab than Chinese. The second painting: *The Prophet leading Hamza and the Muslims against Banu Qaynuqa*<sup>9</sup> (**Figure 2**) shows him on his horseback and separate from the rest of the army, drawn against a blue background, and surrounded by a frame of clouds with six angels preceding and three following him. His features in this representation are more Chinese than the other figures including the angels. In the third miniature showing *The Prophet receiving the submission of the Banu 'l-Nadir*,<sup>10</sup> (**Figure 3**) he is depicted riding a horse and identified by an angel flying behind him making a protective gesture towards him, otherwise no distinguishing features are shown.

When the Mongols assumed power, they were already familiar with devotional art of the Buddhist and Manichaeian monasteries of Turkestan, where scenes of the lives of Buddha and Mani were portrayed.<sup>11</sup> Actually Hulagu's wife was herself a Nestorian Christian. For example in the miniature from the manuscript at Edinburgh University Library, the *Birth of the Prophet*, (**Figure 4**) it is obvious that the illustrator had adapted his arrangement according to a prototype of the Christian nativity scene. However, the above-mentioned scenes cannot be categorized under religious

<sup>7</sup> D. Barret, "Persian Painting in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century", in *Studies in Islamic Painting*, London 1995, pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> S. Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles*, Oxford 1995, folio 66a (K1).

<sup>9</sup> Blair, *A Compendium*, folio 67a (K2).

<sup>10</sup> Blair, *A Compendium*, folio 72a (K3).

<sup>11</sup> Z. Tanindi, *Syer-i nebi*, (English text), Turkey 1984, p. 3.

painting because they were neither meant as icons, nor as religious or sacred art. They were merely illustrations of historical events that had occurred during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.

The second example of the Prophet's depiction is from a dispersed *Mi'raj-name*, executed in Tabriz (c.1360-70) and presently at the Topkapı Palace Library (H.2154) in Istanbul. The *Mi'raj-name* is the account of the miraculous and marvelous journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem, his ascension on a stair of light to heaven and his return to Mecca, in one night. Here a distinction should be made between religious and devotional art. The former is made for the purpose of adoration and prayer such as icons and statues of deities while the latter is meant for *baraka*, meaning divine blessing, under which fall the genres of the *Mi'raj-name* and the *Siyar al-Nabi (Siyer-i Nebi)*. Other types of Muslim devotional literature and art are encountered in Ibn Husam's *Haver-name*, a heroic poem depicting the gallant and dauntless exploits of Ali, the prophet's cousin and son-in-law; in *Hamza-name*, relating the feats of Hamza, the Prophet's uncle; in Nishapuri's *Qisas al-Anbia'*, (History of the Prophets) and in *Asar-i Muzaffer*, the life story of the Prophet himself.<sup>12</sup>

The first of the four miniatures from the Topkapı library *Mi'raj-name* show the Prophet and the Archangel Gabriel standing in front of a giant angel (**Figure 5**). In the second, the Prophet is born on Gabriel's shoulders, arriving at the gate of paradise guarded by the angel Ridwan (**Figure 6**). In the third miniature the Prophet is depicted with his companions and an angel is presenting him with a miniature city, assumed to be Jerusalem (**Figure 7**). In the fourth miniature, the Archangel Gabriel carries the Prophet on his shoulders over mountains where angels are shown among golden flames (**Figure 8**). The four works are attributed to Ahmad Musa.<sup>13</sup> In these miniatures the Prophet and the angels have long braids that fall on their chests and their features are more Chinese (slanting eyes) than in *Jami' al-Tawarikh*. In the first and second miniatures there is a flame in gold surrounding the Prophet's head and that of the giant angel in the first miniature. In the third miniature a flame or a thick cloud in gold defines the Prophet's entire figure while in the fourth composition the whole background is covered in gold flames, which makes identifying the Prophet rather difficult. In the four miniatures the size of the Prophet is smaller than that of Gabriel and other angels. Thus the flame encompassing a human head remains the only form to identify the Prophet among the other figures.

<sup>12</sup> Tanındı, *Syer-i nebi*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers, Çağman, & Tanındı, *Topkapı: the Albums*, p. 69, color plates nos. 45, 46, 47.

### *The Timurid Dynasty 1370-1506*

Descending from Chingiz Khan, Timur's armies swept Khwarazm, Khurasan and Persia, reaching Moscow and Astrakhan. They delved into the Islamic heartland, pillaging Baghdad and Damascus; they sacked Delhi, defeated the Ottomans and conquered Transoxania.

After ransacking Baghdad, Tabriz and Shiraz, Timur brought artists from these artistic and cultural centers to work in his atelier in Samarkand. These artists brought their own styles with them and mixed them with already existing local traditions, thus contributing to the development of a Central Asian school of painting in the later 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

One of the masterpieces of Timurid art is the *Mi'raj-name* at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris produced for Shah Rukh (1405-1447) in Herat, the capital of Khurasan, in 1436. The text was translated into eastern Turkish by the poet Mir Haydar and written in Uighur script by the calligrapher Malik Bakhshi of Herat, with sixty-one illuminations<sup>15</sup> and annotations in Arabic and Farsi. The illustration series open with a miniature portraying the archangel Gabriel in the prophet's house inviting him to go on the heavenly journey and continue with scenes depicting him mounting *al-Buraq*, a mythical creature depicted as half-human half horse, brought to him by Gabriel. On it he traveled to the Rock in Jerusalem and from there to heaven. Muslims also believe that Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isma'il in obeisance to God's instruction on the same Holy Rock; hence, the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, built on it in 685, the first monument in Islam, the Dome of the Rock.

On this journey the Prophet encounters earlier prophets and travels through the Seven Heavens mentioned in the Qur'an where he meets the inhabitants of each sphere. The culmination of the journey is his appearance in the presence of God. On his way back the Prophet passes through heaven and hell before returning to Mecca.

Once more the Prophet is portrayed with Chinese features, two short braids, a trimmed short beard, as in *Jami' al-Tawarikh* and the three Topkapı miniatures from *Mi'raj-name*. Yet in this manuscript the artists have employed vibrant colors, as well as gold and lapis lazuli with a studied abundance, apparent in the Chinese clouds and dots (stars?) that fill the frame of the miniatures, intertwining with the figures, against a deep blue background. Throughout the manuscript, either a golden flame-halo around his head, or a full gold flame-halo enclosing his whole body distinguishes the Prophet from the other characters. In some scenes other prophets as well as *al-Buraq* are identified with the same gold flame-halo around their heads.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Grube, "Persian Painting", p. 206.

<sup>15</sup> M-R. Seguy, *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet*, New York 1977, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> M-R. Seguy, *The Miraculous Journey*, plates pp. 3-57.

It is obvious that the illustrations in all the above-mentioned manuscripts, besides being decorative, serve a descriptive and maybe pedagogical purpose. Coming from China and conquering most of Central Asia, and the Western Islamic lands past Baghdad and Damascus, the nomad Mongols were familiar with Chinese, Buddhist and Christian religious painting. After embracing Islam they were introduced to Arab and Islamic history with all its lore as well as pre-Islamic history. Wanting to establish their legitimacy as successors of a great tradition both religious and historical, the Mongol Khans created manuscripts that were meant to bestow legitimacy on them and act as a form of state propaganda for them though they had not yet grasped the spirituality of the new religion.

The influence of Chinese art on the art of Central Asia goes back to the early centuries of Turkish-Uighur culture in the region, whose inspiration and incentive, probably came from a continued tradition located in the art of China. This unique and intimate relationship between the two cultures did lead at times to direct imitation<sup>17</sup> and later on, filtered into Safavid and Ottoman miniatures. The importance of Turkish or Turkic Central Asian artistic traditions and its influence on Islamic painting has not yet been thoroughly investigated. Many iconographies that appear in later *Mi'raj-name* and *Siyar al-Nabi* (including the Murad III edition of 1594-5) point towards earlier Central Asian Turkic sources.<sup>18</sup>

Another text relative to the life of the Prophet Muhammad is the *Siyar al-Nabi*. The text was originally written by Mustafa ibn Yusuf ibn Omar al-Mawlawi al-Arzan al-Rumi, from Anatolia known as al-Darir (the Blindman) at the request of the Mamluk Sultan Barquq, in 1388. The Mamluk ruler, whose mother tongue was Turkish, wanted a Turkish translation of the Arabic traditions pertaining to the life of the Prophet.<sup>19</sup> This account entered the tradition of devotional works written and illustrated for successive sultans. Volume one (H.1221) and two (H.1222) of an Ottoman copy of this text (the *Siyer-i Nebi*) are in the Topkapı Palace Museum. Volume three of this text is part of the Spencer Collection at New York Public Library; volume four is at Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (T.419) and a copy (T.1974) is at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul; volume five is missing, and volume six (H.1223) is at the Topkapı Palace Museum. During the reign of Sultan Murad III (1574-1595), an illustrated copy was ordered at the Palace atelier. The text was completed and the illustrations begun. Following his death, his son, Sultan Mehmed III (1595-1603), ordered its completion and the six-volume work with 814 miniatures was submitted to Sultan Mehmed III in 1595. In these manuscripts the Prophet Muhammad is depicted with a veil over his face.

<sup>17</sup> Grube, "Persian Painting", p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> E. Grube, "Siyar-i Nabi in the Spencer Collection in the New York Public Library", in *Studies in Islamic Painting*, London 1995, p. 491.

<sup>19</sup> Grube, "Siyar-i Nabi", p. 484.

His countenance is not visible anymore, contrary to the all the other personalities in the story, except for his wives Khadija and Aisha and his daughter Fatima who share a veiled face with him. Khadija and Fatima also share a gold nimbus while Aisha does not. (**Figure 9**, **Figure 10** and **Figure 11**).

### *Subhat al-Akhbar (Rosary of the times)*

*Subhat al-Akhbar*, at the Austrian National Library, is a world history in genealogy from the Creation until the time of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV (1648-1687). Its author, Dervish Mehmed ibn Sheikh Ramadan had lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, under Süleyman the Magnificent.<sup>20</sup> The illustrator and illuminator is Hasan al-Musavir al-İstanbuli and the latest date mentioned in the end colophon is 1085 AH/1674 AD, which falls within the reign of Mehmed IV. The genealogical tree starts with Adam and Eve (**Figure 12**) and continues with their descendants, saints and prophets until the Prophet Muhammad (**Figure 13**). In a parallel vein it has the genealogical tree of figures from Iranian mythology and the Sassanid dynasty, the Quraish tribe to which the Prophet belongs, the four Orthodox Caliphs, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs, the Seljuk, Mongol and Ottoman Sultans until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The manuscript was part of the Turkish booty temporarily incorporated in the library of the Austrian army leader Eugene of Savoy following the siege of Vienna. It was later transferred to the Imperial Court Library and then to the Austrian National Library.<sup>21</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad is the only one in the manuscript who has his face covered with a white veil. As far as we know, the Prophet was never depicted with an open face since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a new genre of calligraphic pieces was developed in Istanbul by the well-known Ottoman calligrapher Hafız Osman. The *hilye-i şerif* is a written description of the Prophet's physical and personal attributes, handsomely composed in several scripts on illuminated and marbled paper (**Figure 14**). In it the artist gives a verbal description of the Prophet's physique and character according to a narrative attributed to his cousin and son in law, 'Ali bin Abu Talib.<sup>22</sup>

### *Hilye Translation*

The *Hilye* begins with the physical characteristics of the Prophet: "He was neither too tall nor too short but of average height. His hair was

<sup>20</sup> H. Suesserott & J. A. Babeluk, *Rosary of the Times*, Graz 1981, (unpaginated) p. 5 from the cover.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-6 from the cover.

<sup>22</sup> U. Derman, *Türk Hat Sanatının Sâhesleri*, Ankara 1990, no. 49.



neither wiry nor straight but in between (wavy). He was not fat nor was his face too rounded with big jowls, slightly full, rather on the longish side and of a ruddy complexion. His eyes were deep black with long lashes. He had little body hair that grew in the middle of his chest down to the top of his abdomen. His hands were full so were his fingers yet they were soft to the touch. His gait was quick and betrayed decisiveness. When he turned he did so with his whole body giving full attention to whatever he was looking at or listening to. On his back between his shoulder blades was the ring of prophethood, a small red mark the size of a pigeon egg, a sign the People of the Book had recognized, as he was the last of the prophets".

The description of Prophet Muhammad's character is thus: "He was patient and compassionate, kind and benevolent, soft spoken and truthful (veracious), humble in his modesty, forgiving and generous. His company was gratifying and pleasant yet whoever met him for the first time was engulfed with a feeling of such respect that could make the person wary of him. Upon knowing him closely one gets to love him for his outstanding attributes more than one's parents and child. Those who got to know him with malice in their hearts hated him. Finally there has never been anyone with such physical and spiritual beauty, neither before nor after him".

This description survives the changes of time while truly expressing the Prophet's ephemeral and perpetual characteristics. According to Islamic aesthetics, such verbal depiction can be considered the genuine portrait of the Prophet by the true Muslim mind. Consequently, every successive Turkish calligrapher since Hafiz Osman had to write at least one *hilye* in his lifetime using three different scripts: *muhaqqaq* for the *basmallah*, *naskh* for the text and *thuluth* in writing the names of the Prophet's companions and the Quranic verses. Great care was also given to illuminating and decorating these pieces that were hung in homes for the blessings they bestowed on the inhabitants, as it was believed that the *hilye* can prevent the occurrence of catastrophe and misfortune.

For a Muslim, the Prophet epitomizes the perfect man whose worldly attributes cannot delineate his spiritual ones. In Islam no way can the shell of a body describe the person and only the soul, which is impossible to grasp within any tactile dimension, can truly represent an individual. For example, a figurative portrait cannot sufficiently denote its subject's image some twenty years after it had been painted; it can only be a contemporary and temporary representation of the original. The changes that take place on man's features and physical appearance render any tangible, static and visual likeness short of an accurate and holistic representation of the person.

Thus, Islamic sensibility shuns any plastic representation that would associate the Absolute with the relative, the Uncreated with the created and God with man, by reducing the former to the level of the latter. Meanwhile, the portraiture of divine messengers, prophets and saints, is avoided for two

reasons, firstly, to prevent their images from becoming objects of idolatrous worship and secondly, because no physical imitation could truly represent the qualities inherent in such holy men and women. From the very beginning, aniconism and not iconoclasm has been the concomitant of the strictures of Islam and one of the main foundations of its sacred art.<sup>23</sup>

There are two sayings attributed to the Prophet that condemn the depiction of living beings. The first: "On the Day of Judgment artists would be asked to recreate their own creations and upon failing to do so would be severely punished". The second: "Those who will be most strictly punished by God on the Day of Judgment will be the painters and sculptors". Both sayings are actually maxims that set down the law for aniconism, which is the prohibition of depicting God, although they were often wrongly interpreted as total prohibitions of imagery. However, they have not affected Islamic art to the extent that some might believe.

Figurative art can be perfectly accommodated into the universe of Islam, provided it does not exceed its proper limits, or participate directly in the spiritual economy of the religion. Aniconism in religion is opposition to the use of icons or visual images to depict living creatures or religious figures; in Islam it is the opposition to the personification of God and the Prophet, has two functions. It ensures that the primordial stature of man, whose form is made in the image of God, will neither be imitated nor supplanted by a limited and one-sided temporal work of art; and it deters the creation of idols that might interpose between man and God.<sup>24</sup>

The arts of calligraphy and abstraction did not develop in the Muslim world to compensate or replace the so-called 'forbidden' living image. Writing and painting were branches of the same art, where the calligrapher and painter used the calamus in the same manner.<sup>25</sup> Although they were meant as book illustrations, Islamic miniatures attained a high artistic level. For reasons of aniconism that were discussed above, the art of miniature painting could not be sacred. In Islamic culture, miniature painting belongs to the art of the book, while the art of calligraphy replaces the art of icons in Christianity. Thus, Islamic art does not copy the outward shapes of nature, but reflects their principles.<sup>26</sup>

Even before Islam, the Semitic peoples of the Middle East had no widespread naturalistic figurative tradition. The pre-Islamic Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula, whose verbal reality eclipsed the reality of the visual image, imported most of their idols from abroad; to them, the image was never a natural means of expression. For an Arab who could condense a whole doctrine into a crystal clear, short and concise verbal formula such as

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<sup>23</sup> T. Burckhardt, *Arts of Islam*, London 1976, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, "The Aesthetics of Islam", in *Treasures of Islam*, London 1985, pp. 21-2.

<sup>26</sup> S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Ipswich 1987, p. 8.

the *shahada*, a painted or carved image seemed like a disquieting congealment of the spirit.<sup>27</sup> A plane image is tolerated as an element in profane art, provided it represents neither God nor the face of the Prophet.<sup>28</sup>

An important element in Islamic aesthetics is the role played by the Arabic language. Among Arabic-speaking people, the need for illustrative pictorial art to accompany historical, religious, or literary works was rarely felt. For example, although the description of the Prophet is quite explicit in the Arabic annals, there is not a single picture painted by an Arab that portrays him. On the other hand, among the Turks, the Persians and the Indians, whose artistic heritage had been rich in pictorial images and whose language is other than Arabic, the Prophet was actually portrayed as was shown above. However, his features are not personal, but of an Arab archetype in order to differentiate him from the other Mongol personages in the composition. Except for a round halo or prophetic veil draped around his turban, both emblems bestowed on other prophets as well, these early pictures bear no special symbols. In the Timurid period that followed, the Messenger of God shared with other messengers and saints, as well as with his son-in-law Ali, his descendants and the angels, a huge flame, halo, or nimbus believed to be of Chinese Buddhist origins. With the passage of time and as the spirit of Islam took over and was better conceived among the non-Arabs, a white veil appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that covered the Prophet's face and distinguished him from other saintly figures bearing the nimbus.<sup>29</sup>

Finally when the spiritual facet of Islam was understood and the spirituality of Islamic art was grasped the literal depiction of the Prophet developed into a numinous representation.

Islam is centered on Unity, and despite having a concrete meaning, remains an absolute idea that cannot be interpreted, represented or expressed with an image. Unity is also a participant, for it forms the synthesis of the multiple and the principle of comparison. It is the axiom of distinctiveness, for every being basically differs from others by its elemental unity, that is unique and can neither be confused nor replaced.

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<sup>27</sup> Burckhardt, *Arts of Islam*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>28</sup> T. Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, Middlesex 1986, p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> B. Gray, *The World of Rashid Al-Din*, London 1978, p. 24; S. Okasha, *The Muslim Painter and the Divine*, London 1981, pp. 47-53.

FROM THE LITERAL TO THE SPIRITUAL



Figure 1: The Prophet exhorting his family before the battle of Badr, from *Jami'al-Tawarikh*, dated 1314-5, reproduced with the permission of the Nour Foundation, London.



Figure 2: The Prophet leading Hamza and the Muslims against Banu Qaynuqa', from *Jami'al-Tawarikh*, dated 1314-5, reproduced with the permission of the Nour Foundation, London.

FROM THE LITERAL TO THE SPIRITUAL



Figure 3: The Prophet receiving the submission of the Banu 'l-Nadir , from *Jami'al-Tawarikh*, dated 1314-5, reproduced with the permission of the Nour Foundation, London.



Figure 4: "The Birth of the Prophet" from *Jami' al-Tawarikh* dated 1307  
Reproduced with permission of Edinburgh University Library  
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Figure 5: "The Prophet and the Archangel Gabriel standing in front of a giant angel" from the *Mi'raj-name*, Tabriz (c. 1360-70)  
Reproduced with permission of Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul





Figure 6: "The Prophet born on Gabriel's shoulders, arriving at the gate of paradise guarded by the angel Ridwan" from the *Mi'raj-name*, Tabriz (c. 1360-70).  
Reproduced with permission of Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul



Figure 7: "The Prophet with his companions and an angel is presenting him with a miniature city"

Reproduced with permission of Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul



Figure 8: "The Archangel Gabriel carries the Prophet on his shoulders over mountains where angels are shown among golden flames"  
Reproduced with permission of Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul

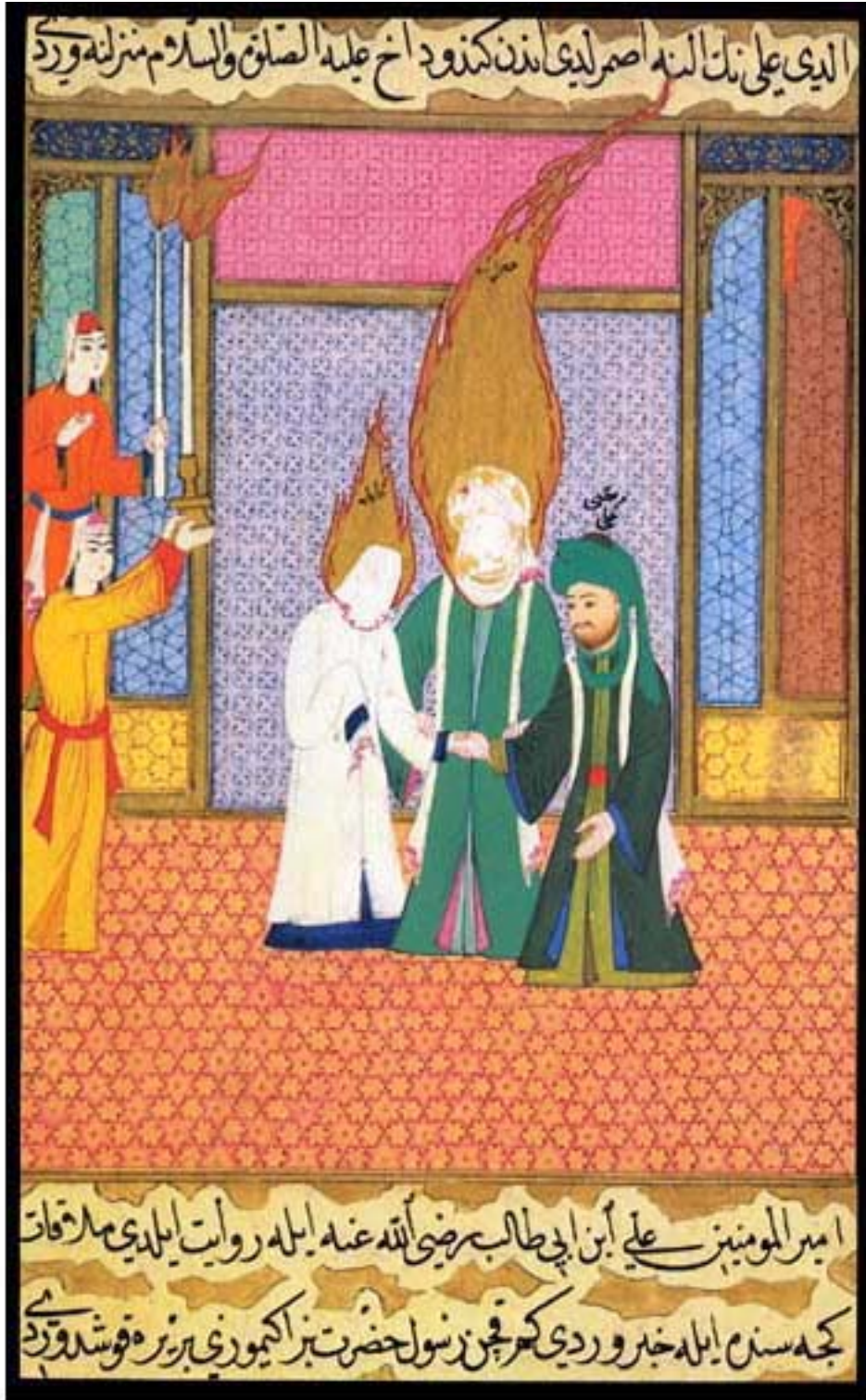


Figure 9: "The Prophet giving his daughter Fatima in marriage to his cousin Ali" from the *Siyer-i Nebi*  
Reproduced with permission of Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul

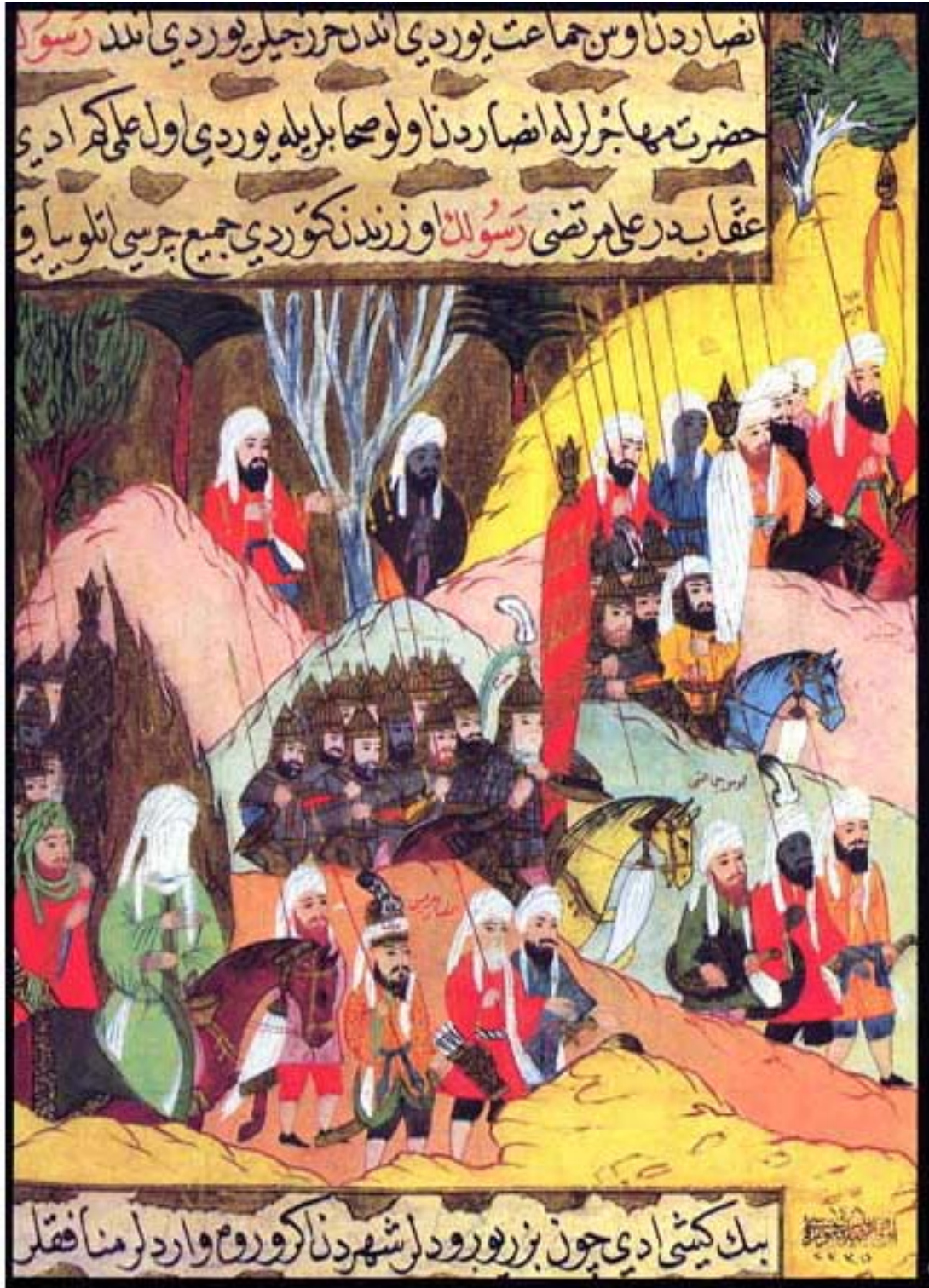


Figure 10: "The Prophet marching to the Battle of Uhud"  
from the *Siyer-i Nebi*

Reproduced with permission of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul

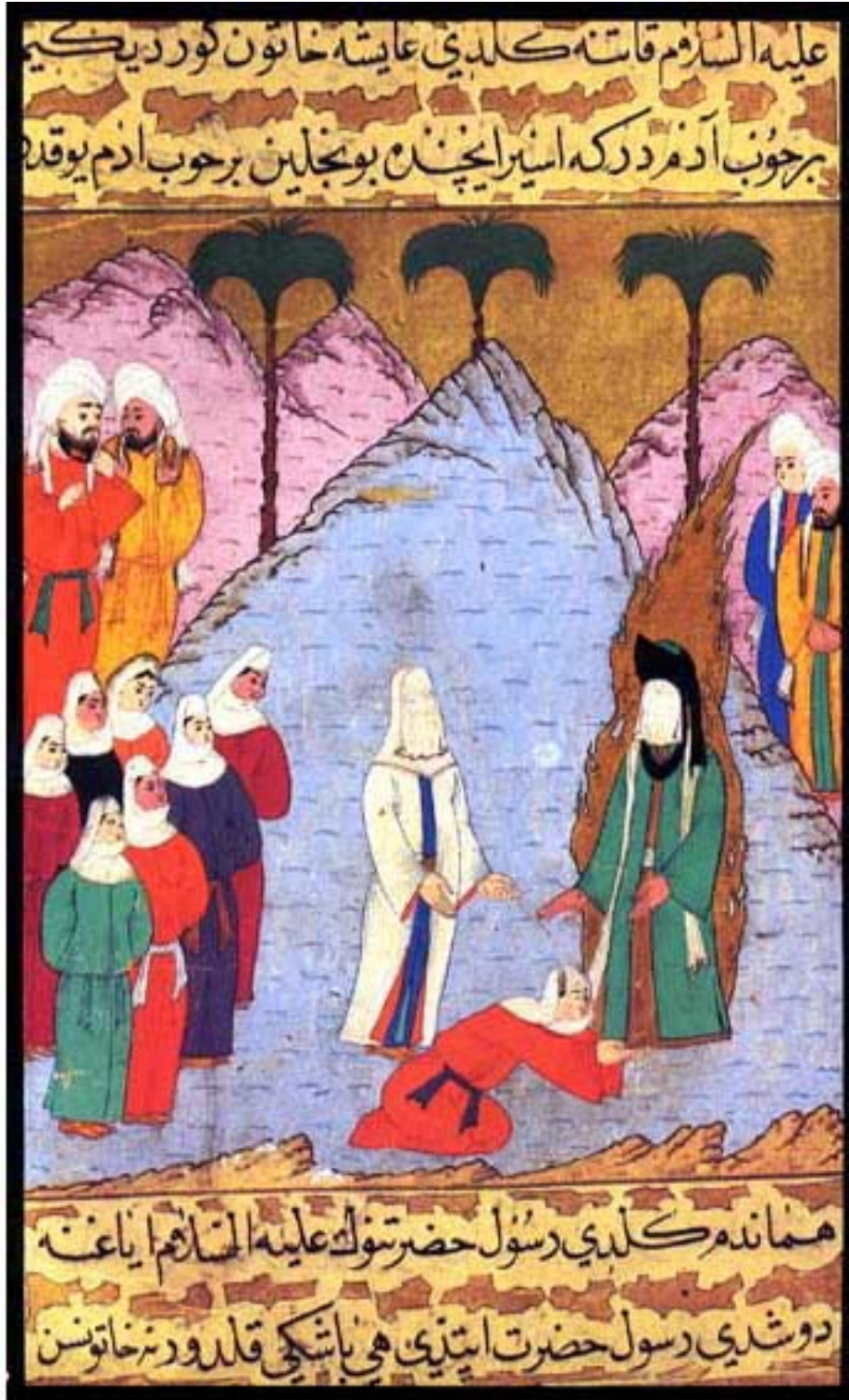


Figure 11: "The Prophet and his wife Aisha freeing the daughter of a tribal chief" from the *Siyer-i Nebi*  
Reproduced with permission of Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul



Figure 12: "Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel" from the *Subhat al-Akhbar*  
Reproduced with permission of the Austrian National Library

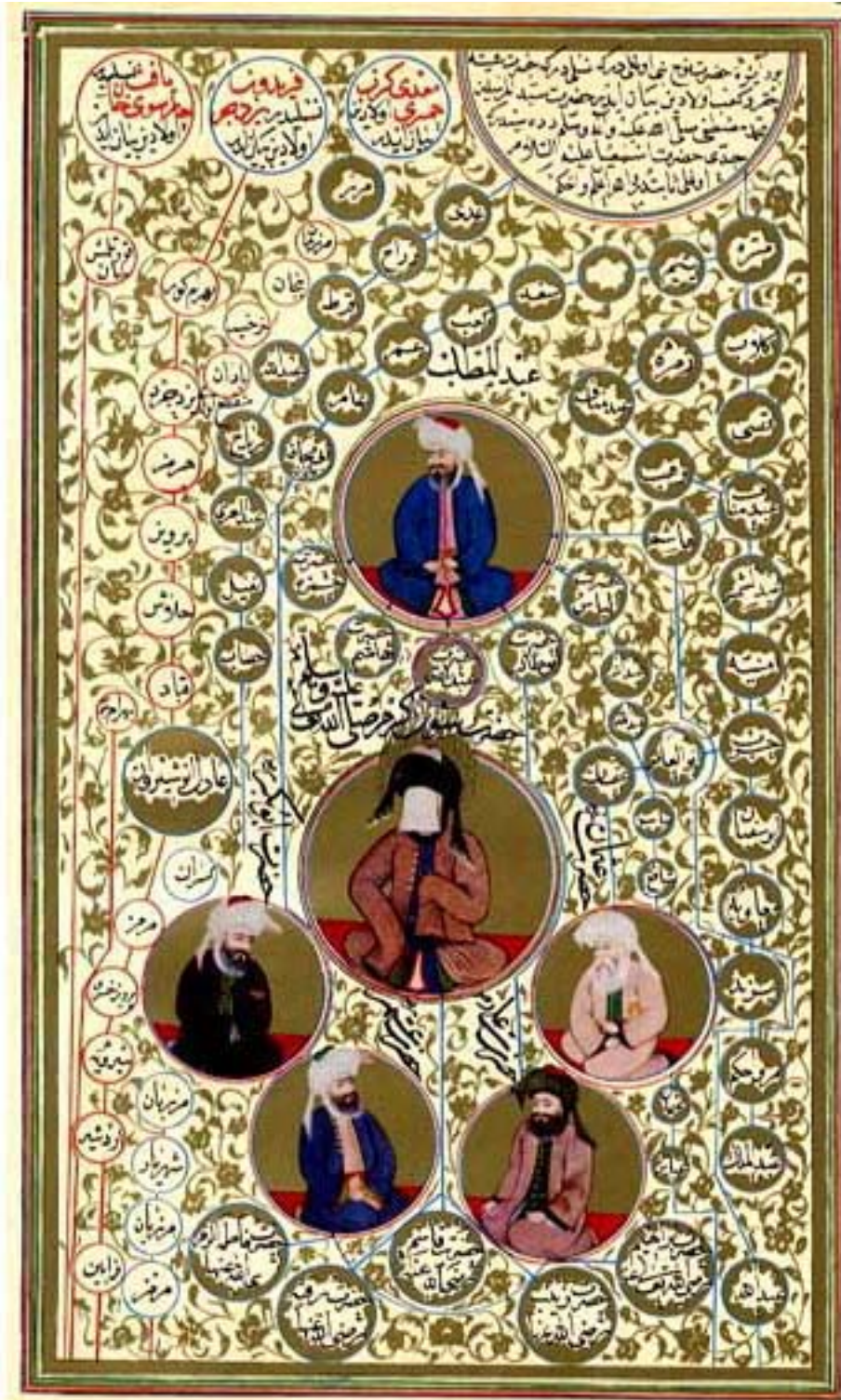


Figure 13: "The Prophet Muhammad and the four orthodox caliphs"  
from the *Subhat al-Akhbar*  
Reproduced with permission of the Austrian National Library





Figure 14: The *Hilye-i Şerif* by Hafız Osman,  
Istanbul 17th Century  
Reproduced with permission of Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul