Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies

Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed, international journal dedicated to comparative thought. It seeks to explore common spaces and differences between philosophical traditions in a global context. Without postulating cultures as monolithic, homogenous, or segregated wholes, it aspires to address key philosophical issues which bear on specific methodological, epistemological, hermeneutic, ethical, social, and political questions in comparative thought. Confluence aims to develop the contours of a philosophical understanding not subservient to dominant paradigms and provide a platform for diverse philosophical voices, including those long silenced by dominant academic discourses and institutions. Confluence also endeavors to serve as a juncture where specific philosophical issues of global interest may be explored in an imaginative, thought-provoking, and pioneering way.

We welcome innovative and persuasive ways of conceptualizing, articulating, and representing intercultural encounters. Contributions should be able to facilitate the development of new perspectives on current global thought-processes and sketch the outlines of salient future developments.

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Abstract
In Ibn ‘Arabi’s epistemology, ḥayra ›perplexity‹ is an unceasing movement between the outward (ẓāhir) and the inward (bāṭin), or the created world (al-Khalq) and the True God (al-Ḥaqq). Only this dynamic link is the truth itself, interlocking both sides of the universal order as mutually necessary and presupposing each other. It is important to bear in mind that this link is something other than the two interlocked sides, as it is a third thing that we arrive at after transcending the first two. Such an understanding of truth as a dynamic link, which transcends the interdependent and interlocked sides but is impossible without their interrelation, is basically different from a Platonic vision of truth as a static, unchanging idea independent of its material embodiments.

This understanding of truth as a dynamic link between ẓāhir and bāṭin and of the ›technology‹ of arriving at it by bringing the two to their unity by transcending them is projected in this paper onto the issue of Islamic ornament and its aesthetic and epistemological value. The paper argues that Islamic ornament is a visualisation of ẓāhir-bāṭin-relation. If viewed correctly, it permits the two sides to be transcended to their unity not depicted on media but nevertheless constituting the truth and the aesthetic value of the ornament. In this ẓāhir-bāṭin interdependence of the displayed (outward) picture and its hidden (inward) meaning the latter is by no means a Platonic idea ›materialised‹ by the artist. Here too, the aesthetic and epistemological effect is produced by the interrelation and dynamic link between the two sides which is arrived at by transcending them to their unity.

Keywords
Islamic art, miniature, ornament, ẓāhir, bāṭin, maʿra, ḥayra, Ibn ʿArabi.

1 Introduction
This paper attempts to apply the ẓāhir-bāṭin paradigm to interpret Islamic ornament. In the following section, I am going to offer a sketch of the ẓāhir-bāṭin paradigm developed into a basic epistemological scheme in a number of Islamic sciences. I will begin with the Qurʾān and culminate my sketch with Ibn ‘Arabi (Section 2). This will provide a necessary background for my query: Can the epistemological strategy of arriving at truth using the ẓāhir-bāṭin dynamic be meaningfully deployed to understand at least some cases of Islamic ornament? I will not try to read the Şûfi meaning into Islamic ornament, or draw parallels between Şûfi ideas and technical specificities of Islamic art, as it has been done in numerous works (see, for example, Nader, and Laleh 1973; Akkach 2005).

1 Instead, I will attempt to test the applicability of the said ẓāhir-bāṭin dynamic with one example. I will thus work to show that it accounts for at least some of typical traits of the ẓāhir-bāṭin relationship and can thus aid in understanding at least some aspects of its aesthetic meaning (Section 3). Finally, I am going to address the question whether the ẓāhir-bāṭin interpretation paradigm may be extended in Islamic aesthetics beyond the examined test case (Section 4).

2 The ẓāhir-bāṭin Relationship
In the Qurʾān, the terms ẓāhir and bāṭin and their derivatives are used on several occasions. On four occasions, those two words come together and are clearly used as opposites. On all those occasions ẓāhir and bāṭin are consistently translated by Arberry as ›outward‹ and


2 They mostly occur as the ordinary words to which any technical meaning can hardly be ascribed, for example, »We gave power to those who believed, against their enemies, and they became the ones that prevailed« (aṣbaḥū ẓāhirīn – 61:14), or »and support (others) in driving you out« (zaharū ʿātā ikhrāji-kum – 60:9) (The Glorious Qurʾān, Translation and Commentary, A. Y. Ali, Beirut: Dār al-fikr, n.y.). All sources cited in Arabic are my translations.
Towards an Understanding of Islamic Ornament: Approaching Islamic Ornament through Ibn 'Arabi’s Fūṣūṣ al-Ḥikam’s Notions of the Žāhir-Bāṭin Interplay and the Šūfī Ḥayra

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sinwards, which is, to my mind, the most successful rendering. Firstly, ṣāhir and bāṭin are divine names: »He is the First and the Last, the Outward (al-ṣāhir) and the Inward (al-bāṭin)« (57:3, ibid.). Next, we find that sins and blessings can be outward and inward: »Forsake the outward sin, and the inward« (6:120, ibid.). »He has lavished on you His blessings, outward and inward« (31:20, ibid.). And finally, ṣāhir and bāṭin come as topological opposites: »And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement« (57:13, ibid.). Twice we find the opposition with a similar meaning between the verbs of the same roots, ḥarā (was or became outward, apparent, visible) and baṭana (was or became inward, invisible): »[... and that you approach not any indecency outward (mā ḥarara) or inward (mā baṭana)« (6:151, ibid.); »Say: My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the outward thereof is chastisement« (57:13, ibid.). »What man has sown wheat and reaped barley, it means that his outward is better than his inward« (3:112, ibid.). Ṣāhir and bāṭin denote the visible and invisible (front and rear, or front and bottom) sides of hand and foot (1:356, ibid.), shin (3:312, ibid.), hoof (3:97, ibid.), ear (3:229, ibid.), eye’s pupil (3:41 ibid.), eyelid (3:178, ibid.), teeth (1:52, 3:212, ibid.), and the like. In all those cases, we have two sides of something which are normally not seen simultaneously, though they can be reversed. We can turn the hand upside down making the palm, which is normally hidden from the eye, visible. Hereby, the back of the hand, which is usually open to the eye, gets hidden. Visibility, being open to the eye is what the term ṣāhir and its derivatives imply (see 2:255, 2:266, 5:179, ibid.). Bāṭin, on the contrary, is what is hidden from the eye and invisible.

Ṣāhir and bāṭin may be understood more generally (or abstractly), as the outward and inward, or visible and invisible sides of something (al-ʿamr, certain case). Explaining the verb baṭana of the same root (b-ṭ-n), al-Khalil says that if someone tabaṭṭana fi al-ʿamr it means that he entered inside it (dakhla fi-hi), that is, learned its bāṭin inward:7 One can speak about biṭana min al-ʿamr (the inward of something; it is called dakhla fi-hi, that is, learned its bāṭin inward) of some person (ibid.). Ṣāhir and bāṭin of a person may stay in accord or display discrepancy. If someone sees in a dream that he sowed wheat and reaped barley, it means that his ṣāhir is better than his bāṭin, says Ibn Sirīn (died 728), the author of the famous dream-book (n.y.: 549; see also 388–389, 407).8 The ṣāhir-bāṭin-balance (or misbalance) is used by al-Sulamī (died 1021) as a classification; thus, ṣālim (evidenced) according to Arberry’s translation – 2:35, 2:51, etc. is explained as the one whose outward ṣāhir is better than his inward bāṭin, muqtaṣid (just), also Ṭukwaruma – 5:66, 31:32, 35:32 as the one whose outward equals his inward, and the sābih (‘outstripper’ in good deeds – see 35:32, 56:11 etc.) as the one whose inward is better than his outward.9 Thus exhausting the logic-

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2 That is, between hypocrites and believers.
5 Those three terms come together in 35:32: »Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our Servants as We have chosen: but there are among them some who wrong (ẓālim) their own souls; some who follow a middle course (muqtaṣid); and some who are, by Allah’s leave, foremost (sābih) in good deeds« (Ali n.y.). They are used separately in other verses as well.

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6 In the outward (ṣāhir), it is the black dot (ṣawāw) of the eye and in the inward it is the opening (ḥurar) in the eye.
7 Al-Khalil, Kitāb al-ʿayn, Mahdī al-Makḥūmī, Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (eds.), Dār wa Maktatab al-alhilāl, n.y., 7:441 [8 vols.].
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Beyond the Qurʾān, the zāhir-bāṭin-opposition was utilized as a sort of basic paradigm in linguistics (lafẓ–maʿnā – opposition), in Islamic ethics, and law (niyya-fiʾl – opposition). The words (kalima) is generally understood as expression (lafẓ) which points to (dalāla) the sense (maʿnā). The lafẓ–maʿnā opposition is the opposition of zāhir and bāṭin: the expression is something spoken out (the verb lafaṣṣa means to spit), which has become external to the speaker and can be accessed by everyone. The sense, on the contrary, is something basically internal, invisible and inaccessible to anyone else, something rooted in the soul and never externalized. Lafẓ and maʿnā, zāhir and bāṭin are linked, however, by dalāla (pointing to) – the relation which, as al-Taftāzānī explains, makes us know the thing pointed to (madālīl) provided we know the thing that points (dāll) and the linkage (ʿalāqa) between them (Al-Taftāzānī 1879: 149–150). This theory explains why language operates as a meaning-conveying vehicle. To master a language means to possess the linking mechanism between expression and sense, so that whenever we hear the expression (lafẓ, the zāhir), the sense (maʿnā, the bāṭin) is actualized in our soul. We can never access the soul of the other and comprehend the senses that flood it; however, the other can speak out expressions which the person links to the intended senses, and whenever we hear the expressions, the linkage mechanism works the reverse way and invokes the senses in our soul. This is the basic trait of the zāhir-bāṭin-relation: it runs both ways, and the bāṭin leads to the zāhir just like the zāhir leads to the bāṭin.

A whole range of Islamic sciences uses the zāhir-bāṭin paradigm. In his groundbreaking Structure of Arab Mind, al-Jābirī delineates three epistemological structures (nuẓūm maʿrifyya) in classical Arabic culture: al-bayān (displaying, revealing), al-irfān (mysticism) and al-burḥān (logical demonstration, proof). The third one is of Greek origin and is rooted in the Aristotelian paradigm (al-Jābirī 2009: 383), while the first two are native Arabic Islamic. Both are based on the zāhir-bāṭin paradigm, though they differ in the way they treat the zāhir-bāṭin-dynamic. The first moves from zāhir to bāṭin, that is, from lafẓ to maʿnā, while the second travels in the opposite direction, from bāṭin to zāhir, or from maʿnā to lafẓ (ibid.: 291). Since the zāhir-bāṭin-relation is basically reversible, the opposition between the bayān and irfān epistemological structures is relative and superficial rather than essential. This is why a reconciliation (muṣālaḥa) between them took place in the late classical age, when the irfān paradigm merged with the bayān and adopted the zāhir-bāṭin-balance idea (ibid.: 293). The first epistemological strategy (ba-yān), according to al-Jābirī, is that of grammarians. Qurʾān commentators, Mutakallimūn and fuqahāʾ (Islamic law doctors), while the second (irfān) is characteristic of the Sūfis and the Shiʿites. Thus the zāhir-bāṭin paradigm is in fact presented by al-Jābirī as the initial basis of all native Arabic Islamic (not Greek-inspired) epistemology covering all the Greek-independent theoretical knowledge.


11 See, for example, al-Jāḥiẓ, Al-Bayān wa-l-taḥqīqīn, (Abū al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 75–76), where this celebrated ‘adīb and Muʿtazilite thinker (died 869) speaks with his characteristic eloquence about the lafẓ–maʿnā relation. This lafẓ–maʿnā relation of dālāla as constituting the word (kalīma) and the speech (kalīmā) is elaborated throughout the Arabic grammar tradition starting with the Sibawayhi’s Kūtiḥ, Al-Taftāzānī, ʿĀdil al-ʿallāma al-Banānī ʿalā Muhāʾṣar al-Saʿd al-Taftāzānī `alā matn al-Tallāḥīs fi ṣīn al-maʿnātī, Second Part, Bālāq, 1879.

12 It follows that we cannot stop understanding the senses once we hear the expressions, for the linkage mechanism operates irrespective of our will – a thesis corroborated by our everyday experience of hearing a speech in a language we know: we comprehend the meaning of it regardless of our wish to do or not to do so.

13 This marks a point of difference with the semiotic relation of designation: generally speaking, we cannot say that it works both ways and the designated designates the sign just as the sign designates the designated street signs designate traffic rules though it would be unexpected to say that traffic rules designate street signs. It is not by chance that Arabic theory excluded the ‘alām (sign, proper name) from the relation of dālāla understood as zāhir-bāṭin-linkage, because the ‘alām, though designating the thing, does not correspond to any sense (maʿnā) in it (Ibn Yaʿṣīr, Sharḥ al-Muṣālaḥāt al-Munīrīyya bi-miṣr, 1938, Vol. 1, p. 27, [10 vol.s.]).


Beyond the Qurʾān, the zāhir-bāṭin-opposition was utilized as a sort of basic paradigm in linguistics (lafẓ–maʿnā – opposition), in Islamic ethics, and law (niyya–fiʿl – opposition). The words (kalima) is generally understood as expressions (lafż) which points to (dalāla) the sense (maʿnā). The lafẓ–maʿnā opposition is the opposition of zāhir and bāṭin: the expressions is something spoken out (the verb lafaẓa means to spit), which has become external to the speaker and can be accessed by everyone. The sense, on the contrary, is something basically internal, invisible and inaccessible to anyone else, something rooted in the soul and never externalized11. Lafẓ and maʿnā, zāhir and bāṭin are linked, however, by dalāla (pointing to) – the relation which, as al-Taftāzānī explains, makes us know the thing pointed to (madīlah) provided we know the thing that points (dāll) and the linkage (ʿalāqa) between them (Al-Taftāzānī 1879: 149–150).12 This theory explains why language operates as a meaning-conveying vehicle. To master a language means to possess the linking mechanism between expression and sense, so that whenever we hear the expression (lafẓ, the zāhir), the sense (maʿnā, the bāṭin) is actualized in our soul. We can never access the soul of the other and comprehend the senses that flood it; however, the other can speak out expressions which the person links to the intended senses, and whenever we hear the expressions, the linkage mechanism works the reverse way and invokes the senses in our soul.13 This is the basic trait of the zāhir-bāṭin-relation: it runs both ways, and the bāṭin leads to the zāhir just like the zāhir leads to the bāṭin14.

A whole range of Islamic sciences uses the zāhir-bāṭin paradigm. In his groundbreaking Structure of Arab Mind15, al-Jābirī delineates three epistemological structures (nuẓūm maʿrifīyya) in classical Arabic culture: al-bayān (displaying, revealing), al-ʿurfān (mysticism) and al-burḥān (logical demonstration, proof). The third one is of Greek origin and is rooted in the Aristotelian paradigm (al-Jābirī 2009: 383), while the first two are native Arabic Islamic. Both are based on the zāhir-bāṭin paradigm, though they differ in the way they treat the zāhir-bāṭin-dynamic. The first moves from zāhir to bāṭin, that is, from lafẓ to maʿnā, while the second travels in the opposite direction, from bāṭin to zāhir, or from maʿnā to lafẓ (ibid.: 291). Since the zāhir-bāṭin-relation is basically reversible, the opposition between the bayān and ʿurfān epistemological structures is relative and superficial rather than essential. This is why a reconciliation (musālaḥa) between them took place in the late classical age, when the ʿurfān paradigm merged with the bayān and adopted the zāhir-bāṭin-balance idea (ibid.: 293). The first epistemological strategy (ba-yān), according to al-Jābirī, is that of grammarians. Qurʾān commentators, Mutakallimūn and fuqahāʾ (Islamic law doctors), while the second (ʿurfān) is characteristic of the Ṣūfīs and the Shiʿites. Thus the zāhir-bāṭin paradigm is in fact presented by al-Jābirī as the initial basis of all native Arabic Islamic (not Greek-inspired) epistemology covering all the Greek-independent theoretical knowledge.

11 See, for example, al-Jāḥiẓī, Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, (Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 75–76), where this celebrated ʿaḥīk and Muʿazzamil thinker (died 869) speaks with his characteristic eloquence about the lafẓ–maʿnā relation. This lafẓ–maʿnā relation of dalāla as constituting the word (kalima) and the speech (kalām) is elaborated throughout the Arabic grammar tradition starting with the Sibawayhi’s Kitāb. Al-Taftāzānī, Taṣīr al-ʿallamā al-Bannāʾī ʿalā Muḥḥasas al-Saʿd al-Taftāzānī ʿalā matn al-Talkhišt fi ʿilm al-maʿṣūla, Second Part, Bulaq, 1879.
The idea of niyya-fi’l balance and interdependence is the basic idea of Islamic ethics. Niyya -intention- is explained by Islamic authors as a steadfast determination of the soul to reach a certain goal through a certain act, while fi’l act is any movement performed by the parts of the body, including tongue. The ‘deeds’ (‘amal) is not just a bodily act (fi’l), but necessarily the act called for life, backed and coupled by intention (niyya) which should never part with the act as long as it is performed. The act (fi’l) is zahir, evident for everyone, while intention (niyya) is only internal, batin, rooted in the soul and unknown to anyone but the soul itself (save God, of course). It means that no other human being except the agent himself can testify to the existence or absence of niyya, its correctness (šiḥḥāt), or corruption (fāṣād). Niyya as batin in principle can have no objective or formal confirmation, it can be endorsed by nothing but has to be taken on a person’s word. And yet niyya is the condition sine qua non for the deed (‘amal), just like the bodily act (fi’l): if, for example, the niyya gets corrupted during prayer (which can be testified to only by a praying person), the prayer as a deed becomes futile though all the required actions (fi’l) are performed as they should. This niyya-fi’l balance and interdependence, based on zahir-batin-paradigm, is a general rule for all ‘ibādat (relation of man to God) deeds and apply to as many ibādat (acts of worship) as possible, thus extending itself to Islamic ethics and fiqh spheres.

Now, if zahir and batin are divine names and if zahir-batin relation displays a certain logic, being developed into a basic paradigm, as al-Jābirī pointed out17, then how do divine attributes fit into that paradigm? Can they be comprehended following the same logic? This is not an easy question, because Islamic doctrine insists on the inscrutability of God18 proceeding from the basic idea of tawḥīd – God’s having absolutely nothing in common with anything created. Then what does it mean for God to be zahir – displayed, evident, open to the eye?

Al-Tha’labī (died 1035) provides in his commentary on the Qur’an a long list of opinions about the meanings that could be attached to those two Divine names (al-Tha’labī 2002: 227–230).19 and al-Māwardī (died 1058) brings different explanations into three classes of non-Šūfī and three classes of Šūfī (ašhāb al-khwātīf people of insights) opinions. As for the first group, zahir is explained as overtopping everything: because of God’s highness, and batin as knowing everything because of His closeness to anything. Secondly, zahir and batin mean that God subdues (qāhir) everything evident and hidden. Finally, those two names mean that He knows everything evident and hidden. As Šūfī explanations run: firstly, God is zahir because He makes His arguments (hujaj) evident (izhār) for minds, and batin because He knows the inner side of everything. Secondly, because He is evident (zahir) for the hearts of His friends (awliyā’) and hidden (bāṭīn) from the hearts of His enemies. And finally, He is evident above: (zahir fawaq – overtopping) everything apparent (mārsūm) and inward (bāṭīn) knowing everything unexpressed (maktūm) (Al-Māwardī n.y.: 469). The famous Ḥanbali faqīh Ibn al-Jawzī (died 1201) gives a similar explanation saying that zahir (outward, evident) could mean that He is evident because of His shining arguments pointing to His uniqueness, or that He is elevated (ẓāhir) above everything because of His might, or His outwardness (ẓāhir) could mean His highness (‘uluw), or His dominance (ghalaba), while batin (inward, hidden) means that He is veiled from the sight of the creatures having no quality, or His outwardness and inwardness (ẓāhir wa bāṭīn) could mean that He is veiled from the sight of the contemplating (baṣr al-mutafakkir) and that He

16 ‘ibādat and mu’tamalāt is the most general division of human deeds and, accordingly, of the fiqh (Islamic law theory).
18 A vision of God will become possible in an afterlife according to a well-known tradition acknowledged as authentic (see Al-Bukhari, Al-Jami‘ al-Šaḥīf al-Mukhtara-

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16 ‘ibādāt and mu’aṣṣābāt is the most general division of human deeds and, accordingly, of the fiqh (Islamic law theory).
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knows all the evident (ẓāhir) things and all the hidden (bāṭin) mysteries (Ibn al-Jawzi 1404 H.: 161).21

Such explanations of ẓāhir and bāṭin as divine names shift the focus of discussion from God per se (from his dhāt -Self-) to his relation to created beings, or to the relation of created beings to Him, and the ẓāhir-bāṭin-logic of outwardness and inwardness as the two necessarily coupled and interchangeable sides of a single thing (or affair – ‘amr) is hardly detectable here. Moreover, the maṣūj (metaphorical) explanation, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (died 1209), was given by those who said that «the meaning of those expressions is like when somebody says: this person is the first and the last in that affair, he is the outward (ẓāhir) and the inward (bāṭin) of it, which means that it is driven and accomplished by that person» (Al-Rāzī 2000: 186).22 Ibn al-'Arabi (died 1148), the famous traditionalist, says that the four names (the First, the Last, the Outward and the Inward) are different but the First is exactly the Last, the First is exactly the Inward, and the Last is exactly the Outward, and so on in all combinations, because He «as such (bi-‘ayn-hi) is One (Ibn al-'Arabi: n.y.: 177), thus refusing to apply those names to the Divine Self in direct (haqīqa) sense.23 The discussed verse (57:3) is mentioned as one of the maqālīd al-samāwāt wa-l-dhāt wal-lārd (»the keys of the heavens and the earth« – 39:63, 42:12) among other formulas that point strictly to the Divine Self and to nothing else.24 Al-Tha‘labī mentions that ‘Abd al-Azīz b. Yaḥyā25 said that the conjunctions between those four names are »extraneous« (muqḥama) and they should be read as a single name, not as four separate ones, because «we cannot be at once outward and inward, the first and the last; this clearly signifies the difficulty of explaining the outwardness and the inwardness of God in the way we can do it with anything that belongs to the world (Al-Tha‘labī 2002: 228).

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Against this background, all the more impressive is the position of the author of Fūṣūṣ al-ḥikmā ascribed to al-Fārābī26 of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and of Ibn ‘Arabi (died 1240), the celebrated »Greatest Shaykh« (al-Shaykh al-akbar)27, for they apply the ẓāhir-bāṭin dialectics to the Divine Self without digressing into metaphors, doing so on the basis of the wujūd (existence) category. We shall leave the question of influences aside, though they do not look improbable, and concentrate instead on the crux of the matter.

God is, in the interpretation of these authors, necessarily-existent-by-itself (wājib al-wujūd li-l-ḍhāt-ḥi), according to the author of Fāṣūṣ al-ḥikmā (this is a generally accepted thesis of the Falāsīfā – Hellenizing philosophers), and this self-necessity is the most evident (ẓāhir) thing. It is so because to possess existence (wujūd) means to possess necessity (wujūbd), and this necessity is transmitted to every thing by its cause. The cause, in its turn, has to borrow its necessity from its own cause, and so on until we arrive at the initial cause having no cause and possessing its necessity by itself. The world of existents (mawjūd), which means necessary (wājib), things demonstrates the existence of the necessary-by-itself First Cause (the God), whose Self (dhāt) is evident (ẓāhir) by virtue of that necessity-transmitting mechanism:

Necessarily existent is devoid of substratum and accidents, so there is no confusion (labs) in Him, so, He is unobserved (ṣurāh); that is, He is evident (ẓāhir) [...] He is the True; could it be otherwise, as long as He is necessary? He is inward (bāṭin); could it be otherwise, as long as He is outward (za-
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Necessarily existent is devoid of substratum and accidents, so there is no confusion (labs) in Him; so, He is unobscured (ṣurāḥ); that is, He is evident (ẓāhir) [...]. He is the True; could it be otherwise, as long as He is necessary? He is inward (bāṭin); could it be otherwise, as long as He is outward (ṣa-

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25 Al-Shāfi‘ī al-ḥāṣimī fī tażīr al-tanzīl wa al-wujūd li-dhāti-hi, ed. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1404 H., Beirut: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 2005, pp. 7–8). Ibn ‘Arabi’s texts present himself as an interpreter of the whole of Shari‘a’s, which he understands as all the Islamic texts and sciences. Shari‘a represents the ẓāhir, which Ibn ‘Arabi supplies with a necessary bāṭin counterpart, thus accomplishing the message of Islam. This mission certainly surpasses any given science.
The evidence of the invisible Divine Self is the meeting point for Falsafa and traditional Arabic Islamic theory of ḍalāla (pointing to, demonstration). As the ḫafṣ (expression) points to the maʾnā (sense), so does the nasba (state of affairs): it also points to its sense (maʾnā). This unbreakable linkage between nasba and its sense possesses a demonstrative force for the mind: once we have the nasba pointing to its sense, we cannot but admit the sense itself as proven by nasba that points to it. Now, the nasba is the whole world of created (makhlaq) things, and the sense it points to is its Creator (khāliq). It is absurd to speak about recipient without an actor, and once the recipient (the world) is before our eyes, the actor (God) is ›proven‹ (ʿaḥāla) inasmuch as He is the Outward and become hidden (yaḥṭun ›become inward‹) for you (al-Fārābī 1381 S.H.: 55–56).

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As for His being ›the Outward and the Inward (57.3)‹, you should know that He is Outward (ẓāhir) -evident) because of the existence (wujūd), for any emerging (kāʾin) and possible (muʾakkin) thing, as you can see, inevitably points to (dalīl) His existence (wujūd), fixedness (ḥabībī), truth (ḥiqqīqqa) and immutableness [ … ] The most evident thing (ṣāʿīd al-ashyāʾ) for the mind is that He is the Creator of all those created things and that He precedes them, and you have learned that the mind is perplexed (ḥayra) and bewildered (dāḥṣa) by the knowledge of that firstness (awwaliyya). So what we have exposed above testifies that the Holy Lord ›is the First and the Last, the Outward (al-ẓāhir) and the Inward (al-bāṭin) (57.3)‹ (Al-Rāzī 2000: 185–186).

Coming to Ibn ʿArabi (1980: 72), we discover that in the third chapter of Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam he says that the ›perplexity‹ (ḥayra) is caused by ›multiplication of the One by facets (wujūd) and correlations (nisab)‹.¹¹

Ḥayra ›perplexity‹ is with no exaggeration the pivotal epistemological concept for Ibn ʿArabi. It is important to bear in mind that for him ›perplexity‹ is a positive, not a negative, notion. That is, to be ›perplexed‹ does not mean ›to be deprived‹ of something, let us say, to be deprived of certainty, or to be deprived of truth. Rather, to be perplexed means ›to possess‹. The question is: to possess what?

Let me expand the context of quotation a little. Ibn ʿArabi comments on the Qurʾānic verse »They have already misled many« (71:24). He explains that those words of Nūḥ mean: ›They have perplexed them in the multiplication of the One by facets and correlations (ḥayyarū-hām fit taʾdād al-wujūd bi-l-wujūd wa-l-nisab)‹ (ibid.). The preposition ›in‹ (fī) – not ›by‹ (bi) - as one could expect – is used here on purpose. Ibn ʿArabi does not speak exclusively about epistemology, he means ontology as well. Ḥayra indicates not just ›perplexity in one’s knowledge‹, ḥayra implies as well ›perplexity in one’s being‹. As Ibn ʿArabi puts it: »The [Universal] Order is perplexity, and perplexity is agitation and movement, and movement is life (al-ʾumr ḥīra wa-l-ḥīra qalaq wa ḥaraka wa-l-ḥaraka ḥayāt – ibid.: 199–200; see also 73).«

I read the Arabic word حرة here as ḥira not ḥayra following Ibn ʿArabi’s intention to identify ›perplexity‹ and ›whirlpool‹. حرة ›perplexity‹ can be read as ḥira as well as ḥayra. Arabic dictionaries tell us, and ›whirlpool‹ (ḥirā) is one of the favourite images of universal life and order in Ibn ʿArabi’s texts. The ḥāʾir ›perplexed‹ human being finds himself in constant movement. He cannot gain a foothold at any point, he is not established anywhere. This is why Ibn ʿArabi says that he is ›perplexed in the multiplication of the One‹: this ›multiplication‹ is not just epistemological, it is ontological as well, and the perplexed human being is moving in the whirlpool of life and universal Order and at the same time realises that he is in that movement.


huwar? He is the Outward (ẓāhir) inasmuch as He is the Inward (bāṭin), and He is the Inward inasmuch as He is the Outward. So move from His inwardness to His outwardness: He will become evident (yaẓhar) become outward) and become hidden (yaḥṭun become inward) for you (al-Fārābī 1381 S.H.: 55–56).

The evidence of the invisible Divine Self is the meeting point for Falsafa and traditional Arabic Islamic theory of dalāla (pointing to, demonstration). As the lafẓ (expression) points to the ma’na (sense), so does the naṣba (state of affairs): it also points to its sense (ma’na). This unbreakable linkage between naṣba and its sense possesses a demonstrative force for the mind: once we have the naṣba pointing to its sense, we cannot but admit the sense itself as proven by naṣba that points to it. Now, the naṣba is the whole world of created (makhluq) things, and the sense it points to is its Creator (khāliq). It is absurd to speak about recipient without an actor, and once the recipient (the world) is before our eyes, the actor (God) is proven (dalîl pointed to) for our mind. Both the world itself and its existence are evident (ẓāhir), yet the existence of its creator is no less evident by that logic, though the Creator Himself (as al-dhāt: the Self) is hidden (bāṭin). Thus the Divine Self is both evident and hidden, outward and inward, ẓāhir and bāṭin: its existence is absolutely evident, though the Self as such is hidden. And yet, the Self and its existence are strictly identical! This is what causes perplexity (ḥayra) of human mind, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: the one splits into two, though there is, of course, no split in the Divine Self.

As for His being «the Outward and the Inward (57:3)», you should know that He is Outward (ẓāhir) evident because of the existence (wujūd), for any emerging (ka‘ūn) and possible (mumkin) thing, as you can see, necessarily points to (dalîl) His existence (wujūd), fixedness (ḥabībat), truth (ḥaqiqāt) and immutableness (†aqqāt) and immutableness [...] The most evident thing (laṣṣ al-ashaṣṣ) for the mind is that He is the Creator of all those created things and that He precedes them, and you have learned that the mind is perplexed (ḥayra) and bewildered (dahshā) by the knowledge of that firstness (awwalīyya). So what we have exposed above testifies that the Holy Lord is the First and the Last, the Outward (al-ẓāhir) and the Inward (al-bāṭin) (57:3)» (Al-Rāzī 2000: 185–186).

Coming to Ibn ‘Arabi (1980: 72), we discover that in the third chapter of Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam he says that the perplexity (ḥayra) is caused by «multiplication of the One by facets (wujūh) and correlations (nisāb)».

Hayra perplexity is with no exaggeration the pivotal epistemological concept for Ibn ‘Arabi. It is important to bear in mind that for him perplexity is a positive, not a negative, notion. That is, to be perplexed does not mean «to be deprived» of something, let us say, to be deprived of certainty, or to be deprived of truth. Rather, to be perplexed means «to possess». The question is: to possess what?

Let me expand the context of quotation a little. Ibn ‘Arabi comments on the Qur’ānic verse »They have already misled many» (71:24). He explains that those words of Nūḥ mean: »They have perplexed them in the multiplication of the One by facets and correlations (hayyarū-hum fi ta‘dād al-wāḥîd bi-l-wujūh wa-l-nisāb) (ibid.). The preposition in (fi) is not ›by‹ (bi) as one could expect – is used here on purpose. Ibn ‘Arabi does not speak exclusively about epistemology, he means ontology as well. Hayra indicates not just perplexity in one’s knowledge, hayra implies as well perplexity in one’s beings. As Ibn ‘Arabi puts it: »The [Universal] Order is perplexity, and perplexity is agitation and movement, and movement is life (al-`umr ḥīra wa-l-ḥīra qalaq wa ḥarakata wa-l-ḥarakata ḥayyū – ibid.: 199–200; see also 73).»

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\[\text{Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1980.}\]
Now, can we grasp this movement, this onto-epistemological ḥayra by any philosophical concept? I think the answer is positive. Ḥayra is the movement between the two opposites which presuppose each other and make sense only in conjunction; this is why the movement from one to the other is endless since those two opposites can only be together, and by this constant transition from the one to the other is the Universal Order constituted. The Universal Order is dynamic, not static; it is a process, not a substance.

Those two opposites are God and the world, al-Ḥaqq (The True) and al-Khalq (The Creation). Those two notions are perhaps the most general ones, and the ḥayra-like transition between them is exemplified by many other, more particular, pairs of opposites, for example, ʿabd ›slave‹ and rabb ›lord‹ (ibid.: 74), and the movement and transition between them. This is why ḥayra is the very truth itself, since this movement is the basic principle of the Universe.

Let me take another step and make another generalisation. Al-Ḥaqq and al-Khalq are the ›inward‹ (bāṭin) and the ›outward‹ (ẓāhir) aspects of the Universal Order. Ḥayra means constant movement from the outward to the inward and visa versa with no final stop point. This fundamental ontological principle accounts for Ibn ʿArabi’s theory of causality, his ethics, and anthropology (to name only some aspects of his teachings). Taking up any being (any zūra ›form‹, to use Ibn ʿArabi’s terminology), the Greatest Shaykh treats it through the logic of ẓāhir-bāṭin-correlation and transition. He thus discloses meanings otherwise not evident in it.

Let me summarise. The question was posed above: to be in ḥayra means to possess what? Now we can answer it. It means to be capable of transition between ẓāhir and bāṭin aspects of the Universal Order and the ability to place any being in this ẓāhir-bāṭin-transition. Thus the ultimate truth of the thing in question is disclosed: it boils down to the stability of the ẓāhir-bāṭin dynamics, that is, the unchanging, though dynamic, linkage of its outward and inward, its visible appearance and invisible meanings.

In this section, I have attempted to develop a framework to understand the ẓāhir-bāṭin relationship. But what light does this framework shed on Islamic ornament, and by implication, Islamic aesthetics? Within the scope of this paper, I will apply this framework on one ornamental art piece as a test case.

3 Applying ẓāhir-bāṭin paradigm to Islamic ornament: A Test Case

Now let us move on to Islamic ornament. Can the idea of ẓāhir-bāṭin-transition further our understanding of what Islamic ornament is? Al-Jābirī did not touch upon Islamic aesthetics in his Critique. If he is right in saying that the ẓāhir-bāṭin paradigm lies at the core of Islamic sciences, then we are justified in putting the question in the following way: does this paradigm explain anything in the realm of Islamic art? Is it relevant for understanding what it is about? Of course, within the scope of this paper any such treatment would have to be cursory. However, I think that this paradigm can at least in part be meaningfully applied to this subject.

Let us have a look at the coloured cover page of the Qur’an created in Maghrib in the eighteenth century (Illustration 1). This is simply one example of an intricate and charming geometrical ornament. It is no exaggeration to say that such designs are plenty across the vast lands of Islam.

This ornament is composed of coloured veins changing their colour after each intersection. I shall argue that such ornaments are based on the ẓāhir-bāṭin-paradigm of construction and perception. Its distinct multi-colouredness makes it very clear that the ornamental pattern is not apparent at once. It is not grasped, so to say, at a glance. Had we been seeking such an overall pattern, an overall image to be perceived right away in this ornament, our efforts would have fallen short of this goal. There appears to be no complete figure (circle, triangle, or the like) in this pattern. Indeed, no vein retains its

32 As Eva Bayer has observed, »the problem begins […] with the definition of ornament itself«, whether it refers only to non-figural and aniconoclastic art or the term has a broader sense, and whether ornament has to be understood as mere ornamentation and embellishment or it »tells us something comprehensible« (Bayer 1998: 1). I think the last is true and will provide my answer with reference to geometrical kind of ornament (E. Bayer, Islamic Ornament, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

33 For further examples of similar patterns which incorporate epigraphic elements and vegetable motifs, see Addendum, Illustrations 2–4.

34 Such patterns have a strict and precise initial geometrical design consisting of circles and straight lines, of which only some sections are painted out to produce patterns in which this geometry stays hidden, not manifested. This is another way of interpreting the geometrical ornament through ẓāhir-bāṭin paradigm, where the initial complete design plays the part of the inward, and the manifested pattern is the out-
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A. Smirnov

Illustration 1: Central part of the Qurʾān created for Moroccan prince in 1729, National Library, Cairo (M. Lings, The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 114).

colour as it intersects with another one; emerging after some time of running beneath, it changes its colour as if suggesting an interruption of this successive movement. Noticing it we cannot but recall Ibn ʿArabi’s words: »The one who follows the stretched path is biased and misses the desired goal« (Ibn ʿArabi 21980: 73).

The Greatest Shaykh speaks about ḥayra as opposed to the ›stretched path‹ of discourse and argument organised according to Aristotelian principles of rationality. This ornament appears to be an illustration of this idea. The colour contrast seems to be aimed at splitting the image into the domain of evident and manifested, and the domain of veiled, covered, and hidden. The first appears as ḥāhir, standing in front before our eyes, while the second seems to step behind, hiding beneath and constituting the bāṭin of the image. This ḥāhir-bāṭin-contrast is underpinned by a colour distinction. However, it is no less important for the other ornaments as well, and the multi-colouredness is only an additional means to stress and accent this ḥāhir-bāṭin-structure.

Such interrupted-colour strapwork ornaments were famous in Islamic culture. A special term was coined to denote such kind of workmanship. It was called mujazza‘ ›of interrupted colour‹. The word mujazza‘ is explained in Lisān al-ʿarab (n.y.: 48) as muqattā‘ bi-alwān mukhtalifa ›cut by different colours‹, where, for example, white is interrupted by black, and its origin is jaz‘ which means cutting a rope or a stick into two halves or two parts (but not pinching off the end of it). This explanation agrees nicely with the nature of the interrupted-colour strapwork ornament constituted by coloured veins which look as if they were cut in two.

›Cutting in two‹ seems to be the basic meaning of jaz‘, and examples provided by Ibn Manẓūr testify to that: kharaz mujazza‘ ›two-coloured beads‹ (usually black and white), laḥm mujazza‘ ›red-and-white meat‹ (meat of partially altered colour), or metaphorical jaza‘ used for ḥuzn ›misery‹ because misery ›cuts‹ the human being off his concerns (ibid.). Though mostly associated with colour interruption and colour discontinuity, mujazza‘ may mean as well any splitting into two parts irrespective of colour or any sensual perception.

› Interruption‹ and ›discontinuity‹ are negative terms implying only the absence, the lack of something (lack of integrality, lack of continuity). I argue that they are therefore inadequate for understanding what the mujazza‘ ornament does convey to the spectator, rather than saying what it does not do. The positive content of ṭajzī‘ ›cutting into two‹ is, to my mind, represented by the procedure of building up the ḥāhir-bāṭin structure for sensual perception. The col-

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other one, hides the cut-off piece from the view, turning it into the
ḥāṭin (hidden, inward) in relation to the vein which the view follows
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cess and the aesthetical meaning of mujazza‘ ornament.

Thus continuity is brought into the perception of the ornament.
It is the continuity of ẓāhir-bāṭin-transition movement, and the more
intricate and multi-optional such transition is, the more beautiful the
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culture.

The mujazza‘ ornament was distinguished in Islamic thought
from other kinds of decoration and embellishment, and especially
from imported mosaic (fusayfisā‘ or mufaqasā). A special term, as
we have seen, was used to denote the mujazza‘ ornament and to con-
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pleasure and delight the ornament brings to the spectator.

Let me quote a couple of evidences for such kind of ornament
perception the classical Islamic literature provides us with. Giving
account of al-Ḥijr (a location near Ka‘ba inside the Mecca mosque),
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(rukḥām mujazza‘ muqaṭṭa‘) which covers some parts of the walls
and the yards. He does not spare a word to express his rapture and
admiration of it:

36 That kind of ẓāhir-bāṭin-linking and the perception has to be differentiated from
the ambiguity and flip-flopping involved in Gestalt images. The ẓāhir-bāṭin kind of
perception is complete when the new, third entity is perceived as a linkage between the
two, the manifest (ẓāhir) and the hidden (bāṭin). The transcendence to that third
entity is the transcendence to the beauty and to the truth. There is no figure-back-
ground ambiguity involved here.

37 Ibn Jubayr was a famous traveller and author of the »Rihla« ('The Travels'), who
depicted the lands of Egypt, Arabia, Iraq and Syria.
our change in the vein, paralleled by the vein’s hiding beneath the other one, hides the cut-off piece from the view, turning it into the *bāṭin* (hidden, inward) in relation to the vein which the view follows until it gets interrupted and which is manifested (*zāhir*-outwards) to the immediate perception. Then the linkage by the two differently coloured veins is constructed, and reconstructed in ever new combinations, in the process of sensual perception by the educated spectator.

This two-layer structure, I suppose, is perceived as *zāhir*-bāṭin*-correlation*, and the movement between those two layers, the *zāhir* and the *bāṭin* one, and transition from the one to the other and backward, constitutes, so to say, the *content* of ornament perception process and the aesthetical meaning of *mujazza*’ ornament.

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It was put together in amazing order (*intīzām*), miraculous arrangement (*ta’liif*) of exceptional perfection, superb incrustation (*taṣrīf*) and colour discontinuity (*taṣāfī*), excellent composition and disposition (*tarīk bī wa raṣf*). When one looks at all those curves, intersections, circles, chess-like figures and the other [patterns] of various kinds, the gaze is arrested by this beauty (*ḥūsn*), as if it sends one on a journey (*ṣūfīlu-hu*) through the spread flowerers of different colours (Ibn Jubayr n.y.: 75).38

The word *ijāla* which I render here as ‘-sending on a journey-’ means also ‘-to send around,-’ ‘to put in a circular movement.’ Once again, we cannot but recall Ibn ‘Arabi’s explanation of *ḥayru* as an endless circular movement. In both cases, in the highly sophisticated theoretical discourse of Ibn ‘Arabi and in the account of immediate sensual perception of *mujazza*’ ornament by the traveller Ibn Jubayr, the circular movement is the movement between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects, and its endlessness, expressed by its circularity (but not caused by it), is grounded in the logic of *zāhir*-bāṭin*-correlation*, as *zāhir* and *bāṭin* make sense only together and only due to mutual transition, so that the movement from the one to the other and back is, so to say, the core of their life and being.

If *zāhir*-bāṭin structure is complicated enough, contemplation of the ornament becomes not just pure sensual perception and delight, it grows into a contemplation similar to theoretical meditation worthy of a sage. Speaking about *al-Jāmi*’ al-‘Umawī, the famous Omeyyad mosque in Damascus, al-Muqaddasi, the greatest geographer of the tenth century, leaves his dry and barren style of technical survey of dimensions, positions and directions and suddenly expresses sincere feeling of admiration:

The most amazing thing there is the arrangement of interrupted-colour marble (*rukhām mujazza*), each *shāma*39 to its counterpart (*kull shāma ilā ‘akhti-hā*). If a man of wisdom goes to visit it for a whole year he would derive from it a new formula (*ṣīgha*) and a new knot (*‘uqda*) every day (Al-Muqaddasi 1980: 146).40

The *‘uqda* (‘-knot-’) is the *zāhir*-bāṭin-interlacing point. This interlacing is, so to say, an apex of *zāhir*-bāṭin-transition movement, since it

37 Shāma means ‘mole’ or any colour spot contrasting the surroundings.
is a place where zāhir and bāṭin meet immediately and directly. It is no wonder that such a place is perceived as a sort of a generating centre for the new sīgha, as al-Muqaddasi puts it. The word sīgha is usually rendered into English as ‘formula’. Perhaps it is not the best translation in this case, since ‘formula’ is associated with ‘form’, while sīgha is not sūra (Arabic equivalent of ‘form’). Speaking of mājaza’s ornament, Ibn Jubayr and al-Muqaddasi use shakl and sīgha, whereas, according to Arabic authors, ḥusayfisā’s mosaic presents us with sīwar ‘forms’-41. The difference between the two is the difference between perception through zāhir-bāṭin-transition-and-movement – and perception ‘at a glance’, perception of the evident, of the manifested form only.

Al-Muqaddasi speaks of the man of wisdom (rajul al-ḥikma). This takes us again to the concept of truth. Genuine truth, in this reading, can hardly be detached from the genuine beauty, that is, they do not exist separately, there is a very close relation between the two. Now we can see how exactly such a relation is perceived. The zāhir-bāṭin-transition discloses the truth of the thing in question when we, transcending both the outward and the inward, elevate ourselves to their linkage, which is the third entity (as is case of al-Haqq-al-Khalq correlation in Ibn ‘Arabi’s philosophy, as well as in many other cases in non-Ṣūfī thought). A deep aesthetic feeling arises out of this endless zāhir-bāṭin-transition movement which constitutes the sensual perception of a beautiful ornament. Thus truth and genuine beauty meet and become – in a sense – the same.

It is well known that the Qur’an and sunna criticise zukhruf (gold adornments), and, in a wider sense, zakhrafa (embellishments). Zakhrafa is associated on a number of occasions with tamwi‘ (‘concealment’), ṭawwir (‘distortion’), and ḥidhb (‘lie’)-42. However, this well-known position expressed in classical texts of Islamic religion does not mean an outright and absolute denial of beauty and beautiful. What is denied and denounced, I argue, is the lack of zāhir-bāṭin-concord and adequacy. In the muzakhruf thing, be it a wall or a speech-act, the evident and manifested (zāhir) does not comply with the inner (bāṭin); or, we can say, it is not possible to transit from such a zāhir to its bāṭin because the natural and normal correlation between the two has been ruined by zakhrafa of the zāhir. It is because of this disassociation between zāhir and bāṭin that zakhrafa is called ‘concealment’ and ‘lie’. However, the lack of zāhir-bāṭin-conformity is incompatible with true beauty as well.

4 Extending the zāhir-bāṭin Interpretation Model

This observation reminds us of what al-Muqaddasi said about ‘the man of wisdom’ who derives ever new designs when contemplating interrupted-colour ornament, and my hypothesis is that this kind of perception is rooted in the habit of perceiving the zāhir-bāṭin dynamic. Oleg Grabar puts forward one of the principles of Islamic ornament saying that

the ornament can best be defined as a relation between forms rather than as a sum of forms. This relationship can most often be expressed in geometric terms (Grabar 1987: 187).-43

This observation agrees well with the zāhir-bāṭin-transition principle and may be derived from it, if we interpret the ‘relation’ as a zāhir-bāṭin dynamic movement. Moreover, it helps clear up some age-long misreadings of Islamic ornament in Western scholarship, such as the ‘horror vacui’ principle presumably characteristic of Islamic ornament. Nasr’s (1987: 186–187) argument against this presumption is more than persuasive, as he stresses that ‘the arabesque enables the void to enter into the very heart of matter‘ (ibid.: 186).-44 Islamic ornament is perceived and contemplated not as a figure against back-

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42 See Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-‘arab, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.y., 9: 132–133). The other meaning of zakhrafa is ‘perfection’ (kamal) and ‘beauty’ (zinā).
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4 Extending the zāhir-bāṭin Interpretation Model  
Beyond the Test Case

Zāhir-bāṭin-transition may be used as a good explanatory model for different ways of describing the distinctive traits of Islamic ornament. Eva Bayer says that its richness and variabilities stem from subdivisions and linear extensions of the geometric network and from continuous interlocking and overlapping of forms that bring about new sub-units and new shapes (Bayer 1998: 125–126).

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ground, which is in fact a goes-without-saying-presumption for the Greek-rooted artistic tradition. Nasr’s argument may be with full right considered through the ṣāhir-bāṭin-interpretation model, so that the void, the material, the opposite of the Divine is taken as a counterpart of the figural, the spiritual, or the Divine: the two come interlocked together, and the ornament as such a ṣāhir-bāṭin-construction is a complete dynamic unit which lacks nothing. To understand Islamic ornament we have to delve into it and realize its inner ṣāhir-bāṭin-movement, instead of looking at it as a complete static unit, as a figure against background.

Logic is something that provides access to the truth, and the truth is something for the wise to seek. As we have seen, Ibn ‘Arabi’s ḥayra is a constant, unceasing ṣāhir-bāṭin-movement which is the truth: Truth is dynamic by its nature, and it is only the dynamic involved in the ṣāhir-bāṭin mutual correspondence that provides unchanging stability to it (like the stability of a bicycle rider whose movement stays stable in spite of her weaving back and forth or from side to side). Building up more bāṭin layers of meaning results in providing a greater dynamic and therefore more truth and stability: a real thing to do for a wise man. If European culture and history of art in general sees in Islamic ornament nothing more than embellishment, it is only because it is looking – by default – for vorgêndes bilde, pre-existing eternal and static idea and therefore misses its rhythm, its dynamic ṣāhir-bāṭin-transcendence-to-the-truth nature.

Several authors have noted that the unity of Islamic art cannot be explained by uniformity of style or continuity of some pre-Islamic tradition. Then by what should it be explained? According to Burckhardt, ṣāhir-Arab art is produced by a marriage between a spiritual message with an absolute content and a certain racial inheritance which, for that very reason, no longer belongs to a racially defined collectivity but becomes a mode of expression which can, in principle, be used universally (Burckhardt 2009: 43). But what exactly is the mode of expression and does it really boil down to a mere technical media for dissemination of religious ideas? Is it something specifically religious, as Burckhardt and Nasr (and many others) claim? Or does it transcend the realm of religious ideas; does it encompass Islamicate (related to Islamic civilization but not necessarily dependent on Islam) as well as Islamic? Fadwa El Guindi (2008: 137) speaks of the rhythmicity of interweaving spatiality and temporality, claiming that a Muslim feels and lives Islam and experiences time and space in interweaving rhythm and, moreover, this is what immigrants in an adopted homeland must miss [...] despite regular praying at home and in mosque, fasting, participating in Islamic community life (ibid.: 123). This suggests that this interweaving rhythm is something beyond the specific and unchanging content of Islamic liturgy or community life, something other than it – and yet in a sense more important than it, for it represents the core of Islamic life and the unity of Islam (ibid.: xi-xii). Burckhardt and Nasr present to us a sort of essence as something that answers the question what it means to be Islamic?, while El Guindi refers to a certain kind of dynamics which is not confined to any fixed essence. Of those two types of answers, I would opt for the second. The ṣāhir-bāṭin interplay which I proposed in this paper to examine as an interpretation paradigm is not an essence in any sense of the word. If it is true that it extends itself from the Qur’anic text throughout Islamic sciences, then it is the logic supposed by that paradigm, and not any kind of essence, be it religious or secular, that explains at least some of the recurrent traits of what is referred to as Islamic and Islamicate.

To conclude: In this paper, the ṣāhir-bāṭin paradigm was traced back to the Qur’anic text. With the development of Islamic sciences it became, as al-Jābirī argued, the basic structure for building knowledge not dependent on Greek legacy, which accounts for a vast body of epistemic production in the Islamic world. I suppose that this paradigm extends itself onto non-verbal sphere as well and explains the specificity of a certain type of Islamic geometrical ornament. If the arguments developed in the paper are sound, the positive test case examined here seems promising for Islamic aesthetics in general.

43 E. Panofsky observes that for the European medieval artist art was nothing more than the materialization of a form that neither depended upon the appearance of a real object nor was called into being by the activity of a living subject; rather this form pre-existed as vorgêndes bilde (E. Panofsky, Idea: A Concept in Art History, J. J. S. Peake (transl.), Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968, p. 52).


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\(^{46}\) See for example Nasr (1987: 3–4).


Addendum


Illustration 3: Central part of the last page of the Quʾrān created in Valencia in 1182/83, Istanbul University Library (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 100).
Addendum

Illustration 2: Central part of the last page of the Qu’ran created in Morocco in 1568, British Library, London (M. Lings, The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 109).

Illustration 3: Central part of the last page of the Qu’ran created in Valencia in 1182/83, Istanbul University Library (M. Lings, The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 100).
Abstract
During the last two decades, it has become fashionable not merely to write about issues concerning the exchange of knowledge between Jesuits and China or the acquisition of goods and knowledge in the Iberian colonial empires, as was previously the case. Historians of science now direct their attention also to other areas of the globe, where such processes took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Depending on their specific expertise, they focus on Dutch trade in what is called today Southeast Asia, networks of knowledge in the Mediterranean or in the Transatlantic world or on colonial institutions in the western parts of the Spanish colonial empire. The actors relevant to these broader historical explorations are mostly men from a selected number of states in Christian Europe. The exclusion of most parts of the world, among them many parts of Europe, from these new narratives continues to be their most glaring deficit.¹ In this paper, I will highlight the continued, even if at times submerged, existence of Eurocentric views and attitudes as expressed in some highly appreciated publications of the last twenty years.

Keywords
Eurocentrism, methodologies, knowledge cultures, Asia, North Africa, history of science, Pietro della Valle, Garcia da Orta.