HISTORIES *of* ORNAMENT

FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

Edited by GÜLRU NECIPOĞLU and ALINA PAYNE

With contributions by
Michele Bacci
Anna Contadini
Thomas B. F. Cummins
Chanchal Dadlani
Daniela del Pesco
Vittoria Di Palma
Anne Dunlop
Marzia Faietti
María Judith Feliciano
Finbarr Barry Flood
Jonathan Hay
Christopher P. Heuer
Rémi Labrusse
Gülru Necipoğlu
Marco Rosario Nobile
Oya Pancaroğlu
Spyros Papapetros
Alina Payne
Antoine Picon
David Pullins
Jennifer L. Roberts
David J. Roxburgh
Hashim Sarkis
Robin Schuldenfrei
Avinoam Shalem
and Gerhard Wolf

CHAPTER 7

THE FLAW IN THE CARPET: DISJUNCTIVE CONTINUITIES AND RIEGL'S ARABESQUE

Finbarr Barry Flood

For himself, beyond doubt, the thing we were all so blank about was vividly there. It was something, I guessed, in the primal plan; something like a complex figure in a Persian carpet.

—HENRY JAMES, *THE FIGURE IN THE CARPET* (1896)

In an article on history, discourse, and discontinuity published in 1972, Michel Foucault argued against historical models that espouse weak forms of continuity by attenuating differences in and through which change is manifest. What is needed instead, Foucault argued, is to pay meticulous attention to the specificity of difference as the harbinger of discontinuity.[1]

In some ways, Foucault's comments encapsulate the method of Alois Riegl (1858–1905), the pioneer of ornament studies whose methods and conclusions continue to resonate in the recent revival of interest in ornament. Riegl's method exemplifies a mode of art historical analysis ahead of its time in its insistence on transformative continuity rather than rupture. Arguing for a continuous and vibrant development of both Byzantine and Islamic ornament from that of late antiquity, in his influential 1893 book, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (*Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*), Riegl nonetheless identified a specific moment when the two diverged, that is, when Islamic ornament took an idiosyncratic path that, according to Riegl, was to lead eventually to the characteristic convolutions of the arabesque.[2] Working with the materials available to him in the 1890s (especially Prisse d'Avennes's *L'Art arabe* [*Arab Art*] of 1877), Riegl intuited this moment of divergence in the stucco ornament of the mosque of Ahmad Ibn Tulun (fig. 7.1), built in 879 as the centerpiece of the new Egyptian capital al-Qita'i, in which, he explained, we first see "Islamic ornament begin to diverge from the Byzantine." This divergence would, he suggested, ultimately lead to the "full-fledged Islamic Arabesque," but not until the twelfth century.[3] Writing less than twenty years later, the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld followed suit, seeing the ornament in the mosque of Ibn Tulun as representing a style "in which the arabesque is presented to us for the first time in a form that is at once old-fashioned and regionally distinct, yet complete in all essential features."[4]

Ironically, it was to be Ernst Herzfeld's own excavations at the Iraqi city of Samarra beginning one year later in 1911 that would reveal what was unclear to Riegl in 1893 and to Herzfeld himself in 1910: that the ornamental stuccoes and woodwork of Ibn Tulun's Egyptian mosque emulated those developed in Samarra, the capital of the Abbasid caliphs in Iraq, in the second half of the ninth century.[5] The relationship between the stucco ornament of Samarra and that in the mosque of Ibn Tulun was first demonstrated only in 1913.[6] Despite these later qualifications to the theory, both Riegl and Herzfeld's identification of the embryonic arabesque in Abbasid vegetal ornament has won general acceptance in subsequent scholarship.[7]

Although its intuitive originality can hardly be doubted, Riegl's "scientific" treatment of the arabesque in *Stilfragen* and later works also reveals the limitations of his teleological history of ornament. The problem

Fig. 7.1. Details of the stucco ornament in the Mosque of Ahmad Ibn Tulun, completed 879. In Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Siemens, 1893), figs. 165–66.

7.2a

7.2b

Fig. 7.2. (a) Detail of the border of a Safavid carpet. In Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (1893), fig. 195. (b) Fragment of the border of a Safavid silk carpet, sixteenth century, similar to that reproduced in Riegl's *Stilfragen*.

appears most clearly in a discussion of ornament on Islamic carpets, which occupied a special place among Riegl's interests. This interest stemmed from his tenure as curator at the k.k. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna, where the collection offered rich material for the early development of his work on ornament, which found expression in a still under-studied monograph on Islamic carpets.[8] It was also galvanized by his rejection of the theories of the architectural historian Gottfried Semper (d. 1879) and his followers, which emphasized the determining role of materials and their associated techniques in artistic development, and which located the origins of architectural form in the carpet. By contrast, Riegl saw in the carpet a constellation of ornamental motifs that demonstrated the operation of *Kunstwollen* (literally, art-will), the locomotive force through which formal transformation affected the evolution of ornament.[9]

The relevant passage appears toward the end of the discussion of the arabesque in *Stilfragen*. While analyzing a specific type of border ornament found on carpets produced in sixteenth-century Iran under the rule of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) (fig. 7.2), Riegl is at pains to explain the presence of a "naturalistic" vegetal tendril ornament in the form of what he calls a "calyx-palmette" (*ein Kelchpalmette*).[10] His unusually extensive treatment of this single motif right at the end of his discussion of the arabesque reflects the fact that the formal hybridity of the carpet, its perceived combination of abstract and naturalistic vegetal ornament, threatened to undermine the forward-oriented march of ornament from Hellenic naturalism to Islamic abstraction under the elusive but dynamic regime of *Kunstwollen*. Addressing this potential rupture in his teleological scheme, Riegl insisted that "we can hardly explain the naturalizing palmettes [of these Persian carpets] as a direct

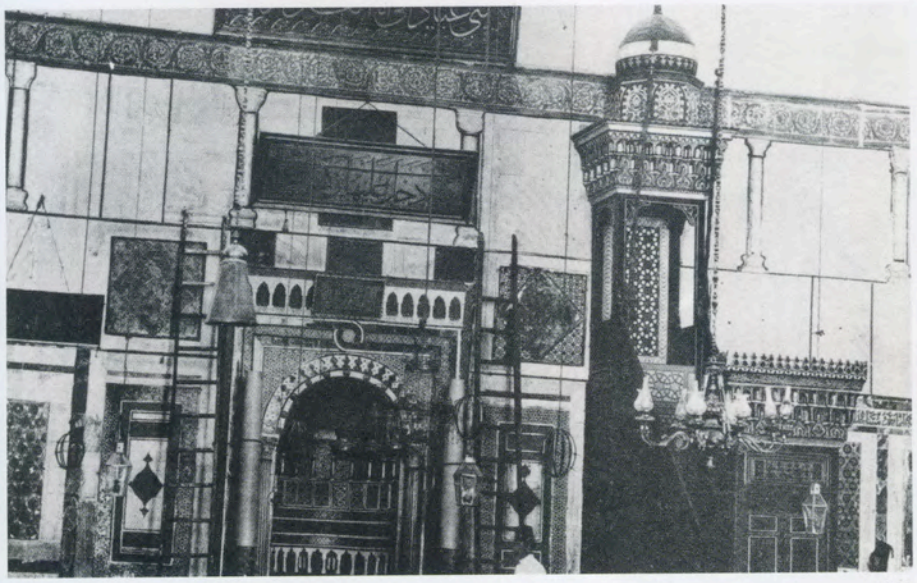
artistic and formal development from earlier [more stylized] arabesque ornaments." Instead, Riegl admitted of only two logical possibilities: either they represent a local development that ran parallel to the abstractions of the arabesque, or these features represent an intrusive element whose roots lie "outside the realm of Persian and Islamic art." He offered a solution somewhere in between these two scenarios, arguing parallel evolutionary trajectories for the two distinct forms of vegetal ornament found on the carpet. While one form of vegetal ornament—the arabesque—represents an evolved or transformed mode of late antique vegetal ornament, the other—the "calyx-palmette"—was transmitted from Roman and Sasanian art with its morphological features barely altered. Riegl writes: "Both kinds of vegetal tendril ornament—one basically two-dimensional, the other more sculptural, one allied with Arabesque decoration, the other naturalistic—coexisted side by side with each other in mature Islamic art, just as they always had in antiquity and the early medieval period, above all in those techniques that were tightly bound by tradition. The second—or sculptural-naturalistic type—was such that it led directly from late Roman overlapping acanthus leaf calyces to the calyx-palmettes on carpets made in the royal workshops of sixteenth-century Persia."[11]

If I labor Riegl's convoluted attempts to explain away cases of "naturalism" in later Islamic vegetal ornament, it is because his ingenious attempt to preserve his evolutionary framework in the face of empirical evidence that appeared to undermine it acknowledges the possibility of different origins, diachronic rates of change and even differential temporal trajectories for modes of vegetal ornament that appear in combination on a single artifact.[12]

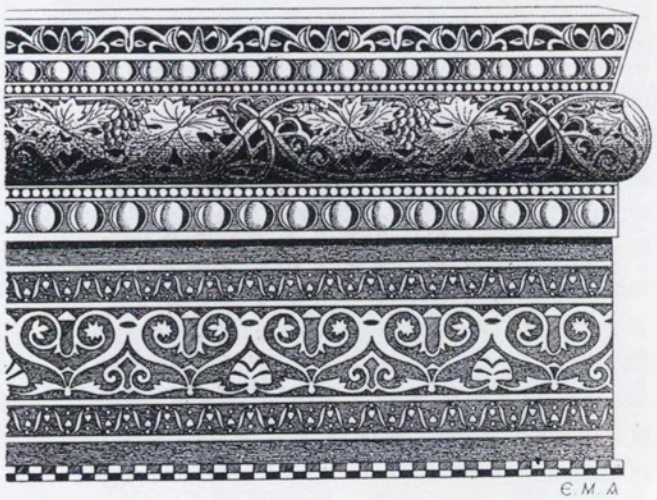
Riegl's concern with the apparently disjunctive constellation of abstract and naturalistic vegetal ornament on early modern Iranian carpets draws attention to a characteristic phenomenon or series of phenomena in the ornament of the Islamic world that might be analyzed under the broad rubric of "disjunctive continuity." In the carpet that Riegl analyzes, the combination of features that he sees as genealogically and morphologically distinct constitutes (in his eyes at least) a kind of parataxis manifest as disjunct form. It is *formal* parataxis that interests me here, but one could conceivably accommodate aspects of spatial relations or ornamental syntax, function, medium, or even technique under the rubric of disjunctive continuity. It is, for example, a hallmark of some early, probably Umayyad, Qur'an manuscripts in which canonical architectonic elements such as arcades and columns common to the illuminations of earlier sacred texts are deployed in noncanonical ways, including ways that subvert their natural function and structural logic.[13] In Umayyad art (661–750), these kinds of disjunctive continuities appear at both the macro level of built architecture and the micro level of architectonic motifs deployed as ornament in representation. Their role in conferring distinction within the parameters of a preexisting ornamental vocabulary reminds us that there are specific moments in the history of Islamic ornament when the disjunctive manipulation of established forms and ornamental syntax can be integral to the reification of identity in visual terms.[14]

In other cases, disjunctive continuities arise from the anachronistic emulation or revival of resonant ornamental forms that evoke specific monuments, places, or times in an attempt to evoke temporal and spatial distance. Examples include the revival of glass mosaic by the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries after the art had apparently been defunct in that region for several hundred years, a revival that can be directly linked to Mamluk interest in the early Islamic monuments of Syria.[15] The emulation of a celebrated early-eighth-century carved marble vine frieze found in the Great Mosque of Damascus (fig. 7.3a) in a series of Mamluk funerary monuments built in Damascus and Cairo is another case in point.[16] The original eighth-century vine frieze in Damascus may *itself* have been both temporally and spatially disjunctive, inspired as it probably was by a carved marble vine molding in the sixth-century church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (fig. 7.3b), a feature significant enough to have been eulogized in Paul the Silentiary's well-known ekphrasis of the building.[17] A millennium after the completion of Hagia Sophia, the potency of this minor detail of a Byzantine ornamental ensemble (or of similar friezes in other sixth-century Constantinopolitan churches such as the church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus) was still sufficient to inspire a similar carved or painted frieze in the superstructure of the mosque built for the Ottoman grand vizier Rüstem Pasha in Istanbul in 1563 (fig. 7.3c).

In all of these examples, we are dealing with disjunctive continuities that stake a claim to a particular locale or tradition through a temporal or spatiotemporal



7.3a



E. M. A

7.3b

7.3c

Fig. 7.3. (a) Detail of the ornament along the qibla wall of the Friday Mosque of Damascus (715) before the fire of 1893, showing a carved marble vine frieze. (b) Drawn detail of the carved marble ornament in the narthex of the Church of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (562), showing a continuous vine frieze. (c) Detail of the ornament in the superstructure of the Mosque of Rüstem Pasha, Istanbul (1563), showing a continuous carved and painted vegetal frieze.

displacement of ornament. In other cases, the disjunctive deployment of ornamental forms can be less topographically specific but no less culturally charged. A good example can be found in the early-eighth-century Umayyad palace of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi in the northern desert of Syria, in which two painted floors were juxtaposed at the base of staircases that lay to either side of the main entrance (fig. 7.4). As has often been noted, one makes use of strongly classicizing or Hellenizing imagery, the other draws upon a strongly Sasanianizing repertoire.[18] However, especially striking about what are surely presented as culturally specific analogues is the fact that the staging of difference is not confined to the realm of figural iconography—the satyrs and figure of Gaia on the one hand juxtaposed with the Sasanianizing hunter, ribbons streaming from his diadem and belt, on the other—but is also manifest at the micro-level of border ornament. In one case, the scenes are framed by a scrolling vine of a variety typically found in sixth- and seventh-century Syrian floor mosaics. In the other, the border is formed by the grid-like repetition of a rosette composed of alternating rounded and pointed petals, a motif commonly found in Sasanian art (fig. 7.5). Although Sasanianizing ornament was known in sixth-century Byzantium,[19] thus confounding any absolute distinction between Byzantine and Sasanian ornamental modes, the care taken here to ensure the internal coherence and consistency of each scene within what were apparently recognized as distinct visual traditions suggests a high degree of self-reflexivity with regard to the consumption of forms and iconographies made available to Umayyad elites by the conquest of Byzantine Syria and incorporation of the former territories of the Sasanian Empire.[20] In the painted floors, the forms, figural iconographies, and ornamental themes identified with the two major antecedent traditions to which the Umayyads lay claim were juxtaposed rather than merged, staged in a self-reflexive parataxis that operates even at the micro-level of border ornament.[21]

In the Islamic world, at least, the paratactic staging of disjunct ornamental modes is often associated with art produced in the wake of radical geopolitical change. It is, for example, a particular hallmark of the carved stone and brick ornament produced in the territories of the Ghurid sultans of Afghanistan during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, when their armies were ranging eastward into North India for the first time. Both the brick ornament of monumental tombs built by the Ghurids in the Indus Valley and the carved marble panels of contemporary cenotaphs produced in Afghanistan often stage a formal juxtaposition between two modes of vine ornament: one loose, scrolling, organic; the other, tighter, more symmetrical and stylized. One mode of rendering vegetation finds antecedents in North Indian stone carving, while the other perpetuates the conventions of eastern Iranian brick ornament. The juxtaposition of distinct modalities of vine ornament on the same frame suggests a deliberate staging of parataxis, which, I have argued elsewhere, reflects a contemporary receptivity toward imported or novel forms, a kind of twelfth-century Afghan Orientalism avant la lettre, as it were.[22] The discontinuities on which this reception depends are rooted in new patterns of circulation and consumption engendered by campaigns of military conquest and the displacements and opportunities that they occasioned, making available new stylistic choices even in the Afghan heartland of the Ghurid sultanate.

The same is of course true of the so-called calyx-palmettes in Riegl's carpet, which, despite his reading of them as a Roman survival in early modern Iranian art, were in fact the legacy of a wave of Sinicizing ornament, a vogue for chinoiserie emblematized by the proliferation of lotus and peony motifs, which first entered the repertoires of textile weavers, painters, metalworkers and stone carvers from Iran to Egypt in the wake of the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century (fig. 7.6). These motifs were later disseminated throughout the eastern Islamic lands with the spread of what has been dubbed the "Timurid International Style" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[23] By the sixteenth century, when Riegl's carpet was produced in Safavid Iran, such elements of chinoiserie had long been naturalized in Persianate art. It is, therefore, doubtful whether the distinction between indigenous and exogenous or abstract and naturalistic vegetal ornament that Riegl is at pains to rationalize away would have struck a sixteenth-century observer as disjunctive in the way that it did Riegl, concerned as he was with constructing a dynamic but nonetheless teleological taxonomy of ornament.[24]

Nevertheless, parataxis need not always entail self-reflexivity at the level of cultural or regional metonymy in order for it to be operative at the level of aesthetic effect. The phenomenon of ornamental parataxis is, in fact, directly relevant to the history of the arabesque

7.4a

7.4b

Fig. 7.4. Excavation drawings of two painted floors from the Umayyad palace of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi in northern Syria, ca. 720.

7.5a

Fig. 7.5a–b. Details of the border ornaments of the painted floors seen in figure 7.4.

7.5b

Fig. 7.6. Detail of carved marble frieze in the tomb of Sultan Hasan, 1363, Cairo. Lotus and peony motifs show the impact of forms of chinoiserie disseminated as a result of contact with Ilkhanid Iran.

itself, the broader rubric under which Riegl's analysis of "naturalism" in Safavid carpets is offered. Although Riegl and others after him located the protohistory of the arabesque in the abstracted styles of vegetal ornament developed in Abbasid Iraq (or, at least, their provincial manifestations in Egypt), the highly stylized modes of vegetal ornament that Riegl and Herzfeld identified in the Ibn Tulun stuccoes (see fig. 7.1) represented only one possible developmental trajectory for late antique vine ornament. As every student of Islamic art knows, excavations at Samarra, from whence the inspiration for Ibn Tulun's mosque undoubtedly hailed, produced evidence for three distinct modes of treating vegetal ornament in the stucco dadoes of the ninth-century houses and palaces executed at the site. These have been dubbed (somewhat unimaginatively) Styles A, B, and C (although "mode" may be more appropriate than "style"), each characterized by an increasing degree of abstraction and a shifting relationship between subject and ground (fig. 7.7).[25]

Following Riegl's lead, it has become something of a commonplace to see in the geometricized stylization of Style C (the so-called beveled style) the ancestor of the arabesque. Although there is, as far as I know, no solid evidence for all three styles being juxtaposed, it is clear that two distinct styles or modes sometimes coexisted in the same space. In several houses at Samarra, the same space was, for example, ornamented with modes of vine ornament executed in both Styles A and B.[26] Indeed, in some cases, vine elements rendered in these two modes appear together, even within the same stucco panel (fig. 7.8). These examples of parataxis are unlikely to entail the self-reflexive invocation of distinct artistic and/or cultural traditions in the manner of the painted floors from Qasr al-Hayr (see figs. 7.4, 7.5), but they certainly exploited its formal possibilities for ornamental effect, a point to which I will return below.

This staging of disjunction through the use of distinct kinds of vine ornament is equally characteristic of certain portable artifacts produced in Abbasid Iraq. It finds its most monumental expression on the so-called Basra Ewer, one of the earliest and most dramatic extant examples of early Islamic metalwork. Standing 65 cm high and weighing more than 10 kg, the cast copper alloy vessel consists of a tapering conical foot, an ovoid gadrooned body, cylindrical neck, and zoomorphic handle, cast in as a single piece (fig. 7.9). The rim of the vessel is adorned with ambiguous zoomorphic vegetation and an incised inscription giving the name of the maker, Ibn or Abu Yazid; the place where the ewer was produced (the southern Iraqi city of Basra); and the date, to which I will return shortly. The form and some aspects of the decoration of the ewer associate it with a group produced in Iran and Iraq during the late Sasanian or early Islamic period, but at twice the size of the nearest comparable vessels, the Basra ewer is the superlative example of the group.[27]

There is much to be said about this spectacular object, which in its combination of vegetal, zoomorphic, and epigraphic elements might be considered paradigmatic. Here, I want to draw attention to the juxtaposition on the neck and foot, and on the body, respectively, of distinct modes of vine ornament, whose differences in conception, form, orientation, and technique emphasize the tripartite structure of the vessel. On the body, the gadroons are incised with vertically

7.7a

Fig. 7.7. (a) Detail of a ninth-century stucco dado from Samarra showing Style A–type ornament. (b) Detail of a ninth-century stucco dado from Samarra showing Style B–type ornament. (c) Detail of a ninth-century stucco dado from Samarra showing Style C–type ornament.

7.7b

7.7c

Fig. 7.8. Detail of a ninth-century stucco dado from Samarra on which modes of ornament traditionally identified as Styles A and B appear together.

rising trefoil leaves. By contrast, the foot and neck are encircled by a single panel of stylized vegetation expanding horizontally (fig. 7.10). Neck and body are associated by the repetition of a small gadrooned section intervening between two zones of abstracted vegetal ornament on the neck, whose vegetal ornament is linked to that on the foot by a common use of drilling; that on the neck is, however, organized around a series of vertical axes that do not structure the similar ornament on the foot. The form of this ornament, including its stylization, lack of distinction between subject and ground, its infinite expansion across a horizontal surface, and the technique of its execution—most obviously the characteristic drill points absent from the vines on the body—suggest a relation to the more modeled beveled style or Style C stucco dadoes from Samarra, whose characteristic forms were disseminated throughout the Islamic world in the ninth and tenth centuries in media ranging from carved wood to ceramics and glass.[28] These distinct or disjunct modes of vegetal ornament are here deployed to great effect, articulating while parsing the morphological features of the vessel without entirely disaggregating them.

Recognizing the relationship of the Basra Ewer to Samarra ornament, however, gives rise to a problem if one would like to see in its abstract vegetal ornament a reflection of the ornamental styles developed in Iraq between roughly 850 and 900. The Basra Ewer is inscribed on its rim with a date that can be read variously as 67 or 69, a CE equivalent of 686/87 or 688/89. If one takes the date at face value, the ewer was produced two hundred years before the appearance of the Samarran style vegetal ornament. For this reason, most scholars have assumed the omission of the word *mi'atan* or "two hundred" from the end of the inscription, preferring to redate the ewer to 879/80 or 882. The problem of dating lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but it seems that the main reason for doubting the date inscribed on the ewer is its potential to undermine the evolutionary taxonomy that still governs our understanding of the development of early Islamic ornament. Yet, in place of Riegl's teleological scheme in which late antique vine ornament morphed into the beveled style around the ninth century, and thereafter transmuted into the arabesque, more recent research has underlined the need to consider the genealogies of the three modes of vine ornament manifest so clearly in Samarra as distinct and probably deriving from different sources rather than as the outcome of a singular and linear teleological development.[29]

It may be that ornamental modes already developed in different regions of the Abbasid empire were catalyzed, canonized, and monumentalized in the massive palatial projects undertaken in Abbasid Iraq, a

Fig. 7.9. (left) The Basra Ewer, ninth century (?), Iraq. Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi.

Fig. 7.10. (below) Details of the Basra Ewer showing distinct modes of vine ornament juxtaposed on different areas of the vessel. Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi.

development possibly facilitated by corvée labor and the assembly of artisans and from different regions for work on caliphal projects. Stucco ornament carved with vine ornament similar to Style A stuccoes from Samarra has, for example, been found in earlier Abbasid palaces at Raqqa and other sites in Syria, while stuccos of the Haji Piyada (Noh Gumbad) Mosque at Balkh in Afghanistan, which show a relationship to Style A and B stuccos at Samarra, have recently been redated to the 790s, several decades before the foundation of the caliphal capital, suggesting a more complex genealogy for the Samarra stuccos than usually assumed.[30] In addition, as Terry Allen and others pointed out several years ago, the spirit of Style C ornament from Samarra is anticipated in some late antique carved marbles produced in northern Syria.[31] A relationship to the beveled style of Samarra is also apparent in a series of famous alabaster capitals from Raqqa in northern Syria, whether one dates them to the period around 800 when Raqqa served as the Abbasid capital or, as seems more likely,

to a later reinvestment of the site by the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim in 223/837–38.[32] Although rarely noted, even these capitals show distinct and disjunct treatments of vegetal ornament ranging from geometricized stylizations of naturalistic acanthus to frank expressions of the beveled style.

The presence in Samarra of Syrian stone worked by masons from Latakia is recorded by the chroniclers, raising the possibility that late antique and early Islamic Syrian stone carving provided the necessary (although not necessarily sufficient) conditions for the emergence of the beveled style in ninth-century Iraq.[33] Support for the suggestion may be found in recent research on the decoration of the Samarra palaces, which suggests that the beveled style was originally specific to marble or wood, with its application to a broader range of media (including stucco) at Samarra representing the adaptive expansion of an existing ornamental mode.[34] Even if the early stages of the beveled style are to be sought in Syrian stone carving, the reasons for its adoption and monumentalization in Abbasid Iraq require explanation. While Styles A and B were sometimes mixed together on the same stucco panel at Samarra, Style C or beveled style ornament is never conjoined with the other ornamental modes on the same dado, suggesting that it enjoyed a certain distinction.[35] It has been suggested that the ambiguous treatment of natural vegetal forms in the beveled style, and its elimination of the distinction between figure and ground, may be related to the rationalist theology of the Mu'tazilites who flourished in ninth-century Iraq and were opposed to the anthropomorphic interpretation of certain Qur'anic verses that appear to describe an embodied deity; insisting on the metaphorical nature of such descriptions, the Mu'tazila valorized the principle of using images of the natural world as metaphors for abstractions. Equally relevant is their espousal of atomistic theories, which held that the universe was composed of atoms and accidents; the consequent fluctuations through which the universe is sustained were, it is suggested, reflected in the visual qualities of the beveled style, its abstracted forms hovering on the borders between "intelligibility and unintelligibility, being and becoming, actuality and potentiality."[36] A related strain of interpretation points to the impact of such theological concepts on the literary and poetical traditions of Abbasid Iraq. The period when the Samarra palaces were being constructed, for example, saw the proliferation of a mode of literary figuration known as *badi'*, which in its espousal of antithesis, catachresis, dramatic juxtapositions, surprising metaphors, and plays on words encapsulated the values of impermanence and nature as metaphor that were then being promoted in contemporary speculative theology. While the impact of these ideas on the field of literary production has long been clear, it has recently been suggested that the trajectory of the visual arts in Abbasid Iraq, including the development of beveled style ornament, was deeply inflected by "*badi'* aesthetics."[37]

These hypotheses are difficult to prove, since the vectors that might have mediated between theory and practice, between the worlds of the artisans, literati and theologians, are far from obvious. Nonetheless, they raise significant questions about the potential iconographic function of early Islamic ornament, a role that has generally been marginalized (and often denied) in modern scholarship, in large measure owing to the Eurocentric biases of iconographic studies, the primacy afforded the figural, and the assumption that only the mimetic can be meaningful. By contrast, the Umayyad painted floors from Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi (see fig. 7.4), in which parataxis might be read as an expression of a self-reflexivity that exploits the cultural or historical associations of ornament, suggest that even "minor" forms of ornament could, on occasion, fulfill both aesthetic and iconographic functions. The evidence is rarely so clear-cut, however. In fact, the historiography of the beveled style or Style C ornament from Samarra highlights the nature of the problem, since it alone has attracted the attention of modern scholars attempting to offer iconographic interpretations: the potential meanings (or even potential for meaning) of Styles A and B ornament remain unexplored.

Nevertheless, given the centrality of catachresis, juxtaposition, and parataxis to the aesthetics of the *badi'* mode, the very staging of disjunct modes of vegetal ornament in close proximity may in itself be meaningful. Whether an early outlier of experiments in ornament that reached their most exuberant expression in Samarra or a provincial Iraqi reflection of these same traditions, the Basra Ewer (see figs. 7.9, 7.10) exemplifies a kind of paratactic approach to ornament that also characterized the large-scale architectural ornament of Samarra (fig. 7.8). The very ability to deploy formal parataxis as an aesthetic strategy (one that in the Abbasid context may even have iconographic implications) brings us back to the flaw in Riegl's carpet. Riegl's attempt to solve the "problem" posed by naturalistic forms in Safavid carpets by

envisaging different origins and distinct rates of change for a constellation of disjunct forms of vegetal ornament finds confirmation in the vegetal ornament deployed in Abbasid architecture and artifacts. However, the strategic deployment of multiple modes of the vegetal in Abbasid art also undermines Riegl's larger teleological project of tracing the emergence of *an* arabesque from late antique vine ornament. At the very least, it calls into question the widespread idea that the so-called arabesque, wherever and whenever one locates its birth, represents a continuous, linear, and monolithic development from the naturalistic vines of late antiquity.

The flaw in Riegl's carpet is, ultimately, a methodological flaw that returns us to Foucault's thoughts on history, discourse, and discontinuity with which I began. In arguing the need to pay meticulous attention to the specifics of difference as the harbinger of discontinuity, Foucault also heralded the need to rethink the category of the discontinuous, in an attempt "to show that discontinuity is not a monotonous and unthinkable void between events, a void which one must hasten to fill." Rather, discontinuity entails "the play of specific transformations different from one another (each one having its conditions, its rules, its level)."[38] Diversity in disjunction may be less neat a rubric under which to study early Islamic ornament than the linear evolutionism of Riegl's approach, but it has, I suggest, two distinct advantages. First, it draws attention to the ability of early Islamic artisans to exploit visual discontinuities, disjunctions, and parataxes for aesthetic ends. In particular, the ability to deploy multiple modes of vine ornament undermines any singular or teleological history of the arabesque. Given the historical role that the arabesque has played as the expression of a specific cultural or racial *mentalité* in Euro-American writings on the Islamic world, the multiple modes of early Islamic vegetation have potential implications beyond the historiography of ornament.[39]

Second, acknowledging the diversity in disjunction of early Islamic ornament—even as deployed on a single artifact or within a unified space—might cause us to reconsider whether the so-called Samarra horizon, the horizontal spread of the modes of ornament pioneered in the Abbasid art of ninth-century Iraq, really marks as dramatic a break with the art of late antiquity as Riegl, Herzfeld, and others have assumed.[40] On the one hand, we can point to possible formal antecedents in late antique Syrian architecture for Abbasid ornamental modes, including the beveled style in which the proto-origins of the arabesque have so often been located. On the other, we might consider Patricia Cox Miller's reading of late antique material culture as characterized by an "aesthetics of discontinuity" common to late antique poetics. Among the features that Cox Miller highlights as characteristic are a taste for the densely textured play of repetition and variation, "a taste manifest in the formal values of parataxis, juxtaposition, and patterning and an emphasis on the part at the expense of organic wholes."[41] Precisely the same could be said of the modes of ornament developed and deployed in Abbasid Iraq, modes of ornament that, in the eyes of Riegl and his successor, marked a significant departure from the arts of late antiquity.

It may, however, be possible to push the argument one step further. The suggested relation between Abbasid literary and ornamental modes, characterized by what Thomas Leisten has called "*badiʿ* aesthetics" is perhaps not surprising, given that the most common term for ornament in the Qurʾan, as well as in medieval Arabic writings on poetics and music, *zukhruf*, denotes the embellishment of both architecture and speech.[42] However, many of the specific characteristics of the *badiʿ* mode favored in Abbasid poetics, including a preference for rhetorical embellishment characterized by contrast and parataxis, are common to the poetic traditions of late antiquity; in spite of the claim for novelty inherent in the very term, it is possible that the poetics of the *badiʿ* (lit., created, invented) tradition and those of late antiquity owe a common debt to the poetical and rhetorical traditions of classical antiquity.[43] Despite the undoubted innovations and originality of Abbasid artistic traditions in both their literary and visual manifestations, there are, therefore, reasons to doubt that Samarra marks as final a parting of the ways, as Riegl and others have imagined.[44]

Nahuatl Devotional Literature," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 21 (1992): 88–111.

61. Heyden, "The Bodies of the Gods," 59.

62. Russo, "El renacimiento vegetal," 12.

63. Ibid., 14.

64. Felipe Pereda, "The Shelter of the Savage: From Valladolid to the New World," *Medieval Encounters* 16 (2010): 268–359.

Chapter 7

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I am grateful to Irina Koshoridze of the Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi, for discussions on the Basra Ewer and to the students in my 2009 graduate seminar at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, "Beyond Abstraction and the Arabesque—Figuring Islamic Ornament," for the numerous stimulating exchanges on some of the topics addressed here.

EPIGRAPH: Henry James, *Embarrassments: "The Figure in the Carpet," "Glasses," "The Next Time," "The Way It Came"* (London: W. Heinemann, 1896).

1. Michel Foucault, "History, Discourse and Discontinuity," trans. Anthony M. Nazzaro, *Salmagundi* 20 (Summer–Fall 1972): 228–29, 237.

2. Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Siemens, 1893), 303–4; Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 267, 287, nn. 385–88.

3. Riegl, *Problems of Style*, 288.

4. Ernst Herzfeld, "The Genesis of Islamic Art and the Problem of Mshatta," in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Jonathan M. Bloom (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 7–86. First published as "Die Genesis der islamischen Kunst und das Mshatta-Problem," *Der Islam* 1 (1910): 27–63.

5. Ernst Herzfeld, *Ausgrabungen von Samarra*, vol. 1, *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik* (Berlin: Verlag Dietrich Reimer, 1923).

6. Samuel Flury, "Samarra und die Ornamentik der Moschee des Ibn Ṭūlūn," *Der Islam* 4 (1913): 421–32.

7. See, for example, Ernst Kühnel, *The Arabesque: Meaning and Transformation of an Ornament*, trans. Richard Ettinghausen (Graz: Verlag für Sammler, 1977); and Terry Allen, "The Arabesque, the Bevelled Style, and the Mirage of an Early Islamic Art," in *Five Essays on Islamic Art*, ed. Terry Allen (Sebastopol, CA: Solipsist Press, 1988), 1–15.

8. Alois Riegl, *Altorientalische Teppiche* (1892; Mittenwald: Mäander Kunstverlag, 1979). For a discussion of the role of the Islamic carpet in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European writings on art and ornament, see Finbarr Barry Flood, *Islam and Image: Polemics, Theology and Modernity* (London: Reaktion, forthcoming).

9. Alina Payne, "Architecture, Ornament and Pictorialism: Notes on the History of an Idea from Wölfflin to Le Corbusier," in *The Built Surface*, ed. Karen Koehler (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 2:61–64. For the resonances of *Kunstwollen*, see Jaś Elsner, "The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901," *Art History* 25, no. 3 (2002): 359–62.

10. Riegl, *Stilfragen*, 339–41, fig. 195.

11. Riegl, *Problems of Style*, 303; *Stilfragen*, 344. Although there are echoes of the notorious *Orient oder Rom* debate of contemporary Germanophone scholarship here, we are not far from the distinction between Hellenic naturalism and Semitic abstraction made more explicit elsewhere in Riegl's work, and which pervades his theory of ornament, despite its progressive intent. For a critical evaluation of Riegl's work in the context of European Orientalist discourses on Islamic ornament, see Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 61–91.

12. In some ways, this aspect of Riegl's enterprise anticipates George Kubler's *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962).

13. Finbarr Barry Flood, "Faith, Religion and the Material Culture of Early Islam," in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, ed. Helen Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 253–54, no. 189.

14. Oleg Grabar, "La grande mosquée de Damas et les origines architecturales de la mosquée," *Synthronon: Art et Archéologie de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), 107–14.

15. Finbarr Barry Flood, "Umayyad Survivals and Mamluk Revivals: Qalawunid Architecture and the Great Mosque of Damascus," *Muqarnas* 14 (1997): 57–79; Ellen Kenney, "Mixed Metaphors: Iconography and Medium in Mamluk Glass Mosaic Decoration," *Artibus Asiae* 66, no. 2 (2006): 175–200; Iman R. Abdulfattah and Mamdouh Mohamed Sakr, "Glass Mosaics in a Royal Mamluk Hall: Context, Content," in *The Arts of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria: Evolution and Impact*, ed. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2012), 203–21; Nasser Rabbat, *Mamluk History through Architecture: Culture and Politics in Egypt and Syria* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 47–58.

16. Flood, "Umayyad Survivals and Mamluk Revivals," 60–63.

17. Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 74–77.

18. Daniel Schlumberger, "Deux fresques Omeyyades," *Syria* 25 (1946–48): 86–102.

19. Most obviously in the Church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople: Eugenio Russo, "La scultura di S. Polieucto e la presenza della Persia nella cultura artistica di Constantinopoli nel VI secolo," in *La Persia e Bisanzio: Convegno internazionale (Roma, 14–18 ottobre 2002)*, Atti del Convegni Lincei, 201 (Rome: Academia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2004), 737–826; Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 211–16.

20. A point of comparison is offered by the merging of currency zones that followed the conquest of Syria and Iran, which saw the minting of silver coins of Sasanian type alongside gold coins of Byzantine type together in Syria for the first time: Stefan Heidemann, "The Merger of Two Currency Zones in Islam: The Byzantine and Sasanian Impact on the Circulation in Former Byzantine Syria and Northern Mesopotamia," *Iran* 36 (1998): 95–112.

21. A similar dichotomy between late antique Hellenizing and Sasanian-derived ornament has recently been suggested for each of the two halves of the carved limestone façade of the late Umayyad period palace at Mshatta in Jordan: Alexander Townson, "First Experiences of Mshatta" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2007), 156–57.

22. Finbarr Barry Flood, "Masons and Mobility: Indic Elements in Twelfth-Century Afghan Stone-Carving," in *Fifty Years of Research in the Heart of Eurasia*, ed. Anna Filigenzi and Roberta Giunta (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa et l'Oriente, 2009), 137–60; Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 200–203.

23. Yuka Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

24. See, however, the use of the term *khaṭā'ī* in Safavid Iran to denote chinoiserie, one of seven ornamental modes, which also included geographic categories such as *farangī* or Frankish (i.e., European) ornament: Bernard O'Kane, "Poetry, Geometry and the Arabesque: Notes on Timurid Aesthetics," *Annales Islamologiques* 26 (1992): 77–78; Yves Porter, "From the 'Theory of the Two Qalams' to the 'Seven Principles of Painting': Theory, Terminology, and Practice in Persian Classical Painting," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 113–14; Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Scroll*, 112–14; Necipoğlu, "L'idée de décor dans les régimes de visualité islamiques," in *Purs décors: Arts de l'Islam, regards du XIXe siècle*, ed. Rémi Labrusse, exh. cat. (Paris: Les Arts Décoratifs; Musée du Louvre Éditions, 2007), 12–13.

25. The basic work is still Herzfeld, *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra*. For an interesting critique of the standard taxonomy, see Avinoam Shalem and Eva-Maria Troelenberg, "Beyond Grammar and Taxonomy: Some Thoughts on Cognitive Experiences and Responsive Islamic Ornaments," *Beiträge zur islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 3 (2012): 396–97. See also Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Scroll*, 91–110.

26. The precise chronology of Samarra ornament is less than clear, although there are some indications that Style C was the latest to appear, sometimes replacing modes of ornament in other styles.

27. M. M. Diakonov, "Ob odnoi rannei arabskoi nadpisi," in *Epigrafika Vostoka* 1 (1947): 6–27; R. H. Pinder-Wilson, "An Islamic Ewer in Sassanian Style," *British Museum Quarterly* 22, nos. 3–4 (1960): 89–94; Boris Marshak, "Bronzovyi kuvshin iz Samarkanda," *Sredniaia Aziia i Iran* (Leningrad: Aurora, 1972), 61–90; Géza Fehérvári, *Islamic Metalwork of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 25–38; James W. Allan, review of *Islamic Metalwork of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection*, by Geza Fehérvári, *Oriental Art* 32, no. 3 (1976): 299–302.

28. Richard Ettinghausen, "The 'Beveled Style' in the Post-Samarra Period," in *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, ed. G. C. Miles (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1952), 72–78.

29. Maurice S. Dimand, "Studies in Islamic Ornament: II. The Origin of the Second Style of Samarra Decoration," in *Archaeologia Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, ed. G. C. Miles (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1952), 62–68; Abdul Aziz Hameed, "The Origins and Characteristics of Samarra's Bevelled Style," *Sumer* 22 (1966): 83–99.

30. Michael Meinecke, "Early Abbasid Stucco Decoration in Bilad al-Sham," in *Bilad al-Sham during the Abbasid Period (132 A.H./750 A.D.–451 A.H/1059 A.D.): Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham* (Amman: Lajnat Tarikh Bilad al-Sham, 1992), 226–67; Michael Meinecke and Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, "Palmyra und die Frühislamische Architekturdekorationen von Raqqa," in *Syrien von den Aposteln zu den Kalifen*, ed. Erwin M. Ruprechtsberger (Linz: Verlag Phillip von Zabern, 1993), 352–59; Chahryar Adle, "La mosquée Hâji-Piyâdah/Noh-Gonbadân à Balkh (Afghanistan): Un chef d'œuvre de Fazl le Barmicide construit en 178–179/794–795?," *Compte Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (January–March 2011): 565–625. One might also consider a series of ewers discussed by Richard Ettinghausen, generally dated to the late Sasanian period, but whose ornament could be either seen as precocious anticipations of proto-Samarran style or later reflections of it. In either case, their current dating would merit reconsideration: Richard Ettinghausen, "Medieval Islamic Metal Objects of Unusual Shapes and Decorations in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Islamic Archaeological Studies* 1 (1978): 27–77.

31. Allen, "The Arabesque, the Bevelled Style," 11–13, figs. 29–30.

32. Meinecke, "Early Abbasid Stucco," 232–33.

33. Aḥmad ibn Abū Yaʿqūb ibn Jaʿfar ibn Wahb ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), 3:276. For other relevant texts, see Alastair Northedge, *Historical Topography of Samarra*, Samarra Studies, no. 1 (London: British Institute for the Study of Iraq, 2008), 268.

34. Matthew D. Saba, "Ephemeral Monument, Lasting Impression: The Abbasid Dar al-Khilafa Palace of Samarra," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014), 136–37.

35. Ibid., 128.

36. Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Scroll*, 93–97. See also Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 74–77.

37. Thomas Leisten, "Abbasid Art," *Hadith al-Dar* 24 (2007): 50–57.

38. Foucault, "History, Discourse and Discontinuity," 233.

39. For a full discussion, see Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Scroll*, 61–72, and her chapter in this volume; Flood, *Islam and Image*.

40. On Riegl and late antiquity, see W. Liebeschuetz, "The Birth of Late Antiquity," *Antiquité Tardive* 12 (2004): 253–61.

41. Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 43. See also Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 55–56; Jaś Elsner, "Late Antique Art: The Problem of the Concept and the Cumulative Aesthetic," in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, ed. Simon Swain and Mark Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 271–309.

42. For *badiʿ* aesthetics, see Leisten, "Abbasid Art." For *zukhruf*, see Qurʾan 6:112, 10:23–24, 17:93, 19:33–35, 43:35. See also Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-jamāhīr fī maʿrifat al-jawāhir* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabbi, 1980), 233; Ḥakīm Moḥammad Saʿīd, trans., *Al-Beruni's Book on Mineralogy: The Book Most Comprehensive in Knowledge on Precious Stones* (Islamabad: Pakistan Hijra Council, 1989), 200.

43. For slightly different approaches to this question, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Toward a Redefinition of 'Badīʿ' Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1981): 1–29; J.T.P. de Bruijn, "Badīʿ," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 3, fasc. 4 (New York: Columbia University Center for Iranian Studies, 1988), 373–76; M. M. Badawī, "Abbasid Poetry and Its Antecedents," in *ʿAbbasid Belles Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 158–62.

44. In the same vein, see Eva R. Hoffman, "Between East and West: The Wall Paintings of Samarra and the Construction of Abbasid Princely Culture," *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 107–32.

Chapter 8

AUTHOR'S NOTE: In preparation for the Harvard lecture on which this chapter is based, the collaboration with Vera Simone Schulz was very inspiring. For discussion, especially regarding the Samanid mausoleum, I would like to thank Avinoam Shalem.

1. Martin Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: The Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana's Palace-Church in Istanbul* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989);