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Animal, Vegetal, and Mineral: Ambiguity and Efficacy in the Nishapur Wall Paintings

Although supposed to be inorganic, stones frequently trouble the divide between that which lives, breathes and reproduces and that which is supposed to be too insensate to exhibit such liveliness.

—Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Stories of Stone,"
postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies 1 (2010): 60.

All presentation is potentially a representation for someone.

—Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, 1989), 108.

I

BETWEEN 1935 AND 1947, EXCAVATIONS led by the Metropolitan Museum of Art at Nishapur, one of the four great medieval cities of the eastern province of Khurasan, brought to light some of the earliest extant wall paintings of the Islamic period from Iran. These included a remarkable series of painted plaster dadoes found in a rectangular room measuring almost thirty square meters within a large complex identified by the excavators as an administrative or palatial structure, located in a western suburb of Nishapur known as Tepe Madrasa.[1] The iconography of the paintings, which can be dated to the ninth or tenth centuries, is unique; although some antecedent traditions can be identified, the bizarre congeries of leaves, limbs, and scales evoked in the medium of paint at Nishapur is without any immediate parallel in Islamic art (fig. 1). The absence of contemporary epigraphic or textual materials that might shed light upon the idiosyncratic imagery of the

ABSTRACT A series of enigmatic ninth- or tenth-century wall paintings from Nishapur in eastern Iran seems to have been imbued with amuletic, apotropaic, or talismanic properties. Recapitulating while exaggerating some of the properties of marble, the paintings also include anthropomorphic and vegetal imagery. Their idiosyncratic iconography seems to highlight a tension between *physis* and *techne* that may be relevant to the ambiguous ontology of efficacious images in general. REPRESENTATIONS 133. Winter 2016 ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 20–58. DOI: 10.1525/rep.2016.133.2.20.

paintings compels one to fall back on analogical reasoning, which suggests that the paintings were invested with apotropaic or talismanic properties directly relevant to their strange appearance. Given the lack of any related contextual data, any attempt to analyze the paintings with respect to their proposed apotropaic imagery must necessarily be speculative. Nevertheless, even such a tentative approach to the paintings may be useful in highlighting aspects of the relation between materiality and representation relevant to the efficacious functioning of apotropaiac and talismanic imagery in general. In particular, the unusual conjunction of anthropomorphic, lithic, and vegetal imagery in the Nishapur paintings raises interesting questions about efficacy, ontology, and the apotropaic image, questions underlined by the metaquality of the Nishapur images as painted abstractions of natural forms and media.

FIGURE 1. Painted dado panel, Tepe Madrasa, Nishapur, Iran, 9th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 40.170.176, New York, Rogers Fund, 1940.

II

When recovered in the twentieth century, the Tepe Madrasa paintings were palimpsests, executed over earlier, simpler designs and then

themselves obscured by whitewash at a time unknown after their creation.[2] They consisted of a series of rectangular or squarish fields divided by narrow-rising rectangular panels (fig. 1). The narrow upper border of the dadoes consisted of hexagons alternating with rhomboids set against an undulating grey pattern, which the excavators suggested imitated "either alabaster or one of the other striped, semitransparent stones commonly used for decorative purposes in Iran" (fig. 2).[3] The likelihood of this is strengthened by the fact that medieval Nishapur was one of the few sources in eastern Iran of marble fit for use as an architectural veneer.[4] Moreover, this painterly emulation of stone continued in the main fields of the dado below (figs. 1 and 5), where the narrow dividing panels are filled with lozenge or rhomboid patterns easily recognizable as painterly versions of book-matched or quarter-sawn marble, their aqueous appearance echoing that of the marbles found in a wide range of late antique and early Islamic monuments (fig. 3), which were often compared to flowing water.[5]

The section of the dado illustrated here (figs. 1 and 4), now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, is typical. It consists of a large square panel once flanked by two narrower, vertically rising dividers quite different in conception. These dividers are decorated with the characteristic repeating vertically oriented rhomboid or lozenge patterns of quarter-sawn and book-matched marble, depicted in blue, ochre, and white made from mineral pigments, including powdered lapis lazuli.[6] The natural patterns of marble are here exaggerated to produce internal alternations of aqueous cell-like membranes and more systematic and symmetrical clusters of alveoli or overlapping scales. The whole is contained within a thick red and white band set against a blue ground.

FIGURE 2. Record of the remains of a faux-marble border, about 20 cm high, framing the dadoes seen in figures 1, 4, and 5, traced and painted by the excavators. From Charles K. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings and Their Decoration* (New York, 1987).

FIGURE 3. Detail of marble veneers, interior of the eastern portico of the Friday Mosque of Damascus, 715 CE. Photograph: Manar al-Athar Photo Archive, MAA21874_099_IMG_2172.

FIGURE 4. Drawing of the central panel of figure 1 showing details of design. From Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*.

The subject of the larger square panels punctuated by these faux-marble dividers is more difficult to discern. In their original state, most featured snaking worm-like bands, which terminated in hands, and enclosed zones of imbricated ornament, rosettes, and sprouting leaves. Although none of the

large square panels are identical, they conform to a general pattern. They are filled with cruciform and largely symmetrical constellations of extraordinary form, which in their basic structure (but not appearance) show affinities with the geometric designs found on contemporary carved stucco dadoes from Islamic monuments in central Asia.[7] Despite the wide variety of designs and their organic appearance, the paintings were executed along a loose grid defined by interlacing and tangential circles, incised on the plaster to guide artists who evidently executed the designs free-form within the general structure provided by the geometric grid.[8] The basic cruciform pattern is formed by intertwined pairs of attenuated limb-like or serpentine forms that terminate in concentric eye-like discs in which a white circle surrounds a blue "iris" with a black "pupil" at its center. The corners of the panel are defined by similar paired extensions, striated, segmented, and terminating not in eyes, but in hands, most of which bear a single circle or disc on their open palms. On some of the panels, these hands gesture toward black discs with stars at their centers, or toward what appear to be triangular arrangements of pomegranate-like fruit (fig. 5).

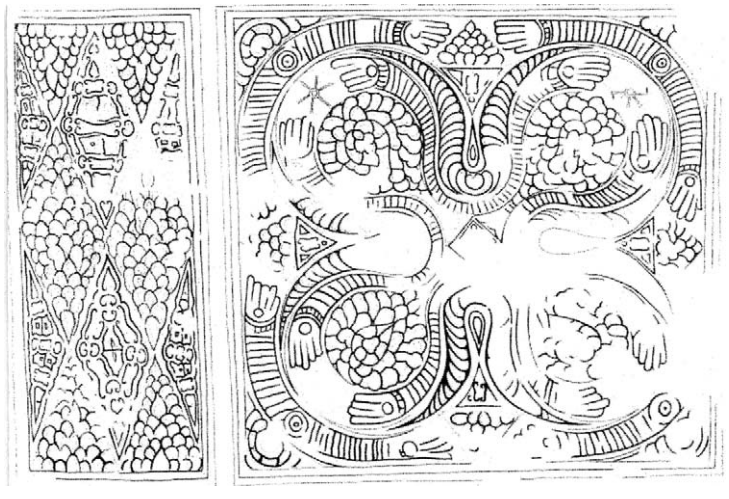

FIGURE 5. Drawing of a painted dado recovered from Tepe Madrasa, Nishapur. From Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*.

The impression of dynamic movement and organic life conveyed by these suggestions of gesturing hands, torqued limbs, and peering eyes is in tension with the two kinds of ornament filling the background and interstices. One evokes stone by repeating the blue and brown or ochre cellular clusters found on the painted marble dividers. By contrast, vegetal

forms comprising broad curving feathery leaves expand to fill the space of the cruciform design. As this description suggests, the overall effect is of scaly or feathery vegetation, reptilian in its aspect, punctuated by symmetrical compositions of intertwining organic tendrils that terminate in eyes, limbs, and beak-like protuberances.[9] The ambiguous qualities of the designs are reflected in their excavator's initial struggle to characterize and describe them; while the striated and segmented "limbs" were referred to as arms, snake-like limbs, or stems, the clusters of interstitial ornaments were variously described as petals, scales, or even wings.[10]

Oscillating between abstract ornament and anthropomorphic depiction, the Nishapur paintings are among the most idiosyncratic examples of pre-Mongol Islamic art. As a result, they have been largely orphaned in modern scholarship. Their resistance to the taxonomic structures that governed the emergent field of Islamic art at the time of their discovery is apparent from the terms in which they were introduced by their excavators in 1942:

> This strange combination of forms seems to be trying to express the frustrated strivings of a human being without actually representing him—a subject obscure enough to satisfy even the most surrealist of artists. It may well be that the designs are a perverted holdover from some ancient cult. That they are artistically successful is questionable, but the color scheme is unusually satisfying, particularly the less bizarre panel.[11]

This account implicitly invokes the *Bilderverbot*, the prohibition on images generally assumed to characterize Semitic cultures (and, by not entirely logical extension, Islamic cultures in general). This racially inflected theory developed in the second half of the nineteenth century as a causal explanatory device for both prescriptive and proscriptive aspects of Islamic art, including the development of geometric and vegetal ornament.[12] Despite its caricatured assumptions and fantastical hypotheses, the astonished tone of this passage captures perfectly the tension between abstraction and representation, living forms and lithic effects, that characterizes the wall paintings from Tepe Madrasa.

Although the Nishapur wall paintings are highly idiosyncratic, it is possible nonetheless to discern some relevant antecedent traditions. As emulations of stone veneers, the ultimate ancestors of the Nishapur painted dadoes should be sought in a late antique Mediterranean tradition of painted faux-marble dadoes imitating book-matched marble veneers and *opus sectile* that is also documented in Egypt and Syria.[13] In an imperial chamber of the Diocletianic period built within the Temple of Amun at Luxor, for example, the lower walls were covered with an ornamental painted dado on which square panels with discs of faux *opus sectile* alternated with narrow vertically oriented rectangular panels imitating conjoined

panels of quarter-sawn marble (fig. 6), similar to those depicted in the vertical dividing panels at Nishapur six or seven centuries later (figs. 1 and 5).[14]

This tradition of painted faux-marble dadoes continued into the Islamic period in the churches and monasteries of Egypt.[15] More relevant still are the painted faux-marble dadoes that are well documented in several early Islamic palaces built for the Umayyad elite of Syria between 700 and 750. Examples of painted quarter-sawn and book-matched marbles have been recovered from the Umayyad palaces at Qasr al-Hayr West in Syria, and Khirbat al-Mafjar in Palestine (both circa 720), while a reception room of roughly the same date in the Umayyad bathhouse at Qusayr 'Amra in Jordan was painted with panels of book-matched marbles alternating with polychromatic paintings of *opus sectile* medallions set amidst faux veneers of ochre marble (fig. 7).[16]

Recent excavations at Balis in northern Syria have brought to light the most baroque examples of such dadoes, in the reception room of an Umayyad mansion (figs. 8–9). These are comparable to the Nishapur paintings in their use of two quite distinct modes of stylizing stone, and in the tension they evoke between the suggestion of natural stones such as marble and the stylized, highly exaggerated modes of their depiction. On these, painted marble discs and veneers are replete with squirming fractures and veins, appearing almost as animated creatures teaming across the painted surface, framed by miniature marble columns and *opus sectile*.[17] The context in which these painted panels occur at Balis might support the identification of the painted rooms at Nishapur as serving an administrative function.

The ubiquity of such ersatz marble dadoes in Umayyad palaces contrasts with a clear preference for actual marble veneers in the mosques and shrines of early Islamic Syria and Arabia. This is unlikely to reflect a shortage of marble, which was in plentiful supply in Syria at least, raising the possibility that the representation of marble in other media was favored because it enabled the enhancement of its pictorial qualities, something considered especially appropriate to profane contexts, perhaps. In the early medieval Islamic world, the staging of these qualities often found their most emphatic expression in the absence of the marble medium, an intermediality marked by exaggerating the aqueous, patterned, or pictorial qualities of the stone in paint or other media.[18]

Such wall paintings continued to be part of the profane architecture of Syria even after the fall of the Umayyads in 750. A fragment of a wall painting recovered from one of the Abbasid palaces at Raqqa in northern Syria and datable to the early ninth century combines the stylized evocation of marble veneers with painted *opus sectile* in a manner comparable to that of the paintings executed almost a century earlier at Balis; both the colors and the execution of the paintings are close to the painted dadoes from Balis.[19] Given this continuity of the tradition into the Abbasid period in Syria, the lack of any

FIGURE 6. 19th century painting of the remains of wall-paintings in a Roman castrum built within the temple of Amun at Luxor, Egypt, ca. 300 CE. Painting by J. G. Wilkinson, ca. 1850, MS XXXI, 51–52, Griffith Institute, University of Oxford. From Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "The Imperial Chamber at Luxor," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975).

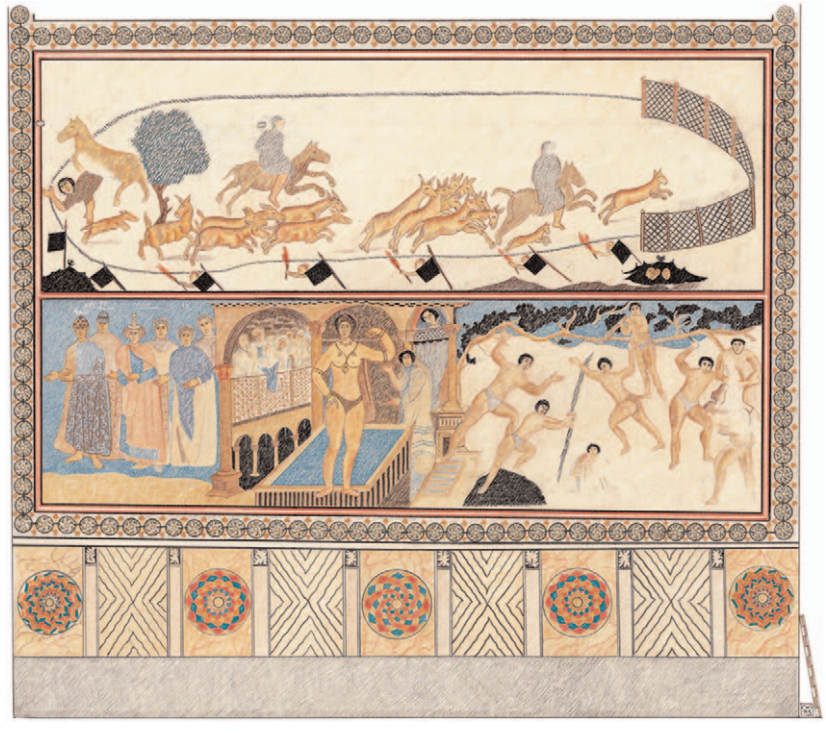

FIGURE 7. Reconstruction of the paintings on the western wall in the reception room of the Umayyad bathhouse of Qusayr 'Amra, Jordan, ca. 720 CE. From Claude Vibert-Guigue and Ghazi Bisheh, *Les Peintures de Qusayr 'Amra* (Beirut, 2007), plate 118.

FIGURE 8. Painted faux-marble dado from the audience hall of an Umayyad palace at Balis, northern Syria, first half of the 8th century CE. From Thomas Leisten, "For Prince and Country(side): The Marwanid Mansion at Balis on the Euphrates," in Karin Bartl and Abd al-Razzaq Moaz, eds., *Residences, Castles, Settlements: Transformation Processes from Late Antiquity to Early Islam in Bilad al-Sham* (Rahden, Germany, 2008).

FIGURE 9. Central panel of a painted faux-marble dado from the audience hall of an Umayyad palace at Balis, northern Syria, first half of the 8th century CE. From Leisten, "For Prince and Country(side)."

obvious parallels from Abbasid Iraq, the heartland of the caliphate, is somewhat surprising. Some small details of the Nishapur paintings recall those found in fragmentary figurative paintings recovered from the caliphal palace at Samarra, the ninth-century Abbasid capital, but there is little evidence for the use of painted faux-marble dadoes in the Abbasid palaces of Iraq, which might otherwise have provided an obvious chronological and geographical link between eighth-century Syria and ninth- or tenth-century Nishapur.[20] This may simply reflect the general paucity of documented examples of wall painting from Abbasid Iraq, but the extensive excavations of the palaces at Samarra failed to produce a single fragment of such paintings.

Nevertheless, for all that precedents from late antiquity and early Islamic Syria are necessary to explain the Nishapur paintings, they are not sufficient. For a full genealogy, we must turn to the styles of architectural ornament developed in Samarra between roughly 850 and 900 CE, and disseminated from there throughout the Islamic world. Although painted faux-marble dadoes have not been found in Iraq, the dadoes of the ninth-century Abbasid palaces of Samarra used stucco rather than paint to evoke the marble dadoes and veneers found earlier in the Syrian palaces of the Muslim elite, but which were not as readily available in Iraq (fig. 10). Just as the

FIGURE 10. Plaster cast of stucco dado, Samarra, Iraq, second half of 9th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Edward C. Moore Jr. Gift, 1927, Accession Number 27.229.1.

painted faux-marble dadoes of Syria had exaggerated the pictorial qualities of stone veneer, so the Samarran ornamental style that comes closest to the natural ambiguities of marble veneers, that conventionally known to art historians as Samarran Style C or the Beveled Style, develops and elaborates the patterning found naturally in marble and other hard stones. In doing so, it emphasizes ambiguity, with ornamental forms oscillating between abstract geometry, hints of representation, and stylized vegetation. Reflecting perceptual ambiguities long associated with marble cladding in the eastern Mediterranean, the relationship between figure and ground on the most abstracted of the stucco panels from Samarra gives rise to ambiguous configurations of vegetal designs with anthropomorphic or zoomorphic qualities. In a description with obvious relevance to the ambiguities of the Nishapur paintings, this kind of Abbasid ornament has been aptly described as hovering on the borders between "intelligibility and unintelligibility, being and becoming, actuality and potentiality"; attempts have been made to relate its ambiguous abstractions to contemporary aesthetic trends or developments in speculative theology.[21]

The ambiguities associated with some of the Samarra dadoes are often amplified by the provision of drill holes resembling eyes. This sculptural feature recalls the eye-like circles depicted in the Nishapur paintings (figs. 1, 4, and 5), which, it has been suggested, are the bizarre product of "an unskilled craftsman faced with the difficult task of transcribing a Samarra-type beveled design into two-dimensional linear forms."[22] Yet, the recurrence of suggestive anthropomorphism or zoomorphism on some of the relief stucco (rather than painted) dadoes of Samarran inspiration also found at Nishapur makes it unlikely that the peculiarities of the painted dadoes are the products of artistic inadequacy alone. The suggestive drill holes found at Samarra recur, for example, on stucco dadoes from Sabz Pushan in Nishapur, on which some of the vegetal tendrils have drill holes resembling eyes that amplify the zoomorphic qualities of the design (fig. 11).[23] Two aspects of these drill holes reinforce the impression that their placement was intended to evoke an ambiguous zoomorphism: first, the fact that they are in all cases placed before split palmettes resembling beaks (a feature also found in the Nishapur paintings); second, the fact that these drill-holes only occur in the upper half of the dado, rather than the lower, where their inversion would have rendered the suggestion of zoomorphism less apparent to a viewer.

The debt to Umayyad and Abbasid antecedents that I have outlined should be set against the likelihood that the ambiguous hybridity of the Nishapur paintings also reflects a regional, eastern Iranian or central Asian penchant for vegetal ornament that morphs into ambiguous animate forms, mostly birds and fish, a tradition seen in pre- and early Islamic stucco and

FIGURE 11. Plaster cast of a stucco dado, part of a pair that flanked a mihrab in a building at Sabz Pushan, Nishapur, 9th–10th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 37.40.43, Rogers Fund, 1937.

wooden carvings. Complicating the picture still further is the fact that central Asian traditions may themselves have contributed to the development of ornamental modes or styles seen as characteristically Abbasid, modes that were disseminated in their turn to North Africa in the West and Iran and central Asia in the East from the Abbasid heartlands during the ninth and tenth centuries.[24] Ambiguously hybrid ornament close in spirit to that of the Nishapur dadoes can be found in Iranian and central Asian art and architecture of this period. It includes ambiguous wooden and stucco ornament from central Asia in which vegetal forms appear to metamorphose into snakes or beaked birds; among them are fragments of a stucco border from the mihrab of a mosque at Khulbuk in Tajikistan in which the "eyes," drilled in a continuous rinceau, produce the impression of fish (fig. 12), much as the holes drilled in the vegetal stucco dadoes from Nishapur produce the impression of long-beaked birds (fig. 11).[25] More relevant in its jarring combination of frankly zoomorphic and vegetal elements is the image of a fantastic animal cut on the base of a glass bowl of the ninth or tenth century from Iran (fig. 13); fragments of similar bowls were found at Nishapur.[26] The animal is clearly a simurgh or senmurv, a mythical beast with the tail of a peacock, the face of a dog, the wings of a bird, and the claws of a lion. On the base of the bowl, however, the head has been replaced by a sprouting trefoil motif. The reasons for this substitution are unclear, but it suggests a contemporary penchant for hybrid imagery with obvious relevance to the Nishapur wall paintings; once again, these may well reflect a regionally specific (eastern Iranian or central Asian) variant of the ambiguous ornamental forms pioneered in Abbasid Iraq.[27]

FIGURE 12. Fragment from the carved stucco frame of a mihrab with hybrid vegetal-zoomorphic imagery, Khulbuk, Tajikistan, 9th or 10th century. From *The Central Asian Art of Avicenna Epoch* (Dushanbe, 1980).

FIGURE 13. (*Left*) Blown and relief cut-glass bowl with a vegetalized simurgh carved on the base, Iran, 9th–10th century. © The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait, LNS 113 KG. (*Right*) Drawing of the simurgh visible in the image at left. © The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait, LNS 113 KG.

III

The Nishapur paintings can be related to earlier architectural ornament executed in at least three different media: marble veneers, painted evocations of such veneers that exaggerate the pictorial qualities of the stone medium, and stucco dadoes that emulate some of the qualities

of both. Given the formal relationship of the Nishapur paintings to the revolutionary experiments with forms, materials, and techniques undertaken in the Abbasid capital of Samarra in Iraq after 850, it seems safe to assume a terminus post quem of the mid-ninth century, even if the precise date of execution is complicated by their palimpsest qualities. However, if the formal and stylistic genealogy of the Nishapur paintings is relatively clear, the significance of their idiosyncratic elaboration of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic tendencies palpable in earlier Islamic architectural ornament is harder to pin down.

Several steps removed from the marble panels that they evoke, the Nishapur dadoes (like their antecedents in the Umayyad palace at Balis) enhance the ambiguous forms of veined marble at the metalevel of depiction in order to imbue them with frankly anthropomorphic qualities. It is these rather than any other aspects of the paintings that have attracted the attention of archaeologists and art historians. Upon reflection, for example, the excavators of the paintings modified their initial suggestion of perverse cultic significance to raise the possibility that an apotropaic or talismanic function attached to the anthropomorphism of the painted dadoes. Writing in 1951, Charles Wilkinson, who led the excavations, noted that the paintings showed "hands that probably had magical or religious significance."[28] By the time of the final report on the architecture of Nishapur, Wilkinson adopted a more dispassionate (if no less astonished) tone, going so far as to suggest that the hands might be an attempt to depict the "hand of God" itself (or themselves).[29] A more recent interpretation relates the unusual iconography of the Nishapur wall paintings to pre-Islamic central Asian iconographies featuring hybrid snake-birds representing the souls of the dead.[30]

There is no evidence to support Wilkinson's implicit claim that anthropomorphist strains, otherwise well documented in early Islam, were ever given visual expression, and little to indicate that the room in which the paintings appeared had any funerary context.[31] By contrast, there is abundant support for Wilkinson's initial ascription of apotropaic or talismanic significance to the depicted marble veins with eyes and hands, motifs with a recognized apotropaic function in other contexts.[32] Although scattered across a series of specialist publications divided by field, language, and region, there is clear evidence for a late antique and early medieval transregional ecumene defined by the circulation of specific kinds of apotropaic imagery. These include the "much suffering eye," the image of the evil eye under attack from animal and human agents who seek to pierce and puncture it.[33] Images of the eye existed on scales ranging from the personal amulet worn around the body to the macro level of mosaics, paintings, and reliefs designed to protect architectural or even urban space.[34] While they are particularly well documented in the Mediterranean, they also circulated

in Arabia and Iran. Although misidentified in recent scholarship as a zodiacal image, a spectacular image of the eye under attack from a host of enemies is found on a wall painting datable to the first through third centuries CE from a building at Qaryat al-Faw in central Arabia (fig. 14).[35] Analogous images of the eye under attack from arrows, birds, dogs, scorpions, and snakes are found on Iranian seals of the pre-Islamic period (fig. 15).[36]

At Nishapur, painted eyes were not confined to the Tepe Madrasa dadoes. Disembodied eyes, more naturalistic in form than the circular eye-like discs that appear on the dadoes, were also found on series of concave terracotta elements, ranging between roughly 20 and 40 cms in height, that appear to have formed part of a *muqarnas* or stalactite squinch or vault in a bathhouse at Sabz Pushan (figs. 16–17), one of the earliest recorded examples of this kind of architectural feature. The interiors of the *muqarnas* cells are painted with floral and vegetal motifs, which in many (but not all) cases bear a pair of elongated tear-shaped eyes at their base or summit. Similar eyes, elongated rather than circular, occur on at least one of the smaller panels from our painted room at Tepe Madrasa, which, for reasons unclear, is also distinguished from the others by the unusual style of its paintings.[37]

The iconography of pre-Islamic Iranian talismanic seals bearing images of the eye provides insights into some of the contexts in which its protection was sought. A connection with the practices used against domestic demons is suggested by the presence on the reverse of many of these seals of a figure identified as the Persian hero Feridun battling a demon; a Middle Persian incantation invokes the power of Fredon (Feridun) in its struggle against "the occult things of the house."[38] Further contexts for the reception of the ubiquitous "much suffering eye" are suggested by a passage in the *Bundahishn*, a compilation of Zoroastrian cosmogony probably compiled around the time the Nishapur paintings were executed, chapter 27 of which deals with demons and evil spirits. This chapter makes several references to the evil eye of both demons and men, citing the saying, "The eye of the covetous is an abode which has no boundaries" and referring to the demon "of the malignant vision" who will "spoil the object which men see."[39] A concurrent emphasis on the necessity of dispatching snakes suggests a serpentine or reptilian dimension to the demonic forces of the evil eye, to which I will return.

In addition to the eye, the replication of the hand motif in the Nishapur dado paintings is significant. Again, there are some earlier parallels in the Umayyad architecture of Syria: a recently found stucco relief from the early eighth-century palace at Qasr al-Hayr West shows a standing figure set beneath an arch formed by two disembodied arms terminating in hands holding palm fronds.[40] In the Syrian palace, however, the hands are integrated into

FIGURE 14. Wall-painting from Qaryat al-Faw, central Arabia, depicting the eye under attack from a scorpion, snake, felines, and other beasts, 1st to 3rd century CE. National Museum, Saudi Arabia. From 'Ali Ibrahim Ghabban, *Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris, 2010).

FIGURE 15. Jasper talismanic seal engraved with an image of the evil eye under attack from a snake, scorpion, bird, and arrows, Iran, 3rd to 6th century. Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, D 6323 (1857). From Rika Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques en Iran Sassanide* (Paris, 1995).

a functional architectonic ensemble and not displayed with their open palms carefully turned toward the viewer, as at Nishapur. Here, the manner of depiction suggests a relationship to the use of the hand motif as protection against the evil eye, a usage known in the pre-Islamic Near East that carried over into the Islamic period. The hand-eye conjunction is, in fact, a consistent combination in apotropaic imagery, the apotropaic motif of the finger in the eye being a particularly efficacious combination.[41] The hand or

FIGURE 16. Element from a *muqarnas* squinch painted with vegetal and eye designs, Sabz Pushan, Nishapur, 35.2 cm high. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 38.40.250, Rogers Fund, 1938.

FIGURE 17. Drawing of another element from a *muqarnas* squinch painted with vegetal and eye designs, Sabz Pushan, Nishapur. From Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*.

hand-eye motif appears to have been widely diffused in the medieval Islamic world. It is especially well documented in the arts of al-Andalus and the Maghrib (figs. 18–19), and is also documented in the eastern Mediterranean, where the motif even appeared in ephemeral materials, including bread made during Ramadan, Ramadan being considered an especially auspicious time.[42] The hand motif is often associated with Shi'i Islam, but was clearly more widely diffused and by no means confined to Shi'i contexts. In the Nishapur paintings, the terminal hands are depicted with both five and six fingers, unlike the *khamsa*, the five-fingered talismanic hand said to represent the five members of the Shi'i holy family.[43]

Although the early history of the motif is a little opaque, hands appeared on pre-Islamic Iranian seal stones and on ceramics from ninth-century Iraq.[44] In the case of Nishapur we are on particularly solid ground, for the excavations that produced the painted dadoes also produced the remains of

FIGURE 18. "Alhambra Vase," southern Spain, 14th century, height 117 cm, with handles featuring eye and hand designs. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia, F317. From Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York, 1992).

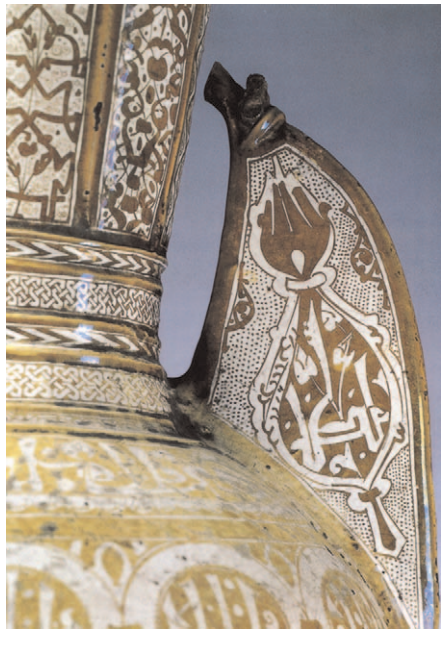

FIGURE 19. Detail of figure 18.

FIGURE 20. Bronze pin in the form of a hand, gilded bronze, nielloed and inlaid with silver, 7.1 cm in length, found at Qanat Tepe, Nishapur. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 40.170.251. From James W. Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork of the Early Islamic Period* (New York, 1982).

a pin in the form of a gilded, silvered, and nielloed bronze hand 7.1 cms long (fig. 20). Although it was originally suggested that the hand belonged to a bronze figure of the early Seljuq period (that is, the eleventh century), the likelihood that it was in fact a talisman was pointed out by Terry Allen.[45] That the thumb and forefinger of the hand describe a circle, a feature also associated with the hand motifs depicted on pre-Islamic Iranian amuletic seals, supports this interpretation.[46]

The hands depicted in the Nishapur paintings do not, however, assume this position. Instead, they are shown with open palms that bear small discs at their centers. These discs form a visual counterpart for eye-like concentric discs that mark the terminal point of the limbs or vegetation forming the cruciform design on many of the panels (figs. 1 and 4). The meaning of this feature can, perhaps, be ascertained from ethnographic parallels, particularly the practice of binding an amulet (*ta'viz*) to the left hand of an ill person while reciting efficacious magical formulae.[47] With this practice in mind, it is worth drawing attention here to the predominance in the Nishapur paintings of pairs of left hands inscribed with discs, which may depict or evoke the binding of amulets to the left hand of the living to cure or protect them. Such practices are documented in Zoroastrian texts that post-date the Islamic conquest, but are likely to have existed earlier. The tying of amulet stones to the body is already documented in Akkadian texts, as is the use of such efficacious stones to protect against a range of evils, from diseases of the eye to sorcery. The efficacy of both eyes and hands in the Nishapur paintings may, therefore, have lain not only in their apotropaic value but also in their curative properties.[48]

The pairs of eyes located at the terminal points of vegetation may equally depict amulets used against the evil eye, among them the "eye stones," semiprecious stones of agate, onyx, or sardonyx formed or polished to resemble eyes, their natural markings resembling (and thus functioning as) pupil and iris.[49] The use of such stones in Iran and other parts of the

Middle East continues today, but is of considerable antiquity (fig. 21). They are already mentioned in Akkadian incantations against the evil eye and survive from the Kassite and Assyrian periods.[50] Blue stones were considered especially efficacious: the *Revayat* or prophetic dialogue accompanying the Zoroastrian text the *Dadestan-i Denig*, probably written in the ninth century, states that "he who keeps the sky-coloured stone, if he displays it before the demons and the devils, they cannot do him any injury or damage, and he will have no fear of them."[51] The efficacy of blue in warding off the evil eye is noteworthy, especially since the serpentine forms painted on the wall surfaces at Nishapur are generally not themselves blue but are executed against a blue ground and surrounded by a blue frame, as if constrained and contained within blueness, even as the demons depicted on pre- and early Islamic Iranian amulets and magic bowls are often "imprisoned" within the bounds of a constraining circle or square.[52]

FIGURE 21. Agate eye stone amulet with a dedication inscription of King Nebuchadnezzar II in Akkadian, Mesopotamia, ca. 604–562 BCE, diameter 3.84 cm. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MLC no. 2624.

IV

Apotropaic technologies operated at both the micro and the macro levels, from protection worn on the body to that installed on the walls and gates of cities.[53] However, domestic, private, or quasi-private space was no less in need of the delivery from evil offered by the inscriptions, mosaics, paintings, and talismanic objects deployed in the late antique and early Islamic world.[54] The magic bowls produced for different religious communities in southern Iraq between the fifth and eighth centuries CE and inscribed with texts in Aramaic, Syriac, Mandaic, Middle Persian, and Arabic are cases in point, intended to avert the evil eye or specific demonic forces in the form of snakes or standing figures, often depicted at the center of the bowl, sometimes with their hands or feet bound.[55] The need for protection within domestic spaces is indicated by the survival of an incantation against "all the occult things of the house, all the evil spirits of the

house, all the wrathful 'robbers' of the house," written in Middle Persian, and thus datable to the late Sasanian or early Islamic period.[56] Similar beliefs in house spirits survived in the Islamic world, as did the belief that these could manifest themselves as snakes.[57]

Why this particular room in this complex at Tepe Madrasa in Nishapur required a de facto visual force field of protection is far from evident. Moreover, even accepting an apotropaic or talismanic function, the precise relation between the content and efficacy of its imagery is not immediately clear. As frequently noted in modern scholarship, whether dealing with Sasanian amuletic seals or Egyptian magic scrolls, it is often difficult to tell whether efficacious imagery represents friend or foe.[58] The peculiar features of the Nishapur paintings are typical in this regard, for they offer material that might support either reading. On the one hand, in addition to their evocation of amuletic practices, the vaguely anthropomorphic forms recall accounts of angelic creatures, such as seraphim, which, in Christian tradition, are characterized by multiple eyes and are sometimes described as serpent-like, as *drakones*.[59] Analogous beliefs can be found in early Islamic tradition.[60] Similarly, Zoroastrian traditions describe the god Mithra as having ten thousand eyes to deploy against demonic forces, or the star god Tishtriya as personified by brilliant eyes possessed of the power to destroy demons. Such descriptions recall the preternatural prominence of the eyes in depictions of those battling demons found on Sasanian and early Islamic amulets.[61]

Against this benign interpretation, however, emphasizing the narrow scaly bands that define the paintings, one might invoke a long and widespread tradition of identifying serpent-like creatures with demonic forces, house spirits, and the evil eye.[62] Among the creatures controlled by Solomon as described in the *Testament of Solomon* (before the third century CE), are demons with hybrid forms and disarticulated limbs, including a demon with human hands who is described as "the crest of dragons," a limbless female demon in the form of a head with hair wild like a dragon's, and one with the appearance of a winged dragon and the face and hands of a man.[63] The eleventh-century Byzantine demonology of Michael Psellos reiterates the ability of demons to assume both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms, including that of dragons, noting their ability to manifest in diverse colors and forms, among them colored air and semiprecious stones and, a detail interesting in terms of the Nishapur paintings, their enormous length, which he compares to that of earthworms, suggesting a thin attenuated form.[64] Similarly, in both the Sasanian and medieval Islamic worlds, the demons and jinn are not only capable of manifesting in reptilian or serpentine form; they also demonstrate a capacity for metamorphosis, polychromy, and transmutation.[65]

If we wanted to read the Nishapur wall paintings as apotropaic evocations of malign forces (comparable perhaps to the "much-suffering eye"), we might also cite the find of fragments of figurative paintings depicting blue creatures, some horned, and characterized by their prominent ovoid eyes, in a building at Sabz Pushan in Nishapur, creatures that have been interpreted as demons.[66] At some time after their completion, these images were defaced, their eyes and faces being particular targets; they were then removed from the wall, broken into fragments, and concealed in a drain.[67] It is worth reiterating that demons, both malign and protective, depicted on Sasanian seal amulets are distinguished from nonsupernatural beings by their unusually large front-facing eyes.[68] The eye motifs appearing in the Nishapur paintings were, therefore, multiple, including what may be demonic eyes, protective eyes, and the abstracted eyes depicted on the hands thrusting from the central vortex of indeterminacy.

V

The many ambiguities regarding the specific valences of the Nishapur wall paintings and the probability of apotropaic significance attaching to their imagery brings us to the question of how exactly such imagery may have been intended to function. This is a trickier issue than at first appears, for the operation of apotropaic and talismanic imagery is often assumed in the relevant medieval texts rather than theorized. For much of the twentieth century, studies of magical efficacy have perpetuated a distinction enshrined in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (published between 1890 and 1915), according to which the efficacy of what he calls sympathetic magic is related to one of two modes of relation between efficacious artifacts and their targets: a similarity articulated through mirroring or symmetry; or, a history of contact or contiguity, so that the apotropaic artifact or image is constituted as efficacious by participation in the nature of its referent. In the operation of symmetry, like repels like—the image of a threat is often used to avert it; in the operation of contiguity, the artifact or image is often intended to attract the depicted subject or some of its positive qualities.[69]

Although the principle of *similia similibus curantur*, of like repelling like, has long been used to explain the operation of much apotropaic and talismanic imagery, the efficacy of apotropaic or talismanic imagery depends not upon perfect similitude. Rather, it depends upon the ability of the inanimate image to deter the animate beast or force that it represents, or to neutralize its pernicious effects after exposure. Such imagery therefore appears to operate across an ontological distinction between animate and inanimate, subject and object. Inscribing the image under the rubric of

similia similibus curantur does little to explain its operational efficacy across this divide.

The avoidance of this fundamental issue is almost a hallmark of writing on apotropaic images: discussing James Frazer's notion of sympathetic magic, the anthropologist Alfred Gell notes that "what Frazer never explained is why the mutual resemblance of the image with the original should be a conduit for mutual influence or agency."[70] At the most basic level, the ability of the image to repel the imaged assumes its operation under the regime of representation, imbued with an "as if" quality that acknowledges the image as an inanimate stand-in for the real thing. Among the many historical examples, one might mention Pliny's tale of Lepidus, whose inability to sleep for the singing of the birds in the grove around his lodgings led his hosts to commission an enormous painting of a dragon that was set around the grove in question in order to terrify the noisy birds into quietude.[71] Similarly, writing in the early thirteenth-century, Niketas Choniates explains how the image of a bronze eagle with a snake in its claws that stood in the Hippodrome of Constantinople scared away living snakes that might otherwise menace the city.[72] Some medieval Arabic texts likewise explain that the apotropaic power of the image derives from its ability to turn the fearsome qualities against which protection is invoked back upon the beast that possesses them: the beast may flee in terror from its own representation; alternatively, it may become so fixated by it that it is frozen into an immobility eventually resulting in death.[73] In all of these cases, the apotropaic image functions as a kind of scarecrow, averting or repelling by simulating a life that it does not possess, without any necessary imputation of either animacy or independent agency. An alternative mode of the image, more rarely exploited in apotropaic practice, attributed efficacy to its role as the locus of an active force inhabiting or imprisoned within and functioning as an operative motor, much like a puppet master manipulating a doll.[74] However, such practices do not affect the basic understanding of the image as an inert representation.

A more active mode of mirroring is implied by the efficacy of the suffering eye, its ability to deflect, or even puncture, the malign gaze. In a recent article, Herbert Kessler suggested that the image of the eye works "first by attracting the desirous eye and then by repelling it with a suitably destructive effect on the person wishing evil."[75] In this, the ability of the evil eye to wound those upon whose gaze it falls is countered by the wounds inflicted upon it in depiction, comparable to (but also distinct from) the way in which the basilisk is killed by means of a mirror that reflects back its poisonous gaze. The same principle is often exploited for prophylaxis rather than prevention, most obviously in the biblical Brazen Serpent of *Numbers* 21:6–9, whose efficacy is based on the principle of homeopathy or sympathy, since the bronze image of the beast, when engaged by the gaze of the afflicted, neutralized the effect

of the serpent's venom. Both venom and antivenom operate through penetrating the body, one by means of the skin, the other by means of the eyes. We might remember here the twin tropes of penetration and poison (a kind of negative insemination sometimes underlined by the presence of a phallus or ithyphallic human attacking the eye) that characterize the image of the "much-suffering eye" assailed by serpents, scorpions, spears, and tridents. Until the twentieth century, amulets produced in various parts of the Islamic world combined a protective power against serpents and scorpions with apotropaic efficacy against demons and the evil eye.[76] The operation of these and many other modes of apotropaic and talismanic imagery reflect the widespread acceptance of extramission theories of vision, according to which vision emanates from the eyes to engage in an almost tactile manner with its objects.[77]

While such images of the eye operate according to principles of mirroring or symmetry, their efficacy depends not on the scarecrow model of passive repulsion, but on the role of the image as a more active agent.[78] This active role would appear to depend on a concept of the image not easily accounted for in traditional notions of representation, in which the image is ontologically distinct from the imaged, to which it is related by a condition of contingency or convention rather than necessity. The efficacy of the Brazen Serpent is, for example, not easily explained as a side effect of representation. Similarly, the efficacy of the eye under attack, of demons and scorpions defeated or imprisoned on Iranian glyptic amulets, or the images of bound demons that appeared on magic bowls from pre-Islamic Iraq and Iran, inverted and buried in walls or beneath the thresholds of houses to form a spherical prison for the forces of evil, cannot be easily accounted for under the regime of representation.[79] Like the "overturning" of the spells that the texts of the bowls contain, or the depicted binding of the demons through the invocation of their names and images, the inversion of the bowl contributes to the ultimate goal. These images do not simply function as scarecrows in the present; they are characterized by a more complex future-oriented relation between image and imaged. If this is a kind of mimesis, it is one in which the causal relationship of representation is inverted, for the combination of textual, imagistic, and physical manipulation presents a powerful conjunction of performative gestures that, rather than reflect or represent an existing or past state of affairs, seek to effect it in the future.[80] Questions of efficacy are thus inseparable from practices of presentation in which notions of ontology and temporality are equally implicated.

In post-Enlightenment thought, the ability to distinguish the image from the imaged, the inanimate representation from the animate being, marks the dividing line between the primitive and civilized. With little modification, the

attitude evinced by the anthropologist Edward Tylor in 1878 could serve as a general theory of the image in modernity:

> Man, in a low stage of culture, very commonly believes that between the object and the image of it there is a real connexion, which does not arise from a mere subjective process in the mind of the observer, and that it is accordingly possible to communicate an impression to the original from the copy.[81]

The representational theory of semiosis central to modernity assumes an ontological distinction between images or words and their referents, a relation of convention and contingency rather than necessity that has been valorized as both natural and universally operative. It is the operation of representation as the default and dominant mode for understanding how images work in both the everyday and scholarly worlds of modernity that marginalizes alternative ways of conceiving images and their efficacy, producing these as semiotic confusion or subaltern superstition.

However, the categories that underlie the claim for confusion are themselves rooted in a very specific notion of representation inherited from Plato and refined in Reformation and Enlightenment thought.[82] Even in the Hellenic tradition that is foundational to modern notions of representation, the triumph of this "disjunctive" notion of semiosis came at the expense of alternative, more enduring ways of conceiving the nature of reference. These might be loosely described as "conjunctive," since they assume the capacity of images and words to partake of or participate in the nature of their referents.[83] The notion of mimesis itself, often seen as synonymous with Platonic representation, may even have undergone a distinct narrowing of meaning from a "pre-Platonic kind of *mimēsis*, composed of identity and participation."[84] The resulting process of historical eclipse was intuited in Louis Marin's classic essay on mimetic representation, when he wrote:

> The dissimilar similarities that characterize it, its greater or lesser degree of resemblance, put to work the "re-" of representation, between duplication and substitution. As Plato noted, any mimetic representation is a lesser being in relation to its model, but what it loses in being—ontologically—it regains pragmatically by the resources of its art in the order of emotive and sensory effects. And no doubt this play of duplication and substitution dissimulates and suppresses, through forgetting, the phantasm of an image that would be a double for the thing as well as a name that would be the transparent description of the image.[85]

The efficacious operation of apotropaia or talismanic imagery often assumes just such a "phantasm of an image that would be a double for the thing," an image capable of acting upon, and with the force of, the very thing that it depicts. If representation assumes the image as an inert and

inadequate copy of a life located elsewhere, this alternative concept of the image, which might be termed presentation or (following earlier scholars) "presentification," is premised on the possible dissolution of the distinction between image and imaged, the potential of the image to instantiate life rather than represent it, acting with the power of the creature that it depicts.[86] Commenting on the reuse of pagan reliefs and statues in Middle Byzantine churches, for example, Anthony Cutler notes that "their role could well transcend the apotropaic function regularly ascribed to them. In an age of 'beseelter Malerei,' they may well have been understood as animating and thus lending strength to the mute stones that surrounded them."[87] Similarly, the deployment of images of animal combat at the thresholds of churches and houses in post-Iconoclast Byzantium has been related to the belief that "they were not merely metaphorical references to some outside supernatural force, but they could ensure good fortune through their own operation."[88] Analogous ideas were intuited several decades ago by André Grabar in his landmark study *L'iconoclasme Byzantin*, in which he suggested that the consistent production of figural imagery in the Islamic world for use in apotropaic or prophylactic contexts reflects the understanding of a "possibility of consubstantiality" between the image and its referent.[89]

One might, therefore, suggest that Frazer's distinction between two modes of efficacy fails to account for the broad spectrum of relations that have governed the ontological status of efficacious artifacts and images with respect to their referents: a wide array of what Frazer dubbed sympathetic magic implicitly assumes ontologies of the image located along a spectrum from Platonic representation to participation and even identity between image and imaged. These are rarely, if ever, theorized, even if the coexistence of distinct (and even incommensurate) ontologies may underlie apparent ambiguities and inconsistencies in the nature and operation of many kinds of efficacious imagery.

Paradoxically, perhaps, this very ambiguity may even have enhanced the functionality of apotropaic and talismanic imagery. As Persis Berlekamp's essay in this issue suggests, the operation of talismans in the medieval Islamic world was often characterized by multiple modes and models of efficacy, whether or not such beliefs were logically commensurate or congruent. Moreover, as Berlekamp indicates, Neoplatonic ideas of emanation that enjoyed great popularity in the medieval Islamic world further erode any hard distinction between symmetry and contact as modes of efficacy. According to these, all of creation (including animals, plants, and stones) emanated from the same primal cause, and is therefore related at a deep ontological level. This relation not only inheres in sympathetic correspondences between organic matter and the celestial sphere but is also manifest in resemblances that may be chromatic, formal, iconographic, or material. Within such a Neoplatonic

frame, the use of eye stones to both repel the evil eye and protect against eye diseases, for example, entails the operation of kinds of sympathy rooted in a formal resemblance (symmetry) that advertises the efficacy of certain plants and stones, their ability to protect that which they resemble by virtue of a relation rooted in emanation from a common source. By virtue of their appearance, origins, or perceived qualities, certain kinds of natural materials, including stone, could be ascribed apotropaic or talismanic properties, highlighting a relationship between materiality and efficacy that is often obscured by a focus on iconography alone.

In the Islamic world, antique carvings and sculptures were frequently ascribed apotropaic and talismanic value; there is, in fact, a clear correlation between the perceived antiquity and efficacy of some such imagery.[90] Treated as *objets trouvés*, such antique images were not subject to the careful rituals of consecration that governed the production of talismans de novo. These exploited the Neoplatonic correspondences between form, material, and celestial constellation, with particular images and signs engraved on specified materials under the sign of auspicious constellations.[91] By contrast, ancient statues and signs invested with apotropaic properties were found objects around which narratives of efficacy were spun, even in the absence of ritualized consecrations that may or may not have been assumed to have governed the conditions of their creation. Here it is perhaps worth stating the obvious: that even unworked stone is a survivor from antiquity, its ancient and mysterious origins attested by its endurance and the marks and patterns upon its surface. Moreover, such marks were often seen as forming representational imagery fashioned by nature, *images trouvés* that enhanced the mystery of stone still further.

This is especially true of marble. The ascription of talismanic qualities to marble in the medieval Persianate world has been noted, if never explored in detail.[92] These qualities have generally been related to the hardness of the stone, its physical capacity to resist or inflict violence, an especially literal congruence between materiality and efficacy. Yet, there are reasons for thinking that the materiality of marble was relevant to its talismanic efficacy in another less obvious sense also, one that drew upon a transculturally and transhistorically consistent notion of the stone as a medium in which images fashioned by nature revealed themselves. Such ideas were widespread from late antiquity and survived in the medieval and early modern Islamic world and Christendom. At a practical level, they were often exploited in the cutting and careful matching of marble veneers in order to "reveal" images of human or vegetal subjects contained within the essence of the stone, generally perceived as products of *natura naturans*, of nature acting as a creative force in its own right (fig. 22). There is, moreover, evidence that the natural images "found" in marble columns and veneers were vested

FIGURE 22. Detail of book-matched marble paneling with anthropomorphic forms, narthex of the Church of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 562 CE. Photograph: F. B. Flood.

with apotropaic significance, their efficacy heightened by their wondrous origins.[93]

However, the basic medium and ground of the Nishapur paintings is not stone, but a painterly evocation of its visual properties (fig. 1). Yet, in the Islamic world, the pictorial aspect of marble was often exaggerated in the depiction of ersatz stone in other media.[94] The resulting dialectic between *physis* and *technē* is in fact common to accounts of marble veneers and polished marble columns in late antique, Byzantine, and medieval Islamic monuments, whose "natural" images were realized only by the work of human artisans charged with the cutting and careful matching of stone. Consequently, if some of the ambiguous figures perceived in marble were invested with apotropaic or talismanic value, there is no reason to assume that these are irrelevant to the exaggerated pictorial qualities that characterize early Islamic painted marbles, and those from Nishapur in particular. On the contrary, the play between presentation and representation that characterizes apotropaia in general is perfectly consonant with the numerous ambiguities associated with the Nishapur paintings.

In this respect, it is worth drawing attention to a fairly consistent ambiguity associated with apotropaic imagery that merits closer analysis. In the fragmentary wall painting from Qaryat al-Faw (fig. 14), for example, the

central feature appears to depict not a living organic eye, but a crafted object representing an eye, raising interesting questions about representation, identity, and efficacy. This quality is common to other depictions of body parts with acknowledged apotropaic properties in the Islamic world: some of the eye-filled hands depicted on Andalusian ceramics from the twelfth century onwards (fig. 19) are clearly recognizable as *'alam*s or standards, probably of metal, while others clearly represent crafted objects of an uncertain sort fashioned in the form of hands.[95] In these cases, it is not the hand or eye that functions talismanically, nor even depictions of either, but representations of crafted artifacts situated at a double remove from the organic body. This meta quality of depiction is common to certain kinds of premodern magical imagery and is surely relevant to the efficacy of particular kinds of apotropaic and talismanic artifacts.[96]

Similarly, remembering the twin traditions of eye stones and hand amulets discussed earlier (figs. 20–21), it seems possible that the Nishapur paintings evoke two distinct modes of amuletic or apotropaic practices current in early Islamic Iran: the use of natural stones imbued with efficacious properties and the binding of certain kinds of manmade amulets to the palm. Both seem to be engaged by the anthropomorphism of the paintings, but there is no reason to confine either the suggested apotropaic function or the play between presentation and representation to the eyes and hands that appear within the paintings alone. On the contrary, the exaggeration of the pictorial or even representational qualities of marble, a natural medium, in depiction may even have heightened the apotropaic or talismanic qualities associated with the natural images found in marble columns and veneers in other contexts. In this sense, the painted hands and eyes integral to the constellations of faux marble at Nishapur draw attention to the factured nature of the painted images while invoking the long-noted capacity of the stone to present legible forms to the observant eye. The resulting tension between presentation and representation, between modes of relation premised on degrees of consubstantiality or alterity would be especially relevant to a marble medium whose "natural" images were sometimes invested with apotropaic properties, but that in Nishapur is evoked in the medium of paint.

The very hybridity or ontological indeterminacy of the Nishapur paintings, congeries of bodies, stone, and vegetation whose antecedents include amuletic practices, marble veneers, painterly evocations of architectonic stone, and stucco dadoes imbued with the qualities of both, is no less relevant. The hybrid ancestry of these painted evocations and exaggerations of lithic qualities conjoined with ambiguous constellations of feathers, leaves, limbs, and scales is perfectly consistent with the hybrid nature of many figurative talismans both in the Islamic world and elsewhere. The patchwork quality of

the monstrous beasts that served in many medieval apotropaia, their constituent elements drawn from a variety of animals, were, for example, likely seen as heightening their efficacy.[97]

VI

Two final points are worth making. The first concerns the visual properties of apotropaia, the second their ontological status. As the encircled eye from Qaryat al-Faw (fig. 14) suggests, apotropaic images are often formally dense. This density imbues them with what, to borrow a phrase from Alfred Gell, might be termed "cognitive stickiness," a visual elaboration that might be understood as trapping the malign gaze to delay, distract, and eventually destroy it.[98] The Nishapur wall paintings share this quality of visual density, while their suggestion of emergent states of life may be related to another aspect of the efficacious image that is often overlooked: its ontological indeterminacy or instability. The constellations of the fleshy, leafy, scaly, and veined—visual evocations of the states of being animal, vegetal, and mineral—in the Nishapur paintings suggest qualities of transpeciation and transmutation, an oscillation between different states of being that was often also associated with the demonic forces against which apotropaia were intended to guard.

There are, of course, further ambiguities associated with the depiction of what appear to be organic forms in worked plaster emulating carved stone veneers, petrified in paint, ambiguities that may stage mediality and materiality in the service of efficacy. The petrification of flesh, its capacity for transmutation into stone, is assumed by legends of the Gorgon, both her terrible gaze and the mirroring through which danger can be averted. Efficacious transformations between fleshy and lithic states are also occasionally mentioned in late antique or early Islamic Coptic spells for protection against reptiles, which express the hope that they become like stone or metal.[99] Conversely, medieval and early modern observers of marble veneers in late antique churches sometimes described them in terms of pale flesh permeated by vascular patterns that appeared as analogues for the blood-filled veins of the human body.[100] This is not quite a case of "mimetic assimilations of the animate to the inanimate," as Roger Caillois observed in another context, for the degree to which stone itself was viewed as inert or even inanimate is open to question.[101]

Given the uncertainties surrounding their subject matter, the Nishapur paintings are admittedly an odd choice with which to try to theorize the efficacy of apotropaic images. Nevertheless, these very uncertainties are consonant with the ambiguities that often characterized both the appearance and

the operative modes of apotropaic and talismanic imagery, not only in the Islamic world. If the interpretation offered here can be accepted, then what the Nishapur paintings suggest is that, from an ontological perspective, the qualities implied in English by the Hellenate prefixes "ambi" and "poly" are essential to the effective operation of apotropaic imagery. Such imagery was often seen as ontologically unstable, or even understood as oscillating between different states of being from moment to moment, its very efficacy premised on an existence that was, in many senses, ontologically multiple.[102]

Notes

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1. Charles K. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings and Their Decoration* (New York, 1987), 161–84, figs. 1.195–1.212.
2. Walter Hauser and Charles K. Wilkinson, "The Museum's Excavations at Nīshāpūr," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 37, no. 4 (1942): 99; Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 168.
3. Ibid., 170.
4. In the early eleventh century, marble was carried from the quarries of Nishapur to adorn the Friday Mosque of Ghazni in eastern Afghanistan: Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbar al-'Utbi, *Al-Tārīkh al-Yamīnī*, printed in the margin of Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Manini, *Al-Fatḥ al-wahabī 'alā tārīkh Abī Naṣr al-Utbī* (Bulaq, 1869), 2:296–97.
5. Marcus Milwright, "'Waves of the Sea': Responses to Marble in Written Sources (Ninth–Fifteenth Centuries)," in Bernard O'Kane, ed., *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand* (Edinburgh, 2005), 211–21; Fabio Barry, "Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 4 (2007): 627–56.
6. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 169.
7. Ibid., 170. See, for example, the dadoes from the ninth- or tenth-century palaces at Sayyod in Tajikistan: Lutfiya Ainy, *The Central Asian Art of Avicenna Epoch* (Dushanbe, 1980), no. 102.
8. Hauser and Wilkinson, "The Museum's Excavations at Nīshāpūr," 99.
9. Maryam D. Ekhtiar et al., eds., *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New Haven, 2011), 100–1. For an image of this panel immediately after its excavation see Hauser and Wilkinson, "The Museum's Excavations at Nīshāpūr," 104, fig. 28.
10. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 171–79.
11. Ibid., 100.
12. Finbarr Barry Flood, *Islam and Image: Polemics, Theology and Modernity* (London, forthcoming).
13. See, for example, Lorenzo Abad Casal, "Las Imitaciones de 'crustae' en la pintura mural Romana en Espaňa," *Archivo espaňol de arqueología* 50–51, nos.

135–38 (1977–78): 189–208; Hélène Eristov, "Corpus des faux-marbres peints à Pompéi," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome* 91, no. 2 (1979): 693–771.

14. Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "The Imperial Chamber at Luxor," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975): 232, fig. I.
15. Elizabeth S. Bolman, "Painted Skins: The Illusions and Realities of Architectural Polychromy, Sinai and Egypt," in Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Roberts S. Nelson, eds., *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai* (Turnhout, 2010), 138–39, fig. 44.
16. R. W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford, 1959), 316–17; Daniel Schlumberger, *Qasr El-Heir El Gharbi* (Paris, 1986), 14, plate 57; Claude Vibert-Guigue and Ghazi Bisheh, *Les Peintures de Qusayr 'Amra* (Beirut, 2007), plates 29, 114, 118. See also the remains of similar painted marble dadoes recovered from an early Islamic residence at Rusafa in northern Syria: Thilo Ulbert, ed., *Resafa II: Die Basilika des Heiligen Kreuzes in Resafa-Sergiopolis* (Mainz am Rhein, 1986), 92, fig. 57. The forms of the *opus sectile* medallions painted on the walls of Qusayr 'Amra recall Roman and late antique floor decorations; such a transposition from floor to wall would be very much in keeping with the formal and syntactic manipulations evident in much Umayyyad art and architecture. For relevant comparanda see Federico Guidobaldi, "Pavimenti in Opus Sectile di Roma e dell'area romana: proposte per una classificazione e criteri di Datazione," in P. Pensabene, ed., *Studi Miscellanei 26—Marmi Antichi. Problemi d'impiego, di restauro e d'identificazione* (Rome, 1985), 171–233. The likely relationship between late antique *opus sectile* floors and certain kinds of Umayyad marble wall ornament has been noted by Markus Ritter, "Umayyadisches Ornament und christliche Motive: Marmorrelieffriese (Champlevé) im Palast von Ḫirbat al-Minya," *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 3 (2012): 119–21, figs. 15–18.
17. Thomas Leisten, "For Prince and Country(side): The Marwanid Mansion at Balis on the Euphrates," in Karin Bartl and Abd al-Razzaq Moaz, eds., *Residences, Castles, Settlements: Transformation Processes from Late Antiquity to Early Islam in Bilad al-Sham* (Rahden, Germany, 2008), 377–94. The colors of these are consistent with those of the painted marble dadoes from Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, which are described as ochre, white, and wine-colored.
18. Finbarr B. Flood, "'God's Own Wonder': Marble as Medium and Late Antique Legacies to Mosques and Modernism," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 23 (forthcoming). For a good example see the riotous colors and pattern of the painted trompe l'oeil marbles preserved in the Red Monastery at Sohag in Upper Egypt, datable between 525 and 800 CE: Elizabeth S. Bolman, "Late Antique Aesthetics, Chromophobia, and the Red Monastery, Sohag, Egypt," *East Christian Art* 3 (2006): 1–24.
19. This important fragment is preserved in an unpublished photograph in the archives of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin. Discussed in Matthew D. Saba, "Impermanent Monument, Lasting Impression: The Abbasid Dar al-Khilafa Palace of Samarra" (PhD diss. University of Chicago, 2014), 139, fig. 3.10. Both the form and the ochre color of the depicted marble veneers are very close to those found in the Umayyad palace at Balis.
20. As Wilkinson later noted, the general iconography of the Nishapur paintings is not paralleled among the few fragmentary wall paintings known from Abbasid Iraq: Charles K. Wilkinson, "Life in Early Nishapur," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (1950): 68. The only obvious overlap is in the ubiquity of the "scale" motif or its use to depict what appear to be bowls of fruit, similar to

those that appear in figurative wall paintings from Samarra: Hauser and Wilkinson, "The Museum's Excavations at Nīshāpūr," 99; Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 170. For the Abbasid paintings see Ernst Herzfeld, *Ausgrabungen von Samarra*, vol. 3, *Die Malereien von Samarra* (Berlin, 1927), plate 12, nos. 17–20.

21. Gülrü Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Los Angeles, 1995), 93–97; Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Art During the Sunni Revival* (Seattle, 2001), 74–77; Thomas Leisten, "Abbasid Art," *Hadith al-Dar* 24 (2007): 50–57.
22. J. M. Rogers, *The Uses of Anachronism: On Cultural and Methodological Diversity in Islamic Art* (London, 1994), 6, fig. 2.
23. As noted by M. S. Dimand, "Samanid Stucco Decoration from Nishapur," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 58, no. 2 (1938): 259–60.
24. Richard Ettinghausen, "The *'Beveled Style'* in the Post-Samarra Period," in *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, edited by G. C. Miles (Locust Valley, NY, 1952), 72–78; Oleg Grabar, "When Is a Bird a Bird?," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 153, no. 3 (2009): 247–53.
25. Ainy, *Central Asian Art of Avicenna Epoch*, no. 106. See also Karin Rührdanz, "Zur Ikonographie der Wandmalereien in Tepe Madrasa (Nīshāpūr)," *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies* (Rome, 1995), 588–95, figs. 5–10; Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 256. One might also mention the recovery of clay molds from Nishapur decorated with hybrid imagery that combines different forms of bird and human heads on scaly and attenuated bodies: Wilkinson, "Life in Early Nishapur," 67.
26. Stefano Carboni and David Whitehouse, *Glass of the Sultans* (New York, 2001), 85–86, no. 19l.
27. Although it is worth pointing out that pious Muslims who attempted to mediate between the disapproval of figural imagery in the hadith, the traditions of the Prophet, and the desire for figuration sometimes compromised by producing anthropomorphic-vegetal or zoomorphic-vegetal hybrids. These were rationalized by reference to a prophetic injunction to produce images of vegetation rather than animate creatures. The phenomenon has hardly been recognized, let alone explored in detail, but for a preliminary study see Finbarr Barry Flood, "Lost Histories of a Licit Figural Art," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 566–69.
28. Wilkinson, "Life in Early Nishapur," 66.
29. Wilkinson was influenced by Richard Ettinghausen, who argued that the apotropaic power of the hand motif in the Islamic world, even outside of its Shi'i associations, lay in Qur'anic references to the hand of God (yad Allāh) and its formal resemblance in certain renderings to a pictogram that forms the word "Allah." In his essay, Ettinghausen explicitly invoked the Nishapur paintings: "Notes on the Lusterware of Spain," *Ars Orientalis* 1 (1954): 151–53. In the final publication, Wilkinson cites Ettinghausen's suggestion: *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 172–73.
30. Rührdanz, "Zur Ikonographie der Wandmalereien in Tepe Madrasa (Nīshāpūr)."
31. See, for example, Josef van Ess, *The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam*, The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University (Phoenix, AZ, 1988); Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin, 1997), 4:370–424; Wesley Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic

Discourse," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (2002): 443; Merlin L. Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzi's Kitab akhbar as-sifat* (Leiden, 2002).

32. As noted by Ettinghausen, "Notes on the Lusterware of Spain," 152n78.
33. James Russell, "The Evil Eye in Early Byzantine Society," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantistik* 32, no. 3 (1982): 539–46; Katherine M. D. Dunbabin and M. W. Dickie, "*Invida rumpantur pectora*: The Iconography of Phthonos-Invidia in Graeco-Roman Art," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 26 (1983): 7–37; Matthew W. Dickie, "The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC, 1995), 9–34; John Mitchell, "Keeping the Demons out of the House: The Archaeology of Apotropaic Strategy and Practice in Late Antique Butrint and Antigoneia," in Luke Lavan et al., *Objects in Context, Objects in Use: Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2007), 273–309. See also Alan Dundes, *The Evil Eye, a Casebook* (Madison, 1992).
34. Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor, 1950), 96–102.
35. 'Ali Ibrahim Ghabban, *Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris, 2010), 340, no. 163.
36. Rika Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques en Iran Sassanide* (Paris, 1995), 47, No. 9.1, fig. 43b. On the participation of eastern Iran and western Central Asia in the world of Syrian and Mesopotamian magic even after the Arab conquest see Pierfrancesco Callieri, "In the Land of the Magi: Demons and Magic in the Everyday Life of Pre-Islamic Iran," in *Démons et merveilles d'orient*, ed. R. Gyselen, *Res Orientales* 13 (2001): 21–24. On belief in the evil eye in medieval and modern Iran see Ebrāhīm Šakūrzāda and Mahmoud Omidsalar, "Čašm-zakm," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London, 1982–), 5:44–47. An especially interesting aspect of these beliefs and practices is that they sometimes involve the anthropomorphization of inanimate objects.
37. Wilkinson, *Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 251–56, esp. 256, figs. 1.210–1.211, 3.64, 3.69.
38. Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques*, 41, no. 6.4, fig. 44; Callieri, "In the Land of the Magi," 29–30. See also S. Kori Pekala, "Evil and How to Combat Evil: Magic, Spells, and Curses in the Avesta" (PhD diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 2000), 104–10; Satnam Mendoza Forrest and Prods Oktor Skjaervø, *Witches, Whores, and Sorcerers: The Concept of Evil in Early Iran* (Austin, 2011), 83–89.
39. Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria, *Zand-Akasih: Iranian or Greater Bundahishn*, 27.33 and 41 (Bombay, 1956), 125.
40. Denis Genequand, "Les décors en stuc du bâtiment E à Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī," *Syria* 88 (2011): 368–71, fig. 13.
41. Ignaz Goldziher, "Zauberelemente im islamischen Gebet," in Carl Bezold, ed., *Orientalische Studien Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten geburtstag (2. März 1906)* (Gieszen, Germany, 1906), 1:322. Edward S. Gifford, *The Evil Eye: Studies in the Folklore of Vision* (New York, 1958), 89–92; Ahmed Achrati, "Hand and Foot Symbolisms: From Rock Art to the Qur'ān," *Arabica* 50, no. 4 (2003): 464–500.
42. Ettinghausen, "Notes on the Lusterware of Spain," 148–54, esp. 151, figs. 21, 26–30, 33–34; Jerrilynn D. Dodds, *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York, 1992), no. 111; Pamela A. Patton, *Art of Estrangement: Redefining Jews in Reconquest Spain* (University Park, PA, 2013), 129, fig. 69; Fahmida Suleman, "The Hand of Fatima: In Search of Its Origins and Significance," in Fahmida

Suleman, ed., *People of the Prophet's House: Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shi'i Islam* (London, 2015), 173–87; Tewfik Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," *Berytus* 5 (1938): 147.

43. A point made on other grounds by Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 172–73.
44. Hans Henning von der Osten, "The Ancient Seals from the Near East in the Metropolitan Museum," *Art Bulletin* 13, no. 1 (1931): 231, nos. 59–60. For hand motifs on a ninth-century 'Abbasid tin-glazed bowl see *Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds*, Christie's catalog, 31 March 2009, lot 7715.
45. The hand was found at Qanat Tepe: James W. Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork of the Early Islamic Period* (New York, 1982), 54, 104, no. 186. For the identification as a talisman see Terry Allen's review of Allan in *Ars Orientalis* 15 (1985): 149.
46. Ettinghausen, "Notes on the Lusterware of Spain," 149n65.
47. J. J. Modi, "Charms or Amulets for Some Diseases of the Eye," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* 3 (1894): 47.
48. Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia, 1995), 124–25, 128; Callieri, "In the Land of the Magi," 18.
49. Ibid., 26. Erich F. Schmidt, *The Treasury of Persepolis and Other Discoveries in the Homeland of the Achaemenians* (Chicago, 1939), 74–75, fig. 54; W. G. Lambert, "An Eye-Stone of Esarhaddon's Queen and Other Similar Gems," *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 63 (1969): 65–71.
50. E. Douglas van Buren, "Amulets in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Orientalia* 14 (1945): 18; Marie-Louise Thomsen, "The Evil Eye in Mesopotamia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 51, no. 1 (1992): 21, 26.
51. A. V. Williams, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, part 2 (Copenhagen, 1990), 112. For modern uses of such stones see Bess Allen-Donaldson, *The Wild Rue* (New York, 1973), 19–23.
52. Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques*, 76–78.
53. Finbarr B. Flood, "Image Against Nature: *Spolia* as Apotropaia in Byzantium and the Dar al-Islam," in "Mapping the Gaze—Vision and Visuality in Classical Arab Civilisation," special issue, *Medieval History Journal* 9, no. 1 (2006): 143–66.
54. Silke Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth-Century Syria* (London, 2007), 119.
55. Michael G. Morony, "Magic and Society in Late Sasanian Iraq," in Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler, eds., *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (University Park, PA, 2003), 84–107; Saul Shaked and Jospeh Naveh, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1987); Shaul Shaked, J. N. Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells* (Leiden, 2013).
56. W. B. Hennig, "Two Manichaean Magical Texts with an Excursus on The Parthian ending—éndéh," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12 (1947): 40–41. Zoroastrian rituals are performed annually in order to drive out any demons who may have taken up residence in the house in the course of the preceding year: Callieri, "In the Land of the Magi," 20, 25.
57. An inscription on a Syrian magic-medicinal bowl of the twelfth or thirteenth century specifically mentions the efficacy of water from the bowl when sprinkled on a house that has been the victim of sorcery: Emilie Savage-Smith, "Magic-Medicinal Bowls," in Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools, and Magic*, part 1: *Body and Spirit: Mapping the Universe* (London, 1997), 76.
58. Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, 2011), 218.

59. *Book of Enoch*, 20:7, 61:10, 71:7; James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (New York, 1988), 286.
60. A collection of traditions redacted by the Hanafi scholar Abu Layth al-Samarqandi (d. 983) explains how the archangel Mika'il is covered from head to toe in hairs of saffron, each of which is endowed with a million faces, in each of which there appeared a million tongues, on each of which a million eyes wept tears from which the cherubim were generated in a manner that emphasizes both their hybrid nature and the proliferation of eyes upon them: John Macdonald, "The Creation of Man and the Angels in the Eschatological Literature," *Islamic Studies* 3 (1964): 300–1.
61. Forrest and Skjaervø, *Witches, Whores, and Sorcerers*, 85–86.
62. Some Sumerian incantations against the evil eye describe it as a dragon-like animal, Thomsen, "The Evil Eye in Mesopotamia," 25. In some Byzantine magical texts demons are described as entering the house like snakes, dragons, or other reptiles, often being shown as female but with serpentine bodies.
63. F. C. Conybeare, "The Testament of Solomon," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 11 (1898): verses 56–60.
64. Emile Renaud, "Une traduction française du *Peri energeias daimonon* de Michel Psellos," *Revue des études grecques* 33 (1920): 86–87. See also Jeffrey Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 35, 39.
65. Flood, "Image Against Nature," 152. Apart from the obvious dangers, the relationship between chthonic and demonic creatures may explain why, in Egyptian magical texts produced between the Old Kingdom and Graeco-Roman periods, protection against snakes and scorpions is sought three times more frequently than against any other threat: Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, 1994), 18–19.
66. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings*, 249–50, figs. 3.56–3.57, color fig. 12. A color image is available online: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Collection Online, Blue Figure, Possibly a Demon, http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/449472?=&imgno=0&tabname=label. Similar paintings were recovered from the Umayyad palace at Qasr al-Hayr West in Syria: Schlumberger, *Qasr El-Heir*, 14, plate 36.
67. Eleanor Simms, *Peerless Images: Persian Painting and Its Sources* (New Haven, 2002), 27, figs. 32–34.
68. Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques*, 26–28, types 2.1–2.2, figs. 2–3, 5.
69. James George Frazer, "Sympathetic Magic," in *The Golden Bough* (1922), http://www.bartleby.com/196/5.html. See also the insightful essay by Roger Caillois, translated by John Shepley, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *October* 31 (1984): 17–32. The principle of like repelling like was already established in Babylonia, for an image of a demon is accompanied by an Akkadian inscription expressing the hope that it will arrest the predations of its brothers: M. Leibovici, "Génies et démons en Babylonie," in *Génies, anges et démons* (Paris, 1971), 96.
70. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998), 100.
71. Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.38.
72. Henry Maguire, "Profane Icons: The Significance of Animal Violence in Byzantine Art," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (2000): 27; W. L. Dulière, "Protection permanente contre des animaux nuisibles assure par Apollonius de Tyane dans Byzance et Antioche: Evolution de son mythe," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 64 (1970): 263.
73. Gaston Wiet, *L'Egypte de Murtadi, fils de Gapiphe* (Paris, 1953), 72.

74. The most common variant reflects a notion of material images as vessels within which an active force might be imprisoned and set to work for prognosticative purposes or to repel others like itself. The Greeks believed the practice to have originated in Egypt, where magical papyri indicate that the practice of imprisoning angels or demons or their souls in images continued well into late antiquity: E. R. Dodds, "Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism," *Journal of Roman Studies* 37, nos. 1–2 (1947): 61–65. In his eleventh-century demonology, the Byzantine Michael Psellus refers to the invocations by means of which Chaldeans and Egyptians invite demons to enter into idols and simulacra; the belief in demonic inhabitation was one reason for the suspicions that fell on the statuary of Constantinople after their original identities had been forgotten at the end of late antiquity: Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 55–75. The idea of demonic inhabitation persisted also in the Latin West; as late as 1326, concerns about sorcery and sortilege in western Europe led Pope John XXII to issue a decree banning such practices as the binding or imprisoning of demons in images, mirrors, rings, and other objects: Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001): 966–67.
75. Herbert L. Kessler, "Evil Eye(ing): Romanesque Art as Shield of Faith," in Colum Hourihane, ed., *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century* (University Park, PA, 2008), 118. See also Ruth Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons: The Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes* (Los Angeles, 2004).
76. Giovanni Canova, "Serpenti e scorpioni nelle tradizioni Arabo-Islamiche," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 8 (1990–91): 191–207; 9 (1990–91): 219–44.
77. David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago, 1976), 18–32; David C. Lindberg, "The *Intromission-Extramission Controversy* in Islamic Visual Theory: Alkindi Versus Avicenna," in Pieter K. Machamer and Robert G. Turnbull, eds., *Studies in Perception: Interrelations in the History of Philosophy and Science* (Columbus, OH, 1978), 137–59. For the medieval West see Michael Camille, "Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing," in Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 2000), 261–90.
78. This is not, however, to imply that the image was seen as animate. As Kessler notes, in his discussion of the efficacy of the Brazen Serpent, Rupert of Deutz (died c. 1129) specifies that it was an inanimate likeness (*inanimatam serpentis similitudinem*): Kessler, "Evil Eye(ing)," 129, no. 102.
79. Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques*, 67–90; Callieri, "In the Land of the Magi," 29. David Frankfurter, "Scorpion/Demon: On the Origin of the Mesopotamian Apotropaic Bowl," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 1 (2015): 9–18; Callieri, "In the Land of the Magi," 21.
80. There are, of course, models of mimesis that do not equate it with Platonic representation. See, for example, Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, eds., *One Way Street and Other Writings* (1979; reprint, London, 1997), 161; Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar" (1933), trans. Knut Tarrowski, *New German Critique* 17 (1979): 65–69; Anson Rabinbach, "Introduction to Walter Benjamin's 'Doctrine of the Similar,'" *New German Critique* 17 (1979): 60–64; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, 1993).
81. Edward Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (London, 1878), 117.

82. For an excellent overview, which emphasizes the implications of this legacy for contemporary approaches to art and visual culture more generally see Michael Squire, *Image and Text in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2015).
83. Thomas M. Greene, "Language, Signs and Magic," in Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, eds., *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium* (Leiden, 1997), 255–72.
84. Nicole Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas About Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes*, trans. Caroline Levine (Princeton, 1993), 82. See also Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, 2002), 13–14, for an extended discussion of this narrowing of the meaning of mimesis. On the ontological spectrum of representation in Classical Greek tradition see Alain Schnapp, "Why Did the Greeks Need Images?," in Jette Christiansen and Torben Melander, eds., *Proceedings of the 3rd Symposium on Ancient Greek and Related Pottery* (Copenhagen, 1988), 568–74.
85. Louis Marin, *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, 2001), 255–56.
86. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, 1991), 151–63, 164–85. See also Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton, 2002), 19–20.
87. Anthony Cutler, "Reuse or Use? Theoretical and Practical Attitudes to Objects in the Early Middle Ages," *Settimane di Studi del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo* 46 (1999): 1073.
88. Maguire, "Profane Icons," 19, 24–25.
89. André Grabar, *L'Iconoclasme Byzantin: le dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1957), 159.
90. Flood, "Images Against Nature"; Julia Gonella, "Columns and Hieroglyphs: Magic Spolia in Medieval Islamic Architecture of Northern Syria," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 103–20.
91. Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven, 2011).
92. See, for example, Scott Redford, "The Seljuqs of Rum and the Antique," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 150.
93. Flood, "'God's Own Wonder.'"
94. Ibid.
95. Dodds, *Al-Andalus*, 111.
96. See, for example, Elliot R. Wolfson, "Phantasmagoria: The Image of the Image in Jewish Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 4, no. 1 (2001): 78–120.
97. See Persis Berlekamp's essay in this issue.
98. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 86.
99. Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 128, no. 68. The date at which the spell was written is unclear, although it was written on paper rather than papyrus, which suggests that it should be located at the upper end of a chronological range from 100 CE to the medieval Islamic period.
100. See, for example, Ruy González de Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy to the Court of Timour*, trans. C. R. Markham (London, 1859), 38; Cyril Mango and John Parker, "A Twelfth-Century Description of St. Sophia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 14 (1960): 239.
101. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 31. In Greek lapidaries, for example, certain stones were not only seen as effective at repelling reptiles but

were also seen as breathing like living beings: Charly Clerc, *Les Théories relatives au culte des images chez les auteurs grecs du IIme siècle après J.-C.* (Paris, 1915), 70–71. See also J. C. Plumpe, "Vivum saxum, vivi lapides: The Concept of 'Living Stone' in Classical and Christian Antiquity," *Traditio* 1 (1943): 1–14. On animated stones in Egyptian magical texts see Leda C. Ciraolo, "The Warmth and Breath of Life: Animating Physical Objects *πάρεδροι* in the Greek Magical Papyri," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers, One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting* (Atlanta, 1992), 250. See, more generally, Thomas Raff, *Die Sprache der Materialien: Anleitung zu einer Ikonologie der Werkstoffe* (Münster, 2008), esp. 66–72.

102. The term is borrowed from Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC, 2010), 8.