

REMARKS ON THE CONCEPT OF PICTORIAL SPACE IN ISLAMIC PAINTING ¹

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1. A different version of this paper was presented to Professor Adolf Max Vogt for his seventieth birthday in June 1995.

2. When referring to Islamic painting, I have in mind the Persian miniatures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which represent the apogee of this art form in Islamic culture, as well as the contemporaneous Ottoman and Mughal miniatures, which largely developed under the influence of the Persian painting tradition.

3. The standard opinion is expressed in Arnold (1928, 1-40); it is also repeated in Eitingerhaus (1944, 250- 67). A problematizing discussion is offered in Grabar (1987, 72-98); also see Kreiser (1978, 549-56).

The pictorial treatment of space in Islamic miniature painting is a subject that has largely remained undiscussed (2). Since naturalism is not a pictorial priority in these paintings, which are essentially two-dimensional, the representation of space appeared to many as an irrelevant problem. Historians of Islamic art accepted too readily the idea that the prohibition of images in Islamic culture crucially determined the two-dimensionality of pictorial representations (3). While this observation has a historical base, the conclusions automatically derived from it (that a pictorial representation of space was not feasible and that whatever the Muslim painter did pertained to the surface and remained, therefore, decorative) are not tenable. Moreover, this idea only helps to explain why Muslim painters would stay within a two-dimensional pictorial system, but it is unable to explain how their two-dimensional system was constructed, and how it was developed as an alternative realm of pictorial representation. Although it remains outside the scope of this paper to discuss them, the 'orientalist' underpinnings of this reluctance to study the Islamic miniatures as an alternative pictorial system can be mentioned at this point (4).

4. I use the term in reference to the notion of 'orientalism' as defined in Said (1979). One rather explicit case is Ettinghausen's evaluation of Kaaba representations in Islamic art. Ettinghausen held that these images reflected unresolved and often inconsistent efforts to represent space, and suggested that if the artists had mastered the linear perspective, their topographical miniatures would have attained pictorial coherence. Ettinghausen's 'orientalist' position is particularly revealed by the following remark: 'In den von Europäischen Bildern beeinflussten Darstellungen, ... die ganze Stadt Mekka aufzeigen, ist das zeichnerische Können besser, das Ganze wirkt aber viel weniger originell und hat die orientalische Note fast ganz verloren' (Ettinghausen, 1932-34, 118).

5. The divergence of the linear perspective representation of space and objects from the human perception is a major point in the argument developed by Erwin Panofsky (1985, 99-167) in his seminal essay 'Die Perspektive als Symbolische Form', first published in *Vorfrage der Bibliothek Warburg 1924/25*, Leipzig, Berlin (1927, 258-330). Panofsky's detailed discussion of the purely rational concept of an infinite, continuous, and homogeneous space, which constitutes the basis of the linear perspective construction, but which is an abstraction from the human visual perception, takes place in the same publication (1985, 101).

6. This symbolic aspect of the single-viewpoint perspective representation is the principal subject of Panofsky's essays.

A close reading of writings on Islamic painting reveals a quasi-unanimous assumption that pictorial coherence can only be achieved with linear perspective. It is necessary to distance ourselves from these assumptions and to examine more critically the question of pictorial space, if we wish to understand the pictorial qualities of Islamic painting.

The way we perceive pictorially represented space today is dominated by the visual logic of linear perspective, or in other words, by the close relation it has established between pictorial space and our visual perception. Space itself being nothing else but a void that surrounds the objects, its illusionistic representation depends on the pictorial replication of the precise geometrical relations of objects in reference to the viewer's eye, so that they can be identified with a direct experience and knowledge of spatial relations. To achieve this effect, linear perspective approximately replicates the human vision through a rigorous geometrical construction comparable to a central projection with the viewer's eye as its center of projection.

The resulting pictorial space is a geometrically continuous and measurable unit of the actual space and the objects contained in it. It is through its absolute dependence on the position of the viewer's eye that the perspectival pictorial space acquires an enclosing character and an illusionistic depth (5). The geometric vigor, the illusionistic efficiency, and the compositional coherence of representation all rely on the single viewpoint according to which a perspectival painting is conceived. Besides its practical necessity, the single viewpoint has a very important symbolic implication: It is an absolute point of reference that establishes the vision of a unique viewer as a representational priority (6).

In Islamic miniatures objects depicted without reference to a single viewpoint cancel out the possibility of representing space as an illusion of depth, yet the intelligibility of pictorial space need not depend on that illusion. As Coomaraswamy pointed out,

Space (...) has to be taken as a primary datum of intelligence, and it is obvious that as soon as it became possible to make intelligible representations of objects, it must have been taken for granted by those who understood them that these were representations of objects existing in space (1956, 147).

The notion of pictorial space as an illusionistic depth is intimately linked to a very particular understanding of the picture surface. In Western painting tradition from Renaissance onward until the revolution of Modern painting, the picture surface was conceived not as a positive entity but as a visually dissolved one, comparable to a 'transparent window'. Alberti's definition of the picture surface as the 'intersection of the pyramid of the visual rays' not only explains its geometrical significance and its role in linear perspective construction, but also points out that in order to realize a perspectival pictorial space the picture surface disappears or becomes transparent (7).

An expression of the planar character of the picture surface, as found in Islamic painting, is obviously incompatible with the illusionistic representation of space, a convention that dominated Western painting until the turn of the century. If this convention of the Post-Renaissance painting is taken for granted by someone who studies Islamic art, it is normal that all the features that seem to emphasize or to confirm the flatness of the picture plane should be seen as preventing pictorial space from emerging. Yet pictorial space cannot be held identical with illusionistic space; some of the alternative approaches that can be found in

7. See White (1987) who refers to Alberti's 'Della Pittura'; L. Mallé ed., 1950, 123r.

8. For example, in an anonymous panel from the end of the fifteenth century showing an architectural perspective (Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz) (H. A. Millon and V. M. Lampugnani 1994, 242-243) or in a fifteenth-century anonymous 'Annunciation' (Boston, Isabella Gardner Museum) the converging lines of the floor pavement are interrupted before reaching the vanishing point. Although located in the distant natural landscape, the vanishing point nevertheless remains the visual focus of the painting.

9. E. Lissitzky's argument, that his 'Proun' series, which were inspired by the Chinese use of axonometry propose a pictorial space liberated from its limits, is precisely based on getting rid of the vanishing point. Since in these paintings all parallels are depicted as parallels, the vanishing point is pushed into infinity or, in other words, it is abolished. Thus, according to Lissitzky, the infinity of the pictorial space in Western painting is restored. See 'Art et géométrie' (1925) in Lissitzky-Küppers (1968, 348-354).

non-Western painting traditions offered a rich source of inspiration to the *avant-gardes* who revolutionized the Western painting in the early-twentieth century and defined the pictorial space in a much broader way.

Before discussing what kind of a pictorial space was realized in Islamic painting, one last point concerning another aspect of the represented space in the Renaissance painting needs to be noted. The illusion of coherently receding depth on a flat surface was successfully created only at some expense: In Renaissance painting, the infinite character of space is paradoxically confined within the spatial unit of the picture. Infinity, where all parallel lines are imagined to meet, corresponds to a precise point in the picture, that is to the vanishing point, which was often dissimulated by the painters (8). All orthogonals in the picture plane converge toward that point and, hence, define the visual limits of the pictorial space (9). Since the precise location of the vanishing point on the picture plane is geometrically determined in reference to the viewer's location, this point becomes, so to say, the symmetrical counterpoint to the viewer's eye: The infinite space finds itself unified and contained within the gaze of a single viewer.

In contrast to this paradox in Western painting, it can be argued that Islamic and Chinese painting achieve more directly the suggestion of an unlimited space. Because of the absence of a single vanishing point in their conceptions, the non-perspectival paintings of Islamic or Chinese art are capable to suggest more directly the infinite quality of space, even though their representation of space remains much less tangible.

As a consequence, the relationship of the pictorial space with the picture surface is also entirely different. Despite the different concepts of space in these two painting traditions, the equivalence between the picture surface and the pictorial space is common to both of them. The representation of space is achieved within the limits of the picture surface, that is, within its two-dimensionality, and the pictorial space depends more on intellectual abstraction than on sensory illusion.

Wilfrid H. Wells suggested that in Chinese painting, the picture plane did not have an optic existence except where it was appropriated and converted into surface by depicted objects; in other words, despite its solid material existence, the unpainted support (paper, silk, etc.) was not conceived by the Chinese artist in its entirety as a picture plane (10). Hence, where it was left untouched by paint, the support suggested the negative presence of space, and paint, in contrast, suggested the material existence of the objects.

In Islamic miniatures, in plain opposition to this practice observed in Chinese painting, the entire support is painted, that is, appropriated and converted into a picture surface. The use of color applied in large patches, sometimes uniformly spread and sometimes interspersed with minute all-over patterns, over large sections of the composition is not the consequence of a decorative approach to painting as it is often considered (11).

Indeed, the valorization of objects, figures, and various surfaces (which may stand for the ground, floor, walls, ceiling, or the sky) as painted surfaces suggests a particular kind of pictorial space in which, flattened and equalized in visual terms, solids and voids become pictorially homogenous. Even where the three-dimensionality of an object is expressed through an axonometric form, the equal treatment of line and coloring throughout the painting establishes a unified order. Neither the representation of solids, nor that of the voids dominates the pictorial composition, something which is masterfully exemplified by a late fifteenth-century miniature from the Herat School (Figure 1).

10. W.H. Wells, quoted in Bois (1979, 275). A concise discussion of the void in Chinese painting is given in Rowley (1974, 71-73).

11. The filling of the whole picture surface with paint and pattern in Islamic painting, and art in general, was also often associated with the notion of 'horror vacui'. Although this notion is not referred to anymore, it was employed until not very long ago by certain authors. See Ettinghausen (1979, 15-28), Berque (1961, 433-444), and Papadopoulou (1976, 108-110).



Figure 1. 'A Party at the Court of Sultan Husayn Mirza' (detail); from a copy of Sa'di's 'Bustan', Herat, dated AH 893 / AD 1488; Cairo, General Egyptian Book Organization, MS Adab Farsi 908, fol.2r (Lentz and Lowry, 1989, 260).

12. For Papadopoulo's diagrams indicating the spiral arrangement see Papadopoulo (1976, 458-464).

In Islamic miniatures this pictorial equivalence of solids and voids suggested by a common two-dimensionality and stressed through paint is furthermore strengthened by the avoidance of a unified viewpoint for the entire composition. One can always notice the presence of more than one viewpoint adopted to depict the different parts or elements of the composition. Depicted objects that cannot be unified in the sight of a single viewer cancel a unique perception of a depicted space; in other words, space cannot be derived from the order of objects seen at once, but it has to be explored pictorially.

This can be achieved by shifting our gaze, to look at the objects depicted with respect to different viewpoints. The pictorially required shift of viewing direction, therefore, not only underlines the significance of the individual parts of the composition, but also suggests that these objects are seen from different angles in space. Thus, by its very structure depending on multiple viewpoints, the two-dimensional miniature painting represents space by implication of movement.

The representation of space through movement may sound paradoxical, given the somehow rigid or frozen poses in which figures are often drawn in miniatures. The movement we are speaking of is, however, not related to an illusionistic pictorial structure, but rather to a virtual one, and it is often sustained by the narrative composition. The particular arrangement of figures along a spiral curve, which Alexandre Papadopoulo (1976) discerned in a great number of miniatures and considered as an enhancement of the narrative (as it gradually leads our attention to the central figure of the story) is also a very suitable compositional structure for suggesting space through movement, that is, a space compatible with the two-dimensional character of the representation: The movement suggested by such a spiral arrangement is parallel to the picture plane and does not attempt to pierce it (12). This seems also to be the opinion of Erzen (1991, 10-12), who characterizes the pictorial space of miniatures as 'equivalent at all points in terms of experiential distance' and notes the two-dimensional conception of miniatures at the same time as their 'radial composition revolving around a center'.

Some authors have identified a similar suggestion of virtual movement in pictorial space in axonometric views, especially in those representing buildings. Here also the objects invite the viewer's eye to move around the depicted object (Bois, 1979, 264; Comar, 1992, 63). However, while axonometric drawings suggest a more easily intelligible movement that follows a continuous path around the object, they still relate to a single, even though impersonal, or virtually non-existing viewpoint, which corresponds to a vanishing point sent back to an infinite distance. The miniatures, on the other hand, suggest a more complex and fragmented movement in pictorial space, as they incorporate multiple viewpoints.

Axonometric forms can also be encountered in Islamic miniatures. Yet this occasional use of axonometric drawing which reveals the three-dimensional aspect of an object, should not be seen as an incomplete attempt to create the illusion of depth. The use of an axonometric form is more likely to be related to a desire of clearly explaining a particular shape, such as the hexagonal pavilion or its three-sided bay window in Figure 1. Moreover, an axonometric form does neither suggest a privileged viewpoint, nor a precise vanishing point for the entire picture, and therefore, it can very well be accommodated within a miniature composition that already incorporates many other viewpoints. Even the isolated perspective views that we find in the early-seventeenth-century miniatures of the Ottoman painter Ahmet Nakşi can be attributed to the principle of multiple

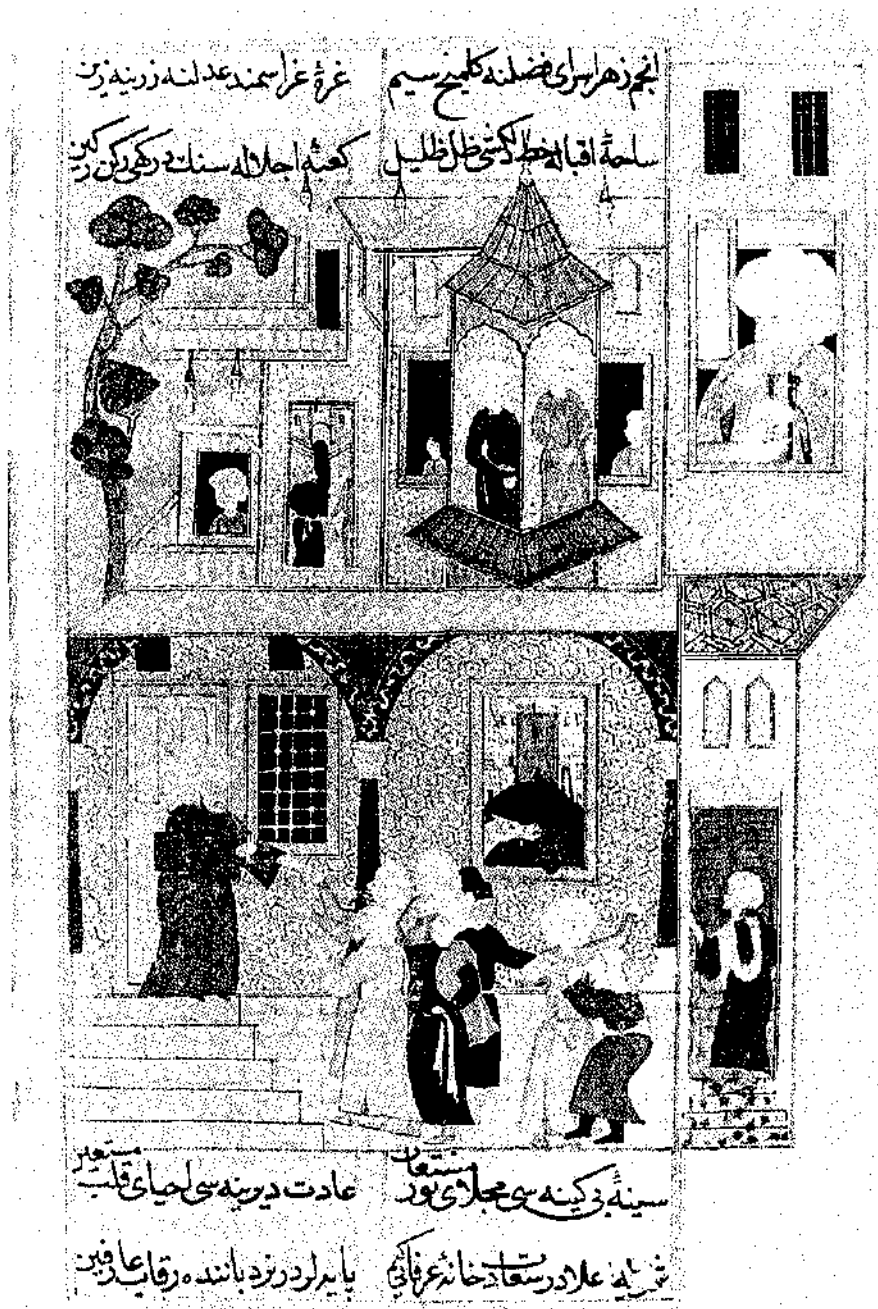


Figure 2. 'The House of Şeyhülislam Mustafa Efendi at Kasımpaşa' by Ahmed Nakşi; from 'Divan-ı Nadiri', İstanbul, ca. AD 1620; İstanbul Topkapı Palace Museum Library, MS Hazine 889, fol. 18v. (courtesy of the Topkapı Palace Museum).

13. On this painter, see Atlı (1978, 103-121).

viewpoints (Figure 2) (13). Although these perspective views seen through windows and gateways suggest an illusionistic depth and render Nakşı's composition somewhat eclectic and ambiguous, they remain isolated views and do not disturb the pictorial composition based on multiple viewpoints.

If we consider the conception of pictorial space as tied to the picture surface in Islamic painting, we must note that this conception is most strikingly expressed by the coincidence of all depicted surfaces such as floors, walls, ceilings, and canopies with the picture plane itself. The spatiality of these surfaces is transformed into a flatness on which all other solids appear to be floating. Hence, the flat picture surface becomes an abstract equivalent of the actual space.

On the basis of such a pictorial treatment of space and objects, it might be appropriate to conclude that in Islamic painting, space is primarily conceived as defined by the surfaces that suggest its limits. Unlike the pictorial space of a perspectival picture, the pictorial space suggested in miniatures does not enclose or unite the objects, but rather remains indifferent to them. In other words, here the pictorial expression of space does not depend on the depiction of objects, as it is the case in a perspectival picture where the precise geometry of depicted objects constitutes the illusionistic space.

Seyyed H. Nasr's (1972) remarks on a concept of cosmic space, predominant in Islam, seem to offer a further elaboration on this observation. Nasr remarks that:

Cosmic space is defined in relation to the inner surface of the outermost sphere rather than by any positive object such as the earth or the planets. Space is, as it were, carved out from the plenum of cosmic creation and is conceived with respect to a surface that surrounds it rather than an object which it surrounds (Nasr, 1972, 118-119) (Italics mine).

Nasr suggests that this conception of 'negative space', that is, a space determined not by the object(s) it encloses but by the surfaces that surround it (them), also characterizes the designs of Islamic buildings, gardens, and cities.

The significance of the surrounding surface in the conception of space may also explain why in Islamic miniatures the pictorial space is intimately linked to a picture surface stressed with paint and pattern rather than to a surface left blank, as in Chinese paintings. The conceptual link between space and its surrounding surfaces may then explain why pictorial space realized on a two-dimensional surface remains intelligible.

Being conceived as a stressed surface rather than a visually dissolved one, the Islamic pictorial space allows its viewers an intellectual viewing distance. We may gain an insight into how this pictorial space works visually and intellectually by looking at a very special example that brings the actual and the represented space together in an architectural composition. A ceramic tile panel, at the entrance to the bedroom pavilion of Murad III in the Topkapı Palace, bears the image of a garden seen through a two-bay arcade, in a nearly one-to-one scale, and proposes a pictorial space the meaning of which depended on its precise location in the architectural environment (Figure 3) (14).

At the time of its construction in 1578-79, the royal pavilion, consisting of a domed hall and its ante-chamber, overlooked the Golden Horn and commanded one of the most attractive panoramas of İstanbul. The tile panel that concerns us must have been moved in mid-seventeenth century to its present location, on the wall of another pavilion that protrudes into the ante-chamber of Murad III's

14. For color photos of this tile panel, also showing its present location, see illustrations 64 and 65 in Çiğ, Batur, and Köseoğlu (1988), or illustrations 96 and 97 in Ertuğ and Köllük (1991).

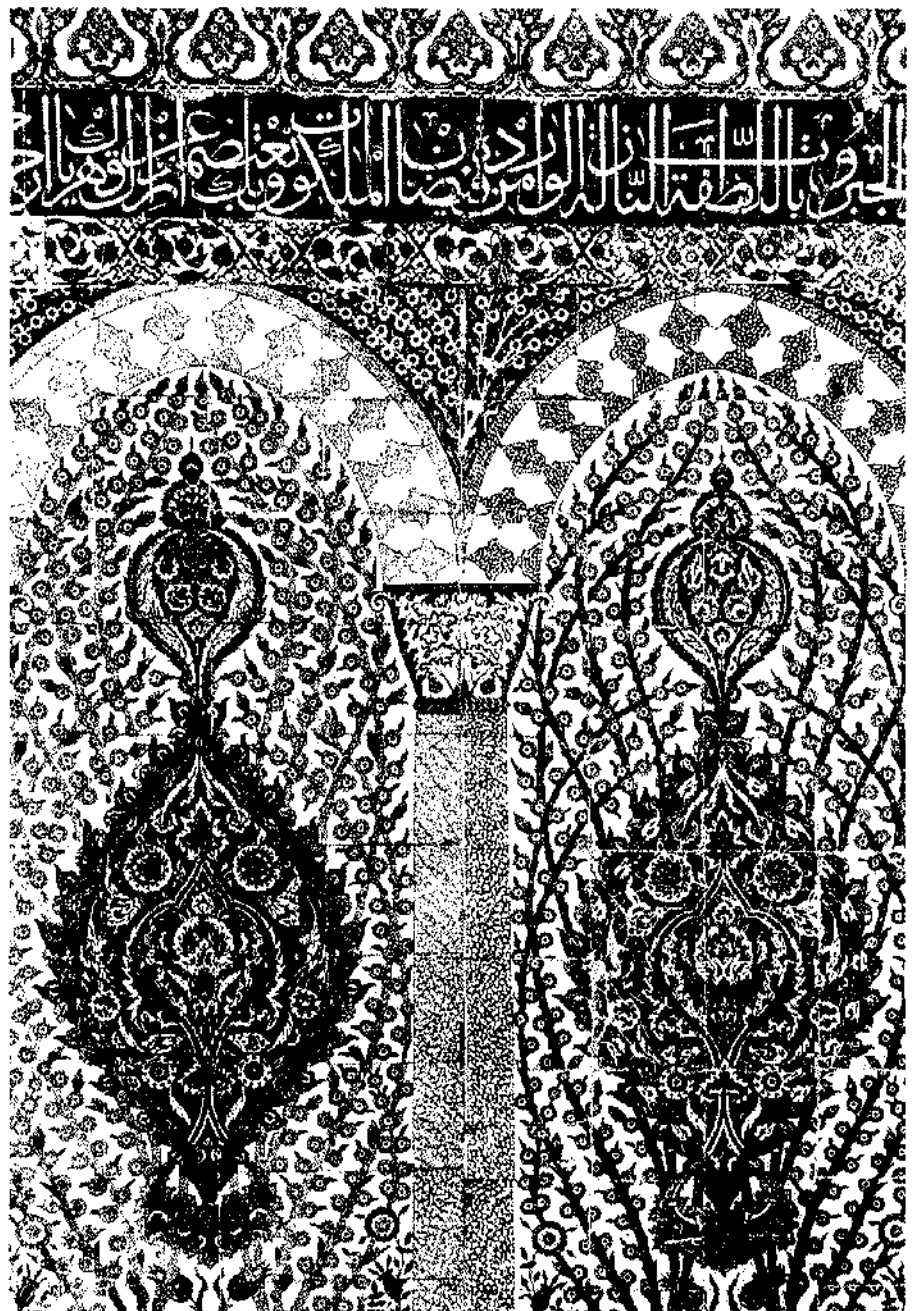


Figure 3. Ceramic tile panel (Iznik, ca. 1578) in the ante-chamber of the bedroom pavilion of Murad III in the Topkapı Palace, Istanbul (photograph by author; also printed in F. Edgü ed. 1983).

15. According to Mualla Anhegger-Eyüboğlu, two pavilions known as 'Twin Pavilions' (Çifte Kasırlar) were built at different times around the middle of the seventeenth century. The first one, which she names the Domed Pavilion (Kubbeli Kasır), covered part of the ante-chamber to bedroom of Murad III and was probably built during the reign of Murad IV (1623-1640). It was entered from this ante-chamber. The second pavilion seems to have been inserted, during the reign of Mehmed IV (1648-1687), between the Domed Pavilion and the bedroom, taking over about one half of the ante-chamber (Anhegger-Eyüboğlu, 1986, 63-79). For a plan of the Twin Pavilions, see figure L:117, and for the situation of bedroom pavilion of Murad III and that of the Twin Pavilions, see Figures L:21 and 22 in Eldem and Akozan (1982).

16. A likely location for this panel would be inside the ante-chamber, on its northeast wall. Precisely this wall of the ante-chamber was destroyed when Mehmed IV's pavilion was built. Another example of an arcade represented on tile revetment can be found in the tomb of Şehzade Mehmed. There, the arcade composition covers the interior walls all around, yet real windows, located between arches, replace the imaginary view and give direct visual access to the tomb garden outside. See illustrations 8 and 9 in Yenişchirlioğlu (1980, 451-452, 456).

17. Necipoğlu (1991, 171, figure 97) suggests that the panel originally covered the exterior façade of the ante-chamber of the pavilion of Murad III. She mentions the similarity between the depicted arcade and the gallery leading to the ante-chamber and observes a link between the inscription above the panel, which refers to 'a beautiful gate resembling spring' and the gate of the bedroom, which indeed is flanked by tile panels showing blossoming spring trees. Anhegger-Eyüboğlu (1986), on the other hand, believes that the panel was brought to its present location from the semi-open Imperial Hall (Hünkar Sofası), located on the southwest side of Murad III pavilion. This hall overlooked the same panorama through an arcade on its northwest side. If this location is true, the relationship I establish between the composition of the panel and the view through a real arcade would still be tenable.

18. See Eldem and Akozan (1982, figure L: 21). The gallery is marked as number 41 and Murad III pavilion as number 34.

19. Necipoğlu (1991, 171) calls the arcade 'illusionistic' but does not elaborate on the pictorial characteristics of the representation.

bedroom pavilion (15). This arcade is only a fragment, yet one can easily imagine that a larger arcade composition once covered either an interior wall of the ante-chamber (16) or the exterior of its entrance façade (17). In any case, the arcade composition picks up its theme from an actual arcaded gallery that led to the entrance of the pavilion (18). As the pavilion itself, also this gallery enjoyed the same charming view of the cityscape and the palace gardens lying just below.

The depicted arcade segment and the imaginary garden seen through it share the same flatness. Despite the fact that the depicted arcade acts as a frame, the space seen through it is filled with fantastic floral compositions that stress the surface without suggesting any depth (19). Although this represented view can somehow be expanded by the viewer's imagination, it cannot be visually perceived as an expansion of the viewer's own space, as a perspectival view would be. Here the viewer can only be reminded of a spring garden, to which the royal pavilion itself is compared by various inscriptions it bears (Necipoğlu, 1991, 167, 170). The pictorial space in this representation, realized on a ceramic revetment on a magnified scale, is not different in its essence from that realized in miniatures. It is a pictorial space that does not depend on an illusion of depth to be intelligible. The efficiency of this two-dimensional pictorial space lies both in its imaginary and concrete qualities. By not suggesting spatial depth, which would have corresponded to an enclosed finite spatial unit, this representation opts for an infinitely expanding space of an imaginary garden, perhaps that of the Paradise, which nevertheless remains sensible and enjoyable thanks to the concreteness of its surface stressed by a powerful pattern.

İSLAM RESİM SANATINDA MEKAN TASVİRİ ÜZERİNE DÜŞÜNCELER

ÖZET

Alındı : 3. 4. 1997 (son sunuş).
 Anahtar Sözcükler: Resim Sanatı, İslam
 Resim Sanatı, Resimde Mekan, Perspektif,
 Minyatür.

İslam minyatürlerinde mekanın nasıl tasvir edildiği genellikle tartışılmamıştır. Özde iki boyutlu olan ve naturalizmi amaçlamayan bu resimlerde, mekan tasvirinin konu dışı kaldığı yargısı yerleşmiş gözükmemektedir. Sanat tarihçileri, İslam resminde görülen iki boyutluluğun tasvir yasağından kaynaklandığı görüşünde birleşirler. Bu görüş, kısmen de olsa, tarihsel bir gerçeğe dayanmakla birlikte, sanatçının ancak neden iki boyutlu bir tasvir sistemi içinde çalıştığını açıklar; fakat bu sistemin nasıl kurulduğu ve hangi açılardan farklı bir tasvir seçeneği oluşturduğu sorusunu cevapsız bırakır. İslam resim sanatı hakkındaki yazılarda mekan tasvirine değinilmemesinin asıl nedeni, bunun ancak doğrusal perspektifle tutarlı bir biçimde sağlanabileceğinin varsayılmasıdır. Bu yazıda, perspektif yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilen mekan tasvirinin özellikleri ve anlamı ile İslam minyatürlerinde mekan tasvirinin nasıl ele alındığı konularına değinilmekte, özellikle her iki resim sisteminde resimsel mekanın nasıl bir resim düzlemi kavrayışına göre gerçekleştiği incelenmektedir. Resim düzlemi kavramına açıklık getirmek amacıyla Çin resim sanatında mekan tasvirinin bazı yönlerine de kısaca değinilmektedir.

Perspektifle mekan yanılması (illüzyon), mekan içinde yer alan cisimlerin birbirleriyle olan geometrik ilişkilerinin kesin olarak tek bir bakış açısına göre resmedilmeleriyle gerçekleştirilir. Tasvirin mekan yanılmasını yaratmadaki etkinliği ve kompozisyon açısından tutarlılığı, hep bu tek bakış noktası üzerinde odaklaşmasından ileri gelir. Tek bakış noktası, basit bir pratik gereklilikten öte, bir simgesel değer taşır: bir tek kişinin görüş şekli öncelik kazanmış ve mutlak referans noktası haline gelmiştir.

İslam minyatürleri cisimleri tek bir bakış açısından resmetmedikleri için, mekanın bir derinlik yanılması biçiminde tasvirine imkan vermezler. Ama, resimsel mekanın anlaşılabilirliği mutlaka bir derinlik yanılması olarak tasvir edilmesine bağlı değildir.

Resimsel mekanın bir derinlik yanılması olarak anlaşılması, Rönesans ile Batı resim sanatında yerleşen ve ancak Modern resim sanatının değiştirdiği, özel bir resim yüzeyi kavrayışına dayanır. Bu kavrayışa göre, resim yüzeyi kendisi olarak varolmaz; mekan yanılmasının gerçekleşebilmesi için adeta bir pencere gibi saydamlaşmıştır. İslam resminde ise resim yüzeyinin düzlemsel niteliği olabildiğince ifade edilir.

Rönesans resim sanatında, resim düzlemine rağmen mekan yanılması başarıyla sağlanırken, mekanın önemli bir niteliği olan sonsuzluğu, resmin mekansal birimi içine hapsedilir: resim düzlemine dik paralellerin bulunduğu kaçış noktası, resim düzlemi üzerinde somut bir nokta haline gelmiştir ve tasvir edilmiş bulunan mekanın sınırını tanımlar. Buna karşın, tek bir kaçış noktasına göre tasarlanmamış İslam ve Çin resimleri, mekanı resimsel olarak daha az tanımlamakla beraber, sonsuzluğunu daha net bir biçimde ifade ederler. Bu durum, her iki resim sanatında resim yüzeyinin Batı resminden başka türlü kavranışıyla yakından ilgilidir. Çin resminde resim yüzeyi tümüyle bir resim düzlemi sayılmaz, ancak çeşitli objeleri tasvir etmek üzere boyanmış noktalar resim düzlemi olarak algılanır; boyanmadan bırakılmış alan, cisimleri kuşatan sonsuz mekanın boşluğuna karşılıktır. İslam resminde ise resim yüzeyi tümüyle

boyanarak bir resim düzlemine dönüştürülür. Bu düzlem içinde, tüm cisimler ve yüzeyler eşdeğerdedir ve oluşturulan resimsel mekan içinde tasvir edilen cisim ve boşluklar aynı biçimde yassılaştır ve görsel olarak eşitlenir.

İslam minyatürlerinde cisim ve boşlukların böyle bir resimsel eşdeğerlilik içinde ifadesi, tüm kompozisyonu birleştiren tek bir bakış noktasının olmayışıyla da güçlenir. Farklı cisimlerin farklı bakış noktalarına göre resmedilmiş olması, hem her bir cismin kompozisyon elemanı olarak taşıdığı önemi vurgular, hem de bu cisimlere, mekan içinde dolaşarak, değişik yerlerden bakılmış olduğunu ifade eder. Dolayısıyla, İslam minyatüründe iki boyutlu resim mekanı hareketin imasıyla da tanımlanmış olur. Bu hareket, özellikle binaların resmedildiği aksonometrik çizimlerde olduğu gibi, gözü cisimlerin etrafında dolaşmaya davet eder.

Aksonometrik bir form olarak tasvir edilmiş cisimleri minyatürlerde de bulmak mümkündür. Bazı cisimlerin böyle resmedilmiş olması, resme bir derinlik verme çabasından çok, üç boyutlu şekillerini açıklama endişesine dayanır ve bu tasvirler öncelikli bir bakış noktası önermedikleri için, zaten birçok bakış noktası içeren resim düzeni içine rahatlıkla yerleşirler.

İslam resminde, mekan tasvirinin resim yüzeyine bağlı olarak kavranışı, en çarpıcı biçimde yer, döşeme, duvar, tavan, gölgelik vb. resmedilmiş tüm yüzey nitelikli öğelerin resim düzlemiyle çakışmasında göze çarpar. Bu yüzeylerin mekansallığı, cisimlerin üzerinde yüzdüğü bir düzlüğe dönüşmüş ve böylece resim yüzeyi gerçek mekanın soyut bir karşılığı olmuştur. Denilebilir ki, İslam resminde mekan, onu sınırlayan yüzeylerin tarif ettiği bir şey olarak algılanmıştır. Perspektife uygun mekan tasvirinin aksine, minyatürlerdeki mekan, cisimleri kuşatarak birleştirmeyi, tersine, cisimlere tarafsız kalır. Seyyid H. Nasr'ın dile getirdiği, İslam'da kozmik mekanın, çevrelediği cisimlerden çok, çevrelendiği yüzeyler yardımıyla kavrandığı düşüncesi de, resimdeki bu durumu destekler görünmektedir.

Mekanın kavranışında, mekanı çevreleyen yüzeylerin önemi, belki İslam resminde mekan tasvirinin neden (Çin resminin aksine) renk ve desenle vurgulanmış bir resim yüzeyine sıkı sıkıya bağlı olduğunu da açıklayabilir. Böylece, mekanla iki boyutlu bir yüzeyde gerçekleştirilmiş resimsel mekan arasındaki kavramsal bağ da anlaşılabilir hale gelir.

Görsel olarak çözülmüş bir resim düzlemi yerine, yüzey oluşu vurgulanmış bir resim düzlemine bağlı olarak kavranan mekan tasviri seyredenlere zihinsel bir bakış mesafesi de sunar. Böyle bir mekan tasvirinin görsel ve zihinsel olarak nasıl bir etki amaçladığını, Topkapı Sarayı'ndaki bir çini pano çok iyi örneklemektedir. Resimsel mekanın panonun yer aldığı mimari mekanla olan ilgisi, mekan tasvirinin temelde nasıl kavrandığını anlamamıza yardım eder.

III. Murat'ın yatak odası köşkü girişinde bulunan bu çini panoda, neredeyse birebir ölçekte, iki kemerden oluşan bir revak ve ardında görünen bir bahçe tasvir edilmiştir. Orijinal konumunda, köşk niteliğindeki binanın muhtemelen giriş cephesinde yer almış bulunan bu kompozisyon, o dönemde giriş kapısına kadar uzanan, revaklı bir galerinin devamı olarak tasarlanmış gözükmektedir. Köşk, İstanbul'un en muhteşem manzaralarından birine yöneltilmiş olup revaklı galeri de aynı manzaraya ve aşağıda yer alan saray bahçesine bakmaktadır.

Çini pano üzerindeki revak parçası ve ötesinde yer alan bahçe aynı resim düzlemini paylaşırlar. Revak bir çerçeve oluşturduğu halde, buradan görünen mekan, çini resim yüzeyini vurgulayan ve derinlik ifadesine yer vermeyen, düşsel

çiçek motifleriyle süslenmiştir. Bu biçimde resmedilen mekanı zihinde genişletmek mümkündür, fakat içinde bulunulan mimari mekanın doğrudan bir uzantısı olarak algılamak söz konusu değildir. Kompozisyona bakan kişi ancak bir bahar bahçesini düşleyebilir (ki köşk de, kitabelerinde böyle bir bahçeye benzetilmektedir). İki boyutlu bu resimsel mekanın etkinliği hem somut hem de düşsel niteliklerinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Çini üzerindeki kompozisyon bize, sınırlanmış bir mekan birimi anlamına gelecek optik bir yanılsama önermeden, zihinsel anlamda sonsuza uzanan, düşsel ama aynı zamanda güçlü bir desenle vurgulanmış somut bir yüzey olarak karşımızda durur ve gerçek bina, bahçe ve kent mekanıyla ancak yanyana olmak sebebiyle bütünleşen bir mekan tasviri sunar.

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