Wahdat al Wujud:

the Moroccan madrasa, Zellige tiles, and Sufi ontology

by

Ali Salama

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2024
© Ali Salama 2024

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Wahdat al wujud—loosely translated as *unity of being*—is a Sufi philosophical concept that refers to the oneness or collectivity of our entire consciousness. This thesis aims to reframe our understanding of space through an exploration of *wahdat al wujud*. Today, our modern societies and spaces overwhelmingly neglect our *unity of being*. Capitalism clouds our hearts so that empathy and care become commodities we don't want to spend, and the increasingly fast pace of daily life leaves little room for reflection on the great loss of our collectivity. We grow more alienated and become increasingly distant from one another and the world at large. Our spaces only further this alienation, neglecting their vital role as the realizers of our *interconnected being*.

Architecture is a cosmological act. Samer Akkach talks about how cosmology and architecture were intimately tied in the premodern Islamic tradition.[1] Spaces reflected our understanding of the universe and fostered our place within it. The link between cosmology and architecture has been lost to our modern conceptions of the practice. The Moroccan madrasa and Zellige tiles serve as reminders and key case studies of this link, connecting architecture with the cosmological view of *wahdat al wujud*.

The Moroccan madrasa is a space of teaching and learning based around a central courtyard where students congregate. The courtyard is adorned by intricate enamelled terracotta tiles, known as Zellige. The spatial configuration of the madrasa symbolically reflects the philosophy of *wahdat al wujud* at the cosmic scale; connecting God, human and world. At the same time, its phenomenological qualities nurture a profound experience of awe and belonging as a part of this *wahdat al wujud*. In the madrasa, our entire perception of existence is redefined: being becomes a collective experience and not an individual one; we perceive ourselves as part of a *communal oneness*, akin to the Sufi analogy of being drops in the ocean.

To break the cycle of alienating architecture, we need to rediscover the link between cosmology and architecture. If our architecture fosters a vision of *communal being*, our built environment can instead perpetuate a cycle of collective belonging. Architecture is not just a backdrop for human activity but the essential conduit that shapes and defines our entire existence. It can reconnect us to our fundamental unity, fostering our empathy and care for one another and the world at large.

1 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), xvii.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge that this thesis was developed at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture in Cambridge, which is situated on the land of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee people. This land is situated on the Haldimand Tract, which includes six miles on either side of the Grand River, which was promised to the Six Nations of the Grand River.

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who supported me during this thesis.

To my supervisor, Tara Bissett, for your constant guidance and encouragement. You gave me the confidence to ask difficult questions and explore challenging concepts. To Robert Jan Van Pelt, for your interest, curiosity, and your questions, I am so grateful to have had your input. To Jaliya Fonseka, for your empathy and care, and for teaching me to trust my voice. To Shobhana Xavier, for your kindness, generosity, and engagement, I feel very privileged to have had your expertise at the defence. Your insights have inspired me to move forward with motivation and optimism. To Anwar Jaber, for clarifying and shaping this thesis, I am so grateful for all of your thoughtfulness and guidance throughout the entire process. To Philip Beesley, for challenging me and guiding me to a thesis out of scattered ideas, I am so thankful for your kindness and openness. To Jane Mah Hutton, for inspiring me to garden. And to Karl Mustoe, for inspiring me to create.

I am very grateful to the community at the School of Architecture, to all of my teachers and friends, thank you. To the administration and Mark and Tina, thank you for your support and kindness. To Justin, Afnan, Cassandra, Shiuli, and Diana, your conversations and friendship have shaped this thesis. To Salim Filali for helping me plan my trip to Morocco, you were so generous with your time, and your input was invaluable. To Razmig, for our coffees, conversations and setting our lineups. To Aly and Marwan, for constantly lifting my spirits. To Oliver, for moulding this thesis, I am indebted to you for your intelligence and feedback every step of the way. And to Elizabeth, for your constant care, encouragement and, most importantly, for being there.

To my family, my parents, for your sacrifices and your unwavering, unrelenting love. Omar, Mohamed, Majda, and Tayel for always caring and believing in me.

Table of Contents

Author's Declaration iii
Abstract v
Acknowledgements vi
List of Figures x

Preface **xviii**
Wahdat al Wujud xxiii

Part one: the three domains **1**

Chapter 1: iman 7
1.1 iman: a transcendent epistemology 9
1.2 Exile: the Return and Home 10
1.2.1 The Fall from Home 10
1.2.2 Vattimo's first Return: The desire to Return after the fall . 11
1.2.3 Ibn al Arabi's first Return: the compulsory Return . . . 11
1.3 The epistemological Kaaba 17
1.3.1 The Kaaba 17
1.3.2 The Kaaba is a shadow of paradise 19
1.3.3 Sakina 21
1.4 Conclusion 22

Chapter 2: islam **29**
2.1 islam: an immanent phenomenology 31
2.2 The phenomenological Kaaba 33
2.2.1 Kaaba-heart 35
2.2.2 Hajj 35
2.2.2.1 Ihram. *36*
2.2.2.2 Tawaf. *37*
2.2.3 The immanent Ihram and Tawaf. 37
2.3 Rhizome: home and return 39
2.3.1 Vattimo's second return: The return without a fall . . . 40
2.3.2 Ibn al Arabi's second return: the voluntary return . . . 40
2.4 home 42
2.4.1 Postmodern Affect: Affect in Deleuze. 42
2.4.2 Sufi Affect: Love 43
2.4.3 Rumi: Love vs Reverence 44
2.5 The Quran as Rhizomatic Book 46
2.6 Conclusion 48

Chapter 3: ihsan **55**
3.1 ihsan: a liminal ontology 57
3.1.1 a synthetical domain 59
3.1.2 Ihsan and Sufism 60
3.2 Barzakh: threshold and in-between space 61
3.2.1 Wahda and Kathra: Unity and Multiplicity. 62
3.2.1.1 The 99 Names of God. *62*
3.3 ihsan: Deleuze and Islam 65
3.4 The Kaaba as Barzakh Reality: the imago templi 71
3.5 The role of the architect 72
3.5.1 Ihsan: Beauty and Awe 72
3.6 Conclusion 74

Part two: spatializing wahdat al wujud **80**

Chapter 4: madrasa **85**
4.1 The Moroccan madrasa 87
4.1.1 Origins of the madrasa 87
4.1.2 The Moroccan madrasa 88
4.1.3 Characteristics of the Moroccan madrasa 88
4.2 The Courtyard 90
4.2.1 Abdallah's courtyard house. 100
4.3 Divine and Domestic: the Prophet's house-mosque 103
4.4 The Divine element 104
4.5 The Domestic Courtyard. 105
4.5.1 Courtyard as Protected Space. 105
4.5.2 Courtyard as Private Realm 105
4.5.3 Courtyard as Paradise 105
4.6 El Attarine Madrasa. 109
4.6.1 In el Attarine Madrasa 117

Chapter 5: Zellige **182**
5.1 Hearing Zellige in Rabat 130
5.1.1 Meeting Ahmet 132
5.2 What is Zellige? A brief history 140
5.2.1 Volubilis 143
5.3 Ornamentation in the madrasa 146
5.4 Zellige as a Mirror to Existence: iman, islam, ihsan 146
5.4.1 Iman: Geometry 147
5.4.2 Islam: Embodied Making 148
5.4.2.1 A detailed description of Zellige making 148
5.4.3 Ihsan: Mastery: The Maallemin 155
5.5 An Analysis of the Portal at El Attarine Madrasa 158
5.5.1 Intelligible and Sensible geometry 161
5.5.1.1 Intelligible geometry 162
5.5.1.2 Quasiperiodicity 162
5.5.1.3 The Sufi principle of wahda and kathra: quasiperiodic tiling 165
5.5.1.4 Sensible geometry 168
5.6 Conclusion 178

Conclusion **182**
Architecture and Cosmology 184

Bibliography 186

Appendix: Drawings 194

Glossary 204

List of Figures

Images by author unless otherwise stated.

Preface

Fig. 0.1. el Attarine madrasa in Fes xxii

Fig. 0.2. methodology diagram of part one: the three domains xxx

Fig. 0.3. methodology diagram of part two: spatializing *wahdat al wujud* xxxi

Chapter 1: iman

Fig. 1.1. roof of al Qarawiyyin University in Fes. Green roof tiles adorn all of the universities, madrasas, and mosques of Fes 4

Fig. 1.2. a mosque in the medina of Rabat 4

Fig. 1.3. inside a Moroccan khettara, an ancient water management and irrigation system, in Tinghir 5

Fig. 1.4. diagram: the transcendent axis of being 8

Fig. 1.5. diagram: the transcendent axis; Ibn Al Arabi's notion that the human presence is the mediator between the creator and the created. 12

Fig. 1.6. sunrise over mount Toubkal. 12

Fig. 1.7. the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.
source: Richard Yeomans, *The Story of Islamic Architecture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 51.. . . . 56

Fig. 1.8. diagram: the transcendent axis: the Kaaba, stands for architecture as the built embodiment of the human presence, mediating between the creator and the created. . . 18

Fig. 1.9. diagram: the epistemological Kaaba. 20

Fig. 1.10. Bab Ftouh, one of the main gates into the Fes Medina 23

Chapter 2: islam

Fig. 2.1. descending the High Atlas mountains 26

Fig. 2.2. a detail of carved stucco at el Attarine Madrasa in Fes 26

Fig. 2.3. cliffside in the Todra Gorge 27

Fig. 2.4. diagram: the immanent plane of being 30

Fig. 2.5. the Kaaba during prayer time.
source: Oleg Grabar, Richard Ettinghausen, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650 - 1250* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2002), 3. 32

Fig. 2.6. diagram: the phenomenological Kaaba 34

Fig. 2.7. pilgrims during Hajj
source: wikimedia commons, by Basil D Soufi 36

Fig. 2.8. diagram: the immanent plane of being: a network of human-human connection 38

Fig. 2.9. Bab Semarine, one of the gates to the Fes Medina 49

Chapter 3: ihsan

Fig. 3.1. overlooking the Fes medina 52

Fig. 3.2. Nejjarine fountain in the Fes medina 52

Fig. 3.3. sunset over the Sahara desert 53

Fig. 3.4. diagram: the synthetical domain of ihsan: transcendent axis + immanent plane. 56

Fig. 3.5. diagram: ihsan as the synthesis of iman and islam 58

Fig. 3.6. diagram: Al-Hindi's notion of First Determination
source: Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 68. . 63

Fig. 3.7. diagram: the synthetical domain of ihsan: transcendent axis + immanent plane. 64

Fig. 3.8. diagram: The Unity and Multiplicity of Being: wahdat al wujud as a rhizome 66

Fig. 3.9. the barzakh Kaaba 68

Fig. 3.10. the Kaaba (c.1907)
source: Titus Burckhardt, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Jean-Louis Michon, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, Commemorative ed (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2009), 3. 70

Fig. 3.11. looking into the courtyard of Ibn Youssef madrasa in Marrakech from a student room 75

Chapter 4: madrasa

Fig. 4.1. el Attarine madrasa in Fes 78

Fig. 4.2. looking out of a student room at Ibn Youssef Madrasa in Marrakech 78

Fig. 4.3. overlooking the Middle Atlas mountains 79

Fig. 4.4. the portalway at el Attarine madrasa in Fes, leading from the courtyard to the prayer hall 63

Fig. 4.5. diagram: the madrasa as the synthesis of the divine and domestic courtyard 86

Fig. 4.6. the fountain in the center of el Attarine madrasa in Fes 89

Fig. 4.7. a narrow alley in the Fes medina 91

Fig. 4.8. el Attarine souq in the Fes medina 93

Fig. 4.9. overlooking a souq in the Marrakech medina 93

Fig. 4.10. the Fes Medina
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 40. 93

Fig. 4.11. *mashrabiya* screens cover a window in the Marrakech medina . . 95

Fig. 4.12. view from a rooftop in the Marrakech medina 95

Fig. 4.13. detail of the "hand of Fatima" door hinge, a symbol that keeps away the "evil eye" 95

Fig. 4.14. an uncharacteristically quiet alley in the Marrakech medina on Eid 95

Fig. 4.15. a quiet alley in the Marrakech medina 97

Fig. 4.16. a blue tinted window in the Marrakech medina 97

Fig. 4.17. "dyers souq" in Fes. 97

Fig. 4.18. a narrow alley in the Marrakech medina 97

Fig. 4.19. a souq in the Marrakech medina 97

Fig. 4.20. a domestic alley in the Fes medina 97

Fig. 4.21. decorative iron window coverings in the Fes medina 99

Fig. 4.22. potted plants in the Marrakech medina 99

Fig. 4.23. a narrow domestic alley in the Fes medina 99

Fig. 4.24. detail of a decorated window in the Marrakech medina 99

Fig. 4.26. diagram: the *Masjid al Nabawi* as the synthesis of the divine and domestic courtyard 102

Fig. 4.25. pastel rendering of Abdallah's door 104

Fig. 4.27. floor plan of *Masjid al Nabawi*
source: Oleg Grabar, Richard Ettinghausen, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650 - 1250* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2002), 5. 103
Fig. 4.28. the courtyard of Samira's Riad, where I spent a week in Marrakech. 106
Fig. 4.29. a view into Al Qarawiyyin University from Bab el Ward . . . 108
Fig. 4.30. map of Fes medina
source: Attilio Gaudio, *Fès: Joyau de la Civilisation Islamique*, Nouvelles Editions (Paris: Presses de l'Unesco, 1982), 40, http://archive.org/details/fesjoyaudelacivi0000gaud. 109
Fig. 4.31. el Attarine madrasa 112
Fig. 4.32. looking towards the prayer hall at el Attarine madrasa . . . 113
Fig. 4.33. people fill the madrasa on an overcast day 113
Fig. 4.34. a view of the entrance into the courtyard 113
Fig. 4.35. a detail of a carved marble column and carved stucco wall . . 113
Fig. 4.36. a detail of two different Zellige panels 114
Fig. 4.37. a detail of the carved stucco and partial muqarnas 114
Fig. 4.38. a view of the courtyard facade of the madrasa 114
Fig. 4.39. el Attarine madrasa 116
Fig. 4.40. pastel rendering of el Attarine madrasa from inside the prayer hall 116

Chapter 5: Zellige
Fig. 5.1. Zellige at Ibn Youssef madrasa in Marrakech 124
Fig. 5.2. Zellige covers the floor of the hallway in Cherratine madrasa in Fes 124
Fig. 5.3. overlooking the Atlas mountains 125
Fig. 5.4. Ahmet's workshop 128
Fig. 5.5. pastel rendering of Ahmet breaking the Zellige tiles 130
Fig. 5.6. pastel rendering of Ahmet 132
Fig. 5.7. Ahmet drawing reference lines. 133
Fig. 5.8. Zellige tiles on top of Ahmet's work station 134
Fig. 5.9. Ahmet chamfering the edge of a tile. 134
Fig. 5.10. Ahmet showing me the pattern 134
Fig. 5.11. outside Ahmet's shop. 134
Fig. 5.12. Ahmet in his workshop 136

Fig. 5.13. Ahmet's tiles, labelled 138
Fig. 5.14. corner detail of Zellige at el Attarine madrasa. 141
Fig. 5.15. detail of two Zellige panels separated by a column at el Attarine madrasa 141
Fig. 5.16. Roman mosaics in a house at Volubilis, depicting a sixfold geometry 143
Fig. 5.17. a view of the Capitoline temple of Volubilis 143
Fig. 5.18. a mosaic from the house of Venus at Volubilis. 143
Fig. 5.19. the *mihrab* at the great Mosque of Cordoba 144
Fig. 5.20. a famous Zellige panel at Alhambra in Granada 144
Fig. 5.21. the geometry of Zellige manifests the transcendent axis of being 147
Fig. 5.22. the embodied making of Zellige manifests the immanent plane of being 148
Fig. 5.23. the *ajjan* mixes the clay and shapes the tiles
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 356. 149
Fig. 5.24. the *fakkhar* lays out the tiles to dry
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 360. 150
Fig. 5.25. *qatta* flattening and cutting the tiles with his son
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 362. 150
Fig. 5.26. the *fakkhar* feeds the oven with crushed olive pits
source: Jean-Marc Castéra. *Arabesques: Art Décoratif au Maroc* (Courbevoie: ACR, 1996), 405. 151
Fig. 5.27. the *fakkhar* loads tiles into the smaller oven for the second bake with the enamel glaze
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 365. 151
Fig. 5.28. the *qatta* uses the *menkakh* to break the tiles
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture, Volume 1*, (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 368. 152
Fig. 5.29. the tiles are sorted by color and shape
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 360. 152

Fig. 5.30. the *maallem* traces the pattern while the apprentice looks on
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 403. . . . 152

Fig. 5.31. the apprentices pour the mortar on the back of the Zellige
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 393. . . . 152

Fig. 5.32. the *maallem* arranges the tiles
source: André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture,* Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 388. . . . 154

Fig. 5.33. the mastery of the *maallem* is a synthesis of spiritual mastery and technical mastery 155

Fig. 5.35. Zellige *maallem's* manifest the transcendent and immanent: *iman* and *islam* *157*

Fig. 5.37. the panel of interest at the portal to the prayer hall 160

Fig. 5.38. Roger Penrose's tiling. 162

Fig. 5.39. the panel around the corner: a sixfold, periodic, translational symmetry 163

Fig. 5.40. the panel of interest: a fivefold, quasiperiodic rotational symmetry 163

Fig. 5.41. overlaying the diffraction pattern of the Al-Mg alloy quasicrystal onto the panel. Recreated based on
source: Abdelmalek Thalal et al., "Islamic Geometric Patterns," *Symmetry: Culture and Science* 22, no. 1–2 (January 2011): 194. 164

Fig. 5.42. the panel at el Attarine exhibits the same fivefold quasiperiodic symmetry that the Penrose tiles exhibit 600 years later. Recreated based on
source: Abdelmalek Thalal et al., "Islamic Geometric Patterns," *Symmetry: Culture and Science* 22, no. 1–2 (January 2011): 199. 165

Fig. 5.43. generating the fivefold quasiperiodic symmetry of the panel at el Attarine madrasa using the hasba method, as described by Yassine Ait Lahcen et al., "New Approach to Construct a New Islamic Geometric Patterns Using the Hasba Method," *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology* 99, no. 14 (July 31, 2021): 3664. 166

Fig. 5.44. studying the geometry and design of the panel at el Attarine madrasa. 169

Fig. 5.45. a side door to a mosque is decorated by Zellige, and carved and painted stucco and cedar, in the Marrakech medina . . 170
Fig. 5.46. a tenfold symmetry at Bou Inania madrasa in Fes 171
Fig. 5.47. Zellige covering the floor of el Bahia Palace in Marrakech . . 173
Fig. 5.48. a detail of a complex panel at the Mausoleum of Mohammed V in Rabat. 173
Fig. 5.49. Zellige decorating a fountain at Dar Si Said Museum in Marrakech. 173
Fig. 5.50. Zellige at Dar el Bacha Museum in Marrakech 175
Fig. 5.51. Zellige at Palais Riad Lamrani in Marrakech 175
Fig. 5.52. Zellige at the Saadian Tombs in Marrakech 177
Fig. 5.53. Zellige at Dar el Bacha Museum in Marrakech 177
Fig. 5.54. Zellige at Bou Inania madrasa in Fes 177
Fig. 5.55. a portal at Moulay Ismail Mausoleum in Meknes 179

Conclusion

Fig. 6.1. the doorway to el Attarine madrasa 181

preface



Fig. 0.1. el Attarine madrasa in Fes

Wahdat al Wujud

> *"[there is] a long Western philosophical tradition that has turned its back on the notion of the metaphysical unity of existence, and looked at the tendency toward metaphysical unity as a product of Oriental imagination."* [1]

Wahdat al wujud—loosely translated as *unity of being*—is a Sufi philosophical concept that refers to the oneness or collectivity of our entire consciousness. It comes from the ideas of Sufi-Islamic thinkers in the medieval period, and especially gained prominence through the work of 13th-century Sufi scholar and mystic Ibn al Arabi.[2] While *wahda* translates directly as oneness or unity, the term *wujud*, often translated as "being" is much more nuanced. Islamic studies scholar and architectural historian Samer Akkach explains, "the polarity of 'being' and 'existence' or 'Being' and 'being' has no linguistic support in Arabic. There is only one term *wujud*, with no lower and upper case, that accounts for all shades of meanings and conceptual nuances."[3] American philosopher William C Chittick explains the term: "when Sufi theoreticians like Ibn 'Arabi explain the nature of the divine life, they are likely to employ the term *wujud*, which is typically translated as 'existence' or 'being.' The Arabic word, however, also means finding, awareness, consciousness, and joy."[4] It is in this broader definition of "being" that *wahdat al wujud* is understood.

---

1 Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn Al-Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 7.

2 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 59.

3 Akkach, 58.

4 William C Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2007), 91.

For the context of this thesis, *wahdat al wujud* is perhaps best illustrated through the Sufi analogy of the droplet in the ocean. Sufi poets and thinkers often use this analogy to describe the relationality of our existence. It comes up in different ways across Sufi literature, but the essence is that we are all drops of water, and the ocean is Reality. "Only when the drop has submitted to … the ocean, can it forget its 'drop-ness.' When the drop finally merges with the ocean, it sees through the eye of the ocean that it is the ocean."[5] *Wahdat al wujud* is the ocean of collective being, and we are the drops finding our way towards it.

In our modern societies, we are like drops without an ocean. We are growing more and more alienated, becoming increasingly distant from one another, and the world at large. Our innate *unity* is displaced by our self-indulgent, self-serving *nafs* (false ego). We lose focus of the ocean of being in which we all belong. Capitalist modern society clouds our hearts so that empathy and care become commodities we don't want to spend, and the increasingly fast pace of daily life leaves little room for reflection on the great loss of our *unity of being*. The hole grows deeper and deeper, and we lose our fundamental care for one another as the cycle perpetuates. Our spaces, driven exclusively by capital, reflect this same nihilism, resulting in an increasingly alienated population whose built environment only further alienates them.

This thesis aims to reframe our understanding of space through an exploration of *wahdat al wujud*. It asks, "How do we realize *wahdat al wujud* through our spaces?" To answer this question, this thesis is grounded in the three domains of human existence, as described by the Islamic tradition. These are *iman, islam,* and *ihsan*. Chittick translates the terms into their English adjective equivalents: knowing, doing, and being respectively.[6] The three domains stem from the *hadith* (prophetic tradition) known as the hadith of Gabriel:

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، أَخْبَرَنَا أَبُو حَيَّانَ التَّيْمِيُّ، عَنْ أَبِي زُرْعَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ كَانَ النَّبِيُّ صلى الله عليه وسلم بَارِزًا يَوْمًا لِلنَّاسِ، فَأَتَاهُ جِبْرِيلُ فَقَالَ مَا الإِيمَانُ قَالَ الإِسْلاَمُ " قَالَ مَا الإِسْلاَمُ قَالَ ". الإِيمَانُ أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ بِاللهِ وَمَلاَئِكَتِه وَبِلِقَائِه وَرُسُلِه، وَتُؤْمِنَ بِالْبَعْثِ " قَالَ مَا ". أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللهَ وَلاَ تُشْرِكَ بِه، وَتُقِيمَ الصَّلاَةَ، وَتُؤَدِّيَ الزَّكَاةَ الْمَفْرُوضَةَ، وَتَصُومَ رَمَضَانَ " أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ " الإِحْسَانُ قَالَ

5 Nazim Adil al Haqqani, "99 Drops From Endless Mercy Oceans," *Sufi Path of Love*, Lulu, June 28, 2019, 20.

6 Abu Hamid Al Ghazzālī and David Buchman, *The Niche of Lights: Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 1st Edition (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), xi.

> *One day while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, (The angel) Gabriel came and asked, "What is [iman]?" Allah's Messenger replied, '[iman] is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection." Then he further asked, "What is [i]slam?" Allah's Messenger replied, "To worship Allah Alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly to pay the compulsory charity (Zakat) and to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan." Then he further asked, "What is [i]hsan?" Allah's Messenger replied, "To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you.*[7]

This threefold vision of existence was often a major point of discussion for Sufi thinkers. Chittick writes, "Sufism focuses specifically on the last [*ihsan*], employing the first [*iman*] and the second [*islam*], however, as its primary means to achieve the focus."[8] *Ihsan*—meaning perfection—is the deepest, in a sense, as it synthesizes the other two. While presented as separate concepts and specifically isolated in the methodology of this thesis, it is important to remember that the three domains (*iman*, *islam* and *ihsan*) are themselves interrelated. Splitting them up is only done for the sake of communicating them. Chittick reflects on this when he writes, "[the three domains] are distinct, yet thoroughly intertwined. Inasmuch as they are distinct, they came to be studied by different disciplines and judged by different standards."[9]

For this reason, each domain is given a chapter. In chapter one, *iman* (knowing), I deal with the epistemological view of existence: how do we know or understand our being? In this chapter, I discuss the transcendent axis of being, as established by traditional religious discourse: God—at the top—created the world and then created humans. In chapter two, *islam* (doing), I challenge this transcendent view, by presenting a postmodernist phenomenological view of existence, where being is experienced in the here-and-now, and not somewhere abstractly outside—this is the immanent plane of existence. In the third chapter, *ihsan* (being), I present a synthesis between the previous two chapters, recognizing being as simultaneously transcendent and immanent, this is what I label as the Sufi ontology.

In the domain of *ihsan*, we find the full understanding of *wahdat al wujud*, a unity at the cosmic-transcendent scale and at the social-immanent scale. Melding together medieval Sufi and postmodern Western philosophy, I describe the idea of *wahdat al wujud* through the lens of Giles Deleuze's rhizome theory. Thus, I bring Ibn al Arabi and other Sufi

---

7 Muhammad ibn Ismail Bukhari and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari: Arabic-English*, 6th rev. ed (Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, 1983), no. 50.

8 Al Ghazzālī and Buchman, ix.

9 William C Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2008), 7.

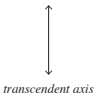
thinkers are brought into direct dialogue with the modern Western societal landscape. This connection highlights the similarities in the thought structures of Sufi thinkers and postmodern thinkers, bridging the perceived gap between the two philosophical traditions and bringing the often misinterpreted or ignored Sufi narrative into more prominence.

The thesis is split into two parts. Part one explores the three domains of being outlined above: *iman, islam,* and *ihsan*. In part one, I discuss Islam's holiest site, the Kaaba in Mecca, through these three lenses. The Kaaba serves as the primordial model of architecture, establishing the entire practice of architecture as a cosmological pursuit in the Islamic tradition. Chapter one considers the epistemological Kaaba as a symbol of God's divine revelation, chapter two considers the phenomenological Kaaba as a place of experiential significance, and chapter three considers the ontological Kaaba as a synthesis of the two: both a metaphysical symbol and an experiential phenomenon. The Kaaba manifests a spatializing of *wahdat al wujud*: it represents the unity of the cosmos, and experientially manifests the social unity of all humans.

Departing from part one's theoretical grounding, part two illustrates *wahdat al wujud* through the case study of the Moroccan madrasa and its Zellige tiles. They serve as primary examples of a carefully considered typology that perfectly embodies the philosophy of *wahdat al wujud* symbolically and experientially. The Moroccan madrasa is a space of teaching and learning configured around a central courtyard where students congregate. The courtyard is adorned by intricate enamelled terracotta tiles, known as Zellige. The spatial configuration of the madrasa symbolically reflects the cosmic *unity of being*, connecting God, human and world. At the same time, the madrasa's phenomenological qualities nurture a profound experience of awe and belonging as a part of a shared existence with every other human. In the madrasa, our entire perception of existence is redefined: being becomes a collective experience and not an individual one; we perceive ourselves as part of a *communal oneness*: droplets within the ocean.

part one: the three domains

	Islamic domain of existence	Western philosophical tradition			framework	
					theoretical	*spatial: Kaaba*

chapter 1	إيمان *iman*	a (transcendent) epistemology	 *transcendent axis of being*	·	- what is iman?
					- symbol: Fall
					  - Fall from Home
					  - spiritual exile
					  - Vattimo's 1st Return
					  - Ibn Arabi's 1st Return
						- epistemological Kaaba
						  - What is the Kaaba?
						  - Kaaba as shadow of Paradise
						  - Sakina

chapter 2	إسلام *islam*	an (immanent) phenomenology	 *immanent plane of being*		- what is islam?
					- symbol: rhizome
					  - social exile
					  - Vattimo's 2nd return
					  - Ibn Arabi's 2nd return
					  - Affect in Deleuze
					  - Sufi Affect in Rumi: Love
						- phenomenological Kaaba
						  - Kaaba-heart
						  - Hajj
						  - Ihram & Tawaf
						  - The Immanent Ihram and Tawaf

chapter 3	إحسان *ihsan*	a (liminal) ontology	 *synthesis of being*		- what is ihsan?
					- symbol: barzakh
					  - Homes/ Returns
					  - Wahda & Kathra: *Unity & Multiplicity*
					  - Zahir & Batin: *Inner & Outer*
					  - Deleuze and Islam
						- the barzakh Kaaba
						- imago templi
						- the role of the architect: beauty & awe

Fig. 0.2. methodology diagram of part one: the three domains

part two: spatializing wahdat al wujud

chapter 4
Madrasa
	- what is the Moroccan madrasa?
	- {Abdallah's courtyard house}
	- The divine madrasa: the Prophet's house-mosque
	  - Mosque vs Madrasa
		- The idea of the courtyard
		  - protection, privacy & Paradise
		- El Attarine madrasa
		- {In el Arrarine madrasa}

chapter 5 Zellige	- What is Zellige? - {Hearing Zellige in Rabat} - {Meeting Ahmet} - Tile as crystallization - Order of Ornament	- Panel at el Attarine madrasa - Intellective & Sensible Geometry - Quasiperiodicity - Zellige Maallem/ Mastery

Fig. 0.3. methodology diagram of part two: spatializing *wahdat al wujud*

part one

the three domains of existence









Fig. 1.1. overleaf: roof of al Qarawiyyin University in Fes. Green roof tiles adorn all of the universities, madrasas, and mosques of Fes

Fig. 1.2. a mosque in the medina of Rabat



Fig. 1.3. inside a Moroccan khettara, an ancient water management and irrigation system, in Tinghir



Chapter 1: iman

keywords: transcendence, metaphysical, nonmanifest, spiritual, sacred, eternal, divine



Fig. 1.4. the transcendent axis of being

1.1

iman: a transcendent epistemology

The first of the three domains of being is *iman*, or "faith." *Iman* deals with knowledge, understanding and doctrine. The domain of *iman* finds alignment with the Western philosophical tradition of epistemology, the study of knowledge: how do we know or understand our being? We can say that traditional mainstream Islam tends to primarily define being through the domain of *iman*. That is, we understand our existence through divine revelation: God's word is sent down from above. The structure of this vision of existence is vertical and transcendent.

Iman is only one of the three domains of existence. In a famous *hadith*, the Prophet said, "Faith is to acknowledge with the heart, to voice with the tongue, and to act with the limbs."[1] Chittick writes, "the Prophet's tripartite definition of faith designates the same three domains as the Hadith of Gabriel – body, tongue, and heart; or activity, thought, and awareness."[2] The domain of *iman* (knowing) is the domain of thought and the tongue. Chittick writes,

> 'Voicing with the tongue' is the realm of expressing faith through articulated self-awareness, or rational speech. Human beings are differentiated from other animals precisely by their power of speech, which expresses and conveys the awareness hidden in the depths of the heart. As a domain of learning, voicing faith belonged to those Muslim scholars who investigated the best ways to understand God, the universe, and the human soul.[3]

While the transcendent domain of *iman* does not operate alone, in this chapter, I consider an isolated view of the vertical axis of being, in order to better understand it. The vertical axis of *iman* (knowing) connects our cosmic *unity of being*, realizing our place between God and the world.

1.2

1 Muḥammad ibn Yazid Ibn Mājah and Muhammad Tufail Ansari, *Sunan Ibn Mājah with Arabic Text*, 2nd improving ed (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2013), no. 65.

2 William C Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2008), 8.

3 Chittick, *Sufism*, 8.

Exile: the Return and Home

1.2.1 The Fall from Home

This chapter explores *wujud* (being) as a vertical axis, while the following chapter explores it as a horizontal plane. In Islam, this vertical axis is established the moment Adam and Eve are exiled from Paradise. They fell from the primordial plane to the created world below. The exile we as humans experienced was a spiritual exile, wherein we became disconnected from a previously primordial, perfect existence.

ٱهْبِطُواْ مِنْهَا

"Fall down from it" {Quran 2:38}[4]

Philosopher Mircea Eliade explains how the fall in the Abrahamic religions represents a moment when humanity lost its connection with the sacred unity of being, a moment when humans experienced an "ontological change in the structure of the world."[5] The holistic cosmic unity of existence was disrupted. The world and our presence in it became disconnected—exiled—from the sacred realm. This is the setup of the transcendental paradigm.

The fall establishes the vertical axis, placing God—creator—on one end and world—created—on the other, but the two become fundamentally disconnected. The exiled human presence is the connection between the two, completing the vertical axis, connecting God to the world.

---

4 Arthur J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran*, Re-issue (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2:38.

5 Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Rites, Symbols* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1976), 440.

1.2.2 Vattimo's first Return: The desire to Return after the fall

In our spiritual exile, we sense the loss of the eternal Home (paradise), and we experience a natural disposition to Return to the place from which we fell. In his essay, *The Trace of the Trace*, Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo speaks of how "[this] [R]eturn may be an (or the) essential aspect of religious experience itself."[6] For Vattimo, there are two forms of 'return.' The first is the capital R, Return, just described. This Return is internal to religion and is the basis of the Abrahamic religions. The second return (lowercase r) that Vattimo talks about is a return to an existentially engaged day-to-day way of being, irrespective of Adam, Eve and paradise. This chapter focuses on the first Return, while the following chapter will discuss the second.

Vattimo writes, "Religion comes to be experienced as a [R]eturn. In religion, something that we had thought irrevocably forgotten is made present again, a dormant trace is reawakened, a wound re-opened."[7] The entire concept of religion is to "Return" or rediscover that forgotten something. That forgotten something is the lost paradise. The desire to Return is the next step in the transcendental paradigm, as it establishes the metaphysical axis as dual-directional. While the fall connects God to the world, the Return connects the world to God.

1.2.3 Ibn al Arabi's first Return: the compulsory Return

Ibn al Arabi is a renowned 13th century Andalusian philosopher, mystic and poet, who is celebrated for his contributions to Sufism and Islamic spirituality. For Ibn al Arabi, there are also two returns. He classifies these as the "compulsory [R]eturn" and the "voluntary return."[8] Again, although intertwined, as ultimately two versions of return(s) to God, this chapter focuses on the first Return, which is transcendent and veritcal, like Vattimo's. Ibn al Arabi explains this Return:

> …human beings return to God by the same invisible route followed by other creatures. They are born, they live, they die, and they are gone, no one knows where. The same thing happens to a bee or an oak tree.[9]

This mysterious Return is referenced in the Quran: "Surely to Allah we belong and to Him we will all [R]eturn." {Quran: 2:156}, and "O humanity, you are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you shall encounter Him!" {Quran 84:6}[10]. The compulsory Return speaks of the predestination of the human, an idea rooted in the transcendent image of God. Once again, this Return presents a notion of connecting world to God

---

6 Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, *Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998), 80.
7 Derrida and Vattimo, 79.
8 William C Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 20.
9 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 20.
10 Arberry, 2:156, 84:6.

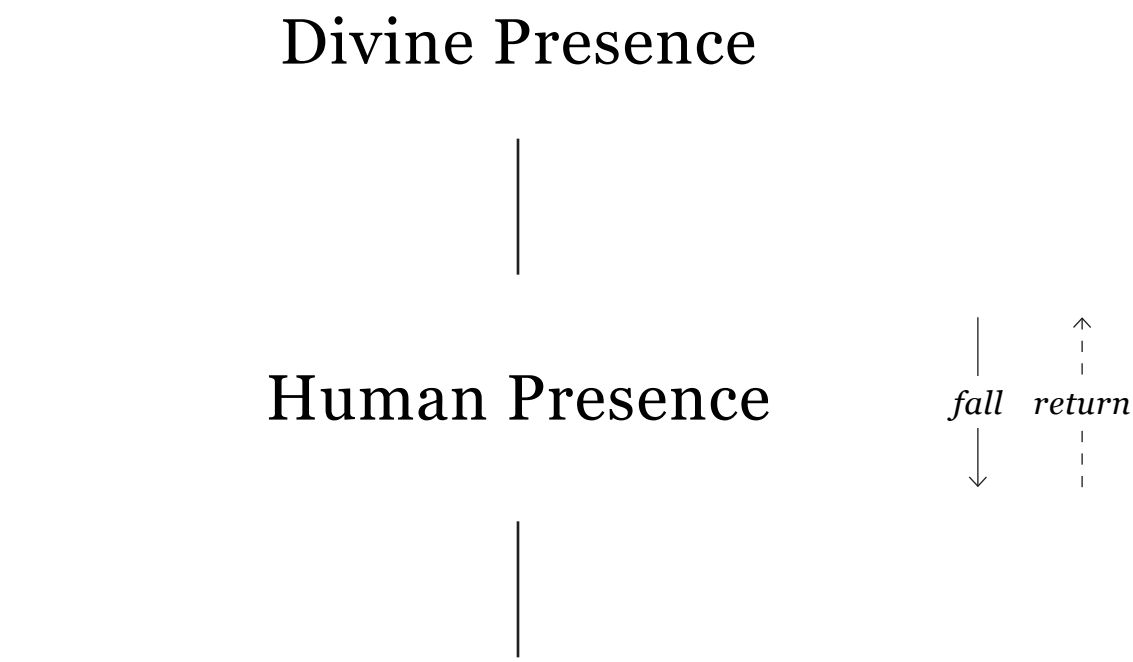


Fig. 1.5. the transcendent axis; Ibn Al Arabi's notion that the human presence is the mediator between the creator and the created

Fig. 1.6. overleaf opposite: sunrise over mount Toubkal

(upwards) and not just God to world (downwards).

The natural critique of this view is that the predestination of humans contradicts our free will. For Ibn al Arabi, however, there is no contradiction between the "compulsory Return" (predestination) and the "voluntary return" (free will), as will be described in the following chapter. In the Islamic view, as presented by Ibn al Arabi, the compulsory Return after death is predestined, but the path we take to return (the voluntary return) is where our free will is exercised.

For both Vattimo and Ibn al Arabi, the capital R Return describes the vertical and transcendent axis of being. An axis wherein God is at the top, and the world is at the bottom. The human presence – in the middle – mediates between the two. Akkach writes:

> The human presence, Ibn al Arabi explains, comprises two 'exemplars'…The former, temporally produced, is homologous to the whole world; the latter, eternally conceived, is homologous to the divine presence. Through this dual structure man [sic] becomes at once the most universal entity and the most effective mediator between God and the world. The duality of the creator-creature is rendered interactive through the agency of man's two exemplars, since no other worldly being admits the quality of divinity, nor can the divine admit the quality of worldliness.[11]

The human presence is the connector between the two points on the axis. Without it, God and the world would remain in duality. Our presence reconnects the vertical axis of being, connecting God, human, and world, in a cosmically unified existence. We not only relate God to the world, but the world to God.

11 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 85.

Occidental Exile [12]
By Seyyed Hossein Nasr

I live in exile, exiled from my land of birth,
From her exalted peaks and vast deserts,
From the vivid colors of all that grows from her soil,
From her azure bright skies,
Exiled in the occident of this world.

But is not this domain of transience,
This world of birth and death,
Of shadows cast upon the cascades of light
Itself the occident, whether it be in East or West,
Of that Orient which is light pure,
Unadulterated by the imperfections of earthly life?

It is from that world that we are all exiled,
It is that world from which we all hail
And to that world that we must return,
Return after our earthly journey's end.

That Orient we carry in our hearts
At that center which is the seat of the All-Merciful,
Our very core, yet beyond our daily reach
Until we turn inward the wayward soul
And break the shell of our hearts
Hardened by the march of forgetfulness through time.

Our return from exile is return to that Center,
To our real land of birth.
I live in exile but in joy of being exiled from the world,
For did not the Blessed Prophet utter,
"Happy are those who are in exile in this world?"

Sensing as they do the home to which they belong,
The luminous Orient of all existence and ours,
Joyous in the thought of their homecoming.



12 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Poems of the Way* (Oakton, VA: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1999), 23.





Fig. 1.7. the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Photo from *The Story of Islamic Architecture* by Richard Yeomans

1.3

The epistemological Kaaba

Islamic Architecture is manifested in Islam's holiest site, the Kaaba, in Mecca. The archetype and first piece of architecture, it presents an understanding of the intimate link between cosmology and architecture in premodern Islam.

1.3.1 The Kaaba

The Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is the most important artifact of divine revelation and is considered by most the holiest site in *Islam*. A cube measuring roughly 12 x 12 x 12 meters, it is constructed out of granite masonry, and covered in a black silk cloth embroidered in gold thread, known as the *Kiswa*. The Kaaba is the focal point for Muslims worldwide, notably during prayers and pilgrimage rituals. Samer Akkach writes, "Mecca was the omphalos of the earth, and the Kaaba was God's first house of worship…the first divine-sponsored architectural project."[13] Iranian philosopher and scholar Dr Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes the Kaaba as, "the primordial sacred edifice dedicated to the One God."[14] When praying, Muslims turn their bodies and hearts towards the Kaaba, and all the mosques in the world have a niche in their wall, known as the *mihrab*, that points directly towards the Kaaba.

The study of the Kaaba invites an embodied understanding of the three domains of existence (*iman* (knowing), *islam* (doing), and *ihsan* (being), as will be covered in chapters 1-3. The epistemological Kaaba, in this chapter, represents the Kaaba in the domain of *iman*. Like the human presence, the Kaaba embodies the role of mediator between the creator—God—and the created—world. Thus, we can say that the Kaaba is the human presence in built form, or as Akkach puts it, "in Sufi terms, the Kaaba's cube-like form is a crystallization of the cube of man [sic]."[15] The Kaaba, the archetype

13 Akkach, 179.
14 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Metaphysical Significance of Makkah," *Holy Makkah: A Celebration of Unity*, First Strategic Insight, 2017, 49.
15 Akkach, 180.

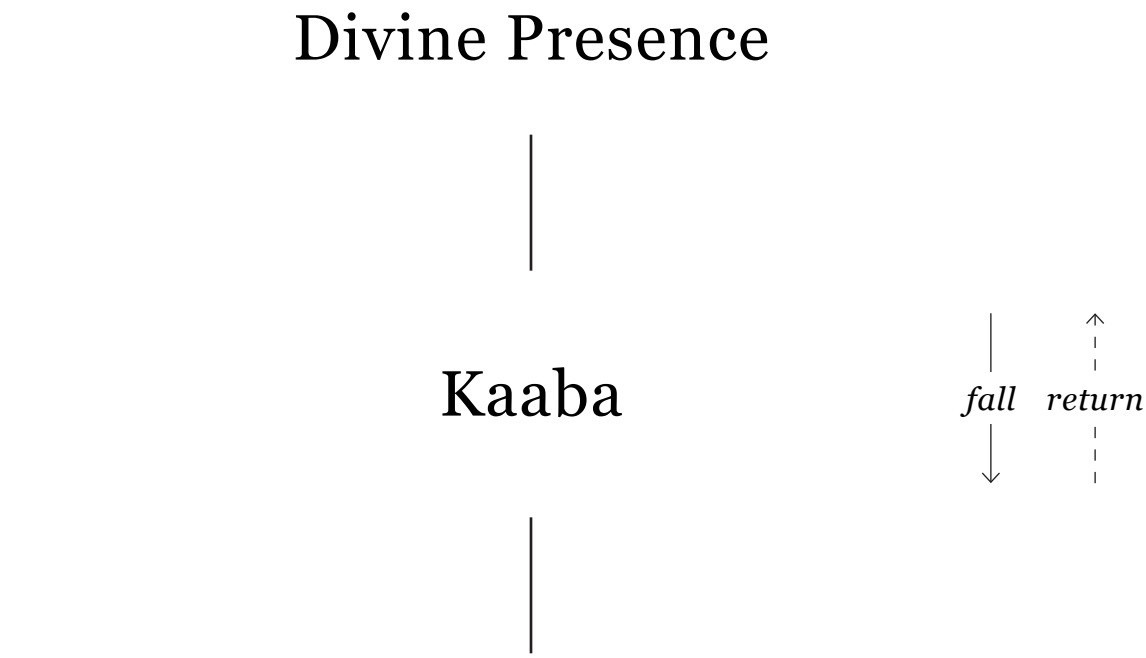


Fig. 1.8. the transcendent axis: the Kaaba, stands for architecture as the built embodiment of the human presence, mediating between the creator and the created

of architecture in the Islamic tradition, is the connector of the vertical axis of being. It makes manifest the transcendent, and otherwise unknowable God, by giving them a dwelling in built form. This becomes clear when we look at the origin story of the Kaaba.

1.3.2 The Kaaba is a shadow of paradise

> God ordered Abraham to reestablish the house of God. Not knowing where he should do so, Abraham asked: 'O Lord, but where?' God replied: 'We shall show you.' God sent him a speaking 'cloud' (al-sakina) that directed him to the sacred spot. Taking on the form of the house, the sakina said: 'O Abraham, your Lord orders you to design according to the measure of this cloud'[…] Ibn al Arabi reports: 'Build according to the measure of my shadow.' Abraham traced precisely the form of the cloud, and with the assistance of his son Ishmael rebuilt the house as he was instructed.[16]

The shadow of Paradise, represented quite literally here by the Kaaba, manifests the divine presence in a rational and worldly form. In our daily existence, we cannot see God or paradise, but we can perceive their shadows. We can't stare at the sun with the naked eye, but we can stare at the shadows cast by the clouds. The Swiss metaphysician, and Sufi perrenialist Frithjof Schoun writes,

> Exiled on earth as we are, unless we are able to content ourselves with that shadow of Paradise that is Virgin Nature, we must create for ourselves surroundings which, by their truth and their beauty recall our heavenly origins and thereby also awaken our hope.[17]

In Schuon's words, our spiritual exile demands that we "create for ourselves surroundings which, by their truth and their beauty recall our heavenly origins,"[18] surroundings that he refers to as the shadows of paradise. In the origin story of the Kaaba, this is precisely what Abraham does, in rebuilding the Kaaba on earth. Reflecting on the transience of this world, Islamic scholar and poet Seyyed Hossein Nasr also references the shadow when he writes (on page 46):

> But is not this domain of transience,
> This world of birth and death,
> Of shadows cast upon the cascades of light
> Itself the occident, whether it be in East or West,
> Of that Orient which is light pure,
> Unadulterated by the imperfections of earthly life?[19]

16 Akkach, 179.
17 Frithjof Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, ed. Harry Oldmeadow (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2019), 191.
18 Schuon, 191.
19 Nasr, *Poems of the Way*, 23.

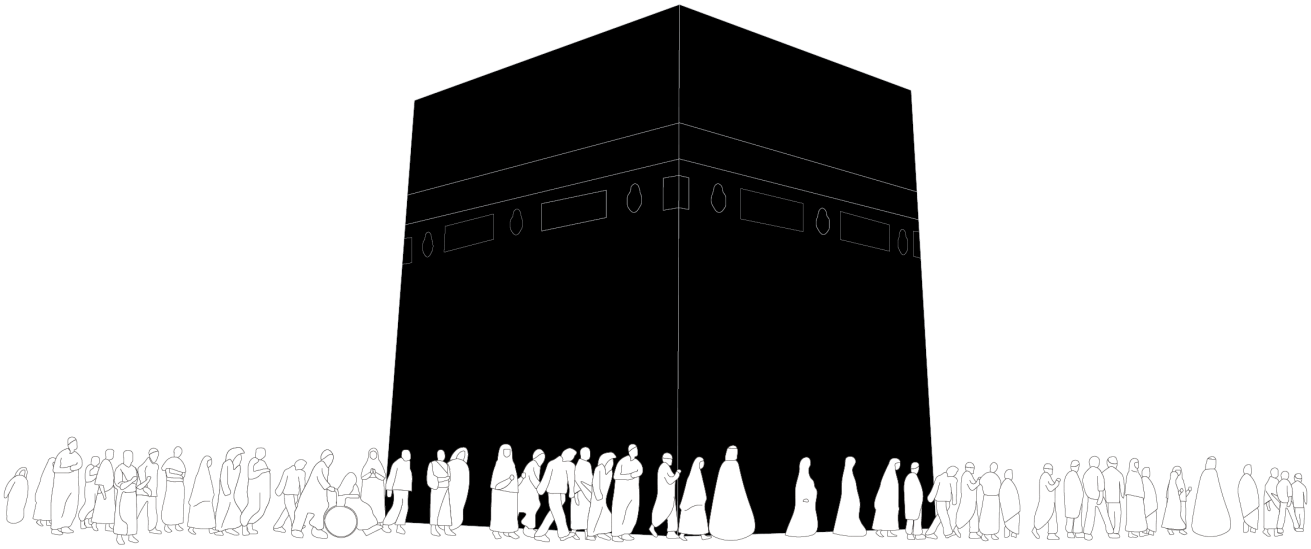


Fig. 1.9. the epistemological Kaaba

Reflecting on this line, Ali Lakhani says, "the earthly transience of existence is itself an aspect of the Absolute for earthly shadows point to the reality of celestial light."[20] The shadow makes manifest the transcendent and otherwise nonmanifest God. The transcendent God casts their revelation down from the primordial realm, but we can only perceive it by way of the shadow. This is clearly demonstrated in the origin of the Kaaba when Abraham literally builds the shadow of the divine presence. We can't see the divine light, but we can understand its presence by virtue of the shadow it casts. Akkach writes,

> As a visible embodiment of the sakina [divine cloud], the Kaaba becomes the heart of the world, the house of stillness, the locus of great peace, **and the immanence of divinity at the center of the world.**[21]

1.3.3 Sakina

The *sakina,* the speaking cloud sent by God, spoke only to Abraham, but cast her shadow into the world for everyone to see. This is the prime significance of the shadow; it is accessible to all in a way that other divine manifestations, such as prophetic visions and miracles are not. The shadow projects the (transcendent) divine revelation into our (immanent) present plane of existence. Although the cloud only spoke to Abraham, and only he could build the Kaaba, the shadow appeared to everyone, and we all built our own Sakina.

To explain, let's consider the word *sakina*, which holds a lot of architectural significance. The root word *sukun* means stillness or tranquility. In the Quran, the word *sakina* is used to reference centrality, certainty, peacefulness, and repose.[22] From this definition, and the notion of repose comes the related word *maskan*, which means house, dwelling, or settlement.[23] According to certain narrations, the divine cloud itself, when it appears to Abraham quite literally takes on the form of a house.[24] The word *sakina* establishes the clear link between divine emanation and the dwelling. The divine presence is not only found in the sacred cloud and the Kaaba, but in every *maskan* (house) on earth. Thus, "the immanence of divinity" emanates universally, not just locally, at the Kaaba.

---

20 M Ali Lakhani, "Editorial: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Occidental Exile," *Sacred Web* 40 (2017): 12.
21 Akkach, 180.
22 Akkach, 180; Dr Abdel-moniem El-Shorbagy, "Traditional Islamic-Arab House: Vocabulary and Syntax," *International Journal of Civil & Environmental Engineering* 10, no. 4 (January 2010): 1.
23 El-Shorbagy, 1.
24 Akkach, 179.

Fig. 1.10. Bab Ftouh, one of the main gates into the Fes Medina

1.4

Conclusion

The domain of iman presents the transcendent, vertical axis of our being. In this axis, we can understand the human role in the cosmological order as mediator between the creator—God—and the created—world. In Ibn al Arabi's words, we are "the dividing line between divine and worldly presence, as the dividing line between the shadow and sunlight. This is [our] reality: [we have] the perfection of both eternity and newness."[25] The human presence is critical, as the actuating presence of the cosmic unity of being. Architecturally speaking, the Kaaba takes on this same mediating role, establishing the entire practice of Architecture in the Islamic tradition, as a cosmological pursuit.

While the domain of iman is concerned with knowing, it is limited by the fact that God is unfathomable. This is why one domain alone cannot encapsulate our *unity of being*. Viewed exclusively through the lens of *iman*, God is only transcendent, and always nonmanifest in our material plane of existence, despite presenting their shadow. The spatial implications of this mode of existence neglects the human experience in its scheme. This is where the second domain of being, *islam* (doing), comes in as an antithesis to the domain of *iman* (knowing). If *iman* is concerned with the rational ideological realm, then *islam* is concerned with the embodied experiential realm. With or without the transcendent axis of existence, the quotidian plane of day-to-day experience is indisputable.

25 Akkach, 85.


HOTEL







Fig. 2.1. overleaf: descending the High Atlas mountains

Fig. 2.2. a detail of carved stucco at el Attarine Madrasa in Fes



Fig. 2.3. cliffside in the Todra Gorge



Chapter 2: islam

keywords: immanence, physical, manifest, corporeal, sensory, material, worldly, affect, love, return

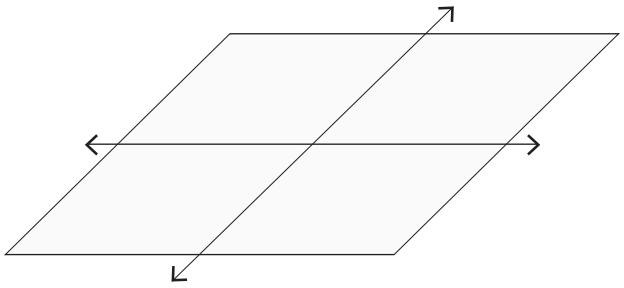


Fig. 2.4. the immanent plane of being

2.1

islam: an immanent phenomenology

The second domain of being is *islam*, distinct from the entire religion of Islam (capital I). While *iman* is rooted in knowledge and understanding, the domain of *islam* is rooted in experience and doing. It finds alignment with the Western philosophical tradition of phenomenology, the study of embodied conscious experience: how do we experience our being? Defined primarily by bodily engagement, *islam* operates in a horizontal and immanent structure, as opposed to the vertical, transcendent structure of *iman*.

In the Prophet's hadith, "faith is to acknowledge with the heart, to voice with the tongue, and to act with the limbs,"[1] the domain of *islam* (doing) corresponds to acting with the limns. It belongs to the realms of the body and activity. The "return," in this domain, is a return to a social *unity of being* between one another on a fundamentally corporeal level. It is a return to a state of being (*wahdat al wujud*) that has been lost to our modern conception of being; a state where we are collectively tied by empathy and care between one another. The horizontal plane of *islam* connects us to our social *collectivity of being*, realizing the communal reality of our existence.

1 Muḥammad ibn Yazid Ibn Mājah and Muhammad Tufail Ansari, *Sunan Ibn Mājah with Arabic Text*, 2nd improving ed (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2013), no. 65.

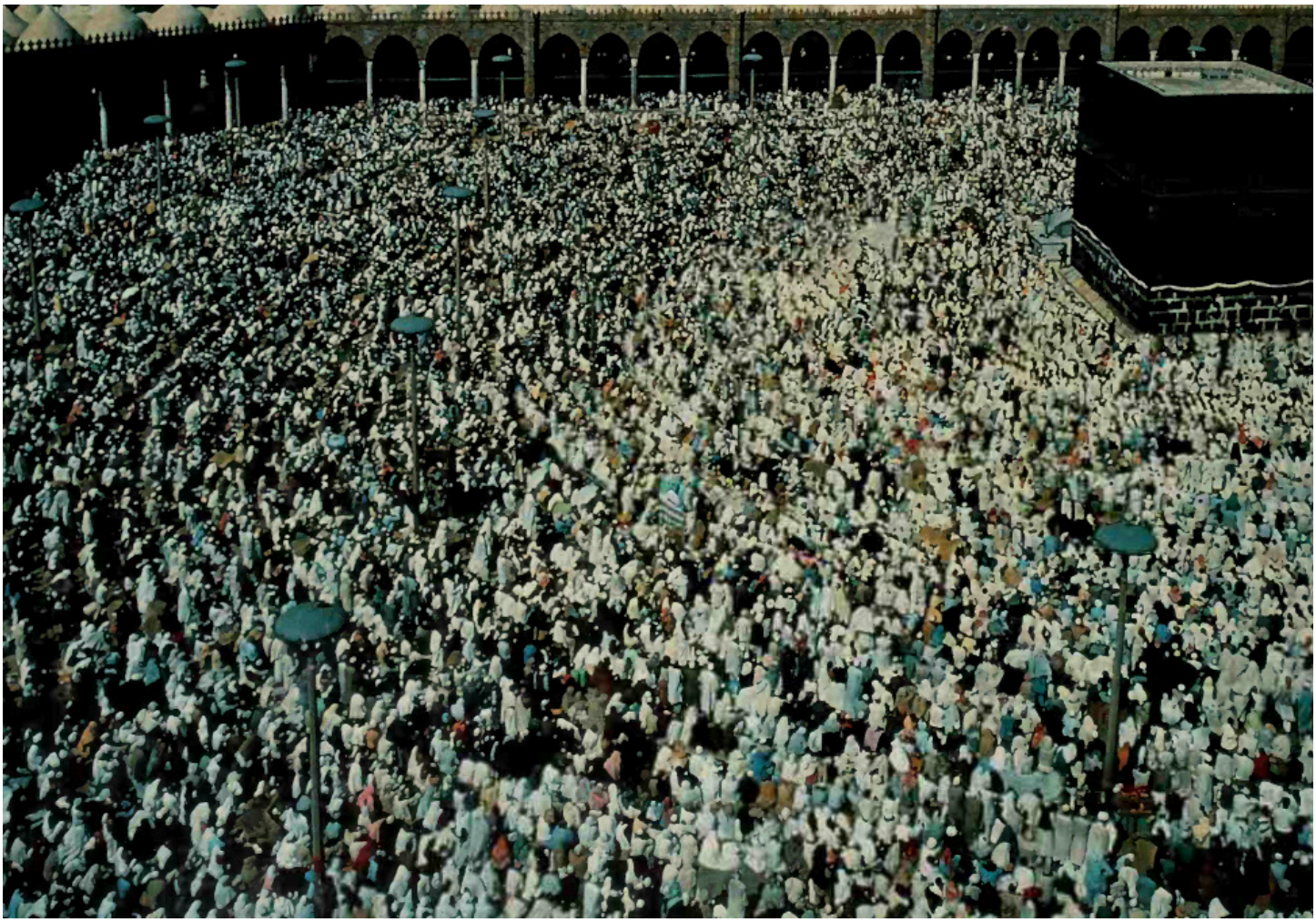


Fig. 2.5. the Kaaba during prayer time.
Photo from *Islamic Art and Architecture* by Oleg Grabar

2.2

The phenomenological Kaaba

As established, in the Kaaba, we can come to an embodied, spatial understanding of the three domains of existence *iman*, *islam*, and *ihsan* (knowing, doing, and being). In chapter one, I introduced the Kaaba as an epistemological form of architecture. Its cosmic role mediated between the Divine and the world. In chapter two, through the lens of immanent phenomenology and *islam*, I will present the Kaaba as a phenomenological entity. As an architectural space, it serves as a social machine that can reactivate our empathy and care for one another.

In chapter one, the epistemological Kaaba embodied divine revelation in the Quranic origin story of Abraham and the Sakina. Through this lens, the Kaaba stands as the eternal house of God on earth, a cube at the center of the cosmos, through which the transcendent vertical axis pierces – from the depths of the earth's core to the heights of God's eternal abode in the loftiest heaven of Paradise. That is the lens of *iman* (knowing). In the lens of *islam* (being), the epistemological Kaaba is displaced by the phenomenological Kaaba. Dissolving the metaphysical transcendent narrative of chapter one, chapter two focuses on what is left behind: the tangible and experiential narrative. The phenomenological Kaaba is not concerned with divine theory. Instead, it is concerned with our immanent plane of existence, becoming socially activated on a human-to-human level.

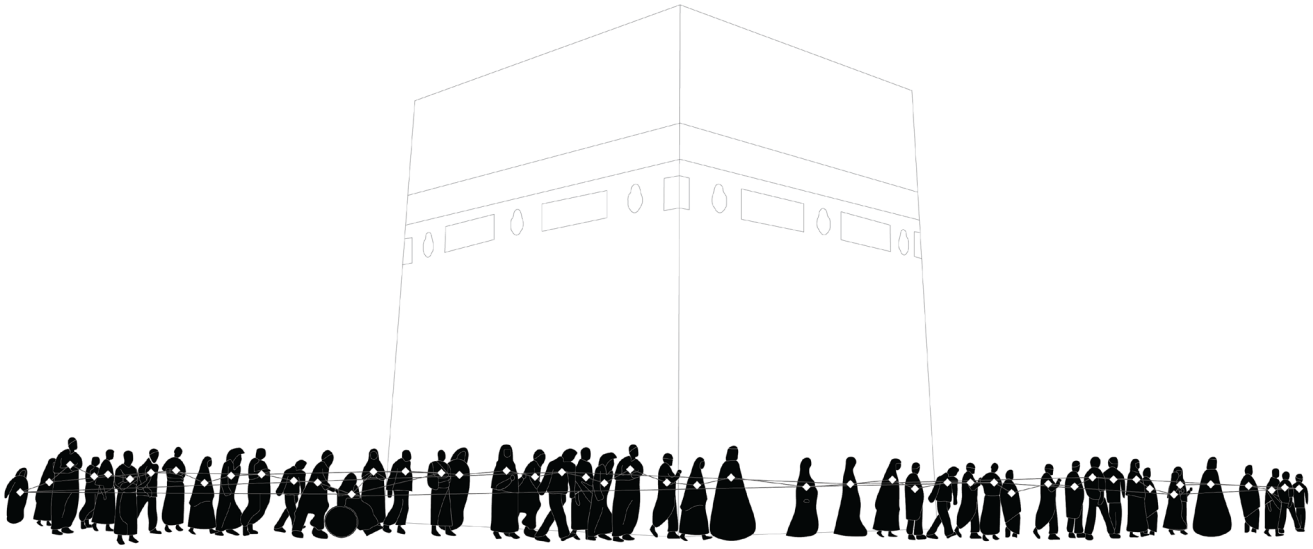


Fig. 2.6. the phenomenological Kaaba

2.2.1 Kaaba-heart

In the words of Akkach,

> Sufis compare the heart to the Kaba for both share the notion of centrality at the micro and macrocosmic levels. Just as man [sic] is defined by two extremities, namely, his innermost heart and outermost body, so the world is defined by the Kaba, its innermost center, and the divine Throne, its outermost body. In a mystical reflection, Ibn Arabi poetically writes what God has communicated to him: 'This Kaba of mine is the heart of existence, and to this heart my Throne is a defined body. Neither of them has space for me, nor tells about me what I tell about them, but the house of mine that has room for me is your intended heart, placed in your perceived body.'[2]

The phenomenological Kaaba is best illustrated in the notion of the Kaaba-heart. Ibn al Arabi writes, "when God created your body, He placed within it a Kaaba, which is your heart."[3] The notion of the Kaaba-heart and its esoteric symbolism was a common point of discussion amongst Sufi thinkers in general, not just Ibn al Arabi. For Ibn al Arabi, the metaphysical Kaaba in Mecca is intertwined in and by the human heart in one's chest; both are reflections of each other; this is the idea of the Kaaba-heart. "God 'dwells', as it were, in the ungraspable center of the world, as he 'dwells' in the innermost center of man [sic]."[4] That said, in a postmodern reading, let us focus on the phenomenological implications of the Kaaba-heart, momentarily ignoring the metaphysical. The Kaaba-heart presents our social unity of being. While every heart is unique, they are all supernally connected by the fact that they are all, in essence, the same, a part of a shared reality (the Kaaba). Every heart is a droplet, but in the ocean, they are all ocean. The image of this network of Kaaba-hearts is similar to Deleuze's conception of the rhizome. Within each of us is a node, the Kaaba-heart, that is linked to every other node in the network. This decentralized model of the Kaaba-heart replaces the centralized model of the transcendent epistemological Kaaba. The Kaaba-heart is rooted in presence, affective experience, and above all, a social connection between humans.

---

2 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 191.

3 Stephen Hirtenstein, "The Cubic Wisdom of the Heart According to Ibn ʿArabī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 48 (2010): 27.

4 Titus Burckhardt, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Jean-Louis Michon, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, Commemorative Edition (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2009), 4.



Fig. 2.7. pilgrims during Hajj. Photo by Basil D Soufi

2.2.2 Hajj

To further engage this notion of Kaaba-heart, let's consider the act of *Hajj*. One of the five pillars of Islam, *Hajj* is the pilgrimage to Mecca. During *Hajj*, Muslims perform a series of rites, which carry both physical and metaphysical meanings. In the lens of this chapter, we momentarily set aside the often-discussed metaphysical meanings of *Hajj so as to extract a less*-discussed phenomenological reading of *Hajj*. In this reading, the spiritual rites are just a series of mundane actions – wearing, walking, reciting, throwing etc. By stripping away divine theory, we can engage the corporeality of the rites. In so doing, we can further illustrate the "phenomenological Kaaba," appreciating its function as a social activator.

The two rites of *Hajj* that I will discuss are the *Ihram* and the *Tawaf*. *Ihram* is important because it is the first and the base for the rest of the rites, and *Tawaf* is most directly related to the Kaaba. Completing the rites of *Hajj* is one of the most profound spiritual experiences in a Muslim's life. Although the spirituality of *Hajj* is often highlighted as the source of its profundity, I argue that the resonance of *Hajj* comes from a simultaneous engagement with the spiritual-transcendent and the bodily-immanent aspects of it; both the metaphysical ideas and the physical experience. This is precisely the vision presented by the three domains of existence; ultimately, profundity is not generated from the spiritual alone.

2.2.2.1 Ihram

The *Ihram* is the first rite of *Hajj*. As Richard Yeomans writes, "before entering Mecca, pilgrims must sever their worldly connections and renounce their identity, class, nationality and all those outward signs that divide humanity."[5] This "state of purity" is called *Ihram*. The word *Ihram* also refers to the garment worn during the *Hajj*, a

5 Richard Yeomans, *The Story of Islamic Architecture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 10.

plain white unsown cloth. “The *Ihram* worn by pilgrims represents not only man’s [sic] poverty before God, but also a return to man’s primordial state. The colour white of the garment of both men and women possesses the same symbolism, representing the purity of the state of fitrah [primordial nature] in which man was created, his primordiality.”[6]

2.2.2.2 Tawaf

Tawaf, means circumambulation. Having entered *Ihram* (spiritually and physically) the pilgrim circles the Kaaba seven times, reciting prayers, typically in unison with the other pilgrims. Nasr writes, “The circumambulation around the Kaaba is counterclockwise, reversing the effect of the fall, returning the pilgrim to the primordial state and undoing the consequence of the downward march of time. Millions of pilgrims come to Makkah [Mecca] from all over the world, representing a vast spectrum of various ethnicities, speaking multiple languages, yet they perform the same rituals around a shared sacred center point. They thus experience directly the unity of the *ummah* [global community] above all differences.”[7]

2.2.3 The immanent Ihram and Tawaf

Within the *Ihram* and *Tawaf* is an engagement of the social *unity of being*, wherein individuation is replaced with community. There is no ‘other,’ no “I,” only a *communal being* – an ocean of droplets, a rhizome of nodes. To enter the state of *Ihram*, one removes traces of worldly individualism: clothes, jewelry, makeup, watches. Stripped of your possessions, one is a body among bodies. Symbolically, one enters the ritual *Hajj* as one enters the grave; the *Ihram*-garment is like the white shroud that covers you in the grave, a symbolic reminder that we are all unified by the same bodily reality. On a phenomenological level, the *Ihram* manifests this oneness in an explicitly experiential way. Imagine thousands of people surrounding you wearing the same white shroud. The sight provokes a sensation of belonging and community, acting as a visual cue of our sameness in the shared experience of being.

Tawaf, or circumambulation, then sets this shared being in motion. Like ocean waves or the murmuration of the starlings, the pilgrims move in unison, creating a syncopated rhythm that deepens the sense of collective belonging. The physical experience of being among this vast crowd, all dressed in white, moving together in circles is entrancing. The rhythms of bare feet slapping the ground, the ebb and flow of faces, bodies, and shrouds, and the murmur of words are enveloping and all-consuming. There is an overwhelming loss of self: you are part of the many, and the many become one. A collective, immanent web of hearts; a *unity of being*; *wahdat al wujud*.

---

6 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Metaphysical Significance of Makkah,” *Holy Makkah: A Celebration of Unity*, First Strategic Insight, 2017, 49.
7 Nasr, “Metaphysical Significance of Makkah,” 49.

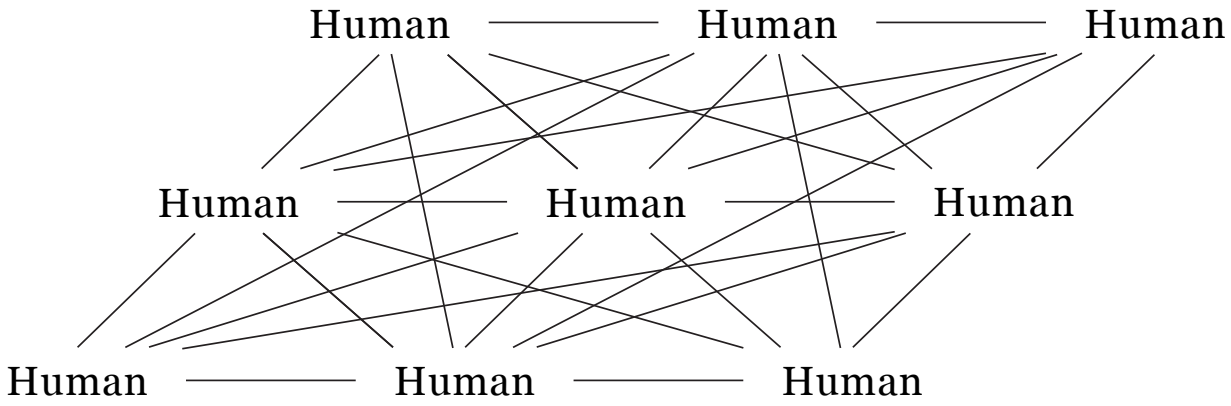


Fig. 2.8. the immanent plane of being:
a network of human-human connection

2.3

Rhizome: home and return

The web of hearts takes on the form of a rhizome. The rhizome is a philosophical concept established by Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to describe a nonlinear, decentralized and non-hierarchical network. In botany, plants such as dandelions and lawn grass have tap roots, while other plants such as mint and ginger have rhizomes. A tap root structure consists of one principal central root, which branches off into smaller roots, like tree branches spreading from the principal trunk. A rhizomatic root structure consists of an underground network of interconnected nodes, where every node is connected to every other node. A rhizome spreads sporadically in a horizontal plane beneath the surface, with no center, no hierarchy, and no beginning or end. For this reason, it is very hard to control the growth of mint for example—pulling one plant out is futile because the rhizome continues to grow and multiply below. Deleuze and Guattari write,

> A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and . . . and . . . and . . .' This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb 'to be.'[8]

A rhizomatic thought structure is nonhierarchical; one can plug into it at any point. The rhizomatic view of God renders God manifest and accessible, unlike the arborescent God who hovers omnisciently above and is ineffable and unreachable. Deleuze's idea of the rhizomatic structure and the immanent plane directly challenge the transcendent epistemological model of divine theory presented in chapter one. For Deleuze, transcendence, which he labels as a disease,[9] represents an oversimplified and unrealistic worldview. Deleuze critiques the traditional arborescent model: "the tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centered or segmented higher unity."[10] A rhizomatic, immanent worldview dismantles the authoritative power structure of the transcendent model. In this view, God is no longer an authoritarian figure, commanding and revealing from above, but is instead immanently present, within our plane of existence. This is the view presented by Michael Muhammad Knight in *Sufi Deleuze*, wherein he seeks resonances between Deleuze and Sufism.

2.3.1 Vattimo's second return: The return without a fall

Coming back to the notion of return, we can now explore the second returns of Vattimo

8 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London, UK: Continuum, 1989), 25.
9 Deleuze and Guattari, 18.
10 Deleuze and Guattari, 16.

and Ibn al Arabi; these are the lowercase 'r' returns that belong to an immanent worldview instead of a transcendent one. The idea of return is important because it concedes that we are exiled and desire to return to a better state before our exile. In chapter one, the exile was spiritual, manifested in the fall of Adam; our fall from primordial, perfect being. Our desire was to Return to that primordial place. In chapter two, moving beyond the metaphysical narrative; the exile is social. The exile refers to our modern-day disillusionment and alienation, one which perpetually grows deeper as our collective empathy and care decline. This exile comes from our becoming increasingly self-concerned, a feeding of the *nafs* (false ego), that clouds the communal reality of existence. The lowercase 'r' return we desire is to a state before our social exile, a state when empathy and care were not commodities, but second nature.

Vattimo's second return is built on Heidegger's event-like-character of being, in which *existential engagement* is the essence of being. In this postmodern lens, existential engagement solves our estranged and socially exiled state. This return is immanent, unlike the transcendent Return covered in the first chapter. Vattimo's second return refers to, "the rediscovery of religion following a dissolution of metaphysical meta-narratives."[11] The two returns distinguish between the transcendent and the immanent. The difference is between a Return to a way-of-being in Paradise and a return to a way-of-being on Earth. Vattimo explains that the transcendent model of traditional religion has become unworkable due to its lack of tangible engagement.[12] The capital R Return to the primordial state is ineffable. The primordial state—paradise—is outside of our existential plane, we can never directly experience or engage it. But the lower-case r return is explicitly accessible because it is only concerned with our present plane of being.

The essence of the immanent return is to posit religion and being as physically manifest and not just metaphysical ideals. In this horizontal immanent plane of existence, we seek a return to a way-of-being on earth, that is socially affective and existentially engaging.[13] We seek to feel connected to one another. The second return concerns being as lived and experienced in the corporeal here and now.

2.3.2 Ibn al Arabi's second return: the voluntary return

The alignment between Vattimo's returns and Ibn al Arabi's is just one example of the resonance between postmodern Western thinkers and medieval Sufi thinkers, of which many more exist. While each thinker brings different nuances to their returns, they both carry intrinsic similarities: the first pair of returns (capital R) belong to a transcendent and epistemological worldview, and the second pair (lowercase r) belong to an immanent and phenomenological one. Ibn al Arabi's second return is what he labels as the 'voluntary

11 Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, *Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998), 82.
12 Derrida and Vattimo, 79.
13 This is further described by Heideggers concept of the "event-like character of Being," which Vattimo references extensively.

return' as opposed to the 'compulsory return' outlined in chapter one. He writes,

> On the other hand human beings possess certain gifts which allow them to choose their own route of return (this is the 'voluntary return'…). Man [sic] can follow the path laid down by this prophet or that, or he can follow his own 'caprice'… and whims.[14]

Ibn al Arabi's returns address the fundamental tension that exists across religions: the question of predestination and freewill and how they can co-exist. How we navigate this tension between the two constitutes the discussion of chapter three, where we begin to understand that *iman* (knowing) and *islam* (doing) are not contradictory models, but are actually synthesized in the third domain, *ihsan* (being).

As Vattimo has argued, the problem faced by the post-industrial world is that the predestination of the transcendent religious model has "become unworkable."[15] He posits that the idea of predestination in the face of modernism translates as a limiting of human agency, as if nothing we do matters. This is why Vattimo and Ibn al Arabi's second returns are important. They each pose an alternate model to the transcendent and predestined Return (as covered in chapter one). In this alternate model, freewill and existential engagement take precedence. We have an agency to engage and affect the world and each other. The voluntary return of Ibn al Arabi speaks of this agency. He explains that we have a choice in the route by which we "return." The voluntary return is the route we choose, in other words, it is the life we lead in the immanent plane of daily existence. In the context of our *wahdat al wujud*, this voluntary return aims to reverse the effects of our "social exile." The voluntary return seeks to return us to a state of being prior to our modern social estrangement. Realizing this return is realizing our unity of being by fostering communal social care and empathy for one another.

14 William C Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 20.
15 Derrida and Vattimo, 79.

2.4

home

The place to which you return is home. The first and second returns each have their own notions of home. The capital R Returns refer to the metaphysical Home, the lost paradise. Once again, this Home is metaphysical, inaccessible in the worldly sense; it exists somewhere transcendentally above. The lowercase r returns refer to home as a feeling of belonging and community in our present existence. This second notion of home is near and phenomenologically present. It is fundamentally a feeling, like the feeling during Hajj, where you become connected to a collective definition of belonging and, through it, feel at home. This feeling of home reinstates our social empathy and care for one another.

In her article, *Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement*, Sara Ahmed argues that, "[t]he question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is here a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel."[16] Our entire unity of being must also consider the question of affect: feeling or experience. If realizing our *unity of being* is to return home, then we must give considerable weight to the question of affect, as the very conduit of the feeling of home.

2.4.1 Postmodern Affect: Affect in Deleuze

To contextualize affect in the postmodern lens of this chapter, we need to revisit Deleuze, and understand his own concept of affect. In his essay on Deleuze titled *From Affection to Soul*, Gregory Seigworth reflects on the question of *being* by discussing affect and soul in Deleuze's work. He quotes Deleuze saying:

> the soul is neither above nor inside, it is 'with', it is on the road,

16 Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (1999): 341.

> exposed to all contacts, encounters, in the company of those who follow the same way, 'feel with them, seize the vibration of their soul and their body as they pass', the opposite of a morality of salvation, teaching the soul to live its life, not to save it.[17]

The soul, in this case, stands for being. Deleuze argues that there is a crucial difference between the soul existing to save itself and the soul living its life. This difference parallels the discussion of the two homes and returns outlined earlier. The soul saving itself (salvation) refers to the lost Paradise of the capital R Return. Deleuze believes this Return is futile, enigmatic, and abstract. The soul that lives its life can be read refers to the lowercase r return [to a communal way of being]. The soul that lives its life is affectionate; it feels with everything and is essentially real and knowable. In elaborating Deleuze, Seigworth writes, "[the soul] opens no longer to a prescribed and transcendent morality but onto an immanently everyday ethics."[18] The affectionate soul is not concerned with the metaphysical Home and the metaphysical Return to it, because these are in-experienceable in our day-to-day. Rather, it is concerned with the everyday immanence and affect of being. It is only concerned with tangible and experiential presence in the here and now. As we've established, affect is the driver of the domain of *islam*; it is the driver of our immanent plane of being. Without affect, if everyone's soul is only trying to save itself, there can be no network of connectivity and no social unity of being. Without affect, there is no rhizome; no model of communal care and empathy.

2.4.2 Sufi Affect: Love

I argue that the postmodern notion of affect parallels the Sufi notion of love. Love, like affect is the driver of the phenomenological view of being. It is the pinnacle of emotional experience. Sufism is often described one-dimensionally as "Islamic mysticism" or "Islamic esoterism," but Sufism and the idea of love in Sufism is much more nuanced than that. For Sufi thinkers and scholars, Sufism is the essence of Islam, a holistic and unified view of existence. Reading the works of any Sufi poet or thinker, you will quickly come across the idea of love. Love is the function that sets the entire idea of our day-to-day existence into motion. One of the most vivid ways to explain the significance of love in Sufism is by reading Rumi.

---

17 Gilles Deleuze et al., *Dialogues* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987), 62.

18 Charles J. Stivale and Gregory J. Seigworth, *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (Kingston, ON: Queen's University Press, 2008), 164.

2.4.3 Rumi: Love vs Reverence

Rumi is one of the most profound voices to speak and write on love. The most important implication of the concept of love is understood when we consider love as the antithesis of reverence. Although reverence connotes deep admiration and respect, ironically, the more reverence you have for someone, the further they are from you. Prior to meeting and spending time with the Persian mystic dervish Shams e Tabriz, Rumi was a prominent and accomplished scholar of Islam. This early Rumi revered God and the Quran, but you could say he didn't truly love God in the way that "Sufism" would come to teach him to. It was only in the latter stages of his life, following his "enlightenment" with Shams, that Rumi, learned to *love* God and the Quran as if he could see them – a profound, divine love. Rumi's poetry speaks on divine love endlessly. Below is just one excerpt from the *Masnavi book v*:

> *Love makes the ocean a boiling pot,*
> *love grinds down mountains to sand.*
> *Love splits the heavens with a hundred splittings,*
> *Love shakes the earth with its outbursts.*
> *Pure love was paired with Muhammad,*
> *for its sake God said to him, "But for thee...":*
> *"Were it not for pure love,*
> *why would I create the spheres?*
> *I raised the celestial wheel on high*
> *so that you might grasp love's exalted rank.*[19]

Love is the pinnacle of all experience. The highest emotion we can conceive of is love, and it is the most important spiritual emotion for Rumi. Chittick writes, "As for love, the later tradition sees it both as God's underlying motivation for creating the universe and as the internal human response to God's love for creation. By following the path of love, human beings complete God's creative act."[20] It is no surprise that this divine love is not what the Western mind might default to in a strictly romantic human idea of love. That is only one aspect of it, the Sufi notion of love is complex and multifaceted: love can be romantic and nonromantic, rational and irrational, divine and mundane, and simultaneously all things and none.[21]

We come to a profound understanding of love through Rumi's poetry, but Rumi could only write such resonant expressions because he knew and experienced divine love in his own life. Persian scholar Manijeh Mannani writes, "Rumi's renunciation of religious formality is deeply rooted in his mistrust of 'knowledge,' logic, dogma, and reason as the only tools to gain proximity to God and as a means of defining the man-God relationship."[22] In Rumi's spiritual transformation, he came to mistrust the purely reverent view of God. He recognized that the only way to love God, was to dethrone the

---

19 Jalal al-Din Rumi and Jawid Mojaddedi, *The Masnavi: Book 5* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022), ll. 2735–37.
20 William C Chittick, "The Spiritual Path of Love in Ibn Al-'Arabi and Rumi," *Mystics Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (March 1993): 4.
21 Manijeh Mannani, "The Metaphysics of the Heart in the Sufi Poetry of Rumi," *Religion & Literature* 42, no. 3 (2010): 160.
22 Mannani, 162.

transcendent God and put them on our plane of existence, where we can love them on a real and tangible level.

The difference between love and reverence is proximity. Reverence keeps the revered at a distance, outside and above, whereas love brings and holds them close inside. This is the basis of the Sufi use of the term Beloved, which is often used in reference to God. Love keeps the respect and admiration of reverence but dissolves the distance between the admirer and the revered. The relationship becomes instead, lover and Beloved. The Beloved lives and shares our plane of existence, so the love is mutual and reciprocal, as opposed to reverence, where one party looks up to the other.

English scholar of Islamic literature and prominent Rumi translator, Reynold A Nicholson, writes that love is the supreme principle underlying Sufi ethics.[23] He says, "the love thus symbolized is the emotional element in religion… the only basis of moral perfection and spiritual knowledge."[24] The 8th century Sufi saint Rabia of Basra speaks about this divine love when she writes, "O God! if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine everlasting beauty!"[25] Love is tangible, engaging and reciprocal in a way that the revered transcendent God is not. Chittick writes,

> Abstract categories do not fan the fire of love. Lovers want to be near their beloved. If they cannot have the beloved in their embrace, at least they want to keep the beloved in mind.[26]

The Sufi concept of love – and its postmodern counterpart of affect – assert the importance of emotional engagement in realizing our *unity of being* on a social level. Love and affect evoke an experience of belonging and home. The phenomenological Kaaba evokes the feelings of love and affect. It acts as a social activator, a place where people come together and feel fundamentally connected socially. By engaging love and affect, architecture can reconnect us to one another and actualize our rhizomatic immanent plane of *connected being*.

---

23 Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, Reprint (Sacramento, CA: Murine Press, 2007), 107.
24 Nicholson, 107.
25 Nicholson, 115.
26 William C Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2008), 142.

2.5

The Quran as Rhizomatic Book

> There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made.[27]
>
> Deleuze and Guattari

If we are to consider God as immanent rather than transcendent, then we need to re-present divine revelation as likewise immanent and not transcendent. To do this, let's re-consider the Quran, the epitome of divine revelation, as a rhizomatic and circular book. This is a fascinating proposition by Michael Muhammad Knight, who writes in his book *Sufi Deleuze*,

> the rhizomatic Quran's possibilities include an Islamic atheism when we connect to the Quran as divine for its effects in life rather than its placement above life in a vertical hierarchy, engaging the Quran not for its origins or what it claims to be or represent but what it does: the ways that it connects to us and our machines, transmitting intensities to our bodies and enhancing our powers.[28]

Just as Knight argues about the rhizomatic Quran, the phenomenological Kaaba engages the Kaaba for what it does, and not for its ideologies or origins.[29] A rhizomatic Kaaba and a rhizomatic Quran dethrone the model of transcendence and reverence, uncovering instead, a model of immanence and love. In this model, God, their house, and their word can be engaged and loved on a real and tangible level.

In its original form, the Quran was not a book; it was revealed as speech. In fact, the word Quran literally translates as "read" or "recited." The words were recited to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel over a period of 23 years, and subsequently compiled into the codex we know today. As a rhizomatic form, it exemplifies Deleuze's description of the rhizome as, "[having] neither beginning nor end, but always a middle."[30] The Quran has no explicit beginning or end, the sequence of the codex it follows is different from the chronology in which it was revealed, so it's unclear what a beginning or end could even be.[31] Rather, the vision of a rhizomatic Quran is always a middle; one can pick it up and plug in to any chapter. Every chapter, verse, word and letter draw webs of connection between each other.

---

27 Deleuze and Guattari, 4.
28 Michael Muhammad Knight, *Sufi Deleuze: Secretions of Islamic Atheism* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2023), 58.
29 This is essentially the difference between the epistemological Kaaba of chapter one, and the phenomenological Kaaba of this chapter.
30 Deleuze and Guattari, 21.
31 Knight, 58.

The rhizomatic Quran presents a resonant example of the synthetical view of transcendent and immanent. The rhizome is immanent, and the Quran—insofar as it is a divine revelation—is transcendent. So, the term "rhizomatic Quran" is somewhat paradoxical, but this paradoxicality is precisely the ambiguous nature of our being. Reading Knight's writing on the Quran-heart, we can gain more clarity on this idea:

> Inscribed upon the heart, the Quran recalls the classical question of the soul's immateriality: if the soul is not material, how would it relate to physical space – how can an immaterial essence be located inside a material body? If the Quran – the ultimate real Quran, not the material reproduction of the Quran on paper between two covers – exists in its truest form as an inscription on the heart, something changes in our experience of the revelation. The Quran is no longer a book to be read and interpreted, nor the supernatural thesis that cannot undergo translation; nor does it lord over us from an incalculably distant outside. The Quran receives a new vibrancy and vitality and a capacity for variation: is it really the same Quran every time? The Quran appears upon infinite hearts with infinite variegation and takes on a kind of agency for producing unique effects within a specific body. The linkage of the Quran and the heart, a new Quran-heart, drives human bodies as an actant in the material universe, speaking to/from it; the Quran can do what it does even without being what it says it is.[32]

We can find a resonance of the rhizomatic Quran when Chittick writes:

> Certainly, [al Ghazali] is striving, among other things, to show that the 'symbolism' of the Quran should not be thought of primarily as literary imagery, as similes and metaphors. On the contrary, God employs the language that He employs to clarify the actual nature of reality. At issue are the structure of the cosmos and the human soul.[33]

32 Knight, 60.
33 Abu Hamid Al Ghazzālī and David Buchman, *The Niche of Lights: Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 1st Edition (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), xiii.

Fig. 2.9. Bab Semarine, one of the gates to the Fes Medina

2.6

Conclusion

The domain of *islam* presents *wahdat al wujud* in social and communal terms. It is concerned with the immanent plane of existence, a material, tangible and corporeal plane, where the collective reality of our being comes to light. The realization of this social *wahdat al wujud* is activated by a fundamental experience of belonging and home. Animated by love and direct existential engagement, the individual self disappears in the face of the collective. The phenomenological Kaaba embodies this in the idea of the Kaaba-heart and the rituals of *Hajj*. The collective rhizomatic network of being becomes the ultimate reality, and the individual nodes become mere fragments. In the domain of *islam*, the return is a reversal of our modern disillusionment and social disconnection from one another. The immanent model of *islam* can re-establish the social connection that we have lost, reminding us of the fundamental empathy and care that ultimately connect us: the ocean of being to which we belong.









Fig. 3.1. overleaf: overlooking the Fes medina

Fig. 3.2. Nejjarine fountain in the Fes medina



Fig. 3.3. sunset over the Sahara desert



Chapter 3: ihsan

keywords: synthesis, cohesion, interconnected, liminal, in-between

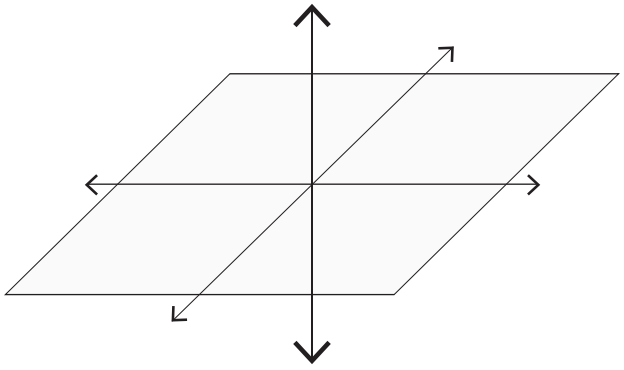


Fig. 3.4. the synthetical domain of ihsan:
transcendent axis + immanent plane

3.1

ihsan: a liminal ontology

In Islam, the third and final domain of being is *ihsan*: "goodness" or "perfection." The domain of *ihsan* is the synthesis of the previous two domains (*iman* and *islam*); it deals with consciousness, awareness, and the overall question of being as a whole. *Iman* is concerned with epistemology and knowing alone, and *islam* is concerned with phenomenology and doing alone, but *ihsan* considers both knowing and doing; epistemology and phenomenology together. Chittick writes about the three domains, "Sufism focuses specifically on the last [*ihsan*], employing the first and the second [*iman* and *islam*], however, as its primary means to achieve the focus."[1] In a sense, *ihsan* is the deepest of the three domains. The contradictions between the domains of iman and islam are reconciled in the domain of ihsan, making it clear that the three domains are deeply interrelated. Chittick reflects, "[the three domains] are distinct, yet thoroughly intertwined. Inasmuch as they are distinct, they came to be studied by different disciplines and judged by different standards."[2]

Ihsan finds its parallel in the philosophical tradition of ontology, the study of being, dealing with the idea of consciousness as a whole. It brings together the transcendent model of *iman* and the immanent model of *islam* in a thought structure that is simultaneously transcendent and immanent. In the Prophet's *hadith*, "faith is to acknowledge with the heart, to voice with the tongue, and to act with the limbs,"[3] *ihsan* is "acknowledge[ment] with the heart." Chittick poignantly reflects,

> the heart is aware and conscious before the mind articulates thought [iman], just as it is alive before the body acts [islam]. Faith's inmost core is found only in the heart.[4]

The heart, the symbol of the domain of *ihsan*, brings together knowledge and activity, mind and body. In this synthesis, we come to the holistic realization of *wahdat al wujud*, a unity of being that is simultaneously cosmic and phenomenological.

---

1 Abu Hamid Al Ghazzālī and David Buchman, *The Niche of Lights: Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 1st Edition (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), ix.
2 William C Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2008), 7.
3 Muḥammad ibn Yazid Ibn Mājah and Muhammad Tufail Ansari, *Sunan Ibn Mājah with Arabic Text*, 2nd improving ed (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2013), no. 65.
4 Chittick, *Sufism*, 7.

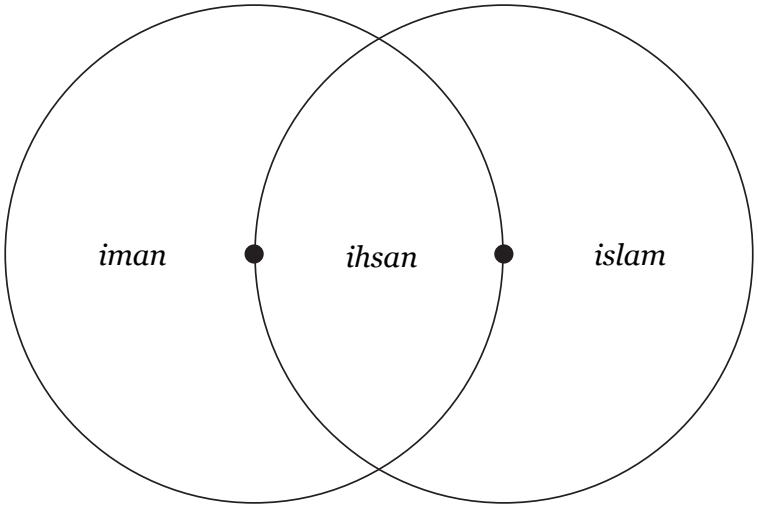


Fig. 3.5. ihsan as the synthesis of iman and islam

3.1.1 a synthetical domain

> We suggested that discussions of [i]slam focus on activity, while those on iman look closely at understanding. As for discussions of ihsan, they focus on human intentionality. Why do people do what they do? [i]slam tells us what they should do and iman provides them with an understanding of why it is necessary to do what they do, but neither of these domains concerns itself with how it is possible to bring one's motivations and psychological qualities into harmony with one's activity and understanding. This is the concern of those who focus on ihsan, and related concepts, as the ideal qualities of the human soul.[5]

Ihsan, as the synthetical mode of being, manifests both the transcendent axis and the immanent plane, bringing together our cosmic role as mediators between God and the world (the transcendent axis), and our social role as nodes in the human communal collective (the immanent plane). The cosmic element informs the meta-unity of everything in the cosmos, and the social element informs an emotional unity with every body in existence. To realize our *wahdat al wujud*, in a complete sense, we need both the cosmic and the social. Either element, acting alone, obscures the larger picture of our consciousness.

A purely transcendent view of being that focuses only on the meta-unity of the cosmos, via divine theory, renders the question of being abstract and inaccessible. A purely immanent view that focuses only on social, human-centric relations renders being mechanical and existentially inconsequential. Synthesized, the overall picture of being becomes one of unity and social, empathetic connectivity. Empathetic not only in the social, human sense but also cosmically empathetic beyond a human-centric view. In this model, the self, or *nafs*, disappears, favouring instead a larger-than-self model, whether it be the social collective of humanity or the cosmic collective of everything in existence.

> On the deepest level, Islam is a religion that teaches people how to transform themselves so that they may come into harmony with the ground of all being. Neither activity nor understanding, nor both together, are humanly sufficient. Activity and understanding need to be focused in such a way that they bring about human goodness and perfection.[6]

5 Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1994), 221.
6 Chittick, *Sufism*, 7.

3.1.2 Ihsan and Sufism

Ihsan—goodness and perfection—is the ultimate focus of the Islamic faith. Within the Islamic tradition, thinkers such as Rumi, Ibn al-Arabi and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali often discussed the significance of *ihsan* as the core of our spiritual-corporeal existence. Their work, which would come to be known as Sufism, focused on a synthetic approach to philosophy, theology, metaphysics and praxis.

Sufism is often described one-dimensionally as "Islamic mysticism" or "Islamic esoterism," but it is much more complex than that. Famously, medieval Sufi teacher Ali ibn Ahmad Bushanji once said, "today, Sufism is a name without a reality, but it used to be a reality without a name."[7] In a similar vein, Sufi philosopher Martin Lings writes, "without Sufism, Islam would be like a circumference without a centre, and … the first Sufi, in all but name, is the Prophet himself, and that Sufism is therefore as old as Islam."[8] The obscurity that is carried with the label of "mysticism" conceals the approachability of the tradition. For many medieval Sufi thinkers and scholars, Sufism was not a specific set of doctrines or beliefs but rather a profound commitment to *ihsan*—perfection/ goodness of being.

7 Chittick, *Sufism,* 1.
8 Martin Lings, *The Book of Certainty: The Sufi Doctrine of Faith, Vision and Gnosis*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1992), x.

3.2

Barzakh: threshold and in-between space

The *barzakh*, or in-between space, is a central concept to *ihsan*. The word *barzakh* is an Arabic word found in the Quran, "[it] signifies a (hidden) barrier between two things."[9] It is often discussed by Sufi writers, most famously by Ibn al Arabi, who frequently discussed the multiple dimensions of the complex term. Chittick defines the *barzakh* as "an intermediate world standing between the luminous or spiritual world and the dark or corporeal world…Instead of saying that things are either spiritual or corporeal, we can now say that they may also be *barzakh*, that is to say, neither spiritual nor corporeal but somewhere in between."[10] The term *barzakh* carries a lot of complexity and layered meaning, but put simply, the *barzakh* is the liminal space or the space in-between.

> It is He Who has let the two bodies of flowing water: One palpable and sweet, and the other salt and bitter. Yet has He made a barrier (barzakh) between them, a partition that is forbidden to be passed. {Quran, 25:53}[11]

The two bodies of water are often interpreted as the sea of meanings and the sea of sensory being.[12] The *barzakh* separates and synthesizes the two opposites: sweetness and saltiness. Salman Bashier summarizes the significance of the verse: "[t]he emphasis in the verse is on the role of the *barzakh* as a differentiator between two entities possessing opposite properties... At the same time, by preventing the two entities from mixing with each other, the *barzakh* also provides for their unity. This synthetic activity that the *barzakh* performs is of a paradoxical nature."[13] The domain of *ihsan*, operates in a paradoxical *barzakh* way, bringing together the domains of *iman* and *islam*, or meaning and sense, to answer the paradigm of transcendence and immanence. How can God be transcendent and immanent if the two are contradictory? Ibn al Arabi explains,

> The sensory thing cannot be a meaning, nor can the meaning be a sensory thing. But the [barzakh,] the Meeting Place of the Two Seas embodies meanings and subtilizes the sensory thing. It transforms the entity of every object of knowledge in the viewer's eye.[14]

In architectural terms, the *barzakh* is a liminal space that embodies meaning and the sensory. The *barzakh* Kaaba is both the epistemological and the phenomenological Kaaba.

---

9 Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn Al-Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 11.

10 William C Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 14.

11 Arthur J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran*, Re-issue (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25:53.

12 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 123.

13 Bashier, 11.

14 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 123.

3.2.1 Wahda and Kathra: Unity and Multiplicity

An essential principle of Sufism is *wahda* and *kathra*, or unity and multiplicity, which is itself another similar paradox. *Wahda*, means oneness or unity, and *kathra* means plurality or multiplicity. For Sufi thinkers, *wahda* and *kathra* are conceived holistically as two parts to a whole; it is impossible to have one without the other. They are synthesized in the concept of *tawhid* (declaring oneness), Islam's first pillar. The phrase of declaring tawhid is known as the *Shahadah*: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God."[15] Ibn al Arabi describes the *Shahadah* as a profession of both the unity and multiplicity of God and being. For Ibn al Arabi, the *Shahadah* is two-part. The first *Shahadah*, "there is no god but God," establishes the unity and oneness of God. The second, "Muhammad is the messenger of God", establishes the multiplicity of God.[16] Chittick explains, "by creating the universe, God causes multiplicity to appear from unity."[17] The manifestation of this multiplicity is the prophet Muhammad, who manifests God's plurality of traits: "[Muhammad] displays the potentialities of existence implied by [Gods] own 'names and attributes'… in an infinite universe."[18] Chittick writes,

> Although the One God in himself cannot be known, his manifestations cannot be avoided … knowledge of the One's infinitely diverse manifestations is infinitely diverse, which is to say that God is known through takthir [or kathra] as well as tawhid [or wahda].[19]

3.2.1.1 The 99 Names of God

This is better understood when considering *asma allah al husna*, "God's beautiful names."[20] In the Islamic tradition, Allah, God, has 99 divine names; each name is an attribute of God, manifested as an archetype of existence (e.g. the Peaceful, the Merciful, the Knower, the Provider). Commentary on the divine names is a common philosophic and poetic genre.[21] The names relate as much to God as they do to human, the archetypes of God are the archetypes of human. This is an essential component to the philosophy of *wahdat al wujud*. Nasr explains,

> The Divine Names mentioned in the Quran are the archetypes of all creatures; the heavens and the earth and all they contain… are the outward manifestations of the ontological perfections referred to by the Names. In their multiplicity the individual

15 Also conceptualized as *takthir* and *tawhid.*
16 Chittick, *Sufism*, 12.
17 Chittick, *Sufism*, 12.
18 Chittick, *Sufism*, 12.
19 William C Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2007), 90.
20 The word husna generates from the root word *ihsan*.
21 Aḥmad ibn Manṣūr Sam'ānī and William C. Chittick, *The Repose of the Spirits: A Sufi Commentary on the Divine Names* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019), xi.

> creatures of the cosmos reflect the multiple Names of God, and the Cosmos as a whole reflects the all-comprehensive Name.[22]

It is through the names that the human relates to the otherwise unknowable and mysterious oneness of God. Allah can be loved through the names: You can love the All-Merciful, the Provider, or the Peaceful in a way that is fathomable, human, and affective—this is what Al Ghazali refers to as the divine mercy.[23] You can know and love these traits because you recognize them in the people around you and, ultimately, in yourself. The *Shahadah* is as much about God's metaphysical unity as it is God's lovable and physical multiplicity. The names manifest God's multiplicity (*kathra*) at a level that we can fundamentally engage with. Al Ghazali explains this idea, reflecting on the famous *hadith*, 'God created human upon the form of the All-Merciful,'

> There is a difference between saying 'in the form of the All-Merciful' and 'in the form of God,' because the divine mercy is that to which the Divine Presence gives form through the [human] form... Adam came to be in the form of the All-Merciful and not in the form of God.[24]

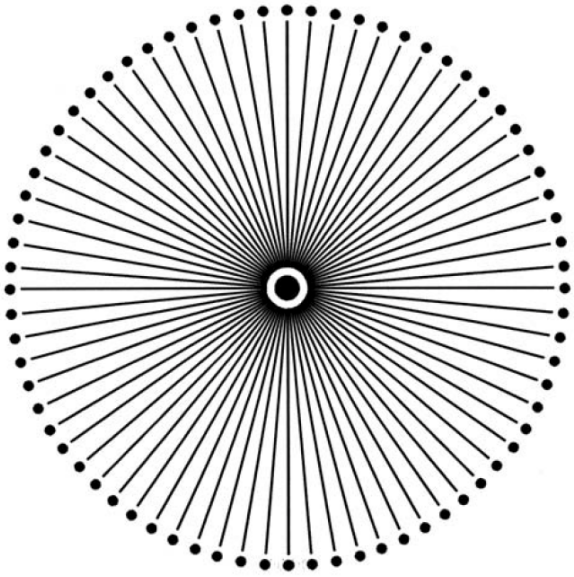


Fig. 3.6. diagram of Al-Hindi's notion of First Determination.
From *Cosmology and Architecture* by Samer Akkach

22 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, vol. 19 (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987), 384.
23 Al Ghazzālī and Buchman, 31.
24 Al Ghazzālī and Buchman, 31.

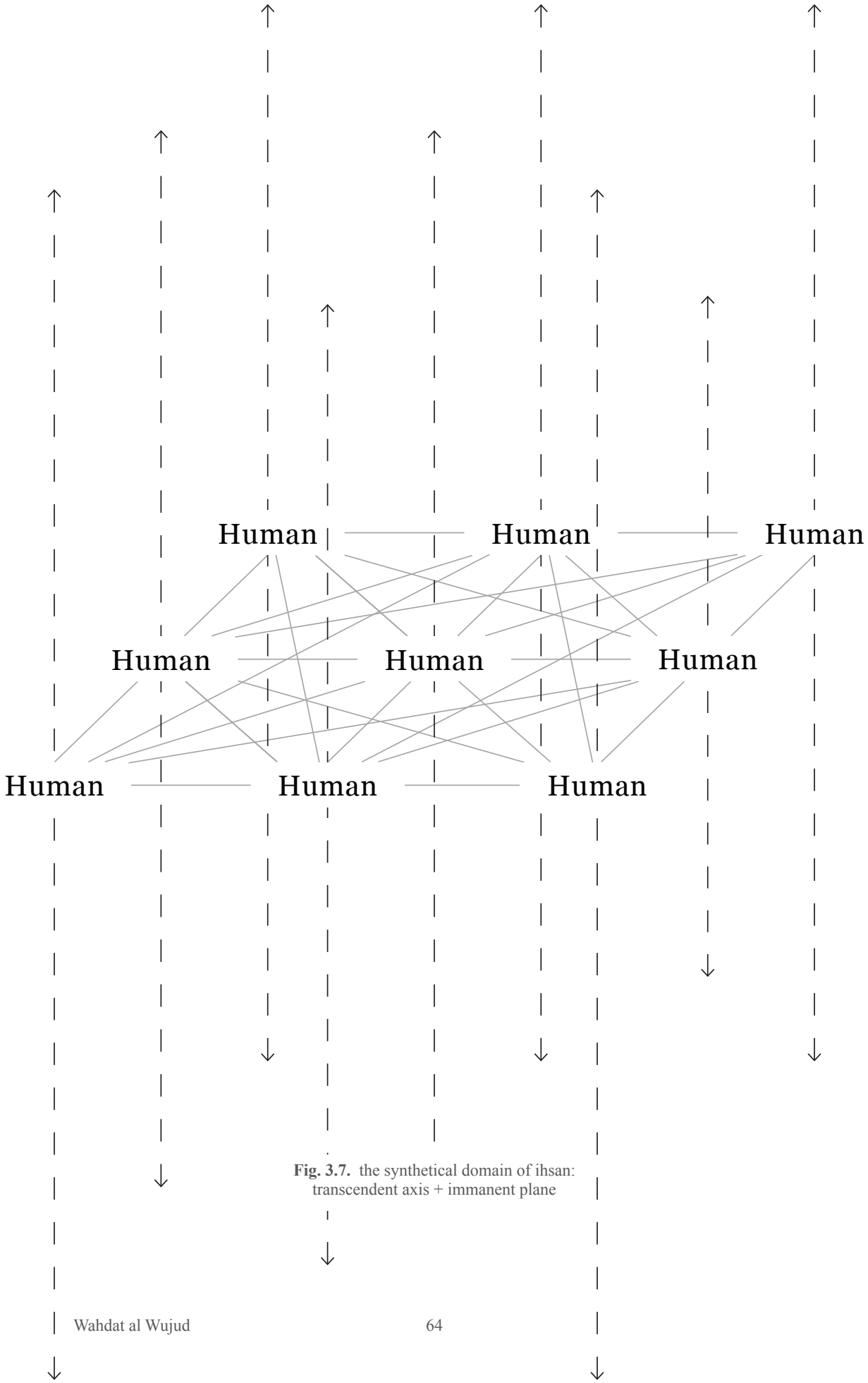


Fig. 3.7. the synthetical domain of ihsan: transcendent axis + immanent plane

3·3

ihsan*:* Deleuze and Islam

However, in traditional mainstream "orthodox" Islamic discourse, Ibn al Arabi's second *Shahadah* and its significance is often lost; the focus instead becomes solely on God's oneness, forgetting that in as much as God is one, their names are multiple. Ideas of multiplicity and difference are well theorized by Gilles Deleuze within a postmodern Western philosophical system. In a modern Western societal landscape, Deleuze's work can help to reinstate the value of multiplicity (or *kathra*) seemingly lost to mainstream Islamic discourse, while also bringing the two traditions into dialogue. In the spirit of occupying liminal spaces and bridging theoretical traditions, I explore a "Deleuzian Islam."[25]

Reconciling Deleuze with *wahda and kathra* is a challenge. The idea of *kathra* (multiplicity) aligns with Deleuze's thought, but *wahda*/ oneness is a little less seamless. Deleuze writes, "it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, "multiplicity," that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world. Multiplicities are rhizomatic and expose arborescent pseudo-multiplicities for what they are."[26] At a glance, the concept of *wahda* and *kathra* risks playing out these "arborescent pseudo-multiplicities." He further explains, "[t]he notion of unity (unité) appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier or a corresponding subjectification proceeding."[27] So, how can we consider *wahda*/ *kathra* within a Deleuzian lens without compromising multiplicity nor unity?

In my reading of Knight's *Sufi Deleuze*, I argue that an integrated Deleuzian Islam lies in a shift in both perspectives. Mainstream *Islam* places primacy on *wahda*, effectively ignoring *kathra*, while Deleuze places primacy on multiplicity, effectively ignoring unity. If the rhizome further engages *wahda*, and *wahda* further engages Deleuze's rhizome, our *ihsan* or "Sufi ontology" can embrace an integrated Deleuzo-Islamic perspective that stays true to the tenets of both Deleuze and Islam.

Vattimo writes that a mechanism of a singular, "essential truth, in this case of religion, that stands unmoving somewhere, while individuals and generations come and go around it with a wholly external and irrelevant movement) has already become unworkable."[28] The pure authoritarian *wahda* God operating unchangingly, overcoding unity onto an "arborescent pseudo-multiplicity" is the unworkable model that Vattimo and Deleuze both critique. I suggest that the pure rhizome is equally unworkable when it discredits any semblance of unity. At the macro-scale, the pure rhizome, with pure multiplicity

25 Michael Muhammad Knight, *Sufi Deleuze: Secretions of Islamic Atheism* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2023), 1.
26 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London, UK: Continuum, 1989), 8.
27 Deleuze and Guattari, 8.
28 Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, *Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998), 79.

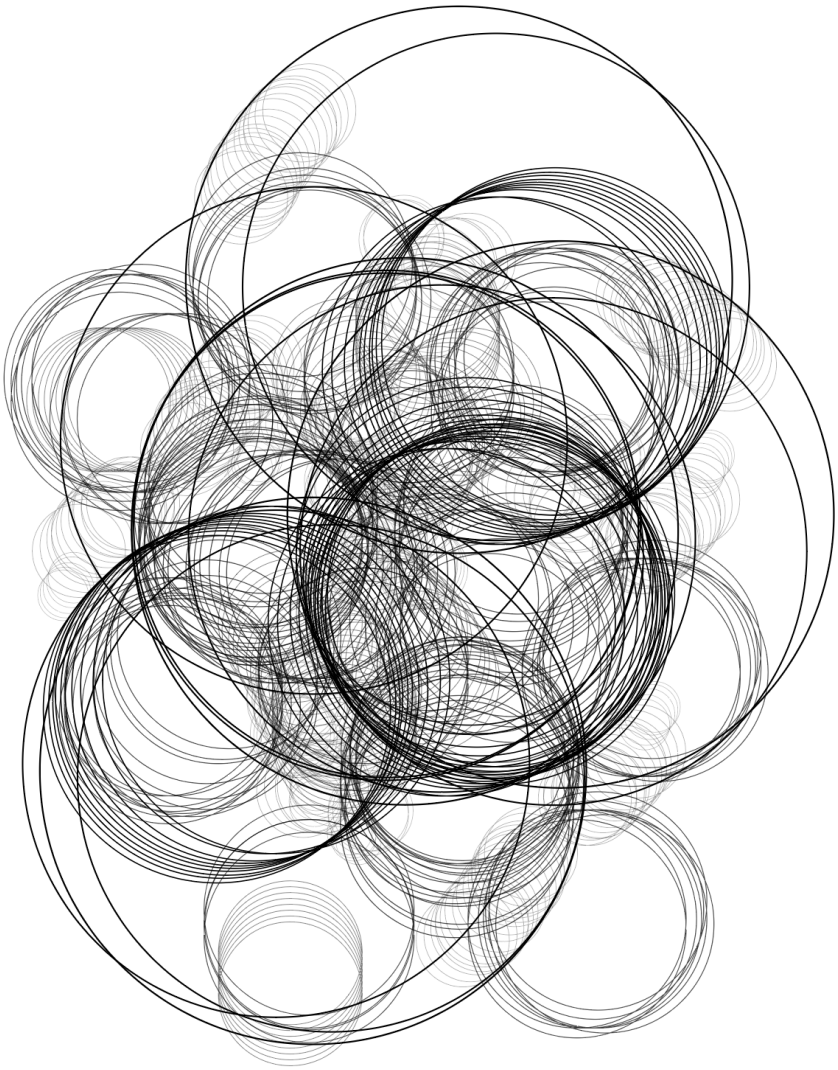


Fig. 3.8. The Unity and Multiplicity of Being:
wahdat al wujud as a rhizome

is just as 'unmoving' as the *wahda* model is at the micro-scale. A pure multiplicity, lacking any unification at the meta-scale of the network as a whole, risks falling into diffusion, fragmentation, and aimlessness. Just the same way that a pure arborescent "essential truth," risks becoming entirely unengaging and inconsequential at the human level. The ignored relationality between the two systems is ultimately where both the Islamic *wahda* and the Deleuzian multiplicity fall short, betraying their core intentions.

It is therefore necessary to synthesize the two: integrate Deleuze's multiplicity with more *wahda*, and integrate *wahda* with more Deleuze. We do this by realizing the overlap between the two, the liminal space, conceding that both sides are in a constant state of flux, always trading places and primacies. We can say that there are moments when the mind conceives of *wahda* first, and other moments when the body conceives of multiplicity first. Neither side can take ultimate primacy because there is no ultimate primacy; that is a construct of a rational way of thinking that needs to define one thing over another. Rather, both are constantly unfolding and changing; you can't assign rigid order to something that changes every time you try to order it. Within this sinuous relationship between multiplicity and unity lies the *ihsan* ontology.

Traditional and mainstream Islamic discourse teaches unity and the oneness of God as the foremost principle of theology, effectively ignoring the plurality of our corporeal existence. Like most mainstream theology, in following a top-down approach, theology (knowing) becomes disconnected from practice (doing). God becomes an abstract ideological ideal that never connects to our tangible reality. Bringing together Deleuze and *wahda* and *kathra*, is a way to occupy the liminal space between theology and praxis: between unity and multiplicity.

From a perspective of integrating Deleuze with Islamic *wahda*, we can point to Islamic practices that demonstrate a close engagement with a Deleuzian-like multiplicity, as a way in. Sufi rituals, such as the *sema* (the famous whirling/ turning ritual associated with Rumi) and *dhikr* (vocal repetition of prayers or the divine Names), are preoccupied with mundane and bodily actions and repetitions: rhythms and multiplicities. In whirling practices and vocal repetition, the connection to the mysterious and spiritual *wahda* is revealed through the repetitive motions of the practices. The focus in these rituals is on the affects and rhythms that resonate through space. Michael Muhammad Knight narrates his experience in a Sufi khanaqah (institution that hosts Sufi gatherings and rituals), explaining the "importance of [Deleuzian] corporeality and materiality to religion, [as it] momentarily decenter[s] 'faith'/ 'belief' as religion's definitive element."[29]

29 Knight, 102.

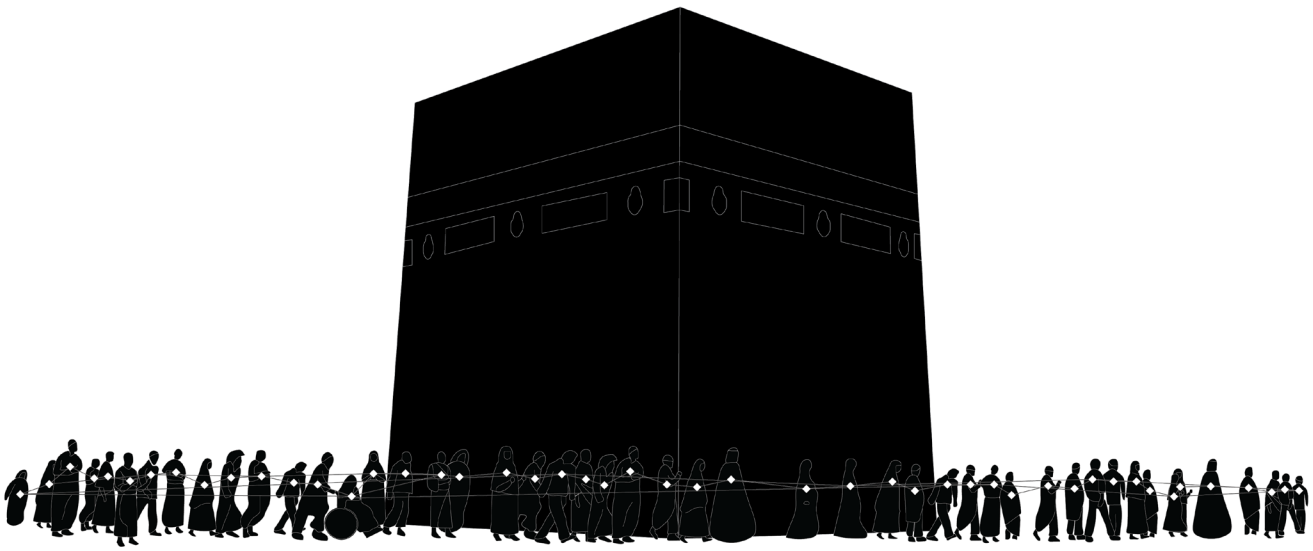


Fig. 3.9. the barzakh Kaaba

> When I'm in a khanaqah with chanting and breathing multiplicities searching for baraka [spiritual energy] transmissions, my experience of the baraka field cannot be reduced to faith in a set of theological claims…God can exist or not, or have an existence that transcends this mode of being or not, or occasionally descend from the highest tier of transcendence to a lower one, but the bodies and flows are here, making affects with their vocalizations of God's names or proximity to baraka transmitting graves. Baraka is here: the energy between bodies, the vibe of the khanaqah, the circulation of forces intensifying or dissolving my sense of body and self, separate from these other bodies and selves. We recite names of a nonexistent entity and our bodies change each other, forging a new condition. Neither dhikr nor ayahuasca ever gave me a system; nor did I have a system before opening my body to them. With or without chemical enhancements, when I really get there, I don't have doctrines; whatever's happening in my heart rate and breath and frontal lobes and neural pathways has shut down any chance for theology.[30]

Knight emphatically conveys the idea that one's total immersion in spiritual practice leads to the disappearance of rational theology. The thinking, knowing, and rational mind takes a back seat and allows the machine of immanence and multiplicity to steer. In Islam, immersion into the spiritual dimension is always borne out of the same fundamentally corporeal and material actions. Bodily action is integral to the practice of Islam, such as daily prayers, fasting, *tawaf*, *ihram*, etc. The repetitive "Sufi rituals" of *sema* and *dhikr* are only acute versions of what daily Islamic practices already have the potential to do.

Deleuze expands the concept of multiplicity and difference in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where he draws upon the rhizome as a model of difference and repetition, not unlike Sufi rituals. Describing the way that the root-like organism of rhizomes grows in relation to other rhizomes, Deleuze writes, "There are knots of arborescence in rhizomes and rhizomatic offshoots in roots… The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models."[31] Transcendence and immanence are not strictly opposing models—even in Deleuze's own rhizome—but they have the potential to be viewed as an *interconnected oneness* that exists in the middle, in-between: in the *barzakh*. Deleuze writes,

> The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate

30 Knight, 102.
31 Deleuze and Guattari, 1.

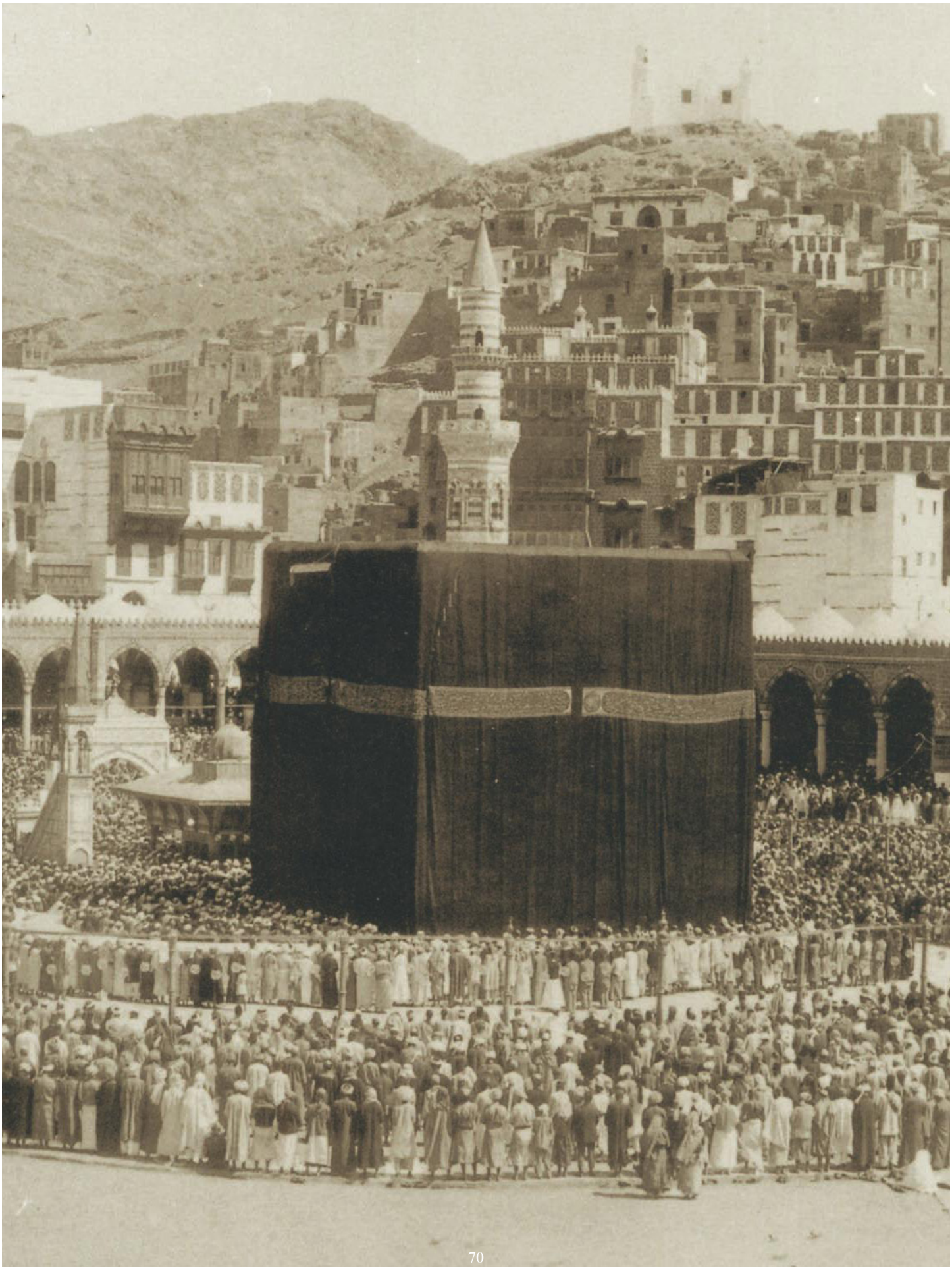


Fig. 3.10. the Kaaba (c.1907). From *Art of Islam* by Titus Burckhardt.

> a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.[32]

In the middle of Islamic *wahda* and Deleuzian multiplicity lies the *ihsan* ontology and *wahdat al wujud*. God is transcendent *and* immanent, and the Kaaba is epistemological *and* phenomenological.

3·4

The Kaaba as Barzakh Reality: the imago templi

As established, the Kaaba is the archetype of architecture. It presents the intimate link between cosmology and architecture in premodern Islam. In this chapter, the Kaaba is presented not as epistemological nor phenomenological, but as fundamentally both. This *barzakh* Kaaba is the embodiment of liminality, wherein transcendence and immanence come together.

In chapter one I addressed the epistemological character of the Kaaba as a symbolic entity. In this reading, the Kaaba served as the mediating presence between God and the World, connecting the fragmented cosmic axis of being. In chapter two, I addressed the phenomenological character of the Kaaba as an experiential site. In this reading, the rites of *Hajj* and the Kaaba-heart connected us to one another, as a collective being. The reality of the Kaaba, as presented here, is understood through the discussed concepts of the *barzakh* and Deleuzian Islam, where the middle and in-between situates reality. The Kaaba is understood as a barzakh, simultaneously epistemological and phenomenological, transcendent and immanent. It realizes our cosmic and social unity of being at the same time. This is the model for architecture's cosmological role, it embodies our *wahdat al wujud* at the cosmic and social scale.

32 Deleuze and Guattari, 25.

3·5

The role of the architect

We can learn from the "ontological enquiry" undertaken in the study of the Kaaba through the three lenses and we can change our approach to design. I draw this idea from Akkach, who writes that the goal of his book, Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam, is "to explore what it could possibly mean to consider the question of design as an ontological enquiry."[33] How can the enquiry of our cosmic/social unity of being change the way we, as architects, design? Akkach goes on to write that for him,

> The exploration revealed what set of existential possibilities the cosmogonic act of design can bring together, what levels of understanding designers can attain when they see themselves as privileged creatures strategically positioned at the center of the universe, and what it means for these creatures to see themselves as the center, the model, and the ultimate aim of existence.[34]

The Kaaba, as the primordial architecture in the Islamic tradition serves as the archetype for Islamic architecture. Architecture is cosmological, not only does it reflect a cosmological understanding of existence, but it also fosters a tangible realization of that understanding in its occupation. The epistemological Kaaba reflects the principles of *wahdat al wujud*, while the phenomenological Kaaba puts them into action.

33 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 207.
34 Akkach, 207.

3.5.1 Ihsan: Beauty and Awe

> God is beautiful, and he loves beautiful things. {Hadith}

Among its multiple meanings, *ihsan* also means beauty. So, we can understand the *ihsan* ontology as a desire to be beautiful and make beautifully. The simple way to realize our *wahdat al wujud*, is to make beautiful spaces. Chittick writes,

> ihsan derives from the word husn, which designates the quality of being good and beautiful. Dictionaries tell us that husn means, in general, every positive quality (goodness, goodliness, beauty, comeliness, pleasingness, harmony, symmetry, desirability).[35]

Our responsibility as architects and designers is to create beautiful surroundings, because beauty realizes our *unity of being*. To rephrase Schuon, "we must create for ourselves surroundings which, by their truth and their beauty recall our heavenly origins and thereby also awaken our hope."[36] Nasr says, "God is beautiful, and he loves beauty, in the same way that God is good and he wants goodness. In the same way that God wants us to do good actions, God wants us to be beautiful and to make beautifully."[37] Beauty is the catalyst of our realization of the greater-than-self.

Beauty, like *ihsan,* is never static; it is constantly unfolding, "always becoming." It is obvious that there are no objective standards of beauty; tastes change, and aesthetic styles come and go. However, there is a fundamental resonance to 'creating beautifully" that transcends objective beauty standards. To create beautifully is to create outside of yourself, for the sake of beauty itself. This resonates with the psychological understanding of the sensation of awe, which psychologists classify as a collective emotion and not a personal one.[38] In psychology, the sense of awe is defined by two things: "the feeling of being diminished in the presence of something greater than the self, and the motivation to be good to others."[39] In their paper, *Awe, the Small Self, and Prosocial Behavior*, social psychologist Paul K. Piff et al. found that the feeling of awe can increase generosity, ethical-decision making, and prosocial values.[40]

With or without the specifics of the Islamic point of view, the resonance of *ihsan*, beauty, and awe is universal. And it is our responsibility, as architects, to design beautiful, awe-inspiring spaces so that we can come to realize *wahdat al wujud.*

---

35 Murata and Chittick, 221.
36 Frithjof Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, ed. Harry Oldmeadow (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2019), 191.
37 *Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr—Islam: Truth and Beauty*, Lecture (Provo, UT: BYU Museum of Art, 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asTPBo9ei1M.
38 Paul K. Piff et al., "Awe, the Small Self, and Prosocial Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 108, no. 6 (2015): 883.
39 Piff et al., 883.
40 Piff et al., 883.

Fig. 3.11. looking into the courtyard of Ibn Youssef madrasa in Marrakech from a student room

3.6

Conclusion

The domain of *ihsan* is the synthesis of the transcendent axis and the immanent plane. It brings together the two poles of our being: our cosmic role as mediators between God and the world, and our social role as nodes in the human social collective. The cosmic element informs a unity of every*thing* in the cosmos, just as the social element informs an emotional-tangible unity with every*one* in existence. To realize our unity of being, we need both. Either element alone leaves the larger picture obscured. On one hand, a purely transcendent view of being renders being abstract and inaccessible. On the other hand, a purely immanent view renders it mechanic and inconsequential. Synthesized, the overall picture of being becomes one of spiritual and social unity. A connected and empathetic humanity.







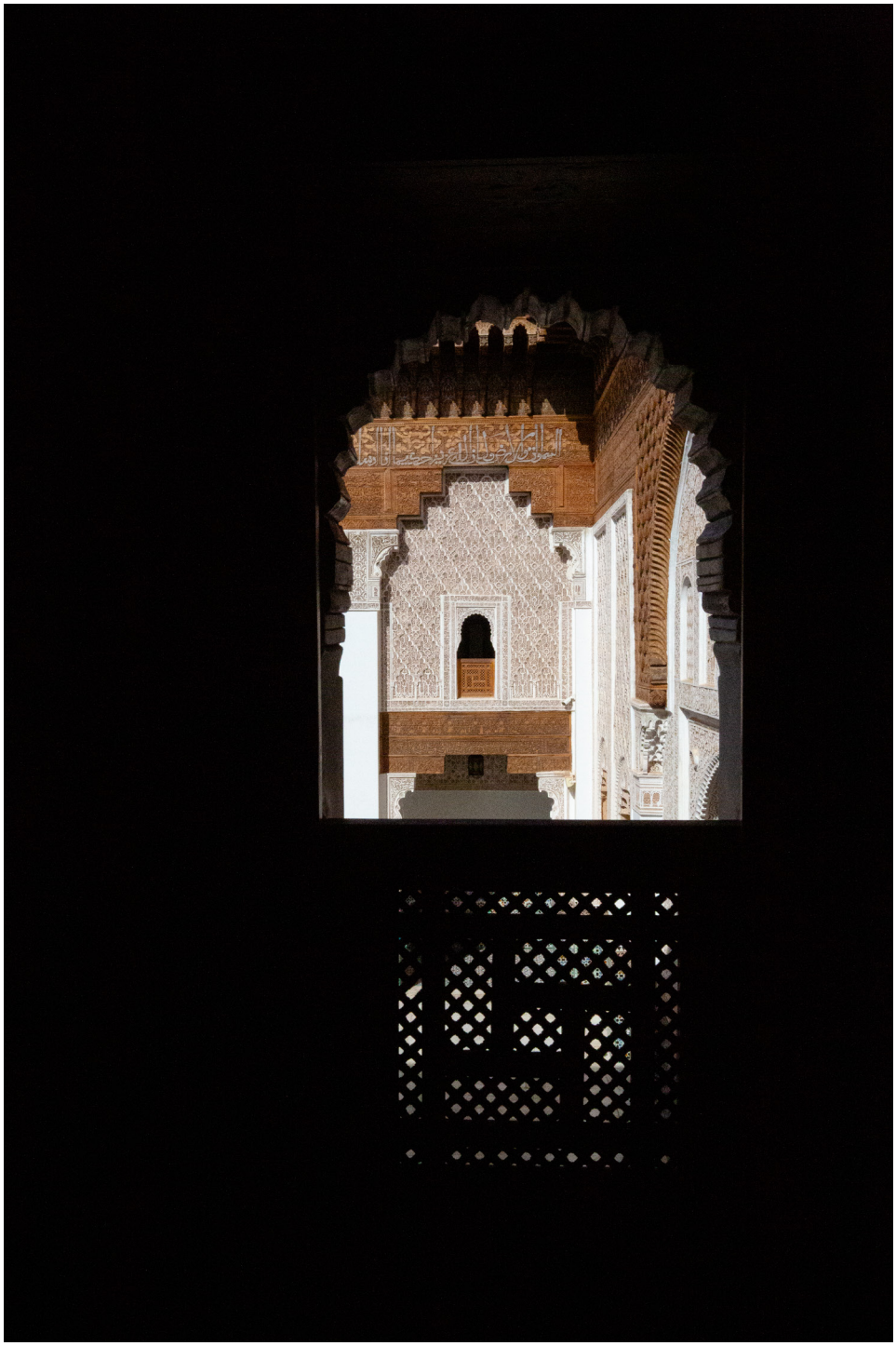


Fig. 4.1. overleaf: el Attarine madrasa in Fes

Fig. 4.2. looking out of a student room at Ibn Youssef Madrasa in Marrakech



Fig. 4.3. overlooking the Middle Atlas mountains

part two

spatializing wahdat al wujud

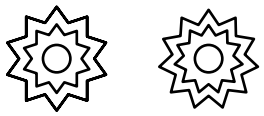
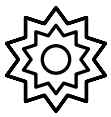






Fig. 4.4. previous page: the portalway at el Attarine madrasa in Fes, leading from the courtyard to the prayer hall



Chapter 4: madrasa

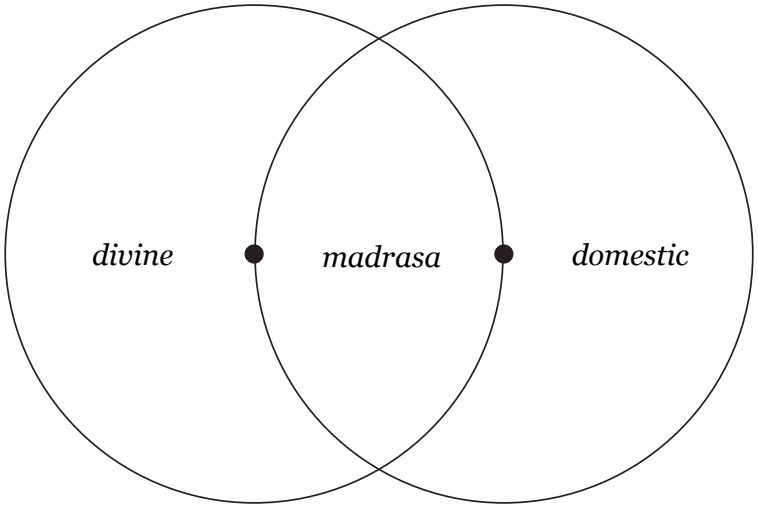


Fig. 4.5. the madrasa as the synthesis of the divine and domestic courtyard

4.1

The Moroccan madrasa

The Moroccan madrasa is the epitome of beautiful, moving space. It exemplifies architecture, whose foremost concern is affecting the entire definition of being. In its design, it symbolically reflects the cosmological vision of *wahdat al wujud*, and in its first hand experience it fosters the feeling of being a part of the *wahdat al wujud*. It represents architecture that operates in the domain of *ihsan*: a synthesis of *iman* (knowing) and *islam* (doing), realizing the collective being, both cosmically (in the transcendent axis) and socially (in the immanent plane). We can understand this by referring to the archetype of the Kaaba, as outlined in part one. Like the epistemological cal Kaaba of chapter one, the madrasa connects the divine presence with the world. Like the phenomenological Kaaba of chapter two, it fosters a sense of collective social being for all humans.

4.1.1 Origins of the madrasa

The madrasa is "an institute of higher education, usually residential, in which the traditional Islamic sciences – hadith, tafsir, fiqh and so on were taught."[1] The literal translation of the Arabic word is "school."[2] The heart of the madrasa is the courtyard, around which the students would gather for learning and also for leisure. The madrasa has long been associated with a sophisticated degree of awe and beauty, most notable in its intricate decorations.

Before the Seljuk empire formally founded the madrasa as an institution in the 10th century, it existed as an idea untied to a purpose-built building.[3] The first madrasas were simply rooms in the homes of the teachers, where students would congregate to learn. They would later evolve to become ad-hoc buildings, often extensions of the teacher's home, where teaching, knowledge sharing, and discussion would take place. As British art historian Robert Hillenbrand says, "[the madrasa] was a specific response to the needs of the Muslim community: it was a custom-built structure tailored to serve an institution which was itself a deliberate innovation.[4] The madrasa developed organically out of a community need, unlike the mosque, which developed in an explicitly transcendent framework of divine revelation. This is significant, because the efficacy of the madrasa lies in its unique synthesis of transcendent divine qualities of the mosque, and the immanent domestic qualities of the home, as I will discuss.

---

1 Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 173.
2 Oleg Grabar, Richard Ettinghausen, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650 - 1250* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2002), 121.
3 Hillenbrand, 173.
4 Hillenbrand, 173.

The development of the madrasa typology was likely fostered by a change in Islamic teaching. Prior to the 9th century, "Islam and information was transmitted by plain dictation. From the 10th century onwards, this was supplemented by explanation and commentary (*tadris*) which in turn went hand in hand with disputation (*munazara*), for which the mosque was obviously not the ideal place."[5] Hillenbrand makes a logical point, but the mosque traditionally was and still is a space of discussion in all its forms. So why was the madrasa desired as a distinct building type?

4.1.2 The Moroccan madrasa

To answer this, I will focus on the Moroccan madrasa. It seems that the madrasa only spread to the Maghreb in the 12th century, reaching Morocco a century later, under the rule of the Marinids.[6] For the Marinids, the novel typology meant a freedom to innovate and inspire without being compared to their predecessors, the Almohads, who had already built many impressive mosques across Morocco. With its lesser budget, the Marinid mosque would have paled in comparison to the feats of the supremely wealthier Almohads. In comparison to the Persian madrasa, which came before it, only one legal school prevailed with little competition in the medieval Maghreb, as opposed to the four different schools which would share the space in the Persian madrasa.[7] This meant there was only need for one space of congregation, which in turn freed up the madrasa's design and allowed for great clarity in its architectural narrative, all the while allowing for a very compact footprint and, thus, a low cost. The low cost, small footprint, and desire of the Marinids to stand out meant that time and money could be spent on ornamentation, which would come to be the defining feature of the Moroccan madrasa.

Whatever the circumstances that led to the development of the Moroccan typology, the result was a madrasa which harkened back to its domestic origins, accessing a remarkable sense of home, intimacy and belonging that had been lost in the madrasas of Persia. Paired with a reverberant ambition for novelty and innovation, the Moroccan madrasa developed under the perfect circumstances to become the quintessence of beauty in Islamic architecture.

4.1.3 Characteristics of the Moroccan madrasa

The unique characteristics of the Moroccan madrasa can be described through an exploration of the courtyard type, as found in both mosque and home. Entry to the Moroccan madrasa is through a bent entrance, as typically found in the courtyard homes of the medina. It acts as a threshold that signifies the transformation of the space,

5 Hillenbrand, 173.
6 Hillenbrand, 241.
7 Hillenbrand, 241.

"[allowing] the visitor time to adjust to the different tempo of life within the madrasa. Conceptually, it marks a transition from the secular to the spiritual world,"[8] creating a buffer of adjustment between the crowded alleys of the medina, and the serene *Sakina* quality of the courtyard. The corridor turns at least twice before you are met with a carved wooden screen door that finally allows you to peak into the central space. Typically, sub-corridors will lead to the latrine on one side and the upper story with the student rooms on the other. Beyond the wooden door is the oasis of the courtyard, meticulously decorated from floor to ceiling in Zellige tiles, carved stucco and carved cedar. Further beyond the courtyard, through a highly decorated portal lies the prayer hall, on axis with the entrance. The axis is capped by the *mihrab*, carved into the wall at the far end of the hall. This axiality, which matches the *qibla*, is a distinct element of the Moroccan typology.[9] Although, in some cases, such as *el Attarine* madrasa, this axis is broken by a perpendicular *qibla*, likely due to the spatial constraints of the old medina.[10]

Open to the air, the courtyard holds a fountain in its center. "[R]ippling water [the fountain] sets the place in motion to a degree that would not be possible in larger expanses. This introduction of nature into the ordered, man made world of architecture is typically Islamic."[11] The courtyard usually opens onto one room only, and that is the prayer hall, a double-height space covered with a dome or otherwise vaulted ceiling that maintains the vertical connection towards the heavens and is decorated accordingly. On the other three sides, usually on the floor above, are the student cells, where students would sleep. The cells were often very small, usually 1-3 students sharing a $4m^2$- $10m^2$ room.



Fig. 4.6. the fountain in the center of el Attarine madrasa in Fes

8 Hillenbrand, 243.
9 Hillenbrand, 247.
10 Hillenbrand, 247.
11 Hillenbrand, 240.

4.2

The Courtyard

The courtyards are the hearts of the medina.[12] In a Western urban fabric, the city's urban heart takes the form of city centers or public squares (ex. Dundas Square in Toronto or Times Square in New York), but the heart of the medina is plural. The hearts of the medina are its courtyards; a network of houses, mosques, and madrasas across the medina animating the city into a collective living being.

As transformative as stepping into the courtyard is, it is the act of stepping out of the courtyard and back into the medina where the real change happens. Leaving the courtyard, you're now aware of the true medina. You know that behind the labyrinthian corridors lies a network of courtyards, hearts breathing together. Now, even the corridors feel different; the entire medina is alive and animated, all around you.

My first time entering a courtyard in the depths of the Fes medina was surreal. I was with a small group of travellers, and it was our first time in a Moroccan medina. We were warned to be very attentive of our surroundings at all times and to always stick to the group. The medina could swallow us in seconds. You might have your eyes on the guide one moment, and the next, they're gone, lost to an ocean of bodies.

12 the old walled city in Morocco.



Fig. 4.7. a narrow alley in the Fes medina





Fig. 4.8. el Attarine souq in the Fes medina



Fig. 4.9. overlooking a souq in the Marrakech medina

Fig. 4.10. left: the Fes Medina. Photo from André Paccard







Fig. 4.11. *mashrabiya* screens cover a window in the Marrakech medina

Fig. 4.12. left: view from a rooftop in the Marrakech medina



Fig. 4.13. detail of the "hand of Fatima" door hinge, a symbol that keeps away the "evil eye"

Fig. 4.14. left: an uncharacteristically quiet alley in the Marrakech medina on Eid







Fig. 4.15. a quiet alley in the Marrakech medina

Fig. 4.16. top left: a blue tinted window in the Marrakech medina

Fig. 4.17. bottom left: “dyers souq” in Fes



Fig. 4.18. a narrow alley in the Marrakech medina



Fig. 4.19. a souq in the Marrakech medina



Fig. 4.20. a domestic alley in the Fes medina







Fig. 4.21. decorative iron window coverings in the Fes medina

Fig. 4.22. left: potted plants in the Marrakech medina



Fig. 4.23. a narrow domestic alley in the Fes medina

Fig. 4.24. left: detail of a decorated window in the Marrakech medina



4.2.1

Abdallah's courtyard house

Morning of June 11, 2023

Fes, Morocco: We entered the medina through Bab Rcif on the east end, near the tanneries. Within a few meters, the medina had completely enveloped me. A few more turns and the city outside had disappeared, becoming a foregone memory. The stark topography of Fes meant that we literally and figuratively descended deeper into the medina the further we walked. I felt a mix of intimidation and excitement as I followed along, utterly enamored by the sights, sounds, and smells surrounding me. The corridors breathed around us. They would get so tight we had to twist our shoulders to squeeze through, then they would release, opening up to a fountain or a souq, a momentary gathering, only to compress again a few minutes later. These corridors were not made for strolling; if you were passing through, it was because you had somewhere to be. Everyone moved with purpose. The alleyways twisted with us as we wandered deeper, and the outside world receded further. It felt like nothing existed except these tall walls—nothing outside and nothing beyond.

Fig. 4.25. pastel rendering of Abdallah's door

Occasionally, I'd glimpse through a door opening or shutting, and remember that people lived here; these corridors were their hallways, the medina their home. Yet, as an outsider, it was inconceivable to me that anyone lived here. To me, it was nothing more than an elaborate maze of high stucco walls. It was beyond thought that anything could survive in the dark, cramped spaces that probably existed on the other side of these walls.

This all changed when we reached the door to Abdallah's house. Abdallah, a personal friend of Rachid (our guide), had insisted we have lunch at his house. This was the Moroccan way, he said. Abdallah greeted us at the door. The centuries-old door was made of weathered cedar and rusting iron nails. But beyond this, it revealed little of what lay inside. Doors in the medina conceal the interiors so that rich and poor families' homes looked the same on the outside. And though the residents surely knew who lived where, the door itself was never the one to reveal the secret. Often, the doors would be adorned with decorative iron hinges in the shape of the hand of Fatima, they kept the "evil eye" out.

It was clear: the door separated the inner world from the outer world. As I ducked under the door frame, I felt the change. The temperature was cooler, and the scents and sounds were different. It was like plunging my head underwater; everything on this side was transformed. The chaos and noise of the outside were muffled and replaced with a new, familiar chaos and noise, one of domesticity and home—spoons clanking in the kitchen, and Abdallah's kids filling the home with sounds of childhood.

One of the first things I noticed was the smell of mint tea (atai) coming from somewhere on my right, cool and refreshing. As I looked up into the space, I felt the gentle glow of Abdallah's modest home. The entryway, a small space with a low ceiling, radiated a quiet warmth that made it feel infinite. My eyes adjusted, and I could see the kitchen ahead to the right, where Abdallah's wife stood with a tray of tea. She welcomed us into the courtyard with a smile and a greeting.

Abdallah's home breathed with presence and peace. The courtyard was an orange haze as the late afternoon sun diffused into the space. It was wide, bright, and serene. I sat down on the floor cushions, feeling overwhelmed in the best way possible. Abdallah poured us tea from on high. As I sipped the sweet tea, Abdallah's five-year-old giggled, peering at us from behind the kitchen door.

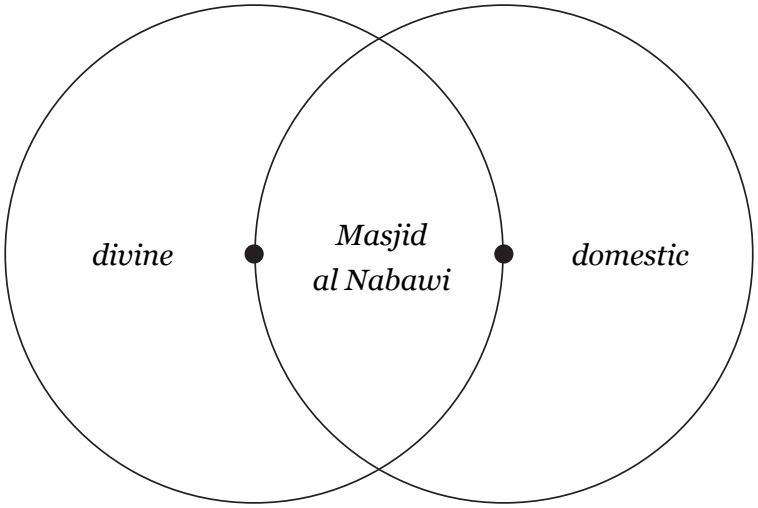


Fig. 4.26. the *Masjid al Nabawi* as the synthesis of the divine and domestic courtyard

4·3

Divine and Domestic: the Prophet's house-mosque

The Moroccan madrasa typology brings together the domains of *iman* and *islam* by weaving the divine and the domestic. The first example of this, and in many ways the first madrasa, is the Prophet's house-mosque, known as the *Masjid al Nabawi*. Erected in 622 AD, following God's command to the prophet Muhammad, it was the first mosque in existence, and it thus defined the Islamic courtyard typology.[13] The *Masjid al Nabawi* consisted of a small flat-roofed shelter with a simple walled courtyard.[14] The main shelter formed the prayer hall, but the predominant space of the building, both in size and use, was the courtyard. It served many roles, "function[ing] as a meeting point for the whole community and serv[ing] a variety of religious and secular purposes. It was here that the format and orientation of the communal prayers was established. It was also the seat of government, and the prophet would hold council here as well as act as judge and arbitrator."[15] Among other functions, the courtyard also served as hospice, sanctuary and refuge. At the same time, it also served leisurely purposes, including informal gatherings and spaces to recite poetry.[16]

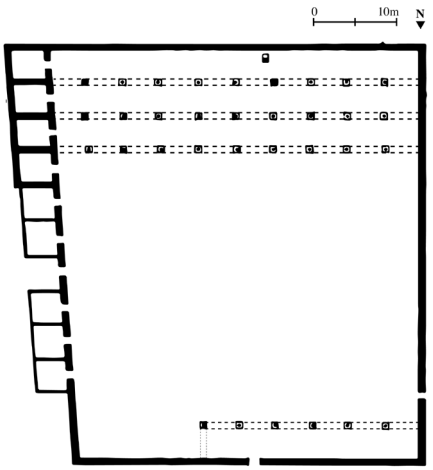


Fig. 4.27. floor plan of *Masjid al Nabawi.*
Recreated based on Oleg Grabar

The Islamic courtyard typology quickly proliferated across early Islamic architecture, diverging into two unique expressions in the mosque and the dwelling. The mosque's courtyards were multifunctional, community-oriented spaces whose primary purpose

13 Grabar et al., 5.
14 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 194.
15 Richard Yeomans, *The Story of Islamic Architecture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 21.
16 Yeomans, 21.

was prayer and divine connection. Consequently, as they became larger and larger, they lacked the intimacy and domestic qualities of the original *Masjid al Nabawi*. In contrast, the home's courtyards were oriented primarily toward domestic daily functions, and therefore maintained the intimacy of the *Masjid al Nabawi*, but they in turn lacked its spiritual qualities.

The courtyard of the *Masjid al Nabawi*, for a moment in time—before it was expanded—manifested a synthesis of both domestic and divine elements. The two elements would veer into the distinct courtyard types in the mosque and the dwelling, only combining once more in the 12th century in the Moroccan madrasa.

4·4
The Divine element

To conceptualize the transcendent divine element further and interpret the relevance of architecture to the question, we need to look at the origin story of the *Masjid al Nabawi*:

> Early sources describe how the Prophet was led to the site of his mosque by God. As he entered the Medina on the back of his camel, Al-Qaswa, Muhammad was fervently welcomed, and many eager invitations were offered. But Muhammad told the inviting crowd repeatedly to let his camel go on her way saying: 'She is under the command of God' … After a short tour, Al-Qaswa finally knelt and flattened her chest against the ground. There, Muhammad alighted and said: 'This, if God will, is the dwelling.'[17]

This origin story shares many similarities with that of the Kaaba and Abraham. Both stories are examples of divine revelation manifested by a divine agent. In this context, the divine agent is *Al-Qaswa*, the Prophet's camel. The role of the divine agent is significant because it reinforces the idea that the divine presence is ineffable within our plane of existence. However, through an agent—such as the *Sakina* or *Al-Qaswa*—the transcendent presence can project itself into the world and become effable. The presence of the ground in both stories emphasizes the importance of material worldly existence. *Al-Qaswa*, the Prophet's camel, "knelt and flattened her chest against the ground," just as the *Sakina*, the divine cloud, cast its shadow onto the ground. Both divine agents signify the critical moment of "the meeting of the two seas," where the spiritual meets the sensible. The divine literally touches the ground, reiterating the analogy of the shadow discussed in chapter two. In both cases, architecture emerges from this meeting. The madrasa is the direct offspring of the divine element that the Al-Qaswa manifested in her kneeling.

17 Akkach, 194.

4·5

The Domestic Courtyard

The proliferation of the courtyard in Islam, particularly present in the context of the domestic courtyard, can be understood through three practical principles: protection, privacy, and paradise.

4.5.1 Courtyard as Protected Space

Walls offer protection from enemies. Like many other ancient cities, the medina is defined by its walls for this reason. However, they also offer protection from the environment. The sheer hostility of the weather and the physical environment in North Africa and Arabia made walls even more necessary for this reason. Whereas the primary concern in a North American context is to have a roof over one's head, as protection from rain and snow, the primary concern for the dwellers of these arid environments were walls, to keep sand and dust out. The idea of a courtyard as protection is fundamental to the region and long predates Islam. It can be found in many nomadic architectures across North Africa and Arabia.

4.5.2 Courtyard as Private Realm

The second principle of the domestic courtyard is privacy. Courtyards delineate a transition from public to private or semi-private spaces. Even in community courtyards such as those in mosques, the outer world is always separated from the inner, creating a sense of seclusion. Architect and psychologist Amos Rapoport labels cities like Fes, which are built around courtyard houses, as "inside-out cities."[18] The life of these cities is internalized within a multitude of private pockets—courtyards—scattered across the urban fabric. A courtyard is, in itself, an inside-out building; homes in the medina don't have external facades, but they project inwardly instead. This inward projection creates a remarkable sense of intimacy and privacy, which is particularly important in the domestic realm.

18 Amos Rapaport, "The Nature of the Courtyard House: A Conceptual Analysis," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Spring, 18, no. 2 (2007): 58.



Fig. 4.28. the courtyard of Samira's Riad, where I spent a week in Marrakech

4.5.3 Courtyard as Paradise

The final principle of the courtyard is paradise. In these geographical contexts, paradise has always been conceived of as an enclosed space.[19] The imagined view of paradise has always been a courtyard, as paradise could only exist as an enclosed space in the Arab, North African, and Persian climates.[20] Paradise had to keep the unwanted out and the desired in. The courtyard did just that, keeping dust, heat, and pests outside, and cool, shade, and peace inside. As Emma Clark notes, the notion of an enclosed paradise even predates Islam, going back to the Summerian period in Mesopotamia.[21] The English word "paradise" itself shows this connection. "[C]oming from the ancient Persian word paridaeza, where pairi means 'around' and daeza means 'wall.'"[22] For the ancient pre-Islamic Persians, paradise was quite literally an enclosed courtyard (around-wall). This same idea can also be seen once again in the etymology of the Arabic word *Jannah*. *Jannah,* one of the commonly used words to refer to paradise or heaven in the Quran; means paradise, garden, and notably *concealment*.[23]

The madrasa embodies the three practical principles of the domestic courtyard—protection, privacy, and paradise—while also integrating the divine qualities of the mosque's courtyard, creating a unique synthesis of divine and domestic.

19 Emma Clark, *The Art of the Islamic Garden* (Ramsbury, UK: Crowood, 2004), 23.
20 Clark, *The Art of the Islamic Garden*, 25.
21 Clark, *The Art of the Islamic Garden*, 25.
22 Clark, *The Art of the Islamic Garden*, 23.
23 Emma Clark, *Underneath Which Rivers Flow: The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden* (London, UK: Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, 1996), 27.



Fig. 4.29. a view into Al Qarawiyyin University from Bab el Ward

4.6

El Attarine Madrasa

El Attarine madrasa is the most enchanting and beautiful space I have ever experienced. Its decoration is unrivaled by any other madrasa I visited across Morocco. Finally seeing it in person for the first time was a deeply moving experience for me. As awe-inspiring as Abdallah's courtyard had been, stepping into El Attarine madrasa for the first time was the transformative moment that redefined my understanding of Fes and clarified and reaffirmed this thesis and my view of architecture.

El Attarine madrasa manifests the innovation, freedom, and ambition unlocked by the new typology of the Moroccan madrasa. Located in the center of the Fes medina, it was clearly designed to be one of the finest madrasas ever constructed. Built under the patronage of the Marinid sultan Abu Said Uthman II in the 14th century AD, it is renowned for being one of the most elegant examples of Islamic decoration ever to exist.[24] As part of the vision for Fes as the new intellectual capital of the Islamic world, Al Qarawiyyin University—considered by some as the first "university" in the world—was built in the heart of the medina in the 9th century AD.[25] El Attarine madrasa was among the madrasa built nearby to serve as lodging and supplementary schooling for the students of el Qarawiyyin. In fact, *el Attarine* madrasa was the closest—located less than 50m away from *Bab el Ward*, one of the main entrances into the university.

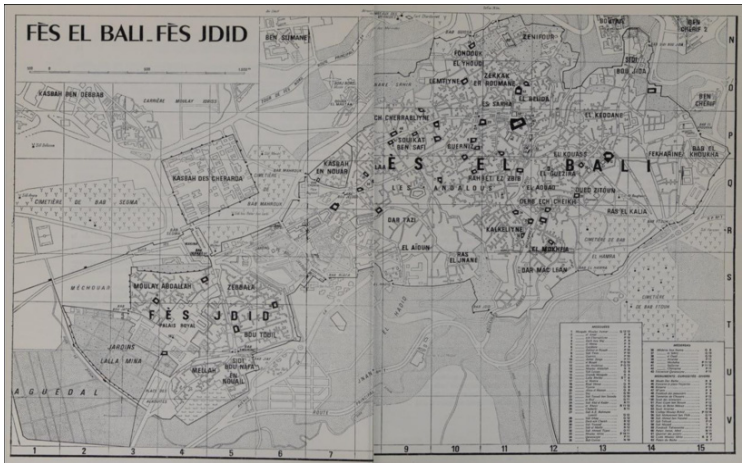


Fig. 4.30. map of Fes medina from *Fès: Joyau de la Civilisation Islamique* by Attilio Gaudio

24 Mohamed Lakhdar Oulmi, "Les Madrasas Marinides: Lieux de Foi, de Savoir et de Pouvoir," *Revue des Études Archéologiques* 19, no. 1 (n.d.): 512.

25 Attilio Gaudio, *Fès: Joyau de la Civilisation Islamique*, Nouvelles Editions (Paris: Presses de l'Unesco, 1982), 23.







Fig. 4.31. el Attarine madrasa

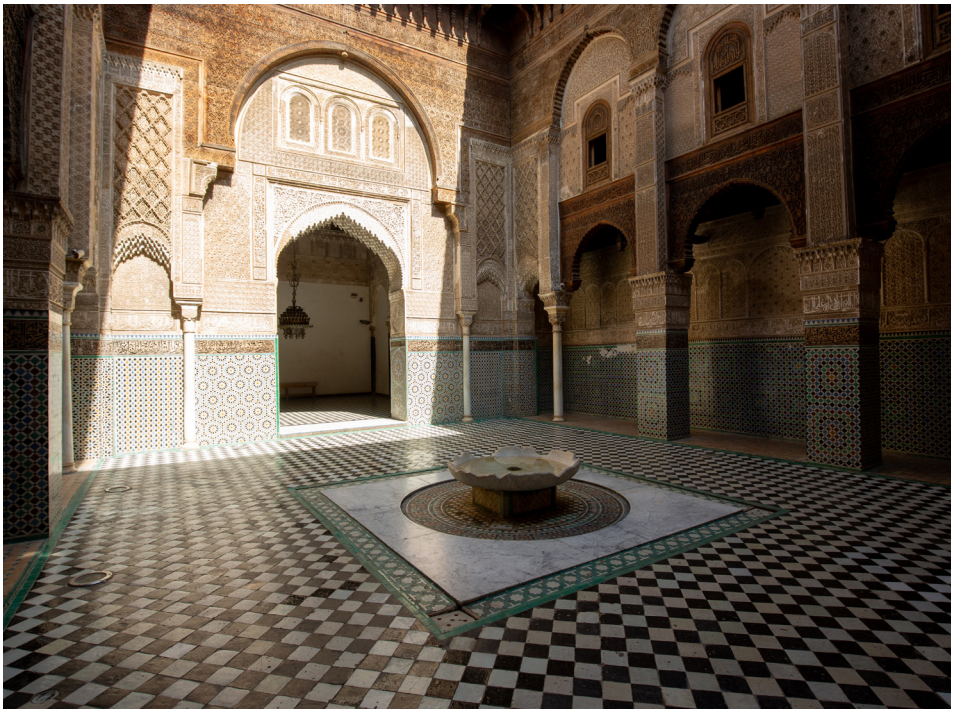


Fig. 4.32. looking towards the prayer hall at el Attarine madrasa

Fig. 4.33. previous page: people fill the madrasa on an overcast day



Fig. 4.34. a view of the entrance into the courtyard

Fig. 4.35. left: a detail of a carved marble column and carved stucco wall



Fig. 4.36. a detail of two different Zellige panels



Fig. 4.37. a detail of the carved stucco and partial muqarnas

Fig. 4.38. right: a view of the courtyard facade of the madrasa





Fig. 4.39. el Attarine madrasa

Fig. 4.40. right: pastel rendering of el Attarine madrasa from inside the prayer hall



4.6.1
In El Attarine Madrasa
Afternoon of *July 3*, 2023

The summer in Morocco was very hot and sweaty; the air was dry and dusty, and the sun was sharp and merciless, with no clouds in sight. Fes is the craft capital of Morocco, and its medina is the oldest in the world. The medina still operates in the same way as it always has: a labyrinth of tight corridors turning in and out and spitting you into more corridors and alleyways. I'd arrived in Fes from Marrakech by train two days ago; I'd entered the ancient medina through the famous Bab Boujloud gate. The world on the inside was immediately different. Today was my first day navigating the city all alone—if I didn't know any better, I'd think the alleyways were moving when I wasn't looking. I'd left my riad early that morning to wander with the plan of moving deeper into the city center and eventually asking someone for directions to el Attarine Madrasa. I'd been told that the only authentic experience of the medina was to get lost; it was inevitable. As I delved deeper into the organs of the medina, the crowd thickened. Everyone seemed to

know where they were going, they walked with fast and with purpose. Almost as if, the moment they stopped was the moment the medina would change around them.

Eventually, I'd made it to el Attarine Souq, its tight alleys overflowing with the rich sights and smells of Morocco. At a certain point, I'd cheated and peeked at a map on my phone to make sure I was still walking in the right direction. The shopowners at the souq were quirky and determined, constantly imploring me into their stall, sometimes with an eccentric remark, sometimes an aggressive yank quickly followed up by a smile. I could smell the chicken-olive tagine from a restaurant I couldn't quite see. Then the smell of the sweet almond treats piled high to my left started to mix in. Cigarettes, orange blossom, and dust muddled the picture, leaving my nostrils confused yet fascinated. The dusty ground was glowing in the July heat. The souq became more and more crowded the more I walked, the narrow streets flooded with merchandise and bustling bodies. In the midst of the labyrinth, I recognized the madrasa. It was far from where I stood, but I could see it; I recognized its inconspicuous entryway from the pictures I'd been obsessing over for months now. It doesn't announce its presence, there are no clear signs, and no bold letters ontop, but I could recognize the simple wood panelling to the left and right and the subtle carved plaster just above the entrance. Lurking in the dimness at the end of the main stretch of the souq, I saw it and instantly felt a wave of excitement. It's nothing special on the outside; I could have easily missed it if I wasn't specifically looking for it. A silence amidst the chaotic cacophony. It simply steps in, the entranceway carved out of the thick wall, quietly asking you to step in.

Slowly, I made my way through the crows, doing my best to shrug off the eccentric shop owners. The orange air stopped at the entrance, as though pushed out by the quiet of the inside. I stepped in. The commotion and heat of the souq was dampened by the thick walls. I faced a blank wall with an inset wooden seat. Turning to meet the man sitting at the ticketing desk, I handed him the purple note, and he gestured to his left. A large cedar mashrabiya screen door. It was glowing with the warmth of the courtyard beyond it. I could hear the courtyard's stillness before I stepped inside, the echo of soft voices from inside. The sunlight was glowing with a different kind of radiance, bright and cool through the screen, as a light breeze from inside blew against my leg.

Carefully, I put my hands through the screen door, just enough to pull it towards me. My eyes were struck by the sudden brightness, and it took a moment to readjust as the courtyard flooded the hallway and

spilled into the street. The sun coloured the previously dim vestibule, and I noticed the tiles under my feet for the first time. White, black, yellow and green squares dancing in the light. Mindful of the door frame below, I stepped down into the courtyard, right foot first. I turned my back on it momentarily to pull the door shut, ushering the light back into the courtyard. On this side, I could see the door in its full splendor. The intricate wood screen, built into an eightfold rosette, the famous Moroccan cedar, whose sweet aroma fills the Nejjarin souq nearby.

I shut the door fully and after a commanding breath, I turned to finally face the courtyard in all of its beauty. The space demanded a moment, closing my eyes I paid close attention to my breath. Inhaling the cool air into my lungs, I held it there for a moment, and exhaled, releasing the hot air of the souq in a quiet controlled breath. I opened my eyes to the sight of shimmering tiles, sculpted stucco, and masterfully carved cedar. They engulfed me, wrapping me in warm tranquillity and harmony. I imagined stepping barefoot on the glowing tiles beneath me, how the cold would tingle up my legs, the thought alone sent a shiver down my spine. The tiles radiated coolness. I felt I needed to move slowly and step gently. The pace of the world was not the same here. Gliding my hands across the wooden door, I let them slip to the tiles on the left-hand side. I felt their coldness bleed its way up my arm. I could feel my pulse between the tile and my finger. Even my eyes cooled at the sight of the tiles. I started to realize the sound of the fountain in the middle, orchestrating the entire space. I was completely comfortable and engaged. The more I engaged, the deeper I sank.

I stared at the tiles beneath my fingers. After a while, I stepped back to admire the entire pattern. Part of me tried to look for an order in the tiles, tried to understand them. Blues, oranges and greens soothed my gaze, but the patterns demanded its attention, insisted that I crack their code. My eyes obeyed, and started to scan, deliberately and carefully. Try as I might to rationalize them, I couldn't seem to hold enough scrutiny to draw the complete picture. Just when I approached comprehension, I was pulled out of it by the beauty of this tile or that, the blue one with the cracked corner, or the white one placed ever so slightly askew. My eyes fought my mind, always jumping and tracing new lines in the pattern. At first, it was slow, but the more I concentrated, the more divergent the lines became. At times the patterns converge, the triangles rationalize into larger triangles stacked on top of one another, and I think I understand them, but then they start to dance again, and I see them as hexagons. But the hexagons are made of triangles, so I see the small triangles again, but then I see the black tiles tracing a new pattern of hexagons, and then I see squares, and more squares and

then triangles again. My eye slips to the panel beside me, and it finds a whole new pattern and a whole new dance, so it slips to the floor beneath me, the one that used to be a simple square grid, but now even that seems to warp the further I look. The more I stare, the more I try to convince myself that there is a stasis, but I know, that there is no stasis, only patterns on top of patterns on top of patterns. My eyes continue to draw lines and shapes over and over again; they wrap around me, enveloping me in triangles and hexagons and circles and squares, dancing ceaselessly. The patterns crowd my mind and satiate my eyes, and somewhere between my overstimulated mind and my effectuated eyes, a flutter is sent through the rest of my body, resonating in the frequency of the world and the heavens, so that I no longer sense my presence, nor that of the tiles, all that is left is being. I feel grounded; the sensation washes over me gently, wave by wave, flowing around, through, and out of me. Each in-breath signals another wave, and with each wave, my gaze finds a new peace. Like the momentary limbo before your eyes close at night, when you float between wakedness and sleep. In that exact moment, where reality is ephemeral and active, unfolding and changing, effective and affective. Did I touch the tiles before I felt their coolness?







Fig. 5.1. overleaf: Zellige at Ibn Youssef madrasa in Marrakech

Fig. 5.2. Zellige covers the floor of the hallway in Cherratine madrasa in Fes



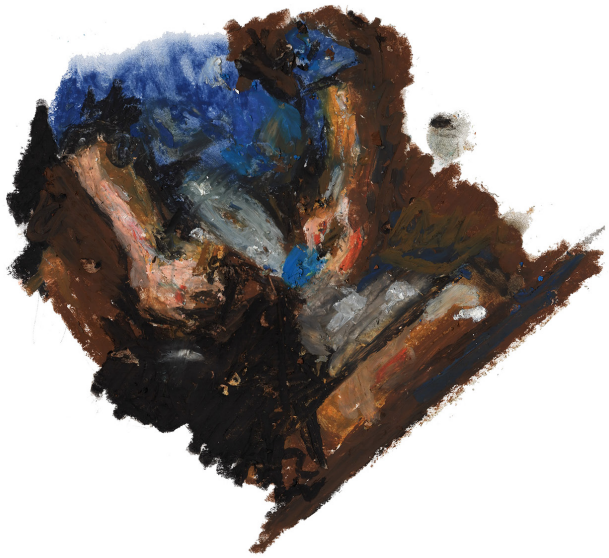
Fig. 5.3. overlooking the Atlas mountains

Fig. 5.4. next page: Ahmet's workshop



Chapter 5: Zellige


SOCIETE LE PARADIS DE PAPIER SARL
Creator Silk
170 65.0 X 92.0 PCT
125
622.67
2777700 002
22593785



5.1

Hearing Zellige in Rabat

Morning of June 10, 2023

Back in January, before I even realized I might be able to go to Morocco, I would sit at my desk thinking about my thesis and fantasize about actually meeting a Zellige craftsman, a far-fetched dream. I would picture an old man working away in the souqs of Fes, and I would fantasize about asking him for a loose tile. I imagined the feeling of running my fingers along the rough chamfer on the back, the unfinished clay between my fingers—Since I'd first learned of how Zellige was made, I obsessed over the beauty of the singular tile, even though I had never seen it in person. The fact that all of this craft, care and effort was put into each individual tile, only to be hidden in the wall, concealed behind layers of plaster and concrete, revealing only one of its surfaces, albeit a beautiful one. I'd imagined chatting with the man, asking him how old he was, how long he'd been doing this. All of this was just a dream.

Fig. 5.5. left: pastel rendering of Ahmet breaking the Zellige tiles

Rabat, Morocco: As it turns out, my fantasy was not too far off. During my first week in Morocco, I visited the old souq of Rabat, just outside of the Kasbah of the Oudayas. As far as I was concerned, Rabat was just a pitstop on my way to Fes and Marrakech where I would finally see Zellige. I had a few hours to kill before my train to Fes, so I was aimlessly strolling around the city. Rabat, with its slow pace and cool coastal climate was the perfect city for that. It was a slow day, and the streets were relatively empty. I walked by the beach where people made the most of the morning breeze. I watched a group of teenagers casually juggle a soccer ball with a finesse I had never seen. Part of me wanted to join them, but they were too far away, and I wouldn't be able to keep up anyway.

The Rabat souq is very different from the souqs of Fes. The streets are wider, there are less vendors and smaller crowds. The souq was especially quiet that day with only a few stalls were open for business, the rest were just working away, preparing for the next business day I presumed. It was very laid back, the market seemed much less about forcefully selling things and more about everyone going about their way. I wandered past the fish markets at the entrance, casually following the movements of a random group of tourists up ahead. I bought an almond dessert and an orange juice, and slipped towards the souq's back end.

That's when I first heard the clanking.

I knew what I was hearing before I saw Ahmet's workshop. I walked towards the sound, and my face broke into a grin. Clink-clink-clink-clunk. The rhythm was almost musical, like a drum ringing through the souq.



5.1
Meeting Ahmet

The workshop was small, no more than 5 square meters, a narrow storage unit where Ahmet was sitting, Menkakh (hammer like tool specific to Zellige) in hand, clanking away. He had some small panels laid out in front of the shop–some fragments of traditional patterns, and some modern etched carvings. I stood there, utterly starstruck, my eyes fixed on him. He looked up, gave me a warm smile, then a nod, then tilted his head back down and the clanking resumed. I stood there, transfixed, my eyes following his Menkakh.

Ahmet spoke darija, so there was a barrier to our communication, but thinking back, it's hard for me to remember that. Ahmet was surrounded by an aura, I felt grounded in his presence. His smile was one of those smiles that infected you, putting a smile on your face before you knew it was there. Talking with him, I couldn't help but grin like a little boy. I vividly remember the deep warmth in his blue eyes, whenever he looked up. I've never experienced such a warm and compassionate

Fig. 5.6. left: pastel rendering of Ahmet

gaze. Behind them were years of wisdom and life that projected out, ensnaring anyone who crossed them.

We exchanged names, and I told him I was from Egypt, and his smile grew wider. "We are brothers!" he said. We communicated through hand gestures, smiles, and the few Arabic words we shared in common. I couldn't contain my excitement, and Ahmet must have noticed. He invited me to step in and graciously allowed me to photograph him working. It smelled like bitter coffee and clay. He offered me a seat and after a moment of watching him work, I asked him about the pattern he was working on. He laid it out on the ground beside him, a stunning fourfold symmetry with a red cross at the centre, deep blue "braids" (dfira), and white infill pieces. He picked up the Menkakh to break the shape of the next piece, and I realized he was working freehand – no reference pattern, no guidelines to follow, just pure intuition. I couldn't believe it.

It was only when I asked him about the pen used for the guidelines that he showed me. He pulled out a reed-like pen, and a small bowl of what looked like solidified white ink from behind him. He showed me on a new tile, tracing the piece he had just cut onto its surface, then putting the pen and ink behind him again.



Fig. 5.7. Ahmet drawing reference lines



Fig. 5.8. Zellige tiles on top of Ahmet's work station

Fig. 5.9. right: Ahmet chamfering the edge of a tile



Fig. 5.10. Ahmet showing me the pattern

Fig. 5.11. right: outside Ahmet's shop


Marvel


الله



Fig. 5.12. Ahmet in his workshop

On top of his workstone, was his small glass coffee cup, a carton of cigarettes, and a handful of loose tiles. I was hesitant at first, but I built up the courage to ask if I could look at them. He gestured the equivelant of "certainly", and he started handing them to me one by one, telling me the names of each as he placed it them in my hand. khatem Suleimani, metamena, betan, menferata. I can't describe how I felt in that moment. It's beyond words.

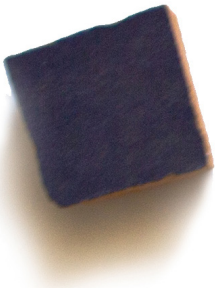
I told Ahmet I wanted to buy one or two. Truthfully, I wanted every single tile, but I felt like I might be ruining a future panel by taking them, so I restrained myself, knowing that Ahmet would have happily given them to me, even if they were part of a pattern he was working on. Then Ahmet pulled out a red mesh bag from behind him and told me to choose whatever I wanted and take them. It was full of loose tiles. I started picking some of my favorites, noting down the names at the same time. Once I had my selection, I tried to ask him how much, but he refused to let me pay. He took a crumpled brown paper bag from beside him and placed my tiles inside. After a few minutes of insisting, he finally agreed to take my money.

I shook his hand sincerely, and we exchanged smiles and vague farewell prayers. Then I walked off feeling complete and content, and the clanking gradually receded.

Fig. 5.13. Ahmet's tiles, labelled



khatim



dirham/ tarb'iah



kmarshuna



yaghnubi



nuss sharafa



sharafa



saft



thn'ashriya



qtib



saft b furkah

5.2

What is Zellige? A brief history

> [In] traditional Moroccan Architecture…It seems that every building was seen and conceived from inside out! Architecture, according to the ancients was based on the need to compose surfaces. Facades and exterior volume were of secondary importance... Decoration of the walls, ceiling and floors was therefore of prime importance in any building, and it is in this field that the creative genius of Moroccans excels.[1]

Zellige encapsulates the spirit and ethos of Islamic art, and the crucial significance of the Islamic aniconic tradition. Zellige are enamelled terracotta tiles that are cut and arranged in complex and stunning patterns by master craftsmen—known as *maallemin*. The craftsmen dedicate their whole lives to the craft, starting as young as seven.[2] Zellige tiles famously decorated mosques, mausoleums, palaces, and notably madrasas across Morocco and Southern Spain between the 10th and 14th centuries.[3] Zellige is still practiced today in some parts of Morocco, but as younger generations turn away from the craft, the rich tradition is slowly fading away, taking the immense knowledge of the *maallemin* with it.

The craft is passed down from generation to generation. The word Zellige (زليج) is commonly traced to the Arabic word *zalaj* meaning "slippery, smooth, or to slide."[4] The craft was likely borne out of the Byzantine mosaic. The first mosaics date back to the 3rd millennium BCE in Mesopotamia.[5] They appeared in Ancient Greece in the 5th century BCE, and from there, made their way to the Roman empire, then to the Byzantine empire, and through Byzantium, they arrived in the Muslim Arab Levant. In the aniconic Islamic tradition, the mosaics found a new expression by depicting nature, architecture, and geometry. Some of the first Muslim Arab mosaics were used by the Umayyads at the Great Mosque of Damascus in 715 CE.[6] In 750 CE, displaced by the Abbasids, the Umayyads founded a new dynasty in Al-Andalous (modern-day Spain, Portugal, and Morocco), where they built one of the most significant examples of the Islamic Mosaic: the mihrab at the great mosque of Cordoba. It has been speculated that craftsmen for both keystone Umayyad projects came from Morocco, due to the prestigious reputation of the Moroccan craftsmen.[7]

---

1 André Paccard, *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture*, Volume 1 (Paris: Atelier 74, 1980), 19.
2 Salma Samar Damluji and John Hedgecoe, *Zillij: The Art of Moroccan Ceramics* (Reading, UK: Garnet, 1992), 205.
3 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 210.
4 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 5.
5 Paccard, 7.
6 Oleg Grabar, Richard Ettinghausen, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650 - 1250* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2002), 23.
7 Grabar et al., 25.



Fig. 5.14. corner detail of Zellige at el Attarine madrasa



Fig. 5.15. detail of two Zellige panels separated by a column at el Attarine madrasa





Fig. 5.16. Roman mosaics in a house at Volubilis, depicting a sixfold geometry

Fig. 5.17. top left: a view of the Capitoline temple of Volubilis

Fig. 5.18. bottom left: a mosaic from the house of Venus at Volubilis

~

Volubilis

Due to its fertile land, Morocco was a valued part of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century BCE. With the help of the indigenous Amazigh, the Romans built the ancient city of Volubilis. Located just North of Fes, they assembled many magnificent late Hellenistic-style mosaics, depicting Greek and Roman mythology – many of which survive today. As a direct result of the Roman conquest, mosaic workshops began to spread across the region, notably including Morocco.[8]

8 Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978), 12.



Fig. 5.19. the *mihrab* at the great Mosque of Cordoba

Fig. 5.20. right: a famous Zellige panel at Alhambra in Granada

The first Zellige tiles date to the 10th Century CE in Morocco.[9] Leaving the Roman and Byzantine mosaic behind, Zellige quickly became its own art form. Instead of using marble and stone tesserae, Zellige craftsmen created their tiles out of clay, which was abundant in high quality in Fes. They glazed, hand-cut and arranged the tiles into complex patterns. The art quickly gained prominence and spread to the Spanish peninsula. In her book, *Zillij*, Salma Damluji writes, "nowhere in the Arab world has the art of Islamic architecture reached the point of sophistication it has in Morocco."[10] The art of Zellige would continue to grow in stature and sophistication through the subsequent dynasties, spreading to the south of Spain and Portugal, and perhaps most famously, decorating the opulent walls of the Alhambra in Granada. Unlike the Islamic mosaics of Cordoba and Damascus, Zellige was not depicting scenery nor architecture. Instead, it pushed the aniconic tradition even further, stripping it down to pure geometry. Rather than depicting nature and buildings, craftsmen now depicted lines, shapes, and patterns.

9 Paccard 22.
10 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 11.



5·3

Ornamentation in the madrasa

In the madrasa, there are three main types of ornamentation. From top to bottom, these are, carved cedar, carved stucco, and Zellige. Zellige stands apart in a number of ways. While the stucco and cedar are carved out of a single material, Zellige is made up of pieces that come together to assemble a whole. The subject matter depicted by Zellige is also different. Where the art of stucco and cedar often rely on calligraphy and natural motifs, Zellige is meant to be touched and admired up close, whereas stucco and cedar are viewed from afar. Except for doors, cedar is always placed above you. It surrounds window openings on the upper levels and adorns the eaves and vaulted ceilings of the prayer halls. It is meant to be admired from below, the raw beauty echoing the divine quality of virgin nature and recalling paradise.[11] Most of the carved stucco is similarly placed out of reach above. In contrast, Zellige is always deliberately positioned below eye level and within touching distance. It is designed to be admired not only from afar but also up close. It is tactile, tangible, and engaging.

5·4

Zellige as a Mirror to Existence: iman, islam, ihsan

Zellige manifests *wahdat al wujud*. Like the Kaaba and the madrasa, it embodies the three domains of existence, and through them expresses our cosmologically interconnected being. These are described through geometry, making, and mastery, which conceptualize *iman* (knowing), *islam* (doing), and *ihsan* (being), respectively. As Keith Critchlow and Paul Merchant write, "There is no doubt that the art of Zellige is intrinsically cosmological, providing an image of the [entire] Islamic world."[12]

11 Jean-Marc Castéra, *Arabesques: Art Décoratif au Maroc* (Courbevoie: ACR, 1996), 384.

12 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 204.

5.4.1 Iman: Geometry

Zellige manifests the epistemological domain of *iman* in its geometry. Kritchlow writes,

> Islamic spirituality could not but develop a sacred art in conformity with its own revealed form as well as with its essence. The doctrine of unity … brought into being an aniconic art wherein the spiritual world was reflected in the sensible world not through various iconic forms but through geometry and rhythm, through [patterns] which reflect directly the worlds above and ultimately the supernal sun of Divine Unity.[13]



Fig. 5.21. the geometry of Zellige manifests the transcendent axis of being

Geometry embodies the transcendent realm of the divine or spiritual world. Since its conception, the city of Fes was intended to serve as the new intellectual capital of Islam, attracting thinkers, writers and, notably, mathematicians from across the Islamic empire. Damluji writes, "A particular intellectual effort and spontaneity exist in Fes, accompanied by geometrical knowledge from which Zillij may be clearly read. This reading is of a very detailed and balanced composition, in which design becomes an integral part of Moroccan daily life; it is not merely a tradition but a living culture."[14]

Zellige craftsmen followed in the rich Islamic mathematical tradition of al Khwarizmi and Ibn Haytham, where mathematics and geometry were considered spiritual pursuits. In this intellectual tradition, mathematics was highly regarded not only for its practical applications but also for its philosophical and epistemological significance. Islamic thinkers saw mathematical study as a way to understand the universe, reveal divine order,

13 Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1999), 6.
14 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 30.

and explore profound truths, blending scientific inquiry with spiritual and intellectual pursuits.[15] As Chittick writes, "mathematical truths, once understood, are seen to be necessarily so, because they conform with the reality that shapes cosmos and soul."[16] It is clear that for the Zellige master, geometry was a divine pursuit of spirit and soul.

5.4.2 Islam: Embodied Making

At the same time, Zellige manifests the importance of phenomenological existence through the embodied process of its creation. While its geometrical dimensions speak to the spiritual aspects of our soul, its physical craft represents our corporeal, material existence. The process of making Zellige is an embodied, haptic one that requires a high degree of expertise, technical finesse, and a lifetime of dedication.

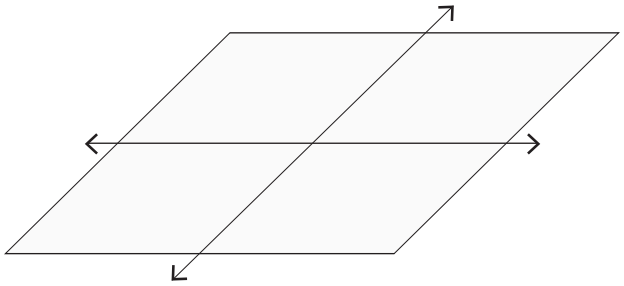


Fig. 5.22. the embodied making of Zellige manifests the immanent plane of being

5.4.2.1 A detailed description of Zellige making

The *Zellige* process begins with Fes clay, renowned for its high quality and purity. The clay is mined and soaked in a ground basin for 24 hours. The *ajjan* (mixer) then kneads the clay by hand, removing any debris.[17] Once it reaches the desired consistency, it is left to firm up briefly before the *fakhkhar* (ceramicist) measures and roughly shapes it into squares using a wooden jig. The clay is dried briefly before the *qatta* (cutter) flattens it with a wooden paddle and trims it to size using a template.[18] The tiles are then set out to dry completely in the Moroccan sun.

15 Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, 1989 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 121.
16 William C Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2007), 135.
17 Paccard, 357.
18 Paccard, 357.

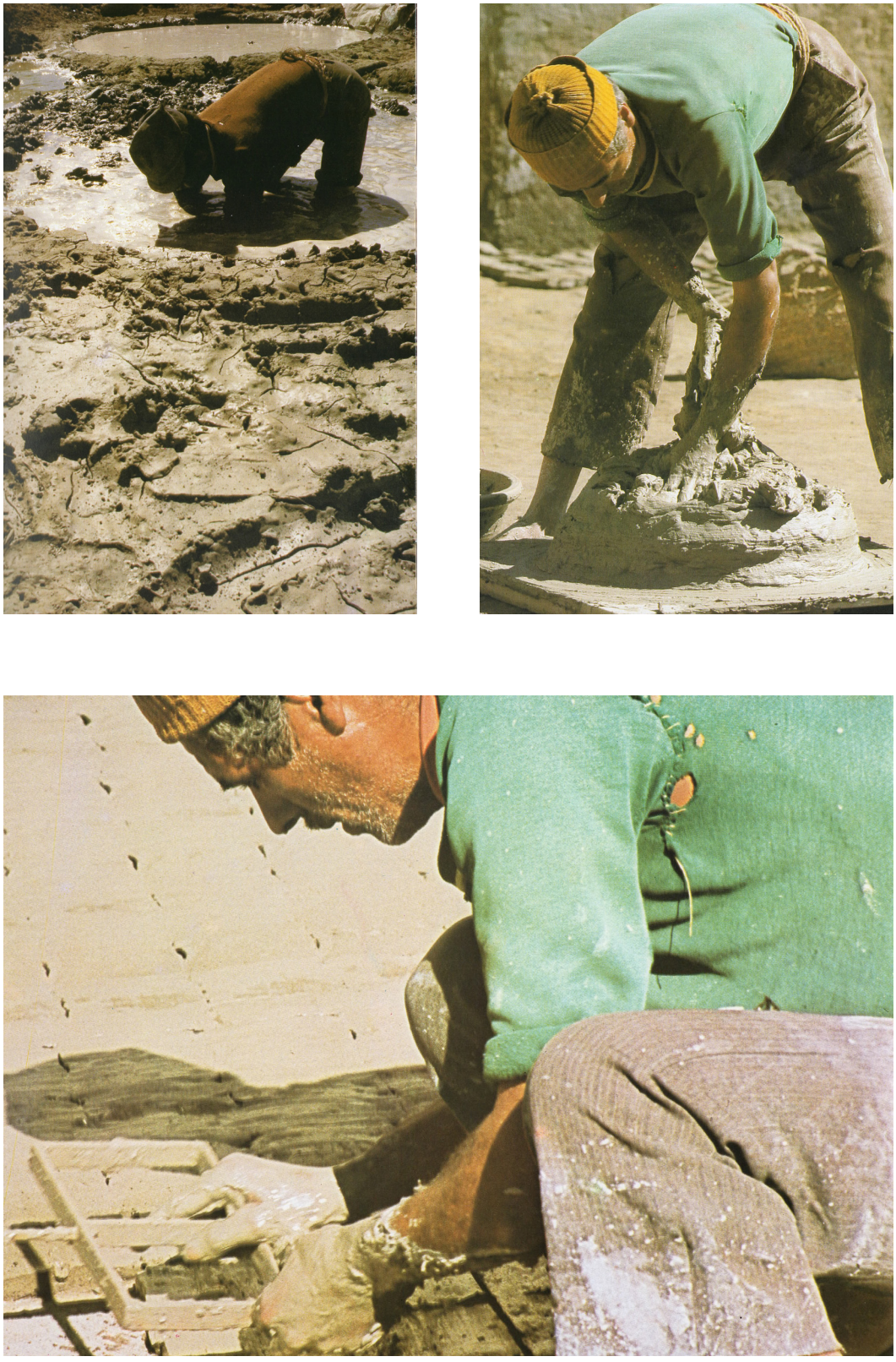


Fig. 5.23. the *ajjan* mixes the clay and shapes the tiles. Photos from Paccard.





Fig. 5.24. left: the *fakkhar* lays out the tiles to dry. Photo from Paccard.

Fig. 5.25. right: *qatta* flattening and cutting the tiles with his son. Photo from Paccard.

The tiles undergo their first bake in a large oven, which is sealed tight to prevent heat leaks. After cooling down, they are dipped in an enamel glaze made from natural, locally sourced dyes.[19] The tiles then undergo a second bake in a smaller oven, where the enamel fuses to the clay. The *fakhkhar* maintains the oven's fire with crushed olive pits. After 24 hours of baking, the Zellige tiles move to the second phase known as *taksir* (breaking).[20]

At this point, the *fakhkhar's* job is complete, and the tiles are handed to the *rashsham* (marker)—often a young apprentice—who traces shapes onto a finished tile using a bamboo stick and a template.[21] The *kassar* then uses a *menkakh*—a hammer with two flat metal ends—to carefully break the tiles into shape.[22] Multiple *kassars* often work together: the first makes the general cuts, breaking the pieces into smaller rectilinear shapes; the next makes precision cuts to finalize the true shape; and the final *kassar* has the highly precise job of chamfering the back end of the tile to make room for the mortar that will join the pieces together.

19 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 193.
20 Paccard, 364.
21 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 205.
22 Paccard, 367.

The third and final phase of Zellige is the assembly. A team of artisans, known as the *ferragha* (singular, *ferragh*), completes this work.[23] Typically, one *maallem* (master) oversees the panel along with a team of apprentices. On a clean, level floor, the *maallem* marks the reference lines for the design. The pieces are arranged upside down, using only the lines as reference. This stage requires very careful attention. Like the pattern creation, the artisans start with the central rosette, which defines the rest of the geometry. They extend out piece by piece, careful not to leave any gaps. The *maallem* constantly scans to ensure the process is executed correctly.[24] Castéra writes, "the *ferragha* know the shape of every piece, and know from habit that such a piece automatically surrounds a central rosette and such another one joins a big rosette to little satellite rosettes."[25] The process takes a highly trained eye and a sharp mind. After careful inspection, the panel is "glued" with a mix of cement, plaster, and mineral soil, which acts as mortar.[26] At this point, the panel is complete and ready to clad the walls.

The embodied knowledge of the artisans and the careful acute bodily engagement with the craft represents our phenomenological plane of being, where engagement and doing (*islam*) fundamentally underscores our entire existence.





Fig. 5.26. left: the *fakkhar* feeds the oven with crushed olive pits. Photo from Castera.

Fig. 5.27. right: the *fakkhar* loads tiles into the smaller oven for the second bake with the enamel glaze. Photo from Paccard.

23 Paccard, 384.
24 Paccard, 388.
25 Paccard, 388.
26 Paccard, 393.





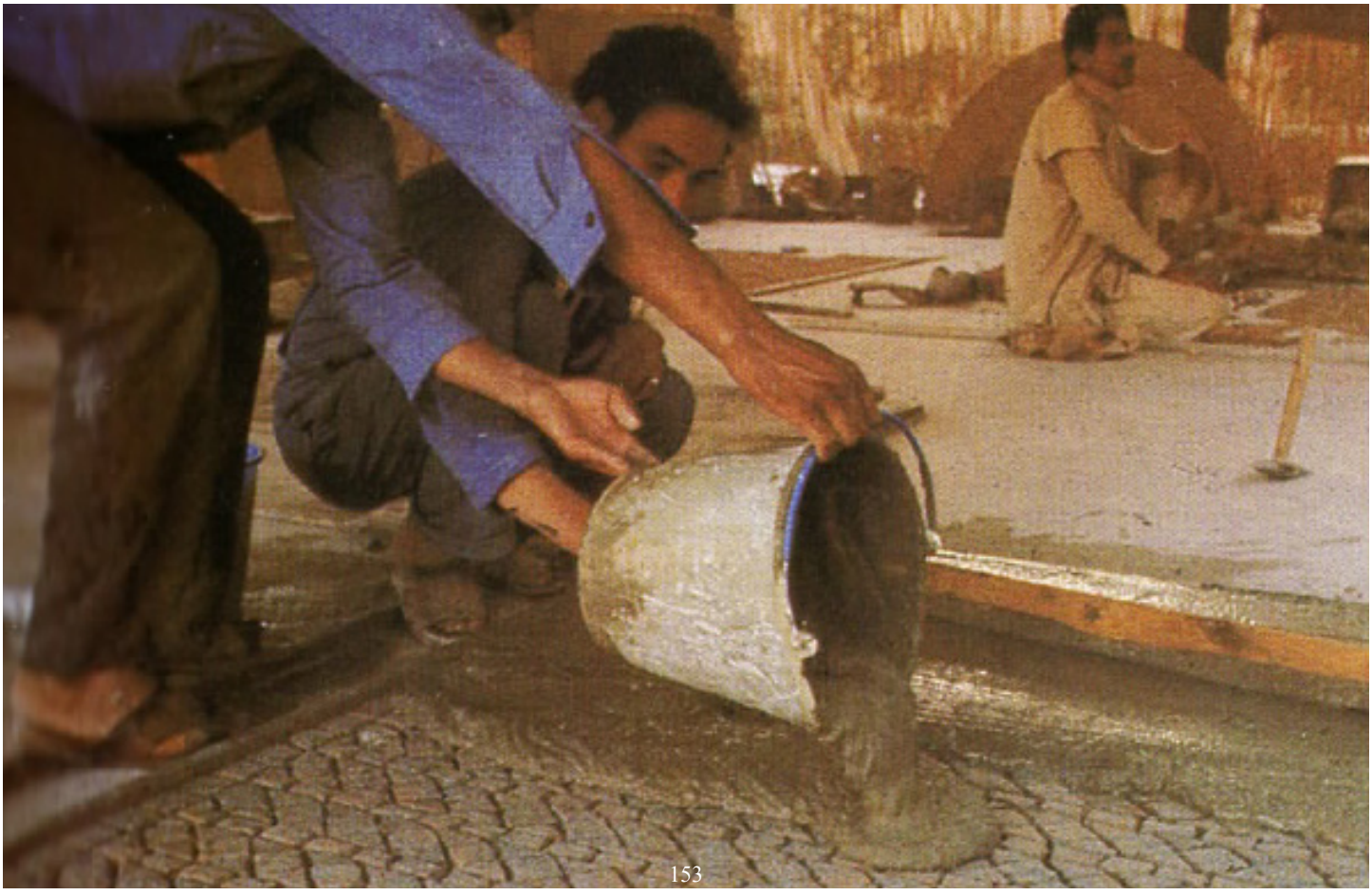
Fig. 5.28. Above: the *qatta* uses the *menkakh* to break the tiles. Photo from Paccard.

Fig. 5.29. below: the tiles are sorted by color and shape. Photo from Paccard.

Fig. 5.30. top right: the *maallem* traces the pattern while the apprentice looks on. Photo from Paccard.

Fig. 5.31. bottom right: the apprentices pour the mortar on the back of the Zellige. Photo from Paccard.





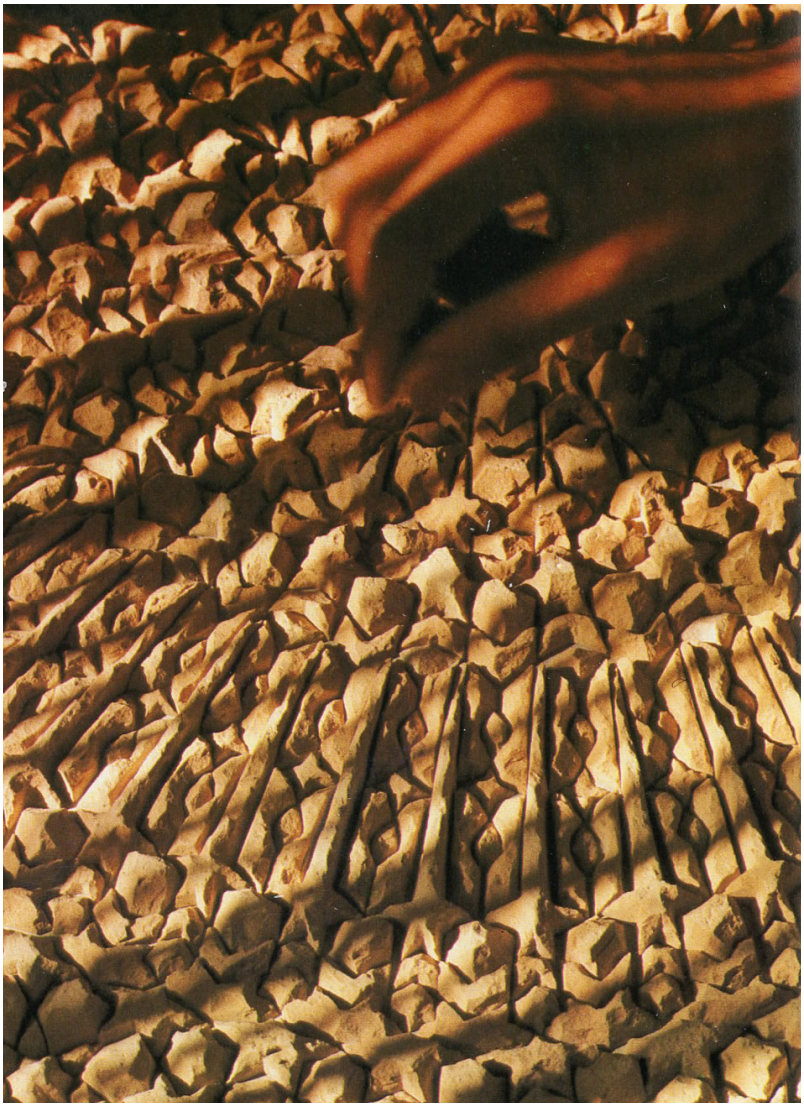


Fig. 5.32. the *maallem* arranges the tiles. Photo from Paccard.

5.4.3 Ihsan: Mastery: The Maallemin

> I became convinced that in their architecture and creativity, the Moroccans had come as close as is humanly possible to match the firdaws (paradise) described in the Quran.[27]

The word *maallem* means "master," "the one who knows," or "the one who teaches." André Paccard writes, "the *maallem* is unchallenged in his authority and reigns supreme in his craft. He is venerated by the *mataallem* or apprentice."[28] The *maallem* is held in high stature not only their apprentices, but by the entire community at large. They manifest the domain of *ihsan* in their synthesis of geometrical mastery and technical mastery. They bring together the epistemological realm of *iman*, through geometry, and the phenomenological realm of *islam*, through making/ practice.

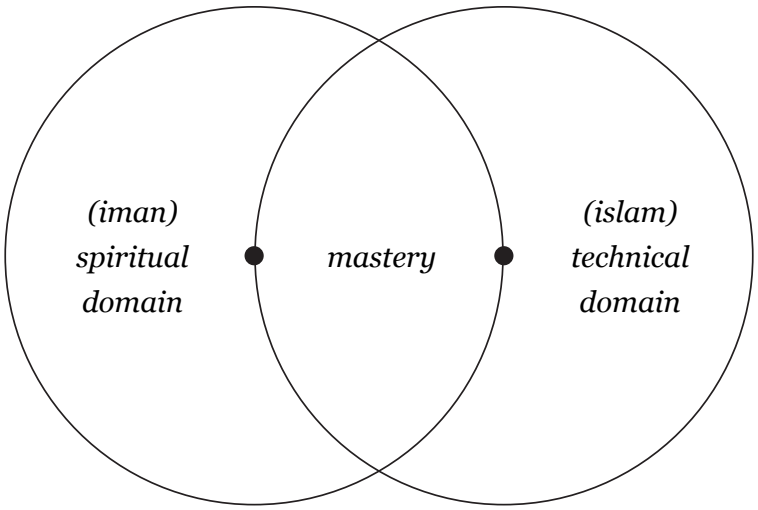


Fig. 5.33. the mastery of the *maallem* is a synthesis of spiritual mastery and technical mastery

In contemporary discourse, the spiritual dimensions of craft in the Islamic tradition are often overlooked, and the sole focus becomes the technical and practical details. The *maallemin*, however, demonstrate just how deeply interwoven the spiritual element is in the practice of Zellife. They, themselves, have, by some account, mastered the technical and spiritual domains of life. Critchlow writes,

27 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 11.
28 Paccard, 18.

> The great masters of this art [Zellige] were certainly motivated by and versed in spiritual disciplines that gave both content and meaning to their work and placed it in the tradition of aiding the viewer to raise his or her spiritual understanding.[29]

Just as technical mastery was a prerequisite for mastering the craft of Zellige, so was spiritual mastery. In the words of Zellige *maallem* Ahmad Dib,

> there are only two factors to consider when trying to understand [Zellige]. The first is the Quranic background and the master's practice of memorizing the Holy Book. This he saw as his primary discipline and the basis of his work, authority and meaning of life. The second factor is the discipline of learning by heart which underlies the visual and manual skills. and is one that we in the 'modern' west (or north) have almost completely lost.[30]

In a similar vein, Samar Damluji reflects, "Zellige work literally echoes to the cadences of the enchanted Quran."[31] The patterns themselves visually echo the rhythms of the Quran. But also, the process of making the Zellige echoes these same cadences. This can be understood in Paccard's reflection on the *taksir* (cutting) of the Zellige, "[t]he final and most delicate operation is cutting the Zellige, the *taksir*... The tile cutter's movements are very regular and his arms with the hammer extending it, constantly repeats the same gesture. The artisan places the piece to be cut with his left hand. His right elbow, placed on his knee, serves as an axis of rotation."[32] The cutting of the Zellige is one of the most mesmerizing elements of the craft. It calls to mind the story of when Rumi first started whirling ecstatically in the marketplace of Konya, to the sounds of Salahoddin, the blacksmith, repeatedly clanking of his hammer.[33]

Much like the model followed by guilds and apprenticeships across different traditions, the journey toward the *maallem's* mastery of Zellige involves giving the self away to the craft. Mastery is a communal endeavour deeply rooted in shared knowledge and collectivity. Damluji writes, "For the Zillij artist, who will have entered the traditional craft possibly as early as seven years old, the giving of one's life to the service of beauty is as noble and honourable a path as any."[34] They absorb the centuries-old techniques passed down through generations of *maallemin*, so that they can one day pass down the same knowledge and continue the cycle. The craft outlives any single *maallem*, and as a result, ties every *maallem* together, transcending individualism and the *nafs* (false self). Damluji writes,

---

29 Critchlow, 8.
30 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 208.
31 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 210.
32 Paccard, 350.
33 Jalal al-Din Rumi and Jawid Mojaddedi, *The Masnavi: Book 1* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), xviii.
34 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 205.

> Individualism... is quite alien to the history of Zillij. Certainly, we can name the living masters - but to whom should we really acknowledge authorship of patterns that have been repeated for maybe twenty-eight generations of Zillij masters? For the traditional Moroccan master it is quite simple - God is the ultimate author, so why confuse matters by placing one's ego in-between?[35]

Castéra echoes this notion,

> It is rare that an individual artist-craftsmen will claim a zellij motif and, in any case, it will never be signed. We are far from the Western concept of art where the individual is at the forefront.[36]

The mastery of Zellige epitomizes *wahdat al wujud*, where the self disappears in favour of the collective. Being is no longer considered in individual terms, but in communal ones. Through its intricate geometry, meticulous craftsmanship, and the pursuit of mastery, it encapsulates the three domains of existence: *iman* (knowing), *islam* (doing), and *ihsan* (being). The craft not only mirrors our existence but also guides us towards the realization of *wahdat al wujud*, the unity of being. Zellige is a profound testament to the interconnectedness of our existence through the realms of knowledge, action, and being.

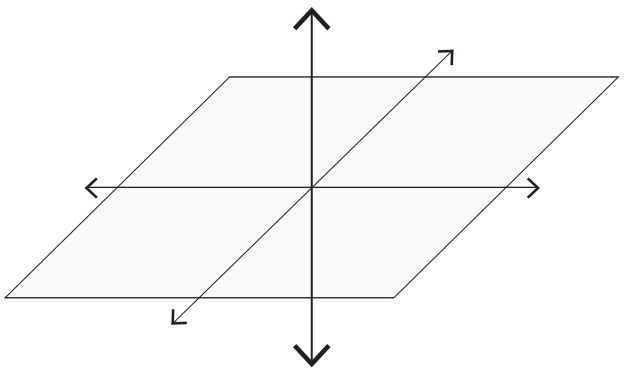


Fig. 5.35. Zellige *maallem's* manifest the transcendent and immanent: *iman* and *islam*

35 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 210.
36 Castéra, 16.

Fig. 5.36. a tourist looks through the portal of el Attarine madrasa

5·5

An Analysis of the Portal at El Attarine Madrasa

> Decoration [is] a window upon a limitless world.[37]
>
> Of all the marvels of Moroccan geometrical art, the most wonderful patterns are those which leave the spectator in perpetual thought, for, in deciphering one figure, another one will appear enigmatically, so that he can never find the beginning or the end of the lines which weave in and out ceaselessly.[38]

I will focus on a particularly moving panel of Zellige located in el Attarine madrasa, at the portal to the prayer hall. This panel is the most striking example of Zellige I encountered during my trip. The portal, which separates the courtyard from the prayer hall, is adorned with carved stucco *muqarnas* above—the only *muqarnas* in the courtyard. These intricate carvings cascade down to meet a circular stucco motif, beneath which lies the panel, one on either side of the opening. The panels have an unusual presence, partly because of their unique location in the courtyard and partly due to their distinctive geometry. In Islamic architecture, geometry is often the link between spaces.[39] This mediating function calls to mind the principle of the *barzakh*. Crichlow reflects on the significance of the threshold function,

37 Paccard, 144.
38 Paccard, 135.
39 Critchlow, 102.





Fig. 5.37. the panel of interest at the portal to the prayer hall

> What is a door? It constitutes a passing from one situation to another, a transition; this can be viewed lightly in a purely mechanical sense, or taken in the seriousness that a change of consciousness demands. The entrance to a sacred place at any time in human history was a matter of great import. It necessitated an effort of mind and heart; to leave behind the petty concerns of daily life - the debts and indebtedness, the desires for material gain, the frustrations, the jealousies, suspicions, meanness and deceit. This was a form of cleansing of inner attitude: from a self-centred to a cosmic-centred attitude, from a self-justified arrogance to one of humility and submission to the will of God.[40]

5.5.1 Intelligible and Sensible geometry

To interpret the geometrical implications of this panel, we should consider Plato's notion of the intelligible and the sensible as it pertains to geometry. The Brotherhood of Purity—a group of enigmatic scholars from the 4th-10th century—provide the basis for the discussion of intelligible and sensible geometry in the Islamic tradition.[41] The intelligible dimension refers to the abstract, conceptual aspects of the ideal geometry that exist in the realm of thought and the intellect. This includes the mathematical principles, relationships, and ideas that underlie the pattern. The sensible geometry refers to the physical and tangible aspects of the real geometry; what we actually perceive with our senses. The *maallemin* understood that by examining both the intelligible and sensible dimensions, we can better understand the panel in its totality, appreciating both its underlying mathematical harmony and its physical beauty.[42]

40 Critchlow, 102.
41 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and Nader El-Bizri, eds., *On Arithmetic and Geometry: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 1-2* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65.
42 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and El-Bizri, 142.

5.5.1.1 Intelligible geometry

Mathematically speaking, these panels exhibit a highly complex geometrical pattern that reflects immense mathematical ingenuity. The pattern displays fivefold rotational symmetry, which necessitates a single point of origin, from which the entire pattern radiates out. Fivefold symmetry, known in mathematics as a "forbidden symmetry," was historically considered geometrically impossible to create because it did not conform to the conventional notions of translational or rotational symmetry. For instance, while hexagons can be tiled seamlessly through horizontal or vertical translations, tiling pentagons in the same way leaves unavoidable gaps (see Fig. 5.39 and Fig. 5.40). Even rotating the pentagons fails to achieve a seamless tiling, illustrating why fivefold symmetry is deemed a "forbidden symmetry."

5.5.1.2 Quasiperiodicity

Patterns that eventually resolved the enigma of the "forbidden symmetry"—such as Roger Penrose's famous Penrose tiling (see Fig. 5.38)—are described as quasiperiodic. This panel in question exhibits a fivefold quasiperiodic pattern. A quasiperiodic tiling can cover a surface infinitely without ever repeating. Quasiperiodicity sits between periodicity and aperiodicity: periodic tiling is stable, rational, and predictable, while aperiodic tiling is unstable, chaotic, and unordered. Quasiperiodic tiling exhibits properties of both. Mathematically, it is described by a sum of periodic functions where the ratio between them is the irrational golden ratio.[43] While quasiperiodic patterns appear stable and predictable, they never actually repeat, defying any attempt to rationalize and understand their repetition.

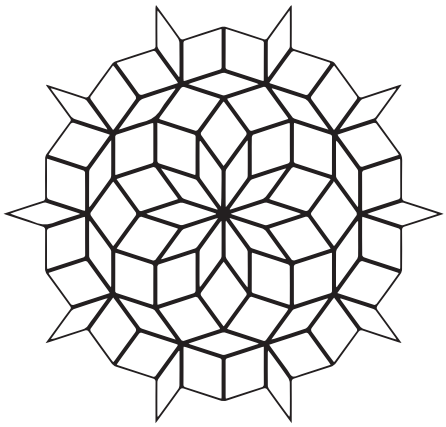
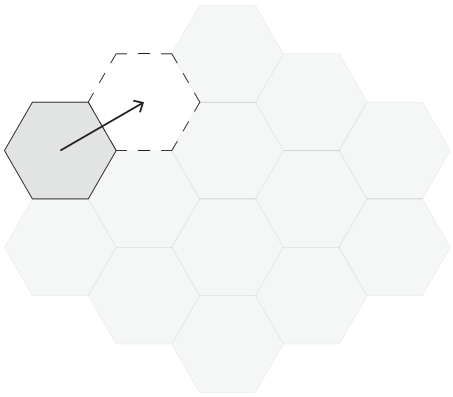
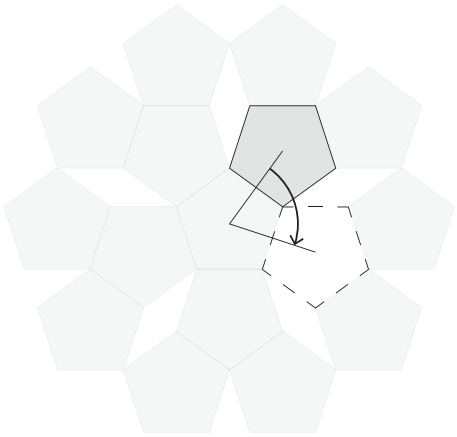


Fig. 5.38. Roger Penrose's tiling

43 Peter J. Lu and Paul J. Steinhardt, "Decagonal and Quasi-Crystalline Tilings in Medieval Islamic Architecture," *Science* 315, no. 5815 (February 23, 2007): 1108.



translational symmetry



rotational symmetry

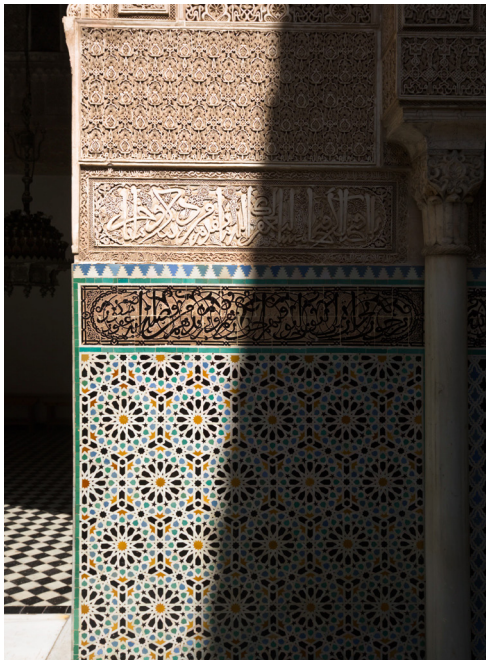




Fig. 5.39. left: the panel around the corner: a sixfold, periodic, translational symmetry

Fig. 5.40. right: the panel of interest: a fivefold, quasiperiodic rotational symmetry

The discovery of quasiperiodic crystals, or quasicrystals, by Dan Shechtman in 1982 was a turning point in crystallography, challenging the belief that natural crystalline structures only exhibited translational and rational symmetry.[44] Today, mathematicians and physicists, including Aboufadil et al. and Lu and Steinhardt, are analyzing similar quasiperiodic patterns in Islamic architecture.[45] They question how and why these geometries were used and whether craftsmen knew about the existence of quasicrystals. Aboufadil et al. compare the diffraction pattern of a quasicrystal (aluminum–manganese alloy) with the panel at el Attarine madrasa. The diffraction pattern highlights the naturally occurring quasiperiodic structure of the alloy, and in the overlay, recreated in Fig. 5.41, the nodes line up almost perfectly with the pattern of the Zellige panel at el Attarine.[46] The similarity is staggering, and serves as a testament to the mathematical prowess of the *maallemin*.

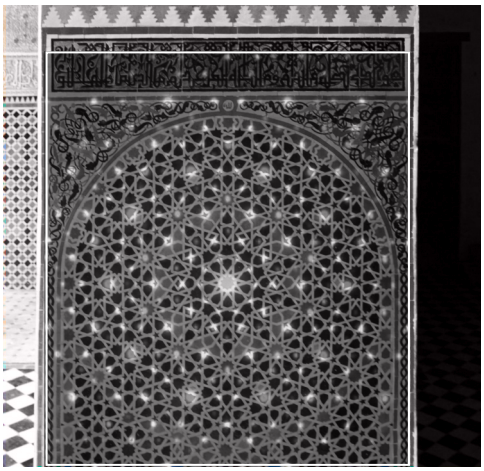


Fig. 5.41. overlaying the diffraction pattern of the Al-Mg alloy quasicrystal onto the panel. Recreated based on Aboufadil et al. (2011)

44 Youssef Aboufadil, Abdelmalek Thalal, and Mehdi Elidrissi, "Quasi-Periodic Tiling in Moroccan Ornamental Art," *Symmetry: Culture and Science* 24, no. 1–4 (January 2013): 191.

45 Aboufadil et al., 193; Lu and Steinhardt, "Decagonal and Quasi-Crystalline Tilings in Medieval Islamic Architecture," 1106.

46 Aboufadil et al., 192.

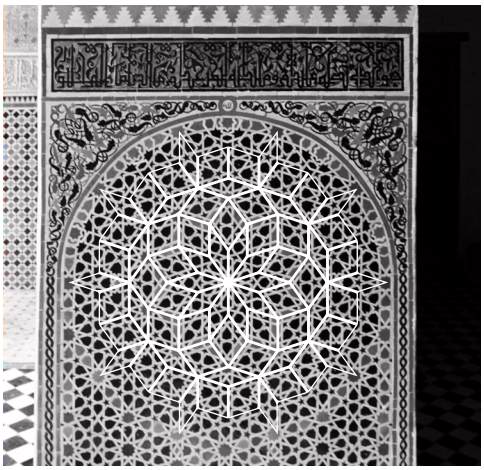


Fig. 5.42. The panel at el Attarine exhibits the same fivefold quasiperiodic symmetry that the Penrose tiles exhibit 600 years later. Recreated based on Aboufadil et al. (2011)

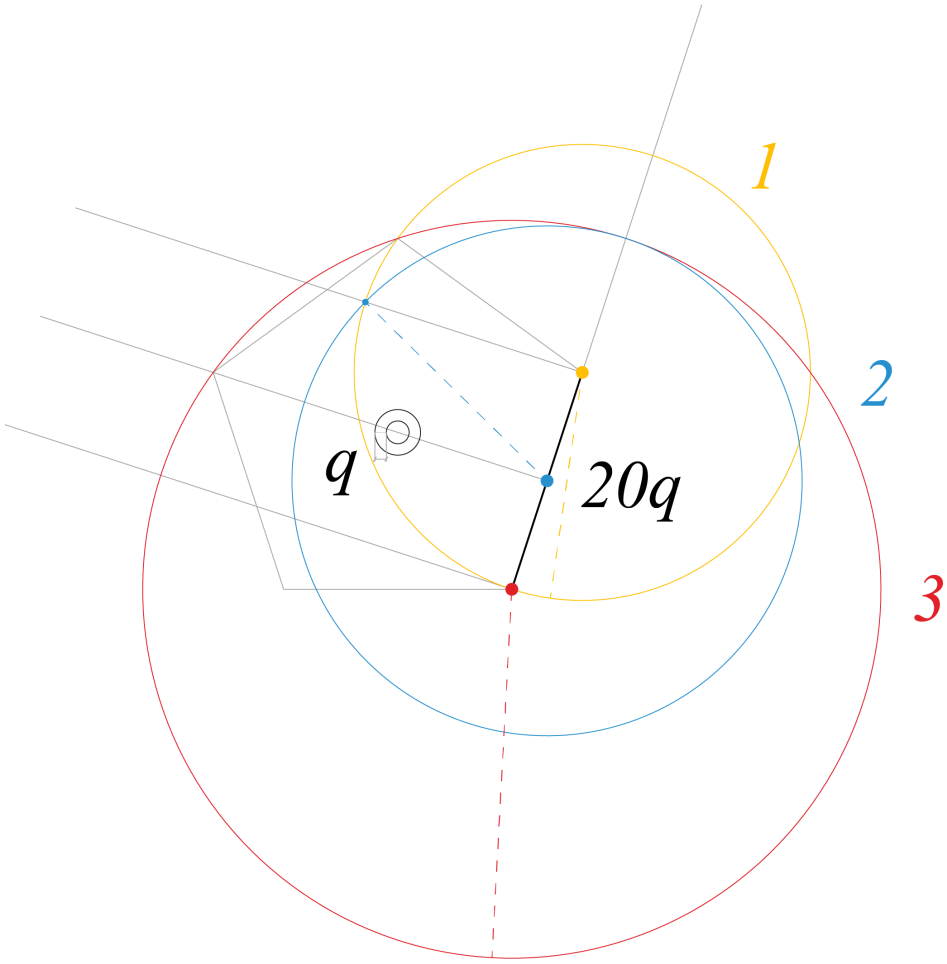
While the crystallographic specifics are beyond this thesis's scope, this connection underscores the intentionality behind the panel's geometry. Zellige *maallemin* aimed to manifest the cosmological and spiritual dimensions of existence, through intelligible geometry.[47] The geometric mastery exhibited by the *maallemin* was significantly ahead of its time, predating Roger Penrose's discovery of forbidden fivefold tiling by 600 years.[48] Aboufadil et al show the shared quasiperiodic symmetry between Penrose and the panel at el Attarine, recreated in Fig 5.42.[49]

5.5.1.3 The Sufi principle of wahda and kathra: quasiperiodic tiling

Quasiperiodic tiling reflects the Sufi principles of *wahda* and *kathra*. The singlular point, about which the pattern radiates and unfolds represents the *wahda* of being—singular, central and eternal—while the unique pieces and non-repeating patterns symbolize the *kathra*—plural and locally unique—ultimately all of the pieces are tied together in the collective being of the overall panel. Critchlow reflects, "[Islamic art] relates multiplicity to unity by means of mathematical forms which are seen, not as mental abstractions, but as reflections of the celestial archetypes within both the cosmos and the minds and souls of men."[50] Similarly, Titus Burckhardt notes, "there is no representational symbol system or narrative which can be read; it expresses notions of the divine, not through devotional images but through the totality of its form, and it is this totality of form that unites and characterises all the visual arts of Islam"[51]

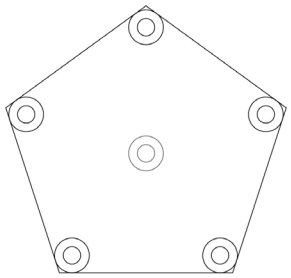
47 Damluji and Hedgecoe, 204.
48 Aboufadil et al., 199.
49 Aboufadil et al., 199.
50 Critchlow, 6.
51 Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, 1st Edition (Louisville, KY: Enfield Fons Vitae, 2001), 16.

Fig. 5.43. generating the fivefold quasiperiodic symmetry of the panel at el Attarine madrasa using the hasba method, as described by Abdelmalak Thalal (2011)

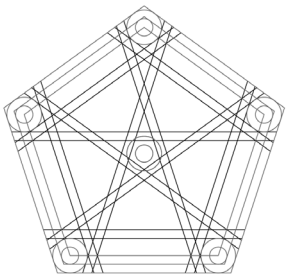


step one: Define q, the thickness of the ribbon in the final design

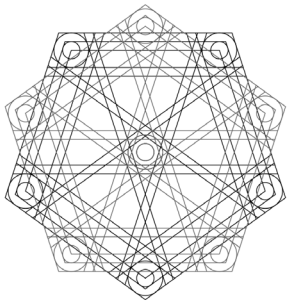
step two: Draw pentagon, based on desired hasba ratio (h). In this case, 20 is used. The length of the pentagon = hq.



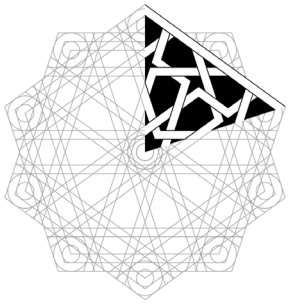
step three: Draw five pairs of inscribed circles, at the vertices of the pentagon.



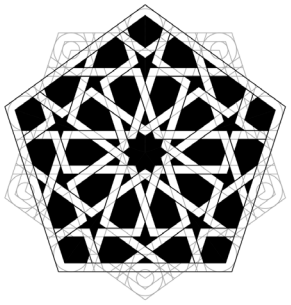
step four: Draw tangential connecting lines between the circles.



step five: Repeat the steps for a mirrored pentagon.



step six: Highlight the pattern using the generated construction lines.



Illustrating the extended pattern.



Highlighting the central rosette motif, which is used to extend the geometry.

5.5.1.4 Sensible geometry

The sensible significance of this panel lies in its peculiar location. The panel is the most geometrically complex and visually engaging in the madrasa, yet it sits on the most awkward and least engaging location. It sits at the passageway and the narrowest point of the entire courtyard. It is impossible to step back and admire the full panel because there is no space. Naturally, you also cannot spend a long in their because people are perpetually walking through. Over several visits to the madrasa, I noted how other tourists engaged with these panels; unsurprisingly, people rarely paid them any attention. In the madrasa's original use, one could imagine that the same would be true—the students would not sit in the portalway, and the panels would only ever be glanced at fleetingly whenever someone happened to walk by them. I noticed this trend in other madrasas and mosques as well; the most stunning and complex panels always sat in the transitory spaces where one would spend the least time. It seems they were not intended to be the subject of direct conscious analysis, which is perplexing considering their remarkable geometries. It begs the question, why would the most sophisticated panels purposely be put in the least engaged areas? Critchlow begins to answer this:

> The doorway, as the symbol of threshold, is the most appropriate place for the content of sensible geometry to affect a man's [sic] perceptual awareness and remind him of the greater values that one might expect to experience on entering either another situation or state of consciousness.[52]

On a certain level, the panels acts as a symbolic "portal," transitioning the bodies moving through it across different states of consciousness. The intelligible geometry does not need to be analyzed and understood in order for the sensible geometry to serve its function.

Sensible geometry underscores the tactile and experiential dimensions of our being. Intelligible geometry highlights the sophisticated mathematical prowess of the *maallemin*. The dual engagement of both intelligible and sensible, tangible and ephemeral, manifests the understanding of Zellige as a mirror to our being in both its intelligible and sensible dimensions.

52 Critchlow, 102.

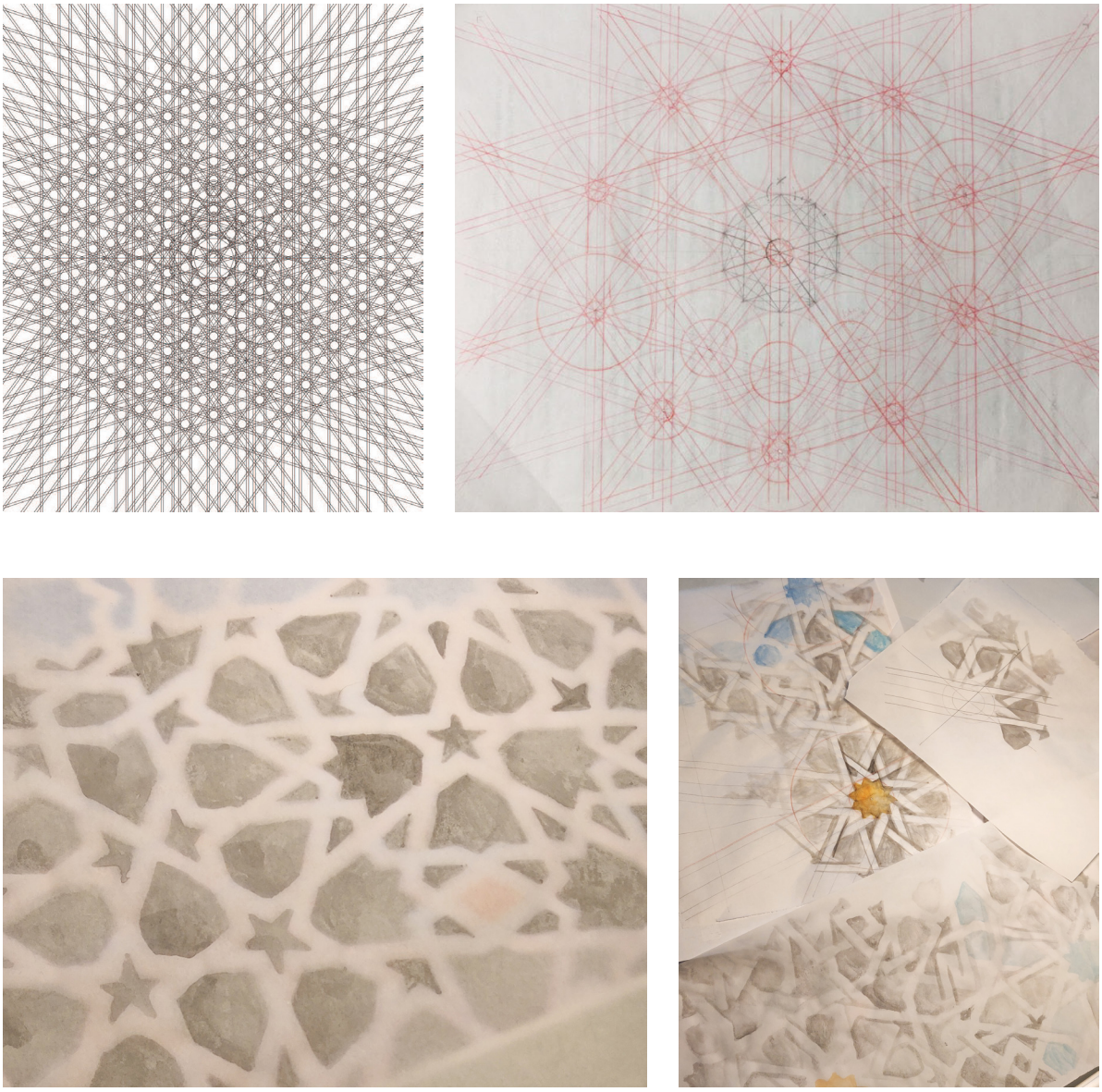


Fig. 5.44. studying the geometry and design of the panel at el Attarine madrasa



Fig. 5.45. a side door to a mosque is decorated by Zellige, and carved and painted stucco and cedar, in the Marrakech medina



Fig. 5.46. a tenfold symmetry at Bou Inania madrasa in Fes



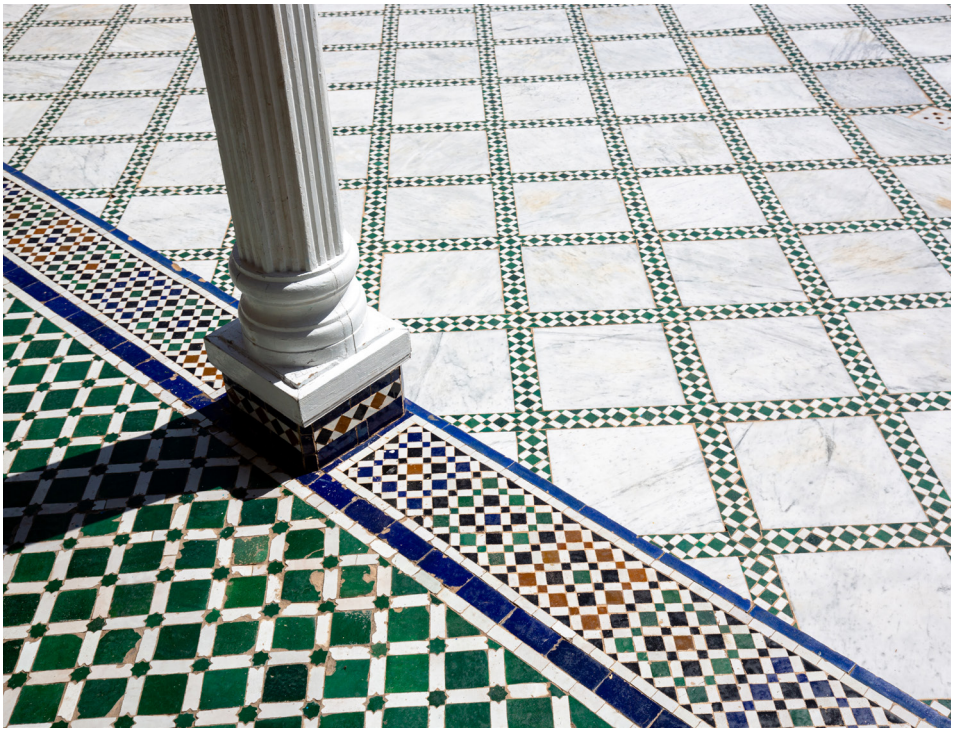


Fig. 5.47. Zellige covering the floor of el Bahia Palace in Marrakech



Fig. 5.48. a detail of a complex panel at the Mausoleum of Mohammed V in Rabat

Fig. 5.49. left: Zellige decorating a fountain at Dar Si Said Museum in Marrakech





Fig. 5.50. Zellige at Dar el Bacha Museum in Marrakech

Fig. 5.51. left: Zellige at Palais Riad Lamrani in Marrakech





Fig. 5.52. Zellige at the Saadian Tombs in Marrakech



Fig. 5.53. Zellige at Dar el Bacha Museum in Marrakech

Fig. 5.54. left: Zellige at Bou Inania madrasa in Fes

Fig. 5.55. a portal at Moulay Ismail Mausoleum in Meknes

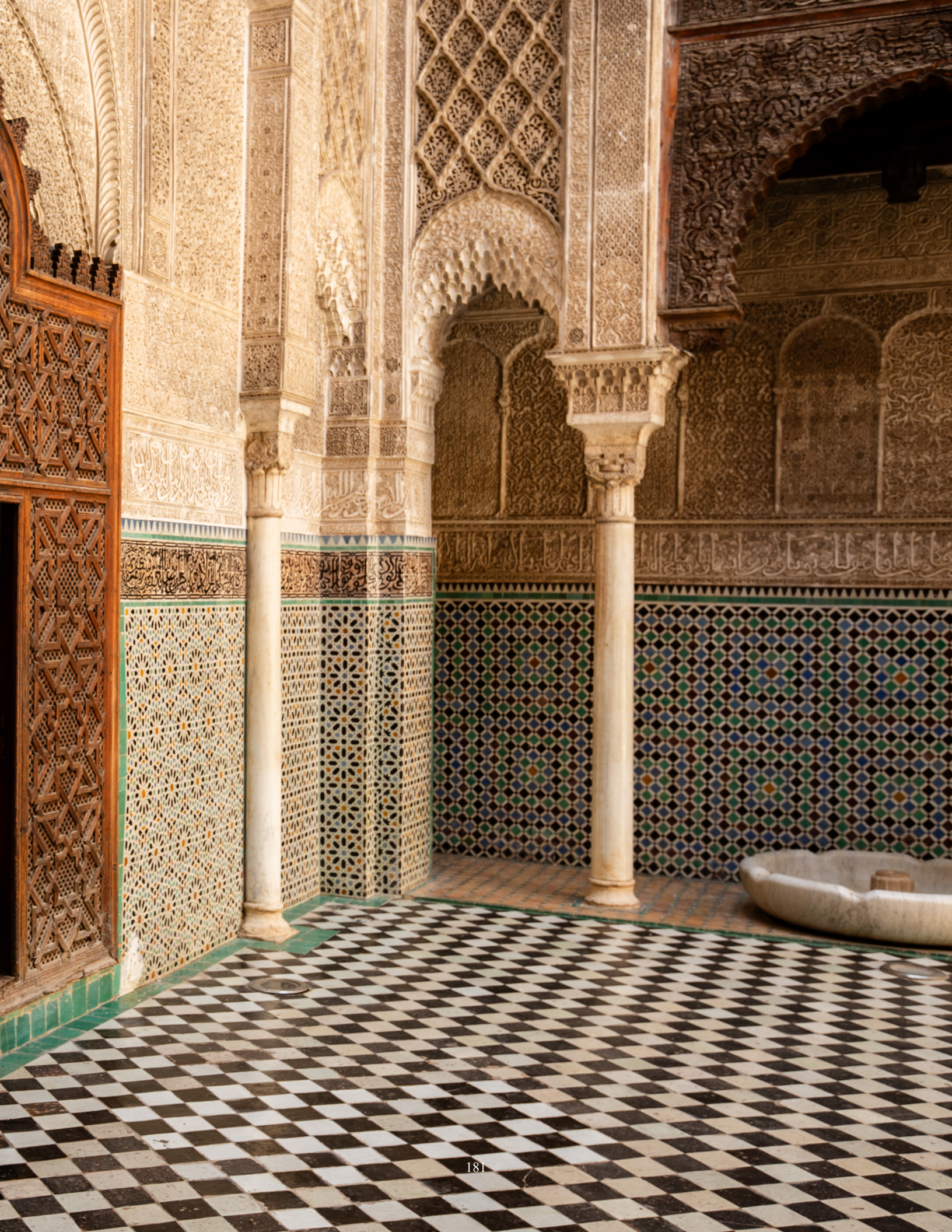
5.6

Conclusion

The *maallem's* work, therefore, is not just decorative but a deliberate manifestation of our *wahdat al wujud*. It manifests the unity and multiplicity that define our existence, and the deep philosophical and intellectual dimensions that underscore our experience of being in this world. On one level, Zellige mirrors our being, reflecting the three domains of existence through its geometry, making, and mastery. On another level, it reminds us of the experiential power of beautiful space. Spaces have the capability to inspire awe and reconnect our disjointed being, as one, *wahdat al wujud*.







conclusion

Fig. 6.1. previous page: the doorway to el Attarine madrasa

Architecture and Cosmology

Architecture is a cosmological act. This is clearly illustrated by the Moroccan madrasa and Zellige tiles. Akkach argues that cosmology and architecture were intimately tied in the premodern Islamic tradition.[1] Spaces not only reflected our understanding of the universe but also fostered our place within it. This link between cosmology and architecture has been lost to our modern conceptions of the practice. The Moroccan madrasa reminds us of this link: on one level, the idea and spatial configuration of the madrasa reflects the cosmological view of *wahdat al wujud*—manifesting iman, islam and ultimately ihsan. And on another level, the experience of being in the madrasa fosters the realization of it.

The madrasa spatially represents the cosmological vision of *wahdat al wujud*, a vision of collective and communal existence. Its configuration symbolically manifests the transcendent axis of being, connecting the divine and the world, on many levels. For example, its courtyard points to the heavens of paradise, and its *mihrab* to the Kaaba (God's dwelling at the center of the world). Its function as a place of prayer and learning the Quran, also serves to connect to the epistemological vision of God. Zellige tiles do the same; their complex geometries are deliberate attempts to reflect the infinite beauty and divine order of the divine presence.

The architecture of the madrasa not only reflects the cosmological idea of *wahdat al wujud*, but also fosters our place within it. As Hirtenstein suggests in reference to Ibn al Arabi's analysis of the Kaaba, "the world apparently 'out there' [acts] as a mirror that corresponds to and reveals the reality of our own self. In other words, we enter into a direct contemplation of the inner through the outer form."[2] The madrasa's outer form—the built structure and its symbolic meanings—prompts inner contemplation. It fosters a place for us to experience the *unity of being*. Walking through the madrasa, staring

1 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), xvii.

2 Stephen Hirtenstein, "The Cubic Wisdom of the Heart According to Ibn ʿArabī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 48 (2010): 20.

at the Zellige, and engaging with the space is an experience of profound depth. It is transformative; redefining our ontological perception of the entire notion of being. Being becomes a collective experience, where we perceive ourselves as part of a *communal oneness*, akin to the Sufi analogy of being drops in the ocean.

This experience is realized in the heart. As Chittick says, the heart is aware before the mind articulates thought and is alive before the body acts.[3] Our built environment can profoundly shift our existential perspective, operating as the heart that bridges the epistemological and phenomenological realms; bridging the spiritual and the material. This bridging function of the heart reflects the domain of ihsan, which defines consciousness as a function of synthesis. Our being is not exclusively epistemological, nor is it exclusively phenomenological, but rather it is in-between the two, a synthesis of spirit and body.

By integrating the philosophies of Ibn al Arabi and Deleuze, we can interpret *wahdat al wujud* through the lens of the rhizome, thus putting Ibn al Arabi in direct conversation with our modern day. We can also interpret the Sufi principles of *wahda* and *kathra* in a new light through Deleuze's theory of multiplicity in the rhizome. The intention is to inspire novel ways of considering the cosmological dimensions of architecture. At the same time, it shines a light on the rich philosophical tradition of Sufism, particularly the idea of the *interconnectedness of being*, which has largely been lost to both Western and Islamic modern discourse.

In our modern context, where architecture is predominantly driven by capital, the profound connection with cosmology has been lost. We create spaces that alienate an already alienated society, that has lost touch with the *collective reality of our being*. It is necessary that we rediscover this connection to break the cycle of soulless architecture. If our architecture fosters a vision of *communal being*, caring and empathetic, our built environment can instead perpetuate a cycle of unity and collective belonging. Architecture materializes our *wahdat al wujud*. It reconnects us to our fundamental collectivity, fostering our empathy and care for one another and the world at large. The case study of the Moroccan madrasa and the Zellige tiles are some of the best examples of the connection between cosmology and architecture. They illustrate a model where architecture becomes not just a backdrop for human activity but the fundamental conduit of our entire cosmology.

3 William C Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2008), 7.

Bibliography

Aboufadil, Youssef, Abdelmalek Thalal, and Mehdi Elidrissi. "Quasi-Periodic Tiling in Moroccan Ornamental Art." *Symmetry: Culture and Science* 24, no. 1–4 (January 2013): 191–204.

———. "Symmetry Groups of Moroccan Geometric Woodwork Patterns." *Journal of Applied Crystallography* 46, no. 6 (December 1, 2013): 1834–41. https://doi.org/10.1107/S0021889813027726.

Ahmad Karkarku, Musa. "Hajj and Its Significance as a Symbol of Muslim Unity." *Journal of Modern Education Review* 5, no. 11 (November 15, 2015): 1092–96. https://doi.org/10.15341/jmer(2155-7993)/11.05.2015/009.

Ahmed, Sara. "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (1999): 329–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/136787799900200303.

Akkach, Samer. *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*. SUNY Series in Islam. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.

Al Ghazzālī, Abu Hamid, and David Buchman. *The Niche of Lights: Mishkāt al-Anwār*. 1st Edition. Islamic Translation Series. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998.

Al Ghazzālī, Abu Hamid, and Richard Joseph McCarthy. *Al-Ghazālī's Path to Sufism and His Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh Min al-Dal¯al*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000.

Arberry, Arthur J., trans. *The Koran*. Re-Issue. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn, and Sholeh Wolpé. *The Conference of the Birds*. 1st Edition. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017.

Bashier, Salman H. *Ibn Al-Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Bausani, Alessandro. “Theism and Pantheism in Rumi.” *Iranian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1967): 8–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/00210866708701345.

Ben-Ari, Shosh. “The Stories about Abraham in Islam. A Geographical Approach.” *Arabica* 54, no. 4 (2007): 526–53. https://doi.org/10.1163/157005807782322427.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Re-Issue. Penguin Books. London, UK: Penguin Books, 2008.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin on Design 1. London, UK: Penguin Books, 2008.

Birch, Robert, and Brian R Sinclair. “Spirituality in Place: Building Connections Between Architecture, Design, and Spiritual Experience.” *ARCC Conference Repository*, 2013, 8.

Bragdon, Claude Fayette. *Projective Ornament*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1992.

Broug, Eric. *Islamic Geometric Patterns*. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2008.

Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʻīl, 810-870., and Muhammad Muhsin Khan. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari : Arabic-English*. 6th rev. ed. Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, 1983.

Burckhardt, Titus. *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*. 1st Edition. Wisdom Foundation Series. Louisville, KY: Enfield Fons Vitae, 2001.

Burckhardt, Titus, and D. M. Matheson. *An Introduction to Sufism*. London, UK: Thorsons, 1978.

Burckhardt, Titus, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Jean-Louis Michon. *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*. Commemorative Edition. Sacred Art in Tradition. Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2009.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Edited by Adam Phillips. Re-Issue. The Oxford World’s Classics. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Castéra, Jean-Marc. *Arabesques: Art Décoratif au Maroc*. Courbevoie: ACR, 1996.

Chittick, William C. *Ibn ʿArabi: Heir to the Prophets*. Makers of the Muslim World. Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2005.

———. *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʻArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*. SUNY Series in Islam. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994.

———. *Me & Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003.

———. *Science of the Cosmos: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*. Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2007.

———. *Sufism: A Beginner’s Guide*. Beginner’s Guides. Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2008.

———. *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Cosmology*. SUNY Series in Islam. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998.

———. "The Spiritual Path of Love in Ibn Al-'Arabi and Rumi." *Mystics Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (March 1993): 16.

———. *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*. Illustrated Edition. Spiritual Masters. Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2005.

———. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Clark, Emma. *The Art of the Islamic Garden*. Ramsbury, UK: Crowood, 2004.

———. *Underneath Which Rivers Flow: The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden*. London, UK: Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, 1996.

Corbin, Henry. *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*. Bibliothèque des mythes et des religions 1. Paris: L'Herne, 1981.

———. *Temple and Contemplation*. London, UK: Routledge, 2013.

———. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Translated by Nancy Pearson. New York, NY: Random House, 1994.

Critchlow, Keith. *Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1999.

Damluji, Salma Samar, and John Hedgecoe. *Zillij: The Art of Moroccan Ceramics*. Reading, UK: Garnet, 1992.

De Groot, Rokus. "Rumi and the Abyss of Longing." *Mawlana Rumi Review* 2, no. 1 (January 25, 2011): 61–93. https://doi.org/10.1163/25898566-00201008.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. London, UK: Continuum, 2004.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* European Perspectives. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Deleuze, Gilles, Claire Parnet, Hugh Tomlinson, and Barbara Habberjam. *Dialogues*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London, UK: Continuum, 1989. https://www.jstor.org/stable/203963?origin=crossref.

Derrida, Jacques, and Gianni Vattimo. *Religion*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998.

Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr—Islam: Truth and Beauty. Lecture. Provo, UT: BYU Museum of Art, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asTPBo9ei1M.

Dunbabin, Katherine M. D. *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

———. "Technique and Materials of Hellenistic Mosaics." *American Journal of Archaeology* 83, no. 3 (July 1, 1979): 265–77. https://doi.org/10.2307/505057.

———. *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage*. Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Edwin A. Abbott. *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2014.

Eliade, Mircea. *Myths, Rites, Symbols*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1976.

———. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. London, UK: Arkana, 1989.

Eliade, Mircea, and Willard R. Trask. *The Sacred and the Profane*. A Harvest Book. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, 1987.

El-Shorbagy, Dr Abdel-Moniem. "Traditional Islamic-Arab House: Vocabulary and Syntax." *International Journal of Civil & Environmental Engineering* 10, no. 4 (January 2010): 7.

Evanson, Tanya. *Book of Wings*. Edited by Dimitri Nasrallah. Montréal, QC: Esplanade Books, 2021.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zero Books. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009.

Frichot, Hélène, ed. *Deleuze and Architecture*. Deleuze Connections. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Gaudio, Attilio. *Fès: Joyau de la Civilisation Islamique*. Nouvelles Editions. Paris: Presses de l'Unesco, 1982.

Gibb, Hamilton A. R. "Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate." *Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University* 12 (1958): 221–33.

Gowan, John Curtis. "Trance, Art and Creativity." *The Journal of Creative Behavior* 9, no. 1 (March 1975): 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.1975.tb00551.x.

Grabar, Oleg. *The Mediation of Ornament*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Grabar, Oleg, Richard Ettinghausen, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina. *Islamic Art and Architecture 650 - 1250*. Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2002.

Grube, Ernst J. *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning; with a Complete Survey of Key Monuments*. Edited by George Michell. Reprint. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2000.

Hamdouni Alami, Mohammed. *Art and Architecture in the Islamic Tradition: Aesthetics, Politics and Desire in Early Islam*. Library of Modern Middle East Studies 104. London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

Haqqani, Nazim Adil al. "99 Drops From Endless Mercy Oceans." *Sufi Path of Love*, Lulu, June 28, 2019.

Hillenbrand, Robert. *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning*. Casebound Edition. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Hirtenstein, Stephen. "The Cubic Wisdom of the Heart According to Ibn ʿArabī." *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 48 (2010): 19–44.

Hunt, John Dixon. *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

Ibn Mājah, Muḥammad ibn Yazīd, and Muhammad Tufail Ansari. *Sunan Ibn Mājah: With Arabic Text*. 2nd improving ed. New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2013.

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', and Nader El-Bizri, eds. *On Arithmetic and Geometry: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 1-2*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012.

James, William, and Martin E. Marty. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982.

Knight, Michael Muhammad. *Sufi Deleuze: Secretions of Islamic Atheism*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2023.

Lahcen, Yassine Ait, Abdelaziz Jali, Ahmed El Oirrak, and Abdelmalek Thalal. "New Approach to Construct a New Islamic Geometric Patterns Using the Hasba Method." *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology* 99, no. 14 (July 31, 2021): 3663-73.

Lakhani, M Ali. "Editorial: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Occidental Exile." *Sacred Web* 40 (2017): 9–14.

Lings, Martin. *The Book of Certainty: The Sufi Doctrine of Faith, Vision and Gnosis*. Revised Edition. Golden Palm Series. Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1992.

Lu, Peter J., and Paul J. Steinhardt. "Decagonal and Quasi-Crystalline Tilings in Medieval Islamic Architecture." *Science* 315, no. 5815 (February 23, 2007): 1106–10. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1135491.

Mallett, Shelley. "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature." *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (February 2004): 62–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2004.00442.x.

Mannani, Manijeh. "The Metaphysics of the Heart in the Sufi Poetry of Rumi." *Religion & Literature* 42, no. 3 (2010): 161–68.

Murata, Sachiko, and William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. Visions of Reality. New York, NY: Paragon House, 1994.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*. Revised and Enlarged Edition. Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 2002.

———, ed. *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*. Vol. 19. World Spirituality. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987.

———. "Metaphysical Significance of Makkah." *Holy Makkah: A Celebration of Unity*, London: First Strategic Insight, 2017, 49–50.

———. *Poems of the Way*. Oakton, VA: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1999.

Necipoğlu, Gülru, and Mohammad Al-Asad. *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture*. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995.

Nicholson, Reynold Alleyne. *The Mystics of Islam*. Reprint. Sacramento, CA: Murine Press, 2007.

Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. A Galaxy Book GB14. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Oulmi, Mohamed Lakhdar. "Les Madrasas Marinides : Lieux de Foi, de Savoir et de Pouvoir." *Revue des Études Archéologiques* 19, no. 1 (n.d.): 505–25.

Paccard, André. *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Paris: Atelier 74, 1980.

———. *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Paris: Atelier 74, 1980.

Parr, Adrian, ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Revised Edition. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Piff, Paul K., Pia Dietze, Matthew Feinberg, Daniel M. Stancato, and Dacher Keltner. "Awe, the Small Self, and Prosocial Behavior." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 108, no. 6 (2015): 883–99. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000018.

Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Henry Desmond Pritchard Lee. 2nd Edition. Penguin Classics. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007.

Rapaport, Amos. "The Nature of the Courtyard House: A Conceptual Analysis." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Spring, 18, no. 2 (2007): 57–72.

Richard Bordeaux Parker. *A Practical Guide to Islamic Monuments in Morocco*. Charlottescille, VA: Baraka Press, 1981.

Robine, Gérard. *Motifs Géométriques: Ornements d'Architecture*. Dourdan: Vial Editions, 2010.

Rønning, Frode. "Islamic Patterns and Symmetry Groups." *Philos Math Educ J*, January 1, 2009, 15.

Rothman, Abdallah. *Developing a Model of Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: Islamic Theology and Contemporary Understandings of Psychology*. 1st Edition. London, UK: Routledge, 2021.

Rozina Ali. "The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rumi." *The New Yorker*, January 5, 2017. https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-erasure-of-islam-from-the-poetry-of-rumi.

Rumi, Jalal al-Din, and Jawid Mojaddedi. *The Masnavi: Book 1*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008.

———. *The Masnavi: Book 3*. Oxford World's Classics - Paper. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022.

———. *The Masnavi: Book 5*. Oxford World's Classics - Paper. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Rustom, Mohammed. "Is Ibn al Arabi's Ontology Pantheistic?" *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2006): 53–67. https://doi.org/10.5840/islamicphil2006216.

———. "Rumi's Metaphysics of the Heart." *Mawlana Rumi Review* 1, no. 1 (January 25, 2010): 69–79. https://doi.org/10.1163/25898566-00101007.

Sa'ari, Che Zarrina. "Al Ghazali's View on the Heart, the Spirit and the Soul: A Comparison Between Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din and Al-Risalah Al-Laduniyyah." *Journal Usuluddin*, January 1997, 193–208.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Reprinted with a new afterword. Penguin History. London, UK: Penguin Books, 1995.

Sam'ānī, Aḥmad ibn Manṣūr, and William C. Chittick. *The Repose of the Spirits: A Sufi Commentary on the Divine Names*. Suny Series in Islam. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019.

Schuon, Frithjof. *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*. Edited by Harry Oldmeadow. Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2019.

Shafak, Elif. *The Forty Rules of Love*. London, UK: Penguin Books, 2010.

Shafer, Ann. "No Man Is an Island: Globalisation and Resilience in the Fez Zeillij Tradition." *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 5 (September 3, 2019): 758–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2018.1483877.

Sharī‘atī, ‘Alī. *Hajj: Reflections on Its Rituals*. Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 1992.

Stein, Achva Benzinberg. *Morocco: Courtyards and Gardens*. New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 2007.

Stivale, Charles J., and Gregory J. Seigworth *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*. Kingston, ON: Queen's University Press, 2008.

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. *The Phenomenon of Man*. 1st Edition. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008.

Thalal, Abdelmalek, Youssef Aboufadil, Jali Abdelaziz, and Mehdi Elidrissi. "Islamic Geometric Patterns." *Symmetry: Culture and Science* 22, no. 1–2 (January 2011): 103–30.

Ursula, Badenhorst. "The Language of Gardens: Ibn al-Arabi's Barzakh, The Courtyard Gardens of the Alhambra and the Production of Sacred Space." Doctorate of Philosophy, University of Cape Town, 2014.

Wolfson, Elliot R. "'Imago Templi' and the Meeting of the Two Seas: Liturgical Time-Space and the Feminine Imaginary in Zoharic Kabbalah." *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 51 (March 2007): 121–35. https://doi.org/10.1086/RESv51n1ms20167720.

Worringer, Wilhelm. *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*. 1st Edition. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1997.

Yeomans, Richard. *The Story of Islamic Architecture*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000.

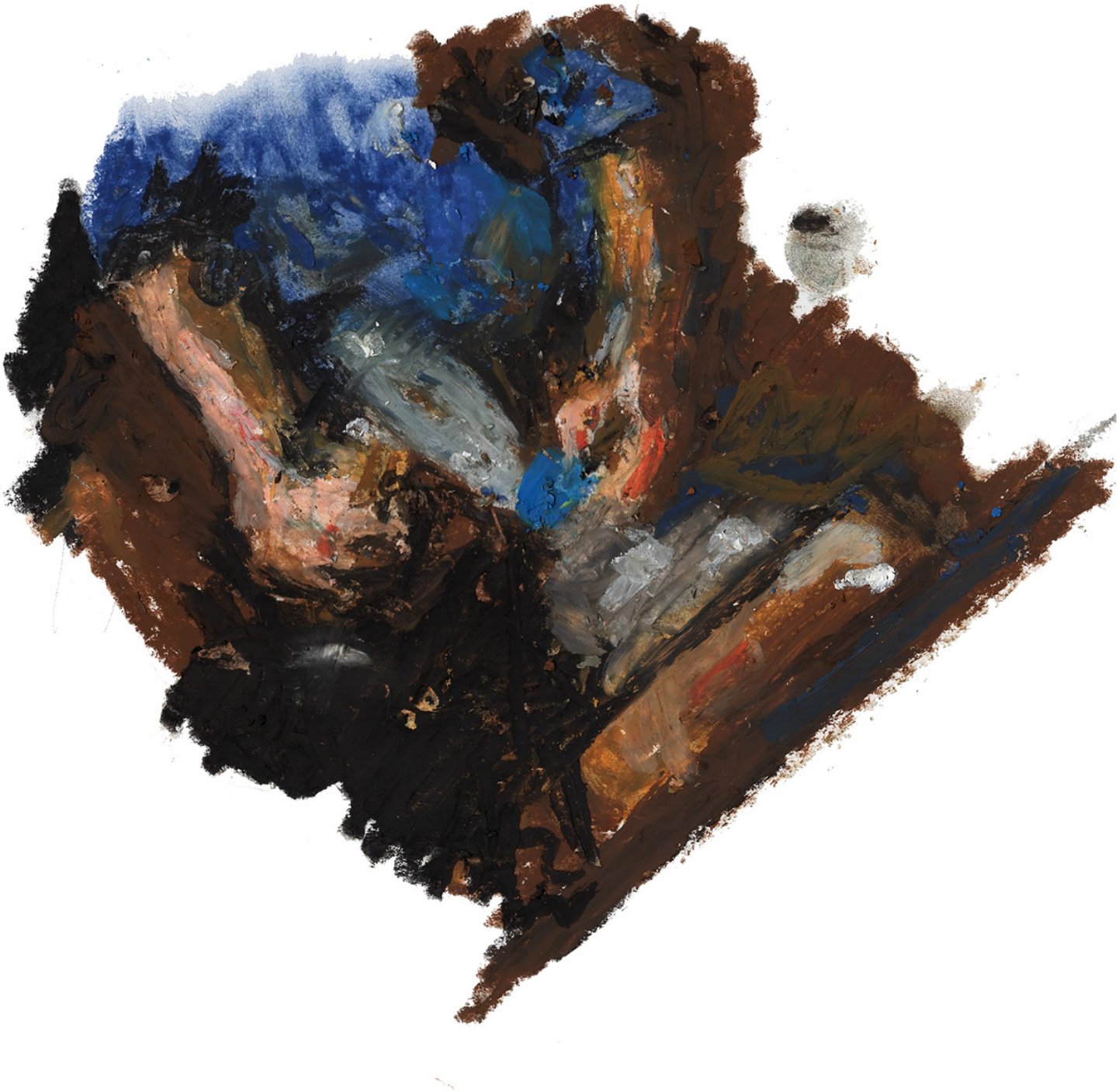
Appendix: Drawings



Entry to el Attarine Madrasa
Digital drawing with charcoal overlay, 2022



Pastel Drawing 1: Ahmet in Rabat
Oil pastel on paper, by author, 2023
(20cm x 20cm)



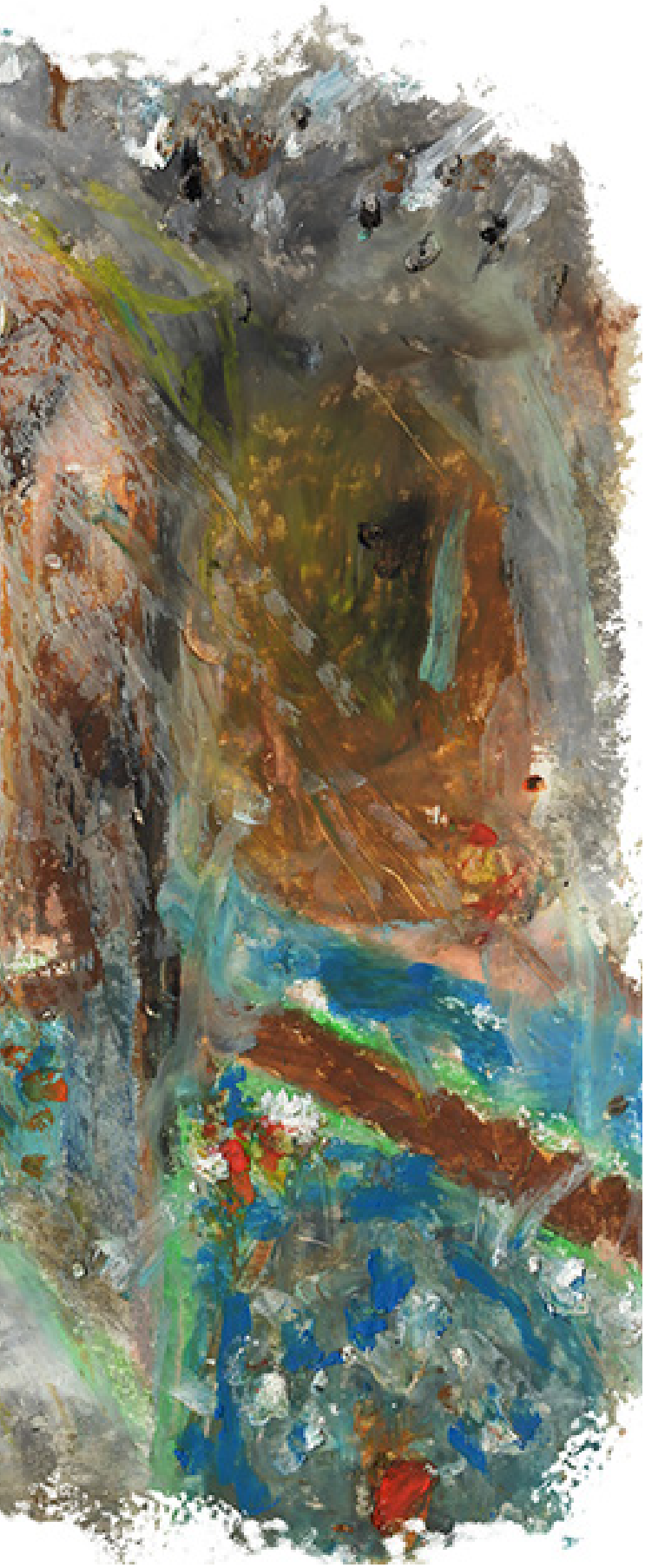
Pastel Drawing 2: Making Zellige
Oil pastel on paper, by author, 2023
(15cm x 20cm)



Pastel Drawing 3: Abdallah's Door
Oil pastel on paper, by author, 2023
(20cm x 27cm)





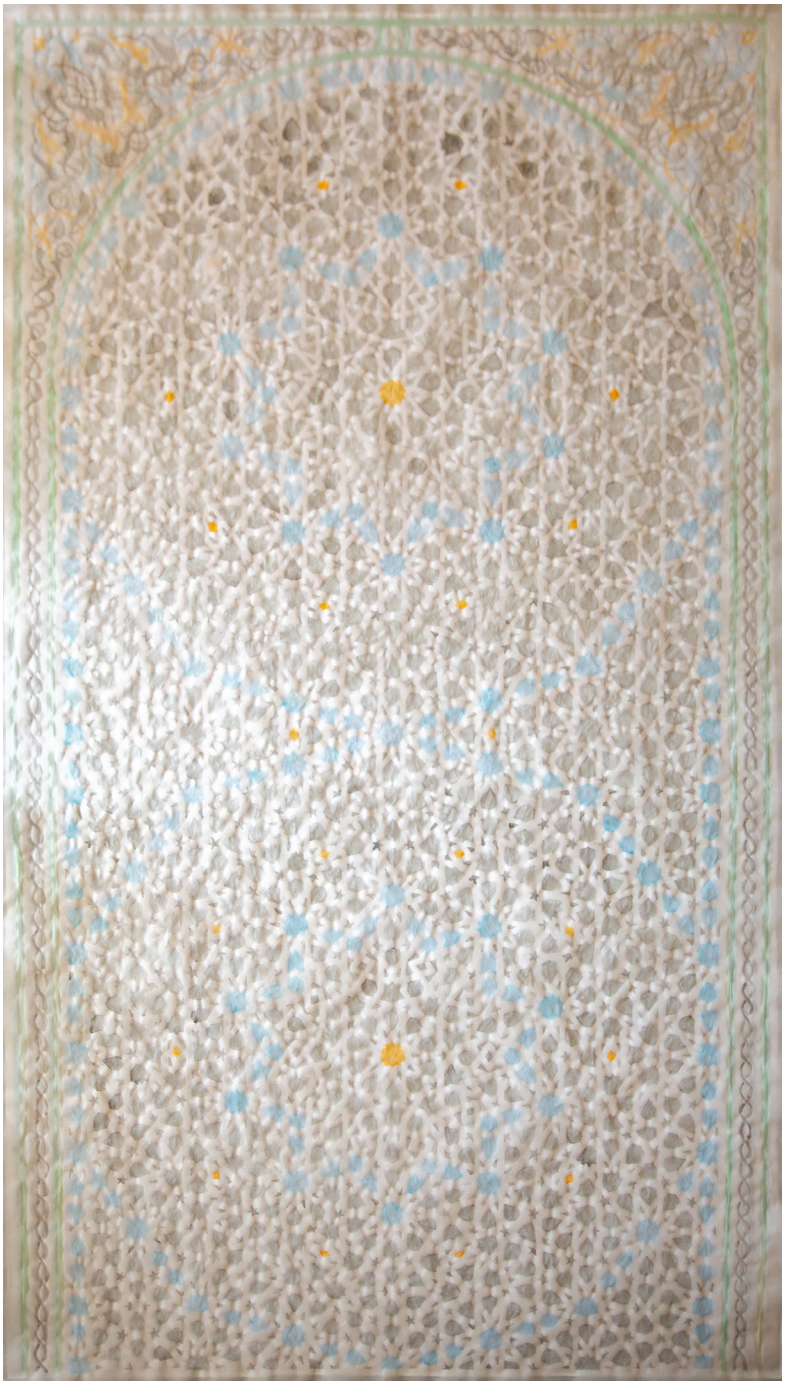


Pastel Drawing 4: el Attarine Madrasa
Oil pastel on paper, by author, 2023
(20cm x 27cm)



Panel at the Portal of el Attarine Madrasa
Watercolour on vellum roll, by author,
2024 (83cm x 115cm)





151cm

83cm

Glossary

al-Qaswa: the name of the Prophet Muhammad's camel, whom he rode during his migration from Mecca to Medina.

al-Sakina: the divine cloud that spoke to Abraham.[1] The word *sakina* also means centrality, certainty, peacefulness, tranquility and repose.[2]

asma Allah al Husna: Allah, God's divine names. In the Islamic tradition, Allah, God, has 99 divine names; each name is an attribute of God, manifested as an archetype of existence (e.g. the Peaceful, the Merciful, the Knower, the Provider).

barzakh: a barrier that "[acts] as a differentiator between two entities possessing opposite properties... At the same time, by preventing the two entities from mixing with each other, the barzakh also provides for their unity."[3] In the Quran, this is interpreted as the place where the sea of meanings meets the sea of sensory being.[4] The barzakh is also often discussed in eschatology as the intermediate state after death, between the physical world and the afterlife.

dhikr: also zikr, is an Islamic practice involving repetitive recitation of the names of God, phrases from the Quran, or other devotional expressions. It is a form of meditation aimed at maintaining a constant awareness of God.

fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence.

hadith: the recorded sayings, actions, and traditions of the prophet Muhammad. Mainstream traditional Sunni Muslims generally regard the Hadith as the second most important source of Islamic guidance, after the Quran.

Hajj: the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is one of the five pillars of Islam, involving a series of ritueals performed over several days, commemorating the actions of the prophet Abraham and his family. Every Muslim is required to undertake Hajj at least once in their lifetime.

ihram: the spiritual state of purity required to begin the Hajj. Also the term for the plain white unsown cloth worn during the pilgrimage.

khanaqah: is a Sufi gathering where practices such as Dhikr and Sema take place.

maallem: master. Plural: maallemin.

mashrabiya: wooden screen lattice often used in Islamic buildings.

---

1 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 179.

2 Akkach, 180; Dr Abdel-moniem El-Shorbagy, "Traditional Islamic-Arab House: Vocabulary and Syntax," *International Journal of Civil & Environmental Engineering* 10, no. 4 (January 2010): 1.

3 Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn Al-Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 11.

4 William C Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 123.

maskan: stemming from the term sakina, maskan means house, dwelling, or settlement.[5]

medina: the old walled city in Morocco.

mihrab: a niche in the walls of prayer halls and mosques that delineates the direction of prayer (towards the Kaaba). The imam stands here to lead communal prayers.

muqarnas: ornament that covers vaulted or arched spaces, consisting of intricate shapes that resemble stalactites or honeycombs.

Quran: is the holy book of Islam, believed to be the literal word of God, as revealed to the prophet Muhammed through the angel Gabriel.

qibla: the direction of prayer (towards the Kaaba).

sema: the spiritual Sufi practice of whirling or turning, often associated with the Mevlevi Order, and Rumi.

shahadah: the profession of faith: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." It is the first pillar of Islam.

tafsir: exegesis of the Quran.

5 El-Shorbagy, 1.