

THE DAVID COLLECTION

Journal of the David Collection. Ed. Kjeld von Folsach; Joachim Meyer. Vol. 4. Copenhagen, 2014. 223 pp. ISBN 978-87-88464-12-2; ISSN 1603-5313.

The David Collection in Copenhagen was established and endowed as a public museum by a prominent lawyer, Christian Ludvig David, who began by collecting European porcelain, more generally European art of the 18th century, and early modern Danish art, and then developed a serious interest in the arts of the Islamic world. Islamic art is now the dominant part of the collection and has been substantially augmented and broadened by acquisitions beginning in the 1980s. It is one of the ten most significant collections of Islamic art worldwide and by far the largest one in Scandinavia. Books on Islamic art and exhibitions around the world regularly draw on its many superb and unique objects.

The new volume of the museum's journal (the first to appear since 2009, at the time of the reopening of the re-mounted collection), contains a series of fascinating and broadly-conceived articles which highlight pieces in The David Collection and thereby can serve as an introduction to the riches it contains. The volume is illustrated with high quality images (the collection photos taken by Pernille Klemp), a great many of them in color and full page in medium format. After reviewing the contributions in it, I shall make some additional observations on the Museum's website, which invites anyone interested in Islamic art to learn about the subject.

This volume of the journal opens with one article not devoted to The David Collection, Anatol Ivanov's very useful introduction to the history of the Islamic collections in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. He reviews the various acquisitions over time and then summarizes the strengths of the holdings. A good many black-and-white photos showing the galleries as they looked in earlier years illustrate the article. The process of producing modern catalogs of the material is ongoing, and, although he does not comment on this, one can hope that the recently re-designed Hermitage Museum website eventually will include the kind of extensive collection database that other museums now provide (The David Collection

provides a model for what one might wish). Ivanov emphasizes that the Islamic material in the Hermitage has traditionally been organized under rubrics other than "Islamic art," often instead by a geographical or political principle, since there is still no dedicated "Islamic art" division administratively in the museum. Among the strengths of the collection are Iranian metalwork, late Iranian ceramics, and Central Asian material.

Thinking about such issues of organizing principles for any collection of "Islamic art" inevitably raises questions about how one might best define the subject. For The David Collection, Islamic art is "works of art produced in the part of the world where the religion of Islam has played a dominant role for a long period of time. They do not necessarily have to be works of art made by or for Muslims. The artists might also be followers of another religion, for example Christians or Jews. And the message conveyed by their art does not have to directly reflect the religion of Islam. It can also have a purely secular character" (What is Islamic Art <http://www.davidmus.dk/assets/2353/What_is_Islamic_art_02.pdf>). The rest of the articles in this volume of the museum's journal provide an excellent sense of that range of work over time, space and genre.

Joachim Meyer writes on "The Body Language of a Parrot: An Incense Burner from the Western Mediterranean" (pp. 26–49), the subject being a late 11th or early 12th century bronze incense burner, in the shape of a parrot [Fig. 1, next page]. Meyer's essay ranges widely over analogies among other animal- or bird-shaped examples of Islamic metalwork, the closest parallels being from Muslim Spain. Metallurgical analysis also points to an origin of the object in the Western Mediterranean. Yet some features of the Arabic inscription on it (analyzed here by Will Kwiatkowski) suggest the provenance was not Spain; in fact the most likely origin may have been Norman Sicily, where the Christian rulers presided over a court at which Muslim craftsmen and savants were welcomed (famously, in the 12th century, the geographer al-Idrisi). So the in-

cense burner was not necessarily produced for a Muslim patron, even if it connects with traditions of the manufacture of such objects for elites in other parts of the Islamic world.

One of the most significant of the essays in this volume for laying the basis for future study is Jangar Ya. Ilyasov's "Exotic Images: On a New Group of Glazed Pottery of the 10th and 11th Century" (pp. 50-87). He stresses that the significant attention which has long been devoted to the study of Islamic pottery might make it unlikely for a whole new category of Islamic ceramics to be discovered. Yet this is precisely what two examples from The David Collection [Fig. 2], ones recently excavated in Central Asia, and a suddenly rather abundant group of wares which have otherwise surfaced in recent years would suggest we have. The dishes in question have bold figures of fauna (strikingly, many depict fish), anthropomorphic or fantastical creatures on them, brightly colored and with distinctive (often purplish gray) background color. He analyzes and catalogs here 43 examples, being careful

Fig. 1. Incense burner. Cast, engraved bronze. Sicily or southern Italy, end of 11th-beginning of 12th century. H: 35.5 cm. Inv. no. 10/2005. Source: <<http://www.davidmus.dk/assets/158/5.2-10-2005-Roegelsesbraender-i-form-af-en-falk.jpg>> © The David Collection, Copenhagen. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Reproduced with permission.



to note where there may be serious doubts as to the age/authenticity

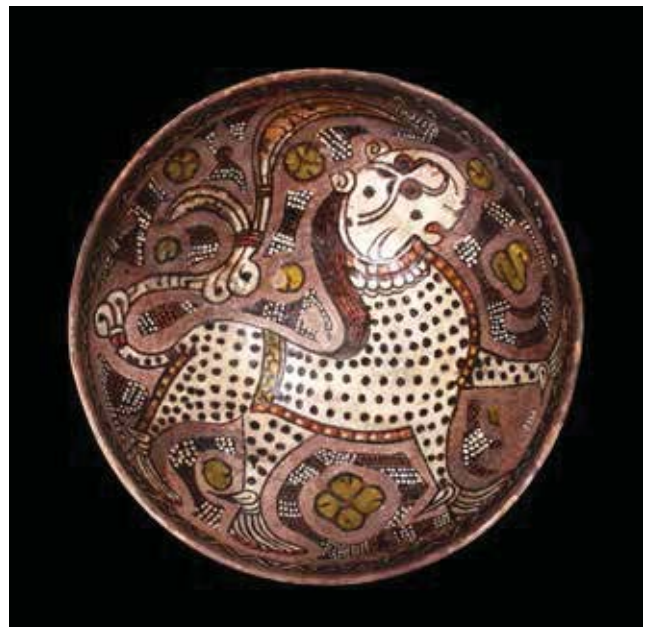


Fig. 2. Earthenware bowl, decorated with colored slips over an aubergine-colored ground under a transparent glaze. Central Asia, Samarkand, or Afghanistan; 10th century. D 29 cm; foot D 11 cm; H 10 cm. Inv. no. 87/2004. Source: <<http://www.davidmus.dk/assets/177/8.12-87-2004-Keramisk-skal-med-loeve.jpg>> © The David Collection, Copenhagen. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Reproduced with permission.

of some of them. Where so many of them are of unknown provenance, the question of authenticity is a serious one, but the fact some have come from documented excavations and others (for example, The David Collections pieces) have had their dates verified by thermo-luminescence provides a reliable reference base for the group. The second part of his article explores the possible models the ceramicists might have drawn upon for some of the designs, thus providing a convincing context in which the dishes could have appeared. Ilyasov concludes that the group might best be designated as Tokharistan pottery and dated to the 10th century. Obviously further analysis and testing of the many un-provenanced examples is going to be needed.

In an equally substantial and significant contribution, Eleanor Sims writes on "The *Nahj al Faradis* of Sultan Abu Sa'id ibn Sultan Muhammad ibn Miranshah: An Illustrated Timurid Ascension Text of the 'Interim' Period" (pp. 88-147). Her article includes the formal publication and analysis of eight exquisite illustrated manuscript pages (five in the David Collection [Fig. 3, next page, and Color Plate IX], three in the Sarikhani Collection) that had been removed from a manuscript book which remains in private hands and is not currently accessible. While the importance of Timurid miniature painting for the larger developments in that genre in the Islamic world has long been recognized, the middle of the 15th century has been something of a void. Attention has been devoted to the period of Tamerlane's successor Shah Rukh or that of Sultan Husayn Baykara in the last decades of the century, the patron of the famous painter Bihzad. The "Paths of Paradise" manuscript discussed here, produced under the patronage of Tamerlane's

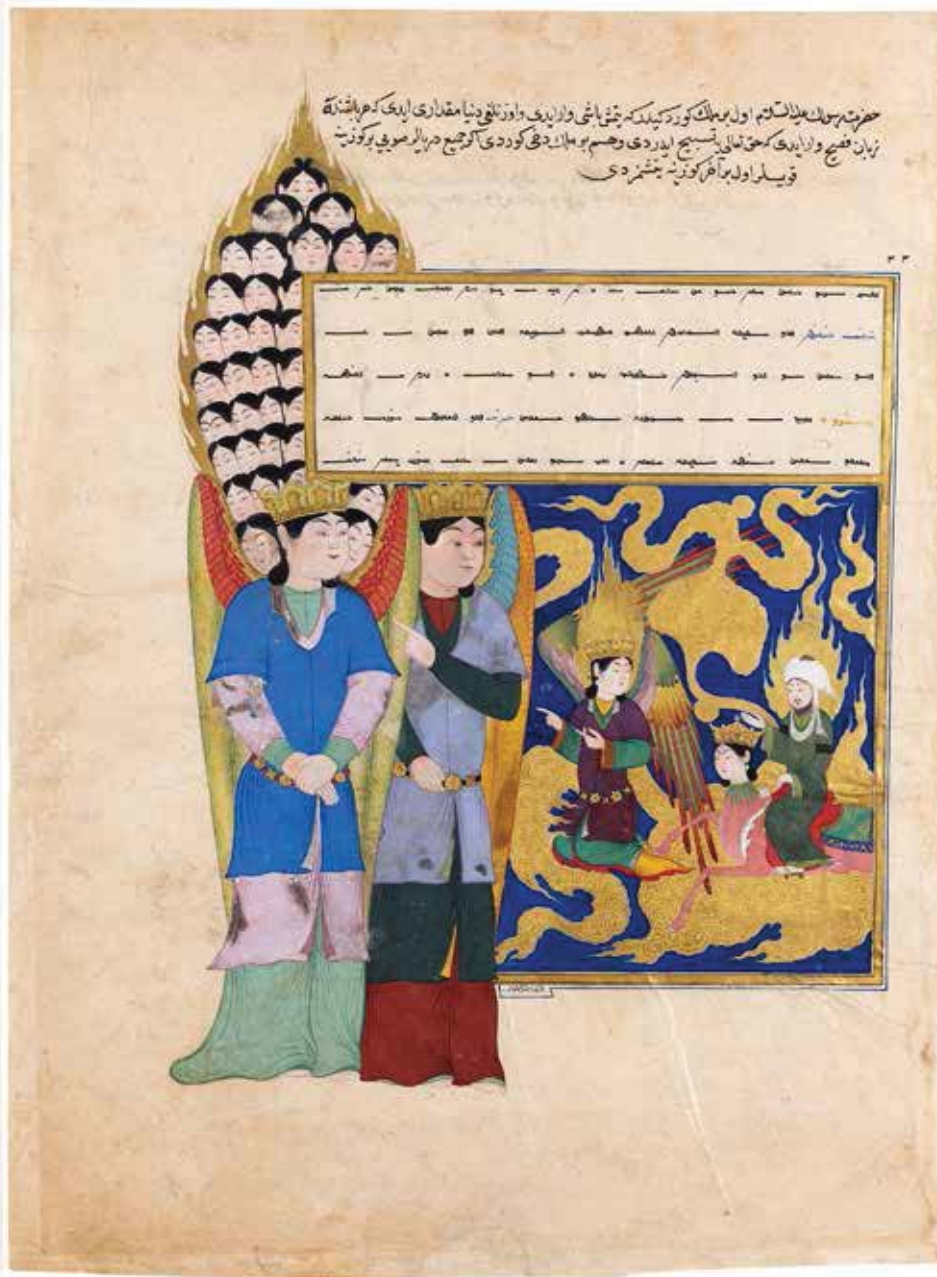


Fig. 3. "The Prophet Muhammad Before the Angel with Seventy Heads." Miniature from a copy of al-Sarai's *Nahj al-Faradis* (*The Paths of Paradise*). Signed: "work of the slave Sultan 'Ali al-sultani (in royal service)." Iran, Herat; probably 1466.

Folio size: 41.1 × 29.9 cm. Inv. no. 14/2012r. Source: <http://www.davidmus.dk/assets/3114/Copy-right_David-Collection_Copenhagen_14_2012_side-A_web.jpg> © The David Collection, Copenhagen. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Reproduced with permission.

credits a great many people for their assistance with this article and makes it clear that the study of the *Mi'raj-nama* by Christiane Gruber (published in 2008) is fundamental and provides important information on the Abu Sa'id manuscript. The emphasis here is broadly on what we learn about Timurid painting and Abu Sa'id's atelier and less on the sources for the images, which include, as is well known, Buddhist imagery. The article provides superb full-page illustrations of the eight illustrated folios (plus the text-only page for one of the David folios) and on facing pages the comparable images from the BN manuscript.

In analogous fashion to Sims, Howard J. Ricketts

great-grandson Sultan Abu Sa'id (d. 1469) in Herat, helps fill that void and leads Sims to reexamine the significance of other manuscripts from the same atelier. As it turns out, Abu Sa'id's manuscript is in many ways almost identical with the famous *Mi'raj-nama* manuscript now in the Bibliothèque nationale, which was produced a generation earlier under Shah Rukh. Clearly the later of these two books devoted to the Ascension of Muhammad is in fact a direct copy of the earlier one, both from the standpoint of the images and the fact that the text is written in Uighur script in Turkic. Interestingly, both manuscripts then fell into Ottoman hands in the early 16th century, following the Ottoman defeat of the Safavids at Chaldiran, before eventually ending up in Western collections. Sims

substantially enhances our knowledge of the arts at the court of one of the lesser-known Indian rulers, in "Ahmadnagar: Nizam Shahi Blazons, Animal Sculpture, and Zoomorphic Arms in the 16th Century" (pp. 149–69). The evidence in the first instance is in the sculpted relief of the Ahmadnagar buildings dated 1550–1560s, which include various animal and foliate designs that then compare with the elaborate hilts of two daggers in The David Collection [Fig. 4, next page; Inv. no. 18/1982] and also can be seen in somewhat schematic form on a dagger handle in a painting it owns depicting the ruler of Bijapur [Inv. no. 6/2013]. While eventually it fell to the Mughals, Ahmadnagar emerges here as more significant politically and culturally than one might previously have assumed.

Fig. 4. Dagger with gilded bronze hilt, set with a few rubies. Probably Ahmadnagar, ca. 1575. L: 42 cm. Inv. no. 36/1997 <<http://www.davidmus.dk/assets/278/18.4-36a-1997-Dolk-med-dyregreb.jpg>> © The David Collection, Copenhagen. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Reproduced with permission.

The David Collection has an important group of works produced in Islamic South Asia. Steven Cohen's "Two Outstanding Mughal Qanat Panels in the David Collection" (pp. 170–201) highlights two large *qanats* or panels for cloth screens which commonly were erected to form an enclosure within which the ruler's tent might be situated. The well-preserved David panels, one in lampas weave [Inv. no. 19/2011], the other [Fig. 5] in "cut, voided velvet enhanced with metal-wrapped threads," are significant for their having required a massive pattern unit "possibly unprecedented in the history of 16th and early 17th-century lampas weaving for textiles displaying human figures" (p. 177). While there is much in the arts of the Mughals which draws on Persian traditions, there is no precedent in Safavid textiles for lampas weavings with such a large pattern. The evidence here points to the initiative of the Mughal emperor Akbar, but it was not simply a matter of his attracting foreign craftsmen, as there is much to suggest the weavings



come out of well-established Indian textile traditions. Cohen's discussion embraces evidence about the uses of the *qanat* panels as well as a great deal on the development of silk weaving in northern India. An appendix to his article by Anne-Marie Keblow Bernsted provides technical analysis of the two panels and drawings of the weave structures.

The final article in this volume illustrates another of the strengths of The David Collection, so many of whose objects speak specifically to long-distance cultural exchange. Yuka Kadoi, whose book *Islamic Chinoiserie* was reviewed in this journal (vol. 8 [2010], pp. 130–32) brings her unique expertise on both Islamic and Chinese art to bear in her "From China to Denmark: A 'Mosque Lamp' in Context" (pp. 202–23). The unusual late Qing cloisonné hanging "lamp" [Fig. 6, next page] serves to illustrate the importance of taking seriously Islamic art objects produced in China. The shape here imitates that of mosque lamps produced in the Islamic West (two good examples, one in brass,

Fig. 5. "Standing Lady Beneath a Cusped Arch." Qanat panel. Velvet, silk and silver lamella spun around silk. Mughal northern India, ca. 1600. 143 × 69 cm. Inv. no. 37/1995. Source: <<http://www.davidmus.dk/assets/446/19.2-37-1995-Floejlsdame.jpg>> © The David Collection, Copenhagen. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Reproduced with permission.

the other enameled glass, are also in the David Collection and depicted here). Yet it seems almost certain that the Chinese craftsman had as his model a hanging lamp made under Mamluk Sultan Baybars I in the 13th century, which he knew not from the original work but from a photo published in a noteworthy French album of Islamic art in 1869-1877. Interestingly, that same photo provided the model for a replica lamp commissioned by Lord Curzon to be hung in the Taj Mahal. Kadoi's essay discusses the distinct Chinese-Arabic calligraphy on the "lamp" and other examples of Chinese cloisonné, including a tankard now in the Victoria and Albert Museum which is modeled on a design popular in Timurid metalwork that was widely imitated (the David Collection includes an elegant silver Ottoman version, Inv. no. 15/1986). Kadoi concludes her essay with a challenge: "Having confirmed the power of portable objects that can bridge Islamic, Chinese, as well as European art histories in a visually dynamic and convincing way, it is hoped that the present study will broaden our disciplinary horizons, redress the art-historical merits of the arts of Islam in the eastern periphery of the Muslim world, and, finally, provoke the contentious issue of the definition of our field – what is Islamic art, after all?" (p. 217).

The David Collection is clearly committed to educating a broad public who might wish to tackle that question. There are regular public lectures (in Danish) and regularly scheduled gallery tours on various topics, for which one can download concise overviews in pdf format from the website. The website <<http://www.davidmus.dk/en>> offers access (in both Danish and English) to the Islamic collection by dynasty, materials or cultural-history theme. Each dynasty is introduced by several paragraphs on its history and relationship to cultural production. From each overview page, one can choose links to images of works of art, coins, architecture, and a map. There also is a series of nearly hour-long recordings of radio broadcasts (in Danish only) about the dynasties and their art. The linked



Fig. 6. Lamp, bronze, parcel-gilt and decorated with cloisonné enamel. China, 19th century. H without chain: 25; D: 23 cm. Source: <http://www.davidmus.dk/assets/912/Copyright_-_David-Collection-Copenhagen_42-1966_web.jpg> © The David Collection, Copenhagen. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Reproduced with permission.

pages bring up sets of thumbnails which then lead to pages with the individual works of art and brief but very informative descriptive text. One can click then to bring up huge jpeg images of the objects, of a size and quality that enables close examination: one might hope that other museums would emulate this generosity [as I write, the Freer and Sackler Galleries in Washington, D. C., have just announced the imminent posting of their whole collection in such large, high-resolution images]. For some objects, there is more than one view (e.g., the exquisite *kesi* medallion from the Mongol period, Inv. no. 30/1995, has five detail photos in addition to the overall view). Both the obverse and reverse of coins are shown. The descriptive paragraphs for the materials pages are quite short. It is important to note that some objects, for which no dynastic date has been assigned, may be found only via these pages. The thematic pages have more substantial text, under topics such as "The Five Pillars of Islam," "Sunni and Shia," "The Religious Prohibition against Images" and "Symbolism in Islamic Art." Apart from links to the relevant images, there may also be supplementary materials: e.g., for "Trade, Measures and Weights"

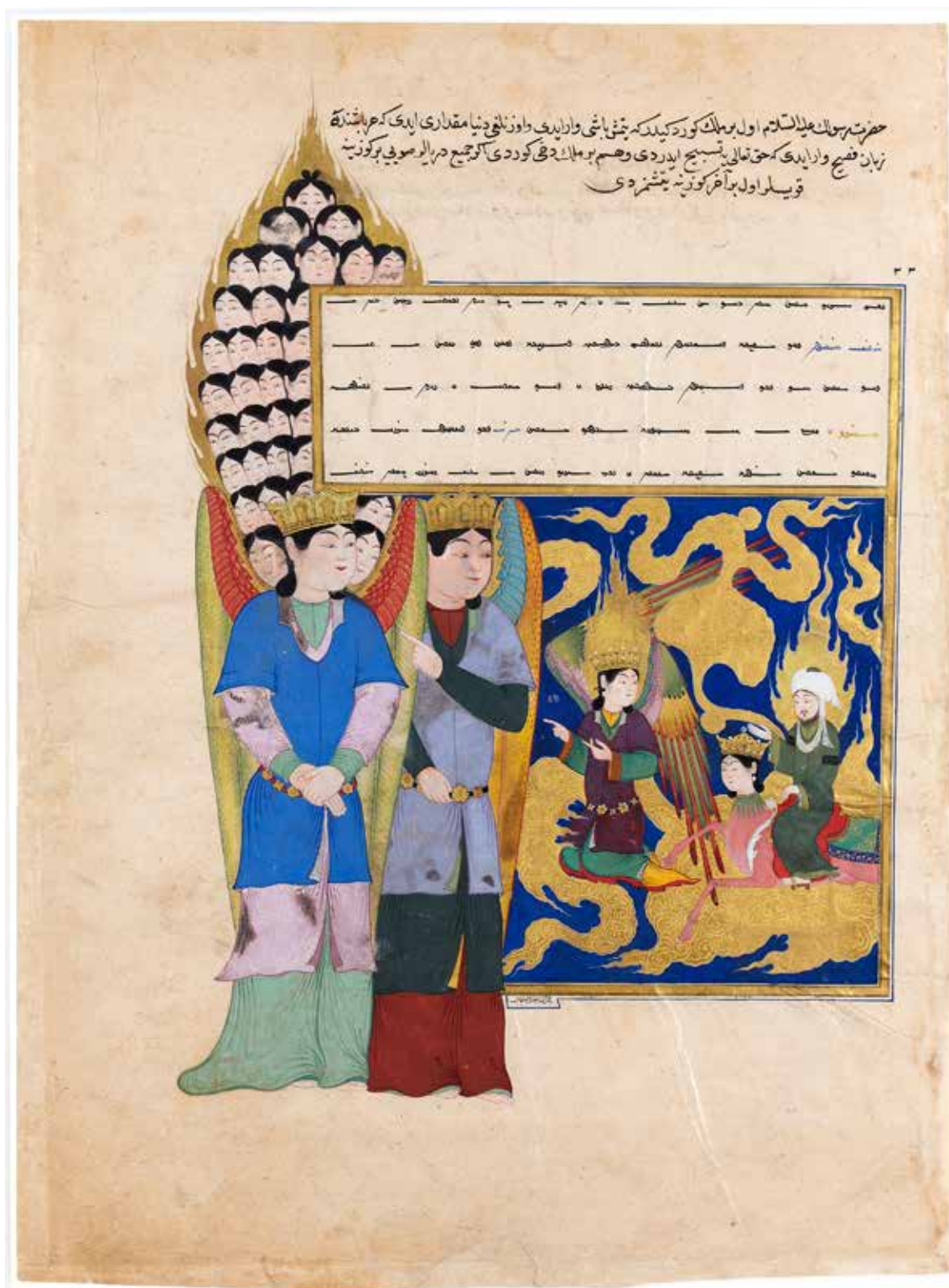
there is a schematic map of trade routes and a set of photos of caravanserais and bazaars; for "Mechanics, Astronomy, and Astrology" there are photos of the Jantar Mantar observatory in Jaipur. The website has a separate section "Mostly for kids" with a memory game, a quiz and a set of Islamic geometric pattern drawings that can be copied as pdf files.

Fortunately I can look forward to an opportunity in the next few months to visit Copenhagen for more than a brief stopover between SAS flights. Even if there for a short time, a visitor would be well advised to skip the Little Mermaid and Tivoli, and instead head to C. L. David's former residence at Kronprinsessegade 30, the home of one of the best Islamic art collections anywhere.

– Daniel C. Waugh
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PLATE IX

[Waugh, "The David Collection," p. 134]



"The Prophet Muhammad Before the Angel with Seventy Heads." Miniature from a copy of al-Sarai's *Nahj al-Faradis* (The Paths of Paradise).
Signed: "work of the slave Sultan 'Ali al-sultani (in royal service)." Iran, Herat; probably 1466.

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