

Islamic symbolism and history

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Commons Islamic Symbols

Symbols abound all over the cultures of Islam, from visual and literary to mainstream culture. It is reasonable to think that knowledge of Islamic culture is imperfect without an understanding of the abundant array of symbols of Islam (Ahmed, 2002). Calligraphy and geometric shapes extracted from the holy texts of Islam have become a foundation of Islamic art (Rodrigues, 2008). Surprisingly, Arabic writing provided itself for integration into material art.

Specific verses and figures from the Qur'an have attained unique value through rhythmic application as ornament (Rodrigues, 2008). Particularly famous are these writings: (1) " In the name of God, the Charitable, the Merciful" (Rodrigues, 2008, 106) or the digest of the Muslim faith; (2) " There is no God but God and Mohammed is his messenger" (p. 106) or the avowal of the Muslim faith. Similarly, among the more wholly Islamic symbols are angels or the divine messengers related to the life and mission of Prophet Mohammed. Angels are abundant in Islamic art and literature (Ahmed, 2002). According to Rodrigues (2008), particularly famous are the guardian angels, like Israfil, Mika'il, and Jibrail.

The culture of Islam reveres the artistic and adept exercise of language, particularly the expressive, effectual use of verses. As an outcome, lyrical language usually surfaces in commonplace sites in Islamic societies, far more than it appears in Western countries (Ahmed, 2002). This fondness at times baffles and even disappoints Westerners trying to make sense of Islamic culture. In numerous situations, Muslims apply verses to admire the splendor of flowers, gardens, and other natural occurrences as the pouring of

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rain (Rodrigues, 2008). By extolling the nature created by God, lyricists indirectly worship God.

Historical Foundation of Islam

It is still contested when the emergence of Islam in the modern period started. Three historical episodes occurred in the 15th century and had an enduring impact on Islamic foundation in the modern age (Esposito, 1999): (1) the conquest of Jerusalem by crusaders, (2) expulsion of Muslims from Spain in 1492, and (3) Islamic revolution in Iran. Under the regime of the Ottoman, approximately from mid-15th century to the conclusion of the First World War, Islam turned into the formal religion of the Ottoman rule (Esposito, 1999). Nevertheless, because of the imperialistic thrust of European powers, Ottoman supremacy was defied in the 19th century. The Ottoman state turned to a restructuring agenda, called Tanzimat, to face this challenge (Ahmed, 2002). Under the Tanzimat, according to Esposito (1999) the Ottoman Empire modernized its economy, commerce, and military. Turkish patriotism emerged at the end of Tanzimat which became eventually an alarming dispute to the Ottoman state's Islamic foundations. In 1924, Kemal Ataturk formed the Turkish Republic which tried to restrict the presence of Islam in politics and public affairs while practicing a Westernized political and cultural rule (Ahmed, 2002). Three main phenomena were existing in the Islamic domain in the 19th century, namely, Islamic Reform, patriotism, and Imperialism (Esposito, 1999). According to Esposito (1999), patriotism in the Islamic world in the modern period emerged as a reaction to the dominance of European powers and the weakening of Islam. Islamic Reform tried to change the foundations of Muslim faith and culture.

The fight against the imperialistic motives of Western powers in the Islamic

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domain resulted in the formation of the modern nation-state in a number of Islamic societies (Ahmed, 2002). As stressed by Esposito (1999), in 1945, Indonesia became independent, and in 1947, Pakistan gained the status of a 'state'.

References

Ahmed, A. (2002) *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*. London: Routledge.

Esposito, J. (1999) *The Oxford History of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rodrigues, A. (2008) "Islam and Symbolism," *Military Review*, 88(3), 106+