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Islamic Identities and Islamic Art: Inscribing the Qur’an in Twelfth-Century Afghanistan

Almost every survey of Islamic art begins with a paradoxical attempt to deconstruct the term itself, an endeavor that reflects a widespread unease with a rubric that must accommodate a vast array of artistic production spanning almost fourteen hundred years and several continents. Among the many recent developments in the field that have helped redefine and refine the problematic notion of "Islamic" art is an interest in the nature of art produced at cultural interfaces, chief among them Andalusia, Anatolia, Central Asia, and north India. Analyzing artistic production as integral to processes of cross-cultural exchange, this work has done much to complicate the cultural monolithism implicit in the term Islamic art. Yet much of this work is concerned with the relationship between Islam and its non-Muslim "others": there have been far fewer attempts to analyze or deconstruct the nature of the Muslim self, even when the adjective entails a reference to religious identity. Instead, particular (and often competing) religious identities are subsumed under the generic terms Islamic or Muslim, assuming and producing a homogeneity characterized by what Stephen Campbell has identified in another context as the "transhistorical reification of categories of belief or philosophical allegiance."2

Recent scholarship on the rivalry between the Sunni 'Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad and its Shi' Fatimid rival in Cairo [from the fourth/tenth through the sixth/twelfth centuries A.H./C.E.] provides a welcome exception to this general trend. When it comes to Sunni Islam, however, there is still a general tendency to reproject a notion of religious consensus that is itself a cultural artifact. As the historian Richard Bulliet has noted: "The mutual tolerance of different legal and doctrinal interpretations of Sunni Islam that characterizes the later centuries [that is, the thirteenth century and later] belies the bitter factional conflicts between Sunni law schools that marks the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries." Bulliet emphasizes that in the absence of detailed synchronic studies at the local or regional level, "it is difficult to erase the image of Islamic social and religious homogeneity that becomes an article of belief in later centuries and suffuses general accounts of Islam and Islamic history," and, one might add, Islamic art history.3

Favoring what Clifford Geertz characterizes as "thin" descriptions over "thick," the reification of medieval identities in ways that ignore their protean character has significant implications not only for our understanding of Islamic history or medieval religious identity but also for the artistic production of medieval elites.4 Studies on 'Abbasid–Fatimid rivalry have demonstrated that within the context of Sunni-Shi'i antipathy, architecture, inscriptions, numismatics, and even textiles could be deployed to bolster competing claims to authority. The impact of intra-Sunni doctrinal disputes on
premodern artistic patronage, however, has received far less attention.

In seeking to address a perceived neglect, this essay also engages another significant development of the past few decades in the field of Islamic art: an increased attention to the aesthetic and iconographic function of nonhistorical inscriptions, especially Qur’anic texts, previously dismissed as meaningless religious formulas. Analyzing the role of Qur’anic citations inscribed on monumental architecture and portable objects, it seeks to demonstrate that the factional conflicts referred to by Bulliet are integral to understanding the choice of Qur’anic inscriptions on certain medieval artifacts, which functioned as discursive statements deployed in the service of medieval intra-Muslim (and specifically intra-Sunni) polemics.

The Shansabanid or Ghurid sultanate of Afghanistan, which forms the focus for this study, is not particularly well known even among Islamicists. The reasons for this neglect include the relatively small number of surviving Ghurid monuments, their geographic remoteness, the dearth of extant objects that can be securely attributed to Ghurid patronage, and the ephemeral nature of the sultanate itself, which flourished for just a few decades at the end of the twelfth century. By contrast, the prominence of the Ghurids in modern South Asian politics reflects their importance and political utility as the first Muslim dynasty to bring large parts of north India under their sway (fig. 1).

The floruit of the sultanate, which corresponds with the period of expansion into north India, was marked both by heated sectarian disputes and by changing patterns of artistic and religious patronage. These shifts can be understood as part of a dynamic process of self-formation on the part of the Shansabanid sultans as their fortunes rose and their territories expanded. The undertaking was shaped by tensions arising from the strong regional associations of the dynasty and its transregional pretensions, tensions that included Shansabanid support for a localized, pietistic sect of Sunni Islam.

1. Map showing the territories of the Ghurid sultanate at their greatest extent in dotted outline
Heterodoxy

The twelfth-century minaret at Jam in central Afghanistan (roughly midway between Herat and Kabul) is one of the most spectacular medieval monuments in the Islamic world (fig. 2). Constructed of baked brick, the exterior elevation comprises three cylindrical shafts of decreasing thickness set on an octagonal socle and crowned with a small 'and remarkably well-preserved' pavilion. The exterior is lavishly decorated with terracotta, stucco, and blue-glazed tiles. The minaret stands sixty-five meters high in the narrow confines of a remote mountain valley that is difficult of access and susceptible to flooding by spring meltwaters: its existence came to the attention of Afghan and foreign scholars only in the 1950s.6

Isolated today, the mountainous province of Ghur, in which the minaret is located (see fig. 1), was a rather marginal region of the medieval Islamic world that converted to Islam only in the ninth or tenth century, much later than many of the surrounding areas.7 Ghur enjoyed a brief moment of glory in the half century after 1150, when one of the maliks (chiefs) of the region sacked Ghazna, the eponymous capital of the Ghaznavid sultans who had dominated the eastern Islamic world for almost 150 years, and assumed the title of sultan.8 This dramatic event, which earned its perpetrator the sobriquet jahan-suz [World Burner], marked the abrupt entry of these mountain chiefs onto the wider political stage and the beginning of their meteoric rise from regional obscurity.

Three lines of the dynasty exercised authority from Firuzkuh in Ghur, Kiamyan in central Afghanistan, and Ghazna in the east. The Ghurid sultanate reached its apogee under the reign of sultans Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam [558–599/1163–1203] and Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam [569–602/1173–1206], maliks of the Shahsaband clan. The brothers ruled in a condominium, with Ghiyath al-Din the elder statesman of the pair, al-sultan al-'azzam [the greatest sultan] in comparison to Mu'izz al-Din, al-sultan al-mutazzam [the great sultan], who acquired the former title only after Ghiyath al-Din's death in 599/1202–3.9

From Firuzkuh in west-central Afghanistan, Ghiyath al-Din oversaw the westward expansion of the sultanate. Mu'izz al-Din was based in Ghazna, from where he expanded the sultanate's reach into the former Ghaznavid territories in the Indus Valley and into north India after 588/1192.

At its zenith in the last decade of the twelfth century, the Ghuric sultanate extended from the Iranian metropolis of Nishapur in the west to the Indian city of Benares [modern Varanasi] in the east, and from the steppe of Central Asia in the north to Sind in the south [see fig. 1]. The floruit of both
ordinary inscription appears, however, on the surface of the lowest shaft of the minaret [fig. 3]. Here the entire text of the Surat Maryam, or Chapter of Mary, a Qur’anic sura (chapter) relating to Mary the mother of Jesus, appears in a series of narrow ribbon-like bands that overlap and intersect each other to form panels filled with geometric ornament. The form and content of the inscription are unique in the Islamic world. In his review of the comprehensive 1959 publication on the minaret, Oleg Grabar noted that the presence of the sura “must be related to some specific event commemorating the building of the minaret.” Since that time the raison d'être of this long inscription has been one of the enduring mysteries of Islamic art history. Although the minaret bears a foundation text, scholars have long been divided about its interpretation, with opinion split between readings of 570/1174–5 and 390/1193–4; the confusion arises in part from the absence of diacritical marks, which renders the Arabic words for ninety and seventy difficult to distinguish. The later date has long been accepted in most of the literature on the minaret. Consequently it has been identified as a commemorative monument erected after a major Ghurid victory against a confederation of Indian rulers in 588/1192, which paved the way for the conquest of northern India. In light of this interpretation, references to idolatry and unbelief in the Chapter of Mary inscription have been read as allusions to the conquered Hindu subjects of the sultan. Epigraphy has thus come to play a central role in constituting the minaret as a symbol of Muslim victory over the conquered Hindus, taking it as a given that references to idolatry and unbelief in the chosen verses alluded to those who were literally outside the fold of Islam.

A recent study of the minaret by Janine Sourdel-Thomine, the doyenne of Islamic art in France, has suggested that the correct reading of its date is 570/1174–5. This redating has significant implications for our understanding of Ghurid architecture and epigraphy. Related to 570/1174–5, the minaret is shorn of any obvious Indian associations, as it antedates the first Ghurid incursions into north India by at least a year. Sourdel-Thomine suggests that the
as ruler of Ghazna and elevated to the rank of sultan, sharing the sovereignty of his elder brother and consolidating the political structures of the state. Identifying the likely commemorative function of the minaret does not, however, resolve one of the central mysteries surrounding it: why was it felt necessary to cover the surface of this remote structure with the entire Surat Maryam?

Sheila Blair has noted that Ghorid patronage of religious monuments (mosques, minarets, madrasas) was “part of a coordinated campaign to champion Islam ... both to convert the heathen and to counter internal heresies.” The intrinsically associating between the suppression of heresy and the chastisement of unbelievers in the royal titulature of the period and in the “Mirrors for Princes” genre of literature that proliferated in the eastern Islamic world during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A concern with both is revealed in the titulature of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din, as preserved in the colophon of an extraordinary Qur’an dated 484/1090, the sole surviving manuscript that can be ascribed to Ghorid patronage (fig. 4). This bombastic rendition of Ghorid titulature combines titles used earlier by both the Seljuq and Ghaznavid sultans to whom the Ghorids had previously been subject: “The chief and great sultan, the greatest king of kings, ruler over the necks of nations, sultan of the sultans in the world, succor of the world and religion, the glory of Islam and the Muslims, victor over the unbelievers and the heretics, suppressor of innovation and the seditious, the supporting arm of the victorious state, crown of the radiant people, glory of the shining nation, order of the world, Father of Victory, Muhammad ibn Sam, partner of the commander of the believers [that is, the ‘Abbasid caliph in Baghdad].”

The emphasis on the sultan’s role as the promoter of orthodoxy and scourge of heretics is reflected in contemporary antipathies toward the Isma’ili Shi’is. Patronized during the reign of ‘Ala’ al-Din Jahan-aziz (r. 544–556/1149–61), the Isma’ilis were persecuted by his son and successor, Sayf al-Din Muhammad ibn Husayn (556–558/1161–63) and by subsequent Shansabani sultans. This shift in religious policies points to the protean attitudes of the Shansabani elites toward

3. Minaret of Jām, twelfth century, detail of lowest shaft
Photograph courtesy of Warwick Ball

minaret commemorates not the later Indian victories but the capture of Ghazna, the former capital of the Ghaznavid sultans, from the Ghuzz Turks in 569/1173-4. The presence of Qur’an 61:13–14 on the minaret, with its invocation of the victory given to the believers, might also support for such a reading, especially as many of the Ghuzz were pagans. The capture of the former Ghaznavid capital was not merely a matter of regional significance but a pivotal event for the development of the Ghorid sultanate. After the victory, Mu’izz al-Din was installed
religious matters and prefigures later more dramatic shifts in religious affiliation that will be discussed below.

The insistence on orthodoxy in this document may also be a product of the close association between the Shamsaband and the Karramiya, a somewhat enigmatic Sunni Pietistic sect known for its implacable hostility toward Isma`ili Shi`ism. Born in Sistan, the eponymous Muhammad ibn Karram (d. 255/869) had studied in Mecca, Jerusalem, Nishapur, Herat, and Merv before seeking more remote regions of the eastern Islamic world, including Gharjistan and the recalcitrant region of Ghur; which his preaching is said to have been instrumental in converting from paganism to Islam. The affiliation between the Ghurid sultans and the Karramiya reflects the dominance of the sect among the population of Ghur in the second half of the twelfth century.

Although the disappearance of the Karramiya in the early thirteenth century, in the wake of the Mongol invasions, has led scholars (especially those concerned with material culture) to overlook them, they enjoyed widespread popularity in the eastern Islamic world during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Karrami madrasas (religious schools) and khanqahs (convents) were established in all the major cities of eastern Iran and Transoxiana, including Herat, Merv, Nishapur, and Samarqand. The sect (which was not homogeneous but comprised as many as twelve different subsets) competed for patronage, material resources, and spiritual adherents with representatives of other legal and theological traditions, chief among them the Hanafi and Shafi`i madhhab (schools of jurisprudence), two of the four law schools of Sunni Islam. Factional rivalry between these various sectarian traditions was intense, and contemporary polemical exchanges, conducted within the frame of heresy, unbelief, and sedition, sometimes degenerated into violent civil strife and even architectural desecration in the cities of eastern Iran during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the survival of several Karrami texts, ranging from works on fiqh (jurisprudence) and qisas (prophetic stories) to a Qur’an commentary. As Josef van Ess notes, the discovery of these materials suggests that the Karramiya left more traces on the historical record than formerly thought. But because studies of the sect have been mainly the preserve of textual historians, the question of the survival of material artifacts, including manuscripts (as opposed to their textual contents), associated with the Karramiya has not been addressed. There can be little doubt, however, that Ghurid patronage of the Karramiya informed contemporary artistic production, for we are told that Sultan Chiyath al-Din founded madrasas and khanqahs for the Karramiya and other groups and provided them with waqfs (endowment deeds) and Qur’ans. Here I would like to suggest that at least one extant Qur’an manuscript and several key Ghurid monuments, including the minaret of Jarn, constitute
Karrami documents even if they have not been recognized as such.

The importance of the royal Qur'an manuscript mentioned above lies not only in the evidence that it offers for the development of Ghurid titulature, or in its unique status as the sole surviving object that can be securely ascribed to Ghurid patronage, but also in its astonishingly high production values (figs. 5–9). The four-volume Qur'an is a superlative example of the arts of binding, calligraphy, and illumination composed of good-quality, large burnished sheets of paper (with a page size of about thirty-nine
by twenty-nine centimeters and a text block size of twenty-seven by sixteen centimeters, it is among the largest Qur'ans of the period, lavishly gilded and illuminated (see figs. 7–9). The illumination culminates in the final volume of the manuscript and reaches a crescendo toward its end, where the short penultimate chapters possess the largest and most elaborate chapter headings (see fig. 5), a foretaste of the dazzling double finispeice of the final volume.

The manuscript is also unusual in a number of other respects, not least the amount of information it provides regarding its own production. This is contained in an extensive colophon (containing the titles cited earlier), which gives a date of 8 Rabi‘ II 584/6 June 1189 for completion of the manuscript. It took five years to complete, and the text was copied by Muhammad ibn ‘Isa ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Nishaburi al-Laythi. The nisba (toponymic) of the scribe suggests that he or his family hailed from Nishapur, one of the four great cities of the eastern Iranian province of Khurasan. Nishapur was evidently a major artistic center at this period, for the architect responsible for the construction of the Jam minaret also seems to have hailed from that city. The calligraphy combines a variety of angular and cursive scripts (including naskh, thuluth, and New Style), a combination that also characterizes the monumental epigraphy in Ghurid monuments at Herat and Shah-i Mashhad (see fig. 11). It is unlikely that the calligrapher was also the illuminator, as was sometimes the case, for the spectacular illumination and marginal ornaments which show formal links to contemporary architectural decoration appear to be the work of several hands.

The Ghurid Qur’an is perhaps the most spectacular Qur’an manuscript to have survived from pre-Mongol Iran and will be the subject of a separate study, but here I want to call attention to a number of its idiosyncrasies that shed light on the religious life of the Ghurid elite. The first of these concerns is its form: unusually for Qur’ans of this period, which tend to be single volumes or else divided into thirty, seven, or, more rarely, six or two volumes, the manuscript is divided into four volumes, each bearing some or all of its original tooled leather
century Khurasan is evident from the fact that two earlier copies, dated 523/1129 and 535/1140, survive. 38

Both the manuscript and the exegetical text that it contains have multiple associations with the western fringes of the areas under Ghurid control. The author of the tafsir, al-Surabadi, had close biographical associations with the areas of Khurasan later controlled by the Ghurids: while he lived in Nishapur, according to some authorities, he bore the *nisba* al-Harawi, suggesting connections with Herat. 39 The post-Ghurid history of the manuscript itself is also closely connected with the border region between Iran and Afghanistan, for in 654/1256, just decades after the demise of the Ghurids, the Qur'an was presented to the shrine of Shaykh Ahmad b. Abul-Hasan [d. 536/1141] at Turbat-i Shaykh Jam [now an Iranian border town to the west of Herat], a place with which al-Surabadi himself had been associated. 40

The date of the Qur'an places it firmly within the period when Ghiyath al-Din supported the Karramiya of Ghur, 41 and its inclusion of a Karrami tafsir raises the possibility that the manuscript was among those commissioned by Ghiyath al-Din for a Karrami institution. The structure of the Ghurid Qur'an suggests that a particular value was ascribed to al-Surabadi's tafsir, for while its four-volume form is unusual for a Khurasani Qur'an of this period, contemporary *tafsir* [exegetical texts] were sometimes produced in four volumes, raising the possibility that the presence of the exegetical text may have determined the unusual structure of the Qur'an itself. Although the place of production is not specified, Herat is a likely contender. In the second half of the twelfth century, an important mealwork school was centered in the city, and Herat's Friday Mosque was rebuilt in 597/1200, during a period when stylistic and epigraphic evidence attests the participation of its denizens in Ghurid architectural projects as far away as the Indus Valley and north India.

The importance of the manuscript can hardly be overstated. As a unique royal manuscript, it fills a major lacuna in the history of the material Qur'an between the introduction of paper and cursive scripts in the early eleventh century and the celebrated
"royal" Mamluk and Ilkhanid Qur'ans of the fourteenth. Equally important is its ability to illuminate the complex religious life of twelfth-century Ghur and its relationship to artistic patronage. In this respect, the manuscript can help shed light on the epigraphic program of the Jam minaret, as we shall see.

Several studies of the minaret at Jam (see fig. 2) have in fact raised the possibility of a Karrami connection but have been hampered in their pursuit of this idea by a relative dearth of information on the sect. In addition to the Karrami documents brought to life recently, however, basic details of Karrami beliefs are contained in medieval Arabic heresiographies. Combining these with a recent careful reconstruction of the spatial relations of the epigraphic bands on the minaret, it is, I believe, possible to demonstrate an association with the sect. In order to do so, we first have to broach the rather arcane world of Karrami kalam (speculative theology) and the issue of anthropomorphism in particular.

Among the most theologically problematic verses in the Qur'an are those that seem to imply the divine possession of corporeal attributes and qualities, apparently contradicting or undermining the notion of an eternal and uncreated deity that was central to Islamic thought. The opponents of the Karramiya depict them as taking a particularly literalist or anthropomorphist approach to these questions, with the result that they were sometimes known as mujassima, those who ascribe jasim [body] to God. One of the key problems was whether [and which] divine attributes were extrinsic or intrinsic to God's essence. In light of these anthropomorphizing verses, divine speech was one of the attributes aggressively contested by various sects. The issue was central not only to the question of God's nature but also to the ontological status of the Qur'an itself as the textualized trace of a speech act. At one extreme of the argument stood the Mu'tazilite opponents of the Karramiya, who asserted that the Qur'an consisted of words and sounds and therefore was not eternal but originated in space and time. At the other end of the spectrum were those scholars of the orthodox Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence who argued that the sounds, the words, and even the material fabric of the Qur'an were eternal and enduring. The Ash'ari theological tradition that was closely associated with the Shafi'i law school sought to mediate between these poles, distinguishing between the meaning of God's words, which constituted a kind of internal speech (kalām nafsī)—part of his divine essence and therefore eternal—and revealed commands, promises, and threats spoken by prophets, iterated in stories about them, or transmitted in revealed books, all of which are created expressions of his eternal word.

The Karramiya also steered a middle course between extremes, judging from the account of their beliefs in the book of Muslim sects and divisions written by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153), a resident of Khurasan who had first-hand experience of them:

They hold that there are many incidents (hadith) in God's essence, such as, for example, information about past or future events, the books revealed to the prophets (peace be upon them), stories, the Promise and the Threat, and commands. In this category also are acts of hearing and seeing in regard to things audible and visible. Bringing into being and annihilation consist of God's Word and Will, for example, his saying "Be" (kā'm) to the thing that He wills to be and His willing the existence of that thing... Muhammad ibn al-Haysam [Karrami theologian d. 409/1015] explained bringing into being and annihilation as Will and Choice, this being connected with His Word by the testimony of the Qur'an: "To anything which We have willed, We but say to it 'Be!' and it is [Kūn fā'ayakūm]" [Qur'an 16:40]; or, again, "Verify, when He wills a thing, His command to it is 'Be,' and it is [Kūn fā'ayakūm]" [Qur'an 36:83].

In their attempt to distinguish between eternal attributes and temporal acts, the Karramiya differentiated between attributes of essence (such as power and knowledge) and attributes of acts (such as creation). Although God has eternal power to act, acts themselves are contingent and temporal incidents (hadīth) facilitated by his power; every originated thing and every temporal event is created and annihilated by the incidents that arise in God's eternal essence. The heresiography of Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi (d. 429/
1017) puts the matter succinctly: "Ibn Karram and his adherents hold that the Object of their Worship is a subject in which created entities exist. They believe that His utterances, His will, His visual and auditory perceptions, His contiguity to the uppermost surface of the Universe, are all accidents originated in Him and He is the place for these creations which originated in Him."50

Crucially, however, and most controversially for the opponents of the Karramiya, God's power extends only over those things that originate in his essence.51 These created things and temporal events are called into being not through power, which is intrinsic to the divine essence, but through the divine command kun (Be!). On this point, al-Shahrastani again quotes the well-known Karrami theologian Muhammad ibn al-Haynas (d. c. 1010): "At the time He creates, He wills whatever He creates with a contingent will [fayż kātib]; and to everything that comes into being by His command He says 'Be!' (kun) and it becomes."52

God's power to speak and his utterances (including the divine command Be, by means of which creation is effected) are temporally and ontologically distinct phenomena.53 The former is eternal; the latter is originated (but as a reflection of power, which is an eternal and enduring attribute) and composed of phenomena such as the words of the Qur'an and those revealed in commands, promises, prophetic stics, and warnings. The Qur'anic phrase kun fayż kān (Be! And it is,) occupied a central position in Karrami polemics on the relationship between divine nature and the created universe. The phrase occurs eight times in the Qur'an, including in verse 35 of the Surat Maryam.54 This verse falls at a key point in the decorative scheme of the Jam, offering tangible support for the suggestion of a Karrami connection.

In her recent study, Sourdel-Thomine detected an axial hierarchy to the decorative scheme of the lowest shaft of the minaret. She noted that all the inscriptions on the minaret terminate on its western face (fig. 10, face 6) and demonstrated that the eastern and western faces of the minaret (fig. 10, faces 4 and 8) constitute the fulcrums around which the entire decorative program is articulated.55 The observation is of considerable importance, for it suggests that the Karramiya shared the conventional designation of a westerly qibla (Mecca orientation) with their Hanafi contemporaries in Afghanistan and Central Asia. That common ground should exist between the two on such a fundamental matter is perhaps not surprising, in view of reports that the citizenry of Ghur adhered to Karrami doctrines in matters of religion (din) and Hanafi precepts in matters of law (fiqh).56

The eastern section (face 4), which a viewer would have faced while oriented toward a westerly qibla, is further distinguished by the presence of an arched panel resembling a minbar (a directional indicator of prayer) surmounted by a knotted thornboidal pattern that is unique among the geometric panels of the minaret. It is precisely here, at what is clearly the visual and iconographic fulcrum of the minaret (what Berthes might have identified as its punctum), that verse 35 falls. There is no numerical logic for this positioning. The verse is not the midpoint of the chapter but the thirty-fifth verse in a series of ninety-eight, considerable care was thus taken to ensure that it fell precisely within the unique forms on the eastern facade. The verses that begin within the hands of the knot (fig. 10: face 4, between I and J above panel 3), then run down the left-hand frame of the arched panel below and the right side of the star beneath, read as follows:

This was Jesus, son of Mary:
A true account they contend about. [34]
It does not becloud God to have a son.
Too immaculate is He! When He decrees a thing
He has only to say: "Be," and it is[kun
fayż kān]. [35]

The chapter then continues:
Jesus only said: "Surely God is my Lord and your Lord,
so worship Him.
This is the straight path." [36]
Yet the sectarians differed among themselves.
As for the unbelievers when they see the
Terrible Day! [37]

The same verses appeared in the interior of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem [72/692] almost five centuries earlier.57 There, the emphasis on the mortality of Jesus had a literal relevance, revisiting a locus classicus of doctrinal difference between Islam.
and the Christian majority of the city [Muslims believe in the prophecy of Jesus but not in his divinity]. There is little evidence, however, for a Christian population in medieval Ghur, and it seems unlikely that the entire epigraphic program of the Jam minaret was designed to address the tiny community of Jews known to have existed there.

In an analysis of the way in which modern preachers deploy specific Qur'anic verses, Richard Antoun has argued that to consider Qur'anic verses divorced from their "spatial, social and diachronic contexts" is to confer upon them "a false semantic content." This is especially true of Qur'anic texts inscribed on monumental architecture, each of which constitutes "an interpretive moment given permanence," a reflection of the particular valences acquired by sacred scripture in specific historical contexts. To read the verses inscribed on the minaret of Jam as a literal address to Christians and Jews is to indulge a literalism, an assumption of transparency, that ignores the complex nuances and resonances that specific verses acquired not only within contemporary (and sometimes contrary) exegetical traditions, but also within kalam and the polemical exchanges of medieval theologians and jurists. As studies of Qur'anic recitation have reminded us, scripture is not reducible to a physically or conceptually static artifact but is rather constituted by sacred text "in its relationship to persons and communities of faith."

Rather than an address to some nebulous monotheist or polytheist other, then, the central epigraphic program of the minaret should be understood as a bold address to the fractious monotheist self. At the heart of the decorative scheme, in the focal inscription of the minaret, appears a distillation of the themes of prophecy, revelation, promise, and warning central to Karrami belief. The same themes are reiterated at regular intervals throughout the Surat Maryam, which invokes a dazzling array of ancestors and prophets, including Aaron, Adam, Abraham, Idris (Ezra), Isaac, Isma'il, Jacob, John, Jesus, Moses, Noah, and Zachariah. Indeed, it is hard to think of another Qur'anic chapter in which such a vast array of prophets appears. The theme of the revealed book is also repeatedly emphasized, often in conjunction with the commemoration of these saintly figures, and dire warnings are visited on those who deny the unity of God or disbelieve in him.

The care taken to position verse 35 provides the clinching argument, for it evidently reflects the centrality of the Qur'anic phrase kun fayakin in kalam concerning the complex relationship between divine will and word, power and creation. While the occurrences of the phrase kun fayakin in the Qur'an all appear amid elucidations of God's creative abilities, the linkage between the person of Jesus and the creative power of the divine command kun throws these issues into high relief, as the Virgin Birth (in which Muslims believe, and which is alluded to in verse 30 of the Surat Maryam) offers one of the ultimate proofs of God's ability to call into being with his command kun. However, the highlighted verses also reject Christian belief in Jesus' divinity, which contradicts the notion of tawhid, the oneness of God, that is central to Islamic thought. Indeed, four of the eight Qur'anic occurrences of the phrase kun fayakin (including that in the Surat Maryam) relate specifically to the creation and nature of Jesus, asserting his mortal character despite the unusual circumstances of his conception, and denying his divinity. The Qur'anic commentary of al-Surabadi constitutes a key document for...
evaluating how these verses were understood in a contemporary Karrami milieu, for its inclusion in the royal Qur’an of 584/1189, a Qur’an probably commissioned for a Karrami institution, indicates its currency at the Ghurid court. In his exegesis of Qur’an 19:35, al-Surabādī links the phrase kun fayakū in with the creative power of God, while emphasizing that the verse contains a rebuttal to those who assert that Jesus was his son. Rather than making a transparent allusion to a hypothetical Christian community, this emphasis on the mortality of Christ in the Qur’anic verses highlighted on the Jam minaret is likely to reflect contemporary criticisms that certain of the anthropomorphist views of the Karramiya had a Christian origin. Such criticisms are found in the work of scholars such as Abu Mansur al-Baghdādi (d. 429/1037) and Abu'l-Muzaffar al-Islārānī (d. 471/1078).68

Considered within the frame of Karrami theology (as far as we can reconstruct it), Qur’an 19:34–35 addresses the relationship between God’s eternal essence and his temporal creative powers, while underlining that the latter did not extend to the production of divine progeny. If the choice of the Surat Maryam reveals the entire program of the minaret as a doctrinal exposition of Karrami theology, the focal verse highlights the issue of anthropomorphism, establishing its appropriate limits in a manner that serves as a rebuttal to the critics of the Karramiya. The discursive deployment of Qur’anic citation on the minaret thus reflects the ability of the timeless text to acquire particular valences that inflect its deployment in historically specific contexts. Assuming (as seems likely) that the verses were chosen for their ability to reflect contemporary concerns, the polytheists and unbelievers referred to in the Surat Maryam are more likely to refer to the Ghuzz Turks, or the Muslim opponents of the Karramiya, who depicted the Karramiya in turn as heretics and spreaders of sedition, than the far-distant Hindus.

Seen in this light, the minaret represents a remarkably sophisticated synthesis of architectural form, decorative elaboration, and epigraphic content that opens a unique window onto the complex entanglements of architectural patronage, dynastic aspirations, legal proscriptions, and theological disputations in the turbulent marches of the eastern Islamic world. Construction of the minaret was not a heuristic enterprise but one that reflects a great deal of planning and probably active collaboration between artisans, khatib [preacher], or qadi [judge], and patron.70 However deliberate the choice and positioning of the Qur’anic verses on the lower shaft of the minaret may have been, their legibility (and hence their utility as discursive statements) was somewhat circumscribed by their elevated placement, scale, and use of a fancy script.71 The need for modern photographic technology to read many of them suggests that their presence was intended as a “symbolic affirmation” of Karrami doctrines to be apprehended monoptically rather than painstakingly deciphered.72 This being so, the minaret may have been intended to provide a focal monument for the Karramiyya self as much as to convey a message to its Shafi’i or Hanafi opponents, the epigraphic content and meaning of the monument being known to a learned few and susceptible of oral transmission to those not cognizant with the arcane theological milieu and abstruse doctrinal disputes that informed both.73 There is no reason to assume that these meanings were perpetuated much beyond the generation following the minaret’s construction, the “short charge” of epigraphic semiosis in Islamic architecture, the ability for the interpretive moment to be subsumed in the diachronic reception of the monument, has been noted elsewhere.74 In any case, the pietistic inclinations of the Shamsahānī sultans were soon to shift away from the Karramiya, as we shall see shortly.

The evidence identifying the preeminent architectural monument of the Ghurid sultans as a Karrami document suggests the possibility that other known Ghurid monuments might also have been constructed for the sect. Although none of the madrasas that Chiyāth al-Dīn built for the Karramiya is known to survive, it is possible that the fragmentary and richly decorated madrasa at Shah-i Mashhad in Ghārijistān, dated 571/1176 [fig. 11], was dedicated for their use. Ghārijistān, like Ghur, had historical connections with the Karramiya, for it was among the areas in which Abu ‘Abd Allah

Flood 103
Muhammad ibn Karram, the founder of the sect, had preached during his lifetime. To judge from the decorations of the Jam minaret, the Karramiya adopted a conventional westward qibla orientation, like their contemporaries in the orthodox Hanafi madhhab. The fragmentary state of the Shah-i Mashhad madrasa makes its qibla orientation difficult to determine, but suggestions that it was occluded leave open the possibility that it was among those constructed for the sect by the Ghurid elite.76

If the identities and personalities of the religious scholars of Firuzkuh who may have shaped the epigraphic program of the Jam minaret are elusive, medieval texts and inscriptions are a little more forthcoming on the architectural patronage of the Ghurid elite. The foundation text of the Shah-i Mashhad madrasa, for example, refers to its female patron as “the great wise queen” [malika al-mu’azzam al-’alima], and it has been suggested that the lady in question was Malika Taj al-Harir Jawhar Malik, the wife of sultan Ghiyath al-Din.77 Given that the wife of the Seljuq sultan Sanjar had restored the royal caravanserai at Ribat-i Sharaf in eastern Iran in 549/1153, this is by no means implausible.78 Little is known about Ghiyath al-Din’s queen, however, and two prominent Ghurid royal women known to have acted as architectural patrons are more plausible candidates. The first is Malika-i Hajji, the mother of Ziya’ al-Din, sultan Ghiyath al-Din’s cousin and son-in-law, who held the appanage of Nishapur and eventually succeeded Ghiyath al-Din as sultan at Firuzkuh.79 Malika-i Hajji had made the pilgrimage to Mecca with her son, founded a khanqah in the holy city, and is reported to have founded mosques, pulpits, and religious schools in the Ghurid territories.80 An alternative patron for the Shah-i Mashhad madrasa would be Mah Malik or Malika.
al-Jalali, Sultan Ghiyath al-Din’s daughter, the wife of Ziya’-al-Din and a woman famed for her religious learning and piety. The bestowal of a robe of honor (an honorific device often associated with the conferment of political authority) on Malik by her uncle, Sultan Mu’izz al-Din, suggests that she was a figure of some importance, an impression reinforced by a recent report that illegal excavations in the vicinity of the Jam minaret had uncovered a foundation text bearing her name. Her husband, Ziya’-al-Din, was one of the most fervent supporters of the Karramiya in Fuzrukh, representing their interests in the turbulent events of 595/1199, to which I now turn briefly in conclusion.

Orthodoxy

The association between the Shansabanids and the Karramiya was not an enduring one. In 595/1199, the Ghurid sultans abruptly ended their patronage of the sect, with its regional and rather backwoods associations, and embraced instead the orthodox (and more transregional) Hanafi and Shafi’i law schools of Sunni Islam. Whereas Ghiyath al-Din became a Shafi’i, building Shafi’i madrasas and a mosque at Ghazna, Mu’izz al-Din became a Hanafi, embracing what was in effect the preeminent madhhab among the population of Ghazna.

The historian Minhaji al-Din Juzjani, who was raised at the Ghurid court in Fuzrukh, attributes this dramatic shift in Ghurid piety and patronage to a dream in which the eponymous founder of the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence appeared to the sultan. According to Ibn al-Athir (d. 630/1233), however, the sultan’s conversion was occasioned through the mediation of the Shafi’i faqih jurisprudent] Shaykh Waihi al-Din al-Marvarudhi, invited to Fuzrukh by the court poet Fakhri al-Din Mubarakshah who had realized the errors in Karramiya doctrine. The notion of a reinvention of the royal persona resulting from the agency of a single individual (whether visionary or incarnate) is suspect, but the idea of mediation by individuals with strong connections to a wider Islamic world is quite plausible. In 594/1198, just a year before these events, the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Nasir (d. 622/1225) had dispatched the famous Shafi’i faqih Yahya ibn Rabi’, of the celebrated Nizamiyah School in Baghdad, to Ghur. There he reportedly remained for four years, strengthening the ties between Baghdad and the Ghurid sultanate. The timing is suggestive, as is the concentrated presence of other major Shafi’i thinkers and Sufi preachers in Fuzrukh at this time. These shifts in pietistic affiliations were not without consequences. On the contrary, we are told that the feelings of the inhabitants of Ghur were sufficiently inflamed that a fitna ‘izzina, or great civil disturbance, broke out in Fuzrukh. The disturbances were not confined to Ghur, where the Karramiya and their supporters were a majority. The Karramı imam of a madrasa at Afshin in Ghurjistan, an area with historical links to Ibn Karram, penned a series of polemical verses criticizing Sultan Ghiyath al-Din, which were sufficiently inflammatory to earn the writer a year’s exile to Nishapur. Civil strife between the Karramiya and their opponents was common during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the violent events of 595/1199 in Fuzrukh were foreshadowed by a number of earlier disturbances in eastern Iranian cities, including Bayhaq (Sabzevar), Herat, and Nishapur. The role of architectural desecration and destruction in these disturbances provides a striking reminder of how heterogeneous and potentially fractious the Muslim self could be.

However unpopular at home, the events of 595/1199 coincide with the emergence of the Ghurid sultans as major players on the world stage, the result of rapid territorial expansion westward into Khurasan and eastward into north India. Occurring just seven years after the conquest of major north Indian cities such as Delhi (a point to which I return), the development reflects the changing nature of the Ghurid sultanate. I suggest above that the titulature of the Ghurid sultans hints at a capacity for reinventing the self (or at least its “official” manifestations) in tandem with the shifting fortunes of the sultanate. This capacity for self-fashioning was already apparent to medieval observers, for Ibn al-Athir observes that when the Ghurid sultans became rulers of Khurasan (that is, of the wider Iranian world), they learned that the Karramiya were considered theologically unsophisticated and therefore
decided to alter their doctrinal allegiances and embrace Shafi‘ism. 91
Among the events of 595/1199 was a concerted attack mounted by the Karramiya on the celebrated Shafi‘i theologian Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, another thinker who came to preach in Firuzkuh and Ghazna at the invitation of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din and later served as an envoy to India. 92 In his speech from the minbar (pulpit) of the Great Mosque of Firuzkuh opposing al-Razi, the leader of the Firuzkuh Karramis, Ibn al-Qudwa, who belonged to the Haysamiyya subsect of the Karramiya, denounced the faqih as espousing the unbelief of Ibn Sina, and the philosophy of al-Farabi, two of the great thinkers of the wider Sunni world whose work Fakhr al-Din al-Razi had studied and commented on. 93 As a religious faction with strong regional ties, the Karramiya were evidently opposed to the sorts of theological cosmopolitanism that the Shafi‘is and Sufis represented. The timing of the switch to a more transregional form of Sunni Islam suggests that it was this very cosmopolitanism that rendered the orthodox schools of jurisprudence attractive to the Ghurid sultans. 94
Although it has escaped notice, the theological volte-face of 595/1199 was also reflected in significant alterations to the “official” self-representations of Ghurid sultans and the media that bore them. In 596/1200, one year after the Firuzkuh riots, major changes were instituted to Ghurid gold and silver coinage. Before 595/1199, in addition to the ubiquitous “bull and horseman” coin type of northwest India, Ghurid mints had also issued coins of traditional epigraphic type, consisting of a central field with superimposed horizontal lines of script and a circular marginal legend (fig. 12). 95 From 596/1200 onward, however, these were supplemented by two new coin types, introduced in a variety of weight standards as both gold dinars and silver dirhams: one bore a distinctive concentric-circle (or “bull’s-eye”) motif, the other a square-in-circle design (figs. 13 and 14).
Both types had originated in the Fatimid and Almohad polities of North Africa during the tenth and twelfth centuries, respectively, and had thence been adopted by the Sunni rulers of the eastern Mediterranean. 96 The introduction of these new coin types thus
linked the Ghurids more directly with their Sunni contemporaries in the wider Islamic world. It is even possible that the contemporary Ayyubid sultanaate of Syria, which had adopted these coin types a few decades earlier, provided the specific models for the new coinage (figs. 15 and 16). The false claim of the Ayyubid sultan Salah al-Din (known to Western sources as Saladin) was then at its zenith. Having ended the rule of the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt in 567/1171 (thus bringing the eastern Mediterranean back into the Sunni fold), Salah al-Din recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 582/1187. Minhaj al-Siraj Jusjami, who was raised at the Ghurid court in Firuzkuh, explicitly compares the military victories of Salah al-Din against the Isma‘ili Fatimids and Christian Franks in the West with those of the Ghurid sultan Mu‘izz al-Din against the Ghaznavid and Hindu kingdoms of northern India in the East during the same period. The Ayyubids also championed the cause of the Shafi‘i madhhab, promoting themselves as upholders of Sunni orthodoxy and employing Qur‘anic inscriptions to this end.

The internationalist turn in the Ghurid polity was indicated not only by the connotative value of the coin types but also by their denotative content. It is on these newly introduced Ghurid coin types that Qur‘anic quotations appear, apparently for the very first time. On both types the quotation consists of Qur’an 93:3, a relatively common numismatic inscription that had appeared on the Afghan coin issues of the Ghaznavid and Samanid predecessors of the Ghurids: “It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the true faith in order to make it superior to other systems of belief, even though the polytheists may not like it.”

The prolific gold and silver issues minted in Ghazna from 590/1194 onward probably reflect an influx of Indian gold after a major victory in India two years earlier, and it is tempting to relate the presence of this verse to those contemporary Indian campaigns. However, this Qur‘anic assertion of orthodoxy is intimately associated with the minting of new “international” coin types that follows hard on the heels of the Ghurids’ radical shift away from the Karramiya in 595/1199 and to which it is likely to be related. Rhetorical accusations of heresy and unbelief were the stock-in-trade of the interminable theological disputes that wracked Khurasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, leveled with equal acrimony at Sunnis and Shi‘is, Shafi‘is and Karramis. It is precisely within the rhetorical frame of heterodoxy, innovation, and polytheism that the dislocations between the representatives of the Karramia, the Shafi‘iya and the Hanafiya in 595/1199 were reportedly conducted. Conversely, despite their popularity in Khurasan, the Karramia had long been depicted as a heretical sect and anathematized both within and without the region. The sudden appearance of a Qur‘anic verse on Ghurid coins, and the choice of verse in particular, suggests that a
tradition of using selective Qur’anic quotations for polemical purposes, a tradition that had previously been harnessed to the promotion of the Karramiya madhab favored by the Ghurid sultans, was deployed in favor of the other madhabs after 595/1199.

Alterations to the form and epigraphic content of Iranian coins have been correlated with the conversion of the Ilkhanid sultan Uljaytu from Shi‘ism to Sunnism in 709/1308, an event that sparked riots reminiscent of those that followed the Ghurids’ abandonment of the Karramiya a century earlier.\textsuperscript{105} In the later case, however, the numismatic charges reflect shifting patterns of royal patronage and resulting alterations to the power balance between rival Sunni groups. The numismatic dissemination of a Qur’anic quotation, one chosen for its ability to promote the position of a particular Sunni faction, finds more germane precedents in the eastern Iranian coin issues of the Ghaznavid and Seljuk sultans whom the Ghurids succeeded.\textsuperscript{106}

**Medieval Heterodoxies and Modern Orthodoxies**

The shifting pictistic inclinations of the Ghurid sultans call into question any notion of a unitary Muslim self, even among elite strata of medieval societies, while the epigraphic program of the Jam minaret offers a very concrete paradigm for understanding the ways in which intra-Muslim doctrinal disputes inflected elite material culture. Perhaps more significant, it illustrates how a failure to interrogate the adjective Muslim or Islamic can obscure or relegate such inflections in favor of more essentializing interpretations. This point has ramifications well beyond the often arcane worlds of medieval theology and modern art history.

In traditional historiography (and art historiography), it has been taken as axiomatic that Ghurid expansion into north India in the 1190s constituted a “Muslim” or “Islamic” conquest (in fact the Islamic conquest) of India, in which a reified Muslim self defeated a hypostatized Hindu other largely constructed in opposition to it. The material instantiations of the medieval past, chief among them the mosques erected in north India in the wake of the Ghurid conquest, have served to validate this reading. These mosques, among them well-known monuments such as the Qutb Minar (1190 onward) and its associated mosque in Delhi (1192 onward), were largely constructed from spolia taken from temples and other structures, and their reception in colonial and post-colonial scholarship has been characterized by the Manichaean division between “Hindu” and “Muslim” traditions that pervades much writing on the period. Despite its geographic and art historical obscurity, the Ghurid sultanate thus occupies center stage in modern polemical and rhetorical representations of medieval South Asian history and their reflections in contemporary Indian politics.\textsuperscript{107}

For medieval observers who wrote about their experience of the Qutb Mosque in Delhi, the most celebrated of the Indo-Ghurid mosques, the extraordinary ubiquity of Qur’anic inscriptions covering the facade of the prayer hall and the adjoining minaret (figs. 17–20) left a far greater impression than the recycled architectural materials. The proliferation of epigraphy in this and other Indo-Ghurid mosques follows a tradition established in the Ghurid monuments of eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and the Indus Valley, which have been compared to “huge billboards proclaiming various messages at those who enter them.”\textsuperscript{108} As we have seen, the programmatic nature of the Qur’anic inscriptions on Ghurid monuments can hardly be doubted (even if they are imperfectly understood), suggesting that what was exported to India in the last decade of the twelfth century was not only a penchant for monumental epigraphy but also an established tradition of employing Qur’anic quotations discursively.\textsuperscript{109}

Studies of the Qur’anic inscriptions in the Indo-Ghurid mosques have highlighted their emphasis on idolatry and unbelief, assuming that their content constitutes them as discursive statements addressed to the conquered Hindu population in some unexamined sense. As with the minaret of Jam, a rhetorical emphasis on infidelity in the inscriptions of these mosques has been among the factors that have constituted them as symbols of “Muslim” victory, contributing to a modern polemic of the medieval.

Construction of Indo-Ghurid mosques like the Qutb Mosque straddled the period of sco-
tarian conflicts in the Ghurid homelands, in which architecture was no less instrumental than epigraphy. Just as architectural patronage had been integral to the Ghurids’ promotion and support of the Karramiya, the patronage of monumental architecture also served to signify the realignment of the Ghurid polity after 595/1199. In 597/1201, for example, when a fire provided Sultan Ghiyath al-Din with the opportunity to undertake a major renovation or rebuilding of the Great Mosque of Herat (funded at least in part by Indian booty), the imamate of the mosque was bestowed on the Shafi’i in perpetuity.\(^\text{110}\)

The instrumentality of both architecture and epigraphy to the internecine disputes between different Sunni factions is integral to understanding the architectural patronage of the Ghurid sultans and their Turkic generals in north India. Although it was the product of territorial expansion, construction of the Indian mosques should also be understood as part of an extended program of Ghurid architectural patronage in the last decade of the sixth/seventh century. Based on the evidence from contemporary Afghanistan, it seems likely that the multiple references to error, falsity, and unbelief in their Qur’anic inscriptions constituted an address to audiences that may have included the Hindu unbeliever but also addressed the heterogeneous Muslim population.\(^\text{111}\)

The question
of religious identity is further complicated by the existence of communities of Muslims of various sorts in north Indian cities before the conquest, communities that included Muslims who did not necessarily share the confessional affinities of the Ghurids or their Turkic soldiers. Doctrinal schisms and their correlates in architectural violence continued to be part of the cultural life of the Muslim communities of north India even after the conquest, following a pattern familiar from eastern Iran and Afghanistan in the preceding two centuries. In 634/1236, for example, riots broke out at the Qutb Mosque in Delhi, reportedly involving Isma'illis and Shi'is.

The connection between campaigns against heresy and rhetoric about it in contemporary manuals on statecraft, a linkage reflected in the titles of the Ghurid sultans, is central to understanding the discursive function of the Qur'anic citations in Ghurid architecture as a whole, not just those in north Indian mosques. The eastward expansion of the Ghurid sultanate began with a successful campaign against the Isma'ili Shi'is of Multan and Sind by Mu'izz al-Din in 569/1174 and effectively ended with his murder by one of their number in 603/1206. The rise and fall of the Ghurid sultanate is thus circumscribed by questions of orthodoxy, heterodoxy (or even heresy), and self-definitions made in relation to the rhetorical claims of both. The last decade of the sixth/seventh century is particularly marked by convulsive sectarian disputes and shifting patterns of religious patronage in the Ghurid heartlands. Contemporary as they are with Ghurid expansion into north India, these shifts undermine the notion of a singular and stable self, defined through religious affinity. They also provide a context for understanding contemporary architectural patronage that is at once more nuanced and historicizing than the generic tropes of "Muslim" victory or "Hindu-Muslim" antipathy.

Returning to the terminological problem with which I began, it might be argued that the use of the qualifying adjectives Islamic or Muslim by historians of medieval art and architecture has produced a coherence effect that both assumes and produces the umma, the Muslim community, as a homogeneous or monolithic entity. Despite their undoubted
convenience, the use of these terms obscures the fact that, at any given moment, the Muslim self was never an entirely unitary or static entity, but rather comprised multiple complementary or competing selves constituted dynamically and relationally in response to shifting cultural, historical, and political conditions. The evidence from the remote mountain valleys of Afghanistan suggests that these alternative selves can be intrinsic to an understanding of pre-modern artistic production, highlighting the need for future research rooted in specific historical conditions rather than generic rhetorical representations.

One final point concerns the interplay of text and artifact in synchronic deployments of Qur’anic scripture. Studies of Qur’anic inscriptions on medieval monuments have generally been undertaken using epigraphic compendia that ignore the materiality of monumental inscriptions, thereby privileging textual content in a way that betrays the genealogical origins of Islamic art history in Oriental studies. Any hypothesis regarding the meaning of the minaret of Jam and its enigmatic epigraphic program, for example, must address both context and content, formal and textual aspects of the monument. Although one can agree wholeheartedly with Carole Hillenbrand’s observation that in the analysis of monumental Qur’anic inscriptions, “the focus of scholarship must shift from mere epigraphy to Qur’anic studies,” one might therefore also emphasize the need for scholars of both religious ideas and Qur’anic epigraphy to engage with the materiality of their sources.115
NOTES

This essay expands on a theme first articulated in Finbar Barry Flood, review of Le Minaret Ghoride de Far: Un chef d’oeuvre du XIIe siècle by Janine Sourdel-Thomine, Art Bulletin 87, no. 3 (September 2005): 536–543 and n. 202. Some of the material that it contains was discussed in the Indian Economic and Social History Review in the same month (see n. 30 below). I express my sincere thanks to Mohammad Reza Kaspar and Zohreh Rouhafz of the Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, for their generosity in facilitating access to the Ghurid manuscript discussed here. I am also grateful to Michael Bates of the American Numismatic Society and to Lutz Bisch of Tübingen University for making the Ghurid numismatic material available to me, to Bernt Glazner for supplying images of Shihab al-Mashhad, and to Everett Rovson, New York University, for helping to clarify my understanding and translations of the relevant theological doctrines.


15. In the absence of decisive marks [which were often omitted in medieval inscriptions], the words for seventy (sub’in) and ninety (tis’in) in Arabic are virtually indistinguishable. Ralph Pinder-Wilson (2001, 165, figs. 32–34) has argued for a reading of 590/1193–94, and this date has been cited in most literature on the minaret. Using photographic material garnered in 1966, however, Sourdel-Thomine (2004, 133–139) reads the inscription as bi‘r-rashid tasn sub’in wa khamsani‘a [on the date of the year five hundred and seventy [1174–1175]] rather than tis’in wa khamsani‘a [five hundred and ninety]. Everything rests on the question of whether or not the haste of the initial letter of the disputed word extends horizontally leftward at its terminal point, as Pinder-Wilson suggests in his text and accompanying drawing. This would identify it as the Arabic letter


27. On the subdivisions of the Karmaniaiy, see Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karim al-Shabestani, Al-Milāl wa-l-Sulṭān [Cairo, 1972], 111; Esté Chambers Seelye, Modern Schisms and Sects [Al-Farq ‘alai al-Farq] [New York, 1960], 38; Bosworth 1978, 668.


32. The third volume was exhibited in Boston and New York in 1949, and another or the same volume was seen in London in 1974. Rahmān-i Gendārā-ī Qurtā’ī dan Māzār-ī Dārās-ī Bastān [Teheran, 1949], part 2, nos. 30-33, 16-17; Mehdī Balanch, Iranian Art: Treasures from the Imperial Collections and Museums of Iran [exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art] [New York, 1949], 33, no. 52; Dahu Jones and George Mitchell, eds., The Arts of Islam [exh. cat., Hayward Gallery] [London, 1974], 350, no. 590.


33. The nearest dated Afghan companion is a Qur’ān executed at Buz in 605/1209-1210, the pages of which measure 20.4 by 15.1 centimeters: François Déroche, Les manuscrits du Cosan du Maghāb à Plaisance, Bibliothèque nationale de France, catalogue des manuscrits arabes II. Manuscripts musulmans 12a [Paris, 1985], 33, no. 532, plates 78 and 258. Two Imāmī Qur’āns in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin and the Nasser D. Khalili Collection in London are closer in size: the former measure 39 by 33 centimeters, the latter 39.3 by 32.4 centimeters. Although both are undated, on stylistic grounds they are datable to the end of the
twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth:

35. Hillenbrand 2000, 143.
39. Leonardo Capuzzo, "Alcatrià e Islamizzazione: iblis e il pavone nel commento Coranico di Sùrùbibi," Annali di Cultura Pensare 31, no. 3 (1992): 17. The language of the work is indicative of a Herati connection: Lazard 1963, 94. According to other sources, al-Surubi was hailed from Turbat-i Shuykh Jami, where the manuscript came to rest before its removal to the National Museum of Iran.
47. For an overview of these controversies, see Yasin Ceylan, Theyology and Tufid in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (Kuala Lumpur, 1996), 136–146; Roger Arnold, Fakhr al-Din al-Râzî: Commentateur du Coran et philosophe (Paris, 2004), 63–64. For the relationship between Ash'ari and Karami theology on these matters, see Ahmad Muhammad El-Galli, "The History and Doctrines of the Karrâmiyya Sect with Special Reference to al-Râzî's Criticism" (M.Litt. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1970), 75.
58. On the figure of Jesus in the Qur'an, see Claus Schiedel, Muhammad und Jesus: Die Christologisch Relevanten Texte des Korans [Vienna, Freiburg, and Basel, 1978].
64. It is precisely the proliferation of such familiar Old Testament figures that reportedly led Jafar b. Abu Talib, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, to receive this sura to the Negus of Abyssinia to win his sympathy and support for the nascent religion of Islam and the community of Muslims who sought shelter at his court. See Trevor Le Gassick, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad: A Translation of al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, vols. 1-5 [Reading, 1988]: 213.


70. Soudel-Thomine 2004, 154, 160. For a speculative attempt to reconstruct the sorts of collaborative processes that the minaret's epigraphic program suggests, see Richard Ettinghausen, "Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. Dichran K. Kouymjian [Beirut, 1974]: 307-308. See also Welch, Keshani, and Buh 2003, 14. The orchestration of the epigraphic program so that a key verse both describes and coincides with the nodal point of the decorative program hints at an early use of paper notation, documented only from the thirteenth century onward.

71. Note that the shahāda is set at the summit of the minaret, precluding easy legibility; yet this is arguably the most important of all the inscriptions, a basic affirmation of the core beliefs that unite the Muslim community, the umma.

72. This distinction and the idea of a monocular perception (appréhension as a glance) is borrowed from Oleg Grabar, *The Meditation of Ornament*, Bellinger Series 38 [Princeton, 1992], 103.

73. Ettinghausen 1974, 308, Edwards 1991, 65, 70. For a discussion of the question of legibility in relation to Ghurid and early sultanate processes in India, see Sunil Kumar, "The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate, 588-685/1193-1286" [PhD diss., Duke University, 1993]: 231-234. It is important here to bear in mind the centrality of the oral and oral transmission of the Qur’an, to which the written text generally functioned as a kind of aide-mémoire for those who already knew it by heart: Grabham 1985, 34.

74. Ettinghausen 1974, 308, Edwards 2001, 65, 70. Both note the consequent tendency for awareness of the particular meanings of complex epigraphic programs to be lost over time, as did Grabar in his foundational essay on the Dome of the Rock (1959, 60-61).


76. Michael I. Cosmides and Bernt Glazier, "Sah-i Mashhad: A Recently Discovered Madrasah of the Ghurid Period in Gargistan [Afghanistan]," *East and West*, n.s. 31 [1971]: 54; Bernt Glazier, "The Madrasah of Shāh-i Mashhod in Badgīz," *Afghanistan* 25, no. 4 (1973): 47-48. Blair (1985, 90 n. 35) suggests that this may have been a Shafi‘i foundation with a southerly orientation. With the principal entrance apparently sited on the south facade, this would produce the very unsatisfactory arrangement of entering the building and then being compelled to double back to access the prayer chamber.

77. Blair 1985, 81.


81. Jurjani 1963-1964, 1:391-392; Raverty 1970, 1:391-392; 1:397-398. We are told that Malik Buq was the living example of the Mongol invasions of Iraq. Assuming that she was in her twenties or thirties in 571/1175-6, when she founded the madrasa, she would have died in her seventies or eighties.


83. Ibn al-Athīr 1965-1967, 12:251-252, 154; Qazwini 1960, 430. In their shifting affiliations, the Ghurids show the same religious eclecticism and equivocation as their Ghaznavid predecessors. Mahmud of Ghazna had, for example, espoused the Karamiya before shifting his allegiances to the Shafi‘i, and the Ghaznavids generally inclined toward the Hanafi madhab: Bosworth 1977b.


87. Ali also relevant is Muhammad Ibn al-Mumawwar’s dedication of the A‘īdab al-Zawālī, a biography of the Sufi saint Abu Sa‘īd ibn Ali’, Khayān o Mayhān, who had clashed with the Karamiya, to Sultan Chiyath al-Din. Bosworth 1977b, 11. The author’s emphasis on the fundamental unity of the Shafi‘i and Hanafi madhhab may reflect the growing strength of both in the Ghurid domains in the second half of the twelfth century; see *The Secret of God’s Mystical Oneness, or, the Spiritual Stations of Shahīb Abu Sa‘īd*, trans. John O’Kane [Costa Mesa, Calif., 1992], 381.
88. Ibn al-Athir 1965-1969, 12:154; Ibn al-Sa‘i 1934, 4-6; El-Gallâr 1970, 34. Finsa is a theologically charged term that denotes “disturbances, or even civil war, involving the adoption of doctrinal attitudes which endanger the purity of the Muslim faith.” L. Gardet, “Finsa,” in Gibb et al. 1986-2003, 2:931.


90. Richard W. Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History [Cambridge, Mass., 1972], especially 28-47 and 235; Bulliet 1994, 147; El-Gallâr 1970, 16; Madelung 1988, 36-37; Bosworth 1977a, 11. In his study of the rivalry between the rival madhâbîs of Nishapur, the epicenter of intercommunal strife during the period, Bulliet has argued that the madhâbîn constituted not only schools of legal interpretation but also “political parties” united by “a vision of the right ordering of society,” which were “vying for possession of key political posts within the city and ultimately for the city itself” (Bulliet 1972, 38-39).


100. For earlier usage on Afghan coin issues, see Mitichiner 1973, 49, 122.


102. Note Bulliet’s distinction between “official” pronouncements and unofficial rhetoric: 1972, 30.


109. Robert Hillenbrand, “The Ghurid Tomb at Herat,” in Cairo to Kabul: Afghan and Islamic Studies Presented to Ralph Pinches-Wilson, ed. Warwick Ball and Leonard Harrow [London, 2003], 140. Titles emphasizing the role of the Shamsabâbîn sultûns as promoters of orthodoxy and extinguishers of polytheism are conspicuous by their absence from surviving monumental inscriptions in India and anywhere else in their domains. Qu’arînî rather than historical inscriptions seem to have assumed a primary historical function.


112. See, for example, a tombstone from Nagaur in Rajasthan, dated 545/1150 and belonging to the son of an Isma'ili missionary (dir`i): Mehdad Shokoochy and Natalie H. Shokoochy, Nagaur: Sultanate and Early Mughal History and Architecture of the District of Nagaur, India [London, 1993], 8.

