

A NEW VISION ABOUT HANDS' DRAWING IN THE ARAB PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

The Arab Painting School is one of the most important artistic of Islamic painting. Therefore, there have been a lot of studies about its representatives in term of classification of their images, their artistic characteristic and methods. However, none of these studies clearly indicates the different patterns of painting hands in this school, some of which were carried out in a number of scenarios in a manner contrary to logic, which is reflected in many of the paintings, and the remarkable thing here is that this difference may be drawn in the hands of one person only while drawing the rest of the hands of the characters in the same visualization in a correct and logical manner. All of that confirms the painter's knowledge of the correct technique of hands drawing, and it is also likely that there is a certain reason behind the drawing of the hand of this person in a different way to reality. This study traces and includes these models to discover the nature of this method, and to explain the reasons which propelled the painters of the Arab Painting School to implement it in their various images.

Keywords

Arab Painting School, Hands Drawings, Egypt, Mamlūk Painting.

ملخص

تعد مدرسة التصوير العربية واحدة من أهم المراكز الفنية التي عبرت عن مميزات التصوير الإسلامي، لذا فقد كرس كثير من الدراسات حولها من حيث تصنيف تصاويرها ومميزاتها الفنية وأساليب مصوريها. وعلى الرغم من ذلك فإن أياً من تلك الدراسات لم يشر بوضوح إلى اختلاف طريقة رسم اليدين في هذه المدرسة، والتي نفذ بعضها في عدد من التصاوير بأسلوب ينافي المنطق، كما ظهر في العديد من تصاويرها. والأمر اللافت للانتباه هنا هو أن هذا الاختلاف قد نشاهده في رسم يد شخص واحد فقط في التصويرية بينما ترسم باقي أيدي الشخصيات في نفس التصويرية بأسلوب صحيح ومنطقي؛ وهو الأمر الذي يؤكد على معرفة المصور بالأسلوب الفني الصحيح لاتجاهات رسم اليدين، ويرجع معه أيضاً إمكانية وجود سبب معين وراء رسمه ليد هذا الشخص بطريقة منافية للواقع. وقد حاولت في هذا البحث حصر وتتبع هذه النماذج، لمعرفة طبيعة هذا الأسلوب، وتوضيح أسبابه والدوافع التي حدثت بالمصور في المدرسة العربية لتنفيذه في تصاويره المختلفة. وقد تبين من الدراسة أن غالبية مصوري المدرسة العربية كانوا على علم واهتمام واضح برسم اليدين بأوضاعهما الصحيحة، كما أن عملية الخلط في رسم اليدين بدأت في فترة مبكرة في التصاوير التي تنسب إلى القرن 4هـ/10م. واتضح أن الغالبية العظمى من التصاوير التي حدث فيها الخلط في رسم اليدين - أياً كان سببه - كانت تنتمي إلى مدرسة التصوير العربية في مصر وبلاد الشام. كما تم الكشف من خلال تحليل التصاوير موضوع الدراسة عن الأسباب التي دفعت المصور إلى ذلك.

الكلمات الدالة

مدرسة التصوير العربية، رسوم الأيدي، مصر، التصوير المملوكي.

INTRODUCTION

Drawing and painting were one of the most important Art which accepted by Muslims to decorate walls and manuscripts.¹ Islamic painting in its various centres received scholars' attention. Many studies have been dedicated to studying the Arab School of Painting along with its characteristics; others have classified its artistic production according to the various technical centres affiliated to it.² However, this school still comprises many phenomena that deserve further research to improve the understanding of the characteristics of this school and to detect its painters' methods. One of these methods focuses on the drawing of hands.

It should be noted that recent studies have found that the hands are among the most important means of human development³. They prove that there are more neural connectors between the hands and brain than any other body parts. In addition, human hands' motions are a strong indication of our emotions. Their importance and their signals mean that the hands were often clearly depicted in front of the body.⁴

For that reason, painters have often been interested in the methods to draw hands, and they have developed different theories on the topic from the Renaissance to the modern era. In terms of different situations and methods of implementation, they found that the hand is the most moveable part of the human body; because of its multiple positions, they consider that the drawing of hands is a necessary process.⁵ So, Leonardo da Vinci advised those who wanted to practice the art of painting to diversify the movements, whether in their organs, hands or fingers.⁶

In reviewing artists of the Arab Painting School, one notices that they are generally interested in the drawings of hands, fingers and their positions. Many scholars interpreted this as an attempt to break the monotony and to create a state of dialogue between the main characters in the painting.⁷

Despite this, a series of paintings show artistic weaknesses in the drawing of the hands. In others, we see a reverse drawing of the hands between the right and the left of the same person, contrary to nature. However, the painter drew perfectly the hands of the other persons in the same painting. This dichotomy questions the reasons behind this phenomenon: was it the result of a weakness in the painter's artistic ability? Did the painter intend to draw hands different from the reality? Did he consider these characters unimportant for his composition and minimise the effort for their implementation? Did other motives cause this appearance?

Although these confusion and weakness in the drawing of hands appears in many of the Arab paintings, there is no study dedicated to this subject. This may be due to the scholarly concern of human figures along with their movements, as well as a focus on the main

¹Zaki, *al-fan al-Islami*, p.10.

² For more details see: Al-Basha, *Al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī fī al-'Isūr al-Wustá*, p.134; Farǧali, *Al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, pp. 80-83; Hussein, *Al-Madrash fī Al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p.116.

³Alan M. Wing, et al., *The Neurophysiology and Psychology of Hand Movements*, pp.1-3.

⁴BarbaraAnd Allan Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, pp. 125, 141.

⁵ Atrīs, *Fan al-Taṣwīr*, p.73; Lomis, *Drawing the Head and Hands*, pp.133-151.

⁶Leonardo da Vinci, *Naẓariyat al-Taṣwīr*, p. 204.

⁷Hussein, *Al-Fnūn al-Islamīh fī al-'aṣr al-Fatimī*, pp.226-228; Al-Shoky, "Taṣāwīr Al-Madrash al-'Arabiah fī daw' al-qawā'id al-Ḥadithali' ilmloght al-Gasad", pp.804-810.

components of the painting from the artistic and illustrative aspects. This paper aims to identify this phenomenon appearing in the Arab Painting, and then analyse and provide an interpretation.

Historical sources show that the Arabs described knew the differences within the movements of the hands and fingers, and identified them by different names. The *al-Tha'ālabī* (d. 429 AH/1038) cited in his book "*Fiqh al-Loghahwa Sir al-'arabiah*" about 36 names describing the hand movements and fingers signals. Moreover, in the eighth chapter of the same book, there is a detailed description, under the title "Analyzing the hand movements and its positions, and their classification" a pioneering reference that confirms the Arabs' knowledge about the indications given by the different movements of the hand.⁸ It illustrates how the Arabs knew early on the differences between the correct and the wrong movements of hands and fingers, which define the rules that the painters should follow in their drawing.

The first example shows the drawings of hands in the painting called "The Six Kings" located in the Umayyad Quṣayr 'Amrah, dating back to the reign of *al-Walīd Ibn 'Abd al-Malik* 96-86 H (705–715),⁹ which is one of the oldest known Islamic paintings executed in fresco. This painting was greatly influenced by Sassanian art, especially the hands drawn in a way that symbolised capitulation and submission.¹⁰

Another early painting contemporary to the previous one comes from the Qasr of al-Ḥīr al-gharbī which was built by the Caliph *Hisham Ibn 'Abd al-Malik* in 109 H (729),¹¹ now preserved in the National Museum of Damascus (Pl. 1).¹² This painting is surrounded by a circular frame with the image of Mother Earth "Gaea", the Greek goddess of the earth, holding a fruit-filled basket, with a serpent coiled around her neck.¹³

The weakness of the execution of the goddess Gaea is noticeable, as her face is drawn at a smaller scale that does not fit her body size. This is especially visible in the left hand, proportions for the rest of the body. This may be due primarily to the fact that the hands were not presented in the model that the artist was aware with his basic role of portrayal– if it existed. It is possible that these were the last elements added by the painter to the scene and executed in a hurry, which showed this weakness and disproportion with the contrary Byzantine methods.¹⁴

⁸Al-Tha'ālabī said: "If a person looks at people in the sun, then he should stick the letter of his palm to his forehead it's called Istikfāf, and if he raises his hand from the forehead it's called Istishraf, If he raises his forehead more it's called Istishraf, If he puts his hand on the wrists it's called I'tīṣam, if he puts them on the biceps it's called I'tīdād, if he moves the forefinger only it's called al-Ilwaa'. For more details see: Al-Tha'ālabī, *Fiqh al-Loghahwa Sir al-'arabiah*, pp. 134-135.

⁹Grabar, "The Painting of the Six Kings at Quṣayr 'Amrah", pp. 185-187.

¹⁰Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, pl.3; Fowden, *Quṣayr Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, pp.197-226.

¹¹Bisheh, *The Umayyads: The rise of Islamic Art, from, The Umayyads The Rise of Islamic Art*, pp.53-57.

¹²Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp.35-36.

¹³The picture is surrounded by a square of decoration surrounded by a frame with successive spiral circles, including vines. The square surrounding the circle was decorated with vegetal motifs, with two creatures displaying the upper half of the human body and the lower half resembling snake's coils, thickened with fins. The Tharwat 'Okasha mentioned that Schlumberger said "These creatures are in sea catacombs ». For more details see: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp.35-36; Okasha, *Mawso'at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p. 70.

¹⁴Grabar, "Islamic Art and Byzantium", pp. 67-88. pl.85.

Pl.1 Gaea and Marine Centaurs, floor fresco, Qasr of al-Ḥīr al-gharbī, National Museum of Damascus



The first known examples of painting on paper and manuscripts date back to the Abbasid period.¹⁵ Among the collection of "Archduke Rainer" in the National Library of Vienna, there is a drawing on paper showing a "horseman riding a horse" (Pl. 2). The reverse of this drawing comprises an Arabic inscription reading:

“وما توفيقى إلا بالله عليه توكلت” الحمد لله شكرا الحمد لله وحده [مما صوت] ر أبو تميم حيدرا¹⁶

It is said that it was found in the province of Fayoum, and probably attributed to Egypt in the 4th H (10th) century; it is known by many scholars as the oldest Islamic painting on paper.¹⁷

Pl. 2. The National Library of Vienna, a drawing on a paper showing a "horseman riding a horse", Fayoum (Egypt) 4th H (10th) c.



In this painting, the knight holds the horse with his left arm, his hand held in a manner different from reality; the viewer sees the palm of his hand and his fingers bent to the left to catch the bridle, as if it was his right hand, in violation of reality. One may argue that it is due to the limited abilities of the artist, but this reasoning overlooks the artistic abilities of the painter, which appear in the vitality of the movement of the horse and the skilful expression of the features of the cavalier's face, his body, the folds of the horseman clothes drawn transparent to showcase his leg. For these reasons, I suggest that the artist intended to draw the hand in such a method. This may be due to his keenness to show the knight's grip

¹⁵Okasha, *Mawso'atal-Taṣwīr al-Islāmī*, p. 75.

¹⁶Preserved under No. 954, paper measures 9.4 × 7.1 cm. For more details see: Arnold, (T.W), and Grohmann, (A)., *The Islamic Book. A Contribution to its Art and History*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁷Hassan ,*Atlas al-Fonwna-lzokhrofiah al-Islāmīahwa al-Taṣawīr*p. 849, p. 509.

on his horse's bridle, which suggests that this sheet of paper was part of an educational manuscript concerning the equestrian art. The focus of the painter being educational rather than artistic, he highlighted these aspects to show the main objective of this drawing.

A similar Fatimid painting on paper, dated the 5thH (11th) century (Pl. 3), preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo,¹⁸ was executed with black ink and shows two soldiers within a decorated frame. Above the main scene there is a foliated Kufic inscription reading:

"Almighty and turnout To the commander Abu Mansour" "عز واقبال للقائد ابي منصور[ور]"

The right soldier holds a spear in his hand, and on his head, there is a turban, its tail adorned with the Arabic word "بركه" "Blessing". The left warrior holds a sword decorated with the words "عز واقبال" "Almighty and turnout" and holds also a spear in his right hand. Both heads are surrounded by a circle.

The left hand of the soldier on the right was drawn the same way as seen in the previous Fayoum drawing; thus his left hand, which holds the spear, appears to be his right. Both hands of the other soldier were done in the correct manner. This confirms that the painter knew what he was doing and was familiar with the rules of drawing hands and their directions. Thus, he may have stressed here the strength of the holding of the spear by showing the soldier's grasp, ignoring the artistic features, which he skilfully applied elsewhere in the same painting.

Pl.3. Two soldiers, Drawing on paper, Fatimid period, 5th AH / 11th AD century, Egypt, The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo



The question here is whether this confusion in this painting is also apparent when hands are stretched out. Another Fatimid example answers this query. It is a restored ceramic-luster dish preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Pl. 4), attributed to the late Fatimid period¹⁹ (6th H/12th century).²⁰ The decorated scene shows a wrestling game between two bearded men, surrounded by spectators, standing and sitting, with the referee at the left of the scene, raising his right hand to the top while pointing with his left hand towards the wrestlers, perhaps referring to the necessity of stop playing. The theme of this painting is considered one of the most important expressive pictorial scenes of that period.²¹ All the

¹⁸Number 13703. For more details see: Hassan, *Knowzal-Fatimūn*, p. 102.

¹⁹Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp.55-82; Grube, "A Drawing of Wrestlers in the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art", pp. 89-106; Bear, "The Human Figure in Early Islamic Art", p.36. pp.32-41.

²⁰Ahmad, *Al-Fan al-Islamī Ḥata nehayat al-'Asr al-Fatimī*, p. 125.

²¹No. 9689, diameter 383 mm, for more details see: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp. 55-56.

hands in this scene were drawn correctly except for the left hand of the referee, which was drawn flat and stretched out. In a totally wrong position, in this case, the thumb should be on the top of the hand, while it is shown turned out under the hand; this is only compatible if this is the right hand. Moreover, it is difficult to believe that the painter who carried out this wonderful visual scene did this obvious mistake, especially as he drew all the other hands in the scene correctly. This non-realistic depiction, considering the theme of the painting along with its various movements, may refer to a specific action from the referee indicating a familiar sign during that period, perhaps announcing the end of the game. Scrutinising this scene shows that the player who is facing the referee seems very violent, whilst the features of the other player reflect pain and the desire to yield in. Thus, the referee's hand has been drawn in this non-figurative way to stress on its meaning, a sign to end the game immediately. This suggests that the Fatimid tradition in painting focuses mainly on the topic or the message of the drawing rather the artistic rules.

Pl.4. A Wrestling game on a Fatimid luster dish, Egypt (Source: The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo)



This tradition continued during the Mamlūk period, as suggested by a painting on paper also preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, which represents the “game of *tahṭīb*”²² (Pl.5) attributed to the Mamlūk manuscript entitled “العديم المثل الرفيع القدر”²³ “al-’adīm al-mthl al-rafi’ al-qadr”. Two men are playing while the referee or trainer stands on the left of the painting. The player on the right is holding his stick with his left hand, while grasping his opponent's one firmly in his right hand. This hand was drawn in a non-figurative way; its grip is visible and its fingers are turned back; in reality the grip should disappear behind the stick with only the fingers visible. Once again, the painter gave priority to the topic rather the artistic rules, stressing on the modality of the strong holding of the stick.

Consequently, some painters of the Arab painting preferred to overlook the artistic rules which they knew very well– to focus on the main message of their design, especially if it included an educational aspect, participating in the main goal of the drawing or the manuscript as a whole.

²²Number 18019 in the records of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.

²³These images were misidentified as manuscript of “ألعاب الفروسية” Al’ab al-Frusiya” as well as “Nihayat al-sul wa al-Ummiah والأمينية والأمنية”. However, Mohammad Ibrahim identified the manuscript in which these painting were taken, from the manuscript of “العديم المثل الرفيع القدر” al-’adīm al-mathal al-rafi’ al-qadr” For further details, see: Abd Al-’al, *’Ilm al-Ramī, Founuh wa Adwath fi daw’ al-Makhtoṭat al-Mamlukīah Dearasa Ḥaḍāriah Atharīh*, pp. 104-111.



Pl.5 *Tahṭīb*, from al-ʿadīm al-mathal al-rafiʿ al-qadr manuscript, Mamlūk period, 10th H/16th century, Egypt, (Source: The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo)

When surveying this phenomenon, it was noticed that in some specific pictorial scenes the painters were imposed to draw non figurative hands, as in the trumpet blowers' scenes. There, the hands were drawn non-realistic.

The seventh maqāmah “*Barqa ʿdiyāh*”²⁴ (Pl. 6) of the “Maqāmatal- Ḥarīrī” –preserved in the National Library of Paris,²⁵ dated 634 H (1237), attributed to the famous painter *Yaḥyā Ibn Mohammed al-Wāsiṭī* from Baghdad–represents an interesting example of the scene known as the “Reconnaissance the Crescent of Shawal”. It depicts a group of musicians playing on their different musical instruments while they are riding mules and donkeys. Horn blowers occupy the left corner of the scene. Each grabs his trumpet with his left hand and put it on his mouth, lifting it to the top. The hand was drawn from the inside and looks like the right hand, which is strange to *al-Wāsiṭī*, who was famous for his interest in details and the accuracy of implementation. *Al-Wāsiṭī* is considered by most scholars to be the most famous painter of the Arab painting.²⁶ *Al-Wāsiṭī* had the choice between three options: the first was to draw normally the players as they are holding the trumpet with the right hand, but with the trumpet raised upwards, as seen in the scene, the right arm would cut off the faces and completely cover them.

The second choice was to draw the left hand holding the trumpet, but in this case only the fingers would appear while the hand grip would disappear. This would give the viewer the impression of faintness and weakness of the trumpet players as a result of holding these trumpets with the left hand. This option was not favoured by *al-Wāsiṭī*, who resorted to having the player hold the trumpet with his left arm, showing the strength in the hand grip acting as the right hand, as it was illustrated.

²⁴Al-*Barqa ʿdiyāh* refers to Abu Zaʿīd’s uncle, and how his wife led him and dispersed him with the ritual prayer. For further details see Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmatal- Ḥarīrī*, pp. 68-74.

²⁵Reserved with MS number. Arab 5847 (Schefer Hariri), folio 19 recto, Full paper measures 234 x 261 mm for more details see: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp.118-100; O’kane, “Text and Paintings in the Al-WāsiṭīMaqāmāt”, pp. 41-55.

²⁶Okasha, *Fan al-Wāsiṭī*, pp.11-16; Roxburgh, “In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's Maqamat”, p.171.

Pl.6. Reconnaissance the crescent of Shawal
"Maqāmāt al- Ḥarīrī, seventh maqāmah
"Barqa 'diyāh National Library of Paris, dated 634 AH / 1237 AD, Baghdad, by *al-Wāsiṭī*
(Source: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p.118)



This hypothesis is confirmed by another painting by *al-Wāsiṭī* himself in the thirty-first "Maqāmāt", showing the "Parade of pilgrims" (Pl. 7).²⁷ It shows a procession of overlapping musicians, as in the previous painting, but this time they are riding horses and camels. The position of the trumpets players here was suitable to hold their trumpets with their right hands without cutting off the face, but *al-Wāsiṭī* did not do so because the fingers of the hand would appear instead of the grip. So, *al-Wāsiṭī* drew the players holding their trumpets with their left hands, tilting the body slightly forward so as not to let the arm block the details of the face. Al-Wāsiṭī was eager to show the grip of the trumpet's players, to add a sense of enthusiasm and strength to the viewer, which is described by 'Okasha: "short trumpets that excitedly pumped."²⁸

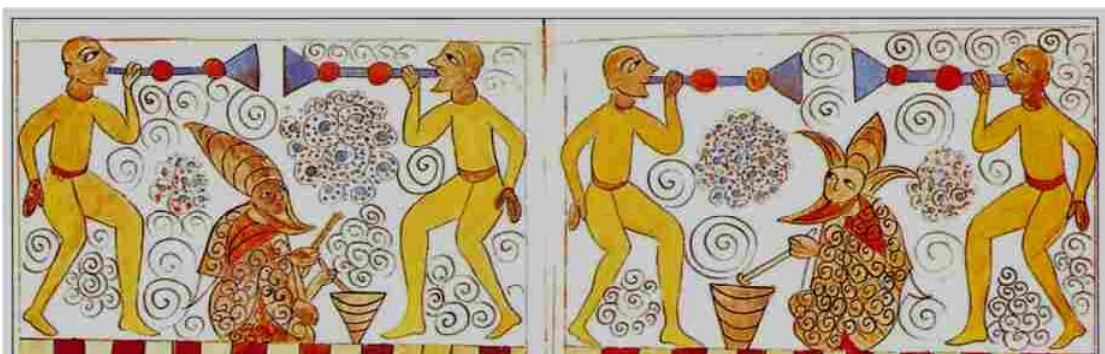
Pl.7 Procession of pilgrims,
"Maqāmāt al- Ḥarīrī, seventh maqāmah
"Barqa 'diyāh National Library of Paris, dated 634 H (1237), Baghdad, by *al-Wāsiṭī*
(Source: Roxburgh, "In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's Maqamat", pl.177)



²⁷Roxburgh, "In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's Maqamat", pp.171-212, pl.177.

²⁸Okasha, *Fan al-Wāsiṭī*, p.71.

Despite the scarcity of Arab painting scenes that show the shape of the hand during the blowing of the trumpet, we can see that the difficulty of its painting was a challenge for most painters and that continued clearly even after the end of the Arab school in Iraq. The same is seen in early Mongol painting which was influenced by the Arab painting traditions; in this instance, each painter tried to solve the problem using his own way and experience. The painting of the "Angel Israfil"²⁹ blowing the horn depicted in the manuscript of *al-Qazwīnī* the "*Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt waghārā'ib al-mawjūdāt*", presents a distinguished example.



Pl.8. Qānun al-Donyā wa 'jab' ha" "The Law of the World and its Wonders" Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, written by *Shaykh Ahmed al-Maṣrī* in 970 AH / 1562 AD, Mamlūk, Egypt or Syria
(Source: 'Okasha, *Mawso'at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, pl. 122M, p. 126)

This method can be seen also in a late manuscript entitled "Qānun al-Donyā wa 'jab' ha" "The Law of the World and its Wonders" attributed to Egypt or Syria, preserved in the Topkapi Saray Museum in Istanbul; it is a book written by *Shaykh Ahmed al-Maṣrī* in 970 H (1562), following the Mamluk style which may have been done in Syria as evidenced by many architectural decorations.³⁰ There are two opposite paintings of the group "The Savage Humans at the End of Earth" (Pl. 8), representing a drummer between two trumpeters at the top of the painting. Two trumpeters hold with their right hand the trumpet, while the other two are holding with their left. The drawing of the hands was made in an identical way; the grip of the hand to the outside while fingers were towards the inside, in a position contrary to reality for all of them. This indicates the commitment of the painter in the manner mentioned above either using in when the painter draw the right or the left hand. This conforms to what *al-Wāsiṭī* did more than three hundred years before in *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. The style of this painting is fraught and shows obvious weakness,³¹ a rigidity and a shoddiness that

²⁹ From the book of "*Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*" "The wonders of creatures", attributed to the school of Jalairid in Iraq in the period from 771 – 781 AH /1370-1805 AD, reserved in the Freer Gallery in Washington under the number verso 54.33-114., It shows the technical characteristics of the late Mongol era in the era of the Jalairid. For more details see: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 178-179. 'Okasha (Tharwat), *Mawso'at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p.126. Also, a picture for the same subject in another copy of the same manuscript, attributed to Baghdad in the late 8th AH/14th AD century, and early 9th AH/ 15th AD century, preserved in the British Museum 1963.0420.0.1 For more details see:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=265816&partId=1&images=true Filed under Revan 1638, folios 118 verso and 119 recto.

³⁰ Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp.180-181.; 'Okasha, *Mawso'at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, pl. 122M, p. 126.

³¹ Atil confirmed that the Sultan of Al-Ashraf Qansuh Al-Ghurī was the only Mamlūk Sultan among the Mamlūk Sultans who paid attention to illustrated manuscripts. This is confirmed by this decorated manuscript. This reduced overall interest led to the scarcity of Mamlūk manuscripts, in comparison to other contemporary art centers. For more details see: Atil, "Mamluk Painting in the late fifteenth century", p.169.

characterise most of the manuscript.³²

The theme of the painting may force the painter to find artistic alternatives methods even if it means he has to draw the hand in a non figurative style.

Pl.9. *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* sitting in the Science meeting, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* in the National library of Vienna, dated to 764 AH/1334 AD. The miniatures of this manuscript provide an accurate picture of Mamlūk painting in Egypt (Source: 'Okasha, *Mawso'atal-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p. 122. pl. 112M)



Some painters were used to drawing the hands in a non figurative method in most of their works, as shown in a copy of the manuscript *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* in the National library of Vienna, dated 764 H (1334). The miniatures of this manuscript provide an accurate picture of Mamlūk painting in Egypt. It is thus considered it to be one of the most important manuscript left of the Mamlūk era.³³ This is characterised by including the name of the calligrapher, “*Abu al-Faḍl ibn Abī Ishāq*.”³⁴ Some studies suggest that he was also the painter. This manuscript contains 69 images.³⁵ Despite the importance of this manuscript, many of his paintings appeared to have the hands drawn in unfamiliar and incorrect situations, among which a painting from the third *maqāmāh* “*al-Dīnārīh*”³⁶ depicting the theme of “*Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* sitting in a scientific session” (Pl. 9). It shows *al-Ḥarīth Ibn Hamam* with his colleagues, two of whom are only visible sitting on the left side of the painting. A man, *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī*, who is standing on the left, came out to them, and then *al-Ḥarīth* responded by giving him a *dīnār* due to his deficiency...³⁷ This is the story mentioned in the miniature, also seen in the painting, as *Abu Zaīd* stretches out his right hand to take the *dīnār* from *al-Ḥarīth* and indicates this with his closed left hand and his forefinger extended, showing his chanting in compliance to *al-Ḥarīth* requirement. The right hand of *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* was drawn in the right position, although the artist did not care to draw the

³²Most of the paintings in this manuscript reveal a mixture of Arabic, Persian and Turkish styles. Many of them also exhibit Hindu-European features. The style of these paintings reveals a tendency to be bold in the implementation and overcoming unimportant details. The images were dominated by the workmanship in the 7th -8th AH / 13th -14th AD centuries, which indicates the decline of the art of Arab Painting without the decline of other Arab-Islamic arts. For more details, see: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp.180-181.; 'Okasha, *Mawso'atal-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p. 122, p. 126.

³³'Okasha, *Mawso'at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p. 122.

³⁴Al-Bahnasī, *Fan Al-Taṣwīr fī 'alsr al-Islamī*, p. 69.

³⁵Farḡali, *Al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p. 147; Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p.148.

³⁶It is also called "al-Qīlīyah" which is a denunciation of the *dīnār* and its praise. For further details see: Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, pp. 23-33.

³⁷'Okasha, *Mawso'at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p. 122. Pl. 112M.

thumb smaller than the other fingers, since he drew all fingers in equal length,³⁸ which is contrary to reality. The painter may have wanted to highlight the strength of the grip of *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* holding the dinār.

Although we could find a reason for weakness in the previous illustration but we have a totally different drawing in the same manuscript, the eighth maqāmah “al-Ma’īah”³⁹ (Pl. 10), which represents “*Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* pleading before the judge.”⁴⁰ The internal scene shows a Byzantine influence visible in the decorative curtain occupying the space above the two main characters in the painting, in reference to the focus on the character of *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī*. In the same context, *Abu Zaīd* was painted acting a distinguished movement in contrast to the other two standing persons, who seemed silent and motionless despite raising their hands towards *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī*.⁴¹ The movement of the hand of the judge, who is pointing both hands at *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī*, were drawn here, as if to confirm the reference of the two standing persons. *Abu Zaīd*’s left hand was clearly illogically drawn, as the index finger appeared clear while the fingers were folded inward, the fingers should point out, in this position with the palm of the hand. Despite this artistic fault, we cannot ignore how the painter know the correct gestures of the hand which appear in his drawing to the hands of the other persons in the painting itself. The painter may have believed that if the left hand of the judge was drawn correctly, it pointed outwards the scene and not to *Abu Zaīd* himself; this position would have confused the audience understanding the judge's reference, and also to clearly emphasize the mistake that *Abu Zaīd* did in this case. The artist broke the artistic rules to implement hand directions. This interpretation has no evidence, except if this phenomenon was repeated by the same artist.



Pl.10. *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* pleading before the judge, Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī in the National library of Vienna, dated to 764 AH/1334 AD. The miniatures of this manuscript provide an accurate picture of Mamlūk painting in Egypt (Source: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p.149)

³⁸The length of the middle finger is about half the length of the hand, the pinky has the length of the upper bone of the finger, and the top of the thumb forms an arch with the bones of the other fingers, and the hand on the side shows the thumb from almost the face, and The thumb forms a 90-degree angle with the hand. For more details see: 'Atrīs ,Fan al-Taṣwīr, p.73.

³⁹It is about *Abu Zaīd* `sdispute with his son, for more details: See Al- Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt al- Ḥarīrī*, 76-83.

⁴⁰Measures 126 x 147 mm, A.F. 9, folio 30 Verso, for more details see: Ettinghausen,*Arab Painting*, pp.149-150.

⁴¹'Okasha, *Mawso'at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, p. 122.



Pl.11. Judge of al-Ma‘arah in the Judicial Council, Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī in the National library of Vienna, dated 764 AH/1334 AD. (Source: ‘Okasha, *Mawso‘atal-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, pl. 114, p. 123)

Other examples support this hypothesis as the painting representing "Judge of al-Ma‘arah al-No‘man in the Judicial Council" from the same Maqama (Pl.11). There two persons stand in front of the judge,⁴² one of them is a bearded old man, and the second is a beardless young man. The hands of the old man point to the judge; his right hand is painted this time different from reality. The painter drew the hand and the forefinger pointing at the judge, and it was logical here to show the palm of the hand and fingers along with the index finger. This supports the previous assumption that the painter believed that if the right hand was drawn in its natural position, the index finger would indicate with the palm of the hand out of the scene and not the judge himself. This is confirmed by the painter drawing of the right hand of the judge which is depicted in the correct position, pointing his finger at the inside towards the old man in the middle of the scene.

It seems that this method was adopted by this painter, as this is also detected in a third illustration of this manuscript (Pl. 12) representing “*Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* and his son sitting at the food table.” The table was full with different kinds of food, there was a knotted curtain in the upper left corner, the floor was gilded as usual, and the drawings were painted in red, orange, blue and turquoise colours.⁴³ *Abu Zaīd* points with the forefinger of his right hand towards the food. His fingers have been bent inward as opposed to reality, since this can only happen with the left hand. Moreover, the correct gesture’s drawing of the right hand of the young man pointing towards the food in the same picture, certifies that the painter was aware of the realistic artistic values.

This is also confirmed by a fourth and final illustration of the same manuscript: “Friends of *Abu Zaīd al-Srwjī* visiting him during his illness” (Pl. 13) of the Nineteenth maqāmah “*Naṣībīah*,”⁴⁴ where *Abu Zaīd* is lying on a bed, surrounded by a boy and three of his friends. The text above states that “... he was in the grip of sickness and the battle of the wailing ...”⁴⁵ An old man standing to the extreme right of the painting is pointing with both hands to

⁴² Okasha, *Mawso‘at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, pl. 114, p. 123.

⁴³ Okasha, *Mawso‘at al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī*, pl. 115, p. 123.

⁴⁴ It is about the disease of *Abu Zaīd* and the visit of his companions to him and how his father described parasitic qualities. For further details see: Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, pp. 184-192.

⁴⁵ Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, p.187.

Abu Zaīd, who is sleeping. The painter violated the rules when he executed the right hand, which was drawn in the same manner. On the contrary to previous scenes, the painter wanted to express a direction different from that of *Abu Zaīd*. Its confirms that *Abu Zaīd* was the only person who violated technical rules when drawing hands in this painting.



Pl.12 *Abu Zaīdal-Srwjī* and his son sitting at the food table, *Maqāmāt al- Ḥarīrī* in the National Library of in Vienna, dated 764 AH/1334 AD (Source: 'Okasha, *Mawso'atal-Taşwīr al-Islamī*, pl. 115, p. 123)



Pl.13. Friends of *Abu Zaīdal-Srwjī* visiting him During His illness "*Maqāmāt al- Ḥarīrī*" in the National library of in Vienna, dated in 764 AH/1334 AD

In conclusion, the painter of the miniatures of the *Maqamat al-Hariri* was aware of the hands' rules with indirections and situations; all hands are indeed drawn perfectly realistic. But he drew contrary to reality and logic being motivated by an artistic intention in specific cases. It appears only in the direction of using the forefinger if the palm of the hand is visible. The painter believed that the direction of the correct signal must be inward and not towards the viewer of the scene. The painter preferred to repeat his artistic methods, as the gestures of *Abu Zaīdal-Srwjī* and his movements have been repeated in a typical manner in all the features of this manuscript, as mentioned by 'Okasha and Ettinghausen. This manuscript is distinguished with its characters which appear like dummies or chess pawns, which were often repeated in the same pattern, although being in various places and their relationship with each other.⁴⁶

Despite the clear motive for painters to alter the hands' direction in the images mentioned, it should also be noted that there are some scenes of the Arab painting, in which the painter failed to implement the hand drawing without an artistic or educational reason. This may result from the painter's confusion or haste in designing, and the lack of attention to details. This led to confusion in the drawing of hands between both hands in the same scene of the same character, as shown in a luster plate preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.⁴⁷ It is dated to the second half of the 4th H (10th) century (Pl. 14), and it depicts a woman sitting with a crown with a winged ornament with two locks of hair on either side of the face, holding two big cups in her hand, her left arm holding the name of the potter *Ja'far*. Her dress was decorated with large leaves, some of which were pierced in the middle.⁴⁸ Both hands were drawn in the wrong way, with each of the two glasses drawn behind the hand that

⁴⁶ Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp. 149-150; 'Okasha, *Mawso'at al-Taşwīr al-Islamī* p.123.

⁴⁷ Archived No. 13478 on the records of the Museum of Islamic Art.

⁴⁸ Ahmad, *Al-Fan al-Islamī Ḥata nehayat al-'Asr al-Fatimī*, p. 125.

was supposed to hold it. The result was the obvious illogic in the execution, which shows that the painter did not understand the rules and technique of hand painting. This error could be due to the potter himself, who may have erred when he transferred the drawing on this dish.⁴⁹

There are many similar pictorial examples in which the drawing of hands is executed correctly such as the Fatimid luster dish no. 15501 (Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo) dated to 5th H (11th) century Egypt. It shows a woman holding a cup with her right hand and a flower with her left.⁵⁰



Pl.14 A woman on a luster dish, attributed to the second half of the 4th AH /10th AD century, Fatimid, Egypt, Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Source: The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo)



Pl.15 The Ascetic and the Dead Weasel and the Infant in the Crib and the Dismembered Snake, Kalīla and Dimna, Bodleian Library at Oxford, attributed to Egypt or Syria in the Mamlūk period, dated 755 AH / 1354 AD (Source: Contadini, *Arab Painting*, fig 7)

⁴⁹Jamāl Mehrez pointed to the use of some images by Mughal in India to draw them by means of stamped papers or prefabricated models when performing personal drawings. This was considered a weakness and a reason for the decline of Painting. See: Mehrez, "al-ṣwīr al-Shakhṣiah fi Al-Taṣwīr al-Islamī, p.97. It is unreasonable to think that artists used such models on Luster dishes because of their need for speed of execution and for drawing similarity.

⁵⁰Aḥmad, *Al-Fan al-Islamī Hata nehayāt al-'Asr al-Fatimī*, p. 125.

Another painting relevant to this presentation comes from the manuscript of *Kalīla and Dimna* which is preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.⁵¹ It is attributed to Egypt or Syria in the Mamlūk period, dated 755 H (1354), and depicts “The ascetic and the dead weasel and the infant in the crib and the dismembered snake”⁵² (Pl. 15). The ascetic stands beside the bed, and points with both hands; his left hand open, his fingers and the rest of his hand appearing to the viewer in a way that contradicts the reality, but his back hand were supposed to appear. This can only happen if this hand was the right hand and not the left one. But the painter was likely to have overlooked drawing it.

The final painting discussed here showing this confusion in the hand’s drawing is in the manuscript of the “*Kāshif al-asrār*” “Reveal of the Secrets” by *Ibn Ghānem al-Maqdisī*, preserved in the Sulymāniyah Mosque library in Istanbul. It shows (Pl. 16) the “Myrrh plant” from Syria in the mid of the 8th H (14th) century.⁵³ Although the human figure played a secondary role in this manuscript,⁵⁴ the painter drew a person seated on the right side next to the Myrrh plant, and it is noticeable that the left hand of this person was painted in an illogical way, as a right hand.



Pl.16 Myrrh plant, manuscript of the "*Kāshif al-asrār*" "Reveal of the Secrets" by *Ibn Ghānem al-Maqdisī*, in the library of the Sulymāniyah Mosque in Istanbul, from Syria in the middle of the 8th AH/14th century⁵⁵ (Source: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 159)

⁵¹Under number Pococke 400, fol. 117r.

⁵²Contadini, *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, fig 7, p.258.

⁵³Under Kala Ismail 565, folio 6 Verso measures 77 x 112 mm.

⁵⁴Perhaps the human figures were drawn for the purpose of decoration and added some vitality to the picture.

For more details see: Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 159.

⁵⁵Under Kala Ismail 565, folio 6 Verso measures 77 x 112 mm.

RESULTS

1. Most of the Arab painters had a clear interest in drawing the hands in correct figurative positions.
2. The process of mixing the hand drawing started as early as the 4th H (10th) century; it continued to appear until the end of the 10th H (16th) century in varying degrees.
3. Such shortcomings in the drawing of hands should not be attributed to a lack of efficiency from the painter, as these depictions are wonderful artistic treasures left by Muslim painters, showcasing their creative ability. And the same artist clearly managed to get the other hands right, and these “wrong” hands are always expressing an intent
4. The present study shows that the paintings that were “weak” in the implementation or where the mixing of the right and left hands’ design is seen, can be explained through four reasons:
 - a) The painter gave the priority to the educational side of the manuscript rather than the artistic one of the visualization, as seen in the paintings of *Al’ab al-Frusiya, Taḥṭīb*, and wrestling.
 - b) The nature of the subject, such as the blowing of the trumpet, forced the painter to find a solution to give the impression of strength and coherence to the image at the expense of mixing hands.
 - c) Some artists’ style led them to have the forefingers always pointing inside the scene even if it required mixing the right and left hands.
 - d) It was sometimes due to the painter’s obvious technical weakness and inability to properly perform hand drawings.
5. The role of the character or its visibility context did not influence the painter’s decision to execute hands in a non figurative way.
6. The majority of the paintings showing this specific drawing of hands belong to the Arab Painting in Egypt and Syria.
7. This new feature characterises Egypt and Syria from other centres of the Arab painting.

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