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A Perspective Illusion or a View from the Clouds? Detail of an Early 16th-Century Miniature Painting Produced in Tabriz (Iran)

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Abstract
A Persian painting (910H/1505) from a manuscript of Niẓāmī's *Khamsa* preserved in the Keir Collection portrays the *mi'rāj* of Muḥammad among many angels in a blue sky; the Ka'ba is depicted in the lower foreground while the desert surrounds almost the entire image. In the upper part of the sky ten half-bust angels look out from an *oculus* among the clouds. This image clearly recalls coeval European painting, and in particular the *oculus* painted by Andrea Mantegna on the vault of the *Camera Picta* or "Camera degli Sposi" in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. Nevertheless, the unusual and contextual introduction of a parallel and inverse perspective enables the *oculus* of the Keir Collection miniature to take on an appearance and consequent meaning different from the Western ones.

Keywords: Niẓāmī's *Khamsa*, Tabriz, Iran, early Safavid painting, Keir Collection.

Introduction

Persian painting started to be significantly influenced by Western painting from 1600 onwards, in terms of both rendering and subjects.[1] The controversial figure of Muḥammad Zamān (d. ca. 1700; cf. Sims 1983 and 2001; Landau 2015; cf. also Yaghoub 2014), to whom numerous miniatures (cf.

1. On the perception of the West in Iran during the Safavid period, see Canby 1996, who reviews Safavid painting from 1580-1720; Matthee 1998 (especially p. 231) and 1999.

the list in Sims 2001: 191-4, with ills.) and wall paintings (cf. Soudavar 1992: 376-7, cat. and ill. 152; Anon. 1933: ill. no. IV, and Anon. 1998, with ill.)[2] depicting European subject matters and/or inspiration are attributed, is without doubt its most famous proponent.[3]

An ink drawing depicting the *Annunciation* by Ṣādiqī Beg Afshār (dating to around 1587-1610), belonging to a private collection and on loan to the Fogg Art Museum (Harvard Art Museums) in Cambridge, Mass. (Inv. no. 418.1983), probably derives from an engraving by the Master of the Banderoles, ca. 1450-70 preserved in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg (Inv. no. 10301; Schwartz 2013: figs. 64 and 65; cf. also Bailey 1994-95; Schwartz 2014: 45-46; Landau 2014: pls. 1.3a and 1.3b).

Friedrich Sarre attributes to the renowned painter Riżā ʿAbbāsī, born around 1565 and certainly active from the last decade of the 16th century until 1634, who was also director

2. These are two fragments of a single painting, once belonging to the Collection of André and Clara Malraux, purchased during a trip to Iran and Afghanistan in early 1930s. For the history of the group of mural paintings from some houses destroyed in Isfahan in 1931, see Anon. 1933.

3. Another Europeanising (*farangī sāz*) painter was ʿAlī Qulī Jabādār, active in Qazvin and Isfahan during the late 17th and early 18th centuries (Habibi 2018): especially his "The Penitent Magdalene" (1673, Saint Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, album E-14, fol. 93r; Habibi 2018: figs. 10 and 13) and "Susanna and the Elders" (probably 1673, unknown owner; Habibi 2018: fig. 15). Furthermore, the most famous example of 17th-century Safavid wall paintings whose characters and/or features were inspired by European fashion is the pictorial cycle of the Chihil Sutūn palace in Isfahan (Grube 1974; Sims 1979; Babaie 1994).

of the imperial workshop of Shāh ʿAbbās in Isfahan, an astonishing "copy" of the *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* by Perugino (1495), the latter preserved in the Galleria Palatina of Palazzo Pitti in Florence. The various characters depicted in the Persian miniature, in a private collection in Berlin, are "Persian-style" (Sarre 1919).

A 17th-century Persian pen-and-ink drawing, also attributed by Sarre (1921) to the school of Riżā ʿAbbāsī, is not a true copy but was most probably inspired by the famous painting of the *Blind Leading the Blind* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (about 1568)[4] in the National Museum of Capodimonte in Naples.[5]

Nevertheless, clear references to European painting are evident in Persian painting since at least the fifteenth century.[6]

4. Specifically on the Dutch influence on Safavid art during the seventeenth century see Schwartz 2014; cf. also Stokes 2014: 163-5, and the bibliographical references in Landau 2012: note 34.

5. For some drawings depicting the same subject see Sullivan 2015: § 16-17, with related notes. Sheila Canby, after discussing how European art influenced Persian artists in the seventeenth century, asked herself: "But what of the Isfahan artists who produced paintings for the Europeans in Isfahan?" (Canby 1996: 55); she introduces an illustration of Layla and Majnūn, a gouache attributed to Jānī farangī sāz (i.e. Europeanising) and produced in Isfahan in 1684-85, from the 'Kaempfer album' in the British Museum, Inv. no. 1974 - 17 01(7) and compares it with "a European *Lamentation* such as that by the Dutch artist Jacob Matham" (*ibid.*), an engraving made in Venice and dated 1607, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inv. no. RP-P. OB-27-012.

6. A Timurid *Anthology* produced in Shiraz for Iskandar ibn ʿUmar Shaykh and dated 813H/1411, preserved in the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon (Ms. L.A. 161), includes a number of illustrations in which various references to contemporary Western painting can be found (cf. Fontana 2014: 90 and notes 45-46); in particular one of these repro-

An early 16th-century Persian *mi'rāj* in the Keir Collection and its *oculus* in the night sky (figs. 1a-b)

The image constituting the subject of this paper is a detail of a miniature which was part of a manuscript of Niẓāmī's *Khamsa*, the history of which is long and complex.[7] This miniature

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duces a sort of *Adoration of the Magi* (fols. 265v-266r; see Fontana 1995 and 2014, with relative bibliographical references). A distinct phenomenon, attesting the depiction of Western characters deduced from many kinds of European original artefacts, is to be found in some pages of the famous Hazine and Diez Albums, respectively preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı Library in Istanbul and the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, dating to the late 14th up to the first half of the 15th centuries, which were studied in depth by Gülru Necipoğlu (2017: especially 543-80). They are: H. 2153, fols. 54v and 120v (Necipoğlu 2017: figs. 20.1, 20.2A-D, 20.3B; and 20.4), H. 2152, fols. 96v and 45r (Necipoğlu 2017: figs. 20.5 and 20.6), H. 2153, fols. 92r, 20v, 115v and 137v (Necipoğlu 2017: figs. 20.12, 20.18A-B, 20.20 and 20.21A-B, for the latter see also Raby 1981, fig. 478); Diez A, fol. 70, p. 14, no. 2 (Necipoğlu 2017: fig. 20.7), Diez A, fol. 71, p. 64, no. 2 (Necipoğlu 2017: fig. 20.8), Diez A. fol. 72, p. 15 (Necipoğlu 2017: fig. 20.9). A very extraordinary case is the reproduction of the "Tazza Farnese" in a drawing attributed by an inscription to "Muḥammad-i Khayyām", Herat or Samarqand, before 1433, Diez A, fol. 72, p. 3, no. 2 (Necipoğlu 2017: fig. 20.17, and note 76 for bibliographical references; more specifically see Weiss 2017).

7. The manuscript was commissioned in Herat by the Timurid Prince Bābur, grandson of Shāh Rukh (1405-1447) and son of the fifth son of the latter, Baysunqur (d. 1433), governor of Herat and great patron. At the death of Bābur (1457) the manuscript was not yet finished. After the Qara Qoyunlu sacking of Herat in 1458, the manuscript passed into the hands of Pīr Budāq, son of the Qara Qoyunlu Jahānshāh (1438-1467) and appointed by him governor of Shiraz (before being expelled in 1460, following a rebellion, and confined to Baghdad). From 1476 the manuscript was continued at the behest of the Aq Qoyunlu Khalīl, appointed governor of the city by his father Uzūn Ḥasan (1453-1478) from 1471.

is one of the eleven added in the Safavid age (1501-5)[8] at the behest of Shāh Ismāʿīl (probably an early work of the painter Sulṭan Muḥammad, d. 1555) and it is also one of the three belonging to the Keir Collection (Ms. III.207):[9] it represents the *miʿrāj* of the Prophet Muḥammad.[10]
The day vision of both Mecca and the desert is the "foreground" of the miniature: the city – at the bottom of the page – is clearly recognisable by the portrayal of the Kaʿba.[11] The urban landscape is depicted as a large oasis in the desert,

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Upon Khalīl's death (1478) his younger brother, Yaqūb, who ruled from the capital, Tabriz, completed the manuscript in 1481. However, when the codex came into the hands of the Safavid Shāh Ismāʿīl (1501-1524), the latter had eleven miniatures added to it in 1501-5. Currently nineteen miniatures of the manuscript are in the Topkapı Sarayı Library in Istanbul, Ms. Hazine 762, and three in the Keir Collection once in London (cf. note 9, below), Ms. III. 207-209 (Stchoukine 1966; see also Robinson 1976, and Canby 1999: 17 and note 16). On the calligrapher of the manuscript, working in Tabriz, see Stchoukine 1966: 1.
8. The Hijra date 910 (1505 CE) can be found in the painting in question (fig. 1a); on the exact spot where the date was inscribed, see Robinson 1976: 178.
9. Since 2014 the Keir Collection is on a 15-year renewable loan with the Dallas Museum of Art.
10. The page illustrating the *miʿrāj* was the painting with which the first book of the *Khamsa* (*Makhzān al-aṣrār*, The Treasure of Secrets) opened (see Robinson 1976: 178-9, pl. 19, and 1993: 104; Starodoub 1997-98: 383, fig. 7; Fontana 1998: 101, 109, fig. 43; Grube 2002, with ill.; Gruber 2012: 51-5, fig. 4; Keir Collection online: https://collections.dma.org/artwork/5342871, last access 18/01/2019).
11. Other monuments are depicted to the left of the Kaʿba (Mecca). For their description see Gruber (2012: 51); for a questionable interpretation of some buildings which would illustrate Jerusalem, see Starodoub (1997-98: 383).

the latter – along the left border and on the top edge of the page – is scattered with villages and palm trees. The central image of the painting is incorporated into a rectangular frame and depicts the ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad riding Būrāq on the blue background of the night sky; the latter is enlivened by swarms of golden cirrus clouds among which several angelic figures appear. In the upper left corner of the sky the golden clouds form a rare elliptical ring (an *oculus*) rotated along the major axis by about 30° East. Ten angels, portrayed in half-bust, "look out" from the inner edge of the *oculus*. Their gazes only at first glance converge towards the centre, where Muḥammad on Būrāq stands out (cf. below).

A comparison with the 15th-century *oculus* painted by Mantegna in the vault of the *Camera Picta* in Mantua (fig. 2)

As early as twenty years ago this detail of the Keir Collection miniature was compared with the famous *oculus*[12] of the painting by Andrea Mantegna in the vault of the *Came-*

12. The structural *oculus*, namely the circular opening in the centre of a dome, was first used by the Romans – the best known example is the Pantheon – and subsequently in the Christian architecture of both Byzantine and Latin medieval period (see Piazza 2018); the Italian Renaissance also employed the *oculus* at the centre of the dome, such as that of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence built by Filippo Brunelleschi, completed in 1436 up to the base of the lantern (the latter was completed in 1471; cf. Scaglia 1991: 68). A particular exemplar of a structural *oculus* (perhaps inspired by solutions such as that of the Florentine Cathedral?) can also be found in Safavid Isfahan, namely in the dome of the Hasht Bihisht palace (1669; cf. Coste 1867: pl. XXXVIII). The perspective illusionism of the Italian fifteenth-century painting adopted the portrayed *oculus* as the transposition of a real opening.

ra Picta or "Camera degli Sposi" in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua (1465-1474):

> Very briefly I would like to dwell [...] on the "Western" appearance of the arrangement of a few half-bust angels who in a circle look out from the oval formed by the clouds placed in the upper left corner against the background of the intense blue of the night sky of the *mi'rāğ*. This "balcony" arrangement is reminiscent of many European paintings, in particular Italian, of which a very famous example is the ceiling of the "Camera degli Sposi" in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua, painted by Mantegna. The influence of Western painting, which had already begun in a lesser tone before (see what has been said about a 15th-century Anthology preserved in Lisbon [...]),[13] became widespread in some later Safavid miniatures as well as in some Ottoman and Mughal ones. (Fontana 1998: 111, translated from the original in Italian).

A few years later Ernst J. Grube stated:

> This [painting], however, is an exceptional picture that ties together the earth and the heavens, and then punctuates the celestial regions with an oculus that must derive from a contemporary European painting. (Grube 2002).

In 2012 Christiane Gruber also compared the *oculus* of the Keir Collection miniature with the opening in the Mantegna's painting:

> The opening of the painting, depicted from a perspective of *di sotto in sù* (from below upwards), recalls the famous ceiling oculus painted by Andrea Mantegna in 1471-4 for the Camera degli Sposi in the Ducal Palace in Mantua (see Cordaro 1992, p. 30). In both compositions, angels or cupids and human figures open up a round space from the sky and peer at events transpiring below. One is struck by the contemporaneity of this pattern in both Italy and Iran. It is possible that this new Safavid motif was influenced by European portable materials, such as prints, that made their way to Iran (Sims

13. See Fontana 1995 and 2014; cf., *here*, note 6.

2002, p. 151).[14] For a further discussion on the influence of European materials on Safavid arts *c.* 1550-1700, see Canby 1996, pp. 46-59. (Gruber 2012: note 19).

The gazes mixed with the curiosity and amazement of both the female characters – in two groups of three and two – and three (of ten) winged putti who look out of the painted balustrade in the centre of the vault of the Mantuan fresco, are indeed apparently similar to the gazes of the angels who protrude from the cloudy *oculus* of the Safavid miniature. In actual fact, the eyes of only four of the five women depicted in Mantua look down, towards the centre of the room, while those of the fifth woman (namely a lady-in-waiting) and two angels look upwards, towards the sky. Similarly the eyes of only two at most – in the lower half of the *oculus* – of the ten angels portrayed in the *oculus* of the Keir Collection miniature look down towards Muḥammad, while the other ones seem to look at each other. Some angels occupying the upper

14. The catalogue entry to which Gruber refers is by Ernst J. Grube (see Grube 2002) and not Eleanor S. Sims (yet Grube's reference is limited to the following quotation "an oculus that must derive from a contemporary European painting", as cited above). Perhaps the reference to Sims' work could have been to Sims 1983 (although the latter's argument refers to the seventeenth century; cf. also Canby 1996: 50) or, more likely, Gruber would have liked to refer – for the inspiration from the prints and, in any case, taking stock of the situation – to Sussan Babaie (2009: 123-8, with relative notes and especially her note 32). In her important contribution to the volume published in 2002, E. Sims stated, more generically and with reference to the European wall-painting in Shāh ʿAbbās Isfahan, that "Despite the presence of Europeans, and in some numbers, in Safavid Iran as early as the sixteenth century, the initial manifestation of European influences on Safavid painting is not easy to date with precision." (Sims 2002: 76).

half of the *oculus* seem to look towards the desert depicted beyond the upper frame of the painting, as if following a principle of specular symmetry with respect to the lower half. Moreover, a further difference between the Mantuan and Persian paintings is the fact that, while in the latter case the object of interest – Muḥammad ascending to the sky on the back of Būrāq – is also painted, in Mantegna's picture, instead, the object of interest is intended to be the bride and groom to whom the Chamber was dedicated.[15]
To what extent can we talk about "perspective illusionism" in the Keir Collection miniature illustrating the *mi'rāj*? This painted page appears as a window that has been carefully opened – albeit improperly constructed – on Muḥammad's vision, rather than imagined or virtual realities (such as in Mantegna's image), leaving no place for a real perspective vision.[16]

15. Campbell (2014: 320) maintained: "Does it [the vault imagery] constitute a 'key' to the 'meaning' of the entire ensemble, or is it a decorative complement to the dynastic and political imagery on the walls below? A further possibility will be explored here: that the vault does not simply frame or embellish the courtly imagery below, but that it amplifies and answers it through a logic of complementarity and dialogue, even inversion and parody". The perspective illusionism of the 15th-century Italian painting has also inspired, as is well known, other famous artists such as Melozzo da Forlì, who in 1477-9 frescoed the sixteen half-bust angels in the dome of the sacristy of San Marco in the Basilica of the Sanctuary of the Santa Casa in Loreto (Ancona), commissioned by Cardinal Girolamo Basso della Rovere (d. 1507) (fig. 3); or Alessandro Araldi, who in 1514 painted the seven putti players in the centre of the vault of a room in the apartment built by the architect Giorgio Edoari da Herba commissioned by the Abbess of San Paolo, Giovanna da Piacenza (d. 1524), in the Monastery of San Paolo in Parma (fig. 4).
16. Cf. El-Bizri's statement: "Two pyramids-cones of visibility intersect

Some problems of perspective

Vincenzo Strika was one of the first scholars to ponder the problem of the "absence" of a three-dimensional perspective in Islamic miniature painting and stated, although with more specific references to perspective as it relates to the depiction of architecture: "One of the characteristics of the Islamic miniature, and in particular of the Persian one, is the almost total absence of a three-dimensional perspective, in complete contrast with what was developed in classical and Chinese painting, where, albeit with some limitations and in different ways, the problem had at least been partially solved." (Strika 1972: 239, translated from the original in Italian).[17]

Robert Hillenbrand addressed a specific issue related to perspective in the Persian paintings, namely the uses of space in fifteenth-century production.[18] He identified four significant themes governing the depiction of the space: "architecture, preference for solid blocks of color or form, the margin, and the use of empty space" (Hillenbrand 1992: 76). Citing numerous examples Hillenbrand also introduced the principle of the "parallel perspective" (*Idem*: 80).

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in seeing by way of perspective: the finite pyramid-cone of vision of the *perspectiva naturalis*, as studied in optics in connection with direct visual perception, and the pyramid-cone of the *perspectiva artificialis* in the pictorial order, which seemingly tends towards infinity." (El-Bizri 2014b: 29).

17. Cf. also Kathami's peculiar argumentation about the Persian miniature paintings which, drawing inspiration from literature rather than real life as was the case for European paintings, "had a distinct dream-like style free from painting rules imposed in Western paintings such as perspective, lighting, etc [...]." (Kathami 2013: 5).

18. Hillenbrand (1992: note 1) records some previous bibliographical references concerning the space-forms in the Islamic painting, to which Grignon's interesting article (1996) and the compelling Chapter Four of Pérez González's volume (2012) can now be added.

In recent years, the use of the space and, more generically, perspective themes in Islamic painting began to arouse increasing interest and more scholars approached the subject. Mohammadreza Abolghassemi, a critical voice of mystical aesthetics on which the Persian painting would be based, theorised about "flat visual space [...] emerged from other [i.e. non-mystical] aesthetical reasons", a sort of "inverse perspective" generated by "a non-centralized visual space where various elements are juxtaposed on a flat two-dimensional surface beside one another, encountering the viewer with a 'decentralized' space" (Abolghassemi 2016: 33).[19]
In a meaningful article published in 2010 Nader El-Bizri focused on the different manners of depicting representational space in Islamic – with its theological-religious implications – and Western painting, arguing the subject in an articulate way and providing plenty of suggestions, and a comprehensive assessment (El-Bizri 2010: 18). It is followed by long and well developed speculation on early modern Western "theories of vision", also compared with "Ibn al-Haytham's findings in optical research on the psychological – neurological – physiological aspects of vision"[20] (*ibid.*; on the latter subject see also El-Bizri 2014a).

19. Abolghassemi considered it appropriate to underline what he assumed to be the advantages of this "decentralised space" by stating that "this leads the possibility of viewing different scenes from one event simultaneously and experiencing temporality by way of a different presentation of spatiality which on its own turn replaces an 'aesthetics of depth' with an 'aesthetic of surface'." (Abolghassemi 2016: 33). These last claims actually resume previous studies, such as that of Ernst Diez (1937); see also de Francovich (1964: 9).
20. Ibn al-Haytham, the so-called "father of modern optics", was a phy-

Charles M. Falco and Aimée L. Weintz Allen summarised their "theory of vision" of the images as follows:

> Visual literacy is not limited to the narrative and symbolic qualities of pictures and images [...], but it is also rooted in the scientific and cultural study of optics and the visual system [...]. (Falco and Weintz Allen 2009: 115),

the genesis of which they also claimed can be traced back to the work of the 11th-century polymath scientist Ibn al-Haytham. The latter has taken into account previous treatises on optics, including Ptolemy's *Optica* (see Ibn al-Haytham 1989 [Sabra's comment]: II, 136). In chapter eleven of his third volume[21] he dwelt at length on the importance of the distance, light and influence of these factors on the viewer's perception of the painted image (Ibn al-Haytham 1989 [Sabra's transl.]: I, 295-7; cf. also Krenkow's transl. 1925: 51; original Arabic in Ibn al-Haytham 1983).[22]

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sician, mathematician, astronomer, and physicist who was born in Baṣra in 965 and died in Cairo in 1040. His most famous work is the *Kitāb al-Manāẓir* (Book of Optics), written from 1011 to 1021. For the manuscripts and Latin translations of his treatise (especially Ibn al-Haytham 1572) see Sabra 2007 and cf. Lindberg 1976 (on the fortune in the West of Ibn al-Haytham's treatise on optics, see also El-Bizri 2010: note 9). The scholar who dedicated the most studies to the scientific work of Ibn al-Haytham is Abdelhamid I. Sabra; on the latter's essays concerning Ibn al-Haytham's work see Raynaud 2016: 199; for other literature on Ibn al-Haytham it is appropriate to visit the following website: https://philpapers.org/rec/JONTOO-6 (last access: 18/01/2019).

21. Of the seven-volume treatise of Ibn al-Haytham only the first five volumes were edited (Ibn al-Haytham 1983 and 2002) and only the first three volumes were translated into English (Ibn al-Haytham 1989).

22. On both the perception of depth and perspective in Ibn al-Haytham, see the several publications by El-Bizri cited in El-Bizri (2010: 23).

The "paradox" lies in the fact that Islamic painting does not seem to have benefited from Ibn al-Haytham's theories as much as Western painting has.

The Keir Collection miniature and "parallel" and "inverse" perspectives

The Keir Collection miniature would appear to be one of the best examples of both parallel and inverse perspectives.
The parallel perspective, commonly encountered in the architectures depicted in some Persian illustrated manuscripts (cf. Hillenbrand's assumption about the Timurid paintings, above), can also be recognised, in my opinion, in the different visual planes represented in the Keir Collection miniature, in this case enhanced by a narrative and symbolic content.[23]
In most cases the angels enclosed by the *oculus* look at each other: the painter probably intended to convey the wonder on their faces – which is revealed with almost doubtful gazes – rather than catch them as they look towards the Prophet, in fact only at a glance do the angels' gazes seem to be cast downward and converge on the central figure of Muḥammad. The painter reserves this task for just a few of them

23. Christiane Gruber (2012: 53) pointed out that the "ocular opening in the skies" is not included in the illustrations of Muḥammad's Ascension before Shāh Ismā'īl's reign, and she suggested "historicoreligious factors that marked Shah Ismail's reign, namely, his cult of personality and his claims to divinity through the allegorical potential of the upward and downward heavenly motions of the Prophet Mohammad and Ali on the night of the *mi'raj*." (*ibid*.). Furthermore, she added that "the oculus [...] reflects Nizāmī's poetry and espouses, in powerful pictorial terms, Shah Ismail's claims of celestial origins." (Gruber 2012: 54).

(two at most). Much more interesting are the gazes of those angels who, being placed in the upper half of the *oculus* and looking in front of them, necessarily turn their gazes towards the upper frame of the miniature and, specifically and meaningfully, the desert beyond the frame, thus creating a significant parallel perspective. It would seem similar to the Mantuan painting by Mantegna where the lady-in-waiting and two angels look upwards, towards the sky enclosed by the painted balustrade, but in reality the difference is that the sky in Mantegna's painting is enclosed by the circumference of the opening, while the desert depicted in the Keir Collection miniature lies outside the oval of the *oculus*. As a result, the angels of the Keir *mirʿāj* look out of the opening, rather than into it.
Furthermore, the "decentralised space" of the "inverse perspective" (cf. Abolghassemi's assumption, above) without a doubt fits with the object of the gaze of the angelic figure portrayed with both its shoulders emerging from the clouds to the very left of the lower half of the *oculus*, namely the spectator: this angel, in fact, looks towards the viewer.
An interesting comparison can be made between this angel and another one portrayed in the *miʿrāj* painted by Sulṭān Muḥammad on a page of the 1539-43 *Khamsa* of Niẓāmī made for Shāh Ṭahmāsp, left unfinished and completed by the above-mentioned seventeenth-century painter Muḥammad Zamān in Ashrāf, Māzandarān (London, British Library, Ms. Or 2265, fol. 195r; Canby 1996: fig. 18).[24]

24. On the "history" of this manuscript and its paintings see Soucek and Waley 2011; Landau 2011 (in particular for Muḥammad Zamān's work); and Soudavar 2016: 20-2 (especially for fol. 195r).

> The sixteenth century angels look only toward the Prophet [...] Muhammad Zaman's angels, on the contrary, have fleshy mouths and large eyes. In one case the angel gazes directly at the viewer. (Canby 1996: 54).

Final remarks

The *oculus* device depicted in the Keir Collection miniature, which perfectly fits the European feature of a top-down perspective both conceptually and iconographically, illustrates an unprecedented way of depicting characters looking out from an opening: the ten angels are portrayed all around the *oculus* in a mirror-like way. As a matter of fact, the angels' gazes are not focused on the figure performing the *mi'rāj*, i.e. Muḥammad. Some of them exchange astonished gazes, others seem more attracted by what surrounds them, while only one or two angels look in the direction of the Prophet. Finally, one angel turns its gaze to the viewer. This unusual and contextual introduction of a parallel and inverse perspective allows this painting to assume an appearance – and consequent meaning – that are different from Western ones.

As far as I know, later Safavid painting no longer employed this particular perspective,[25] which therefore seems to have been assumed only by the Keir Collection miniature.

25. On perspective in later Safavid painting see Aghaei and Ghadernejad 2018.

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Fig. 1a. Painting illustrating the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet Muḥammad from a manuscript of the *Makhzān al-aṣrār* (The Treasure of Secrets), the first book of Niẓāmī's *Khamsa*, Tabriz (Iran), 910H/1505, Keir Collection, Ms. III.207 (after Robinson 1976: pl. 19).

Fig. 1b. Detail of fig. 1a illustrating ten angels looking out from an *oculus* in the upper left corner of the night sky.

Fig. 2. Detail of the vault of the *Camera Picta* or "Camera degli sposi" in the Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, painted by Andrea Mantegna (1465-74) (after Cordaro 1992: ill. on p. 30).

Fig. 3. Detail of the dome of the sacristy of San Marco in the Basilica of the Sanctuary of the Santa Casa in Loreto (Ancona), painted by Melozzo da Forlì (1477-9) (after Hartt and Wilkins 2011: fig. 14.26).

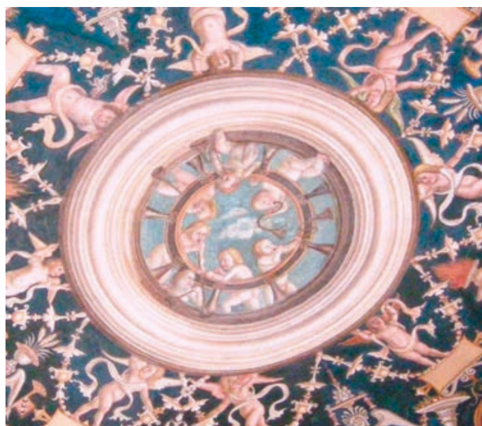

Fig. 4. Detail of the vault of a room in the apartment built by the architect Giorgio Edoari da Herba in the Monastery of San Paolo in Parma, painted by Alessandro Araldi (1514) (after Zanichelli 1979: fig. 1).