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Pearls On A String: Art In The Age Of Great Islamic Empires



Synopsis

Pearls on a String presents the arts of historical Islamic cultures by focusing on specific people and relationships among cultural tastemakers, especially painters, calligraphers, poets, and their patrons. Through a series of chapters, the book spotlights certain historical moments from across the Islamic world. Each chapter pivots around patrons and their social networks. These independent sections allow different voices and perspectives to emerge, enabling the reader to see that Islamic societies are not monolithic but made up of a tapestry of individuals with distinct and varying views. Pearls on a String pays particular attention to individuals from different sectors of society, giving voice to anonymous artists and translators, merchants, and women of the harem. Islamic historical sources reinforce the book's themes of writing in Islamic societies, artistic patronage, biographical traditions, and human connectivity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In May 2013, the National Endowment for the Humanities made a gift to the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore that would help underwrite an exhibition drawn in part from its collection of Islamic art and manuscripts. The fruit of that investment can now be seen by a wide audience via a catalogue of exceptional beauty and expert scholarship. Titled "Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts," this catalogue accompanies a show that opened at the Walters in November 2015 and will move on to the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Both the catalogue and exhibition examine Islamic courts located in a geographic sweep from China, India, and Persia westward to Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Spain. Throughout the emphasis is on human interaction

among artists, poets, and court patrons in "webs of personal relationships." Each chapter uses a somewhat different lens, but short introductory essays pull the book together, and the Walters' curatorial approach allowed contributing scholars to play to their unique strengths. Topics dealt with in individual chapters are: ladies' ivories in 10th-century Spain; art, history, and science in the 13th-14th century Mongol Empire; the 14th-century sultan of Egypt and Syria; art and literature in Herat of 15th-century Persia; 16th-century Sanskrit texts in Mughal India; late 17th-century painting in Isfahan, Persia; and an 18th-century jeweled gun from the Ottoman Empire. While the emphasis in "Pearls on a String" is on Islamic courts, multiple religious and foreign influences impacted these courts and only a portion of the art depicted in this book was created solely for religious purposes. On the literary front, as any reader of Sufi verse will know, references to worldly love and wine consumption were prominent, even if they were often metaphors for an ecstatic merging with the Divine. Readers desiring an even closer look at the patronage of one Islamic Sultan- Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur in India--can find it in "The Visual World of Muslim India: The Art, Culture and Society of the Deccan in the Early Modern Era." Readers desiring a fictional account, meanwhile, of Ottoman Empire court patronage can find it in "My Name is Red" by the Turkish Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk.

This exceptional collection of scholarly texts is a comprehensive overview of Islamic cultures and the persons who created and commissioned the objects that continue to tell stories across time. The book takes a nuanced approach by looking at Islamic history through a biographical lens. Reading the texts and becoming acquainted with the historical characters and their networks, readers will gain a novel perspective on the moments in time, that together, form the richly diverse and culturally vibrant history of the Islamic world. Students and scholars, as well as anyone with a curiosity or interest in Islamic art will find the essays in "Pearls on a String" a fascinating read.

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