

## Introduction

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The 16<sup>th</sup> Colloquium of the *Ernst Herzfeld Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der islamischen Kunst und Archäologie (EHG)* | *Ernst Herzfeld Society for Studies in Islamic Art and Archaeology*, devoted to “The Arts and Archaeology of Funerary Cultures in Islam”, was originally planned to be held at Sapienza University of Rome from 2 to 4 July 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it took place one year later, from 1 to 3 July 2021.

Nevertheless, the postponement resulted in a fortunate coincidence: the year 2021 marked the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ernst Herzfeld’s architectural and archaeological investigation of the Qubbat al-Ṣulaybiyya in Samarra (3–5 December 2011). The discovery of three bodies with their heads facing the *qibla* buried underneath the central room, and a Kufic inscription containing the term *qubūr* (tombs) appeared to confirm Herzfeld’s previous interpretation of the building – a central square room covered by a dome and surrounded by an octagonal ambulatory – as a mausoleum. More precisely, Herzfeld identified the Qubbat al-Ṣulaybiyya as the burial place of the Abbasid Caliphs al-Muntaṣir (r. 861–862), al-Mu‘tazz (r. 866–869) and al-Muhtadī (r. 869–870), thus as the first dynastic and Caliphal monumental tomb ever built in Islamic history and, according to the sources, realised upon the initiative of a Greek lady, the mother of al-Muntaṣir.

Though Herzfeld’s identification of the burials and his interpretation of the structure were later questioned, the Qubbat al-Ṣulaybiyya has retained its significance in the still unsolved discussion on the origins of Islamic funerary and commemorative architecture, the time and circumstances of its introduction, the reasons for adopting the domed central plan, its widespread diffusion, and the relationships with cemeteries, mosques, and other associated architectural genres. The Qubbat al-Ṣulaybiyya has also remained central in the debate revolving around the disapproval of conspicuous grave markers and visitations of the tombs expressed in – mostly sunnī – *aḥādīth* vis-à-vis visual and material evidence and literary sources attesting to the spread, all over the *dār al-Islām* and throughout the centuries, of monumental buildings, cenotaphs, tombstones, inscriptions and rituals aimed at remembering the dead and connecting them with the living.

Indeed, overwhelming visual and material evidence testify to the importance of funerary culture in Islamic societies. However, while art historical and archaeological research on other civilizations has dealt with funerary culture through a systematic and comprehensive approach, this is less the case in Islamic art and archaeology. Despite the large amount of significant scholarship produced on the subject, a whole picture is difficult to grasp and some aspects have been overshadowing others. One focus has been on the origin, form and function of funerary and commemorative monumental structures, and their relationships with other architectural genres and contexts; another focus has been on inscribed tombstones, their morphology and decoration, graphic and textual features. Uninscribed tombstones and cemeteries, which constitute the majority of evidence, have been less systematically studied; even lesser the various media and artefacts that furnished monumental tombs and memorials, such as cenotaphs, railings, textiles, etc. Semantics of form have rarely been dealt with. The evidence gained from archaeology, such as types of tombs, placement and clothing of

corpses, and their anthropophysical study – rarely performed – has often remained discrete, disconnected from wider discussions and interpretations of visual and material culture.

Among the reasons behind this fragmented picture are the diversity and geographical spread of evidence and the variety and range of disciplines and methods involved. They include art historical analysis and discussion of architecture and artefacts, epigraphy, field archaeology, archaeometrical analysis, anthropology, historical and religious studies based on texts.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Colloquium of the Ernst Herzfeld Society precisely aimed at bringing together diverse perspectives on visual and material aspects of death, and the hereafter, in the Islamic contexts by fostering a discussion on the many manifestations of funerary culture among art historians, archaeologists and specialists of relative disciplinary fields and subfields. The following contributions reflect the variety of the perspectives presented on that occasion and the depth of the discussion they prompted. The evidence analysed included human remains, burials, cemeteries, monumental structures and complexes, textiles, inscriptions, manuscripts, paintings, photographs, and multi-media artworks; their chronology spanned from the 7<sup>th</sup> century up to the present days, and concerned almost all the territories belonging to the *dār al-Islām*, from al-Andalus to Central Asia, from the Indian subcontinent to South East Asia; the diverse disciplines involved in their study were archaeology and physical anthropology, history of architecture, epigraphy, art history, gender studies, social history, and anthropology.

The volume opens with an essay by Franziska Schneider exploring the relationships between the late Ottoman Mosque of Zeyneb Sultan and the adjacent remains of the early Byzantine Theotokos Chalkoprateia church in Istanbul. A thorough analysis of extant structures and archival documents, and a reflection on the consonance of style, materials and space arrangement in both buildings leads to a new reading of Ottoman Baroque, its actors, and the role played by Byzantine local heritage. Andrew Petersen's essay, which expands upon his keynote lecture, is an extensive and detailed overview of recorded excavations of Muslim burials – from the Qubbat al-Ṣulaybiyya up to the most recent investigations –, and examines the attitude of archaeologists and local communities towards the study of human remains, new methodological approaches and prospective results. In particular, the case of two 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>-century burials discovered in 2009 at the site of Tell Qarassa, in Syria, illustrates the contribution of isotope analyses and ancient DNA sequencing to archaeological and historical research. The essay by Amelia Blundo deals with the architectural artefacts found in the necropolis of Aswan; their structural, formal and compositional features are analysed and set within the discussion on the origins of the muqarnas dome, leading to question the traditional dating of the Aswan artefacts to the Fatimid period. Frantz Chaigne's contribution focuses on the mausoleum of Öljaytü in Sultaniyya, and the Qur'ān manuscripts specifically realized to be kept there. Through an attentive examination of the decorative motifs and compositions featuring in the building and on the pages of the extant manuscripts it is argued that they were devised by the patron, and the artists in his service, as 'a global program' in order to convey a political message. The almost coeval complex in Hasankeyf, known as Koç mosque, recently submerged due to the construction of the Ilısu dam, is analysed by Ana Marija Grbanovic. On the basis of an architectural and art historical investigation, particularly focussing on the *qibla* block, its two *mihrābs* and their stucco revetment, including the inscriptions, she identifies it as a mosque, revises its structural history and chronology, and discerns the intervention of craftsmen from the area of Qazwīn. Riyaz Latif approaches from a novel perspective the

study of funerary complexes commissioned by and dedicated to royal ladies of the Aḥmad Shāhī dynasty. By analysing their distinctive architectural and functional characteristics, and epigraphic programme, and relating them to the status of their patronesses, he identifies these complexes as manifestations of a gender dynamic specific to the social and political context of the sultanate of Gujarat. The works of the modernist Egyptian painter Mahmoud Saïd, and especially those realised between 1924 and 1934, are the subject of Roberta Marin's essay. Connected to a spiritual crisis the artist experienced after surviving a fatal illness, these paintings focus on the theme of death and loss, conveyed in dominating portraits and scenes set against distinctive funerary architectural landscapes. The analysis of the details of these canvases compared to historical photographs, allows the author to identify allusions to Fatimid and Mamluk monuments still extant in Cairo and Alexandria. Gianfranco Bria presents a reconstruction of the recent history of the Bekhtāshīyya in Albania, and its attempts to reclaim its social role after the end of communism, especially by promoting the veneration of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, Twelver-Shī'ī Imams, and Ḥajjī Bekhtāsh through images and depictions located in monumental tombs and cemeteries. Indeed, as the recent field research pursued by Bria shows, the aesthetic practices and sensorial experiences related to this 'iconographic worship' involve faithful with different religious backgrounds and results in a multiplicity of perceptions and meanings on both an individual and collective scale.

The volume ends with an alphabetical list of the speakers who attended the Colloquium, and the titles of the papers they delivered. The original programme consisted of eight panels thematically arranged, including one on current research, preceded by the keynote lecture, as usual, and, for the first time, a presentation by the Ernst Herzfeld Award recipient. The annual Ernst Herzfeld Award for MA theses in Islamic Art History and Archaeology was established by the Society in 2019 in order to encourage and support emerging scholars, based in Europe, in the fields of Art History, Archaeology, and Historical Building Research. The 2020/2021 Ernst Herzfeld Award was assigned to Franziska Schneider for the MA thesis entitled "Rediscovering the Local Heritage - Zeyneb Sultan Mosque and the Chalkoprateia Church in Constantinople" she discussed at the Freie Universität Berlin.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Colloquium was among the earliest conferences held in a hybrid form, after the pandemic waned and gatherings were allowed again. However, some restrictions were still in place at the time, and they required an extraordinary effort to ensure the success of the event. This was achieved thanks to the commitment and support we received from Sapienza University of Rome's Rectorate, Faculty of Humanities and Arts, Department of Sciences of Antiquity, Museum of Classical Art, Museo-Laboratorio d'Arte Contemporanea, and Security Department. We express our gratitude to all their directors and staff. The valuable contribution of the colleagues, PhD students, MA and BA students who provided assistance in the organisation and practical issues also deserves to be acknowledged, as well as the work of the members of the Scientific Committee, and the other members of the Society involved in the selection of the paper proposals. Lastly, we would like to thank all the speakers, chairs and attendees for their enthusiastic and vibrant participation.