

## Artistic Resonances Between Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'anic Theory of Imagery and the Safavid Mi'rāj Miniature of Sulṭān-Muḥammad

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### Introduction

The intrinsic harmony between the Qur'an and the human natural disposition (fiṭrah) has produced profound conceptual parallels between Qur'anic teachings and various literary and artistic traditions within Islamic culture. Among these, the Prophet's Mi'rāj-his celestial ascent-has been a central subject repeatedly depicted in Persian-Islamic miniature painting, with artists and their patrons across different eras attempting to visualize this extraordinary event.

This study aims to examine how Qur'anic concepts influence diverse aspects of Islamic art, particularly miniature painting, and to offer a model for understanding how transcendent religious themes-such as the Mi'rāj-are artistically represented. After outlining the expressive functions of imagery and the Qur'anic verses concerning the Mi'rāj, the article introduces Sayyid Quṭb's modern theory of Qur'anic imagery, followed by an analysis of the celebrated Safavid-era miniature Mi'rāj of the Prophet (ṣ) by Sulṭān-Muḥammad. Through this comparative framework, the study highlights another dimension of the Qur'an's aesthetic and miraculous qualities.

### Methodology

Understanding historical events-especially those distant from the interpreter in time-relies on sounds, linguistic signs, and symbolic representation. This method applies not only to classical texts but also to the interpretation of high-level artworks, including iconic Persian miniatures. Such expressive forms make it possible to trace the reflections of Qur'anic meanings, particularly transcendent events like the Mi'rāj, in theoretical and artistic productions shaped by revelation.

The hidden layers of Qur'anic influence in Iranian art emerge through familiarity with the Qur'anic text, which reveals the depth of devotion and the spiritual inclinations of Persian artists. Among Qur'anic themes, the Mi'rāj is one of the most frequently illustrated in Islamic miniature painting, with artists in every era striving to visualize the majesty of this miraculous event.

### Findings

Safavid miniature painting maintained a close relationship with religious thought. Artists not only internalized the Qur'anic worldview but also selected their subjects primarily from Qur'anic narratives. The miniature Mi'rāj of the Prophet (ṣ) by Sulṭān-Muḥammad-one of the most renowned Safavid painters-is a paradigmatic example of spiritually inspired Persian art. The work reveals profound mystical depth, conceptual coherence, visual harmony, and a distinctly Iranian artistic identity. These qualities justify the analytical importance of the piece.

This Mi'rāj miniature may be understood as a "composite text," simultaneously engaging the intellect and the emotions. Through a carefully orchestrated visual language-harmonized colors, purified forms, non-perspectival depth, bold yet balanced compositions, and aesthetic completeness-Sulṭān-Muḥammad presents a metaphysical truth rather than a naturalistic scene. His depiction highlights aspects of the



Qur'an's own imagery: focusing on the human element while leaving the invisible realm beyond direct representation. Without the artist's mystical vision and Safavid-era spiritual sensibilities, masterpieces of this nature would not have emerged.

Thus, Safavid Persian painting reached a level of artistic maturity that aligns closely with the Qur'anic mode of imagery, making visual representation a foundational tool in expressing both conceptual and spiritual elements.

### Conclusion

The major findings are as follows:

- Because the *Mi'rāj* is a universally revered event among Muslims, artists across Islamic history have sought to portray its grandeur, each employing distinctive visual languages shaped by religious, historical, and political aims.
- Artistic imagery is a primary expressive element in the Qur'an, used masterfully to convey scenes, states, and concepts. Sayyid Quṭb's theory of Qur'anic imagery-rooted in deeply established aesthetic principles-is applicable to all Qur'anic "visual" verses and provides a methodological tool for analyzing *Mi'rāj*-related texts and artworks. It also offers fertile ground for future research in Qur'an-and-art studies.
- The Qur'anic method of visualization relies on two key components: **sensory imagination (takhayyul ḥissī)** and **artistic embodiment (tajassud fannī)**. Through these, the Qur'an presents inner states, existential models, and eschatological visions in vivid and comprehensible form.
- The miniature *Mi'rāj of the Prophet (s)* by Sulṭān-Muḥammad exemplifies the height of Qur'an-inspired Persian art in the Safavid period. The artist's spiritual insight and commitment to Qur'anic and mystical themes position the work as a crown jewel of six centuries of Persian miniature tradition.
- The six components of Sayyid Quṭb's aesthetic-Qur'anic theory (religious worldview, reality, imagination, emotion, language, rhythm) correspond remarkably with the six artistic features of Safavid miniature painting (vision, thematic content, structural design, functional purpose, technical execution, visual qualities). These sets of elements align both individually and collectively, forming an integrated interpretive framework.

### Keywords

Qur'an, Sayyid Quṭb, Safavid miniature painting, artistic imagery of the *Mi'rāj*, Sulṭān-Muḥammad.

### Ethical Considerations

**Compliance with research ethics.** The authors observed the ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scholarly research, and this is confirmed by all of them.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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