

“other” manuscript, the one illustrated in Figure 12.16, is clearly of a West, not East, African provenance.

In context, however, these are relatively minor concerns. All in all, this book should prove a welcome addition to the growing catalogue of works on Islamic art and calligraphy.

**Yasin Dutton**

BRANNON WHEELER:

*Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Ethics, and Territory in Islam.*

xi, 333 pp. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. \$25. ISBN 0 226 88804 5.

In *Mecca and Eden*, Brannon Wheeler examines how Islamic scholars negotiate the gap between an ideal past (Eden) and an imperfect present through relics, rituals, and places that direct society and civilization towards a divinely sanctioned, state-approved, model future. Drawing from the methods of Robertson Smith and Jonathan Z. Smith, Wheeler skilfully demonstrates how Muslim scholars “set apart” profane objects, actions and locations associated with the sanctuary at Mecca, and imbue them with a sacred status derived from their associations with Eden. Ultimately, this link between Mecca and Eden allows for mythological and practical reflections on the loss of that pristine paradise, a loss that can only be overcome through the establishment of a state-run, ordered society whose existence depends on the absolute obedience of its subjects to its sanctioned world view.

Each chapter in the work develops this thesis by focusing on some aspect of ritual, relics, and territory in Islam. Chapter 1 highlights the treasures of the Ka‘ba in order to link Islamic civilization with Adam’s founding of the Meccan sanctuary after his departure from paradise. For example, Ṭabarī and Ya‘qūbi both record how ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib uncovered a number of swords, armoury, and two gazelles of gold within the Ka‘ba and in the well of Zamzam. Wheeler suggests that the burial of religious treasures and their recovery is linked to broader Near Eastern motifs of conquest and the passing on of royal authority from one age to another. Weapons are particularly significant in that God gave man swords to establish justice and civilization after the fall of humanity. Ibn ‘Abbās reports how Adam himself was presented with a sword that was later inherited by the Prophet Muhammad. In the Islamic context, the swords and armour that have passed from one prophetic hand to another represent technology, order and governance, and mark the creation and legitimization of a new civilization separate from, yet continuous with, a privileged past.

Chapter 2 delves into the symbols and rituals that accentuate the gap between civilized life and the edenic utopia by first analysing what ablutions are required for fondling one’s penis. In this and other examples of mundane rituals and symbols surrounding food, sex, dress and offerings, Wheeler demonstrates how a purified state of existence, achieved through the daily enactment of mandatory rituals and adherence to established symbols, creates a temporary replica of what life was like in the Garden of Eden. The temporary nature of this purified state serves primarily to cast in sharp relief the profane realm of everyday existence, where humans are all too aware of their inherent

deficiencies and therefore depend even further upon the scholarly elite to construct rules and regulations that will draw them as close to the ideal as possible.

Relics serve as the basis for chapter 3, which shows how the collection and dispersion of the Prophet's physical and artificial remains are linked with the origins and spread of Islam outwards from the Meccan sanctuary, which represents Eden on earth. Scraps of hair, fingernails, footprints, and other artefacts, which achieve their status through authoritative choice, rightful ownership, and public consent, do not solely embody the continued presence of Muhammad in the world; rather, they remind humans that the Prophet and the law are essential to ordering and signifying a post-edenic world. In other words, relics place physical markers within a fallen world to separate "true civilization", a state-dependent civilization that resembles Eden as closely as possible, from chaos, anarchy, and destruction. In the case of the state's patronage of relics, the state asserts the right to inherit all the properties the relic embodies and therefore the authority and legitimacy to administer the entirety of religious laws, practices, and beliefs to a fallen humanity.

Chapter 4 extends this discussion of state patronage to include the tombs of the prophets mentioned in the Quran and in Muslim exegesis, in particular, the so-called "long tombs". Citing a *ḥadīth* report from Ibn Ḥanbal that claims that God gradually reduced the size of humans from the time of Adam onwards, Wheeler argues that as technological advances were made, and humans no longer needed to rely upon brute strength for their survival, God reduced them in stature. The long tomb, therefore, provides yet another opportunity for humans to reflect on the disparity between what is, and what once was. It is important to note, however, that the reduction in size came at a price; while humans developed the advanced skills and technologies necessary to improve their lot, they also became completely dependent upon such advances. Civilization, therefore, serves as a two-edged sword, especially when viewed in light of the fact that civilization, in all of its glory, represents only a mirror-image of the ideal state humans ultimately hope to achieve. Ironically, humans have a vested interest in ensuring the perpetuation of a condition that maintains their inferior status, which ultimately prevents them from ever reaching the ideal. The repercussions of this realization, and its manifestation in symbolic or ritual form, would be a parallel theme to explore.

At first glance, *Mecca and Eden's* broad range of topics and seemingly unrelated examples appear somewhat disconnected and random. Fortunately, Wheeler is a masterful and thoughtful guide as he leads the reader through the rich and varied facets of the human religious expressions he presents back to his primary thesis. In addition to its useful expanse of textual sources, archaeological data, artefacts, and first-time translations of primary texts, *Mecca and Eden's* greatest scholarly contribution is to the study of religion. Wheeler follows the footsteps of pioneer theorist Jonathan Z. Smith to suggest that religion has much to do with the impulse to map a world humans know all too well to be flawed. In this light, what the map ultimately signifies, if anything, takes a back seat to the decidedly human endeavour of constructing a meaningful existence through rituals, symbols, artefacts, words and relics.

**Kathryn Kueny**