



Report: International Online Conference: “Islamic Medieval Wall Paintings: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach”

Authors: Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic and Dr. Agnieszka Lic

In this report, we inform the scholarly community about the conference we co-organised. We provide information regarding the development of the conference concept and design as well as the scientific output of the event and its final programme.

1. Event Information

International online conference, Bamberg and Warsaw, September 4-5, 2025

Conference Organisers:

Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic, Centre for Heritage Conservation Studies and Technologies (KDWT), University of Bamberg

Dr. Agnieszka Lic, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences

This conference is related to the *Iranian Medieval Wall Paintings* project funded by the German Research Foundation (the DFG, at the University of Bamberg’s Centre for Heritage Conservation Studies and Technologies – the KDWT; Applicant: Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic).



Figure 1: Shamsiyya madrasa in Yazd, Central Iran. Applied stuccos and wall paintings (c. 1365). (Ana Marija Grbanovic)

2. Conference Subject and Objectives

The international and interdisciplinary conference was dedicated to the subject of Islamic medieval wall paintings. It aimed to explore the use of interdisciplinary research methodology for research of medieval wall paintings in the Islamic lands. Broad chronological and geographical scopes have been chosen as the conference focus, in order to discuss wall paintings as a trans-regional phenomenon and to be able to observe changes in their aesthetics, production technology and materiality across a longer time span. The conference was organised as an online event in order to bring together excellent international scholars of diverse backgrounds and generations, to discuss wall paintings from perspectives of different fields and to attract a diverse international audience.

Wall painting decorations are one of the *par excellence* decorative media used in monuments in the Islamic lands, starting with the early Islamic period (transition from late Antique traditions). In the medieval period, wall paintings were particularly frequently employed to decorate monuments in the Islamic lands, and further separate and more regional developments are observable in the modern period. In sum, wall paintings were a widespread and trans-regional medium of medieval Islamic architectural decorations. Recent years witnessed a surge in research on Islamic stuccos. Moreover, Islamic tile decorations are well researched, due to their removal from architectural structures and availability in museum collections globally. In contrast, research on Islamic medieval wall paintings has so far been performed sporadically, and broader, inter-regional studies have been particularly missing. Wall paintings have mainly been addressed in the form of case studies of single monuments or surveys limited to restricted geographical units. This state of the art has been caused by several factors. Firstly, the dichotomy and language barriers between Eastern and Western Islamic lands, as well as Arabic, Persian and Ottoman regions. Secondly, wall paintings largely remain *in situ*, and their study and research depend on access to the lands of their location. Thirdly, the subject of wall paintings seems to have been overshadowed by scholarly attention to architectural structures, rather than their architectural decorations within the given architectural context. In this respect, wall paintings have mainly been studied in the context of dating evidence for buildings, thus leaving out aspects of their aesthetics, function and meaning.

Wall paintings also pose a methodological challenge. So far, little is known about their materiality, especially binders, as well as pigments, and artistic techniques. This knowledge is necessary for informed conservation interventions for their preservation. Moreover, wall paintings need to be researched in their architectural context, where they fulfilled a specific meaning and function from the moment of their production to the present time. We often encounter monuments with architectural decorations in specific artistic media. In this context, wall paintings can be combined with stuccos or tiles to form a multimedia architectural decorative programme, with specific visual hierarchy and distinct roles of the materials, which still need to be thoroughly comprehended.

Our conference was designed to fill the outlined gaps, to transcend the mentioned dichotomies, and to ultimately improve our understanding of Islamic medieval wall paintings as well as to make advancements in research methodology of the subject. In order to transcend the traditional boundaries and limitations of the field of Islamic architectural history, and to develop an approach and research methodology of the field, the conference was envisioned as an interdisciplinary event. It provided a platform for a lively interdisciplinary discussion on Islamic medieval wall paintings from perspectives of Islamic art history, building archaeology, manuscript studies, cultural heritage preservation sciences, archaeometry, conservation sciences, heritage studies, and archaeology. Experts in diverse fields interacted with each other, exchanged their knowledge, and developed new ideas and professional ties. In doing so, we attempted to address the following research question: *How to study Islamic wall paintings in an interdisciplinary manner?* This question has wider methodological implications, because it addresses issues of integration of cultural heritage sciences and technologies in the field of Islamic art and architectural history in general. The event contributed to shedding light on structural and conceptual challenges of an interdisciplinary approach, and we discussed possible solutions which may be implemented by future generations of scholars.



Figure 2: Wall paintings in the transitional zone of the Gunbad structure at the Turbat-i Jam pilgrimage complex, north-eastern Iran (second half of 14th century). (Ana Marija Grbanovic)

A geographical focus on all the Islamic lands was intentional and allowed us to debate wall paintings from a trans-regional perspective, for case studies to be contextualised, and wall paintings from different geographical contexts to be compared. In doing so, we transcended the traditional disciplinary boundaries and language limitations of studies performed so far. Moreover, we also needed to transcend the linguistic divides (Arab vs Persian vs Ottoman language). Although produced by distinct dynasties, cultures, ethnicities or religions, the organisers of the conference believe that we can pinpoint common traits as well as differences between wall paintings across the given geographical context. The chronological scope of the

conference is the medieval period, broadly conceived, and it thus encompasses the time span from the beginning of Islam in the early seventh century CE until roughly 1500, when the modern period starts. Scholars, however, addressed connections between Early Islamic and pre-Islamic or Late Antique wall paintings. Moreover, they also referred to Modern wall paintings when discussing late medieval examples. The term medieval, in the title of the conference, is therefore used instead of a more precise chronological definition, due to the extensive geographical area of the conference and differences in exact chronological periodisation between Eastern and Western Islamic lands. In sum, research approaches debated in the conference are going to be transferable to research on other decorative media of Islamic architecture as well as Islamic material culture more broadly.

3. Conference Programme and Speakers

Conference keynote speaker, speakers, chairs and discussants (see below) were chosen based on consultations with colleagues representing diverse disciplines and inquiries across the existing academic networks. The invited speakers represented various fields and diverse geographical areas to contribute to the discussion on wall paintings from a trans-regional perspective and in an interdisciplinary manner. They represented diverse research methodologies and traditions. While some scholars from major universities participated in the conference, care has also been taken to provide space for scholars from less well-known organisations to participate. Attention was paid to the career stages of scholars and a mix of diverse generations of participants to enable an intergenerational knowledge transfer. Principles of diversity, equity and inclusion have been employed in the process of selecting speakers for the conference.

Summarising, this international and interdisciplinary event provided a discussion of research methodology that could indicate best-practice approaches for research on Islamic medieval wall paintings more broadly and advance our scientific field. The conference brought together approximately fifty active speakers and was attended partially or entirely by c. 250 listeners from Mexico to China. Its online format enabled participants from diverse continents to actively participate and to reach a global audience. The final version of its two-day programme comprised discussions of current research on Islamic and related wall painting case studies spanning the Iberian Peninsula, the Maghreb, the Near East, Iran, Central Asia and Western China. These papers presented approaches ranging from Art History, Archaeometry, Computer Sciences, Sociological and Religious Studies, Conservation and Preservation Sciences, Building Archaeology, Textile Studies, Machine Learning, Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Research, to Digital Humanities.

Specific conference components were research methodology transfer discussions aimed at scholarly exchange between scholars who work on Islamic material culture and those working on non-Islamic material culture. Podium discussions and special sessions of the conference brought together experts debating less frequently employed methodologies in the field of Islamic art and architectural history, such as gender-sensitive research and DIEA aspects for examination of wall paintings, as well as artificial intelligence and machine learning methodology for a better understanding of wall paintings. We are now proceeding to work on the conference edited volume.

4. Final Conference Programme

We provide here the final version of the conference programme that was carried out.

Conference Programme Times are provided in Central European Summer Time (UTC/GMT +2 hours)

Day 1 – September 4, 2025		
Opening of the Conference, Welcome and Greetings, Housekeeping Information		09.00-9.30
Keynote		
Prof. Dr. Markus Ritter	<i>Space Painting in Medieval Islamic Art and Abbasid Raqqa</i>	9.30-10.30
Break		10.30-11.00
Podium Discussion 1: Research and Conservation of wall paintings for a sustainable future Moderator: Franziska Prell, M.A. and Leander Pallas, M. A.		
Dr. Habil. Dobrochna Zielińska	<i>Technology of medieval Nubian wall paintings. An insight into a culture through the materiality of an image</i>	11.00-12.30
Franziska Kabelitz, M. A.	<i>Sustainability in Practice: a Personal Perspective</i>	
Dr. Melina Perdikopoulou	<i>Layers of Memory: Preserving Ottoman Wall Paintings in Greece</i>	
Claudia Christina Hennrich, M. A	<i>Preservation of the cultural buildings in their authenticity – an Uzbek – German Project</i>	
Maik Sommerfeld	<i>Preservation of the cultural buildings in their authenticity – an Uzbek – German Project</i>	
Break		12.30-13.30
Panel 1 – Setting the Ground: Conservation, Preservation and Production Technologies of Wall Paintings Chair: Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic		
Prof. Dr.-Ing. May al-Ibrashy and Amina Karam, M.A.	<i>The painted wood interior of al-Imam al-Shafi'i Dome in Historic Cairo: Discoveries and Observations from the Conservation Project</i>	13.30-14.00

Dr. Melina Perdikopoulou	<i>The Wall Paintings of Alaca Imaret in Thessaloniki: A Comparative Approach to 15th-Century Ottoman Painting</i>	14.00-14.30
Dr. Giovanna De Palma	<i>The conservation of Qusayr 'Amra wall paintings: methodologies and discoveries</i>	14.30-15.00
Break		15.00-15.30
Panel 2 – Cutting Edge Research of Wall Paintings in the Islamic West		
Chair: Dr. Peter Tamas Nagy		
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Victor Garcia Rabasco	<i>Abbadid Seville and the development of the Caliphate's artistic language</i>	15.30-16.00
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Umberto Bongianino	<i>Wall painting in the Islamic West and the aesthetic of naqsh</i>	16.00-16.30
Walid Akef, M.A.	<i>Islamic Mural Paintings: Propaganda and Power in the Age of Chivalry and Crusades</i>	16.30-17.00
Break		17.00-17.30
Special Session: Innovative Approaches to Research of Wall Paintings in Christian Nubia		
Chair: Dr. Agnieszka Lic		
Prof. Dr. Karel Christian Innemée	<i>Costumes of Authority, Images of Authority. Christian wall paintings of Medieval Nubia</i>	17.30-18.00
Dr. Agnieszka Jacobson-Cielecka	<i>From mural to costume: The reconstruction process of medieval robes</i>	18.00-18.30
Day 2 – September 5, 2025		
Panel 3 – Archaeology of Islamic Wall Paintings in the Middle East		
Chair: Dr. Agnieszka Lic		
Dr. Thomas Leisten	<i>An Umayyad Painters' Studio at Work: Design and Execution of Frescos at Balis, Syria</i>	9.00-9.30
Dr. Julie Bonnéric and Solène Mathieu	<i>The Wall Paintings of the House of Hearts: Interpreting Archaeological Fragments from a Byzantine and Umayyad Urban Residence in Jerash, Northern Jordan</i>	9.30-10.00

Dr. Ignacio Arce	<i>Umayyad Mural Paintings: from architectural decoration to narratives of power: some case studies from Qasr Hallabat/ Hammam as Sarrah, Qusayr Amra and Khirbat al Mafjar</i>	10.00-10.30
Ass. Prof. Dr. Tawfiq Da'adli	<i>Khirbat al-Mafjar frescoes reconstruction – which pieces found their way in and why others were left out?</i>	10.30-11.00
Break		11.0-11.30
Podium Discussion 2: DEIA and gender-sensitive research of wall paintings: perspectives for societal cohesion Moderator: Dr. Mareike Spychala		
Cornelia Thielmann, M. A.	<i>Gender-sensitive studies for architectural cultural heritage preservation</i>	11.30-13.00
Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic	<i>Intersectionality analysis for preservation of endangered monuments with wall paintings in Ottoman Baroque South-eastern Europe</i>	
Prof. Dr. Konstantinos Giakoumis	<i>Visual Artworks and Blind or Visually Impaired Persons: New Concepts for Independent Accessibility of Orthodox Icons</i>	
Dr. Jeanine Linz	<i>Gender sensitive research and gender dimension in proposals</i>	
Break		13.00-14.00
Panel 4 – Research and Preservation of Persianate Islamic Medieval Wall Paintings Chair: Bekhruz Kurbanov, M. A.		
Dr. Hamed Sayyadshahri, Ass. Prof. Dr. Mohammad Mortazavi and Dr. Mozghan Mousazadeh	<i>A review on the Conservation of Historical Wall Paintings in Khurasan, Iran: An Ethical Discussion</i>	14.00-14.30
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Amir Hossein Karimy and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Parviz Holakooei	<i>Gilding and glittering in wall decorations from the 12th to the 17th century Iran</i>	14.30-15.00
Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic	<i>Medieval wall paintings in Iran: a trans-regional phenomenon?</i>	15.00-15.30

Mohammad Mahdi Amini Qomi and Mohammad Mahdi Mohammadi Iraqi	<i>Art historical research of damaged wall paintings at the Gunbad-i Azadan mosque near Isfahan</i>	15.30-16.00
Break		16.00-16.30
<i>Podium Discussion 3: Role of digitization in research of wall paintings: challenges and perspectives</i> Moderator: Dr. John Hindmarch		
Dr. Ines Konczak-Nagel	<i>Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road</i>	16.30-18.00
Dr. Erik Radisch	<i>Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road</i>	
Dr. Ivana Lemcool	<i>Digitizing Fresco Paintings in the Balkan Area- Issues and Perspectives in Digital Preservation of Monumental Heritage in Multi-faith Environments</i>	
Break		18.00-18.30
<i>Special Session: AI, ML new technologies and ethical aspects for research of wall paintings</i> Moderator: Dr. Julian Hauser		
Prof. Dr. Markus Rickert	<i>AI application in different domains: from production to agriculture to ... cultural heritage?</i>	18.30-20.00
Dr. Tomasz Michalik	<i>Eye-tracking as a tool to support informed presentations of wall paintings</i>	
Conference Closing Discussion		20.00-21.00

5. Acknowledgements

Organisation of this conference was made possible with institutional support of the Centre for Heritage Conservation Studies and Technologies (KDWT) at the University of Bamberg and the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The conference was supported by a project grant from the German Research Foundation to Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic for the project “Iranian Medieval Wall Paintings” (Project number: 522740621). Further funding was secured through the SPOT funding line for conference organisation of the Equal Opportunities Office at the University of Bamberg. We are greatly indebted to these institutions and funding bodies for their support of our event.



Bamberg and Warsaw, July 15, 2026

Dr. Ana Marija Grbanovic and Dr. Agnieszka Lic