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## INTRODUCTION

In 2007, Franz Rosenthal's (1914-2003) seminal work, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, was posthumously published.<sup>1</sup> This massive work by the renowned Islamic historian stands as one of the most comprehensive and significant books on the concept of 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*, in Arabic) in mediaeval Islam, and indeed as a remarkable testimony to Rosenthal's distinguished career and outstanding scholarship. In this work Rosenthal proposed that '[c]ivilizations tend to revolve around meaningful concepts of an abstract nature which more than anything else give them their distinctive character'<sup>2</sup>, and that in the Islamic civilisation, as the title of his book suggests, the concept of *ʿilm* triumphed above all as its most conspicuous definer.<sup>3</sup> Such was the level of importance Islamic civilisation had accorded the idea of *ʿilm*, Rosenthal adds, it was 'unparalleled in other civilisations'.<sup>4</sup> He went so far as to identify Islam with *ʿilm*, stating unambiguously that '*ʿilm* is Islam', because there was in his view 'no branch of Muslim intellectual life, of Muslim religious and political life, and of the daily life of the average Muslim that has remained untouched by the all-pervasive attitude toward "knowledge" as something of supreme value for Muslim being'.<sup>5</sup> Rosenthal's exhaustive discussions leave little room for doubt about the central role knowledge had played, and has continued to play, in the shaping of Muslims' collective imagination and social reality.

The proposition that it is possible and appropriate to identify a whole civilisation with a singular concept or idea, no matter how significant and central it might have been, is certainly reductive and problematic. Yet, contestable as this thesis may be, Rosenthal's masterful coverage and forceful arguments remain admirably insightful and enlightening, presenting a multifaceted, rich understanding of the notion of *ʿilm* from the religious, mystical, philosophical, and literary perspectives. As an abstract concept, *knowledge* is often contrasted with *ignorance*, and is regarded as a virtue, a good thing to have, yet the nature and content of knowledge vary not only across cultural boundaries but also within the same cultural context. Muslim mystics, jurists, and philosophers, for example, would agree on the centrality of the Quran and Hadiths as two indispensable and incontestable sources of knowledge in Islam, yet they would significantly (and even vehemently) differ over the appropriate method of using and interpreting these sources to attain certainty and truthful knowledge. Revelatory and rational approaches to knowledge differ markedly in Islam, and many religious scholars consider philosophical knowledge to be corruptive and pernicious.

While inspired by Rosenthal's study in certain ways, the focus on the concept of *ʿilm* in this publication is not driven by a desire to support, advance, or contest Rosenthal's thesis, but rather by the necessity to use it as a launching ground. The aim of this volume is to explore the Islamic civilisational responses to major shifts in the concept of 'knowledge' that took place in the post-mediaeval period, and especially within the context of the 'early modern'. The Western historiography of the rise of the so-called early modern science and the consequent demarcation of the 'early modern' in European history have posed insurmountable challenges to the writing of both Islamic intellectual history and the history of Islamic science (*ʿilm*). The challenges lie in how and where to position the Islamic world in a global history shaped by the critical episodes of the early modern which appear to be entirely Eurocentric. Many perplexing questions have arisen from these challenges and have so far remained without satisfactory answers — for example, how

to account for the Copernican revolution and subsequent surge of intellectual curiosity in Europe from an Islamic perspective? How to construct and maintain an Islamic relevance to the new 'scientific' developments of early modernity? And how and where to position Islam in the profound intellectual changes that took place during the Enlightenment? The responses to these challenges have been many and varied; however, most positions (and especially those from the Islamic world) have revolved around the issues of Eurocentrism and Western hegemony, and can be generally characterised by defensiveness and disengagement.<sup>6</sup> The theory of civilisational rise and decline has weighted heavily in the field, leaving only a limited space for negotiating a positive outlook.

In focusing specifically on mediaeval Islam, Rosenthal was able to present a more or less static and stable understanding of *ilm*, which allowed him to shuttle freely between numerous sources (Islamic and non-Islamic) spanning over a millennium. He carefully avoided the difficult questions concerning the Islamic civilisational response to the early modern shifts in the understanding and pursuits of knowledge. If knowledge was the core preoccupation of the Islamic civilisation, how can we explain its apathetic attitude toward the revolutionary shifts that took place in Europe? Although he did not delve into this area, Rosenthal's response can be gleaned from the following statement, which he made in the last paragraph of his book:

Its insistence upon 'knowledge' has no doubt made medieval Muslim civilization one of great scholarly and scientific productivity, and through it, Muslim civilization made its most lasting contribution to mankind. 'Knowledge' as its center also hardened Muslim civilization and made it impervious to anything that did not fall within its view of what constituted acceptable knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

With reference to the concept of *ilm*, Rosenthal thus presents a clue to a possible new reading of Islamic intellectual history in the post-mediaeval period, which proposes that it was the Islamic civilisation's stubborn preoccupation with its own knowledge that prevented it from developing openness towards the new developments in European knowledge. Recent studies in the field tend to support this proposition.<sup>8</sup> Plausible as this may appear at first glance, the proposition involves several contradictions. First, one of the supposed key features of the Islamic attitude that led it to be of 'great scholarly and scientific productivity' was both its openness towards the achievements of other civilisations (Greeks, Persians, and Indians) and its dynamic nature, which enabled Muslims to absorb existing knowledge and create new knowledge throughout the mediaeval period. To assume that 'knowledge' itself suddenly turned into an 'inertia' that rendered Islamic civilisation 'impervious' to external influences seems contrary to its supposed fundamentally receptive and productive nature in the first place. Second, following the popular civilisational rise and decline theory, many have assumed that the state of knowledge creation and production in the Islamic world had indeed reached a level of inertia that made it impervious to European influences; however, recent studies have shown that the dynamic and productive characteristics of Islam have continued, though along traditional lines, but Muslim scholars have remained uninterested in new scientific developments. Thus, the main issue was not internal inertia and stagnation in Islamic societies but something else, which is yet to be identified.

Third, at a certain point in their early modern history Muslims realised that they needed to change their traditional stance on knowledge, and that the new pursuits of knowledge advanced by the Europeans were indeed *better* than their own. This moment of collective realisation is highly significant, and the change of heart that followed raises the perplexing question of the timing of this

sudden awakening — why did it not happen two centuries earlier? From Rosenthal's perspective, the answer lies in the unflinching confidence in the validity and truthfulness of its own internal system of knowledge, which prolonged the life of the Islamic belief system and delayed its eventual collapse — which later, ironically, took place under the mounting pressure of a new form of *ʿilm* (as modern science).

To the unflinching confidence in their own system of knowledge, Rosenthal would add the Muslims' attitude toward doubt (*shakk*), which he discussed at some length in his book. 'Doubt in whichever way indicated', he wrote,

became the true pariah and outcast of Muslim civilization. It stands for all that is to be shunned like the plague. No worse fate can befall man than being tossed into the sea of doubts and left there to flounder and possibly to drown. Doubt in itself is a sufficient manifestation of ignorance.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, doubt is paired with certainty, faith, and belief in antinomies that present it as the soul's most perilous disease, a satanic tool devised to deviate people from the right path of religion. Yet again, one cannot ignore the great works of Muslim scholars in which they raised — in true scientific spirit — doubts about the works of leading Greek figures, such as Ibn al-Haytham's *al-Shukūk 'alā Baṭlīmīyus* (Doubts on Ptolemy) and *al-Shukūk 'alā Iqlīdis* (Doubts on Euclid), and al-Rāzī's *al-Shukūk 'alā Jalīnūs* (Doubts on Galen). If doubt in scientific studies was an accepted methodology in the Islamic knowledge system, and some would credit Muslim 'scientists' with introducing it, why were Muslim scholars not interested in doubt when it became an established methodology of knowledge acquisition and verification in early modern scientific developments? One can understand the Muslims' rejection of doubt in matters of faith and belief, but not in science, especially when they themselves used it and presented fine examples of its efficacy. The answer to this perplexing question lies in the complex polarity of religion and science, the intertwined history of which is one of the main themes of this volume.

In discussing the intertwined relationship between science, religion, and art in Islam under the embracing theme of *ʿilm*, this book aims to show how the unflinching confidence in the validity and truthfulness of the Islamic system of belief manifested itself through various enduring cultural practices, erratic events, and challenging new encounters during the early modern and modern periods. The chapters, which have been selected from papers originally presented at the *ʿIlm: Science, Religion, and Art in Islam* Conference 2016 in Adelaide, Australia, take multiple positions on the Islamic approach to knowledge, viewing *ʿilm* not as a static and stable enterprise, but rather as a dynamic understanding and engagement that can represent different and changing notions and values. The scientific and intellectual developments that took place in early modern Europe, which changed its whole civilisational outlook concerning the types of knowledge that should be pursued and the kind of education that must be cultivated and delivered, have undermined the stability and consistency that the Islamic notion of *ʿilm* was struggling to maintain. This moment of critical shift in understanding clearly shows that the knowledge strongly desired and pursued by Muslims meant ignorance and stagnation to early modern Europeans.<sup>10</sup>

The chapters in this volume bring into focus three related complex issues. First, through the concept of *ʿilm* Islam was able to maintain — in the face of the divided epistemology that Western modernity introduced after the Enlightenment — an undivided approach to knowledge until the early 20th century. The rise of modern science introduced an unprecedented rift into the

traditional approaches of knowledge by establishing a self-propelled mode of knowing completely independent of the moral values of religion. In this new mode of knowing the purpose, validity, and merit of knowledge are determined by science itself, thereby creating two systems of belief, one guided by religious values and principle, and one not. This divided approach was, and still is, alien to Islamic tradition.

In the introduction to his monumental catalogue of Islamic sciences (*ʿulūm*, pl. of *ʿilm*), *Kashf al-zunūn* (Dispelling Doubts), the renowned 17th-century Ottoman scholar Kātip Çelebi expressed this unitary understanding of knowledge when he referred to *ʿilm* as being ‘one in meaning and in truth’ (*maʿnā wāḥid wa ḥaqīqa wāḥida*).<sup>11</sup> This statement reflects the broader Islamic understanding of the undivided and unpolarised nature of knowledge, which was a major reason why Islamic culture neither experienced a divisive split between ‘science’ and ‘religion’ as two distinct modes of knowledge nor witnessed a liberating divorce of art from the religious/scientific concerns until the wide infiltration of European influence in the 20th century. Throughout the pre- and early modern periods in the Arab-Islamic world, *ʿilm* was used to denote one, undivided mode of knowing, and the terms *ʿālim* (sing.) and *ʿulamāʾ* (pl.) were used for both ‘scientists’ and ‘clerics’ — that is, for scholars concerned with and having expert knowledge in worldly matters, as well as for scholars concerned with and having expert knowledge in other-worldly matters. Primary Arabic sources show how *ʿilm* has always been one in nature, but different in purposes. This is to say that the belief system guiding the processes of knowing is the same, and the ultimate goal is one (knowledge of God), but meanwhile the purposes and approaches in various branches of knowledge are different. Accordingly, a literary scholar, a religious scholar, a philosopher, an astronomer, and a medical practitioner all share the titles *ʿālim* and *ʿallāma* (one with an exceptionally high level of knowledge), although the purposes and pathways of their pursuit of knowledge are different. All branches of Islamic religious sciences involve rational reflections and most philosophers, mathematicians, and natural scientists either were religious scholars or shared with religious scholars the same set of religious beliefs. This has continued to the present time, albeit with a sharper definition of the two realms of expertise.

The second complex issue derives from the first, and concerns the unitary understanding of *ʿilm* and the enduring dilemma this unified approach to knowledge creates, as it can be evaluated from two contrasting positions. From the modern scientific perspective, the stubbornly unified approach can be blamed for having impeded the development of the new mode of knowing called ‘science’, which consciously and deliberately divorced itself from the traditional approach during the early modern period. Historically, there has been no specific Arabic word for ‘science’ (other than *ʿilm*), understood in the modern sense as ‘the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment’.<sup>12</sup> Early modern and modern Arab intellectuals, linguists, reformers, and ‘scientists’ did not coin a new term for this to help delineate the territories of modern science from that of traditional *ʿilm* in Arabic thought. The Arabic term *ʿilm* (pl. *ʿulūm*) has continued to be used to describe both religious and non-religious pursuits of knowledge — that is, the term comprises the devotional and intellectual engagements with the divine revelation as well as the rational and empirical study of nature. For critics of the science-religion split, who see modern scientific enterprise as having been divorced from the questions of morality and religious beliefs, the unified Islamic approach appears as a positive trait of resistance. For those who consider

the liberation of science from the dictates of religion as a key factor in its modern success and advancement, however, the Islamic position appears as a negative expression of traditional inertia. Today, as the chapters in this volume show, the Islamic world is certainly torn by this dilemma: Muslims want to be progressive owners and producers of scientific knowledge, yet they also want to remain traditional and ‘Islamic’.

The third complex issue raised in this volume concerns the relationship between art and knowledge. The modern demarcation of scientific and religious epistemologies has been predicated on a deeper division of objective and subjective modes of knowing. Modernity privileged the objective over the subjective mode, which has been relegated to the realm of the individual. This is where religion and art now belong. Art in particular has become a self-focused enterprise concerned more with subjective emotions, feelings, and personal experiences than with objective knowledge production and acquisition. This is alien to Islamic cultures, which equate beauty with truth and goodness and neither reduce the transcendental dimension of beauty to aesthetics nor confine it to the eye of the beholder. Despite the exquisite beauty of Islamic art, Muslim craftsmen and scholars are not recognised for having produced a coherent theory of aesthetics. Rather, art was always at the service of religious, literary, scientific, or everyday life’s needs. Whether it be a scientific instrument, a calligraphic inscription, a miniature in a manuscript, or an everyday object, Muslim craftsmen produced objects that appeal to the taste of diverse communities that have one thing in common: privileging the mind over the soul, and knowledge over feeling. Acting as a unifying cultural force, *‘ilm* informed art (*san‘a*), imagination (*khayāl*), and artistic creativity (*ibdā‘*), thereby bringing together science and religion to form the common foundation of artistic production. A master craftsman was referred to as *mu‘allim* (from *‘ilm*), which is the same term used today for ‘teacher’. From this perspective, the traditional concept of *‘ilm* was able to, on the one hand, fuse science and religion together into an indissoluble whole, and, on the other, make art an act of knowledge before being an expression of feeling.

The structure of this volume follows that of the conference, which explored the agency of *‘ilm* in the three related realms of science, religion, and art. Viable as this structure may appear, the intertwined nature of these three realms of knowledge within the unifying perspective of *‘ilm* makes the tripartite division often seem contrived, superficial, and indeed problematic. Discussions could not be segregated neatly into these three conceptual spaces without some inconsistency, especially since most chapters focus on the early modern context within which the term’s unifying epistemological scope was still wielding significant force. Yet it is this complex synthesis of ideas and connections buried within the folds of *‘ilm*’s multidimensional conceptual scope that this volume is attempting to unravel.

Part I, ‘*‘Ilm* as Science’, features four chapters examining the conceptualisation of *‘ilm* as science and the different modes of engagements with the ‘scientific’ study of the natural world. Two of the chapters focus on the Arab-Ottoman context and two focus on the Indian-Mughal context. My own opening chapter, on the polarisation of the unitary scope of *‘ilm* into science and religion, which took place in the second half of the 19th century, discusses the role that the influential works of JW Draper (1811-82) and AD White (1832-1918) played in raising an awareness of the polarity among Arab scholars and intellectuals as well as the general public. The irony of such an awareness lay in the way Draper’s and White’s theory had led Arabs to see the conflictual relationship between science and religion as having resulted from the repressive practices of the Church and, accordingly, being

expressive of the internal affairs of Christendom. Islam by contrast was seen, thanks to Draper in particular, as a religion of science. The study discusses how the conflict thesis then re-emerged in the second half of the 20th century in a historical narrative that attempted to explain the destruction of the Istanbul Observatory by Sultan Murād III (r. 1574-95) as an event that expresses the triumph of religious fanaticism over rational sciences. This attempt mapped the modern polarity of science and religion over the traditional distinction between rational (*ʿaqlī*) and religious (*naqlī*) knowledge, thus extending Draper's and White's conflict theory into the Islamic religion. Showing how such mapping is inconsistent with early modern sources, the study argues that the questions the polarity of science and religion has raised in the Arab-Islamic context have not been concerned with issues of historiography and the lost moral guidance of the scientific enterprise, but rather with Islam's compatibility with modernity and its secular-scientific foundations.

In Chapter 2, Perri Sparnon's study, 'Science and Art', focuses on anatomical illustration in early Islamic optics through examining the agency of the image as a bearer of scientific knowledge in Islamic culture. Sparnon examines the oldest surviving image of the optical system, initially found in the *Kitāb al-manāẓir* (Book of Optics) by the celebrated mediaeval scholar Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040), so as to trace its function in this landmark study and its reproductions as an expression of anatomical knowledge in subsequent commentaries. The main question underlying Sparnon's study concerns the role of art in the advancement of scientific knowledge as developed in early modern Europe. She critically examines the proposition that the Islamic religion's prohibition of the mutilation of the human body was responsible for the limited use of anatomical dissection and illustrations and consequent impediment of scientific developments. Shaha Parpia's study, meanwhile, in Chapter 3, of the imperial Mughal hunt as a pursuit of knowledge shifts the focus to early modern Mughal India to introduce a new reading of the cultural practice of hunting, showing its agency and efficacy in technological advancements and the understanding of the natural system. Customarily understood as a leisure activity, hunting was rarely considered a 'scientific' activity that involves investigations, experimentation, and analyses of natural phenomena encountered on the field, as well as systematic recording of findings with emphasis on anatomy, taxonomy, and animal psychology. Parpia's study shows, on the one hand, how science, ethics, and religion were interrelated concepts in Mughal cultural contexts, and, on the other, how the documentations of scientific activities were closely linked to art.

Part I concludes with Katharine Bartsch's and Peter Scriver's study of the ill-fated modern astronomical observatory, *Tarewālī Kōthī* (House of Stars), which was established in Lucknow during the reign of Nawab Naṣīruddīn Ḥaidar (r. 1827-37). The erratic closure of this state-of-the-art scientific institution in 1849 by the last Nawab of Awadh, Wajīd 'Alī Shāh (r. 1847-56), recalls the puzzling destruction of the Istanbul Observatory, discussed in Chapter 1, showing that after more than two and a half centuries the state of the science of astronomy was still shrouded with ambiguity with regard to its legality and religious merit. The politics of destruction always comes to the fore when explanations of such baffling events are sought, yet one cannot but ponder the apathy Muslim cultures have shown towards *ʿilm* as 'modern science', the lack of immunity against the rulers' whimsical desires, and the absence of other indispensable legal tools for ensuring the survival of the new institutions of early modern science.

Part II, '*ʿIlm* as Religion', features four chapters concerned with the centrality of religion in the production, dissemination, and authentication of knowledge in Islamic society. They explain,

albeit in different ways, Rosenthal's emphatic statement that '*ilm* is Islam', with Islam understood here primarily as a faith or system of belief and not as cultural potency and dynamism. Virginia Hooker opens with a study of the way in which Quranic calligraphy is used as a vehicle for spreading *ilm*, as 'religious knowledge', in contemporary Indonesia, and conversely how Islamic religious knowledge provides the foundation and impetus for artistic creativity, production, and refinements. Didin Sirojuddin's school of Quranic calligraphy, which Hooker presents in detail, is a remarkable example of how a modern aesthetic sensibility is profoundly shaped by religious knowledge in the world's largest Muslim majority nation. It shows how knowledge and not feeling remains a strong driving force of artistic expression. There are many other forms of subjective and emotional artistic expressions in Indonesia; however, in the continuing struggle between tradition and modernity and the search for cultural identity, the self-conscious appeal to the religious source for inspiration has never been greater.

This anxious search for an Islamic identity in an increasingly globalised world is further elucidated in Chapter 6, in which Syed Mehboob Bukhari focuses on the preoccupation with the Islamisation of modern science that goes back to Islam's early encounters with modern Europe in the 19th century. Bukhari examines the intellectual campaign of two leading Muslim scholars, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ziauddin Sardar, who have called for the Islamisation of *ilm* — that is, the remarrying of modern science, which deliberately divorced itself from religion, with the religious and moral principles of Islam, so as to show the contradictions and shortcomings of their project in today's globalised society. Nasr and Sardar view modern science as a product of the Western secular system, which generated an uncontrolled, reductive, and destructive approach to knowledge, in contrast to which their utopian 'Islamic science' presents not only a potent progressive project, but one that is also inherently ethical and environmentally friendly. Bukhari's study questions the validity and relevance of such religiously driven, utopian visions to find simple answers to the maladies of the increasingly globalised, technologised, and spiritless modern world.

Selen Morkoç's chapter, 'In Between the Mind and the Heart', follows by showing that the conscious preoccupation with differentiating between Islamic and foreign sciences, which Nasr and Sardar have dramatised, was not new to the Islamic system of knowledge. This duality emerged early with Islam's wide exposure to Greek knowledge, and took on various forms, one of which has been the distinction between the rational (*aqlī*) and religious (*sharī*) sciences, which was conspicuously expressed in the works and personal quest for truthful knowledge of the celebrated Ottoman Scholar Kātip Çelebi (1609-57). Being among the first Ottoman scholars to present a positive attitude towards early modern sciences and to engage actively in introducing them to a Muslim audience, Çelebi occupies a special place in Islamic intellectual history. It is thus remarkable to see him oscillating between his mind and heart in his quest for the truth, and to hear the visionary dream that put an end to his perplexity, by settling the intellectual battle in favour of faith over reason. As Morkoç shows, Çelebi's dream might have represented a decisive moment that resolved his personal dilemma, yet his views can be taken to represent a prevailing trend among various intellectual circles in the Ottoman society at the time.

Finally, Faris Hajamaideen's '*Ilm* and the Human Body' concludes Part II by shedding fresh light from the Islamic perspective on the agency of the body in the conceptual relationship between knowledge (*ilm*) and light (*nūr*). Focusing on the work of the renowned 12th-century philosopher-mystic Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), Hajamaideen shows how conceptions of the



relationship between knowledge, illumination, and the human body were constructed using two architectural metaphors: the temple (*haykal*) and the fortress (*sīyiyā*). Focusing on Suhrawardī's two key works, *Hayākil al-nūr* (Temples of Light) and *Hikmat al-ishrāq* (The Philosophy of Illumination), Hajamaideen examines the cosmological significance of these architectural metaphors in order to show how the structure of the human body was conceived as playing a key cognitive-illuminative role in the process of transformation from being a fortress of darkness into becoming a temple of light. He discusses the process through which the body and the mind work as a unified 'structure' or 'temple', wherein 'form' and 'space' work together in an integral manner as 'architecture' to enable the infusion of light to dematerialise the body and erase its opacity.

Part III, 'Ilm as Art', features three chapters concerned with the questions of Islamic aesthetics in the art and architecture of early modern and modern Turkey, Indonesia, and Egypt, and the challenges of staging Islamic art outside its cultural context in modern institutions of display. Susan Scollay opens with a study of the aesthetic context that shaped the unprecedented imperial palace built by the Ottoman sultan Murād II (r. 1421-51) at Edirne in Thrace. She draws attention to the lack of theoretical writings on art and architecture in pre-modern Islam, and the consequent absence of collective aesthetic theory that informs Islamic artistic imagination and guides modern interpretations. Mediaeval sources on Islamic sciences (*'ulūm*) do not mention *'ilm al-jamāl* (the science of beauty), which emerged in the 20th century to account for the existing Western discourse on the topic. In this rather ambiguous interpretive context, Scollay proposes that palaces of the imagination described in illustrated manuscripts, such as the Persian *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings) and other Persianate poetic tales, were likely models for the Edirne Palace. She argues that through the agency of *'ilm*, understood as knowledge of literature and cultural models from elsewhere in the Islamic world, appropriate poetic ideals of beauty were constructed and mobilised to play a large part in the artistic evolution of the House of Osman during the early modern period.

James Bennett's chapter, 'Ilm or Fashion?', follows, showing how in the absence of established Islamic aesthetic theories, modern scholars fabricate their own theories to fill in the vacuum with constructed ideals of beauty that serve their religious ideologies and nationalistic tendencies. This is particularly the case, as Bennett shows, with the geometric batik motifs of Javanese textiles, generically known as *ceplokan*, which Southeast Asian scholars interpret as visual expressions of the Islamic concept of *tawhīd* (divine unity). Tracing the long history of *ceplokan*, which is among the most popular category of designs, the origins of which date back to the pre-Islamic early classical period (c.700-900 CE) in Java, Bennett argues that the geometric motifs did not develop as a conscious response to the concept of *tawhīd*, but came about through a natural process of cultural negotiation, by which older Hindu-Buddhist textile designs were reinterpreted in the context of the new dress fashions that emerged following the ascendancy of Islam in Java in the 16th century. As *ceplokan* patterns became particularly admired in the Javanese sultanates, imported India textiles, featuring similar geometric designs, contributed to the development of the batik style, now closely identified with Javanese aesthetics, long before the introduction of the *tawhīd* theory.

Sam Bowker's 'Curating 'Ilm' concludes Part III and the volume with a study of the agency of *'ilm* in the process of curation, which tends to impose new, and often foreign, aesthetic frameworks to enable the visibility, appreciation, and understanding of works of art. In this process, several modes of knowledge come into an interactive play. Bowker distinguishes the mode of *'ilm* involved in the

act of curatorship from the haptic knowledge of the makers or tacit knowledge of the visitors and/or previous owners of the objects displayed. With reference to two Egyptian Tentmaker Applique exhibitions (*khiyāmiyya*) he curated in regional Australia and the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (IAMM) in Kuala Lumpur, Bowker shows how the curation of exhibitions acknowledges and balances those forms of knowledge as a core component of the museum's and gallery's educational function. He further shows how each of his exhibitions enabled the creation and transmission of haptic, tacit, and explicit knowledge viewed as conceptual structures of *ilm*.

Rosenthal concluded his study with the following question: 'What does it mean for a civilization, and beyond it, for the history of mankind, if "knowledge" is made its central concern?' Important though the question seems, Rosenthal made it appear rather rhetorical with his admission that 'no one answer would seem possible ... and it is, perhaps, enough merely to have posed it'.<sup>13</sup> His difficulty with finding an answer seems to derive from the cultural relativity position he assumed, wherefrom the meaning and merit of knowledge can only be determined from within. From the perspective of this volume, as shown by the multiple perspectives of the authors, the true value of knowledge lies in its cross-civilisational reach, as when the development of knowledge in pre-modern Islam exerted profound changes onto the Europeans, whose resurgence in the early modern period has in turn forced massive changes onto the Islamic world view and its systems of knowledge. Now the landscape of knowledge has significantly changed, the Muslim mind, which has been historically calibrated to be particularly sensitive towards knowledge, can and should contribute to opening new horizons of knowing where science, religion, and art can meet again on freshly cultivated and intellectually fertile grounds.

## NOTES

- 1 Franz Rosenthal, 2007, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill).
- 2 Rosenthal, 2007, 1.
- 3 Rosenthal, 2007, Introduction, 1-4.
- 4 Rosenthal, 2007, 334.
- 5 Rosenthal, 2007, 2.
- 6 See, for example, the heated debate between George Saliba and Toby Huff on the rise of modern science, which I discussed in my book on Istanbul Observatory. Samer Akkach, 2017, *Marṣad Istanbul: hadm al-raṣd wa raṣd al-hadm. Taṭawwur thaqāfat al-ʿulūm fī al-Islām baʿd Copernicus* (Doha: Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies), Chapter 12.
- 7 Rosenthal, 2007, 340-1.
- 8 See Khaled El-Rouayheb, 2015, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- 9 Rosenthal, 2007, 300.
- 10 Rosenthal, 2007, 240.
- 11 Kātip Çelebi, 1835, *Kaṣṣf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa l-funūn* (Beirut: Dār Ṣadir, rep. London: Bentley), vol. 1, 24-5.
- 12 Angus Stevenson (ed.), 2010, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- 13 Rosenthal, 2007, 340-1.

