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When Icon Enters the Realm of Religion: Tracing the Idea of Iconoclasm in Islamic Tradition

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to trace the ideas of iconoclasm that have grown within the Islamic tradition. It is motivated by the relationship between religion and icons, which has sparked considerable debate. On one hand, there are some religions that consider icons a legitimate element in their religious tradition, a practice known as iconodulism. On the other hand, there are religions that take the opposite stance, rejecting, prohibiting, or even condemning the use or production of icons within their religious tradition, a practice known as iconoclasm. In the context of Islam, some argue that iconoclastic movements are often directed at specific groups as a purification effort. However, upon closer examination, many dominant traditions within Islam have elements of iconoclasm: Allah is symbolized through the concept of Asma` al-Husna or depicted through calligraphic art; the visualization of Prophet Muhammad has been a controversial subject, leading to an evolution that is symbolized through light or calligraphy. There is also a stigma attached to painting and sculpture in this context. Why does Islamic tradition prefer symbols over icons?

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1. INTRODUCTION

This research discusses religion and icons, where in this "arena" arises a controversial issue, namely iconoclasm. This issue refers to the rejection and destruction of icons in religion deemed heretical. Iconoclasm is a form of opposition to iconodulism or iconophilism, which supports and even constructs the existence of icons or religious images as a form of reverence in religion. In this case, the icons that become objects in this issue receive two kinds of treatment in religion: 1) Accepted, to be subsequently constructed; 2) Rejected, to be subsequently destroyed.

Various sources indicate that the early iconoclasm movement refers to the controversy in the Byzantine era triggered by Emperor Leo III in 726. It was a time of widespread destruction of religious imagery, leading to social division within Byzantine society, resistance against the monks, and artistic stagnation (Brubaker, 2012). It is understandable that Byzantium later became famous and closely associated with the terms icon, iconoclasm, and iconoclasm.(Brubaker, 2012, p. 1)

The root issue behind the controversy of iconoclasm is the question of whether it is legitimate to use icons or images in worship. Supporters of iconoclasm assume that icons must be destroyed so that believers do not fall into idolatry and do not worship icons, thus potentially forgetting the actual figures of the saints themselves. Byzantine iconoclasm had a significant influence in the Middle Ages, and its impact is still felt to this day. Specifically, it has altered the way Orthodox Christians worship, but generally, the issue has been referenced in several historical events: the English Reformation in the 16th century, the French Revolution in the 18th century, the Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001 (Flood, 2019), and ISIS's destruction of Shia holy sites and significant relics of Prophet Jonah and Prophet Seth in Mosul (Brubaker, 2012).

Referring to Barnard, Wilson-Kastner views the controversy of Byzantine iconoclasm as highly complex. It involves many factors: political, economic, social, theological interactions, and even popular piety (Wilson-Kastner, 1980). The issue of Breaking-Image is not solely targeted due to reasons of religious resistance deemed heretical or paganistic, but also for political reasons, such as the case in Indonesia in the 1970s, where there was the destruction of images of Sukarno and they were replaced with images of Suharto. It wasn't until 1998 that images of Sukarno were allowed to "come out" freely again.

The statement regarding iconoclasm being solely targeted at specific groups within religion seems to warrant further examination. There exists a general tradition of iconoclasm within Islam that deserves deeper scrutiny. For instance, Islam prohibits the depiction of certain holy figures such as Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and Angels. Instead, imagery concerning Allah in Islam is developed through the Asma' al-Husna (the Beautiful Names of Allah). Additionally, the concept of prohibition against drawing and sculpting in Islam remains prominent. Some literature that still exists with these iconoclastic values includes the book Sulam al-Taufiq. This is what has prevented visual art within Islam from significantly flourishing. Why is Islam more sensitive towards icons and chooses symbols as alternatives in its tradition? This significant question directs this article towards tracing the evolving idea of iconoclasm within the Islamic tradition.

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2. METHODS

The discourse on icons thrives intensively within the realm of semiotics, especially in the school of thought stemming from Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), an American philosopher and logician who sought to investigate what and how the processes of human reasoning occur (Peirce, 1986, p. 4). This school of thought differs from the semiotic tradition stemming from Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a linguistic scholar (Budiman, 2005, pp. 33–35). The prominent difference between these two "fathers" of semiotics lies in their views on the conventionality and arbitrariness of signs. Saussure introduced a dyadic model that views a sign as a structure consisting of two main components: the signifier and the signified (de Saussure, 1959, pp. 65–67). The relationship between these two components is arbitrary, unmotivated, without reason. Their relation is solely based on convention or social agreement within a particular linguistic community. However, in turn, Saussure acknowledged the existence of linguistic signs that are not wholly arbitrary, such as in the case of language referred to by traditional linguistics as onomatopoeia. Saussure then gave a specific term for these linguistic signs that are not entirely arbitrary, using the term "symbol" (de Saussure, 1959, pp. 68–70). However, this terminology later caused confusion because Saussure and Peirce both used the term "symbol" but to denote concepts that are opposite to each other. According to Peirce, symbols refer to arbitrary signs. Meanwhile, for non-arbitrary signs, he referred to them as icons, referring to the function of similarity or resemblance between the object and the sign (Peirce, 1986, pp. 7–9).

Table 1. *Difference of Icon and Symbol*

Sign	Term		Fuction
	Ferdinand de Saussure	Charles S. Peirce	
Arbitrary Sign	Sign	Symbol	Conventional
Non-Arbitrary Sign	Symbol	Icon	Similarity/Resemblance

When Saussure briefly touched on non-arbitrary signs, Peirce instead paid more attention to the issue of iconicity. Unlike Saussure, Peirce introduced a triadic model that views a sign as a structure consisting of three components: the Representamen, the Object, and the Interpretant. In Peirce's semiotics, icons and symbols are located within the Representamen component, which is the aspect that is perceptible or material and functions as a sign. Meanwhile, the Object is something represented or referred to by the sign, while the Interpretant is the meaning or interpretation generated from the relationship between the Representamen and the Object in someone's mind. Below is an example of the relationship between these three components and the position of an icon within it,

Table 2. *The components and the position of an icon*

Representamen	Image of a running animal (icon)
Object	A running animal
Interpretant	“That animal looks fast”

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In the domain of the Representamen, Peirce distinguishes three types of signs based on the degree of similarity in reference between the sign and the object: icon, index, and symbol. An icon is a sign with the strongest degree of similarity and resemblance, while a symbol is the weakest (Sulibra, 2016, p. 75). Through semiotics, it can be understood that: 1) The concept of an icon, which falls under the representamen component, indicates that it involves perceptual actions to construct sensory knowledge. These perceptual activities may include seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, memory, and imagination (Yazid, 2021, p. 317). 2) The concept of an icon holds strength in the functions of similarity and resemblance. Therefore, the concept of iconicity can be found in various realms of visual culture, especially in the field of visual arts.(Budiman, 2005, p. 12)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

When tracing the meaning of icons in various literature, many explanations refer to the Byzantine era context. In the tradition of the Orthodox Church during the Byzantine era, icons refer to flat pictures painted with egg tempera on wood to depict Jesus (The Lord), Saint Mary, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints, as well as narrative scenes such as the life of Jesus, baptism, and crucifixion (Cross & Livingstone, 1997, p. 815). Although today the term "icon" is most closely associated with wooden panel paintings, Byzantine icons could be made in all media, including marble, ivory, ceramics, precious stones, precious metals, enamel, textiles, frescoes (wall paintings), and mosaics (Brook, 2009). Meanwhile, in terms of size, icons range from miniature to monumental. Some are made in the form of pendants, while others are created as triptychs (artworks divided into three parts, or three carved panels joined together and can be folded or displayed open). Icons can also be made to be mounted on poles or framed and carried into battle, as suggested for the icon of Saint Demetrios (1970.324.3). Alternatively, icons can be more permanent fixtures, such as wall paintings and mosaic images that adorn the interiors of churches (Brook, 2009).

In the Byzantine era, there was a term called Acheiropoieta, which refers to icons made without human hands, said to have miraculously appeared on their own and not crafted by humans. A large number of acheiropoieta originated from the Early Byzantine period, before the emergence of Iconoclasm in the early eighth century. These icons usually depict Jesus or the Virgin Mary. The most famous acheiropoieta is the Mandylion, a white linen cloth from Turin bearing the imprint of the face of Christ, as well as the Keramion, ceramic tiles depicting the imprint of the face of Christ from the Mandylion. However, it seems that these Acheiropoieta were due to most icon makers hiding themselves and choosing to remain anonymous, as suggested by Gerald O'Collins. They preferred to remain faithful and obedient to tradition rather than showing elements of originality (O'Collins & Farrugia, 2013, p. 140). The images are used as a form of reverence. The scenes depicted in icons often relate to liturgical celebrations rather than directly to historical events (Cross & Livingstone, 1997, p. 185).

The emergence of icons in Christianity occurred significantly in the 5th century, as well as in the 8th-9th centuries when icons sparked the controversy of iconoclasm. During these centuries, devotion to icon objects increased. Icons then acquired an essential and significant role, both in public and in private spaces such as worship spaces in Byzantine churches. These icons were given various forms of reverence such as kissing, prostration, and incense. Through these

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holy figures, followers believed that their past good deeds could guide them towards a good life, effectively combat diseases, drive away demons, obtain blessings, and serve as strong channels of God's grace. Some famous icons include the Edessa icon, the Thetokos icon, and the Acheiropoietos icon. Meanwhile, the most famous Christian icon is the Trinity, created by Andrei Rublev (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.).

Figure 1. *Icon with Saint Demetrios* (950-1000)

Figure 2. *Four Icons from a Pair of Doors (Panels), possibly part of a Polyptych: John the Theologian and Prochoros, the Baptism (Epiphany), Harrowing of Hell (Anastasis), and Saint Nicholas*

Figure 3. *Icon with Christ Pantokrator*

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Figure 4. *Medallion with Christ from an Icon Frame* (ca. 1100)

Iconoclasm in Islam refers to the understanding of at least three things: *First*, the Quranic verses (21: 51-73) which narrate and depict Ibrahim as the destroyer of idols,

۞ وَلَقَدْ اٰتَيْنَآ اِبْرٰهِيْمَ رُشْدَهٗ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهٖ عٰلِمِيْنَ اِذْ قَالَ لِاَبِيْهِ وَقَوْمِهٖ مَا هٰذِهِ التَّمَاثِيْلُ الَّتِيْٓ
اَنْتُمْ لَهَا عٰكِفُوْنَ قَالُوْا وَجَدْنَآ اٰبَآءَنَا لَهَا عٰبِدِيْنَ قَالَ لَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ اَنْتُمْ وَاٰبَآؤُكُمْ فِيْ ضَلٰلٍ مُّبِيْنٍ قَالُوْٓا
اَجِئْتَنَا بِالْحَقِّ اَمْ اَنْتَ مِنَ اللّٰعِبِيْنَ قَالَ بَلْ رَّبُّكُمْ رَبُّ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ الَّذِيْ فَطَرَهُنَّ ۖ وَاَنَا
عَلٰى ذٰلِكُمْ مِّنَ الشّٰهِدِيْنَ وَتَاللّٰهِ لَاَكِيْدَنَّ اَصْنَامَكُمْ بَعْدَ اَنْ تُوَلُّوْا مُدْبِرِيْنَ فَجَعَلَهُمْ جُذٰذًا اِلَّا
كَبِيْرًا لَّهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ اِلَيْهِ يَرْجِعُوْنَ قَالُوْا مَنْ فَعَلَ هٰذَا بِاٰلِهَتِنَآ اِنَّهٗ لَمِنَ الظّٰلِمِيْنَ قَالُوْا سَمِعْنَا فَتًى
يَّذْكُرُهُمْ يُقَالُ لَهٗٓ اِبْرٰهِيْمُ ۗ قَالُوْا فَأْتُوْا بِهٖ عَلٰٓى اَعْيُنِ النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْهَدُوْنَ قَالُوْٓا ءَاَنْتَ فَعَلْتَ
هٰذَا بِاٰلِهَتِنَا يٰٓاِبْرٰهِيْمُ ۗ قَالَ بَلْ فَعَلَهٗ كَبِيْرُهُمْ هٰذَا فَسْـَٔلُوْهُمْ اِنْ كَانُوْا يَنْطِقُوْنَ فَرَجَعُوْٓا اِلٰٓى
اَنْفُسِهِمْ فَقَالُوْٓا اِنَّكُمْ اَنْتُمُ الظّٰلِمُوْنَ ۙ ثُمَّ نُكِسُوْا عَلٰى رُءُوْسِهِمْ ۚ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا هٰٓؤُلَآءِ يَنْطِقُوْنَ
قَالَ اَفَتَعْبُدُوْنَ مِنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ شَيْـًٔا وَّلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ ۗ اُفٍّ لَّكُمْ وَلِمَا تَعْبُدُوْنَ مِنْ دُوْنِ
اللّٰهِ ۗ اَفَلَا تَعْقِلُوْنَ قَالُوْا حَرِّقُوْهُ وَانْصُرُوْٓا اٰلِهَتَكُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ فٰعِلِيْنَ قُلْنَا يٰنَارُ كُوْنِيْ بَرْدًا وَّسَلٰمًا
عَلٰٓى اِبْرٰهِيْمَ ۙ وَاَرَادُوْا بِهٖ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنٰهُمُ الْاَخْسَرِيْنَ ۚ وَنَجَّيْنٰهُ وَلُوْطًا اِلَى الْاَرْضِ الَّتِيْ بٰرَكْنَا فِيْهَا
لِلْعٰلَمِيْنَ وَوَهَبْنَا لَهٗٓ اِسْحٰقَ وَيَعْقُوْبَ نَافِلَةً ۗ وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا صٰلِحِيْنَ وَجَعَلْنٰهُمْ اَئِمَّةً يَّهْدُوْنَ بِاَمْرِنَا
وَاَوْحَيْنَآ اِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرٰتِ وَاِقَامَ الصَّلٰوةِ وَاِيْتَآءَ الزَّكٰوةِ ۚ وَكَانُوْا لَنَا عٰبِدِيْنَ ۙ

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Leyla Ozgur mentions that the story of Ibrahim has been the basis for at least two iconoclastic moments in Islamic history: 1) The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001, 2) The looting of the Shiva temple at Somnath, Gujarat, in 1025 CE by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (Alhassen, 2019, p. 201).

Second, the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad that explicitly condemns and prohibits the action of drawing and sculpting statues. Among them are narrations where the Prophet's response shows a facial expression of displeasure, where angels refuse to enter a house adorned with images, and narratives resembling the creation of God.(Firmanto & Yunani, 2022, pp. 94–95)

Third, the story of Prophet Muhammad during the conquest of Mecca in 630 CE (Assyaukanie, 2005). At that time, Prophet Muhammad ordered his companions to remove the mural paintings on the inner walls of the Ka'bah, except for the painting of Isa (Jesus) son of Mary, held by his mother. The painting of Isa being held by his mother depicts Isa as a child. This painting was protected by the Prophet, while he allowed the removal of other paintings. Unfortunately, the story of Muhammad protecting the painting of Isa son of Mary is not as popular as the story of idol destruction.(King, 2004, pp. 219–229)

The role of Hadith and Fiqh scholars cannot be disregarded, whether they reject, accept, or accept with conditions. For those who object to images, sometimes they erase the heads and body parts from them. During the Ottoman Empire, where the Hanafi school of thought was the official school of the empire, efforts were made to reconcile the tradition of figural art with religious piety by establishing parameters for legitimate figural art, namely applying the principles of fragmentation or incompleteness. For those who reject figurative art, strategies such as floralization, fragmentation, and incompleteness are attempts to correct living images, making figurative images acceptable to many legal experts because they are no longer viewed as mimesis or truth in imitating God's creation due to containing theological objections.(Widiarto, 2021, p. 211)

The early Islamic governance's stance is often cited as the source of the formation of iconoclasm in Islam. Outside of the Arab region, evidence of iconoclasm until the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate is only found during the reign of Caliph Yazid II bin Abdul Malik, which was relatively brief (101-105 AH / 721-724 CE). The iconoclastic decree by Yazid II was likely issued in 721 or 722, long before Leo III enforced the removal of icons. Although the desire to eliminate blatant errors from the public appearance had already been carried out by his predecessor, Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz (99-101 AH / 717-720 CE), that decree had already been confirmed to Emperor Leo III. Leo III himself claimed to be both a priest and a king and had legitimate authority to intervene in Church affairs. Leo III prohibited icons of all saints, martyrs, and angels. This prohibition was based on the Biblical command to oppose all forms of idol worship. Another basis for the prohibition of icons was the absence of justification for their use in the six Ecumenical Councils. He also believed that reverence should not be given to human-made objects or other realistic representations. All preservation of excessive practices such as the magical efficacy of icons and excessive relics, as well as permissiveness, further strengthened his resistance. These practices thrived under the influence of emperor worship. Thus, it can be said that iconoclasm was part of a cultural revolution; it was not dedicated to the suppression of art. Secular art flourished, and in Christian churches, iconographic representations provided ample room for artistic depictions of the natural world. His attack on iconoclasm differed from that of

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Caliph Yazid II because Yazid II's attack on mosaics encompassed all representations of flora and fauna (Atkinson, 1973, pp. 205–206).

The painting tradition in Mecca died out with the advent of Islam. Oleg Grabar suggests that the murals in Mecca might have been associated with the wealthy social elite, and for this reason, paintings might not have been favored by the lower economic groups who were part of the Muslim emigrants accompanying Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina. In such circumstances, it is not difficult to see that the early years of Islam offered little opportunity for the continuation or revival of painting in Mecca. However, the mural taste of the Quraysh people resurfaced on a much larger scale under the Umayyad descendants in Bilad al-Sham. Whatever stylistic changes were provided with a broader landscape reference to the Umayyad caliphs in Syria and Palestine, it can be said that their desire for mural paintings rooted in the aristocratic Quraysh ancestors' works, which we know little more than a shadow through our scant knowledge of the Ka'bah's decorative scheme.

It is acknowledged that people during the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not have significant art beyond worthy prose to showcase. However, this changed when they successfully conquered Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Baghdad. They quickly adopted the art existing in the conquered regions. History shows how the successors of the Umayyad Dynasty, who took power from 661 onwards, brought building materials along with craftsmen or artists from various regions to construct cities, mosques, and palaces. The Damascus Mosque was built by importing workers from both Syria and Byzantium to embellish mosaics, while architects from Iran supervised the architectural work. Artists from Egypt also came and worked in the reconstruction of Jerusalem, Damascus, and Mecca. The tradition of bringing artists from various regions by the Abbasids from 799-945, as mentioned by Thabari, continued with the establishment of Baghdad. The Abbasids brought artists from Syria, Iran, Mosul, Kufah, Wasit, and Basra. Gradually, Islamic styles emerged primarily from two artistic sources: Byzantium and Sassanid (Isa, 1994, p. 24).

Returning to the discussion of the figurative painting issue, historical records tentatively indicate two main phases that led to this vacuum. The first encompasses the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, roughly from the 7th century to the mid-10th century. During this period, Muslim artists were still in the process of self-discovery by adopting available models such as Sasanian and Greco-Roman,(Widiarto, 2021, p. 207) which they later adapted to their needs. Rooms were decorated with images of hunting activities, female dancers and musicians, or idealized women with prominent breasts and fuller hips. Another motivating factor in official art was the desire to visually demonstrate the succession of caliphs' pleasures by continuing the tradition of a "photo gallery" with Sasanian motifs.

One of the patterns used as a source of early Islamic ornamentation is the Sasanian art (the last pre-Islamic Persian Empire from 224-651 AD). The influence of early Islamic art can be seen in many objects from the Umayyad (641-749) and Abbasid (749-1258 AD) styles. Under the Abbasid rule, the Islamic capital was moved from Damascus to Baghdad, a newly founded city near Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sasanian Empire. In the 9th and early 10th centuries, the Sasanian decorative style appeared on plaster, wall panels, and pottery in Nishapur. These artifact data are beautiful examples of arabesque motifs in their early forms. The combination of Arabic language with Kufic script and the use of calligraphy as an ornamental device in iconography are

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significant contributions from the Sasanian period (Gocer, 1999, pp. 683–692; Widiarto, 2021, p. 207).

Throughout its long journey, Islamic art has been dominated by three visual languages: calligraphy, biomorphic, and geometric. The selection of these three patterns is primarily based on theological arguments. Calligraphy is considered a form of art directly connected to revelation. Meanwhile, biomorphic patterns include elements of flowers, leaves, and buds, representing recognition of the Divine Source and Origin. Geometric patterns are often found in architectural designs. This third pattern is a blend of Islamic and Roman cultures in the 8th century, as an effort to avoid figurative forms prohibited during that time.(Widiarto, 2021, p. 208)

3.2 Discussion

Islam is more dominated by iconoclasm, especially among Sunni circles. Meanwhile, among Shia, statues also appear to be forbidden, but in the form of images, they can still be found in many places. In southern Lebanon, which is predominantly Shia, there are many photos or at least images of Ali Bin Abi Thalib and Husein bin Ali in the form of billboards or posters along streets and intersections (Thohari, 2022).

In the history of Islam, paintings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are indeed very rare, but not entirely absent. Paintings of the Prophet can be found in various parts of the Islamic world from the 13th century to the modern era. Starting from the oldest period, there is an illustrated depiction of the Prophet in a masnawi book (a type of couplet poetry) titled "Warqa & Ghulshah," believed to have been painted in the 1240s and preserved in the Topkapi Museum in Turkey. In that year, the Mongol invasion of Persia and Iraq resulted in the destruction of many books in libraries. Among the remnants that could be found, illustrations of human figures were common in Persian literature in various fields, including science and history. The art of drawing human figures as illustrations in books was a common tradition since the 8th century when the Abbasid caliphate ruled, spanning Spain, North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Mesopotamia, and Persia.

A historical manuscript titled Jami al-Tawarikh (meaning: Collection of Histories), written by Rashid al-Din Hamadani in 1305 during the Mongol dynasty, contains a number of illustrations of the Prophet without his face being covered. Currently, the manuscript is scattered in various museums, including the University of Edinburgh museum and the Nour Foundation's Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art museum in London.

In Siyer-i Nebi, an illustrated history book written by Mustafa of Erzurum completed in 1595 CE, there are illustrations of the Prophet with his face covered by a white cloth or in white color. There is also a historical series written in Persia in 1126 titled Mojmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qasas, which also includes illustrations of the Prophet with a fairly clear facial depiction. Apart from historical books, the Prophet has also been painted for artistic works.

Paintings of the Prophet can also be found in illustrated historical manuscripts titled Siyer-i Nebi, which narrates the life story of the Prophet in Turkish. This book was written by Mustafa of Erzurum at the request of the Mamluk Sultan in Cairo, Egypt. The book was completed around 1388 and contains many images of the Prophet, but with his face covered in white or depicted as covered by a white cloth.

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Figure 5. *Prophet Muhammad Placing the Black Stone in the Kaaba in the book "Jami' al-Tawarikh"*

Figure 6. *The Prophet Meeting Gabriel in the Cave of Hira in the book "Mojmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qasas"*

Figure 7. *Prophet Muhammad meets Bahira in the Book "Jami' al-Tawarikh"*

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Because painting the Prophet eventually sparked controversy, from clear paintings in the 13th-15th centuries that experienced censorship on the facial features, gradually in the 17th-19th centuries, the Prophet was depicted only as light or fire (Hakimah, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The idea of iconoclasm that emerged in early Islam was influenced by Byzantine iconoclasm. Iconoclasm in Islam began during the time of the Prophet, even before Leo III (675-741) implemented official policies for the destruction of statues. The common ground between these two civilizations was their opposition to paganism and idol worship. Besides the presence of Hadith literature rich in anti-paganism, which is often used as evidence by hadith scholars and jurists, one of Prophet Muhammad's responses to icons can be found in historical literature. This response occurred during the conquest of Mecca in 630 AD when Prophet Muhammad ordered the removal of murals from the walls of the Kaaba. This event has often served as the inspiration for subsequent iconoclastic movements within Islam. However, the depiction of this incident does not align with the portrayal of the Prophet allowing the image of 'Isa (Jesus) to be held by his mother when he was a child.

Furthermore, in the context of early Islam, the tradition of painting was often associated with the culture of the social elite, who were wealthy. As a result, painting was less favored by the lower classes. Early Islamic appreciation for art began to grow during the Umayyad era when they expanded their political influence in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Baghdad. From these regions, they adopted art from the conquered territories. The art that emerged during the Umayyad era was also heavily influenced by Byzantine art due to the shift of the Islamic center of governance from Mecca to Syria. This art exhibited characteristics of early Christianity. The emergence of art during this period sparked controversy based on the motif of rejecting mimesis or imitation in God's creation due to theological objections. During the Ottoman Empire, efforts were made to reconcile the figural art tradition with religious piety by establishing parameters for permissible figural art, including the application of the principles of fragmentation and incompleteness. However, the breaking-image movement also had a tendency to manifest as a form of political movement, as iconoclasm can, on the other hand, be defined as idoloclasm.

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