

| TRAVEL |

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Another gallery is displaying the Constellation Gemini in an illustrated copy of al-Sufi's *Kitab suwar al-Kawakib* (The Book of Fixed Stars) from 17th-century Iran. Astronomy was important in the Islamic world to determine the times of prayers and the direction of the Qibla, as well as for navigation. From 9th century onwards, data from antique



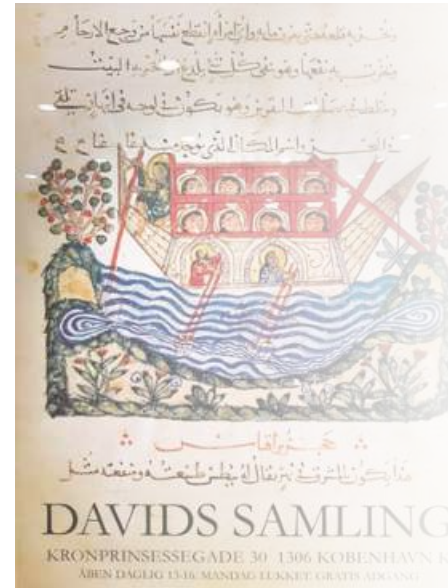
Parchment leaf from Quran written in Hijazi script



Pen case, brass, engraved and inlaid with silver, Mosul, Iraq, 1255-56.



Inscription frieze, from the Nilometer, Cairo, Egypt, 861-862.



Poster of The David Collection

writings were compared with observations made in the Islamic world and the results were compiled in new treatises. It was the Syrian Arab astronomer Al-Shatir (1304-1375) who developed the first accurate lunar model that matched physical observations of its distance from the Earth. Copernicus (1473-1543) proposed his lunar and Mercury models, both identical to those of al-Shatir's, almost a century later. However, it is not known if Copernicus was familiar with the works of Al-Shatir.

The gallery on textiles is showing intricate designs on oriental rugs, robes and royal dresses, woven in different techniques with wool, linen, silk, cotton and Muslins, dyed with vegetable and minerals. "Art of War" gives an overview of how Islam transformed the squabbling

Arab tribes into the most formidable military might in the world that fought relentlessly to spread their belief at a lightning speed, bringing decisive victories from Spain to India and beyond.

Islamic medicine was once the most advanced in the world, combining ancient Greek, Roman, Persian and Indian medicines. It was in 8th century Baghdad that the world's first modern hospital was founded and the concept of public

foundation of the most important part of his collection, The Islamic Art, which has now come to be the museum's *raison d'être* in a Scandinavian context. David's Islamic Art is not a large collection when compared with similar others around the world. However, this is perhaps the only of its kind in Northern Europe that tells a story, connects the dots and gives a bigger picture of Islam and its place in history.

The museum repeatedly makes the



The David Collection

health service introduced. Muslim artisans invented new techniques and improvised existing ones in pottery, glassmaking, metal, stone and stucco, wood, ivory and leather.

As we walk through the galleries, we bump into the same school group we have met earlier, sitting on the floor around their teacher, listening to him attentively. The teacher doesn't forget to apologise to us for the "inconvenience" they are causing. We only smile and move on.

The David Collection was founded by Christian Ludvig David (1878-1960), a famous lawyer in Copenhagen. David started in 1910 with a few Danish paintings and sculptures. He soon developed a special interest in porcelain from the Islamic world, which laid the

point that Islamic civilisation contributed significantly to the advancement of science, technology, governance and philosophy. And that it acted as a bridge between Greek and Roman civilisations and European Renaissance. The deep respect and humility shown to Islamic traditions is unmissable. Such museums help us realise that in this world no nation, or for that matter civilisation, can grow alone, and everyone is indebted to others for what they are today. They facilitate reconciliation among nations, and challenge the current trend of post-truth politics. A must-see in Denmark.

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| BURNTHEWATCHTOWER |

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The theory of re-Orientalism is not without its critics, with Minoli Salgado in particular castigating Lau for reinforcing the East-West divide of Orientalism by arguing that diasporic writers—reductively framed as at once of the East and outside it, instead of the complex relations of belonging unique to each person—perpetuate Orientalism. While Salgado's critique is dense reading primarily of interest to academics (i.e. no one anyone else wants to spend time with), re-Orientalism hits at the fundamental problems of belonging. Where ought we situate ourselves?

Where can we?

Ironically, there are aspects of South Asian culture that really can only be written by the West-based diaspora. Writers on 'sensitive' subjects as such minority rights, homosexuality, feminism or atheism have had good reason to be afraid to voice their opinions at home, leaving them little

recourse but to either stay silently vulnerable, or to export their voices. In doing so, such diasporic authors may indeed reproduce what Lau calls re-Orientalism, either benignly or through having a bone to pick, playing into the established Western tropes of the backward, violent East. It is difficult to discuss such subjects without resorting to unflattering comparisons to Western countries, which are modern and aspirational. Orientalism obscures the role colonial states played in perpetuating and codifying the same systems of oppression that Western liberals pride themselves on having "overcome" at home (though the myth of Western domestic progress is being increasingly exposed through the resurgence of right-wing politics.) Not glorifying the West may be a hard sell for diasporic authors who cannot even express themselves at 'home'. The sympathy bred from belonging is difficult in the face of alienation.

In my own limited writing career I've

run into the problem of writing about themes I'm familiar with—for example, animal sacrifice—and the confusion this elicited from Western readers for whom this is exotic, and should be treated as such. I have been asked whom my intended audience is. My use of visibly non-Western elements in Western-centric media such as cyberpunk fiction has been critiqued as purely cosmetic, difference for the sake of difference. Otherness must have some utility, it cannot simply be. However, where is the authenticity in a man born and raised in Dhaka writing something Jane Smith could have churned out—and probably better?

While I don't consider myself diasporic as yet, I cannot claim to feel true belonging anywhere. I'm an Anglophone, English medium, Western-educated academic and writer from a well-off family. These are the filters through which I perceive Bangladeshi life, and my representation of it in my writing is arguably inauthentic and

Western-centric (I could not have written this article in Bangla). Is it my personal duty at this point to shed these filters and immerse myself in "my" culture in order to create work that does not perpetuate the legacy of Orientalism? Should I abandon trying to be intelligible and sympathetic to a Western audience because in order to do so I may—intentionally or otherwise—write stereotypically and reductively about 'my' culture?

Doesn't the luxury of writing something abroad that I would not dare write in Dhaka vindicate Orientalism?

I don't know, but I think we should ask ourselves these questions and seriously wonder how to avoid the perpetuation of Orientalism in our work—with an increasing awareness of how practically difficult this may in fact be.

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