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The advent of Abrī: the first wave of paper marbling in the long 16th century (ca. 1496-1616CE)

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The Advent of *Abrī*

This dissertation examines the appearance of paper marbling in the Islamic world and its spread to Europe during the long 16th century. Primarily known by the Persian term *abrī*, or "clouded" designs, artists employed it with other decorated papers to cover, mount, margin, or write, and even visually illustrate 16th-century Turco-Persian manuscripts. Artists produced such sheets in institutional, commercial, pedagogical, and personal contexts. Prevailing literature suggests the art originated in East Asia or Turkistan and then "transferred" elsewhere; however, instead of privileging unproven speculation, this investigation pursues the evidentiary trail instead. It ascertains and articulates how an initial wave of *abrī* first arose and rippled throughout Turco-Persian Muslim culture and ultimately reached Europe. Comparing the earliest Indo-Persian, Ottoman, and Dutch sources on marbling reveals vastly varied technical information in broad circulation amongst artisans. Marblers disseminated their methods when they emigrated elsewhere, or recorded their observations in writing. The need to adapt substitute materials for unavailable ones also resulted in regional variants. Others who lacked the requisite technical information also tried to imitate the papers they saw. Despite these differing modes, surviving evidence falls into three main pattern categories: droplet motifs, swirled, and pebbled designs. Gazing at the abstract patterns can elicit perceptual responses that likely inspired artists and poets alike to employ the paper. It proves that well before 17th-century "second wave" technical patterning advancements occurred, Muslim and European intellectuals viewed these early marbled designs with curiosity, esteem, and delight.

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JAKE BENSON

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