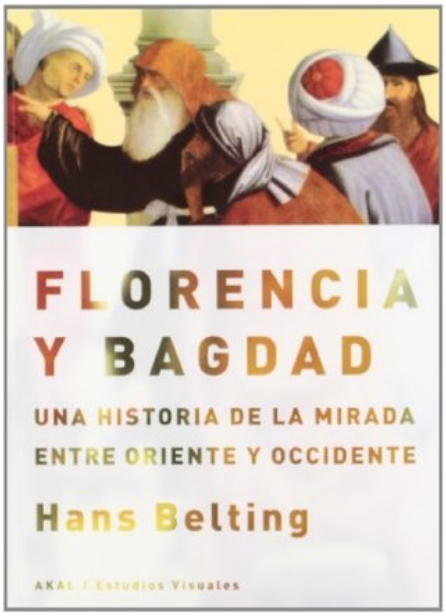


# Florencia y Bagdad (Estudios visuales)

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La perspectiva fue una de las invenciones más importantes del Renacimiento. Con ella, el arte occidental experimentó el mayor viraje de toda su historia. La imagen en perspectiva es hoy omnipresente y ha sido exportada al mundo entero. Pero su dominio nos hace olvidar que en modo alguno reproduce nuestra visión natural. El mundo islámico conoce una mirada completamente distinta, que se expresa claramente en su arte. A diferencia de la imagen occidental, el arte islámico no está ligado a ninguna posición personal en el mundo y trata de aproximarse a algo que es en sí irrepresentable. La invención occidental de la imagen en perspectiva se debe, sin embargo, a un descubrimiento hecho en el mundo árabe ya en el siglo XI. Inmerso en una cultura sin imágenes, el matemático Alhacén concibió una teoría de la percepción que creó las condiciones que hicieron posible la perspectiva pictórica occidental. Belting explica en qué se distinguen Occidente y Oriente en su relación con las imágenes, aunque una vez partieran ambos de la misma teoría. Pues en vez de reproducir el mundo, el arte árabe tuvo por tema la luz y su geometría.

## Florencia y Bagdad (Estudios visuales) Details

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# From Reader Review Florencia y Bagdad (Estudios visuales) for online ebook

### Usuyitik says

perspektif meselesine dair müthi? bir kitap. konu ve yöntem itibariyle bilim tarihi, sanat tarihi, kültür tarihi gibi alanlar? kaps?yor. tüm bunlara uzanabilmek büyük ba?ar?.
konular?n? çok iyi i?lemi?. do?u bahsi ister istemez k?sa kal?yor ama ibn heysem'e yapt??? yak?n okumay? çok k?ymetli buldum.

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### Rick says

Thought provoking long after last page turned. Insight into (normally invisible) norms of depicting.

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### Mira says

Belting verknüpft Kunstgeschichte mit einer Theorie des Sehens. Er erklärt, dass im Westen und Osten der Welt anders gesehen wird. Während sich der Westen rasch auf "Bilder" konzentrierte, arbeitete die Kunst des Orients mit Geometrie und Schrift. Er beschreibt wie Alhazen seine neuen optischen Erkenntnisse entwickelte, ohne die der Westen die Theorie der Perspektive nicht hätte erfinden können. Ein interessantes und lesenswertes Buch!

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### Katie says

I don't know very much at all about art or art history (or optics for that matter), but from a layman's perspective I thought that this was a really fascinating book and it changed the way that thought about art in a couple of ways.

Belting's main focus is the the place of linear perspective in western art and it's indebtedness to Arab science, particularly the 10th/11th century scientist Ibn al-Haithan (known in Europe as Alhazen). Perspective, originally a scientific theory, was translated into art in 15th century Italy. But the work is more ambitious than this as well, and it explores the theological, epistemological, and even colonial implications of the fact that the West adopted linear perspective in art while Arabic and Islamic countries largely did not.

There are a lot of fascinating insights swirling around these ideas, but I was most fascinated by one of the most simple ones: the idea that linear perspective is not necessarily a natural development in the history of art. In hindsight this is kind of embarrassing to me, and illustrates the degree to which I come at things (consciously or not) from a western perspective. I've never been of the opinion that art utilizing perspective was "better" art - I like medieval art too much for that - but I did always think of linear perspective as something that always existed and was waiting around to be "discovered."

Because of this, Belting managed to blow my mind within twenty pages:

> "Whereas the natural world is characterized by an unpredictable flow of visual phenomena on which no logical schema can be imposed, perspective depicts the world as only the imagination can see it. It constructs the world for the symbolic gaze. Seen in this light, perspective is more an invention than a discovery."

This was crazy to me, but it does make sense. Belting discusses how the concept of linear perspective is predicated on the idea that a piece of art was designed assuming a viewer would be standing in a very particular spot. That's not an inherent idea. Islamic art and visual theory, Belting observes, "treated vision as a process whose end result was always uncertain, since it depended on the atmosphere and many other conditions. For this reason they necessarily found suspect any pictures that stabilized perception an reified it as an artifact." This can be seen in Islamic art like *muqarnas*, which placed two-dimensional designs on a three-dimensional surfaces and put a high importance on light. There was no central perspective: unlike western art, there is no single place in which the viewer is assumed to be standing.

The presence or absence of linear perspective, therefore, quickly gets loaded with lots of weightier philosophical assumptions about the relationship between an individual and the physical world. For example, in Arabic visual theory, eyes are receptive, generating mental images from external stimuli. In the West, eyes are seeking, an ‘active gaze’ attempting to piece the world together. There are a lot of ideas floating around about subjectivity and objectivity, certainty and relativism.

The actual historical process by which Alhazen's ideas get translated into art theory is rather complicated, but in broad strokes: scholastic debates over sight and epistemology - particularly between Roger Bacon and William of Ockham - slowly led to a growing consensus that people saw things as they appeared (rather than necessarily as they were), and this in turn led to the accounting for a particular viewer by artists around the time of Giotto. Roughly, you could say that pre-Giotto painters painted things; post-Giotto painters painted things as people saw them. As this becomes more popular, Biagio Pelacani creates the idea of mathematical space that would then lead to Brunelleschi's development of perspective.

It's a fascinating book and I feel like I haven't done it justice here. There are all kind of wonderful insights - like the idea that in western art, windows are objects through which the eye sees while in Arabic art, a windows are where the light is let in - in nearly every section of the work. I'm not really qualified to comment on the validity of all of it, but I would recommend it for anyone even remotely interested in any of these topics.

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### David says

A nice example of comparative history taking two familiar topic areas - the history of optics during the Arab 11th century, and the invention of perspective in Renaissance Italy two to three centuries later - and bringing them together in a way that puts both subjects in a new 'perspective.' The crux of the comparison is the image, or picture, and why it emerged as the focus of Italian art in the 14th century, but not in the Muslim world.

Already this language does not do justice to Belting's project, however, which is less to pursue an art-historical analysis à la Weber of why the Muslim world failed to produce this conspicuous feature of modernity, than to demonstrate the concrete influence of Arab optical research on Renaissance mathematics and painting, and to set beside that the little-known (in the West) elaboration of a Muslim geometric art that rejected representational images.

Where the Renaissance used perspective to give us portraits of people, likenesses that appear to gaze out at the viewer, Muslim art and architecture remained faithful to the iconoclasm of Islam and used the study of light and optics to develop an amazingly sophisticated non-representational art. The *muquarnas* carvings of ceilings in the Alhambra and elsewhere, the complex arabesques and geometric patterns that decorated mosques and volumes of the Koran, all derived from Arab-Muslim development of classical Greek mathematics, in particular Euclid.

Though the subject matter is fascinating, the book itself suffers from several flaws. Above all, Belting's preoccupation with certain jargon concerning 'the gaze' can be plodding and difficult to understand. This is tied to a failure to substantially present the mathematics underlying the Arab and Renaissance developments. There are plenty of lovely illustrations of *muqarnas*, and the 'blueprints' that craftsmen worked from, but the reader is never fully apprised of how this unique form of decoration is laid out and fabricated. Likewise with perspective: "the gaze" stands in for what would more helpfully be a concrete presentation of how perspective was thought to work. Much of the latter portion of the book is concerned to legitimate this category of 'the gaze' by using it to treat later works of the Renaissance, perhaps most interestingly in the case of Baroque theater.

The book's strength is without a doubt its exposition of the Arabic scientist Alhazen and his optical researches, and how these were assimilated and altered by Western artists and natural philosophers, or developed in Islamic lands with such spectacular results. As long as Belting keeps these twin, comparative foci in view, the reader is swept along. Unavoidably in such an approach, Belting often speaks of Islamic "culture" and Western "culture" in a way that always seems dated and perhaps even somewhat German (*kultur* and *kulturkreis* of course being well-worn concepts of German origin).

None of this should discourage a reader, however; the illustrations alone and the treatment of Alhazen and his impact are well worth the time.

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### carelessdestiny says

A bit long winded and, at times, repetitive but some very detailed and intriguing research on Islamic mathematics and Western painting tradition.

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