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Adornment as aesthetic philosophy Cross-cultural perspectives from Kerala murals, Tibetan Thangkas, and medieval European thought

Abstract

This paper explores adornment and metaphysical beauty through Kerala murals, Tibetan Thangkas, and medieval scholastic thought. Aquinas defined beauty through integritas, proportion, and claritas, whereas Asian traditions invest jewels, textiles, and pigments with layered meaning. Such elements work as devotional and epistemic devices, linking material form with the transcendent and opening cross-cultural perspectives beyond Eurocentric aesthetics.

Keywords

Embellishment, Medieval theology, Asian sacred art

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Introduction

Adornment has long served as a visual and symbolic mediator of sacred art, determining the ways communities perceive, approach, and internalize the divine. From South Indian temples to Tibetan monasteries and western medieval churches, ornamentation functions not merely as decoration but as a means to articulate metaphysical order, ritual meaning, and theological presence. The present study explores these dynamics comparatively, placing in dialogue the canonical aesthetics of Kerala mural painting with the iconographic systems of Tibetan Thangka art and selected strands of western medieval scholastic thought. Though these traditions emerge from discrete historical, religious, and philosophical contexts, each utilizes ornamentation as a formalized mode of visual cognition whereby spiritual truths are rendered perceptible to the devotee. Disciplines such as Buddhist Thangka and Kerala Mural paintings rely on the same codified texts like *Śilparatna*, *Mānāsāra*, *Tantrasamuccaya* and the various *Vajrayāna* iconographic manuals. They are also all governed by the same set of iconographic prescriptions, requiring the representation during personification of textiles, jewelry, and glowing light surfaces to epitomize auspiciousness, ritual potency, and cosmic order.

As South Indian temple murals depicting deities are adorned with splendiferous jewelry, head dresses, and draped costumes each with a piecemeal internally coherent iconographic canon, depicting also the substratum of the art historical period of South Indian history (Yalçınkaya, Yıldız 2022: 31). Medieval theologians of Europe, such as Thomas Aquinas, also espoused the theory of beauty formed, in *integritas*, *proportio* and *claritas*, merger of all, which also governed the ornamentation of the sacred within liturgical and devotional contexts. Thus, scholasticism, the centerpiece of medieval European thought, could not be said to define the intellectual landscape of the period in any monolithic sense. All traditions also espouse aesthetic forms of visual transcendence, which testify to far more philosophical and cultural differences than the traditions themselves seem to. Rather than suggesting equivalence, the analysis here employs a cross-cultural comparative methodology that highlights disparate metaphysical grammars of ornamentation. This study does not merge Kerala, Tibetan, and early Christian medieval thought together into one giant universal aesthetic system; rather it examines how each of these traditions mobilizes a surfeit of

the visual-crowns, textiles, jewels, patterned cloths, gold leaf-as a modality for visioning sacred knowledge. By juxtaposing these traditions, the paper broadens the field of medieval aesthetic studies beyond its overwhelmingly European borders and inserts it into comparative aesthetic philosophy by demonstrating how sacred ornamentation can serve as a universal transcendental aesthetic principle. It is also a response to more general art-historical and aesthetic debates about the nature of the ornamental – as mere surface or epistemic device and mediator complex theological and cosmological meanings. In such a light, the introduction establishes the conceptual framework for analyzing ornamentation as a structured, philosophical discourse rather than a secondary artistic feature.

Medieval aesthetic theory of adornment

In medieval Christian philosophy, beauty was much more than sensual delight; it was a form of divine order manifesting itself. The theologian saw that the visible splendor of sacred art might convey believers to spiritual truths. This idea is also seen in the jewelry and ceremonial robes, along with the decor in the medieval churches, the illustrations of manuscripts, and the religious imagery. As Aquinas says, “beauty includes three conditions: integrity or perfection, due proportion or harmony, and brightness or clarity” (Ivanov 2016: 590). It is from this text that we understand that the gilded halos, the jeweled crowns, and the ornate robes were an essential part of the *claritas*. The abundance of such lavish pieces was to help the worshippers see in their mind the perfection of what God created. This is the reason the medieval sacred art used so much light revealing material: white fabrics, light revealing gemstones, and light revealing ornamentation. All of these used to draw worshippers closer to the divine and were used to represent the divine light.

While Aquinas may be the first in the history of scholasticism to give an account of beauty, within the intellectual medieval world, Aquinas is but one voice among many. Medieval aesthetics were monastic, scholastic, and mystical, and none of them had a consensus of the significance of beauty and its adornments. Moreover, in the High and Late Middle Ages, sacred adornments had a use beyond the devotional, having to do with the expression of liturgical power, institutional grandeur, and the

growing political authority of the Church. This complexity is necessary to appreciate the historical and theological range of this comparison.

Comparative aesthetic framework

In order meaningfully to examine how ornaments and clothing function in Kerala Mural and Tibetan Thangka paintings alongside medieval European aesthetics, it would be in order to establish a comparative philosophical framework. But comparative aesthetics does not try to erase cultural differences or pretend that meanings are identical, instead exploring common metaphysical notions that come into view in different traditions of sacred art. Sacred ornamentation, whether in medieval Christian churches or Asian temple paintings, often carries a similar purpose: to manifest transcendental qualities of beauty which point toward ultimate reality. Scholars in comparative aesthetics argue that certain concepts such as proportion, harmony, luminosity, and symbolic adornment, appear across cultures because they respond to universal spiritual needs. As Akazunina and Palaguta observe, “Ornament as a theme seems to be amply represented in scholarly writing: apart from art history, it is considered in ethnographic, archeological, and related humanitarian studies. The principles of ornamental patterning are researched in mathematics. Ornamental décor is also a ‘live’ object within artistic practices and art criticism. From a philosophical point of view, ornamentation can be conceived of as a transcendental aesthetic principle” (2020: 572). In Medieval Christian theology, as mentioned before, marks out beauty as inseparable from truth and goodness. Adornment in Religious art—from jewel-encrusted crowns to embroidered vestments—represents divine light and order. Likewise, Hindu and Buddhist traditions use jewelry, patterned clothing, and luminous textiles as symbolic representations of spiritual virtues and cosmic harmony. Beauty for Aquinas can be understood as a transcendental of being, because while it has the same extension as being itself, it adds a different quality, *quae visa placent*, “that which pleases when seen”. This puts beauty alongside truth and goodness as a property convertible with being (ST I, q.5, a.4, ad 1; De Haan 2016: 11). The framework also argues for a philosophical convergence between Kerala Mural and Tibetan Thangka art with medieval Christian thinking. When

we attend to the operation of ornament, the signifying of transcendence and directing human devotion, we can look past those stylistic variations to a shared depth intention: sacred embellishment works as visual conduit to divine insight. The focus on Aquinas is not intended to represent the entirety of medieval Christian aesthetics but rather to engage with a clearly articulated scholastic framework that allows for conceptual comparison. This comparison does not equate the philosophical systems but examines how each tradition uses ornamentation to articulate metaphysical meaning within its own doctrinal boundaries.

Kerala mural depictions of ornaments and clothing

Between the 9th-19th centuries, southern India had mural paintings on the walls of temples that were made in Kerala. The paintings were famous for their intricate details, lively colors, and spiritual representations. The entries were made with great care, and the creators paid attention to the details while designing outfits and accessories. These accessories were not placed for mere decoration, as the details were essential to the Hindu religion and to the devotion of the temples. Important temples that contain murals and are considered to have great religious value are the Vadakkunnathan Temple in Thrissur, Ettumanoor Mahadeva Temple, and the Mattancherry Palace (Dutch Palace) in Kochi. These temples have drawn great religious value through the murals that contain religious figures, and also have great religious value through the highly detailed depiction of the figures that include Shiva, Vishnu, and Devi along with their specific, codified iconographic details. Such details include crowns that are to indicate these characters as sovereign royalty (clear with divinity), and specific textiles that indicate abundance or follow along as pure, ascetic, or saturated with extreme spiritual power. Noting the specific depiction (Sheena 2017: 814) states, in Kerala murals, Shiva as *Aghoramūrti*, “is usually shown wearing tiger skin and adorned with snake ornaments, armlets, *yajñopavīta*, ear ornaments, necklaces, girdles and anklets”. These accessories follow the details of the iconographic details that are described in the Shaiva religion.

As an important God in Hinduism, Shiva represents change, cosmic disintegration, and ascetics. His adornments represent some meaning,

tiger skin shows control over primal forces, and snakes represent dominance over time and death, and the sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*) means ritual power. The textiles and the jewels in Kerala murals, thus, function as theological furnishings that convey the metaphysical and ritual value of the god on the outside. With such Kerala murals adornments become a metaphorical system of communication of the divine presence, moral attributes and cosmic values, signifying how sacred ornaments help the worshippers understand the divine magnitude of transcendence.

Canonical foundations and artistic discipline

The Kerala mural tradition draws primarily from two groups of work. The first group includes murals of Kerala and *śilpa* and *tantra śilpa* (The mural tradition in Kerala). The second and major groups of work consist of sculptures, paintings and architecture in Brahmanic temples and are exemplified in the *Śilpa Ratna of Śrīkumāra* (Sastri 1928), the Kerala Tantrasamuccaya (Unni 1997) and the *Mānasāra* (Acharya 1927). The writings within these texts prescribe ratios of limbs, stances and bodily postures, configurations of garments, and arrangements of ornaments such as bracelets, anklets, and diadems, and each piece of textiles so that a fully composed canonical ensemble can be achieved. These canons of proportion and brightness are spoken of also in the *Śilpa Prakāśa* of Orissa (Boner, Sarma 2005) which draws similar line of thought, and while distinct spatially, gives attention to the harmonious embodiment of the body within its architecture. The Kerala mural tradition as well displays similar proportional canons and this can be articulated with that of Aquinas where harmony, or due proportion of the parts which constitutes a whole, as a principle of beauty.

Types of ornaments and their symbolism

The ornaments as worn by the deities in the Kerala murals follow canonical prescriptions as laid down in the *Śilparatna* of *Śrīkumāra* (ed. Ganapati Sastri 1928) and the *Vastuvidya Śāstra*. Anna Dallapiccola (2010) and C. Sivaramamurti (1963) state: crowns (*mukūṭa*) are symbols of divine ethereal power; layered necklaces and pendants are symbols of spiritual affluence and auspiciousness. Armlets and bracelets (*keyūra*, *kañkaṇa*), as *Śilparatna*, denote strength and divine shelter. Anklets (*nūpura*), which appear frequently in South Indian iconography (Sivaramamurti 1963), are associated in Indian aesthetic theory with rhythmic cosmic movement, while lotus-shaped earrings (*kuṇḍaḷa*), also classified by Sivaramamurti, evoke purity and spiritual illumination, as Kramrisch (1946) points, are symbols of enlightenment and a pure heart. These ornamental symbolic expositions are bound to the South Indian sacred arts and Kerala mural traditions. These ornaments are more than mere embellishments; in Indian sacred art, they are optical forms that express philosophical concepts. As Sompur and Udashan (2024) point, the rich symbolic forms, sacred geometry, and the ornamented details, done to embellish the sacred structures and the images are meant to express, in a tangible form, the ideation of the cosmos, the spiritual ideals, and the metaphysical concepts. Here, the ornamentation of the Kerala murals gives philosophy a powerful visual form, enabling a contemplation of the deep-seated cosmic principles.

Clothing and textile patterns

Similarly important is how clothing is depicted. Divine figures are wrapped in godly flowing attire in the form of dhotis and richly pleated saris and robes. “Painters used, almost constantly from the Middle Ages up to today, the same graphic solution to give the observer the impression of the garments’ motion” (Cennini 2018: 210). The dresses are embellished with geometric patterns, such as lotuses and vines, indicative of fertility, growth, and cosmic equilibrium, which are elaborated in every piece of clothing. Divine radiance is suggested in the attire, which is, as to the colors used, shimmering with lighter tones of yellow. Treesa (1999) notes certain valuable distinctions that speak to the transparent traditional life women led in those days, are noted to

the adornments and clothing of women in the mural paintings of Kerala. Muslin garments with a transparent look were worn by depicted princesses and noble ladies, while lower-middle class women were illustrated in flower-printed robes. Maidservants were illustrated wearing the same clothing, usually in a light *kanchuka* (upper garment) with a blouse (jacket) and at times with a dress that showed the waist along with either a sari or a blouse that was body revealing. In contrast, foreign figures were depicted with socks and trousers along with a silk hat, a scarf around the neck and were completely contrary to the depicted style of the others.

Aesthetic choices reflect the Thomistic and Aquinas precepts on *claritas*. For Aquinas, *claritas* is the beauty that allows the essence or truth of a thing to shine through – a radiance by which form becomes perceptible to the viewer (De Haan 2016). In the Kerala mural paintings, this is not achieved through literal light alone, but the skillful depiction of shimmering cloth, patterned garments, and gradations of color that articulate the spiritual, morally pure, or culturally unique identity of each figure. *Claritas*, therefore, is the philosophy that helps us explain why the radiant textiles, the light yellow tones, and the graceful patterns of the garments were designed to let the viewers ‘see’ the divinity within. Thus, the murals of Kerala are a clothing medium where ‘decorative’ textile patterns became a means to display the character, virtue, and divine presence.

Role in temple rituals and devotion

Kerala murals are not isolated works of art; they are integrated into temple architecture and ritual life. During worship, devotees meet some of these richly embellished images against a backdrop of incense, lamps, and chanting. The clothing and ornaments are said to facilitate devotion (*bhakti*), allowing worshippers to imagine and thus connect with the divine presence. The divine is visually evoked and the mind directed upward toward transcendence by the crowns, jewelry, and other glowing fabrics.

Thus, adornment in Kerala mural paintings functions as a transcendental aesthetic principle, revealing cosmic order, embodying spiritual virtues, and aiding the devotee in the consummation of devotion. This

is similar to the rest of medieval Europe's sacred art when jeweled reliquaries, golden halos, and rich vestments intended to embody divine light and perfection in the church offered within.



Figure 1. Kerala mural of Gaṇapati at Suryanarayana Temple, Kerala. Photographed by the author.

Tibetan Thangka representation of ornaments and clothing

Tibetan Thangka paintings, dating from the 7th to the 20th century, are sacred instruments for meditation, ritual practice and teaching that originated in the Himalayan Buddhist monasteries. They are scroll paintings on a portable rigid scroll, which show the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, divinities and mandalas and with elaborate scenic background details. Externally, the mandala's structure embodies the Buddhist cosmological concepts of the 'material world' and 'three realms' as outlined in the *Abhidharmakośa* and *Kālacakra* Tantras: a circular disc centered on Mount Sumeru, surrounded by the four continents and eight sub-continents, the outermost circle encircled by the sun, moon, and stars" (Xu 2025: 166). As Brauen (2002) observes, many scroll paintings

incorporate mandalas that remain visually concealed until their geometric structure is examined, revealing a three-dimensional, symmetrical formation centered on a core point. He further notes, referring to the *Dharmamandala Sūtra*, that the human body is envisioned as a fivefold mandala composed of the central trunk and the four limbs. Of these, the ornaments and vestments serve as a deep means of expression of spiritual truths, leading practitioners towards enlightenment. Pullen (2025) notes that “pearls, long traded across Asian maritime routes, carried meanings of wealth, rank, and spiritual power. In Buddhism, the pearl (*maṇi* in Sanskrit, *nor bu* in Tibetan) is regarded as a divine jewel symbolizing virtues, wisdom, and compassion, often adorning Bodhisattvas as luminous ornaments. Importantly, Pullen highlights that specific motifs such as strings of pearl-beaded swags along the arms appear only rarely outside Tibet, with notable instances in Central and East Java and Khara Khoto, suggesting that the shared Buddhist ornamentation style spread through extensive maritime and overland trade networks” (Pullen 2025).

Canonical foundations and iconographic rules

The method of Thangka painting is a disciplined one from studying the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist philosophy and scripture. Art students and artists who have graduated are trained to make the most precise sort of grid and proportional system that enables them to establish how each individual figure is drawn, how many ornaments that figure should bear, how the robes should fall. This is a regulation that is not just technical but theological: every ornament, every robe, carries metaphysical meaning as well as a quota of a charge of spiritual potency to be added to the painting.

Ornaments and their spiritual meaning

Though Buddhas in Thangkas wear the best vestments, nothing about their ornamentation is unnecessary. Crowns (*pañcāśrī mukuṭa*) are indicative of the attainment of the five wisdoms of enlightenment, and act as symbols of divine kingship and spiritual power (Brauen 2002; Beer 1999). Bodhisattvas has multi-layered pearl or gem necklaces (*maṇi*),

hanging around on his chest, symbolizing compassion, generosity, and the well-acquired merit of laws of the world (Beer 1999). The armlet, bracelet and anklet refer to the Bodhisattvas as being both ready to intervene with great compassion in the world while also remaining stable in meditative awareness itself (Brauen 2002). Earrings, usually in the form of lotuses or with disc forms, indicate virginity and the passive aspect of wisdom (Beer 1999). Sapphire ornaments, often depicted inside the heart or in the hands of the deities, represent the ultimate wisdom and enlightenment (Brauen 2002; Beer 1999). Ornaments are made to shine with visual light, applied with gold leaf and precious pigments, eliciting the spiritual brilliance that connects the divine and the transcendental realm (Brauen, 2002).

Clothing and celestial robes

Thangkas also emphasize flowing robes and layered garments that drape around figures with elegant precision. These robes often include: monastic robes which represent renunciation and simplicity as well as full devotional practice to the dharma. Silken Shawls and Sashes flowing with movement and symbolizing life and compassion represent openness. Celestial fabrics in each tradition use motifs shaped by the culture of that region; these designs help show the sacred nature of the figures. In both Thangka art and Kerala murals, garments are not only for mere decoration but carry meaning. They guide the practitioner, especially during tantric meditation, where one is imagining oneself as the deity, helping them connect with the enlightenment within.

Role in rituals and meditative practice

Paintings in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism are centerpieces for both ritual and meditation practices. Practitioners meditate on and contemplate the virtues of a representative Buddha or Bodhisattvas. Spiritual qualities like wisdom and compassion are symbolically represented in the meditation by the figure's crown, other ornaments, and highly detailed robes. These richly embroidered robes are also aimed at helping the meditator overcome the ordinary and transition into a higher reality. Consequently, Thangka paintings, in terms of their highly detailed

style, also remind one of medieval Christian artwork incorporating reliquaries and sacred garments. In both traditions, the highly detailed adornments are intended to help the user perceive the divine in a much more direct and nuanced way. Through the depiction of *Vajrayāna* Buddhist ornaments and the principles of Buddhism, the meditator's spiritual truths are made much easier to understand in a visual way.



Figure 2. Tibetan Thangka painting depicting divine figures adorned with ornaments and richly patterned attire, symbolizing spiritual virtues and cosmic harmony. Photographed by the author at Namdroling Monastery (Golden Temple), Bylakuppe, Karnataka.

Comparative philosophical analysis

Mural paintings from Kerala, Tibetan Thangka art, and medieval Christian sacred art were produced in different cultures and religions, and yet, the philosophical implications of their use of ornaments and clothing are similar. All three use adornment not merely as an external superficial element, but as an essential aesthetic element to evoke the

deeper beauty of the transcendental and assist in the transformation of the spirit.

Universal qualities of sacred adornment

St. Thomas enumerates three constitutive elements of beauty: “integrity (*integritas*) or perfection (*perfectio*), since those things which are impaired (*diminuta*) are by the very fact ugly (*turpia*); due proportion (*debita proportio*) or harmony (*consonantia*); and lastly, brightness or clarity (*claritas*), whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color” (ST I, q.39, a.8, in c). The principles were manifested in the sacred ornaments of European cathedrals, jeweled reliquaries, and liturgical vestments: intricate patterns created harmony, golden embellishments produced radiance, and complete vestures signified wholeness of divine order.

The Mural paintings of Kerala similarly show that the crowns, jewelry and clothes are painted with canonical exactitude to achieve a heaven on earth that reflects the harmony of the cosmos. Their glowing colors and shining gold reflect a light not of this world, which we might still call reflex, like the divine *claritas* of Aquinas. In Tibetan Thangka painting, wholeness is represented through elaborately dressed robes with many layers and the finest of cloths; unity through meticulously applied forms and shapes; joyfulness via pure gold leaf on painted line, color and pigment. In both Kerala and Tibetan arts, the luminous quality of ornaments, crowns shining with jewels, and flowing robes highlighted with gold invites the devotee into contemplation, drawing him closer to spiritual truths.

Theological functions of ornamentation

Adornment holds equal theological importance across these religions, even though their identities differ. As a bridge between the earthly and the divine, ornaments visually connect heaven and earth. They also represent spiritual virtues, compassion in Buddhism, cosmic order in Hinduism and holiness in Christianity. When worshippers look at an adorned sacred form, these ornaments help shift their understanding of the divine from a physical image to a deeper spiritual experience.

Jewelry in Kerala Murals speaks volumes about divine play (*līlā*) and spiritual abundance. The use of jewelry can connote enlightened qualities in Thangkas and in visualizations. In medieval Christian art, ornately robed priests and golden halos stand for divine authority and sanctity. While it takes various forms, the intention of ornamentation as a whole is to express spiritual realities through a medium of beauty and symbol.

Cross-cultural transcendence of beauty

The parallels suggest that sacred adornment embodies a transcendental understanding of beauty, crossing cultural boundaries. Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist, these traditions share one philosophical conviction: visual richness expressed in jewelry, crowns, and robes is essentially required to make divine or ultimate truth perceivable to humans. Ornamentation is a metaphysical language that directs believers beyond sensory appearances toward spiritual transformation. As Palaguta points out, “the fact that ornamental studies have transcended the boundaries of traditional art scholarship is predetermined by the basic properties of ornament: the rhythmical structuring of its elements, their metrics and symmetry, that are also the basis for construing any artificial structure” (Palaguta 2020: 580).

Although the present study makes a brief comparative gesture toward medieval European notions of beauty, it is important to note that traditional Indian and Indo-Tibetan aesthetic systems do not employ a single, unified term equivalent to the Western concept of “beauty”. Instead, Sanskrit aesthetic theory speaks in terms of *śobhā* (radiance) (SanskritDictionary.com, n.d.), *saundarya* (graceful form) (SanskritDictionary.com, n.d.), and the rasic experience of *śṛṅgāra* and *śānta* (SanskritDictionary.com, n.d.), each of which conveys a dimension of aesthetic or spiritual refinement rather than a purely formal notion of beauty. Similarly, Tibetan scholastic and artistic traditions emphasize *mdzes pa* (beauty in the sense of harmony and auspiciousness) (*Tibetan and Himalayan library* n.d.) primarily as a quality that supports contemplative insight rather than an autonomous aesthetic category. Hence when Indo-Tibetan sacred ornament appears “beautiful”, it does not strive to embody the ideals of Western aesthetics but rather func-

tions to actualize auspiciousness, radiance, and the perfected attributes of awakened beings. The following comparative treatment is interpretive, then, not one of equivalence, understanding that resonances, no doubt, do exist but that these traditions conceptualize aesthetic value in decidedly different philosophical lexicons within their respective metaphysical systems.

Universal role of sacred adornment

Adornment mediates between the human and the divine, visually and symbolically, in all the three traditions. Medieval Christian art used sumptuous vestments, golden reliquaries, and illuminated manuscripts to denote holiness and heavenly perfection. In Kerala Murals, deities are portrayed in all their glory with elaborate jewelry and richly colored garments, reflecting cosmic order and divine prosperity. Tibetan Thangkas use luminous crowns, multilayer robes, and sacred jewels to depict enlightened wisdom and compassion.

This cross-cultural similarity suggests that sacred adornment is not some incidental artistic feature but is, in fact, a universal element of spiritual expression. It speaks to divine attributes, wisdom, purity, authority or compassion through visible tangible symbols, theologically speaking. While considering the philosophy of Aquinas, the belief that embellishment situated in harmony is indicative of the principle of the beauty of the whole in terms of the order of elements, balance or proportion, and the inner beauty such that the forms that shine both visibly and invisibly direct the perceiver to the source of ultimate truth (ST I, q.39, a.8).

Expanding medieval aesthetic thought

Medieval aesthetics in Europe, specifically the philosophy of Scholasticism, conventionally discusses only Christian art and theology. However, a comparison of Kerala murals and Tibetan Thangkas with medieval Christian ornamentation opens up this narrow purview. Though from diverse cultural traditions, these two Asian art forms similarly use adornment to metaphorically represent divine presence, thus emboldening medieval aesthetic thinking along two ways:

1. Intercultural dialogue: It allows medieval concepts of beauty to engage with Hindu and Buddhist understandings of sacred representation. The dialogues demonstrate that the use of ornate decoration as a sort of spiritual tool is a universally human phenomenon, ornamentation is not uniquely European.

2. Reinterpreting the transcendental: the wholeness, harmony, radiance, and the like are not exclusive to Christian sacred art. The same qualities can be seen and to the organized proportions and sparkling jewels of Kerala and the art of Tibet. This shows that the philosophic doctrine of beauty as radically other and in its essence Christian shows that the doctrine of beauty is not exclusively Christian but resonates across traditions.

Furthermore, any engagement with medieval ornamentation has to recognize that its meanings were influenced, among other things, by institutional factors alongside theological ideals, including ecclesiastical power, liturgical rank, and the ceremonial representation of authority. The comparison made here takes these historical contingencies into account and thus remains cautious with its claims.

Sacred ornamentation and the path of transcendence

The transformative power in religious practice of adornment and sponsorship in religion that unites these traditions is the use of adornment and sponsorship in religion. Being in the presence of richly vested clergy and glowing, jeweled stained glass decorated silhouetted based reliquaries of medieval churches, the liturgical experience was enhanced, helping the worshippers imagine and so more easily arrive at, the divine. In the Hindu temples of Kerala, the intricacy of the adornment on the Murals inspires devotion and aids the spiritually aspirational in their journey towards liberation (*moksha*). In the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, one's meditation on a deity of a Thangka, adorned in exquisite finery, is to help the practitioner internalize and so transcend the ordinary to see and live the enlightened virtues. Hence, sacred adornment provides a visual pathway to transcendence. By their holding in harmony and radiance the divine figure, these traditions close a gap in providing a union of the material with the spiritual. The use of ornamentation in the traditions becomes a language that communicates theologically and philosophically through adornment.

Implications for aesthetic studies

Recognizing sacred ornament as a generic aesthetic principle will have major consequences for any study of medieval thought and aesthetics. Globalizing medieval studies: It encourages scholars to work with medieval aesthetics in relation to non-Western sacred traditions that extend the culture and philosophy of the field in question. Re-valuing ornament opposes the current trend that considers adornment superficial and affirms its spiritual value. Comparative aesthetic philosophy lays the groundwork for further studies on how cultures construct visual abundance to convey the divine and enable spiritual transformation.

This analysis would, therefore, suggest that sacred artistry in the medieval European vestments, Kerala temple jewelry, and Tibetan celestial robes share a universal impulse that reflects the desire to make the divine visible and for the viewer to transcend themselves through the artistry which is a fact not restricted to geography or doctrine.

Discussion

A comparison of the Kerala mural paintings, Tibetan Thangka art, and Medieval Christian aesthetics demonstrates that the embellishment of the sacred transcends culture and religion. In all of them, the visual adornments of the various jewelries, crowns, and garments, and the costume, is not a mere stylistic accoutrement, but rather is of a theological and philosophical-aesthetic necessity. Three key implications of such conclusions are the universal place for sacred adornment, the contribution to a global medieval aesthetics, and the implications for the understanding of beauty as a path of transcendence.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the roles of ornamentation and costume in Kerala mural painting and in Tibetan Thangka art, putting them into conversation with Medieval Christian aesthetics. The discussion shows that sacred adornment whether jewelry, crowns, robes, or luminous fabrics has never been intended as mere decoration. In each of these

traditions, adornment serves a higher purpose. It functions as a transcendental aesthetic principle that makes the divine visible and guides devotees toward spiritual understanding. Medieval thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas have described beauty in terms of wholeness, harmony, and radiance. Recognizing sacred ornamentation as a universal aesthetic principle has profound consequences in medieval thought and medieval aesthetics. In medieval studies' expanding, global framework fosters provocation of medieval aesthetics in attention to and comparison with non-western sacred others. Valuing ornament counters modernity's denigration of ornaments as shallow by contending that they convey deep spiritual value. In comparative aesthetic philosophy, it can serve as the basis of a project to compare civilizations, looking for 'visual opulence' that responds existentially to the enriching experience of the sacred and also endures towards inward metamorphosis.

This study posits that the sacred medieval art in Christian European vestments, temple jewelry of Kerala, and celestial garments of Tibet argues for no geographical or doctrinal divides for the beauty of the sacred. It demonstrates humanity's perennial aspiration to make the divine visible.

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