

V&A in row over self-censorship after Muhammad image is taken down

From the [Spectator](#) and [Spectator](#) :-

I am not sure it is a very uplifting example, this censorship of the past, but they are certainly not alone in doing this.

Indeed over the last generation, a slow but efficient iconoclasm has been at work in Britain pruning images of the Prophet from published books, not just about the life of the Prophet but also illustrated surveys of Islamic Art. It is extraordinary how successful this campaign has been, based not on any physical threat but on a deluge of orchestrated complaints by telephone and email.

Last week, an art scholar friend of mine, who is incidentally a Muslim, told me that things are getting worse. He has been doing valuable work for many years, teaching the basic principles of Islamic design to young craftsmen who are keen to reconstruct in carved wood, plaster and painted tile their own Islamic heritage. . . You might have thought he would be honoured, but after one of these recent lectures he was arrested by the police of his host-nation and told that he had a choice: either destroy all the slides on his computer or be thrown into jail. His crime was to have shown a beautiful book illustration of the Prophet, veiled in a halo of light, ascending to the heavens. (the comments point out that Mohammed is a prophet to Muslims, not *THE* prophet.

We have become so inured to this process that it can be a shock to stroll into a second-hand bookshop and see how free the 1960s and 1970s were from this iconoclasm. To take an example, look at a copy of Emel Esin's study of the two Holy Cities, entitled *Mecca the Blessed, Madinah the Radiant*. It is

a book that oozes piety, scholarship and devotion, and also has dozens of beautiful illuminated images of the Prophet and his family. If you tried tracking down the various images from the dozen museums proudly cited in the acknowledgements to this book, including lots from the V&A, you would now enter a world of selective silence.