

APPLICATION – please follow the format provided below.

A. Abstract: *(100 word limit using Microsoft Word – please post word count at the end of your abstract)* Describe briefly how the funds for which you are applying will be used. If funded, the abstract will be posted to the CoTA website.

I am requesting funds to conduct preliminary research in Summer 2018 toward a new monograph titled *An Album of Muthanna/Mirror Writing in Islamic Art*. This study will be a sequel to my recent book, *Muthanna/Mirror Writing in Islamic Art: History, Theory, Aesthetics*, currently under review at Indiana University Press (IUP). In order to compile visual and textual data for my new project, I intend to travel to Greece, Bulgaria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina—three countries where rich Islamic art collections remain largely undocumented and unpublished. If granted funding, I would use the funds toward travel expenses, specifically, accommodation.

Word count: 96

B. Proposal: *(500 word limit using Microsoft Word – please post word count at the end of your proposal)* Describe the goals of your project / activity / conference and the areas in which your project supports the strategic goals and objectives of the unit, college and university.

The main goal of my project is to collect visual and textual data toward a new book titled *An Album of Muthanna/Mirror Writing* (hereafter, *Album*) to accompany my recent monograph *Muthanna/Mirror Writing in Islamic Art: History, Theory, Aesthetics*, currently under review at IUP. *Muthanna* is a form of Islamic calligraphy composed of a source text and its mirrored image placed symmetrically on an axis. It is found in media ranging from architecture, textiles, and tiles to paper, metalwork, and woodwork. Previous scholarship has erroneously traced the origins of *muthanna* to fifteenth-century Iran, and appropriated it readily as the quintessential product of Muslim creativity. Describing this sophisticated art form as a secret code for a number of theological discourses, past inquiries have generated a chain of misguided assumptions and theories without merit. In my monograph, I investigated a hitherto scattered corpus of artworks from Isfahan, Istanbul, Cairo, Beit-Shean, Jerusalem, Damascus, and parts of Muslim Spain, thereby dating this art form to Late Antiquity and presenting a new theory of its meaning and function.

While in this monograph I limited my research to the Middle East and Spain, in my new project, the *Album*, I intend to expand the geographical focus to include the Balkans. This broader scope will help me discern and explain the significance of the variations in the aesthetics, uses, and meanings of mirror calligraphy. The Balkan peninsula, which was ruled by the Ottoman Empire for over five centuries before the empire's dissolution in 1923, is fertile ground for a study of Arabic epigraphy, as the region was home to many Muslim artists and patrons. Despite its rich history of Islamic art, due to centuries-old political and religious frictions and hostility between some Balkan countries and their predominantly Muslim neighbors, Islamic monuments in general, and epigraphic works in particular, have been suffering from neglect as well as deliberate destruction.

Within this context, the purpose of my preliminary research is twofold: to identify and record some of the extant Arabic epigraphic works (specifically, mirror calligraphy) in Greece, Bulgaria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina; and to provide critical readings of the artworks. By expanding the geographical boundaries of research in Islamic calligraphy beyond the Middle East and Muslim Spain, I hope to contribute to scholars' understanding of the nature and significance of regional and local variances in Islamic art.

The monograph that will result from this research is intended to support the strategic goals of USF and CoTA in three ways:

- It will be the first study on Islamic inscriptions found in the Balkans, thereby contributing to the field with novel analyses and theories.
- Revealing a portion of the shared histories of pre-modern Islamic/Ottoman and Christian/Balkan communities, it will bring to the fore the various transnational and transcultural aspects of Muslim and Christian lives, beliefs, and practices, facilitating a scholarly bridge between these allegedly incompatible cultures and societies.
- Its geographically inclusive and conceptually diverse framework will help reinforce USF's emphasis on global research.