ART OF ISLAM

Gaston Migeon & Henri Saladin

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Authors : Gaston Migeon and Henri Saladin

Layout:
Baseline Co. Ltd
61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street
4th Floor
District 3, Ho Chi Minh City
Vietnam

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ISBN: 978-1-78310-768-1

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Art of Islam

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Introduction

Within a century, the Arab conquests that spread rapidly into the East, North Africa and Spain upset the social fabric of all the subjugated peoples by imposing not only a new religion and organisation, but also new customs and practices. One religion alone orchestrated the spread of a single statute. Although still reeling in the aftermath of barbarian conquests and torn by sectarian conflicts among Christians, the ruined former Roman provinces became the cradle of a new world, the Muslim world, which for centuries was more civilised than most countries in Europe. Since Muhammad had promised his followers that they would possess the kingdoms of the world, the enjoyment of material things was viewed as a gift and a reward, not as a despicable pleasure to be shunned by the faithful. Consequently, Muslim leaders sought to surround themselves with luxury and decorated their cities and palaces. The ostentation of caliphs became proverbial, and throughout their empire imposing monuments sprang up whose opulence and elegance remained legendary in the East.

The Muslim civilisation, forged by the efforts of many different people, was not composed solely of Arabs. Consistent with the models that influenced it and the places where it grew, it also included Greeks, Persians, Syrians, Egyptians, Spaniards and Indians. Considering all origins together, however, Arabs, although never so far accurately defined, unquestionably made up the greatest number. This background notwithstanding, they were able to fuse these greatly diverse elements into one homogeneous blend and build a civilisation that bears the mark of their genius. The art of Felix Arabia, ancient Yemen, cannot be left out of a list of countries that influenced early Islamic art. The primary result of Islamic conquests was a kind of blend of Eastern and Western artistic traditions.

This vast Muslim world, whose pilgrimages to Mecca reflected the nomadic nature of their culture, made persistent efforts towards unification, transmission and mixing of the various traditions in their empire, resulting in a constant evolution of the arts. During periods of peace, the pilgrimage, obligatory for every faithful Muslim, brought together people from various countries. Naturally, people of the same trade preferred to meet together and interact with one another. The trip to Mecca was long and expensive for craftsmen from far-flung countries, and the poorest had to stop and work along the way in order to obtain the necessary resources. During such relatively long stays in the cities, the most assiduous could learn construction techniques and manufacturing skills. Upon returning home, they would try to imitate the new techniques they had seen.

Consequently, the rich and powerful Muslim world established a considerable trade system throughout the Mediterranean, along caravan routes, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. During long periods of peace, under the great caliphs, the luxury and wealth of individuals facilitated trade. Immense bazaars were set up in every big city, and caravansaries appeared even in the middle of deserts. Islamic maritime art rivalled that of the Byzantine Empire or Italy. This situation was very advantageous to the renewal and proliferation of artistic techniques. The distinction between the splendour of the early centuries of Islam and the barbarism of the Christian world until the crusades is extraordinary.

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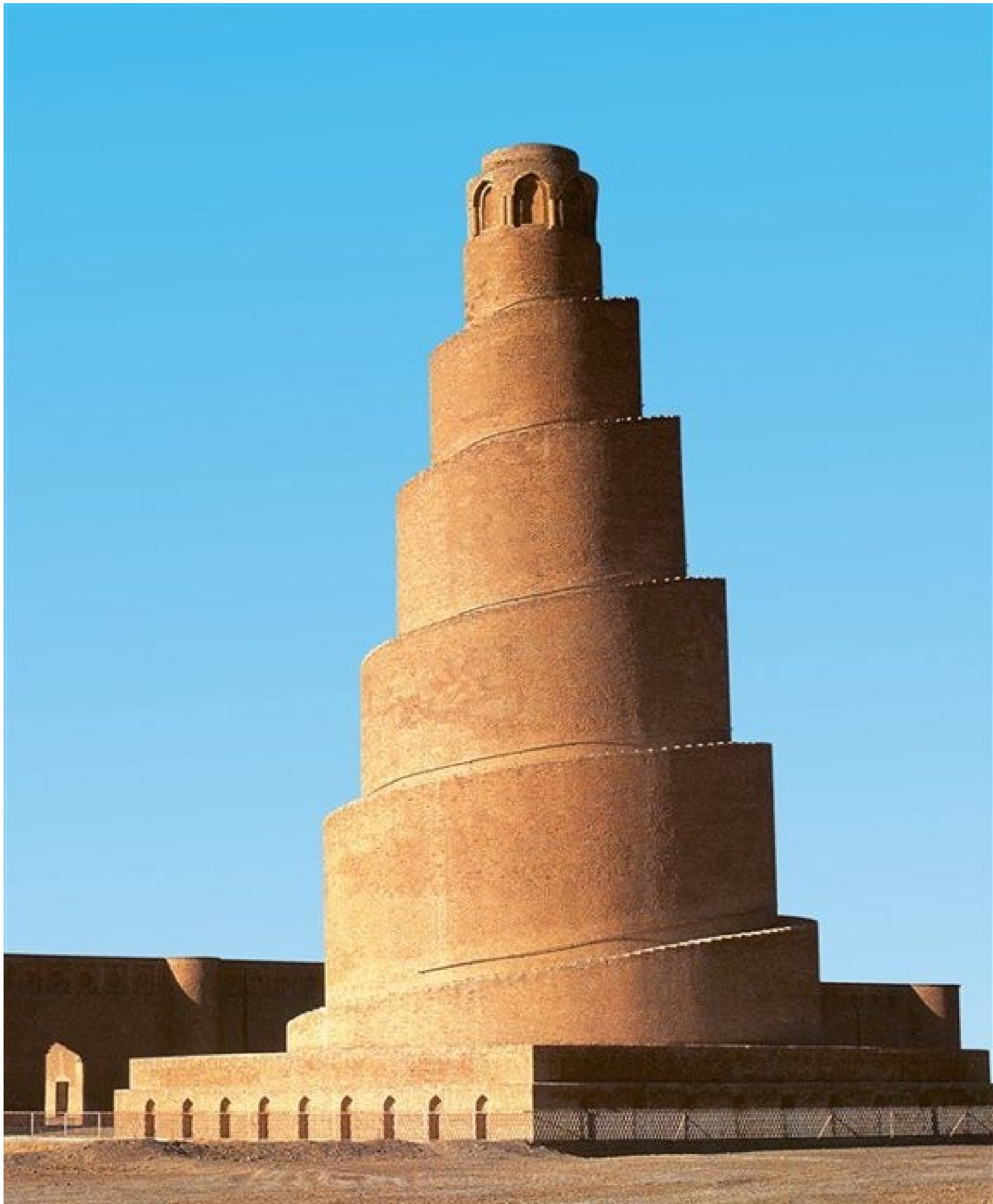

Minaret of the Great Mosque of Al-Mutawakkil, 848-852.
Height: 50 m. Samarra, Iraq.

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Courtyard of the Al-Azhar Mosque, 970-972. Cairo.

Architecture

A – The Near and Middle East

Following a rapid conquest by Amr-ibn-el-As several years after Umar seized Syria, Egypt's history was thereafter closely linked to Syria's. Regular contacts between Egypt and Syria resulted in interactions between these two countries and, in most cases, the mutual

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development of art. In 634, Damascus fell to the Muslims; in 637, Umar entered Jerusalem, and Aleppo and Antioch followed respectively. It is most likely that the monuments of Antioch were inspired by the construction of the Qubbat al-Sakhra in Jerusalem. There was also a renowned domed church in Antioch, dedicated to the Virgin Mary: according to the ancient Muslim writer Macoudi, this church was one the wonders of the world. Nevertheless, the style of these Syro-Egyptian monuments remained similar to the method adopted by architects in the Maghreb until around the close of the 9th century.

The heart of the mosque is the mihrab, a decorative niche in the wall that indicates to worshipers the direction of Mecca, towards which they must turn during prayer; this wall, along with an open courtyard, presents the typical design of early North African mosques. The first type is the mosque with porticos. It has a square central courtyard, with an ablution fountain in the centre; the fountain is shaded by porticos, the one in the east being the furthest away, below which is located the mihrab; this portico is a shaded oratory with parallel naves; next to the mihrab is the minbar, a pulpit for sermons, podiums where readers of the Koran stand and massive pulpits on which the holy book is placed. All the mosques in Cairo followed this plan until the reign of the Ayyubids. After that period, small and even big mosques were often built on the cruciform plan of madrasas or religious seminaries, and later, the Ottoman conquest introduced the plan of great Turkish mosques with domes.

The first mosques were all constructed according to this plan. In effect, the entire length of the whole mihrab wall runs parallel, so to speak, from the point of view of the orientation of worshippers at the time of prayer, to the mihrab itself; it is, thus, the nave that spans the length of the wall that is in actuality the sanctuary. It is therefore to be expected – it actually happened several times – that the enlargement of mosques was carried out with relation to this direction. As a matter of fact, the ceilings or arches of these naves were supported by columns. Ancient columns, their capitals and their bases were therefore used to support these arcades.

Cairo

Rather than the lavishness of materials used, the beauty of early Egyptian mosques sprang from painting, gilding and tapestry hangings. For example, the Tulun Mosque, one of the oldest in Cairo, is made solely of plaster-coated bricks. In Syria, Damascus and Jerusalem, however, the rich decoration does not have similar characteristics: precious marbles, metals and enamel mosaics were used in construction. Marble columns, capitals and bases, marble or mosaic coverings, bronze doors, painted and gilded ceilings, beams covered in sheets of embossed and gilded bronze... all were used both as construction materials and as decoration. It was thus an application of Roman and Byzantine methods, but with an entirely new spirit in the general layout, which was distinctly defined by lavish decoration.

The representation of human figures was not completely banned in early Muslim art. Statues, bas-reliefs and tableaux were frequently seen in the palaces of monarchs or prominent individuals. Unfortunately, all we have are documents that enable us to imagine the likely layout of these edifices: no existing vestiges can hint at the possible features of the palaces of both Ibn Tulun and his son, Khomarouyeh, of which Makrisi provides interesting descriptions.

Introduced in the 13th century, the cruciform plan became so typical that it was used even in small mosques. Syrian influence was already becoming evident in the construction of religious

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edifices under the Fatimids, and we will find that influence more present in the fortifications of Cairo; the architects who constructed the three large entrances of the Badr El-Gemali compound were from Edessa, and therefore Syrians.

Although the unorthodox features of this eastern influence disappeared when the Ayyubids replaced the Fatimid dynasty in Cairo in the second half of the 12th century, the influence of Syrian methods was becoming common, especially in the construction methods Egypt had adopted. The use of stone, complex devices and multicoloured decorations with marble or coloured stones, both of them of Syrian origin, spread quickly and grew to include not only religious but civil architecture as well.

This influence, which was first felt under the Fatimids and subsequently under the Ayyubids, further increased under the Mameluke-Baharite sultans (from 1250 to 1382) and reached its climax under the Mamelukes (1382-1515).

Turkish conquerors introduced the Ottoman dome-shaped mosque in Cairo to emphasise their control by imposing a stamp on religious edifices. While the conquerors were hailed as supreme caliphs and Muhammad's assistants by all Sunni or orthodox Muslims, their rule was not absolute: many small mosques in Cairo maintained the traditional design, even after 1516. However, the Ottoman occupation had no effect whatsoever on civil and domestic architecture.

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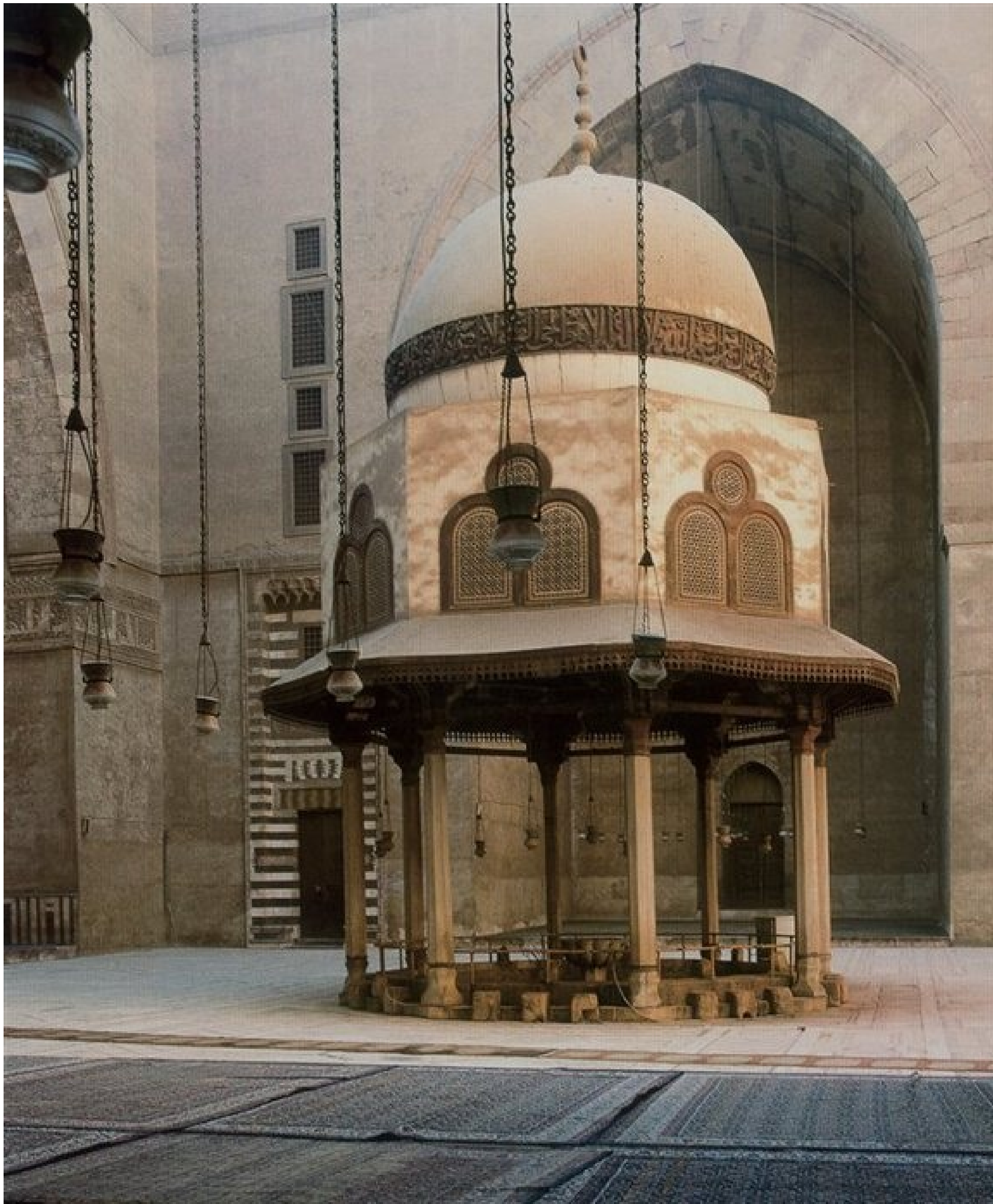

Ablution fountain, 1363.
Sultan Hassan Mosque, Cairo.

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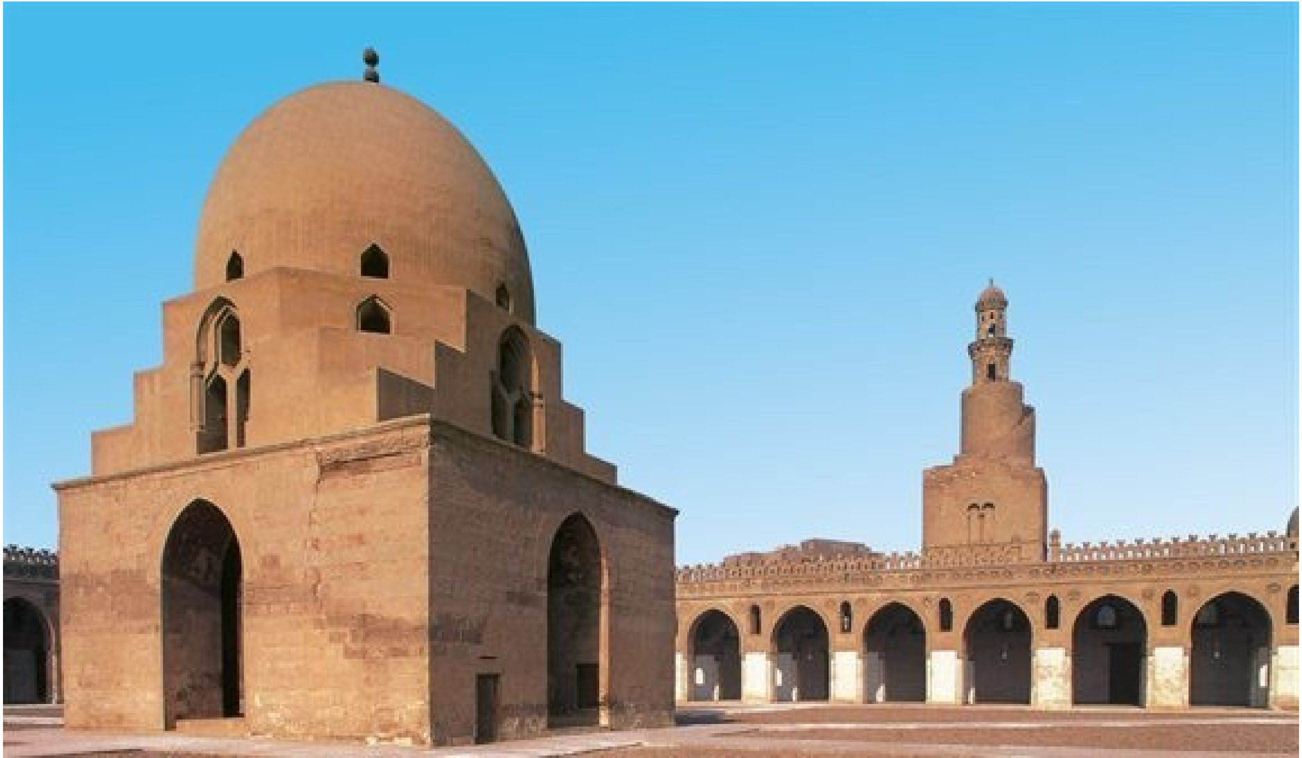

Courtyard of the Ibn Tulun Mosque, 876-879.
Cairo.

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The Dome of the Rock, 691-692.
Jerusalem.

Jerusalem

The Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, which is similar to the Umar Mosque, is full of splendour. A former Justinian Basilica, it was reconstructed by Abd al-Malik, destroyed by two earthquakes and rebuilt in 785. Saladin restored it in 1187, according to an inscription, and contributed the beautiful minbar that Noureddin made for the Great Mosque of Aleppo. The mosaics which he used to decorate the sanctuary are, in spite of the period when they were done, similar to those of the Qubbat al-Sakhra and as beautiful.

Mecca

The Kaaba in Mecca, which covers the sacred Black Stone that Muslims believe fell from heaven, has a long narrative history. It is said to have been constructed by Adam, then by Seth, then by Abraham, then by the Amalekites, then in the 7th century by the Korachites under the Copt architect Dokun. After it was destroyed by Yazid, Abdallah Ibn Zobeir rebuilt it. It was again destroyed as part of an order from Abd al-Malik, who, shortly after, reconstructed the porticos; it was from this moment that it went down in history.

Medina

The first mosque in Medina seems to have been merely a square area enclosed by a brick wall, partly shaded by a wooden roof supported by plaster-coated palm tree trunks. A courtyard with

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porticos and the sanctuary at the far end was a reproduction of ancient Semitic and Phoenician sanctuaries, a prototype of portico mosques. This mosque (Masjid en-Nebi, the prophet's oratory) was constructed in 707 by El-Walid, who decorated Muhammad's tomb with faience plates. Later destroyed by an earthquake and fire, it was reconstructed under Kaïl-Bey, probably following the old plan. It follows the plan of ancient mosques with parallel naves; it contains Muhammad's tomb.

Damascus

The Umayyad Mosque, or Great Mosque of Damascus, is an ancient Christian church dedicated to John the Baptist by Theodosius in 379, and restored by his son Arcadius on the site of an ancient temple that stood in the middle of an immense court, and whose porticos are still partly standing. Upon their entry into Damascus, Muslims used this mosque jointly with Christians; however, the Umayyad caliph El-Yalid devoted it entirely to Muslim worship and, to this effect, slightly altered it.

The upper part of the mosque's interior has Byzantine-style stanchions with very flat surfaces, a frieze made of white marble and gilded rinceaus (ornamental bands of scrolled foliage) that spread against a background of dark marble that actually brings to mind the Qubbat al-Sakhrah. The piers surmounting the column capitals are like truncated pyramids but more massive than those outside. The ceilings of the transept wings before the most recent destructive fire were made of exposed, overhanging beams; semi-cylindrical beams that were connected to the square parts by gilded stalactites (like those in 15th-century Cairo) spanned between a frieze decorated with an inscription in white letters on a blue background, supported by consoles decorated with red, blue and gilded ornaments. This beautiful work undoubtedly dates back to the 15th century renovation, which included the mihrab, the minbar and the mosaics that decorated the lower part of the wall. Nothing, however, was as attractive as the transept's mosaics, which had been given to Walid by the Greek emperor and laid by Byzantine mosaic workers; they had a green and brown tone on a gilded background. The sheiks of the mosque claimed that these mosaics represented Mecca and Medina. Thanks to this splendid exteriour finish, the Great Mosque of Damascus, viewed from the courtyard, had a magnificent appearance.

As lavishly decorated as Cairo's mosques were, its palace complexes were equally as stunning; should we agree with the description of historians, the Arab Muslims sought in every way to surpass the extreme luxury of Byzantine emperors.

The Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo

In 868, the Abbasid caliph Motawakkel appointed Ahmed Ibn Tulun governor of Egypt; the following year, Ibn Tulun virtually became independent, bringing Syria and Egypt together under his command. The luxury of his court was magnificent. He abandoned the former El Askar district capital and settled in the outskirts, in El-Kataï, which he founded in 868 and where he built his palace. Makrisi describes its wealth to us: a golden and azure room was decorated with wooden bas-reliefs with life-sized representations of him and his court; human figures were finished in gold, turbans were enhanced with precious stones, clothes were

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painted and encrusted. His palace was surrounded by those of his dignitaries. He built his mosque on Yachkur hill.

The Ibn Tulun is a mosque with porticos. Around it are groups of accessory buildings with external courtyards, whose layout is reminiscent of ancient Egyptian temples.

The mosque itself is one hundred and twenty metres long and thirty-eight metres wide; there is a small minaret at each corner of the sanctuary: the principal minaret is located outside the mosque. It is built of stone on a square plan. Niches like geminated Arabic arches adorn its side walls. According to Makrisi, the architect of this minaret and the mosque drew inspiration from the model of the Samarra mosque (erected 48 kilometres from Baghdad by the caliph Ouatek ibn Motassim in 542) – although the architecture of this region was made from bricks. This is also true of Mesopotamia, where gypsum was so beautiful and plentiful that the Assyrians used it for their high and bas-reliefs. One finds evidence of the four-column tradition in the use of attached columns surrounding a square or rectangular cluster at the Mosque of Ibn Tulun. The arcades in the naves of Ibn Tulun, where the tympanum between the arches is lightened by an openwork arcade, present a form whose origin is unknown. A similar shape can be found on Sassanian bridge piers at Dizful and Shushtar. Most ornamental details of this mosque are reminiscent of the decoration of Sassanian stars, especially those that are reminiscent of the winged globe of the capitals of Tak-i-Bostan. Finally, lancet windows evocative of the arches of monuments in Amman appeared for the first time in the Ibn Tulun Mosque. Considering the fact that Cairo was not lacking in stones, this preference for bricks clearly resulted from Mesopotamian traditions brought to Cairo during the reign of the Abbasids, which continued to influence architecture during the Shiite Fatimid dynasty.

Cantoned by four columns with Byzantine capitals, the mihrab is decorated with marble mosaics: its dome was made of wood, its framing of enamel mosaic rinceaus above it emerges a small wooden dome, supported by pendentives dating back to the restoration of Sultan Lagin in the 13th century, as well as the wooden mihrab and the openwork covering of the windows. These are not windows set in a plastered truss-frame, but slabs made of small stones cut into simple but very attractive geometric shapes.

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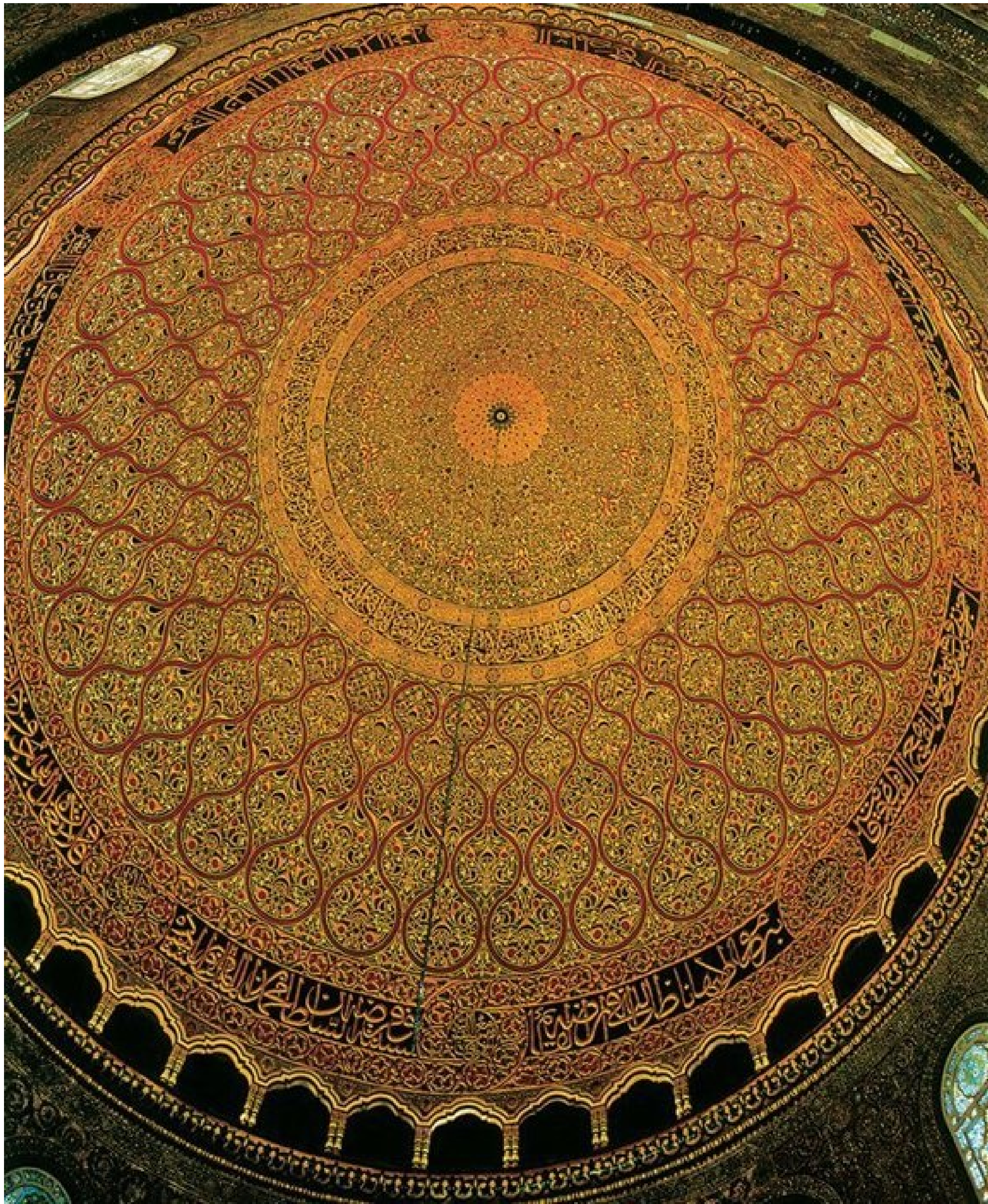

The Dome of the Rock, interior dome,
1540-1550. Jerusalem.

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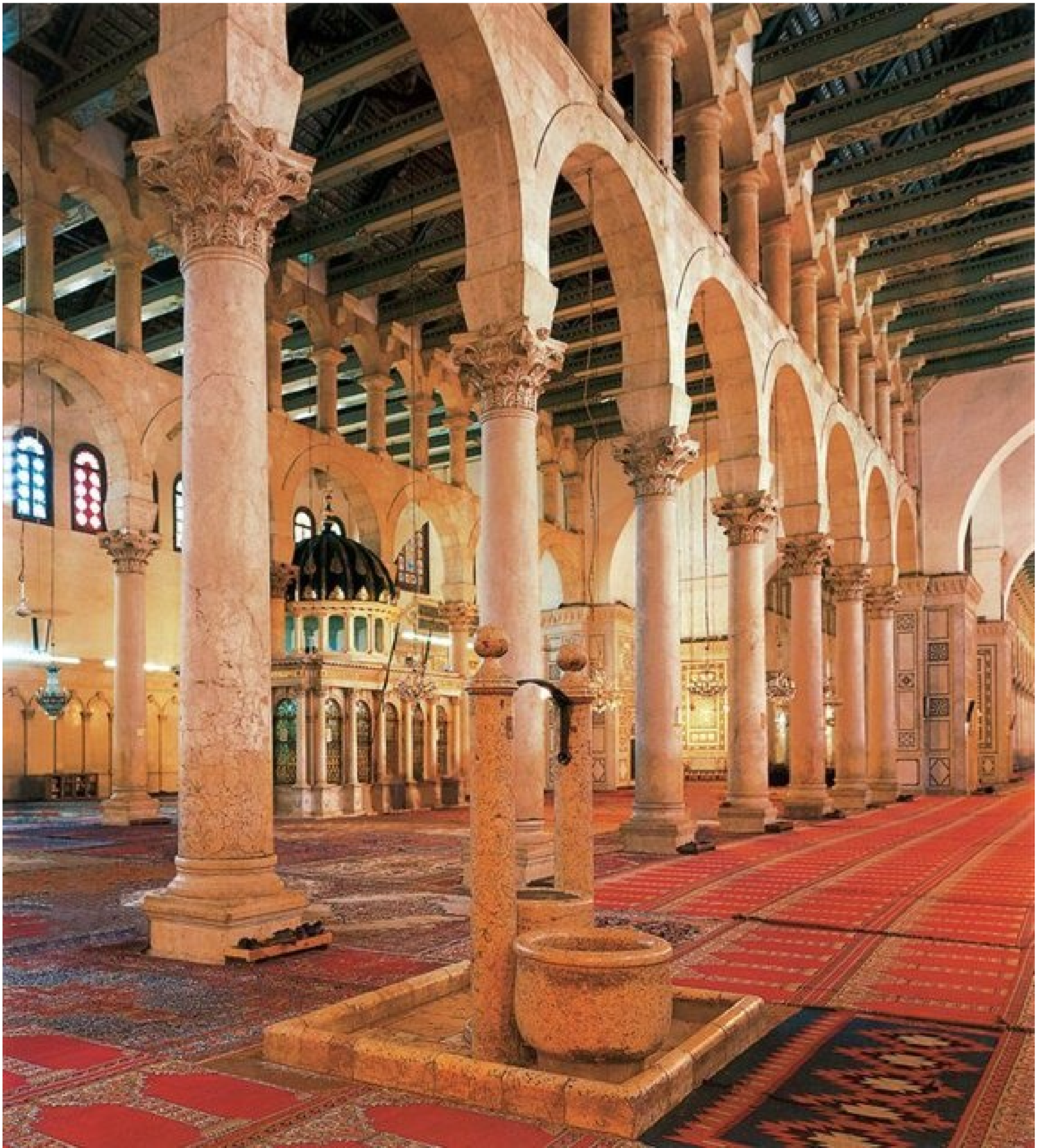

Prayer hall in the Great Mosque of Damascus, 706-715.
Damascus.

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Mihrab and minbar of the Great Mosque of Damascus, 706-715.
Damascus.

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Minaret of the Great Mosque of Aleppo, early 8th century.
Aleppo.

The Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo

The Al-Azhar Mosque, constructed in Cairo by Jauhar, a Sicilian slave, general in the army of Al Moizz and the first Fatimid sovereign of Egypt, has a larger central nave, lined by two rows of pillars, and a design that is quite different from that of Ibn Tulun and Amrou. It was transformed into a madrasa not long after it was founded and has been renovated and expanded many times. The entrance doorway dates back to Kaït Bey, including the minaret, whose base is visible (1468-1496); a wooden fence that dates back to Kaït Bey, located below the first portico, has recently been restored. Four additional naves were added to the mosque by Abder-Rahman Katkhoda, whose tomb is located in one of the rooms towards the mosque's southern tip.

These additions notwithstanding, it seems that the podium indicates a central nave, flanked by a twin-row of columns, which is an ancient design that most likely originated from Tunisia (where it is found in the great mosques in Sfax, Tunis, Kairouan, Mehdiya, Beja, Gafsa, etc.), the cradle of the Fatimid dynasty. While the recent sections are made of stone, the ancient sections of Al-Azhar are constructed with bricks covered in a thick levelling plaster coat with ornamental engravings; it is the same in the small dome at the entrance.

The courtyard is accessible through a broad passage. This entrance, dominated by the minarets of nearby madrasas, presents recycled Roman and Byzantine columns and their capitals. The wall of the courtyard is overlaid with an openwork frieze richer than that of

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Tulun, above which hollowed out openwork melons with six-level indentations rise. Al-Azhar arcades that span between columns have a slender, unique form, like the arches of niches interposed between them: this type of arch, made of bricks, was used quite often in Persia. Since the Fatimid dynasty was Shiite like the Persians, this form might somewhat have been the result of dealings with Persia, or a Persian architect might even have influenced it. This use of arches was evident for a long time in Cairo, even under the Mameluke-Baharites, when all monuments were made of hewn stones.

The Hassan Mosque in Cairo

Whereas Cairo's mosques revealed, at the beginning of the 14th century, an increasingly unique trend towards stone construction – as seen in the Al Sankor mosque (1346) – a visit to the Sultan Hassan Mosque reveals an entire structure where Persian contributions fuse with other eastern and northern influences to create an important monument. This mosque, begun in 1350 and completed in 1362 by Sultan Mohammed Hassan, Al Nasser's seventh son, is the most beautiful mosque based on the cruciform plan. It has in its centre an unshaded courtyard with an ablution fountain, and to the east of this courtyard is the sanctuary. Behind the lower wall is the tomb chamber, whose renovated dome dates back to the 17th century; the three other iwans complete the layout, and between the arms of the cross are the colleges of the four orthodox rites, each of which includes a courtyard, an iwan and rooms for students. Viewed from the exteriour, the mosque exudes grandeur and severity, towering into the sky with its two minarets, the tallest of which comprises three stories and stands fifty-five metres tall. The walls of the mosque are fitted with very attractive windows; long grooves run along the walls. A story told by Khalil Zahiri reveals that among all the influences that contributed to the composition of the plan of the Hassan Mosque, Asian and Mesopotamian influences rank first. According to his account, Sultan Hassan summoned architects from several countries and asked their opinions of the most impressive mosque in the world, so that he could construct his mosque to outshine it. He was told it was Khosroe Anushirvan's iwan. He had it measured and drawn, and then had his mosque built three metres taller. The lateral facades of the Hassan Mosque have a unique decoration reaching up to the enormous cornice of stalactites and long, solid bands that separate the vertical series of windows. The unknown architect thus achieved, through the simplest of means, an extraordinary effect.

The dome which covered the mausoleum is bulbous, with corbelled ribs supported by pillars. The original plan of the mosque called for four minarets, but the minaret that overlooked the porch collapsed in 1360 and was never reconstructed, and a fourth was never built. Of the two remaining ones, the one in the southwest is the most beautiful. By way of a simple triangular glacis, it moved from the square plan to the octagonal plan. On four of its faces, the first part of the octagonal shaft has on four of its faces a long window and balcony supported by stalactites; on the other four, a flat niche, and windows or niches are still locked by an angle with rectilinear sides, which is the simplest form of the short brick arch. A stalactite cornice supports a second octagonal lower floor surmounted by a second, richer cornice with the last platform where, above eight arcades with slender stanchions, emerges the dome supported by a pedestal that remained the terminal pattern motif most frequently used on minarets in Cairo until the 17th century.

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The lavishness of the mosque's interiour reflected the splendour of its exterior. The main entrance was of bronze, with large panels filled with a polygonal network whose principal elements were decorated in high relief; the two panels were set in a flat bronze border with huge, decorative door knockers. This entrance, together with the gate, formed a rare and impressive example of Islamic art. Sultan El-Moyed had it placed in his mosque, where it stands today. He equally seized the bronze lustre he found in the Hassan Mosque, which was subsequently built; it is currently conserved in the Cairo museum along with twenty-four enamelled glass and gilded lamps equally from this mosque. A look at the numerous chains still hanging from the masonry arch in the grand iwan, each of which carries a lamp, is enough to imagine the stunning beauty that once characterised the interior of this monument. The iwan was decorated with low marble panelling; below the sanctuary, this panelling rose to the magnificent frieze in cut stucco where a Kufic inscription runs and which shows the springing of the vault. The dikka, the marble minbar, with chased bronze doors, and the mihrab inlaid with marble round out this structure with an extravagance that is severe and almost austere.

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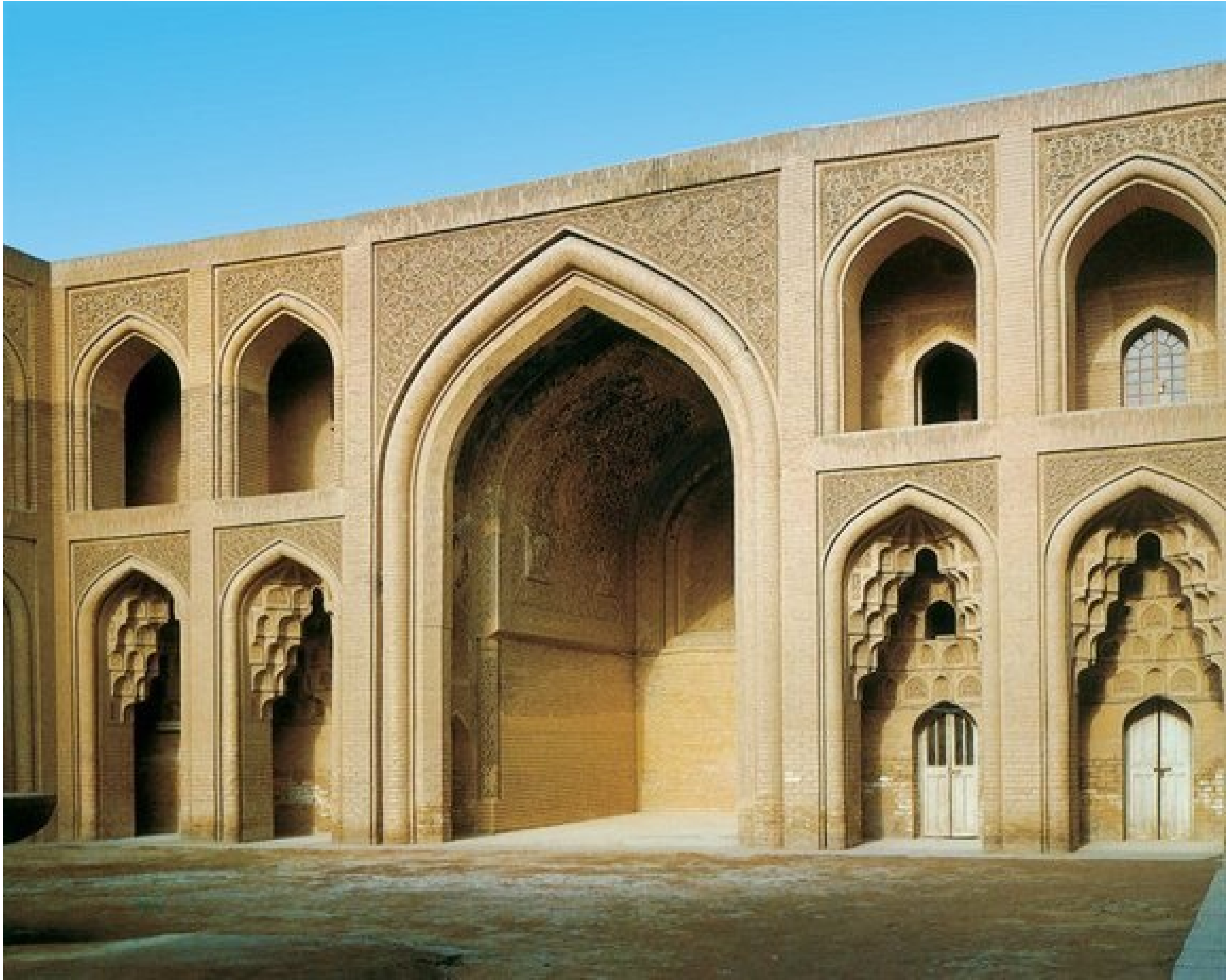

Palace of the Abbasids, 1179.
Baghdad.

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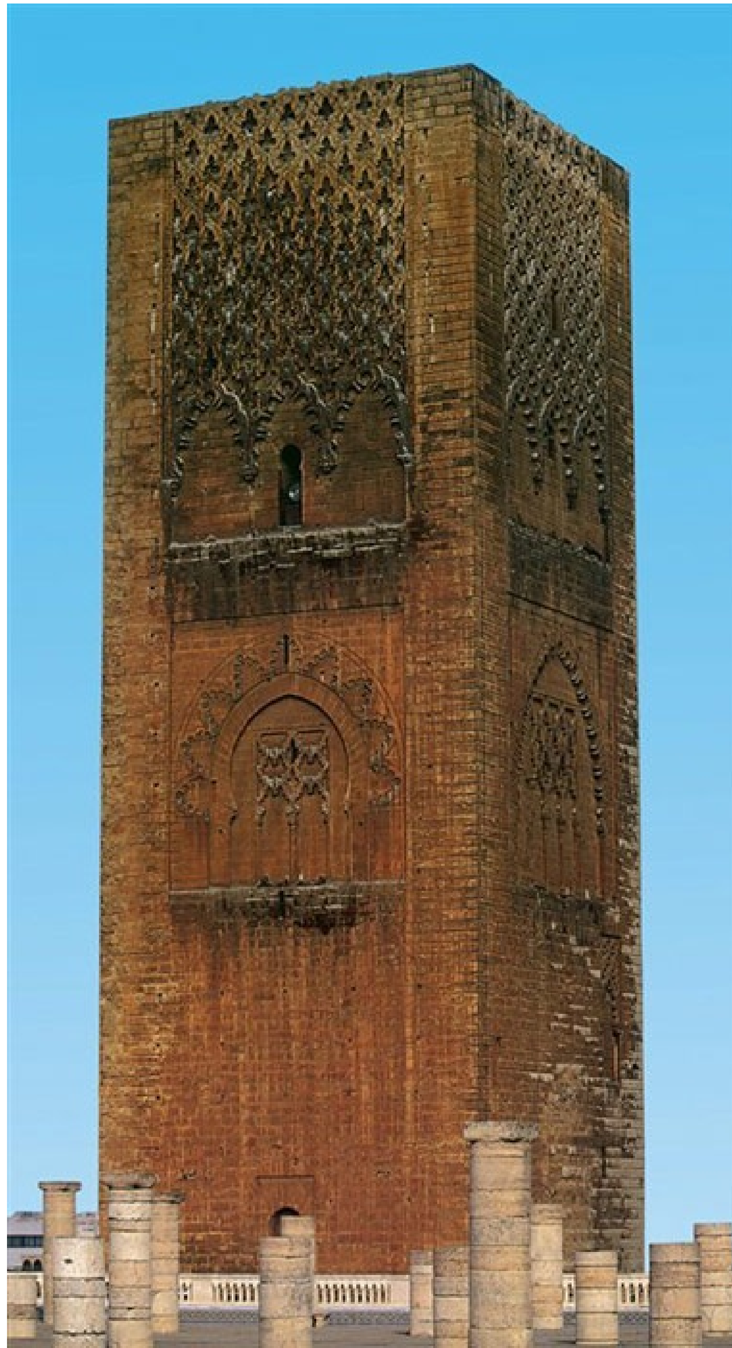

Al Hassan Mosque, 1195-1196.
Rabat, Morocco.

B – North Africa and Spain

During the early centuries of the Hijra, Kairouan, capital of the Aglabite kingdom, and Córdoba, capital of the Umayyad caliphate of the West, were the centres of Maghrebian artistic influence. In the 9th and 10th centuries, Morocco became the cradle of a new power that asserted the Berber component almost without any foreign influence. Fez was founded in 807 and Marrakech two hundred years later. The Muslim power in the far West was not Spain, with its provinces torn by the ambition of small sovereigns, each jealous of the others: the

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Almoravids, the Almohads and later the Merinids asserted Morocco's power. Subjugated by Sultan Abou of Morocco in the 11th century, Spain's art was apparently not influenced by its conquerors, apart from the fact that it was at about this period that Spain's Arab style took on a more concrete character. This was due, to a large extent, to change, the natural consequence of Islamic Spain's material prosperity and continuity in the transfer of manufacturing techniques to artisans.

This art flourished in Morocco, Spain, Algeria and Tunisia in the 12th and 13th centuries. In spite of political decline, Maghrebian art produced its most sublime works in the 14th and 15th centuries. When the Christians forced the Arabs out of Spain, the Andalusian civilisation sought refuge in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, where its literary and artistic traditions were not completely wiped out by violent events. Following the reclamation of Spain by Christians, the Mudejar style, an Islamic-influenced artistic tradition used by the Christians, persisted for a long time.

The anarchy that split Algeria for a long time had a negative impact on the conservation of the nation's buildings. In Morocco, however, owing to a fairly stable and sustainable government, these traditions were partly preserved. Finally, notwithstanding the unique regime that replaced the overthrown Hafsid dynasty, Tunisia saw the burgeoning of an Islamic art in the 16th and 17th centuries, a style which, while lacking in absolute purity from a traditional perspective, nevertheless produced beautiful works and attractive monuments.

In the Maghreb, as in Syro-Egyptian architecture, the principal monument is the mosque; initially made of lateral naves, like the mosques in Amrou and Tulun, Maghreb mosques in Tlemcen and Mansurah were afterwards constructed in an original style. Early mosques in Algeria, Tunisia, Spain and Morocco have parallel naves like those of Amrou, Ibn Tulun and EL-Hakem in Cairo. They are rather "typical," considering that they are designed to respond to specific needs. Muslims usually pray facing the mihrab, which is oriented in the direction of Mecca. They stand or kneel in parallel lines along the mihrab wall. Consequently, the mihrab wall must be very long and the mosque's naves must run parallel to it. However, when there is not enough space along the length of the mosque, it is expanded laterally, as one can notice in the mosques of Córdoba, Tunis and Sfax. It was during this period that the square form, which became traditional in Maghrebian minarets, appeared. During the first period, until about the 10th century, ancient materials were frequently used: Greco-Roman, Byzantine or even Punic columns, bases, and capitals are found in Tunisian mosques and in the Great Mosque of Córdoba. A distinction, however, must be made between the plans of Maghreb and Egyptian mosques. The central nave, which is visibly larger in Aghlabite mosques in Tunisia (where it so clearly stands out) and can be seen in Córdoba and Fez (in the Qarawiyin Mosque), did not exist previous to the 10th century either in Egypt or Syria.

Later, although the ephemeral empire of the Hammadits erected at the Kalaa of the Beni Hammads and in Bejaïa monuments – which historians acclaimed as marvellous – it is especially in Morocco and Spain that architecture developed at a tremendous rate and to an extraordinary degree. The layout of mosques there has not changed. In Tunisia, where the Hafsids encouraged and protected the arts, Andalusian artists decorated the capital and its surroundings. It was not until the 16th century, when the protectorate of the Grand Master appointed Turkish governors to the regencies of Algiers and Tunis, that some of them

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constructed mosques according to the Hanefit example. The resulting structures had octagonal minarets, like the mosques of Hamouda Pacha and of Sidi ben Ziad in Tunis, or domes, like the Sidi Mahrez mosque in the same city. Almost all the great mosques in the Maghreb were built on huge cisterns where rain water was collected from the terraces.

Unlike the madrasas in Cairo, the collegial, cruciform mosques are virtually absent from the Maghreb. Here, the Maliki rite had always been promoted to the exclusion of the three others; the Hanafi could be found only among Turkish families, which were few in Tunisia and Algeria. The school, or madrasa, was thus reduced to a little mosque comprising a lecture room and rooms for students. If this kind of madrasa is attached to a sacred tomb, it is called a zaouia, and may undergo relatively large expansions. An example is the Kankah of Cairo. By extension, the madrasas where the members of the same religious fraternal society meet are also called zaouia. After all, these buildings with their portico courtyards are simply a kind of expanded home that opens onto the mosque, with the tomb of the founder and lecture rooms on the ground floor, and student rooms on the first floor. The mosques of these little monasteries were also constructed following a parallel nave plan. Although relatively rare, it was only from the 16th century, when the Beys declared themselves vassals of Turkish sultans, that some of these little mosques adopted the multiple dome design.

From the early centuries following the Hijra, the palaces of the sovereigns were certainly very lavishly designed. In this regard, we can only refer to the descriptions of historians, since to this day we know little about those of Madinah al-Zahra near Córdoba, those around Kairouan, those in Béjaïa and Kala. However, the mosques of the 13th century and later are known from extant monuments, perhaps the most famous of which is that of the kings of Granada in Alhambra, which is particularly remarkable in general design, lavishness and beauty. In my opinion, it is only in India that Muslim sovereigns managed to outshine the splendour of Andalusian palaces, especially in the extravagance of the materials used. In his *History of the Berbers,* Ibn Khaldun presents a description of detached pavilions with raised domes, kiosks, aqueducts, fountains, basins forming large reflecting pools (a Sassanian tradition which was introduced to the West via Mesopotamia), pavilions of marble columns whose walls were coated in marble or faience mosaic. The arabesque-styled and sculpted ceiling perfected this awe-inspiring ornamentation.

Moroccan historians also left us many descriptions of palace complexes. An example is the El-Bedi palace built in Marrakech by El Mansour el-Dzehebi, where onyx, precious marble, gold, silver, faience, gold-plated ceilings, cut out and painted stucco and beautiful tapestries were used to give the building unparalleled splendour. Gardens decorated with fountains, basins, pools and silver statues flanked this masterpiece of Islamic architecture. The luxury of the feasts at the palace reflected that of the architecture, and meals were served in gold-plated dinnerware from Malaga (Hispano-Arab faience) or Valencia, in dinnerware from Turkey (faience from Kütahya), and in gold- and silver-plated cups. The sultans took this luxury even to their camps: during his travels, according to the author of *Nozhet el-Hadi*, El Mansur Dzehebi carried a pavilion made of boards that were nailed and bound to each other through rings, clamps and stunningly silver-coated metal plates. Surrounding this pavilion and forming a kind of wall stood a partition of linen cloth with drawings that evoked a garden or an ornamented façade; within its confines were domes painted in red, black, green and white,

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whose lustre passed for the flowers in a parterre; the pavilion’s inside walls were decorated with magnificent sculptures and superb hanging draperies.

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Courtyard of the Great Mosque of Kairouan, 836.
Kairouan.

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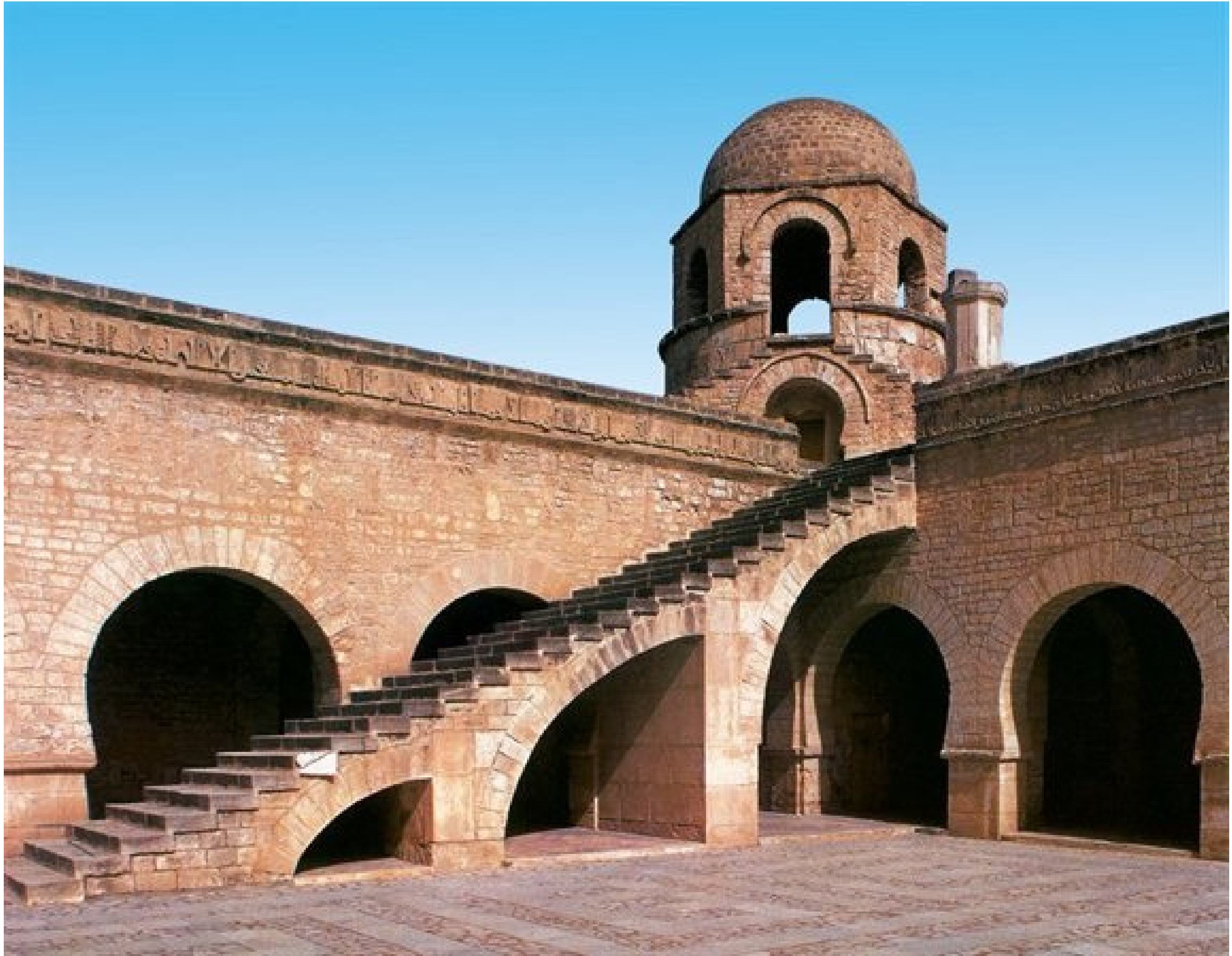

Courtyard of the Great Mosque of Sousse, 1850.
Sousse.

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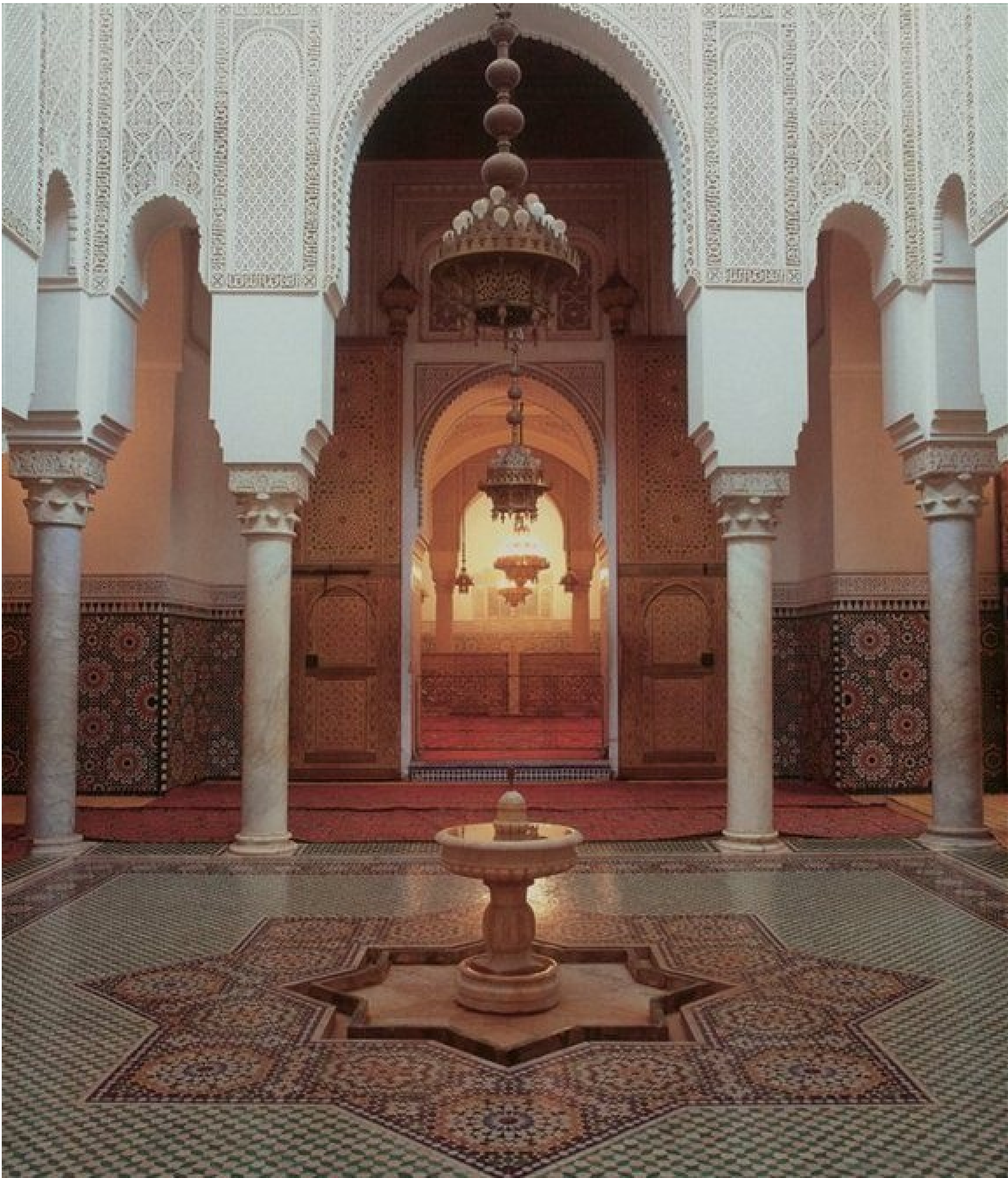

Mulay Isma'il Mausoleum, 18th century.
Meknes, Morocco.

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Palaces

In the cities of Kairouan and Córdoba, the magnificence of the sovereigns called for palaces as luxurious as those of Asian caliphs. We know them only from descriptions by Muslim historians. A prominent example is the one that Abd-ar-Rahman had constructed near Córdoba in 926 in honour of his favourite concubine al-Zahra. He called it Madinah al-Zahra (the City of Flowers). This magnificent residence could accommodate the caliph's court and a guard of 12,000 horsemen. It had a fountain decorated with a golden swan in the caliph's pavilion. He set up a statue of al-Zahra, his concubine, over the palace's entrance.

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The political change resulting from the battle of Zalaca which brought Spain under the Almoravids – Berbers from the south of Morocco – marked the end of Middle-Eastern supremacy in the area. The policy of the new Berber monarchs involved identifying and propagating small Arab states across the Maghreb that were then considered inoffensive. This change evidently had an impact on the arts, since it was from this period that the Maghrebian style became more defined and distinct from other Muslim styles. Even in independent regions such as Tlemcen, the most beautiful monuments were erected during this period.

A style unique to the Maghreb thus emerged from the independent centres of North Africa. In 1018, the Great Mosque of Algiers had horseshoe-shaped arcades, which were already slightly ogival. With the palace of the grand vizier in Fez in mind, we could compare the modern arch, barely shrunken at the base, with antiquated arches, whose overhang is so distinctive.

The Hassan Tower in Rabat (1199)

The Hassan Tower in Rabat is simple. It was unfortunately denied its crown, which was supposed to be a series of blind arcades surmounted by a row of serrated melons on top of which arose a small dome-carrying lantern on a platform, a regular feature in Maghrebian minarets. The small marble columns that supported the three arcades of advanced beam filling have disappeared. An examination of the casing of the large blind window of the second floor and the three serrated arcades below reveals that these forms are enhanced by a kind of border which, unlike the relief moulding in 14th-century Cairo monuments, is an area bounded by a deep line of engraving. Many interlaced arches, in a row or two, border the archivolt. The arches' tympanums are decorated with symmetrical rinceaus based on a model that became conventional.

The Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech

In 1069, while the Hammadid leader, en-Nasser, was erecting monuments in Béjaïa, the Almoravids were founding Marrakech, whose fortifications still have a Byzantine aspect. The Koutoubia tower is one of the most attractive in Morocco. Its severe aspect gives it the appearance of a Roman work of art. Like the one in Rabat, it is made of stone. Characteristically similar to the two others, its bays do not match each other horizontally because they follow the rising movement of the interior ramp of the staircase. This edifice is classical given its accent and firmness.

Marrakech

The 12th century witnessed the embellishment of Muslim capitals in the Maghreb. In Marrakech, Yacoub el Mansour, during whose reign the Koutoubia was constructed, raised the mosque's height by fifty cubits, decorated it with jasper and alabaster he imported from Spain, and added as trophies the doors of the great church in Seville, which can still be seen today at the northern entrance, studded with small bronze coins and large bolts of the same metal. He also installed two bells wrested from Spain that he suspended upside-down. At the top of the tower are four apples of fine gold attached to each other on a large iron bar. The body of the apple is made of copper covered with a large golden blade from Tiber.

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Mihrab of the Great Mosque of Kairouan, 836.
Kairouan.

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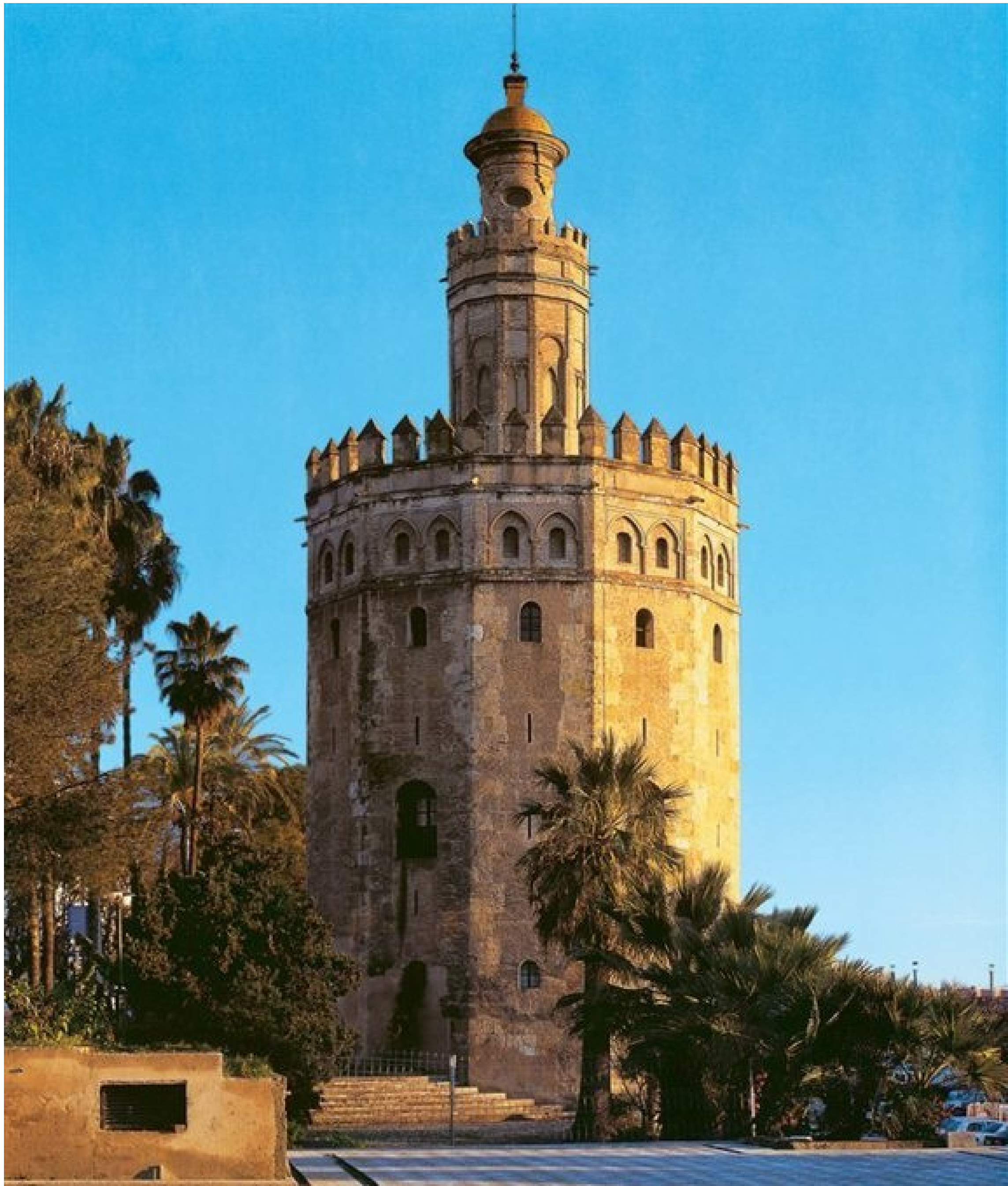

The Golden Tower, 1172.
Seville.

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The Great Mosque of Tlemcen

The beginning of the 11th century marked a period of prosperity for Tlemcen, whose beautiful monuments, especially its mosques, are masterpieces of Islamic art. This great mosque (1135-1138) is a clear example of Maghrebian architecture. The widest of all the parallel naves, the central one, is accessible through a large gate whose matchless beauty shows the way to the sanctuary. At Mansurah, close to Tlemcen, the mihrab forms a kind of small tower. Inside the mosque is a sanctuary even more precisely highlighted than in the mosque at Córdoba. The minarets of both mosques are on a square plan. To this present day, every Maghrebian mosque

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is equipped with parallel naves, with a central nave, a richly ornamented porch, a turret-like mihrab and a minaret on a square plan.

The minarets are decorated with a sort of network which is logical given that the goal was to make the wall lighter and firm at the same time using this rigid brick decoration. These bricks are often glazed in order to create a delicate effect. It is quite likely that these glazed ceramic bricks are of Mesopotamian and Persian origin. The ornamentation of the Momine Khatun Mausoleum in Nakhchivan (1186) has some similarities with the one in Zaragoza). As soon as the Maghrebians discovered the manufacturing of glazed ceramics, they replaced the porphyry, granite and marble they had used for paving and casing with this bright and economic material. With regard to faience mosaics, each piece was manually cut into tiles and then filed or moulded into shape and adapted to its neighbour, following a section tilted toward the exposed face in such a way as to ensure the joint is firm; this technique is still used in Fez. It was only later that ceramists, following a slightly coarser technique, moulded the different pieces to be assembled, or better still, added lines or reliefs to the tiles to show their polygonal harmony.

The toothing of the arches in the Great Mosque of Tlemcen shows the extent of lavishness that characterised Islamic architecture. These indentations could be imitations of some forms of wooden architecture that may be understood better if one studies the consoles of great Arab canopies in the Alcázar in Seville or some monuments in Marrakech, Meknes and Fez. In my opinion, these indentations – especially those that are small and regular – are the result of using bricks in construction. Indeed, it is preferable for brick arches to have intersecting joints, and it is important to coat them by reducing the intervals that exist between the longest and the shortest bricks found in the intrados of the arch.

The mihrab of this mosque is an architectural masterpiece. Its rectangular framework suits the alternatively smooth and sculpted arch whose archivolt is beautifully silhouetted in successive lobes. The dome surmounting it is beautifully decorated with pierced shapes.

The building of such monuments also flourished during this period in Spain and Morocco under the guidance of Almoravid and Almohad rulers, who had united these two countries under their power. This was presumably a classical era. The relatively severe decoration and the simple and vigorous plans comprise the major features of a layout with excellent proportions.

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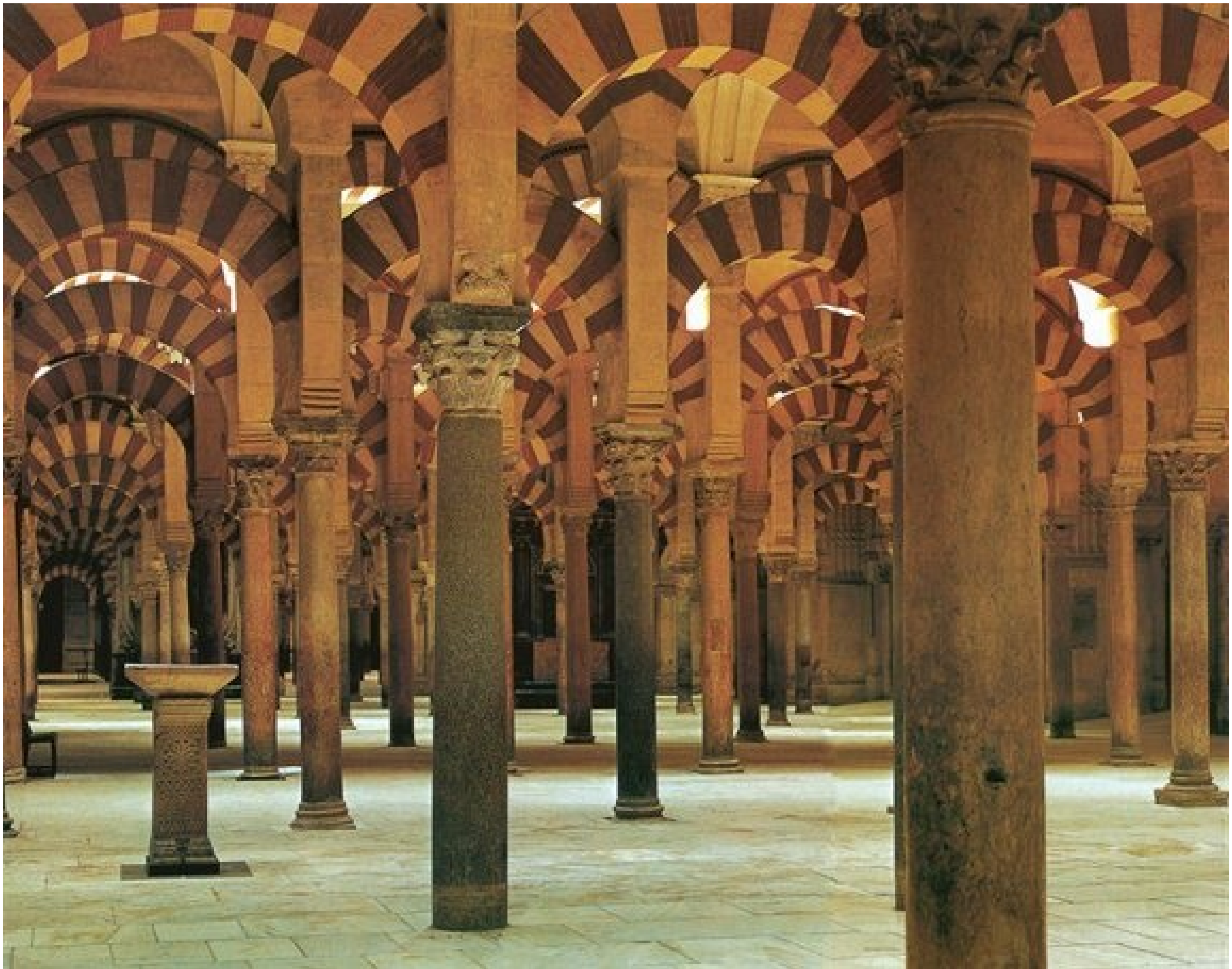

Prayer hall in the Great Mosque of Córdoba, 785-988.
Córdoba.

The Giralda (1195)

The Great Mosque of Seville was constructed between 1171 and 1172. Its extant minaret is the famous Giralda, erected by Yacoub El Mansour, who expanded the mosque from 1195 to 1197 while constructing numerous monuments in Morocco and in Andalusia. The entire Arab section (the crown dates from the Renaissance) is made of bricks, and the decoration, initially very simple, becomes more sophisticated as you it ascends. On the second floor from the top, which is occupied by a mesh of intersecting arcades in the other minarets, there are three long, vertical bands. The middle one has four-level *ajouré* [open-work] windows, while the other two are covered with strapwork broken by just two series of blind arcades.

The Great Mosque of Córdoba

The construction of the Great Mosque at Córdoba was begun in 785 by the first caliph of Spain, Abd-ar-Rahman. Hicham I completed it by extending its naves to the south between 793 and 796. Hakam II and Hakam III further extended it in 961-962 and 988-1001 respectively.

Córdoba's Great Mosque has parallel naves with a larger central nave that leads to the

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mihrab. This mosque is architecturally different from the one in Kairouan. The influence of ancient and indigenous monuments was stronger here than in Tunisia. The Byzantine influence here is visible only in the decoration of the mihrab. Here, there are no massive minarets like those in Kairouan and Tunis, neither are there slender minarets like those in Susa, nor domes with cupolas like those in Kairouan. The same is true of the ornamentation. In Spain, Islamic decoration took an excessive turn that would remain a permanent feature of the artistic tradition.

The traditional plan of the mosque initially comprised eleven naves with columns, with a larger central nave that led to the mihrab. Hicham I extended it to the south; Hakam II added twelve naves to it; and Hakam III added eight, separated by seven rows of thirty-three columns, giving it its current dimensions. Short columns raised by arches that brace and support each other function as a beautiful solution to spatial limits: they make it possible to increase the height of the naves with minimal materials.

The mosque was decorated with ceilings placed under nets of parallel roof framings whose walls have gutters following a pattern widely used in the Maghreb. These worm-eaten roof framings were later replaced by light arches, except in the parts where the ancient ceilings were renovated.

Its dome frame is a replica of the neighbouring bay in the axis of the central nave, which is made of stone. Strikingly, the springing of the arches are supported by lion-shaped corbels. The stalactites visible above the multi-foil arch are in many ways similar to those which, in the Alcázar in Seville, are designed in the 15th-century Mudéjar style. The mosque's minbar (Silla del Hey Almansor), which was pulled on four wheels like the Maliki minbars in Tunisia and Algeria, was stunning in both its material makeup and its design. Its construction, ordered by Hakem, began in 1236 and lasted nine years. It was destroyed in 1572.

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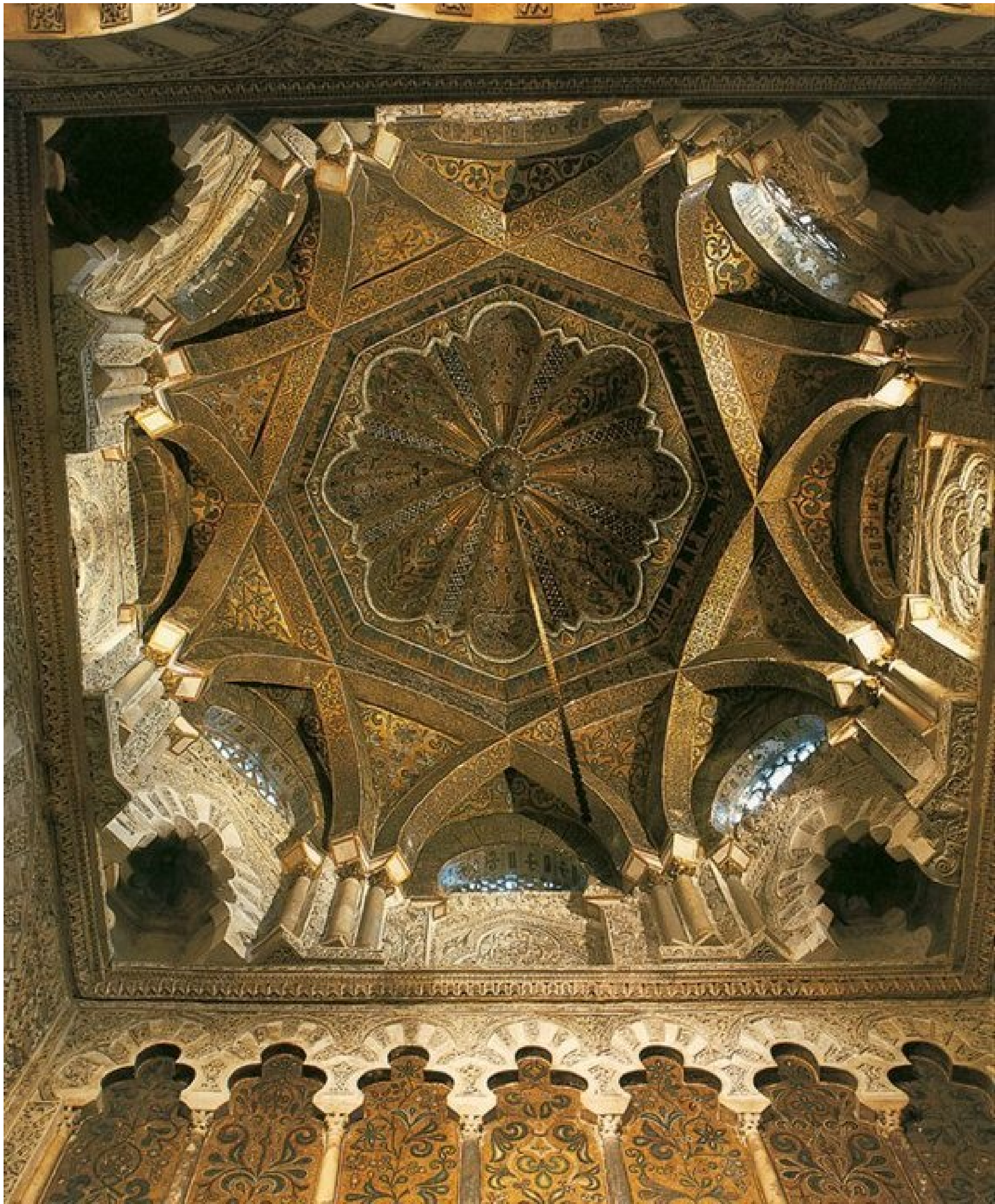

Cupola of the mihrab in the Great Mosque of Córdoba, 971-976.
Córdoba.

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Mihrab hall, the Great Mosque of Córdoba, 961-966.
Córdoba.

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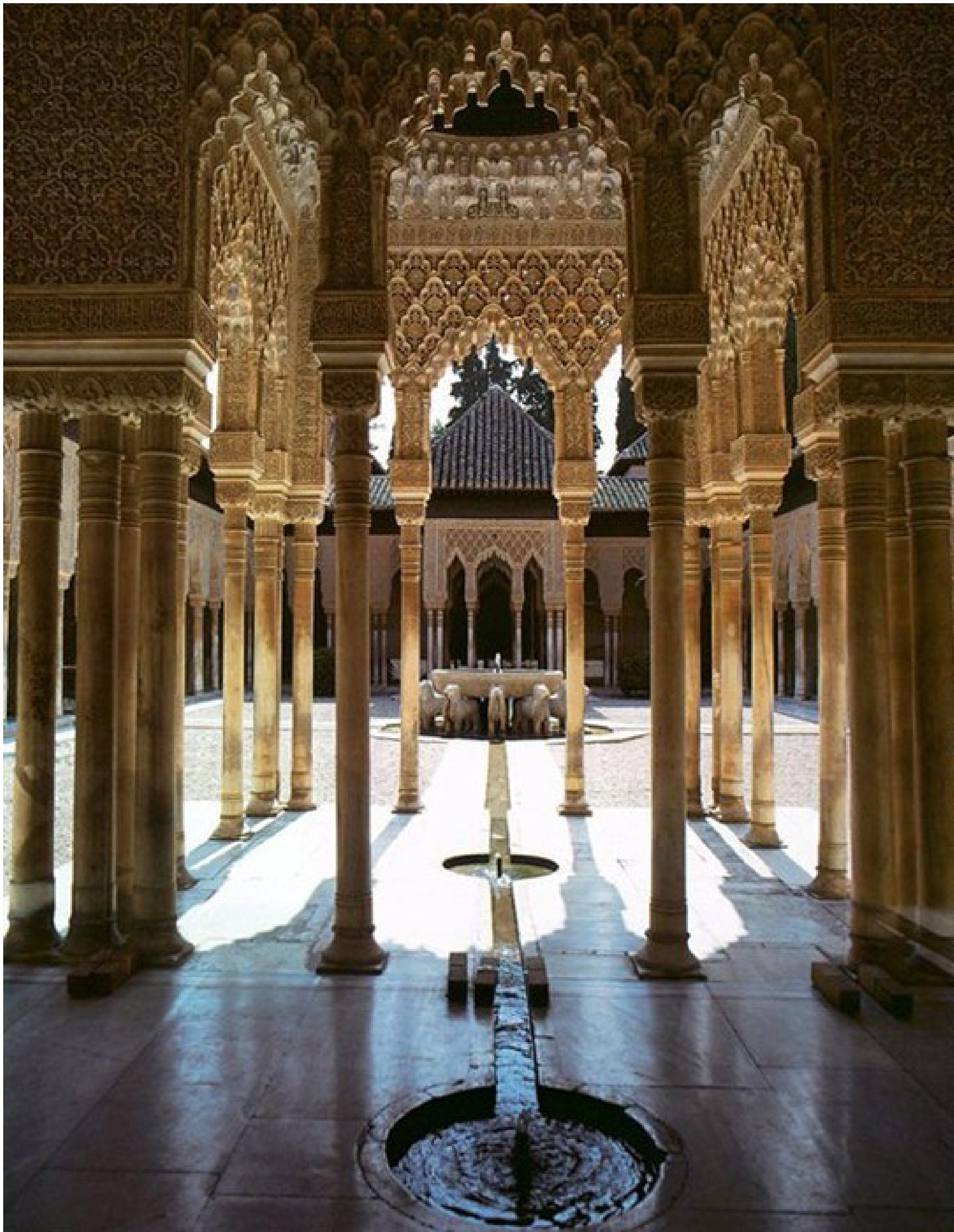

Court of the Lions, Alhambra, late 15th century.
Granada.

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The Alhambra

Despite the frequent restoration and damage it has experienced, the Alhambra is still the most remarkable Islamic monument of the 14th and 15th centuries.

This palace is built on a long hill overlooking Granada. Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, destroyed a weak part of it to construct a palace in his taste. Despite these damages, it remains an attractive structure exuding elegance and luxury.

The creation of the thick walls generally included packed earth or backfilled blocks, joined by brick courses. Its porticos are, however, made of very light materials. The construction is

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based on half-timberings finished in plaster, which support roof framings. The entire structure is supported by columns with bases and marble capitals. Owing to the relatively mild Andalusian climate and the care with which the materials were assembled, these delicate buildings have endured for five centuries, with no damages other than the fading of the gold and colours which gave them their lustre.

Decoration consisted of excavated and carved plaster, whose richness is perhaps exaggerated. Stalactites are heavily used in the consoles and corbels and as stunning capitals. They are also used to make cornices, and in big halls they are used to make pendentives to change from the square to the semi-circular shape. In the Hall of the Ambassadors and the Hall of the Two Sisters, they accentuate vaults with cavities whose lavishness is staggering and sophisticated.

Ceilings, doors made of gold-plated and painted wood and decorated with interlaced rosettes, faience inlays, abundant marbles, stained-glass windows set in plaster networks, arabesques laid out like a precious and coloured lace on all the walls – these and other features demonstrate the amazing resources the architects used in an ingenious way that reflects supreme taste. The Alhambra was decorated in rare and attractive shades. Whereas the patina of time has taken its toll on the brightness of the colours, the frankness of the original hues and the skill with which Muslim artisans were able to blend them are testimony to the structure's original splendour.

The light and elevated interior design of the apartments exude charm and elegance. There is a strong contrast between the whiteness of the whitewash and the tinting of painted ceilings or faience panellings. It should equally come as no surprise that the skilled artisans who decorated the Alhambra sought to reduce this contrast by painting some portions of its stucco panelling blue, red, green and even gold. Even the white-painted sections have acquired a patina of old ivory which mitigates any inconsistency possibly resulting from these diverse tonalities.

To imagine this palace how it orginally was, it is essential to add to its current beauty the water effects of the fountain in the Court of the Myrtles. The gentle noise they made in the halls, the reflection of the big pools, the bright silk clothing worn by sultans and their guests, brocade draperies and exquisite carpets completed the architecture's enchanting aspect. Not to be left out are the diversity and harmony of tone produced in its entire interior through the shady light of stained-glass windows in *ajouré* plaster – the light generally came in through tiny bays. These pools, which embellished the halls and courtyards, also ornamented beautiful gardens, with thick shades of cypress, flower parterres, and the lush and opulent greenery of orange and lemon trees. Kiosks, like those described by historians in Tunis, Morocco, and the courtyard of the Karaouyine Mosque in Fez, line the Court of the Lions.

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The Alhambra, 12th-14th centuries.
Granada.

In addition to the reception halls, rooms, parlours and mosque, the Alhambra is decorated with sumptuous pools. Unfortunately, only a section of the palace has survived, as Emperor Charles V made the ill-judged royal decision to tear down one wing to construct a formless palace on an elliptical plan.

The gardens of the Alhambra, like those of Medina Azahara or Islamic structures in Morocco, were replications of Baghdad's gardens, which in turn emulated the paradise gardens of Sassanid kings. Splendid gardens appear frequently in Muslim architecture. Indeed, for these children of the desert, after suffering from the effects of heat, thirst, extreme exposure to light and drought, nothing could be more gratifying than relaxing under cool shades, listening to the soft sound of water spewing from fountains, and being able to stroll around admiring the greenery and gorgeous flowers, with a light softened by the canopy of large trees. So wherever it was possible, they sought to create gardens with water effects.

The small palace of the Generalife in Granada still has some of these gardens which, despite their small size, give an idea of how those of large Moorish palaces could be. Water spurted by many tiny, vertical, hydraulic nozzles collects in a narrow basin running the entire length of the compound. The water then flows into the gardens through a canal. Ducts covered with large half-round tiles are placed on each side to form miniature cascades of flowing water. At each stage, the canal widens into full basins of gushing water. This is a relative depiction of the Alhambra gardens as they used to be.

This plan can also be likened to that of the famous Abu Fehr garden, designed in 1253 by Andalusian gardeners for one of the Hafsid monarchs of Tunis, El-Mostanser. According to Ibn

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Khaldun, it includes:

> numerous kiosks, and a massive pool which receives water through the ancient aqueduct – a colossal structure which channels the waters of the Zaghouan right to Carthage. This enters the garden in the form of a wall, in such a way that water first gushes out of a wide opening and then cascades into a huge and deep square pool. This decorative pool was so huge that the sultan's wives could go boating there. At each extremity is a pavilion, supported by white marble columns lined with marble mosaic. The ceilings were made of sculpted wood and decorated with painted and gilded arabesques. The kiosks, porticos, the garden's pools, the multi-storey palaces, the streams that flowed in the shade of its trees, all the luxury at this captivating site were so precious to the sultan that, in order to enjoy them fully, he abandoned other pleasure palaces built by his predecessors.

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Court of the Myrtles in the Comares Palace, Alhambra, 1333-1354.
Granada.

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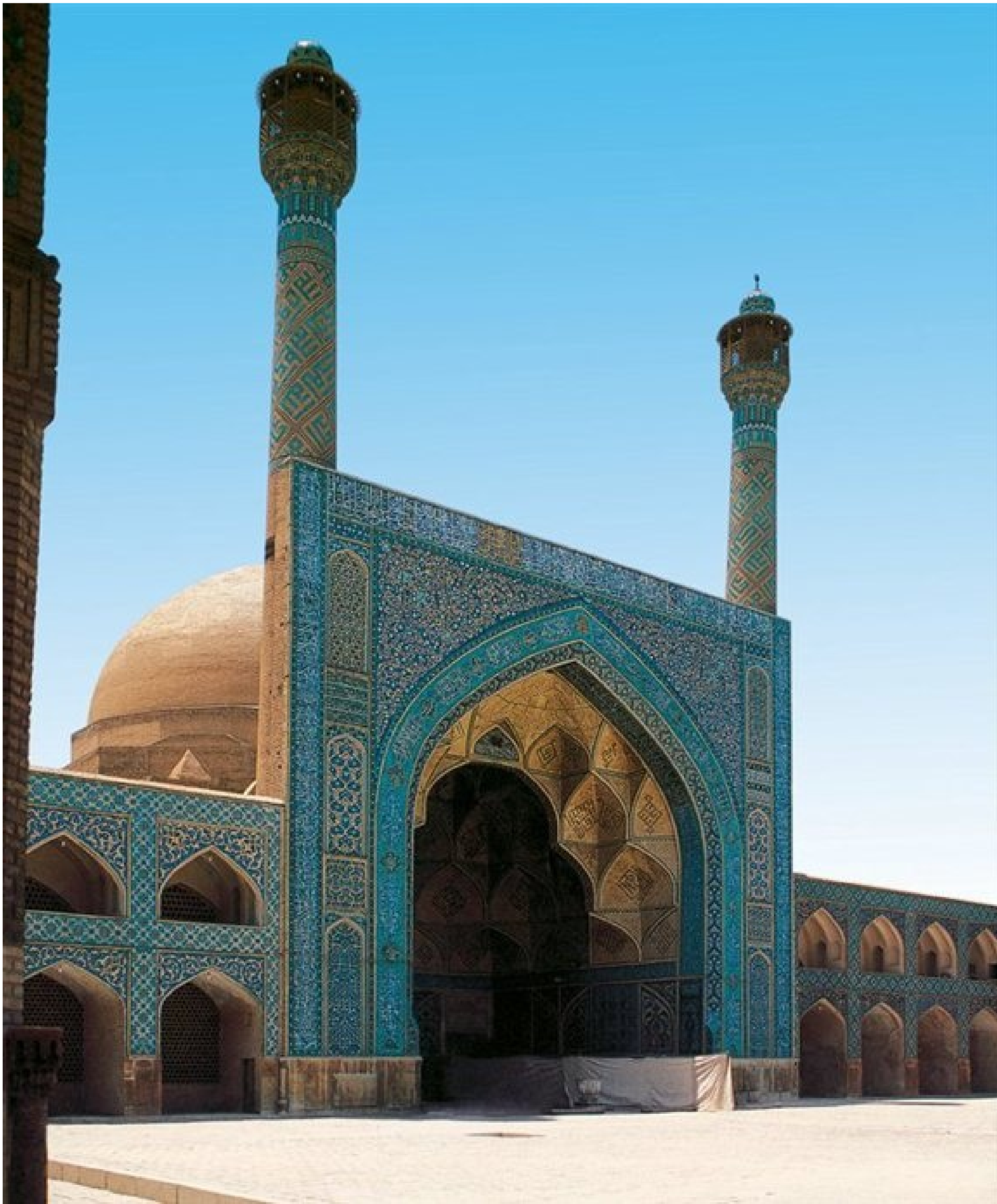

The Friday Mosque, 8th-17th centuries.
Isfahan, Iran.

C – Iran and the Persian School

The art of the early caliphs, whose splendour has been revealed only by historians, and which spread to the south and the west, was equally crucial to the development of Persian art, given that Persia had initially been a province of the vast empire of the caliphs. In spite of its continual originality, demonstrated initially through Shiism and its ingenious and abundant but varied works of art, Persia had no political independence as a state for close to nine hundred years. A province under the caliphate, Persia was in effect ruled by caliphs through local

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dynasties including the Tahirids, the Saffarids, the Samanids, the Deilemits, the Ghaznavids, the Buyids, the Seljuqs led by Togrul Beg, and later the Kharismians. However, it was finally subjugated by the Mongols under Genghis Khan in the 13th century. Although the il-Khanids or the dynasty of Hulagu's descendants for some time built a peculiar kingdom comprising Persia and part of Anatolia, this kingdom was razed following an invasion by Tamerlane. In the 15th century, the Turcoman Qara Quyunlu (Black Sheep) dynasty was created by Kara Yusuf. In 1468, however, the Aq Quyunlu (White Sheep) dynasty replaced it and put the Turcomans back on the Persian throne. It was only in 1502 that Shah-Ismaïl, of the Safavid dynasty, gave Persia its independence and a prosperity which reached its height under the reign of Shah Abbas. This dynasty disappeared in 1722 and was replaced by an Afghan family which, notwithstanding the remarkable rulers it produced, was replaced by Nadir Shah. After the relatively short reigns of Adil Shah and Shah Rukh, Kerim Khan, from the tribe of the Zends, gave power to his family, leaving Shah Ismaïl of the Safavid dynasty to rule only in principle. After three short successive reigns, this small dynasty was defeated by Agha Mohammad Khan of the Qajar tribe.

This short historical review of Persia is crucial to demonstrating that despite the diverse origins of its Muslim rulers, Persian art witnessed a constant evolution, not only in Persia per se, but also in Turkestan, which depended on Persia's architectural influence. In effect, it was impossible to find architects from Turkestan's nomadic tribes. It is a known fact that when Tamerlane wanted to adorn Samarkand, he had to resort to Persia's finest architects and the monuments that they erected there, for the great conqueror and his successors are by all standards a reflection of Persia's architectural glory.

Ancient and pre-Islamic Persian architecture is well-known today thanks to a good number of extant, impressive monuments. Nevertheless, Persian Muslims were able to decorate their buildings, even public buildings, in such a way as to give them a character entirely distinct from the one that can be seen on Achaemenid or Sassanian monuments, and the variety of construction programmes with which they had to comply left us with an even greater number of different types of buildings that we cannot find in Egypt, Syria or the Maghreb.

Buildings in Persia, Mesopotamia and Turkistan were influenced by two building systems, both of which stem from earlier traditions. The platband with its columns and ceilings includes the roof framing and timber construction, the walls of which can either be made of baked or unbaked bricks, rough stones, or half-timberings covered with earth and bricks. This system of construction comes from Assyrian and Median art. Vaulted buildings, with arcades and without monolithic columns, from Chaldean and Persian traditions as well as Sassanian art, have only brick pillars as isolated support points, built on either a circular, octagonal, or square plan flanked by four attached columns. The Persians preferred the vault system because structural timber was absolutely lacking in a greater part of the country. Therefore, they quickly became very skilled at such construction. As a logical outcome of the construction system used, Persian architects concluded that the rib, which crimps the beam fillings and forms a resistant self-supporting network, is the most important component of the vault. Owing to this subdivision of the total surface area of the vault, construction work was made easier than that of huge barrel or groined vaults, good examples of which are found in extant ancient hot baths. They had at their disposal two types of artificial materials: baked and unbaked bricks.

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Bricks

Unbaked brick constructions are essentially very fragile. From early times, humans initially saw the need to preserve their facings by covering them with baked bricks. A short while later, enamelled bricks were used, and it may just have been by chance, a result of accidental extreme baking, that ancient Chaldean architects discovered the possibility of glazing the external surface of bricks and took advantage of this feature to improve on solidity and beautify the decoration of their buildings.

Since bricks do not easily lend themselves to projections, various skills are therefore required to create a play of shadows and lighting effects, either by using bricks laid out like the teeth of a saw or corbels. Corbels, however, cannot produce solid projections without a special arrangement that enables the creation of successive supports, whose bond stems from the type of materials used. Such is the case with the *ajouré* lattices of the minaret of the Great Mosque in Mosul, for example, which were intended to make the walls sufficiently solid without rendering them any lighter, or the creation of stalactites – a peculiar element in Islamic architecture, produced by a series of different squinches stacked up like corbels.

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The Registan, 17th century.
Samarkand.

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The Sher-Dor Madrasa, 1619-1636.
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The Gur-e Amir Mausoleum, 1403-1405.
Samarkand.

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Stalactites

While stalactites are often nothing but relatively complex brick squinches, they can be remarkably developed. The use of stalactites in construction was not restricted to corbels, arches and cornices. They were also used to make entire vaults. Upon becoming a common motif in decoration, stalactites were used indiscriminately; they decorated interior arches, formed cornices, capitals, and even the crowns of minarets, and when this vault component was used in structural timber works, it lost its characteristic successive squinches and resembled juxtaposed prisms with flat surfaces. They were painted and gilded, regardless of

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whether they were made of wood or plaster. Finally, when a creative artist thought of decorating them with small pieces of glass, tinned in a way as to form some sort of glowing crystallisations which reflected light from every angle and appeared invisible, they invented one of the most elegant and original components of Persian architecture.

Roofs

Roofs of structural timber buildings are often terraces lined with terra-cotta tiles. For vaulted buildings, the roofing was most often formed by the extrados of the vault itself. For colossal domes or tombs, the need to have a pleasant outline inevitably required the use of either a higher dome supported by a drum (as in Isfahan, Shiraz and Samarkand), or a conical or polygonal roof circumscribing and sheltering the interior dome.

Ornamentation

Faience was the most luxurious component of architectural decoration in Persian buildings. Initially reduced to the size of enamelled bricks, contrasting with the pink background of baked bricks or the white tone of stuccos (Momine Khatun Mausoleum in Nakhchivan), enamelled decoration soon became very common in brick masonry. Then, in an attempt to create something different using drawings with rectilinear components, which is possible only with bricks, small enamelled fractions were cut and juxtaposed to create beautiful decorations of a faience marquetry, a kind of *opus sectile* that can be used alone or alongside baked bricks. The use of different types of enamelled terra-cotta tiles, whose juxtaposition allows for drawings or accurately glazed components in turquoise blue with reliefs, alternating with lustrous elements on a creamy white background, was initially used for sub-standard decoration, on panellings and mihrabs. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the palette of ceramists steadily improved, drawings became more complex, and finally, at the beginning of the 16th century in Ardebil, Sheik Sefi's tomb was decorated with a wide range of possible applications of architectural ceramics: cornices with stalactites, fascia boards, friezes with inscriptions and enamelled brick domes. Buildings that were constructed or restored in Isfahan during Shah Abbas's reign are also wonders of ceramic ornamentation, but the indiscriminate use of wall tiles is one of the main reasons for the dilapidation of these buildings. Abandoned without any maintenance and with the changing Persian climate, these coverings gradually fell off, and monuments less than four centuries old lost their adornment in a few years. Colours became more and more varied in the 17th century. Pink, light yellow, red and green added to the range of colours that were initially used: turquoise blue, brown, reddish brown, dark green, cobalt blue, white, violet and black. The decorations originally looked like carpets, then like the human figure, scenes with people, animals, and then real flowers were gradually introduced into this disarray, which quickly led to the decline of this beautiful art. Coloured stained-glass windows set in structures of cut plaster, friezes made of sculpted or moulded plaster or stuccos, precious wood inlays, precious metals, gildings, and later glass from Venice, paintings and impressive stars stitched with gold or silver – all these elaborate crafts added to the collections which we only know vaguely, either through the descriptions of travellers who did their best in describing what they had seen, or through books in which the presentation of these

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buildings and their decoration was often very vivid.

In Persia, whose pre-16th century edifices are known today as exclusively religious or public buildings, there are still the palaces of the Safavid kings and their successors, as well as those of the main Persian lords that date back to the 17th century. Based on these examples, we can still clearly appreciate the splendour and taste of Persian courts as they were and see these ancient luxurious wonders that we know only through history books constructed today, as it were.

We have seen the reasons that make us point to Mesopotamia as the cradle of Islamic architecture in Persia. As for monuments in Turkestan, they cannot be studied separately because they demonstrate a strong Persian influence: some buildings in Samarkand and Bukhara were erected by Persian architects from Shiraz or Isfahan. It would be very difficult to draw any kind of analogy between them, and to attribute all of them to a so-called Seljuq style, since Ottoman art is different from that of Persia, from a strictly architectural point of view.

These foreign dynasties sometimes fairly contributed to modifying local styles by encouraging more frequent interactions between the peoples they united under their rule; by introducing the taste of enamelled coatings, as did the Seljuqs of Anatolia; by seeking to find, in the monuments that they were erecting in Edirne, some of the aspects of this luxurious decoration that they had admired in Persia; or by creating substantial colonies of Chinese ceramists, whose influence is clearly established by some details of faience coating used as ornamentation and tonality for coloured enamels. This is what Hulagu and Tamerlane did for Persia and Samarkand respectively.

The Mosque of Samarra is known for its imposing minaret. It was designed on a square foundation, where the tower itself is erected with its spiral staircase, which tapers to a sort of cone. It includes six revolutions, and the tower is 50 metres tall. The pillars are rather similar to those of El-Achik, though smaller in diametre. Samarra has three huge palaces: El-Gauchak, El-Oumari and El-Waziri constructed by Montassim, el-Haruniye constructed by Harun el-Walid, an artificial hill and a hippodrome. Upon Moulaouakil's death, his successor abandoned Samarra, and its inhabitants were forced to leave their homes, taking along their furniture, beams and the doors of their houses.

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The Tikari Madrasa, Samarkand.

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Kalyan Minar, 1127, Kalyan Mosque, 16th century, *Miri Arab Madrasa*, 17th century, Bukhara.

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The Poi Kalon complex, 12th-20th centuries.
Bukhara, Uzbekistan.

Baghdad

Although Baghdad became the ultimate capital of the caliphate, nothing is left of Haroun-al-Rashid's monuments or those of his successors, who reigned there without interruption for almost four centuries. This may be explained by the fact that the buildings there were made of baked and unbaked bricks, and very rarely of stone, which was reserved for columns and the pavement of courtyards. Mosul alabaster was used for the buildings. Since buildings made of sun-dried bricks are short-lived, we can understand why most monuments from this period have since crumbled. In addition to time, however, almost all monuments there were destroyed following the conquest of Baghdad led by Hulagu in 1250. The vanquishers swept radically across the territory, leaving nothing in their wake: wealth was pillaged and manuscripts were burnt or thrown into the Tigris. "These were resources that knowledge seekers had assembled in this city before this terrible tragedy," says Kotb ad-Din El Hanafi. "The Mongols threw all the college books into the Tigris to the extent that they piled up to form a kind of bridge for both pedestrians and horsemen, and the river's waters turned completely black from them."

The Friday Mosque of Isfahan

The plan of this mosque is unique. It has a vast square courtyard, with a square pavilion in the middle. The four sides of the courtyard are decorated with huge, arched gates, linked to each other via porticos with two-tiered arcades. The tallest and most attractive of them, leading to the sanctuary itself, is flanked by two big minarets. The minarets, which may actually be

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likened to huge chimney stacks, are slightly conical, ending in a balcony supported by stalactite-like corbels, from where the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer.

The plan of this mosque is very different from the classical plan of early mosques in the area. Its square courtyard and the huge gates, which are fairly reminiscent of the gigantic arch in Khosrau's palace in Ctesiphon, are the distinguishing elements of the mosque. The rest are beam fillings, such that, in the end, there seem to be four mosques with parallel and multiple naves. It was simply hollowed out in the middle, and still stands because all the area from the base of each side of the sanctuary seems identical and apparently forms a separate mosque on either side, each with its own mihrab. In between these two wings, the real sanctuary is sheltered by a huge dome.

The vaults are either supported by square pillars or by four attached columns. The dome is supported by the columns and surmounted by an internal dome made of bricks laid out according to the sinuous ribs, which are separated by blue faience mosaic panels on a yellow background and overlaid with an external dome decorated with faience.

The arch of the main porch is extraordinary, not only because of the faience and enamelled brick decoration and the two minarets lined with enamelled bricks, but also and most importantly because of the way it was constructed. The rectangular plan on which it is constructed does not actually constitute a cradle; it is a half-dome preceding a dome, both of them star-shaped, which have been able to restore this rectangular plan through a succession of stalactites in the form of tiered corbels on a triangular plan. This succession of tiered stalactites is distinctive, and the vaults seem to float in the air.

The stalactites are made of pink enamelled bricks. The interior and exterior of the entire building are lined with enamelled tiles, painted in bright and stunning arabesques, while the base is decorated with beautiful wavy and banded porphyry tables, which Abbas the Great wanted to be used in the royal mosque. The ornamentation is exquisite everywhere – the entire lengths of walls, on friezes and cornices – and contains verses of the Holy Koran and utterances of imams. The main dome has a diametre of more than 30 metres. In front of this dome, which is like the choir space of the mosque, there is a spacious courtyard surrounded by cloisters with arcade fronts and supported by huge pilasters of the same craftsmanship as the domes. This mosque has two minarets embellished with enamelled bricks and seven doors. Each of the main entrances to this huge edifice has a specific name, and, like the domes and towers, some of them name the particular founder, since numerous princes contributed to the construction of this mosque. On the frontispiece is inscribed in bold letters the name of each prince, as well as those of the architects and main workers.

Tamerlane's Mausoleum (Gur-e Amir)

The Tamerlane Mausoleum in Samarkand, also called the Gur-e Amir, is also accurately dated to the year 1405, and we know it was constructed by Mohammed, son of Mahmud, from Isfahan. This information is vital, as it clearly demonstrates the great influence Persian architecture had on that of Turkestan. As a matter of fact, the Gur-e Amir is only a combination of a number of tombs, the most important of which is Tamerlane's. The conqueror's relatives are buried in two less significant ones, in the left and far-right corners of the front yard whose wide gate, now in ruins, leads to Tamerlane's tomb. The tomb itself is a cross-shaped hall

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inscribed within an octagon: this hall comprises four large niches, on square plans, circumscribed by the dome's projection. The arches of these niches are decorated with beautiful stalactite-like corbels. There are two domes supported by a cylindrical drum. The dome's exterior is decorated with juxtaposed half-cylindrical ribs, which taper to a narrow tip at the top. Below, they are supported by very simple stalactites, whose distinguishing feature is the triangular hipped gable, which later on had a great influence on the design of Persian and Turkish stalactites. These ribs are lined with, or rather made of, enamelled bricks whose regular layouts form rosettes. The dome's drum is decorated on the exterior with an enormous frieze of inscriptions in Kufic characters, crowned by two consecutive decorative strings of enamelled bricks that have not lost any of their lustre. Inside, the central hall contains decorative sarcophagi, since the tombs themselves are in the crypt, protected by an attractive gravestone in black jade overlaid with inscriptions. Around the tombs are balustrades with *ajouré* marble panels pierced following the polygonal and geometric patterns joined together by square pillars that terminate in sculpted finials. The walls of this hall are lined with jasper plates decorated with arabesques, inscriptions and hexagonal faience. The main entrance to the Gur-e Amir, in front of the inner courtyard, is one of the most beautiful pieces of inlaid ceramic decoration ever seen, both in terms of the precision with which it was crafted and its beauty. The same is true of the inner mihrab.

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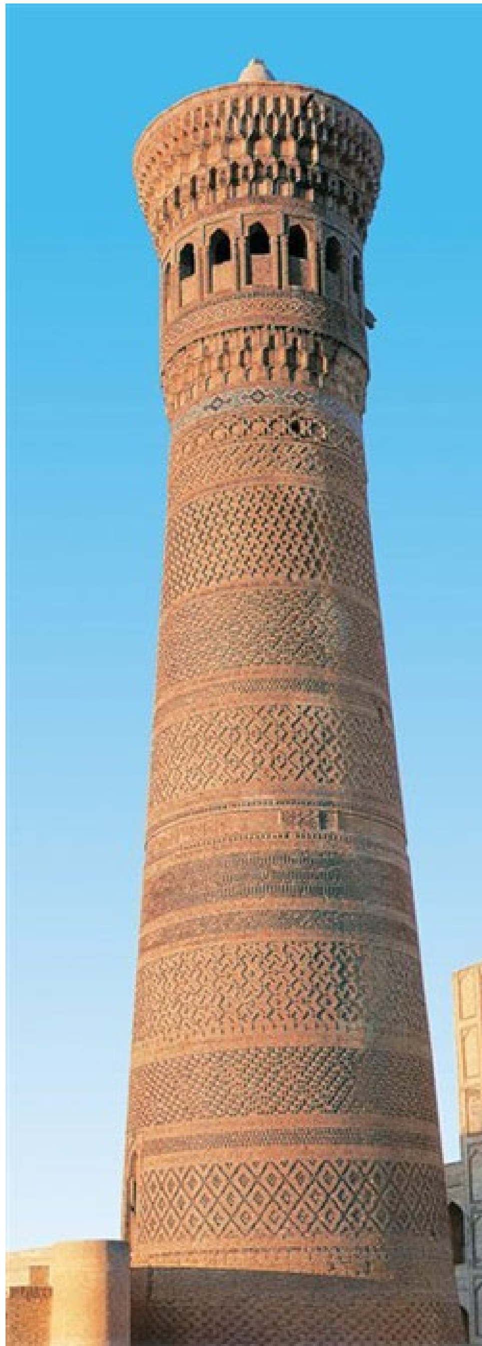

The Kalyan Minaret, 12th century.
Bukhara.

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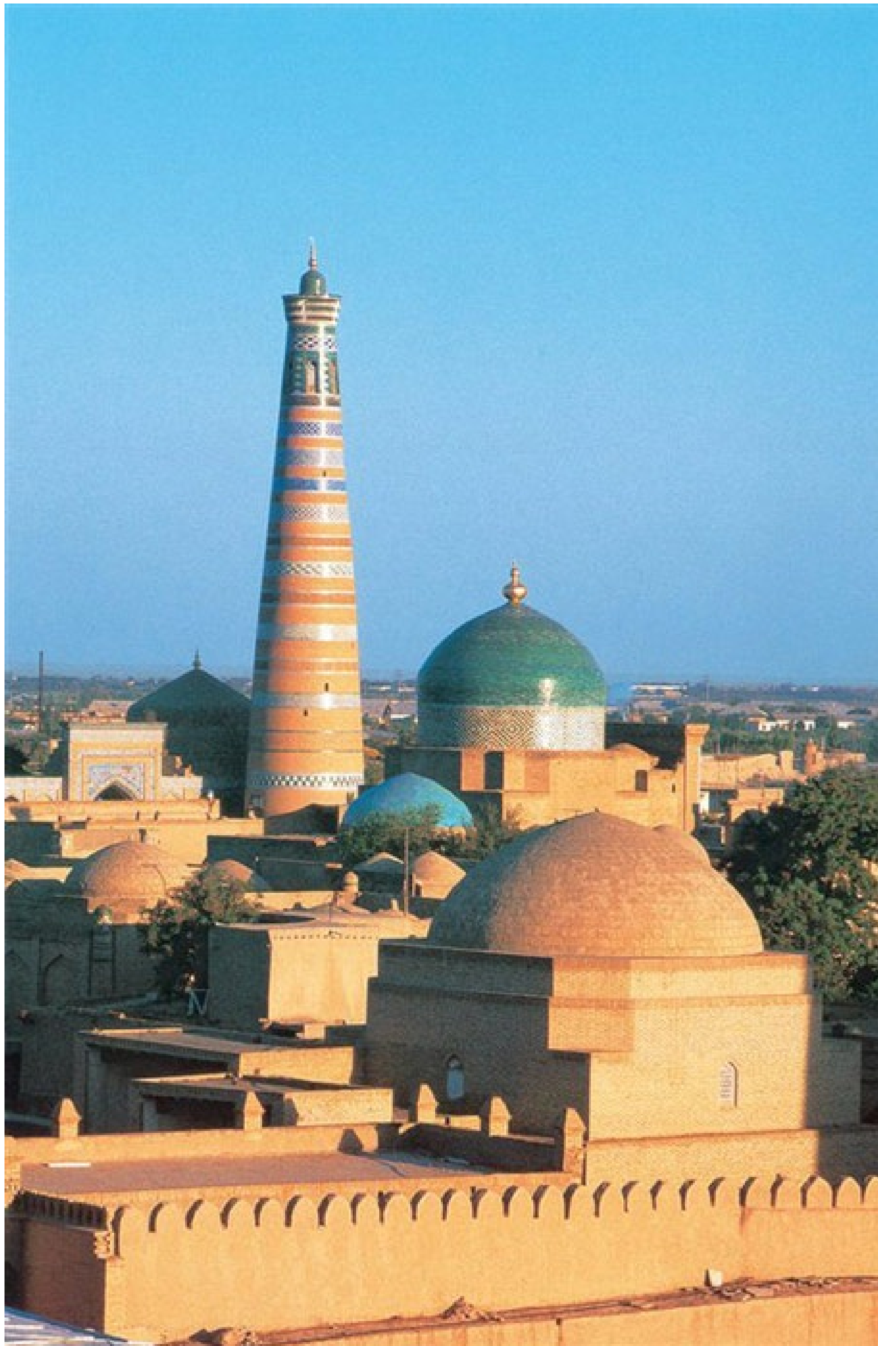

Minaret of the Islaimi Khodja Madrasa, 1908-1910.
Khiva, Uzbekistan.

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The Sher-Dor Madrasa

Samarkand is full of domes. They can be seen in the Registan monuments and in the tombs in the Shah Sindeh necropolis. For a long time, the use of domes was propagated by tradition, and ribs with stalactite-like springings can still be seen in the decoration of the Sher-Dor Madrasa, constructed between 1619 and 1636 by Yalangtush Bahador. Here, the stalactites are tiered in three consecutive layers. The wall base of the entire façade is in marble, as well as the stems of large beads with twisted flutings that embrace the large central bay. The monument's façade has a rather stunning effect, with its corner minarets, domes and huge portal. However, it is

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incomplete, as the minarets and the portal have no crowns, and there are some serious shortcomings in the enamelled decoration, which is almost entirely made of bricks and cut faience fragments that form mosaics. The tympanums of the portal's large arch bear a decoration of two big lions framed in rinceaus on a sun-setting background. The lions are made of enamelled terracotta, but only of cut tile fragments and not brick fragments. It is probably for this reason that they stand out, since most of these fragments have detached from the wall. In the mosque, there are three main buildings and raised porticos, among which the rooms of mullahs emerge on two floors around a large central courtyard.

These faience decorations are not only made in blue, yellow, green, black and white tones, like those of Persia, but also include red, pink, gold, brick red, green and carmine, borrowed from the palette of Chinese ceramists.

Monuments of Isfahan: Shah Abbas's Constructions

Persian art was to experience a tremendous blossoming, and Isfahan was rebuilt through the will of one of Persia's most influential monarchs – Shah Abbas I. Spurred by unswerving determination, he transformed Isfahan into one of the most beautiful 17th-century cities in the East, and within a few years, many lavish and very attractive buildings were erected in the new capital.

This reconstruction scheme was neither the result of contributions from various individuals nor a disorderly array of diverse monuments. Rather, the building programs were the result of a plan completely conceived at the same time, the first overall approach to embellishing an entire city ever seen in a Muslim state.

It is not our aim to present the plan of Isfahan, but rather to describe briefly the programme that Shah Abbas designed with absolutely remarkable accuracy of perspective and carried out within a few years. Curved like a C on the northern bank of the Zayandeh-Rud, Isfahan is bounded on the southern edge by two of its suburbs – Ferashabad and Jolfa. The royal palace is located virtually in the centre of the city. On its eastern side, Shah Abbas opened the city onto the majestic Meyden Shah, whose sides open onto the Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque in the east, the Ali Qapu gate, itself a small palace, in the west, the entrance of the great bazaar in the north, and the Shah Mosque in the south. From this end of the square, gardens and parks stretch along the palace's southern façade with splendid pavilions in the middle, such as the Chihil Sutun, or Forty Pillars (constructed by Shah Abbas, burned down and subsequently reconstructed under the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein). The Hasht Behesht, the Ser-Pouch-i-Deh and one of the sides of the Chihil Sutun park are located in an extension of the palace's western façade. Shah Abbas had this line extended across the city, across the Zayandeh-Rud and up to the garden or the Hazar Jerib park. He made one of its sides a large avenue called Chahar Bagh, lined with palaces, decorated with pools, fountains, pavilions, adorned with plane trees and on whose sides many attractive palaces were soon erected. This avenue, which is over six times longer than the boulevard in Meyden Shah, crosses the Zayandeh-Rud via a beautiful bridge. This overall approach was apparently interrupted at some point, as it seems incomplete.

This overall approach thus involved including within the palace area a series of parks, gardens and avenues, which gradually furnished the space left between the two bridges and the

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avenues, thus forming cohesive extensions. This plan was not entirely abandoned by Shah Abbas's successors, who erected a number of great edifices, such as the Madere-i-Chah-Sultan-Ifussein (Soltan Hosain?) madrasa and caravansary, built in 1710. The layouts of these examples of architecture reveal the builders' desire to erect them within the framework of the overall artform. This avenue's canals, pavements and trees made it an exceptional promenade in the world at the dawn of the 17th century.

The Imperial Mosque at Isfahan

This mosque is a real masterpiece in terms of its plan and workmanship. It is majestically and ingeniously linked to the vast palace square, but slightly tilted towards the square's main axis through the use of a very simple method: the axis is broken at the entrance to the mosque. The entrance itself is shaped like a semi-octagon whose faces have been dug to create deep niches, the biggest of which is the arch leading into the mosque. It opens onto a rectangular passage which immediately leads to the hipped gable of one of the four big porches decorating the sides of the courtyard of the mosque. Here, as in the mosque at Juma, there are four big iwans at the centre of the courtyard's four walls. These iwans, reminiscent of the Tag-e-Kersa decorations, seem to be a more imposing development and expansion of the plan of the Sultan Hassan Mosque in Cairo.

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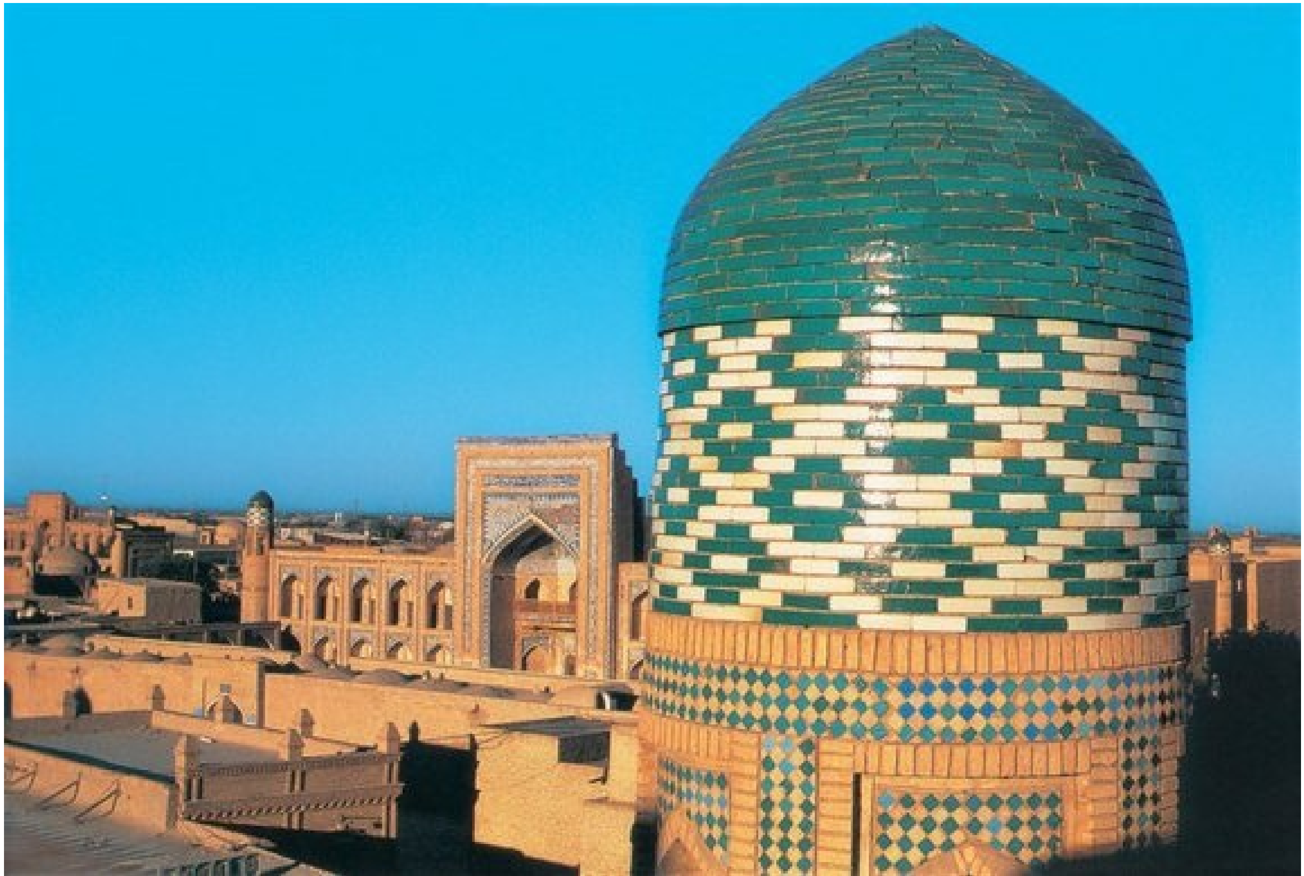

Muhammed Rahim Khan II Madrasa, 1876.
Khiva, Uzbekistan.

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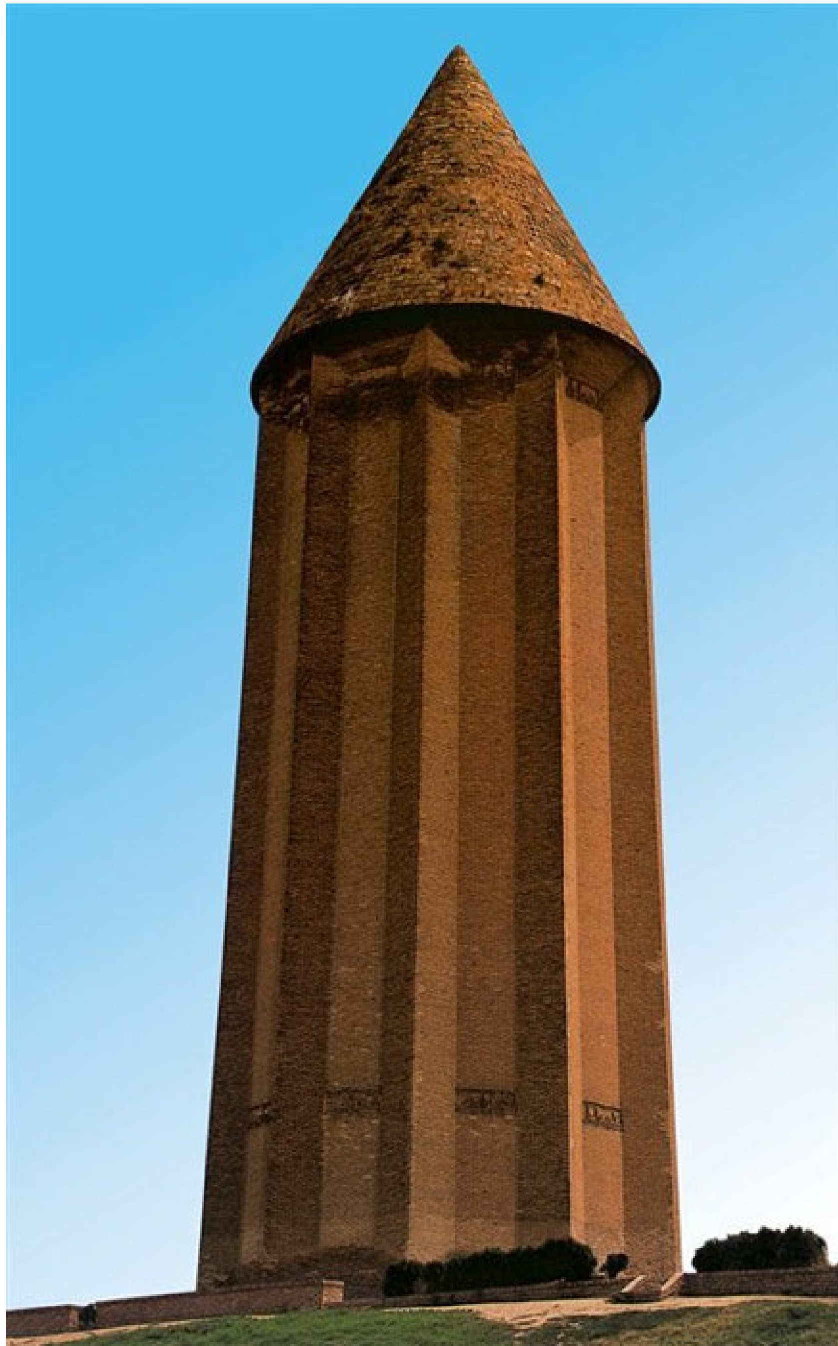

Gonbad-e Qabus, 1006-1007.
Goran, Iran.

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The sanctuary is located in the large iwan, which is a square hall with a dome vault, at the end of which is the mihrab. On each side, two long, massive halls, comprising four two-storey bays, have two mihrabs each and form separate mosques. Each of the two other iwans to the right and left also has its square sanctuary covered by a dome and decorated with a mihrab. Other halls between the main iwan and the others serve as prayer halls; this single mosque thus comprises seven prayer halls in total. Located in the courtyard on the right, near the entrance but further away, are latrines separated from the other buildings. In the far corners, on each side of the large iwan and the two adjacent prayer halls, there are open, large, paved

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courtyards with pools and ablution fountains. The weighing of masses, the ingenuity of clearances, the excellent display of details and the clarity of the overall approach distinguish this building as a true masterpiece, whose merits are yet to be sufficiently emphasised. The royal mosque is located to the south, in front of which there is a polygonal parvis with a polygonal pool in the middle. The front of the building is shaped like a pentagon, and on both sides a balustrade of polished stone at chest height can be seen stretching right up to the entrance. The storeys which are six metres above the ground have balcony-like galleries. Its decoration is awe-inspiring and novel in European architecture. It comprises checker bricks with a thousand illustrations ornately decorated in gold and blue, inlays of enamelled tiles and a flat frieze all around. The portal is embellished with a gallery like the one found on the sides. The lintels are made of jasper. The door is made of two valves or hangings decorated with solid silver wool and covered with massive, chased, gilded and *ajouré* linking pieces. Linking the portal to the interior are two tall spires or turrets with loggias or shaded galleries above the capitals, all of which are structured like the contours of the portal. In the middle, there is a magnificent pool made of jasper, supported on a pedestal with stairs. From this pool towards the main section of the mosque, there is an unshaded lane that widens as one progresses, made of four porticos with arcades on the sides, leading to a vast courtyard. Surmounted by a gilded crescent, the middle portico's dome is one of the most exquisite examples of Persian art. The vast portico is like the temple's choir, divided into two unequal parts. The far end of the portico comprises an entablature made of jasper and a mihrab that looks like an encrusted door. The marble used in the construction is white and red. Sefi I, Shah Abbas's successor, had its doors covered in silver plates. The external decoration of the mosque is therefore entirely of enamelled materials, ranging from bricks and shafts to the bases of minarets and faience mosaics or enamelled tiles. The main dome is coated in faience. Marbles and alabaster decorations were added (attached Solomonic columns, panelling, flooring and *ajouré* fences). The marble harmonises beautifully with the faience, as its gloss matches the sparkling of the enamelled walls. It is evident from the buildings in Istanbul that the sultans' architects knew how to make the most of this array of materials. In Persia, however, marble was scarcely used, faience being preferred. Marble, onyx and alabaster were used occasionally and elaborately. However, the Turks who erected white marble buildings in Constantinople rapidly abandoned these elaborate faience decorations, which they had used in Bursa, for example, and discovered the breathtaking harmony of faience on a white background, with light arabesques to enhance the beauty of the marble architecture surrounding them.

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Exterior view of the Selimiye Mosque, 1569-1575. Edirne.

D – The Ottoman School

Ottoman Turks played no political role until the 14th century, when the last Seljuq sultan of Konya, Ala ed-din, defeated by the Mongols, abdicated in favour of Osman I. It is therefore vital that the Seljuq monuments of this region be studied, as they obviously served as models for early Ottoman monuments and contain the quintessential elements of Turkish decoration.

The empire of the Seljuqs reached its climax at the end of the 11th century and was divided up among the three sons of Malik Shah following his death. Malik Shah had created the

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sultanates in Persia, Syria – with Aleppo as capital – and Asia Minor; in the latter area, Daud and Kilij Arslan, Malik Shah's nephews, had founded the sultanate of Iconium or Rûm.

Seljuq monuments found in the area between Erzurum and Konya all have the same features, albeit in varying degrees. The proximity of northern Syria and especially the cities of Aleppo and Damascus also influenced the monuments in Konya, especially within the framework of line correction and porch design.

Finally, Persian artistic influence emerged as a result of the arrival of Turcoman tribes in Asia Minor, following a long stay and long peregrinations in Persia, whence they brought the skills indispensable to the life of nomadic tribes: saddlery, the manufacture of textiles, carpetry and embroidery. On the other hand, it should be noted that, in addition to being the capital of a Seljuq kingdom in the 13th century, Konya was a centre of religious philosophy and mysticism. It was here that Shams al-Din from Taurica in Persia and Jalal al-Din Rumi founded a religious order known as the Mevlevi (the Whirling Dervishes), whose doctrines originated in Persia.

Konya's budding art could not avoid artistic influences from the Byzantine Empire, located to the west of the Seljuq kingdom; it drew from this civilisation to formulate its methods, some architectural designs, construction and ornamentation details – sometimes the sultans even had their monuments built by Greek architects.

Gradually, as the Turks increasingly grew closer to Constantinople, Byzantine art's influence on the composition of Ottoman art grew stronger. The adoption of the Byzantine plan of Hagia Sophia and its variants gave this architectural tradition its ultimate identity.

Seljuq monuments in Konya contain the main elements of Ottoman architecture: porches with lateral niches, large arches with stalactites, rectilinear frames of these panels decorated with faience applied on marble-coated monuments, etc. When the Ottomans entered Anatolia, they seized former Byzantine provinces that had been under Seljuq subjugation for only about a century or two. Muslim penetration there had been more political and religious than material; the population there had preserved craft trades whose methods were for a long time handed down by experience. However, Byzantine decoration was absolutely rejected, perhaps because the conquerors feared their new subjects might interpret this as a concession to Christian principles. So it was Arab and Persian art that, having become truly Muslim, provided all the decorative elements of Ottoman art.

Muslim architects gradually abandoned monument plans from Asia Minor, and upon adopting the dome as an integral part of their architecture, they understood its advantages to the extent that they subjected all their layout designs to accomodate the use of dome vaults. As soon as the conquest of Constantinople "legitimised" the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire, Hagia Sophia became a model for these architects. The Bayezid II Mosque is one example of a reproduction of Hagia Sophia's imposing layout: a colossal dome flanked by two half-domes.

More often than not, the architects of these mosques were not Turks. They were, for the most part, Greeks like Christodoulos, the architect of the Conqueror's mosque, or Janissaries (children of Christians converted and forcefully drafted into the imperial militia), such as the famous Sinan. Finally, the sultans had their mosques and palace complexes partly decorated by Egyptian and Persian craftsmen captured from their native lands. It is thus no coincidence that in the beautiful 16th-century mosques, whose ornamental sculpture, woodwork and stained-glass windows are reminiscent of Islamic art from Cairo, the faience embellishment appears to

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have been patterned after Persian textiles and embroidery. This influence from Persian art resulted from the importation of Persian decorations.

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Dome of the Selimiye Mosque, 1569-1575. Edirne.

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Sultan Ahmed Mosque (The Blue Mosque),
1609-1616. Istanbul.

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Suleymaniye Cami (Suleymaniye Mosque),
1550-1557. Istanbul.

The Great Mosque of Konya

The layout of the façade of the Great Mosque of Konya (Alaeddin Mosque?), constructed in 1219, appears rather inconsistent. The open arcades, which look like two porticos of disparate widths in the upper section of the wall on each side of the main entrance, are an awkward adaptation of this edifice, with sections borrowed from a Byzantine church in Iconium. They are basically pillars made from two stanchions, supported against a pilaster and partly attached to it, as can be seen in the octagonal church in Isaura (Oulu-Bounar). The middle of the large entrance is completely Syrian in design. This door comprises an arch that forms a huge lancet, which includes a rectangular door with a simple architrave whose lintel is carved like serrated voussoirs. This arch is supported at its base by short, deflected stanchions with simple Corinthian capitals. Identical capitals complete the attached stanchions embedded into the arch's abutments. The shafts of these columns are decorated with overhung flutings in a zigzag pattern, which seem to have been frequently used by the architects of Seljuq sultans. The ogival arch is enclosed by a series of intersecting marble arcades, embedded in the façade, then by a series of moulded bands which crimp, as if the arch's angles and tympanums were a narrow fabric of flattened braids. This style is typically Syrian.

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The mosque itself was renovated or restored at some point; it includes columns made of intersecting stanchions and windows with mixed arches whose trussed centres are made of bullnoses connected at their top by a lintel. This form was found in Paris in the 16th century, but had been used in Anatolia and Asia Minor as early as the 13th and 14th centuries; from there, it was introduced into Constantinople. It was undoubtedly a technique borrowed from roof framing. The mosque has an attractive mihrab of faience and a beautiful minbar of sculpted wood. The pendentives that make up the dome's base, above the mihrab, are triangular, like those that support the arch at the entrance of the domed Yes¸ il in Bursa, and of the large dome of Yes¸ il Cami in the same city.

Asia Minor supplied the basic elements of Turkish art. This region fused the Byzantine and oriental styles that resulted in the remarkable development of Turkish art. Upon making Bursa their capital, and owing to Byzantine architects and materials, the Ottomans were able to decorate early colossal edifices on which to imprint their style,

The conquest of Constantinople led to a sudden revolution in plan design. It was Hagia Sophia and the domed churches imitating it that supplied the standard mosque plan. This could either be because the natural admiration inspired by this masterpiece influenced the taste of the sultans, or because Greek architects commissioned by the sultans to construct their mosques did not deem it wise to seek models anywhere but in the attractive Byzantine edifices around them.

In any event, it was from this period that Ottoman architecture took an irreversible turn towards the classical Turkish mosque with a Byzantine plan but Syro-Egyptian and Persian ornamentation. This decorative tendency included the characteristic component of Turkish art – the rectilinear stalactite – which is essentially different from the Persian or Syro-Egyptian stalactite. The sculpted ornamentation of the Ottoman Empire is bolder and richer than Egypt's or Persia's. Finally, the use of faience, which in Bursa still owes its merits to a Persian tradition, takes on an original quality when it is transposed onto a white background, with excellent tone, fine porcelain, coloured decorations inspired from Persian forms and colours that blend excellently with the lustre of the white marble coatings.

Following many transformations, the Turkish mosque adopted the square hall, shaded by a dome on spherical pendentives, as a primary architectural component. A small mosque would require a single dome. Sometimes the dome is flanked or preceded by smaller domes; there are two possibilities if a mosque covers a larger area: either an increase in the number of domes or the establishment of a large central dome flanked by four half-domes (as in the Sultan Ahmed Mosque), or the extention of the plan by two half-domes (demonstrated in the Bayezid and Suleymaniye mosques).

The minarets are different from those in Egypt and the Maghreb. They are actually cylindrical shafts as in Persia. Here, however, rather than appear cone-like, the minaret's diametre is even throughout. In Persia, they have a small bulkhead at their pinnacle, covered by a dome whose staircase ends with a corbelled-out terminal gallery, open or shaded, where the muezzin stands to call the faithful to prayer, and one or several galleries for the muezzin whose shaft is crowned with a pointed, cone-shaped roof. Ottoman architects accurately understood the disadvantages of these rather simple forms of minarets. The traditional Persian shaft contained an insulated column that contrasts with the sky; consequently, it sags or warps, and

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the reinforcement line grows deeper at its median point. To solve this problem, the number of balconies was increased in Ottoman minarets in order to break the long, straight line and prevent any possible deformation. Persian architects, for the same reason, had given their minarets a slightly conical structure.

The Bayezid II Mosque

The Bayezid II Mosque is the oldest among the great mosques of Constantinople (the temple of Mohammed II the Conqueror, which had been built on the site of the Church of the Holy Apostles by the Greek architect Christodoulos in 1469, was partially destroyed by an earthquake and subsequently lost almost all of its original features as a result of the reconstruction work ordered by Sultan Mustafa III). Its general aspect demonstrates a perfect blend of styles and provides us with a remarkably accurate picture of the ensemble of the Ottoman mosque as it would continue to be designed from then on, with relatively elaborate variations, but always according to a similar pattern.

There is a portico-surrounded courtyard, fairly resembling a cloister, which can be accessed through a main entrance drawn in the plan's central axis and through two lateral doors located opposite the courtyard's penultimate bay of porticos. This layout is that of a conventional Turkish mosque. The domes that rise over the cupolas of the courtyard's bay of porticos are silhouetted against the plain cornice that crowns the façades and avoids the monotony that would otherwise result from this line's uniformity.

Surrounded by a gallery of five arcades per face, the centre of the courtyard has an ablution fountain shaded by a lead-plated dome. With a confidence that can be demonstrated only by architects of genius, Khayr ad-Din dared to set up a main entrance broader than the other arcades in front of the portico abutting on the mosque though supported by identical columns, and the boldness with which he executed the stalactite-like cornice surmounting the arcades, to emphasise and crown this main entrance, is a model of ingenious design. These marble arcades alternate between white, brown and red. This red tone is found in some areas of the minarets and in the interior tympanums of the courtyard's windows, filled with black and red marble arabesques embedded in white marble. The same obsession with polychromy is found in the portico, which has two columns of red porphyry per face. All the capitals are made of white marble, and the astragals, with a rather sophisticated profile, are bronze. The bases of the columns are made of two parts. The first, with a profile similar to that of the attic base, is bronze and directly supports the column. The second, with a broader footing and a plain profile supported by an octagonal plinth, is made of white marble.

The mosque itself opens on to this gallery, and regular buildings comprising a library and several residences extend in a symmetrical pattern from each side of the mosque. The mosque was constructed based on the plan of Hagia Sophia, which was streamlined and excellently incorporated in its simplification. This is noticeable only by observing the entire structure. The central dome is flanked by a half-dome of the same diametre; it also has another half-dome, symmetrical with the first, at the rear face that surmounts the mihrab and the minbar. However, the architect of the Bayezid II Mosque eliminated the galleries on the first floor, featured in Hagia Sophia, and maintained only the naves of the ground floor. He reduced them to two arcade bays that carry two domes and open onto each of the mosque's lateral, four-domed

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façades along with the corner bays, all of which are impressively silhouetted against the roof. As can be observed, this layout is rather similar, particularly thanks to the lateral porticos, to the design of Byzantine churches in Asia Minor and of Hagia Sophia of Thessaloniki.

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Suleymaniye Cami (Suleymaniye Mosque),
interior view, 1550-1557. Istanbul.

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Sultan Ahmed Mosque (The Blue Mosque),
1609-1616. Istanbul.

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The Suleymaniye Mosque

Sinan built Suleiman the Magnificent's mosque based on a plan derived from the same principle as the Bayezid II Mosque. A general view of this mosque reveals the skill with which the architect was able to arrange the domes in tiers to give the whole structure an imposing profile, contrasting so beautifully with the slender spires of the four minarets. Those located at the entrance of the mosque's courtyard are lower than those abutting onto the mosque itself, resulting in a perspective effect that seems to increase the monument's general dimensions.

This mosque is located at the centre of a gamut of monuments and diverse buildings, emerging from among them with breathtaking splendour. The plan is on a rather larger scale, based on that of the Bayezid II Mosque and also inspired by the layout of Hagia Sophia. However, whereas the Suleymaniye architect maintained the same architectural scheme by eliminating the towering galleries, while the galleries of Hagia Sophia had opened onto the nave or section of the church shaded by the central dome, he did not radically abandon this

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means of increasing the monument's surface area. He consigned these galleries to a kind of nave including the large nave to the right and to the left between the main buttresses. In this way, he succeeded in avoiding the weighing down of the mosque and determining a low horizontal line, which, by contrast, demonstrates the actual scale of the great arcades and enhances their splendour. These interior galleries are parallel to exterior galleries, comprising a series of sixteen ogival arcades shaded by an almost-flat roof made of a huge projection, which gives this entire part of the façade a remarkable sense of harmony.

To give the arcades of the lower portico a more robust proportion than the higher arcades, Sinan laid out a portico of unequal but similarly designed arcades on the ground floor. This ingenious technique had an excellent effect, and Khodja Kassim, the architect of the New Mosque in Istanbul, successfully replicated not only the lateral facades but even the interior decoration of the mosque.

The interior view clearly reveals the excellent skills Sinan brought to the deisgn of this stunning monument, where architecture achieves an expression of grandeur and extraordinary splendour. Indeed, if we exclude from it the awe-inspiring stained-glass windows of *ajouré* plaster by artist Sarhos Ibrahim, several of which are quite visible in the windows from the pavement below the mosque, some beautiful inscriptions either gilded on marble or painted on faience, and the faience panelling of the mihrab wall which covers it right up to the springing of the vault – even without these elements, the columns of porphyry, voussoirs of black and white marble, stalactites, proportion of the bays, arcades and stanchions and the cadence in the rows of arches and domes that the architect borrowed his mode of expression. The two columns of ancient red porphyry and the two columns of pink syenite that support the lateral arches under the large right and left gables supposedly came from the imperial palace and Justinian's Augusteon. The mosque's other columns and materials mostly came from the St. Euphemy church in Chalcedon. The wall abutting the mihrab is covered with faience from bottom to top, and breathtaking *ajouré* stained-glass windows give this entire section of the mosque a lustrous, coloured radiance, over which the plainness of the mihrab stands out. The minbar, completely sheathed in marble with *ajouré* ramps and sharp spire, perfects the ornamentation of this sanctuary.

The rather severe minimalism of the mosque's interior courtyard is arresting; were it not for the bronze rings with bases and astragals, the alternating black and white stones of the voussoirs and the beautiful capitals with crystal-like stalactites, this simplicity would be unpleasant. Nevertheless, the entrance that opens onto the esplanade is exceptionally attractive, and the fluted minarets that tower above the mosque with their open-air galleries, supported by stalactites, add a note of poignancy to this rather austere structure.

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The Selimiye Mosque at Edirne

This mosque, constructed on the orders of Selim II, son of Suleiman the Magnificent, was Sinan's last work. Upon completing this project, the great architect cheerfully said that he had been merely an apprentice when constructing the Mosque of Princes (Shehzade), a journeyman when constructing the Suleymaniye, and a master craftsman only when he built the Selimiye Mosque at Edirne (1568-1574).

This mosque, beautiful by any standard, has a stunning silhouette with domes, tiered turrets

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and four beautiful fluted minarets with three floors of galleries that, according to Mehemet Effendi’s beautiful expression, seem to rise alongside the gleaming dome like four candlesticks around an altar.

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Türbe, 13th century.
Bayrami, Turkey.

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Külliye of Bayazid II, 1484-1488.
Edirne.

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque

The Mosque of Sultan Ahmed I is less sophisticated. It is located southeast of the Hippodrome, the ancient race course. A huge enclosure, whose opening onto the site of the ancient Hippodrome looks like an *ajouré* fence of roasted berries, envelopes madrasas, schools, minarets, tombs and appendages of all sorts. A huge esplanade, studded with beautiful trees whose lush greenery creates a picturesque background to contrast beautifully with the mosque and its six minarets, separates the mosque from all the outbuildings. These six slender minarets with firm foundations blend in harmoniously with the mosque's massive silhouette, and the stunning distinction between the slenderness of Turkish minarets and the imposing outline of the domes of their mosques cannot truly be overemphasised. Considered separately, these two elements are strikingly inconsistent. The minaret seems too slender and the mosque too imposing. Considered together, however, when they stand out against Constantinople's soft blue sky or the greenery of plains and cypress trees, they emphasise each other's beauty.

The plan of the mosque itself is very simple. A large central dome is supported by four huge, cylindrical pillars decorated with overhung flutings up to the springings of supporting arches. It is flanked by four other large half-domes that are each supported by three half-domes. The light weight of the domes is outstanding. Like that of Hagia Sophia, this dome is supported by other

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ajouré domes that are either built on ajouré arches or attached to stalactite-like pendentives with geometrically patterned clearances, which reduce the weight that would have resulted from the use of simple spherical pendentives.

Evidently the architect of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque borrowed from Hagia Sophia the element that makes it remarkable – that is, the overlapping of domes. However, rather than restricting himself to mere duplication, like the architect of the Bayezid had done, or committing to an impressive layout of genius as Sinan did with the Suleymaniye Mosque, he had the remarkable intuition of lightening the sidewalls by repeating the half-domes of the apse and porticos and placing these *ajouré* domes on top of each other. Thus, he obtained an amazing interior sense of weightlessness. This effect is further enhanced by beautifully painted decorations, which adorn the pillars and vaults to match the mosque's interior faience ornamentation. In order to increasingly soften incoming light and give scale to these many windows whose plain dividers are rather monotonous, it was necessary that plastered stained-glass windows be added to these decorations

Regarding the exterior layout, the lateral porticos are similar to those of the Suleymaniye Mosque. Here, however, the architectural scheme of asymmetrical arches is applied to both the upper and lower porticos, and no longer results in the pleasant contrasting effect admired in in the porticos at Suleymaniye Mosque. It also has a vast and imposing interior courtyard. Five columns of pink granite, twelve of gray granite and nine of white marble support its towering arcades, crowned with domes. The stalactite-like capitals are well-proportioned: their astragals, just like the ring of the bases of the columns, are made of bronze. The door of the mosque is made of walnut, ebony and olive wood, inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl, with a large cabochon in the middle of the panels and fittings and decorations in bronze. In the middle of the courtyard is a lovely white octagonal marble fountain, whose arcades are coated with arabesques carved with great skill and supported by beautiful columns with bronze bases and astragals. Some bronze grills, perforated according to a geometric network of hexagons fire-stopped with equilateral triangles, are laid out between the columns to prevent the fountain's water from being polluted.

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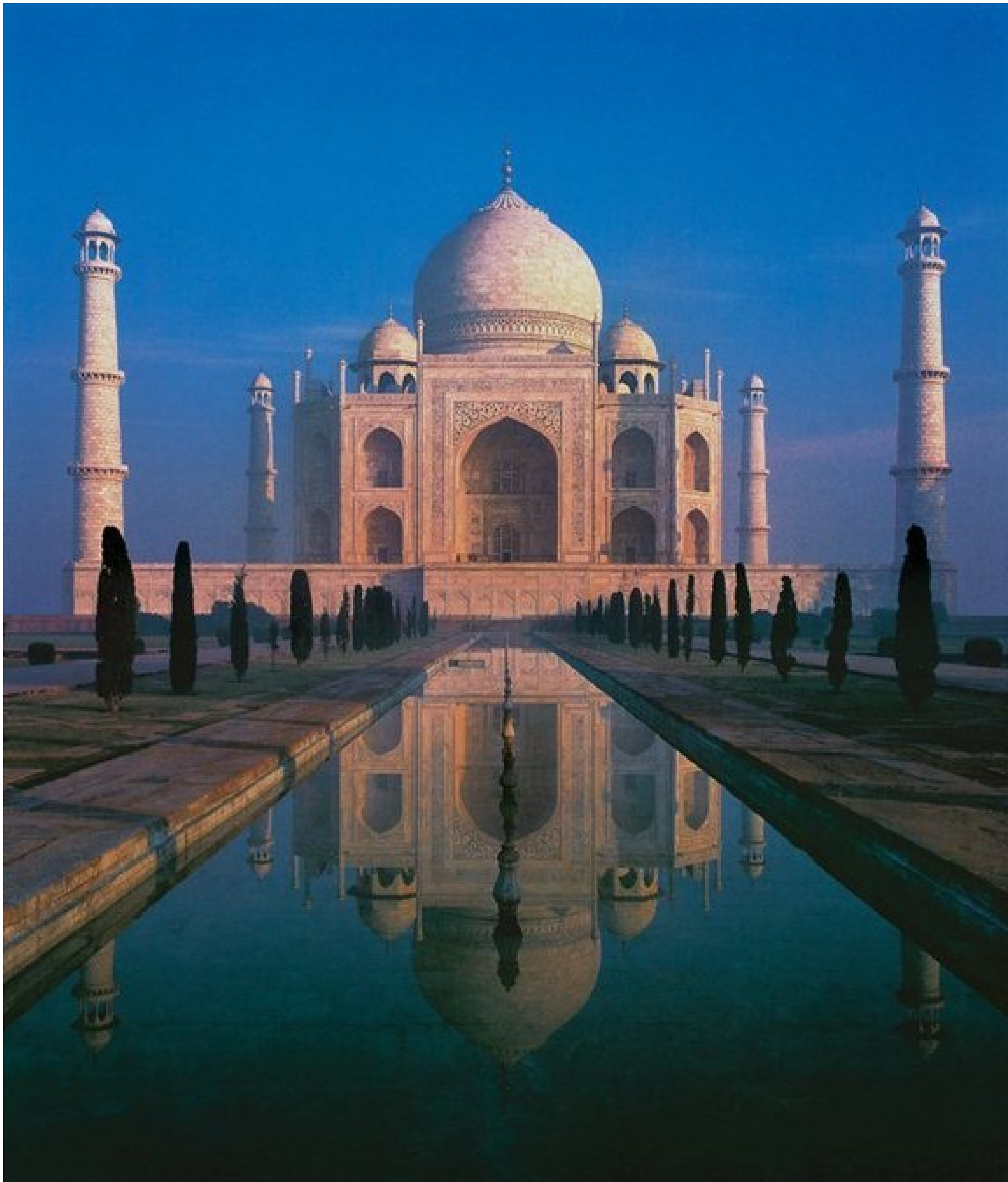

The Taj Mahal, 1632-1643.
Agra, India.

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E – Muslim India

The chasm separating India from the Islamic epicentre is so vast that Islamic architecture there was influenced by the flourishing art that had already been established in India for centuries. However, the exceptional racial diversity of the Indian subcontinent makes it a peculiar part of the world. Religious civilisation expanded and gave Indian art a powerful and original style.

Early Muslim conquests date back to 712. Following the invasion of its northwestern frontier, India was, from a political perspective, made of only divided, unorganised and fragile

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states. As in Africa, Muslim conquests were characterised by successive invasions by tribes with diverse origins and culminated in the founding of well-organised empires imposed on the subjugated native people. Upon subduing the Indus Valley Civilisation, the conquerors ran into the Aravalli Range, which pushed them to the Ganges. Consecutive capitals spread from east to west, and even the ascendancy of the Great Mughals barely went beyond the Nermada River.

The first Muslim kingdom was that of Turkish Ghaznavids, founded around the end of the 10th century, with a capital in Ghazni. It spanned the Punjab, Multan, Gujarat and Kashmir regions right to the Ganges. Following the destruction of Ghazni in 1152, Delhi became the capital of Ghurids from Afghanistan. It in turn was sacked by Tamerlane in 1398, during his futile conquest of India. Babur (1483-1530) finally set up a powerful empire from the ruins of the last Muslim kingdom of India. It was thus under the dynasty of the “Great Mughals” that a particular style, dominated by Persian forms, was introduced to Northern India. Consequently, Islam took a lot of time to take root in India, and the conquest was never completed.

As a matter of fact, Muhammad’s religion found a far less fertile ground there than in Africa or western Asia, where Judaism and Christianity had conditioned the people to monotheism. Home to a spirited religion and a long-standing religious civilisation, Persia had already mounted a stronger resistance, and quickly adopted the schism of the Shiites. In India, only the inhabitants of the northwestern border, people with Persian ancestry, willingly embraced the new religious propaganda. Everywhere else, Semitic genius was ignored and considered foreign.

The solid establishment of Islam required the violence of a military conquest, and, importantly, the sustainable establishment of a powerful Muslim empire that was much more organised than that of Asian and Western caliphates and India’s early Muslim states. Babur and his successors, the Great Mughals, introduced into their method of government a remarkable unity of purpose, sense of authority and administration. They developed an entirely new language, Hindustani, which was imposed by the administration.

Therefore, Muslim architecture in India can be divided into two distinct periods: the periods prior and subsequent to the formation of this great Mughal Empire. During the first period, the conquerors used local architects and methods and were delighted to introduce some new forms, such as the pointed arch in façades. The influence of the Jaina style on the monuments of this era is what makes them unique.

Visible in Indian Islamic architecture are structural woodworking traditions, procedures relating to piling, corbelling, the formation of horizontal lintels and pillars made by juxtaposing vertical baulks. Vaults were rather a series of stacked up ceilings laid out like concave structures. Local artists used their methods, ornamentation and traditions in serving their new masters; however, radical Muslim puritanism suppressed the statuary, disposing of countless figurines.

Since Persia had previously had close relations with India, the second period, under the Great Mughals, has distinct elements of Persian influence throughout its artistic style. The style of the imposing monuments the Indian Muslims left behind is so strikingly similar to the Islamic architecture of Persia that it might be considered a variety of the Persian school.

The edifices that Muslims built in India include mosques, madrasas and tombs. Islam’s influence was palpable especially in religious architecture. During the early centuries of the

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Hijra, this influence was quite weak, marked only by slender arches in façades. This influence, however, was probably more palpable in the palace complexes and castles of Indian sultans than in any Muslim country. This is evident in Ibn Battûtah's 14th-century description of Jalal al-Din's palace in Delhi.

A castle called the Red Castle is located in the heart of Delhi. It is very large, with a vast audience hall and an immense vestibule. Near the entrance is a dome soaring high above the audience hall, as well as above the palace's main entrance. Sultan Jalal al-Din had the habit of sitting in the pavilion of this hall. When Saïf al-din Emir Ghada's wedding was held in this palace, large tents were set up and in each was erected a colossal cupola whose floor was covered with carpets of breathtaking beauty.

Extant dams, bridges and reservoirs prove that the construction of public buildings was a primary focus of Muslim leaders, both in Indai and other Islamic countries. Some of the underground reservoirs were similar to Persian abambars. The country's kings and leaders sought to outshine each other by building similar rainwater tanks in rural areas that had no water. In Deh Fattan, there was a large pool five hundred strides long and three hundred strides wide, decorated with red sandstones, and flanked by twenty-eight stone domes, each of which contained four seats of the same material. Each pavilion could be accessed by a stone staircase. In the middle of the pond was a large four-storey pavilion, and on each storey were four seats. This bath was constructed by Sultan Kuehl's father; opposite the bath was a mosque for Muslims.

Feasts organised by Indian sultans involved the use of lavish draperies similar to those set up by Abbasid caliphs and Persian kings. The streets were decorated with carpets, installed not only in houses, but also on the ground. Wooden storeyed pavilions, whose domes and balconies were decorated with silk stars embroidered with gold, were set up along the procession course, where female dancers and singers stood. The general public refreshed themselves from reservoirs made of buffalo skin and filled with water laced with syrup.

Qutab Minar

The famous minaret of this mosque, completed under the reign of Altamash, is an imposing, five-storey, corrugated tower, a colossal replica of the minarets in Ajmer; it measures 14 metres in diametre at the base and used to be about 80 metres high. In order to avoid giving it a monotonous appearance, the architect divided this massive structure into several storeys, highlighted by sturdy balconies with pure Jaina-style corbels. Ensuring that the surface of each floor was fluted following a different pattern, he then enhanced this decoration with parallel lines of inscriptions in bas-relief, in which Jainist themes are recurrent. It was made attractive through the use of colours: the three lower floors were of red sandstone and the others of white marble, with two areas of carved red sandstone on each floor. Since 1993 the Minar has been a UNESCO World Heritage site.

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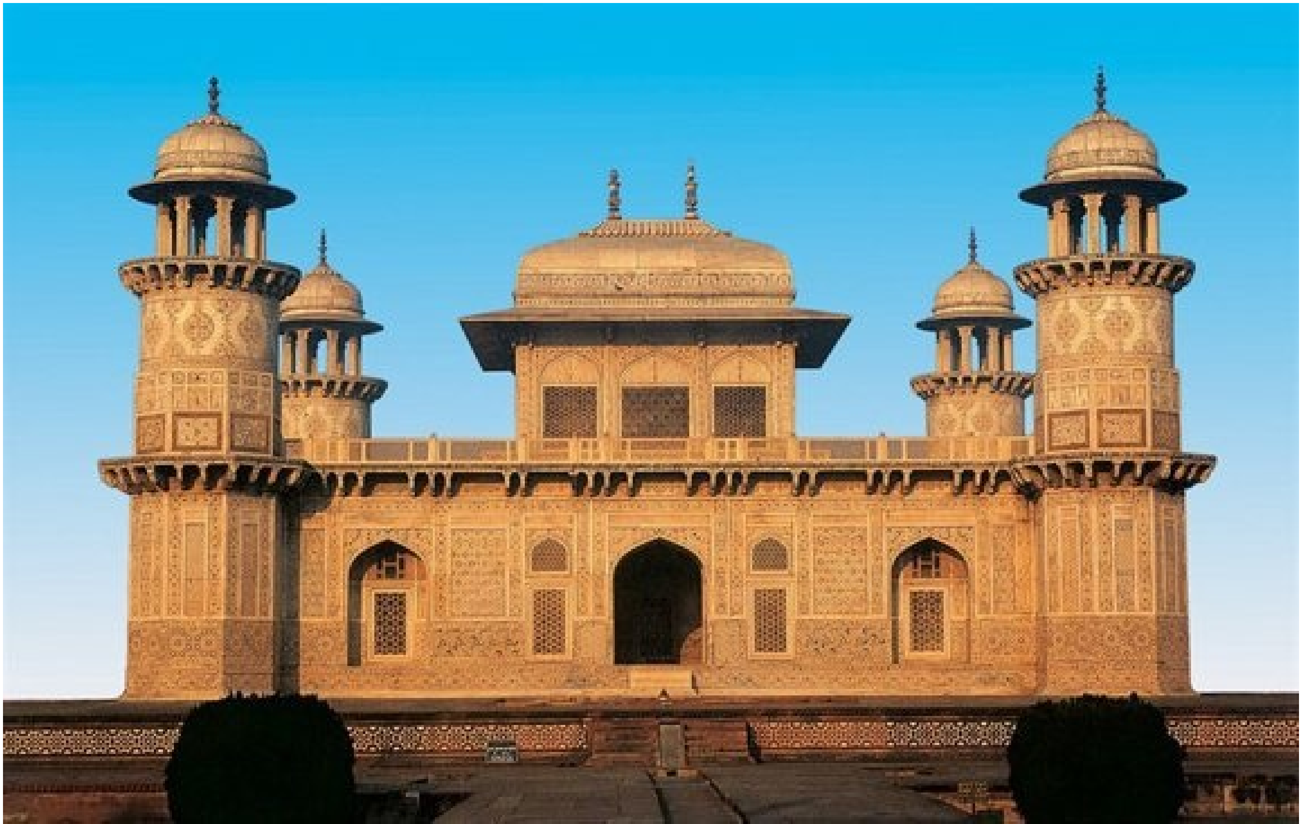

Itimad-ud-Daulah Mausoleum, 1622-1628.
Agra, India.

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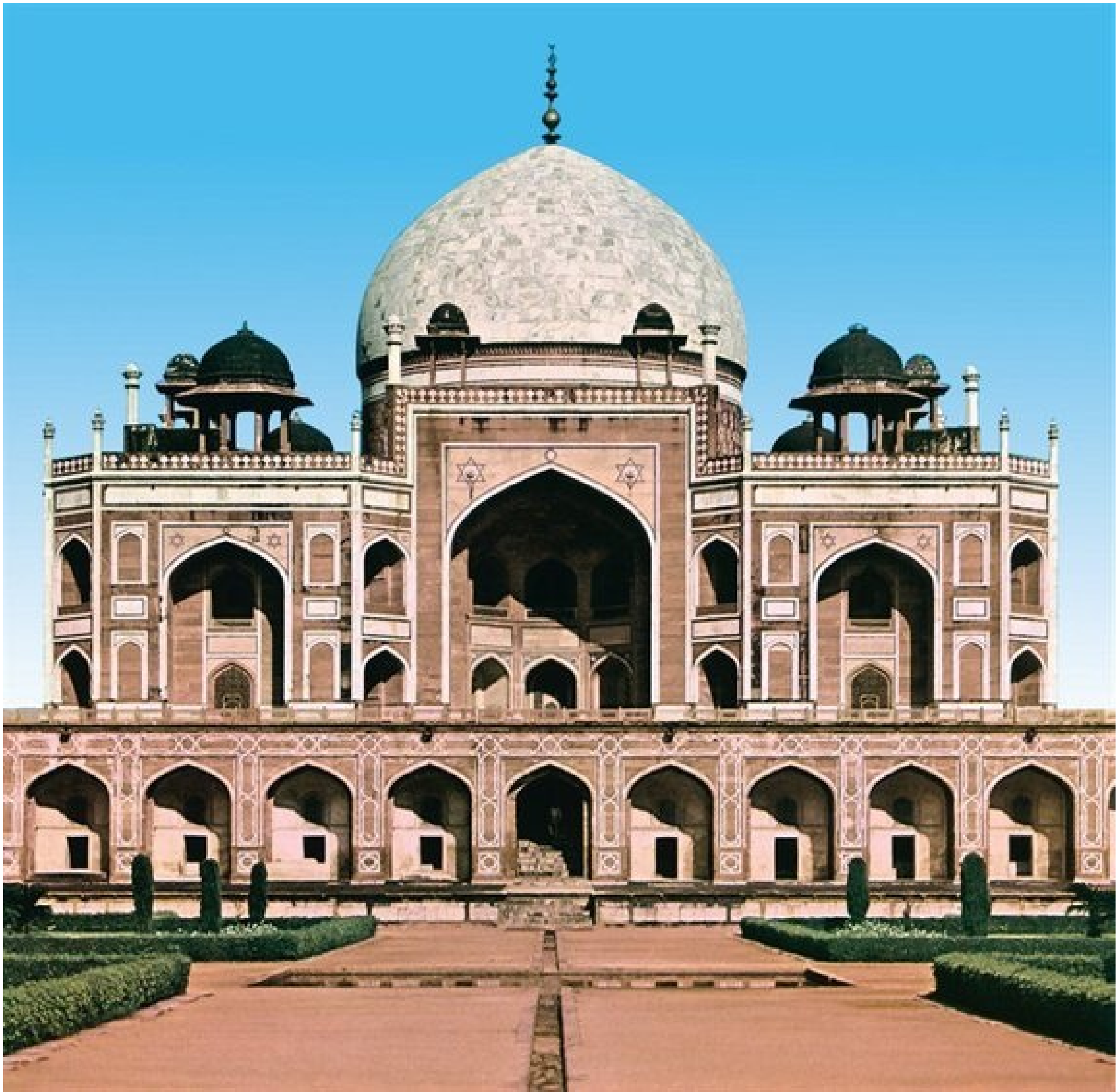

Humayun Mausoleum, 1565.
Delhi.

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The Monuments of the Mughal Emperors

Bijapur, the former capital of a sultanate, is located in the Indian state of Karnaka. The architecture of Mughal emperors obviously influenced the construction style of Bijapur monuments, the most famous of which is the mausoleum Gol Gumbaz, with its impressive dome that measures 37 metres in diameter. In the 17th century, it was the world's third largest dome. It is supported by a square foundation and seven-storey high corner towers. The tomb contains the sarcophagi of a sultan and some of his family members. Other striking monuments are the unfinished Friday Mosque, the almost ruinous citadel and one of the world's largest cannon,

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Malik-e-Maidan (The Monarch of the Plains) from the 17th century.

Contemporaneous with the formation of the Bijapur dynasty, Babur's reign (1494-1531) marked the beginning of the influence of Persian arts, then the work of Turkish architects was introduced into India from the northwest. It may be said that in the 16th century, Persia, with respect to Ottoman and Indian arts, played the same role as 15th-century and Renaissance Italy did in France and Spain.

In both India and Turkey, Persian art was a kind of theme that artists of these countries elaborated upon, though with their own ideas and using different processes from those of the Persians. However, if the Turks considered Persian art as a mere decorative feature to be affixed to a Byzantine frame, it was something more than that to India. Thus the art and literature in Tamerlane's court was almost exclusively Persian. Nevertheless, about half of the Aryan population inhabiting the Indus Valley was Persian in both tradition and nationality.

Muslims had already sparked the interest of Indians in letters, arts and sciences, all of which were quite different from what had existed there previously. Owing to its solid organisation and especially to Akbar's outstanding intelligence, the Mughal Empire continued to expand by emphasising the changes that Islam had already brought to the arts of India's northern provinces.

Babur, who had ascended the throne in 1494, seized Agra only in 1526. His son, Humayun, whose intelligence and scholarship were like his father's, faced such enormous difficulties that he left no monuments of any significance. Moreover, his reign was temporarily interrupted by the conquests of Sher Shah and his son Selim. The style of this period was still simple and elegant. Under Akbar's reign, however, it gained remarkable verve and splendour while maintaining its originality. The grace and beauty of Persian arts, which flourished under his successors in the monuments of Agra and Delhi, blended with the firmness of Pathan and Jaina styles. Although Barbur did not leave any great monuments that have been genuinely dated, his memoirs reveal he employed workers for his projects in Sikri, Biana, Agra, Gwalior, Sholapur.

Monuments constructed under Humayun's reign are probably similar to those of his contemporary and rival Sher Shah, to whom is attributed the construction of the Purana Kilah mosque or the Delhi fort, and the walls of the city that Humayun had repaired (in 1553). In a mosque that Sher Shah completed in 1541, we notice the use of colour marble mosaics which subsequently underwent remarkable development, as illustrated in monuments in both Agra and Delhi.

Akbar, who reigned for almost fifty years and was certainly the most outstanding of Mughal Emperors, had a sense of liberalism which was quite uncommon for his time. He treated his Muslim and Hindu subjects as complete equals and apparently sought, at one point, to create a homogeneous nation based on mutual tolerance. This preference for blending, which he failed to instill in the minds of his subjects, shows up in the stylisation of his monuments, the most significant of which are those in Fatehpur Sikri, the City of Victory.

Whereas the mausoleum he erected in Delhi for his father Humayun is a Persian monument where India's traditional character is apparent only in the use of coloured stone and marble, the monuments in Fatehpur Sikri are more Hindu than Persian in structure, and the architects who constructed them demonstrated unusual talent and originality. The complex of the palace,

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including Akbar’s private palace, the zenanas, the five-storey high Panch Mahal and the Dargah Mosque belong to these monuments and are UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Badshahi Mosque (Lahore)

Monuments built by Akbar can also be found in Lahore. He turned the city into one of the centres of Islamic culture on the Indian subcontinent. The mosque, however, was built by his son Selim (1569-1627), who called himself ‘Jahangir’ meaning ‘conqueror of the world’. Constructed by Vizier Jahangir, it is completely Persian in style and decorated with mosaics and faience tiles. The tomb where Jahangir and Empress Nur Jahan, his wife, were buried has partially disappeared because the Sikhs demolished some of its most attractive parts to decorate their Golden Temple in Amritsar. The construction of a new city in Decca, whose stucco-coated brick monuments (only its pillars and corbels are of stone) are reminiscent of the most beautiful monuments in Delhi and Agra, is attributed to this same leader.

The Taj Mahal in Agra

The accurate symmetries and the almost too regular profile of this monument suggest the involvement of a European architect. A Frenchman named Austin or Augustin de Bordeaux, it is said, might have supervised all the precious stone inlays that decorate the interior and exterior of the Taj Mahal. It is impossible to fathom fully the elegance of the decoration.

Constructed by Shah Jahan to be used as a tomb for his wife, Empress Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal was commenced in 1631 and completed in 1653. For thirteen years, twenty thousand labourers worked on this huge project that required forty thousand chariots of marble from Rajputana and pink sandstones. It was decorated with materials from every country famous for the beauty of its hardstones. An enormous amount of money went into its construction.

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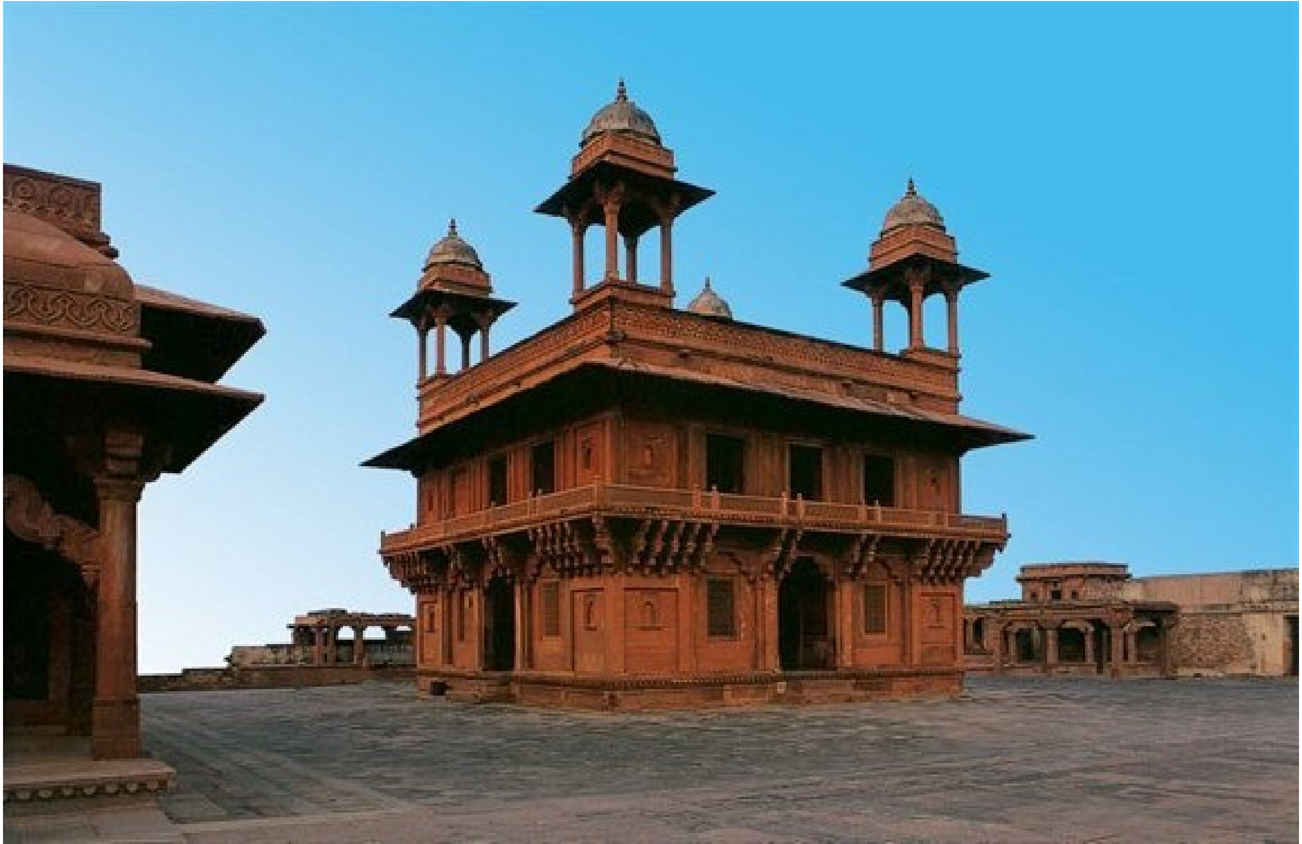

Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Private Audience), 1571.
Fatehpur Sikri, India.

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Badshahi Mosque, 1673-1674.
Lahore, Pakistan.

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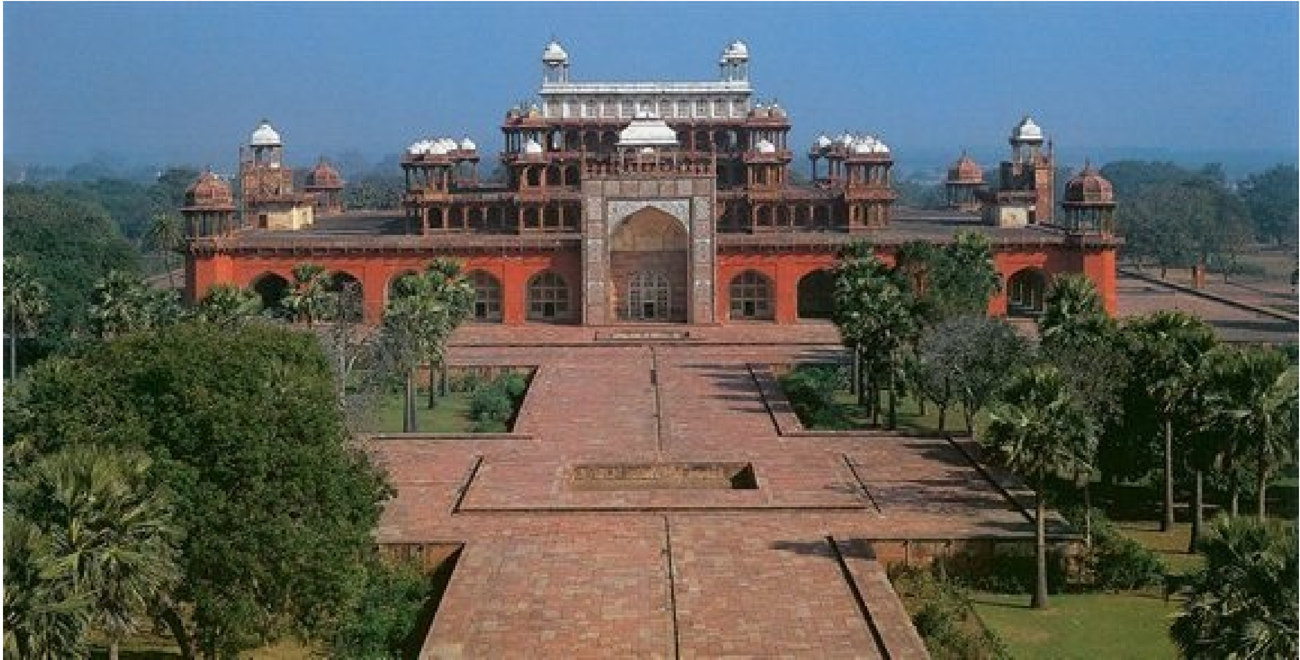

Akbar Mausoleum, 1614.
Sikandra, India.

Its gold-plated crescent soars above the Jumna; the red sandstone platform supporting the monument is two hundred and fifty metres long and one hundred and ten metres wide. Above is a square terrace measuring ninety-five metres wide, surrounded by soaring minarets (cone-shaped on a circular plan), at the centre of which is the main monument on an irregular octagonal plan. This layout is, in effect, more of a square plan with bevelled edges than an octagonal one. In the centre is the octagonal tomb hall with large niches and doors which run parallel to smaller halls in the corners and porches respectively; the latter's long faces are pierced with octagonal bars. The white marble interior is decorated with friezes, strings of encrusted ornaments and large Arabic inscriptions in black marble on a white background.

The porches' huge Persian arches are stalactite-like, and their framework is complemented by two octagonal columns of white marble inlaid with herringbones and colourful marble rings that are reminiscent of the small minarets of Agra's Pearl Mosque. Ajouré marble and wooden fences adorn its bays; its silver doors are no longer there, however, as the Jats from Suraj Mal, upon the defeat of the Mughals in Pânîpat in 1761, took them away together with Taj treasures. Fifteen years later, the Mahrattas tore the mosaic of precious stones off the walls and floor.

Its interior, vault and stones are inlaid with marble and precious stones, forming foliate patterns, friezes, flowery clumps, fruits and birds made of hardstone. Its general blend of white and gold, including its doors' corner pieces in blue and red tones, reflects local taste, as exquisite gold and colourful embroidery on white silk backgrounds were then still being produced in Agra.

The Taj is merely the centre of this composition, surrounded by elaborate gardens adorned with pools and marble canals fed by fountain jets. The garden's entrance is, in itself, a monument, with its large red sandstone façade and a rather severe harmony, enhanced by bands and strings of white marble and mosaic tympanums of marble and onyx.

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At the western end of the gardens, in the axis of the Taj, is an elegant mosque in coloured marble and, at the eastern end, a symmetrical monument called the Jawab. Based on the magnitude of its composition and its symmetry, this plan is almost of classical design.

Time has taken its toll on this wonderful building, and pollution can clearly be seen. Because the white marble slowly becomes yellow, cars and buses have to stay at least 2000 metres away. The monument has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1983.

According to legend, another mausoleum in black marble for Shah Jahan was planned, but never built, on the other side of the river. At the moment, archaeological excavations are under way.

The Delhi Palace

This palace, reminiscent of the fortress of Agra, is partly destroyed. Built during the reign of Shah-Jehan (1628-1638), this monument was obviously completely designed at one time. A large porch with an inner courtyard and a large entranceway introduces the building, leading to a square courtyard that is strikingly similar to Persian plans (especially that of the Masjid-i-Shah madrasa and caravansary in Isfahan). The court is flanked on either side by two vaultless bazaars. Opposite the entrance is the music room, or Noubat Khan, leading to the second courtyard, which is more than one hundred and fifty metres long with a depth of over a hundred metres, and which opens on to the large hall, the Diwan-i-am.

The Palace of Jaipur

This comprehensive, extraordinary and quite imposing courtyard influenced the art of even non-Muslim kingdoms in India. This influence can be perceived upon the examination of Jaipur, a Rajput city constructed in 1727 on a regular plan by King Jey-Sing. The Diwan-i-Khas is a true masterpiece that is almost absolutely Persian. The most famous building is the Wind Palace, whose red façade narrows upwards from the bottom. The many windows served the court ladies as observation posts. The palace's entrances are delicately and beautifully decorated in the Jaino-Persian style.

The Golden Temple in Amritsar

Finally, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, set in the centre of an attractive lake and decorated with remnants from Jahangir's tomb, demonstrates how the Sikhs built on the knowledge of their architects. The construction of the Temple was initiated by Arjan Dev (1563-1606), a guru who combined Hindu and Muslim texts and died under torture at the hands of his emperor.

The End of Indian-Muslim Architecture

This period of dramatic artistic development was short-lived; Goleonde mausoleums were massive and bizarre-looking, with minarets or exaggerated turrets topped by a kind of lantern larger than the minaret itself and crowned with heavy, bulbous and impressive-looking domes.

Upon the collapse, as it were, of the Mughal Empire following the death of Aurengzeb, many kingdoms emerged from its debris. The unity it had introduced to political Islam in India was

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quickly replaced by a severe decline.

Indian and other influences contributed to the development of Indo-Islamic architecture. Jaina architecture, indigenous art that attained perfection in design and highly advanced implementation, was first adapted to the requirements of the new form of worship and changed gradually, keeping its essential construction features, which are traditional methods of structural timberwork: stacking or corbelling.

Muslims progressively modified this art, especially by simplifying it, making major alterations and eliminating superfluous ornamentation. While Islamic art introduced the pointed arch into this indigenous art, local artists could never fuse the former with their platband arches.

This fusion took place under the Mughals, as a result of their tolerant spirit and the introduction of foreign artists who, not bound by local methods, drew inspiration from features of indigenous and Persian arts which were compatible with each other, and constructed monuments in Agra and Delhi in a style that was, although not entirely unique, certainly attractive and quite often grandiose.

It is thus obvious that, unlike that which occurred in other countries conquered by Islam, the Hindu sense of nationhood and India's social composition constituted a formidable resistance to anything the conquerors introduced that was not an integral part of religious education. Art was one of these almost entrenched traditions, and until the Mughals, notwithstanding some slight alterations, it remained almost purely Hindu.

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Qutab Minar, 1192-1368.
Height: 80 metres. Delhi.

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Crowned head, Central Asia, 8th or 9th century.
Khalili Collection.

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Statue of a woman with a basket of fruit, second half of the 8th century.
Gravestone. Khirbat Al-Mafjar, Palestine.

Fine Arts

A – Sculpture

When Abd ar-Rahman, the Caliph of Córdoba, founded the city of Madinah al-Zahra, to cater to a woman's whim, popular legend holds that he placed the statue of this favourite concubine,

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which resembled ancient Flora, right in the middle of the palace.

Ibn Bassani recounts that one day when Abu Arab, a Sicilian poet exiled to Spain, went to see Mohammed, the king of Seville, he found him busy admiring some amber figurines.

Elsewhere, in Mesopotamia, the statue of a knight wielding a lance can be seen on the koubba of a mosque in Baghdad, and on another koubba there is the statue of man showing time. Over the entrance of a mosque in Homs, there used to be a strange sculpture, the bust of a man culminating in the tail of a scorpion.

The 14th century traveller Ibn Battutah saw in many cities statues of animals, especially those of lions.

A reading of Makrisi reveals that even before the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, under whom Islamic law had already relatively declined as a standard, Tulunid sultans such as Khumaraweh had their statues, those of women in the harem and of their children, as well as those of royal musicians, in one of the halls of their palaces, along the Nile. These statues, of beautiful artistry, were made of wood, a custom that apparently drew from that of some of the great statuary workshops of the pharaohs, whose enduring masterpieces are conserved in the Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art in Cairo.

Whereas none of these works have survived, we can appreciate the art of Arab sculptures in Egypt only by examining the sculptural decoration of monuments faced with stone, stucco and wood.

Since stucco had been in use from the outset in Egypt, it was consequently used in early architectural decorations. The Ibn Tulun Mosque, dating back to 876, as well as the Al-Azhar (971) or the Al-Hakim (1012) mosques, still have some of their original stucco decorations, not mechanically moulded, but sculpted by nimble and skilful hands. In the 13th century, this technique was very reliable, as can be deduced from Sultan Kalaoun’s tomb-mosque, or that of Mohammed Al Nasir, whose decoration is rather reminiscent of early Moorish art in Spain.

Notwithstanding the fact that stone was most highly esteemed, the use of stucco in decoration still persisted, as in the fabulous frieze of Kufic inscriptions in the Hassan Mosque, and in the beautiful decorations of the dome of the Al Sunkur mosque in Darb El-Ahmar (1347).

Whereas the use of this technique was apparently discontinued in the 15th century, a monument still proves the contrary: the interior of the tomb of Al-Fadaouieh in Cairo is coated with decorations and inscriptions in stucco.

We noticed the rather late use of stone in monuments constructed by Arabs in Egypt. Its use, nonetheless, introduced a more supple material into the decoration. The domes especially had to agree fully with it, just as it obtains in Barkouk’s funerary mosque (1405-1410). Stone was used as decorative material first in Souyour-Gatmieh’s mosque (1356-1359) and later in Sultan Hassan’s.

Here, the decoration is basic, limited to the floral representation of buds and leaves, as if it were left to artisans not used to working stone; they are rosettes in the form of rinceaux of buds and flowers around a central bud. Here, the stone is enhanced with beautifully sculpted motifs in all of Sultan Kait Bey’s monuments (1468-1496), and nowhere else are they more stunning than on the arch in the sanctuary of his mosque’s interior, more especially in its wekala or khan, south of the Al-Azhar Mosque, whose exterior decoration offers an inexhaustible source of gorgeous geometric motifs and arabesques. In addition to huge edifices, stone was equally

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used to decorate dikkas or tribunes, minbars or pulpits used to preach in mosques, and cenotaphs and grave steles. A striking monument that has survived to our day is the white sandstone minbar which Sultan Kait Bey built in Sultan Barkouk's funerary mosque in the desert. This late 15th-century (1483) work of art is one of the most beautiful types of Arab decoration. This triangular object was fully made of decorated stone slabs with a range of carved motifs, rather than of wood as were many jointed wood minbars.

These tombstones or grave steles (chahid) were generally made of serpentine or diorite, materials from ancient monuments. The often undulating surfaces of these monuments comprise prayer formulas and names of the deceased and the date of their death engraved in Kufic characters on a slightly dotted background or, better still, sculpted in relief on a carved background. Generally, these grave steles date back to the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Hijra; earlier dates are extremely rare. The oldest of them are from the Ain Al-Sira necropolis in Cairo and the Aswan cemetery in Upper-Egypt.

Also produced in Cairo were large ovoid jars, shaped in open marble blocks, which could stand only with support from marble stands (kailaghi) hollowed out to form a basin into which they are placed. These jars are ornamented. Square-shaped stands preceded by a large tilted spout from which liquid could flow from the holes in the bottom of the jars, were also decorated with ornaments, Kufic inscriptions and even with seated human figures or lions in two small niches arranged in the corners of the room.

Other works of art included large boards of white marble fountains that were carved and installed at the bottom of niches, out of which water flowed to allow the entry of cool air. One of these jars, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, presents undulating lines, and its rim is gracefully decorated with a stunning and bold string of animals such as large-eared rabbits, dogs and panthers. It was originally from the public bowl or fountain, built in 1400 by Sultan Faraj, son of Barkouk.

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Figure of a dromedary, 13th century.
39.5 x 25 x 13 cm. Private collection.

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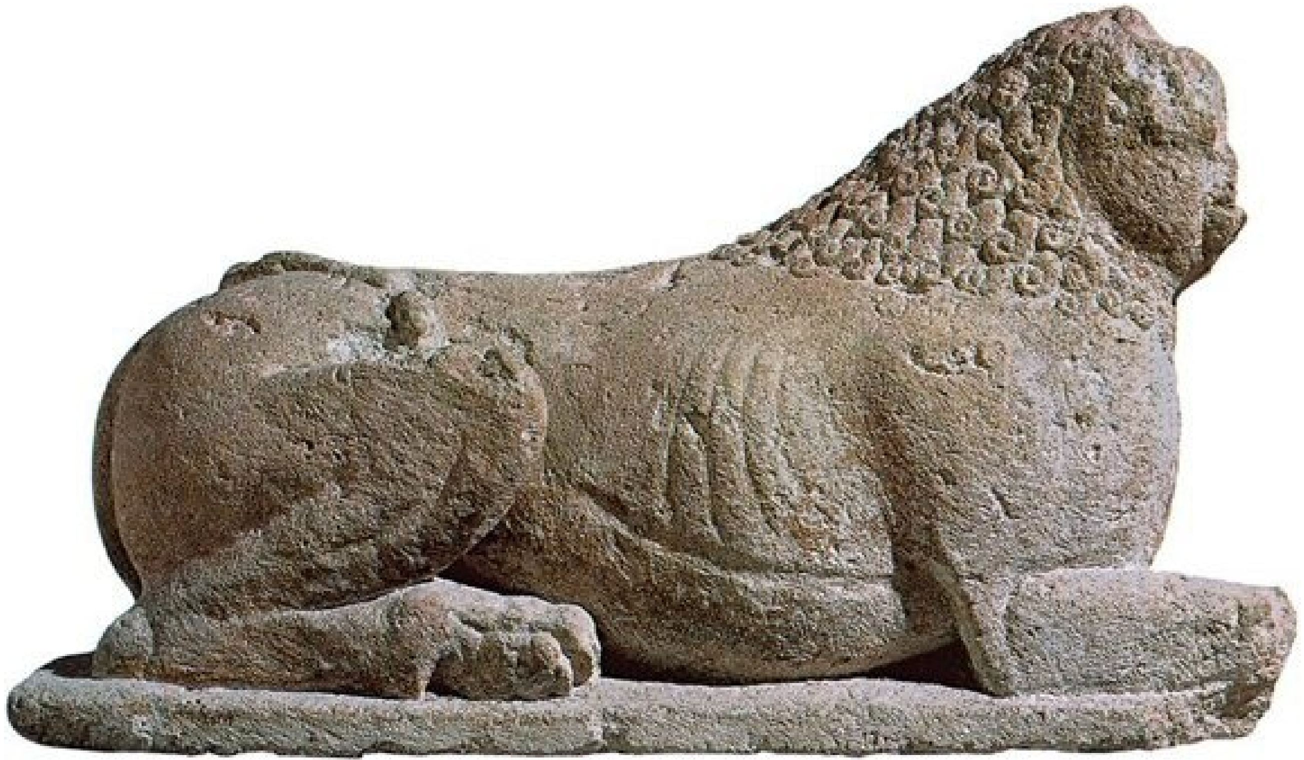

Mshatta Palace lion, Jordan, 743-744.
Gravestone. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.

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Lion from a fountain, 11th-12th century.
Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.

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Pulpit, 19th century. Wood.
The Dushanbe Museum of Archaeology, History and Decorative Arts, Tajikistan.

Upon reading the works of Arab writers, it is impossible to doubt that sculpture had greatly flourished in Spain during the early centuries of the Caliphate.

The lion fountain in the Alhambra is certainly one of the most important works of Islamic sculpture conserved in Spain. This is a white marble dodecagon fountain surmounted by a smaller one, on twelve plain- and wild-looking lions. This large fountain bears an inscription, and certainly dates from when the patio was constructed, that is during the reign of Mohammed V, in the last quarter of the 15th century.

But for the existence of similar monuments in Spain, the marble capitals, judging from the bold vigour of their execution, would not be sufficient as a testament to the genius that the workers could bring into stone and marble sculpture. It would however be ill-considered to date them based on the inscriptions they quite often bear because many such inscriptions may well have been superimposed on older capitals. Although almost all provincial museums in Spain have beautiful specimens of these capitals, few if any museum can boast of greater beauty than the one in Zaragosa. These are from the Aljaferia, transformed into a pleasure palace by those governing in place of the caliphs. It would be difficult to find elsewhere any invention and imagination this decorative and more personal.

In Spain, the sculptural decoration of monuments was done only in mechanically moulded plaster. While recognising the striking effect and remarkable skills that Spanish artists

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introduced into their models, decorated with complex geometric patterns, it is nonetheless true that the material plays one of the most crucial roles in the general beauty of every work of art, and that the sculptural decoration of Spanish monuments lacks such beauty. Any admiration for the attractive plaster coating in the Alhambra quickly vanishes in the face of the noble splendour of a stone monument, such as the Sultan Hassan Mosque in Cairo.

We will see that the assertion made by several historians of Islamic art that, Muslims never represented people due to a prohibition against images written in the Koran, is not only literally false, but is continuously contradicted by the monuments themselves. These belong to a civilisation, that of Konya's Seljuq sultans, that left behind monuments of remarkable architecture.

Sculpted wood

In view of the scarcity of wood in Egypt, its widespread use triggers great wonder. Production being zero, so to speak, there is no doubt it had to be imported from the nearest countries rich in beautiful softwood species, pine or cedars, such as Syria and Asia Minor.

Its use as furniture in mosques was much more limited than in Christian churches, since the former needed no seats, pipe organs or choir screen. It was only used in decorative friezes, in ceilings, pulpits for sermons (or minbars) in tribunes for reading the Koran (or dikkas) in cupboard doors where religious objects were kept. It was not uncommon in chapels where important personalities were buried to find their coffins surrounded with beautiful wood panels decorated with art. Houses also had doors, cupboards, furniture, and even trellis windows (shaped and sculpted Mushrabiyya).

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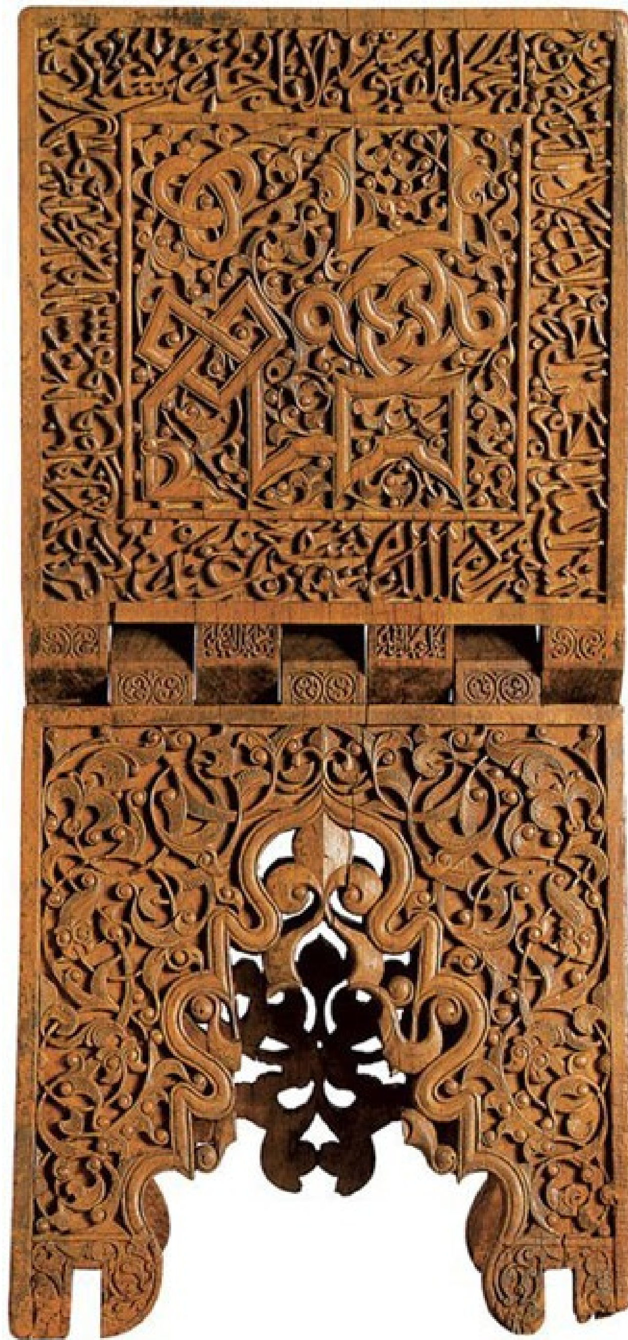

Pulpit for the Koran, 12th century.
Wood. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.

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Sacristy door with geometrical decoration, 15th-16th century.
Carved wood, 178 x 45.5 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

The peculiarity of woodwork is its division into many panels, as a precaution against climate rather than a method of principles. To avoid the shrinking of wood caused by the sun and heat, a superficial division into small superficial panels was introduced having between them enough space to ensure the shrinking does not destroy the overall layout of the panels.

Ancient Arab woods that have survived to our day are in the Muarabe, Cairo and come from the old Tulun cemetery. These old timbers torn from furniture and doors were used to prevent mudslides in the burial vaults of tombs. The oldest, reportedly from a tomb in Ain, south of

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Cairo, is dated between the 8th or 9th centuries.

One could then assume then, that the door from the mosque at Tulun, (Cairo Museum) with its relatively deeply carved volutes in a style resembling Byzantine, is close in date to the ceilings of the door openings in the Ibn Tulun (Cairo Museum).

The wood-decorative frieze in the Tulun Mosque contained, according to tradition, the entire Koran carved on its sides in Kufic. However, it was found that the friezes could only contain a small part of the Koran. Rather than cut and nail the letters onto the frieze that formed the background, they were carved in relief on the background itself.

The characteristic of woodworking in the 13th century was the diversity in decorative forms; panels were smaller, lines thinner and art forms more diverse.

This method of decorating tombs with carved wood panels seems to have become popular in the 13th century. The beautiful tomb of Salih Ayyub dates back to 1249. It is the oldest surviving example of joined, carved panels, fifty years older than the panels of Sultan Lajin, and whose very simple arabesques are part of the incredibly attractive hexagonal stars, displaying the early use of coloured wooden fillets and inlays. Bacciferous rods are still there as in 12th-century sculpture and in Sitta Roukayya’s niche.

During the reign of Mohammad Nasir, Kalaoun's son, while the ancient and purely Arabic style of decoration appeared in copper decoration, the style was adapted to small, geometric joining panels of sculpted wood arabesques which, by their form, were better suited to the country's climate. It was from this period that the minbar in particular was decorated with an array of polygonal panels carved in the most beautiful way.

The minbar retains its straight staircase with two solid sides which form handrails. This is preceded by a door, surmounted by a pediment which supports a small platform holding a bench, and crowned by a cupola.

It was always placed in the mosque, on the left (right for the viewer) of the mihrab, or prayer niche. Besides the door, all the beauty of the sculptural decoration was earmarked for both sides, formed from a complex array of many small polygonal panels, whose varied arabesques and drawings were highly diversified and showed a profound creativity, and a dynamic artistry which were never more remarkable than in very ancient times.

The most beautiful specimens are the panels from the minbar the Mameluke sultan Ladjin had made in the Ibn Tulun Mosque, when he began its restoration in 1290. It can be seen that each side contained a large circular geometric figure, decorated in the centre of a star flanked by eight octagonal panels, with alternating carved stars and arabesques, and four semi-layouts of the same plan, above, along the ramp and below. Although the panels are missing, the structure and the roof framing are still in the Ibn Tulun mosque in Cairo.

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Ivory chest, 11th century. Ivory.
Museo nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid.

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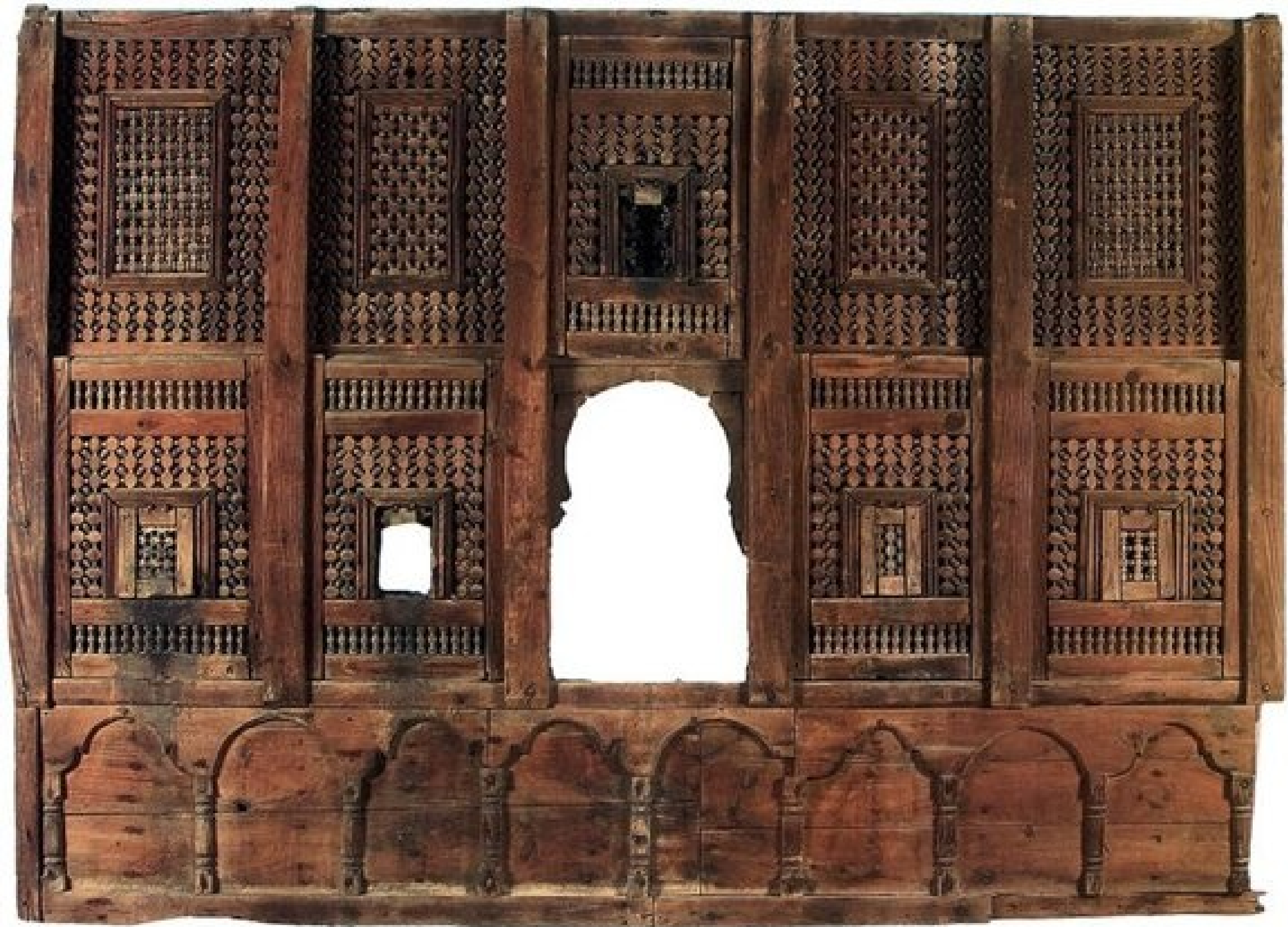

Panel with Mushrabiyya, Egypt, 17th century.
175 x 240 x 10 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

The typical minbar of an Egyptian mosque, encompassing integrity, elegance, finesse and an infinite variety of geometric patterns, is the beautiful minbar built in the name of Sultan Kait Bey, which is still in perfect condition in the Victoria & Albert Museum. However, whereas the minbar of the Mosque of Sheikhou (1358), or that of Sultan al-Moayyedi (1420), already indicates drier sculpting techniques with little imagination and charm, it should be remembered that the minbar of Kait Bey does not indicate a regeneration. This is may be very surprising, as the reign of Kait Bey was one of those during which architecture in Cairo especially flourished. The quality of stone sculpture there was matchless; perhaps Cairo absorbed all the artistic genius of its time. It was at this time that small carved ivory panels were introduced into wood panels, and were further surrounded by coloured wooden fillets. This results in a charming, picturesque and colourful effect, and the gracefulness resulting from the use of this tool is stunning.

One of the mosque's furnishings on which the artisan demonstrated outstanding artistry is the koursi. It is a stand like a pulpit where the Koran was placed to be read. The generally hexagonal surface supported by solid sides had, like the minbar, a decoration of carved and embedded panels. The Islamic Museum in Cairo has a number of them and the most beautiful is

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certainly that from the Sultan Shaban Mosque decorated with exquisite inlays of ivory and coloured wood.

There is another form of wood sculpture in Cairo, which was very unique to it. It is called mechrebiya or mushrabiyya. It was referred to as the latticed fence, which in some mosques was sometimes used to isolate tombs. The most famous set is the fence of the tomb of Kalaoun in his Moristan, an assemblage of balusters made of wood, shaped sometimes as squares or sometimes as circles, and presenting square layouts. Nevertheless, this fence, whose execution is neither lacking in strength nor breadth, offers less variety and imagination than the Mushrabiyya seen in private homes. They were big windows that stretched beyond homes into the street from which one could see without being seen. Here all geometric combinations were put to use, and this inexhaustible ingenuity is demonstrated both in the constant renewal of the layout and in the turning of the wood reels. They are sometimes produced by a turning machine, and sometimes the pieces are cut into triangles, into polygons, which are combined with the turned pieces. Sometimes joining battens were added to produce inscriptions and figures. Arrangements made it possible to reproduce a swag lamp, the seal of Solomon, inscriptions, an intertwined cypress or even crosses.

Ceilings, which were sometimes attractive woodworks, ensured the most attractive decoration in mosques or homes. The most beautiful ones had exposed beams, like in the Tulun Mosque, where they have either retained their natural round or half-round shape or have been covered with square planks. Generally, they are covered with a layer of plaster similar to Italian gesso, coloured and decorated in red and blue, with gold and white touches. The hollow between the beams, cut by rails, are divided into small boxes that are equally painted. The planks are also painted with arabesques and beautiful designs. Another ceiling decoration involved applying thick wooden fillets on planks that formed the roof and floral elements was added to the geometric patterns.

Beautiful ceilings were not found solely in mosques, as they can still be seen in some palace complexes in Cairo. Examples are the 14th century palace of Emir Bectak and the house of Djamal ad-din ez Zahabi dating from the 17th century.

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Door with ornamentation, 17th century.
Carved wood, 191 x 48 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Eagle, 796-797.
Bronze, height: 38 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Egypt was not the only country with the prerogative to seek, through skilful wood sculpture, to enhance the prestigious beauty of furniture in its mosques. During the early Islamic periods, in Kairouan, the holy city of the Maghreb, and well before the most beautiful woodworks produced by workshops under the Fatimids in Egypt, a minbar and a maksoura were sculpted-breathtaking works to which time has fortunately done justice. This minbar is entirely of open work sculpture. Its risers and staircase handrails are covered with geometric ornaments visibly inspired by Byzantine art. The stiles and crosspieces connecting the panels are equally carved

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with a dense decoration drawn from stylised flora. Three Arab writers are mentioned on this remarkable monument, and we know that Ibrahim Al Aglab, the first Aglabite sultan, imported shiny faience tiles from Baghdad that decorate the mihrab and the plane wood used in building the minbar. It is probably the oldest surviving monument of Arab joinery dating from the late 9th century. Besides the minbar is the maksoura, an ajouré screen, which separated the emirs from the masses during prayer. One cannot imagine a more beautiful Mushrabiyya. A Kufic inscription at its top bears the name of the man who had it [the inscription] made, Abu el-Temimi Moizz, emir of the Fatimid caliph of Egypt, el -Mostanser Billah (1031-1078).

In Spain, the Cordoba Mosque in its original state must have contained attractive joinery and cabinetwork. No traces of the old ceiling, replaced in 1713 with light brick walls, remain. This ceiling of larch wood painted red and gold was dazzling: “Gold”, according to chroniclers, “glimmers from the ceiling like fire; it shines like a streak of lightning in the clouds.”

The mosque furniture must have included a maksoura, [a mobile tribune for the prince] described by Ambrosio de Morales, and which also seems to have been mobile. It has been identified owing to the designation of Silla del Bey Almanzor (throne of the Almanzor King), a sort of four-wheeled richly decorated wooden chariot that was destroyed in 1572 and on which was placed the beautiful Koran which was, according to tradition, entirely hand-written by Caliph Othman. The latter was gold-plated, topped with pearls and rubies on a silk background and fastened by golden nails to a seat of aloe wood.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem still retains its ancient minbar with its rich inlays of ivory and pearl. It is clear that the principles of decor and technique were similar to those applied by workshops in Egypt. Its very important inscription reveals that it was made in 1168 by an artist from Aleppo, commissioned by Nour Eddin. It was set up by Saladin upon his restoration of the mosque.

The Great Ala’eddin Mosque in Konya has also maintained its beautiful hardwood minbar (ebony or teak), whose ramps are cut ajouré polygonal ornaments, and whose solid sides and pediment are decorated with a parquetted assemblage of small polygonal panels, similar to works in Cairo but whose relief is more pronounced and forms a bossing. On the right side of the throne chair, a quite complete inscription gives the name of the artist “work of the Mecquois master Zizeni, the pilgrim from Akhlat (Armenia), which was completed in the month of Redjeb of the year 550 (September 1155), that is, 70 years before the completion of the mosque where the great King Kai Khosrau I is buried.

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Stag, c. 1000. Bronze, 40 x 36 cm.
Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich.

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Ivory

From a certain period in Egypt, and based on wooden sculpture, we have discovered what role ivory played in inlay work, or even as small, solid and sculptures assembled on door leaf or minbar panels. Sometimes, these ivory panels are alternated with small pentagonal panels of ebony marquetry. Although these very beautiful works were often dryer and harder than those of wood, they never had the enchanting flexibility and grace of the latter. We cannot but blame the material and not the artists who were undoubtedly the same people who carved wood with great artfulness in the 14th century.

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It is not unusual to find a large rectangular plate of ivory on minbars, carved with a beautiful inscription running on a background of rinceaus in low relief, which decorates the top of the exterior door, sometimes bearing the name of the founder and the date. The Islamic Museum in Cairo has one bearing the names and titles of Mohamed Al Nasir I. There are two others not in good condition from the mosque of Sultan Shaban and four others with beautiful rinceaus.

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Cat-shaped incense burner, 11th century.
Bronze, height: 45 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Griffin, 11th century. Bronze, 107 x 87 x 43 cm.
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Pisa.

In Egypt it is rare to find Ivory worked without wood, although it was very easy to find it from Sudan. The Victoria & Albert Museum holds two specimens: a small cup with a frieze having the following inscription engraved close to its rim: "The righteous shall indeed drink from a cup flavoured with camphor", and on the other side: "Made by Mohammed Salih in Cairo, 1521". An inkstand of this nature was quite common in the East consisting of an ink base or container, at the end of a handle with nibs made of reeds. Under the ink cavity, decorated with an ancient-style floral ornament, is engraved "made by Sayyid Mohammed Salih at Misr (Cairo) in 1672."

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Among the artisans who established themselves in Spain, and who imported artistic influences from the East, especially from Constantinople and Baghdad, at the beginning of the wonderful Caliphate of Córdoba, those who worked in the ivory industry outnumbered all others.

This art is complex and was obviously influenced by the East, both by Byzantine and Mesopotamian arts.

The 10th and 11th centuries in beautiful Cordoba, Spain, were periods characterised by a supremely refined, luxurious artistry of unmatched splendour. A beautiful cylindrical box with a round lid, on display at the Victoria & Albert Museum, is a clear testimony. Its periphery is carved with interlaced bands forming four leaves, and among those on the lid are four eagles with their wings outspread. A small knob is used to hold the cover. The four leaves on the rim are separated by a star with broadleaved ornaments, and the same decoration is on the lid. It is entirely of open work sculpture, except for a frieze at the lower circular part of the lid that bears the Arabic inscription: “May God bless his servant, el-Hakem el-Mostanser Billah, commander of the Faithful”. He was the Caliph who ruled Córdoba from 961-976.

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Astrolabe, 1029-1030.
Bronze. Staatsbibliothek, Berlin.

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B – Metal Arts

Bronze

Some bronze monuments greatly made up for the extreme scarcity of monuments of pure sculpture, and enable us to appreciate plastic sensibilities of Muslim artists. Some of these bronze works can almost certainly be attributed to the fabulous period of the Fatimids, who reigned for two centuries, from the middle of the 10th century to the middle of the 12th century.

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Indeed, only two types of bronze are known, those for fountains or aquamaniles, and incense-burners.

The most popular monument is the famous bronze griffin from Pisa. It was allegedly taken from Egypt to Italy by King Amaury during the Crusades. It has the body of a lion and the head of an eagle. On its rump is thrown a cover from which hang, on its thighs and shoulder joints, four shields decorated with the faces of eagles and lions. The chest is lined with chain mail and two wings that spread out from the shoulders, spiked with fastened contour feathers. This beast of such a proud appearance and beautiful character is one that cannot be forgotten. Many details of the engraved decoration remind us of Fatimid art, like those wheels with shoulders joints, found in a few works of this art, particularly in the stars.

A deer in green bronze that is part of the collections of the Bavarian National Museum in Munich has been included in this series of Fatimid bronze art. Its head is crowned with soaring antlers, the posterior part of its body sags slightly on its relatively short legs, and on its shoulder joints is found the usual wheel. Its body is engraved with large rinceaus and arabesques, and its neck is surrounded by a trivial inscription in Kufic. Some traces of cracks would suggest that it used to have a handle attached to its neck and rump, and was thus used as an aquamanile. This is probably the oldest form of this utensil, a form believed to have been passed from Arabs to Christians who popularised it in the Middle Ages, first in the Romanesque period. These objects have, too restrictively, been termed copperware.

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Ewer, Herat, c. 1200.
Copper. British Museum, London.

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Ewer, Mameluke dynasty, 1496. Copper.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

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Copper Inlays

In effect, copper-encrusted monuments among Arabs do not give us any information regarding this industry before the 12th century; rather, we know more of its decline. However, based on the extraordinary beauty of the work during this period, there is no doubt that the industry previously had a long period of development in Persia and Mesopotamia. At the beginning of the Muslim era, compliance with Koranic prescriptions was broad enough to proscribe the representation of living forms.

In imitation of the Byzantines, Abd el-Malik made a futile attempt put his image on his own

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currencies. But when the Turks took control of the Court of the Caliphate and spread its authority into the provinces where they founded dynasties, this prohibition quickly lost its absolute character, since they had little regard for the petty demands of the new religion they had embraced. We must give credit where it is due, because it is owing to them that Muslim art developed admirably in the East. It would be very interesting to compare the currencies of the Artuqid and Zenguid dynasties, which in the 12th century bore the first human faces and representations that were later found on many bowls, ink stands and chests encrusted with copper.

One might also research the extraordinary spread of engraved copper in the Mesopotamian regions, in the great industrial development of mining, particularly at Argana Maden.

Formerly, all Asian countries, from Constantinople to Isfahan, acquired copper and even wrought copper utensils from Khapour and Argana. Diyarbakir in the upper valley of the Tigris, and Mosul on the Tigris, rich and powerful cities reigning during the Middle Ages, widely used minerals like copper from Khapour. It is remarkable that in the 12th century, silver coins were no longer in use in Mosul and were replaced with spun copper coins, on which artists began to engrave objects drawn from life around them; war legends began to be replaced with faces and even events. The king was sometimes represented seated in Asian fashion, wearing a turban. Sometimes, currencies were also engraved with horsemen.

A comparison of the monuments apparently indicates that decoration engraved in relief and embossed was the first method of decorating articles made of copper and currencies. Precious inlays of silver or gold only came a little later and began rather slowly. Mesopotamian art, or more precisely, Mosul art, named after the principal and famous city praised by Ibn Saïd, was noted for its predominant use of human and animal images in decoration. Riders, often nimbed, were depicted engaging in various methods of hunting, in which the Persians excelled, such as the use of the spear or bow. Riders, with an erect leopard on the horse’s rump, a falcon in his fist, are accompanied by greyhounds chasing bears, lions or antelopes. Crowned or haloed princes seated in Asian fashion on their low thrones flanked by servants, a cup of wine in hand, were popular on medallions, which also carried dancers and musicians entertaining them. The signs of the zodiac enclosed in small medallions bring an amount of diversity to the subjects. The most beautiful were those representing men fighting others, birds and animals. Long friezes of animals chasing one another, lions, panthers, antelopes, greyhounds, birds and hares in the middle of winding rinceaus separate the various zones of decoration, while spaces in-between were often occupied by ducks or flying water birds. The backgrounds were enriched with bold and flexible arabesques or a sort of T-shaped hook or iron. Inscriptions were written in narrow bands of Nashki characters, with rare examples of ascending letter stems culminating in human heads, as in the game of pick-up-sticks. It is noteworthy how similar these hunting subjects, by their decorative spirit and drawing forms, are to Assyrian bas-reliefs, the decor of Balawat doors, the Sassanian bas-reliefs in Taghe Bostan or silverware cuts of the same civilisation.

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Plate depicting a prince hunting lions, 8th or 9th century.
Silver, diametre: 25.8 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Tray, Syria, mid-13th century.
Bronze, diametre: 43.1 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Bowl, Iran, late 12th – early 13th century.
Bronze. Khalili Collection.

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Falcon, Mughal, 17th century. Copper.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

The characteristic technique of these early copper works is the use of silver inlays (gold was not used initially) and sometimes, but rarely, red copper. Each feature of the drawing, pre-engraved, was covered with a sheet of silver, and the intermediate spaces were covered with a black bituminous layer which hid the copper background and helped to highlight the brightness of the silver. The silver was placed directly on the copper, without being welded. Such apposition was so delicate and superficial that it disappeared with time and constant use, and it is somewhat difficult to see the exact work method. This method involved shaping the copper sheet according to the design, forming a groove created by a tool, and forcing a silver sheet

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into the groove. The edges of the grooved copper were then folded over the encrusted silver sheet so the two metal sheets held each other. The Arabs called this process keft, and Makrisi mentions it quite frequently.

When there was need to cover fairly large surfaces with silver, as we shall see in great inscriptions from Egypt, grooves were not only hollowed but were also dotted: the flattened silver sheet was then hammered and stuck to all the small nails that the knurling wheel had created on the copper. This technique is not an indication of the most innovative manufacturing process.

With regard to heavy pieces made of bronze alloy, the work is similar to that of champlevé enamel, with reserved backgrounds, and the design was formed by hollows into which silver was deposited, then packed and polished until the surface was totally homogeneous. When the copper sheet had thus been hollowed with a tool, and the silver sheet had been placed in and fixed, the artist’s work was only half done. He had to redo the surface of each silver sheet; the figures' heads and clothing, animal fur and bird plumage had to be finely engraved with error-free precision and attention not known to modern artisans. Mahmoud le Kourde, a typical eastern artisan who came to work in Venice, was so daring that he drew his first dotted line on a background of rinceaus and spirals, even though he knew that the silver sheet would hide this first work. Had some of these silver sheets not been destroyed by accident, we would never have suspected such awareness.

All these technical details also apply to Syro-Egyptian copper-encrusted works and those from early Mesopotamian times. The fame of the first Mosul artisans must have been great; many copper-encrusted objects bearing inscriptions reveal the names of Mosul employees who were attracted to Egypt and Syria by Mameluke princes, and from there emerged an art that remained tied to these early influences. Undoubtedly, the décor there changed slightly, as Mameluke sultans of Egypt and their successors preferred large lustrous inscriptions on plates, which drew attention to their titles, to subjects abounding in human characters and animals. Syrian copper from Aleppo or Damascus, while keeping the human characters and animals, reveals a keen taste for birds, groups of ducks drawn with their heads touching each other and forming a circle, the rosette of leaves and flowers and the use of gold inlays, the preferred decor of Damascus artisans.

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Sagger, India, 16th century.
Metal, beads and lacquer, 20 x 33.4 x 19.7 cm.
Private collection.

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Chest, India, early 18th century.
Metal, beads and lacquer.
Private collection.

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Chest, Goa, India, 17th century.
Silver, 57 x 40 x 32 cm.
Private collection.

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By approximately 1250, there was a sudden halt in the production of copper inlays. This date coincided with the Mongol invasion and the fall of the Caliphate in 1258 which hampered all artistic production in Asia. It was from these ruins that new dynasties emerged, and that Baybars established the Mameluke regime in Egypt. Although he constructed a great deal, leaving many monumental inscriptions, industrial art was apparently neglected during his reign. This explains the mediocrity of many objects from 1250 to 1270.

Fortunately, this artistic eclipse was short-lived and the arts flourished greatly once more

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under the reigns of Kalaoun and his successors. The art of inlaid brass was revamped, and produced this beautiful Syro-Egyptian school of the 14th and 15th centuries, which can be called the Mamelukes, which left behind uncountable monuments. Only an insightful reading of inscriptions reveals once more the important role the art and the influence of Mesopotamian, and especially Mosulian, artisans played in Egypt and Syria.

The radiance of this Mesopotamian renaissance in the West seemed to have given rise to a new Persian school, which asserted itself through a rather new style based on humans; human figures in medallions, a decorative process which had been abandoned in the West, were extended and made thinner. The dress was different: the Arab costume, the gandoura whose belt hugged the waist and the haïk that was worn on the head had disappeared. They were replaced with loose and half-floating gowns, and most often long ribbons knotted around the head that fell to one side. There were in addition anonymous Persian protocolar inscriptions, which were sometimes distorted. From these two Syro-Egyptian and Persian schools, which have survived to our day, emerged, around the 16th century, the Venetian school in the West and the Hindu school in the East.

On all coins, the desired relief effect was greatly influenced by the strong currency at the time- the effigies on Mosul's copper coins. It first began appearing slowly, and then it later invaded the entire coin and covered the inscription letters, giving a magnificent aspect to the object. The desired effect was no longer in the relief, but in the engraving and marquetry.

These types of copper became increasingly visible towards the middle of the 13th century: coins were covered with a rich silver adornment; real life scenes were engraved on them, and the figures on them were particularly stocky and firm in nature; their backgrounds were covered with decorations.

There are numerous copper objects signed by artists from Mosul who worked in Damascus, Aleppo or Cairo; it seems many Mesopotamian artists had left their countries of origin to teach their techniques and art in Syria or in Egypt, possibly because they could not endure the Mongol domination, or that their fame attracted the sultans of the two countries. This exodus is clearly demonstrated by all copper-encrusted coins, which by their nature and style, should be traced to Mesopotamia, although the artist on behalf of the city or the foreign person for whom he worked had not insisted on adding his own origins, about which he apparently was very proud.

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Bowl and cover, c. 1220-1230
or late 13th-early 14th century Khorasan, Iran.
Hammered copper alloy, engraved and
dulled decoration, silver and red copper inlays.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Brodinski Cauldron, 1163.
Brass, silver and copper marquetry.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Candlestick, Iraq or Syria, 1248-1249.
Copper, 40.5 x 40.3 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Ewer, Iraq or Syria, 14th century.
Copper, 31 x 32.3 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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The renaissance of the Persian group of the 14th and 15th centuries which inspired the Syro-Egyptian school, under the Mameluke sultans, apparently led to the formation, in the East, of a new Persian school that makes it quite difficult to link it to the primitive group of monuments of the late 12th century – the starting point – and which makes it hard to start from any particular period without any inscription bearing a specific name or date. Based on a good number of common features that they share with the copper from Mosul, it seems, however, that the copper to be examined may be dated between the 11th and the 15th century and that this school

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flourished in Persia, under the Mongol dynasty, thus corresponding to the Egyptian school under the Mamelukes.

This damascened copper art continued for a long time in Persia but, as the law required, it increasingly inclined towards finesse and dexterity, to the detriment of strength and the breadth of style and performance. A taste for nature had also grown in Persia under the Safavid dynasty, and artists knew how to give it increasingly accurate features in their decorations.

Later, copper art in Persia only produced increasingly unattractive coins with a very precise but rigid engraving, lacking in originality, and limited to a very small number of motifs whose repeated use became monotonous, engraved on backgrounds encrusted with a black glaze.

From this Persian school of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries emerged the Hindu school whose influence must be extended to the khans of Central Asia, particularly that of Bukhara, and also to the Kashmir Valley.

The huge quantity of works of art produced by this group comprises trays, bowls and especially ewers and coffee pots dating from the 17th and the 18th centuries. Some made by heavy copper smelting, with only an engraving but no silver inlays are often quite splendid or beautiful, with fine bail patterns, and were manufactured in Samarkand or Bukhara; others, made by copper smelting filled with pewter, engraved, rarely damascened, sometimes with *ajouré* ornaments, are ugly, shapeless and lean, and poorly decorated pieces of art poor and are especially works of art manufactured in India and Kashmir.

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Pilgrim's canteen, Deccan, India, 16th century.
Bronze, 30.5 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Nargileh, Rajasthan, India, early 18th century.
Gold and lacquer, 27 x 21 cm.
Private collection.

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Flask, Jaipur, India, 18th century.
Gold, enamels and diamonds, 24 x 13 cm.
Private collection.

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Weapons

In Egypt, Cairo was the centre of weapons manufacture; Arab historians talk of a weapon market that was very popular there in the 13th century between the Two Castles. For the Mamelukes, Damascus was no greater a capital than Cairo, and the fame of Damascene weapons, celebrated by all historians, has survived to our day. Weapons from Damascus are among the list of presents that Sultan Baybars sent to Baraka, the IIkhan of Persia.

Moreover, “Damascus” was the generic term widely used to refer to “blade” in the Eastern

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world, a word that is synonymous with steel of the highest quality. If there was anything cherished in the Eastern world, it was the quality of the blade and the strength of steel. With the setting coming only afterwards, a good number of blades we come across are generally of Syrian or Persian origin, which enthusiasts handed from one generation to another while adapting them to Central Asian or Indian handles, depending on their nationalities. Thus, at Armeria in Turin, the sword of Duke Emmanuel Philibert (mid-16th century) had a beautiful blade from Damascus with an inscription damascened in gold.

Upon seizing Spain in the early 8th century, the Arabs imported their arts and industries, and special weapons, most of which were patterned after Syrian or Persian models. Their swords, helmets, and shields are worthy of study. The décor of their swords and helmets was especially stunning, but they applied their skill more in the design of the former. The Arab author from Camous said they had a thousand terms to describe the sword. In the early days of the Hijra, their historians praised Yemeni and Indian swords, and later about those from Syria. Damascus was the manufacturing centre of weapons in the East. Various Arab manuscripts have dwelled on this subject.

While Syrian factories fell into decline in the 15th century, other centres became more famous in Egypt, Morocco and Spain, which especially rivalled the East throughout the Middle Ages.

Though it is quite true that the Arabs introduced this industry into Spain, old traditions of quenching steel had existed at Bilbilis and Toledo. It is common knowledge that Abd ar-Rahman II (822-852) restored the weapons factory in Toledo, and that El-Hakem II sent rich manufactured products to Don Sanche, King of Leon, as gifts.

Although Córdoba was the great capital of Arab domination in Spain, it was never a centre for the production of arms: Almeria, Murcia, Seville and Granada rather excelled in this area.

It is known, according to Makkari, that during the 12th and 13th centuries, Almeria was famous for the manufacture of all kinds of vases and metal utensils and weapons.

Writing in the 13th century, El Abou Said says Murcia was a centre for the manufacture of gold-plated copper and iron objects (steels, knives and scissors). Regarding Seville blades, the same author rated the steel as being of the highest quality, and said it would take a lifetime to enumerate all the delicate objects manufactured there. The industry remained in the hands of the Moors, well after the city's conquest by Christians in the 13th century. A century later, King Don Pedro had this to say: "I will give my son a Castilian sword manufactured in Seville, decorated with precious stones and gold."

The ordinary helmets worn by Spanish Moors were similar to those of Christians, but decorated differently. The Crusaders imported them and made the similarity even greater. The *almofar*, a name derived from the East, and frequently seen in Spanish documents from the Poema del Cid, protected the head, and had a form similar to those customarily used in France and other countries. It was formed of a protective cap that covered the head and left the face unprotected. Above it was placed the lining of the helmet.

Some helmets of Moorish origin are in Armeria in Madrid. Two very remarkable ones among them are attributed to Boabdil, the last king of Granada. They are decorated with gold filigree, niello, and beautiful geometric decorations; their style and art work are stunning. Another helmet of the same origin is found in the province of Almeria.

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War mask, Anatolia or west of Iran, late 15th century.
Bronze. Khalili Collection.

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Dagger and sheath, 17th century.
38.4 cm. Kremlin Museum, Moscow.

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Sabre and scabbard, early 19th century.
92.7 cm. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Swords, 19th century,
Central Asia.

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Iron helm encrusted with precious stones,
mid-16th century.
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul.

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Swords, known as perrillos, were highly valued in Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries. They bore a mark resembling a dog, and were manufactured by a Moor from Granada. A gunsmith of Boabdil's, he converted to Christianity and took the name Julian del Hey, with King Ferdinand as his godfather. He also worked in Zaragoza and Toledo.

During the Renaissance, Toledo became the sole epicentre of this arms industry, until the king made it a royal factory in 1760.

Among the Turkish weapons, we know a great number of remarkable arms which we can

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identify with some accuracy. These are armours and helmets that bear a mark associating them with Constantinople's arsenal. They most probably date back to the period after the Turks took over the city in 1453.

The helmets we know from private collections that are similar to those conserved by Constantinople were those that survived a significant robbery which took place at the end of the 19th century. It is likely, however, that the Turks produced some in other arsenals in their Asia Minor provinces, called vilayets; it was also probable that some might have been made in Erzerum.

All these conical helmets, round, ocassionally with vertical or oblique grooves, or cut panels inlaid with beautiful rinceaus, and high relief inscriptions in gold or silver. Their shape and especially their large interior diametre – unique features – clearly show they were placed on the turban. The treasury of sultans with old seraglios is still home to some of these admirable historical monuments.

In Persia, the demand for arms which characterised every epoch probably explains the industry's rapid development. The forms of edged weapons were relatively simple, especially when compared to various forms of similar weapons from India. There were about three forms: the Persian sword, curved, with a handle whose pommel curls backwards in a pistol grip and is equipped with quillons, the switch knife with a straight blade, and the curved dagger whose handle is usually made of bone or ivory.

In India, however, there was an endless stream of variety. Apart from arms, where the Persian tradition had made an impact, where the beautiful artistry of Muslim Damasceners was evident, decoration was generally quite different, and I often find difficult to establish a close connection between them and the arts we dealt with, be they the double-curved daggers from Afghanistan, the long knives from Peshawar, the Indo-Islamic weapons from Hindustan, the sacrificial sabres from Orissa, the gauntlet swords of the Marathas, the spears and lances of chased iron of elephant-drivers from Vizianagaram, Goorg knives, the kukri from Nepal, Singhalese knives and swords, and all these exotic weapons, koultars, chakras, saintis, etc.

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Dagger and sheath, late 17th – early 18th century.
41 cm. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Dagger and sheath, 18th century. 41.2 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Sword and sheath, late 18th – early 19th century.
59.2 cm. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Crescent-shaped pendentive, Spain, 12th century.
Khalili Collection.

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C – Metalwork and Rock Crystals

The use of engravings on stones to express thoughts or represent a subject dates back to very ancient times, and Muslims are not different from the people who had preceded them in this regard. They exploited the stones used by their ancestors such as jasper, agate, onyx, sardonyx, hyacinth, carnelian, amethyst, hematite, jade, but this was exclusively for their stamps, seals or rings. Only rock crystal was apparently used to compose beautiful works of art, cups or ewers.

Additionally, they apparently attributed to real stones some specific virtues which they

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cherished.

Contemporary texts confirm to what value travellers and writers gave to the beautiful rock crystal objects that they could see. Here is what Khosrau Nassiri said in the 11th century: “I also saw there (in Cairo) rock crystals of assorted beauty, artistically decorated by workers with taste... They were brought from the Maghreb, but recently it was said that they came from the Red Sea, and that they were shaped in Egypt.” And in the inventory he compiled of Mostanser Billah’s treasures, Makrisi mentions “several boxes containing a large number of vases, shaped like those that still hold beer today, of the purest crystal, smooth or chased. Two boxes full of precious vases of different materials, a pool and a ewer of crystal, a carafe and a crystal jar that is completely transparent and perfectly worked, on each of which was engraved the name Aziz bil lah; 1,800 crystal vases some of which were worth up to 1,000 dinars and many other pieces of crystal, including a box decorated with figures in relief weighing 17 *roks*”.

There is therefore a high probability that all these beautiful rock crystals, mentioned extensively by Makrisi, date back from the time of the Fatimids, and here again, this kind of work is not limited only to Egypt, which they ruled for so many years, and where they efficiently protected the arts, but also perhaps to Sicily, that was so prosperous under their reign.

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Earrings, early 11th century. Gold.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

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Five-tip ring indicating the five pillars of Islam, date unknown.
Silver. Private collection.

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Ring with Islamic motif, date unknown.
Silver. Private collection.

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Ewer, early 11th century. Rock crystal.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

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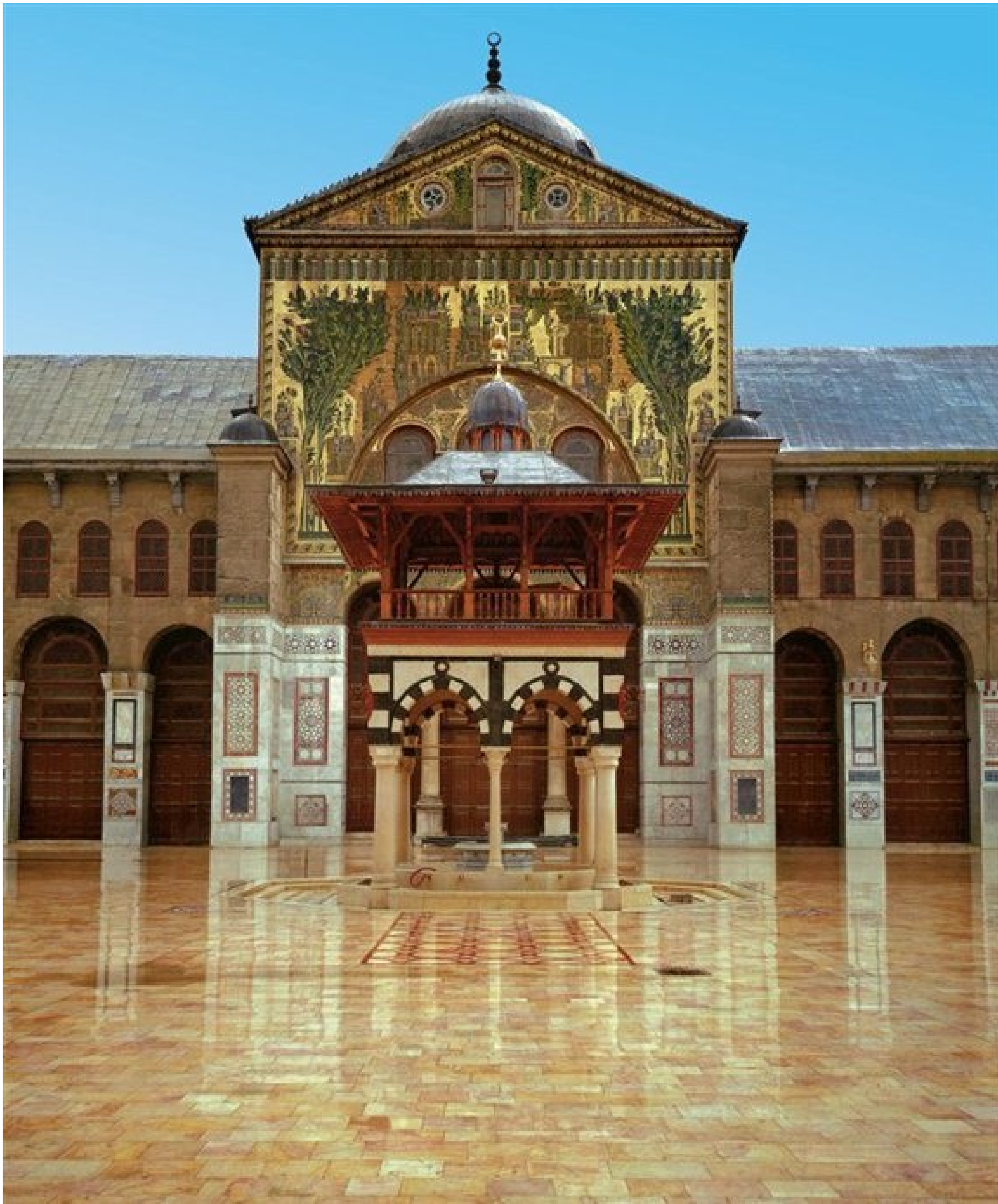

Courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque, 706-715.
Damascus.

D – Mosaics

The origin of mosaic dates back to the Romans who used it for the pavement of buildings, for overlaying vaults and walls. It was the result of the combination of small cubes and small pieces of marble of different colours.

The Byzantine *opus Alexandrinum* was a combination of small pieces of marble, porphyry and other materials, shaped and arranged in regular geometric patterns. The Byzantines popularised the *opus graecum* or *græcanicum*, a sort of mosaic made up of small paste-like

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cubes of coloured and gilded glasses, which was found in Italy in the 5th and 6th centuries (at the Tomb of Galla Placidia and Sant'Apollinare in Ravenna), in Venice, Sicily and Lombardy.

This process was evidently introduced into Córdoba, where the mosque has many examples. In his description of the mosque, Edrisi recounts that the coatings of the walls of the mihrab were brought from Constantinople by Greek workers who were made to come for this sole purpose by Abd-ar-Rahman. The mosaics there often are made of small cubes of glass on which were applied a gold sheet, covered in turn by a glassy coating, and on this glossy background were decorations, flowers, garlands, strap-work and even inscriptions. Those were perhaps local works, since several Andalusian factories were renowned for a kind of mosaic called "el-mofassas." There is no doubt that the early mosaics applied to the most ancient Arab monuments were done by Greek artists who borrowed from Byzantine traditions. Arab chroniclers called them "foseifosa" and unanimously considered them Byzantine works. The jewel-like, marvelous mosaics that sumptuously cover the walls and vault of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem cannot be considered any differently.

Ibn Said says that when Caliph Walid wanted to build the great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, he turned to the Emperor of Byzantium, who provided him with a certain amount of mosaics and a large number of architects to apply them. Ibn Battutah and Mukadassi say that "the mosque was decorated with mosaics of extraordinary beauty and that from the marble panelling to the ceiling were dazzling gold-plated mosaics" and "colours representing cities, trees combined with inscriptions of the most magnificent handiwork". Terrible fire disasters did not, however, spare any of these.

During the Arab era in Egypt, mosaics were made in two ways: it consisted of small cubes of marble applied in a mortar bed, or various marble fragments sealed in one piece forming the main background of the work, a process fairly similar to inlaying.

Sometimes it was preferable to fill the hollows of the carved pattern with softwood putty, especially of red and black colours, which simplified the work.

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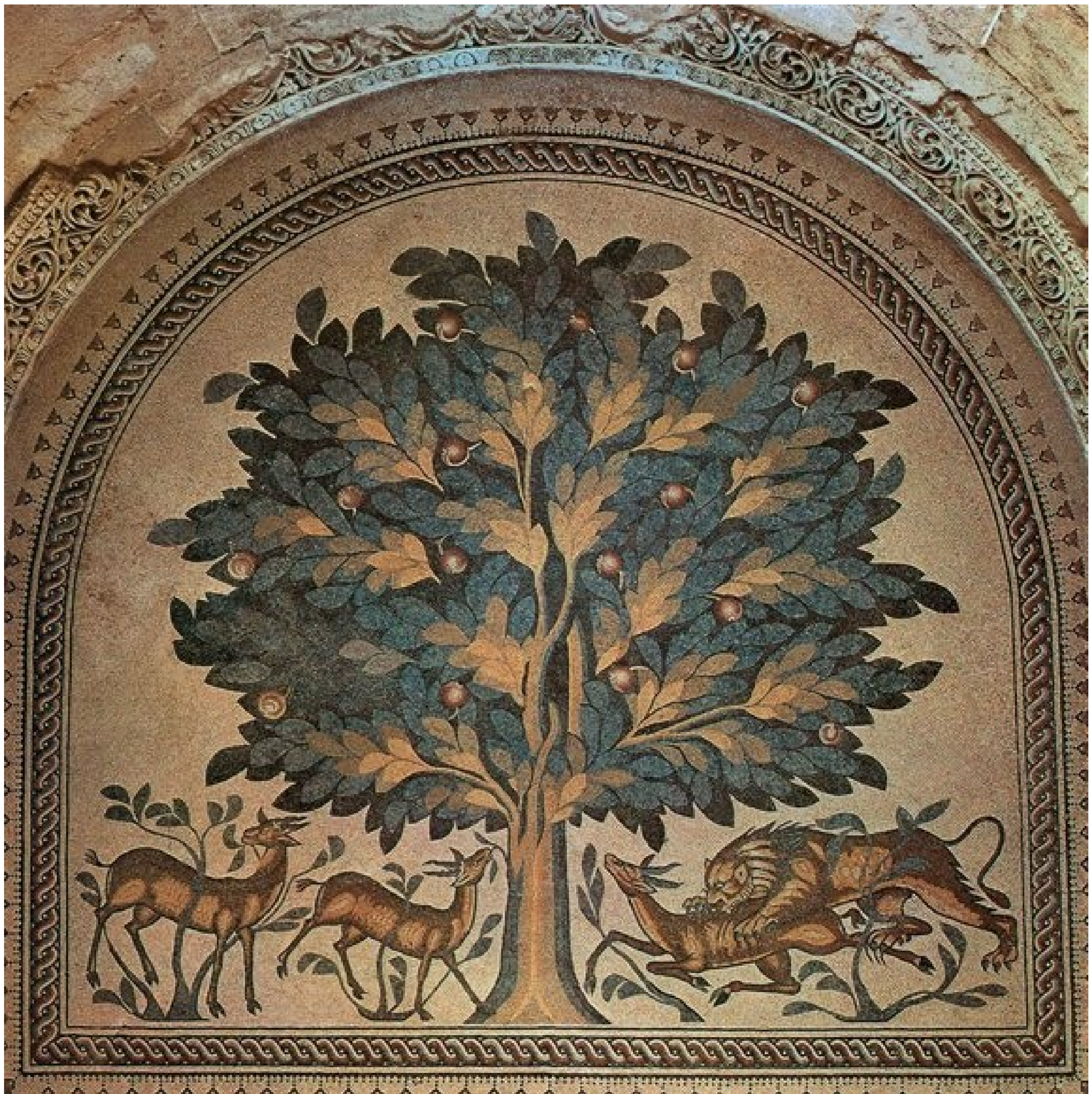

Lion and gazelles, 724-743. Mosaic.
Kirbat Al-Mafjar palace, Palestine.

The most commonly used marble in Cairo mosaics were red, black and white: the red ones had a particularly beautiful tone. It is widely believed that these marbles were imported from Italy, all polished and ready for use. However, there there clearly were some exceptions, as some amount of materials from ancient and Christian monuments was obviously used.

The most remarkable mosaics of Islamic art are found in the Mosque of Damascus, whose decoration dates from the 9th century. It is a Byzantine work of art. It has two dominant themes: on the walls of the stone building, there is a representation of a peaceful and islamised world, and through floral decorations, an Umayyad vision of the ideal city. [See illustration 1,

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illustration 2, and illustration 3] From then on, mosques became both a religious and political project. The Umayyad Mosque at Damascus was impacted by Byzantine influences through the works that were carried out by Byzantine architects and artists. Its capitals with their pyramid-like abacuses were already in use during the Byzantine period.

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The Pavilion of the Treasury (detail),
Great Mosque of Damascus, 710-715. Mosaic, Damascus.

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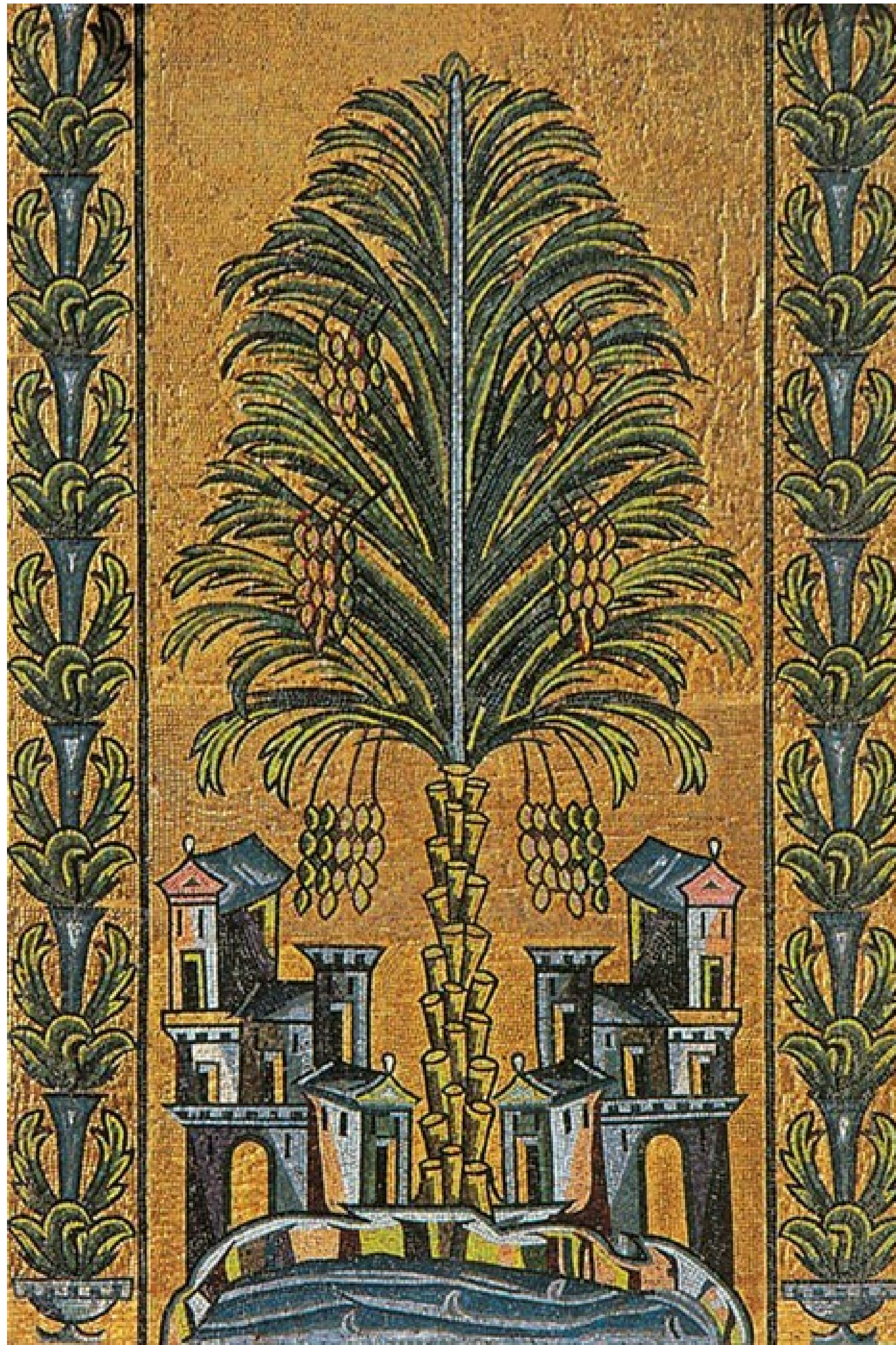

The Pavilion of the Treasury (detail),
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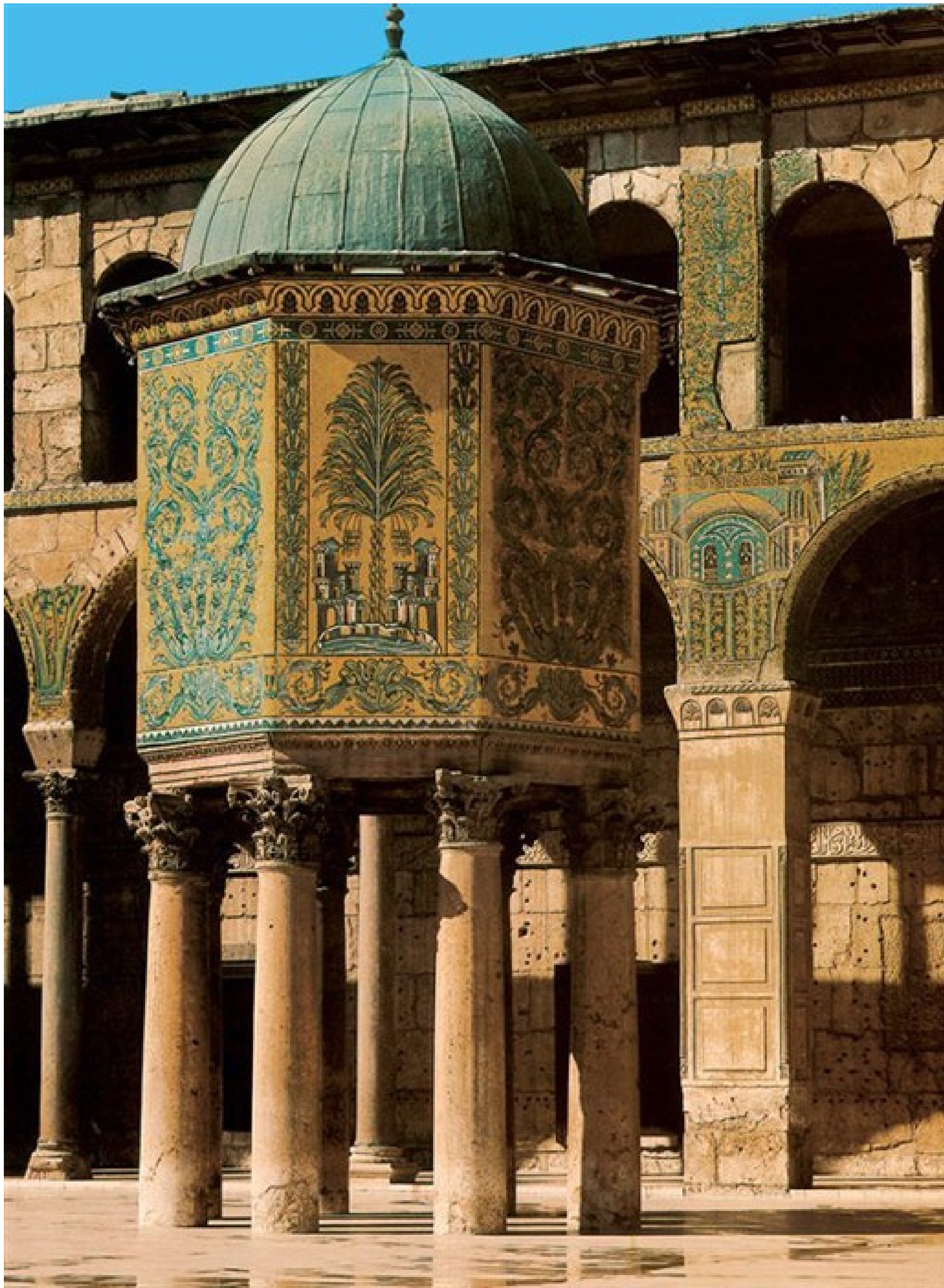

The Pavilion of the Treasury, Great Mosque of Damascus,
710-715. Damascus.

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Jug with ornamentation, Iraq, 9th century.
Khalili Collection.

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Panel designed like a mihrab with inscriptions from the Koran, 13th – 14th century. Ceramic, 62 x 45.5 cm. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

Manufactured Products

A – Ceramics

Eastern Muslim populations left behind ceramics of astonishing abundance and variety. We shall never stop admiring its beautiful plastic forms, its shiny glaze or its fanciful, free and rich

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decoration. Yet, we often find it impossible to know where and when exactly such species of ceramics were made. Indeed, it is very rare to find inscriptions like the name of the artist, place and date, the name of a sovereign or any indication on pieces of faience from the East, as it is common with encrusted copper or enamelled glasses.

It should be understood that in the case of faience with golden lustre, the golden glint on the ceramics is not produced by gold. Its very red lustre would not contain only copper; its softer glints, with a paler and more yellow lustre, would be caused by a copper and silver alloy.

Glossy faience originated from Persia, a country reputed for ceramic works: the beautiful decorations of Veramin and Isfahan mosques are proof of a high level of technical aptitude which is suggestive of centuries-long attempts and trials. Easier access to the East and excavations leading to the discovery of unknown fragments have made it possible to address this issue more directly.

It originated from the Maghreb, from tiles in the Kairouan mosque. Above the mihrab niche of the Sidi Okba mosque in Kairouan, the head wall is decorated with faience tiles with a diamond-pattern glaze. These tiles, decorated with leaves and stylised flowers, also bear some inscriptions. Based on the assertions of several Arab authors, tradition holds that Ibrahim Ibn Al Aghlab (756-812), founder of the Aghlabite dynasty, imported faience tiles from Baghdad to decorate the mihrab, and plane wood to construct the mosque's minbar. It would thus seem authentic that in the early days of the Hijra, Mesopotamia possibly mastered the techniques of glazed ceramics.

From workshops in Rakka emerged fragments of cups, vases and plates imported to Europe by Armenian merchants, which they carefully reconstituted with rather coarse loam, and covered with a transparent siliceous glaze that often flowed outwardly in thick drops at the rim of the base. Lustrous decoration has a rather purplish brown hue, dotted from its stay in the earth; it is either embellished with rich Kufic characters or with simple rinceaus, stylised flowers and closed buds. There are great comma-shaped patterns, with dark brown reflections bordered by by medallions, and sometimes by huge light blue stripes. These were probably made from the rejects from potters' kilns in Rakka, a city spread across the Euphrates, between Aleppo and Baghdad. During the early years of the 9th century, the latter became Caliph Harun ar-Rashid's preferred city. However, following the humiliation and murder of his Barmecide ministers, he preferred to move out of Baghdad. Given that the court of caliphs had always been the centre of art work, it is normal to suppose that ceramic workshops burgeoned there.

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Tile, Herat, early 14th century. Ceramic.
Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran.

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Panel with two flower vases, Syria, 1560-1600.
Ceramic, 187 x 120 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

Glazed faience originated from Persia and we believe it was equally from there that its processes spread to the east and westward to Syria, Egypt and Spain. When the Arab geographer, Yakub, visited Persia in 599/1221, Reï had just been ruined following a Tatar invasion. It was a very old city that was once powerful under the Sassanids. From accounts by Arab historians, it is obvious that under the caliphate of Mansur, the city was at the peak of its glory and could be equated with Baghdad. Ahmed Razi, author of *Seven Climates,* gives an exaggerated number of its mosques, its religious schools and its colleges. Eastern historians

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hold that 700 000 inhabitants were cruelly murdered here when the Tatars invaded the region. This exaggerated eastern account notwithstanding, it is possible the city had a substantial number of inhabitants.

Ruined by the invasion of 1221, Reï tried to regain its power under the reign of Genghis Kan, but Vermin and Isfahan, which had become great dynastic centres, did not allow this city to rise to its former position. Gradually abandoned, it became nothing more than a vast desert, where only tumuli indicate the place that once held this great city.

All 13th century enamelled tiles produced in Persia have smooth glazed surfaces, and it is only from the 14th century that richly decorated panels with large epigraphic motifs in relief, usually with a blue enamel coating, were seen, on a lustrous background, where flower rinceaus were reserved in white.

Birds and, very rarely, humans are at times drawn on the upper part of the friezes as decoration.

Apart from these metallic lustre glazed ceramics, which were unrivalled anywhere else, Persia also produced gilded ceramics with a transparent enamel coating, usually in dark or turquoise blue. The edges of the drawing were set with a reddish-brown hue, and embellished with golden leaves that were set in a muffle [a kiln without direct exposure to flames]. The decor is composed of drawings of plant stems, gilded flying birds, and sometimes touches of small commas of white enamel on a blue background. On these, there is a shallow but perceptible thumb-produced relief. This ceramic technique was extensively used on wall tiles, crosses and stars, producing a rare lavish splendour. Many specimens, probably from Tabriz, have been preserved in museums and collections. One of the most significant of these is a panel forming the niche of a mihrab.

This ceramic ware, which dates back to the 15th century, was still used much later, and during the 17th century, its techniques were applied to vessels, as can be seen in such examples as a rare mug found in the Musée de Sèvres. It is decorated with animals, shrubs and contrast on gold-plated sheets against a light green background.

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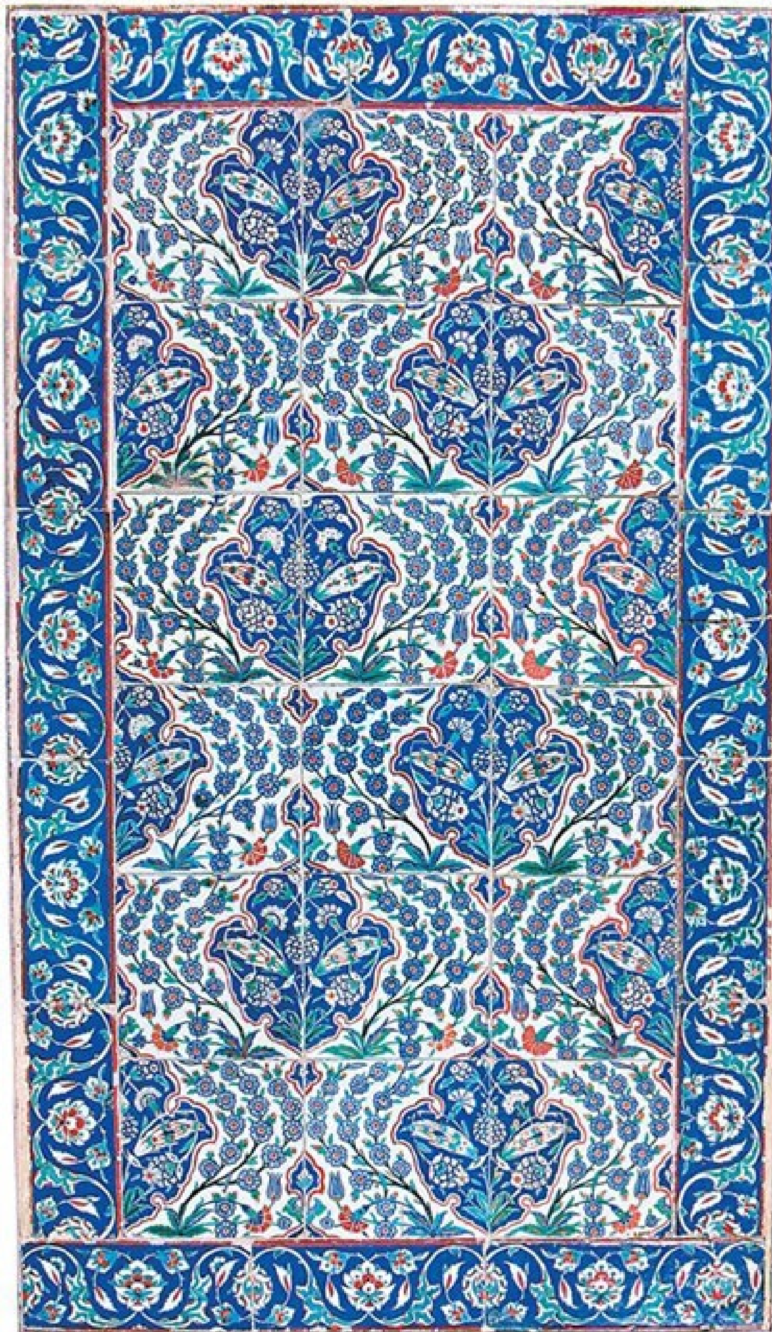

Panel with floral ornamentation, Turkey,
1575-1580. Ceramic, 169 x 100 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Vase from the Alhambra, 1878.
Ceramic, 108 x 50.9 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Vase, Spain. Ceramic, 187 x 64 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

This same method is used in the décor of some tiles of the Green mosque at Bursa. Within the next two centuries, Persia continued this art of decoration with lustre and attained the highest degree of perfection. The clay for the items became finer and was better treated; the enamel was more homogeneous, without cracks. The harmony of creamy white glazed surfaces with the lustre of burnished gold was of a rare taste. Persian workshops of the 16th and 17th centuries essentially manufactured bottles and cups. The décor sometimes included extremely stylised leaves on which a bird or a wild animal rests; sometimes it is a freely imagined string of animals, asymmetrically spread across plants and trees. Motifs borrowed from Chinese art

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and which reflect the influence of the Mongols who for long dominated the country are still visible: the dragon, Fire bird, the Fong Hoang or Chinese phoenix and the fisherman's stick in floral ornamentation. All these patterns abound in 16th-century Persian carpets. The golden lustre has a beautiful fawn shade; at times there is a mixture of two colours: buttercup yellow and ruby red. In some rare cases, the harmony is very subtle, with a thick blue or delicate green background. It was during the Safavid era, more specifically under Shah Abbas the Great (1587/88-1629), that this type of ceramics reached the peak of technical success and artistic beauty.

Chinese-decorated faience is also found in Persia. Genghis Khan and Hulagu had brought with them colonies of Chinese labourers, who remained in the country. For a long time, it was thought that China manufactured porcelain vessels for Persia, whose shapes and ornamental features were made to reflect Persian taste, while maintaining a profound Chinese feature. Most of the vessels were manufactured right in Persia itself, either in Chinese or Persian workshops, which applied all techniques from the Far-East in the late 16th century. Consequently, these white porcelains, sometimes with subtly engraved decoration under the glaze can be considered as truly Persian as their enamel exuded a quality absent in Chinese porcelain – its enchanting depth and thickness.

At a time when Chinese influence became more perceptible, some clay products attributed to the city of Kirman still conserved a beautiful Persian taste, in spite of the introduction of all the imaginary fauna from the Far-East.

Some siliceous half-faience vessels, painted with a transparent glaze, and decorated with a rather strong blue, are attributed to the city of Gombroon: they contain T-shaped holes, cut in the preheated earth before firing, and later filled with enamel in such a way that these *ajouré* sections remain transparent. These plates or cups, dating back to the first half of the 18th century, were directly influenced by Chinese porcelain known as "rice grain". We will see that Syria and Egypt may have used this method centuries earlier to produce stunning ornamental motifs.

We have seen that the practice of lustre which was born in Mesopotamia during the early years of the Hijra had burgeoned in Persia. Let us now follow its expansion to the West, along the banks of the Mediterranean, before coming back to the exciting destiny it encountered in Spain.

Metallic lustre faience then reached Egypt. Once again, it is perhaps Nassiri Khosrau who provides us with useful information about these ceramics. During a visit to the city of Misr in Egypt in the 11th century, he wrote: "Faience of all sorts were produced there… bowls, cups and plates, decorated with colours very much like those used on the cloth called boukalemoun. Shades change depending on the viewer's position in relation to the vase". Manufactured on the island of Tinnis, the Boukalemoun was a cloth whose colour changed with the refraction of light. This indeed is one of the attributes of metallic lustre faience. It is noteworthy that the Persian, Nassiri Khosrau, startled upon seeing these lustrous ceramics, could not have seen anything like it back in his own country in the 11th century. Indeed, the first time it was seen was in Rhages in the late 12th century. A collection found in Fostat and in Achniounein shows the same paste to be siliceous and white. However, instead of the transparent glaze, it is covered with pewter enamel.

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Demonstrating a real feat of ingenuity and matchless virtuosity, Egypt undoubtedly manufactured very enchanting ceramic vessels. A reading of the works of Nassiri Khosrau, who visited Cairo in the 11th century, reveals that he was surprised to see some very fine and transparent vases displayed at bazaars.

There are equally ceramics of Syro-Egyptian origin. There must have been a generalised production extending to many Mediterranean regions. This was also the case with another type of ceramics that was long thought to be of Siculo-Arab origins. This was because most of the samples collected were found in Sicily, divided into two closely-related categories: one has a blue background and animal and floral decorations with an olive-greenish lustre; the other has a white or blue background with a geometric, floral or animal decoration, in dark grey or pale blue.

Blue faience with embossed decorations is of Persian origin. Monochrome vases are usually sky blue or thick blue, with no decoration. They are iridescent as a result of being kept in the ground, and their style and glaze are similar to those found in the Louvre which date to the time of Darius. Many others could have been found elsewhere, possibly in Mesopotamia; but in this case, we only see a relocation of workshops of Persian origin.

They from one link in the chain of traditions that was never broken, vestiges of which we find in a collection of beautifully decorated, heavy and massive vases made of coarse earth which carry a relief decoration under a cover of thick blue or turquoise glaze.

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Bowl depicting two princes gazing at a pool with two fishes, 13th century.
Ceramic, height: 9 cm, diametre: 21.7 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Bowl depicting a prince sitting down, 10th century. Ceramic, height: 10.8 cm, diametre: 36.5 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Bottle decorated with flower from a plum tree,
c. 1560. Ceramic. Khalili Collection.

Faience wall tiles are most often found in Seljuq monuments. Wall covering continued in Persia in the Middle Ages, as an age-old national tradition. They made the most use of the technique of gold lustre whose assembled tiles gave the walls of mosques sparkling beauty. We may attribute to Persia yet another technique which was to witness resounding success in Western Asia, and which monarchs of the Seljuq dynasty used in the decoration of their beautiful monuments: faience mosaic on huge ceramic plates. This is one of the most sophisticated techniques. Smaller pieces were cut from a large, uniform faience plaque following a specific pattern. These pieces, either alone or with pieces of different colors, were

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then adhered to a support to form the desired mosaic motif. The whole structure was then plastered with a layer of liquid mortar which filled the crevices between the pieces, helping to hold the entire structure together. The walls were then covered with these mosaic slabs. Nevertheless, the coating of curved surfaces posed enormous challenges, which were overcome by Seljuq ceramists. They used four colours in these mosaics: light blue and thick blue (turquoise and cobalt), manganese violet, and white.

This procedure was used for the first time in ceramic coating on monuments in Konya. The first example is the Medersa Tai, built by Jelal ed-din Kara Tai, the Emir of Kaï Kaus II in 629/1251. The inner part of the mausoleum was entirely decorated with faience mosaic, the dominant ones of light and dark blues, and white (geometric, epigraphic and star motifs).

Another important edifice with a mosaic faience surface is the Sirçali Medrese in Konya, built by Bedr ed Din (1267-1354), to serve as a law school. Its light blue faience and terracotta tiles form a harmonious blend, a peculiarly Persian idea. An inscription noticed by Sarre bears the name and country of the ceramist who executed it. “Mohammed, son of Osman, the master-journeyman of Toûs.” Toûs is present-day Mechhed, to the North-East of Persia, near Merv, in Khorassan. It was in Toûs that were found the tombs of Harun Er-Rachid, Firdawsi, Gazali the philosopher, Nasir-ed-Din and Ali El-Rida. The magnificent city of Nishapur was a three-day walk from Toûs. Due to their geographical location, these cities of Khorassan were the first to experience the Mongol invasions. It is possible that in the face of these devastations, their craftsmen, like their scholars and philosophers, escaped and sought refuge in Seljuq courts.

These Persian artists who came to construct Seljuq monuments in Konya were most definitely the forefathers of those who used ceramics to coat the walls of the mosques of Bursa, the Green Mosque (1424) and the Ipek Han, which dates back to Mohammed I.

This use of faience mosaic, which probably originated from Khorassan, was preserved in Persia, where it can be seen on many 14th- and 15th-century monuments. In Sultanieh, it was equally used in the construction of the funeral mosque for Khoda bende Khan, a Mongol prince (1304- 1316), and in Tabriz, in the Blue Mosque, built by Djek Han Shah (1437-1468).

Persian artisans certainly introduced the technique into Turkestan and Samarkand, where it can be seen in the mausoleum of Timur (who died in 1405); the sole difference is that the cubic pieces there were cut with less precision. As such, there were on Timurid monuments in Samarkand magnificent ceramic coatings either in mosaic or in genuine champlevés, mostly in white and yellow, or decorated with rinceaus, deeply cut in the layer of the plate before firing, and that stand out as pierced and enamelled green on a solid background. It
can be seen in the Tilakari mosque, built in 1598, and in the Kussem Ibn Abassa mausoleum dating back to the 17th century. Here, Chinese motifs are predominantly used.

From Samarkand, the technique spread into India with the Mongol dynasty of the Timurids in the 16th century. In the Lahore palace complex are mosaics representing real-life scenes, humans and animals. However, its artistic work with regard to the beautiful use of colours and the lustre of the enamel does not parallel that of Persia and Turkestan.

Faience mosaic was also used in the West, in Spain and in the Maghreb. They are common on monuments in Tlemcen, where there is no visible sign of Persian influence. While geometric patterns are widely used there, arabesques are rather rare.

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During the 15th century, decoration with ceramic coating burgeoned in Asia Minor and Turkey, especially during the reign of Mohammed I. It was used to line the walls of the Green Mosque at Bursa (completed in 1424 by Ihias Ali) and the sultan's mosque. The wall tiles used in these monuments do not cover the walls entirely, but only the most important parts. The sandy reddish Terra cotta is enamelled without a very bright lustre in the following shades: two light and thick blue, green, yellow, white, violet and brown. As we mentioned earlier, the white enamel surfaces still bear traces of gilding by continuous muffle. The predominant colour is copper green. The motifs were borrowed from pure arabesques combined with flower garlands treated Persian style, but with rather rigid shapes.

This technique, heavily influenced by Persian styles, can be seen in ceramic coatings in Persia, in the 16th and 17th centuries, when lustrous ceramics had gone out of use, and wherever faience mosaic was not adopted. It was especially in Isfahan that this art developed. With the Afghan domination in the 18th century, however, many of such beautiful coatings were destroyed. Some of them were rather well preserved in the royal mosque, built about 1590 by Shah Abbas I. The style of the decoration there is strikingly different from that in Bursa: the inscriptions and arabesques there have lost their original significance; the abundant decoration of floral patterns and garlands there is similar to that seen on the carpets of the same period. While yellow is the predominant colour there, blue and white are equally used, and red is very rare.

This style of ceramics was quite unique in Asia Minor, and that gave these lustrous glaze to mosques especially in Constantinople, should be given pride of place in the history of oriental ceramics, on account of the beauty of its colour, its decorative creativity, and the brilliant perfection of its technique which has remained unbeaten for ages. It consists of square wall tiles; a setting with rather vast layouts often had to be located during placement.

The decoration comprised three basic elements: floral ornamentation with tulips, carnations, blooming roses with half-open buds, long and slender hyacinths in the wild; Persian sarmentose decoration with a yet-to-be accurately identified flower which we shall call Persian palmette; and arabesque which, in this ceramics, is relegated to the background. The colours often used are blue, green and especially thick red, a shade of incomparable intensity, overlaid with a very light modelled relief, against a white background.

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Hanap with leaves, Turkey, 1570-1580.
Ceramic, 26 x 14.5 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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In the 16th century, the city of Nicea was nick-named Çinili, Iznik Çinili (Faience Nicea), which clearly indicates how prosperous this industry was in that city, and it probably provided most of the tiles used in mosques in Constantinople and Asia Minor. In the beginning of the 17th century, the tiles used on the Ahmed Mosque in Constantinople were certainly from Nicea. A few years later, however, as result of civil wars, the city saw its industry decline and go into oblivion. Mosques can be sources of dates; their tile, similar to hollow vessels, can thus provide us with quite precise information. This art reached its climax in the 16th century, under

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the reign of Suleiman the Great (1520-1566).

There were flourishing workshops in Syria which specialised in the manufacturing of this type of ceramics, with a less strong, softer aspect and a blend of blue and green. In Damascus, there are still a number of ancient houses and hammams coated with this type of wall tiles; other styles are obviously rare. There was a remarkable inclination toward not just making profit but at least creating these local workshops.

It is even more curious that in Cairo, where ceramic coating was very rare, at least one mosque has it. It is the Al Sunkur mosque; it was Ibrahim Agha who introduced this decorative technique in 1653. All the tiles used in the mosque are of this same blue and green. Trade between Syria and Egypt had always been more intense than with any other country in the region.

The last products of Turkish ceramics in the 17th and 18th centuries are faiences from Anatolia, whose centre was at Kütahya. Today this name is used to describe, especially in British museums, a certain collection of tazzas, plates, vases and mosque lamps, which was confused with that from Damascus, with their characteristic two-blue-shade patterns on a white background, and white spots on a blue background. The decor is particularly geometric and epigraphic, rather than floral; even when flowers are represented, it is in a dry cold way that lacks the creative ingenuity and the decorative genius of Damascene artists. Ceramic art from Anatolia was increasingly graceful and simplistic, and during the 18th century, the production of dinnerware sets was greatly in vogue and comprised lightly decorated cups, tazzas, coffee pots, ewers and soup tureens with new colours, especially pink and yellow.

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Plate depicting a bird, Iraq, 10th century.
Ceramic. Private collection.

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Mudéjar-style plate, Valencia, 1450.
Ceramic. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Hispano-Moorish Faience

Since the beginning of Umayyad domination, Islamic Spain had always kept close ties with Eastern Islamic countries, and traded with them. In this respect, it can well be assumed that, unlike in other sectors, Spain learned more from the East in the area of ceramic decoration.

It was apparently from Baghdad that the technique of lustrous faience spread into the western basin of the Mediterranean, starting first in Kairouan. It is impossible to state whether it was introduced into Spain directly by Baghdad, or indirectly by Kairouan via Maghrebian routes.

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During the 12th century, less than a century following the Almoravid invasion (1086), Edrisi mentions that gilded clay products were manufactured in Calatayud, and exported to very far-away countries. A second account informs us of a factory in Jativa (in the province of Valencia). However, it is impossible to tell whether or not it manufactured lustre. In 1248, its potters received a charter from James I of Aragon, enabling them to practise their profession freely when they paid their taxes.

A little later, between the 13th and 15th centuries, Malaga was reportedly one of the oldest centres of ceramic works in the Iberian Peninsula. Upon the collapse of the Almohad Empire, the city became dependent on the kingdom of Granada. The construction of the Alhambra that commenced in 1273 certainly stimulated the activities of Andalusian workshops, as the need arose to decorate and coat its walls. We are given further insight by Ibn Battutah, born in Tangiers, whose numerous trips in the East took him to Malaga. In 1350, he wrote: “In Malaga, beautiful gold-plated pottery or porcelain is manufactured and exported to the most remote regions”. Next, concerning Granada, he makes no mention of faience manufacture. Two other Arab travellers – Ibn Saïd in the 13th century and Ibn el-Hatib in the 14th century – equally mention Malaga. Malaga was conquered by Catholic kings in 1487. Far from claiming that this subjugation razed its Moorish industries, it can be affirmed that their works lost their original lustre. Indeed, it is only within these two centuries that Malaga’s ceramic workshops witnessed an expansion.

The famous vase known as the Vase of Alhambra can also be rightfully attributed to the Malaga workshops. Judging from the shape of the characters and style of its decoration, it apparently dates back to the 15th century. The decoration is of charming and intricately interwoven arabesques, in middle of which runs an ornamental inscription. In the middle, above each of the two antelopes, a bold inscription runs around the paunch of the vase. The drawing is highlighted by a pale golden lustre that blends in harmoniously with the blue surrounding the letters and arabesques, and with a very soft creamy white background.

Nevertheless, the very nature of its decoration, which is similar to that of other great vases, and the technique of its lustrous decoration are strong evidence of the link between them. Its glazes are perhaps slightly flawed; they should be seen only as a defect resulting from firing, similar to that of the fragment of a huge vase at the Islamic Arts Museum in Berlin. At the very most, we could say that the Alhambra vase is subsequent to the others, and dates back to the close of the 15th century, and belongs to a collection that was not meant to be exported, but to be kept at the Royal Palace of Granada.

In Spain, too, in a distant past, there were vases of varnished clay, mostly used to manufacture tinajas, or huge jars for keeping oil and wine. Later, between the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, in workshops in Triana, Sevillan ceramists, who had been working together for centuries, continued to manufacture beautiful and large baptismal basins, richly decorated with motifs formed separately (rosettes, leaves and bunches of grapes).

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Figure of Sultan Toghril, 1143-1144.
Ceramic, height: 40 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Occasional table, Mughal, 17th century.
Gold with enamels and precious beads,
23.7 x 23.7 x 10 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Tray, Iran, 19th century.
Diametre: 45.5 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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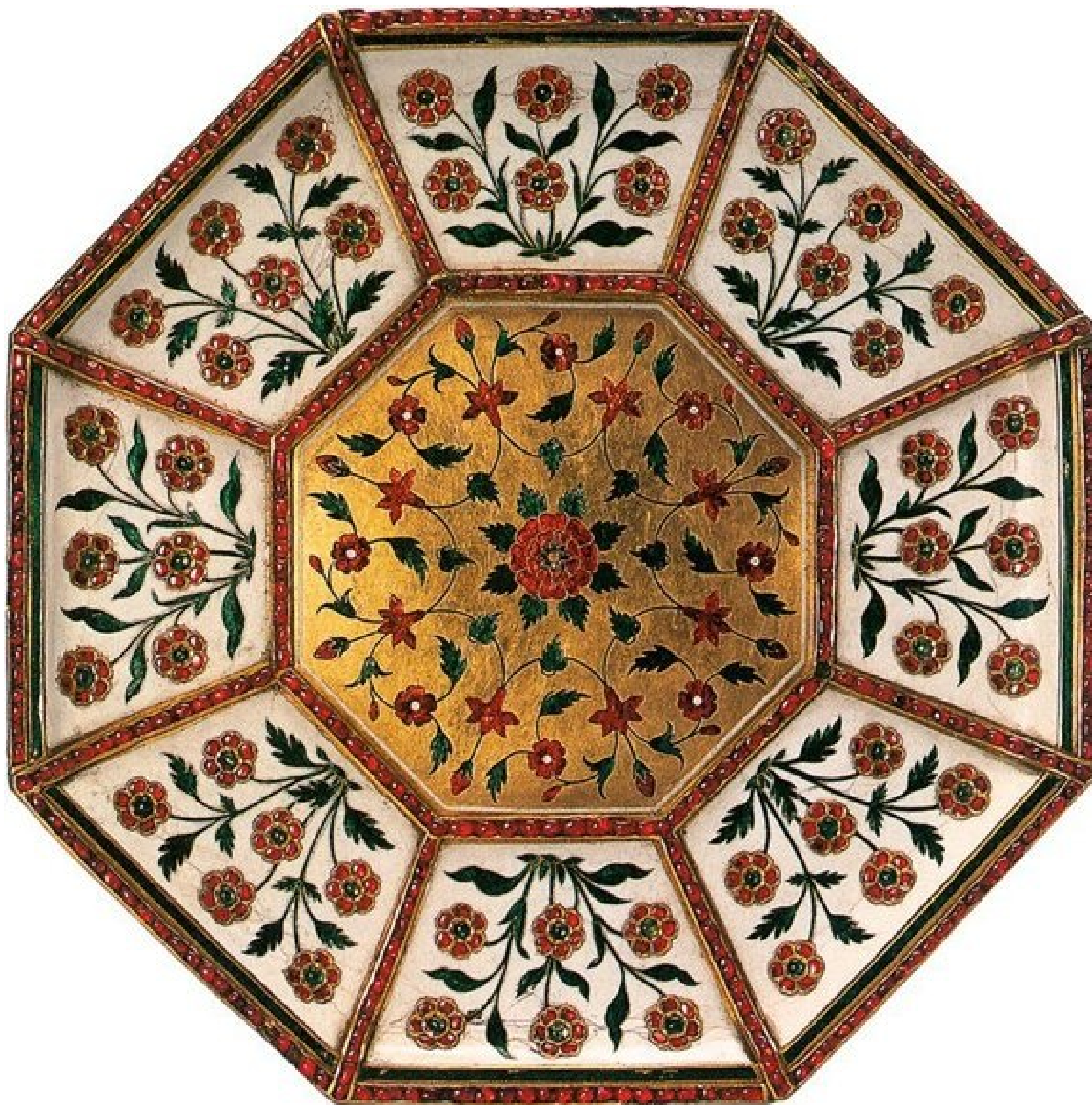

Octagonal tray with enamels and precious beads, Mughal, 17th century.
Diametre: 30.8 cm. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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Lamp bearing the name of Baybars II, 1309-1310.
Enamel on glass, 30 x 21 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

Specific books clearly illustrate the importance of factories in Valencia. When James I of Aragon became king of the kingdom of Valencia, it can be said that ceramic art was already well developed there, as he promulgated a special charter in 1248 for Saracen potters in Jativa, near Valencia. It is most probable that popular and common ceramic vessels were already being made there many centuries earlier, whose techniques continued into the 14th and 15th centuries through these light green enamel plates that have survived to our day. Writing in 1517, Marineo Siculo mentions “crockery and faience products from Valencia, so perfectly

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wrought and gilded”.

The decorative reputation of this beautiful faience was so widespread that the Senate of Venice issued a decree in 1455 prohibiting the importation of any ceramic utensil, other than the “majolicas from Valencia”, (already considered to be purely for decoration). The common characteristic of faience from Valencia, as opposed to that from Malaga, was that it had a less conventional design, with motifs closely drawn from nature, and reflected local flora more accurately.

The great blue inscriptions on faience are mostly found on armorial ensigns of the predecessors of Alphonse V of Aragon. However, it is very unlikely they were made before 1400. Under Alphonse V of Aragon (1416-1458), inscriptions had less decorative significance. Under John II (1458-1479), large blue or gold vine-leaves and sometimes crowns appeared. Gadroons probably emerged only by the end of the 15th century.

After 1500, the same motifs persisted, but were influenced by the Italian decorative style; the glaze became redder, and the background enamel became more yellow; the use of blue and manganese tended to disappear completely from them. A type of acanthus leaves equally emerged in decorative motifs.

It is interesting to note that following his return in 1514 from Valencia, where he went to study their decorative lustre technique, Galgano di Belforte, a Sienese potter, imitated this technique which he introduced into his country. He then made many glazed armorial ensigns of Florentine and Sienese families in Seville. Although no document or monument proves it, it is quite likely, based on the very close ties that existed among Andalusian cities, that there were many workshops in Seville specialising in the manufacture of lustrous pottery patterned after that of Malaga or Granada.

In the 16th century, however, lustre was extensively used by workshops in Seville to manufacture glazed tiles. Magnificently decorated ones were used to line the walls of the Casa de Pilato, and the decoration of the escutcheons of Enriquez Rivero is astonishing. Two frontals are decorated in this way in the chapels of the Seminary and palace of the duke of Alba in Seville, as well as at the Casa de los Pinélos and at the Palio of the Convent of the Mother of God.

We know how extensively the Orientals used ceramic tiles either as floor coverings or wall linings. Spain was no exception.

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Mosque lamp, 1321. Enamel on glass.
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon.

It is rather curious that in Granada, where enameled wall tiles are found in the Cuarto real de Santo Domingo, a former leisure castle, they are absent in the Alhambra, except for the floor tiles: some, dating to the 14th century, can still be found in the Sala de Justicia.

Apart from these plates or wall tiles with metallic lustre, Spain had a tiling industry that manufactured tiles called azulejos. These early azulejos of the 13th century reveal a very elaborate technique; they are ceramic tiles of a rather red hue, decorated in some areas with a layer of green enamel. Although they have endured to our day, much of the enamel is gone.

Apart from the rather small tiles decorated with armorial ensigns and sometimes animals,

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what constitutes the decorative feature of all the others is the geometric element. Their line combinations are infinitely varied. They are coloured with very light blue and green, supported by a rather sienna brown, whose vigorous tone enhances the harmony of the entire décor.

The Arabs used two different techniques in the manufacture of azulejos. During the early period, that is in the 13th century, the method was known as mosaic; stonemasons assembled small pieces with colours varying from white, green, blue, black and yellow. This method was difficult and expensive. Later on in the 14th century, small fragments were used to fill the small spaces between the interlacings of big white tapings.

In the 15th century, it became necessary to find a simpler and less expensive method: it was known as cuerda seca, where the drawing was executed on a flat surface, with a greased brush in order to prevent enamel patches from merging during placement, thus forming a kind of ceramic partition. It was equally the process of decorative embossing in fired clay with a matrix, known as Cuenca, which can also be called stamping. This process was used from the beginning of the 16th century up to the middle of the 17th century.

But for a long time, whereas tradition strengthened these practices, the taste for painted and polychrome faience, done Italian style, grew in Spain, and the ceramic art, known as pisano, experienced an unprecedented development there.

Apparently, the placement method used was that of faience mosaic, combined with glazed tiles of different shades shaped following a pattern and embedded in each other, and with colours ranging from white, brown, to yellow and copper green.

Nowhere else in all of western Islam can be found any samples of ceramic coatings more beautiful and more complete than those on some Merinid monuments in Tlemcen. In Tlemcen, the ceramic industry equally produced paving tiles by stamping.

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Mosque lamp, Syria or Egypt, late 15th century.
Enamel on glass, height: 33 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Bottle, Egypt, 14th century. Enamelled glass,
48 x 34 cm. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Bottle, Mameluke dynasty, mid-14th century.
Enamelled glass, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon.

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B – Enamelled Glass

As far as form and design are concerned, the enamelled glass industry in the East produced objects of undeniable originality. In the early days of Arab domination, the glass industry apparently limited itself to the production of measuring vessels, which took the form of discs or large rings, with specific dates on them. Some of them even bore the names of the first Egyptian governors who ruled under the Caliphs of Damascus and Baghdad, and the names of

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the Fatimid Sultans of the 10th and 11th centuries, which is sufficient proof that they were produced and used on a large scale in Egypt. There were equally potter's marks on the vases stating their exact capacity. There equally were found phials with very thin walls which certainly must have been meant for perfumes. A good number of these phials, in varied forms and with no decorations, have survived to our day in a complete state of iridescence, indicating that they had stayed in the soil for long or at least in the shadow of the tombs in which they were supposed to be kept filled with water or perfumes to accompany a corpse, as was the case in ancient times.

Some among these will need to be studied, especially those with moulded decorations. The most important glass objects which still exist from Oriental workshops include: cups, saucepans, bottles and enamelled lamps that hung from chains attached to the ceilings of mosques. Although glassmakers demonstrated rare skill in producing glass objects on a very large scale, the product was not always of prime quality, given that the glass was often filled with bubbles and defects. Enamelling must have been one of the artistic traditions inherited from Constantinople.

Epigraphy, through large inscriptions, and floral or animal motifs were used as decoration. Sometimes, though quite rarely, drawings of people either hunting or playing polo are reminiscent of the decorations of encrusted Mesopotamian copper. The bottom of the article is sometimes left undecorated or enamelled; this consequently renders the decor imperceptible, revealed by very fine traces of enamel. The colours used are red, blue, green, yellow and pink.

Furthermore, the history of Muslim civilisations in Asia made it easy for an industry like the enamelled glass industry to thrive in regions where other art industries had greatly flourished. Written documents incidentally authenticate this viewpoint. Damascus and Tyre certainly became very renowned for the production of enamelled glass.

An Arab geographer, el-Mou-kaddassi, who described Muslim countries in the 10th century, reveals to us that Tyre was famous for its lathe-cut glassware. Guillaume, Archbishop of Tyre (1130-1188), equally noticed the presence of a glass industry in Syria. Benjamin de Tudele (1173) mentions ten glass-works that he saw in Antioch, and the famous, widely esteemed glassware from Tyre. Jacques de Vitry reveals that the glass industry in Saint-Jean d'Acre was as prosperous as the one in Tyre.

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Mosque lamp, 1342-1454. Enamelled glass,
Royal Museum, National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

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Bottle with horsemen playing polo, Syria, 1300.
Enamelled glass. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.

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Mosque lamp and its holder, late 14th century.
Enamelled glass, 30.7 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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In the Middle Ages, Syria witnessed an absolutely amazing industrial and commercial boom. A 1277 treaty, signed between Doge Contarini for the Republic of Venice and Bohemond VI, Prince of Antioch, regulating the exportation of broken glass from Syria confirms the existence of glass factories in many Syrian cities.

After the decline of Tyre, these prosperous factories for luxury goods were transferred to Damascus and throughout the 14th century, the enamelled glass produced from there was legendary. Poggibonsi, who visited Damascus in 1346, noticed that glassworkers had set up

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workshops in a street, along the Umayyad Mosque, next to copper workers. All of these were destroyed by Tamerlane, who conquered the city in March 1400, and took all the workers to Samarkand. Thus Bertrandon de la Brouquière makes no more mention of glassworkers when he visited Damascus in 1432. Two factories that Guinpenberg visited in 1444 in Armenaz and Hebron, Syria, still existed in 1449, and have endured. We have even more accurate information on the glass workshops that workers from Armenaz, near Tyre, founded in Aleppo.

Early 15th-century author, Hafiz Abrou from Herat, is very categorical declared: “Of all industries in Aleppo, the glass industry is a unique one. Nowhere else in the whole world can there be found glass objects more beautiful than these. Upon entering the bazaars where they are sold, it is very difficult to leave, as one becomes enchanted by the beauty of these vases, decorated with such elegance and great style. Glass products from Aleppo are taken to be offered as gifts in every country”.

Saadi, in Gulistan (1258), recounts a conversation he had with a trader on the Island of Qieh. The latter told him of his plans to import steel from India to Aleppo in exchange for beautiful glassware that he would take from there to Yemen.

As for the possible Mesopotamian origin of some enamelled glass, it is evident that the glass production industry could well have endured in Persia and Mesopotamia, where it flourished greatly under the Sassanids. The tazza of Chosroes in the medals cabinet of the National Library is a testimony to this fact.

Ibn Djobair from Valencia, who visited Mecca in 1183, pointed out, as did Nassiri Khosran, that the windows of the Kaaba, engraved with beautiful arabesques, were decorated with glass from Iraq. This glass from Iraq (irage or iraga in Spanish) was manufactured in Kadessia, on the banks of the Tigris and exported to distant countries. An Arab manuscript illuminated in Baghdad in 1235, shows gold-plated and enamelled goblets, bottles and lamps, whose miniatures the artist must have seen in his country.

Finally, Ibn Battutah, during his journeys in the middle of the 14th century, equally mentions the glass-works in Iraq. He saw in Antalya, Asia Minor, glass chandeliers from Iraq, and vases of similar origin at the home of the cadi of Kharezin.

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Mosque lamp with inscription, 1880. Enamelled glass, 27 x 25 cm. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Imperial kaftan, date unknown. Fabric.
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul.

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C – Textiles

The study of Arab-manufactured textiles inevitably takes us back to those of the Sassanids, the Copts and the Byzantines. In this art, maybe far less than in any other, there is no sudden transition; the rules of change that characterise human activity apply here just like anywhere else. Gradually, through slow, successive and inexplicable stages, things change, and consumption environments, production centres, and declining countries where luxurious products are no longer in demand are abandoned for countries experiencing growth where

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markets are open to them. This is how art moves, carrying along with it development prospects that will be fruitful if the environment is favourable for growth.

When Egypt adopted Islam in the 8th century, industrial art was practised there by Copts, and this greatly influenced the nomadic conqueror. Regarding textile decoration, in particular, the Arabs rejected all religious representations that the Copts had borrowed from the Byzantine Empire. However, everything that had to do with geometry, the combination of lines, and which the Copts considered a belated souvenir of the ancient Phoenician civilisation, corresponded quite well with the Arab spirit and was to become the primary background of decorative compositions. The Arabs preserved the Byzantine decorative layout, the layout of tangent or isolated wheels, the horizontal lines of a diamond-shaped arrangement, and the Hieratic arrangement of aspectant or addorsed animals very frequently found on each side of the Persian Cape. There was often an inscription praising the person for whom the woven fabric was made, or repeating some verse from the Koran or the names of the prophet and his lieutenants. Inscription-carrying textiles are found throughout the East, and become accurate reference documents only if they bear the names of the owners. Inscriptions often accompanied the animated or linear decoration of the textile, and they constituted the entire decoration. Kufic writing reigned supreme until the 10th century, when Naskhi, a more cursive flowing script, was developed. As a matter of fact, however, Naskhi writing existed well before the Hijra, at least on papyri, and if the Kufic script was dominant, especially in monumental inscriptions, it was not the only script. What the Arabs considered personal was the arrangement with repetitions which later enabled them, upon their emancipation, to make the composition less rigid and stiff, and more flexible and imaginative.

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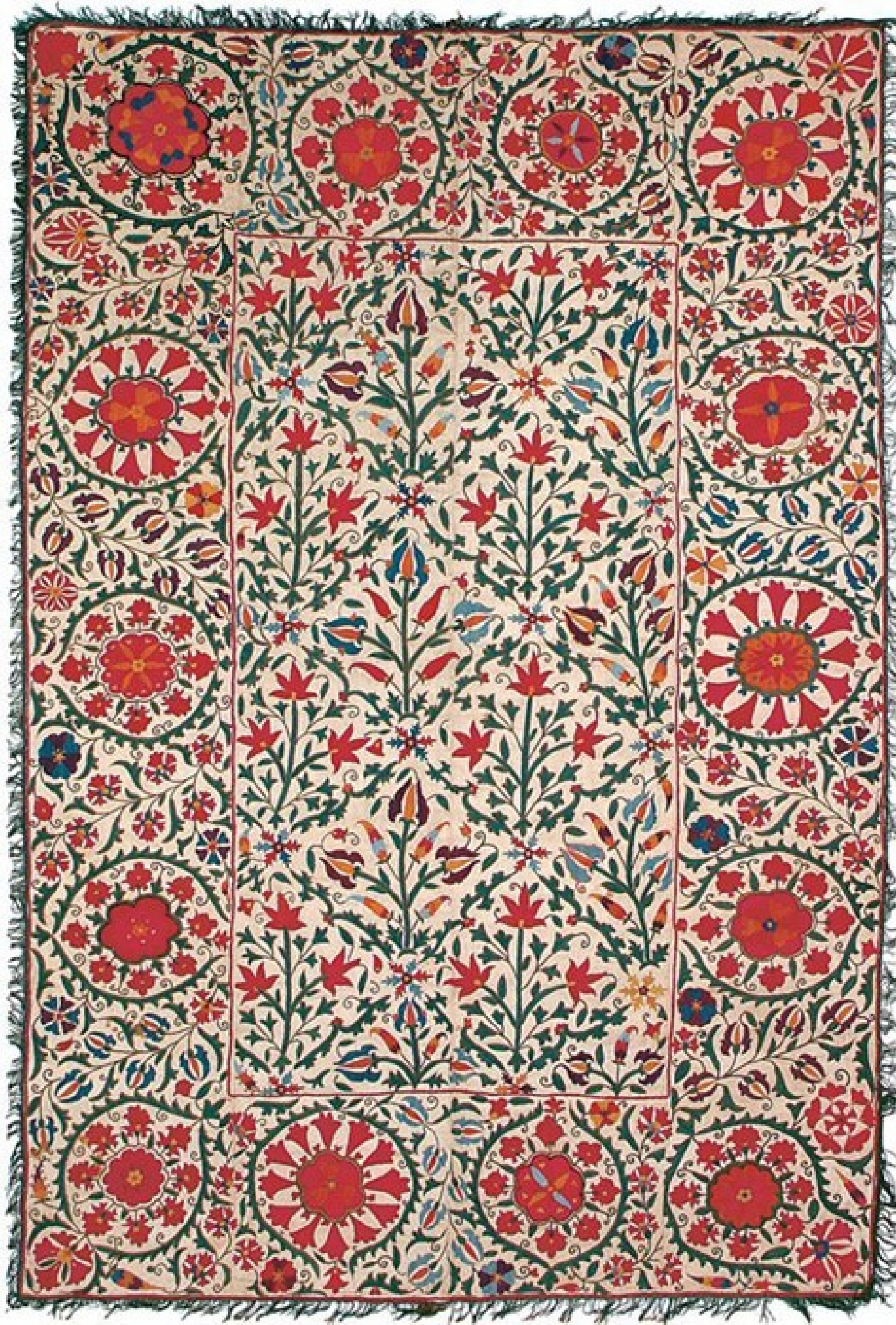

Tapestry with floral ornamentation, 19th century.
Silk, 200 x 130 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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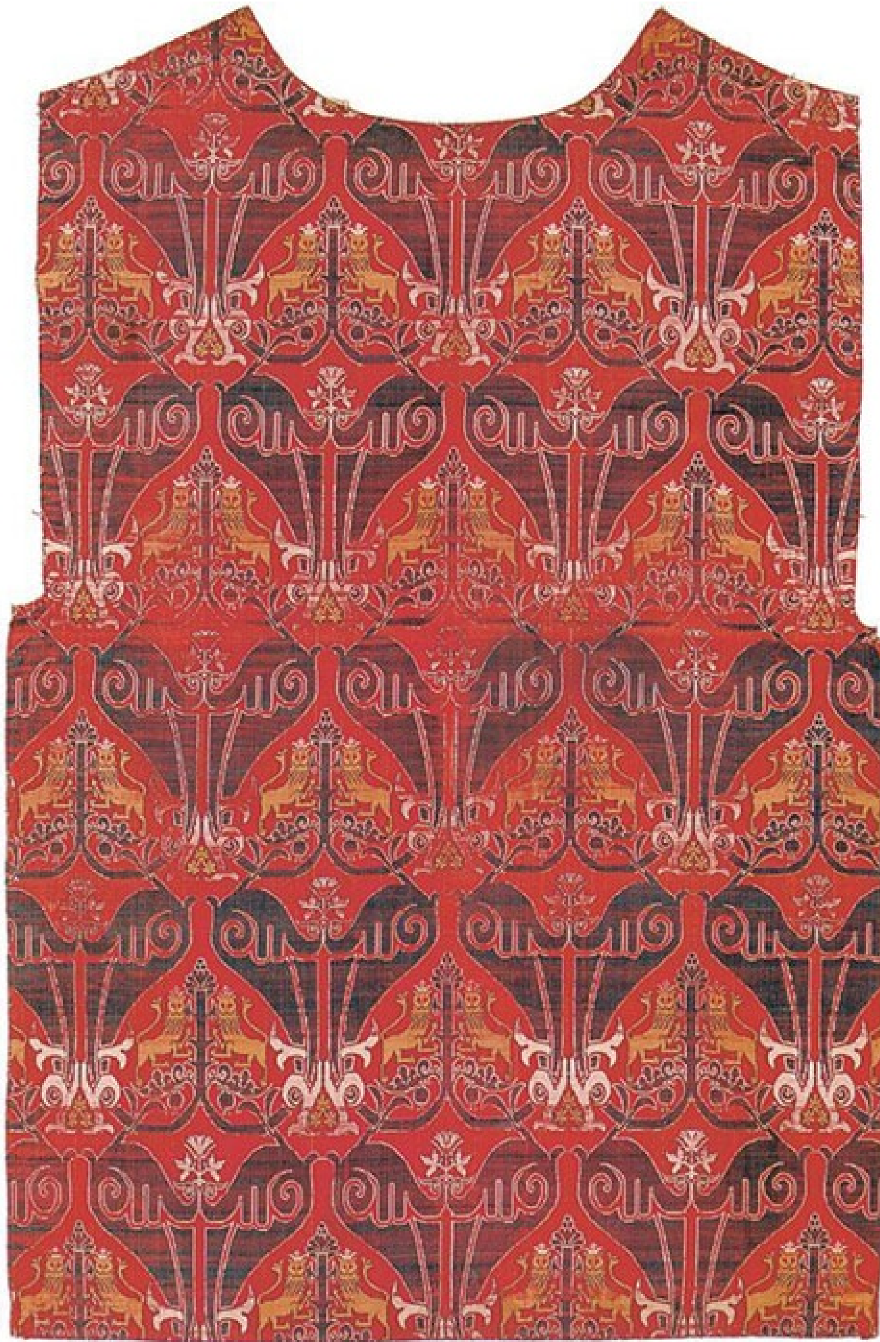

Web of a fabric with lions, 16th century.
Silk, 84.5 x 55.5 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Nonetheless, they found their tastes and aspirations echoed in Sassanian compositions, through the representation of war or hunting scenes, which they considered the best part of life. These compositions came to them directly through the Sassanids whom they had subjugated, and indirectly through the Copts from Egypt who had resisted these decorative formulae but ended up adopting them.

It then became very difficult to distinguish between textiles made in Baghdad and those made in Cairo. The first reference ever made to an Arab textile was in the holy city of Mecca, which

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had requested the main decorative components for the Kaaba from the textile industry. Egypt originally made the cloth that covered the walls of the Kaaba. In 157 (779), the fabrics and carpets that hung from the walls of the sanctuary were so heavy that their solidity was compromised. Later, the lustre of this decoration kept growing and the Sicilian traveller, Ibn Djobair, who visited Mecca in 1183, was thrilled by the sumptuousness of the decoration. On the exterior, thirty-four cloths were sewn together; these green silk cloths bore many inscriptions and some sort of niches with triangular endings. Inside, its columns were covered with cloths.

The weaving of silk in Egypt did not in any way dwindle following the Arab conquest. Thus Makrisi mentions many cities renowned for their cloths. Indeed, no cloths more lavishly decorated than these were ever seen until the reign of the Fatimids. A reading of Makrisi's descriptions reveals the marvels that these sultans had piled up in their palaces. One of them, Moezz li-din Allah, commissioned the design of a star representing the earth, with mountains, seas, rivers, roads, cities, and especially Mecca and Medina. Each locality had its name woven with silk, silver or golden yarn. Makrisi preserved an inventory of the treasures of Sultan el-Mostanser who, in 1067, abandoned his riches to his rebellious Turcoman guard. A reading of it brings to mind *The Arabian Nights*.

Alexandria was renowned around the world for its textiles, and Alexandrian fabrics are constantly mentioned in our ancient poems and novels. However, it was probably not a centre of production: Alexandria was a large warehouse from where great European merchants came for supplies. Nevertheless, no one cannot deny that Egypt produced very beautifully decorated textiles. In 1414, to thank Sultan Mohammed I for congratulating him upon his accession to the throne, the sultan of Egypt sent pieces of Egyptian cloth to the former.

Beautiful cloths, dresses embroidered with gold, cloths with golden flowers known as dabiki, and even cloths with animated representations of people were made in Damietta, Dabik, Domairah and Touneh. These representations included feasts, hunts, banquets, concerts, dances, and even fights and contests. This precious merchandise was transported by Saracen or Christian ships which carried them across the ocean to the Northern countries. Consequently, the accounts of Bernard the Treasurer and Jacques de Vitry come as no surprise when they narrate that upon seizing Damietta in 1219, the crusaders found among other riches, "abundant silk cloths with the merchants".

Other travellers have praised Egyptian textiles; Ibn Battutah especially praised woollen cloths from Behnessa. Nassiri Khosrau confessed never having seen anywhere else such beautiful woollen cloths for turbans, except in Asyûþ; so beautiful they were that they could pass for silk fabrics. Tinnis was equally renowned for its fine batistes that weavers decorated with bright colours. Nassiri even reveals that Tinnis was home to a tiraz, a royal workshop that manufactured vestments only for Egyptian sovereigns. "A king from Fars", he wrote, "gave 20, 000 pieces of gold for a dress probably to come from the royal factory; but he waited so many years for it that he asked his ambassador to cancel the order". The marvellous star called houkalemoun, whose colour varied with daylight hours, was equally manufactured in Tinnis. It was used as a saddle cover and bed covering. A dress called hadna, which took only two rolls of yarn, was produced there for the Kabyle. The rest of it was in gold.

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Tapestry, India, 17th century.
Silk, 180 x 109 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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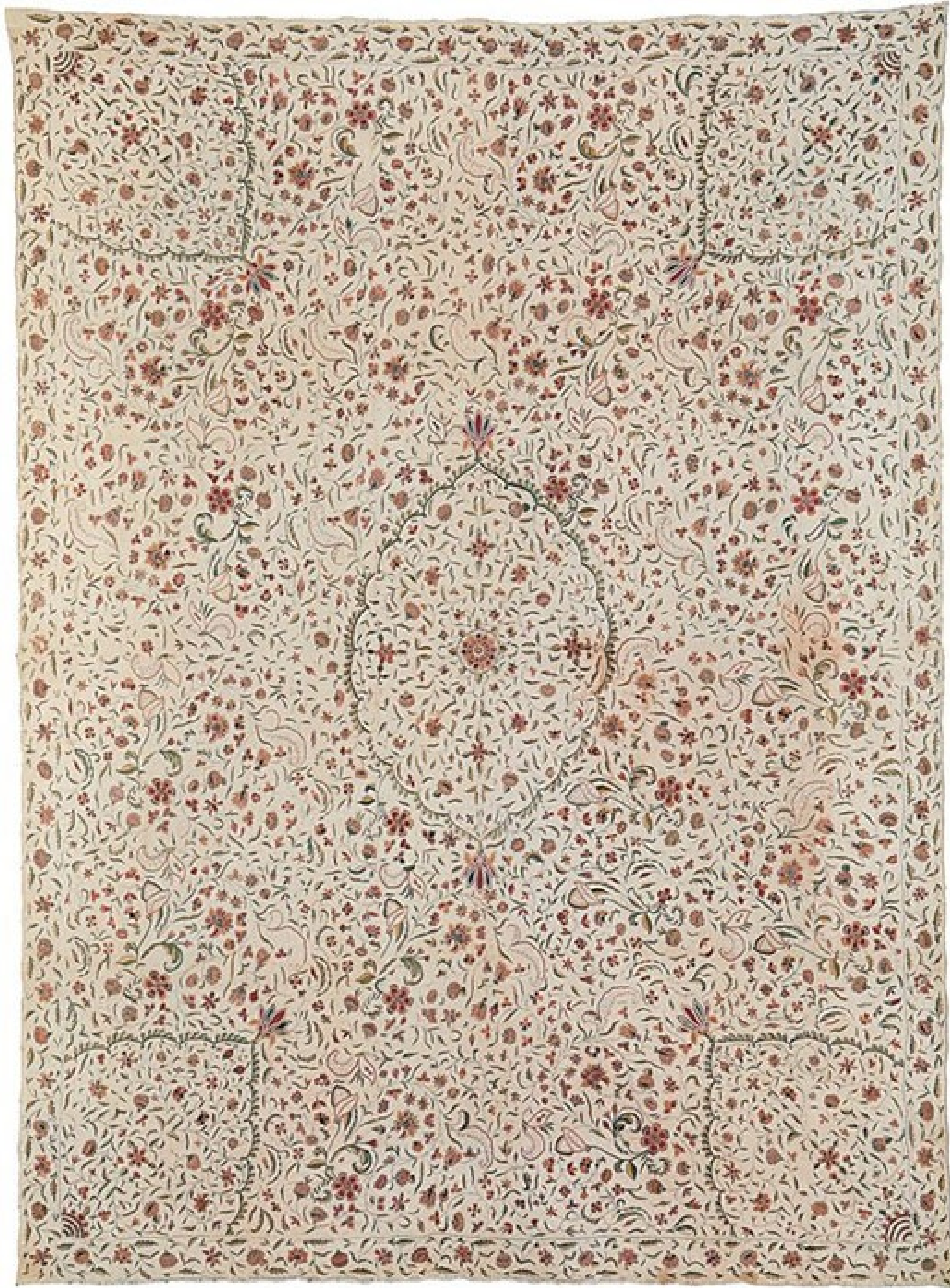

Bedspread with floral ornamentation, India,
18th century. Cotton and silk, 270 x 198.5 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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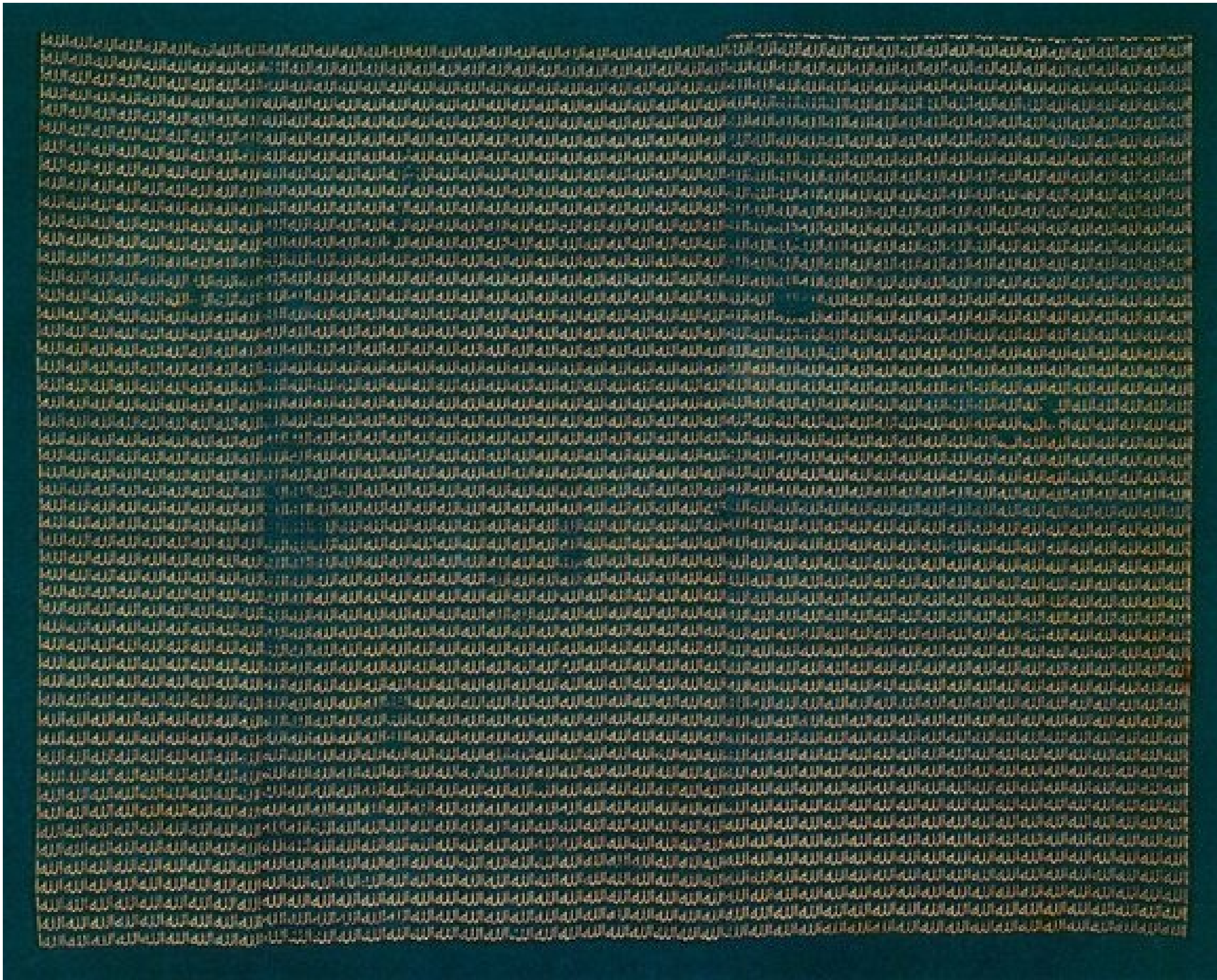

Repetition of the word Allah, 18th century.
Silk, 130 x 158 cm. Khalili Collection.

The courts of the Mameluke rulers were filled with unbridled luxury. Although they loved sumptuous cloths, their entourage sometimes loved them more. Emir Salar became famous when he introduced a new style of jackets made of linen from Baalbek to En-Nasir's court. They were beautifully decorated and adorned with precious stones. Silk was very common and it was used to make pennants, gonfanons, servants' clothes, caparisons for horses, and war and hunting tents. Tirazes wove cloths with inscriptions or emblems for the sovereign as well as his entourage. These goods were certainly used as gifts in the diplomatic milieu. All the treasures of Muslim princes included silk and golden cloths, which played the same role as money and were used for commercial transactions: some vassals used them to pay tributes to their sovereigns. Many Western books refer to the commercial importation of these textiles to the West. In the Middle Ages, Damascus and Aleppo were very important places where trade fairs that attracted many merchants were organised. According to 8th-century chroniclers, caravans came back from there filled with all types of silk or purple fabrics, silk mattresses and cushions, skilfully embroidered with the aid of a needle, and very expensive pavilions and tents.

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This explains why the crusaders focused on attacking these caravans. Whereas woollen cloth from Antioch is rarely mentioned in the 12th century, in Chretien de Troyes' novel, *Perceval*, for example, it is very common in 13th- and 14th-century inventories. Included in a 1295 inventory of the Saint Paul's Cathedral in London is a cope, made of black cloth from Antioch, on which ornaments are embroidered in gold thread. Another 1315 inventory from Canterbury Cathedral mentions a red chasuble, presumably from Antioch, with embroidered red birds, and also red cloths with blue birds having golden heads (this should be noted, as we will meet silk with similar features), or blue cloths with golden birds.

Precious textiles were equally produced in Cyprus, as Chrétien de Troyes refers to this as early as the 12th century. However, it was only in the 13th century that factories sprouted there. The Lusignans favoured the establishment of factories in the major cities of their kingdom. Nicosia produced silk cloths comparable to those of Damascus, which were exported to Europe as damask from Cyprus- silk brocades with gold wefts. The dyeing there was renowned for its bright and strong colours. Gold from Cyprus, the craze of the Middle Ages, and imitated by 15th-century Italian braid-makers, was nothing but these little gold cordonnets, still very skilfully woven today by Cypriot women.

Silk naps were also produced in Damascus from the 7th or 8th century. In his geography, Edrisi asserts that it equally manufactured silk fabrics and filoselle silk, and especially very expensive and superbly woven brocades, which, according to him, paralleled the most beautiful productions of Isfahan and Nishapur.

As a real Venetian with a good taste, Marco Polo could not help but notice the beauty of silk goods manufactured in Central Asia. When he arrived at the court of the Khan of Tartary, he was stunned by the splendour of the dresses of these Barbarians. Even outpost beds were covered with sumptuous silk sheetings. When he arrived in Persia, the beauty of the gold and silk sheetings left him awestruck, and he noticed the high volume they exported. Kazbin, the former Parthian Empire, was especially renowned. Everywhere he turned, he saw the same crafts made by Turcomans, and in Mosul. There, silk fabrics woven with gold yarn were called mosulins, which gave rise to the name muslin, for cotton fabrics.

In addition to purely decorative motifs, fabrics in Persia and Asia Minor equally bore the portraits of rulers. Included among these are those that were displayed in palaces in Baghdad, dating back to the reign of Caliph Motawakkel, who died in 861.

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Fabric with a warrior and prisoner, Iran,
16th century. Silk, 128 x 67 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Carpet, Iran, c. 1600.
Silk, silver wire, 249 x 139 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

D – Carpets

In the Middle Ages, the word carpet could refer to many different things. Here we shall refer solely to looped or knot-carpets, that is large pieces woven on looms, and in which wool or silk, with loops overflowing from the bottom of the weft, were then trimmed with scissors, forming a surface of thick and flexible wool.

All descriptions by ancient authors of pieces called “carpets”, could therefore be very

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misleading, were we not to examine them critically.

It definitely seems that Egypt was not familiar with the knotted carpet; from the descriptions of Arab authors, we are left with the impression they referred to mere silk fabrics interwoven with gold or silver threads, with representations of complicated patterns. Regarding this, it would be important to read the inventory of Mostanser Billah's treasure, one of the Fatimid caliphs of Cairo.

At around the same periods, Persia perhaps produced similar very sumptuous and precious textiles, meant to be worn or used as veils or door curtains. This textile was seemingly nothing compared to the carpets that were to be spread on the floors of mosques or palaces several centuries later meant to be treaded on by worshipers or subjects. Thus Yakout refers to Kachan, founded by Zobeida, Harun ar-Rashid's wife, in his *Geographical Dictionary* as being famous for its carpets woven with gold, its brocades and its taffeta. It is true that at the same time, Vacant refers to Van as being equally famous for its very smooth carpets, and el-Mou-kaddassi, another geographer said Toûs was a city that harboured a good number of weaving mills, where workers wove wool.

In speaking of the carpet industry in Asia Minor and in the Seljuq Empire, Marco Polo praised these carpets as the most beautifully coloured in the world and identified the Armenians and Greeks as the producers of these beautiful carpets.

The artistic relationship between all the formulae for decorating carpets is apparently very much linked to those of other arts of the same period: copper, ceramics, miniatures and bookbinding. Without denying the influence Chinese arts must have had on Persia from those ancient times, and knowing that Hulagu brought Chinese artisans, ceramists and weavers, it is nonetheless certain that such influence from Chinese arts was never perhaps greatly felt by Persian artists until the reign of Shah Abbas I. This ruler attracted Chinese artists to his court and urged his artisans to imitate them. This, therefore, led to a high importation of Chinese porcelain into Persia and workshops were set up in Persia for the production of porcelain.

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Prayer carpet known as Bellini, 16th century.
Silk, 156 x 100 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Carpet with medallion, 16th century.
Silk, 248 x 199 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Prophet Muhammad travelling at night, 1539-1543.
Miniature. British Library, London.

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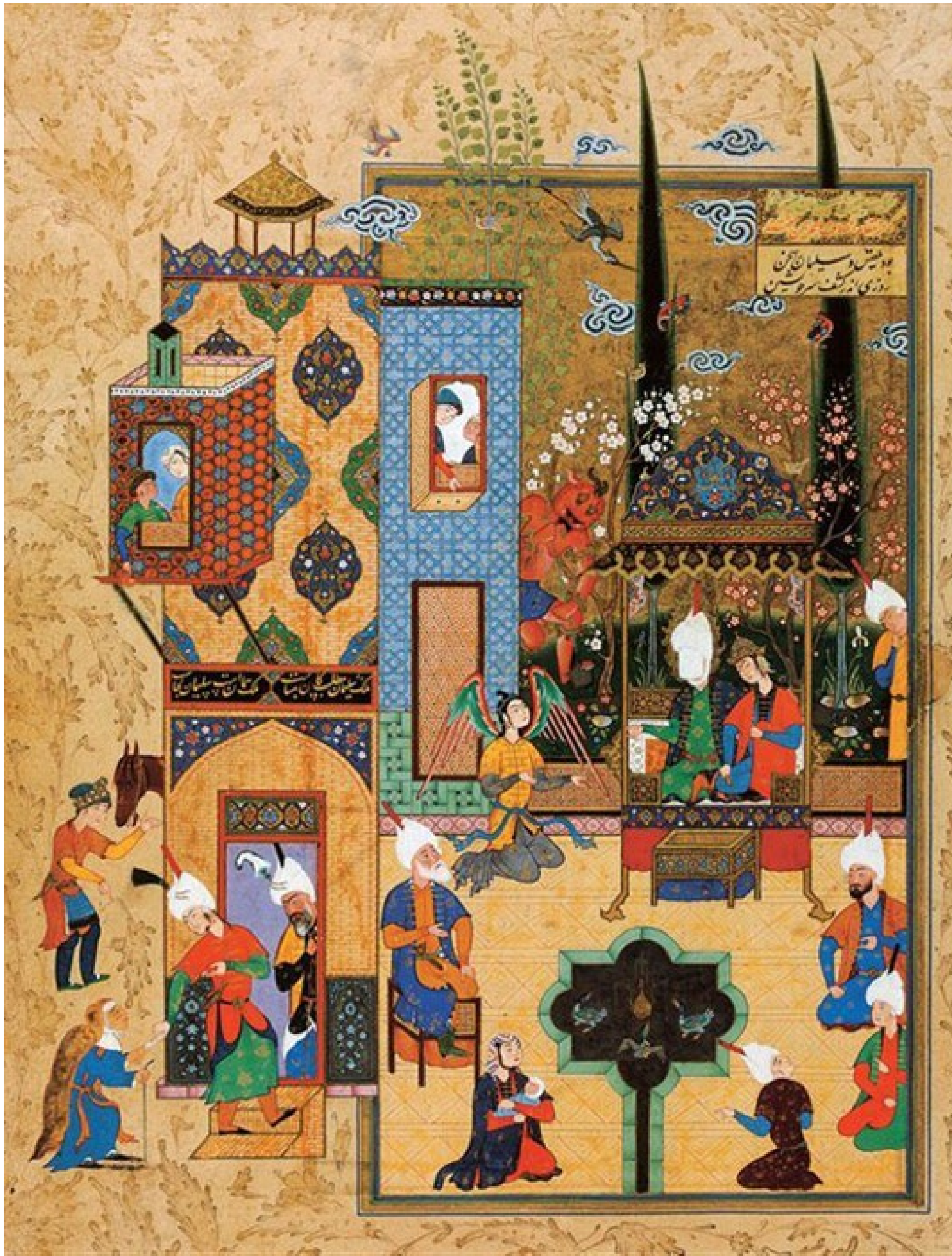

Solomon and the queen of Sheba, 1556-1565.
Miniature. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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The Art of the Book

Arabs had painters, and very famous painters too. Bona fide painting schools were set up in some cities of the East and they had their historians. Makrisi reveals he had personally composed a biography of Muslim painters; but unfortunately, the manuscript went missing. According to Mouradgea d'Ohsson, Caliph Abd el-Malik had erected a mosque in Jerusalem

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whose doors were decorated with the image of the Prophet; the interior walls were lined with paintings representing hell with the inhabitants of the eternal fire and the double paradise of believers. These representations were undoubtedly the handiwork of Byzantine artists.

All one needs to do is refer to Makrisi's surviving inventory of the Treasury of el-Mostanser Billah to have a feel for what these Fatimid monarchs of Egypt had for a animated representations; and one of his viziers, Yazouri, who was specifically in charge of the monarch's orders pertaining to artistic works, was very interested in beautifully illuminated manuscripts. He equally paid exorbitantly for the services of artists he invited to Cairo. Among these were two famous painters he assigned with decorating the walls of his palace with paintings: Ibn el-Aziz and Kasir, from Basorah and Iraq respectively. Among Kasir's compositions was one that was animated; its light white voiles stood out on a dark background, leaving an amazing perspective effect. In contrast, Ibn el-Aziz had represented a female dancer draped in red voiles on a yellow background, with relief effects.

Makrisi returns to this skill of emphasising images by referring to a painting representing Joseph thrown by his brothers into the cistern of Dothan, whose naked matte white body stood out on a dark background, and appeared to climb out of his subterranean prison.

Time has not done justice to the works of these famous masters Makrisi mentions. Neither do we have the works of Abou Bekr Mohammed, son of Hassan, who died in 975 and whom Abou El Feda mentions; nor those of one Ahmed ben Youssouf, known as the painter; nor those of one Mohammed ben Mohammed; nor those of Schodja ed-din ben Daia, the hajeb whom Sultan Baybars used to send as an ambassador to Prince Berekeh and who used to take to him three of his paintings, representing the pilgrimage ceremonial.

In the hall of the kings in the Alhambra in Granada are ancient paintings painted, on leather, in albuminous colours on a gold or blue background nailed to wooden plaques. Their contours are sketched with a dark line, and the surfaces are generally decorated with a single uninterrupted colour. They show figures engaged either in the hunt or a tournament, and a type of divan or meeting bringing together Moorish kings of Granada.

Miniature painting – decorating with illustrations the pages of a hand-written book with the aid of gouache – is one of the domains in which Muslims excelled, especially those of Turkey and Persia. It is owing to this art that many monuments have fortunately survived to our day.

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Alexander at the Kaaba, based on Firdawsi's *Shah nameh*, Shiraz, mid-16th century.
Miniature, 36 x 21.5 cm. Khalili Collection.

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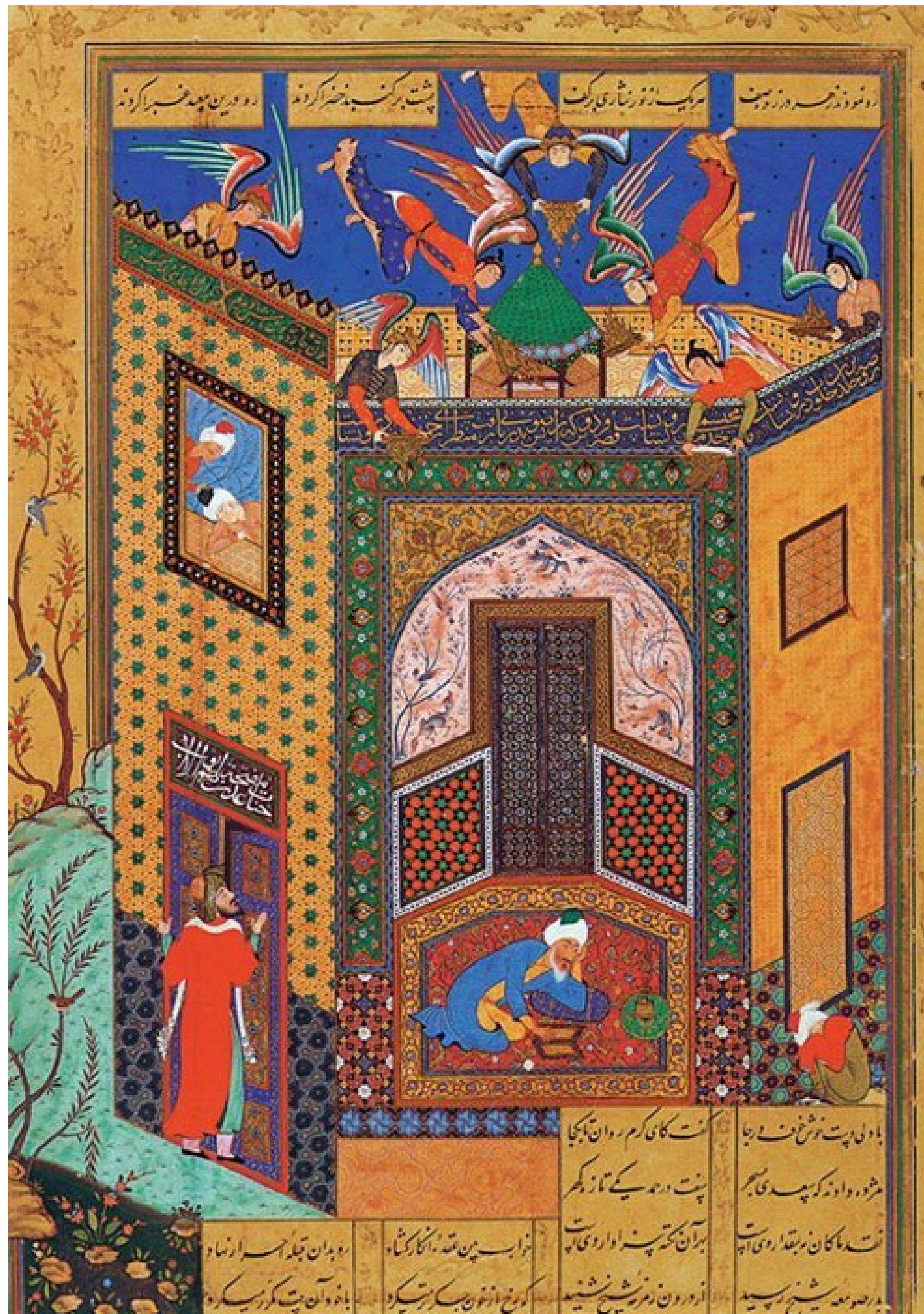

Jami, the seven thrones, a holy man meditates in a pavilion under angelic protection, 1556-1565.
Miniature, 34.2 x 23.2 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

In ordinary manuscripts, the artist sketched out the major elements of his composition with a black or red pencil before painting. In very elaborate manuscripts, the miniature was not done directly on the page where it had to appear. The copyist left the page blank, and then the artist would bring the special sheet on which he had painted and laminate it. This sheet was covered with a thin layer of plaster, very finely thinned in acacis gum, and it was on this primer that he drew and painted. The paintings on some sheets are so thick that they pass for a type of relief. Some jewels were made of superimposed layers of gold sheets, then reworked with a stylus, as in some Venetian paintings.

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Should the artist append his name, he did so slyly in a corner of the miniature in Talik characters, so fine that they are very difficult to decipher. Where the drawing was a representation of a house, the names of the monarch or artist would simulate an inscription that runs the length of the impediment. The last page of manuscripts usually bore the year they were completed. However, miniatures often came after them.

A mastery of these works and an attempt to classify all of them, according to their countries of origin and schools, is a very daunting task, as very few of the manuscripts were dated and signed by the painters. They often had the names of calligraphers, but hardly those of illuminators. This would imply that the work of the calligrapher was considered more important than the painter's.

Once again, equally noticeable in these manuscripts is the rather unscrupulous way the artists transgressed the law of the Prophet, and scorned the prohibition against representing living forms, which Islam inherited from Jews. Indeed, it is actually through these manuscript miniatures that we gain the greatest insight into the genius with which some of these oriental masters handled the human figure, better than in any other sector of their arts. There are representations of hunting or battle scenes which, for their mere heroic and picturesque character and sense of movement, can hardly be equalled, especially in Persian arts. There are portraits which, based on an analytical study, the possession of the type, the profound individual character, and the masterful representation of the human figure, parallel the greatest masterpieces along this line in the West.

Based solely on the artist, or the school from which the book sprang, and not the language or country in which it was written or illuminated, three types of manuscripts can be distinguished: Arab, Persian, and Turkish manuscripts. They are generally luxurious books made for the libraries of princes, or large private collections:

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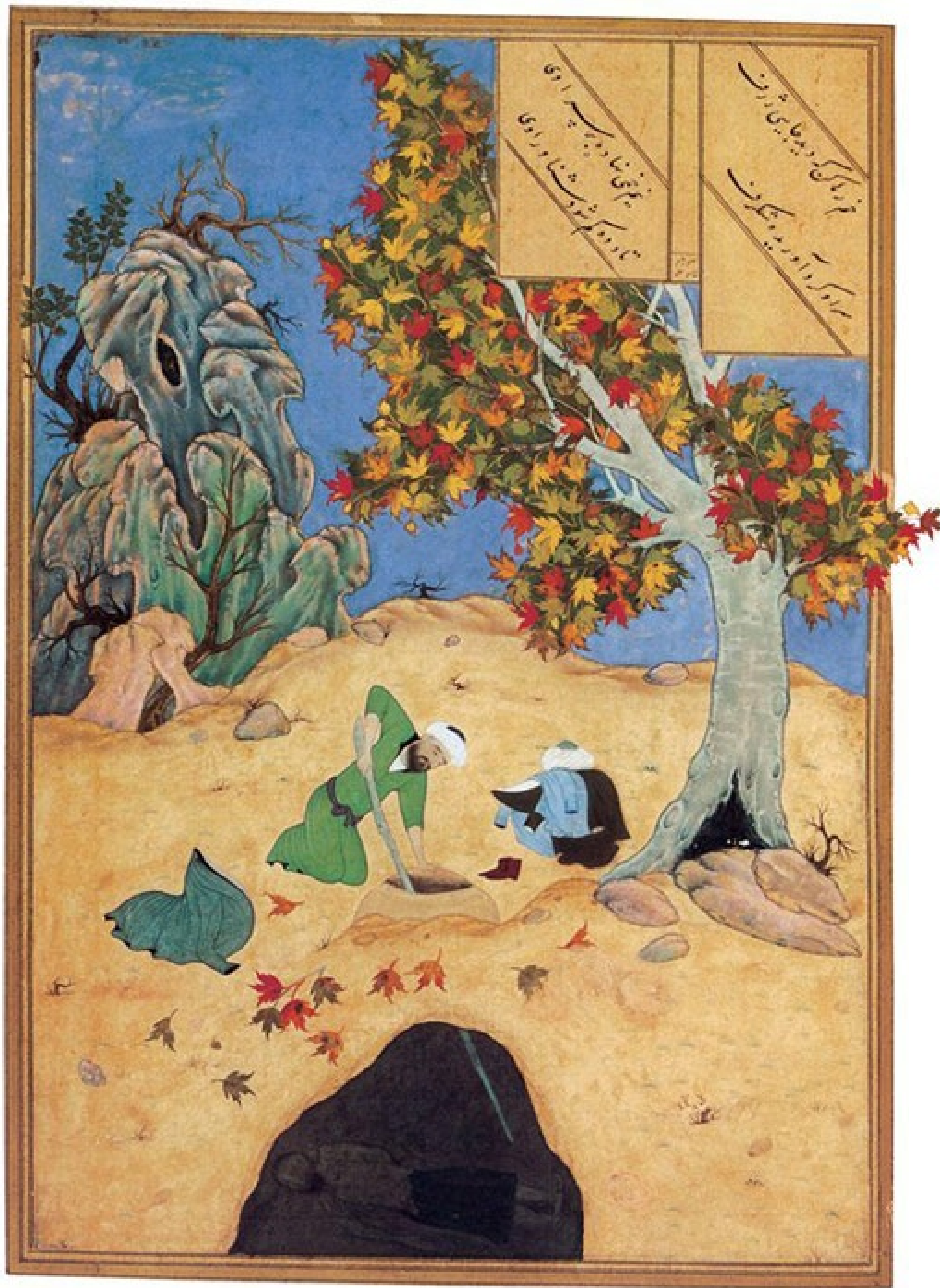

Recovery of Malikha's body by the holy man Bishr, 1494-1495.
Miniature. British Library, London.

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Behzad, *An arrogant clerk engulfed under the weight of his own beard,* 1487-1488. Miniature. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

A – Arab Manuscripts

Given that the Arabs have always adhered more strictly to Muhammad's law than the Persians and Turks, it is therefore not surprising that Arab manuscripts were only exceptionally illuminated with miniatures.

It was during the Ayyubid dynasty, under Saladin, that the first Arab manuscripts decorated with paintings were seen. They are, however, very rare and not very beautifully executed; they

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were documents rather than real attractive works of art. They betray an almost complete lack of imagination and originality, as they were mere reproductions of paintings from Byzantine manuscripts, illustrated between the 8th and 9th centuries, and the artists were so ignorant that most often, without even realising it, they nimbed their characters with golden discs of saints of the Greek Church. Such blind attachment to Byzantine traditions can also be seen in the works of painters who worked in the Seljuq court.

However, Arab literature, outstandingly epic in character, lent itself to illustrations, and works such as *The Arabian Nights*, *The poem of Antar* or stories of Islamic heroes contained beautiful and many fabulous subjects, which would have inspired artists.

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Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, 1580.
Miniature. Topkapi Library, Istanbul.

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Mehmed II, 1475. Miniature.
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul.

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Young man lying down, 1600-1635.
Miniature, 9.8 x 18.8 cm.
State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

One of the most significant Arab manuscripts known is a copy of the *Maqamat*, or *Al-Hariri's Assemblies*, registered at the national library under the Schefer collection. It is comprised of 198 leaves and 101 miniatures, and was executed in Mesopotamia in 1237. One of the pages represents a troop of soldiers of the army of Abbassid caliphs, carrying the family's black pennant, and blowing huge trumpets. It is interesting because it represents a realistic scene, and can form a basis for studying the dresses and harnesses of the period. Other pages represent a lavish banquet at the Court of the Caliph, groups of soldiers on horse back or camels, a group of scholars, with one preaching to the crowd, the burial of a Sheik, a stop in the desert, a slave market, a concert and lastly, the subjects of the 50 tales of Hareth ben Hamman and the travels and adventures of his friend Abou Zeid de Saroudj. The Byzantine influence is clearly seen almost everywhere through the free and large execution, similar to that of frescos in basilicas, and which in many aspects is closer to the painter's art than the precious art of the illuminator, in which the Persians excelled. However what makes this book unique and gives it a rather special flavour are the souvenirs of life in the desert and nomadic life. It is a crucial document on the free existence of pastoralist Arabs of this period. The artist, calligrapher and illuminator, the same person, wrote his name on the last leaf of the manuscript: "Yahia ben Mahmoud ben Yahia ben Abou ci-HAssan". He was from Wassit, a city which became famous in the East owing to its schools, and about which Hariri could have described, like Basorah, his fatherland, as the mother of science.

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Arabs equally illuminated books on natural history and geography. One such interesting books is el-Kazwini’s *The Marvels of Nature*, dating from 1283, which gives a rather limited description of animals, but shows remarkable imagination in the representation of fabulous beasts.

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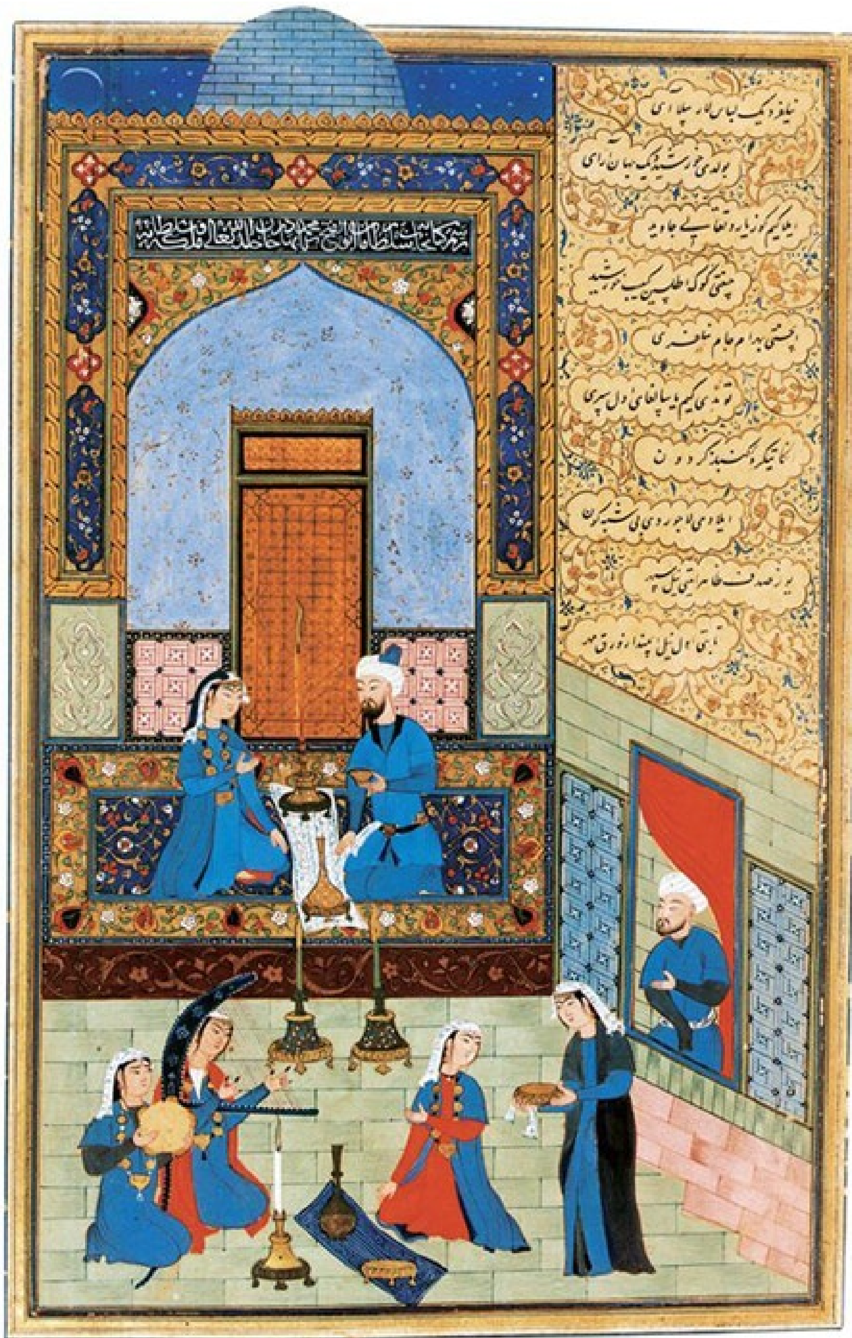

Prince Bahrâm listening to the story of the princess of the blue pavilion, 1553. Miniature. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

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Emperors of the Mughal dynasty, from Babur to Aurangzeb along with their ancestor, Tamerlane,
1707-1712. Miniature, 25.8 x 34.2 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Prince Azam Shah hunting a lion, 1685-1690.
Miniature, 42.6 x 28.3 cm. Khalili Collection.

B – Egyptian Korans

In Egypt, the ornamentation of books was reserved for Korans. They had sumptuously enlightened titles and very magnificent marginal insets. Each sura is inscribed in a gold and colourful illumination. The workmanship, flexibility, elegance and inexhaustible imagination of the skilled Arab decorator find no parallel in the thousands of combinations in geometric decoration. Neither had any artist's palette decorated with more beauty and harmony the page of a book, as did the Egyptian artist in his sovereign art of blending gold with other colours.

The most beautiful Korans, from major mosques, are found in the Cairo Library. The oldest of them, very badly damaged, was written in Kufic, in 850 by Djafar es-Sadik, son of Mohammed el-Bakir, son of Ali Zein el-Abidin, son of Hussein, son of Ali, son of Abu Talib and son-in-law of the Prophet. The most beautiful are those of Baharite sultans, especially that of Mohammed ibn Kalaoun (1293-1341), written in gold letters by a Turk, Ahmad Youssouf, in 730.

Others date from sultan Shaban (1353-1377), from 709 or 770. One of them bears the name of Khawend Baraka, Shaaban's mother. They were all made for the school founded by Baraka, the sultan's mother, in the Khatl el-Tabbaneh. Three other Korans bore the name Barkouk (1382-1399), the oldest of which was written on the orders of Mohammed ibn Mohammed,

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nicknamed Ibn el-Boulout by Abderrahmane es-Saigh, and later reviewed within 60 days by Mohammed ibn Ali, nicknamed el Koufti.

All the Korans were written on creamy or reddish paper, from paper mills in Fostat. The sketch of the drawing was made with white lines, and the shades used were plain, simple or without flourish. The gildings are protected by a glaze of crimson lacquer which gives them a metallic lustre. A dark line surrounds the contours, where it outlines ordinary decorations.

Historical books written in the 14th and 15th centuries were equally illuminated in Egypt. The first page is filled with a frame painted in gold, red, and blue, bearing the book's title and the name of the author. The ornamentation is heavily done, and the use of gold is extreme. The Persians introduced more nobility and moderation into illumination.

In the Maghreb, illumination was still very ordinary; the handiwork of the framings was run-of-the-mill and awkward and the colours poor (yellowish gold replaced gold). The very beautiful red used in Egypt became wine- or brick-coloured.

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Harem garden, 18th century. Miniature.
David Collection, Copenhagen.

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C – Persian Manuscripts

In Persia, the works they focused on illuminating were neither law nor religious books; they were sometimes, although rarely so, historical manuscripts, monarchical biographies, and geography and natural history books. They were especially collections of poems and tales, light poetry meant for the general public and to which very few Persians remained indifferent. These includes Sa'di's *Bustans*, Hafiz' *Gulislans*, and especially the five poems of Nizami. They equally comprise Hateti's five poems, and Jami's two divans and The Seven Thrones.

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Finally, there was also the *Shah nameh (Book of Kings),* the great epic where we find a vast part of Persia's legendary history.

A painter worked on the miniatures of Shah nameh produced by Abbas II. It was Riza-i musawwir. Even though this miniature does not bear his signature, it does reveal all the features peculiar to his style: clear color range, round faces, a representation of heaven with bluish white speckles. It is on this basis that we attribute this illustration to him (other miniatures bearing the artist's name are found in another Shah nameh which is also preserved in the Saint Petersburg Library).

Things continued to change during the 17th century as we see in a painting of the sovereign of Bukhara, Imam Quli Khan, apparently the only surviving painting of him. It was produced one year before his death in Medina. Following his abdication, he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in November 1641. He passed through Persia where Shah Abbas II gave him a triumphal reception. It was during his stay in Persia that this portrait was painted, a typical example of the miniature school of Isfahan in the 17th century. This is clearly visible in the representation of plants and clouds and in the very figure of the Khan.

Greece had little or no influence on Persian art, given that the caliphal domination had isolated it from the Byzantine Empire from which it was separated by Syria and the Seljuq kingdom of Roum, in Asia Minor. If it was even felt at all, it would have been through an initial Arab interpretation, produced in Syria, of Byzantine manuscripts, as Persians had no access to Greek originals. Were we to find a measure of this influence, it would have been in some magical and astronomical manuscripts, those sciences which Muslims derived, to a great extent, from Hellenic science.

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Prince Khusru watches Queen Shirin bathing,
1539-1543. Miniature. British Library, London.

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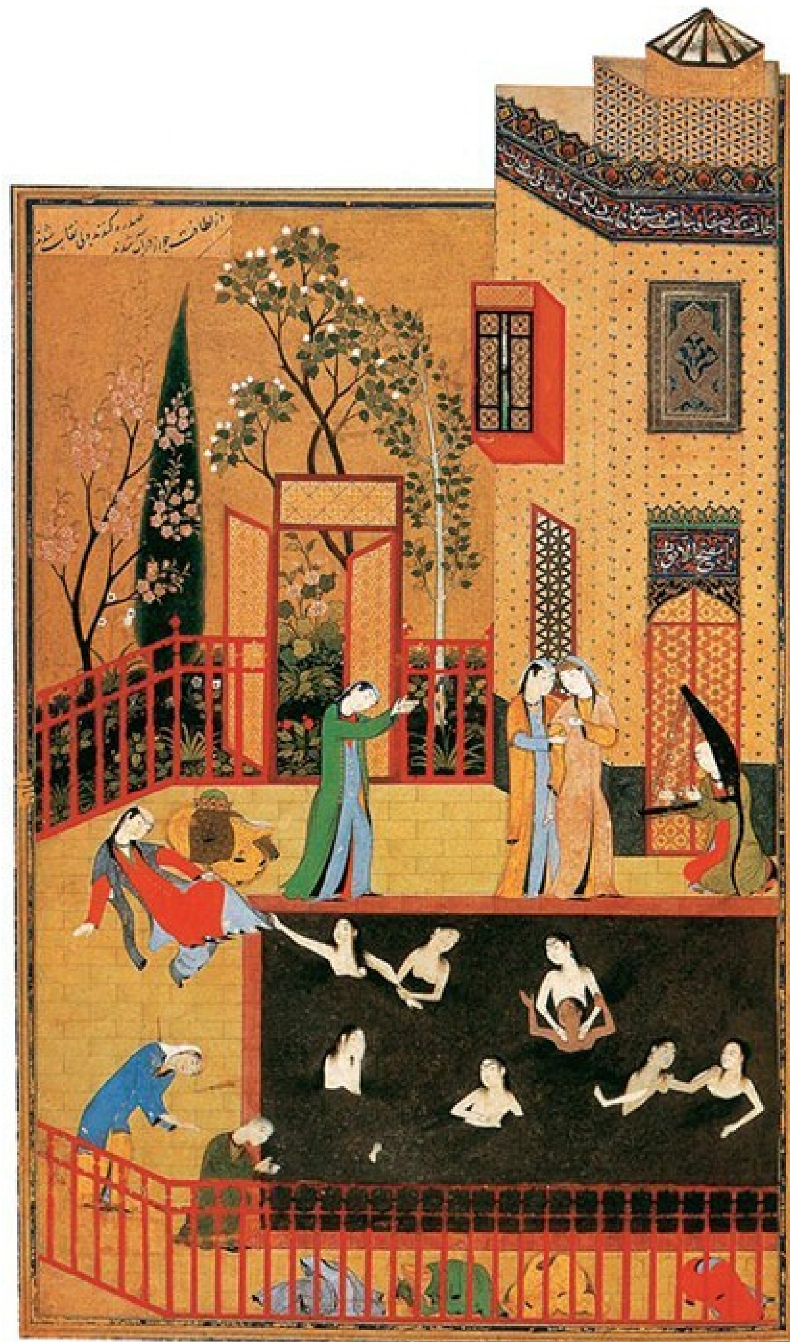

A mature man watches young girls bathing,
1494-1495. Miniature. British Library, London.

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Moreover, this inherent interest in painting among Persians apparently stretches back into the distant past, that is, if it is true that in the midst of constant wars with the Romans, the Arsacids persisted in decorating their sumptuous palace in Shiz with amazing paintings. The Persians of the Sassanian period had the same interest in this art as did the Islamic Persians. Thus the unknown author of the chronicle “Mojmel al-Tavarikh” quotes a book entitled *Portraits of the Monarchs of the Sassanid Dynasty,* in which were found illuminations representing all the princes of the family. And this work, contemporaneous with the Sassanids or an accurate copy produced later, was still seen a long time afterwards by Massoudi, who said that in the 303rd

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year of the Hijra, he saw in the library of an old Istakhar family from Fars, a manuscript with 27 portraits of Sassanid monarchs. He seized the opportunity to describe them, although he was unable to ascertain how they were made.

The three famous schools of art in Persia succeeded each other without interruption from the beginning of the 13th century to the end of the 18th century, corresponding to the three major dynasties that ruled Iran during this period of close to six centuries: the Mongols, the Timurids and the Safavids. The Tabriz school is well known for the quality of the miniatures it produced. In *Alexander's Quest for the Fountain of Youth*, it is possible to see in the miniatures of this manuscript the consolidation process that was practised in the 1520's in the miniatures school in Tabriz. In the beginning of the 16th century, Tabriz owned its own miniatures school with Muhammad Iraqi as its most brilliant representative. It was equally during the 1520s that the future shah Tahmasp and Behzad visited Tabriz, and the latter took charge of the royal library (Kitab Khana). They were apparently accompanied by other painters from Heart. The Tabriz school developed a new style in the mid 20's, and subsequently produced masterpieces like the miniatures of the *Khal nameh*, the Shah nameh of Houghton's ancient collection and the *Khamza* by Nizami (British Library).

A development was later observed during the 16th century with the dominance of the Qazvin school, equally based on the traditional illustration of literary works. Persian painters began producing miniatures on detached sheets. Far from literary themes, these miniatures that represented human figures or scenes drawn from everyday life attained very high quality. It was in Qazvin, Persia's capital from 1548-1585, that these miniatures experienced considerable development. The youthfulness of the design, the pure lustre of the colours, though a little duller in comparison with the previous stage, the accurate rendering of figures (stretched proportions, elongated necks, small round heads, dynamic curves) are some of the characteristics of the Qazvin school, which played a crucial role in the development of the painting style in the following century. The painting of a young man playing his lute by Shar af al-Husaini is attributed to the Qazvin school. (1624/1625). The figures of the teenager and the white horse were rendered on the paper's plain background, which is characteristic of miniatures on detached sheets of the Qazvin paintings. The lower section of the miniature bears the barely decipherable signature of the artist: "work of the wretched… counting on the mercy of Allah, Sharaf al-Husaini al-Yazdi, in 1003." This is this painter's only known surviving work.

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Homay and Humayun meet in a garden, Herat, 1430-1440.
Miniature, 29.5 x 18 cm.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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Lion-patterned calligraphic composition, 1913.
Miniature, 26.5 x 38.8 cm. Khalili Collection.

D – Indo-Persian Miniatures

The earliest illustrated books emerged under the dynasty of the Mongols, whose ancestor, Hulagu, was sent to conquer Persia by his brother, Mankoukaan, the Emperor of China, who wasted no time in bringing the people of Iran and Turkestan under a single sceptre. Will we ever see the artistic ventures that marked the most distant past of this Turkestan, where new artistic methods found expression in the fabulous schools of miniaturists created during the reign of the Timurids and which executed some of the finest masterpieces that this art has ever produced? It is certain that the Turkish tribes of Central Asia cultivated a very early and fervent interest in art, and that at the beginning of the 13th century, following the death of Kul Tigin, his brother, one of their princes, Bilge Kagan enjoined the Chinese Emperor to send him artists to erect a temple in memory of the deceased. The artists came and lined the walls of this temple with commemorative frescos.

This fact already speaks for itself. Turkestan and China have always had close relations. Upon seizing Persia, the Mongols, in their barbarism, would not have been able to achieve anything without the assistance of Chinese secretaries-cum-interpreters who accompanied them. Thenceforth, many a Turkish word found its way into the Persian language, and Turkish arts succumbed to many Persian formulae. Regarding the technique of painting in particular, the

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Chinese were definitely quite more advanced than the Iranians. Thus a new type of art was born in Persia and Turkestan, which, although definitely different from that of Chinese painting schools, still maintained some of their characteristics.

During the period of the Mongols (1258-1335), few manuscripts were produced, as warfare and hunting left little or no time for them to enjoy artistic works. The coherence in their themes is rather remarkable: they always centred around battle scenes, the capture of cities and bloody combats which were followed by banquets and drinking sprees, since the Mongols were heavy drinkers and got drunk. They loved to be represented personally in their manuscripts along with their wives. A very unusual and interesting in its Chinese features that Mongol artists introduced in Persia, is a manuscript in the National Library, Ala ed-din Juvayni's history of the Mongols, made in 1290, with a single miniature depicting Ala ed-din kneeling and offering handing a manuscript of his chronicle to Argun, Persian monarch. Seriously damaged, this miniature was almost entirely executed with lines, without colours, with light hues and China ink.

The emergence of Timur at the end of the 14th century brought an end to this anarchy, and the reign of his successor Shah Rokh was a period of peace, one that Persia had not experienced for a very long time. The Timurids who ruled in eastern Persia and in Transoxiana after the death of Timur, and those who went to seek wealth in Hindustan were great lovers of art and literature. Timur himself, whose cruelty and savagery remained legendary, took great delight in reading the poetry of Hafiz and Nizami. He used to write himself, and although the apocrypha of his memoirs has never been proved, some of the pages attributed to him are among the masterpieces of eastern literature. He loved painting so much that he had portraits of his entire family and himself made, and thus was preserved the name of a famous Baghdad artist who lived in his court – Abdhali. His grandson Ulug Beg, was one of those Muslims who contributed the most to the development of science, especially astronomy. Sultan Husain who lived in Heart, his capital, was surrounded by the greatest writers and the most renowned artists of his time. The same applies to Babar and hisdescendants, the Great Mongols of Delhi, whose seals are found on many books from their magnificent libraries.

Chinese influence is very obvious in all books with miniatures of this period and these schools; so this raises some questions: Who executed them? Persian artists educated in Chinese schools, or Chinese artists who were attracted to Persia? We know that around the year 630, a painter from Khotan moved to China with his father, and he was, certainly, not the only one. Anyone with experience in Far-Eastern works would definitely and immediately notice a striking similarity of spirit, style, and character between Persian miniatures and some Chinese or Japanese paintings, especially those of the ancient Japanese aristocratic school of Tosa and its beautiful horizontal scroll paintings. Considering the differences in civilisation and the very different choice of subjects, the compositions as well as the style are strikingly similar. The admirable work, *The Chronicles of Rachid ed-Din*, executed at the beginning of the 14th century, during the reign of Sultan Oljaitu, was certainly the product of a workshop in Turkestan or Transoxiana.

Very characteristic of Chinese painting, its figures are decorated with rather unusual hairstyles – a further illustration of an artistic spirit similar to that of the 13th-centuryArab illuminators. However, its drawings are leaner and their execution less skilful.

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One of the most beautiful manuscripts executed during this period is undoubtedly Muhammad's *Night Travel*, executed in Herat, during the reign of Shah Rokh; the figures of the chimera carrying the Prophet away to heaven and of the angels accompanying him are given round cheeks and slanting eyelids – characteristic of the Far-East. The blue-illuminated background is covered with clouds in the form of Chinese chi.

This influence is perhaps more glaring in an Arab manuscript containing a famous Treatise on astronomy by Abd-ar-Rahman Soufi, executed in Samarkand for Sultan Mirza Ulug Beg (1447-1449), this astronomy enthusiast, who had constructed at the entrance to his capital, Samarkand, a small palace of porcelain entirely imported from China.

These same workshops produced: the beautiful *The History of The World Conqueror* by Juvayni, executed in 1437, with horsemen in front of the walls of a fortress, and the striking poem by Muhammad al Kalrnumi, *The Love Stories of Honmaï and Humayun*, stunningly executed in 1427 in Herat. The drawing is quite charming; the character of the figures and their feminine charm are rendered with very rare originality. [See illustration]

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Ornamented sheet with religious, bird-shaped text in Nashki, Iran, 17th century. Paper. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.

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Rostam fighting a monster, 1640.
Miniature, 25 x 39 cm.
Russian National Library, Saint Petersburg.

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Sulayman, *Sikander ceases to search for water*, Tabriz, 1520.
Miniature, 20.5 x 24 cm. Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg.

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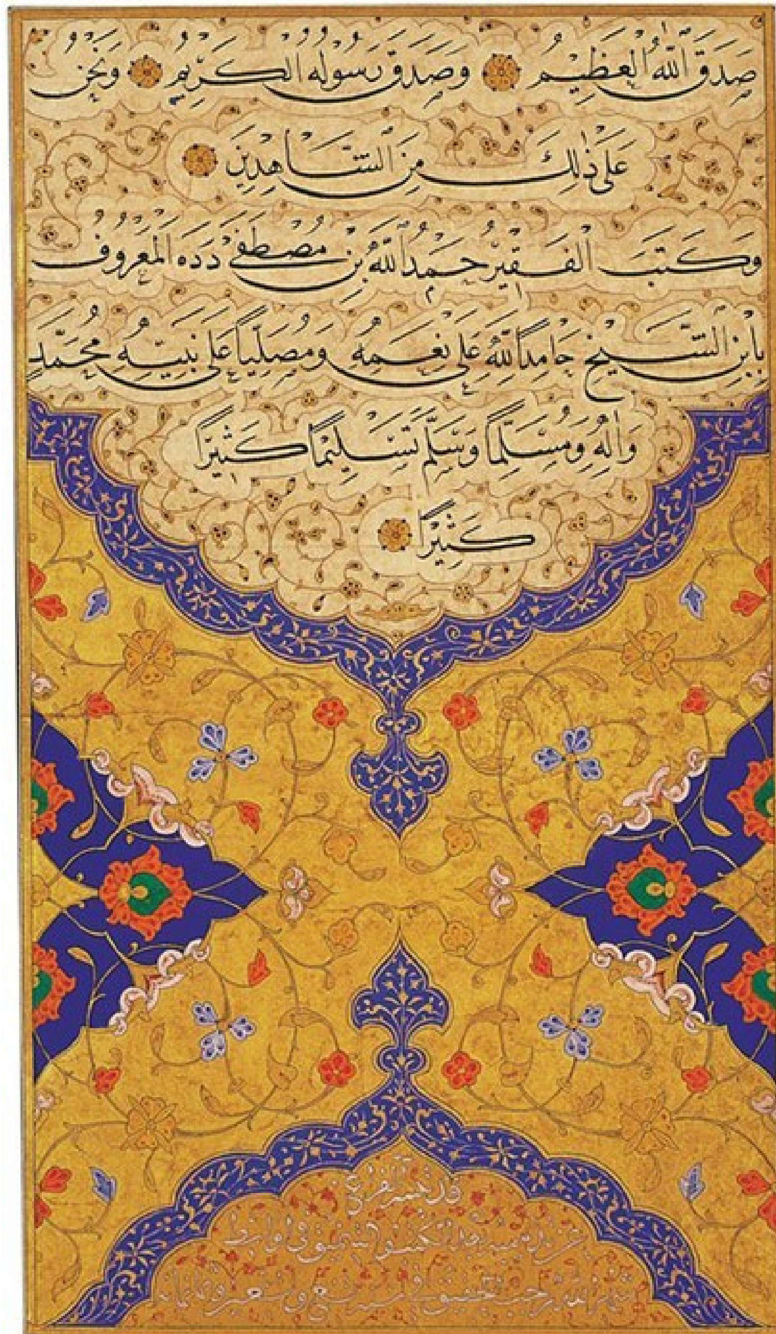

Sheik Hamdallahi's Koran, 1494.
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul.

The miniatures produced by Timurid schools are infinitely superior to those produced by Mongol schools. They were made for people of a higher culture and taste, and thus had far less scenes depicting battle and bloodshed. It was a period of free artistic expression, where in cities like Samarkand or Herat, their last capital in Khorassan Province, everything was crucial to the lustre of a unique moment in the grandeur of the East.

The culture of Timurid schools spread into all the countries to the far-East of Iran, where Uzbek princes held sway over the cities of Bukhara, Khiva and Tashkent. These likewise produced many manuscripts, some of which are very beautiful and their handiwork is still as

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stunning. Some include a book by Nizami illustrated in 1537 by Mahmud for the Uzbek sultan of Khujand; a beautiful Bustans by Sa'di copied in Bukhara by Mir Hussein el-Husseini in 1585, and brought from India by Darmesteter; another manuscript that was probably written in Bukhara in 1564, under the reign of Sultan Iskender, and, finally, a manuscript of Mirkhond's *Chronicle,* datable to 1604, and most likely written in Khiva or Bukhara under the reign of Mohammed I.

However, towards the end of the Timurid era, there was an increasing sense of change, and the noble, rather Hieratic style, with beautiful pieces, took a break and produced, during the Safavid era, more attractive works of art, such as this beautiful book written by Jami, copied in 1499 by Sultan Ali-Meshhedi, and which was illustrated by a certain Mahmud with splendid miniatures.

This same calligrapher had, some years earlier (1485), written a very remarkable manuscript, which was unique both on account of its excellent execution and the elegance of its tall and slim characters, whose slimness is quite reminiscent of Persian figures, but contrasts with the round and stout nature of Mongol characters.

In the field of calligraphy, a calligraphy master, Imad al-Mulk Muhammad ibn Husain (or Ibrahim) al-Hassani al-Saifi al-Qazwini (1554-1615), widely known as Mir'Imad, was a student of the illustrious calligraphers Malik Daylami (who died in 1562) and Mohammad Hussein Tabrizi (who died around 1578). He was the last reformer of the nastaliq writing style, and was made famous for his writing in bold and medium nastaliq characters. For a long time, he worked in the court of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629). The catalogue contains 188 samples of artistic writing by Mir' Imad and 26 exercises.

The very many manuscripts that have survived to our day from the Safavid era, dating from the close of the 15th century, make for easy study. The strong influence the Timurids had on Iranian civilisation for over two centuries, and which will never fade completely, is very obvious in these manuscripts. The Safavids failed in their attempts to oppose the Turanian regime. They failed to dispense with the collaboration of the Turks who had the most top-ranking positions in the army and important civil duties. The chronicle of Shah Abbas I (the Tarikh-i Alem Araï Abbasi), reveals that most of the celebrated painters who added to the lustre of this great reign were from the Samarkand and Bukhara schools, that greatly flourished during the Timurid era.

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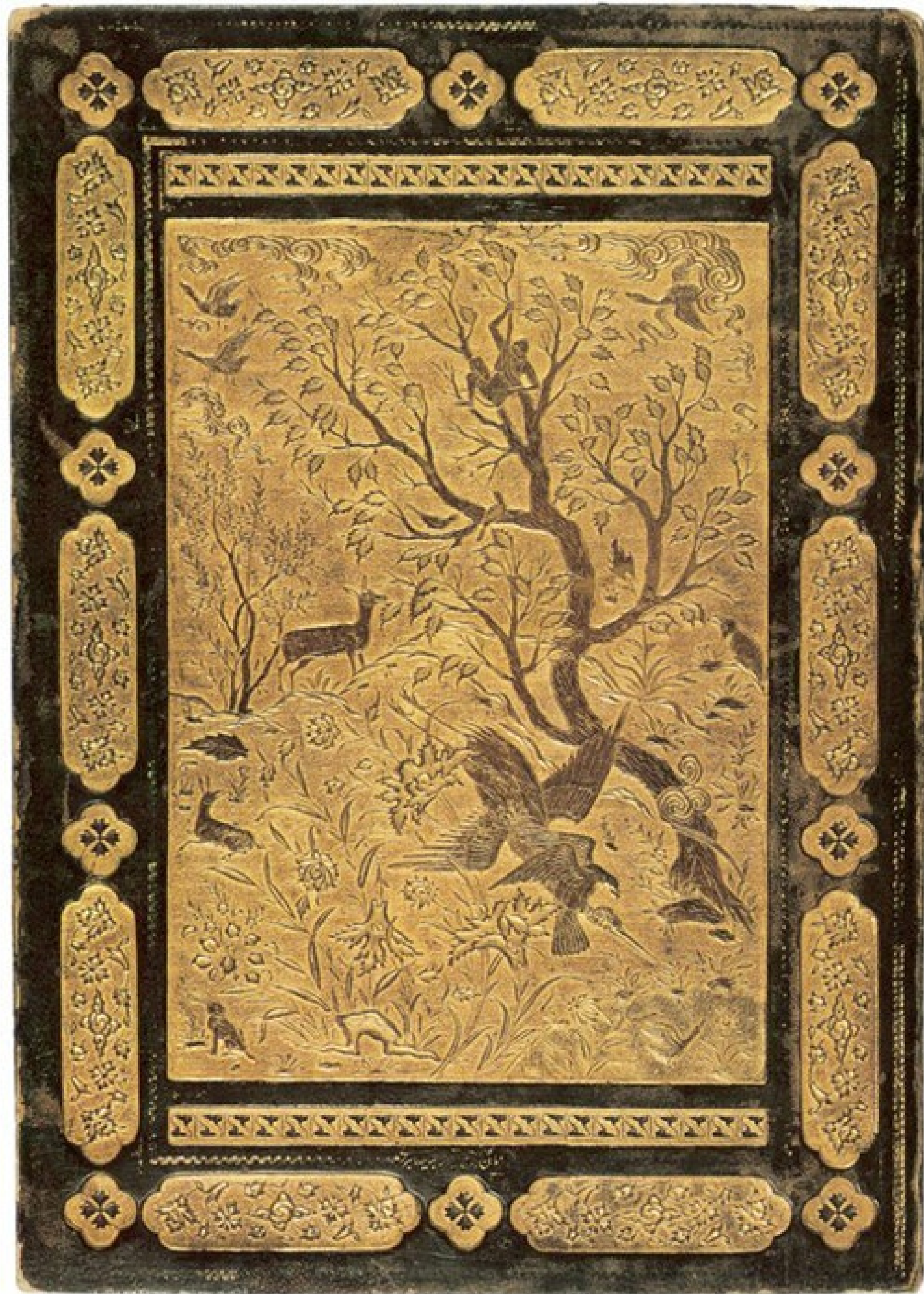

Cover of a book by Muhammad-Zaman Ibn Mirza Beg Tabrizi, 16th century.
Leather, 33.8 cm x 23.5 cm
Russian National Library, Saint Petersburg.

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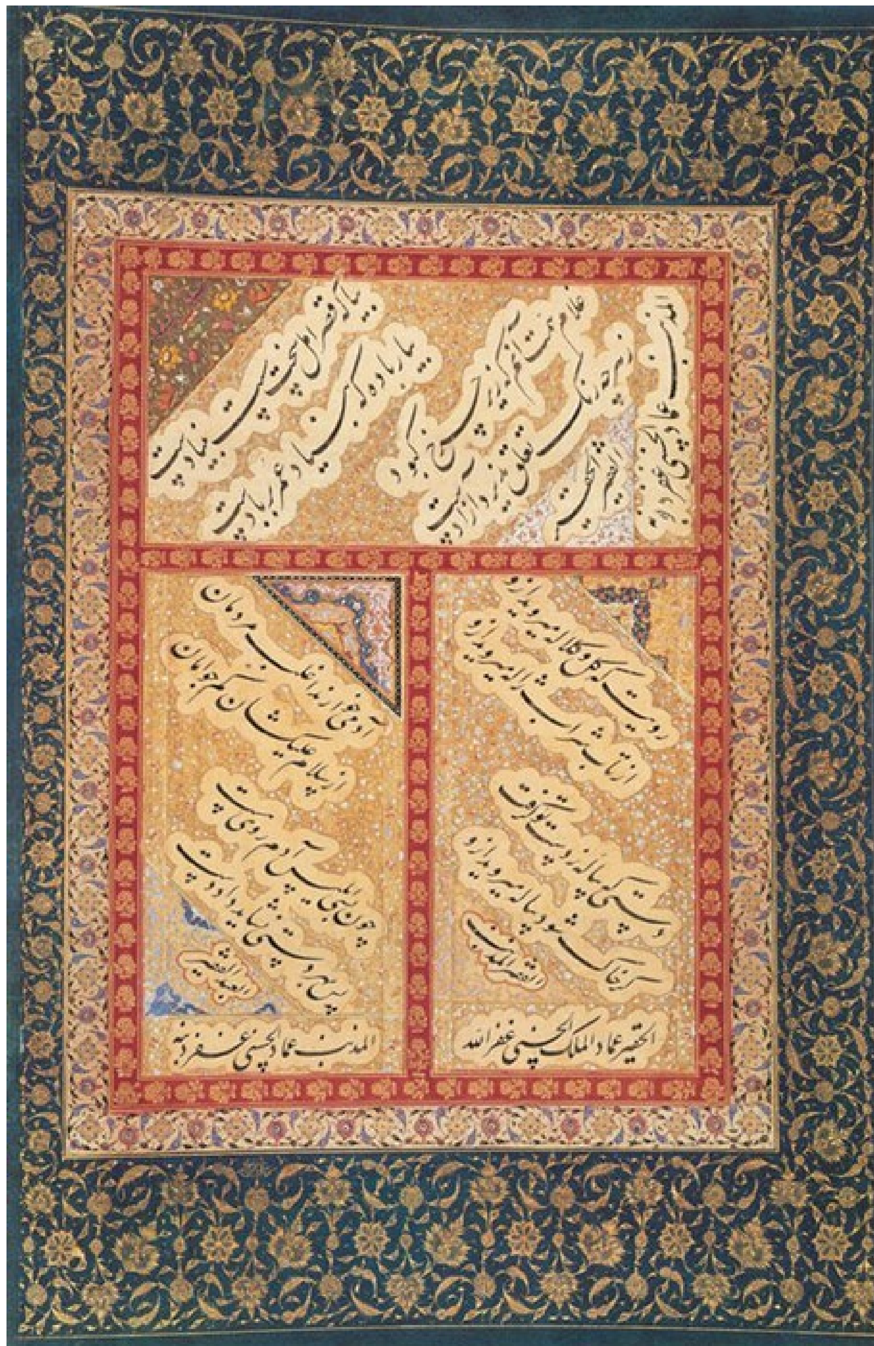

Three calligraphy drills, before 1615. Miniature, 45 x 29.5 cm.
Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg.

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Portrait of Imam Quli Khan, 1642-1643.
Miniature, 12.7 x 16.3 cm.
Museum of Oriental Art. Moscow.

The art is fabulous, flexible, natural and simple; the quest for a sense of tenderness and sophistication is very beautifully insinuated. The artists thus experimented with and excelled in all genres. While some battle scenes reflect all the epic character of older works, hunting scenes depict a movement and a picturesqueness that are stunning, and are often very similar to the art of carpet decoration. Their landscapes with varying perspectives are a testimony to the most fervent love and observation of nature. In many interior scenes, a sense of intimacy coupled with a skilful grouping and composition are extraordinarily brought together. Finally,

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there are some pencil drawings which, judging from their fine lines and perfect figures, are similar to some of Ingres' paintings.

We know nothing about the founder of the school, Ustad Gung (the dumb), apart from the fact that he trained a brilliant student, Jahangir. The second generation, trained by Jahangir produced Pir Sayyid Ahmed of Tabriz, and the famous Behzad of Herat, or Kemal Eddin (perfection of religion). The Cairo Library has beautiful books produced by these artists. The Bustans of Sa'di and a Collection of poems by Hafiz, executed by Jahangir; and the Apocalypse of Muhammad with its impressive deep blue sky with gold flames and fiery lines cutting across it, executed by Bukhari.

In his huge Divan of Sheikh Ibrahim ibn Mohammed el Goulchani, found in the Cairo Library, Jami seems to have been a great painter of landscape, just like Mani, an Indian, who painted Shah Abbas' Court.

Many other artists, on whom a careful and human study should definitely be carried out in the future, painted this glorious period.

One of the most important books written during the Safavid period is undoubtedly the famous Shah nameh, or *Book of Kings*, which, with its 258 miniatures, is a masterpiece of the books of this period. Written in 1566 by the Kacem scribe Esiri, the book was offered to Isfahan to the Safavid Shah of Persia, Thamasp I (1524-1574). Although the hunting, battle and festive scenes in it are rather monotonous, its execution is breathtaking. [See illustration 1, illustration 2]

Safavids; they are matchless in the *Khamsah* or *The Five Poems* by Nizami in the British Museum, dating from Jumada II (1539-1543), with its fourteen excellent miniatures, one of the masterpieces of Persian miniatures with its very distinctive figures and its very pleasant colour blend of pink and mauve.

What should be noted about all the manuscripts of these periods is the little iconographical variation in the subjects. Not only are the same scenes more or less often represented, but any variation in their composition and type is very imperceptible. This is equally true of many Latin and French transcripts produced by untalented artists. Thus, throughout Firdawsi's *Books of Kings*, Rustam, the Iranian hero, always wears a hat made of a lion's head. In depicting the meeting between Chi-rin and Khorasu, the Persian king, the king passes behind a hillock, and takes notice of a naked young woman seated near a spring, combing her long hair. Her tunic and quiver are hung on the branches to which the horse is tied. [See p. 224]

Its beautifully illustrated margins were one of the breakthroughs of Persian artists under the

An obvious lack of perspective is not evidence of a personal initiative, but of a reproduction of a Western work. This influence is even more glaring in many works with Christian subjects, copied from Western prints.

In Ali Kapu's palace, on the Meidan in Isfahan, which was constructed by Shah Abbas at the end of the 16th century, two painted panels, apparently in fresco, are placed face to face on the first floor below the colonnade; on each side is a woman standing in a garden, dressed in a light green flowing gown. Based on their style, these enchanting figures, beautifully slim, and drawn with staggering precision, are exactly reminiscent of figures in beautifully illuminated manuscripts. The palace was painted with thick whitewash around the 18th or the 19th century.

There are still huge hunting and war paintings in the palace of Forty Pillars, which were apparently oil-painted on canvas, and then rebacked. The shades are darker and the

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compositions seem to look more like the lapis lazuli of the same period.

On the walls of the Friday Mosque of Isfahan, in Shah Ismael's tomb, are two paintings depicting the figures of Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, and maybe those of veiled Fatima; they do not seem to have been done in the very distant past.

Though it may be very difficult to distinguish the two schools, it seems painters in India wanted to produce something unusual, so they tended to engage more in painting than in illumination. They softened the tones that the Timurids preferred bright and sharp; furthermore, the great Mughals of Delhi did not cease importing these brightly illuminated books from Turkestan.

Masterpieces of Indo-Persian art cannot be found in books, which lack the beauty of colour and are only a reflection. They can be found in isolated sheets, individual works, which are small tableaux depicting scenes of a more private nature, epics, jousts or bouts. Sometimes, completely saturated with a modern notion of nature, these landscapes entertain us with a stunning light show.

In the ruins of the Fathpur Sikri palaces, filled with great memories of Sultan Akbar, there still exist fresco remnants, which attest to the influence of Jesuit Fathers on the Court of the Great Mughals in the 16th century. Artists there, probably Chinese, painted Christian subjects such as that of Adam being sent out of Paradise or the Annunciation. These are valuable documents in the History of painting in India.

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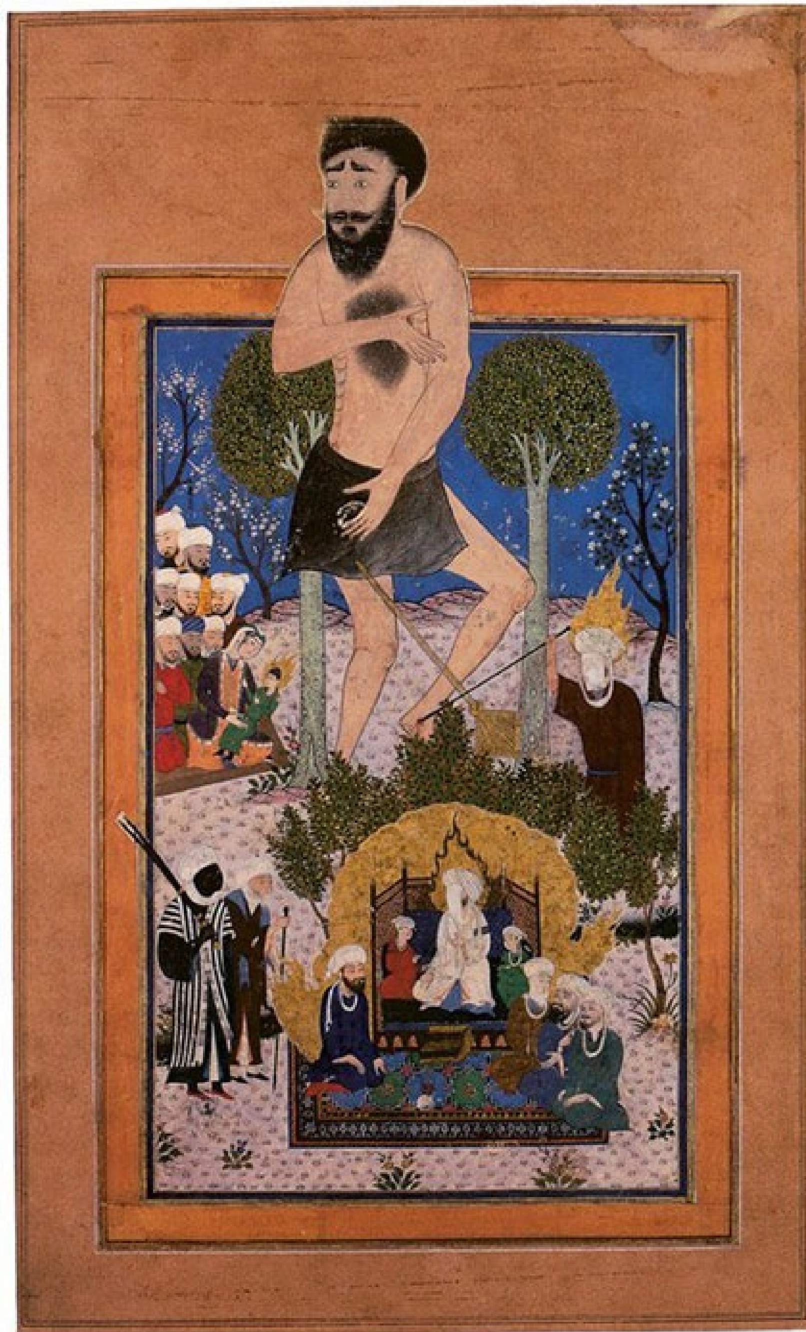

Prophets Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and Og the giant, early 15th century. Miniature, 38 x 24.4 cm. Khalili Collection.

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Behzad, *Firdawsi's Book of Kings (Shah nameh), Rostam is assisted by his horse, Rakch, as he fights the dragon*, Iran, 1648.

Miniature. Royal Library, Windsor Castle, Windsor.

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Behzad, *Firdawsi's Book of Kings (Shah nameh), Akwan the demon casts the sleeping hero Rostam into the sea*, Herat, 1440.

Miniature. Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, London.

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Mani's painting of a dead dog in a Chinese magic pool, 1445.
Miniature. Topkapi Library, Istanbul.

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E – Turkish Manuscripts

Ottoman Turks have never had painters or illuminators. Just like the Moroccans, they have always respected the law of Muhammad to the letter. The miniatures in our possession were produced by Persian artists, invited to the court in Bursa or Constantinople. Consequently, this art is merely degenerated Iranian art.

The binding of Muslim manuscripts are evidence of a beautiful art that involved the

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goffering or varnishing the leather with lacquer; and the ornamental motifs that we find are quite often similar, in their polygonal decor or animated composition, to those that we find on the very pages of illuminated manuscripts.

Muslim bindings, generally made of morocco leather, are flat and almost always have a decorated flap which looks just like the binding itself.

The decorations of the sides were either hollow, in gold or colour, while the background leather preserved its natural colour. In Egypt, the decoration was basically polygonal and epigraphic, and regardless of the sophistication or the originality of the form, goffering irons were always used.

In Persia and countries under Turkey, motifs were predominantly naturalist in character. Iron was replaced by the matrix or mould, wherein the leather was heavily compressed and decorated with visible overhangs. In order to achieve depth, Persian and Turkish binders used two superimposed leather pieces, cutting out the piece above which had as background the one below.

Persians equally engaged in lacquered binding, initially using matt gum, which enabled them to produce fabulous hunting or battle compositions like those of miniatures or carpets. Next, the artists coated the leather plate with fine plaster, then painted it with motifs from nature such as flowers and birds, and finally polished the entire surface with a layer of protective varnish.

The national library in Russia is home to such a flat binding made of embossed and gold-plated leather. As a matter of fact, the two entirely identical black leather covers (without the flap) currently hold the pages of the very modestly decorated manuscript of Kulliyat in Newai. There is a sharp contrast between the magnificent binding and the modest manuscript. From this we can infer that the binding might have been executed for some other luxurious, older manuscript. The hardly visible signature at the bottom of the binding bears the name of an artist who was definitely famous at the time: Muhammed Zaman. It is apparently his sole surviving work. The Turkish writer of the second half of the 16th century, Mustafa Ali, mentioned Muhammed Zaman among those artists who left Persia for Turkey.

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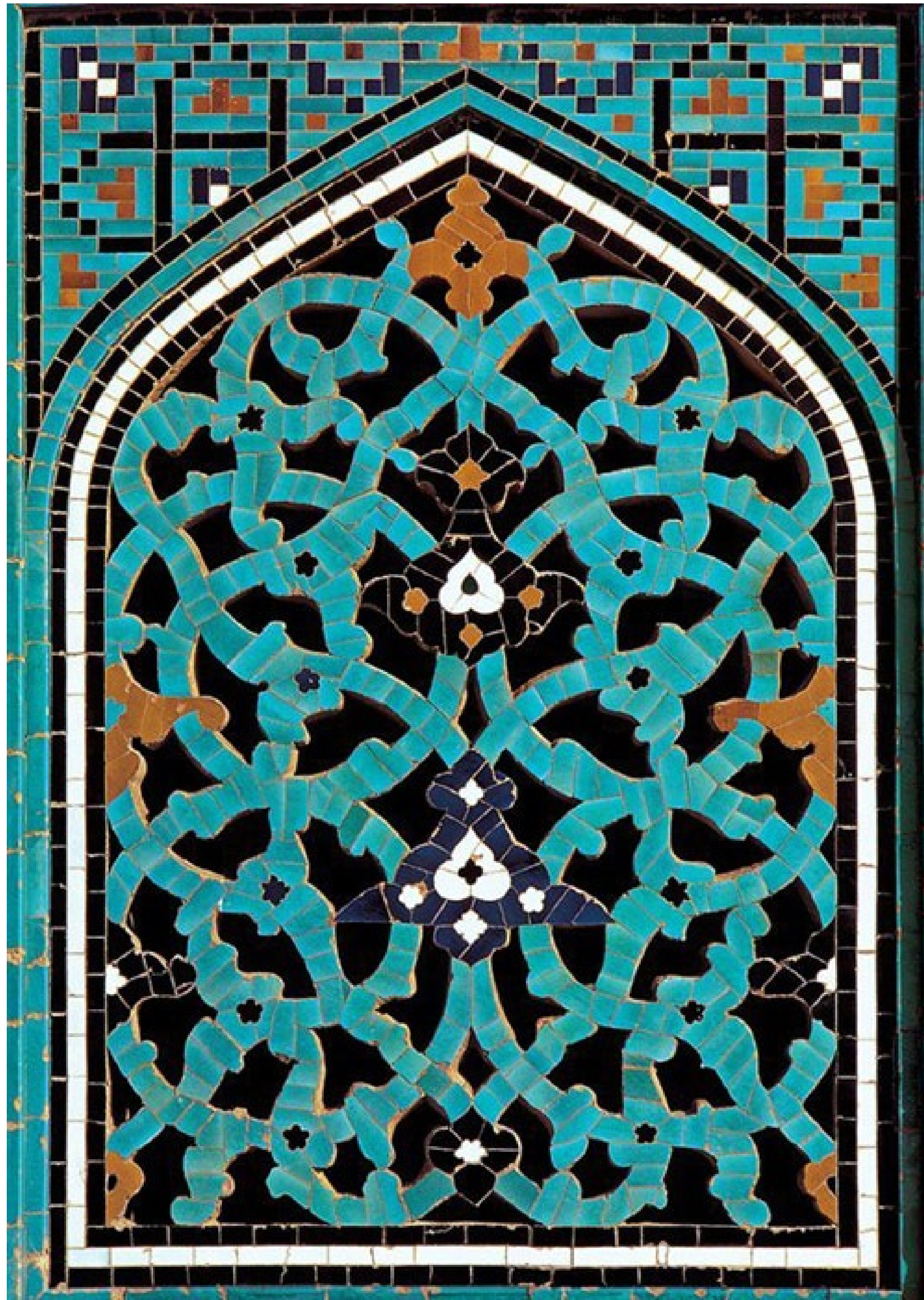

Detail of the Lutfullah mosque.
Ceramic. Isfahan, Iran.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, from the early years of the Hijra, the more Rome dealt, in every aspect, with the subjugated people, the more, on the contrary, the arts of the vanquished people influenced the victor. In effect, Rome succeeded in stamping her civilisation only on the barbarians it subjugated. From an artistic perspective, Greece, Sicily, Egypt and Asia Minor never

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completely succumbed to Roman influence. On the contrary, Islam subjugated people whose civilisation was in all ways superior. Consequently, everywhere it went, it transformed and made use of the arts it encountered.

Whereas Islamic arts initially had a visible affinity with Persian and Byzantine arts, a constant evolution on its part enabled it to perfect itself and become unique in all its forms. Depending on the countries and the period, this art was characterised by its varied forms and decorations. Islamic art is thus a vast field of study that stretches from the Hijra in 622 to the works of art produced until the 19th century. The territory covered is vast, stretching from Spain to India. Owing to the movement of artists, merchants, sponsors and works of art, at least forty-two dynasties that ruled on three continents had a certain degree of stylistic unity. This sense of unity was strengthened by the use of a single form of writing in the entire Islamic world and the amazing development of calligraphy. Therefore, rather than being viewed as merely religious, Islamic arts should be considered as one of the pillars of a civilisation.

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Green Mosque, Green Mausoleum, tomb of Mehmed I,
1421. Bursa, Turkey.

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