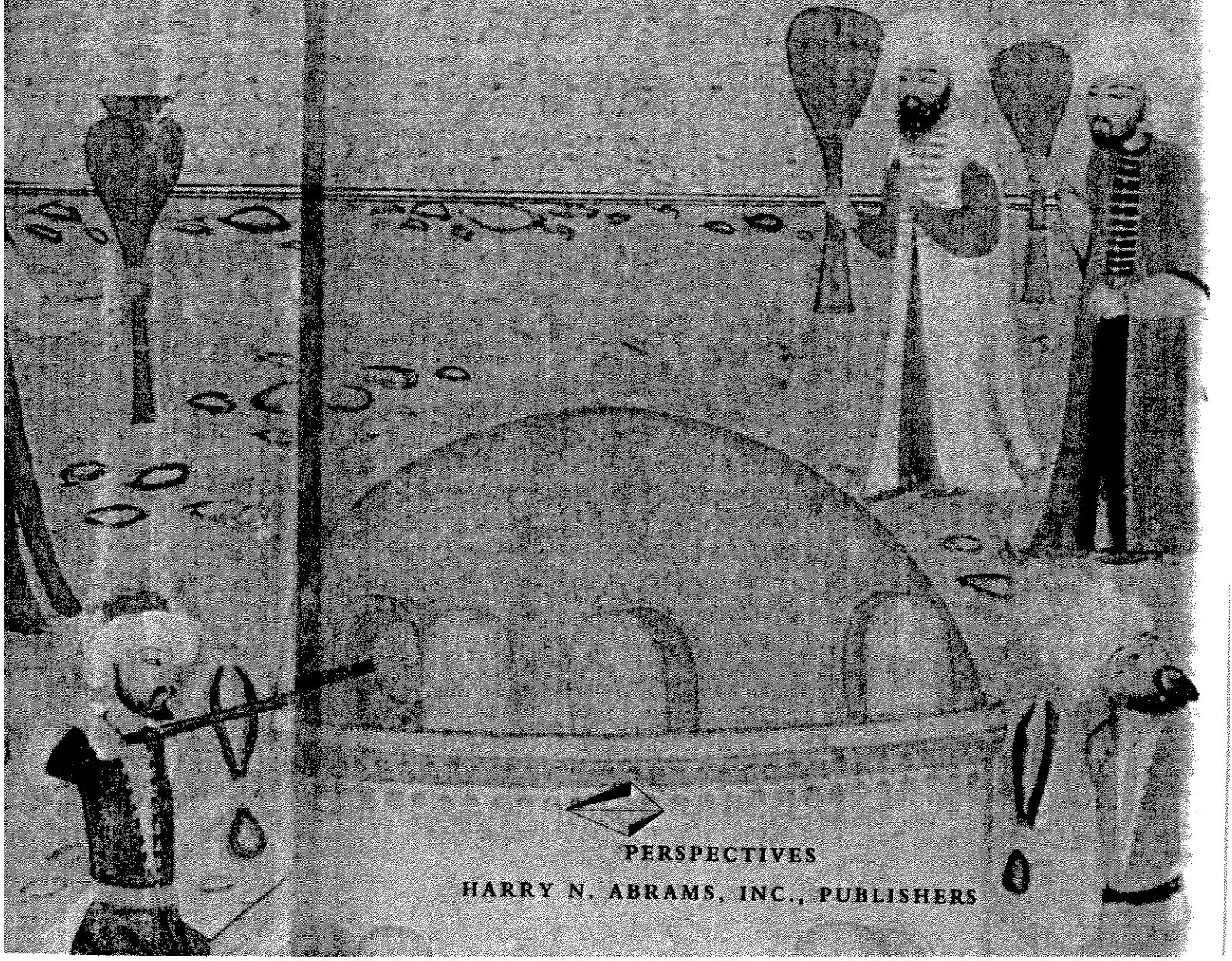
Islamic Art in Context

Art, Architecture, and the Literary World

Robert Irwin



PERSPECTIVES
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Frontispiece Parade of the Guild of Ottoman Potters, pages 136–37 (detail)

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177. Hans Holbein (1497–1543)
The Ambassadors, 1533.
Oil on canvas, 6′9″ x 6′10¼″ (2 x 2.1 m). National Gallery, London.

The design of the carpet is based on largish octagons within squares and it must have been woven in Ottoman Turkey. In the variant small-pattern Holbein carpets, the octagons and enclosing squares are smaller. (An example of a small-pattern Holbein appears in Mantegna's *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, the centre panel of the St. Zeno altarpiece in Verona.)

NINE

Beyond the Frontiers of Islam

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Islamic regimes and Islamic art did not evolve within a self-contained environment. Both inside and outside the borders there were cultures and civilisations that influenced and were in turn influenced by developments in Islamic art and thought. The Middle East was composed of a multitude of overlapping worlds. Christians such as the Copts or Mozarabs lived and worked within Muslim frontiers. Jews or Armenians sometimes acted as the middlemen in material and cultural commerce. The Muslim world also exported artefacts to Western Europe. Not only did *mudejar*s and Sicilian Arabs work for Christian markets, but craftspeople working in the great Muslim cities produced carpets, costumes, and all kinds of vessels that were specifically targeted at European markets. Chinese art had the greatest influence of all on that of the Islamic world. Here again the artistic traffic was not simply one way or on one level: Muslims did not just import or imitate Chinese luxury goods; they also attempted to improve on them. This penultimate chapter therefore will breach the frontiers of Islam both in the literal and geographic sense and in more metaphorical terms.

The "People of the Pact"

Unlike the pagan tribes, Christians and Jews were treated by the conquering Arabs as protected peoples, *ahl al-dhimma* (literally, "people of the pact"). As non-Muslims, Christians and Jews paid a special poll tax, but they were allowed to worship in their own way. In the early period Christians actually constituted the majority of the population throughout most of what we now think of as the Islamic lands. Many of the protected Christians

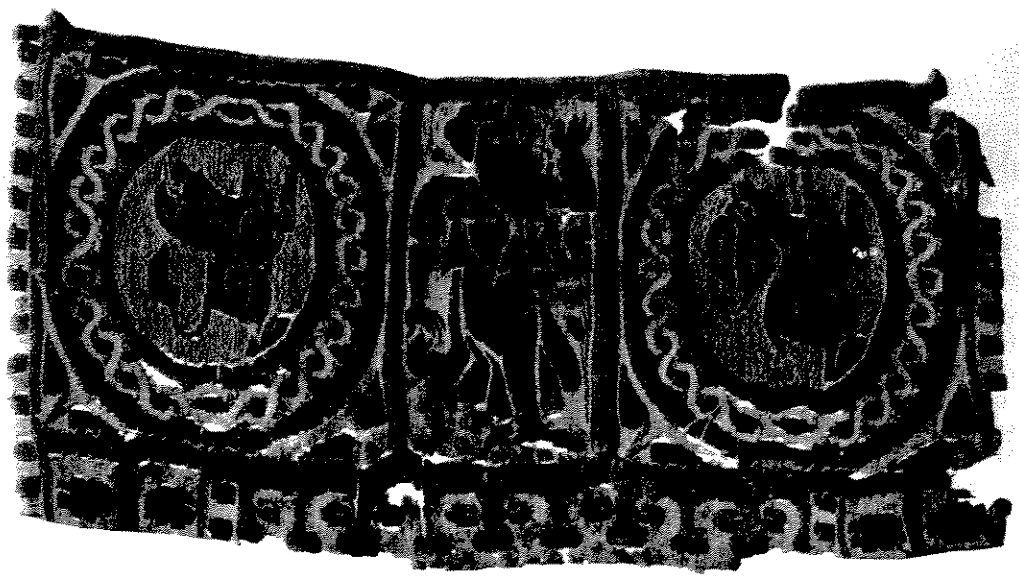
under Muslim rule, particularly in Syria, were Orthodox, and regarded the Byzantine emperor and the Patriarch in Constantinople as the heads of their religion. However, there were other Christian churches under Muslim rule with large followings who differed in doctrinal and other matters from the Orthodox. Coptic Christians formed the overwhelming majority of the population of Egypt in the seventh century, and there were Christian communities in Armenia and Georgia, and others widely dispersed throughout Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia as far east as Mongolia and China.

Orthodox and Coptic Christian Art

Christians in most provinces of the caliphate converted to Islam, but the process was slow. Even when Muslims did become a majority in the various regions, there was still a tendency for certain trades and professions to be dominated by Christians, and much of the art and architecture that we classify as Islamic was actually the work of Christians. In the first century of Islam the Copts enjoyed a particular reputation as architects. When the Umayyad caliph al-Walid I (r. 705–15) wanted the mosque at Medina rebuilt, he summoned Copts from Egypt and Orthodox Christians from Syria to do the work. He also used them in Jerusalem and Damascus, and there are indications that Copts worked on the desert palaces of Khirbat al-Mafjar and Mshatta (in particular the striking carved vine decoration on Mshatta's exterior seems to have been done by Copts; see FIG. 69).

178. Coptic fragment of tapestry-woven textile, Egypt, 7th–8th century. Coloured wool and undyed cotton, 13⅞ x 6¼" (35.5 x 17 cm). David Collection.

Coptic weavers produced garments with abstract patterns too – there was a general tendency for designs to become more stylised and geometric in the Islamic period. Characteristic designs were based on long, narrow bands, fairly simple oval or square designs, and circular pieces.



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After the downfall of the Fatimids, the political and economic status of the Christians seems to have declined somewhat, but they remained prominent in certain crafts. In the seventeenth century, the goldsmiths' guild in Cairo was predominantly Coptic Christian, as was that of the jewellers. Egypt was above all noted as a textile producer, and throughout the period covered by this book Copts dominated this industry. They were highly proficient in specific weaving techniques such as the flying shuttle, and large numbers of the tunics they produced have survived, many of them from excavations of Christian cemeteries. Some of the tunics feature religious imagery, but others are decorated with naturalistic representations of flowers or of mythological figures. The decorative vocabulary drew heavily on classical and pagan imagery, including Dionysiac figures, dancers, nereids, and conches (FIG. 178).

Artistic influence did not all run one way. Miniatures in Arab secular manuscripts of sages and doctors seem sometimes to have served as the models for Coptic portraits of evangelists. Indeed, by the twelfth century it is hardly possible to distinguish Coptic from Muslim work, as floral and geometric motifs invaded churches and what had formerly been distinctive Coptic art forms were slowly assimilated into the mainstream of what we call Islamic art.

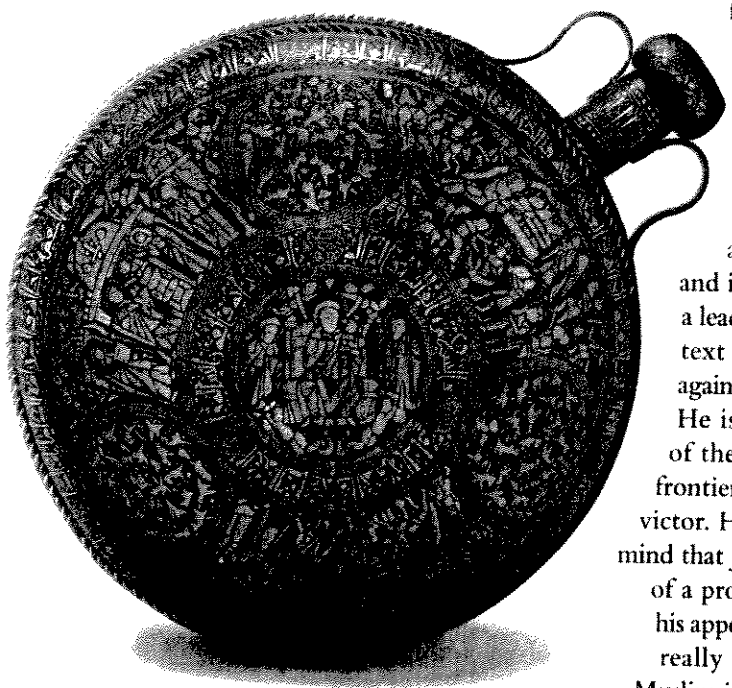
There was an explosion of figurative imagery on objects in Syria, Iraq, and Anatolia in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. To take a numismatic example first, in the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth, the Artuqids, a Turkish clan that ruled as a petty dynasty over towns in northern Syria, northern Iraq, and eastern Anatolia, began to mint bronze coins bearing figural imagery, some of which harked back to Roman and Sasanian prototypes. The heads of Roman emperors (FIG. 179) were copied with varying expertise. Astrological motifs, fantasies such as a man riding a serpent, and nomadic Turkish tribal branding marks, plus miscellaneous vaguely heraldic motifs such as the two-headed eagle, and even non-Muslim imagery, such as the enthroned Christ, were eclectically featured on the coinage of the Artuqids and their immediate neighbours. Part of the explanation for this phenomenon may be that the Artuqids and Anatolian Seljuqs ruled over a predominantly Christian population. Figurative Byzantine coinage had always circulated widely in the region and the Muslim rulers may have minted figural coins to meet the expectations of their subjects.

The neighbouring territory of the Ayyubids also produced some striking artefacts featuring Christian imagery, particularly in high-quality metalwork. A brass canteen now in the Freer Gallery

179. Artuqid coin featuring the head of a Roman emperor and an Arabic inscription. Bronze, diameter 1¼" (3 cm). British Museum, London.

in Washington, D.C., is in the centuries-old pilgrim flask shape (FIG. 180), that is to say, it is round with a cylindrical neck. It was apparently produced around the middle of the thirteenth century. It features scenes from the Christian Bible, including the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Presentation at the Temple – as well as more conventional secular imagery such as princely figures, jousters, musicians, and foliage.

There were still large numbers of Christians living under Muslim rule in Syria and Egypt in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Mosul in northern Iraq, which had been one of the Muslim world's leading centres for the production of metalwork, had a large Christian population, and around the time of the Mongol sack of Mosul in 1262 many of its craftworkers seem to have migrated into the Mamluk lands. So it is not surprising *per se* that the Freer canteen and similar objects should have been made for (presumably) Christian patrons. Some of the patrons could have been inhabitants of the Crusader states or visiting pilgrims. But other pieces are genuinely puzzling, such as the brass basin, formerly known as the "d'Arenberg Basin," which was made in Syria in the late 1240s (FIG. 181). The basin is decorated with hunting and battle scenes, but also five scenes from the life of Christ, framed within polylobed medallions. Thirty-nine monastic and saintly-looking figures with haloes are portrayed on the interior of the basin. Yet its inscription dedicates the basin to al-Salih Ayyub, the sultan who ruled over Egypt from 1240 and Damascus from 1249 onwards, and it celebrates his prowess as a leader of the *jihad* (in the context of the time, the holy war against the Christian Crusaders). He is praised as the defender of the faith, the warrior of the frontiers, the conqueror, and the victor. Here it is worth bearing in mind that Jesus is accorded the status of a prophet in Islam, so perhaps his appearance on the basin should really be seen as an example of Muslim iconography.



180. The Freer pilgrim canteen, Syria, mid-13th century. Brass, diameter 14½" (36.9 cm). Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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181. Detail of the interior of the so-called "d'Arenberg Basin," showing what appear to be Christian saints, Syria, c. 1240s. Brass inlaid with silver, height 9" (23.3 cm). Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Certainly, not everything that looks Christian in Islamic art is intended to have a Christian significance. Haloes were commonly used in Muslim miniatures and decorative designs, not to indicate sanctity, but simply to emphasise the head of a figure and set it off from the background. A thirteenth-century Arab *Maqamat* shows the rogue Abu Zayd with a halo (FIG. 182), for example.

182. A miniature from a copy of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, showing Abu Zayd and two camel-riders with haloes, probably from Iraq, 13th century. Illuminated manuscript, 3⅜ x 7⅛" (9.2 x 18.8 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Abu Zayd's halo here is purely for decorative effect.

Armenian Christian Art and Architecture

Armenians, like Copts, prospered under the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt. Badr al-Jamali, the vizier who was effective ruler of Egypt from 1073 until 1094, was an Armenian. It was during his rule that the fortified gateways of medieval Cairo were rebuilt by three Armenian architects summoned from Urfa (FIG. 183). Armenians were noted specialists in building in stone. The shapes of their buildings and their decoration exercised a decisive influence on Seljuq architecture in Anatolia from the twelfth century onwards (FIGS 184 and 185). The conical roofs on tall drums that are characteristic of Armenian churches reappear on Muslim tomb towers. The characteristic layout of the Seljuq caravanserai had Armenian precedents. Armenians also wove high-quality textiles. Their carpets and other textiles were especially prized by the Abbasid court, and in this early period when someone wanted to praise an Iranian carpet it was common to do so by likening it to an Armenian carpet. Long after the heyday of the Abbasids, the thirteenth-century explorer Marco Polo believed that the best and finest carpets were woven by Armenians and Greeks.

183. The Bab al-Futuh (Gate of Deliverance), Cairo, 1087. Its stonework was far in advance of other Cairene buildings, which were mainly of brick.

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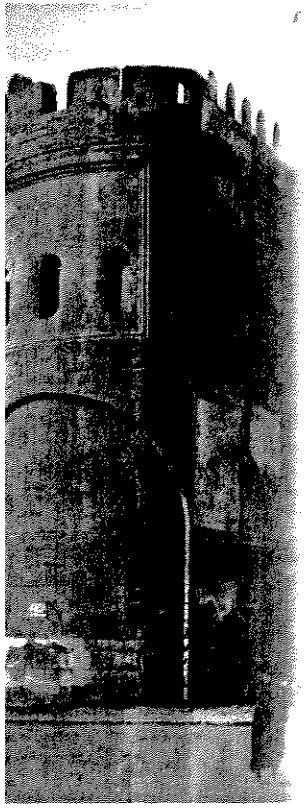
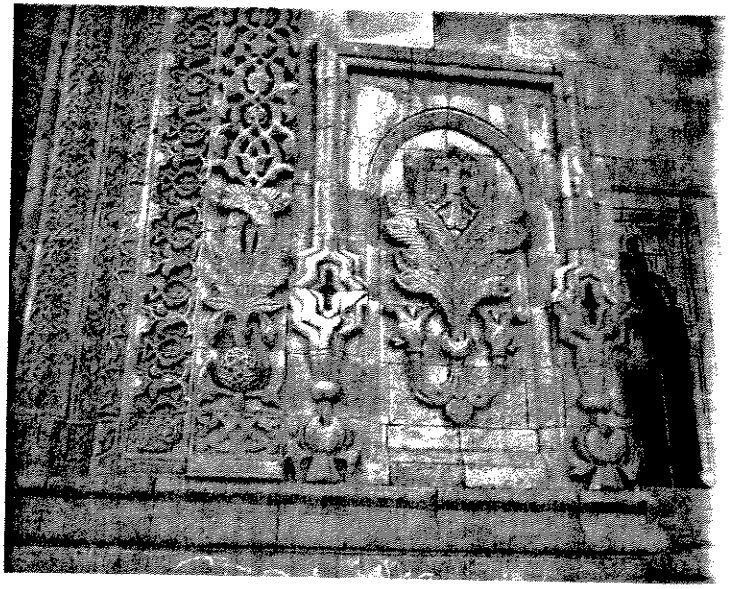


184. Detail of the exterior of the Armenian church of Aghtamar, Lake Van, Turkey, 10th century.

Armenian churches were decorated with exterior sculpture, a practice also imitated in Seljuq Anatolia. David and Goliath, among other biblical figures, may be seen.



185. Vegetal sculpture of the Seljuq school on the Çifte Madrasa, Erzerum, Turkey, begun 1253.

186. The colophon of an Armenian magical miscellany, 1610. Illuminated manuscript, 9⅞ x 6⅞" (25 x 17.5 cm). British Library, London.

Armenian artists and craftworkers played a vital role in the Safavid and Ottoman empires. Christian forms and techniques influenced Islamic ones and vice versa. This particular Armenian magical compendium was probably written in Constantinople, and is modelled on Turkish astrological and magical works, though the technique of illustration is distinctively Armenian.

From the early sixteenth century onwards there was a renewed dispersal of Armenians throughout the Islamic lands as Ottoman Turkish and Safavid Iranian armies fought one another and ravaged the towns and countryside of Armenia. In 1605, after Shah Abbas decided to turn eastern Armenia into a depopulated defensive zone, large numbers of Armenians were forcibly resettled in a special suburb of Isfahan known as New Julfa (FIG. 186). (Jesuit and Carmelite missionaries as well as the occasional European craftworker also resided there, providing a possible conduit for influence of the techniques of European painters and of Christian iconography on Iranian art.) New Julfa became the centre of Iran's luxury crafts and trade. Armenians were prominent as goldsmiths and silversmiths, and above all Armenian merchants constituted a commercial elite that dominated both production of silk textiles and their export – for example, Armenians ran the overland silk caravans from Central Asia to Damascus and Smyrna (modern Izmir).

As late as the fifteenth century Christians were probably still in a majority in Asia Minor and this was certainly the case in territories ruled over by Ottoman sultans in the Balkans. Whether Orthodox, Coptic, or Armenian, the Christian population made a significant contribution to Ottoman art and architecture and it has been estimated that out of the 3,523 craftsmen who worked on the Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul, 51 per cent were Christian.

The Jewish Community and Islamic Art

It is less easy to present a similar account of the various aspects of the Jewish contribution to Islamic art. The Jews shared the Muslim prejudice against figurative imagery in art and it is usually impossible to point to distinctively Jewish imagery on textiles, metal, or glass. However, textual sources make it clear that Jews were extremely prominent in all these areas. We know that in Fatimid Cairo Jews were heavily involved in goldsmithing, glassblowing, weaving, and dyeing. In fourteenth-century Fez they were prominent in damascening metalwork, goldsmithing, and silversmithing. In Isfahan, Jews were engaged in dyeing and embroidering textiles. They played a major role in glass production in the Levant. Benjamin of Tud it was part of the Crusader that the city contained four in glassmaking and ship-owi centuries many Jews fled Cl Ottoman lands. Mehmed II tle in underpopulated Istanbu shops in Palestine. Business pa allowed businesses to function gious holidays. Inevitably, Isl on such things as Jewish man architecture. Moreover, the in restricted to Jews living in Isla Jewish communities within C Spanish Jews, were often tra to the medieval West.

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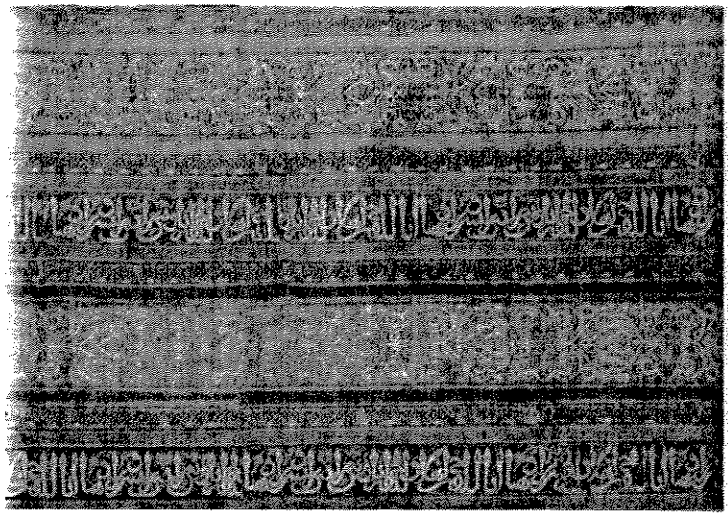
the Levant. Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Tyre in 1163 (when it was part of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem), reported that the city contained four hundred Jews who were involved in glassmaking and ship-owning. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries many Jews fled Christian persecution to settle in the Ottoman lands. Mehmed II encouraged them to come and settle in underpopulated Istanbul. Other Jews set up textile workshops in Palestine. Business partnerships between Muslim and Jew allowed businesses to function continuously without regard to religious holidays. Inevitably, Islamic art also exercised an influence on such things as Jewish manuscript illumination and synagogue architecture. Moreover, the influence of Islamic art forms was not restricted to Jews living in Islamic territory; it also extended to the Jewish communities within Christendom, and Jews, particularly Spanish Jews, were often transmitters of Arab sciences and arts to the medieval West.

Spain

Spain, Sicily, and southern Italy were the main channels for the influence of Islamic art and architecture in the West. An Islamic art in exile continued to evolve outside the frontiers of Islam and to produce supreme pieces in the territories to the north. Although the Muslim territory in Spain was confined to the southern region of Granada by the second half of the thirteenth century, nevertheless Muslim *mudejar* craftworkers continued to be employed in the territories that the Christians had reconquered. To take one example, *mudejar*s were largely responsible for the Alcazar palace in Seville (a city that had passed into Christian hands in 1258). In 1364 Pedro the Cruel of Castille ordered the building of this palace on the site of a largely demolished earlier palace. He recruited plasterers and carpenters from the Muslim capital of Granada as well as from Toledo. The general effect achieved is that of an Islamic palace in which richly decorated halls lead off from open courtyards. Multi-lobed and horseshoe-shaped arches frame the entrances to the halls, with stone carved like lacework (FIG. 187). Stucco and glazed tiles arranged in geometric tesselated patterns covered the surfaces of the walls. Columns and capitals were looted from the ruined Umayyad palace of al-Madinat al-Zahra and there are indeed indications that the *mudejar*s were consciously seeking to emulate the features of the old Umayyad palace. Kufic inscriptions both proclaim that "Allah alone is Conqueror" and celebrate the magnificence of Pedro. Carpet- and silk-weaving (FIG. 188) was another outstanding area of *mudejar* achievement. As with ceramics, heraldic shields sometimes appear in the midst of oriental patterns.

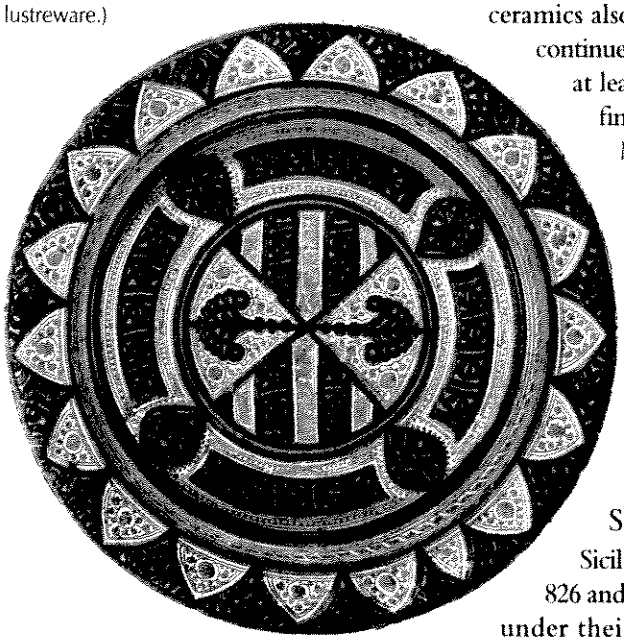
Overleaf
187. An interior courtyard of the Alcazar palace, Seville, begun 1364, showing Moorish arches and other details produced by *mudejar* craftworkers.

188. A fragment of Spanish coloured silk, 14th–15th century. 14⅛ x 21⅝" (36 x 55 cm). David Collection.



189. Hispano-Moresque dish from Valencia, 1450. Lustreware, diameter 18⅛" (46.3 cm). British Museum, London.

The glaze and lustre techniques spread from Spain to Italy, and ultimately majolica too evolved from Hispano-Moresque ware. (The Medicis in Florence are known to have collected Hispano-Moresque lustreware.)



Besides *mudejars*, Mozarabs (Christians who lived under Muslim rule) also carried with them memories of southern Spanish architecture when they migrated north to Christian lands. Islamic decorative themes and techniques were adopted wholesale even in parts of Spain that were far from Muslim Andalusia – for example, the Cistercian nunnery of Las Huelgas de Burgos in northern Spain, where the cloisters are decorated with stucco in the Islamic manner, with peacocks shown in an arabesque setting, as well as with Kufic inscriptions and floral scrolls. In ceramics also, Muslim techniques and traditions continued to develop in Christian Spain. From at least the fifteenth century onwards the finest lustreware, the so-called Hispano-Moresque ware, was produced in Manises near Valencia (FIG. 189). Although the techniques of lustre, painting cobalt in glaze and the use of tin glaze, as well as many of the basic designs, were all of Middle Eastern origin, nevertheless there was an increasing infiltration of Christian heraldic and other European figurative themes.

Sicily

Sicily had been ruled by the Muslims from 826 and the mainland of southern Italy came under their rule from 901 onwards. Then in

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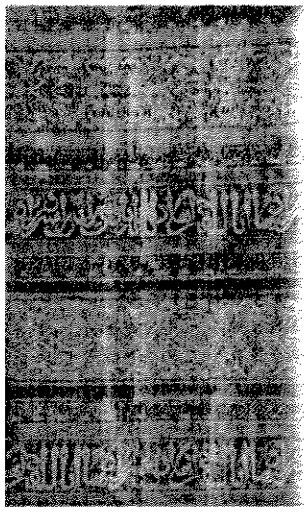

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the course of the eleventh century Norman adventurers slowly conquered Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily. A mixed culture flourished under the Norman Hauteville dynasty, in which Greeks as well as Arabs played an important part. Although the basic structures of the cathedrals at Cefalu (1131) and at Monreale (c. 1174) are Western in shape (as best befitted the liturgy that was celebrated in them), nevertheless aspects of the decoration are unmistakably Islamic. Similarly, the twelfth-century Zisa palace in Palermo, with its *muqarnas*, its roundels with trees and peacocks, and its Kufic inscriptions, is purely Islamic in inspiration; and the honeycombed ceiling of the nave of the Palatine Chapel, built in 1132–43 (attached to the much-rebuilt Royal Palace), is a sort of encyclopedia of Fatimid painting in exile, richly decorated with figures and arabesques, framed by octagonal stars (FIG. 190).

The Muslim textile industry continued to flourish for a while under Christian rule and the Norman kings kept a silk workshop attached to the palace. The silk mantle of Roger II of Sicily, woven in 1133 or 1134, was made in the royal treasury

190. A scene at a wall fountain, from a ceiling panel in the Palatine Chapel, Palermo, 12th century.

191. Roger II's red and gold coronation robe, made in Sicily, 1133/34. Silk with gold embroidery, 4'7⅛" x 11'2" (1.4 x 3.4 m). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

The inscription in Arabic declares that it was made in the workshop and calls down prolix blessings upon the ruler, including "the pleasures of days and nights without surcease and change."

or workshop (*khizana*). It features two tigers savaging a camel (FIG. 191).

Trade: Textiles and Metalwork

Medieval Sicily under the Normans and later the Hohenstaufen continued to be a major producer of decorated silks. But the influence of Muslim textiles on Western Europe ran much wider than that. Consider that the words alpaca, blouse, camelot, chiffon, cotton, damask, mohair, muslin, and satin all derive from Arabic words or place names and have all passed into the English language. Many of the oldest Islamic textiles to have survived have done so because they were preserved in Christian churches where they were used as hangings, copes, and so on. Muslim textiles were treated as objects of prestige throughout Europe. Quattrocento Tuscan painters such as Fra Angelico and Gentile da Fabriano reproduced Islamic fabrics in their paintings when they wanted to suggest status or wealth. Islamic metalwork, including weaponry, was also prized in Western Europe, and specific examples of Islamic calligraphy, patterns, and ornamentation occur throughout Western art.

Oriental carpets became favoured props in European painting from the Renaissance onwards. Venice seems to have been the chief point of entry for these luxury objects and the richness of Venetian painting in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with its profusion of reds and golds, certainly owes much to the presence in them of Turkish carpets, which hang from windows, cover tables, or are strewn over marble floors. One of the best-known examples of the carpet in art is in Hans Holbein's painting *The*

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Ambassadors (1533; FIG. 177, see page 213), where the two ambassadors stand in front of a table covered by a carpet with a striking geometric design, known as a large-pattern Holbein, precisely because it appears in this painting. Other types of Middle Eastern carpet have also been named after the painters in whose works they appear, though these labels are becoming obsolete. Thus, a "Lotto" carpet is more correctly known as an arabesque Ushak, and a "Bellini" is a particular type of Ottoman rug with an infolding of the inner border. In some cases, painters may have owned the carpets they painted, as such things could serve both as artists' props and as investments.

On the evidence of paintings, it would seem that Persian carpets only entered Europe in any numbers in the seventeenth century. Perhaps the latter development reflected growing European trade links with Iran via the Gulf. Alternatively, it may be that the more fluid lines of these carpets, which relied more on floral designs than strict geometry, consorted better with the Baroque taste of the age. Despite the Eastern provenance of the carpets, they do not seem to have been regarded as specifically exotic.

Although it was certainly not unknown for carpets to be used as floor coverings, this was rare until the eighteenth century. Egyptian Ottoman carpet-weavers produced round and cross-shaped carpets, which appear to have been designed specifically for Western tables. It seems likely that whole categories of carpet, such as the arabesque Ushak, were produced primarily for export to Europe. Carpets were also produced to be given as gifts to ambassadors – for example, the Polonaise carpets produced in seventeenth-century Iran. Since carpets were expensive to import, their designs were copied in England and elsewhere, and English manufacture of imitation small-pattern Holbeins began in the late sixteenth century.

It seems likely that many of the finest pieces of Mamluk metalwork were produced for export to Europe. As with carpets, much of the metalwork passed through Venice, and it seems that under market pressure from Europe new shapes were created in the Middle East. In the fifteenth century a lot of metalwork, intricately decorated with scrolls and arabesques, produced in western Iran by Mahmud al-Kurdi and others, was exported to Europe. The decorative style of this sort of Iranian work was copied by craftworkers in northern Italy and adapted to Western shapes of vessel. As was the case with carpets, European craftworkers also set to imitating the shapes and designs of Eastern metalwork. Venice, which took a leading part in producing metalwork in the Islamic

style, also began from the thirteenth century onwards to compete with Egypt and Syria in the production of enamelled glass.

Trade: Ornament and Pattern

Textiles and metalwork often carried calligraphic inscriptions and these caught the eyes of European artists and designers. Thus, it is quite common to find Arabic, or pseudo-Arabic, appearing on Renaissance artefacts. For example, the border of the tunic and greaves on Verrocchio's statue of *David* is decorated with mock-Arabic (FIG. 192). The Arabic script, which was not intended to be deciphered, was used purely decoratively. Indeed, in most cases the inscription is gibberish, the letters being joined in nonsensical ways. The technical term for this is Kufesque. Examples of Kufesque are also found in the decoration of medieval English and French manuscripts and enamels. Occasionally, however, the artist would make an accurate copy of Arabic, so it is not unknown for a painting or other object designed for use in a church to bear the Muslim declaration of faith – "There is no God but God and Muhammad is His Messenger."

192. ANDREA DEL VERROCCHIO (c. 1435–88)
David, 1473–75.
Bronze, height 49¼ (125 cm).
Museo dello Bargello, Florence.

The mock-Kufic ornamentation on the tunic border over his shoulder is clear.

During the Renaissance the Roman ornamental system known as the grotesque was rediscovered and this was combined with Eastern arabesques and knot designs. Thanks to various types of craft manual and pattern-book, knot designs became pervasive and appear on textiles, bookbindings, and interior decoration. Stylised plant forms in a drop repeat pattern also became popular from the sixteenth century onwards. Pomegranate and ogival patterns appearing on textiles probably also derive from Islamic exemplars.

The influence of Islamic art and architecture on the West ran wider than one might at first suspect. From the twelfth century onwards church facades

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Islamic Art and the Ea

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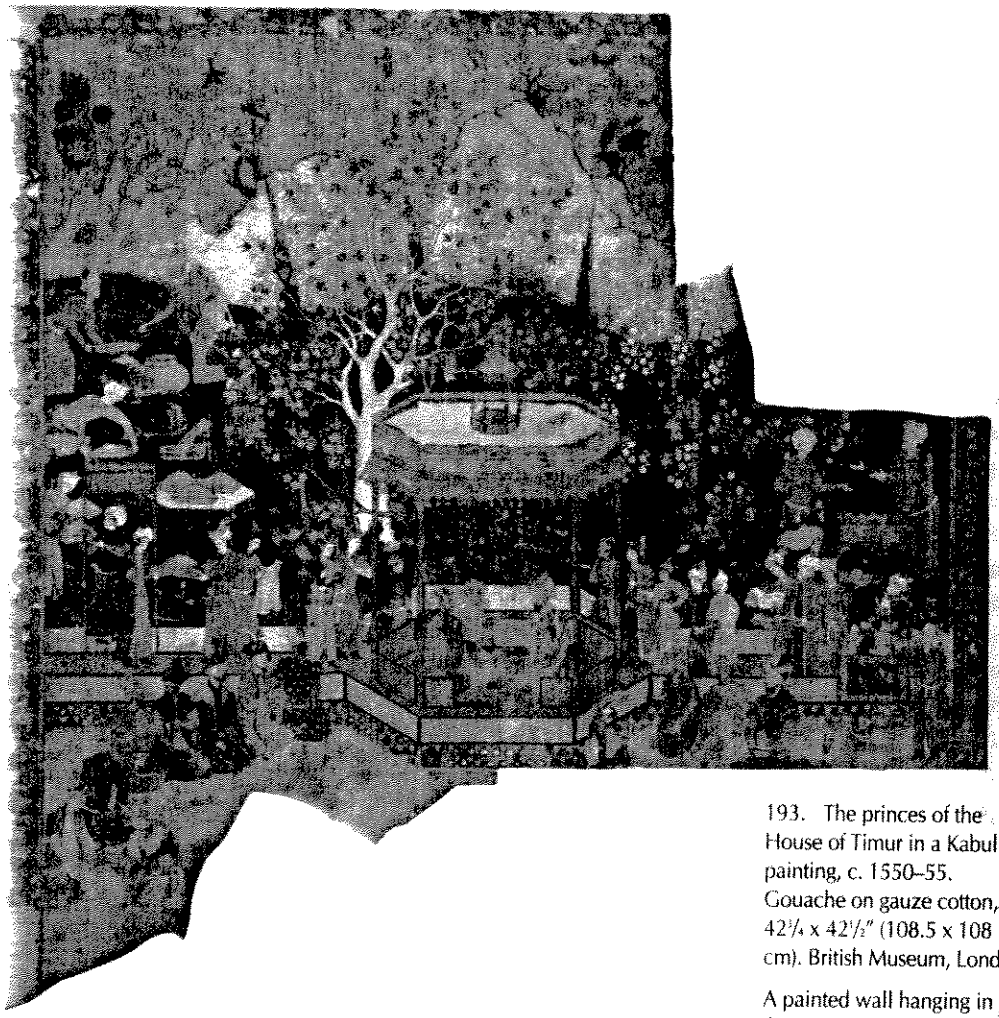
and other decorative details became more ornate and Romanesque buildings in France and elsewhere made use of such Islamic features as polylobed, pointed, horseshoe, and cusped arches, as well as rib-vaulting, polychromy, and rolled corbels. Often such features appear on churches that were on the pilgrim route to Compostela in Spain. Returning Crusaders may also have carried back to Europe memories of Muslim architecture. Writings in Arabic played an even greater part in the shaping of Western culture and it is impossible to think either of the twelfth-century Renaissance or of Scholasticism as developing in the way that they did without considering the earlier contributions made by Arab scholars and translators, particularly in the fields of science – one thinks of Ibn Sina (Avicenna; 980–1037), whose medical treatise was translated into Latin in the twelfth century and was the most important text for medical teaching in the West for three centuries – mathematics, and philosophy (and from the eighteenth century onwards *The Thousand and One Nights* exercised a vital influence on European and American fiction). This is a subject to which we will return at the end of this chapter, in considering the influence of Islamic art on that of the West up to the present day.

Islamic Art and the East: India

In 896 a brass statue of a four-armed Hindu goddess was brought from India to Baghdad. According to al-Masudi in the early tenth century, "the people nicknamed the idol *Shughl* – 'A Hard Day's Work' – because everyone stopped what work they were doing to go and see it during the days it was on view." But though carved and painted Indian idols may have fascinated the Muslims, their influence on Islamic art was inevitably slight. Even so, the protruding eye of western Indian painting of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the pendant leg posture of seated Indian idols resurface in illustrated Arab manuscripts of the thirteenth century. Indian textile designs exercised a more pervasive influence. The Iranian scholar al-Thalabi (d. 1038) refers to the excellence of Indian velvets, and Indian dyed cloths were extremely popular in Mamluk Egypt. As regards cultural commerce in the other direction, the establishment of Muslim dynasties in India, beginning with Mahmud of Ghazna's invasion in the early eleventh century and culminating in the establishment of the Mughal dynasty in northern India in the early sixteenth century, imposed an Islamic and more specifically a Persian visual culture on large parts of India (FIG. 193).



193. The princes of the House of Timur in a Kabul painting, c. 1550–55. Gouache on gauze cotton, 42¾ x 42½" (108.5 x 108 cm). British Museum, London.

A painted wall hanging in the Timurid Persian (though not Iranian) tradition. Humayun, son of Babur, the famous founder of the Mughal dynasty, ruled Delhi from 1530 to 1540 and again from 1555 to 1556. The painting probably originally showed Babur holding court, but it was subsequently added to and tampered with, so that it became a sort of group portrait of the Mughal dynasty in India. It was probably first painted by artists who had migrated from the Safavid court of Tahmasp.

Islamic Art and the East: China

All the cultural traffic that may have existed between Islam and Christendom and Islam and India (and for that matter between Islam and sub-Saharan Africa) shrinks by comparison when one comes to consider the range and scale of Islam's contacts with China. The Chinese emperor was recognised by the Arabs as being one of the great rulers of the world (he is portrayed as such in one of the frescoes of the Umayyad desert palace at Qusayr Amra in Jordan), and without trade with China, particularly in ceramics and textiles, and the influence of Chinese motifs, technology, and artistic styles, Islamic art would never have evolved as it did. Examples must be limited here, so this section will look at only some of the most important exchanges between China and the major dynasties of the Islamic world.

194. The transport of Chinese porcelain in an Aqqoyunlu Turkoman scroll fragment, late 15th century. Silk, 9⅞ x 18⅞" (25 x 48 cm). Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul.

During the 15th century vast amounts of Chinese porcelain were exported to the Islamic world. Although probably executed in western Iran at the time that it was ruled by the Aqqoyonlu Turkomans, this image (actually of part of a wedding procession) not only shows Chinese people and Chinese blue-and-white ware in a cart, but also clear signs of Chinese influence in the artist's treatment of landscape. This is one of the album pictures classified as "Siyah Qalam."

Early Contacts

Ceramics and textiles, China's most admired products, were exported to the West by overland caravan routes, the chief of which ran through eastern Turkestan to the high Pamir passes, down to Samarqand and Balkh (FIG. 194). The Battle of Talas, near Samarqand, in 751, where an Arab army defeated the mostly Turkish troops in the service of China, led to the rise of a Tibetan empire, which cut off direct overland communication between China and the Islamic lands for centuries to come.

Despite the military confrontation between Muslim and Chinese armies and despite the contraction of Chinese frontiers, maritime trade between Tang China and the Gulf ports of the Abbasid caliphate flourished, albeit intermittently. (The battle itself had most importantly led to the capture of Chinese papermakers, who were used to set up a papermaking industry in Samarqand; by the early eighth century the technology of papermaking had spread to Baghdad.) The late seventh and early eighth centuries saw a fashion for Chinese silver vessels and decorated glass in the Muslim world, and by the early ninth century half the population of the Chinese port of Guangdong (Canton) was in fact Muslim. Even the massacre in 878 of the merchant colony in Guangdong did not prevent the continuing growth of trade between the Middle East and China, through ports on the Malay coast and elsewhere.

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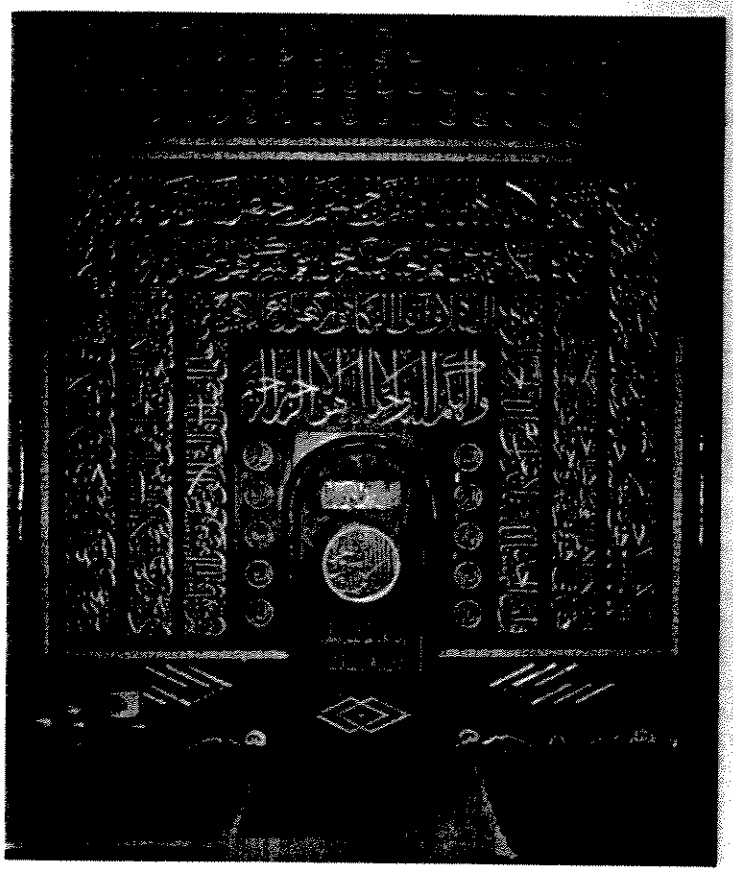
After 960 the xenophobic Tang dynasty in China was ousted by the Song, who encouraged Muslim merchants not only to resettle in Guangdong but also to move into other cities. Moreover, for the first time Chinese traders competed with Arabs and Iranians in the Indian Ocean trade. Islam was so much the religion of international trade in the region that many Chinese converted to it (FIG. 195). Around the year 1000 the trade route began to shift from the Gulf to the Red Sea, with the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt being an important beneficiary.

The inventory of treasures of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir (1036–94), already mentioned in the context of palace life, includes objects that are of overtly Chinese provenance: a multitude of large porcelain pitchers of all colours, filled with camphor from Qaisur (Sumatra); a porcelain buffet supported by three legs and equipped with platters, each of which could hold 220 *ruks* (= 9 lbs, or 4 kg) of meat; great vats designed for washing clothes, each of which was supported on three legs depicting all sorts of animals (and each



195. The *mihrab* of the Mosque of the Immortal Crane in Yangzhou, China, c. 1275.

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worth 1,000 dinars); a multitude of cases filled with porcelain eggs of the shape and whiteness of real eggs. In 1038 al-Thalabi wrote that:

> The Arabs used to call every delicately or curiously made vessel and suchlike, whatever its real origin, "Chinese," because finely made things are a speciality of China. The designation "china" has remained in use to this day for the celebrated type of dishes. In the past, as at the present time, the Chinese have been famous for the skill of their hands and for their expertise in fashioning rare and beautiful objects. The Chinese themselves say "Except for us the people of the world are all blind – unless one takes into account the people of Babylon, who are merely one-eyed."

The Mongols

The Mongol invasions of the Middle East and of China in the thirteenth century brought Chinese and Islamic culture closer together than ever before. Chinese scholars, administrators, and craftworkers followed their Mongol rulers into the Muslim lands. The *Pax Mongolica* and the relative safety of the overland trade route under Mongol control led to increased quantities of Far Eastern textiles arriving in western Asia. Such textiles were not just of importance in themselves but also for the designs they carried, which were copied by Muslim craftworkers in other media. Such was the popularity of Chinese textiles that some Muslim potters strove to get a textile effect in the decoration of their pots, hence the appearance of what are essentially striped and panel designs from textiles, as favoured by the Mongol elite, on Iranian and Syrian pots. From the late fourteenth century onwards, as a result of Timurid diplomatic contacts, a new wave of Chinoiserie motifs circulated throughout the Muslim lands and, to some extent, the International Timurid style can be understood as a fusion of traditional Muslim designs and new Chinese decorative, mostly floral, motifs.

Chinese Imagery and Mamluk Art

Although relations between the Mongols and the Mamluk sultans were initially hostile, after the Peace of Aleppo in 1322, trade flourished once more and, doubtless as one of the consequences, distinctively Chinese imagery begins to appear on Mamluk metalwork and ceramics. Thus Muslim artists based new designs on the Chinese lotus, but they did not understand that the lotus was a plant that grew in water and they turned it into a fantastic flower (FIG. 196). The craze for Chinese things in the Mamluk lands

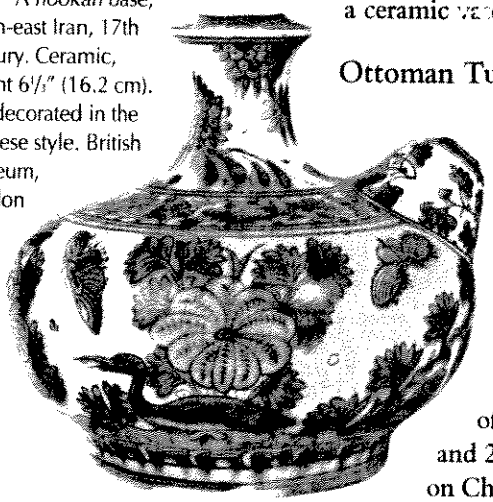
196. A large Egyptian or Syrian basin with Chinese lotus-flower decoration, early 14th century. Brass inlaid with silver and gold, diameter 21⅛" (53.6 cm). British Museum, London.

Other motifs adopted but misunderstood by Mamluk ceramists include the dragon, the benign bringer of rain as well as the image of the emperor in Chinese art. Muslim dragons, even when they look like Chinese dragons, are fierce and nasty creatures. Chinese cloud bands or scrolls also appear in Iranian paintings and carpets, but Muslim artists were not aware of the way the Chinese discriminated between cloud, flame, and mushroom scrolls, and used them indiscriminately.

persisted throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and the penultimate Mamluk sultan, Qansuh al-Ghuri (r. 1501–16), possessed a fine collection of celadons. Like the Timurids, the Mamluks both imported Chinese ceramics and imitated them. Muslim potters produced imitations of blue-and-white ware, which began to appear in Syria at the end of the fourteenth century. However, they were not content just to copy the Chinese products. Again, they adapted Chinese motifs (among them the lotus, peony, chrysanthemum, and floral scroll) to un-Chinese panel layouts and they added extra colours.

Safavid Iran and Chinese Blue-and-White

The Safavids, who followed the traditions of their Timurid and Turkoman predecessors in so many things, maintained the cult of things Chinese. Shah Abbas (r. 1587–1629) owned a splendid collection of blue-and-white, celadon, and polychrome ware. Imitation blue-and-white ware dominated ceramic production in Safavid Iran, and here also stock Chinese images underwent curious transformations at the hands of Iranian artists. So Chinese sages became Safavid poets with wine bottles and the *contrapposto* pose favoured by the Chinese was taken up by mooning Iranian lovers. Chinese designs were also applied to such an intrinsically un-Chinese object as a *hookah* (a tobacco pipe that uses a ceramic vase containing water; FIG. 197).



197. A *hookah* base, south-east Iran, 17th century. Ceramic, height 6⅛" (16.2 cm). It is decorated in the Chinese style. British Museum, London

Ottoman Turkey and "Chinoiserie"

The Safavid enthusiasm for late Ming export ware of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their readiness to imitate it is in contrast to the way things developed in Ottoman Turkey. The Ottoman sultan Selim I acquired a lot of china as a result of the Battles of Caldiran (1514) and of Raydaniyya (1517). Today the Topkapi collection in Istanbul, the legacy of centuries of Ottoman acquisitions, includes 1,300 celadons and 2,600 pieces of Ming ware. The court dined on Chinese porcelain; others had to make do with

local products, including imi
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work rather than on any c
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(FIG. 199) and other objects,
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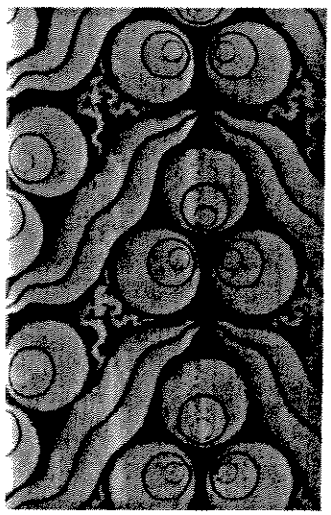
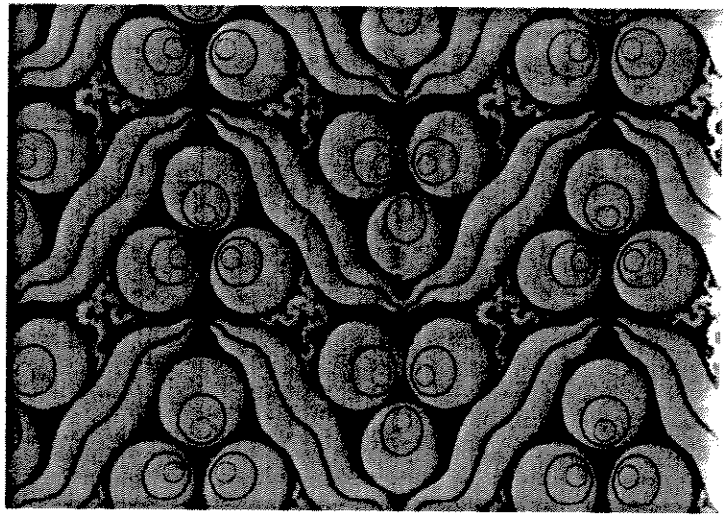


local products, including imitations of true china. But the earliest Iznik pots tended to be modelled on examples of Turkish metalwork rather than on any ceramic prototype. Only from the 1520s onwards, in the wake of the looting of the Safavid and Mamluk porcelain collections, did the potters at Iznik seriously study the Chinese porcelains. What they tended to copy were not contemporary exports, but choice pieces that had been hoarded for decades or even centuries, so their copies often had a rather antiquarian flavour.

The Turks were also less prepared than the Iranians to accept Chinese designs and shapes, and took even greater liberties with the originals. It is indeed difficult to mistake blue-and-white Iznik ware for Chinese blue-and-white – most crucially, the decorators of Turkish pots had a far wider range of colours than was available to the Chinese. In the long run, Iznik ware absorbed what it wanted from the Chinese competition, and developed independently.

Chinoiserie motifs also appeared and were adapted on Ottoman metalwork, album pictures, and silks (FIG. 198). Designs, currently referred to as *chintamani*, frequently feature on Ottoman textiles (FIG. 199) and other objects, such as Iznik jugs, in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. The pattern consists of repeated regular sets of three balls arranged in a pyramid, and sometimes these little pyramids are underlined by pairs of wavy "tiger-stripe" lines. It is widely accepted that *chintamani* has a Chinese Buddhist origin and that the original image is of three pearls borne on the waves of the sea, signifying good fortune. However, tracking down its original meaning in China does not mean that we

198. Detail of *Hatayi*-style ink drawing from an album of the Ottoman sultan Murad III (r. 1574–95). Ink on paper. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.



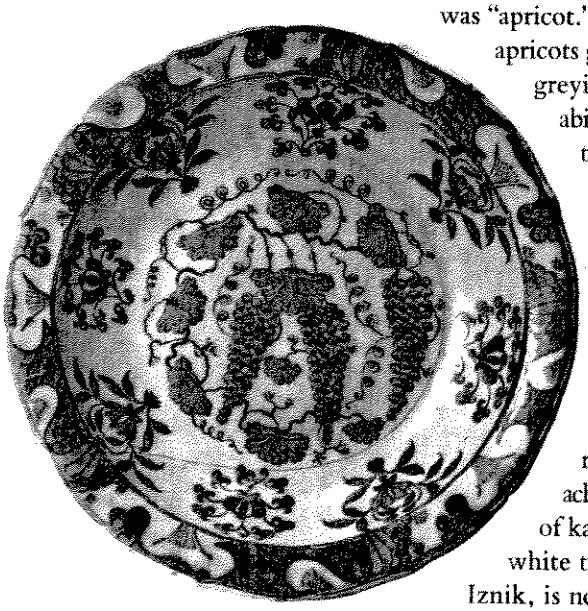
199. *Chintamani* designs on an Ottoman velvet brocade, 16th century. 37⅜ x 44⅞" (95 x 114 cm). David Collection.

have understood its meaning in Ottoman Turkey. In Ottoman art the balls look more like planets than pearls (sometimes, indeed, they appear as closed crescents), while the stripes do not resemble the waves of the sea. The three balls might be taken as referring to the crescent moon which, from the fourteenth century onwards, became the emblem of the Ottoman dynasty. (All the same, though such an association seems eminently plausible, the three-circle design appears as early as the ninth century on Iraqi pottery.) Some scholars interpret the circles as leopard spots. The Ottoman Turkish term *pelengi* (leopard-like) refers to some kinds of design found on textiles. As for the tiger stripes, they have strong associations with heroism and vigour and, most specifically, with Rustam, the greatest of the heroes of the *Shahnama*, who is almost invariably portrayed wearing a tiger-skin. Yet it is still, of course, quite conceivable that when an Ottoman Turk looked at the *chintamani* design, Rustam or Timur or Buddhist jewellery did not come to mind because the pattern was just part of the background of everyday life.

The Influence of Chinese Ceramic Technology

The response in Islamic art to Chinese ceramics was certainly not limited to imitation or the influence of certain motifs.

Muslim development of frit technology in the eleventh century was in response to the new delicate and translucent Chinese porcelain of the Song dynasty then being first imported. According to al-Thalabi, the most favoured colour in these new wares was "apricot." This is at first sight puzzling. However, apricots growing in the region of Damascus were greyish-green in colour, so perhaps al-Thalabi was referring to celadon ware. This was the great age for the production of celadon – a porcelain with a greyish-white body and a thick translucent glaze varying from greyish-green and bluish-green to sea green (FIG. 200).



200. Large Iznik dish of the Ottoman period, c. 1530–50. Underglaze blue decoration on ceramic, diameter 15½" (39.4 cm). Khalili Collection.

The three bunches of grapes in the centre of this early Iznik piece are after a Chinese Ming-dynasty prototype.

Above all, Muslim potters, desirous of emulating Chinese ceramics, developed the use of tin glaze (FIG. 201) to get an effect of whiteness that corresponded, however poorly, with that achieved by Chinese porcelain through use of kaolin and high firing temperatures. This white tin-glazed and decorated ware, such as Iznik, is now seen as almost more characteristic

of Islamic art than any other
hugely influential on Europea
technology. Indeed, the very
pottery with painted designs s
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Chinese Painting and the

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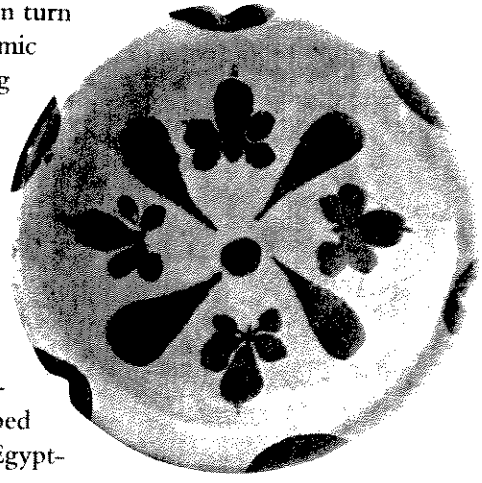
Central Asia can be seen in s

of Islamic art than any other product and was in turn hugely influential on European ceramics and ceramic technology. Indeed, the very idea of decorating pottery with painted designs seems to have begun in the Middle East and was only later imitated in China. It is not just a matter of artistic techniques and motifs flowing downhill from China into the Islamic world. In the early fourteenth century the Chinese were learning from Muslim ceramic technology. They took to importing cobalt ore from the Muslim lands and painting cobalt under a glaze, just as Iranian potters did. Chinese weavers also copied Arab striped silks and went on to produce them for export to Egyptian and European markets.



201. A tin-glazed bowl with blue decoration, Iraq, 9th century. Earthenware, diameter 8¼" (20.9 cm). Khalili Collection.

Chinese Painting and the Decorative Arts

The Mongol elite in China and Iran were keen on Chinese paintings (particularly ones featuring horses) and they collected them avidly. It is evident from what Iranian painters produced that they also saw and studied Chinese scroll paintings. Manuscripts from this period might be painted in a mixture of Arab and Chinese styles and follow the Chinese calligraphic style of rendering trees and rocks. Characteristically Chinese features in Islamic painting include an emphasis on landscape, a calligraphic style of brushstroke, linearity, subdued colouring, and the imitation of the Chinese way of rendering vegetation, clouds, and water. (The grass is feathery, the trees are gnarled, the clouds are long and ragged like dragons' tongues.) As has been mentioned, Iranian painters also copied the Chinese use of the line of the frame to cut off the tops or the sides of things, so as to suggest that a scene extended beyond the edges of the painting.

Muslim painters in general marvelled at the Chinese skill in portraiture. The traveller Ibn Battuta, who visited (or at least claimed to have visited) China in the 1340s, described his astonishment in coming across portraits of himself and his companions in correct Iraqi dress on display on the walls and in the markets of some Chinese towns in no time at all after their arrival. He was told that the Yuan emperor had ordered that portraits should be made of foreigners in case they tried to leave the country without authorisation – an instance of the underlying xenophobia of the period of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368).

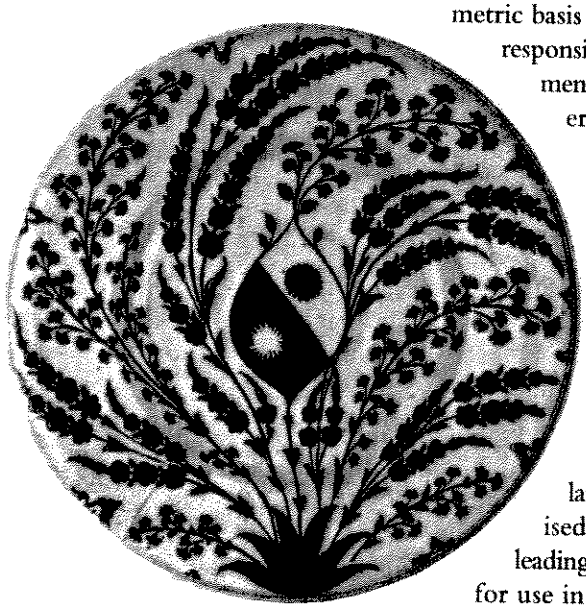
The impact of closer contacts between China and Timurid Central Asia can be seen in such diverse aspects as a craze for jade-

carving, as well as Muslim attempts to imitate on wood or stone the style of carving that the Chinese had pioneered for working in lacquer. The Chinese were also especially esteemed for silks, felts, steel mirrors, and talismanic amulets.

The Return to the West: Islamic Art in the 18th and 19th Centuries

In the post-Renaissance period, Western painters sometimes included Islamic costumes and headgear in their paintings in order to create a wilfully exotic effect. The presence of an interlace design or an Ottoman carpet is most unlikely to represent a considered reference to Middle Eastern culture. In the eighteenth century this changed. European travellers visited Muslim territories more frequently and a visit to the Levant was sometimes added to the conventional Grand Tour.

Serious engagement with the key elements of Islamic art came with the French military expedition to Egypt in 1798, and the various publications subsequently produced by Bonaparte's team of scholars helped familiarise the West with Egyptian art and material culture generally. British possession of India also increased interest in Muslim and Iranian culture, but Spain was the closest source of Islamic inspiration. The design theorist Owen Jones (1809–76), having published an influential study of the Alhambra and its decoration, went on in 1856 to publish *The Grammar of Ornament*. He stressed the need for ornament to have a geometric basis and proclaimed that Muslim artists were responsible for some of the world's finest achievements in this field. The work of Jones and others at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, especially in its Alhambra Court, did a great deal to popularise characteristically Islamic uses of pattern and colour.



202. Turkish Iznik dish made for European export, c. 1580. Fritware, diameter 14⅜" (36.5 cm). British Museum, London.

London's Victoria and Albert Museum, which opened in 1857, also played a part in introducing the British public to oriental artefacts, especially textiles. Its oriental carpet collection was started in 1876, and in 1893 it acquired the large and spectacular Ardabil carpet, largely through a public subscription organised by William Morris. Morris also took a leading part in adapting Islamic decorative motifs for use in Western interiors. British men like F.

du Cane Godman and Georg
Iznik ware and Andalusian
were to end up in public mu
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Iznik ware (FIGS 202 and 203)
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who illustrated the *Arabian*
Khayyam – Kandinsky, Ma
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low the impact of Islam on
fine art movements would ta
logical limits and leading the

203. William de Morgan
Panel of tiles with an Islamic-inspired central motif, 1888–97. Private collection.

du Cane Godman and George Salting were leading collectors of Iznik ware and Andalusian lustreware, and their collections were to end up in public museums. William de Morgan carried out experiments to reproduce and adapt the techniques used for Iznik ware (FIGS 202 and 203) and, having mastered these, went on to research the techniques used by Muslim potters for lustreware. In the twentieth century, artists as different as Dulac – who illustrated the *Arabian Nights* and the *Rubayyat of Omar Khayyam* – Kandinsky, Matisse, and Escher have been influenced in strongly contrasting ways by Islamic art. However, to follow the impact of Islam on abstractionism and other modern fine art movements would take us far from the original chronological limits and leading themes of this book.

Historical Events

Numbers in bold italic represent dates in the Muslim calendar

500–700

527–65 Reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I
531–79 Reign of the Sasanian ruler Khusraw I
c. 570 Birth of the Prophet Muhammad at Mecca
591–628 Reign of the Sasanian ruler Khusraw II
622 The beginning of the Muslim era. The flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina (Hijra) and the establishment in Medina of the first Muslim state ***1***
632 Death of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina ***11***
633–40 Muslim conquest of Syria, Palestine, and Iraq ***12–19***
642 Alexandria abandoned by Byzantine army. Muslims conquer Lower Egypt ***21***
651 Muslims conquer western Iran ***31***
661 Assassination of Ali ibn Abi Talib ***40***
661–750 Reign of the Umayyad caliphs ***41–132***

701–900

710 A Muslim army reaches the Indus ***91***
711 Muslim troops invade Spain ***92***
732 Charles Martel defeats Muslims at Poitiers ***114***
749–1258 Reign of the Abbasid caliphs ***132–656***
751 Muslim conquest reaches Tashkent. Defeat of the Chinese at the Battle of Talas ***134***
756–1031 Reign of the Spanish Umayyads ***138–422***
786–809 Reign of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid ***170–93***
800–909 Reign of the Aghlabids in Tunisia, Algeria, and Sicily ***184–296***
819–1005 Reign of the Samanids in Khurasan and Transoxania ***204–395***
821–73 Reign of the Tahirids in Khurasan ***205–59***
836 Abbasid capital moves from Baghdad to Samarra ***221***
868–905 Reign of the Tulunids in Egypt ***254–92***
883 Abbasid capital returns to Baghdad ***269***

901–1100

909–1171 Reign of the Fatimids in Tunisia, Egypt, Sicily, and Palestine ***297–567***
932–1062 Reign of the Buyids in Iran and Iraq ***320–454***
945 The Buyids enter Baghdad ***334***
969 Foundation of a new city at Cairo by the Fatimids ***358***
977–1186 Reign of the Ghaznavids in Khurasan, Afghanistan, Iran, and northern India ***366–582***
1001 First raids by Mahmud of Ghazna into India ***391***
1038–1194 Reign of the Seljuqs ***429–590***
1055 The Seljuqs enter Baghdad ***447***
1056–1147 Reign of the Almoravids in North Africa and Spain ***448–541***
1061 The Normans drive the Muslims from Sicily ***453***
1072–92 Reign of the Seljuq sultan Malik Shah ***465–85***
1095–99 First Crusade ***488–92***
1099 Jerusalem captured by the Crusaders ***492***

1101–1200

1127–1222 Reign of the Zengids in parts of Iraq and Syria ***521–619***
1130–1269 Reign of the Almohads in North Africa and Spain ***524–667***
1147–48 Second Crusade ***541–42***
1171 Salah al-Din (Saladin) overthrows the Fatimid regime ***567***
1187 Crusaders defeated by Salah al-Din at the Battle of Hattin ***583***
1189–92 Third Crusade ***585–88***
1194 The Khwarazm shahs defeat the Seljuqs in Iran ***590***

Art and Archit

526–47 S. Vitale in Ravenna
532–37 Hagia Sophia in Constantinople
after 540 The rebuilding of Antioch by Justinia
635 Mosque constructed at Basra, Iraq (re
638 Mosque constructed at Kufa, Iraq (re
c. 670 Great Mosque at Qairouan, Tunisia (century AD) ***c. 50***
691–92 Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem com
696 Aniconic coinage introduced by the al-Malik ***77***

706–15 Great Mosque of Damascus ***87–96***
707–09 Mosque of the Prophet at Medina re
709–17 Mosque of al-Aqsa in Jerusalem ***91–***
c. 724–43 The desert palace of Qusayr Amr ***c.***
726–843 Iconoclast period at Constantinople
c. 740s The palaces of Khirbat al-Mafjar and
762–63 Foundation of the round city of Bagh
784–86 Great Mosque of Cordoba (later enla
c. 836–37 Jawsaq al-Khaqani palace at Samarr
841 Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez founded
848–52 Great Mosque of Samarra ***234–38***
850 Great Mosque of Sfax; Great Mosque
866 Friday Mosque at Shushtar ***252***
876–79 Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Fustat (Old C

before 943 Mausoleum of Ismail the Samanid a
936 Work begins on the palace-city of al- Spain ***324***
940 Death of the calligrapher Ibn Muqla
970 Mosque of al-Azhar in Cairo founded
from 990 Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo ***from 3***
1006–07 Tomb tower of Gunbad-i Qabus ***397***
1022 Death of the calligrapher Ibn al-Baw
1067 The looting and dispersal of treasures Fatimid palace in Cairo ***459***
c. 1085 Great Mosque at Isfahan rebuilt for th Shah ***c. 478***
1087 New city wall built for Cairo ***480***
1091–92 Great Mosque of Diyarbakir ***484***

1121–22 Great Mosque at Isfahan rebuilt with
1125 Mosque of al-Aqmar in Cairo ***519***
1133/34 Roger II's coronation robe made in Sic
1135 Four-*iwan* mosque constructed at Zav
1140 Palatine Chapel in Palermo ***534***
1163 "Bobrinski Bucket" manufactured in I
1183–84 The Citadel in Cairo begun by Salah a
1194 The minaret of Jam at Firuzkuh, Afgha

net Muhammad from Mecca to Medina (Hijra) *1*

nquer Lower Egypt *21*

se at the Battle of Talas *134*

34–296
94–395

tine *297–567*

, and northern India *366–382*

48–541

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57
n *583*

826–47 S. Vitale in Ravenna
832–37 Hagia Sophia in Constantinople
after 540 The rebuilding of Antioch by Justinian I
635 Mosque constructed at Basra, Iraq (rebuilt AD 665/AH 45) *14*
638 Mosque constructed at Kufa, Iraq (rebuilt AD 670/AH 50) *17*
c. 670 Great Mosque at Qairouan, Tunisia (rebuilding in the 9th century AD) *c. 50*
691–92 Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem completed *72*
696 Aniconic coinage introduced by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik *77*

706–15 Great Mosque of Damascus *87–96*
707–09 Mosque of the Prophet at Medina restored *88–90*
709–17 Mosque of al-Aqsa in Jerusalem *91–99*
c. 724–43 The desert palace of Qusayr Amr *c. 106–27*
726–843 Iconoclast period at Constantinople *108–228*
c. 740s The palaces of Khirbat al-Mafjar and Mshatta *c. 123–32*
762–63 Foundation of the round city of Baghdad *145*
784–86 Great Mosque of Cordoba (later enlarged) *168–70*
c. 836–37 Jawsaq al-Khaqani palace at Samarra *c. 222*
841 Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez founded *226*
848–52 Great Mosque of Samarra *234–38*
850 Great Mosque of Sfax; Great Mosque of Susa *236*
866 Friday Mosque at Shushtar *252*
876–79 Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Fustat (Old Cairo) *263–65*

before 943 Mausoleum of Ismail the Samanid at Bukhara *before 331*
936 Work begins on the palace-city of al-Madinat al-Zahra in Spain *324*
940 Death of the calligrapher Ibn Muqla *328*
970 Mosque of al-Azhar in Cairo founded *361*
from 990 Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo *from 380*
1006–07 Tomb tower of Gunbad-i Qabus *397*
1022 Death of the calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwab *413*
1067 The looting and dispersal of treasures and artefacts from the Fatimid palace in Cairo *459*
c. 1085 Great Mosque at Isfahan rebuilt for the Seljuq sultan Malik Shah *c. 478*
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1121–22 Great Mosque at Isfahan rebuilt with four *iwans* *515*
1125 Mosque of al-Aqmar in Cairo *519*
1133/34 Roger II's coronation robe made in Sicily *528*
1135 Four-*iwan* mosque constructed at Zawara, Iran *530*
1140 Palatine Chapel in Palermo *534*
1163 "Bobrinski Bucket" manufactured in Herat *558*
1183–84 The Citadel in Cairo begun by Salah al-Din *579*
1194 The minaret of Jam at Firuzkuh, Afghanistan *590*

c. 540 Death of the Arabian poet Imrul Qays
c. 565 Death of the Byzantine historian Procopius
650–51 Establishment of standard text of the Koran *30*
696 The Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik orders the introduction of Arabic in government offices *77*

751 Arabs capture Chinese papermakers; manufacture of paper at Samarqand *134*
c. 757 Death of Ibn al-Muqaffa, translator of *Kalila wa-Dimna* (*Kalila and Dimna*) into Arabic *c. 140*
768–69 Death of Ibn Ishaq, biographer of the Prophet Muhammad *151*
c. 813 Death of the poet Abu Nuwas *c. 197*
869 Death of the prose stylist al-Jahiz, author of *Kitab al-Bayan* (*Book of Proof*) and *Kitab al-Hayawan* (*Book of Animals*) *255*
c. 870 Death of the philosopher al-Kindi *c. 256*
874 Death of the historian al-Yaqubi *260*
877 Death of Hunayn ibn Ishaq, translator of Greek works into Arabic *263*

923 Death of the historian al-Tabari *311*
956 Death of the historian al-Masudi *345*
c. 960 Al-Sufi writes *Kitab Suwar al-Kawakib al-Thabita* (*Book of Images of the Fixed Stars*) *c. 349*
965 Death of the poet al-Mutanabbi *354*
967 Death of Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, compiler of the *Kitab al-Aghani* (*Book of Songs*) *356*
969 *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa* (*Letters of the Brethren of Purity*) written *358*
c. 1000 Death of the geographer al-Muqaddasi *c. 390*
c. 1010 Firdawsi writes the *Shahnama* (*Book of Kings*) *c. 400*
1037 Death of the philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna) *428*
1039 Death of the mathematician Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen) *430*
1048 Death of the polymath al-Biruni *439*
1064 Death of the Spanish scholar Ibn Hazm *456*
1080s Nizam al-Mulk, vizier to Malik Shah, writes the *Siyasatnama* (*Book of Government*) *470s*

1111 Death of the theologian al-Ghazali *504*
1122 Death of al-Hariri, author of the *Maqamat* (*Sessions*) *516*
1160–87 Gerard of Cremona translates some 87 works, including the Koran, Aristotle, and Ibn Sina, into Latin *555–83*
1177 The Persian poet Farid al-Din Attar completes *Mantiq al-Tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*) *572*
1198 Death of the philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) *594*

Historical Events

1201–1300

1206–1555 Reign of the Delhi sultans in northern India ***602–962***
1212 The Almohads defeated at Las Navas de Tolosa and subsequently withdraw from Spain ***609***
1220 Mongol invasion of Transoxania ***617***
1227 Death of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan ***624***
1230–1492 Reign of the Nasirids from Granada ***627–897***
1248 Seville passes into Christian hands ***646***
1250–1517 Reign of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria ***548–922***
1256–1353 Reign of the Mongol Ilkhanids in Iran ***654–754***
1258 Baghdad sacked by the Mongols. End of the Abbasid caliphate ***656***
1260 The Mamluks defeat the Mongols at the Battle of Ayn Jalut ***658***
1271 Journey of Marco Polo to China ***669***
1281–1924 Reign of the Ottomans in Anatolia, the Balkans, and Arab lands ***680–1342***

1301–1500

1316 Death of the Ilkanid ruler Uljaytu ***717***
1323 Peace between the Mongols and the Mamluks ***723***
1326 The Ottoman ruler Orhan takes Bursa ***726***
1357 The Ottomans cross into Europe at Gallipoli ***758***
1366 The Ottoman capital moves from Bursa to Edirne ***767***
1370–1506 Reign of the Timurids in Transoxania and Iran ***771–912***
1398–99 Timur (Tamerlane) invades India and sacks Delhi ***801***
1400–01 Timur conquers Syria and sacks Damascus ***803***
1404 The Castilian envoy Clavijo reaches Samarqand ***806***
1453 Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans ***857***
1487 Portuguese round the Cape of Good Hope ***892***
1492 Fall of Granada to the Christians ***897***
1496 Columbus discovers America ***901***
1498 Vasco da Gama reaches Calicut ***903***

1501–1700

1501–1732 Reign of the Safavids in Iran ***907–1145***
1516–17 The Ottoman conquest of Syria, Egypt, and the Yemen ***922–23***
1520–66 Reign of Suleyman the Magnificent ***926–74***
1526–1858 Reign of the Mughal emperors in India ***932–1274***
1529 First Ottoman siege of Vienna ***935***
1534 The Ottoman conquest of Baghdad ***940***
1571 Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Lepanto ***979***
1609–14 The Moriscos are expelled from Spain ***1018–23***
1617 Pietro della Valle visits Isfahan ***1026***
1619 Foundation of Dutch settlement in Batavia ***1028***
1683 Second Ottoman siege of Vienna ***1094***

1701–1800

1739 Delhi sacked by Nadir Shah ***1152***
1798 Napoleon invades Egypt ***1213***

Art and Arch

1209–10 The Citadel at Aleppo ***606***
1217–18 Hospital built by Kay Kaus in Sivas
1243–50 The Madrasa and Mausoleum of S
Cairo ***641–48***
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Glossary

arabesque ornamentation based on intertwining leaf and flower motifs

bida innovation, especially unwelcome innovation not sanctioned by the Koran or by the practices (*sunna*) of the Prophet

caliph (Arabic *khalifa*) "deputy," commander of the Islamic community (theoretically) combining both religious and political functions

caravanserai a lodging place for merchants, with provision for securing goods and stabling pack-animals

cuerda seca a Spanish term for the "dry cord" technique, a way of separating differently coloured glazes on a tile during firing with greased lengths of cord

dervish another word for Sufi

dervshirme the Ottoman system of collecting Christian boys for training and conversion prior to service in the palace or army

dinar gold coin

dirham a silver coin

emir (Arabic *amir*) a prince or a military officer. (The title was applied to a wide range of ranks in the palace and army)

fals a copper coin

futuwwa a loosely linked group of brotherhoods, usually of young men, who came together in lodges for religious, charitable, craft, or even occasionally criminal purposes. Sometimes *futuwwa* brotherhoods were linked with guilds or with Sufi orders

hadith an orally transmitted saying of the Prophet or an account about him or his contemporaries. Such traditions both guide Muslims in their everyday life and form one of the important bases of Islamic law

hammam a public or "Turkish" bath

hisba the inspection of markets and public morals

Ilkhan a Mongol ruler, subordinate to the Great Mongol Khan

imam (a) a prayer leader in a mosque; (b) a religiously guided political leader

iwan a vault closed at one end and open at the other, a kind of open porch, usually opening onto a courtyard, a standard feature in particular of Seljuq mosques

jami the great mosque in a town in which the sermon was preached on Fridays (see *masjid*)

khan a caravanserai

khanqa a foundation for the maintenance of Sufis (see Sufi), often endowed and supported by *waqf* income (see *waqf*)

khizana treasury, storehouse, sometimes library

kitabkhana literally "book house," a library and scriptorium, where books were both stored and produced. In practice, *kitabkhanas* often functioned as centres for design innovation

Kufic a form of Arabic script. (A variety of ornamental forms of this script, such as plaited Kufic, are known)

lajvardina pottery with a cobalt blue glaze and decoration in raised enamelling

madhhab a Muslim law school. In Sunni Islam there are four main schools of law. Although they differ on many legal and ritual issues, there is nevertheless a substantial body of common ground between the four schools

madina city

madrasa a college for the teaching of the religious sciences. Such foundations and their teaching staff were normally sustained by *waqf* income

mamluk a slave soldier. Most commonly such slaves were imported from beyond the frontiers of Islam and then converted to Islam. From c. 1250 to 1517 Egypt and Syria were governed by a sequence of Mamluk sultans. Elsewhere in the Islamic world (e.g., in Abbasid Samarra) officers of *mamluk* origin were often the powers behind the throne

maqsura enclosed space offering the ruler or governor and his entourage some security while they prayed

mashrabiyya window grille or screen of turned wood

masjid literally "a place of prostration," and hence a mosque. *Masjid* tends to be used of a small building, or even room, while the larger Friday or congregational mosque is known as a *jami*

masjid-i jami Persian term used for a *jami*, or Friday mosque

mihrab a recess or niche on the *qibla* wall

minai a form of pottery in which the colours are applied first under and then over the glaze. It was known in medieval times as "seven-colour" pottery

minaret (Anglicisation of the Arabic *manara*) in theory a tower from which the call to prayer was given. In practice, minarets were used for a variety of purposes and, in particular, the multiple minarets of large mosques often have a purely decorative function

minbar pulpit

Mozarab a Christian living under Muslim rule in Spain

muallim an urban official appointed by the *qadi* to enforce trading standards (weights, measures, quality of the materials used) and to police certain aspects of morality (see *hisba*)

muqarnas a three-dimensional architectural ornament, formed by the juxtaposition of cones. Often used in zones of transition and arranged in such a fashion as to create honeycomb or stalactite effects

muraqqa an album of pictures. Such albums were commonly put together for presentation to princes

nadim a cup-companion retained by a caliph or other prominent figure. The *nadim* was a cultivated man who was paid to provide edifying or entertaining conversation at the dinner table

nastaliq a script invented in the fourteenth century and thereafter extremely popular in the areas dominated by Persian culture

pishtaq Persian term for a portal or a high arch framing an *iwan*. Usually the arch is within a large and ornately decorated rectangular frame

qadi a Muslim judge

qasr palace, castle, or enclosure

qibla the direction of prayer, towa Mecca

qubba dome

ribat in North Africa, a frontier fortress for warriors dedicated to holy war. Also a term for a Sufi hospice

shaykh a title of respect to be used any old man or senior figure. It can refer to a prince, a tribal chi a village head man, or a group leader. However, in the context this book, two uses of the word are particularly relevant. First, t term was used to refer to the master of a Sufi order. Second, i the early modern period, it was also used in the Arab world to refer to a head of a guild

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Shia the religious party who support the claim of Ali (cousin of the Prophet Muhammad) and his descendants to leadership of the Islamic community. There are several branches of the Shia faith, who differ from one another in supporting different chains of succession

sinf (pl. *asnaf*) literally "kind or sort." Also a guild or body of craftsmen

sirdab, or ***sardab*** a cool sunken cellar in a building

Sufi a Muslim mystic or ascetic

sultan a political title first used in the eleventh century. The title was first granted by the Abbasid caliphs to the Greater Seljuqs. Political theorists tended to describe the sultan as the executive arm of the caliph

Sunni the adjective applied to the broad body of "orthodox" Muslims who hold that succession to leadership of the Islamic community after the death of the Prophet was elective rather than hereditary (thus distinguishing them from Shia, or Shii, Muslims). Sunni Islam bases itself on the Koran and the practices (*sunna*) of the Prophet Muhammad

suq market

Taifa literally "party" or "section," applied to the kings who ruled in the successor states to the Spanish Umayyad caliphate after the latter's break-up in the early eleventh century

talar open columned hall or veranda

tiraz royal textile factory, often situated within the palace

ulama (sing. *alim*) Muslim theologians or lawmen

waqf land or other income-producing property dedicated in perpetuity to the upkeep and staffing of a pious institution

waqfiyya the legally attested document specifying the details of the *waqf*

zarif one of the refined, a dandy, a connoisseur

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