10: Islamic Art
10.1: Introduction to Islamic Art

10.1.1: Islamic Art

Islamic art encompasses visual arts produced from the seventh century onwards by culturally Islamic populations.

Learning Objective

Identify the influences and the specific attributes of Islamic art

Key Points

- Islamic art is not art of a specific religion, time, place, or of a single medium. Instead it spans some 1400 years, covers many lands and populations, and includes a range of artistic fields including architecture, calligraphy, painting, glass, ceramics, and textiles, among others.
- Islamic religious art differs from Christian religious art in that it is non-figural because many Muslims believe that the depiction of the human form is idolatry, and thereby a sin against God, forbidden in the Qur’an. Calligraphy and architectural elements are given important religious significance in Islamic art.
- Islamic art developed from many sources: Roman, early Christian art, and Byzantine styles; Sassanian art of pre-Islamic Persia; Central Asian styles brought by various nomadic incursions, and Chinese influences appear on Islamic painting, pottery, and textiles.

Key Terms

idolatry

The worship of idols.

arabesque

A repetitive, stylized pattern based on a geometrical floral or vegetal design.

Qu’ran

The central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be the verbatim word of God (Arabic: Allah). It is widely regarded as the finest piece of literature in the Arabic language.

monotheistic

Believing in a single god, deity, spirit, etc., especially for an organized religion, faith, or creed.

Islam
Islam is a monotheistic and Abrahamic religion articulated by the Qur’an, a book considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God (Allah) and the teachings of Muhammad, who is considered to be the last prophet of God. An adherent of Islam is called a Muslim.

Most Muslims are of two denominations: Sunni (75–90%)[7] or Shia (10–20%). Its essential religious concepts and practices include the five pillars of Islam, which are basic concepts and obligatory acts of worship, and the following of Islamic law, which touches on every aspect of life and society. The five pillars are:

1. Shahadah (belief or confession of faith)
2. Salat (worship in the form of prayer)
3. Sawm Ramadan (fasting during the month of Ramadan)
4. Zakat (alms or charitable giving)
5. Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime)

**Islamic Art**

Islamic art encompasses the visual arts produced from the seventh century onward by both Muslims and non-Muslims who lived within the territory that was inhabited by, or ruled by, culturally Islamic populations. It is thus a very difficult art to define because it spans some 1400 years, covering many lands and populations. This art is also not of a specific religion, time, place, or single medium. Instead Islamic art covers a range of artistic fields including architecture, calligraphy, painting, glass, ceramics, and textiles, among others.

Islamic art is not restricted to religious art, but instead includes all of the art of the rich and varied cultures of Islamic societies. It frequently includes secular elements and elements that are forbidden by some Islamic theologians. Islamic religious art differs greatly from Christian religious art traditions.

Because figural representations are generally considered to be forbidden in Islam, the word takes on religious meaning in art as seen in the tradition of calligraphic inscriptions. Calligraphy and the decoration of manuscript Qu’rans is an important aspect of Islamic art as the word takes on religious and artistic significance.

Islamic architecture, such as mosques and palatial gardens of paradise, are also embedded with religious significance. While examples of Islamic figurative painting do exist, and may cover religious scenes, these examples are typically from secular contexts, such as the walls of palaces or illuminated books of poetry.

Other religious art, such as glass mosque lamps, Girih tiles, woodwork, and carpets usually demonstrate the same style and motifs as contemporary secular art, although they exhibit more prominent religious inscriptions.
A calligraphic panel by Mustafa Râkim (late 18th–early 19th century)

Islamic art has focused on the depiction of patterns and Arabic calligraphy, rather than on figures, because it is feared by many Muslims that the depiction of the human form is idolatry. The panel reads: "God, there is no god but He, the Lord of His prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Lord of all that has been created."

This photo shows a calligraphic panel by Mustafa Râkim (late 18th to early 19th century). Islamic art has focused on the depiction of patterns and Arabic calligraphy, rather than on figures, because it is feared by many Muslims that the depiction of the human form is idolatry. The panel reads: "God, there is no god but He, the Lord of His prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Lord of all that has been created."

Islamic art was influenced by Greek, Roman, early Christian, and Byzantine art styles, as well as the Sassanian art of pre-Islamic Persia. Central Asian styles were brought in with various nomadic incursions; and Chinese influences had a formative effect on Islamic painting, pottery, and textiles.

Themes of Islamic Art

There are repeating elements in Islamic art, such as the use of stylized, geometrical floral or vegetal designs in a repetition known as the arabesque. The arabesque in Islamic art is often used to symbolize the transcendent, indivisible and infinite nature of God. Some scholars believe that mistakes in repetitions may be intentionally introduced as a show of humility by artists who believe only God can produce perfection.
Arabesque inlays at the Mughal Agra Fort, India

Geometrical designs in repetition, known as Arabesque, are used in Islamic art to symbolize the transcendent, indivisible, and infinite nature of God.

This is a current-day photo of arabesque inlays at the Mughal Agra Fort, India. Geometrical designs in repetition, known as Arabesque, are used in Islamic art to symbolize the transcendent, indivisible, and infinite nature of God.

Typically, though not entirely, Islamic art has focused on the depiction of patterns and Arabic calligraphy, rather than human or animal figures, because it is believed by many Muslims that the depiction of the human form is idolatry and thereby a sin against God that is forbidden in the Qur'an.

However, depictions of the human form and animals can be found in all eras of Islamic secular art. Depictions of the human form in art intended for the purpose of worship is considered idolatry and is forbidden in Islamic law, known as Sharia law.

10.1.2: Islamic Architecture

Islamic architecture encompasses a wide range of styles and the principal example is the mosque.

Learning Objective

Describe the development of mosques, and their different features during different periods and dynasties

Key Points

- A specifically recognizable Islamic architectural style emerged soon after Muhammad's time that incorporated Roman building traditions with the addition of localized adaptations of the former Sassanid and Byzantine models.
- The Islamic mosque has historically been both a place of prayer and a community meeting space. The early mosques are believed to be inspired by Muhammad's home in Medina, which was the first mosque.
Key Terms

mosque
A place of worship for Muslims, corresponding to a church or synagogue in other religions, often having at least one minaret. In Arabic: masjid.

mihrab
A semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque, that indicates the qibla (direction of Mecca), and into which the imam prays.

minaret
The tall slender tower of an Islamic mosque, from which the muezzin recites the adhan (call to prayer).

Islamic Architecture

Islamic architecture encompasses a wide range of both secular and religious styles. The principal Islamic architectural example is the mosque. A specifically recognizable Islamic architectural style emerged soon after Muhammad's time that incorporated Roman building traditions with the addition of localized adaptations of the former Sassanid and Byzantine models.

Early Mosques

The Islamic mosque has historically been both a place of prayer and a community meeting space. The early mosques are believed to be inspired by Muhammad's home in Medina, which was the first mosque.

The Great Mosque of Kairouan (in Tunisia) is one of the best preserved and most significant examples of early great mosques. Founded in 670, it contains all of the architectural features that distinguish early mosques: a minaret, a large courtyard surrounded by porticos, and a hypostyle prayer hall.
Dome of the mihrab (9th century) in the Great Mosque of Kairouan, also known as the Mosque of Uqba, in Kairouan, Tunisia

This is considered to be the ancestor of all the mosques in the western Islamic world.

This is a current-day photo of the dome of the mihrab (ninth century) in the Great Mosque of Kairouan, also known as the Mosque of Uqba, in Kairouan, Tunisia This is considered to be the ancestor of all the mosques in the western Islamic world.

Ottoman Mosques

Ottoman mosques and other architecture first emerged in the cities of Bursa and Edirne in the 14th and 15th centuries, developing from earlier Seljuk Turk architecture, with additional influences from Byzantine, Persian, and Islamic Mamluk traditions.
Sultan Mehmed II would later fuse European traditions in his rebuilding programs at Istanbul in the 19th century. Byzantine styles as seen in the Hagia Sophia served as particularly important models for Ottoman mosques, such as the mosque constructed by Sinan.

Building reached its peak in the 16th century when Ottoman architects mastered the technique of building vast inner spaces surmounted by seemingly weightless yet incredibly massive domes, and achieved perfect harmony between inner and outer spaces, as well as articulated light and shadow.

They incorporated vaults, domes, square dome plans, slender corner minarets, and columns into their mosques, which became sanctuaries of transcendently aesthetic and technical balance, as may be observed in the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey.

The Blue Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey

The Blue Mosque represents the culmination of Ottoman construction with its numerous domes, slender minarets and overall harmony.

This is a photo of the Blue Mosque, in Istanbul, Turkey. The Blue Mosque represents the culmination of Ottoman construction with its numerous domes, slender minarets and overall harmony.

Architecture flourished in the Safavid Dynasty, attaining a high point with the building program of Shah Abbas in Isfahan, which included numerous gardens, palaces (such as Ali Qapu), an immense bazaar, and a large imperial mosque. Isfahan, the capital of both the Seljuk and Safavid dynasties, bears the most prominent samples of the Safavid architecture, such as the the Imperial Mosque, which was constructed in the years after Shah Abbas I permanently moved the capital there in 1598.
Imperial Mosque, Isfahan, Iran

Isfahan, the capital of both the Seljuk and Safavid dynasties, bears the most prominent samples of the Safavid architecture.

This photo shows the Imperial Mosque, Isfahan, Iran. Isfahan, the capital of both the Seljuk and Safavid dynasties, bears the most prominent samples of the Safavid architecture.

10.1.3: Islamic Glass Making

Glassmaking was the most important Islamic luxury art of the early Middle Ages.

Learning Objective

Describe the art of Islamic glass

Key Points

- Between the 8th and early 11th centuries, the emphasis in luxury glass was on effects achieved by manipulating the surface of the glass, initially by incising into the glass on a wheel, and later by cutting away the background to leave a design in relief.
- Lustre painting uses techniques similar to lustreware in pottery and dates back to the 8th century in Egypt; it became widespread in the 12th century.

Key Terms

glassmaking

The craft or industry of producing glass.

luxury arts

Highly decorative goods made of precious materials for the wealthy classes.
Islamic Glass

For most of the Middle Ages, Islamic luxury glass was the most sophisticated in Eurasia, exported to both Europe and China. Islam took over much of the traditional glass-producing territory of Sassanian and Ancient Roman glass. Since figurative decoration played a small part in pre-Islamic glass, the change in style was not abrupt—except that the whole area initially formed a political whole, and, for example, Persian innovations were now almost immediately taken up in Egypt.

For this reason it is often impossible to distinguish between the various centers of production (of which Egypt, Syria, and Persia were the most important), except by scientific analysis of the material, which itself has difficulties. From various documentary references, glassmaking and glass-trading seems to have been a specialty of the Jewish minority.

Between the 8th and early 11th centuries, the emphasis in luxury glass was on effects achieved by manipulating the surface of the glass, initially by incising into the glass on a wheel, and later by cutting away the background to leave a design in relief. The very massive Hedwig glasses, only found in Europe, but normally considered Islamic (or possibly from Muslim craftsmen in Norman Sicily), are an example of this, though they are puzzlingly late in date.

These and other glass pieces probably represented cheaper versions of vessels of carved rock crystal (clear quartz)—themselves influenced by earlier glass vessels—and there is some evidence that at this period glass and hard-stone cutting were regarded as the same craft. From the 12th century, the glass industry in Persia and Mesopotamia declined, and the main production of luxury glass shifted to Egypt and Syria. Throughout this period, local centers made simpler wares, such as Hebron glass in Palestine.
The Luck of Edenhall

This is a 13th-century Syrian beaker, in England since the Middle Ages. For most of the Middle Ages, Islamic glass was the most sophisticated in Eurasia, exported to both Europe and China.

This is a photo of the glass beaker, The Luck of Edenhall. This is a 13th-century Syrian beaker, in England since the Middle Ages. For most of the Middle Ages, Islamic glass was the most sophisticated in Eurasia, exported to both Europe and China.

Lustre painting

Lustre painting, by techniques similar to lustreware in pottery, dates back to the 8th century in Egypt, and involves the application of metallic pigments during the glass-making process. Another technique used by artisans was decoration with threads of glass of a different color, worked into the main surface, and sometimes manipulated by combing and other effects.

Gilded, painted, and enameled glass were added to the repertoire, as were shapes and motifs borrowed from other media, such as pottery and metalwork. Some of the finest work was in mosque lamps donated by a ruler or wealthy man.
As decoration grew more elaborate, the quality of the basic glass decreased, and it often exhibited bubbles and a brownish-yellow tinge. Aleppo ceased to be a major center after the Mongol invasion of 1260, and Timur appears to have ended the Syrian glass industry around 1400 by carrying off the skilled workers to Samarkand. By about 1500, the Venetians were receiving large orders for mosque lamps.

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Mosque lamp

Produced in Egypt, c. 1360.

This is a photo of a glass mosque lamp that was produced in Egypt, around 1360.

10.1.4: Islamic Calligraphy

Calligraphic design was omnipresent in Islamic art in the Middle Ages, and is seen in all types of art including architecture and the decorative arts.

Learning Objective
Explain the purpose and characteristics of Islamic calligraphy

Key Points

- In a religion where figural representations are considered an act of idolatry, it is no surprise that the word and its artistic representation became an important aspect in Islamic art.
- The earliest form of Arabic calligraphy is Kufic script.
- Besides Quranic verses, other inscriptions include verses of poetry, and inscriptions recording ownership or donation.

Key Terms

Kufic script

The earliest form of Arabic calligraphy, noted for its angular form.

calligraphy

The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes.

In a religion where figural representations are considered an act of idolatry, it is no surprise that the word and its artistic representation became an important aspect in Islamic art. The most important religious text in Islam is the Quran, which is believed to be the word of God. There are many examples of calligraphy and calligraphic inscriptions pertaining to verses from the Quran in Islamic arts.

9th century Quran

This early Quran demonstrates the Kufic script, noted for its angular form and as the earliest form of Arabic calligraphy.

This photo shows a page from a ninth century Quran. This early Quran demonstrates the Kufic script, noted for its angular form and as the earliest form of Arabic calligraphy.

The earliest form of Arabic calligraphy is Kufic script, which is noted for its angular form. Arabic is read
from right to left and only the consonants are written. The black ink in the image above from a 9th century Quran marks the consonants for the reader. The red dots that are visible on the page note the vowels.

However, calligraphic design is not limited to the book in Islamic art. Calligraphy is found in several different types of art, such as architecture. The interior of the Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem, circa 691), for example, features calligraphic inscriptions of verses from the Quran as well as from additional sources. As in Europe in the Middle Ages, religious exhortations such as Quranic verses may be included in secular objects, especially coins, tiles, and metalwork.

![Interior view of the Dome of the Rock](image)

**Interior view of the Dome of the Rock**

The interior of The Dome of the Rock features many calligraphic inscriptions, from both the Quran and other sources; it demonstrates the importance of calligraphy in Islamic art and its use in several different media.

This photo shows the interior view of the Dome of the Rock. The interior of The Dome of the Rock features many calligraphic inscriptions, from both the Quran and other sources; it demonstrates the importance of calligraphy in Islamic art and its use in several different media.

Calligraphic inscriptions were not exclusive to the Quran, but also included verses of poetry or recorded ownership or donation. Calligraphers were highly regarded in Islam, which reinforces the importance of the word and its religious and artistic significance.
10.1.5: Islamic Book Painting

Manuscript painting in the late medieval Islamic world reached its height in Persia, Syria, Iraq, and the Ottoman Empire.

Learning Objective

Discuss the origin and development of Islamic manuscript painting

Key Points

- The art of the Persian book was born under the Ilkhanid dynasty and encouraged by the patronage of aristocrats for large illuminated manuscripts.
- Islamic manuscript painting witnessed its first golden age in the 13th century when it was influenced by the Byzantine visual vocabulary and combined with Mongol facial types from 12th-century book frontispieces.
- Under the rule of the Safavids in Iran (1501 to 1786), the art of manuscript illumination achieves new heights, in particular in the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp, an immense copy of Ferdowsi's epic poem that contains more than 250 paintings.
- The medieval Islamic texts called Maqamat were some of the earliest coffee-table books and among the first Islamic art to mirror daily life.
- Masterpieces of Ottoman manuscript illustration include the two books of festivals, one from the end of the 16th century and the other from the era of Sultan Murad III.

Key Terms

Maqamat

The plural for Maqāma, an Arabic literary genre of rhymed prose with intervals of poetry that often ruminates on spiritual topics.

muraqqa

An album in book form containing Islamic miniature paintings and specimens of Islamic calligraphy, normally from several different sources, and perhaps other matter.

miniature

An illustration in an ancient or medieval illuminated manuscript.

illuminated manuscripts

A book in which the text is supplemented by the addition of decoration, such as decorated initials, borders (marginalia), and miniature illustrations.

Mongols

An umbrella term for a large group of Mongolic and Turkic tribes united under the rule of Genghis Khan in the 13th century.
Islamic Book Painting

Book painting in the late medieval Islamic world reached its height in Persia, Syria, Iraq, and the Ottoman Empire. The art form blossomed across the different regions and was inspired by a range of cultural reference points.

The evolution of book painting first began in the 13th century, when the Mongols, under the leadership of Genghis Khan, swept through the Islamic world. Upon the death of Genghis Khan, his empire was divided among his sons and dynasties formed: the Yuan in China, the Ilkhanids in Iran, and the Golden Horde in northern Iran and southern Russia.

The Ilkhanids

The Ilkhanids were a rich civilization that developed under the little khans in Iran. Architectural activity intensified as the Mongols became sedentary yet retained traces of their nomadic origins, such as the north–south orientation of buildings. Persian, Islamic, and East Asian traditions melded together during this period and a process of Iranization took place, in which construction according to previously established types, such as the Iranian-plan mosques, was resumed.

The art of the Persian book was born under the Ilkhanid dynasty and encouraged by the patronage of aristocrats for large illuminated manuscripts, such as the Jami’ al-tawarikh by Rashid-al-Din Hamadani. Islamic book painting witnessed its first golden age in the 13th century, mostly within Syria and Iraq.

Minatures

The tradition of the Persian miniature (a small painting on paper) developed during this period, and it strongly influenced the Ottoman miniature of Turkey and the Mughal miniature in India. Because illuminated manuscripts were an art of the court, and not seen in public, constraints on the depiction of the human figure were much more relaxed and the human form is represented with frequency within this medium.

Influence from the Byzantine visual vocabulary (blue and gold coloring, angelic and victorious motifs, symbology of drapery) was combined with Mongol facial types seen in 12th-century book frontispieces. Chinese influences in Islamic book painting include the early adoption of the vertical format natural to a book. Motifs such as peonies, clouds, dragons, and phoenixes were adapted from China as well, and incorporated into manuscript illumination.
Mongol soldiers, in Jami al-tawarikh by Rashid-al-Din Hamadani

The Jāmi al-tawārīkh is a work of literature and history, produced by the Mongol Ilkhanate in Persia. The breadth of the work has caused it to be called the first world history and its lavish illustrations and calligraphy required the efforts of hundreds of scribes and artists.

This is a photo of Mongol soldiers from a page in Jami al-tawarikh by Rashid-al-Din Hamadani. The Jāmi al-tawārīkh is a work of literature and history, produced by the Mongol Ilkhanate in Persia. The breadth of the work has caused it to be called the first world history and its lavish illustrations and calligraphy required the efforts of hundreds of scribes and artists.

The largest commissions of illustrated books were usually classics of Persian poetry, such as the Shahnameh. Under the rule of the Safavids in Iran (1501 to 1786), the art of manuscript illumination achieved new heights. The most noteworthy example of this is the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp, an immense copy of Ferdowsi’s epic poem that contains more than 250 paintings.
The Court of Gayumars, from the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp

Illuminated manuscripts of the Shahnameh were often commissioned by royal patrons.

This photo shows the Court of Gayumars from the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp. Illuminated manuscripts of the Shahnameh were often commissioned by royal patrons.

Maqamat and Albums

The medieval Islamic texts called Maqamat that were copied and illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, were some of the earliest coffee-table books. They were among the first texts in Islamic art to hold a mirror to daily life, portraying humorous stories and showing little adherence to prior pictorial traditions.

In the 17th century a new type of painting developed based around the album (muraqqa). The albums were the creations of connoisseurs who bound together single sheets of paintings, drawings, or calligraphy by various artists; they were sometimes excised from earlier books and other times created as independent
works.

The paintings of Reza Abbasi figure largely in this new form of book art. The form depicts one or two larger figures, typically idealized beauties in a garden setting, and often use the grisaille techniques previously used for background border paintings.

**Mughal and Ottoman Manuscripts**

The Mughals and Ottomans both produced lavish manuscripts of more recent history with the autobiographies of the Mughal emperors and purely military chronicles of Turkish conquests. Portraits of rulers developed in the 16th century, and later in Persia, where they became very popular.

Mughal portraits, normally in profile, are very finely drawn in a realist style, while the best Ottoman ones are vigorously stylized. Album miniatures typically featured picnic scenes, portraits of individuals, or (in India especially) animals, or idealized youthful beauties of either sex.

Masterpieces of Ottoman manuscript illustration include the two books of festivals, one from the end of the 16th century and the other from the era of Sultan Murad III. These books contain numerous illustrations and exhibit a strong Safavid influence, perhaps inspired by books captured in the course of the Ottoman–Safavid wars of the 16th century.

**10.1.6: Islamic Ceramics**

Islamic art has notable achievements in ceramics that reached heights unmatched by other cultures.

**Learning Objective**

Discuss how developments such as tin-opacified glazing and stonepaste ceramics made Islamic ceramics some of the most advanced of its time

**Key Points**

- The first Islamic opaque glazes date to around the 8th century, and another significant contribution was the development of stonepaste ceramics in 9th century Iraq.
- Lusterwares with iridescent colors were either invented or considerably developed in Persia and Syria from the 9th century onward.
- The techniques, shapes, and decorative motifs of Chinese ceramics were admired and emulated by Islamic potters, especially after the Mongol and Timurid invasions.
- The Hispano–Moresque style emerged in the 8th century, with more refined production happening later, presumably by Muslim potters working in areas reconquered by Christian kingdoms.

**Key Terms**

ceramics

Inorganic, nonmetallic solids created by the action of heat and their subsequent cooling. Most common ceramics are crystalline and the earliest uses of ceramics were in pottery.
Hispano–Moresque style

A style of Islamic pottery created in Al-Andaluz, or Muslim Spain, which continued to be produced under Christian rule in styles that blended Islamic and European elements.

Lusterware

A type of pottery or porcelain having an iridescent metallic glaze.

Glaze

The vitreous coating of pottery or porcelain, or a transparent or semi-transparent layer of paint.

Islamic Ceramics

Islamic art has notable achievements in ceramics, both in pottery and tiles for buildings, which reached heights unmatched by other cultures. Early pottery had usually been unglazed, but a tin-opacified glazing technique was developed by Islamic potters. The first Islamic opaque glazes can be found as blue-painted ware in Basra, dating to around the 8th century.

Another significant contribution was the development of stonepaste ceramics, originating from 9th century Iraq. The first industrial complex for glass and pottery production was built in Ar-Raqqah, Syria, in the 8th century. Other centers for innovative pottery in the Islamic world included Fustat (from 975 to 1075), Damascus (from 1100 to around 1600), and Tabriz (from 1470 to 1550).

Lusterware

Lusterware is a type of pottery or porcelain that has an iridescent metallic glaze. Luster first began as a painting technique in glassmaking, which was then translated to pottery in Mesopotamia in the 9th century.
10th century dish

Islamic art has very notable achievements in ceramics, both in pottery and tiles for walls, which reached heights unmatched by other cultures. This dish is from East Persia or Central Asia.

This photo shows a 10th century dish painted with complex geometric patterns and a repeated bird portrait. Islamic art has very notable achievements in ceramics, both in pottery and tiles for walls, which reached heights unmatched by other cultures. This dish is from East Persia or Central Asia.

The techniques, shapes, and decorative motifs of Chinese ceramics were admired and emulated by Islamic potters, especially after the Mongol and Timurid invasions. Until the Early Modern period, Western ceramics had little influence, but Islamic pottery was highly sought after in Europe, and was often copied.

An example of this is the albarello, a type of earthenware jar originally designed to hold apothecary ointments and dry drugs. The development of this type of pharmacy jar had its roots in the Islamic Middle East. Hispano–Moresque examples were exported to Italy, inspiring the earliest Italian examples, from 15th century Florence.

Hispano–Moresque Style

The Hispano–Moresque style emerged in Al-Andaluz, or Muslim Spain, in the 8th century, under Egyptian influence. More refined production happened much later, presumably by Muslim potters who worked in the areas reconquered by the Christian kingdoms.

The Hispano–Moresque style mixed Islamic and European elements in its designs and was exported to neighboring European countries. The style introduced two ceramic techniques to Europe:

1. Glazing with an opaque white tin-glaze.
2. Painting in metallic lusters.

Ottoman Iznik pottery produced most of the finest ceramics of the 16th century—tiles and large vessels boldly decorated with floral motifs that were influenced by Chinese Yuan and Ming ceramics. These were still in earthenware, since porcelain was not made in Islamic countries until modern times.

The medieval Islamic world also painted pottery with animal and human imagery. Examples are found throughout the medieval Islamic world, particularly in Persia and Egypt.

10.1.7: Islamic Textiles

The most important textile produced in the Medieval and Early Modern Islamic Empires was the carpet.

Learning Objective

Discuss the making and designs of Islamic textiles

Key Points
The production and trade of textiles pre-dates Islam, and had long been important to Middle Eastern cultures and cities, many of which flourished due to the Silk Road. When the Islamic dynasties formed and grew more powerful they gained control over textile production in the region, which was arguably the most important craft of the era.

**Key Term**

textile arts

The production of arts and crafts that use plant, animal, or synthetic fibers to create objects.

**Islam and the Textile Arts**

The textile arts refer to the production of arts and crafts that use plant, animal, or synthetic fibers to create objects. These objects can be for everyday use, or they can be decorative and luxury items. The production and trade of textiles pre-dates Islam, and had long been important to Middle Eastern cultures and cities, many of which flourished due to the Silk Road.

When the Islamic dynasties formed and grew more powerful they gained control over textile production in the region, which was arguably the most important craft of the era. The most important textile produced in Medieval and Early Modern Islamic Empires was the carpet.

**The Ottoman Empire and Carpet Production**

The art of carpet weaving was particularly important in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman state was founded by Turkish tribes in northwestern Anatolia in 1299 and became an empire in 1453 after the momentous conquest of Constantinople.

Stretching across Asia, Europe, and Africa, the Empire was vast and long lived, lasting until 1922 when the monarchy was abolished in Turkey. Within the Ottoman Empire, carpets were immensely valued as decorative furnishings and for their practical value. They were used not just on floors but also as wall and door hangings, where they provided additional insulation.

These intricately knotted carpets were made of silk, or a combination of silk and cotton, and were often rich in religious and other symbolism. Hereke silk carpets, which were made in the coastal town of Hereke, were the most valued of the Ottoman carpets because of their fine weave. The Hereke carpets were typically used to furnish royal palaces.
Carpet and interior of the Harem room in Topkapi Palace, Istanbul

The Ottoman Turks were famed for the quality of their finely woven and intricately knotted silk carpets.

This photo shows the carpet and interior of the Harem room in Topkapi Palace, Istanbul. The Ottoman Turks were famed for the quality of their finely woven and intricately knotted silk carpets.

**Persian Carpets**

The Iranian Safavid Empire (1501–1786) is distinguished from the Mughal and Ottoman dynasties by the Shia faith of its shahs, which was the majority Islamic denomination in Persia. Safavid art is contributed to several aesthetic traditions, particularly to the textile arts.

In the sixteenth century, carpet weaving evolved from a nomadic and peasant craft to a well-executed industry that used specialized design and manufacturing techniques on quality fibers such as silk. The carpets of Ardabil, for example, were commissioned to commemorate the Safavid dynasty and are now
considered to be the best examples of classical Persian weaving, particularly for their use of graphical perspective.

Textiles became a large export, and Persian weaving became one of the most popular imported goods of Europe. Islamic carpets were a luxury item in Europe and there are several examples of European Renaissance paintings that document the presence of Islamic textiles in European homes during that time.

The Ardabil Carpet, Persia, 1540

The Ardabil Carpet is the finest example of 16th century Persian carpet production.

This photo shows the Ardabil Carpet from Persia, made in 1540. The Ardabil Carpet is the finest example of sixteenth century Persian carpet production.
Indonesian Batik

Islamic textile production, however, was not limited to the carpet. Royal factories were founded for the purpose of textile production that also included cloth and garments.

The development and refinement of Indonesian batik cloth was closely linked to Islam. The Islamic prohibition on certain images encouraged batik design to become more abstract and intricate. Realistic depictions of animals and humans are rare on traditional batik, but serpents, puppet-shaped humans, and the Garuda of pre-Islamic mythology are all commonplace.

Although its existence in Indonesia pre-dates Islam, batik reached its high point in the royal Muslim courts, such as Mataram and Yogyakarta, whose Muslim rulers encouraged and patronized batik production. Today, batik has undergone a revival, and cloths are used for other purposes besides wearing, such as wrapping the Quran.

Javanese court batik
The development and refinement of Indonesian batik cloth was closely linked to Islam. This photo shows a Javanese court batik with an intricate design. The development and refinement of Indonesian batik cloth was closely linked to Islam. The Islamic prohibition on certain images encouraged batik design to become more abstract and intricate.

**Attributions**

- **Islamic Art**

- **Islamic Architecture**

- **Islamic Glass Making**
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