The Islamic World

*Tile*, Turkey, Iznik, c. 1580-90, Late Islamic Period

*Page from a Manuscript of the Qur’an (2:266-272)*, Late 8th century, Calligraphy; Ink on parchment
The Islamic world's borders have changed frequently from the seventh century to the present. This map locates the sites discussed in this chapter in the context of modern political geography.
History

- Islam arose in the early 7th century under the leadership of the prophet Muhammad.
- It is the youngest of the world’s 3 great monotheistic religions and follows in the prophetic tradition of Judaism and Christianity.
  - Muhammad is considered by Muslims to be the last in the line of Old and New Testament prophets.
Muhammad

- Muhammad (c. 570–632) was born in Mecca, in western Arabia, where he first began to receive the divine revelation and to preach a message of one God around the year 610.

- According to Muslim belief, the word of God was disclosed to Muhammad through the intermediary of the archangel Gabriel, who commanded him to "Recite! In the name of thy lord."
  - These revelations were then collected and codified as the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, which means "recitation" in Arabic, the language of the Prophet and the Qur'an
Qur’an

• The Qur’an is the cornerstone of Muslim faith, practice, and law.
• It provides guidelines for social welfare, family and inheritance laws, and proper behavior within the framework of a just and equitable society.
• The Qur’an does not speak against the creation of figural images, only the making of idols.
  – Restrictions on figurative arts are, however, found in another body of literature known as Hadith, or "tradition."
  – Hadith includes accounts of the sayings, deeds, and thoughts of the Prophet and is superseded in importance only by the Qur’an.
Islamic Art

- **Calligraphy** is the most important and pervasive element in Islamic art.
- A characteristic of Islamic art is a preference for covering surfaces with **patterns composed of geometric or vegetal elements** (such as the *arabesque*), create the impression of unending repetition, which is believed by some to be an inducement to contemplate the infinite nature of God.
- **Figurative art** is excluded from the decoration of *religious monuments*.
- Islamic art is generally the work of anonymous artists. An exception can be found with the work of calligraphers, which is not surprising given the importance of the written word in Islam.

*Tughra (symbol) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566)*, ca. 1555; Ottoman
Early Architecture

- 1st great Islamic building, erected as a tribute to Islam

- Adam’s burial place, Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac, Muhammad journeyed to Heaven and back to Mecca that same night

Aerial view of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 687–692
Interior of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 687–692
Compare + Contrast - DOMES

Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, 532-37

Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 687–692

Pantheon, Rome 118-125
The Great Mosque is considered the fourth-holiest place in Islam.

Damascus becomes a new capital.

Was a Roman temple, then Byzantine Church.

Minarets – modified Roman towers?

Detail of a mosaic in the courtyard arcade of the Great Mosque, Damascus, Syria, 706–715
The Great Mosque
Artistic Vocabulary

• **Mosque** – place of worship for followers of Islam; oriented to Mecca
• **Qibla(h)** – direction (toward Mecca) Muslims face while praying
• **Mihrab** – semicircular niche usually set into the qibla(h) wall
• **Minaret** – towers used to call the faithful to worship
• **Madrasa** - a school for the study of Islamic religion and thought, especially the Qur’an
Aerial view of the Great Mosque, Kairouan, Tunisia, ca. 836–875
Malwiya (snail shell) minaret of the Great Mosque, Samarra, Iraq, 848–852

Largest mosque in the world. Once had a bridge that linked the minaret to the Mosque

At one time, it was confused with a Mesopotamian ziggurat (temple)

Inspired European depictions of the Tower of Babel

Brueghel, 1563
Mausoleum of the Samanids (Persian *amirs*), Bukhara, Uzbekistan, early 10th century
Islamic Spain

• Spanish Ummayad dynasty established
• 756-1492 (1502 Muslims are expelled from Spain)
• Capital was established at Cordoba, later moved to Granada.
• Great Mosque was established and expanded throughout the 8-10th centuries; located in Cordoba
• Alhambra is the best example of *palace-fortress architecture*; located in Granada
Prayer hall of the Great Mosque, Córdoba, Spain, 8th to 10th centuries
Maqsura of the Great Mosque, Córdoba, Spain, 961–965

Maqsura (“closed-off space”), an enclosure, a box or wooden screen near the mihrab or the center of the qibla wall, which was originally designed to shield a worshiping ruler from assassins.
Dome in front of the *mihrab* of the Great Mosque, Córdoba, Spain, 961–965
Islamic influences in the West

Granada becomes the capital in 1230, When the Nasrid’s became the ruling Dynasty.

Palace-like fortress, rose color stone was used for the walls & watch towers.

The complex, with a massive population of 40,000 included various royal residences.

Court of the Lions, Palace of the Lions, Alhambra, Granada, Spain, 1354-1391

Alhambra – the red house
Dome sits on an octagonal drum, with 8 windows and stucco decorations.

Vault symbolized the dome of Heaven; inscriptions sustain this idea.

*Muqarnas* dome, Hall of the Two Sisters, Palace of the Lions, *Alhambra*, Granada, Spain, 1354–1391
SULAYMAN, Ewer in the form of a bird, 796

Signed by the artist. Holes between the eyes & beak are the spout; Doesn’t look utilitarian

**ewer** – jug or pitcher
• **Calligraphy** is the most important and pervasive element in Islamic art.

• It has always been considered the noblest form of art because of its association with the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book, which is written in Arabic.
  – Found in all the arts – including secular manuscripts; inscriptions on palaces; and those applied to metalwork, pottery, stone, glass, wood, and textiles
The art of calligraphy

Koran page with beginning of surah 18, “Al-Kahf” (The Cave), 9th or early 10th century. Ink and gold on vellum

**Surah** – division of the Qur’an, roughly equivalent to a chapter
Koran page with beginning of surah 18, “Al-Kahf” (The Cave), 9th or early 10th century. Ink and gold on vellum

Unknown
German, Regensburg, about 1030 - 1040
Tempera colors, gold leaf, and ink on parchment
Madrasa-mosque-mausoleum complex of Sultan Hasan (looking northwest with the mausoleum in the foreground), Cairo, Egypt, begun 1356. Cairo = new capital
“...Those who consider themselves architects among Christians say that in the realm of Islam no dome can equal that of the Hagia Sophia; They claim that no Muslim architect would be able to build such a large dome. In this mosque, with the help of God and the support of Sultan Selim Khan I, I created a dome 6 cubits heigher and 4 cubits wider than the dome of the Hagia Sophia.”
– Aptullah Kuran, qtd in Gardner, pg. 274

**Cubit** = length of the forearm
(Egyptian hieroglyph for a cubit was the forearm)

SINAN, Mosque of Selim II, Edirne, Turkey, 1568–1575
SINAN, interior of the Mosque of Selim II, Edirne, Turkey, 1568–1575
Illuminated *tughra* of Suleyman the Magnificent, from Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey, ca. 1555–1560. Ink, paint, and gold on paper

*Tughra* - calligraphic monogram, seal or signature of an Ottoman sultan that was affixed to all official documents and correspondence
Great Mosque, Isfahan, Iran, 1611–1638

**Imam** – leader of collective worship, either of a mosque or Muslim community. Similar to spiritual leaders, the imam is one who leads Islamic worship & that the community turns to if they have a religious question.
Tilework

*Mihrab* from the *Madrasa Imami*, Isfahan, Iran, ca. 1354

Includes geometric shapes, abstract floral motifs, calligraphy (Arabic script)

All mosaic; every piece was cut to fit its specific place in the design.

Perfect balance between ornamentation and calligraphy.
MAQSUD OF KASHAN, carpet from the funerary mosque of Shaykh Safi al-Din, Ardabil, Iran, 1540

Central medallion, pendants surround the medallion, with 2 lamps hanging of a pendant on each side, blue background covered in leaves and flowers....

All meant to present the illusion of a heavenly dome.
Manuscripts

Bihzad, *Seduction of Yusef*, folio 52 verso of the *Bustan* of Sultan Husayn Mayqara, from Herat, Afghanistan, 1488. Ink and color on paper

Text is disbursed throughout the page in Arabic script

Illustrates the story of Joseph and the attempted seduction by Zulaykha (this story is in both the Bible & Qur’an)
Decorative Arts

MUHAMMAD IBN AL-ZAYN, basin (Baptistère de Saint Louis), from Egypt, ca. 1300. Depicts Mamluk hunters & Mongol enemies.

Mosque lamp of Sayf al-Din Tuquztimur, from Egypt, 1340
Canteen with episodes from the life of Christ, from Syria, ca. 1240–1250. Similar to Christian pilgrim flasks bought in the Holy Land; Arabic inscriptions promising eternal glory, secure life, prosperity & good luck. Christian object b/c of subject content & figural representations (narrative)