ISLAMIC MINOR ARTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON EUROPEAN WORK

When Islam began that dramatic career which, in its Western course, was destined to plant a new form of art in cities overlooking the Atlantic, it set out from regions where art was in a primitive and backward state. Such art as existed in Arabia was either a sterile survival from the remote past, or merely imitative in nature, a reflection from abroad that flickered in places precariously affected by alien progress. Not even in the fertile spots where a settled population prospered, under conditions very different from those that kept the nomads of the desert in stagnant isolation, does any outstanding native art seem ever to have arisen. Islamic art derived its spiritual complexion from Arabia; but its material texture was fashioned elsewhere, in lands where art was a vital force.

In Syria and Egypt Christianity had wrought profound changes in the pagan art current at its inception. Various factors, rooted in the soil or brought in and developed by foreign domination, had been reanimated by a new spirit, and combined to produce a coherent and impressively beautiful art. Beyond the Euphrates and the Tigris another order of things prevailed. Some centuries had elapsed since the Persians, rising against their Parthian overlords, had set up the native Sassanian dynasty and entered upon a brilliant national revival. Their art, an ancient stock upon which Greek elements current since Alexander's invasion, and later importations from Inner Asia, had been grafted by Iranian genius, was now a vigorous growth characterized by most splendid magnificence. It was amidst these two cultures, mutually hostile and both equally repugnant to the Muslims, that Islamic art came gradually into being.

In the Middle Ages art was first and foremost a religious expression. We instinctively identify the great orders of medieval art with the creeds that shaped them, for however clearly certain elements in their composition and technical procedure may unite them in common ancestry, they were moulded into distinct entities by religious influences. Christian art was essentially a vehicle for religious edification; its mission was always plainly apparent, clearly expounded with all the subtle resources of picture and symbol in ways as intelligible to the unlettered as to the scholar. But its superb iconography seemed sheer idolatry to the Arabs, who, lacking any artistic tradition, regarded art with suspicion, associating it, like all primitive people, with magic. Moreover, in the first flush of puritanical zeal, luxury was to them specially reprehensible; an outcome of effete infidel levity, it was a snare of the Devil with which the true believer could have no truck. The splendour of Persian art, the very quality that Persian craftsmen were presently to impress so deeply upon Islamic art, was at first as offensive as the heathen abominations it so patently displayed.

Islamic art had its beginnings in the mosque. Here it was born in the full light of day, and bred openly under public tutelage. The first mosques were bare structures without any architectural pretensions, planned solely for prayer and exhortation. Their furniture, when it appeared—for at first there was none—was as simple as could be, and every innovation was subject to rigorous criticism. It is said that the first pulpit set up in Egypt was destroyed by order of the Caliph when the scandal reached his ears, for it raised the preacher in unseemly dignity above his brethren. The first recessed niche built to mark the direction of Mecca was sharply questioned because it recalled too closely the Christian apse, from which, indeed, it was undoubtedly derived. But soon a more sophisticated generation arose to contrast the poverty of the mosque with the richness of the infidel church. In due course the minbar and the mihrab became the chief ornaments in buildings that for skill in design and
diversity of decoration count amongst the triumphs of architectural art.

As Islam spread farther afield, contact with alien races enlarged its artistic vision, and, within the restrictions permanently imposed by the creed, produced fresh aspects of the ideal type. Moreover, as it acquired a wider outlook, a new cultural element purely secular in nature began to assert itself at the expense of spiritual supremacy. When alien customs began to infect rulers who were not conspicuous pillars of the faith, the odour of sanctity waxed faint in the palace. Kinds of art not strictly orthodox crept in when cultured sovereigns began to indulge refined tastes for beautiful books, richly figured stuffs, and other such things, fit, perhaps, for a king, but not for a successor to the Prophet. When the ruler’s connoisseurship found imitators amongst the nobility and those who aped the manners of their betters a distinct ‘Court art’ arose, a development not without profit to the craftsman, but grievous to the devout.

Aristocratic seclusion was impossible under the early Caliphs, who enforced social equality as an inviolable principle, holding that every one at his need might seek the presence of the ruler, whose way of life, whose house and its appointments, should be above reproach. It was not until an easy-living governing class began to detach itself from public business that the palace became a place apart, where a new standard of conduct prevailed. That a secular court art was already in being under the Omayyads is shown by some remarkable wall-paintings with finely designed figure subjects, in mixed Hellenistic and Oriental tradition, which still survive in a derelict hunting-lodge in the desert to the east of the Dead Sea,¹ a building thought to have been erected by the Caliph al-Walid I between the years 712 and 715. Court art was an established tradition when the Abbasids moved the seat of govern-

¹ Coloured drawings of these decorations are reproduced in Alois Musil’s Kusayr Amra. Vienna, 1927.
developed, and spread abroad the traditional 'workshop practice' of arts current in the Orient, which had either never penetrated into Europe, or, if known there in former times, had decayed during the period of storm and stress that ushered in the Middle Ages.

In developing anew this ancient skill Islamic art acquired a characteristic so obvious that it may easily be taken as a matter of course and overlooked. Everything, whether made for common or ceremonial use, is lavishly enlivened with ornament, so justly planned and expressed that the patterns seem to be natural growths, like the figurings with which Nature endows living creatures, rather than artificial embellishments. The forms taken by the designs, although definitely exotic, are not so far removed from European tradition as to be inconsistent with it. Their strangeness is attractive and romantic. So dexterously are their component elements unfolded that we are beguiled almost into the belief that beyond their material structure lies some elusive vitality. Such enrichment is no mere space-serving artifice for masking bare forms, but an essential part of fine craftsmanship, without which a work is incomplete. To the contemplative Oriental eye the rhythmic dance of a pattern is as much a recreative necessity as is melody to the Western ear. Ornamental composition had such fascination for Oriental craftsmen that they continually devoted intensive study to its problems, systematizing its practice on lines which modern workers still pursue. The most casual survey of Islamic art will show that ornamental design must be ranked as the outstanding minor art evolved by Muslim genius.

Although religious tenets absolutely forbade Muslim designers to introduce into their work human figures or living creatures, such representations are, as a matter of fact, very commonly found in Islamic ornament. But they are not tolerated by any particular sect, as is sometimes supposed, nor are they under any circumstances allowed in the mosque. Their occurrence at
the original piece (774) and the Muhammadan religious formula it recited are both clearly legible in the copy. This coin had no successor similar in type, but it records how widely the sound currency then being issued from Muslim mints was circulating. In the same museum another instance of Western contact with Muslim work is seen on an Irish bronze-gilt cross of about ninth-century date, which has in the centre a glass paste inscribed with the Arabic phrase ُبِيْسِمِ ٰلِلُّهِ in Kufic letters. In neither case can the workers have realized the significance of the strange writing they copied or adopted, for inscriptions so flagrantly Muhammadan could hardly have been set knowingly upon the coinage of a Christian king, or inserted on a sacred emblem.

From this time onward scraps of Arabic lettering, often so crudely rendered as to be illegible scribbles, and ornamental details derived from Muslim sources become increasingly numerous in craftwork wrought in Christian Europe. Pious attraction to the Holy Places, thirst after the learning inherited solely by Islam, commercial enterprise and other such interests, drew many travellers to Muslim lands, whence they returned with trophies of Muslim skill to bear out their tales of Saracenic magnificence.

Among the things brought back by wandering scholars who sought in Muslim seats of learning knowledge unknown in their own countries, the astrolabe was a most important acquisition. An astronomical instrument of ancient Greek invention, improved by the Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy, and perfected by the Muslims, the astrolabe came to Europe some time in the tenth century. Its principal use in the East was to determine the hour of prayer and the position of Mecca. But it also served other purposes, like that described in *The Story Told by the Tailor*, where the glib barber delays his exasperated victim whilst he finds with his astrolabe the precise moment auspicious for shaving. Association with astrology gave the astrolabe and those

versed in its use a sinister reputation throughout the Middle Ages, when in popular belief astronomy and astrology were synonymous terms. The great tenth-century scholar Gerbert of Aurignae, who became Pope under the name of Sylvester II in 999, was held, from his astronomical learning, to have had dealings with the Devil during his sojourn in Cordoba. Recounting how Gerbert, who 'surpassed Ptolemy in the use of the astrolabe', revived the legitimate mathematical sciences in Gaul, where they had long been in abeyance, William of Malmesbury gives a dark hint of his necromantic skill. An interesting relic of late-tenth-century science is preserved at Florence, an astrolabe made for the latitude of Rome, which is thought by some authorities to have belonged to Pope Sylvester. 1

The earliest dated astrolabe known is at Oxford. Made in 984, it was the joint work of two masters, Ahmad and Mahmud, sons of Ibrahim the astrolabist, of Isfahan. Amongst those in the British Museum is an English example dated 1260. Merton College Library possesses the instrument traditionally associated with Chaucer, who wrote a treatise on the astrolabe for his little son.

To mariners the astrolabe was invaluable. Its use for nautical observations continued in the West until the seventeenth century, when it was superseded by new inventions. A fine astrolabe is a beautiful work of art, made and engraved with amazing care and skill in a form that persisted for centuries without material change. One made under the superintendence of Ibrahim ibn Sa'id at Toledo in 1066–7, shown in Fig. 15, may be compared with another (Fig. 16), similar in shape but covered with delicate ornament, the work of a celebrated Persian master, 'Abdul-Hamid, in 1715.

Amongst the many specimens of early Islamic metal-work that have come down to us is a casket in the Cathedral of

1 See Eduardo Saavedra, 'Note sur un astrolabe arabe'. *Atti del IV. Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti*, 1898. Firenze, 1898.
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Girona (Fig. 17), made of wood sheathed with silver-gilt plating heavily patterned in repoussé with scrolling foliation. The casket bears an inscription stating that it was the work of two craftsmen, Badr and ʿArifa, and was made for a courtier of al-Ḥakam II (961–76) to give to the heir-apparent, Hishām, who succeeded his father as Caliph at Córdoba. This is one of the few pieces of silver-work which have survived to our times; but, despite religious objection to the use in this world of the precious metals reserved for the blessed in Paradise, gold and silver plate was by no means prohibited in the Caliphs’ palaces.

Egyptian records describe in some detail the gold and silver treasure accumulated by the Fāṭimid Caliphs in Cairo, the bulk of which was dispersed by tumultuous Turkish mercenaries during a rising in 1066. An inventory of the heirlooms hoarded in the palaces since their foundation, transcribed by the historian al-Maqrīzī from early archives still existing in his time, helps us to picture some of the curious luxuries that the court goldsmiths were then contriving. It is a lengthy document, describing with business-like precision items such as gold and silver inkstands, chess-men, parasol-handles, vases for narcissus flowers and violets, golden birds, and trees set with precious stones, in such amazing numbers, that, even if we discount a few hundreds or so from the round thousands freely enumerated by the enthusiastic surveyors, the sceptical cannot remain wholly unimpressed. Moreover, the reputed wealth of the Fāṭimids is amply borne out by a contemporary witness, the Persian traveller Nasir-i-Khusrau, who, in 1047, by favour of a palace official, made a tour of the State apartments. He traversed in succession eleven chambers, each more splendid than the last, before entering the twelfth, in which was the throne, a stupendous work made of gold and decorated with scenes of the chase, interspersed with finely wrought inscriptions. Before the throne, which was raised upon three silver steps, was set a wonderful golden trellis of
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open-work. Unfortunately its beauty was such that 'it defied description."

Early Islamic gold- and silver-work has practically disappeared. It is mainly in what survives of the bronze, brass, and copper furniture and utensils used by wealthy Muslims that Islamic metal-work can now be studied. The great bronze griffin (Fig. 18) that stands in the Campo Santo at Pisa is a monumental example of a type more usually represented by small birds and beasts, often parts of fountains, or portable water-vessels, from some of which the later European so-called aquamaniles derived their fantastic shapes. The body of this engaging monster—he has all the self-satisfied assurance of a pampered pet—is completely covered with engraved patterns. On the neck and wings in represented a scale-like feathering, and the back bears the semblance of a close-fitting cloth decorated with roundels and edged with an inscription in Kufic characters, which is continued on a band round the chest. On the haunches are pointed panels engraved with lions and falcons within borders of running spirals. The inscription, a verse showering adulation on the possessor, gives no clue to the date or origin of this remarkable piece of bronze-casting, but in all probability it is a relic brought from some Fatimid palace of the eleventh century.

Other ways of decorating metal besides raising patterns in relief or engraving them were practised by Muslim craftsmen. They excelled in the art of inlaying designs in gold and silver in bronze or brass; a process performed in several ways, known generally as damascening, a term derived from European association of the work with Damascus, where it was certainly practised, although it did not originate there. In the finest and most ancient kind the patterns were incised in the metal ground and the grooves filled in with gold or silver, both sometimes being used on the same object. The brilliance of the design was often

heightened by filling other interstices with a black mastic composition, and in some cases this was the sole method of enrichment.

Muslim inlaid metal-work reached perfection about the middle of the twelfth century, and persisted in great excellence for two hundred years. A typical specimen, one of the finest extant, is a brass ewer in the British Museum (Fig. 19), entirely covered with designs inlaid in silver. The ten-sided body and neck are divided horizontally into zones diversified with variously shaped panels, and every part of the surface is heavily enriched with figure subjects, geometric or floral patterns, and inscriptions. At the base a valance of knotted-work, finishing in tassel-like pendants, completes the design. The little inlaid silver plates that express the figures are exquisitely shaped, and have details such as features of faces, hands, and folded draperies, engraved upon them with minute care. An inscription running round the neck states that the ewer was made by Shujā' ibn Hanfar \(^1\) at Mosul in the year 1232.

This ewer is representative of a school supposed to have been centred at Mosul, a city in close touch with ancient and prolific copper-mines, and filled with craftsmen who were renowned for all sorts of artistic products; particularly, as a thirteenth-century writer quoted by M. Reinaud explicitly declares, for the manufacture of copper vessels for table service. But the same technique and similar decoration occur on work earlier in date made in regions to the north and east of Mosul, showing the school to have had Armenian and Persian connexions, which are not yet clearly defined. As the technical processes and some elements in the decoration of the later pieces go back to Hellenistic traditions of the second century, it is not improbable that

\(^1\) The name is so given by M. Reinaud, who first read the inscription in 1828. But a revision by M. Max van Berchem ("Notes d'archéologie arabe", *Journal Asiatique*, XI\(^e\) \(\text{\textit{se}c}\), Paris, 1904) substitutes Man'ah for the paternal name Hanfar.
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Islamic developments originated in a local art current in these regions from remote times.

The influence of this school spread rapidly through Syria to Egypt, a migration accelerated by the Mongol invasion, which laid the cities of Mesopotamia in ruins and dispersed their craftsmen. The capture of Baghdad by Hulagu, grandson of Chingiz Khan, and the death of the Caliph Musta'sim brought the Abbasid dynasty to an end in 1258.

A writing-case in the British Museum (Fig. 20), made of brass inlaid with silver and gold, bears the name of the master, Mahmoud ibn Sunqur of Baghdad, but it cannot have been made in the city of his fathers, for it is dated 1281, when the sole inhabitants of Baghdad were country folk who had settled amidst its ruins. A most beautiful piece, this writing-case is in design and workmanship scarcely inferior to the ewer. The twelve signs of the Zodiac, grouped in fours in three medallions, are the chief ornaments on the lid, which has, inside, a row of circles containing astronomical devices. The circle in the centre has a rayed human-faced Sun, and in those on either side of it are seated figures representing the Moon, Mercury with pen and script, Venus with a lute, Mars holding a sword and severed head, Jupiter seated like a judge, and Saturn with staff and purse. All are set upon a richly patterned ground, and enclosed by a border of intricate design. This case is a magnificent example of many similar objects which in their original state were fitted with ink-wells, boxes for sand and paste, and oblong cells for reed pens, arranged as shown in Fig. 22.

As the inlayer's art spread southwards its decoration changed, and new developments became characteristic of a second school centred in Cairo during the fourteenth century. The medallions placed at intervals in the ornamental bands acquired delicate floral borders, and the inscriptions, from being more or less
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subsidiary, became the most important features. In Fig. 23 is a typical bordered medallion, a detail from a large basin made for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalā‘ūn, Sultan of Egypt, who reigned, with two interruptions, from 1293 to 1341.

These two examples must suffice to give some idea of the many lovely pieces that have come down to us, often in marvellous preservation. Amongst them are ewers and basins, and other shapely vessels which, as is shown by the names and titles incorporated in their ornament, once graced the banquets of sultans and great nobles. Things such as jewel-cases, writing-boxes, candlesticks, perfume-burners, flower-vases and other similar objects of sumptuous domestic use abound in variety and quantity too numerous to specify. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries this beautiful inlaid work was much favoured, and fine examples by famous masters were eagerly sought by wealthy nobles, who frequently had pieces specially made for them. In the British and Victoria and Albert Museums are many specimens with interesting historical associations, and several of outstanding excellence unrivalled elsewhere.

At the end of the fourteenth century the art of inlaying was already in decline. The Mongol irruption into Syria and the sack of Damascus by Timūr in 1401 wrought havoc in busy centres, and the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 scattered the few remaining Cairo masters. But whilst it was decaying in its original home, the art was receiving increased attention in Europe, where it was destined to enjoy a brilliant rebirth. In the fifteenth century the Oriental trade established by Italian cities during the Crusades flourished exceedingly. Eastern products became popular in the splendid pageantry of the petty Italian princes, whose workmen adopted them as models and began to emulate their triumphs. In Venice Muslim metal-work inspired native craftsmen so profoundly that a distinct Venetian-Oriental school arose in which Muslim technique and designs were adapted to Italian Renaissance taste. An example of this development is seen in Fig. 21, a brass salver dating from about the middle of the fifteenth century. It is inlaid in silver with an Islamic interlaced knot-pattern that recalls the bold Cairo ornament of earlier times, and has as a central feature a silver shield enamelled with the arms of the Occhi di Cane, a noble Veronese family. Other pieces were modelled upon contemporary Persian work, which was then actually being made in Venice itself by Persian craftsmen settled in that city.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries metal-working had followed in Persia a course similar to that taken by the Mosul school with which it was intimately connected, but its progress was marked by increasing refinement in the shapes of the vessels and certain modifications in their decoration. At the beginning of the second national revival of Persian art, which dates from the rise of the Šāfī dynasty in the opening years of the sixteenth century, these changes were fully developed into a new style, in which the inlays were generally reduced to linear patterns or inscriptions, set on grounds covered with minutely chased scrolling patterns. An example of this style is shown in Fig. 24, the top of a bowl-cover signed by Maḥmūd al-Kurdi, a famous Persian master who worked in Venice in the first years of the sixteenth century.

As used by medieval Muslim craftsmen, gold and silver inlaying was in some measure an Oriental counterpart of the enamelled metal-work produced by contemporary European workers, whose champlaini process inlaid designs in coloured glass-pastes upon many objects which it was customary for the Muslims to enrich with precious metals by a similar method. Enamelling on metal...
was certainly practised in the Orient, but examples definitely Islamic are rare. Gold plaques enamelled in colours are mentioned in al-Maqrizī’s inventory of the Fātimid treasures, and a metal disk with foliated ornament and an inscription enamelled in cloisonné, recovered from the rubbish heaps of Fustat and now in the Museum of Arab Art at Cairo, is apparently a relic of this period. But the most important specimen of Muslim enamelled metal-work known is a copper bowl in the Museum Ferdinandum at Innsbruck, which is decorated in champlée with a central medallion containing a representation of the Ascent of Alexander, surrounded by others filled with mythical beasts, set upon a ground enriched with palm-trees and standing figures. Although Byzantine in style, this bowl bears an inscription showing that it was made for an Ortuqid prince of Mesopotamia, who reigned towards the middle of the twelfth century.

Judging from the few specimens that have come down to us, it would seem that enamelling did not find favour with Muslim metal-workers. It was not until the fifteenth century, when richly enamelled sword-furniture was made in Spain, that the art reappears in Islam; and these examples, like the later enamelled work made for the Mughal Emperors of India, are perhaps rather reflections of foreign fashion than traditional developments.

In enamelling of another kind, the application of coloured glazes to earthenware, the Muslims were from an early period expert masters. Under Islamic rule native potters in Egypt and the Near East revived and developed technical processes and decorative devices which had survived from ancient times in more or less decadent forms. Wall-tiles with beautiful greenish-blue glazed surfaces go back to a very early period in Egypt, and similar work, variously coloured, was used with great effect in the palace of Darius at Susa about 500 B.C. In these regions the art persisted in obscurity until the Arab invasion, when, under
Muslim influence, potters began again to experiment with new technical processes and ornamental schemes.

The early history of Islamic ceramics is as yet unwritten, and although many interesting specimens have been unearthed in recent years, their provenance and chronology are largely matters of conjecture. It is clear that various types spread rapidly throughout the Islamic world from centres situated in Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt, but it is impossible to determine exactly where specific wares originated. So widely were popular kinds scattered that pieces similar in form and design are found on several ancient sites, in places far separate from one another. One or two specimens must serve to show what early Islamic pottery was like.

A glazed earthenware dish found at Susa (Fig. 30), painted with a poppy-head in bright cobalt blue upon a white ground, is assigned to ninth-century date, as similar pieces have been excavated on the site of a palace at Sāmarrā, built by a son of the Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd in 856 and abandoned fifty years afterwards. The dish is an early example of the blue and white decorative scheme now so familiar in Western ceramic art, a fashion that came to modern Europe in later times from China. In the ninth century the Abbasid rulers were already importing Chinese wares; characteristic pottery and porcelain made under the T'ang dynasty have been recovered at Sāmarrā, together with pieces which are plainly native imitations of those wares. The realistic design upon the dish belongs to this alien tradition; but the beautiful blue with which it is expressed is an indigenous
product, a colour that was eventually exported to China, where it was known as ‘Muhammadan blue’. So essential was it to the Chinese for the manufacture of blue and white wares that when, for unknown reasons, the supply occasionally failed, the production of them temporarily ceased. Thus, although the West habitually ascribes ‘blue and white china’ to the Far East, the typical blue was there associated with Islam. Muslim potters used it with superb effect upon certain wares made at Kutahia in Asia Minor during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Whilst readily absorbing progressive ideas the Muslim potters maintained great originality, very thoroughly welding their acquisitions from abroad into a distinct tradition, in ways clearly shown by many interesting examples. The lid of a jar drawn in Fig. 31 is a piece of so-called Gabrī ware, a kind of pottery supposed to have been made by Fire-worshippers, who in certain parts of Persia clung obstinately to their ancient religion long after the Arab conquest. In this the decoration is roughly but expressively drawn by cutting through the thin white clay ‘slip’, with which the surface is coated, to the brick-red body beneath. The whole is then covered with a transparent glaze, tinted yellow, green, purple, or warm brown, colours in some cases distributed in irresponsible splashes in a way that recalls a contemporary Chinese practice. From the prevalence of Sassanian motives—such as mounted huntsmen, mythical monsters, and characteristic foliated work—Gabrī ware was formerly assigned to the beginning of the Muhammadan era, but as examples have been found inscribed with Kufic letters of eleventh-or twelfth-century style, most of it is now dated from this period. The incised method of drawing, known as graffito work, was in common use in China, but did not necessarily originate there, as it also occurs in pre-Islamic Egypt. In the fifteenth century the process was used with great success by Italian potters, who probably derived it from Islamic sources, whence they obtained much of the mature technical knowledge that was so serviceable to them in the revival of the ceramic arts during the Renaissance.

In what is termed ‘lustred pottery’ the Muslims achieved their great triumph. In this the design is painted in a metallic salt on a glazed surface and fixed by firing in smoke in a way that gives it a metallic gleam, which varies in different specimens from a bright copper-red to a greenish-yellow tint, and in some cases throws off brilliant iridescent reflections. Pieces dating from the tenth century have been discovered in the Near East, north Africa, and Spain, showing by their wide diffusion how the ware was esteemed throughout Islam, but leaving its place of origin in doubt. Whether it was first made in Egypt or Persia is still a moot point upon which authorities are somewhat hotly divided. The large vase in Fig. 26 was recovered from the ruins of Fustat, and is assumed to be Fatimid work of the eleventh century. Fig. 32 is a dish, painted in pale lustre with a sprightly griffin, foliated work, and formalized Kufic lettering, which was found on the site of Ray, or Rhages, an ancient Persian city destroyed by the Mongols in 1220.
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Ray was a great centre of ceramic industry, where several characteristic types originated. Its ruins are a mine of lovely specimens. Definitely associated with this city are certain vases and dishes painted in opaque colours—blue, green, red-brown, and purple, touched here and there with gold-leaf upon white or tinted grounds—with figure subjects and formal decoration remarkable for their delicate workmanship, which resemble so closely the paintings in contemporary manuscripts that it would seem that the artists were inspired by them. The cup in Fig. 25, decorated with sphinxes and seated musicians set in shaped panels formed by a series of opposed S-shaped curved lines, is a typical example of this ‘miniature’ ware, as it is often called, the manufacture of which was at its height when Ray was overwhelmed by the Mongols.

The vase in Fig. 27, painted in turquoise, dark blue, and black, represents a type of pottery made at Sulbanjid, in Persia, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A pot so shaped was known to the Italians as an albarelo, a term perhaps derived from the Arabic al-barniya, denoting a drug-jar. The name shows the purpose that such vessels served in the Orient and the use to which they continued to be put in Italy. In the fifteenth century Italian apothecaries’ shops displayed many such pots, filled with drugs and preserves imported from the East. This trade brought westwards the prototypes of the Italian drug-jars in much the same way that Chinese ginger-jars still come to us. In Fig. 28 is seen an Italian development of the Oriental form, an albarelo of buff-coloured earthenware painted in dark blue, made at Faenza about the middle of the fifteenth century.

The Italians obtained drug-jars painted in lustre from Valencia, the Islamic centre of this ware in the West, where examples that rank amongst the finest ever made were manufactured, sometimes to the order of foreign purchasers, whose arms were painted upon them. In Fig. 29 is shown a dish decorated in yellow lustre and blue which was made at Valencia late in the
fifteenth century for a member of the Degli Agli family of Florence, whose blazon it bears. Spanish lustred pottery inspired Italian emulation so successfully, that in the sixteenth century native potters learned how to illuminate characteristic Renaissance designs with its unfading brilliance in ways that broke definitely with tradition. At Gubbio, a famous centre, worked the great master Giorgio Andreoli, whose golden and ruby lustres remain unsurpassed either in Italy or the Orient.

At the opening of the sixteenth century the old order of ceramic art was everywhere changing; amongst its new manifestations two closely allied types which had been slowly emerging in Asia Minor and Syria flourished in superb magnificence. Made of earthenware coated with a white slip, they are painted under a transparent glaze with designs outlined in black, and coloured vivid green, blue, and dull purple, to which the Asia Minor factories often added a bright tomato-like red. In what was, perhaps, the most interesting development of these wares, they were used as wall-tiles, moulded in squares and painted either with the repeating units of formal patterns or the separate parts of large symmetrical compositions complete in themselves. In Constantinople, Brussa, and other great cities of the Ottoman Empire are many buildings with walls gleaming with this ornate decoration.

The next three examples illustrated are specimens of tilework decorated with repeating patterns. In the first (Fig. 33) the designer, setting in the middle of each tile a pointed oval device, and repeating one quarter of the same figure in each corner, produces—when a number of tiles are fixed in place—an effect of white bands running in opposed curves from top to base of the space decorated. In contrast to this design the second (Fig. 34), is purely naturalistic, being made up of parallel waved stems bearing alternately vine-leaves and grapes, and almond-blossom. Both these motives, one formal and the other realistic, are combined in the third pattern (Fig. 35), which
adds a network of slender acanthus leaves punctuated with acanthus rosettes. Such elaboration of simple themes into complex designs in which apparently incongruous motives are skilfully played off against one another is characteristic of this school, and incidentally we see how methodically Islamic designers were experimenting with decorative ideas. The beautiful panel in Fig. 36 illustrates the second type of tile-decoration, a large set piece, composed as a whole. It is a fine example of Damascus work in the subdued blue, green, and purple scheme that distinguishes Syrian from Turkish wares.

Turkish and Syrian potters used the same technique as in their tiles, and similar kinds of decoration, in beautiful dishes, bowls, vases, and other vessels of various forms. The slender bottle in Fig. 37, ornamented with a strange medley of sphinxes, birds, and beasts, reserved in white on an apple-green ground, is a remarkable example of a distinct type, in which somewhat archaic elements persist. The red touches that enliven the colour-scheme show Turkish origin. Red is not always present on pieces made in Asia Minor, but it is never found in Syrian work.

The most striking decorative elements used in this kind of pottery are undoubtedly the floral forms, such as those displayed so profusely upon the Damascus panel (Fig. 36), where tulips, roses, hyacinths, irises, and almond-blossom issue from two elegant vases in a splendid riot of vigorous growth. The flowers are always drawn with consummate skill, and with such just decorative sense that their naturalism never sinks into mere pictorial representation. It was from Persia that the designers gathered their floral elements and learned how to draw them with such exquisite grace. We have in Fig. 38 a fine piece of Damascus work influenced by Persian models, a jug, decorated with tulips and roses on a blue scale-patterned ground, which for delicate drawing and brilliant colour is a masterpiece of its kind.

From Persia, largely through Turkish and Syrian channels, Western art obtained certain flowers now commonly cultivated in our gardens, but once known in Europe only from representations of them seen on pottery and porcelain imported from the Islamic East. The tulip was first brought to the West by Busbecq, imperial ambassador to Constantinople, about the middle of the sixteenth century.

In Syria, where excellent native material for glass-manufacture had been exploited in ancient times, the Muslims developed a characteristic style of glass-decoration, seen upon numerous bottles, beakers, vases, and other objects painted with figure subjects and formal ornaments in coloured enamels, and often heightened with gold. Some examples enriched in ways that recall certain kinds of Persian and Mesopotamian pottery are assumed from technical reasons to be the earliest in date. They were, perhaps, the work of Mesopotamian craftsmen who migrated to Syria during the first Mongol invasion, and established there the workshops that flourished so brilliantly throughout
the fourteenth century, only to suffer extinction when Timur overran Syria in 1401.

The beaker in Fig. 39, painted with two horizontal inscribed bands, and between them a prince seated upon a throne, with a standing attendant on either side, is a typical composition of late thirteenth-century style, repoussé in red and white enamels and gilding. The beaker must have come to Europe soon after it was made, for it is mounted as a chalice with a broad foot and slender stem of silver-gilt, heavily ornamented in repoussé work of French fourteenth-century fashion, being evidently regarded as a thing of great value. Contemporary documents show that Syrian glass was highly prized in Christian Europe at this period. In the inventory of the treasures belonging to Charles V of France in 1397 two entries describe this kind of glass very explicitly, thus: ‘Trois potz de voire ouvè par dehors a ymages à la façon de Damas;’ and ‘Ung bassin plat de voire paint à la façon de Damas.’ Another Syrian beaker in the British Museum must have been made specially for a Christian, for it bears figures of the Virgin and Child, St. Peter and St. Paul, and an inscription in Latin. In the fifteenth century, Venetian glass-workers, famous throughout Europe since the thirteenth century, turned their attention to Oriental methods, and mastered the process of enamelling so thoroughly that it soon ceased to be a Muslim monopoly. From Venice the art spread to other European centres, and developed new styles. The gaily enamelled spirit-bottles common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are debased descendants of medieval Muslim skill.

Interesting as are the imitations they never rivalled their Oriental prototypes in either beauty of form or spontaneous directness in their ornamentation. Such pieces as the long-necked bottle in Fig. 41 and the delicate bowl and cover in Fig. 42 are typical representatives of Muslim table-glass. The bottle is enamelled with medallions, inscriptions, and foliated work.
disposed in horizontal bands, and it bears the name of an Amir associated with al-Kāmil Sayf al-Dīn Shāh-bān, Mamlūk Sultan of Egypt in 1345. The bowl has a similar design, enameled in green, blue, red, and white, and is gilt in places. This fine piece, of uncommon shape, bears no name, but is inscribed 'Glory to our Lord the Sultan!'

The most splendid achievements of the Syrian glass-workers were the lamps—or rather lamp-shades, fitted internally with small oil-vessels hooked by wires to the rim—which, suspended by three or more silver or brass chains attached to loops contrived on the body of the lamp, illuminated the gloom of many great mosques with jewel-like radiance. They are generally ornamented with band-work filled with medallions and inscriptions, enlivened with conventional foliage; but in some the whole surface is covered with floral patterning, like a brocaded silk, as in Fig. 44. Another (Fig. 40), is treated in the same way, but bears a shield with the blazon of the donor who dedicated it to some unknown mosque.

Muslim nobles, following an ancient Oriental tradition, often set devices of heraldic character upon their belongings. Their use of such figures influenced the development of Western heraldry which, during the Crusades, evolved into a systematic science with a peculiar nomenclature of its own. In this the technical term for blue, azuré, is derived from the Persian word
denoting the blue stone called lapis lazuli. There are other interesting links between European and Oriental heraldry, such as that curious figure the double-headed eagle which makes its first appearance in remote antiquity on Hittite monuments. It became the badge of the Seljuk Sultans early in the twelfth century, and in the fourteenth was adopted as the blazon of the Holy Roman Emperors.

Muslim heraldic devices were set upon shields either circular in form, as on the lamp in Fig. 40, or pointed at the base, like the one enamelled on the bottle in Fig. 41. Besides symbolical birds and beasts—such as the eagle, which was fairly common, and the lion, borne by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars—there were other devices of a different nature, attached to certain court functionaries—the cup-bearer, the polo-master, and various military secretaries of state—by virtue of their offices. In Fig. 45 some of these devices are brought together. The significance of the chalice-like cup and the polo-sticks is obvious, but the meaning of the last figure in the series was long a perplexing question. Once thought to be the sole survival of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing in Islamic art, it is now recognized as a diagrammatic representation of a writing-case, showing the internal fittings as in the plan given in Fig. 22.

The pointed shield on the tall bottle shows how a personal device—an eagle—sometimes accompanied an official badge. Muslim blazons were always brightly coloured if the means by which they were expressed rendered this possible, for a noble's colours were an important part of his arms.

In Persia, Syria, and Egypt the sumptuous textile arts—to which we shall now turn—were already highly developed when the Arabs conquered those countries. In the adjoining provinces of the Byzantine Empire important weaving centres were manufacturing silk fabrics of wonderful richness, and incorporating in their patterns many Sasanian elements taken over when Christian workers began to emulate their neighbours' skill. Although silken garments had been specifically prohibited by the Prophet, the Muslims not only encouraged existing silk factories but established new ones wherever they went. So shameless and unrestrained was their interest in the forbidden luxury that they rapidly and surely gained a dominating position as leading silk-mercers in the medieval world. This is shown by the names by which many fabrics were known in the Middle Ages, trade terms that in some cases have persisted down to our own times, recording the distant places where certain materials were originally made, or the markets where they were procured. Thus the cloth known in Chaucer's time as 'fustian' came from Fustat, the first Muslim capital of Egypt.

The stuffs we still call 'damasks' took their name from Damascus, that great trade-centre to which the West referred many things not exclusively made there. Our 'muslin' is the mussolina imported by Italian merchants from Mosul. Baghdad, Italianized as 'Baldacco', gave its name to the rich silk fabrics brought thence and also to the silken canopy suspended over the altar in many churches, the 'baldacchino'. In later times dress fabrics from Granada were known as 'grenadines' in European shops, where ladies also bought Persian tīstāb under the name of 'taffeta'.

The 'Attābīyah quarter of Baghdad, where dwelt the descendants of 'Attāb, great-grandson of a companion of the Prophet, was in the twelfth century renowned for a special fabric which, imitated in Spain, was known there as attabi silk. France and Italy adopted it as tabi, and by this trade name it became popular throughout Europe. In 1661, on October 13
(Lord’s Day), Mr. Pepys put on his ‘false taby wastecoate with gold lace’, all unconscious of the word’s ancient history; and in 1786 Miss Burney attended a royal birthday celebration at Windsor attired in a gown of ‘little tabby’, a tint known in Persia as iltīq and brought westwards with the flowering shrub of that name. These beautiful watered silks are now out of fashion; but a brown and yellow attābi pattern is still worn by our familiar friend the tabby cat.1

Although there is in Berlin a scrap that bears the magic name of Ḥarrūn al-Rashīd, silks associated with Bagdad are extremely rare. A fragment preserved in the Colegiata del San Isidoro at Leon (Fig. 43) bears an inscription definitely stating that it was woven at Bagdad, perhaps by a master called Abū Naṣr, a name that appears in the mutilated lettering in a place where the maker’s signature might well be put. Woven in red, yellow, black, and white, the design is a characteristic early Islamic pattern of about the end of the tenth century in date, showing birds, beasts, and foliated ornaments inherited from an older tradition set in and around large circular panels. A prominent element, the elephant, probably came from India. This beast occurs on a somewhat earlier Persian silk discovered a few years ago in a village church near Calais, a piece which is now one of the treasures of the Louvre. It is also found on several Byzantine imitations of Persian fabrics, notably on the magnificent silk preserved in the tomb of Charlemagne at Aachen.

In Europe the demand for rich silk textiles increased rapidly as the Oriental trade developed. Finely wrought stuffs came from Muslim countries in such quantity that Western enterprise saw in this lucrative industry a potential source of wealth, and, setting up looms in various centres, began seriously to compete with the Eastern and Spanish factories. It was largely from Sicily, where Muslim invaders had established in the royal palace at Palermo a famous weaving-house—which continued to flourish when the

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1 See C. le Strange, *Baghdad under the Abbasid Caliphate*. Oxford, 1900.

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Europe. Some superb examples of medieval Chinese workmanship have survived; the most remarkable is, perhaps, a piece preserved at Danzig which must have been especially made for the Mamluk Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalâ`un, whose name is woven into the design. In Fig. 47 is shown a silk and gold brocade of Chinese origin, with a pattern composed of phoenixes and palmettes inscribed in Arabic, set in bands between lines of formal ornament, an example of a type from which the bird in the design shown above it might have been derived.

Not only in the Middle Ages but also in later times Oriental silks were often made up into church vestments. The chasuble in Fig. 48 was cut from a Persian fabric of late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century make, with a pattern by no means suitable for the purpose to which it was put, and one that most certainly would not have been tolerated in a mosque. Its main elements are rows of standing youths attired in court dress, holding cups and wine-bottles. They are set amidst slender trailing stems bearing foliage and flowers of the kind that the Turkish potters were then closely copying; in the inter-spaces are lively birds posed and drawn in a manner that points to a Chinese origin. The design belongs to a group of similar gay patterns fashionable upon such brocades during the Safavid period. Elaborate examples were even more pictorial in character, showing episodes from romantic histories, such as the meeting of Khosrau and Shirin or the woful story of Lâlâ and Majnûn, and sometimes enriched with veritable landscapes of flowering trees and shrubs wherein roam all sorts of kindly or ferocious beasts, drawn and coloured with irresistible spirit and brilliance.

The pattern on the silk strip used for the orphrey introduces an interesting series of textile designs produced during a period when Turkish and Italian weavers were so actively and successfully imitating each others' stuffs that experts often find it difficult to distinguish fabrics as definitely of European or
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of Oriental origin. Although late in date and European in appearance, this piece has a Turkish pattern of a type that arose in Asia Minor some time in the fifteenth century. In their simplest forms these patterns are composed of plain or decorated bands running vertically in opposed curves which, uniting at intervals, cover the field with a net-like design. Some examples have more or less elaborated formal ornaments set within the meshes of the net, as in the pattern on the orphrey; whilst in others similar elements spring from the bands at their junctions. The latter plan is followed on the magnificent silk brocade in Fig. 50, with a pattern woven in gold, outlined and touched with cobalt blue, upon a crimson ground. Within the interspaces left by the main system a secondary netting is contrived, from which spring roses, tulip buds, pinks, and narcissus flowers.

From flower-knobs, such as the main element in this design, the Italians evolved the floral elements drawn in Fig. 49, and the very similar one used in the late fifteenth-century velvet shown in Fig. 51. During the sixteenth century European and Turkish weavers, each alternately outdoing their rivals, worked out many intricate variations of the net and knot theme, and gave the rich velvets so fashionable at this period the special type of pattern that became traditionally associated with them. It was a pattern of this kind that William Morris designed for the sumptuous brocaded velvet woven in blue, orange, white, and gold (Fig. 52) which was his sole attempt to revive these costly fabrics.

The carpet, now a universal necessity, came into Europe from the Orient as a luxury reserved for wealthy connoisseurs, who
at first regarded it more as a treasure than as a thing of use. Carpets, both with smooth faces like tapestries, and with loose threads knotted into the fabric so as to produce a velvet-like 'pile' surface, are of great antiquity in the East, where they served as sleeping-mats and hangings, as well as coverings for floors. From representations of Oriental rugs in Italian pictures it is known that they came to Europe at least as early as the fourteenth century. In the sixteenth they were regular articles of commerce. It is recorded that in 1521 Cardinal Wolsey, through the good offices of the Venetian ambassador, secured sixty Oriental rugs for his palace at Hampton Court. They probably resembled examples seen in pictures by Holbein, which can be matched by existing carpets made in Asia Minor at that time. At Boughton House, in Northamptonshire, are preserved three pile carpets specially made for Sir Edward Montagu, with his arms and the date, 1584, woven in the border. Of a type known then, as now, as 'Turkey' carpets, they are decorated with shaped ornaments, coloured blue and enlivened with detail in yellow, set upon a red ground.

In the sixteenth century Persian craftsmen carried carpet-weaving to heights never attained before or since, producing with miraculous skill designs unparalleled in beauty. One of these masterpieces, brought from Ardabil—where it lay for centuries in the mosque of Shaykh Safi the venerated ancestor of the Safavid Shâhs—is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Fig. 53 shows a portion of this colossal carpet, which is of most delicate workmanship, being built up of more than thirty million minute knots, 380 to the square inch. In the centre is a large medallion with serrated edges, surrounded by pointed oval panels, all enriched with foliated work in glowing colours. A quarter of the central element is repeated in each corner of the rectangular field, which is of deep blue covered with gay flowers issuing from meandering stems, amidst which two lamps, represented as if suspended in mid-air, form secondary centres.
in the design. The border, bounded by rigid marginal lines, is filled with lobed circles and elongated panels, which, like the plum-coloured ground they ornament, are heavily decorated. In a cartouche at one end is a verse by the poet Ḥāfīz; and beneath this is written: ‘The work of the slave of the threshold, Maqṣūd of Kāshān, in the year 946’ (A.D. 1539). Although many older carpets exist, this one was long the earliest dated example known; in this respect it must now, however, yield pride of place to another very fine Persian carpet, in the Museo Poldi-Pezzoli at Milan, which is stated to have been woven by Ghiyāthu-l-Dīn Jāmī in 1521.

European craftsmen learned how to weave pile-carpets from the Muslims, using at first the traditional Oriental sleight-of-hand, but in later times purely mechanical means. Upon the machine-made carpets and rugs now almost universally in use, designs borrowed from Islamic originals are common, but they are fakes of fashion rather than traditional survivals. It is in their velvet-like texture rather than in their designs that the ancient ancestry of modern carpets is most worthily perpetuated.

When we pass from flat surface decoration to ornament executed in relief we find Muslim carvers and modellers pursuing much the same system of design that governed their practice in other modes of technical expression. The diversity of style to which we are accustomed in European relief work, where sculptur esque and pictorial influences unknown in Muslim countries have become traditional, is absent in Islamic carving and modelling, in which repeating patterns similar to or precisely the same as those used in weaving, inlaying, or painting are generally found. Such patterns were adapted to decorative purposes in ways wholly foreign to European usage. A design that served to enrich the title-page of an illuminated manuscript, or as the pattern of a silk fabric, would be deemed equally suitable for carving in stone upon the exterior of a dome, or the walls of a mosque. The white marble fountain-basin in Fig. 55,
dated 1277–8 and inscribed with the name of Muḥammad II, Sultan of Ḥamā—uncle of Abu-l-Fidā the historian—shows how the carver adapted a type of design common to several crafts to his special needs. The scheme is essentially a repeating pattern; its elements might be extended indefinitely either laterally as a border or frieze, or both laterally and vertically as an ‘all-over’ design. Similar ornament is carved on the long frieze and in the panels of the wooden casing from the tomb of a Shaikh who died in 1216, shown in Fig. 56. One side of this remarkably rich example is at South Kensington, and the rest at Cairo. In carvings of the Fāṭimids period the ground was often sunk very deeply, with almost the effect of pierced work, as in Fig. 54, a panel in the Museum of Arab Art at Cairo. Although made in Sicily, the carved wooden ceiling in Fig. 57 is Fāṭimid in style. Besides showing how effective are such deeply cut panels, it has amongst the leafage in its ornament numerous birds and beasts, features often seen in Fāṭimid work designed for court or secular decoration, in which human figures were also freely used.

This ceiling follows the characteristic method of construction adopted by Islamic carpenters, a system which arose from considerations both practical and decorative. Climatic conditions that rendered wood very liable to shrink and warp, and scarcity of suitable timber, led to panels being reduced to the smallest possible dimensions, and to a corresponding increase in the supporting framework. To secure stability and variety of in-

Fig. 54. Carved wooden panel. Egypt. Tenth or eleventh century. Museum of Arab Art, Cairo.

Fig. 55. MARBLE FOUNTAIN-BASIN Syrian. Dated 1277–8. Victoria and Albert Museum

Fig. 56. CARVED WOODEN PANELLING FROM A TOMB AT CAIRO Dated 1216. Victoria and Albert Museum
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interest in the designs, a strangely elaborate method of assembling small panels was gradually evolved, a scheme that actually expressed by structural means pattern-schemes in which the Muslims took particular delight. Designs made up of various polygonal shapes radiating from stars form a type of ornament that is, perhaps, the most characteristic Islamic contribution to decorative art. In woodwork, which played a great part in developing the type, it finds its most complete expression, but such patterns were used by many craftsmen working in different arts. The designing of them exercised ingenious spirits everywhere throughout Islam, and if in later times they tended to become irritatingly intricate and to degenerate into over-conscious spectacular geometry, their simpler forms were always singularly effective vehicles for displaying the rich colour-schemes in which Muslim genius was so adept.

A pattern of this type is given in Fig. 60, an ingenious arrangement of twelve-pointed stars set within hexagons. This drawing is developed from the outline in Fig. 61, traced from a note made by Mirzâ Akbar, architect to the Shah of Persia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, many of whose working drawings are preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum. In the original the geometrical setting-out, shown by thin lines in the diagram, is scratched with a pointed tool upon the paper, and the pattern is drawn in ink upon this basis. The method used.
is instructive, as it probably records an ancient workshop tradition, showing how Oriental designers set about a task which may be tackled in many different ways—as the very considerable literature devoted to these patterns testifies.¹

In the two door-leaves of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Egyptian work shown in Figs. 58 and 59 the panels are so small that it has become possible to substitute ivory for wood, and so to gain an effect of surprising richness. In one of them the panels are carved with foliated ornament cut in sharp relief, and in the other they are inlaid with geometrical patterns. Both are probably relics of pulpits similar in design to the one in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which was erected by the Mamlûk Sultan Qâ‘îr Bey (1468–95) in a mosque at Cairo, destroyed in the nineteenth century to make way for a new street.

The Muslims produced many beautiful things made partly or wholly of ivory, a substance which they decorated with carved, inlaid, or painted ornament. In the tenth century a school of ivory-carvers centred at Córdoba was working in a style that already proclaims mature experience. Amongst the extant examples of their work is the cylindrical casket in Fig. 62, from the cathedral of Zamora, which is now exhibited in the Museo Arqueológico at Madrid. Around the domed lid runs an inscription stating that it was made in the year 964 for the

¹ M. J. Bourgois in Le trait de ceram en (Paris, 1879) has analysed some two hundred of these curious designs. Dr. E. H. Hankin (The Drawing of Geometric Patterns in Saracenic Art; Calcutta, 1925) has explained with uncanny wizardry some remarkably intricate examples.
Caliph al-Hakam II, as a gift to his wife, the mother of prince 'Abd-al-Rahmân. The finest example of a group that includes several similar objects made in Córdoba at about the same date, it is entirely covered with palmette leafage, peacocks and other birds, and beasts. Other specimens now in London, Paris, and elsewhere, although similar in shape and workmanship, have different ornament, being carved with interlaced lobed circles enclosing figure subjects, like the design upon the rectangular ivory casket in Fig. 63. This piece is the work of several craftsmen, the names of two of them—Khayr and 'Ubayda—being legible upon panels they carved. It was made in 1005 for a court functionary whose name and titles are prominently inscribed upon the lid.

Another type of ivory work is seen in Fig. 64, a circular box with geometrical ornament pierced through the body and flat lid. This is representative of a series thought to have been made in Cairo in the fourteenth century. Dating from the thirteenth century, and rather vaguely described as 'Siculo-Arabic', are a number of plain cylindrical and rectangular ivory boxes painted in colours and gold, with circles filled with knot-work or with figures, beasts and birds, flowers and trees, in a style that recalls illuminated manuscripts. An example decorated with a mounted huntsman, who has a cheetah perched behind him, is shown in Fig. 66.

Ivory caskets, painted, carved, or pierced, were used as jewel-cases, perfume or sweetmeat boxes, and for other similar purposes. They were often, as the inscriptions testify, made specially as
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gifts. The earliest are amongst the most valuable records of Islamic art in its beginnings. Many have come down to us in wonderful completeness, but judging from the traces of colour still visible on some specimens, it is probable that the carved caskets in their original state were resplendent with colour and gold. Some still retain their metal hinges and clasps, fittings which are interesting examples of a minor branch of the metalworker's art.

As a final specimen of Muslim skill in carving, a remarkable rock-crystal ewer in the Treasury of Saint Mark's, Venice, is given in Fig. 65. This superb work is historically important, for it bears the name of al-'Azîz, the second Fâtimid Caliph of Egypt, and may well be one of the crystal ewers mentioned in al-Maqrîzî's inventory of the treasures dispersed in 1067, because they had this Caliph's name engraved on them. In workmanship and design it is a worthy memorial of a period that marks an epoch in Islamic art.

Amongst the things in every-day use that owe something of their substance, technique, or design to Islam, our printed books are, perhaps, the most widespread. Although at first sight their connexion with the Orient may appear remote, modern methods of book-production have gained much from medieval Muslim enterprise and skill. It was only in recent times that Islamic literature began to be reproduced by mechanical means, either from type or by lithography, the latter process being specially favoured, as it faithfully preserved the actual work of the scribe, the most honoured of all craftsmen. But although printing was perfected in Europe long before it spread to Muslim countries, it is to the Orient that we owe a substance that was a great, if not the chief, factor in its development. Paper, an ancient Chinese invention, became known to the Muslims when they captured Samârquand in 704, and learned how to make it from Chinese workmen. Its use spread westwards throughout Islam. A considerable number of Arabic manuscripts written on paper date from the ninth century, but it was not imported into Christian Europe until the twelfth, and was still uncommon there in the thirteenth. The first European paper factories were established by the Muslims in Spain and Sicily, whence the manufacture passed into Italy.

When in the fifteenth century book-production was commercialized by the introduction of mechanical apparatus, paper became an essential material in the manufacture of machine-made books, without which printing could hardly have progressed as it did. It is not, however, solely for paper that the modern publisher is indebted to the Muslims. During the fifteenth century, when Venice was so actively absorbing and scattering abroad Islamic fashions in art, books bound in Italian workshops assumed a very Oriental appearance. At this period some volumes took on a peculiarity common in Muslim bindings, the flap that folds over to protect the front edges. This feature still persists in certain bindings made for accountants—such as our bankers’ ‘pass-books’—and is a memorial of their Oriental descent.

Another innovation inspired by Muslim work was a new method of decorating leather covers. In the Middle Ages European binders often enriched leather covers by impressing devices upon them by means of metal dies, a process that developed effective schemes as the stamps became larger and more elaborate in design, and cleverly devised units giving a wide range of repeating surface patterns and borders came more generally into use. But ornament produced by ‘blind toothing’, as it is termed, was expressed only in relief until Oriental workers began to enrich stamped designs by filling the sunk parts with gold paint, a practice introduced into Europe by Muslim binders settled in Venice. Towards the end of the fifteenth century this method was supplemented by a new process, in which the gold was permanently fixed by reimpressing the heated tool through gold-leaf. This new departure appears to
have originated at Córdoba. In the sixteenth century it was universally used by both Christian and Islamic binders, although the older Oriental way of using gold was never entirely superseded.

The result obtained by the Oriental use of gold is seen in the superb patterns worked on the late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century binding of which the inside is illustrated in Fig. 67. It is a marvel of clear, delicate design, patiently executed by making an infinite number of impressions with a few simple tools. Fig. 68 shows some other decorative processes used by Oriental binders, methods that go back to times much earlier than the seventeenth century, when this example was made. The crimson leather cover has a central device stamped and enriched with gold; above and beneath it, and in each corner, are shaped panels sunk below the surface and decorated with lace-like ornament cut out of thin white leather and pasted on a black ground. A formal landscape, with trees, birds, and beasts—amongst which is a dragon from the Far East—is painted in gold upon the plain field. The Venetian sixteenth-century cover in Fig. 69 has similar sunk panels and painted decorations obviously imitated from a Persian model.

The Egyptian binding (Fig. 67) has a central pointed oval panel, which is quartered in each corner, and the Persian cover is decorated with a variant of the same scheme, a plan, as we have already seen, common to many crafts. A similar design, with central and corner devices of Muslim origin and linear work of Oriental inspiration, is tooled in gold upon a Venetian cover, dated 1546, shown in Fig. 70; and in Fig. 71 the same arrangement appears in a later German example, although the details are now being modified in accordance with contemporary European fashions.

These four bindings trace roughly the development of certain technical processes that, originating in Muslim lands, found their way into European workshops and brought with them schemes of design and ornamental elements which, with slight
changes, have become firmly incorporated in modern practice. The gold tooling and lettering now universal upon fine leather bindings are expressed by means that were perfected by Muslim workers; and when, in the nineteenth century, mechanically produced book-covers began to supplement ancient hand-work, machine-bound books to a great extent merely stereotyped ways of working that hark back to Islamic origins.

The gaily decorated ‘marbled’ patterns so common upon end-papers, paper covers, and edges of books bound in European workshops during the eighteenth century, were directly derived from Oriental sources. Delicate examples of such patterns occur on strips of paper pasted round the margins of Muslim drawings and specimens of calligraphy mounted during the sixteenth century for connoisseurs whose fastidious taste required elaborately contrived settings for their treasures. Marbled papers were known in England in Bacon’s time; he tells us that ‘the Turkes have a pretty art of chamoletting of paper, which is not with us in use. They take divers oyled colours, and put them severally (in drops) upon water; and stirre the water lightly, and then wet their paper, (being of some thickness,) with it, and the paper will be waved, and veined, like Chamolet or Marble.’

Books bound in the West towards the end of the sixteenth century are found with end-papers brought from the Orient, but it was not until about a century later that European binders began to make them themselves. Hand-made marbled papers are now rarely used, but more or less clumsily reproduced imitations still serve various purposes.

For more than a thousand years Europe has looked upon Islamic art as a thing of wonder; at first largely because it was closely associated with lands deemed the Christian heritage, but later solely by reason of its own intrinsic beauty. Many of its rich products owe their preservation to medieval piety, for not a few have rested secure for ages in churches, where a casket
that had served as a Caliph's jewel-case became the repository of sacred relics, perhaps brought in from the Holy Land wrapped in a scrap of splendid silk cut from a Muslim robe of honour. The awe with which such things were regarded found appropriate meanings for the strange figures and mysterious writings upon them, thought sometimes to be talismans and characters in the tradition of Solomon, or even to date from his time, for in the Middle Ages archaeology was nothing if not romantic. It was only in the last century that the cold light of research dared to throw doubts upon the associations which had long hallowed some remarkable treasures as gifts from Harun al-Rashid to Charlemagne, or as acquired by Saint Louis in the Orient. But whether such things were paraded under false colours or not, their magnificence was real enough. Masterpieces that every craftsman reverred, they were always an inspiration to those who devoted themselves to arts neglected in the West.

Intercourse between Christians and Muslims began in times long prior to the Crusades. In Spain Islam was firmly established upon the very frontiers of western Europe, and from the first exercised profound influence upon Christian culture. In Sicily the two religions occupied common ground, while North Africa was wholly ruled by the Muslims, whose ships swept the Mediterranean from end to end.

With the Crusades a new era opened. The half-fabulous magnificence traditionally ascribed to the Saracens became a reality to astonished Christendom. A host drawn from every part of Europe came suddenly into close contact with a social order that in every respect outrangethe narrow limits of their experience. In every activity of life the reactions of this impact with alien progress soon became apparent, and in art its results were by no means the least far-reaching. As time went on Italian merchants established direct traffic with Syrian ports, Oriental trade became regularly organized, and all kinds of rare things from Islamic workshops arrived in European markets. These imports met new-found needs, aroused emulation wherever they went, and opened up lines of development either immediately or in subtle ways destined to mature in the future.

During that critical period when the West was emerging from medieval conditions, forces aroused and fostered by religious enthusiasm entered upon another phase of energy centred wholly in commercial activities. In the fifteenth century European craftsmen, impelled by Muslim success in the sumptuous and lucrative arts that had become essential to Renaissance splendour, turned with renewed interest to the Orient. Moved by deeper study of Islamic methods, they reviewed and enlarged their own technical procedure, and in so doing were no longer content to absorb such ornamental elements as came by the way. They began to explore intently Muslim canons of design, and to adapt them in a new spirit to work that was purely European in conception. Not only humble craftsmen, but also outstanding figures like Leonardo da Vinci, experimented with Oriental pattern-work; the design in Fig. 72, developed from a rough sketch in one of his notebooks, records his interest in such studies.

These innovations were not always results of direct observation, for early in the sixteenth century a new method of spreading the inspiration came into being, the 'pattern-book', an immediate product of the printing-press. By means of such collections specimens of master designers' researches in the new
style became known to those to whom access to original sources was difficult. One of the most interesting pattern-books is the rare volume by Francesco di Pellegrino,¹ whose examples are wholly derived from Islamic models. From this and contemporary pattern-books of the same kind—such as those by Peter Flotner, Virgil Solis, Martinus Petrus, and others—it is instructive to turn to the designs by Holbein, in whose drawings for silversmiths and workers in other crafts Muslim inspirations are skillfully welded into an original style.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Dutch and English enterprise was reaping the fruits of Vasco da Gama’s adventure into the Indies. A new stream of trade flowed in ever increasing volume directly from the Orient, and influenced crafts closely connected with everyday life, which, attracting an increasing demand, were now being organized in ways that foreshadowed modern industrial developments. From Muhammadan Asia came many seemingly insignificant things which, becoming necessities, have found not only European favour but spread throughout the civilized world. Cargoes of cottons and ‘chintzes’ printed with gaily coloured patterns brought a new vogue in textiles, which, developed in the ‘peniennes’ of Paris, gave ladies in the time of Queen Anne pretty dress fabrics, and, later, brought wealth to Manchester. New ‘shawls’, as their name tells us, came from Persia. Certain forms of tea- and coffeepots, imitated perhaps from Moghul ewers brought back from India by opulent nabobs, were still common on Victorian breakfast tables, and have persisted in modified shapes until to-day.

Ever since the beginnings of Islam, Western piety, learning, commerce, and curiosity have found each something to its taste


Their Influence upon European Work

in the products of Muslim skill; but in knowledge of their technical excellence and their beauty master craftsmen such as Odericus of Rome, who in 1286 wrought Islamic patterns upon the inlaid marble pavement of the Presbytery of Westminster Abbey, and William Morris, who wove another into his velvet in 1884, together with a host of others before, since, and between them, have time and again refreshed Western art from a fund which has been to us rather an annuity than a legacy.

A. H. Christie.

Islamic Art and Its Influence on Painting in Europe

There is no evidence of any Muhammadan paintings having been brought to Europe before the seventeenth century, and Rembrandt is believed to have been the first painter in the West who was sufficiently interested in Oriental art to make copies of some pictures that had reached Holland from the far East—portraits of members of the imperial family of Delhi.¹

Any direct influence of the pictorial art of the Muslim world upon any individual artist in Europe is therefore excluded; still less is there evidence that any great movement in the art of painting in Europe has been stimulated by influences from the Muslim East; it is impossible, for example, to trace to Islam any new direction in pictorial art similar to that which manifested itself in Italian painting in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the result of the revived interest in classical art. Such Muhammadan influences as are traceable, tend, therefore, to be superficial; but they make their appearance in Europe at quite an early period of the Arab domination in the waters of the Mediterranean. From Oriental fabrics were copied several