The Alhambra, the Taj Mahal and the Tahmasp Shahnameh, these masterpieces of Islamic art were produced during the period from the Mongol conquest in the early thirteenth century and the advent of European colonial rule in the nineteenth. This book surveys the arts and architecture of the traditional Islamic lands during this era.

Following chronological and regional divisions and treating architecture separately from the other arts, the authors describe numerous works of art while investigating broader social and economic issues, considering such topics as function, patronage, and meaning.

They discuss how the universal caliphs of the first six centuries gave way to regional rulers and how as a result the Iranian world became the centre of artistic and cultural innovation and Iranian-influenced forms, techniques, and motifs played a dominant role in the artistic life of the Muslim world.

The concluding essay is a provocative study of the varied and far-reaching legacies of Islamic art in Europe and the Islamic lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom are a husband and wife team of independent scholars. Blair has taught at Pahlavi University in Shiraz, the University of Pennsylvania, and Dartmouth College. Bloom has taught at the University of California at Los Angeles, Harvard University and Yale University. They have both written widely on Islamic art and architecture.

Cover illustration: detail from Rustam Sleeping While Rakhsh Fights the Lion, from an unfinished copy of Ferdowsi, Shahnameh, Tabriz, 1535–22.

(London, British Museum)
When The Pelican History of Art first commissioned a work on Islamic art, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner envisioned a single volume covering the 1400 years and forty-odd countries where Islamic art and architecture were produced. Richard Ettinghausen asked Oleg Grabar to collaborate on the project in 1959, and they began to write it together, with Grabar writing largely about architecture and Ettinghausen about the “minor” arts. Within twenty years, however, interest in and knowledge about Islam in general and Islamic art and architecture in particular had grown so enormously that Ettinghausen and Grabar felt that the first half of its history was sufficient to fill a single volume (which Grabar finished after Ettinghausen’s death in 1979). The first volume was published in 1987, but other commitments made it impossible for Grabar to continue the project and he suggested that Pelican approach us, a team of independent scholars, to write Volume II. We enthusiastically agreed to undertake the project in 1987 and met with the two editors of the series, Peter Lasko and Judy Nairn, who provided encouragement and advice about how to approach such a large and complex project. Susan Rose-Smith, the indefatigable picture researcher responsible for the images illustrating the first volume, agreed to take on the task for the second. In early 1992, a year after the death of Judy Nairn (who had been the mainstay of the series), Penguin Books, for decades its publisher, announced that The Pelican History of Art had been acquired by Yale University Press in London. We are pleased that our volume is one of the first to appear in Yale’s new and expanded format, and Susan Rose-Smith has cheerfully and ably expanded her search for color photographs to illustrate it.

When Yale University Press announced that it would continue to publish the Pelican series, some critics wondered about the value of surveys and handbooks in an age of multiple and competing critical approaches to the history of art. In the half-century since the series was conceived as the first comprehensive history of art in English, the study of the history of art has evolved enormously from such formalist concerns as the description of works of art, their attribution to masters, and the delineation of careers to broader questions not only about the roles the arts play in the societies in which they are made and exhibited but also about the nature of the investigation itself. Once the purview of a handful of rich collectors and connoisseurs, the study of the history of art has expanded to become a staple of college curricula everywhere and its popularity has exploded the numbers of museum-goers.

In the thirty-five years since Pevsner commissioned a book on the subject, the study of Islamic art has metamorphosed, not only because of new approaches to the history of art in general and discoveries in Islamic art in particular, but also because of the changed political and economic positions of many lands where Islam is the dominant religion. Thirty-five years ago the study of Islamic art was almost exclusively the bailiwick of Europeans and Americans interested in a somewhat alien and exotic world; today Islamic art is increasingly studied by scholars from that very world, who quite naturally see it in a different light and ask of it different questions. Unlike some critics who see any approach by the English and American “Orientals” as a vestige of nineteenth-century colonization and an attempt at domination, we do not question the validity of one culture trying to “understand” or “explain” the other. We do, however, realize that our position and method are relative and take note that ours is but one possible approach of many.

Paradoxically, while much of the Islamic world has been intent on rediscovering and validating a tradition of Islamic art, equivalent in the grand scheme of things to, say, Chinese or Greek art, other scholars, particularly in the West, have come to question the validity of such concepts as “Islamic” art. In their view, the concept of an Islamic art is the equivalent not of Chinese or Greek art, but of a Christian or Buddhist art, and the study of Islamic art, which is supposed to explain not only Morocco but Malaysia, makes as much sense as the combined study of Ravenna and Raphael or the Kushans and Kyoto. The concept of a unified “Islamic” culture is largely a creation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the West, when scholars looked back to a golden age in the eighth and ninth centuries and projected it onto the kaleidoscopic contemporary world. This appealing idea has been accepted somewhat uncritically by newly empowered countries seeking to validate their position in the twentieth century and create connections with past glories. Scholars have recently begun to look at continuities and discontinuities in the arts of such well-defined entities as the Mediterranean or the fifteen century, without prejudice to the confessional or political allegiances of the participants.

The nature of the Pelican series and the desire to continue the story begun in the first volume have prevented us from addressing such issues. Constraints on the size of this book have forced us to omit discussion, let alone illustration, of Islamic art and architecture in sub-Saharan Africa, both west and east, the Balkans, China, and south-east Asia. We have limited our coverage to the traditional Islamic belt stretching from Spain across North Africa and Egypt to Syria, Arabia, and Turkey, and across Iran to Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India. We have also continued the arbitrary and somewhat old-fashioned method of treating architecture separately from the other arts. We believe, nevertheless, that this methodology and type of book are still valuable, for the study of Islamic art is comparatively young, and there are few accessible sources to which the interested reader or student may turn. Even for experienced scholars in other fields, it is often difficult to distinguish the forest from the trees, and we hope that this book will provide a balanced overview for a wide audience, including art historians in
Photographic Acknowledgements

The publishers are grateful to the following persons and institutions for providing photographic material:


Line Drawing Credits


All other photographs by the authors.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

This book surveys the art and architecture of the traditional Islamic lands between the Atlantic and Indian oceans and the Eurasian steppes and the Sahara in the period from the Mongol conquests in the early thirteenth century to the European conquests in the early nineteenth. It is conceived as a sequel to The Art and Architecture of Islam: 650–1250, written by Richard Ettinghausen and Oleq Grabar and published by Penguin Books in 1987. Like Ettinghausen and Grabar’s volume, ours is designed as a survey and a manual, not as a vehicle for speculation and broad cultural interpretation. These are perennially popular and important topics, and there is ample literature on them, to which we have tried to provide adequate but not ponderous references for the interested reader. We have followed the general format of the first volume, with chronological and regional divisions and the separation of architecture from the other arts, so that the two volumes may be used together profitably.

Already in the early period, Iran and the eastern Islamic lands had begun to play an increased role in the history of the Islamic world, but the old Arabo-centric order was definitively disrupted by the Mongol invasions, which effectively ended the Abbasid caliphate (although a puppet caliph was maintained in Cairo until 1257, when the Ottoman sultans assumed the caliphate). For architecture and the arts, the Mongol conquests resulted in the Iranian world becoming the undisputed center of artistic and cultural innovation in the Islamic world, and the visual arts in most Islamic lands after 1250 can be understood in terms of their reliance on or reaction to Iranian models and ideas. In architecture, for example, the arrangement of four iwans around an open court that had been introduced for the design of Iranian mosques in the twelfth century was adopted in Egypt, which had continued to favor the traditional hypostyle plan, and the echo of the four-iwan plan was soon heard as far as Morocco and India. Similarly, the illustrated book, although known in the Arab lands before the Mongol conquests, was transformed after them into a major medium of royal patronage in Iran, whence it was adopted elsewhere. Iranian art was also the channel through which Chinese decorative motifs were disseminated throughout the Islamic world. Although Chinese wares, most notably ceramics, had long been prized imports in the Islamic lands, it was only after 1250 that chinoiserie motifs were incorporated into the decorative repertory, where they became major elements of design. We have therefore given the arts of Iran prominence by considering them first in each of the two chronological sections of this book.

For the first two and a half centuries Iranian ideas were paramount among the regional powers, while after ca. 1500 the preeminence of Iran was challenged by new imperial powers, the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean and the Mughals in northern India. Nevertheless, Persian culture and language remained the standard against which achievements were measured. Only gradually did Turkish replace Persian as the literary language at the Ottoman court and new Ottoman artistic formulas replace traditional Persian ones. Similarly, Iranian artists emigrated in the mid-sixteenth century to the Mughal court in India, where Persian manuscript traditions were avidly adopted, but only late in the century did the distinctive Mughal idiom of book illustration and decoration emerge, although Persian remained the literary language there for centuries.

We have ended our survey ca. 1780, when the European imperialistic presence began to be felt increasingly in such countries as Egypt, Algeria, and India. Although neither Turkey nor Iran was colonized directly, in the nineteenth century European industrial manufacturers replaced native goods and European styles of architecture were grafted onto indigenous ones, with greater or lesser degrees of success. The story of European interaction with North Africa and the Middle East is long and involved: one need think only of Hannah (a North African) crossing the Alps or Crusader ventures into the Levant. Within the period covered in this book, European paper supplanted the local product in Egypt, while ceramics from Islamic Spain were highly prized in England (in 1289 Eleanor of Castile, wife of Edward I, had fifty-six pieces of lustreware brought from Málaga). Perhaps the most intriguing period for the artistic interaction between the lands of the East and West is the reign of the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–81, with interruption; see Chapters 15 and 16), when Italian painters, medalists, and perhaps even architects attended the court of this quintessential Renaissance patron, while Bursa silks were prized in Italy. Most of the interchange between Europe and the Islamic lands took place in the nineteenth century, but the limitations of space and the nature of the experience have prevented us from devoting more than a cursory glance (Chapter 20) in this direction. Given the media introduced, such as photography and printing, the wealth of information available staggers the imagination, as do the questions that can be answered, and these fascinating and challenging subjects demand separate and fuller treatment.

The two periods covered here are subdivided geographically, and these divisions largely correspond to long-established regions of Islamic art: Iran and Central Asia, Syria and Egypt, and North Africa. Nevertheless there are several changes from the earlier period: Spain, after the catastrophic defeat at Las Navas in 1221, ceased to be a major Muslim power, although the court of the Nasrids remained a splendid cultural center until 1492. North Africa became increasingly isolated from the central and eastern Islamic lands and developed its own distinctive and introspective forms. Sicily, which had flourished briefly as a