real change that overcame painting and drawing during this period, and became even more pronounced after the move to Isfahan, was the emphasis placed on personal handling. This emerged not only in the traditionally personal areas, such as the overflow of the landscape into the area beyond the frame (now almost total), but in elements within the landscape itself, like the heavily modelled rock formations and the dark stippled green of the ground underneath. Figures became winnowy and there is an element of caricature in their features.

Towards the end of the century the representation of the human figure became entirely transformed; this was particularly so in drawing. Before the pigment was applied to paintings, the composition had always been drawn in with a fine wiry line, and when separate drawings became popular in the mid 16th century this technique was continued. Excellent examples appear in the work of Muhammad, whose tinted drawings of pastoral scenes were greatly prized. But in the second half of the century a bold slashing calligraphic style appeared in which forms are delineated with sweeping strokes, alternately thick and thin, reminiscent of Nasta’lq script. This style is associated initially with Sadig-i Beg, librarian of Shah Abbas the Great (1587–1627), and then with Riza-i Abbasi, leading draughtsman-painter of the Isfahan school, whose work dominates the first half of the 17th century.

If earlier painting had been about man in his natural environment, the late 16th- and early 17th-century painting is about man himself. The work of this period is dominated by large-scale representations of lovers, pretty young men and voluptuous women. There is a fashion for the sensuous and erotic and a concern with the tactile quality of hair, fur and material. In the drawings of Riza, the instant description of basic shapes is accompanied by an obsession with pleats and folds which normally serve to emphasize the sensuous curvature of bodily form, but on many occasions reach the point of pure abstraction. In a country with a powerful calligraphic tradition, writing and drawing are always interconnected, but at this time the link seems to have been particularly strong so that drawing actually takes on the physical appearance of Shi-Kas-tah or Nasta’lq calligraphy.

During Safavid times painting seems to have had some influence on textile and carpet design, for we find figures and animals reproduced which resemble, stylistically at least, those in contemporary miniatures.

**Mughal India**

Europeans felt at ease with Mughal painting and this is understandable; it comes from an area with a long-established three-dimensional tradition and was the only form of Islamic painting to digress successfully the lessons of Western art. It was based on the traditions of 15th- and early 16th-century Persian painting brought to India by a number of outstanding émigré artists, and influenced by the actions and attitudes of some of India’s most able rulers, the Mughal emperors Akbar (1556–1605), Jahangir (1605–1627), and Shah Jahan (1627–1659).

The former, as part of his general policy of accommodating the Hindu majority of the state, encouraged the fusion of Persian and native Indian artistic traditions in the painting of the court, thereby encouraging the best humanistic and realistic aspects of the classical Persian style and playing down the impersonal stereotyped image and purely decorative colour schemes. There is an individualisation of people and animals, and this extends to landscape details. Even the traditional spatial format of the high horizon begins to relax with the introduction of miniature scenes along its upper edge. Mughal painting of this time reflects the humanistic outlook of Akbar himself.

As Jahangir followed the religious policy of his father, Hindu-Muslim collaboration in the visual arts continued. However, as the emperor was a man of insatiable scientific curiosity, the court painters were encouraged to adopt a style of almost photorealistic realism. The artists’ concern with their immediate surroundings led to the creation of intimate genre scenes and ultimately to portraiture. Western works of art brought to the court by foreigners stimulated an existing interest in free space and solid form. The result was an art of genuine representations of historical personages moving and breathing in real space, quite unlike anything we find elsewhere in the Islamic world.

**The Ottoman Turks**

Turkish painting was produced almost exclusively for the Imperial Library in Constantinople. It was first regarded as a mere transplant of 15th- and 16th-century Persian miniature painting, but like the art of Mughal India should be considered quite independent. We find the same high-horizon format and absence of optical and atmospheric effects, but as these are common to virtually all Islamic painting, we should expect the peculiarly Turkish contribution to manifest itself in other areas.

This is found first in the choice of subject-matter. The personality of Ottoman painting emerges in the great triumphal and ceremonial works of the 16th century, recounting the conquests of the Imperial armies in Europe and Asia and describing the festivals of state. In works like the *History of Sultan Suleyman* and the *Sur Namik* (Circumcision Festival), the illustrations take the form of realistic reportage of contemporary events. Colours are hard and bright, while the romantic landscape of Iran is replaced by a simple terrain, austere yet topographically accurate.

Perhaps the finest painting occurs in the huge series of miniatures depicting the life of Muhammad, the *Siyar-i Nabi* (Life of the Prophet). These illustrations display the same fundamentalist intensity of religious feeling that we find in the best Ottoman calligraphy and decoration of the 16th century.
Islamic non-representational art was long considered by Europeans to be simply decorative, existing only because Muslims were forbidden to paint anything else. In fact the floral and geometric motifs that appear on the prayer mat, the koran frontispiece and tile façade interior can be identified with specifically Islamic concepts, and as such transcend the merely decorative to reflect important aspects of the vital life-structure of the Islamic community of believers. This is one level. When used with a more individualistic art form like poetry, non-figurative decoration may have, in addition to its metaphorical value, magical and talismanic connotations. In medieval times magic and the supernatural often existed just below the level of orthodox belief, and in popular imagination there was no contradiction between the two. Thus a pot or piece of metalwork may be inscribed with the traditional Islamic invocation of blessing, and at the same time be reinforced – just to be safe – with a magical symbol of remote origin.

It is not known when the Islamic state first formulated its artistic policy, but some decisions regarding the use of art in religious structures must have been arrived at in early Umayyad times, for we find non-representational decoration, along with calligraphy, used extensively in the interior of the Dome of the Rock. This decoration is a unique amalgamation of motifs taken from the repertoires of pre-Islamic east-Mediterranean and Persian art. That a new civilization should express itself through an ancient art is not as surprising as it at first appears, for Islam had an enormous assimilative capacity. Just as the existing Greek and Iranian civil services, monetary systems and even local customs were taken over and Islamised, so was much of the art and architecture of the conquered areas. The Arabian Muslims who established the new faith in Iran and the Mediterranean, as far as we know, possessed only the most rudimentary forms of visual art, not because their aesthetic sensibilities were undeveloped, but because these had traditionally expressed themselves orally through poetry and rhetoric. Furthermore, after the coming of Islam, much creative artistic energy was channelled into calligraphy. Thus when it was decided to employ art in the service of religion, historical circumstances decreed that the forms already in existence all around be used. Undoubtedly the fact that Islam considered itself the primordial religion of mankind helped it to assimilate the art associated with earlier faiths. So thorough was the process of assimilation that today we immediately identify the floral and geometric arabesque with Islam, without realising that many of these abstract themes and patterns originated in Coptic Egypt, pre-Islamic Syria and Iran, and among the nomads of Central Asia.

In particular decoration from the earliest Umayyad period, figure painting, carving and even freestanding sculpture were all employed along with floral and non-figural forms, facts which are known from archaeological and literary evidence. Religious decoration however was always abstract. Quite liberately and for sound theological reasons only calligraphic inscriptions and non-representational art were employed in the mosque and other sacred edifices. Because God was believed to be beyond description, it was thus impossible to represent Him in finite, human terms. The Prophet, it is true, was credited with saying that God created man ‘in His form’ but this, it has been pointed out, can only be taken to mean that man possesses faculties which reflect divine qualities, and does not imply any other resemblance. Similarly, although the perfection of Muhammad (and all earlier prophets) was unquestioned, his sole function was to reveal God’s plan and see it put into effect. To emphasise the messenger (which is what the Arabic word for prophet really means) by putting his picture in the mosque would have been quite irrelevant and may even have distracted attention from the message, that is the Koran, which was displayed everywhere. The Prophet’s name, and sometimes word-pictures of him, did eventually appear in the mosque but this was a relatively late development. Devotional imagery however, if that term can be used in this context, did exist in profusion; verses of the sacred text, accepted by Muslims as the eternal manifestation of the Divinity, appeared everywhere.

The purpose of art in the mosque was therefore to create suitable conditions for worship, whereby the divine presence established by the Koranic texts could be acknowledged by the community and contemplated by the individual. These aims were achieved both in the design of the mosque itself and by applying forms of decoration. On the one hand the latter created a perfect equilibrium by simple repetition; on the other hand they were not closed patterns but could be continued in the imagination indefinitely, created a feeling of infinite order. Furthermore, because floral forms, which were a prominent part of the decoration, had distinct associations with Paradise, the believer could be brought to contemplate the goal of existence.

The appearance of identical decoration in mosque, mausoleum, private dwelling and palace need not surprise us, for almost no form of geometric or floral decoration was specifically associated with either domestic or religious architecture. We can explain this by pointing to the theocratic unity of Church and State in Islam; just as the chief mosque of any city was built next to the governor or caliph’s palace in a visible demonstration of this unity, equally there was one form of decoration for both.

The spiritual, contemplative quality of an arabesque pattern is always there in potential. This potential may be realised when the decoration occurs in the mosque in conjunction with Koranic calligraphy, it may lie submerged in the palace as the background of an animal or figure frieze, but it never disappears.

Architectural decoration

From the earliest times geometric and foliate motifs were used in the same building. In the Great Mosque of Damascus built by the Umayyad caliph Al-Walid (705-715), the softs of the arches are covered with floral scrolls and plant forms in mosaic, reminiscent of the decoration in the Dome of the Rock, while the window grills are geometrical. In later architectural decoration separate geometrical shapes are combined with foliage. The Umayyad palace in the Syrian desert called the Mushattah, built in the first half of the 8th century, has a richly carved facade in which vine and acanthus scrolls are set inside triangles, octagons and lobed hexagons. The plant forms of the Mushattah are still naturalistic in conception but when the same geometric-foliate format occurs again in Samarra, built in the following century, the naturalistic aspect is considerably reduced. Samarra was built as a new capital by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847-861), in order to put an end to the constant friction between the Turkish troops of the army and the citizens of the old capital, Baghdad. Excavations carried out in the ruins of Samarra, abandoned in about 883, reveal three types of decoration: styles A, B, and C. The first two are similar to that of the Mushattah, but with the floral element within the geometic shapes becoming progressively more stylised.

The other type of decoration, style C, was the first example of Central Asian influence on Islamic art, obviously brought by the Turks of Al-Muta-
53 Painting by Riza-i Abbasi, Isfahan, Iran, 1630. 7 x 4 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Riza-i Abbasi was the leading master of the 17th century and this picture of two lovers is one of his most accomplished pieces. From the end of the 16th century the human figure becomes increasingly more important. Subjects and treatment are sensuous and there is a concern to render material as realistically as possible. Drawing and painting have a vigorous, calligraphic quality, always present in Persian art but now much more pronounced.

54 Silk with figurative pattern, Iran, 16th century. 47\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 26\(\frac{1}{2}\) in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The design here appears to be inspired by miniature painting. In Safavid times painters became directly involved in the production of textiles and carpets. This resulted in the decline of carpet design which became little more than a woven picture.

55 Ceramic mosque lamp, Iznik, Turkey, dated 1549. Height 15 in. British Museum, London. The lamp was made for the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, and dates from the time of alterations made to the building by the Ottomans. A fine example of Iznik pottery and particularly important for an inscription on the lower rim linking it with Iznik. Calligraphic inscriptions are relatively rare in Iznik pottery and for the most part confined to mosque lamps.

56 Gold signet ring with jade seal-stone. Timurid, about 1430. Diameter 1 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Calligraphic inscriptions and arabesque designs are employed to cover even the smallest surface. Here, as is often the case with metal objects, representational forms are introduced: the familiar motif of confronted dragons. This ring is one of the few surviving personal ornaments in precious metal known to us.

57 Karatay Madrasah, Konya, Turkey, 1231. The portal and interior chamber behind are excellent examples of the type of decoration practised by the Anatolian Seljuks. There was a long-established tradition of stone-carving in this area, but the swastika and braid motifs, and interlocking polygonal shapes, were brought from Iran where they appear in Seljuk brickwork, and ultimately go back to Central Asia. The interlace and intersecting arch designs, in marbles of two different colours, were derived from the architectural decoration of neighbouring Syria.
thing very like it is found in the mausoleum of Shaykh Muhammad bin Bakran, the Pir-i Bakran (1299–1313) at Linjan near Isfahan.

The combination of geometric and floral arabesque, which we regard as so typical of Islamic art, appears in its earliest developed form in the art of Fatimid Egypt, particularly in woodcarving. From Tulunid times (886–905), Egyptian craftsmen had followed the artistic tradition of the Abbasids, best seen in the decoration of Samarra. Under the Fatimids the old bevelled style continued for some time, but gradually the carving became deeper and the scrolls and tendrils finer and more cursive. A fine early example of the floral-geometric complex is the carving of the mid 12th-century mihrab of Sayyidah Ruqayyah, where multiple lines intersect to make polygonal shapes containing fillets of wood carved with foliate designs or inset with bone. Whether large or small these complexes were made in the same way; the fillets were carved independently and the linear sections cut in short straight sections and then the whole construction slotted together.

The same tradition and methods continued under the Mamlukes, though there was an increased preference for star-polygons. Star-polygons separated by intersecting rectangles had already appeared on the mihrab of Sayyidah Ruqayyah. In later Mamluke work however, the stars are allowed to grow until they make contact. In addition, the fillets start to include Far Eastern elements like peony blossoms which came into Mamluke decoration by way of Mongol Iran.

One of the most dramatic uses of the floral and geometric complex occurs in Mamluke architecture. Many of the domes of the 15th-century Mamluke tombs outside Cairo are covered with enormous arabesque patterns; some are purely geometric but others like that of Qayt Bay use geometric and floral forms. The decoration on the Madrasah-Mausoleum of Qayt Bay (1474) is quite different from the earlier examples of the floral-geometric complex as here each form has an independent existence. Instead of the floral arabesque pattern being composed of separate units within the geometric linear intersections, it now grows down from the apex of the dome, the geometric arabesque being superimposed on it. This superimposing of patterns was not a Mamluke invention but was used throughout western Asia. Although generally associated with...