

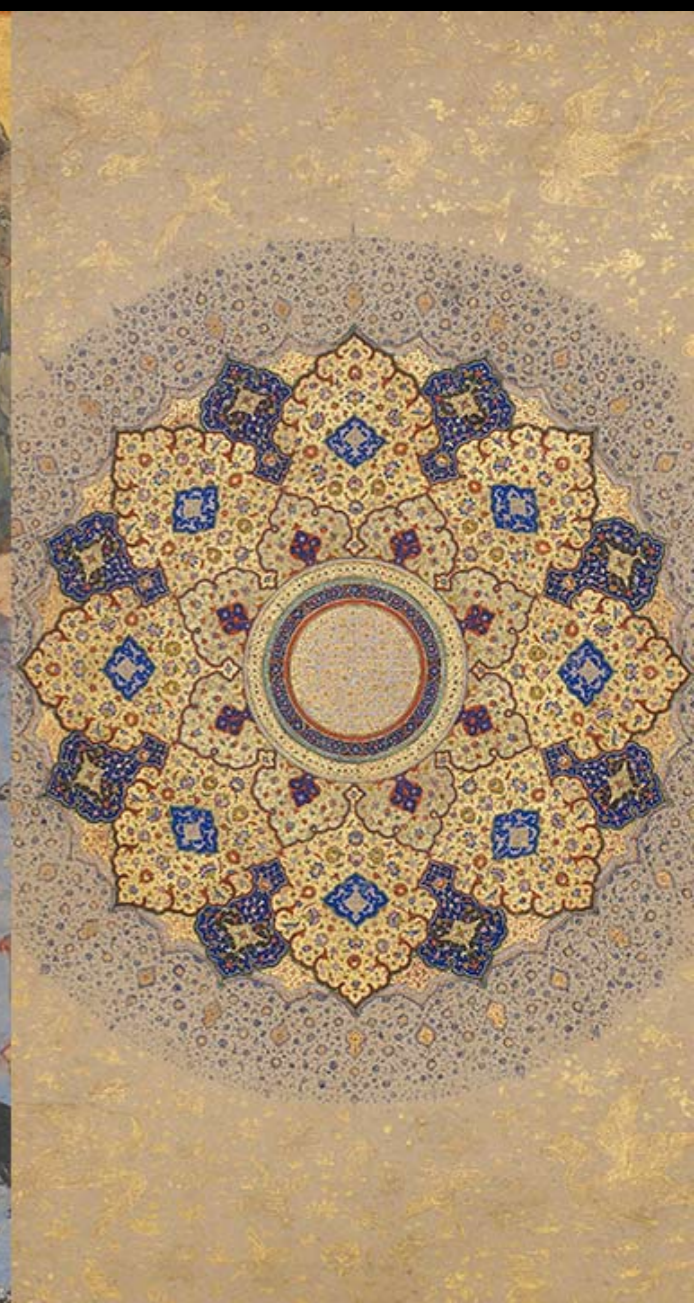
ART, FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY (I)

ISLAMIC ART

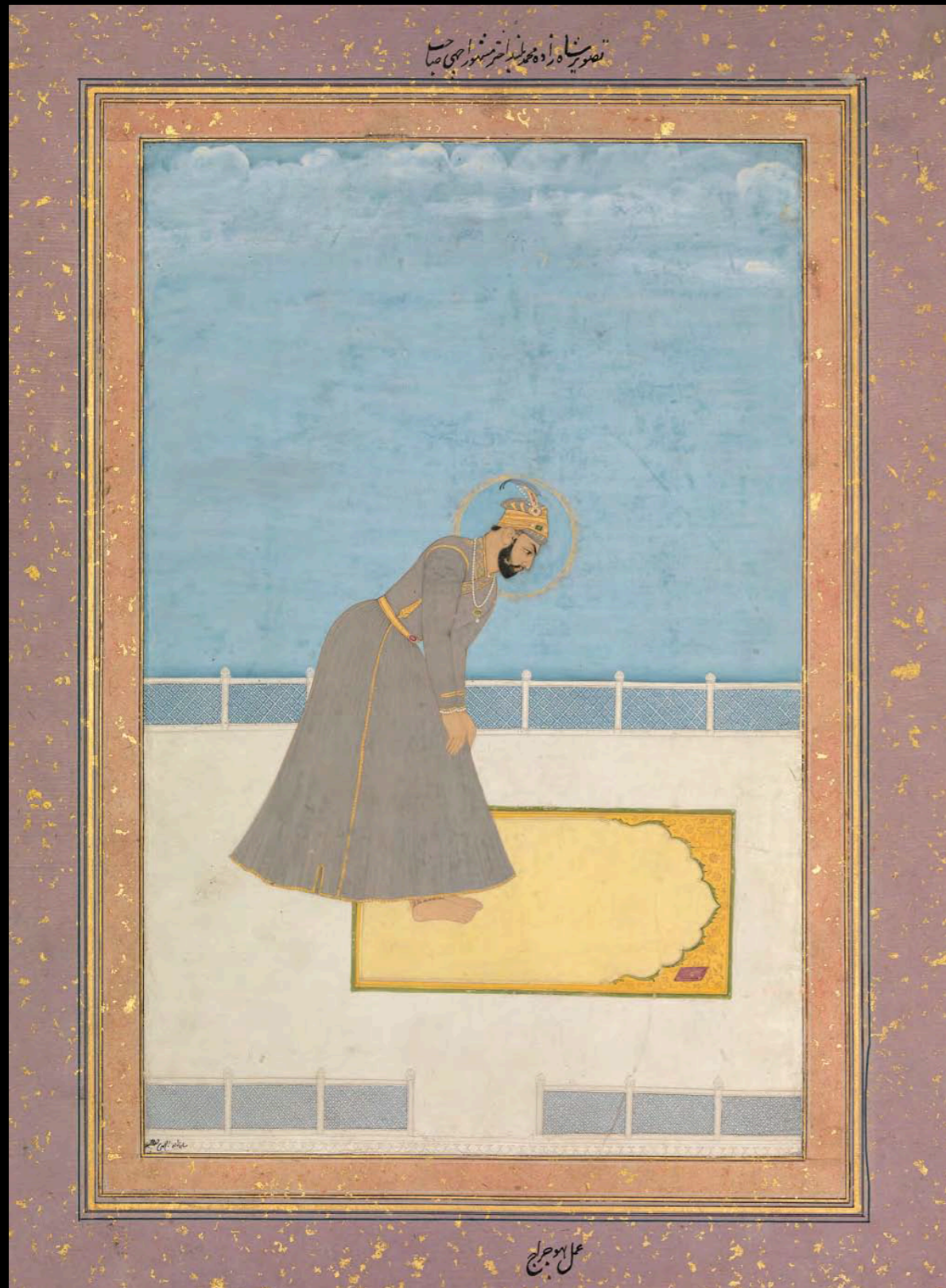
What role do you think art plays in “faith”?

How do art objects communicate beliefs or values associated with a culture?

What various mediums do you think a culture uses to convey its messages?



The key tenets of Islam



- ▶ Began after a revelation to Prophet Muhammad by God in the 7th century on the Arabian Peninsula
- ▶ **Monotheism:** Belief in one God
- ▶ **Prayer:** Muslims pray facing Mecca five times a day; prayer includes a recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur'an
- ▶ **The Qur'an:** believe that the holy book of Islam was revealed to Muhammed over 23 years. After the Prophet's death, his successors compiled these revelations in a manuscript

Portrait of Prince Muhammad Buland Akhtar at Prayer:
Folio from an album, 17th century
India
Ink and watercolor on paper

The spread of Islam

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l14x4-q_Gj4

“Islamic world” refers to regions who have historically been ruled or inhabited predominantly by Muslims- from 7th century to the present- in places across the globe from Spain to Indonesia



What is Islamic art?



Installation of a Mihrab (prayer niche) at the Met

- ▶ “Islamic art” is a modern concept (created in the 19th century)
- ▶ Describes the art of all regions where Islam was the dominant religion
- ▶ Not necessarily objects created for Muslim worship, could be secular objects from an Islamic region
- ▶ Therefore important to distinguish between the religious and cultural aspects

KEY FEATURES OF ISLAMIC ART

- ▶ Islamic teachings and values
- ▶ Ornamentation
- ▶ Interconnections and influences

Key features of Islamic art



Installation of a Mihrab (prayer niche) at the Met

- ▶ **Islamic teachings and values:** even though artistic styles are very diverse across different dynasties, a shared feature are the Islamic teachings (particularly in religious forms like mosque architecture and Quran manuscripts)
- ▶ **Ornamentation:** common preference for calligraphic, floral, and geometric motifs. Generally non-figurative and non-representational
- ▶ **Interconnections and influences:** influence of trade, diplomacy and international relations (as Islamic dynasties spread around the world) is directly seen in the art

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE



Hagia Sophia
Istanbul
532-37

Syncretism: The amalgamation of elements from different religions in one.

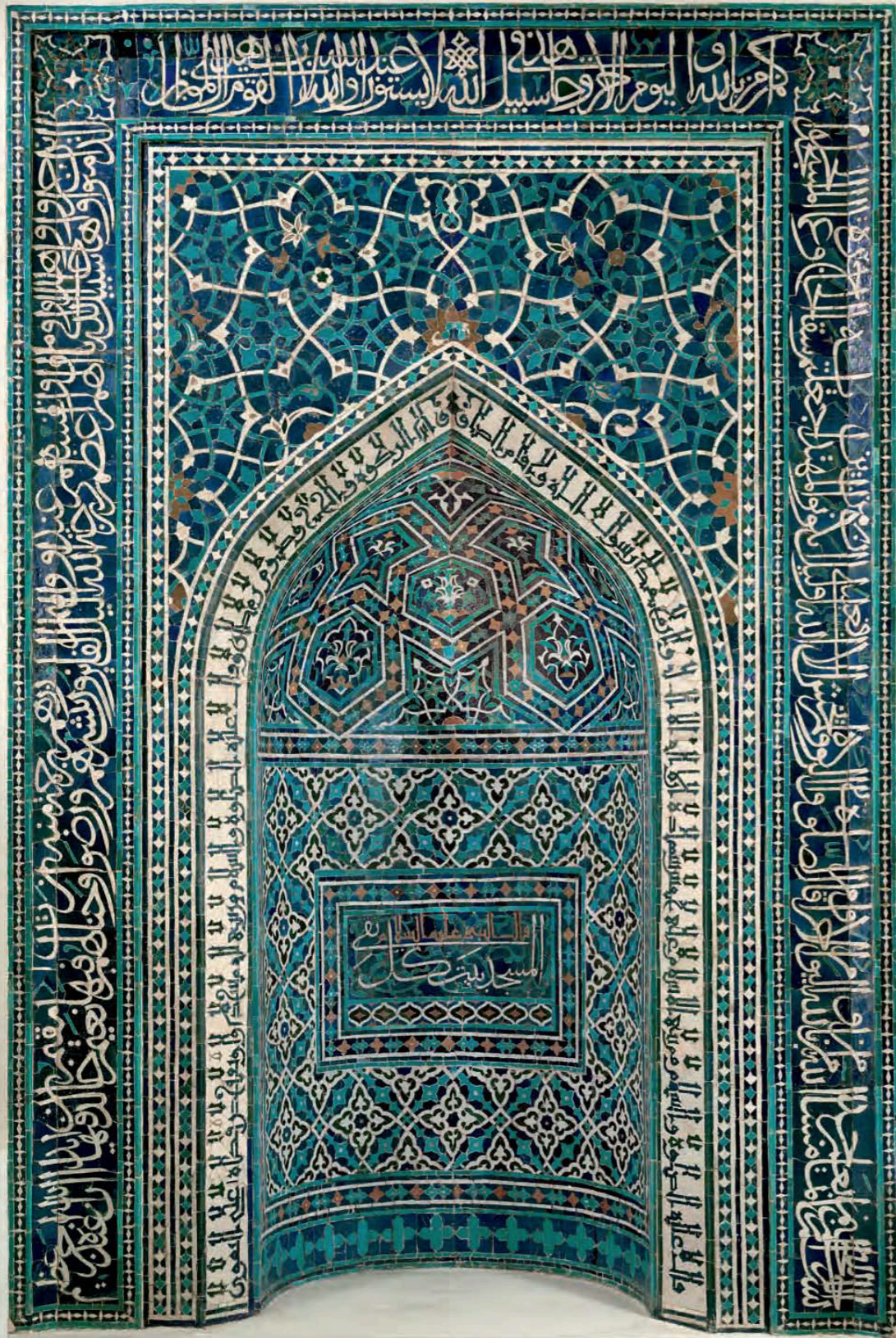
Mosque: A place of worship for Muslims, often having at least one minaret. In Arabic: *masjid*.



Contemporary image of the Hagia Sophia
Istanbul, Turkey

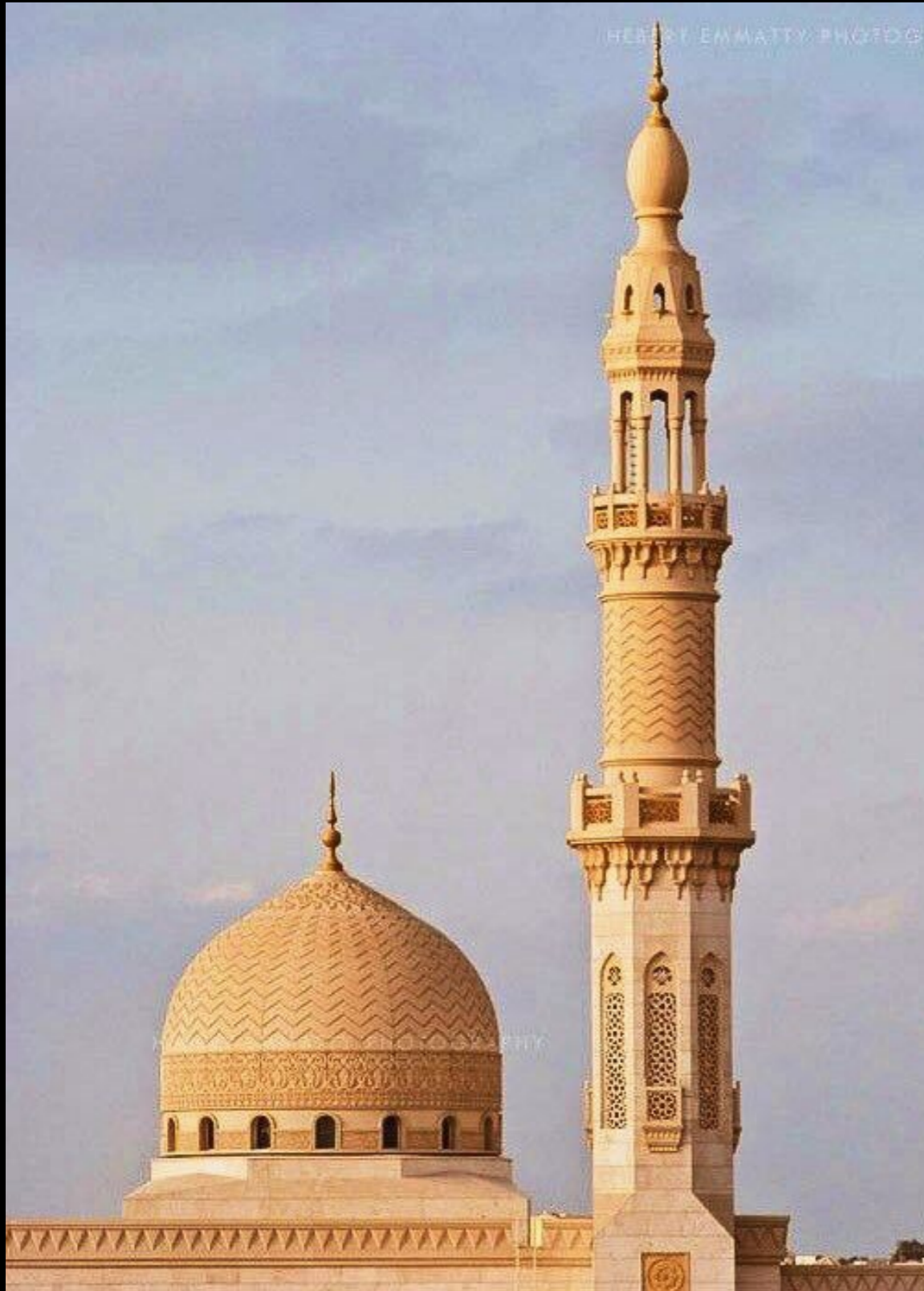
ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF A MOSQUE

- ▶ **Mihrab:** a niche in the qibla wall indicating the direction of Mecca (usually most decorated part of the mosque)



Mihrab (Prayer Niche)
dated A.D. 1354-55
(Met Museum)

ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF A MOSQUE



- ▶ **Minaret:** wall tower attached to the mosque; designed so the call to prayer can be heard loud throughout the city

ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF A MOSQUE



- ▶ **Minbar:** staircase on which the prayer leader stands when delivering a sermon

Minbar in the Umayyad Mosque, Damascus, Syria

SYNCRETIC SITES

- ▶ Shrine in Jerusalem built by the Umayyad dynasty in the 7th century (oldest existing Islamic monument)
- ▶ The building was constructed between 688 and 691 CE under the patronage of the Umayyad caliph Abd Al Malik

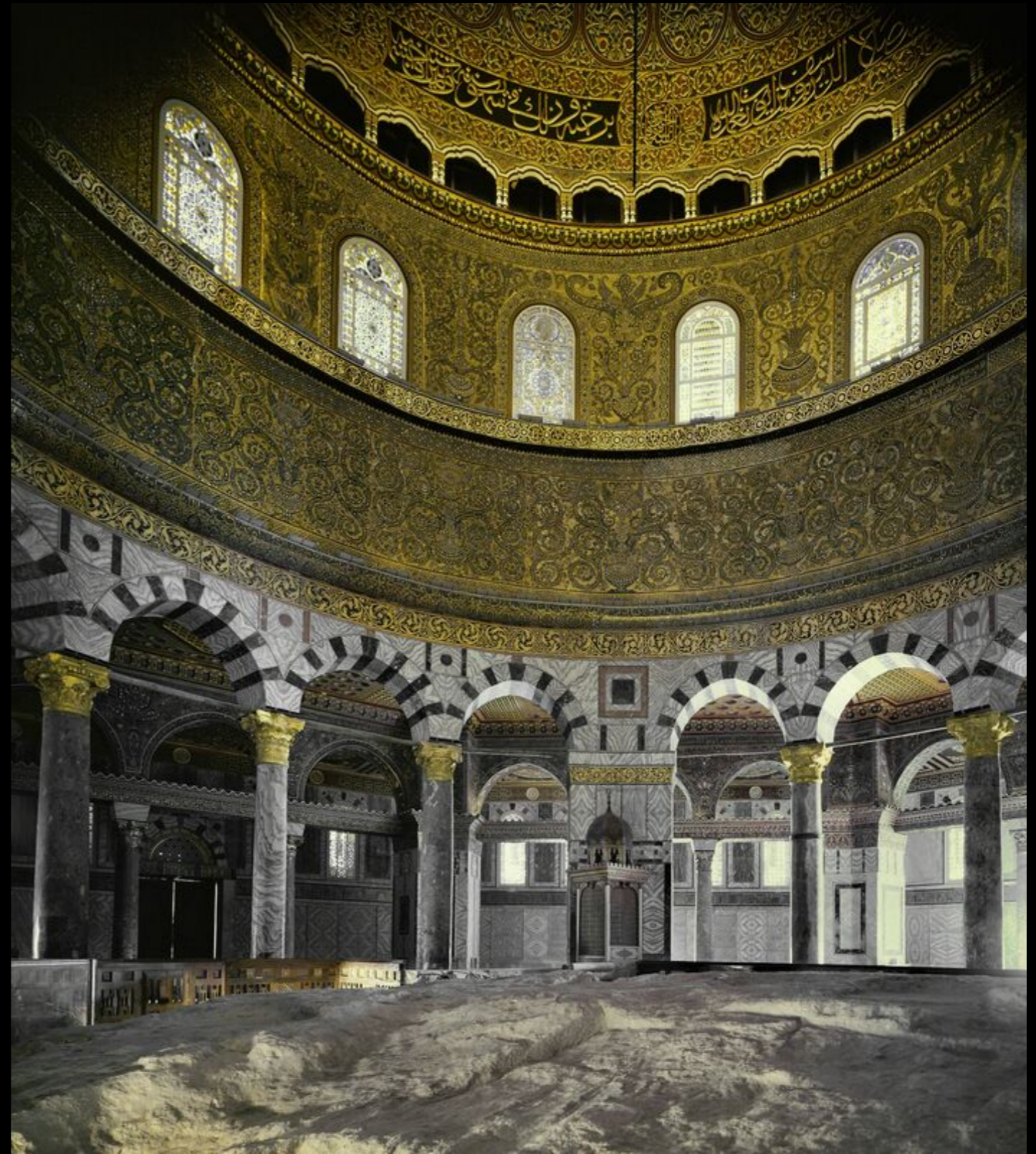


- ▶ Considered sacred for Jews, Christians and Muslims- worshipped by Muslims as the site where Prophet Muhammad began his journey to heaven and according to the Jewish tradition, as the site where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son.
- ▶ The original function and significance of the Dome of the Rock are uncertain

Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem
Completed in 692 AD



Mosaic detail from the Dome of the Rock



Interior of the Dome of the Rock (showing Foundation Stone)



The Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, Spain

Histories of interconnections and influence

- ▶ Historians believe that there had originally been a temple to the Roman God, Janus on this site
- ▶ The mosque was built by Abd ar-Rahman 784-786 (at the time one of the largest buildings in the Islamic world) who founded the Umayyad dynasty in Spain after his family was overthrown from Syria
- ▶ In Cordoba, he tried to recreate the grandeur of his home in Syria- promoted architecture and even imported fruit trees from Syria



- ▶ In 1236, King Ferdinand took over the region and converted the mosque into a Cathedral.
- ▶ In the 16th century, the cathedral's bishops suggested demolishing the structure and building a new cathedral. There was such opposition from the citizens that they came to a unique solution- to build an altar in the prayer hall.
- ▶ The architecture is therefore a unique mix of Islamic and Christian elements.

Mihrab, Great Mosque at Córdoba, Spain

NON-RELIGIOUS SITES



Taj Mahal, Agra, India
1632-53 AD



Taj Mahal, Agra, India
1632-53 AD

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

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



Closeup of a minaret with an umbrella decoration (drawing influences from Hindu architecture)



Closeup of Quran verses on the walls and patterns of inlaid semi-precious stones

THE WRITTEN WORD



Ceramic Vessel in the Shape of a Mosque Lamp
1525-40 (Met Museum)

Calligraphy: The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes; from the Greek words *kallas* (beauty) and *graphos* (writing)

- ▶ Calligraphy is the most highly regarded element of Islamic art- the Quran considered to be the **word of God** was written in an Arabic script
- ▶ Figural representation was considered **idolatry**; hence the written word became important
- ▶ Used for both **communication and decoration**
- ▶ Not limited to books: tiles of buildings, ceramic vessels, paintings etc.
- ▶ A number of languages adopted the **Arabic alphabet** even though they bear no linguistic similarity.

Examples of calligraphic scripts



Folio from a Qur'an Manuscript
ca. 1180



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 1530



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 19th century

Examples of calligraphic scripts

Kufic script: long letters, angular, earliest script used for the Quran



Folio from a Qur'an Manuscript
ca. 1180

Nasta'liq script: graceful, fluid, used for literary non-Quranic works



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 1530

Shikaste script: easy to write quickly, used for poetry for its flowery, visual style



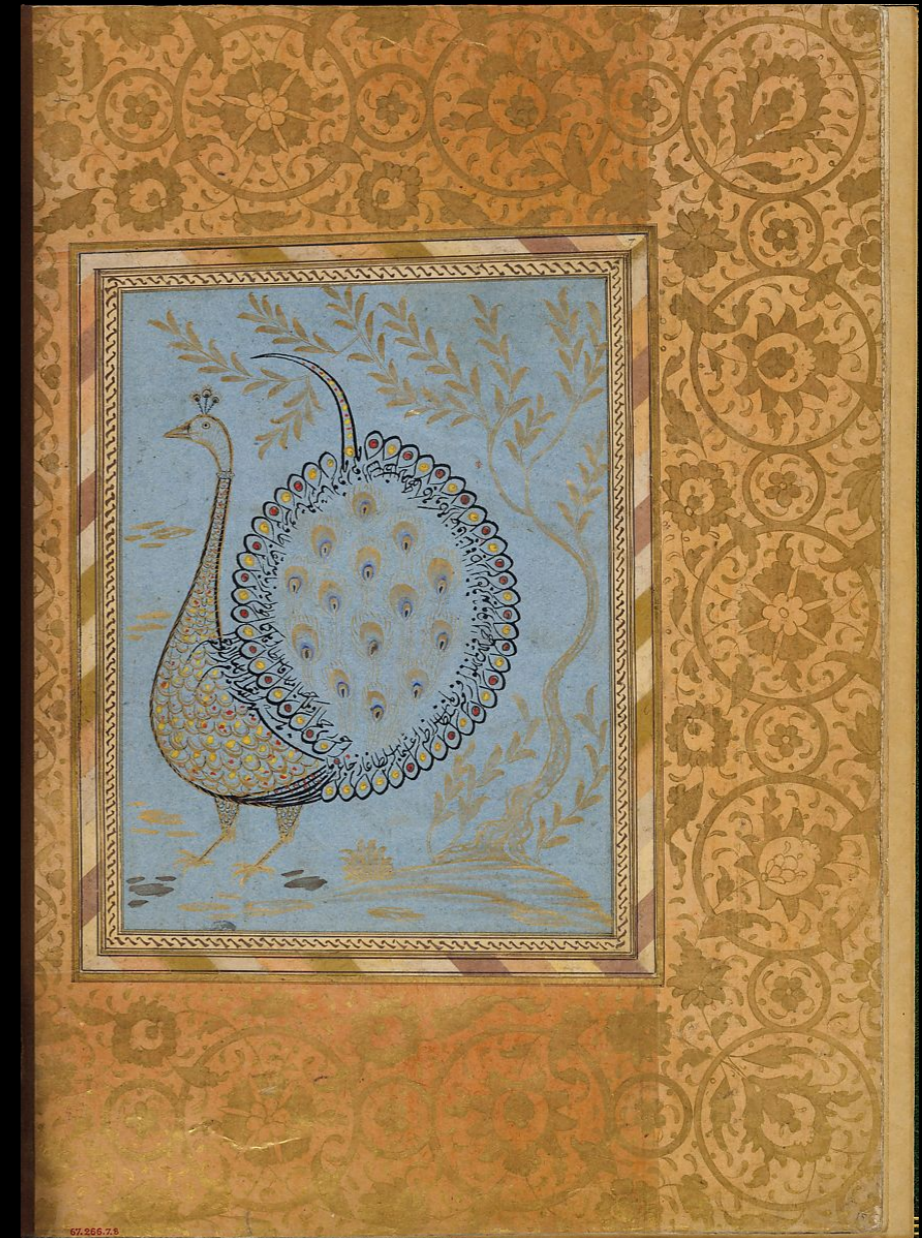
Folio from an unidentified album
c. 19th century

Calligraphy as art

Calligram: a word or piece of text in which the design and layout of the letters creates a visual image related to the meaning of the words themselves.



Calligraphic galleon
by 'Abd al-Qadir Hisari
c. 1766-67 CE
Turkey
(Met Museum)



"Calligraphic Composition in Shape of Peacock," Folio from the Bellini Album
c. 1600
Turkey
(Met Museum)

The question of figuration

- ▶ **Figurative art:** Art that draws from the real world, in particular depicting human figures (therefore always representational)
- ▶ **Aniconism:** The absence of a material representation of the natural world
- ▶ **Idolatry:** The worship of idols



Unknown artist, *Prince With a Falcon*, 1600-1605.
Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

MINIATURE PAINTINGS

- ▶ The tradition of Persian miniature painting began around the 13th century
- ▶ Persian miniature influenced other Islamic miniature traditions, like the Ottoman miniature in Turkey and Mughal miniature in India
- ▶ The illustrations are intended to be kept in an album known as *muraqqa* (the survival rate and preservation of these is therefore better)
- ▶ Because this was an art of the court and only shown to a private audience, the constraints of depicting human figures was more relaxed- more freedom of expression and subject matter compared to public wall paintings

Incident in a Mosque
folio from Divan of Hafiz
c. 1530
Iran (Harvard Art Museum)



Visual characteristics of Miniature paintings



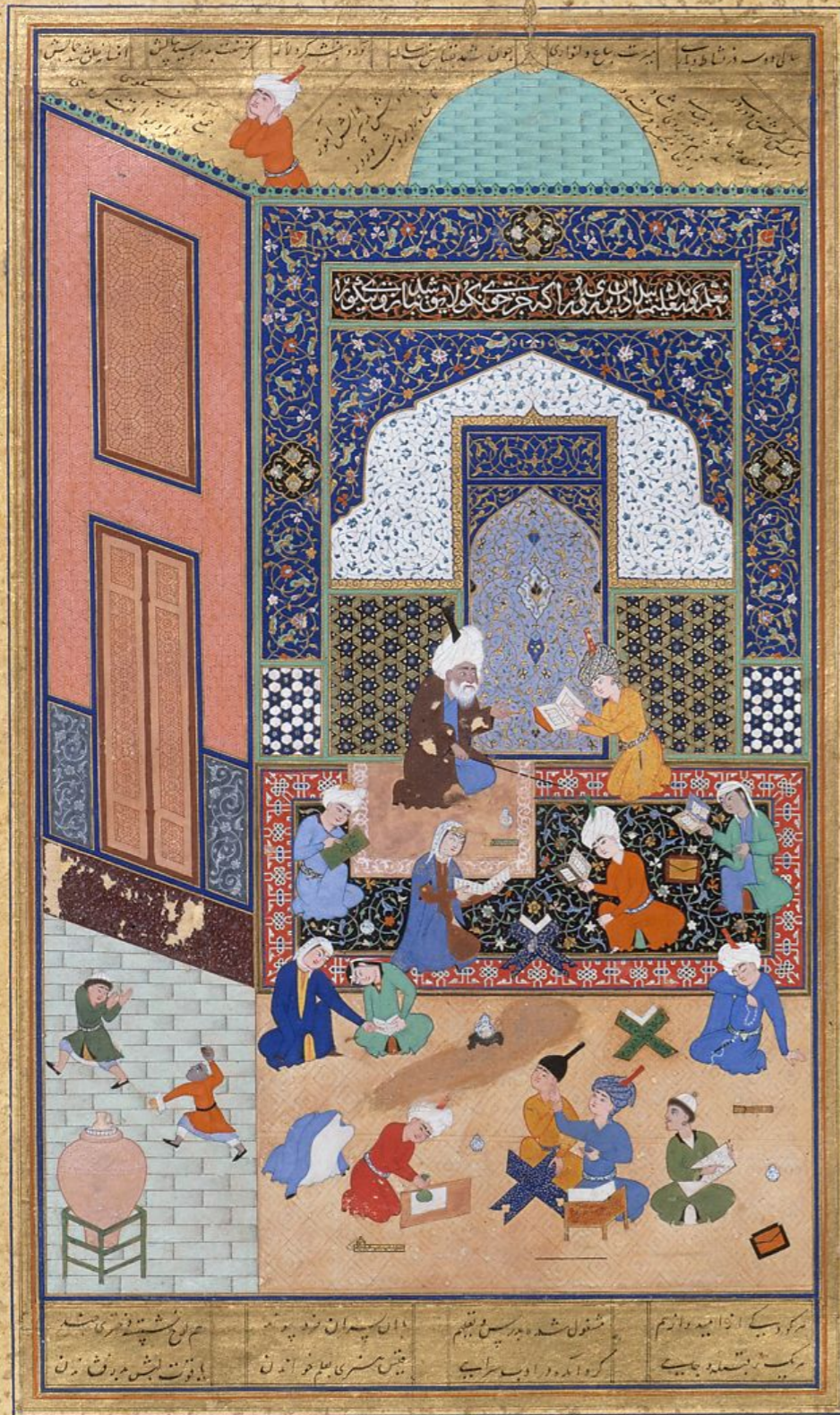
An Attempt on Akbar's life in Dehli in 1564
 illustration from Akbarnama
 c. 1590-95
 India (Collection of V&A Museum)

Visual characteristics of Miniature paintings

- ▶ bold, vivid colours
- ▶ packed composition that fills the page
- ▶ fine delicate lines- often made using brushes of a single hair
- ▶ small- not more than a few inches
- ▶ valued color and detail over shading and realistic perspective



An Attempt on Akbar's life in Dehli in 1564 illustration from Akbarnama c. 1590-95 India (Collection of V&A Museum)



"Laila and Majnun in School", Folio 129 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami
A.H. 931/A.D. 1524-25



"Akbar and Asaf Khan," from Akbarnama, ca. 1590-95, Mughal Empire,
present day India

GLOSSARY

- ▶ **Monotheism:** worship of a single god or deity
- ▶ **Syncretism:** The amalgamation of elements from different religions in one.
- ▶ **Mosque:** A place of worship for Muslims, corresponding to a church or synagogue in other religions, often having at least one minaret. In Arabic: masjid.
- ▶ **Minaret:** The tall slender tower of an Islamic mosque, from which the muezzin recites the adhan (call to prayer).
- ▶ **Arabesque:** A repetitive, stylized pattern based on a geometrical floral or vegetal design.
- ▶ **Calligraphy:** The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes.