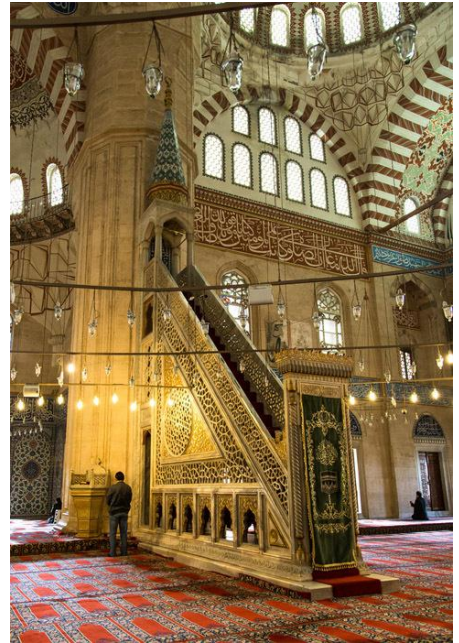


## TCI 9.10 Art & Music

Muslims created many forms of art and music. In this section, you'll look at four types of artistic expression in the medieval Islamic world.

**Geometric and Floral Design** - Muslims earned fame for their decorative arts. Early in the history of Islam, Muslims did not favor the use of images of humans or animals in religious art. Instead, artists referenced shapes and patterns found in nature and geometry to create marvelous designs and decorations.

Art sometimes was religious, as in the elaborately illuminated manuscripts of the Qur'an. But artists and craftspeople also applied their talents to everyday items like plates, candlesticks, glassware, and clothing. They decorated the walls and other features of mosques and palaces with intricate designs.



A type of design called *arabesque* took its beauty from the natural world. In arabesque, artists crafted stems, leaves, flowers, and tendrils (threadlike parts of plants) into elegant patterns that were repeated over and over. Artists carved, painted, and wove intricate arabesque designs into objects both large and small, including metal boxes, ceramic bowls, tiles, carpets, and even entire walls.

Artists also used geometric shapes in their designs, as circles, triangles, squares, and hexagons had special meaning to Muslims. Artists used simple tools—rulers and compasses—to create abstract designs from these shapes. This basic design was then repeated and combined to create a complex pattern.

**Calligraphy** - For Muslims, the highest form of decorative art was calligraphy, the art of beautiful handwriting. When Muslims began copying the Qur'an, they used calligraphy to artistically record the words of God. Skilled calligraphers have been honored as great artists in different periods of Islamic history.

Calligraphers used sharpened reeds or bamboo dipped in ink to write on parchment and paper. Some forms of calligraphy had letters with angles. Most featured round letters and cursive writing, in which the script flowed, and letters within words were connected.

In addition to copying the Qur'an, artists used calligraphy to decorate everyday items. They put elegantly written lines of poetry on pottery, tiles, and swords, while bands of calligraphy trimmed the borders of fabric. Calligraphy even adorned coins, which sometimes featured verses from the Qur'an.

Verses of the Qur'an also decorated mosques. Sometimes, the holy verses were engraved along the tops of exterior walls, or they circled the inside dome of the mosque.

## TCI 9.10 Art & Music



**Textiles** - Manufactured fabrics, or textiles, had long been important to Arab people as practical items and as trade goods. Muslims in medieval times brought great artistry to making textiles. Weavers wove wool, linen, silk, and cotton into cloth, and then dyed it in vivid colors. Valuable cloths sometimes featured long bands of inscriptions or designs showing important events. Fabrics were also embroidered, often with gold thread.

As is still often the case today, clothes showed rank, and served as status symbols in the Muslim world. The caliph and his court wore robes made of the most valuable materials. Fine textiles served as awnings and carpets in the royal palace.

**Music in Muslim Spain** - There were several centers of music in the Islamic world, including Baghdad and Damascus. Persian musical styles were very influential. But in Cordoba, Spain, a unique style developed that blended elements of Arab and native

Spanish cultures.

A key figure in this cultural innovation was Ziryab, a talented musician and singer from Baghdad. In 822, Ziryab re-settled in Cordoba where he established Europe's first conservatory, or music school. Musicians from many different social classes came to Cordoba to learn from the great Ziryab. Many of his students were then hired as entertainers at royal courts in other parts of the world.

Singing was an essential part of Muslim Spain's musical culture. Musicians and poets worked together to create songs about love, nature, and the glory of the empire. Vocalists performed the songs accompanied by such instruments as drums, flutes, and lutes. Although this music is lost today, it undoubtedly influenced later musical forms in Europe and North Africa.