Tawheed in Islamic Art:
Defining an Aesthetic Theory

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Abstract

The first chapter of this thesis introduces the subject of the research, details a review of the literature which is currently available in the field, and outlines the scope and methodology that has been used in this study. Chapter Two examines the sources and definitions of modern aesthetic theories, discusses their applications in a cross-cultural setting and proposes a new multi-cultural theory that would encompass common values of diverse cultures. Chapter Three focuses on historical contexts for the development of Islamic art which aim the viewer toward why the forms were produced rather than the accepted classifications of when or where. Islamic aniconism is discussed and its relationship to the development of Arabic calligraphy and the arabesque is detailed. In Chapter Four, the Islamic doctrine of Tawheed and its influence on the visual arts is analyzed using writings from the Quran, Hadith and Islamic scholars. The fifth chapter deals with Islamic art symbolism on the literal, sacred and mystic levels. The final chapter concludes with the creation of the *Sacramentalist Theory*, its proposed criteria and samples of aesthetic judgments rendered through its direct application to Islamic art. The current state of Islamic art is also commented upon and future suggested areas for research are delineated.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted for any degree.

Signed..... Candidate

Date.....

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed.....Candidate

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organizations.

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Date.....

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the University of Wales at Lampeter, the Islamic Studies Centre and Dr. Mashuq ibn Ally for accepting my proposed thesis and allowing me to do this degree as an external student while living in no less than four different countries during its tenure.

Likewise, the professors of Art Education and Islamic Humanities and the Harold B. Lee librarians at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah deserve mention for starting me down this path in the beginning and later providing me with the best available resources on the subject.

To friends Karen Seely and Rebecca Haynes, I also owe a debt of gratitude for their inspiration, suggestions and willingness to do tasks for me from overseas so that this thesis could be written.

Finally, to my husband, Isam, whose patience and support during the long hours of researching and writing which precluded me from taking care of him as a loving wife should for the last four years, I promise future recompense and proudly dedicate this work.

Transliteration

The transliteration of Arabic words into English in this thesis relies on whatever systems and spellings were used in the sources quoted; therefore, not any one system was used exclusively. Where the spellings differed from source to source, the most commonly or easily pronounced spelling was chosen for further reference to the term not directly quoted. Notations were added (sp.) in any further quotes which had a different transliteration.

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Pre-amble

Is there an Islamic aesthetic? Does the *Quran* or *Hadith* set forth the values that govern beauty and visual forms as well as moral, social and religious codes? What is the standard and meaning of beauty in Islam? How does the all-encompassing doctrine of *Tawheed* influence the creation of visual arts within the Islamic World? Was the choice to use non-figural forms in Islamic art due to strict religious injunctions, or were there other more important factors that determined the selection? Why haven't these repetitious patterns changed or evolved over the space of 1300 years? How can a value judgment of Islamic art be made?

This doctoral study, *Tawheed in Islamic Art: Defining an Aesthetic Theory,* seeks to provide possible answers to these questions. While research in the past has been focused on the classification of periods, regions, styles and techniques, there has been very little said about the motives, meanings or contributing factors behind the creation of the art objects, and nothing said by way of a standard for judgment or possible aesthetic criteria concerning them. Considering the vast length of time span involved in Islamic art, and the consistency of the forms employed, it is unusual in the world of art history and criticism that not more has been attempted by

way of scholarship in this area.

> Despite the vast amount of documentation and descriptive studies already carried out by Western scholars, Islamic art has remained until now a singularly neglected field as far as the study in depth of its inner meaning is concerned...Islamic art continued to be a closed book as far as its symbolic meaning was concerned. (Burckhardt 1976, p.xv)

Perhaps the Western historians feel that since Islamic art has not been classified within the main-stream Western art movements, that it is not important enough to merit such attention; or, they feel that Islamic art belongs to that total group of multicultural art traditions which are too endemic and require too much specific cultural knowledge in order to contribute any discerning comments regarding them.

In any case, they do not make the effort to look beyond the art form to the Islamic culture which produced it in an effort to understand the symbolic values present nor the religion that engendered them.

> ...most Western historians of art have either remained indifferent to the spiritual message of Islamic art or have failed to delve into its inner meaning, symbolism, metaphysical and cosmological significance, and organic relation to the religion which gave birth to it. (Nasr 1991, p. 197)

More than likely, however unfortunate it may be, they do not see Islamic art as possessing enough to talk about, since it does not rely on figural representations as the other "artistic" cultures do. The geometric forms, while beautiful in their motion and colors are "merely ornamental decorations" and carry no significant values

from the viewpoint of the Western critical mind.

As Oleg Grabar, an eminent Islamic art historian observes, it is not the Islamic art forms that lack the meanings, but we who lack the understanding and language to discern and discuss them.

> It is plain therefore that we have not yet found the appropriate terms and concepts through which and with which to explain and evaluate the arts of Islamic culture and to describe and define our reaction to them, our sense of what unifies them as a special aesthetic experience. (Bamborough 1977, p.14)

This study, while written by a Westerner, seeks to prove that there is much to learn, value and judge in these "sterile" forms, and hopefully, this uncovered knowledge will lead to further astute investigations along these lines in the future. In order to mark the current departure points of this study, a brief discussion of the major literature and researchers in the fields of aesthetics, Islamic art and Islam will now be cited.

1.2. Literature Review

In the field of visual aesthetics, there is one major work which provides specific research relative to multicultural aesthetic issues. Richard Anderson's book, *Calliopie's Sisters: A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art* (New Jersey, 1980), focuses on the applications of ethnographic studies to the aesthetic systems of various minority cultures, such as the Yoruba Indians, Navajo and Eskimo ethnic groups, and several isolated island tribes.

In each instance, Anderson identifies common cross-

cultural values found within the group's art forms that can relate to a multicultural view. His definition of the terms *etic* and *emic*, in reference to these cultural values, are used as a foundation for this study.

For general Western aesthetic reference, Marcia Eaton's *Basic Issues in Aesthetics* (University of Minnesota, 1988) and articles by Karen Hamblen in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (1984, 1986) and K. Congden in *Studies in Art Education* (1989), contribute information relative to the modern Western aesthetic theory positions and some applications to multicultural contexts. David Ecker's reflexive multicultural aesthetic theory is also helpful in pinpointing attitudes and meanings as connotated through the linguistic vocabulary used to describe art functions within specific cultures.

As multicultural aesthetics is a very new field in today's scholarly circles, there are really very few works which can be used as background research for this study, especially as relates to sacred multicultural art. There are books and scholars that deal with sacred art in general, and sacred art in symbolic and archetypal applications, but none that relate these issues in a specifically aesthetic judgmental context.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is perhaps the only scholar who has devoted chapters in numerous works to the concept of sacred Islamic art, its meanings and significance.

Primary among these are his *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Ipswich, 1987), *Islamic Spirituality Foundations* (New York, 1991) and *Islamic Education Series: Philosophy, Literature and Fine Arts* (Jeddah, 1982). Two more of his works, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh, 1981) and *Ultimate Reality and Spiritual Discipline* (New York, 1984) concentrate their focus on Islamic spiritual issues which Nasr promotes as the major message found in all Islamic art forms.

While he tends to slant toward the Sufistic mystical attitudes in his definitions of the reality of life, Nasr's concepts relating to sacred art in general and Islamic art specifically, offer an enriching viewpoint to the apparent reticence other authors have in approaching attributed symbolic meanings. Only two other Islamic art scholars vigorously ally themselves with Nasr in these interpretations: Keith Critchlow in his works on sacred geometry, notably, *Islamic Patterns: An Analogical and Cosmological Approach* (London, 1976), and Titus Burckhardt in *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (London, 1976). Nasr has written of Burckhardt,

> Except for the writings of T. Burckhardt, which cast special light upon the intellectual, symbolic, and spiritual dimensions of Islamic Art, there are very few works which look upon Islamic art as the manifestation in the world of forms of the spiritual realities (*al-haqa'iq*) of the Islamic revelation itself as coloured by its earthly embodiments. (Nasr 1991, p.ix)

While Nasr almost always provides a poetic choice of linguistic expression in his works, Burckhardt seems more

realistically focused in scholarship and style of writing. His assertions, along with Nasr's and Critchlow's are the more liberal of the Islamicists who deal with symbolism. For a main-stream attitude, the best resources are in the works of Lois and Ismail Al-Faruqi.

Lois' earlier work, *An Islamic Perspective on Symbolism in the Arts: New Thoughts in Figural Representation* (in *Islam and Contemporary Society*, 1982) is an insightful look at the influences and attitudes which contributed to the development of the Islamic style. The later joint work with Ismail Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York, 1986) is an encyclopedic and definitive reference work which includes in-depth research in the Arts (chapter 8), Calligraphy (chapter 20) and Ornamentation (chapter 21). Not only is this work easily read and understood, but it supplies scholarly new insights into the classifications, meanings, motives and attitudes of the Islamic visual arts and their makers.

Another helpful resource for probing the Muslim mind and understanding the art forms from the inside is found in Oleg Grabar's works, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, 1992) and *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, 1987). Grabar analyses the use of ornament, writing, geometry and nature as intermediaries in carrying the Islamic message. He moves beyond the traditional ideas of literal symbolism and discusses the essence of the works, their roles and contributions in the

viewer context as well as defines the art forms relative to function and motivation.

Grabar's works can be appreciated all the more for his depth of thinking and formulating which takes the next step in the interpretation of the Islamic Arts. His writing is stimulating and the reader is filled with a sense of enlightenment and real understanding rather than the normal detail of descriptive reports or classified accounts.

Richard Ettinghausen also provides well-thought out analyses of the questions and answers Islamic art presents. His *Islamic Art and Archaeology: Collected Papers* (Berlin, 1984) and his collaborative effort with Grabar to produce the Penguin guide, *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 650-1250* (London, 1987) are both adequate resources for the whole Islamic art phenomenon. While the Penguin Guide is written as a general domain complete reference work, and is a little heavy on the classification side, the photos and examples are of excellent quality and many have been reproduced as aides for this study.

Two other specific media works on Islamic art history should be mentioned- that of T.W. Arnold's *Painting in Islam: A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture* (New York, 1965) and Anthony Welch's *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World* (Kent, 1979). When touching on the issue of non-representational figurism in

Islamic Art, texts over the last thirty years have taken their information and references from Arnold's research into the *Hadith* and *Quranic* literature relating to this issue. His handling of the topic is very scholarly and well-documented, and although it does not go heavily into the motivations and other contributing factors which later works allude to, it does provide a good starting point for a discussion of the issue.

Welch's work is in connection with a catalogue description of various examples of Islamic calligraphy over all time periods. Again, Welch seeks to go beyond mere classifying and explains the backgrounds of the items in depth with timely period references, quotes and research into the Muslim mind of those times.

Turning to the literature available and applicable in the area of Islam, there are the early works of the philosophers and poets, Al-Ghazzali and Rumi. Al-Ghazzali's *Alchemy of Happiness* (1106), in a recent translation (London, 1980) includes references to the visual arts through a discussion of the philosophy of Islamic beauty. While a Sufi in thought and concept, Al-Ghazzali has been called the *Hujjat al-Islam,* or the proof of Islam by orthodox Muslims (Al-Ghazzali 1980, preface). The other Sufi advocate of Islamic beauty is the medieval poet, Jalal al Din Rumi. Many of his poems deal with the concepts of truth and beauty as seen from an internal Islamic perspective.

For authoritative definitions and discussions on Tawheed, translations of the generally known works of 'Abd al Wahhab, *Kitab al Tawheed* (Kuwait, N.D.) and *Three Essays on Tawhid* (Riyadh, 1979) were helpful, as was A.B. Philip's book, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed* (Riyadh, 1994). The collected symposium papers and presentations that make up the book, *The Place of Hadith in Islam* (Riyadh, 1979) offered research and classifications relative to Hadith literature, and the modern work by A. Mutahhari, *Fundamentals of Islamic Thought* (Berkeley, 1985), contributed views of Tawheed in present life applications as well as how modern Muslims interpret the *Quranic* teachings today.

For references from the area of injunctions and specific *Hadith* quotes, Al-Bukhari's and Muslim's *Sahih* translated works were used. For a modern jurisprudence and authoritative source, Al-Qaradawi's *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (Indianapolis, N.D.) was very illuminating. The topical organisation of the book and the easy readability make this a helpful resource for all Muslims today who seek specific rulings and clarifications of what is religiously accepted or rejected and the reasoning behind the judgments according to Islam's teachings.

Finally, the first and last reference for any research study that deals with Islam should be and is the Holy Quran. Not less than five translations were used, and

additionally, the original Arabic source was referred to in order to give the closest possible context and meanings of specific words and passages.

While every effort has been made to research the most current sources in print, only those texts, journals and books available within the United States university inter-library system and religious publications of Saudi Arabia were able to be employed as the foundation of this study. There are probably additional articles and works which have been published within the past five years in Britain bearing relevance to this study. Hopefully, they will add further documentation and support for the major premises of this thesis.

1.3. The Scope of the Thesis

In order to define a theory which can be applied to Islamic art forms in the area of aesthetic judgment, the individual areas of aesthetics, Islamic art history, Islam, and Islamic art symbolism must all be explored in depth. Then, by collating the applicable points together to create a working criteria, an aesthetic theory can be synthesized.

Within the philosophical branch of aesthetics as discussed in chapter two, the definitions of beauty and cross-cultural values provide the stepping stones. There are also descriptions and definitions of the modern Western theories already in use that can serve as models for the theory design, but as they are unsuited overall to

multicultural contexts, there is little else from them which can be applied.

One helpful aspect discussed is the discrimination between the two groupings of artist-based and audience-based theories. Within this area are some points which can relate directly to Islamic art in terms of focus and intent. There are also some interesting concepts regarding sacred and traditional art forms in general which can be applied specifically to Islamic art.

The most relevant contribution from chapter two lies in the discussion of ethnographic reference terms for cross-cultural values and their direct application to the arts of the Arab and Islamic cultures. Also, a cross-cultural aesthetic theory is proposed in the conclusion of the chapter which can be used to aesthetically judge these ethnographic values in a multicultural setting as they apply to visual art forms.

In the area of Islamic art history, as set out in chapter three, the most relevant knowledge toward this study is not found in the basic classifications under which the separate parts of Islamic art have been traditionally identified, but rather the intents and motivations behind the forms themselves and the answers to all the "why's". A discussion of the influencing factors surrounding the choice of the non-figural style is especially significant, as is the way in which the art forms were interpreted by the *ummah* and the artisans as

they related to any injunctions given in those times.

A description and discussion of the two unique Islamic innovations of Arabic script and the arabesque offer answers to how the Islamic style evolved and which forms are considered the best carriers of any Islamic symbolism. These forms are critically dissected by structure and element in order to see if there are any specific rules or principles of art which can be identified for the basis of a set standard by which to judge aesthetic proficiency.

A study of the central Islamic doctrine of *Tawheed* as cited in chapter four, provides many of the answers for the above motives and choices and also makes clear the reasons for the longevity of the unchanging art forms. By defining and detailing what constitutes Tawheed and its antithesis, *shirk*, from the religious standpoint, an understanding of significant meanings and symbolism relevant to the art forms also can be gained.

A further search into the *Quranic* and *Hadith* literature for anything regarding the status or injunctions relating to the creation of formal art, defines the foundations for what is appropriate and recommended in Islam and follows up the discussion as started in chapter three, but now from the religious viewpoint. It also defines the reasons why the representational forms could not be used and the overall positions of artist and viewer towards the arts at that

time within the religious sphere.

The significant contributions of the research in this chapter focus on the changes which the ummah underwent in attitude and intent while defining the daily application of their new religion and how those changes impacted upon the evolving art forms. Also, the time period of the eighth century becomes significant to the development not only of the Islamic style in art, but in the formalization of the religion as shown in the Hadith and jurisprudence, both of which came into being during this period.

Chapter five moves into a discussion aimed at disclosing the symbolic messages which can be affixed to Islamic art forms. Several definitions are given relative to types of symbolic language and ornament as related specifically to Islamic art. Interpretations of the motifs, forms and structures used in both architecture and minor art works are evaluated, as well as mystical, archetypal and cosmological meanings from the Sufic and sacred traditional art aspects.

Literal, implied, Quranic and geometric symbolism as documented in calligraphic and arabesque works are analyzed, and conclusions regarding the extent to which the forms should be interpreted along with suggested areas for further research are given. By evaluating the symbolic content of Islamic art, a standard and criteria can be created to match the message, and thereby allow for

a judgment of an individual form.

This criteria is the concluding focus of the study as formulated in chapter six. Through incorporating research from all of the above components, several of which have strongly stated evidence as proof for their positions, an aesthetic theory can be produced which is not subjective nor based on majority opinion. As Grabar, who is cited as an expert in Islamic art theory, has said in relation to a need for this research regarding judgment of beauty in Islamic art forms:

> I shall mention the ...criteria briefly, not because it is unimportant, but because it is an area so totally understudied that there is relatively little that one can actually say, furthermore, this area requires philosophical and philological investigations beyond my competence. The criteria is beauty. (Grabar 1992, p.86)

The goals of this study are to specifically define upon what bases Islamic art forms can and should be judged, postulate a theory complete with set criteria for the assessment, and then, provide examples, both positive and negative, whereby the theory can be applied and tested. The result should be considered a valued and new contribution to the field of Islamic art studies.

1.4. Methodology and Structure

While the field of aesthetics traditionally has been built around the issue of the judgment of beauty, today's applications also focus on the question of, "Is it art?" Both of these philosophical areas rely upon the perceptions of value and worth inside the culture

involved. Aesthetician Marcia Eaton proposes four criteria that must be examined when determining any aesthetic cultural attitude: the artist, the audience, the object itself and the context or culture within which it is experienced (Eaton 1988, p.6)

The methodology for analysis of these areas can be qualitatively gathered through the means of observations, writings, interviews, and ethnographic studies conducted within the target culture. In no case should outside values or meanings be imposed upon the target culture during the collection of data, or in the later formulation of criteria for judgment, although, they can be helpful in comparative studies and interpretation of data for outside readers.

The fourth criteria listed above, that of context, is especially important whenever considering an art form that lies outside of the Western sphere. It is only by looking inside of the specific culture- from the inside- that the form can be given its appropriate meaning and understood. The term *multicultural,* as it relates to aesthetics and art, is formulated around the awareness of the different values that can exist apart from the Western ethics system.

The main problems encountered then, in defining and discussing multicultural aesthetics, is in bringing the target culture's value system into an arena of Western thought and analysis, and yet, still being able to

maintain its individual differences without rendering a biased view in the process. It is natural to want to evaluate all new values against those of the researcher's native culture, but this should only be done as a means of objective comparison and not used as the basis for judgmental conclusions.

Additionally, there exists another related problem on the other end of the spectrum. When the observed aesthetic values are so specific as to only find relevance and value within the target culture itself, the bias of the researcher moves in the other direction and theories become subjective as they try to bend far enough to include the foreign entity in a comparative multicultural context.

As applied directly to this study, Islamic art forms cannot be analyzed or judged in the light of outside accepted art criticism paradigms, except where the observed values can be discussed in a cross-cultural context of similarities, such as those found in sacred or traditional art carriers generally. Even then, not all sacred art shares the same focus or symbolic attitudes.

Care must be taken to insure the wholeness and purity of the Islamic core values in any observations made; and as the author of this study is not a native-born Muslim, additional effort has been administered in finding the best sources available within the main-stream Muslim scholarly community to use as support for any new theories

posited.

Another problem in the past, as specifically observed in Islamic art studies, is that Islamicists have taken an art form and said, "Here is the work of art, how did it happen?", instead of looking at the values present in the Islamic culture first, and then asking, "Here is a value or idea, how shall one go about creating a form to visually represent this adequately?" (Grabar 1987, p.74). In other words, the historians have been looking at the results and asking about the motives rather than studying the culture and determining the motives first, then formulating theories about how these influences determined the art forms.

It is only through a thorough understanding of the early developmental phases of Islam, its historical adaptations and conquests, religious attitudes and applications, that the specific context for Islamic art formation can be determined. Once the influences and factors have been defined, possible theories can be put forward to explain the choices made and meanings implied within the expression of their art forms.

Of course, the work of past researchers and art historians provides the foundation for any future building blocks, or as Grabar calls it, the "collective laboratory effort at scholarship", which "to my mind is the only way for research in the humanities to become true research" (Soucek 1988, p.53). Grabar himself lists three

separate elements needed to be identified and explained in the creation of Islamic art: the mind of the Muslim user and beholder, the meanings given to his artistic creations, and the forms utilized by him (Grabar 1987, p.5).

All of these points will be discussed in this study as they relate to each of the four content areas listed above. Added to this will be the cross-cultural and multicultural aesthetic concepts which pertain specifically to Islamic art works.

Finally, all the relevant data will be compiled together to form a list of proposals which will constitute the specific criteria of an aesthetic theory having been designed for the purposes of judging Islamic art forms, both historic and modern. The theory will then be directly applied to chosen forms to test its viability and workability.

The end of the study will focus on future concerns and the state of Islamic art today. Additionally, points for future research will be identified along the way in order to provide a suggested course for the collective laboratory effort of the future.

Islamic art continues its 1300 year tradition of providing the world with enduring masterpieces that leave the viewer with a memorable aesthetic experience. Many museums house collections and the architectural monuments found all over the Middle East, North African,

Mediterranean and Near Eastern regions are showcases for the traditional forms. Toward an increased understanding of the aesthetic values which produced the works, and the current values of today which can still appreciate them, this study is directed.

Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem

CHAPTER TWO

AESTHETIC THEORIES AND CLASSIFICATIONS RELATING TO ISLAMIC ART

2.1. Sources and Definitions of Aesthetics

The term "aesthetics" was first used by the German philosopher Baumgarten in 1744 to mean "the science of the beautiful". The word itself comes from the Greek root *aesthetikos*, or "pertaining to sense perception". In today's vernacular, it does not just refer to a concept of beauty, but an attempt to understand experiences and the concepts used to talk about objects that are perceptually interesting or valued in and of themselves for their own sake. Its meaning is "having to do with art" rather than just sensory perception (Smith 1991, p.18). Donald Crawford, a noted aesthetician has said:

> Aesthetics is that branch of philisophical activities which involve the critical reflection on our experience and evaluation of art. Critical reflection consists in part of conceptual analysis, formulation of principles of interpretation, critical meanings, and evaluation. (Smith 1991, p.20)

Further definitions include *Webster's Dictionary*, "A branch of philosophy which deals with the nature of the beautiful and with judgments concerning beauty," and a cross-cultural definition by Richard Anderson, "aesthetic values (are those which are) held by a sizable portion of the populace for a significant period of time" (Anderson 1990, p.5).

Because many of the above definitions are based upon human values and judgments that are not fixed universal

standards, the quest for defining aesthetic terms such as beauty and ugliness is on-going and subject to personal interpretations (Eaton 1988, p.2). That aesthetics pertains to art is certain, and that it deals with the question, "what is beauty?" can also be generally accepted. However, the nature of any issue which is founded in philosophy is going to change over time and vary from population to population.

Within the universal theoretical structure of aesthetics, there are many different views or categorizations of types of aesthetics in use both anciently and modern. Many cultures have developed their own bases for theories as their value structures have been formed. Many aestheticians have concluded that though there is not one aesthetic theory or trait that can cover every given culture and time, still there are many traits that are usually present in most cultures and these give rise to a hope of common cross-cultural values that can be understood by all.

2.2. Western Aesthetic Theories

In looking specifically at Western cultural aesthetics, there are four main groupings that can be discerned: mimetic, pragmatic, emotionalist and formalist. Many works exist that deal with each of these theories separately, but for simplification and brevity, they will be defined as follows:

1. *Mimetic* refers to the styles and forms of art that

imitate the real world or the idealized form that can transcend the mundane world.

2. *Pragmatic* can also be described as functional or instrumental. It uses art to explain social, political, or religious views. It contributes to the well-being of an individual or society.

3. *Emotionalist* is concerned with the psychological realms of the inner experience- the feelings of the artist, audience or art itself.

4. *Formalist* states that the stylistic world is manifested in the art work itself. Art media is manipulated to produce a significant form, or unique response to the audience who is likewise attuned. Art is solely for aesthetic satisfaction, or sometimes is looked as "art for art's sake" (Anderson 1990, p.201).

Western aesthetics carry a broad range of interpretations and cover deep philosophical issues. Whereas most other cultures have one main aesthetic system and explore variations on a main theme, Western aesthetics gives many completely different views- a diversity that can perhaps be explained by the historical length and cultural breadth of its human components and values. Of all the Western theories, formalism appears to be the most unique as it divorces itself from any social, cultural or religious influences (Anderson 1990, p.286).

The Western "aesthetic response" theory that came as a result of formalism is a definite stranger to most other

cultural aesthetic value systems. To focus attention only on a work's aesthetic component as opposed to subject matter or skills simply does not make sense to other cultural groups (Anderson 1990, p. 272).

Another way of categorizing aesthetic theories which also encompasses those divisions already listed above is to group them by differentiation of focus between artist-centered and audience-centered theories. The artist-centered states that the views and values of the artist are more important than those of the audience or viewers.

As art works are created, the artist's judgment as to the achievement of the desired effects cause the work to be of worth. What the viewer receives by way of an aesthetic experience or their opinion of the artwork's success is of little consequence.

The Expressivist theory which falls under the umbrella of the Emotionalist aesthetic classification is a good example of this. Art is judged to be of aesthetic value if it expresses the feelings of the artist in the act of creation. It does not need to make sense to the viewer as long as the artist feels that the work has portrayed the true emotion.

Conceptual art is also belonging to this category. The actual finished physical artwork is looked upon as only a by-product of the artist's creative idea. The thought and concept before and during the production of the piece is where the value lies. Again, the audience is

left with only the after-thought and cannot judge the work by the physical remains.

In audience-based theories, the emphasis is on the message or reaction that the viewer receives and not what the artist necessarily considers to be of worth. Theories such as the Instrumentalist and Marxist belong to this class. The artist's only concern is to insure that the message can be understood by anyone who views the work. Propaganda and social movements were spread and published through this medium.

The Hedonistic theory also incorporates an audience-based outlook. Basically, the value of a work depends on its capacity to bring pleasure to the viewer. Any work of any period, culture or style can be included in this classification as it is solely at the discretion of the audience as to its value or worth.

In a hedonistic judgment, the beauty of a piece is indeed in the eye of the beholder, regardless of what the artist, art critic, art institutions or cultural community may have to say about it. Ibn al Haytham called this concept the "art of seeing" and defined it further by stating that the observer makes the object beautiful through his or her own context, not through the intrinsic properties of beauty which the artwork itself might carry (Grabar 1992, p.232).

2.3. Aesthetic Meanings and Truths

All of the foregoing theories seek to explain the

criteria for making aesthetic judgments based on the values assigned by artist, audience or institution. They look at the artwork from the viewpoint of the subject matter, intent behind creation, ability to fit into a recognised style, and message that can be sent or received.

Additionally, aesthetics deals with the meaning of the visual symbols employed and the kinds of truth they convey. There are three groupings of theories which define these premises: Humanistic, Naturalistic and Transcendent (Faruqi 1982, p.165).

Humanistic theories describe art as a statement about humanity or some aspect of human life. They are based on the dichotomist views of Friedrich Schiller which set beauty mid-way between the antagonistic functions of the sensuous and formal/ rational impulses. According to Schiller, artworks should "present an aesthetic statement that reveals the importance of this balance between the two forces of human nature" (Faruqi 1982, p. 166).

The Naturalistic theories describe artistic meaning as an intuition of truth about the natural world. Nature and the natural world are the focus from which any symbolism is drawn. There the artist will find the universal and archetypal forms with which to create art and convey meaning.

Another stance within this theory is that posited by Plato, who regarded art as an imitation of nature. The

natural world contains the ideals of life and are therefore worthy of imitation. Incorporated into this concept is the idea that art can carry the principles of unity and harmony that are found in nature and that exist even beyond perceived reality (Faruqi 1982, p. 167).

The third group of theories are those of Transcendence. They base aesthetic importance on the ability of an artwork to convey the view or intuition of transcendence beyond the corporal world. Reality is not based in human existence or in nature, neither can it be represented or explained through the human intellect or nature (Faruqi 1982, p. 167).

Within these three categories can the meaning of art and its value be found. The extent to which an artwork follows the values described by each category is the extent to which it can be called good art and achieve aesthetic truth.

These classifications provide yet another spoke with which to affix the hub of aesthetic truth. The center of the hub, however, still revolves around the definition and judgment regarding beauty.

2.4. Beauty Defined

Philosophically, beauty carries many meanings across many spheres of understanding. There is the physical concrete substance of beauty which is found in a object and which relies on the visual interpretation to justify its worth. There is the beauty received of the other physical

senses which are tied into emotional responses when input of sound, smell, or taste are present.

Beyond the physical senses are the extra-sensory organs of the inner self which perceive abstract qualities of beauty as found in moral character:

> How is the beauty of things appreciated which can be neither seen nor heard, nor smelt, nor touched? The answer is that beauty does not only belong to things known by sense-experience. There is such a thing as extra-sensory experience, the experience of moral qualities we perceive in others. (Ullah 1984, p.39)

The beauty of character or inner beauty of the self is recognised through human acts and speech. Along with this is often the beauty of the spirit, or the essence of the God-made soul within one. It conveys and perceives the beauty of the inner world of spiritual and religious values.

It is the soul which recognises and interprets beauty as experienced by the other physical senses. This is why the soul is oftimes called the sixth sense. This sense is keener in perception of beauty than the physical senses as it includes the additional faculties of heart, light and reason and belief (Ettinghausen 1984, p.19).

There is also beauty as an abstract term by which countless debates are possible as it is linked into the cognitive processes of the mind. Here, beauty uses logic and reasoning as tools for judgments, devoid of emotional input or influence.

Cultural beauty is another area of differentiation

because of the diversity and ability of man to interpret life in a variety of ways dependent upon his earthly situation and experience. When considering artistic beauty, perhaps this area carries more weight than other factors as art is a cultural entity in itself.

Beauty has also aptly been joined to the ideal expressions of truth, harmony and perfection in this life. These qualities exist in beauty and beauty has a causal effect upon them in return.

> Since beauty is the splendor of truth, the expression of truth is always accompanied by beauty...Dionysius the Aeropagite said, "Beauty absolutely is the cause of all things being in harmony." (Nasr 1981, p.273, 253)

> The philosophy of beauty is deeper than appreciation of the exquisite, ...it is concomitant with perfection. (Ettinghausen 1984, p.16,17)

Within all of these definitions and modes, beauty carries a set criteria. Whether based in culture, senses or philosophical truth, certain traits are observed by which an object is judged. Many times the criteria is set by the traits found within the object itself: "..To be beautiful, an object shows traits in accord with its own nature which are perfect- the more traits, the higher the standard of beauty" (Ettinghausen 1983, p.19).

It is the object's achievement of perfection in those traits which causes it to be considered beautiful. Even people, as imperfect as they are, can be judged by this criteria of perfection of traits:

> What is beauty, then? Beauty is excellence, but excellence proper to the object, the beauty of which is in question, proper to the person whose beauty is being judged. When such excellence is present to a degree of perfection we call the person beautiful. (Ullah 1984, p.36)

Beauty as judged by perfection can even be applied according to scientific laws. When a law is followed, the result is beauty because it achieves perfection in the standard as exactly described by that law. An example is seen in the laws of proportion as it relates to the designing or rendering of an object using geometrical and mathematical means: "The traditional science of proportion affirms in short, that beauty is not a matter of taste; whilst having unlimited possibilities, it has laws; it is objectively true" (El-Said & Parman 1976, p.x).

Beauty as seen through the attainment of perfection has a direct link with the realm of God because it is He who is the Creator of all things perfect. There are many writers, both ancient and modern within the Islamic world who have devoted studies and commentaries on the relationship between God and beauty.

2.5. God and Beauty

There is a traditional saying by the prophet Mohammed as reported by Muslim which says, "God is beautiful and loves beauty". The fact that God possesses each of His attributes to the degree of perfection means that He is the source of all traits, qualities or properties of beauty. He also is the essence of beauty Himself.

> ...Where does the beauty of beautiful things come from? Who has created this beauty? Not self-created, for sure. It is created by God our Creator. And He Who has created all this beauty, how very beautiful must be He Himself. The beauty we find in the world around us is proof of the unique, unequaled beauty of our Creator. It does not make good logic that He should be able to create beauty but Himself remain devoid of it. He, Who gives beauty to others, how can He be without it Himself? (Ullah 1984, p.28)

When God creates anything, it is a thing of beauty by virtue of the fact that it has been part of His act of creation. It does not have to be judged or compared to any standard, nor can it be made less through man's lack of its perception. A traditional Arab poem illuminates this kind of beauty:

> Thy Beauty makes us forget
> all other beauties;
> Thy grace makes us forget
> those nearest and dearest to us.
> But for Thy animating Beauty,
> there would have been
> no beauty-
> Anywhere in the world.
> The enchantment of beautiful faces
> comes all from Thee;
> the colour of flowers in each garden
> also comes from Thee.
> The apple-pink on white chins
> comes
> from the same
> tall trees
>
> And from the same lands
> come these two-
> the tresses of beautiful maidens
> and the musk of Tartar.
> (Ullah 1984, p.29)

The poet Awhad al-Din Kirmani likened the beauties of this earth to a mirror which reflects the face of God, and the Sufi philosopher-poet Rumi wrote of nature and

creation as a reflective stream in which could be seen the Beauty of the Creator:

> Oh Lord thou knowest that even now and again
> We never gazed at Thy beautiful Face.
> The beauties of this world are all mirrors of Thy Beauty.
> In these mirrors we only saw the Face of the King. (Kirmani [ND] cited in Nasr 1981, p.270)
>
> Consider creation as pure and crystalline water
> In which is reflected the Beauty of the Possessor of Majesty
> Although the water of this stream continues to flow
> The image of the moon and the stars remain reflected in it.
> (Rumi [ND] cited in Nasr 1981, p.271)

Since God is beauty and all that He creates is beautiful, this reality in which we live has a direct link with God. "Beauty...is inseparable from reality and is related to the inner dimension of the Real as such" (Nasr 1981, p.268). Through seeking and perceiving beauty, man is brought closer to an understanding of the realm of God and what the true reality of the universe is.

Perfection as an attribute of God is also a conjoined with beauty. The word *ihsan* in Arabic denotes both beauty and perfection simultaneously:

> ...It is understood in this saying of the Prophet: "God has prescribed perfection for all things" (*inna-'Llaha kataba 'l-ihsana 'ala kulli shay'*), in which the term *ihsan*, which we have translated "perfection", includes equally the sense of "beauty" and "virtue". (Burckhardt 1976, p.196)

While this discussion has presently been centered on beauty as defined by God's attributes, and the perfection

existing in God's creations as the primary example, it is necessary to turn once again to the temporal existence where beauty as a human judgment is not a fixed absolute. To say that there is beauty existing in the earthly realm is also to admit the existence of the earthly opposite, that of ugliness.

2.6. Beauty versus Ugliness

Beauty in judgment is a comparative art. To pronounce a thing beautiful necessarily connotates that the opposite judgment of ugliness is available for comparison. If there were no ugliness, there would be only beauty and it would lose its qualitative power.

Ugliness by Webster's definition (1988) is that which is unpleasing to look at; aesthetically offensive or unattractive; disagreeable or objectionable. It can also connotate an altered appearance, misshapen or disfigured. It carries a strong feeling of innate repulsion and negative emotional reaction when encountered.

In each of the types of beauty that have been identified, there exists the possibility of ugliness within the same context. Ugliness can be observed in physical visual form and feature, through senses other than sight; within the inner being and spirit, also the soul and human character; ugliness can be found according to philosophical and cognitive logic, natural laws and even within the context of the spiritual world according to that which Satan can create.

Just as beauty is formed as a natural result of following principles and created order, ugliness is attained through chaos and a conscious disregard for the cosmic laws. God cannot therefore create ugliness, but humans are always capable of such a deed.

This is why there is a need for one to distinguish the difference between beauty and ugliness. There are many gradients between these two poles in the physical world. Through the process of discernment, one can learn to choose the better part and decrease the unnecessary and destructive chaos of this existence.

Differentiating between beauty and ugliness is something one possesses innately. Just as our other sensory organs grant us the difference between hot and cold, light and dark, silence and noise, so beauty is attractive on an instinctive level, just as ugliness is repulsive:

> It is impossible that there should be beauty and it should not move us. It is not different from our other senses, from taste, for instance. We distinguish between things sweet and things bitter. We feel attracted towards the former and turn away from the latter, so we feel attracted to beautiful objects and turn away from objects that are ugly. (Ullah 1984, p.28)

This innate ability to distinguish beauty does not necessarily apply to further discernment of degrees or levels within the realm of beauty itself. In judging human beauty of form and features, for example, there is no set criteria for a totally "perfect" being as all people have

the capacity to display beauty and so many of the values are set within a cultural-specific sphere.

However, there can be very little disagreement about the beauty discerned in the colour of flowers or in the array of foliage in plants and trees, especially if the arrangement of the flowers "harmonizes and asserts the colours in the truest relation, nor is anyone likely to dispute the ugliness present in the clash of ill-ordered and jumbled things" ('Abduh 1980, p.67).

The reaction of one to beauty is one of "delight and wonder", while the feelings of "disgust and dismay" are conversely experienced toward ugliness. As 'Abduh concludes, "...tastes may differ- but things are either beautiful or ugly ('Abduh 1980, p.67).

The level of discernment to which one is capable of attaining is also based upon the actions and moral choices in life. Through a conscious rejection of beauty and seeking after the negative aspects of this existence, one can dull the perceptory organs to the point of being incapable of feeling or reacting to beauty. Such a person cannot experience the high aesthetic feelings and positive forces which lead to delight and joy.

Conversely, a person who seeks after the enriching aesthetic opportunities life offers, and becomes conversant with the vehicles and carriers of beauty, will increase in the ability to enjoy a variety of aesthetic experiences that others would miss. Through this

magnification and growth in innate perception, man is able to appreciate life itself to a fuller degree and gain all the richness this earthly state has to proffer.

Judgment and discernment of beauty, therefore, has parameters that are set according to the traits of the object, the natural and perfect laws that govern it, the innate attraction within man to recognise it, and the increased perception man can gain through continually seeking it. However, all these factors are subjected eventually to the determined values that exist within a certain group of any given culture.

These cultural attitudes become problematic when the values of one group are used as the standard for judging the worth or beauty of objects produced by another group. Such an example is found when applying the Western aesthetic theories and values previously cited to multicultural arts as a whole, and to Islamic art specifically.

2.7. Cross-Cultural Problems in Aesthetic Applications

When looking at the possible problems in applying Western aesthetic theories to multicultural images, it is obvious that to a Westerner, using Western values and cultural bases for judgments are the most natural and comfortable premises to work from. Since all cultures share some common values, surely they can be judged by Western standards in order for us to gain a point of reference for understanding. It was previously thought in

fact that any art that could not be judged by Western standards or did not fit that mode, simply was not art (Hart, 1991).

Obviously, this is not the attitude that should be taken today in our world of ever increasing realisations and appreciations of the diversities of values in different cultures. Some cultures, in fact, resent the intrusion of Western values; however, seeing the need based on commercial interests, they adjust their values to be more universally salable in today's world market.

> The culture of the hegemonic west has been established as the "international" cultural language that all countries should speak in order to develop in the new epoch determined by the imposition of capitalism as a planetary system. That which doesn't speak "Western" will not attain the international category and remain labeled as "local". (Mosquera 1989, p.13)

Because of this pressure to become part of the world community, many countries drop their native culture, language, arts and expressions that are the basis of their individuality and uniqueness, in favor of the generic all-inclusive international personality with the aim of making money. How many art forms and cultural traditions have been forgotten or lost through this homogenization effort?

When applying Western values/ judgments to other cultures, the viewer should not make the culture bend to their preconceived attitudes or rationales, but rather the viewer, as the outsider-observer should be the one to

bend to the values and traditions of the new culture, thus gaining the truly aesthetic experience of added understandings and perceptions outside their own circle.

The enrichment and knowledge that is available through the exploration of other cultures' aesthetic values is one of the great opportunities this life affords. By putting themselves into another culture's aesthetic shoes, the viewer widens the circle of life experience and is able to grow in tolerance and understanding of human differences.

In order to share in the cross-cultural experience, the outsider-observer must be able to determine what the valued components of the new culture are and how they differ from that of their own cultural system. The next step, then, is to identify exactly what is a culture, its values and practices, that define an art aesthetic.

2.8. Cultural Identity and Aesthetics

Human culture has been defined as a logical meaningful system of symbolic relationships (Anderson 1990, p.240). These relationships are built upon values that the cultural entity jointly agrees upon and becomes the basis for aesthetic judgments.

> All cultures make judgments about art, and they come to these conclusions by accepted practices and values within their own groups. (Congdon 1989, p.178)

> Each art form has its own internal aesthetic which must be evaluated from within its own set of standards. (Hart 1991, p.149)

These values that have their own sets of standards are usually determined by what the culture has the most interest in. To be able to state these values, it becomes necessary to work with ethnographic data, or that which gives the basic format of any culture. There are two distinct groups of data. The *etic* is that which a culture performs that can be applied to any other human population, while the *emic* is that which a culture performs that exists only in the minds of members of a specific culture. Many values of cultural aesthetics fall into both categories. As Karen Hamblen, an art education researcher states:

> The crosscultural commonalities of art, have their roots in the basic needs of all humans as biological, sentient beings who inhabit a finite physical environment with certain properties and characteristics. These needs and experiences are the source of universal principles that, in art, are expressed as common themes, qualities, and functions. (Hamblen 1984, p.100)

An example of one of these common etic themes is the need for all peoples "to create something beautiful as well as useful to elaborate objects and actions beyond the requirements of every people's cultural tradition" (Leach 1964). The adorning of the human body, for example, whether it be by jewelry, skin colorings, clothing, or ornamental scaring, is a significant value across all cultures.

Health, strength, sensuality, and cleanliness, are all values for survival that have been defined as basic

human needs (Anderson 1990, p.276). Additionally, each culture builds a value system surrounding economic, sentimental, historical, religious and ethical considerations and needs (Eaton 1988, p.126).

These etic cultural values lead to the development of etic aesthetic values as well. The definition of an aesthetic value is: "the value a thing or event has due to its capacity to evoke pleasure that is recognised as arising from features in the object traditionally considered worthy of attention and reflection" (Eaton 1988, p.143).

Once the aesthetic value has been determined by the culture as a whole and affixed to an object or event, the making, viewing and association with the object leads onward to an aesthetic experience, or an "experience of intrinsic features of things or events traditionally recognised as worthy of attention and reflection" (Eaton 1988, p.143). All cultures experience differing types of these aesthetic experiences, many of which are also etic in nature.

All of this points to a common cross-cultural value of meaning that art fulfills within the culture. That which is meaningful or significant to the culture can be found in all its art forms. Along with the etic values of high significance, Anderson also cites three other cross-cultural commonalities:

1. Art everywhere is executed in a style-medium that is characteristic of its place and time of origin.

2. Art usually makes a notable impact on the feelings of those who experience it.

3. Art is typically executed with exceptional skill. (Anderson 1990, p.261)

Often, in order to understand the cultural significance of a given art form, an analysis of the language of art must be made to show the true meanings and values that the culture bases its aesthetics judgment on. "Words and phrases about art often point out what is important in a culture" (Congdon 1989, p.179). Maquet (1986) suggests that the presence in a language of ordinary words referring to visual qualities, and intellectual reflections on the experiencing of those qualities, indicates that aesthetic principles have been developed in most literate as well as non-literate societies.

One pioneer in this field of linguistic analysis for aesthetics is David Ecker. In a recently unpublished paper given to the National Association of Art Education (NAEA), Ecker promotes the "reflexive multicultural aesthetic theory" which proposes that by exploring words that relate to art in any given language, and then classifying them under similarities, understandings or cross-cultural aesthetics can be gained.

There is interesting data collected by Anderson that

relates to this theory; for example, the lingual roots of the words for beauty and goodness are the same in both the Yoruba and Navajo languages (Anderson 1990, p.224). He states that the English word *art* is derived from Greek meaning "useful skill" and had reference anciently to all skilled works: poetry, sculpture, warfare, medicine and farming. In fact, most languages do not have a word that means the same thing as the modern English word art (Anderson 1990, p.201, 279).

While linguistic roots can provide insights into meanings of a culture's art symbolism and values, perhaps the greatest conveyor of cross-cultural etic information is found in a culture's religious and spiritual art. Anderson concludes that "art reaches its highest purpose when it conveys the meanings of significance for a culture's spiritual, philosophical, or ethical traditions" (Anderson 1990, p.28).

2.9. Sacred Art Values

The common etic theme that carries this high significance and exists in all cultures is that which surrounds sacred symbolism. Also referred to as sacred *art*, this category revolves around a language of symbolic elements that give definition and further meaning to religious belief and values.

Sacred art is concerned with the liturgical, ritual, cultic and esoteric elements of the culture it serves. It has been given the title of "traditional" and sometimes

"tribal" art according to many art historians, but not all traditional or cultural art can be considered to be sacred art. However, the converse is aptly considered:

> All sacred art is traditional art but not all traditional art is sacred art. Sacred art lies at the heart of traditional art and is concerned directly with the revelation and those theophanies which constitute the core of the tradition. Sacred art involves the ritual and cultic practices and practical and operative aspects of the paths of spiritual realization within the bosom of the tradition in question. (Nasr 1981, p.275)

Through sacred art, spiritual knowledge is bestowed upon both the artist and audience, whether inside the culture or as outsider-observers. As a high etic value, sacred art is not cultural specific in that it does not just portray an individual culture's attitude toward the Divine. Within every specific culture's religious beliefs are contained the broader archetypes that reveal the universal truths that apply to all.

Sacred art opens the door to the inner dimension of Reality that every culture can enter. A masterpiece of traditional sacred art carries a vision of "that Reality which constitutes the inner nature of man as a work of the Divine Artisan" (Nasr 1981, p.274).

It is a testament to the beauty of God. In this sense, beauty not only transmits knowledge, but it is inseparable from the sacred knowledge it contains. It also reflects the perfection and Goodness of God, and "the harmony and order which are also reflected in the cosmos" (Nasr 1981, p.268).

Nasr further defines sacred art as the *scientia sacra*, or the science of the Real, which is concerned with the nature of reality and the whole of man's being. He does not consider it to be a philosophy of mental activity only, but an actual knowledge whereby man is able to distinguish between the Real and the illusory, or to know things in their essence as they are, which means to know them *in divinis*. (Nasr 1981, p.133).

Nasr also sees traditional sacred art as carrying the archetypal patterns and hierarchy of the universe because it conforms to cosmic laws, the nature of the materials used to create it and the symbolism inherent in the object itself. The art form once created is not to be viewed as a physical object of this existence. If it is truly symbolic, it will shed this physical mode and reveal the true essence it contains which is a carrier of spiritual truths. Of course, it is up to the viewer to be spiritually in tune in order to comprehend the sacred message conveyed.

> It is through traditional art that a knowledge of a sacred character manifests itself, outwardly cloaked in the dress of beauty which attracts the sensibility of even those who are not able to understand its tenets intellectually, while providing an indispensable spiritual climate and contemplative support for those who do understand its veridical message and whose vocation it is to follow the sapiential path. (Nasr 1981, p.268)

Because of this primary relationship between the object and the sacred message which is carries, all

considerations such as those of form and function come secondary and are concerns only as far as they enhance or detract from the delivery of the message or symbol. In sacred art, therefore, there is no separation between art and technique, use and beauty. All work together toward the expression of the sacred message (Burckhardt 1976, p.141).

Sacred traditional art's most central function is to act as the intermediary between heaven and earth. "To reach the formless, man has need of forms" (Nasr 1981, p. 261). The bridge between this concrete life and the realm of the Unseen can be best traveled by using physical forms that are carriers of the transcendent message through symbolism.

> In order for religion to exist and function in the world, it must remold the world not only mentally, but formally, and since humans are more receptive to material forms than to ideas, and material forms leave the deepest effect upon the human soul, even beyond the mental plane, it is traditional art which is first created by the tradition in question. (Nasr 1981, p.255)

Another way of looking at the role of the physical form is to observe that on the material level of existence, the form *is* the actual reality of the object. However, when it contains a sacred message, it is no longer seen as just a physical presence of form. The reflection of the spiritual presence in the form acts as a gate which:

> opens inwardly and upwardly unto the formless essence... and transforms (it) into a vehicle for the journey across the stream of becoming...Only the sacred forms invested with

> the transforming power of the sacred through revelation can enable man to see God everywhere. (Nasr 1981, p.260)

It is this final theophany that fulfills the etic religious needs of all cultures wherein they strive to represent their deepest religious values and beliefs through traditional sacred art forms. The judgments of worth, therefore, focus on whether and to what extent the object carries the intended message and allows for the spiritual dimension to be revealed. The aesthetic value of sacred art is when the object created gives an aesthetic experience which leads the viewer and artist alike to an understanding of the culture's core religious values and provides the gateway to the universal archetypal truths.

The need for sacred art, along with the other etic values discussed have been talked about generally as they apply to all cultures as part of an overall cross-cultural commonality. Now, the focus will shift to which of these values are important within the Arab and Islamic cultures and what creative and aesthetic means they take in expressing them.

2.10. Etic Arab Cultural Aesthetics

In looking specifically at the Arab culture, there are many aesthetic values and significant cross-cultural similarities that can be mentioned with what has been stated thus far. It should here be differentiated between Arab culture and Islamic culture because although they

relate, they have different aesthetic values as will be shown.

For now, the dicussion will center on Arab culture, or the everyday life aesthetic as it relates to Anderson's cross-cultural commonalities. Under the given ethnographic classifications, this would be considered as the etic value, or that which is common to all populations, and in this case, that which is shared by the majority of the Arab world.

Most Arab cultures stem from a nomadic tradition. The peoples today still have much the same value systems that have existed for thousands of years. Mobility being of prime import, most art forms or aesthetic considerations are therefore linked with portable art. Function is of paramount importance as well, as there is no room for excess baggage, so decorative art forms of everyday items carries a main value. Also, to the bedouin, there is a great sense of using whatever is available to create art.

A good example is the art of bedouin weaving. Taking the hair from goats, sheep and camels, then dying it with natural plant dyes, gives a limited range of colors and contributes to a certain style. The loom is made of rocks and wood tent stakes, and the patterns incorporated into the fabric represent the daily sights of sand dunes, scrub trees and animal life from the desert.

The weavings' chief function is to provide all the

furnishings of the bedouin house-tent: room dividers, floor coverings, utilitarian carrying items and pillows. The tightness of weave, consistency of hand-spun yarn fiber (created on drop-spindles), and complexity of pattern make up the aesthetic values for this form. It is easy to see how it has evolved as a primary art form through the ages for Arab art in general. The need has been the impetus while the beautification and sensual pleasures are relegated to a secondary consideration.

This is not true, however, of how the Arabs view body decoration and pleasures involving the physical senses. A highly developed appreciation of color is predominant here, using henna (red dye) for hair and intricate hand pattern painting, especially considered sensual in a sexual context as seen at weddings, and use of colored stones for making jewelry. As Islam prohibits gold for men, traditionally silver work has been in the fore and used in the production of household wares, such as ewers, basins, tea sets, and serving platters. A technique of inlaying other metals excluding gold is also common.

Houses are traditionally built by hewing rocks by hand from the local village quarries. Great care is taken in selecting the best color available, greens, reds and purples becoming more valuable than brown or gray. Colored glass is important as a local art form. Some houses incorporate stained-glass windows using methods many centuries old. Mosques are decorated with the best

materials available. Lamps, tiles, floor coverings, windows, wooden screens and stairs, and calligraphic Quranic inscriptions are all used for adornment.

In looking at the Arab virtue of hospitality, it is easy to see where many of the decorative arts have emerged. The idea of giving your guest the best you have so that they may truly rest and have pleasure is valued greatly in the culture. The senses are in full play in an aesthetic drama arranged for sheer enjoyment and relaxation.

The best pillows and floor coverings are used for the sense of touch. Perfume and incense are available for smell. Incredible culinary delicacies that include all four sensory taste perceptors (bitter, sweet, sour and salty) are offered. Music or poetry readings are given for the auditory sense, and the best clothing, wall hangings, room decorations, well-crafted tea sets, decorated ewers and basins for washing offer a visual sense of enjoyment for the honored guest.

After spending all day out in the sand and hot wind, it is understandable why these particular aesthetic sensual experiences have developed among these people. Water, of course, is also valued for religious purification. Green trees, flowers, or any type of growth is looked at as a true blessing from God. Many Arab textile rug patterns have floral designs or even full gardens depicted, so that the wandering nomad can have a portable garden to enjoy wherever he or she goes.

Tribal influence and identity play an important part as well in the cultural aesthetic value as exemplified by each tribe having a slightly different ornamental dagger or way of wearing their head-dress. Even the many dialects of the Arabic language show the need for individualism in a daily society as expressed through their art forms.

All these are specific examples of how the Arab culture as a whole relates to the cross-cultural aesthetic value systems thus described. While the general value is said to be etic, the specific cultural standards and expectations are emic from one tribal group to another and from country to country. The one area that stays etic within all Arab cultures is their view toward Islam as the unifying force and focus of their existence. How these values and aesthetics in general relate to Islam will now be discussed.

2.11. Etic Islamic Cultural Aesthetics

To understand Islam at all, there must first be a general knowledge of the concept of *Tawheed*. The religious Arabic word for unity, it encompasses more than our English translation can possibly connotate. It is the main principle, force, doctrine and reference in Islam. Every act and thought of life to a Muslim is centered on this principle.

To perceive the true meanings and values associated with Islam as a religion is to understand Tawheed as expressed through Islamic art, since both are

inextricably linked together. Visual arts are sometimes the only means of conveying spiritual truths, especially if, as in Islam, these truths permeate every aspect of daily life.

> If one were to ask what is Islam, one could in answer point to the mihrab of the Cordova mosque or the cuppola of the Shah mosque in Isfahan. If the questioner were only capable of reading the message which these structures convey. ...one of the most pertinent aspects of the spiritual message of Islamic art today is its ability to present the heart of Islam in a much more direct and intelligible manner than many a purportedly scholarly exposition. (Nasr 1987, p.195)

Islam is Tawheed and Islamic art carries the same message- complete unity of form. Tawheed is the aesthetic realm, the beautiful, that which directs attention to God. It shows one of the divine attributes of God, that of infiniteness. Islamic art has been called the art of the infinite pattern. What better way to show infinity and continuity than by a complex patternal structure, perfect in formation, made of small, simple elements and motifs that repeat into a large unified whole.

Another attribute of God is diversity in unity. So is the *arabesque*, or Islamic ornamental pattern, formed in Islamic art one of diversity in unity. There are no visual focal points just as in the history of Islam, there is no focal point (it is the one true and continuing religion from the beginning); yet, there is a diversity in the successful modular combinations that form the whole.

A simplistic form would not represent God appropriately as it can not be infinite. But as the viewer

concentrates on details and follows the tensions and relaxation of the movement in the pattern, one finally is overcome by the scope of the work and has gained the otherwise incomprehensible understanding of God's character and therefore exclaims, *Allah Akbar*, or God is great (Faruqi 1982, p.176).

This is the truly aesthetic experience that the Islamic art can offer, that of an emotional, intellectual and spiritual perception of the greatness of God: "I created them only that they should adore me" (Quran 51:57).

If the infinite pattern is to remind one of God's attributes, and an understanding of God's attributes are necessary for partaking in the fundamental concept of Tawheed, then all physical forms in this life should be thus adorned. This is why there is no differentiation between fine art and practical arts in level of importance to the Muslim.

To drink from a cup glazed in geometrical designs is just as important as going to the mosque and basking in the beauty of the most prized calligraphic script. All point to Allah, and all focus the mind to Him. In fact, it is thought that by decorating normal, dull household items with such designs, it is a protection to keep the *jinn*, or evil spirits, away because it brings a little of God's realm into the natural world.

The aestheticians who claim that these decorative art forms show that aesthetic considerations are secondary to function do not understand this relationship in Islamic art. The function is not important when compared to the aesthetic/ spiritual response that can be gained by seeing such an item in daily use. Indeed, decorative popular items "partake of the dignity of man as the representatives of God on earth" (Nasr 1982, p.44). As Anderson notes, such forms are always symbolic, even if decorative in nature (Anderson 1990, p.258).

As to Islamic art fulfilling the etic need for sacred art, there is much by way of symbolism and meaning within the patterns and forms found in the Islamic repertoire. The specific symbols and their messages will be fully discussed as they relate to the formation of an Islamic art aesthetic theory in the last chapter of this study.

2.12. Aesthetic Values Summary

To make a final analysis then, as it relates to the classifying of Islamic aesthetic values, it is noted that the modern application of the term aesthetics is used toward defining and judging beauty, addressing perceptions and critical reflections of sensory and expressive art experiences and seeking to identify cultural values which in many cases are cross-cultural commonalities. Within the Western view, there are major groupings as differentiated by the types of message, properties, symbols, meanings and feelings associated

with the art work.

Western theories are also either artist-based or audience-based and are concerned with where the value of a given work lies. Beauty is only one of many considerations that make up an aesthetic judgment. In fact, great worth can be attached to an object devoid of aesthetic physical beauty if other factors such as social, economic or religious meaning are decidedly more significant.

Beauty, when expressed as the main value in intent behind the creation of any work, has a set criteria that can be based upon the object's inherent traits, attainment of perfection both according to law and degree, or possession of transcendent absolute qualities. Human judgment of beauty can be subjective or objective depending on the criteria and the inherent properties in the object assessed.

Beauty as a trait of God which is displayed through His creation is at once perfect and beyond comparison in degree. There is no contrasting ugliness except that which man or Satan is capable of creating. Beauty becomes a definite fixed element in the ethereal context and can never be given over to subjective human judgments.

Ugliness as the archetypal opposite to beauty is innately repulsed by man. The power of discernment between the two poles is present in all humans at birth, but through deliberate means can be dulled as time passes. Seeking and recognising beauty can help to increase the

perceptory organs and allow for much added pleasure and joy in this life.

In looking at the aesthetic expressors which exist among all ethnographic groups, every culture has needs and values that are conveyed through traditional art forms. Many of these values are cross-cultural commonalities and though the specific aesthetic form may vary, the significant message remains constant.

One of the main common values found in traditional art of any group is that which pertains to the sacred and religious concepts. While not all traditional art can be viewed as sacred, all sacred art is a component of traditional art. The highest purpose art possesses in a cultural context is to portray the spiritual traditions and perceptions of its people.

All sacred art relies on symbolism and archetypal structures to convey its message. The physical form is only the container of the message and acts as an intermediary between heaven and earth. Form and function are secondary to the meanings conveyed and aesthetically, there is no separation between beauty and use in a transmitter of the divine.

Through sacred traditional art, one is able, if spiritually perceptive, to find the higher realm of Reality and experience the ultimate aesthetic experience, that of a personal theophany. In this vehicle of religious transcendence, sacred art fulfills the role of a common

cross-cultural need which all men recognise.

Common cross-cultural themes can also be discovered through a linguistic analysis of the terms and phrases dealing with art in each cultural group. Comparisons of word origins and meanings help to define and determine what significance art forms have and what factors are recognised multicultural entities.

Overall then, cultural values may be categorised into two main groups: the cross-cultural etic and culturally specific emic values. The etic conveys the archetypal universal needs of man which include spiritual and social attitudes, while the emic deals with the culturally specific function of physical daily needs and the individual situation or environment of the culture. It is the etic values that can be considered as a group when dealing with multicultural aesthetic content.

In Islamic art versus Arab art, these two categories are distinct; the former dealing with the etic spiritual values and the latter with a more sensual, functional emic approach. The terms etic and emic apply to this rationale in that the etic of Islamic art, the spiritual and symbolic, applies to every culture and country in the Muslim world, while the emic applies specifically to the local cultures in the values each tribe or country will identify from their own cultural settings.

In referring to the premise that any culture's art has significant meaning, is skillfully executed and

expresses an affecting sensual medium, Islamic art fulfills the first two requirements, while Arab art is fundamentally the sensual expressor.

While considering large versus small scale societal formats and the types of arts that represent both, Islamic and Arab art fill both these roles. By definition, the small scale should be the more simplistic, fairly general and dealing only with appearances, which is the primary part Arab art takes, while Islamic art is the large scale, more complex form which shows an intricate cannon of beauty and is more formal in appropriateness.

As to the comparison with Western aesthetic norms, there is a pragmatic parallel with the Islamic/ religious structures, though Islamic art does not seek to explain Islam as such; and to a lesser extent, an emotionalist reference in Arab cultural arts. Mimetic forms are totally forbidden and there is no logical reason to the Muslim mind for the formalist view except as it relates to the pleasure concept in Arab sensual experiences.

Consequently, it is best to leave the Western aesthetic theories and values to the Western arts which inspired them and delve more deeply into the significance of the cross-cultural applications that can be enjoyed by those of a world-view orientation. Where Western aesthetic theories fall short is in their ability to be applied outside of their own value system. What is needed is an aesthetic theory which can encompass the etic values

regardless of the cultural carrier's specific mode. A proposal is therefore in order.

2.13. A Cross-Cultural Aesthetic Theory

All Western aesthetic theories have been created in response to a need to classify art by meanings and similarity of foci. Each shift in emphasis or visual style has caused a theory to be developed whereby the new context could be compared and analysed critically based upon its artistic and aesthetic worth. During the past century alone, five or more theories have been posited in order to handle the changes of intent, style and meaning found in modern art. However, none of these theories is broad enough to be applied to more than one specific aesthetic value at a time.

It is therefore suggested that a new theory capable of handling multicultural views and values be formulated. The theory would be named after the main judgmental component, that of its ability to recognise and judge common etic values found across many cultures. Using the prefix -homo, which denotes sameness, and a root to refer to values, elements or archetypal structures, three possibilities can be formed.

The first, *homovalerist*, would refer to those components which share the same values. Another candidate is *homogenist*, which would be defined as those entities composed of similar or identical elements or parts of the same structure or quality. The third name is *homologist*,

which refers to entities related by archetypal structures or similarities.

Of these three, perhaps homogenist is more readily pronouncable and understood as it already has a connotation in common usage, that of a mixing into a whole, such as in the processing of dairy products. For purposes of easy reference, the term homogenist will be used in this study as the name of this proposed theory.

The homogenist aesthetic theory then, is based on the premise that any art form containing or possessing a designed focus on the basic human etic values which are shared by all the human population regardless of culture-specific identities, can be considered aesthetically of worth to the degree to which it is capable of representing these values to the observer. The etic values would include but not be limited to: religious, sacred beliefs, symbols and rites, beautification of the human body, coverings and shelter, high moral principles such as courage, strength, virtue, integrity, purity, etc. and societal needs such as family bonds both as relating to the living as well as dead, tribal structures, recreation, pleasure and sensuality.

In defining this theory further, it is interesting to note that *Webster's Dictionary* differentiates between the terms value and worth. The two words are seen as interchangable in application to economic issues, but in reference to a power of discrimination, "worth implies an

intrinsic excellence resulting as from superior moral cultural or spiritual qualities. Value suggests the excellence attributed to something with reference to its usability, importance, etc."

Since traditional cultural art does not differentiate between use and beauty or form and function as already stated, within the homogenist theory, value and worth would carry the same cultural connotation. Specifically, they both would refer to that object, action or concept which is significant to a majority of any given population.

Regarding beauty, the homogenist theory would accept all subjective cultural definitions and criteria that carry aesthetic worth within a group. Judgments from outside the target culture would come from applying recognised etic values rather than any other group's specific emic standards. The extent to which an object would be considered aesthetically beautiful is the extent to which the object's etic value could be recognised and understood by outside groups.

The homogenist theory would be an audience-based theory in that the message the viewer receives, that of the etic value, would be more important than any private value the individual artist would have during the process of creation. The object would be considered a container of the message and therefore could fulfill all the necessary requirements previously mentioned in reference to sacred

traditional art.

Finally, the homogenist theory could pick up all of the past heretofore aesthetically neglected art periods of differing countries and cultures such as, pre-historic, neo-lithic, pre-Columbian, Celtic, Asian, Islamic and aboriginal to name a few. Each of these periods could be critically analysed and aesthetically surveyed for common etic themes and then interpreted based upon the specific cultural emphases as related.

As the world continues to expand in the opportunities available for cross-cultural awareness and knowledge, there is a real need for instruments of gathering and interpreting this information in a cross-cultural medium. The more understanding people can gain, the more tolerance can be achieved and the quality of the world life experience can be raised to new heights. To this end, the homogenist theory would serve well.

In regards to a specific Islamic aesthetic theory and the study at hand, the present philosophical issues will now give way to the historical studies that have already been conducted in the past. In order to go forward to the end, it is necessary to have started from the beginning...

CHAPTER THREE

A HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF ISLAMIC ART

3.1. Characteristic Questions

In order to discover the characteristics that would govern an aesthetic theory applying to Islamic art, it is first necessary to define exactly what Islamic art is, both on the cognitive-rational level, as well as the physical structural elements by which it is made. Many historians have sought to record possible origins, influences, styles, time periods, techniques, regional groupings and contrasts of the various surviving monuments and art forms; but, most agree that not any one system covers every kind of classification necessary for an art period lasting 1300 years in an area reaching from Spain to China and Siberia to Sub-Saharan Africa.

The main question, therefore, is what is the common bond that ties together all these times and places to form a continuous thread that can be recognised in almost every architectural building or minor art form; that for over a millennia, there cannot be chosen one period for any single craft to reach a universal zenith across the Islamic world? How could such a factor be so solidified and perfectly transmitted as to unite this vast community over such a long period of time undergoing minor if any stylistic changes?

As Ettinghausen states in referring to the Islamic character and scope:

> There are "dialectical" differences, but all Islamic art speaks the same language, a uniformly inspired artisanry using similar methods of production which can be assumed to have existed in nearly every craft throughout the Muslim world. (Ettinghausen 1984, p. 23)

To find some answers, the common denominators and relationships must be exposed which form this language.

Most Islamic art books completely skirt this issue of commonalities in totale, choosing rather to concentrate on time periods and/or regional groupings to find comparisons or contrasts within the art forms produced. The problem with using this kind of classifying system is that it shortens the scope and ability to see Islamic art as a whole and gain a true perspective as to what it represents overall.

> Archaeology and the history of art are both founded on the historical analysis of works of art. Such analysis may well deliver objective results but it does not necessarily lead to an essential view of things. On the contrary it has a tendency to stop at details at the expense of more comprehensive views, just as if man looking at a wall built with stones tried to understand the very reason for the existence of that wall by tracing back each single stone to its origin. (Burckhardt 1982, p.41)

As these kinds of classifications would not help to define an overall aesthetic theory nor really explain what the underlying ideals and values are that give expression to this art, it is perhaps wise to ask different questions to gain a better focus on the issues. First, as most art styles and periods build on previous values and established forms, what were the visual art models immediately preceding the the formation of Islam?; and,

more significantly, what kinds of changes did Islam make upon these pre-existing archetypes in order to form something entirely its own?

Why did these changes occur and in which medium of Islamic art are they best identified and exemplified? What caused these now uniquely Islamic forms to be spread over so many cultures and centuries and yet remain intact and impervious to local influence or contamination? Only by looking for these answers can there be enough information gained to act as a foundation for putting the title "Islamic" onto any art form and further making an aesthetic judgment regarding it.

3.2. Pre-Islamic Influences

The beginnings of the seventh century found the peoples of Arabia still in a semi-nomadic state. As previously mentioned, most possessions were of a portable type and the tribal structure allowed for little interaction of a permanent nature with other groups of people. Although some tribes and groups chose to set up settlements along the more fixed trade routes, there is very little that remains today as a testament to any kind of truly sedentary life.

As to art forms or classical structures that could be used for launching a new era, the Arabs were content to use what items and forms other industrial cultures had produced. Through trade and travel, they built up a repertoire of such designs and methods as could be

incorporated to match their own needs and mobile lifestyles. They had little use for grand art and architecture as it existed in the political centers of power around them at this time, but they were certainly aware of them and later could draw on them for artistic ideas as their needs changed.

That focal point occurred when the Islamic era was officially ushered in with Mohammed's call in 610 A.D. Over the next 30 years, a following strong enough had arisen to wrest Egypt and Syria from the Byzantine Empire and Iraq and Persia from Sassanian rule. The concept of actually creating a permanent structure for prayer was a foreign idea to the Arab nomads, but readily accepted by their conquered allies in the faith who came from a much more sedentary background where such structures already existed.

Also, as the list of cultures, languages and countries grew among the ranks converted, the artistic heritages from these peoples could be drawn upon to fill the void left-over from the lack of an Arab style already predominant Iran with its Zoroastrian past, Syria and Egypt's Christian-Byzantine monuments, geometric forms left-over from the Greco-Roman era plus Hellenistic vaults and domes all contributed to form the new syntax of the artistic language already in use in the seventh century.

Mosque architecture continued to develop until Al

Aqsa was constructed in 687 in Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock stands as the first permanent edifice to show what direction Islam would be heading artistically. Strong in its use of the foregoing list of influences, the Dome yet introduced some definite Islamic ideals and served as a prototype for what remained constant elements in mosque architecture over the next millennia.

Early Islam, then, took what forms and techniques were already in existence from its surroundings and combined them in a new way to give new meaning. It did not build step by step from a single previous path that had to undergo various stages of development to become whole, nor did it reject all preceding elements and ties as unsuitable for the new faith. Instead, it accepted openly the old traditions that the new converts brought, and just as over time a divergent cultural community was unified, so time helped to channel all the past influences to become a completely new self-sufficient visual art form.

During the first century of the new faith, there were also other factors that contributed to the formation of the Islamic ideal. These further clarify the elemental structural ideas of the origins of Islamic art.

3.3. Other Factors Governing Initial Islamic Art Development

Besides the needs to provide a coalescence of the multicultural groups into one community, construct permanent places to worship and make the shift from a largely nomadic to sedentary lifestyle, Islam also had to

deal with the societal and political demands surrounding its formation. With each new conquest, the centers of political power were affected and consequently, Islamic history is full of shifts of major and minor movement between various ruling houses in different regions (Table 3.1).

As the powers shifted, so did the artistic centers and places noted for princely patronage. Trained craftsman under one sovereign could be sent to another country to share their knowledge. Additionally, the trade for well-known goods allowed great exposure over the many regions; "The various regional traditions developed roughly along parallel lines and so were able to influence each other by exchanging of craftsman and goods among informed audiences" (Allen 1988, p. 109).

Assimilating these imported styles produced hybrids among the luxury items in all media and inspired the artist to adapt. This kept Islamic art for 500 years in a rough linkage without having to fall into a central traditional core art form. The unity that was there was not consciously maintained, but came about through the natural influences of the regional craftsman upon each other.

Peaceful conditions and economic security in-between conquests also helped give the breathing space necessary for the forms to solidify. Islam did not conquer in such a way as to wipe clean all pre-existing traditions or

resources; rather, the assets, functions, purposes and associations of the conquered region or country remained intact so that new incoming cultures had a chance to transfer over what memories and values would apply to the new faith.

> The point of departure of Islamic art does not lie in merely physical of aesthetic reactions to another art, but in actual utilization by the Muslim world of the material, aesthetic and emotional order of the conquered territories." (Grabar 1987, p. 41)

Perhaps the biggest single factor influencing the early stages of development was the response of the people to the new tenets of their faith. The changes it required affected daily living habits, especially the identifying of a single focus in life, that of remembering God and worshipping Him only.

> It is because of these basic tenets and this constant appeal to the aesthetic sense in man that Muslims displayed from the start a remarkable ability to integrate various artistic techniques and forms already used in the different regions opened to Islam. And it was the originality and vigor of these tenets that, together with the specific prescriptions of the *Shari'ah* including ritual practice (*'ibadat*) and social behaviour (*mu'amalat*) gave rise to a new style of art, recognizable only as 'Islamic', an art which has been part and parcel of the Islamic way of life throughout time and space. (Michon 1982, p.50)

Lastly, along with the new lifestyle came the adopting of a new language for many of the converts. Arabic, as the language of the revelation to the prophet, took on a life of its own as soon as the recitations of the Quran were put down in physical form. The written Quran

became as one with the spoken Word of God, and respected as such, took a permanent place in the emerging arts.

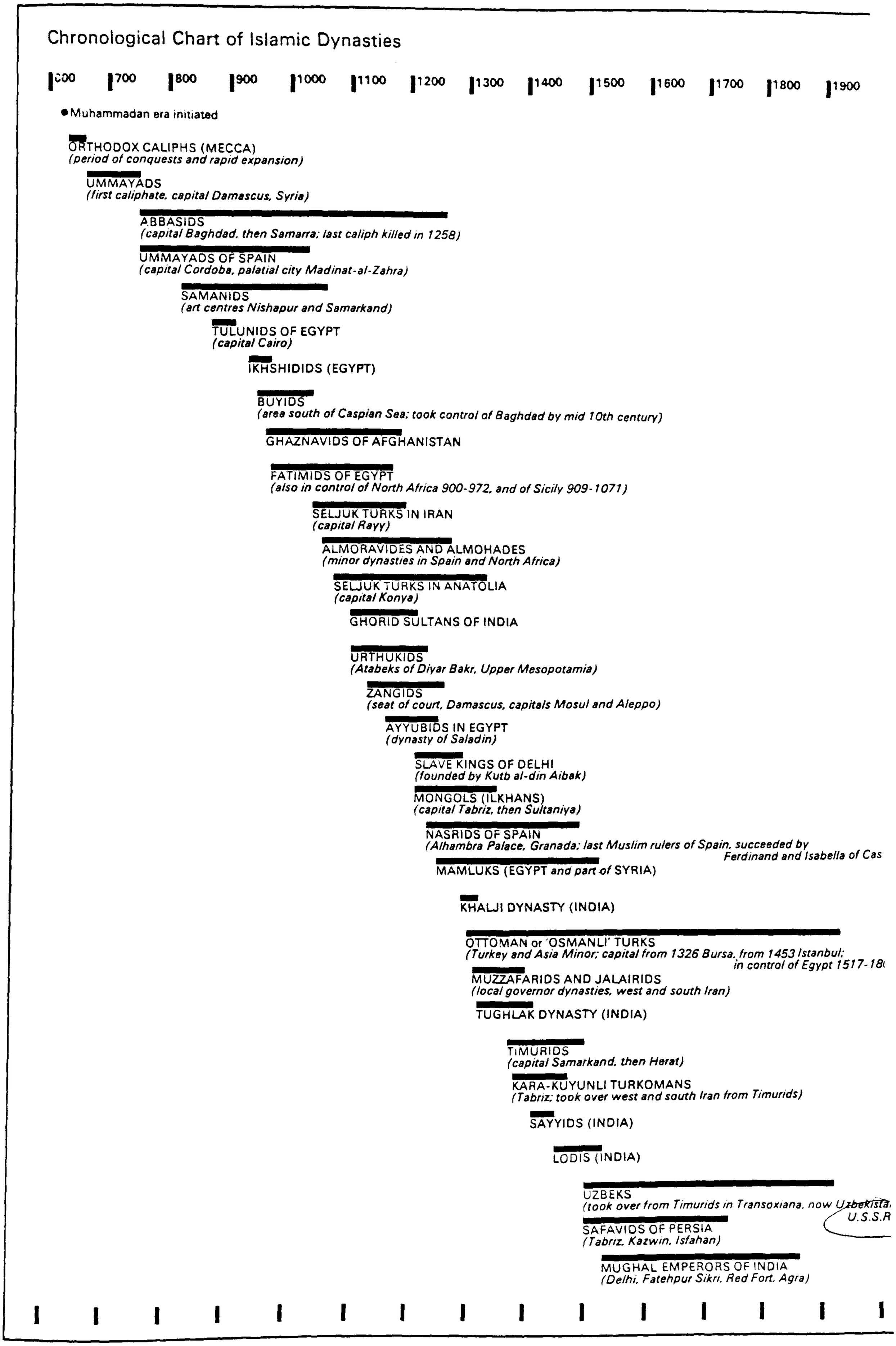
What better way to remember God and worship Him than by inscribing His word in all phases and places of daily life? As a symbol of unity of the faith, Arabic calligraphy soon became a symbol of visual unity as well.

3.4. Survey of Historical and Political Shifts

After mentioning all these factors which contributed to the beginnings of a new artistic era, it is next worthwhile to consider the overall political shifts of the Islamic millennia in a historical artistic context (Table 3.1), since Islamic art has been classified according to the times and rulers as such. While doing so, however, it is wise to note that although a date of conquest can be set at the beginning of a particular Islamic art era, there really is no date that can be set for an end in certain countries and regions as the cultural art time and the historical event time do not always coincide. All times quoted will be according to the Gregorian calendar rather than the Islamic reckoning of the *hejira* calendar.

The measure to use instead can be based on the attainment of "classical" art forms, that is, when the classic example of that time or form in that period had been produced and could be recognised. According to Grabar, this time could be identified when the following four criteria had been met: a wide cultural acceptance of

Table 3.1


Chronological Chart of Islamic Dynasties
600
700
800
900
1000
1100
1200
1300
1400
1500
1600
1700
1800
1900
Muhammadan era initiated
ORTHODOX CALIPHS (MECCA)
(period of conquests and rapid expansion)
UMMAYADS
(first caliphate, capital Damascus, Syria)
ABBASIDS
(capital Baghdad, then Samarra; last caliph killed in 1258)
UMMAYADS OF SPAIN
(capital Cordoba, palatial city Madinat-al-Zahra)
SAMANIDS
(art centres Nishapur and Samarkand)
TULUNIDS OF EGYPT
(capital Cairo)
IKHSHIDIDS (EGYPT)
BUYIDS
(area south of Caspian Sea; took control of Baghdad by mid 10th century)
GHAZNAVIDS OF AFGHANISTAN
FATIMIDS OF EGYPT
(also in control of North Africa 900-972, and of Sicily 909-1071)
SELJUK TURKS IN IRAN
(capital Rayy)
ALMORAVIDES AND ALMOHADES
(minor dynasties in Spain and North Africa)
SELJUK TURKS IN ANATOLIA
(capital Konya)
GHORID SULTANS OF INDIA
URTHUKIDS
(Atabeks of Diyar Bakr, Upper Mesopotamia)
ZANGIDS
(seat of court, Damascus, capitals Mosul and Aleppo)
AYYUBIDS IN EGYPT
(dynasty of Saladin)
SLAVE KINGS OF DELHI
(founded by Kutb al-din Aibak)
MONGOLS (ILKHANS)
(capital Tabriz, then Sultaniya)
NASRIDS OF SPAIN
(Alhambra Palace, Granada; last Muslim rulers of Spain, succeeded by Ferdinand and Isabella of Cas
MAMLUKS (EGYPT and part of SYRIA)
KHALJI DYNASTY (INDIA)
OTTOMAN or 'OSMANLI' TURKS
(Turkey and Asia Minor; capital from 1326 Bursa, from 1453 Istanbul; in control of Egypt 1517-18
MUZZAFARIDS AND JALAIRIDS
(local governor dynasties, west and south Iran)
TUGHLAK DYNASTY (INDIA)
TIMURIDS
(capital Samarkand, then Herat)
KARA-KUYUNLI TURKOMANS
(Tabriz; took over west and south Iran from Timurids)
SAYYIDS (INDIA)
LODIS (INDIA)
UZBEKS
(took over from Timurids in Transoxiana, now Uzbekista, U.S.S.R
SAFAVIDS OF PERSIA
(Tabriz, Kazwin, Isfahan)
MUGHAL EMPERORS OF INDIA
(Delhi, Fatehpur Sikri, Red Fort, Agra)

certain forms as identifying the culture's functional and aesthetic needs, repetition of standard forms and designs, quality of execution at various levels of artistic production, and clarity in the definition of visible forms (Grabar 1987, p.11). Usually, once the classical form had been set as a standard, any move beyond it would be considered as a decline or a shift to the next progressive step.

In this narrative there will be only a brief attempt made at discussion of what art styles, techniques, trends or media are noted in these periods because, as mentioned previously, they have little to do with finding an overall aesthetic theory. They also tend to be so detailed in analysis as to distract the reader from the more important considerations of the meanings and attributes of Islamic art as a whole.

The issue of which crafts, if any, carry the best examples of the Islamic spirit and innovations in their development as it will relate to later aesthetic issues will be covered toward the end of this chapter. Also, in discussing each particular period or seat of power, a listing of predominant monuments will be given, as they prove the best showcase for what was happening artistically at that time and provide points of reference for later comparisons.

While the minor arts and household items were traded and circulated through the Islamic world, the monuments

built by the ruling powers were permanent immovable timepieces. They can be looked at as definitive in what was or was not accomplished in that era.

3.5. Umayyads (650-750)

In terms of the first Islamic era then, upon the Prophet's death in 632, Abu-Bakr, his deputy was appointed as the first *Caliph,* or successor. He held the office only two years, when after his martyrdom it was then passed to Umar I. During this second Caliph's ten year reign, the Arab expansion began outward to the Sassanid and Byzantine empire holds of Persia and Iraq, Egypt and Syria respectively.

By 644, these lands had all been conquered, so that Umar's successor, Uthmann, a member of the Umayya tribe of Mecca, became the ruler of the newly formed Umayyad dynasty. For the next 100 years, the power remained with this ruling family as expansion continued northward into Armenia, west towards Cyprus and the north African coast and east into Afghanistan. The Umayyads moved their principle seat of power from Medina to Damascus in 661.

The greatest monument of note in this period as stated, was the Dome of the Rock because of its role in fusing the pre-existing Hellenistic, Asian and Roman elements together to create new art forms while fulfilling the new community's immediate needs for a place of worship. The re-formulated motifs (fig.1) ranged from pure realistic late classical to the modern abstract

Islamic and became the patterns for craftsmen to emulate in Syria and Transjordan over the next 50 years.

The most significant feature of the Dome was the establishment of a relationship between decoration and architecture. Previously, decoration had been used to solely accent architecture and never overcame it to become the predominant visual force. The Dome reversed the roles and the decorations almost hid the architectural structure of the building entirely.

The Great Mosque in Damascus (705-715) is noted for its pictorial mosaics (fig.4). The scenes of rivers, trees, and paradisiacal landscape follow a similar design as seen in the Justinian Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna, and have been interpreted to represent the new peace of Islamic rule in a golden age.

The desert castles of Khirbat al Mufjar (743) and Mshatta in Jordan, and Kasr al Hayr (728) and Kasr al Amra (724-43) in Syria though secular in purpose, show the rich figural pictorial heritage that Islam had accepted. The later aniconism that Islam adopted in its sacred art was not a concern for these secular works. Their display of wonderful human heads (figs.2,3) and animals which survive today are proof of a tolerant view toward sculpture in the first era.

The pictorial floor mosaics of Khirbat al Mufjar are naturalistic with depth of shaded colors showing a late Hellenistic influence. The particular floor mosaic scene

with a lion killing a grazing stag under a fruit tree (fig.5) has been interpreted as a symbol of royal peace and royal power under Islam's new age.

Kasr al Hayr and Kasr al Amra have wall and floor paintings that show the surviving figural representations in the Roman traditional style. The earth Goddess and Sassanid hunting scenes show a contemporary awareness for what other forms and styles were around the vicinity at that time.

Also striking are the geometric floor mosaics at Khibat al-Mufjar (fig.6) and the vegetal ornament scrollwork at Mshatta (fig.7). These were the prototypes for the later inventions of the arabesque and geometric interlace.

3.6. Abbasids (750-950)

In 746, an alliance of dissenters from the Empire led a major revolt in eastern Iran. By 750, all the Umayyad princes had been killed except Abd al Rahman I who escaped into Spain. Abul Abbas as-Saffah established the Abbasid caliphate at Baghdad, the first city built entirely by Muslims, in 762. Persia had a great influence at this time, and after the death of Haroon ar-Rashid, the Iranian factor defeated the Arabs and brought temporary stability to the ruling seat.

The Abbasids reached their zenith in the ninth to tenth century and by the time the Buyid Shi'ite princes took over in Baghdad in 945, north Africa, Egypt, parts of

Syria, eastern Iran and Transoxiana became more independent and started to develop their own cultural and economic centers. The early part of the reign of the Abbasids mark the last period where the Islamic community could be said to be unified geographically.

In terms of Islamic art development during the ninth and tenth centuries, centers in Samarra under the central Asian-Turkish migration, Cairo with the Tulunids and Nishapur and Samarkand under the Samanids are all included under the umbrella of the classification of the Abbasid time period. Of Baghdad Abbasid, no monuments remain, but of Samarra, there are the Mosque of Mutawakkil (847), the largest ever built by Muslims (376 x 444 meters), and the Mosque of Abu Dulaf (861).

The decorative arts and paintings used floral patterns that were becoming semi-abstract and all naturalistic forms were being eliminated and substituted with linear abstract ornamentation. Samarra was also known for its lustreware tiles and ceramics that were not found elsewhere in the Islamic world at this time.

Other monuments worth noting are the Mosque of Ibn Tulun at Fustat, Egypt (876-879) and the Great Mosque of Kairouan in Tunisia (rebuilt 875-902). Kairouan was the first major monument in North Africa and the first to make a conscious effort to embellish the *mihrab*, or prayer niche, by way of becoming the visual emphasis of the interior.

Abbasid characteristics in mosque decoration were intensified in some parts of the buildings, but generally subordinate to the structural forms and serving mainly to emphasize the architectural lines. The ornament itself was varied, classical in spirit, even though many of the themes were changed. Stucco friezes were used, i.e. moulded plaster techniques like Umayyad and Iranian traditions used previously.

The most famous examples of these techniques came out of Samarra and used the three basic styles: set inside rectangular frames with incised vine and leaf scroll (fig.8), carved free-hand in diversely-shaped frames with less deeply contrasting surfaces (fig.9), and the newer endless moulded abstract designs of rhythmic repetition of curved lines and spiral endings that gave total coverage and symmetry (fig.10).

This third style was the true beginning of the arabesque, one of the great Islamic innovations given to the world of art:

> Its significance goes beyond Abbasid architectural decoration, for it is the first- and in certain ways the purest and most severe- examples of the "delight in ornamental meditation and aesthetic exercise" which had been called the arabesque. (Ettinghausen & Grabar 1987, p.104)

The plaster panels at Nishapur in Khurassan, Iran (fig.11) also show the complexity of floral and abstract cut patterns. They reflect the close ties that had developed with Samarra, since this type of plaster work

was unknown in Iran prior to the tenth century.

The *minbar*, or pulpit, at Kairouan (fig.12) is the oldest surviving pulpit in wood (862). Its geometric and vegetal carvings in rectangular panels are somewhat like the floral Mshatta compositions mixed with the geometric patterns from the Great Mosque at Damascus, basically a search for non-naturalistic abstract motifs.

The artisans of this time were still uncertain about the vocabulary of the new decorative language. Their struggles are witnessed by the ever-changing juxtapositions, piling up of forms and lack of relationships between floral and geometric panels to each other, although, the spacing and unity in each group art well-formed (Ettinghausen & Grabar 1987, p.108).

Two other important points to mention in the later Abbasid period are the formation of the Kufic script, named after the Iraqi town of Kufa, and the lustre tiles at Kairouan, which have been linked to possibilities for transcendental associations, the design of which falling secondary to the ever-changing optical effects of light reflection. Both of these will be examined elsewhere in this thesis.

3.7. Umayyads of Spain (756-1031) & Fatamids of Egypt (969-1170)

With the breakdown of the unified caliphate came different economic and cultural centers springing up left and right in the Muslim world. Only those with the greatest artistic contributions will be mentioned from

this point onward.

Abd al Rahman bin Mu'awiya (756-788), the only Umayyad prince left unslain by the Abbasids, escaped to Spain and there set up Cordoba and the second most important cultural center next to Baghdad at that time. His descendants continued to rule Spain until after the first millennia mark. Shielded from outside influences or other conquering races, Muslim Spain was left to develop its own arts freely in a peaceful expanse of more than 200 years.

Abd al Rahman and his successors were patrons of the arts and the Great Mosque of Cordoba originally built in 785 was continually added onto over the period of the next two centuries as artisans continued to try out their innovations. The carved marble around the mihrab (fig.13), decorative panels, mosaic work (fig.14) and painted wood heighten the dramatic effect of the innovative inter-crossing raised arches (fig.15).

Ornamentation from the local Roman/ Byzantine traditions was used in the form of vegetal vine and acanthus scrolls, but were given over to inventive modulations in the interlace patterns. Ivories were cut in the same floral abstract patterns known in Umayyad art, but with a greater interplay of light and shade coming through the carvings.

Especially by the eleventh century, Spain's decorative ornament became more complex than that of North

Africa. Designs full of inner movement reflected a refined sculptural sense and both the vegetal and geometric were well integrated.

Turning to Egypt, after the Tulunids fell into chaos around 905, the Ikhshidids (935-969) established order so that the arts could develop once more. The movement of the Shi'ite Berbers in 969 across North Africa to Egypt marked the beginning of the Fatamid reign and they set their capital up in Cairo until it was overthrown by Saladin in 1176.

The Mosque of Al Azhar (970-972) and the Great Mosque of Al Hakim (996-1020) are the noteworthy monuments of this period. During this time, Kufic was predominant with abstract interlace patterns for accompaniment. Tulunid motifs were still in use and wood decoration showed a deeply cut bevel vine scroll.

The decorative arts of this period flourished with figural representations designed in wood, glass, painting, textiles and ivory carving. Everything from formal heraldic patterns to dancing girls were seen in the different media. Great realism was focused on everyday subject matter with little background decoration.

Larger surfaces of wood or ivory were carved with abstract ornamentation in linear patterns that showed a first time development of the idea of the infinite pattern. This was not created accidentally out of a lack of figural representational images available, but rather

it was reserved particularly for architectural decoration in mosques, most notably mihrabs, minbars and doorways. The Fatamids also excelled in jewelry, crystal and bronze casting in the minor arts.

3.8. Seljuk Turks of Iran (1037-1157) & Anatolia (1077-1300)

In the eleventh century, a Turkish tribe from central Asia, the Seljuks, conquered the whole Islamic world from Syria to Asia Minor. They took over Baghdad in 1055 from the Buyids, placing the Abbasid Caliph under their "protection". In Anatolia, they gained power in 1077 and held it until the Ottoman Turks came in 1299.

The most innovative addition by the Seljuks to the development of Islamic art came by way of the *madrassahs*, or the religious school architecture. Many of these buildings were rich in decorative brick work and cut or moulded plaster. Calligraphic inscriptions banded the portals and gates with floral and geometric filler ornament of knots, ribbons and palmettes.

Although figural motifs were used in secular buildings, art decoration was confined to ornamentation devoid of human and animal forms. Mosque furnishings contained the basic geometric and vegetal ornaments in polygonal panel patterns while smaller objects used freer arabesque and inscriptions. The Masjid-i-Jami of Isfahan (1072-92) was the most important monument built at this time by order of Malik Shah.

Naskhi calligraphic style was an invention of the

times though Kufic was still used for monuments or ceremonial objects. Naskhi became sanctioned as a Quranic script through the masters of the Baghdad school and the replacement of paper over parchment in Samarkand brought the Quran arts to a high level. Beautiful texts that were written vertically, embedded in a ground of arabesque and very decorative title pages were in vogue.

In ceramics, lustreware again became used in architectural decor. Many of the techniques were imported via Cairo from artisans who were searching for new work after the fall of the Fatamids.

The quality of the lustreware tiles added much to enhance the Seljuk mosque designs as they outstripped other decorative media "in (their) ability to dissolve solid masses of architectural structures and create complete optical illusions of insubstantiality" (Grube, p. 71). Lustre glazes were used further on household ceramic items and Kashan became a famous pottery center for lustre painting (fig.16) until well into the fourteenth century.

The Seljuks in Anatolia, Konya being the main seat from 1116-1156, reached their peak as a major cultural center in the middle of the thirteenth century. They were the first to introduce blue faiance to be used on a monumental scale. This quickly spread to Iran from Anatolia and many striking monuments were constructed using this technique. The Mosques of Alaeddin Cami in

Nigde (1223), Ulu Cami in Divrigi (1228-29), Alaeddin Cami in Konya (1116-56), Karatan Madrassah (1251) and Ince Minare (1258) are all notable examples.

The Seljuks were also famous for their rug and textile work. Simple repeated patterns were based on abstract floral forms with borders using Kufic script. Many of the decorative patterns are still in use today and sought all over the world for their simplicity and beauty.

3.9. Ilkhanids of Persia (1220-1349)

Ghengis Khan conquered the Muslim east in the early thirteenth century and took Rayy from the Seljuks. He destroyed Baghdad in 1258 and slaughtered the last of the Caliphs. He then settled Tabriz as the principle ruling seat in 1295.

The Mongols were responsible for introducing far-eastern motifs and patterns into Persia that soon became stylized in an Islamic manner. Lotus flowers were used in arabesques and the far-eastern fabulous beasts were adopted by the Islamic craftsman. Because of their unreal quality, there was no need to denaturalize them, but their eastern symbolic meanings were not carried over onto the Islamic expression. Instead, they were seen as a fresh breath on the decorative arts for non-symbolic representational use.

The eastern element was also seen in the paintings of this time. The three specific styles: Seljuk, Ilkhanid

and Baghdad, all showed the influences of Chinese landscape and realism painting.

Among the most famous fourteenth century illustrated books are Rashid-al-Din's *History of the World* and the Demotte *Shah-nameh* which carry strong oriental pictorial qualities. Also, in the *World Chronicles* of Vizier Rashid-al-Din (1307-13), the life and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad were depicted for the first time without religious restriction. Additionally, the calligraphic script of nast'aliq was introduced at this time by Mir'Ali as the new Persian cursive script.

The Mosque of Ali Shah is the only monument of the Mongol period to survive, the architectural style continuing on from the previous Seljuk rather than inventing something new. The plaster decoration, however, was the highest accomplishment of this period. Simple incised lines to deep undercut relief using forms from abstract linear to large floral and semi-floral abstract patterns were seen.

Kashan was still producing ceramic ware undisturbed by the change of power, and faiance was still the color of the time used in architectural adornment. This period also gave a large repertoire of decorative forms and ideas to the future artists of the Timurids and Safavids in Iran, Ayyubids and Mamluks in Egypt and Syria.

3.10. Ayyubids (1176-1250) & Mamluks (1252-1517) of Egypt & Syria

The Fatamid Shi'ite Caliphate ended in Egypt in 1176

when Salah al-Din-Ayyub took power. From then onwards, the destinies of Egypt and Syria were closely bound together and their arts developed hand in hand through the political connection of Cairo and Aleppo, as well as the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

Many famous monuments of this period were built in Cairo, but it was Syria that took the lead in the minor arts of pottery, glass, metal-working, woodcarving, textiles and paintings. Of the architectural monuments from this time, the Great Mosque of Aleppo (1190) and Great Madrassahs of Baghdad, Aleppo and Damascus bear mentioning. Also, the citadel of Saladin in Cairo and the Iman al Shafi mausoleum (1211) of the secular buildings should be noted.

Book illustration was prominent both in Mosul (*Kitab al Diryak*, 1199) and Syria (Hariri's *Makamat*, 1222). The pottery center of Rakka, Syria, produced fine lustre and polychrome ware, while the inlaid brass ewers of Mosul were samples of the beautiful metalwork of the period (fig.20). Abstract and floral designs and figural decoration were once more the choice of secular designs. Polychrome stone inlay work on building decoration was taken from the Anatolian Seljuks, passed through the Ayyubids, then kept by the Mamluks as well.

The Mamluks were white slaves of Turkish descent who served the Ayyubids and were in the right place at the right time to jump into power shortly after Saladin's

death. They brought the region into a more decidedly Turkish stylistic sphere.

In ornamental decoration, they used court scenes and heraldic motifs set in medallions among friezes of round naskhi Ayyubid calligraphic script. They had new types of geometric and plant motifs, naturalistic flowers and palmettes used in their arabesque patterns. These were set in rosettes, cartouches or continuous bands. Animal figures were not used so much at this time.

In architecture, fine examples of the stalactite vaulting method of *muqarnas* (figs.17,18) was seen in both Syria and Egypt in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although the first documented occurrence of muqarnas was in Raqqa, Syria at the end of the eighth century, it was not until the twelfth century that it took hold as a common technique for articulating three-dimensional space in a synthesis of geometry and rhythm.

Polychrome stonework was still in fashion during this time as well. The Great Mosque of Sultan Baybars al-Bundugtani (1266-69), Sultan Kalaun Madrassah (1284) and Sultan Hasan Madrassah (1354-62) are notable Egyptian monuments.

Mamluk painting was still in the Baghdad style with its far-eastern influence, but was becoming more abstract. Inlaid brasses which were rich in non-figural decoration of floral designs and calligraphy (fig.19,21) were said to have reached their peak in this period. Many

fine examples remain of ewers, basins, candlesticks (pl.1), trays and incense burners, in brass or mixed metal in-lays.

3.11. Nasrids of Spain (1232-1492)

After the fall of the Umayyads in the middle of the eleventh century, many minor dynasties took their turn until the Nasrids were able to give some long-lasting stability to the region in 1232. They set up court at Granada and stayed until Ferdinand and Isabella ousted them in 1492.

The Alhambra palace, built during the reigns of Yusuf I (1333-35) and Mohammad V (1353-91) is an incredible structure of artistic significance. It has been called the most perfect piece of Islamic architecture in existence (Grube, p.112).

The Alhambra was covered with continuous ornamental patterns in frames, borders and friezes (fig.22). Round naskhi script was combined with vertical kufic and arabesque plant motifs in floral and semi-abstract floral designs were set in trefoils, rosettes and palmettes. Muqarnas vaulting was used freely to enhance the three-dimensional aspects in court arcades and the concept of light as an architectural element was exemplified in the interplay of carved surfaces in screens and lattices set in the Court of Lions (fig 23).

Lustre tiles were also used to dissolve substance visually. Textiles in the arts of tapestry and embroidery

reached a high point in this period as seen in the court gold brocades.

3.12. Timurids (1369-1502) & Safavids (1502-1736) of Iran

The descendants of the Chagatay Turks in central Asia raided Iraq and Iran in the mid-fourteenth century. They took Shiraz, Tabriz and Baghdad and defeated the Ottoman Turks who had just established an empire in Anatolia. This conquest under Tamerlane established Samarkand as the architectural Mecca in Persian art.

The Mausoleum of Tamerlane (1434) is considered one of the world's most perfect buildings with its beautiful faiance fluted dome (pl.2) and intricate geometric tile work (Rice 1975, p.211). The mosques at Kerman (1349) (pl.3), Yezd (1375) (figs.24,25) and the Great Mosque at Samarkand (1399) are also notable examples as are the gate structures at Shahr-i-Sabz in Kesh (1390-1405) and the Blue Mosque in Tabriz (1465) with its startling floral and calligraphic designs (fig.26).

Painting was still a flourishing art with progress being toward space that showed distinct back, middle and foreground. The School of Herat's master illustrator, Bihzad, is attributed many fine works including Sadi's *Bustan* (1489) (fig.27). The Shiraz School went forward into the Turkoman style in the mid-fifteenth century. Its greatest work was noted as *Kharavan-Nameh* (1480).

Book binding using leather filagree work was developed at this time. Pressed or stamped designs in gold

with abstract or semi-floral patterns made books considered precious possessions and high art.

The Safavids were a Shi'ite dynasty that took control from the Ottomans in 1502 under the Shah Ismail. They moved the capitol from Tabriz to Kasuin and again to Isfahan where they reached their peak from 1587 to 1629. They became the center of the eastern Muslim world for the next 200 years.

Again, the faiance tile as architectural decor of this period is a showcase for the beautiful fully developed floral and geometric arabesque styles. The Maidan-i-Shah complex made up of Ala Kapi, the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfullah (pls.4,5) and the Masjid-i-Shah (1600-1620) are the hallmark examples.

The Bukhara School followed the Herat School's style of painting on into the sixteenth century. Later, they tried variations of highly decorative bright colors, unnaturalistic and elaborate compositions and stylized landscapes and architectural settings. The later seventeenth century School of Kasvin in Isfahan became famous for portrait drawing.

Tabriz became the center for Quran illumination with masters using naskhi and thuluth scripts. These calligraphers were later summoned to India and Turkey during the sixteenth century because of the high quality of their work. Generally, all the book arts of papermaking, gilding, illumination, calligraphy and

binding excelled during the Safavid time.

Also, patterned silk or brocades were well-known. Rug patterns changed from the Turkish tradition of abstract designs to more floral and figural designs. The great abstract rugs of the early Tabriz School were still fairly abstract, but incorporated figural motifs of birds and animals. The Rug of Ardabil (1539) is considered a major work (fig.28).

The sixteenth century Safavids developed the classical example of the Persian rug industry with centralised patterns using floral motifs connected by thin leaf scrolls (pl.6). There were also "garden" rugs which had basin, canals, tree-lined avenues and flower beds (pl.7).

However, by the end of the Safavid reign, Persian art had already begun to make a dramatic decline:

> Even before the overthrow of the Safavid dynasty in 1722, there was a decadence in every sphere of art. Royal interest slackened, mass production of cheap bazaar wares became a fixed policy and the awakening of Western interest in the Orient showed itself principally in ignorant admiration and greedy acquisition of exotic small wares. This all contributed to a general collapse into stagnation which was soon to come and which even the efforts of Fath Ali Shah failed to remedy when he tried to raise the standard of craft work in the early nineteenth century. (Kuhnel 1966, p.145)

3.13. Ottomans of Turkey (1299-1920)

With the decline of the Seljuks in Anatolia by the end of the thirteenth century, the way was opened for the Ottoman tribe to take power. Their capitol was Bursa, but

in 1453, they conquered Constantinople and there set-up the center of the western Islamic civilisation for the next 400 years. They also spread out to take the Mamluks out of Syria and Egypt in 1517 and on into Europe and Asia minor.

While much of their architecture was built using pre-existing Byzantine models, their great domed mosque plan, developed by the great court architect Sinan, became known as the architectural achievement for this period. The Sulimaniye mosque in Istanbul (1550-57) and the Selimiyeh Cami in Edirne (1569-1575) are examples of this style.

Other Ottoman highlights include the beautiful tilework and pottery from Iznik in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that filled the sultans' palaces. The walls of Top Kapi Sarayi in Istanbul (1462) are covered with the traditional floral arabesque in continuous semi-floral patterns.

The book arts were marked by the inception of the Ottoman court style displayed in large figures , brilliant costumes, fine expressive faces, simple landscapes and highly decorative interiors. The illuminated *Siyar-i-Nabi* in the late sixteenth century is a good example.

The Turkish tribes from western and central Asia provided beautiful knotted rugwork. Each region had its individual type and design, but all employed what came to be known as the Gordes knot.

3.14. Mughals of India (1526-1857)

Although India's early history is not really considered an important contribution toward the Islamic art world as a whole, the time period of the late sixteenth to seventeenth century when the Mughal emperors were in power should be mentioned. They were descendants of the Timurids in Central Asia and much of their architecture reflects this connection.

The Mausoleum of Sultan Sher Shah (1540-45), though similar to the Timurid domed mosques of central Asia, was the first to have fully developed polychrome architecture that became characteristic of this period. The highest peak of Indian architecture, of course, was the Taj Mahal (1629), built by Shah Jahan for his wife Mumtaz-i-Mahal at Agra. Its beautiful marble work is inlaid with abstract floral patterns of colored stone. The cut marble grill work is exceptional for its intricacy of pattern.

The painters of this time were imported from the Tabriz School, so the book arts are very similar, though they branch into a later Mughal style of their own. Battle scenes, court life, hunting scenes and family life of the emperor Akbar were recorded realistically in *Akbar Nameh*. In 1635, portrait painting became popular and many fine Mughal portraits remain (pl.8). Also, silk brocades, jade carvings, enameling and metalwork are noteworthy from this period.

3.15. Current Times

Although traditional Islamic art history stops at the mention of the Mughals and Ottomans, many forms of the traditional crafts and architectural building styles continued in every region of the Muslim world through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has only been in the last century that the school and apprentice system has been lost in most crafts. The mass production of the mechanized era has replaced the skilled artisanry of the hand and has made it very difficult for masterworks to be created.

Still, in traveling around the Muslim world today, it can be observed that there are yet artisans who use the traditional patterns in tilework and ceramics, wood inlay and brass, rugs and textile weaving and surface decoration for newly built edifices. Whether or not this modern work can be classified as Islamic art will be addressed later in this study.

Returning then to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter relevant to how Islamic art history should be looked at, if separate periods, countries and styles could be synthesized into one complete whole, then the focus would shift onto what factors are responsible for binding the entire group together and giving a continuity of form and meaning. When considering the whole scope of Islamic art, scholars have identified two main components that stand out over all of

the Islamic centuries as the unchanging foci- those of Arabic calligraphy and the non-representational patterns of the arabesque (Wilson 1988, p.16; Bamborough 1977, p.19).

> Calligraphy, which perpetuates the word of God, developed into the highest form of art under the Muslims. Due to its sacred and mystical nature, it is employed on all forms of religious and secular architecture and art. A similar feature can be observed in the arabesque which, through the flow and interaction of its geometric, floral and vegetal components, create a sense of infinity and omnipotence. (Atil 1975, p.9)

These two inventions are used in every media and time period in every region of the Muslim world. They shift in small detail according to purpose and direction, but they are constant in their predominance over every art form's final design. In fact, it is rather amazing that over a span of 1300 years, they have not decayed or mutated into vastly different forms or gone into a state of disuse. Their staying power is a proof of their importance as the carriers of the Islamic core elements. In order to understand how and why they fulfill this role, they will now be discussed in greater detail.

3.16. Calligraphy as the Divine Script

> There is little doubt that calligraphy is the greatest artistic achievement of Islamic culture, In fact its importance to Islam and Islamic art is paramount. Without understanding the unique importance and significance of calligraphy to Islam, Islamic art cannot be properly understood, let alone appreciated. (Bamborough 1977, p.24)

By the end of the seventh century, Islam needed a common means to transmit the prescripts of the faith and

administer the governmental issues across the newly formed Islamic empire. The Arabic language became that unifying factor among all the different linguistic groups that made up Islam from the Atlantic to Siberia. Although Arabic script developed very late compared with other systems of writing, its role was set as a sacred language when it was chosen by God to transmit His message to all men:

> Its preeminent use- to write the divine message of the *Qur'an*- of course endowed it with extraordinary strength and transcendent significance: from this world's manifold possibilities Allah had chosen it, and the Arabic language it initially expressed, as the vehicle for his final revelation. Thus whether understood as content or simply perceived as form, the Arabic script carried with it an implicit affirmation of authority. (Welch 1979, p.23)

Arabic belonged to the Semitic family, most closely related to the script of the Nabataens, a semi-nomadic people who lived between Sinai and southern Syria in the first century A.D.; This script was in turn derived from Aramaic. Arabic script developed in the fifth and sixth centuries with local forms and variations gradually merging into an approved script for all the Arabs (Wilson 1988, p.11).

The Arabs of the pre-Islamic period relied largely on oral tradition as their literary form. When the Quran was revealed, they kept it in the oral tradition for many years before seeing a need to convert it to a written form.

> The need to record the Koran, and to create a worthy vehicle for the message, played a

> central role in the development of the script and led to a preoccupation with clarity and legibility as well as with the beauty of the script. At this point it ceases to be mere script and becomes calligraphy, produced by trained artist scribes. (Wilson 1988, p.11)

It is hard to separate Arabic writing from its divine role as the one basically developed through the other. The Quran arts were considered much more than just beautiful writing as the term calligraphy implies. They were considered a holy invention by God used to further His causes.

The Quran clearly states the divine qualities of the pen and writing: "Thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen, teacheth man that which he knew not" (Quran 96:3-5). "If all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea, with more than 7 seas to replenish it, were ink, the writing of Allah's words could never be finished. Mighty is Allah and Wise" (Quran 31:27).

To early Muslims, the pen and the written word were not separate from the spoken word of God and were looked upon justifiably as a direct creation of God:

> The "Supreme Pen" (or calamus) which inscribes the destiny of all beings on the "Guarded Tablet" is none other than the Divine Spirit or the Universal Spirit, and the greatest title of nobility accorded to the art of writing is the fact that it is like the distant shadow if the Divine Act. (Burckhardt 1976, p.51)

It is by its role as the divine conveyor or the Quran that Arabic script has achieved its status as the sacred symbol of Islam:

> Thus the written form of the *Qur'an* is the

visual equivalent of the eternal *Qur'an* and is humanity's perceptual glimpse of the divine. The holiness of the *Qur'an* extended to lend a special aura to all forms of the written word, which thus became in essence the 'sacred symbol' of Islam. (Welch 1979, p. 22).

The Quran was also responsible for the setting up of the Islamic culture through the commitment of the *ummah*, or Islamic community, to abide by the new revelations. Islamic culture is a "Qur'anic culture; for its definitions, its structures, its goals, and its methods for execution are all derived from that series of revelation from God to the Prophet Muhammad.." (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.162).

3.17. The Worthy Profession

Further, the ability to write in general was approved by the Prophet Mohammed and became regarded in the light of a worthy religious activity which could grant forgiveness of sins:

> The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Beauty of handwriting is incumbent upon you, for it is one of the keys of man's daily bread." (Arnold 1965, p. 2)

> The writing of the *asma' al-husna* (the ninety-nine most beautiful names of Allah), as well as the names of the Prophet, his kin, and the imams were also favored religious activities, while a beautiful rendering of the *bismillah* (the words "in the name of Allah" that begin the *Qur'an*, almost pious statement, and, until modern times, every book) was thought to bring forgiveness. (Welch 1979, p. 23)

The skill of writing was thought well of in the secular circles as was recorded by Mohammad ibn Mahmud al-Amuli, whose fourteenth century encyclopedic work, *Nafa'is al-Funun*, classified writing as part of the

literary sciences and as:

> ...an honourable one and a soul-nourishing accomplishment; as a manual attainment it is always elegant, and enjoys general approval; it is respected in every land; it rises to eminence and wins the confidence of every class; being always held to be of high rank and dignity, oppression cannot touch it, and it is held in remembrance in every country, and every wall is adorned by its hand...Fine utterances (set out) in elegant handwriting are a pleasure to the eye, and a joy to the heart, and fragrance to the soul. (Arnold 1965, p.2).

In fact, if a script were poor, it could impact negatively on pending decisions by the authorities. A story is told of a badly written petition submitted to 'Abdullah ibn Tahir who was the governor of Khurasan, Iran in the early ninth century. Upon looking at the petition, he replied:

> We were willing to accept your excuse, but in view of your bad handwriting we changed our mind. If you had been truthful in stating your case, the movement of your hand would have aided you. Or do you not know that a beautiful handwriting speaks for the writer, makes his arguments convincing, and enables him to obtain what he wants?" (Welch 1979, p.33)

There was a definite connection between righteous living and a steady hand. Nearly every writer on the art stressed that perfection of technique came hand in hand with moral rectitude: "Only he who of trickery, intrigues, and hypocrisy has cleansed himself, has become the master of writing. He knows the soul knows that purity of writing proceeds from purity of heart" (Welch 1979, p.33).

Thus the profession of calligrapher retained a high place in society. Apprentices studied at the side of the

their masters many years before they could earn the title master themselves. "According to the Sultan Ali, an aspiring scribe was expected to observe his predecessor's arts with a careful eye and imitate them with a diligent hand in order to perfect his own skills and find the style most suited to his nature" (Welch 1979, p. 34).

The highest praise given would be to say that the apprentice scribe's hand could not be told apart from that of the master's. Single-minded practice and total dedication were required for the development of a hand. A story told about an incident during the great earthquake of Tabriz in 1776 illustrates the point further.

The earthquake came in the middle of the night. As survivors were searching among the debris the next morning in hopes of finding others who might still be alive, one search party saw a spark of light coming from the basement of a collapsed house. They dug their way inside to find a man sitting by candlelight, working intently on a small piece of paper.

The rescuers urged him to come out of the basement into the open as there might be aftershocks, but there was no response from the man. He was so absorbed by his work that he ignored their pleas. After several more vocal attempts at warning, the man looked up and inquired why they were disturbing him. When told that the town had been demolished, thousands had been killed in the quake and there was little time left to flee, the man replied:

"What is that to me?" and proudly exhibited his paper on which was a perfect *waw*, a particularly difficult letter to make. "After many thousands of trials I have at last achieved one that is absolutely perfect," he said, "and such a perfect letter is worth more than the whole city." (Welch 1979, p.34,35)

Once a calligrapher received a reputation for perfection, they became a valuable possession to their princely patrons. The Shah Ismail hid the illustrator, Behzad and the calligrapher, Shah Mahmud Nisapuri in a cave before the battle of Chaldiran in 1514 when Salim I was taking away artisans to Tabriz (Ettinghausen 1984, p.56).

3.18. Calligraphy as Iconography

As the calligraphers were living treasures, so were their books to be considered spiritual and temporal treasures. In the beginning, the emphasis of the early Qurans was in getting the actual words down as a permanent record. Later, as the scripts became more regulated and styles were set, the calligraphers could consider beautifying and enhancing the manuscripts with all kinds of added ornamentation and illuminative techniques.

As Islam did not have a pictorial iconographic tradition, the script and their ornamental accessories served as a visual equivalent to the figural images of other cultures.

> Where almost every other faith made use of figural images to convey its core convictions, Islam's early theocracy chose the word and saw in figural arts real implications of idolatry. Whether by clear design or less overt development, it came to be Islam's response to

> the icons of opposing religions and served as the most effective means of visually separating the Muslim's world from the world of others. (Welch 1979, p.22)

The Quran was considered as having fulfilled the role of a divine symbol of the faith by all believers:

> Since God did not reveal himself nor his image to the Prophet, He had neverthless revealed the faithful "picture" of His word. The representation of this word, the Holy Koran, offered a meaningful substitute for the traditional human figures that represented divinity in both pagan and Christian religions and would necessarily have a divine association for all true believers, the only kind of symbol open to Islam. (Dodd & Khairallah 1981, p.17)

The Quran did not lend itself to visual illustration in the same way that perhaps the Bible did. There were no major narrative sequences and the Quran's aesthetic appeal was registered in the sounds of its words as one read it. This would make perfect sense as Islam only continued in the oral traditional mode from its Arabian nomadic influences.

There is a dichotomy which exists when considering the reason for this mode. Because there was a Quran that contained the actual physical written word of God, there was no need for pictorial symbolic or iconographic representations; Or, because the pre-Islamic Arabs were an oral-based society with no pictorial heritage, the Quran was given to them to be put into a written state to act as that physical visual iconography. Either way, the written word was used as a visual symbol of Islam from the beginning and it was natural for the aesthetic needs of the

ummah to be centered around in and around it.

3.19. Calligraphy as Monumental Ornament

Almost as soon as the Quran was in book form, it appeared in architectural decorative form on the walls of early Islamic buildings.

> In addition to its use in books and in the decoration of some objects d'art, calligraphy was used both religiously and artistically on the interiors and exteriors of buildings, especially mosques, to the total exclusion of pictorial representation, for the use of beautifully written verses from the Koran made it unnecessary. (Bamborough 1977, p.24)

To say that the words served as mere ornament simply to cover the architectural lines of a building would be almost blasphemous given the fact that the Quran was the center point about which a Muslim's existence revolved. Rather, it is proof of the depth to which the Quran had been accepted and utilised by the ummah.

> The frequency of Koranic inscriptions on the walls of mosques and other buildings reminds us of the fact that the whole of Islamic life is interwoven with quotations from the Koran and spiritually supported by its recitation as well as by prayers, litanies, and invocations drawn from it. (Burckhardt, p.315)

The verses used for building display were not just randomly chosen. Theologians rather than scribes or designers selected verses based upon the purpose a building was to serve and the needs of the patron. Usually, inscriptions were placed in pre-designated areas to have the most exposure: on the exterior, especially near the entrance portals, minarets and drums of the domes; and on the interior, the mihrab and qibla walls as

the focal points of prayer.

The throne verse from Surat al-Baqarah, 2:255, was one frequently used as were the asma' al-husna, or names of God. Surat 24:35, "God is the light of the heavens and the earth," was most commonly used around the mihrab. The verse of Surat al-Hashr, 59:23, which asserts Allah's uniqueness and affirms Islam's uncompromising monotheism, was inscribed on the tenth century mihrab of the Great Mosque of Cordoba (Welch 1979, p. 35).

It states, "He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner unto Him."

When the Dome of the Rock was erected in the late seventh century in Jerusalem, the city was predominately Christian in population and the Caliph Abd al-Malik was no doubt aware of the large repertoire of representational pictorial art that visually displayed the Christians' tenets and beliefs in the buildings around him. The choices of verse, therefore, for the first great Muslim monument had to center in the contemporary rivalry of the two faiths.

The surahs chosen affirmed Allah's uniqueness and denied the divinity and trinity concepts of the Christians. Christ's role as a prophet was also asserted, but the role of Mohammad as the prophet is underscored,

while verses telling the fate of those who reject Islam are also issued as a warning.

Through the use of these inscriptions, Abd al-Malik planned the building to become a symbol of the new supremacy of Islam and its unitarian beliefs, as well as a victory monument to commemorate the defeat of the Byzantines and Iranians. As the first major piece of Muslim art, the Dome had to be meaningful to the new followers of the faith and also have significance in relation to the current Jewish and Christian beliefs.

It had to act as a permanent testament to the final truth of Islam and be used as a missionary tool to teach the unbelievers. As being able to read the inscription was a more important consideration than the aesthetic value of decoration or beautifying, Kufic script was used on the Dome, having served as the standard for all monumental inscriptions by the seventh century.

> There are certain arts which may be said to have issued from the mosque, in the general sense of its being the centre of religious activity- such as Quranic psalmody, sacred architecture, and calligraphy, especially the Kufic which represents the most archaic, formal and religiously significant calligraphic style. (Nasr 1991, p.12)

Kufic came from the town of Kufa, south of Baghdad. It was used extensively in the first five centuries of Islam in architecture, Quran copies, textiles and pottery. There are eight different types of Kufic total, but they are divided into two main branches: *Al Kufi al Yabis* (dry Kufic) which was angular and rigid, and *Al Kufi*

al Layyin (soft Kufic), also called *Al Kufi al Muqawwar* (rounded Kufic) which served as a prototype for the later cursive scripts (El-Said & Parman 1976, p.129).

Kufic is bold, angular and majestic and was ideally suited to the oblong format of the early books (figs.28,29). Its monumental quality has an austere air, somewhat befitting the religious text. In its use in primitive book form, there were no diacritical marks, which often caused inaccurate interpretations, especially among non-Arab peoples. But that it was the right script for portraying the word of God, there was no doubt.

> Thus the almost exclusive choice of an angular, *Kufic* style for *Qur'ans* in the early centuries of Islam was not at all haphazard: it had been the lapidary script, devoted to stone monuments and meant to last. Slow-moving and dignified, exacting in its application and requiring skill to read, it bore the connotation of eternity and visually defined Islam's perception of the holy book. (Welch 1979, p.31)

By the tenth century, there were many variations on the basic Kufic style: folaited, plaited, floriated, to name a few (fig.30). The emphasis for Quran texts, however, had shifted to Nashki script, or the cursive style, due to the geometric proportional system of writing founded by Abu Ali Mahammad ibn Muqlah (885-940).

Ibn Muqlah's *Khatt-al-Mansub*, or proportioned script, was based on a fixed unit of measure- that of how much ink was left by a rhomboid point applied to one spot (fig.31). All verticals and horizontals in the script were measured by these points. For example, some script

types of *alif*, or the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, were three points, others five or seven in height (fig.32). All other letters in the script were in a fixed relation to the alif or the rhomboid point.

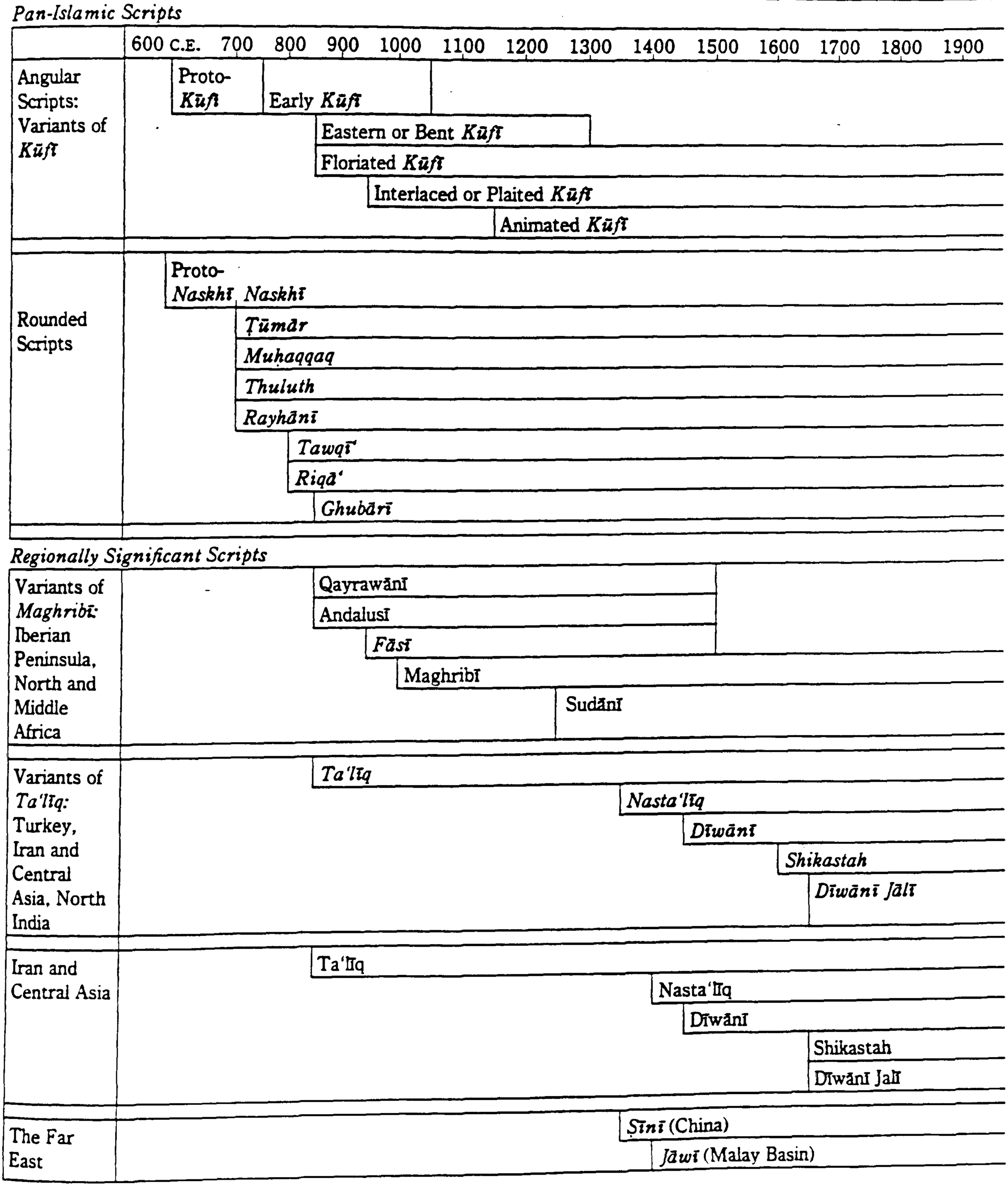
It is from this system that Arabic calligraphy perhaps gained the name *handasat al-khatt*, or the geometry of line. Ibn Muqlah applied this system to the *sitta*, or six cursive scripts of the region: *muhaqqaq, rayhani, thuluth, naskhi, tauqi* and *riqa* (Nasr 1991, p.28). Later, Ibn al-Bawwab, another great calligrapher of the late tenth to eleventh century, founded a calligraphy school in Iraq that built upon Ibn Muqlah's work and broadened the principles still further. Many beautiful illuminated manuscripts remain (fig.33; pl.9) which attest to the skills of Ibn al-Bawwab's school.

Not all styles of Arabic script in the tenth century used the proportioned system, however. The *maghribi* script (pl.10) was developed out of the Kufic angular modes in isolated areas of north Africa. Also, *taliq* was being developed in Turkey, Persia and Central Asia which led to the development of the *nasta'liq* script variations in the fourteenth century (Table 3.2).

By the eleventh century, Qurans were almost all written in naskhi because of its legibility and emphasis on long horizontal strokes. Often, beautiful accent designs accompanied the text and the art of Quranic illumination was born.

Table 3.2

TIME CHART OF ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY



> The *naskhi* style flowered as a later form of calligraphy but continued to serve as a vehicle for the writing of the Quran. It is in this medium of sacred art that one finds the most perfect examples of the *naskhi* style often combined with the art of illumination which is like the visualization of the luminous inspiration flowing from the Sacred Text. (Nasr 1991, p.29)

The art of Quran illumination was a gradual development that took three centuries to evolve. More than likely, this had to do with a reluctance on the part of the ummah to have any visual embellishment added to the word of God. But over time, more and more was added until it became an accepted art form and one fed continually by princely patronage.

At first, the markings made were in order to add technical help in dividing text chapters and verses. Usually, this was done with panels of palmette designs in the margins and little rosettes between verses. However, with time, the designs became larger and more involved until the added forms almost obscured the text (pl.11).

> These decorations subsequently became more lavish; frontispieces covered entire pages with intricate geometrical designs, the spaces filled with leaf scrolls, the interlaced borders decorated in gold, blue and red. (Wilson 1988, p.12)

3.20. Writing versus Calligraphy

When looking at the genre of the Quran arts and script variants, it is important to here note that not all writing can be classified as calligraphy. It is a misnomer to say that Arabic writing is calligraphy simply because its letters are visually enhanced or are created in a

different style which uses ornamental accompaniment.

> In calligraphy we go beyond the purely functional to the aesthetic value of writing. Again, there is a tradition that the Blessed Prophet more than once pointed out the rules to distinguish one letter from another. He thus emphasized the purely formal characteristics of various letters. Paying attention to the form of letters, I believe, is the genesis of calligraphy. Here we become interested not in *what a piece of writing says* but *how it looks*. This is to consider writing as a form of art. (Kadir 1982, p.65)

Between the seventh and tenth centuries, as many varieties of scripts came into being, letter shapes became standardized and more easily defined in formal terms: horizontal, vertical, rounded, angular, above or below the base line, alone or attached to other letters. Once this typology was set up, dots were added to show distinctions of sounds.

Consistent forms emerged and variables manifested themselves in proportions, thickness of stroke, spacing of letters, etc. As these differences in styles were not done for aesthetic reasons or for pleasure per se, but for clarity and smoothness in reading enhancement only, they still came under the heading of writing and not calligraphy (Grabar 1992, p.66).

Calligraphy by definition is "writing with the intent to be beautiful" (Grabar 1992, p.67). Early Qurans of the seventh century did not make beautification their focus. Later, when floral and vegetal illumination was added, it was still not considered calligraphic as it did not change the letters of the script from their legible

state, but simply added an interesting frame around them to attract and entice the reader to read the message.

The *Qarmatian* manuscript Quran (pl.12) was a step beyond the distinct entities of illumination and writing. Here the pages were separate units, each richly decorated in strong borders that detracted from a book- like state of pages following each other. Each page as a unit was to be treated separately, pondered as a single thought, not connecting with what came before or after. In doing so, the book-like continuity was lost and the writing, though visually dominant, became less legible (Grabar 1992, p.74-76).

Only when writing gave way completely to the aesthetic considerations of beauty over legibility and form over function, could it then be considered as a calligraphic work. As lines dissolved and the standardized line or quality became lost in a search for a total composition, the letters that could no longer be easily read became a tool to create a visual picture of writing (figs.34,35,36,37).

In this form, the meaning of the words was not in the normal symbolic position of representing individual ideas. It instead shifted to a total combined visual aesthetic which brought pleasure as its main message.

The *tughras*, or heraldic monograms, of the Turkish Sultans (fig.38) in the sixteenth century, were along this order as were the animal art forms, such as the parrot and

lion whose bodies were created from a single phrase or word (figs.39,40). The minor arts also carried calligraphic content as text often appeared against a background of scrolls as part of a decoration scheme or reduced to a geometric design barely distinguishable as a script on metalwork and pottery (Wilson 1988, p.11). Ceramic plates (figs.41,42) were often ringed in kufic script or had center medallions which complemented the calligraphic forms.

In some cases, the writing when made out to read actual letters, made no sense at all and seemed to be used only for appearance with no thought of meaning attached.

> There are also totally meaningless inscriptions on objects and there are lengthy debates as to whether certain combinations of letters do or do not stand for whole words...They even include the very denial of writing- that is to say, letters that have apparently no verbal meaning associated with them. (Grabar 1992, p.83)

As to the symbolic interpretation and meanings that were given to calligraphy in general and what aesthetic judgments could be made based on beauty and its role as the purveyor of truth, all these will be discussed in the last chapter on Islamic aesthetics. For now, it is fair to state that the Arabic script and subsequent development into calligraphic form, both in the Quran arts and in monumental decoration, are a true innovation of Islam that carry a major portion of the aesthetic values of their society.

> The art of Arabic writing is by definition the most Arab of all the plastic (concrete) arts of Islam...because it gives visible form to the revealed word of the Quran...It can be said without exaggeration that nothing has typified the aesthetic sense of the Muslim peoples as much as the Arabic script. (Burckhardt 1976, p.47)

3.21. Arabesque: The Infinite Pattern

The second great innovation of the art of Islam centered around the development of the arabesque along with geometric patternism used as a form of ornamental decoration on all minor arts as well as monuments in the Islamic world. Ettinghausen has defined the arabesque as, "vegetal ornament inorganically treated in an infinite diversity of rhythmic repetition" (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1970, p.ix).

As was noted before, Islamic art built upon the traditions of the cultures and styles of its incoming peoples; although the motifs and styles of such ornament were already present during the seventh and eighth centuries, it was Islam's "overlay" or graft on already existing entities that resulted in a definite style and process that could only be termed as Islamic (Grabar 1992, p.19). "Thus the arabesque is the outcome of artistic movements set in motion centuries before it appears, not the immediate result of the cultural split that created the Islamic world" (Allen 1988, p.9).

3.22. Pre-existing Ornamental Traditions

The vine and grape designs, bevelled style, circular units and basic geometric shapes (figs.43,44) all had a

pre-existing history among the ornament of the Sassanid, Byzantine and Hellenistic prototypes. What became the differentiating mark of the Islamic arabesque was not the style or motifs used, but the way in which the pattern was set out and the rhythmic repetition of forms that created an infinite pattern. It was viewed as "a transformation of manner; not of subject matter- emphasis on outline over textures, methods of construction rather than literal representation of vegetation" (Allen 1988, p.10).

As compared with the Hellenistic prototype, the interlace patterns of antiquity were very naturalistic and still in a rudimentary form without any of the intracacy or rhythmic accuracy of the Islamic interlace work (Burckhardt 1976, p.44). The Islamic arabesque, on the other hand, showed geometrization of the stems of the vegetation, particularly in the kinds of vegetal elements used. They grew naturally from one to another rather than branching off from a single continuous stem.

There is also an infinite correspondence seen in the expanding designs as they continued in all directions indefinitely. The previous Sassanid or Roman designs did not have the same sense of infinity in their vegetal scrolls (Allen 1988, p.3).

Islamic art made these motifs and patterns more expressive, tangible and exclusively its own. The artisans ornamentalized nearly every motif to create redundancy as their main tradition; additionally, they

developed what could be referred to as a "mode" of handling the elements (Grabar 1987, p.180).

The arabesque was based on the relationship of full to void forms, or its positive and negative space interplay and the rhythms that existed between them. It was not necessarily symmetrical, but the necessary element was the repetition of the forms that caused the patterns to emerge (Burckhardt 1976, p.60).

3.23. Arabesque Structure

The arabesque is laid out in relation to the architectural space and lines of the building or surface space of the object to be filled. Several interlocking systems are incorporated that contrast larger and smaller geometrical areas.

Within the vegetal and floral arabesques, the stalk becomes a line that twists and spirals to make attractive shapes and enclosed compartments. The leaf becomes an outgrowth of the stem while this stem passes right through the leaf. "Thus where a leaf or bud or flower would be at the tip of the plant in nature, in arabesque they are not an end but a new point of departure for another stem to develop, and so on in endless repetition" (Gibbons 1981, p.79).

At times, the areas of foliage were contained inside a single band framework. This led to a progression of the use of several interwoven bands or complex geometric

patterns, although the resulting image remained the same.

> The visual effect of these non-floral arabesques is the same as those with identifiable flowers and leaves, they create an interplay of positive and negative patterns focused around fixed points that are the bright buds in floral arabesques and are the stars, suns and other polygonal shapes in interlace. These points allow the eye a fixed reference within the dynamism of lines. (Gibbons 1981, p.81)

Geometric arabesques are subdivided into layers of designs with elements that echo each other. The decoration follows the principle structures of the architecture so that bands lead to arches and niches while other patterns are connected in panels that relate to the proportions of the walls and floors. Within this main organisation is a secondary relationship between the decorative elements themselves- contrasts of texture, materials, patterns and colors that harmonize the repetition and underlying geometry (Gibbons 1981, p.73).

The basic elements of the designs are set onto regular grids of three basic shapes: the equilateral triangle, the square or the hexagon (fig.45). Between these three grids, any plane surface can be filled leaving no empty spaces.

There are also a variety of semi-regular grids using combinations of different equal-sided polygons, such as the octogon and square; the hexagon and triangle; or the octagon, square and triangle. These are often used to fill

panels within a total ensemble which serve to create a dynamic patchwork of different pattern-filled areas (fig.46) which intracacy cannot be looked at as a simple pattern by the viewer (Gibbons 1981, p.75).

> In order to appreciate the geometric interplay of interlacement, it is not enough simply to look at it head on; it must be "read" by letting the eye follow the flow or intertwining and compensating forces. (Burckhardt 1976, p.30)

From the viewer's point of view, it is the continual shift of attention away from one focal point to another that leads the eye in many different directions and establishes the movement within each pattern. At the beginning, the eye fixes on a simple grid shape, such as the square or hexagon. As the eye gets used to the regular lines and angles, the shape appears static, so a new direction must be introduced to increase complexity.

Therefore, a second grid or angle is rotated to the first and several together are overlayed together to create an increasingly complex pattern. The most successful patterns also carry an element of stillness to them:

> These islands of inactivity have a centralising character- always an enclosed, roughly circular shape that does not move in any direction- a star, rosette or leaf that acts like a full stop or comma after the eye has "read" one "phrase" or "sentence" before moving on to another part of the statement. (Gibbons 1981, p.76)

Also, the use of color incorporated into the later arabesque of the tenth to thirteenth centuries (pls.13,14) helped to isolate certain motifs and elements

for easier visual translation.

3.24. Arabesque Classifications

Arabesques can be classified by time period, region, materials, techniques or motifs. Different art historians have found various similarities and starting points for arabesque styles, most notably the work of Lois and Ismail Al-Faruqi in their *Cultural Atlas of Islam*. They have chosen to create groupings according to regional variations in which various motifs are observed (Table 3.3; Map 3.4). As to the techniques and materials, they note that:

> There is little in the field of ornamentation techniques that distinguishes one region from another. Carving, painting, weaving, veneering, engraving or etching, embossing, leather-tooling, enameling, filigree, glass-blowing and casting are found in every region.
>
> Materials are only slightly less homogeneous in the Islamic arts regardless of region and period of time. Stucco, paint, wood, metal, fibers for weaving, and clay for ceramic production are so widespread in their provenance that they can be regarded as typical of all seven regions. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.384)

The Al-Faruqis further divide the arabesque structures into four general categories, two of which are considered disjunct (*munfasilah*) or discontinuous in organisation, while the other two are basically conjunct (*muttasilah*) or continuous (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.403).

The first of the disjunct categories could be called the multi-unit arabesque or infinite pattern (fig.47). It

Table 3.3

Artistic Motifs of the Muslim World

Styles of ornamentation used throughout the Muslim world:

- Calligraphy
- Geometric patterns
- Stylized figures from nature (vegetal, animal, and lifeless objects)
- Architectural motifs

Ornamentation used in Area I (Maghrib, North Africa, and Spain)

- Lozenge interlace
- Shell motifs
- Lobed arches/arcades
- Horseshoe arches/arcades
- Interlaced arches

Ornamentation used in Area II (Middle Africa)

- Styles influenced by Area I motifs
- Rectilinear geometric shapes
- Freehand rendering of designs

Ornamentation used in Area III (Mashriq)

- Fluted domes
- Sculptured domes
- Alternating bands of color

Ornamentation used in Area IV (Turkey)

- Triangular arch
- Turkish triangles
- Triangular or conical domes

Ornamentation used in Area V (Iran and Central Asia)

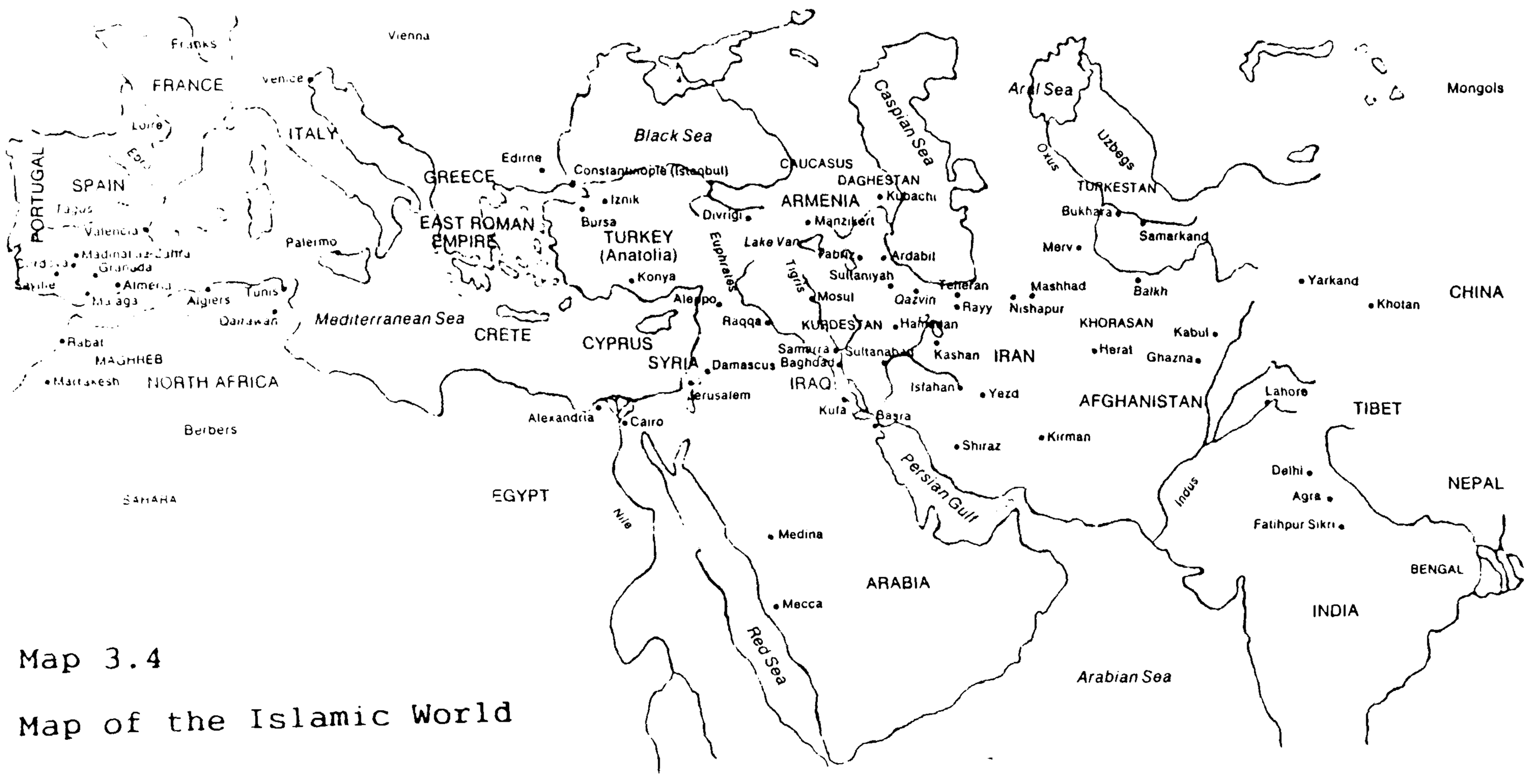
- Stylized figures from nature (very important)
- Delicate rendering of motifs

Ornamentation used in Area VI (Indian Subcontinent)

- Lobed arches/arcades
- Inverted lotus figures at crest of domes
- Greater naturalism in rendering of figures from natur
- Bulbous domes

Ornamentation used in Area VII (East Asia)

- Wave motifs
- Boat prow motifs
- Voluptuous plant and animal forms
- Umbrella motifs
- Dragon motifs
- Lobed arches/arcades



Map 3.4

Map of the Islamic World

is composed of distinct parts or modules combined in an additive or repetitive fashion. Each unit retains a separate identity and there is no single focus while viewing the larger combination it forms.

The second disjunct structure is termed as *mutadakhilah*, or interlocking (fig.48). Here, the modules are combined but elements from one frame have interplay with the next and so create a multiplicity of focal points over the repetitive pattern that is not present in the simple juxtaposition of frames of the first type. The overall impression is one of never-ending succession and though each module can be experienced separately, the inter-relating parts that extend through all the frames should be viewed as a whole composition.

Both the interlocking and multi-unit structures share in the commonalities that make up the discontinuous pattern elements:

> Both of the disjunct structures comprise organizations of a number of modules which retain their separate and distinct identity despite their combination into larger artistic entities. Both structures fulfill the infinite pattern requirements of a multiplicity of focal points in their repetitive patterning and give the impression of unending continuity. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.406)

The third category, part of the conjunct or muttasilah structures, is labeled as the meander arabesque (fig.49). It entails a seemingly never-ending succession of calligraphy, leaves, flowers, tendrils and/or abstract shapes that follow each other but cannot be

divided into separate or distinct entities as in the multi-unit arabesque. Rather, these motifs are connected by a track or continuing evolution and cannot be defined in terms of focal points, beginnings or endings of a pattern.

The fourth category and second of the conjunct structures is the expanding arabesque (figs.50,51). It is more intricate in detail than the meander form and literally explodes in a vast array of multiple designs. A central core pattern is added onto by border after border and figure upon figure which furnishes a new composite view of the arabesque overall.

Eventually, the border of the page or edge of the overall panel is reached and the pattern is cut off in mid-stride without completion or finality which gives a sense of infinite continuity of the pattern into space.

> That inconclusiveness is not to be disguised or avoided; in fact, it is the essence of the Islamic pattern that, through this inconclusiveness, the design demands continuation beyond its empirical limits by the viewer's imagination. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.407)

It is by this continuation of the pattern in the mind's eye that the arabesque becomes meaningful and an aesthetic experience is gained on the part of the viewer.

This will be discussed fully in the last chapter of this study, but for the purposes of classification, it is the expanding arabesque structure that is considered the high point of Islamic arabesque development, the

classical phase that took many centuries to reach its full form and that which is considered one of the distinct innovations of Islamic art. There are, however, several developmental points along the way to the full classical stage which bear mentioning.

3.25. Historical Examples of Arabesque

A prototype of the arabesque can be seen at Mshatta and Khirbat al-Mufjar in Jordan (figs.6,7). These eighth century desert palaces are rich in geometric and vegetal ornament that set the starting points of arabesque development based on what pre-existing elements there were with which to work.

Set in borders and geometric frames, a tremendous variety of themes and motifs were used in three different ways: implied geometry which organised the vegetal designs, closed geometrical units that were fit into an available space, and the "wallpaper" method in which the geometric forms were simply stopped at the end of a wall or door frame and did not try to define any set parameters (Grabar 1992, p.136).

In Mshatta, the vines and rosettes with scroll interlace were filled with all kinds of animate objects including figural heads. Another early arabesque is seen at the Great Mosque of Damascus (705-715) using vine, acanthus and palms.

In Samarra during the ninth century (fig.10), the ornamental form became more defined with further motifs

added, but the first good example of early arabesque is cited as the marble panels (fig.13) and mihrab from the Great Mosque at Cordoba in 965. Also, the portal of the mosque at Al-Hakim in Cairo in 1000 shows a well-developed form and the Khurasan Ribat-i-Sharif caravanserai (fig.52) of the late eleventh century has an interesting combined vegetal and geometric form.

However, none of these examples cited are in the continuous conjunct style as yet. Here, the vine scroll became interlaced with geometric designs which was a new development. Later, the patterns of vine scroll were assimilated into the geometric framework and the stems became linked to non-vegetal patterns. This method of construction was infinitely variable and led to the full arabesque form (Allen 1988, p.5).

The early styles of arabesque then, focused on the filling of space and exploration of kinds of ornament available for use in the new artistic vocabulary that Islam was forming. "Total coverage, relationships between forms, geometric motifs, freedom in choice of subject, and arbitrariness are all characteristics of early Islamic ornament" (Grabar 1987, p.191).

There is also some interesting research done by Oleg Grabar which suggests that the main reason for the early types of geometric patterns chosen and their method of application was in order to convey a textile surface onto a wall that would evoke familiar sensual feelings that the

viewer was used to in the textile arts of the nomadic lifestyle (Grabar 1992, p.141). Ettinghausen echoes this theory stating that: "familiarity with textiles prompted ready acceptance of flat, infinite patterns in other media as well. For instance, much decoration of architecture was regarded as "clothing" applied to the body of the structure" (Ettinghausen 1984).

The tenth through twelfth century brickwork on the outer walls of Iranian monument (fig. 53) shows a definite correlation to the verticle and horizontal axis that represent the warp and weft of a loom. "The patterns change abruptly from one panel to the next as if the eye were moving from fabric to fabric" (Soucek 1988, p.34).

The interlace in ornament was also a result of the influence of this textile mentality. The grammar of ornament was affected by weaving technology such that the two-dimensional interlace by the ninth century had its lines overcoming the surface they were supposed to decorate and thus opened the way for the multi-level arabesque (Soucek 1988, p.35).

The muqarnas vaulting used from the eleventh century onward also was a related exploration of this multi-level dimension. Muqarnas was considered to be the arabesque in a three-dimensional form. Usually used for squinch fillings and cornices, later it was also applied to covering an entire bay or chamber as in the Tomb of Iman Dur in Iraq (1085-1095) commonly called the "sugarloaf" dome.

The muqarnas of the Great Mosque at Isfahan was in full dome form as were the mosques in twelfth century Damascus and fourteenth century Natanz (Allen 1988, p.4, 85).

The high forms of arabesque (pl.15) and muqarnas (pl.16) that were seen in the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries wherein the most complex application of these techniques were used, is the point in history where Islamic art is said to have developed a distinct identity. These elements were copied across the whole Islamic world and created a unity of the Islamic visual language.

In looking back over the development of the arabesque from its prototypes, there is one important point that can be observed. The most significant factor that influenced the development of these techniques and the reason why these forms once developed, could remain constant for several centuries, was due to the on-going tradition of non-figural representation that Islamic art had adopted from the start.

3.26. The Non-Representational Legacy

> There is no fundamental change that produced a full blown Islamic art in the early Islamic period, that the development of what we call Islamic art happened step by step; and that the aniconism of Islamic religious art is no distinctively Islamic characteristic, but rather a continuation of traditional practice among the pre-Islamic Arabs which was maintained because the high level civilization of the new Islamic empire had no narrative that could appeal to all the conquered peoples and at the same time be illustrated. (Allen 1988, p. 116)

Islam came at a time when oral traditions were used to

pass the narrative arts from one generation to the next. Pictorial art was not used as an expressive narrative form by the pre-Islamic Arabs and most visual sources as previously mentioned, were adopted and then adapted from the cultural symbols available from the imported art forms and outside aesthetic influences around them. "What disappeared was not figural representation but the use of figural representation to show human actions and states of mind- in the Islamic era these were the domain of poetry" (Allen 1988, p.33).

It was not a matter of imagery being suppressed due to the new religious injunctions, but rather a searching for what could best be used to represent the newly formed Islamic attitude; and pictures,although still used for secular matters, could not fill the requirements of the ummah's needs.

> The fact remains that in practically no period of Islamic culture were figurative representations and painting suppressed, with the singular exception of the strictly religious sphere where idolatry was feared. Mosques and mausoleums are therefore without figurative representation. Elsewhere, imagery forms one of the most important elements and a multitude of other pictorial traditions were also assimilated during the long and complex history of Islamic art. (Grube, p.x)

Because of the diverse cultural and ethnic mix of groups that made up its converts, Islamic art stayed aniconic and thereby let each cultural entity continue in its own linguistic and narrative tradition already in place to tell their individual stories. But in matters of

religion, the imagery remained aniconic because Islam was not considered to be culturally specific. Also, as the Quran was not a book given hugely to narrative accounts that could be graphically illustrated, there was little in the way of subject matter that could be considered symbolic in the first place for an artist to embellish upon visually.

The Great Mosque at Damascus (707-715) was probably the closest to come to an attempt at pictorial depiction. Its mosaics (fig.4) of buildings, rivers and trees have been interpreted to represent the Quranic description of paradise given in Surahs 79-81 (Soucek 1988, p.16). In *jennah,* or heaven, there are gardens where "under or beneath them rivers flow" (Quran 2:25, 9:72, 14:23, 20:76, 22:23, 48:5, 54:54-55, 58:22, 61:12, 64:9, 65:11, 66:8). But this was as far as pictorial mosque art developed.

Other factors perhaps had stronger influences upon the developing art than a mere desire for exploration of religious theological depiction. The edict of Yazid in 721 which erased all religious images in Christian churches is referred to as a possible source to prove the overall influence of the concurrent Byzantine and Jewish elements of iconoclasm.

The Byzantine Christians had their idolatry phase and felt the need to purge it from their surroundings prior to the time Mohammed received his revelations regarding idolatry. In the fifth and sixth century, they destroyed

statues as worship forms and pagan idols. The baths of Zeuxippus in Constantinople had almost a hundred statues eradicated in the Nike riot of 532 (Grabar 1987, p.85).

The already present Jewish tradition of iconoclasm carried over upon their conversion to Islam and it is their influence that is thought to have directly led to the *Hadith*, or traditional sayings of the Prophet, regarding pictorial representations

> The historian is therefore faced with the problem of attempting to determine whence this fanatical attitude towards pictorial art derived its origin...A more plausible solution seeks in the influence of the Jewish converts to Islam the explanation of this violent antipathy towards pictorial representations of the forms of living beings. The city of Medina contained a large Jewish population at the time of the Hijrah of the Prophet, and a number of Jews were among his early converts. The influence of the Jewish converts on the development of thought and ritual in the early generations of Islam has recently been made the subject of more than on profound study.
>
> In regard to Jewish influence upon many of the *Hadith*, the Traditions of the Prophet, there can be no doubt whatsoever. A large number of these Traditions reproduce almost verbally the precepts enunciated in the Talmud, and it seems more than probable that the Jewish converts to Islam carried over into their new faith the hostility to plastic and pictorial art which had been impressed upon them from childhood. (Arnold 1965, p.10)

Further, the fear of committing idolatry or even coming close to it by using and two-dimensional or three-dimensional forms that could be misconstrued, leaned heavily on the ummah's perceptions of pictorial art.

> The hatred of idolatry, common to Islam and Judaism, caused a statue or a picture to be regarded with suspicion, through apprehension

> of the possible influence it might exercise on the faithful by leading them astray into the heresy most abhorred by Muslim theologians, *shirk*, or the giving a partner to God. (Arnold 1965, p.10)

> Muslim aversion to mimetic art derives from a deep-rooted fear that the idolatry which Islam had conquered might re-enter through this means. The most explicit denunciation of visual emulation is to be found in the Hadith of the Prophet, where the making of pictures and images is seen to be the work of the enemy of God. Mimetic art thus falls in the realm of falsehood, and such handling of God's creation becomes a perpetuation of lies since the only true creativity is that of God. (Boulatta 1973, p. 5)

This all contributed to an attitude of "iconophobia" (Grabar 1987, p.95)- not an outright rejection of figural representations as much as being frightened of committing a sin. This threat carried over to the value of having visual symbols at all. Why should Islam adopt any of the traditional reminders of the past idolatrous cultures when it could find another form not in competition with the visual forms already in use?

In fact, Islam systematically tried to rid itself of any of the *jahiliyyah*, or time of ignorance, from the past (Grabar 1987, p.77). If Islam wanted visual religious symbols of its own, it would be logical to steer away from any contemporary methods that would confuse it with the other religions of the time. By avoiding pictorial representation, Islam could be free to expand its symbolic vocabulary without fear of offense to God or the misunderstanding of other sects.

The supportive Hadith and confirmation of religious

dogma towards this attitude came after Islam had had time to see that figural images were not the right visual avenue for them. Thus it was a conscious decision not to use figural representations for religious art, not a religious restriction that caused avoidance (Grabar 1987, p.89).

No early sources of legislation or jurisprudence exist to prove that representational prohibition existed by religious injunction or even as a controversial issue in the early years.

> It may be proper to conclude simply that at the time of the Prophet, the problem of artistic creativity and representations simply did not come up as a significant question requiring some sort of pronouncement or legislation. (Grabar 1987, p.80)

Any of the eighth century Hadith that speak of the visual arts at all should be looked at in the light of showing the appropriate uses and places for art, not as a forced evidence for eradication of artist's creativity or representational visual forms.

3.27. Islamic Secular Iconography

In regards to the proper use for pictorial art,

> In the early period of development of the religion, it was thought to be entirely appropriate for figural representation to occur in the context of ordinary life and even religious settings, if those representations were not meant for religious purposes. Where there was no intent to create an icon, figural imagery seems to have been unexceptionable. (Allen 1988, p.18)

Even the prophet kept figural art images as items of secular use in his house. Although unsuitable as curtains

which might be confused for objects of adoration in full form, cut up as cushion covers, the figures were pleasant household devices and carried no further threat of misunderstanding (Allen 1988, p.19).

Also, subject matter became important divided into that which was appropriate for religious setting and that which could be secularized. Usually, the vegetal and abstract forms were mosque-worthy while the human and animal figures were appropriate for secular use (fig.54). This logical division could have served as a primary motive for the later ecclesiastical endorsements by the Hadith.

> This rational division between religious and non-religious subject matter was probably the original basis of Islamic iconoclasm too and the reasons given by the theologians were probably secondary to the original motives for the non-use of figural representations in religious contexts. (Allen 1988, p.19)

There were some cross-over areas between the two divisions as much of the ornamentation used in mosque decoration was taken from the secular architectural designs in use. They were not specifically designed just for religious settings.

> Most importantly, there is no reason to think that the motifs, techniques and designs that later came to be used in decorating the mosque originated in a religious context. They were specific applications of arts that existed in secular architecture as well and that could include figural components. Islamic religious aniconism applies to mosque first and foremost. (Allen 1988, p.23)

These designs served their role in Islamic art as

figural representations functioned in other religious art and classical traditions of the time. The arabesque and geometric patterns became the visual symbolic language of Islam and had many levels of meaning including the basic visually symbolic one.

> In Islamic art, abstract elements such as geometry serve the integrative function of representations in classical art: they tie together the whole work of art by belonging to the same conceptual category. They are the visual, though not the intellectual subject matter of Islamic art. Geometry and arabesque are the intended focus, and the meaning, if any to be assigned to them should be visual and artistic rather than literary or covertly religious. (Allen 1988, p.35)

3.28. Artisan Techniques and Attitudes

The abstracting of visual elements was a recognised style in existence at the time of Islamic art formation. The artists were already most probably trained in the stylized scrollwork and simple interlace using vegetal forms in the ornament of the seventh century.

The further abstraction of these forms would seem like a natural progression to a trained craftsman who now applied their talents to the Islamic decoration. "The natural instinct of the Islamic artist seems to have been towards abstraction rather than representation. Even elements which have naturalistic origins, such as leaves, are so stylized as to be barely recognizable" (Ettinghausen 1984, p.22).

Not all artists used solely abstracted forms for their subject matter. While later Hadith gave rise to

some concern about the artist receiving judgment for imitating the creative power of God, the artisans and craftsmen continued to use nature and figural representations in their art work and escaped the judgment by applying some simple techniques.

> Thus, artists not willing to discard nature, sought ways in which to disguise it so as not to incur God's wrath or punishment. They disguised it through a stylization in form and through a transformation of natural beings into decorative patterns. Thus in their attempts to "deceive" God, "they satisfied themselves, for example, by cutting of the paw of an animal and replacing it with the paw of another; likewise they very often represented fantastic beasts, a bird with a man's head," a horse with a womans's head, or a four-legged animal with wings. (Boullata 1973, p.25)

Birds and horsemen, friezes of fields of animals, courtisans and heros, planetary and zodiac symbols all were represented. Of the fantastic creatures, unicorns, the sphinx and harpies were seen. Perhaps the attitude towards using these beasts came logically with the knowledge that since they did not really exist, God could hardly punish the artist for representing nature too closely.

Zoomorphic forms of birds and fish appeared on ceramic ware using religious words such as *baraka*, blessing, or *bismillah*, in the name of God, to form the body of the animal (fig.39). Sometimes, even Arabic letters (fig.40) themselves were shaped in the form of an animal (Ettinghausen 1984, p.79).

> Visually-oriented artists who defied the "ban" on imitation of nature turned this verbal

tribute to the divine into a concrete image of a natural creature. Thus, the script itself takes the shape of an ostrich, an eagle, a peacock, or other creatures. With extreme inventiveness, Arab artists manipulated their malleable script, intertwining, stretching, and controlling lines to create images. (Boulatta 1973, p. 27)

Another favored technique was to portray animals in a silhouette flattened form without any sense of depth of detail that would make it a living animal.

> Artists which favoured figural designs endeavoured to devise animals in silhouette style, without a viable corporeal quality, and appearing as mere shadows or symbols of the real creature. Later, when on carpets, animals and human beings were realistically rendered, they were usually skillfully hidden in a dense landscape scenery. (Ettinghausen 1984)

Through the total avoidance of natural shading and cast shadow, solidity and therefore reality could not be seen and taken as an imitation of the reality of the world (Gibbons 1981, p.88). Perspective, if used at all, was from a distorted viewpoint looking down or a flattening of the various views from all sides. Only much later in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was an idealised perspective allowed in Mughal portraiture (pl.8).

> The dislike for pagan idolatry was identified with three-dimensional figures and hence early Muslim artists kept the element of depth out of their paintings. There is a deliberate avoidance of perspective to remind the artist and the patron that a painting is a flat surface and that it should be kept like that. However, because of a more sophisticated attitude towards religious injunctions, in the Mughal Style of painting a sort of idealized perspective was introduced. (Kadir 1982, p.64)

Thus the artist, while adhering to the religious

injunctions that limited the realistic portrayal of things, could yet feel free to use natural subject matter and explore many creative techniques and expressive visual styles.

> Arab art, in time, developed a strong tradition evolving from this distrust of rivaling God's creativity or distorting His creation; at the same time it developed its own evasive tactics by means of which the artist could still indulge his creative impulse and yet skirt around forbidden practices. (Boullata 1973, p.31)

3.29. Aniconism: the Natural Choice

Islamic art then, came by way of a realisation that the pictorial representational world artistically in place at the seventh century was not the right carrier of the separate visual identity Islam needed; and that because of an already rich oral tradition, little could even be added by the adoption of figural representation as a means of expression in the arts.

As observed in the aesthetics discussion earlier, in the end, the values we assign to art come down to what our culture is interested in. Islamic art left human figural description and artistic narrative to speech to explain, tell and express rather than displaying it in pictures. "While their language- Arabic- defined the limits of their new empire, an aniconic religion left no central cultural story to be told by visual narrative" (Allen 1988, p. 36).

Perhaps the choice of the word aniconism over iconoclasm sums it up best. Aniconism is simply the non-

use of images rather than the outright rejection of them that iconoclasm denotes. While aniconism has a decidedly positive character and leaves room for a replacement also positive in nature, iconoclasm speaks loudly in a negative sense as a means of censorship with nothing left to fill the void but fear of offense.

The Hadith and Quranic passages contain strong statements against replacing God with idols of any kind or placing the artist on the same level as God's creation; but nowhere does it state that figures are evil in themselves, that an artist is automatically condemned to *jahennah*, or hell, for artistic creation or that Islam should not be allowed to seek a means of visual symbolism to carry its message.

More about the strictly religious restraints and shirk in general will be discussed in the next chapter which is exactly where it should be- in the religious context, not in the artistic one.

3.30. Final Answers to Questions

Returning for a moment back to the initial searching questions at the beginning of this chapter of what Islamic art is, where it came from, what artistic elements Islam added all its own, why these changes were necessary and what kept them in tact for over a millennia, the answers can best be summarized as follows.

Islamic art is an aniconic tradition of visual imagery that, while influenced by pre-Islamic styles and

cultures, developed readily into a separate identity within 150 years after the time of its inception. The main components of vegetal and geometric ornament together with the development of the Arabic script created tools that could be used in all media, countries and times without fear of any individual cultural favoritism.

The choice of using these non-figural elements centered in a desire not to be linked with the representational heritage of other current groups and also because Islam, being a Quran-centered environment, could not portray by normal pictorial means a narrative that did not exist. The vegetal and geometric arabesque forms that developed after some three centuries became the recognised Islamic innovations that hallmarked Islamic visual art and formed the basis for all significant symbolic meanings.

Arabic calligraphy developed as a result of a need to portray God's Word through the most perfect carrier of His message and for the obvious guidance and reminders a religious community the size of Islam needed in order to give some continuity over time. While figural representations have always been a part of Islam's secular arts, in a religious setting it was deemed inappropriate, not because of any Quranic or strictly religious injunction against it, but because it could not fulfill the aesthetic cultural and religious needs adequately enough.

The fact that these aniconic forms have remained the chosen symbols and have carried the Islamic visual values for a millennia virtually unchanged is proof of their ability to perfectly portray the Islamic visual language. There is nothing in the history of Western art that can compare with the consistency of the Islamic style, even when considering other religious art.

As with anything that is a perfect truth, though people, boundaries, traditions and lifestyles change from century to century, the truth remains constant and will always be in current use for those who can perceive it. So the history of Islamic art continues in our time as well, carrying the same unchanged truths.

Plate 1. Base of candlestick, brass inlaid, Egypt or Syria, circa 1290.

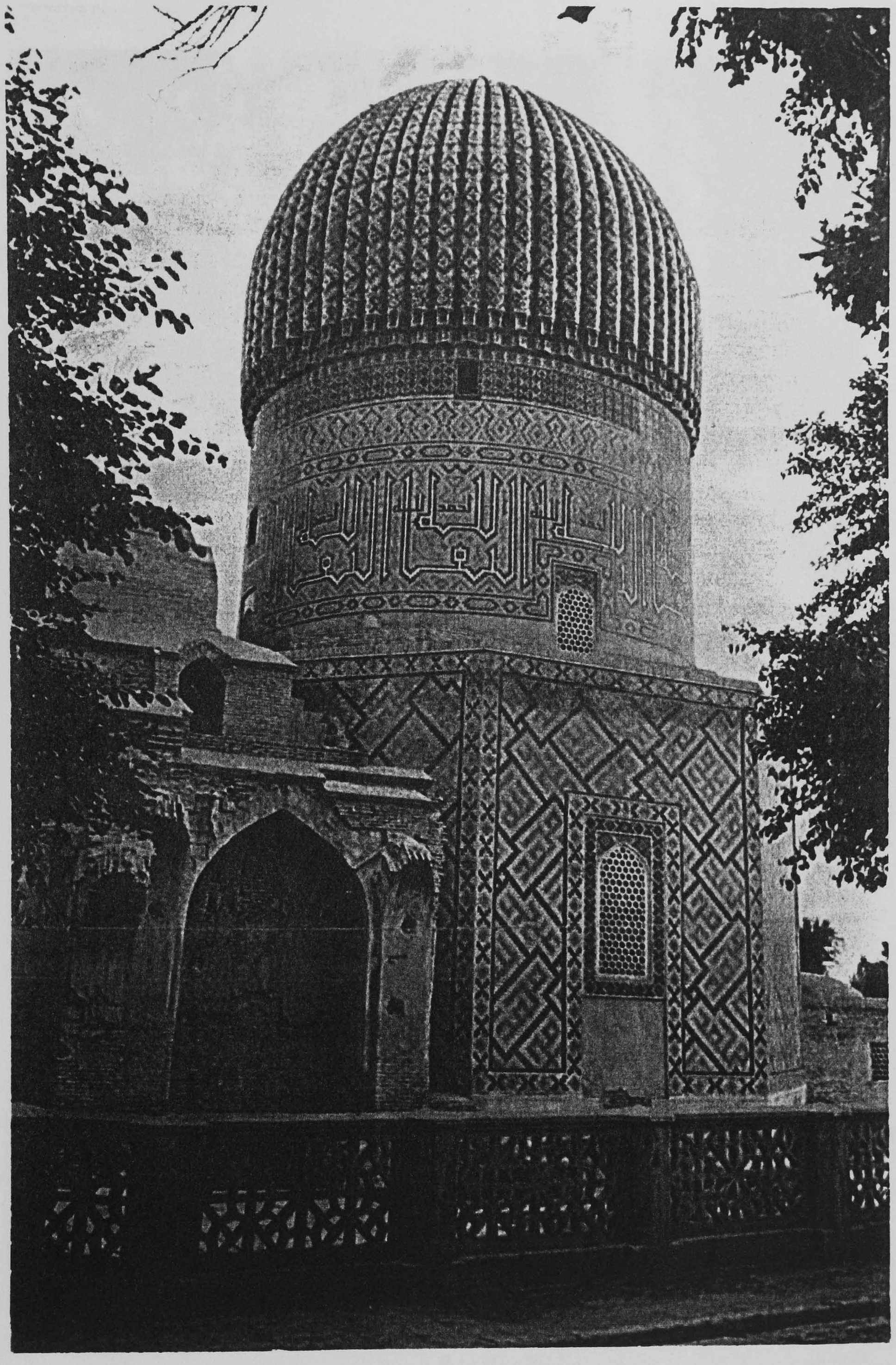


Plate 2. Mausoleum of Tamerlane, the Gur Emir, Samarkand, 1434.

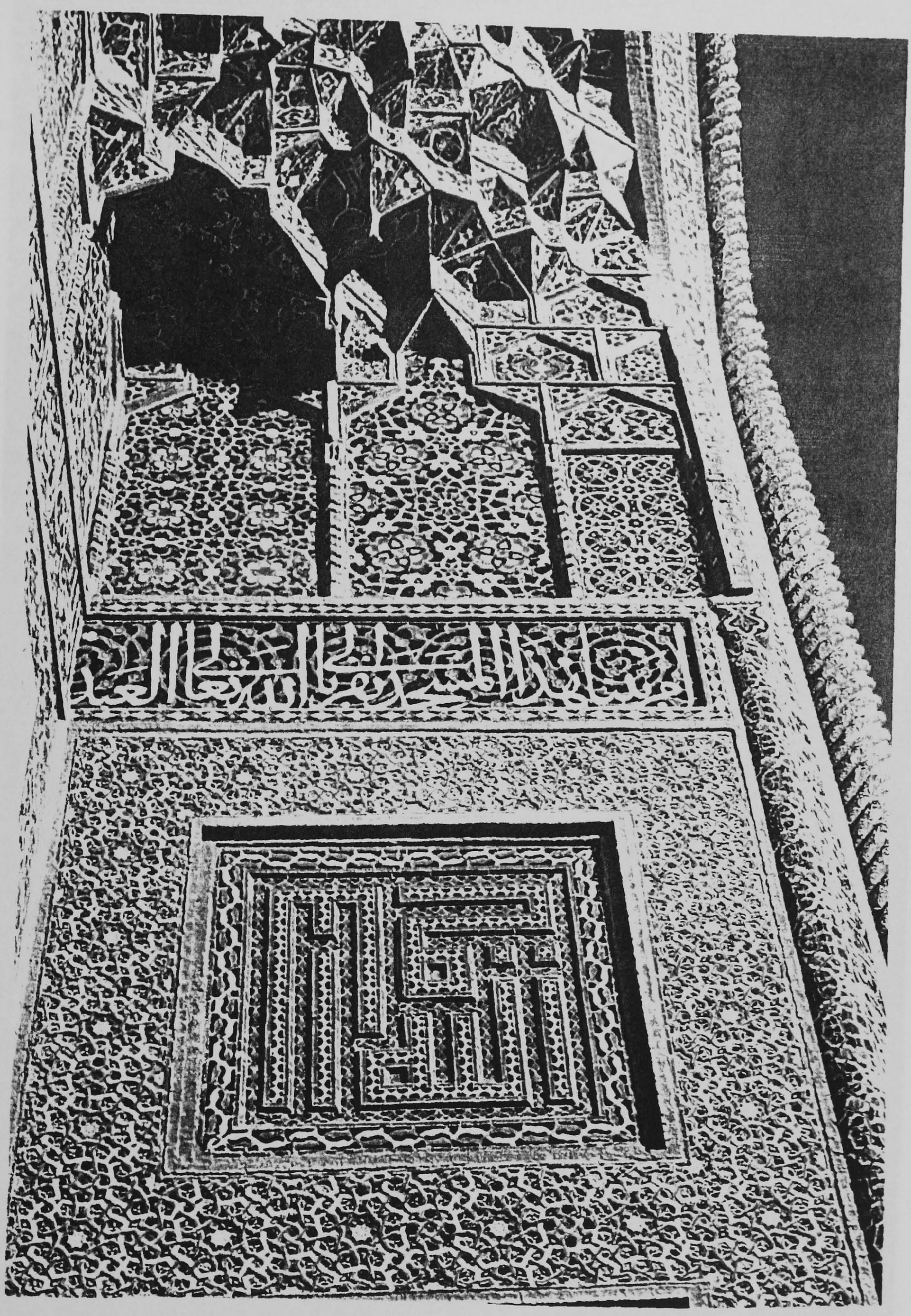


Plate 3. Jami' Mosque, portal detail, Kirman, Iran, 1349.

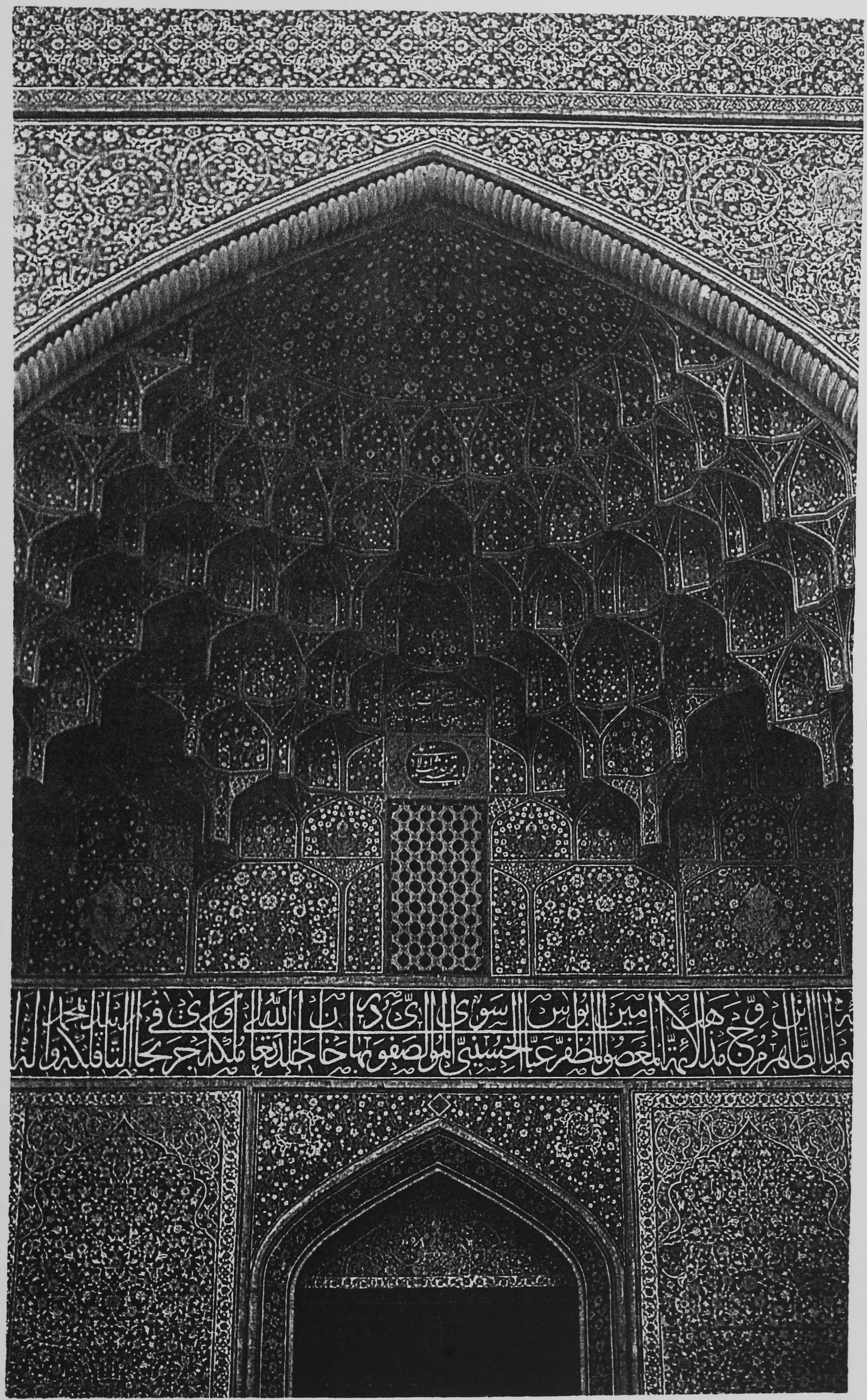


Plate 4. Shaykh Lutfallah mosque, main entrance detail, Isfahan, Iran.

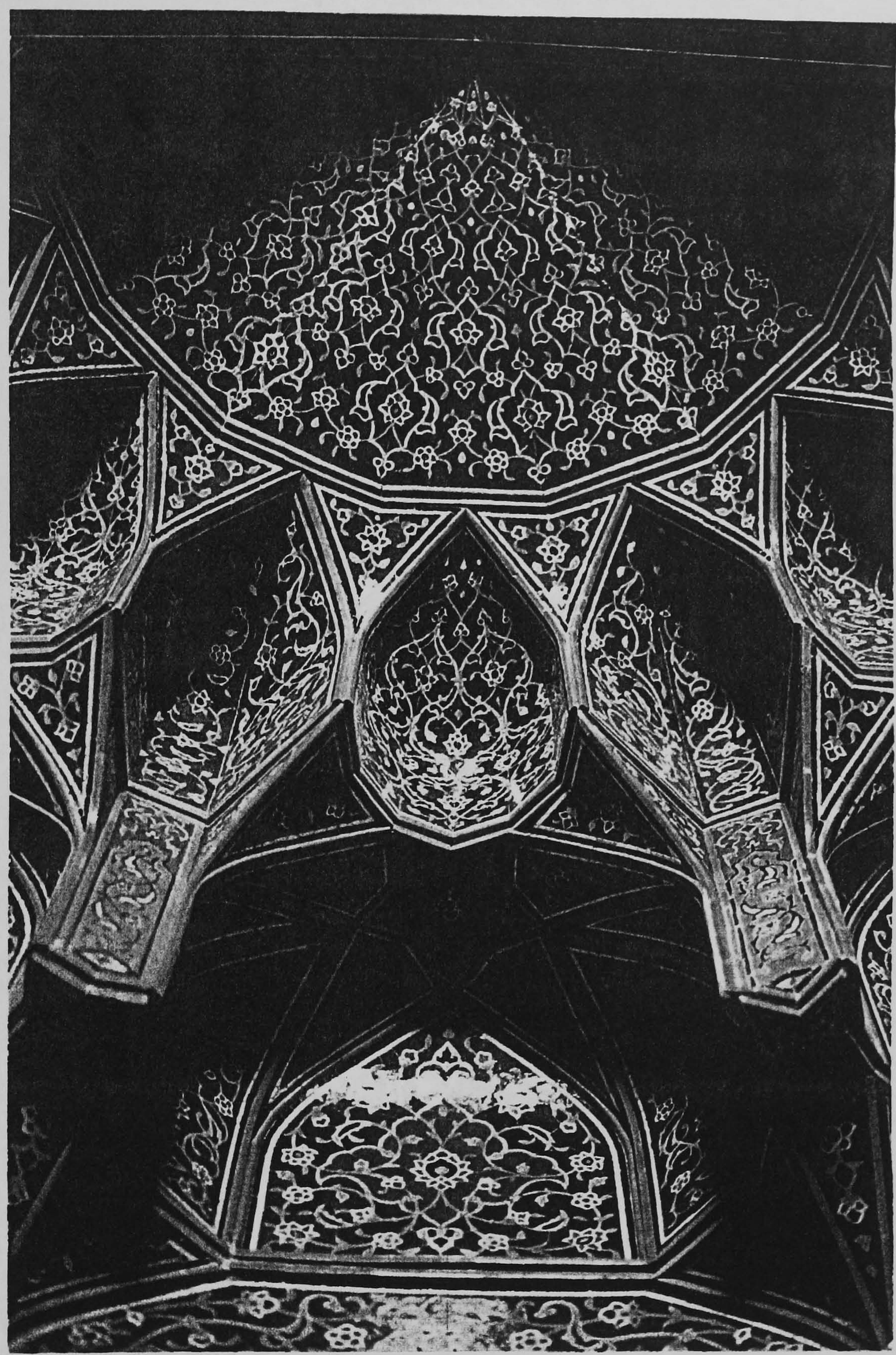


Plate 5. Shaykh Lutfallah mosque, detail of muqarnas vaulting in mihrab, Isfahan, Iran.

Plate 6. Arabesque carpet detail, Herat, Afghanistan, 16th century.

Plate 7. Garden Carpet, northwestern Iran, circa 1700.

Plate 8. Mughal portrait of Jahangir holding the portrait of his father Akbar, India, circa 1599-1605, Paris, Musee Guimet.

Plate 9. Ibn al-Bawwab, manuscript of the Quran, end page, 1000-1001, Dublin, Chester Beatty Library.

Plate 10. Quran page in Maghribi script, probably Spanish, 12th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1946.

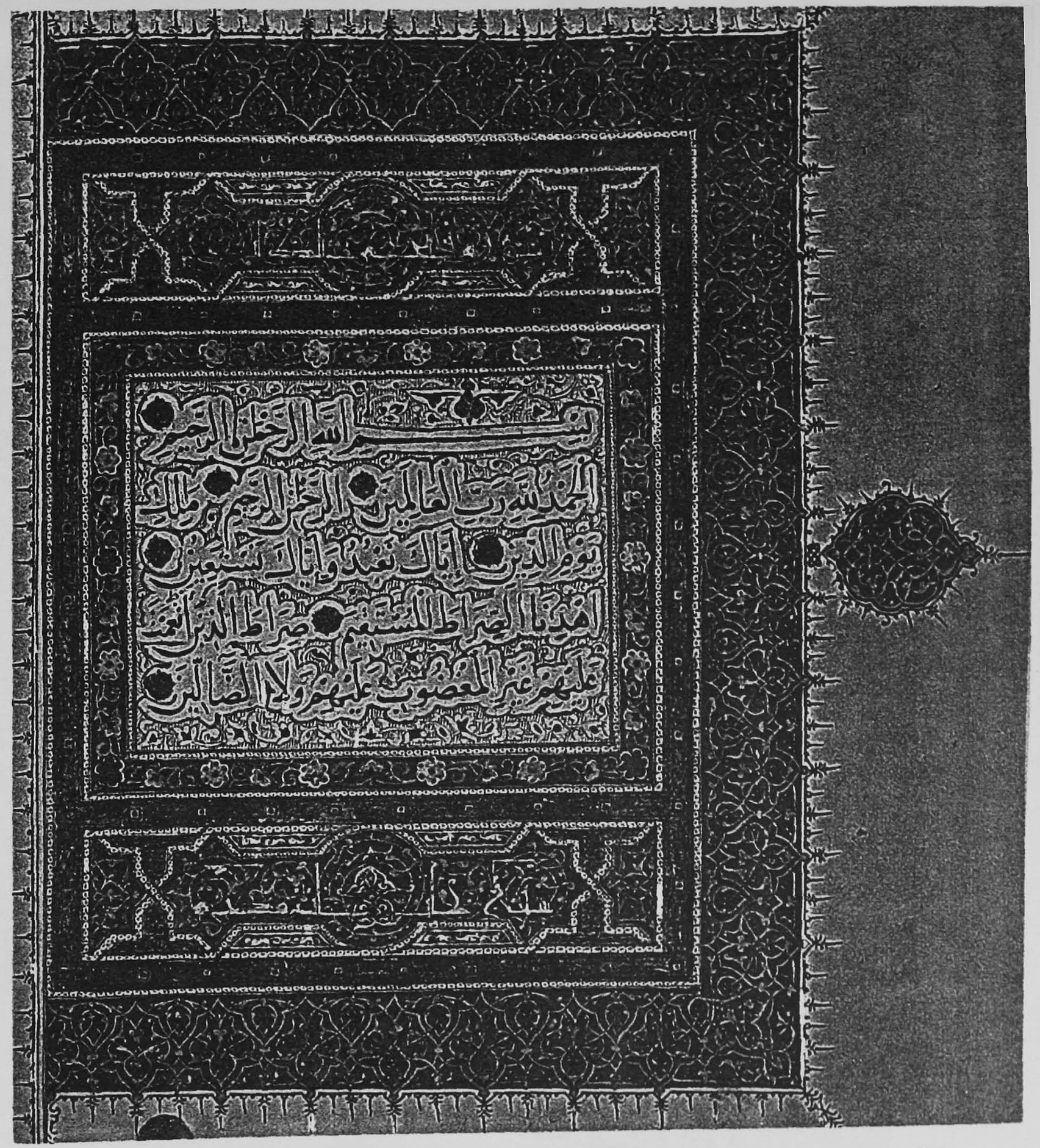
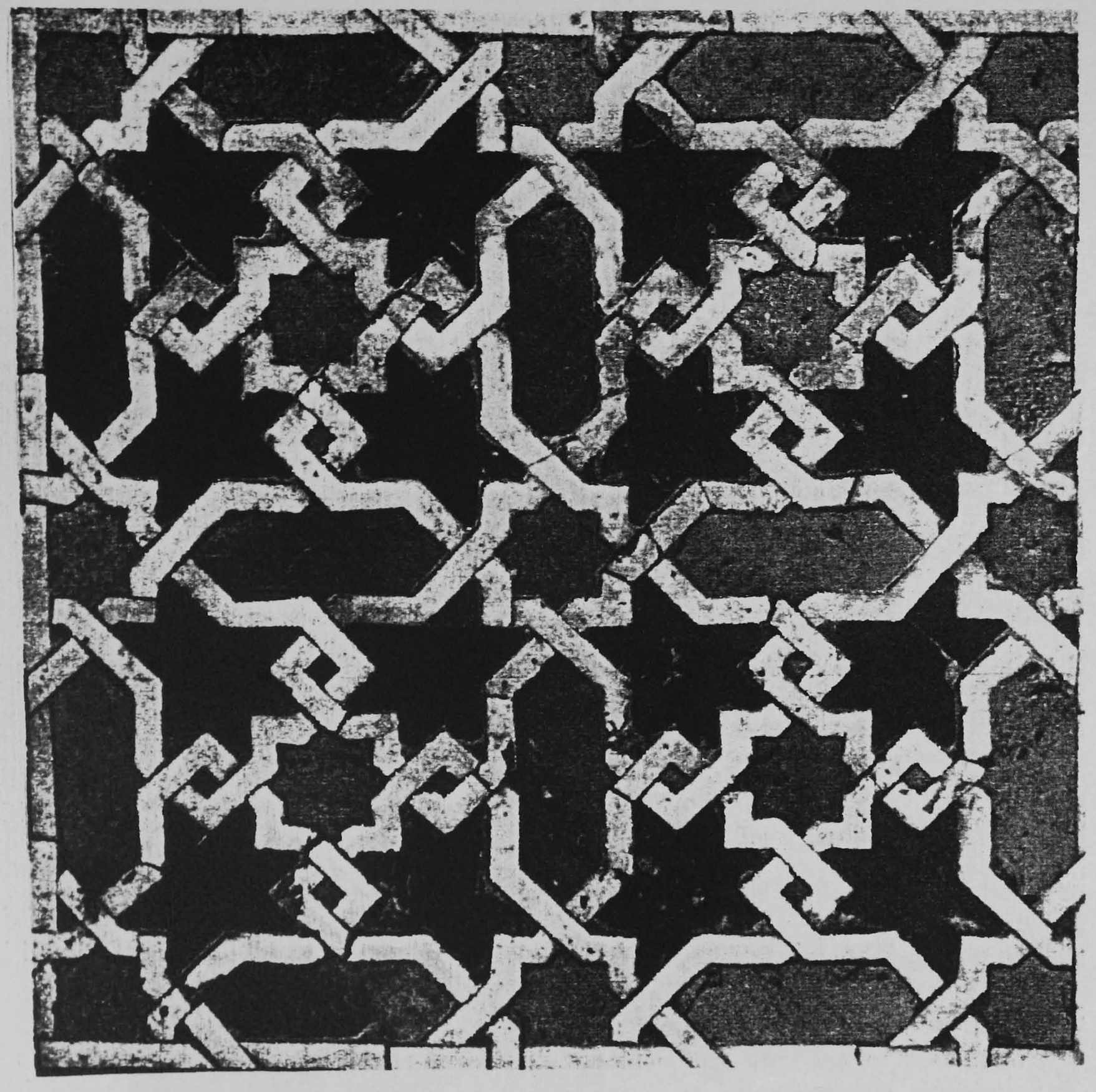
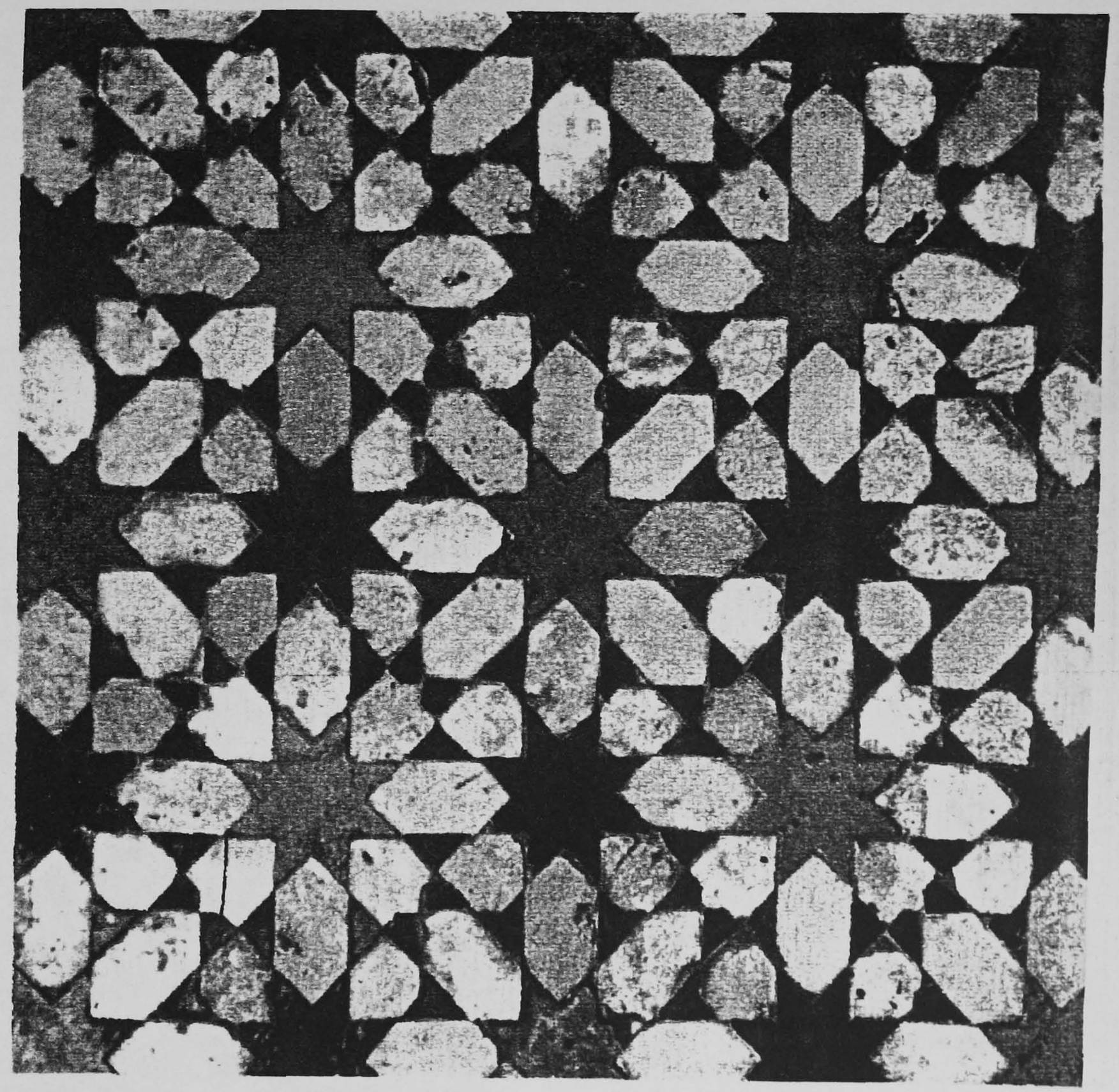


Plate 11. Quran page in Naskhi, Cairo, 1425, World of Islam Festival Trust.

Plate 12. So-called Qarmatian Koran, Istanbul, Beatrice St. Laurent.





Plates 13,14. Tile decoration from Bedi Palace, Marrakesh, Morocco.

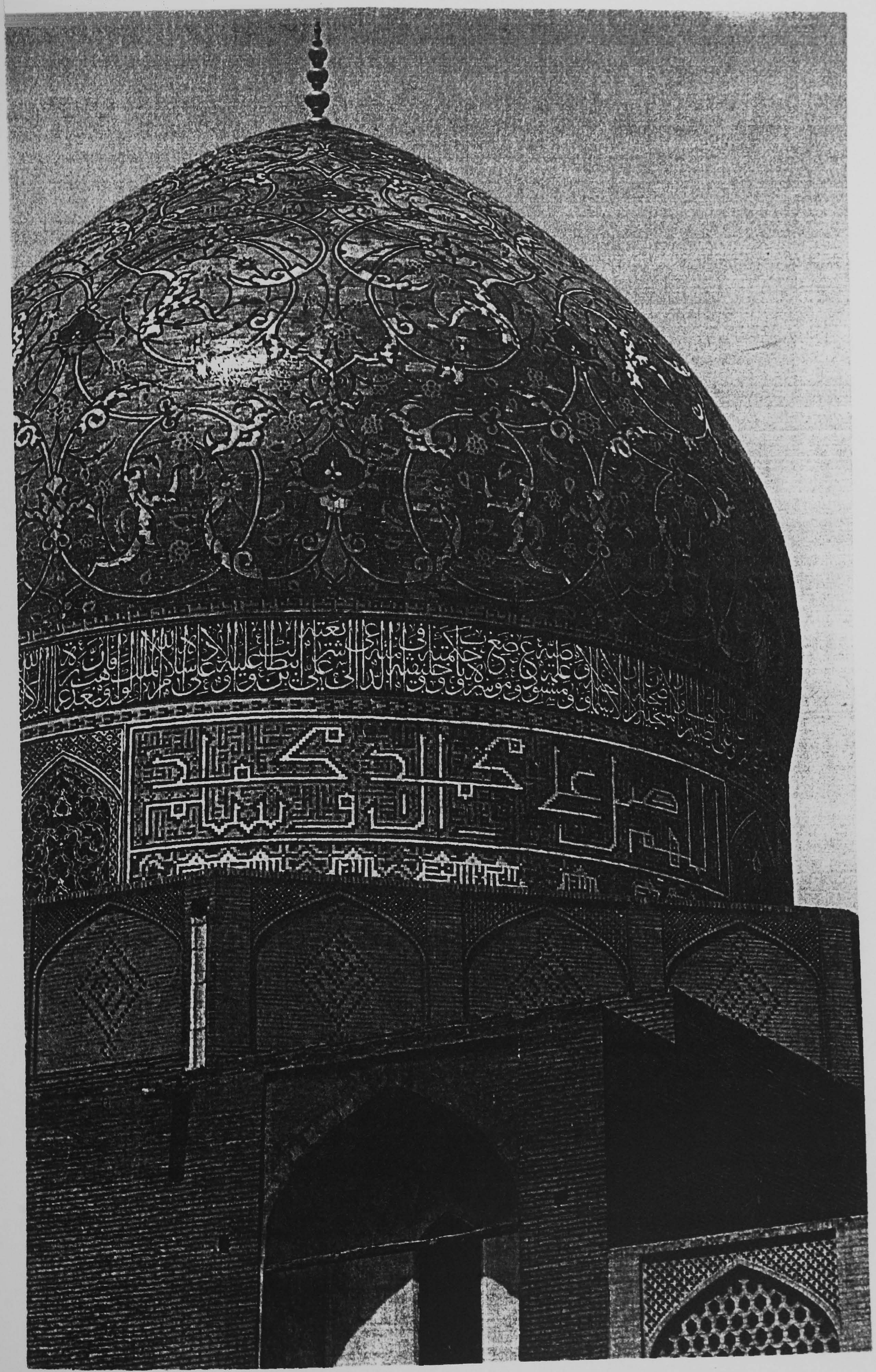


Plate 15. Madressah Madar-i-Shah, faiance tile dome, Isfahan, Iran, 1704-1714.

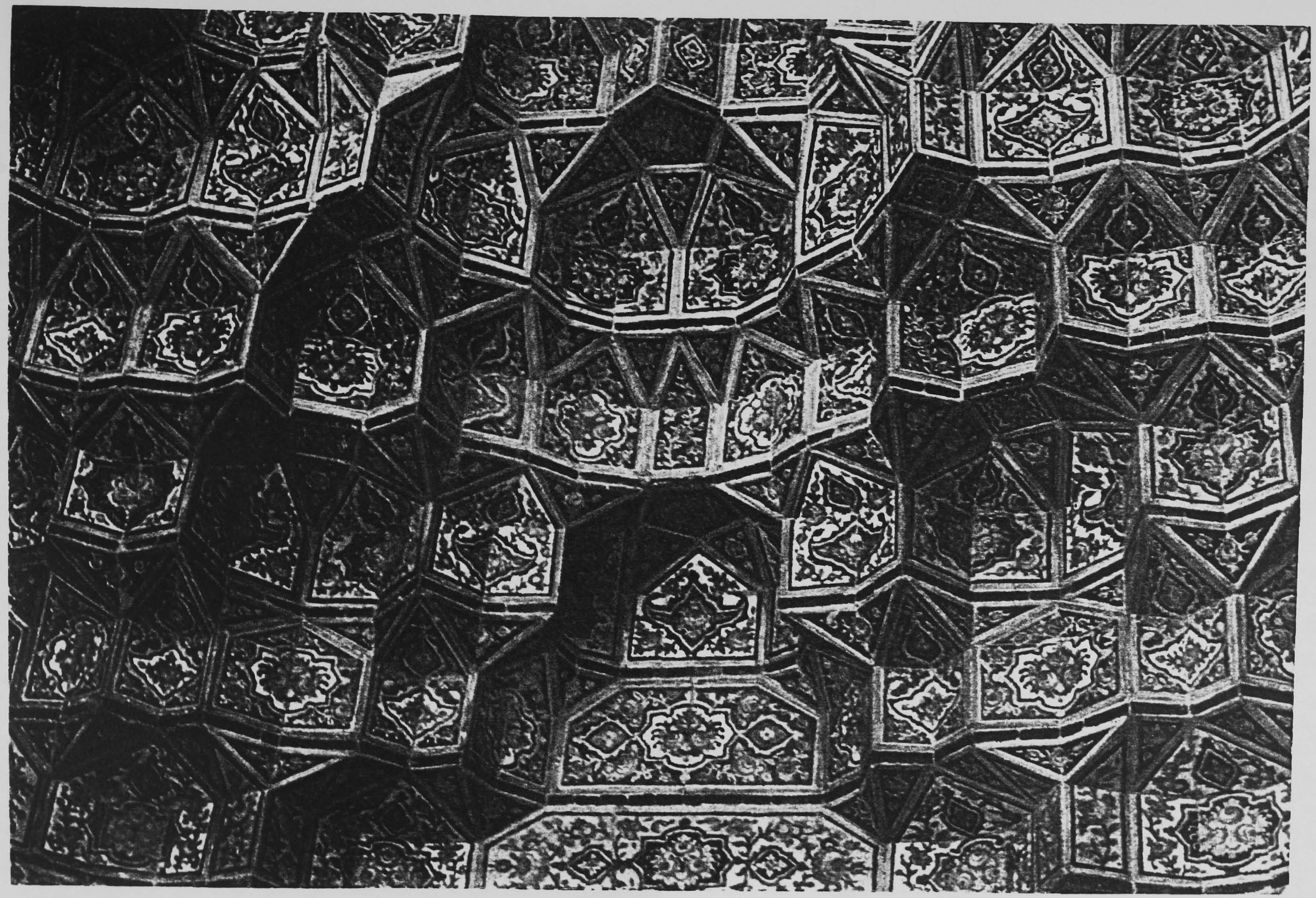


Plate 16. Vakil mosque, detail stalactite vaulting, Shiraz, Iran, 18th century restoration.

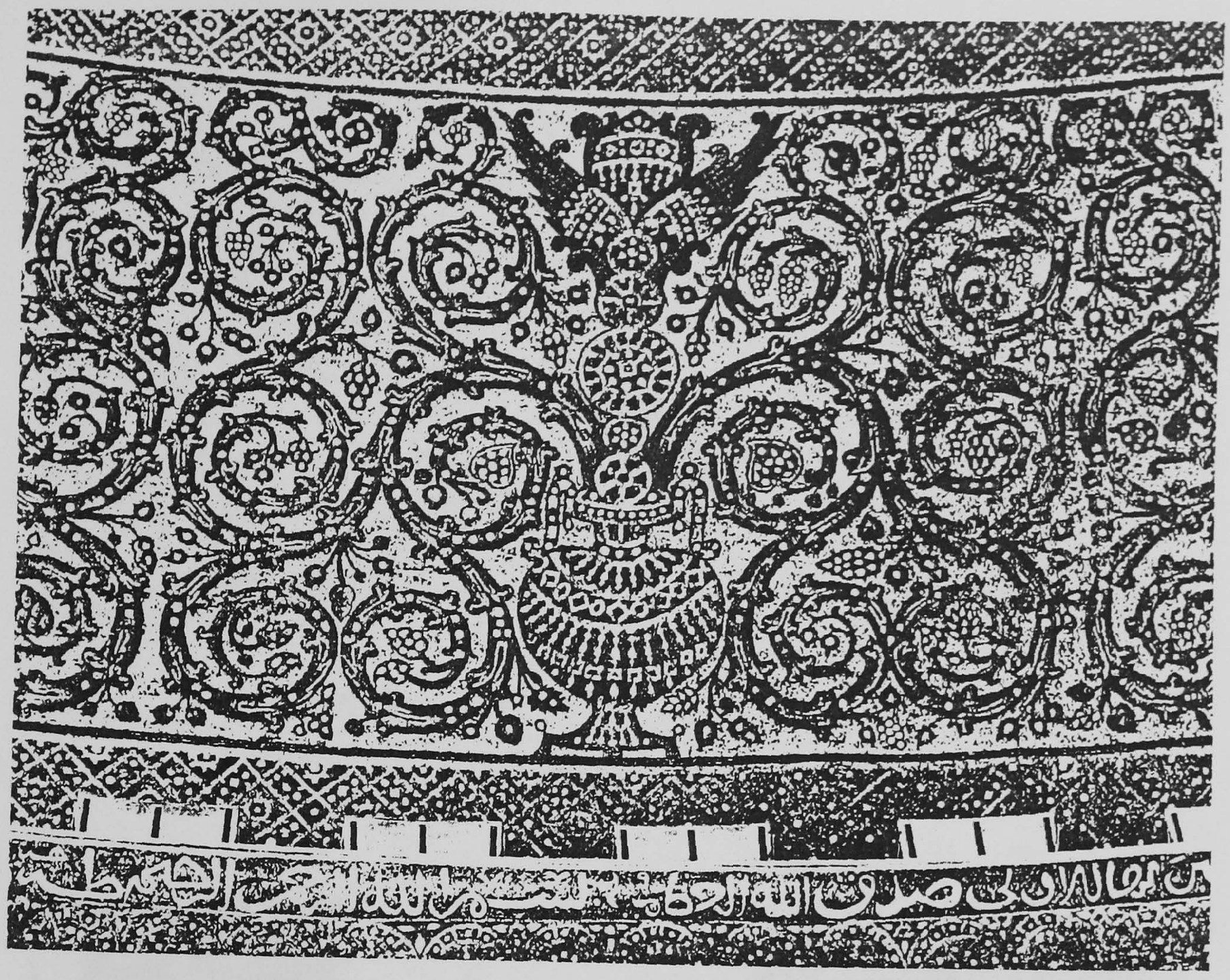


Fig. 1 Dome of the Rock, detail of scroll mosaics, Jerusalem, 7th century.

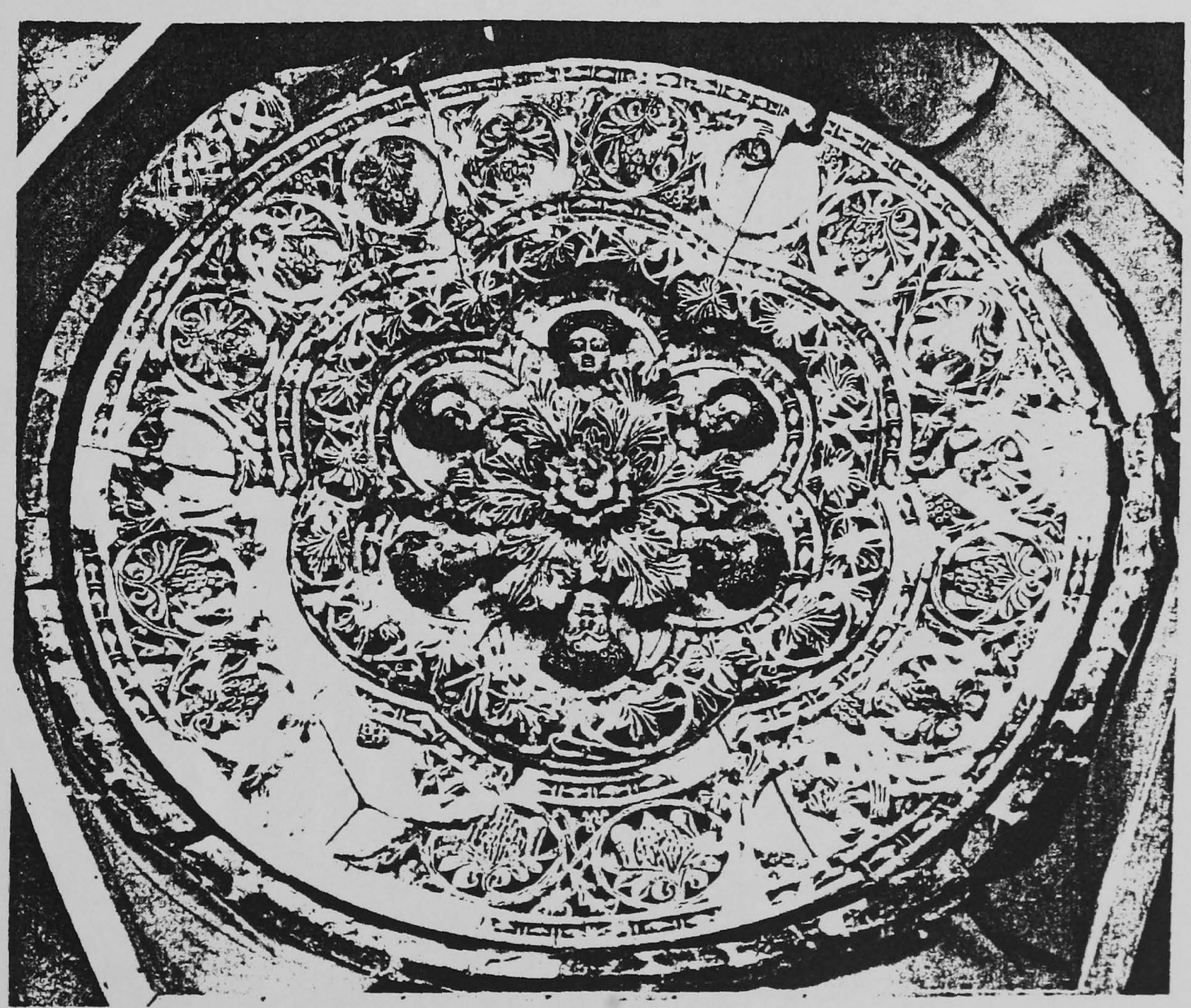


Fig. 2 Khirbat al-Mufjar, detail of domed divan ceiling with heads, Transjordan, 8th century.

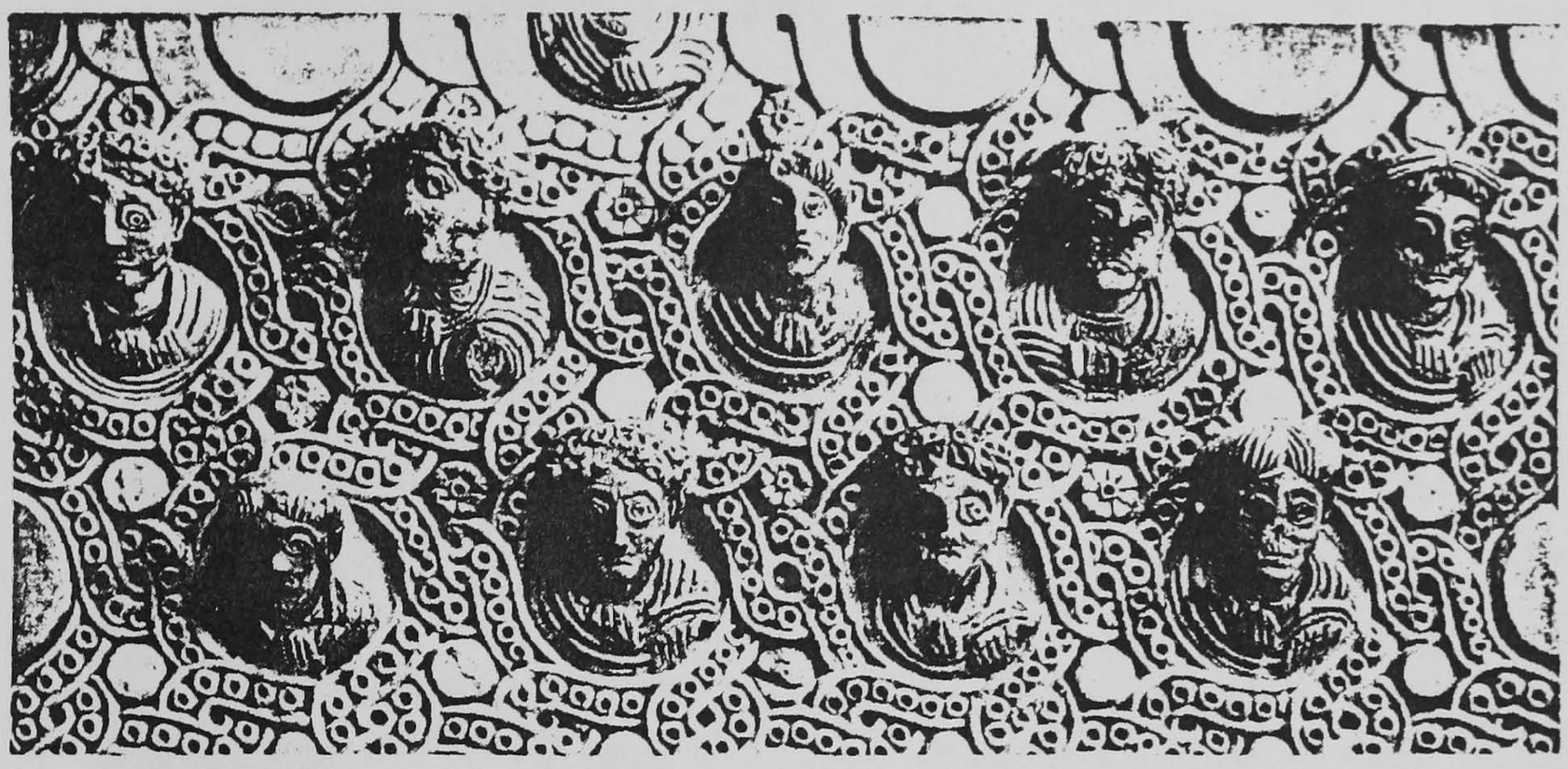


Fig. 3 Khirbat al-Mufjar, detail of frieze interlace with heads, Transjordan, 8th century.

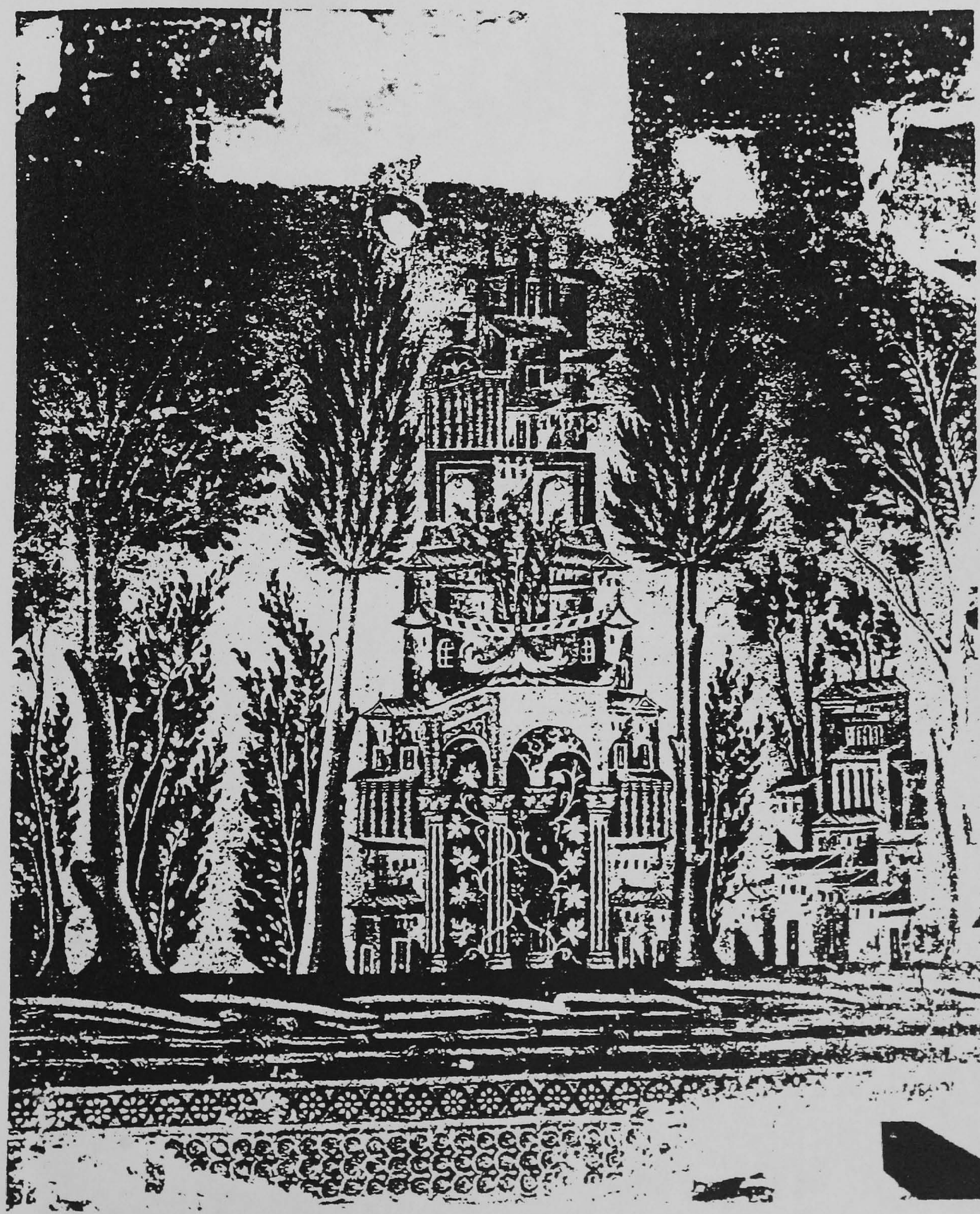


Fig. 4 Great Mosque of Damascus, detail of mosaic from the western portico, Syria, 706.

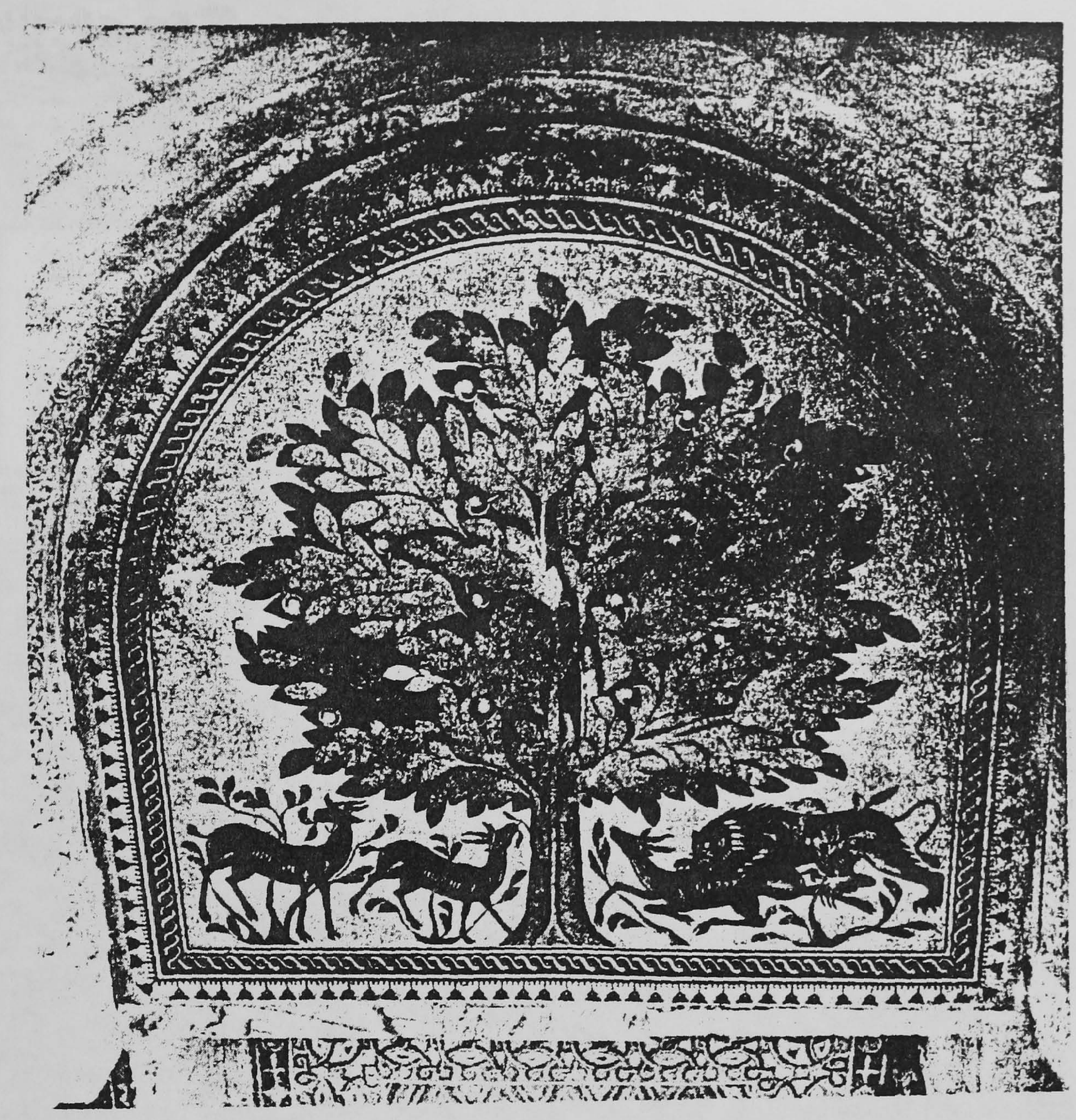


Fig. 5 Khirbat al-Mufjar, detail of mosaic of lions hunting gazelles under a tree, Transjordan, 8th century.

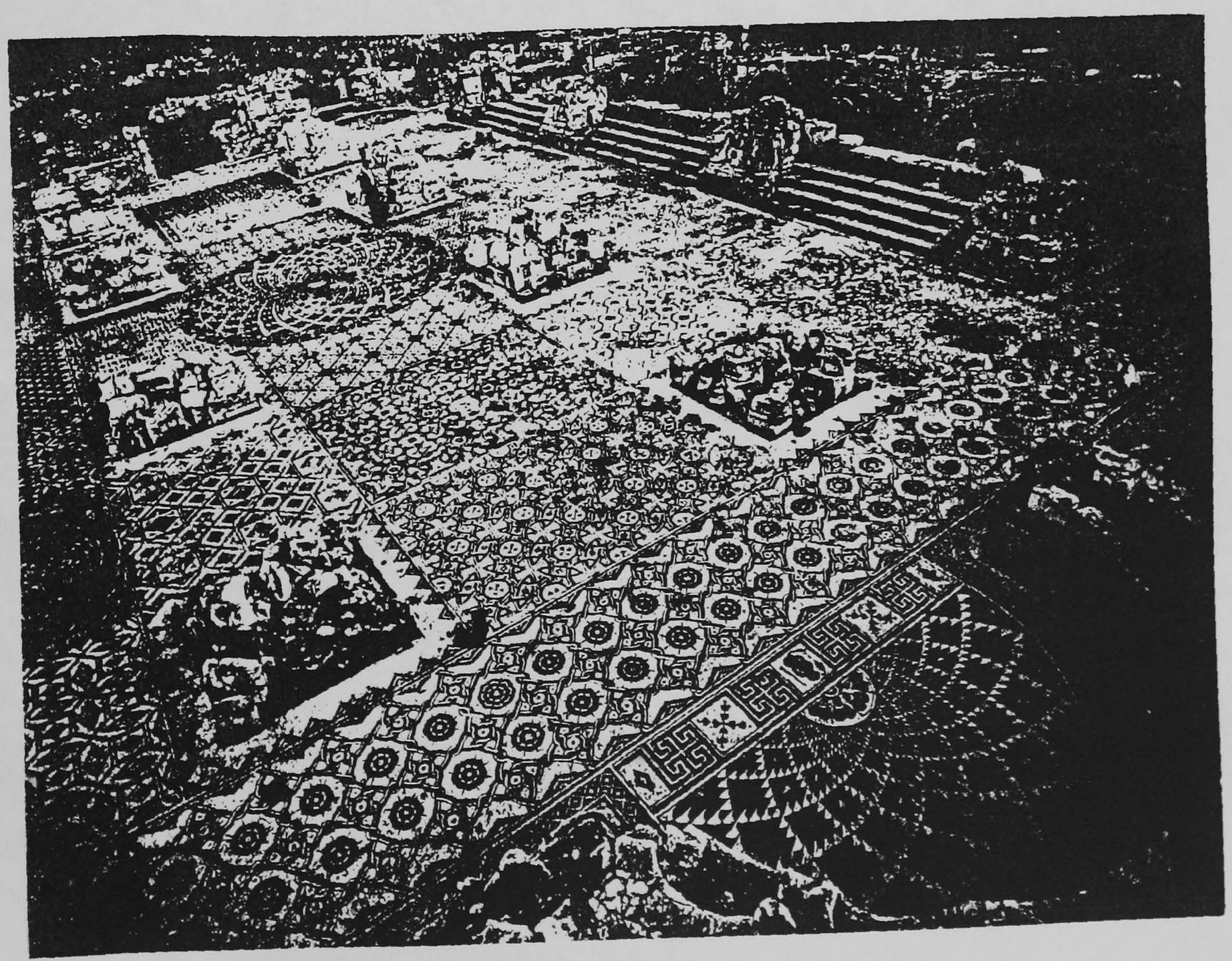


Fig. 6 Khirbat al-Mufjar, floor mosaics in bath, Transjordan, 8th century.

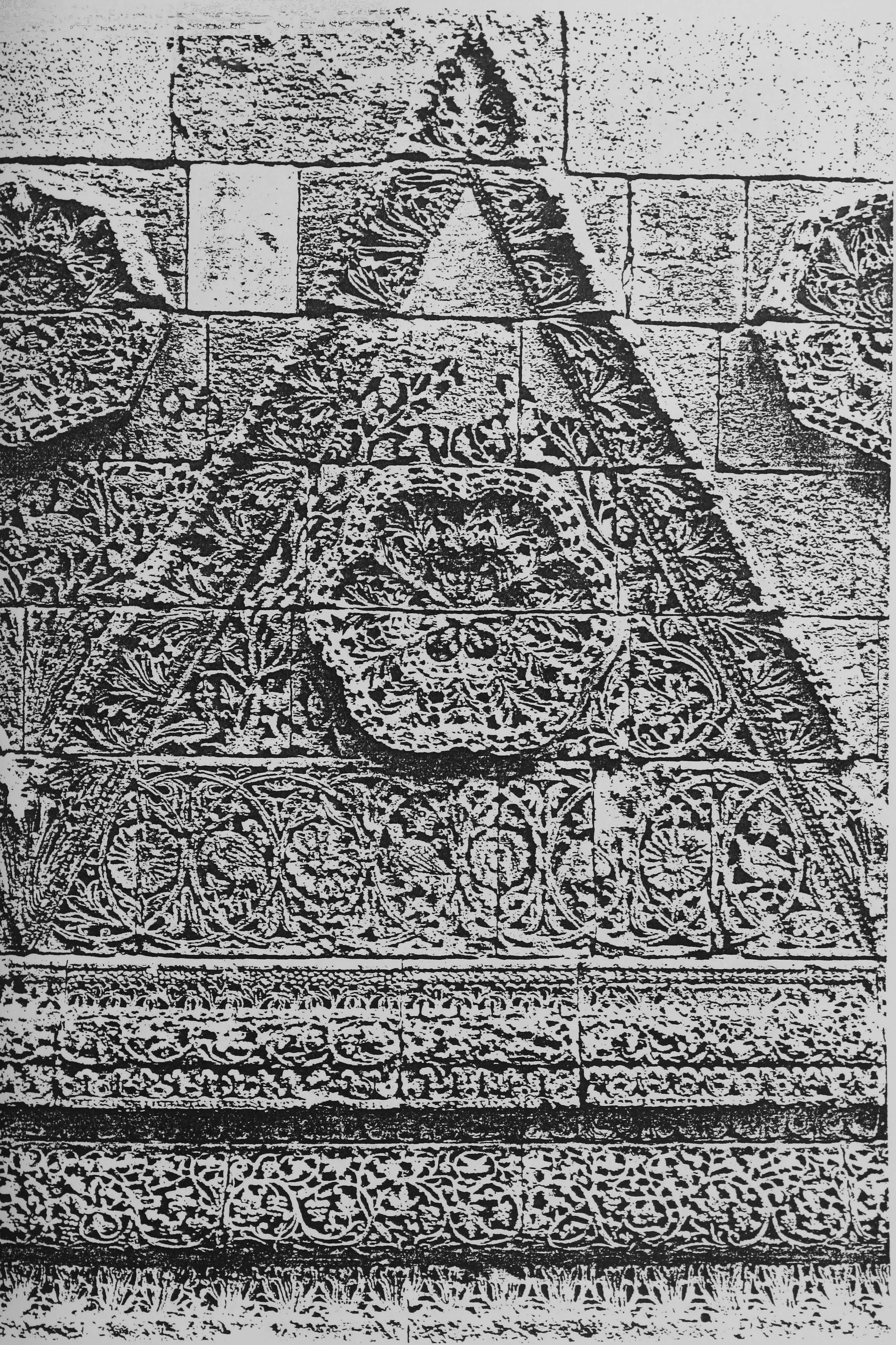


Fig. 7 Mshatta palace, detail of decorative triangle ornament, 8th century.

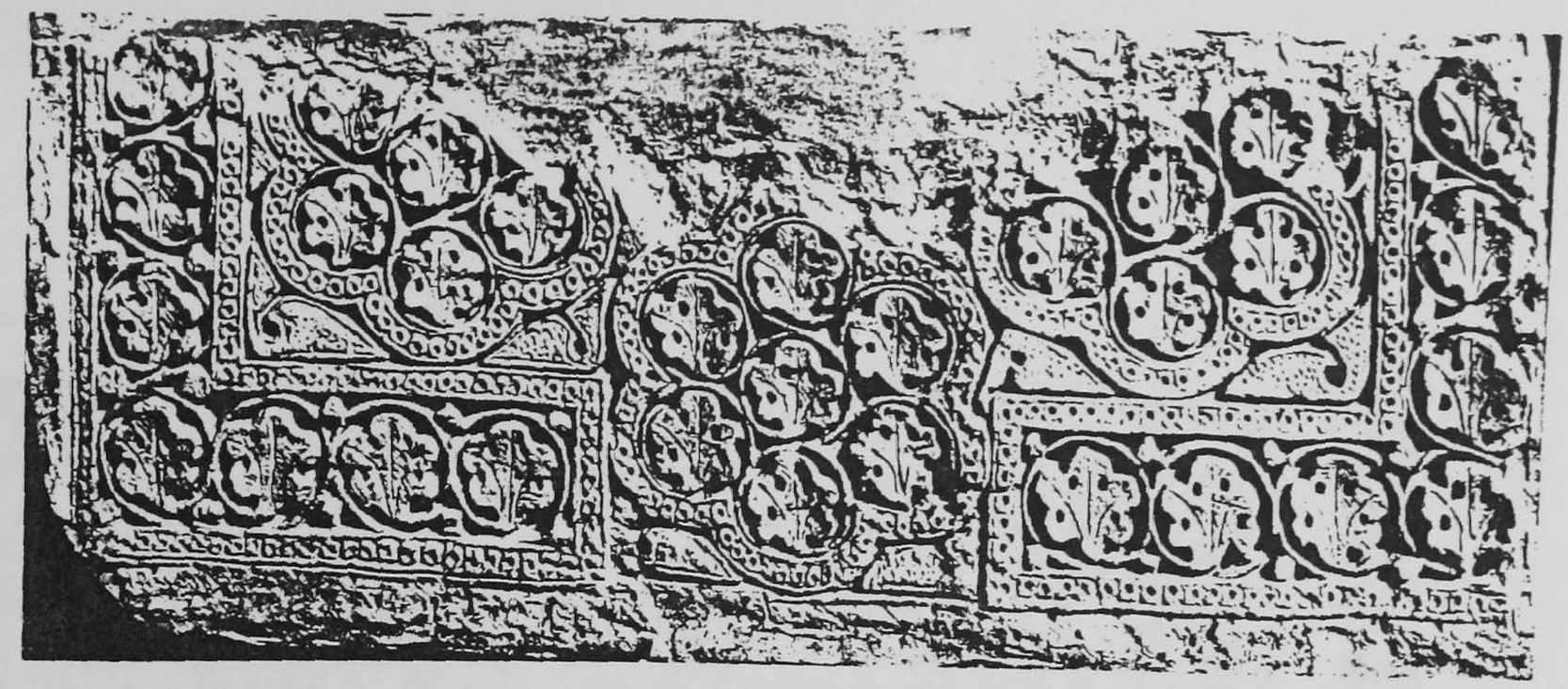


Fig. 8 Samarra, detail of wall stucco, Iraq, 9th century.

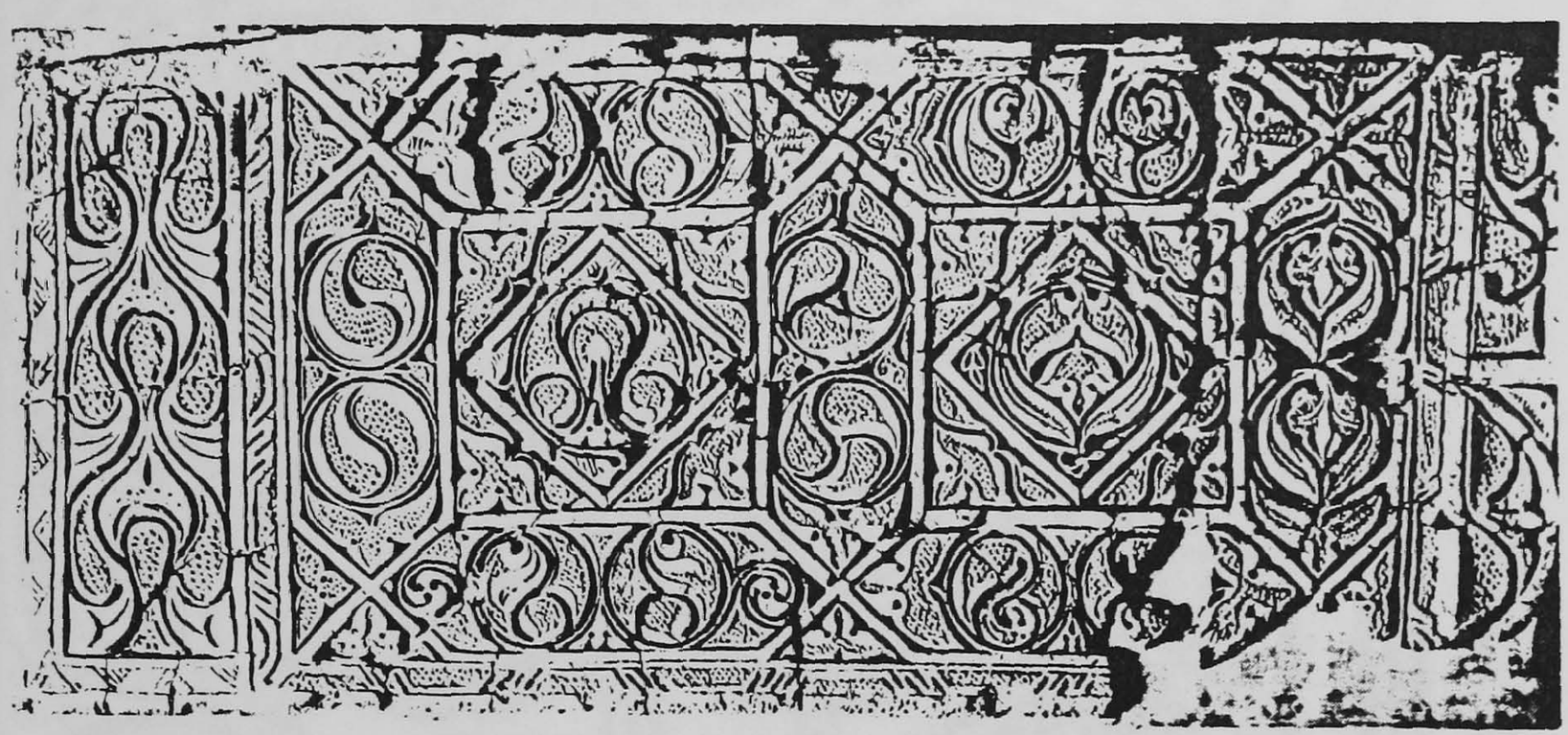


Fig. 9 Samarra, detail of wall stucco, Iraq, 9th century.

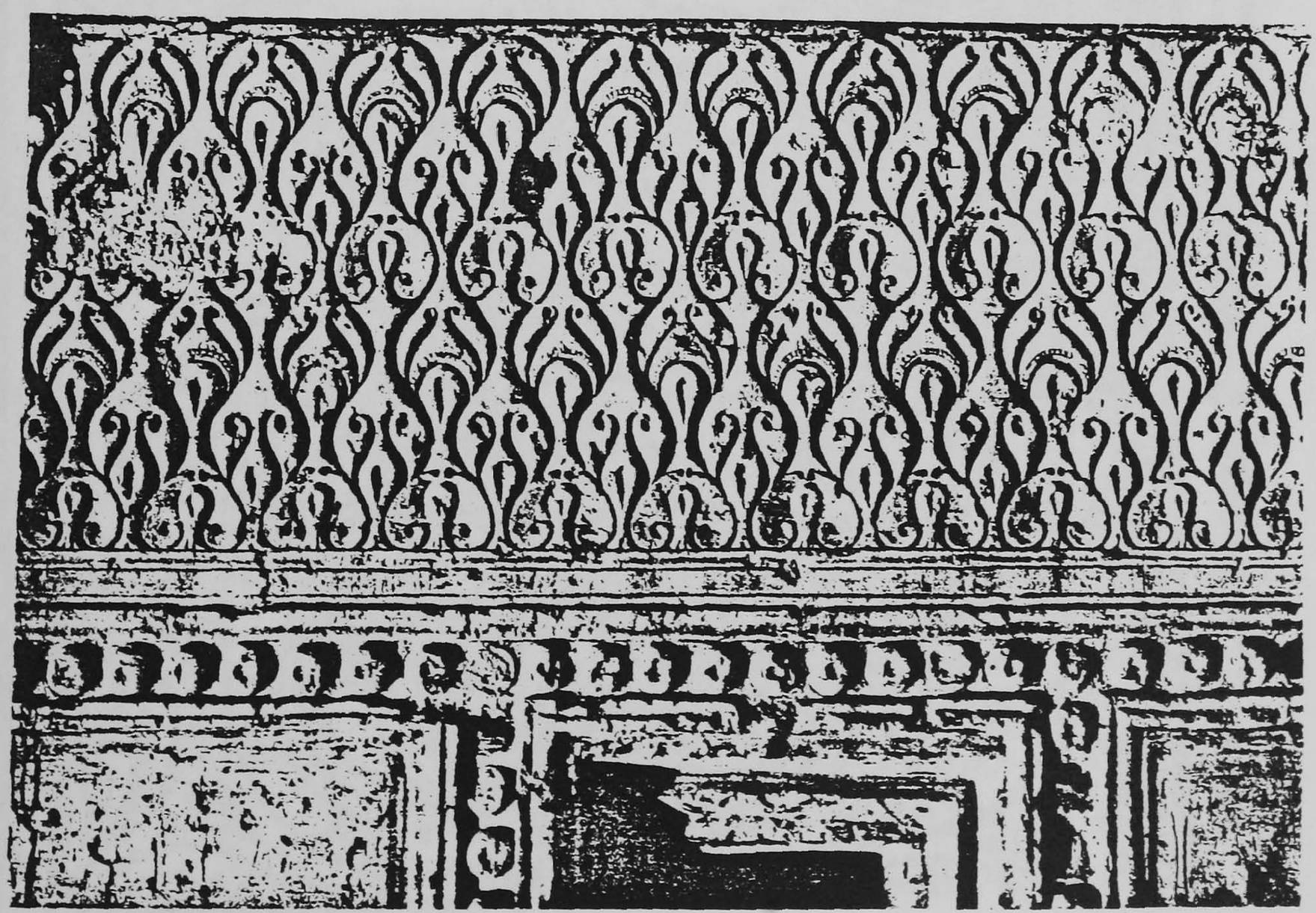


Fig. 10 Palace of Balkuwara, detail of wall stucco, Samarra, Iraq, 9th century.

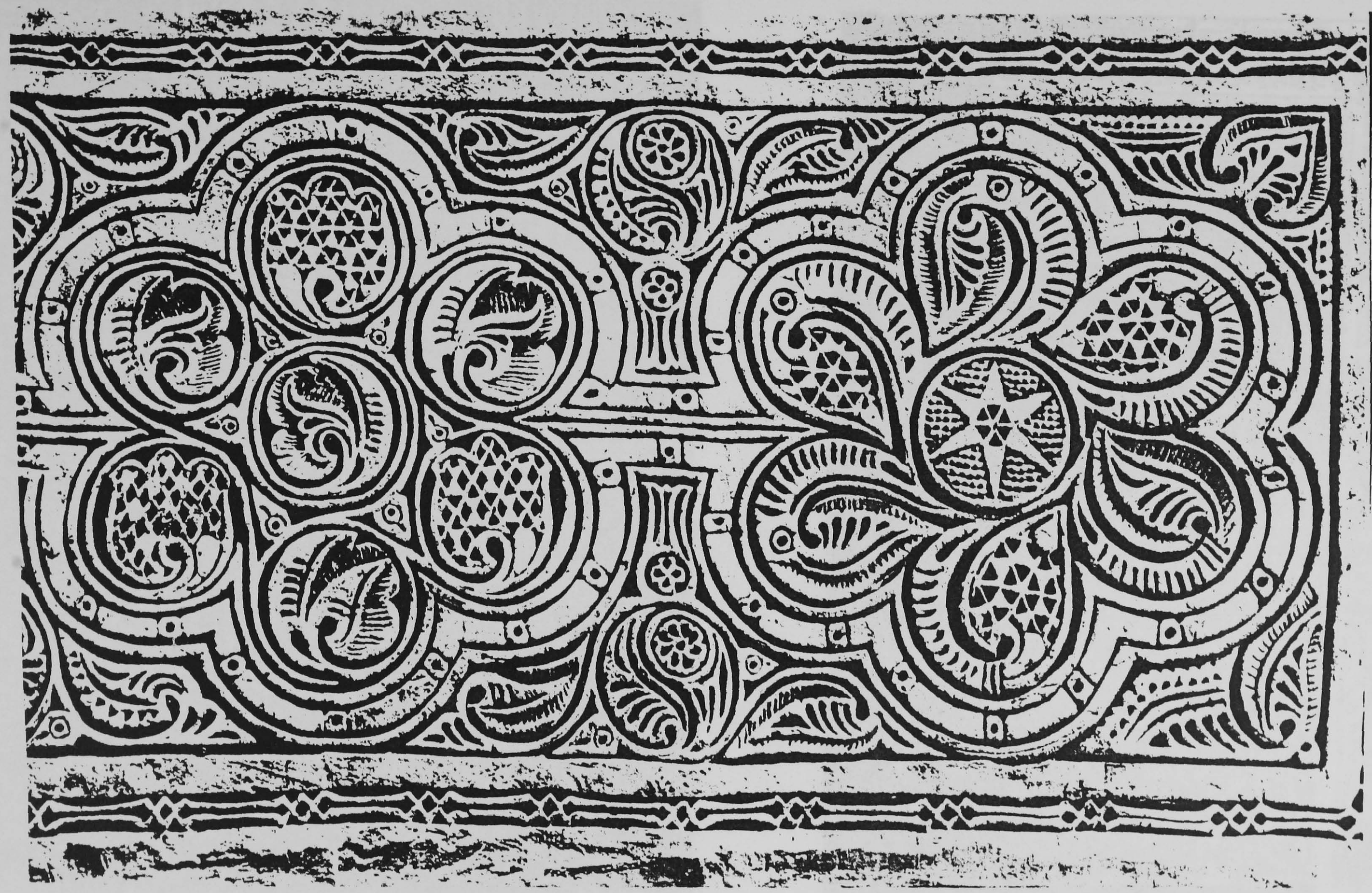


Fig. 11 Nishapur plaster panel, Khurassan, Iran, 10th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

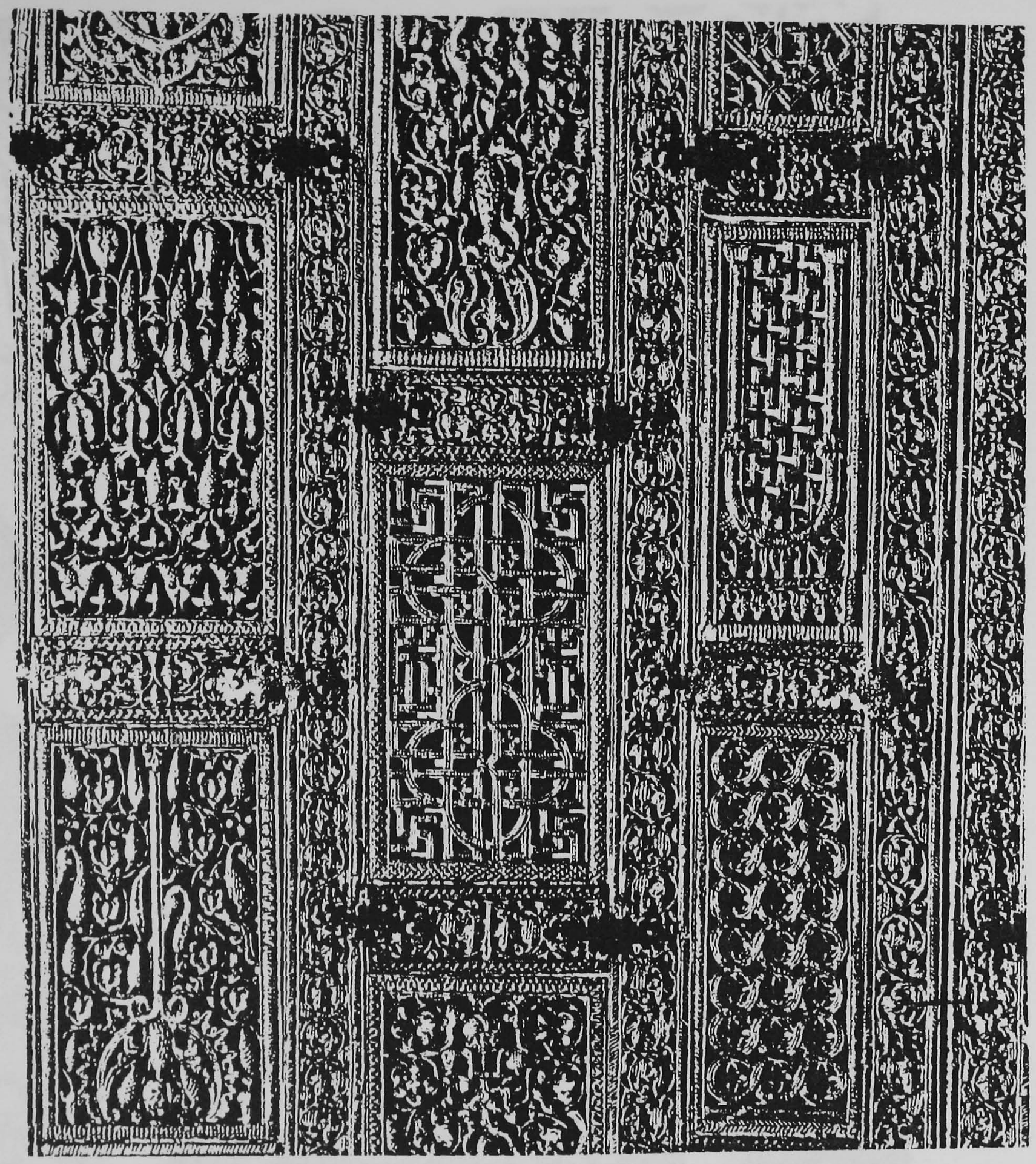


Fig. 12 Great Mosque at Khairouan, detail of wood panels from minbar, Tunisia.

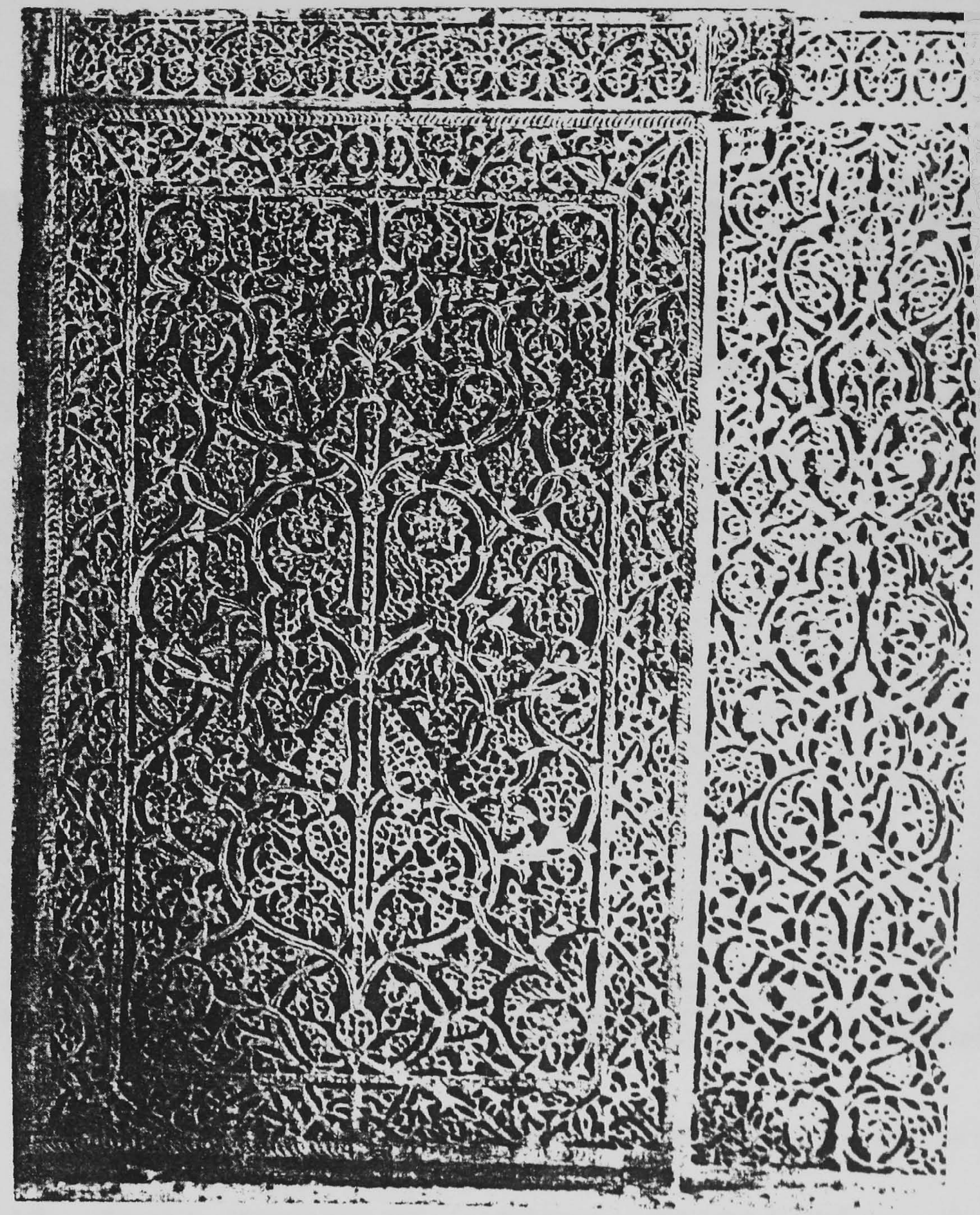
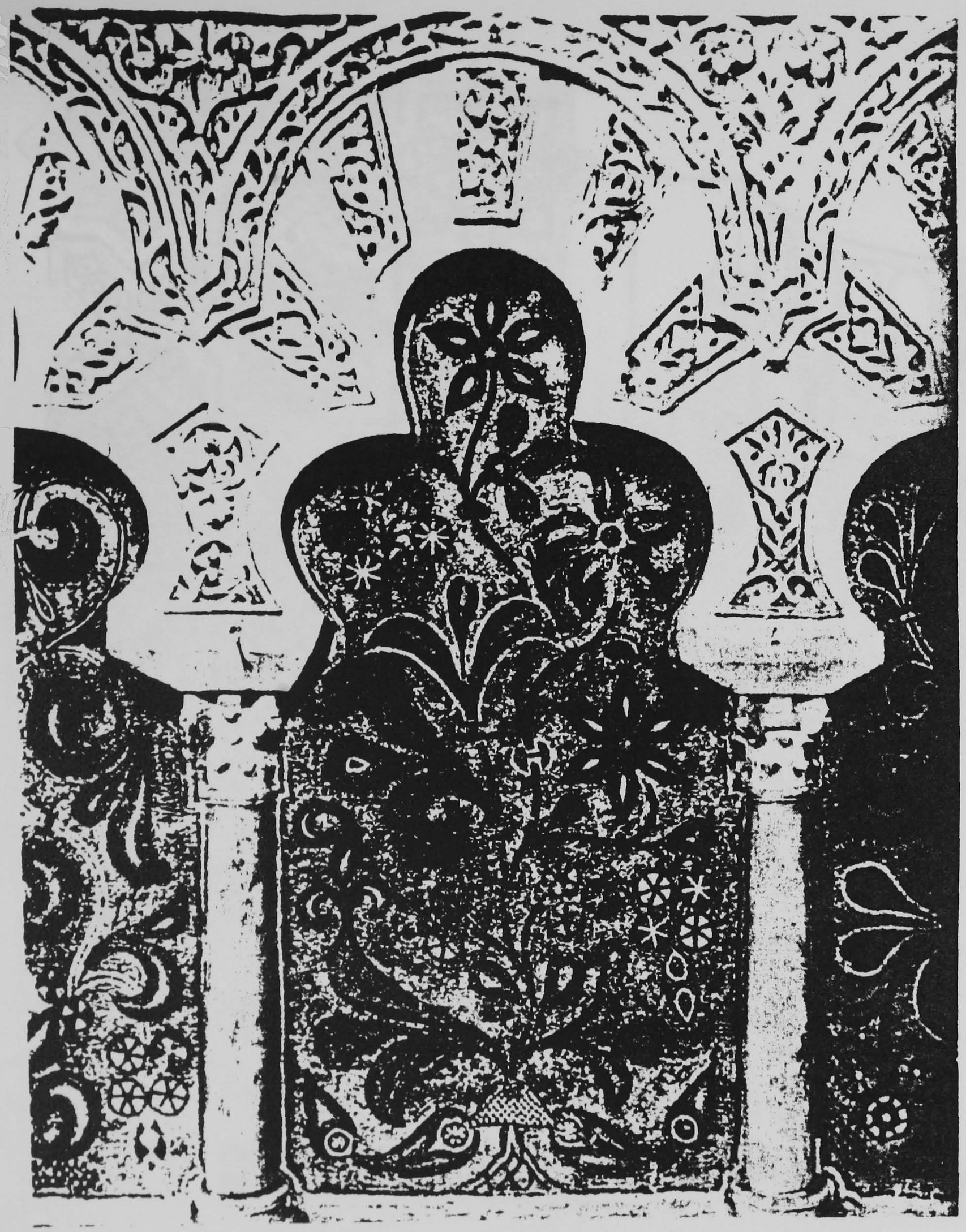


Fig. 13 Great Mosque at Cordova, detail of marble carving from mihrab, Spain, 961-976.



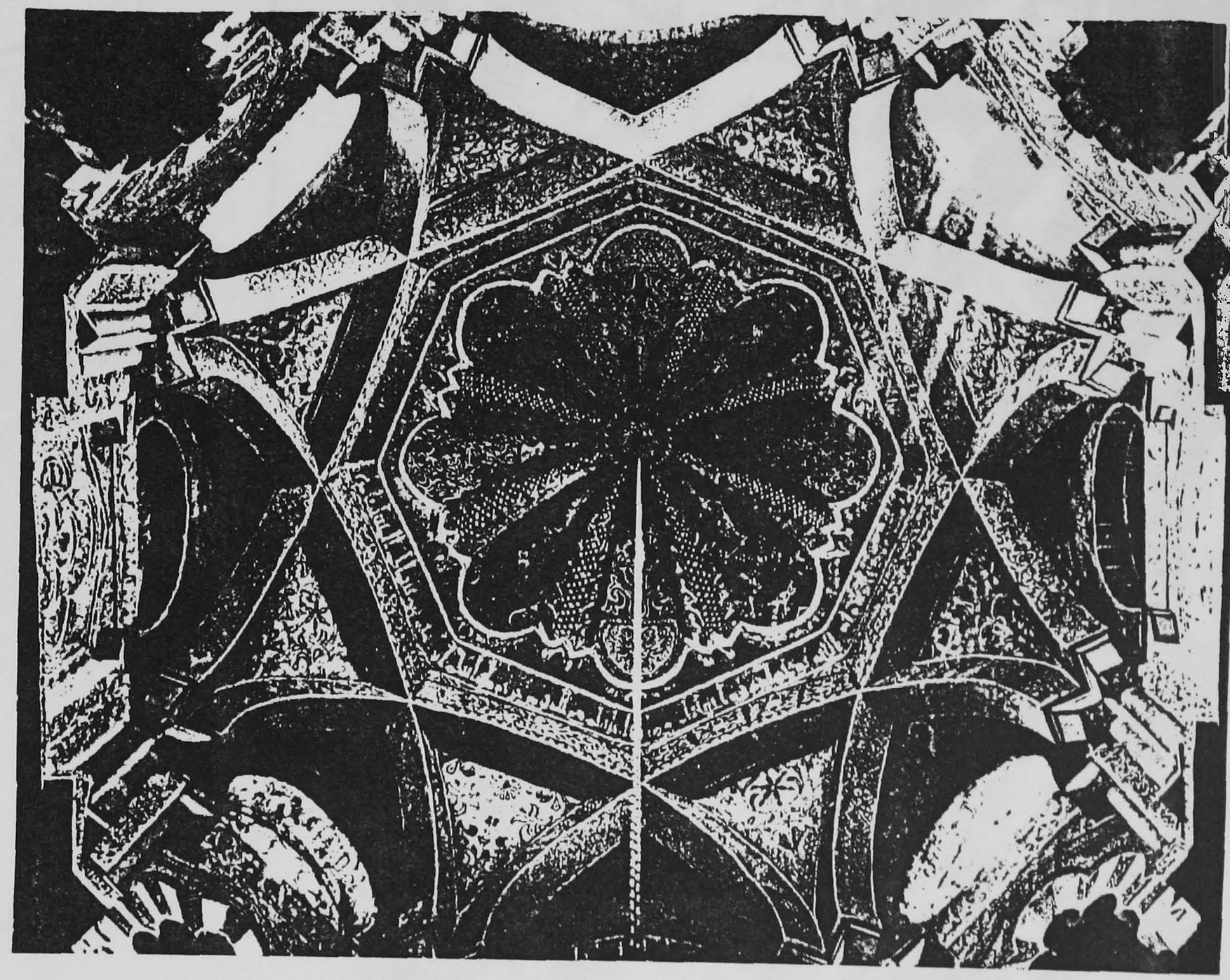
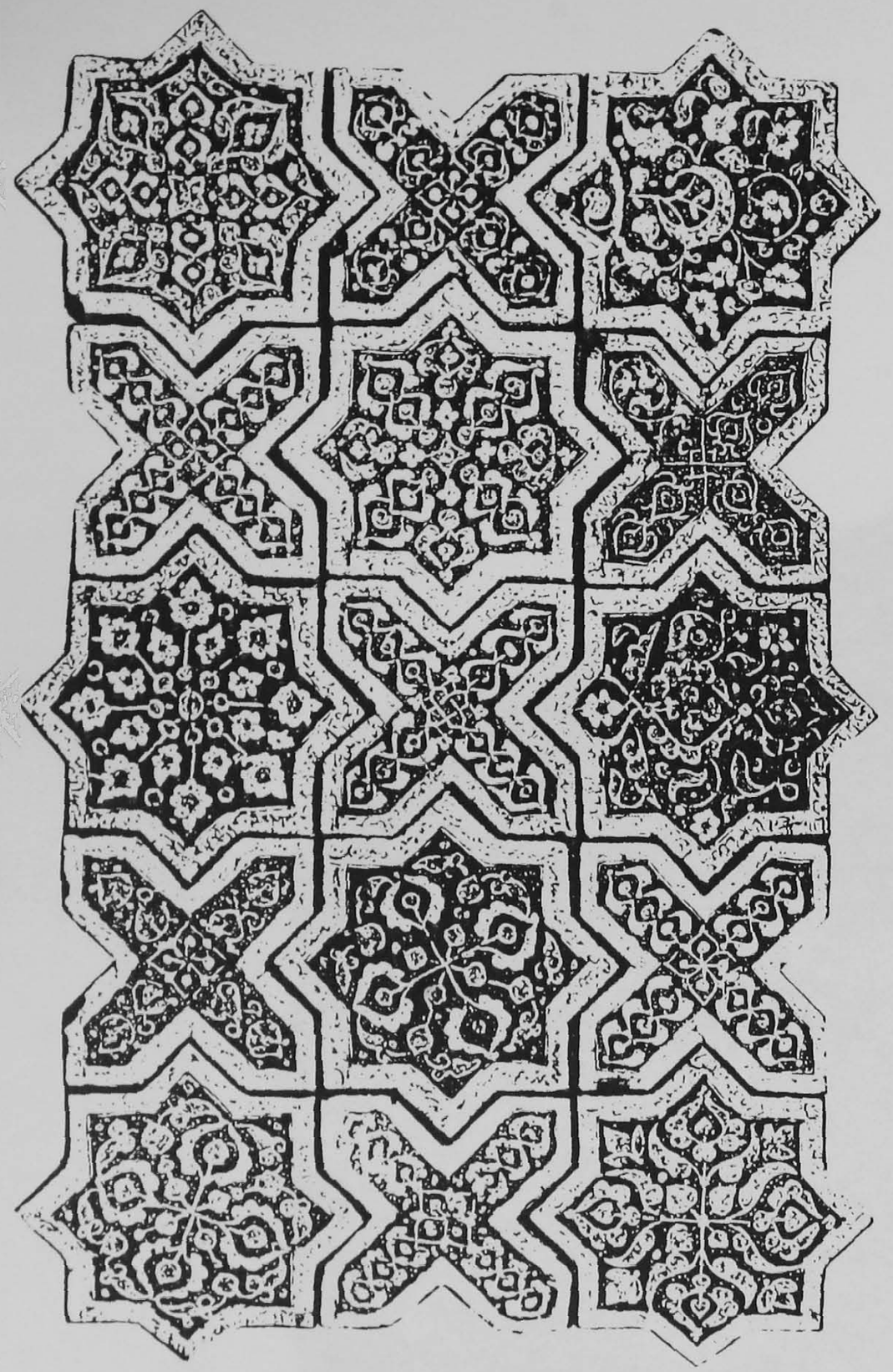
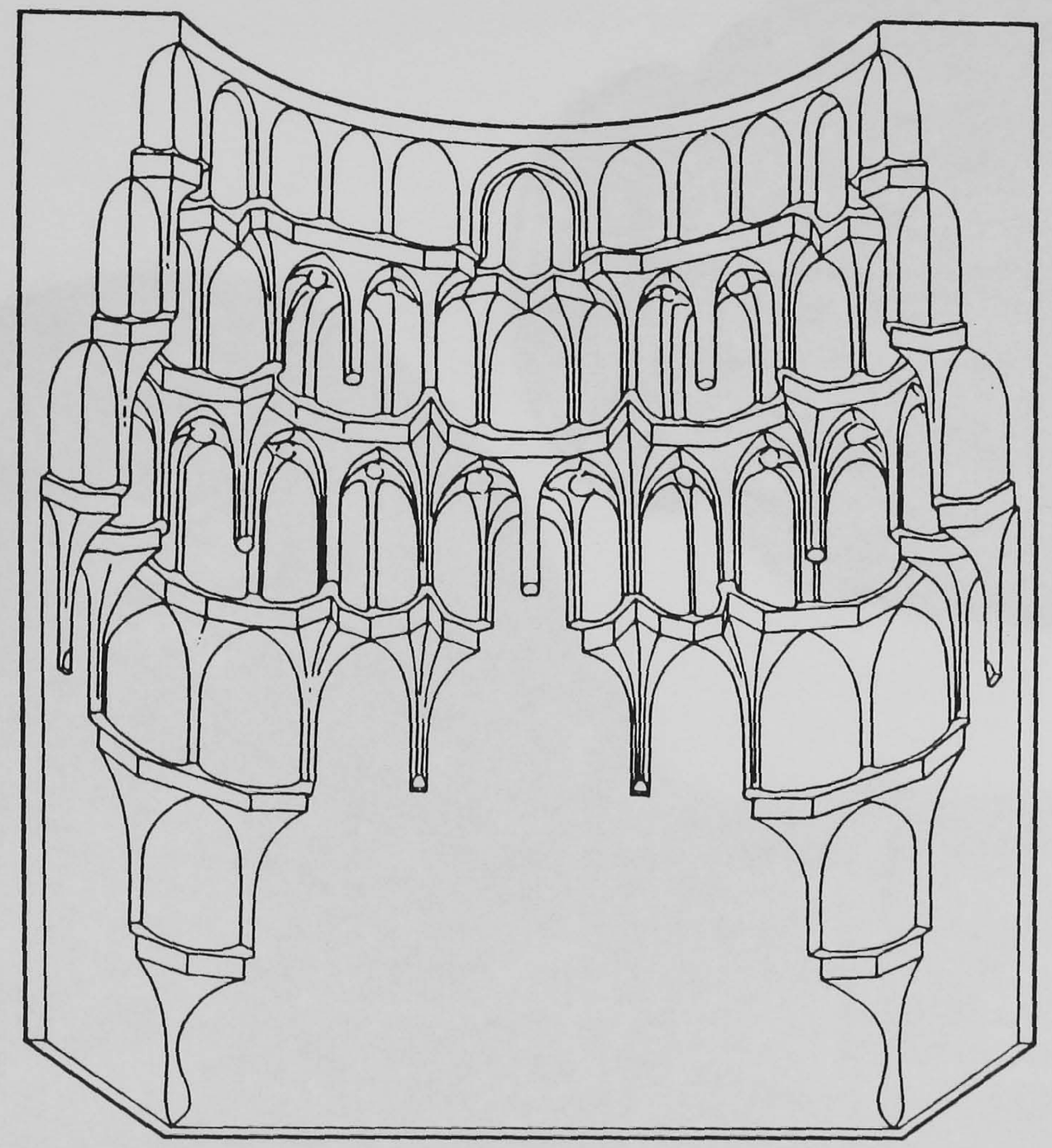


Fig. 14 Great Mosque at Cordova, detail of mosaics from mihrab, Spain, 961-976.

Fig. 15 Great Mosque at Cordova, detail of intercrossing vault dome in front of mihrab, Spain, 961-976.





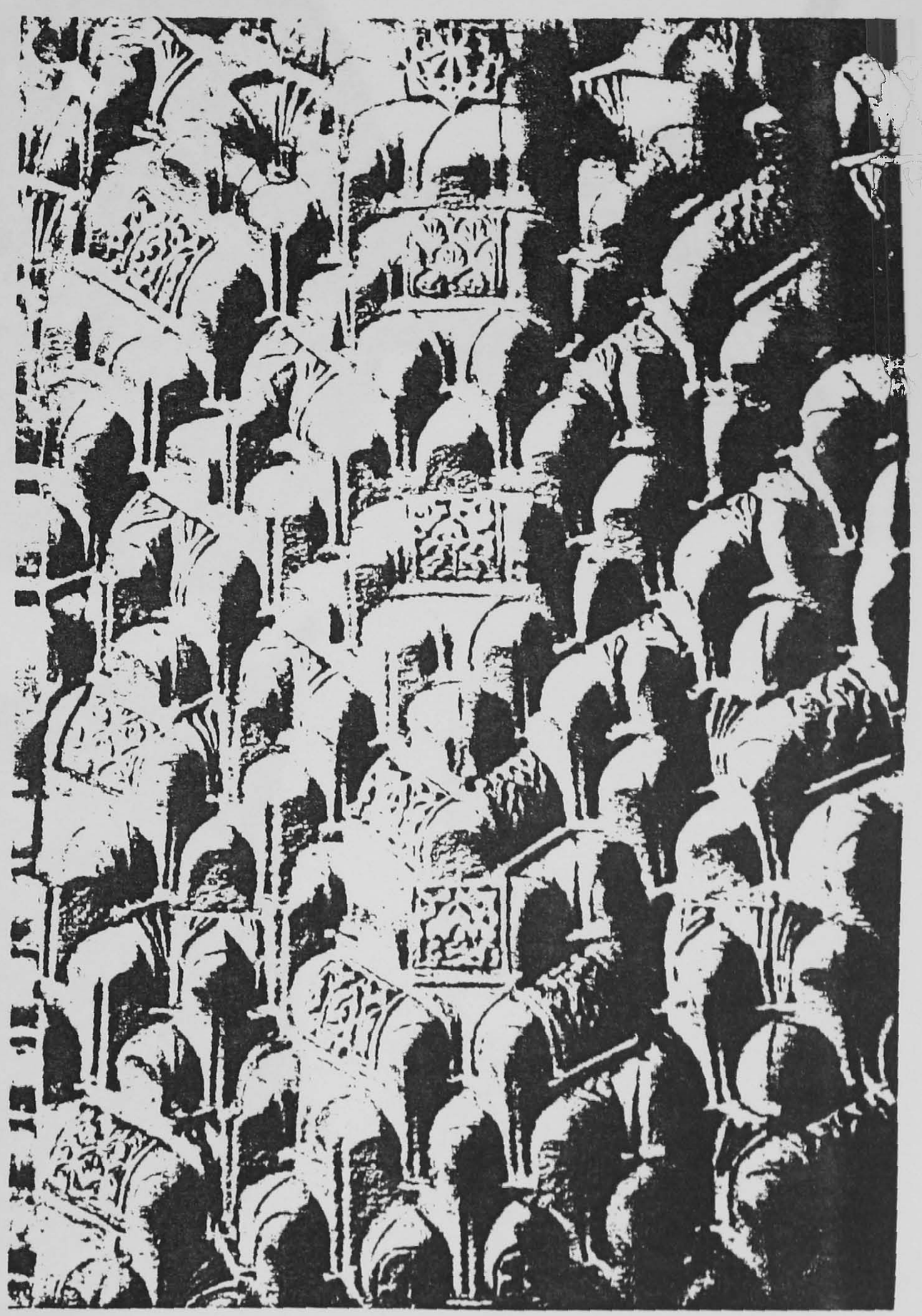


Fig. 16 Panel of lustre-painted tiles, probably Kashan, circa 1220, London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig. 17 Drawing of muqarnas stalactites.

Fig. 18 Bu'Inaniyya madrassah, detail of muqarnas vaulting, Fez, Morocco, 14th century.

Fig. 19 Ewer, brass inlay, Persian, late 13th century.

Fig. 20 Ewer, brass inlay, Mosul, 1232, London, British Museum.

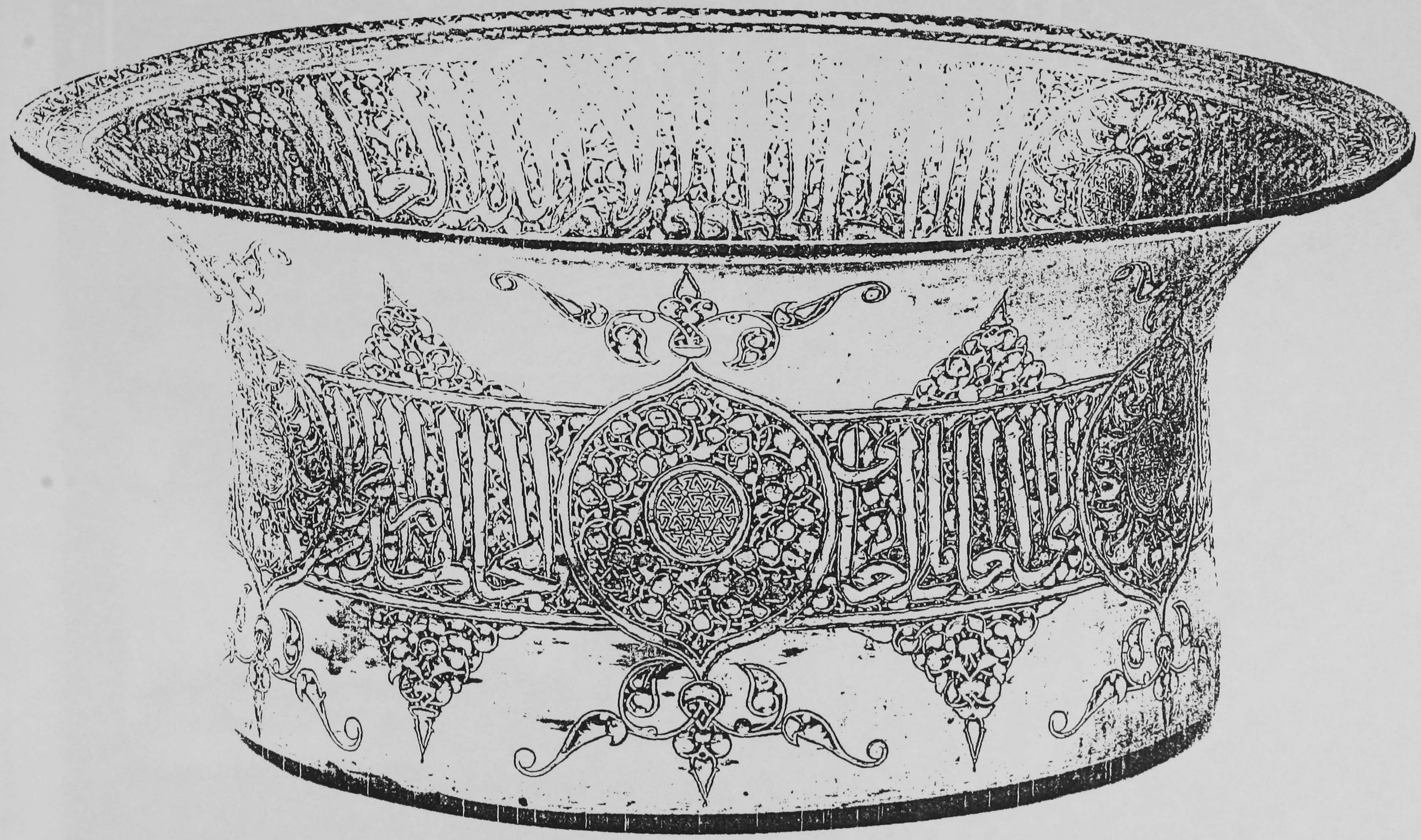


Fig. 21 Basin, brass inlay, Egypt, circa 1300.

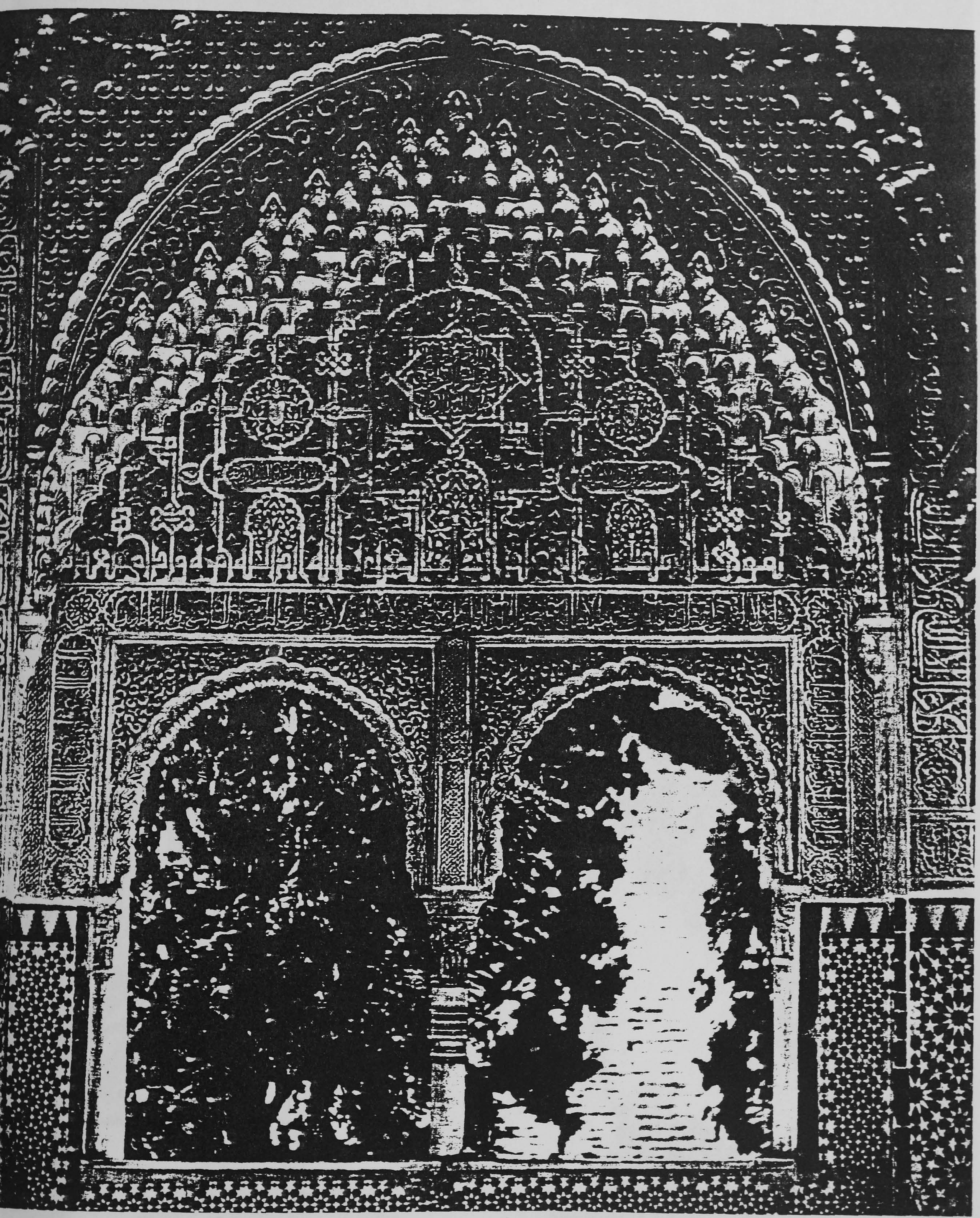


Fig. 22 Alhambra Palace, the Mirador or Lindaraja, Granada, Spain.

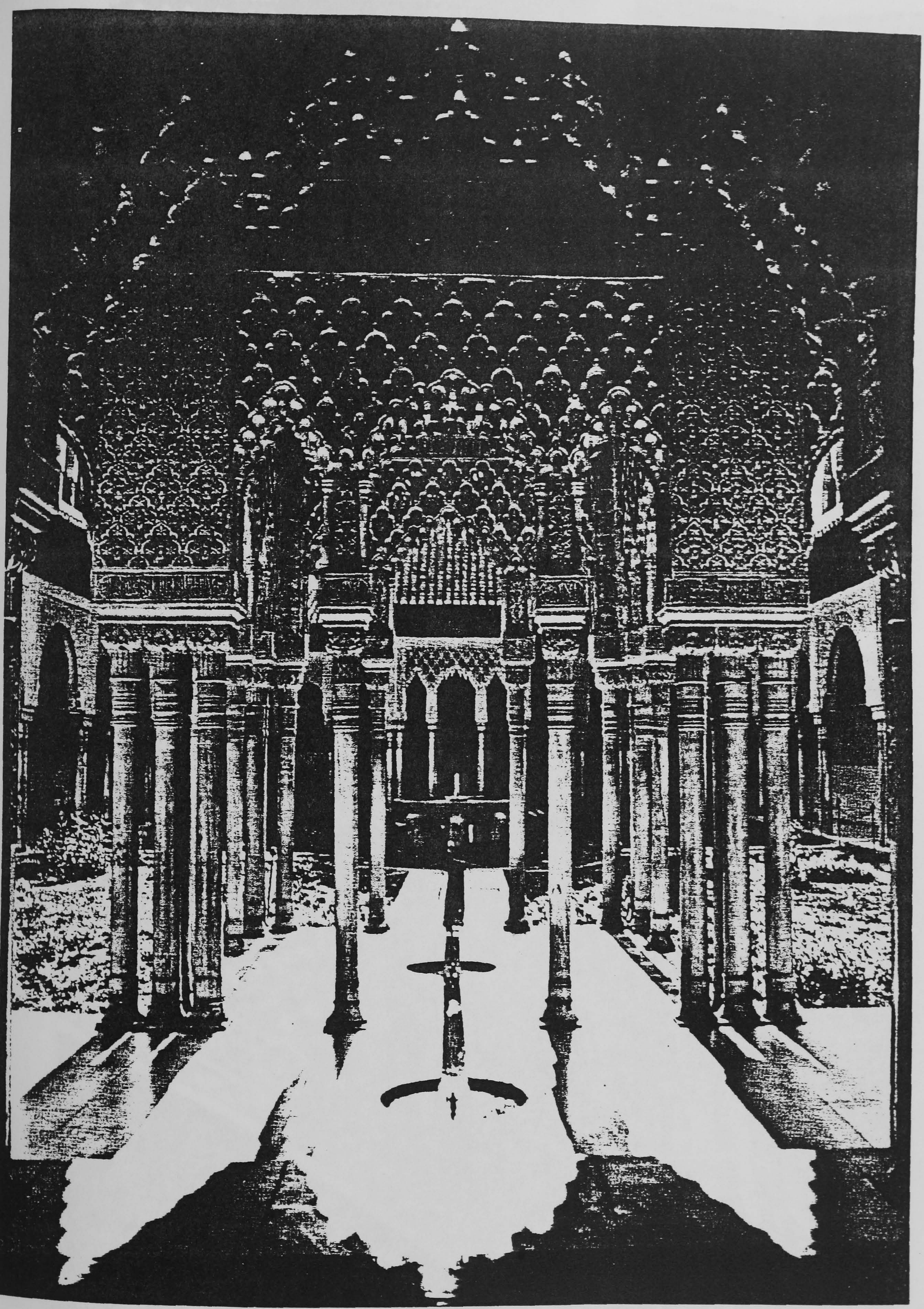
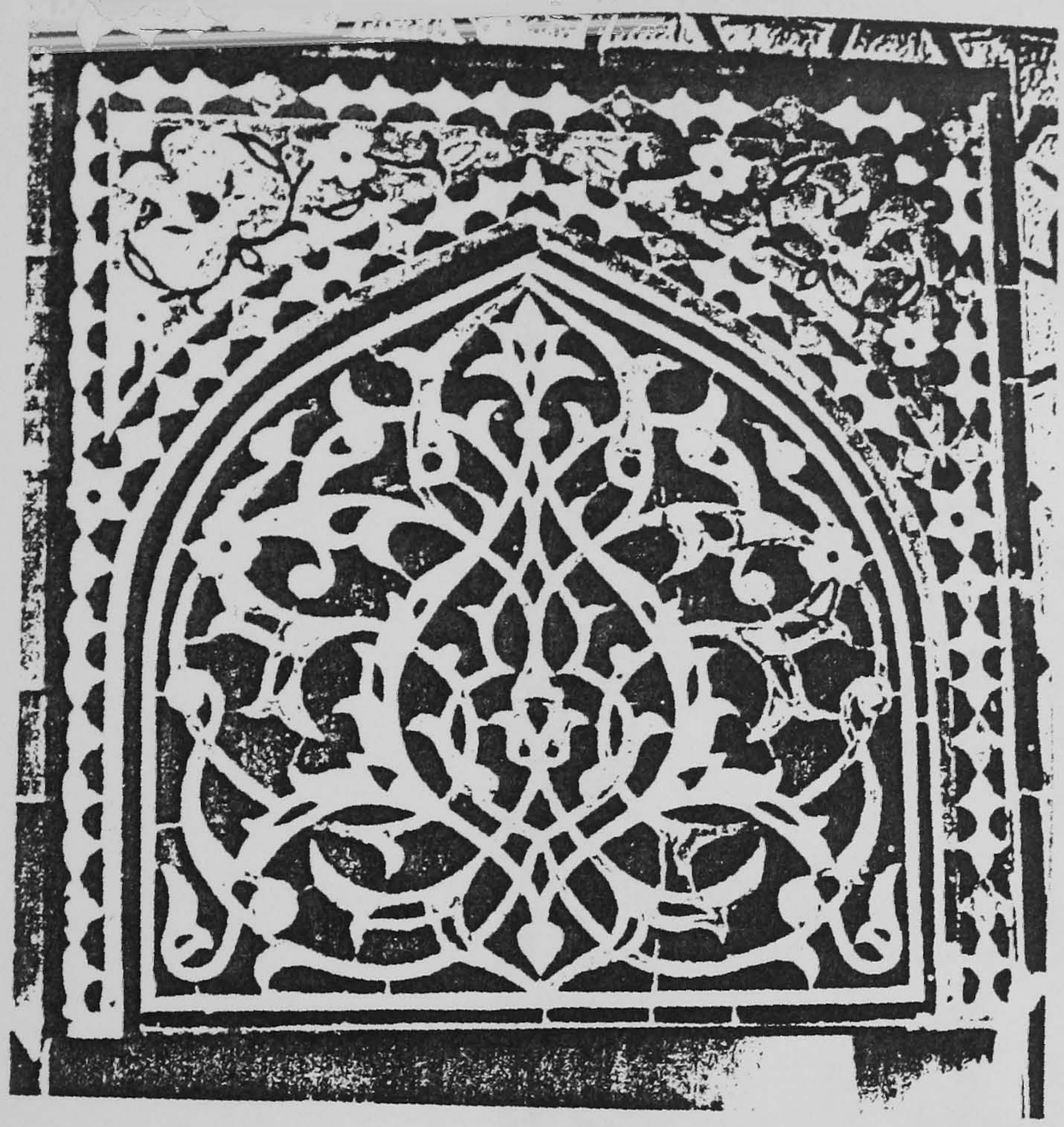
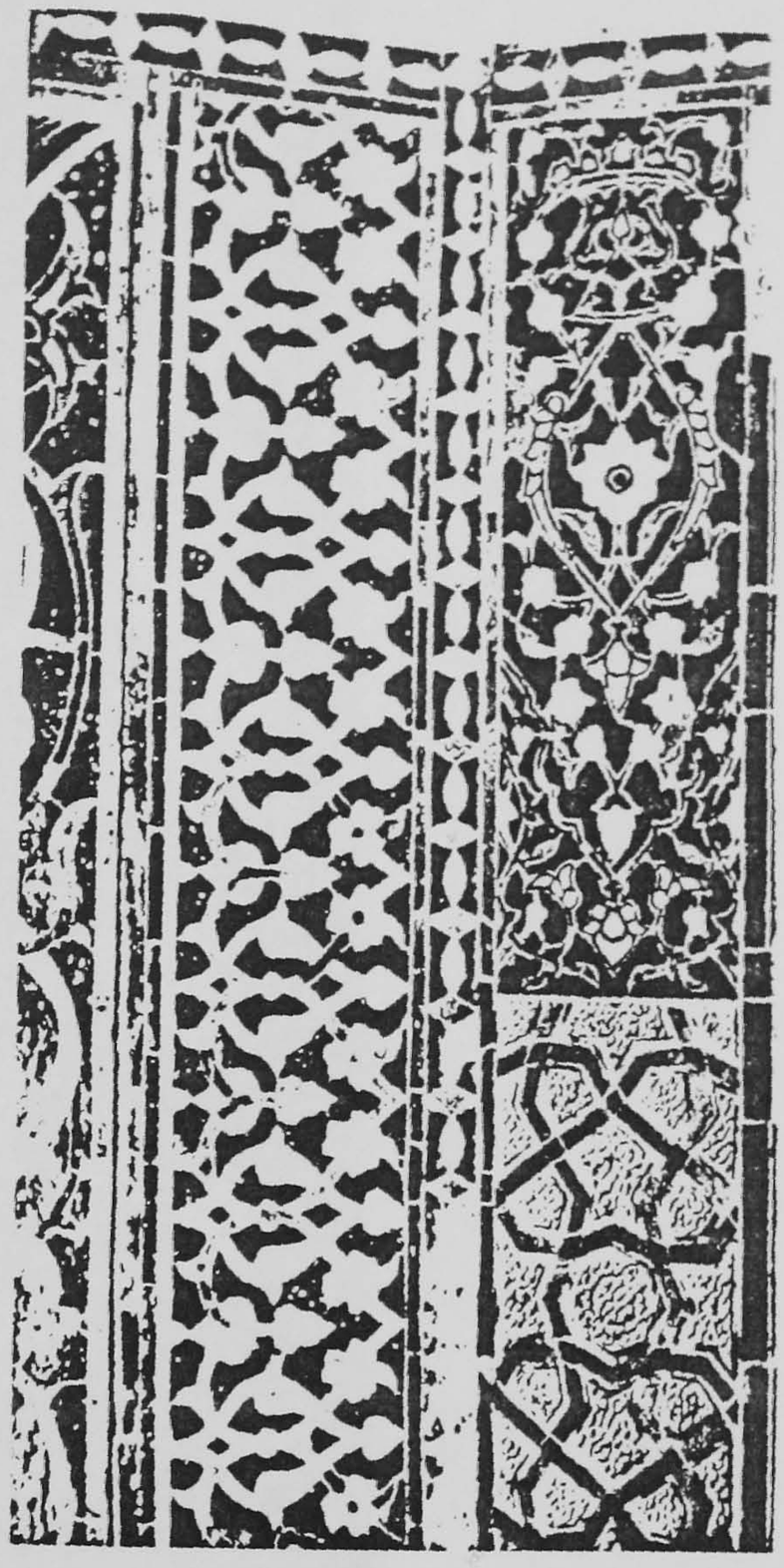


Fig. 23 Alhambra palace, the Court of Lions, Granada, Spain.





Figs.24, 25 Jami' mosque, detail of tile mosaics in mihrab, Yazd, 14th century.

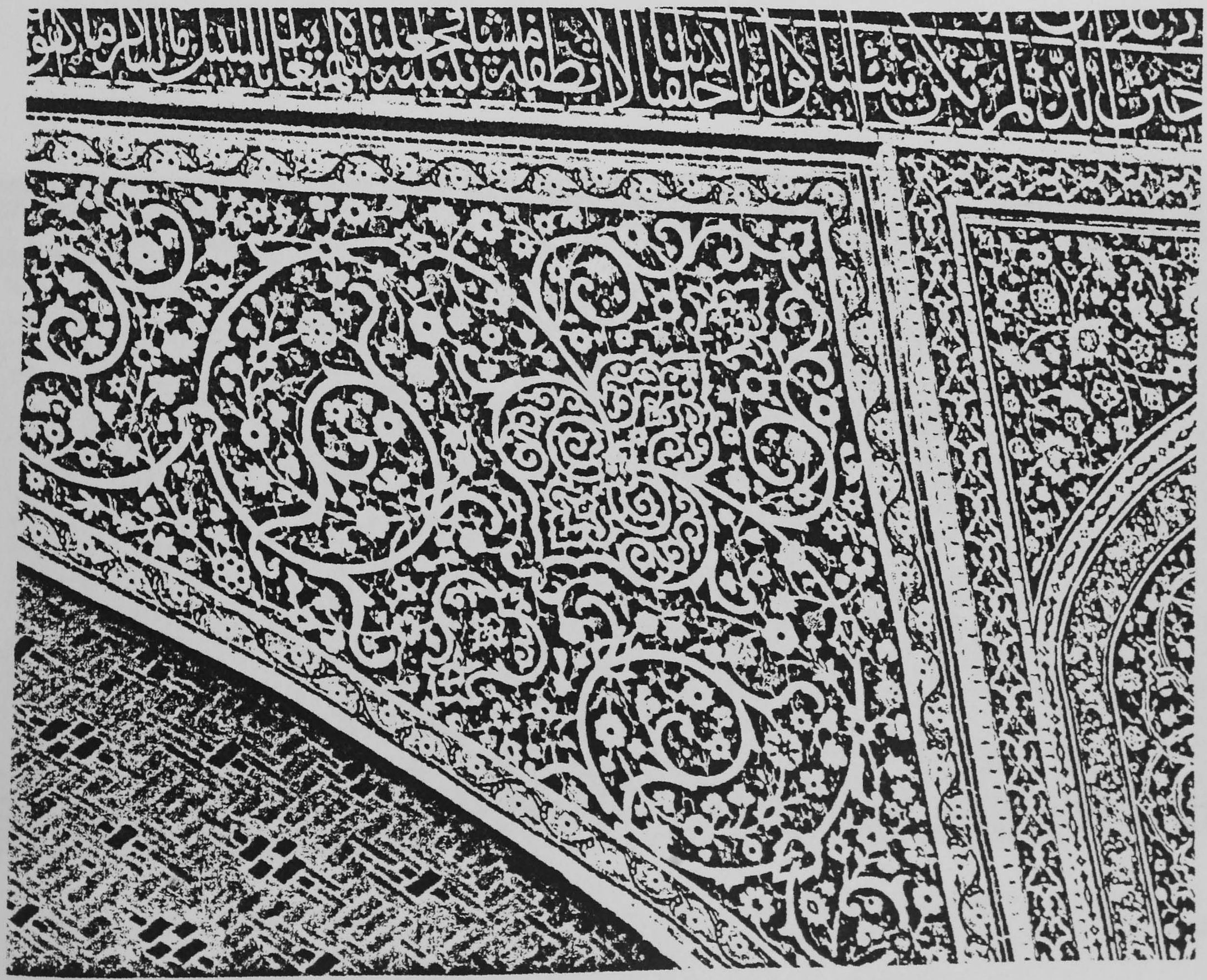


Fig. 26 Jami' mosque, detail of arabesque on qibla wall, Kirman, 1349.

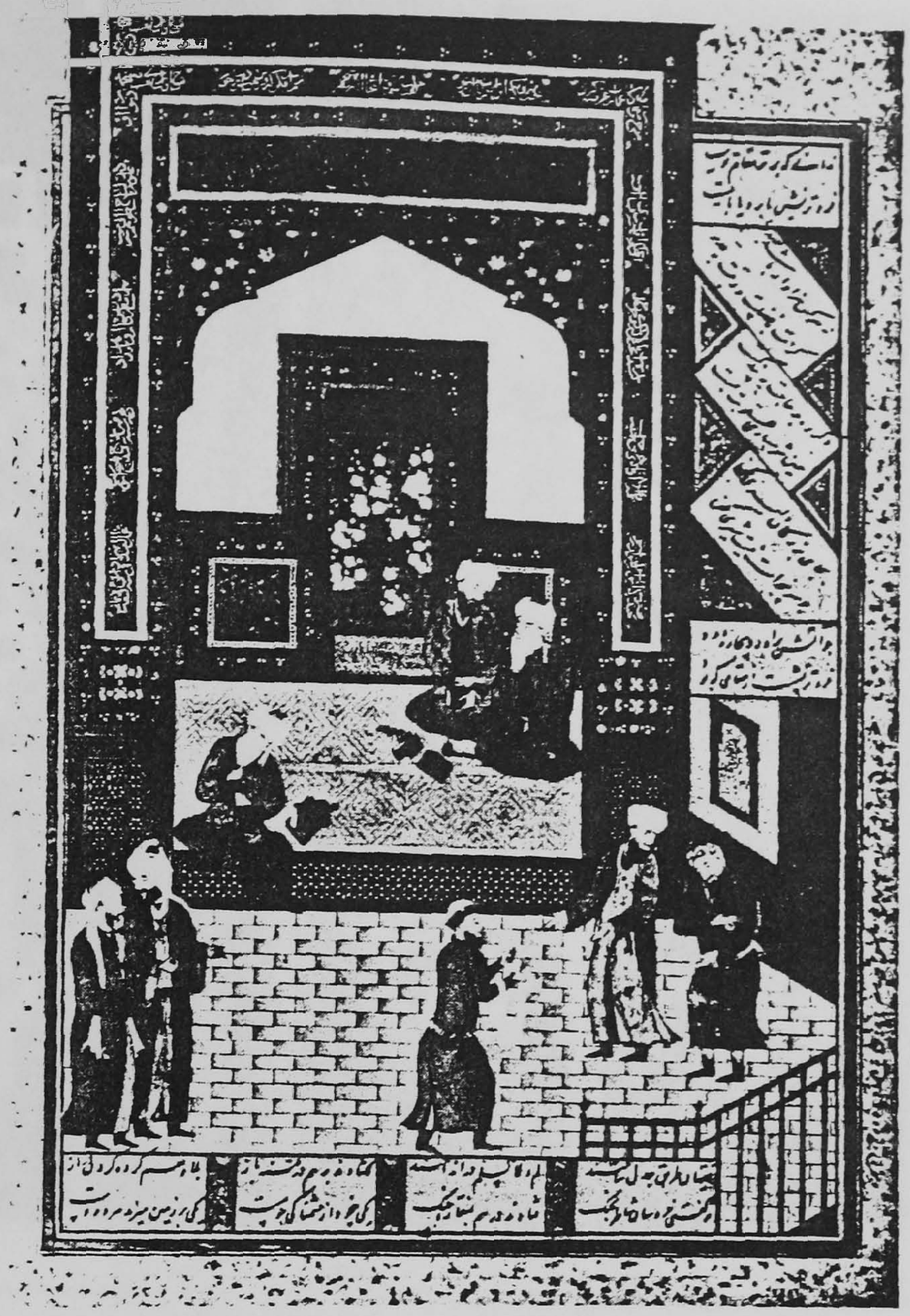


Fig. 27 Sadi's Bustan, Bihzad illumination, Herat School, 15th century, Cairo, National Library.

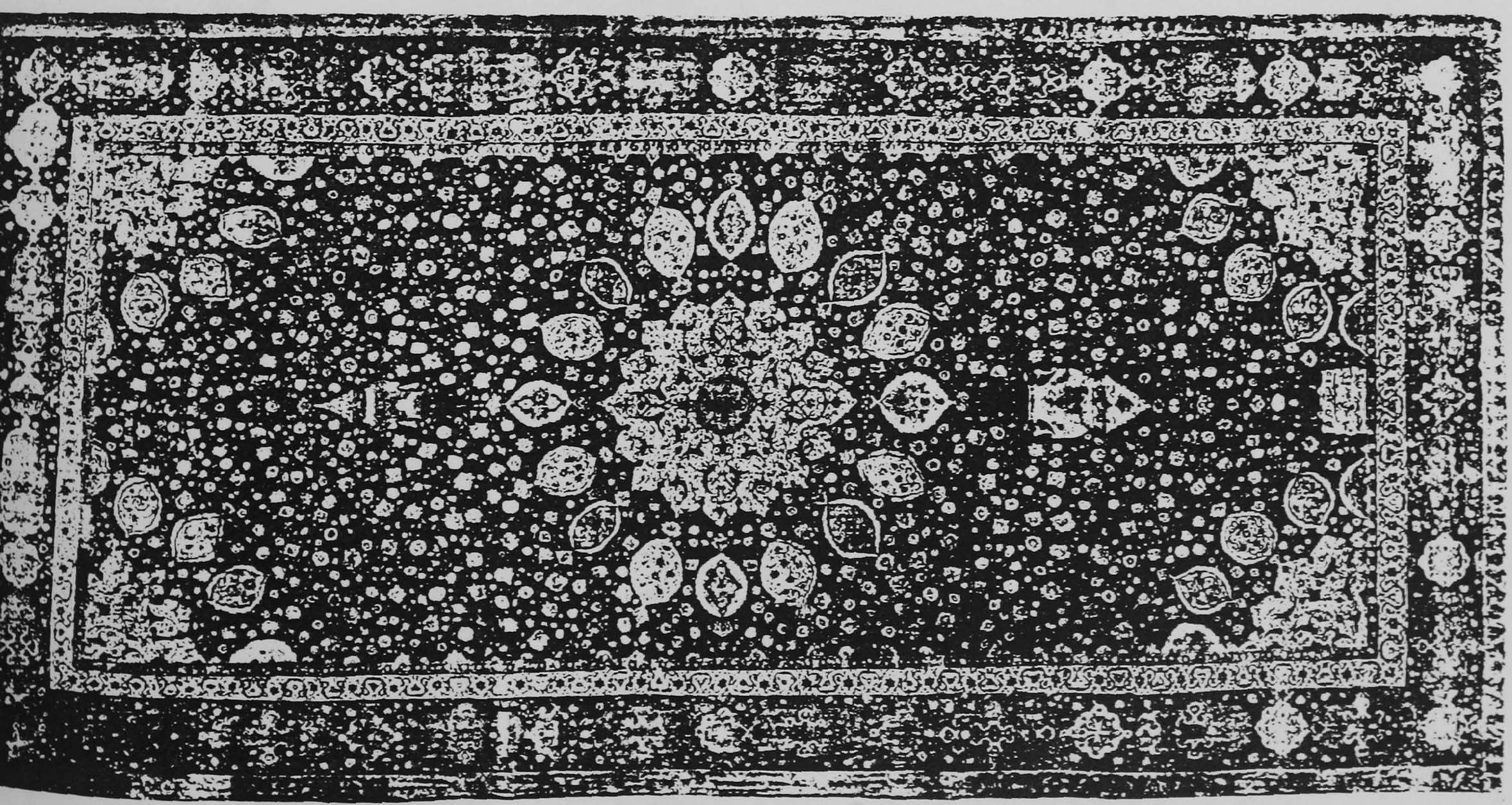


Fig. 28 The Ardabil Rug, made by Maksud al-Kashani, Tabriz. Persia, 1539-40, London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig. 29 Quran page in Kufic script, written and illuminated by 'Uthmann ibn Husayn Warraq, Iraq or Persia, 1073.

Simple Kufic
from an Egyptian tombstone
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, 790.

Foliated Kufic
from a tombstone at
Kairouan, Tunis 952.

Floriated Kufic
from an Egyptian tombstone
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, 848.

Naskhi
from an Egyptian tombstone
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, 1285.

Thuluth
from the drum of the
Mausoleum of Princess
Tughai, Cairo, 1348.

Nastaliq
from the front page of
Sadi's *Gulestan*, Bukhara,
950.

Fig. 30 Drawing of six different Arabic script styles.

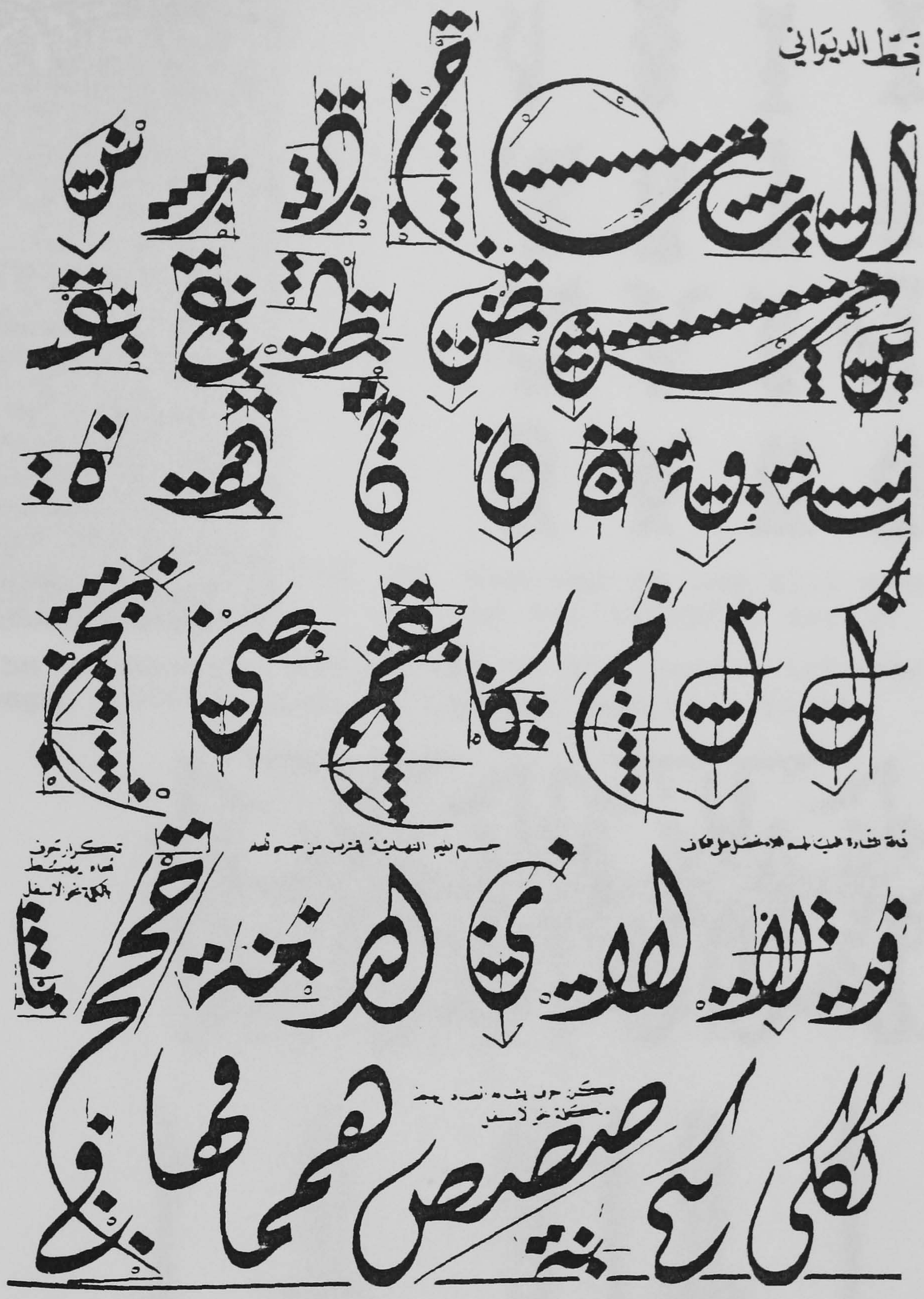


Fig. 31 Drawing of techniques for proportioned script.

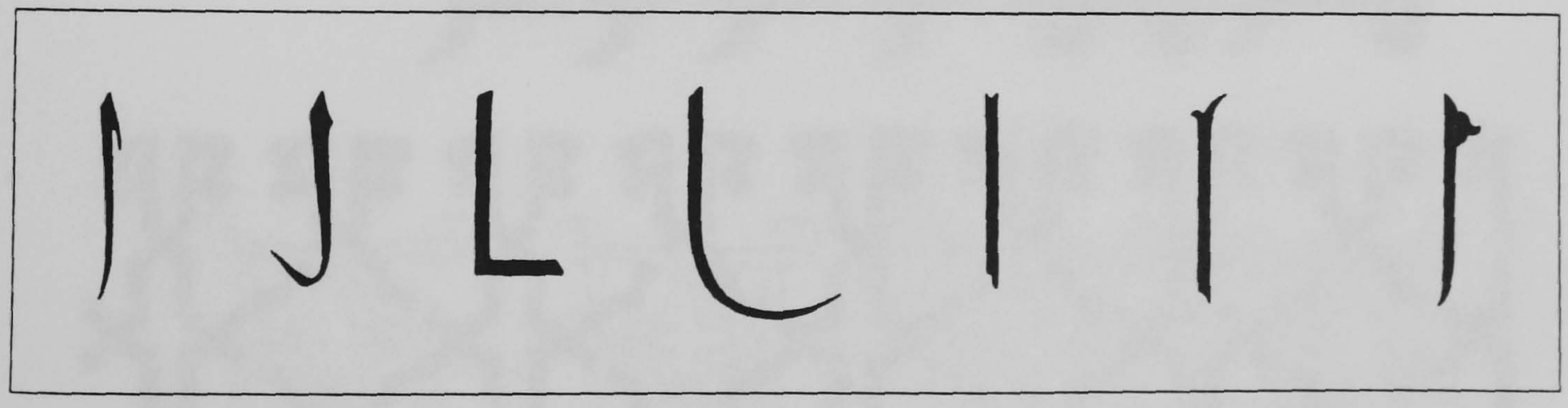


Fig. 32 Drawing of different alif styles.

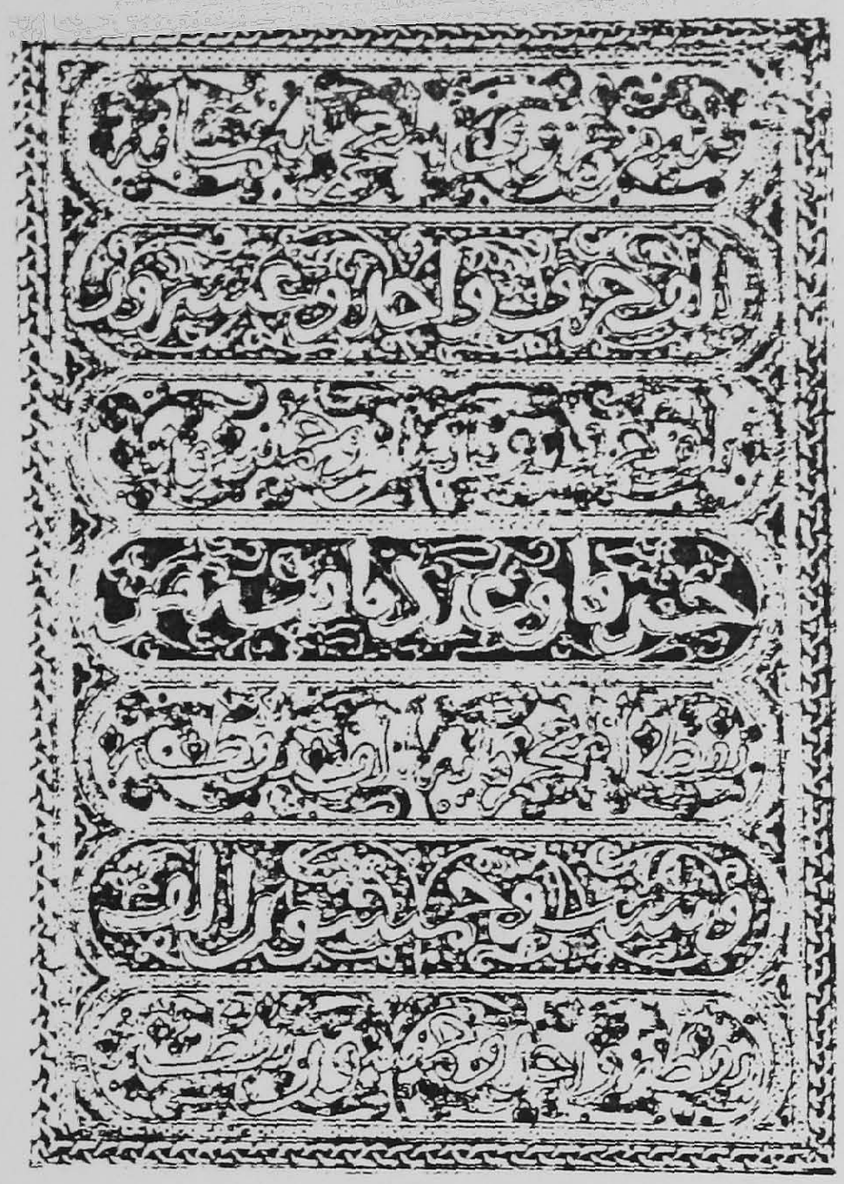
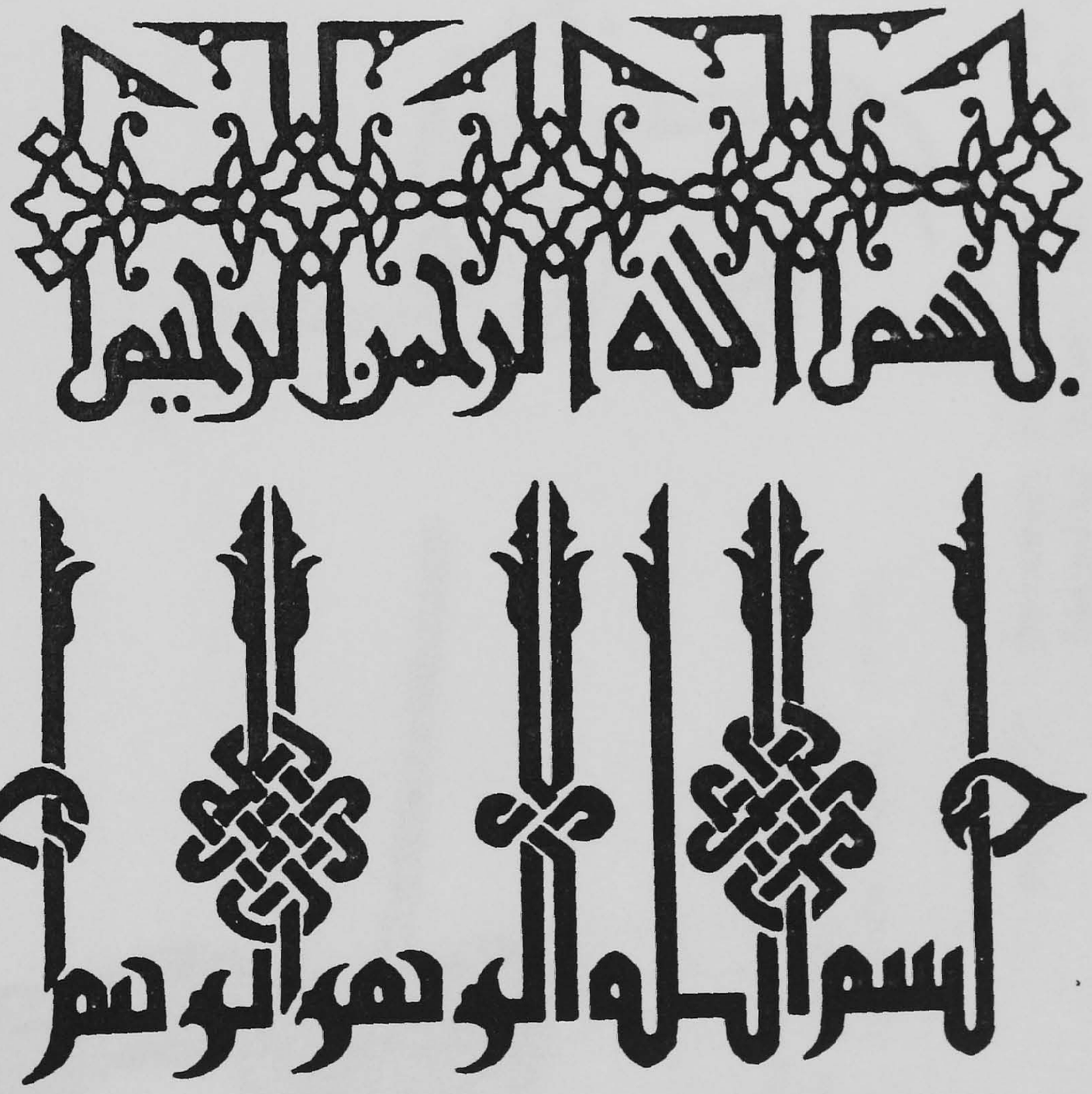


Fig. 34 Drawing of lam-alif examples in calligraphic script.

Fig. 33 Ibn al-Bawwab, manuscript of the Quran, introductory page, 1000-1, Dublin, Chester Beatty Library.



Figs. 35, 36, 37 Drawing of bismillah in calligraphic style.

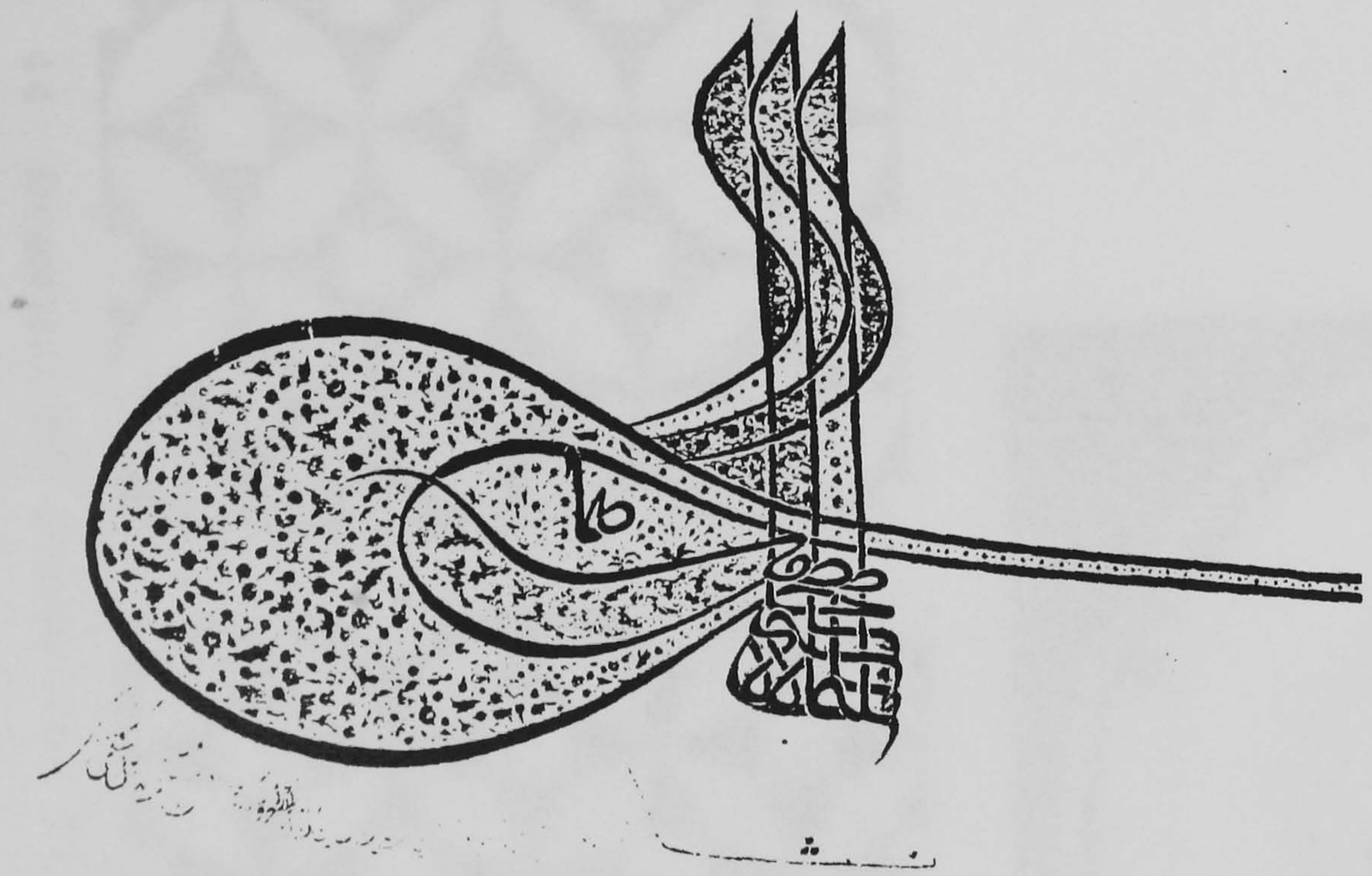


Fig. 38 Tughra of Suleyman the Magnificent, 1520-1566, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1938.

Fig. 39 Ottoman bird with calligraphic letters forming bismillah, 19th century.

Fig. 40 Drawings of zoomorphic letters "Ahmad" and bismillah in the form of a bird.

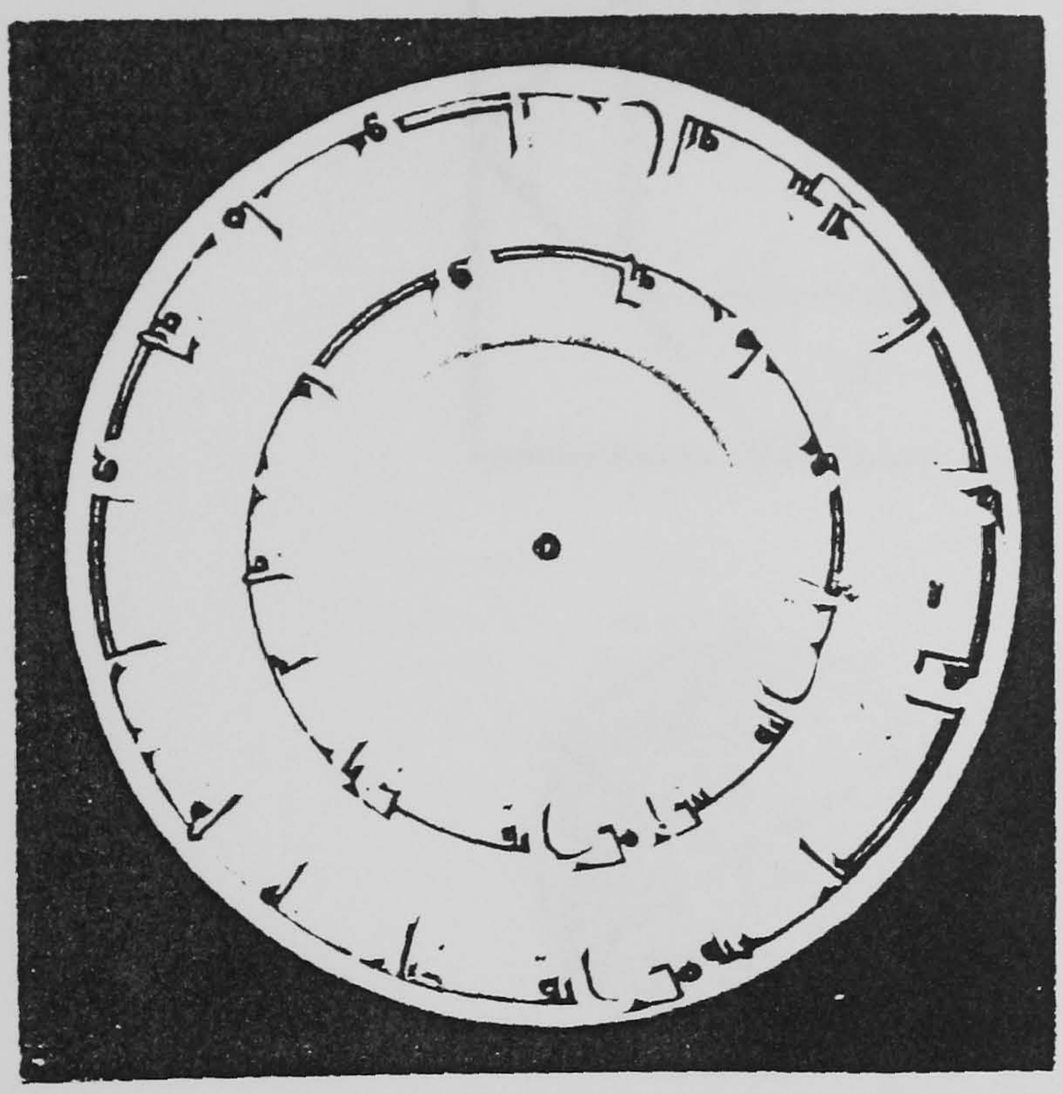
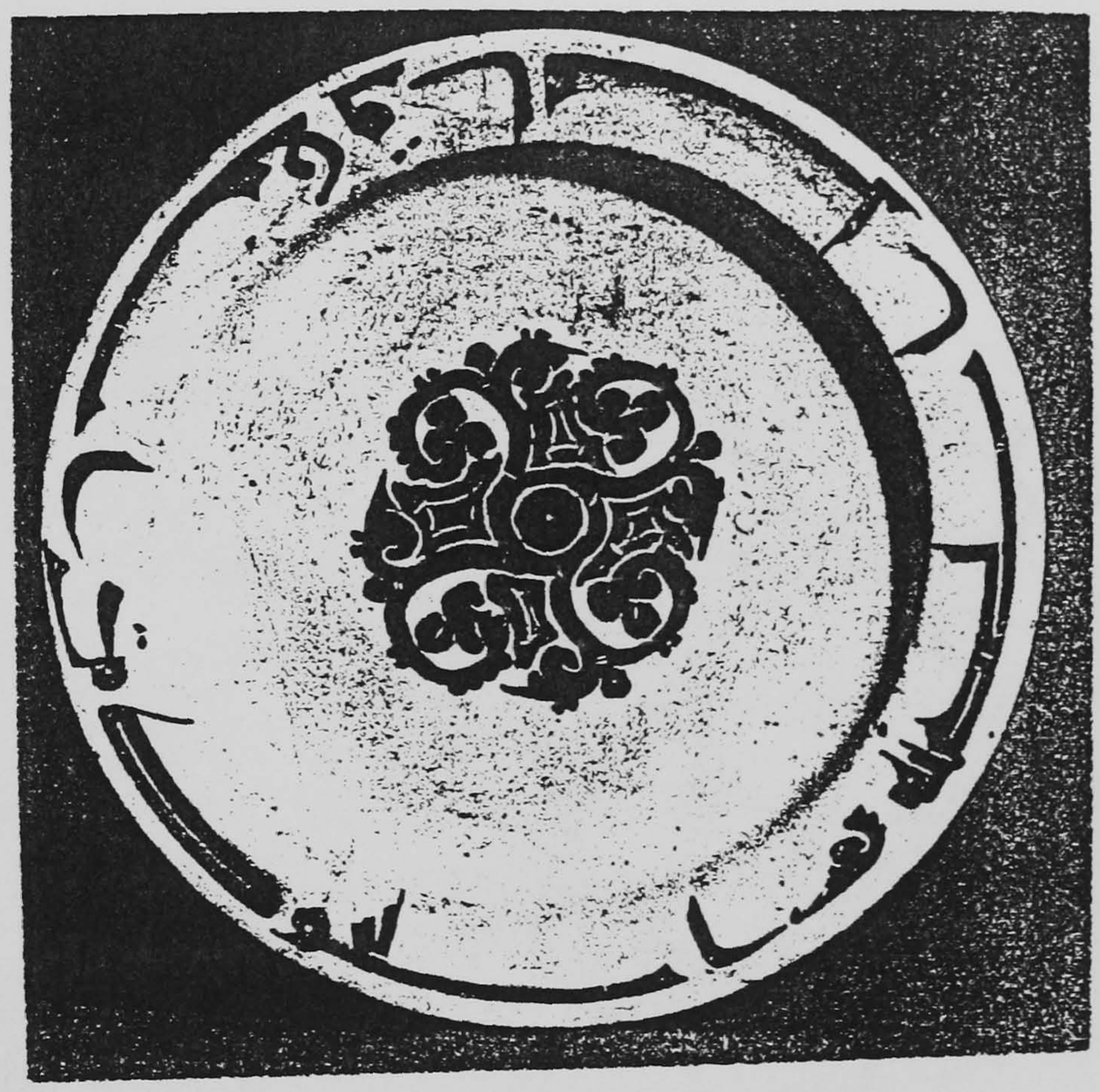
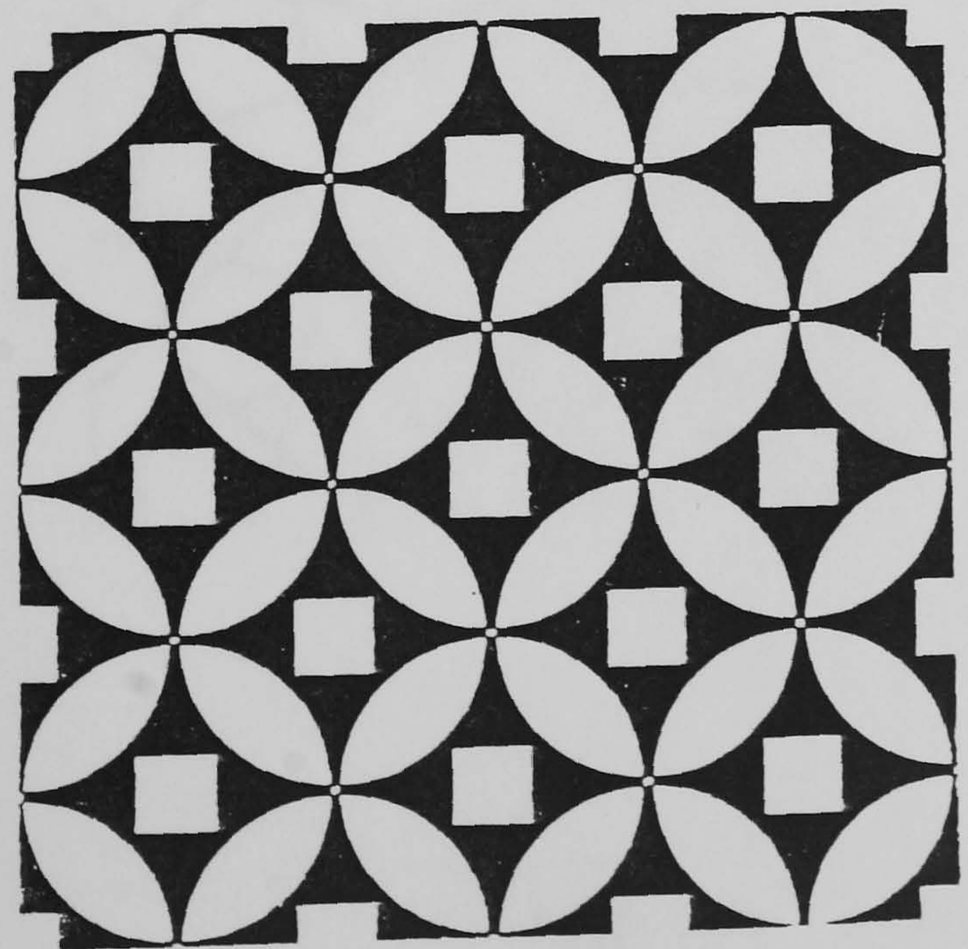
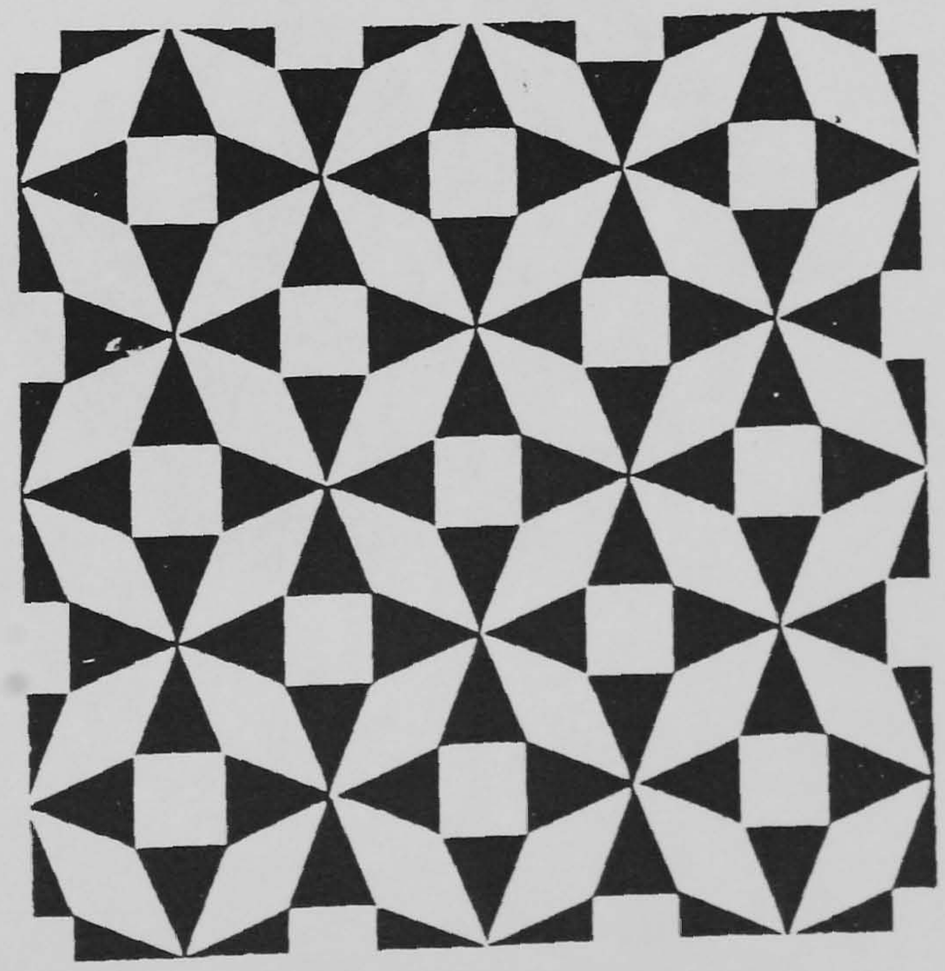


Fig. 41 Ceramic plate with kufic bands, Persia 10th century.

Fig. 42 Ceramic plate with kufic decoration, Khurasan, Iran, 10th century.







Figs. 43, 44 Drawing of Byzantine floor mosaic pattern.

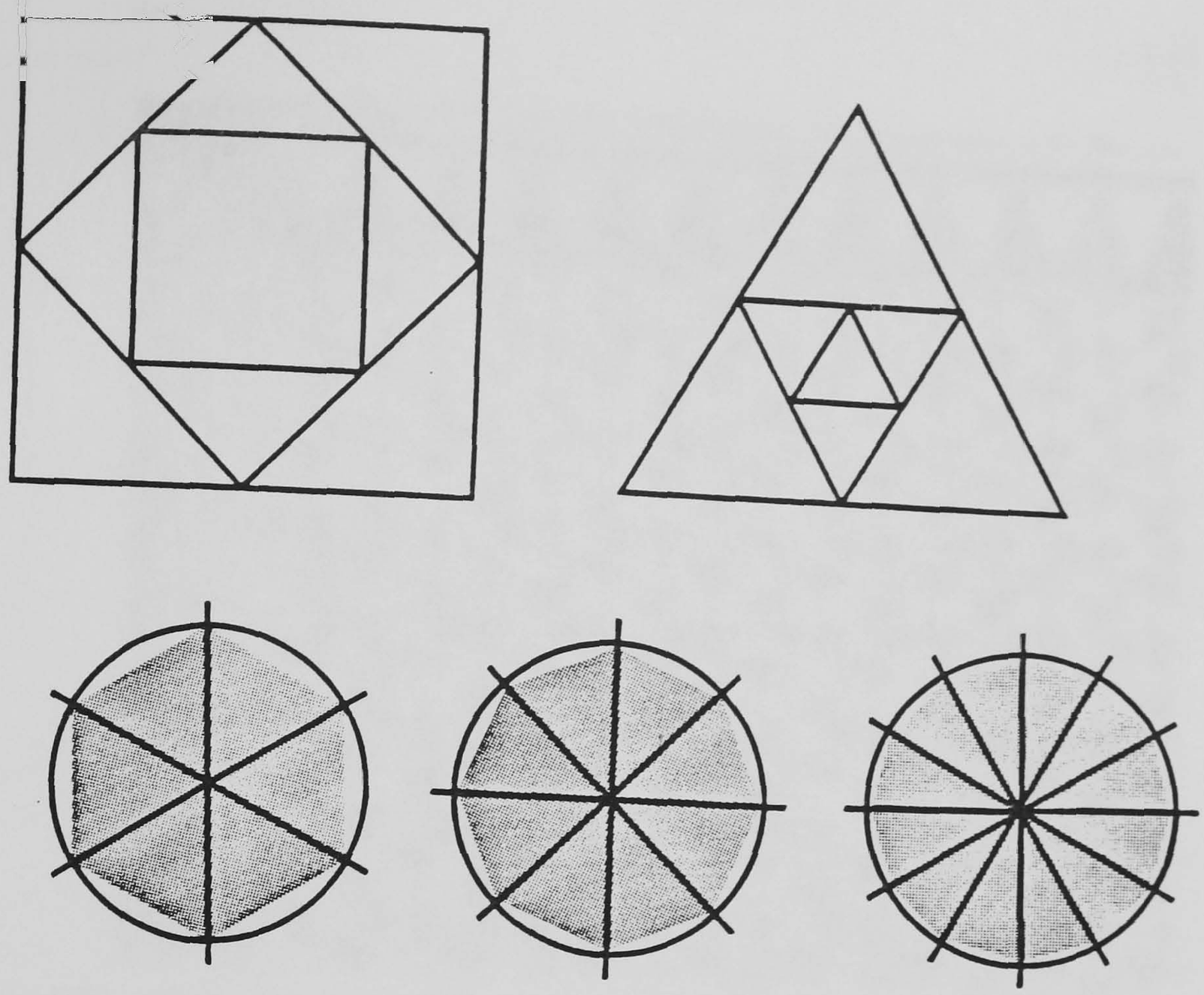


Fig. 45 Drawings of geometric grids and their divisions for Islamic patternism.

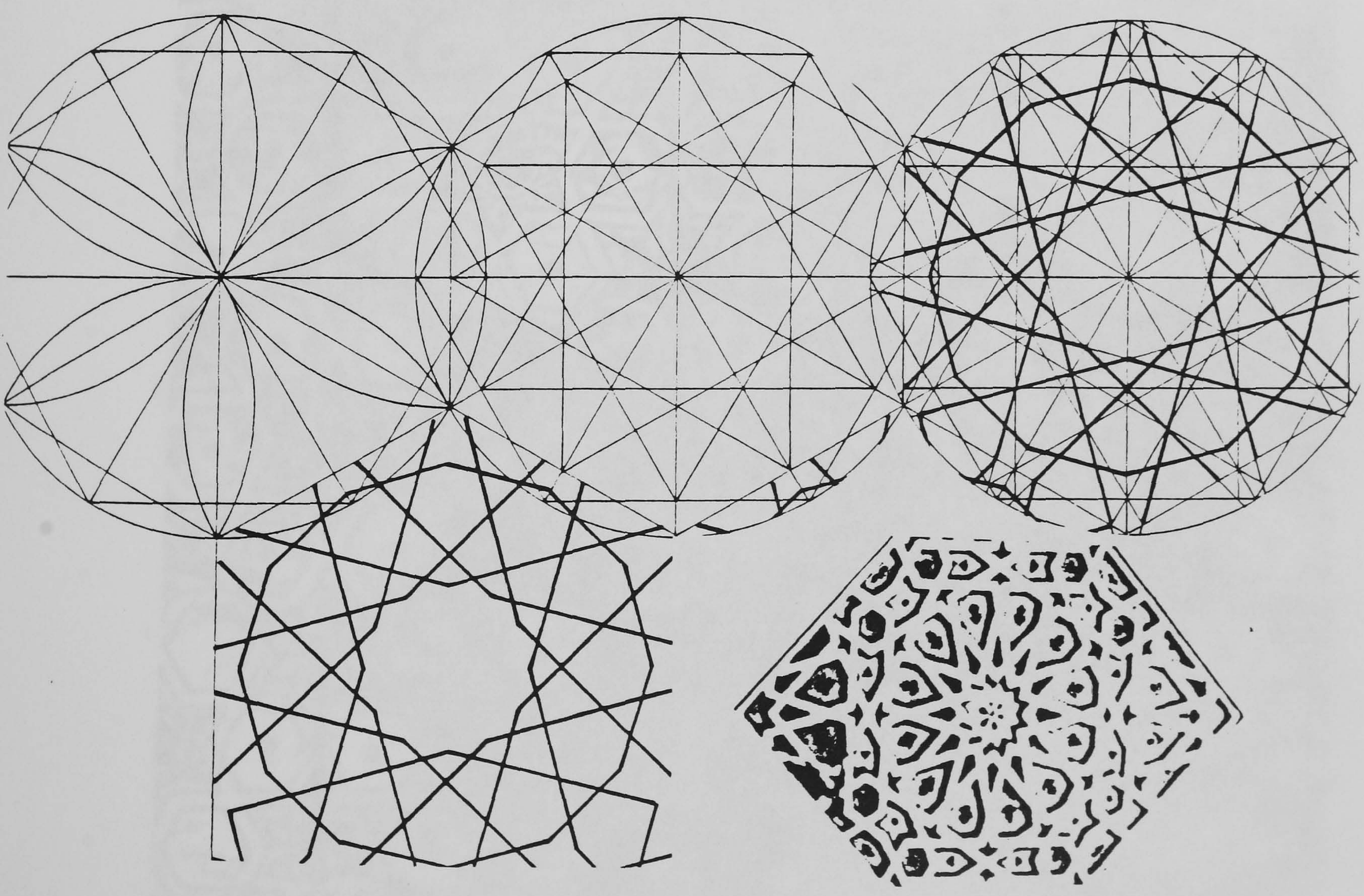


Fig. 46 Dome of the Rock, tile and drawing of geometric pattern.

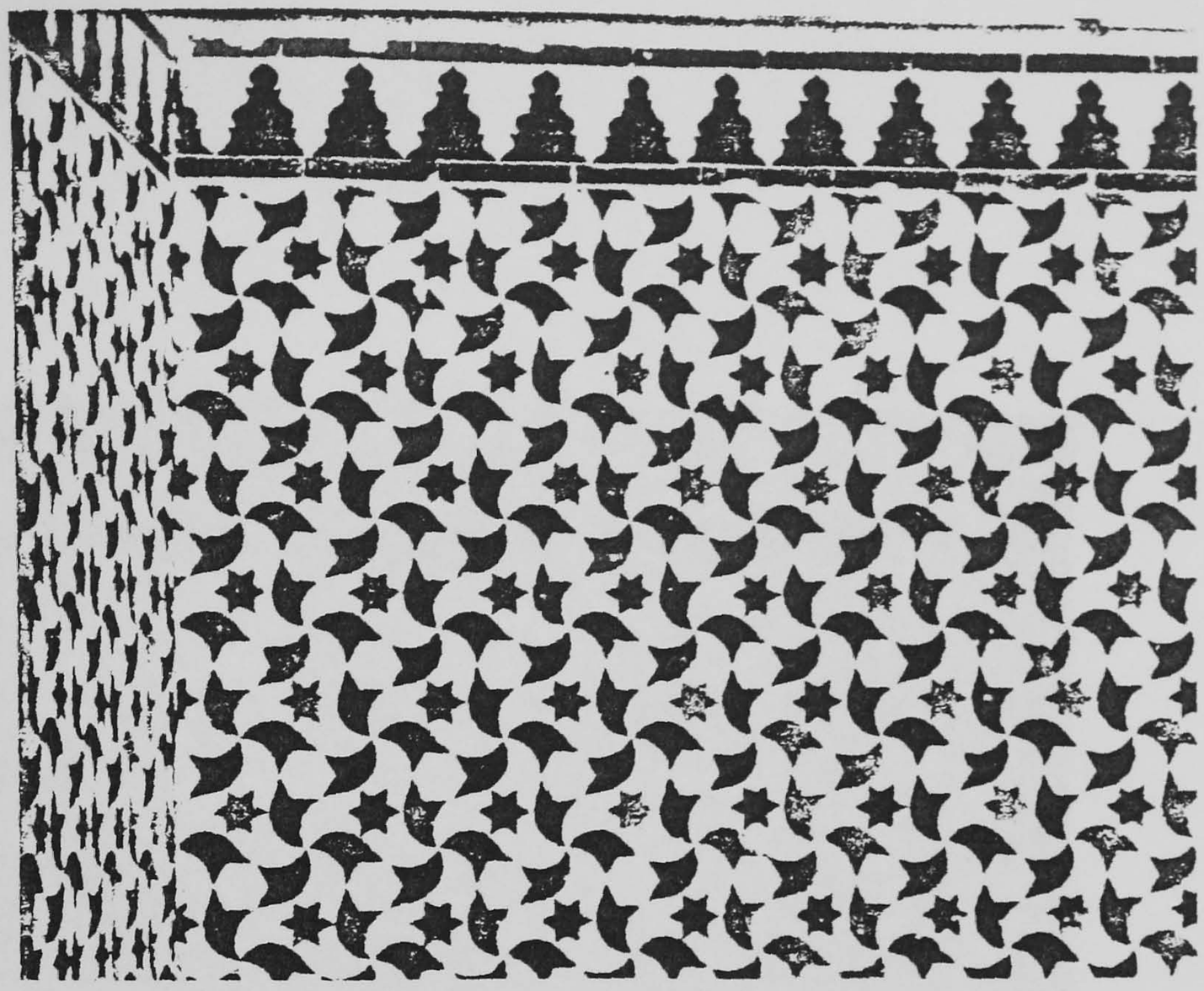


Fig. 47 Alhambra Palace, Hall of the Ambassadors, tilework set in geometric patterns, Granada, Spain, 14th century.

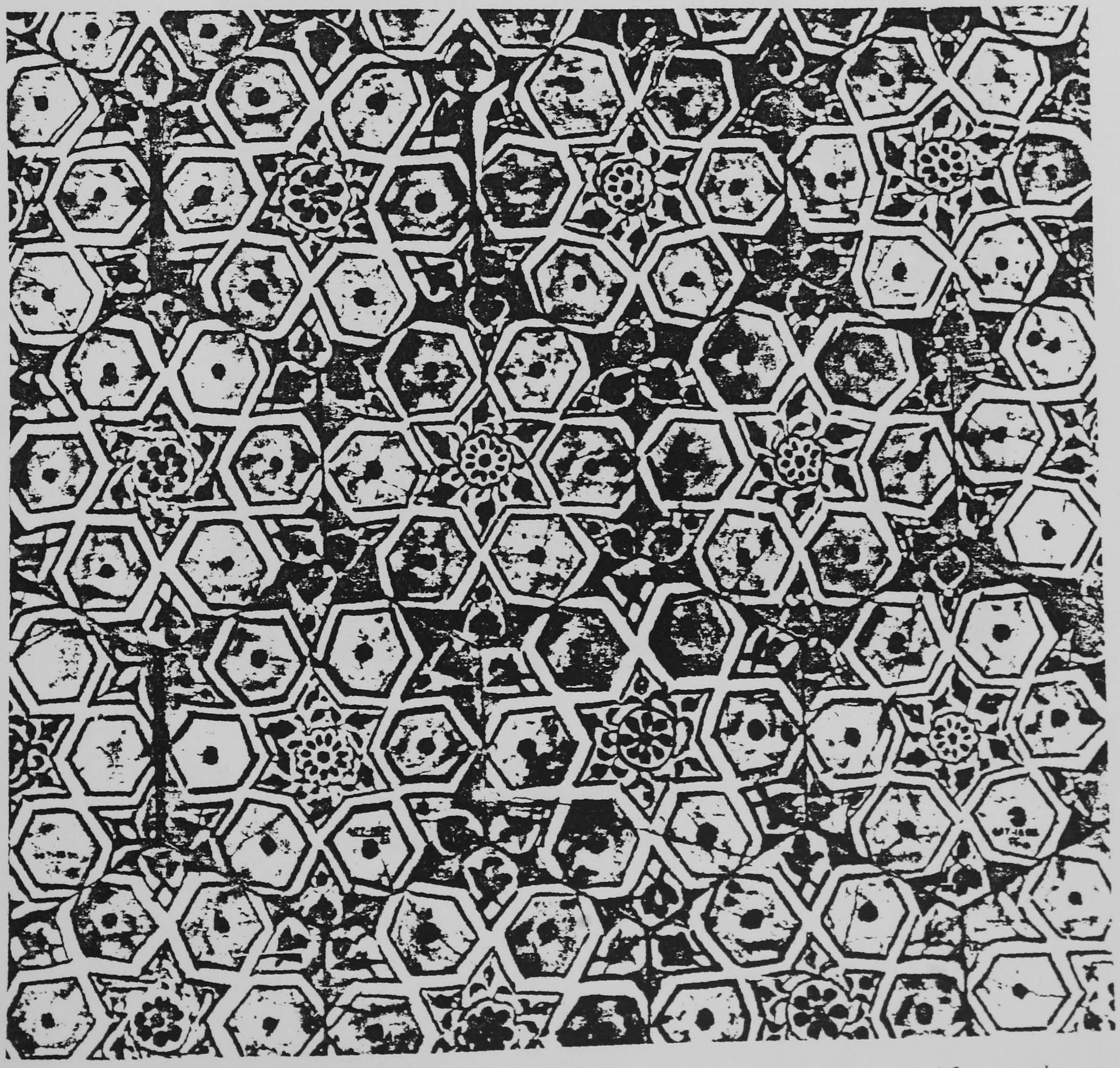


Fig. 48 Great Mosque in Damascus, tilework set in geometric patterns, Syria, 14-15th century.

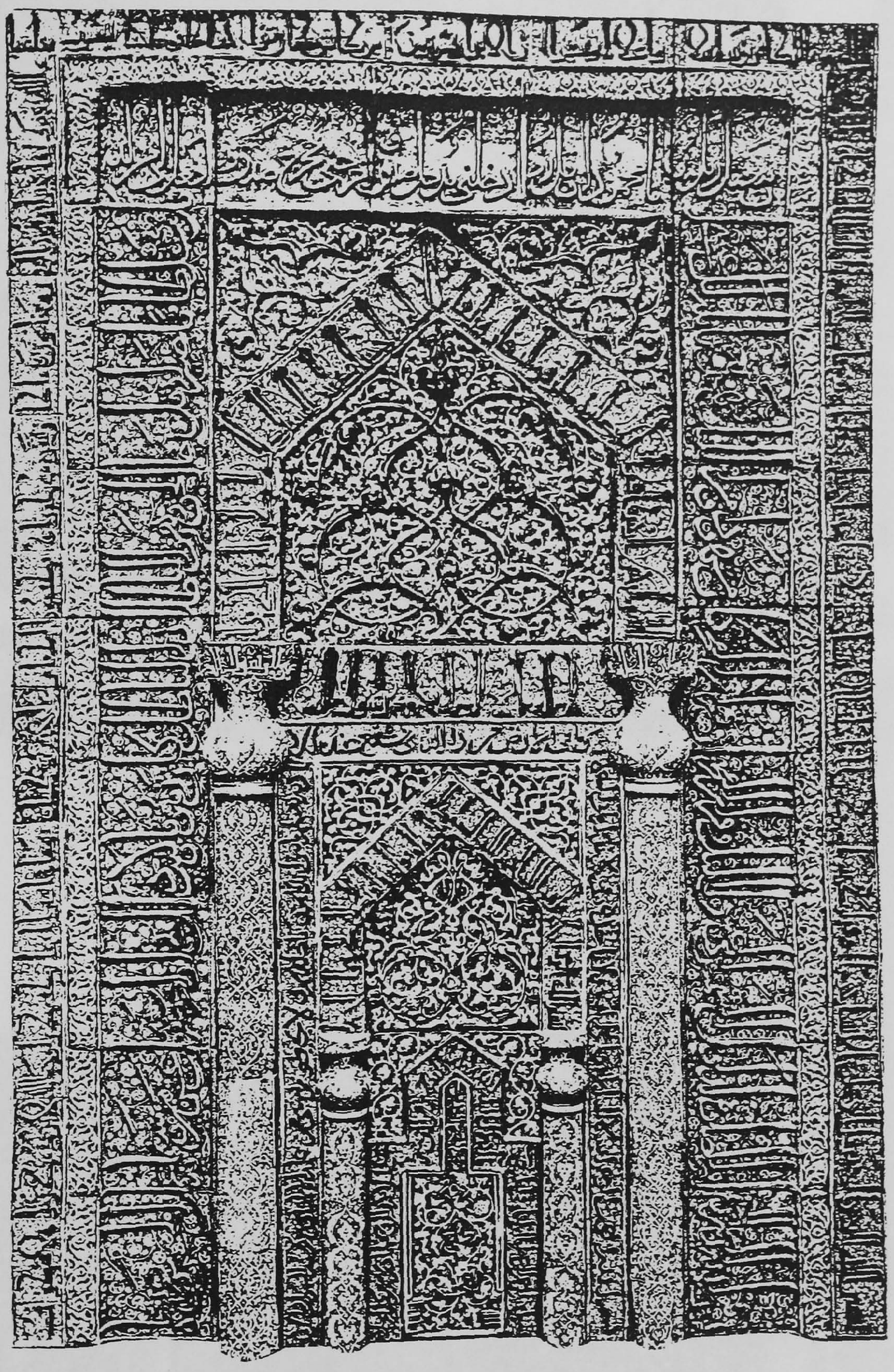


Fig. 49 Kashan, underglaze and lustre-painted ceramic mihrab, 1226, Berlin, Staatliche Museum.

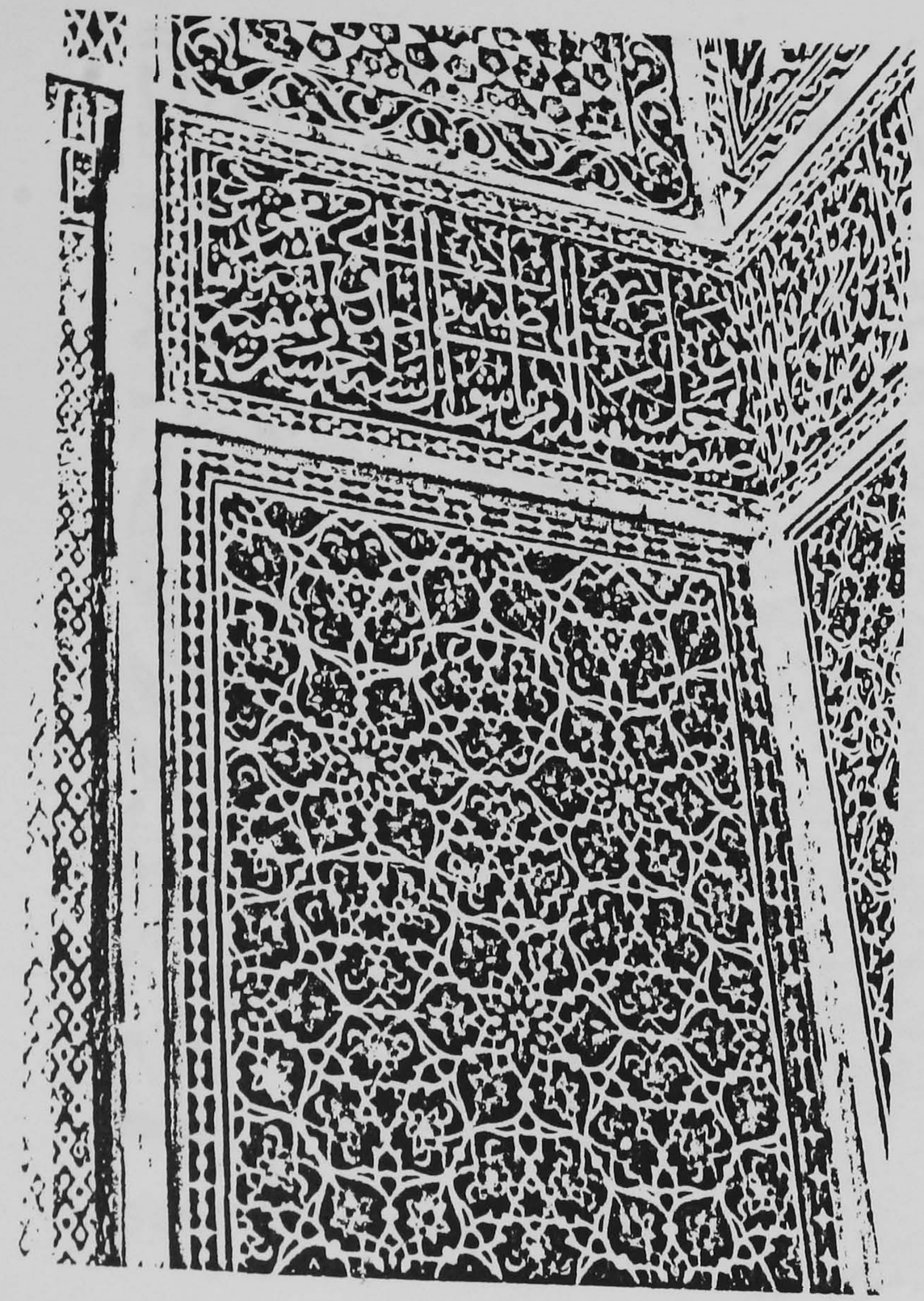


Fig. 50 Jami' mosque, detail of Timurid portal, Isfahan, 1447.

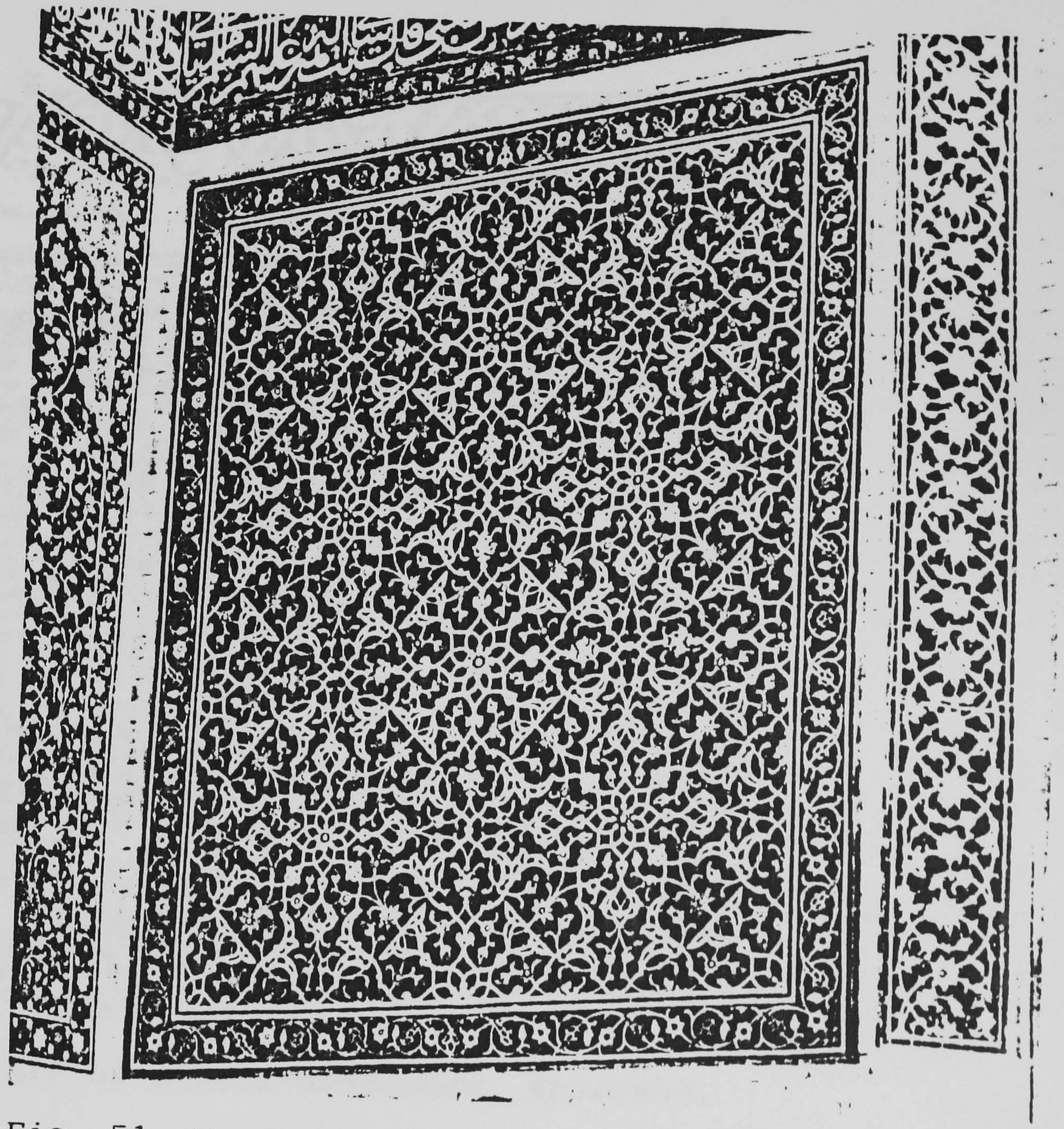


Fig. 51 Mausoleum of Harun-i Vilayat, detail of tile mosaic entrance portal, Isfahan, 1512.

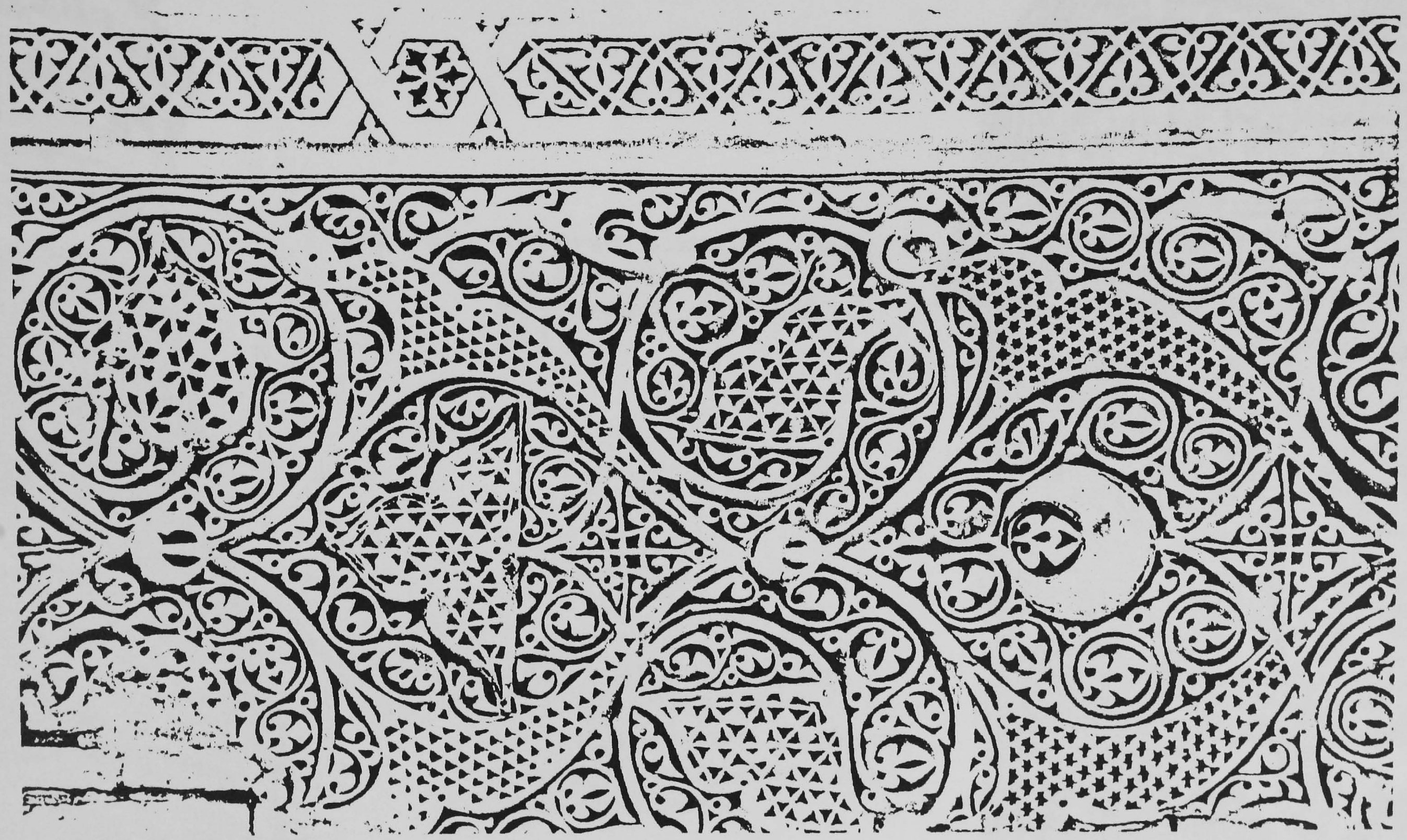


Fig. 52 Ribat-i-Sharif caravanserai, detail of stucco arabesque, Khurasan, late 11th century.

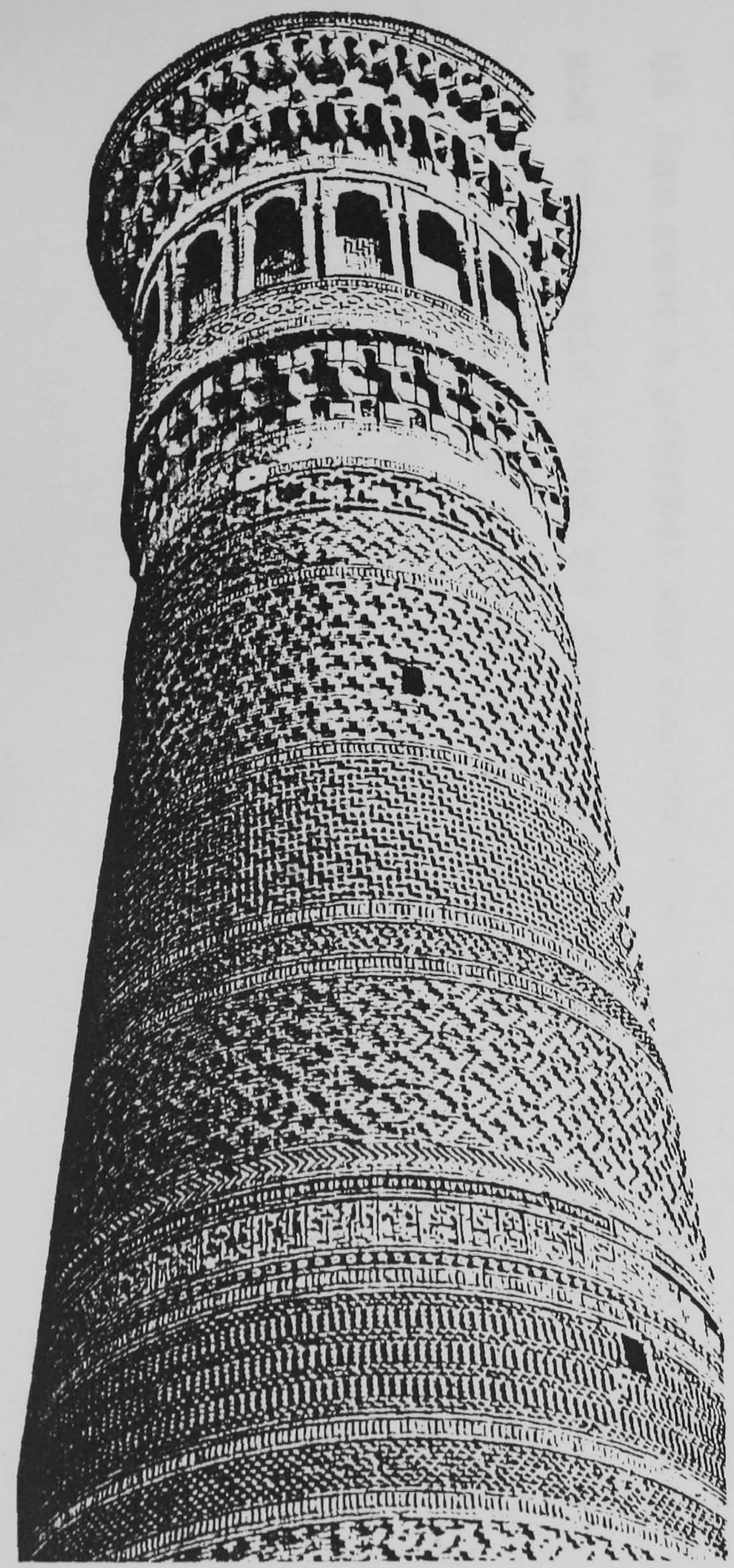


Fig. 53 Kalayan minaret, detail of textile surface brickwork, Bukhara, 1127.

Fig. 54 Pyxis of Al-Mughira, carved Ivory with prince, fan-bearer and lutanist, probably Cordova, 968, Paris, Louvre.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ISLAMIC DOCTRINE OF TAWHEED AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE VISUAL ARTS

4.1. Message of Islam

Throughout all the ages, a prophet has always been brought forth to reveal the truth of God's character and divinity during times of misconception and waywardness. The practice of idolatry which promotes the dogma of the multiplicity of God has been a recurring theme from the beginnings of time as has been recorded in scripture.

The prophets Abraham and Moses struggled against the pharoahs of Egypt and their priests who practiced idolatry. The Prophet Elijah fought against the god Baal and had to perform many miracles before his people would forsake false worship. The destruction of the cities of Aad, Midian and Thamoud were due in part to the continued idolatry practiced by the inhabitants and their rejection of the prophets Houd, Shoaib and Saleh who tried to teach the truth.

The Prophet Noah was sent to stop the glorification of the saints Wadd, Suwa, Yaghuth, Yaaq and Nasr by the people of his time. Allah has said that unto every people, He has sent a prophet who called them to worship Him alone, and to forbid them to serve false gods (Quran 16:36).

In each case during these periods of apostasy and in others as recorded in Scripture, God re-established the knowledge of His oneness through revelation to His prophets as well as re-instituting the proper forms of

worshipping Him. It would not be long before the people would fall away again from the One truth due to their disobedience and disregard for God's laws and wander back down the path into idolatry.

The Arabian Peninsula during the seventh century was not an exception. The people of the time were not wholly idolatrous in that they did believe in Allah, worshipped Him regularly, performed pilgrimage and paid charity ('Abd al Wahhab 1979, p.25). Their main transgression was the misconception regarding His complete Oneness. They allowed other creations to play the role of intermediary through intercession with Allah for His blessings. They prayed to saints for protection and help, believing that it would bring them closer to God (Quran 39:3).

God's main message to the prophet Mohammad as given by the angel Gabriel therefore, was the concept of Divine Unity, or *Tawheed*, the unchanging Oneness of God. Along with it came the knowledge of the true character of God, His powers and abilities and the fact that nothing on this earth can be on the same plane with Him.

> The religion of Islam teaches the Unity of God, in His essence and His Acts, and His transcendence above all comparison with created beings. It insists that He is incomparably other than anything in His creation: the only relation between Him and them consists in that He is their originator, that they belong to Him and unto Him is their returning. "Say: He is God alone...God the selfsubsistent: whom none is equal."(Surah 112.1-3). ('Abduh 1980, p.123)

Surah 112, *Al Akhlas* (The Purity), referred to above

from the Quran, is also called *Surat at Tawheed* and is perhaps the most oft repeated Surah that bears witness of the uniqueness and unity of God. In its declaration, the realisation of one's position to God is defined in that God is on a level by Himself. One is not capable by deed or thought of attaining the same level no matter how long one lives, what one invents or creates, or how many progeny one produces.

Further, it declares that God was not created as humans were, nor does he beget earthly offspring as is required to continue humankind. God exists *a priori* and independently of any power of creation with which one is familiar. He is Eternal and Endless. He has no others upon whom He must rely for life, power, or existence. He is truly One and Alone in His essence.

4.2. Definitions and Types of Tawheed

Further understanding of the concept of Divine Unity is offered by looking at the various aspects and meanings of Tawheed. One definition of Tawheed is "a belief that God is one in inalienable Divinity" ('Abduh 1980, p.29). Another given definition is that of unification (making something one) or asserting oneness which comes from the Arabic verb *wahhada*, meaning to unite, unify or consolidate. In reference to God, however, it carries specific meanings:

> When the term *Tawheed* is used in reference to Allaah (sp.) (i.e. *Tawheedullaah*), it means the realizing and maintaining of Allaah's unity in all of man's actions which directly or

indirectly relate to Him. It is the belief that Allaah is One, without partner in His dominion and His actions (*Ruboobeeyah*), One without similitude in His essence and attributes (*Asmaa wa Sifaat*), and One without rival in His Divinity and in worship (*Ulooheeyah/ 'Ebaadah*). (Philips 1994, p.1)

Tawheed, as expressed through the three categories listed above, Ruboobeeyah (Lordship), Asmaa wa Sifaat (Names and Attributes) and Ulooheeyah/'Ebaadah (Worship) constitute the science of Tawheed which developed in the centuries following the initial expanse of Islam. Due to the influx of new peoples, traditions and philosophies, Islamic scholars felt a need to intricately classify and define the tenets of Islam so that any opposing or outside arguments would have a standard to be compared against and in order to fully maintain the integrity and purity of the original ideals (Phillips 1994, p. 5).

A study of the three individual components which make up the science of Tawheed will help gaining a true understanding of the concept and its applications in daily life. The first category looks at Allah as the Lord of the universe.

4.3. Tawheed ar Ruboobeeyah

Tawheed ar Ruboobeeyah acknowledges God as the only Creator and Lord. It affirms the uniqueness and exclusiveness of His works, creation and direction of the universe. The word, ruboobeeyah, is derived from the Arabic root *Rabb*, which means, Lord. This form of Tawheed states that Allah:

> alone caused all things to exist when there was nothing; He sustains and maintains creation without any need from it or for it; and he is the sole Lord of the universe and its inhabitants without any real challenge to His sovereignity;... It is He who gave all things the power to move and to change. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) used to often repeat the exclamatory phrase "*La hawla wa laa quwwata illaa billaah*" (There is no movement nor power except by Allaah's will). (Philips 1994, p.5)

In regards to the things created by Allah, including man, it should be remembered that God is completely separate from the creation itself. He is above all things created and the creation neither surrounds Him nor is above Him in any way (Philips 1994, p.131).

The Quran states that,"Allah created all things and He is the Agent on which all things depend" (Quran 39:62). Many other Surahs contain the same teaching and testimony of Divine Unity in creation:

> It is God Who has made the night for you, that you may rest therein, and the day to see. Verily, God is full of Grace and Bounty to men. Yet most men give no thanks. Such is God, your Lord, the Creator of all things. There is no God but He...It is God Who has made for you the earth as a resting place and the sky as a shelter, and has given you shape and made your shapes beautiful, and has provided for you sustenance of things good and pure; such is God you Lord. So glory to God, the Lord of the worlds! He is the Living (One); There is no God but He; call upon Him, giving Him sincere devotion. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds (Quran, 40:61-65). (Abdulati 1990, p.4)

In the role of Creator and Lord, therefore, God displays His Unity. All nature was created by Him. God gave all things on the earth into the care of man for his needs to be met and yet, no one expresses gratitude for

these daily blessings. The fact that there is night to take rest in and food to eat for sustenance are all gifts from the Creator that one should acknowledge gratefully.

The Quran teaches that even the heavens and the earth themselves are further proof of the existence of the One God:

> "Were there in the heavens or on earth any other than God, the heavens and the earth would have gone down in ruin. But their ruin is plainly ruled out." (Surah 21.22) So God most high in essence and attributes is One: His existence and His acts are inalienably His own and His alone. ('Abduh 1980, p.52)

God is the only One to whom the animals, elements and all living things owe their allegiance. The proof of His Unity over all things is the fact that they still exist and submit to Him and His rule through eons of time. Had there been another or more than One God, the heavens would have been in chaos and have ceased to function by now or would be in a changing turmoil due to divided stewardship.

Along with His titles of Lord and Creator, Allah possesses many other names and attributes. Referred to as Tawheed al Asmaa wa Sifat, they illuminate the character of God and help define His Unity in detail.

4.4. Tawheed al Asmaa wa Sifat

As the word *Islam* means to surrender, the first things that must be surrendered to are the realities and truths concerning the character of God, for it is not possible to believe or know God without understanding who

He is. The Quran provides information regarding the character of God and lists His attributes as taught by God Himself. Tawheed is considered the first and greatest attribute.

> Tauhid (sp.) is presented in Islam in the purest form and manner. According to Islam, God resembles nothing and no thing can be compared to God. God is the Absolute without needs; all need Him; He needs none-"You are the ones needing God, and God is the One Free of Need, the Praiseworthy" (35:15). "He is aware of all things" (42:12) and "He is capable of all things" (22:6). He is everywhere, and nowhere is devoid of Him; the highest heaven and the depths of the earth bear the same relationship to Him. Wherever we turn we face Him-"Wherever you turn, there is the presence of God" (2:115)...He is the summation of all perfections and is above and devoid of defect-"The most beautiful names belong to God" (7:180). (Mutahhari 1985, p.75)

Each of God's 99 names refers to His attributes and powers (Table 4.1). They are all nouns and adjectives which, when applied to Deity, encompass the highest degree and use of these attributes. The similarity between God's attributes and those of humankind are in name only and not in degree.

When attributes are used in reference to God, they are to be taken in the absolute sense, free from human deficiencies. It is important not to compare them in any way to those which humans possess or to change them to match worldly conceptions. In acknowledging them in reference to God, the user must:

> ...affirm Allah's Attributes as He Himself describes them in the Book and as His Messenger (PBUH) describes Him in authentic *Ahadith*, that they are true without allegorizing them

Table 4.1

THE 99 NAMES OF ALLAH

1.	Ar-Rahman	The Beneficent
2.	Ar-Rahim	The Merciful
3.	Al-Malik	The Sovereign Lord
4.	Al-Qudous	The Holy
5.	As-Salam	The Source of Peace
6.	Al-Mu'min	The Guardian of Faith
7.	Al-Muhaymin	The Protector
8.	Al-Aziz	The Mighty
9.	Al-Jabbar	The Compeller
10.	Al-Mutakabbir	The Majestic
11.	Al-Khaliq	The Creator
12.	Al-Bari	The Evolver
13.	Al-Musawwir	The Fashioner
14.	Al-Ghaffar	The Forgiver
15.	Al-Qahhar	The Subduer
16.	Al-Wahhab	The Bestower
17.	Al-Razzaq	The Provider
18.	Al-Fattah	The Opener
19.	Al-Alim	The All-Knowing
20.	Al-Qabidth	The Constrictor
21.	Al-Basidt	The Expander
22.	Al-Khafidth	The Abaser
23.	Ar-Rafi'	The Exalter
24.	Al-Mu'izz	The Honorer
25.	Al-Muzill	The Dishonorer
26.	As-Samih	The All-Hearing
27.	Al-Basir	The All-Seeing
28.	Al-Hakam	The Judge
29.	Al-Adl	The Just
30.	Al-Latif	The Subtle One
31.	Al-Khabir	The Aware
32.	Al-Halim	The Forbearing One
33.	Al-Azim	The Great One
34.	Al-Ghafur	The All-Forgiving
35.	Ash-Shakur	The Appreciative
36.	Al-Ali	The Most High
37.	Al-Kabir	The Most Great
38.	Al-Hafidth	The Preserver
39.	Al-Muqit	The Maintainer
40.	Al-Hasib	The Reckoner
41.	Al-Jalil	The Sublime One
42.	Al-Karim	The Generous One
43.	Ar-Raqib	The Watchful
44.	Al-Mujib	The Responsive
45.	Al-Wasi'	The All-Embracing
46.	Al-Hakim	The Wise
47.	Al-Wadud	The Loving
48.	Al-Majid	The Most Glorious One
49.	Al-Ba'ith	The Resurrector
50.	Ash-Shahid	The Witness
51.	Al-Haqq	The Truth
52.	Al-Wakil	The Trustee
53.	Al-Qawi	The Most Strong
54.	Al-Matin	The Firm One
55.	Al-Wali	The Protecting Friend
56.	Al-Hamid	The Praiseworthy
57.	Al-Muhsi	The Reckoner
58.	Al-Mubdi	The Originator
59.	Al-Mu'id	The Restorer
60.	Al-Muhyi	The Giver of Life
61.	Al-Mumit	The Creator of Death
62.	Al-Hayy	The Alive
63.	Al-Qayyum	The Self-Subsisting
64.	Al-Wajid	The Finder
65.	Al-Majid	The Noble
66.	Al-Wahid	The Unique
67.	Al-Ahad	The One
68.	As-Samad	The Eternal
69.	Al-Qadir	The Able
70.	Al-Muqtadir	The Powerful
71.	Al-Muqaddim	The Expediter
72.	Al-Mu'akhkhir	The Delayer
73.	Al-Awwal	The First
74.	Al-Akhir	The Last
75.	Al-Dthahir	The Manifest
76.	Al-Batin	The Hidden
77.	Al-Waali	The Governor
78.	Al-Muta'ali	The Most Exalted
79.	Al-Barr	The Source of All Goodness
80.	Al-Tawwab	The Acceptor of Repentance
81.	Al-Muntaqim	The Avenger
82.	Al-'Afuw	The Pardoner
83.	Ar-Ra'uf	The Compassionate
84.	Malik-Ul-Mulk	The Eternal Owner of Sovereignty
85.	Dhul-Jalal-Wal-Ikram	The Lord of Majesty and Bounty
86.	Al-Muqsidt	The Equitable
87.	Al-Jame'	The Gatherer
88.	Al-Ghani	The Self-Sufficient
89.	Al-Mughni	The Enricher
90.	Al-Mani'	The Preventer
91.	Adth-Dtharr	The Distresser
92.	An-Nafi'	The Propitious
93.	An-Nur	The Light
94.	Al-Hadi	The Guide
95.	Al-Badi'	The Incomparable
96.	Al-Baqi	The Everlasting
97.	Al-Warith	The Supreme Inheritor
98.	Ar-Rashid	The Guide to the Right Path
99.	As-Sabur	The Patient

> (*Ta'wil*), anthropomorphizing them (*Tajsim*), comparing them to the creation (*Tamthil*), or negating them (*Ta'til*) or questioning about their quality (*Takyif*). (Zino 1995, p.15)

The names detail God's powers, His authority and sovereignty and His relationship to all of creation. All of them can be said to show the Goodness and Perfection that exist in Him (Philips 1994, p.11):

> He is the Merciful and the Compassionate, the Guardian and the True Guide, the Just and the Supreme Lord, the Creator and the Watchful, the First and the Last, the Knowing and the Wise, the Hearing and the Aware, the Witness and the Glorious, the Able and the Powerful...He is the Loving and the Provider, the Generous and the Benevolent, the Rich and the Independent, the Forgiving and the Clement, the Patient and the Appreciative, the Unique and the Protector, the Judge and the Peace (Quran 57:1-6;59:22-24;3:31;11:6;35:15;65:2-3). (Abdulati 1990, p.5)

As mentioned, God as the Creator rules over all things because the heavens and earth belong to Him. He is acknowledged as the One God by all who are intelligent and He receives obedience from all things because He made them. Some of His names, therefore refer to His role as the One responsible for all earthly creation and actions, life and death.

> Allah bears witness that there is no God but He- and so do the angels and those possessed of knowledge- Maintainer of Justice; there is no God but He, the Mighty, the Wise (Quran 3:19). Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the Guardian over all things. To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth (39:63-64). Allah originates Creation; then He repeats it; then to Him shall you all be brought back (30:12). To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All are obedient to Him. It is He Who originates the Creation, then repeats it, for it is most easy for Him. His is

> the most exalted state in the heavens and the earth. He is the Mighty and the Wise (30:27-28). (Abdulati 1990, p.7)

By studying the Names and Attributes of God as revealed in the Quran, and then using them in worship and supplications, one can understand and practice Tawheed on a daily basis. The category of Tawheed al 'Ebaadah addresses these issues of Unity in worship.

4.5. Tawheed al 'Ebaadah

By definition, worship in Islam is a means of purification both of one's soul and of daily life. "Thus man's turning towards God, in intimate communion, reverence, and in the spirit of devotion and humble submission, is termed *'ibadah* (sp.)" (Al-Zarqa 1980, p.3).

Another definition states that it is "to devote to Him exclusively all our worship like; supplications, invocations, sacrifice, vows, prayer, hope, fear, seeking help, trust etc." (Zino 1995, p.15). In the Quran, Allah states,"I have not created jinn and men but to worship me" (Quran 51:56). This word worship in this passage has been interpreted to mean "proclaim My unity" ('Abd al Wahhab 1979, p. 13).

'Abd al Wahhab goes on further to list forms of worship including:

> submission (*islam*), conviction (*iman*), beneficence (*ihsan*), as well as prayer (*du'a*), reverential fear (*khawf*), hope, trust, loving obedience (*raghbah*), fearing disobedience (*rahbah*), awe (*khushu*), wonder, reliance, prayer for rescue and assistance, taking

> refuge, sacrifice, taking vows- these and other forms of worship commanded by Allah are to be addressed exclusively to Him. ('Abd al Wahhab 1979, p.14)

Islam also considers any virtuous action performed in sincerity with intent to please and obey God an act of worship for which man will be rewarded (Al-Zarqa 1980, p.6). Even the menial every day tasks of existence can be made a form of worship if done with the right intent.

When performing specific acts of worship, such as prayer and supplication, the use of God's names is an important part of the process. In worship, both the positive and negative forms of the attributes are used. The positive attributes are called the attributes of perfection or those affirmative attributes which are attached to God. The negative attributes are those which arise from defect and teach that by which God can not be characterized or which are devoid from Him.

To worship God, one can offer Him words of praise that are by *thana*, or the positive attributes, or by *tashih*, when it is recounted how He is beyond and free of what is unworthy of Him (Mutahhari 1985, p.80). Both categories of attributes teach what should be emulated and what is worthy to strive after in terms of character development in this life.

By using the names of attributes in worship, man commits a significant action. Spoken or physically performed, one is expressing a truth about God. The physical motions of worship, such as bowing, fasting, or

circumambulating are therefore giving meaning to the spoken utterances (Mutahhari 1985, p.81).

Man is showing his recognition of and submission to God's Divine authority over him. The humble action combined with the spoken utterance reiterates the position of God to man and therefore, God's attributes become meaningful in comparison to man's lack thereof.

Worship is also seen as thanksgiving to God as the original source of all good things and blessings, an "affirmation that all the blessings we enjoy come from Him and Him alone, that things other than Him are means He has established" (Mutahhari 1985, p.83). God has declared many times through the ages that man is very ungrateful for His gifts and daily blessings to him. "Man is ever thankless" (Quran 17:67). To worship God is to affirm His Goodness and offer thanks for all He has granted.

Another kind of worship in Tawheed is seen in acknowledging His Unity in that He has no partner in either His attainment of a perfect state or in His ability to bless mankind. Only the One God is the source of all perfection and goodness.

> There is no absolute perfection but in Him; there is no essence beyond defect other than Him; there is no benefactor or original source of blessings to whom all acts of thanksgiving revert but Him. (Mutahhari 1985, p.83)

Solely through Tawheed is the true Essence of God understood and His attributes acknowledged in worship. In perceiving the Unity of essence and attributes, multi-

plicity is denied as a direct result of this process.

> Tawhid (sp.) as regards the Essence means to know the Essence of God in its Unity and Uniqueness...Tawhid as regards the attributes means to perceive and know the Essence of God in its identity with its attributes and the attributes in their identity with one another. Tawhid as regards the Essence means to deny the existence of a second or a likeness, but Tawhid as regards to the attributes means to deny the existence of any sort of multiplicity and compoundness in the Essence itself... Therefore, Tawhid as regards the attributes means perceiving and knowing the Unity of the Essence and the attributes of God. (Mutahhari 1985, p. 85)

4.6. Tawheed in Theory and Practice

The science of Tawheed as expressed by Tawheed ar Ruboobeeyah, Tawheed al Asmaa wa Sifat and Tawheed al 'Ebaadah explain in great detail the concept of Divine Unity overall. Further depth can be gained when examining the relationship of science to the interplay between practice and theory.

The science of Tawheed is "demonstration of the Unity of God in Himself and in the act of creation" ('Abduh 1980, p.29). Tawheed in practice is seen in the *shahada*, or witness spoken by every Muslim, "*la ilaha illa 'llah*". It is the first pillar of Islam, also referred to as the *kalimah at-Tawheed*, or statement of Unity, and declares boldly that there is no God but Allah and that none but God is worthy of worship (Mutahhari 1985, p.89).

Tawheed in practice or worship means that God is the object of our obedience and center towards which every thought and action is directed. He acts as the *qibla*, or

directional point to which all is focused in our lives. All other ideals and directions are rejected as none else is worthy of our attentions in the place of God (Mutahhari 1985, p.88).

Tawheed in theory is to see or understand the concept of the Unity of God. Science takes this concept and offers the proofs of creation and natural laws to back it up. Then, practice and worship act upon the knowledge and allow for the following of a daily path designed to bring one into harmony with the truth about God and gain an even further understanding of His Unity and Essence. Thus Tawheed becomes a circle which enables one to fully actuate an awareness in this life of God's Reality and, consequently, the purpose for existence.

While theoretical Tawheed belongs to the class of knowledge, that is, the belief in the existence of God as One, the acts of Tawheed in practice or worship involve right being and becoming; theoretical Tawheed is to perceive the Unity of God; Tawheed in practice is to bring one into unity with God, to go or move to be in alignment with God's will (Mutahhari 1985, p.88).

> Theoretical Tawhid (sp.) is an insight into perfection; Tawhid in practice is a movement aimed at reaching perfection. Theoretical Tawhid means perceiving the Unity of God, but Tawhid in practice means bringing man into Unity. (Mutahhari 1985, p.88)

Both kinds of Tawheed require the initiative and effort from our side as God's Unity exists independently from our actions or beliefs. We are agents to act for

ourselves in choosing to follow or reject God's truth in this life. Whether we so choose the right path, God still retains His Tawheed and is unaffected by our actions.

> Islam is Unity as such, which exists *a priori*, everywhere and at all times, and which simply needs to be recognised, so that man's effort in this regard serves only to extricate the unity already existing in himself and in all things. (Burchhardt 1976, p.75)

Man must seek the metaphysical knowledge and spiritual realisation that come with the Divine theophany. The Unity of God is not dependent upon one's understanding of it, yet, "to perceive theological truths... is itself the ultimate end of humanity" (Mutahhari 1985, p.88).

Because man lives in the world, he perceives the reality of life as being this earthly existence only. Man has, in a sense, lost the knowledge of who he is due to the *hijab*, or veil that has obscured his view of any premordial existence. The inversion of the state of reality has caused an atrophy in the power to see God as the center. What should be the periphery is now the center, and the true reality is awaiting man's discovery (Nasr 1984, p.155).

By obtaining a realization of the existence of God, understanding His attributes and seeking to become unified with Him, one then can reverse the outlook on this life and allow the spiritual world to become the reality and its precepts the aim of earthly existence. In this sense, Tawheed carries a world view that encompasses man's

life search for the realities existing in science, philosophy and religion.

The Unity of God and the Divine Reality of His existence answer the questions left by the void of scientific fact regarding the formation of universe. It also handles the questions of "why?" that the deduction and logic of philosophy can not answer in order to bring meaning to life. It bridges the area of knowledge by faith that is necessary to claim a religious belief that sanctifies human aims and details a code of conduct for living the God-required life. Tawheed is the only world view that can fulfill all three of these categorical needs of culture (Mutahhari 1985, p.68-74).

By believing and practicing Tawheed, one is able to reach their potential in life and find peace through becoming unified with God. One is able to face and successfully oppose any false ideals that would lead astray in either belief or action. By using Tawheed on a daily basis, man possesses a strong counteractive agent against the erroneous opposing doctrine of multiplicity, or *shirk*.

4.7. Tawheed Against Shirk

Tawheed is considered to be a causitive and intensive noun. It is aggressive and forceful in its fight against pluralism, not just an abstract concept or state of mind (Nasr 1976, p.12). It has the positive sense of the Unity of God as well as the negative sense to refrain from

worshipping any but God

> Thus to be a Muslim- i.e. to surrender oneself to God- it is necessary to believe in the Unity of God in the sense of His being the only Creator, preserver and nourisher. But this belief- later on called *tawhid ar-rububiyya* (sp.)- is not enough. In fact many of the idolaters did know and believe that it is a supreme God alone who can do all this. But that was not enough to make them Muslims. To *tawhid ar-rububiyya* one must add *tawhid al-uluhiyya* (sp.)i.e. one must acknowledge the fact that it is this God alone who deserves to be worshipped, and therefore abstain from directing any of one's acts of worship to someone or something else. (Idris 1990, p.8)

The Arabs at the time of Mohammad practiced both Tawheed ar Ruboobeeyah and Tawheed al Asmaa wa Sifaat. It was the third aspect, that of Tawheed al 'Ebaadah, which was not observed and thereby prescribed the need for a prophet. The Quran refers to them as *mushrikoon* (idolaters) and Allah states:

> Say: "Who is it that gives you all sustenance from the sky and earth, governs sight and hearing, brings forth life from dead matter and death from the living, and plans the affairs of man?" They will all say: "Allah". (Quran 10:31) If you asked them who created them, they would surely say, "Allah". (Quran 43:87) Most of them do not believe in Allah except while joining partners to Him. (Quran 12:106)

Even though the Makkans believed in the first two aspects of Tawheed, it was not enough to save them from being classified by Allah as idolaters. The fact that they worshipped other human-made gods in addition to Allah was unacceptable to Him, as shirk in any form is to ultimately deny the Unity of God.

Just as the opposite of Unity is multiplicity, in the

religious sense, the opposite of Tawheed is shirk , which is much more than simple idolatry. As translated literally, it is to share, associate or partner. It is the pairing or equaling anything to God which in turn causes God to become more or less than One in Essence. It is worship in any form directed toward any source other than God.

> To attribute sacredness to nature or anything in it is to commit shirk or association of other beings with God... To make of His creatures a part of Him (Quran 43:15), to call upon anything other than God for help (39:43), to adore any part of nature beside God (40:66), to claim a genealogical connection between Him and humans or *jinn* (37:158), to take anything from the earth as divine (21:21)- is the capital crime, the unpardonable sin (4:48, 116). In Muslim eyes, shirk or the ascription of any sacredness to profane, to anything in creation, is the vilest abomination. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p. 315)

Shirk includes the worship of idols, or *taghut*, but the definition includes anything that is served other than God, and not just in the physical sense. "The meaning of *al-Taghut* is everything to which man commits higher loyalty, service or obedience than is due" ('Abd al Wahhab 1979, p.21).

The Quran states, "Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden you, namely, that you do not associate aught with Him" (Quran 6: 151). Also, "Serve no other Gods besides Allah, lest you incur disgrace and ruin. Your Lord has enjoined you to worship none but Him.." (Quran 17:22).

There is a *Hadith* or traditional saying of the

Prophet Mohammad which states:

> Muadh ibn Jabal related: "I was riding behind the prophet-(PBUH)-when he said to me: "o Muadh! Do you know what is due to Allah from His creatures, and what is due to them?" I responded: "Allah and His Prophet know best." He continued: "What is due to Allah from His creatures is to serve Him alone and never to associate any other being with Him. What is due them is not to punish any person who does not associate aught with Him." (*Hadith* [ND] cited in 'Abd al Wahhab, p.4)

The service to God mentioned is that of Tawheed and "whoever does not fulfill the requirements of tawhid (sp.) has not served Allah. For, only in tawhid may the meaning of the verse be sought: 'Nor will you serve the God Whom I serve' (Quran 109:3)" ('Abd al Wahhab, p. 5).

Every time a Muslim repeats the shahada, he is serving God through a declaration of Tawheed. Another Hadith recounts how the Prophet Musa (Moses) asked God to teach him a prayer to recite. God answered,

> "Say, O Musa, there is no God but Allah."Musa said,"O Lord, all your servants say these words." Allah said: "O Musa, if the seven heavens and all they hold, and the seven earths as well, if all these were weighed against this word of 'There is no God but Allah,' the latter would outweigh the former." (*Hadith* [ND] cited in 'Abd al Wahhab, p.9)

The shahada serves as a denial of shirk as well. By affirming the Unity of God, the utterer shows His understanding of the Essence and chief attribute which defines God's character. There is no room for other deities in such a declaration.

The shahada also has a physical manifestation that is seen through the action of destroying an image or anything

that could be considered one. This serves as the concrete meaning of the shadada or the shahada in practice.

> Therefore, the destruction of idols-and, by extension, the putting aside of every image likely to become an idol- is the clearest possible parable for Islam of the "one thing necessary", which is the purification of the heart for the sake of tawhid (sp.), the bearing witness of the awareness that "there is no divinity save God." (Burckhardt 1976, p.5)

4.8. Types of Shirk

Just as there are many forms of Tawheed, shirk also has many faces. There is Shirk ar Ruboobeeyah which allows for a belief in two or more Gods under the names of dualism, trinitarianism or polytheism. It could also include atheism, or the belief that God does not exist at all.

Belief in multiplicity of origins is shirk as regards Essence. The shirk of Creatorship places some created things on the same level as He is, creating a type of partnership in creation.

Shirk al Asmaa wa Sifaat envisions Allah possessing the form and quality of humans or animals. Pictures or figures of God, as drawn by the worshippers, show His image as it relates to their idea of what He should look like and oft-times carries the racial characteristics of the group, such as skin color and facial features.

Conversely, this shirk also allows created things to take on the attributes or qualities of Allah. Here, the object or person is revered to the point of worship and can even become deified. Many of the ancient Arab idols' names came from a mutation of the Names of God (Philips 1994,

p.34).

Shirk al'Ebaadah, or shirk as regarding worship, was the most important infraction among the Arabs as already mentioned. In this shirk, acts of worship are directed to other beings and objects than God and the reward for the worship is sought from the creation instead of the Creator.

4.9. Shirk al Akbar

This is perhaps the most obvious kind of shirk and is referred to as *Shirk al Akbar,* or major shirk. Objects or idols (taghut) are placed alongside or in lieu of God and worshipped accordingly. Made of wood, stone, or metal- whether inanimate or a part of nature- such as stars, sun, moon, trees or animals, this shirk in practice places a representational physical object in the role of the One God.

In the case of the Makkans, they were making requests and seeking aid from these hand-made idols. Allah has declared that He is the only one from Whom aid must be sought. The *Fatihah,* or opening passage in the Quran, which a Muslim recites in prayer 17 times a day, reads, "You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help" (Quran 1:4).

To pray to anything or anyone else, dead or alive is major shirk. To ask aid or intercession from saints, martyrs or righteous people after death is major shirk.

> If someone prays to the dead seeking their influence on the lives of the living or the

souls of those who have passed away, they have associated a partner with Allaah (sp.), because worship is being shared between Allaah and His creation...If someone prays to the Prophet (PBUH), to so-called saints, *jinns* or angels asking for help or asking them to request help from Allaah for them, they have also committed *shirk*. (Philips 1994, p. 21)

Other forms of major shirk include swearing oaths or making vows to any besides in the Name of Allah, and performing sacrifice to any but Allah (Zino 1995, p. 28). As Allah has said, "Those who they (idolaters) invoke besides Allah have not created anything, but are themselves created" (Quran 16:20).

The Quran has many warnings and reminders relative to physical idolatry. "Believers, wine and games of chance, idols and divining arrows, are abominations devised by Satan. Avoid them, so that you may prosper" (Quran 5:92).

The story of Abraham, who was living in a time of great idolatry served as example: "Tell of Abraham, who said to Azar, his father: 'will you worship idols as your Gods? Surely you and all your people are in palpable error.' Thus we showed Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he might become a firm believer."

Abraham then watched a star rise and thought that it was his God. But, as the star faded in the morning light, Abraham declared he would not worship a God who faded. He then observed the moon and sun rise and fall and finally concluded, "I am done with your idols. I will turn my face to Him who has created the heavens and the earth, and live a

righteous life. I am no idolater" (Quran 6:74-79).

To think of creation as an end unto itself or to attribute any influence or supernatural manifestation to any other than God is shirk:

> To believe something whose existence is not from Him is shirk. To believe that something has an influence that is not from Him is likewise shirk, whether that influence is supernatural, like the creation of the heavens and the earth, or is small and inconsequential, like the tumbling of a leaf. (Mutahhari 1985, p.111)

4.10. Shirk al Asghar

There is also the shirk in regards to possessions that counts personal ownership above all else in this life. This is part of *Shirk al Asghar*, or minor shirk.

Beyond the physical object, this includes the possessions of power over others, intellectual supremacy and self-sufficiency which excludes the recognition of God's design and hand in the course of events. It takes the form of prestige, position and attainments of personality.

> Words and deeds that convey praise, magnification and glorification, express worship of an absolutely perfect essence or an absolutely self-sufficient being, and are directed to other-than-God are shirk. (Mutahhari 1985, p.112)

Minor shirk also includes any form of worship done with the intent of being seen righteous in others' eyes. It is referred to as *ar Riya*, or worship for praise, and gives no benefit for the deed performed, but rather, a punishment in its place. The Prophet said:

"The thing I fear for you the most is *ash-Shirk al-Asghar*." The companions asked, "Oh! messenger of Allaah (sp.), what is minor shirk?" He replied,"*Ar-Riya* (showing off), for verily Allaah will say on the Day of Resurrection when people are receiving their rewards, 'Go to those for whom you were showing off in the material world and see if you can find any reward from them.'" (Philips 1994, p.40)

The Prophet also referred to secret shirk as,"When a man gets up to pray and strives to beautify his prayer because people are looking at him; that is secret shirk" (Philips 1994, p. 40). It is the self-pride and lack of humility before God which is such a detriment to proper belief and worship.

Pride in any form is considered shirk as it is the opposite to recognition of God as the source of all that is good or praiseworthy. The result of pride is ingratitude which can also be classified as shirk as it puts one in a position of self-sufficiency. By not acknowledging God's hand in the daily affairs of life with gratitude, and thinking that all things are brought about through individual thought and effort alone, one places one's own independence and actions above God's will and causes God to be replaced by self-pride. Then, the state of submission to God's will is lost and thereby, the Divinity of God and His omnipotence are denied.

Shirk changes the "we" of unity into the "I" of individualism in the *ummah*, or community. It allows pride to overcome the desire to serve and share with others. It forms individual attachments of a selfish kind which cause

social inequity to form. It is the opposite effect from that which Tawheed engenders. Shirk causes:

> waywardness and directionlessness of man and fragmentation and dispersion of his personality...and conversely, his unity, his attainment of a single character and direction, and his evolutionary assignment in the system of Tawhid (sp.)...Man under the system of shirk is drawn every moment into a different direction, toward a different pole. (Mutahhari 1985, p. 99)

This splinterization of the personality causes one to create the chaos which is ever present in life. The wanderings and seekings of humanity for the ultimate peace is a direct result of the lack of a centered outlook which Tawheed can offer. Shirk is one of the great sins not only because it is a denial of the true essence of God, but because it affects so many of the choices which one must make correctly in order to live a successful life and find fulfillment. Its consequences affect not only the instigator, but all those with whom they come into contact.

One who chooses a life devoid of submission to God automatically allows shirk to lead their footsteps. All of the ills of society can be traced back to individuals or groups of people who have committed acts of shirk and have thereby caused the destruction of their societies' well-being.

4.11. Tawheed as a Social Truth

Tawheed, on the other hand, brings the ummah together by proper worship into a unified whole. It allows for the

proper use of community action, that of uplifting and helping one another to achieve the righteous goals. It calms any chaos created by individual waywardness or ignorance.

Tawheed binds the ummah together into a centered direction and uses any differences to the benefit of the whole rather than to cause schisms. It does not allow separations to occur based on earthly attainments, honored lineage or even by God given gifts to individuals.

> Tawhid in practice, individual and social, consists in the individual's growing unified through worship of God alone by means of rejection of all kinds of counterfeit worship (such as worship of carnal desires, money or prestige) and in society's growing unified through worship of God alone by means of rejection of discrimination and of injustice. (Mutahhari 1985, p. 98)

In opposition to shirk's splinterization of society, Tawheed becomes a social truth that takes its place as part of the *jihad*, or struggle to overcome, in the tendencies among humans to look for inequalities among their fellows.

> When Islam proclaimed Tawhid (sp.) as an inner psychological truth, in the light of faith in God Most High and worship of His single Essence, it simultaneously proclaimed Tawhid as a social truth, to be realized by means of jihad and struggle against social inequalities. (Mutahhari 1985, p. 93)

The jihad in Tawheed consists of ridding oneself of the impulses and desires to be superior to another fellow being. It promotes the acceptance of humankind as equals

in life along with the utter and complete submission to God and His will. There is no discimination of any kind in a society based on the observance of Tawheed. Rather, the ummah enjoys the variety of races, skills, circumstances and personalities and seeks to make all feel welcome and useful to the whole.

Jihad in Tawheed is to overcome the "I" of the individual wants and desires. It is to submit the ego and "love thy neighbor as thyself." It is to be content with whatsoever God has bestowed by way of wealth, intelligence, position or any other earthly desires and never to envy another for what appears to be a greater blessing. It is to obey all of God's laws without feelings of regret or compulsion.

> The contract of a real worshipper has two provisions. One is to free oneself from the rule of other-than-God, from obedience to that rule, whether psychial impulses and appetites or of beings, objects or persons. The other is utter submission to what God commands, contentment with that, love of that. (Mutahhari 1985, p.113)

4.12. Tawheed and Remembrance

The only way to accomplish the jihad of self in seeking to rid all unwanted directions toward shirk is to have God continually in mind. In an attitude of daily conscious worship, or *Ihsan,* wherein the mind is centered in an on-going thought of praising God and seeking for His Reality in everyday struggles, true Tawheed is realized.

Ihsan is perfection in worship, or to be conscious of Allah during worship, as Muslim reports, "as if you are seeing Him, (and if you cannot concentrate to that extent) yet truly He is seeing you" (Zino 1995, p.12). This is in effect why Allah referred to the Prophet as the remembrancer: "Remind them, for you are but a remembrancer; you are not a warder over them" (Quran 88:21-22).

Only as one focuses on remembering Allah can they say that there is true submission. Surrender to the One God is a matter of continual remembrance and state of worship. As Ismail Faruqi states in the introduction to the *Kitab al Tawhid:*

> Tawhid (sp.) requires therefore that no thought, tacit or explicit, enter the mind of the Muslim which compromises this absolute metaphysical unity; and that no deed or desire cause the Muslim's loyalty to God to be shared, diminished or compromised in any way whatever. ('Abd al Wahhab, p.xviii)

In order to keep the mind from entertaining the negative thoughts offered by this physical world that would disrupt the attitude of Tawheed, there must be a constant effort on the part of the worshipper to feed the mind with that which engenders the continual remembrance of God. If the mind is idle and a vacuum is formed, the immediate surroundings and physical environment will offer unguarded imput which will eventually lead toward the wrong path. As the proverb states, "As a man thinketh, so is he."

As one must live in the world, the input and impulses that come daily through the senses, the appetites and passions of the body and mind, can not necessarily be stopped from forming. Rather, it is a matter of not dwelling on or taking action concerning them. In order to achieve this, the scales must be balanced by focused thinking upon that which is worthy and which leads toward God.

If negative thoughts come, they can then be immediately replaced by positive ones which is a form of continual worship and remembrance. God's command for one to pray five times daily is a confirmation of the need for continual effort to focus the mind on the things of God at regular intervals.

Thus Tawheed can be maintained, not through the perfect remembrance of every second of consciousness, but by the attitude of rejection of worldly thoughts through focused times of positive input. The negative thoughts simply can not be acted upon when they are ignored or replaced by positive ones.

One of the most important helps that God has provided to enable worshippers to maintain a constant state of Tawheed is the Holy Quran. Faith is kept alive and remembrance assured through the recitation during the daily prayers.

> Remembering God is thus the life-force of faith, without which fades and might even wither away. So, "the faithful are those who remember God, standing and sitting, and on

their sides" (Quran 3:191). (Idris 1990, p. 11)

The Quran therefore prescribes and describes, in great detail ways and means of helping one to remember God and keep their faith alive. It teaches, exhorts and stimulates one toward the proper actions. As Al Bukhari said, "Knowledge precedes expression and action" ('Abd al Wahhab 1979, p.12). The Holy Quran provides the proper knowledge to act upon.

All Quranic and Prophetic injunctions and prohibitions which extend to all aspects of human life, such as acts of worship and personal matters, social relations and political order, are designed to put one in a state which is conducive to God's remembrance (Idris 1990, p. 11).

The Quran states that God created humans "only that they should adore Me" (Quran 51:57). Through the act of adoration and worship, through study of the Quran and application in every area of life, one can remember God fully and always. Additionally, the Prophetic injunctions and prohibitions mentioned above are designed to lead one to the right path in daily affairs. Many of these are contained in the Hadith.

4.13. Hadith as Guidance

The Hadith, sayings or traditions, of the Prophet Mohammad were copiously gathered and verified some time after the prophet's death through the eighth century. The Hadith, though not considered on the same level as the

Quran as being direct revelation from God, are considered an irrefutable source of clarification for many of the teachings in the Quran. "Thus the Quran is Allah's words, and the Hadith contain the Prophet's and form a body of scripture second in authority to the Quran" (Mawlana M.'Ali, *A Manual of Hadith*, p.362 as quoted in Welch 1979, p. 23).

The Quran states,"..And We have also sent down to you the reminder and the advice (the Qur'an), that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought" (Quran 16:44). The Prophet added, "Indeed I have been given the Quran and along with it that which is like it...Hold fast to my *Sunna* (sayings) and the *Sunna* of my rightly guided successors" (Zino 1995, p.54).

The Hadith reflect the personality of the Prophet and his interpretation of the revelations he was declaring, either by example directly from his life or by an explanation in words:

> The importance of Hadith is increased for the Muslim by the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) not only taught, but took the opportunity of putting his teachings into practice in all the important affairs of life...His practice was not mere private conduct, but a detailed interpretation and application of his teachings. (Alvi 1975, p.59)

At the time of compilation, the Hadith were categorized according to their verity, the classification of *sahih*, or true, being the highest and most unquestionable, *hasan*, or on good authority, down to

dhaef, or weak and questionable. In order to receive a ranking of sahih, separate sources had to report the same words as spoken by the Prophet and the chain of transmission had to be unbroken (Azami 1975, p.20).

The integrity and soundness of memory of the transmitters plus the conformity of the Hadith to other Hadith regarding similar topics were also examined to fulfill the conditions of acceptance. The term *isnad*, or science of transmission, later defined the rules which governed the divisions and classifications of Hadith. The term is also used in a more vague sense in reference to the great heritage of spoken tradition of the pre-Islamic Arab peoples in poetry and literature.

It is completely logical to assume, therefore, that the Hadith were verbally and accurately passed down for 150 years before anyone thought of actually writing them down in a permanent physical record. There is also some debate as to whether the Prophet forbade their being written at first in order to not cause confusion with the Quran (Graham 1975, p.35). Two common sources for written sahih Hadith are Bukhari and Muslim, whose collections were put together during the end of the eighth century.

When reading the Hadith, it should be remembered that the actual words are the Prophet's thoughts and not directly spoken by God. Further, as they were compiled after his death, Mohammad never had the opportunity to read the record and make any corrections. Also, the Hadith

originated in the conquered territories rather than the homeland of Islam and reflect the judgements, attitudes and problems of a later time than the prophet's (Grabar 1987, p. 82).

But to a Muslim, the Hadith are still considered a sacred work and not questioned as such. The recorded utterances are inspired by God and are an authoritative source when questions concerning doctrine are raised.

> In the formation of Muslim dogma the Traditions of the Prophet have not been of less importance than the Quran itself; they are held by Muslim theologians to proceed from divine inspiration, though unlike the Quran, which is the eternal uncreated Word of God, they are held to be inspired only as to content and meaning, but not in respect of actual verbal expression. Accordingly, the Traditions enjoy an authority commensurate with that of the precepts of the Quran itself and are equally binding on the consciences of the faithful. (Arnold 1965, p.5)

The subject matter of the Hadith focus on every day life situations and what is the proper course of conduct, thought or attitude that a Muslim must possess in order to be counted among the faithful. There are many details of explanation and instruction regarding how to handle the non-clear-cut situations that confront every individual in life. Whereas the Quran provides the overall doctrines, the Hadith provide the means of living and believing in those doctrines on a daily basis.

Essentially, the Hadith offer further support toward focusing life on remembering God and worshipping Him. They support the attitude of Tawheed and offer many

concrete warnings against any kind of shirk, in theory or in practice. There are specific shirk Hadith which have been applied directly to the visual arts. Their influence have had a great impact on the general attitudes regarding visual imagry and have defined the parameters of Islamic aniconistic art.

4.14. Hadith Regarding Shirk

Since shirk, and more specifically idolatry, was the greatest concern of the time, there are many Hadith that relate to the owning or making of statues, pictures, or any object that could be a source for misguided worship. As mentioned previously, the fear of commiting shirk led to a very iconoclastic view regarding the visual arts that although not present at the outset of Mohammad's time, came to be an important issue shortly thereafter.

The Hadith that deal with this topic represent a precaution against commiting unintentional idolatry and sacrilage rather than an outright ban on representational images (Gibbons 1981, p. 86). However, many of the jurists in later centuries would use these sayings as a source of condemnation for the artist and visual arts which led to a general acceptance of belief among the Muslim ummah that pictures of any sort should be banned altogether.

> Primitive Muslim society, therefore, does not appear to have been so iconoclastic as later generations became, when condemnation of pictoral and plastic art based on the Traditions ascribed to the Prophet had won general approval in Muslim society. (Arnold 1965, p. 8)

It should be remembered, as also mentioned previously, that the Jews had a strong influence in the iconoclastic attitudes during the eighth century. The edict of Yazid which destroyed all of the iconographic images in Christian churches and replaced them with vegetal ones happened in 721 A.D. Both Judaism and Christianity teach shirk as a doctrine received directly from God through His Prophets. "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me," was the watchword for generations.

One of the more hateful things to a Muslim in that time, then, was the pictoral narrative tradition of Christian art which acted as a block and even threat to the spread of Islam. By banning all images, even non-religious ones, Islam was declaring the restoration of the pure faith, as given by God in the Holy Books of both Judaism and Christianity.

However, the actual prohibition that is given in all three religions is, strictly speaking, only in reference to a representational image of deity and more especially to worship of such an image. In that same sense, Islam even went a step further in disallowing portraits of prophets, saints, or any human called by God as they too could become objects of adoration (Burckhardt 1976, p. 27).

This prohibition makes sense when considering that the tradition of making likenesses of dead, noble ancestors was in part responsible for the gradual decline into a full state of idolatry of the Arabian peoples.

> ...the worship of idols originated when people began making statues of their dead or pious ancestors in order to remember them. Gradually they began to venerate them, adding to this veneration little by little until they had made the statues into gods, worshipping them besides God, asking them for help, fearing their anger, and imploring them for blessings. This is what happened, among earlier communities such as the people of Wadd, Suwwa, Yaghuth, Ya'uq and Nasra. (Al-Qaradawi, p.101)

It is logical to assume that over a period of years, any physical object which carries with it a strong sentimental or emotional attachment, could increase in meaning to become an object of adoration or even worship. That is why shirk also includes attachment to anything other that God in the sense of ownership or possessions that could replace worship of God.

This is where Tawheed in practice and remembering God only as the Source of all things comes into play. The prohibitions mentioned in the Quran and Hadith against idols and the making of forms are given to protect the Oneness of God in the emotional attachments that can be so easily formed by people otherwise.

> One of the reasons for this prohibition (of statues), although not the only one, as some people may suppose, is to safeguard the belief in the Oneness of God and to be far-removed from the practices of idolaters, who fashion statues and idols with their own hands and them sanctify them, standing before them in adoration. Islam's sensitivity in safeguarding the belief in the Unity of God is very acute, and assuredly this caution and concern is quite justified. (Al-Qaradawi, p. 101)

The Prophet warned the people about forms of hidden or unintentional shirk which would be so easy to commit if

continual care was not taken:

> One day Allaah's (sp.) messenger delivered a sermon saying "O people, fear shirk for it is more hidden than the creeping of an ant." Those whom Allaah wished asked, "And how do we avoid it when it is more hidden than the creeping of an ant, O Messenger of Allaah?" He replied, "Say: O Allaah, we seek refuge in you from knowingly committing shirk with you and we seek forgiveness for what we do not know about." (*Hadith* [ND] cited in Philips 1994, p.42).

Another illustration of this attitude of discouraging anything that could resemble shirk or allowing people the chance to commit it is seen in the story of the Caliph 'Umar, who, when seeing that the people were unduly sanctifying a tree under which the the companions of the Prophet had sat, had it cut down. By doing so, he believed he had helped, "destroy everything which might blur the distinction between the creature and the Creator" (Al Zarqa 1980, p.4).

In reference to all of the Hadith carrying shirk ramifications, the original intention was to provide further counsel and enlightenment regarding improper religious worship or concepts that could steer the practicing Muslim off the true path regarding God's Unity. The Hadith were never meant to condemn art or the artist as such or to be used as justification for the disallowal of any and all representational images in a non-religious setting.

> Certain pronouncements attributed to the Prophet and carried in the Hadith have perhaps been interpreted against artistic activity, although they are of purely religious significance. When saying that no angel will

> enter a house in which there are images, idols are meant, not figural representations. (Grube, p.7)

Most of the Hadith used for artistic prohibition are of religious significance only as stated above. The Hadith referred to regarding angels is as follows:

> Malik related to me...that Abdullah ibn Abi Talha had gone to visit Abu Said al Kudri while he was ill. Abu Said said to them, "The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace informed us, 'The angels do not enter a house which contains pictures or images.'" (Malik 1982, p. 478)

Further Hadith as reported in Ali Al-Muttaqi's *Kanz al-Ummal*, volume two, speak out against the image-maker who is classed as an enemy of God, worthy of destruction on Judgement Day:

> Those who will be most severly punished on the Day of Judgement are the murderer of a Prophet, one who has been put to death by a Prophet, one who leads men astray without knowledge, and a maker of images or pictures... A head will thrust itself out of the fire and will ask, Where are those who invented lies against God, or have been the enemies of God, or have made light of God? Then men will ask, Who are these three classes of persons? It will answer, The sorcerer is he who has invented lies against God; the maker of images or pictures is the enemy of God; and he who acts in order to be seen of men, is he that has made light of God. (*Hadith* [ND] cited in Arnold 1965, p.6)

4.15. Artist as Creator

The problem thus appears to be two-fold. First is the image itself that could be used as an idol and secondly, the role of the artist in acting as a creator which is blasphemous as it is an attribute of God. The Quran is explicit in detailing the attribute of creation as

belonging only to God.

> Exalted be He above their idols. He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Modeller. His are the most gracious names. All that is in heaven and earth gives glory to Him (Quran 59:24). Allah is the Creator of all things, and of all things He is the Guardian. His are the treasures of the heavens and the earth (Quran 39:63).

The Quran shows the differences between that which an idol can supply as opposed to that which God only can create:

> Say:"Why have you chosen other Gods besides Him, who, even to themselves, can do neither harm nor good?" Say:"Are the blind and the seeing alike? Does darkness resemble the light?" Have their idols brought into being a creation like His, so that both creations appear to them alike? Say:"Allah is the Creator of all things. He is the One, the Almighty" (Quran 13: 15,16). Say:"Can any of your idols conceive creation, then renew it? Allah conceives creation, then renews it. How is it that you are so misled?" (Quran 10:34).

In each case quoted above, God is referred to as the *musawwir*, or Creator. Unfortunately, the same term is also used in reference to the painter or artist in the visual art sense as it also means to fashion or form in the verbal use.

> There is no foundation in the Quran itself for the prohibition on the representations of living forms. However, the Arabic verb for "to fashion" or "form" is synonymous with that for "to create" and Allah is not only the Creator but also a *musawwir*, a painter or artist. Therefore the making of imitations of living beings is dangerously close to being in blasphemous competition with Allah and the presumer may, according to another tradition, be required on the Day of Judgement to breathe life into his work and, failing, be condemned. (Wade 1976, p. 9)

The Bukhari Hadith referred to in this instance says that on the Day of Judgement, the punishment of Hell will be bestowed upon the painter, his paintings headed to the Fire and "whoever makes an image will be asked to provide it with life which he can never do" (*Hadith* vol IV p.106 (no.97) cited in Arnold 1965, p.5).

It is because the artist is seen as trying to usurp the creative function of God and thereby assimilate himself to God that he is damned. A Hadith is reported which tells of the horror of Abu Hurayah on seeing an artist at work painting pictures in the upper story of a house in Medina. He tells his companion that he heard the Prophet say:

> Allah ta'ala said: "None is more unjust than the person who claims to create as I do. Would they only create an atom? A single reed? a single grain of barley?" (*Hadith* vol IV p.104 (no.90) cited in Arnold 1965, p.8)

Another problem is with the artist's pride in creating something beautiful or of worth. It is looked upon as rebelling against Tawheed. The artist is officially regarded as an imposter in attaining the title of creator and "the highest term of praise which the Christian world can bestow upon the artist in calling him a creator, in the Muslim world, serves to emphasize the most damning evidence of his guilt" (Arnold 1965, p. 6).

A story is told to teach the point more clearly in which a sculptor created an image after a great deal of labor and was so overcome in admiration of the finished product that he said to it"speak! speak!" (Al-Qaradawi,

p.102) This is why at the time of the prophet, likenesses copied in a three-dimensional form could only be looked at in an anti-Islamic light. The sculptor was also commanded not to create any such images for non-Muslims as the punishment would be just the same (Al-Qaradawi, p.100).

The only person to ever be allowed to share in a way God's creative power was Jesus Christ in his miracle of the clay bird as recorded in the Quran. It was given as a sign to people of God's Reality and Truth for conversion among the Israelites, not as a means of Jesus competing with God or assuming His powers for his own gain. Even in the performance of this miracle, Jesus gave all creative credit to God:

> I bring you a sign from your Lord. From clay I will make for you a likeness of a bird. I shall breathe into it and, by Allah's leave, it shall become a living bird...I bring you a sign from your Lord: therefore fear Him and obey Me. Allah is my God and your God. (Quran 3:49-53)

4.16. Boundaries in Creation of Visual Art

In looking at all the Hadith as a whole then, and trying to make some overall judgements from them as applied to art forms, one possible dividing line can be drawn at whether the image is capable of being a living form. Certainly, a good three-dimensional likeness in sculpture is in this category, whereas, a two-dimensional drawing of either human or animal forms lacking any depth perspective at all could be hardly considered capable of maintaining life. As Burkhardt says,

> ...Islamic negation of anthropomorphic art is

> both absolute and conditional: it is absolute with regard to all images which could be an object of worship, and it is conditional with regard to forms imitating living bodies...Islam tolerates anthropomorphic art forms on the condition that they do not create the illusion of living beings. (Burckhardt 1982, p. 42)

Due to the Hadith quoted thus far, from the eighth century A.D. onward, the representational visual arts were considered illegal by jurisprudence based on the interpretation of these Hadith by the schools of canonical law of the times. Arnold notes:

> When in the third century (according to the Islamic *hijeria* calendar) the Traditions took permanent and authoritative form in the great canonical collections connected with the names Bukhari, Muslim, and others, no further doubt was possible for the faithful as to the illegality of painting and sculpture, and the same condemnation was embodied in the accepted text-books of Muslim laws and was thus enforced by the highest legal opinion. (Arnold 1965, p.9)

He then goes on to quote a legist, Nawawi, of the thirteenth century who said that the painting of a picture of any living thing is strictly forbidden, whether for domestic use or not, and is one of the great sins. The reason being that it implies a likeness to the creative activity of God.

Nawawi allows that it is permissible for the painting of anything which does not have cognisant life, such as a tree or camel saddle. Conversely, he states that it is forbidden to make use of any object with a picture of a living thing on it except in situations wherein the object becomes debased by use, such as in walking or sitting on it

(Arnold 1965, p.9).

In modern times, Al-Qaradawi has compiled a summary of rulings pertaining to figures and figure-makers in order from the most *haram* (prohibited and sinful) to that which is *halal* (permissible). The top of the list are those made specifically for worship purposes in place of or in addition to God, the most detestable of which are statues. Next are images made not to worship, but for imitation of God's creations and are determined by the intention of the artist rather than the actual art form itself.

After these fall statues of commemoration of heros and rulers set up in public places; then, any statues at all,followed by portraits of great people; and finally, pictures of animals or people which constitute a display of luxury by the owner. Among the permissible are pictures of nature, except if they distract from worship or lead to extravagant living, photographs excepting haram subject matter and defaced statues or debased figures, such as those tread upon on a rug (Qaradawi, P. 119-120).

Perhaps the best overall way to judge the level of correctness regarding artistic creation is to look at the intent with which the individual form is made and ask the following questions: "What does the picture depict ? Where is it placed? What is its use? What was the artist's purpose in making the picture?" (Al-Qaradawi, p. 108).

Regarding the permissible pictures of nature, Al-

Qaradawi states that there are many Hadith in support of allowing drawings and paintings of plants, trees and inanimate objects such as lakes, oceans, ships, and mountains. Also allowable are objects from the heavens, such as the sun, moon and stars.

In reference to living things being portrayed, it is still the proper intent which groverns the permissibility of the rendering: "Moreover, if someone wants to make a picture of an animate being with no intention of competing with Allah as Creator or for its glorification or respect, there is no prohibition of doing so; there are numerous sound *ahadith* in this regard" (Al-Qaradawi, p. 110).

To own objects with figural decoration that serve a household use, such as cushions or rugs, serving dishes or wash basins is also allowable. There is no specific ruling regarding the material involved. "As for figures drawn or printed on wood, paper, cloth, rugs and carpets, walls, and the like, there is no sound, explicit, and straightforward text to prove that they are forbidden" (Al-Qaradawi, p. 111).

The physical use of an object, such as rugs that are trodden upon, would not lend respect to any figure woven upon it, and therefore would be considered permissible. "Urwah used arm cushions with pictures of birds and men on them. Ikrimah said,'We detested seeing figures in the upright position but did not mind if they were in rugs or mats, since to tread on them was to debase them'" (*Hadith*

[ND] cited in Al-Qaradawi, p.116).

There is a Hadith which reports that the angel Jibril sought permission of the Prophet to enter his house but exclaimed, "How can I enter while there is a curtain with figures in your house? If you have need of it, cut off the heads (of the figures), or cut it into small pieces and make cushions, or use it as a floor-mat" (*Hadith* [ND] cited in Al-Qaradawi, p.116).

A different Hadith reports the same circumstances, but that a statue was by the Prophet's door rather than the curtain. The reply was basically the same with Jibril suggesting that the head be broken off so that the statue would resemble the trunk of a tree and therefore be acceptable (*Hadith* [ND] cited in Al-Qaradawi, p.106).

Another option, then, was to change or disfigure an object so as to render it unrecognizable. This was fine for objectionable items already created by someone else, but what of the Muslim artist who was caught in the struggle of a desire to express visual art through animate means? One frustated artist was reported to have asked:

> "But, once and for all, am I not to practice my trade? Am I to give up representing animate beings?" And the reply was, "Yes, but you can always chop off the animals' heads so they don't look alive, and you can do your best to make them look like flowers." (Gibbons 1987, p. 87)

The artist would, of course, do better by not creating anything in the first place that resembled an animate object that would require alteration or

disfigurement. In cases of patronage for religious art, the artist was much more restricted in the use of any kind of object decor, animate or not.

When an object was made for a religious institution or had been ordered for donation to a mosque, madrasa, or shrine, the artists generally refrained from any decorations by which a pious Muslim would have been offended (Baer 1983, p. 154).

4.17. Figural Art in the Prophet's House

Since the Prophet Mohammad did not give any direct rulings regarding the use of figural representation in the visual arts, and there are no passages in the Quran wherein God supplies the guidelines, perhaps it would be best to look at what the Prophet himself considered appropriate for his own house and use. The *sunna*, or traditions of how he lived his life, can be taken as an authoritative stance regarding things not spoken directly about.

According to Ibn Rustah, the tent of the Prophet was made of a woolen textile decorated with fabulous beasts, eagles, lions, human figures and Christian crosses (Soucek 1988, p.31). While this sounds almost too remarkable to be believed, there is plenty of sound documentation that record the Prophet's owning of textiles and metalwork inside the house with figures and animals on them.

Muslim reports of Aisha, the Prophet's youngest and most oft-quoted wife, as having said:

> Once when he (Mohammad) had gone on an expedition I draped the door with a curtain having pictures on it. When he returned and saw it, I could discern from his face that he disliked it. He pulled it down and tore it apart, saying, "Allah has not commanded us to clothe stone and clay." She said, "We cut it and made two pillows out of the cloth, stuffing them with palm fibres. He did not criticise me for that." (*Hadith*[ND] cited in Al-Qaradawi, p.112)

The fact that the curtain was accepted as pillows still containing the figures proves that the objection the prophet made was not to the representations themselves, but rather to the location and use of the original object. Muslim reports another Hadith, similar in content, which tells of a curtain with the figure of a bird on it that hangs in the doorway to the house.

The Prophet again requests "remove it from here. When I enter and see it, I am reminded of this world." Al-Bukhari, in telling of the same instance, adds that the objection was that "its figures keep distracting me from my *salat* (prayer)" (*Hadith*[ND]cited in Al-Qaradawi,p.112)

In both instances, the Prophet did not order the figural curtain destroyed, but rather relocated to a less distracting location. In jurisprudence circles, this is seen as a support for the keeping of an object with animate representations on it. "This Hadith indicates that he had allowed the drape to remain in the house as long as it had not distracted his attention to prayer; he did not have any particular objection to the pictures on it" (Al-Qaradawi, p. 112, 114).

As to three-dimensional objects and figures, Aisha

was allowed to bring her dolls with her when she came into the Prophet's house at age 9. She reports:

> I used to play with dolls in the house of the Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) and my friends would come over to play with me. They would hide when they saw the Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) approaching, but he was in fact very happy to see them with me, and so we played together (Al-Qaradawi, p. 107).

Another report from Aisha describes a conversation with the Prophet about one of her dolls which was a representation of King Soloman's winged horse. The prophet was surprised to see the winged horse and when he found out what it represented, he threw back his head and "laughed so heartily that I could see his molars" (Al-Qaradawi, p. 107).

From these Hadith, it is apparent that the Prophet not only did not have objections to figural likenesses or three-dimensional forms, but in fact, kept them in his house and let members of his family use them. As the foremost authority in religious rulings at the time, it could be surmised that if there were even the slightest doctrinal objection to using figures in secular art forms, the Prophet would surely have pronounced it openly and often.

Regarding religious figural representation and the Prophet's views regarding them, there is not much to be found. However, there is an interesting record that is reported in Azraqi's *Chronicles of Mecca*, written in 858 A.D. (Vol 1, p.111). It states that:

> When, after his triumphal entry into Mecca, Muhammad went inside the Ka'bah, he ordered the pictures in it to be obliterated, but put his hand over a picture of Mary, with Jesus seated on her lap, that was painted on a pillar, and said,"Rub out all the pictures except these under my hands." The same narrator adds that it was not until years later, in 683...that these pictures perished in the fire which destroyed the Ka'bah. (Arnold 1965, p.7)

If this story is true, even religious renderings of prophets and events in a religious narrative are considered halal. But, as pointed out, Islam had no need for a narrative pictoral art form, so this really becomes irrelevant to the development of Islamic art as a whole. Representational art simply could not have filled the role for the Islamic culture.

It is sad in some ways that the Prophet Mohammad did not give any direct comments regarding the visual arts in his time. All of the Hadith are indirectly used to refer to art and the rulings given are to the very strictest interpretation that can be applied.

4.18. A Final Analysis

By way of summary towards an overall view of the influence of Tawheed on Islamic visual art, the following points must be considered:

The major message of the prophet Mohammad to the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century was to forsake their idolatry of worship and be brought to a true knowledge of the Unity of God. This message was not a new institution unheard of in prior times, but a main theme throughout all generations. Humankind has often

lost sight of the Truth concerning God and has had to be brought back to the correct knowledge time and time again through prophets' teachings.

The concept of Tawheed, or Divine Unity, is the realisation that there is but One God, One Creator, to Whom nothing else is equal or on the same plane. The creed of Islam declares "There is no God but Allah." It is the first and most complete sentence that can be uttered as to the Reality and Character of God.

Tawheed is exhibited through Ruboobeeyah (Lordship), Asmaa wa Sifaat (Names and Attributes) and 'Ebaadah (Worship). To belief is added the proof of creation and natural laws of the universe which result in knowledge of God. This knowledge is then acted upon to produce a focus for daily life which is physically acted out through submission, worship and continual remembrance of Him. Gradually, the person is brought into Unity with God as he overcomes the worldly reality and is opened to an awareness of the true Existence of God's Reality.

Through Tawheed, the true Character of God is unfolded. The positive and negative attributes show all that is the Essence of God and what His relationship is to man. It teaches that God's existence and power is unaffected by man's doings and that all living things owe obedience and allegiance to Him and none other.

Tawheed is also a social truth in disallowing discrimination and inequality of any kind. It promotes

the jihad, or struggle to overcome the worldly desires of pride and attainment which attribute to social ills and prejudice.

Tawheed is not just a passive belief, but an active verb which fights in direct opposition to shirk. Shirk is not only physical idolatry of other that God; it includes placing any possession, intellectual power, pride in achievement, or worldly desire ahead of God or next to Him in personal focus. It makes God less important than the things of the world. It causes independence of attitude and therefore the loss of submission; the exchange of pride for gratitude; and the release of Unity into a chaos of fragmentation.

Within the societal structure, shirk causes the splinterization of the ummah as personal desires and selfishness act in the place of working together toward unity. It is the cause of unrest and unlawful disobedience in any society.

In order to achieve a true state of Tawheed continually, remembering God is the most important element. Positive input by way of the teachings of the Quran and reciting the Quran through prayer five times daily are a protection against any negative thoughts that may come while going about a normal daily existence. Through daily obedience and submission, an attitude of Tawheed is gained and outside distractions are ignored as the person is brought into a state of Unity with God.

The Hadith, or traditional sayings of the Prophet Mohammad are also positive input and act as guidelines for daily living. They offer advice and help interpret what is the best course to follow in order to maintain Tawheed in individual situations. They help to judge any gray areas that might unwittingly compromise Tawheed.

Within the Hadith are several pronouncements concerning idolatry and things that are considered like unto it. They are primarily directed toward the creation or ownership of any object that could be intentionally or even unintentionally used to commit shirk.

These Hadith were collated at a time when Christian pictoral imagry was being banned. The Jews also had an influence in many of the conquered territories and consequently, the Hadith were used to support the movement against figural representations in the visual arts.

Since idolatry formerly came into the Arab culture through the adoration of ancestral commemorative art, the people were reticent to come any where near the line of what could be considered an artistic rendering of a living object that might later cause an emotional attachment to that form.

Later, as the Hadith were being used as legal proof in the schools of Jurisprudence, the outlook regarding the use figural representations became even darker as actual parameters were set concerning the level and type of unlawfulness or permissibility. The role of the artist

and the intent behind the creation became more important than the actual object itself. Lines of division eventually were drawn, such as whether or not the object could be capable of being a living form.

Permissibility was granted according to: subject matter, such as renderings of nature and inanimate objects; function, such as a rug or cushion which would be debased by its use; possessive intent, wherby the owner is not displaying the object out of pride over worldly wealth; and defacement, wherein the object becomes unrecognizable as a possible figure through the removal or disfigurement of its parts.

4.19. Two Significant Conclusions

Taking into account all that has been said thus far, there are two important points that should be brought out in conclusion. First, concerning the use and interpretation of the Hadith regarding idolatry, the original intention was to help guard Tawheed against any form of shirk using taghut.

To this end, the focus in the early years of Islam was to warn against the physical types of idolatry which could be prevented through positive means by maintaining the proper form and diligence in worship rather than by the negative means of destroying or ridding the environment of all possible unacceptable objects. In the case of actual idols, however, destruction or disfigurement was the only solution that Tawheed prescribed.

As time progressed. however, the focus shifted away from physical shirk and became centered in that of intent. That an object could represent a living thing was not the issue so much as was the reason behind the artist creating it, its use and what the attitude of the owner would be concerning it.

The artist was being viewed as a competitor in using the creative power of God and was committing the shirk of blasphemy. Additionally, the pride which he might feel in the completion of a beautiful object was the shirk of intent. The owner would also share in the guilt as the object could become revered for art's sake and become more important emotionally than the attachment to God.

This shift of focus toward intent was due in part to the natural progression of any religion, in that at the beginning, as the laws and dogma are revealed, physical structures are developed to implement the ideals into daily life. After the codes of conduct have been securely formed and have become a matter of course, the next stage is to become introspective and seek to understand the meanings, intents and why's behind the laws.

As the Islamic ummah became comfortable with the physical requirements of the religion after many years, they began to explore the inner facets of Islam which would further their path toward uncompromising Unity with God. A danger in this quest for depth of understanding was that not all of the followers were capable of living a life

focused on intent, nor could they discern the finer points and meanings involved.

To them, the black and white of the physical law remained. Also, they applied the laws and prohibitions given in one area to other areas that were seemingly related which had had no pronouncements of their own given. Their interpretations based on these two factors became suffocating to areas such as the visual arts.

This attitude led to the second observation that because of the span of years between the actual pronouncement of the Hadith when the prophet was alive and the collating and interpretation of them almost 150 years later, and given the above mentioned shift from the physical to the internal, the Hadith never had a chance to be explained and fixed in meaning on the purer less sophisticated level at which they were uttered.

The pronouncements about physical idolatry and physical idols became applicable to mental, emotional and spiritual themes in later centuries. Further classifications of objects, pictures and art forms were added to the interpretation by reason of intent.

By the eighth century, the Hadith were used in schools of Islamic law to prove or disprove points of argument over the finest details. Many things were read into them and meanings affixed which had no other corroboration by the Prophet or the Quran. In many cases, they were taken out of their historical context in which

they were uttered and applied to an entirely different set of circumstances in another time to another people.

It is always dangerous to apply any interpretation which is not found, or at least referred to in the original context, to other situations. As a result, the visual arts became drawn into the context where, in reality, no utterance had ever been given regarding them directly.

The jurists would have done better to look at the actual way in which the Prophet lived his life in regards to these issues. In using textiles and household items with figural images displayed, Mohammad showed that there really was no objection to the actual artwork.

His only concern was that they not distract him from his prayers or disrupt his continual state of worship by reminding him of the world. The fact that he allowed and even played with Aisha and her dolls, which were representations of living beings in a three-dimensional form, proved that he had no objection to the sculptural shapes themselves.

Again, it was the use of the objects that determined their acceptability. The Prophet understood better that anyone the sin of idolatry. Yet, he did not see a likeness in intent or design of a child's doll. The purity of Islam in his time did not allow for the minute circumspection of every law and the consequent application to anything touching upon the subject.

As was concluded in chapter three, all of these later

pronouncements against figural representation did not really impact the overall development of Islamic art, though. Right from the start, the vegetal and geometric forms of the conquered lands were used in preference to any pictoral or narrative tradition. By the time the Hadith were published, they could only really support an on-going heritage of non-representational forms.

What did become a major influence in the crystalisation of Islamic Art was the shift to the internal ponderings of the Islamic life and more specifically, the further understanding of Tawheed as expressed in the symbolic sense. Islamic art was not unduly influenced in its final developmental forms by any of the injunctions stated previously. Rather, it had already emerged onto a path of symbolic and sacred forms that had no need of images to give meaning to the Islamic message of Tawheed.

The truths that Tawheed taught were encapsulated in the arabesque and the geometric forms as well as the visually written word of God. These are the physical manifestations of Tawheed and the visual symbols of the Reality of the One God. Just because Islam did not have a pictoral heritage did not mean that it was devoid of symbolism as well. In fact, there could not be a better symbolic visual interpretation of Tawheed and the essence of Islam than the repetitive forms which Islamic art employed. Their meanings will next be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

ISLAMIC ART SYMBOLISM

5.1. Islamic Art and Tawheed

By its very nature, all visual art includes a physical expressor or symbol of a mental concept to provide meaning. In some cases, this concept is an actual message that uses art as a carrier; in others, it is an abstract idea, such as a simplistic element in formalism, or the purely emotional portrayal of expressionism. Even in "art for art's sake" art works, the viewer can receive the feeling of pleasure as a message when the work is viewed. As discussed in chapter two, any art work which additionally carries the values, concepts or symbols of the culture in relation to its religious views is considered sacred art.

Islamic art, which came about due to the inception of Islam, is considered a sacred art since its main message is related to religious truth:

> Islamic art is ... the earthly crystallization of the spirit of the Islamic revelation as well as a reflection of the heavenly realities on earth with the help of which the Muslim makes his journey through the terrestrial environment and beyond to the Divine Presence Itself, the the Reality which is the Origin and End of this art. (Burckhardt 1976, p.xvi)

Since the Islamic revelation revolves solely around the principle of Tawheed, it is this concept which Islamic art symbolizes and reveals. "Islamic art is fundamentally derived from *tawhid* (sp.)- that is, from an assent to or contemplation of divine unity" (Burckhardt, *Symbolic*

Truth, p.316). It is because of its link to Tawheed that Islamic art does not experience the stylistic or period changes that most other art eras contain.

Tawheed is the unchanging focal point of Islam, and its consistency is reflected in Islamic art as a spiritual style which is not subject to the normal ebb and flow of cultural ideas and changing values.

> A traditional style ... results not from that false deity of modern times called "a period" or "the times," but from the encounter of the spiritual style of a particular religion and the ethnic genius of a particular people that embraces that religion. That is why the style remains valid as long as that religion and the people in question survive. (Nasr 1976, p.17)

Tawheed is always symbolized in any art work of the Islamic style regardless of media, place or time period. To better understand how Islamic art acts in this symbolic mode, a brief discussion of the types of symbolism in general and as specifically related to Islam follows.

5.2. Symbolic Classifications

By simple definition, a symbol is that which represents another object, thought or emotion. It is also a sign which "is constituted mainly by the fact that it is used and understood as such" (Eaton 1988, p.57) An example is found in linguistic and visual language, such as the word or picture of a bird. Everyone recognises that the picture or word represents the real thing because they have seen the real referent and understand the relationship to it by the picture or word.

There is an *icon*, which is a sign that "refers to the

object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own" (Eaton 1988, p. 57). For example, a designer's model of a new car shares the essential properties of the actual automobile once built. There are three levels of icons: *iconic, iconographic* and *iconological.*

Iconic refers to a picture that represents something because it resembles the thing. Iconographic is when a picture of a thing represents something via recognised practices, for example, a picture of a heart represents love. Iconological means that a picture stands for an idea, such as expressing the relation between truth and beauty or making the metaphysical claim about the reality of the physical world (Eaton 1988, p.58).

An *index* is a sign which "refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being affected by that object" (Eaton 1988, p. 57). An example of this kind of representation are the visual marks one gets when having a rash. They appear as a result or effect of the allergic reaction.

Art historian and theorist E.H. Gombrich has written about the symbolic relationships which art carries in his book, *The Sense of Order* (New York, 1979). He states that objects in art can be used to refer to things beyond themselves by means of vocabulary, syntax, and semantics in the language of art. References do not depend on resemblance alone.

Artists can use the schema of the culture or viewer to produce pictures that have representational meanings at a

deeper level than that which physically appears. Human psychology plays a role in interpreting the non-arbitrary aspects of representational art, such as the seeing of faces in a cloud. Pictures are stand-ins that stand for things (Eaton 1988, p. 61).

There is a thorough analysis of the symbolic content of Islamic art as presented by Lois Ibsen Al-Faruqi in her article entitled, *An Islamic Perspective on Symbolism in the Arts: New Thoughts on Figural Representation* (Al-Faruqi 1982). Al-Faruqi divides all symbolic statements into three levels: the explicit, literally symbolic and implicit.

The explicit is that which "depicts characters, objects, actions, scenes and motifs....It includes the subject matter or surface content of the work" (Al-Faruqi 1982, p.169). The literally symbolic content "makes use of a particular figure, object or scene to arouse in the mind of the initiated spectator a remembrance or an intuition of another object, figure or an idea that is conveniently associated by that culture with the sensory image" (Al-Faruqi 1982, p.169).

Lastly, the implicit symbolic image, which is not generally included in iconographic studies, is the implied category. It contains "those features of any art that relate to the way in which materials of the explicit content and the literally symbolic content are combined in product or performance" (Al-Faruqi 1982, p.169).

Implicit symbolism includes elements of style which refer to the manner of mode and expression, and also the form, which is the overall structure of the artwork.

5.3. Specific Islamic Art Symbolism

Al-Faruqi defines Islamic art as belonging to the explicit and implicit categories only. The explicit symbols found in Islam involve abstract or stylized motifs of geometric, calligraphic and denaturalized figures within intricate patterns and designs. Depictions have no place as the goal is to symbolize the nature of God and man's relation to Him within Tawheed; pictures in addition to being disapproved, would not be adequate in providing the necessary representation (Al-Faruqi 1982, p.170).

The implicit symbolism in Islamic art centers around the structure and style of the forms rather than iconographic features. Here, the subtle meanings are revealed through the modes, methods and organisations of creating the infinite geometric and arabesque patterns. They convey the quality of transcendence and the infiniteness of the divine realm (Al-Faruqi 1982, p.173).

This is accomplished through the choice of size of motifs, the intricacy of the combinations of those motifs, the prevalence of divisions and the repetition of modular combinations. The smallness of the units "enhance the infinite pattern by forcing the viewer to concentrate on the details of the composition. It attracts the mind of

the spectator to follow the unfolding of the design" (Al-Faruqi 1982, p.174).

The depth of intracacy generates a series of visual tensions and relaxations while the disjunct divisional organisation causes a series of modules to be repeated that express a sense of infinite continuation of the total pattern on into space. In many cases, the design is not fitted into an exact frame, but is cut off in mid-pattern, which hints at a larger field of vision and at further possible combinations (Al-Faruqi 1982, p. 176).

The aesthetic experience for the viewer when encountering such a form is based in the overpowering realisation of the concept of infinity and the universal realities. "In this aesthetic exercise, in the experience of awe which it engenders, the percipient gains an understanding that there exists an inexplicable Reality, which is beyond space-time, but which is the Source and Determiner of all that comprises creation" (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.407).

These geometric infinite pattern forms express visual infinity and became recognised as the best way to symbolize God's Unity and the religious concept of Tawheed:

> In all cases of the infinite pattern- which has no beginning or end and is self-contained- the design is at once symbolic both of Allah's infinity and unity in multiplicity and at once expressive both of His transcendence and the concept of *al-tawhid* (sp.). (Madden 1976, p.3)

The perception of unity in multiplicity, *al-wahdah*

fi'l-kathirah, and multiplicity in unity, *al-kathirah fi'l-wahdah*, is recognised in the use of a single element, a single rope or line which comes endlessly back upon itself (Burckhardt 1976, p.63). There is no individual emphasis or focus on any given element in the design or pattern being repeated and every part is subordinated to the overall pattern (Madden 1976, p.2).

The infinite pattern was not limited only to strictly geometric applications. It was applied to the vegetal and floral combinations found in the arabesque as well. The same concepts of small elements combined into larger modules which are repeated over an entire surface still could break the edges of any frame and convey the sense of infinity.

> In making visible only part of an (arabesque) pattern that exists in its complete form only in infinity, the Islamic artist relates the static, limited, seemingly definite object to infinity itself. (Grube, p.10)

> The arabesque therefore can never be a static composition as has sometimes been charged by mistaken interpreters...For those who understand its message and structures, it is the most dynamic, most aesthetically active, of all art forms. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.168)

The infinite pattern in Islamic art is Tawheed and whether it is formed through arabesque, geometric or calligraphic representations, it always carries the same visually significant message. Many Western critics of Islamic art see the repetitious patterning as sterile, simplistic or purely decorative. They do not understand

the relationship which Islamic art has to the fundamental principle of Islam, and therefore, classify all infinite patterns as ornamental embellishment; additionally, they do not understand the meaning of ornament as it specifically applies to Islamic art.

5.4. Ornament in Islamic Art

Ornament according to Western definition is "that component of the art product which is added, or worked into it, for purposes of embellishment ...(It) refers to motifs and themes used on art objects, buildings or any surface without being essential to structure and serviceability" (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.379).

By this definition, all designs on any object could be called ornamental, but not all ornament can be classified as additive embellishment. Questions should be asked regarding cultural significance, aesthetic beauty values and symbolic meanings, if any.

In Islamic art, ornamentation is not added as an after-thought. It is one of the most important if not the single most important element in the visual arts.

> It is not a superfluous addition to the art object which can be added or subtracted without aesthetic damage or consequence. Instead, it is of the very essence of the Islamic arts- an essence that determines the use of materials, molds the perception of forms, and generates a series of structures that can be recognised in every branch of artistic production. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.407)

Ornament in Islamic art moves past the visual embellishment definition and qualifies as a work of art

itself through its relationship between the visible and its meaning (Grabar 1987, p.191). Besides its function as a carrier and visual reminder of Tawheed, ornamentation fulfills three other main functions: as a device for transformation of materials in order to give an intuition of divine transcendence, transfiguring the physical structures upon which it is laid so as to become less visually dominant, and overall beautification of the space ornamented (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p. 379-83).

When speaking of the transformation of materials, it does not mean changing the actual substance of the material, but rather the object or space itself is transformed in form or appearance. The natural properties of the substance remains intact, for example, wood is still wood and granite is still hard, but the material takes on a glorifying or spiritualizing aura.

The material gains an exalted or enhanced status in the mind of the viewer because of the ornament applied. Conversely, if the treatment of the materials would cause the viewer to "concentrate on their naturalistic qualities, the aesthetic purpose of *Tawhid* (sp.) would not be served, and the adherence to abstract quality would be denied" (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.380).

Muslim artists used the techniques of overlay, stone piercing, wood carving and specialised lustre glazes to stylize, denaturalize and beautify their work. The viewer's attention is focused on the resulting ornamental

patterns produced rather than the material underneath.

Through these means, the structure of the building or object can be said to be transfigured as it is veiled in a disguise of ornament. The basic framework is hidden or minimized and the viewer is focused on the visual message before them. The beautification of the structure is achieved because the patterns are themselves intrinsically pleasing to the eye (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.383).

In another sense, the building or object transcends the limits of physical matter when the infinite pattern is applied as ornamentation. The result is:

> ...a world which is not a reflection of the actual object, but that of the superimposed element that serves to transcend the momentary and limited individual appearance of a work of art...vaults and arches are covered with floral and epigraphic ornament that dissolve their structural strength and function, and domes are filled with radiating designs of infinite patterns ...that banish the solidity of stone and masonry and give them a peculiarly ephemeral quality as if the crystallisation of the design is their only reality. (Grube, p.11)

Because of this transforming ability, Islamic art ornamentation can never be classed with mere decoration, even though many of the same motifs appear in other art traditions in a purely decorative state. This is due mostly to the fact that the other traditional motifs are not used in an infinite pattern organisation, nor do they transform the material or structure which they are covering. They simply act as fillers and not carriers.

The vegetal and geometric pre-Islamic forms are set inside frames which cause the motif to lose its repetitive quality once the edge is reached. There can be no meanings affixed to the overall pattern with such abrupt terminations. Any symbolism seen in these decorative patterns would be on the level of the individual motif itself, or of the small grid unit.

Even the early ornamental patterns used on Islamic monuments in the seventh century belong to this class of non-infinite pattern structures. At Mshatta (fig.7), the vegetal scrollwork, while repetitive in design, is still very grounded within the triangles, bands and elevated rosette shapes it fills. It covers rather than transforms the stone walls that house it.

While the carved grooves give a sense of lightness to the pattern, it is still contained within the frames that dominate the design. As to meaning, there is no clear symbolism involved and art historians, even the Islamicists, consider it to be decorative in nature.

> In an example like Mshatta, we simply have not learned to understand the message in the mass of signs thrown all over the facades or, possibly, there was no iconographic messages and the ornament was there for its own sake. It alone carries its own message and, since we are unlikely to get fascinated by grapes or pine cones for their own sakes; some other purpose, ambition, or expectation has to be acknowledged for the Mshatta facade. The only logical one is that it was meant to attract by providing pleasure. (Grabar 1992, p.37)

Grabar continues his treatise on ornament by citing four levels of ornamental interpretation. First, are the

hierarchies of classification that range from referential to non-referential. Secondly, the interpretation that exists in the minds of the artist as separated from that of the viewer must be considered and differentiated between when considering the making as opposed to the perception of the object or ornament.

Thirdly, are the ethical and aesthetic values and purposes which can be possibly attached to the ornament; and lastly, the language used to describe the object should be precise and refer to attributes, such as *calliphoric*, or providing beauty, and *terpnopoietic*, or providing pleasure (Grabar 1992, p.43).

Additionally, ornament can be delineated in taxonomies according to style and motif or geographic location with dictionaries created to provide typological lists of designs according to these categories. The downfall of these orderly rolls is in their lack of information regarding the aesthetic characteristics of the ornaments or their values to the cultures involved.

Ornament should not only be classed by description of visual vocabulary and style, but should also include information relative to the cultural background, time and place that give consideration to why these particular forms were chosen by this group of people to be on that object (Grabar 1992, p.120). Only then, can possible meanings be brought out and formulated along with the ornamental symbol.

One such taxonomy, written by Owen Jones, entitled *The Grammar of Ornament* (London, 1856), provides propositions regarding Islamic ornament in general as observed from the Alhambra Palace in Granada. While many of these propositions are not helpful in understanding the symbolic nature of Islamic ornament, two are very appropriate in relation to the infinite pattern structure.

The first states that "all ornament should be based in geometric construction" and the second, that a perfect work is achieved when there exists "true proportion between all parts. All forms should be arranged on set proportions, the whole and each part a multiple of each unit. Those proportions will be the most beautiful which it will be the most difficult for the eye to detect" (p.5,6).

It is through the application of geometry, or more precisely, the "tessellation through isometry" (Grabar 1992, p.121), that Islamic art receives its power. Geometry has been linked with many sacred arts in its symbolic content.

Most prominent is the work by Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns: An analogical and Cosmological Approach* (London, 1976). His research has focused on the symbolic meanings behind many of the structures used in the creation of Islamic art. A glimpse into the historical development of geometry and its influence in the eighth

century and onward is, therefore, beneficial.

5.5. Sacred Geometry Symbolism

The beginnings of geometry have been traced to ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt where simple mathematical equations were used to divide land and construct buildings. Astronomical calculations were also seen to be a product of the numerical skills. The Greeks developed the knowledge further and the first systematic treatise on the subject, *The Elements*, was recorded by Euclid around 300 B.C. in the mathematical school in Alexandria (Wilson 1988, p.140).

The Greeks were attributed with transforming geometry into an exact abstract reasoning device for the purposes of academia. Soon, their manuscripts were circulated among the Islamic world through the eighth century conquests of that region, and became the basis for educating a class of Arab scholars who emerged around the ninth century onwards.

The metaphysical concepts of Pythagoras and his school were also added. "The Pythagoreans taught that the structure of the universe was to be found in mathematics and ascribed mystical properties to numbers and geometric figures" (Wade 1976, p.10). Doctrines of Plato and Aristotle concerning divine unity were readily assimilated.

In the end, it was a combination of all of these abstract symbolic ideals coupled with the need for

expressing Tawheed in every aspect of life that led to the used of sacred geometry as the Islamic visual vehicle. The "universal" men, such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Rushd, and Abul Abbas bin al-Munajjim were well versed in this knowledge and more than likely passed on their teachings (El-Said & Parman 1976, p.153).

The three-dimensional geometric muqarnas vaulting reached its height at the time of Al-Farabi, the first major school of mathematics in the Muslim world (Soucek 1988, p.58). The muqarnas is considered to be a synthesis of geometry and rhythm which is not just linear, but is also spacial as seen in the vertical multiplicity of the forms (Burckhardt 1976, p.70).

As geometry filled the two and three-dimensional art works of these times, a question should be asked relative to whether the artisans and general public could also understand their symbolic nature. In using such a complex form, the artist must have had a basic familiarity at least with the geometric grids from which the patterns were constructed. However, this did not necessarily prove that they knew the interpretations or metaphysical natures of each part.

> While it is probable that geometric designs were not seen merely as abstract patterns but as imbued with a sacred content, it seems unlikely that the craftsman decorating a wall or carving a door would have had these properties uppermost in his mind. Rather he would be following the teaching of his master and the traditional skills of his craft, and he would no doubt have left to others the philisophical interpretations of the traditional patterns he

produced. (Wilson 1988, p.15)

It is extremely probable then, that the craftsman relied on a teacher or a proficient in geometric principles to actually design the grids upon which the work would be completed. It was this master who was "certainly versed in the spiritual disciplines that gave both content and meaning to the work (Critchlow 1976, p.8).

Only those who possessed the "archetypal vision" (Nasr 1991, p.49) would be able to teach the craftsman the appropriate forms to use. The artist, in turn would have to have a complete knowledge of the techniques and nature of the materials that were to be used and, therefore, a collaborative relationship could exist in the formation of any work.

As to whether or not the viewer of those times had the schema necessary to understand the message of the geometry employed, it is hard to say. The only records that could be taken as proof are those which, of course, have been written by the educated class, and they cannot be used as evidence for the majority.

The poets' domain gives a glimmer of hope in this area as there are poems which speak of the metaphysical relationships found in the geometric forms. The poet Ibn Zamrak refers to the muqarnas of Alhambra as a dome of heaven which rotates as heavenly spheres with the planets and constellations (Grabar 1992, p.127).

Since Islam had a deeply oral literary tradition, it can be assumed that poetry would reach the masses and, conversely, the laymen's attitudes also would be reflected within the poems. Additionally, it is interesting to note that both Arab poetry and Arab music is said to have been constructed through geometric proportions, and most forms of artistic expression were founded on the same ordering principle of *mizan*, or balance (El-Said & Parman 1976, p.xi, 153).

In any case, geometry was a perfect choice for symbolically representing the infinite as it was devoid of cultural specificity; and as an intermediary, it left the viewer free to choose what to think and what meanings there were, if any. In this regard, it became equally accessible to the illiterate as well as the intellectual (Grabar 1992, p.154).

> Thus astrological configurations, magical squares, cosmological considerations, and the central Muslim notion of unity are all seen as numerical ideas for which a geometrical formulation is not only possible, but even desirable. (Grabar 1992, p.151)

Also, in symbolising the universal aspects of infinity, geometric forms were perfectly matched as the universe is endless, yet constituted of infinite small particles without accentuating focus. "...It is clear that to the Islamic mind there were parallels that could be drawn between the structure and the visual effect of the patterns and the nature of God and his Creation (Gibbons 1981, p.69).

Beyond the symbolic representations of infinity and unity as seen in Islamic geometric structures, some scholars today have attributed specific literal meanings to the forms as well. Not everyone agrees, however, and the main division of opinion appears to be over whether the mystical Sufistic attitudes, which include cosmological meanings, can be attached to Islamic art forms overall.

5.6. Sufism amd Islamic Symbolism

The Al-Faruqis feel that any reference to mystical literally symbolic meaning is contrary to the Islamic mainstream tradition as it would imply an intermediary nature which is in direct opposition to the doctrine of Tawheed. The abstraction that is so deeply embedded in the Muslim aesthetic consciousness would be threatened and such meanings, and, although they attract Western scholars, "do not satisfy the need for a comprehensive and internally consistent interpretation of the Islamic arts." They see the Muslim ummah as strictly non-mystical or even anti-mystical in nature (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.180).

In direct denial of the previously quoted poet Ibn Zamraq, they state that the dome of the mosque is not equated with the representation of heaven. All mosque architecture is functional only, and the blues of Persian monuments were chosen simply out of abundance of the raw material available at the time of construction rather than a representation of the infinite.

The Al-Faruqis see the Sufi tradition as viewing every object, person and activity as a symbol for something absent, hidden, or esoteric. "Such interpretations that judge the products of the whole Muslim ummah by ideas held only by a particular segment of it are bound to lead to misconceptions" (Al-Faruqi 1982, p.171,2). The hidden meanings to letters, words, phrases and types of visual motifs attributed by the mystics have lead to a lack of "clear distinction between the transcendent and the natural realms which is the hallmark of orthodox Islam and *tawhid* (sp.)" (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.179).

On the other side of the fence are Titus Burckhardt, whose work, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, (London, 1976) is full of symbolic interpretations of the different forms employed; Seyyid Hossein Nasr's works which speak in behalf of cosmic symbolism; Oleg Grabar in a treatise on the iconography of Islamic architecture (Soucek 1988); and the aforementioned Keith Critchlow work on sacred geometry.

These men all feel that the patterns and forms found in Islamic art are deeply and literally significant and express archetypal as well as specifically Islamic meanings. Burckhardt attributes much of this symbolism to the Shi'ite Sufi focus on cosmology.

The Shi'ites broke away from the main branch of Islam upon Mohammed's death as they believed his nephew, Ali,

should be the next in line of authority rather than the caliphate. After Ali, the line continued through the twelve *imams*, or ruling spiritual leaders, all of whom died except the twelfth. He was said to have been hidden away and, even today, remains in communion spiritually with the faithful.

The Sufi's, which are the mystical branch of Shi'ism, believe in a *qutb*, or center pole of the earth, where the influence of heaven pours onto the earthly plane. It is here that all cosmic influence is felt and the Shi'ite follower tries to concentrate on achieving this realm where the last imam is said to be. The qutb is the mysterious region between heaven and earth and coincides with the Divine Presence at the center of the world, or that of your own soul, as is seen at a different level of meaning (Burckhardt 1976, p.36).

Nasr refers continually to this inner dimension and Divine Reality which is represented through Islamic art. His translation of the *Ras'il*, written by the Sufi Brotherhood of Purity, or *al-Ikhwan al-Safa*, provides concepts upon which Critchlow builds on in his discussions of sacred geometry. A passage from the *Rasa'il* states:

> Know, oh brother..., that the study of sensible geometry leads to skill in all the practical arts, while the study of intelligible geometry leads to skill in the intellectual arts because this science is one of the gates through which we move to the knowledge of the essence of the soul, and that is the root of all knowledge. (Critchlow 1976, p.7)

The Brotherhood of Purity were also aligned with

Pythagoras' teachings and gained an appreciation of numerical symbolism from him. It was Pythagoras who first found that the nature of numbers corresponded to Nature and the cosmos. The Brotherhood applied his theories in the formulating of a science of Nature based on numerical and geometric properties. In these applications, they found direct links with the Islamic concept of Unity.

> Above all the science of number was considered by the Ikhwan as the way leading to the grasp of Unity, as a science which stands above Nature and is the principle of beings and the rest of the other sciences, the first elixer and the most exalted alchemy. (Critchlow 1976, p.104)

The Brotherhood saw the final aim of geometry as assisting the soul to "reflect and meditate independently of the external world" and thereby achieving the qutb and entering into the other Reality (Critchlow 1976, p.104). As applied to the Islamic arts, geometry:

> draws attention away from the representational world to one of pure forms, poised tensions and dynamic equilibrium, giving structural insight into the workings of the inner self and their reflection in the universe. (Critchlow 1976, p.8)

The four main geometric forms adopted for use in Islamic art are the circle, square, triangle and hexagon. Much has been written relative to the use of the circle and square in other artistic traditions, especially in the architecture of Christian religious monuments. Their symbolism is always representative of the joining of heaven (circle) and earth (square).

Islam continues in this interpretation by seeing the

circle as a symbol of cosmic Tawheed, wholeness and eternity, as it has no beginning or end (Critchlow 1976, p.9). It is the prime shape by which all other divisions are measured against and is used in all forms of architecture.

> In the Islamic perspective, this method of deriving all the vital proportions of a building from the harmonious division of a circle is no more than a symbolic way of expressing Tawhid (sp.), which is the metaphysical doctrine of Divine Unity as the source and culmination of all diversity. It is not surprising, therefore, that Muslim artists should have explored all the geometric systems that depend upon the regular division of the circle. (El-Said & Parman 1976, p.ix)

The combining of the circle and the square creates the archetypal structure known as the *mandala*, or cosmogram. Seen in many cultures and traditions, the mandala is always representative of "the reflection of the cosmos and the cosmic processes within (which) all things work through numbers and geometry, beginning with Unity, moving through the theophany, and coming back again to Unity" (Critchlow 1976, p. 181).

In Islamic terms, the mandala relates to the dimensions of the Universe, the archetypes or Divine names and attributes of God. The Prophet Mohammed, in describing his ascent to heaven described an immense dome resting on a square with four pillars. This mandala vision was thereafter called the "Garden of Paradise" (Critchlow 1976, p.181).

Beyond its use as part of the mandala symbolism, the

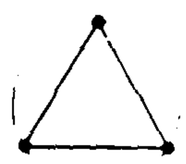
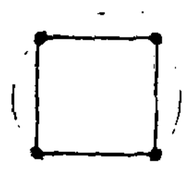
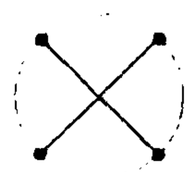
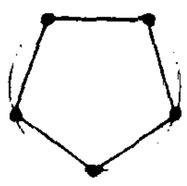
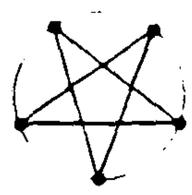
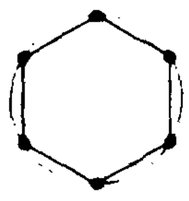
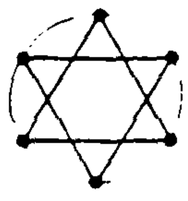
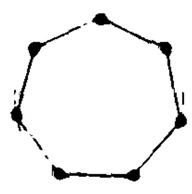
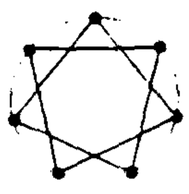
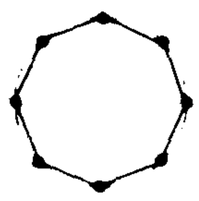
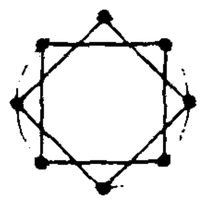
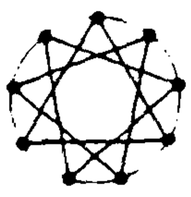
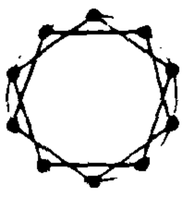
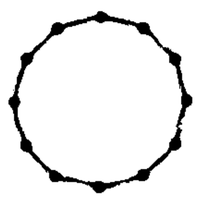
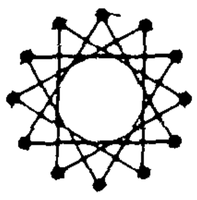
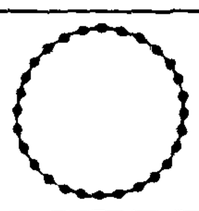
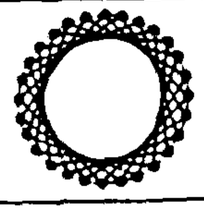
square has additional archetypal meanings. It has been said to be representational of the worldly physical elements- those of earth, air, fire and water, or the solid, liquid, gas and radiation states of energy.

The other two forms common in Islamic art geometry, the triangle and hexagon, have symbolic meanings as well. The triangle represents the state of man with his three-fold nature and consciousness- that of "the knower, the known and the knowing; the object, the subject and the conjunctive; or the relationship which links them" (Critchlow 1976, p.150). The hexagon is seen as a number representing perfection and is symbolic of heaven. It also symbolizes the six days of creation, which was an act of perfection.

Critchlow has identified a listing of sacred geometric numbers and their symbolic counterparts (Table 5.1) as taken from various cultural, religious and philisophical traditions of mankind. While all of these cannot be said to be a part of the Islamic symbolic language, Critchlow maintains that the archetypal nature of sacred geometry belongs to sacred artistic traditions generally.

Beyond the cosmic Sufi and archetypal geometric symbolism, scholars have also attached other literal symbolic meanings to the forms and motifs in Islamic art. Again, they are not proven to have existed in the Muslim mind of a thousand years ago, but they provide possible

Table 5.1
Sacred Geometry Symbolism

Number	Geometry: Static	Geometry: Dynamic	MACROCOSM	
0			Divine Essence	
1			**Creator**	One Primordial Permanent Eternal
2			**Intellect**	Innate Acquired
3			**Soul**	Vegetative Animal Rational
4			**Matter**	Original Physical Universal Artifacts
5			**Nature**	Ether Fire Air Water Earth
6			**Body**	Above Below Front Back Right Left
7			**Universe**	Seven visible planets and seven days of the week
8			**Qualities**	Cold, dry Cold, wet Hot, wet Hot, dry
9			**Beings of this world**	Mineral Plant Animal (Each containing three parts)
10			**The Holy Tetractys**	First four universal Beings
12			**Zodiac** Aries, Leo, Saggitarius Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn Gemini, Libra, Aquarius Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces	 *Fire, hot, dry, east* *Earth, cold, dry, south* *Air, hot, wet, west* *Water, cold, wet, north*
28			**Stations of the Moon** (divided into four quarters)	Each quarter equals one week, seven days represent seven planets
360			**Number of solar days**	

Number	MICROCOSM		MATHEMATICAL ATTRIBUTES
0	Divine Essence		
1	**Creator**	One Primordial Permanent Eternal	The point The principle and origin of all numbers
2	**Body divided into two parts**	Left Right	One-half of all numbers are counted by it
3	**Constitution of animals**	Two extremities and a middle	Harmony First odd number One-third of all numbers are counted by it
4	**Four humors**	Phlegm Blood Yellow bile Black bile	Stability First square number
5	**Five senses**	Sight Hearing Touch Taste Smell	First circular number
6	**Six powers of motion in six directions**	Up, down, front, back, left, right	First complete number The number of surfaces of a cube
7	**Active powers**	Attraction Sustenance Digestion Repulsion Nutrition Growth Formation	First perfect number
8	**Qualities**	Cold, dry Cold, wet Hot, wet Hot, dry	First cubic number and the number of musical notes
9	**Nine elements of the body**	Bones, brain, nerves, veins, blood, flesh, skin, nails, hair	First odd square and last of single digits
10	**Basic disposition of the body**	Head, neck, chest, belly, abdomen, thoracic cavity, pelvic girdle, two thighs, two legs, two feet	Perfect number First of two-digit numbers
12	**Twelve orifices of the body**	Two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, two nipples, one mouth, one navel, two channels of excretion	First excessive number
28	**Twenty-eight vertebrae**		Second complete number
360	**Number of veins in the body**		Numbers of degrees in a circle

answers as to why Islam chose to use these forms in their visual arts.

5.7. Literal Symbolic Forms

Much of the literal symbolism ascribed to early Islamic monumental ornament is due to the fact that Islam had adopted the readily available Byzantine, Sassanid and Hellenistic motifs for use in their early decoration. Since many of the concepts and meanings attached to these elements were also found in Islamic beliefs, it made sense that the artisans of those times would use the already familiar forms (Dodd & Khairallah 1981, p.20).

In the Dome of the Rock (fig.1), the vegetal motifs, vases, fruits and cornucopia represented eternal life or life in paradise. The crowns and jewels seen in the Dome were from the Byzantine decorative tradition specifically, and symbolized authority of the Divine Kingdom, a concept which Islam promoted in its belief of the last true religion.

"From the very beginning, apparently, the Arabs did not hesitate to adopt Christian symbolic vocabulary that was applicable to their own faith" (Dodd & Khairallah 1981, p.20) Another interpretation sees the crowns and jewels as images of glory, victory and paradise, again, concepts which could fit both Christian and Islamic traditions (Grabar 1987, p.127).

The main problem with these interpretations is that the Western scholars who make these claims to literal

meanings are so used to seeing these motifs in the Western iconographic tradition, that they automatically apply them to Islamic use regardless of the differences in ideology (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.177). It could just be that Islamic artisans, who had come from these traditions and converted to the new faith, simply used what motifs they were accustomed to and did not think of meanings in the beginning when they applied their skills to the new faith's edifices.

On the other side is found the meanings attached to Islamic architecture that fit only within the Islamic tradition and are not shared with pre-Islamic beliefs. Among these are the interpretations that have been applied to the components in mosque architecture: the dome, minaret, mihrab or niche and muqarnas vaulting.

According to Boullata (1973), the dome and minaret reflected the forms of the physical environment around the Arabs at the time. He sees the dome as being from the influence of the dunes and the minaret from the desert cactus. He bases this interpretation on the use of these references in pre-Islamic poetry and classical Arab poetry in general.

Burckhardt (1976) views the dome in Ottoman architecture as peace and submission, and the vertical minarets as the shahada to Divine Unity. The muqarnas are representative of a cosmic model of heaven, while the prayer niche is the "cave of the world", or place of

appearance of Divinity (*mazhar*).

The literal translation of mihrab is "refuge", and in a Quranic context, refers to a secret place in the Temple at Jerusalem where Miriam, mother of Jesus, was nourished by angels. This symbolism is alluded to by inscriptions that come from Surat Miriam in the Quran, that are frequently found around the arches of mihrabs. It is analogous to prayer in that "In the heart the Virgin soul takes refuge to invoke God and the nourishment given is the Grace of God to man" (Burckhardt 1976, p.86).

Grabar (1987) believes the mihrab perhaps commemorates the presence of the Prophet as the first Imam. The Jewish synagogues had a similar device and possibly served as the prototypes for the Islamic design. Additionally, the minarets were not just functional, for it was impossible to call a whole city to prayer from one; therefore, they were a symbolic expression of the presence of Islam pointed at the non-Muslims in the city as they projected out visually and drew attention (Grabar 1987, p.88).

Additionally, Grabar sees the use of blue faiance on the Persian domes, as mentioned, carrying a reflection of mystical or even archetypal unity of Creation. The sparkling appearance of the white of a north African town denotes the purity of the Prophet's message (Soucek 1988, p.53).

Nasr (1991) chooses to relate mosque architecture,

as with all Islamic art forms, to the cosmic elements. The octagonal base of a dome is the Throne and Pedestal and angelic world; the square base is the corporeal world on earth; muqarnas represent "reflection here below of the supernal archetypes, the descent of the heavenly abode towards the earth and the crystallization of the celestial substance or ether in terrestrial forms" (Nasr 1991, p.50).

The external dome is seen as Divine Beauty, the vertical minaret is Divine Majesty, and these symbols are the means whereby "Unity penetrates into the world of architectural forms to create a sacred quality whereby earthly forms come to signify realities beyond the earthly realm" (Nasr 1991, p.50).

Lastly, when considering literal Islamic symbolism, reference should be made to two distinct visually significant passages in the Quran that lend themselves to exact representational meanings. The first, as discussed in the historical section in chapter two, are the descriptive scenes regarding paradise. The mosaics of the Great Mosque in Damascus (fig.4) are said to be pictorial representations of the verses referring to the trees, rivers and beauty that will be present in paradise for those who will have earned entrance.

The fact that there are more than ten references in the Quran to this physical depiction, proves that the imagery is important and should be used as a motivational

factor in this life for performing righteous acts. Any Muslim, regardless of era, would be pleased to be in such a physically attractive place when they receive their deserved award. The symbolism in these scenes, therefore, would be in line with the Islamic focus of remembering God and striving to fulfill all obligations to be able to return into His presence in paradise.

The second Quranic passage about which much has been written by both sides of the symbolic fence, is that of the *Ayat al-Nur*, or verse of light. Because it is a literal metaphor as given by Allah directly, everyone agrees that it has great significance. Of course, how far the representation can be carried beyond the literal interpretation is still an item for discussion.

5.8. Symbolic Light

> God is the light of the Heavens and the Earth; the likeness of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp is a crystal, the crystal as it were a shining star;...Light upon Light; God guideth to His light whom He will...(Quran 24: 35,37)

To the more conservative side, the symbolism in this verse is direct and taken at face value. The use of a mosque lamp suspended in the mihrab is the exact meaning with a literal reference to God's presence and prayer as the means of getting there. Lustre tiles of 13th century Iran offer proof of their initial presence in the mihrab up through the first 600 years.

However, it is interesting to note that today, this feature is generally absent from most niches in mosques.

This particular symbol in modern times is more likely found on a *sijad*, or prayer rug, where it still retains its reference to prayer and Divine access.

To the other, more cosmologically oriented side, the symbolism of light is equal to that of geometry in its ability to represent the Universal order of Unity and other Reality.

> The artist who wishes to express the idea of "Unity of existence" or "Unity of the Real" (*wahdat al-wujud*), actually has three means at his disposal: geometry, which translates Unity into spatial order, rhythm, which reveals it in the temporal order and also indirectly in space, and light, which is to visible forms what Being is to limited existences. (Burckhardt 1976, p.76)

Burckhardt further speaks of light as giving the power of existence, in that a thing is only real to the extent that it can be seen in the light of Being. He states that there is no more perfect symbol of Tawheed than light and that the Muslim artist, therefore, sought to transform the materials with which they worked into a vibration of light.

> It is to this end that he covers the interior surfaces of a mosque or palace and occasionally the outer ones with mosaics in ceramic tiles. This lining is often confined to the lower part of the wall as if to dispel their heaviness. It is for the same purpose that the artist transforms other surfaces into perforated reliefs to filter the light. Muqarnas also serve to trap light and diffuse it with the most subtle graduations. (Burckhardt 1976, p.77)

The most perfect piece of architecture that carries this dissolving and transforming quality of light is the Alhambra Palace, and more specifically, the Court of Lions

(figs.22,23). All forms and techniques mentioned above are carried out in an intracacy which truly creates another dimension from this physical world.

Nasr refers to the Alhambra as being like "crystallizations of light, limpid and lucid, illuminating and illuminated..." (Nasr 1991, p.50). He also identifies light with the Divine Presence which shines upon the whole universe and is a spiritual substance.

The Islamic philisophical School of *ishraq*, or illumination, which was based on the symbolic nature of light, was founded by the Persian theosopher and Sufi, Suhrawardi. Much of the Sufi belief regarding the supernatural and supernal powers of light came from this tradition (Nasr 1991, p.51).

There is a Prophetic saying as quoted by Nasr which states that "The first being created by God was light"; This saying goes along with the Hadith that says "The First being created by God was the Word", hence the two are judged equal in identity (*Hadith* [ND] cited in Nasr 1991, p.51).

> It is certainly not accidental that the place in the mosque from which the Word of God in the form of the call to prayer reaches the community, namely the minaret, is called in Arabic *al-manarah*, literally the place of light. (Nasr 1991, p.51)
>
> The light which defines the spaces of Islamic architecture and brings out its geometric clarity and intellectual lucidity is inseparable from that Word which in the form of the Quran reverberates within those spaces and brings those who hearken to its echo before the Divine Presence. (Nasr 1991, p. 51,54)

The Word of God as recorded physically in the Quran has always been considered to be a visual symbol of Islam, Tawheed and the Divine Presence. The Arabic script that developed around the Quran arts carried direct symbolism, especially in its use as ornamental decoration in the mosque and on minor art forms.

5.9. Arabic Calligraphy Symbolism

> Because the Quran was written in Arabic, that language and its script became the unifying visual symbol of the Islamic faith wherever it traveled, distinguishing those things that belong to Islam in an unmistakable way. The main purpose of Arabic now was to transmit the Koranic message and the script itself became imbued with some of that divine authority and power. (Gibbons 1981, p.81)

The strength of symbolism in Arabic calligraphy lies in the fact that it is a sacred script. Its use on any object, wall surface or textile immediately identified it as a Divine symbol, regardless of what the script said, or even its legibility at all. In fact, the more illegible it was in its application on monuments, the more it could be said to be literally symbolic of God's Word in general and the Divine Presence specifically. It did not have to be read in order to have meaning since it existed independently as God's Word at all times.

> In many cases the text is very difficult to read because of the elaboration of the letters or the inaccessibility of the text in an architectural setting. Indeed in a number of cases it is clear that the writing has no meaning at all- but the fact that it is Arabic is sufficient enough to give it power. (Gibbons 1981, p. 82)
>
> It becomes clear, in fact, that after its first application, the pious inscription was

> primarily meant as a symbol, addressed to God rather than men. Its function became that of a beautiful affirmation of the Faith, no longer intended to be deciphered by worshippers or passers-by word for word. (Ettinghausen 1984)

Also, since the Quran was first revealed orally, the visual written form is already iconographic in that it is a step removed from the initial oral form. The written word, therefore, acted at all times as a symbolic reminder of the original spoken Word of God (Dodd & Khairallah 1981, p.25).

Oleg Grabar deals with the topic of symbolic meaning in Islamic calligraphy in his chapter on the intermediary of writing in *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, 1992). His point of departure for the discussion surrounds the "Ali" painting from 15th century Iran (plate 17). This interesting work bears resemblance to a modern Mondrian abstract painting. It contains rather abstract Arabic letters of the word "Ali" repeated in four quadrants in various colors, rotating around a central axis.

Because of its size (45 x 55 cm.), Grabar postulates that it cannot have been intended to be part of a book illustration. Its use is non-apparent as it is not related to any of the normal minor artistic forms found in Islamic art at that time. He observes that it can be looked at in four different ways: as a jigsaw pattern of shapes for simple design purposes, as a whole design which rotates around the center axis and displays symmetry, as a literal meaning in using the letters to make "Ali", and lastly, as

a work of simple pleasure or to give an aesthetic feeling when viewing (Grabar 1992, p.47-48).

Of all of these different possibilities, the third statement has some connection to prior calligraphic renderings of names (figs.55,56) in a similar fashion as seen in Iranian ornament before the 15th century. Grabar then postulates that Islamic calligraphy shares all four of these views in different works at different times; and, regarding the "Ali" painting specifically,

> It can be simply the apparent carrier of a specific time- or a culture-bound message through the medium of writing and what it says becomes more important than how it says it. (Grabar 1992, p.48)

The question that should be asked regarding this work or any other like it, is if the reading of the writing helps or hinders the pleasure of looking at the work, since the enhancement of pleasure is one of the main characteristics of any calligraphic tradition. Another common factor found in all artistic cultural writing forms is the transformation of letters through a series of devices that make the ciphering of the visible word difficult or even impossible and, therefore, meaningless linguistically (Grabar 1992, p.59).

Grabar further cites three common experiences all people in all cultures have with writing. Firstly, it is a message carrier whose primary function is to be read and understood linguistically; secondly, it is a visual expression which is where the reading of the words comes

secondary to an examination of the composition of its parts; and thirdly, it is an aesthetic visual experience entirely when the writing is totally subordinate to its design (Grabar 1992, p.103).

It is in this third category that calligraphic forms fall, especially in their ability to provide aesthetic pleasure, for Grabar defines calligraphy as writing with the intent to be beautiful. "Writings also signify another reality than that of the words and thoughts they represent. They also signify sensory pleasure in the expression of everything...at this level, writing has become art" (Grabar 1992, p.113).

Writing creates a written sign of a spoken word that is a symbol for an object itself, so it is twice removed from the original form. Arabic Quranic script is only once removed, however, since the spoken Word is the original referent; and, it can be said that when the script becomes changed visually into a non-readable calligraphic form, it even removes that level and becomes an equal to the oral Word.

This is how Arabic calligraphy can symbolise Tawheed and the Divine Realm directly- because of its spiritual and glorifying significance which raises the viewer to new levels of his understanding of God. The written word also carries an eternal aspect in its permanence, which is unlike the spoken counterpart that lasts only as long as the time of utterance.

Additionally, Arabic calligraphy carries many of the same traits as the infinite pattern in its proportionate and rhythmic nature. The Al-Faruqis state that "...the very essence and function of calligraphy (is) to present a discursive message in the beautiful forms of the infinite pattern" (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.374).

They see the Quran as the most perfect example of infinite patterning with its smallness of individual elements found in the separate letters and vowels, to the repetitious divisions of the whole as seen in the verses and surahs.

> Poetic devices resulting in sound or metrical repetitions abound in the Quran. In addition to frequent instances of single- or multisyllable end-rhymes, the Quran contains numerous rhymes internal to the lines. Repetitions of metrical vowel and consonant sounds abound and poetically enliven this literary work. Refrain phrases and lines return again and again to reinforce both the didactic and the aesthetic message. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.171)

Nasr has devoted one complete chapter in his work, *Islamic Spirituality Foundations* (New York, 1991), to the spiritual message of Islamic calligraphy. He starts with the Creation of the universe from the Word, that was then recorded by means of the Divine Pen upon the Guarded Tablet, or the archetypal record, which is the Quran. Calligraphy, therefore, is the visual embodiment of the Sacred Word and is the geometry of the Spirit. As the Quran is the sound of the Divine Word, calligraphy is the echo (Nasr 1991, p.17,18,27).

> The sacred art of calligraphy aids man to pierce through the veil of material existence so as to be able to gain access to that *barakah* (blessing) that resides within the Divine word and to "taste" the reality of the spiritual world. (Nasr 1991, p.19).

The symbolism of the pen and ink pot are seen in the *Surat al-Qalam*, or The Pen, which opens with the passage, "By the pen and that which they write..." (Quran 68:1). The starting letter is the *nun* in Arabic, which visually resembles an ink pot. Additionally, the first letter of the alphabet, *alif*, is a symbol of God because it is the first letter of the name, Allah.

> One need only "know" this single letter (alif) in order to know all that is to be known, for the Divine Name (Allah) is the key to the Treasury of Divine Mysteries and the path to the Real. It *is* that Reality by virtue of the essential identity of God and His sanctified Name. (Nasr 1991, p.31)

The second letter of the Arabic alphabet, *ba*, is seen to be a symbol of the Divine Essence itself because the point under the arch is the Primordial Point, or the first drop of the Divine Pen on the Guarded Tablet. All surahs in the Quran begin with the *bismillah* heading, "In the Name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate", which in Arabic, starts with the letter *ba* (Nasr 1991, p.31,35).

The verticals of Arabic letters represent the "Unity of the Principle," and the horizontals are the "multiplicity of manifestation" (Nasr 1991, p.38). Burckhardt also upholds the verticals as symbols of Unity while the horizontals are a "joyful and serene expansion of the soul" (Burckhardt 1976, p.48).

Nasr sees traditional calligraphy as based on the precise science of geometric forms and rhythms, each letter following the proportional system as designed by Ibn Muqlah in the 10th century. It is a science which can be followed through all calligraphic styles and letter applications and which is centered in the Truth of the Quranic revelation (Nasr 1991, p.26).

Calligraphy also belongs with the vegetal motifs found in the arabesque because of the symbolic Quranic reference to the universe as compared to a tree with roots firm and branches spreading through the heavens. Alluded to as the "World Tree", this verbal symbol is represented through the vegetal intertwining forms in the arabesque, and is frequently combined with Quranic calligraphy on mosques and madrassahs (fig 49,50) (Nasr 1991, p.29).

Illumination as found in book arts never detracts from the calligraphic text, but only enhances the delivery of the message:

> Illumination makes possible the visualization of the spiritual energy which flows from the reading of the sacred Text; it therefore occupies the margin of the page while the calligraphy comprises the text itself. The illumination is like the halo which surrounds the Sacred Word and the luminosity which is generated by the theurgical presence of the word that is the Word of Light. (Nasr 1991, p.30)

Calligraphy used in monumental ornament usually carried literal reference if its script could be read. The Quranic texts used in decorating the Dome of the Rock's wall surfaces were understood by all as a proclamation of

the new religion of Islam and the unity and universality of God (Dodd & Khairallah 1981, p.24).

Of course, the calligraphic script in any mosque decoration was considered to be holy, and whether legible or not, it retained its sacred significance down to the smallest particle or diacritical marking.

> (The Quran) consisted of 114 Surahs, or chapters; 6,236 ayah, or verses; 77,460 words; 321,250 letters; and 156,051 diacritical marks. From this sort of knowledge pertaining to the text of the Revelation itself, it was easy to imagine that every letter or word had in it a particle of the Divine, and thus that writing itself was holy. (Grabar 1992, p.64)

5.10. Mystical Calligraphy Symbolism

Other symbolic references to the written word describe its more mystical meanings in the Sufi tradition. Mystically oriented calligraphy did not have to appear in a strictly religious setting in order to express religious symbolic meanings. Many pieces of ceramic ware or minor art forms carried animal-shaped calligraphy which was said to mystically symbolize humanity or Ali. The Quranic verses chosen in these instances was said to be a protection against evil, and though orthodox Islam disapproved of these Quranic images, the Sufi followers use them as a physical talisman (Welch 1979, p.180).

The followers of the mystical tradition regarding Arabic script published a work, *'ilm al-Huruf*, or the science of letters, in the 14th century which gave the systemised form for earlier occult treatments of the 'phabet. They saw great symbolism in the 28 letters as

related to the moon cycle, divisions of alchemical elements and numerical equivalents of words and placement in the Quran (Welch 1979, p.25).

> Letters became associated with numerical. occult and mystical significances, and could be used in a metaphorical and talismanic way. Thus one of the Names of God or the names of the Prophet and the Companions or a quote from the Koran could be inscribed on any object to serve as a protection or blessing on the user. (Gibbons 1981, p.81)

Some of the mystical symbolism surrounded the function of the mihrab in mosque architecture. In Iranian 13th to 14th century mihrabs (Plate 18), where the letters frame the awning in bands of colbalt relief, the background tiles are executed in lustreware which causes them to make visual shifts under the solid writing. To the reflective Sufic mind, this meant that the Word of God was forever enduring while man and his handiwork was of a temporal and fleeting existence (Ettinghausen 1984).

Mihrabs were constructed as the architectural focus of the faith since they pointed directionally to Mecca, and as such, were a natural place to portray the Word of God. To inscribe the mihrab with a verse from the Quran "not only places the divine word before all believers, but also puts it at the heart of prayer" (Welch 1979, p.1981). Since many mihrabs contained lustreware tiles with arabesque, geometric and calligraphic patterns on them, it is a natural assumption that the mihrab also took on a meditative property, whether strictly mystical or not, which is in addition to its primary function as a

directional indicator.

Additionally, the mystical transluscence of the lustreware tiles would have certainly been brought out even more if a mosque lamp were placed so that the light reflected directly on the tiles. The mihrabs that had a variety of decorative forms would have given the supplicant several aesthetic focal points to choose from during meditation in prayer.

This rationale could also be applied to all the profusion of calligraphy present on minor art forms. To see Quranic verses and lettering present on items of daily household use would serve a meditative function as well if the owner were seeking ways of focusing on God at all times.

> Since every act and thought of the Muslim carries a religious connection or determination, the incorporation of the words of God in every possible decorative scheme, in every aural and visual experience, is a desired objective. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.175)

> Calligraphy (was) used as decoration on objects of everyday life always with the idea of reminding man of the presence of God's Word in all phases of human life. (Nasr 1991, p.20)

Whether used as message carrying decoration on monuments, meditative ornamentation on mihrabs or household goods, or mystical elements alone as taken from the Quranic text, Arabic calligraphy is always seen as a symbolic bearer of the essence of Islam. Its sacred character as the Quranic language has set it apart from other scripts in its function and meaning and it is still

an important visual form in Islamic art today.

5.11. Symbolic Summary

Because Islamic art is a sacred art, it is deeply symbolic in nature. Its main meaning is found in its relationship to the principle of Tawheed which is seen in every facet of Islam and is the focal point of daily life. Since this central focus has remained unchanged over the course of 1300 years, Islamic art's symbolic message and forms used to carry it have also remained unchanged.

The visual symbols that represent Tawheed are icons because they share the same properties with one another, that is, Unity in all things and diversity in that Unity. It is also iconological in that the visual form stands for an idea or an abstract concept. Islamic art symbolism is an implicit symbol as well because its structure and organization are where the meaning lies, rather than any specific motif, color or form.

This structure, called the infinite pattern, is found in the three major forms of Islamic art, geometric ornament, arabesque ornament and calligraphy. All three of these devices use infinite pattern characteristics in all media and time periods.

Western art critics view these patterns as mere embellishment added onto a form as almost an after-thought and refer to them as purely ornamental and decorative at best. They see no symbolism or meaning attached because they do not make the connection between the art form and

Islam. They view the forms as simplistic and pretty and compare them to other art traditions which have similar motifs and interlace and are known to have no symbolic meanings.

On the other hand, are those who follow the mystical traditions of the Sufi Shi'ite branch of Islam and apply cosmological and archetypal meanings to all things, especially those based on geometric principles. They also see a transformative quality in the use of light and lustreware which symbolize the Divine Realm and lead the way to that meditative Presence.

There is justification for the symbol of light, however, from the Quranic passage *ayat al-Nur*, which compares the light of a mosque lamp to God, thus putting light into a symbolic religious setting and opening the door for more mystical interpretations. Another visually symbolic passage in the Quran, that of the physical description of Paradise, has also been used as subject matter for rather realistic artistic renderings in early wall mosaics.

Arabic script is symbolic in any form and use because of its role as the Divine script of the Quran. Whether legible or calligraphic, Arabic letters contain the proportional principles that relate to the infinite pattern and, therefore, represent Tawheed as well. Unlike regular writing, Quranic calligraphy maintains a first generation symbolic status in that it does not have to

refer back to the spoken Word level in order to be understood as representing Sacred truths. In this way, calligraphy becomes directly symbolic of Tawheed when it loses its initial readability.

Two closing points should be noted when discussing Islamic visual symbolism. The first is in regards to making a judgment in how far symbolic interpretations can be carried as pertaining to the art forms involved. The statement of the Al-Faruqis that any artistic interpretations should fit all the classes of people at the time of the art creation is well-considered.

The mystical Sufi tradition represented only a portion of the ummah during the classical arabesque and geometric pattern eras. It would be unfair to say that their interpretations were known and accepted by other groups in the ummah or that their teachings were widespread enough to be the central doctrines of these times. This does not make their knowledge or interpretations invalid, but simply puts a constraint on using them as a general statement of explanation for the art forms' symbolic role.

As the mystical poet Jalal al Din Rumi wrote, "the external form is for the sake of the unseen form and that took shape for the sake of another unseen form in proportion to your insight" (Ettinghausen 1984, p.36). Or in other words, only those who are prepared to find hidden truths and symbolic meanings will see them.

The one point that all scholars and Islamic art historians agree upon is that Islamic art is always representative of Tawheed since this is the fundamental aspect of Islamic belief and is carried over into all areas of action and thought by all members of the community. The symbolic content of the ornamental forms is grounded in the infinite pattern relationship to Unity and universal Truth as given by the revelations in the Quran. All Islamic art symbols in this context, then, would have to relate to Tawheed.

Additionally, as idolatry is based on using forms as symbols of Deity, any focus in Islamic symbolism would have to remain totally iconological and always refer to the *concept* of Tawheed rather than any physical object or concrete representation of it. This is why the patterns proved perfect carriers of this message- because they could not be misinterpreted for anything *more* literally symbolic, only for things less so, as the Western scholars have decided.

The second point is related to the differences between the arabesque and geometric patterns in reference to the kind of symbolism they represent. The geometric designs are all laid out on functional visible geometric grid work. The straight lines follow boundary lines which cause the polygonal shapes to be readily seen. This is based on explicit symbolic geometric use in the fact that these parts and shapes can be easily discerned and re-

constructed from the finished work.

Conversely, while the arabesque is also laid on geometric grids initially, the vegetal ornament and curving linear motifs remove all obvious evidence of the straight-line grid in the finished piece. The arabesque, therefore, has implicit symbolic geometric use because of its implied linear forms.

When considering Sufi and Sacred geometric symbolism, if the purpose of geometry is to provide archetypal teachings relative to the meanings and purposes of the numbers and shapes employed, shouldn't these forms be obvious in the art work in its finished state so that the viewer can see the symbolic shapes directly? In the arabesque, the motifs and intertwining structure as an infinite pattern is noticed, but not the geometric equation from whence it came.

There have been no studies completed which detail comparisons between or reasons for choosing arabesque over geometric, or geometric over arabesque, or even an analysis of these works by time period or region. It would be a great help in understanding the exact symbolism of these forms, or if there truly was no difference in message or use between the two in the Muslim mind.

Also, while there have been references made to the muqarnas forms' symbolic nature in poetry, it would again be interesting to make a thorough search to see what other symbols were employed in the literary components of the

time as they could be used as a gauge for the mentality of the Muslim ummah as a whole. In other words, there is a lot more work that needs to be done in the area of Islamic symbolism. Perhaps in the future, we will be able to more adequately understand the past. Then, maybe, there will be mosque lamps hanging in the mihrabs once again.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: AESTHETIC JUDGMENT IN ISLAMIC ART

6.1. The Creation of a Theory

As each of the four areas of aesthetics, Islamic art history, Islamic religious dogma and Islamic symbolism have been explored and detailed through this study, the final step is to put them all together in order to create an aesthetic Islamic theory that can be applied to all areas of Islamic art. When forming any art historical hypothesis, Grabar suggests the three following criteria.

The new theory should explain a high number of perceptible phenomena or documents without being compelled to explain them all; it should be meaningful both in terms of individual monuments and wider historical settings in which the forms are created; it is a perfectable statement in that its acceptance is not a final conclusion, but one that seeks and leads to further explanation and research, a step in the process of understanding that is characteristic of any science (Grabar 1987, p.17).

It is hoped that this study complies with all of these requirements, and, as the last condition states, can be a source for further investigations along the lines of formal aesthetics generally, and of Islamic art aesthetics specifically. The formal area of Islamic art symbolism requires more research , especially in the points mentioned at the end of chapter five's summary.

The first set of concepts that should be looked at in this cross-combination of areas is that of the Islamic aesthetic values by which the criteria for judgment comes. While chapter two mentioned Islamic art as the carrier of the overall etic values of the ummah which exceed any specific cultural group in Islam, and the secular Arab arts as containing the individual tribal and group-specific emic values, there are still considerations in each of these divisions that should be observed and clarified.

6.2. The Islamic Aesthetic Value of Equality in Unity

The discussions have thus far centered on the symbolic relationship between Islamic art forms and the Islamic principle of Tawheed as the main Islamic etic value expressed through the visual arts. Besides the visual Unity as displayed through the physical structures used to make the infinite patterns, two more types of etic Unity should be noted, and specifically their association with the principle of equality.

Equality is a very strong value in Islamic life as all of the ummah seeks to live together without differentiations made based on origin, culture, language or any other normal factor upon which prejudiced biases are easily formed. Etic Islamic art shares in this concept because it is devoid of any type of cultural, regional, chronological or stylistic differences as it maintains the same characteristics and message at all times and in

all forms.

> Infinite patterns and arabesques superbly symbolise a nondirectional, nondramatic world that has no special times and places, that has Allah everywhere at any time and therefore makes all times and places equal in importance. (Madden 1976, p.12)

It is when any art object surpasses its culturally specific context and rids itself of all discriminating factors, that it can be called etic and the carrier of the Islamic aesthetic. This is the truly "classical" Islamic art form. In this way, the object not only represents the Divine Unity which Tawheed teaches, but also the very earthy and physical unity which exists among the ummah as a whole.

When an individual partakes of the aesthetic experience surrounding the realisation of Tawheed that is exhibited in the etic art form, they join the ummah and in a very real sense, becomes Unified with them. This is another reason why the structures and forms of Islamic etic art have remained unchanged through the centuries- because they have the ability to join together the ummah, not only of a certain location or era, but all across the Islamic expanse of time and space.

Whether the object carrying the infinite pattern is a massive monument from fourteenth century Spain or a small ceramic bowl from eleventh century Iran, they are both equal in their importance of portraying the etic Islamic values. The forms themselves are unimportant because that is all they are- a physical form or container.

This is why art versus craft, or form versus function are not issues of separation within Islamic art, but are considered of equal value. The form simply supplies a surface for the ornamental overlay which is where the value exists, not in the physical object upon which it is applied nor its ability to be functionally used.

> Both the small box and the huge dome of a mosque are regarded in the same way, differing only in form, not in quality. With this possibility of giving equal value to everything that exists or bringing to one level of existence everything within the realm of the visual art, a basis for a unity of style is provided that transcends the limits of the period or country. (Grube, p.11)

The geometric and arabesque structures were designed in such a way that there was no grand secret that required special knowledge to be passed on to the next generation in order to create a similar pattern. The ease with which the artisans could be trained in continuing the infinite style helped to insure that the knowledge could be transmitted down through the ages. Additionally, with Arabic being the only official and sacred language in use, calligraphy was also included in the art forms that were readily copied and could be used as a tool for Unification.

This concept of surpassing cultural specific barriers is also seen in the second observation about equality and unity, that of personal expression or ownership. Although many secular object d'art carry the artisan's or patron's names signed on the bottoms or sides of the work, the great masterpieces of etic Islamic art

remain ownerless. The artist was not creating a personal expression which belonged just to him, his patron or another group of people, but a work which would belong to the whole ummah equally as an expression of communal religious concepts.

To the contrary, any artist or patron who would seek to identify himself as the personal source of the Sacred portrayal of Tawheed would, in fact, be committing shirk by his seeking agrandizement or praise, partnership and authorship in Creation, thus denying Unity and equality by his display of pride as pointed out in chapter four. The artist or patron's only role is to be a messenger and provide the means of delivering the message to others. Any art form that is so individualised and marked as to point its significance back to the artist or patron rather than solely toward the message, is immediately relegated to the level of emic art and cannot be called an etic work.

The emic Islamic values center around the specific cultural expressions of a certain group at a certain time. Values such as hospitality, honor, service, comfort, mobility and sensual pleasure are based on tribal traditions and change from group to group. Individual artistic expressions find their home within these values and many artists or patrons have been recognised through the past, especially in the literary arts. In these emic forms, there are no religious inferences nor inherent messages displayed beyond the obvious cultural value.

One way to help distinguish the values belonging to both the etic and emic groups in Islamic and Arab art is to look at the linguistic vocabulary used to define the terms related to art in these spheres. As mentioned in chapter two, the Ecker reflexive multicultural aesthetic theory of linking cultural value to vocabulary is very aptly applied to the arts of Islam, especially as it has a Quranic or word-centered cultural value to start with.

6.3. Islamic Aesthetic Linguistic Values

Lisa Golombek observes that the linguistic theory of analysis is based on, "the axiom that a society will invent an extensive vocabulary to distinguish variations in the areas that are most important to it" (Soucek 1988, p.26). She cites three examples by way of proof: the 40 types and terms for snow which the eskimos use, the multiple terms for camels by the bedouins Arab nomads, and the volume of terminology employed to describe textiles and fabrics among Arab tradesmen (Soucek 1988, p.26).

The point of her research is in relation to the importance of textiles and fabrics in Islamic culture all through the eras. An etymological knowledge of important words used in describing the various forms and processes of Islamic art can be applied to the same point of cultural importance.

In the Arabic language, the word for art, *fann* means both art and craft together, as in Islamic art there is no significant difference between the two. This term can be

applied to both etic and emic art.

> One can still observe today that most traditional craftsmen, even among such humble professions as those of shoemaker, weaver or ironsmith, may be termed "artists" in the sense that they possess a virtual, if not always actual, creative power and that they are able to shape and decorate their products with renewed forms and patterns which remain consistent with the style and spirit of the traditional milieu. (Michon 1982, p.51)

Additionally, the word *fann*, includes a reference to science, which would be fitting considering the use of geometry, proportion and rhythm found in the infinite pattern. The science meaning "has to be not only a rational instruction but the expression of a wisdom (*hikmah*) that links things to their universal principles" (Ettinghausen 1984, p.313). This also coincides with the symbolic nature of the patterns and sacred geometry as previously discussed.

In the description of the process of ornamentation, or the application of the patterns to objects, the Arabic word *naqqasha* means "to cover with decoration in many different techniques", which can be both etic and emic, *zawaqa*, "to embellish", an emic application, and *isti'ara* is "to use metaphorically", as seen in etic forms (Grabar 1992, p.25). In architecture, the term *riwaq*, or arcade, is synonymous with the etic values of beauty, grace and purity (Burckhardt 1984, p.310).

In vocabulary related to writing and calligraphy, the verb and noun *khatt*, which means script, handwriting or calligraphy, have both etic and emic uses. This term

was not used in reference to writing pre-Islamically and was probably a direct result of the Quranic arts as influenced by Ibn Muqlah's proportional writing system (fig.31). It was applied originally in reference to boundary mapping as its root denotes marking out or outlining, which is also meaningful in association with monumental inscription and even arabesque patterns (Grabar 1992, p.166). The emic meaning is that which relates to the rules, laws and physical techniques of writing, while the etic refers to the symbolic qualities found in calligraphy and illumination.

The word for picture or image, *sourah*, was used in the Ottoman empire to describe the emic work of their calligraphers, who, at that time, created animals and figures out of Arabic letter designs. The term *muhandis*, or engineer, was used to praise a good scribe who was proficient in the application of the proportional system of the 10th century (Grabar 1992, p.87,120). This term as applied today, carries a secondary etic meaning of anyone who is proficient or excels at what he or she does.

It is also interesting to note that the Iranian artists and calligraphers used the word *calamus*, or pen, for both the writing instrument as well as paint brush. Given their prolific illuminations of the book arts, it would seem natural that these emic two meanings were found in one word.

In the classical Arabic language, *ihsan* and *ahsan*

come from the same linguistic root; the former used etically in reference to the character and worship of God, relate perfection, beauty and virtue synonymously, while the latter is the superlative form meaning "the best" (Burckhardt 1982, p.45). In daily language use, the word *jameel* is used to connotate both beautiful and good, which is its emic meaning, while etically, it refers to an attribute of God and is one of the titles He uses.

In speaking of the linguistic choice of words to describe art both in Arabic and English, Oleg Grabar postulates:

> As will be evident more than once in the course of these essays, one of the main expectations of words on the history and criticism of art is that they contribute to the understanding of works of art, not merely that they be a sort of poetic or pedantic gloss over them. (Grabar 1992, p.98)
>
> On the whole, I feel more confident in arguing that there probably was a terminology for aesthetic sensibility and judgment, but that these terms have not been properly fleshed out and identified. (Grabar 1992, p.107)

Again, this would be a worthy project for further research in the field of Islamic aesthetics for the future, especially as it applies to the etic and emic aesthetic values mentioned in this chapter.

A last linguistic point should be made regarding the distinction between Islamic etic and emic art. The two groups have been separated by art historians previously, but under the guise of different terms, such as religious and secular, sacred and traditional, Islamic and Arab,

archetypal and sensual, and classical and non-classical.

The division, however, still centers on that which speaks for small group or specific cultural values, and that which surpasses individual characteristics and speaks for the overall predominant cultural values which do not limit themselves to times, places and peoples. Both divisions maintain separate values, uses and cultural contexts, but in some areas, there is an overlap.

6.4. Cross-over Value Areas

For example, one such area is the previously mentioned distinctions between form and function, or of art versus craft, which so many Western traditions view as two completely separate things. Michon and Burckhardt have ready answers for the non-application of this division in Islamic art:

> Islamic art has never known the anything like the distinction made in the West in recent times between "pure art" (also called "fine arts" or "art for art's sake") and "applied art" (or "utilitarian art"), the first type aiming at provoking a mere aesthetic satisfaction, and the second responding also to some useful experience. The arts of Islam ...are always "functional", that is, useful, whether their usefulness be directly of a spiritual order... or whether they confer upon objects used in everyday life a distinctly qualitative character. (Michon 1982, p.51)

> Art, however, cannot exist without the artist or without the craftsman, no distinction being made between the two in the traditional worlds of Islam where art without craftsmanship or a technical achievement without beauty are both inconceivable. (Burckhardt 1982, p.45)

The cross-over between etic and emic is seen, therefore, in the use of everyday household items which,

while possibly possessing an emic function or purpose, such as fulfilling secular, pleasure-seeking or sensual needs, yet still carry the etic message of Tawheed because of the ornamentation on the surface of the form. The reason for this cross-over is related to another Islamic value to be discussed forthwith, but the point here is that the useful household form exhibits characteristics found in both etic and emic Islamic cultural values.

Another cross-over area exists in what Ettinghausen lists as the three levels of aesthetic values which can be distinguished in various cultures- that of physical and sensual pleasure, the psychological need for beauty and the highest level of moral, religious or spiritual reflections (Ettinghausen 1984, p.34,35). While the first two levels are mostly fulfilled through emic art forms, the last level of the spiritual dimensions is only found in etic Islamic art.

However, just because an art work is etic in nature does not mean that it cannot provide emic sensual pleasure or be mentally recognised as a thing of beauty without the religious aspects involved. In fact, for those who are insensitive to the etic message through choice or ignorance, the emic pleasure and beauty aspects are all that give the form value in their eyes. This is evidenced enough by the attitudes of most Western art critics who seek to apply Western intellectual and aesthetic judgments to etic Islamic forms.

Nevertheless, the real element of beauty and pleasure that is discerned in Islamic art, by those who are perceptually in tune, is on the etic end- that of a spiritual beauty related to God, perfection and the vision of the transcendent Realm beyond this earthly reality. This is another very strong Islamic etic value which should be recognised and further defined.

6.5. Etic Islamic Beauty

In chapter two, the philosophies and definitions of beauty were discussed in an array of general applications as seen in the world view. Islam, however, discerns beauty clearly through a single focus, that of Godly Beauty, which is directly related to the attributes of perfection which God possesses. An artist does not create beauty, but only provides the physical form wherein beauty can reside.

> The Muslim artist by his very surrender to divine law is always aware of the fact that it is not he who produces or invents beauty, but that a work of art is beautiful to the degree that it obeys the cosmic order and therefore reflects universal beauty. (Burckhardt 1982, p.42)

The simple definition of Islamic beauty, then, is that which reveals God. It has nothing to do with personal judgment or ideas. It comes directly from God and can only be recognised in the perception of things in their true spiritual dimension. Physical beauty, therefore, is merely a reflection of the spiritual beauty which exists in any object or person.

Ettinghausen comments that any art object which

reflects this inner beauty from God is the only "real" expression of beauty because if it is not, it is mere delusion and imagination only since it is based on man's concepts of outer beauty (Ettinghausen 1984, p.20). Burckhardt adds the idea that "to the extent that human activities are integrated into Islam, they become a support for beauty- a beauty which in fact transcends those activities because it is the beauty of Islam" (Burckhardt 1982, p.44).

He also states that beauty is inherent in Islam itself and "flows from its innermost reality, which is Unity" (Burckhardt 1982, p.44). The Al-Faruqis write of beauty as a function of ornament which is not just visual, but spiritual as well in its manifestation of Tawheed:

> ...for any figure or object, any phrase or movement, any line or anecdote that expresses *tawhid* (sp.) is for the adherent of Islam an expression of truth and goodness. It is therefore, a fortiori, an expression of beauty. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.383)

Additionally, beauty in Islam is related to Truth, whether abstract as in spiritual truths, or concrete in the function of Nature and the laws of proportion and balance.

> Therefore beauty implies truth (*haqq*) and visa-versa: truth implies beauty. There is no real beauty which does not have truth concealed in it, and there is no truth from which beauty does not emanate...Perhaps the greatest lesson traditional Islamic art can teach us lies in the fact that beauty is a criterion of truth. (Burckhardt 1982, p.47)

Al Ghazzali in his *Alchemy of Happiness* (1106) as

quoted in chapter two, asserts that Islamic beauty or Islamic art, used synonymously, is classified by its perfection (Ettinghausen 1984, p.32). Plato and Pythagoras saw beauty in forms not as relative, but as ideal and absolute when they followed geometric laws (Wade 1976, p.20).

Owen Jones, in his nineteenth century *Grammar of Ornament*, proposed that, "Beauty is produced by lines growing out one from the other in gradual undulations. There are no excrescences; nothing could be removed and leave the design equally good or better" (Jones 1868, p.5).

Whether by physical law or abstract concept, absolute or relative judgment, inner or outer form, beauty is another strong value in the Islamic cultural aesthetic. It additionally possesses one more function which is tied into another etic Islamic value, that of its ability to lead to a remembrance of God.

> The earthly function of beauty is therefore to guide men back to the source of this earthly beauty, that is, back to the principle domain. Beautiful forms are an occasion for the recollection of the essences in the Platonic sense. They are means of remembrance (*anamnesis*) of what man is and the celestial abode from which he has descended and which he carries still within the depth of his being. (Nasr 1981, p.271)

6.6. Remembrance as an Islamic Aesthetic Value

Perceiving a beautiful work transports the viewer's mind to God and teaches Divine truths. This is not just an aesthetic value, but an aesthetic experience which

Islamic art offers- that of its "memorability" or power to act as a direct reminder of God.

As the Al-Faruqis state: "The aim of art for the Muslim is to direct human beings, as vicegerents of the one transcendent God, toward contemplation and remembrance of Him" (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.173). Remembering God through this kind of an aesthetic experience also qualifies as an act of worship, as discussed in chapter four.

Nasr provides additional commentary regarding the relationship between Islamic art and the performance of the Islamic concept of remembrance:

> The causal relation between Islamic revelation and Islamic art, is brought out by the organic rapport between this art and Islamic worship, between the contemplation of God as recommended in the Quran and the contemplative nature of this art, between the remembrance of God (*dhikrallah*) which is the final goal of all Islamic worship, and the role played by Islamic art of both a plastic and sonoral nature in the life of individual Muslims and the community or *al-ummah* as a whole. (Nasr 1991, p.4)

As noted in previous chapters, Islam's choice of non-representational art forms were made because they were recognised as being the optimal carriers of the Islamic message of Tawheed. Additionally, these forms provided the best means of symbolizing and helping man achieve a state of remembrance, contemplative worship and knowledge concerning God's character.

> The Supreme Master of the whole world and the Creator of everything is Allah. Because He is so Great and different from other beings, man

> can know Him only by reflection and through meditation. (Abdulati 1990, p.4)

The chosen forms in pattern and calligraphy taught the reversals of the states of Reality- God as the concrete Truth and this earthly life as the unreal abstraction. By meditating on the geometric and arabesque forms, the worldly manifestations were bypassed or pushed into the background while the Divine Realm was brought forward into the conscious mind.

> (Aniconism) reflects no ideas, but transforms the surroundings qualitatively, by having them share in the equilibrium whose whose center of gravity is the Unseen...(Islamic art's) quality is essentially contemplative. Aniconism does not detract from this quality, very much to the contrary, for, by precluding every image inviting man to fix his mind on something outside himself and to project his soul onto an "individualizing" form, it creates a void. (Burckhardt 1976, p.29)

Other cultural religious traditions relied on visual and sculpted figural representations, physical icons and objects for their sacred art symbols. Since the main values in Islam were conceptually taken from the written Word, the Quran became the main visual and physical symbolic source behind the art forms dealing with Divine truth, the search for and remembrance of God.

> A large measure of contemplative life centered on the written word, for observation of verses from the *Qur'an* and the names of Allah and holy persons constituted one of the most used aesthetic roads to religious experience: like the icon, the epigraph in content and formal harmonies functioned as a manifestation of the intangible and eternal divine. (Welch 1979, p.23)

A good example of a Quran that was specifically

designed for the purpose of meditation was the Qarmatian manuscript (Plate 12), as mentioned in chapter three. This Quran was not created to be read like a book, but rather, each richly decorated page was a unit in itself to be pondered before going on to the next concept (Grabar 1992 p.74).

Through calligraphy, writing became a tool towards exploration and understanding of the teachings found in the Quran. Meditation of these inscriptions decorating all media of Islamic art, was a main value to the Muslim ummah in their attempts to remember God at all times, for "the faithful must ever be reminded to turn to God; for the faithful are forgetful" (Dodd & Khairallah 1981, p.32). Figural representations of any kind could not be used for this purpose as the forms would get in the way of the contemplations by their concrete presence, thereby blocking the abstract truths and realisations sought.

This desire to remember God by using His word is best represented by the use of calligraphy on ceramics, metalwork and other minor art forms designed for the purpose of daily use. As referred to previously in the section concerning cross-over etic and emic values, the focus on remembering God was the reason behind the combination of emic and etic forms.

> "Only that they should adore Me", as the Quran states, means that life is intended to be a perpetual act of devotion and remembrance of its Author. It implies that men should be surrounded in their day-to-day existence, and not only at the moments of prayer and ritual

> worship, with an ambiance composed of persons, natural forms and man-made objects which help them to remember God constantly. (Michon 1982, p.50)

The Quranic inscriptions found on ewers (fig.19), bowls (fig.41), basins (fig.21), candle holders (plate 1), and the like, served as constant reminders of Tawheed and what the focus of life should be. The uses of the ewer and basin for performing the ritual ablution before prayer, made them natural objects to be endowed with Quranic passages.

The spoken word from the Quran was also used in all aspects of life, both the consequential and inconsequential, to serve as an aural reminder. There were Hadith that took the form of small invocations called *dua*, to be used when doing actions, such as: entering or leaving a house, eating, sneezing, traveling, getting dressed, having sex, or going into the bathroom. There were dua for hearing a dog bark or a cock crow, inviting a guest to your house, entering a market, hearing thunder or being in the rain.

The most fundamental greeting of a Muslim, *asaalamu aleykum*, or peace be upon you, is a religious expression, as is the famous "*inshaAllah*", or God willing, which Muslims today use after almost every sentence. In short, the whole language, both visual, oral, and auditory is based on words of remembrance which are an important etic Islamic value.

Aristotle believed in this principle of remembrance

through all things as well. He saw every creation of Nature in this world as a reflection of the other Reality. Islam applies this view in that there are no distinct secular and religious realms in life, but that all things have God in and around them- earthly Nature, the planets, universe and all created things are to remember Him by as "everywhere is the Face of God" (Dodd & Khairallah 1981, p.33). This is another definition of Islamic Tawheed as it applies to daily existence.

Also, according to a well-known Hermetic saying, "that which is lowest symbolises that which is highest." Therefore, the daily small actions and commonest physical forms can lead to remembering God on the highest level of existence. This is why the geometric and arabesque forms were so suitable in their role as symbols of the Divine Realm.

> The material physical form therefore is capable of symbolizing that which is the highest planes of spiritual knowledge and understanding ...That is why (the arabesque) can become the locus of the Divine Presence and support for the contemplation of the formless. (Nasr 1981, p.267)

> Through contemplation of these infinite patterns, the recipient's mind is turned toward the Divine, and art becomes a reinforcement and reminder of religious belief. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.165)

Islamic patternism, which expresses Unity through rhythm and repetition, is not a static form in contemplation. Because it exhibits a movement of its own, it can also lead to a reflection of the eternal flow of

time. The meditative quality is not created by the form itself, but takes place in the mind of the viewer as the spiritual meanings are perceived.

This has reference to the void mentioned earlier that comes as a result of contemplation directed at these patterns. It is only when a void and emptiness of worldly thoughts exists that the Realities can be reversed and the other world be revealed.

> The proliferation of decoration in Muslim art does not contradict this quality of contemplative emptiness; on the contrary, ornamentation with abstract forms enhances it through its unbroken rhythm and endless interweaving, Instead of ensnaring the mind and leading it into some imaginary world, it dissolves mental "fixations", just as a flame, or leaves quivering in the wind, can detach consciousness from its inward idols. (Burckhardt 1976, p.29)

Remembrance and contemplation go hand in hand in Islamic art forms. They are linked to Unity through the object of the contemplation, and equality in the fact that remembrance is performed indiscriminately through all aspects of daily life. The Islamic values of Unity through equality, beauty, and remembrance are all etic when considering any period, style, technique, motif, structure, or geographical location in Islamic art.

They can be observed within the three divisions which make up Tawheed: Ruboobeeyah (Lordship), Asmaa was Sifaat (Names and Attributes) and 'Ebaadah (Worship), as detailed in chapter four. Unity as seen through equality, along with the beauty inherent in Creation are all part of

the Tawheed of Lordship. Beauty is also a Name and Attribute of God and belongs to that category of Tawheed as well. Remembrance is an act of Worship, while equality comes under this category as a social form of Worship.

Therefore, Tawheed can be called the core receptacle and origin of all the major etic Islamic values which have been thus far discussed. Because Tawheed is first and foremost a religious Truth in Islam, any aesthetic theory formed that could be applied specifically to Islamic art must be capable of sustaining sacred truth, sacred symbols and the etic values spoken of in this study. The next concept to be considered then, is the formation of a theory- its name and definition of purpose and properties- which will encompass Islamic art aesthetics.

6.7. The Sacramentalist Theory

As stated in chapter two, all aesthetic theories in the past have been formulated in response to a need to define, qualify and discuss the observed aesthetic properties which are shared by a volume of art forms within a certain style. The theories, once formed, must be broad enough to encompass any other art forms from any other tradition which display similar qualities and components, but narrow enough to exclude other art works based on their lack of these defining constituents.

This applies to the formation of any theory brought about in response to Islamic art. It must be specific

enough to include all the key aesthetic components of the Islamic arts, yet be general enough that it can be applied to other art forms and traditions possessing the same focus and properties.

The best aesthetic theory that could be postulated using Islamic art as the primary basis, then, is that which would judge an art work expressly by its sacred values and symbols. One word that describes this function of a sacred transmitter, outward sign or symbol of a sacred truth, is the generic word, "sacrament". Although used mostly in a Western Christian context, this word by definition connotates all that Islamic art fulfills in symbolizing Tawheed, and, in fact, has actually already been used previously to describe Islamic art concepts.

Nasr has applied it within the context of Divine beauty when he writes, "That is why beauty seen in the sapiential perspective, which always envisages beauty in its rapport with God, is a sacrament that elevates man to the realm of the sacred" (Nasr 1981, p.270). He also speaks of the ability of Islamic art calligraphy to reveal that which is hidden, and thereby administer a sacramental experience.

> Although the prototypes of all the traditional styles of Islamic calligraphy are contained ultimately in the "Hidden Treasures" in the Divine Order, without which this calligraphy would not be a "visual sacrament", the earthly crystallization of various styles took place over a period of time in accordance with the laws of manifestation and crystallization whereby a tradition becomes established in the world of time and space. (Nasr 1991, p.27)

It is Islamic art's power to so adequately symbolize and reveal the Sacred truths surrounding Tawheed and transport the viewer into an ethereal Realm which would classify it as a sacrament. Hence, a *sacramentalist* theory would be an appropriate title for this etic aesthetic classification.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a sacrament as "having a sacred character or function; a type, token, sign or symbol; a mystery; something secret or having a secret meaning; to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality." Sacramentalism is defined as, "belief in or use of sacramental rites, acts, or objects," and a sacramentarian is "one who interprets sacraments as merely visual symbols." Lastly, the term sacred, besides meaning holy, is "dedicated or set apart for the worship of a deity; worthy of religious veneration; not secular or mundane; highly valued and important."

All of these meanings can be applied to Islamic art forms in their primary role as the conveyor and transmitter of Tawheed. The etic Islamic values mentioned all through this study are sacred in character because of their relation to and origin from Islam and can only be perceived through the symbolic patterns and calligraphic forms as discussed. In every way, Islamic art can be considered a sacramental symbol, just as the viewer's aesthetic experience is akin to partaking in a sacramental rite.

The sacramentalist theory by definition, therefore, proposes to find its application in any art form whose primary function and focus is that of a carrier, transmitter, or symbol for sacred truths and values. The criteria for judgment is the extent to which any art form is capable of displaying this symbolic and sacred quality.

In this theory, an object's aesthetic beauty and worth is judged only by the appropriateness of the form in carrying the message and how much sacred truth can be perceived through it. Conversely, any form which does not have this sacred focus as its primary function or cannot adequately symbolize or transmit the message, would be judged as of poor quality and not be aesthetically valued.

The type of beauty involved is that which comes as a result of a sacred experience, or recognition of God's beauty, and as such, is not judged according to subjective opinions of individual viewers. This beauty also can be evaluated according to obedience to laws, level of perfection and recognised innate values, all within the context of recognition of God's beauty through these qualities.

In a broad sense, this theory can be applied to the sacred traditional arts in all cultures. It follows the etic cross-cultural value of humankind's need to create religious symbols and sacred visual forms. This is

different from the homogenous theory proposed in chapter two, in that the sacramentalist theory is only applicable to the etic values of sacred and religious needs, whereas the homogenous theory can be applied to all cross-cultural etic values which might be represented in a multicultural art form.

As applied specifically to Islamic art, the sacramentalist theory has a set of proposals which provide the criteria for judgment based upon the aforementioned aesthetic values. While these are most likely not the only criteria which can be applied, they are those observed from all the research done in this study toward defining etic Islamic art values and structures.

Therefore, the following proposals are suggested. The numbers included in parenthesis at the end of each proposal refers to the chapter and page numbers in this study where the justification for that specific proposal can be found.

6.8. Islamic Art Aesthetic Criteria

1) The main aesthetic criteria for any Islamic art form is its successful ability to assist the viewer in perceiving the Islamic concept of Tawheed. (2:49-52; 4:224-226; 5:233-234,273-276; 6:292-294,300-301)

2) This ability is best actualized in the utilization of geometric, arabesque and calligraphic structures which are generally applied as ornament and are sometimes included in the structural aspect of aesthetic Islamic art

forms. (3:91-119,130-132; 5:235-250,263-274)

3) Figural representations, whether realistic or abstracted cannot be used as structural motifs in any ornamental pattern or calligraphic work. In the same light, all natural or vegetal elements should be abstracted to the point of removing any focus on their individual forms and identities within the overall ornamental application. (3:119-130; 4:209-213; 5:237)

4) All manner of physical objects can be the carrier of the patterned and calligraphic ornaments in Islamic art as the only aesthetic value of the art work is in the message and not in the object itself, and as there is no differentiation necessary between secular and religious use items. This can be applied to today's art forms as well. (6:282-283,290-291,299)

5) In order to represent the aesthetic value of Tawheed in the best possible manner, the visual motifs and elements must be visually organised using the principles of rhythm, repetition, and symmetrical balance. (3:110-116; 5:245; 6:299-300)

6) In specific reference to the geometric patterns, the focal quality of infinity must be present in the work and enhanced by the choice of shape and modular style of joining within the pattern. (3:110-116)

7) Geometric patterns should always exceed their frames visually in order to produce an infinite pattern, while frames should be used only as a device to divide and

contain the design in a supportive way and never dominate them in visual emphasis or act restrictively upon the pattern. (3:110-116; 5:242,243)

8) All patterns should possess enough intricacy and movement to allow the eye to read the whole work in constant motion without encountering any static stopping points which disrupt the flow. Additionally, patterns should never display individual focal points brought out through color, size or placement of any of the motifs used. (5:237-240; 6:299-300)

9) The purer the form of infinite pattern chosen, the more easily the viewer can obtain a sense of infinity, and therefore, the more aesthetic worth the pattern possesses. (6:294-300)

10) Calligraphic forms should also possess the principles of rhythm, repetition and symmetrical balance as well as intracacy and movement. (5:267; 6:299-300)

11) Letters should be proportionately balanced between imaginary vertical and horizontal lines which allow no breaks in flow, and letter style width and height should remain consistent. (3:102-103; 5:269; 6:300-302)

12) Legibility should always be a secondary consideration behind the primary concern of the aesthetic transmission of Tawheed in the choice of the script chosen, format and any letter transformation used. The stylization of the letters should lead the viewer to focus on the whole visual field rather than any specific written

words or individual letters. (3:104-108; 5:263-270)

13) Any Islamic art object is adjudicated beautiful to the extent to which it reveals God and manifests His Attributes. (2:29-32,41-45; 6:292-294)

14) Any Islamic art object possesses aesthetic value to the degree that it reminds the viewer of God. The depth of value is directly proportional to the intensity of remembrance given. (4:202-204; 5:272; 6:294-300)

15) Any Islamic art object possesses aesthetic value to the degree that it promotes a meditative and contemplative frame of mind in which the attuned viewer can perceive spiritual truths. (3:106; 5:272; 6:294-300)

16) Any Islamic art object possesses aesthetic value to the degree that it brings the viewer into Unity with the ummah through equality. The depth of the value is the extent to which the viewer feels an equal and cohesive part of the whole. (4:200-202; 6:282-284)

17) Any Islamic art object possesses aesthetic value to the degree that it surpasses the individual stylistic differences found in culture, region and time period, in favor of its function as a non-discriminatory symbol of Tawheed. (6:283-284)

18) Any Islamic art object which displays a quality of personal ownership by artist or patron as one of its main characteristics is contrary to the Islamic order and, therefore, can display no aesthetic worth as a sacred transmitter of Tawheed. (4:198-200; 6:284-286)

19) Additionally, any Islamic art object which emphasizes specific cultural emic values carries no aesthetic worth as an etic sacred art work. (2:55-56; 6:283-286)

6.9. Additional Judgmental Considerations

Before going on to apply these proposals to specific examples, it is also worthwhile to include what has been written in the past which focuses on any criteria for judgments on Islamic art forms. As discussed in chapter one, most Islamic art historians have been reticent to include any types of criteria for critical analysis in their essays, however, a few of them report lists of adjectives or qualities which different art forms should possess according to earlier sources or their own observations based on the inherent properties of the forms themselves.

The Al-Faruqis have provided a most thorough listing of classifications and qualities that define a successful infinite pattern as detailed in chapters three and five of this study. Their categories of conjunct and disjunct patterns, and especially their observations regarding the expanding arabesque structure, can be used as criteria for aesthetic judgment of an ornamental pattern in representing Tawheed.

Further, they list six aesthetic characteristics which they have analyzed as being present in all Islamic art forms which represent Tawheed: abstraction, modular

structure, successive combinations, repetition, dynamism and intracacy (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.165-169). They apply these properties to the calligraphic works as well, but here additionally refer to the ordered process of viewing as a consideration:

> The work, therefore, like any successful Islamic art work, must be viewed successively in parts and combinations of parts, as a series of "views" rather than as a single unity. Such additive structures demand the use of repetition, timed viewing, and intracacy, which are the other core characteristics of the Islamic arts. (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi 1986, p.376)

Oleg Grabar refers to the aesthetic terpnopoietic, or pleasure-giving ability, by which a geometric pattern can be judged and also its richness and variety of design and texture of materials used. He relates this as a purely visual aesthetic emic value which does not belong in the same class as the meanings and symbolic nature of the pattern relative to Tawheed (Grabar 1992, p.145).

In his treatise on writing as an intermediary, he includes themes used in writing criticism: technical merits and methods, creativity, beauty and connotational functions of symbolism and values. Grabar refers to Ibn al-Haytham's eleventh century Egyptian text, *The Book of Optics*, which provides commentary on notions of enhancement (*tahsin*), composition, and proportionate order (*tartib*) as being criteria for aesthetic judgment.

He refers to Qadi Ahmad, who claimed that Maulana Mir Mohammed Qumi wrote with "extreme lusciousness, with much

movement and maturity" (Grabar 1992, p.84-87). Grabar writes that when order and legibility of scripts take precedence over beauty in writing, the form should no longer be considered as calligraphic, but instead be referred to as *paleography*, or the study of ancient scripts (Grabar 1992, p.97).

As to beauty, he concludes that there are great difficulties in deciding what is beautiful or even artistic in writing due to the absence of distinction between writing a script to be read and writing in order to create a different effect. He states that most books give information relative to how to form letters and give examples, but that none of them explain what makes a good example of calligraphy or set standards by which to judge the examples; they simply show every example of calligraphy as classified by style or era, but do not distinguish between good or bad examples of a given style (Grabar 1992, p.60)

Welch in his definitive work, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World* (Kent 1979), quotes a part of a text by Mohammed Abdul Rahman on calligraphy which details all the properties which good writing possesses:

> When its parts are symmetrical, its *alif* and its *lam* made long, its lines regular, its terminals made similar to its upstrokes, its *'ayns* opened, its *ra* clearly distinguishable from its *nun*, its paper polished, its ink sufficiently black, with no commixture of styles, permitting of rapid visualization of outline, and quick comprehension of content, its separations clearly defined, its principles carefully observed, its thinness and thickness in due

> proportion...It should disregard the style of the copyists and avoid the artistry of the elegant writers, and it should give you the suggestion of motion, though stationary. (Welch 1979, p.249)

He also quotes from Sultan 'Ali's treatise on calligraphy:

> It is known that if a hand is legible it is a good sign of writing. Writing exists to be read. Not that (readers) should get stuck in it. A beautiful writing renders the eye clear, the ugliness of writing turns the eye into a bathstove. ([ND] cited in Welch 1976, p.30)

Lastly, Welch refers back to Ibn Muqlah's Khatt al-Mansub, which made the art of writing into a science through the use of measured letter proportions. Welch affirms, however, that just because a script followed the system did not necessarily assure that it was a beautiful work, but rather it had a potential through its use to become beautiful, based on its additional characteristics of "refined, excellent, delicate, mature and tasteful", which were added in Ibn Bawwab's time. He adds, "A sense of calligraphic beauty was more dependent upon long experience as a practitioner and connoisseur of script than upon the tools of precise measurement" (Welch 1979, p.30).

While some of the aesthetic criteria stated above can be seen in the Islamic art aesthetic proposals under the sacramentalist theory, many of them, on the other hand, have to do with emic aesthetic values specifically. Since Islamic art has not been judged according to separate etic nd emic aesthetic values in the past, there really has

not been much written authoritatively concerning what is good or bad Islamic art.

It is hoped that this study will lead to further investigations regarding judgmental criteria in all areas pertaining to Islamic art, including the emic traditional arts. For now, the focus will turn to the application of the stated criteria upon various Islamic visual art works of the past and present eras.

6.10. Application of the Sacramentalist Theory

In looking for examples that epitomize the proposals and aesthetic values enumerated above, art works were chosen based on the highest number of proposals that could be applied. Although there are Islamic art forms which come from the early periods that could be said to contain a few of the criteria stated, most works selected are from the tenth century and beyond when the forms were more developed and the criteria mentioned became the focal points.

In looking at the infinite pattern as implemented through arabesque and geometric structures, the first good example can be seen in the marble panel from the tenth century mihrab of the Great Mosque at Cordova (fig.13). The intracacy and motion of this work is advanced beyond its time and although it has some structural distractions as seen in strong vertical framework and inner vine lines, its symmetrical lay out and balance between the positive and negative space help to lessen the flaws. The elemental

structure of the motifs is still too large for a full repetition of the forms, but overall, it suggests the effect of a continuing pattern and thus qualifies as an early aesthetic work.

The Jami' mosque at Kirman, Iran (1349) (plate 3, fig.26) is a fine example of all that geometric and arabesque patterns can display. Here, the constant modular repetition of the intricate geometric forms (plate 3) exceed the frame in mid-stride, while the muqarnas vaulting at the top of the portal gives a sense of ever-ascending height. Even the calligraphic letters contained in the square set amid the geometric ornament is constructed out of smaller units and therefore blends in without detracting from the overall pattern.

Both the Jami' mosque (1447) and the Mausoleum of Harun-i Vilayat at Isfahan (1512) (figs.50,51) display the expanding arabesque forms which embody the infinite pattern. They fulfill all the proposals which can be applied to patterns in Islamic art and contain a definite meditative and contemplative quality. They are a pure form and thus proposals 9 and 13 apply in their abilities to reveal the other Reality more clearly. Because of these abilities, they would be judged to possess a high aesthetic worth in Islamic art.

Two other monumental ornaments from Iran are prime examples of the infinite pattern, that of the Shaykh Lutfallah mosque (1600-1620) and the sixteenth century

Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashad (plate 19). The arabesque as applied to the muqarnas planes in the main entrance and mihrab of Shaykh Lutfallah (plates 4,5) have frames around them which help accentuate the structure of the vaulting and intracacy of the overall composition.

The interesting combination of the geometric octagon filled with arabesque forms at Imam Riza (plate 19) gives the feeling of a stencil which is placed over a background of arabesque and windows have been cut through to observe the pattern underneath. While the use of color is not highly aesthetic here as it detracts from the overall unity of the pattern by providing a central yellow focal point, the other colors blend in well and give the pattern a sense of three-dimensional depth which helps in its meditative quality.

The Court of Lions (fig.23) and Mirador (fig.22) of the fourteenth century Alhambra Palace at Granada fully apply the proposals for patterns and aesthetic values. The hallmark of this monument, as mentioned in chapter five, is the element of light which is brought out through the vaulting and pierced carving of the ornamental motifs.

Here, the meditative and contemplative qualities almost dwarf the infinite pattern symbolism as the reflections and shadows cause the viewer to be immediately transported into another realm. The Mirador is especially aesthetic in the combinations of the calligraphic overlays combined with the geometric undersurfaces, and

the muqarnas is so intricate as to almost appear as a series of two-dimensional geometric units.

Other good examples of the combined forms of calligraphy and infinite pattern together are observed in the ceramic mihrab at Kashan (1226) and the Isfahan mihrab (1354) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The harmony and intricacy of the Kashan mihrab (fig.49) is such that the calligraphic letters in the outside bands almost look like straight vine stems which extend from the arabesque surrounding them. The elements of this mihrab all are equal in intricacy and proportionately structured so that none of them act as a visual focus detracting from the others.

The brass inlaid candlestick from thirteenth century Egypt or Syria (plate 1) is a truly aesthetic work of combined forms. Its calligraphic band is the obvious focal point because of the height of the letters in relation to the other bands of ornament. The calligraphy rests three-dimensionally on a bed of vegetal arabesque ornament and two bands of geometric interlace frame the center band on top and bottom.

The letter verticals provide the rhythmic repetitive elements while the interlace and arabesque add to the meditative intracacy. The shape of this piece seems to change form with every eye-tracing motion and the round medallion motifs offer a resting pause in the action that is ever continuing.

The Isfahan mihrab (plate 18) is also a good combined form with the colors of blue and white acting to unify the separate elements. Although three different calligraphic scripts are employed, they are not disharmonate in their placements. The foliated Kufic on the white band which is the closest to the actual niche is very rhythmic in the use of its vertical repetitions and harmonises well with the diamond-shaped bands which immediately follow next to it.

One other nicely combined form is the Qibla Ivan detail from the fifteenth century Jami' mosque at Varzana (fig.55). Here, all three elements of calligraphy, geometry and arabesque are seen in the interior of an arch. The geometric pattern exceeds the frame of the structure while the arabesque is totally symmetrical, though non-repetitive. The calligraphy is a good example of what is mentioned in proposal 12 in that it is created to be a visual aesthetic work first and read only as a secondary concern.

Another example of aesthetic calligraphy in the same style is that of the twelfth century panel from a mosque in Linjan, Iran with the name of the descendants of the Prophet carved in stucco (fig.56). The horizontal and vertical letters are all equally proportionate in height and width which allows the viewer to see the unity of the work first over the individual letters or words.

A combined calligraphic and arabesque structure is

seen in the Karatay Madrassah in Konya from Seljuk times (fig.57). The calligraphic band at the base of the geometrically intricate dome is almost perceived as a geometric pattern itself. The letter heights are so exaggerated that they are visually separated from the vertical bases that tie them into the script.

Additionally, the words are mounted onto a patterned design underneath which adds to the continual motion of the whole composition. The dome ornament is an excellent example of the infinite geometric pattern with two distinct elements, the large polygonal sunburst shapes and the small elemental gridwork which surrounds them. Both the arabesque and the calligraphy are full of repetition and symmetry which qualify them as aesthetic Islamic art.

A good example of calligraphic unity is the tiled inscription on the Royal Mosque of Isfahan (1612-1637) (fig.58). Again, the heightened verticals of the *lam* and *alif* letters form a repetitive motion which adds to the total unity of design. The script flows well and while legible, also maintains a calligraphic form overall due to the placement of the words in a non-singular level line.

The detail of embroidery from a *kiswah*, or covering of the Ka'abah made in Cairo (fig.59), shows the use of symmetrical repetition of a word or phrase as placed between zig-zag structural lines. The letter widths and

heights of the verticals give further repetitious emphasis while the different directions of the words show that the work was meant to be a visual symbol first.

As discussed formerly, the Qarmatian manuscript (plate 12) from Istanbul is meant as a contemplative work. The Kufic letters are very linear, but divide the space rhythmically. It is the integration of the script with the background ornamental arabesque which gives this piece its aesthetic worth and separates it from the other more average Quranic illuminations. The harmony of the letters with the arabesque add a dimensionality to the page and allow for a continual flow of eye movement.

Finally, three modern works from the twentieth century show the continuation of the aesthetic Islamic values in Islamic art works today. First is the calligraphic design in Thuluth script by 'Abd al Ghani Baghdadi (1963) (fig.60). It is perfectly symmetrical in balance as the one half is a mirror image of the other half.

The letter formations are well-proportioned and the movement and flow is uninterrupted. The central geometric structure, while not being an infinite pattern, still adds an angular form which complements the straight verticals in the piece. The only quality which could be improved upon is the overall intracacy as the letters do not fill all the available space.

The contemporary calligraphic design by Emin Berin from Turkey (fig.61) creates an infinite pattern because

of its circular format. The Kufic script horizontals and verticals are exactly proportioned and act as dividers to create twelve segments in the piece. They flow toward the center geometric composition and at first glance, it is difficult to tell if the viewer is looking at a calligraphic work or a geometric design.

The Quranic passage written is, "We have granted you a manifest victory" (Quran 48:1) repeated four times with an abstract floriated top of the initial *'ayn* to mark the beginning of the passage. Visually, the whole work exudes a meditative quality and the viewer feels pulled in toward the center focal vortex in their contemplations.

Finally, the geometric arabesque inlaid tabletop from Syria (fig.62) is also a circular infinite pattern design with many modular geometric combinations. The center hexagonal star is only slightly emphasized by the amount of white used, but the rest of the design has equal an balance between the black and white mosaic pieces. The intracacy of the design is what gives it the meditative quality due to the smallness of the elements and their combined motion through repetition.

6.11. Negative Aesthetic Judgments

While the Islamic art aesthetic proposals are all formulated in a positive statement form, the converse applications are also true in judging forms which would be deemed poor in aesthetic quality or of little worth under the Sacramentalist theory. In order to help frame the

concepts of the theory more fully by showing what it excludes, negative examples will now be discussed in relation to their lack of qualities and value.

The first non-aesthetic work is the Nishapur plaster panel from tenth century Khurassan (fig.11). However, it is almost unfair to call the work poor in aesthetic quality simply because the tenth century is still considered a developmental stage; but the piece will serve an instructional function in what elements are not appropriate to the theory proposed.

The most obvious problem with the panel is in the inconsistency of the motifs used. While the gridwork is symmetrical and balanced, and the carved negative space gives the pattern intricacy, there is no repetition of elements and the framework is totally constrictive. Even though there is no focal point per se, the successive viewing is stopped each time a new motif is encountered. These distracting points can be emphasized further by comparing this work with the stucco panel from Khurasan (fig.52) which has solved many of these problems and carries a positive aesthetic quality.

The polychrome bowl from fifteenth century Rabat (plate 20) was never intended to be a classical Islamic aesthetic work. It is a fine example of emic folk work with the interplay of its two bright colors and strong pictorial quality. It is a well-balanced piece, but lacks any of the components of repetition or rhythm except in the

shapes which form the outside band. It would be a good piece to use as the start of a discussion on emic aesthetics.

Another work that would be considered aesthetic under emic classifications, but unfortunately tries to belong to the etic Islamic art aesthetic is that of the eighteenth century Quran frontispiece from north Africa (plate 21). It attempts to use vegetal arabesque and geometric shape, but totally fails in its structural application.

There is the large focal point of the octagonal star in the center which is not repeated and hence loses the point of its presence in reference to a possible Islamic pattern. The arabesque organization is full of intricate but non-similar shapes and sizes of elements and even the choice of abstract leaf, flower and vine scroll forms are not related to the motifs Islamic art employs.

The interlacing appears haphazard in directional shifts and is not discernably laid out on any kind of recognisable geometric grid. The use of color is inconsistent, and while the whole double page is symmetrical, there are a variation of design elements within the frames which do not match each other. The frame is highlighted in red which only serves to contain the forms securely rather than allowing the eye to exceed their limits. While rhythm is present through vegetal motion, it is subordinated to the central large shape

which stops the successive viewing in mid-stride.

Overall, this work resembles Celtic interlacing and structures more than Islamic pattern design. If it had belonged to an illuminated book of poetry or Arab literature, it could be looked at as a nice emic piece, but as a frontispiece of a Quran, it does better as a Lindisfairne Gospel carpet page.

The other sample from a nineteenth century Quran out of Turkey or Iran (plate 22) is slightly better in its overall appropriateness as belonging to the Holy Book, but still possesses major flaws aesthetically. It is similar in design to the fifteenth century Quran page from Cairo (plate 11) which is a successful example of the Islamic aesthetic style.

In comparison between the two pages, moving from the outside toward the script, the borders bear discussion. While the Turkey Quran uses over one third of its visual page space on the flower spike motifs which give the whole page a feeling of raggedness, the Cairo page uses a much smaller and less elaborated form which does not draw the eye away from the central script space.

The arabesque border on the Turkey page seems cramped for space in comparison the the Cairo page and its differently sized components do not blend into a singular continuing pattern well. The Cairo page, on the other hand, has a consistent arabesque line and all shapes are well integrated proportionally; they flow off the page

creating an infinite pattern in the mind of the viewer. The Turkey page presents the viewer with too many starting and stopping points visually, and it is would take a computer to continue that many different types of design elements past the page edge.

In reference to the central script frame, the Cairo page has an obvious linear quality to its lines, and while the rosette markings between verses are distracting, the script has a calligraphic quality by its white bubbled outline effect. The Turkey page has no such linear or calligraphic aspect to it. The writing is very small in comparison to the rest of the embellishment and the wavy lines that tie to the frame design and separate the script lines actually make the script to appear wavy as well. Upon closer examination, however, the script is very linear and well-proportioned, just lost in the sea of poorly designed ornament.

One more poor aesthetic example of a Quran page is noted from the eleventh century (fig.63). This page resembles a practice notebook for a scribe experimenting with different styles and measurements. It is totally disproportionate and the attempt at floriated Kufic in the rendering of *Mohammed Rasool Allah walatheena* in the largest letters is very distracting to the overall page.

Additionally, the word *walatheena* visually should be placed on the next line down or the following *ma'ahu* should be brought up to that line in order to keep the phrasing and

importance of the words consistent with the marked difference of size. Again, the sense of flow is disrupted because of the size dissimilarities and the sense of repeated elements gets lost in the resulting confusion.

Turning to more modern times, the funerary procession of letters from nineteenth century Turkey (fig.64) is inappropriate because of its representational form use. The letters are calligraphically rendered and very consistent in structure, but this kind of art falls completely under the category of emic due to the lettering being used as a tool whose primary use is to create the figural shapes.

Two calligraphic works from this century by Sadiqayn (fig.65) and Naja al Mahdawi from Tunisia (fig.66) also fall into the category of emic works because while each one has some of the aesthetic qualities listed above, both works use the calligraphic forms in a totally personal expressionary mode. Rhythm and repetition is seen in the Mahdawi work, but the visual illusionary technique of making the letters appear to travel through the square has little to do with an infinite pattern structure.

The surah used for the subject matter in the Sadiqayn piece is Quran 55: 66-67 which speaks of the palm trees in paradise. The artist has chosen to employ literal representational forms to show the meaning of the verse which, therefore, disqualifies the work as aesthetic Islamic art. Also, there is no relationship of the letters

to each other proportionately in both pieces and the pictorial quality of both overall tends to remind the viewer of abstract and op art expressionist works from Western art.

Finally, the photos of geometric tilework used as building decoration in Istanbul (plates 23-25) show the misuse of the Islamic forms for pure embellishment's sake. Plate 23 is a fast food restaurant in one of the busy suburbs. There is little infinite pattern relation that can be seen as the tiles used are in a separate conjunct pattern structure just laid side by side. The floral tile in the center is nothing more than a focal point for decorational purposes.

Plates 24 and 25 show the same kind of tile decorative applications on the side of a ferry landing building. While the tiles in this case are disjunct and could be used to represent an infinite pattern, the single band presentation does not allow them to form enough repetition to make a full pattern, hence they are merely nice geometric shapes.

If the whole side of the building in plate 25 were filled with the same tiles, it would be able to fulfill the aesthetic criteria for an Islamic art work. It is too bad that the architects or building designers who renovated this structure with these tiles did not consider other aesthetic features than mere embellishment.

This brings up the point of how Islamic art forms are

perceived by today's artists, architects and audience. The final segment of this chapter will deal with this issue more fully, but in reference to this section on judgment, it its simply nice to know that there are forms being created today which can qualify aesthetically under the Islamic art proposals listed above.

6.12. Some Final Observations

As suggested in the beginning of the example section, works from before the tenth century are really not consistent enough in their structural applications to be judged according to the theory. Many early works incorporate a few of the qualities necessary to carry the message, but they are not visually fully developed enough yet to be classical as examplars of the Islamic aesthetic.

It wasn't until the beginning of the eighth century that the pre-Islamic forms and motifs began to show an individualised Islamic application which separated them from their "borrowed" past. Additionally, the eighth century is the time when many other influences came together.

The iconoclastic movement of the Christian and Jewish cultural traditions were putting emphasis on abstracted forms; the Hadith were compiled at this time and the schools of jurisprudence were applying them to the smaller details of daily living, such as the visual arts, which were not covered specifically in the Quran.

The Greeks were spreading their geometric knowledge through the conquered territories which lead the schools of mathematics and mystical branches to continue on with applications in this area; and Islam was looking more inward toward the intent and meanings behind the revelations which put more emphasis on the need for a symbolic visual language.

In other words, it took time for the Islamic culture to assimilate all of these ideas, influences, cultural group experiences and knowledge before they would be reflected in the art forms. Islamic art can be said to begin when the art works lost their references to their borrowed roots in favor of what became uniquely Islamic-that of the message carrying and symbolic structures defined. Before the eighth and even up to the tenth century, in the majority of the surviving pieces seen today, the forms could not be said to represent Tawheed as they were still in prototype form.

To this point, not all art works are considered Islamic just because they are old and come from Islamic lands, and not all art works are aesthetic just because they contain patterns. Hopefully the criteria defined in this study will be useful in identifying even early works of aesthetic worth.

Another idea to consider is that any art work that is rejected as part of the Islamic aesthetic from the etic point of view could be still considered of aesthetic value

as an emic work. The cultural specific criteria is not included within the confines of this study, but would make an interesting follow-up.

One more area for future study could include the mystical symbolic applications in Islamic aesthetics. While the Sacramentalist theory can encompass the mystical meanings applied to Islamic art forms on the grounds of their being a part of sacred art symbolism, it would be beneficialto delve into the aesthetic properties involved in making a judgment concerning them specifically.

Also, the perception of Tawheed talked about in this study is on qualitative grounds and not quantitatively determined. How much and what kind of knowledge can be gained would lend itself to some interesting studies. Certainly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Titus Burckhardt would enjoy addressing this subject.

Finally, the test of any truth is how long it has been around, and as the aesthetic Islamic forms have survived more than a millennia, it could be said that they are definitively True. If they are lost in the future, it will be the result of man's lack of spiritual perception altogether rather than the loss of Truth from the message- that of Tawheed, the uncompromising Unity.

6.13. The Gift to the Future

> What remains intact today of the traditional arts of Islam- especially their sacred centre which is Islamic sacred art- is a most precious gift of God for Muslims as well as for all men

> and women sensitive to the revivifying power of beauty as it is wedded to truth. (Nasr 1991, p.201)

When considering current and future attitudes toward Islamic art, there are some primary aesthetic questions to ask regarding the forms from the perspective of the present time, such as, "What is the difference between the meaning and value of the work to the people at the time of creation as compared with the work's value and meaning to today's present audience?"; "Is the former level of significance any more or less valid than the significance attached to today's views?"

"Are the artist, designer and viewing culture aware of the message carrying importance of Islamic art as a whole; or, when any work is produced today which fulfills the aesthetic requirements to be called Islamic art, it is just by pure chance?"; Conversely, if an emic work is produced, "Is it the artist's initial informed intent to choose the emic values over the etic ones and create the work solely as a personal expression, or is there a lack of awareness of the difference and the emic form is created unconsciously instead without recognising it as such?"

The answer to these questions is found in the strength and purity of the religion of Islam in today's world. As long as there are people who still follow the Quranic teachings and strive to attain Tawheed in all aspects of their lives, the meanings and symbolism of Islamic art will remain unchanged from that which they

were in the beginning- the same values and same Truth.

As observed earlier, not all Muslims were capable of understanding or perceiving the depths of the Truths available or in being able to discern the shades of gray of intent in applying the teachings of Islam to their daily life. Today, there are yet many who are losing the fullness of the message for getting caught up in the smallness of the parts and who vastly misinterpret the clear teachings in favor of supporting some specific leader or cause.

The point is, that the message has been and always will be available for the attuned, whether artist or audience.

> Even a modernized Muslim experiences deep down in his heart the sense of peace and joy, when sitting on a traditional carpet, viewing a piece of calligraphy, or hearing classical poetry in his or her language, not to speak of hearing the Quranic psalmody or praying within the confines of one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture which dot the Islamic world from the Pacific to the Atlantic. (Nasr 1991, p.196)

Islamic art will continue to be produced by trained artisans in many of the ancient Islamic capitals of the world. Even with all the mechanization and technological advances, the content will remain unchanged; the patterns can now be applied by means of machines or computers, but they are still the infinite patterns of Tawheed.

> Fortunately, a considerable reservoir of skilled artistic craftsmanship still exists in the Islamic world. All the great cities of Islam, from Isfahan to Fes, passing by Damascus, Istanbul, Cairo and Tunis, shelter

> bodies of craftsmen who retain the qualities of their ancestors: humble dedication to their work, perfect honesty, deep piety and, on the technical plane, sureness of aesthetic judgment, skillful hands, and ability to make the best use of a given material or substance according to its intrinsic nature. (Michon 1982, p.54)

There are, however, three real concerns that apply to our time; the first of which, is that the audience is educated enough to realise what they are viewing and that the worth of the piece is beyond "something pretty." Hopefully, this understanding is being taught in higher centers of learning throughout the world that will keep the knowledge in an active and expanding form.

The second concern is in reference to the world growing smaller and smaller in terms of cultural adaptations. As noted in chapter two, many cultures give up their specific cultural traditions and heritage in favor of the "advanced" Western generic values and lifestyle. Islamic art is based on a very specific concept in today's conglomeration of relative truths, and any artist who tries to combine the Islamic aesthetic with a Western approach or expressionist style will only ever be able to create emic works, not Islamic art forms.

> The impact of the modern concepts and forms of art has also had several consequences for the artists themselves. Firstly, it has caused the emergence of a new class of artists who, like their Western models, consider art as a means of self-expression and, therefore, place themselves outside the realm of tradition... Secondly, traditional craftsmen have a growing tendency to borrow formal elements of Western origin which are frequently in patent contradiction with the Islamic spirit (and are

kinds of) contamination. (Michon 1982, p.53)

Thirdly, the attitude of most of the Islamic world toward art in general today is that it is nice, but only a marginal activity and subject to individual tastes; therefore, it doesn't require much attention on the whole. The tourist trade takes up where the lack of interest on the part of the Islamic ummah leaves off and the artisans are rather stuck in the middle.

However, there are government programs in many countries today for the preservation and continuation of the skills used in the arts. Apprentices are placed with masters of the craft and provided with government subsidies so that the education and skills will be passed down. The fact that governments are willing to provide funds for this effort is proof that the arts are still a priority and maintain their value as part of the cultural traditions.

By encouraging the arts in this way, further avenues are opened for spreading the message of Islamic Tawheed and the Islamic culture in general.

> "What ought to be the role of fine arts in Muslim education today?" The study of Islamic art, if undertaken with an open mind and without the European prejudices we have mentioned, is a way to approach the spiritual background of the whole Islamic culture. (Burckhardt 1982, p.47)

Tawheed was, is and always will be the focus of the Islamic arts. It is the center axis from which all things flow in the Islamic life and as such, is a living,

expanding and vital element in any era of man.

As Nasr states, "Islamic art fulfills its goal and function as ancilliary and aid to the Quranic revelation itself by acting as support to attaining the end for which Islam was revealed. That end is the realisation of the One..." (Nasr 1991, p.202); and to the attainment of this end, is this study dedicated.

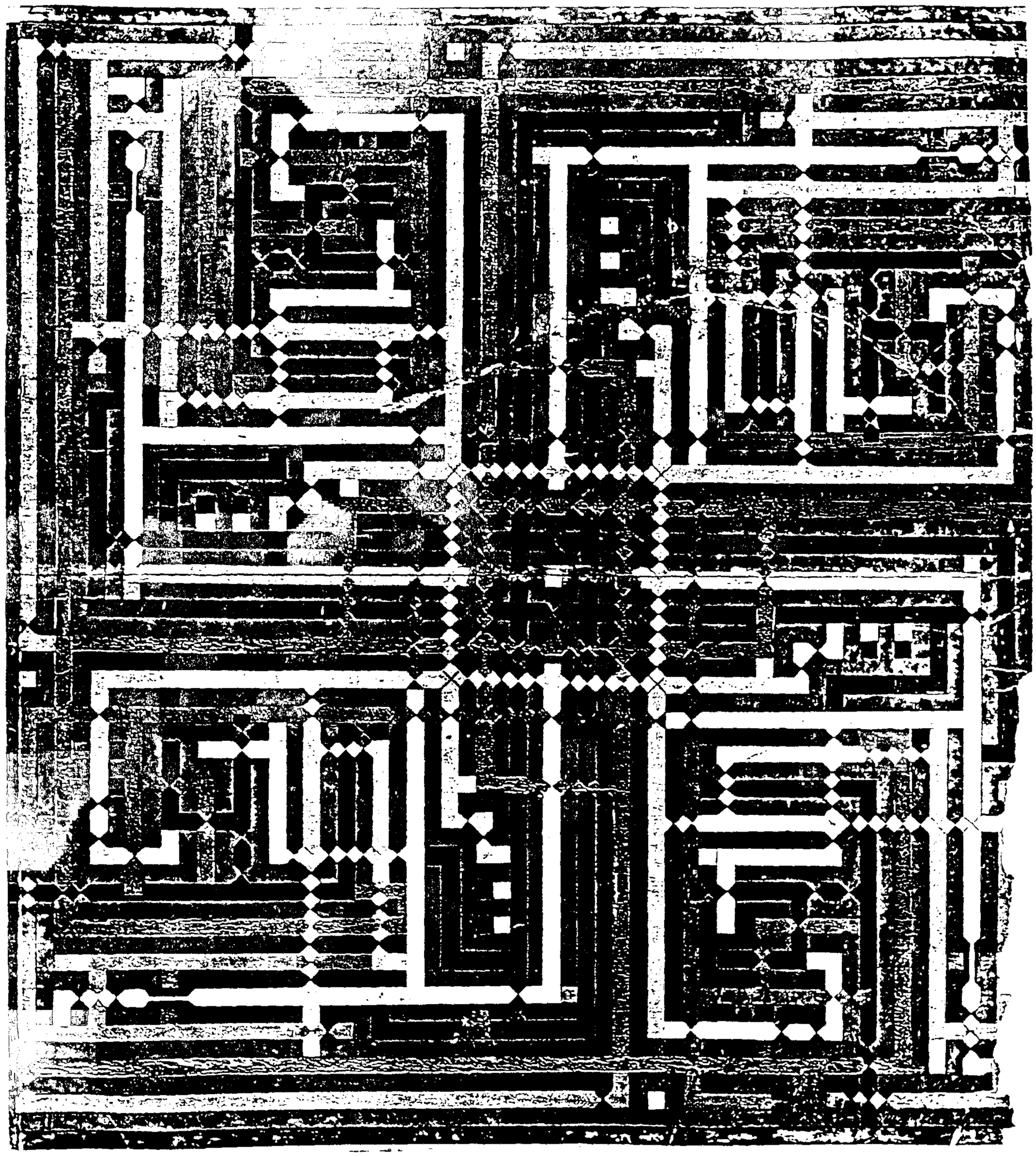


Plate 17. Painting, Iran, 15th century, Istanbul, Top Kapi Seray Museum.

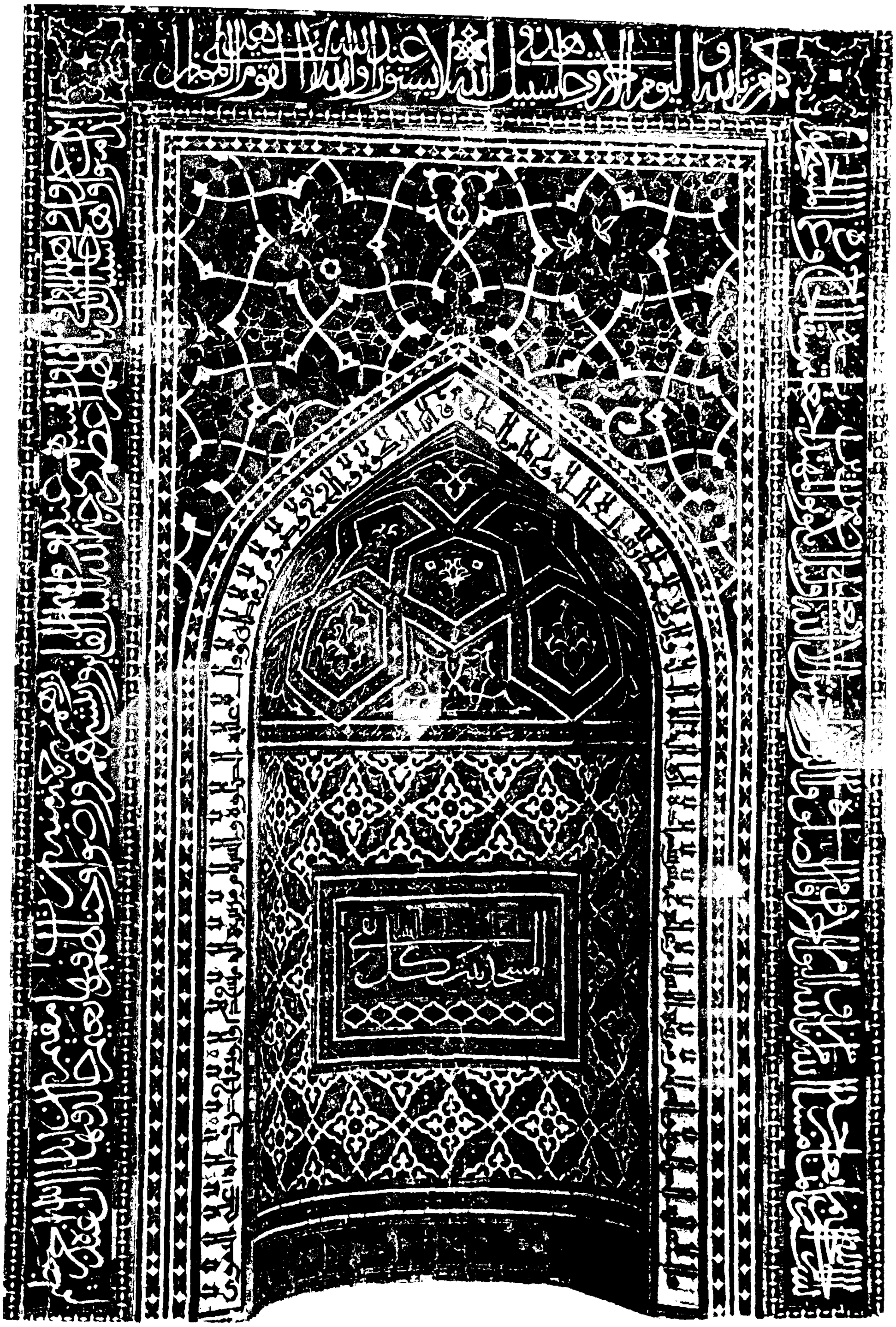


Plate 18. Tile mosaic mihrab, Isfahan, 1354, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

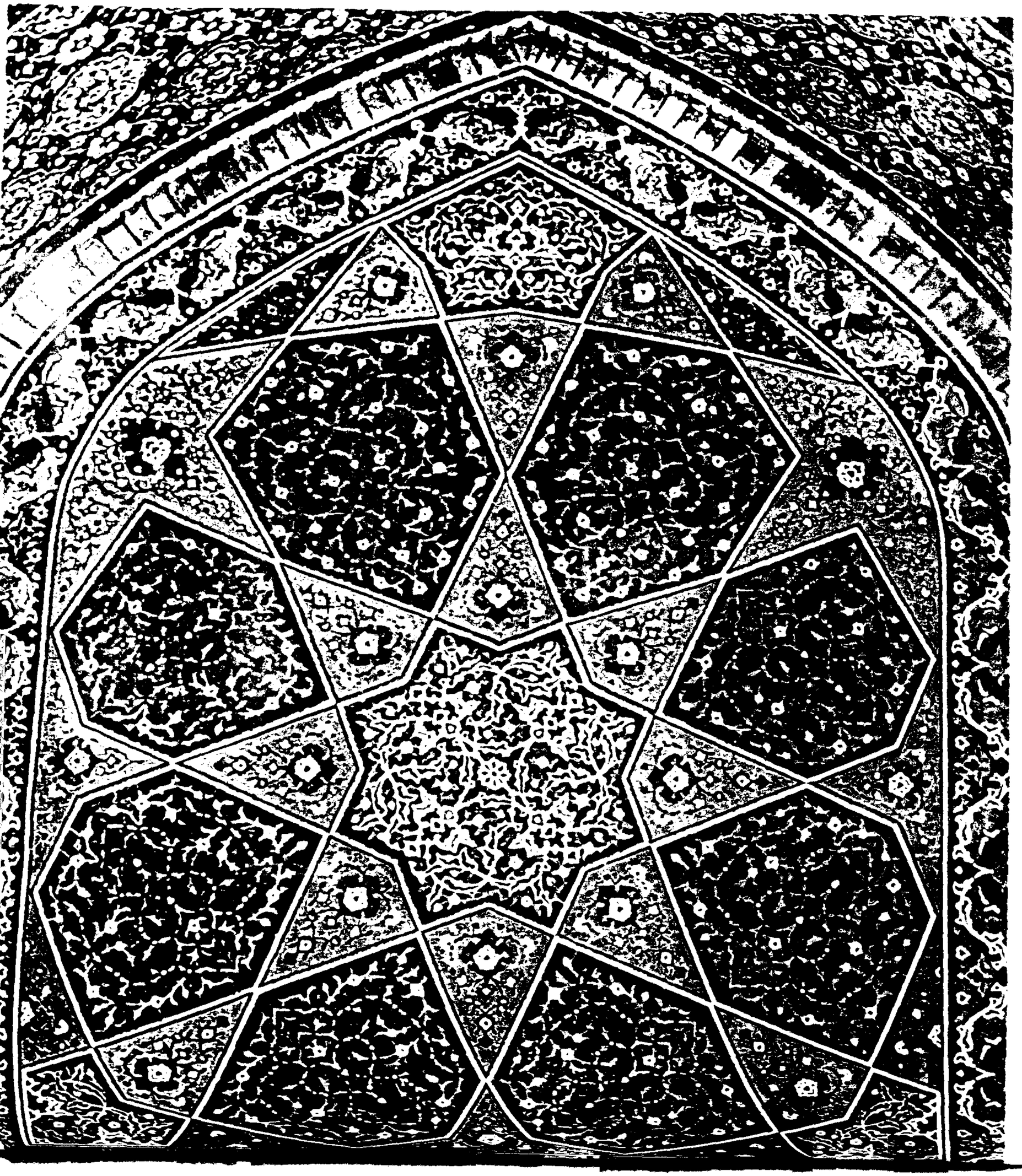


Plate 20. Ceramic bowl, polychrome war
Rabat, Morocco, 15th century
Rabat Museum.

Plate 19. Shrine of Imam Riza, Meshed (detail)

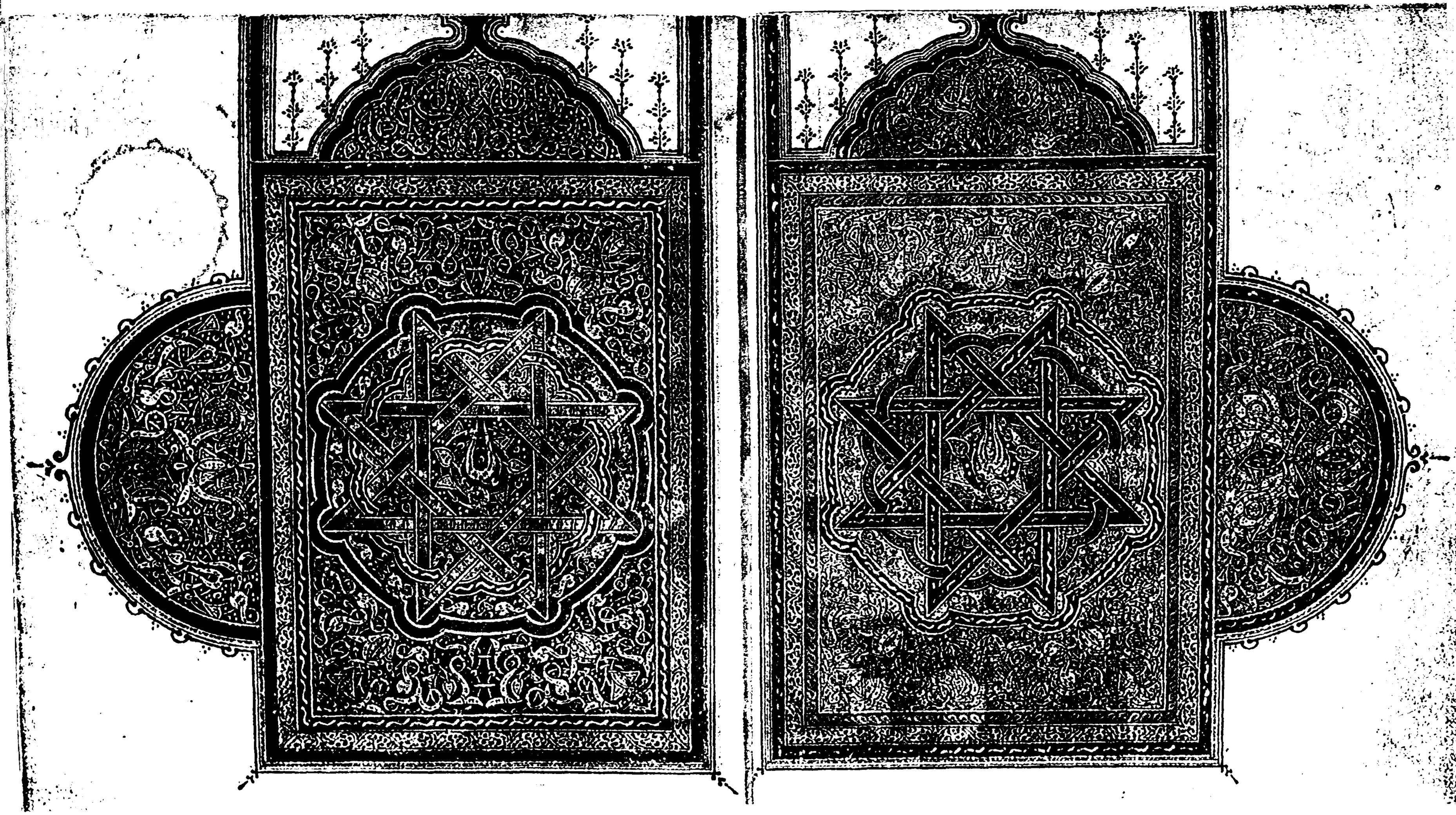


Plate 21. Quran frontispiece, North Africa, 18th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

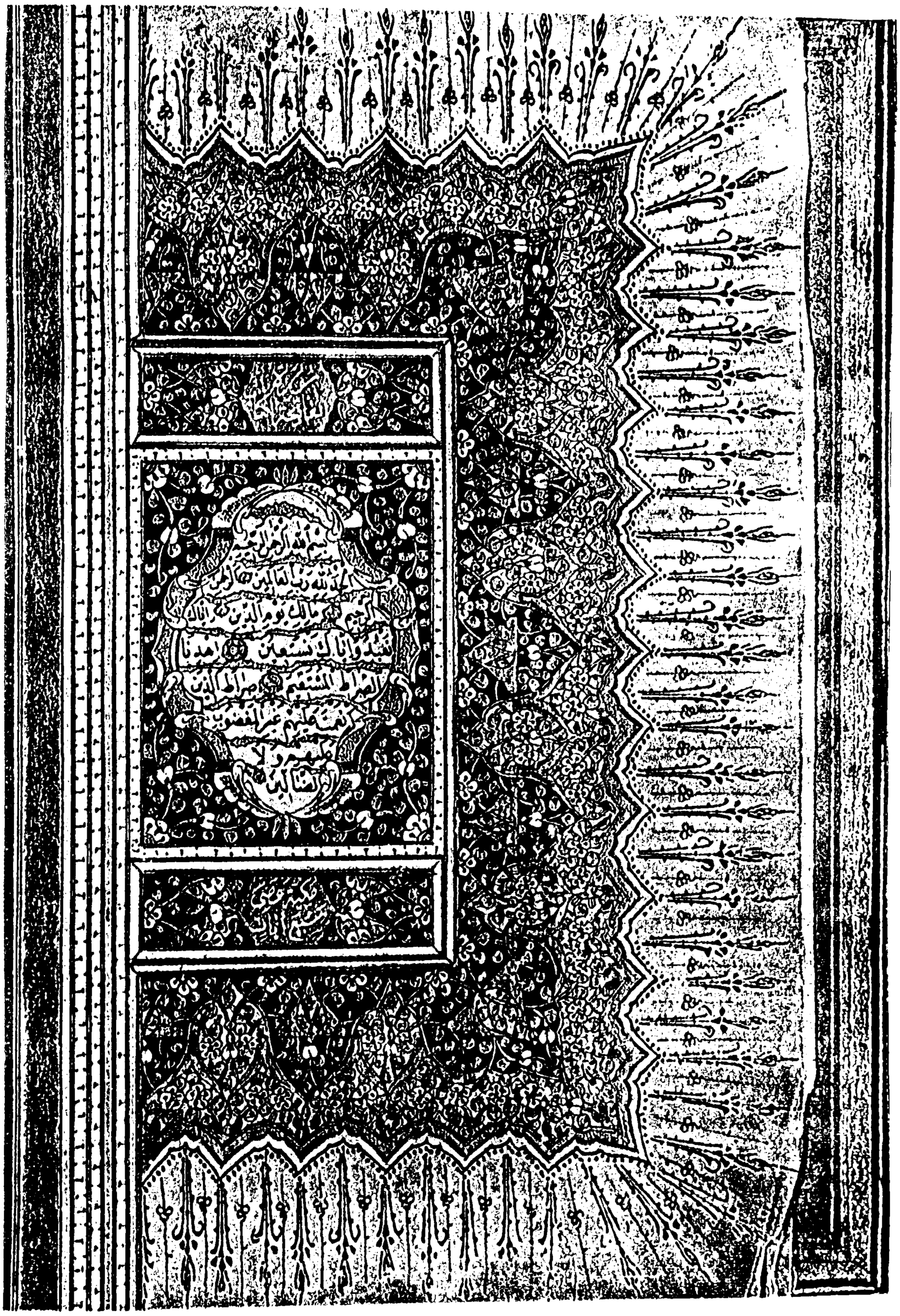
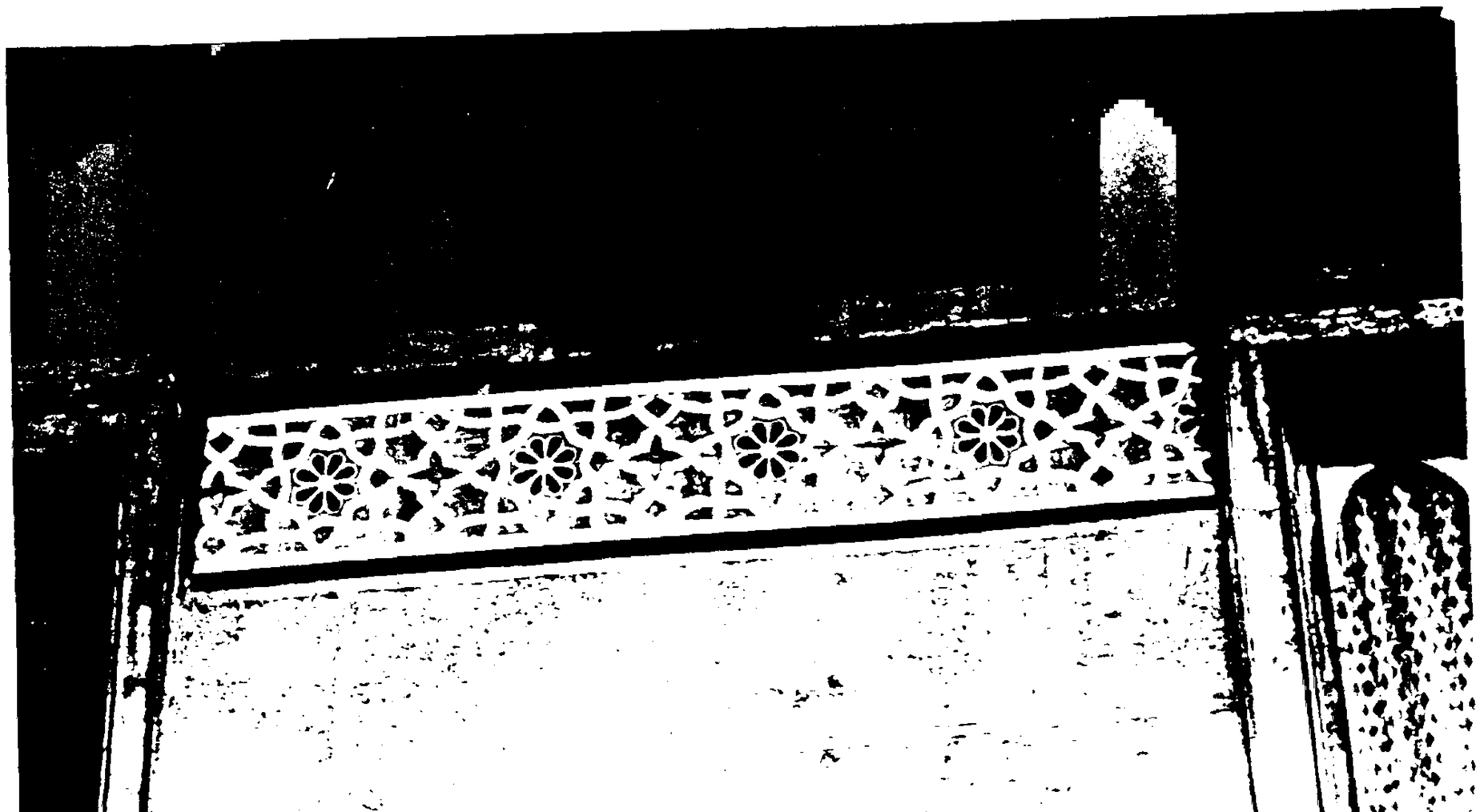
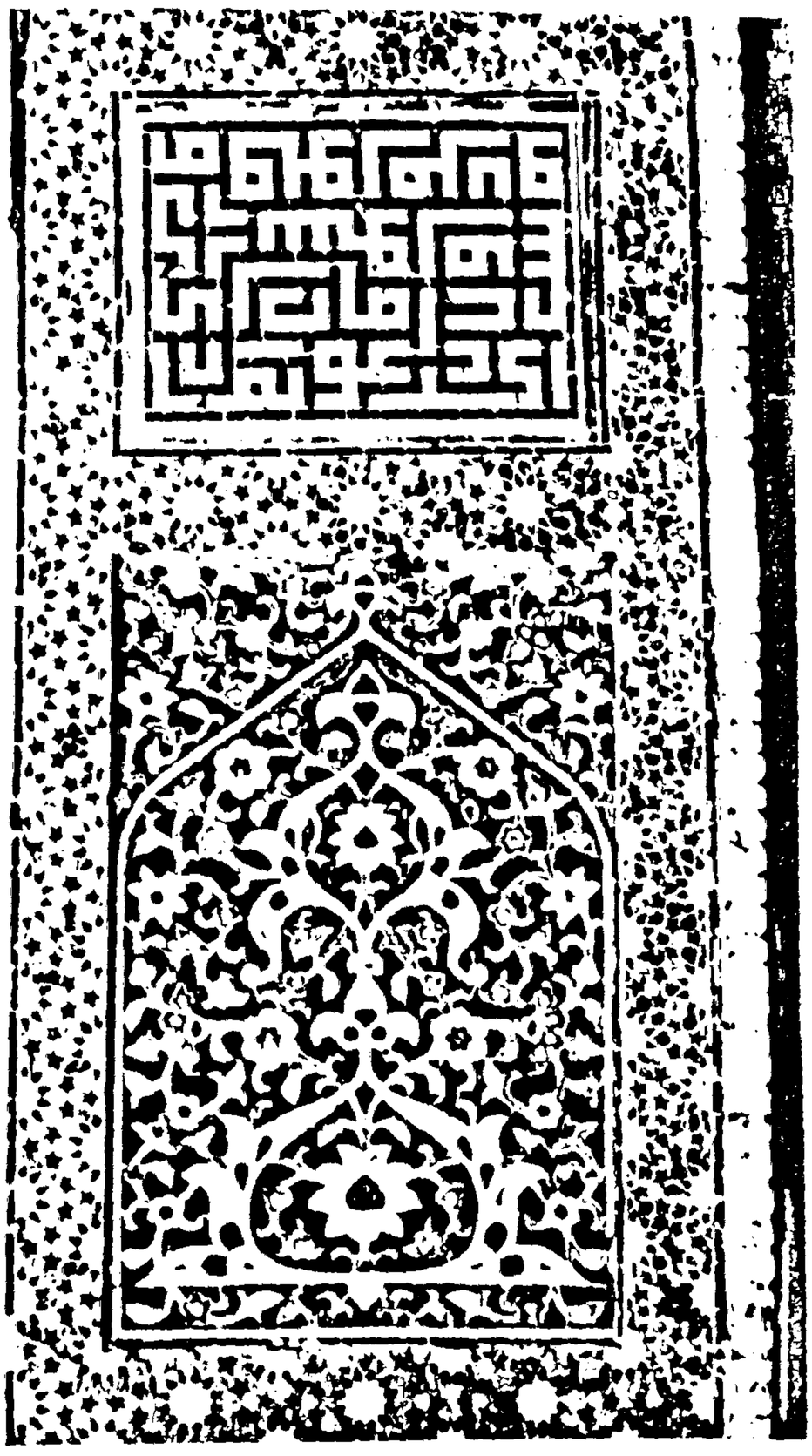


Plate 22. Quran manuscript pages, Turkey or Iran, 1848, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Plate 23. Photograph of Islamic tile pattern on restaurant window counter, Üsküdar, Istanbul, 1997.



Plates 24,25. Photograph of Islamic tile patterns on ferry landing building, Beşiktaş, Istanbul, 1997.



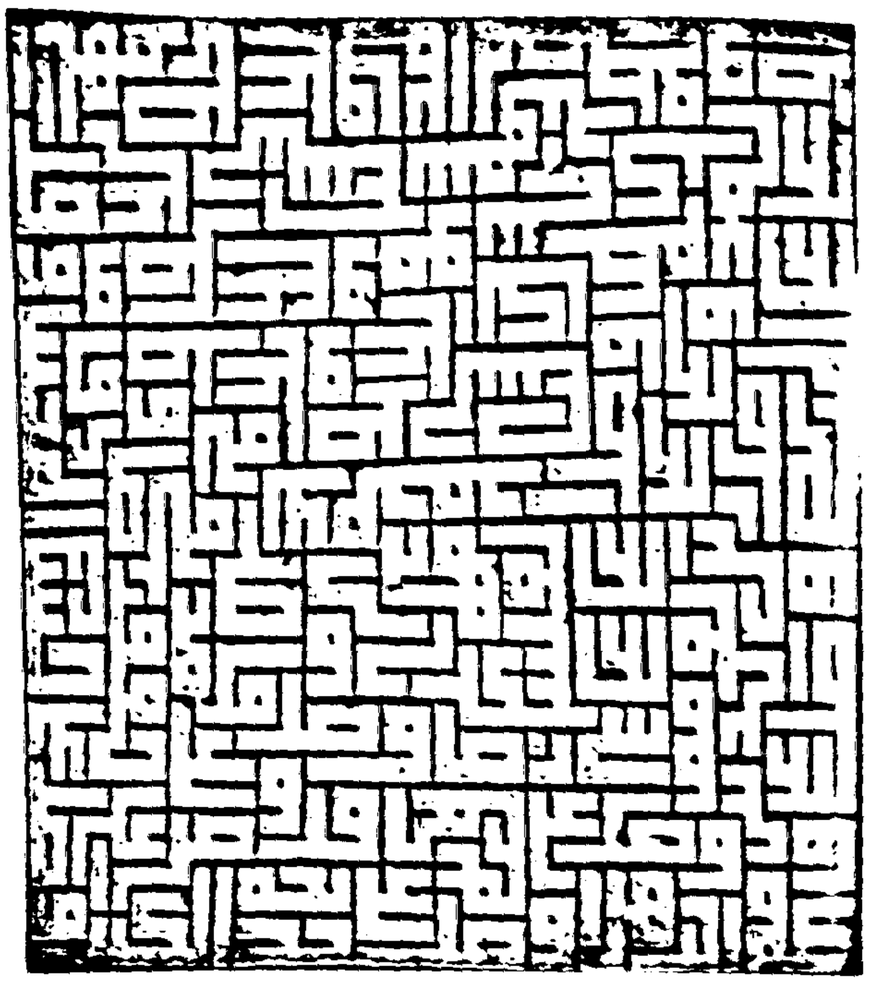


Fig. 56
Stucco panel with names of the Prophet and descendants, Linjan, Iran, circa 1300.

Fig. 55 Jami' Mosque, Qibla Ivan arch detail, Varzana, 1443.

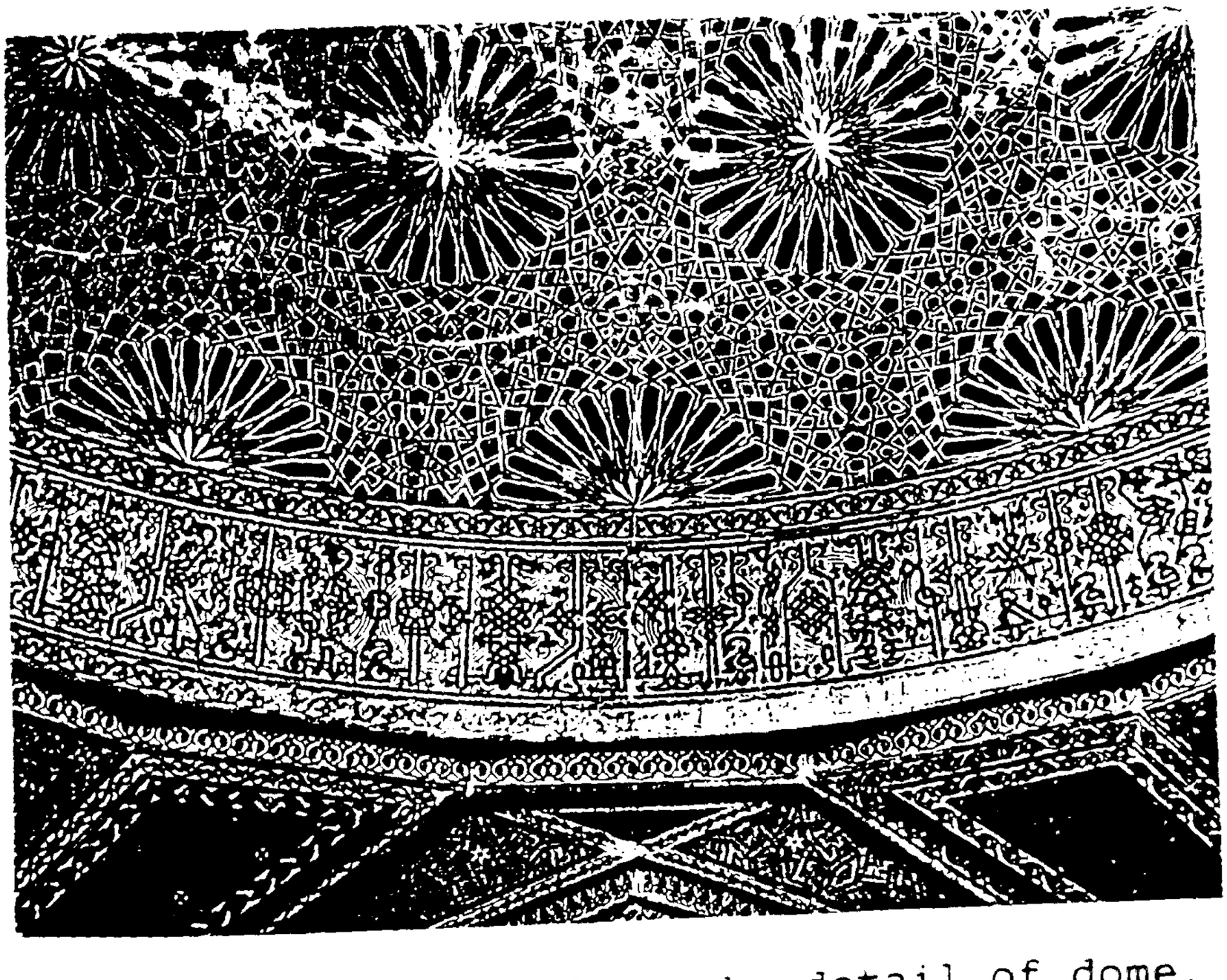


Fig. 57 Karatay Madrassah, detail of dome, Konya, Turkey, Seljuk period.

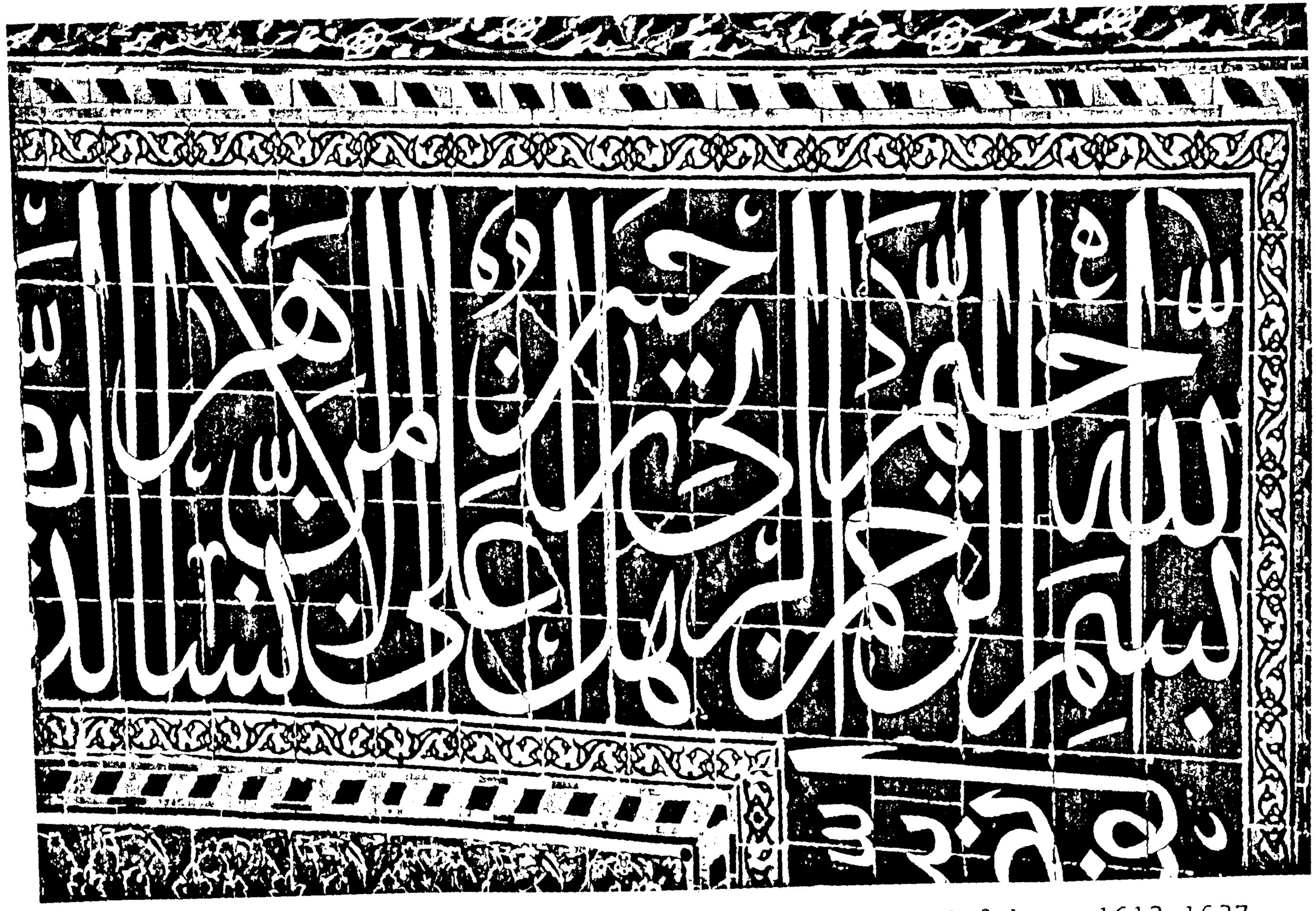


Fig. 58 Royal Mosque, tiled inscription detail, Isfahan, 1612-1637.

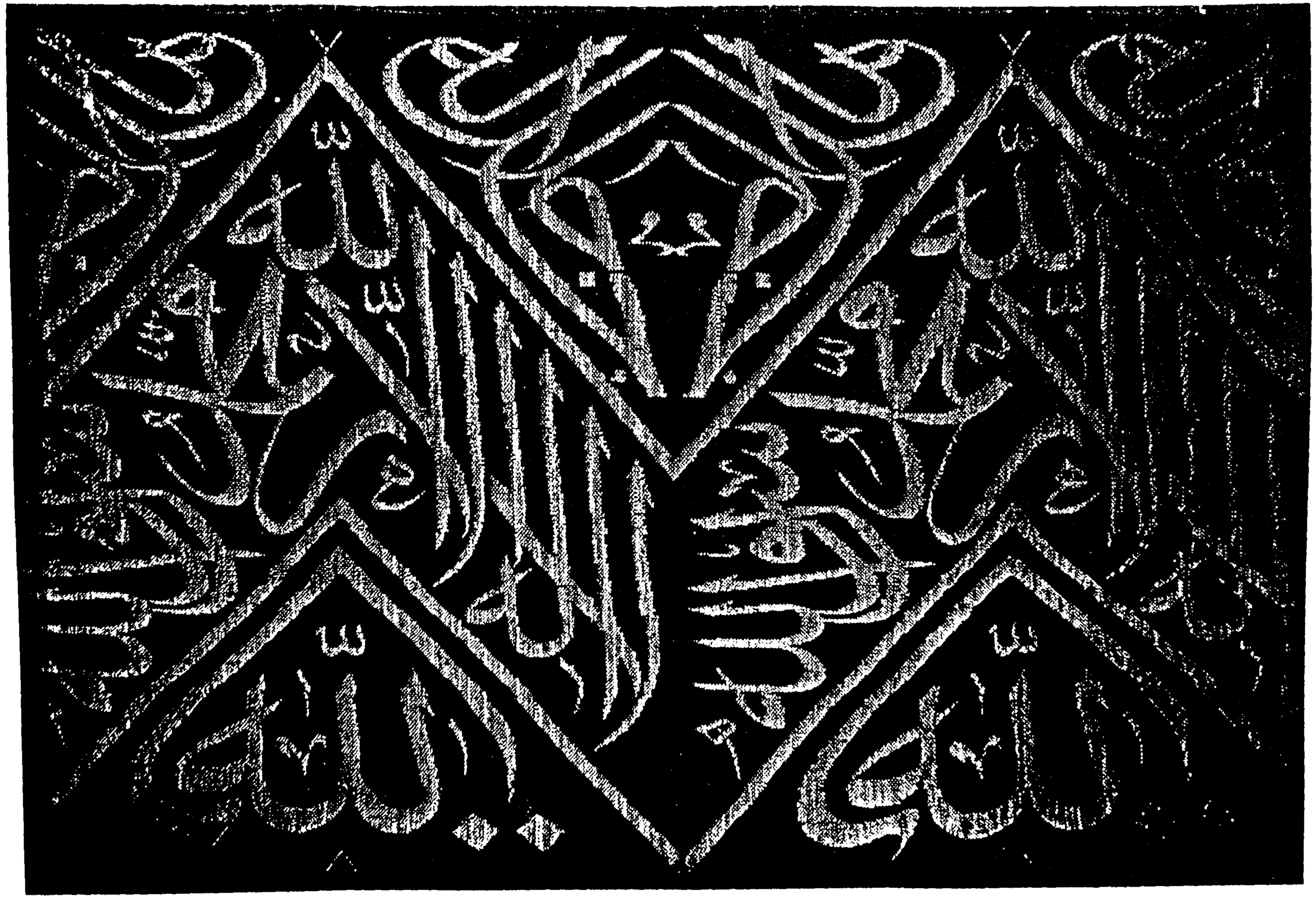


Fig. 59 Kiswah from the ka'abah, embroidery detail, Cairo.

Fig. 60 Calligraphy design in Thuluth script, artist: 'Abd al Ghani al Baghdadi, 1963.

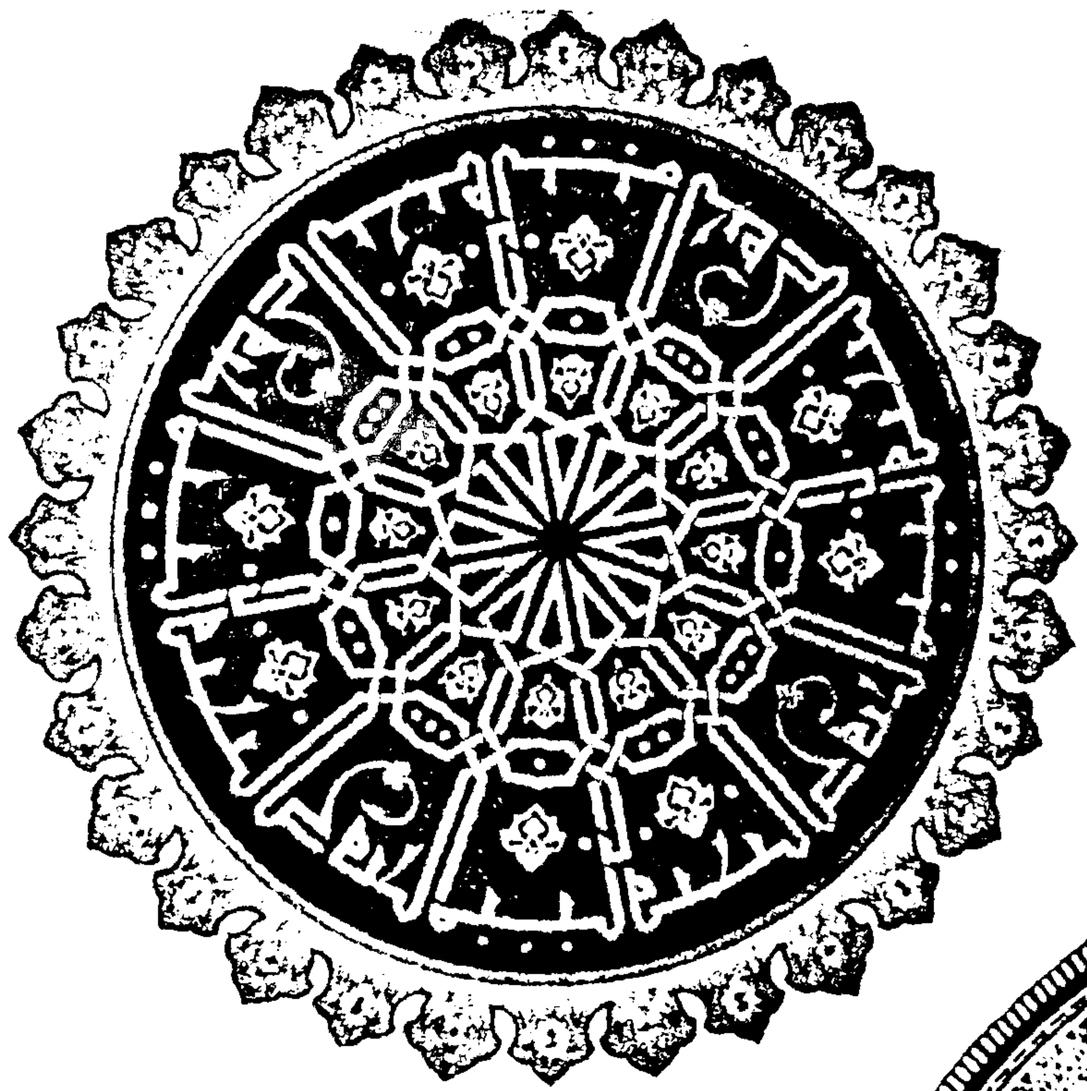


Fig. 61
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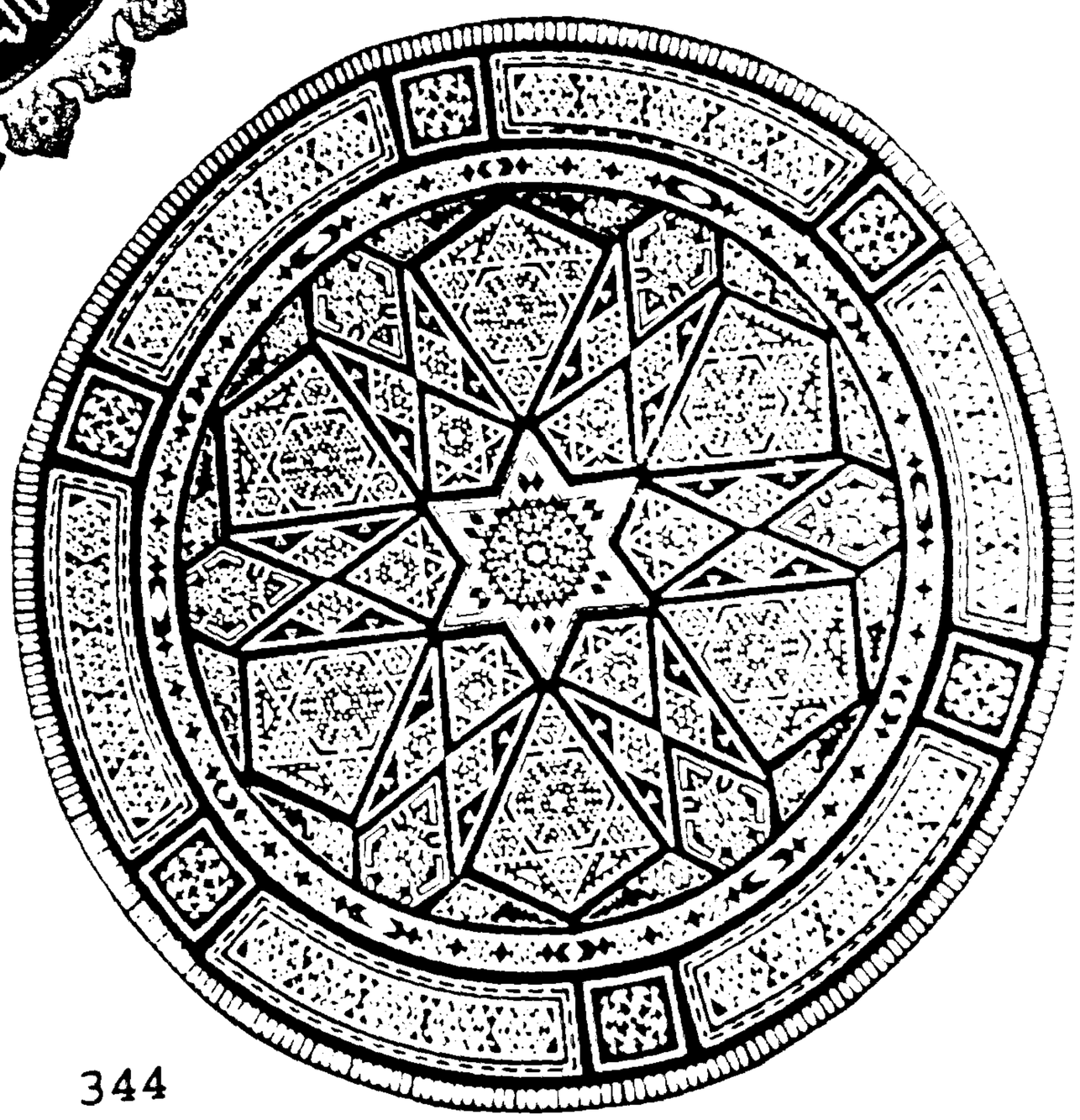

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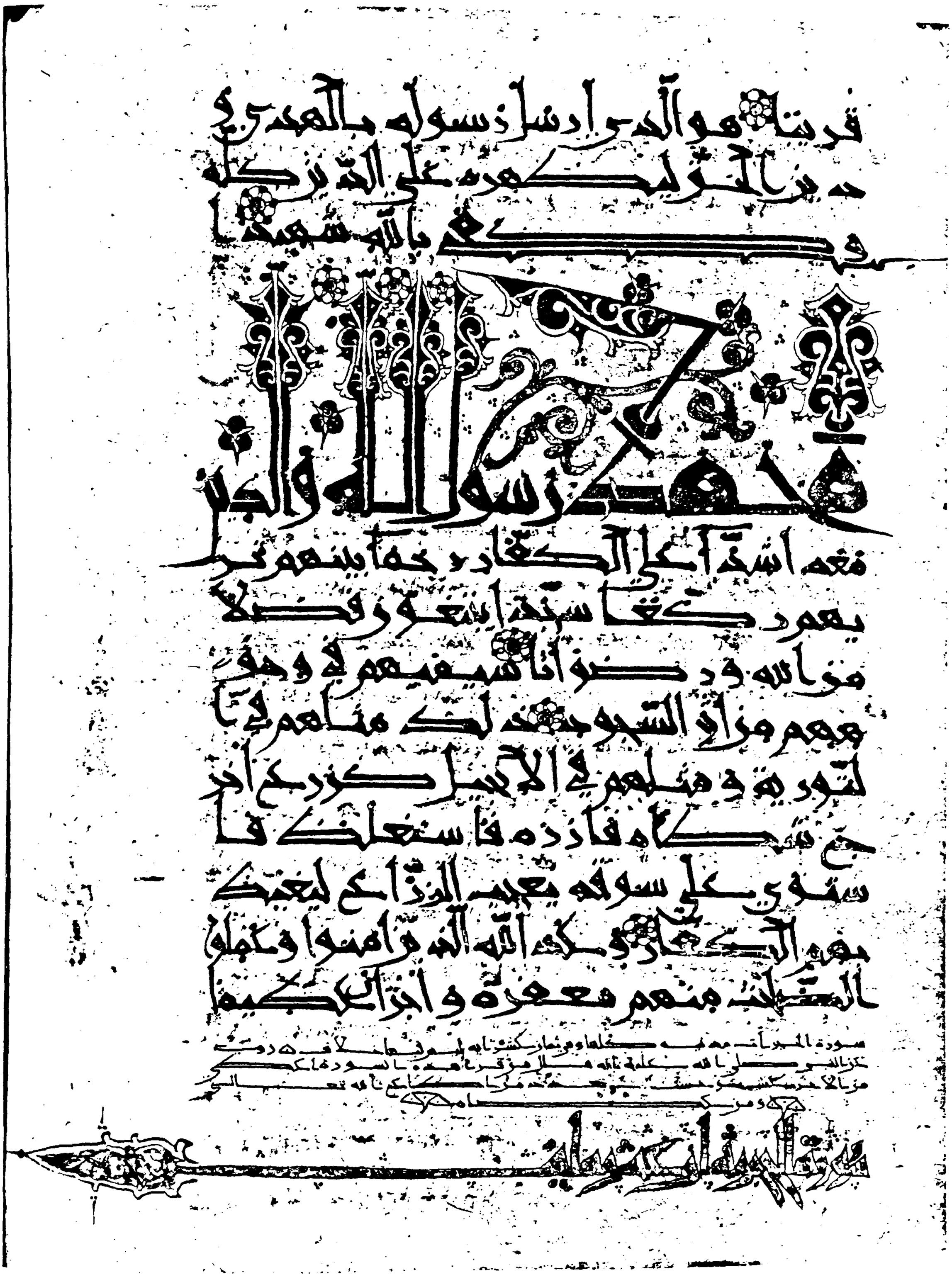

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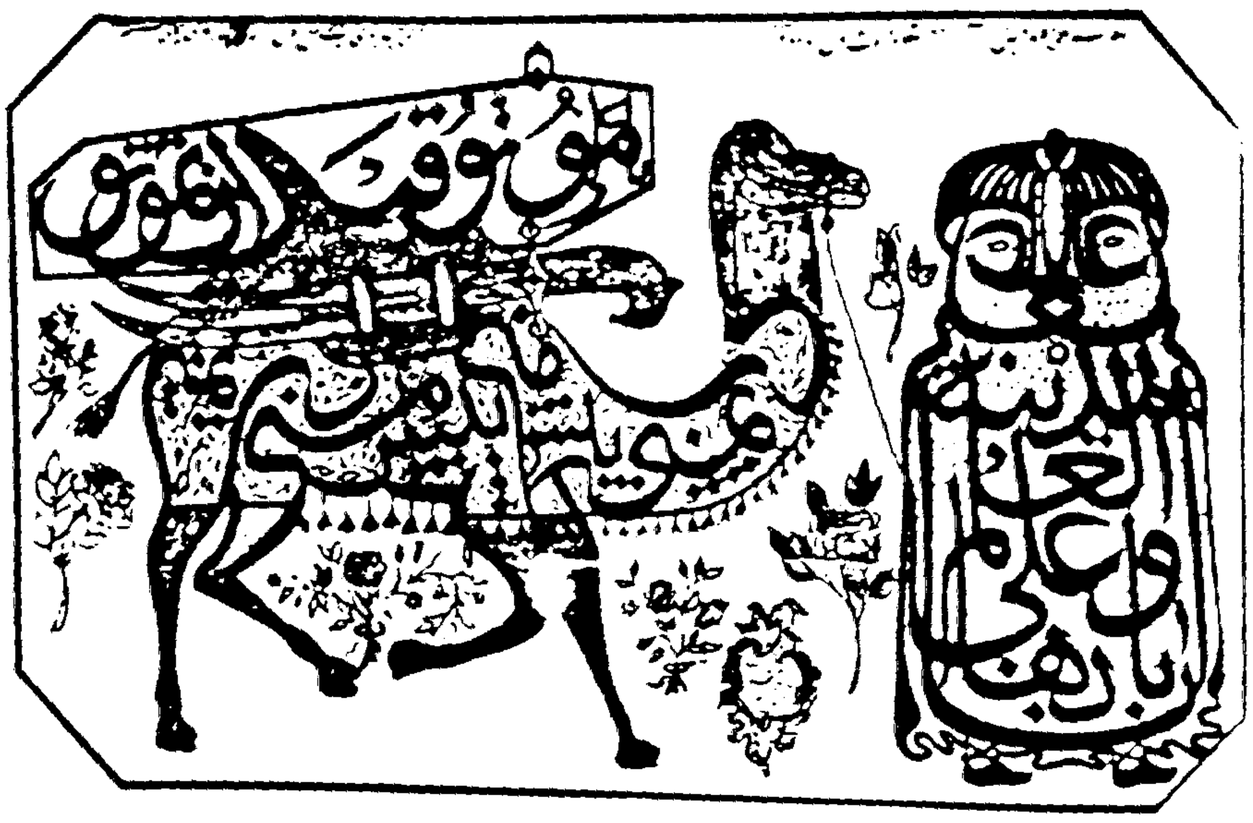

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GLOSSARY

abstract, the process of altering art forms to a non-realistic shape from the original visual referent.
aesthetics, philosophical study of the judgment of artistic beauty.
ahsan, the best.
al-Akhlas, the chapter "the Purity" in the Quran.
alif, first letter of the Arabic alphabet.
Allah Akbar, God is great.
aniconism, without or non-use of figural images.
arabesque, geometric or vegetal ornamental Islamic pattern.
asaalamu aleykum, peace be upon you; traditional Islamic greeting.
asma' al-husna, most beautiful names of God.
Ayat al-Nur, verse of light in the Quran (24:35).

ba, second letter of the Arabic alphabet.
baraka, God's blessing.
beauty, in Islam, that which reveals God; God's beauty.
bedouin, Arab nomad who has no permanent habitation.
bevel, angular cut used in plaster carving techniques.
bismillah, In the name of God.

caliph, successor of the Prophet.
calamus, pen or paint brush.
calligraphy, artistically aesthetic writing.
calliphoric, providing beauty.
cross-cultural, anything which can be shared by more than one culture.
culture, logical meaningful system of symbolic relationships; an ethnographic group.

decoration, embellishment to an object surface which does not affect the structure.
dhaef, Hadith classification of weak.
dhikrallah, Remembrance of God.
dua, small invocations or recitations.

emic, ethnographic term which defines values found in any specific culture.
emotionalist, Western aesthetic theory which states that art should be based on the emotional values of the artist or audience.
etic, ethnographic term which defines common values found across all cultures.
expressivist, Western aesthetic theory which states that an art work's value should be based on the expression of the feelings of the artist only.

faiance, a bright blue ceramic glaze used in Seljuk architectural decoration.
fann, art and craft.

Fatihah, opening passage of the Quran.
figural representation, any art form which resembles a living being.
formalist, Western aesthetic theory which states that art should be based on the principles and elements of which it consists itself, not on human values.
frieze, decorative wall panels.

Gordes knot, Turkish technique of knotted rugwork used during Ottoman times.
Hadith, traditional sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed.
halal, permissible.
handasat al-khatt, geometry of line.
haqq, truth.
haram, prohibited.
hasan, Hadith classification on good authority.
hedonist, Western aesthetic theory which states that art should be judged by the amount of pleasure the viewer receives.
hejira, Islamic lunar calendar instituted in 622 A.D.
henna, a red plant dye.
hijab, veil.
hikmah, wisdom.
homogenous, entities composed of similar or identical elements or parts of the same structure or quality.
Homogenous Theory, proposed theory which uses etic cross-cultural values as criteria for judgment.
homologist, entities related by archetypal structures or similarities.
homovalerist, components which share the same values.

iconic, a sign which refers to an object which it resembles by characteristics.
iconoclasm, rejection of figural images.
iconographic, a picture which stands for a thing or idea via recognised cultural practices.
iconological, a picture which stands for an idea.
ihsan, beauty, virtue or perfection, also used in worship.
illumination, to decorate a book page using ornamental forms.
al-Ikhwan al-Safa, The Sufi Brotherhood of Purity.
image, a visual form.
imam, ruling spiritual leader.
index, a sign which refers to an object in a causal relationship; the effect.
infinite pattern, Islamic ornamental pattern which exceeds the frame visually to imply infinity.
inshaAllah, God Willing.
interlace, method of intertwining visual forms to create a logical and symmetrical pattern.
intracacy, a quality of compexity as related to a geometric or arabesque pattern.

ishraq, illumination.
isnad, Hadith science of transmission.
isti'ara, to use metaphorically.

jahennah, hell according to the Quran.
jahiliyyah, time of ignorance.
jameel, beautiful or good; an Attribute of God.
jennah, Islamic heaven or paradise according to the Quran.
jihad, struggle to overcome.
jinn, evil spirits.
jurisprudence, judgment rendered according to Islamic law.

kalimah at-Tawheed, the statement of Unity, or shahada.
al-kathirah fi'l-wahdah, multiplicity in Unity.
khatt, script, handwriting or calligraphy; boundary mapping
Khatt-al-Mansub, proportioned script writing system developed in the tenth century by Ibn Muqlah.
Al kufi al Layyin, rounded Kufic script.
Al kufi al Yabis, angular or rigid Kufic script.
Kufic, Arabic script which came from the town of Kufa.

la ilaha illa 'llah, there is no God but Allah.
linear, a quality or appearance resembling a line.
lustreware, ceramics applied with a special glaze containing a reflective quality to light.

madrassah, religious school.
maghribi, a style of Arabic script.
mandala, archetypal combined circle and square shape.
mazhar, appearance.
mihrab, prayer niche in a mosque.
mimetic, Western aesthetic theory which states that art should imitate the real world.
minaret, needle-like tower attached to the mosque from which the Muslims are called to prayer.
minbar, pulpit furniture in a mosque.
mosaic, art technique using small pieces of ceramic glass set next to each other to create a large image.
motif, a singular visual element which when repeated, makes up a pattern.
muhandis, engineer; adept.
muhaqqaq, a style of Arabic script.
multicultural, factors or things which relate across many cultures.
munfasilah, disjunct category of arabesque structural organisation.
muqarnas, stalactite vaulting method.
musawwir, Creator.
mushrikoon, idolaters in the Quran.
mutadakhilah, interlocking as seen in disjunct arabesque structural organisation.

muttasilah, conjunct category of arabesque structural organisation.

naqqasha, to cover in decoration.
naskhi, an Arabic script used mostly for Quran copies.
nast'aliq, an Arabic script used for Persian books.
nun, letter in the Arabic alphabet.

ornament, use of decorative forms to enhance an object or building surface.
paleography, the study of ancient scripts.
pattern, repeated motifs in a symmetrical manner to create a larger, more complex work.
perspective, technique of making two-dimensional drawings show three-dimensional space.
polychrome, multiple colored glazes in ceramic ware.
pragmatic, Western aesthetic theory which states that art should be an instrument to teach views of a culture.

qibla, directional point to Mecca.
Quran, holy book of revelation given to the Prophet Mohammad by the angel Jibril in the seventh century.
qutb, center pole of the earth.

Rabb, Lord.
rayhani, a style of Arabic script.
realism, art forms which portray an object or entity with exactness, or in a realistic manner.
riqa, a style of Arabic script.
riwaq, arcade.
riya, improper worship for praise.

Sacramentalist Theory, proposed aesthetic theory which uses sacred symbolism as the criteria for judgment.
sacred art, symbolic artistic elements which give definition to religious beliefs and values in any culture.
sahih, Hadith classification of true.
salat, prayer.
schema, background knowledge.
scientia sacra, science of the Real.
shahada, witness that there is no God but Allah.
Shi'ite, Muslim followers of the Prophet Mohammed's nephew, Ali.
shirk, idolatry, doctrine of multiplicity of God; to share, associate or partner.
shirk al Akbar, major shirk.
shirk al Asghar, minor shirk.
shirk al Asmaa wa Sifat, giving God the form or qualities of humans or animals.
shirk al 'Ebaadah, acts of worship directed to other than God.
shirk ar Ruboobeeyah, belief in more than one God.

sijad, prayer rug.
sourah, picture or image.
stucco, technique using moulded plaster relief used for building decoration.
style, web of attributes found in a single object.
Sufi, mystical branch of the Shi'ite Muslims.
sunna, traditions of how the Prophet lived.
surah, chapter in the Quran.
Surat al-Qalam, chapter of "the Pen" in the Quran.
Surat at Tawheed, another name for the chapter "the Purity" in the Quran.
symbol, sign, object or image which represents another idea, thought or emotion.

taghut, idol
tahsin, enhancement.
taliq, a style of Arabic script.
tartib, proportionate order.
tashih, praise of God by lack of negative attributes.
tauqi, a style of Arabic script.
Tawheed, Arabic Quranic term for the Unity of God; Oneness
Tawheed al Asmaa wa Sifat, Unity of Names and Attributes.
Tawheed al 'Ebaadah, Unity of Worship.
Tawheed ar Ruboobeeyah, Unity of Lordship and Creatorship.
taxonomy, ordering of data according to groups which form sets.
terpnopoietic, providing pleasure.
thana, praise of God by positive attributes.
theophany, to obtain God's presence.
thuluth, a style of Arabic script.
traditional, as pertaining to the specific culture.
tughra, heraldic monogram of the Sultans of Turkey.

ummah, Muslim community.
Unity, the central Attribute and Characteristic of God according to Islamic belief.

values, attitudes of a culture which states what objects or ideas are important to them.
vegetal, shapes either abstracted or realistically rendered that use plant forms as their visual referent.

al-wahdah fi'l-kathirah, Unity in multiplicity.
wahhada, to unite, unify or consolidate.
waw, Arabic letter of the alphabet.
zawaqa, to embellish.

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