

# West Looks East: The Influences of Traditional Arab Design

## Art of the Arab World

### OVERVIEW

Esin Atil, PhD     *November 4, 2004*

Former Curator of Near Eastern Art

Freer Gallery of Art     Washington, DC

**A word from the speaker:** Although western Asia and northern Africa had a rich pre-Islamic cultural history since Antiquity, it was with the coming of the Prophet Muhammad that a new kind of community crystallized and led to the emergence of a new conception of the world which was expressed in the arts. The development of the artistic expression of Islam reveals three consecutive periods: the formative years during which the artistic vocabulary was developed; the classical age when the arts reached full maturity; and the second classicism which I prefer to call the renaissance of Islam. This presentation will define the characteristics of each period and discuss a select group of architectural monuments and art objects that represent the evolution of the artistic traditions in the Arab world between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Biography:** With an impressive career that has great emphasis on the artistic traditions of the Islamic world, Mosaic is privileged to have Esin Atil, PhD begin its series of lectures on the influences of traditional Arab design on contemporary Western designers. With a BA in literature and drama and another in arts and art history, Dr. Atil, received her MA in European art and her PhD in Islamic art from the University of Michigan. In 1970, Dr. Atil joined the Smithsonian Institution as the Curator of Islamic Art at the Freer Gallery of Art, a post she held for fifteen years. Later she served as Historian of Islamic Art at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

Dr. Atil's career is punctuated by the numerous exhibitions she organized and curated and nearly twenty books she published on the artistic traditions of the Islamic world, the subjects of which range from studies on manuscripts, ceramics, and metalwork to surveys of Mamluk and Ottoman art. Notable exhibits and publications are Ceramics from the World of Islam (1984), Renaissance of Islam (1981), and Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art (1986). Between 1985 and 1987, Dr. Atil was Guest Curator at the National Gallery of Art, where she published Süleymanname: The Illustrated History of Süleyman the Magnificent (1986), as well as, The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1987) to accompany the traveling exhibition of the same title, which she organized. She has traveled extensively in the United States, Europe, northern and eastern Africa, western and south-eastern Asia and throughout Turkey, conducting research, participating in conferences, presenting lectures and accompanying the traveling exhibits. ❄️

### Suggested Readings:

Bazaar to Piazza; Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600, by Rosamund Mack

University of California Press, 2002

Moorish Style, by Miles Danby

Phadon Press Ltd., London, 1995

Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts, by John M. MacKenzie

Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1995

The Renaissance Bazaar from the Silk Road to Michelangelo, by Terry Brotton

Oxford Press, Oxford, UK, 2002