

Islamic Architecture

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Civilizations that Islam has touched as well as some Islamic religious beliefs have both had influence on Islamic architecture. This lesson covers:



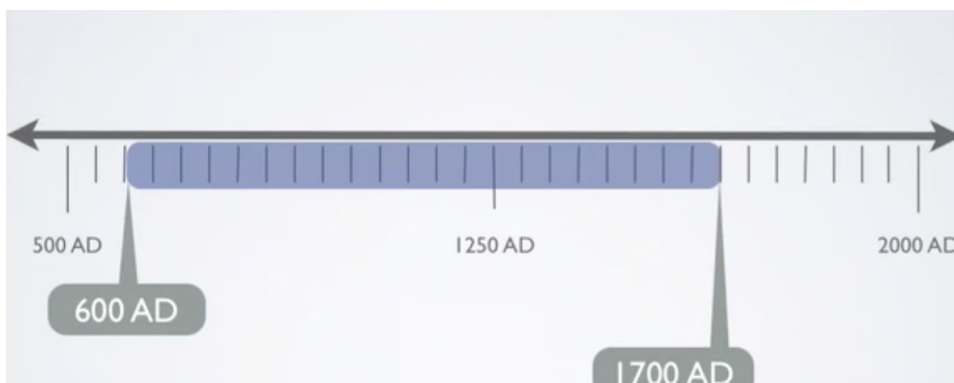
BIG IDEA

Design elements of Islamic architecture are a blend of styles from the civilizations that Islam has touched and reflective of some Islamic religious beliefs.

1. Time Period and Location: Islamic Architecture

This lesson covers architecture ranging from the seventh century AD to the 17th century AD.

The timeline below highlights this period. Notice that 600 AD, the beginning of the seventh century, and 1700 AD, the end of the 17th century, are labeled as end points.



2. Basic Features of Islamic Architecture

The first area of focus for this lesson is the elements found in Islamic buildings, including:

- The minbar
- The mihrab
- The Qibla
- The hypostyle prayer hall

Styles of architecture vary, but there are some common design features that distinguish Islamic architecture from other styles. The **minbar**, the **mihrab**, and **Qibla** are common within all **mosques**. One of the most unique elements of Islamic architecture is the use of geometric or vegetal patterns. These are patterns that can be repeated and continued indefinitely in any direction. They can adorn the exterior and interior of buildings and are just as common within smaller works of art.

The dome is a borrowed element from earlier forms of architecture, such as the Christian design of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. **Minarets** are the (usually) thin towers that rise around, or are attached to, Islamic mosques. They are used as places to call people to prayer. The **hypostyle prayer hall** is a space separated by columns for privacy. Finally, the **horseshoe or keyhole arch** is another characteristic element of Islamic architecture, an example of which is shown here:



Horseshoe arch



TERMS TO KNOW

Minbar

In Islam, the pulpit from which the sermon is delivered

Mihrab

In a mosque, a niche or decorative panel showing the direction of Mecca

Qibla Wall

Also kiblah; in Islam, the wall that indicates the direction of Mecca and the Kaaba, for prayer

Mosque

A Muslim temple or place of worship.

Minaret

A tower attached to a mosque and used for calling people to prayer

Hypostyle Prayer Hall

In a mosque, a personal space separated by columns for privacy

Horseshoe Arch

Also called a keyhole arch; semicircular and characteristic of Islamic architecture

3. Dome of the Rock

Within the holy city of Jerusalem, Israel, the Dome of the Rock can be found. This building is a shrine that was constructed by Muslims in the late seventh century after the city had been taken from the Byzantines in 638 AD. The Dome of the Rock shares certain characteristics with Byzantine architecture, which was an influence on the architects of the dome. The octagonal-shaped, centrally planned building was just one of these influences.

The Dome of the Rock, of the late seventh century, is pictured below:



Dome of the Rock shrine

Late 7th century

Jerusalem, Israel

Architecturally, the building is dominated by the huge, golden dome. It is covered in beautiful, colorful, vegetal and geometric patterns, which continue inside. This building is a shrine built over the Foundation Stone, which

is the holiest location in all of Judaism. The stone was originally covered by the Jewish Temple of Solomon that once stood in the same spot. In terms of Islam, some scholars regard it as the location where Muhammad ascended into heaven.

4. Great Mosque, Qayrawan

The next building is found within Qayrawan, Tunisia, and is an example of a hypostyle mosque that was largely constructed during the ninth century.



Great Mosque at Qayrawan

836-875 AD

Qayrawan, Tunisia

This huge stone building resembles examples of Roman architecture, specifically with the large central courtyard enclosed by a colonnade. However, instead of a rounded arcade like we'd see with Roman architecture, this is an example of a horseshoe style arcade. Right at the top of the column, the masonry juts in, creating a keyhole shape with the arch and columns.

5. Great Mosque at Cordoba

When people think of Islam, they tend to think of the Middle East, but the Iberian Peninsula, which is home to modern-day Portugal and Spain, has a rich history associated with Islam and the narrow Strait of Gibraltar. This strait separates the peninsula from the African continent. The strait did little to prevent the Moors from

Northern Africa from coming over and occupying it for many centuries.

The Great Mosque at Cordoba, shown below, is another fantastic example of a hypostyle prayer hall that makes use of the horseshoe shape in the lower arches. It was completed in the late 10th century.



Prayer hall in Great Mosque at Cordoba

Late 10th century

Cordoba, Spain

6. Mosque at Isfahan

Our last example of Islamic architecture is located within the city of Isfahan, Iran, and was constructed over many centuries. Eventually completed in the 17th century, it's an impressive example of Islamic architecture at its finest.



Mosque at Isfahan

17th century AD

Isfahan, Iran

What cannot be appreciated from this photo, however, is the attention to detail paid to the vegetal and geometric patterns or designs that adorn the mosque. Take a close look particularly at the colorful examples that cover two entrance gates that are flanked by the minarets and the large peaked dome in the background.



SUMMARY

Islamic architecture has roots in several of the civilizations that Islam has touched as well as in some Islamic religious beliefs. This lesson started with a review of the **time period and location of Islamic architecture**, followed by an explanation of the **basic features of Islamic architecture**. Remember, many of the terms to know were covered in this section.

Continuing on, you looked at elements of architecture such as the minbar, mihrab, Qibla, and the hypostyle prayer hall. These elements were explored further using examples of Islamic architecture, including:

- Dome of the Rock
- Great Mosque, Qayrawan
- Great Mosque at Cordoba
- Mosque at Isfahan



TERMS TO KNOW

Horseshoe arch

Also called a keyhole arch, semicircular and characteristic of Islamic architecture.

Hypostyle Prayer Hall

In a mosque, a personal space separated by columns for privacy.

Mihrab

In a mosque, a niche or decorative panel showing the direction of Mecca.

Minaret

A tower attached to a mosque calling people to prayer.

Minbar

In Islam, the pulpit from which the sermon is delivered.

Mosque

A Muslim temple or place of worship.

Qibla wall

Or kiblah, in Islam, the wall that indicates the direction of Mecca and the Kaaba, for prayer.