

ART, FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY (I)

ISLAMIC ART

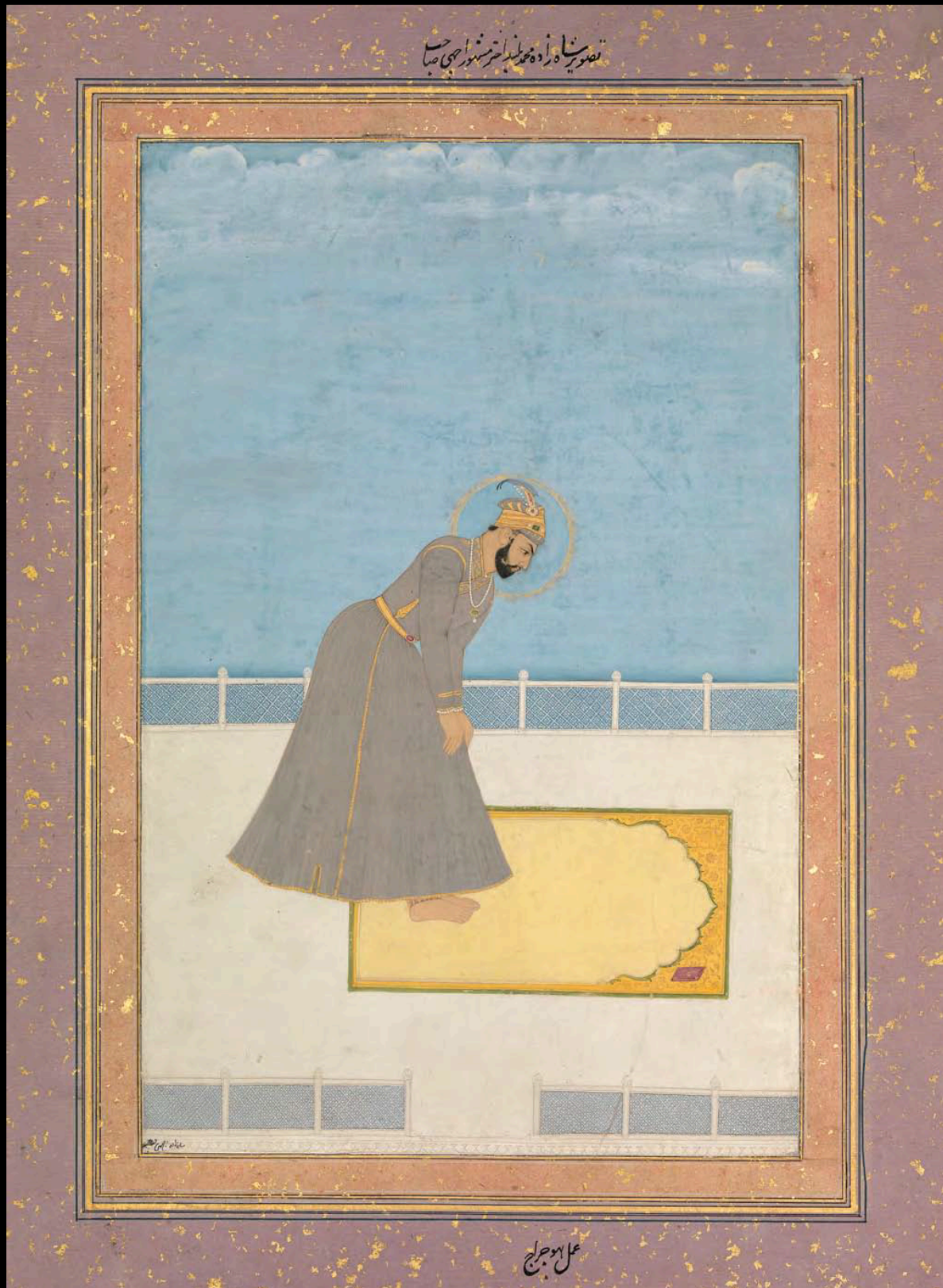
What role do you think art plays in “faith”?

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

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



The key tenets of Islam



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

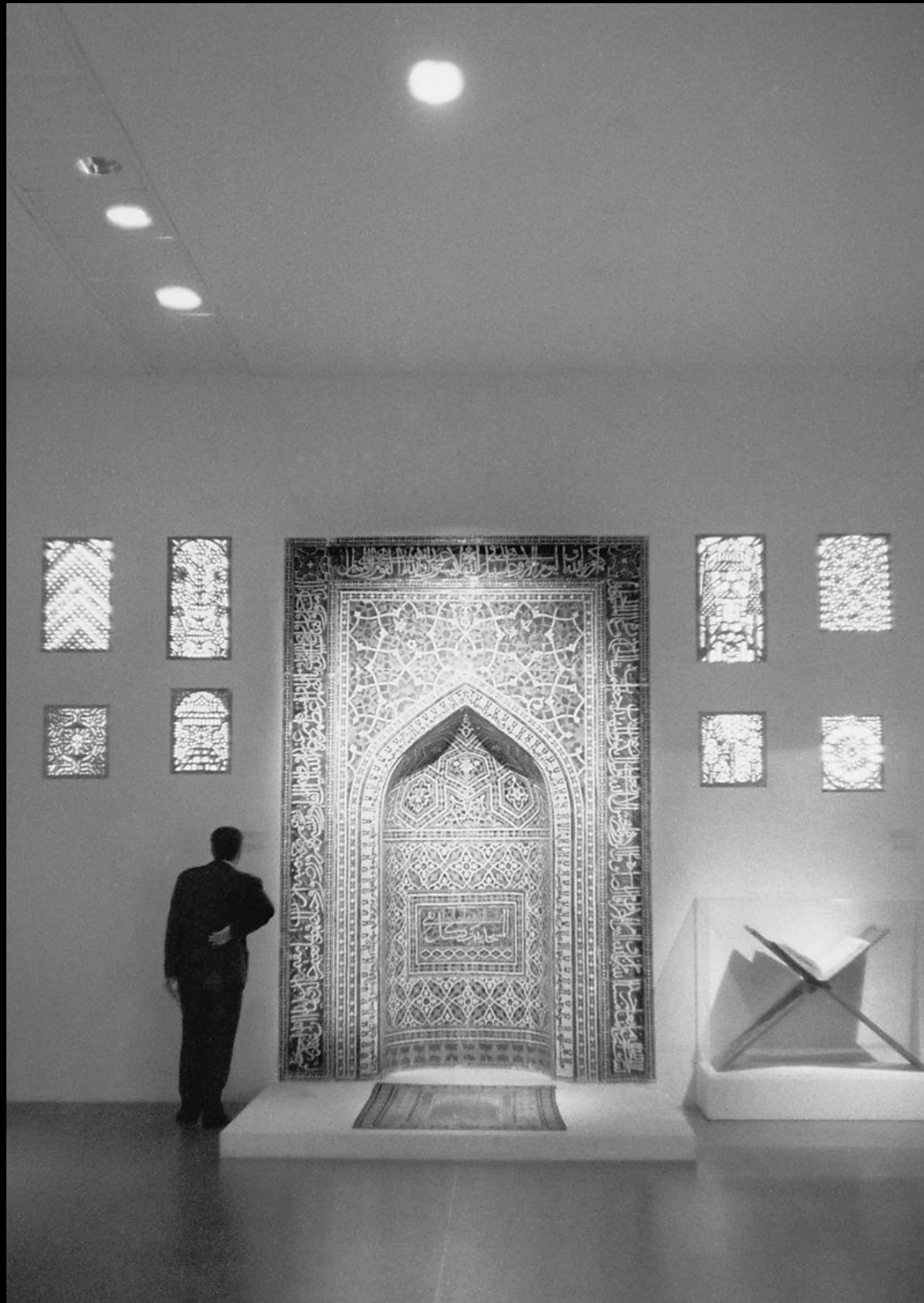
Portrait of Prince Muhammad Buland Akhtar at Prayer:
Folio from an album, 17th century
India
Ink and watercolor on paper

The spread of Islam

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



What is Islamic art?



Installation of a Mihrab (prayer niche) at the Met

- ▶ “Islamic art” is a modern concept
- ▶ Describes the art of all regions where Islam was the dominant religion
- ▶ Not necessarily objects created for Muslim worship, could be secular objects from an Islamic region

KEY FEATURES OF ISLAMIC ART

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

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE



Hagia Sophia
Istanbul
532-37

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

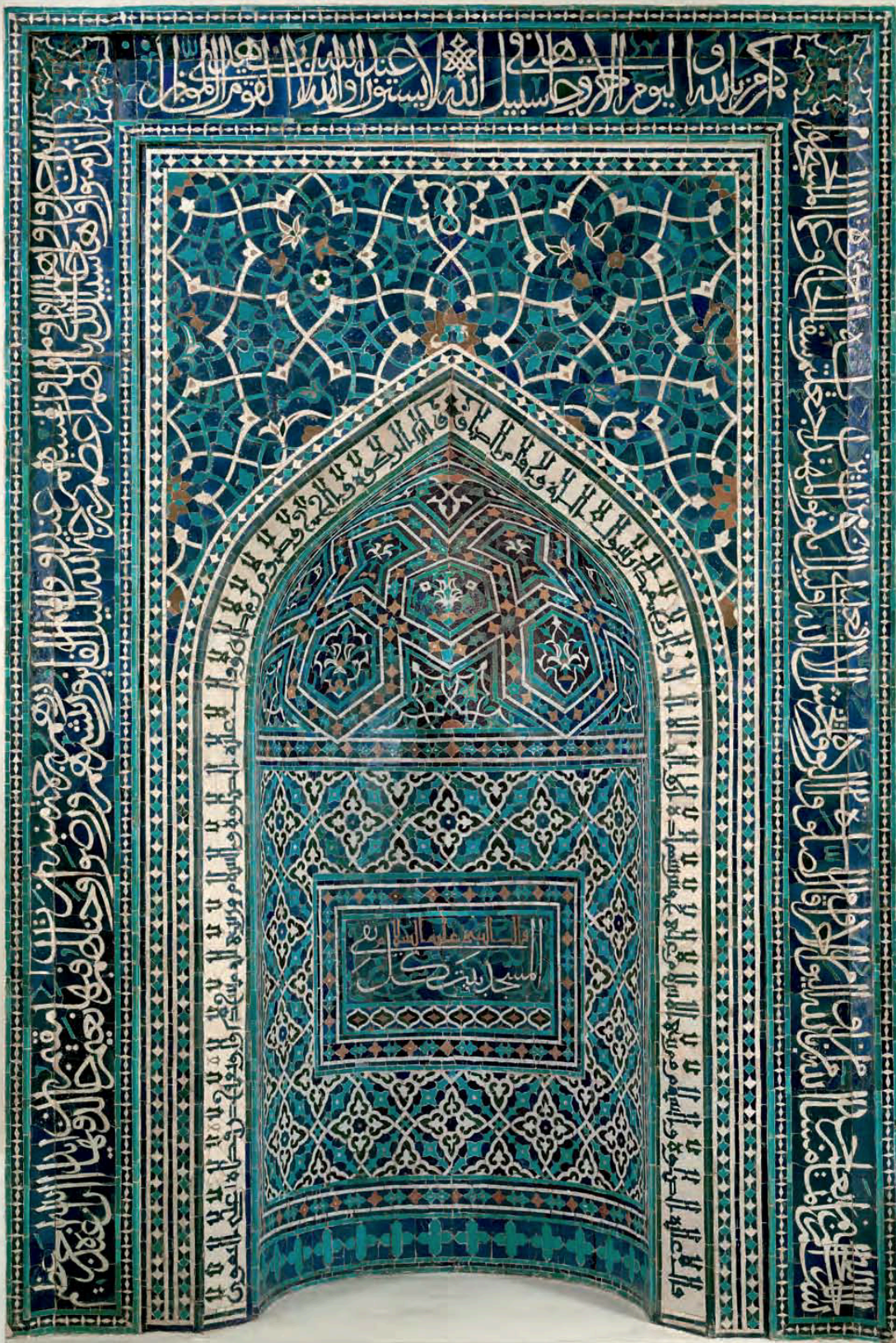
Mosque: A place of worship for Muslims, often having at least one minaret. In Arabic: *masjid*.



Contemporary image of the Hagia Sophia
Istanbul, Turkey

ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF A MOSQUE

- ▶ **Mihrab:** a niche in the qibla wall indicating the direction of Mecca (usually most decorated part of the mosque)
- ▶ **Minaret:** wall tower attached to the mosque; designed so the call to prayer can be heard loud throughout the city
- ▶ **Minbar:** staircase on which the prayer leader stands when delivering a sermon



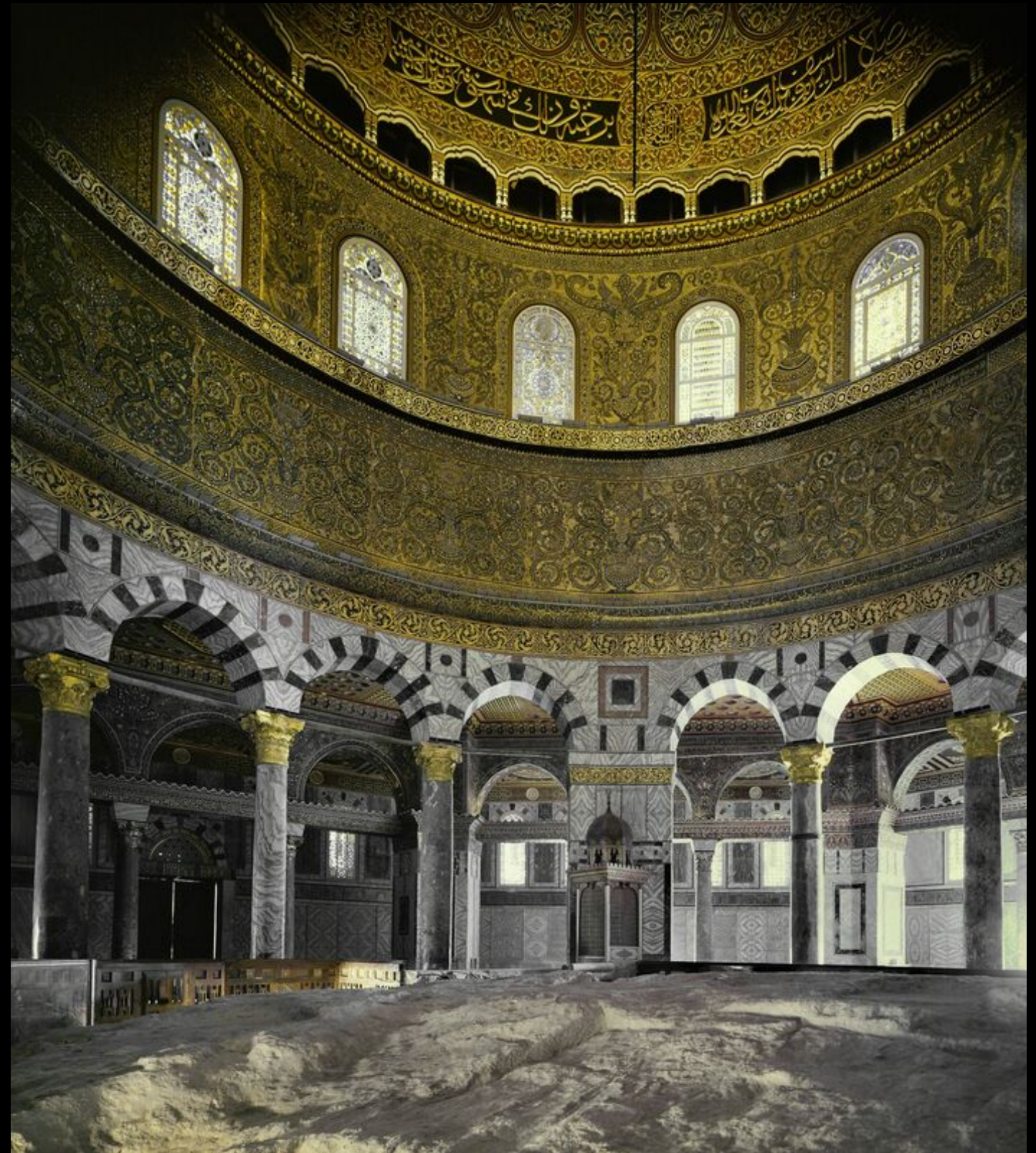
Mihrab (Prayer Niche)
dated A.D. 1354-55
(Met Museum)



Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem
Completed in 692 AD



Mosaic detail from the Dome of the Rock



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



Taj Mahal, Agra, India
1632-53 AD



Taj Mahal, Agra, India
1632-53 AD

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

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



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



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

THE WRITTEN WORD



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

Calligraphy: The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes.

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

Examples of calligraphic scripts



Folio from a Qur'an Manuscript
ca. 1180



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 1530



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 19th century

Examples of calligraphic scripts

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



Folio from a Qur'an Manuscript
ca. 1180

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



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 1530

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



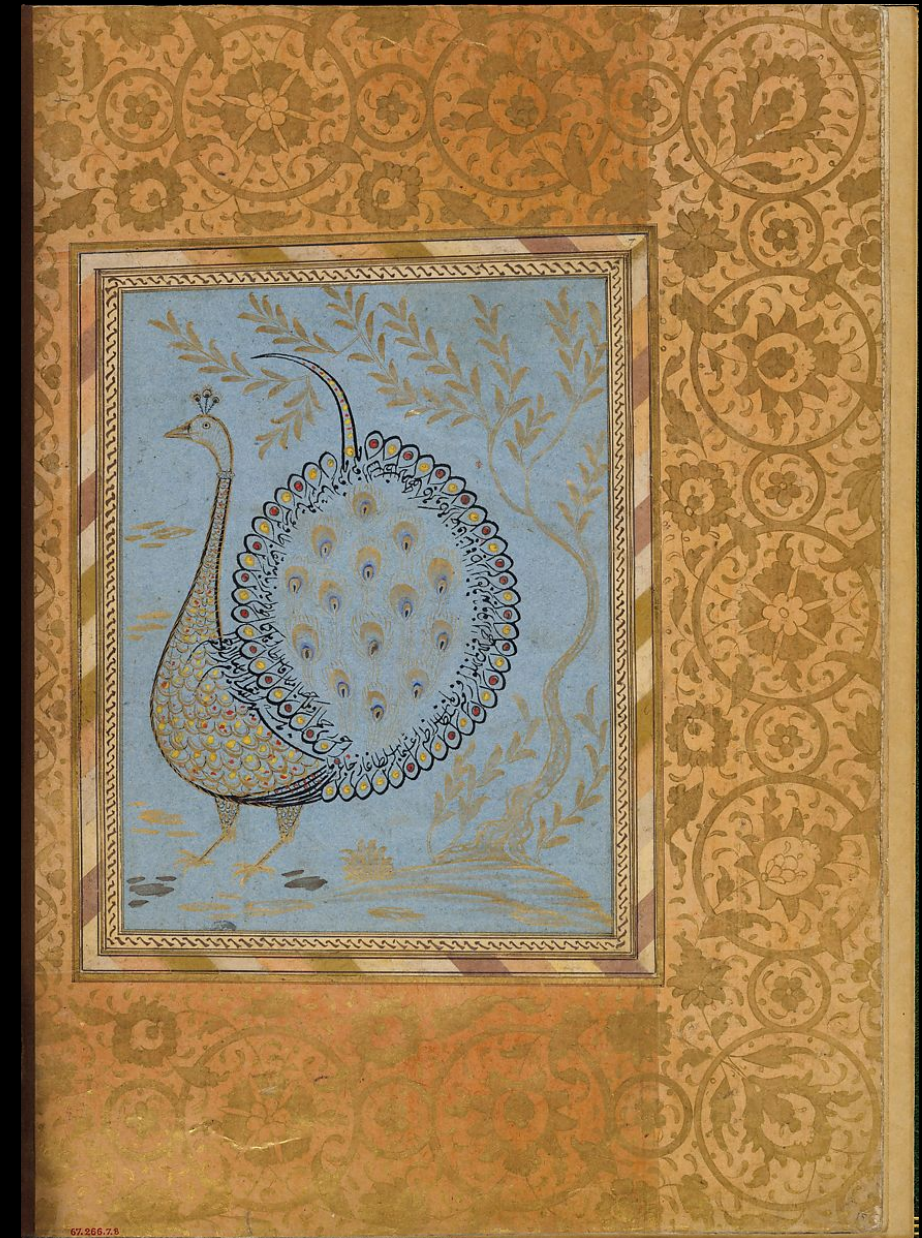
Folio from an unidentified album
c. 19th century

Calligraphy as art

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



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



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

The question of figuration

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



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

MINIATURE PAINTINGS

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



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

Visual characteristics of Miniature paintings



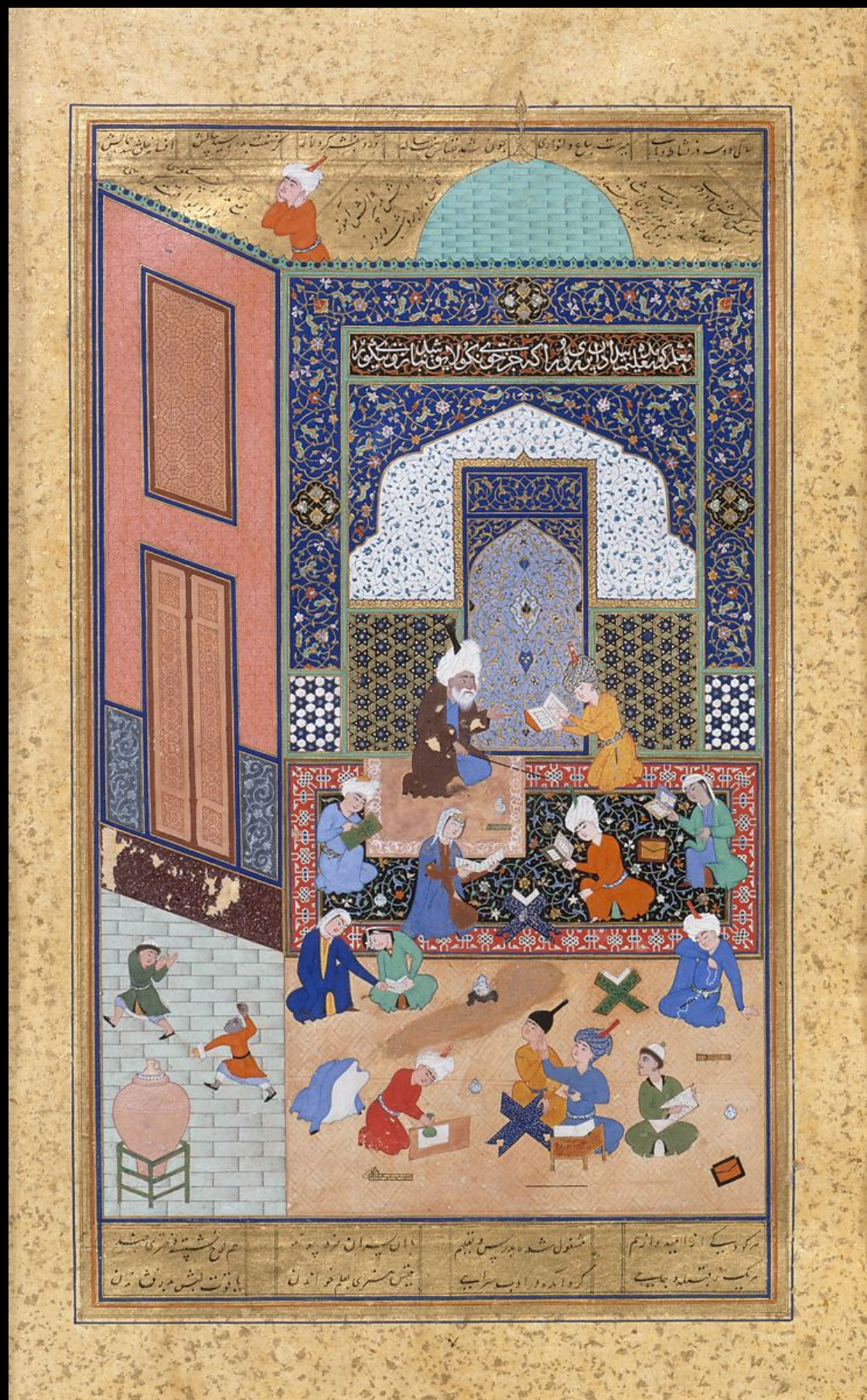
An Attempt on Akbar's life in Dehli in 1564
illustration from Akbarnama
c. 1590-95
India (Collection of V&A Museum)

Visual characteristics of Miniature paintings

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



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



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



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

GLOSSARY

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