

What is Islamic Architecture?

Worksheet

Islamic architecture is a diverse tradition unified by recurring features - domes, minarets, muqarnas, horseshoe and pointed arches, and intricate geometric and calligraphic ornament - used across mosques, palaces and tombs to create spaces of prayer, learning and power.

Questions

1. Which feature is used to transition from a square base to a round dome in Islamic architecture?

- A) Flying buttress
- B) Muqarnas
- C) Pediment
- D) Barrel vault

2. The Great Mosque of Cordoba is a classic example of which plan type?

- A) Centralized dome
- B) Hypostyle hall
- C) Basilica
- D) Cruciform

3. What is a charbagh?

- A) A type of minaret
- B) A four-part paradise garden
- C) A calligraphy script
- D) A prayer niche

4. The Taj Mahal's dome shape is best described as

- A) Flat
- B) Bulbous (onion-shaped)
- C) Conical
- D) Hemispherical

5. What features identify the Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem, completed 691 CE) as an early Islamic monument?

6. How does the Great Mosque of Cordoba (8th-10th c.) show the evolution of the hypostyle mosque?

7. What Mughal and Persian elements combine in the Taj Mahal (Agra, completed 1653)?

8. Define: What is muqarnas?

9. Define: Why do many Islamic buildings avoid figural imagery?

10. Define: What is a minaret for?

Answer Key

1. B) Muqarnas - Muqarnas is the stalactite-like vaulting used for this transition.
2. B) Hypostyle hall - Its prayer hall is a hypostyle hall of columns supporting tiered arches.
3. B) A four-part paradise garden - Charbagh is the four-quadrant garden framing many Islamic tombs and palaces.
4. B) Bulbous (onion-shaped) - Its bulbous double dome is a Persian-Timurid form.
5. Octagonal plan wraps a sacred rock, echoing earlier Byzantine martyria A wooden double-shell dome, later gilded, rises above the center Interior mosaics use geometric and vegetal patterns instead of figures Inscriptions in Kufic script run around the arcades, among the earliest monumental Quranic calligraphy
6. Hundreds of columns support two-tier horseshoe arches in red-and-white voussoirs The design lets the roof span a huge prayer hall without a dominant central axis A later mihrab (10th c.) is framed by an elaborate scalloped arch and gold mosaic Successive rulers enlarged the mosque by adding parallel aisles, showing organic growth over centuries
7. A bulbous double dome on a high drum, a Persian-Timurid form Four minarets frame the mausoleum symmetrically, marking the corners of the platform Pietra dura inlay (Persian-influenced) covers the white marble with floral motifs A charbagh (four-part Persian garden) with a central water channel frames the approach
8. A honeycomb-like stalactite vaulting used to transition from square walls to round domes, common in Islamic ceilings and portals.
9. Religious tradition discourages figural depiction in sacred spaces, so artists developed geometric patterns and calligraphy instead.
10. A tower attached to a mosque from which the call to prayer (adhan) is announced.

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