Arabic Calligraphy | Monumental Calligraphy

‘A variety of calligraphic styles were developed for purely aesthetic reasons too.’

Calligraphic inscriptions on architecture had two main roles: in the religious context, to assert the authority of Islam and, in the political arena, to help establish a new state according to the ethos of the prevailing religious school. From the 3rd / 9th century, the use of architectural inscriptions spread across the Islamic world where they were used to complement the building’s function. Qur’anic verses, prayers in praise of God, as well as construction dates and patronage inscriptions appeared on mosques and other religious buildings for posterity and perhaps for pious and/or political reasons. On civic buildings, the date of construction and other details about the architect and artisans involved in construction may well appear, but the inscriptions referring to a particular caliph, ruler or wealthy benefactor’s patronage often take on particular importance because they seek to actively demonstrate the patron’s power and benevolence. A variety of calligraphic styles were developed for purely aesthetic reasons too, which became a particular feature of Arabic calligraphy. Nevertheless, the legibility of inscriptions has always been as important as their aesthetic value.



Name:
Diyarbak#r Citadel

Dynasty:
Originally built during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 349. Additions and repairs made in the Byzantine, Abbasid Marwanid, Artuqid and Seljuq periods

Details:
Diyarbak#r, Turkey

Justification:
The Ulu Beden tower is embellished with inscription bands that are surrounded by a double-headed eagle, two human-headed lions and two bulls.



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Details:
Diyarbak#r, Turkey

Justification:
General view of the walls, Diyarbakir Citadel.



Name:
Diyarbak#r Citadel

Dynasty:
Harput Gate: Hegira 297 / AD 910; Mardin Gate: Hegira 297 / AD 910; Melikshah Tower: Hegira 464–85 / AD 1072–92; Urfa Gate: Hegira 579 / AD 1183; Ulu Beden (High Wall): Hegira 605 / 1209; Yedi Karde#ler (Seven Brothers) Tower: Hegira 596–619 / AD 1200–22 Originally built during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 349. Additions and repairs made in the Byzantine, Abbasid, Marwanid, Artuqid and Seljuq periods

Details:
Diyarbak#r, Turkey

Justification:
Close-up of Keçi Burcu tower at Diyarbakir Citadel; the tower has an Arabic inscription in kufic script.



Name:
Inscribed limestone panel

Dynasty:
Hegira 659 / AD 1261 Mamluk

Details:
Ajlun Archaeological Museum
Ajlun, Jordan

Justification:
This panel from Ajlun Castle shows three lines of naskhi script commemorating the patronage of the Mamluk sultan al-Zahir Baybars (658–76 / 1260–77).



Name:
Ajlun Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 579–658 / AD 1184–1260 Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:
Ajlun, Jordan

Justification:
General view of Ajlun Castle.



Name:
Mosque of the Three Doors

Dynasty:
Hegira 252 / AD 866 Aghlabid

Details:
Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:
The kufic-style inscription attributes the building of this mosque to Muhammad Ibn Khayrun in 252 / 866.



Name:
Mosque of the Three Doors

Dynasty:
Hegira 252 / AD 866 Aghlabid

Details:
Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:
General shot of the entrance to the Ibn Khayrun Mosque.



Name:
Ince Minareli ('Slender Minaret') Madrasa

Dynasty:
About hegira 658–63 / AD 1260–5 Anatolian Seljuq

Details:
Konya, Turkey

Justification:
The entrance façade of this madrasa exhibits an extravaganza of calligraphy showcasing the skills of the practitioner.



Name:
Ince Minareli ('Slender Minaret') Madrasa

Dynasty:
About hegira 658–63 / AD 1260–5 Anatolian Seljuq

Details:
Konya, Turkey

Justification:
General view of Ince Minareli Madrasa showing the domed building and its minaret.



Name:
Ince Minareli ('Slender Minaret') Madrasa

Dynasty:
About hegira 658–63 / AD 1260–5 Anatolian Seljuq

Details:
Konya, Turkey

Justification:
Detail of the top edge of the entrance to Ince Minareli Madrasa.



Name:
Castle of Moura

Dynasty:
Hegira 2nd–3rd century / AD 8th/9th – 13th century Umayyad, early Taifa, Almoravid, Almohad

Details:
Moura, Beja, Portugal

Justification:
A commemorative panel relating to the construction of the mosque minaret at the Castle of Moura in 444 / 1052.



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Castle of Moura

Dynasty:
Hegira 2nd–3rd century / AD 8th/9th – 13th century Umayyad, early Taifa, Almoravid, Almohad

Details:
Moura, Beja, Portugal

Justification:
General view of the Castle of Moura: the tower, fortifications and adjacent red-roofed buildings.
