

Figurative Art | Human Representation

'The details seen in some hunting scenes display scenes of a specifically local nature.'

Human representation in Islamic art occurred in different artistic media: mosaics, painting, and sculpture. Besides portraiture, the viewer is entertained by illustrative pictorial representations of various pastimes such as hunting, battle-scenes, dancing, music-making, poetry-reading, nude or half-clad women, games and acrobats, gift-bearing and scenes of working life. The precise 'meaning' of the imagery may be understood in different and sometimes even conflicting ways, often making the motivation for the subject matter unclear. Although most of the images may be generally interpreted as depictions of luxurious living; pleasures of the court and the symbolism of wealth and power, some of the visuals can be understood also as precise references to concrete historical or social events. Moreover, the details seen in some hunting scenes display scenes of a specifically local nature.

**Name:**

Bas-relief in carved marble

Dynasty:

Hegira 4th–5th centuries / AD 10th–11th centuries Fatimid–Zirid

Details:

Bardo Museum

Tunis, Tunisia

Justification:

An unusual marble low-relief from the Fatimid period (297–567 / 909–1171) which shows two figures, one probably a sovereign or military leader, and to his right a flautist.

**Name:**

Human head

Dynasty:

Hegira, mid-4th–mid-5th centuries / AD 10th–11th centuries Fatimid–Zirid

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art

Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:

A plaster head belonging to an exceptional collection that was excavated at Sabra al-Mansuriyya.

**Name:**

Bowl

Dynasty:

About hegira 427–87/ AD 1035–94 Fatimid

Details:

Victoria and Albert Museum

London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:

A bowl decorated with the figure of a Christian priest of the Coptic (Egyptian) church; he carries a lamp or censor and beside him is a cypress tree or ankh ('key of life' cross), an ancient Egyptian hieroglyph adapted by the Copts for Christian use.

**Name:**

Casket

Dynasty:

About hegira 390–410 / AD 1000–1020 Spanish Umayyad

Details:

Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:

A casket that may have been used as a jewellery box by a member of the royal court. It consists of panels depicting pleasurable courtly pastimes.

**Name:**

Lower part of a semi-naked female statue

Dynasty:

Hegira first half of the 2nd century / AD first half of the 8th century Umayyad

Details:

Jordan Archaeological Museum
Amman, Jordan

Justification:

The lower part of a limestone semi-nude woman who holds a basket in her left hand.

**Name:**

Fragment of a female statue from Mushatta

Dynasty:

Around hegira 125–6 / AD 743–4 Umayyad

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification:**Name:**

Fresco panel: 'Group of Musicians'

Dynasty:

Hegira first third of the 2nd century / AD second half of the 8th century Umayyad

Details:

In situ at Qusayr 'Amra
Amman, Jordan

Justification:

A fresco painting of a boy flautist from Qusayr 'Amra. The image is an iconic one, often seen at court during the Umayyad period (41–132 / 661–750).
