

Echoes of Paradise: the Garden and Flora in Islamic Art | Visions of the Heavenly Garden and the Tree-of-Life

'... we represented what we found in the Qur'an with regard to trees and palaces of Paradise ...'

Literal representations of the Garden of Paradise are rare. One example is the astonishing mosaic cycle applied around the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, dating to the AH 2nd / AD 8th century. It shows an idealised landscape with a sinuous river and an array of palaces and sophisticated buildings. That this pictorial cycle is indeed based on Qur'anic descriptions is confirmed by the survival of a statement by one of the mosaicists involved: 'In the mosaics we represented what we found in the Qur'an with regard to trees and palaces of Paradise. And when a worker had executed a tree in a particularly fine manner the Caliph 'Umar would give him 30 dirhams as a reward.'



Name:
Umayyad Mosque

Dynasty:
Hegira 87–96 / AD 706–715 Umayyad

Details:
Damascus, Syria

Justification:
The Umayyad Mosque, Damascus. Façade with mosaic in the Treasury courtyard, showing lush swaying trees and a complex assembly of architectural units.



Name:
Umayyad Mosque

Dynasty:
Hegira 87–96 / AD 706–715 Umayyad

Details:
Damascus, Syria

Justification:
Detail of mosaic in the Treasury courtyard. Some mosaicists may have been Christians, as similar techniques and images were popular in the region before the advent of Islam.



Name:
Umayyad Mosque

Dynasty:
Hegira 87–96 / AD 706–715 Umayyad

Details:
Damascus, Syria

Justification:
Detail of mosaic in the Treasury courtyard. Animated life is absent from all scenes of Paradise as it will only be inhabited at the end of time.
