

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

'Trees with sweet-scented blossoms and plentiful ripe fruit play a special role.'

Trees with sweet-scented blossoms and plentiful ripe fruit play a central role in literary depictions of the Islamic Paradise. The palm tree occupies a special place. One tradition describes it as man's aunt, created out of the clay left after God's creation of Adam. According to another, the Prophet Muhammad associated the palm tree with Paradise. Reference is also made to the pomegranate tree and the mystical tuba tree, a Cyprus-like tree-of-life, placed at the heart of Paradise.



Name:

Ivory box from the Cathedral of Braga

Dynasty:

Hegira 394 / AD 1004 and Hegira 398 / AD 1008 Umayyads of Córdoba, Caliphate period

Details:

Cathedral of Braga Treasury
Braga, Portugal

Justification:

On this pyxis two figures harvest fruit from a tree amidst a lush setting reminiscent of Paradise.



Name:

Ablutions basin

Dynasty:

Hegira 377 / AD 988 Umayyads of al-Andalus, Caliphate period

Details:

National Archaeological Museum
Madrid, Spain

Justification:

The lush trees contained within arcades on this basin reflect the architectural and horticultural aspects of the royal gardens of Madinat al-Zahira, for which it was made.



Name:

Fragment of an ivory dagger

Dynasty:

Hegira 2nd century / AD 8th century Umayyad

Details:

Jordan Archaeological Museum
Amman, Jordan

Justification:

The Palm tree has many paradisiacal properties as it provides food, fibres, fuel and of course shade.



Name:
Fragment of wall decoration

Dynasty:
Hegira 296–467 / AD 909–1074 Rustamids of Sedrata

Details:
National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts
Algiers, Algeria

Justification:
The aesthetic properties of the palm tree lend themselves to successful application in many art forms.



Name:
Mashrabiyya window

Dynasty:
Hegira 13th century / AD 19th century Ottoman

Details:
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow Museums
Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification:
The Cyprus tree was sometimes compared to a pious Muslim in religious poetry for, like the believer, it is said to bow in the wind to the Creator.



Name:
Decorative stone with stylised scrollwork and pomegranates

Dynasty:
Around Hegira 86–96 / AD 705–15 Umayyad, period of Caliph al-Walid I (r. c. AH 86–96 / AD 705–15)

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification:
The pomegranate tree laden with fruit is often used in Islamic art to signify fertility and abundance.
