

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

'Images of the paradisiacal Tree-of-Life evoke lushness, a profusion of shade-giving leafy branches and fertility.'

Often the notion of the paradisiacal Tree-of-Life is alluded to in Islamic art without depicting a specific type of tree. Stylised images do, however, always evoke lushness, a profusion of shade-giving leafy branches and fertility. Sometimes, the image of the tree is replaced by a luxurious vase that holds an exuberant, colourful bouquet of flowers. This motif goes back to pre-Islamic, Hellenistic notions of the Font-of-Life. It recalls both expensive flower displays in the arcades of Islamic garden pavilions, and the floral delights in the Garden of Paradise.



Name:
Prayer rug

Dynasty:
Hegira 1217 / AD 1802 Ottoman

Details:
Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums
Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification:
Here, a stylised Tree-of-Life grows from a ewer, in itself symbolising the waters of Paradise.



Name:
Decorative wooden panel

Dynasty:
Hegira 1st century / AD 8th century Umayyad

Details:
Islamic Museum, al-Aqsa Mosque / al-Haram al-Sharif
Jerusalem

Justification:
Fantastic trees and exuberant vegetal scrolls decorate this early Islamic frieze from Palestine.



Name:
Wooden panel

Dynasty:
Hegira 1st–2nd century / AD 7th–8th century Umayyad

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
On this panel a leafy vine laden with grapes rises from a vase, the associations with fertility are borrowed from Hellenistic art.



Name:
Panel decorated with a mosque

Dynasty:
Hegira 12th century / AD 18th century Husaynid Beys (Ottoman)

Details:
Sidi Qasim al-Jalizi Museum
Tunis, Tunisia

Justification:
The Font-of-Life motif in Islamic art survived for centuries. Here its religious overtones are reinforced by the depiction of a mosque above.



Name:
Prayer rug

Dynasty:
Hegira 12th century / AD 18th century Ottoman

Details:
Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities (Medelhavsmuseet)
Stockholm, Sweden

Justification:
On this prayer rug an abstract arrangement of flowers replaces the Tree-of-Life motif at the heart of the arch, often interpreted as the Gate of Paradise.
