Women | Muslim Women as Patrons

‘Muslim women generously provided patronage for the interior enhancement of religious buildings.’

Muslim women generously provided patronage for the interior enhancement of religious buildings; in the supply of elegant Qur’ans and other high-quality mosque furnishings. One of the most admirable is the intricate, inlaid-teak prayer niche for the shrine of Sayyida Ruqayya, the patron of which was the wife of the Fatimid caliph, al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah in 527 / 1133. There are a number of Qur’anic manuscripts commissioned by Zirid princesses that were intended for use in the Great Mosque of Kairouan, among them Umm Milal’s Qur’an and that of Umm al-‘Ilu, the sister of the Zirid prince al-Mu‘izz ibn Badis. A third manuscript was presented by Fatima, governess to the prince Badis Bin al-Mansur.

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Name: Page from a Qur'an
Dynasty: Hegira 410 / AD 1020 Fatimid-Zirid
Details: Museum of Islamic Art
Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia
Justification: Fatima, governess to the Zirid prince Badis, endowed this Qur'an to the Great Mosque of Kairouan. Interestingly it was compiled under the supervision of another woman, ‘Dura al-Katiba’ – ‘Dura the lady-scribe’.

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Name: Qur’anic illumination
Dynasty: Hegira 295 / AD 907 Aghlabid
Details: Museum of Islamic Art
Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia
Justification: A Qur'an manuscript that was executed and dedicated to the Great Mosque of Kairouan by a local woman.

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Name: Mihrab
Dynasty: Hegira 6th century / AD 12th century Fatimid
Details: Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt
Justification: An inscription on this mihrab (prayer niche) tells us that it was made by order of Sayyida ‘Ulam al-Amiriyya (d. AH 535 / AD 1140), wife of Caliph al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah, for the tomb of Sayyida Ruqayya.
Name: Mihrab

Dynasty: Hegira 6th century / AD 12th century Fatimid

Details: Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification: Detail of the mihrab made for the Shrine of Sayyida Ruqayya; now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.

Name: Ceramic tile with a picture of the Ka'ba

Dynasty: Hegira last quarter of the 10th century / AD 16th century Ottoman

Details: Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification: The granddaughter of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 886–918 / 1481–1512), commissioned the Neslişah Sultan Mosque in Istanbul, embedding this tile depicting the Ka'ba into one of the walls; the tile was still in situ right up until 1914.