

Women

Islam assigns women an integral position in society. Their rights, duties and status are explored in the Qur'an, and legislated for in the Shari'a – the Islamic law. In the Islamic period, women actively embraced and practiced their faith. There has never been and nor is there today, however, a uniform approach by which to interpret and implement the Islamic system across the Muslim world and its civilisations; every society within Islam has adapted its system according to its local cultural heritage and, therefore, there is no standard prototype for Islamic civilisation, and not one prototype for the condition of women within Islamic society. Indeed, the complexity of the diverse cultural and patriarchal legacies with which Muslim women have had to deal – some of them pre-Islamic – and the multitude of their tasks within the societies they live mean that they have faced a continuous struggle for a better life within a just society. Throughout the ages many Muslim women have become role-models for other Muslim Women most importantly Sayyida Khadija bint Muhammad al-Khurasani, first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, an independent and powerful businesswoman and a key supporter of the Prophet in his mission. Others have included Sayyida al-Manubiya, an acclaimed mystic writer in medieval Tunisia. Maryam bint 'Abd al-Rahman, a leading judge in early AH 8th- / AD 14th-century Palestine with her own lexicon of interpretations of al-Hadith ('Sayings of the Prophet'). A key figure in the 19th century is Huda Sha'rawi, a pioneer and leader for women's rights in Arab and Muslim society. Historians recorded the public work associated with upper-class women and their relationship to the ruling classes, while surviving buildings and luxury artefacts attest to their patronage and influence. On the other hand, due to the bias of historical recording and the uneven survival of artefacts, our knowledge of ordinary Muslim women is sparse. Some glimpses, however, can be derived from the crafts in which they were engaged, such as weaving, embroidery and pottery; and by studying official records that relate to the courts, marriage, divorce, or matters of female inheritance.



Comb

Hegira 8th century / AD 14th century
Mamluk
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt



Ribat and Mosque of the Sayyida

Hegira mid-3rd century / AD 9th century
Aghlabid and Zirid
Monastir, Tunisia