

# Figurative Art | Human Representation

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Islamic art adapted and stylised the human figure of pre-Islamic art without hesitation. Human figurative motifs are found on the surface decoration of both artefacts and monuments (the exception being as a general rule mosques) as part of woven or applied patterns, in sculptural forms, on coins, and in manuscript illustrations. Religious figures such as prophets and angels were drawn from the Byzantine tradition, and mythical themes such as harpies (female-headed birds) were drawn from antiquity, other figurative forms were created through the customisation of well-established, culturally familiar, visual forms.



**Name:**  
Painted wooden ceiling of the Palatine Chapel

**Dynasty:**  
Between 1131 and 1140 Norman

**Details:**  
Palermo, Italy

**Justification:**  
Executed during the Fatimid period (AH 297–567 / AD 909–1171), the ceiling was commissioned by King Ruggero II of Sicily. Dancers, flautists, gamblers, horsemen and wrestlers are depicted together with lions (Ruggero's heraldic emblem) and other animals.



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**Name:**

Large dish

**Dynasty:**

Hegira 5th century / AD 11th century Fatimid

**Details:**

Museum of Islamic Art  
Cairo, Egypt

**Justification:**

A lustre ware ceramic plate depicting an elegant female musician playing a stringed instrument. She is surrounded by decorative tendrils and spirals and a delicately executed ewer to her left.

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**Name:**

Bowl

**Dynasty:**

Hegira 6th–7th century / AD 12th–13th century Ayyubid

**Details:**

National Museum of Damascus  
Damascus, Syria

**Justification:**

A reveller, drinking, and enjoying the pleasures of court life.

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**Name:**

Portrait of the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I

**Dynasty:**

Hegira first half of the 11th century / AD first half of the 17th century Ottoman

**Details:**

National Museums of Scotland (NMS)  
Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom

**Justification:**

A miniature painting on paper that once formed part of an album containing both Ottoman-Turkish and Persian miniatures. Manuscripts concerned with the history of Islamic dynasties were illustrated with similar portraits of sultans.

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**Name:**

Dish

**Dynasty:**

Hegira, early 11th century / AD early 17th century Ottoman

**Details:**

National Museums of Scotland (NMS)

Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom

**Justification:**

A dish embellished with a male figure thought to be a young, unfulfilled lover called Ibrahim, known from popular Ottoman literature. The dish was probably produced for the general market.

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**Name:**

Painting

**Dynasty:**

Hegira 7th century / AD 13th century Ayyubid

**Details:**

The British Museum

London, England, United Kingdom

**Justification:**

Battle-scenes are seen on many artefacts and in all sorts of media including, like here, on paper. Whether they are 'history paintings' or a warning to would-be aggressors is a matter of some debate.

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