

Figurative Art | Animal Representation

‘Both real and mythical animals held an important place in Islamic art.’

The virtual preclusion of human and animal representations in the religious context was systematic and deliberate, but in all other spheres both real and mythical animals held an important place in Islamic art. Birds and horned animals, dragons and griffons are predominant, while beasts of burden, animals of the land, appear only occasionally, often reflecting local popular culture.



Name:
Wooden panel

Dynasty:
Hegira 3rd century / AD 9th century Tulunid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
A wooden panel carved with rounded pigeons. The spaces left in between the birds are filled with decorative motifs.



Name:
Ewer

Dynasty:
About hegira 391–452 / AD 1000–1060 Fatimid

Details:
Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:
An exquisite rock-crystal ewer that shows a bird attacking an animal (possibly a gazelle), and perhaps symbolic of the owner's power.



Name:
Ivory box

Dynasty:
Hegira 6th century / AD late 12th century Siculo-Norman (Siculo-Arab)

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

Justification:
The animals and birds seen decorating this casket are a good example of the figurative style in Islamic Sicily.



Name:
Plaster graffito

Dynasty:
Hegira, second half of the 4th–first half of the 5th centuries / AD 10th–11th centuries Fatimid–Zirid

Details:

Bardo Museum
Tunis, Tunisia

Justification:

An engraving of a stylised horse with a majestic demeanour, by the shape of its head and the gracefulness of its neck and legs the horse is typically Arab. The work represents an unique example of Islamic art from the Maghreb.

**Name:**

Floor mosaic

Dynasty:

Hegira 101–5 / AD 720–4 or AH 125–6 / AD 743–4 Umayyad

Details:

In situ at al-Qastal, Jordan

Justification:

A floor mosaic depicting a lion attacking a bull and representing blatantly the power of the owner; such scenes were known in the art of the Byzantine period in Jordan and Syria.

**Name:**

Fresco panel: 'Hunting Scene'

Dynasty:

Hegira first third of the 2nd century / AD first half of the 8th century Umayyad

Details:

In situ at Qusayr 'Amra
Amman, Jordan

Justification:

A fresco at Qusayr 'Amra depicting a group of hunters; scenes such as these were characteristic of court life in the Umayyad period.
