

Figurative Art | Animal Representation

'Mythical animals like harpies, unicorns, Pegasus and griffons were derived from traditional Greco-Roman themes.'

Animal representation occurred across artistic media: mosaics, painting and sculpture, and on architecture. Although animal motifs appeared in a wide variety of materials they are very common on stone, pottery, metal, wood and ivory. Both domestic and wild animals such as bulls, horses, trotting camels, gazelles, onagers, deer, doves, eagles, storks, snakes, rabbits, monkeys, cats and lions are present. Mythical animals like harpies, unicorns, Pegasus and griffons were derived from traditional Greco-Roman themes.



Name:
Ceramic dish

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

Details:
The British Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:
In the classical repertoire the harpy was a vicious monster, but in Islamic art it is an auspicious creature.



Name:
Stand

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

Details:
The British Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:
The griffin, another mythical creature, was associated with good fortune.



Name:
Candlestick with dragons

Dynasty:
Hegira 8th–9th centuries / AD 14th –15th centuries Beylik (Emirates) or Early Ottoman period

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

Justification:
Dragons, a symbol of power, are here combined with the symbolism of light (the candle).



Name:
Ornamental plaque (fragment)

Dynasty:

Hegira 4th century / AD 10th century Umayyad of al-Andalus, Caliphate period

Details:

Silves Municipal Archaeology Museum
Silves, Faro, Portugal

Justification:

A two-sided plaque (most probably a lid of a small chest) depicting on one side a golden eagle standing on the ground with its wings open and, verso, there appears a deer holding a bough in its mouth.



Name:

Painted wooden ceiling of the Palatine Chapel

Dynasty:

Between 1131 and 1140 Norman

Details:

Palermo, Italy

Justification:

Detail from the painted ceiling at Cappella Palatina. It depicts a lion, the heraldic emblem of the patron, King Ruggero II, and many other animals.



Name:

Fragment of plate

Dynasty:

Hegira 406–547 / AD 1015–1152 Hammadid

Details:

National Museum of Setif
Setif, Algeria

Justification:

A fragment of a plate bearing a central animal motif consisting of the plate and consists of a fragmented lion represented by a head and a section of shoulder. There is an inscription repeated twice in kufic script that reads: 'al-yumn' (prosperity).
