

# Intertwined Aesthetics: An Overview of West Asian Art and its Influence on Indian Artistic Traditions

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## Abstract

This paper explores the development of West Asian art, tracing the course from the beginning and focusing on some of the aesthetic developments of the region. The aim is to consider major art forms including prehistoric rock paintings, Mesopotamian seals, Nabatean rock-cut architecture, Zoroastrian temples, sculptures, Islamic art, and architecture their evolution with time. The study focuses on the archaeological findings as well as the historical records and tries to emphasize the cultural, economic, and political exchanges between West Asia and India, showcasing its widespread influence on Indian arts and crafts traditions. The study further emphasizes that West Asian art remains historically and culturally significant in global history. Findings state that the styles and techniques brought about through these interactions reveal a fascinating blend, adding value to both regions' artistic heritages. Discussions highlight the ways that these interactions have formed cultural identities, promoting shared heritage that is found in artistic and architectural developments.

**Keywords:** Art, Crafts, Paintings, Sculptures

## Introduction

West Asia is an arid desert region, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, among several other countries. Although the climate is mostly dry, areas around the rivers Tigris and Euphrates were fertile enough to have supported the early civilizations that began about 3500 B.C. The great cities of this region developed in "Ur", "Uruk", "Eridu", and "Nippur", supported by the agricultural produce from the fertile land. The "Tigris and Euphrates" rivers supported irrigation systems that made possible sustained agricultural output, leading to the development of complex societies. "Pastoralism and caravan" trading were essential subsistence strategies in the region, shaping its socio-economic practices. The intersection of fertile land and advanced irrigation played a very important role in the establishment of urban life. West Asia can rightly be considered a cradle for some of the earliest human civilizations. The history of this region reflects the way geography played an important role in social and cultural evolution.

Fertile crescent soil combined with rivers "Tigris" and "Euphrates", which irrigated the region, allowed the area to enjoy rich food production that later helped cities along with their sophisticated social structures. The process of urbanization led to and influenced arts and crafts production, where much of it was used for the religious beliefs of Mesopotamian empires. The availability of food surplus together with the production of arts and crafts, and the strategic point of the Mesopotamia region that connected central Asia, Europe, the Persian Gulf as well as the Mediterranean created market opportunities. Their trade

activities connected them with other civilizations in the East and West. They encountered the Harappan civilization of the East and the Roman civilization of the West. The nomadic pastoral not only helped the generation of wealth in the region but also enriched it culturally [1].

These broad-based trade networks along land and sea routes contributed to creating the rich cultural life of the West Asian regions. West Asia is also of extreme importance from a religious point of view as this region is considered the birthplace of “Zoroastrianism”, “Judaism”, “Christianity” and “Islam”. Religious practices, sacred architecture, and other traditions had been great factors in creating many varieties of art forms, and their existence and pertinency spread over beyond the borders of the West Asian region. Against this sort of backdrop, one shall observe West Asian arts and crafts, which have long remained an important tourist magnet for bazaars and souks in these lands.

The confluence of religions and arts in this region has influenced its artistic presentations, which have continued over time to captivate and influence other cultures, thus affirming the region's artistic as well as spiritual heritage. West Asian arts have exerted their influence from as far west as Spain to India in the east, through modern-day Turkey and North Africa. These art traditions have continued through architectural styles, fine arts, performing arts, and cuisine. These are represented in "mosques, tombs, planned gardens, bazaars, souks, calligraphy, paintings, ceramics, glassware, wood, ivory, and stone carving, carpet weaving, and gemstone work", which characterize the continuing cultural and artistic heritage of the region. The earliest artistic proofs in West Asia are in the form of prehistoric rock art including paintings, petroglyphs, and reliefs found in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iran. These artworks range from zoomorphic figures, hunting scenes, dancing scenes, and geometric patterns; they are a valuable source of information for the study of Stone Age cultures [2].

**Figure 1. Rock art depicting a hunting scene, Golpayegan, Iran,(Image courtesy [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))**



The gradual transition of hunting-gathering cultures to pastoral activities and then the domestication of plants like wheat and barley led to a revolutionary change in human life. That first urbanization led to social and economic life changing itself into aesthetic and can be very clearly seen through the specialism one can identify in the types of arts and crafts made, not to forget items from seals and sculptures, all the pottery, ornaments, and so forth. Some of these artifacts show excellent artistic skills notably, the "Ram in Thicket," which has been unearthed from the "site of Ur" and dates to (2600-2400) B.C., is a masterpiece. In its creation, this sculpture was made from different materials like lapis lazuli, gold, silver, shell, copper, and wood. Thus, this artifact points out the advanced skills used in sculpting, metallurgy, and inlay work. This artifact shows that during this period, the specialization and technical proficiency in

the production of art and craft objects was increasing [3].

The "Standard of Ur," from 2500 B.C., is a wooden box containing two panels that represent "war" and "peace." The complex mosaic, consisting of wood, lapis lazuli, shell, and red limestone, demonstrates high skill in inlay techniques. "Lapis lazuli", found in both the "Ram in Thicket" and "Standard of Ur", was extracted from the Badakhshan region of Afghanistan and was carried to Mesopotamia via the Harappan trade networks. Such cultural interchanges among the Bronze Age Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley were greatly impacted by the land and sea networks of interrelated trade routes [4].

**Figure 2. Ram in thicket, (Image courtesy [www.artsandculture.google.com](http://www.artsandculture.google.com))**



**Figure 3. Standard of Ur, (Image courtesy [www.smarthistory.org](http://www.smarthistory.org))**



West Asian art before Islam is famous for its great architectural achievements, as in the "Nabatean tombs in Petra". The Achaemenid Empire 550-330 BC created its legacy with architectural remains in "Persepolis", "Susa", and "Ecbatana", which laid down the basis for the Persian style. Colossal stone columns, with marked bases and capitals, characterize Achaemenid architecture. The "Zoroastrian temples" and bas reliefs at "Sistan and Adur Gushnasp" are also reflective of the period's artistic excellence. The "Sasanian period", spanning from 224 to 651 CE, also did not break away from the tradition. Examples of the monumental palaces at "Firouzabad", "Bishapur in Iran", and "Ctesiphon in Iraq" reflect the grandeur of Sasanian architecture and their artistic brilliance [5].

**Figure 4. Standard of Ur, Naqsh e Rostam, Iran (Image courtesy [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))**



With the emergence of Islam in the 7th century, came a sacred space for worship that manifested in mosque architecture. In these early Arab-style mosques, rectangular prayer halls with flat roofs were divided by columns of wood, later replaced with stone. These mosques typically featured an enclosed courtyard. This style of architecture is evident in ancient buildings in North Africa, Syria, and Spain, where the diffusion and assimilation of Islamic architectural traditions have occurred across different regions.

The "Iwan style" of the architecture of mosques appeared in Iran in the 11th century with the Seljuk Turks. This design of the mosque comprised four domed halls forming a cross-shaped ground plan around a central courtyard. In later times when Ottoman Turks ruled, emerged third type of mosque bore the mark of a gigantic central dome. This style highly influenced the Indo-Islamic architecture in India, wherein the central dome became the hallmark of both mosque and tomb architecture. Some examples are the "Jami Mosque" of Delhi, the "Badshahi Mosque" of Bhopal, and the iconic tombs of "Humayun's Tomb" and the Taj Mahal". The arches, domes, and minarets that are part of the architecture became integral to Indian buildings, testifying to the enduring legacy of Islamic art in Indian architectural traditions from the 12th century onwards. The synthesis of styles resulted in the evolution of unique architectural forms that defined the Indo-Islamic aesthetic [6].

**Figure 5. Humayun's tomb, Delhi, India, (Image courtesy [www.incredibleindia.gov.in](http://www.incredibleindia.gov.in))**



**Figure 6. Taj Mahal, Agra, India, (Image courtesy [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))**



It is often thought that figural images are not allowed in Islamic art, but this is a false notion. The Quran forbids the use of idols in religious worship. It does not prohibit figural representation.". However, "hadith" literature does condemn the portrayal of living organisms and even rebukes the artist for the appearance of crafting a living form, something that only God has all the power over. We thus see the use of geometrical patterns, floral designs, and calligraphy in Islamic architecture for decoration.

**Figure 7. Use of floral motifs and calligraphy for enhancing the architectural aesthetics, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, (Image courtesy [www.kaarwaan.com](http://www.kaarwaan.com))**



The oldest Arabic style was Kufic, the script with which one primarily works, which was largely made up of straight lines until the more proportioned "khatt al-mansub" became the style in the 10th century. Until the 11th century, calligraphy had only started. It was further encouraged because of the Sitta Qalam, or six canonical cursive scripts by which the foundations for this Islamic calligraphic art were established. The cross-cultural influences of Persian, West Asian, and Indian art, especially during the Mughal period, indicate the mutual enrichment of the rich and diverse traditions. A more beautiful, italic form of calligraphy was developed by the Persian calligrapher "Mir Ali", which was a hallmark of Islamic art. Calligraphy was an element in diverse forms of art expression such as architectural ornamentation, books with illustrations, paintings, metalwork, glass, and gems. Mainly in religious settings, calligraphy was seen as a great tool for transferring sacred texts. The tradition of calligraphy continues to flourish and has been seen in the significance of the two aspects that make it: religious art and secular art [7].

Geometrical patterns provided a key role in adding symmetry and balance to West Asian art and the

influenced regions. The utilization of basic shapes including circles, squares, triangles, rectangles, pentagons, and octagons gave a structured frame to architecture and most of the other forms of art. These shapes were often employed in repeating patterns, interlacing, and overlapping, which resulted in quite intricate designs. When created in stone, they were used to achieve a "jaali" or lattice effect to add texture and depth to architectural features. This play with geometry was further proof of the mathematical abilities of this region during this medieval time. Islamic ceramics utilized these geometric designs to create exquisite mosaics, which decorated both the exterior and interior walls of buildings. They could also be used in metalware and carpet weavings; thus, the application of these decorative designs is broad. Geometric designs were a lasting impression of the artistic West Asian heritage [8].

**Figure 8. Use of geometrical patterns, Shah Nematollah Vali shrine, Mahan, Iran (Image courtesy [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))**



The "Chahr-Bagh" concept, which comes from West Asia, is exemplified in the architecture of the "Humayun's Tomb" and the "Taj Mahal", in which the central structure is surrounded by a garden divided into four parts. The design represents the idea of "Jannat" or paradise, and the aerial view of these famous monuments can well be appreciated for this very reason. The gardens, whether accompanying these structures or standalone, as in the case of "Shalimar and Nishat" in Kashmir, are a wonderful blend of nature and design. They have central water channels, fountains, and cascading water that produces gentle sounds by flowing through intricately patterned waterways. A mix of flowers, shrubs, and fruit trees makes these gardens an even more beautiful place. The term 'paradise' itself originated from the Persian word; this also signifies the West Asian influence in the shaping of the region's garden design and architectural landscape [9].

In Islamic culture, "Jannat al-Firdaus" depicts a very lush, green garden with flowing rivers, fruit, flowers, and foliage all circumscribed by walls. The Quran describes paradise in the phrase "gardens beneath which rivers flow, a picture that resonates in most Islamic cultures, most especially in arid regions where irrigation is a necessity and thus essential for creating a garden and symbolizing life. Water, as a representation of life, was at the center of these designs. The ruler's ability to control and provide water represented his generosity and duty as a leader. Fountains, pools, and waterways were not only for aesthetics but also cooled the air, providing an environment that was peaceful, melodic, and quiet for visitors [10].

The floral motifs encountered in Islamic art have varying origins, as influences of different cultures are observed. From Byzantine art, Muslims borrowed the acanthus leaf, which normally curves in spirals or

undulating movements, and the spiral tendril of vines, filled with leaves and grape branches. Floral ornamentation was also heavily influenced by the wood carvings of nomadic tribes, which had palm leaf patterns created by complicated, free curves. Despite these varied origins, two features are distinctive about all these motifs: the repetition of the pattern and the stylization that transformed them into an abstract and unrealistic form. This abstraction drew a lot from the Arab fondness for the geometrical principles of mathematics and astronomy, combined with more traditional crafts such as weaving and basket making. Elements resulted in an aesthetic characterized by intricate repetition and abstract ornamentation, a leading design feature being that of the arabesque: delicate, interwoven patterns of floral and leaf forms covering surfaces.

With the advent of the Mughal period, representations of flora and fauna gained importance. The Mughal emperors were extremely keen on nature. One such emperor was Jahangir. He was a true naturalist, dedicating much attention to documentation through detailed paintings of plant, animal, and bird life. Flowers like roses, tulips, and lilies were often depicted, and animals like deer, lions, elephants, and birds like parrots, peacocks, and cranes. The Mughal period is especially important because it has preserved these elements of nature in the most beautiful forms, like paintings, architectural reliefs, inlay work, and Pietra dura. This period's representation of flora and fauna not only enriched Indian artistic traditions but was also a reflection of the emperor's deep appreciation for the natural world [11].

Caravanserais were one of the defining features of West Asian architecture, serving a critical function in promoting trade and travel in the region. These establishments were inns for merchants and travelers who needed accommodation and facilities along the principal trade routes. The prosperity of the West Asian region, which was largely powered by caravan trading, ensured that caravanserais would be erected in large quantities. The iwan, or halls surrounding a central courtyard with an arched gateway, was the commonly used architectural style for its construction. These caravanserais were credited to the "Seljuks" for constructing them in Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and even India, where they became integral to the medieval trade infrastructure.

The Mughal Empire followed this architectural trend, realizing the function of trading as a great source of income for them. They constructed caravanserais to facilitate the movement of commodities and comfort for travellers. Several such ruins are still visible along the old trade route from Agra to Lahore, including "Serai Doraha" and "Serai Nur Mahal". The Mughal serai in Delhi, built during the reign of Sher Shah Suri, is a fine example of this tradition that was a halting place between Delhi and Lahore. These caravanserais were crucial for fostering trade and commerce, providing rest and safety for traders and pilgrims [12].

West Asia takes pride in the architectural grandeur it possesses. This feature can be observed in continuity with regards to how the desert states of this region utilized the oil and natural gas-produced wealth to create architectural landmarks of the world's new age. Their form and style may have changed but architectural grandeur and splendour continue to remain the same as the medieval era. Miniature paintings are a very major feature of Islamic art though their roots go way back into the 13th century regarding paintings. Persia became the center of this art for miniature painting in the broader Islamic world. It is in India that this art form found its patronage when Emperor Humayun, after his return from the Safavid court of "Shah Tahmasp", brought Persian artists to his court. Akbar further promoted this art when he founded a royal atelier where prominent Persian artists such as "Mir Sayyid Ali" and "Abd as-Samad" taught Indians. [13].

The miniature painting during the Mughal Empire became a passion of kings, and studios hired many

artists who collaborated in works; each one added according to their expertise. The Mughal emperors illustrated important texts using this art, such as the "Hamzanama", "Akbarname", "Tutinama", "Razmnama", "Daastan-i-Amir Hamza", and "Anwar-i-Suhaili". These paintings were often characterized by an intricately bordered floral and calligraphy work, which is distinctive in Islamic decorative art. Renowned painters of this era included "Mansur", "Daswant", and "Basawan", whose paintings were for their minute details and lively colors and portrayal of life in the courts, wars, and portraits of royalty. These miniatures not only served as visual documentation but also as a symbol of imperial patronage and artistic achievement [14].

**Figure 9. A miniature painting from the Hamza-Nama, depicting emperor Jehangir visit an ascetic, (Image courtesy [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))**



It's so famous worldwide for splendid carpets. They are created interlacing warp and weft strands through the flat - weaving technique. Two known types are the "Ardabil carpets, designed around a circular central field to follow the Islamic proscription of animal or human representations ". On the other hand, "Safavid carpets" often feature images of animals such as lions, leopards, and birds including falcons, peacocks, and waterfowl. Both types often contain geometric and floral motifs. The carpets are still one of the region's principal export items that reflect the continuation of excellence and tradition in Persian arts and crafts and passed down from generation to generation.

**Figure 10. An Indian carpet, the Persian influence is evident in the motifs, techniques and the colour palette,(Image courtesy [www.inheriteagex.com](http://www.inheriteagex.com))**





The art of glassmaking has been in the region well before the Arab conquest. It was during the 9th and 10th century that it gained significant momentum. Persian craftsmen perfected grinding, cutting, and polishing glass, much like gem cutting. Geometric and floral patterns in their glassware were added to make it more beautiful. This vibrant and coloured glassware became a hallmark of the region especially when used to craft-stained glass windows. In Mughal India, it was the coloured, cut glassware that became representative of the elite lifestyle of the time. It created goblets, lamps and architectural elements, including the stained-glass windows, thus reflecting the refinement and artistic taste of the period. The other prominent art traditions that exist till this very day and have remained intact as well as excelled across generations and even until this date is the metalware, the leather products ceramics and engraved gems [15].

**Figure 11. Stained glass art in Nasir Ol-Mulk Mosque, Shiraz, Iran, (Image courtesy [www.thearchaeologist.org](http://www.thearchaeologist.org))**



### Objectives

- To examine the artifacts such as the "Ram in a Thicket" and the "Standard of Ur", focusing on the material and technological features drawn from distant civilizations and the cross-cultural exchanges and enhanced artistic traditions that helped to establish a blend of styles across regions.
- To discuss the primary religions of the birthplace of West Asia-the "Zoroastrianism", "Judaism", "Christianity", and "Islam"-influences on its art and concentrated efforts on architectural symbols domes, arches, and minarets. To last with calligraphy, geometric motifs, and "Char-Bagh Garden" designs among art heritage.
- To study the influence of West Asia on Mughal art, in the light of "Persian calligraphy", floral motifs, architecture and miniature paintings and study how traditional West Asian crafts continued to exist and have affected modern architecture and culture.
- Explore how the major world religions of West Asia have influenced its art, concentrating on Islamic architecture, calligraphy, geometric patterns, and garden designs, and how these have influenced global artistic traditions.
- Examine the development of the artistic activities in West Asia, focusing on socio-economic influences and technical advances; and to discuss the continuity of aesthetic traditions in ceramics, glassmaking, and metalwork.

### Findings and discussion

The article traces the vibrant historical, cultural, and artistic changes in West Asia, dwelling much on the profoundness that geography had on early civilization, especially Mesopotamia. The fertile valleys along the "Tigris and Euphrates" led to early urban centers such as "Ur", "Uruk", and "Nippur," which were

advanced in the fields of irrigation and commerce not only to boost economic strength but also to share in the cultural aspects of civilization in Central Asia, Europe, and the Mediterranean regions. These interactions played a critical role in forming the region's artistic traditions, as reflected in prehistoric rock art and Bronze Age artifacts such as the "Ram in Thicket" and the "Standard of Ur," both of which reveal creative expression and trade connections. pre-Islamic structures, including the Nabatean tombs and remains of Achaemenid culture, were a precursor to future Persian styles

Developments in Islam during the 7th century had a transforming impact on art and architecture, especially in the style of mosques, calligraphy, and geometric designs. These innovations spread well beyond West Asia, influencing structures such as India's "Taj Mahal." The study also continues with the ever-blooming Persian carpets and miniatures. Persian carpets and miniatures became standard symbols for both cultural and commercial exchange. Traditional craftsmanship, including carpet weaving, glassmaking, and ceramics, remains an important symbol of the region's enduring artistic abilities [16]. Furthermore, it looks at the idea of "Chahar-Bagh," or heaven in Islamic gardens, and its effect on the Mughal gardens' design, which often had water elements and reinforced the aesthetic and symbolic role of nature in art. Caravanserais, essential to trade and cultural exchange, illustrate the role that infrastructure played in the regions' artistic and economic ties. Above all, the research argues the strong presence of West Asia's legacy in art which now sustains in the latest modern architectures from oil money. Thus, the region has marked their influence on global religion and aesthetic traditions, particularly about architectural and ornamental legacies. The birthplace of the major world religions—"Zoroastrianism", "Judaism", "Christianity", and "Islam"—of West Asia added to its rich cultural heritage. The book concludes with the cross-cultural interactions of Persian, West Asian, and Indian art, particularly in the Mughal period, highlighting mutual enrichment of the diverse traditions [17].

## Conclusion

West Asia with its wealth of diversity and dynamic cultural heritage has played a most significant role in influencing the art and craft traditions all over the world and stamped an indelible mark upon the civilizations there. Its multifaceted artistic traditions owe much to the geographic and ethnic diversity comprising Arabs, Persians, Turks, Kurds, Bedouins, and Armenians. Diversification, combined with the strategic position of this region as an important crossroads for trade, cultural interchange, and the spread of Islam, has imbued West Asian art with a character both unique and evolving. Interactions with other civilizations have enriched West Asian art and contributed to its universal appeal and enduring relevance. Perhaps the most profound expression of cultural synthesis is in its impact on the Indian arts, specifically during the appearance of Indo-Islamic art. Merging West Asian aesthetics with Indian traditions during the Mughal period gave rise to an art form characterized by intricate architecture, delicate miniature paintings, luxurious carpets, and ornate artifacts. Iconic structures such as the Taj Mahal and other Mughal architectural masterpieces remain as a timeless testament to this creative synthesis of Persian, Central Asian, and Indian elements. Beyond its historical contributions, West Asian art remains a very important component of the region's cultural identity and economy.

Traditional crafts like carpet weaving, pottery, calligraphy, and metalwork are also part of the cultural heritage, preserving the skills and knowledge of generations. All these art forms also make a significant contribution to the present markets, symbolizing the region's ability to balance tradition with modernity. So, West Asian art celebrates diversity and exchange, bridging across cultures and time. It best illustrates its role in changing cultural evolution by influencing Indian art and global aesthetics. West Asian art is a

living legacy, yet continuously adapting to the changing cultural forces of the world, while still honouring its roots, will continue to be a vibrant force for the ages.

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