

Discover how Muslim Civilisation Influenced Today's Towns



Lush gardens



Gardens and gardening spread across Muslim civilisation from Spain to the frontiers of China. Historians describe people in the early Muslim world as enchanted by greenery, seeing civilisation itself as a garden.

Geometrical flowerbeds, shallow canals and fountains emerged as new features of gardens in the 9th century. You can still see such gardens surrounding the Alhambra in Granada and the Taj Mahal in India – along with similar features in European formal gardens designed centuries later.

Life in many cities of Muslim civilisation was a pleasurable experience. In 10th-century Cordoba in Spain, and Baghdad in Iraq, public baths, bookshops and libraries lined paved streets that were lit at night. Rubbish was collected on a regular basis and some sewage systems were underground.

Did you know?

Public baths or *hammams* in Muslim civilisation had sumptuous tiled walls, fountains and decorative pools. Men and women would bathe at different times of day, and visiting the hammam would be a social experience full of opportunities to exchange news and catch up with friends.

Architectural ideas



The architecture of Muslim civilisation demonstrated a huge variety of new ideas, many of which were re-used and adapted all over the world in important and impressive buildings such as the Alhambra in Granada, the Great Mosque of Cordoba, and many buildings of utilitarian nature such as the impressive dams of al Qayrawan.

Most arches were semicircular at first, like those of Rome and Byzantium. But architects soon adopted the pointed arch in the search for rich and varied building designs. It appears in the palace of Mshatta, built in Jordan by the Umayyads in 744, and became increasingly common. Horseshoe arches were used in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, then in North Africa and Spain.

Some historians believe the multi-arched designs of Muslim civilisation influenced Gothic architecture, particularly in decorative window shapes such as the five-lobed cinquefoil.



Town Planning



Towns laid out during Muslim civilisation were designed with local people's needs in mind. Centred around the mosque, with its crucial role in religious and civil life, nearby would be the market, where traders sold food, spices, candles and perfumes.

Away from this bustling centre, along narrow streets, you would find residential zones. Houses had inner courtyards with gardens and terraces, kept private with walls high enough to stop a camel-rider from peering over.



Sinan



A staggering 477 buildings were designed and built by Sinan during his long service under three Sultans in Turkey during the 15th century.

His Selimiye Mosque in Edirne has the tallest, most earthquake-defying, minarets in the whole of Turkey. His Suleymaniye Mosque had a filter room to clean the smoke from the numerous oil lamps inside before it was expelled into the atmosphere. The collected soot was then used in ink.

Domes



Master-architect Sinan developed techniques to construct taller and wider domed roofs than those built before his time such as Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and St Paul's in Rome.

Today, onion-shaped domes are well known in Russian Orthodox churches and were particularly popular throughout the Mughal Empire in India. In 1710, Sir Christopher Wren drew consciously on Muslim influences when he designed St Paul's Cathedral in London, with its combination of domes and towers.

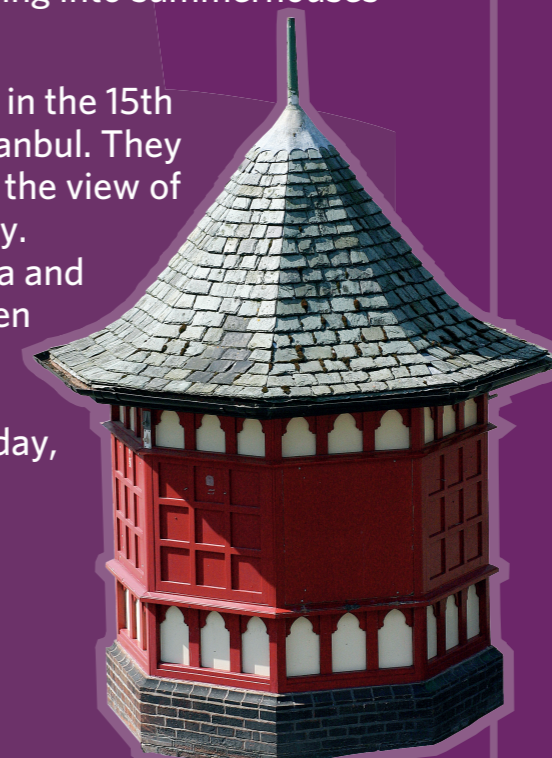


Summerhouses



The word kiosk comes from the Turkish *koshk*, which was adopted in modern Arabic and means an open-sided domed hall. These structures would originally have been side-rooms to a mosque, later evolving into summerhouses used by sultans.

The most famous *koshks* were built in the 15th century at the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. They offered a place to sit while enjoying the view of the gardens and the surrounding city. European royal families saw the idea and adopted it, using the *koshks* as garden pavilions in which to serve refreshments. Later, *koshks* evolved into the conservatories we know today, glazed and furnished for comfort.



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