

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2015 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3

The work shown is an example of a mihrab.

Analyze how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam. How would this mihrab have facilitated religious practices? (10 minutes)

Background

This question asks students to analyze the characteristics of a 14th-century tiled mihrab that was once installed in the mosque of an Islamic religious school, the Madrasa Imami in Isfahan, Iran (1354-55 C.E.). The intent of this question is to prompt students to analyze how visual characteristics reflect religious beliefs and how an architectural feature can facilitate religious practices.

As a type, the mihrab is a feature of Islamic architecture that consists of a shallow, empty niche placed into a wall to indicate the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, the holiest place in the Islamic world. Muslims turn in prayer in the direction of Mecca five times over the course of a day, with the prayer direction itself being called the qibla and the wall in which the mihrab is placed, the qibla wall. The mihrab is the central feature around which all mosques are built, and as the center of focus for Muslim prayer, the mihrab is often richly ornamented to draw attention to its presence. Variations in the style of the mihrab exist depending upon the culture in which it is created. In this case, the cobalt blue of the mihrab's tilework reflects the abundance of cobalt in Iran, as does the use of turquoise glaze, which is also common to Persian ceramics. The shape of the mihrab's wide, pointed arch is based upon architectural styles in the region. Art from the Islamic lands also has a certain cohesiveness in its preference for aniconism in works created for religious use.

A number of Islamic beliefs are reflected in the characteristics of this mihrab. This mihrab features a decorative program of intricate and extensive abstract geometric, vegetal, and calligraphic forms created through a mosaic of cut, glazed ceramic tiles laid into plaster. The repeating abstract geometric forms that seem to extend in infinite patterns, known as tessellations, are one of the most recognizable decorative aspects of Islamic art, and students may address them as a representing unity, harmony, and a belief in divine order and expansiveness. The vegetal motifs, including the use of a jointed patterns created from arabesque vines, are a reference to the lush garden of paradise awaiting the believer. The calligraphic forms are verses from the Qur'an written in the cursive *muhaqqaq* script on the outer frame of the mihrab, verses from the hadith written in an angular *kufic* script framing the niche, and a blessing and statement "The mosque is the abode of the pious" in *kufic* and *thuluth* scripts the center of the niche. The presence of these inscriptions in this mihrab reflects a belief in and reverence for the holy book of Islam and the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed and also references both the education and literacy of Islamic cultures and the flourishing book arts created during this period in Iran.

While it is often thought that Islam forbids the depiction of the figure and, in particular, the Prophet Mohammed, the Qur'an itself has no explicit prescription against figuration, only idolatry. However, the hadith, a collection of teachings, deeds, and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed written down after the Prophet's death, expresses concerns with the artist attempting to mimic the creative role of God as well as with the idolatry of graven images. The concerns with idolatry arose in the polytheistic environment in which Islam developed and flourished. As such, figurative images are condemned in Islamic rituals and in holy texts; however, figuration does appear elsewhere. Because this mihrab is associated with a religious ritual — prayer — the decorative program of the mihrab eschews figuration.

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Question 3 (continued)

Additionally, students may discuss the placement and orientation of the mihrab as an indication of the belief in the holiness of Mecca as the sacred center of Islam and a reminder of the *hajj*. While the mihrab is certainly not a symbolic depiction of Mohammed, students may state that a mihrab serves as a distant reminder of the first mosque at the Prophet Mohammed's house in Medina, where he would have stood before the faithful for prayer.

In terms of religious practices, students may refer to specific features of all mihrabs as they relate to the practice of the Five Pillars of Islam: sole devotion to Allah through the Prophet Mohammed's teachings (*shahadah*); ritual prayer towards Mecca five times a day (*salat*); giving of alms to the poor (*zakat*); fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (*sawm*); and pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*) at least once in a person's lifetime.

Students may also analyze the mihrab's function in relation to the practice of prayer. The intended purpose and location of the mihrab along a qibla wall enables worshippers to orient themselves in prayer toward Mecca five times a day, in addition to the Friday mosque's communal prayers given by an imam from a minbar to the side.

Students may correctly surmise that this mihrab displays inscriptions from the Qur'an and therefore promotes the central belief in the practice of daily worship of Allah, and the traditional recitation from Islam's sacred text. Students may also suggest that some of the inscriptions relate to the hadith. If students know the content of the inscriptions on this particular mihrab, from the Qur'an (sura 9:18-22) and the hadith, they may comment in detail about how these inscriptions reinforce specific practices in Islam: the Five Pillars; the building, maintenance and support of mosques; the support of pilgrims and the Al-Haram Mosque in Mecca; and the belief in the promise of paradise.

Note that many of the beliefs and practices of Islam are closely related. For example, the Five Pillars of Islam can be addressed as a belief in the tenets of the faith as well as a series of practices. The successful response will clearly state when it is referring to an aspect of Islam as a belief or as a practice.

Two Tasks for Students

1. Analyze how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam.
2. Explain how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices.

Points to Remember

This question asks students to combine skills of both formal and contextual analysis to analyze a specific work of art. While aspects of this question may be answered accurately in general terms, it is essential for students to analyze specific characteristics of the mihrab shown to earn full credit.

The highest score a response can earn if it does not both analyze how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam and explain how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices is 2 points.

Students are not required to identify the mihrab shown, although some students may include such details in their responses.

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Question 3 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

4 points

Response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response clearly and accurately analyzes how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam and explains how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices. The response may include minor errors that do not have a meaningful effect on the analysis.

3 points

Response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response accurately analyzes how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam and explains how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices. However, the response may be somewhat unbalanced, with either a stronger analysis of how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam or a stronger explanation of how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices, although both are represented. The response may include minor errors that have some effect on the analysis.

2 points

Response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response accurately addresses how characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam and explains how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices, but the response is less analytical than descriptive. It may be overly general, simplistic, or unbalanced. For example, the discussion of how characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam may be mostly accurate, whereas the discussion of how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices may include errors that affect the response.

OR

The response clearly and accurately analyzes how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam or explains how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices, but not both.

NOTE: This is the highest score a response can earn if it does not both analyze how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam and explain how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices.

1 point

Response demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response demonstrates some general familiarity with the issues raised by the question by discussing how characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam and/or how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices. However, the response is weak, overly descriptive, and/or contains significant errors.

0 points

Response demonstrates no discernible knowledge and understanding of the question.

The student attempts to respond, but the response makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements. The score of 0 points includes crossed-out words, personal notes, and drawings.

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3A 1/2

ART HISTORY
SECTION II—Part B
Time—1 hour
6 Questions

Directions: The questions in this part are based on color images and/or text. The corresponding images are shown in the orange booklet for Section II: Free Response, Part B, Images. You have one hour to answer the six questions in this part, and you are advised to spend 10 minutes on each question. The proctor will announce when each 10-minute interval has elapsed, but you may proceed freely from one question to the next. You must answer each question on the lined pages in the exam booklet.

Read the questions carefully and take time to think about what the questions ask. Formulate your answers before you begin to write. You can receive full credit only by directly answering the questions.

Note: For questions involving two images, when you are not asked specifically to name the artists and/or titles of the works, you may refer to the work on the left as (L) and the work on the right as (R).

- 3. The work shown is an example of a mihrab.
 - Analyze how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam. How would this mihrab have facilitated religious practices? (10 minutes)

Islamic art is marked by the use of calligraphy and geometric patterns in favor of the figural representation common in Western art. This is because the creation of figural art, though not specifically prohibited in the Quran, was seen as a form of hubris, as Muslims believed that only God had the power to create living animals. In this mihrab, a calligraphic border frames a pattern of floral motifs intertwined in complex geometry. More calligraphy, considered the highest form of art in Islamic culture, can be seen in the pointed arch and the base of the mihrab niche. The calligraphy reflects the belief in the beauty of the written word of God, Allah in Islam, and the intertwined floral motifs demonstrate the belief that geometric patterns rather than depictions of animals were the proper decoration for the Islamic world.

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3A 2/2

The mihrab is a niche in the wall of a mosque that points in the direction of Mecca. Mecca is an important holy city in Islam because it is the site of the religion's foundation. The Hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca, is an important rite in Islam, but worshippers at ~~the~~ a mosque would have used this mihrab to identify the direction in which they should pray several times a day.

ART HISTORY
SECTION II—Part B

3 B, 11

Time—1 hour

6 Questions

Directions: The questions in this part are based on color images and/or text. The corresponding images are shown in the orange booklet for Section II: Free Response, Part B, Images. You have one hour to answer the six questions in this part, and you are advised to spend 10 minutes on each question. The proctor will announce when each 10-minute interval has elapsed, but you may proceed freely from one question to the next. You must answer each question on the lined pages in the exam booklet.

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Note: For questions involving two images, when you are not asked specifically to name the artists and/or titles of the works, you may refer to the work on the left as (L) and the work on the right as (R).

3. The work shown is an example of a mihrab.

Analyze how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam. How would this mihrab have facilitated religious practices? (10 minutes)

Mihrabs are always pointed towards Mecca so that when you pray at one you are praying towards Mecca, ~~the holiest~~ a very holy place of Islam. Covering the mihrab are tessellations, patterns that interlock with itself and continues infinitely. This reflects the infinite nature of Allah. Also covering the Mihrab is calligraphy. Calligraphy teaches Islamic ideals and values, but also makes god's words beautiful. There are no representations of god in this mihrab because Islam is against having icons or images of god.

ART HISTORY
SECTION II—Part B
Time—1 hour
6 Questions

30 1/1

Directions: The questions in this part are based on color images and/or text. The corresponding images are shown in the orange booklet for Section II: Free Response, Part B, Images. You have one hour to answer the six questions in this part, and you are advised to spend 10 minutes on each question. The proctor will announce when each 10-minute interval has elapsed, but you may proceed freely from one question to the next. You must answer each question on the lined pages in the exam booklet.

Read the questions carefully and take time to think about what the questions ask. Formulate your answers before you begin to write. You can receive full credit only by directly answering the questions.

Note: For questions involving two images, when you are not asked specifically to name the artists and/or titles of the works, you may refer to the work on the left as (L) and the work on the right as (R).

3. The work shown is an example of a mihrab.

Analyze how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam. How would this mihrab have facilitated religious practices? (10 minutes)

The primary decorative element of this mihrab are calligraphy texts from the ^{Koran} ~~Quran~~, the holy book of Islam. The ~~Koran~~ forbids the use of physical representats that may be used as deities of worship, therefore a majority of Islam one is primarily decorated w/ calligraphy text.

In a mosque, the mihrab would be positioned facing Meccah so that worshippers would be able to properly position them-selves on the floor in the direction of Meccah that the mihrab exemplified.

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2015 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3

Overview

This question asked students to analyze the characteristics of a 14th-century tiled mihrab that was once installed in the mosque of an Islamic religious school, the Madrasa Imami in Isfahan, Iran (1354–55 C.E.). The intent of this question was to prompt students to analyze how visual characteristics reflect religious beliefs and how an architectural feature can facilitate religious practices.

Sample: 3A

Score: 4

The response clearly and accurately analyzes how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam. The response identifies specific forms of decoration of the mihrab: “a calligraphic border frames a pattern of floral motifs intertwined in complex geometry.” The response analyzes how these characteristics reflect the belief that “figural art, though not specifically prohibited in the Qur’an, was seen as a form of hubris” because “only God had the power to create animals.” The analysis of how the mihrab reflects beliefs continues as the response describes the calligraphy written in and around the niche as “the highest form of art in Islamic culture for its representation of the words of God.” The response also addresses the belief in Mecca’s holiness, identifying it as “the site of the religion’s foundation.” The response then explains how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices. The response states that a mihrab in the wall of a mosque “points in the direction of Mecca” and explains that the practice of the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca is “an important rite of Islam.” The response further explains how the mihrab facilitates Islamic practices, stating that it identifies “the direction in which they [Muslims] should pray several times a day.” In this way, the response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

Sample: 3B

Score: 3

The response accurately analyzes how specific characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam. The response begins with a brief acknowledgement that Mecca is a “very holy place of Islam” but does not elaborate on the reasons why. The response then analyzes how the tessellations “interlock . . . and continue infinitely,” reflecting the belief in the “infinite nature of Allah.” The response analyzes the calligraphy on the mihrab, stating that it teaches “Islamic ideals and values” and makes God’s “words beautiful.” The response concludes the analysis of how the mihrab reflects Islamic beliefs by acknowledging that the lack of representations of the divine is “because Islam is against having icons or images” of God. While the response provides a thorough analysis of how characteristics of the mihrab reflect Islamic beliefs, the response is unbalanced in that it has a weaker explanation of how the mihrab would have facilitated religious practices. The response explains how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices by briefly stating that mihrabs point towards Mecca so that “when you pray at one you are praying towards Mecca.” In this way, the response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

Sample: 3C

Score: 2

The response accurately addresses how characteristics of this mihrab reflect the beliefs of Islam. The response accurately states that the primary decorative element of the mihrab is calligraphy from the Qur’an, “the holy book of Islam.” However, the response is overly general. The response does not explain how the calligraphic text is depicted on this mihrab. The response does not elaborate on the possible meaning of the calligraphy or how the calligraphy could facilitate religious practices. The response does address the lack of “physical representats [sic] that may be used as deities of worship” as forbidden in the Qur’an as the reason for the use of calligraphic decoration. While the plural wording of this sentence makes it unclear whether the

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2015 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3 (continued)

response is referring to multiple representations of the same, single deity or multiple representations of various deities — perhaps referring to Islam’s rejection of polytheism — the response does demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of a prohibition against iconic imagery. The response then explains how this mihrab would have facilitated religious practices by stating that it helps worshippers “properly position them-selves on the floor in the direction of Meccah [*sic*].” This is an accurate explanation of how a mihrab facilitates religious practices. In this way, the response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.