

Dates of Islamic patterns

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1 Introduction

It has been pointed out that the addition of dates to the information about patterns would make the web site much more useful. This note points out some of the issues involved.

Dates appear in two forms: those which are ‘informal’ derived from the specified source, and those which are processed as ‘Islamic dates’ by the database system. Examples of informal dates are *St Maria Maggiore, Rome 431-1750* and many dates of Chinese ornament from [\[dye\]](#).

Many dates already appear in David Wade’s web site [\[4\]](#) so that adding at least some dates is feasible. Many other sources are available, such as [\[2, 1\]](#). Only dates of Islamic patterns are considered below.

2 Issues arising from dating patterns

Location. The exact location is often not well recorded. This can occur even when a photo is available from the photographer. Given that the site itself is known, this may not be a barrier to providing a date. Of course, no date is given if no location is known.

There is a problem with ensuring some consistency in the spelling of sites and also with the dates. This will take time to resolve. The use of Archnet [\[1\]](#) is helpful in this regard.

Date format. Actually, dates are stored internally in AD years or as a range of years. Since the dates considered here are only those of Islamic designs, the dates are also presented in AH format. Slightly different formats are used according to the actual dates:

- (1305AD, 704AH) an exact date.
- (985-1021AD, 374-411AH) a range.
- (14th century AD) a century, no AH date as centuries overlap.
- (1108-9AD, 501-2AH) a small range.

Restoration. Many sites have been subject to restoration work. The assumption made here is that the original pattern has been restored faithfully.

However, many sites like the Fatimid mosques in Cairo have been extended and changed over long period so dates cannot be reliably be given to the patterns.

Photo. Direct access to photos are not provided on this site, but links are made to <http://patterninislamicart.com>, and the Victoria and Albert collections web site. Records of photos are retained, but not released due to copyright reasons. It appears that for the majority of patterns, a photo is available with a location.

Site changes. When a site has been changed over a long period (say, more than 100 years), no date is usually recorded. Examples of this are for the Great Mosques of Damascus and Aleppo.

Inscription. Fortunately, some patterns have an inscription giving details of the object allowing an accurate date to be established.

We have an interesting example of this in the minbar of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo. This is on the web site as: [Bourgoin, Plate 143](#). The high quality of the woodwork might indicate a restored minbar. This is indeed the case since the V&A records shows that they have part of the original dated 1296. The V&A documentation also shows that the modern restoration is dated 1845-1869.

Accuracy. It is rare for historic dates to be accurate. The cases here have many problems noted above. Hence all the dates on the web site should be regarded with caution. For this reason the prefix *circa* is not used since it could be applied almost everywhere.

The Alhambra. Tony Lee has provided some dates extracted from a careful reading of [3]. Otherwise, the rule above would imply no dates being given.

References

- [1] A major web site: <http://archnet.org>
- [2] C.E.Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* Edinburgh University Press; 2nd New edition of Revised edition (29 Sept. 2004)
- [3] Antonio Fernández-Puertas *The Alhambra: Volume I—from the ninth century to Yusuf I (1354)*. SAQI Books. 1999. ISBN 0863564666
- [4] David Wade, *Patterns in Islamic Art*. The web site: <http://patterninislamicart.com>.