

# **THE CONFLUENCE OF ART, MATHS, AND GOD.**

**Sacred Geometry in Traditional Tilework Across the Muslim World**

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# GOD AND GEOMETRY

Geometry is a key feature in Islamic Art and Architecture, along with calligraphy and vegetal patterns. The Masters and the Ustad's of old designed for remembrance, as opposed to distraction, as we do today.

The underlying value behind designing for remembrance is the idea and the philosophy that Allah is everywhere, within all of us. As a result of which, in one way or another, that it is befitting of us to create what pays homage to our Creator. Moreover, one can only create something timeless and immortal, by connecting it to the source of all life itself: God.

This raises two questions: why did they specifically choose geometry, and how does the Sacred reflect in it? The answers to both of these questions relate to both, the form and function, the innate and superficial qualities of geometric shapes and patterns.



To begin with, Geometry follows rules, and principles; in Muslim tradition, discipline is highly valued, for it is the way of those with Taqwa. Rationality and spirituality go hand-in-hand.

Secondly, the hierarchy of this Dunya begins with Allah, and ends with His creations; He is one simple, eternal unit. Geometry builds upon tessellations and patterns of simple, single units: squares, circles and triangles.

Moreover, geometric patterns on a grid create an illusion of infinity; thereby reflecting the greatest attribute of Allah in the art.





# BELIEF AND PATTERNS

The first of these beliefs is that there is beauty in all of God's creations. By using shapes inspired by His creations, we bring beauty to our work.

This links up to the second belief, which is that beauty is not superficial, it comes from within.

Lastly, to quote the Quran, "Nothing, including you, is made in vain, or made worthless (3:190-191)."

It means that every shape and form which exists has a purpose, and it is up to us, to find that purpose in the best of ways.

Moreover, the creation of symbols is more of an intuitive process, rather than a conscious one. As a result, all symbols and patterns attract the eye, for they hold within them, the energy of the mind, and the power of revelation.



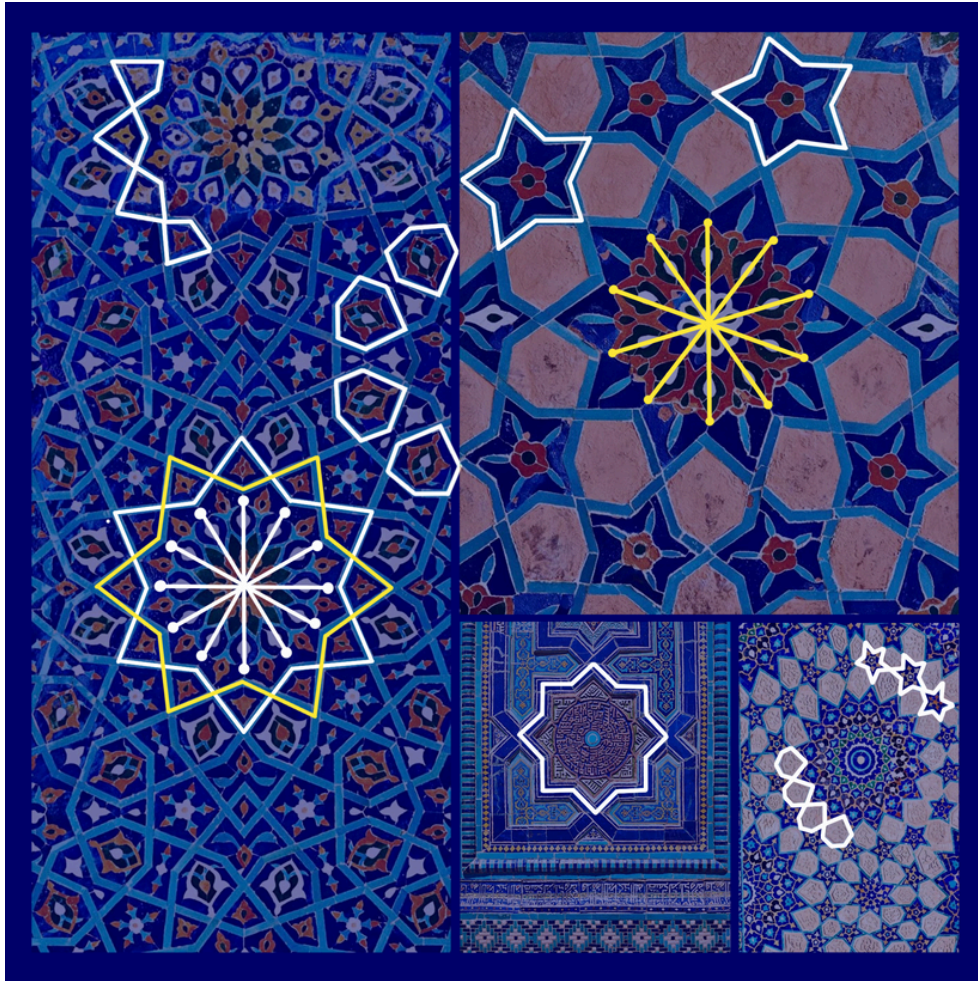
# KASHIKARI: PAKISTAN

With Pakistani Kashikari at the heart of the visual exploration, this project looks into geometric shapes in traditional ceramics from around the Muslim World, and at how they maintain an overarching association with Islamic art, whilst simultaneously keeping a unique cultural identity intact.

In Pakistan, Kashikari is practiced on tiles and pottery, with Sindh and Southern Punjab being the primary hubs for the craft. With blue as the predominant colour, it uses a mix of both, geometric, and floral patterns. In tilework specifically, geometric shapes form the base layer, and the florals take their place in an overlay of sorts.







# MAJOLICA: UZBEKISTAN

Further North, in Central Asia, similar patterns are also found in Uzbek Majolica Tilework. They are also known as Kashikari Urdu and Persian. It is plausible that Blue Tiles from modern-day Pakistan and Uzbekistan developed distinct visual identities over time, but are sub-genres of the same Persianate craft of Blue Ceramics.

In Islamic tradition, blue, the colour of the sea and the sky, represents life itself, and the expanses of this Dunya. In Persianate tradition, blue was a very popular choice for palaces and places of worship, because it was associated to divine wisdom and royalty.

However, it is also worth noting, that the Blue Tiles of Uzbekistan include far less florals than those from Pakistan. There is a notable increase in the use of straight lines, and polygons. On occasion, chiselled stonework is also incorporated, giving it a far more straight, as opposed to flowy feel.





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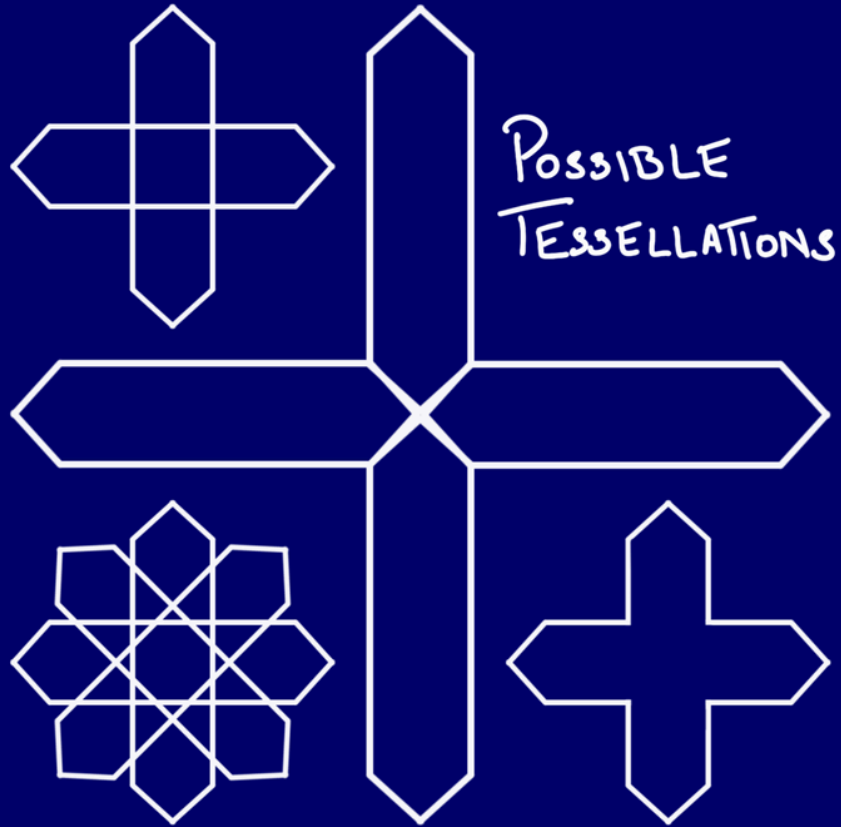
Halfway across the world, in North Africa, we find these shapes in Moroccan Zellige, the earliest samples of which date back to the Almoravid Dynasty, in the 10th Century. Kashikari is also believed to have originated during the same time period in Iran, with evidence of Blue Pottery dating to the Timurid Era.

It is worth noting that whilst Zellige feels floral and flowy, it is owed largely to the circular arrangement of shapes. Also unique to Zellige are multi-fold flower patterns, which ranged from anywhere between six to over fifty! As far as shapes alone are concerned, polygons used in Zellige follow mathematical rules and symmetry in the strictest sense of the words, in comparison with other arts.

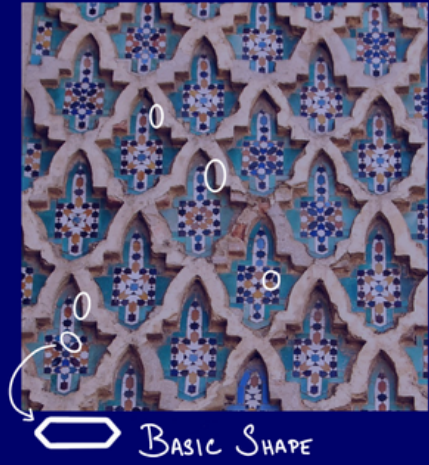
Moreover, whilst Kashikari primarily relies on the blue, turquoise and white, with hints of yellow, pink, or natural terracotta clay on occasion, Zellige uses a variety of colours besides these, including orange, green, rich browns, and quite a fair bit of red.



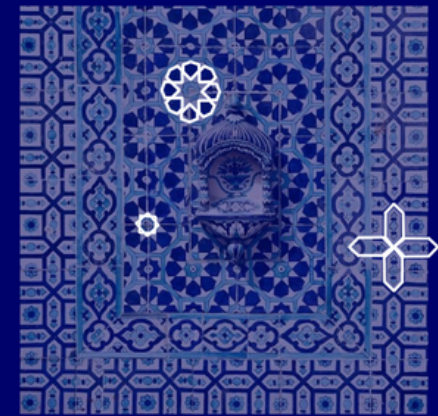
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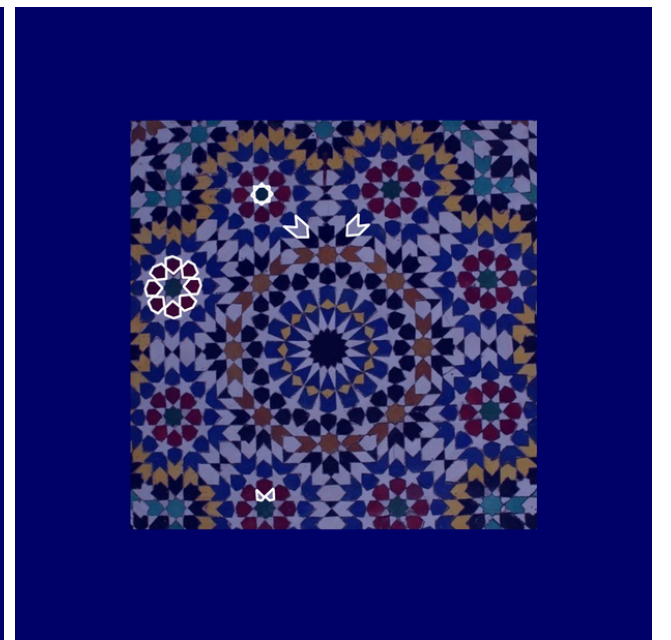
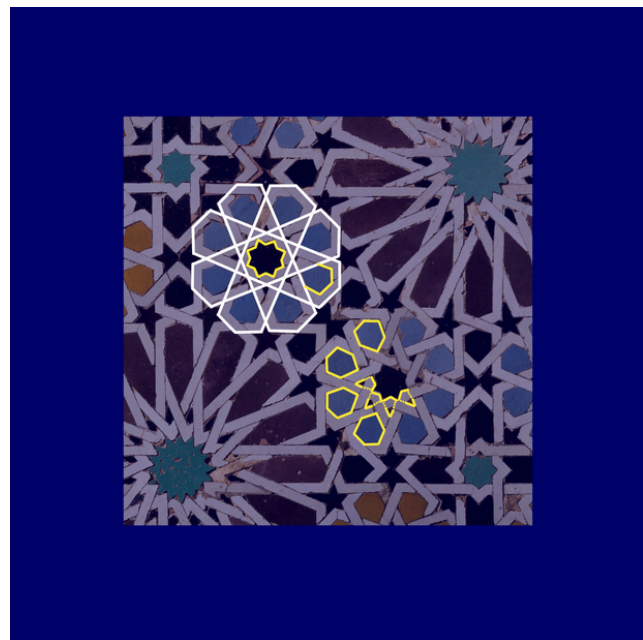
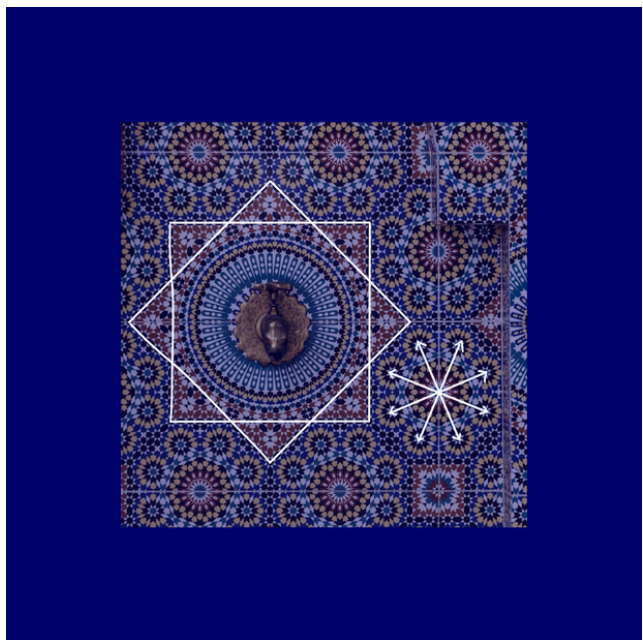


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# IZNIK TILES:

Moving North, in Turkey, tilework once again overwhelmingly used blue, azure and white. It retained an overall sense of geometry but was based primarily on florals and vegetal patterns. The city of Iznik is particularly known for its blue ceramics, including both tiles and pottery.

It is likely to have been brought to Turkey by the Anatolian Seljuks, who brought with them several crafts from the Iranian plateau. It was the patronage of the Ottoman courts which spurred the growth of the ceramics industry in Iznik.

Historically, the most popular colour for glazing Iznik tiles is turquoise. However, cobalt blue, eggplant violet, and sometimes black were also used. Most designs also feature a hint of red.





# KASHIKARI: IRAN



Moving further East once again, to Iran, Persian Kashikari exhibits a blend of florals and polygons. Also known as Kashani, the craft is believed to have originated in the city of Kashan.

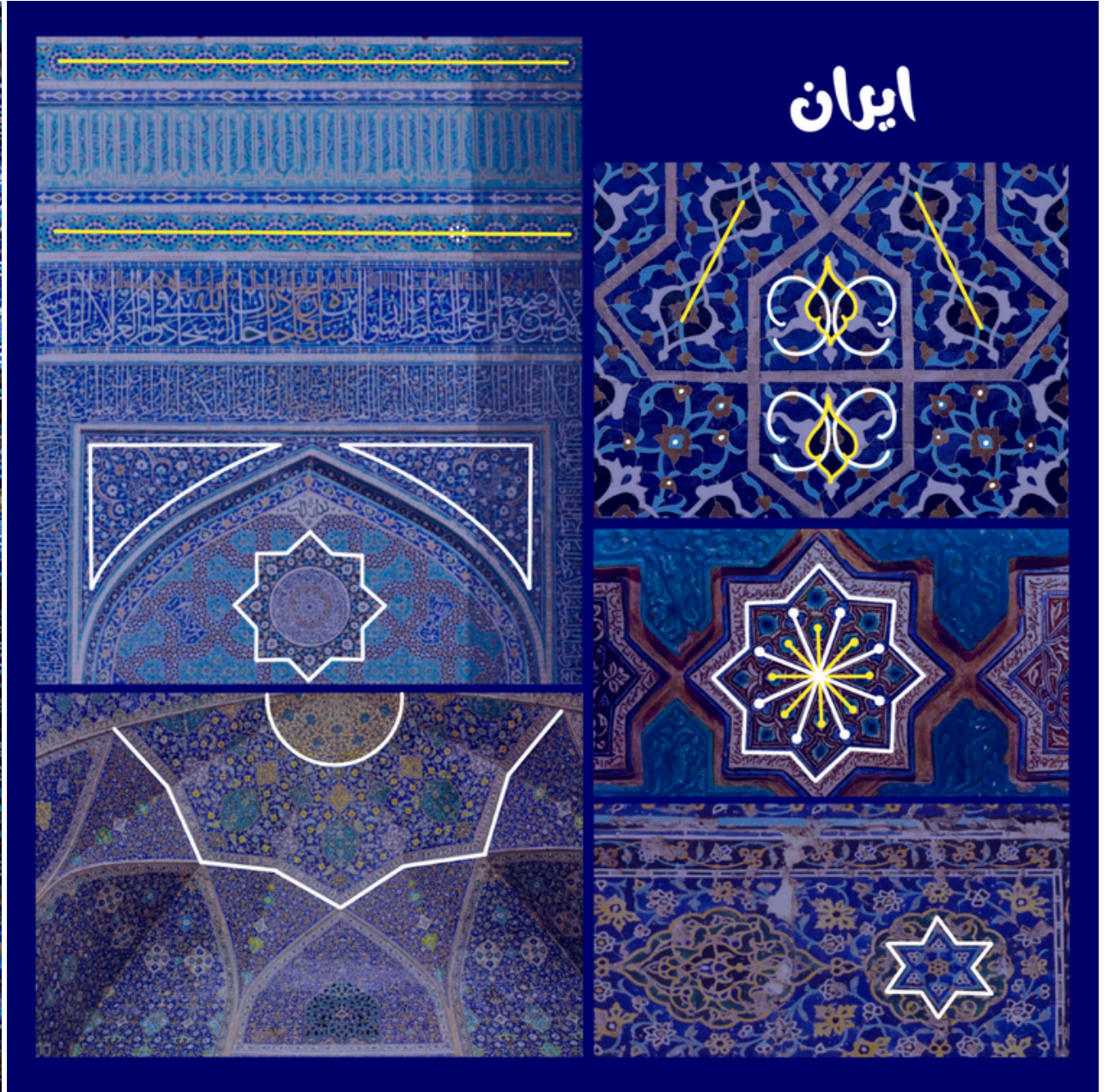
Historians suggest that this art form dates back to the Achaemenid era. Under the Sassanids, enameled tile-making continued with minor variations in patterns.

With the advent of Islam, particularly during the Safavid and Timurid periods, Kashani tiles evolved further in style and became popular for both their aesthetic and functional qualities, especially in religious buildings.

In Iranian Kashikari, one finds rows of strict geometric shapes, reminiscent of Zellige, arched symmetrical floral panels, like those in tilework from Iznik, and vegetal patterns painted atop geometric motifs, like Pakistan.

The diversity is truly befitting to the home of the craft.





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