The Gardens of Islam: Earthly Paradise Revisited

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“The Muslims emphasized the injunctions to dress the garden and keep it—man the steward. They developed the belief that man could make a garden of nature. Paradise could be created on earth by wise men and realized by artists”

Design with Nature

Ian McHarg, 1969
What is an Islamic Garden?

A landscape which is designed:

- With specific intentions in mind
- Applying certain ideological Principles and objectives rooted in the Islamic faith and the Muslim culture
- using distinct design elements
When was the typical Islamic garden Developed?

The Islamic Empire spanned from the 7th to the 16th century. From the establishment of the 1st Islamic State in Medina to the peak of the Ottoman Empire, the Islamic civilization dominated a millennium, encompassed half the world, and shaped the history of the human race.
Is there any difference between "Islamic" and "Muslim"?

"Islamic" refers to what pertains to Islam as a religion, a body of knowledge, ideology, and a system of life and ideals.

"Muslim" refers to the actual way of life in what are conventionally known as Muslim countries or Muslim people.
Where can one find examples of the Islamic garden?

- Western Asia: Iran, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula.
- South-Eastern Asia: India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan.
- The Middle East: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia.
- Europe: Spain (Granada, Cordova, Seville and Toledo).
What are the typical design elements of an Islamic garden?

- Courtyards
- Water features
- Trees
- Flowers
- Calligraphy on Walls
For what purpose did the designer of the Islamic garden use water?

- To emphasize architectural elements
- To add dynamic quality
- To mask outdoor noises
- To provide pleasing sounds
- To irrigate plants
- To moisturize the dry environment
- To soothe the dusty environment
What are the factors that may have influenced the design of the historic Islamic gardens?

- Earlier civilizations
- The Holly Qur’an: Gardens are mentioned 164 times.
- The Sunnah: Traditions of Prophet Muhammed
- The arid environment
The Holy Qur'an: Chapter 27-60

“God has created the heavens and the earth
And He sends you down rain from the sky
Yea, with it we cause to grow well-planted orchards
Full of beauty and delight”
The Holy Qur'an: Chapter 55

“For those who fear the day of judgment, there will be two gardens” (55-46)

“Abounding in branches” (55-48)

“In them (each) will be Two Springs flowing freely” (55-50)

“In them will be fruits of every kind, two and two” (55-52)
How has the Islamic faith influenced the landscape designer?

- Balance between physical and metaphysical
- Multiple use
- Diversity
- Beauty
- Moderation
- Contextuality
- Individualism
Balancing the Physical and Metaphysical

1. The concept of unity
2. The belief of the seen and unseen
3. The harmony among god, humans, and nature
4. The duality of humans: material and spirit
The multiple use
1. Accommodating recreational activities
2. Life-sustaining oasis
3. Displaying beauty and scenic qualities

Diversity
1. Science and art
2. Natural and urban
3. Tangible and symbolic
4. Light and shadow
Beauty

1. Arts were integrated into life
2. Beauty without arrogance
3. Inner richness vs. Humble appearance

“God is beautiful and he loves beauty”

(Prophet Muhammad)
- **Moderation**
  - Reason vs. Nature
  - Spiritual vs. Physical
  - Rational vs. Artistic

  "**We have indeed created you a middle nation**" (The Qur'an)
Contextuality

1. Zoning in city planning
2. Harmony with nature and respect of God-made environment
3. Harmony with people and respect of ones neighbor

“A system of planning is evident from the very many bazaars, markets, squares, streets, and other localities”
Individualism

1. Humans are responsible
2. No intermediary
3. Free will
4. The right decision is unique in space and time
5. Regional variation
“In this perusal there are two clear paradoxes. The same Semitic people, living in the same arid and hostile environment, deriving their religious views from the same source in genesis, developing two quite distinct views of man-nature.

The first, presented in Islam, emphasized that man could make paradise on earth, make the desert bloom, that he was the creator and steward. The Jews and later Christians emphasized conquest…”

Ian McHarg

*Design with Nature, 1969*