

The “Arts of Islam” exhibition: Will Abu Dhabi be a centre of Islamic Culture?

> Abu Dhabi-
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At Abu Dhabi in March I viewed the “Arts of Islam” exhibition in Gallery 1 of the Emirates Palace (23 January to 22 April 2008).

Under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the prime intention is to raise awareness of Islamic Art, both religious and secular. Similar exhibitions will follow to create Abu Dhabi as a world centre of Islamic culture. Spaciously displayed in air conditioned halls, 500 artefacts from the Khalili collection show the rich artistic heritage from the 7th to 20th centuries including coverage from China, Spain, central Asia and Africa. A panoramic watercolour (1843) is the earliest known visual record of Mecca. As a Christian I have always admired the artistry of Islamic script and it was a pleasure to see a 19th century banner from Egypt and many Qur’anic texts in rich colours, discovering how over the centuries illumination of the scripts became more elaborate.

Seven other zones cover pilgrimage, science, the medieval period, early Islam, Baghdad, the Mongols and the Age of Empire. It is difficult to select personal highlights. Interest in carving led me to detailed examination of a 15th century tomb, a Byzantine white marble pillar circa 11th century and a standing tomb stone in the same material (India 17th century). I was impressed with the 19th century gold/diamond necklace and also the turban of the same period from Nepal. The compass and sundial from Istanbul (1748) looked contemporary enough to be



Mecca (C. 1030 AD)

مكة المكرمة (عام 1030 م)



Qur'an (1030 AD)

قرآن کریم (عام 1030 م)

used today as did the gold saddle from China (1200). There is no doubt that Abu Dhabi is being increasingly recognised as a global cultural centre and that this exhibition is a prelude to even greater things. ■



Casket (Iraq, 1200-50 AD) خزائنة (العراق. ق 1200-50 م)