The Golden Age of Islam

The Golden Age of Islam was a period between 750 and 1250 CE when Arab culture and influence were greatest. The Islamic world extended from West Africa, across India, and as far as South China. Muslim leaders were very interested in discovering new knowledge in the areas they controlled. These men were responsible for many important developments in art, science and medicine. This essay will examine the artistic achievements of this time in architecture, calligraphy and poetry.

The rapid growth of the Islamic world during the Golden Age created great change in architecture. Beautiful palaces were built to show the wealth of the sultans who lived in them. In addition, Arab architects began to use local styles and traditions in the buildings. This could be seen in the different designs of mosques in different places (Watkins, 1999). Also, many ‘khans’ or resting houses, were built for travellers who bought and sold goods throughout the Muslim world. These ‘khans’ were built using new architectural styles (Islamic Golden Age, 2006).

Calligraphy, which means ‘beautiful writing’, also became important during the Golden Age. At that time, Islamic artists were not allowed to include images of people in their art. Because of this, they used basic shapes, such as squares, circles and rectangles, and beautifully written phrases. This calligraphy was used in holy books and on mosques and everyday objects (Watkins, 1999). Often, this writing was taken from the Qur’an, therefore, it was not understood simply as art. It contained the feelings and ideas of Islam too.

During the Golden Age, poetry was very popular in the Muslim world. According to Professor Mann of Kings College London, the first poems were created by the ‘bedu’ who traveled the desert. Later, professional poets began to perform in the streets. They also wrote poems for the rich (Mann, 2003). One of the most famous types of poems from this time is called the ‘ghazal’. It is a love poem. Another well-known type is the ‘rob’ai’. This poem has four-lines and its first, second and fourth lines rhyme. The best example of ‘rob’ai’ is called the ‘Ruba’iyat of Omar Khayyam’ (Islamic Golden Age, 2006).

This essay has explored three areas of artistic expression; architecture, calligraphy and poetry. For more than 1,000 years the Islamic world was the global leader in arts by designing beautiful buildings, creative works of calligraphy and poetry that is still read and enjoyed today. Islamic art from the golden age is still valued by curators and academics throughout the world. This Golden Age was a significant era in Islamic civilization as it was a time of great creativity and artistic expression, which later inspired ideas and artwork in other civilizations.