

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

One faith, many denominations – is that always perceptible?

WHAT IS THE ISSUE HERE?

A prayer niche (aka mihrab in Arabic) can be found in every mosque around the world as it shows believers the direction of prayer, namely the direction of Mecca. Prayer niches (referred to as maharib in Arabic plural form) are as diverse as the cultures and religious communities in Islam. All have a common basic form. The unity in the diversity of Muslims is exemplified by two prayer niches in present-day Turkey and in present-day Iran.



IN TOTAL 110 MINUTES



THE EXERCISE CONSISTS OF FOUR PARTS



THREE PERSONS OR MORE



SHAPE ANALYSIS
DRAWING ORNAMENTS,
CUTTING AND PLACING
CALLIGRAPHIC WRITING



DIVERSITY
SELF-CONFIDENCE
INTERCULTURE

How is a prayer niche designed?



AIM

Observe and experience:

- How prayer niches are structured
- That prayer niches are designed differently

Acknowledge that there are no significant differences between the niches, although one niche originates from a Sunni context and the other from a Shiite context.

HOW IS THIS DONE?

The images of prayer niches are placed in a visible location (or potentially projected onto the wall by using a data projector). The participants draw the rough structure and division of the niches on paper which is handed out to them. In the meantime, questions concerning both objects can be written down. The drawings are collected and placed or hung at the object. Subsequently, everyone/each participant may give an account of what invoked the respective impression of the object. Together the group attempts to find answers to their questions, whereby the exact description of the shapes, colours, motifs and ornaments can help. Also, the information sheets prayer niche, calligraphy, ornamentation and aesthetics can be utilised to evaluate the questions, where individual elements of the niche are precisely explained.

EVALUATION

You all again exchange and communicate with each other in the whole group:

Describe the structure of a niche in your own words. What about the significance can be derived from the design? Which questions arose for you personally?



APPROX. 20 MINUTES



THREE PERSONS OR MORE

ACTION SHEET A, PAPER, PENS,
WALL OR BLACKBOARD,
ADHESIVE TAPE



INFORMATION SHEETS:
PRAYER NICHE OF KONYA,
PRAYER NICHE OF KASHAN,
PRAYER NICHES, ORNAMENTA-
TION AND AESTHETICS,
CALLIGRAPHY

Which detail interests you?



AIM

- Engaging with basic forms of geometry and calligraphy
- Experiencing the correlation between function and design



45 MINUTES



THREE PERSONS OR MORE

ACTION SHEET B:
PENS, TRACING PAPER

ACTIONSHEET C:
COMPASSES, RULERS, PENCILS,
COLOURED PENCILS



ACTION SHEET D:
(CALLIGRAPHY) PENS, INFOR-
MATION SHEET CALLIGRAPHY
ACTION SHEET E:
COLOURFUL DIN A4 PAPER,
RULERS, SCISSORS, PENCILS

TO CONTINUE

You have now looked at the two niches intensively and attempted to understand their structure, which now allows you to focus more intensely on two frequently occurring details: The inscriptions and ornaments.

The prayer niche indicates the direction of prayer in front of which the congregation prays. Its function thus represents one of the five pillars of Islam: Prayer.

The design of the prayer niches reflects this religious function in two ways: The Koranic verses originate from the revelation, the word of God. And the ornaments can be interpreted as a reference to the beauty of creation.

The challenge now is to comprehend these two forms of design.

HOW IS THIS DONE?

The participants utilise the action sheets to understand the calligraphic and geometric shapes of the niches.

The group leadership can form smaller groups depending on the size of the group.

One or multiple actions can be taken depending on how much time is available.



Overview of the actions



ACTION SHEET B **PLANT ORNAMENT IN THE PRAYER NICHE OF KASHAN**

Painted ornaments are copied with tracing paper.

ACTION SHEET C **STAR ORNAMENT IN THE PRAYER NICHE OF KONYA**

A tile ornament is reproduced using a compass, ruler and pens.

ACTION SHEET D **WRITE YOUR NAME USING ARABIC LETTERS!**

Various font variants are tried and tested.

ACTION SHEET E **DIAMOND SHAPED ORNAMENT IN THE PRAYER NICHE OF KONYA**

The variety of patterns is explored using a geometric element.

EVALUATION

You all exchange and communicate with each other in the whole group:

What did you notice when copying and refine the design elements?

What ideas or questions do you have?

How would your dream niche be?



TO CONTINUE

After having focused intensively on the two prayer niches from the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art, you can now design your own prayer niches.

HOW IS THIS DONE?

The participants will each design one draft for a prayer niche and can use the images of the two prayer niches as a source of inspiration.

All discussed components of the niches such as typeface design, scriptural messages, ornaments and the overall design can now be refined to draft your own designs.

AIM

- Take on a creative role designing a niche
- Discover the meaning within the beautiful form
- Capture personal themes in an individual form

EVALUATION

The drawings are displayed visibly for all to see. Each drawing is jointly - however swiftly - discussed in the order of the following topics:

- What do the others perceive?
- What did I wish to portray?
- Discussion



30 MINUTES



THREE PERSONS OR MORE



PAPER, PENCILS AND COLOURED PENCILS, COMPASSES, RULERS, BLACKBOARD OR WALL, ADHESIVE TAPE

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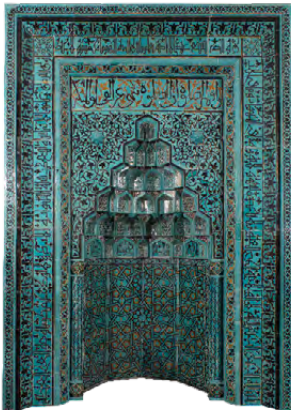
HOW IT ALL MERGES TOGETHER



The unity in diversity of the prayer niche forms of design was today's theme. Finally, you reflect together once again on what you have explored and identified.

HOW IS THIS DONE?

Questions to the group: How has your perception of religious diversity changed? Which inspirations did you gain from today's meeting?



AIM

Safeguarding the results

TIPS FOR FURTHER THINKING

- Which prayer niches do other denominations and religious groups in Islam have?
- Before the next meeting, document (photograph, note, draw) prayer niches in your surroundings/city/ community or collect prayer niches on the Internet that you find interesting.
- Do other objects come to mind that are particularly beautifully designed as they symbolise a special meaning? Set off in search of them!
- Bring your results to the next meeting and exchange and discuss the results with each other
- If you feel you have accomplished something with your drawings, hang them up for a week in the mosque. Present them in a small exhibition and invite friends, parents and acquaintances.



15 MINUTES



THREE PERSONS OR MORE



INFORMATION SHEET
PRAYER NICHE OF KONYA,
INFORMATION SHEET
PRAYER NICHE OF KASHAN,
SELF-DESIGNED NICHES