

Muqarnas domes: an interpretation of the “Heavenly Vault”

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Abstract From the twelfth century onwards, the decorative style of muqarnas became a constant standard in Islamic art. Obviously, its enormous aesthetic appeal and its extraordinary ability to adapt easily to any architectural surface were sufficient to trigger the enormous profusion it achieved, mainly in domes, in which it forms part of complex geometric patterns, usually based on star designs. In this sense, I believe that the occasional presence of water fountains located beneath muqarnas ceilings, the entry of light through small openings and the presence in some cases of Koranic inscriptions and poems, not to mention the symbolism geometry holds for Islam, mean that we should interpret domes of muqarnas as representing the “Heavenly vault”. This meaning is also emphasized by the philosophical school of the Ashars, which developed in Iraq during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Keywords Muqarnas, dome, Ashar, “Heavenly Vault”, occasionalist.