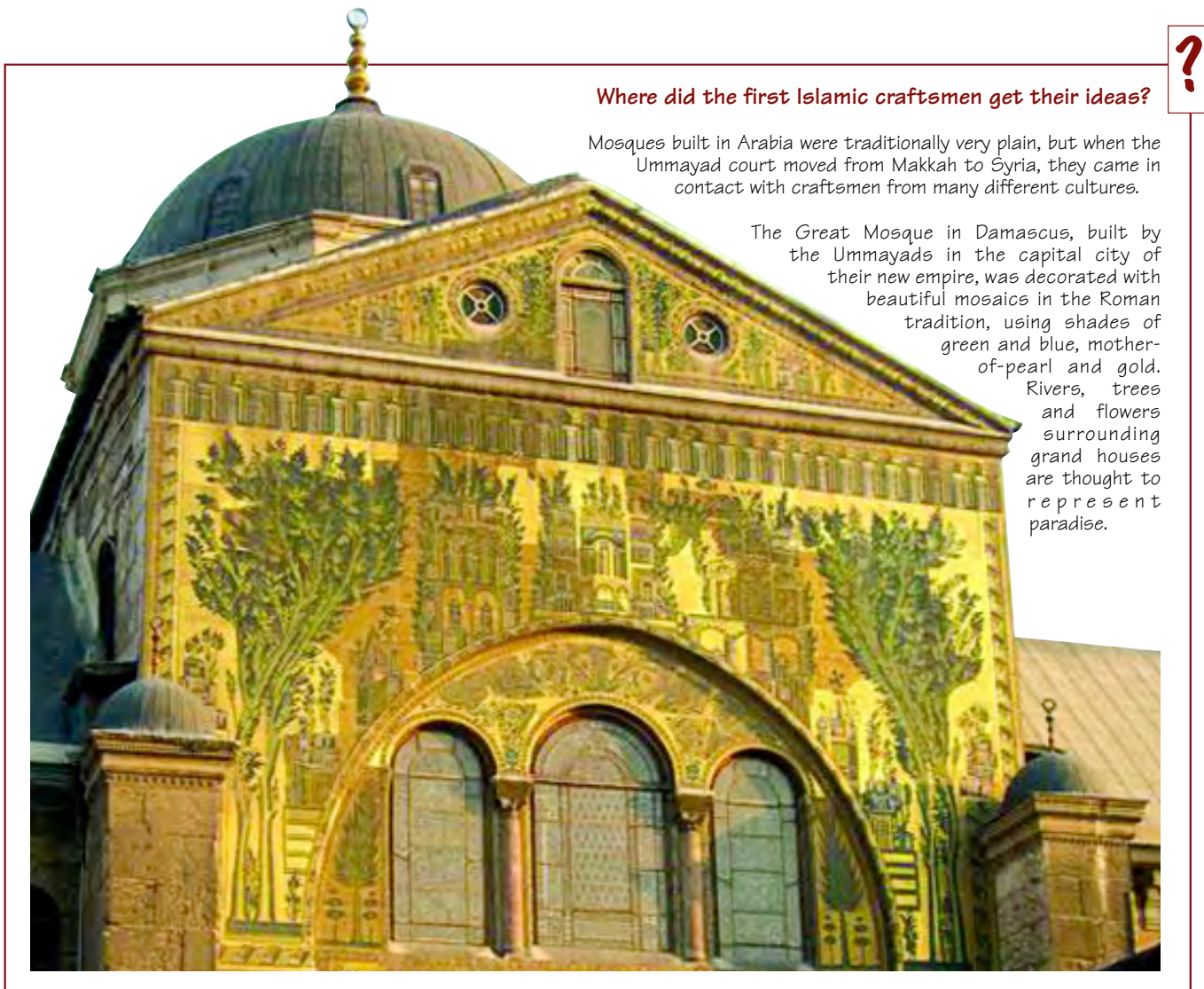
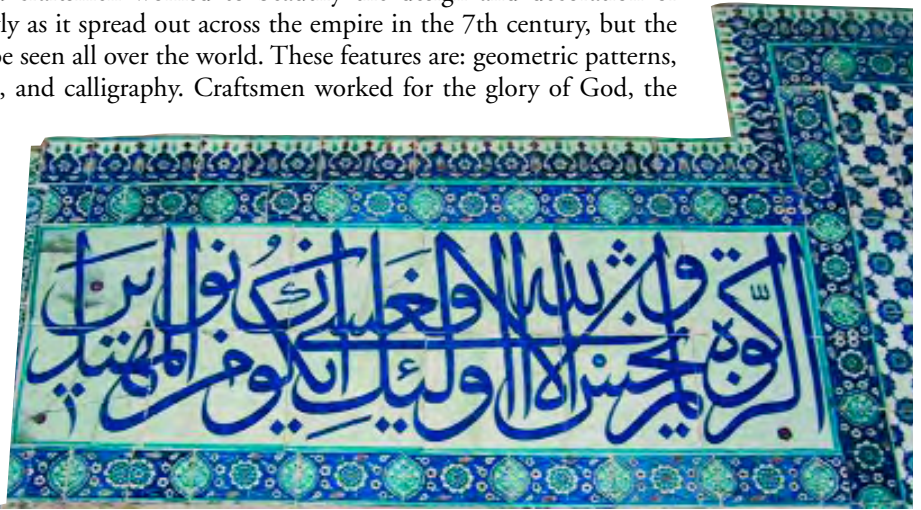


For hundreds of years architects and craftsmen worked to beautify the design and decoration of mosques. Islamic art developed slowly as it spread out across the empire in the 7th century, but the essential features became clear and can be seen all over the world. These features are: geometric patterns, arabesques based on the form of plants, and calligraphy. Craftsmen worked for the glory of God, the Creator. They didn't seek fame and praise for themselves but remained anonymous. As the Prophet Mohammed condemned idolatry, pictures of people or animals were never used in sacred places. Craftsmen throughout the Islamic Empire decorated mosques using techniques that were traditional to the region where they lived. They copied artwork from the Roman and Persian empires, but added ideas of their own, gradually creating a unique style of Islamic art. In Arabia today, modern mosques are often decorated in designs that come from Syria, Iran or Egypt.



Where did the first Islamic craftsmen get their ideas?

Mosques built in Arabia were traditionally very plain, but when the Umayyad court moved from Makkah to Syria, they came in contact with craftsmen from many different cultures.

The Great Mosque in Damascus, built by the Umayyads in the capital city of their new empire, was decorated with beautiful mosaics in the Roman tradition, using shades of green and blue, mother-of-pearl and gold. Rivers, trees and flowers surrounding grand houses are thought to represent paradise.

