The decorated mihrab (pl. minbar) is a unique feature of some mosques in central Oman. The earliest extant example is from Surah al-Burayqah, 961 CE. An excellent product of cultural exchanges between southeastern Arabia, Iran and East Africa, it reflects the influence of the Indian Ocean trade, the reception of the mihrab in Oman was shaped by the moderate and mystical strands present within Bādalism, that repeatedly strove towards reviving the mainstream.

DESIGN

The focus of the decorated mihrab is a low-arched, heavily scalloped shallow niche, its arches supported by receding sets of half columns. Unlike in Sunnī mosques, this inescapable niche conforms to the Isāī requirement that the imam should always remain part of the congregation.

DECORATIVE MOTIFS

A key motif employed in the decorated mihrab is a wide band of impressed, alternating small and large roundels, encrusted in a closed pendant-knot pattern set within intricate foliage. Roundels contain stellar representations, and the pendant-knot has devised endless expanses of time/space across the Middle East.

PORCELAIN INSERTS

The early-13th century revival of the mihrab tradition incorporated Chinese porcelain ware as decorative features. A small number of these were already in circulation before the Portuguese expansion of the trade. The earliest example from Manah (928/CE) is identical to a sample found from the Java Lana Shool shipwreck.

INSCRIPTIONS

In addition to the shahada (the words “flah Allah Muhammad rastun Allah’s law” at the top, other inscriptions record the date of commissioning, benefactors, as well as the artisan. ‘Abdul ‘Ali Quraysh and his descendants from Manah contributed significantly to the revival.