

The Pennsylvania State University  
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THE EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE  
ON EDUCATION AND PRACTICE OF CRAFTS  
IN THE ARABIC SOCIETY

A Thesis in  
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## ABSTRACT

Today, crafts in Arab-Islamic society are experiencing a crisis of survival. Due to changes in social attitudes and economic resources of many countries in the area, crafts traditions are competing with machine-made products. In the Al-Saffareen area in the middle of old Fez, Morocco, traditional crafts are practiced in a traditional manner, and one can see the craft of metalsmithing taught by the old craftsmakers to the younger generation. Objects such as bowls, plates, ewers, etc. are produced in the traditional manner by following the ancient processes of metalsmithing.

This investigation focused on the effect of social and economic changes which took place during the last century in the Arab-Islamic society. Furthermore, the research presents a descriptive account of crafts in three sites in the Arabic world. The first case is in Morocco, where apprentices are trained to make crafts following the traditional methods, utilizing motifs inspired by those that appear in Islamic and traditional crafts. The second case is in Cairo, Egypt, where a government-sponsored crafts program is offered to preserve and to continue the Islamic artistic heritage. The third example selected for investigation is in Jordan, where foreign agencies are sponsoring a national project to train Jordanian craftsmakers and to support the establishment of cottage industries to provide income for low-income families.

Accordingly, this investigation focuses on four major goals. The first is to provide a foundation for the study of Islamic crafts. In this regard, the inquiry presents and overview of historical concepts in Islamic crafts with an emphasis on the aesthetic, historical and artistic elements common to the various countries from which these crafts derived. The second major goal is to examine possible causes of the decline of the economic and social role played by crafts in Arabic-Islamic societies. Changes in socioeconomic conditions affecting the Islamic world and their effects on the practice of crafts will be examined. The third major goal of the study is to examine contemporary craft practices in Arabic-Islamic society using Morocco, Egypt and Jordan as examples. From this perspective the research provides a historic background of the three countries mentioned above, presents a descriptive account of the crafts in each country and analyzes the current methods of crafts education in each country and the historical connection of such practices with Islamic art. The fourth and final goal of the inquiry is to construct a framework for the development of a university crafts curriculum.