Important dates:

c.570-632    Life of the Prophet Muhammad

632-750        The age of the great Islamic conquests, creating an empire stretching from the borders of France to the borders of China

750-1258       The Abbasid empire rules much of the Islamic world

1055-1194      Saljuq Turks rule the Iranian world, establishing a vibrant Turco-Persian culture

1220           The invasion of Central Asia and Iran by Mongol armies under Genghis Khan begins; other Mongol armies conquer Russia and penetrate as far west as Germany and as far east as the straits of Japan

1256           Foundation of the Ilkhanid Mongol dynasty in Iran; it collapses in 1336. Toleration of other religions, especially Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism, results in a multi-confessional cosmopolitan society

1258           Baghdad falls to the Mongols; end of the caliphate

1295           The Mongol elite converts to Islam. Tabriz, in northwest Iran, becomes the Mongol capital and turns into a global hub, with ambassadors from England to China flocking to the city. The Mongols pursue an active diplomatic policy designed to form alliances with the Western European powers in a strategy to defeat the Muslim Mamluk sultans of Egypt and Syria. They also maintain close ties with the successors of Kubilai Khan in China; they are the junior partners in that relationship. So the Mongol empire looks both east and west; they impose a peace on Eurasia which makes travel from Europe to China safe

1317           Completion of one of Asia’s greatest mausolea at Sultniya, not far from Tabriz; it is the forerunner of the Taj Mahal

1336           On the death of the last Mongol Ilkhan, the empire crumbles and minor principalities jockey for power until the arrival of Timur (Tamburlaine), the next great Mongol conqueror, some fifty years later
KEY ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS

c.1298  The Usefulness of Animals, which combines Western and Islamic knowledge of animals

1307  The Chronology of Ancient Nations reflects the Mongol interest in other societies and religions and in the wider world

1314  The World History of Rashid al-Din, vizier (prime minister) of successive Mongol rulers, charts Mongol ambitions of world leadership but is also a summary of medieval Muslim knowledge of the world and its history

c.1320-1336  The Great Mongol Shahnama encapsulated the mingling of cultures at the Mongol court and the Mongols’ ambition to claim Iran’s past as their own. This great epic – a mix of statecraft, myth, history and a code of right conduct for kings – is still crucial to Iran’s self-image

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GENERAL SURVEYS

M.Hattstein and P.Delius (eds), Islam: Art and Architecture (Köln, 2004)
Very short chapters; wonderful illustrations.

(London, 1994)
Covers the required ground with admirable economy and sureness of touch.

Useful for this course because it is thematically rather than chronologically arranged.

R.Hillenbrand, Islamic Art and Architecture  (London, 1999)

R.Irwin, Islamic Art (London, 1997)
Full of quirky insights. Sometimes it pays not to be an art historian.

   Excellent for background - history, society, religion – as well as for art in its many forms. Probably the most challenging book in this entire bibliography. You must give it a try.

RELIGIOUS ART IN ISLAM

T.W.Arnold, Painting in Islam (Oxford, 1928; many reprints)
The opening chapter is an unsuperseded classic.
BOOK PAINTING: GENERAL

B.Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva, 1961; several reprints, including pbk)
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   Easily the best colour plates published to date.

   Includes a provocative introduction to Mongol painting.


