# ART OF THE
# Islamic World

## A Resource for Educators

Edited by Maryam D. Ekhtiar and Claire Moore

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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Front cover: *Mihrab*, from a religious school dated A.H. 755/A.D. 1354–55; Iran, Isfahan (image 4)
Inside flap: The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court, created onsite at the Metropolitan Museum by the Naji family and their company, Arabesque, Inc., Fez, Morocco, in 2011 (image 12)
Back cover: Planispheric astrolabe, dated A.H. 1065 / A.D. 1654–55; maker: Muhammad Zaman al-Munajjim al-Asturlabi (active 1643–89); Iran, Mashhad (image 16)

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# Foreword

Art can be a dynamic and creative portal for students to gain an understanding of the world around them. Awareness of the global community is particularly essential in the current era of social, economic, and political change. We therefore take great pleasure in presenting to teachers and their students this publication, *Art of the Islamic World: A Resource for Educators*, which provides insight into the complexity and diversity of Islamic regions and cultures—from the Middle East to North Africa, Europe, and Central and South Asia—and illustrates the beauty and intricacy of their artistic production over the course of twelve centuries.

Since its founding, education has been at the core of the Metropolitan Museum's mission. This institution has always been an important resource for educators and students in their exploration and study of world cultures. *Art of the Islamic World* exemplifies our continued commitment to support teachers in their efforts to bring art into their classrooms and excite their students with direct experiences of the works in our galleries through school visits. In fact, key to ensuring that this publication would be useful and relevant to classroom teachers was the focused involvement of an advisory group of their peers from New York schools, who helped develop and test the lessons with their students.

This project is also the result of a close collaboration among the Museum's curators of Islamic art and educators and publications staff of the Education Department. We thank this team for successfully shaping this guide as an essential and practical introduction for K–12 teachers at all grade levels and across disciplines. We also thank The Olayan Group for its generous commitment to fostering a better understanding of Islamic culture in young people. In addition, we are grateful to the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for supporting this resource and thereby strengthening the diverse and vibrant cultural life of New York City and its schools.

We know that the educational value of this material will be realized in classrooms not only in New York but also across the globe, underscoring the interconnectedness of cultures today and fostering global awareness and understanding among students. We encourage teachers and their students to visit The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection, or that of a museum closer to home, as there is no substitute for the direct, intimate, and often transformative experience of seeing works of art in person.

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As with any project of this scale, the Museum's donors were vital. We owe our appreciation especially to The Olayan Group for its generous support. The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and The Hagop Kevorkian Fund were all committed to the success of this project, for which we are most grateful.

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# Contents


| | | Subject Areas |
|---|---|---|
| **INTRODUCTION** | | |
| The Goals of This Resource • Why Include Islamic Art in Your Teaching? • The Structure of This Guide • Recurring Themes in the Art of the Islamic World • Frequently Asked Questions about Islam and Art of the Islamic World | 1 | |
| Curriculum Connections | 12 | |
| Quick List of the Featured Works of Art (Images) | 16 | |
| Maps: The Islamic World, The Silk Road | 19 | |
| Chronology of Major Empires and Dynasties in the Islamic World | 26 | |
| **UNIT 1. ISLAM AND RELIGIOUS ART** | 29 | English Language Arts, Visual Arts, World History |
| Introduction • The Five Pillars of Islam • The Prophet Muhammad and the Origins of Islam • The Qur'an • The Written Word in Islam • The Mosque | | |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 1–6 | 40 | |
| Lesson Plan | 52 | |
| **UNIT 2. ARABIC SCRIPT AND THE ART OF CALLIGRAPHY** | 55 | English Language Arts, Visual Arts |
| Introduction • Arabic and Islam • Arabic Calligraphy as an Art Form • Origins and Characteristics of the Arabic Alphabet • The Arabic Alphabet and Other Languages • The Development and Spread of Calligraphic Scripts • Proportional Scripts • Regional Scripts and Variations • Calligraphers and Their Tools | | |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 7–11 | 64 | |
| Lesson Plan | 74 | |
| **UNIT 3. GEOMETRIC DESIGN IN ISLAMIC ART** | 77 | Geometry, Visual Arts |
| Introduction • Primary Characteristics of Islamic Geometric Decoration | | |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 12–15 | 80 | |
| Lesson Plan | 88 | |
| **UNIT 4. SCIENCE AND THE ART OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD** | 91 | Science, Visual Arts |
| Introduction • Astronomy and Astrology • Medicine | | |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 16–19 | 96 | |
| Lesson Plan | 104 | |
| **UNIT 5. COURTLY SPLENDOR IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD** | 107 | |
| CHAPTER 1. COURT ARTS OF ISLAMIC SPAIN | 109 | Visual Arts, World History |
| Introduction • The Spanish Umayyads (756–1031) • Alliances between Islamic Spain and North Africa • Nasrid Rule in Spain (1232–1492) | | |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 20–22 | 114 | |
| Lesson Plan | 120 | |
| CHAPTER 2. ART AND EMPIRE: THE OTTOMAN COURT | 123 | English Language Arts, Visual Arts, World History |
| Introduction • The Ottoman Empire • Ottoman Art | | |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 23–26 | 128 | |
| Lesson Plan | 136 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| CHAPTER 3. THE MAKING OF A PERSIAN ROYAL MANUSCRIPT: THE *SHAHNAMA* (BOOK OF KINGS) OF SHAH TAHMASP | 139 | English Language Arts |
| Introduction • The *Shahnama* • Themes of the *Shahnama* • The *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp • Making a Royal Manuscript | | Visual Arts |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 27–29 | 144 | World History |
| Lesson Plan | 150 | |
| CHAPTER 4. THE MUGHAL COURT AND THE ART OF OBSERVATION | 153 | Science |
| Introduction | | Visual Arts |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 30–32 | 156 | |
| Lesson Plan | 162 | World History |
| **UNIT 6. FROM THE CITY TO THE STEPPE: ART BEYOND THE ROYAL COURT** | 165 | |
| CHAPTER 1. DAILY LIFE IN MEDIEVAL NISHAPUR | 167 | English Language Arts |
| Introduction • The City of Nishapur • The Metropolitan Museum's Archaeological Excavations | | Visual Arts |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 33–37 | 170 | |
| Lesson Plan | 180 | World History |
| CHAPTER 2. DOMESTIC LIFE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DAMASCUS | 183 | Visual Arts |
| Introduction • Eighteenth-Century Damascus • Courtyard Houses in Damascus | | World History |
| Featured Work of Art: Image 38 | 186 | |
| Lesson Plan | 190 | |
| CHAPTER 3. THE NOMADS OF CENTRAL ASIA: TURKMEN TRADITIONS | 193 | Visual Arts |
| Introduction • Who Are the Turkmen? • The Nomadic Way of Life • The Dwelling • Weaving • Jewelry Making | | World History |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 39–40 | 198 | |
| Lesson Plan | 202 | |
| **UNIT 7. TRADE AND ARTISTIC EXCHANGE** | 205 | |
| CHAPTER 1. CERAMICS IN CHINA AND THE NEAR EAST | 207 | Visual Arts |
| Introduction • Trade and Travel • Artistic Interconnections • The Importance of Ceramics | | World History |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 41–44 | 210 | |
| Lesson Plan | 218 | |
| CHAPTER 2. VENICE AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD | 221 | Visual Arts |
| Introduction • Venice and the Mamluks • Venice and the Ottomans • The Islamic Impact on Venice | | World History |
| Featured Works of Art: Images 45–46 | 226 | |
| Lesson Plan | 230 | |
| **RESOURCES** | | |
| Suggested Resources about Art of the Islamic World | 234 | |
| Glossary | 235 | |



# INTRODUCTION

## The Goals of This Resource

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of Islamic art is one of the most important and comprehensive in the world. It comprises more than 12,000 works of art created in a vast geographical area, stretching from Spain to India. The works were produced between the seventh century (the beginning of the Islamic period) and the nineteenth in a wide range of media, including works on paper (such as paintings and calligraphy), ceramics, glass, metalwork, lacquer, and textiles. Although this resource focuses on the strengths of the Museum's collection—art of the Arab lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and later South Asia (particularly the Indian subcontinent)—it is important to note that Islamic art was also created in many parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, and China during this long period and continues to be produced today.

This guide and the organization of the Museum's galleries emphasize the diversity of regional traditions and their cultural contexts, rather than presenting the art and culture of the Islamic world as a single monolithic entity dominated by religion. The art of these regions—both religious and secular—has been studied and presented together because Muslim dynasties ruled them for long periods of time and works of art were largely commissioned by Muslim patrons. Therefore, this art has traditionally been referred to as Islamic art. In some cases, the artists and craftsmen who created these works were non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. While Islam has been practiced in all of these regions since the seventh century, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists have also been a part of the communities within this geographic expanse. The common thread of Islam unites these regions and thus major recurring themes, forms, and modes of expression emerge. This guide aims to highlight these commonalities, while emphasizing the unique culture of each region.

Detail, image 6

## Why Include Islamic Art in Your Teaching?

- Examining works of art from the Islamic world helps students meet National Learning Standards for world history, visual arts, English language arts, geometry, and science through dynamic lessons involving observation, investigation, and critical thinking skills.

- Exposing students to both religious and secular artworks produced in the Islamic world provides a more complete picture of global cultures and religions past and present. Islam is currently practiced by about 23 percent of the world's population.

- Learning about the outstanding aesthetic and intellectual achievements of the inhabitants of the Islamic world over twelve centuries in the arts, sciences, and mathematics, as reflected in the Museum's exemplary collection, will help students recognize ways in which these accomplishments continue to inform our lives today.

- While some of the works of art in this guide might be expected, others—including human figures and naturalistic renderings of the world—may be surprising. A close look at works of art from the many regions included in the Islamic world will help students recognize the breadth and diversity of these cultures and overcome misconceptions.

- Given the importance of these regions within current geopolitics and the role of history in elucidating our world today, this guide will help students understand the global context in which they live.

## The Structure of This Guide

This resource is designed to help you incorporate works of art from the Islamic world into your teaching in the classroom or at the Museum. The thematic units in this guide each support one or more of the following subject areas: world history, visual arts, English language arts, geometry, or science; the table of contents will help you identify which units (and chapters) support each discipline. Each unit includes an introduction, featured works of art with detailed information, and a lesson plan aligned with the National Standards and Common Core State Standards (see also Curriculum Connections charts, pages 12–15). Some units have been divided into chapters that address different aspects of the unit theme. An overview of recurring themes and modes of expression in Islamic art (page 4) will help

you and your students make links among the units. Depending on your goals and available time, you might draw upon the contents of an entire unit or focus on a single work of art.

In addition, maps and a chronology provide useful geographic and historical context, and the Quick List of Featured Works of Art (Images) offers an easy overview of the focus objects. At the back of the guide, you will also find a list of general resources about the art of the Islamic world (units and chapters contain resources related to specific topics), and a glossary of key terms (each of these is underlined at first mention in each unit/chapter).

### Supplemental materials included in this teacher resource packet:

- A CD including a PDF of the resource book and high-resolution images of the featured works of art for classroom viewing
- Two posters that can support your teaching of Islamic art in the classroom (images 3 and 27)
- A family guide, *Dazzling Details: Zoom in for a Close Look at Art from the Islamic World!*, presenting several ideas for engaging children ages seven through twelve in the Museum's galleries.

### Dating and Transliteration Conventions Used in This Guide

This publication utilizes certain standardized dating conventions and spellings. All dates are given according to the Christian (or Gregorian) calendar (A.D.). In a case where we can ascribe an object with a precise date through an inscription or other material evidence, we offer both the Islamic calendar date (*al hijri*, abbreviated A.H.) and the Christian calendar date (for example, calligraphic galleon, dated A.H. 1180 /A.D. 1766–67).

Arabic, Persian, and some Turkish words are transliterated using a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* system. In certain instances, the authors of the sources we quote use a different transliteration system. This accounts for the occasional variation in spelling of the same foreign words or names (for example, *Shahnama* and *Shahnameh* or Tahmuras and Tahmures). The Arabic diacritical (accent) marks, *ayn* (for example, in *mi'raj*) and *hamza* (in Qur'an), are included, but other less-common accents are not. Certain transliterations are based on the phonetic conventions of individual languages. For example, the name *Sulaiman* is used in an Arabic or Persian context, but *Süleyman* in a Turkish one.

When an Arabic, Persian, or Turkish word is not found in *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*, we italicize it; if it is found in the dictionary we use the standard English spelling (thus Qur'an is not italicized, while *mihrab* is).

## Recurring Themes in the Art of the Islamic World

The works of art featured in this resource reflect the diversity of the people and cultures of a vast area that includes Spain, North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. The common thread of Islam unites these regions, and thus recurring themes, forms, and modes of expression emerge. This guide highlights these themes while preserving an understanding of the unique cultural and artistic heritage of each region.

### Religion

Perhaps the most significant shared feature of these regions is the presence of Islam. All the geographic areas discussed in this guide produced art for Muslim religious life. Many aspects of the religion naturally give rise to the creation of art, including, most notably, the production of manuscripts of the Qur'an, Islam's holy book. Presented in this publication are examples of Qur'an folios and manuscripts from regions as disparate as Spain, Syria, and the central Islamic lands. You will also see a proliferation of writing, or calligraphy, on many other works of art from across the Islamic world. The interest in calligraphy and its ornamental possibilities is directly linked to the exalted position of the Qur'an in all Muslim societies. (See "Islam and Religious Art" and "Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy".)

Mosques are also a common feature of all of these regions; many works provide a glimpse into the decorative and functional features of these structures, such as prayer niches (*mihrabs*) (image 4) and mosque lamps (images 6, 45). In addition, the necessity of daily prayer influenced the artistic development of prayer rugs (image 24), as well as scientific instruments like astrolabes (image 16), which helped calculate prayer times and locate the direction of Mecca.

### Ornament

Despite distinct regional variations, all of the religious art and much of the secular art in this guide share a common preference for calligraphic, geometric, and vegetal (plantlike) decoration. This type of nonfigural ornament abounds in art from the Islamic world and is present in a vast range of media—from architectural surfaces to small decorative objects. You will see such decoration on many, if not most, of the works in this guide, including the stylized floral ornament on the prayer niche (*mihrab*; image 4), the geometric ornament on all the featured works of art in "Geometric Design in Islamic Art," and the calligraphic ornament on ceramics, textiles, and metalwork in "Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy."

Ornament in the form of animal and human figures is also present in the decorative margins of manuscript pages and on an array of objects.

However, this type of decoration is only found in secular (nonreligious) spheres, since figural representation is not deemed appropriate in religious contexts. (See also "Frequently Asked Questions," page 9.) Examples of figural ornament in this guide include the margins of Mughal album pages (image 30) and the ivory panel from Spain (image 20). Figural representation is also seen in manuscript illustrations and sometimes appears in the form of statues of humans or animals. Examples in this guide include Persian and Mughal manuscript illustrations or album folios (images 27–29, 30, 32) and the Persian elephant-shaped drinking vessel (image 44), among others. In these works, figural representation, rather than ornamental surface decoration, is the primary focus.

### Interconnections

The influence of trade, diplomacy, and cultural interconnections is another element reflected in the art of these regions. Trade was an important commercial and cultural factor because of the many vital trading posts and routes throughout the Islamic world, such as the Silk Road. Two chapters in this guide—"Ceramics in China and the Near East" and "Venice and the Islamic World"—focus specifically on the artistic ramifications of these types of interconnections. However, you will see evidence of artistic influence and exchange in many of the other chapters of this resource. For example, you will read about the influence of Persian painting and calligraphy on the art of Mughal India (see "The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation") and the impact of fourteenth-century Spanish architecture on a sixteenth-century Ottoman prayer rug (see "Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court").

### Diversity of Patronage

People from many different walks of life in the Islamic world commissioned and bought works of art.

The patronage of the court, or ruler, was paramount in many areas. Court workshops—with unparalleled access to funds, fine materials, and the most talented artists—produced sumptuous goods and fostered the transmission of motifs and styles from one medium to another as artists worked together in a collaborative environment. The significance of court patronage is evident in the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) manuscript (images 27–29), the Ottoman royal emblem (*tughra*) and tile (images 23, 26), the Mughal decorative objects and paintings (images 15, 30), and the textile fragment from Islamic Spain (image 13 or 22).

The artistic patronage of nonruling classes—whether merchants, nomads, scholars, or members of a wealthy urban elite—demonstrates the overarching importance of art in daily life and the common desire for beautiful objects. Examples of works of art commissioned by nonruling

classes in this guide include ceramics from the mercantile city of Nishapur (image 33), nomadic Turkmen objects (image 40), and the Damascus Room (image 38).

Works of art were not only commissioned or bought for private use, but also as gifts. The importance of charity in the Muslim faith expresses itself in the practice of giving gifts to mosques and other religious institutions by those in all echelons of Muslim society in every region. Many of the objects discussed in this guide—such as the Qur'an stand (image 5), the mosque lamps (images 6, 45), the Spanish textile fragment (image 13 or 22), and the lamp stand (image 9)—were likely commissioned as gifts for religious institutions. Other works of art, such as *tiraz* (image 8), were likely given by rulers to subjects or visiting dignitaries as marks of honor.

### Technical Innovation

Constant innovation in both materials and techniques characterizes the art of the Islamic world. Artisans from these regions were internationally renowned for their ingenuity in developing increasingly fine materials and experimenting with new and complex techniques to create works of art, from ceramics and metalwork to carpets and textiles. Because of the interconnections among many Islamic regions, innovations spread quickly and were often adopted and further improved far from their place of origin. The introduction of stonepaste as a medium for ceramics is one of the most important of these innovations (and further discussed in "Ceramics in China and the Near East"). Other artistic techniques—originating in Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia—such as opaque white glazes, underglazing, and techniques for inlaid metalwork, likewise revolutionized artistic production in many parts of the Islamic world and beyond.

Techniques conceived in the Islamic world found their way into Western artistic production, facilitated by trade routes between the East and West (see "Venice and the Islamic World"). Techniques for producing transparent glass, luster-painted ceramics, and certain types of textiles such as velvet are among the artistic innovations that had a global impact.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Islam and Art of the Islamic World

These frequently asked questions provide a brief overview of some of the issues that arise when teaching about Islamic art and culture. These issues pertain to the full range of places and time periods covered in this guide.

### Islamic Religion and Culture

**Q:** How many people practice Islam today?
**A:** According to most estimates, about 23 percent of the world's population is Muslim. In 2012, this constitutes approximately 1.6 billion people.

**Q:** What do the words *Islam* and *Muslim* mean?
**A:** The word *Islam* literally means "submission" in Arabic, referring to submission to God. *Muslim*, one who practices Islam, refers to one who submits to God.

**Q:** The term "the Islamic world" appears frequently throughout this guide—what area does this refer to?
**A:** This guide uses the term "the Islamic world" to refer to regions that have historically been ruled and/or inhabited predominantly by Muslims. This term generally encompasses lands reaching from Spain to Indonesia, from the seventh century to the present.

**Q:** How is Islam similar to other monotheistic religions?
**A:** There are several similarities among the three major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The most obvious is the belief in one God. All three religions consider certain figures from biblical history, such as Abraham and Moses, to have been true prophets of God. In addition, all three faiths originated in the Middle East and have holy sites in common (for example, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the Cave of the Patriarchs at Hebron). The concept of pilgrimage is also common to all three.

**Q:** Do Muslims consider Allah to be the same God worshipped in Judaism and Christianity?
**A:** Yes. Allah is simply the Arabic name for God, like *Yahweh* in Hebrew, *Dios* in Spanish, or *Dieu* in French. However, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity each characterize God and the qualities of the Divine somewhat differently.

**Q:** Are there different branches of Islam?
**A:** Within Islam there exist many different variations of faith, including two major branches—Sunnism and Shiism.

**Q:** What is the difference between Sunnism and Shiism?
**A:** The initial schism in the Islamic faith occurred after the death of the Prophet Muhammad as a result of the disagreement over who should succeed the Prophet as the leader of the Muslim community. Some believed that only a blood relative of the Prophet could lead the Islamic community; they believed ʿAli, the Prophet's cousin, should be his successor. They became known as Shiʿa, meaning "Party [of ʿAli]." Others believed that leaders within the community should elect the Prophet's successor based on merit; they became known as Sunni (meaning "way" or "path," referring to the traditions of the Prophet, whose example all Muslims are to follow). About 80 percent of Muslims today are Sunni. Over time, differences in theology emerged, but both sects believe in the basic tenets of Islam (the Five Pillars; see "Islam and Religious Art," page 30) and revere the Qur'an as divine revelation.

**Q:** What is Sufism?
**A:** Some Muslims practice Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism. The focus of Sufism, which is practiced by Sunnis and Shiʿis alike, is to attain unity with God. Its most notable practices include repeating the names of God, asceticism, and mystical dance.

**Q:** The numbers we use every day are called 'Arabic numerals.' Have Western languages also adopted words from Arabic?
**A:** Because of contact between the Islamic world and Europe at various junctures throughout history, many cultural and linguistic influences passed back and forth. For instance, a number of Arabic words were absorbed into the Romance languages, particularly Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. This was because of the proximity of Europe and the Arab world and the seven centuries of Muslim rule in southern Spain and Italy. Arabic words, such as apricot, alcohol, algebra, coffee, cotton, lute, sofa, and zero, made their way into English through Romance languages.

**Q:** What languages are spoken in the Islamic world?
**A:** Arabic is the language of the holy Qur'an. Muslims and non-Muslims alike in Arab lands speak Arabic. However, not all Muslims speak this language on a daily basis. Muslims in non-Arab regions, where the vast majority of Muslims live today, use Arabic for prayer and religious purposes only. Most of the works of art introduced in this guide were created in areas where Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu were, and still are, the primary spoken and written language. Arabic is a Semitic language similar to Hebrew, while Persian is an Indo-European language, like English or French. Turkish is related to neither and is an Altaic language. Though distinct

languages, both Persian and Turkish (until 1928) were written in the Arabic alphabet. Because of the interconnections within the Islamic world, the Arabic, Turkish, and Persian languages borrowed many words from each other.

**Q:** What countries comprise the region called South Asia in this guide?
**A:** South Asia consists of the subcontinental region south of the Himalayas including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives.

## Art of the Islamic World

**Q:** How did The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquire all of these works of art?
**A:** The Museum started acquiring Islamic works of art as early as 1891. Since then many major collectors have donated objects or portions of their collections. The Museum's collection continues to grow through purchases and gifts.

**Q:** Many people say that Islam prohibits the depiction of figures (both people and animals). Why are there so many images of people in the Museum's galleries and in this guide?
**A:** Attitudes toward figural art in the Islamic world varied depending on period and location, and ranged from totally aniconic (no images of people or animals) to entirely accepting of figural imagery. There is no prohibition against the depiction of humans or animals mentioned in the Qur'an. However, the subject is discussed several times in the hadith (the sayings of the Prophet), in which the objections are based largely upon the role of God as sole creator. One tradition from the hadith states that Muhammad removed figural curtains from his home, saying that they would invite the temptation of idol worship. He asked his wife Aisha to turn the curtains into pillows instead, since an object on which one sits could not invite idolatry. This story illustrates the pervading Islamic attitude toward the use of figural imagery in art—that it depends entirely on function and context. In most Islamic regions throughout history, a common compromise was to use figural imagery in a secular context but not in a religious one, or to use images of people and animals on small-scale works of art intended for private enjoyment.

**Q:** What accounts for the Asian facial features of many people depicted in the works of art in the galleries of the Islamic department and in this guide?
**A:** From the eleventh century onward, the concept of human beauty in some parts of the Islamic world began to reflect Central Asian ideals, largely due to the westward migration of Turks from Central Asia. This convention endured in this region through the seventeenth century, after which new ideals of beauty emerged.

**Q:** There is calligraphy (decorative writing) on so many of the objects in the galleries and in this guide. Would the average person living in the Islamic world have been able to read it all?
**A:** Most educated people would have been able to read Arabic writing. However, some examples of calligraphy are so ornate that creativity was clearly favored over legibility. Calligraphy was, and is, appreciated above all for its aesthetic qualities and the skill of the calligrapher.

**Q:** Why are space and depth represented differently in works of art from many Islamic regions than they are in Western paintings?
**A:** Different cultures have different aesthetic values, ideals of beauty, and concepts of realism and space as represented in painting. Many Islamic paintings favor elements like color and detail, whereas many European painters and patrons of the same time were concerned with creating the illusion of spatial depth. Painters in Islamic and European countries were equally concerned with conveying stories through visual imagery. The differences derive from tradition and cultural conventions, and do not reflect fundamental differences in artistic skill.

**Q:** Why are there so many images of gardens, plants, and flowers in Islamic art and ornament?
**A:** Nature-based imagery is important in almost all artistic traditions. In Islamic art in particular you will see a broad range of garden imagery, as is evident in this guide. There are repeating patterns of flowers and plants, sometimes abstract and sometimes naturalistic, on everything from rugs and ceramics to manuscript ornamentation. You will also encounter narrative garden scenes, like those in Mughal and Persian manuscript illustrations. Some believe the pervasiveness of garden and plant imagery in Islamic art stems from the Qur'an's description of heaven as a lush garden paradise. There are also nonreligious factors at work—it is important to remember that many regions of the Islamic world are hot and dry, making images of verdant, water-filled gardens all the more alluring.

**Q:** How did most artists in the Islamic world work?

**A:** The modern artist working today uses a very different process than an artist working in the Islamic world during the seventh through the nineteenth centuries. Most artists belonged to workshops, in which groups of skilled craftsmen worked together on multiple projects. Some workshops were commercial, creating relatively large numbers of art objects, from carpets to ceramics, for sale on the open market. Other workshops belonged to royal courts. These employed the very best artists from throughout the empire, who each often had their own specialty. For instance, in a manuscript workshop one artist might specialize in calligraphy, another in painting figures, and yet others in making decorative bindings. The workshop system was not unique to the Islamic world; it also existed in medieval and Renaissance Europe.

**Q:** A number of the chapters in this guide mention courts. What were these like and who lived in them?

**A:** Most regions in the Islamic world until the nineteenth century, as in Europe at the time, were controlled by absolute rulers—kings or other leaders who attained their position through lineage (their fathers were the rulers) or conquest. The ruler lived at a court, a large complex with a palace for the ruler, his family, and other nobility. The court also accommodated traveling guests and foreign dignitaries, and usually included a royal workshop (see question above), a mosque, and other cultural institutions. Princes, regional governors, and other members of the nobility often had their own individual courts. Additionally, many rulers led a semi-nomadic life, traveling around their realms to maintain order or fight wars and insurrections.

# Curriculum Connections

## National Learning Standards

| | LESSON PLANS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | UNIT 1 Islam and Religious Art | UNIT 2 Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy | UNIT 3 Geometric Design in Islamic Art | UNIT 4 Science and the Art of the Islamic World |
| **English Language Arts** | | | | |
| NL-ENG.K-12.2 Understanding the Human Experience | | | | |
| NL-ENG.K-12.5 Communication Strategies | | ● | | |
| NL-ENG.K-12.6 Applying Knowledge | | ● | | |
| NL-ENG.K-12.8 Developing Research Skills | | | | |
| NL-ENG.K-12.9 Multicultural Understanding | ● | | | |
| NL-ENG.K-12.10 Applying Non-English Perspectives | ● | | | |
| **Geography** | | | | |
| NSS-G.K-12.5 Environment and Society | | | | |
| **Mathematics, Geometry** | | | | |
| In grades 6–8 all students should recognize and apply geometric ideas and relationships in areas outside the mathematics classroom, such as art, science, and everyday life | | | ● | |
| In grades 9–12 all students should draw and construct representations of two- and three-dimensional geometric objects using a variety of tools | | | ● | |
| In grades 9–12 all students should use geometric ideas to solve problems in, and gain insights into, other disciplines and other areas of interest such as art and architecture | | | ● | |
| **Science** | | | | |
| NS.K-12.3 Life Science | | | | |
| NS.9-12.5 Science and Technology | | | | ● |
| NS.9-12.6 Science in Personal and Social Perspectives | | | | ● |
| NS.9-12.7 History and Nature of Science | | | | ● |
| **Visual Arts** | | | | |
| NA-VA.K-12.1 Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes | | | | |
| NA-VA.K-12.2 Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions | | ● | | |
| NA-VA.9-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas | | | | |
| NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures | ● | | ● | |
| NA-VA.K-12.5 Reflecting Upon and Assessing the Characteristics and Merits of Their Work and the Work of Others | | | | |
| NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| **World History** | | | | |
| NSS-WH.5-12.4 Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300–1000 C.E. | | | | |
| NSS-WH.5-12.5 Era 5: Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000–1500 C.E. | ● | | | |
| NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770 | | | | |
| NSS-WH.5-12.7 Era 7: An Age of Revolutions, 1750–1914 | | | | |

Source for National Learning Standards: http://www.educationworld.com/standards (select "Voluntary National Education Standards" for each subject area)

| UNIT 5 CHAPTER 1 Court Arts of Islamic Spain | UNIT 5 CHAPTER 2 Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court | UNIT 5 CHAPTER 3 The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript | UNIT 5 CHAPTER 4 The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation | UNIT 6 CHAPTER 1 Daily Life in Medieval Nishapur | UNIT 6 CHAPTER 2 Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus | UNIT 6 CHAPTER 3 The Nomads of Central Asia: Turkmen Traditions | UNIT 7 CHAPTER 1 Ceramics in China and the Near East | UNIT 7 CHAPTER 2 Venice and the Islamic World |
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# Curriculum Connections

## Common Core State Standards

| | LESSON PLANS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | UNIT 1 Islam and Religious Art | UNIT 2 Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy | UNIT 3 Geometric Design in Islamic Art | UNIT 4 Science and the Art of the Islamic World |
| **English Language Arts** | | | | |
| R.CCR.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text | | ● | | |
| R.CCR.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text | | ● | | |
| R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words | | | | |
| SL.CCR.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively | ● | | | |
| SL.CCR.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally | | ● | | |
| SL.CCR.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience | | | | |
| W.CCR.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content | | | | |
| W.CCR.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences | | | | |
| **Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects** | | | | |
| R.CCR.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text | | | | |
| R.CCR.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone | ● | | | |
| R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words | ● | | | ● |
| W.CCR.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content | | | | |
| W.CCR.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation | | | | |
| **Mathematics, Geometry** | | | | |
| G.CO.12 Make formal geometric constructions with a variety of tools and methods | | | ● | |
| G.CO.13 Construct an equilateral triangle, a square, and a regular hexagon inscribed in a circle | | | ● | |

Source for Common Core State Standards: www.corestandards.org

| UNIT 5 CHAPTER 1 Court Arts of Islamic Spain | UNIT 5 CHAPTER 2 Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court | UNIT 5 CHAPTER 3 The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript | UNIT 5 CHAPTER 4 The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation | UNIT 6 CHAPTER 1 Daily Life in Medieval Nishapur | UNIT 6 CHAPTER 2 Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus | UNIT 6 CHAPTER 3 The Nomads of Central Asia: Turkmen Traditions | UNIT 7 CHAPTER 1 Ceramics in China and the Near East | UNIT 7 CHAPTER 2 Venice and the Islamic World |
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# Quick List of Featured Works of Art (Images)



**1. Muhammad's Call to Prophecy and The First Revelation: Folio from a manuscript of the *Majma' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Histories),** about 1425; present-day Afghanistan, Herat



**2. The Night Journey of The Prophet Muhammad (*Mi'raj*): Folio from the *Bustan* (Orchard) of Sa'di,** about 1525–35; calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur (about 1472–about 1536); penned in present-day Afghanistan, probably Herat; illustrated in present-day Uzbekistan, probably Bukhara, 1530–35



**3. Folio from a Qur'an manuscript,** late 13th–early 14th century; Spain



**4. *Mihrab*,** from a religious school dated A.H. 755/A.D. 1354–55; Iran, Isfahan



**5. Qur'an stand (*rahla*),** dated A.H. 761/A.D. 1360; maker: Hasan ibn Sulaiman Isfahani; Iran



**6. Mosque lamp,** about 1329–35; maker: 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Barmaki; Egypt



**7. Bowl with Arabic inscription,** 10th century; Iran, Nishapur



**8. *Tiraz* fragment,** late 14th–early 15th century; Spain



**9. Lamp stand with chevron pattern,** dated A.H. 986/A.D. 1578–79; Iran



**10. Illuminated folio with poetic verses from the Shah Jahan Album** (verso), about 1500; calligrapher: Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi (act. late 15th–early 16th century); India



**11. Calligraphic galleon,** dated A.H. 1180/A.D. 1766–67; calligrapher: 'Abd al-Qadir Hisari; Turkey



**12. The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court, created onsite at the Metropolitan Museum by** the Naji family and their company, Arabesque, Inc., Fez, Morocco, in 2011



**13. Textile fragment,** 14th century; Spain



**14. Star- and hexagonal-tile panel,** late 13th–14th century; Iran, Nishapur
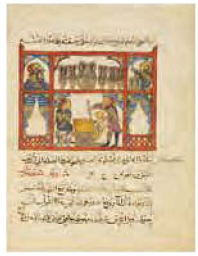


**15. *Jali* (screen),** second half of the 16th century; India



**16. Planispheric astrolabe,** dated A.H. 1065/A.D. 1654–55; maker: Muhammad Zaman al-Munajjim al-Asturlabi (act. 1643–89); Iran, Mashhad



**17. Perseus: Folios from the *Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabita* (Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars) of al-Sufi, late 15th century; Iran**



**18. Preparing Medicine from Honey: Folio from a dispersed manuscript of an Arabic translation of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, dated A.H. 621/ A.D. 1224; calligrapher: ʿAbdullah ibn al-Fadl; Iraq, Baghdad or northern Jazira**



**19. Mortar made for Abu Bakr ʿAli Malikzad al-Tabrizi, late 12th–early 13th century; Iran**



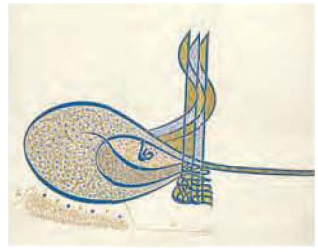
**20. Panel, 10th–early 11th century; Spain, probably Córdoba**



**21. Capital, 10th century; Spain, probably Córdoba**



**22. Textile fragment, 14th century; Spain**



**23. *Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66), about 1555–60; Turkey, Istanbul**



**24. Prayer carpet with triple-arch design, about 1575–90; Turkey, probably Istanbul, possibly Egypt, Cairo**



**25. Fragment of a kaftan back with peacock feather design, mid-16th century; Turkey, probably Istanbul**



**26. Tile with floral and cloud-band design, about 1578; Turkey, Iznik**



**27. The Feast of Sada: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525; author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020); artist: attributed to Sultan Muhammad (act. first half 16th century); Iran, Tabriz**



**28. Tahmuras Defeats the *Divs*: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525; author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020); artist: attributed to Sultan Muhammad (act. first half 16th century); Iran, Tabriz**



**29. Siyavush Plays Polo: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525–30; author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020); artist: attributed to Qasim ibn ʿAli (act. 1525–60); Iran, Tabriz**



**30. The Emperor Shah Jahan with His Son Dara Shikoh: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso), about 1620; artist: Nanha (act. 1605–27); India**



**31. Dagger with hilt in the form of a blue bull (*nilgai*), about 1640; India**



**32. Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso), about 1615–20; artist: Mansur (act. 1589–1629); India**



**33. Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration,** 10th century; Iran, probably Nishapur



**34. Bowl with Arabic inscription,** late **10th–11th century; Iran,** excavated at **Nishapur; probably** made in **Samarqand (in present-**day Uzbekistan)



**35. *Dado* panel,** 10th century; Iran, Nishapur



**36. Pendant,** 10th century; Iran, Nishapur



**37. Chess set,** 12th century; Iran, Nishapur



**38. The Damascus Room,** dated A.H. 1119/A.D. 1707; Syria, Damascus



**39. Storage bag face(s),** early 18th–19th century; Central Asia, probably present-day Turkmenistan, Arabatchi tribe



**40. Amulet,** late 19th–early 20th century; present-day Uzbekistan, Karakalpak tribe



**41. Bowl with cobalt-blue inscriptions,** 9th century; Iraq, probably Basra



**42. White bowl (*tazza*),** 12th century; Iran



**43. Tile with image of a phoenix,** late 13th century; Iran, probably Takht-i Sulaiman



**44. Elephant-shaped drinking vessel (*kendi*),** second quarter of the 17th century; Iran, probably Kirman



**45. Lamp for the Mausoleum of Amir Aidakin al-'Ala'i al-Bunduqdar,** shortly after 1285; Egypt, probably Cairo



**46. Velvet fragment,** second half of 16th century; Turkey, Bursa




## The Islamic World

OMAN Modern country borders and names

Dakar Modern national capitals

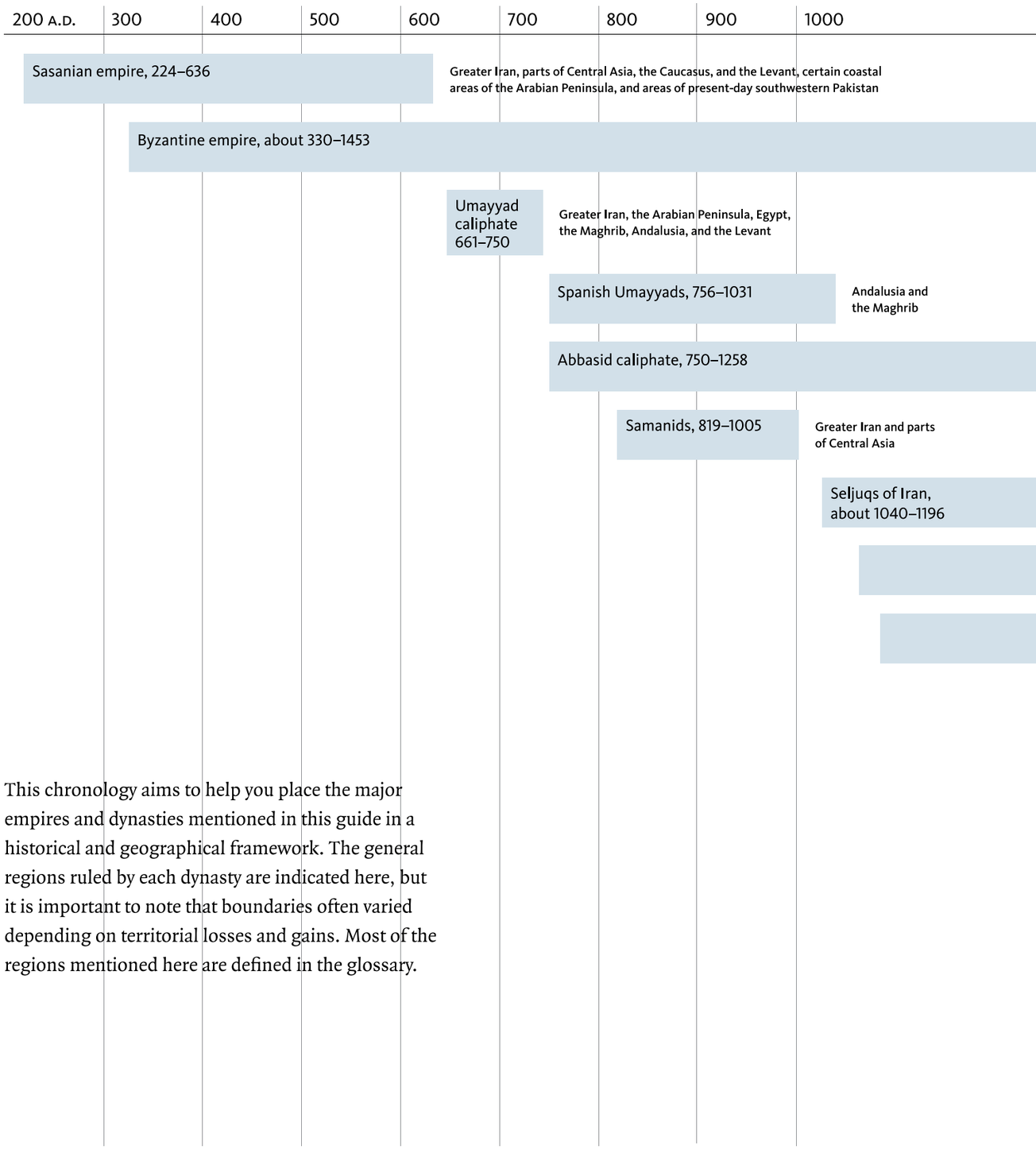
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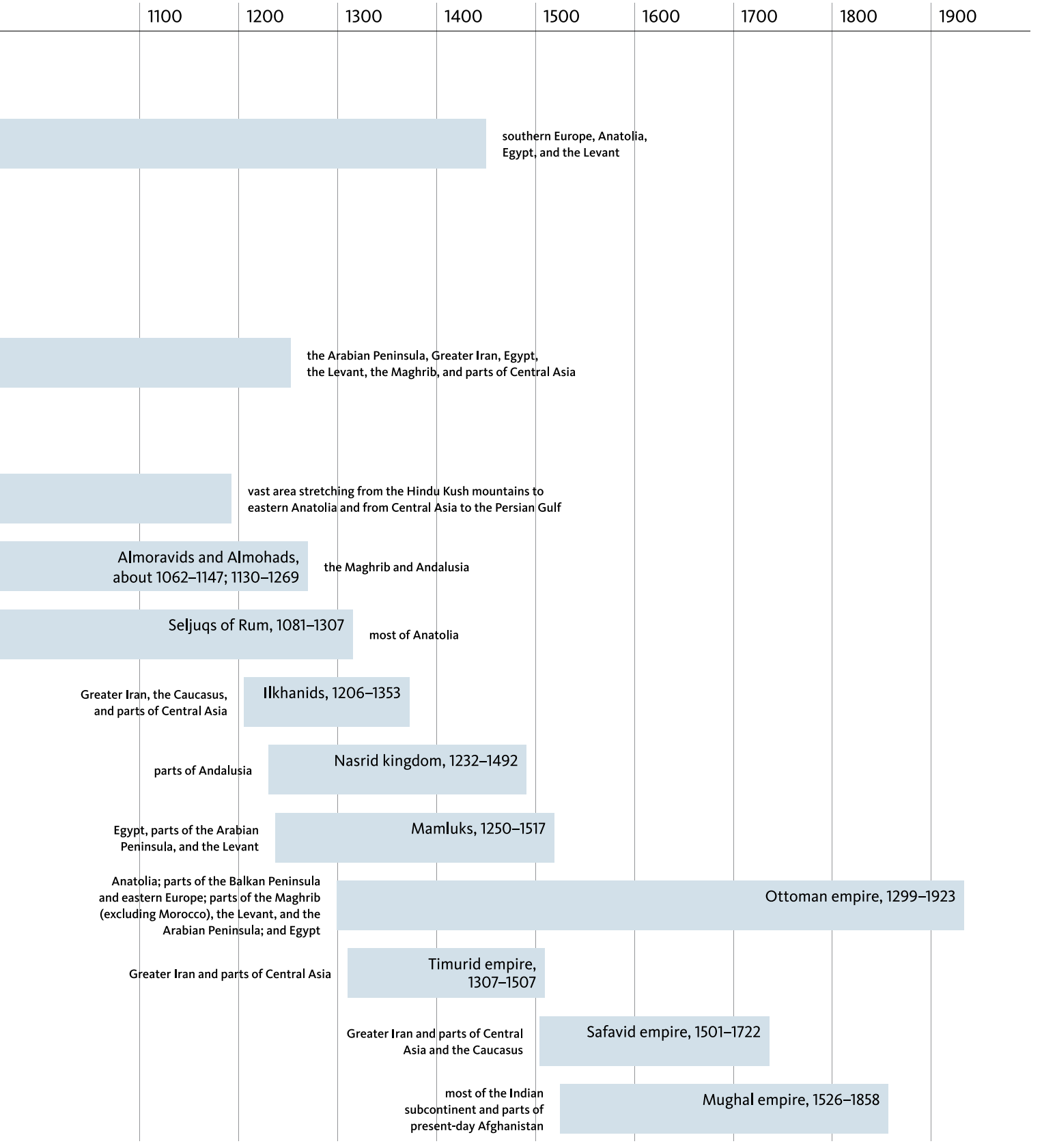
Robinson Projection, 55°E


The Silk Road
and Related Trade Routes
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Dakar Modern national capitals
Silk Road
Other trade routes
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SLOVAKIA
UKRAINE
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HUNGARY
MOLDOVA
ROMANIA
SLOVENIA
CROATIA
BOSNIA & HERZ.
SERBIA
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
MACEDONIA
BULGARIA
ITALY
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GREECE
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GEORGIA
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PAKISTAN
INDIA
NEPAL
BHUTAN
BANGLADESH
MYANMAR
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PHILIPPINES
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Aral Sea
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Red Sea
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Kiev
Odessa
Istanbul
Ankara
Trabzon
Tbilisi
Baku
Konya
Tabriz
Aleppo
Takht-i Sulaiman
Tehran
Nishapur
Mashhad
Merv
Bukhara
Samarqand
Tashkent
Fergana
Almaty
Urumchi
Turfan
Kashgar
Yarkand
Khotan
Dunhuang
Karakorum
Beijing
Luoyang
Shanghai
Hangzhou
Takrit
Samarra
Damascus
Baghdad
Kashan
Isfahan
Yazd
Herat
Ghazna
Kandahar
Islamabad
Lahore
Delhi
Lhasa
Lijiang
Quanzhou
Guangzhou
Cairo
Basra
Shiraz
Kirman
Bandar Abbas
Medina
Mecca
Aden
Mumbai (Bombay)

# Chronology of Major Empires and Dynasties in the Islamic World




This chronology aims to help you place the major empires and dynasties mentioned in this guide in a historical and geographical framework. The general regions ruled by each dynasty are indicated here, but it is important to note that boundaries often varied depending on territorial losses and gains. Most of the regions mentioned here are defined in the glossary.


1100
1200
1300
1400
1500
1600
1700
1800
1900
southern Europe, Anatolia, Egypt, and the Levant
the Arabian Peninsula, Greater Iran, Egypt, the Levant, the Maghrib, and parts of Central Asia
vast area stretching from the Hindu Kush mountains to eastern Anatolia and from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf
Almoravids and Almohads, about 1062–1147; 1130–1269
the Maghrib and Andalusia
Seljuqs of Rum, 1081–1307
most of Anatolia
Greater Iran, the Caucasus, and parts of Central Asia
Ilkhanids, 1206–1353
parts of Andalusia
Nasrid kingdom, 1232–1492
Egypt, parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and the Levant
Mamluks, 1250–1517
Anatolia; parts of the Balkan Peninsula and eastern Europe; parts of the Maghrib (excluding Morocco), the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula; and Egypt
Ottoman empire, 1299–1923
Greater Iran and parts of Central Asia
Timurid empire, 1307–1507
Greater Iran and parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus
Safavid empire, 1501–1722
most of the Indian subcontinent and parts of present-day Afghanistan
Mughal empire, 1526–1858

# Major Empires and Dynasties of the Islamic World: Important Facts and Events

**Sasanian empire (224–636 A.D.)**

Internal struggles and wars with Byzantium weakened the Sasanian empire, leaving it open to defeat by Islamic armies in 642 A.D.

**Byzantine empire (about 330–1453)**

After the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he shifted the capital of the Roman empire to the east, making Constantinople the seat of the new Byzantine empire. The Byzantine empire came into constant conflict with expanding Islamic territories, and ultimately lost Constantinople to the Ottoman empire in 1453.

**Umayyad caliphate (661–750)**

As the first major Islamic dynasty, their art reflects an emerging Islamic aesthetic; they were centered at Damascus, Syria.

**Spanish Umayyads (756–1031)**

Established by the last Umayyad prince fleeing Syria after the Abbasid conquest, the Spanish Umayyads were the first of many Muslim dynasties to rule in Spain.

**Abbasid caliphate (750–1258)**

This caliphate was the second major Islamic dynasty and one of the longest in power. During the second half of their rule, the Abbasid caliphs were rulers in name only, having become the puppets of other princely states, such as the Buyids, the Samanids, and the Seljuqs.

**Samanids (819–1005)**

The Samanids were the first native Persian dynasty to rule Iran after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the Arab Muslim conquests. Their rule marked the beginning of a revival of Persian art and culture. The cities of Nishapur, Samarqand, and Bukhara thrived under the Samanids.

**Seljuqs of Iran (about 1040–1196)**

The Seljuqs were a Turkic people from Central Asia. Their art is notable for its synthesis of Persian, Islamic, and Central Asian–Turkic elements.

**Almoravids and Almohads (about 1062–1147; 1130–1269)**

The Almoravids and Almohads were Berber dynasties that ruled southern Spain after the collapse of the Spanish Umayyad regime in 1032. They created capitals at Marrakesh in Morocco and Seville in Spain.

**Seljuqs of Rum (1081–1307)**

Part of the Seljuq dynasty of Iran broke off and established control over a large portion of Anatolia. Anatolia was known as "Rum," a derivation of "Rome," alluding to the Byzantine empire's former rule in that region.

**Ilkhanids (1206–1353)**

One of the khanates (principalities or kingdoms ruled by a khan) established by the descendants of the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan. "Il Khan" literally means "Lesser Khan," because the Ilkhanids were subordinate to the Mongol Great Khans ruling China (also known as the Yuan dynasty).

**Nasrid kingdom (1232–1492)**

The Nasrids, centered at their capital of Granada, were the last of many Islamic dynasties to rule in Spain. Their reign ended in 1492, when most Muslims and Jews were cast out of Spain by the Castilian king and queen, Ferdinand and Isabella.

**Mamluks (1250–1517)**

The Mamluks (literally, "military slaves") were originally Turkic military forces who served the preceding Egyptian dynasty. They overthrew their masters, establishing their own rule with an unusual political system in which slaves held positions of great power and were recruited into leadership.

**Ottoman empire (1299–1923)**

One of the longest-lasting dynasties in world history, the Ottomans ruled over a vast and varied territory with the help of a highly structured bureaucracy. Many of the Ottoman sultans were great patrons of the arts.

**Timurid empire (1307–1507)**

Named for the founder of the dynasty, Timur (called Tamerlane in the West), the Timurids were Turks who conquered much of Greater Iran and Central Asia. They were important patrons of the arts, commissioning architectural monuments as well as fine illustrated manuscripts.

**Safavid empire (1501–1722)**

The Safavids were a Shi'a dynasty that traced its lineage to an important Sufi mystic. Safavid palaces in Isfahan were known all over the world for their opulence and luxury. The Safavid *shah*s (kings) are renowned for the patronage of fine decorative arts and the production of luxury manuscripts.

**Mughal empire (1526–1858)**

The Mughals traced their lineage to the Mongol rulers of Iran. Their art and architecture is unique in its synthesis of Persian, indigenous Indian, and European influences.

See pages 26–27 for regions ruled by these empires and dynasties.

# UNIT 1

# Islam and Religious Art

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- identify key tenets of Islam and important figures and events in early Islamic history; and
- recognize ways works of art reflect and support religious beliefs and practice.

## Introduction

The birth of Islam is marked by the first revelation conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad by God (in Arabic, Allah), which occurred in the seventh century near the city of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. Islam emerged in a polytheistic environment; although there were notable Jewish and Christian communities, most people living on the Arabian Peninsula believed in multiple gods. In contrast, the fundamental tenet of Islam was monotheism—the belief in one God alone. What began as a religious movement soon took on a political dimension and Islam spread quickly throughout the Middle and Near East. The fall of the Sasanian empire in Persia and Byzantium's weakening control of its eastern territories in the seventh century provided fertile ground for this expansion, and within a hundred years of the Prophet's death the new leaders of the Islamic community (*umma*), the caliphs, controlled lands reaching from Spain to present-day Pakistan. The spread of the faith stimulated new architecture and the production of other arts in territories with rich and well-established cultural and artistic traditions. Mosques were built for growing Muslim communities and religious texts about Islamic belief and practice were written and decorated. Works that functioned in or responded to Islamic religious life continued to be produced over the centuries in every region in which Islam is practiced. This unit examines such works and provides an introduction to the beliefs and early history of Islam.

## The Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars are the core beliefs and practices of Islam:

1. **Profession of Faith (*shahada*).** The belief that "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" is central to Islam. This phrase, written in Arabic, is often prominently featured in architecture and a range of objects, including the Qur'an, Islam's holy book of divine revelations. One becomes a Muslim by reciting this phrase with conviction.

2. **Prayer (*salat*).** Muslims pray facing Mecca five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark. Prayer includes a recitation of the opening chapter (*sura*) of the Qur'an, and is sometimes performed on a small rug or mat used expressly for this purpose (see image 24). Muslims can pray individually at any location (fig. 1) or together in a mosque, where a leader in prayer (imam) guides the congregation. Men gather in the mosque for the noonday prayer on Friday; women are welcome but not obliged to participate. After the prayer, a sermon focuses on a passage from the Qur'an, followed by prayers by the imam and a discussion of a particular religious topic.

3. **Alms (*zakat*).** In accordance with Islamic law, Muslims donate a fixed portion of their income to community members in need. Many rulers and wealthy Muslims build mosques, drinking fountains, hospitals, schools, and other institutions both as a religious duty and to secure the blessings associated with charity.

4. **Fasting (*sawm*).** During the daylight hours of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, all healthy adult Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink. Through this temporary deprivation, they renew their awareness of and gratitude for everything God has provided in their lives—including the Qur'an, which was first revealed during this month. During Ramadan they share the hunger and thirst of the needy as a reminder of the religious duty to help those less fortunate.

FIG. 1. Portrait of Prince Muhammad Buland Akhtar, known as Achhe Sahib, at Prayer: Folio from an album, 17th century; painter: Hujraj; India; ink and opaque watercolor on paper; 13 1/16 x 9 in. (33.2 x 22.9 cm); Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.138.2)

This illustration shows a Mughal prince praying on a mat that features an arch recalling the shape of a prayer niche (*mihrab*), symbolic of the gateway to Paradise. The prince is barefoot as a gesture of humility before God. The simplicity of his surroundings is an indication of piety; the emphasis here is on the prince's spiritual nature rather than the opulence of his costume or surroundings (which is the case in many royal Mughal portraits; see "The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation," page 153).


تصویر شاہ زادہ محمد بلند اختر مشہور اچھی صاحب
عمل ہو جراح

5. **Pilgrimage (*hajj*).** Every Muslim whose health and finances permit it must make at least one visit to the holy city of Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia. The Ka'ba, a cubical structure covered in black embroidered hangings, is at the center of the Haram Mosque in Mecca (fig. 2). Muslims believe that it is the house Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic) built for God, and face in its direction (*qibla*) when they pray. Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, believers from all over the world have gathered around the Ka'ba in Mecca on the eighth and twelfth days of the final month of the Islamic calendar.

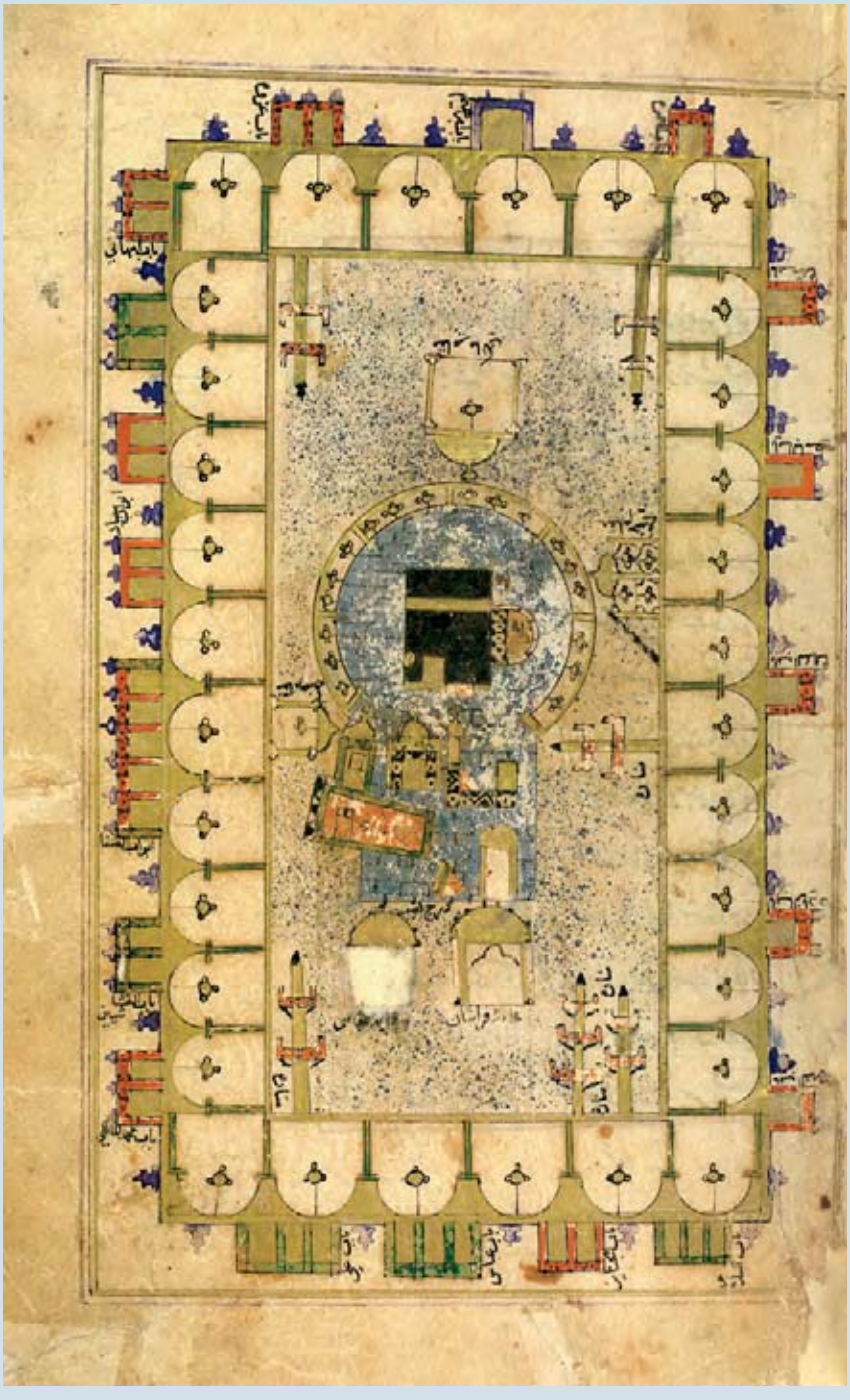


**FIG. 2.** Folio from the *Futuh al-Haramain* (Description of the Holy Cities), mid-16th century; by Muhi al-Din Lari; Turkey; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 8⅜ x 5¼ in. (21.3 x 13.3 cm); Rogers Fund, 1932 (32.131)

This book illustration provides a schematic view of the innermost enclosure of the Haram Mosque in Mecca. It includes six minarets, the names of the gates, and even shows mosque lamps hanging in the arcades around the Ka'ba at the center of the composition. The book is a pilgrimage manual, which describes the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and the rituals that pilgrims are required to perform at each location. The most important of these rituals include walking around the Ka'ba seven times, running between the hills of Safa and Marwa to commemorate the story of Ishmael (Isma'il in Arabic) and his mother, and symbolically stoning the devil in the area of Mina.

## The Prophet Muhammad and the Origins of Islam

The rise of Islam is intrinsically linked with the Prophet Muhammad, believed by Muslims to be the last in a long line of prophets that includes Moses and Jesus. Because Muhammad was the chosen recipient and messenger of the word of God through the divine revelations, Muslims from all walks of life strive to follow his example. After the holy Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet (hadith) and descriptions of his way of life (*sunna*) are the most important Muslim texts.

### Early Life

Muhammad was born into the most powerful tribe in Mecca, the Quraish, around 570 A.D. The power of the Quraish derived from their role as successful merchants. Several trade routes intersected at Mecca, allowing the Quraish to control trade along the west coast of Arabia, north to Syria, and south to Yemen.

Mecca was home to two widely venerated polytheistic cults whose gods were thought to protect its lucrative trade. After working for several years as a merchant, Muhammad was hired by Khadija, a wealthy widow, to ensure the safe passage of her caravans to Syria. They eventually married.

### Divine Revelations

When he was roughly forty, Muhammad began having visions and hearing voices. Searching for clarity, he would sometimes meditate at Mount Hira, near Mecca. On one of these occasions, the Archangel Gabriel (Jibra'il in Arabic) appeared to him and instructed him to recite "in the name of [your] lord." This was the first of many revelations that became the basis of the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. These early revelations pointed to the existence of a single God, contradicting the polytheistic beliefs of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula.

Initially overwhelmed by the significance of what was being revealed to him, Muhammad found unflinching support in his wife and slowly began to attract followers. His strong monotheistic message angered many of the Meccan merchants. They were afraid that trade, which they believed was protected by the pagan gods, would suffer. From that point forward, Muhammad was ostracized in Mecca. For a time, the influence and status of his wife and his uncle, Abu Talib, the chief of the clan, protected Muhammad from persecution. After they died, however, Muhammad's situation in Mecca became dire.

### The Hijra

Emigration became the only hope for Muhammad and his followers' survival. In 622, they headed to Medina, another oasis town, where they were promised freedom to practice their religion. The move from Mecca to Medina is known as the *hijra*—the flight—and marks year 1 of the Islamic, or *hijri*, calendar.

### Spreading the Message of Islam

In Medina, Muhammad continued to receive divine revelations and built an ever-expanding community around the new faith. The conflict with the Quraish continued, but after several years of violent clashes, Mecca surrendered. Muhammad and his followers soon returned and took over the city, destroying all its pagan idols and spreading their belief in one God.

### The Night Journey and Ascension of the Prophet

Accounts of the ascension (*mi'raj*) of Muhammad have captured the imaginations of writers and painters for centuries. One night, while the Prophet was sleeping, the Archangel Gabriel came and led him on a journey. Mounted on the heavenly steed Buraq, Muhammad traveled from the Ka'ba in Mecca to the "Farthest Mosque," which Muslims believe to be the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. There he prayed with other prophets such as Moses, Abraham, and Jesus, and ascended to the skies, where he was led by Gabriel through Paradise and Hell, and finally came face to face with God. He then returned to earth to continue spreading the message of Islam. According to Islamic belief, Muhammad was the only person to see Heaven and Hell while still alive.

### After the Prophet's Death: Emergence of Shi'i and Sunni Sects of Islam

When Muhammad died in 632, he had not named a successor. One faction, the Shi'a, believed that only individuals with direct lineage to the Prophet could guide the Muslim community righteously. They thought that 'Ali, Muhammad's closest surviving blood male relative, should be their next leader (caliph). The other faction, the Sunnis, believed that the Prophet's successor should be determined by consensus and successively elected three of his most trusted companions, commonly referred to as the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman), as leaders of the Muslim community; 'Ali succeeded them as the fourth caliph.

Today the Islamic community remains divided into Sunni and Shi'i branches. Sunnis revere all four caliphs, while Shi'is regard 'Ali as the first spiritual leader. The rift between these two factions has resulted in differences in worship as well as political and religious views. Sunnis are in the majority and occupy most of the Muslim world, while Shi'i populations are concentrated in Iran and Iraq, with sizeable numbers in Bahrain, Lebanon, Kuwait, Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

### Depictions of the Prophet Muhammad

Featured in this unit are several depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. These portrayals, while somewhat rare, are not unheard of as there were (and still are) many different attitudes toward depicting the Prophet, and humans in general, in the Islamic world. These attitudes varied dramatically from region to region and throughout history; the societies that produced the works discussed here are among those that allowed the depiction of the Prophet. Commissioned by Muslims for Muslims, these images appear in biographies of the Prophet and his family, world and local histories, and accounts of Muhammad's celestial journey (*mi'raj*), as well as in literary texts. In each context, they serve a distinct purpose. They illustrate a narrative in biographies and histories, while in literary texts they serve as visual analogues to written praises of the Prophet. An image of the Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of a book endows the volume with the highest form of blessing and sanctity. Thus, illustration of him was a common practice, particularly in the eastern regions of the Islamic world (see also "Frequently Asked Questions," page 9).

## The Qur'an

Muslims believe that the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, was revealed to Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years, starting with the initial revelation at Mount Hira. After the Prophet's death, his successors compiled these divine revelations in a manuscript.

The Qur'an contains prayers, moral guidance, historical narrative, and promises of paradise. It opens with a short prayer called the *Fatiha*, the most widely recited passage, and is divided into 114 chapters (*suras*) organized in descending length. For binding and reading purposes, manuscripts of the Qur'an are often divided into thirty equal parts, called *juz'*.

Every chapter of the Qur'an (except one) begins with the *bismillah*, the collective name for the invocation "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." Muslims often repeat this phrase at the start of an event or task—before giving a speech, beginning a meal, or even boarding a bus. The calligraphic *bismillah* is frequently written on both religious and secular objects. (See also "Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy," page 55.)

The Qur'an places Muhammad at the end of a long line of prophets that began with Abraham. Although narrative is not central to the Qur'an, it includes the stories of Noah, Moses, and Jesus. It recognizes Jews and Christians as "People of the Book"; as a result, Muslims accept many of the teachings of the Jewish Torah and Christian Bible. Many of the great Islamic empires (like those in Spain, Iran, India, and Turkey) were tolerant of religious minorities.

## The Written Word in Islam

Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains the literal words of God, which were spoken in Arabic. Their written form is considered the purest expression of God's intent. Muslims throughout the world share a linguistic bond based on the desire to read the Qur'an in its original language.

Because of the exalted position of the Qur'an in Muslim societies, historically special attention was paid to the production, illumination, decoration, and display of Qur'an manuscripts. Due to its association with the written word of God, calligraphy is considered by Muslims to be the highest art form. Luxuriously embellished Qur'an manuscripts are often placed on specially designed bookstands (*rahla*) and prominently featured in mosques and religious schools (*madrasa*s). (See image 5.)

## The Mosque

The English word *mosque* denotes a Muslim house of worship. The word evolved from the Arabic term *masjid*, which means "place of prostration." During prayer, Muslims briefly kneel and touch their foreheads to the ground as a sign of submission (literally, Islam) to the will of God.

### The Origin of the Mosque

The Prophet Muhammad's original house in Medina (in present-day Saudi Arabia) is thought to be the first mosque and probably served as a model for early mosque architecture. It was a mud-brick structure with living quarters on one side of an enclosed rectangular courtyard. Since Muhammad's followers would gather at his home for prayer, the side of the courtyard facing the *qibla*, or the direction of prayer, included a porch covered by palm branches, which offered shelter from the hot desert sun. Most early mosques, as well as the majority of later mosques in Arab lands, follow this general layout (see fig. 4).

## Essential Architectural Elements of a Mosque

The essential architectural elements of the mosque include:

- The *qibla* is the direction Muslims face when praying toward the Ka'ba in Mecca. The *qibla* wall is the wall in a mosque that faces Mecca.
- The *mihrab* is a niche in the *qibla* wall indicating the direction of Mecca; because of its importance, it is usually the most ornate part of a mosque, highly decorated and often embellished with inscriptions from the Qur'an (see image 4).
- The *minbar* is a pulpit in the form of a staircase on which the prayer leader (imam) stands when delivering a sermon after Friday prayer. The pulpit is usually situated to the right of the *mihrab* and is often made of elaborately carved wood or stone (fig. 3).
- A minaret is a tall tower attached or adjacent to a mosque. It is designed so the call to prayer, issued from mosques five times a day, can be heard loud and clear throughout a town or city. Alternatively, the call may be made from the roof or entrance, and is now often projected with the aid of microphones and speakers. The minaret is also a visual symbol of the presence of Islam. (See the six minarets of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, fig. 6.)
- Most mosque courtyards (*sahn*) contain a public fountain, where believers can perform ablutions, the ritual washing of the hands, feet, and face required before prayer. In the arid lands of Arabia, water is revered as a gift from God, and fountains also have symbolic meaning, alluding to the four rivers of Paradise mentioned in the Qur'an.



**FIG. 3.** *Minbar* in the Great Mosque of Divrigi, Divrigi, Turkey, 1228–29

## The Role of the Mosque

Mosques reflect the size and needs of individual Muslim communities, as their occupants all worship together on Fridays. Historically mosques have been at the center of education and intellectual life.

Inscriptions from the Qur'an adorn the interiors and exteriors of mosques, establishing a strong link between scripture and the place of prayer. Mosque decoration almost never includes human or animal forms, which are seen as potentially idolatrous. Instead, geometric, floral, vegetal, and calligraphic designs adorn mosques, symbolically recalling the promise of Paradise.

## Mosques around the World

Mosques throughout the Islamic world use diverse building materials and reflect different regional traditions and styles. Despite variations in size and design, the special place mosques hold in Muslim communities remains universal.



**FIG. 4.** Mosque of Ahmad Ibn Tulun, Cairo, Egypt, 9th century. View of the courtyard



**FIG. 5.** Shah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran, 17th century. The *qibla* entrance as seen from inside the courtyard



**FIG. 6.** Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey, 17th century

# 1
# Muhammad's Call to Prophecy and The First Revelation: Folio from a manuscript of the *Majmaʿ al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Histories)

About 1425
Present-day Afghanistan, Herat
Opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper; page: 16⅞ x 13¼ in. (42.8 x 33.7 cm)
Cora Timken Burnett Collection of Persian Miniatures and Other Persian Art Objects, Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 (57.51.37.3)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT**

This manuscript page presents a scene from the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

**FUNCTION**

A folio like this would have originally been part of a larger manuscript, in this case the *Compendium of Histories* (a chronicle of religious and historic events), written by Hafiz-i Abru in 1423. Rulers commissioned such manuscripts for distribution to educate their subjects.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This image depicts Muhammad's first revelation and is framed on the top and bottom by text in Persian that includes quotations from the Qur'an. In the top right of the composition, the Prophet sits upon Mount Hira, his head surrounded by a flaming halo as he looks toward the Archangel Gabriel, who stands below with outstretched arms and returns the Prophet's gaze. The illustration is remarkable for its bright, saturated colors and gold.

**CONTEXT**

This illustration depicts Gabriel's first appearance to Muhammad. The Archangel commands Muhammad to recite God's word. Muhammad initially hesitated before he spoke God's message.

The text surrounding the image describes this crucial episode in the history of Islam—the first revelation and Muhammad's acceptance of his role as God's messenger:

> *Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created,*
> *created Man of a blood-clot.*
> *Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous,*
> *who taught by the Pen,*
> *taught Man what he knew not.*
> (Qur'an, 96:1–5)

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Birth of Islam, Mecca, Prophet Muhammad, Archangel Gabriel, revelation, figural painting



1. Muhammad's Call to Prophecy and The First Revelation: Folio from a manuscript of the *Majma' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Histories)

## 2
## The Night Journey of The Prophet Muhammad (*Mi'raj*): Folio from the *Bustan* (Orchard) of Sa'di

About 1525–35
Calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur (about 1472–about 1536)
Penned in present-day Afghanistan, probably Herat
Illustrated in present-day Uzbekistan, probably Bukhara, 1530–35
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; painting: 7½ x 5 in. (19 x 12.7 cm)
Purchase, Louis V. Bell Fund and the Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1974 (1974.294.2)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

From a sixteenth-century manuscript of a thirteenth-century literary work, this painting depicts one of the most spiritual and revered episodes in Muhammad's life—his ascension to Heaven.

#### FUNCTION

The *Bustan* (Orchard) of Sa'di, one of the great works of Persian literature, contains moral advice and illustrated anecdotes. Like other folios featuring the Prophet, this image teaches followers about his life. It was once part of a richly illustrated and illuminated (gilded) manuscript of poetic verses commissioned for private use by a ruler or other wealthy patron.

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The Prophet Muhammad is mounted on the celestial steed Buraq at the center of the composition. They ascend to the heavens, guided by the Archangel Gabriel. The illustration clearly distinguishes between the heavenly world of angels and golden clouds, and the earthly world below, where three figures are asleep in a mosque.

#### CONTEXT

Painted by Muslim artists for a Muslim patron, this image portrays the Prophet unveiled, a practice now deemed blasphemous by conservative religious authorities. Throughout Islamic history, however, artists depicted the Prophet both with and without a face veil.

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Birth of Islam, Prophet Muhammad, Buraq (celestial steed), manuscript, *mihrab* (prayer niche), figural painting



2. The Night Journey of The Prophet Muhammad (*Mi'raj*): Folio from the *Bustan* (Orchard) of Sa'di

# 3
# Folio from a Qur'an manuscript

Late 13th–early 14th century
Spain
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on parchment; 21 1/16 x 22 in. (53.5 x 55.9 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1942 (42.63)

(See poster included in this resource)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

This large leaf is a page from a manuscript of the Qur'an. The skilled calligraphy and elaborate ornamentation reflect the eminence of the Qur'an in Islam.

### FUNCTION

Large, richly illuminated Qur'ans like the one to which this folio originally belonged, celebrated the word of God and raised the written word to an art form. As manuscripts containing the literal word of God, Qur'ans have an indispensible function in both private and public Muslim religious life. They also support oral recitation: cues in the script helped the reciter identify key details such as where to pause and how to vocalize various letter sounds.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The chapter heading, *Sura al-Zumar* (The Crowds), appears at the top of the page in gold letters. Read from right to left, the title ends in a large circular medallion with an elaborate vegetal pattern that showcases the illuminator's extraordinary talent. Similar smaller medallions indicate the end of each verse, where the reciter is expected to pause. The blue and red dots that appear throughout the page help ensure the proper pronunciation of short vowels, which are not written out in Arabic. Their colorful and precise execution adds a further decorative touch to the page.

### CONTEXT

This manuscript was probably produced in Islamic Spain. It features *maghribi* script, which is characterized by cursive letters and swooping sublinear elements (see also page 61). The use of this script is typical of Spanish and North African Qur'ans, as is the use of parchment, which was unusual in other regions at this late date. The text includes the first, second, and part of the third verses of the *Sura al-Zumar* chapter of the Qur'an, which focuses on the centrality of God and Muhammad's role as the Prophet.

While all Muslims are encouraged to read the Qur'an, correct recitation is a skill acquired through rigorous practice and schooling. In illuminated copies of the Qur'an like this one, elements that may look purely decorative, including the medallions mentioned above, often have practical purposes, such as marking the ends of verses. Because of the exalted place of the Qur'an in Islamic culture, illuminators often exhibited the finest accomplishments of their craft in these manuscripts.

Qur'ans come in many sizes. Very large Qur'ans sometimes serve for public recitation (see, for example, the massive Qur'an of Umar Aqta [1972.279 and 18.17.1]). Others are very small and could be carried on one's person (fig. 7).



**FIG. 7.** Folio from a Qur'an manuscript, 9th century; probably Egypt or Iraq; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on parchment; 1½ x 2⅞ in. (3.8 x 7.3 cm); Rogers Fund, 1962 (62.152.2)

The small size of this Qur'an would have allowed the owner to carry it on his or her person, making it ideal for travel. A personal Qur'an like this could also have functioned as a talisman, exemplifying the belief that the word of God brings blessings and protection to the believer through its mere presence.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Spread of Islam, Qur'an, Arabic, calligraphy (*maghribi*), recitation




3. Folio from a Qur'an manuscript

# 4
# *Mihrab*

From a religious school dated A.H. 755 / A.D. 1354–55
Iran, Isfahan
Mosaic of polychrome-glazed cut tiles on stonepaste body, set into mortar; 135 1/16 x 113 11/16 in. (343.1 x 288.7 cm), Wt. 4,500 lbs. (2041.2 kg)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT**

*Mihrab*s, like this example from Iran, are central architectural features of mosques and many Islamic religious schools all over the world.

**FUNCTION**

A *mihrab* is a niche in the wall of a mosque or religious school (*madrasa*) that indicates the direction of Mecca (*qibla*), which Muslims face when praying. It is the architectural and symbolic focal point of religious buildings.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

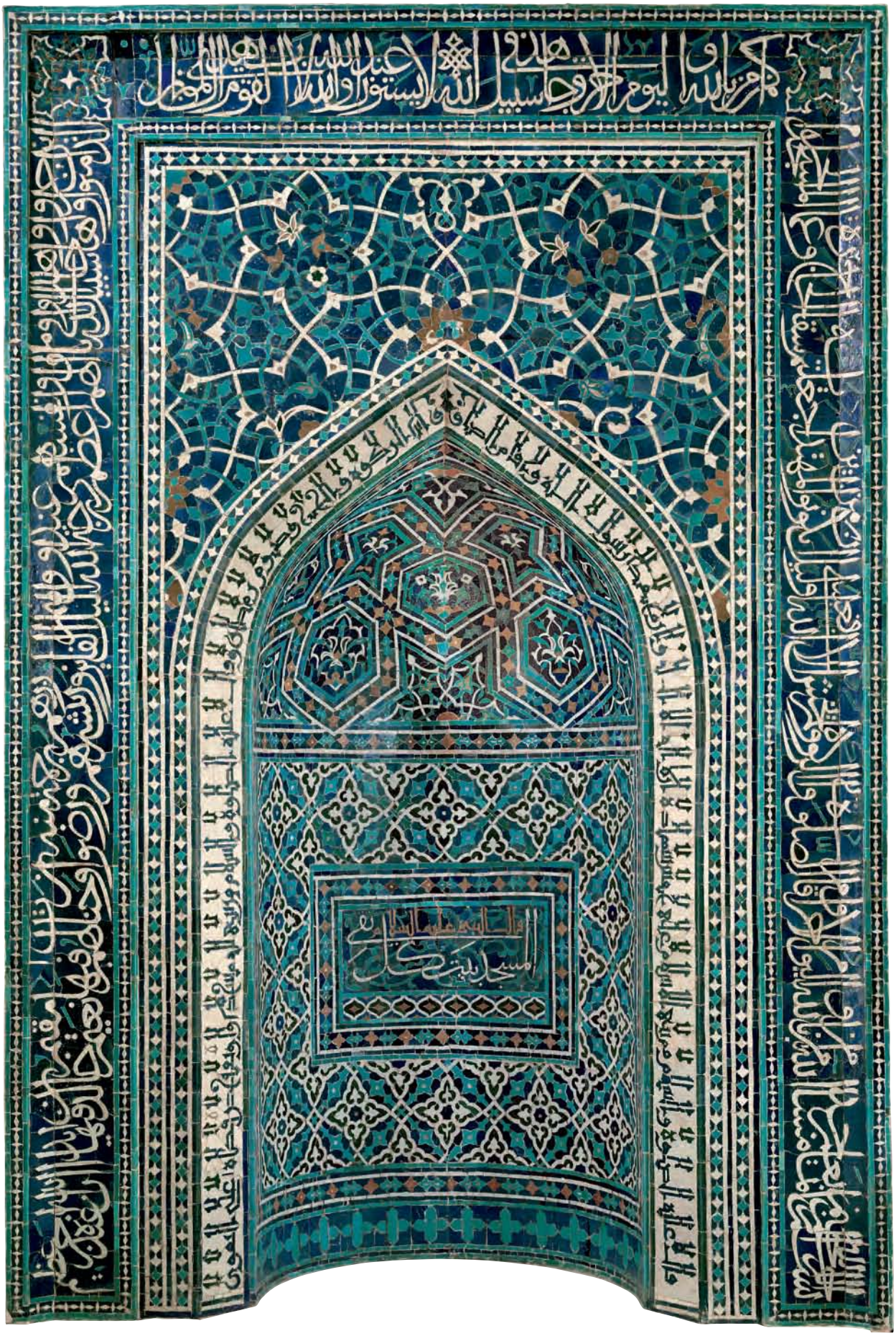
This *mihrab* is decorated with inscriptions on a background of cobalt blue, turquoise, golden yellow, white, and dark green tile mosaic. The outermost rectangular band contains cursive verses from the Qur'an (9:14–22) describing God as all-knowing and omnipresent. The frame around the niche is decorated with arabesque designs outlined in blue and interspersed with floral blossoms. An inscription from the hadith (Sayings of the Prophet), written in angular *kufic* script (see also page 58) along the edge of the pointed arch, describes the Five Pillars of Islam. At the center of the *mihrab*, directly facing the worshippers, an inscription reads: "The Prophet, may peace be upon him, said, 'the mosque is the abode of the pious.'"

**CONTEXT**

Mosques were not the only religious buildings that had prayer niches—this one comes from a fourteenth-century religious school (Madrasa Imami) in Isfahan, in present-day Iran. Students would have performed their daily prayers here, but would also have gone to the communal mosque on Fridays. This *mihrab* shows that lavish ornamentation was encouraged rather than shunned, even in religious settings.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Five Pillars of Islam, Arabic, calligraphy (*kufic*, *thuluth*, and *muhaqqaq* scripts), Mecca, Qur'an, *madrasa* (religious school), Iran, tilework



4. *Mihrab*

# 5
# Qur'an stand (*rahla*)

Dated A.H. 761 / A.D. 1360
Maker: Hasan ibn Sulaiman Isfahani
Iran
Teak; carved, painted, and inlaid;
45 x 50 x 16½ in. (114.3 x 127 x 41.9 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1910 (10.218)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT/FUNCTION**

Lavishly decorated stands (*rahlas*) were designed to hold large copies of the Qur'an. According to its inscriptions, this one was used in a religious school (*madrasa*) in a town near Isfahan, in present-day Iran.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This stand is made of two interlocking wood panels decorated with carved inscriptions and floral, vegetal, and geometric motifs. The upper square panels bear the word God ("Allah") repeated in four quadrants over a background of carved spiral arabesques. The lower rectangular sections are deeply carved in several layers; at the center of a representation of a prayer niche (*mihrab*) stands a cypress tree. The frame of the niche is decorated with calligraphy and spiraling arabesques, while naturalistic flowers cover the surface outside this border. The inscriptions include the name of the carver, Hasan ibn Sulaiman of Isfahan, and evoke the might of God and the holiness of Muhammad and the twelve Shi'i imams, his successors.

**CONTEXT**

Inscriptions from religious texts frequently decorate Qur'an stands. Those using this stand would have been highly educated and thus able to read and understand the calligraphy. However, in Islam, the words of God are a blessing to believers, even when they cannot be read.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Qur'an, imam (prayer leader), *madrasa* (religious school), calligraphy (*thuluth*, *kufic*, and *naskh* scripts), vegetal and floral ornament, wood



5. Qur’an stand (*rahla*)

# 6
# Mosque lamp

About 1329–35
Maker: ʿAli ibn Muhammad al-Barmaki
Egypt
Glass, colorless with brown tinge; blown, blown applied foot, enameled and gilded; H. 14⅛ in. (35.9 cm), Max. Diam. 10⅛ in. (25.6 cm)
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.991)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

Mosque lamps like this one symbolize God's presence. In the *Ayat al-Nur* (The Light Verse), one of the most quoted passages from the Qur'an, God is compared to light:

> *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth;*
> *The likeness of His Light is as a niche*
> *wherein is a lamp*
> *(the lamp in a glass,*
> *the glass as it were a glittering star)*
> *kindled from a Blessed Tree,*
> *an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West*
> *whose oil well-nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it;*
> *Light upon Light*
> *(God guides to His Light whom He Will.)*
> (*Sura al-Nur*, 24:35)

### FUNCTION

Because the first and last daily prayers are held before dawn and after sunset, lamps are necessary for illumination in mosques and other religious buildings. In earlier periods, lamps such as this were used for both secular and religious purposes, but by the fourteenth century they were made almost exclusively for mosques, mausoleums, and religious schools (*madrasas*). Often a wealthy official would donate lamps to a mosque or shrine as an expression of charity and piety.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This mosque lamp is made of blown glass shaped into a semi-spherical body with a low foot and wide opening, and enameled and gilded. The shape, intricate enameled decoration, and detailed inscriptions are typical of mosque lamps produced during the Mamluk sultanate (1250–1517) in Egypt and Syria. (See image 45.)

The calligraphic decoration is divided into three bands: one on the flare, one on the body, and a third on the underside. The name of the patron who commissioned the lamp is inscribed in the lower portion. When lit, the flickering flame illuminated areas without enamel paint, such as the text in the mid-section. The lamp is also decorated with bands of floral ornament.

### CONTEXT

The decoration on this lamp indicates the status of its patron. The cup design featured prominently near the mouth is the blazon (similar to a coat of arms) of the sultan's cupbearer (*jashanqir*), a position in the Mamluk court. During the Mamluk sultanate, high court officials usually had blazons that indicated their roles in the hierarchy and ceremonies of the court. The ceremonial cupbearer who commissioned this lamp is identified by an inscription as Saif al-Din Qawsun; the lamp may have been created for his mosque or mausoleum in Cairo.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Egypt, Mamluk dynasty, patronage, *amir* (commander), mosque, blown glass



6. Mosque lamp

# Lesson Plan: Unit 1 Islam and Religious Art

### FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Muhammad's Call to Prophecy and The First Revelation: Folio from a manuscript of the *Majma' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Histories)** (image 1)
About 1425
Present-day Afghanistan
Opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper; page: 16⅞ x 13¼ in. (42.8 x 33.7 cm)
Cora Timken Burnett Collection of Persian Miniatures and Other Persian Art Objects, Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 (57.51.37.3)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** English Language Arts, Visual Arts, and World History
**GRADES:** High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art and Belief

### GOALS

Students will be able to:

- identify important figures and events in early Islamic history;
- recognize ways works of art reflect and support religious beliefs and practices; and
- use visual evidence to support inferences.

### NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- NL-ENG.K-12.9 Multicultural Understanding
- NL-ENG.K-12.10 Applying Non-English Perspectives

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.5 Era 5: Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000–1500 C.E.

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- SL.CCR.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

- R.CCR.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Pencil and paper, computer with Internet access and speakers, projected images or printouts of image 1 and figs. 8, 9

### QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- Look closely at the clothing, pose, facial expression, and attributes of each figure in image 1. What might they suggest about each figure? (Note: Attitudes toward figural arts in the Islamic world varied according to time and place, ranging from totally aniconic—no images of people or animals—to entirely accepting of figural imagery in secular settings. The Qur'an does not prohibit the depiction of figures, but the Sayings of the Prophet (hadith) discusses the subject several times. The objections expressed there largely focus on the exclusive role of God as creator.)
- What appears to be happening? What do you see that makes you say that?
- According to Muslim belief the Prophet Muhammad (seated) received his first revelation when the Archangel Gabriel (left) appeared and instructed him to recite God's message. What do you think this artist hoped to convey about the event?
- The text surrounding the image describes this crucial episode in the history of Islam—the first revelation and Muhammad's acceptance of his role as God's messenger. Listen to an audio recording of the section of the Qur'an corresponding to the first revelation (see link in RESOURCES). What do you notice about the sound of the words? How does this support or challenge your initial impressions of the scene?
- Read an excerpt from the revelation below (translated from Arabic). What do these words mean to you?

> *Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created,*
> *created Man of a blood-clot.*
> *Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous,*
> *who taught by the Pen,*
> *taught Man what he knew not.*
> *(Qur'an, 96:1–5)*

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**DURATION:** Approximately 60 minutes

Compare and contrast the ways in which works of art reflecting Christian and Muslim beliefs (figs. 8, 9; image 1) present a pivotal spiritual moment. Collect information about the figures (pose, facial expression, clothing and accessories), setting, and artistic choices (color, composition, and selection and application of materials) in each work. Identify similarities and differences between the works using the data you collected as an aid. Discuss how the various representations of these important moments support the religious beliefs and practices of each faith.



**FIG. 8.** Luca Giordano (Italian, 1634–1705), *The Annunciation,* 1672; oil on canvas; 34 x 31½ in. (86.4 x 80 cm); The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (1973.311.2)



**FIG. 9.** Joos van Cleve (Netherlandish, about 1485–1540/41), *The Annunciation,* about 1525; oil on wood; 34 x 31½ in. (86.4 x 80 cm); The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.60)

## RESOURCES


Sorabella, Jean. "The Birth and Infancy of Christ in Italian Painting." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/birt/hd_birt.htm (June 2008).

"Surah al ʻAlaq." *Audio Islam*. January 31, 2009. http://www.audioislam.com/audio/quran/recitation/al-afaasee/surah_al_alaq.mp3.

Yalman, Suzan. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Birth of Islam." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/isla/hd_isla.htm (October 2001).


## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Fig. 8. Luca Giordano (Italian, 1634–1705), *The Annunciation*, 1672; oil on canvas; 34 x 31½ in. (86.4 x 80 cm); The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (1973.311.2)

Fig. 9. Joos van Cleve (Netherlandish, about 1485–1540/41), *The Annunciation*, about 1525; oil on wood; 34 x 31½ in. (86.4 x 80 cm); The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.60)

Image 2. The Night Journey of The Prophet Muhammad (*Miʻraj*): Folio from the *Bustan* (Orchard) of Saʻdi, about 1525–35. Calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur (about 1472–about 1536). Penned in present-day Afghanistan, probably Herat Illustrated in present-day Uzbekistan, probably Bukhara, 1530–35; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; painting: 7½ x 5 in. (19 x 12.7 cm); Purchase, Louis V. Bell Fund and The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1974 (1974.294.2)

Image 3. Folio from a Qur'an manuscript, 13th–14th century; Spain; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on parchment; 21 1/16 x 22 in. (53.5 x 55.9 cm); Rogers Fund, 1942 (42.63)


Author: Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher Jody Madell
Date: 2012

# Unit 1 Suggested Readings and Resources

### THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: A Short History*. New York: Modern Library, 2002.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Bloom, Jonathan, and Sheila Blair. *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**
Handbook to the PBS video *Islam: Empire of Faith*. See especially chapter 3, "Sources of Faith."

*Islam: Empire of Faith*. DVD. 163 min. Arlington, Va.: PBS Home Video, 2000.
A series of three programs that trace the rise of early Islamic civilization through scholarly interviews, evocative reenactments, and an exposition of Islamic art, artifacts, and architecture. See also the companion website, http://www.pbs.org/empires/islam, and handbook, *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power*, above.

Esposito, John L. *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*. 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
**HIGH SCHOOL**
An excellent reference for students and educators, presented in question-and-answer format.

Khan, Hena, and Julie Paschkis. *Night of the Moon: A Muslim Holiday Story*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2008.
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

### THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND HIS LIFE

Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*. Eminent Lives. New York: Atlas Books/HarperCollins, 2006.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

*Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*. Film website. Menlo Park, Calif.: Kikim Media, 2002.
See also http://www.pbs.org/muhammad/index.shtml, a highly informative online companion to the film *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*.

Yalman, Suzan. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Birth of Islam." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/isla/hd_isla.htm (October 2001).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

### THE MOSQUE

Grazda, Edward, and Jerrilyn D. Dodds. *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York City*. New York: powerHouse Books, 2002.
**HIGH SCHOOL**
An exploration of the mosques of New York with beautiful black-and-white photos.

Macaulay, David. *Mosque*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL**
An in-depth look at the process of building a mosque in sixteenth-century Istanbul.

### UNIT 1 SOURCES


Akbarnia, Ladan, and Francesca Leoni. *Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam*. Exhibition catalogue. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2010.

Arberry, Arthur J., trans. *The Koran*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Bloom, Jonathan, and Sheila Blair. *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

——. *Islamic Arts*. London: Phaidon Press, 1997.

Carboni, Stefano, and David Whitehouse. *Glass of the Sultans*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.

Chebel, Malek, and Laziz Hamani. *Symbols of Islam*. Paris: Assouline, 1997.

Ernst, Carl W. *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Ettinghausen, Richard, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina. *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Flood, Finbarr B. "Faith, Religion, and the Material Culture of Early Islam." In *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century*, edited by Helen C. Evans with Brandie Ratliff, pp. 244–58. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

——. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

UNIT 2

# Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy



After reading this unit, you will:

- understand why calligraphy is the most esteemed art form in the Islamic world;
- be able to identify the function and visual characteristics of some of the key scripts represented in the featured artworks; and
- recognize ways calligraphers use the shapes of letters to decorate objects and convey a wide range of messages.

## Introduction

Calligraphy is considered the quintessential art form of the Islamic world—Arabic letters decorate objects ranging from bowls to buildings. Numerous scripts have emerged over the centuries that serve a multitude of religious, political, social, and cultural functions. This unit explores the variety and versatility of Islamic calligraphy and historical efforts to perfect and codify scripts and generate new forms.

## Arabic and Islam

The written word acquired unparalleled significance with the arrival of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. The Prophet Muhammad's trusted companions and followers collected the divine revelations from written and oral sources and compiled them into a manuscript known as the Qur'an, Islam's holiest book. Since the divine revelations were conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, Muslims regard the Qur'an in Arabic script as the physical manifestation of God's message. Copying text from the Qur'an is thus considered an act of devotion. The organic link of the Arabic language to Islam elevated it to the *lingua franca*, or common language, of the Islamic world.

The text of the Qur'an was codified in its present form under the Caliph 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (reigned 644–56). To preserve the authentic pronunciation of the Qur'an, a system of diacritical (or accent) marks indicating short vowels was developed.

## Arabic Calligraphy as an Art Form

Calligraphy, from the Greek words *kallos* (beauty) and *graphos* (writing), refers to the harmonious proportion of both letters within a word and words on a page. While some of the best examples of calligraphic writing make this art form appear effortless, each letter and diacritical mark is the result of painstaking measurements and multiple strokes.

Calligraphy appears on both religious and secular objects in virtually every medium—architecture, paper, ceramics, carpets, glass, jewelry, woodcarving, and metalwork. In addition to its decorative qualities, it often provides valuable information about the object it decorates, such as function, maker, patron, and date and place of production.

A number of factors, such as the prospective audience, content of the text, and the shape and function of an object, informs the type of script employed. Graceful and fluid scripts such as *nasta'liq* are used for poetry (fig. 14), Qur'an manuscripts are written in bold and stately scripts (fig. 13), and royal correspondence utilized complex scripts that are difficult to forge (see image 23). Although there are exceptions, most scripts have several specific functions (figs. 11, 13, 14).

## Origins and Characteristics of the Arabic Alphabet

The origins of the Arabic alphabet can be traced to the writing of the semi-nomadic Nabataean tribes, who inhabited southern Syria and Jordan, Northern Arabia, and the Sinai Peninsula. Surviving stone inscriptions in the Nabataean script show strong similarities to the modern Arabic writing

system. Like Arabic, their written texts consisted largely of consonants and long vowels, with variations on the same basic letter shapes used to represent a number of sounds.

Arabic is written and read from right to left. There is no distinction between upper- and lower-case letters, though shapes of letters usually vary depending on whether they are in an initial, medial, or final position in a word. Punctuation marks were not adopted until the twentieth century. Short vowels, represented by a set of marks below or above the letters, aid in the pronunciation of a word—these are usually only written in the Qur'an, where correct recitation is important, and in texts for novice readers.

The Arabic alphabet consists of eighteen shapes that express twenty-eight phonetic sounds with the help of diacritical marks. The same letter shape can form a "b" sound when one dot is placed below (ب), a "t" sound when two dots are placed above (ت), or a "th" sound when three dots are added above (ث). (See fig. 10 for more examples.)

**FIG. 10.** The Arabic alphabet

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| alif | ا | za | ز | qaf | ق |
| ba | ب | sin | س | kaf | ك |
| ta | ت | shin | ش | lam | ل |
| tha | ث | sad | ص | mim | م |
| jim | ج | dad | ض | nun | ن |
| ha | ح | ta | ط | ha | ه |
| kha | خ | dha | ظ | waw | و |
| dal | د | ain | ع | ya | ي |
| dhal | ذ | ghain | غ | | |
| ra | ر | fa | ف | | |

## The Arabic Alphabet and Other Languages

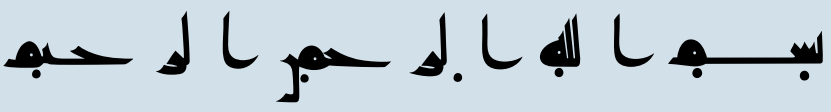
With the arrival of Islam and the conversion of many regions, a number of languages adopted the Arabic alphabet even though they bear no linguistic similarity.

Today, Persian (or Farsi, spoken in Iran; Dari in Afghanistan; and Tajik in Tajikistan), Pashto (spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan), Kurdish (spoken in parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey), and Urdu (spoken in Pakistan and parts of India) are among the languages that adopted Arabic letters. Turkish also used Arabic letters until 1928, when the country officially switched to the latin alphabet.

## The Development and Spread of Calligraphic Scripts

The first calligraphic script to gain prominence in Qur'ans and on architecture and portable works of art was *kufic*, which features angular letters, horizontal format, and thick extended strokes. Eventually, variations of *kufic* emerged. Examples range from letters intertwined with floral ornament (floriated *kufic*) to letters that appear to be woven into knots (knotted/plaited *kufic*) (fig. 11).

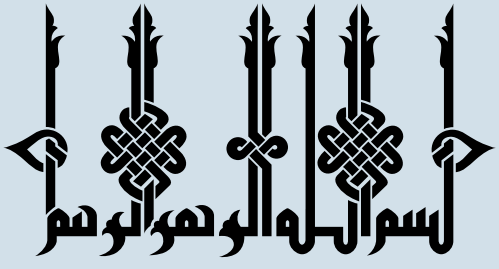
**FIG. 11.** *Kufic* script variations, all reading *bismillah*



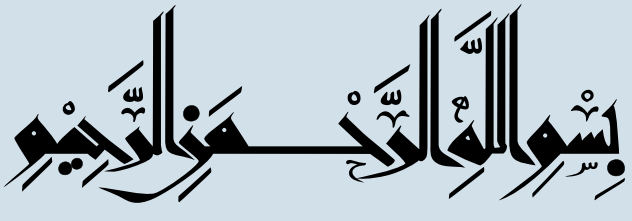
| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| *kufic* | Qur'ans, architectural decoration, textiles, carpets |



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| floriated *kufic* | Qur'ans, ceramics, metalwork |



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| Knotted/plaited *kufic* | Qur'ans, architectural decoration |



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| "New style" script | Qur'ans, architectural decoration |

## Proportional Scripts

A new system of proportional cursive scripts was codified from the tenth to the thirteenth century. In a proportional script, each letter's shape is determined by a fixed number of rhombic (diamond-shaped) dots (fig. 12). A rhombic dot is the shape formed when a calligrapher presses his or her pen to paper in one downward motion, producing the diamond shape. A word written in one of the proportional scripts can vary in size but the letters will always be in strict proportion to one another. There are six proportional scripts (the Six Pens)—*naskh*, *thuluth*, *muhaqqaq*, *rayhani*, *tawqi'*, and *riqa'* (fig. 13).

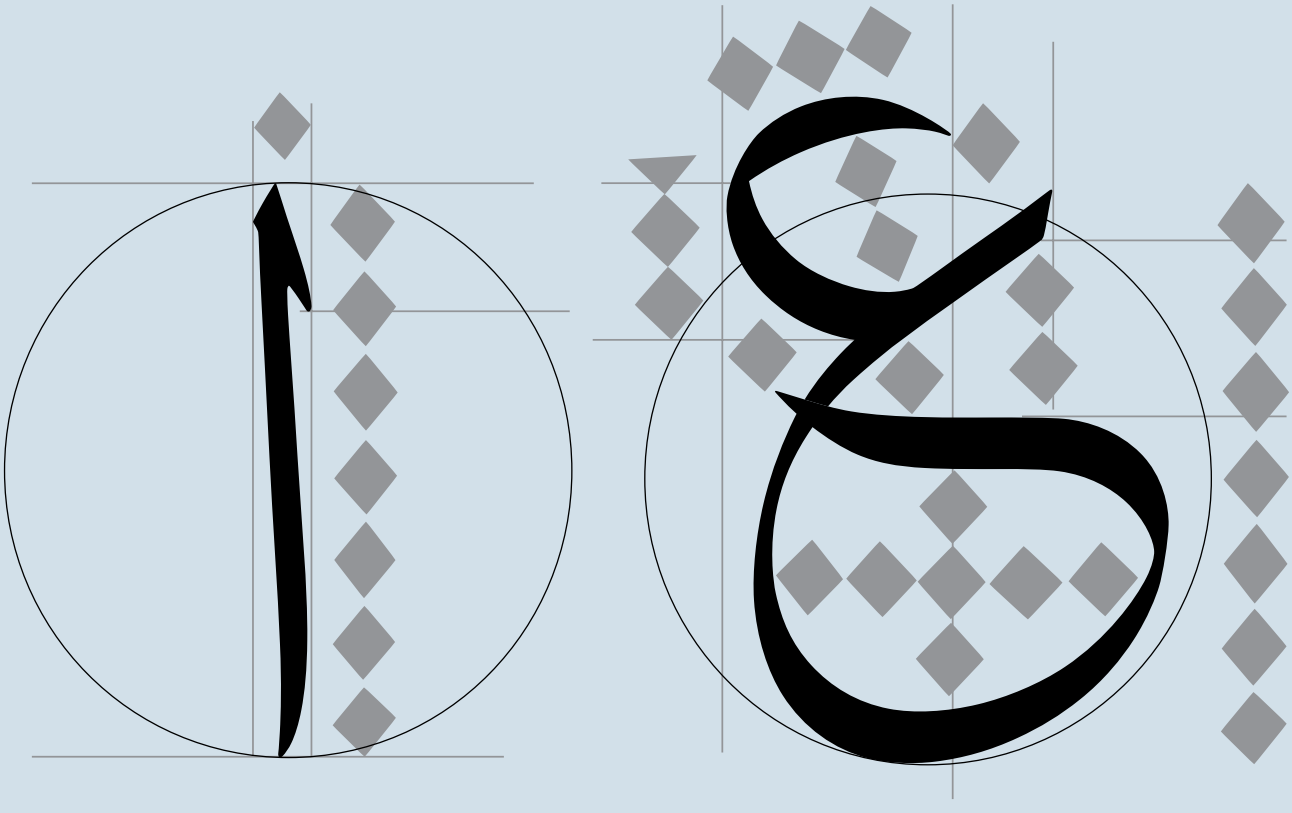
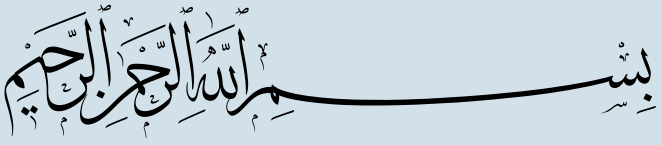


**FIG. 12.** Calligraphic diagrams of the letters *alif* and *ain* using the proportional system based on rhombic dots described above

**FIG. 13.** Six Pens (proportional scripts), all reading *bismillah*



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| *naskh* | Manuscripts, ceramics, tiles |



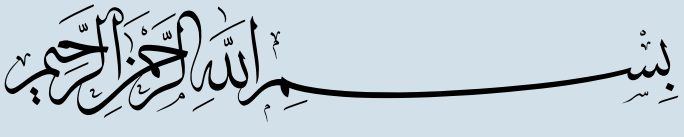
| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| *thuluth* | Qur'ans, architecture, metalwork, ceramics, manuscripts |



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| *muhaqqaq* | Qur'ans, architectural decoration, ceramics |



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| *rayhani* | Chancellery script for letters, missives, edicts, architecture |



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| *tawqi'* | Qur'ans, missives, edicts, architecture |

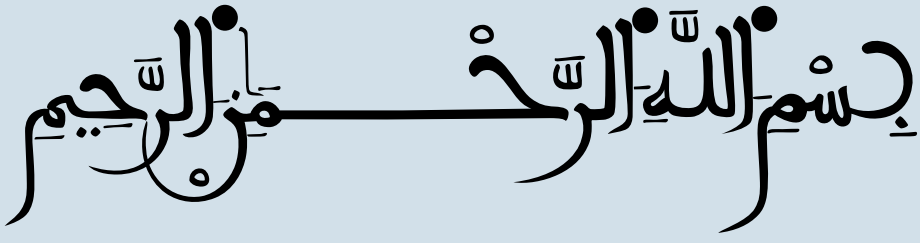


| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
|---|---|
| *riqa'* | Letters, edicts, manuscripts |

## Regional Scripts and Variations

Scripts have their own distinct function and history; some were used widely while others remained local. For example, *maghribi* was developed and used primarily in Spain and North Africa, while *nasta'liq*, a flowing script originating in Iran and Central Asia, spread eastward and became popular in Mughal India and Ottoman Turkey (fig. 14).

FIG. 14. Examples of regional scripts, both reading *bismillah*



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
| --- | --- |
| *maghribi* | Qur'ans and other manuscripts |



| SCRIPT NAME | USES |
| --- | --- |
| *nasta'liq* | Poetry (in manuscripts or on objects), album pages, textiles, carpets |



## Calligraphers and Their Tools

Calligraphers are the most highly regarded artists in Islamic culture. The art of calligraphy was passed down from master to student, often within the same family. In order to become a master calligrapher and acquire a formal license, a student had to train for years by copying models to perfect his or her skills.

Training to become a calligrapher was a long and rigorous process. Most calligraphers were highly educated and some came from the upper echelons of society. Many rulers received extensive calligraphic training from the best court masters and became accomplished calligraphers in their own right. While most calligraphers at the time were men, some wealthy women practiced calligraphy too. Today, the art of calligraphy is widely practiced by both men and women.

Tools and materials affected the quality of the final product. Every calligrapher learned how to prepare pens, inks, and paper. Pens (*qalam*) were often fashioned from reeds due to their flexibility. First, hollow reeds were harvested and left to dry; the calligrapher then cut a tip in the shape, width, and angle that best matched the particular script he or she planned to use. Inks were made of natural materials such as soot, ox gall, gum Arabic, or plant essences. Manuscripts were written on papyrus and parchment (animal skin)before paper was introduced to the Islamic world from China around the eighth century. Because of the status of calligraphy as an art form, the tools associated with it—shears, knives, inkwells, and pen boxes—were often elaborately decorated and sometimes made of precious materials.

Detail, image 10

# 7
# Bowl with Arabic inscription

10th century
Iran, Nishapur
Earthenware; white slip with black-slip decoration under transparent glaze; H. 7 in. (17.8 cm), Diam. 18 in. (45.7 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1965 (65.106.2)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

This bowl exemplifies the use of calligraphy as decoration on ceramics, and illustrates the dramatic impact a simple inscription can make.

### FUNCTION

In addition to its use as a bowl, a ceramic vessel of this quality was a visual indicator of wealth and status. The proverbs featured in the calligraphic decoration on bowls like this are powerful tools for understanding the values and mores of the society in which they were made.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This vessel is made of local earthenware, covered with white slip (semifluid clay), which offers a smooth surface and uniform background for decoration. The brownish black inscriptions encircling the interior of the bowl present a striking contrast. The elongated letters of the text radiate toward the center of the bowl, creating a harmonious relationship between the shape of the vessel and its surface decoration. Written in "new style" script, the letters feature angular shapes and slender vertical shafts. "New style" script was used primarily in the eastern Islamic lands in Qur'ans, architectural decoration, and ceramic vessels.

### CONTEXT

This vessel was produced in the city of Nishapur, in northeastern Iran, during the tenth century. The bowl belongs to a larger group that includes some of the oldest existing records of proverbs and adages in the Islamic world. The writing on this vessel offers the following advice: "Planning before work protects you from regret; good luck and well-being"—an appropriate warning given the careful planning needed to ensure the text fit properly around the perimeter of the bowl. The inscriptions on wares unearthed at Nishapur sometimes mention the name of the maker, but hardly ever the name of the patron. Based on the content of the inscriptions, we know that such ceramics were not made for royal patrons, but rather for members of an affluent urban class.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Calligraphy (*kufic* script), proverb, secular, Iran, urban class, ceramic



7. Bowl with Arabic inscription

# 8
# *Tiraz* fragment

Late 14th–early 15th century
Spain
Silk, lampas; 10⅝ x 21¼ in. (27 x 54 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1918 (18.31)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT**

Calligraphy was an important social and political tool within the royal courts of the Islamic world and text was used as both a decorative and functional element on many objects, including textiles.

**FUNCTION**

Textiles with calligraphic bands are called *tiraz*, which means "embroidery" in Arabic. They were produced in royal workshops and presented to individuals in service to the court. Inscriptions followed a formula that often included the name of the ruler, his titles, honorifics, the place of manufacture, and sometimes the name of the workshop superintendent. The prolific production of these gifts in royal workshops led to the workshops themselves being referred to as *tiraz*. Though many *tiraz* were used in clothing, this specific textile fragment's function remains unclear. Nevertheless, it is certain that *tiraz* served to celebrate and reinforce the power and authority of the ruler and his court.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

A calligraphic inscription in yellow letters against a red background decorates the center band of the fabric. The inscription repeats the phrase "Glory to our Lord the Sultan." The tall vertical shafts of the letters are balanced by the horizontal sections of the inscription and the decorative elements embellishing it. At the center, the decoration is more ornate and emphasizes the word *sultan*, successfully fulfilling the main purpose of the textile—to glorify the ruler and acknowledge his authority.

**CONTEXT**

With examples dating from as early as the seventh century, *tiraz* textiles from Egypt are among the oldest inscribed objects in the Islamic world. In addition to mentioning the ruler's name, these bands of calligraphy sometimes bear wishes of good fortune to the owner or provide historical information such as the date and place of production. Textiles containing good wishes for the ruler were common in North Africa and Muslim Spain, where this example was produced. The calligraphy on this textile is executed in a Spanish version of *thuluth*, a script also widely seen in other media such as stone, metal, wood, glass, and metalwork.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Calligraphy (*thuluth* script), Spain, sultan, courtly life, textile, silk



8. *Tiraz* fragment

# 9
# Lamp stand with chevron pattern

Dated A.H. 986 / A.D. 1578–79
Iran
Brass; cast, engraved, and inlaid with black and red pigments;
H. 13¼ in. (33.7 cm), Diam. (base) 6⅝ in. (16.8 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1929 (29.53)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

This lamp stand is inscribed with a mystical Sufi poem that, in its description of a moth drawn to a flame, links the surface decoration with the object's function.

### FUNCTION

Hollow brass stands such as this incorporated a separate element containing lamp oil that fit into the socket. They were sometimes also used to hold large candles. The writing on the stand transforms this everyday object into a symbol of mystical devotion. Some of these stands were commissioned as gifts for shrines, mosques, or other religious institutions.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The surface of this brass lamp stand features alternating bands of engraved poetic inscriptions, in *nasta'liq* script, and vegetal scrolls. The diagonal arrangement of the writing is a common feature seen in Persian and Mughal album pages containing rhyming couplets of lyrical poetry (see image 10). The residue of red and black pigments suggests the background may originally have been inlaid with different colors of enamel or mineral paste.

The inscriptions are from well-known Persian and Indian poems. Starting at the top of the stand, verses belonging to the *Bustan* (Orchard) by the Persian poet Sa'di translate as follows:

> *I remember one night as my eyes would not sleep*
> *I heard a moth speaking with a candle*
> *[Said the moth:] "Because I am a lover, it is [only] right*
> *that I should burn.*
> *[But,] why should you weep and burn yourself up?"*
>
> (Translation based upon the work of
> Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani)

Around the shaft, two couplets by Indian poet Amir Khusrau Dihlavi, each from a different lyric poem (*ghazal*), read:

> *There is not a moment that my soul is not burning from love for you.*
> *Which heart is not burning from that artful coquetry?*
>
> *I am burning from jealousy because you set fire to another*
> *You set fire to another, yet no one else is burned but me . . .*
>
> (Translated by Denise-Marie Teece)

### CONTEXT

The verses belong to the mystical tradition of Islam called Sufism and speak of a moth (the lover) drawn to the flame (the beloved). The lover and the beloved are common metaphors in Sufi poetry, meant to express the relationship between God and the believer and the yearning of the believer (the lover) to unite with the divine (the beloved). The dialogue between the moth and the candle represents the desire of the devout believer, who, like a lover, seeks the object of his or her love, God. The flame of the lamp represents the intensity of the divine, in whose presence no mortal can survive. Despite this, it is the nature of the moth to be captivated by the bright flame.

The maker of this brass lamp imbued it with multiple layers of meaning through his use of metaphor. The poetry, rendered in highly decorative yet legible calligraphy, links the lamp stand to the rich symbolism of fire. The expertly chosen passages by different authors would have been immediately recognizable by the patron, who would have admired their arrangement and calligraphic rendering. In this case, calligraphy transforms an everyday object into a symbol and a reminder of a rich poetic tradition, prompting reflection on faith, devotion, and love.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Calligraphy (*nasta'liq* script), poetry, metaphor, symbolism, Sufi, Iran, brass



9. Lamp stand with chevron pattern

# 10
# Illuminated folio with poetic verses from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

About 1500
Calligrapher: Sultan ʻAli Mashhadi (active late 15th–early 16th century)
India
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 15⅝ x 10¼ in. (38.9 x 26 cm)
Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.32v)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

This page from a royal album demonstrates the high status and importance of calligraphy as a court art. This example features the popular regional script *nastaʻliq*, which was developed in Persia but also widely used in the Mughal court in India (1526–1858).

### FUNCTION

Calligraphy by well-known masters was often collected by royal patrons and arranged in albums. This page, containing a love poem, belongs to an album assembled by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

A short lyric poem, written in elegant *nastaʻliq* script, is set against a background of elaborate floral arabesques at the center of the page. The verses, which flow diagonally, are framed in cloud-shaped compartments. The poem reads:

> *By Khwaja Salman, may God's mercy be upon him*
> *In your curls seek and ask how I am*
> *Ask about those broken by the snare of misfortune*
> *Ask about all the broken ones*
> *Then ask me first, for I am the most brokenhearted [of them all].*
> *Written by Sultan ʻAli Mashhadi*
>
> (Translated by Maryam Ekhtiar)

Several decorated frames surround the text; the outermost frame, the wide page border, is comprised of a blue ground covered in gilded floral elements—palmettes, leaves, blossoms, and elongated stems.

### CONTEXT

Collecting paintings, drawings, and calligraphy—and assembling them in bound volumes—was a favorite pastime of the Mughal royalty and elite. The emperor Shah Jahan, the patron of this album, was an especially avid patron of the arts and collected beautifully written poetry set against ornate backgrounds, calligraphic exercises, and paintings to assemble in albums such as this one. Albums were made for private viewing, enjoyment, and meditation and often contained brief notes written by the owner. (See, from the same album images 30, 32; and fig. 34)

The inclusion on this page of the name of the calligrapher, Sultan ʻAli Mashhadi (below the verses), as well as that of the poet Khwaja Salman (above the verses), draws attention to the high status of the calligrapher within the royal workshop. The poem uses a familiar trope in Persian love poetry—that of the beloved who ensnares others with the "ropes" of her curls, but leaves them in a trap of misfortune. The verses in the border are from other love poems.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Calligraphy (*nastaʻliq* script), poetry, Mughal court, Emperor Shah Jahan, album, floral and vegetal ornament, painting



10. Illuminated folio with poetic verses from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

# 11
# Calligraphic galleon

Dated A.H. 1180 / A.D. 1766–67
Calligrapher: ʻAbd al-Qadir Hisari
Turkey
Ink and gold on paper; 19 x 17 in. (48.3 x 43.2 cm)
Louis E. and Theresa S. Seley Purchase Fund for Islamic Art and Rogers Fund, 2003 (2003.241)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

This calligraphic drawing (calligram) of a ship at sea exemplifies one of the most innovative artistic genres developed by Ottoman calligraphers while also conveying an important religious message.

### FUNCTION

The combination of Qur'anic verses, prayers, and poetry venerating the Prophet renders this calligram an object of talismanic devotional power.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The prow, deck, hull, and stern of the ship are formed by a gilded calligraphic inscription that names the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, as well as their dog Qitmir (see Context, below). On the stern, the Throne verse from the Qur'an (2:255) acknowledges God's power to protect and preserve everything in his kingdom. The verse is believed to have the power to avert evil. Below the distinctive imperial emblem or insignia (*tughra*; see also image 23) on the stern is a dedication to the Ottoman sultan Mustafa III (reigned 1757–74). Calligraphy dominates the composition; even the waves in the scene contain aphorisms in a minute script whose name, *ghubar*, means "dustlike."

### CONTEXT

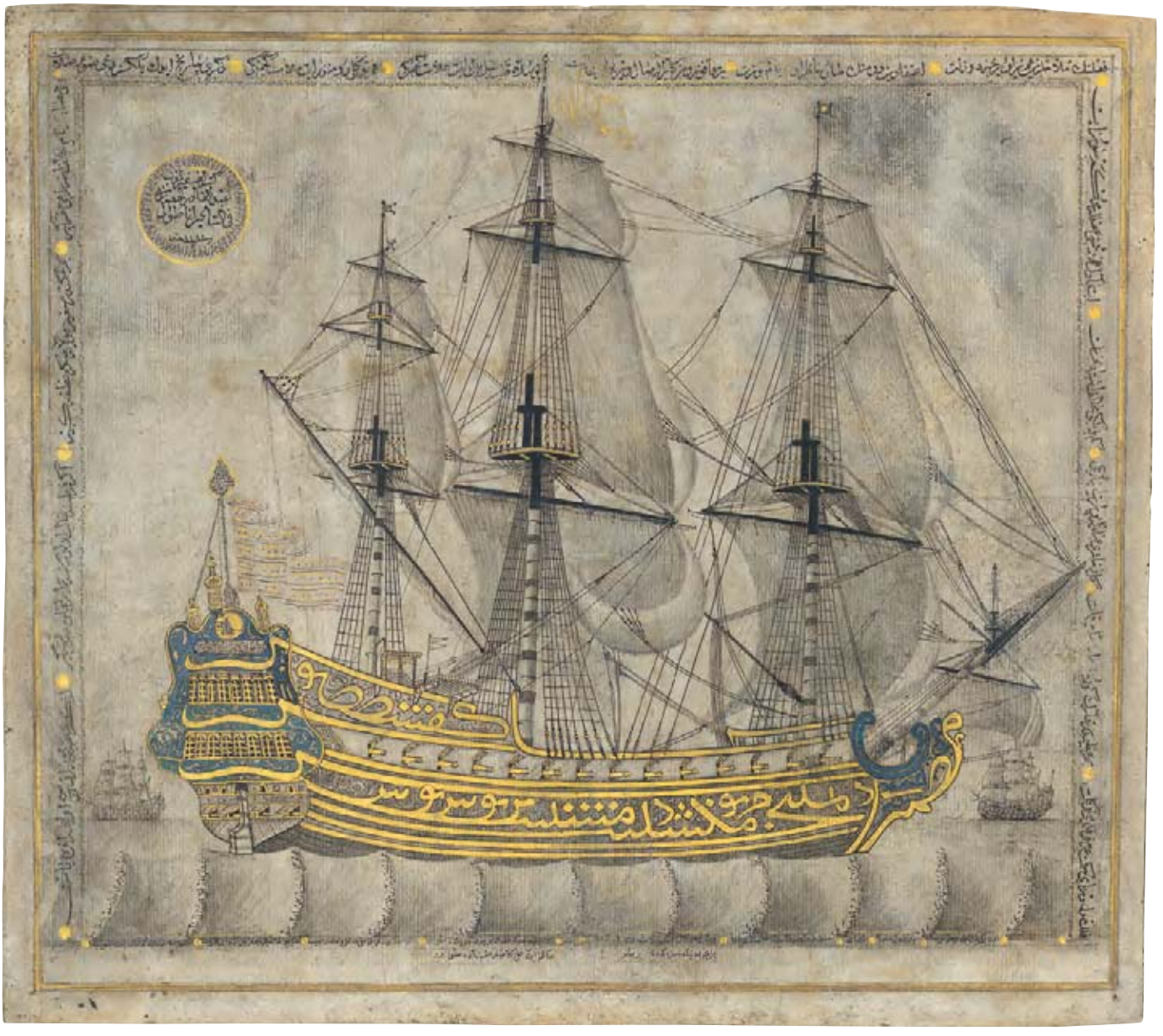
Calligrams were especially popular in Ottoman art; many were made in the form of lions, storks, peacocks, mosques, and ships.

The imagery and text featured here derive from the story of the Seven Sleepers—a legend dating back to pre-Islamic times that became a metaphor for divine protection. The story, included in passage 18:9–25 of the Qur'an, took place in Ephesus (a town in present-day Turkey). Three Christian youths fled a pagan town and were later joined by four others and a dog. Determined to punish the fugitives for not respecting the pagan gods, the ruler set after the youths. The seven men and their dog found refuge in a cave, where they fell asleep. God ordered the angels of death to take their souls until the danger had passed. Three hundred and nine years later, God breathed life into them again.

The image of the ship also carries symbolic meaning. In illustrated manuscripts and written sources, the Islamic faith is sometimes represented as a ship in a stormy sea. According to religious sources, if a ship was inscribed with the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, it would not sink.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Calligraphy (*thuluth*, *naskh*, and *ghubari* scripts), calligram (calligraphic image), Ottoman empire, poetry, talisman, ink



11. Calligraphic galleon

# Lesson Plan: Unit 2 Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy

### FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Lamp stand with chevron pattern** (image 9)
Dated A.H. 986 / A.D. 1578–79
Iran
Brass; engraved, cast, and inlaid with black and red pigments; H. 13¼ in. (33.7 cm), Diam. (base) 6⅝ in. (16.8 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1929 (29.53)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** English Language Arts and Visual Arts
**GRADES:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art and Writing

### GOALS

Students will be able to:

- identify visual qualities of several calligraphic scripts;
- recognize ways artists from the Islamic world engage various scripts to enhance works of art supporting a range of functions; and
- assess the merits of several computer-generated fonts in supporting specific uses.

### NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- NL-ENG.K-12.5 Communication Strategies
- NL-ENG.K-12.6 Applying Knowledge

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.2 Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- R.CCR.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text
- R.CCR.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text
- SL.CCR.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Paper, pen or pencil, copy of the alphabet (or the same word) in ten or more fonts

### QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- What function might this object have? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Describe the way the object is decorated. What do the forms remind you of? Why?
- What strategies has this artist used to unify the decoration and the form? What aspects of the design do you find most successful? Why?
- Look closely at the bands of calligraphic writing that surround the lamp stand (see detail below). What adjectives would you use to describe the visual qualities of the script (*nasta'liq*)? Why?



Detail of the calligraphy, image 9

- Around the shaft are two couplets by the Indian poet Amir Khusrau Dihlavi, each from a different lyric poem (*ghazal*). Read the following text translated from Persian. How does the content of the text challenge or reinforce your initial impressions of the writing?

> *There is not a moment that my soul is not burning from love for you.*
> *Which heart is not burning from that artful coquetry?*
> *I am burning from jealousy because you set fire to another*
> *You set fire to another, yet no one else is burned but me . . .*
>
> (Translated by Denise-Marie Teece)

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Language Arts and Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 30–40 minutes

Look at the font choices employed by three different businesses or institutions. What messages or ideas does each font bring to mind? What might you infer about each company based on your observations? If possible, use the Internet to locate the company or institution's mission statement. Compare and contrast the ideals conveyed in the mission statement with your initial impressions of the text. In what ways, if any, do the mission and font align? If you do not feel they make a strong match, consider how you might refine the font to better support the company or institution's mission. *Extension:* Collect copies of company or institution mission statements and create a font for one of the selections before looking at the solution posed by their designer.

## ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Language Arts and Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 30 minutes

As noted in the chart outlining various Arabic calligraphic scripts (see figs. 11, 13, 14), each has distinct visual qualities that align with various functions. Consider how these principles apply across other cultures and languages. Choose five fonts in your language as a focal point for this activity. After looking closely at each example, write a sentence or two describing the visual qualities of each. Share the fonts and your observations with a partner. If you had to match one of your font selections with each of the following functions/purposes, what pairings would you make? Why?

- Job application
- Love poem
- Billboard
- Political message
- Wedding invitation

## RESOURCES

Department of Islamic Art. "Calligraphy in Islamic Art." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cali/hd_cali.htm (October 2001).

## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Image 4. *Mihrab,* A.H. 755 / A.D. 1354–55; Iran; mosaic of polychrome-glazed cut tiles on stonepaste body, set into plaster; 135 1/16 x 113 11/16 in. (343.1 x 288.7 cm), Wt. 4,500 lbs. (2041.2 kg); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20)

Image 7. Bowl with Arabic inscription, 10th century; Iran, Nishapur; earthenware; white slip with black slip decoration under transparent glaze; H: 7 in. (17.8 cm), Diam: 18 in. (45.7 cm); Rogers Fund, 1965 (65.106.2)

Image 11. Calligraphic galleon, dated A.H. 1180/ A.D. 1766–67; Turkey; ink and gold on paper; 19 x 17 in. (48.3 x 43.2 cm); Louis E. and Theresa S. Seley Purchase Fund for Islamic Art and Rogers Fund, 2003 (2003.241)

Author: Adapted from lessons by classroom teachers Dr. Sujay Sood and Erin Fitzgerald
Date: 2012

## Unit 2 Suggested Readings and Resources

Asia Society. "Traces of the Calligrapher and Writing the Word of God." Exhibition website. New York: Asia Society, 2008. http://sites.asiasociety.org/islamiccalligraphy/.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

See also the related exhibition catalogues:

McWilliams, Mary, and David J. Roxburgh. *Traces of the Calligrapher: Islamic Calligraphy in Practice, c. 1600–1900*. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007.
**HIGH SCHOOL**
Focuses on the tools and craft of the calligrapher.

Roxburgh, David J. *Writing the Word of God: Calligraphy and the Qur'an*. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Department of Islamic Art. "Calligraphy in Islamic Art." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cali/hd_cali.htm (October 2001).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Ja'far, Mustafa. *Arabic Calligraphy: Naskh Script for Beginners*. London: McGraw-Hill, 2002.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**
An instruction manual for learning *naskh* calligraphic script; especially useful for art and design classes.

Khan, Gabriel Mandel. *Arabic Script: Styles, Variants, and Calligraphic Adaptations*. New York: Abbeville Press, 2006.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL** (some of the visuals may be used for elementary school)

Kvernen, Elisabeth. *Calligraphy Qalam: An Introduction to Arabic, Ottoman and Persian Calligraphy.* Website. Baltimore: University of Baltimore MFA thesis project, 2009. http://calligraphyqalam.com.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

Whitesides, Barbara. *Sugar Comes from Arabic: A Beginner's Guide to Arabic Letters and Words*. Northampton, Mass.: Interlink Books, 2009.
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

### UNIT 2 SOURCES


Allan, James. "Early Safavid Metalwork." In *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501–1576*, edited by Jon Thompson and Sheila R. Canby, pp. 203–40. New York: Skira with the Asia Society, 2003.

Blair, Sheila S. *Islamic Calligraphy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Derman, M. Uğur. *Letters in Gold: Ottoman Calligraphy from the Sakıp Sabancı Collection, Istanbul*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998.

Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. nos. 67, 49, 164, 206).

George, Alain. *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*. London: Saqi, 2010.

McWilliams, Mary, and David J. Roxburgh. *Traces of the Calligrapher: Islamic Calligraphy in Practice, c. 1600–1900*. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007.

Melikian-Chirvani, Assadullah Souren. *Le chant du monde: L'Art de l'Iran safavide, 1501–1736*. Exhibition catalogue. Paris: Somogy, 2007.

——. "Of Prayers and Poems on Safavid Bronzes." In *Safavid Art and Architecture*, edited by Sheila R. Canby, pp. 86–94. London: British Museum Press, 2002.

——. *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th–18th Centuries*. Exhibition catalogue. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982.

Roxburgh, David J. *Writing the Word of God: Calligraphy and the Qur'an*. Exhibition catalogue. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007.

Safadi, Yasin Hamid. *Islamic Calligraphy*. Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1979.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 1984.

UNIT 3

# Geometric Design in Islamic Art

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the role of geometric design in the art of the Islamic world; and
- recognize ways in which the featured works of art exhibit repetition, symmetry, two-dimensionality, and an illusion of infinity.

## Introduction

One of the defining characteristics of Islamic art is its abundant use of geometric patterns to adorn a wide variety of architectural and decorative surfaces. The sources of the basic shapes and patterns used in Islamic ornamentation are rooted in the artistic traditions of the pre-Islamic Byzantine and Sasanian empires. During the early spread of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries, artists encountered a range of patterns and designs that they adopted, abstracting and adapting them into new forms and to support new uses. Although there is little historical evidence that tells us how they worked, we know that Islamic craftsmen continued to elaborate upon these forms through the centuries, ultimately creating new abstract geometric patterns that were symmetrical, proportional, and balanced. These designs were often based on the replication and repetition of a single unit in a sequence of steps to develop the overall pattern. The works of art discussed in this unit are drawn from many regions and span the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. In spite of regional variations, the areas in which the works were produced are united by a common appreciation and taste for geometric patterns.

Islamic geometric design is unique in its elevation to a primary art form—while the earlier traditions upon which Islamic art drew also utilized geometric forms, they were often relegated to the borders or were secondary to a figural composition (fig. 15). Early Islamic artists often privileged the geometric over the figural, covering whole surfaces in dense geometric designs. The reason for this change in focus is not entirely clear. It may have been due in part to the new religious community's desire to distinguish itself visually from previous empires, and in part a need to respond to Islam's avoidance of figural forms in religious or public art. Scholars have suggested other explanations for this tendency, such as an intense cultural focus on textiles in Islamic lands, where covering surfaces with geometric and other types of ornament was akin to draping them in patterned textiles. It is likely that a combination of these factors led to the continuous popularity of calligraphic, geometric, and vegetal (plantlike) ornament in the Islamic world.



**FIG. 15.** Mosaic (detail), Roman, about 300 A.D. Excavated at Lod (Lydda), Israel. Stone mosaic tesserae. Israel Antiquities Authority and the Shelby White and Leon Levy Lod Mosaic Center

The contributions of Islamic mathematicians and other scientists were essential to the development of this unique form of ornament, and their ideas and advanced technological knowledge are reflected in the mathematical exactitude of Islamic geometric patterns. Recent research has shown that mathematicians and artisans met on a regular basis, accounting for the transmission of mathematical concepts from theory to artistic practice. This phenomenon also provides insight into the significant relationship between medium and the technology of patternmaking; the shape and medium of an object informs how the pattern will be translated from mathematical concept into artistic reality. The prevalence of geometric ornament in Islamic art thus shows the confluence of art, mathematics, philosophy, and religious thought.

The basic instruments for constructing geometric designs are a compass and a ruler, tools that generate the circle and line, upon which all such design is based. Using these two simple forms, an artist could create endless variations of patterns and motifs by repeating a single geometric unit laid out according to a basic organizing principle. The result is an overall geometric pattern that is both mathematically rooted and visually harmonious. The circle and line are also the basis for the proportional system used in Islamic calligraphy (see fig. 12). For this reason, scholars often refer to the art of calligraphy as the "geometry of the line."

Complicated patterns are constructed from basic shapes: circles and polygons. The complex patterns found in Islamic art often include many of these shapes in a variety of spatial arrangements.

## Primary Characteristics of Islamic Geometric Decoration

### Repetition and illusion of infinity

Most patterns are derived from a grid of polygons such as equilateral triangles, squares, or hexagons. The mathematical term for these grids is "regular tessellation" (deriving from the Latin *tesserae*, i.e., pieces of mosaic), in which one regular polygon is repeated to tile the plane. (See activity, page 88.) No matter how complex or intricate a design becomes, it is still predicated on a regular grid. Most geometric ornamentation is based on the premise that every pattern can be repeated and infinitely extended into space. This means that a frame can appear to be arbitrary, simply providing a window onto a pattern that continues beyond the bounds of that frame.

### Symmetry

Symmetry is created in Islamic geometric design through the repetition and mirroring of one or more basic design units—usually shapes such as circles and polygons. Although the design can be elaborated and made complex, the basic symmetrical repetition and mirroring of these shapes creates a sense of harmony.

### Two-dimensionality

Most Islamic geometric design is two-dimensional. Not only is it generally applied to flat surfaces, but the patterns themselves rarely have shading or background-foreground distinction. In some instances, however, an artist will create interlocking or overlapping designs that create the illusion of depth and produce an aesthetically pleasing and visually playful composition.

## 12
## The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court

Created onsite at the Metropolitan Museum by the Naji family and their company, Arabesque, Inc., Fez, Morocco, in 2011
Polychrome-glazed, cut tilework, carved stucco, carved cedar wood, carved marble

### Columns

About 1350–1400
Granada, Spain
Marble, carved; 86⅜ x 15¼ in. (219.4 x 38.7 cm); Diam. 6⅜ in. (16.2 cm)
Gift of The Hearst Foundation, 1956 (56.234.18–21a–d)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

This tiled courtyard evokes the perfection of geometric design during the golden age of Islamic Spain under the Nasrid dynasty (1232–1492) (see page 109). The themes of repetition and infinity in particular are embodied in the complex repeating star motifs of the tiled wall panels.

#### FUNCTION

Tilework like this, called zilij, was used frequently in southern Spain (known under Islamic rule as al-Andalus, hence "Andalusia") and North Africa to decorate architectural surfaces similar to ones seen in this courtyard.

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The walls are divided into three sections, as is traditional in Moroccan and Andalusian courtyard architecture. The lowest section of the courtyard wall is covered in brightly colored geometric tiles. Just above this is intricately carved plaster, and above that, in the top register, carved wood. The patterns of the tiles decorating the bottom register of the courtyard display all the common characteristics of geometric design. The design begins at the center of each star and radiates out symmetrically in a series of interlacing stars, pentagons, and other shapes. The patterns repeat infinitely outward, creating a harmonious geometric composition. The borders of the tile panel appear arbitrary—the design does not end but is simply cut off, suggesting it continues infinitely into space. Although this particular colorful design is unique to Moroccan and Andalusian architecture, similar star-based patterns can be seen in works from other regions in the Museum's collection.

#### CONTEXT

Courtyards like this were typical of the architecture in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Morocco and southern Spain (fig. 16). This courtyard was inspired by these and built and decorated onsite in 2011 by a team of Moroccan craftsmen from the city of Fez. The aim was to celebrate the excellence and enduring vitality of contemporary craftsmanship in the Islamic world. Morocco is one of the few countries in this vast region that has kept these centuries-old traditions alive and maintained them at the highest level. Every element of the courtyard was created with traditional techniques and materials, including the designs and colors of the tile panels, which are based on the wall panels (*dadoes*) of the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain (see fig. 22), built under Nasrid rule (1232–1492). Tiled *dadoes* like these are commonly seen in Islamic buildings throughout southern Spain and North Africa.



**FIG. 16.** Courtyard and fountain, 'Attarin Madrasa, Fez, Morocco, 1323–25

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Spain, Morocco, Nasrid kingdom, Alhambra Palace, cultural exchange, geometric, marble, stucco, zilij (type of tilework)



12. The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court

# 13
# Textile fragment

14th century
Spain
Silk, lampas; 40 3/16 x 14 5/16 in. (102 x 36.3 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.22)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT**

This textile fragment demonstrates the ease with which geometric design is adapted to the technique of weaving. Textiles like this are created on a loom and are composed of warps (yarns that run vertically) and wefts (yarns that run horizontally). Together, the warps and wefts create a regular grid that naturally lends itself to geometric design.

**FUNCTION**

Silk textiles were expensive luxury objects often commissioned by the court or other wealthy patrons. They may have furnished wealthy homes or served as charitable gifts to mosques. This silk fragment displays decorative bands of varying widths, each of which has its own complex, self-contained geometric design.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This textile exhibits many of the key characteristics of geometric design. Each self-contained design is symmetrical and appears as though it could extend infinitely past the edges of the textile. The thin black and white patterned bands toward the top of the piece exemplify the idea of reflection. Each black crenellation (stepped design) creates an identical and reciprocal white one, and vice versa. In the wide band at the bottom are four rows of five stars, each bordered by yellow bands that extend out, interlacing and generating a secondary repeating motif of interlocking squares. The weaver used this geometric design to play with foreground and background perception. The viewer's eye follows each yellow band as it goes under and over others, even though the composition is without actual physical depth. In addition to the seven distinct geometric designs, this textile also features calligraphic decoration in *naskh* script (see also proportional scripts, fig. 13), highlighting the decorative and proportional relationship between geometric design and calligraphy (which here reads "good luck and prosperity").

**CONTEXT**

This textile was created during the reign of the Nasrids, who ruled parts of southern Spain from 1232 to 1492. The reign of the Nasrids is considered to be a golden age of Islamic Spain. It was in this period that the Alhambra Palace, famed for its artistic and architectural beauty, was built in the Nasrid capital of Granada. Many of the geometric designs on this textile resemble those used in the architectural decoration and tilework of the Alhambra (see fig. 23). A present-day example of this kind of tilework can be seen in the Museum's Moroccan Court (see image 12). Textiles similar to this one were still produced after the fall of the Nasrid kingdom, indicating their continued appeal and the European conquerors' admiration for Andalusian art.

(See also image 22.)

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Calligraphy (*kufic* script), Nasrid kingdom, Spain, geometric ornament, silk



13. Textile fragment

# 14
# Star- and hexagonal-tile panel

Late 13th–14th century
Iran, Nishapur
Stonepaste; polychrome tiles glazed in turquoise and blue and molded under transparent glaze; 41¾ x 24¼ x 2 in. (106 x 61.6 x 5.1 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.40.26)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT

This tile panel from Nishapur, Iran, is an example of the repetition characteristic of geometric design in the Islamic world. It consists of twenty-seven hexagonal tiles glazed turquoise and seven complete six-pointed star tiles glazed blue. The artist also included many blue stars that are cut off at the edge, suggesting the design extends infinitely past the limits of the actual panel. The simple repetitive pattern of alternating hexagons and stars is typical of this period. Also evident is the Islamic interest in creating dimensionally proportional forms: the side of each star corresponds exactly in measurement to the side of each hexagon, producing internal logic and harmonious balance.

### FUNCTION

It is likely that such panels decorated the interiors of residences or public buildings (see, for example, similar tilework on the walls in *Laila and Majnun at School*, fig. 17).

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Although the overall composition is highly geometric, each tile also features nongeometric designs. The hexagonal tiles each contain a molded circular design of abstracted vegetal or floral shapes in relief. A lotus flower in relief decorates the interior of each star tile. These secondary patterns add texture to the surface of the panel and liveliness to the repetition of the overall geometric pattern.

**FIG. 17.** Laila and Majnun at School: Folio 129 (detail) from a *Khamsa* of Nizami, A.H. 931 / A.D. 1524–25; present-day Afghanistan, Herat; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 7½ x 4½ in. (19.1 x 11.4 cm); Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913 (13.228.7.7)

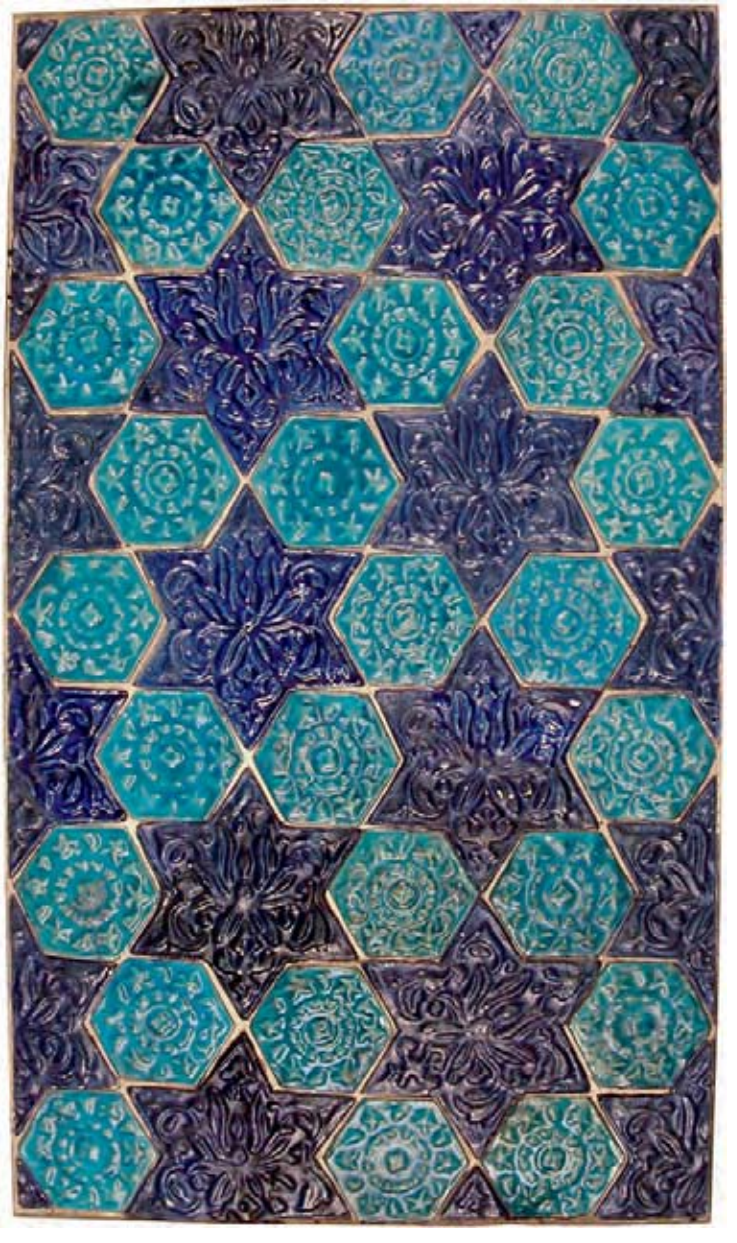
### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, geometric, ceramic, stonepaste

### CONTEXT

This type of ceramic decoration with strong-colored glazes and bold patterns was typical of northeastern Iran in the fourteenth century. Excavations at Nishapur revealed many similar panels, as well as examples carved out of plaster and other materials. Nishapur, founded in the third century A.D., was a bustling medieval city before its destruction in the thirteenth century. Its success was due in part to its advantageous position on the Silk Road, the major overland trading route from China westward. Nishapur was also a center of production for ceramics like this tile panel, which dates from that city's later period. The Metropolitan Museum of Art carried out excavations in Nishapur in the 1930s and '40s that led to many important discoveries (see "Daily Life in Medieval Nishapur," page 167). Objects such as this panel tell scholars and archaeologists much about the development of art and architecture in Iran, such as the fact that colorful tile panels decorated not only palaces and mosques, but also people's homes.





14. Star- and hexagonal-tile panel

# 15
# *Jali* (screen)

Second half of the 16th century
India
Red sandstone; pierced, carved
Rogers Fund, 1993 (1993.67.2)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT**

This carved screen, called a *jali*, illustrates the kind of intricate and complex geometric designs that can be created with the simplest of elements—the line and the circle. This screen exhibits three distinct geometric patterns—the star-based pattern in the interior of the arch, the interlace design above the arch, and the simple geometric border that frames the entire rectangular screen.

**FUNCTION**

Screens like this, typical of Mughal Indian architecture, were used as windows or interior room dividers, allowing light and air to enter the room while screening the inhabitants from the glare of the sun and the gazes of passersby. The intricately carved design would have created a subtle play of shadow and light in the interior, emphasizing the characteristics of symmetry and the illusion of infinity inherent in geometric design (fig. 18).

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

The innermost pattern is based on the eight-pointed star shape; each star is circumscribed within octagons in even rows. Between the octagons is a field of five-pointed stars within interlocking pentagons. Although displaying the basic characteristics common to geometric design, this screen is also unique in that its design makes use of the possibilities of positive and negative space. The work was created through openwork carving, a subtractive sculptural process. The remaining stone forms the *jali*'s design, while the holes (or negative space), create supplemental patterns. (See activity, page 88).

**CONTEXT**

Screens like this are a hallmark of Mughal architecture. The Mughals were a Muslim dynasty of Central Asian origin who ruled the north of India from 1526 to 1858 (see "The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation," page 153). Screens similar to this can be seen in their original settings in many Mughal palaces and mausoleums, like Fatehpur Sikri and the Taj Mahal. The weathered condition of this screen suggests that it was probably part of a series of similar screens used as windows set in an exterior wall.

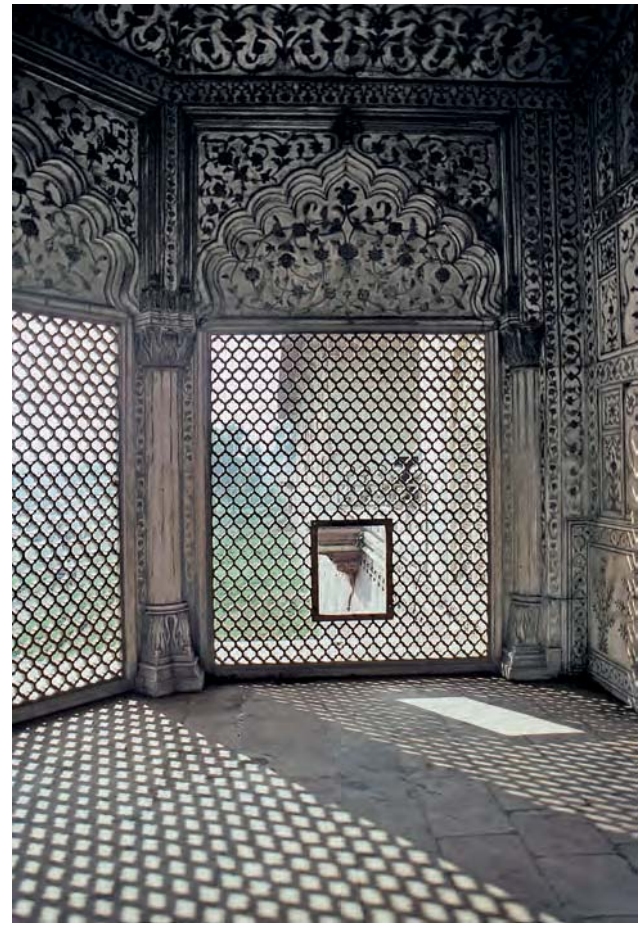
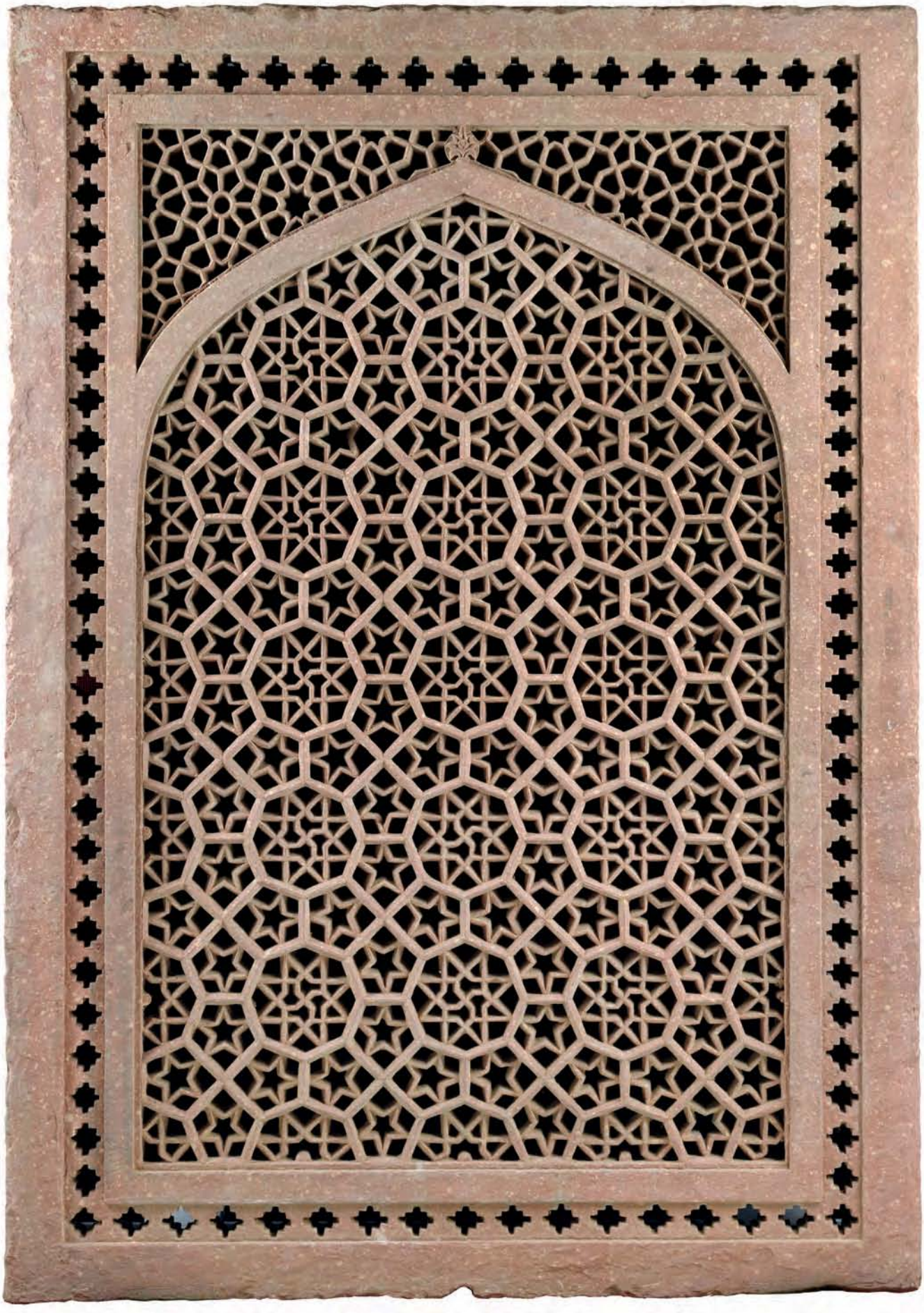


FIG. 18. *Jali* from the Khwabgah (royal bedroom) of the Lal Qil'a (Red Fort), Delhi, India, 1638–48

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Mughal dynasty (India), geometric, architecture, sandstone



15. *Jali* (screen)

# Lesson Plan: Unit 3 Geometric Design in Islamic Art

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

***Jali* (screen)** (image 15)
Third quarter of the 16th century
India, Mughal
Red sandstone; pierced, carved; 73 x 51 5/16 x 3 1/4 in.
(185.4 x 130.3 x 8.3 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1993 (1993.67.2)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Mathematics and Visual Arts
**GRADES:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Geometric Constructions

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- use a compass and straightedge to construct regular polygons; and
- recognize ways works of art from the Islamic world utilize geometric forms and relationships.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Mathematics, Geometry

- In grades 6–8 all students should recognize and apply geometric ideas and relationships in areas outside the mathematics classroom, such as art, science, and everyday life
- In grades 9–12 all students should draw and construct representations of two- and three-dimensional geometric objects using a variety of tools
- In grades 9–12 all students should use geometric ideas to solve problems in, and gain insights into, other disciplines and other areas of interest such as art and architecture

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Mathematics, Geometry

- G.CO.12 Make formal geometric constructions with a variety of tools and methods
- G.CO.13 Construct an equilateral triangle, a square, and a regular hexagon inscribed in a circle

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Pencil, paper, straightedge, and compass for each student (alternatively, you can use the computer program "The Geometer's Sketchpad")

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- What stands out as you take your first look at this object?
- The weathering on one side suggests that this screen likely formed part of a series of windows set in an outside wall. What shapes and patterns might the light and shadows have made as the sun shone through the screen?
- Look closely at the various shapes that make up the design. How do they relate to one another and the outer frame?
- Imagine creating a work like this. What might you do first? Last? Why?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** Geometry and Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 30 minutes

While geometric ornamentation may have reached a pinnacle in the Islamic world, the sources for the shapes and intricate patterns employed in Islamic art already existed in late antiquity among the Greeks, Romans, and Sasanians in Iran. Islamic artists appropriated key elements from the classical tradition and then elaborated on them to create new forms of decoration. The compass and the straightedge—tools used to generate lines and circles, the foundations for all geometric forms—allowed artists to explore countless patterns and motifs.

The featured work of art includes regular polygons (two-dimensional shapes in which all of the sides are the same length and all of the angles are equal) such as the octagon and pentagon, as well as elaborate polygons such as the five-pointed and eight-pointed star. Investigate ways you can use your compass and straightedge to create each of these polygons, and others. Share your working methods with a peer. Compare and contrast your findings with the animated drawing *All the Possible Polygons!* or the demonstration in "Geometric Construction" listed in the resource section.

## RESOURCES


Aldoaldoz. *All the Possible Polygons!* Animated drawing. February 14, 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBgIWQcC6lM&feature=related.

Blair, Sheila S., and Jonathan M. Bloom. *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Department of Islamic Art. "The Art of the Mughals before 1600." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mugh/hd_mugh.htm (October 2002).

———. "Geometric Patterns in Islamic Art." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd_geom.htm (October 2001).

———. "The Nature of Islamic Art." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/orna/hd_orna.htm (October 2001).

Weisstein, Eric W. "Geometric Construction." Interactive demonstration. *MathWorld—A Wolfram Web Resource*. Wolfram Research, Inc., 1999–2012. http://mathworld.wolfram.com/GeometricConstruction.html.


## SPACES/OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Image 14. Star- and hexagonal-tile panel, late 13th–14th century; Iran, Nishapur; stonepaste; polychrome tiles glazed in turquoise and blue and molded under transparent glaze; 41¾ x 24¼ x 2 in. (106 x 61.6 x 5.1 cm); Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.40.26)

*Jali* (screen), early 17th century; India; marble; 48⅞ x 26½ x 2¾ in. (123 x 67.3 x 7 cm); Rogers Fund, 1984 (1984.193)

The Astor Court (Chinese courtyard in the style of the Ming dynasty); assembled onsite at the Museum by Chinese craftsmen in 1981; ceramic tiles; *nan* wood columns; granite from Suzhou; Taihu rocks; Gift of the Vincent Astor Foundation

Tile assemblage, first half of the 13th century; Seljuq, Anatolia; composite body, overglaze-painted; max. diam. 9⅜ in. (23.3 cm); Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jack A. Josephson, 1976 (1976.245)

Ceiling, 16th century; Spain; wood; carved, painted, and gilded; side 1: 99 in. (251.5 cm), side 2: 168 in. (426.7 cm), side 3: 192 in. (487.7 cm), side 4: 146 in. (370.8 cm); Gift of the Hearst Foundation, 1956 (56.234.35.2)


Author: Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher Michael Wilkinson

Date: 2012

## Unit 3 Suggested Readings and Resources

Beshore, George. *Science in Early Islamic Culture (Science of the Past)*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1998.
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Broug, Eric. *Islamic Geometric Patterns*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008. Includes CD-ROM.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL** (can be adapted to the needs of younger students)

Department of Islamic Art. "Geometric Patterns in Islamic Art." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd_geom.htm (October 2001).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Islamic Art and Geometric Design: Activities for Learning*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004. Online version: http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-educators/publications-for-educators/islamic-art-and-geometric-design.
Explores featured objects from the Museum's Islamic collection with related activities, a glossary, and a list of published resources.

*The Pattern of Beauty*. DVD. 25 min. Falls Church, Va.: Landmark Media, 1998.
Discusses the underlying meanings of curvature, lines, and forms in Islamic design.

Sutton, Daud. *Islamic Design: A Genius for Geometry*. New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2007.
**HIGH SCHOOL** (can be adapted to the needs of younger students)

**UNIT 3 SOURCES**


Aanavi, Don. "Western Islamic Art." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (November 1968), pp. 197–203.

Bier, Carol. "Art and Mithal: Reading Geometry as Visual Commentary." *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 4 (September 2008), pp. 491–509.

——. "Patterns in Time and Space: Technologies of Transfer and the Cultural Transmission of Mathematical Knowledge across the Indian Ocean." *Ars Orientalis* 34 (2004), pp. 172–94.

Blair, Sheila S., and Jonathan M. Bloom. *Cosmophilia: Islamic Art from the David Collection, Copenhagen*. Exhibition catalogue. Chestnut Hill, Mass.: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2006.

Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. no. 48).

UNIT 4

# Science and the Art of the Islamic World

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- identify significant innovations in the Islamic world that contributed to the fields of astronomy, astrology, and medicine;
- understand how the esteem for scientific inquiry led to the creation and beautification of scientific instruments, implements, and manuals; and
- understand how an interest in science prompted the translation of ancient texts into Arabic and ensured the preservation of this knowledge, which provided a foundation for future advances in both the East and the West.

## Introduction

The works of art featured in this unit were created with a practical purpose in mind. Together, they highlight achievements in three of the most developed scientific disciplines in the Islamic world: astronomy, astrology, and medicine.

Scientists in the Islamic world drew on Greco-Roman, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, and Chinese traditions to formulate many of the principles that today are recognized as the foundation of modern science. One of the Islamic world's most significant contributions to modern science was the translation of mathematical, medical, and astronomical texts from their original languages into Arabic. These texts, along with many other Greek and Roman writings, had long been forgotten in the West, and their translation into Arabic ensured their survival and transmission across the globe and through the centuries.

لا يشتهي الطعام او من كانت قوته تخلل وصفته على هذه



يؤخذ من العسل جزء ويخلطونه بالعسل ويطبخونه على الصفة

الليتين ثم يرفعونه

The Islamic scientific community was united by the Arabic language, but was religiously, ethnically, and geographically diverse. It included Muslims, Christians, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Indians, Turks, and Berbers. The so-called golden age of Islamic science (from the eighth to the fifteenth century) took place in regions and centers throughout the Islamic world, such as al-Andalus in Spain, the Near East, Central and West Asia, Ottoman Turkey, and India.

The impact of Arab math and science on Western civilization is evident in the scientific and mathematical language we use today. Many scientific words in English derive from Arabic: alchemy, algebra, alkaline, antimony, chemistry, elixir, zero, alcohol, algorithm, almanac, azimuth, cipher, sine, zenith. In addition, many stars discovered by Arab astronomers still bear Arabic names. For instance, the star that comprises the tail of the constellation Cygnus is called Deneb, the Arabic word for tail.

## Astronomy and Astrology

By the ninth century, Islam had expanded into regions where a knowledge of the stars and their movements had long helped in the calculation of time, the prediction of weather and river floodings, and navigation across trackless deserts. During the eighth and ninth centuries, under the rule of the first Islamic dynasties (the Umayyads and Abbasids), scientists built upon this knowledge to develop new theories and instruments. Court patronage also supported an intensive program of translation of Greek, Sanskrit, and Pahlavi (early Persian) astronomical texts into Arabic, a practice that was instrumental in preserving this important body of knowledge.

One of the most influential of these translated works was Ptolemy's *Almagest* (the Latinized version of the Arabic title *al-Majisti*, or "Great Compilation"). The treatise, which describes the circular motion of the sun and the planets around a fixed earth, became the most important point of departure for astronomers working in the Islamic world. Supported by their own observational records, they identified discrepancies between scientific models and reality and set out to create theories regarding the celestial bodies that would address these inconsistencies.

Significantly, astronomical knowledge fulfilled a utilitarian function in the Muslim world by facilitating the proper ritual practice of Islam. Daily prayers occur at times determined by the sun's position and are always performed facing the direction of the holy city of Mecca, where the Ka'ba, Islam's holiest shrine, is situated. The Islamic calendar is a lunar one, which means that every month starts when the new moon first becomes visible. Precise observation of the moon is crucial to determine holidays and other

Detail, image 18

key dates, such as the start of the month of Ramadan, when Muslims are required to fast during daylight hours.

Though not considered a science today, astrology used to be regarded as a branch of astronomy. In practice, astrology is largely concerned with understanding the influence of the stars on earthly events. Astrologers therefore needed an in-depth understanding of the movement of the planets and the locations of the stars. Serious scientists such as Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi (787–886), al-Biruni (973–1048), and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (1201–1274) all wrote astrological treatises.

### Observatories

Observational astronomy flourished in the Islamic world, where sophisticated observatories and instruments were developed. Observatories were centers of learning and research that also housed libraries containing thousands of books. The Caliph al-Ma'mun (reigned 813–33) built the first observatory in Baghdad in the ninth century. His patronage enabled astronomers to prepare tables describing the motions of the sun and moon, star catalogues, and descriptions of the instruments used.

The accuracy of medieval Islamic observatories and astronomical instruments was remarkable. In fact, the calculations of famous observatories in Samarqand (in present-day Uzbekistan) and Maragha (in present-day Iran) differ from contemporary calculations by only a fraction of a percent. In addition to the large stationary instruments at observatories, scientists working under Islamic patronage were also successful in developing smaller portable tools such as the astrolabe (used for mapping and astronomical calculations), the astrolabic quadrant, and the celestial globe. The astrolabic quadrant, shaped like a 90-degree pie segment, was used to record the location of stars and planets in the celestial sphere, the domelike shape the skies take when observed from the earth. The celestial globe (see the Austrian example from 1579 in the Museum's collection, 17.190.636) was used for teaching and illustrative purposes, and for many was also a desirable decorative object. Over time, these portable tools made their way into Renaissance Europe, aiding in the development of similar astronomic instruments by European scientists. This is clearly seen in the astrolabes produced by sixteenth-century Italian and Flemish scholars, which are decorated with motifs and inscriptions similar to those on Islamic instruments. Moreover, Italian and Flemish scientists and architects produced detailed drawings of Near Eastern astrolabes, including refined reproductions of the engraved Arabic inscriptions. These drawings and astrolabes demonstrate knowledge of Arabic and an avid interest in Islamic instruments in sixteenth-century Europe.

## Medicine

Surviving medical texts are a testament to the work of Muslim physicians and their desire to understand and heal the human body. Physicians practicing in the Islamic world drew on the works of early physicians such as Galen and Dioscorides (see image 18), which contained information about the healing properties of plants. Physicians also drew upon pre-Islamic "folk" practices. By the later eighth century, the Abbasid court's interest in medical and scientific knowledge led to the creation of the famous House of Wisdom (*Bait al-Hikma*) in Baghdad, in which scientific texts were translated, studied, and preserved. Through these efforts, physicians had access to an extensive body of medical writings—some in their original language and others translated into Arabic. By the end of the ninth century, concepts such as Galen's theory of the four humors (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood) had been completely absorbed into Arab medical theory and practice.

Once this extensive corpus of medical writings became widely available, the need for systematization became more important. Al-Razi (known in the west as Rhazes), a ninth-century medical pioneer from Iran and the first to write about measles and smallpox, took on the monumental task of compiling the corpus of Islamic medical knowledge into one source—the formidable *Comprehensive Book of Medicine*. Scientists from the Islamic world were also responsible for many original innovations in the field of science and medicine. For instance, one of the world's most important early physicists, Ibn Al-Haytham, wrote a famous and influential treatise on how the human eye works, which still forms the basis for modern optical theory.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, Islamic medical sources (including both original writings and translations of classical treatises) began to make their way to the West, where they were eventually incorporated into European medical theory and practice.

# 16
# Planispheric astrolabe

Dated A.H. 1065 / A.D. 1654–55
Maker: Muhammad Zaman al-Munajjim al-Asturlabi (active 1643–89)
Iran, Mashhad
Brass and steel; cast and hammered, pierced and engraved; 8½ x 6¾ x 2¼ in. (21.6 x 17.1 x 5.7 cm)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1963 (63.166a–j)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

Astrolabes were the most important astronomical instruments in the Islamic world and Europe until the early Renaissance. Astrolabes created in the Islamic world made their way to the West and shaped the production of these scientific tools in Europe.

### FUNCTION

An astrolabe maps the spherical universe on a flat surface without compromising the exact angles between the celestial bodies. Thus, it can show the position of the stars and planets in the sky at a particular location and time. When given certain initial values, astrolabes can do a range of astronomical, astrological, and topographical calculations, such as measuring latitudes, telling time, and determining hours of daylight. They were also used to determine prayer times and the direction of Mecca.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

An astrolabe consists of a number of stacked circular plates, which rotate around the axis of a central pin (fig. 19). The topmost plate, the *rete*, was often decorated. In this example, an elegant cut-brass lattice forms the *bismillah*, the opening phrase of most chapters (*suras*) of the Qur'an. The degrees of latitude and geographical locations are engraved on the topmost plate. The name of the maker is on the back.

### CONTEXT

The earliest examples of Persian astrolabes date from the ninth and tenth centuries. This particular one was made in seventeenth-century Iran, a flourishing center of astrolabe production. Scientists and artisans in the Islamic world embellished and refined the astrolabe, which was originally an ancient Greek invention. Astrolabes produced in the Islamic world inspired those made in Europe. For example, this astrolabe and another by a Flemish maker, Arsenius, with a similar calligraphic design, were both based upon earlier Islamic prototypes.

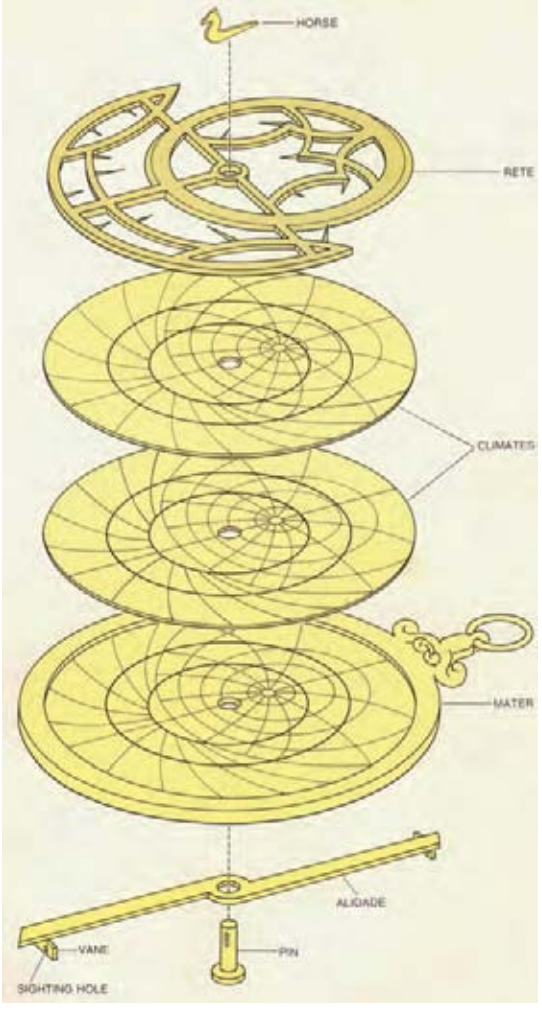



**FIG. 19.** Illustration showing the parts of an astrolabe

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Astronomy, technology, renaissance, Iran, cultural exchange, calligraphy (*nasta'liq* script), brass, steel



16. Planispheric astrolabe

## 17
## Perseus: Folios from the *Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabita* (Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars) of al-Sufi

Late 15th century
Iran
Ink and gold on paper; 10 3/16 x 7 1/8 in. (25.8 x 18.1 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1913 (13.160.10)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT**

These pages from a fifteenth-century illustrated copy of the *Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars* depict the constellation Perseus. Al-Sufi, one of the most prominent astronomers in the Islamic world, originally wrote the book in 965. It describes the constellations, provides their names, and links them to the signs of the zodiac.

**FUNCTION**

Illustrations like this helped scholars and students identify and remember constellations. The text contains both the Arabic and Greek names of the stars, paying homage to the Hellenistic tradition while presenting contemporary scientific knowledge as a synthesis of classical and Islamic scholarship.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

The illustrations feature Perseus, the Greek mythological figure, holding Medusa's head in one hand and his sword in the other. Red dots throughout the illustrations represent the twenty-six internal and three external stars that comprise this constellation.

**CONTEXT**

Illustrations like these could be used independently or in conjunction with astronomical devices. Each constellation in the book is illustrated in two versions (as shown here)—one showing how the constellation appears in the sky (left), and the other how it appears on astronomical instruments (right).

In these illustrations, Perseus is dressed in garb characteristic of fifteenth-century Iran, when this work was made. Many elements of Persian art at this time reflect the influence of Chinese imagery and motifs (see "Ceramics in China and the Near East," page 207). Here, this tendency is most notable in the rendition of the faces and the loose drapery of the pants.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Astronomy, constellations, Greek mythology, zodiac, astrolabe, cultural exchange, China and Iran, figural painting, ink







17. Perseus: Folios from the *Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabita* (Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars) of al-Sufi

## 18
## Preparing Medicine from Honey: Folio from a dispersed manuscript of an Arabic translation of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides

Dated A.H. 621 / A.D. 1224
Calligrapher: ʿAbdullah ibn al-Fadl
Iraq, Baghdad or northern Jazira
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 12⅜ x 9 in. (31.4 x 22.9 cm)
Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 (57.51.21)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT/FUNCTION**

This page from a manual on the medicinal uses of herbs contains a recipe and an illustration of an imagined scene in the daily life of a thirteenth-century pharmacist. It comes from the *Materia Medica*, written by the Greek physican Dioscorides in the first century A.D.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This richly colored illustration is organized into six architectural frames. On the top row, starting at the left, a man in a turban drinks from a white cup. A group of large brown clay vessels occupies the middle frame; and a seated man stirs the contents of a large vessel on the right. In the lower central panel, a pharmacist mixes a liquid, probably a medicinal remedy, in a large cauldron with his right hand and holds a golden container in his left. Across from him, another figure, probably the patient, awaits his medicine. The Arabic text above and below the image is written in *naskh* script and describes a medicinal recipe.

**CONTEXT**

Texts describing herbal medicine survive from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and India. Copies of the *Materia Medica* continued to be made for centuries. It was one of the most popular and widely used medical texts in the Islamic world.

In thirteenth-century Baghdad, pharmacology was a family business; the secrets of the trade were passed down from father to son. Pharmacists relied on both family tradition and the many books on pharmacology available to physicians and apothecaries to make medicines that they sold in the marketplace.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Medicine, Arabic, Iraq, calligraphy (*naksh* script), cultural exchange, ink



18. Preparing Medicine from Honey: Folio from a dispersed manuscript of an Arabic translation of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides

# 19
# Mortar made for Abu Bakr ʻAli Malikzad al-Tabrizi

Late 12th–early 13th century
Iran
Brass; cast, chased, engraved, and inlaid with silver and a black compound; H. 4½ in. (11.4 cm), Diam. 5¾ in. (14.6 cm)
Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.527a,b)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS UNIT/FUNCTION

This mortar and pestle (fig. 20) would have been used to grind ingredients for medicine and other mixtures. The auspicious inscriptions and astrological imagery on the mortar reinforce its function as a tool used in healing.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This octagonal silver-inlaid brass mortar is richly decorated with both figural and calligraphic ornament. Six of the eight sides include lobed medallions flanked by harpies—creatures with the face and body of a woman and the wings and claws of a bird. In the center of each medallion are seated figures (one on a throne) or figures on horseback (a falconer, an archer, or two soldiers holding severed heads). The inscriptions in *naskh* and *kufic* calligraphy along the top and bottom flared rims contain the name of the owner as well as an array of wishes for his well-being, such as glory, prosperity, happiness, wealth, and good health. The figures depicted in the medallions likely refer to the zodiac and planets. The warriors, for instance, recall Mars (Aries), the god of war, while the archer may represent Sagittarius. The enthroned figure flanked by dragon-headed snakes is thought to represent the invisible "eighth planet," often symbolized by the dragon, which was believed to cause eclipses by swallowing the sun or moon.

### CONTEXT

Zodiac symbolism was popular in the Persian metalwork of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The inscription on the mortar names the patron as Abu Bakr ʻAli Malikzad al-Tabrizi. The word *malikzad* denotes a princely status, literally meaning "of/from (*zad*) a king (*malik*)." It is possible that the patron of this mortar was a prince of the Seljuq dynasty. The Seljuqs ruled over large territories in Iran, Central Asia, and West Asia (1081–1307). The mortar reflects the royal interest in science and astrology.



**FIG. 20.** Pestle accompanying the mortar (91.1.527b)

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Medicine, mythology, zodiac, calligraphy (*naskh* and *kufic* script), brass, silver



19. Mortar made for Abu Bakr ʻAli Malikzad al-Tabrizi

# Lesson Plan: Unit 4 Science and the Art of the Islamic World

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Planispheric astrolabe** (image 16)
Dated A.H. 1065/A.D. 1654–55
Maker: Muhammad Zaman al-Munajjim al-Asturlabi (active 1643–89)
Iran
Brass and steel; cast and hammered, pierced and engraved, inscribed; 8½ x 6¾ x 2¼ in. (21.6 x 17.1 x 5.7 cm)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1963 (63.166a–j)

**SUBJECT AREA:** Science
**GRADE:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art and the Environment

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- identify similarities and differences between scientific tools used now and long ago; and
- use research findings to support observations and interpretations.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Science

- NS.9-12.5 Science and Technology
- NS.9-12.6 Science in Personal and Social Perspectives
- NS.9-12.7 History and Nature of Science

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

- R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** paper, pencil; research materials supporting investigations of an astrolabe, sundial, celestial globe, compass, water clock, and telescope; a computer and internet access (ideal but not required)

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING:

- Look closely at the featured work of art; note its individual pieces and the way they link to one another. How might the various parts move?
- Describe the markings that cover each surface and the forms that make up the screenlike panel that covers the face (the *rete*, the Latin word for "net"). What might these shapes and markings indicate? (See fig. 19 and "The Parts of an Astrolabe" in **RESOURCES** for more information.)
- An astrolabe is a tool that performs a range of tasks that include telling time, identifying when the sun will rise and set, and locating celestial objects in the sky. What are some ways this information might be useful every day? In the Islamic world, astrolabes were often used to help find the direction of Mecca (*qibla*) and determine prayer times. In this example, the *rete* forms the *bismillah*, the opening phrase of most chapters of the Qur'an.
- What are some devices people use today to help with telling time, navigating the environment, and viewing distant objects?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** Science
**DURATION:** Approximately 60 minutes (longer if you plan to build and test models of each device)

Research the origin, function(s), and underlying principles of one of the following tools: astrolabe, sundial, compass, water clock, or telescope. Compare and contrast your findings with your peers. Discuss what functions or guiding principles, if any, the works share and how these devices might support daily life or scientific practice. If time permits, build and test a model of the device (see **RESOURCES** for links to relevant materials).

Reflect on the various tools used today to support tasks such as finding your way to a new place, telling time, and observing objects too far away or too small to see with the naked eye. What benefits might these devices offer? What limitations do they present? Why might some people view the creation of a digital watch or GPS navigation as "progress" while others challenge this idea? Watch "Tom Wujec demos the 13th-century astrolabe" (see **RESOURCES**). In what ways does his presentation challenge or reinforce your opinion about the benefits or limitations of modern technological devices?

## RESOURCES


Al-Hassani, Salim T. S., ed. *1001 Inventions: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Civilization*. 3d ed. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2012.
Related website includes materials for educators: http://www.1001inventions.com/media/teachers-pack-download

American Association for the Advancement of Science. "Building a Water Clock." In *Science NetLinks*. Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2012. http://sciencenetlinks.com/lessons/building-a-water-clock/.

American Museum of Natural History. The Parallax. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 2002 [see "Making an Astrolabe"]. In *Discovering the Universe*. http://www.amnh.org/content/download/1903/25321/file/du_u10_parallax.pdf.

Exploratorium. "Making a Sun Clock." San Francisco: Exploratorium,1998. http://www.exploratorium.edu/science_explorer/sunclock.html.

Morrison, James E. "The Parts of an Astrolabe." In *The Astrolabe*. Rehoboth Beach, Del., 2010. http://www.astrolabes.org/pages/parts.htm.

Sardar, Marika. "Astronomy and Astrology in the Medieval Islamic World." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/astr/hd_astr.htm (August 2011).

"Tom Wujec Demos the 13th-Century Astrolabe." In *TED Talk*. New York: TED, 2009. http://www.ted.com/talks/tom_wujec_demos_the_13th_century_astrolabe.html.


## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Image 17. Perseus: Folio from the *Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabita* (Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars) of al-Sufi, late 15th century; Iran; ink and gold on paper; 10 3/16 x 7 1/8 in. (25.8 x 18.1 cm); Rogers Fund, 1913 (13.160.10)

Gerhard Emmoser (Austrian, working 1556–died 1584); celestial globe with clockwork, 1579; Austria, Vienna; silver, partly gilded; brass; 10 3/4 x 8 x 7 1/2 in. (27.3 x 20.3 x 19.1 cm); Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.636)

Herter Brothers (American, 1864–1906); library table, 1882; New York, New York City; rosewood, brass, mother-of-pearl; 31 1/4 x 60 x 35 3/4 in. (79.4 x 152.4 x 90.8 cm); Purchase, Mrs. Russell Sage Gift, 1972 (1972.47)

Design for the Water Clock of the Peacocks: Folio from the *Book of the Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* by al-Jazari, A.H. 715 / A.D. 1315. Syria. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 12 3/8 x 8 11/16 in. (31.4 x 22.1 cm). Rogers Fund, 1955 (55.121.15)

The Elephant Clock: Folio from the *Book of the Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* by al-Jazari, A.H. 715 / A.D. 1315; Syria; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 11 13/16 x 7 3/4 in. (30 x 19.7 cm); Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 (57.51.23)


**Author:** Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher John Debold

**Date:** 2012

## Unit 4 Suggested Readings and Resources

Al-Hassani, Salim T. S., ed. *1001 Inventions: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Civilization*. 3d ed. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2012.
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**
Accompanied the *1001 Inventions* exhibition. Looks at the contributions of Muslim thinkers throughout history. Related website includes materials for educators: http://www.1001inventions.com/education#teachers.

Carboni, Stefano. *Following the Stars: Images of the Zodiac in Islamic Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**
Closely examines zodiac symbolism in several works in the Museum's collection of Islamic art.

Saliba, George. *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories during the Golden Age of Islam*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Sardar, Marika. "Astronomy and Astrology in the Medieval Islamic World." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/astr/hd_astr.htm (August 2011).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

*Science and Islam: The Golden Age*. DVD. 156 min. New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2009.
Three-part series exploring the achievements of the Islamic physicians, astronomers, chemists, and mathematicians who helped establish our modern scientific worldview.

Turner, Howard R. *Science in Medieval Islam: An Illustrated Introduction*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

Wujec, Tom. "Tom Wujec Demos the 13th-Century Astrolabe." In *TED Talk*. New York: TED, 2009. http://www.ted.com/talks/tom_wujec_demos_the_13th_century_astrolabe.html.

**UNIT 4 SOURCES**


Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (Cat. nos. 165, 118).

King, D.A., and J. Samsó. "Zīdj." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2012. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/zidj-COM_1388?s.num=4.

Hartner, W. "Asṭurlāb." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2012. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/asturlab-COM_0071?s.num=154&s.start=140.

Pingree, D. "'Ilm al-Hay'a." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2012. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ilm-al-haya-COM_0365.

Saliba, George. *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007.

——. "The World of Islam and Renaissance Science and Technology." In *The Arts of Fire: Islamic Influences on Glass and Ceramics of the Italian Renaissance*, edited by Catherine Hess, pp. 55–73. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004.

——. *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories during the Golden Age of Islam*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Turner, Howard R. *Science in Medieval Islam: An Illustrated Introduction*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.

UNIT 5

# Courtly Splendor in the Islamic World

In most regions of the Islamic world, the patronage of the ruler and the court was vital to the production of fine works of art and led to important artistic innovations. The sponsorship of artistic activity was viewed as a privilege of kingship. Royal workshops had unparalleled access to funds, fine materials, and the most talented artists. These workshops supported the production of sumptuous luxury objects and fostered collaboration among artists, which resulted in the transmission of motifs and styles from one medium to another. The chapters in this unit highlight the art of two courts in Islamic Spain, the Umayyads (756–1031) and the Nasrids (1232–1492), and the court art of three later Islamic empires—the Mughals of India (1526–1858), the Safavids of Iran (1501–1722), and the Ottomans of Turkey (1299–1923). These chapters examine the role of the royal workshop in the production of art and the creation of distinct dynastic visual languages.



Detail, image 20

UNIT 5: CHAPTER 1

# Court Arts of Islamic Spain

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- identify how the court art of Islamic Spain reflects a convergence of cultures; and
- understand the ways in which royal patronage of the arts reflected the visual identity and opulence of two dynasties in Islamic Spain.

## Introduction

For eight centuries, between 711 and 1492, Southern Spain was part of the Muslim world. A rich culture emerged around the royal and provincial courts in Córdoba, Granada, Toledo, and Málaga. Trade, intellectual life, and the arts flourished. The works of art featured in this chapter, from the Spanish Umayyad (756–1031) and Nasrid (1232–1492) periods, illustrate how elements from various traditions came together to create distinct styles that were both enduring and far-reaching.

## The Spanish Umayyads (756–1031)

In 711, less than a century after the birth of Islam, an army of Arabs and Berbers serving the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus (in Syria) landed in the Iberian Peninsula, ushering in a new phase of art and culture in the region. Within a period of seven years, most of the peninsula was under Muslim rule. These new territories came to be known by their Arabic name, al-Andalus.

In 750, the Umayyad dynasty in Syria fell to the Abbasids. The one surviving member, ʻAbd al-Rahman I (reigned 756–88), escaped to Spain and established autonomous rule there. He rebuilt Córdoba, the capital city, to reflect his Syrian heritage and the Byzantine roots of the Umayyad capital of Damascus. This influence can be seen in the architecture and surface ornamentation of the Great Mosque of Córdoba as well as other buildings in the city. Under ʻAbd al-Rahman III (reigned 912–61), who proclaimed himself caliph, al-Andalus grew into an empire with a diverse religious and ethnic population.



**FIG. 21.** Interior of the Salon Rico (a reception hall), Madinat al-Zahra, Spain, 953–58

From 945 to 1010, the court was centered in Madinat al-Zahra, a palace city on the outskirts of Córdoba built between 936 and 940 by ʻAbd al-Rahman III. The city became synonymous with opulence and sophistication (fig. 21). It consisted of hundreds of buildings and included inns, schools, and workshops. The architecture employed columns imported from North Africa and regions in the Byzantine empire as well as marble fountains from Syria. Distinct motifs and designs, such as symmetrically arranged vegetal scrolls and complex geometric patterns, covered the surfaces of objects and were carved onto the stucco and stone walls of mosques and palaces. Works of art made in Madinat al-Zahra were products of a Mediterranean taste that drew upon indigenous traditions of Spain as well as those of the Umayyads' native Syria. Many of these masterfully crafted luxury objects, such as intricately carved ivory containers, illuminated manuscripts of the Qur'an, and lavish textiles, traveled via trade routes to other Mediterranean courts as gifts and tributes. However, the glory of the Umayyad court did not last; in 1010, Madinat al-Zahra was destroyed during a Berber revolt and its riches plundered. Many of its objects ended up in northern Europe, where they were admired, preserved, and emulated.

As a result of civil wars, Umayyad rule in Spain ended in 1031 and al-Andalus was divided among feuding city-states that faced constant attacks from northern Spanish Christian powers. Despite this upheaval, art continued to be created; artists from the Spanish Umayyad imperial workshops dispersed and their subsequent work in smaller courts ensured the survival and continuation of their outstanding craftsmanship.

## Alliances between Islamic Spain and North Africa

The divided and ambiguous allegiances of the numerous Islamic dynasties in Spain enabled the Christian forces from the north to overtake many Muslim territories. However, with military assistance from the North African Almoravid dynasty (1062–1147), which was also Muslim, al-Andalus was able to successfully drive out the Christian forces temporarily. This victory prompted a period of cultural, political, and artistic unity in North Africa and southern Spain that is evident in the shared visual vocabulary of the architecture and decorative arts. The Almohads (1130–1269), also a North African Berber dynasty, replaced the Almoravids by 1150 and came to control much of al-Andalus, establishing capitals at both Marrakesh in Morocco and Seville in Spain. After the Castilian and Aragonese armies of the North defeated the Almohads, Southern Spain again entered a period of warring principalities.



**FIG. 22.** View of the Court of the Lions, Alhambra, Granada, Spain, 1354–91

## Nasrid Rule in Spain (1232–1492)

By the thirteenth century, only one Islamic kingdom remained in Spain, the Nasrids of Granada (1232–1492). In spite of geographic gains by northern forces elsewhere, the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula flourished as an intellectual and artistic center as it had two centuries earlier under the Spanish Umayyads. The Nasrids built a palace in their capital, Granada, around an existing hilltop fortress, which came to be known as the Alhambra (from the Arabic word for red, *hamra*, referring to the color of its outer stone walls).

The Alhambra quickly became the most recognizable symbol of Islamic civilization in Spain. Its decoration is the result of a synthesis of preexisting local Spanish traditions and artistic influences from neighboring Christian regions, North Africa, Iran, and other areas of the Near East. This distinct Nasrid style is known for its slender columns, colorful geometric tilework, horseshoe arches, carved plaster walls with lacelike patterns and Arabic inscriptions, extensive use of *muqarna*s (small, honeycomblike niches used to decorate architectural surfaces), and four-part gardens (fig. 22). Known as Moorish, this style was used by Muslims and Christians alike in fourteenth-century Spain (see, for example, the similarities between the Alhambra [fig. 22] and the Christian King Pedro's Alcazar in Seville). The style eventually reached as far as Russia, England, Germany, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and the Americas as travelers' accounts of the Alhambra spread around the world. Nasrid rule in Spain ended in 1492, but the Christian conquerors from the North continued to use the Alhambra palace, and adapted many Andalusian forms and styles into their own visual culture (see, for example, the Museum's sixteenth-century Spanish ceiling [56.234.35.2]).

## 20
## Panel

10th–early 11th century
Spain, probably Córdoba
Ivory; carved and inlaid with stone with traces of pigment;
4¼ x 8 in. (10.8 x 20.3 cm)
John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1913 (13.141)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

The lush vegetal designs on the surface of this plaque, drawn from the visual vocabulary of Umayyad Syria, symbolize abundance and fertility. Like many decorative motifs, these forms were incorporated into a variety of media, including ivory containers, stone architectural surfaces, and ceremonial textiles.

#### FUNCTION

This ivory panel once decorated the side of a box. In Umayyad Spain, containers like this often held precious perfumes and cosmetics. Such elaborately carved boxes would have been ideal for presenting expensive and rare gifts, such as perfume. An inscription on a related example reveals that such boxes were commissioned as gifts for favored women in the royal household. After the fall of Islamic Spain, conquering forces from the north took many precious objects as booty. In Christian hands, boxes like this were often used as reliquaries for saints' remains.

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Complex lacelike decoration, dancing figures, stylized trees, and an assortment of animals such as jackals, peacocks, and birds of prey cover this ivory panel. The dense composition is organized by vertical symmetry that creates a mirrorlike effect resembling the repeating patterns found on textiles. Two full repetitions of the symmetrical pattern cover the plaque, while the edges suggest the extension of the pattern on both sides.

The background, carved in deep relief, features an intricate pattern of scrolling leaves and stems that is characteristic of Spanish Umayyad ornament. Visible traces of pigment suggest the plaque was originally painted. Deep holes reveal where the eyes of the figures were once inset with tiny quartz stones.

#### CONTEXT

This ivory panel was carved from a single piece of elephant tusk. The use of precious elephant tusk made such vessels a popular choice for gifts destined for rulers in Byzantium and the Muslim West.

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Umayyad Spain, court life, figural ornament, vegetal ornament, symmetry, cultural exchange, elephant tusk (ivory)



20. Panel

# 21
# Capital

10th century
Spain, probably Córdoba
Marble, carved; 14½ x 13½ in. (36.8 x 34.3 cm)
Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915 (30.95.134)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

The deep carving and symmetrical design of this Corinthian-inspired capital are distinguishing features of the courtly arts of Umayyad Spain. Buildings and palaces, such as those in Madinat al-Zahra were covered with intricately carved vegetal designs.

**FUNCTION**

Capitals are the decorative tops of columns. Originating in ancient Greece, this architectural form was used all over the world and continues to be used today. This capital was part of the decorated colonnades in the palace city Madinat al-Zahra, near Córdoba (see fig. 21), where gardens with cascading pools, carved and painted stone arcades, capitals, and tiled wall panels combined Syrian, Byzantine, and local influences into a distinct Umayyad Spanish style.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

Lacelike surface ornament became one of the distinguishing characteristics of Umayyad Spanish style; further examples can be seen in textiles and ivory carvings of the period (see image 20). This capital, which once crowned a column, has four identical sides. Decorative vegetal stems climb, intertwine, and spread out to the sides, giving the heavy marble a sense of lightness. Near the top, acanthus leaves, supported by elegant arabesque-like stems, form thick crowns. The name of the stone carver appears in an Arabic inscription on a boss at the top center of one side of the capital. Traces of paint on similar capitals suggest that they were originally painted.

**CONTEXT**

Syria was a Roman, and later a Byzantine province before the Umayyads conquered it in 634. Capitals like this one, which combine Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic styles, are a testament to the rich artistic heritage of the Spanish Umayyads. This synthesis of influences distinguishes the decorative forms developed in Islamic Spain, and the ornate column capitals of Madinat al-Zahra tell us as much about the Spanish Umayyads' history as their taste for opulence in court architecture.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Umayyad Spain, ancient Rome, architecture, capital, vegetal ornament, marble



21. Capital

# 22
# Textile fragment

14th century
Spain
Silk, lampas; 40 3/16 x 14 5/16 in. (102 x 36.3 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.22)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

This silk fragment is an example of the Nasrid court's production of luxurious textiles. The similarity between the woven decorative elements in this textile and the tile patterns adorning the walls in Nasrid palaces like the Alhambra reflect a unified aesthetic language that transcends media and in many cases geographic boundaries. The geometric motifs on this panel—especially the eight-pointed star—also emerged as favored decorative elements in nearby North Africa, which attests to the transmission of decorative motifs to surrounding areas and the indelible imprint of Nasrid visual culture in the region.

**FUNCTION**

Silk textiles like this one were expensive luxury objects often commissioned by the court or other wealthy patrons. Its large size, the original edge preserved on one side, and the presence of fringe on the other suggest it likely served as a furnishing or space divider in the home of a court official or elite member of the community. Works such as this were also used in court ceremonies and presented as gifts to individuals or religious institutions.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

The composition consists of colorful geometric interlacing based on a radiating eight-pointed star motif organized in wide horizontal bands. A decorative calligraphic band written in Arabic is skillfully incorporated into the design. The word "beatitude," which means blessedness or happiness, is repeated across one of the rows in mirrored pairs of plaited *kufic* script on a red ground. The phrase "good luck and prosperity" woven in *naskh* script fills the narrow borders on both sides of the larger *kufic* band.

**CONTEXT**

The royal textile workshops in al-Andalus were famous for their luxurious woven creations. Silk panels, used to adorn the interiors of affluent homes and palaces, were among the most precious objects produced in royal workshops. The star-shaped motifs and crenellations featured in this example resemble the ceramic tile mosaic *dados* (panels on the lower register of a wall of a room) in Nasrid palaces such as the Alhambra (fig. 23). This visual connection has aided scholars in dating and attributing these textiles to Nasrid Spain. In addition to their popularity in Muslim Spain, such textiles were prized by neighboring Christian communities, who often used fragments of them as linings for reliquaries (containers for saints' remains).

(See also image 13.)



FIG. 23. Detail of a tile panel from the interior of the Nasrid palace, the Alhambra, Granada, 1354–91

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Spain, Nasrid dynasty, architecture, North Africa, Christian reliquaries, geometric ornament, calligraphy (*kufic* script), textile, silk



22. Textile fragment

# Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 1 Court Arts of Islamic Spain

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Textile fragment** (image 22)
14th century
Spain
Silk; lampas; 40 3/16 x 14 5/16 in. (102 x 36.3 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.22)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**GRADES:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art as a Primary Resource

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- identify shared visual characteristics among several works of art from Islamic Spain;
- recognize ways designs are adapted across a range of media; and
- cite strengths and limitations of various materials.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.1 Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.5 Era 5: Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000–1500 C.E.

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARD

English Language Arts

- SL.CCR.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Pencils (graphite and colored), paper, images of tilework from the Alhambra, magazines for collage work, glue, and an assortment of found objects or recycled materials such as bottle caps and cardboard boxes

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- Describe the various shapes you see. What patterns do you notice? What skills or tools might someone need to create these designs? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Artists in Islamic Spain often employed the same or similar motifs across a range of media. Compare and contrast this textile with tile panels from Spanish palaces of the same period such as the Alhambra (fig. 24). What similarities do you notice? What visual elements (colors, shapes, designs, etc.) are common in your community?
- Close cultural ties between Muslim states in Spain and North Africa led to the sharing of styles across the Strait of Gibraltar. Compare the featured work of art with The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court (image 12), a space created in 2011 in the style of late medieval Islamic Spain and Morocco, with original Nasrid columns. What details, if any, suggest close ties between these two regions?
- This textile was likely used as a furnishing or space divider in Islamic Spain. In neighboring Christian lands, however, works such as this often lined reliquaries (containers to hold relics of holy individuals such as saints). Create a list of goods or ideas from other countries or regions that inform your life today. How, if at all, have people modified these items to support local interests, tastes, or needs?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**DURATION:** Approximately 90 minutes

A comparison of the featured textile and tile panels from the Alhambra, a Spanish palace of the same period (fig. 24), reflects the ways in which artists applied similar designs across various media. Explore the strengths and limitations of various materials as you translate a detail from this textile into another medium.

1. Identify a small area of the design you would like to concentrate on.
2. Before selecting the materials you plan to use, create a list of the potential strengths or limitations of two (or more) options—for example, colored pencil, collage, or an assemblage of found objects/recycled materials. Imagine translating the design into each medium; consider what aspects of the design might prove challenging and how, if at all, you would need to adapt the design.
3. Select one material and use it to re-create the design.
4. Compare and contrast your work with that of your peers. Discuss the challenges that emerged during the process and the strategies you used to overcome them.
5. Revisit your initial list of strengths and limitations for each material and update it as necessary.



**FIG. 24.** Detail of a tile panel from the interior of the Nasrid palace, the Alhambra, Granada, 1354–91

## RESOURCES


Department of Islamic Art. "The Art of the Nasrid Period (1232–1492)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nasr/hd_nasr.htm (October 2002).

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Dodds, Jerrilynn D., ed. *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992.

"Building the Moroccan Court." New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/new-installations/new-galleries-for-the-art-of-the-arab-lands-turkey-iran-central-asia-and-later-south-asia


## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Image 12. The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court, created onsite at the Metropolitan Museum by the Naji family and their company, Arabesque, Inc., Fez, Morocco, in 2011; polychrome-glazed and cut tilework, carved stucco, carved cedar wood, carved marble

Dish, 14th century; Spain; earthenware, tin-glazed; overall: 2⅝ x 12⅜ in. (6.7 x 31.4 cm); H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.96)

Panel, 14th century; Spain, Toledo; wood; carved and painted; L. 10 in., W. 5⅝ in.; Gift of Dr. Walter L. Hildburgh, 1951 (51.45.8)

Deep Dish (*brasero*), about 1430. Spain, Valencia. Tin-enameled earthenware; Diam. 17¾ in. (45.1 cm). The Cloisters Collection, 1956 (56.171.162)

Tile with heraldic device of the Nasrid kings, first third of the 16th century; Spain; probably made in Seville; earthenware, impressed and glazed; 7½ x 4 15/16 x 1⅜ in. (19 x 12.5 x 3.5 cm); The Cloisters Collection, 2011 (2011.153)


Author: Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher Jesse Johnson
Date: 2012

## Unit 5: Chapter 1 Suggested Readings and Resources

Department of Islamic Art. "The Art of the Nasrid Period (1232–1492)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nasr/hd_nasr.htm (October 2002).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Ecker, Heather. *Caliphs and Kings: The Art and Influence of Islamic Spain*. Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2004.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Irving, Washington. *Tales of the Alhambra*. Granada: Ediciones Miguel Sánchez, 2002.
**HIGH SCHOOL**
A semi-fictional account of a nineteenth-century American author's sojourn at the Alhambra. The stories evoke the beauty and allure of the palace, though they take place well after the Nasrid period.

Islamic Arts and Architecture. "The Alhambra: A Virtual Walking Tour." Islamic Arts and Architecture, 2012. http://islamic-arts.org/2011/the-alhambra-a-virtual-walking-tour/.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Jungman, Anne, and Shelley Fowles. *The Most Magnificent Mosque*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2004.
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
A children's story set in Muslim Spain that focuses on the Great Mosque of Córdoba, built by the Spanish Umayyad dynasty.

*The Moorish South: Art in Muslim and Christian Spain from 711 to 1492*. DVD. 51 min. New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2008.
An episode of the BBC series *The Art of Spain* featuring commentary by art critic Andrew Graham-Dixon as he examines Islamic art along his travels from Córdoba to Seville and Granada.

Rosser-Owen, Mariam. *Islamic Arts from Spain*. London: Victoria & Albert Publishing, 2010.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

*When the Moors Ruled in Europe*. DVD. 101 min. Silver Spring, Md.: Acorn Media, 2005.
A new interpretation of the effects of Islam on Spanish and European history and patrimony.

### UNIT 5: CHAPTER 1 SOURCES


Aanavi, Don. "Western Islamic Art." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (November 1968), pp. 197–203.

Anderson, Glaire D., and Mariam Rosser-Owen, eds. *Revisiting* Al-Andalus: *Perspectives on the Material Culture of Islamic Iberia and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Dodds, Jerrilynn D., ed. *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992.

Ecker, Heather. *Caliphs and Kings: The Art and Influence of Islamic Spain*. Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2004.

Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. nos. 36, 40, 48).

Mann, Vivian B., Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn D. Dodds, eds. *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: G. Braziller in association with the Jewish Museum, 1992.

Rosser-Owen, Mariam. *Islamic Arts from Spain*. London: Victoria & Albert Publishing, 2010.

UNIT 5: CHAPTER 2

# Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- identify the visual qualities and functions of objects produced under Ottoman patronage; and
- understand the role of the Ottoman court workshops in generating a unified dynastic visual language, seen across a range of media, that spread throughout the empire.

## Introduction

At its height, the Ottoman empire (1299–1923) stretched across three continents and ruled over a linguistically, religiously, ethnically, and culturally diverse population (see map, page 125). Uniting and governing such a population was a challenging task for the sultan (ruler) and his vast administration. The development of a distinct visual language was just one of the ways the centralized government created and projected a shared identity. The finest examples of Ottoman art were commissioned and made for royal patrons in the capital city, Istanbul (in present-day Turkey). From there, the designs and decorative motifs spread throughout the empire and beyond. (See also "Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus," page 183.)

## The Ottoman Empire

Osman Gazi (reigned 1299–1324)—known in Italy as Ottomano, hence the English term Ottoman—was a Turkish tribal leader and the founder of the Ottoman dynasty. Through both warfare and diplomacy, he was able to unify inherited and captured lands under his rule. Successful military campaigns by his successors extended the empire deep into the Balkans to the north, and into Egypt and North Africa to the west, and eastward into the Caucasus and Anatolia.

In 1453, the city of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), the capital of the Byzantine empire, was captured by the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II (reigned 1451–81). It remained the Ottoman capital until 1923. Mehmet II's leadership and legacy were instrumental in the steady growth of the empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Ottoman cultural, political, and economic power reached its zenith under Sultan Süleyman I (reigned 1520–66), his son Selim II (reigned 1566–74), and his grandson Murad III (reigned 1574–95), who all ruled from the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul (fig. 25). Süleyman I was known in Turkey as Kanuni (the Lawgiver) because of the numerous legal reforms he made that shaped Ottoman law for many centuries. In the West, where he was both admired and feared, Süleyman became known as "the Magnificent"—a testament to his political and cultural achievements and his reputation as a wealthy and powerful ruler.

By the eighteenth century, despite repeated efforts to reform and modernize the army and civil institutions, the vast Ottoman empire started to decline. By the nineteenth century, many of its territories in North Africa, Europe, and West Asia were lost. In 1923, the modern Turkish Republic, established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, replaced the Ottoman state.



FIG. 25. Topkapı Palace, Istanbul, Turkey, begun 1459


15°W
0°
15°E
30°E
45°E
60°E
45°N
30°N
15°N
SWEDEN
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
Moscow
BELARUS
IRELAND
UNITED KINGDOM
NETHERLANDS
POLAND
RUSSIA
BELGIUM
GERMANY
CZECH REP.
UKRAINE
KAZAKHSTAN
Vienna
AUSTRIA
Budapest
HUNGARY
MOLDOVA
SWITZERLAND
Venice
SLOVENIA
CROATIA
ROMANIA
ITALY
FRANCE
BOSNIA & HERZ.
SERBIA
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
UZBEKISTAN
BULGARIA
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
MACEDONIA
Edirne
Istanbul
GEORGIA
CAUCASUS
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
Madrid
ALBANIA
Bursa
Iznik
Erzurum
AZERBAIJAN
ANATOLIA
ARMENIA
TURKMENISTAN
GREECE
Izmir
Athens
Konya
TURKEY
Ashgabat
ANDALUSIA
Ushak
Algiers
Tunis
Aleppo
Tehran
Tell Minis
Rabat
MAGHRIB
Mediterranean Sea
LEBANON
SYRIA
LEVANT
Baghdad
TUNISIA
Tripoli
Damascus
IRAQ
Tigris
PALESTINE
ISRAEL
MOROCCO
ALGERIA
Alexandria
Jerusalem
IRAN
Cairo
JORDAN
ARABIAN PENINSULA
Persian Gulf
LIBYA
EGYPT
QATAR
Medina
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Mecca
SAUDI ARABIA
OMAN
Arabian Sea
SUDAN
ERITREA
YEMEN
CHAD
DJIBOUTI
ETHIOPIA
SOMALILAND
The Ottoman Empire
in the Late 1600s
OMAN
Modern country borders and names
Baghdad
Modern national capitals
Greatest extent of Ottoman Empire, late 17th century
0
1000 km
0
500 mi
Robinson Projection, 25°E



## Ottoman Art

Two different but distinctly Ottoman styles emerged in the court workshop. The first, called *saz*, combined floral palmettes and curving, featherlike leaves. The second, called the floral style, featured flowers, namely carnations, hyacinths, honeysuckles, roses, and tulips. Together these two styles have come to epitomize Ottoman Turkish art.

The imperial workshop at the Ottoman court worked exclusively for the sultan, his household, and the highest ranking officials. The most talented artists, designers, weavers, bookbinders, and calligraphers were recruited from regions all over the empire. Successful designs were copied and used repeatedly. When an order for the court was especially large, the royal workshop would contract external craftsmen, who would then become familiar with the court's designs. Such interactions helped spread these patterns throughout the empire. As a result, works of art in the official court style were produced throughout the empire in many media, including carpets woven in Cairo and throughout Asia Minor, silk velvets woven in Bursa, and brilliantly colored ceramic wares and tiles made in Iznik, near Istanbul.

Mosques from Baghdad to Budapest used a distinctly Ottoman architectural style, developed in part by the famous Ottoman architect Sinan. This style, which features a central plan, lead-covered domes, and slender minarets, visually conveyed the identity of the Ottomans from the capital in Istanbul to the farthest reaches of the empire (see fig. 6).

Detail, image 26

# 23
# *Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66)

About 1555–60
Turkey, Istanbul
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 20½ x 25⅜ in. (52.1 x 64.5 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

This *tughra* exemplifies the masterful calligraphy and illumination created by the Ottoman royal court. It illustrates the ways calligraphy visually conveyed the sultan's identity and showcased the talents of his court artists.

**FUNCTION**

The *tughra* was a calligraphic emblem that appeared at the top of official documents, serving as the principal written symbol of Ottoman imperial authority. Each sultan had his own distinctive *tughra*, containing his name and titles, the name of his father, and the phrase "eternally victorious." This *tughra* was formerly at the top of a long, scroll-like official document, known as a *firman*, of Süleyman I (reigned 1520–66). A court official, known as a *tughrakeş*, added the sultan's *tughra* at the top of all official decrees. In addition to official documents, the *tughra* was also stamped on some coins (fig. 26). *Tughras* deliberately included elaborate calligraphy that was hard to copy to help prevent forgeries.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

Like the *tughras* of other Ottoman sultans, this example consists of vertical strokes and elongated lines, contrasting with wide intersecting ovals. The letters are written in blue and outlined in gold, and the inner areas are painted with patterns of blue and gold spiraling scrolls of stems, blossoms, plants, and cloud bands (between the strokes extending to the right).

**CONTEXT**

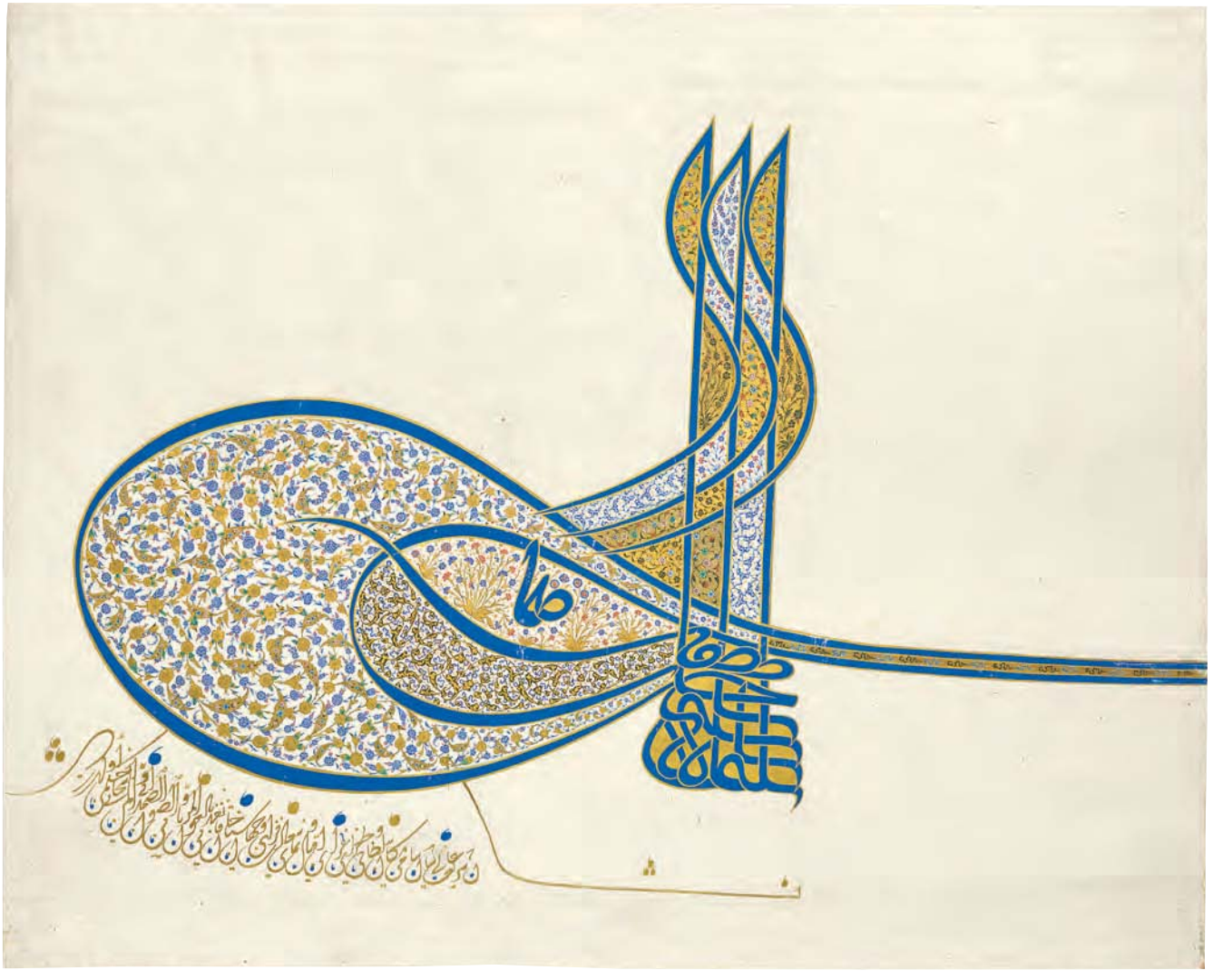
The personal involvement of Sultan Süleyman was a driving force behind what is frequently described as the "Golden Age of Ottoman Art." In accordance with Ottoman imperial tradition, every ruler was required to learn a practical trade. Süleyman was a goldsmith as well as an accomplished poet who wrote in Persian and Turkish. His sophisticated taste and avid interest in the arts stimulated artistic activity and encouraged talented artists from all reaches of the empire to work in Istanbul. The court artists, organized into workshops according to media, were a linguistically and ethnically diverse group that brought an array of designs, motifs, and techniques from various regions of the empire into the capital. Süleyman's vision and patronage were instrumental in the formulation of a distinct Ottoman style in the mid-sixteenth century, characterized above all by masterful floral and vegetal forms. These uniquely Ottoman designs found their way onto objects in a variety of media, from ceramics to works on paper.



**FIG. 26.** Coin struck in Istanbul showing insignia of Sultan Mahmud I, A.H. 1143/A.D. 1730–31. American Numismatic Society, New York (1949.163.737)

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Ottoman empire, Süleyman I (reigned 1520–66), visual identity, emblem, royal workshop, ink



23. *Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66)

# 24
# Prayer carpet with triple-arch design

About 1575–90
Turkey, probably Istanbul, possibly Egypt, Cairo
Silk (warp and weft), wool (pile), cotton (pile); asymmetrically knotted pile; 68 x 50 in. (172.7 x 127 cm)
The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.51)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This rug exemplifies how Ottoman designs and motifs, originating in the court design workshop, were incorporated into religious as well as secular art. These designs and motifs represent collaboration in the royal workshop. Artists trained in the arts of ink and paper—calligraphy, painting, and manuscript illumination—worked with those who specialized in carpets, textiles, ceramics, ivory carving, stone carving, and metalwork.

### FUNCTION

A prayer rug is a small carpet on which one person can perform daily prayers. It usually includes an image of a niche, or *mihrab*, symbolic of the gateway to Paradise. Some examples, including this one, depict a mosque lamp hanging in the center.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This prayer rug is somewhat unusual in its depiction of a triple (as opposed to single) arch, which is supported by pairs of slender columns with faceted bases and ornate capitals. Four small domes, characteristic of Ottoman architecture, appear above the gateway, emphasizing the architectural design. A lamp, symbolizing the presence of God, hangs from the central arch. Tulips and carnations, typical of the Ottoman floral style, adorn the bottom of the gateway and the borders. The flowers may be a reference to Paradise, which in Islamic art is often represented by gardens and lush vegetation. Despite its modest size, the rug's sophistication, skillful execution, and fine materials suggest that a member of the royal court commissioned it.

### CONTEXT

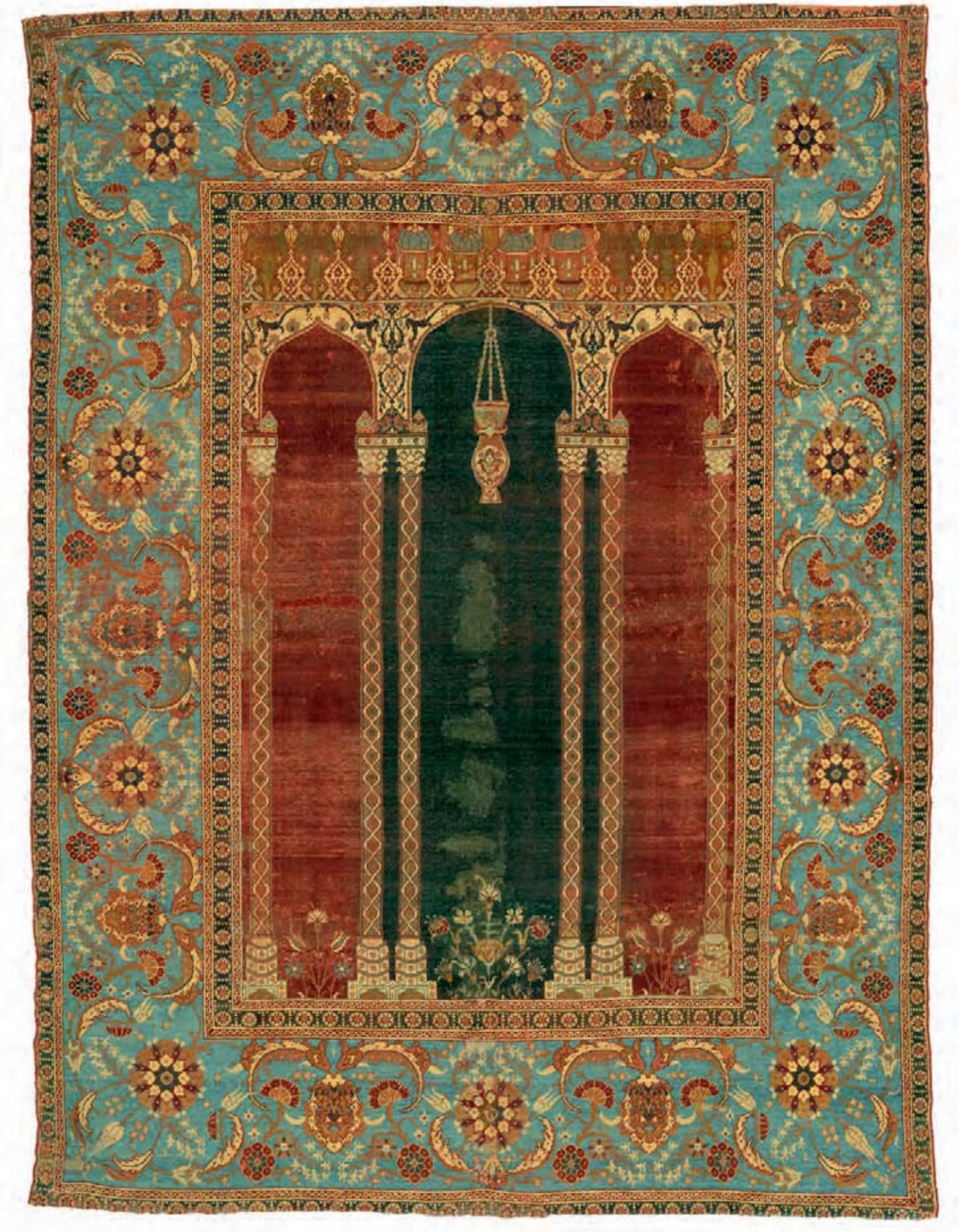
This carpet exemplifies the multiculturalism of Ottoman society. The slender coupled columns are characteristic of the Andalusian architecture of southern Spain (see fig. 22). This motif's sudden appearance in Ottoman art has been linked to the immigration of Spanish Jews, who, after being expelled from Spain in 1492, found refuge in the Ottoman empire. The coupled-column motif likely migrated from Spain in the manuscripts and textiles of Spanish Jews, and was then adapted into the Ottoman visual repertoire.

The physical make-up of the carpet also reflects cultural interconnections. Although the design is distinctly Ottoman, the technique and materials are typical of Egypt. This fusion of disparate traditions is due to the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman empire in 1517. This carpet reveals the collaboration between the royal Ottoman workshop in Istanbul and Egyptian weavers.

The design was enormously influential in later centuries; thousands of carpets with the same basic design were eventually woven in Turkish urban workshops, villages, and by nomadic tribes.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Ottoman empire, prayer, *mihrab*, floral and vegetal ornament, cultural exchange, textile, silk, cotton, wool



24. Prayer carpet with triple-arch design

## 25
## Fragment of a kaftan back with peacock feather design

Mid-16th century
Turkey, probably Istanbul
Silk, metal-wrapped thread; *taqueté* (*seraser*);
52 x 27 in. (132.1 x 68.6 cm)
Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1952 (52.20.15)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

Luxurious textiles are among the most well-known examples of Ottoman art. These fabrics, often fashioned into ceremonial garments, were admired by Ottomans and Europeans alike.

**FUNCTION**

This cloth panel was once the back of a ceremonial robe, or *kaftan*, worn by an Ottoman sultan or a high-ranking official. The designs often carried symbolic meanings. In popular Islamic tradition, the peacock, whose features are emulated here, is an inhabitant of the Garden of Eden.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This fragment is woven of costly silver-wrapped silk thread. The main pattern consists of a trilobed form inspired by the feathers of a peacock's tail. The serrated edges along the outside of the large plumes and tear-shaped designs set against the peach background of their interiors evoke the texture of feathers. Small floral rosettes in the same colors appear on each side of the composition.

**CONTEXT**

The Ottoman court placed great emphasis on public ceremonies in which the sultan and high officials wore garments crafted of expensive and sumptuous silk fabrics with ornate designs. Travelers' accounts frequently mention the opulence of the sultan's apparel and the splendor of the court. Colorful and festive public events, such as parades and diplomatic receptions, were occasions for the display of wealth. The large-scale patterns also helped audiences view the sultan from a distance during processions. To the Ottomans and their subjects, appearance spoke of one's rank in society. Regulations promulgated by the court specified a strict dress code for every echelon of society. For example, foreigners, non-Muslims, or people of low standing were not allowed to wear cloth of silver such as this.

Another important court practice involved the annual gift of ceremonial robes and textiles to individuals in the service of the sultan. Rank in the military and civil administration determined the number and quality of the gifts. For example, a vizier might obtain three robes and several yards of a fine textile along with material for turbans, while an ordinary soldier would receive a few yards of cotton. Foreign ambassadors were frequently given court robes to wear as they prepared for an audience with the sultan. Some of these, taken back to Europe, were subsequently made into dresses for the ambassadors' wives. It was the royal workshop's responsibility to respond to this huge demand and its craftsmen were almost always at work on imperial commissions.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Ottoman empire, courtly life, costume, textile, silk



25. Fragment of a kaftan back with peacock feather design

# 26
# Tile with floral and cloud-band design

About 1578
Turkey, Iznik
Stonepaste; polychrome painted under transparent glaze;
9 13/16 x 9 7/8 x 1 1/16 in. (24.9 x 25.1 x 1.7 cm)
Gift of William B. Osgood Field, 1902 (02.5.91)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

Iznik, a town in northwestern Turkey, was the main center for the production of ceramic tiles and tableware in the Ottoman empire. These ceramics were highly valued luxury objects and have come to represent Ottoman visual culture at its height.

### FUNCTION

This tile is one of many commissioned in the 1570s (the height of Iznik kiln production) for a renovation of the sultan's private quarters. When placed next to identical tiles, the motifs that appear to be cut off here would be complete, and a larger design would emerge. A large panel of these tiles would have decorated the royal bedroom of Sultan Murad III, grandson of Süleyman the Magnificent (fig. 27).

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This tile features typical Ottoman motifs: lotus palmettes (the four here halved by the edges of the tile), serrated leaves known as *saz* leaves, and Chinese-inspired cloud bands. In the center, sinuous cloud bands are painted in thick red pigment against a solid white background. The simple color palette of white, blue, green, and red is typical of later Iznik wares.

### CONTEXT

This tile exemplifies the mature style of Iznik wares; the cloud bands and *saz* leaves are typical of this phase of Iznik production. The technique used to create these tiles was complex and required multiple firings to ensure the highest level of clarity for both the colors and the design. Designs such as this were developed in the imperial design workshop in Istanbul and subsequently executed in Iznik.



**FIG. 27.** View of the bedroom of Sultan Murad III, about 1578, Topkapı Palace, Istanbul, Turkey, displaying the same type of Iznik wall tiles as image 26

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Ottoman empire, visual language, Iznik pottery, court life, *saz* (serrated leaves), cultural exchange, tile, stonepaste



26. Tile with floral and cloud-band design

# Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 2 Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

***Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66)** (image 23)
About 1555–60
Turkey, Istanbul
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 20½ x 25⅜ in. (52.1 x 64.5 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**GRADE:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Power and Leadership

## GOAL

- Students will be able to recognize ways a *tughra* functioned as a symbol of power and authority within a culturally diverse and geographically expansive empire.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

English Language Arts
- NL-ENG.K-12.5 Communication Strategies

Visual Arts
- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History
- NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts
- SL.CCR.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects
- R.CCR.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text
- R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Map of the Ottoman empire (page 125) and books, essays, or other informational texts about Sultan Süleyman (see suggestions in **RESOURCES** below).

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- Look closely at the materials and craftsmanship employed in this work. What qualities might distinguish this as something fit for a sultan?
- A *tughra*, a calligraphic emblem signifying the authority of an Ottoman sultan, most often appeared on royal decrees and coins. Why might a leader use a combination of ornament and words to convey his or her power? What organizations today effectively use imagery, such as logos, to quickly convey ideas and authenticity?
- *Tughra*s were intentionally complex to prevent forgeries. What aspects of this design might be the most challenging to copy? Why? What are some strategies used today to prevent the forgery of documents, signatures, and money?
- What images are associated with the governing body of your community? What do they convey? Where do you most often see them?

ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** World History
**DURATION:** Approximately 60 minutes

Look closely at the map of the Ottoman empire; note the expanse and geographic features covered. Imagine ruling this enormous area. What challenges might you encounter? Why? Brainstorm several strategies for communicating a leader's power and decisions to a culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse community encompassing a broad geographic area. Consider how advances in technology have eased communications, if at all, among diverse peoples today. Present your ideas to your peers and include an outline of the pros and cons of each approach. Research ways Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66) managed this challenging task using the suggested **RESOURCES** below as a starting point. (Hint: research the Divan and Janissary Corps as a starting point.)

## RESOURCES


Sardar, Marika. "The Greater Ottoman Empire, 1600–1800." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grot/hd_grot.htm(October 2003).

Yalman, Suzan. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Age of Süleyman 'the Magnificent' (r. 1520–1566)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/suly/hd_suly.htm (October 2002).

——. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Art of the Ottomans before 1600." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/otto1/hd_otto1.htm (October 2002).


## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

*Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent Wearing a Jewel-Studded Helmet*, about 1532; Venice; woodcut on paper; sheet: 36¼ x 21¹⁵⁄₁₆ in. (92 x 55.8 cm); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1942 (42.41.1)

*Procession of Sultan Süleyman through the Hippodrome:* From the frieze *Moeurs et fachons des Turks* (Customs and Fashions of the Turks), 1553; after Pieter Coecke van Aelst (Flemish, 1502–1550); woodcut; 11¾ x 15⁵⁄₁₆ in. (29.8 x 38.9 cm), b: 11¾ x 17⅜ in. (29.8 x 44.1 cm); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928 (28.85.7a, b)

Image 26. Tile with floral and cloud-band design, about 1574–78; Turkey, Iznik; stonepaste; polychrome painted under a transparent glaze; 9¹³⁄₁₆ x 9⅞ x ¹¹⁄₁₆ in. (24.9 x 25.1 x 1.7 cm); Gift of William B. Osgood Field, 1902 (02.5.91)


Author: Claire Moore, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Date: 2012

## Unit 5: Chapter 2 Suggested Readings and Resources

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. "Style and Status: Imperial Costumes from Ottoman Turkey." Exhibition interactive. Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2005. http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/styleandstatus/.

**HIGH SCHOOL**

See also the exhibition catalogue *Style and Status: Imperial Costumes from Ottoman Turkey* (London: Azimuth Editions, 2005).

Atıl, Esin. *The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent*. Exhibition catalogue. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

Macaulay, David. *Mosque*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL**

An in-depth look at the building of an Ottoman mosque in sixteenth-century Istanbul.

*The Ottomans and Their Capital Istanbul*. DVD. 39 min. Falls Church, Va.: Landmark Media, 2006.

Showcases the glorious heritage of Ottoman artists and architects by focusing on the close connections between architectural splendor and the religious message of Islam.

Roxburgh, David J., ed. *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*. Exhibition catalogue. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005.

**HIGH SCHOOL**

An important and comprehensive resource, especially for those interested in Turkish art and culture before the Ottoman period.

Ruggiero, Adriane. *The Ottoman Empire (Cultures of the Past)*. New York: Benchmark Books, 2002.

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL**

*Süleyman the Magnificent*. DVD. 57 min. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987.

Explores the political, social, and cultural background of the Ottoman empire, concentrating on the forty-six-year reign of Süleyman. Distributed by UCArt, musefilm.org/ucart. Available in Nolen Library.

"*Tughra* (Imperial Cipher) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) [Turkey (Istanbul)] (38.149.1)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/38.149.1 (October 2006).

See "Related Media" for a short video highlighting the different components of an imperial calligraphic emblem.

Yalman, Suzan. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Age of Süleyman 'the Magnificent' (r. 1520–1566)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/suly/hd_suly.htm (October 2002).

**HIGH SCHOOL**

### UNIT 5: CHAPTER 2 SOURCES


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UNIT 5: CHAPTER 3

# The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript: The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- identify some of the key themes and events presented in the Persian national epic, the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings);
- make connections between figures and events in the story and the illustrated pages of the manuscript produced for Shah Tahmasp; and
- understand the process and materials used to create a royal manuscript of this caliber.

## Introduction

This chapter explores one of the masterpieces of the Metropolitan Museum's collection, the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp (reigned 1524–76). Written by the poet Abu'l Qasim Firdausi in 1010, the *Shahnama* is one of the most celebrated works of Persian literature. The epic poem provides a history of Iranian kingship from the creation of the world to the conquest of Iran by Arab Muslims in the mid-seventh century. The *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp has been referred to as the finest and most lavishly illustrated surviving manuscript of Firdausi's epic ever produced. Beyond its great artistic value, the manuscript provides an important visual reference for the architecture, customs, decoration, ceremonies, and fashion of the court of the sixteenth-century Safavid ruler.

## The *Shahnama*

The poet Abu'l Qasim Firdausi did not invent the stories and legends that make up the *Shahnama*, but undertook the ambitious project of collecting them and setting them to verse. Firdausi was born in the town of Tus, in northeastern Iran, and devoted considerable energy to studying old texts in Persian and Arabic. Poets often dedicated works to rulers, who rewarded them with money in return. When Firdausi finally completed the *Shahnama* after roughly thirty-three years of careful labor, he set out for Ghazna (in present-day Afghanistan) to present it to one of the most powerful rulers of the period, Sultan Mahmud (reigned 999–1030). According to legend, when the sultan did not compensate Firdausi adequately, the disappointed and insulted poet gave the money away and wrote a scathing satire about the sultan. By the time Mahmud sent more generous payment under the advisement of his counselors, it was too late—Firdausi had just died.

The *Shahnama* consists of more than 50,000 rhyming couplets recounting the deeds and glory of the Iranian kings from the creation of the world to the Arab conquest of Iran in 642. The book is divided into three generally chronological cycles: the mythical past, the time of legendary heroes, and the recorded histories.

### Cycle I: The Mythical Past

At the dawn of creation, during the reign of the Pishdadians, the first dynasty, social order and religion (Zoroastrianism) were established. Fierce conflicts between the forces of good and evil—a recurring theme in the *Shahnama*—continued for centuries as heroic kings battled evil demons.

### Cycle II: The Time of Legendary Heroes

A turning point in the narrative occurs when the ruler Shah Faridun divided the world among his three sons. Two sons, Sam and Tur, united to kill the third, Iraj, who had been given Iran and Arabia to rule. This marks the beginning of a prolonged cycle of revenge between the Iranians (descendants of Iraj) and their archenemies, the Turanians (descendants of Tur). Among the numerous heroes that emerge, Rustam stands out as the epitome of courage and strength.

### Cycle III: The Recorded Histories

The last section of the epic, which corresponds with other written historical records, takes place during the rule of the Sasanian kings—a dynasty that ends with the Islamic conquest of Iran by the second Muslim caliph 'Umar.

## Themes of the *Shahnama*

Although the majority of the stories in the *Shahnama* involve battles and struggles between the forces of good and evil, other themes include love, humor, and the supernatural. One of the principal themes concerns kingship and the relationship between sovereigns and their subjects. Over time, the poem became an emblem of royal power and legitimacy, and a kind of didactic handbook for young princes and rulers. The book's inherent connection to kingship led many rulers of Iran to commission manuscripts of the *Shahnama* for their own royal libraries.

## The *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp

Around 1524, the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp (reigned 1524–76) commissioned an illustrated manuscript of the *Shahnama*. He recruited the most talented painters, calligraphers, illuminators, and binders to work in the royal workshop and spared no expense. The workshop in the Safavid capital of Tabriz produced the 759 folios of text in elegant *nasta'liq* script. Its 258 innovative and sumptuous illustrations far surpass those of any other royal Iranian manuscript in both number and quality. An undertaking of this scale and scope could only have been financially supported by a ruler; this *Shahnama* reflects the great wealth and sophistication of Shah Tahmasp's Safavid court. This commission can be interpreted as an act of legitimization, linking Tahmasp's dynasty to the legendary kings of Persia.

The completed manuscript was part of an opulent gift to Sultan Selim II (reigned 1566–74) on the occasion of his ascension to the Ottoman throne in 1566. The arrival of the Iranian embassy in Istanbul (in present-day Turkey) is well documented, and a number of gifts—this *Shahnama* among them—are mentioned in Ottoman and European sources. The manuscript remained well preserved in Ottoman hands before appearing in Europe in the nineteenth century. Its folios were later dispersed among museums and private collections.


کرا با د کردن جهان شاد کرد
جهانی به نیکی از و یاد کرد

## Making a Royal Manuscript

In the royal Safavid workshop, the making of a manuscript—especially one as ambitious as this—drew upon the resources of the state to employ artists and supply materials such as paper, ink, gold leaf, pigments, and leather bindings. Production took place in the Safavid court's "house of books" (*kitabkhana*), which was at once a library and a workshop. The process began with papermaking. Sheets made of the pulp of linen and hemp rags were custom-sized and coated with a starchy solution to prepare them for ink and paint. Multiple factors informed design and layout: the entire text had to fit in the allotted lines, the relationship between text and image had to be meaningful and balanced, and the illustrated scenes had to provide a compelling visual narrative. Once the layout was established, scribes wrote the text in the spaces designated by the director, who inspected every line for accuracy before passing the pages on to the painters.

The painters sketched out the entire composition with a light brush before focusing on specific areas. They often showed off their talent by incorporating minuscule details and playful visual elements (see detail opposite). They prepared their pigments from natural minerals, including semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli (blue) and malachite (green), as well as gold, silver, sulfur, and dyes from various plants and insects. Thanks to surviving contemporary accounts and stylistic analyses of the paintings, scholars have been able to distinguish the hands of many artists involved in producing the illustrations—some by name, though others remain anonymous.

When the paintings were finished, illuminators contributed to the overall sumptuousness of the manuscript by adorning the borders, chapter headings, and text frames with gold. Most importantly, they created the complex geometric designs on the opening page of the manuscript, called the frontispiece. Then the finished gilded pages were burnished with a smooth, hard stone such as agate or rock crystal to give them a polished effect.

Once all the pages had gone through this elaborate process, they were brought to a binding specialist who sewed and bound the leaves and attached a decorated leather or lacquer cover to the spine. Finally, the completed book was placed in a jeweled container and presented to the patron.

Detail, image 27

## 27
## The Feast of Sada: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

About 1525
Author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020)
Artist: Attributed to Sultan Muhammad (active first half of the 16th century)
Iran, Tabriz
Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 9½ x 9⅛ in. (24.1 x 23 cm); page: 18½ x 12½ in. (47 x 31.8 cm)
Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.2)

(See poster included in this resource)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This page, from the first cycle of the *Shahnama*, illustrates the legend of the discovery of fire and subsequent celebratory feast. It was created by one of the most renowned painters of the time, Sultan Muhammad, who was also the first director of the project.

#### FUNCTION

Like the other folios from the manuscript featured in this chapter, this illustration highlights specific themes from the text and enhances the beauty and value of the book. It celebrates the discovery of fire and the beginning of its worship as a divine gift—a core tenet of Zoroastrianism, the primary pre-Islamic religion of Persia. The Iranian feast of Sada still marks the occasion today.

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Activity abounds in this lush and evocative painting. Wearing a gold-embroidered garment, King Hushang sits on an elaborate carpet in the center of the composition. He is offered a pomegranate by one of his two flanking courtiers, and the celebrated fire burns in red and gold just beneath him. The creatures in the foreground—whose careful and psychologically compelling portrayal is characteristic of Sultan Muhammad's style—recall the legend that animals were first domesticated by Hushang. The vibrant colors of the landscape create a magical atmosphere, reinforcing the mythical nature of the story it illustrates.

#### CONTEXT

During the reign of King Hushang of the first Iranian dynasty, humanity acquired useful knowledge of mining, irrigation, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fire. According to legend, one day King Hushang saw a gruesome monster peeking from behind a rock and hurled a stone to kill it. The monster disappeared and the stone hit the rock, creating a spark. The wise king immediately understood the significance of the accidental discovery and ordered a huge fire built and a feast to celebrate it, thus marking the beginning of the worship of fire as a divine gift.

Related excerpt from the *Shahnama*:

> *When night fell he [Hushang] gave orders that his men produce sparks from the rock in the same manner. They lit a huge fire, and in honor of the divine splendor which had been revealed to Hushang, they instituted a festival of rejoicing. This is called the Sadeh festival, and it was celebrated with great reverence by the ancient Iranians, and the custom is still observed as a memorial of that night.*
>
> —Dick Davis, *The Lion and the Throne: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 18

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

*Shahnama* (Book of Kings), Iran, Safavid empire, storytelling, discovery, celebration, Zoroastrianism, figural art, royal workshop, watercolor, ink



27. The Feast of Sada: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

# 28
# Tahmuras Defeats the *Divs*: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

About 1525
Author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020)
Artist: Attributed to Sultan Muhammad (active first half of the 16th century)
Iran, Tabriz
Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 11⅛ x 7⅝₁₆ in. (28.3 x 18.6 cm); page: 18½ x 12⅝ in. (47 x 32.1 cm)
Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.3)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting from the first cycle of the *Shahnama* vividly recounts the struggle between good and evil as the good king Tahmuras, son of King Hushang (see image 27), defeats the evil demons (*divs*).

#### FUNCTION

This richly colored and illuminated page is one among 257 paintings that illustrate the epic and highlight specific themes.

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This image, painted by Sultan Muhammad, bursts with energy and dynamism. At the center, the Iranian king Tahmuras (on horseback) strikes the demon with his ox-headed mace. His blue robe embroidered with golden threads and ornate crown capped by a tall plume add to the vibrancy of the illustration. In the lower left corner, anthropomorphic demons (*divs*) are outnumbered and bound in chains. On the right, a group of courtiers on horseback watches the scene unfold. The painter conveys his talent and sense of humor through the depiction of the demons: though representative of the forces of evil, they cower in fear, their faces twisted in an almost comical parody of the grotesque.

#### CONTEXT

Although Tahmuras, the son of King Hushang, was a heroic leader, he could not escape falling under the influence of the evil *div* Ahriman. According to legend, when Tahmuras finally managed to defeat Ahriman and the army of demons, they offered to teach humankind the precious art of writing in exchange for their lives. According to the story, this is how people learned various alphabets, including Arabic, Chinese, Greek, and Persian.

The anthropomorphic depiction of the demons in this scene reflects the influence of works on paper and silk from Central Asia, suggesting that Eastern paintings and drawings were circulating in the royal workshop (*kitabkhana*) in Tabriz at this time.

Related excerpt from the *Shahnama*:

> *On their side the demons and their magicians also prepared for war, crying out to the heavens and raising great clouds of smoke and vapor. Once again the prescient Tahmures resorted to sorcery; by sorcery he bound in chains two-thirds of Ahriman's army (and for this reason he was afterwards known as "Tahmures, the Binder of Demons"), and the other third he shattered with his heavy mace, laying them prone in the dust . . . Tahmures spared the [remaining] demons, and they too became his slaves . . .*
>
> —Dick Davis, *The Lion and the Throne: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 22

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

*Shahnama* (Book of Kings), Iran, Safavid empire, storytelling, figural art, royal workshop, watercolor, ink



28. Tahmuras Defeats the *Div*s: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

## 29
## Siyavush Plays Polo: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

About 1525–30
Author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020)
Artist: Attributed to Qasim ibn ʿAli (active 1525–60)
Iran, Tabriz
Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 11 3/16 x 9 5/16 in. (28.4 x 23.7 cm); page: 18 5/8 x 12 5/16 in. (47.3 x 31.9 cm)
Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.26)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting depicts a game of polo between Iranians and Turanians, legendary rivals of the second cycle of the *Shahnama*. It shows how contemporary tastes were reflected in the illustrations of the epic, as polo was a favorite pastime of the Safavid court.

#### FUNCTION

This page of the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp illustrates a legendary encounter between two Iranian royal figures through the eyes of a sixteenth-century painter.

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The circular arrangement of the figures in this illustration draws attention to the central action, where men mounted on horses scramble to gain control of a ball. The dynamic poses of the players and animals illustrate various moments during a polo game. Near the middle of the composition, a dark black horse and plumed headdress set one figure apart from the others; he is Siyavush, an Iranian prince lauded as an extraordinary polo player. In the upper right, a lone figure identified as Afrasiyab, a powerful Turanian king, sits on a brown horse watching the game. A large crowd of spectators looks on in the background.

#### CONTEXT

The encounter between Siyavush, an Iranian prince, and Afrasiyab, the most distinguished and formidable of all Turanian kings, is a popular legend in Iranian history. In this rendition of the story, Afrasiyab asks Siyavush to play a game of polo. After playing for a while, Afrasiyab retreats to the sidelines to admire the prince's athletic skill. The Iranians dominate the game. The emphasis is not on illustration as a faithful record of historical events. Rather, the elaborate horse trappings, complex headdresses, and the fascination with polo reflect the sixteenth-century world of the patron and painter.

Related excerpt from the *Shahnama*:

> *One evening the king [Afrasiyab] said to Seyavash, "Let's go up at dawn tomorrow and enjoy ourselves at polo; I've heard that when you play, your mallet's invincible." Seyavash agreed and the next morning they made their way laughing and joking to the field . . . At the field's edge drums thundered out, cymbals clashed, and trumpets blared. The ground seemed to shake with the din, and dust rose into the sky as the horsemen took the field.*
>
> —Dick Davis, *Fathers and Sons: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 50

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

*Shahnama* (Book of Kings), Iran, Safavid empire, storytelling, sports, figural art, royal workshop, watercolor, ink



29. Siyavush Plays Polo: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

# Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 3 The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript: The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

**The Feast of Sada: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp** (image 27)
About 1525
Author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020)
Artist: Attributed to Sultan Muhammad (active first half of the 16th century)
Iran, Tabriz
Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 9½ x 9⅛ in (24.1 x 23 cm), page: 18½ x 12½ in. (47 x 31.8 cm)
Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.2)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** English Language Arts, Visual Arts, and World History
**GRADE:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art and Writing

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- identify some of the key events and figures presented in the Persian national epic, the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings);
- make connections between the text and the illustrated pages of the manuscript produced for Shah Tahmasp; and
- create a historical record of their community.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- NL-ENG.K-12.2 Understanding the Human Experience
- NL-ENG.K-12.6 Applying Knowledge
- NL-ENG.K-12.8 Developing Research Skills
- NL-ENG.K-12.9 Multicultural Understanding

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.9-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA-VA.9-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.9-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words
- W.CCR.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content
- W.CCR.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Paper, pencils, newspapers and magazines from the past year (or computer with Internet access), and colored pencils (or paints and brushes)

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

Before looking at the featured work of art, read the following excerpt from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) describing the celebration that took place after King Hushang (first Iranian dynasty) accidentally discovered fire when a stone hit a rock and created a spark. Take a moment to visualize the scene. Share the image that came to mind with a classmate.

> *They lit a huge fire, and in honor of the divine splendor* [the discovery of how to light a fire] *which had been revealed to Hushang, they instituted a festival of rejoicing. This is called the Sadeh festival, and it was celebrated with great reverence by the ancient Iranians, and the custom is still observed as a memorial of that night.*
>
> —Dick Davis, *The Lion and the Throne: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 18

- How does the painting compare to your image of the scene? What details in the painting does the text support? What aspects of the story does the writer leave open to our imagination?

- Describe this celebration. How might your community honor or celebrate a discovery?
- Look closely at the figures in the painting. What might their clothing, accessories, pose, and location suggest about their status and relationship to one another?
- Survey the setting. What aspects of the landscape has the artist emphasized? How? How would you describe the relationship between the figures and the landscape? Why?

### ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Language Arts, Visual Arts, and World History
**DURATION:** Approximately 120 minutes

The featured work of art presents one event recorded in the "Book of Kings," a history of Iranian kingship from the creation of the world to the conquest of Iran by Arab Muslims in the mid-seventh century. List the five most important events you would choose to record if you were writing this year's history—consider politics, sports, technology, sciences, natural disasters, wars, economy, fashion, and arts and entertainment. Create an illustrated page with a short article describing each event and the reason for including it in your timeline. Post all of the entries created by the class in chronological order. Note trends among the group (such as event type) and compare and contrast the rationale presented in the submissions. Explore ways to group the works to create more focused timelines for the year (for example, the year in entertainment).

(Alternative: Each person creates a timeline for the year they were born or a timeline with one entry for each year since their birth.)

### RESOURCES

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Ferdowsi, Abolqasem. *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*. Translated by Dick Davis. New York: Penguin Classics, 2007.

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### OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Image 28. Tahmuras Defeats the *Divs*: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525; Iran, Tabriz; opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 11⅛ x 7⅝ in. (28.3 x 18.6 cm); page: 18½ x 12⅝ in. (47 x 32.1 cm); Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.3)

Image 29. Siyavush Plays Polo: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525–30; Iran, Tabriz; opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 11⅜ x 9⅜ in. (28.4 x 23.7 cm); page: 18⅝ x 12⅜ in. (47.3 x 31.9 cm); Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.26)

Author: Adapted from lessons by classroom teachers Dr. Sujay Sood and Julie Mann
Date: 2012

## Unit 5: Chapter 3 Suggested Readings and Resources

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Basic English translation in a single volume.

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**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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**HIGH SCHOOL**

*Persian Miniatures from the Shahnameh*. DVD. 30 min. New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1977.
Traces the development of different styles of illustration of Iran's national epic over three centuries and three distinct dynasties: the Mongol, Timurid, and Safavid.

*Persian Miniature: The Gardens of Paradise*. DVD. 31 min. New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1997.
Spotlights an outstanding Persian miniature from the Safavid period, which is in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

*Tales from a Book of Kings: The Houghton Shah-nameh*. Video. 26 min. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972.
Studies a selection of paintings from a sixteenth-century Persian manuscript created for Shah Tahmasp.

Welch, Stuart Cary. *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-nameh of Shah Tahmasp*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

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**HIGH SCHOOL**

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UNIT 5: CHAPTER 4

# The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- understand the role of luxury objects in the Mughal court of India; and
- recognize how the precise and highly naturalistic depictions of animals, plants, and people demonstrate the Mughals' extraordinary interest in the natural world and the keen observational skills of Mughal artists.

## Introduction

The Mughal dynasty (1526–1858) was among the richest and longest ruling in India, and at its peak controlled large portions of the Indian subcontinent. The Mughals were Muslims of Central Asian origin, and Persian was their court language. Their intermarriage with Hindu royalty and establishment of strong alliances with the diverse peoples of the subcontinent led to profound cultural, artistic, and linguistic exchanges.

The Mughal dynasty claimed descent from the Mongols ("Mughal" is from the Arabized transliteration of "Moghol," or Mongol). The Mughal emperors were among India's greatest patrons of art, responsible for some of the country's most spectacular monuments, like the palaces at Delhi, Agra, and Lahore (in present-day Pakistan) and the famous mausoleum, the Taj Mahal (fig. 31).

The tastes and patronage of the first six rulers, known as the Great Mughals, defined Mughal art and architecture, and their influence has endured to this day. The works of art featured in this chapter highlight artistic production during the reigns of Jahangir (1605–27) and his son Shah Jahan (1627–58).

Emperor Jahangir (fig. 28) remains best known as a connoisseur and patron of the arts. His memoirs, the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, describe opulent court events and sumptuous gifts in great detail. They also reflect the emperor's intense interest in the natural world—most evident in the meticulous descriptions of the plants and animals he encountered in India and during his travels. Jahangir is notable for his patronage of botanical paintings and drawings. In addition to works made at his own court, botanical albums with beautifully drawn and scientifically correct illustrations were brought to India by European merchants (see fig. 33). These inspired many of the works in Jahangir's court.

Emperor Shah Jahan's court was unrivaled in its luxury. Like his father Jahangir, Shah Jahan (fig. 29) also had a strong interest in the natural world and a taste for paintings, jewel-encrusted objects (fig. 30), textiles, and works of art in other media. In spite of his large collection of portable works, Shah Jahan is best known for his architectural commissions, which include a huge palace in Delhi and the Taj Mahal (fig. 31), a mausoleum built for his favorite wife. Shah Jahan's architectural projects also reflect the Mughal love of botanical imagery; many of the Taj Mahal's walls are carved with intricate images of recognizable flowers and leaves (fig. 32).

During the golden age of Mughal rule (approximately 1526–1707), the emperors had a marked interest in naturalistic depictions of people, animals, and the environment. They employed the most skilled artists, who documented courtiers and their activities as well as the flora and fauna native to India. Informed by Mughal patronage, a new style of painting emerged in illustrations made for books and albums, which combined elements of Persian, European, and native Indian traditions. These works demonstrate keen observation of the natural environment and the royal court. The emperors collected their favorite poetry, calligraphy, drawings, and portraits in extensive albums, which were among their most valued personal possessions and were passed down to successive generations.

In addition to works on paper, the decorative arts of the Mughal court engaged a broad range of natural forms in carpets, textiles, jewelry, and luxuriously inlaid decorative objects, and used precious materials ranging from gemstones and pearls to silk.



**FIG. 28.** Portrait of Jahangir (detail), about 1615–20; India; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 14 x 9½ in. (35.6 x 24.1cm); Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913 (13.228.47)



**FIG. 29.** Shah Jahan on a Terrace, Holding a Pendant Set With His Portrait: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (recto) (detail), dated 1627–28; artist: Chitarman (active about 1627–70); India; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 15 5/16 x 10⅛ in. (38.9 x 25.7 cm); Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.24)



**FIG. 30.** Mango-shaped flask, mid-17th century; India; rock crystal, set with gold, enamel, rubies, and emeralds; H. 2½ in. (6.5 cm); Purchase, Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, 1993 (1993.18)

This small flask typifies the Mughal interest in natural forms and their transformation into richly decorated objects. The realistic mango shape was carved from rock crystal and encased in a web of golden strands of wire punctuated by rubies and emeralds. This flask is a practical vessel—possibly used to hold perfume or lime, an ingredient in *pan*, a mildly intoxicating narcotic popularly used in India—as well as a jewel-like decorative object that would have displayed the wealth and refined taste of its owner.



**FIG. 31.** Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632–53. Commissioned by Shah Jahan



**FIG. 32.** Detail of wall showing highly naturalistic floral decoration, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632–53.

# 30
# The Emperor Shah Jahan with His Son Dara Shikoh: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

About 1620
Artist: Nanha (active 1605–27)
India
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; margins: gold and opaque watercolor on dyed paper; 15⅝ x 10⅝ in. (38.9 x 26.2 cm)
Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.36)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting demonstrates the Mughals' focus on portraiture as well as their love of precious objects (see fig. 30). It presents two realistic depictions of the Mughal royal family—the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his eldest son, Dara Shikoh, who are shown examining precious stones.

### FUNCTION

The painting comes from an album begun by Emperor Jahangir and continued by his son Shah Jahan. The album was created for private viewing and study by the emperor.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Two figures are seated on a golden throne furnished with luxurious cushions. Shah Jahan admires the large ruby clasped in his right hand, while his son—who is facing him—looks toward the bowl of precious stones resting in his father's left hand. The emperor is clad in a red and yellow striped turban with a plume, a white double-breasted gown called a *jama*, a richly embroidered sash, and a violet garment called a *pajama*. On his right thumb is a jeweled ring, which could be used to draw the string of a hunting bow. The handle of a jeweled dagger, signaling his supremely important position in the court, is visible just above his waist.

Prince Dara Shikoh is dressed in a yellow *jama* fastened with a sash. In one hand he holds a turban pin, in the other a fly whisk made from a peacock feather. Multiple strands of pearls adorn Dara Shikoh; under Mughal rule, pearls were a hallmark of nobility, and princes and princesses were almost always portrayed with them.

### CONTEXT

The patron of this painting was most likely Shah Jahan's father, Emperor Jahangir, who was interested in realistic and masterfully drawn depictions of people, animals, and plants. The wide border that frames the painting contains precisely rendered images of flowers and birds. In the upper right corner are flowers, including narcissus, roses, poppies, and crocus. The Mughal style of creating botanically accurate flowers was informed by the presence of European botanical prints in the court (fig. 33). Birds, such as chukar partridges, demoiselle cranes, pigeons, Indian peafowl, and Birds of Paradise (symbolizing royalty), are also depicted with skillful realism. All the birds are native to the Mughal territories and still exist in present-day India and Pakistan.



**FIG. 33.** Crocus, folio 61 of *Le Jardin du Roy tres Chrestien Henry IV Roy de France et de Navare*, 1608; designer: Pierre Vallet (French, about 1575–1657); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1935 (35.67.3)

This type of illustration, from a European botanical album, influenced the paintings produced at the Mughal court. Notice the crocus in the top right corner of the margin of image 30.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Mughal empire, courtly life, Emperor Shah Jahan, natural world, album, figural art, plants, birds, watercolor, ink



30. The Emperor Shah Jahan with His Son Dara Shikoh: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

## 31
# Dagger with hilt in the form of a blue bull (*nilgai*)

About 1640
India
Hilt: nephrite; blade: watered steel; 15 in. (38.1 cm)
Gift of Alice Heeramaneck, in memory of Nasli Heeramaneck, 1985 (1985.58a)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

Mughal emperors were keen observers of animals and the blue bull (*nilgai*)—a large antelope native to India—was among their favorites. The intimate familiarity with the features of the blue bull, as well as the fine quality of the carving, suggest that this dagger was made in the royal workshop by someone with access to the imperial zoo, which would have housed both native and foreign animals.

### FUNCTION

Finely carved daggers such as this were seldom used as weapons, but rather were part of the royal ceremonial costume of the Mughal court. Surviving daggers featuring animal heads are relatively rare, and were probably worn by those of the highest status at the Mughal court.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The head of the blue bull, which forms the handle of this dagger, features thin hollow ears, delicately carved facial features, and grooves along the neckline where the owner could rest his fingers. At the base of the hilt, a lotuslike flower rests in a leaf scroll, which bulges over the edge—a feature that prevents the hand from slipping from the smooth handle onto the sharp blade. The blue tone of the jade (nephrite) resembles the animal's coat, which was admired for its bluish gray hue.

### CONTEXT

The Mughal emperors' interest in animals might be considered paradoxical by today's standards. They admired animals for their beauty, enjoyed observing them in the wild and in the imperial zoo, but also were avid hunters and even held animal fights at the court where courtiers could place bets on their favorites. Court painters were often present during these fights and sketched the animals from life (fig. 34).

While the Mughals' Islamic faith informed their disapproval of large-scale figurative sculpture, India had a rich indigenous sculptural tradition, which influenced Mughal art. This figural tradition was transformed by the Mughals into objects such as this one—small in scale and finely executed. The genre of small-scale animal sculptures and depictions flourished in Mughal India, and the handle of this dagger, with its realistically carved head of a blue bull, is a prime example of this trend.



FIG. 34. Blue Bull (*Nilgai*): Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso), about 1620; artist: Mansur (active 1589–1629); India; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 15⅝ x 10⅛ in. (38.9 x 25.6 cm); Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.13)

According to Emperor Jahangir's memoirs, the blue bull (*nilgai*) was commonly encountered on royal hunts. This illustration is by the court artist Mansur, who often accompanied the ruler on his hunts. He had a special talent for observing and depicting nature, and shows how the bull would have appeared in the wild. Blue bulls still live in the grasslands of present-day India, Pakistan, and Nepal.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Mughal empire, royal hunt, dagger, Emperor Shah Jahan, natural world, album, animals, nephrite (jade), steel



31. Dagger with hilt in the form of a blue bull (*nilgai*)

# 32
# Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

About 1615–20
Artist: Mansur (active 1589–1629)
India
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 15⅜ x 10⅛ in. (39.1 x 25.6 cm)
Purchase, Rogers Fund and the Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.12)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting of two vultures reflects the Mughal emperors' interest in studying and visually recording animals and their behaviors and attributes.

### FUNCTION

This painting is one of many works from an imperial album commissioned by Emperor Jahangir. In addition to other depictions of animals, the album included portrayals of the royal household and central administration as well as lavishly illuminated pages of calligraphy containing poetic verses. Like a luxurious scrapbook, such royal albums reflect the range of interests and refined tastes of their owners.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This scientifically accurate painting is the result of careful observation of two vultures. Close attention to detail is evident in the shape and color of the beaks, the proportions of the bodies, and the color and texture of the feathers, all of which help distinguish the birds as two different species: a red-headed vulture (on the left) and a long-billed vulture (on the right). Although the surroundings are minimal, they give a sense of the birds' habitat; one of the vultures perches on a branchlike formation, while the other appears to rest on a rocky ledge nearby.

### CONTEXT

The court painter Mansur was a favorite of Emperor Jahangir because of his ability to create highly realistic portrayals of animals and plants. His skill prompted Jahangir to take the artist with him on hunting expeditions and other journeys so that the painter could record the animal and plant species they encountered. Mansur also had access to the imperial zoo, which housed animals that had been captured or given to the emperor as gifts.

Sketching from nature was essential to Mansur's practice and Jahangir's zoo provided a perfect opportunity to draw a wide range of animals. He continually redrew his lines to account for the animals' shifts in pose and movement, resulting in sketches that appear both realistic and animated. In his studio, he used very fine brushes to apply opaque watercolor to selected drawings, creating a highly detailed finished product.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Mughal empire, courtly life, natural world, observation, album, plants, birds, watercolor, ink



32. Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

# Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 4 The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album** (verso) (image 32)
About 1615–20
Artist: Mansur (active 1589–1629)
India
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 15⅜ x 10⅛ in. (39.1 x 25.6 cm)
Purchase, Rogers Fund and the Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.12)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Science, Visual Arts, and World History
**GRADES:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art and the Environment

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- recognize ways works of art reflect an intense interest in observation of the human and natural world among Mughal leaders; and
- understand ways works of art from the past and present communicate ideas about the natural world.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Geography
- NSS-G.K-12.5 Environment and Society

Science
- NS.K-12.3 Life Science

Visual Arts
- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History
- NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects
- R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom or Museum (alternative activity: outdoors)

**MATERIALS:** Images of a red-headed vulture and a long-billed vulture (or computer with Internet access to screen video clip; see **RESOURCES**), and an image of the French botanical illustration (fig. 35)

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- Take a close look at the two birds in the center of the composition. What similarities do you notice? What differences stand out?
- Compare the painting of the birds with images or videos (see **RESOURCES**) of the same species, the red-headed vulture and long-billed vulture. What do you think this artist felt was most important to convey? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Turn your attention to the setting. What might it suggest about the birds' habitat?
- Investigate the flora and fauna featured in the surrounding borders. How does the presentation of the natural world in the borders compare to the central image?
- Imagine creating a work such as this. What research or planning might be involved?
- The Mughal empire (1526–1858) was one of the most powerful and longest ruling in India. Mughal court artists had many opportunities to sketch animals and plants; they often accompanied leaders during royal hunts and had access to imperial zoos, which housed both native and foreign animals. What are some ways people in your community learn about plants and animals in their immediate environment and other regions?



**FIG. 35.** Crocus, folio 61 of *Le Jardin du Roy tres Chrestien Henry IV Roy de France et de Navare*, 1608; designed by Pierre Vallet (French, about 1575–1657); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1935 (35.67.3)

- European merchants brought botanical albums with beautifully drawn and scientifically correct illustrations to India (see, for example, fig. 35). What does the featured work of art share in common with this illustration? What unique features distinguish each work?
- Mansur, the Mughal court artist commissioned to create this work, was one of Emperor Jahangir's (reigned 1605–27) favorite painters. What might this image suggest about Emperor Jahangir's artistic preferences and outlook on the natural world?

### ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Science and Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 30 minutes

Compare and contrast representations of birds in works of art from around the world (see **OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION**). Consider the following points:

- What aspects of the bird(s) does the work emphasize? How does it create that emphasis?
- How would you describe the relationship between the subject and environment? Why?
- What animal behaviors, if any, does the work suggest?
- Who purchased or commissioned this work? What might have motivated the artist or the buyer?

Based on the information you gathered, what might each work suggest about attitudes toward the natural world at that time and place?

### ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Science and Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 60 minutes

Take a nature walk or visit a zoo to closely observe animal life. During your trip, select one animal and sketch the following: the animal in action, two of its distinguishing features (for example, the beak, paws, or wings), and the environment in which it lives. Use the information you collect as a foundation for a finished artwork that conveys one key idea about the animal, such as how it moves, its relationship to its surroundings, or how one of its features helps it survive in the wild.

### RESOURCES


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### OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

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John James Audubon (American, 1785–1851). *Goshawk, Stanley Hawk (No. 29)*, 1829; 38¼ x 24¼ in. (97.2 x 61.6 cm); Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.2506)

Bird (*sejen*), 19th–mid-20th century; Côte d'Ivoire, northern Côte d'Ivoire; Senufo peoples; wood, pigment; H. 59⅝ x W. 23½ x D. 14¼ in. (151.5 x 59.7 x 36.2 cm); The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.176)


Author: Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher John Debold

Date: 2012

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Welch, Stuart Cary. *India: Art and Culture, 1300–1900*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985.

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UNIT 6

# From the City to the Steppe: Art Beyond the Royal Courts

Throughout the Islamic world, people from all walks of life bought, commissioned, and collected works of art. Artistic patronage by the non-ruling classes of society—such as merchants, nomads, scholars, and members of the wealthy urban elite—reflect the importance of art in daily life and the universal appeal of beautiful objects. The chapters in this unit explore the art of three disparate societies: medieval Nishapur, a mercantile city along the Silk Road; the nomadic Turkmen people of Central Asia; and the urban elite of eighteenth-century Damascus, a provincial center of the Ottoman empire.



Detail, image 35

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 1

# Daily Life in Medieval Nishapur

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- identify how artifacts excavated in the medieval city of Nishapur (in present-day Iran) provide insight into the customs, activities, and environment of its residents.

## Introduction

Nishapur, a city in northeastern Iran, was a prosperous commercial city from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries due to its prime location on the Silk Road. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's excavations at this site in the 1930s and '40s uncovered objects that reflect Nishapur's exposure to the cultures and artistic traditions of many different regions as a result of its key location. Observations and interpretations of these objects by archaeologists, historians, scientists, and art historians provide insight into the daily lives of Nishapur's citizens.



**FIG. 36.** View of The Metropolitan Museum of Art excavations at Sabz Pushan, Nishapur



**FIG. 37.** *Dado* wall fragments *in situ*, Tepe Madrasa, Nishapur



**FIG. 38.** Unearthed vessel at Tepe Madrasa, Nishapur

## The City of Nishapur

Nishapur was founded around the third century A.D. By the eighth century, it flourished as a regional capital famous for its commercial and religious life. The city consisted of a walled citadel surrounded by a walled outer city that included a palace, mosque, marketplace, and other public buildings. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, Nishapur had a population of 100,000 to 200,000 people and covered an area of about six and a half square miles.

Nishapur was an important economic center due to its location on a trade route, known as the Silk Road, which extended from China to the Mediterranean Sea. Nishapur produced and traded raw cotton, silk and cotton textiles, turquoise, and earth with healing properties. These were traded throughout the region, bringing the city great prosperity. Invasions and earthquakes in the thirteenth century reduced the once bustling metropolis to ruin. The ruins of Nishapur remained underground until a team of excavators from the Metropolitan Museum arrived in the 1930s (fig. 36).

## The Metropolitan Museum's Archaeological Excavations

The Museum's team worked at Nishapur between 1935 and 1940 and returned for a final season in the winter of 1947–48. The most significant finds came from two areas, Sabz Pushan and Tepe Madrasa. In the residential neighborhood of Sabz Pushan, the houses were connected to each other by narrow alleys and had three to four rooms each. Excavated materials from the houses included stucco wall panels, ceramic and metal household goods, cosmetic containers, glass vessels, beads and other items of personal adornment, gaming pieces, and coins (figs. 37, 38). Although archaeologists excavated only a small fraction of the city, their work gives us a sense of its architecture. The everyday objects found in Nishapur provide a glimpse into the daily lives of its inhabitants during the tenth through twelfth centuries.

## 33
## Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration

10th century
Iran, probably Nishapur
Earthenware; white slip incised and splashed with polychrome glazes under a transparent glaze (*sgraffito* ware); H. 2⅞ in. (7.3 cm); Diam. 10¼ in. (26 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.40.137)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

This bowl was excavated in Nishapur. The abundance of bowls with this type of decoration found there attests to their popularity. They were likely produced in Nishapur in large numbers.

**FUNCTION**

Bowls such as this would have been used in Nishapur homes in the tenth century. The craftsmanship and aesthetic appeal of the bowl would likely have made it a prized possession.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This earthenware bowl has two separate layers of decoration. The top layer consists of translucent splash-color glazes in green, yellow, and purple brown. The layer below was created using so-called *sgraffito*, lines scratched into the clay through the thin coat of white slip covering the reddish tan earthenware body. Incised on the rim of the bowl is an alternating series of stylized flowers and other vegetal forms. A lattice pattern decorates the center.

**CONTEXT**

The bowl's green-and-brown splashed-glaze decoration imitates a type of Chinese ceramic known as *sancai* ware (fig. 39). A few shards of Chinese ceramics with green and brown glazes were unearthed during the Museum's excavations at Nishapur, demonstrating the presence of Chinese imports in that city.

Splashwares emulating Chinese pottery were first produced in Abbasid Iraq and were the result of extensive trade in ceramics between China and Iraq. It is likely that the Abbasid ceramics made their way to Nishapur and were another important source of inspiration for the Nishapur splashwares. The incised decorations on the Nishapur splashware, however, were a local innovation not seen in either the Chinese originals or the Abbasid examples.



**FIG. 39.** Ewer, Tang dynasty (618–906), late 7th century; China; earthenware with three-color (*sancai*) glaze; H. 11⅛ in. (28.3 cm); Gift of Stanley Herzman, in memory of Gladys Herzman, 1997 (1997.1.2)

The decoration and color palette of this Chinese ewer bear a strong resemblance to the bowl from Nishapur. It was made during the Tang dynasty, predating the period in which Nishapur was an active production center of ceramics. The two regions were actively engaged in trade, and Chinese splashwares were likely imported into Iran. Chinese ceramic shards found at Nishapur during the Metropolitan Museum's excavations provide evidence of this influence.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, bowl, exchange, splashware, floral and vegetal ornament, earthenware



33. Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration

# 34
# Bowl with Arabic inscription

Late 10th–11th century
Iran, excavated at Nishapur; probably made in Samarqand (in present-day Uzbekistan)
Earthenware; white slip with polychrome slip decoration under transparent glaze; Diam. 14 in. (35.6 cm), H. 4¼ in. (10.8 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1940 (40.170.15)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

The inscription on this bowl reads: "Blessing, prosperity, goodwill, peace, and happiness." The bowl belongs to a category of pottery that uses inscriptions as the primary decoration. The inscriptions often include blessings or good wishes for the owner, or simple proverbs. Some directly relate to the function of the bowls (such as "eat with appetite"; see image 7). Inscriptions such as these reflect the values and culture of hospitality of the inhabitants of medieval Nishapur.

### FUNCTION

The bowl was probably used for serving food, which would have been "blessed" by the good wishes written on the interior.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The calligraphic text, outlined in white, runs along the interior rim. The words have been carefully arranged and spaced so that the vertical letters at the beginning of each word punctuate the horizontal flow of the text at rhythmic intervals. Between the words are alternating red and black strokes; at the center of the bowl is a large motif of interlacing vegetal designs on a stippled ground.

### CONTEXT

Although this bowl was found in Nishapur, the style of the piece—with its interlaced design in the center and red and black lines above the words—suggests that it may have been made in Samarqand (a city on the Silk Road), where many vessels with this type of decoration and color palette have been unearthed. This work is a fine example of the calligraphic decoration popular in Iran in the ninth and tenth centuries. It was found near the center of Nishapur, where experts believe the governor's palace was located. The buildings uncovered in this area were larger in scale and had thicker walls and more prominent facades than structures found in other neighborhoods. Like the building in which it was found, this bowl is larger and of better quality than many ceramics unearthed in other areas of the city.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, bowl, exchange, calligraphy ("new style" script), earthenware



34. Bowl with Arabic inscription

# 35
# *Dado* panel

10th century
Iran, Nishapur
Stucco; carved; 37½ x 92⅝ x 3½ in. (95.3 x 235 x 8.9 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.40.40)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This carved plaster panel, from one of the houses excavated at Nishapur, provides a sense of how urban residences were decorated in tenth-century Iran.

### FUNCTION

This is one of several particularly well-preserved panels that adorned the lower part of the wall (*dado*) in a residential building in Nishapur. In the installation at the Museum, the panels from three separate rooms have been reconfigured in a single space approximately the same shape and dimensions as one of the rooms in the house from which they came (fig. 40).

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The primary decorative element of this panel is a six-petalled flower, repeated three times against a background of roundels and swirling leaves and palmettes. A different abstract vegetal design appears within each petal. Although the decoration in every panel varies, each derives from the same basic forms.

### CONTEXT

The houses and other buildings in Nishapur were decorated with a variety of materials, including carved stucco and wall paintings. While some decoration emphasized abstract motifs, others—such as wall paintings—included figures. Excavations suggest that decoration changed frequently. In a bathhouse, for example, archaeologists discovered fifteen separate layers of painted designs.

The artist or craftsman who made this panel applied a thin layer of stucco (a form of plaster) to the wall, sketched its design on the surface, and then carved it by hand. Originally, panels such as this were painted in bright yellows, reds, and blues to accompany equally colorful murals on the plaster walls above. Once the excavated panels were exposed to air, the colors began to fade.



Fig. 40. *Dado* panels installed in the Metropolitan Museum's galleries, replicating their position in the rooms they originally decorated.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, wall painting, vegetal ornament, stucco



35. *Dado* panel

# 36
# Pendant

10th century
Iran, Nishapur
Bronze, cast; Diam. 15⁄16 in. (2.4 cm), D. 3⁄16 in. (0.5 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1940 (40.170.245)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This circular metal pendant is a personal accessory discovered during excavations of Nishapur; like other items from the site, it offers a glimpse into the daily lives of the city's inhabitants.

### FUNCTION

Objects like this one were decorated with symbols believed to have magical powers. Because the meaning of these symbols has been lost over time, we can only speculate about their function. We know that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was believed that objects depicting zodiac signs like this pendant provided their owners with protection. This pendant, originally suspended from a chain, was likely worn as a talisman.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The center of the circular pendant features an image of a lion and a scorpion with three starlike motifs; these figures are surrounded by a square frame that is enhanced by perpendicular lines reminiscent of writing. The figures may represent the zodiac symbols of Leo and Scorpio, which frequently appear on objects from this period.

### CONTEXT

The pseudo-writing on the pendant is an important feature. Though illegible, the series of vertical strokes resembles the Arabic phrase known as the *shahada*, which states, "There is no god but God." This phrase has its own talismanic power, as belief in this concept is one of the basic tenets of Islam.

The inclusion of esoteric symbols and images indicates an early date for this pendant; later Islamic talismans usually feature signs with more obviously Islamic connotations, such as quotations from the Qur'an or letters representing the names of God.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, jewelry, talisman, zodiac, bronze



36. Pendant

# 37
# Chess set

12th century
Iran, Nishapur
Stonepaste, molded and glazed; largest piece (king) H. 2 in. (5.5 cm), Diam. 2⅛ in. (4.4 cm); smallest piece (pawn) H. 1⅜ in. (3.3 cm), Diam. 1⅛ in. (2.9 cm)
Pfeiffer Fund, 1971 (1971.193a–ff)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER/FUNCTION

Chess was one of the most popular pastimes in the medieval Islamic world, enjoyed by people from many different echelons of society. Although the chess set was not uncovered during the Museum's excavations, a pawn similar in color and shape to those in this set was excavated at Nishapur.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This is one of the oldest extant chess sets and is one pawn short of being complete—it has sixteen turquoise pieces and fifteen dark purple pieces. Each figure is highly abstracted, and corresponds roughly to a piece in the modern chess set. The *shah* (king) and vizier (corresponding to the queen) take the form of thrones; the vizier is slightly smaller. To their sides are elephants (bishops in modern sets), comprised of circular bases and flat tops with tusklike protrusions. Nearby are horses (knights), reduced to triangular knobs, and *rukhs* (meaning chariots; rooks in modern sets), featuring inverted wedges atop rectangular bases. The pawns, the smallest pieces in the set, are each made up of a faceted dome crowned by a small knob.

### CONTEXT

Chess, which originated in India, reached Greater Iran by the seventh century. The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), the Persian national epic, recounts that chess entered Persia through a royal challenge: an Indian ruler sent a chess set to the Persian court with the message that he would pay tribute to the Persian king only if the king figured out the goal of the game (fig. 41). The *Shahnama* also relates a story in which chess was invented as a way to explain to a grieving queen how her son was killed in battle. (See also "The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript," page 139.)

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, daily life, games, figural, stonepaste

This chess set is made of stonepaste, an eleventh-century innovation adopted by Iranian potters in the following century. That, paired with the use of turquoise glaze, dates this set to the twelfth century.

### OTHER CHESS PIECES FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION

Both abstract and naturalistic pieces were popular in chess sets from the Islamic world. In the Museum's collection, you can find examples of both types. For more naturalistic versions of a *rukh* piece and an elephant piece, see 1974.207 and 17.190.228, respectively. Other examples of abstract pieces are 1972.9.3 and 67.151.2



**FIG. 41.** Buzurgmihr Masters the Game of Chess: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp (detail), about 1530–35; artist: attributed to ʿAbd al-Vahhab; Iran, Tabriz; opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; entire page: 18⅝ x 12½ in. (47.3 x 31.8 cm); Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.71)



37. Chess set

# Lesson Plan: Unit 6, Chapter 1 Daily Life in Medieval Nishapur

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration** (image 33)
10th century
Iran, Nishapur
Earthenware; white slip incised and splashed with polychrome glazes under transparent glaze, (*sgraffito* ware); H. 2⅞ in. (7.3 cm); Diam. 10¼ in. (26 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.40.137)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**GRADE:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art as a Primary Resource

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- recognize ways works of art reflect medieval Nishapur's status as an important center of trade;
- use visual evidence to support inferences; and
- apply an original two-dimensional design to a three-dimensional form (in alternative activity).

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.2 Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions
- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.5 Reflecting Upon and Assessing the Characteristics and Merits of Their Work and the Work of Others
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.4 Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300–1000 C.E.

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

- R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Pencil, paper, map of the Silk Road (see page 23), and images of the featured work of art and three related objects. For the alternative activity, you will also need one recycled (or inexpensive) household object such as a heavy paper cup, bowl, or plate for each student, as well as paint, a container for water, and brushes of varying size *or* colored pencils and markers.

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- Look closely at the glaze that colors the surface. How might you describe this style of glazing to someone who had never seen it? How might an artist achieve this effect?
- Turn your attention to the lines incised in the bowl; observe the rim and work your way to the center. What do you notice? What might have inspired these forms?
- What are some ways the artist has used the incised decoration to complement or emphasize the form of the bowl?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**DURATION:** Approximately 40 minutes

Compare and contrast this featured work of art with the ewer (fig. 39; see **OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION**). Note similarities and differences in the coloring, decoration, and use of materials. While the featured work likely comes from Nishapur, where excavations have uncovered many bowls of this kind, the ewer comes from China. What might your observations suggest about ties between Nishapur (Iran) and China?

Print images of all the related objects included in the lesson. Note when and where each object was created and organize the images in chronological order. What stands out as you look at them in sequence? Consider the various locations in which they were produced (and found). How does this information challenge, support, or expand your initial inferences about connections between Nishapur and other regions? Why?

What are some ways regions may have shared or exchanged goods or ideas during this time period? (See map of the Silk Road, page 23) Read the description for image 33 (and, if possible, use the links throughout this text to the Museum's website) to learn more about each object and ways in which goods and ideas circulated among Nishapur (Iran), Iraq, and China. Consider how, if at all, innovations in technology had an impact on the

ways in which communities around the world share goods and ideas today.

**KEY POINTS:** Splashware originated in China. Splashwares emulating Chinese pottery were first produced in Iraq during the Abbasid reign (750–1258). Both Chinese and Iraqi splashwares likely influenced artists in Iran.

### ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 90 minutes

Closely observe the relationship between the shape of this bowl and the surface design. Note how the netlike pattern in a circular frame accentuates the flat base, the slightly rounded walls create an illusion of volume, and the curvaceous floral motifs that decorate the interior wrap around the form.

Try creating a surface design for a three-dimensional object that complements or emphasizes its form:

1. Select a recycled or inexpensive household object to decorate (for example, a paper bowl, coffee can, milk jug).
2. If the surface is already decorated, paint it white (or another neutral color) to create a solid ground.
3. Note the various planes of the object (i.e., the base, lip, rim, walls) and sketch several possible designs for each. As you consider the options, reflect on ways each selection will reinforce or complement the shape of the object.
4. Transfer the designs you selected onto the object using a pencil.
5. Share your work and preparatory sketches with a peer. Discuss aspects of the design you feel are most and least successful (and why).
6. Observe the works produced by the rest of your class. Identify one or more strategies that might strengthen an aspect of your design. Revise your work as needed; a quick coat of paint over areas you would like to revisit will create a fresh ground if you have trouble removing your pencil markings.
7. Once you have finalized the design, add color (using colored pencils, markers, or paint) as desired.

### RESOURCES

American Museum of Natural History. *Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World.* Online educator's guide. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 2009. http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/traveling-the-silk-road/promos/traveling-the-silk-road-educators-guide.

Sardar, Marika. "The Metropolitan Museum's Excavations at Nishapur." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nish/hd_nish.htm (originally published October 2001, last revised July 2011).

### OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Fig. 39. Ewer, Tang dynasty (618–906), late 7th century; China; earthenware with three-color (*sancai*) glaze; H. 11⅛ in. (28.3 cm); Gift of Stanley Herzman, in memory of Gladys Herzman, 1997 (1997.1.2)

Fragment of an imported Chinese bowl, late 7th–first half of the 8th century; China; found in Nishapur, Iran; earthenware; applied relief medallion under three-color (*sancai*) glaze; Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.40.274)

Bowl with green splashes, 9th century; Iraq, probably Basra; earthenware; "splash-painted" on opaque white glaze; H. 5/16 in. (.8 cm), Diam. 11⅛ in. (28.3 cm); Gift of V. Everit Macy, 1930 (30.112.46)

Author: Claire Moore, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Date: 2012

## Unit 6: Chapter 1 Suggested Readings and Resources

American Museum of Natural History. *Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World*. Online educator's guide. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 2009. http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/traveling-the-silk-road/promos/traveling-the-silk-road-educators-guide.

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**MIDDLE SCHOOL**

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**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

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**HIGH SCHOOL**

The Silk Road Project, Inc. Website. Boston: The Silk Road Project, Inc., 2012. http://www.silkroadproject.org/tabid/177/default.aspx.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

**UNIT 6: CHAPTER 1 SOURCES**


Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. no. 70).

Mackenzie, Colin, and Irving Finkel, eds. *Asian Games: The Art of Contest*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Asia Society, 2004.

Rawson, Jessica, M. Tite, and M. J. Hughes. "The Export of Tang *Sancai* Wares: Some Recent Research." *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 52 (1987–88), pp. 39–61.

Sardar, Marika. "The Metropolitan Museum's Excavations at Nishapur." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nish/hd_nish.htm (originally published October 2001, last revised July 2011).

Wilkinson, Charles K. *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973.

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 2

# Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- understand how a reception room from the house of an affluent family in eighteenth-century Damascus reflects the tastes, interests, and life of the urban elite in a provincial city of the Ottoman empire; and
- identify key features of this domestic interior and their cultural and artistic significance.

## Introduction

The Damascus Room is an early eighteenth-century residential reception chamber (*qaʿa*) from Damascus, a provincial capital of the Ottoman empire. (For more on the art of the Ottoman empire, see "Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court," page 123.) The space provides a vivid impression of the domestic setting of an affluent Damascus household during this period. Historical sources and travelers' accounts from the period, as well as the various features of the room itself—such as the painted and gilded woodwork, extensive poetic inscriptions, and inlaid marble floors—shed light on its historical context, its use, and the symbolic significance of many of its decorative elements.

## Eighteenth-Century Damascus

During the first half of the sixteenth century, successful military campaigns by the Ottoman empire added new territories to its already vast domain. In 1516, the Ottomans defeated Mamluk forces in Damascus, the provincial capital of southern Syria (which included parts of present-day Israel, Palestine, and Jordan; see map of the Ottoman empire, page 125). By the eighteenth century, Damascus was not only one of the most prosperous commercial cities in the empire, but a center of Islamic scholarship and worship. The population included sizeable Christian and Jewish communities, and the city attracted merchants, scholars, and pilgrims from all over the world.



**FIG. 42.** Damascus, 1857, Francis Frith (English, 1822–98); albumen silver print from glass negative; David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1966 (66.640.1.46)

## Courtyard Houses in Damascus

Within the city walls, eighteenth-century Damascus was densely built (fig. 42). Palatial residences stood alongside more humble dwellings, bathhouses, mausoleums, schools, and places of worship, all within a grid of bustling market streets, narrow alleys, and cul-de-sacs. Courtyard houses, like the one that contained this room, traditionally accommodated an extended family,



**FIG. 43.** Interior view of a reception chamber (*qa'a*). Plate XLVI in *Architecture arabe; ou Monuments du Kaire, mesurés et dessinés, de 1818 à 1825*, by Pascal Coste (1787–1879). Engraving; 52.5 x 37 cm. New York Public Library, New York

often consisting of three or more generations, as well as domestic servants. Narrow winding entryways to these domestic residences—preceded by plain exterior doors—obscured views of the interior from pedestrians on the busy streets outside. The entrance created a dramatic effect as guests traveled from the simple exterior through a dark and narrow passage, which opened onto an airy, lushly planted courtyard surrounded by living spaces. Windows and balconies often lined the interior walls of the home, rather than the street, enabling its residents to take full advantage of the calm and quiet courtyard within. Foreign travelers frequently recorded their observations in accounts that serve as valuable sources of information about these houses and their surroundings (fig. 43). One nineteenth-century European visitor aptly described an interior courtyard in the dense city as "a gold kernel in a husk of clay."

# 38
# The Damascus Room

Dated A.H. 1119 / A.D. 1707
Syria, Damascus
Wood (poplar) with gesso relief, gold and tin leaf, glazes and paint; wood (cypress, poplar, and mulberry), mother-of-pearl, marble and other stones, stucco with glass, plaster ceramic tiles, iron, brass
Gift of The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, 1970 (1970.170)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This reception room sheds light on the interests, aesthetics, and culture of members of the urban elite living in Damascus in the early eighteenth century.

### FUNCTION

The reception room served as a place to entertain guests or gather a family for festive meals. A visit to an eighteenth-century Syrian reception room engaged all of the senses. Upon entering the reception room (*qa'a*), visitors would remove their shoes, proceed into the main room, and ascend the high step under the archway to the seating area (*tazar*). Plush carpets covered the marble floor and guests could recline on the low sofa against cushions upholstered in patterned silks and velvets. In the background, one could hear the continuous sound of the gently splashing fountain and chirping birds. At mealtime, the reception room doubled as a dining area. Servants set large trays bearing platters of food on the floor or on low stands as the diners gathered around them. For a special occasion, the host might hire musicians and singers to provide entertainment. It was customary to sprinkle guests with perfumes; incense burners were used to diffuse aromatic smoke. These scents mingled with those of the fragrant blossoms floating in from the courtyard.

The display of objects was integral to the architectural design of a well-appointed reception room in Ottoman Damascus, which invariably included custom-made shelving, niches, and cupboards. From archival sources and historical descriptions by European visitors, we know that the shelves of the antechamber included functional possessions related to hospitality, such as wash basins and jugs, incense burners, and rosewater sprinklers (long-necked bottles with tiny openings to dispense drops of rose-scented water); coffee services (including a coffeepot, cups with holders, and a tray); sherbet services; water pipes; braziers; and candleholders.

In contrast, the shelves of the raised area displayed a range of prized possessions, heirlooms, and recent purchases according to the latest fashions. These reflected the owner's individual tastes and interests and often included ceramics, glass objects, and books. Inventories and descriptions provide evidence that the large cupboards stored textiles and cushions.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Like others of its kind, this room is divided into two areas: a small entry space on the courtyard level and a raised square seating area. The wall paneling incorporates built-in shelves, cupboards, and shuttered window bays.

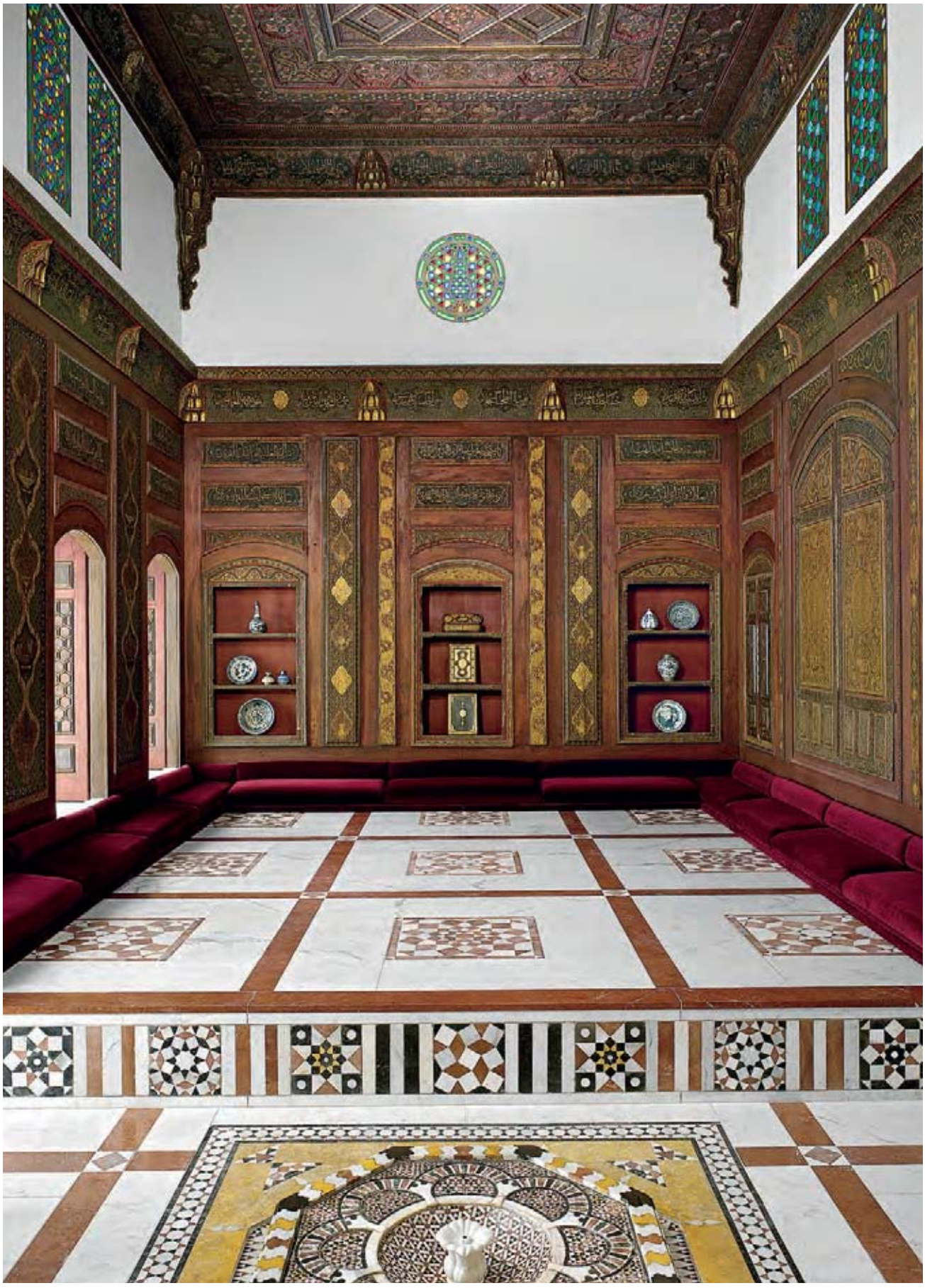
The owner ordered woodwork with densely patterned and richly textured designs produced using a decorative technique characteristic of Ottoman Syria known as *'ajami*. Craftsmen also included gilded *muqarnas*, architectural decorations known throughout the Islamic world (seen here in the upper sections of the woodwork). Craftsmen created some design elements in relief by applying a thick layer of gesso to the wood. They highlighted parts of this relief by applying tin or gold leaf, which they painted with tinted glazes to achieve a colorful and radiant glow. By contrast, they executed some elements of the decoration in egg tempera paint on the wood, which provided a matte surface.

In addition to decorative woodwork, calligraphic panels appear prominently on the cornices and wall panels. On the ceiling cornice, twelve verses of a poem complemented by surrounding floral imagery allude to a garden. On a nearby wall cornice, the next fourteen verses of the poem shift from images of nature to praise for the Prophet Muhammad. The final verses of the poem, on the walls of the room, praise the house and the nobility of its owner—"He who built you surpasses the planets and stars in glory."

Above the wood paneling and cornice, intricate stained-glass windows and densely carved woodwork on the ceiling complement white plastered walls.

### CONTEXT

The courtyards of Damascus houses typically contained a summer reception space (a three-sided hall that was open to the courtyard) and a winter reception space (an interior chamber built on the north side of the court).



38. The Damascus Room

## 38
## The Damascus Room (continued)

The location of the winter reception room was strategic; it provided optimal exposure to the sun, which helped heat the room. The Museum's room functioned as a winter reception space.

The decorative designs on the painted woodwork of the room closely reflect the fashions popular in eighteenth-century Istanbul (in modern-day Turkey), the capital of the Ottoman empire. For example, craftsmen incorporated European-inspired elements into the painted woodwork reflecting Ottoman interconnections with Europe. These include motifs featuring flower-filled vases, overflowing fruit bowls, and small landscape vignettes that appear alongside more traditional Ottoman-style motifs, such as serrated leaf designs (*saz*), vegetal arabesques, geometric patterns, and calligraphy.

The calligraphic ornament, which plays an important role in Islamic architecture in general, also communicated the owner's literary taste, religious piety, and social affiliation in the context of eighteenth-century Damascus. Although the owner is unnamed, one verse states that the family "traces its root[s] to the most noble of men," a reference to the Prophet Muhammad. This indicates that the owner was probably a member of the local aristocracy, many of whom claimed descent from the Prophet.



Detail, image 38

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Ottoman empire, eighteenth-century Damascus, urban elite, daily life, furnishings, Islam, trade and exchange, calligraphy (*thuluth* script), architecture, wood, marble, stucco, ceramic, iron, brass, glass



Detail, image 38

38. The Damascus Room

# Lesson Plan: Unit 6, Chapter 2 Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

**The Damascus Room** (image 38)
Dated A.H. 1119/A.D. 1707
Syria, Damascus
Wood (poplar) with gesso relief, gold and tin leaf, glazes and paint; wood (cypress, poplar, and mulberry), mother-of-pearl, marble and other stones, stucco with glass, plaster ceramic tiles, iron, brass; H. 22 ft. ½ in. x 16 ft. 8½ in. (671.6 x 509.2 cm), D. from inside front entrance to back wall 26 ft. 4¾ in. (804.2 cm)
Gift of The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, 1970 (1970.170)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**GRADES:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Identity

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- understand how a reception room from the house of an affluent family in eighteenth-century Damascus reflects the tastes, interests, and life of the urban elite in a provincial city of the Ottoman empire; and
- recognize ways interiors from different time periods and places (including their own) reflect the personal tastes, interests, and values of their inhabitants.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

- R.CCR.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text
- R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words
- W.CCR.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom or Museum
**MATERIALS:** Computer with Internet access ideal, but not required. For the alternative activity, you will also need paper, pencils, markers, poster board, magazines, glue, and fabric swatches.

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- What are some ways your family entertains guests when they visit your home? What types of activities might take place in a room like this? How is this room, reflective of life in eighteenth-century Damascus, similar to or different from the place you use to entertain guests?
- As a prosperous commercial center and hub of Islamic scholarship and worship, Damascus attracted merchants, scholars, and pilgrims from all over the world. What objects or details in this room reflect these international influences? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Large, luxurious residences containing rooms like this stood alongside more humble dwellings, bathhouses, mausoleums, schools, and places of worship on a grid of bustling streets in Ottoman Damascus. Watch the video simulating the path used to enter such a home (see **RESOURCES**). What advantages might this design offer? Why might someone create such a plain exterior for such an elegant home?
- Rooms often convey information about the tastes, interests, and values of their inhabitants. What might you infer about the owner of a room such as this?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**DURATION:** Approximately 30 minutes

Imagine someone you never met took a tour of your home. What might they infer about your tastes, interests, hobbies, personality, etc.? Why?

Explore ways the materials, ornamentation, layout, and furnishings employed in rooms from different places and moments in history (see **SPACES IN THE MUSEUM**) reflect the tastes, interests, and values of their times. Compare your inferences with the information provided on the Museum's website; to learn more about the contents of each room select images of the gallery highlights at the bottom of each web page.

### ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 120 minutes

Design an entertainment room for a classmate that supports his or her tastes and lifestyle.

1. Interview a classmate to learn more about their interests, hobbies, and tastes; you will be designing an entertainment room to meet their needs. Work with your "client" to identify the various functions and activities the space will support and the message they hope to convey to their guests through the design. Make sure that you have a clear picture of their priorities before you end the meeting.

2. Develop three sketches for the floor plan and present them to your client. Discuss how each design would meet their needs. You will need final approval from the client to proceed with one of the designs; this may require making a few revisions on the spot.

3. Once the client approves your plan, consider how you might furnish and decorate the room based on the information you gathered during your initial meeting. Use magazines, newspapers, websites, and other such sources to gather inspiration for the furniture, wall colors, lighting, and other decoration. Create a presentation board for your client including a sketch or collage of the furnished interior, any photos or visuals that inspired your design, and fabric swatches.

4. Present your design to the client. Listen closely to his or her feedback and revise as necessary.

5. Share the final design with your class along with a profile of your client and their needs.

### RESOURCES

Daskalakis Mathews, Annie-Christine. "A Room of 'Splendor and Generosity' from Ottoman Damascus." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997), pp. 111–39.

Kenney, Ellen. "The Damascus Room." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dama/hd_dama.htm (October 2011). (The video mentioned under "Questions for Viewing" is located about halfway down the page.)

### SPACES IN THE MUSEUM RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Hôtel de Varengeville Room, French Decorative Arts
http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/galleries/european-sculpture-and-decorative-arts/525

Rococo Revival Parlor, The American Wing
http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/galleries/the-american-wing/739

Author: Claire Moore, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Date: 2012

## Unit 6: Chapter 2 Suggested Readings and Resources

Burns, Ross. *Damascus: A History*. London: Routledge, 2009.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Daskalakis Mathews, Annie-Christine. "A Room of 'Splendor and Generosity' from Ottoman Damascus." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997), pp. 111–39.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Keenan, Brigid. *Damascus: Hidden Treasures of the Old City*. Photographs by Tim Beddow. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000.
**HIGH SCHOOL**
Contains many color photographs and is especially useful for contextualizing images of Damascus courtyards and buildings.

Kenney, Ellen. "The Damascus Room." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dama/hd_dama.htm (October 2011).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Conserving the Damascus Room at The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Video. 3 min. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011. Go to www.youtube.com/user/metmuseum and search for "Conserving the Damascus Room."

"Reception Room (*Qa'a*) [Damascus, Syria] (1970.170)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1970.170 (October 2011).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

### UNIT 6: CHAPTER 2 SOURCES


Baumeister, Mechthild, Beth Edelstein, Adriana Rizzo, Arianna Gambirasi, Timothy Hayes, Roos Keppler, and Julia Schultz. "A Splendid Welcome to the 'House of Praises, Glorious Deeds and Magnanimity.'" In *Conservation and the Eastern Mediterranean: Contributions to the 2010 IIC Congress, Istanbul*, pp. 126–33. Istanbul: International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2010.

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Daskalakis Mathews, Annie-Christine. "A Room of 'Splendor and Generosity' from Ottoman Damascus." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997), pp. 111–39.

Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. no. 238).

Grehan, James. *Everyday Life & Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.

Kenney, Ellen. "The Damascus Room." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dama/hd_dama.htm (October 2011).

"Reception Room (*Qa'a*) [Damascus, Syria] (1970.170)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1970.170 (October 2011).

Weber, Stefan. *Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation, 1808–1918*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2009.

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 3

# The Nomads of Central Asia: Turkmen Traditions

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- identify ways the art of the Turkmen people of Central Asia reflects nomadic life; and
- understand the functional and symbolic role objects played in their lives.

## Introduction

The history of Central Asia presents a constant political and cultural interplay between nomadic and settled peoples. Art museums have rarely displayed the material culture of nomadic peoples, even though their traditions exerted a powerful influence on art and culture. There were many tribal groups in Central Asia, and the Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs, among others, all have rich artistic traditions. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a particularly strong collection of Turkmen textiles and jewelry; an exploration of these everyday artworks can help us understand the lives and traditions of the Turkmen people.

The art of the Turkmen nomads serves specific practical purposes. Some works marked important life events, such as the ceremonies surrounding birth or marriage. Others were destined for use in portable dwellings or were bartered to townspeople for metal goods, such as dye pots or weapons. Turkmen artists are known for their skills in weaving carpets—largely the work of women artists—and making silver jewelry, which was the work of male artists.

## Who Are the Turkmen?

The Turkmen art discussed in this chapter dates from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and the way of life described here pertains to the Turkmen who lived during that period. The Turkmen have a long history in Central Asia, but little is known about their early history because they did not keep written records. Although the Central Asian Turkmen still exist and some still live nomadic lives, most have permanently settled in and around the country of Turkmenistan. The Turkmen were historically pastoral nomads and herders of sheep. The people known as Turkmen are in fact made up of more than two dozen major tribal groups, and were documented as living in Central Asia as early as the ninth century. With the advent of Islam in Central Asia, the Turkmen people converted, combining Sunni Islam with elements of their pre-Islamic faith, known broadly as Shamanism.

For most of their history the Central Asian Turkmen were politically independent, largely existing outside the control of ruling dynasties. Despite this, the Turkmen played a significant role in shaping the cultural, political, and economic landscape of Central Asia. Turkmen herdsmen frequently provided transport and security for the caravans traveling from one city to another with valuable merchandise. Meat, cheese, wool, and leather from the Turkmen flocks found their way to towns and cities, and prized Turkmen horses were traded across Central Asia. The Turkmen were also warriors and occasionally plundered other areas for supplies and trophies.

## The Nomadic Way of Life

Because the livelihood of the Turkmen depended on their livestock—including sheep, goats, camels, and horses—year-round access to pastures was essential. Every Turkmen tribe had its own pattern of migration and its own preferred winter and summer pastures and springs or oases for watering flocks. This way of life is called pastoral nomadism. It allowed tribal groups that depended on livestock to move where their flocks could graze as the seasons changed. To support this way of life, all their possessions had to be easily portable. Camels were the favored method of transportation because they could traverse rough terrains, carry heavy loads, and subsist on very little water.

## The Dwelling

In addition to livestock, the most important Turkmen family possession was the housing unit: a fabric-covered domed tent fashioned from slender wooden poles that were tied together with rope each time it was erected. The dome of the wooden frame was covered with large, thick slabs of felt that were secured with fabric bands. The felt allowed for ventilation and protection from water during rare rainstorms.

The primary furnishing of the tent was a large carpet (known as a main carpet) that covered most of the floor, though less affluent families may have used felt floor coverings. Additional carpets served as doors and exterior decoration. The Turkmen hung storage bags filled with clothing, cooking utensils, bread, and tent pegs on the walls. The faces of these bags were woven in warm colors and elaborate patterns incorporating abstracted floral motifs, called *gul* (fig. 44), which are particular to each tribe and tribal subgroup. These textiles served both functional and decorative purposes in the Turkmen dwelling (fig. 45).



**FIG. 44.** Comparison of the Arabatchi (detail, image 39) and Salor (detail, 1974.149.46) *gul*s in the Museum's collection



**FIG. 45.** A Turkmen family, about 1910–15



## Weaving

The tradition of Turkmen weaving, dating back centuries, was a universally female practice and constituted a major part of women's contribution to tribal cultural and economic life. Weaving also played an important role in the socialization process; young women learned their art from their mothers and older sisters. By the time a girl was considered old enough to marry, often shortly before she turned twenty, she was already an experienced weaver. Women created many items for a dowry or as wedding decorations, such as the tasseled trappings (*asmalyk*) designed to decorate the camel that carried a woman from her father's tent to that of her new husband.

## Jewelry Making

Unlike the women in the tribe who wove textiles, men made jewelry. The process required fire, chasing tools made of hardened steel, and an understanding of techniques for shaping and decorating silver. Although metalworking was a logistical challenge for those living a nomadic lifestyle, the Turkmen excelled in this medium.

In Turkmen society, jewelry served several functions. Its precious metal (silver) and semi-precious stones (carnelian was the favored gem) served as a tangible and convertible form of wealth, which in hard times could be sold or pawned to help the tribe or family. Jewelry was also a form of conspicuous consumption and an indication of status that proclaimed the wealth and prosperity of its wearer. Equally important in traditional Turkmen society was the apotropaic, or protective, power ascribed to jewelry—shiny silver, bright red or blue stones, and tinkling pendants were thought to protect against the malign influence of evil and envious spirits. Girls wore jewelry from an early age; it was thought to promote fertility and good health, and was given as gifts on important occasions, such as religious holidays and celebrations of rites of passage.

Detail, image 39

# 39
# Storage bag faces

Early 18th–19th century
Central Asia, probably present-day Turkmenistan, Arabatchi tribe
Wool (warp, weft, and pile), cotton (weft); asymmetrically knotted pile; 29½ x 54½ in. (74.9 x 138.4 cm)
The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.40a,b)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

Like many Turkmen objects, this textile combines functionality and portability with striking decoration.

**FUNCTION**

Storage bags added to the comfort and beauty of the tents in which the Turkmen lived. The bag was hung from the interior structure of the tent and served as a portable wardrobe or cupboard.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

Woven in woolen pile, the design consists of row upon row of tiny knots of wool yarn tied to a woolen foundation. Small quartered medallions, whose design is unique to each Turkmen tribe, rest on a grid formed by small octagons with green knotted extensions. The dyes used to color the wool are all traditional; some were bought in the marketplace (indigo) and some were harvested locally (madder). A variety of warm reds and reddish browns, obtained from madder root, dominate the color palette.

**CONTEXT**

The motifs decorating the field of these storage bag (*chuval*) faces are called *gul* (fig. 44 ), and their design is unique to the Arabatchi subgroup of Turkmen nomads. Each Turkmen tribe had their own individual *gul* that they used to decorate carpets and bags. This makes it possible to identify the tribal affiliation of the maker of a storage bag like this. Textiles were traditionally woven by women and furnished Turkmen tents; carpets covered floors and entryways, while smaller rugs were incorporated into bags of various sizes to hold a range of goods, architectural decoration, and animal trappings.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Nomads, Turkmen, daily life, visual identity, portable furnishings, weaving, wool, cotton



39. Storage bag face

# 40
# Amulet

Late 19th–early 20th century
Present-day Uzbekistan, Karakalpak tribe
Silver, fire gilded with false granulation and twisted wire and beaded wire decoration, gilded and silver appliqués, chain-link and cone-shaped pendants with slightly domed and cabochon-cut carnelians and turquoise beads; 9½ x 10½ in. (24.1 x 26.7 cm)
Gift of Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf, 2008 (2008.579.12)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This amulet combines symbolic meaning, exquisite craftsmanship, and precious materials to create a wearable and portable object of both monetary value and talismanic power.

#### FUNCTION

Turkmen jewelry was not only decorative; it also was thought to have protective properties. This amulet, worn as a chest pendant, was designed to offer the wearer protection. The central hollow cylinder, which opens on either side, would have held a rolled paper scroll containing blessings, passages from the Qur'an, or prayers. The gentle sound produced by the many dangling elements was believed to ward off evil spirits.

The talismanic function of the amulet illustrates the Turkmen tribes' blending of pre-Islamic customs and beliefs with the Muslim faith.

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The size and weight of this amulet contribute to its dignified appearance. The body is made of silver, which was gilded for a multicolored effect. Harmoniously placed throughout are orange-brown carnelian stones, which were widely prized for their protective properties. Tiny bits of turquoise provide blue accents. The solidity of the upper section is balanced by the hanging pendants extending below.

#### CONTEXT

Though men made Turkmen jewelry, most was worn by women. Jewelry indicated a woman's wealth, tribal affiliation, and social and marital status; one could tell if a woman was a young girl, newlywed, or long-married just by looking at her jewelry. Jewelry was often made of high-quality silver and there are documented cases of women selling their jewelry for the tribe in times of dire need.

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nomads, Turkmen, daily life, jewelry, talisman, silver, precious stones



40. Amulet

# Lesson Plan: Unit 6, Chapter 3 The Nomads of Central Asia: Turkmen Traditions

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Storage bag face** (image 39)
Early 19th century
Central Asia, probably present-day Turkmenistan
Wool (warp, weft, and pile), cotton (weft); asymmetrically knotted pile; 29½ x 54½ in. (74.9 x 138.4 cm)
The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.40a,b)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**GRADE:** Elementary
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art as a Primary Resource

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- identify ways art of the Turkmen people of Central Asia reflects nomadic life; and
- understand the functional and symbolic role objects play in their lives.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770
- NSS-WH.5-12.7 Era 7: An Age of Revolutions, 1750–1914

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- SL.CCR.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom
**MATERIALS:** Graphite, colored pencils, markers, paper for sketching, at least three 5 x 7–inch note cards per student, a hole punch, one skein of yarn, and scissors

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- The Turkmen nomads of the eighteenth to early twentieth century moved throughout the year to ensure their livestock had pastures to graze and water to drink. What might you enjoy about this lifestyle? What, if any, drawbacks might a nomadic lifestyle present?
- As nomads who moved with herds of sheep throughout the year, the Turkmen had easy access to wool, which they used to make a large range of everyday items, from portable furnishings to animal trappings. What goods or products does your community make out of wool?
- What natural resources are available where you live? How do they support your daily life?
- Imagine creating a wool bag like this. What steps might be involved? What skills or qualities might someone need to create such a bag? What special skills are valued in your community?
- Bags like this were hung inside the Turkmen dwelling, where they were used for storage. Look closely at the photograph of a Turkmen interior (fig. 47). What other goods furnish this home? If you could only keep what you could carry, what items would you choose? Why?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**DURATION:** 120 minutes

Small quartered medallions (*gul*s), such as the one on this bag, convey the identity of each Turkmen tribe. Although Turkmen *gul*s are similar, each is unique. Compare and contrast the *gul*s featured on this bag with other Turkmen *gul*s (fig. 46). (You may also refer to the flag of Turkmenistan, which features the five distinct *gul*s of the five main tribes.) What do the designs share in common? What makes each unique?

What shared interests, beliefs, or ties bring people together in your community? What visual cues, if any, convey membership in each group? Design a quartered medallion for a group you belong to (your family, your class at school, a club, etc.). Consider how the colors you select, shapes you choose, and type of line you use will best express key qualities of this group. If you are a member of swim team, for example, instead of focusing

on water or swimsuits, think of ways line might show fluidity, speed, or strength. Sketch four to five possible designs for your medallion and present them, along with a written or verbal description of your decision-making process, to a peer. Create three different versions of the design he or she identified as the strongest, each on a separate 5 x 7–inch note card. (Make the image as large as possible on the card.) Select your favorite medallion and add color with markers or colored pencils. Next, cut out the design and punch a hole at the top. Thread a piece of yarn through the hole and tie the ends together to create a necklace (make sure the loop of yarn is big enough to fit over your head). When everyone is wearing his or her necklace, look closely at the medallions and form groups based on similarities in subject or design. Discuss the features or qualities each "community" has in common and present your findings to the rest of the class.



FIG. 46. Comparison of the Arabatchi (detail, image 39) and Salor (detail, 1974.149.46) *gul*s in the Museum's collection



FIG. 47. A Turkmen family, about 1910–15

## RESOURCES


Department of Islamic Art. "Turkmen Jewelry." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/turk/hd_turk.htm (August 2011).

Diba, Layla S. *Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.

Mackie, Louise W., and Jon Thompson. *Turkmen, Tribal Carpets and Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 1980.


## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Robe, first half of the 19th century or earlier; Turkmenistan; silk and cotton (lining only) with embroidery; L. 47¾ in. (121.3 cm), W. 89½ in. (227.3 cm); Purchase, Hajii Baba Club and The Page and Otto Marx Jr. Foundation Gifts, in memory of Newton Foster, 1999 (1999.141)

Tent door hanging (*ensi*), early 19th century; Central Asia, Turkoman/Saryk; wool, cotton; 74 x 54 in. (188 x 137.2 cm); The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.42)

Image 40. Amulet, late 19th–early 20th century; present-day Uzbekistan; silver, fire gilded with false granulation and twisted wire and beaded wire decoration, gilded and silver appliqués, chain-link and cone-shaped pendants with slightly domed and cabochon-cut carnelians and turquoise beads; 9½ x 10½ in. (24.1 x 26.7 cm); Gift of Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf, 2008 (2008.579.12)

Camel trapping, 19th century; Turkmenistan; wool embroidered with silk; 26¾ x 57½ in. (67.95 x 146.05 cm); Gift of Irma B. Wilkinson, in memory of Charles K. Wilkinson, 1989 (1989.383)

Tent door surround, 19th century; Central Asia, Turkmenistan; wool, goat's hair; 52 15/16 x 51 in. (134.5 x 129.5 cm); The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.37)

Fragment of a storage bag, first half of the 19th century; Central Asia, Turkmenistan; wool (warp and weft), cotton (weft and pile), wool (pile), silk (pile); asymmetrically knotted pile; 32½ x 49 3/16 in. (82.5 x 125 cm); The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.43)


Author: Claire Moore, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Date: 2012

# Unit 6: Chapter 3 Suggested Readings and Resources

Diba, Layla S. *Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.
**HIGH SCHOOL**
A comprehensive introduction to Turkmen jewelry with detailed color photographs.

*Grass: A Nation's Battle for Survival*. DVD. 71 min. Harrington Park, N.J.: Milestone Films, 1992.
A classic silent documentary film made in the 1920s that follows the nomadic Bakhtiari people of Iran on their annual migration. These are not Turkmen nomads, but the documentary provides a good general picture of nomadic life.

Mackie, Louise W., and Jon Thompson. *Turkmen, Tribal Carpets and Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 2008.
**HIGH SCHOOL**

Major, John S., Joan Barnatt, and John Bertles. *Silk Road Encounters Education Kit*. Providence, R.I.: Asia Society and The Silk Road Project, Inc., 2001. Online version: http://www.silkroadproject.org/Education/Resources/SilkRoadEncounters/tabid/339/Default.aspx.
See especially chapter 3 of the Teacher's Guide, "Trading in the Silk Road Cities."

Thompson, Jon. *Oriental Carpets: From the Tents, Cottages and Workshops of Asia*. New York: Dutton, 1988.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**
A broad introduction to carpet weaving in the Islamic world, featuring contextual photographs of nomadic life, information about how textiles are made, and a full chapter on nomadic weaving.

**UNIT 6: CHAPTER 3 SOURCES**


Diba, Layla S. *Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.

Mackie, Louise W., and Jon Thompson, eds. *Turkmen, Tribal Carpets and Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 1980.

Schletzer, Dieter, and Reinhold Schletzer. *Old Silver Jewellery of the Turkoman: An Essay on Symbols in the Culture of Inner Asian Nomads*. Berlin: D. Reimer, 1983.

Thompson, Jon. *Timbuktu to Tibet: Exotic Rugs & Textiles from New York Collectors*. New York: Hajji Baba Club, 2008.

——. *Oriental Carpets: From the Tents, Cottages and Workshops of Asia*. New York: Dutton, 1988.

UNIT 7

# Trade and Artistic Exchange

The role of trade, diplomacy, and cultural interconnections is crucial to understanding works of art produced in the Islamic world. The fluid movement of artists and luxury objects among eastern and western Asia and Europe led to the cross-fertilization of motifs, designs, materials, and production techniques. The existence of a network of trading posts and routes throughout this vast geographic region facilitated long-distance communication, the transmission of ideas, and the emergence of a global culture. The chapters in this unit highlight artistic relationships between China and the Near East and those between Venice and the Islamic world.


30°E
60°E
90°E
120°E
60°N
30°N
ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
BELARUS
RUSSIA
UKRAINE
MOLDOVA
Kiev
Odessa
Bucharest
Moscow
Perm
Kazan
Ufa
Volgograd
Rostov
Astana
Omsk
Novosibirsk
GOLDEN HORDE
KAZAKHSTAN
Aral Sea
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
CAUCASUS
GEORGIA
Tbilisi
AZERBAIJAN
Baku
Yerevan
Istanbul
Ankara
ANATOLIA
TURKEY
Tabriz
Takht-i Sulaiman
Mosul
Tehran
Varamin
Bukhara
Samarqand
Tashkent
Bishkek
UZBEKISTAN
KYRGYZSTAN
TURKMENISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
Ashgabat
Merv
Nishapur
Dushanbe
Yarkand
CHAGHADAI KHANATE
Kabul
Islamabad
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
Karakorum
Ulaanbaatar
MONGOLIA
EMPIRE OF THE GREAT KHAN (YUAN DYNASTY)
Dunhuang
Beijing
N. KOREA
Pyongyang
Seoul
S. KOREA
CHINA
Shanghai
Taipei
LEBANON
SYRIA
Beirut
Damascus
PALESTINE
Jerusalem
Amman
ISRAEL
JORDAN
LEVANT
Baghdad
IRAQ
IRAN
Yazd
Kirman
Shiraz
Cairo
KUWAIT
Kuwait
ILKHANATE
Persian Gulf
QATAR
Doha
SAUDI ARABIA
Medina
Riyadh
EGYPT
Delhi
INDIA
NEPAL
Kathmandu
BHUTAN
Thimphu
BANGLADESH
Dhaka
MYANMAR
Naypyidaw
VIETNAM
Hanoi
LAOS
Vientiane
THAILAND
Bangkok
Phnom Penh
Manila
PHILIPPINES
The Mongol Empire in the Early 1300s
OMAN
Modern country borders and names
Baghdad
Modern national capitals
0
1000 km
0
500 mi
Robinson Projection, 70°E

UNIT 7: CHAPTER 1

# Ceramics in China and the Near East

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- identify how trade and cultural ties led to artistic exchange between China and the Near East from the tenth to the seventeenth century; and
- recognize visual evidence of these exchanges in ceramic works of art.

## Introduction

This chapter explores how trade connections between China and the Near East informed Near Eastern ceramic production, beginning in the eighth century. In China, certain ceramic technologies were far more advanced than in the Near East. Potters living in the region of present-day Iraq and Iran experimented with new materials and decorative techniques in an attempt to imitate prized Chinese wares. The ceramic works featured in this chapter reflect the ways in which Chinese materials, technical innovations, forms, and motifs inspired specific styles of pottery in the Near East.

## Trade and Travel

Contact between China and the Near East predates the advent of Islam in the seventh century; sea and land routes connected the two regions as early as the third century B.C. The main route was the Silk Road, named after the most important commodity that was traded along it—Chinese silk (see map, page 32). The ease of travel across Asia and the Middle East was facilitated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by the Pax Mongolica (literally, Mongol peace)—the unification under the Mongol conquerors, who swept through Asia establishing control over territories stretching from East Asia to eastern Europe (see map opposite).

In addition to traveling by land routes, merchants also traded via sea routes, carrying luxury commodities such as ceramics, carpets, rice wine, musk, perfumes, paper, dyestuffs, pearls, ink, and ivory in great quantities.

During the reign of the Abbasids (750–1258) there was remarkable expansion in international trade. Sea routes stretched all the way from Iraq to Indonesia, and ships traveling back and forth would stop at many ports along the way to buy and sell goods. Abbasid merchants returned home with finished goods (such as ceramics, paper, silk, and ink from China) as well as raw materials (like spices from India and teakwood from Southeast Asia). This boom in trade transformed Iraq into an international marketplace in which prized Chinese and Southeast Asian imports such as silk, paper, tea, and ceramics were sold.

## Artistic Interconnections

On their journeys, traveling merchants were exposed to different peoples, places, and cultures. In addition to the commodities they traded in bulk, they often acquired luxury items, such as textiles, rugs, and metalwork—goods that were admired and subsequently copied in areas far from their source. Islamic motifs, such as arabesques, were disseminated in this way and began to appear on Chinese-made textiles, marble carvings, and ceramic vessels. Likewise, Chinese styles and materials influenced objects made in the Islamic world. Among these are ceramic vessels that were inspired by Chinese porcelain. The study of these ceramics, excavated in large numbers in the Near East and in China, traces the history of artistic exchange and helps us understand how trade facilitated artistic interconnections between two distant regions.

## The Importance of Ceramics

In the pre-Islamic period, most luxury vessels were made of precious metals, including gold and silver, while ceramic wares were largely used for utilitarian purposes such as storing water and food, transporting goods, and cooking. However, in the Islamic world, luxury ceramics became popular and were appreciated for their aesthetic appeal and affordability. This phenomenon may be due in part to Muslim prohibitions on men using gold vessels. However, it is also likely that the creation of more ornate ceramics was a response to the demands of new buyers, who desired reasonably priced luxury goods. Chinese imitations account for only a segment of the luxury ceramics made in the Near East, however; many techniques and styles, such

as *mina'i* and lusterware, were developed independently, responding to local tastes and influences.

Local potters in the Near East were impressed by the elegance and durability of Chinese stoneware and porcelain ceramics and attempted to re-create their prized qualities. Porcelain required white kaolin clay fired at an extremely high temperature; neither the clay material nor the amount of wood required for sustained firing at high temperatures were available in the Near East. Iraqi potters invented ways to imitate the smooth white surface of Chinese ceramics. Using locally available clay, they covered the earthenware body of vessels with an opaque white coating called slip and decorated it with designs in cobalt blue and other colors in emulation of Chinese porcelain.

Chinese ceramics had an indelible influence on the pottery of the Islamic world, a trend that continued in Iran in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and culminated during the Safavid period (1501–1722), when ceramics were increasingly regarded as desirable luxury goods to present as gifts. For instance, in 1609 the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas gave a gift of 835 Chinese porcelain vessels to the shrine of his dynasty's spiritual founder, Shaikh Safi in Ardabil, Iran. This act reflects the status of Chinese porcelain as prized luxury objects in the Safavid court and demonstrates its role in official gift giving.

During the early seventeenth century, Chinese potters emulated Ottoman and Safavid ceramic designs. The likely patrons of these works were Muslims in powerful positions in the Ming court, as well as Muslim merchants in other parts of China. These patrons favored Islamic designs and Arabic inscriptions on their luxury ceramic wares (fig. 48).

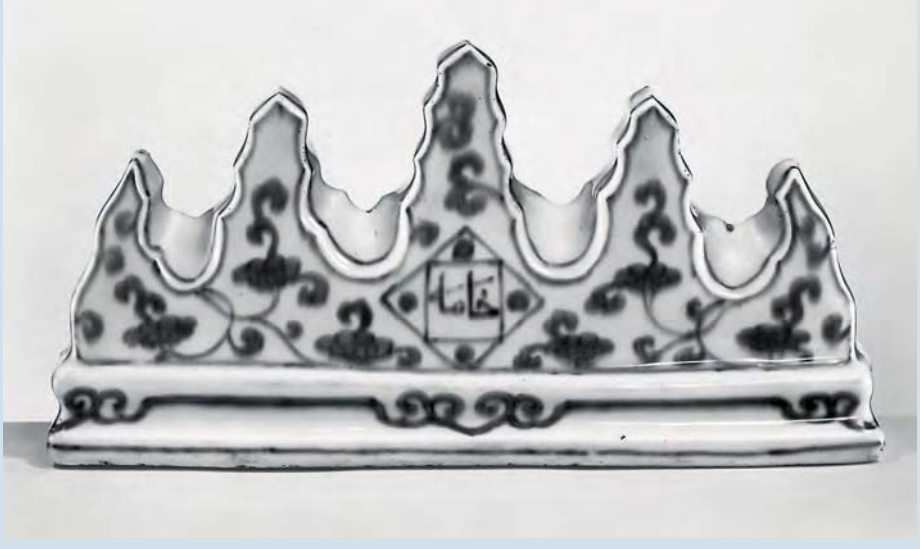


**FIG. 48.** Brush rest with Arabic inscription, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), early 16th century; China; porcelain painted with cobalt blue under transparent glaze (Jingdezhen ware); L. 8¾ in. (22.2 cm); Rogers Fund, 1918 (18.56.14)

A Muslim patron living in China commissioned this brush rest. The mountain form of the brush rest is distinctly Chinese, while the inscription is in Arabic, reading "pen rest" ("pen" on one side, and "rest" on the other). The surface decoration in the form of scrolling arabesques may also be inspired by Islamic art.

# 41
# Bowl with cobalt-blue inscriptions

9th century
Iraq, probably Basra
Earthenware; painted in blue on opaque white glaze;
Diam. 8 in. (20.3 cm)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1963 (63.159.4)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

This bowl, made in Iraq, is an example of the earliest Chinese-inspired vessels produced in the Near East.

**FUNCTION**

In addition to being a functional object, a work like this also conveyed the social and cultural status of its owner. The person who bought or commissioned this bowl could afford luxury ceramics and appreciated them for their aesthetic qualities.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

The white ground of this shallow bowl creates a stark contrast with the dark blue designs along the rim and in the center. The central calligraphic design consists of a single word, *ghibta* (happiness), repeated twice in *kufic* script.

**CONTEXT**

When white wares from China arrived in the Abbasid domains (present-day Iraq and Syria) in the eighth century, potters were impressed by their translucent white surfaces. Although kaolin clay—the material used to create porcelain—was not available locally, Iraqi potters attempted to reproduce its visual effect and durability by covering the earthenware body of vessels with a layer of opaque white glaze. The white ground provided an ideal surface for decoration in any color, but the combination of blue and white was particularly popular.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Silk Road, cultural exchange and trade, China and Iraq, calligraphy (*kufic* script), Abbasid caliphate, ceramics



41. Bowl with cobalt-blue inscriptions

# 42
# White bowl (*tazza*)

12th century
Iran
Stonepaste; incised under transparent glaze; H. 3 11/16 in. (9.4 cm), Diam. 7¾ in. (19.7 cm)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1963 (63.159.2)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

This vessel reflects efforts by Near Eastern potters to emulate Chinese porcelain and motifs.

**FUNCTION**

In addition to being a functional bowl, a work like this reflected the sophistication and refinement of its owner.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

At first glance, this footed bowl is almost indistinguishable from Chinese examples (fig. 49). The entire body is incised with delicate motifs and covered in a transparent white glaze with a slightly greenish tint. In the center of the interior, a rosette motif radiates upward to the vessel's walls and a vine scroll wraps around the exterior. The incised lines are decorative, but are also used to make the clay appear even thinner, in order to more closely approximate the look of translucent porcelain. The light shining through the incised lines creates a subtle play of translucency and opacity.

**CONTEXT**

This *tazza*, or shallow bowl resting on a foot, reflects the result of the artistic interconnections between Greater Iran and China during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is made of stonepaste, a material adapted by twelfth-century Persian (Iranian) potters in Kashan in the twelfth century as a more translucent, durable, and sophisticated alternative to earthenware. Stonepaste (also known as frit) is made of ground quartz mixed with clay and glaze, and turns white when fired. Visually, these wares were near perfect imitations of Chinese porcelain. Thus, while the appearance of this bowl is Chinese, the materials and techniques are purely Persian. The introduction of stonepaste was a significant development in the history of Islamic ceramics and remained the primary medium until the materials and techniques required to produce true porcelain were developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



**FIG. 49.** Small bowl, late Northern Song (960–1127)–Jin (1115–1234) dynasty, about 12th century; China; porcelain incised with decoration under ivory-white glaze (Ding ware); Diam. 3½ in. (8.9 cm); Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Roger G. Gerry, 1980 (1980.532)

This twelfth-century bowl is an example of Chinese porcelain, the material Iranian potters tried to imitate. The inside of the bowl displays an incised flower motif. The body is covered with an ivory-white glaze.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Silk Road, cultural exchange and trade, China and Iran, Abbasid caliphate, ceramics, porcelain, stonepaste



42. White bowl (*tazza*)

## 43
## Tile with image of a phoenix

Late 13th century
Iran, probably Takht-i Sulaiman
Stonepaste; underglaze-painted in blue and turquoise, luster-painted on opaque white ground, molded; 14¾ x 14¼ in. (37.5 x 36.2 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.49.4)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

The phoenix (featured here) and dragon (found on many other tiles found at the same site) are important symbols in Chinese art and culture, in which they are regarded as benevolent and auspicious beasts (fig. 50). Both subjects made their way from China into Iran. The phoenix was transformed into a mythical Persian bird, the *simurgh*. In its Persian context, the *simurgh* retained its benevolent and magical associations. It is legendary for saving the life of prince Zal in the *Shahnama*. (See "The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript: The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp".) This is just one of many Chinese motifs—such as scroll-like clouds and vegetal spirals of flowers, leaves, and vines—that began to appear in Persian art during the thirteenth century.

**FUNCTION**

Archaeological evidence indicates that this tile was once one of hundreds that decorated the interior walls of the Ilkhanid imperial palace Takht-i Sulaiman (near Tabriz, in present-day northwestern Iran). Together with other decoration such as carved stucco, the tiles created a richly colored and textured surface in the interior of the palace.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

A phoenix, or *simurgh*, adorns the center of this tile, the body pointing upward toward the sky and the blue and turquoise plumage spreading out behind it. The entire surface is molded in relief and painted in blue, turquoise, white, and luster—a gold-colored metallic sheen achieved by firing at a specific temperature. One can imagine the stunning visual effect created by hundreds of such intricate and colorful tiles adorning the inside of a palatial room.

**CONTEXT**

This tile indicates the close economic, political, and artistic relationship between the Ilkhanid Mongols and their Chinese Yuan cousins within the vast area controlled by descendants of the Mongol conqueror, Genghis Khan. As east-west trade flourished throughout the Mongol domains, so did the transmission of artistic techniques, aesthetic tastes, and decorative motifs. The Ilkhanids, whose name means "subordinates to the Great Khan [of China]," ruled Iran and its surrounding territories. Nomads and traders transported luxury items, such as textiles and works of art on paper and silk, throughout the vast empire, introducing dragons, lotus flowers, phoenixes, and other creatures from Chinese mythology into the Ilkhanid decorative repertoire, where they took on new meanings and forms.



**FIG. 50.** Canopy with phoenixes and flowers, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), China; silk and metallic thread embroidery on silk gauze; overall: 56⅜ x 53 in. (143.2 x 134.6 cm); Purchase, Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat Gift, Louis V. Bell and Rogers Funds, and Lita Annenberg Hazen Charitable Trust Gift, in honor of Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg, 1988 (1988.82)

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Cultural exchange, Genghis Khan, Ilkhanid Mongols, Chinese Yuan, phoenix, *simurgh*, relief, stonepaste



43. Tile with image of a phoenix

# 44
# Elephant-shaped drinking vessel (*kendi*)

Second quarter of the 17th century
Iran, probably Kirman
Stonepaste; painted in shades of blue under transparent glaze; H. 9⅛ in. (23.2 cm), W. 7⅛ in. (18.1 cm), Diam. 4⅝ in. (11.7 cm)
The Friends of the Department of Islamic Art Fund, 1968 (68.180)

#### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This object illustrates a late phase in the artistic interconnections between China and Iran, when domestically produced wares in Iran were strikingly similar to Chinese models.

#### FUNCTION

This jar most likely served as a drinking vessel or a base for a water pipe, but was above all appreciated for its decorative qualities. Persian potters adopted the form from similar Chinese wares (fig. 51).

#### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This vessel takes the form of a seated elephant with a cylinder on its back. The decoration, in underglaze-blue paint, extends along the entire body. The cylinder, into which the liquid would be poured, sits upon a flowerlike collar embellished with painted birds and flowers. Garlands and hanging tassels adorn the neck and rear of the elephant. A blanket, thrown across the elephant's back, is divided into four decorative quadrants on each side and features a stylized lotus flower (another Chinese import).

#### CONTEXT

An important difference between Persian and Chinese examples is the smooth white porcelain body that was unique to China. Craftsmen in Persia were unfamiliar with the main raw ingredient, white kaolin clay. They also had no knowledge of the complex firing technique, which involved specially constructed, high-temperature kilns. Works made of stonepaste, such as this example, reflect an attempt to re-create the smooth white surface of Chinese porcelain and were often painted in cobalt-blue pigment, which was mined in Iran and was both used locally and exported to China. The blue-and-white wares produced in China were avidly collected in Iran and later in Europe. The demand for blue-and-white wares stimulated the production of domestic imitations in many regions. Eventually, Persian potters achieved a level of mastery that enabled them to sell blue-and-white stonepaste pieces to the Dutch, who appreciated them as replicas of Chinese porcelain.



**FIG. 51.** Elephant-shaped drinking vessel (*kendi*), Ming dynasty (1368–1644), late 16th century; China; porcelain painted in underglaze blue; H. to top of spout 7 in. (17.8 cm), L. 6½ in. (16.5 cm); Purchase, Seymour Fund, funds from various funds and Stanley Herzman Gift, 2003 (2003.232)

This *kendi* is a Chinese original—the white translucent surface readily distinguishes the material as porcelain. The strength and malleability of this material enabled the artist to shape the trunk and contour of the head with greater precision than in the Persian example.

#### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Cultural exchange and trade, China and Iran, Ming dynasty, Safavid empire, elephant, lotus, geometric ornament, stonepaste



44. Elephant-shaped drinking vessel (*kendi*)

# Lesson Plan: Unit 7, Chapter 1 Ceramics in China and the Near East

### FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Tile with image of a phoenix** (image 43)
Late 13th century
Iran, probably Takht-i Sulaiman
Stonepaste; underglaze-painted in shades of blue and turquoise, luster-painted on opaque white ground, molded; 14¾ x 14¼ in. (37.5 x 36.2 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.49.4)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**GRADES:** Middle School and High School
**TOPIC/THEME:** Art as a Primary Resource

### GOALS

Students will be able to:

- identify ways works of art reflect exchange between Chinese and Near Eastern civilizations;
- recognize ways animals act as symbols in various cultures; and
- create a tile that highlights the qualities and traits commonly associated with an animal.

### NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.5 Era 5: Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000–1500 C.E.

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

- W.CCR.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content
- W.CCR.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom or Museum
**MATERIALS:** Pencil, paper, "The Mongol Empire, about 1300" map (see page 206), and computer with Internet access (or relevant printouts from the Museum's website). For the alternative activity, you will also need clay and paint or glaze.

### QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- Look closely at the tile. What type of lines, shapes, and colors do you notice?
- Describe the features of the animal. What do they remind you of? Why?
- The phoenix (featured here) and dragon (found on many other tiles from the same site) are important symbols in Chinese art and culture, in which they are seen as benevolent and auspicious beasts. When the phoenix motif was imported into Iran, it was transformed into a mythical Persian bird, the *simurgh*. What words might you use to describe the *simurgh* featured on this tile from Iran? Why?
- Where do you see tilework in your community? How, if at all, do the types of tiles used at each site differ?
- Where might a tile like this be found? What do you see that makes you say that? Tiles bearing this motif and possibly produced from the same molds were excavated at Takht-i Sulaiman, the royal summer palace of the Ilkhanid Mongol ruler Abaqa (reigned 1265–82) in northwestern Iran.

### ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History
**DURATION:** Approximately 45 minutes

The Ilkhanid Mongols of Iran (1206–1353) and their Chinese Yuan (1271–1368) cousins both lived within the vast area controlled by descendants of Genghis Khan (see map, page 206). Compare and contrast the art of the Ilkhanid Mongols and the Yuan dynasty (see **RESOURCES**). Note similarities and differences between the materials, motifs, and techniques employed, and identify details that suggest ties between these two cultures (see fig. 52). (For young children, focus each student or small group on one comparison image.)

### ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 90 minutes

Cultures throughout history have frequently associated animals with specific qualities or traits; for example, many have revered lions for their bravery and strength, and owls for their wisdom. Select one animal and research the various qualities and traits that communities around the world have associated with it. Create a tile design featuring this animal using line, shape, and color to emphasize key details and reinforce those qualities or traits. Present the tile along with your research findings, a statement about your use of elements (such as line, shape, and color) in the work, and a photograph or description of where you would place the tile and why.



**FIG. 52.** Canopy with phoenixes and flowers, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368); China; silk and metallic thread embroidery on silk gauze; overall: 56⅜ x 53 in. (143.2 x 134.6 cm); Purchase, Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat Gift, Louis V. Bell and Rogers Funds, and Lita Annenberg Hazen Charitable Trust Gift, in honor of Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg, 1988 (1988.82)

### RESOURCES


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### OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Fig. 52. Canopy with phoenixes and flowers, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368); China; silk and metallic thread embroidery on silk gauze; overall: 56⅜ x 53 in. (143.2 x 134.6 cm); Purchase, Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat Gift, Louis V. Bell and Rogers Funds, and Lita Annenberg Hazen Charitable Trust Gift, in honor of Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg, 1988 (1988.82)

Plate, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), mid-14th century; China; porcelain painted with cobalt blue under transparent glaze; Diam. 18 in. (45.7 cm); Purchase, Mrs. Richard E. Linburn Gift, 1987 (1987.10)

Dish with two intertwined dragons, about 1640; Iran, Kirman; stonepaste; painted in blue under transparent glaze; H. 2¾ in. (7 cm), Diam. 17¼ in. (43.8 cm); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1965 (65.109.2)


Author: Adapted from lessons by classroom teachers Jesse Johnson and Katherine Huala

Date: 2012

## Unit 7: Chapter 1 Suggested Readings and Resources

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Discusses the underwater discovery of Ming-dynasty porcelain from a ship that was bound for the Sultanate of Brunei and sank 500 years ago.

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UNIT 7: CHAPTER 2

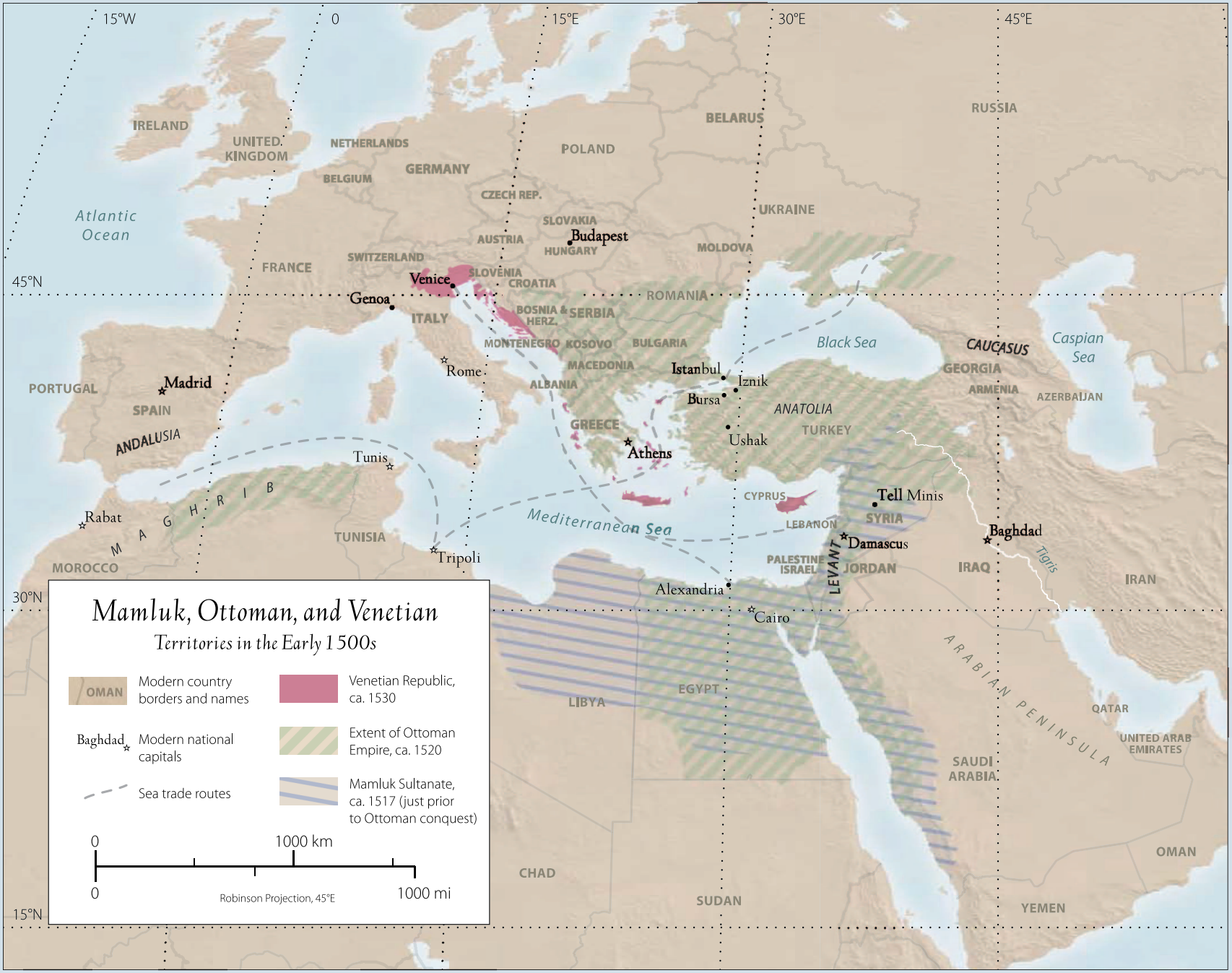
# Venice and the Islamic World

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- identify how factors such as trade and diplomacy led to artistic exchange between Venice and the Islamic world during the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries; and
- recognize visual evidence of exchanges in works of art.

## Introduction

The city of Venice, in northeastern Italy, was founded in the seventh century. The city is comprised of 117 small islands situated in a lagoon with easy access to both the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas. The Venetians took full advantage of their city's strategic location to conduct both local and long-distance trade, and eventually became one of the world's most powerful maritime empires. Venice's economy focused on trade and merchants held important positions of power in Venetian culture. Venice began trading with the Islamic world as early as the eighth century. For centuries, Venice was the link between Europe and the Muslim powers in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean; most luxury goods making their way over sea routes from Islamic lands to Europe passed through Venetian ports (see map, page 222). Because of the importance of trade with Arab lands and Ottoman Turkey, many Venetians learned Arabic and spent considerable time in these regions, buying goods such as spices and raw silk that could be sold for a profit upon their return. This trade had an enormous economic as well as cultural advantage for both parties. Artistic techniques, ideas, and motifs flowed from East to West, and vice versa, through the movement of both merchants and goods. Venice's main trading partners were the Mamluks, whose capital was in Egypt, and the Ottomans, whose capital was in Turkey. Despite the mutual benefit of trade, Venice's relationship with both of these empires was complex, encompassing intermittent periods of peace interrupted by trade embargos and territorial wars.


15°W
0
15°E
30°E
45°E
45°N
30°N
15°N
IRELAND
UNITED KINGDOM
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM
GERMANY
POLAND
BELARUS
RUSSIA
CZECH REP.
SLOVAKIA
AUSTRIA
Budapest
HUNGARY
UKRAINE
MOLDOVA
Atlantic Ocean
FRANCE
SWITZERLAND
Venice
SLOVENIA
CROATIA
Genoa
ITALY
ROMANIA
BOSNIA & HERZ.
SERBIA
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
BULGARIA
Black Sea
CAUCASUS
Caspian Sea
Rome
MACEDONIA
Istanbul
İznik
GEORGIA
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
PORTUGAL
Madrid
SPAIN
ALBANIA
Bursa
ANATOLIA
ANDALUSIA
GREECE
TURKEY
Ushak
Athens
Tunis
CYPRUS
Tell Minis
SYRIA
Rabat
MAGHRIB
Mediterranean Sea
LEBANON
Baghdad
TUNISIA
Damascus
PALESTINE ISRAEL
LEVANT
JORDAN
IRAQ
Tigris
IRAN
MOROCCO
Tripoli
Alexandria
Cairo
ARABIAN PENINSULA
LIBYA
EGYPT
QATAR
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
SAUDI ARABIA
OMAN
CHAD
SUDAN
YEMEN
Mamluk, Ottoman, and Venetian
Territories in the Early 1500s
OMAN
Modern country borders and names
Baghdad
Modern national capitals
Sea trade routes
Venetian Republic, ca. 1530
Extent of Ottoman Empire, ca. 1520
Mamluk Sultanate, ca. 1517 (just prior to Ottoman conquest)
0
1000 km
0
1000 mi
Robinson Projection, 45°E

## Venice and the Mamluks

The Mamluk empire (1250–1517) was a military-controlled sultanate that ruled lands in present-day Egypt and Syria. Trade between the Venetians and Mamluks began as early as the thirteenth century and profited both empires, strengthening their diplomatic ties. Trade led to the exchange of materials and goods as well as artistic styles and techniques. Artists in Syria and Egypt produced works of exquisite craftsmanship in glass, metal, silk, and wood to be traded with Europe, most often through the Venetians. The Venetians particularly valued the opulence and sophistication of Mamluk enameled glassware and began producing local imitations. Some of the buildings erected in Venice during the height of this trade relationship also reflected Mamluk style, which the Venetians saw as luxurious and exotic (see figs. 53, 54). The Mamluks and Venetians remained advantageous trading partners until Ottoman forces conquered the Mamluks in 1516–17. Trade between the former Mamluk lands and Venice continued, but under the auspices of Ottoman rule.



**FIG. 53.** Facade of the Doge's Palace, Venice, Italy, 1340–1510



**FIG. 54.** Mosque of Altinbugha al-Maridani, Cairo, Egypt, 1339–40

Note similarities in the style of the arcades and crenellations to those in the Doge's Palace above.

## Venice and the Ottomans

The Ottoman empire (1299–1923) was, at its peak, one of the most important economic and cultural powers in the world and ruled a vast area stretching from the Middle East and North Africa all the way to Budapest (in present-day Hungary) in the north. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Venetian and Ottoman empires were trading partners—a mutually beneficial relationship providing each with access to key ports and valuable goods (fig. 55). Though territorial wars intermittently interrupted their relationship, both empires relied on trade for their economic well-being. As a Venetian ambassador expressed, "being merchants, we cannot live without them." The Ottomans sold wheat, spices, raw silk, cotton, and ash (for glass making) to the Venetians, while Venice provided the Ottomans with finished goods such as soap, paper, and textiles. The same ships that transported these everyday goods and raw materials also carried luxury objects such as carpets, inlaid metalwork, illustrated manuscripts, and glass. Wealthy Ottomans and Venetians alike collected the exotic goods of their trading partner and the art of their empires came to influence one another. (For more about the Ottoman empire, see "Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court," page 123, and "Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus," page 183.)



**FIG. 55.** Venice as rendered by Ottoman admiral and cartographer Piri Reis in the early 16th century. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz

## The Islamic Impact on Venice

The latest Islamic tastes were often reflected in the homes of the richest Venetians, for whom luxury objects from the East became desired collectibles. Islamic art and architecture also influenced Venetian painting. Artists who traveled to Islamic lands were fascinated by the people, garments, and architecture they saw there and sketched them in meticulous detail. Many brought their drawings back to Europe, where they circulated widely in artistic circles. Such sketches influenced a whole generation of painters and led to the popularity of Eastern scenes and costumes in Venice (fig. 56). Venetian paintings, particularly of biblical subjects, incorporated settings inspired by Mamluk Egypt and Ottoman Turkey. In addition to artistic influence, the Islamic world also contributed to the scientific growth of Venetian culture. Many of the classical astronomical and mathematical treatises known in Venice were originally introduced through Arabic translations. (See "Science and the Art of the Islamic World," page 91.) These various connections left a very tangible legacy in Venice; by the nineteenth century, some of the most important and largest collections of Islamic art were in Venetian hands.



FIG. 56. *Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus*, 1511; Venice; oil on canvas, 46½ x 80 in. (118 x 203 cm); Musée du Louvre, Paris

## 45
## Lamp for the Mausoleum of Amir Aidakin al-'Ala'i al-Bunduqdar

Shortly after 1285
Egypt, probably Cairo
Glass, brownish; blown, folded foot, applied handles; enameled and gilded; 10⅜ x 8¼ in. (26.4 x 21 cm)
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.985)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

Venetians prized enameled glass objects produced in Egypt and Syria. They collected and emulated Mamluk glass, inspiring the local production of enamel-painted glass vessels in Venice.

**FUNCTION**

This enameled glass lamp was made for the mausoleum of a high-ranking Mamluk officer. It would have been suspended from an arch, lintel, vault, or dome by chains attached to the glass loops on the body, and filled with oil and a floating wick, which when lit would illuminate the lamp from within. In the days before electricity, these lamps were essential in providing light to the interiors of mosques and other buildings. One can imagine the visual effect of hundreds of such lamps hanging from chains, illuminating the interior of a mosque or tomb. (The Museum has re-created this effect in gallery 454 with modern hanging lamps commissioned specifically for this space.)

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This lamp features a semi-spherical body with a low foot and a wide opening. The enameled and gilded surface is decorated with three bands of calligraphy—one on the flare, one on the body, and a third on the underside of the vessel. The inscription on the body, which has been left unpainted, would have glowed when the lamp was lit. In addition to the calligraphic text, a pair of confronted bows set against a red circular ground appears nine times.

**CONTEXT**

This lamp provides insight into the court life of thirteenth-century Egypt. An inscription indicates the lamp was commissioned for the tomb of a high-ranking Mamluk officer who held the title "Keeper of the [Sultan's] Bow"; the blazon, or coat of arms, on this lamp features a crossbow, the symbol of his office.

The Venetians admired and imitated floral decorative elements popular in Egypt during the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries (fig. 57). Luxury items from the Islamic world were readily available as models, having come into Venetian collections through trade and as diplomatic gifts.



**FIG. 57.** Pilgrim flask, about 1500–1525; Italy, Venice; glass, colorless, nonlead; blown, enameled, gilt; H. 12⅜ in. (31.4 cm); Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.1167)

This flat-sided bottle, called a pilgrim flask, is an example of a vessel produced in Venice after Islamic models, and reflects the transmission of artistic forms and techniques through trade. The scrolling floral elements, which form a medallion surrounded by a double pearl border, are evocative of motifs seen on gilded and painted glass from Syria and Egypt. The technique of enameled glass was highly prized by Venetian collectors. Responding to local demand, Venetian craftsmen imitated the forms and motifs of the foreign works of art.

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Trade, Venice and Egypt, Mamluks, calligraphy (*thuluth* script), lamp, blown glass



45. Lamp for the Mausoleum of Amir Aidakin al-‘Ala’i al-Bunduqdar

# 46
# Velvet fragment

Second half of the 16th century
Turkey, Bursa
Silk, metal-wrapped thread; cut and voided velvet, brocaded; 66 x 52 in. (167.6 x 132.1 cm), Wt. 89 lbs. (40.4 kg)
Rogers Fund, 1917 (17.29.10)

**LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER**

This velvet fragment contains motifs typical of Ottoman textiles, which were transmitted to Venice via trade and inspired a new direction in Italian weaving. Motifs traveled back and forth between Ottoman and Venetian workshops and many of the textiles of both centers feature strikingly similar characteristics (fig. 58).

**FUNCTION**

While the exact function of this textile is unknown, Ottoman textiles woven from fine silk were often used to make expensive garments or furnishings such as cushions, wall hangings, upholstery, and curtains. Textiles like this were also frequently sewn into ecclesiastical or other ceremonial garments in the West.

**DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS**

This panel consists of two almost identical, loom-width pieces of silk velvet. In the first row of each piece, the featured motif is intact; in the second row, it is split in half along the outer edges. When the two panels are placed side by side, the motif in the second row is completed.

The motif, a symmetrical design of repeating artichoke-shaped forms surrounded by a palmette with *saz* leaves, is enhanced by the floral forms that appear within the leaves, as well as by the meandering scrolls of carnations, tulips, and hyacinths. The silver metallic thread, now slightly tarnished, would once have shimmered against the rich red background.

**CONTEXT**

Italian weavers, admiring Ottoman designs, readily incorporated and adapted them into their own textiles. Likewise, Turkish weavers often wove carpets inspired by designs in Venetian velvets. Preferring the expensive and exotic Venetian velvets to those locally produced in Bursa, the Ottoman court ordered a large number of *kaftans* made of Venetian silk. Despite vibrant textile industries of their own, the Ottomans and Venetians remained important clients of one another's textile production. Works like this reflect the cultural and economic ties between the two powers.



**FIG. 58.** Length of velvet, late 15th century; Italy, Venice; silk, metal thread; 23 x 12 ft. 4 in. (58.4 x 375.9 cm); Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.49.8)

This velvet fragment woven in Italy features an artichoke motif that closely resembles those found in contemporary Ottoman examples. Such velvets were in high demand throughout Europe and the Ottoman empire, where they were used to make luxurious clothing and home furnishings. Similar textiles appear frequently in paintings of the Madonna and Child and other religious scenes, where their preciousness pays tribute to the exalted status of the subjects. (See, for example, Crivelli's *Madonna and Child Enthroned* [1982.60.5].)

**KEY WORDS AND IDEAS**

Trade and diplomacy, Venice and Turkey, Ottoman empire, cultural exchange, textile, silk



46. Velvet fragment

# Lesson Plan: Unit 7, Chapter 2 Venice and the Islamic World

### FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Velvet fragment** (image 46)
Second half of the 16th century
Turkey, Bursa
Silk, metal-wrapped thread; cut and voided velvet, brocaded; 66 x 52 in. (167.6 x 132.1 cm); weight, 89 lbs. (40.4 kg)
Rogers Fund, 1917 (17.29.10)

**SUBJECT AREA:** English Language Arts, Visual Arts, and World History
**GRADE:** Middle School
**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom or Museum
**TOPIC/THEME:** Artistic Exchange

### GOALS

Students will be able to:

- recognize evidence of artistic exchange and mutual influence between Venice and the Islamic world in works of art; and
- use informational texts as a resource to substantiate inferences.

### NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- NL-ENG.K-12.8 Developing Research Skills

Visual Arts

- NA-VA.K-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- SL.CCR.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally
- SL.CCR.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

**MATERIALS:** Pencils, 8½ x 11–inch paper for sketching, large paper (8½ x 11 inches or larger, if possible), tracing paper

### QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING (designed to *follow* the suggested activity)

- Describe the shapes you see. Of what do they remind you? Why?
- What do you notice about the way the shapes are organized?
- What steps might be involved in creating this work? What do you see that makes you say that?
- How might fabric like this be used in your community? In the Ottoman empire works such as this were used in furnishings (i.e. cushions, curtains, and wall hangings) or clothing; Europeans frequently imported textiles in this style for ceremonial costumes like this robe (fig. 59).



**FIG. 59.** Vestment (chasuble), late 16th century; Italy; silk, metal, linen; L. 50 in. (127 cm); Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of the Rembrandt Club, 1911 (2009.300.2953)

- Ottoman weavers and other artists frequently used the artichoke-and-leaf motif in the sixteenth century. During this period the artichoke motif was also employed by Venetian artists. A comparison between the featured work of art and a length of velvet reveals subtle variations in the forms (fig. 60).



**FIG. 60.** Length of velvet, late 15th century; Italy, Venice; silk, metal thread; 12 ft. 4 in. x 23 in. (375.9 x 58.4 cm); Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.49.8)

How might motifs travel from one region to the next? Read one or more of the suggested essays (see RESOURCES) to learn more about ties between Venice and the Ottoman empire; compare your findings with the inferences you developed based on close observation of the two works.

- If someone asked you to create a work of art incorporating the motifs in this design, would you feel stifled or inspired? Why?

### ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** Visual Arts
**DURATION:** Approximately 60 minutes

Trade and exchange between Venice and the Islamic world prompted artists in both regions to use and adapt designs from one another; a comparison of the featured work of art and the length of velvet (fig. 60) reflects this trend. Create a motif inspired by a work from Venice or the Islamic world:

1. Fold an 8½ x 11–inch sheet of paper into quarters.
2. Select a work of art and sketch one small detail in each rectangle on your page.
3. Trade sketches with a partner.
4. Look closely at the sketches you received and select one to develop further. Place tracing paper over the drawing you selected. Copy the parts of the design you like best and modify the remaining areas to suit your taste; repeat this process several times using the same base drawing.
5. After exploring several possibilities, identify the motif you feel is the strongest and share your work with your peers. Use one or more of the motifs developed by you and your classmates to create a pattern on a large sheet of paper; you can reproduce the shapes by placing each drawing face down on the fresh sheet of paper and rubbing the back with the tip of your pencil.
6. Share your finished work and two or more process sketches with a classmate. Discuss the development of the design and your thoughts on where you might best apply it (for example, on a shirt, wallpaper, or rug) and why.

### RESOURCES

Carboni, Stefano, Trinita Kennedy, and Elizabeth Marwell. "Commercial Exchange, Diplomacy, and Religious Difference between Venice and the Islamic World." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cedr/hd_cedr.htm (March 2007).

———. "Islamic Art and Culture: The Venetian Perspective." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/isac/hd_isac.htm (March 2007).

Watt, Melinda. "Renaissance Velvet Textiles." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/velv/hd_velv.htm (August 2011).

### OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Fig. 59. Vestment (chasuble), late 16th century; Italy; silk, metal, linen; L. 50 in. (127 cm); Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of the Rembrandt Club, 1911 (2009.300.2953)

Fig. 60. Length of velvet, late 15th century; Italy, Venice; silk, metal thread; 12 ft. 4 in. x 23 in. (375.9 x 58.4 cm); Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.49.8)

Carlo Crivelli (Italian, active by 1457–died 1493), *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, 1472; tempera on wood, gold ground; 38¾ x 17¼ in. (98.4 x 43.8 cm); The Jack and Belle Linsky Collection, 1982 (1982.60.5)

Author: Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher Katherine Huala
Date: 2012

# Unit 7: Chapter 2 Related Readings and Resources

Carboni, Stefano, ed. *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007.

Carboni, Stefano, Trinita Kennedy, and Elizabeth Marwell. "Commercial Exchange, Diplomacy, and Religious Difference between Venice and the Islamic World." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cedr/hd_cedr.htm (March 2007).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

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**HIGH SCHOOL**

———. "Venice's Principal Muslim Trading Partners: The Mamluks, the Ottomans, and the Safavids." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vmos/hd_vmos.htm (March 2007).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

*Church and Mosque: Religious Architecture in Venice and Istanbul*. DVD. 30 min. New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1996.
Discusses how the political and economic relationship between these two cities influenced architectural design in the sixteenth century.

Covington, Richard. "East Meets West in Venice." *Saudi Aramco World* (March–April 2008), pp. 2–13. http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200802/east.meets.west.in.venice.htm.
**MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL**

Sardar, Marika. "Europe and the Islamic World, 1600–1800." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/erpr/hd_erpr.htm (October 2004).
**HIGH SCHOOL**

**UNIT 7: CHAPTER 2 SOURCES**


Carboni, Stefano, ed. *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007.

Carboni, Stefano, Trinita Kennedy, and Elizabeth Marwell. "Commercial Exchange, Diplomacy, and Religious Difference between Venice and the Islamic World." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cedr/hd_cedr.htm (March 2007).

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Covington, Richard. "East Meets West in Venice." *Saudi Aramco World* (March–April 2008), pp. 2–13.

Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. no. 109).

Hess, Catherine, ed. *The Arts of Fire: Islamic Influences on Glass and Ceramics of the Italian Renaissance*. Exhibition catalogue. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004.

Howard, Deborah. *Venice & the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100–1500*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Mack, Rosamond E. *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

# Suggested Resources about Art of the Islamic World and Glossary

# Suggested Resources about Art of the Islamic World

## Books


Al-Hassani, Salim T. S., ed. *1001 Inventions: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Civilization*. 3d ed. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2012.

Arberry, Arthur J., trans. *The Koran*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Blair, Sheila S., and Jonathan M. Bloom. *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Bloom, Jonathan M., and Sheila S. Blair. *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. Handbook to the PBS video *Islam: Empire of Faith*.

——. *Islamic Arts*. London: Phaidon Press, 1997.

Brend, Barbara. *Islamic Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Canby, Sheila R. *Islamic Art in Detail*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.

Esposito, John L. *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*. 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Ettinghausen, Richard, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina. *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Hagedorn, Annette. *Islamic Art (Taschen Basic Genre Series)*. Cologne: Taschen, 2009.

Stanley, Tim. *Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Middle East*. London: Victoria & Albert Publications, 2004.


## Videos


*Islam: Empire of Faith*. DVD. 163 min. Arlington, Va.: PBS Home Video, 2000.

*New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands—Behind-the-Scenes Curator's Commentary*. Video. 11 min. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011. http://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/collections/isl/new-galleries-2011?chanID=dd142067-04e9-423c-8754-baecfc56a0ec


## Websites


Islamic Art Network. http://www.islamic-art.org/. Cairo: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2006. Includes an extensive technical glossary as well as a database of articles and a photograph archive.

Islamic Arts and Architecture. http://islamic-arts.org/. Islamic Arts and Architecture, 2012. This user-friendly website features an interactive walking tour of the Alhambra Palace as well as a large range of articles and videos on Islamic art and architecture.

Victoria & Albert Museum. "Style in Islamic Art." http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1342_islamic_middle_east/.

# Glossary

al-Andalus / Andalusia – the region of southern Spain under Muslim rule from the eighth to the fifteenth century. Today this region is still known as Andalusia.

Anatolia – the region also known as Asia Minor, comprising most of present-day Turkey.

arabesque – an Islamic decoration employing abstract intertwining vine, leaf, and plant motifs.

assemblage – a collection of objects grouped together.

Berbers – the indigenous people of North Africa living west of the Nile valley.

*bismillah* – the phrase, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," repeated before all but one chapter in the Qur'an (also sometimes spelled *basmala*).

blazon – an emblem similar to a coat of arms; in Mamluk art a blazon indicates an individual's status in the court hierarchy.

boss – an ornamental projection on both decorative objects and architectural surfaces.

Buraq – the celestial steed that carried the Prophet Muhammad on his miraculous night journey (*mi'raj*).

caliph – the title of the Prophet Muhammad's immediate successors who were the political and spiritual leaders of the Muslim community. Many subsequent Islamic dynasties continued to use this title. The term "caliphate" refers to the dominion of a caliph.

calligraphy (adj. calligraphic) – decorative writing prized for its aesthetic qualities. (See examples of Arabic calligraphy and descriptions of key scripts in Unit 2.)

Caucasus – the region to the east of the Black Sea, generally acknowledged to include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and parts of Russia.

Central Asia – the region between Iran and China comprising present-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and sometimes Afghanistan.

chasing – a decorative technique in which the front of a metal surface is indented with a tool (usually a hammer) to create depressed patterns. This technique is most often used in conjunction with repoussé, in which the same metal surface is hammered from the other side.

cloud bands – stylized scrolling bands representing clouds. Derived from Chinese art, cloud bands were used extensively in Persian, Ottoman, and Mughal art after the fourteenth century.

*dado* – the lower part of an interior wall, often decorated.

*div* – a Persian term for a demon.

enameling – a decorative technique in which melted and fused glass (often multicolored) is applied to the surface of an object.

folio – a page belonging to (or formerly a part of) a manuscript.

gesso – a white plasterlike substance used to prepare a surface for painting.

Greater Iran – the region historically within the Persian cultural sphere, comprising present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, and parts of Central Asia.

hadith – a pronouncement on a religious topic ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad.

*hijri* – the Islamic calendar (*al hijri*, abbreviated A.H.). The first year of the *hijri* calendar corresponds to the year 622 A.D. in the Christian calendar and marks the Prophet Muhammad's *hijra*, or emigration, from Mecca to Medina (in present-day Saudi Arabia).

illumination (adj. illuminated) – the practice of embellishing manuscript pages with gold. In Islamic art the term illumination refers to the gold decoration applied to paintings, calligraphy pages, and manuscripts of the Qur'an.

imam – a Muslim prayer leader.

incised – in an artistic context, incised decoration consists of shallow lines cut into the surface of ceramics or metalwork.

Indian subcontinent – the region comprising present-day Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

*juz'* – a section comprising one-thirtieth of the Qur'an.

Ka'ba – Islam's most sacred building; the cubical structure at the center of the Haram Mosque in Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia) used as the focus of prayer.

Levant – the region along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, generally considered to include present-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria.

*madrasa* – a school in the Islamic world, especially one offering instruction in Islamic law and theology.

Maghrib – the northernmost region of North Africa comprising the countries bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, including present-day Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia.

mausoleum – a tomb with an above-ground architectural structure, built for a family or individual for the purpose of burial and remembrance.

*mihrab* – a niche in a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca and of prayer.

*mina'i* – the modern term, derived from the Persian word for enamel (*mina*), used to describe ceramics with multicolored underglaze and in-glaze painted decoration produced through several firings in a kiln.

minaret – one of the integral architectural elements of a mosque; the tall tower attached or adjacent to a mosque from which the call to prayer is announced.

*minbar* – a raised platform reached by a set of steps, usually situated in a mosque to the right of a *mihrab*; speakers address an assembled group from the *minbar*.

*mi'raj* – the Prophet Muhammad's night journey to the heavens.

Mongol – a nomadic people of Central Asian origin who swept through Asia and the Islamic world in the thirteenth century, conquering and establishing rule over a vast territory (see map, page 206).

motif – a design or shape, often repeated, used decoratively in a work of art.

*muqarnas* – honeycomblike and stalactitelike architectural decoration, often used in portals, cornices, and domes in the Islamic world (see, for example, the *muqarnas* in the Damascus Room, page 187).

palmette – a decorative motif used extensively in Islamic art, as well as in many other artistic traditions; it usually features broad leaves fanning out from a central stem.

parchment – a writing surface derived from animal skin. Paper replaced parchment in most parts of the Islamic world by the tenth century, though parchment continued to be used in Spain and North Africa until much later.

*qibla* – the direction Muslims face when performing ritual prayers, toward the Ka'ba in Mecca.

Qur'an – the holiest book in Islam, believed to contain God's revelations to the Prophet Muhammad.

*rahla* – a stand used to hold a Qur'an; usually made of wood or stone.

Ramadan – the holy month during which Muslims abstain from food and drink during daylight hours. It is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, and marks God's first revelations to Muhammad.

*saz* – an artistic style, popular in Ottoman Turkey and developed by the court artist Shah Qulu; it is characterized by blossoms and serrated leaves.

*shah* – the title given to rulers in several regions of the Islamic world, most notably Iran and Central Asia. *Shah* means "king" in Persian (the Iranian language).

*Shahnama* – literally, "Book of Kings"; an epic poem recounting the history of Persian kingship from legendary times to the advent of the Arab conquests of Iran. It was compiled and versified in the eleventh century by the poet Firdausi.

Silk Road – the name given to the interconnected trade routes that reached from China to the Middle East; the Silk Road was the major route of cultural and mercantile exchange in Asia for almost 2,000 years.

Sinai Peninsula – a peninsula in Egypt that geographically unites the Asian and African continents.

slip – semifluid clay used to decorate a ceramic vessel or to cover its surface with a solid (usually white) background to which further decoration can be applied.

stonepaste – a white ceramic material that combines clay, quartz, and ground glass, and approximates the qualities of porcelain; also known as frit.

stucco – a durable plasterlike coating applied to architectural surfaces that can be decoratively carved.

sultan – a title for a ruler used widely in the Islamic world, including in Nasrid Spain, Mamluk Egypt, and Ottoman Turkey. The term "sultanate" refers to a dynasty or kingdom established by a sultan.

*sura* – a chapter of the Qur'an; the Qur'an contains a total of 114 *sura*s.

talisman – an object thought by its owner to possess supernatural or magical powers, including, typically, the ability to protect the owner against bad luck or malevolent forces.

*tiraz* – literally "embroidery" in Arabic; describes both inscribed textiles and the royal textile workshops where they were produced.

*tughra* – a stylized royal insignia containing the name of the Ottoman ruler, names associated with his lineage, and the phrase "May he reign forever".

*umma* – the Muslim community.

vizier – a high-ranking political advisor, usually serving a sultan or shah.

*zilij* – architectural tilework used primarily in Morocco and Southern Spain.