The Worlds of Islam in the collection of the Aga Khan Museum
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Pious Wonders of Islam in the collection of the Aga Khan Museum
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Presentation

Isidro Fainé, President of “La Caixa” and of the “La Caixa” Foundation

Exhibitions devoted to the cultures of Antiquity organised by “La Caixa” Foundation aim to show the different ways in which humankind has, at various times and places, grappled with great universal questions; they broaden our outlook on the world and help us gain a better understanding of people from other cultures who live in our midst.

From that point of view, “The Worlds of Islam in the Aga Khan Museum’s collection” is of particular interest. In times marked by statements proclaiming that East and West are separated by an unbridgeable divide, arts and culture challenge clichés and bring opposing views closer. The 190 works on display in this exhibition give a vision of the history, traditions, languages and geographies of the Islamic world as an extraordinarily rich and varied conglomerate, extending from the Far East to the Iberian Peninsula, encompassing languages, beliefs and lifestyles under the common denominator of the Arabic language and of Islam. The exhibition shows how Islam took different forms as it permeates different substrata and local cultures – from the Maghreb and al-Andalus to India - and shows Islamic art and culture as a common heritage of mankind.

All the works in this exhibition, brought together by His Highness the Aga Khan and managed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), constitute one of the finest collections of Islamic art in the world. In the last few years, intense efforts have been made to ensure its development and conservation. The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is active on several fronts at the same time: culture, education, health, microcredits and the restoration of historical cities. In 2013 the museum which will house AKTC’s collections is due to open its doors in Toronto, Canada. In the meantime, the works are exhibited in various capitals in the world as cultural ambassadors.

“The Worlds of Islam in the Aga Khan Museum’s collection” possesses an abundance of surprising and novel aspects for the public of our country. The first part is dedicated to Qur’anic tradition: the sacred text, the copying of sacred verses as a devout practice, the different writing styles, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the importance of mysticism. The second takes us via a narrative interplay based on the concept of the journey to the ends of the Muslim world, depicting the splendour and refinement of courtly life and the importance of science, music and literature. One of the appeals of the exhibition is its illuminated manuscripts, be they religious, scientific, literary or based on fantasy. Many of these contain animal figures and human representations that contradict the erroneous belief whereby images are prohibited in Islamic art.

The “La Caixa” Foundation would like to express its special thanks to His Highness the Aga Khan and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for the opportunity to exhibit this extraordinary collection of works of Islamic art in Madrid and Barcelona. It would also like to pay tribute to the work of the commissioner and the scientific committee made up of international experts, and express its appreciation to everyone who contributed to this exhibition.
Introduction

His Highness the Aga Khan

Islamic culture is an integral part of the Spanish historical heritage. At the beginning of the 8th Century, a few thousand men – Arabs and North Africans – entered the Iberian Peninsula through the straits. Thus the Visigothic Kingdom came to an end, the last vestige of Roman antiquity, and a meeting of civilizations began. Young Europe, an incipient mosaic of kingdoms in the making, entered into contact with Islam, a newly minted civilization, ahead of its time and, at that period, politically united and booming. For over seven centuries, both worlds will coexist in Spain with long periods of peace and harmony and interludes of armed conflict.

The Umayyad Caliphate integrated the Peninsula to a vast transcontinental empire which, from Baghdad to Cordoba, was the focal point of human civilization during a period of European obscurity. Muslim Spain transmitted to the West many of the literary and scientific works of antiquity, which had been lost at the fall of the Roman Empire. Classical texts, recuperated in the Alexandria Library, were rendered into Arabic and then translated into the Romance languages by the school of Toledo. It was also from al-Andalus that the works of the great Muslim humanists and scientists spread to Europe, contributing decisively to the development of medieval knowledge in a great number of subjects: astronomy, geometry, mathematics, natural history, medicine, geography, technology, philosophy...

“The Worlds of Islam” is an exhibition which tries to reflect, through works of art of different periods and geographic origins, the splendour of Muslim culture in all its diversity. The exhibition highlights the pluralism of Islam, which can be seen both in the interpretation of Quranic faith as in the variety of styles, materials, and techniques, which characterizes its artistic expressions. The objects exhibited cover a period of more than one thousand years and constitute a small sampling of the collections of the future Aga Khan Museum, which will be built in the Canadian city of Toronto and will open its doors in the year 2013.

Why this exhibition and why create a Museum dedicated to Muslim cultures? In the first place, to correct the great ignorance of Islam which is widespread - particularly in industrialized societies.

There was a period in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived in harmony and shared a glorious intellectual and spiritual adventure. In Spain, Toledo was the main centre of this plural and prosperous civilization, which promoted scientific progress, philosophical knowledge and artistic creativity. But time has eroded the traces of mutual understanding which was the basis of reciprocal respect.

This is why the works of art which express the values of tolerance and pluralism, specific to the Muslim world and related to its ethnic, linguistic, and social diversity throughout its history, are important witnesses today. I think that the periods and the societies which have considered pluralism as a value can be useful examples to develop a cosmopolitan ethics, a concept which could give birth to a civil society based on the principle of merit and capable of integrating the best values of the different units of which it is composed. This would be, in my opinion, the only way to understand pluralism and to build upon it, in any place in the world, a real democracy.

It is in Spain that the term “convivencia” was coined and its concept took form, as a way of life based on mutual respect and understanding, which allowed peaceful and productive relations between different communities. I am convinced that the future Aga Khan Museum’s central task will be both educational and humanistic: to actively promote, internationally, the spirit of “convivencia.”
A plural vision of Islam for a singular museum

Luis Monreal, General Manager, Aga Khan Trust for Culture

Since 2007, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture has developed a programme of exhibitions of Islamic masterpieces that have visited various European cities. The initiative’s main purpose is to allow the public of many countries - initially in Europe and then in other parts of the world - to get to know the anthological aspects of the collection that in the near future will be permanently exhibited in the Aga Khan Museum, a museum that will start being constructed in Toronto (Canada) in the next few months.

For this reason, when the Fundación La Caixa invited us to organise two exhibitions of this anthological collection in their centres in Madrid and Barcelona, we accepted the challenge of conceiving ex novo an exhibition of interest for the only part of Europe with its own Muslim culture.

It is reasonable to ask ourselves: Why, at the beginning of the 21st century, establish a museum of Muslim art and culture in North America? The reasons are obvious. Nowadays, for social and geopolitical reasons, Islam is closer to us than it was in our parents’ time. Migration phenomena and the circumstances that have prevailed since the Second World War in the Near East make the Muslim world very present in our daily lives. Nevertheless, the rapprochement of these civilizations has not resulted in improved knowledge of each other. Until recent times, public opinion was not interested in Islam, its history, culture and social composition. Thus people are unaware that throughout history and geographical space, the Muslim world has been a plural and pluralistic civilisation that interprets Qur’anic faith in different ways and has developed a great variety of material cultures and artistic expressions. Also, there is marked ignorance of the ethnic pluralism of Muslim societies and their linguistic diversity. For instance, it would come as a surprise for many that for a great number of Muslims, Arabic is just a vehicular language for religion, as incomprehensible as Latin is for Christians today.

The Aga Khan Museum will therefore aim to undertake an informative and educational mission. Its natural audience will be some 70 million people (the population living in a radius equivalent to one hour’s flying distance from Toronto to areas on both sides of the border between Canada and the United States). In order to capture this potential public and attract visitors from other countries, the museum will develop an active programme of temporary exhibitions that will contribute to highlight its permanent collections. The Museum is looking to attract a very diverse public, not only in terms of cultural origins – the Muslim communities in North America constitute, obviously, a priority -, but also with different sociological origins and ages. The project is looking to develop specialised programmes and activities for different types of visitors (school and family groups, students, researchers, minorities, etc.) and use the most advanced technological methods to give the museum a virtual existence that will allow its access via Internet to millions of people around the world.

The Toronto Museum will be located in a building of around ten thousand square metres that has been designed by the renowned Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki and will be situated in a large park, conceived by the Serbian landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic. As contemporary designers with an external vision of Muslim culture, these architects have tried to establish a formal dialogue with pluralistic Islam, which through the ages has been open to influences from other cultures and diverse in its artistic expressions.

This museum project is part of the wider framework of the institutional mission of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) that primarily promotes conservation programmes and the rehabilitation of historic cities in the Muslim world. In order to improve the local living conditions of the inhabitants of these cities, the
A rendering of the building of the future Aga Khan Museum in Toronto

Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan’s “Salon Persan” in Bellerive Castle, Geneva, Switzerland. Princess Catherine has generously donated the showcases and ceramics of this room to the future Aga Khan Museum, where it will be reconstituted as seen here.
Trust sets out to restore the urban fabric, such as its houses, public spaces and monuments, and to introduce new socio-economic development initiatives via micro-credit programmes, professional training, public health, education and technical assistance in various fields. Presently, AKTC, with the cooperation of various institutions of the public sector in each country, undertakes projects in Cairo, Delhi, Aleppo and Damascus, Zanzibar, Timbuktu, Djenné, Mopti, Kabul and Herat.

Secondly, AKTC seeks to encourage architectural creation with the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, which was created over three decades ago and awards triennially contemporary architectural creation as well as the conservation of heritage of the Muslim world. It also supports the programme of study and research of Islamic architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), as well as ArchNet, the largest existing on-line resource of architecture and urbanism for Muslim countries.

It is in this context that the decision to create the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, of which this exhibition is a small representative sample, should be placed. The institution will have a relevant role in the cultural, social, educational and development policies that His Highness the Aga Khan promotes through the Aga Khan Development Network, of which AKTC constitutes the cultural agency. In short, with its educational mission, the museum will try to promote a better understanding of Islam as a tolerant, plural culture that has contributed to the universality of knowledge and to the dialogue between civilisations.
The historical context

Professor Azim Nanji, Senior associate director of Islamic Studies, Stanford University

The last in the line of the Abrahamic family of revealed traditions, Islam emerged in the early decades of the seventh century. Its message, addressed in perpetuity, calls upon people to seek in their daily life, in the very diversity of humankind, signs that point to the Creator and Sustainer of all creation. Revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabia, Islam’s influence spread rapidly, bringing within its fold, within just over a century of its birth, the inhabitants of the lands stretching from the central regions of Asia to the Iberian Peninsula in Europe.

A major world religion, Islam today counts a quarter of the globe’s population among its followers. All Muslims affirm the absolute unity and transcendence of God (tawhid) as the first and foremost article of the faith, followed by that of Divine guidance through God’s chosen messengers, of whom the Prophet Muhammad was the last. This affirmation constitutes the shahada, the profession of faith, and is the basic creed of all Muslims. In its essence, Islam refers to the inner struggle of the individual, waged singly and in consonance with fellow believers, to engage in earthly life, while rising above its trappings in search of the Divine. This quest is only meaningful in tandem with the effort to do good for one’s kin, for orphans, the needy, the vulnerable; to be just, honest, humble, tolerant and forgiving.

Shia Islam: historical origins

Within its fundamental unity, Islam has evoked, over the ages, varying responses to its primal message calling upon man to surrender himself to God. Historically, these responses have been expressed as two main perspectives within Islam: the Shia and the Sunni. Each encompasses a rich diversity of spiritual temperaments, juridical preferences, social and psychological dispositions, political entities and cultures. Ismailism is one such response from within the overall Shia perspective which seeks to comprehend the true meaning of the Islamic message. During his lifetime, Prophet Muhammad was both the recipient and the expounder of Divine revelation. His death marked the conclusion of the line of prophecy, and the beginning of the critical debate on the question of the rightful leadership to continue his mission for future generations. In essence, the position of the group that eventually coalesced into the majority, the Sunni branch, which comprises several different juridical schools, was that the Prophet had not nominated a successor, as the revelation contained in the Qur’an was sufficient guidance for the community. There developed a tacit recognition that spiritual-moral authority was to be exercised by the ‘ulama’, a group of specialists in matters of religious law, or shariah. The role of the caliph, theoretically elected by the community, was to maintain a realm in which the principles and practices of Islam were safeguarded and propagated.

The Shi‘at ‘Ali or the “party” of Ali, already in existence during the lifetime of the Prophet, maintained that while the revelation ceased at the Prophet’s death, the need for spiritual and moral guidance of the community, through an ongoing interpretation of the Islamic message, continued. For them, the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad could only be entrusted to a member of his own family, in whom the Prophet had invested his authority through designation. That person was ‘Ali, the Prophet’s cousin, and the husband of his daughter and only surviving child, Fatima. ‘Ali was also the Prophet’s first supporter who devoutly championed the cause of Islam. Just as it was the prerogative of the Prophet to designate his successor, so it is the absolute prerogative of each Imam of the time to designate his successor from among his male progeny. Hence, according to Shia doctrine, the Imamate continues by descent from the Prophet through ‘Ali and Fatima.

In time, the Shia were sub-divided. The Ismailis and what eventually came to be known as the Ithna‘ashari or Twelver Shia parted ways over the succession to Ja‘far al-Sadiq, the great great grandson of Ali and
Fatima. The Ithna'asharis transferred their allegiance to al-Sadiq’s youngest son Musa al-Kazim and after him, in lineal descent, to Muhammad al-Mahdi, their twelfth Imam who, they believe, is in occultation and will reappear to dispense perfect order and justice. Today, the Ithna’asharis are the largest Shia Muslim community, and constitute the majority of the population in Iran. The Ismailis gave their allegiance to Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq’s eldest son Isma’il, from whom they derive their name. They trace the line of Imamate in hereditary succession from Isma’il to His Highness the Aga Khan, who is currently the forty-ninth Imam in direct lineal descent from Prophet Muhammad through ‘Ali and Fatima. The Ismailis are the second largest Shia Muslim community, and are settled in over twenty-five countries, mostly in the developing world, but now also with a substantial presence in the industrialised nations.

The Ismaili Imamate from the time of the division in the Shia community: an overview

The foundation of the Ismaili Fatimid caliphate in North Africa in the year 909 was the culmination of a long and sustained commitment of the descendants of Imam Isma’il to promote the Islamic ideal of social justice and equity.

Centred in Egypt, the Fatimid caliphate at its peak extended westward to North Africa, Sicily and other Mediterranean islands, and eastward to the Red Sea coast of Africa, Palestine, Syria, the Yemen and Arabia. The Fatimids encouraged intellectual and philosophical inquiry, and attracted the finest minds of the age to their court, whatever their religious persuasions. Al-Azhar, the Cairo mosque built by Imam-caliph al-Mu’izz in 972, was a great centre of learning, and the Dar al-’Ilm, the House of Knowledge, established in 1005, was the first medieval institution of learning, a precursor of the modern university combining in its programme a full range of major academic disciplines, from the study of the Qur’an and Prophetic traditions through jurisprudence, philology and grammar, to medicine, logic, mathematics and astronomy. In the same spirit, the Ismaili view of history, which accorded due respect to the great monotheistic religions of the Abrahamic tradition, provided the intellectual framework for the participation of the followers of different faiths in the affairs of the Fatimid state. Christians and Jews, as much as Muslims of either branch, were able to rise to the highest echelons of state office on grounds of competence alone. The Fatimids’ policies reflected a plurality of pious ways rather than a monolithic interpretation of the faith.

In the last decade of the eleventh century, the Ismaili community suffered a schism over the succession to Imam-caliph al-Mustansir billah. One part of the community followed his youngest son al-Musta’li. The other gave its allegiance to his eldest son Imam Nizar from whom the Aga Khan, the present Imam of the Ismailis, traces his descent. The seat of the Ismaili Imams then moved to Alamut, in northern Iran, where the Ismailis had succeeded in establishing a state comprising a defensive network of fortified settlements. These fortresses housed impressive libraries and study rooms whose collections ranged from books on religion and philosophy to scientific instruments, and the Ismailis did not abandon their liberal policy of patronage to men of learning of Muslim as well as non-Muslim backgrounds. However, the invasions by the Mongol hordes led to the destruction of the Ismaili state in 1256. After this, the Ismailis lived in dispersed communities and, under the direction of each succeeding Imam, centres of activity were established in the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan, the mountainous regions of the Hindu Kush, Central Asia and parts of China over the course of several centuries.

The modern phase of Ismaili history began when the forty-sixth Imam, Aga Hasan ’Ali Shah, emigrated from Iran to India in the 1840s. He was the first Imam to bear the title of Aga Khan, bestowed by the
Persian emperor, Fath 'Ali Shah. He established his headquarters in Mumbai (Bombay), and this marked the beginning of an era of regular contacts between the Imam and his widely dispersed followers. Aga Khan I was succeeded by his eldest son Aga 'Ali Shah, who assumed the title of Aga Khan II, and was honoured with the courtesy of His Highness, first granted to his father by the British government. Building on the initiatives of his father, Aga Khan II set about the long-term task of social development of the community, with emphasis on education. He passed away in 1885, and the institution of the Imamate then devolved upon his son Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, who was eight years old at the time of his accession.

His life marks a remarkable era of momentous significance. From every platform, the third Aga Khan advocated free, universal, practically oriented primary education, improved secondary schools for Muslims, and a generous provision of government and private scholarships to enable talented Muslim students to study in Britain, Europe, and America. It was in pursuit of his educational vision that Aga Khan III successfully transformed the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, India, into a leading university.

Aga Khan III’s abiding concern, throughout his seventy-two years as Imam – the longest in history – was the welfare of the Ismaili community. This period was a critical one in the modern history of the Ismaili community, and it was his inspiring leadership as much as its enthusiastic response to his guidance that enabled the community to enter a period of remarkable progress in the areas of health, education, housing, commerce and industry, leading to the establishment of a network of health clinics, hospitals, schools, hostels, cooperative societies, investment trusts, and insurance companies.

The contemporary period

Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III passed away on 11 July 1957, having designated his grandson, Prince Karim – twenty years old at the time of his accession – to succeed him as the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslim community. Under the leadership of Aga Khan IV, the institutions and activities of the Imamate have expanded far beyond their original scope. The Aga Khan has explained many times that the impulse that underpins these activities and shapes the social conscience of his community remains the unchanging Muslim ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society.

To give an operational structure to his humanitarian activities, the Aga Khan created the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a group of private, international, non-denominational agencies working to improve living conditions and opportunities for people in specific regions of the developing world. The Network’s organisations have individual mandates that range from the fields of health and education to architecture, rural development and the promotion of private sector enterprises. Together they collaborate in working towards a common goal – to build institutions and programmes that can sustainably respond to the challenges of social, economic and cultural change. The Aga Khan Foundation, Aga Khan Education Services, Aga Khan Health Services, Aga Khan Planning and Building Services, Aga Khan University, and the University of Central Asia operate in the field of social development. Economic activities are the province of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development and the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance with their affiliates in tourism, ecotourism, promotion of industry and financial services. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) implements cultural initiatives aimed at revitalising the heritage of communities in the Islamic world. One of the newest undertakings of AKTC is the project, set up in 2003, to establish an Aga Khan Museum in Toronto.
The Gambia
Senegal
Mauritania
Sierra Leone
Madinat al-Zahra
Guinea
th-18th century
th-14th century
th century
Geographic extension
Liberia
Rabat Fez
Marrakesh
d'Ivoire
Seville Granada
Côte Cordoba
Maghrib
Burkina
Ghana
Faso
Mali
Togo
Algeria
Benin
France
Alger
Switzerland
Nigeria
Equatorial Guinea
Tunisia
Qayrawan
Germany
Niger
Venice
Cameroon
Italy
Gabon
Tunis
Rome
Slovenia
Malta
Congo
Croatia
Montenegro
Mediterranean Sea
Angola
Libya
Central African Republic
Hungary
Albania
Slovakia
Bulgaria
Crete
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Georgia
Cyprus
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Sudan
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China
India
Pakistan
Afghanistan
Kazakhstan
Uzbekistan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Afghanistan
India
Pakistan
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North Korea
South Korea
Japan
Works of art like those in this exhibition have made up the visual landscape of the Islamic world for 1,400 years. The scope and diversity of these objects, religious and secular, mirrors that of the societies in which they were produced. For this reason, the exhibition which this catalogue accompanies has been structured in two parts, ‘The Word of God’, consisting of sacred texts and related objects, and ‘The route of the travellers’, where objects from a wide geographical area are shown, extending from part of the Iberian peninsula – Al-Andalus – to China and which reflect different traditional cultures and a multiplicity of aesthetic choices.

The sacred and profane were never strictly separate in the Islamic lands. In fact, from at least as early as the eleventh century, some Muslim sultans incorporated the phrase ‘wa-l-dunya wa-l-din’ in their titles, meaning that they were princes of ‘the world (or state) and of the faith (religious domain)’. Various dynasties considered themselves protectors of the faith as well as temporal leaders.

How did these dual roles manifest themselves in art? The earliest artefacts in Muslim history are found in the mosque and in the Qur’anic texts written in the Arabic alphabet. The codification of the text occurred during the reign of the third Rightly Guided Caliph, ‘Uthman (r. 644–55) in connection with his move to have a canonical text of the Qur’an produced in written form. Revealed to Muhammad by God between the first decade of the seventh century and Muhammad’s death in 632, the Qur’an, consisting of one hundred and fourteen chapters or suras, is the holy scripture of Islam. ‘Uthman’s efforts ensured that the Qur’an was not corrupted by textual variants of any sort. The copying of Qur’ans from the outset was considered an act of piety. To attain the most beautiful outcome, calligraphers manipulated Arabic letter forms in artistic ways. Although some scholars have suggested that the elongation or bunching of letters in early Qur’ans is the visual analogue of the spoken word, scribes were more likely concerned with the visual rhythms and balance of words on a page.

Muslims fulfil several obligations: to accept one God; to say the formal ritual prayers facing in the direction of the Ka’ba in Mecca; to share their wealth; to fast during the month of Ramadan; and to perform the hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca. Most practising Muslim families today possess a copy of the Qur’an, but in early Islamic times this was probably not the case and memorization of the Qur’an was not unusual. Figural imagery is absent from mosques and other religious buildings and the Qur’an is never illustrated. Nonetheless, a religious iconography of Islamic art exists, centred on the Arabic script, geometry and vegetal designs, including the vine scroll known as the arabesque. While depictions of the human form are also absent from prayer books and collections of Hadith (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), narratives on religious and important personalities of Islam composed from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries include illustrations.

The Shia and Sunni communities in Islam differ on the question of the succession to the leadership of the Muslim world after the death of the Prophet. The Shia accept ‘Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, as the designated Imam, while the Sunnis accept him as the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph. Thus the notion of the Imam, a divinely inspired guide for the faithful, is a key tenet of Shiism. Although the Shiite followers of ‘Ali and the Imams who followed him held no political power in the early period of Muslim history, their religious movement survived and in the tenth century the Shia Fatimids founded a caliphate in Tunisia and Egypt.

One tradition common to all forms of Islam was mysticism. Groups of mystical devotees, or dervishes, gathered around spiritual masters, or pir, who acted as guides to achieving mystical states and ultimately oneness with God. To accommodate the large crowds of disciples who clustered around their spiritual
leaders, dervish lodges were constructed in which the faithful could pray and enact their rituals as well as be housed and fed. When a pir died, he would be buried within the precinct of his dervish lodge. While his followers would continue to impart his teachings, the pir’s grave became a place of veneration in its own right. As a result, large cemeteries grew up around the tombs of pirs.

Many paintings from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries depict dervishes and holy men. While certain dervish practices such as whirling in order to induce a heightened spiritual state are dynamic subjects for manuscript illustrations, a great number of Persian and Mughal paintings portray princes consulting their spiritual masters. The importance of such figures in the lives of great rulers such as Timur (Tamerlane) (r. 1370–1405) and Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1587–1629) is attested not only by historical texts but also by their building shrines and mosques to honour these spiritual guides.

The Qur’an contains many graphic descriptions of Paradise as a verdant land, intersected by rivers of water, milk, wine and honey, planted with fruit trees and flowers and filled with celestial beings of great beauty. Such a vision of Paradise not only is a desirable contrast to the arid desert of Arabia, where the Qur’an was revealed, but also reflects ideas inherited from Zoroastrian and biblical sources. The need for water for irrigation as well as drinking and bathing has consistently informed the construction of gardens and buildings in much of the Islamic world. Gardens in the Islamic world, with fruit trees and shade trees, roses and watercourses, are often equated with Paradise.

The Qur’an encourages a reverence for nature and the humane treatment of animals, both of which are reflected in the pictorial arts of the Islamic world. The artists of some periods and regions, such as Ottoman potters from Iznik, concentrated on incorporating flowers or graceful plants in their designs. Others, particularly from Iran and India, preferred to depict animals in landscapes or make objects of daily use in the form of animals. The artists’ powers of observation and understanding of animal and plant life animate their depictions and often inject an element of humour into otherwise humble objects. At its best, Islamic art communicates the balance of the natural world. Its gardens can be likened to Paradise and its pleasures can echo those enjoyed in the afterlife, but the physical world in an Islamic context is the illusion and the spiritual world the reality.

Studying the political history of Islam, one might be forgiven for believing that caliphs and kings concentrated on the realities of the material world such as dominion and conquest rather than on their roles as leaders of the faithful. Even within the Abbasid Caliphate, which ruled from 750 until the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258, local dynasties exercised considerable power and in some cases operated independently of the Abbasids. Although the plethora of dynastic names and complex feudal interrelationships can be confusing, stylistic differences across the various media of Islamic art often reflect regional modes that developed under the patronage of local dynastic potentates. Works from a variety of courts included in the exhibition range from precious gold and rock crystal pieces produced for the Fatimids in the tenth to twelfth centuries, to portraits of Ottoman sultans and Qajar shahs made two hundred years ago. Through coins and objects inscribed with the names and titles of the king or caliph, rulers ensured their public presence in their realms. Luxury items produced for kings and their courtiers, by contrast, existed within the rarified world of the court, simply for the pleasure of their owners.

This exhibition contains many works of art that represent the preoccupations of medieval and early modern Islamic courts. Because of the paramount importance of the written word in Islam, princes and ‘men of the pen’ were trained to read and write. Writing beautifully was a skill that required training, and
historical texts describe the education of princes by leading calligraphers. As a result, not only were examples of calligraphy produced and collected by princes, but also richly decorated pen cases, inkwells, knives for cutting pen nibs and other accoutrements of the scribe’s studio were created for wealthy calligraphers.

While theology was studied by all educated Muslims, ethics, science and mathematics were also important subjects which were encouraged at the most enlightened courts. Arab and Persian mathematicians not only translated treatises on their subject from Greek and Latin, but they were also responsible for extremely important advances of their own, especially during the eighth to the eleventh centuries. Likewise, Muslim scientists translated Greek and Latin scientific texts on medicine, botany, and astronomy and significantly added to the literature on these subjects well into the fifteenth century. With the introduction and spread of the use of paper, the production of books of all sorts increased enormously from the eleventh century onwards. Poetry, books of fables, collected biographies, histories, and cosmographies filled the libraries of princes and scholars. Another aspect of life within the palace walls was the enjoyment of music. In Iran, from the sixteenth century on, rooms were constructed with specially shaped niches on the walls to provide improved acoustics. Here concerts of singers accompanied by stringed instruments would entertain the master of the house and his coterie.

In addition to reading, writing, and statesmanship, princes at Islamic courts were expected to be accomplished horsemen and hunters. These skills are celebrated in manuscript illustrations, pottery and metalwork. Finely ornamented arms and armour would have been used for sport as well as battle. Polo enjoyed popularity in Iran and Central Asia, while falconry was practised across the Islamic world. Proficiency at riding horses was necessary not just for the sporting pleasure of the prince; it was crucial so that he could lead his armies in battle. Although kings did not enter the fray every time they went to war against their enemies, their presence could be intimidating and make the difference between victory and defeat.

In times of peace and prosperity rulers in the Islamic world used their wealth to commission monuments such as mosques, mausoleums, palaces, religious colleges, and hospitals. They also amassed collections of luxurious items including gold objects, silks, carpets, Chinese porcelains, and rare and precious substances such as the bezoar stone, extracted from the stomachs of goats and antelopes and thought to be an antidote to poison. Lavish gifts were exchanged between courts and later rulers corresponded with one another about gems and cures. They encouraged their agents to look out for rare substances on behalf of their royal allies. Unfortunately, political turbulence led to the dispersal or destruction of royal collections. Gold and silver objects were melted down, delicate textiles disintegrated, ceramics and glass shattered. Yet, as this exhibition demonstrates, enough of the rarities of Islamic art remain to validate the historical descriptions of the magnificence of, for example, the Abbasid, Fatimid, Safavid and Mughal courts. While the medieval and early modern courts of the Islamic world are remote from the present day in many ways, their treasures can still inspire wonder and fascination, much as they would have done when they were first produced.
The Word of God
Word of God
AS THE WORD OF GOD REVEALED to the Prophet Muhammad, the verses of the Qur’an are canonical and cannot be changed. Because of the centrality of the Qur’an to the religion of Islam, copying all or some of its verses in any medium is considered a pious act.

Over time a wide variety of styles of writing Arabic script developed, but not all of these were considered appropriate for copying Qur’ans. Qur’an manuscripts from the first two centuries of Islam were written on parchment in an angular style called Kufic after the Iraqi city of Kufa, an early Muslim capital.

Recent research suggests that the horizontal-format Kufic Qur’ans (cat. nos. 1-3) were used for recitation in mosques, a practice that probably originated in Iraq, while large vertical-format Kufic Qur’ans would have been placed in cradles (kuris) on display in mosques, possibly in the Hijaz, the area around Mecca in Arabia. If this supposition is correct, the evidence for production of horizontal-format Qur’ans in ninth-century North Africa demonstrates the widespread need for such volumes for recitation purposes.

In the tenth century variants of the early squared letter forms began to appear in Qur’an manuscripts from the Maghreb, the western edge of the Islamic world, as well as examples from Iran. A distinctive script developed in North Africa (cat. no. 4) which features nearly circular letter terminals below the line. Rounded script was not new but the application of this style to Qur’ans seems to have begun in Iran and marks a major innovation. Thanks to a secretary in the administration of the Abbasid government called Ibn Muqla, a system of proportions based on the rhombic dot was devised. Ibn Muqla is also credited with the invention of six cursive scripts, thuluth, naskh, rihan, muhaqqaq, tauqi and riqa, which range from monumental to small, and fulfilled different calligraphic purposes. Additionally, regional styles of writing developed. When pages of Qur’ans from different centuries and production centres are exhibited together, the remarkable stylistic variety of Arabic writing becomes evident.

Thanks to the replacement of paper for parchment from the tenth century on, Qur’an production expanded exponentially across the Muslim world. As a result many Qur’ans have survived from the last millennium and we are thus aware of the range of purposes for which these manuscripts were produced. Some very large Qur’ans, written on sheets of paper glued together, would have come from manuscripts intended for display in royal mosques. By contrast, more conventionally shaped Qur’ans may have been for personal use in a domestic setting (cat. nos. 10, 13, 14). Tiny Qur’ans that fit into metal cases would have been worn as amulets and Qur’an scrolls would have been equally portable.

One of the striking features of Qur’ans of all periods is the decorative illumination that appears at the beginning of the manuscript, around chapter (sura) headings, and to mark
the fifth and tenth verses within the chapters. Consisting of foliate, floral and geometric motifs, illuminated ornament also varied by period and region. Although gold decoration appears often in early horizontal-format Qur’ans, lapis lazuli blue was combined with gold by the beginning of the eleventh century. In Mamluk Egypt and Syria, Ottoman Turkey, and Timurid and Safavid Iran, lavishly illuminated Qur’ans, sometimes in thirty volumes, were compiled for the rulers and their mosques and madrasas. Qur’ans were also copied on tinted paper, from the ninth or tenth century onward. One of the earliest, most famous examples of this type (cat. no. 2), with gold writing on a blue parchment ground, was produced in ninth-century North Africa.

Great artistic skill has also been lavished on the bindings that enclose and protect Qur’ans. Made of leather and from the seventeenth century on in Iran and India, lacquer, these bindings often have Qur’anic verses stamped on the leather exterior and gilded filigree decoration laid over coloured paper on the interior surface. Because of the Islamic prohibition against anthropomorphic or zoomorphic imagery in a religious context, the decoration of such bindings is limited to the floral, epigraphic and geometric.

In architecture Qur’anic inscriptions were carved into stone panels in the form of bands running around the interior or exterior of mosques and other religious edifices. Tile panels and walls of glazed and unglazed bricks also feature Qur’anic verses. The analysis of the choice of Qur’anic verses on specific buildings can lead to a better understanding of the patron’s religious or political preoccupations.2 The large number of tiles from the Il-Khanid period in Iran (13th-14th century), the result of refurbishment and new building after the destruction of the Mongol invasions, indicate a new taste for inscriptions in relief used for mihrabs (prayer niches), tomb markers and wall decoration.

Finally, the power of the Qur’an is so great that its verses are considered capable of protecting people from evil. Thus, amulets and undershirts were inscribed with Qur’anic verses to save the wearer from harm. Even on humble surfaces, a shell (cat. 16) or a leaf (cat. 18), the word of God was lovingly written, an enduring act of devotion and artistic virtuosity. As if to remind Muslims that God is ubiquitous and all-powerful, the Qur’an in all its forms is a constant presence throughout the Islamic world.

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2 Grabar 1959, Necipoglu 2005, p. 200 and ss.
As with the pages of the celebrated “Blue Qur’an” (see cat. no. 2), the execution of this Qur’an folio in gold kufic script on vellum involved the lengthy and expensive process called chrysography (see Fraser and Kwiatkowski 2005, p. 30). The letters were written in "liquid glue", filled in with a careful application of ground gold suspended in a solution, and finally outlined with pale brown ink using a thin-nibbed stylus. The vocalisations used to read and recite the text have been applied in the form of dots painted in red, blue and green. An eight-petalled rosette framing the letter kāf ("k") signals the end of a group of ten verses in the abjad system, found also in other kufic Qur’ans. Each letter of the Arabic alphabet is assigned a numerical value to signal the completion of a particular verse in a chapter — in this case, kāf, which equals 20, marks the end of the twentieth verse of Sura Qāf. Two other leaves from this Qur’an manuscript are housed in the National Library, Tunis. | AF LA
This extraordinary bifolium of gold kufic calligraphy on indigo-dyed parchment comes from the celebrated “Blue Qur’an,” one of the most lavish Qur’an manuscripts ever created. Careful attention to detail was devoted to every aspect of the manuscript, including the complex and costly technique of chrysography, as described in cat. no. 1. Silver rosettes (now oxidized) were also used to indicate the divisions between the verses. The virtual simplicity of decoration and illumination using the finest materials—indigo-dyed parchment, silver, and gold—combined with the angular kufic script results in an overwhelming effect on the viewer regardless of his or her level of literacy.

Although the two folios are attached, they do not represent sequential pages in the manuscript. Fifteen lines of text fill each page in a dense, angular kufic script typical of manuscripts attributed to the tenth century (Déroche, 1983, p. 42); no diacritical marks are used to indicate vowels. The calligrapher also inserted cæsurae within the words in order to place isolated letters at the beginning of the line as much as possible, creating a column effect. The rhythm of the script is made even more striking by the reduction of illuminating elements to a minimum: in the margin of the left folio, an almost obliterated silver rosette marks each group of twenty verses.

Differing views exist as to the exact origins of this manuscript. One scholar has relied on palaeographical and historical evidence to suggest that it was created for the Fatimids, who ruled North Africa from Qayrawan during the first half of the tenth century (Bloom 1986, pp. 59–65; Bloom 1989, pp. 95–99; Bloom 2007, pp. 42–44). Another, however, notes that the alphanumeric notation system (abjad), here apparent in the form of letters appearing in medallions at the end of each verse, was subsequently reserved only for the western Islamic world (Stanley 1995, pp. 7–15). The unusual colour scheme may have been inspired by Byzantine manuscripts or documents, some of which are written in silver and gold on parchment dyed blue or purple. The blue and gold decoration of the mihrab at the Great Mosque of Cordoba may also bear some relation to the similar decoration used for the Blue Qur’an.

A section of the manuscript is currently housed in the National Institute of Art and Archaeology in Tunis and detached leaves or fragments are in the National Library, Tunis, the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and in other public and private collections.
The Qur’an to which this folio once belonged has often been given a Maghribi attribution because sections of the manuscript were purportedly discovered in the mosque at Qayrawan, Tunisia. However, as the abjad system (by which Arabic letters are used for verse counts) in this Qu’ran has been identified as “eastern,” it is possible that the manuscript was produced in more eastern Islamic lands, perhaps in the greater Iranian world. As with cat. nos. 1 and 2, no expense was spared in the preparation of this Qur’an, which was also calligraphed in gold ink using the technique of chrysography. At only five lines of fine kufic script per page, the cost of production would have been high, as its completion would have required a proportionately greater amount of vellum, ink, colours, and gold. Like the folio in cat. no. 1, vocalisations appear in the form of red, blue, and green dots. Singular verses are divided by gold rosettes, while every tenth verse receives an abjad letter, echoed in the margin within a larger medallion containing the verse count in gold (in this case, thalathün for “thirtieth”). Other leaves and sections from the same Qur’an can be found in various collections, including the Bibliothèque Nationale, Tunis; the National Institute of Archaeology, Tunis; the Beit al-Quran, Bahrain; and the Nasser D. Khalili collection, London. | L A
With only three grand lines of elegant and carefully attenuated script per page, the Qur'an to which this folio originally belonged was surely a luxury commission produced at enormous expense. The present leaf relates to folios from two known dispersed manuscripts located in public and private collections, including the National Library, Tunis, Museum of Islamic Arts, Qayrawan, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, and the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London. Brown ink was used to calligraph the text against a background of parchment, red to indicate vowels, and gold to illuminate the large medallions and to mark verse endings. The characteristic features shared by all of the folios in the codex include a type of kufic script notable for its dominant verticals such as the lām-alif combination, countered by an exaggerated width in the strokes of some letters. In the terminal nūn (‘n’) letters, for instance, the calligrapher has changed the angle of his nib at the mid-point of the round letter, creating an aesthetically pleasing, symmetrical nūn that maximises the width of the stroke.

It is difficult to date and identify the geographical origins of kufic-script Qur'ans. A three-line Qur'an folio very similar to this one has been attributed to the first half of the tenth century somewhere between Qayrawan and Damascus (see Fraser and Kwiatkowski 2006, pp. 52–57; Déroche 1992, pp. 42 and 109).
This folio is from a dispersed copy of the so-called "Qarmathian Qur'an," one of the most elaborate large-scale Qur'an manuscripts produced between the eleventh and early thirteenth centuries. Each page contains four lines of a broken angular cursive script, characterised by towering verticals anchored to a strict horizontal baseline with dramatic modulation between thin and thick strokes. The decoration of each folio is appropriately extravagant. The script is complemented by a detailed background of stylized palmette scrolls in reserve white on a ground of blue curls. These motifs recall contemporary ceramics and metalwork. Lavish gold braided borders frame the text and two half-medallions project into the right margin. The faded gold text panel on the right may have indicated the number of verses in the sura, or where it was revealed, according to Sheila Blair, who also remarks that such extensive decoration executed on an estimated total of 4,500 pages must have been an extraordinarily time-consuming enterprise (see Blair 2006, p. 198).
Qur’an production from the eleventh century onwards was marked by a change in the selection of script styles. One of the scripts that gradually replaced the kufic of earlier Qur’ans as the predominant style was the rectilinear but more monumental muhaqqiq featured on this folio. The earliest known Qur’an written in this script is dated 1160 and can be found in the National Library, Cairo (MS. 144; see Lings and Safadi 1976, cat. no. 60). Three lines of text fill the present page; they are enclosed in a ruled margin outlined in red with multi-petalled rosette extensions rendered in gold, pale green, red, and black and framed in turn within stylised palmettes and half-palmettes. A gold rosette also marks the division between the thirty-third and thirty-fourth verses of al-Rūm, the thirtieth chapter of the Qur’an. This folio was formerly in the collection of Krikor and Adrienne Minassian in New York. | L.A
In the western Islamic world, a distinct round style of script with generous, sweeping curves of descending letters had developed by the mid-tenth century (Déroche 1999, pp. 239–41; Blair 2006, p. 223). Known as maghribi, this script was employed in Al-Andalus and the Maghrib, modern-day Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Maghribi-script Qur’ans are usually written in brown or black ink with elaborate illumination in gold. Some, like this one, are on tinted peach-pink paper believed to have been produced in Jativa, site of the earliest documented paper mill in Spain (Fraser and Kwiatkowski 2006, p. 64). The systems used for vocalisation, pointing, and orthography are also peculiar to maghribi script. This Qur’an folio is an elegant example of how the script had evolved by the early thirteenth century. | AF
Folio from a Mamluk Qur’an

Egypt, Mamluk, circa 1450
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
41.3 x 32.1 cm
AKM 00243
Published: AKTC 2008a, pp. 52–53 (no. 6); AKTC 2009a, p. 39; AKTC 2009b, p. 39

Qur’ans decorated with illumination and gilding are known to have existed as early as the tenth century, their embellishment at first limited to marking a sura or chapter, as well as the headings and ends of ayas, or verses. On the present folio, the al-Naml is introduced in an elegant white script, outlined in black and placed within a gilded rectangular frame. The frame contains a gold background and a series of lobed cartouches painted in red and blue and decorated with gilded vine scrolls and rosettes. Twelve-petalled rosettes outlined in black and illuminated with gold petals and red dots indicate the end of each verse.

The production of such lavish manuscripts required a team of calligraphers, artists, illuminators, and gilders, all contributing to a finished product that often represented the generosity and wealth of the patron who had commissioned it.

While the patron of the codex to which this page belonged is unknown, the manuscript itself can be attributed to Egypt based on stylistic grounds. Its monumental muhaqqaq script is typical of Qur’ans produced under the Mamluks (1250–1517) in the second half of the fifteenth century; earlier manuscripts would have avoided this script as it was also associated with the Qur’ans of the Ilkhanids (1256–1353), the Mamluks’ former rivals in Iran.)
This folio belongs to one of a very few Qur'an manuscripts that survive from the period between Timur's invasion of northern India in 1398–99 and the founding of the Mughal dynasty in 1526. It has been a challenge to understand the general development of the arts of the book in this region during the fifteenth century due to the diversity of artistic styles corresponding to the cultural centres of independent Muslim sultanates. Manuscript production seemed to follow the Timurid tradition in Iran and Central Asia, with one distinguishing feature: the use of the bihari script, as shown here. A strange mutation of naskh script with obscure origins, bihari appears only in manuscripts predating the Mughals (James 1992b, p. 102). It is characterized by an exaggeration of the sublinear letter forms through a thickening of the letter’s curves and a sharpening of its end points.

On the present page, thirteen lines have been calligraphed in gold, red, and black, with black diacritical marks and interlinear Persian translations in red nastalig script. The first of every three lines is alternately executed in gold or red ink, outlined in black, followed by two lines of black script. The gilded and coloured lines do not include text that varies in significance from the following lines in black, but the formula creates a visual rhythm that brings a sense of order to a somewhat overpacked page of text. Gold circular pendants separate singular verses and the letter ‘ayn, standing for ‘asharah (ten) to mark a group of ten verses, appears in the left margin, sandwiched vertically by glosses in black Persian nastalig. A clearly visible mistake in the six and seventh lines—additional words that do not appear in the Qur’anic verses have been circled and crossed out after it was too late—suggests that this particular Qur’an was not executed by a scribe of the highest calibre. | LA

One of the folios appearing at the end of this Qur’an manuscript includes the name of a copyist, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Yusufi, and the date the copy was completed (1036 H / 1626 CE). The Qur’an’s illumination, which might be later than the script, suggests an attribution to Mauritania in the 18th century. Other features, such as the characteristic Saharan-Maghribi (or Sudani) script style and a format recalling the square shape of twelfth-century Maghribi manuscripts in a revivalist manner (Baya-ni, Contadini, and Stanley 1999, p. 43), likewise support a Northwest African provenance | LA
11

Manuscript of an Ottoman Qur'an

Ottoman Turkey, circa 1500

Copied by Shaykh Hamdallah b. Mustafa

Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper

39.2 x 26.5 cm

Text: Sura al-Baqara (The Cow), 1:1–17

This manuscript is one of the greatest early Ottoman Qur'ans. The colophon in Ottoman Turkish on folio 278r identifies the scribe as Shaykh Hamdallah ibn Mustafa. Although the patron of the manuscript is not named, it may have been Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512). Shaykh Hamdallah (d. 1520) was one of the most celebrated Ottoman calligraphers. He revised the six canonical scripts of Yaqut and influenced generations of Ottoman calligraphers. Nearly fifty Qur'ans and numerous prayer books and single sheets of religious texts are credited to his hand.

A native of Amasya, Shaykh Hamdallah taught the future Ottoman sultan Bayezid II calligraphy while the latter was governor there. Thus began a lifelong relationship that continued throughout the entire reign of Bayezid II. The complete opening chapter of the Qur'an appears on this elaborate frontispiece in naskh script, a specialty of Shaykh Hamdallah and a standard script for Ottoman Qur'ans. The elongated letter sin ("s") in the bismillah and the far-reaching niš ("n") that wraps under the gold rounded verse markers add rhythm to the calligraphy and are hallmarks of Shaykh Hamdallah’s style. | AF

12

Manuscript of a Safavid Qur'an

Copy by Abdallah Shirazi

Iran, Qazvin or Mashhad, Safavid, circa 1550–65

Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper

39.2 x 26.5 cm

Text: Sura al-Baqara (The Cow), 1:1–7

This manuscript is similar to Qur'ans produced in workshops of Shiraz in the sixteenth century, although it was probably not done in that city. Such Qur'ans stand out for their rich illuminations, of which the best compositions are reserved for the first and last pages of the volume. Thus, this manuscript does not start directly with the Qur'anic text, but is preceded by two pages, each decorated with an inscribed rosette. The following double page carries the first sura, al-Fatiha, which can be read on two polobyate mandorlas in the centre of two completely illuminated double pages. The last pages of the volume were also subject to special treatment. These are two additional texts; a final prayer (duʿāʾ khatn) to be recited upon completion of the reading of the Holy Book, and a Fālnāma, an abridged bibilomancy manual which indicates the divinatory values of the letters of the Arabic alphabet (Makariou 2007, p. 139, n. 64). More modestly, an illuminated frontispiece lies above the first few verses of sura 2 (al-Baqara), the last sura (al-Nās), and sura 18 (al-Kahf), which is highlighted because it marks the beginning of the second half of the Qur'anic text.

The double page that is reproduced here corresponds to the beginning of the al-Baqara sura, the second and longest sura in the Qur'an. The frontispiece (sarlaw) consists of a rectangular cartouche, surmounted by four identical folrets, with alternating dark blue and gold backgrounds scattered with fine flowery foliage. At the centre of the cartouche, a polobyate medallion encircles the title of the sura, written in rigā’ in white ink on a gold background. The text of the sura starts beneath this rich frontispiece and runs along in visual discontinuity; the text is divided into panels of unequal width, alternating between two writing styles, different inks and colour backgrounds. Three then five lines of naskh are etched on a white scalloped edge demarcated by a gold background decorated with fine flowery foliage. These alternate with a longer line in muhaqqaq copied in white ink against a blue background outlined in red, or against a gold background outlined in blue. Rectangular cartouches covered with flowery foliage are on either side of the lines in naskh. This visual discontinuity is purely aesthetic and does not signify, for example, the transition from one verse to the next. If the end of a verse occurs mid-line, this is only indicated on this page by a slight space between the words (e.g., the eighth and ninth lines). Outside the written surfaces, medallions punctuate the margins every five verses (with blue rosettes) and ten verses (with gold rosettes).

In the margins, there is a notation in black ink; this is the Arabic expression waqafa which recalls the transformation of this manuscript into an alienable good (waqf) (ibid., n. 65). This mark is explained in the founding text which follows the Fālnāma and which declares that this manuscript was a gift from the Ottoman sultan Selim II (r. 1566–1574) to the mosque he founded in Edirne - the Selimiye. It is possible that this luxurious manuscript was one of a number of diplomatic gifts, presented in 1568 by the Safavid sovereign Shah Tahmasp to Selim II to mark the renewal of the peace treaty of Amasya, signed in 1555 with Selim II’s father, Süleyman the Magnificent (ibid., n. 66).

As with many sixteenth century Qur’ans, we do not know the date of this manuscript’s copy, but the calligrapher, or more likely the illuminator, Abdallah Shirazi, signed his name at the end of the last sura. Two miniaturists bearing this name are identifiable: the first worked in the scriptorium of Shah Tahmasp in Qazvin around 1550–1560 and died in this same city in 1574 (ibid., n. 67); the second, who is better known, worked in the scriptorium of the Safavid prince and governor of Mashhad, Sultan Ibrahim Mirza (1540–1587) in Qazvin. He died in Mashhad at an unknown date while attached to the service of the mausoleum of Imam Riza and of the tomb of his deceased protector. He contributed notably to the completion of the famous Haft Awaran created for Ibrahim Mirza and a Dīvān for this same prince housed at the Aga Khan Museum. Only a close and careful analysis of the illuminations of these manuscripts and their respective signatures could confirm that the decoration of the Qur’an and of these manuscripts have been done by one and the same person (ibid., n. 68). Whether it was by the first Abdallah Shirazi or the second, this sumptuous Qur’an could have been copied and illuminated in the royal and princely workshops of Qazvin or Mashhad. | CM
Unlike the embracing and open-minded attitudes of his predecessors toward the diverse religions practiced in the Indian sub-continent, the Mughal emperor Awrangzeb’s reign (1658–1707) was characterised by a strict and severe religious policy that showed little tolerance for opposing beliefs. It should come as no surprise, then, that the heyday of illustrated manuscript and album production enjoyed under the emperors Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), and Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658) came to an end under his rule, especially in light of Awrangzeb’s embrace of Muslim orthodoxy, which exercised a more stern and restrictive attitude towards figural representation. On the other hand, Awrangzeb appears to have shown a greater interest in Qur’an production, especially those executed in naskh script, before he even ascended the throne (Bayani, Contadini, and Stanley 1999, p. 172).

The present manuscript comprises approximately 460 leaves and contains thirteen lines per page, with the majority of text copied in naskh and the first, middle, and last lines written in the more monumental muḥaqqaq. The margins are ruled in black ink and gold and chapter headings are highlighted in gold muḥaqqaq script, while small, multi-petalled and gilded rosettes mark verse divisions. The two pages shown here constitute the middle pair of three sets of illuminated double-pages appearing in the manuscript. Similar to other Qur’ans produced in the later Mughal period, text areas are divided into bands of varied widths, including panels with gilded and inscribed cartouches outlined in red against a blue background filled with small red and white flowers. The bands of text are consolidated within a series of colourful and gilded ruled and floriated narrow frames, enclosed within a larger border containing polychrome vignettes and lotus blossoms among the smaller red and white flowers. This pattern, along with the green-and-gold outlined “hasp” extending from the frame on each side of the double-page composition, is another design typical of seventeenth-century Indian manuscripts; it is repeated in panels flanking each of the smaller text boxes containing black naskh script. A gold, floriated scroll pattern fills the margins, surrounding the overall illuminated composition, its rhythm broken at one point by the gilded and polychrome-bordered cartouche appearing on the right margin of the right-hand page.

Persian manuscripts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries appear to have been a great source of inspiration for Qur’an illumination in seventeenth-century India, this manuscript however being an exception (ibid., pp. 174, 194–200), although the combination of small and large scripts on one page is reminiscent of Qur’ans produced in Shiraz, Iran, in the sixteenth century.

A colophon provides information about the scribe, a certain Muhammad Fazil who identifies himself as a shāgird, or pupil, of Mulla al-Yās, along with the manuscript’s completion date, Jumada al-Awla 1093 H / May–June 1682 CE.
Thanks to the political stability brought about by the first Qajar ruler, Muhammad Khan, in 1785, the early Qajar period witnessed a cultural revival lasting over a century, demonstrated in particular by large-scale architectural and artistic patronage under the reigns of Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834) and his grandson, Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96) (Diba 1998, p. 169). The production of illustrated manuscripts dwindled as the taste for life-size painting rapidly increased, never to recover from this decline (Diba 1998, pp. 169–70). As this Qur’an suggests, however, the production of illustrated and illuminated manuscripts did not come to a complete end. The manuscript includes the entire text of the Qur’an, copied in Arabic in a combination of naskh and thuluth scripts. On the double-page illuminated frontispiece shown here, verses from the first chapter and part of the second are highlighted by frames created with gilded cloud forms while interlinear Persian translations appear in the narrower bands in a dark pink nastaliq. Central cartouches above the text frame on each page provide the name and number of verses contained in each chapter in red naskh script (seven for al-Fatiha and 286 for al-Baqara). A ruled pink lozenge scroll frames the text and is surrounded by polychrome gilded illumination composed of projecting polychrome half-medallions filled with heart-shaped knots and orange, pink, and blue floral rosettes set against a blue background. The colophon on folio 302r identifies “the humble scribe,” ‘Abd al-Mudhnab al-Khati al-Jani ‘Abdallah and gives the date of 1233 H / 1817–18 CE, but it appears that another colophon was added on the verso of the same folio, with a later date. | LA
15

Manuscript of a Sulawesi Qur’an

Scribe: Isma’il ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Jawi of Makassar
Indonesia, Sulawesi Island, Layakak (probably Laikang), dated 25 Ramadan 1219 H / 28 December 1804 CE
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on European paper, leather binding
Each folio 35.5 x 20 cm
Text: al-Kahf (The Cave), 18:1–6
AKM 00488
Published: AKTC 2008b, no. 28 (different folios illustrated); AKTC 2009a, p. 46; AKTC 2009b, p. 46

Although the spread of Islam reached the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia as early as the thirteenth century, the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Qur’an from the region date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The present example has been identified as one of only three core exemplars in a group of eighteen Qur’ans illuminated in the “Sulawesi geometric style”; the other fifteen represent localised variations. They are characterized by a few distinct features, including double illuminated frames formed from geometric shapes and appearing on the manuscript’s initial and ultimate bifolia as well as by a bold and dark colour palette.

The Aga Khan Museum’s Qur’an is one of the most impressive of this group in size, quality, and condition; it survives in its complete form and contains a full colophon identifying its scribe and attesting to a production in south Sulawesi. It was written in thuluth script with explicationary glosses added in naskh. The sura heading appears at the top of the right-hand page in an oval cartouche painted in black, while the number of verses in the chapter (110) is given in the matching cartouche at the bottom of the same page. The cartouches on the opposite page provide the numbers of verses (110) and words (1877) in the sura, as well as the number of letters (6360) in the chapter and its order of revelation to the Prophet (67th), respectively. Some of the commentators who have added explanations have been identified in the margin on the left-hand page.

The extraordinary amount of artistic variation among these manuscripts and the fact that they reflect far-flung provenances and locations has led some scholars to propose the existence of a diasporic artistic idiom rather than one restricted to south Sulawesi. | LA
Mother-of-pearl shell
India, Iran, or Turkey, 18th century

Maximum diameter 14.5 cm

AKM 00665

Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 47 (no. 17); Makariou 2007, pp. 132–33 (no. 46); AKTC 2008a, pp. 20 and 64–65 (no. 12); AKTC 2009a, p. 47; AKTC 2009b, p. 47

Using the natural shape of this shell and its lustrous mother-of-pearl lining, the artist has created a pleasing decorative programme of eight concentric circles engraved with verses from the Qur'an. The delicate floral vinoescrolls in the widest circle recall Deccani painting as well as the spiral scrollwork backgrounds of Ottoman sultans' tuğras (monograms, tuğra in modern Turkish) and the cobalt blue decoration of early sixteenth-century Ottoman ceramics. The style of nasta’liq script, however, would suggest an Indian or Iranian hand. Gujarat was a major centre of manufacture of mother-of-pearl and perhaps this object was made for export to Turkey. No matter where it was produced, the quality of skill demonstrated on this object suggests that it was made for a person of high standing.

It is difficult to find an equivalent object that has been written about or even discovered. A shell of 14.3 cm in diameter bearing Qur'anic inscriptions and described as being Iranian, was sold recently, but seems to have later origins (19th century). The structure of the decoration on the inside is reminiscent of therapeutic magical cups. It consists of double concentric circles which define the areas for "magical writing", engraved on marked lines in the middle circle. A motif with splayed beams starts in the third circular band from the bottom of the object and is recalled in the seventh band, "in sun-like fashion", revealing the medallions on which the texts are engraved. Finally the eighth band bears concentric circles and lines of "magical writing". Liquid can be poured into the shell's concave space, thereby coming into contact with all the inscriptions and elements inside. Depending on the different known uses of these cups, the patient can drink the liquid, pour it over his head, spray himself with it or use it to massage parts of the body.

Apart from the "magical writings" in the middle circle, there is a Shiite supplication starting with "qul" ("dis"), followed by "yā 'Ali", repeated three times, on the second circular band. Within the medallions of the next, third, circular band is to be found a series of extracts from the Qur'an, each time introduced by the expression bismillāh, which signals a change of sura. Thus, starting with the medallion which we will number 1, since it is the only one with the expression bismillāh in the first line, moving clockwise around to medallion 11, we can find suras al-Kāfirūn (The Unbelievers), 109, verses 1–6; al-Tawhīd (Pure Worship), 112, verses 1–4; al-Falaq (The Dawn), 113, verses 1–5; al-Nās (Mankind), 114, verses 1–6; al-Qalam (The Pen), 68, verses 51–52, the last two of the sura; finally, al-Isrā (The Night Journey), 17, verse 81. Suras 109, 112, 113 and 114 are special in that they all start with "qul" and appear on the object in full. In the fourth, sixth and eighth circular bands, the inscriptions are engraved on lines radiating from the centre. Whereas, on the one hand, the inscription in nasta’liq of the fifth circular band, verse 31 of sura Āl ‘Imrān (The Family of ‘Imrān), 3, once again beginning with "qul", is circular; on the other hand, the texts of the seventh circular band are again to be found engraved on the medallions. Among the latter, we find the beginning of sura 48, al-Fatih (Victory).

Suras 109, 112, 113 and 114, as well as sura 17, verse 81, the beginning of sura 48 and sura 68, 51-52 appear in therapeutic magical cups, and often, as well, the first four suras. Furthermore, the same verses of suras 48, 58 and 112 appear in the shell that was recently sold.
A beautiful frame of rubies surrounds the circumference of this oval-shaped pendant, which was meant to be worn, as suggested by three loops added at its top for suspension. After the invocation of the shahāda (“there is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger”), which appears in the centre, the entirety of the thirty-sixth chapter of the Qur’an, generally reserved for recitation during challenging or difficult times (such as hunger, adversity, illness, or impending death) has been densely inscribed onto the surface. The chapter begins on the outer border and is followed by text written in pairs of panels framing the rectangle, continuing in this manner towards the centre of the pendant. The choice of Sura Yā Sin emphasizes the talismanic nature of this object, which would have been used to protect its wearer from harm. The final lines of text suggest the pendant was probably made for a Shia Muslim. They include two lines from a well-known Arabic prayer invoking the help and protection of the Prophet Muhammad and his cousin and son-in-law, ‘Ali, followed by the ninety-nine names of God, and ending with the names of Muhammad, ‘Ali, and ‘Ali’s sons, Hasan and Husayn. | LA
Sweet chestnut leaf with calligraphy
Ottoman Turkey, 19th century
Sweet chestnut leaf
28 x 13.5 cm
Text: Sura al-Isra' (The Night Journey), 17:80
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 49 (no. 20); AKTC 2007b, p. 44 (no. 20); Makariou 2007, pp. 134–35 (no. 47); AKTC 2008a, p. 70 (no. 15); AKTC 2009a, p. 49; AKTC 2009b, p. 49

Qur’an verses were applied to objects using an astonishingly wide variety of techniques.

One of the most beautiful and unusual examples is the gilded leaf, popular in nineteenth-century Ottoman Turkey. This example features a verse from al-Isra’ (The Night Journey, 17:80): ‘And say, ‘Lord grant me a good entrance and a goodly exit, and sustain me with Your power.” The calligrapher has made masterful use of his elegant thuluth mumakkab script to create a calligraphic composition resembling a boat filled with a crew, their long oars dipping into the water that is the skeleton of the leaf. Related visually to Ottoman cut-out work or découpage, the technique for leaf gilding was actually quite distinct. The inscription was either written or stencilled and sealed on both sides with a wax barrier. The leaf would be soaked in an alkaline solution long enough to yield only its skeleton and the inscription. The virtuosity of the present example is further highlighted since its foundation is a sweet, or Spanish, chestnut leaf (Castanea sativa), a leaf more fragile than many of those employed for such compositions. | AF
Two calligraphic lustre pottery tiles
Iran, probably Kashan, early 14th century
Stonepaste, painted in lustre, blue, brown and turquoise on an opaque white glaze
Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 172–73; Falk 1985, p. 235 (no. 237); AKTC 2007a, p. 61 (no. 21); AKTC 2007b, p. 46 (no. 21); Makariou 2007, p. 129 (no. 40); AKTC 2009a, p. 50; AKTC 2009b, p. 50

19
175 x 38.1 cm
AKM 00796
Kindly lent by Princess Catherine Aga Khan
Text:
(Top) Sura al-Rahman (The Beneficent), 55: 14-19
(Centre) Sura al-Yumna (Friday) 62: 8
(Bottom) Sura Sabal (Saba) 34: 2-3

20
18.6 x 43 cm
AKM 00565
(Top) Sura al-Rahman (The Beneficent), 55: 32-35
(Centre) Sura al-Yumna (Friday) 62: 8
(Bottom) Sura Sabal (Saba) 34: 7-9

These two tiles were part of the same frieze, but not quite contiguous. The central inscription stands in moulded relief with elegant thuluth writing, decorated in blue cobalt over a turquoise field of vine rolls, superimposed on small embossed white canes over a golden background. The top and bottom inscriptions, made in naskhi writing, appear on a raised section at the top and bottom part of the main decorative band.

Kashan is considered the most important centre of tile and ceramic production, but some of the glazed tiles might have been produced in other parts of Iran. These two objects are probably parts of a frieze decorating the walls and tombs of a Shia mausoleum. According to Sheila Blair, they were made to decorate the cenotaph of the Sufi master 'Abd al-Samad, in Natanz, Iran. Similar objects are kept in public collections and others have appeared on the market over the past years. Such lustre-glazed ceramic tiles were also used to decorate mihrabs, and cenotaphs.
Chinese ‘swatow’ dish

Coarsely potted and covered with a thick, crackled glaze, this dish belongs to a distinct group of porcelain, the so-called ‘Swatow wares’. Swatow is a Dutch mistranslation of Shantou, the port from which such ceramics were supposedly exported, although this port was actually not used until the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). Recent archaeological research by Chinese scholars has established that Swatow wares were produced in Zhangzhou prefecture between the mid sixteenth and mid seventeenth centuries for export to Europe, Japan and South East Asia. Dishes similar to this one appeared in Indonesia and are believed to have been commissioned by the powerful seventeenth-century Shia sultans of Aceh in northwest Sumatra, including Sultan Iskander Muda (1607–36) (Canepa 2006, no. 40). The inscriptions on this dish include invitations to Allah, verses from the Qur’an, including Sura al-Baqara (The Cow), al-Ikhlas (Fidelity) and al-Nas (The People), the Nad-e ‘Ali prayer and the word ‘Allah’ which is repeated along the cavetto of the dish. The inscriptions are talismanic, seeking protection and assistance for the owner. | AF
Carved beam with Qur’anic inscription
North Africa?, 10th–11th century
Wood
16.7 x 42.7 cm
Published: AKTC 2007a, pp. 52–53 (no. 23); AKTC 2007b, pp. 46–47 (no. 23); AKTC 2009a, p. 52; AKTC 2009b, p. 52

A rare, intact survival from the Umayyad period (756–1031), this long, carved wooden beam is a work of austere beauty. The foliated motifs do not seem to grow organically from the letters as they usually do in Fatimid (909–1171) objects; rather they act as added decoration. There are some exuberant moments, however, in the decorative use of letters. The word for God (Allah) is treated with special decorative significance the three times it is repeated in the inscription. The wooden beam, which would most likely have been fitted in a mosque, is inscribed with parts of the “Light Verse” from the Qur’an (Ayat al-Nūr, 24: 35–36):

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. And God strikes similitudes for men, and God has knowledge of everything. In houses God has allowed to be raised up and His name to be commemorated therein.

This famous verse from the Qur’an is often inscribed on mosque lamps, which thus become symbols of divine light. One can imagine the present wooden beam in a mosque, its monumental kufic inscription softly illuminated by a nearby hanging lamp, both objects symbolising the presence of God.
The growth of the ceramic industry in Iznik played a significant role in the codification of a distinctly Ottoman court aesthetic and ceramic technique (see cat. no. 99-103). Small square tiles produced in Iznik were transported to Istanbul to decorate numerous palaces and mosques in brilliant colours of blue, white, turquoise, green, and an astounding relief red. This frieze, formed from three separate tiles, might once have decorated part of a mosque. Its inscription, written in Arabic in a graceful naskh script, comes from the twelfth chapter of the Qur’an, and reads: “God is the best guardian and He is the most merciful of the merciful.” | LA
This unusual Qur'an represents the fusion of Persian and Indian art that flourished in eighteenth-century Mughal India. The text of the Qur'an is written in minute black naskh, termed ghubari, while red and black roundels indicate the start of each verse. In addition to chapter headings written in red thuluth, five large roundels contain the bismillah composed in black on gold and decorated with gold and polychrome illumination. According to the colophon, the scribe, Munshi ‘Abd Khani al-Qadiri, began this Qur’an on 3 Ramadan 1130 H / 31 July 1718 CE and completed it on 5 Ramadan 1132 H / 11 July 1720 CE. The challenges involved in writing on a painted cloth perhaps explain the amount of time it took to make. This Qur’an was presented to the governor of Allahabad, Amir ‘Abdallah. Although the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) designated Allahabad as one of his capitals in 1583, its importance in the eighteenth century derived from its strategic location at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers rather than from its former imperial status.
Pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*, plays an important role in Islam. The first two weeks of the Muslim calendar month, Dhu'l Hijja, are devoted to it. In the modern world the *hajj* is organised with great precision by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which sets quotas for pilgrims according to their country of origin. Before the age of modern transport, the *hajj* was expensive, arduous and time-consuming, especially for Muslims travelling from the fringes of the Islamic world, Spain and the Maghrib in the West and Central Asia and India in the East. Often *hajjis*, the pilgrims, performed the *hajj* in old age and many of them did not survive the journey. However, dying while performing the *hajj* was thought to ensure that the *hajji* would go to heaven.

Because of the vagaries of politics in the Islamic world, Muslims often did not have the freedom of movement and required documents to ensure safe passage to Mecca. While some of these were supplied by clerics at the point of departure, others in the form of diagrammatic pictures of the Ka'ba and the Great Mosque at Mecca were produced in the Hijaz to verify that pilgrims had performed the *hajj*. The desire to demonstrate that one had performed the *hajj* resulted in pilgrims returning from Mecca with plans of the Great Mosque (cat. no. 26) and other key sites visited, produced and sold in or near Mecca and in the production of Iznik tiles depicting the Ka'ba and the stations of the *hajj* (cat. no. 35). In Egypt, to this day, pilgrims paint scenes from the *hajj* on the exterior of their houses. Although Shia Muslims do perform the *hajj* to Mecca, they also travel to other shrine cities which are central to their beliefs. As a result the shrine of Imam 'Ali at Najaf and the shrine of Imam Husain at Karbala, both in Iraq, draw Shia communities from all parts of the world. In Iran, the Safavid shahs promoted the shrines of Fatimeh Ma'sumeh at Qum and Imam Riza at Mashhad as alternatives to Mecca in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when their Ottoman enemies controlled Mecca, Madina, and Jerusalem, the three holiest cities in the Muslim world.

In addition to the major Islamic shrines at Mecca, Madina and the tombs of the Shi'i Imams, smaller shrines developed around the graves of the children and descendants of the Shi'i Imams. Called *imamzadehs*, these centres were often lavishly decorated with tilework. Some of these shrines functioned as satellites to the great shrines, while others were important focal points for local worshippers.
**Pilgrim flask**
Greater Iran (Iraq or Iran) or Syria, 7th–8th century
Ceramic; earthenware, with carved decoration and painted in a green lead glaze
H. 19 cm
AKM 00540
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 58; AKTC 2009b, p. 58

While pilgrim flask shapes can be traced in the pre-Islamic Iranian world to as early as the second millennium BCE (Fehérvári 2000, p. 29), flasks covered in glaze date to the later pre-Islamic Parthian (2nd c. BCE – 3rd c. CE) and Sasanian (2nd–7th c. CE) periods. According to Oliver Watson, in the early Islamic period, three distinct trends of glazed pottery appear; including the continuation of pre-Islamic glazed ceramics; the invention of new glazed ceramics; and the addition of new glazes on previously unglazed wares (Watson 2004, pp. 161–62). The present bottle falls within the first category; it has an oval form, its surface decorated with impressed and carved patterns and featuring the figure of a bird with a fish-like tail. The existence of an Arabic inscription in Kufic, possibly a blessing, distinguishes the flask from its pre-Islamic models; the outline format of the calligraphy can be found on early ceramic dishes from this part of the world (see, for example, a dish in the David Collection, Copenhagen, published in von Folsach 2001, p. 129 [no. 99, inv. no. 50/1999]; and one in the British Museum, London, published in Pancaroğlu 2007, p. 29 [fig. 14, inv. no. OA1963.4-24.1]). The ceramic technique and bird motif, however, pre-date the Islamic period. Representations of birds in profile may have been inspired by Sasanian prototypes of different media (Auld 2005, p. 5) (see Harper 1978, pp. 63–65 [nos. 19, 21, 26, 49, and 77]). The shape of the present flask is rare among the variety of Islamic pilgrim flasks; the closest parallel found for it so far is also a one-handled vessel with a design of birds carved in relief; it is housed in a private collection in Japan. | LA

**Map of the Masjid al-Haram**
Probably the Hijaz (Arabia), 18th century
Ink, opaque watercolour, and silver on paper
85 x 61.5 cm
AKM 00539
Published: AKTC 2007a, pp. 62–63 (no. 31); AKTC 2007b, pp. 58–59 (no. 31); AKTC 2009a, pp. 58-59; AKTC 2009b, pp. 58-59

This map of the Great Mosque of Mecca (Masjid al-Haram) is part of the literary tradition surrounding the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj), including books of prayers, practical guides with schematic depictions, and pilgrimage certificates. Important locations within the precinct of the mosque are identified in Arabic in black naskh script. Similar maps are thought to have been produced for Indian pilgrims in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by draughtsmen working in the Hijaz. | AF
This prayer amulet is a rare example of an early Arabic printing technique known as *tarsh*. The paper displays eighteen lines of kufic text on the page shown here and further lines on the reverse, which may have been offset from the recto when the paper was folded inside its lead case, also a very rare survival. The text, which has been translated by Abdullah Ghouchani, contains excerpts from different *suras* or chapters of the Qur’an, including *al-An’ām* (6: The Cattle), *Āl-i ‘Imrān* (3: The Family of ‘Imrān), *al-Hijr* (15: The Rocky Tract), and *al-Baqara* (2: The Cow). The style of the kufic characters in the present example would indicate a Fatimid origin and no later, since this script was no longer used for manuscripts after the Fatimid period. The printing technique probably involved metal plates or woodblocks. The history of early printed amulets has yet to be written. What is known about them is based on a small group of extant printed amulets and literary sources. Bulliett cites poetry verses from tenth- and fourteenth-century authors referring to printed amulets from wooden blocks and cast tin plates (Bulliet 1987). | AF
**Polychrome qibla tile**

Ottoman Turkey, 17th century

Ceramic, fritware, polychrome underglaze painted

52 x 32 cm

Text: Sura Al-i- cImrān (The Family of 'Imrān), 3:96–97

Published: Falk 1985, p. 238 (no. 240); AKTC 2007a, p. 57 (no. 25); AKTC 2007b, p. 52 (no. 25); Makariou 2007, pp. 202–03 (no. 73); AKTC 2008a, pp. 80–81 (no. 20); AKTC 2009a, pp. 62-63; AKTC 2009b, pp. 62-63

This tile depicts the black-shrouded Ka'ba within the Great Mosque of Mecca (Masjid al-Haram), the site of the annual Muslim pilgrimage (hajj). It is inscribed with an excerpt from the Qur'an that reinforces the image: “The first House established for the people was that at Bakka [Mecca], a holy place and a guidance to all beings. Therein are clear signs—the Station of Abraham and whosoever enters it is in safety. It is the duty of all men towards God to make a pilgrimage to the House if they are able.” The artist uses multipoint perspective - both plan and elevation - to give a sense of the overall form of the site. As in pilgrimage guides, which were produced throughout the Islamic world, essential locations are labelled here for further clarity. Decorated with the characteristic Ottoman ceramic palette of turquoise, cobalt blue, green, and red on a white ground, tiles like this one were produced in the seventeenth century. They were often placed in an architectural setting such as a mosque’s south-facing wall to indicate the geographical direction of Mecca and one’s prayers. This plaque reflects the Ottoman interest in topography and the long-standing Islamic tradition of depicting the holy shrine of Mecca in various artistic media. | AF

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**Chao jin tu ji by Ma Fuchu**

China, 1861

Woodblock on rice paper

15 x 26.5 cm

AKM 00681

Published: AKTC 2007b, pp. 54–55 (no. 29); AKTC 2008a, pp. 84–85 (no. 22); AKTC 2008b, no. 26; AKTC 2009a, p. 62; AKTC 2009b, p. 62

The *Chao Jin Tu Ji* is the travelogue of Ma Fuchu (Ma Dexin, 1794–1874), considered the most eminent Chinese Hui scholar of Islam and Sino-Muslim philosophy during the Qing dynasty. Originally from the Yunnan, his travels covered distances from China to Mecca and Cairo as well as the Ottoman Empire; this book recounts his pilgrimage to Mecca from China. Ma Fuchu left China with a group of Muslim merchants, travelling overland and by riverboat to Rangoon, where he boarded a steamship to take him to the Arabian Peninsula. After performing the pilgrimage, he spent two years in Cairo, where he studied at Al-Azhar University, and thereafter travelled throughout the Ottoman Empire before returning to Yunnan. Ma Fuchu is also well-known for his five-volume Chinese translation of the Qur’an and for writing over thirty-five works on metaphysics and history in both Chinese and Arabic. This scholar’s work attests to the several cultural networks existing between China and the Islamic world. | AM LA
Muslim merchants from the Middle East and Central Asia settled in China’s Fujian province as early as the eighth century and continued to immigrate to various regions in that country after the Mongol invasions. Blue-and-white porcelain wares with Arabic inscriptions, such as the beautiful dish shown here, may have been made either for the Chinese Muslim community or for export to foreign lands. The present object may have come from one of the thousands of kilns around Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, where several blue-and-white porcelains have been excavated. The centre of the dish includes an inscription in cobalt blue of the Arabic word for purity, ṭahārat, enclosed first within a circular frame, then within two squares and a larger circle. The interstices of the circles and squares contain blue cloud scrolls and another scroll design that is repeated on the rim of the dish. Four small, square panels appear at regular intervals along the rim and enclose Arabic inscriptions that collectively read, “Blessed is he who purifies his hand from wrongdoing.” Six panels arranged in a similar format on the exterior together contain the Arabic inscription: “Ablution upon ablution is light upon light.” The six-character reign mark of the Ming emperor Zhengde (r. 1506–1521) has been added to the base of the dish.

Ming China (1368–1644) was marked by a period of xenophobia that stood in stark contrast to the great amount of East-West exchange under the Mongol rule of the Yuan emperors (1271–1368). In spite of this, the Ming did allow a certain level of foreign trade, and blue-and-white porcelain wares continued to be coveted by the courts of Iran, Mamluk Egypt and Syria, India, and the Ottoman Empire. This dish may have been produced for an Iranian market, where the taste for Chinese art and khīṭā’ī (a Chinese-inspired aesthetic) seems to have been most pronounced, but blue-and-white porcelains and other Chinese ceramics were also exported to other parts of the Islamic world as well, both by land and by sea, particularly to Indonesia. Blue-and-white Safavid and Ottoman Iznik wares attest to a taste for the Far East, as shown in the efforts made by Islamic potters to emulate Chinese porcelain prototypes on a frit body. The present dish was previously in the Eumorfopoulos collection and included in the 1966 exhibition at the Quantas Gallery, A Thousand Years of Chinese Art (Quantas Gallery 1966).
This manuscript contains a compilation of one hundred short maxims attributed to the caliph and first Shi'a Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, all accompanied by an anonymous Persian translation rendered in quatrains (Makariou 2007, p. 158, n. 1). The first page of this nineteen-folio volume is decorated with an illuminated frontispiece containing the bismillah introducing the text. The succession of Arab maxims and their Persian translations are executed in different scripts and at differently sized fonts, creating a visual rhythm that subdivides the surface of each page. This fragmented organization mirrors the similar nature of the text, the development of which is simultaneously two-fold (first in Arabic, then in Persian) and discontinued (the succession of words). The Persian quatrains are disposed in two separate panels that meet the first hemistich of each verse at left and the second of each at right. The reader’s eye thus moves beyond the manuscript’s central fold and follows the same line to read the complete bayt (distich). The use of a central caesura in the middle of the verse and the separate columns that result respond here to the rhythmic structure of Persian poetry; the bayt, composed of two hemistiches, constitutes a semantic unity, and the hemistich contains the metre of the poem and serves as its rhythmic measure. The end of the metre coincides with the end of a hemistich, necessitating a pause in diction, which materializes the central caesura. If the type of presentation in panels juxtaposed with the alternating scripts is adapted to the translated texts or commentaries, it is equally acceptable in the fifteenth-century Iranian world for copying Qur’anic texts, giving scribes the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of different types of calligraphy (ibid., n. 2). In this copy of one hundred maxims, the calligrapher wrote in the supple and elegant nasta’liq script, which figures among the six canonical scripts (aqlām al-sitta). For the Persian text, the scribe chose nasta’liq (ibid., n. 3). The ensemble was written on parchment and paper, which is unusual as parchment was no longer - or only rarely - used in the Islamic world after the eleventh century.

Born in Herat, Mahmud Haravi entered the service of the Qaraqoyunlu prince Pir Budaq around 1458, at the time governor of Shiraz and a great bibliophile (ibid., n. 4). The prince’s desire for autonomy soon paid off due to an open conflict with his father Jahanshah, one that was rapidly settled and which resulted in the compensatory nomination of Pir Budaq to be governor of Baghdad in 1460. Haravi followed Pir Budaq to Baghdad and stayed there most likely until the death of his patron in 1466. He ended his career at the court of the Aqqoyunlu sultan Ya’qub (r. 883–896 H / 1478–1490 CE) (ibid., n. 5).
ليَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ الْجَنَّةَ الْمَغْلُوبَةَ
لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بَعْدَ إِيَّاهَا وَاتَّبَعُواْ
الْمَأْثَرَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ فَإِنَّهُمْ ذُنُوبُهُمْ
مَعَ الذُّنُوبِ مَّعَهُمْ وَأَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْمَأْثَرِ
إِذَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَسْتَ إِيَّاهُ بَعْدَ مَا نُصِبْنَا
وَمَعَيْنَ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَذَٰلِكَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعُ الْمَكْمُونِ
وَقَالَ اللهُ عَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ يَسِينُ وَلَقَدْ لَبِنَاءَتْ مِنْهُ
وَعَلَى مَكَّةِ مُحَافِظَةٌ وَبِالْفُضْلِ
Arranged in four sections, this manuscript is a book of Hadith or Traditions (sing., hadith) containing supplications to be recited after the daily prayers as well as during different days of the week. The pages shown here refer to the Saturday and Sunday prayers as well as to the start of the Monday prayer, which begins at the bottom of the left-hand page. The colophon suggests that this manuscript was copied by Ahmad al-Nayrizi, one of the most important and prolific calligraphers of the late Safavid period who was active between 1682 and 1739. He is known to have copied numerous Qur’an manuscripts, prayer books, and calligraphy samples in a characteristic form of Arabic naskh script. Because of the popularity and prestige associated with al-Nayrizi’s style, his works were sometimes copied in their entirety—colophon included—by later scribes in the Qajar period (1794–1925). As a result, it is sometimes difficult to attribute works to his hand with certainty, especially if the calligrapher copying his style were a talented one. | AF

This oblong-shaped, lobed cartouche frames a panel of calligraphy executed in gold nastā’īq against a gold foliated background of cobalt blue. The border is painted in pink and filled with green and blue dots. The inscription on the panel names the celebrated panjtan, or “band of five,” which included the Prophet Muhammad, his first cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib, his daughter Fatima (Ali’s wife), and his two grandsons (the children of Ali and Fatima), Hasan and Husayn. The text is the second half of an Arabic couplet, the complete version of which appears in an angular Kufic script at the Madrasa Chahar Bagh Mosque (Madrasa Madarshah) in Isfahan (Ghouchani 1985, p.157, pl. 143): I have five [persons] whom by them I will smother the heat of burned hell, (they are) al-Muṣṭafa (the Prophet) and al-Murtaḍa (Ali) and their two sons (Hasan and Husayn) and Fāṭima. | L.A
The set of eighteen tiles comprising this panel displays numerous points in common with two similar mihrabs located on the north courtyard wall of a mosque founded by Governor Darwish Pasha in Damascus in 1572–75: the two candelabra, the Prophet’s sandals, the suspended lamp bearing the shahada, and the false marble of the columns inhabited by hidden creatures. At the Darwish Pasha Mosque (Darwishiyya), one of the mihrabs is topped by a ceramic tympanum bearing the date 982 H / 1574–1575 CE (Makariou 2007, p. 206, note 1).

However, there are some differences between the Darwishiyya mihrabs and this panel, such as the number of tiles, the narrower set, and the fact that the two candelabra touch each other, which is not the case on the Darwishiyya panels (ibid., note 2). Several clues, such as the design of the lamp’s chains, which curve softly to the left, and the false marble, indicate that these were probably produced in the same atelier. The false marble’s decoration serves as a refuge for a crowd of small animals. Still, the variety of animals—rabbits, flatfish, small quadrupeds, and ducks—is richer here (ibid., note 3).

In the centre of the panel, the Prophet’s sandals occupy a place of paramount importance. The iconography of the Prophet’s sandals, which sometimes seems to be confused with the representation of his footprints, became widespread in the sixteenth century and is also present in Safavid Iran and in India (ibid., note 5). The sandal is a sign of distinction specific to the Prophet of Islam, in comparison to Moses; its protective shape (mithāl) “leads to life in both homes” (earthly then eternal).

This devotional context explains the singularity of an image of a pair of sandals right in the middle of a space where all faithful believers are required to remove their shoes. The sandals, believed to have touched the throne of God, made the Prophet of Islam the quintessential intercessor par excellence and an example to be followed (ibid., note 10). | SM
In the Islamic world, mysticism has played an important role in both Shia and Sunni contexts. Mystics, known as Sufis, have sought to achieve oneness with God through prayer and specific exercises, such as *dhikr*, the repetition of sacred words or phrases. While some mystical thinkers, for example al-Hallaj in the ninth-tenth century, were considered heretical, many others led lives as wandering mendicants, seeking the company of other dervishes or settled in dervish lodges in the presence of their spiritual advisors, or *pirs*. In India, with its long tradition of Hindu *sadhus*, or holy men, Mughal paintings depict them meeting dervishes, their Muslim counterparts. The Mughal emperors and many Iranian and Central Asia rulers before them employed religious advisors and are portrayed in spiritual or philosophical questions with the sages of their day (cat. no. 40). Even when political leaders did not sanction particular Sufi orders, the ideas that they espoused were spread by the faithful through pilgrimage to shrines and other holy sites. In the same way, the *hajj* enabled Muslims from throughout the Dar al-Islam, or Muslim world, to meet and exchange ideas, thus cementing a unity that depended on a shared faith and the communal understanding of the Arabic language.

In association with their ascetic lifestyle, a range of objects is associated with dervishes. These include begging bowls (*kashkul*) and animal skin cloaks. In paintings of dervishes (cat. no. 38), small, lightweight begging bowls of metal or wood are often suspended from their belts or carried on a stick. By contrast, most extant examples are made of metal, ceramic, or nineteenth-century coco-de-mer shells (cat. nos. 41 and 42). Even if the coco-de-mer *kashkul* were used by mendicant Sufis, the heavy metal and fragile ceramic versions must not have had a practical use as begging bowls. Rather, their function would have reverted to the original use of such vessels, that is, as wine bowls. Although wine is prohibited in Islam, it was one of the aids to achieving a mystical state.

Finally, the works of the great mystical poets such as Jalal al-Din Rumi, the originator of one of the best known Sufi brotherhoods, have inspired Sufis for the past five hundred years. Not only are his followers, the Mevlevi dervishes, famous for their whirling, but also his poetry remains popular across the globe.
The **Mathnavī-i Ma'navī** is a poetic masterpiece of around 25,000 couplets, written by Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi (d. 1273) and concerned with the main theoretical issues and themes of Sufi doctrine. Although his nationality is debated among Iranians, Turks, and Central Asians, Rumi is one of the most celebrated mystical poets in Sufi and Persian literature and the originator and ultimate pir, or spiritual master, of the Mawlavi (Turkish Mevlevi) dervish order. While illuminated manuscripts of Rumi’s writings, sometimes enclosed in elaborate bindings, are not unusual, illustrated manuscripts of this text are rare.

The image on the right-hand folio shown here illustrates the tale of the lover who had spent many years searching for his beloved in vain. One night, however, as the lover was running from a night-watch, he accidentally ended up in an unfamiliar garden where, to his great surprise and delight, he found his beloved. Another image in this manuscript (shown at top right of the group of four smaller reproductions) depicts a game of chess. Two stories are embedded in this narrative in order to bring its major points to light; the one illustrated here recounts an episode in which Sayyid Shah Tirmidh is checkmated by his court jester and reacts angrily by throwing the chessboard at the courtier’s head. The next time the two sit down to a game, the jester anticipates the need to protect himself by covering his head with a turban of felt. The scene is identified both by the figures seated on either side of a chessboard as well as by a caption just above the painting. Its depiction suggests the importance of this story, perhaps to the patron who commissioned the manuscript; not only was the episode selected for illustration, but it was also allotted most of the space on the page, leaving room for only three lines of Persian text above and below the image. | LA
Amir Khusraw Dihlavi (d. 1325), one of the best-known poets of Persian in Islamic India, was a Turkish military aristocrat who served the Delhi sultanate under the Khalji and Tughluq dynasties. His *Khamsa*, or Quintet, was composed for the second ruler of the Khaljis, 'Ala al-Din Khalji (r. 1296–1316), in Delhi, between 1298–99 and 1301–02. Amir Khusraw was also a Sufi mystic who followed the teachings of the Chishti shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya (d. 1325) and is buried next to him in his tomb in Delhi (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 144).

The present page depicts the eighteenth story recounted in the first section of the *Khamsa*, the *Matla al-anwār* (The Ascent of Lights) story of a saint who made a failed attempt to stay awake until the 27th day of Ramadan, known as the “Night of Power” (Arabic *laylat al-qadr* and Persian *shab-i qadr*). The *laylat al-qadr* is mentioned in the Qur’an (*al-qadr*, 97:1–5) and refers to the night when Prophet Muhammad was called to his mission through the first revelations from God. The painting appears to be a continuous narrative, at right illustrating the saint in his efforts to remain awake, and then, at left, after he has fallen asleep. Along with its narrow horizontal format, the saturated pigments used to colour the image recall the painting styles of both Mamluk Egyptian and southern Persian (in particular, Shiraz) painting of the fourteenth century, but some scholars believe that the script style of this manuscript dates it to the second half of the fifteenth century (see *ibid.*, pp. 144 and 146).
A young man dressed in fine robes and a gold-edged turban gazes at a *safina*, the small oblong album in his hands. His seat is the trunk of a blossoming tree, whose curving branches gently surround him. The tripartite division of the landscape into a gilded sky full of scrolling clouds, a lilac mountain background, and a flower-filled dark grassy ground is typical of the Khurasan style at the end of the sixteenth century. Opposite the youth is a fresh faced young dervish with a shaven head, accessorised by a white leopard skin, a *kashkul* or begging bowl, a purse, and a knife. He holds out something, perhaps a cup, which has been effaced. Some dervish groups may have incited trouble, but late sixteenth-century Persian sources also laud the personal qualities of dervishes, calling them self-effacing, noble-minded, and kindly. In this vein, Sheila Canby has proposed that the young dervish here may not represent an actual dervish but a metaphor for the admired ideals of a dervish. Although this painting is currently mounted on an album page, its composition – that of a youth in conversation with a dervish – was seen often on colophon pages of manuscripts. | AF
A gathering of dervishes
Iran, Khurasan, late 16th century
Ink and watercolour on paper
Page: 38.5 x 28.5 cm
AKM 00104
Published: Welch 1978a, pp. 98–99; AKTC 2007a, p. 68 (no. 37); AKTC 2007b, p. 69 (no. 37); AKTC 2009a, pp. 76-77; AKTC 2009b, pp. 76-77

Drawings intended for inclusion in albums became increasingly popular in the second half of the sixteenth century. Less expensive to produce than paintings or illustrated manuscripts, drawings could be afforded by a broader market than simply the court. As a result, artists expanded their choice of subject matter to include dervishes, nomads, and working people. This scene depicts six dervishes in varying states of dizziness and collapse after whirling to induce a mystical state. Two bearded figures stand with the aid of young novices, while two others are seated on the ground. At the lower left, a youth holds a book, perhaps of poetry, while at the right, another beats his tambourine.

The technique of drawing with the addition of touches of colour was practised in this period by Muhammadi of Herat, an artist with wide influence in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Although this work cannot be attributed to him, the jackdaws in the tree, the subject of dervishes, and the technique all derive from his works. The empty rectangles at the upper right and lower left suggest that this was an illustration to a text, though it is more likely that these were added long after the drawing had been completed. | AF
This colourful rocky landscape depicts a prince visiting a hermit at his cave. The prince is seated pensively before the hermit while his eight attendants wait on both sides of a small creek. His stately horse appears to be the focus of the painting, its grand and stocky figure occupying the major part of the lower half of the painting and emphasized by a natural halo formed by the sandy-coloured ground upon which it rests. As Anthony Welch has observed, the stallion was a symbol of authority and splendour but also one of “worldly impermanence” (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 160). Along with the brightly and colourfully dressed servants, the great horse stands in stark contrast to the hermit and his companion (perhaps a disciple), who sits before the cave at the water’s edge; their gaunt figures indicate their renunciation of worldly possessions in favour of following the path to enlightenment through mysticism. The top half of the painting evokes an air of meditation and sombreness that affects even the prince, who may have come here seeking the guidance of a spiritual advisor.

The relationship between a Sufi master (shaykh, murshid, or pir) and his disciple (murid or shagird) was a popular theme in Persian poetry and painting. The master was charged with the task of leading his student along the challenging path (tariqa) towards enlightenment and the attainment of oneness with God. The transfer of knowledge between murid and murshid was seen as the transfer of light from the heart of the teacher to that of the student. The combination of a Persian painting style fused with the use of a more earth-toned palette and naturalistic rendering of figures and landscape, however, suggest that the present painting was produced in India under the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), a period marked by the synthesis of diverse foreign and indigenous artistic styles. This combined aesthetic was a reflection of the ruler’s great tolerance for different religions; Akbar created the Dīn-i illāhī (“Divine Faith”), which borrowed ideas from Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Jainism (Canby 1998, p. 111).

Welch has attributed the work on stylistic grounds to the Persian painter ‘Abd al-Samad, an artist of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1732) who left the court of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576) to work first for Akbar’s father, the emperor Humayun (r. 1530–1539 and 1555–1556), and then for Akbar (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 160). Welch also believes that the prince represented in this image could be Akbar’s son Salim, the future emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), based on the likeness of this figure to that of a seated prince in a tinted drawing identified as Prince Salim and signed by ‘Abd al-Samad, also in the AKM collection (ibid., p. 162; for an image of this work, see Canby 1998, p. 110, no. 80, although Canby identifies this figure as Akbar). Sheila Canby, however, has suggested that the princely figure may represent Akbar if it can be linked to a hunting event (gamargha) in the Punjab ordered by the emperor in April–May 1578 at the alleged site of one of Alexander the Great’s successful battles (Canby 1998, p. 111). According to Akbar’s historian Abu’l Fazl (d. 1602), Akbar experienced an epiphany in the midst of the hunt, which led him to cancel the hunt and free all of the captured animals. Unaware of what had caused his change of heart, Akbar’s close friends imagined a few different theories, one of which involved the ruler’s meeting with an anchorite who inspired him to adopt a more ascetic lifestyle, something he did, in fact, do for a while after the incident (ibid., pp. 111 and 113).
This *kashkūl* or beggar’s bowl made from half of a *coco-de-mer* shell would have been carried by a dervish who had renounced all worldly possessions, subsisting only on almsgiving from devout Muslims. Beggars’ bowls were often highly decorated and this one is no exception: intricate floral motifs, Arabic prayers, and Persian verses cover the entire surface of the shell. The upper band of inscription includes the famous *Nad-i ‘Ali*, the devotional prayer to ‘Ali, the Prophet Muhammad’s first cousin and son-in-law. The spout of the *kashkūl* is inscribed with the signature of a certain Sufi mystic and the date 1028 H / 1618–19 CE; this date is probably optimistic, however, since the script and decoration are more characteristic of the Qajar period.

The Arabic prayer, inscribed in thuluth script, reads:

> Help me with your hidden kindness, God is higher than the fire of your torture O … with Your Mercy O You, Most Merciful of all those who are merciful, God is my Lord, my aid comes from You O …

(trans. A. Ghouchani)

| AF |

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*Coco-de-mer kashkūl (beggar’s bowl)*  
Iran, probably Qajar, 19th century  
Carved nut shell (*coco-de-mer*), with chain as later addition  
Length: 24 cm  
AKM 00640  
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 70 (no. 40); AKTC 2007b, p. 67 (no. 40); AKTC 2009a, p. 80; AKTC 2009b, p. 80
Snarling dragon heads project from either end of this boat-shaped kashkul or dervish’s begging bowl, which contains a wide band of elegant inscriptions engraved in cartouches in Arabic nastalig script and several bands of floral interlace decoration. This brass kashkul is one of five important Safavid examples from the end of the sixteenth century. The others are in the Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul; The Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar (ex-Khosrovani coll.); in a private collection (offered at Christie’s, Islamic Art and Manuscripts, 27 April 2004, lot 97); and one formerly in the Rothschild and Edwin Binney III Collections (A. U. Pope, A Survey of Persian Art, London and Oxford, 1938, pl. 1386A; Welch 1973, fig. 42, pp. 470–71). A.S. Melikian-Chirvani presented this group in an article that demonstrates how the dervish’s begging bowl developed from the ancient, pre-Islamic royal wine-boat shape. He notes that “...the idea [is] embodied in the shape: the crescent-moon out of which wine, seen as liquid sunlight, is poured.” (Melikian-Chirvani 1991, p. 21). The Persian inscriptions on this vessel have been read in full by the same scholar, who comments that this kashkul once belonged to the head of a khanaqah or Sufi hospice.

Inscriptions, side 1:
The prince of the two worlds, the seal of messengers
Came last; he became the pride of the very first
He made his ascent to the throne and the seat, not to the sky,
The prophets and friends of God were in need of him
His existence was spent in guarding the two worlds
The whole surface of the earth became his mosque
The lord of the two worlds, the leader of mankind:
The moon was split by the tip of his finger.

Side 2 (in a different metre):
The one had for him the friend of the Beloved
While the other was the leader of the Pious bands
(The servant of the Shah of Najaf, Shams al-Din)
...For this reason did they become friends of God
The one was a fount of moral gentleness and spiritual modesty in the world
While the other was ‘The Gate of the City of Knowledge’
That envoy of Truth/God that was the best among humans
His immaculate uncle was Hamza son of ‘Abbas.
(Melikian-Chirvani 1991, pp. 35–36)
The Route of the Travellers
From Cordova to Damascus
It is commonly accepted that the process of islamisation of al-Andalus was over by the end of the 11th century: the majority of the population had converted to Islam, regardless of the number of Arabs who arrived on the Iberian Peninsula, and Arabic had become the vehicular form of written and oral expression, regardless of creed. It does not appear that Latin and Hebrew played any role outside the private or religious sphere; as for Berber dialects, it is not even sure that they actually passed the Gibraltar Straits in any of the successive North African migrations. Therefore, one can talk about al-Andalus as a land fully integrated in dār al-Islam, in its religious aspects as well as in its linguistic and cultural ones.

Immediately after the Arab conquest, everything new came from Damascus. There were a few well-known Andalusians in the East, but only after the 11th Century did they become an important presence - not just a few devoted believers performing their hajj, but traders, scholars, academics, or sometimes all at once.

After 750, when the coup d'état of the Abbasids and the enthronement of an Umayyad prince in this Western edge of Europe occurred, cultural exchanges between both sides of the Mediterranean do not seem to have been interrupted, despite the obvious enmity between the two dynasties. Some valuable pieces from the treasury of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786-809) ended up in the hands of the Emir ‘Abd al-Rahmān II through traders aware of the interest the court of Cordova had in the novelties that came from the East; indeed western sovereigns watched closely what was going on in their enemies’ courts. In fact, the orientalisation of the Andalusian State – which was a Persianisation – was a phenomenon that occurred at the same time as the presence of Mesopotamian artistic forms increased in the art of al-Andalus. Exchanges with the East were intense, but were mostly from East to West rather than in the opposite direction. Soon, devout Westerners would start going on pilgrimages to the East, but not only for religious reasons. One thing was the official political attitude; another was the need to refresh their cultural tradition, something that could not be done by any means in the West.

There were diplomatic contacts with Byzantium, which became very sustained during the second half of the reign of caliph ‘Abd al-Rahmān [III] al-Nāsir and during al-Hakam [II] al Mustansir’s. Also, new Byzantine artists arrived in order to fill certain Andalusian gaps – such as mosaic makers sent by Emperor Constantine VII to decorate the maqsura of the third phase of the Cordovan aljama (961). However, the increasing appearance of floral patterns, clearly of Mesopotamian origin, in Western Umayyad decoration, shows evident connections and a precise knowledge of what the Iraqi Abbasid artists and their homologues in Egypt were doing at the time.

The production of ivory caskets is the best testimony of the flagrant Cordovan interest in the East. Certain decorative elements and, above all, iconography, where it exists, have their distant roots in Iran and close ties with Iraq and Egypt. But the mere presence of this industry, without known precedents in the peninsula, indicates that an oriental workshop was established in the capital of al-Andalus. Its products, intended both for the court and as diplomatic presents, were and still are the best showpieces of the dynasty: they returned to the East, in the form of caskets, as reinterpreted versions of the artistic influences they had received.
The collapse of the Umayyad State of al-Andalus did not interrupt the cultural contacts that came with the pilgrims and traders. There are testimonies in manuscripts found in the still unfathomed depths of the *genizah*, or storage room, of the old synagogue of Ben Ezra in Cairo. Andalusian traders, mostly - but not only - Jewish, moved around the Mediterranean easily, surmounting all political or physical obstacles. That was the case of the family of a so-called Ismael ben Isaac, from Badajoz, who carried out his activities between Cairo, Damascus and Jerusalem in the second half of the 11th century.

One of the most interesting testimonies of Andalusian travellers to the East might perhaps be the one of Yūsuf ibn al Sayj (1132-1207), who came from an affluent family in Malaga and lived during the Almoravid and Almohad rule. As a devote Muslim, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca and took the opportunity of attending lectures by scholars in the cities on his way, which was not uncommon at a time when journeys could be so time-consuming and dangerous, that it was usual for travellers to plan stops in their itineraries, which allowed them to stay for longer periods in certain cities. Yūsuf arrived in Alexandria in 561H / 1165 CE and stayed for two years. When he finished his pilgrimage and went back to al-Andalus, he decided to write a book to help his younger son’s education. The book, entitled *Kitāb Alif Bā’* (ABC book), contains materials on arithmetic, physics, botany, zoology, anthropology, religion and philology, as well as an invaluable description of the Pharaohs of Alexandria, the most precise description left by any Arab author. It was published in 1933 by the Spanish Arabist Miguel Asín. Yusuf al-Sayj would have never expected his testimony to be so useful to archaeology.

Abū’l-Hasan ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), a Valencian contemporary of Yūsuf, came from an affluent family and had studied in Jativa, before starting his *Hajj* from Granada in 1183. He took a boat from Tarifa to Ceuta, then to Sardinia, Sicily, Crete and disembarked in Alexandria. From there, he crossed to Cairo, navigated the Red Sea to Arabia, and accomplished his pilgrimage to Mecca. He then moved on to Baghdad, Mosul, Aleppo and Damascus, and from there, to Saint John of Acre, via Tyre. In this Palestinian port, he embarked to Carthage, via Sicily. He lived in Granada until he received the news of the reconquest of Jerusalem by Salāh al-Dīn al-Ayyūb (Saladin). He then undertook a second trip to the East (1189-1191), but it seems that he did not leave any account of it. It is surprising to read in his work how relatively easily one could transit through the Mediterranean area, sometimes at war, as long as one was willing to face the dangers of seafaring as well as, in some regions, the arbitrariness of the governors. His biography is also an example of how simple it was to initiate hazardous voyages when there were sufficient financial means for them. Faith, curiosity, thirst for profit, or all of them at the same time, pushed the restless from the West to look for knowledge in the East, since the only way of acquiring it then was by getting it under their own steam.

On 2nd Rajab 725 H / 13th June 1325 CE, a traveller from Tangier initiated a pilgrimage to Mecca. It was Shams al-Dīn ibn Yūsuf al-Tanyí, better known as Ibn Battūta (1304-1377). In his journey he visited Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Mecca, and far from ending there, continued to Iraq, Kazakhstan, Fars, Tabriz, Kurdistan and Baghdad; another time travelling from Mecca to Yemen, Aden and the eastern coast of Africa. In 1332, he made the pilgrimage again and, after living for three years in Mecca, travelled through Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, the South of Russia, Constantinople, Transoxania, Afghanistan, India - where he
lived between 1333 and 1342 - the Maldives, Ceylon, Bengal, Assam and Sumatra. Although he mentions going to China, there are serious doubts that this is true. In 1347, he was in Malabar; from there he came back by sea to Baghdad, Syria and Egypt and accomplished the pilgrimage for the fourth and last time. In 1349, he went to Tunisia, and from there he went on to Sardinia, then to Algeria, and finally to Fez. And he still had time to cross over to al-Andalus, visit Granada, and travel to the remote African region of Mali.

Ibn Battūta's testimony, with its invaluable information on the regions he visited, not only makes him the Arab traveller par excellence and a symbol of Islamic culture, but it is also a trustworthy testimony of the permanent interest of the western Muslims for the East and everything eastern. At the same time, if one considers the relevance of what he wrote on al-Andalus, his testimony shows the brief role that this territory played in the Islamic world, only a century before the extinction of the last Iberian Muslim state: the Nasrid Sultanate of Granada.

There is no doubt that the Islamic West was always inclined to the East. However, once the caliphate of Cordova collapsed at the beginning of the eleventh century, Andalusian Islam stopped having, in some aspects, the active role of importing the eastern trends, specially the artistic ones. This does not mean, as can be deduced by the long voyages mentioned above, that contacts ceased, but rather that they moved to other areas less related to the arts. In order to legitimise their own power and show their link with the western Umayyads, successive western dynasties limited those creations, with a few exceptions, to the - reinterpreted - repertory of the formal world created by them.

The East continued being the source of Islamic intellectual contribution, but al-Andalus did not take any more interest in Eastern art. In some cases new techniques were adopted for specific fields of industrial activity - pottery, fabrics, etc., - but the great architectural buildings, most of them due to the patronage of the political oligarchy, do not show, except to a minimum, the impact of what was happening in the central regions of Islam. And this, despite extensive commercial trade exchanges with the eastern Mediterranean, especially with Egypt. Al-Andalus stopped being clearly part of the East and only the watchful eyes of the travellers, whose stories have fortunately been kept, reflect the curiosity that anything Eastern generated. Actually, it was the longing for a past that was perceived as better and anguish at what was intuitively felt to be the colophon of a world about to be lost.
The Route of the Travellers

Al-Andalus: the Orient in the West

Fernando Valdés

In 711 the Arabs (in the Iberian Peninsula, “Arab” and “Muslim” are synonyms) arrived in the most western territory of Mediterranean Europe. Within a short time, after very few battles and some sieges that were nearly all solved through negotiations, the Arabs provoked the collapse of the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo, and incorporated what has since then been known as al-Andalus, the political territory under Muslim Arab dominance, into dār al-islam. Such a quick expansion would have been unimaginable without support from part of the Visigothic aristocracy, a sector of the Church, the oligarchy of Roman Hispanic landowners, and, apparently, also from the large Jewish minority. The same process that made the conquests of Syria and Egypt possible was repeated, although with some differences.

In general, the history of the Iberian Peninsula, today incorporating Portugal and Spain, has since Prehistory experienced phases of Europeanisation and Orientalisation - depending on whether the main cultural influx came from north of the Pyrenees, the Italian Peninsula or the Eastern Mediterranean, directly or through northern Africa. The Muslim Arab conquest was, beyond doubt, the last of the big Orientalisation phases that affected this extreme tip of Europe.

Spanish historiography, deeply influenced by ideological concepts that in some cases go back only to a few years after 711, has obstinately insisted on emphasising, or maybe even inventing, the role that native tradition – at the time of the conquest, i.e. late Roman – played on the origins, development and evolution of the historic phenomenon known as al-Andalus. Although the arguments have been very persistent, they have never been entirely convincing, except for those who want to believe them. The similarities between the material culture - leaving religion aside - of the invaders and the conquered should not be explained or interpreted as mere influence of the latter over the former. Instead, other arguments not completely excluding this influence in certain matters should be taken into account. At the peak of its power, the Umayyad dynasty, the main political protagonist of the conquest, was creating at its epicentre an artistic world with Syrian roots mixed with Roman-Byzantine and Iranian elements; to the extent that even Syria, where the dynasty settled, started copying this method in its artistic tradition.

For years, the most western province of the Islamic Empire did not vary substantially with regard to the method implemented after the conquest. However, three different processes started to occur slowly: arabisation, or change of vehicle of expression from Latin to Arabic; islamisation, namely the conversion to Islam of the majority of the population; and berberisation, the occupation of sparsely populated areas by people from the Maghreb, in line with Arabisation and Islamisation.

It could be the arrival of the last Umayyad Prince 'Abd al-Rahman I al-Dājil (The Emigrant) (756 – 788), who had escaped from the coup d'état of the Abbasids and was the sole survivor of the massacre of his family, that caused a radical change. Al-Andalus separated from the Islamic middle-eastern Empire, which in turn accentuated its Iranian character and moved its centre of gravity to Baghdad, which had been until not long before, the epicentre of the Persian Empire of the Sassanids. Paradoxically, the western Umayyads did not initiate a westernisation process that would emphasize their Roman cultural features. On the contrary, they kept an Umayyad appearance, especially with the claim for the right to the Empire that had been taken away from them, and they started copying their enemies’ state structure in every sense. The same occurred with culture and art. Al-Andalus became more Iranian, in the sense that they adopted...
rules that had some resemblance to those of the Persians. This explains the building, in the middle of the eighth century, of the almunia of al-Rusāfa (756), near Cordoba; and of the first phase of the construction of the Great Mosque of the Andalusian capital (786-787), thanks to the first monarch of the dynasty; and the construction of the palatine city of Medina Azahara (begun in 937) as well as the third phase of the Aljama mosque in Cordoba (961), thanks to the second and third caliphs of al-Andalus, ' Abd al-Rahmān [III] al Nāsir (912-961) and al-Hakam [II] al-Mustansir (961-976). Even fashion and most of the traditions from the western Islamic court were subjected to an orientalisation process, that was represented by the famous musician Abū'l-Hasan ' Ali Ibn Nāfi, known as Ziryāb (789 - till around 857), who arrived in Baghdad and played an outstanding role in the movement that introduced Abbasid cultural novelties. The indigenous population did not participate in this long and complicated process, which was to some extent responsible for the implosion of the Andalusian Umayyad dynasty, which disappeared leaving a deep cultural and institutional legacy in the Mediterranean, in al-Andalus as in the Maghreb.

Immediately after the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty of Cordova in al-Andalus, all their achievements had a very eastern style. However, since the reign of ' Abd al-Rahmān II (822-852), this tendency was observed not only in religious architecture - the Great Mosque of Cordova (848) - but also on military constructions - the alcazaba of Merida (Badajoz, Extremadura) (855). It was the proclamation of the caliphate (929) that would give a clear orientalisation process, based on the formal characteristics of the Syrian Umayyad tradition and the incorporation of other traditions that came from Iraq, as can be witnessed in what has been preserved from the palatine city of Medina Azahara and from the third phase of the Great Mosque of Cordova (961), deed of caliph al-Hakam II.

Iranian heritage becomes even more evident in the iconography of ivories, probably created by non-native specialists, during the reign of ' Abd al-Rahmān III, not long after he proclaimed himself prince of the believers (929). Made for the court and, above all, as diplomatic presents, the ivories constitute a paradigm of western Umayyad decorative style and a defining feature of what was becoming an authentic dynastic art. The iconography of ivories - e.g., the casket from Leyre in the Museum of Navarra - and its vegetal patterns, as well as the rare silver examples that arrived in Spain – e.g., the casket in the Cathedral of Gerona – give a precise idea of the image that the Cordovan caliphs wanted to portray: following an already oriental tradition and also adjusting it to the Abbasid artistic trends; an authentic statement of principles. The Mesopotamian influence is also reflected in other art expressions like pottery, but it was not as developed in technique or in iconography at that time.

The collapse of the caliphate of Cordova did not end the courtly art, which was partially taken over by the courts of the small principalities known as the Taifa Kingdoms (Mulūk al-Tawā'if) - from the eleventh to beginning of the twelfth century -, although in a less monumental scale in its “imperial” appearance and entrepreneurial ambition, and by the Almoravid sultanate - end of eleventh to mid twelfth century -, which introduced it in its new Maghrebian settlements and gave it a wider geographical range. Nevertheless, there was an almost radical change in the conceptual point of view: al-Andalus art continued developing until well after the Castilian conquest of the Granada sultanate (1232-1492), prevailing in the so-called ”mudejar style”. Although there were some new influences from the Islamic East, one can say that the development of al-Andalus art after the eleventh century was, essentially, based on its own tradition. From then on, it only used selected forms of vegetal and geometric patterns and opted for a more stylised form of the palms, elongated and intertwined. It was only during the Almohad period - from mid twelfth to mid thirteenth century -, that palms without much detail, or plain, were preferred for official monuments. The plastic arts were a way of disseminating the political and doctrinal differences of the new western Sunni caliphate that considered itself, despite its Berber origins, successor and follower of the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba.
It cannot be denied that the Nasrid sultanate of Granada reached a highly refined level in its artistic endeavours and that it developed an autonomous evolution of the Andalusian style untouched, or nearly, by middle eastern currents - despite the intense commercial exchanges with Egypt.

The Andalusian artistic heritage continued in *Maghreb al-Aqṣâ*, nowadays Morocco, and it even reached sub-Saharan areas - Mauritania and Mali -, through the South; and the eastern border of Tunisia, through the East, thanks to artisans that prolonged it for several more centuries with a remarkable technical ability nourished by stylistic means which came all the way from Umayyad Cordoba.

The Mudejar phenomenon started in some parts of the peninsula as they were absorbed militarily by the northern Christian kingdoms. It was not univocal, as it extended and diversified with time, dividing itself into different schools depending on the conquering states - Portugal, León, Castilla and Aragon - and on chronology. Considerable colonies of Muslim craftsmen, called "mudejares", stayed, especially in some cities, and continued working with the artistic tradition inherited from their Andalusian ancestors. In most cases these artisans would stay isolated from their colleagues from Islamic territories and would repeat, or rather fossilise, the style of the place where they were living. On some occasions, royal patronage, aristocratic or ecclesiastic, would refresh the tradition and favour works from foreign artisans coming from what was left of al-Andalus. Although their roots were identical, these artisans had a more developed style. In other cases, people coming from newly conquered territories settled in places where Islamic tradition had disappeared or had never existed, and new manifestations, classified as mudejares, appeared, which had no connection to previous local traditions. It should also be taken into account that crusades and cultural exchange brought new Islamic trends that mixed with the local ones, especially in Aragon. Whether the authors were local artisans, experts on what was being done in the middle eastern Islamic states, or foreigners established in the Peninsula thanks to the tolerance from which they benefited, the fact is that certain features, such as polygon-base towers in many Aragon churches, can only be explained as an imitation of the Ayyubid, Mamluk, or even Ottoman minarets from the same period.
Everything about this astrolabe indicates that it came from Spain: the rete (ankabūt, or “spider”), representing part of the celestial coordinate system, and the fixed stars form a network ornamented with openwork, the line of which is characteristic of Maghribin and Andalusian instruments. Indeed, on the ecliptic circle, which bears the names of the zodiacal constellations in Latin and Arabic, the cut-outs are in the form of half quatrefoils; they end in three openwork rings and a long curved point. The point indicates the exact position of the star whose name is engraved on the base in Arabic and Latin; other star names are inscribed on the outer circle and the segment of the median circle (equator). There are four tympani, each bearing a projection of the celestial coordinates onto the given terrestrial coordinates. Three of them, which date back to the first phase of the instrument’s history, are for latitudes ranging from Jerusalem to the north of Paris.

While many astrolabes made in al-Andalus (Arab-controlled Spain) during the eleventh through fifteenth centuries have been preserved, only five astrolabes from pre-fifteenth-century Christian Spain are extant. Four of them are from Catalonia. This one does not come from there, and furthermore is the only one with inscriptions in Arabic, Latin and Hebrew, the latter in the form of scratches, more than engravings, on one of the tympani.

The ring topping the openwork “throne” (kursi) bears an Arabic inscription: “Its owner [is] the poor Mas’ud confident in Him who should be adored.” Moreover, the last tympan, which probably dates to the second phase of execution of the astrolabe, is marked Ardh al-jazā’ir (latitude of Algiers or the Balearic Islands); on the back is a tympanum corresponding to the latitude of Mecca, which is not mentioned by name. It is possible that the inscriptions on the ring and the last tympanum were done by the same hand, namely that of Mas’ud.

On the back, the centre of the mater bears a double shaded square and, on the circumference, the signs of the zodiac in Arabic (to the outside) and the names of the solar months (to the inside), in inlaid and engraved silver cartouches. The inlaid silver cartouches are unique on a western astrolabe. In any case, there are a number of mistakes in the Arabic, which is probably evidence of a vernacular Arabic—and therefore, of the survival of Arabic in Spain long after the Reconquista.”
This composite capital, with two lines of acanthus leaves, represents a brilliant phase of Andalusian architectural sculpture. The model of Corinthian capital, which can be found in numerous Roman ruins in Spain, as well as in later Visigothic interpretations, reaches here a very refined elegance. The general structure of Corinthian capitals is respected, rendered livelier by two rows of deeply carved foliage sprouting in a bee’s nest arrangement and a base of plain stalks where the second row of leaves starts. Over the bead-and-reel band, an equinus, also with a bee’s nest arrangement, is topped by four projecting volutes, demarcated by curling acanthus leaves; on top, there are four dados, also with vegetal motifs.

This capital is similar to the ones made for the reception room of ‘Abd al-Rahman III in the royal palace at Madinat al-Zahra, six kilometres from Cordoba, which date from between 342 and 345 H (952-953 and 956-957), according to inscriptions found on the bases. The same composite type, with two rows of acanthus, have been found there. The bead and reel pattern is also used, as well as the overall sculpture of the set, with rectilinear carving, and identical decoration of the volutes. From the forty capitals which originally crowned the marble columns of the room, before its destruction in the 11th century, only eleven remain in their original position. Had they been worked from cubic or nearly cubic blocks, the final result would have been very different from what we can see here. From their shape, the capitals from that room are not cubes. Our object relates more to a capital from Segovia dated 349 H / 960-961 CE; both capitals are drawn from a perfect 28cm cube. Aesthetically they are very close, although the one shown here shows cleaner craftsmanship, undoubtedly due to its good state of conservation.

Composite capitals reappear during the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahman III. One from Loja dated 340 H / 951-952 CE, represents a good and early example. Another, from the al-Sabah collection (362 H / 972-973 CE), is slightly more decorated than the one here (Dar al-Althar al Islamiyya, LNS 2 S). Thus it is reasonable to date ours between 340 and 362 H (951-952 and 972-973 CE). During the fitna (revolution) of 1010 and the plundering of Madinat al-Zahra the same year, and later during the collapse of the caliphate of al-Andalus in 1031, objects were disseminated. Even architectural elements were affected; for this reason, many Andalusian capitals were reused elsewhere, even in Italy. [SM]
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Manuscript of Mi'a layla wa layla (One hundred and one nights) and the Kitāb al-jughrāfiyya (Book of geography) of al-Zuhri (d. 1154–1161)

Copied by 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Mawla al-Majum
Spain, Al-Andalus, dated 632 H / 1235 CE
Ink and opaque watercolour on paper
19 x 26.5 cm
AKM 00513

Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 156 (no. 122); AKTC 2007b, p. 155 (no. 122); AKTC 2009a, p. 94; AKTC 2009b, p. 94

This manuscript contains the earliest extant copy of al-Zuhri’s Book of Geography, followed by one of the earliest versions of the famous stories of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid, A Thousand and One Nights, thought to have been adapted from a Persian source. The Book of Geography was written as a companion for a map of the world commissioned by the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mun. It provides a description of the world at the time, including important new information about trade routes and commodities traded in the western Islamic lands and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as about the expansion of Islam. The second oldest copy is housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and is dated 1410 CE. The version of the Thousand and One Nights in this text is written in maghribī script and entitled A Hundred and One Nights, establishing its antiquity within the larger “Nights” tradition. | AF LA

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Scribe’s cabinet

Spain, Al-Andalus, Nasrid, 15th century
Walnut wood inlaid with bone, metal, wood, and mother-of-pearl
Dimensions: 22 x 49 x 33 cm
AKM 00634

Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 125 (no. 93); AKTC 2007b, pp. 128-29 (no. 93); AKTC 2009a, p. 94; AKTC 2009b, p. 94

This scribe’s cabinet is a rare survival and an extraordinary example of luxury woodwork production in Spain under the Nasrids (1232–1492). The tradition of inlaying walnut dates back to the Umayyad period in Spain (756–1031), and may be seen in extant mosque minbars (pulpits), doors and a variety of objects. The hallmarks of Nasrid era woodwork include elaborate inlays of ivory, bone, metal, wood and mother-of-pearl. The decorative programme of this cabinet includes large eight-pointed stars formed from interlocking squares; these motifs appear on many of the extant Nasrid wooden pieces in museums in Granada and at the Alhambra. The cabinet contains a lidded interior compartment which probably contained writing implements. | AF
Bronze lamp holder
Spain, Al-Andalus, Umayyad, 10th century
Inscription (Arabic): Baraka (“blessing”) repeated
Cast bronze, with openwork, engraved, and punched decoration
Height 52.5 cm
AKM 00593
Published: AKTC 2008b, no. 2; AKTC 2009a, p. 95;
AKTC 2009b, p. 95

This rare lamp stand, of which there is a similar example in the David Collection, was produced under the Spanish Umayyads (756–1031), descendants of the first Muslim Umayyad dynasty based in Damascus. When the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 749, the only surviving member of the family fled to the Iberian Peninsula and founded a new branch of the dynasty. Although the object includes a typical Islamic inscription in Arabic kufic script, its form and decoration reflect the Byzantine culture that preceded Umayyad rule in Syria. | LA
The Mudéjar style of the Iberian Peninsula grew out of a synthesis of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish artistic idioms beginning in the twelfth century and continuing through the end of the fifteenth century, when the Mudéjars, i.e., Muslims who had remained in the region after the Reconquista but who continued to practice their own religion, were forced to convert to Christianity. During the mediaeval period, Mudéjar artisans excelled in the crafts of woodwork, plaster work, pottery, metalwork, and textile production (Ecker 2004, p. 58). The beautifully carved wooden corbels and beams in this group contain design combinations reminiscent of other architectural elements attributed to Toledo. Split and curved palmettes, for example, appear in corbels in the collection of the Hispanic Society of America, New York (Ecker 2004, pp. 64–65 and 147–48 [no. 56, inv. no. D51–D60]). Heather Ecker notes that the combination of the curved palmette motif (which “sweeps back from the top volutes like the prow of a ship, in Spanish, canecillos de proa or quilla, between two vine tendrils that project outwards as points”) and the appearance of multi-petalled rosettes distinguish these examples as typical of Toledo rather than Granada as a place of production (ibid., p. 147). Further comparative examples can be found in the David Collection, Copenhagen (von Folsach 2001, p. 271 [fig. 437, inv. no. 46 a-b/1999]). Traces of polychrome decoration on some of the works in this group (i.e., cat. 48) suggest that these architectural elements were once painted in colour. | LA
The long tenure of the Nasrid dynasty (1230–1492) in the Andalusian state of Granada was remarkable considering the frequency of political and military challenges that existed in the region while they were in power. As the centre of authority in the Islamic lands shifted from the central more towards the eastern Islamic lands in the Middle Ages, the western regions began to develop their own more uniquely regional styles; Spain and North Africa were no exception. In Spain, the coexistence of Muslims, Christians, and Jews led to a synthesized style which would distinguish the art and architecture of this region from the rest of the Islamic world.

The three architectural panels shown here probably originally belonged to a ceiling made of wood, a popular medium for the representation of interlacing geometric designs appearing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Each equilateral triangular panel is subdivided into smaller panels that form a radiating design starting from an eight-pointed star shape at the centre. The eight-pointed star, produced from the superimposition of two interlocking squares at a 45° angle, appears on wall decoration at the Alhambra fortress of the Nasrids in Granada. Heather Ecker has described this design principle as the “lazo of eight,” which consists of geometric designs built from various interlocking combinations involving the eight-pointed star. This design appears on several different media during the Nasrid period, including wood, stucco, and textiles (for textile and wood examples, see Ecker 2004, pp. 47–51 and 139–40, cat. nos. 42–44, from the Hispanic Society of America, New York, although there are several more in other collections). Each panel includes a floral or foliate design painted on a brown ground and divided from other panels with borders in high relief, painted in light blue outlined by bright yellow and red. Although wooden ceilings from Islamic Spain often survive in fragments, it is rare to find a coherent group of ceiling elements, such as these three panels. | LA

Three triangular ceiling panels with interlacing geometric designs
Spain, Al-Andalus, Nasrid, 14th - 15th century
Wood, carved and painted
Each panel 151 cm
Published: Museo sin Fronteras 2000, p. 285; AKTC 2009a, pp. 98-99; AKTC 2009b, pp. 98-99
This skilfully carved, long rectangular wooden beam includes an inscription in kufic of an Arabic couplet framed between two horizontal bands. The inscription is intertwined with an intricate vegetal design composed of interlacing vine scrolls ending in single leaves and split palmettes. Vegetal and epigraphic ornament are differentiated from one another by the addition of an increased amount of detailing carved into the foliate pattern; this helps highlight the inscription carved in the bevelled technique against the dense background. The overall carving style seems to have been common in Nasrid Spain (1238–1492) and even in contemporary North Africa in a variety of media. In Spain, it shows up in the stucco decoration of the "Hall of the Two Sisters" at the Alhambra, built in the fourteenth century (see Barrucand 2002, pp. 202–03). Similar motifs involving calligraphy juxtaposed with vegetal carving can also be observed in a wooden beam from Toledo dated 1360 and in a carved stucco panel from thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Spain or North Africa, both in the David Collection, Copenhagen (von Folsach 2001, p. 270 [no. 434, inv. no. D 14/1986] and p.251 [no. 400, inv. no. 35/1978, accidentally printed in reverse], respectively). | L.A
This is one of two carved, painted and partially gilded pine friezes that originate from an Almohad palatial context. The use of pine rather than cedar clearly leads us back to Al-Andalus. The preserved parts, 6.26 metres long, are decorated with an inscription in tawīl meters reproducing an ode of pre-Islamic Arabia. The equal lengths of the two parts, of over three metres, and the sequence they form, enable us to reconstruct how they would fit in a square room of just over 9 m². One could link them to later constructions, such as the Tower of the Captive at the Alhambra, which was square, with a section of a qasida inscribed on each wall.

The two friezes were placed on two perpendicular walls, probably at the base of the ceiling. Indeed, the two texts follow each other. Panel B, which is presented here, follows panel A. They both belong therefore to a qasida of the poet Jāhiliyya Samaw’al ibn ‘Adiyā, who died in circa 560. The text differs in parts from the edited text of the Dīwān; notably, in the first hemistich of the last verse, the subject changes; the “I” becomes “we”; in one of the verses, the word dhibat is substituted with suyuğ (the swords); lastly, an entire distich has been displaced to later on in the text. However, as each distich constitutes a complete sense unit, this shift hardly affects the flow of the text.

The use of pre-Islamic poetry deserves to be highlighted: it indicates a particularly literate environment replete with memories of original Arab poetry. This sensitivity underscores once more Spain’s role as the land of the preservation of classical Arab poetry. This, in turn, gave way, more than a century later, to a dialogue between the most illustrious of poets, historians and viziers of Nasrid Spain, Līsān al-Dīn ibn al-Khāṭīb (died in 1374), and the greatest historian of Islam, Ibn Khaldūn (died in 1406), on the preservation of the vestiges of the literary glory of the Arabs at the end of Arab Spain, whereas in the rest of the Arab world, where history was still being written, a technical and practical language had been born.

The inscription is couched in angular writing without any diacritic signs. The letters are reduced to a third of the available height on the base-line, strongly contrasting with the long downstrokes. The crossed lām-alif on panel A are characterized by a polylobate motif in the upper third. Lastly, the loop of the lām rises and curls around the downstroke.

The size of the downstrokes rules out the inscription belonging to the Almoravid period. However, the contours of the torus and several epigraphic marks make it more similar to an undated Qur’anic inscription at the Batha museum in Fès or a prismatic stele in the same museum dated 580 H / 1184 CE. The form of the hā (panel A), made with two embedded spherical triangles (or twisted hā) is a specific marker of this inscription; it was present in the East at the end of the eleventh century and is to be found on two funerary inscriptions in Badajoz dated respectively 539 H / 1144 CE and 556 H / 1160 CE. Equivalents can also be found in the Marinid and Nasrid inscriptions; however, it is the plant-like decoration, whose simplicity contrasts with the Marinid woods, which conduces to its assignment to a much earlier date, in the course of the twelfth century. | SM
Incense was used in the Islamic world to scent people and air alike with a fragrant mix of aloes (wood), frankincense and ambergris. According to the historian al-Mas’udi, guests of the ninth-century caliph al-Ma’mun (r. 813-33) were offered an incense burner to perfume themselves before meeting with him (Bloom and Blair 1997, p. 120). Metalwork incense burners were made in a variety of shapes, including animal forms such as lions and birds, which were associated with paradise and good fortune. The head and neck of this piece are hinged to facilitate the placement of the incense, which when burned would emit fragrant smoke through the body’s pierced decoration. A masterpiece of medieval bronze casting, this incense burner is a representation of a variety of pigeon called “scandaroon”, a distortion of the name of the Turkish town Iskenderun, itself derived from the name Iskandar (Alexander the Great). This species originated in Iraq and spread westward across the Mediterranean. While the present object is close in shape to contemporary Khurasan-style bird incense burners, its casting is heavier and more sculptural, the pierce-work holes are larger, and the colour and patination are different. It has been suggested that this bird incense burner may have been produced in Sicily in the late eleventh or early twelfth century under its Arab and Norman governors, although further research may yet indicate a different source. | AF
The peacock is associated with Paradise and royalty; it is depicted on a wide range of Islamic objects, from ceramic bowls to textiles, metalwork, and book arts. Some believe that the peacock was ejected from Paradise with Adam and Eve, explaining its mournful cries. The peacock is a very popular motif for the decoration of ceramic bowls throughout the Islamic world, from North Africa to Central Asia, over a long span of time. The bird’s shape fits neatly within the cavetto and the tail feathers are often curved back toward its head. The decorative motifs, technique, and palette of this bowl are typical of North African ceramic production: a large bird with incised details is painted in green, yellow, and manganese against a dark yellow ground. | AF
**Rectangular cut-glass box**

Probably Italy (Sicily) or Spain (Al-Andalus), 10th-11th century
Glass; free-blown and cut; bronze hinges and clasp
Length 11.3 cm
AKM 00652
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 104; AKTC 2009b, p. 104

The technique of cut glass in the Islamic world became best known in the ninth and tenth centuries, appearing in a variety of forms, including relief patterns created from wheels made of stone, metal, or wood, and drills for incision made of stone or diamond points (Carboni 2001, p. 71). This rectangular box, revealing some polychrome iridescence, consists of two parts joined together, both free-blown and wheel-cut; the top includes a design of two circles containing lozenge motifs and the bottom includes one of two kite-shaped motifs. The bronze hinges and clasp each end in a pair of rams’ horns.

The wheel-cutting technique predates the Islamic period as it was used widely by the Romans and the Sasanians. Around the fourth or fifth century, the practice appears to have declined throughout the Mediterranean; it then resurfaced in the eighth and ninth centuries in the eastern Islamic world, particularly in Iran and Iraq (Carboni and Whitehouse 2001, p. 155). While the technique is associated more closely with the eastern Islamic lands, the form of this object is reminiscent of caskets produced in Islamic Spain and Sicily (see, for example, Dodds 1992, p. 192 [no. 2], or von Folsach 2001, p. 255 [no. 407]). A taste for the Middle East had already existed since the earliest Umayyads of Spain experienced nostalgia for their homeland in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean region, which had been lost to the ‘Abbāsids who overthrew them. However, it is possible that the arrival of a certain Ziryab – a freedman of the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775–785) who is credited with introducing ‘Abbāsid court traditions of music, dress, food, and proper etiquette to the Umayyads of Spain (Dodds 1992, p. 42) – may also have inspired the transmission of artistic tastes and techniques that spread throughout the rest of the western Islamic world.

**Funerary stele**

North Africa, dated 377 H / 987 CE
Carved marble
Height 59.7 cm
AKM 00662
Published: AKTC 2007a, pp. 72–73 (no. 42); AKTC 2007b, pp. 68–69 (no. 42); AKTC 2009a, pp. 104-105; AKTC 2009b, pp. 104-105

There is a long tradition of inscribed marble funerary steles in the Islamic world. This stele is a dignified example of North African production, typically Tunisian, during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The fifteen-line kufic inscription includes the name of someone who was possibly a leather merchant (jallād, although this could also imply the profession of a torturer, according to Abdullah Ghouchani).

The date of Sha‘bān 376 H / December 986 CE is given for his death and for the collection of his body by his brother from the city in which he died. The date inscribed for his burial in another city, most likely his hometown, is Jumada II 377 H / 15 October 987 CE, which means he was interred some ten months after he died. The city of death has been read as Cairo (Misl) but also as Mansūf.

The stele was not made from a ‘new’ piece of marble, but from a Roman baluster with large scrolling acanthus leaves carved in deep intaglio. It probably dates back to around 300 CE and must have lain unused with architectural debris for seven hundred years before being turned into a funerary stele. Such examples of reuse of precious materials point to the scarcity of materials in areas such as North Africa.

| AF LA |
After the 750 rebellion of the Abbasids against the first Islamic dynasty, the Umayyads, the core of the Islamic world moved from Damascus to Baghdad. The Abbasids’ success was fuelled by the assistance of slave soldiers called mamluks (Arabic for “slaves”) who ultimately gained increasing power themselves and actually contributed to weakening Abbasid control in favour of independently ruling provincial dynasties who paid lip service to the Abbasid caliph for legitimacy. In the meantime, in North Africa, the Tulunids broke away from the Abbasid caliphate and established themselves as the first independent dynasty in Egypt (865–909). Egypt gained even more importance under the Fatimids, who claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter, Fatima, and her husband Ali, Muhammad’s first cousin. The Fatimids entered Egypt in 969, created the capital of Cairo, near the old city of Fustat along the Nile, and ruled most of North Africa, Sicily, the Yemen, the Hijaz, and parts of Syria at the height of their power.

The Fatimid dynasty fell in 1171 to Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, known to the West as Saladin. The Ayyubids were of Kurdish origin and had served the Turkic Zengids, descendants of a slave to Malik Shah (r. 1072–1092), the last Great Seljuq ruler of Iran. In the twelfth century, the Zengids took control of parts of Iraq and Syria and turned their sights on Egypt, where Salah al-Din claimed victory as an officer to Nur al-Din Zengi. Salah al-Din had greater plans, however; in 1169, he usurped control of Egypt from his master and, after Nur al-Din’s death in 1174, he conquered Syria as well. During its tenure from 1169 to 1250, the Ayyubid dynasty ruled over the Yemen, the Hijaz, and parts of Mesopotamia in addition to Egypt and Syria. The Ayyubids were eventually overtaken by members of the same mamluk slave soldiers who had once served the Abbasids and later served under the Buyids (934–1062) and Ayyubids. The Mamluks would go on to establish their own dynasty instead of serving other rulers in 1250 and rule until the Ottoman conquest of 1517.

Because of the several cultural and political currents that ran through Egypt and Syria between the tenth and sixteenth centuries, the art produced in these countries during that period exhibits a combination of artistic motifs, styles, and techniques that borrowed from Abbasid court culture but also reflected new developments under each new dynasty. Lustreware technology, for example, is believed to have been developed for glass decoration in eighth–ninth-century Egypt and Syria, translated to ceramics in ninth–tenth-century Iraq, and then reintroduced for ceramic decoration in Egypt under the Fatimids (Bloom and Blair 1997, p. 251). At times, similarities in styles and techniques among the artworks produced under these dynasties makes it difficult to attribute undated or untested objects specifically to one court (see cat. no. 66). Nevertheless, as the quality and prolific amounts of art and architecture produced in this region testify, this period contributed significantly to the visual culture of the Islamic world.
Given the central location of Syria along numerous routes of cultural exchange, it is no surprise that excavations of mediaeval kiln sites in this country have yielded ceramic wares produced in a variety of techniques and exhibiting diverse motifs and styles. As a result, the identification and classification of this material are particularly difficult (see discussion of Raqqa ware in cat. no. 61). The two lustre painted dishes shown here, however, can be grouped stylistically among the so-called “Tell Minis” wares, named after a village site near Ma`arrat al-Nu`man in western Syria and distinguished by their fine frit bodies and a unique lustre painting style. As Oya Pancaroğlu has noted, there is not enough evidence about the discovery of the “Tell Minis” hoard or the site itself to allow for a confident attribution of this location as a centre of production (Pancaroğlu 2007, p. 63). At the very least, works categorised as “Tell Minis” can be spotted by their inclusion of vegetal ornament composed of three- or five-lobed leaves with pointed tips, often surrounding a large central figural motif, such as the peacock in cat. 59, or a non-figural motif, such as the circular medallion with radiating spokes in cat. 60. These motifs can hold auspicious meanings; in the Greater Iranian world, for example, the peacock is associated with royalty and, on a mystical level, with paradise (as suggested by the Sufi poet Farid al-Din ‘Attar (d. 1220) in his Mantiq al-tayr, or Conference of the Birds). Similar bowls are found in other collections, such as in the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection, Chicago. One bowl of that collection includes a central peacock like the one in cat. 59, while the other contains the auspicious Seal of Solomon in which the Arabic word for “blessing” (baraka) has been inscribed in a manner not unlike the “glory” appearing in cat. 60. Furthermore like in the latter, both of the Chicago dishes have exterior Arabic inscriptions identifying the workshop or artist, followed by the word khâṣṣ, which can be translated as “special” or “private,” perhaps meant to indicate royal or special commissions (see ibid., pp. 62–63 [nos. 20 and 21]). | LA
**Tile with star-shaped central aperture**

Syria (Raqqa ware), Ayyubid, early 13th century
Ceramic; fritware, moulded with a transparent turquoise glaze
36.5 cm square

AKM 00702

Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 109; AKTC 2009b, p. 109

This moulded tile is decorated with split-palmette scrolls radiating from a central aperture in the form of an eight-pointed star, while a tri-lobed palmette motif marks each of its four corners; the entire decoration is framed within a border formed by a raised line. The tile has been covered with a transparent turquoise glaze and resembles other moulded wares made in the same technique and attributed to Syria in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Connections may also be made to ceramics produced in the neighbouring Iranian world, as suggested by a moulded tile in the David Collection, Copenhagen, covered with turquoise glaze and including sixteen small, evenly-spaced, eight-pointed star-shaped apertures (von Folsach 2001, p. 167 [no. 208, inv. no. 5/1980]).

So-called Raqqa ware – which, over time, has come to refer to a wide range of pottery, including certain kinds of lustreware, underglaze painted wares, monochrome-glazed wares, and Laqabi and “Tell Minis” wares (see cat. nos. 59-60) – has been the subject of several studies, especially in recent years. The city, located on the left bank of the Euphrates River in Syria, is one of the first archaeological sites for the excavation of Islamic ceramics. It was once assumed that wares resembling the ones found at Raqqa were produced in that city and then travelled to other regions, such as Anatolia, Iran, and Egypt (for a summary of previous scholarship on Raqqa ware, see Jenkins-Madina 2006, pp. 7–8). More recently, Oliver Watson suggested that a similar range of ceramic wares were produced at other sites throughout Syria and that there is strong evidence for Egypt being a centre of production for wares of equal or higher quality, with the exception of lustreware (Watson 1999 and Watson 2004, p. 289). The latest study of Raqqa ceramics was conducted by Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, who examined a group of ceramics of this type found in Konya alongside the Raqqa wares in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Jenkins-Madina concludes that these works were produced in the first three decades of the thirteenth century while the Ayyubid dynasty was in power (1169–1260), a period which corresponds specifically to the residence of the Ayyubid prince al-Malik al-Ashraf Musa in Raqqa and his patronage of an extensive building program for the city (Jenkins-Madina 2006, pp. 186–87). Soon after this time, Raqqa was occupied by the Rum Saljuqs and the Khwarazmshahs and it was eventually destroyed by the Ilkhanid Mongols in 1265. | LA
**Carved beam with Qur'anic inscription**

Syria, late 12th – early 13th century
Carved wood
11.2 x 122 cm
Text: _al-Baqara_ (“The Cow”), 2:255
AKM 00632
Published: Makariou 2007, pp. 118 – 19 (no. 39); AKTC 2008a, p. 73 (no. 17); AKTC 2009a, pp. 110-111; AKTC 2009b, pp. 110-111

Between the two smooth ends, which have holes for fasteners, extends a long cartouche with a raised inscription that stands out from the finely sculpted background consisting of plant foliage, punctuated by small whorls, bifid leaves or palmettes with a long, curved tip, fairly typical of the Syrian repertoire. This epigraphic carved wooden beam may have belonged to the small side of a cenotaph. The inscription contains part of verse 255 of _al-Baqara_ (The Cow), the second chapter of the Qur’an: “[His is what is in the heavens and what is in] the earth! Who is it that intercedes with Him save by His permission?” Known as the “Throne verse,” this is one of the passages of the Qur’an most often used in a funerary context or for decorating mihrabs. The script is highly representative of the Ayyubid _naskh_ script, a form of cursive marked by its elegant simplicity and compact, dynamic nature. The same combination of softly rounded letters standing out from slender foliage is found in some Syrian and Egyptian pieces. A fragment of an epigraphic frieze preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (David-Weill 1931, pp. 34–35, no. 2118, pl. 21), which was discovered in Imam al-Shafi’i’s mausoleum and certainly comes from a cenotaph, is very similar to this piece. | C)

**Capital with mythical creatures**

Eastern Syria or Mesopotamia, first half of the 13th century
Marble
Height 33 cm
AKM 00731
Published: AKTC 2009a, pp. 110-111; AKTC 2009b, pp. 110-111

A scrolling vegetal design of palmette and split-palmette motifs, surrounding a pair of addorsed birds and a pair of animals resembling a cross between a sphinx and a griffin (facing opposite directions), has been carved in shallow relief onto each of the four largest panels of this capital, which is composed of an octagonal base and a square top. The decoration, in low-relief, covers all four sides of the capital. The interstitial triangular panels contain a more abstract interlacing scroll design. Similar vegetal ornament appears on works of diverse media, including a cast bronze element for suspension in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London (Rogers 2008, p. 101 [no. 111]); a carved wooden storage chest in the David Collection, Copenhagen (von Folsach 2001, p. 266 [no.428, inv. no. 3/1993]); and a candlestick in the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha (Allan 2002, pp. 42–43 [no. 8]). Similar animals embedded in scrolling ornament can be found on objects produced in the eastern Anatolian region, as suggested by sphinxes depicted in the roundels of a canteen in the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. (Atıl, Chase, and Jett 1985, pp. 124–36 [no. 17]). | L.A
By the late ninth century, the hegemony of the Abbasid Caliphate had weakened. Regional governors in Egypt and Iran exercised near-total control of their territories, paying lip-service to the caliph through the mention of his name in the Friday sermon (khutba) and in coinage and tiraz textiles produced at official manufactories. Some Islamic dynasties, such as the Umayyads of Spain, operated entirely outside the caliphate, while local leaders in parts of Syria and Arabia espoused Shiism.

In 267 H / 909 CE a new Shia leader, 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi, conquered Tunisia and founded a new capital at Mahdiyya. He followed the Ismaili doctrine of Shi'ism which claimed a new era of history would be heralded by the arrival of the Mahdi (the messiah), who would be descended from 'Ali and Fatima through Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq. 'Abd Allah and his successors, the Fatimids, set themselves up as rivals to the Abbasids and within seven years of Imam al-Mahdi’s conquest of Tunisia they had established a governor in Sicily.

In 969 an exceptional general, Jawhar, occupied Egypt, and in 973 the fourth Fatimid Imam-caliph, al-Mu'izz, relocated the Fatimid capital to Cairo (al-Qahira, the Victorious), the new city he built on the Nile next to the pre-existing town of al-Fustat. Although the Fatimids maintained their capital at Cairo, they taught their vision of Islam by proselytizing through a broad regional organisation, the da'wa. At the height of their power in the late tenth century the Fatimids controlled Mecca and Madina, Yemen and parts of Palestine and Syria. Supported by an army of North African, Turkish and Sudanese soldiers, the Fatimids eventually suffered from internal dissensions that took both ideological and political forms. Exacerbating the power struggles within the military, drought led to economic woes in the 1060’s and the inability of the Fatimid caliph to pay his army. In 1067, during the reign of al-Mustansir, the soldiers ransacked the Fatimid treasury. While this was a disaster for the Fatimid ruler, it has proved to be a boon for historians of Fatimid art because of the descriptions by the historians, Ibn al-Zubayr and Makrizi, of the objects dispersed from the treasury. While the Fatimid dynasty survived until 1171, its territories in Sicily, Syria and Palestine fell to its rivals and finally Saladin delivered the coup de grâce with his conquest of Egypt.

The historical descriptions of the Fatimid treasury corroborate the tangible evidence of the luxury and refinement of this court. Carved rock crystal vessels designed to contain precious substances such as attar, gossamer-thin textiles inscribed with the name and titles of the caliphs, and jewellery made of the finest filigree and enamel reflect the Fatimid court’s opulence. Fatimid art shows a loose influence of Abbasid and Byzantine prototypes. While some elements of Fatimid lustreware pottery derive from Abbasid lustrewares, the iconography of large hares, figures engaged in sports such as cock-fighting, and the combination of foliated epigraphy and geometric ornament are more typical of the Fatimids than the Abbasids. The descriptions of the Fatimid treasury call attention to how much was lost, but the few items that remain are witness to a period of great cultural wealth.
Islamic woodwork is known through surviving examples since the seventh century; its history has been traced most comprehensively in Egypt (Contadini 1998, pp. 111–12), where the woodworking tradition was first practiced among the Christian Copts and the Tulunids, the first independent Islamic dynasty in that country. It is believed that Fatimid woodwork developed out of the Coptic and Tulunid traditions (ibid., p. 112). This square-sectioned beam contains mortice and tenon joints and bears a kufic inscription containing verses from the sixty-seventh chapter of the Qur’an.

Only two other Tulunid beams with calligraphic decoration are known, one dated 898 (“Art from the World of Islam, 8th–18th Century”, Louisiana Revy 27/3 [March 1987], p. 65, no. 10) and the other comprising fragments. One of these fragments was exhibited at the Musée d’art et d’histoire in Geneva in 1988–89 and is now housed in the David Collection, Copenhagen (Musée d’art et d’histoire 1988, pp. 52–53, pl. 1); other fragments can be found in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. | L.A.
Precious objects fashioned from rock crystal were highly prized in Egypt. They may be linked to the Fatimid period as they are often mentioned in Fatimid treasury accounts, and there are extant objects inscribed with the names of Fatimid caliphs and officials. Valued throughout the centuries, Fatimid rock crystal objects are found today in European royal and church treasuries to which they were brought by Crusaders and travellers to the Holy Land. An extraordinary ewer is kept in the Astorga cathedral museum (León). Another, in the San Marco church treasury, Venice, features an inscription with the name of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-ʿAziz (r. 975–96). The tubular-shaped bottle has as its sole decoration a kufic script inscription in Arabic which translates as “Glory and prosperity to its owner.”

The rectangular dish contains two circular compartments and is decorated with palmettes and scrolls in the familiar “bevelled” style, which ultimately originates in the stucco decoration of Abbasid Samarra (Iraq). The vessel’s shape is unusual and seemingly without parallel in rock crystal from this time. It may have been used as a cosmetics dish or, more likely, as a double inkwell, though there are no extant contemporary rock crystal inkwells in single or double format. | AF
This type of jar, with an ovoid belly extending into a short, fairly wide neck and rolled mouth, is a well-known Fatimid style used into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Nevertheless, this is an exceptional piece because of the quality of the design and the excellent state of preservation. The technique used and the decorative style place it among the ceramics known as “Tell Minis”, named after a village in northern Syria, close to Ma‘arrat al- Nu‘mān, where a collection of some one hundred pieces were reportedly discovered in 1957. Some of these pieces were purchased by the David Collection in Copenhagen, in particular a cup decorated with an intertwined ribbon forming polylobe motifs punctuated by fine re-engraved spirals, very similar to the design on our jar (Makariou 2007, p. 197, n. 29).

This production, termed “Tell Minis” by Venetia Porter and Oliver Watson, groups siliceous clay wares finished with a metallic lustre or glazed after incision (Makariou 2007, p. 197, n. 30). The discovery of many similar pieces in different parts of Syria (Damascus, Hama) has corroborated the thesis of a Syrian production, very influenced by Fatimid Egypt, and possibly dating back to the middle of the twelfth century.

In fact, three fragments of a cup kept in the Benaki Museum, and a single fragment housed in the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art, discovered in Fustat and subject to a similar technique, present the same type of epigraphy (ibid., notes 31–32). It is a very special type of angular writing, whereby the long downstrokes have a sort of midway hook or elbow, while the split bevels at the ends are preceded by a double horizontal line. In the lower frieze, one in two downstrokes ends with a half-palm leaf pattern. This type of writing style is extremely unusual. Apart from the above-mentioned fragments, this kind of downstroke with a crocheted projection can be seen on two fragments found in Fustat; one decorated with metallic lustre (ibid., n. 33), the other with glazed champlevé, and also on a cup published by Porter and Watson, as well as on the so-called “Fadā” cenotaph in Homs, Syria, possibly dating back to the thirteenth century (ibid., notes 34–36). These examples illustrate well the difficulty of unequivocally attributing this production to any one centre.

The inscriptions are a set of vows commonly found on objects. In the medallions, are the words: baraka wa / kāmila wa / kāfiya bara[ka] / kāfiya wa (“blessing, perfect, complete, blessing, complete”). The same words can be found around the base, in a different sequence: baraka kāmila kāfiya kāfiya kāfiya kāmila kāfiya wa. [CJ]
Manufactured in state-run mints, the coins of the Fatimids were a means of visual communication to a vast public and a vehicle for enhancing the way people viewed the caliphate’s power and prestige. Their high gold content and purity - sustained throughout the Fatimid period - testified to the economic and monetary wealth of the state. Inscribed with the names and titles of the Fatimid imam-caliphs, the coins are also usually dated. They serve as important historical documents, while the mint and place names they bear illustrate the geographical extent of Fatimid rule. These coins are known for their fine, elegant epigraphy, and the myriad stylistic variations of their design. One example of this is the unusual and distinctive design that appears on coins produced in Palermo, Sicily (central item, third row).

The central inscriptions on the reverse and obverse are arranged within segments so as to divide the surface into a star-like pattern.

The coins of the following Fatimid imam-caliphs are presented:

'Abd Allah al-Mahdi bi'llah (r. 909–934)
Al-Qa'im bi'Amr Allah (r. 934–946)
Al-Mansur bi'llah (r. 946–953)
Al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (r. 953–975)
Al-'Aziz bi'llah (r. 975–996)
Al-Hakim bi'Amr Allah (r. 996–1021)
Al-Zahir li-I'zaz Din Allah (r. 1021–1036)
Al-Mustansir bi'llah (r. 1036–1094) (two coins)
Precious objects such as this miniature Qur’an case (cat. no. 83) and jewellery, including necklaces of biconical and spherical beads, pendants, and a variety of rings, all made from gold filigree work and embellished with granulation, were produced in tenth- and eleventh-century Fatimid Egypt and Greater Syria. The objects in this group reflect the superb craftsmanship of the goldsmiths who made them. As the pendants suggest, the crescent (hilāl) shape was particularly popular. Semi-precious stones or pearls may have been suspended from the loops on each pendant, which was made of typical Fatimid box construction featuring filigree and gold strips embellished with granulation. The rings and biconical bead exhibit typical Fatimid filigree arabesques and S-shapes with granulation. This filigree work was called mushhabbak (latticework) in twelfth-century trousseau lists from the Cairo Geniza documents, which are an important source for the study of medieval Mediterranean history (Jenkins-Madina 1997, pp. 419–20, citing Goitein 1967–83, vol. 4, pp. 211–12).

The miniature Qur’an case is a beautiful example of Fatimid-style granulated filigree decoration, exposing the goldsmith’s skill with different patterns on each side. The front has dense foliate scrollwork formed into a programme of circles and triangles around a central panel (with missing inset), while the reverse exhibits a geometric lattice based on interlocking hexagons. The case would have contained a miniature Qur’an and hung around the wearer’s neck, suspended by two loops (one is missing here). The influence of the Fatimid goldsmiths’ work extended far and wide; the goldsmiths’ decorative vocabulary was adapted later by the Mamluks (1250–1517) and in Spain by the Nasrids (1230–1492). | AF

Three enamelled gold pendants
Egypt or Syria, 10th–11th century
Gold and cloisonné enamel
Length 3.2 cm, 2.9 cm, and 2.6 cm, respectively
AKM 00594
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 91 (no. 63); AKTC 2007b, p. 91 (no. 63); AKTC 2008a, pp. 134–35 (no. 46); AKTC 2009a, p. 119; AKTC 2009b, p. 119
Three gold filigree rings

Egypt, 10th–11th century
Gold
Height 3.4 cm, 2.5 cm, 3.1 cm, respectively
AKM 00596; AKM 00595; AKM 00597
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 95 (no. 65); AKTC 2007b, p. 92 (no. 65); AKTC 2008a, pp. 136–37 (no. 48); AKTC 2009a, p. 120; AKTC 2009b, p. 120
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Biconical gold bead
Egypt or Syria, 11th century
Gold
Height 2.9 cm; length 7.2 cm; weight: 18 grams
AKM 00618
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 95 (no. 64); AKTC 2007b, p. 92 (no. 64); AKTC 2009a, pp. 136–37 (no. 47); AKTC 2009b, p. 121

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Miniature Qur’an case
Egypt, 11th century
Gold
Length 4.7 cm
AKM 00598
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 95 (no. 65); AKTC 2007b, pp. 92–93 (no. 66); AKTC 2009a, p. 121; AKTC 2009b, p. 121
Tiraz refers to inscribed textiles, such as the robes of honour distributed by a ruler. It may also refer to the band of inscription on the textiles as well as the state workshops where they were produced (dār al-tirāz). The importance of clothing in Fatimid ceremonies created a constant demand for complete new wardrobes. The caliph regularly outfitted his entire court with lavish new clothing for religious, civil, and military ceremonies. Egyptian weavers were kept busy making tiraz robes for both Fatimid and 'Abbasid caliphs at the same time. Few complete inscribed garments survive and the fragmentary nature of extant tiraz like this one makes it difficult to identify their specific context or function. The foliated kufic inscription of this textile fragment includes blessings to the Prophet Muhammad and the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (r. 952–75).

The Arabic inscription on the textile reads:

“In the name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful; may God’s blessing be upon Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets, and his family... from God... for the servant of God and His believer, Ma’ad Abu Tamim, the Imam al-Mu‘izz” (trans. Abdullah Ghouchani)
This silk-embroidered textile fragment blurs the typical stylistic, chronological, and geographical boundaries in the study of Islamic art. The ground fabric, woven in an indigo-dyed linen, is embroidered in silk and gold thread (wrapped around a silk core) with decorative elements comprised of confronting pairs of birds flanking a human face, small running hares, and ornamental rosettes. The use of silk thread wrapped in gold recalls the luxurious *nasiq* (an abbreviated form of the Arabic *nasiq al-dhabab al-harir*, "cloth of gold and silk"), from the Arabic textiles woven in Iran and Central Asia before and during the medieval period, after the Mongol invasions. It is possible that the practice of weaving in silk and gold might be related to the cross-cultural exchanges resulting from trade (and sometimes war) between Egypt, the Near East, and Central Asia during this time. The appearance of animals on a medieval Egyptian textile is also not uncommon; confronting and addorsed animal pairs, in particular, have a rich history in the Ancient Near East. The inclusion of a human face without a body, however, is unusual. On a technical level, given the linen ground of the fabric and even its figural decoration, this skilfully woven panel relates to Fatimid and Coptic textiles produced in Egypt during the tenth and eleventh centuries. | LA
After Salah al-Din’s death in 1193, disputes over who should ascend the throne ensued among his descendants, resulting in divided rule throughout Egypt and Syria. Ironically, the Ayyubids’ ultimate demise came at the hands of one of their own elite military caste of slaves, a Mamluk (Arabic for “slave”) bowkeeper named Baybars. The Mamluks rule of Egypt and Syria, which lasted from 1250 until 1517, was divided between the reigns of two ethnic groups: the Bahri Mamluks (“Mamluks of the Sea”), who were mostly Kipchak Turks (1250–1390), and the Burji Mamluks (“Mamluks of the Citadel”), who were of Circassian origin (1382–1517). One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Mamluks is that they never became a dynasty in the true sense of the word, as ruler succession depended not on family ties but on the requirement that one had to have been born a slave. This ruled out the freeborn offspring of Mamluk sultans, although in practice there were some exceptions. For the most part, however, this non-dynastic system contributed to an art and architectural style reflecting the individualized tastes of various Mamluks and their legacies.

Initially, Mamluk style paralleled that of the Ayyubids, which itself borrowed aspects of Fatimid artistic and architectural styles. The Mamluks came to be known by the great charitable foundations and complexes they commissioned, which allowed them to propagate orthodox Sunni Islam in a land once dominated by the heterodox Shi’ism of the Fatimids. It also prevented the possible confiscation of properties they had collected over their lifetimes by passing on much of their acquired wealth through endowments naming their descendants as trustees. The largest structures built during this period were domed mausoleums, which attested to the secular power of the Mamluks and glorified the individuality of each ruler. The monumental size of these buildings, which boasted massive domes and minarets, also reflected inspiration from the Mamluks’ rivals to the east in Iran and Central Asia, the Ilkhanid Mongols (1256–1353), and their successors, the Timurids (1370–1526). Complexes were additionally endowed with Qur’ans as well as mosque lamps, candlesticks, and other objects. Objects often reflected the rank and status of their patrons, with epigraphic emblems identifying sultans and blazons representing amirs, or generals (cat. nos. 87, 88). Cairo became the capital of the Mamluks and a destination for artists and craftsmen fleeing the Mongols from Mosul and other parts of Iraq and the Iranian world. Mamluk art therefore includes features shared with the arts of Iran. In addition, it reflects inspiration from China, with whom it also enjoyed maritime trade relations, as suggested by the blue-and-white tile panel depicting an architectural structure (cat. no. 89), as well as an awareness of European tastes for the exotic east, as evidenced by albarellos made for the European market (cat. nos. 93, 94, 95).
Candlestick
Egypt or Syria, Mamluk, early 14th century
Brass, incised and inlaid with silver and niello
Height 35 cm; maximum diameter 31.5 cm
Inscription (Arabic):
Round the socket: "The High Authority, the Lordly, the Possessor, the Diligent, the Leader, the Holy warrior, [an officer of] al-Malik al-Nasir"
Round the shoulder: "The Honourable Authority, the High, the Lordly, the Possessor, the Learned, the Diligent, the Just, the Conqueror, the Holy warrior, the Defender, [an officer of] al-Malik al-Nasir"
Round the body: "The Honourable Authority, the High, the Lordly, the Possessor, the Learned, the Diligent, the Holy warrior, [an officer of] al-Malik al-Nasir"
Interior: (later Ottoman ownership inscription incised in tughra) "For the needy Ahmad ibn al-Sarim in the year 961 [1553–1554 CE]"
AKM 00736
Published: AKTC 2009a, pp. 126-127; AKTC 2009b, pp. 126-127

Thanks to the active patronage of Mamluks sultans and their amirs, the art of Mamluk metalwork between the late thirteenth and the mid-fourteenth centuries reached its greatest height, distinguished by a flourishing of the figural style and the development of an epigraphic one (Atıl 1981, p. 51). This period falls under the relatively long reign of Sultan al-Nasir al-Din Muhammad (r. 1293–1341, with interruptions), a particularly enthusiastic patron of art and architecture. The present candlestick may have been made for one of al-Nasir’s amirs, as suggested by the inscriptions around the socket, shoulder, and neck; the predominance of the bold and monumental thuluth, the preferred script under the Mamluks, represents the epigraphic style that evolved during this period. The truncated conical socket includes a band of inscription interrupted by whirling eight-petalled rosettes. Although the whirling rosette motif was not a blazon, it does appear to have held associations with some Mamluks, including al-Nasir al-Din Muhammad. The motif is repeated six times in a six-petalled form on the neck, enclosed within and between three large roundels filled with foliate scrolls and bordered by an abstract design of stylised overlapping leaves. The largest inscription appears on the body against a dense background of foliage composed of spiralling leaf scrolls and bordered by raised ridges above and below. A tughra inscribed on the object’s interior indicates that it was later in the possession of another individual, perhaps an Ottoman official, in the mid-fifteenth century, when Egypt and Syria came under Ottoman control. Similar candlesticks may be found in the collection of the Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. no. AO 5005), as well as in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (inv. nos. 4043 and 3982). | L.A.
The inlaid silver inscription on this Mamluk brass bowl reads, "For the High Excellency, the Lordly, the Great Amir, the Learned, the Just, the Valiant, the Supporter, the Succour, the Sparkling, the Help, the Orderly, the Responsible, the [officer] of al-Malik al-Nasir." This is a typical formulaic inscription, meant to bring glory and prosperity to the owner, and it is seen on a variety of artistic media, from ceramic bowls to enamelled glass mosque lamps, during the Mamluk period (1250–1517). Mamluk society thrived on emblems and symbols. The interior of the brass bowl is decorated with a sun disc and six fish. When the bowl was filled with water, the fish and sun would appear to shimmer. The image of the sun may be seen as symbolising the ruler, as well as wealth and the source of life. | AF
The use of coats-of-arms in the Islamic world is unique to the Mamluks (1250–1517), whose status in society could not be inherited. Pictorial blazons representing recognized images, such as a stemmed cup or napkin, identified the rank of an amir that served as cupbearer or master of robes. Epigraphic heraldic emblems, such as the one in this wood and ivory panel, were destined to monarchs or rulers, although other composite panels were not uncommon (see Mayer 1933). While several Mamluk sultans used the epithet *al-mālik al-ashraf*, it is likely that the inscription carved into the tripartite blazon on this panel refers to Sultan Qaytbay (r. 1468–1496), a ruler who brought about the revitalisation of the arts in Cairo. The form and style of the star-shaped architectural element bear resemblance to other carved ivory door panels produced during this sultan’s reign, one of which is housed in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, and is inscribed with his name (Atıl 1981, p. 210 [no. 105, inv. no. 2334]). That panel has been attributed to about 1470, around the time Qaytbay’s funerary complex was under construction in Cairo’s Northern Cemetery (1472–79). The sultan’s epigraphic blazon appears throughout the structure, and it is possible that these ivory and wood panels were meant for this building or another structure commissioned by him. | LA
The blue and white decoration of this tile is characteristic of the ceramic productions at the end of the Mamluk period which drew their inspiration from Chinese porcelain. Some pieces are faithful reproductions of Chinese models but others, like this one, present more original and highly charming compositions.

The decoration is symmetrical without being rigid. The central two-level edifice, surmounted by a bulbous dome and the two small pavilions (or gates) flanking it, stand against a landscape of sinuous bushes ending in broad leaves. The variations in proportion, the leaning horizontals and wavy lines suggest that this drawing was done freehand, spontaneously, lending a sort of naive but extremely lively touch to the composition. Could it be a religious building, mosque or mausoleum - the Gothic arch shapes of the two small structures recall the form of certain tombstones – or a palace, a pleasure pavilion in the middle of a garden? It conjures up images of luxuriant orchards of the Ghuta in Damascus and architectural landscapes of the mosaics of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads.

Two tiles housed at the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo, of unknown origin, present the same tripartite architecture with soaring domes surrounded by vegetation. One of them seems to have been cut to be embedded into a set of hexagonal tiles. The other one is also quadrangular and of very similar dimensions. There are other common elements, such as the diagonal band strangely covering the facade of the central edifice, the dome framed by two triangular leaves, and the grilled windows reminiscent of the mashrabiyya. Another decorative architectural tile can be found embedded in the stonework of the minaret of the al Qali mosque, in Damascus, dated circa 1470. Placed very high and difficult to observe, it seems to represent a mosque (a building with a dome topped with a crescent and flanked by a minaret). One rediscovers the theme designed on this tile on a blue and white-decorated bottle, linked to Iznik production at the end of the fifteenth century - absolutely unique, which boasts a design of pavilions set against a landscape. However, the two pieces differ in the architectural and plant-decoration details.

Finally, a connection can be established with a small group of gilded enamel glasses decorated architecturally. A bottle from this small group can be dated back to the Ayyubid domination, but the entire set of objects is more closely related to the production from the second half of the thirteenth century or beginning of the fourteenth century.
Under the Mamluks (1250–1517), the major centres of ceramic production were Damascus, in Syria, and Cairo, in Egypt. Perhaps because they were produced under a single authority, the wares produced in these regions are still difficult to distinguish from each other, although underglaze painting seems to have been practiced more widely in Syria (Fehérvári 2000, p. 246). However, it appears that some new styles and techniques were introduced to both these regions between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. One of the most noticeable changes in the aesthetics of Mamluk ceramic production was the addition of a Chinese-inspired aesthetic apparent in blue-and-white colour schemes and celadon glazes meant to imitate Chinese porcelains and celadon wares, as well as the use of Chinese motifs such as lotuses or peonies. The taste for the Far East may have arrived directly through contacts between the Mamluks and China and/or through an Iranian “filter” overland; the khiṭā’ī (“Cathayan”) idiom was prevalent in Iran, particularly from the Ilkhanid Mongol period (1256–1353) forward. The present tile depicts a central stylised lotus-like flower with five cobalt-blue floral sprays radiating towards an aubergine scalloped frame bordered by a black line. Hexagonal tiles of comparable dimensions with similar and varied motifs appear in other collections, including the Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait (Fehérvári 2000, pp. 250–51 [no. 311, CER1728TSR]) and the David Collection in Copenhagen (von Folsach 2001, p. 165 [no. 203]). However, the tiles in these collections display a colour palette of cobalt blue, black, and turquoise in contrast to the cobalt blue, black, and aubergine of the present tile. Géza Fehérvári has attributed these tiles to the fifteenth century but reiterates John Carswell’s conclusion that a place of production for these works remains uncertain (Fehérvári 2000, p. 251; and Carswell 1972, p. 75). | LA
المستورة الطسطسة والعباس طبر
Mosaic arches
Egypt, 15th–16th century (?)  
Marble and coloured-stone mosaic  
Length 2,235 m  
AKM 00571
Published: Makariou 2007, pp. 94-95 (no. 30); AKTC 2009a, p. 133; AKTC 2009b, p. 133

Badi al-Zaman ibn al-Razzaz al-Jazari wrote his mechanical treatise, the Kitab fi ma‘rifat al-hiyal al-hindasiyya (Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices), in 1206 for the Artuqid Sultan Nasir al-Din Muhammad (r. 1201–1222), who had a great fascination for machinery. The book included descriptions and illustrations of gadgets invented by al-Jazari and was highly copied and disseminated throughout the medieval Middle East. This folio, depicting a blood-letting device explained in the seventh chapter, comes from an Egyptian copy dated February–March 1354, made for the Mamluk amir Nasir al-Din Muhammad ibn Tulak al-Hasani al-Malik al-Salih at the time of Sultan Hasan’s second reign (r. 1354 - 1361). The Arabic description at the top of the page reads: “And I am showing an illustration of the shape of the basin, the stand, and the cylinders” (trans. A. Ghouchari). While most of the extant folios from this codex, including its colophon, are in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul (Aya Sofya 3606), a number of the original illustrated pages remain dispersed. Anthony Welch has alluded to the humour that may have been intended to accompany some of these illustrations (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 26). Perhaps this followed in the footsteps of al-Hariri’s (d. 1122) witty Maqamat, or Assemblies, illustrated copies of which were circulated widely in the thirteenth century. | LA
Three albarello
Syria, 15th century
Ceramic; fritware, underglaze painted in blue and black.
Height (a) 31.7 cm; (b) 30.7 cm; (c) 30.7 cm
AKM 00567 (a), AKM 00568 (b), and AKM 00569 (c)
Published (a): AKTC 2007a, p. 133 (no. 101); AKTC 2007b, p. 136 (no. 101); Makariou 2007, pp. 190–191 (no. 69); AKTC 2008a, pp. 204–205 (no. 78); AKTC 2008b, pp. 134–135; AKTC 2009a, pp. 134–135; AKTC 2009b, pp. 134–135
Published (b): AKTC 2007a, p. 133 (no. 101a); AKTC 2007b, p. 136 (no. 101a); Makariou 2007, pp. 26–27 (no. 2); AKTC 2009a, pp. 134–135; AKTC 2009b, pp. 134–135
Published (c): AKTC 2007a, p. 133 (no. 101b); AKTC 2007b, p. 136 (no. 101b); Makariou 2007, pp. 26–27 (no. 2); AKTC 2009a, pp. 134–135; AKTC 2009b, pp. 134–135

Two albarello from this group obviously come from the same workshop: they have the same size, similar concave cylindrical belly, horizontal shoulder and wide triconical neck, ending in a thick mouth and with very similar designs painted in cobalt blue under transparent glaze. Registers of foliage, separated by horizontal double lines, cover the two vases in their entirety, mixing rosettes, lotus flowers and small bent or dentate leaves. On the central, wider register are crests with a lily flower alternating with large rolled stems, punctuated with florets and leaves, shielding a large centre flower on one of the vases, and a crane in flight on the other. The third vase, however, has large inscriptions painted in black and blue and written in thuluth style with very slender downstrokes against a background of fine, rolled stems with foliage sparser than that found on the albarello mentioned above.

This type of high, narrow cylindrical vase seems to have appeared in Iran, in the eleventh or twelfth century, before spreading around the near East. This elegant hourglass shape profile was readily adopted from the end of the twelfth century in Syria. It is generally thought that these albarello were used to store pharmaceutical substances or perfumes and could be exported – especially to Europe – with their contents. Various French, Spanish and Italian inventories of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries mention ceramic items “from Damascus”. Thus, the Medici archives indicate the presence of albarello damascini in Florence.

These three vases were recently rediscovered in Italy, along with two similar albarello, bearing the same crest. A piece comparable to the calligraphic vase is known and housed at the National Ceramic Museum in Sèvres. It is an albarello with a thicker shape, decorated in blue and white only and presenting the same kind of writing stretched in length adapted to the vertical form of the base. The inscription was deciphered by L. Kalus who suggested that it was a text relating to impotence and erection, no doubt in connection with the pharmaceutical content of the vase. It might be that the inscription - unique – on our albarello also related to the substance which it contained.

Another albarello, housed among the collections of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris, presents a very similar design to cat. no. 94 and cat. no. 95, blending coats of arms with lily flowers and cranes in flight. These five blazon-decorated vases thus form a highly coherent set. The particular design of the lily flower, with its two flowery outgrowths in the upper corners, has been associated with the coat of arms of the city of Florence. It is tempting to make this attribution, but it is not entirely convincing. One could certainly imagine an ”adapted” version, based on the Florentine coat of arms model, made by the Eastern potter, which was more in keeping with his ornamental repertoire. Italian merchants – and those from Florence, in particular – were present in Cairo, Damascus and Beirut and it is possible that one of them could have ordered these vases for a Florentine apothecary.

The lily flower nonetheless did form part of the Islamic repertoire, as a symbolic crest. Several Mamluk sultans and emirs used it until the fifteenth century. It is to be noted that, on monuments at least, the motif appeared essentially within a Syrian context. A version that is surprisingly close to our vases (but without the flowery outgrowths) can be discerned on the marble decoration of the Māristān Nūr hospital in Damascus. This is due to the embellishments effected in 1283 by the sultan Qalā'ūn (who used the lily flower as a blazon), after he had been cared for in that institution. This distinctive design can be seen on gourds with moulded designs found in Syria and probably dating back to the end of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It would be tempting to assume that there is a link between these albarello and the highly respected Nūr hospital, which was still very reputable in the fifteenth century. A jar bearing a blazon with a lily flower design, though a very different design, possibly of the fourteenth century, bears an inscription which indicated that it had been made by the same Māristān Nūr and supposedly contained a waterlily-based preparation.

However, the shield-like shape of the blazon is not frequently found among the coats of arms of the Mamluks who used a medallion that was either circular or almond-shaped. It could be seen, however, on Mamluk incrust metal objects intended for the European market, sometimes left white for the purchaser to engrave later his coat of arms thereon. Moreover, these albarello were part of a blue and white production, with borrowed Chinese references, which developed in Syria, but also in Egypt, probably from the end of the fourteenth century on, under the influence of mostly imported Yuan porcelain. The Syrian production is exemplified in a small blue and white plant-decorated bowl, kept in the Louvre museum, which bears on its underside “Made in Damascus”. Fragments with plant motifs that are fairly comparable to the decoration on these two vases were found in that same city, near Bāb al-Sharqi, where potters’ workshops were located in medieval times. The Fustat excavations also unearthed a significant number of blue and white fragments, sometimes with the addition of black, often bearing signatures of potters. This sort of blue and white Chinese-type decoration is also often seen on wall tiles in Syria, Egypt and Anatolia, taken from monuments dated between 1425 and the end of the fifteenth century, which help to establish a date for this production.

It should be noted, however, that the calligraphic albarello exhibits a colour scheme that includes black in addition to the blue and white present on the other two albarello. Ceramic wares decorated in these colours have a history of production in Iran during the Ilkhanid period (1256–1353). While also almost certainly inspired by Chinese blue and white porcelain wares, the use of black appears to be an Iranian addition to the decorative scheme, found on numerous ceramics as well as in the architectural decoration of some Ilkhanid tombs in Yazd. With the close contact existing between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanids in both times of war and diplomacy, it would not be far-fetched to suggest the additional possibility of Chinese inspiration through an Ilkhanid filter. | C] I.A
The Route of the Travellers

Anatolia and the Ottomans

Sheila Canby

The works in this section mostly date from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the period of large, powerful empires which dominated the Middle East, North Africa, and India. Known as the Gunpowder Empires, the Ottomans (r. 1299–1924), Safavids (r. 1501–1722), and the Mughals (r. 1526–1858) ruled in an age of increasing global trade, not only between Europe and Asia but also with Africa and the Americas. With the wealth gleaned from trade and conquest, the sultans and shahs of these dynasties were directly involved in forging distinct artistic styles of architecture, ornament and painting through which they broadcast their imperial message.

In the sixteenth century, following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the sultans supported the formation of an imperial Ottoman style in the arts. In textiles and ceramics a penchant for non-figurative decoration manifested itself in designs based on floral and vegetal forms (see cat. nos. 99-103). Unlike Iran, where poetic and epic texts were most often chosen for illustration, the Ottomans preferred to illustrate historical manuscripts either chronicling their own history or that of the prophets. Foreign trade and the extent of the Ottoman empire, which included Arabia, the Levant, parts of Eastern Europe and Egypt, led to stylistic changes in painting, architecture and ceramics. Nonetheless, in all the lands under Ottoman control distinct artistic and architectural forms reinforced their presence.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the Ottomans extended their version of ‘branding’ to portraiture. Ottoman portraits (cat. nos. 96, 97, 98) depict the sultan dominating his surroundings and accompanied by attributes specific to himself. Series of portraits of the Ottoman sultans were produced for albums where their sheer numbers placed them in marked contrast to the Safavids, Mongols and Uzbeks, all dynasties that came to power in the sixteenth century. Although distinct artistic styles developed at different Muslim courts, the aim of using art to present the ruler as regal, cultured and powerful was common to all of them.
This large album portrait of Sultan Selim II (r. 1566–1574) reveals much about his reign. It was Selim’s father, Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), who solidified the geographical borders of the Ottoman Empire and refined the central administration of his government, allowing his son and successor to pursue more sedentary pleasures such as literature, art, and wine-drinking. Nicknamed “Selim the Sot” for his affection for wine, the sultan was nonetheless a great bibliophile and patron of architecture, music, and the arts of the book. The painter, poet, and naval commander Haydar Reis depicted Selim II as larger than life; the robust sultan in his luxurious fur-lined and brocaded gold garment dwarfs both the page boy and the interior in which he sits in a cross-legged position on a carpet. This composition was one of a number of conventions for Ottoman royal portraiture developed in 1570s and is similar to portraits in Loqman’s Kiyafetî’l Insaniye fi Selâilan-ı Osmanîye, a study to record the physiognomy of the Ottoman sultans.
An Ottoman official
Turkey, Istanbul, circa 1650
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Page: 29 x 17.9 cm; image: 22.3 x 13 cm
AKM 00217
Published: Welch and Welch 1982, pp. 36–38 (no. 8); AKTC 2009a, p. 139; AKTC 2009b, p. 139

This portrait depicts a large, grey-bearded gentleman wearing a lilac bulbous-shaped Ottoman turban and a fur-lined, gold-embroidered burnt orange robe. He carries a blue tooled and gilded leather-bound manuscript, perhaps a dīvān, under his left arm. His grand stance, stern expression, and right hand (which is raised in a pontificating gesture), all suggest this figure is a person of high standing, perhaps a court official. The portrait was once mounted in an album and may date to the reign of the Ottoman sultan Mehmet IV (r. 1648–1687).

LA
Royal portrait series bound into albums provided an important way for Ottoman sultans to record their lineage and statecraft. The portraits of Selim II (cat. no. 97) and Selim III (r. 1789–1807) are examples of this venerable tradition. This image of Selim III represents a different format for Ottoman royal portraiture. It demonstrates the profound effect of European painting, particularly French, on Ottoman art by the nineteenth century. Of note is the attention to shading and a grisaille, blue, and gold palette, as well as the painting’s presentation as an oval window set on an allegory of the Sultan’s reign, framed on a black ground highlighted with gold details. Canby suggests that the buildings in the distance may be the new army barracks built by Selim III at Haydarpaşa in Istanbul or restorations of Mevlevi complexes. In either case, this depiction reflects the Ottoman interest in topographical representations and maps. Continuing this story of cross-cultural influence, the series to which this portrait belongs subsequently provided the inspiration for a London printed version of Ottoman Sultan portraits published in 1815 by John Young, *A Series of Portraits of the Emperors of Turkey: Engraved from Pictures Painted at Constantinople.*
Ottoman visual culture reached its apex under the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566). Like his predecessors, Süleyman used art and architecture to legitimize his power and authority; unlike them, however, he initiated the creation of a royal aesthetic that would become understood as uniquely Ottoman. In addition to continuing the practice of royal portraiture, which could be transported via medals and albums throughout the empire and to foreign lands, the court’s design atelier, or nakkaşhane, developed an imperial style that visually unified the Ottoman realm and distinguished it from neighbours and rivals. Before the 1550s, the Ottoman court had relied on an eclectic court culture that drew from both the Iranians to the east and the Europeans to the west. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, these foreign artistic models were synthesized into a classical Ottoman style, which coincided with the replacement of Persian with Ottoman Turkish as the official language of the court. This new artistic vocabulary was immediately recognisable in the medium of ceramics, where a selection of floral, vegetal, geometric and Chinese-inspired elements (arriving via the Timurids in fifteenth-century Iran) were painted under a transparent glaze onto a white, frit body. The tulips, rosettes, carnations, saz leaves, grape designs, and wave patterns on the dishes in this group comprise some of the aspects of this distinctive new genre, which was canonized through architectural decoration. The dating of these beautifully painted dishes is based on sources that attest to a move of ceramic production from Istanbul (where the ceramic industry was declining in the shadow of a growing textile industry of kemha, or silk brocade) to İznik, where potteries thrived from their close proximity to wood and other materials needed for kilns and ceramic production. The symmetrical organisation of geometric and floral ornament seen on many of these wares has been compared to other ceramics produced during the reign of Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–1595) and attributed to his patronage based on stylistic and technical comparison to datable architectural tiles from this period (Atasoy and Raby 1989, pp. 246–249; AKTC 2007b, p. 96). | LA
99

**Dish with geometrical decoration**
Turkey, Iznik, circa 1575–1580
Ceramic; fritware, polychrome underglaze painted on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 28.5 cm
AKM 00738
Kindly lent by Princess Catherine Aga Khan
Published: Welch 1978b, p. 206; AKTC 2009a, p. 142; AKTC 2009b, p. 142

100

**Dish with central flower**
Turkey, Iznik, circa 1575–80
Ceramic; fritware, polychrome underglaze painted on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 29.2 cm
AKM 00686
Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 204–05; Falk 1985, pp. 244–45 (no. 248); AKTC 2009a, pp. 142–43 (no. 51); AKTC 2009a, p. 142; AKTC 2009b, p. 142

101

**Dish with red roses**
Turkey, Iznik, circa 1575–1580
Ceramic; fritware, polychrome underglaze painted on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 28.5 cm
AKM 00686
Kindly lent by Princess Catherine Aga Khan
Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 202–03; AKTC 2007a, p. 76 (no. 45); AKTC 2007b, p. 72 (no. 45); AKTC 2009a, p. 142; AKTC 2009b, p. 142

102

**Dish with a representation of a garden**
Turkey, Iznik, circa 1575–1580
Ceramic; fritware, polychrome underglaze painted on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 29.8 cm
AKM 00737
Kindly lent by Princess Catherine Aga Khan
Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 208; AKTC 2009a, p. 143; AKTC 2009b, p. 143

103

**Dish with tulips and roses**
Turkey, Iznik, circa 1575–80
Ceramic; fritware, polychrome underglaze painted on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 34.3 cm
AKM 00687
Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 204–205; Falk 1985, pp. 244–45 (no. 248); AKTC 2007a, p. 97 (no. 67); AKTC 2007b, pp. 96 and 206 (no. 67); AKTC 2009a, p. 143; AKTC 2009b, p. 143
The pattern on this *yorgan yüzü* (quilt cover) recalls typical 17th-century Ottoman designs on silk and velvet textiles. Whereas earlier patterns include lattice designs enclosing floral motifs, later ones such as this panel show wavy parallel stems or vines, some of which form ogival frames around grape clusters or tulips. The designs may also reflect Florentine tastes resulting from cultural exchanges with Italy. | LA
The Route of Travellers
The Route of the Travellers

From Baghdad to Delhi
Although dimly perceived by Spanish and North African Muslims (for whom “Islamic” has almost always been equated with “Arabic”), the rise or rather resurrection of the Persian language, by the mid-11th-century AD, to equal cultural if not liturgical status with Arabic throughout the Eastern Islamic world, was no historical accident.

The Persian-speaking lands constituted, not some remote eastern frontier, but the demographic core of the early Arab empire, which through a civil war shifted its capital from Damascus to Baghdad by the middle of the 8th century CE precisely in stark political recognition of young Islamic civilization’s now inescapably Iranian centre of gravity.

The Muslim Arab conquerors of the 7th century swept across large portions of the Christianized Roman or “Byzantine” Empire, but overran the totality of its erstwhile rival, the former Zoroastrian Persian Empire of the Sasanian dynasty – thus uniting for a few generations (before inevitable dynastic break-ups) the twin military road networks of both far-flung domains, into a single politically united territorial band running from the Tagus to the Indus.

While the caliphs adopted artistic and other cultural aspects from Byzantium (including the legacy of Greek science and philosophy), they also borrowed the old Persian system of administration: to such an extent that the caliphate as ruled from Baghdad, with its many converted Iranian ministers, scribes and officers, almost appears as an Islamicized metamorphosis of the ancient empire of the Sasanian Persians. Imperial Islamic culture’s underlying Persian heritage was clearly perceived by Muslim authors in 8th and 9th century caliphal Iraq, often of Iranian origin themselves although they now expressed their thoughts in Classical Arabic. Prestigious Iranian authors in Iraq (read as far west as Spain) transcribed into Arabic the chronicles of the ancient Persian kings and even their favourite animal fables, as models of political conduct for the caliphs.

The towering Islamic scholar Tabarî (832-923 CE), composer of the most authoritative of all glosses on the Quran, deliberately intertwined the histories of the ancient Persian emperors with the traditions of the Prophet-Kings of the monotheistic Scriptures in his Târîkh or “World Chronicle”, to expose the gradual convergence of their twin lines by the will of God until Muhammad’s birth in Arabia (570 CE) should coincide, precisely, with the rule in neighbouring Iran and Iraq of Khusrô I the Just, the model Sasanian Persian monarch in virtue of his wise laws and humane administration. Through the influence of scribes like Tabarî, the caliphs of Baghdad, and all Muslim princes who either owed them allegiance or politically vied with them, became ideally perceived, or at any rate praised, as legitimate heirs to both combined lines: symbolic successors at once to Khusrô and the other heroic kings of Ancient Persian lore, and to Solomon son of David from among the Prophet-Kings.

Christian writers had in fact long argued a similar God-willed convergence between the reigning lines of Rome and Judah, with Christ born by Divine choice under the just world-rule of Caesar Augustus: so that both lines should merge through Emperor Constantine’s conversion in CE 313 and all succeeding Christian monarchs be regarded as combined successors to both Rome and Judah (like Charlemagne crowned as an “Augustus” and anointed as a “David”). Byzantine Christian precedent probably influenced, and in any case illuminates, the similar retroactive justification and hence “Islamization” of ancient Persian imperial history, with decisive effect on the representation of the Iraqi caliphs and all subsequent Muslim rulers in medieval Islamic literature and art.

The 10th-century Samanid emirs of Bukhārā in Central Asia, Sunni princes of Iranian stock, professed vassals to the caliph but autonomous in their own domains, restored the Persian language (now written in Arabic script) to full administrative parity with Arabic as their dārî or “royal” tongue. By no accident, the
first book they chose for transcription into Neo-Persian prose was Tabari’s “World Chronicle”. The next and even higher literary stage of the Persian Renaissance was attained under Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (r. 998-1030 CE), ruler in what is now southeastern Afghanistan.

Mahmud, a Central Asian Turkish military adventurer who became the first Muslim prince to sport the title sultân (literally, “power”), overthrew the rule of his Samanid overlords to establish his own widespread West Asian empire, with plundering raids deep into India to finance his ambitions to conquer Baghdad itself. But Mahmud most importantly sponsored the poet Firdawsi, who put the entire epic record of Ancient Persia into majestic Neo-Persian verse as the Shâhnâma or “Book of Kings”, composed as a heroic model for the perceived Muslim successor to the world-rule of the Sasanian emperors: that is, Sultan Mahmud himself.

Sultan Mahmud may have poorly rewarded his epic poet financially, but the cultural impact of his patronage of Firdawsi cannot be overemphasized. Mahmud’s fellow Turks, the Seljuks, outfought his successors and entered Baghdad themselves as de facto lord protectors over the now politically helpless caliphs in CE 1055, launching almost nine centuries of Turkish political supremacy in the Near East. But the Seljuks followed Mahmûd’s precedent both imperial and cultural: the defence and spread of Islam through military conquest; and the promotion of the Persian language and the Persian epic at court: much like, say, 12th century Crusading Norman kings and knights spread use of French from England to Sicily to the Holy Land. Nor was nationalism, either Norman or Seljuk, in any modern sense involved: rather, the Seljuk Turks laid claim to the imperial inheritance of Ancient Persian World-Rule as legitimized by Islam and sung by the poet Firdawsi: again, much in the way their Norman contemporaries portrayed themselves as heirs to Roman World-Rule as sung by the poet Virgil, read in a Christianized light.

This dominant cultural pattern – Islam defended by Turkic dynasts portrayed in literature and art as heirs to the Ancient Persian cosmocrators – remained unbroken throughout the subsequent history of the Near East and notably also in Islamicized northern India (ever since its initial conquest by Sultan Mahmud), from the 11th century down to the collapse of the traditional Islamic state-systems in the course of the 19th. Even the 13th century Mongol conquerors of Iran and Iraq, upon converting to Islam in CE 1295, intermarried with local Turkish aristocrats, adopted Persian as their court language, and sponsored an especially famous manuscript of the Shâhnâma: where newly fashionable Chinese aesthetic models in the depiction of dragons, clouds, trees and rushing streams were permanently assimilated into the region’s Byzantine-inspired techniques of illumination and incorporated into the traditional allegorical code of Persian royal representation.

Imperial houses between the Bosphorus and Bengal commissioned costly illuminated manuscripts of Firdawsi’s epic – the most splendid was illustrated for Iran’s Shâh Tahmâsp in the 1520s and 1530s – as part of their royal regalia. Political rivalry fanned by sectarian tension may have pitted against each other in wars the three great 16th and 17th century Islamic empires of the Sunni Ottomans in the Near East, the Shiîte Safavids in Iran, and the (more tepid) Sunni Mughals in India, but all three states (equally founded by Turkish princes) defended similar pretensions to World-Rule: based on the same Islamicized Persian cultural heritage symbolized by Firdawsi’s epic Book of Kings.

For all the evolution of successive historical styles under changing dynasties, the Persian royal key still unlocks the meaning of much Islamic figurative art, beginning with stylized representations on metal or ceramic discs of the Baghdad caliphs and then their Seljuk lord protectors, and even in the elaborately carved ivories of the 10th and 11th century rival Fâtimid and so-called Spanish Umayyad caliphs in Cairo and Cordova.
Drawing on ancient Iranian (and ultimately even ancient Mesopotamian) precedents, artists until the middle of the 19th century normally depicted the traditional Muslim ruler as a mighty hunter curbing or racing his horse as the dominant conquering lord over a dominated vigorous animal, slaughtering wild beasts as both protector and food-provider of his people, and shooting arrows that symbolized the shafts of light of his solar power. Otherwise the Muslim ruler was shown enthroned cross-legged, in majestic, rigid frontal position (although the Mughals in 16th- and 17th-century India preferred their portraits in three-quarter view or profile), and adorned with all, or some, of the following emblems:

a) A halo shining around the head. This was the ancient Persian farr or light of royal glory, the sign of a just and legitimate ruler. The Romans actually adopted this emblem of imperial portraiture from the Sasanian Persians in the 4th century CE, and only in the 5th century began transferring it to depictions of Christ and the saints. According to Firdawsi and other authors of the Persian epic, the farr fades away from around the head of a tyrant, one reason why Islamic royal portraiture insisted on showing this farr in the 9th to 11th centuries. 12th century art sometimes used the halo for purely decorative effect, and it dropped from artistic fashion in the 15th century, but the farr was deliberately revived as a royal emblem in the art of the 16th and 17th-century Mughal emperors in India.

b) A stylized crown derived from the Sasanian royal headdress bedecked with designs of the outstretched wings of the mythical Vâragna sunbird (a variant of the Simurgh sunbird), a crescent moon, and the morning star, proclaiming the Sasanian Persian King as brother to the sun, moon and stars. Iraqi caliphal art of the 8th to 11th centuries still shows recognizably Sasanian-type crowns, albeit increasingly simplified. Later medieval Islamic stylization further reduced its design to the familiar star-and-crescent motif that became the Imperial Ottoman standard.

c) A cup held tight in the right fist against the heart. This symbolized the magic cup of the mythical Persian king Jamshêd, in which this cosmocrator was supposed to have miraculously beheld in a mirror the seven climes of the world he ruled. Medieval Eastern Islamic tradition assimilated King Jamshêd to King Solomon, and attributed to both monarchs an identical magic cup. Actually the cup represents the monarch’s own heart and in some depictions can even be omitted, with the ruler simply shown pointing — significantly - to his own breast. 17th-century Mughal Indian art added the Emperor’s contemplation of his own signet-ring, another Solomonic emblem signifying the gem-sealed ring of the monarch’s own heart and a further sign of his world-rule.

d) A kerchief grasped tight in the left fist, almost certainly derived from the ancient Roman mappa or white cloth brandished by the consuls to signal the opening of the circus games, and still shown clutched by Byzantine officials and even emperors as late as the 12th century CE as an emblem of their legal power. This symbolic strip of cloth also endured tenaciously in Islamic art, still seen not only dangling from princely left fists in late 12th-century Iraqi manuscript paintings or tucked into the royal sash in 15th-century Herâti illuminations, but as a visible attribute of all Ottoman rulers from Mehmed the Conqueror of Byzantium in the 15th century to Selim II in the 16th and even Selim III (who holds one stitched with jewels in this exhibition) at the outset of the 19th.

e) A throne upheld by twin monstrous beasts, normally lions but sometimes griffins or dragons. The mythological reference here was to the throne of the 5th-century CE Sasanian Persian King Bahram, who according to Iranian legend won his crown by ordeal as the only prince of the blood royal, among various pretenders, that dared snatch the regalia from between two unchained lions - whom he heroically overpowered. From Sasanian royal art, depictions of such a ruler sitting in glory upon a twin-lion throne passed into Islamic heraldry and appear as far west as early 11th-century caliphal Spain. Explicit reference
by the 12th-century Sicilian Muslim writer Ibn Zafar, in his “Nectar for Princes” (Sulwân al-Mutâ’, of which a rare 14th-century Iraqi illumination appears in this exhibition), further testifies to the legend’s popularity even in the farthest Arabic-speaking Occident: Man akhadha t-Tâja wa-z-Zaynata min bayn al-asadayn, fa-huwa bi-l-mulki awlâ, “He who seizes the Crown and Regalia from between the twin lions, he is of Kingship the most worthy!”

The late 12th-century Seljuk Persian poet Nizâmî of Azerbaijan, in his Haft Paykar or “Book of the Seven Icons” beloved by generations of medieval Iranian, Central Asian, Indo-Muslim and also Ottoman princely readers, richly embroidered upon this symbolism: his heroic King Bahrâm’s Solomonic intellect overpowers the twin lions signifying lust and wrath, and Bahrâm’s crown itself is the moonlike pearl of eternal life, set between these same twin beasts as if between the twin dragon jaws of the constellation Draco: Tâj-i zar dar miyân-i shêr-i siyâh / Chûn ba-kâm-i dô azhdahâ, durr-i mâh: “The golden crown between these lions sable/ Like the moon’s pearl, within twin dragons’ maw.” Nizâmî tapped here into the deepest universal mythological motif of the TWIN HERALDIC BEASTS, mirroring the dual nature of the magic monster who protects the divine treasure from the unworthy, but bestows it upon the conquering and deserving spiritual hero – like King Bahrâm himself, one of the many solar dragon-slaying princely warriors of the Iranian epic. In symbolic equivalence to King Bahrâm’s twin throne-lions, twin heraldic dragons frame holy verses in 16th and 17th century Iranian military standards – for the king’s armies - and also ornamented bowls – for dervishes to beg with - in this exhibition.
Under the Umayyads (661–750), the Islamic world grew to a territory stretching from Spain and North Africa to the borders of China and India, with Damascus as its centre of government. In 750, however, the Umayyads were overthrown by the ‘Abbasids, who transferred the capital to Baghdad on the river Tigris. The heart of the Islamic world was now situated in the “cradle of civilisation”, the land known as Mesopotamia (Greek for “land between the rivers”). This region is comprised of the land around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern Iraq as well as parts of northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and southwestern Iran. Baghdad was situated only 56 kilometres away from Ctesiphon, the old capital of the Sasanian dynasty (224–651), which controlled an empire that once encompassed Mesopotamia, Armenia, Iran, Central Asia, and even parts of the Arabian Peninsula. In 836, increasing tensions between mamluks, the slave soldiers who served the ‘Abbasids, and the citizens of Baghdad resulted in the creation of a new capital, Samarra, which became a major centre of court culture and inspired motifs such as the “bevelled” style in the art and architecture of the Islamic world.

It is well known that Graeco-Byzantine and Sasanian cultures contributed to the development of Islamic art and architecture, but in Mesopotamia, the influence of Ancient Near Eastern culture was understandably more apparent, whether in visual motifs, vessel shapes, or artistic mediums or techniques. The art of this region includes metalwork, a craft partly inherited from the Sasanians (gold, silver, copper, mercury, lead, and iron were mined in Mesopotamia and the Iranian lands) [cat. no. 106]). Ceramics were produced from porous earthenware and covered in alkaline glaze to render them impermeable (Bloom and Blair 1997, pp. 104–05); their surface decoration ranged from inscriptions of blessings or aphorisms in the Kufic Arabic script prevalent in the ‘Abbasid period to blue-and-white or vibrant and colourful splash-decorated works inspired by Chinese porcelain and ceramic wares (cat. no. 107). The ‘Abbasids’ taste for the “exotic” was encouraged by cultural exchanges with the east; Chinese artists are even known to have been present in Baghdad in the eighth century. Book production also flourished, as seen in extant manuscripts of scientific treatises such as Dioscorides’ *Materia Medica*, translated from Greek to Arabic in manuscripts with illustrations based on classical models (cat. nos. 110-113), as well as belles lettres literature and *mirrors for princes*, which often consisted of fables or tales embedded with lessons that served as handbooks for rulers-in-training (cat. no. 115).
Ewer
Iran or Mesopotamia, 8th–9th century
Ceramic; earthenware, moulded, impressed, and covered in a monochrome mustard or light brown transparent glaze
Height 33 cm
AKM 00539
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 154; AKTC 2009b, p. 154

This ewer exhibits a bulbous body, the bottom portion of which appears to have been made from a mould containing an overall pattern of spiral circle, rosette, and heart motifs. Teardrop shaped leaf forms pointed in alternating vertical directions and framing five-lobed foliate motifs have been impressed onto the upper portion. Most of the flared portion of the neck, which ends in the object’s mouth, is missing, but the applied handle is still intact. Multi-petalled rosettes are also applied throughout. The variations in colour created by the arbitrary spreading of the glaze in thinner and thicker portions around the body create a polychrome effect similar to that of Tang Chinese splashed wares, but the decoration here was formed from a single colour. Iranian artists would certainly have been aware of Chinese designs due to cross-cultural exchanges between these regions, which date to at least the first millennium BCE. A discovery in 1997 of a Tang period shipwreck off the coast of the Indonesian island of Belitung - the first archaeological evidence of an Arab or Indian ship found in Asia and the first to found with a complete cargo - has yielded additional information about these connections during the late antique period. One bowl found on the ship is said to be inscribed with a date equivalent to 826 CE, a date confirmed (to the century) by Carbon 14 analysis (Wade 2003, p. 20). When more information about this cargo comes to light, it may lead to new conclusions about artistic transmission between the Near and Far East. In the meantime, the body on the present example also bears resemblance to numerous Islamic metal wares made in Iran or Iraq in the eighth–ninth century, wares that, in fact, reflected a continuation of forms used during the Sasanian period (226–651). The ewer may therefore be given a similar attribution. | LA

Ewer with inscribed blessings
Iran or Iraq, Abbasid, 9th century
Brass, engraved and punched
Height 32.8 cm
Inscription (Arabic): baraka wa [yumn wa…] sadaa wa salama wa ghibta wa n i cma wa rahma wa… i-salihin wa… (“Blessing and [good fortune and… (restored) happiness and wellbeing and felicity and [God’s] grace and mercy and… to its owner and…”) AKM 00718
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 154; AKTC 2009b, p. 154

The earliest datable metalwork from the Islamic world consists of ewers made in a variety of shapes, sometimes including spouts and sometimes without. The present example has an ovoid body, a narrow, raised foot, a narrow and short tubular spout, a wide shoulder decorated with scrolling palmettes, and a round, trumpet-shaped mouth, the latter framed almost entirely by two bodiless eagle or falcon heads. The birds’ heads appear to grow out of the join between the ewer’s mouth and a long, serpentine handle. The tail of the handle ends at the top of the bottle in a palmette-shaped thumb-rest similar to extant examples datable to the eighth–ninth century and attributed to Iraq or Iran (for examples, see Atl, Chase, and Jett 1985, p. 14, fig. 4 and p. 63, fig. 23). An inscription invoking blessings upon the owner appears in Arabic kufic script just below the shoulder and above a pair of ten-petalled rosette medallions engraved on opposite sides of the lower body. Several metal ewers from the early Islamic period reveal shapes and decorative programmes used in the pre-Islamic Iranian world. The ones with pear-shaped bodies, no spouts, and handles ending in a palmette motif are considered to be the earliest metal wares and are believed to have been produced in Khurasan and Transoxiana in the eastern Iranian (including modern Afghanistan and Uzbekistan) world (ibid., pp. 62–63). Their shapes and designs, which sometimes display engraved, carved, or repoussé real and mythical animals, reflect a close relationship to the artistic idiom seen in Sasanian metalwork, which even includes representations of single-handed pear-shaped ewers in some silver gilt plates (ibid., p. 63, figs. 23–24). This ewer, which contains a somewhat varied shape with a more angular mouth, may have been produced in the Greater Iranian world or Mesopotamia at a slightly later period. | LA
This large, shallow dish has been decorated using a variation of the "splashed" technique, an effect achieved when pigments added to the surface of a ceramic object run when fired under a lead glaze. Splashed wares, which can include splashed decoration only or additional incised (sgraffiato) designs, have been the subject of much debate among scholars. It was first assumed that the technique was inspired by Tang period (618–907) Chinese ceramic splashed wares, but this theory was questioned as no verified Chinese originals for the Near Eastern objects were identified and the funerary function of the Tang wares made it unlikely that they would have travelled outside of China. However, certain Chinese splashed wares were later found in Samarra, in modern Iraq. These are believed to be the so-called sancai wares produced specifically for export; these, perhaps, may have provided points of creative departure for their Near Eastern counterparts (see Rawson, Tite, and Hughes 1987–1988; Fehérvári 2000, p. 47; and Watson 2004, p. 199). The present dish was tested using thermoluminescence analysis, which provided a date of last firing consistent with a ninth century date of manufacture; this is also consistent with the absence of incised or sgraffiato decoration, which first appeared in the tenth century (Watson 2004, p. 201). However, a carefully painted abstract design in manganese evoking the image of a blossoming flower with a large scalloped rim distinguishes this dish from straightforward "splashed" wares. | LA
Socrates and Aristophanes
Illustrated manuscript of the Judgements of the Greek Philosophers
Style of Baghdad (Iraq) or Damascus (Syria), 13th–14th century, with 19th-century additions
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
20.6 x 15 cm
AKM 00283
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 129 (no. 99); AKTC 2007b, p. 133 (no. 99); AKTC 2009a, p. 158; AKTC 2009b, p. 158

The two turbaned figures are labelled Saqrat and Aristajanis in this folio from an Arabic manuscript based on the judgements of Greek philosophers. The figures may be identified as the Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE) and the contemporary Greek playwright Aristophanes (circa 450 - 386 BCE). Their depiction is similar to what one finds in illustrations of Dioscorides’ De Materialia Medica and other Greek manuscripts produced under the medieval Baghdad or Damascus schools of painting. | AF

Ibn Sina’s Qanūn fī’l-tibb (Canon of Medicine) is the most important encyclopaedic corpus of medieval medical knowledge in the Islamic world. With the transfer of knowledge to the Latin west in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it became the most used of all medieval references in the medical schools of Europe, almost until the beginning of modern times. The Qanūn is organised into five books. The present manuscript is a copy of the fifth book, on compound drugs and pharmacopoeia. Copied only fifteen years after the death of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), it is one of the earliest, if not the earliest manuscript of this work. The other books cover topics including anatomy, the humours, the temperament, the effects of environment on health and disease, materia medica, specific pathology and diseases of various parts of the body, general pathology, fevers, leprosy, surgery, dislocations, and fractures. Born near Bukhara in 980 to a Samanid government official, Ibn Sina received a proper education and was, at eighteen, a talented physician who had mastered all the sciences and made a great number of medical discoveries and observations that remain relevant today. The page shown here is the title page, which announces in large thuluth script that the manuscript contains the fifth book of the Qanūn, also known as Al-anqrābādhīn. It is followed immediately by Ibn Sina’s name, al-Shaykh al-Ra’īs Abī ‘Alī Sīnā, written in naskh. Names of previous owners of the codex appear in naskh and nastaʿlīq scripts around the page (trans. Abdullah Ghouchani). | AF
لا يوجد نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي من الصورة المقدمة.
One of the earliest scientific manuscripts to be translated from Greek to Arabic was Dioscorides’ *De Materia Medica*, as it is called in Latin. Pedanius Dioscorides, a Greek physician, wrote his treatise on medicinal plants in the first century CE. The manuscript was initially translated into Syriac, and then into Arabic in Baghdad in the ninth century (Guesdon and Nouri 2001, p. 118). It became the foundation for Islamic pharmacology and was copied widely. The four present folios belong to a rare dispersed thirteenth-century Arabic copy of the text and depict various medicinal herbs and roots with an accuracy characteristic of Arab scientific texts produced during this period. The illustrations follow the Greek model closely. Although the paintings do not lack artistic sensibility, they are very accurate. Each specimen is depicted in its entirety from tip to root against the plain paper ground.

The first page depicts the *lābāthūn*, a plant used in the treatment of ailments such as kidney stones, if taken with wine. The second illustrated page, recto side, features a spikenard plant (*amadūūn* or *nārdīn*) with five leafy branches, bare green roots, and red flowerbuds on the branches; the underground stems (rhizomes) of the spikenard plant were crushed and distilled to extract an aromatic oil used to treat a number of ailments. The third page illustrates the Bugloss herb (*Ḥašīša al-ḥamāmā*), and the fourth page depicts *rāsīyūn*, “the thorny plant which grows in the mountains.”
This exceptionally large, almost hemispherical bowl bears on its outer face an engraved decoration, split into three superimposed registers. The upper border displays an alternation of passing animals against a flourish backdrop and cursive script inscriptions. Below, a wider banner is marked out by the relief of a twisted ribbon which knits together circular medallions, filled with geometric patterns each different from the other. Between the medallions, epigraphic cartouches display an alternation of cursive and animated (that is, topped by human heads) Kufic scripts. In addition, the downstrokes of the Kufic inscriptions form interlacing bows. The lower register shows medallions containing the twelve signs of the zodiac. Between these medallions, the ribbon knits together small diamonds and complex bows from which seem to be escaping floweret-covered stems.

The 12th and 13th century production of Iranian white bronzes is not linked to a specific centre. The examples preserved in Iran’s National Museum in Teheran were the subject of a fairly recent publication. Among them, a small bowl is reminiscent of this piece with its horizontal register decorations showing an epigraphic border over passing animals against a flourish backdrop and, more importantly, a wide central register with a very similar pattern of medallions containing the signs of the zodiac, separated by small diamonds from which coiled stems are escaping. Whilst the technique used to mat the background of the decorations is different from the one used on this bowl (small slanted lines instead of dots), the same bevelled engraving can be sharply distinguished on the inscriptions of both pieces. However, the signs of the zodiac are represented differently. Of particular significance here is the Capricorn, represented in its most ancient form: the goat fish, a feature rarely found on the many Khurasan astrological iconography metals, though related forms can be observed in Jezireh.

It is also interesting to compare the decoration on our bowl with contemporary pieces from Khurasan (North east of Iran / Afghanistan): for instance, with a bucket with an inlaid decoration belonging to the Keir collection, displaying the same type of circular medallions shaped by interwoven ribbons and containing the signs of the zodiac. In the interstices separating the medallions, the oval bows shaped by the ribbons are framed by identical symmetrical floweret-covered stems.

Three young hunters
Frontispiece from the
Sulwān al-muta’fī ‘udwān al-atba’ of Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli (d. 1170)
Mosul (Iraq), circa 1330
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Page: 24.7 x 16.9; image: 13.7 x 11.2 cm
AKM 00012
Published: Falk 1985, p. 41 (no. 11); AKTC 2007a, p. 147 (no. 114); AKTC 2007b, p. 151 (no. 114); AKTC 2009a, p. 163; AKTC 2009b, p. 163

Three young men dressed in sumptuous garments embellished with gold tiraz bands (see cat. no. 84) on their arms and turbans are ready for a hunt. One has a bow in a brown case and arrows (left); the central figure carries a brown and white hawk; and the figure on the right holds a blue long-necked bird. This painting is the right side of a double frontispiece from a manuscript of the Sulwān al-muta’fī ‘udwān al-atba’ (Comfort of Rulers when faced with the hostility of their followers). The work uses Qur’anic verses, sayings and traditions of the Prophet (hadīth), animal fables, and princely characters from ancient Persian history to advise princes on conduct and the preservation of power and leadership. A. S. Melikian-Chirvani’s facsimile publication and discussion of the manuscript demonstrates its value as a sharp commentary on “injustice, social exploitation and political oppression,” as well as the manuscript’s importance for the history of Arab painting (Melikian-Chirvani 1985). The text was composed in 1159 by Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli (“the Sicilian,” d. 1170), an Arab philosopher and prolific author who travelled extensively and was born probably in Norman-ruled Sicily in 1104. The frontispiece belongs to a copy of the manuscript in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. | AF
Early and Mediaeval Iran

Ladan Akbarnia

The Islamic conquest of Iran was sealed in 651 with the assassination of Yazdigird III, the last ruler of the Sasanian empire (224–651). Greater Iran - which at various times included modern Iran, Iraq, Armenia, as well as parts of Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other Central Asian countries, and even some coastal regions of the Arabian peninsula - became part of the 'Abbasid caliphate, which in turn inherited much of Iran's rich legacy of kingship and courtly culture alongside that of the Byzantines. Among the enduring pre-Islamic Iranian artistic and cultural traditions were glass production, metalwork, stucco wall painting, and a thriving silk industry. Ancient Near Eastern motifs such as paired parrots or griffins, lions, and pearl borders would also be translated into the Islamic visual repertoire. One of the most significant artistic contributions, however, came from the literary legacy of pre-Islamic Iran, best represented in the Shāhnāma (Book of Kings), the national epic recounting the legends of Iran's ancient kings and heroes; its stories would be illustrated profusely in the art of later Islamic dynasties in Iran, India, and the Ottoman empire.

Although rooted in oral tradition, the Shāhnāma was put to verse around 1010 by the poet Firdawsi (d. ca. 1020) as a commission for a ruler of the Samanid dynasty (819–1005), which rose to power as 'Abbasid control over the Islamic world weakened. Based in Khurasan and Transoxiana, the Samanids were responsible for some of the finest ceramics produced in Greater Iran, in particular black and white slip-painted epigraphic wares containing blessings and aphorisms (cat. nos. 122-124). As an indigenous Iranian dynasty, the Samanids were admired by later foreign rulers of Iran, including three important Turkic dynasties: the Ghaznavids (975–1187); the Great Seljuqs (1038–1194); and the Rum Seljuqs (1077–1307), a branch of the Great Seljuqs who settled in Anatolia in the eleventh century. In the twelfth century, Seljuq ceramic production witnessed a significant transformation with the development of fritware, a technique involving the addition of powdered quartz to the clay body and requiring a higher firing temperature. The result was a finer, white body (in contrast to the buff colour of earthenware) that facilitated surface decoration and contributed to the imitation of Chinese blue and white porcelains as well as to a proliferation of figural imagery based on the illustration of courtly pastimes and specific episodes from the Shāhnāma.

Fritware was also lustre painted in medieval Iran under the Seljuqs and the Ilkhanid Mongols, who overthrew the 'Abbasid caliphate in 1258 and ruled Greater Iran from 1256 to 1353 (cat. nos. 137-139). The Ilkhanids' close connections with their Mongol counterparts in Yuan China contributed to the development of the khitā'i idiom, which became more standardised under the Timurids (1370–1506) and Safavids (1502–1736) (Akbarnia 2007); it featured significantly in the development of the arts of the book, which flourished from the Ilkhanid through the Safavid periods in Iran. This Chinese-inspired aesthetic was apparent in certain motifs such as the lotus or peony and the dragon or phoenix, as well as in techniques that were translated into different media once they reached the Iranian context, such as Chinese lacquer carving and Ilkhanid and Timurid woodcarving. By the Safavid period, the fascinating combination of pre-Islamic, Islamic, and Far Eastern inspired artistic traditions in the art of early and mediaeval Iran had become fully synthesized into a highly refined artistic idiom that would eventually incorporate European elements as well.
Glass bottle
Syrian region or Greater Iran, 8th – 9th century
Inscription (Arabic): “the work of Abu Ja’far”
Glass, free blown, applied, and impressed
Diameter 22.5 cm
AKM 00644
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 166; AKTC 2009b, p. 166

Glass vessels designed for everyday use did not normally include surface decoration; at most, they might receive handles or suspension loops, as in the present example. This bottle is particularly interesting: while it appears to exhibit a rather simple aesthetic, it provides a good example of the great difficulties involved with the attribution of early Islamic glass. The vessel has a globular shape with a narrow neck and lipped rim, with three loops applied at even intervals around the body, each impressed at the base with a circular medallion containing a three-line kufic inscription identifying the artist as Abu Ja’far. Vessel stamps with kufic inscriptions exist in other collections, such as the al-Sabah Collection in the Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmīyyah, Kuwait (Carboni 2001, p. 282, cat. 3.49a–c); one, like the medallions on the present bottle, bears an inscription identifying “the work of” a different artist (ibid., cat. no. 3.49b). Stefano Carboni has attributed these stamps to the Syrian region in the eighth–ninth century. The globular shape of this bottle supports an early Islamic date and an attribution to the Syrian region, as examples of this shape can be found in late Roman glass produced in the eastern Mediterranean (coasts of modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt) before the Umayyad period (661–750) (Carboni 2001, 15–16, 26–27, and 39–42). However, the practice of stamping vessels may have been a continuation of a Sasanian tradition in the Iranian lands. It is difficult to determine whether this bottle, which combines aspects of the two major pre-Islamic traditions in the Islamic lands with the most original feature of Islamic art - the Arabic script - was produced in Greater Iran by an artist from the Syrian region; if an Iranian artist may have imitated a work exported to Iran from the Syrian or Mesopotamian region; or if it were made in Syria by an artist familiar with and interested in incorporating some elements of the Iranian artistic tradition into his work. Regardless of where, when, and by whom it was made, this bottle is of importance for its great condition and for the questions it continues to raise. | LA
Islamic glassmaking grew out of a tradition begun in the first century BCE in the Syro-Palestinian region, where molten glass was inflated with a blowpipe and manipulated into desired forms with special tools. Craftsmen had discovered how to create glass through the transformation of raw materials prior to this period, as early as the third millennium BCE; however, until about 50 BCE, they were forming glass around a removable core or using casting moulds, which required much time and labour and thus resulted in less overall production. The bottles in this group represent some of the various techniques used to decorate Iranian glass in the centuries after Islam. The handled ewer (cat. no. 117), made of a flattened globular body with a low circular foot, a slightly flared cylindrical neck, and a fan-shaped thumb-rest, recalls similarly shaped pitchers attributed to Iran or Central Asia in the 10th–11th century and believed to have been used as measuring vessels (see, for example, Carboni 2001, pp. 148–49, cat. 36b). The object also exhibits a wheel cut design of waves and chevron patterns around the neck and body bordered with double lines.

Glass cutting began in Iran under the Sasanians (226–651) and continued uninterrupted until at least the eleventh century. Most of the time, objects were decorated using the intaglio technique, where the glass surface is incised beneath the surface, or through relief cutting, where the surface is ground away around the desired pattern in relief (ibid., p. 71). The ewer exhibits a shallow linear relief cut pattern while the cylindrical turquoise bottle with a narrow flared neck (cat. no. 118) and another cylindrical clear glass bottle with a long tubular neck (cat. no. 120) display designs engraved in higher relief. Cat. no. 118 may be attributed to the Iranian region in the 9th–10th century based on stylistic comparison with works of similar shape and decoration (see ibid., p. 95, cat. 25a, and p. 154, cat. no. 3.5c). Cat. no. 120 may be given a similar attribution based on comparisons to other glass bottles of cylindrical form with arcade cut and faceted decoration (ibid., pp. 93–95, cat. nos. 23a & 25a [around the neck]). The inverted teardrop motifs on this object’s shoulder resemble the upper row of a two-tiered teardrop pattern on a bottle in the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait, which has been compared to the “Style C” ornament type identified at Samarra (Iraq) and suggests the cross-cultural connections between Iran and Mesopotamia during this period.

The remaining bottle in this group represents the mould blown glass technique, to which threads of glass are applied and trailed (cat. no. 119). The technique of blowing glass in a mould is known to have been popular in the eastern Mediterranean region under the Roman Empire by the first or second century CE (see cat. 121). The object has a compressed globular form with a moulded pattern created in a dip mould (see Carboni and Whitehouse 2001, pp. 81–85, cat. nos. 10–11 and cat. no. 121). Cat. no. 119 contains a trellis pattern of concentric rounded rhomboids. Its neck has been embellished with three bands of trailed glass threads, while two tiers of trails resembling those applied on seventh–eighth-century Syrian cage flasks have been applied to the shoulder (see ibid., pp. 112–13 nos. 29–32). Globular-shaped long-necked bottles became a standard for glass production in early and medieval Iran, probably inspired by parallel forms produced in the ceramic medium under the Seljuqs (Carboni 2001, p. 237 and cat. no. 66). Coloured and mould blown glass has generally been attributed to northeastern Iran between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries (Carboni and Whitehouse 2001, pp. 98–99, nos. 25–26; and Carboni 2001, pp. 236–237, cat. no. 66). | LA

117
Cut-glass beaker with handle
Iran, 10th century
Glass; free blown, tooled, and linear cut, handle applied
Height 11 cm, diameter 12.2 cm
AKM 00650
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 167; AKTC 2009b, p. 167
118  
**Turquoise bottle**  
Iran, 9th–10th century  
Glass; free blown, tooled, and relief cut  
Height 14.1 cm  
AKM 00657  
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 167; AKTC 2009b, p. 167

119  
**Turquoise bottle with applied and trailed decoration**  
Iran, 12th century  
Glass; mould blown, applied, and trailed  
Height 23 cm  
AKM 00661  
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 167; AKTC 2009b, p. 167

120  
**Long-necked bottle with relief cut decoration**  
Probably Iran, late 9th–10th century  
Glass; free blown, tooled, and facet cut  
Height 19.1 cm  
AKM 00646  
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 167; AKTC 2009b, p. 167
Bottle
Greater Iran, 10th – 11th century
Glass; mould blown and applied
Height 28 cm
AKM 00648
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 93 (no. 61); AKTC 2007b, pp. 86 and 90 (no. 61); AKTC 2009a, p. 169; AKTC 2009b, p. 169

This unusual honey-yellowish coloured mould-blown glass bottle has two main panels of decoration featuring an omphalos pattern, palmettes, and concentric heart or chevron-shaped forms. There are two small loop handles applied to the shoulder. Mould blowing was a Roman technique that was later adapted by glassmakers across the mediæval Islamic world. The steps involved in the production of mould blown glass begin with the creation of a mould (in bronze, terracotta, or clay) with the final object’s decoration in reverse on the interior of the mould. Next, the glassmaker introduces a glass gob (parison) on the blowpipe into the mould and inflates the glass until it reaches the recesses of the mould’s pattern. Once taken from the mould, the object is re-blown (so-called optic blowing), manipulated, transferred to the pontil, and finished. Thus, although mould blowing has been described as a cost-effective, simple procedure in comparison to cut decoration, it was actually an involved process that required skill and creativity (see Carboni 2001, p. 197 for complete discussion of this technique).

No full-size metal moulds for Islamic ceramics are known to exist from the mediæval period, but two metal dip moulds do survive (Carboni and Whitehouse 2001, pp. 84–85, nos. 10–11). The present bottle was probably produced using a two-part mould that would have been initially fastened together and then reopened after the glassmaker blew the parison inside the mould to impress the mould’s pattern; then the design would be finalised outside the mould. In shape, this object bears some resemblance to a series of much smaller one-handled pear-shaped bottles attributed to the Mesopotamian region in the ninth century. The omphalos and leaf patterns, on the other hand, can be found on glass bottles of varying colours that have been attributed to the Iranian lands between the tenth and twelfth centuries (see Carboni 2001, pp. 210–229, cat. 53a, 59, and 62). | AF LA
The vase and two bowls in this group represent fine examples of ceramic wares produced in the workshops of Khurasan and Transoxiana during the ninth and tenth centuries, the period during which Samarqand, Nishapur, and Bukhara enjoyed economic and cultural prosperity under the Persian Samanid rulers (819–1005) (Makariou 2007, p. 197, n. 1). The Samanids oversaw a wide variety of ceramic production. Epigraphic slipware, such as the ones shown here, has been ascribed to centres of production such as Nishapur and Afrasiab (old Samarqand) and were for local consumption; they are not found in excavations west of central Iran or at Rayy. In the case of cat. nos. 122 and 123, a white slip formed from semi-fluid coloured clay was used to cover the ceramic body and create a blank surface on which the ornamental inscription could be written. Calligraphy, traditionally thought of as the highest form of Islamic art because of its power to transmit the word of God, provides the sole adornment for these vessels. While most of the ceramic wares attributed to the workshops of this region in the ninth and tenth centuries display white slips with dark brown calligraphy, examples such as cat. no. 124, which show the inverse form of this decoration (white inscription on a dark slip-covered ground) also exist (Makariou 2007, p. 197, n. 6). Added to the sobriety and sophistication of the epigraphic ornament, the colour contrast heightens the beauty of these vessels.

Samanid artists excelled in the mastery of the void in an era when surface decoration on objects exhibited a wide variety of ornament (ibid., n. 7). Simple, functional wares were turned into stunning works of austere beauty meant for a distinguished clientele. The inscriptions on these objects are typically pious aphorisms addressed to the owner and give a glimpse into a genre of Arabic literature that does not survive in manuscript form from this period. The shapes of the wares may derive from contemporary Iranian silverware. | AF MF LA

122

Vase

Eastern Iranian world, Khurasan (Nishapur, Iran) or Transoxiana (Samarqand, Uzbekistan), late 9th–early 10th century

Inscription (Arabic): ʾBaraka liṣāḥihubu

"Blessing to its owner"

Ceramic; earthenware, white slip with black slip decoration under a transparent glaze

Height 19.8 cm

AKM 00544

Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 174 (no. 148); AKTC 2007b, p. 174 (no. 148); AKTC 2008a, pp. 274–275 (no. 107); AKTC 2009b, p. 170; AKTC 2009b, p. 170
Dish

Eastern Iranian world (Khurasan or Transoxiana), 9th–10th century
Inscription (Arabic): Iyyāka wa al-aḥmaq lā tuḍāṣiruhu wa al-tā'ih al-mucjab lā tujāwiruhu. Bi'l-baraka ("Be aware of the fool, do not associate with him, and do not trust the bewildered admirer; with blessing")
Ceramic; earthenware, black slip with white and red slip decoration under a transparent glaze
Diameter 33.5 cm
AKM 00545
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 174 (no. 149); AKTC 2007b, p. 175 (no. 149); Makariou 2007, pp. 176–177 (no. 62); AKTC 2009a, p. 171; AKTC 2009b, p. 171

Dish

Eastern Iranian world (Khurasan or Transoxiana), 9th–10th century
Inscription (Arabic): Al-jūd min akhlāq ahl al-janna ("Generosity is the disposition of the dwellers of Paradise"); Al-salāma ("Good health")
Ceramic; earthenware, white slip with black and red slip decoration under a transparent glaze
Diameter 34.9 cm
AKM 00546
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 174 (no. 149); AKTC 2007b, p. 175 (no. 149); Makariou 2007, pp. 176–177 (no. 62); AKTC 2009a, p. 171; AKTC 2009b, p. 171
Like their monochrome or bi-coloured counterparts, polychrome slip-covered earthenware ceramics produced in the tenth and eleventh century under the Samanids (819–1005) are unrivalled in quality and design. While still using the simplest of materials, Iranian craftsmen achieved an unprecedented level of refinement in the production of earthenware dishes and in the colour and texture of the slip used to cover their surfaces. Designs ranged from figural to epigraphic (see cat. no. 122-124) to abstract, or any combination of the three. The surface of cat. no. 125 is dominated by a large, stylised bird, perhaps a peacock, known since the pre-Islamic period in Iran for its associations with royalty and, later, through a mystical interpretation, with Paradise. The composition and decorative technique recalls that of so-called “Sari” wares, often identified by an interior filled mostly by the figure of a large bird (often against a background of smaller birds or “lollop” flowers) and by decoration in reds, yellows and browns. Sari wares were named after a town in the northern Iranian province of Mazandaran where some were found and believed to have been produced. Oliver Watson, however, mentions wasters of a similar ceramic type excavated in Gurgan, another northern town near the Caspian Sea, and believes Gurgan was one of the production centres for such wares (ibid., p. 243). Since none of the wares in Sari were found in excavations, an attribution of Sari as a place of production cannot confidently be made. Given the stylistic variations in Sari wares and other ceramic pieces such as the present bowl, one can only speculate that a number of local production centres existed in northeastern Iran and were responsible for the circulation of a variety of wares exhibiting a wide range of quality. This dish and cat. no. 126 are related to the other epigraphic wares produced in Samanid Iran and Central Asia (see cat. 122-124), but are distinguished from them by their vibrant polychrome decoration. Cat. no. 126 contains an aphoristic inscription in its cavetto, yet the centre is occupied by an abstract interlacing strapwork design based on a four-pointed star. The final object in this group (cat. no. 127) is a bowl of truncated conical form with a narrow foot-ring, painted in burnt-orange, green, and dark brown over a white slip. The decoration consists of four ornamental palmette leaves alternating with abstract kufic inscriptions (perhaps meant to read “Good Fortune”) around the cavetto and a strapwork-border roundel containing an abstract spiralling foliate design. Stylised leaf and teardrop forms fill the remaining interstices and a scalloped border completes the design around the vessel’s rim. | L.A.
126

Dish

Eastern Iranian world, circa 10th century
Inscription: "Generosity is the disposition of the dwellers of Paradise"
Ceramic; earthenware, polychrome slip decoration under a transparent glaze
Diameter 32.8 cm
AKM 00541
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 174 (no. 147); AKTC 2007b, pp. 170, 173 (no. 147); AKTC 2009a, p. 172; AKTC 2009b, p. 172

127

Bowl

Northeast Iran, circa 10th century
Ceramic; earthenware, polychrome slip decoration under a transparent glaze
Height 11.5 cm; diameter 31 cm
AKM 00542
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 172; AKTC 2009b, p. 172
The present beam recalls similar carved wooden panels that formed architectural elements for mosque minbars (pulpits) or mihrabs in the Seljuq Iranian world. In such cases, the inscription usually reads ‘Sovereignty belongs to God’. Foliated kufic inscriptions containing Qur’anic verses or praising the ruler were carved into a vegetal background of palmette and split-palmette leaves, often in the bevelled style associated with Samarra in modern Iraq. Many examples were also signed by the artist. | LA

This robe, with its fitted waist, but also the flared hips and tiny-button closure is a remarkable example of luxury clothing of the mid-Islamic period. Its long sleeves and fastening on the right evoke numerous comparisons with drawings on the scattered pages of Mongol manuscripts. The sleeves extend beyond the length of the arms and, thus, were worn pleated. This detail invariably appears on the pages of Ilkhanid manuscripts, whether from the pages of the great Mongolian Shāhnāma, now dismembered, or from the “Albums Diez” or illustrations from the Universal History by Rashīd al-Dīn, among others. This long-sleeved robe is an undergarment, always worn beneath a coat with sleeves covering the shoulders only, knotted on the right with ribbons. The model is likely to have its roots in China. It appears in Yuan works (Yuan was an older, allied dynasty of the Ilkhans), especially on a mandala done on a kesi (silk tapestry) on which Emperor Yuan Togha Temur (1328–1332) and his brother Khoshila were represented (Makariou 2007, p. 55, n. 75). Very rarely was it depicted without an overcoat; this is how it features in mourning scenes, but also on a page of the great Mongolian Shāhnāma housed in the Louvre (ibid., notes 76–77). This is, no doubt, a ceremonial garment (ibid., n. 78). The complex weave of the fabric – seemingly a lampas – assigns this piece to a set itself subdivided into several sub-sets but which medieval European inventories all refer to as panni tartarici. These luxurious fabrics were documented between 1295 (London, St. Paul’s Cathedral) and 1380 (inventory of Charles V). Unfortunately, the inventories are sparing in details which still makes it difficult to assign a piece to a specific manufacturing centre. This robe fits into the medallion decoration group. These textiles with compartmentalized decoration appear in inventories between 1311 (inventory of Pope Clement V) and 1361 (inventory of the Vatican). However, it differs on a number of points. First of all, the usual figurative decoration is missing in this set; secondly, there is a pseudo-inscription around the large lobed circles. A six-petal rosette is woven into the centre of these wheels in a contrasting greyish-green thread. The pseudo-inscription could indicate an origin from the Iranian coast or Islamic Central Asia, which should be confirmed with a technical analysis.

The panni tartarici are kept among the treasures of Western churches, but this is the only model which has retained its original cut. A short coat was discovered in Urumqi (Xinjiang) in 1960 (ibid., n. 79). The arrival of these fabrics among civil and religious treasures had an impact on Italian Gothic silk designs (ibid., n. 80).

This garment, therefore, speaks of Chinese influence on the Islamic world and the fertile influence of the latter on the beginnings of luxury fabric manufacture in Europe, particularly in Lucca. | SM
These objects belong to a distinct group of ceramics known as “Bamiyan” wares. Their ceramic make-up is characterised by a particularly fragile frit fabric that results in several cracks during firing, and their decoration tends to include moulded linear designs and inscriptions in low relief under a transparent coloured or colourless glaze, sometimes with the addition of coloured accents (Watson 2004, p. 327). Both bowls contain geometric central designs, one displaying an interlacing, radiating star (cat. no. 130), and the other exhibiting a woven pattern in the form of a medaillion (cat. no. 131). Splashes of cobalt blue and manganese have been applied at regular intervals around the rims of both wares to provide pleasing accents to the moulded white background. A band of cursive script, also part of the mould, fills the walls of cat. no. 130 (perhaps containing poetic Persian verses), while a row of abstract leaf motifs spans most of the walls of cat. no. 131 underneath vegetal frieze. The three interior spur marks on cat. 130 are a common feature in Bamiyan wares, evidence of their being stacked using tripods. | LA
Moulded ceramic bottle with horsemen

Iran, 12th century
Siliceous ceramic ware, glazed moulded design with running glaze
Height 35.5
AKM 00552
Published: Tokyo 1980, no. 221; AKTC 2007a, p. 149 (no. 117); AKTC 2007b, p. 152 (no. 117); Makariou 2007, pp. 64-65 (no. 118); AKTC 2008a, pp. 234-235 (no. 91); AKTC 2009a, p. 177; AKTC 2009b, p. 177

This round-bellied bottle, with narrow, elongated neck ending in a dome shape, presents an extraordinary embossed design. The fine, white siliceous clay, which appeared in Iran at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was covered with transparent glaze and later topped with cobalt blue and turquoise running glaze.

On the belly is a dense decoration depicting a lion hunt scene. Several horsemen form a frieze, while footmen are struggling with wild animals. The design is completed with birds and plant motifs scattered among the various groups. The lion hunt theme – a princely hunt, par excellence – is to be found on a cup in the Louvre Museum and on another similar one housed in the Rizā-yi Abbāsī museum in Tehran (Makariou 2007, p. 87, notes 9–10). They are two pieces that are contemporary to this bottle, subject to the same technique but with an even more sophisticated design; here, the thick glaze reduces certain spectacular effects of the decoration.

The tip of the neck, treated as a polylobe dome decorated with embossed faces, can be observed on several Iranian pieces of the pre-Mongolian period (ibid., n. 11). The faces motif is reminiscent of embossed representations of crowned personalities, such as the small, glazed ceramic figurines sculpted in the round, or moulded, unglazed low relief figurines, such as those that were found in the Shushan excavations (ibid., notes 12–13).

The beautiful, lively vigour of the decoration makes this vase a remarkable milestone in pre-Mongolian ceramics, although the narrative content of this hunting episode is unknown to us today.
Monumental jar
Central Iran, 13th century
Ceramic; fritware, decorated with a turquoise glaze
Height 71 cm
AKM 00566
Published: AKTC 2007a, pp. 78–79 (no. 48); AKTC 2007b, pp. 76–77 (no. 48); AKTC 2008a, pp. 114–115 (no. 37); AKTC 2009a, p. 178; AKTC 2009b, p. 178

This large jar demonstrates the technical expertise of Iranian potters and belongs to a small group of comparable pieces, all distinguished by their great size, plain opaque turquoise glaze, and combination of moulded and incised decoration. The decoration of the jar is organised into horizontal registers and includes benedictory wishes in a moulded band of Arabic naskh script around the neck and a moulded frieze of running animals on a vine scroll ground around the shoulder. Incised bands of bevelled motifs and scale-like motifs complete the exterior decoration. | AF
Elaborately decorated metalwork pen boxes and inkwells are among the finest objects associated with writing in the medieval Islamic world. Pen boxes held both practical and symbolic functions at Islamic courts. They served as compact and often beautifully decorated containers for scribes' tools, but they could also represent a specific court office or more generally the power of kingship. Profusely decorated with precious gold and silver inlay and engraved geometric, floral and vegetal designs, this luxury pen box would have been carried by a high-ranking individual, perhaps even a ruler.

Along with the reed pen, the inkstand, called dawat (Baer 1981, pp. 203–204) or mihbara, is the quintessential attribute of the scribe and calligrapher. Here, decorative form and function are in harmony with each other, as writing (khatt) is also the main decorative theme of this object. The edge and top of the lid are decorated with an inscription in kufic script and an inscription in a cursive form that are successive wishes in Arabic. On the edge of the lid can be read, twice, "al yumm wa al-baraka (good fortune and divine grace)" and on the flat part: "al-'izz wa'l-iqbāl wa'l-dawla wa al-sa'ada wa'l-salama wa'l-i'naya (glory and prosperity and good fortune and happiness and salvation and divine grace)." On the body of the object, the composition is arrayed on three superposed levels: votive formulas in both Arabic and cursive, interrupted by the hanging rings, surround a frieze with figures. These good wishes twice repeat the following formula: "al-'izz wa'l-iqbāl wa a/l-dawla wa al-sā'ada (glory and prosperity and / good fortune and happiness)." The receptacle was intended to contain a glass ink bottle containing the ink, with black ink being used the most often. Three main types of black ink were made in the medieval Islamic world. They are known thanks to texts written by calligraphers or copyists, who gave the recipes. The first type of ink had a carbon base, the second, a base of oak galls and metal, and the third, a mixture of the other two (Déroche 2000, p. 120 ff.). Traditionally, inks of the first type were called midād and of the second type, hibr (ibid., p. 121). | AC
This small brass jug or goblet is made of a compressed globular body, octagonal flared neck, and a hexagonal faceted foot. Two bands of Arabic inscriptions in naskh script border a series of palmette motifs around the neck, while the body displays a diagonal fluted mould with alternating bands decorated with spiral and split-palmette ornamentation. Vegetal design also embellishes each facet on the foot, the base of which contains a six-pointed interlacing star recalling the Seal of Solomon. The base is incised with the artist’s name, Yahya ibn Yusuf. A blank inverted teardrop form has been engraved on opposite sides of the neck, perhaps meant to decorate the points of attachment for a handle that may never have been applied.

The ewer was previously attributed to Nasrid Spain in the fourteenth century based on the calligraphic style of the inscription as well as on the form of the half-palmette motif used to decorate its surface (Geneva 1985, p. 284). However, extant Nasrid metalwork is rare, and no comparable objects are known to exist that would confidently support this attribution. It appears the jug shares more features in common with Greater Iranian metalwork from the medieval period, at least from the eleventh century. Iranian metal wares reflect a composite form that continued to be refined in the centuries that followed; decoration seems to have gradually evolved from sparse to denser epigraphic and ornamental programmes in medieval and pre-modern times. A partially gilt and nielloed silver jug in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, exhibits a relative overall proportion similar to this ewer, including a wide, flaring neck, but does not share its angular and fluted characteristics; this work has been attributed to Iran in the twelfth century (Atıl, Chase, and Jett 1985, p. 85, fig. 32). Fluted and faceted bodies were also not unusual in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Greater Iranian (especially northwestern Iran and including modern Iraq) and Syrian regions (Baer 1983, p. 291). They appear in metal ewers (Atıl, Chase, and Jett 1985, pp. 120–121, figs. 46 & 49 [with a faceted foot]), and certainly in thirteenth-century Iranian candlestick bases (ibid., p. 113, figs. 42–44; and von Folsach, p. 319, no. 509). Elements of the surface decoration can also be found in the decorative programme of certain wares from northeastern Iran in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, where a couple bands of inscription appear on the neck and (near) shoulder region, and medallions or repeated floral or vegetal motifs are engraved around different parts of the body, with some nielloed background but most left blank (see, for example, a jug in the Müzim-i Rawza, Ghazni, Afghanistan, in Melikian-Chirvani 1982, p. 65, no. 2). While most of the features present in this jug appear in medieval Iranian metalwork, the combination of features that are individually but never collectively found in works of different periods and regions challenges a secure attribution of place and time. More research must be conducted on the identity of this object’s maker, as results might yield information about the cultural context in which this very interesting piece was made. | LA
Beginning in the twelfth century, ceramics in Iran were produced with a frit body that provided a clean, light surface for painting. In addition to the many transparent and opaque coloured glazes, lustre could also be added to the ceramic decoration, painted over the glaze after it was fired, and then fired a second time, developing an impressive metallic sheen in the process. Most of the stunning works in this group belong to a larger group of pre-Mongol lustre wares with decoration that can be classified as illustrative or pictorial (see Lentz and Lowry 1989, ch. 2) and exhibit the “miniature” and “monumental” styles of Persian lustreware coined by Oliver Watson (Watson 2004). The “miniature” wares include two bowls in the AKM collection (cat. nos. 137 & AKM 00558, not illustrated here), one with a central figure riding a horse at the base, with a caravan of camels following another figure around the wall below the rim; the other depicting horses and riders moving in a circle framing a central mounted rider. Another dish (AKM 00559, not illustrated here) represents the more “monumental” style identified by the larger scale of the subject matter, in this case a seated royal figure, shown at centre in a robe with uninscribed tiraz bands; he is flanked by two attendants or officials, their lower status suggested by their depiction on a smaller scale. The decoration on these objects resembles manuscript illustrations containing stock figures and compositions that could either depict genre scenes or refer to a specific text. Given their concave surface, however, different conventions were used to fill the background of a figural scene on bowls and deep dishes. In the bowl depicting camels, for example (cat. no. 137), the horse and rider appear against a background of curving stems, dotted on either side to suggest the presence of leaves. A band of vine scrolls borders the base image and is topped by the caravan frieze, where chequered trees add pauses to the steady rhythm created by the moving camels. These types of wares may be compared to the highly figural mina’i or haft-rangi (seven-colour) wares, also attributed to pre-Mongol Iran, a period that witnessed an intensive proliferation of figural art (often depicting royal pastimes), especially in the production of ceramics. While not as figural in their design, the bottle and seven-part dish (cat. nos. 139 & 138) nevertheless share characteristics of the “miniature” and later “Kashan” styles in Persian lustreware. The bottle is decorated with bands of panels filled with foliate forms and lozenges alternating with bands of pseudo-calligraphic and calligraphic inscriptions, and the background or negative space on the surfaces of both wares is filled in the same comprehensive manner as the other objects in this group. The seven hollows in the dish (cat. no. 138) suggest that this piece may have been used to hold seven fruits or the seven items of the traditional sofra-yi haftsı̄ın (lit., “seven-S spread”) at Nowruz, the Persian New Year that begins with the spring equinox. | LA
These ceramic pieces aptly illustrate the mutations of architectural vocabulary in the Islamic world, the models for which were initially inherited from the classical and Ancient Near Eastern (Sasanian) worlds. The builders, whether they worked in the east or west of the vast territories of the Dar al-Islam, conceived and diffused original solutions for the coating and the transition from squared based vaults to circular ones. To do so, they invented the muqarnas, an architectural module whose genesis has been very controversial. Attributed to Egypt in the Fatimid period as well as to the Great Seljuqs of Iran, the muqarnas have also evolved from an essential architectural module for transition areas, with an important role in construction, to a purely decorative element. It soon becomes a repetitive element of groups of stalactites; the most brilliant examples are found in the sixteenth century in the vaults of the Alhambra (Hall of the Two Sisters and Hall of Abencerrajes) and later on, in Central Asia in the tomb of Ahmad Yasavi (Yasi, Turkestan in Kazakhstan, nowadays). Two of the architectural elements in this group (cat. nos. 141 and 142) are units that might have once belonged to a muqarnas vault. Along with the third (cat. no. 140), these pieces could have once been affixed to the exterior façade of a mosque or mausoleum, a large group of which can be found in the Shah-i Zinda complex at Samarkand, one of the great Timurid capitals. Timur (r. 1370–1405), a Barlas Turk who founded the Timurid dynasty, was a fierce ruler, but he and his successors were also grand patrons of the arts. The brilliant turquoise vaults and elaborately patterned façades of Timurid buildings are a familiar site in cities such as Samarkand. Along with the use of muqarnas, builders used a range of other techniques such as bannā'ī (glazed brick patterns), carved and glazed terracotta, tile mosaic, cuerda seca (dry cord), underglaze painted relief moulding, and even lustre, all revealing the virtuoso talents of these craftsmen. | SM AF
This two-tiered wooden panel, divided into six sections, closely resembles carved *thuluth* inscriptions from Mazandaran, a northern province of Iran. Two published examples bear the signatures of two sons of a master carpenter, Ustad Ahmad-i Sari. One is dated 1468 and signed by Husayn, son of Ustad Ahmad (Welch 1979, pp. 130–131); the other is dated 1494 and signed by Shams al-Din, son of Ustad Ahmad (Bivar and Yarshater 1978, pl. 65). Even if this panel is not the work of one of these woodcarvers, the examples share the manner in which vertical letters rise and intersect letters above the text line and words within each panel are written on two levels, lower and upper. Unlike the comparative examples, however, this panel contains verses by the celebrated poet Hafiz (d. 1389–90):
First register:

“In the eyes and brows of my beloved I confided heart and soul
Come, come contemplate the arch and the window!
Say to the guardian of paradise: the dust of this meeting place […]”

Second register:

“[…] do not falter in your task, pour the wine into the cup!
Beyond your hedonism, your love for moon-faced beings,
Amongst the tasks that you accomplish, recite the poem of Hafiz!”


As the panel is fragmentary, it may have been part of a frieze that ran around the walls of a room. Despite being poetic and not religious, the inscription may have come from one of the many shrines in Mazandaran with carved wood decoration. | AF
One of the finest examples of its kind, this object bears the characteristic features of Timurid carved wooden doors: deep, intricately carved floral designs inherited from the preceding Ilkhanid period and reminiscent of Chinese lacquer wares; geometric patterns formed by the tongue-and-groove technique; plaited borders; and panels inscribed with prayers and information about patrons, craftsmen, and dates of production. Mazandaran in northern Iran is known for its dense forests and sweetly scented *khalanj* wood and several examples of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century woodcarvings have been found in that region (Bronstein 1938, p. 2622). The doors share design elements with other doors from this period surviving in public and private collections: a cenotaph in the Khalili Collection, signed by Shams al-Din Sari and dated 902 H / 1496 (London 2001, pp. 218–219); and pairs of doors in the Art and History Trust Collection, Houston, (Soudavar 1992, p. 94, no. 34) and in the National Museum of Iran, Tehran, signed and dated 846 H / 1442 (London 1976, p. 292, no. 458). | L.A.
The Safavid shahs of Iran were not only the first native Iranian dynasty to unite the country for nearly a millennium, but also they introduced Shia Islam as the state religion. The impact of this institutionalized faith was wide-reaching. It instilled Iranians with an intensified sense of religious and national identity that set them apart from their Sunni rivals, the Ottomans and Uzbeks.

While Safavid painters of the early sixteenth century synthesised the styles they had inherited from the Turkman court at Tabriz and the Timurids at Herat, the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a new emphasis on single-page paintings made for inclusion in albums. New styles in metalwork included openwork steel plaques (cat. nos. 146, 147) and small objects, while Safavid potters relied on Chinese prototypes for their inspiration. Foreign influences had an impact on all the arts of the Islamic world in this period.

An interest in portraiture intensified in the seventeenth century in Turkey, Iran and India, in part reflecting the increased importation of European prints including portraits of kings and other notable people. Different conventions for royal portraiture developed at different courts. The Safavid shahs of Iran were portrayed at official gatherings greeting foreign diplomats in works on paper and on the walls of the Chihil Sutun, a royal palace built in the 1640s in Isfahan. These scenes emphasise the shah’s supremacy and magnanimity.
Standard (Alam)

Iran, late 16th century
Pierced steel plate with moulded iron adjuncts
Height 81.5 cm; width 32.5 cm
AKM 00679

Publications: Thompson and Canby 2003, p. 222; AKTC 2007a, pp. 178-179 (no. 154a); AKTC 2007b, pp. 180-181 (no. 154a); Makariou 2007, pp. 148-149 (no. 52); AKTC 2008a, pp. 282-283 (no. 112); AKTC 2008b, p. 192; AKTC 2009a, p. 192; AKTC 2009b, p. 192

Although steel, which is an alloy of iron and carbon, is a metal essentially used for the production of weapons and armour, in the Safavid period it was often used as a raw material for etching plates (cat. nos. 146 and 147) and openwork standards. This standard is made from a pear-shaped sheet of steel ending in two divergent outgrowths alluding to the two tips of the Dhū'l-fiqār sword. The largest openworked area presents a mirror inscription which can thus be read from different angles. The inscription is engraved on a stylised foliated background repeated symmetrically in relation to the central axis. The following text can be read from top to bottom: “Yā Al-lah, yā Muhammad, yā ‘Ali” (“Oh God, Oh Muhammad, Oh Ali”). The two invocations of ‘Ali meet on the axis to form a stylised face, perhaps of a lion, which is symbolic of the first Imam. The lām and the yā of ‘Ali outline the contours, the ‘ayn (the name of the letter but which also means “eye” in Arabic) form the eyes and the two vocative particles yā are joined to form a muzzle.

Several related elements are nailed to this openwork sheet of metal, ornate with stylised dragon heads. This animal motif is repeated three times: at the end of the two curved extensions at the base of the standard; at the end of the two pieces of metal which are set in the pear-shaped part of the standard and are affixed to it in several places; on either side of the top element of which the middle axis is made of two symmetrical, separated sheets of metal between which another element could be inserted and attached. The dragon motif, the meaning of which could here be protective, was highly appreciated in the Islamic world and often used on metal objects. During the Safavid period and in Mughal India, it would decorate the stern and prow of boat-shaped bowls or kashkūls. Pear-shaped standards with dragon heads often appeared in Safavid miniatures where they would be associated with battle scenes or be represented inside sanctuaries, which attest to both their warlike and religious functions at the time (Makariou 2007, pp. 158–59, n. 14). The still current practice of taking out these standards during processions associated with Shiite religious calendar celebrations was confirmed by European travellers since the seventeenth century, but it does not seem to have been represented in sixteenth century manuscripts (ibid., p. 159, n. 15). | CM
Two steel plaques

146

Multi-lobed steel plaque
Iran, second half of 17th century
Incised iron alloy
Height 34.8 cm
AKM 00617
Published: Makariou 2007, pp. 152–153 (no. 54); AKTC 2008a, pp. 66–67 (no. 13); AKTC 2009a, p. 193; AKTC 2009b, p. 193

147

Oblong steel plaque
Iran, late 17th century
Openwork iron alloy
Length 22 cm
AKM 00616
Published: Makariou 2007, pp. 164–165 (no. 55); AKTC 2008a, pp. 68–69 (no. 14); AKTC 2009a, p. 193; AKTC 2009b, p. 193

These steel plaques were most likely created as part of larger assemblies of plates forming a composition framing a central cartouche with openwork decoration. One is shaped like a multi-lobed almond and bears the Shi’a profession of faith, La illaha illallah wa Muhammadun rasul Allah wa ‘Ali wali Allah (“There is no God but God and Muhammad is His prophet and ‘ Ali is His companion”). The surface is done in openwork, with the exception of the plain plate that outlines the shape of the sconce. The three-line inscription is written in Arabic thuluth script that stands out from a background of delicate spirals of foliage. These twining plants have bifid leaves and stylised florets in a flowing and dynamic design. Their precision and fineness are reminiscent of the meticulous work of illumination. The sconce’s shape also evokes book art from the Safavid era: multi-lobed mandorlas at the centre of the binding plates and medallions inscribed on the heart of the initial carpet pages of Qur’ans or literary works. This plaque belongs to a group of other such multi-lobed plates based on shape, design, and calligraphic style; in the absence of definite clues about the circumstances of their creation, it is difficult to assert that they were produced at the same time for the same usage. However, it seems well established that they were made as decoration for a door, and three of the plates in this group tell us something about how they might originally have been assembled (two additional plates from a private collection have recently been published in Melikian-Chirvani 2007, pp. 260–261, cat. nos. 61 and 62).

The second plate, executed almost entirely in openwork and with Arabic thuluth inscription standing out against a background of three spiralling scrolls bearing stylised plant elements, is similar to the first in general design. It differs, however, in its oblong shape and a few ornamental details, such as the more developed design of plant elements: symmetrical and more complex florets and leaves with two, three, and four lobes. The general effect evokes the multi-lobed medallions common in illuminated decoration and that contain the title of a work or its subdivisions. Here, the inscription is limited to the name of Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad’s only daughter and the wife of ‘Ali, followed by the distinctive epithet al-zahra (the brilliant one). While its provenance is unknown, this object can be related to a set of ornamental plaques that are comparable in design, though longer (between 38 and 39 cm). Each of these invokes one or more of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones (chahārdah ma’sūmīn) revered by the Twelver Shi’a: the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and the twelve Imams. | CM
Manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami (d. 1209)

Scribe: Pir Husayn ibn Pir Hasan al-Katib al-Shirazi
Artist: Qiyath al-Mudhahhib

Iran, Shiraz, dated 20–30 Rabi’ al-Awwal 933 H
/ 25 December 1526 – 4 January 1527
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper;
contemporary gilt leather binding
33.4 x 21.5 x 5.5 cm; page 33.5 x 20.2 cm
AKM 00270
Published: Welch 1978b (Ms. 15); Welch and Welch 1982, pp. 74–76 (no. 22; different folio); AKTC 2009a, pp. 194-195; AKTC 2009b, pp. 194-195

The Khamsa (Quintet) is a posthumous collection of five narrative poems composed by Nizami of Ganja (a city in present-day Azerbaijan) (d. 1209), one of the greatest romantic poets of Persian literature. The present copy of the text is composed of 401 folios with a four-column, gold-ruled text format containing 19 lines of nasta’līq Persian script; headings appear in blue nasta’līq against a gilded background of spiral scrolls and are embellished with orange, yellow, and green flowers. Twenty-seven miniatures illustrate selected episodes from each of the five poems, the final one signed by the artist, “Tasvīr-i Qīyāth al-Muḏāhib (the reproduction of Qiyath the Gilder).” This painting appears on folio 382 verso of the manuscript as part of the fifth book, the Iskandarnāma (“Book of Alexander”). Although the colophon names a scribe, Pir Husayn ibn Pir Hasan al-Katib al-Shirazi, it does not identify a patron. Anthony Welch has suggested that this book may have been produced for a wealthy individual of high standing or perhaps for the governor of Shiraz, as no Safavid prince lived in Shiraz during the period of production for the manuscript (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 76). The dark leather gilded binding is contemporary with the codex and includes verses in praise of Nizami on its spine.

The present image depicts a scene from the story of Khusraw u Shirin (Khusraw and Shirin), the first of the five narratives in the collection and composed by Nizami between 1171 and 1181. The text
is composed of some 7,000 couplets relating the adventures of the Sasanian king Khusraw Parviz (r. 590–628) and his romance with the beautiful Shirin, an Armenian princess who later became his wife after the king subdued his rival, the sculptor Farhad, in the quest for Shirin’s love. Khusraw first learns of Shirin from his companion, the painter Shapur. The king falls in love with the princess without ever having met her and asks for Shapur’s aid in pursuing her and winning her hand in marriage. Shapur travels to Armenia, where he paints a picture of his king and posts it strategically in an outdoor setting frequented by Shirin and her companions. Shirin is struck by the image; intrigued by its subject, she finally demands to know who the portrait represents and how she may find the man depicted; this is the moment illustrated in the present painting. Shapur reveals the identity and love of his master to Shirin and instructs her to meet Khusraw half-way between Armenia and Iran. All of the illustrations in this manuscript of the Khamsa are believed to have been executed by the same painter, Qiyath al-Mudhahhib (“Qiyath the Gilder”), and build from a tradition of painting and calligraphy developed in Shiraz in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (ibid., p. 74). | LA
An illustrated manuscript of the *Anvār-i Suhaylī* (Lights of Canopus) of Husayn ibn 'Ali al Wa‘iz al-Kashifi (d. 1504)

**Scribe:** Na‘īm Muhammad al-Husayni al-Tābrīzī  
**Artist:** Sādiqī Bīg  
Iran, Qazvin, dated 13 Safar 1002 H / 8 November 1593 CE  
Ink and opaque watercolour on paper  
30.1 x 20.3 cm  
Provenance: Marquess of Bute  
AKM 00289  
Published: Welch 1976, pp. 125–144, figs. 42–55 (fols. 10r, 17r, 38r, 28v, 20v, 52r, 309r, 55v, 85r, 227v, 40v, 313r, 83v, and 22r); Welch and Welch 1982, pp. 100–105, cat. no. 32 (fols. 22r, 139v, and 198r); Canby 1998, pp. 70–72 (no. 43); AKTC 2007, p. 136r (no. 103); AKTC 2007, p. 138v (no. 103); Melikian-Chirvani 2007, pp. 446–447 (fol. 22v); AKTC 2009a, p. 196; AKTC 2009b, p. 196

The paintings in this manuscript depict stories from the *Anvār-i Suhaylī* (Lights of Canopus), a selection of fifteenth-century fables based on a twelfth-century version of the *Kalīla wa Dimna* (Kalila and Dimna) collection. The text’s origins are thought to lie in the oral traditions of India and to have been first recorded in writing around 300 CE as the *Panchatantra* (Five Occasions of Good Sense), a book of five chapters on statecraft (*arthaśāstra*) (De Blois 1991, p. 10). Its stories are held together by the framework of an Indian king, Dabshalim (or Dabshilim), consulting his court philosopher Bidpāi (or Pilpay, both corrupted versions of Bidnag and later, in Arabic, Bindna) about proper ruling conduct in a variety of situations. Bidpāi responds to each question with a fable featuring animal protagonists, each fable in turn framing other stories and sub-stories and eventually returning to the king’s conversation with Bidpāi in order to lead to the next of the five main fables.

The present image refers to one of the five chapters or strategies of statecraft, “Of Crows and Owls.” The tale involves a longstanding enmity between the owls and the crows, each group led by their respective king. The crows lived in a tree while the owls lived in a cave, and the owl king made it a point to have any crow he ever saw leave the tree killed as a pre-emptive measure. Concerned about his shrinking flock, the crow king consulted his advisors on how to retaliate and ultimately followed the counsel of the advisor who suggested finding out who the owl king’s closest advisors were and turning them against each other through deceit and duplicity. Once they were divided through dissent, the crows could conquer their enemy. The history of the *Panchatantra*’s transmission to the Islamic world is recalled in its various recensions into Persian and Arabic, as the story of *Kalīla wa Dimna* was first translated into Pahlavi or Middle Persian by the physician Burzoy in the sixth century; then into Arabic in the eighth century by Ibn al-Muqaffa; later into neo-Persian in the mid-twelfth century by Nasrallah Munshī; and, finally, at the end of the fifteenth century, incorporated into the *Anvār-i Suhaylī* by Husayn ibn ‘Ali al Wa‘iz al-Kashifi (d. 1504).
باشند بالینکی و سپاه خیامیان، برای آنان زندگی زمانی و ایندیا که
بپرودند سپاه عیلامی در آوردند.

سیل‌های شیبان، کره جنگی خاک است.

مدیران بهتری به سیال‌هاان شکری کاران باید کار آرزویی و وقت اثبات
که برخی بمانند که گاهی طرف روزگاران دوخت و وظیفه مسترد.
This mystical poem by 'Arifi (d. circa 1449) uses the concept of the polo ball and mallet as a metaphor for yearning for and being spurned by the beloved. In the painting a dervish on the edge of a rocky horizon observes a princely polo player who is accompanied by an attendant carrying a mallet. The illustration is stylistically close to the work of 'Ali Asghar who worked in Qazvin in the 1570s and 1580s and joined the kitabkhana of Shah Abbas I upon his accession in 1587. 'Ali Asghar illustrated two manuscripts of Guy u Chawgān and one of Shāh u Darvīsh of Hilālī that all include polo-playing scenes (Robinson 1988, p. 126). The jutting rocks, sharply bent elbows and treatment of the hair of the dervish recall these equally small-scale works by 'Ali Asghar. | AF
Lacquer book covers
Iran, late 16th century
Lacquer with powdered gold and mother-of-pearl
27.7 x 16.7 cm
AKM 00637
Published: AKTC 2007a, pp. 74-75 (no. 43); AKTC 2007b, pp. 70-71 (no. 43); Makariou 2007, pp. 70–71 (no. 21); AKTC 2008a, pp. 106–107 (no. 32); AKTC 2009a, p. 200; AKTC 2009b, p. 200

The use of “lacquer” painting – in fact made waterproof and very shiny from applying a varnish - for papier mâché binding boards goes back to the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The development of this technique for binding manuscripts produced in Herat during the rule of Husayn Mirza (1470–1506), seems to have resulted from the importation of Chinese lacquered objects whose vitrified appearance and the rich contrast of golden decoration on a dark background inspired imitations. From the last years of the fifteenth century on, colour ranges became richer for the treatment of the background and decoration through the use of a deep red colour and pearl or shell dust, covered with red varnish to accentuate the coloured background.

Polychromy continued to evolve during the sixteenth century, whilst animal scenes, sometimes involving humans, could cover the entire outer board which would gradually resemble a miniature page. This theme was reserved for binding boards used for poetic or literary works. The present book covers, decorated with an animal theme picture repeated on the two outer boards, reflects this development while maintaining a colour assortment restricted to yellow, orange and red on a black background. These colours were emphasized with gold and pearl dust, and the contours outlined with a gold line contrasting with the dark background. The undulating frieze framing the picture, achieved through the juxtaposition of ‘chi’ clouds painted in black on a gold background, can be seen on all the early lacquer bindings produced in Herat and continued to be frequently used as a border motif throughout the sixteenth century. Inside the central field, a primary register depicts a pond on whose banks two deer drink and revel in, seemingly undisturbed by any predator. Two flowering trees, which take up most of the available surface area, spread their branches, overlapping each other. On their branches, a sparrow and two pheasants seem to be exchanging vehement words, while in the restricted space of the upper corners two ducks fly hastily amid swirling clouds. Between the branches, the dark background is punctuated by small tufts of grass and flowery grebes leaving space on the top for small spiralling clouds, suggesting the end of the earth. This piece of sky in the top part of the landscape is a common feature in Persian miniatures. Similarly, all the elements of the scene have their match in numerous pages of miniatures and marginal decorations. These are some of the recurring elements of an idealised nature which is characteristic of Iranian miniatures. Moreover, the principal elements of this landscape are presented in pairs (twin trees, two deer, and two pheasants); their doubling, like the replication of the same composition on each of the two boards, could represent the mirror and doubling theme that was so dear in mystical Persian poetry. The whole picture gives an impression of balance and serenity, which is not the most sought after effect in the animal scenes of binding boards, usually divided into several dynamic sketches depicting animal fights and predators chasing their prey.

The two illustrations presented here are from Shah Tahmasp's *Shāhnāma*, one of the most remarkable Persian manuscripts which was started when Shah Tahmasp returned to Tabriz from Herat in 1522. Over a dozen painters, at least two calligraphers, two or more miniaturists, bookbinders, persons responsible for polishing, gold stippling and margin creation, with a whole team of assistants, pooled their talents in a *kitabkhana* or book workshop to design the most sumptuous manuscript ever produced in Iran. In the twentieth century, the manuscript lost its colophon and a large part of the research work done by art historians focused then on the identification of the workshop chefs and painters. Before it was dismantled in the 1970s, the complete manuscript consisted of 380 folios, including 258 miniatures.

The manuscripts bear two signatures - of both Muir Musavvir and Dust Muhammad - and a date: 934 H / 1527–28 CE. It is thought that these two paintings, done on thicker paper were added later, between 1535 and 1540, when the manuscript was close to completion (Welch 1979b, pp. 39 et seq). The paintings of this manuscript not only reflect the work of several major painters of the sixteenth century, but also plunge us into the daily Safavid court life. Indeed, although the *Shāhnāma* depicts the legendary and pre-Islamic history of Iran, the artists represented the characters in clothing from the period of Shah Tahmasp within their context. In some cases, architecturally decorated objects or elements represented in these miniatures have lasted to this day. The style of the miniatures was the subject of a major study (Dickson and Welch 1981), but the aspects of Safavid court life that these paintings reveal are also worthy of interest.

Around 1568, Shah Tahmasp gave the manuscript to the Ottoman sultan Selim II (see cat. no. 96) and it remained in the Ottoman royal library until the nineteenth century. It is possible that it returned to Iran in the nineteenth century, but, in 1903, it was sold to Baron Edmond de Rothschild and, in 1959, was bought by the American Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. Today, the two largest parts of the manuscript belong to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Isolated illustrations can be found in many private and public collections in Europe and North America.

The first illustration shows Firdawsi, the author of the written version of the *Shāhnāma*, with the three poets of the court of Mahmud, the sultan of Ghazna, a city which is now in modern-day Afghanistan (cat. no. 152). Firdawsi left Tūs, his native city, in the north-east of Iran, to seek out the patronage of the sultan for his *Shāhnāma*. Before meeting with the sultan, he was confronted by three poets of the court who cornered him before finally acknowledging his superior talent. In this picture, a small black servant roasts a bird on a spit while young fine-faced boys bring wine and delicacies to the three Ghazna poets, seated, in the centre of the picture, on the grassy bank of a stream of water. Firdawsi’s isolation is emphasized by his position to the extreme left of the main group, just where the composition spills over into the margin. The role of the young man to the right of the picture, his head elegantly wrapped in a golden turban topped with the Safavid red ‘taj’, is not at once clear, but identifying him is key for the broader interpretation of this illustration and the role of Aqa Mirak in the production of the *Shāhnāma*. As a member of the distinguished Sayyid family (recognised descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) of Isfahan, Aqa Mirak was described by Dust Muhammad as being “unique in his time, the confidant of the Shah and unequalled as a painter and portraitist” (Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray 1933, p. 186). S. C. Welch has suggested that Shah Tahmasp might have granted his friend the honour of painting the first picture of the manuscript, including Firdawsi, and the three poets of the court of Ghazna. Returning the compliment, Aqa Mirak might have included a portrait of the Shah, the young man in the golden turban in this illustration (Welch 1979b, p. 43). Basing his theory on Tahmasp's age at the time and the relative youth of Aqa Mirak compared to Sultan Muhammad and Mir Musavvir, the first and second persons responsible for the *Shāhnāma* project, S. C. Welch dated the picture around 1532, approximately ten years after work on the manuscript began.

The second painting depicts Gushtasp, the son of Shah Luhrasp who travelled to the court of the qaysar (Caesar) from Rūm to Constantinople, killing a dragon. The eldest daughter of the qaysar immediately fell in love with him and refused to marry any other man, to the great consternation of her father. To avoid the same misfortune befalling his two younger daughters, the qaysar decreed that only suitors capable of accomplishing heroic feats would be accepted as suitable matches for his young daughters. Fearing failure, the aspirants of the young girls asked Gushtasp to join forces with them and be their secret champion. His second test, as illustrated here, was to kill the dragon of Mount Saqila. Armed with a special dagger, its tip coated with poison, Gushtasp first shot a volley of arrows at the dragon and whilst the latter tried to suck him into his mouth, Gushtasp lunged at him and planted his dagger in the back of his throat. He then decapitated the dying monster and returned to Constantinople, where the qaysar, recognising his heroism, restored to him and his fiancée the favours of the court of Rūm. The painting is attributable to Mirza ‘Ali, son of Sultan Muhammad, who was one of the artists of the younger generation who worked on the *Shāhnāma* of Shah Tahmasp. The great skill exercised by Mirza ‘Ali in describing nature is evident here in the interplay between the pale blue sky and golden hillsides, which convincingly portrays a luminous and ethereal atmosphere.
Bowl with a hero killing a dragon

Iran, probably Shiraz, Zand, mid-18th century
Fritware, underglaze lustre painted in brown and blue
Height 9 cm; diameter 22.2 cm
AKM 00697
Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 194–95; AKTC 2008a, pp. 216–17 (no. 82); AKTC 2009a, p. 205; AKTC 2009b, p. 205

The lustre painted technique and the subject matter depicted on this small bowl are more reminiscent of medieval Seljuq and Ilkhanid wares, which commonly illustrated scenes from Persian literature, especially the Shāhnāma of Firdawsi, the national oral epic about the ancient kings and legendary heroes of Iran, put to verse in circa 1010. A princely or heroic figure pursues an awkward-looking dragon around a central, eight-petalled rosette; two sets of triangular mountain peaks appear between the figures, setting the scene for the hunt. The circular shape of the bowl and the running stance of the hunter add a dynamic tension to the episode. Stylistically, however, the figure of the hunter appears more related to the early Zand period (r. 1750–79) during which artists closely followed the aesthetic models of their Safavid predecessors. The exterior of the bowl contains six panels displaying various landscapes and a large bird that appears in alternating frames. | LA
Since the ninth century, the Islamic world has observed and admired the production of Chinese potters. In its classification of different peoples, the mastery of the arts and various techniques was the domain of the Chinese. This is a model dating back to the beginning of the fifteenth century which has been faithfully copied. No fewer than thirty-four similar dishes are still to be found among the collections of the Ardebil sanctuary, the founding site of the Safavid dynasty (Makariou 2007, p. 55, no. 81). They present slight variations; with or without wings. However, the winged model, decorated with waves and rocks and cavettos with small bouquets of flowers, has two examples among the Ardebil collection (ibid., n. 82). It is unusual for an imitation to be so faithful to the original. It copies almost detail for detail the decoration of waves and rocks on the wings and the bouquets embellishing the cavetto. Nevertheless, the Safavid piece is bigger than the Chinese examples that have been preserved. Some of them bear the mark of Shah Abbas, which leads us to date the Safavid copy back to the first quarter of the seventeenth century. However, the Chinese model probably goes back to the beginning of the fifteenth century. This poses a problem for the reception of these objects and the gap between their approximate date of fabrication and that of their imitations. The Chinese model boasts a number of features which fit in perfectly with ornamentation in the Islamic world: the wave and rock design on the wing is static and the wavy writing less skittish, compared to fourteenth century dishes. On the Chinese original, the curly lines of the waves remain fluid, though repetitive. By contrast, on the Safavid model, the waves fold up into geometrically organized bands. It is here a different universe of transcription at play, dominated by a steadily maintained rhythm. The centre bouquet copies the Chinese model almost down to the minutest detail. However, these transcription details change the design, accentuating a simple contrast between the spindly lines and the excessive colour on the petals from which the monochromes have disappeared (ibid., n. 83). On the underside, the undulating foliage replete with flowers from the Chinese model has been simplified, or “ornamentalised”. The thick, oily and shiny glaze spread over the piece lends warmth to the copy. The Ottoman world also liked Chinese ceramics; the Topkapi Palace holds one of the most extensive collections of Chinese ceramics outside of China. However, the Ottoman pastiches of Chinese ceramics most often elicited transcriptions more distanced from the model. | SM
The Islamic world’s fascination with China most likely reflects an interest in the Far East which has existed in the entire region, and in particular in Iran, since Antiquity. However, in the Islamic period a concerted effort was made to imitate Chinese blue-and-white porcelain and monochrome celadon wares. Artists and craftsmen from China are known to have worked in Kufa (Iraq) as early as the eighth century, during the Abbasid period (Pelliot 1928, 110–112), so cultural transmission occurred through the movement of technicians as well as through trade and diplomacy. The present bottle is an excellent example of moulded monochrome glazed ware imitating Chinese celadon. Two images created by a mould appear on the body of the bottle: a winged bull and a Chinese qilin on one side, and the figure of a lion tamer and a lion on the other. A virtually identical bottle is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, suggesting that the two objects were produced from the same mould (Pope 1938, pls. 807B & 808A [inv. no. 1339-1876]); a similar bottle can be found in the Gemeente Museum, The Hague (Pope 1938, pl. 808B). The pear shape seems to have been popular in the early seventeenth century, as several bottles with this form exist in other collections but with a different decorative programme (see, for example, bottles with a white body, black outlines, and leafy grounds depicting hunters and their prey, in the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg). The image of the lion tamer and lion also appears in drawings of the period; these probably served as models for ceramic decoration as well as for the surfaces of other media. This very scene is depicted by the well-known sixteenth-century Safavid artist Sadiqi Beg (see cat. no. 149), whose drawings sometimes reflect the influence of his contemporary, Riza ‘Abbasi, known for his extraordinary “calligraphic” drawing style. | LA
The fragment highlights the stems darting off to the right. The bold shades of blue, turquoise, white and yellow create a strong colour contrast with the mustard-coloured background. A touch of green at the base of the irises adds richness to the array. Similarities with the most graphic tradition of European engraving are rapidly obvious. Plates of botanical books were, as already stressed, a likely source of inspiration for designs on ceramic pieces for pleasure pavilions in Iran and for Mughal residences in India. The work that was best received was "Hortus floridus" (1614) by Crispin de Passe (Makariou 2007, p. 55, n. 61). However, artists of the great modern Islamic empires made their selection recomposing from among this vast repertoire; the same theme was often transformed into an entity which was ornamentalised through repetition, as for instance unreal meadows storming over the brick walls of the Isfahan pavilions. The colour scheme could conduct to assign these two tiles, fragments of a larger piece, to India. The technique, however, is rigorously similar to that applied to tiles still to be found in Isfahan. The terra cotta is entirely coated with a white opaque glaze; on this background a black line traces the contours; the composition is undetermined but the difference of mortar between the black line and the glaze ensures effective insulation between the layers of coloured glaze. The decoration is subsequently painted with coloured glaze which practically covers the underlying white glaze. The white petals, visible here, are therefore reserves. The black line restores the design element to the piece and allows a finer rendering of the outpouring of the petals which are just about ready to fall off their petiole. The term 'naturalism' has been overused, but sensitivity to nature, however, expressed a preoccupation of the literate elite of the time.
Two wistful-looking shepherds loll on a hillock as their sheep and a goat graze at the left and their dog lies watchfully at the right. In the background a hamlet with onion-domed towers and low buildings set in a grove completes the composition. Not only do the hat of the piping shepherd, his contrapposto pose and the transparent pantaloons of both figures give a decidedly un-Persian impression, but also the painterly treatment of foliage and the shading of the gullies in the middle ground indicate the presence of strong European influence.

By the 1670s European artists had been active in Isfahan for at least fifty years, and the Europeanising or ‘farangi’ style had been established since the middle of the century. According to the 18th century writer Luft ‘Ali Beg Adar, ‘Ali Quli Jabbadar was a European convert to Islam. His name suggests that he had come to Iran to work as an official in the Safavid armoury (Makariou 2007, p. 55, no. 51). Apparently he abandoned making armour in favour of painting, though his eclectic style, neither wholly European nor Persian, may indicate that he was never thoroughly trained in either mode. The painting of the shepherds is one with very few Persian elements and should be dated near the beginning of his career in the mid-1670s shortly after his earliest dated work of 1084 H /1673-1674 CE (ibid., cat. no. 52).

‘Ali Quli may have worked in several centres since one of his paintings is inscribed ‘Qazvin’ and another ‘Isfahan’. Several paintings by him in an album in St Petersburg have Georgian inscriptions, prompting Soucek to propose that a Georgian official commissioned these portraits of Shah Sulayman (ibid., cat. no. 53). His career lasted until at least 1129 H /1716-1717 CE, the year of his latest dated work (see cat. No.64), and his son, Muhammad ‘Ali Beg, became head of the painters under Nādir Shah (ibid., cat. no. 54). | SC
Polychrome doors with Sufi inscription

Iran, 17th–18th century
Wood, carved and painted
161 x 84.5 cm
Inscription: “Dar-i shādī bi sāhib-i in bāb / bigushay mufath al-abwāb (Doorman, open the door of happiness for the owner of this door)”

AKM 00704
Published: AKTC 2008a, pp. 148–149 (no. 53); AKTC 2009a, p. 210; AKTC 2009b, p. 210

These well-preserved polychrome painted doors are carved with floral and foliate motifs in high relief, enclosed within a strapwork design of oblong star-shaped frames and bordered by narrow and shallow-carved bands of vegetal scrolls and rosettes. Their floral ornamentation is typical of the dynamic vegetal designs of the Safavid period and probably originated in manuscript illustration and bookbinding. Two frames located above the star-shaped panels on each door include an inscription in Persian, carved against a background painted in green and surrounded by a stylized vine scroll painted in red. The text, which speaks on behalf of the person who would stand on the outer side of the doors, appears to carry a more spiritual significance characteristic of Sufi-inspired Safavid culture: “Dar-i shādī bi sāhib-i in bāb / bigushay mufath al-abwāb (Doorman, open the door of happiness for the owner of this door).” While their original context remains unknown, these doors might have once opened into a Sufi hospice or a palatial retreat. | LA
The Qajar dynasty, which ruled Iran from 1779 to 1925, was descended from a Turkman tribe that rose to prominence under the Safavids (r. 1501–1722). In the second half of the eighteenth century Karim Khan Zand and his heirs controlled Fars province in southern Iran but could not bring the rest of the country to heel for any extended period of time. In this period the Qajar heir, Agha Muhammad, was kept under house arrest at the Zand court where he was castrated. A desire for revenge fuelled Agha Muhammad’s eventual rebellion against the Zands and his consolidation of power. Upon his death in 1797, his nephew Fath ‘Ali Khan, acceded to the throne.

Fath ‘Ali Shah began his reign on shaky political ground and did not experience unqualified military success. Yet he masterminded the promotion of his imperial image to a far greater extent than earlier kings of Iran had done. His long black beard and narrow waist emphasised his manliness and made his image instantly recognizable (see cat. no. 161). In addition, Fath ‘Ali devised a new Kaianian crown which stressed his royal connection with the ancient Achaemenid emperors of Iran. Numerous portraits of Fath ‘Ali Shah were produced for wide dissemination; at the same time, court artists produced lifesize portraits of him in oil on canvas for installation in palatial dwellings.

While Fath ‘Ali Shah looked to the past to validate his reign, Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96) (see cat. no.170) embraced new artists and technological ideas from Europe. The shah developed an interest in photography, taking pictures himself of members of his household. Painting styles changed to reflect this new preoccupation.

The Qajar period was also the heyday of Persian lacquerware, which had been used for pen boxes, book covers and caskets increasingly since the late fifteenth century (see cat. no. 169). Bird and flower motifs were especially popular on Qajar lacquers, though portraits and vignettes after European print sources also found their way onto them.

Politically the Qajars could not withstand the pressure to open markets to European countries; this monopolised lucrative industries and weakened the shahs’ economic control of the country. Culturally, the Qajars encouraged traditional arts such as calligraphy while showing a curiosity about the outside world. This sometimes contradictory combination resulted in an immediately recognisable artistic style that frequently served the shahs’ political purposes.
In contrast to the Qajar imperial enthronement scenes of Nadir Shah (r. 1736–1747) and Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834; cat. no. 161) both of whom are decoratively depicted in full regalia, there are few indicators that this is an imperial image. Karim Khan, the Zand regent who ruled for one of the last Safavids, wears a Zand turban but no official regalia. The informality of this casual smoking portrait relates to the style of his rule. Karim Khan Zand’s strong shoulders, the deferential posture of his courtiers, the monumentality of the columned porch and the sheer size of the painting itself convey the power of his rule and the stability he brought to Iran. Diba has attributed the work to Muhammad Sadiq based on a portrait sketch of Karim Khan Zand signed by the artist and details such as the heavily shaded faces, turbans and small-scale floral patterns, all also found in the artist’s signed portrait of Rustam Khan Zand. She has suggested that the present painting may have been a commemorative portrait commissioned after the ruler’s death, based on her observation that the serious tone of the courtiers contradicts the reportedly coarse humour and jocularity of Zand’s actual court (Diba 1998, pp. 152–153).
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**Fath 'Ali Shah seated on a throne decorated with precious stones**

Iran, Qajar, early 19th century

Watercolour and gold on paper

33.2 x 21.1 cm

AKM 00504

Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 217; AKTC 2009b, p. 217

This watercolour portrait is the work of Mīr 'Alí, one of the greatest artists of the beginning of the Qajar period; he was famous mainly for his large scale portraits of Fath 'Alí Shah, which conveyed a sublime greatness and majesty much in keeping with the image the sovereign wished to project. The top-right-hand-corner plate and insets marked out with gilded lines bear the title Fath 'Alí Shah and two laudatory couplets. Whilst this composition can also be found in the Louvre Museum in a portrait attributed to the same artist, its dimensions and execution on paper are more unusual. | LA

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**Muraqqa' of portraits and calligraphies**

Iran, Tehran, early 18th – early 19th century

Sixteen hinged folios; ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper, in a contemporary lacquer binding

29.2 x 19.5 cm

AKM 00275

Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 98–119; Welch and Welch 1982, pp. 132–34 (no. 45); Diba 1998, pp. 176–78; AKTC 2007a, p. 110 (no. 76); AKTC 2007b, pp. 110–111 (no. 76); AKTC 2008a, pp. 162–163 (no. 59); AKTC 2009a, p. 217; AKTC 2009b, p. 217

This Muraqqa' (album) opens in concertina-style format to reveal twelve Persian ruler-portraits and eighteen calligraphy specimens mounted onto decorated pages. The calligraphy pages are written in shikasta, thuluth, naskh and nastaliq scripts, set within finely illuminated floral borders. The twelve portraits include three of the most important kings of the Shāhnāma, Jamshid, Kay Khusraw, and Kay Kavus. Portraits of Genghis Khan, Timur, and rulers from the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar dynasties also appear. A painting of Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834) in opulent imperial finery on the Sun Throne on fol. 3v contains a medallion inscribed with his name and the date 1234 H / 1819 CE. The album may have been commissioned by Fath 'Ali Shah or presented to him by an attentive courtier. According to Robinson, the album is perhaps a "portable" version of the large oil paintings commissioned by Fath 'Ali Shah from the artist Mīr 'Alí for the Imārat-i Naw palace in Isfahan (Ekhtiar in Diba 1998, p. 176). Like the life-size portraits of past and contemporary rulers, this album represents another way the Qajars used the visual arts to convey imperial power and dynastic legitimacy. | AF
This eclectic group reflects the range of small-scale but high-quality objects that were made from the valuable medium of gold under the Qajars. The six presentation coins provide the only exact dates of production, struck in either 1795 or 1796 under the reign of Agha Muhammad Shah (r. 1794–1797), the founder of the Qajar dynasty. Some of the coins, including one that is square-shaped, contain inscriptions with invocations to God, Muhammad, and ‘Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and the first Shi’a imam. Others exhibit figural images such as the peacock, a symbol associated with royalty in Iran but also with Paradise, or the lion and sun, both well-recognised symbols of kingship and authority in Iran since pre-Islamic times. One of the coins contains a pearl border, a motif that also stems from pre-Islamic, in particular Sasanian, imagery. It is possible that the coins struck in AH 1210 celebrated the coronation of the king, while those struck in AH 1211 commemorated his first anniversary of rulership. These massive gold coins formed part of the indemnity of 5 krur or 2,500,000 tomans paid by Iran to the Russians under the Treaty of Turkmanchai, in 1928, following a disastrous war. 5 krur would have weighed over two metric tons and contemporary reports state that it took some 1600 mules to carry the specie. The treaty also ceded the Khanates of Erivan and Nakhichvan to Russia in perpetuity as well as forbidding Iran to have any armed vessels in the Caspian Sea.

The miniature Qur’an case and both amulets contain inscriptions of verses from the Qur’an. The amulets may have contained rolled pieces of paper with Qur’anic verses or even an entire Qur’an written in miniscule ghubār (“dust”) script, so-called because the minute letters were thought to be as small, fragile, and transient as grains of powder. The Qur’an case might have once housed a miniature Qur’an or a section of a Qur’an made in the same shape as the case. The amulet in cat. 165 also names the Shi’a Ahl al-bayt, or “People of the House [of the Prophet],” which include Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. The amulets and case were meant to be worn, their inscriptions and contents meant to invoke God’s power and protection of the wearer. The Qur’an case also includes an Arabic quatrain in addition to excerpts from al-Baqara (The Cow) and al-Qalam (The Pen).

Objects made of gold not only reflected Islamic and pre-Islamic indigenous tastes; sometimes these incorporated European designs and influences as well, as demonstrated by the rare and beautiful enamelled gold compendium seen in cat. no. 166, which includes a universal equinoctial quadrant. This object reflects the Qajar rulers’ taste for personal luxury objects as well as their interest in scientific knowledge and trade with Europe.
Amulet
Iran, Qajar, 19th century
Gold
Length 8.3 cm
AKM 00623
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 220; AKTC 2009b, p. 220

Miniature Qur’an case and amulet
Iran, Qajar, 19th century
Gold
Diameter of case 5.3 cm; length of amulet 8.5 cm
Text (Arabic): (both Qur’an case and amulet) al-Baqara (The Cow), 2:255
AKM 00624
Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 48 (no. 18); AKTC 2007b, p. 44 (no. 18); AKTC 2009a, p. 220; AKTC 2009b, p. 220
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**Enamelled gold compendium**

Iran, Qajar, 19th century

Enamelled gold

Diameter 9 cm

AKM 00625

Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 111 (no. 77); AKTC 2007b, p. 112 (no. 77); AKTC 2008a, pp. 164–165 (no. 60); AKTC 2009a, p. 221; AKTC 2009b, p. 221
Diplomatic relations between the Qajars and the West began to open up again during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834). The period between 1805, when Napoleon inaugurated exchange with the Qajars, and 1808 - the date of this letter - saw a number of intense diplomatic exchanges and treaties between the Qajars and the French and British, as loyalties shifted in the context of the Perso–Russian wars. Crown Prince 'Abbas Mirza (1789–1833), son and heir apparent of Fath 'Ali Shah, was governor of Azerbaijan and based at Tabriz, where he organised military campaigns - with the latest French military technology and training - for the control of Georgia and Azerbaijan. This letter, which arrived in Paris on 17 February 1809 according to an inscription on its reverse ("Lettre du Prince 'Abbas Mirza à S. M. Impériale, écrite à la fin de l’année 1808, et arrivée à Paris le 17 février 1809") was written by nineteen-year-old Prince 'Abbas Mirza to the French emperor Napoleon I. The prince remarks upon the emperor’s two-year silence, describes how the Russians have been breaking their treaty, and asks Napoleon what he plans to do about it, since the Prince’s troops are ready for battle (see Layla Diba in Falk 1985, pp. 193–94, with further references). It was a British envoy, Sir John Kinneir Macdonald, who helped arrange the final treaty of Turkmanchay with Russia in 1828 and financially supported Prince 'Abbas Mirza after the loss of Tabriz to the Russians. | AF
The visual arts flourished under Qajar patronage in the nineteenth century and lacquer painting was a particular speciality (see cat. nos. 151 and 168 for examples of bookbinding and a bowl). The scribe’s humble pen box was often transformed into a work of beauty and this box is no exception: it is highly decorated with images of familiar political, legendary, literary, and mystical themes. It shows, in a central cartouche, the Qajar ruler Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896) holding court; legendary kings are crowned; poems of Sā’id and Nizami are illustrated; and there are six portraits of Sufi dervishes. This important pen box is signed by the Qajar painter laureate (naqqāsh bāshī), Muhammad Isma’īl, who was active in the mid-nineteenth century and famous for his lacquer paintings. On the inside of the drawer, it contains a miniature self-portrait of the artist wearing an Astrakhan hat, paintbrush in hand, in an oval cartouche. A couplet above and below identifies the artist’s name, Isma’īl.
Calligraphic painting by Isma'il Jalayir

Signed: Isma'il Jalayir written in red horizontally at the bottom (raqamaha al-haqır Ismā'īl al-musavvir al-kātib sana...)

Iran, circa 1860–1870

Inscription (in Arabic): At top, in red: Huwa al-'azız al-wahhāb
Second line: Y ā mūtādā yā 'Alī 'alayhi al-salām
Centre of the page, starting from the bottom, in black: Yā 'Alī ibn al-Husayn 'alayhi al-salām

Ink and gouache on paper
35 x 53 cm

Published: Falk 1985 (no. 177); Blair 2006, pp. 454-455; Makariou 2007, pp. 156-157 (no. 56); AKTC 2009a, p. 226; AKTC 2009b, p. 220

Seeming to emerge from a strange landscape bathed in ethereal light, the letters of an invocation to 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, better known as Zayn al-Abidin, the Shiite imam, stand out. The ḥā and the sīn of his father's name, Husayn, the second Shiite imam, who was martyred in Karbala (Iraq) in 680, divide the page in two with their long diagonal. The "cuts" of the yā of 'Ali and the final nūn of ibn and Husayn form a perfect line alternating with three 'alifs. On the lower line, the dance of the pen tips – two and one and two again – marks the cadence of the writing. Unfortunately, the page has been trimmed slightly and so the date (on the bottom line to the left) is missing. This page could be likened to another calligraphy attributed to Isma'il Jalayir based on the same model of an inscription in nastā'liq writing style on a blurred background, illustrated with a number of sketches.

At the top of the page is an almost unreal architecture which transmutes the models of classical Western architecture: columns, domes and porticos that conjure up an ideal city or an earthly or heavenly palace. In the "cut" of the yā of 'Ali nestled in an ovum are 'Ali, facing front and carrying on his knees the Dhūl-fiqār sword which the Prophet gave him, flanked by his two sons, Hasan and Husayn, the second and third Shiite imams. This "spiritual investiture" scene certainly throws light on other scenes: the two Sūfis to the right of the word 'Ali, the hunting and beast scenes which could also depict a symbolic pursuit. In the timeless and vaporuous landscape, a sun rises directly above the letter lām of 'Ali. The letters appear to be basking in the glow of that light. Jalayir's style is vaporuous, impalpable, with delicate superimpositions, as photographic images. He was trained in Dār al-funūn, in Tehran, and learned calligraphy from the Master Mirza Ghulam Riza. The mark of this progressive institution is clearly felt here: photography, proudly adopted by the sovereign Qajars, was taught as of 1860, along with lithography. The signature of this hearth of new technologies and styles, which was Dār al-funūn, is visible in Jalayir's work through the skilful mix of calligraphy - archetypal Islamic art - and painstakingly precise miniature painting, to the extent that its vaporuous appearance resembles contemporary photographs developed on albumin paper. On the other side, one can see the floating image of a bearded man wearing an Astrakhan hat, painted with light strokes in grey monochrome, recalling the lithography that became fashionable under the Qajars. | SM
The Route of the Travellers

India and the Mughals

Sheila Canby

The first Mughal emperor of India, Babur, was born in Central Asia, the descendant of Timur (Tamerlane) and Chinghiz (Genghis) Khan. Despite his pedigree, he failed to realise his ambition of conquering Samarqand and from 1514 until 1526 he turned his energies to Afghanistan and then to India. In 1526 Babur defeated the Lodi Sultan of Delhi at the Battle of Panipat and thus began to rule northern India. Following Babur’s death in 1530, his son and heir, Humayun, struggled to hold onto power in India. After a period of exile in Iran and delay in Afghanistan, however, he regained Delhi and Agra in 1555. Humayun brought artists with him from the Safavid court of Iran, whom he had invited to work in his library. His untimely death in 1556 meant that his son, Akbar, benefited from these émigrés far more than his father did. Chosen because of their more naturalistic painting style, the Persian artists at the court of Akbar worked on numerous, ambitious illustrated manuscripts alongside native Hindu and Muslim painters as well as some from Central Asia.

Akbar’s policy of engaging with all the populations of India and welcoming Europeans at his court resulted in an emphasis on realism and the adoption of illusionistic techniques in painting. This tendency was heightened during the reign of Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). Portraiture gained in importance while paintings of the flora and fauna of India were produced, a subject of profound interest to Jahangir. Like his father, Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58, see cat. no. 174) he commissioned many portraits of members of the Mughal dynasty and lavish illustrations to the history of his reign, the Padshahnama. One of Shah Jahan’s sons, Dara Shikoh, demonstrated a broadminded interest in art and mysticism. However, his brother, Aurangzeb, proved to be militarily more powerful and not only had Dara Shikoh murdered but also deposed Shah Jahan.

In his very long reign, from 1658 to 1707, Aurangzeb pushed the Mughal conquest of India southward but abandoned the tolerant attitudes of his predecessors. The wars and rigid attitudes of Aurangzeb ultimately weakened the Mughal empire so that the eighteenth century saw a long decline and a nostalgia for the heyday of the dynasty under Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan.
This 'ālam (standard), imposing in appearance and size, is one of the most sophisticated standards in the James Allan classification. This four-branched type, in the shape of successive almonds of increasing dimensions, with inscriptions on an extensive arabesque openwork background, is reportedly of Safavid Iranian origin, particularly from Isfahan. In his study, Allan lists a few, only two of which are dated: one 1069 H / 1658–59 CE and the other 1117 H / 1705 CE. This 'ālam could be from South India, from one of the Shiite kingdoms of the Deccan which were established following the weakening of the Bahmanid dynasty (1347–1527) between the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. Indeed, the detailed nature of the open-worked metal, mixing arabesque and calligraphic designs, is an indication of the close links these kingdoms maintained with Shiite Safavid Iran. Many artists, men of letters and religious personalities from the Iranian world settled in that part of India. Only an in-depth study of the different inscriptions on this standard, which seem to be in thuluth style, could perhaps confirm the origin of this piece. Mark Zebrowski highlights certain features of the thuluth style which are particular to that region, as well as the absence of the nastā‘īq, widely used in Safavid Iran, and some examples of which are known in northern India. A standard identified by Allan blends these two writing styles. The 'ālams are represented on a ceramic mosaic piece, dated 1611, in the royal Shiite tomb, the Badshahi 'āshurkhāna, built between 1593 and 1596 by Muhammad Quli in Hyderabad. No standard of this type seems to have appeared during that period, so the standard presented here might date back to the second half of the seventeenth or beginning of the eighteenth century, like those mentioned by Allan.

The commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn, son of ‘Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, who died in the Battle of Karbala, on 10 Muharram 680, was a major milestone for Shiism and brought about several important events. In the Deccan, since the end of the sixteenth century, during the month of Muharram, poems in honour of the Shiite martyrs, the marsiyas, were recited in assemblies that met at specific venues, the 'āshurkhānas. This is where unused standards were also stored. During the processions, they were carried with a representation of Husayn’s cenotaph, the tabut, as well as an image of Buraq, the white, winged mount of the Prophet, and a candelabrum of incense. At the end of the procession, the tabut was buried or immersed in a river, according to Hindu tradition where the image of the goddess Durga was thrown into a river. | MB
Genealogical portraits and histories were used by Islamic dynasties, particularly the Mughals and Ottomans, to reinforce their legitimacy and power (see cat nos. 96 and 97). In this album page, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) is located at the top of his “family tree.” He is linked by lines to four of his sons (from left, Khusraw, Jahandar, Shahryar, and Sultan Parviz) and their sons. His Timurid ancestors are pictured beneath him in a reversal of genealogical order. The genealogies were rearranged and recomposed at some point. This is not unusual considering Jahangir’s other refurbishments of historical paintings, such as the Princes of the House of Timur (British Museum), which was probably a painting of a garden party of the Mughal emperor Humayun (r. 1530–1556, with interruption) and his friends before Jahangir’s artists refashioned it into a Timurid-Mughal dynastic portrait. | AF
Portrait of Shah Jahan and his three sons

India, circa 1628 or later
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Page: 35.8 x 24.2 cm; image: 24.8 x 14.7 cm
Inscribed (Persian): “Work of the most humble of the house born, Manohar”
Inscribed (Persian): “Portrait of Nur al-Din Jahangir and his sons”

AKM 50124
Published: Canby 1998, pp. 147–148 (no. 119); AKTC 2007a, p. 119 (no. 85); AKTC 2007b, pp. 118 and 129 (no. 85); AKTC 2009a, p. 233; AKTC 2009b, p. 233

The emperor sits in haloed profile upon a gilded footed throne under a high white canopy, flanked by his three young princes who stand on the left. All are resplendent with opulently bejewelled turbans, necklaces, qatar daggers, and sashes (patkas) against a rounded backdrop of turquoise, perhaps suggesting a globe, as golden light appears on the right.

The inscription on this Mughal painting identifies it as a portrait of the Emperor Jahangir and his three sons, but what we see today are the faces of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1657) and his three eldest sons - Dara Shikoh (1615–1659), Shah Shuja’ (1616–1659) and Awrangzeb (1618–1707) - and their maternal grand-father, Asaf Khan, on the right. It was not unusual for the Mughals to refurbish earlier works (see cat. no. 173) for propaganda reasons. The inscription at bottom left reads, “work of the most humble of the house born, Manohar.” Sheila Canby notes that the painting is characteristic of Manohar’s style from about 1615 except for the refurbished faces, and that the composition follows the conventions of intimate royal portraits from Akbar’s reign, which, under Jahangir and Shah Jahan in the 1610s–1620s, developed to include a more psychological focus. | AF
Portraits of Jahangir and Shah Jahan

Portrait of Jahangir: signed by Balchand
Portrait of Shah Jahan: signed and dated by Abu'l-Hasan
India, Mughal, 1628
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
55.1 x 34.5 cm; Jahangir portrait within borders: 5 x 4.1 cm; Shah Jahan portrait within borders: 18.2 x 13.9 cm

Framed within elaborately painted and illuminated borders and mounted on an album page filled with vegetal design in gold, these portraits of two of the greatest Mughal emperors illustrate the contrast in the artistic conventions under each of their reigns. The painted bust of Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), the fourth ruler of the dynasty and the son of Akbar (r. 1556–1605), represents the miniature portraits that became fashionable for important figures to wear during this emperor’s reign. The trend began after 1615, when miniature portraits were introduced to India from England by Sir Thomas Roe (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 215; Canby 1998, p. 143). The artistic style under Jahangir is well represented by the artist Balchand, known for his ability to capture the more emotional and “human” qualities of subjects in his paintings (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 215). Balchand identifies himself through a Persian inscription on Jahangir’s left shoulder: “rasm-i [the drawing of] Balchand.”

The portrait of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), Jahangir’s son and successor, provides a stark contrast to the image of his father. While both sitters are shown in profile view and are illuminated by the golden halo around their heads, the standard convention for representing Mughal emperors, Shah Jahan’s larger, oval-shaped portrait commands a more public viewing audience. The illustration of the later emperor’s torso allows the artist to show Shah Jahan holding attributes that symbolize his power, such as his sword and the official seal in his hand. The seal inscription, deliberately made legible (in reverse mirror image) for the viewer, lists the emperor’s titles: “Abu’l-Muzaffar Muhammad Shihab al-Din Shah Jahan Padshah-i Ghazi Sahib Qiran-i Thani.” Sheila Canby has suggested that the last title, “Sahib Qiran-i Thani” (the Second Lord of the Astral conjunction), refers to Timur (r. 1370–1405), the founder of the Timurid dynasty from which the Mughals were descended (Canby 1998, p. 143). This connection to the greatest Timurid ruler would have helped Shah Jahan legitimate his right to the throne following his father’s death. The iconic, idealized courtly style of Shah Jahan’s era is already apparent at the start of his reign; the painting is signed and dated in the first year of the emperor’s rule to the left of the portrait by Nadir al-Zaman, known as Abu’l-Hasan: “It was painted at the beginning of the blessed ascension / Presented for the appraisal of the most pure / the work of the humblest of servants, Nadir al-Zaman.” The emperor is shown in strict profile, staring blankly ahead while covered in precious, easily identified jewels. In contrast to the naturalistic rendering of his father, whose facial features are carefully modelled and suggest a three-dimensional appearance, Shah Jahan’s image has become iconic and creates a greater distance between the viewer and the sitter. These disparities demonstrate the varying uses of art by Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the latter of which was known for his active involvement in the conception of artistic and architectural projects (Koch 1997). Using the painted portrait in different ways, one ruler preserves his royal status while evoking his human character, while the other dehumanizes himself by creating an iconic image that will emphasize his power and authority and render awe in his subjects. | LA
Humayun defeats his rebellious brother Kamran at Kabul

Folio from a dispersed copy of the Akbarnāma of Abu’l-Fazl ‘Allami (d. 1602)

Inscribed: “Painting by Mahish, principal faces by Padarath”; (bottom margin left) “razm nimulav/ haur [the battling of] …”; (top right margin) “5”

India, Agra, circa 1597

Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper

37 x 25.2 cm

AKM 00133

Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 236; AKTC 2009b, p. 236

During the earlier years of his reign, manuscripts commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) included adventure texts, such as the Tūtīnāma or Ḣamzanāma, or literary narratives, such as the Anvār-i Suhaylī (Lights of Canopus); in the 1580s, however, royal commissions shifted to historical texts. Some of the historical manuscripts produced under Akbar include the Tārīkh-i Alfi, a history of the first thousand years of Islam; the Timūrnāma, a history of Timur, the founder of the Timurid dynasty from which the Mughals descended; and the Akbarnāma, a history of Akbar (Beach 1987, p. 83). The emperor commissioned his close friend and advisor Abu’l Fazl ‘Allami (d. 1602) to write the Akbarnāma, an official account of his reign, in 1590–1591. The first volume, which was completed in 1596, covered the years up to 1592 and also recounted the founding of the Mughal empire as well as its loss under Babur (r. 1526–1530) and Humayun (r. 1530–1539 and 1555–1556); the remainder was finished in 1598 (ibid., p. 112). This painting illustrates a scene from the first volume. It refers to the reign of Humayun, who encountered much resistance from his rival brothers, especially Kamran, the governor of Kabul and Qandahar in modern Afghanistan. Although Humayun had distributed the various provinces of the empire he had inherited to each of his four brothers, soon Kamran had banded together with another brother, Askari, and seized control of the Punjab from Humayun. Humayun was exiled between 1539 and 1555, during which time he sought refuge at the Safavid court of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576). With Tahmasp’s support, Humayun led a Mughal-Persian force into Qandahar and Kabul, where he entered an eight-year war with Kamran until he finally seized Kabul in 1553; that moment is depicted here. Kamran was taken captive and punished by blinding (Richards 1993, pp. 9–11). Most of the pages from the earliest manuscript of the Akbarnāma (including 116 miniatures) are housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Folios from the other well-known copy of this manuscript are divided between the British Museum, London (39 illustrations of vol. 1), and the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (66 illustrations from vols. 2 and 3). Some recently discovered additional Akbarnāma folios appear related to the Victoria and Albert copy of the text (Leach 2004); the present painting likewise seems to belong to the same manuscript as the folios in the Victoria and Albert Museum. | LA
The Emperor Jahangir at the jharoka window of the Agra fort

Folio from a dispersed copy of the Jahāngīırnāma (Memoirs of Jahangir)

Attributed to Nadir al-Zaman (Abu’l-Hasan)

India, Mughal, circa 1620

Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper

Page 56 x 36.2 cm; image 31.4 x 20.4 cm

AKM 00136

Published: Delhi 1912, p. 92 (cat. No. 508, pl. XXVIII [a]); Martin 1912, vol. 2, pl. 216 left; Beach 1978, pp. 64 and 91; Welch and Welch 1982, pp. 212–215 (no. 70); Welch 1985, pp. 185–186 (no. 116); Goswamy and Fischer 1987, pp. 86–87 (no. 37); Canby 1998, pp. 141–42 (no. 105); AKTC 2009a, p. 238; AKTC 2009b, p. 238

_jharoka_ scenes such as the one shown in the present example are common in Mughal painting, illustrating the importance of the _darbar_ ceremony, where rulers give public audiences. Such audiences regularly followed another ceremony known as _darshan_, which emphasized the idea of the divinely illuminated ruler through ritual performance. Akbar (r. 1556–1605) initiated this ritual during his reign; the emperor would appear before his subjects each morning before sunrise, so he could see and be seen by them, as suggested by the name _darshan_ (Sanskrit for “sight” and “beholding”) (Necipoğlu 1993, p. 314). As Abu’l Fazl, Akbar’s close friend, advisor, and biographer, described:

Royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe.... Modern language calls this light _farr-i izad-i_ (the divine light), and the tongue of antiquity called it _kiyan khura_ (the sublime halo). It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of anyone, and men, in the presence of it, bend the forehead of praise towards the ground of submission (Abu al-Fazl 1977, 1:3).

The _darshan_ ceremony took place at the _jharoka-i darshan_, or the “balcony for viewing,” pictured here at top right, where Akbar’s son, the emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) appears in profile view, and the _darbar_ would follow just after. The structure in which the _jharoka_ window appears resembles and is probably meant to represent the Shah Burj (Royal Tower), which was an octagonal tower with a white marble pavilion located at the Agra Fort. Sheila Canby notes that such scenes became popular under the reign of Jahangir and even more so under Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), when court rituals became even more codified (Canby 1998, p. 141). In this image, numerous figures have been identified by inscriptions appearing on their skirts; Nadir al-Zaman (Abu’l-Hasan), the artist to which the painting is ascribed, appears below the sage. Whether the audience illustrated in this painting actually occurred or not, the significance of the ceremony and the role it played for both ruler and subject is certain: “As the emperor stood framed by the _jharoka-i darshan_ that overlooked the river, his gaze emanating from above assured the multitudes gathered below of his continuing existence, without which they feared the universe might collapse, while their upward gaze convinced him of the adoring devotion of his subjects” (Necipoğlu, p. 314). | LA
Music in India

178

Tambura, or tampura
India, Rajasthan, circa 1800
Teak wood, a calabash, metal and bone
Length 126 cm

Published: AKTC 2007a, p. 165 (no. 138); AKTC 2007b, p. 166 (no. 138); AKTC 2008a, pp. 206–207 (no. 16); AKTC 2008b, no. 23; AKTC 2009a, p. 240; AKTC 2009b, p. 240

The rise of the Mughal Empire (1526–1858) called for the subjugation of numerous small states that had existed in India before the sixteenth century. Some of these principalities were already Muslim, while others, like those ruled by the warrior Rajput caste in northern India, belonged to a native Hindu heritage. Situated at the foothills of the Himalayas, the Rajputs’ were known for their military might, but even they, like many other indigenous groups in India, eventually faced Mughal domination. The Rajputs came to an agreement with the Mughal conquerors; the Mughals would allow them to rule their individual territories in exchange for their participation in Mughal military campaigns and their sending of an important member of their family to be raised at the Mughal court.

In spite of their military talents, the Rajputs also cultivated the arts, producing distinctive painting styles, one of which included a bright yellow colour (made from the urine of mango-fed cows) and a stylised, flat quality, seen in the painting with two figures seated on a tilted carpet against a plain, bright yellow backdrop. This may have corresponded to the fact that Rajput paintings sought to illustrate an ideal world (Cummins 2006, p. 93). One of the most popular subjects in Rajput painting was the depiction of raga family; the man in the painting is understood as the personification of the raga (Canby 1998, p. 167). It is an example of a ragamala illustration that is romantic in nature, inspired by the amorous side of Rajput culture (when not at war) and belonging to other such paintings that express the diversity of love, whether joyful or heartbreaking (Cummins 2006, p. 99).

It is believed that ragamala illustration existed before the Mughal period. The Mughals, however, did not seem to adopt this form of painting, perhaps because of their greater interest in Persian music coming from Iran and Central Asia (ibid., p. 96). Nevertheless, ragamala illustrations exhibiting a Mughal aesthetic suggest that some paintings might have been produced by Mughal artists for non-Mughal clients, or by non-Mughal artists who integrated Mughal tastes with indigenous subjects. The painting of ascetics in a landscape (cat. no. 179) provides an example of the latter. Mughal shading and modelling techniques as well as the subject of dervishes or ascetics gathering in a landscape are combined with indigenous Bundi elements, such as the bright orange sky and the inclusion of indigenous birds and flowers. The figures in patched robes are Hindu yogis; in ragamalas, ascetic gatherings are also common, but while in ragamalas there is a distinction between the raga and his raginis, here members of the group appear to be on a similar level (Canby 1998, p. 172).

The instrument played by the musician in cat. no. 179 is most likely a veena, a Southern Indian string instrument comprised of a pair of gourd resonators connected by a vertical wooden shaft. It consists of four main and three subsidiary drone strings. The tambura in cat. no. 178 is another example of an Indian plucked drone lute, but it requires four strings instead of three. The tambura is traditional to both northern and southern India but the present object demonstrates the northern variety. Such instruments resemble the sitar (lit., “three strings” in Persian), another plucked string instrument common to India and Iran and played in a similar manner.
179

Ascetics in a landscape
India, Rajastan; Bundi, third quarter of the 18th century or later
Ink and opaque watercolour on paper
Page 45.8 x 33.9 cm; image 21.4 x 14.2 cm
AKM00175
Published: Canby 1998, p. 172 (no. 131); AKTC 2009a, p. 243; AKTC 2009b, p. 243

180

Kausa Ragaputra: music for after midnight
Folio from a dispersed ragamala series
India, Punjab Hills, Mankot, Rajput, circa 1700
Opaque watercolour on paper; borders cut down; glued to card
14.8 x 16.5 cm
AKM 00194
Published: Canby 1998, pp. 166–167 (no. 125); AKTC 2008a, pp. 264–265 (no. 104); AKTC 2009a, p. 243; AKTC 2009b, p. 243
Like his father Akbar (r. 1556–1605) before him, the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) showed an interest in portraiture, continuing his father’s portrait albums and encouraging court artists to capture the psychology of their subjects in their portraits (Welch 1985, p. 226). This portrait of an Ottoman holding a book demonstrates that subjects were not limited to Mughals and Indians alone, but also included foreigners who were in frequent contact with the royal court. It was not unusual for court artists to record meetings between the emperor and his visitors in painting (see, for example, a portrait study of Shah ‘Abbas by Jahangir’s court artist Bishn Das, in the British Museum, in Canby 2009, p. 38, no. 1). The painting is identified on the reverse as a gift given by a certain Baha’ al-Din on 6 Urdhibisht [regnal] year 5, which is equal to 26 April 1610 and falls under Jahangir’s reign. Persian and Mughal seal impressions from later periods also appear on the back of the page, as well as notes about when the work entered the Mewar Royal Library along with that library’s stamp and the royal inventory number of 20/220.
Pair of mother-of-pearl doors
India, Gujarat, Ahmedabad, 18th century
Wood and mother-of-pearl
187 x 49.5 cm
AKM 00705
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 246; AKTC 2009b, p. 246

The mother-of-pearl and wood combination of media as well as the form and design of this beautiful pair of doors indicate the native work of craftsmen from Gujarat, recognized in the sixteenth century as the centre of mother-of-pearl production. Smaller, portable objects also display a similar design composed as a puzzle of individual pierced pieces of mother-of-pearl. The doors may have once adorned a wealthy home or public structure, such as a temple or tomb. The chain suspended from the top of the right door suggests the door would have been situated in an interior, attaching to a hook within the doorframe to keep the door closed; a door with access to the exterior, on the other hand, would have received a stronger lock for greater security. | LA
A giant sea serpent constricts its gold coils around a royal fleet, its full mouth leaving no doubt as to its intentions toward the remaining vessels. As if the carnivorous serpent were not enough, the alternative is a scary sea filled with demon-headed fish, giant crabs, and turtles, as well as a mermaid and merman. Most of the sailors appear to pray with upturned hands for deliverance from this nightmare.

The painting has been identified as an illustration from the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* (Rose Garden of Love) a heroic epic written in Deccani Urdu by the court poet Nusrati for Sultan 'Ali II ibn Muhammad ‘Adil Shahi (r. 1656–1672) (Falk 1985, p. 174). The 'Adil-Shahis were great patrons of the arts and ruled Deccani Bijapur as an independent Shi’a kingdom from 1489 until it became part of the Mughal Empire in 1689. It has been suggested that this painting was produced for an aristocrat at the end of Sultan ‘Ali’s reign or during the reign of his successor, Sikandar ‘Ali Shah (r. 1672–1686) (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 229).

The theme of disaster at sea in this painting may be compared with similar episodes in the *Hamzanama* as part of the picaresque genre of adventure-romances, featuring heroes who travel through strange lands and meet with danger on land and sea. | AF
The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a growing interest in art and the art of collecting in the three "gunpowder" empires, beginning with the Safavids in Iran and followed by the Ottomans and Mughals. Not only did more artists exhibit a hitherto rare sense of self-awareness by increasingly signing their works, but the royal and wealthy patrons who compiled or commissioned the albums had the chance to express their own taste and connoisseurship through their collecting. These extraordinary codices were filled with specimens of calligraphy, painting and drawing, including single-page, finished compositions as well as elements of illustrated manuscripts and calligraphy exercises (for a Qajar example, see cat. no. 162). Artists’ and calligraphers’ works were recognized within the albums for their individual talents and styles - sometimes by glosses added by the patron himself.

The four album folios in this group contain writing samples both by Persian masters as well as Mughal princes whose royal training would have included learning the art of calligraphy. Three of the examples (cat. nos. 184, 186, and 187) are signed by one of the greatest masters of the nasta’liq script, Mir’Ali (d. circa 1544), who served in Herat and Buhkara at the Timurid, Uzbek, and Safavid courts and was extolled by Qadi Ahmad in his sixteenth-century treatise on calligraphers and painters (Qadi Ahmad in Minorsky 1959, p. 131). In cat. no. 184, the calligrapher has signed two couplets of poetry in the lower left corner of the innermost rectangle on the page, using the Arabic formula, “katabahu Mir’Ali (Mir’Ali wrote it).” The verses, calligraphed in black but outlined in red, are written in Persian:

“My God, if the entire universe should be blown away by wind
Let not the light of fortune be extinguished
And if the entire universe should become flooded with water
Let not the mark of the unfortunate be washed away!”

More verses in Persian border the main text, set within ten rectangular cartouches alternating with small panels containing colourful floral and vegetal scrolls; they also frame two strips of green, marbled paper on the right and left, drawing attention to the fact that the entire composition of text, image, and border has been created from various cut pieces of paper. A green and gold border of vegetal ornament provides the largest frame around the calligraphy and sets it off from the margins of the folio on which it is mounted. These margins have been treated as a painting surface, on which several different species of flora and fauna appear.

The subject matter, painting style and signature - “'Amal-i Dawlat Khan” (the work of Dawlat Khan) - on the outer margins of this page have led to its identification as part of an album made for the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658).

The careful rendering of the plants, in particular, is typical of the Mughal style, influenced by European plant manuals that reached India via Jesuit missionaries. While the text might be attributed to the early sixteenth century, the album was probably assembled around 1640, at which point the same artist responsible for the margins might have also painted the flowers and cows in the interstices of Mir’Ali’s text. Cat. nos. 186 and 187 contain similar formats, with calligraphic samples by Mir’Ali pasted onto two other pages of the Shah Jahan album. Like cat. no. 184, the text in cat. no. 186 has been pasted onto an album page with borders depicting flora and fauna, here including seated deer, kingfishers, parrots, and other birds; the margins of cat. no. 187, on the other hand, are devoted to botanically accurate representations of flowers.

It is possible the Mughals admired Mir’Ali not only for his talent but also because of the praise he gave to Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, in one of his poems (Welch and Welch 1982, p. 220). By the time Shah Jahan’s album was compiled, however, Persian poets had been emigrating to the Mughal courts in Agra and Lahore, and the influence once coming from Iran to India now began to move from east to west, initiating the sabk-i hindī, or Indian style, in Iran (Welch 1976, p. 9). These poets and calligraphers must have exercised great influence on the education of princes in the royal household as well. The Persian verses in cat. no. 185 were signed by Shah Jahan’s preferred son, Muhammad Dara Shikuh (1615 - 1659) and dated 1041 H / 1631-1632 CE at Burhanpur in the Deccan; they were probably written while the Mughals were campaigning in that region. This sample was later mounted into an eighteenth-century album, another presumed page of which was copied in Burhanpur in 1631 and now belongs to the British Museum.
185
Calligraphy by Prince Dara Shikuh
India, Burhanpur
Calligraphy dated 1041 H / 1631–1632 CE
Margins: 18th century
Ink, opaque watercolour, gold on paper
Page 42.3 x 28.8 cm; text 21.9 x 6.3 cm
AKM 00249
Published: Falk 1985, p. 167 (no. 146); AKTC 2007a, p. 124 (no. 89); AKTC 2007b, p. 126 (no. 89); AKTC 2009a, p. 250; AKTC 2009b, p. 250

186
Calligraphy signed by al-Faqir ’Ali (d. circa 1544)
Signed (at top right and bottom left): Aytiba... al-Faqir ’Alî al-Kâtib... (“Written/composed by the poor ’Ali the writer [Mir ’Ali... ]”)
Calligraphy: Iran, Safavid, 16th century
Margins: India, Mughal, circa 1640
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Page 37.9 x 25.6 cm; text 18.3 x 10.1 cm
AKM 00255
Published: AKTC 2009a, p. 250; AKTC 2009b, p. 250

187
Sample of calligraphy from an album made for Shah Jahan
Signed by Mir ’Ali
Calligraphy: Iran, Herat, Safavid circa 1520
Margins: India, Mughal, circa 1640
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Page 36.9 x 25.2 cm; text 27.2 x 14.1 cm
AKM 00351
Published: Falk 1985, p. 65 (no. 36); AKTC 2007a, p. 173 (no. 146); AKTC 2007b, p. 173 (no. 146); AKTC 2009a, p. 250; AKTC 2009b, p. 250
With much effort, the Mughals succeeded in conquering the various Deccani sultanates at the end of the seventeenth century, but the success left them somewhat depleted of energy and resources. The century that followed brought with it instability throughout India as a result of constant political struggles between smaller kingdoms and the Mughal emperor to whom they paid nominal allegiance in Delhi. The Deccan eventually came under the control of Nizam al-Mulk, the viceroy of the emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–1748). Nizam al-Mulk left north India for the Deccan in 1724, earned the title Asaf Jah from his master, and founded the Asafiya dynasty based in Hyderabad (and sometimes shifting to Awrangabad), which lasted until 1950. Asaf Jah ruled relatively peacefully from 1724 until 1748, but his descendants experienced power struggles with English, French, Marathas, and nizams; Hyderabad was eventually relinquished as a British dependency in 1800 (Zebrowski 1985, p. 244). The present painting was executed in the early nineteenth century, when the major patrons of art included the nizams, their Muslim and Hindu nobles, and sometimes feudatory princes (ibid.). Whereas the subjects of earlier Deccani painting, in particular during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tended to include rulers and leaders of Muslim states, later subject matter appears to be more general in nature. The peaceful landscape with villagers, travellers, and animals shows a sensitivity apparent in depictions of plants and animals in other paintings of the period (ibid., p. 245). | LA

This painting depicts the palace of Begum Somru, which is also illustrated in Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi, an album of 89 folios and around 130 paintings of Delhi monuments from the pre-Mughal and Mughal periods, compiled by and accompanied by the text of Sir Thomas Theophilus Metcalfe (1795–1853), the Governor-General’s Agent at the imperial court. Metcalfe describes Begum Somru as the widow of a certain “Walter Reinhard, born of obscure parents,” who entered the French Service under the name of “Summer.” Due to his dark complexion, he was given the sobriquet “Sombre,” subsequently corrupted into Sumroo, by which name Her Highness was generally known, though she always styled herself the Begum Sombre” (Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi, The Sir Thomas Metcalfe Album, The British Library, London). Metcalfe also comments on the doubtful origins of the Begum, who was either believed to come from a noble Mughal family or to have been a native Kashmiri who was sold to Somru as a slave. In either case, Begum Somru inherited her husband’s principality upon his death and remained active as an independent ruler until her death in 1837. The current view of the colonial style palace is from the south; the building was later converted into a bank. | LA
These tiles form the spandrel of an arch from an unknown building. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century funerary monuments in Multan, Punjab, were decorated on the exterior with tile panels such as this. The sixteenth-century tomb of Sultan 'Ali Akbar, for example, is clad with spandrels that closely parallel this panel. Each of the eight sides of that mausoleum includes spandrels above blind arches. The palette of turquoise, white, and blue underglaze reflects the strong influence of Timurid Central Asia, possibly a source of craftsman potters as well as designs. Used here as a central point around which stylised leaves rotate, this motif is also commonly found on tilework from Multan and Sind in southern Pakistan from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. | AF
The principal Islamic dynasties

This schematic chart does not give more than a very simplified picture of the political complexity of certain periods. Large parts of Central Asia, China, South-east Asia and Africa have been omitted.
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Makariou 2007

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Chronology

650-651 • Caliphate of ’Ali

656-661 • Caliphate of ’Ali

661 • Murder of Imam ’Ali

670 • Foundation of Kairouan and its Great Mosque

680 • Death of Imam Husayn at Karbala (Iraq)

691 • Construction of the mosque (Dome of the Rock) in Jerusalem by Umayyad caliph ’Abd al-Malik

692 • Monetary reform; replacement of Sasanian and Byzantine coinages by coins with purely Arabic inscriptions

707-715 • Construction of the Great Mosque in Damascus

711 • Muslim conquest of Iberian Peninsula

712-715 • Construction of the bath house of Qusayr’ Amra (Jordan)

712 • Construction of the Great Mosque in Samarkand

713 • Construction of the Great Mosque in Bukhara

714-716 • Completion of Muslim conquest of the Western regions of the Iberian Peninsula and of part of South-West France

715 • Foundation of Ramallah (Palestine) and its Great Mosque

718 • Great Mosque of Zaragosa was designed

724-727 • Construction of the Umayyad palace of Qasr al-Hayr al-Garbi (Syria)

728-729 • Construction of the Umayyad palace of Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi (Syria)

732 • Battle of Poitiers

744 • Construction of the Umayyad palace of Mshatta (Jordan)

748 • Construction of the dār al-Inara, of Abu Muslim, in Merv

750 • Translation of classical medical and philosophical works into Arabic begins

754 • Construction of the Great Mosque of Nishapur

756 • ’Abd al-Rahman I] al-Dajil builds the palace of Rusafa, near Cordova

762 • Baghdad founded as capital city of the Abbasids

765 • Death of Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq

772 • Al-Mansur builds the city and Great Mosque of al-Raqq/ al-Raflq

776 • Probable construction of Ujайдir (Iraq)

784-786 • First phase of the construction of the Great Mosque of Cordova

790 • Construction of the Great Mosque of Tfrmecn (Algeria)

793-794 • Erection of the first minaret of the Great Mosque of Cordova

794 • First paper mill established in Baghdad

797-806 • Construction of the first alcazaba in Toledo

806 • Harun al-Rasid orders the construction of Hiraqla, outside Raqq (Syria)

808 • Foundation of Fez (Morocco)

821 • Construction of the Ribat of Suss (Tunisia)

822-842 • Probable foundation of Madrid by emir ’Abd al-Rahman II

854 • Foundation of the Great Mosque of Seville

857 • Construction of the Great Mosque of Cordova

862 • Construction of Quibbat al-Sulaybiya in Samarra (Iraq)

866 • Death of the philosopher and scientist al-Kindi

868 • Death of al-Jahiz, litterateur and master of Arabic prose

870 • Death of al-Bukhari, author of a respected canonical collection of hadith

873 • Death of Hunayn ibn Ishaq, translator of medical, scientific and philosophical works from Greek into Arabic

875 • Construction of the Mosque of the Three Doors, in Kairouan (Tunisia).

879 • Completion of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Fustat (Cairo, Egypt)

909 • Establishment of the Fatimids in North Africa

922 • Death of the mystic Mansur al-Hallaj

923 • Death of al-Tabari, author of important texts on early Islamic history
925 • Death of the physician and philosopher, Abu Bakr al-Razi (Rhazes)
929 • Death of the astronomer, al-Battani (Alhazen)
931 • Death of the Andalusian philosopher and mystic Ibn Masarra
935 • Death of Abū'l Hasan al-Ash'ari, founder of Ash'ari school of law
936 • Foundation of the palace city of Madinat al-Zahra, near Cordoba
940 • Death of the Abbasid vizier and calligrapher Ibn Muqta

943 • Fatimid coin of al-Mu'izz (cat. no. 58)
944 • Marble funerary stele (cat. no. 67-75, first coin middle row)
947 • Ibn Hawqal visits al-Andalus and the Maghreb
950 • Death of the philosopher al-Farabi
952 • Great minaret of the Great Mosque of Cordoba
953 • Fatimid coin of al-Mu'izz (cat. no. 67-75, first coin middle row)
956 • Death of al-Mas'udi, author of an encyclopaedia on history, geography and sciences
961 • Al-Hakam II extends the Great Mosque of Cordoba.
969-970 • Fatimid conquest of Egypt and foundation of new capital city, Cairo (al-Qahira)
979-981 • Construction of the Madinat al-Zahra
987 • Marble funerary stele (cat. no. 58)
988 • Last extension of the Great Mosque of Cordoba
988-989 • Foundation of Al-Azhar University in Cairo (Egypt)
999-1000 • Construction of the Bab al-Mardum Mosque, in Toledo (Spain)
1000 • Death of al-Muqaddasi, world-traveller and geographer
1005 • Foundation of the Dar al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) in Cairo
1006-1007 • Construction of the tower-mausoleum of Gunbad-i Qabus, built near Gurgan
1007 • Death of Maslama al-Majriti, Andalusian mathematician and Astronomer
c. 1010 • Firdawsi completes the epic of the Shahnama
1022 • Death of the calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwab
1030 • al-Biruni completes his work on India
• Death of the philosopher and historian Miskawayh
• Death of the Andalusian poet Ibn Darraj
1035 • Death of Ibn al-Samh, Andalusian author of works on geometry and astronomical tables
1037 • Death of Ibn Sin a (Avicenna), influential philosopher and physician
1039 • Death of Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen), astronomer and physicist,
1049-1083 • Construction of the Aljaferia Palace in Zaragoza (Spain)
1052 • Manuscript of the Qanun fi'l-tibb (Canon of medicine) of Ibn Sina fifth book (cat. no. 109 )
1064 • Death of Ibn Hazm, Andalusian philosopher and theologian
1067 • Foundation of the Nizamiyya madrasa in Baghdad
1068-1069 • Destruction of Fatimid libraries
1070 • Death of Ibn Zaydun famous Andalusian poet
1081 • Death of al-Baji, distinguished Andalusian theologian and literary figure
1086 • Death of Ibn 'Ammar, Andalusian poet and vizier of the king of Seville (Spain)
1090 • Ismaili state established in the fortress of Alamut, Iran
1111 • Death of al-Ghazali, jurist and theologian
1122 • Death of al-Hariri, master of the literary genre of the muqam (prose poem)
1134 • Death of Ibn 'Abdun, Andalusian poet and writer
1139 • Death of Ibn Baja, Andalusian philosopher, poet and musician
1143 • First translation of the Qur'an into Medieval Latin by Robert of Ketton
1147 • Death of Ibn Bassam, Andalusian poet and anthropologist
c. 1150 • Translations of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) into Latin
1154 • Al-Idrisi completes his universal geography at the court of Roger II of Sicily
• Construction of the Nur al-Din hospital in Damascus
1160 • Death of Ibn Quzman, famous Andalusian poet
1162 • Death of Ibn Zuhr (Avenzoar), Andalusian physician
1170-1180 • Construction of the Almohad Great Mosque of Seville with its minaret, nowadays called Giralda
1179 • Death of Ibn Khayr al-Ishibli, philologist and traditionist of Seville
1185 • Death of Ibn Tufayl, celebrated Andalusian physician and philosopher
1187 • Farid al-Din 'Attar writes the allegorical verse epic, Mantiq al-tayr ("Conference of the Birds")
1198 • Death of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Andalusian philosopher and physician, author of important commentaries on the works of Aristotle
c. 1200 • Manuscript of the Khawass al-ashjār (De Materia Medica) of Dioscorides (cat. no. 110-113)
1204 • Death of Ibn Maymun (Maimonides), Jewish philosopher and theologian
1209 • Death of Nizami, Persian poet author of romantic verse epics
1217 • Death of the Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr, author of the Rihla
1233 • Death of Ibn al-Athir, author of a monumental world history
c. 1235 • Manuscript of Mi'a Layla Wa Layla (One Hundred and One Nights) of Al-Zuhri (cat. no. 45)
1238 • Construction of the Alhambra by the Nasrid ruler Muhammad I
1240 • Death of Ibn al-Abri, Andalusian philosopher and mystic
1248 • Death of Ibn al-Baytar, Andalusian botanist and pharmacologist
1258 • Destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols
1259 • Construction of the observatory at Maragha begins
1273 • Death of Jalal al-Din Rumi, author of mystical poems
1274 • Death of Nasir al-Din Tusi, eminent philosopher and astronomer
1284 • Construction of the Mansuri hospital in Cairo
1286 • Death of Ibn Sa'd al-Maghribi, Andalusian poet, historian and geographer
1292 • Death of Sa'di, Persian poet, master of lyrical and ethical-didactic poetry
- Naguib Mahfouz awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature
1989 - Death of the architect Hassan Fathy
1990 - Itchan Kala in Uzbekistan added to World Heritage List
1993 - Humayun's Tomb and the Qutb Minar complex in Delhi (India), the Historic Town of Zabid (Yemen), and the Historic Centre of Bukhara (Uzbekistan) added to World Heritage List
1996 - Ancient Ksour of Ouedane, Chinguetti, Tichitt and Oualata (Mauritania), and the Historic city of Meknes (Morocco) added to World Heritage List
1997 - Qila Rohtas in Pakistan added to World Heritage List
1998 - Death of the musician Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
1999 - Ahmed Zewail awarded Nobel Prize in Chemistry
2000 - Historic Town of Zabid (Yemen), and the Fort and Shalamar Gardens in Lahore (Pakistan) added to List of World Heritage
2001 - Lamu Old Town (Kenya), and Samarkand (Uzbekistan) added to World Heritage List
2002 - Minaret and archaeological remains of Jam (Afghanistan) added to List of World Heritage
- ArchNet, online library on architecture, launched
2003 - Shirin Ebadi awarded Nobel Peace Prize
- Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (Kazakhstan) added to World Heritage List
2004 - Tomb of Askia in Mali added to World Heritage List
2005 - Old Bridge and Old City of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Kunya Urgench (Turkmenistan), and the Mausoleum of Oljaitu in Soltaniyeh (Iran) added to World Heritage List
- Inauguration of Al-Azhar Park, Cairo
2006 - Orhan Pamuk awarded Nobel Prize in Literature.
- Muhammad Yunus awarded Nobel Peace Prize.
- Death of the writer Naguib Mahfouz.
- Death of the singer-musician Ali Ibrahim Toure
2007 - Mehmed Paşa Sokolović Bridge (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Samarra Archaeological City (Iraq) and Red Fort Complex (India) added to World Heritage List.
- Samarra Archaeological City added to List of World Heritage
- Stone Town of Zanzibar, and the Historic Centre of Shahr-i Sabz (Uzbekistan) added to World Heritage List
- Aga Khan Music Initiative in Central Asia (AKMICA) established
2001 - Lamu Old Town (Kenya), and Samarkand (Uzbekistan) added to World Heritage List
2002 - Minaret and archaeological remains of Jam (Afghanistan) added to List of World Heritage
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- Samarra Archaeological City added to List of World Heritage

**Abbasids**
Dynasty that founded the city of Baghdad, and ruled large parts of the central Islamic lands from 750 to 1258.

**Abjad**
Alphanumeric system in which each letter of the Arabic alphabet is assigned a numerical value.

**Almoravids**
Berber dynasty that ruled North Africa and southern Spain from 1140 to 1269.

**Almohads**
Berber dynasty that ruled North Africa and southern Spain from 1062 to 1147.

**Ayah**
A verse from the Qur'an.

**Ayubids**
Founded by Salah al-Din (Saladin), dynasty that ruled Egypt and Syria from 1169 to 1260.

**Basmala**
The invocation 'Bism Allah al-ra'haman al-ra'him', meaning 'In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful,' which appears at the beginning of most chapters of the Qur'an.

**Bihari**
Stately cursive script used exclusively in India with thick round bowls for endings and wide spaces between words.

**Dhikr**
Form of prayer, which consists in the constant repetition of a name or formula, performed either in solitude or collectively.

**Fatimids**
Dynasty that ruled large parts of North Africa and the Middle East from 909 to 1171, and founded the city of Cairo.

**Firman**
Royal decree or written edict.

**Ghazal**
Short lyric poem or ode whose form is characterized by rhyming couplets.

**Ghaznavids**
Turkic dynasty that ruled parts of Iran, Afghanistan and India from 977 to 1186.

**Ghubari**
Miniscule script said to have received its name because it resembled motes of dust and to have been invented to write messages carried by pigeon post.

**Hadith**
Report of the sayings of the Prophet, and in Shia Islam, for the traditions of the Imams.

**Hajj**
Annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

**Ilkhanids**
Established by Hulegu, dynasty that ruled Iran from 1256 to 1353.

**Imam**
In general, a leader of prayers or religious leader; used by the Shia to denote the spiritual leaders descended from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima.

**Iwan**
Vaulted hall or chamber.

**Janna**
Heaven or paradise in the Qur'an, symbolised by the serenity of a garden.

**Jaz'**
A thirtieth part of the Qur'an.

**Ka'ba**
Cubic building in Mecca, and the focus of the hajj.

**Khanqah**
Lodge or hospice for Sufis.

**Khutba**
Sermon delivered in a mosque during Friday prayers.

**Kiswa**
Textile covering for the Ka'ba during Friday prayers.

**Qur'an**
Heaven or paradise in the Qur'an, symbolised by the serenity of a garden.

**Samarra Archaeological City**
List. (Iraq) and Red Fort Complex (India) added to World Heritage List.

**Soltaniyeh (Iran) added to World Heritage List**

**Stone Town of Zanzibar, and the Historic Centre of Shahr-i Sabz (Uzbekistan) added to World Heritage List**

**Tomb of Askia in Mali added to World Heritage List**

**Worship or prayer**
Form of prayer, which consists in the constant repetition of a name or formula, performed either in solitude or collectively.
**Madrasa**
College or educational institution, especially for religious studies.

**Maghribi**
Distinctive round style script used in North Africa and in Spain.

**Mamluks**
Turkic dynasty that ruled from 1250 to 1517, with Cairo as the capital.

**Mihrab**
Niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of prayer.

**Minbar**
Elevated pulpit in a mosque from which the Friday sermon is delivered.

**Mughals**
Founded by Babur, a descendant of Timur, dynasty that ruled the Indian subcontinent from 1526 to 1585.

**Muhaqqaq**
Monumental cursive script with well-balanced ascending and horizontal strokes.

**Mugham**
Musical mode in Uyghur music combining in suite form sung poetry, popular tales of famous lovers, and dance rhythms.

**Muqarnas**
Decorative vaulting system composed of tiers of small niche-like elements resembling stalactites or honeycombs.

**Muraqqa’**
Album with a collection of samples of calligraphy and paintings.

**Naskh**
Cursive script used to transcribe texts, and the basis for modern typography.

**Nasrids**
Dynasty that ruled southern Spain from 1230 to 1492.

**Nasta’liq**
Elegant ‘hanging’ script characterized by short ascending strokes and sweeping elongated diagonal strokes, developed especially for Persian poetry.

**Ottomans**
Dynasty that came to power in Anatolia during the early 14th century, and ruled Turkey, the Balkans, North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East for over 400 years until 1924.

**Pir**
Spiritual guide qualified to lead disciples on the mystical path.

**Qajars**
Dynasty that ruled Iran from 1779 to 1925.

**Qasidah**
A poetic genre; in Persian, a lyric poem, most frequently panegyric.

**Qibla**
The relative direction of Muslim prayer towards Mecca.

**Rihan**
Round script, which is the smaller counterpart to muhaqqaq and notable for its smooth line, even spacing and balance.

**Riq’a**
Script par excellence for administrative decrees and official letters.

**Rukh or roc**
Mythical bird believed to be an Aepyornis maximus.

**Safavids**
Dynasty that ruled Iran from 1501 to 1722 and established Shiism as the official state religion.

**Samanids**
Dynasty that ruled from 819 to 1005 in Central Asia and Transoxania.

**Saz**
Type of vegetal decoration common in Ottoman art of the 16th century.

**Seljuqs**
Turkic dynasty that ruled parts of Iran and Iraq from 1040 to 1194, as well as Anatolia from 1081 to 1307.

**Shahada**
The Muslim profession of faith.

**Shari’ah**
Standard term used for the body of rules guiding the life of a Muslim.

**Shikasteh**
Dense script in which letters and words that should be detached are sometimes joined allowing the calligrapher to complete each word in a single penstroke.

**Simurgh**
Gigantic mythical Persian bird.

**Sura**
Chapter of the Qur’an.

**Taqi’i**
Script usually used for administrative documents, the larger counterpart to riqa’.

**Tawhid**
The Oneness of God or belief in Divine Unity, one of the fundamental tenets of Islam.

**Thuluth**
Elegant monumental cursive script often used for inscriptions, the larger counterpart to naskh.

**Timurids**
Dynasty founded by Timur that ruled in Central Asia and Afghanistan from 1370 to 1507.

**Tiraz**
Textile with woven, embroidered or painted inscriptions.

**Tughra**
Distinctive and intricately executed monogram of the Ottoman sultan.

**Ulama**
Religious and legal scholars.

**Umayyads**
Dynasty that ruled the central Islamic lands from 661 to 750 with Damascus as the capital, and also the Iberian Peninsula from 756 to 1031, with Cordoba as the capital.

**Waqf**
Pious endowment or trust stipulated for a charitable purpose.