

# Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum



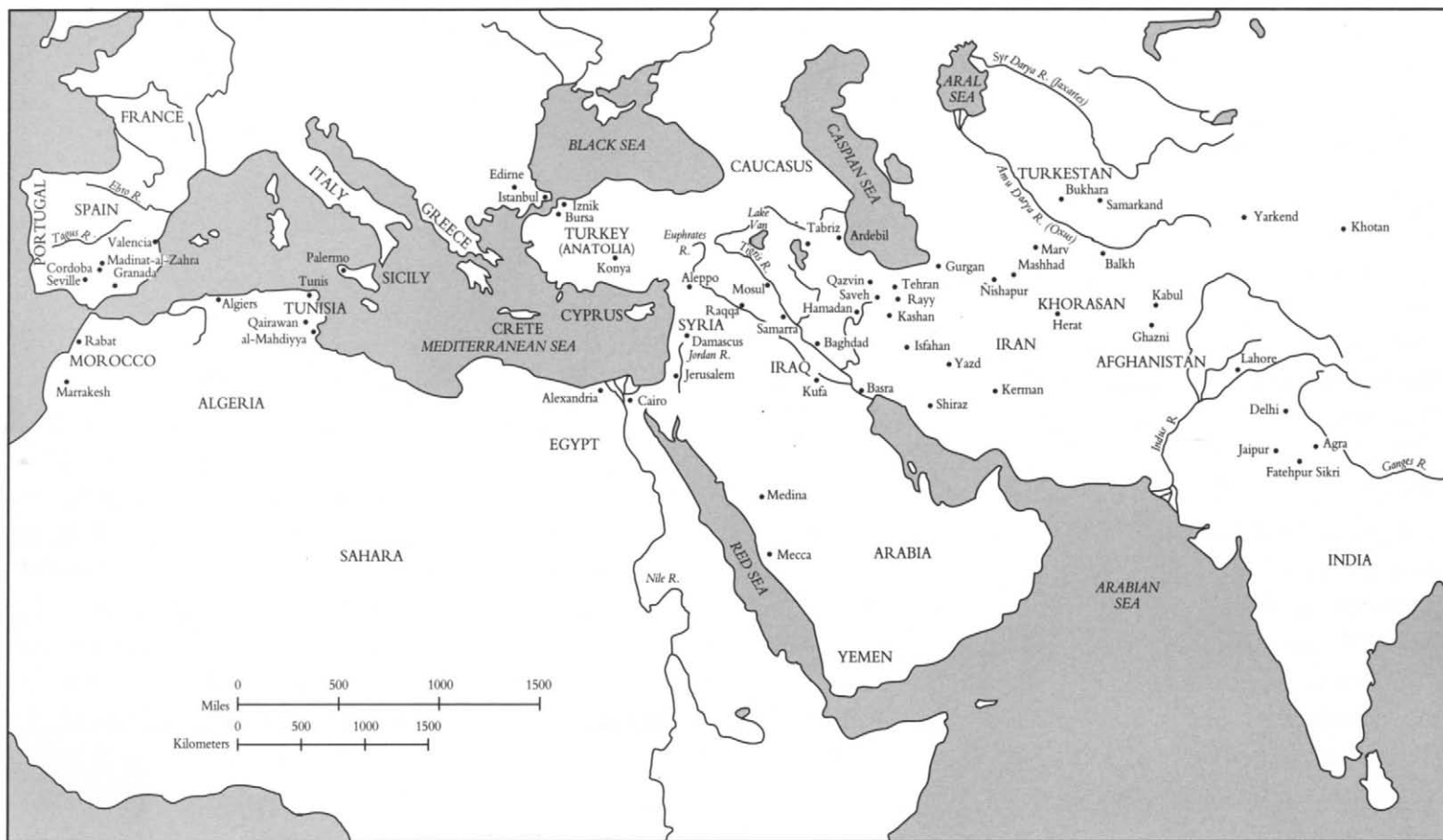
# **Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum The Historical Context**

Linda Komaroff

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Islam is the religion founded by the Prophet Muhammad in the early seventh century A.D. It is a monotheistic faith that shares a number of features with Judaism and Christianity, including their prophetic tradition. In Arabic, the language of the Prophet, Islam literally means “submission” (to God). Muslims, the followers of Islam, believe that Muhammad is the last in the line of Old and New Testament prophets, which included Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muhammad is not regarded by Muslims as a divinity, nor is he worshiped; he is called simply Prophet or Messenger of God.

Born in Mecca, in western Arabia, Muhammad (A.D. ca. 570–632) was already a mature man when he began his mission. Muslims believe that the word of God was revealed to him by the archangel Gabriel, who said “Recite in the name of thy lord . . .” Muhammad then repeated this divine message to his followers, and these revelations were subsequently collected and codified as the Muslim holy book—the Koran, which means “recitation.” As the source of Muslim faith and practice the Koran

describes the relationship between an almighty and all-knowing God and his creatures. But the Koran also maintains that all individuals are responsible for their actions, for which they will be judged by God, and so it provides guidelines for proper behavior within the framework of a just and equitable society.

When Muhammad began to preach, around 610, Mecca was a prosperous city, whose wealth and influence were based on the caravan trade and on the Ka’ba, a shrine and place of pilgrimage housing the pagan deities then being worshiped by the Arabs. Muhammad’s message, heralding a new socioreligious order based on allegiance to one god—Allah—was unpopular among the leaders of Mecca, and they forced Muhammad and his followers to emigrate north to the oasis town Medina. This occurred in 622, the year of the *hijra*, or “emigration,” which marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. In Medina Muhammad continued to attract followers and within a few years Mecca had submitted to Islam. Upon his return to Mecca one of the Prophet’s first acts was to cleanse the Ka’ba of its idols and

to rededicate the shrine to Allah. Although Muhammad died in 632, his followers continued to spread the message of Islam throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and as far west as Spain and as far east as India. Here, in these lands, Islam fostered the development of a religious, political, and cultural commonwealth and the creation of a global empire.

Today Islam is a faith shared by nearly one-quarter of the earth’s population who direct their prayers toward Mecca, their spiritual home. But the heart of the Islamic world comprises a vast territory, extending from Morocco to Pakistan and beyond, and from south of the Sahara to the Steppes of Siberia. Although many diverse peoples speaking many distinct languages inhabit these lands, they are united in a common cultural identity molded by their religion and their allegiance to Islam.

There are five main obligations, sometimes called the Five Pillars, that are required of all Muslims:

1. The profession of faith: There is no God but Allah; Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.
2. Prayer five times daily: at dawn,

at midday, afternoon, evening, and night. These may be said in private or in congregation. Only the midday prayer on Friday, the Muslim Sabbath, need be recited in a mosque.

3. The giving of alms.

4. Fasting from sunrise until sundown during the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, which is a lunar calendar).

5. If at all possible, undertaking the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca and the Ka'ba, the supreme symbol of Islam.

Islam does not have an organized priesthood or clerical hierarchy. Instead, Islam and Islamic law are taught, studied, and interpreted by religious scholars known as the *ʿulama*. These learned men are the guardians of a shared system of values, practices, and beliefs. Certain Muslims have chosen to follow a more mystical path by which the true believer can draw nearer to God; such mystics, who generally follow the teaching and guidance of a particular spiritual master, or *shaykh*, are known as Sufis (from the word *suf*, or wool, after the rough woolen robes affected by Sufis). Due to a schism that

occurred in early Islamic times between rival religious and political factions regarding the Prophet's successor, two main sects of Islam developed: Sunni and Shi'i. The majority of Muslims are Sunni, so designated because they follow the *sunna*, or way of the Prophet. The Shi'i, from *shi'at ʿAli*, or party of ʿAli, maintain that ʿAli, the son-in-law of Muhammad, was the only rightful successor to the Prophet. Among the Shi'i, ʿAli, his sons, and their descendants (called Imams) are held in highest esteem.

Whether Sunni or Shi'i the mosque is the Muslim house of prayer. Although only the Friday midday prayer service requires attendance at the mosque—generally the main congregational or Friday mosque of the city or town—all five daily prayers may be said in the mosque. A special building is not in fact required for prayer. The worshiper's physical needs are simply a state of cleanliness, knowledge of the direction of Mecca, and sufficient space to touch his head to the ground. Muslims are summoned to prayer by the muezzin, who, so that his voice may be heard, generally calls from a

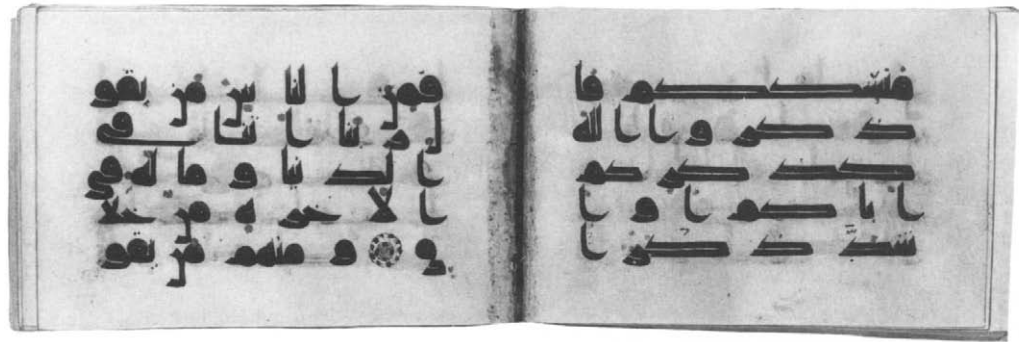
balcony on a minaret, a towerlike structure attached or adjacent to the mosque. Since liturgical prayers must be preceded by ablutions, the mosque generally provides a fountain or other outlet for running water. Because one enters the mosque barefoot, and as prayer requires kneeling and touching the head to the ground, its floor is usually covered by carpets. Muslims pray facing toward the Ka'ba in Mecca. The direction of prayer is known as the *qibla*. This focal point is emphasized within the mosque by a niche, or *mihrab*. Facing the *mihrab*, a prayer-leader, or imam, directs the ritual, which consists of praise to God, recitations from the Koran, formulas of prayer, and a series of bowings and prostrations whose number varies with the particular prayer service.

### *Gallery 1* **Islamic Art**

The term Islamic art not only describes the art created specifically in the service of the Muslim faith (for example, a mosque and its fur-

nishings) but also characterizes the art and architecture produced in lands ruled by Muslims, or produced for Muslim patrons, or created by Muslim artists. As it is not only a religion, but a way of life, Islam fostered the creation of a distinctive culture with its own unique artistic language that is reflected in art and architecture throughout the Muslim world. Unlike Western art, easel painting and sculpture are rare in Islamic art. Instead, illustrated and illuminated manuscripts, woven carpets, inlaid metalwork, and glazed pottery are the primary means of artistic expression. Islamic art is generally utilitarian or functional, and most examples are therefore portable. Islamic objects are nonetheless meticulously fabricated, carefully embellished, and decorated with costly and rare materials. What should become clear to even the casual observer is that the people for whom this art was produced sought to surround themselves by beauty.

Calligraphy, the most pervasive and important element in Islamic art, has always been regarded as the highest form of art on account of its connection with the Koran.



*Page from a Koran. Egypt or Iraq, 9th century. Ink, colors, gold on vellum, 6 3/4 x 4 in. (17.1 x 10.2 cm). Gift of Philip Hofer, 1937 (37.142)*

Because it is through writing that the Koran is transmitted, the Arabic script was first transformed and beautified in order that it might be worthy of the divine revelation. As Islam spread from Arabia to Egypt, Iran, Spain, Turkey, and India, so too was Arabic writing, the vehicle of the Koran, brought to these lands. Verses quoted from the Koran became the most important decorative element on religious edifices and on their furnishings. This concern with the beauty of the written word extended to all arts, ranging from secular manuscripts to inscriptions on palaces and domestic structures or inscriptions applied to objects fabricated of glass, metal, pottery, stone, wood, and textiles. Other languages used within the Islamic

commonwealth and written in Arabic script, such as Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, also demonstrate the importance of calligraphy.

Figural imagery, which occurs primarily in secular and especially courtly arts, is another significant feature of Islamic art. These images appear in a wide variety of media and in nearly every period and place in which Islam flourished, but almost invariably within the context of private rather than public art. Literary, scientific, and even religious manuscripts were illustrated, as were metalwork, pottery, glass, textiles, and carpets. The stately leonine incense burner in the center of Gallery 1 indicates that large, three-dimensional figures were created for personal use in a secular setting. On the other hand,



*Incense Burner in Feline Form. Iran, 1181/82. Bronze, 36 in. (91.4 cm). Rogers Fund, 1951 (51.56)*

figural representation is excluded from the decoration of the mosque and related religious buildings. An Islamic abhorrence of anything that might be confused with idols or idolatry, expressly forbidden in the Koran, helps to explain the absence of such imagery. Furthermore, unlike Christianity and Buddhism, Islam does not offer any individual, including Muhammad, as a central

figure of worship. This seeming avoidance of representational imagery also may have evolved in early Islamic times as one means of setting the young Islamic state apart from its neighbors and enemies, such as the Christian Byzantines. It is perhaps for this reason that figural imagery was rejected in early Islamic coinage; instead, writing, in Arabic, serves to distinguish one of the most recognizable and portable manifestations of the Islamic state.

Another important feature of Islamic art is the tendency to cover surfaces with all-over patterns composed of geometric or vegetal elements. This abstract ornament may have come to be highly developed and in continuous use because of the absence of figural imagery, at least within a religious setting. Both the complex geometric patterns and the seemingly endless vegetal motifs, such as the arabesque, give the appearance of infinite repetition, which is believed by some to be an especially appropriate type of decoration for the mosque wherein one can contemplate the infinite nature of God. The transformation of one surface into another, or the metamorphosis of one form into

another, in both architectural decoration and decorative arts, is another characteristic of Islamic art. Walls constructed of mud brick or rubble masonry are often sheathed in a brilliant decorative façade of carved and painted stucco, glazed ceramic tilework, or carved wood or stone. Examples of such colorful and opulent architectural decoration intended to disguise the original base building material are visible throughout the galleries, in Gallery 10 in particular. Just as the architectural surface was transformed, so too were natural forms metamorphosed. For example, a bird becomes a plant in the decoration of a ceramic vessel or a wooden panel, or the head of a deer or horse is transfigured into the hilt of a dagger. The act of transforming animate into inanimate may relate to the broader issue of representational art, since in these instances the artist has found a means of depicting images in such a way that they cannot be mistaken as viable life forms.

One method of classifying Islamic art, as can be seen in the Islamic galleries at the Metropolitan Museum, is according to the

dynasty reigning when the work of art was produced. This type of periodization follows the general precepts of Islamic history, which is divided into and punctuated by the rule of various dynasties, beginning with the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties that governed a vast and unified Islamic state, and concluding with more regional dynasties such as the Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals.

## *Gallery 2* **Nishapur Excavations**

From the ninth through the early thirteenth century Nishapur was one of the greatest cities of medieval Iran. Located in the eastern province of Khurasan and well-situated along the trade route across which goods were exchanged between the Far and the Near East, Nishapur was an important political, commercial, and cultural center. Excavations were undertaken by the Iranian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum from 1935 to 1940, with a final season in 1947. The excavations were spread

over several different mounds, or *tepes*, which revealed both residential quarters as well as a palace or some governmental building. Built of sun-dried bricks—and occasionally kiln-baked bricks—excavated structures revealed that architectural decoration was a highly developed art form in Nishapur. Carved and molded plaster, glazed-brick tiles, and wall painting were all used as means of embellishment. One of the buildings excavated at the small mound known as Tepe Sabz Pushan (Green-covered Mound), included an *iwan* (a vaulted hall closed on one end and open at the other) decorated with carved plaster, which has been partially reconstructed at the Museum. Here, the dadoes were covered with carved plaster vegetal ornament set within a strictly geometric framework. Traces of yellow, white, blue, and red paint indicate that the carved plaster surfaces must originally have been brilliantly colored, which enhanced the stunning visual impact of the decoration.

Among the wealth of objects unearthed by the excavations, the pottery finds were among the most abundant and the most significant.

In ninth- and tenth-century Nishapur ceramic vessels and utensils were made from earthenware, a material whose humble nature could be disguised or beautified through the application of a slip, a semifluid colored clay, used as a means of coloring and decorating the object. The slip-painted ware was then covered by a transparent or colorless lead glaze. Of particular note are the so-called Black on White wares, dating to the tenth century, in which the buff-colored earthenware body is coated by a white slip and decorated in black slip before it is covered with a transparent, usually colorless, glaze. Among the most elegant and striking of the Black and White wares are those in which an austere black inscription in Arabic is the sole means of decoration on the pristine white surface.

By the beginning of the eleventh century a new type of ware appears to have been introduced at Nishapur. Unlike earthenware, the body of this new ware is a manmade combination of finely ground quartz, fused ground glass or frit, and clay. This composed ware has a white body, which no



longer required the addition of a colored slip coating; instead of the transparent lead glaze, a new alkali-based glaze in varying shades and intensities of blue was produced. Although Nishapur was evidently an early center of production, composite-bodied ware was to achieve its greatest prominence at other and later Iranian sites.

Metal and stone objects, coins, and especially glassware were also well-represented among the finds from Nishapur. Although no textiles were uncovered, most likely because they are highly perishable, hundreds of small, carefully decorated spindle-whorls were found there.

### *Gallery 3* **Early Islamic Art** **7th–11th century**

A series of four caliphs (caliph from the Arabic *khalifa*, meaning successor), known as the Rightly Guided, succeeded Muhammad in 632.

Under the command of the caliphs the Arab armies carried the new faith and leadership from Arabia to the shores of the Mediterranean



*Ewer. Iran, 7th century. Bronze, chased and originally inlaid, H. 19 1/8 in. (48.6 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1947 (47.100.90)*

and to the eastern reaches of Iran. In the west, the Arabs wrested Syria, Palestine, and Egypt from the Byzantine empire, while in the east, Iraq and Iran, the heart of the Persian empire, under the rule of the

Sasanian dynasty, succumbed to their forces. The assassination of 'Ali, the last of the Rightly Guided caliphs, in 661, ushered in the rule of the first Islamic dynasty, the Umayyads. The death of 'Ali also marks the beginnings of the political and religious factionalism that was to give rise to the Shi'i sect.

The Umayyads transferred the Islamic seat of power from Arabia to Syria and began a new wave of conquest. Islamic forces were victorious in North Africa and Spain, and even crossed the Pyrenees to raid France; in the east, they raised the banner of Islam in Central Asia and on the Indian subcontinent. With Damascus as its capital, the Islamic empire now extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus River. These diverse lands were gradually transformed into a relatively unified empire, with Arabic as the official language and Islam the principal religion. A new civilization slowly began to emerge.

The lands newly conquered by the Muslims had their own pre-existing artistic traditions, and initially, at least, those artists who had worked under Byzantine or Sasanian patronage continued to work in

their own indigenous styles but for Muslim patrons. The first examples of Islamic art therefore rely on earlier techniques, styles, and forms reflecting this blending of Classical and Iranian decorative themes and motifs. An example of the latter is a large bronze ewer, displayed in this gallery, which was originally inlaid with copper. The stylized ducks on the rim of the vessel and the abstract ornament on the body, which seems to combine vegetal ornament with the paired wings and central orb of the Sasanian royal crown, are of Persian derivation, while the feline handle and floral base have Roman antecedents. Other examples of metalwork, woodcarving, inlaid wood, glass, pottery, and textiles displayed in the first two cases in this gallery likewise demonstrate this mixed artistic heritage. Even religious monuments erected under Umayyad patronage, which have a clearly Islamic function and meaning, such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, demonstrate this amalgam of Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian elements. Only gradually, under the impact of the Muslim faith and the nascent Islamic state, did a uniquely Islamic art emerge.

In 750 the Umayyads were overthrown and succeeded by the Abbasid dynasty. Under the Abbasid caliphate the focal point of Islamic political and cultural life shifted eastward from Syria to Iraq, where, in 762, Baghdad was founded as the empire's new capital. The first three centuries of Abbasid rule are generally regarded as a Golden Age, with Baghdad as the cultural and commercial capital of the Islamic world. Literature, theology, philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences flourished, enriched by the encounter of Arab thought and culture with Greco-Roman, Persian, and Indian traditions. This was an important period in the history of Islamic art as well, one in which a distinctive style and new techniques developed and spread throughout the Muslim realm.

One of the most notable arts of the early Abbasid period is architectural ornament in stucco, wood, and stone. Some of the most important examples were excavated at or are associated with Samarra, in northern Iraq, which was an alternate capital to Baghdad, from 836 to 892. Three separate, contemporary styles arose at Samarra; the

most significant is the beveled style, insofar as it had the longest life span and widest geographical distribution. Architectural elements and ornament in the beveled style, so-called on account of the distinctive slant of the decoration's contour, are on view in Gallery 3. Here, highly stylized leaf and plant forms have been transformed into abstract motifs in which it is impossible to distinguish between background and foreground, or between abstract and natural forms. The motifs and designs associated with the beveled style were also reproduced in the decorative arts, such as pottery and glass, which are on view in nearby cases.

The early Abbasid period witnessed a number of important developments in pottery. The most notable technical achievement was the development of luster painting, which represents as well a significant contribution to the development of ceramics in the Western world. This technique seems to have been used first in glass, and then in Egypt, around the seventh century, and by the ninth century it was in use by potters in Iraq. Developed for its glittering effect, probably in imita-



*Bowl. Iraq, Abbasid period, 10th century. Earthenware, glazed and luster painted, D. 12 in. (30.5 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1964 (64.134)*

tion of precious metal, metal oxides combined with sulfur and other materials were applied in liquefied form to the surface of a previously glazed and fired object. The ware was then refired in a reducing, or muffled, kiln, so that the oxygen was drawn out from the metal oxide leaving a metallic film on the ceramic surface. This technique spread from Iraq to Egypt, Syria, Iran, and Spain.

Abbasid political unity began to disintegrate in the mid-ninth century, and independent or semi-autonomous local dynasties were subsequently established. By the tenth century Abbasid political

power was effectively limited to Iraq. Elsewhere in the Islamic world a series of dynasties in Egypt, North Africa, Spain, and Iran fostered the development of indigenous styles of Islamic art.

In North Africa in the early tenth century the Shi'i Fatimid dynasty founded a caliphate to rival the Abbasids. The Fatimids soon extended their control to southern Italy and to Egypt, where, in 969, Cairo was established as their new capital. Under the Fatimids, Egypt enjoyed a period of enormous prosperity, owing primarily to the country's intermediary role in the lucrative trade between India and the Mediterranean. In addition to its important commercial activities, the caliphs made Cairo a great cultural center that was to rival Baghdad in the eleventh century. After having sought the help of Syria in an attempt to rid itself of the Crusaders who were then besieging Cairo, the Fatimid dynasty came to an end in 1171. The Syrians drove the Crusaders from Egypt, but one of their officers, Salah al-Din (Saladin), overthrew the Fatimid caliphate and established the Ayyubid dynasty.

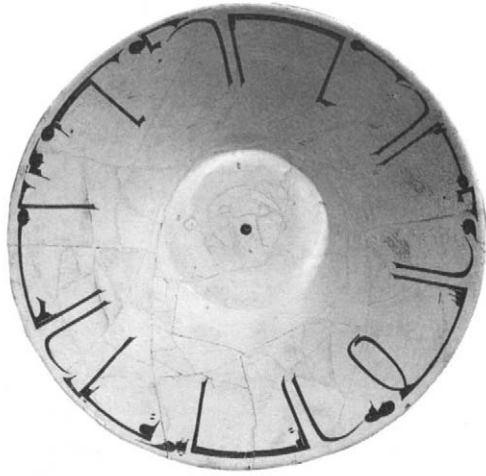
The extravagance and material prosperity of this period is reflected in Fatimid art, including breathtakingly detailed goldwork, such as earrings, pendants, bracelets, and beads displayed in Gallery 3. Animals and birds became a predominant motif in Fatimid art, as reflected in carved wood decorated with lively figural imagery, and luster pottery, such as the bowl decorated with a stylized heraldic eagle in this gallery. Animated figural decoration also distinguishes the nearby carved ivory hunting horn, or "oliphant," produced in southern Italy, perhaps by a Fatimid artist working for a Christian patron.

In 756 a new Umayyad dynasty was founded in Spain by a prince who had escaped the overthrow of his family by the Abbasids in 750. Córdoba, its capital, became a great center of Arabic culture and learning, competing with Baghdad and Cairo. The Spanish Umayyads ruled over a diverse society that included Muslims of Arab, North African Berber, and Spanish descent, as well as Christians and Jews. Umayyad art and architecture on the Iberian peninsula, while reflecting classical Islamic forms,

styles, and techniques, was also influenced by indigenous artistic traditions. One such example is the Great Mosque of Córdoba; its hypostyle plan, double colonnade, carved capitals, and red-and-white horseshoe-shaped arches represent a blending of Islamic, Roman, and Visigothic elements. Among the arts that once flourished at the Umayyad court, carved ivories, which survive in some quantity, demonstrate a contemporary taste for opulence and a high level of workmanship. Because many of these ivories are inscribed, it is apparent that most of them were made for the royal family and other members of the ruling elite. Ivory carvings, as represented by an eleventh-century panel in the Museum's collection, depict figures and vegetal designs that are animated by an inner movement. The richly patterned surface is typical of Islamic art in general, while the paired figures, animal and human, suggest Western or even Byzantine influence.



*Panel (detail). Spain, Umayyad period, early 11th century. Ivory, stones, and traces of pigments, 4 1/4 x 8 in. (10.8 x 20.3 cm). John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1913 (13.141)*



Bowl. Iran or Transoxiana (Nishapur or Samarqand), Samanid period, 10th century. Earthenware, white engobe, slip painted, incised, and glazed, D. 18 in. (45.7cm). Rogers Fund, 1965 (65.106.2)

The Samanids were one of several Persian dynasties that established autonomous control in the eastern Islamic provinces, in Khurasan and Transoxiana, in eastern Iran and Central Asia. The age of the Samanids, the late ninth and tenth century, marked a renaissance of Persian culture and their court at Bukhara was associated with the rise of Persian literature. The tenth-century slip-painted ceramic wares in which elegant Arabic inscriptions painted in black on a white ground belong to the Samanid period. Until the end of the tenth

century the Samanids prevented the large-scale migration of Turkic nomads from the Central Asian steppe; however, with the fall of the Samanids ethnic Turks replaced the Persians as rulers of the eastern Iranian world.

In the late tenth century a former Turkish vassal of the Samanids founded the Ghaznavid dynasty in what is now Afghanistan; this dynasty soon extended its control over Khurasan in the north and to the Indian subcontinent in the south. The Ghaznavid capital, Ghazni, served as a meeting ground between Islamic and Indian cultures. Although ethnic Turks, the Ghaznavids spoke Persian and through their patronage they helped establish modern Persian as a cultural language. The *Shah Namah*, the great Iranian national epic, was completed by Firdawsi at the court in Ghazni in 1010 and dedicated to the Ghaznavid ruler. Within several decades the Ghaznavids forfeited their Iranian provinces to another Turkic dynasty, the Saljuqs, although they maintained control of their Indian empire until the late twelfth century. Much of what is known of

Ghaznavid art stems from literary or archaeological sources. Excavations of Ghaznavid palaces demonstrate a wealth of architectural ornament, including carved marble, stucco, wall paintings, and glazed tiles; examples of the latter are on view at the rear of Gallery 3.

#### Gallery 4a–b Saljuq and Ilkhanid Art in Iran

The Saljuqs, a Turkic tribe from Central Asia, settled in Khurasan in the early eleventh century, and within fifty years they founded a vast though short-lived empire that included all of Iran, the Fertile Crescent, and much of Anatolia. By the close of the eleventh century their empire dissolved into separate territories governed by different branches of the Saljuq dynasty. The main branch of the Saljuq house, the so-called Great Saljuqs, maintained control over Iran. Like the Ghaznavids before them, these ethnic Turks succumbed to Persian culture, as they too adopted the Persian language. Under Saljuq



rulers, Iran enjoyed a period of material and cultural prosperity, but they were succeeded in the mid-twelfth century by another Turkic dynasty, which fell before the Mongol onslaught in 1235.

Saljuq sovereignty was also established in Anatolia in 1071, when its forces defeated the Byzantine army in eastern Anatolia; this important victory paved the way for the gradual introduction of Islamic and Turkish culture into Asia Minor. The Saljuq sultanate of Rum (meaning Byzantium) survived until the early fourteenth century, although from the mid-thirteenth century its authority was severely curtailed by the Mongols.

Apart from a series of important architectural monuments, there are very few surviving examples of Iranian art from the Saljuq period proper. Frequently, works of art dating to the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries are labeled "Saljuq," although they were actually produced under the patronage of one of several local Turkic dynasties. Figural imagery was a common theme in "Saljuq" art, even to the extent that Arabic inscriptions came to be inhabited

by humans and animals, and often the letters were themselves metamorphosed into living creatures. Such scripts, which were an especially common means of decoration in contemporary metalwork, are referred to as "animated" writing.

Beginning in the second half of the twelfth century the art of inlaying bronze or brass objects with precious metals, such as copper, silver, and gold came to prominence in Iran, in the eastern province of Khurasan. Inlaid metalwork may have developed as a less costly means of imitating the opulence of objects made entirely of precious metal. In this technique wire and especially small, very fine pieces of precious metal were inserted into designs cut into the surface of the metal object; the precious metal was then generally decorated with finer details. Astrological symbols, scenes of feasting, hunting, and other forms of entertainment were the most common means of decoration. Such objects were also decorated with Arabic inscriptions written in the "animated" script. Ewers, trays, inkwells, and candlesticks are among the most frequent types of extant examples of inlaid

metalwork.

The same shapes known in metalwork were also produced in contemporary pottery. These ceramic wares demonstrate the development of new techniques or the further refinement of existing ones. Luster-painted pottery, a technical achievement of ninth-century Iraq, had spread to Iran by the second half of the twelfth century, where it reached new heights. The complicated art of luster-painting must have been a closely guarded process that was shared by only a few families of craftsmen. In Iran, the center for this industry seems to have been Kashan. Apparently not disrupted by the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, lusterware, including primarily vessels and tiles for architectural revetment, was made in Kashan up to the fourteenth century. Whether decorating a bowl or a series of star and cross tiles, one of the hallmarks of Kashan lusterware is the use of plump birds, both standing and in flight, multipetaled flowers, and a tiny spiral patterning scratched through the lustered surface as a background or a filler motif. Kashan was especially noted for the



“Preparation of Medicine from Honey”: Page from an alleged *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides completed in Arabic by the calligrapher ‘Abdallah ibn Fadl. Iraq (Baghdad), 1224. Colors, gold on paper, 12 3/8 x 9 in. (31.4 x 22.9 cm). Cora Timken Burnett Collection of Persian Miniatures and Other Persian Art Objects. Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 (57.51.21)

production of mihrabs, or prayer niches, composed of several large luster-painted panels that are further decorated in cobalt blue; frequently the inscriptions and ornament were molded in relief. Examples of all such works of art are on view in Gallery 4a–b.

A new ceramic type introduced in late-twelfth-century Iran, possi-

bly in Kashan, is *mina’i* ware that, like luster painting, required a complicated and costly double firing process. *Mina’i* is an overglaze painting technique in which enamel colors are applied to the cold, glazed surface and then fixed in a second firing. Only vessels, primarily bowls, are preserved in this technique; these were frequently decorated with complicated narrative scenes, including episodes from the *Shah Namah*, the Iranian national epic. Especially popular was the story of the Persian ruler Bahram Gur hunting on his camel and accompanied by his favorite slave girl and her harp. Such ceramic wares help to fill an important gap in our knowledge of Persian painting, especially manuscript illustration, as relatively little of it datable before the end of the thirteenth century has survived.

If Persian manuscripts were illustrated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, they may have been similar in style to examples produced in Baghdad, such as a dispersed manuscript dated 1224, several pages of which are displayed in Gallery 4b. This manuscript is alleged to be an Arabic translation

of a work entitled *De Materia Medica*, written in the first century A.D. by Dioscorides, a Greek physician in the Roman army. Focusing on the medicinal values and applications of plants and minerals, this pharmacological text was one of many classical scientific works that were translated into Arabic in ninth-century Baghdad. Illustrations from the 1224 version frequently depict human activity rather than the plants themselves, which are the main point of the text. Among the most famous of these manuscript paintings, in Gallery 4b, is a scene depicting what is perhaps a medieval pharmacy. While the text discusses the manufacture of a medicament from honey, the artist has given a broader context to his illustration by including figures shown in an architectural setting as they prepare and drink this medicine. The depiction of details, such as the patterning of the costume and curtains, and the inclusion of furniture and other equipment, suggests a desire for veracity on the part of the artist, but it did not extend to an interest in depicting a three-dimensional space. As can be seen

from early-fourteenth-century Persian manuscript illustrations (also on view in Gallery 4b and discussed below) an important change was soon to take place with regard to the artist's perception of pictorial space; this change can be viewed as a byproduct of the Mongol incursions of the thirteenth century.

The Mongol invasions of the Islamic world began in 1220 with the conquest of the eastern Iranian provinces by Ghengis Khan's son. In 1253 a grandson of Ghengis Khan began a second devastating wave of conquest. The Mongol forces subjugated all of Iran, and by 1258 they had also taken Baghdad, thus bringing to an end the Abbasid caliphate. Their ruler assumed the title "Il-Khan," meaning lesser Khan, that is subordinate to the Great Khan, who ruled in China. The term Ilkhanid also serves to designate the branch of the Mongol dynasty that ruled over Iraq, Iran proper, Khurasan, the Caucasus, and parts of Asia Minor. The Ilkhanids were only gradually converted to Islam, and it was not until the end of the thirteenth century that this dynasty embarked upon an active cultural policy in

support of Islam. After the death of the last Ilkhanid ruler in 1335, the empire disintegrated and a number of local dynasties came to power in Iraq and Iran.

Although relatively little is preserved of manuscript painting from the Ilkhanid period, those few examples, as well as subsequent Persian painting, indicate that this medium was irrevocably changed by its contact with Far Eastern art. Perhaps the most noticeable Far Eastern influence in early-fourteenth-century Persian manuscript painting is the altered concept of pictorial space. A good example, on view in Gallery 4b, is a page from a dispersed copy of the *Shah Namah*, which was probably produced in Tabriz, the Ilkhanid capital, during the last years of this dynasty. This painting illustrates the funeral of the hero Isfandiyar, who was slain by the greatest of all Persian warriors, Rostam. Here, in contrast to the Baghdad school paintings of about a century earlier, also exhibited in Gallery 4b, one can see a distinct evocation of space rendered by overlapping and partially cut-off figures set within a broadly defined landscape. The linear quality of the

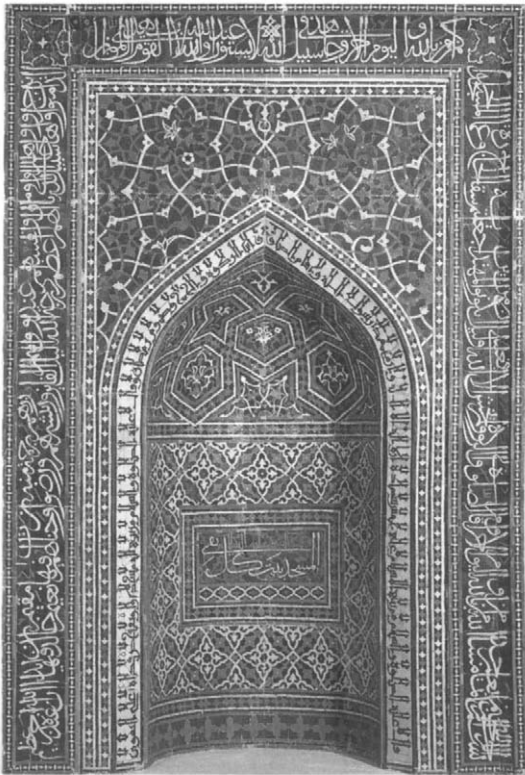
drawing and the pale washes of color suggest a further connection with Chinese art. In other media, new motifs were introduced into the repertoire of the Persian artist, including lotuses and peonies, cloud bands, and dragons and phoenixes. These motifs, along with certain new shapes, serve to distinguish fourteenth-century inlaid metalwork and ceramics, examples of which are to be found in Gallery 4b. While it is unlikely that Persian artists had access to Chinese scroll paintings, decorative arts from China, such as porcelains, textiles, and lacquers, may have been more generally accessible under the Ilkhanids.

#### *Gallery 4c* **The Art of the Mosque**

Most of the works of art on view in this gallery formed a part of a mosque or other religious setting. The mosque, in Arabic *masjid*, meaning place of prostration, is the Muslim communal house of prayer. The house of the Prophet in Medina, the first Muslim gathering

place, is the prototype for the mosque; however, due to local climates and indigenous building traditions and materials, the particular form of the mosque varies throughout the Islamic world.

The earliest type of mosque (based on the house of the Prophet) is in the form of a columned hall oriented toward Mecca and opening onto a courtyard surrounded by a colonnade. Such mosques are still customary throughout the Arabic-



speaking world. In the time of the Prophet, and even among the earliest mosques, the call to prayer was given from a rooftop and not from a minaret, which may have first evolved as a symbol of the Islamic presence in non-Muslims lands rather than for acoustical purposes. Within the mosque, the mihrab, or prayer niche, in the center of the wall facing Mecca (qibla), is a focal point, which came to be further emphasized by placing a dome above this area. Additional domes may be added elsewhere along this same axis, or along the axis of the qibla wall. Other major architectural types developed in Iran and Turkey. The Iranian mosque combines a domed prayer hall preceded by a high vaulted chamber opening onto a courtyard. This vaulted hall, or *iwān*, is repeated at the center of the other three sides of the courtyard. Turkish mosques, particularly those of the Ottoman period, place an even greater emphasis on the domed prayer hall, while the courtyard is often substantially reduced in size and significance.

*Prayer Niche (Mihrab). Iran, ca. 1354. Composite body, glazed, 11 ft. 3 in. x 7 ft. 6 in. (3.43 x 2.29 m). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20)*

Just as the form of the mosque reflects regional variations, so too does the mosque's decoration and furnishings. As the focal point of prayer, the mihrab is often the most highly decorated element of the mosque. Although the techniques may vary, the mihrab was often covered with tilework and embellished by an Arabic inscription, generally a quotation from the Koran, as is the example in the present gallery. From a madrasah, or theological college, in Isfahan, this large fourteenth-century mihrab is covered with ceramic tilework rendered in a complicated and time-consuming technique known as mosaic faience in which the various elements of the predetermined decoration and inscriptions were cut from different colored glazed tiles that were fitted together and fixed in a mortar setting.

A Friday or congregational mosque in which the weekly sermon (khutba) is delivered includes a minbar, or pulpit, generally fabricated from wood, as is the fragmentary example in this gallery. The minbar, which is often elaborately decorated with carved and inlaid wood, may date back to the time

of the Prophet, who is said to have ascended a simple pulpit to address his followers.

Mosques and other religious edifices, up until modern times, were often lit by oil lamps suspended in rows from the ceiling. Glass mosque lamps with gilt and enamel decoration were particularly well known in late-thirteenth and fourteenth-century Egypt. Such lamps were produced in quantity, most likely in Damascus, especially for the numerous mosques and funerary complexes erected in Cairo at this time. Several of these lamps are displayed in this gallery, as well as in Gallery 5. In addition to their practical function, the lamps can be viewed as a visual re-creation of a specific verse from the Koran in which the light of God is likened to the light from a lamp, lit by oil from a tree neither of the East nor the West. In fact, lamps of this type are very often inscribed with the opening line of this Koranic verse (XXIV.35): "God is the Light of the heavens and of the earth."

Korans were also commissioned and produced for mosques and other religious establishments. The

earliest Korans, up to around the twelfth century, were generally written in an often austere, rectangular script known as Kufic. From the twelfth century onward, Korans were most often copied in a more fluid, curvilinear, cursive script. That is, one of the six traditional scripts which include Muhaqqaq, Naskhi, Rayhani, Riqā, Tawqi<sup>6</sup> and Thulth. Regardless of the type of script in which the Koran was written, the text was frequently embellished with elaborate illuminated frontispieces and chapter headings in which gold and blue predominate.

### *Gallery 5* **Egypt, Syria, and Spain: Art of the Ayyubids, Mamluks, and Nasrids**

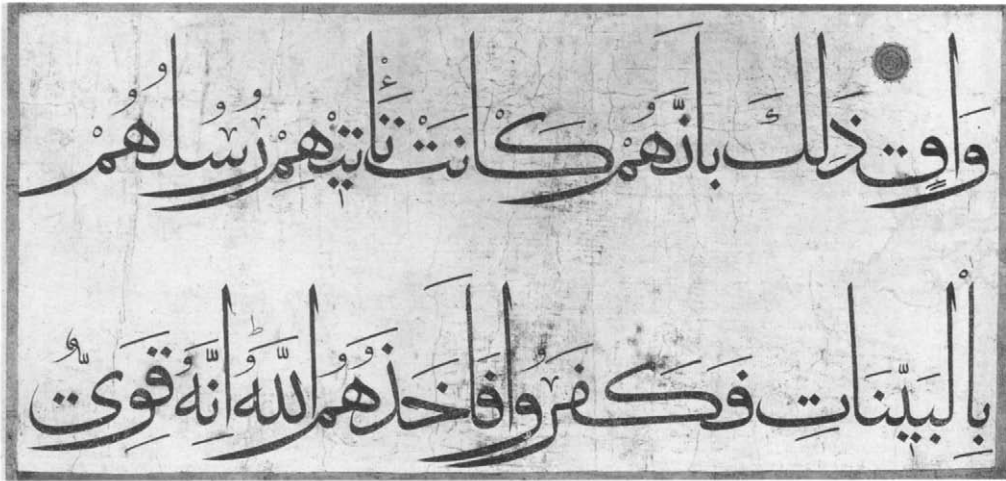
The Ayyubid dynasty was founded by Salah al-Din (Saladin), who had come to Egypt in 1169 in the service of the Zengid ruler of Syria, to fight against the Crusaders. Salah al-Din not only drove the Crusaders from Egypt but in 1171 he deposed the last of the Fatimid Shi'i



*Mosque Lamp. Eastern Mediterranean, Mamluk period, ca. 1285. Free blown and tooled with applied handles, enameled and gilded, pontil on base, H. 10 1/2 in. (26.7 cm). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.985)*

caliphs, making himself master over all the land and restoring Sunni (orthodox) Islam. Within short order he also gained control over Yemen and then Syria and Iraq. He next embarked upon a Holy War against the Crusader states. The Franks were defeated in 1187, and Jerusalem became once more a Muslim city; in subsequent battles Frankish influence in Palestine and Syria was further curtailed. Salah al-Din's power and that of his successors was in large measure based





Fragment of a Giant Koran. Iran, Timurid period, ca. 1430. Ink, gold on paper, L. 38 1/4 in. (97.2 cm).  
Anonymous Gift, 1972 (1972.279)

upon the strength of their armies, which were frequently made up of forces of slave origin. Under later Ayyubid rule, the army was transformed into a corps whose highest offices were reserved for former slaves, usually of Turkish origin. The Ayyubid military organization eventually constituted a foreign military body loyal to a single ruler rather than to a dynasty. In 1250, following the death of the last Ayyubid ruler, his former military slaves, or *mamluks*, had gained sufficient strength to raise one of their own number to the throne.

The Mamluks, as their name implies, were a dynasty of former

military slaves who established in Egypt and Syria the greatest Islamic empire of the later Middle Ages, with Cairo as their capital. In consolidating their power, the early Mamluks had to face two predominant threats. On one hand, the Crusaders still occupied most of the Syrian coast; on the other, the Mongols were moving westward, following their conquest of Baghdad in 1258. The Mamluk army soon defeated the Mongol forces, and by 1291 the last of the Crusader strongholds had also fallen to them.

The system instituted under the Mamluks, whereby they continued to purchase and import slaves who

might rise from their condition, often to the highest offices of the realm, was perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Mamluk state. Thus the Mamluks created a new nobility whose members were distinguished from the native Egyptian and Syrian population by the fact that they were former slaves, bore Turkish names, and spoke a Turkish dialect rather than Arabic.

Throughout the Mamluk period, commercial activity provided the main source of the state's income. Serving as intermediaries in the lucrative trade between the East and the West, the Mamluks grew rich by charging high tariffs on precious commodities, such as silks and spices, which passed through their ports and thence to European markets. A serious blow was dealt to Mamluk commerce in 1498 with the opening of a direct sea route to India, via the Cape of Good Hope. But the final blow to Mamluk power was administered by the Ottomans, who—unlike the Mamluk mounted lancers, swordsmen, and bowmen—utilized an infantry equipped with handguns and cannons. The Mamluk dynasty

came to an end in 1517, and Egypt and Syria became part of the Ottoman Empire.

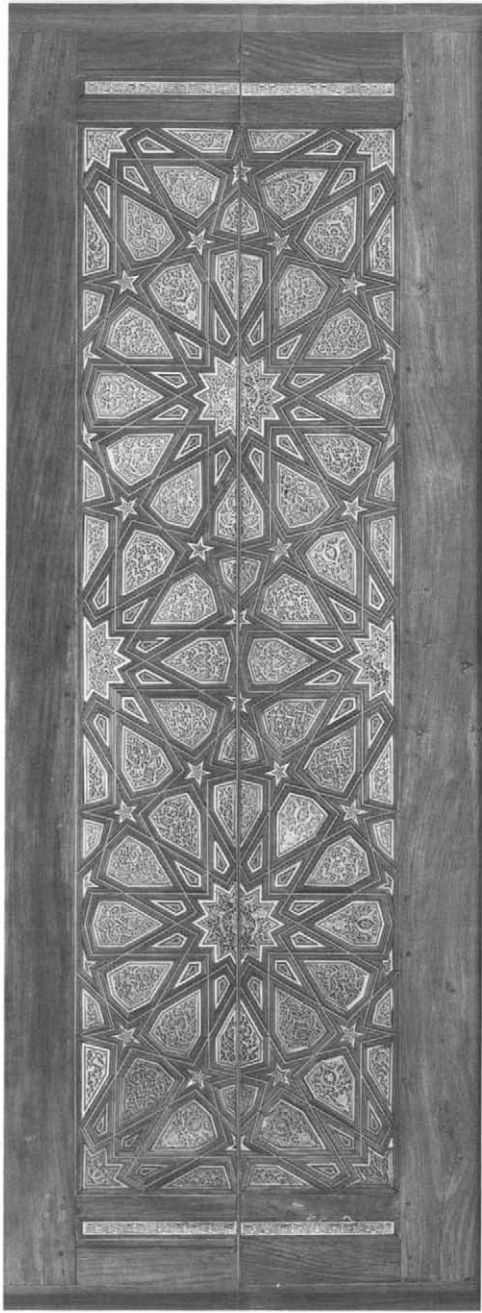
In terms of art and architecture, the Ayyubid period in many ways provided the foundation for the still greater achievements of the Mamluks. Among the decorative arts, Ayyubid inlaid metalwork and pottery represent some of the most notable achievements. Brasswares, inlaid with silver and/or gold, produced by metalworkers trained in a style that had originated in northern Iraq, were frequently commissioned by members of the Ayyubid royal family. Such objects, primarily ewers, basins, trays, and candlesticks (some of which are represented in the Museum's collection) generally bear figural imagery as well as inscriptions. Pottery of the Ayyubid period, particularly that produced in Syria, includes both luster- and underglaze painted wares. A small but stately underglaze polychrome-painted jar of the period, in Gallery 4a, is typically decorated in black, a diffuse cobalt blue, and a dull red. Painting in blue and black under a transparent glaze was first developed in Iran around 1200; the Syrian examples exhibit bolder, sparser

designs. Glazed jars of this type were evidently used as storage vessels, often for rare substances and medicaments. Such vessels, with underglaze-painted blue and black decoration, also continued in use in the succeeding Mamluk period, as is demonstrated by another larger jar on view in this gallery.

While the Mamluks were first and foremost professional soldiers, they were also avid patrons of the arts. Cairo reached the zenith of its greatness and wealth under these rulers, who erected religious and public buildings on an unprecedented scale. Even today the monumental stone façades, high domes, and balconied minarets of their monuments are some of Cairo's most outstanding features. The Mamluks took special interest in the building of religious foundations that they endowed lavishly and supplied with all manner of beautiful furnishings. The Mamluks also commissioned objects for their personal use, which were elaborately inscribed with their names and titles.

Whether intended for a religious edifice or for private use, the works of art commissioned by the

Mamluks were often decorated with their blazons, a heraldiclike device that referred back to the *mamluk's* former position as a military slave. A silver-and-copper-inlaid brass stand, in Gallery 5, bears the emblem of a footed cup on a circular shield; this device identifies the patron as the royal cupbearer, while the accompanying Arabic inscriptions supply the name and titles of this individual. Such heraldic devices likewise characterize more humble ceramic vessels, including a green-glazed bowl decorated with a pear-shaped shield bearing a napkin (the emblem of the master of the royal wardrobe), which is repeated three times. One of the glories of Mamluk art is glassware, which is renowned for its technical virtuosity. In addition to the mosque lamps, of which there are several examples in Galleries 4c and 5, enameled and gilded glass was also commissioned for secular purposes; these include basins, beakers, and rose-water or perfume sprinklers, on view in Gallery 5. Mamluk glassmaking technology was to have an important impact on the development of the Venetian glass industry, which eventually



replaced the Mamluks in catering to the luxury glass market. Mamluk glassmakers were also skilled in other more ancient techniques, such as marvered and combed glass, in which, as in a large covered bowl in this gallery, opaque white glass threads were trailed around and then pressed or marvered into the dark purple vessel; the glass threads were then combed, producing the distinctive patterning. Gallery 5 also includes a superb pair of wooden doors inlaid with elaborately carved ivory polygons set between wooden straps, as well as examples of the Mamluk rug-weaver's craft that constitute a distinct class of carpets decorated with compartmentalized geometric units and woven in jewel-like tones of red, green, and blue.

Following the fall of the Umayyad dynasty of Córdoba in 1031, Spain was divided into several minor principalities, under the *muluk al-Tawa'if*, or Party Kings, which in the twelfth century were brought under the control of two

successive North African Berber dynasties, the Almoravids and Almohads. By the early thirteenth century nearly all of Islamic Spain had been forfeited to the Christian Reconquest, and only the southernmost region of the Iberian peninsula remained in Muslim hands. Here, in this last stronghold of Islam, the Nasrids established their kingdom in Granada, bringing to fruition the final, and perhaps the greatest cultural achievements of Islamic Spain.

Coming to power in 1230, the founder of the Nasrid dynasty established the means by which he and his successors were able to survive not only as the masters of Granada but also as the Muslim rulers of Andalusia. In order to stave off the possibility of Christian attack and to keep his Muslim adversaries at bay, the Nasrid ruler declared himself a vassal of the Christian king of Castile. Despite its precarious political situation, for over two and a half centuries Granada served as a great cultural center of the Muslim West, to which were attracted leading scholars and literati of the day. The later history of the Nasrid dynasty is

*Door. Egypt, Mamluk period, 14th century. Wood inlaid with ivory, H. 65 in. (165.1 cm). Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore. 1891 (91.1.2064)*

filled with internal strife and marred by the gradual erosion of the kingdom. By the mid-fifteenth century much of Nasrid territory was under Christian control, and in 1492, following an onslaught that had lasted ten years, Granada fell to the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella, bringing to an end over seven hundred years of an Islamic presence on the Iberian peninsula.

The most singular artistic achievement of the Nasrid period is the famous Alhambra (*al-qal'a al-hamra*), or the red castle, so-called perhaps on account of the color of the walls and towers that surround the citadel. Situated on a hill overlooking Granada, the Alhambra was conceived as more than a well-fortified palace; it was a royal city. Work on the Alhambra continued for nearly two centuries; the resulting architectural complex, with its intricate succession of rooms and courts, its rich interior façades, and its numerous gardens, fountains, and watercourses, is one of the most magnificent examples of Islamic architecture.

The rich interior settings of the Alhambra are echoed in the Metropolitan Museum's Islamic galleries

by the installation in Gallery 5 of a carved, painted, and gilt wooden ceiling from a slightly later Spanish building. Decorated with a complex geometric design, at the center of the troughlike ceiling is a star-shaped unit from which emanates, in seemingly infinite succession, a variety of geometric forms. In each of the four corners are stalactitelike elements known as *muqarnas*, which is a type of architectural decoration that is specific to the Islamic world. Textiles in Gallery 5 also recall the colorful interior of the Alhambra, as in a woven silk textile decorated with geometric and epigraphic bands and enlivened by the use of a predominantly red and gold color scheme. Nasrid art is noted as well for its lusterware, a technique that dates back to ninth-century Iraq, and which, as has been seen in other galleries, traveled to many parts of the Islamic world. Initially lusterware was manufactured in Málaga, Murcia, Almería, and possibly Granada, but by the fifteenth century Manises, near Valencia, supplanted Málaga as the main center of luster production, thanks to Islamic potters who had been lured north by Christian patrons. These

Spanish luster-painted wares, examples of which are on view in Gallery 5, whether produced under Muslim or Christian patronage, had an important impact on the ceramic industry of Italy, where they gave rise to the development of maiolica. Their shapes too, were influential. In particular a type of cylindrical storage jar, known as an albarello, which is characteristically tapered at the center, allowing for easy removal from a shelf. Such jars, often filled with spices or drugs, were exported to the West, where this vessel type was translated into the common apothecary jar.

### *Gallery 6* **Art of Timurid and Early Safavid Iran**

With the dissolution of the Mongol Ilkhanid Empire in the 1330s, a number of local dynasties once more asserted themselves throughout the eastern Islamic world. By the end of the fourteenth century, however, these minor principalities were swept away by the forces of the last great wave of Central Asi-

atic warriors under the command of Timur (Tamerlane), to be replaced by the Timurid empire.

In 1370, Timur, who belonged to a Turkic-Mongol tribe that settled in Transoxiana, became master of this province and established Samarqand as his capital. Within thirty-five years, he subjugated all of Central Asia, Greater Iran, and Iraq. His further conquests included southern Russia and the Indian subcontinent; while to the west, the Timurid forces defeated the Mamluk army in Syria and that of the Ottomans at Ankara. In 1405, while preparing to invade China, Timur died.

The vast empire that Timur carved proved difficult to keep. Timur's son and successor barely managed to maintain the empire's boundaries, and subsequent Timurid princes sought to establish their own kingdoms, weakening the empire with internal strife and thus marking the beginning of their political decline. The Timurid territories in Iraq and western Iran were gradually swallowed up by the Turkman federations of the Qara Qyunlu (Black Sheep) and Aq Qyunlu (White Sheep) tribes.

Eventually only Khurasan and Transoxiana remained Timurid, and during the remaining years of the dynasty, these were ruled by separate branches of the Timurid family.

While Timur had dedicated his reign to military conquests, his successors were occupied with more peaceful pursuits. Through their singular patronage, the eastern Islamic world became a prominent cultural center, with Herat, the new Timurid capital, as its focal point. The members of the Timurid dynasty were sympathetic to Persian culture, and from throughout Iran they lured artists, architects, and men of letters to their courts. Many of the Timurid princes were prodigious builders—religious institutions and foundations being the main beneficiaries of their building programs. Certain of these rulers were also great patrons of the arts of the book, commissioning manuscripts that were copied, compiled, and illustrated in their libraries. This cultural efflorescence found its ultimate expression in late-fifteenth-century Herat, at the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the last effective Timurid ruler.

The Timurids were the final

great dynasty to emerge from the Central Asian steppe. Their decline dates to the beginning of the sixteenth century when their holdings in Transoxiana were overrun by the Uzbeks, a dynasty of Mongol origin. In 1507 Khurasan also fell to the Uzbeks, and the Timurid dynasty in Iran came to an end (one surviving member of the Timurid house went on to found the Mughal dynasty in India).

In the early sixteenth century Iran was united under the rule of the Safavid dynasty, the greatest Persian dynasty of the Islamic period. The Safavids were descended from a long line of Sufi shaykhs who maintained their headquarters at Ardebil, in northwestern Iran. In their rise to power, they were supported by Turkman tribesmen known as the Qizilbash, or red heads, on account of their distinctive red caps. By 1502 Isma'il Safavi and his Qizilbash warriors had wrested control of Azerbaijan from the Aq Qyunlu, and in the same year Isma'il was crowned in Tabriz as the first Safavid shah. Upon his accession, Shi'i Islam became the official religion of the new Safavid state, which as yet consisted only



of Azerbaijan. Within ten years, however, all of Iran was brought under Safavid dominion.

Throughout the sixteenth century the Safavid empire was threatened by its two powerful neighbors (both orthodox Sunni states), the Uzbeks to the east and the Ottomans to the west; the latter were then at the height of their military prowess. The Uzbeks launched numerous attacks across the Oxus River into Khurasan, where the principal cities of Herat and Mashhad frequently changed hands. Iran's northeastern borders were not stabilized until the end of the century, and then only briefly. On the western front, the widespread support that the Safavids enjoyed among the tribes of Asia Minor alarmed the Ottoman Sultan. At Chaldiron, in 1514, the armies of the sultan won a decisive victory over the forces of the shah. For a time the Ottomans occupied the Safavid capital at Tabriz, and in subsequent years they made frequent incursions into Azerbaijan, forcing the Safavids to move their capital farther east, to the less vulnerable city of Qazvin. The Ottomans were finally expelled

from Iran and Transcaucasia in 1607.

Since Gallery 6 includes primarily manuscript painting from the Timurid and the early Safavid periods, a brief discussion of the art of the book, and book production in general is in order. By comparison with earlier periods and places, there is a good deal of contemporaneous information regarding the production of manuscripts under the Timurids and early Safavids. Manuscripts from this period required wealthy, often royal patrons; those concerned with all aspects of manuscript production worked mainly within the library, essentially an atelier where books were produced. Here, under the direction of the head of the atelier, manuscripts chosen to be copied and illustrated were assigned to various artists and craftsmen. First came the papermakers (the technique of paper manufacture had been introduced to the Islamic world in the mid-eighth century by captured Chinese craftsmen). Once the paper was made, the pages had to be sized and polished to produce a smooth surface across which the pen could glide. But the layout of

the manuscript had to be decided before pen and ink touched the page, including the number of lines per page, where to insert chapter headings (which were often richly decorated), and when and where in the text illustrations were to be introduced. Since many of the most frequently copied Persian texts are written in verse, the two halves of the distiches were often divided into columns, with as many as six columns of text per page, each couplet being read from right to left. After the layout was established, lines had to be ruled for the calligrapher, who copied the text and left appropriate spaces for the illustrations. The calligrapher wrote with a reed pen (*qalam*) whose nib he carefully cut himself since the style of writing is largely dependent on the angle at which the pen is cut. The calligrapher also prepared his own ink, which was generally made from lampblack combined with water, gum Arabic, and other ingredients. Last came the illustrators; two or more may have worked on a single painting.

The artists prepared their own brushes and pigments. For their brushes, Iranian artists preferred the

fur of long-haired white cats that were bred for this purpose. The hairs were attached to quills, and the thickness of the brush was dependent upon the use to which it was put. Given the delicate detail of Persian painting, very fine brushes were often required. The brilliant, jewel-like colors in Persian paintings reflect the use of mineral pigments, including lapis lazuli, cinnabar, and azurite, as well as precious metals like gold and silver. The minerals were finely ground and mixed with a binding medium, such as albumen, glue, or gum arabic. Gold or silver was pounded into leaf and then liquefied and mixed with a binding medium.

As already indicated, several artists could work on a single illustration. Perhaps the most skilled of these designed the painting, which frequently incorporated figures and compositional elements taken directly from earlier paintings or drawings. Unfinished paintings indicate that silver, which blackens with time, used for arms and armor as well as water, and gold, used for the sky, were applied first. Next came the application of the landscape colors—pale greens, pinks,

blues, mauve, and tan. The details, flowers, facial features, elements of costume, architecture, and so on were then applied, and finally touches of gold ornament over the pigment. Only rarely did the master sign his page, sometimes cleverly concealing his signature in the inscription of the painted architectural façade.

The final stage in the production of the manuscript was to gather and sew the pages and to bind them. The leather bookbinding, which could be ornamented with stamped, painted, and gilt decoration, and lined with dyed or painted paper, served as a kind of decorative skin for the manuscript.

The various paintings on display in Gallery 6 represent the classic phase in Persian manuscript illustration. Two series of paintings from two separate manuscripts, one from Timurid Herat, the other from Safavid Tabriz, will provide the focal point of this discussion.

The *Mantiq al-Tayr*, or *Language of the Birds*, a twelfth-century Sufi text about a group of birds searching for unity with God, was copied in Herat, the capital of the Timurid dynasty, in 1486, possibly for the

contemporary ruler and patron of the arts, Sultan Husayn Bayqara. According to the text, as the birds travel along in their search, they tell one another moralistic tales, and these form the subject matter of the eight illustrations. Only four of these illustrations are contemporary with the manuscript; the other paintings were added around 1600. The four Timurid paintings are typical of the style of manuscript illustration associated with late-fifteenth-century Herat. The refinement of composition and palette are the result of over 150 years of synthesis and innovation, which Persian painting underwent from the fall of the Ilkhanid state in the 1330s. Whether in a landscape or in an architectural setting, the artists demonstrate a close observation of detail, but always within a lyrical, artificially constructed world—one that is believable but not substantial. The figures that inhabit this world interact with one another and their environment like actors on a stage. Typically, the color scheme emphasizes earth tones—blues, greens, and browns, with a strategic use of warm colors—reds and oranges—for details, which draw the viewers'

attention to certain areas of the page. The figures, their poses and placement, and the architectural and landscape elements are repeated from earlier compositions, and/or they will be repeated in later paintings of the sixteenth century. The reuse of images and even entire compositions is a typical feature of the working methods of the Persian artist whose art relies on perfection rather than innovation.

The second group of paintings to be considered here is from a now-dispersed copy of the *Shah Namah*, which originally included 258 illustrations. The most profusely illustrated of all extant *Shah Namah* manuscripts, this version was produced in the royal atelier of the Safavid court in Tabriz, between about 1522 and 1540. Dedicated to Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576), the manuscript was actually begun during the reign of Shah Isma'il, Shah Tahmasp's father and the founder of the Safavid dynasty. A number of artists are



"A Funeral Procession": Leaf from the *Mantiq al-Tayr* (*Language of the Birds*) by Farid al-Din 'Attar, calligraphy by Sultan-Ali Mashhadi. Iran (Herat), Timurid period, 1486. Colors, gold on paper, 9 1/4 x 5 3/8 in. (23.5 x 13.7 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1963 (63.210.35)

believed to have participated in the production of this manuscript, including painters who had once worked under Timurid royal patronage in Herat. These artists, who were brought to Tabriz after 1510, worked alongside artists trained in the Turkman style of painting indigenous to northwestern Iran. In many of these *Shah Namah* pages there is a clear preference for the highly refined style of Herat, or else for the more rustic Turkman style. But the most impressive of these paintings are an amalgam of the two styles, resulting in a new Safavid style of painting that represents, for many connoisseurs, the high point of Persian manuscript illustration. Here a more vivid palette and a stronger sense of drama, interaction, and movement enliven the sophisticated, carefully balanced composition associated with Herat. As is typical of Persian painting, however, this is still an artificial, idealized world in which the beautiful spring-like landscape remains undisturbed by the often violent heroic exploits enacted in the foreground.

### Gallery 7 **Later Iranian Art 15th–19th Centuries**

The most distinguished of the Safavid rulers and their greatest patron of the arts was Shah 'Abbas (r. 1587–1629). It was in large measure due to his military and political reforms that the Safavid forces were able finally to defeat the Ottoman army in the early seventeenth century. Under the predecessors of 'Abbas, the Qizilbash, the Turkman tribesmen who had helped the Safavids seize control of Iran, had become a powerful force within the state, controlling all the important military and political offices and eventually threatening the authority of the throne. 'Abbas attempted to diminish their influence by establishing the Ghulamiyya, a corps of *ghulams*, or royal slaves loyal, to the shah. The *ghulams* were of Georgian and Circassian descent and were specially trained in military and civil administration. Through the Ghulamiyya, 'Abbas managed in time to counterbalance and ultimately to eliminate the Qizilbash. In 1597–1598 Shah 'Abbas transferred his capital to Isfahan, in

southern Iran, where he built a new city alongside the old one. The centerpiece of his capital was the Maydan-i Shah (the Royal Square), with the magnificent Masjid-i Shah (Royal Mosque) as the focal point of the entire complex. Shah 'Abbas also encouraged trade with Europe, silk being Iran's main export. Carpets, textiles, and ceramics were also important export items, and these were produced in workshops set up under state patronage in Isfahan and other cities.

Although Shah 'Abbas's successors failed to match his achievements, they continued his traditions for another century. In 1722 part of the Safavid empire was lost as a result of Afghan invasions. Taking advantage of Iran's weakened condition, the Afghan Nadir Shah deposed the last Safavid ruler in 1736, making himself master of Iran (and Afghanistan) and thereby establishing the Afsharid dynasty. The Afsharids ruled until 1795, although following Nadir Shah's death in 1747 their kingdom was confined to Khurasan, while the rest of Iran was contested among rival factions, the most powerful

of which was the Persian Zand dynasty (1750–1794). By 1794, another dynasty, the Qajars, had become undisputed rulers of Iran, establishing their capital at Tehran, where they reigned until 1924.

A wealth of ceramic material survives from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iran, including both architectural decoration and portable objects. Two groups of ceramic tiles that may have once decorated a palace complex in Isfahan from the time of Shah 'Abbas are on view in the center of Gallery 7. They are painted in the  *cuerda seca*  (burnt cord) technique, a technique that allowed the use of multi-colored glazes, but which was faster, cheaper, and more flexible than that of mosaic faience (see the mihrab in Gallery 4c). To prevent the different glazes from running during the firing process, the motifs were outlined with a greasy pigment that burned off in the firing, leaving behind a dull dark line. The elaborate figural compositions depicted here, including a man clothed in a European costume, are closely related to contemporary manuscript and wall paintings.

Among the portable ceramic

objects in this gallery are a number of seventeenth-century vessels whose decoration and color scheme were evidently inspired by imported examples of Chinese blue-and-white porcelains of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which were collected and prized by the rulers and ruling elite of Iran. Such Persian wares may even go so far as to include an imitation of the emperor's reign-mark, or *nianhao*, which was used in China to authenticate and date the porcelains. Chinese blue-and-white porcelains also served as an inspiration for Ottoman pottery in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (see Gallery 8).

Of all Islamic arts, perhaps carpets are the best known throughout the world. Pile and flat-woven rugs have a long history in the Middle East, and they are known from earliest Islamic times. Most famous of all Islamic carpets are those from Iran, however, because of their fragile nature, it is only from the sixteenth century onward that Persian carpets have survived in any quantity. Prior to this, the main sources of information on Persian carpets are textual descriptions as

well as depictions of carpets in manuscript painting. Given the present state of knowledge, the sixteenth to seventeenth century seems to represent the classical period of Persian carpets. Intended to be both beautiful and functional, carpets of this period, examples of which are on view in Galleries 6 and 7, are among the finest works produced at the Safavid court. The most representative type of carpet is one known as the medallion carpet. The layout of these carpets is derived from contemporary and earlier bookbinding and manuscript illumination. Such carpets characteristically display a centralized medallion, often in the form of a sun-disk or star, set within a field of contrasting color. The medallion, divided into quarters, may be repeated in the four corners; strict symmetry is always observed. This compositional type is sometimes combined with repetitive scenes of the hunt, a favorite royal pastime and one of the most common themes in Persian art (as can be seen in Gallery 6).

## Gallery 8 Art of Ottoman Turkey

At the time of its foundation in the early fourteenth century, the Ottoman state was merely one among many small principalities that had sprung up as a result of the disintegration of the Saljuq empire in Anatolia and the subsequent instability caused by Mongol rule. This embryonic Ottoman state, located on the frontiers of the Islamic world, was dedicated to the Holy War against the Byzantine Christians. Gradually, the Ottomans conquered and absorbed the former Byzantine territories in Anatolia and the Balkans, and in 1453 they captured Constantinople, the great capital of eastern Christendom. With the conquest of the Mamluk empire in 1517, the Ottomans ruled over the most powerful state in the Islamic world. By the middle of the sixteenth century, continued military success in an area extending from Central Europe to the Indian Ocean gave the Ottomans the status of a world power.

Ottoman military supremacy was in large measure based on the highly disciplined Janissary corps,

which formed the nucleus of the Ottoman standing army. The members of the Janissary were slaves who were initially drawn from the ranks of Ottoman war captives; later, however, Christian children taken as tribute provided the main source of recruitment. Following their conversion to Islam, and after basic training, the Janissary recruits were instructed in the military arts; a select few were specially educated to occupy posts in the administration or palace service and they sometimes rose to occupy the highest offices in the realm.

Under Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), the empire reached the apogee of its military and political strength. Suleyman's armies conquered Hungary, over which the Ottomans maintained control for more than 150 years, and they advanced as far west as Vienna. To the east, the Ottoman forces wrested control of Iraq from the Persian Safavids; while in the Mediterranean, their navy captured all the principal North African ports, and for a time the Ottoman fleet completely dominated that sea. By the end of Suleyman's reign, Ottoman hege-

mony extended over a large portion of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The age of Suleyman also witnessed the zenith of Ottoman art and culture. Among the most outstanding achievements of this period are the incomparable mosques and religious complexes designed by Sinan, one of the world's greatest architects.

Ottoman power began to decline in the century following Suleyman's death, and for the first time the Ottoman army suffered large-scale military defeat at the hands of the Europeans. The empire was also beset by financial difficulties, due in large measure to a sharp decrease in revenue from the formerly profitable eastern trade, because European merchants found it cheaper to import goods from India and the Persian Gulf via an all-sea route around Africa. Ottoman manufactured goods also suffered from competition with less costly European goods that came into the empire under low tariffs granted as special concessions to the European states. By the eighteenth century the empire had acquiesced to European economic and military power. Following its defeat in



World War I, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled, with only Central Anatolia remaining under Turkish rule; shortly thereafter, in 1922, the sultanate was abolished.

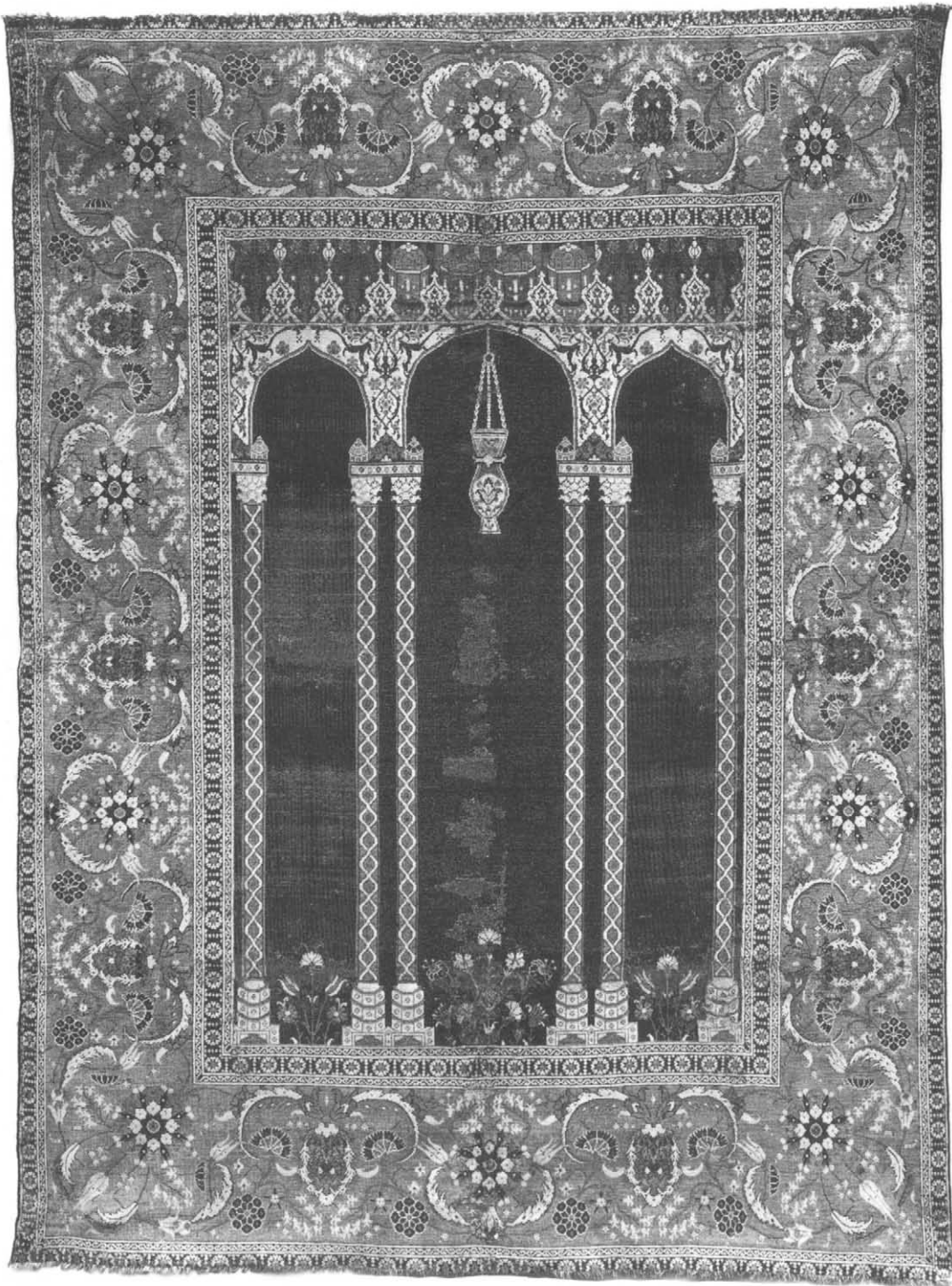
One of the most notable and renowned arts of the Ottoman period is the pottery referred to as Iznik ware, named after the northwestern Anatolian city in which much of this material is believed to have been made. It is not known precisely when the kilns of Iznik began to produce a high-quality, fine white pottery decorated in cobalt blue under a transparent glaze, but most likely before the beginning of the sixteenth century. Such wares were clearly inspired by Chinese blue-and-white porcelains that were imported to Turkey, examples of which formed a part of the Ottoman imperial collection of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. Early blue-and-white Iznik wares were decorated primarily with floral and vegetal motifs of both Far Eastern and Islamic origin. Several examples of such early-sixteenth-century Iznik pottery, some of which demonstrate the addition of turquoise alongside the cobalt blue, are on view in Gallery 8. Sometime

in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the palette of the Iznik potter expanded to include manganese purple, sage green, and a gray that was used to outline the still primarily floral motifs, including stylized lotuses, peonies, carnations, and tulips. An example of this comparatively rare type of Iznik ware, a dish decorated with a central rosette with radiating tulips set against a blue background, is in the Museum's collection. By the middle of the sixteenth century the color scheme of Iznik pottery had achieved its final and best-known form in which a brilliant, thick red, cobalt blue, and grass green predominate against the white ground. Such wares were produced in great quantity, not only in the form of dishes and other vessels but as tiles that were used to decorate the interior of the great Ottoman mosque complexes and palaces of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A number of examples of this type of Iznik ware, both vessels and tile panels, which are decorated with the ubiquitous Ottoman tulip, as well as with plump, lush peonies and carnations, are exhibited in this gallery.



*Plate. Turkey (Iznik), Ottoman period, mid-16th century. Composite body, painted and glazed, D. 11 3/4 in. (29.8 cm). Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.732)*

Many of the same types of floral, vegetal, and abstract ornament found in Iznik pottery were repeated in contemporary textiles and carpets installed in this same gallery. Also on view is a late-sixteenth-century Ottoman prayer rug that is the most outstanding such example in the collection. Its main decoration, in the form of a stylized architectural façade composed of three arches with a lamp suspended in the central arch, is especially appropriate for a prayer rug. Like the enameled glass mosque lamps in Galleries 4c and 5, the rug's decoration is a visual re-creation of the



Koranic Verse of the Light (XXIV.35), in which the Light of God is likened to the light of a lamp suspended in a niche.

### *Gallery 9* **Art of Mughal India**

Northwestern India was first penetrated by Muslim armies early in the eighth century, and it was through the northwest, where the passes of the Kabul river valley permitted easy access from Afghanistan, that subsequent Islamic invasions of India were launched. The Ghaznavid dynasty of Afghanistan used this route to establish their Indian kingdom in the eleventh century, and later Islamic dynasties secured possession of the northern plain, or Hindustan, whose capital was Delhi. The period from the early thirteenth century up until the advent of Mughal rule in the early sixteenth century is generally known

*Prayer Rug. Turkey (Bursa or Istanbul), Ottoman period, late 16th century. Silk warp and weft, wool and cotton pile, 5 ft. 5 in. x 4 ft. 2 in. (1.65 x 1.27 m). The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.51)*

as the Sultanate period, although from the mid-fourteenth century Islamic states were also established in the Deccan, and in Kashmir and Bengal. Timur's conquest of 1398 did not establish a long-lived government at Delhi; rather, the rule of northern India fell in time to the Lodi, an Afghan tribe. In 1526 Babur, a prince of the house of Timur, deposed the Lodi sultan and eventually reconquered the territories formerly won by his famous ancestor. The dynasty founded by Babur, the Mughal dynasty, ruled over the greatest Islamic state of the Indian subcontinent.

As a youth, Babur was unable to maintain his sovereignty over the small Central Asian state bequeathed to him by his father. Instead, he turned his attention to the southeast, where he occupied Kabul in 1504, and almost immediately thereafter embarked on his conquest of India. By 1527 Babur had defeated both the forces of the Lodi sultan and those of the Hindu confederacy. However, at the time of his death, in 1530, he had not yet transformed his territorial acquisitions into an empire. This task was left to Humayun, Babur's son and suc-

cessor, who unfortunately lacked the military genius of his father and soon forfeited the Mughal foothold in India. Only through Persian military intervention did he manage to regain the capital cities of Agra and Delhi in 1555. But it is Humayun's son Akbar who can be credited with the real foundation of the Mughal Empire.

During his reign, which lasted nearly fifty years (1556–1605), Akbar established dominion over northern and central India, as far east as Bengal. He secured the northwestern frontier, gateway to India for so many previous invasions, through his control of Kabul. Akbar's most important territorial gain was the sultanate of Gujarat, in the west, which provided the Mughal empire with enormous wealth from its commercial centers, as well as access to the Arabian Sea and hence opportunity for lucrative trade both with the Europeans and with the Ottoman empire. Unlike his grandfather, Akbar succeeded in consolidating the empire that he had won and in establishing a strong administrative system. Akbar was also the first great Mughal patron of the arts. Despite the fact

that he is said to have been illiterate, Akbar assembled a royal atelier from which he commissioned numerous illustrated manuscripts that incorporate Persian, Indian, and even European elements.

Under Akbar's son Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), Europeans and particularly the British began to receive important trading concessions in India. During the reign of Shah Jahan (1627–1658), the son of Jahangir, the Mughal empire reached the height of its splendor and opulence. Shah Jahan was a prodigious builder; the most famous of his constructions is the Taj Mahal in Agra, which he built as a tomb for his wife and, it seems, as a memorial to himself. In 1658 Awrangzeb, Shah Jahan's son, usurped the throne and imprisoned his father. Under Awrangzeb (r. 1659–1707), the boundaries of the empire reached their greatest extent; the wars that he undertook in the south to subjugate the Deccan, however, caused irreparable damage to the central administration, to the military, and to the economy.

Awangzeb was the last of the great Mughal emperors. His succes-



"A Nilgai": Folio from an Album by Mansur. India, Mughal period, ca. 1615. Folio 10 x 15 1/2 in. (25.4 x 39.4 cm). Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.13)

sors could not prevent the deterioration of Delhi's central authority, nor could they curtail the growing influence and power of the British East India Trading Company. The Mughal dynasty came to an end in 1858 when the British assumed direct rule over India.

Despite the comparatively early Islamic presence in India, there is relatively little evidence of Muslim patronage of the arts of the book there until the fifteenth century, during the Sultanate period. Manu-

script illustration from this time reflects a variety of influences, both Islamic and indigenous Indian, but most notably that of Persian painting, as is evident in several paintings from a fifteenth-century *Shah Namah* on view in Gallery 9. Subsequent manuscript painting in India, under the patronage of the Mughal dynasty, demonstrates a mingling of Persian elements with an indigenous Indian style of painting. In fact, the artists who worked for Akbar, the first great Mughal

patron of the arts of the book, included Persians as well as Indian Muslims and Hindus. This collaborative process helped to foster the development of a specifically Mughal style, which was initiated under Akbar and is demonstrated by pages from diverse late-sixteenth-century manuscripts displayed in this gallery. This style of painting was further developed and refined during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, as is reflected in the paintings from a seventeenth-century album also exhibited in Gallery 9.

Mughal imperial albums, as in the present example, were often added to over a period of years spanning the reigns of several rulers; they were commissioned and compiled for the pleasurable purpose of leisurely contemplation and perusal. Such albums include pages of paintings and calligraphies set within beautifully decorated borders. In this instance the paintings are primarily datable to the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The paintings produced for Jahangir are especially remarkable for their intense realism and attention to detail. These include portraits of

the emperor, his family, and courtiers, as well as highly individualized, closely observed portrait-like paintings of birds and animals, for example, the nilgai, or blue bull, exhibited here. Such animals must have been painted from life, possibly in the imperial zoo that Jahangir had built.

This strong interest in naturalism, as reflected in the painting of the nilgai, is repeated in the hilt of a dagger in the form of a nilgai's head, on view in the same gallery. Carved from nephrite, the natural curve of the animal's neck is here accentuated to give the hilt an appropriate length and form. This dagger hilt, which terminates above the blade in a flower, is also an example of the often playful manner in which the Islamic artist transforms an animate being into an inanimate object.

Colorful carpets and textiles were typically used to furnish and decorate Mughal royal residences. Inspired by manuscript illustration, Indian carpets such as the large, late-seventeenth-century cotton and wool pile example in Gallery 9, are closely related to their Persian counterparts, which likewise com-

bine landscape elements with birds and animals, both real and imaginary.

### *Gallery 10* **The Nur al-Din Room**

Islamic domestic architecture, whether a palace or a more ordinary dwelling, generally presents a comparatively austere façade that often belies the decorative riches within. This is an architecture that emphasizes privacy, focusing on the carefully secluded interior life of the inhabitants, as is demonstrated by this room from a mansion in Damascus built in 1707, during the Ottoman period. Serving as a winter reception room, the colored inlaid marble, gilt and painted wood, stained-glass windows, built-in shelves, ceramic tilework, and calligraphic panels are all typical of eighteenth-century upper-class Syrian homes and palaces, examples of which are still preserved in Damascus and Hama. Here, the master of the house could relax in privacy with his guests, to whom refreshments would be served from trays resting on low, portable tables.

The soft, gurgling sound of water flowing from the fountain, which helped to humidify the room, adds to the delightful ambience.

*Carpet (detail). India, Mughal period, early 17th century. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile, 27 ft. 4 in. x 9 ft. 6 in. (8.36 x 2.9 m). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.858)*



## Glossary

### Abbasids

early Islamic dynasty,  
750–1258.

### Allah

the word for god in Arabic.

### arabesque

all over decorative pattern based on highly abstract leaves or half leaves applied to winding stems or scroll work; arabesques were used throughout Islamic decorative arts, as well as in architectural decoration.

### Ayyubids

dynasty that ruled Egypt and Syria, 1169–1250.

### caliph

from Arabic *khalifa*, meaning successor (to Muhammad); the title used by early Islamic rulers.

### Fatimids

dynasty that ruled North Africa, and then Egypt and Syria, 909–1171.

### Ghaznavids

dynasty that ruled eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and northern India, 977–1186.

### *hajj*

the pilgrimage to Mecca required of all Muslims.

### *hijra*

literally, emigration; it denotes the flight of the Prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622; it also marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

### Ilkhanids

dynasty of Mongol origin that ruled over Greater Iran, 1256–1335.

### imam

Leader in the congregational prayer; when capitalized, it refers to the spiritual guide of the Shi'is.

### Islam

Arabic word meaning submission (to God), it is the name for the religion founded by the Prophet Muhammad; it also refers to the Muslim community.

### *iwan*

a vaulted hall, often opening onto a courtyard, in religious and secular structures.

### Ka'ba

shrine in Mecca (within the central courtyard of the Great Mosque), which is the focal point of Muslim prayer and pilgrimage.

### khutba

sermon delivered by the imam in the mosque to the Friday congregation; in medieval Islam the khutba was said by, or in the name of, the caliph.

### Koran

the holy book of Islam.

### Mamluks

dynasty of former slaves who ruled Egypt and Syria, 1250–1517.

### *masjid*

literally “place of prostration,” a mosque.

### mihrab

niche in the qibla wall of the mosque, emphasizing the direction of prayer.

### minaret

towerlike structure from which the call to prayer is given by the muezzin



**minbar**

seat or pulpit, first used by the Prophet, which came to be used in Friday mosques for the pronouncement of the khutba.

***mina'i***

from Arabic *mina*, meaning glaze; a type of overglaze painting technique in Islamic pottery.

**mosque**

any place of Muslim communal worship.

**muezzin**

the person who calls the faithful to prayer, often from the minaret.

**Mughals**

dynasty that ruled India, 1526–1858.

***muqarnas***

stalactite or honeycomblike units used as a decorative device in Islamic architecture, especially in and around domes and vaults.

**Muslim**

literally, “one who submits”; someone who adheres to the faith of Islam.

**Nasrids**

dynasty that ruled the Spanish kingdom of Granada, 1230–1492.

**Ottomans**

Turkish dynasty that ruled over Anatolia, and then much of eastern Europe and the Middle East, 1281–1924.

**Qajars**

dynasty that ruled Iran, 1779–1924.

**qibla**

direction of prayer in Islam, toward Mecca and the Ka'ba.

**Safavids**

dynasty that ruled Iran, 1501–1732.

**Saljuqs**

general name for several dynasties of Turkic origin that ruled Iran, as well as Anatolia and Syria, in the 11th–13th centuries; dynasty that ruled eastern Iran and Central Asia, 819–1005.

**shaykh**

spiritual head of Sufi order, or tribal leader.

***shi'at 'Ali***

party of 'Ali, son-in-law of Muhammad and fourth caliph, whose followers formed the sect of Shi'ism.

**Shi'is**

members of the heterodox sect of Islam, Shi'ism, who recognize 'Ali, and his descendants as the rightful successors to Muhammad.

**Sufis**

Islamic mystics, both Sunni and Shi'i.

**Sunnis**

followers of the “tradition,” who believe that the Prophet's successor should be elected; approximately 85% of all Muslims are Sunni.

**Timurids**

Central Asian dynasty that ruled Greater Iran, 1370–1507.

***'ulama***

collective body of individuals knowledgeable in Muslim belief and dogma.

**Umayyads**

early Islamic dynasty, 661–750; Spanish branch, 756–1031.

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Textile (detail). Spain or North Africa, 14th–15th century.  
Silk, compound weave, 39½ x 45¼ in. (100.3 x 114.9 cm).  
Fletcher Fund, 1946 (46.156.16)

