Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

Volume
I

اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يُحِبُّ اِذَا عَمِلَ اَحَدُكُمْ عَمَلاً اَنْ يُتْقِنَهُ

"God Almighty expects excellence in all works performed."

- saying of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. (*hadith*)

Dedicated to A. S.

Note to reader:
BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) are used in place of BC and AD for dating.
Diacritical marks do not appear in the transliteration of Arabic, Iran and Turkic names and words.

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Cover illustration: *Tilework detail of the tree of life motif on the side pillar of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia* iwan.

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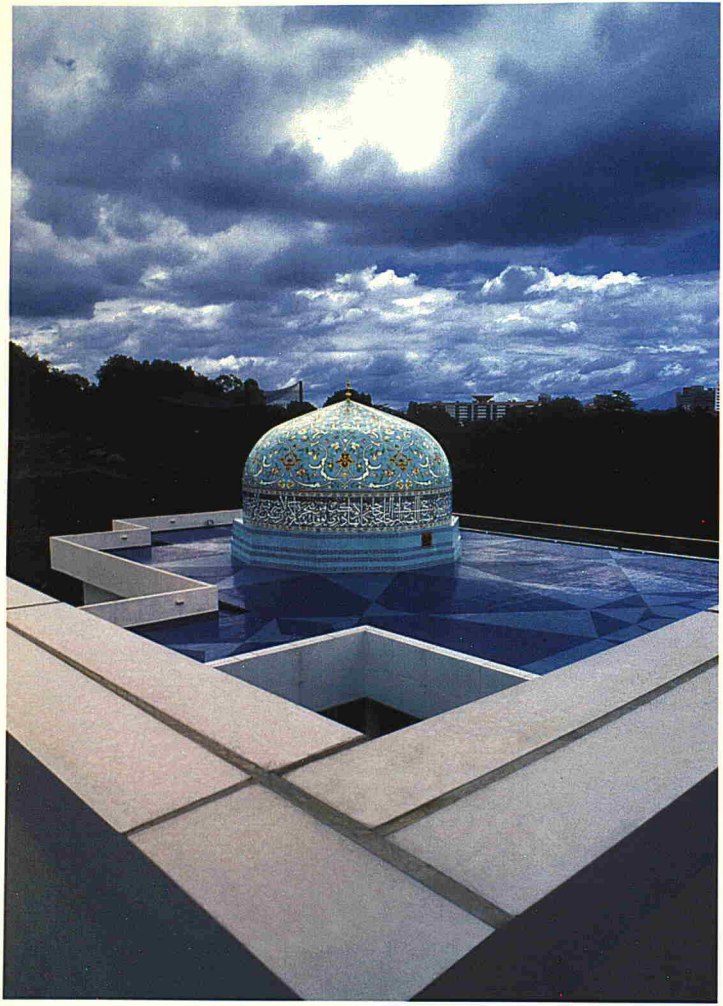


Foreword

When I first embarked on this project, my knowledge of Islamic Art was somewhat limited, but as I gained more exposure in this art form, I was astounded by how far reaching its influence has been and the contribution it has made towards the civilisation of the world as a whole.

My personal wish is to see that our children and the children of the world appreciate their rich heritage and understand that we have more in common as a people than we do differences; that Islam is very much a "living" religion that promotes peace. In order to understand others, we need to understand ourselves first. Material enrichment alone should not be the ultimate goal. It is the enrichment of the soul that needs nurturing. That which is foreign need not necessarily be frowned upon nor exalted but be seen as an extension of another's self-expression or interpretation of his or her culture and belief.

It is my belief that intolerance comes about through lack of exposure and understanding of another's culture. It is my hope that with the existence of this institution that the public would seize this opportunity to gain more insight into the rich culture and tradition of Islamic Art, which has no cultural boundaries. Islam is not only a religion but a way of life. As evident from the artefacts on display in this museum, Islam does not purport to eradicate one's culture but, instead, enriches it. If these artefacts are able to marry both culture and belief so successfully, let it be a lesson to us that function and form, culture and belief, and above all, tolerance and understanding can co-exist and lead to peace and harmony.

Even the architectural concept of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is a departure from the norm as emphasis was placed on light and modernity so as not to detract from the artefacts whilst still maintaining the very essence of Islamic architectural elements throughout the building.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the government of Malaysia, in particular, its Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad for giving the Albukhary Foundation the trust and honour in building and managing the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia as a non-profit institution.

I hope the museum will be a learning centre and a place for Muslims and non-Muslims to congregate and exchange ideas for the betterment of mankind irrespective of religious backgrounds. Lastly, my prayers to the Almighty Allah s.w.t. to ensure that the good work of this museum will continue.

Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Albukhary
Executive Chairman, Albukhary Foundation

Introduction

طَلَبُ العِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

"The search for knowledge is an obligation laid on every Muslim."

The history of Islamic civilisation began in the 7th century CE with the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.. The year 622 marked the first year of *Hijrah* and the beginning of the Muslim calendar. Despite the early opposition met by the Prophet from the people of Arabia, the religion of Islam and the caliphal empire spread quickly, conquering the lands of the Arabian Peninsula and the Hijaz, into Egpyt and Iran. By the middle of the 8th century, Islamic rule had expanded to Spain where the capital of Cordoba became the most advanced European city of its time. Islam continued to grow and various empires arose and toppled each other contributing to the development of a unified Islamic culture and artistic character.

The Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. once said that "The search for knowledge is an obligation laid on every Muslim" (*hadith*). We are thus fulfilling an obligation of a sacred nature when we do what we can to preserve the fragments of an amazing past and collectively share with others their stories and historical accounts. This vision to collect, preserve, display and educate others on Islamic art and civilisation is now a realisation with the setting up of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, dedicated to the works of Islamic civilisations and peoples. The journey I took to arrive at this point, just over three years after the museum's launching, has been an interesting one and an ultimate learning process; one which I will now share.

The summer of 1991 was when it began; the birth of what was to become a new phase in the many chapters of my life. As clear as if it were yesterday, I recall travelling on my bicycle from my office in the centre of Florence to my home on the other side of the city, a common practice of Florentines and part of my daily routine. The time was 1:00 p.m. when all offices in the city were closed for lunch. As I crossed the old Ponte Vecchio bridge, I suddenly came across a group of Malaysians, an uncommon sight in Florence, a city well-known for millions of tourists passing through every year.

I recognised a member of the group, a man at the Malaysian Embassy in Rome, and asked him what had brought him to Florence. Quietly, in soft-spoken tones, he replied, "I am here with the Prime Minister who is on a private visit to the city for a day". Without hesitation I asked him if it was possible for me to give my greetings to the Prime Minister. With his consent, I put my bicycle aside and, interrupting his excursion on the Ponte Vecchio, the old bridge famous for its jewellery shops, I was granted an informal audience with the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad. We spent a few minutes in polite conversation. I was then presented with the name card of one of the Prime Minister's aides and off I went on my bicycle home.

It was not until about three years later in 1994 that this chance encounter led to a second meeting that truly saw the start of my involvement in the Islamic arts. I received a call from Dato' Abang Abu Bakar, then Minister in the Prime Minister's office in charge of religious affairs, seeking an assistant for the World Islamic Civilisation Festival 1994 (WICF 94) and

exhibition dedicated to the Islamic Arts and organised by the Malaysian government. The exhibition officiated by the Prime Minister was a huge success with a great number of visitors. It was at this point that I realised that the Malaysian public had a tremendous amount of interest in Islamic civilisation and craved more information about this subject hitherto little exposed in Malaysia.

Several months after the WICF 94, back in Italy, I was offered a complete collection of Islamic gold coins by an art dealer. The significance of this collection prompted me to think that it would be better if it was acquired by the Government of Malaysia for exhibition by a museum and made accessible to the public. I decided with a friend to write to the Prime Minister's office in 1996 and requested an appointment to see the Prime Minister with the intention of presenting the coin collection to the Malaysian Government. In all honesty, I never imagined that the Prime Minister of Malaysia, with his extremely busy schedule, would grant me an appointment. To my surprise, I received a letter requesting the reason for the meeting and one later confirming the date of the meeting.

I remember very well how nervous I was going into the the Prime Minister's office, explaining to him about the coin collection. He listened carefully and replied that it would be a nice idea for Malaysia to acquire the collection but that the country needed first to have an Islamic Museum. Though the Malaysian Islamic Centre (JAKIM) was well known for possessing a vast collection of Islamic art, it did not incorporate an art museum. The Prime Minister shared with me his vision of establishing a museum of international standard that would achieve worldwide recognition. In addition to this, he also expressed a belief that the Malaysian private sector should be more pro-active in the development of such a museum with full support coming from the Malaysian government.

A few days later, I met with my brother, Syed Mokhtar, chairman of the Albukhary Foundation, and over dinner related to him my meeting and discussion with the Prime Minister. Without hestitation, he suggested that the Albukhary Foundation undertake the responsibility of building and developing the museum for the government as a gift to the Malaysian people and as a legacy to future generations. Without further

ado, I requested a meeting with the Prime Minister to give him the news that the Albukhary Foundation had volunteered to construct and manage a museum dedicated to Islamic art. During the next few months, we surveyed possible locations in and around the city of Kuala Lumpur for an area deemed suitable for the building. Once identified, the site was proposed to the Malaysian Government and following approval on 16th May 1997/09 Muharram 1418H, an agreement signing and ground-breaking ceremony was officiated by the Prime Minister.

Subsequently, we worked with an architect in designing and constructing a building that would be one of the landmark buildings of Kuala Lumpur. Instead of appointing a museum consultant for the project, I took it upon myself to do the groundwork personally in order to understand how a museum is built and managed. I embarked on an extensive series of travels, from North America to Europe to the Middle East, to meet with museum professionals and study museum structures and management systems. I spent months in New York City at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, studying their layouts and every detail and angle of their respective buildings. I was fortunate to receive excellent advice from the staff of these museums.

From observing American methods of running museums, I then moved to study the museums in Europe. In London, I divided my time between the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum. The renowned Islamic collections of both these venerable museums contributed greatly to my understanding of Islamic Arts and its importance to the world. I chose to extend my research to the Louvre in Paris, following the completion of recent renovation in their galleries. While in Paris, I visited the Institut du Monde Arabe, which was located in a relatively new building with facilities that paralleled that of our proposed museum.

It is nearly impossible to recount exactly how many more museums I visited and how each visit brought with it newfound knowledge. All that I learned contributed significantly to the initial design and planning of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. At the conclusion of my research and survey of international museums, the original size envisioned for our

museum had swelled from 130,000 square feet to nearly 300,000 square feet. The necessity for such a large area has often been questioned. Yet, after only three years in operation, we are already beginning to run out of space. In addition to the permanent and temporary galleries, the museum houses such facilities as the Education Centre, Auditorium, Children's Library, Patron's Lounge, Volunteer Centre, Scholars' Library, Conservation Centre, Restaurant/Café and Museum Shop.

Once the building plans were finished, a mock-up of the museum building was presented to the Prime Minister. Based on modern architectural principles, the building is finished with details in a range of Islamic styles. It was the Prime Minister's suggestion to employ craftsman from Uzbekistan and Iran, famed in the Islamic world for their rich artistic heritage and continued practice of traditional crafts. After travelling back and forth between Uzbekistan and Iran, we eventually forged relationships with the necessary bodies which led to the bringing down of forty skilled craftsmen from both countries to produce the wonderful ornamentation of the museum building. The tilework gracing the front portal of the museum and the great domes were commissioned from the Iranians, while the museum fresco designs inside the domes were produced by the Uzbeks. The stupendous result of the incorporation of these two art forms with the modern lines of the museum building was more than we could have asked for and can be seen in this book.

As the museum building steadily took shape, we also embarked on developing the collection of Islamic art and artefacts that it would house. We have become the custodians of the collection of the Islamic Centre (JAKIM) which was bequeathed to us by the Malaysian Government at the official launch of the museum on 12th December 1998. Comprising a total of 5,694 pieces, of which over 3,000 are manuscripts and Qur'ans, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia has actively built upon this core in line with our policy to present a conclusive overview of each great civilisation of Islam and represent as many of the art forms over as wide a time line as possible. Our first acquisition was a complete set of 30 *Judz* of an 18th century Chinese Qur'an. In addition to the pieces we acquired ourselves, we have benefited from the generosity of private collectors

in our custody on loan. Within three years, the collection has grown to over 6,500 artefacts and continues to expand. It currently consists of a wide range of objects, including pottery and ceramics, Qur'ans, religious manuscripts, secular documents, poetry and literary works on paper, miniature paintings, scientific treaties and instruments, metalwork, architectural models of important Islamic buildings, wood and stone building elements, ceramic tiles, textiles, costumes, weaponry, armour, jewellery, and precious objects carved out of jade, ivory and wood.

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is now in its second stage of development with the creation of its own Conservation Centre. Not only will the IAMM Conservation Centre be one of a kind in Malaysia, it is set to be one of the premier institutions for art conservation and restoration in the region. Operation is expected to commence by the end of 2002.

There is a pronounced need for the preservation of Islamic art in the world. Only in the past two centuries has a small interest in the arts of Islamic lands existed, though this interest has increased significantly over the last few decades. In this region, however, the field of Islamic art is still a relatively new one. It is, indeed, a matter of some concern that most of the great Islamic collections in the world are located in the West and not the East. In the Middle East there are some great private collections and a small number of museums that showcase Islamic art. In the region of Southeast Asia, however, few can claim comparable collections. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, thus, is somewhat of a novelty in Malaysia and will be a museum of immense value in the Asian world of art. We consider our collections an important part of our cultural heritage and necessary for historical awareness and appreciation. Perhaps, no less noble is the intent to preserve and display artefacts of supreme beauty.

At the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, we combine Western and Eastern scholarship and artistic ideals to create displays and collection interpretations that we feel are best suited to reach as wide an audience range as possible — from children to adults, local visitors to foreign tourists, Muslim and non-Muslim. This book is part of our attempt to educate the public about Islamic art, history and culture. We, thus, feel that a book on the museum and the collections would be incomplete without an introduction to what we term Islamic art and an explanation of the history behind the great civilisations of Islam.

The next few pages will take you on a visual journey through the museum building. Then, prior to the collection, we offer you an insight into the philosophy behind art and the Muslim sense of aesthetics. Assisted by our Head Curator, Dr. Mandana Barkeshli, you will gain an understanding of the complexities of representing the intangible. This is then followed by an overview of Islamic history and the progression and development of artistic trends and innovations. Many Islamic dynasties have been overshadowed by the later more prominent ones — the Ottomans, the Mughals — which happen to be more well-known mainly because it was at this time that the Western world had increased contact with these empires through trade, war and imperial expansion. Yet, it is important that we learn more about the very first empires of Islam; the caliphates and the spread of Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula to North Africa and to Spain. As we trace the growth of these empires, we become increasingly aware of the great diversity of the ancient Islamic world and the interactions between Islam and the other prominent religions of that particular era.

Finally, this book takes us to the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia's collections. Each of our permanent galleries is presented here, with a selection of some of our finest pieces. We hope that this book will serve as a lovely memento of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. Not only will you be able to possess, in a sense, a portion of our collections, but we hope this book also manages to satisfy a small part of your soul in its quest for knowledge and whets your appetite for further artistic triumphs and historical sagas we will continue to bring you.

Syed Mohamad Albukhary
Director

Front entrance of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

Architectural scale model of
the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia ~ The Building

Located in one of the greenest areas of Kuala Lumpur, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM) is set within the parameters of the city, on a sloping hill away from the bustling crowds and noisy streets. Its stark white façade and blue domes create a sense of calm and order that is conveyed throughout the entire museum interior. As a museum dedicated to the preservation of ancient cultures, built at a time when the world was at the brink of the 21st century, it was imperative that the IAMM be an environment that was sleek and modern and at the same time successful in displaying the artefacts of brilliant past civilisations to their best advantage. As a museum of Islamic art, the great architectural achievements of Islamic lands were of profound influence in the decoration of the building and their features were to become essential elements of the museum's character.

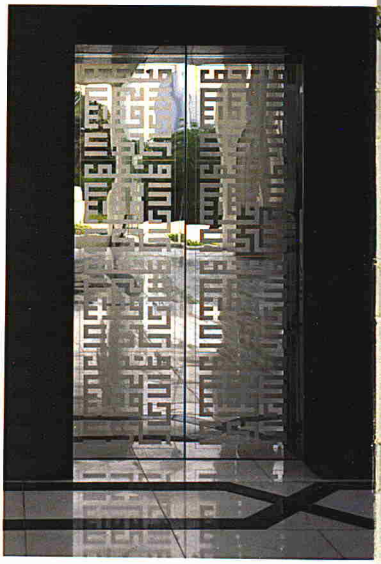
The design of the museum building was conceptualised by an Italian architect, Roberto Monsani, and the Malaysian architectural firm, Kumpulan Senireka Sdn Bhd. The result is an imposing, geometric structure, lightened by its use of glass panelling and lofty dimensions, and divided into three separate wings over a gently sloping land area. Clad in gridded panels of white marble, the IAMM is surrounded by tropical foliage. With its shimmering glass windows, white façades and glittering blue domes, it stands as a welcoming oasis of Islamic art and culture. Its white marble walls recall the opulent monuments of Mughal India, whilst its grand portico and impressive size bring to mind the great mosques and *caravanserais* of medieval Iran.

Main façade of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia with marble panels of *Kufi Banaie* script.

Kufi Banaie in marble.

Kufi Banaie in wood.

As one approaches the building, the name of the museum is spelt out in simple black characters with the museum logo at its left. The otherwise plain white walls are embellished by panels made up of repeated grids in the name of the museum again; this time, in Arabic in the complex geometric forms of the *Kufi Banaie* script. Also known as the *Mo-aqali* script, *Kufi Banaie* is an ancient and angular form of the traditional Kufic, popularly used for architectural inscriptions and particularly suited to be rendered in brickwork and adapted to masonry. In *Kufi Banaie*, the inscription, in this case, the name of the museum, is formed in angular Kufic that is rotated within a square frame. This square motif is found repeatedly throughout the museum fashioned in a variety of mediums.



Elevator doors adorned with *Kufi Banaie*.

Left pillar of the *iwan* at the main entrance.

Museum visitors pass through the great front portal, the *iwan*, from the main street into the museum lobby. An architectural form originating in pre-Islamic Sassanian times, the *iwan* serves as a monumental entrance to normally sacred places. During medieval Islamic times, the construction of colossal entrances and gateways was seen as testimony to a ruler's power and strength. A vaulted hallway with a pointed arched opening encased within a rectangular frame, the *iwan* can be seen in numerous buildings throughout Central Asia and Iran in particular. In its physical appearance, the *iwan* can be associated with the *mihrab*, the *qibla* marker of mosques. It symbolically imbues a sense of reverence to the building whose façade it graces, creating a hallowed entrance portal to the place of prayer which in turn acts as a spiritual gateway for the faithful. The *iwan* of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, however, is re-created in an abstract form, where the vaulted hall and pointed archway no longer exist, leaving only the rectangular framework. Not only does this form continue the repetition of rectangular frames carried throughout the entire building's architecture, it creates a quietly restrained façade for a building devoted to the preservation of Islamic art and culture that is inextricably bound to religion, yet is preserved and presented in an ultimately aesthetic approach that reinforces the museum's position as a temple of art and not an institution of religious dogma.

The *iwan* is dressed in mosaic tilework, painstakingly produced by Iranian tileworkers. Tilework began to be used extensively in architectural ornamentation in Central Asia particularly during the time of the Il-Khans (1256-1353) and Timurids (1370-1506), although brickwork with ceramic embellishment had already been in use by the 12th century during the Seljuq period. The 15th century saw the apex of tile ornamentation and numerous buildings still remain in evidence of this in Samarqand, Herat and Tabriz. During the Safavid (1501-1732) period in Iran, tilework further developed to the point where entire buildings were fully adorned in decorative tiles with a uniformity in motifs that were manifested on all surfaces. The mosaic tile technique involved the use of individual tiles, cut into the desired shapes and fitted together onto outlined patterns created on the building surface. These tiles were glazed and fired separately to create their individual colours. According to the 12th century Persian poet Nezami, the *Haft Rang* or Seven Colours traditionally used in building decoration corresponded with the astronomical seven heavenly bodies: black, yellow or gold, green, red, blue, sandalwood or brown and white. The museum is ornamented with tiles of yellow, light and dark green, cobalt blue (ultramarine or *lajvardina*), turquoise, a brownish red, pink and white; contemporary versions of the traditional colours that characterise the tilework of the most magnificent monuments in modern day Uzbekistan, Iran and Afghanistan.

The columns of the *iwan* are adorned with coiling floral tendrils and cartouches, emanating from the tree of life motif prevalent in Central Asian tilework. The tree of life has held symbolic meaning since the pre-Islamic era, representing the divinity of the creator. The upper section of the *iwan* frame consists of a calligraphic frieze in white *Thuluth* script on the same floral and arabesque ground of the other surfaces.

Detail of the *iwan* tilework showing floral designs.

Frontal view of the *iwan* at the main entrance of the museum.

Verse 20 of the *Surah Al-Ankabut* (chapter 29) proclaims a greeting to all visitors to the museum:

قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ بَدَأَ ٱلْخَلْقَ ۚ
ثُمَّ ٱللَّهُ يُنشِئُ ٱلنَّشْأَةَ ٱلْءَاخِرَةَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
سورة العنكبوت ٢٠

"Travel through the earth and see how Allah originates the creation. Moreover, Allah will cause a later creation to grow. Indeed, Allah has power over all things."

The Rehal Terrace located outside the museum's auditorium.

Detail of the foliate arabesque motifs on the urn.

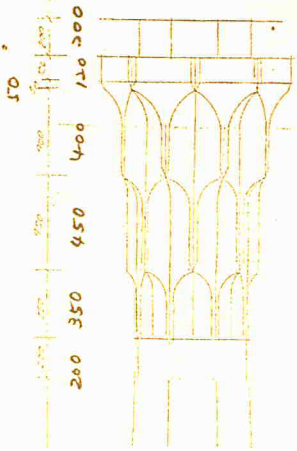
Carved stone water trough based on those of the Imam Mosque in Isfahan.

Museum visitors can also enter the IAMM via a second entrance located at the side of the building that leads directly into the second floor of the museum. The building's location on sloping land necessitated a multi-level structure with landscaped areas on each plane. Winding roads take visitors to the various gardens scattered around the vicinity of the museum. Thus, the second entrance provides visitors with easy access to the building without having to descend to the main front entrance. Situated towards the rear of the museum building is the museum auditorium and Rehal Terrace. Like the museum's fountain garden and viewing terrace, the Rehal Terrace offers tired visitors a moment's respite from the heat of the Malaysian outdoors. The terrace is only accessible from the outside of the building and the cool blue tiled floors, granite ornaments and benches create a refreshing point for pause. The Rehal Terrace gets its name from the carved granite *rehal* or Qur'an holder set on a stepped pedestal in the centre of the terrace. The stands holds an open book, also carved of stone, inscribed with two lines of poetry by the great 13th century Iranian poet, Sa'di:

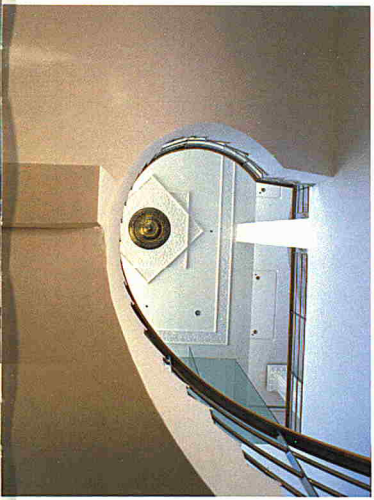
"All men are members of the same body, created from one essence. If fate brings suffering to one member, the others cannot stay at rest."

The same poem greets the public at the entrance to the United Nations building in New York and is symbolic of the brotherhood of humankind. Flanking the *rehal* at either end of the terrace are reproductions of water troughs from the Imam Mosque of Isfahan. Carved by the hands of Persian craftsmen, the water troughs are symbolic once again of water and carry spectacular examples of the arabesque motif.

A view of the Inverted Dome Lobby showing the IAMM Special Gallery 2 for temporary exhibitions which is located beyond the wall to the left.

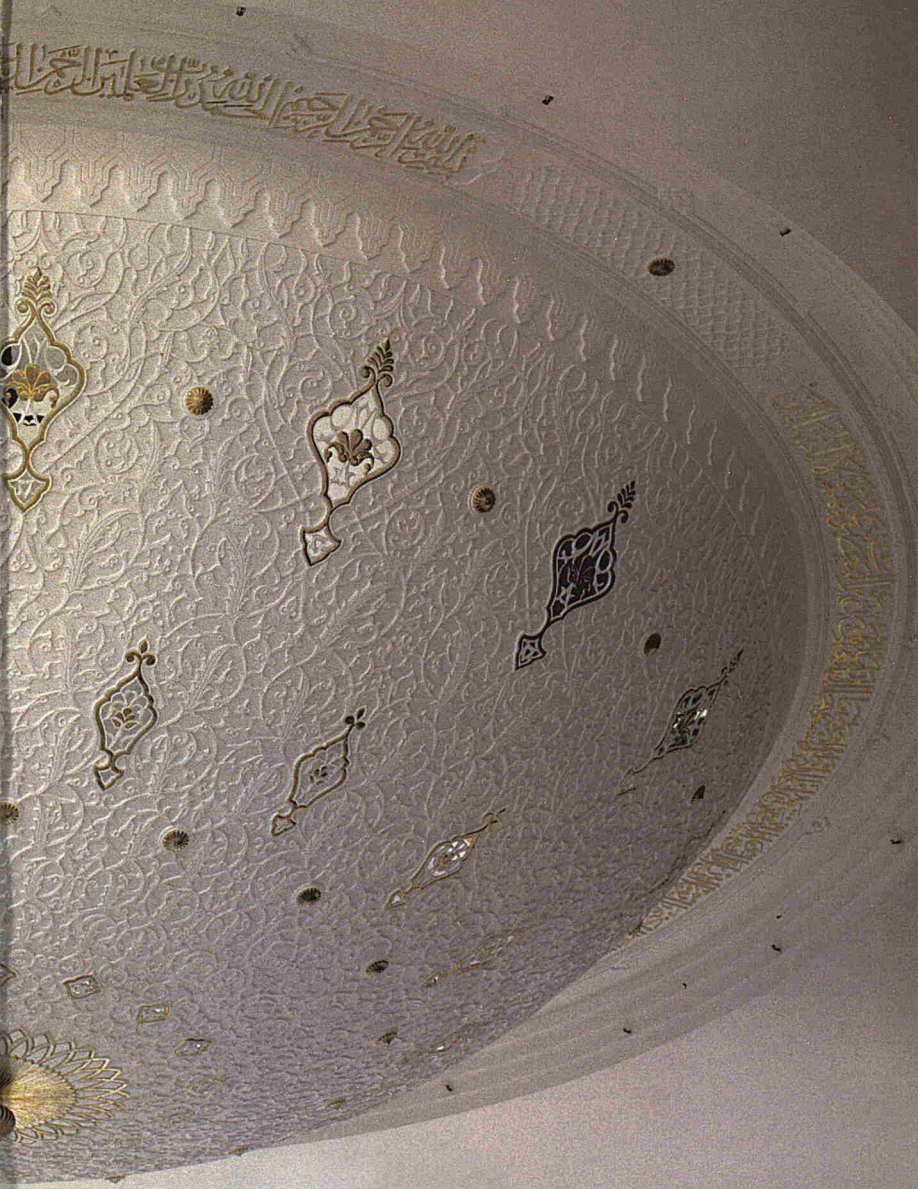


Main lobby



The staircase leading from level 1 to level 2.

From the museum's main lobby and ticket counter, visitors have the option of taking the elevator to the upper levels, but are encouraged to take the grand staircase leading from the lobby to the second level. As they approach the top of this winding staircase, they are greeted with a vast open space that is the Inverted Dome lobby. Beams of sunlight stream in through gridded windows, illuminating a giant bronze Iranian *ghandil* lamp suspended above the staircase and reflecting off the mirrored cartouches embedded in the inverted dome from which the area derives its name. Four large square columns on marble pedestals stand near each corner of the lobby, with receding flanges that create an eight-pointed star at the base; reminiscent of the Ghaznavid flanged towers still standing in the Afghan plains. The capitals of the columns are formed by rows of *muqarnas* detailing in stucco. Often described as a honeycomb structure, the *muqarnas* developed mainly as a system of vaulting, commonly used in dome construction. It grew to serve a more decorative than structural function, with its repeated niches stacked one atop the other. From the 11th century on, *muqarnas* were often used as a popular form of capital decoration, replacing pre-Islamic Byzantine forms. Similar *muqarnas* decoration can be found on the capitals of the large columns in the permanent galleries on level four, located near each of the other four domes of the museum.



The Inverted Dome is the first of the five magnificent domes that are a main element in the character of the museum building. The interior of the four domes and the exterior of the inverted dome are all decorated with carved and moulded gypsum. The product of Uzbekistani craftsmanship, the four dome interiors are painted in warm tones of terracotta, blue, lavender and white with gilt detailing. The inverted dome, however, has no colour embellishment and its pure white surface is adorned with elegantly carved coiling arabesque tendrils relieved by two rows of mirror and gilt cartouches.

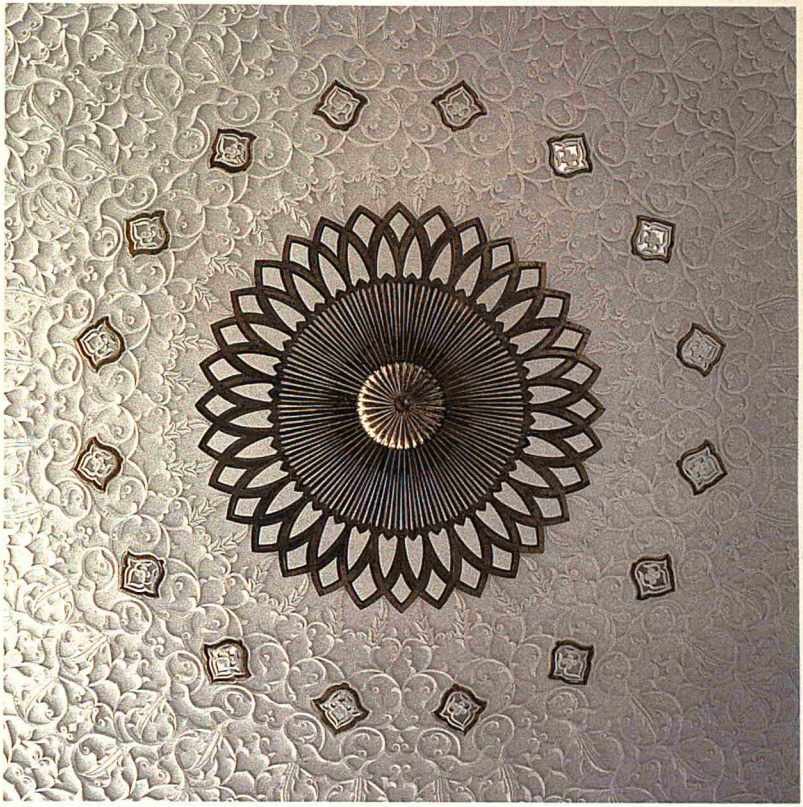
The rim of the dome is inscribed with the opening verse of the Qur'an:

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَـٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ۝
ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَـٰلَمِينَ ۝ ٱلرَّحْمَـٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ۝
مَـٰلِكِ يَوْمِ ٱلدِّينِ ۝ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝
ٱهْدِنَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ
ٱلْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ۝

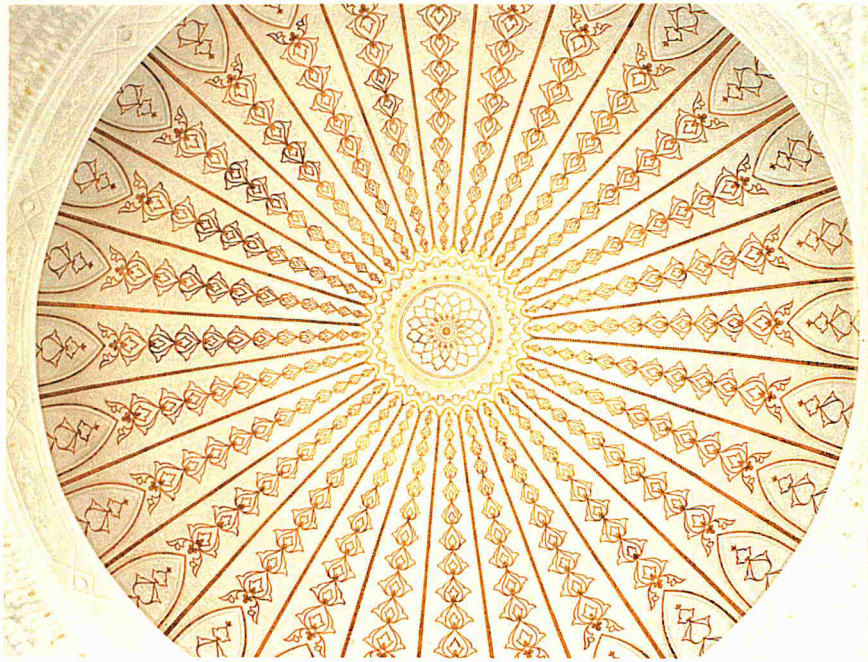
سورة الفاتحة ١ - ٧

"In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgement. You alone do we worship, and You alone do we beseech for help. Guide us to the Straight Way; the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace; Not the way of those who earn Your wrath, nor those who go astray."

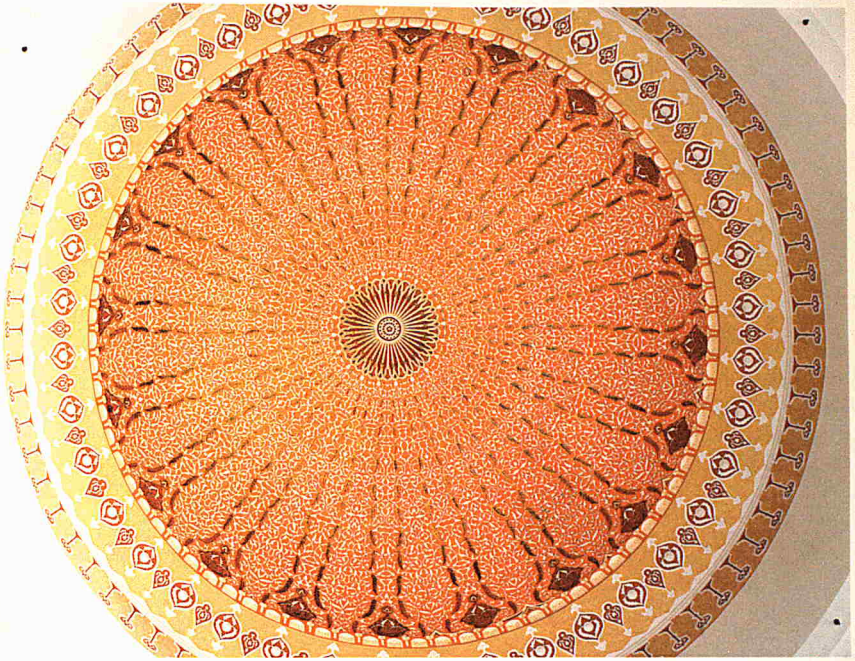
- Surah Al-Fatehah (chapter 1)



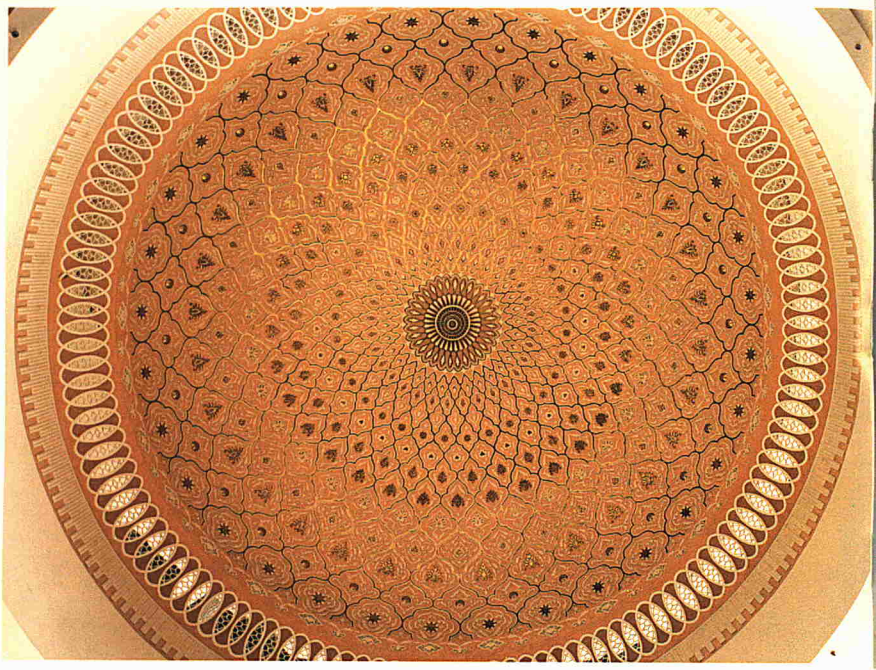
Detail of the Inverted Dome showing mirrored cartouches and intricate arabesques.
Preceding pages: View of the Inverted Dome.



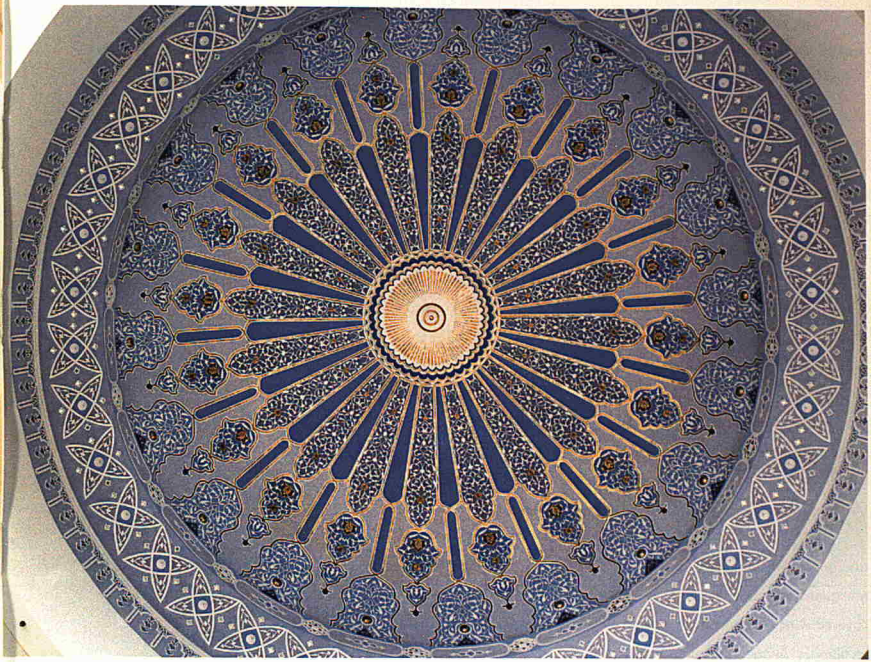
Interior view of the white dome over the Architecture Gallery.



Interior view of the terracotta dome over the Malay World Gallery.



Interior view of the terracotta dome over the China Gallery.



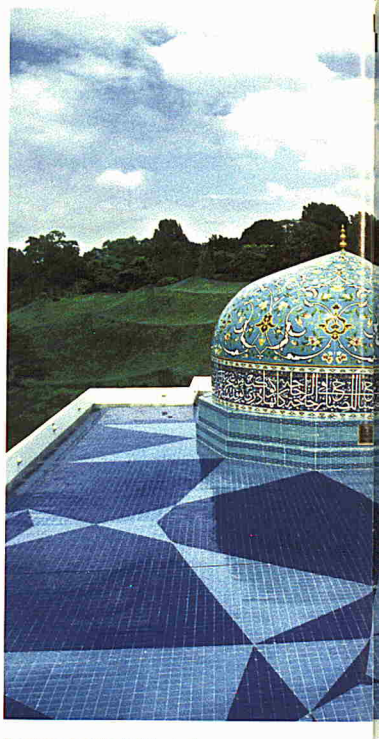
Interior view of the blue dome over the Qur'an and Manuscript Gallery.

The dome is one of the most significant aspects of Islamic architecture. Although dome construction had been carried out in pre-Islamic times, Muslim architects and builders refined its methods of construction and engineering besides introducing a variety of forms of decorative embellishment. Traditionally, the dome is placed above the most important space in the mosque, that of the *qibla* wall, a practice of marking out the sacred or significant that had been in use during Roman times.

Muslim engineers devised ingenious methods of dome vaulting such as the squinch and *muqarnas*. The interior of domes were often elaborately decorated, as illustrated by the stunning tiled domes of Iran and the *muqarnas* domes of Islamic Spain. Different regions and periods also developed patterns and trends for the exterior decoration of domes, creating a sense of identity that defines these periods. The museum's inverted dome is reminiscent, for example, of the carved stone domes of the Mamluk era in Egypt, with their plain grey-brown surfaces elaborately decorated with intricate arabesques and inter-lacing geometric patterns.

The exterior of the museum domes was in turn inspired by the great mosques of Safavid Iran. During the Timurid period, mosques and mausoleums in Central Asia began to be increasingly covered with tile decoration, often in the tile mosaic or *cuerda seca* techniques. By the 17th century and the Safavid Dynasty of Iran, this tile decoration had become more unified in its use of decorative motifs and similar florals and delicate arabesques would be used consistently throughout buildings, adorning dome exteriors and interiors, walls, front portals, iwans and more. For centuries, Central Asian domes have been covered in brilliant blue tile, known in Persian as *gombad-e mina*, the "enamelled azure dome", reflecting the sky as well as symbolically representing the heavens.

The main IAMM dome was inspired by the dome of the Lutfallah Mosque in Isfahan. Like the latter, the IAMM dome is relatively low, resting upon a broad band, all completely covered in tile decoration. Like its predecessor, the dominant motif of the IAMM dome is based on florals and spirals. The typical Persian *Khati* motif



Exterior view of the IAMM main dome viewed from the rooftop.

sends its coils over the surface of the dome's turquoise ground, punctuated with small sprays of hibiscus, Malaysia's national flower, introduced specially to reinforce the identity of the IAMM as a Malaysian institution.

The base of the museum dome is clad in cobalt blue encircled with verse 35 from the *Surah An-Nur* (chapter 24) inscribed in white *Thuluth* script:

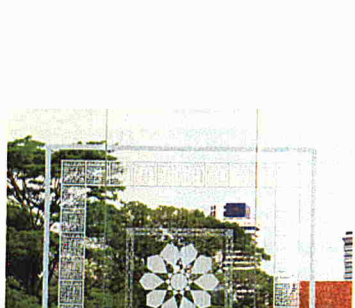
ٱللَّهُ نُورُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ مَثَلُ نُورِهِۦ كَمِشۡكَوٰةٖ فِيهَا
مِصۡبَاحٌۖ ٱلۡمِصۡبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍۖ ٱلزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوۡكَبٞ
دُرِّيّٞ يُوقَدُ مِن شَجَرَةٖ مُّبَٰرَكَةٖ زَيۡتُونَةٖ لَّا شَرۡقِيَّةٖ وَلَا غَرۡبِيَّةٖ
يَكَادُ زَيۡتُهَا يُضِيٓءُ وَلَوۡ لَمۡ تَمۡسَسۡهُ نَارٞۚ نُّورٌ عَلَىٰ نُورٖۗ يَهۡدِي ٱللَّهُ
لِنُورِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَيَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡأَمۡثَٰلَ لِلنَّاسِۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ
عَلِيمُۢ

سورة النور ٣٥

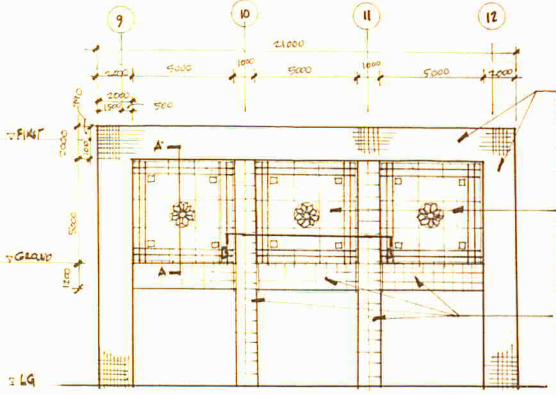
"Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as if it were a niche wherein is a luminary, the luminary within a crystal; the crystal as if it were a planet glittering like a pearl, lit from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is almost luminous, though no fire touched it. Light upon light; Allah guides to His light whom He pleases. Allah sets similitudes for people, and Allah is all-knowing of all things."

Returning to the halls and galleries of the IAMM, one finds the Inverted Dome Pavilion, located at one end of the Inverted Dome Lobby. Its three walls have floor to ceiling windows separated by white pilasters and framed in stainless steel rectangular bars. The centre of each window is decorated with sand-blasted engraved images of the museum's ten- pointed star logo framed by the museum name in *Kufi Banaie* script. One of two major vantage points in the museum, the visitor has a clear view, towards the right, of the grounds of the National Mosque situated conveniently in front of the IAMM, with the Kuala Lumpur skyline providing a backdrop of contrast. Towards the left, one is confronted with the soothing vision of the treetops of the Kuala Lumpur Bird Park beyond the rich foliage of the museum grounds.

The National Mosque viewed from the Inverted Dome Pavillion.



Sand-blasted ten-pointed star museum logo framed by the museum name in *Kufi Banaie* script.


9
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FIRST
GROUND
LG
A
A'
IRANIAN TILE CLADDING ON PANELS, MOUNTED TO EXIST. WALL BY S.S. BRACKETS
THIS WALL IS PROJECTED 300 MM INFRONT OF GRANITE WALL
5000 X 5000 MM OPENING WITH GLAZING PANEL OF 12 MM THK TEMPERED GLASS IN POLISHED S.S FRAMES AND BUTT JOINT PANELS (SEE DETAIL A')
600 X 600 GRANITE PANELS WITH ON S.S. BRACKETS

The IAMM fountains.

At the opposing end of the Inverted Dome Lobby are the doors that lead to the museum courtyard and fountain garden. From the courtyard mosques in the dry and arid Arab lands to the courtyard homes of the Middle East and Mediterranean, fountains are an integral part of both religious and domestic architecture. Besides the relief it provides from the heat and dust, water holds great significance in Islam and is both symbolically and physically represented in Islamic architecture. It represents cleanliness and happiness as well as the source of life whence all creation springs. Islamic palaces and imperial grounds always include fountains and pools amidst lush greenery and flowering plants, evocative of images of paradise and the afterlife.

The central focus of the IAMM fountain garden is the main fountain where a bubbling spray of water emanates from the core of a raised circular platform in the centre of a turquoise blue square pool. The stellar IAMM logo forms the centrepiece of the fountain in cobalt blue and white tile. A gentle stream of water is channeled to this pool from a second larger fountain at the far end of the courtyard. Also dressed in the museum's shades of blue, this fountain is made up of two squares, one placed above the other at an angle to create an eight-pointed star when viewed from above. Water cascades from its two tiers to the pool and canal below. Surrounding

Doors from the Inverted Dome Lobby lead to the fountain garden.

Lattice dome beyond the second fountain.

this second fountain is a variety of tropical shrubs and bushes. The flowering plants grown in the museum garden produce only white flowers, symbolising the purity of the religion. The garden terminates with a short pathway shaded slightly by a white trellis arcade and lattice dome.

With the exception of the end of the garden that overlooks the neighbouring Kuala Lumpur Bird Park, the courtyard is enclosed from all sides by glass walls. As visitors mount the ramp to the third floor galleries, the fountains and garden stretch out below them, presenting a view that delights the senses and helps set the mood for the treasures that await in the galleries. Upon reaching the third level, the inverted dome once again appears before the visitor, allowing a closer look at the arabesque detailing. As the visitor enters the permanent galleries, glass paneling gives way to plain white walls. The windows nearest to the galleries are gently shuttered by canvas screens of fine woven mesh.

The Ceramics Gallery overlooking the Qur'an and Manuscript Gallery.

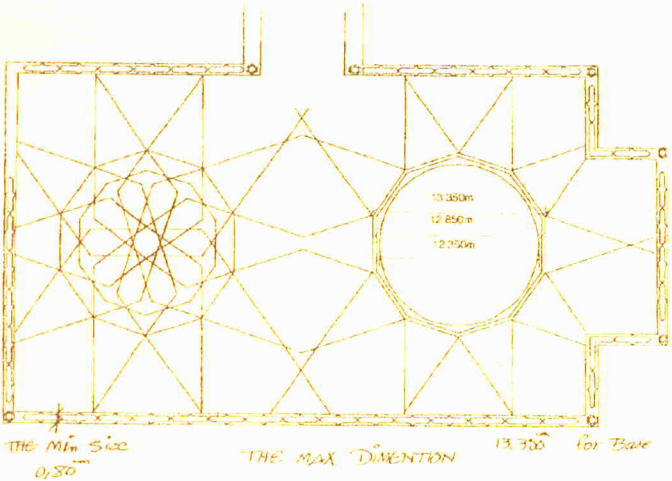
The galleries are spacious, minimally adorned, with clean lines and subtle detailing. Unlike most museums that are made up of groups of rooms or corridors, they are all connected as one vast space, with areas that flow throughout the museum's different wings and levels. This elimination of precise division permits the visitor uninterrupted movement from one area to the next and reflects the Islamic spirit of continuity, a fundamental feature of Islamic decoration. Square, white columns and pilasters provide subtle relief from what could otherwise be a monotonous stretch of space. While recalling the seemingly endless pillared arcades of the great mosques of Islamic civilisations, the galleries nevertheless retain a sense of order and simplicity. The vitrines with their precious contents stand

serenely in simple arrangements and each gallery relates to the next in this uniformity of display.

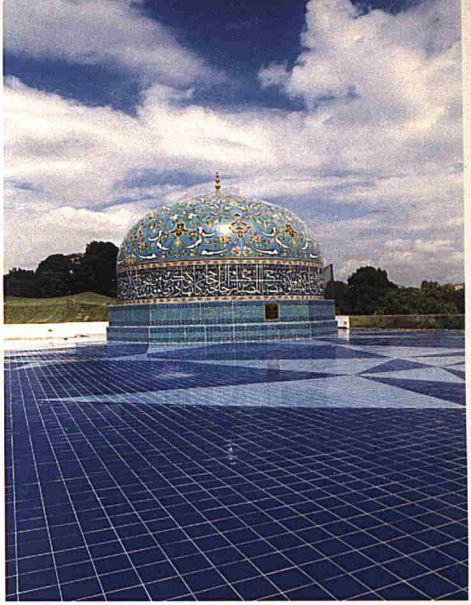
In all expressions of Islamic art, there is an emphasis on the repetition of motifs. In the IAMM, this is not only seen in the artefacts in its collections, but also in the detailing of the museum building. Besides the columns and domes, the same materials are used throughout the building reinforcing the unity that is Islam and one of the main aspects of Islamic art. The museum is not a space of rich textures. Instead, the plain white walls and smooth surfaces create a neutral platform for the often opulent artefacts of the most splendid civilisations of Islam. Far from being austere, however, the building environment is a welcoming one with the warm glow from the carefully lit vitrines and recessed lights, comforting beige marble floors and warm beech railings that complement the beech tones of the wall display cases.

Small amounts of natural light are permitted in the inner sections of the top floor of the permanent galleries. Filtered natural light makes its way into the museum through the window panelling above the wall cases that line the Textile, Jewellery and Arms and Armour Galleries on the fourth floor. The repeated arches of the *muqarnas* inspired the architect to create abstract *muqarnas* forms in tempered glass. Five layers of tempered glass were stacked upon each other to create rows of arched, scale-like patterns, introducing a new decorative element, while incorporating a form that appears throughout the building in a different medium. This application of the same motif or idea in a wide range of mediums is a characteristic of Islamic decoration and is further revealed as one examines and compares the vast range of artefacts in the museum collection.

Muqarnas glass detailing above the wall cases of the Textile Gallery.



The immediate neighbourhood of the museum and the skyline of Kuala Lumpur city as seen from the viewing terrace.



The Main Dome as seen from the rooftop view terrace.

From the fourth floor, the museum visitor can step out onto the museum's viewing terrace, a large rooftop area surrounding the museum's main dome. The floor of the terrace is made up of turquoise and cobalt blue tiling in geometric and stellar designs. Not only does the terrace enable visitors to examine the main dome at close range, it also provides them with an excellent view of the ever-expanding Kuala Lumpur city skyline that unfolds around them from lush greenery on the left to an eclectic blend of highrise office blocks, colonial architecture, the modern Islamic forms of the National Mosque and other prominent buildings of the city and towering sky-scrapers. A fitting conclusion to the museum tour of art and history, the integration of the museum with its surroundings serves as a reminder of the necessity for the preservation of cultural heritage in the midst of mankind's relentless pursuit of development and modernisation.

Islam & Islamic Art

Much has been written about Islam and Islamic art by western as well as oriental scholars, theologians, historians and artists. As the fastest growing religion of the globe and the youngest monotheistic one, its most important distinction is its unifying quality and the force and magnitude that holds a vast diversity of races and ethnic groups of different geographical locations together. The name "Islam" generally translated as "Submission" or "Surrender to God's will" is a distinctive feature of this religion as it does not attach itself to a religious personality — as is the case with Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism or Zoroastrianism; nor is it identified with a certain geographical territory as in the case of Hinduism, for example, which is a religion related to Hindustan or India only.

Islam is the universal religion and the unifying factor to keep all believers and worshipers of the one and only God under one umbrella. It transcends linear time and establishes itself as the religion of Adam, Nuh and Ibrahim who definitely belong to a - historically speaking — pre-Islamic era. The word Islam in the latter sense refers to a timeless truth that does not and cannot be confined by local and territorial boundaries. The body of the Islamic faith has been symbolically explained in the Qur'an as a tree with a firm root and many branches. These many branches are manifested in the form of multiple races and cultures that have grown on or become joined to the body of the Islamic tree on one hand, and in the colourful and diverse art forms created by man throughout the history of Islam on the other.

The Qur'an is the embodiment of God's words. It is not a product of man's intellectual calibre worshiping the glory of the divine through intellectually and artistically man-made words and writings. The year 610 marks the birth of Islam through revelation. The first words of revelation, which indicate the first encounter of the Prophet Muhammad with the angel Gabriel, was God's command to him: *"Read and thy Lord is most generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not"* (Qur'an 96:1-4). These verses refer to the divine origin of knowledge and writing. In the Islamic prayers (*al-Salat*), the Muslims praise God with His words and phrases revealed to His selected prophet and recorded in the Book (al-Qur'an). Therefore, a Muslim praises his creator not according to his limited understanding of the divine, but by divine words taught and dictated to him by the Lord directly. In other words, Muslims throughout the world praise their creator in their prayers held ritually five times daily, not how they see and understand Him, but how He instructed them to praise Him. The individuality of the worshipper is dissolved in the unifying names of Allah — the one and only God. This sense of unity is considered to be the axis-mundi that holds together the earth and the heavens in the divine order.

Furthermore, the content of the the Qur'an is not limited to the divine Law (*al-Shariah*) alone, but extends to a spiritual path (*al-Tariqah*) which would ultimately lead followers to the truth (*al-Haqiqah*). For the Muslim, the Qur'an explains all that man needs to know in order to live a balanced life - a balance between a spiritual and material life — as man is constituted of a material and a spiritual dimension according to Islam. Based on the Islamic worldview, the origin of all forms reverts to God, for He is the creator, He who knows all, and He is both the manifest and the concealed. Therefore, the essence and the form of all things have their reality in divine intellect.

■ Islamic Art

Art comprises two essential dimensions: the inner and the outer. These two dimensions are also known as form and content. Content here means spirit (*ruh*) or meaning (*ma'na*). A successful work of art is one whose form is able to lead the viewer to its latent content. Religious art deals with strong symbolism. These symbols act like guidelines that relate to the viewers' intellectual as well as emotional properties, and make connections with what we call the content of religion.

The content of Islamic art becomes vague and is not as tangible as what is implied by the meaning of art in other religious contexts. As Oleg Grabar states, the attribute "Islamic" in Islamic art does not carry the same meaning and cannot be used the same way that "Christian" is used in Christian art and "Buddhist" in Buddhist art. If we look closely and examine the subject and content of the above mentioned religions, we would understand that in the two latter arts the content is closely related either to the history of religion or to the concept of the world hereafter. For example, in Christian art we come across innumerable examples that are connected with the life of Christ, the virgin Mary, the crucifixion, creation, the day of judgement and other such subjects. The life of Buddha and its different outstanding stages constitute the subject of many forms of Buddhist art. Symbols like the cross (in the case of Christianity), the

wheel of Dharma (in the case of Buddhism) and many other symbols related to such religions constitute the body of their respective arts.

In the case of Islamic art, we hardly face scenes that remind us of the history of religion. Nor does Islamic art depict a panoramic scene of the world hereafter. This has caused art historians problems that question the authenticity of anything called Islamic art. The answer lies in the teachings of Islam itself.

In the Islamic world view, there is no distinction between "sacred" and "profane". Any act of any nature could be Islamic or un-Islamic depending on the intention of its doer. Conducting a business for the sake of the welfare of one's family may be considered a godly act, while helping the poor or standing for prayer to either flaunt or promote oneself, or for the achievement of high social status, is considered to be unpious. It is, therefore, the remembrance of God in all times and at all conditions that would develop an Islamic view or Islamic cosmology upon which any "Islamic" act could be performed and a wide range of Islamic art may be produced.

The origin of Islamic art is to be found in the two fundamental pillars of Islam, i.e. the holy Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet (*sunna*), the most important of which is the Qur'an itself. Words and writing occupy a high position in Islamic culture and calligraphy is the most elevated and venerated form of Islamic art. Calligraphy received its veneration because of its status as the immediate vehicle for the divine words. Muslim artists devoted their creative talents to the growth of this art. Innumerable examples of beautifully handwritten Qur'ans in different styles of Islamic calligraphy bear witness to the status of this highest form of art in the Islamic culture.

Many branches of Islamic art came into being at the beginning to supplement this art. The art of illumination and the wide variety of decorative motifs later developed into independent arts and manifested in different branches of crafts such as pottery, textile, wood craft, architectural developments and the like. The prominent presence of complex geometric patterns forms the backbone of many arts in the Muslim world. Geometry was an important and powerful

grid upon which both calligraphic as well as floral elements could flourish. Kufic monumental style with its geometrically oriented nature gave way to many developments of calligraphy in architecture. Some patterns with more flexible qualities adorn pottery and metal works. Geometry opened a vast scope of endless patterns, symmetrical as well as asymmetrical, which in the path of time became synonymous with Islamic art and a signature identifying Islamic ornamentation and decoration. Such patterns seem to have neither beginning nor end as if they represent a state of limitless nature. Such curved, bent and twisted forms that are broadly known as the arabesque fall into this category. This does not and shall not imply that the arabesque motif was invented by Muslims but it is certain that such decorative forms already present in many forms of pre-Islamic and non-Islamic art found a solid and prominent identity in the world of Muslim art.

These basic elements of Islamic art spread throughout the world with natural speed. Each group or community that embraced Islam contributed to their new faith with their local artistic abilities and elements. Those who embraced Islam accepted the art of calligraphy and used it like sacred symbols as a part of their own traditional art creating an amalgam of a unique nature. For instance, in the beginning stages of Persian Islamic art we come across examples where animal figures of pre-Islamic mythical Iranian nature are combined with elements of Islamic calligraphy in textiles, pottery decoration and metal engravings. Such works may not be totally identified as Islamic art but they certainly represent transitional stages where the spirit of Islamic art started penetrating into local artistic traditions. It is for this reason that a vast variety of arts with different imported forms are categorised under a single title, namely Islamic art. To understand Islamic art, one must move from elements and details to a wider scope, to the totality and the unifying identity.

Islamic architecture, for instance, is a good example. We see that many secular buildings, houses and bridges are categorised under "Islamic architecture". It is not their religious function that makes them Islamic but having the same unifying essence puts them

alongside mosques as prominent forms of Islamic architecture. Even within the mosque, the variety of designs, patterns and colours that represent a people, race or culture are seen. But, in this case, the component and the function unify them. A *mihrab* (prayer niche), *minbar* (mosque pulpit), ablution fountain, minaret, portal and colonnades on a demarcated space — partly roofed (sanctuary or *shabestan*) and partly open to the sky (*sahn*) — creates a mosque. It may be adorned with beautiful turquoise blue domes (as is the case in Iran and central Asia) or have a very large central dome supported with smaller half domes with colours playing not a major role (like the mosques of Anatolia), triple domed structures of red stone and white marble (as is the case in the Indian subcontinent), detached pavilions within a walled garden enclosure (as in China) or have central pyramidal roof construction as in Southeast Asia. These are different features of one unifying identity and all are called mosques.

In removing the barriers between the secular and the sacred by welding them together and expressing them by the means of unified and prescribed behavioral doctrine, Islamic art creates a world view that unifies the diversity and gives space for the multiplicity to grow on a plane of unity. For a Muslim, art is not something to be explored in galleries and museums as it is not considered an individual independent discipline with no relation to day-to-day life. The distinction made by modern thinkers between fine art and the crafts does not exist in Islamic art and any kind of traditional art. According to the Islamic point of view, a product without a function would be useless. Therefore, the distinction between applied or functional art and the fine or non-functional art is not acceptable in the Islamic world view. This implies a certain type of approach to art and life. For a Muslim, art is something that is present in nature and everything created by God. The essence of art is present in all daily utilitarian items, tools and utensils and furniture. The elements that enrich the surface and seen in a wide spectrum of items should not be considered as simply "decorative" elements although they decorate the subject on which they appear and make pleasant the visual appearance of our surroundings.

A prominent quality of Islamic art is its intentional distance from representation. Although forms of plants, animals, and even occasionally humans may be seen in examples related to Islamic art, as a rule we cannot call Islamic art "representational". This art is manifested in objects such as ceramics, metalwork, wood carvings, stone lattice works, textiles, coins and so on. Muslim artists do not reproduce nature but use natural forms to develop them into other forms that represent a world beyond the natural appearance of the nature. In the floral motif one can discern designs derived from plants but the patterns which these forms create speak in an archetypal language. It implies an abstract conception of plants rather than referring to a specific type.

Even in the figurative examples of this art manifested mostly in the form of illustrated manuscripts, we come across many figures, man and woman, most of whom could not be identified unless the name is written next to it as they basically look alike and refer to "man" in its archetypal state. The light is distributed evenly throughout such scenes as if there is no distinction of lightness and darkness. Skies appear in gold and trees are always green and blossoms smile at the viewer as if he is looking at perfect scenery beyond time and space. Meanwhile, the same painting or illustration is explaining a story that is of an earthly nature, yet there are no specific expressions on the faces, no joy or grief is reflected in the gestures. There is an obvious intentional distance from these feelings and, along with the world that creates them, will pass away and dissolve in a "true" world, the one which presents eternal joy or grief. Thus, even the figurative arts of Muslims are far from being "representational" or "naturalistic". These arts together with other non-figurative floral arts have a close affinity and speak the same language. No one can mistake a Persian miniature painting with men, women, animals, building, trees and sky with another painting having the same elements executed in the naturalistic manner. These are not merely different styles and techniques but different world views in the embodiment of different forms.

A traditional Muslim considers art as an inherent quality of every produced thing. This is not a new concept and has been with man throughout his existence in this world. Art was a tradition for man at all times. It is only during the modern age of the last century or so that the issue of "traditional art" as opposed to "modern art" has been presented. The word "art" in its modern sense that refers to certain activities performed or executed in certain materials has not existed in the language and literature of the ancient civilisation and traditional cultures. In the language of many cultures we come across words and phrases such as the art of bravery, the art of archery, the art of speech and so on. These examples are hints that unveil the original meaning of art and its essential connection to "perfection" in any context. "Perfect" is a quality that in its absolute sense refers to "The Divine". The "Perfect man" in the Islamic context is used to designate His messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. According to the Qur'an, man is created by God "in the perfect appraisal". This perfection is expected to be reflected in his daily deeds, be it religious rituals or worldly acts. In another words, art — as a state of perfection — is expected to be inherent in anything that man produces. Perhaps it is for this very reason that we have countless numbers of artifacts scattered all over the world with no "religious" identity that are still rightly designated as "Islamic art".

I would like to conclude with a prophetic tradition (*hadith*): *"God is beautiful and He loves beauty"*. The beauty of God and the kind of beauty He admires reveal the spiritual status of beauty that transcends its temporal quality introduced by "aesthetic" in western contemporary sense. To reach such a state of beauty and to be "liked by God" one has to go through an essential transformation; to beautify his soul and to manifest this beauty through his deeds and products. This way man becomes art and everything done or produced by him becomes artistic. The self is negated to let the beauty of the sublime self shine. This is the mystery of splendid works of art in the Islamic world where we hardly come across the names of the artists. Even in cases with the artist's signature, a modest prefix such as *Al abdul haqir* (the humble

servant) or *Al faqir* (destitute) is added. Art has always had an affinity with mysticism in its Islamic context. Reaching the ultimate state of *Fanafellah* (annihilation of self) in the essence of God has always been the target of Muslim Sufis and mystics. So we may say that Islamic art in its highest sense is not a matter of "self expression" but a platform for the expression of "the self" in the mundane realm.

Dr. Mandana Barkeshli
Head of Curatorial Affairs
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

History of the Islamic World & Artistic Developments

■ Early Islamic Art

▲ The age of the Caliphate (632-661) and the Umayyad period (661-750)

In order to understand the emergence of Islam and Islam as a socio-religion, pre-Islamic society must first be carefully considered. Pre-Islamic Arabia was called *Jahiliya* (The Age of Ignorance) by the later inhabitants of Arabia. Nevertheless, pre-Islamic Arabians are believed to have enjoyed luxurious and sophisticated imported products from Egypt, India and the Mediterranean region as excavations in a number of sites have shown. Spice and incense trading with India, Mesopotamia and Egypt conveyed wealth to the Arabian peninsula. Monsoon rains allowed Oman and Yemen in the south of the Arabian peninsula to develop an irrigation system and grow fertile. Culturally, poetry was highly developed. Outside the peninsula, Arab Christian kingdoms were thriving. These kingdoms included the Nabatea (fourth century CE to 106 CE) centred in Petra, and Palmyra whose renowned Queen Zenobia ruled most of Egypt and Syria until her defeat by the Romans in 272.

By the fourth century, two ancient super powers, the later Roman Empire, known as the Byzantines in the west (395-1453) and the Persian empire, the Sassanids, (226-651) in the east confronted each other. The Byzantines were predominantly Christian while the ruling class Sassanian Persians were Zoroastorian though its non-ruling class was seldom part of this faith. Sassanian Persia consisted of different kinds of ethnic groups such as Persians, Jews and Central Asians. These non-ruling classes followed the teachings of Christianity, Manicheanism, Buddhism and Judaism. Both ancient empires engaged in a long-term war for supremacy. Arabia was also involved in this warfare. An Arab Christian dynasty, the Ghassanids supported the Byzantines, while the Lakhmids supported the Sasasnians. Neither side succeeded in vanquishing the other. Rulers and people were exhausted from the long endless warfare and this worsening situation might have contributed to the appearance of Islam as a centripetal force as well as to its growth as a new religious movement. Such was the basic political climate of Arabia when the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. first received his revelations.

Islam's expansion beyond Arabia began through military conquest immediately after the death of Muhammad. After the reign of the *Rashidun* or 'Rightly Guided' *Caliphs* (632-61), the first Islamic dynasty, the Umayyads established their power in Syria, a centre of Byzantine administration as well as culture for many centuries, and clear influences can

be detected in the arts of the Umayyad period. For instance, the first major architectural feature, the Dome of the Rock, shows Byzantine influence in its planning, with its octagonal base surmounted by a dome. The Great Mosque of Damascus contains fantastic mosaic works, an art highly developed during the Byzantine period. The motifs and its manner of execution clearly show the Byzantine legacy and this is evidence that Byzantine artists were possibly engaged for the mosaic works. The early mosques built at Basra in 635 and at Kufa in 637 were modelled on the first mosque in the courtyard home of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina.

Major Umayyad secular buildings such as in Mshatta, Qasr al-Amra, Khirbat al-Mafjar and Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi were decorated with relief paintings, frescoes, painted stucco, carving, sculptures and mosaics, including very distinctive human figures and animals. The figures show a very wide variety of sources. For example, a prince in baggy trousers sitting with one knee up reflects the Sassanian manner, whereas women are portrayed in the Byzantine style costume of heavy drapery. In addition, semi-nude women standing in a swimming pool and angel figures can be seen. The lion in Mshatta could be symbolic of kingship, a depiction used in the Near East since ancient times. Other examples too numerous to mention also exist. The Umayyad period can be placed as the formative period of Islamic art, and it is thus not surprising that the art of the Umayyads, especially secular art, was heavily influenced by forerunners.

Calligraphy is a wholly authentic Islamic art form. The earliest fragment of the Qur'an can possibly be dated as early as the eighth century. Calligraphy has always been highly prized in Islam due to its close relation with the Qur'an. Kufic especially had been used for the copying of Qur'an and coinage, which were the most formal purposes until the ninth century when the *Naskh* script was developed. Calligraphy itself was intensively developed as an art form throughout Islamic history and it has been widely used as a favoured motif in a large variety of media.

▲ Abbasid period (750-1250)

With the establishment of the Abbasids in Baghdad, the cultural and political centre of the Islamic empire moved from Syria to Iraq. This physical movement weakened the influence from the classical world. Instead, Iranian thought along with the rise to power of the Turkish dominated military became prominent. A wide variety of intellectual activity in philosophy, theology, mathematics, the natural sciences and art flourished under the Abbasids. The first three centuries of Abbasid rule is regarded as the Golden Age of Islam.

The Abbasid caliphs practised architectural patronage for mosques, palaces, urban centres and canals. Splendid mosques and palaces were built as symbols of their authority. Mosques were important as a place of prayer and a centre of social activity. With the consolidation of Islamic law schools, the importance of mosques as religious institutions became increasingly important. The Abbasid period saw the first growth of tomb architecture. Although monumental tombs and mausoleums were prohibited by the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., a tomb was erected for him by his family and followers after his death. The Qubbat al-Sulabiya where Caliph al-Mantasir (r. 861-862), Caliph al-Mutazz (r. 866-869) and Caliph al-Muhtadi (r. 869-870) were buried seems to be the first surviving dynastic mausoleum in Islamic lands.

Great prosperity was brought to the Abbasid court through long distance trading between the Mediterranean and China. This trade brought not only economic prosperity but also cultural and scientific exchanges encouraging technical evolution under court patronage. One of the most important innovations occurred in ceramic production in the later half of the eighth century. With increased demand for imported Chinese ceramics, Islamic potters attempted to recreate the thin and hard ceramic body which proved highly significant in the further development of the ceramic production of the medieval period.

To achieve the fineness of Chinese porcelain, a special clay and a high temperature was needed. Unlike the Chinese, Islamic potters had no access to fine clay, neither was there an abundance of trees

Bowl
Syria. c. 12th - 13th century CE.
6.5cm x 20cm

This *sgraffito* earthenware bowl has a lightly incised geometric pattern revealing the earthenware body beneath the thin clay slip ground. The cavetto of the bowl is decorated with splashes of iron and copper glazes.

needed to stoke strong kiln fires. As a result of their need to find a substitute, they invented a stone paste and thick creamy glaze to disguise its reddish body. *Sgraffito* (*sgraffire*, Italian: to scratch) is a very common technique that covers the body with thin clay slip and the motifs are incised through the slip before glaze is applied. *Sgraffito* ware is sometimes decorated in tri-colour, splashed green and brown with yellowish glaze. The colour scheme is the same as Chinese *San Cai* (three-colour) ware introduced to the Islamic world through the Silk Route trade.

Large amounts of Abbasid lustreware were produced. Lustre was a luxurious ware due to its time-consuming manufacture that required both double firing and a special kiln. The lustre technique is believed to have been brought by glassmakers during the Abbasid period from Egypt and Syria where highly developed glassmaking

techniques have been practised since pre-Islamic times. Princely iconography, scenes of music, banqueting, hunting and wrestling were frequently exhibited on the lustreware. Facial features can be characterised by pop-eyes, over-large heads and curling hair. The high development of Abbasid lustreware was probably encouraged because of the prohibition on the usage of gold and silver vessels in the *hadith* (Traditions of the Prophet). The colour gold on lustreware must have been an acceptable substitute for precious metal vessels. The Abbasid pottery industry began a long tradition in the ceramic arts of the Islamic world.

Sassanian Iran produced silver plates with hunting scenes and animals. Abbasid metal works carry similar iconography to Sassanian silver works. However, whereas the Sassanians used silver as their main material, the Abbasids used mostly brass or bronze.

Textiles served as one of the most important sources of revenue and a means of social identification. Costumes often denoted one's social status. Many Arabic or Persian terms that are related to textile production were modified into European words. *Damask* is derived from textiles woven in Damascus. Mohair was *mukhayyir* (lit. select, choice) in Arabic and taffeta came from the word *taftan* (to spin) in Persian. During the Abbasid period, factories were set up in Samarqand by Chinese artists captured by Muslim soldiers in the battle of Talas in 751, resulting in the introduction of Chinese silk weaving to the Islamic lands.

One of the epoch-making events in the art of calligraphy was the development of the cursive script. The Abbasid calligrapher and vizier, Ibn Muqla (885/86-940), introduced the cursive style; unfortunately none of his surviving works are known. The cursive style further evolved and became consolidated as the scripts *Naskh*, *Thuluth*, *Muhaqqaq*, *Rihan*, *Tawqi* and *Riqa'* by the early eleventh century. Each style had its preferred usage. *Naskh* was used for the copying of manuscripts, *Thuluth* for chapter headings in the Qur'an and architectural inscriptions, *Muhaqqaq* and *Rihan* were used for large Qur'ans, and *Tawqi* and *Riqa'* were used for chancellery documents. As well as Chinese weavers, Chinese paper makers were

captured by Muslim soldiers and the paper making technique was thus transferred to Islamic areas and eventually further west. This would have encouraged more paper production and the wider availability of paper, especially larger sized paper, in turn encouraged the production of more manuscripts.

The most distinguished achievements of early Islamic civilisations from the ninth century until the thirteenth century was in the sciences. Islamic science was far more advanced compared to that of Europe at the time. Islamic scientists were qualified not only in one specialised field, but generally had knowledge of physics, medication, astronomy and philosophy. The most important early Islamic polymath was Ibn Sina (c.980-1037) known throughout the medieval Western world as Avicenna. His masterwork *Kitab al-Shifa* (The Book of the Cure) became a standard among European physicians. Further scientific advances developed as a result of the Muslim's need to know the exact direction of Mecca to pray, the exact time of prayer, the exact time of sunrise and sunset for fasting. The earliest time keeping was recorded by al Khwarizmi in the ninth century. The seventh Abbasid caliph, al Ma'mun (r.813-819) planned the first observatory in Baghdad and Damascus.

By the ninth century North Africa, Central Asia and Afghanistan, the margins of the Abbasid Empire, gained autonomous status. It is worth mentioning the Samanid dynasty (812-1005) in Iran, which embraced Islamic culture and encouraged the revival of pre-Islamic Persian culture at the same time. They played a very important role in Transoxiana in the conversion of Turks to Islam. For the first time, the dominance of Islamic Arab culture was replaced by Persian culture. This Persian cultural hegemony was to be the forerunner of Islamic art for a great part of history. The Samanids introduced pre-Islamic — probably Sassanian Zoroastorian — temple features into Islamic tomb architecture, as illustrated by the Samanid mausoleum in Bukhara. For example, the Samanid encouragement of Persian culture led to a clear distinction between Persian and Arab taste. The Samanid buff coloured earthenware and the fine white slip show a marked departure from the dominant Abbasid Arab-Mediterranean

decorative style. The surface bears simple but carefully executed calligraphy under colourless transparent glaze. Its fine accomplishment indicates that the calligraphy could have been executed on paper first.

■ Medieval Times

▲ Fatimid period (909-1171)

From the tenth century onwards, several small dynasties emerged one after another. Among them, the Fatimid dynasty rose to prominence and its caliphs expanded their power from the Tunisian coastal area and took Cairo in 696. With strong military power, the Fatimids continued to expand eventually, taking Hijaz, Palestine and Syria. The Fatimids' affluence and prosperity were due partly to their control of the profitable Mediterranean sea trade

Fatimid society and culture were very much elitist, a fact reflected in their formal and elaborate court ceremonies. Erecting tomb buildings was considered part of the court ceremony. More memorial monuments, tombs and mausoleums were built than ever before. Over 4,000 examples of tomb architecture were erected between the ninth and tenth century. A characteristic of Fatimid architecture, the fluted dome, was brought into Egypt from western North Africa where the Fatimid empire was founded. Both the interior and exterior of Fatimid buildings — secular, religious and even residential — were highly ornate and decorated with stone and stucco.

The decorative art of the Fatimids can be characterised by its consumption of costly materials. Not only members of the royal family but also the growing prosperous middle classes were active patrons of the arts. Rock crystal was the most favoured material in the Fatimid court. Found in the Maghrib (the area from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia to Libya) it was cut with a wheel adapted from a model used in glass-cutting. Rock crystal was exported to Europe and it is believed that a rock crystal chalice was used as a container for Jesus' blood. The Fatimids were also consumers of other luxury

carved objects made from ivory and imported woods such as pine, ebony and cypress, many of which were carved by Coptic craftsmen.

Since pre-Islamic times, Cairo and Damascus had long traditions of glass production. A great number of highly impressive glass objects were produced during the Fatimid period. Although the styles of early glassware are very similar to that of Iranian products, significant changes are discerned to have occurred during the Ayyubid (1169-1250) and Mamluk periods. The Iranian devised shape was replaced by a very distinctive beaker form, which was most probably produced in Syria or Egypt.

The Fatimids maintained close contact with Christian culture. This could have been established through the large number of Coptic Christian inhabitants in Cairo and contacts with the Crusaders. Christian motifs were frequently depicted by Islamic artists on

Water filter
Egypt. c. 10th - 11th century CE
6cm

Fatimid unglazed earthenware water filter with Kufic inscription.

various materials such as metalwork, textile and lustreware. This reflects the importance of Coptic society at that time and demonstrates the status the Copts enjoyed under Fatimid rule.

Textiles were as important in the Fatimid court as was rock crystal, especially the *Tiraz* which was highly prized. *Tiraz* (literally embroidery in Arabic) is a textile produced in workshops under the caliphs and is usually adorned with Arabic inscriptions woven into or embroidered on it. The *Tiraz* can be divided into two categories, *Tiraz Khas* (private *Tiraz*) and *Tiraz amm* (public *Tiraz*). Lavishly ornate *tiraz* sometimes carried the caliph's name and place of production and have hence proved extremely valuable to modern-day historians as an historical record. Many examples of fine Islamic art which were acquired by the Crusaders are kept in churches in Italy, France and Greece.

▲ Islamic Spain

The Muslim invasion of Spain began in 711 and settlements on a small scale followed. After the fall of the Umayyads in Syria, an Umayyad prince escaped to Spain. The Muslims who had earlier settled down in Spain helped to restore the house of Umayyad in Spain and they soon took Cordova. Andalusia became the centre of Islam in Spain and Cordova grew into an international and multicultural city inhabited by a thriving Muslim, Christian and Jewish population which flourished. The Spanish Umayyads rejected international Abbasid hegemony and created their own culture. After the decline of the Caliphate of Cordova, many small dynasties came into existence. The Almoravids (1056-1147) from the Western Sahara expanded their territory into Andalusia and Portugal, overcoming Alfonso I of Aragon. The Almohads next came to power over the Almoravids (1133-1269) and defeated Alfonso VIII of Castille. Though the Nasrids of Granada (1232-1492) were not politically influential, they developed the city of Granada. After the last effective Almohad ruler died in 1213, Islam in Spain started to decline and Christian power began to take over. Thus began the so-called *Reconquista*. The last major city of Muslim rule, the Nasrid capital of Granada,

eventually fell to the kingdom of Castille and Islam lost its hold on Spain.

The Umayyad artistic vocabulary was transmitted to Spain. A very distinctive horizontal calligraphy developed alongside the archaic Umayyad Syrian Kufic script. Boxes in cylindrical shapes bearing dense Umayyad arabesque and animal motifs such as deer, camels and griffins were produced. These animals as royal symbols can also be seen in *tiraz*. Rock crystal, *marquetry* caskets or boxes of ivory and wood were very popular, especially under the Nasrid dynasty. Ivory carvings were exported to Fatimid Egypt. A number of Spanish lustreware was produced under Christian patronage. Tin-glazed earthenware known as Hispano-Moresque pottery was produced in quantity. They were mainly executed with the tree of life and palm tree motifs along with Arabic inscriptions in reddish glaze.

Casket
Spain. c. 16th - 17th century CE
18cm x 25cm x 12cm

Hispano-Moresque wooden casket inlaid with ivory, ebony, silver and a variety of coloured woods in a stylised floral and geometric design.

Sometimes those wares carry western coats of arms. Their main production centres were Mauise, Paterina and Malaga. These wares were conveyed to Italy around the fifteenth century via the island of Majolica, now known as Majorca, whence the name *majolica* ware originates.

▲ Ayyubid period (1169-1250)

By the 11th century, the medieval Muslim world was facing serious problems. The Fatimids, though weakened, ruled from Egypt which was the heart of the Muslim lands. Jerusalem, considered one of the most holy Islamic cities, was taken by the first Crusaders in 1099. The notorious Mongol invasion of the 1220s was imminent. The hero, Salah al-Din (r.1169-93), a Kurdish general, helped to restablish a Sunni Islamic dynasty, the Ayyubids, in Egypt in 1169. Renowned as a brave and just soldier not only among Muslims but also among Europeans, Salah al-Din also took Jerusalem back from the kingdom of Jerusalem and fought against the third Crusaders led by King Richard (r.1189-99).

Ayyubid architecture was concentrated on religious and military buildings. This is a reflection of the social climate of the Ayyubid period. To counter internal as well as external threats, the Ayyubids encouraged the building of *madrasas* which were especially important as educational institutions. *Madrasas*, hospitals and *khanqahs* were built under royal patronage. The fortification of citadel cities was another important means of defence of the Muslims against the Crusaders. For example, Aleppo, which was taken by Salah al-Din in 1183, was reinforced by his son al-Malik al-Zahir Ghazi and came to be known as the most powerful citadel in medieval times.

Metalwork is the most prominent of Ayyubid arts. Mosul had been a developed metal production centre under Badr al Lulu of the Zangids. As a result of the Mongol invasion into Iran, many Persian artists fled westwards. This helped Mosul to develop as a great centre of Islamic metalwork. The impact of the Crusaders appeared in the decoration of Ayyubid metalwork. Christian figures and themes like

saints, soldiers, the Gospels, Madonna and child and Christ's birth were often depicted. Even the New Testament was used as a source of motifs. Most of them are believed to have been produced in Syria and Egypt, and in some cases, by Christian artists where there were Christian strongholds. Even the city of Mosul had Christian inhabitants although they were a minority.

▲ Seljuq period (1038-1194)

From the tenth century onwards, nomad Turks from Central Asia started to appear in Eastern Iran as large-scale migration increased. The Seljuqs, a pagan Turkish nomad tribe, converted to Islam in about 960. The Seljuqs' importance increased through their support to the Samanids and the Ghaznavids (1017-34) as *ghazi* (Islamic frontier warriors) against pagan Turks. Their masters awarded them horses and land as rewards, which attracted other nomad Turks to join the Seljuqs and encouraged a mass conversion of Turks to Islam. Their power eventually grew enough to defeat the Ghaznavids in Afghanistan who were the first Turkic dynasty, and displaced them from Khorasan in 1040. Iran came under Seljuq rule as a result of the weakness of the Buyids in Iran (932-1062). In 1055, the Seljuqs took Baghdad from the Buyids and the Abbasid caliph became merely a nominal and symbolic figure. The empire stretched from Anatolia to the Chinese border and the south of the Arabian peninsula, becoming one of the largest Islamic empires.

Seljuq ascendancy marked the end of the Arab domination in eastern Islamic lands. These Turks accepted Persian culture and their elite adopted the Persian language. The Turks had started their relentless penetration into the Perso-Islamic world and the Seljuq dynasty marked the high point of their control in the Islamic east. The most immense Seljuq impact on the Islamic world was their victory over the Byzantines in 1071 at Manzicurt and their resulting dominance in much of Anatolia. From that time, Turkish culture started to spread throughout Anatolia gradually replacing Byzantine culture although Byzantine influence still remained in the Turco-Islamic culture of Anatolia. Under Malik Shah (r.1072-1092), the Seljuq culture reached its golden age.

Ewer
Iran, Gorgan. c. 12th century CE
8cm x 6.5cm

Miniature fritware ewer with black slip stripes painted under a turquoise alkaline glaze.

The quick advance of their techniques and civilisation was further enhanced as a result of the Mongol invasion. Growing instability in the east culminating in the Mongol invasion in the second decade of the thirteenth century led to an exodus of people, including artists and artisans, from East to West and with them came their developed techniques. Skilled artists and scholars travelled in search of suitable patronage. Among them was the great sufi Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi whose family came from Balkh and who came west around 1215. In the Seljuq court, Persian was the main language of communication and viziers such as Nizam al-Mulk were often of Persian origin.

Seljuq architecture defined idioms of classical Persian Islamic architecture. It could be characterised by the four-*iwan* type mosque with *pishtaq*, double dome and glazed tile decoration on the exterior.

The dominance of Turkish culture from Central Asia through members of the Turkish military elite who brought with them elaborate funerary traditions had a strong influence on the development of Islamic tomb architecture. These influences are often seen alongside Armenian architectural influences. A great number of *caravanserais* were erected along the trade routes and many *madrasas* appeared in urban areas. A new trend in plasterwork developed through the combination of indigenous stonework traditions of Seljuq conquered Anatolia, Georgia and Armenia.

The Seljuq period witnessed one of the most active times of ceramic production since the Abbasids. A characteristic Seljuq ceramic comprised a finely potted body with alkaline glaze. The Seljuq potters achieved a method to stop pigments from running into the glaze, which allowed them much wider opportunities to paint on the body. A wide range of decorative techniques on ceramics appeared such as monochrome glaze, incised or carved, moulded and under- and overglaze painted ceramics. Overglazed ceramics, especially lustreware, were not only used for pots and plates but also for tiles and *mihrab* decoration. Only one Persian lustre production centre has been known, Kashan. Signed lustre works inform that all lustre makers were seemingly related and lustre was produced by a very limited number of potters. The enamelware in several colours called *minai* (enamel in Persian) ware started to be produced in the late Seljuq period. Themes of mainly Turkish princely figures were depicted. Figures in the Seljuq pottery such as *minai* and lustre show clear parallels with those depicted in manuscript illumination. The facial features are clearly Central Asian and distinct from those found in Mesopotamian Abbasid iconography. However, the lion, eagle, bull and battling bull and lion, all found in ancient Near East iconography, appeared frequently.

The earliest surviving Persian illuminated manuscript is associated with the Seljuq period and shows that the Seljuqs had already become advanced in the development of illumination. Major centres of production were Mosul and Baghdad. Illumination soon spread to Iran, Egypt and Spain. In book illumination, non-Islamic

influences can be seen. For instance, usage of blue and gold most probably came from Byzantine enamel work while angel figures, victorious scenes and draped cloth were also legacies of the Byzantine tradition.

▲ Mamluk period (1259-1517)

Mamluk is the name for Turkish military slaves who were taken from the Black Sea region. The Mamluk military hierarchical society was based on their loyalty to their master. They became politically stronger and entrenched under the Abbasid caliphs, coming to power in Egypt in 1250. The Mamluks saw themselves as the defenders of Islam against the Crusaders and also the Mongols who had already set up power in Iran. The hierarchical character of Mamluk society was reflected in their art. Mamluk art developed epigraphic blazons that displayed the title and status of the owners or commissioners. The blazon usually features a tri-part in a circular medallion. In the centre of the tri-part, epigraphic identification is bare. For example, the lion is associated with Sultan Baibars (r.1260-77), and the double-headed eagle is associated with Sultan Nasir al-Din Muhammad (r.1294-99). Other motifs included the pen, polo-stick and napkin. These epigraphic blazons were used by sultans, viziers and people of various status. Bold *thuluth* calligraphy stating the glory of the master or God usually accompanied the symbol. The tradition of the blazon might have been adopted from Europeans who carried coats of arms. European kings used the lion and double-headed eagle motifs on their coats of arms from the early twelfth century. The Mamluks also favoured arms and armour with gilded inscriptions of blessing for the Sultans as a symbol of their power.

The most popular forms of Mamluk art were metal and glasswork. The major centres of production were Damascus and Cairo. The Mongol onslaught in the thirteenth century caused an exodus of skilled metalworkers from Mosul to the Mamluk realm. Masters of advanced inlay techniques, they soon shared their expertise with the local metalworkers, resulting in their development into highly skilled

Candlestand
Egypt or Syria. c. 1293-1341
20.5cm x 19.5cm

Silver inlaid brass candlestand from the reign of Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir of the Mamluk period. Its base is chased with a broad band of honourific *Thuluth* calligraphy: *The honourable authority, the high, the lordly, the emir, the learned, the diligent, the most excellent, the most perfect, the master, the possessor (the officer of) al-Malik al-Nasir.*

artisans. A great number of mosque lamps, basins, candlesticks and dishes were produced in metal with brass increasing in popularity over bronze. However, the ensuing mass production led to a decline in the varieties of their shapes. The elaborate religious ceremonies of the Mamluks created a need for a range of religious tools. Mamluk metal decoration was similar to glass decoration. Metal and glassmakers produced a range of ceremonial tools such as mosque lamps, beakers, perfume bottles and candlesticks with emblazonments and words extolling the glory of God. Glass lamps for mosques were usually about 35cm in height and gilded in gold and enameled in blue with honorific words for sultans and Qur'anic verses. An account in the 1490s recorded five hundred mosque lamps being sent to the Dome of the Rock.

The decoration of Mamluk textiles saw inscriptions glorifying the sultans replacing the traditional arabesque. Textiles were exported to major European cities, as indicated by the nine-metre long Bardini carpet which belonged to the Medicis and was recorded in the catalogue of the Palazzo Cecchio. The Ottoman sultans also held Mamluk carpets in high esteem. After the Ottomans took Cairo and Damascus in 1585, Sultan Murad III (r.1574-95) ordered eleven master carpet makers and 1,000 kilograms of dyed wool to be sent to the Ottoman court workshop in Istanbul.

▲ Il-Khanid (1256-1353)

The Il-Khanids were a Mongol dynasty which established its supremacy in Iran under Hulegu Khan (r.1256-65) who was sent to Iran by the Great Khan of China, Möngke (r.1251-59). Hulegu then expanded into Iraq, the Caucasus, much of Anatolia and Afghanistan. He advanced to Baghdad and put the Abbasids to an end by murdering the caliph in 1258. Under Il-Khanid rule, Buddhist, Christian and Jewish cultures flourished. Even after the seventh Il-Khanid ruler, Ghazan Khan (r.1295-1304), converted to Islam in 1295, the deep-rooted cultural traditions of the steppe continued to be maintained.

Other branches of the Mongols thrived among the Eurasian steppe lands. The Chagatai Khanid was set up in Transoxiana by Chagatai (r.1227-42) who was the eldest surviving son of Chingiz Khan (c. 1162-1227). The Golden Horde (1243-1502) was also set up in southern Russia and there they had two capitals called *Saray* (Palace or Court) along the Volga. The third ruler, Berke (r.1257-67), converted to Islam and all *khans* (rulers) eventually became Muslim and his rule was the highest point of their power. They were strongly opposed against the Il-Khanids who were pagan at that time. The Golden Horde was strategically placed geographically for trading with Anatolia; their trade included Mamluk slaves for Egypt and Syria and textiles for Europe.

The most important influence in later Islamic art occurred during the Il-Khanid period despite the violence and upheavals of their invasion. Once they had established their power in Iran, what is called the *Pax Mongolica* was brought into the Middle East. A vast land mass stretching from China under the Yüan dynasty to the Middle East under the Il-Khanids was connected under one umbrella by the Mongols. With this stability, trading, especially along the famed silk route, flourished and a number of Chinese arts, lacquer works, silk embroidered textiles, metalwork, porcelains and bronze mirrors were brought into the Islamic west. This scale of trading was unprecedented for its time. Exotic Chinese arts triggered the fashion for Chinese motifs in Islamic art. The first major appearance of *chinoiserie* (Chinese inspired motifs) predominantly the lotus, peony, dragon, phoenix, prune, and landscape scenes can be seen on the tiles of the Takht-i Sulayman, the palace built by Abaqa Khan (r.1265-82). Features of moon-like rounded faces with slanted eyes clearly show Mongolian facial characteristics. From this point on, Chinese motifs spread quickly into Islamic lands.

The Mongol incursions had a great impact on many aspects of life in the Islamic west. They caused serious disruption to agriculture and cultural production. However, it is also true that intellectual and cultural activity came to life again under their royal patronage. With the increase in architectural projects under royal patronage, arts

related to architectural decoration became highly developed. Glazed tile production, for instance, for both the interior and exterior became extremely popular. Large scale *mihrabs* and calligraphic panels composed of smaller lustre tiles were commissioned. Due to the high expense and time consuming aspect of the work, the lustre and *minai* techniques started to be replaced by *Lajvardina*, overglaze painting with gold. Lustre, *minai* and *lajvardina* were all used for bowls, plates and architectural decoration. A very distinctive underglazed painted ware, Sultanabad, was also produced. The body was covered with thick greenish or greyish-brown slip, producing a bumpy effect on its surface. The inside and outside were both heavily decorated with Chinese motifs.

Bowl
Iran, Kashan. c. 13th century CE
9.5cm x 20cm

Lustre painted fritware bowl adorned with the figure of a rider on horseback. The rim is decorated with a calligraphic band and the cavetto with a geometric compartmental design.

Although the Il-Khanids valued their strong ties to Yuan China as illustrated by the name Il-Khan (literally subordinate), they also valued the legacy of the great Persian Sassanian empire. Abaqa's palace was built over the Sassanian sanctuary of Shiz, "Solomon's Throne". The living quarters of the Il-Khanids was the site of the throne room of the great Sassanian ruler Khusrau. The Il-Khanids favoured the Persian literary masterpiece, the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), which also shows their respect for Sassanian culture.

Besides the *Shahnameh*, another national undertaking was the compilation of a universal history book, *Compendium of World History* by Rashid al-Din Hamadani, a converted Jewish historian and vizier to the Mongol court. A copy of the *Shahnameh* with 300 illustrations was also commissioned. Extremely large sized illuminations show that more paper was available. Those manuscripts display various traditions in paintings and the depiction of facial expressions become markedly more individualistic. The largest surviving manuscript (each page 72 x 50 cm) was copied at Baghdad and dedicated to the mausoleum of Uljeitu (r.1304-16) at Sultaniyya. It took eight years to complete. The commissioning of fine and large manuscripts was a costly and long-term event, and became a long tradition of princely activities.

A horizontal format developed from the standard square format of earlier manuscripts. One third of the paper was dedicated to text; lines were emphasised in black; landscapes were detailed and colours were faded and shaded, indicating a Chinese influence on Islamic painting. Indoor scenes have tri-partite divisions by columns or walls. Outdoor scenes tended to expand beyond the margins of the paper to show the movement or continuation of the scene.

The court of the Il-Khanid was interested in the sciences and set up an observatory and acclaimed library in Marageh under the control of the widely respected Islamic scholar Nasir al-Din Tusi. Books on mathematics, science and philosophy were kept in this fine library. This internationally known observatory was operational for fifty years, longer than the one operational for eighteen years under the Seljuq ruler Malik Shah.

Candlestand
Iran. c. 14th-15th century CE
31.5cm x 20.5cm

Section of an ornate cast brass candlestand with the stylised tulip design popular in Timurid metalwork.

▲ Timurid period (1370-1506)

In Iran and Central Asia, following the disintegration of the Il-Khanids, various small Turkmen dynasties became embroiled in a battle for supremacy. Another great warlord from the steppe who claimed descent from Chingiz Khan, Timur (r.1370-1405) and his successors consolidated the area again. Timur viewed the Golden Horde with hostility and crossed the Oxus river and surged into Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, northern Iraq and part of south Russia. Fearlessly, he took Aleppo and Damascus from the Mamluks and sacked Delhi, the capital of the Tughluqs (1320-1414). He was also victorious against the Ottomans in Ankara and captured Bayazid I in 1402. Following Timur's death, his empire, with the exception of Central Asia, became fragmented.

Although Timur himself brought artists from his plundered cities to his capital, Samarqand, his contributions to art production were comparatively smaller in scale than his successors who glorified their patronage for art rather than politics. Timurid art reached a new stage of development incorporating Chinese influences which permeated Persian art and spread to most Islamic lands. Under royal patronage, Chinese motifs were reproduced in all media, including wood carving, all kinds of stone carving such as jade and marble, ceramics, manuscripts, metalwork, and bookbinding. The origin of the motifs can be clearly recognised as Chinese though they have lost their original meaning and came to be used simply as decoration. A characteristic of Timurid *chinoiserie* is the harmony between Chinese art and Islamic traditional decorative styles. The stiffness that had been evident in Il-Khanid art was replaced by the highly naturalistic fluidity of Timurid art. This Timurid style was to have profound influence on later Islamic art.

Underglazed tile, tile mosaic and *cuerda seca* tile work became an essential and characteristic decoration of Timurid architecture. It was applied for minute interior work and for adorning the exterior of grand Timurid buildings. Since the fourteenth century, Chinese blue and white porcelain captivated Muslim eyes as evidenced in Timurid ceramic production which was heavily influenced by Ming blue and

white wares. Excessive demands for Chinese blue and white wares encouraged Muslim potters to produce copies of blue and white. The Timurid pot-belly shaped jade jar with s-shaped dragon handle of inlaid metal became popular, particularly in the fifteenth century, a form possibly copied from imported Chinese blue and white wares.

The best example of Timurid art is the period's miniature paintings. Until the early fourteenth century, production centres were Baghdad and Shiraz. By the fifteenth century, more schools were set up which produced original manuscripts for the court of the Timurids. The Herat school in Khorasan under Shah Rukh (r.1405-47) and Baysungur (1399-1434) reached the highest point in its quality. Timurid painting represents detailed landscapes and compartmentalised architecture in bright colours. The Timurids also produced the *Shahnameh*. More than 40 artists, not only illuminators but also gilders, leather artists, designers and binders, were involved in manuscript production in the court of Baysungur. Under the patronage of Sultan Husain Baiqra (r.1470-1506) who enjoyed the second peak of Timurid art, great artists like Ali, Aqa Mirak and Bihzad became very active. The epoch making contribution of Bihzad's paintings was the representation of the lives of ordinary people which had never before been considered worthy as a subject. The scale of Timurid court art can be said to rival the patronage of Lorenzo de Medici in Florence during the Renaissance period.

As well as in manuscripts, the finest workmanship of Timurid artists is represented in carving work. The quality of carving in many kinds of material from hard stone to wood and stucco reached a climax under the Timurids. The deep carving technique chiselled in several layers is called *haft qalam* (seven pens or seven chisels), a technique which seems to echo Chinese lacquer works. Incorporating both the arabesque and Chinese inspired motifs, these were freely carved in an almost three-dimensional quality. This highly developed technique can be seen in Qur'an stands, pen boxes, cenotaphs, tombstones and walls.

■ Later Islamic Period

▲ Safavid period (1501-1732)

The Safavids ruled Iran and a part of Central Asia at a time when the other great Muslim empires of the time, the Ottomans and the Mughals, were all feuding to a greater and lesser degree. However, Safavid Iran alone in the region suffered major defeat by the Ottomans. Early Safavid arts were taken to Turkey when the Ottomans sacked Ardebil, site of the most sacred shrine of the Safavids. Despite some rather extremist religious beliefs, Safavid society practised relative religious tolerance. This is suggested by increasing Armenian patronage, as well as their strong ties with European allies against the Ottomans.

During the Safavid period, Isfahan was called the pearl of Islam and the Safavid capital expanded under its greatest patron of architecture, Shah Abbas (r.1587-1629). A wide range of new architectural forms such as mosques, tombs, palaces and bridges were developed under his patronage. The *maidan*, measuring 512m x159m (1680 x523 ft) in size, became a symbol of the growing city and was the largest plaza in the world. Records show that from the seventeenth century onward, increasing numbers of Europeans visited Iran seeking trading opportunities and were impressed by the new capital.

The Timurid and other Turkmen dynastic tradition of art patronage as a princely activity, particularly of manuscripts, was inherited by the Safavid court and continued to produce fine paintings. The most important art patron among the Safavids was Shah Tahmasp (r.1524-76) under whose rule the Safavid court workshop was formed. The Safavid master calligrapher Sultan Muhammad produced a copy of the *Shanameh* that took ten years to complete. The impressive 742 large folios (47cm x 31.8cm) with each page framed in gold, was most probably the largest manuscript project ever undertaken during the sixteenth century. When the Safavids invaded Timurid Herat in 1507, top artists like Bihzad were taken to the Safavid court because of their knowledge and taste of

Timurid art. Shah Tahmasp himself was sent as a governor to Herat where Timurid court art tradition had endured. It is very possible that artists who practised Timurid traditions moved to Isfahan when Tahmasp returned in 1522. Around this time, portraiture was introduced into Persian painting by the artist Dust Muhammad who opened up a new area in Persian art.

The Shah, unfortunately, became increasingly extremist in his religious views during his later reign and lost his enthusiasm towards painting at the same time. This brought immense change to art production. Some projects for instance, the *Khamsa Nama* by the calligrapher Shah Muhammad al-Nishapuri, also known as *Zarin Qalam* (Golden Pen), were abandoned as incomplete manuscripts, as were the works of artists such as Aqa Mirak, Muzaffar Ali, Sultan Muhammad and Mir Musawwir. This decline in manuscript production could have encouraged artists like Samad and Dust Muhammad to move to India with the exiled Mughal prince Humayun in search of new patronage.

The Safavid period was also a turning point for Persian painting. European paintings were brought into Persia as gifts for shahs by European merchants. Painters started to accept the European style and materials such as oil paints. Portraits increased in popularity and a three-dimensional effect started to become the norm. Classical Persian miniatures had never shown depth as dimensional in the miniature. Subject matter like landscape and costume also show strong European influence. The Safavid miniature painting was very close to lacquer decoration. Lacquer wares became popular for book covers and boxes with *chinoiserie*, animal motifs and European landscapes.

Persian calligraphers like Sultan Ali of Mashhad, Mir Ali, Mahmud Nishapuri and Mir Emad developed the *Nastaliq* style, which became the common script used for poems. Ali Riza of Tabriz refined the *Thuluth* style. The highly refined *Nastaliq* script was then brought into Turkey and India by migrated Persian calligraphers the same way Persian painters brought the Persian miniature.

In ceramics, the most popular Safavid colour scheme was cobalt blue decorated on a white body, reminiscent of Chinese porcelain. The lustre technique also resurfaced in the second half of the seventeenth century although Safavid lustre did not achieve the popularity it had previously enjoyed. A variety of shapes were produced: the *hookah* base, spittoon, bowl, dish, goblet and cup.

The Safavid carpet was the first form of artistic evidence to survive in great quantity. It became one of the most important commercial commodities as Safavid silk became popular in Europe. Silk trading through Armenians who were relocated to New Jorfa brought enormous wealth for the Safavids. Repeating motifs of animals and humans in medallions became popular as a new form of decoration in sixteenth century court carpets. Safavid textile production reached its highest level. The Ardebil carpet (10.97 x 5.34m), which was probably produced in Tabriz, is the best example of the quality and fineness of Safavid court carpet. The famed carpet had been offered by Shah Tahmasp to the sacred shrine at Ardebil in memory of the founder of the Safavid line, Shaykh Safi al-Din.

Tribal carpets also started to survive in quantity. Caucasian weavers were very active, and Turkmen tribes produced carpets and tent hangings which were often in imitation of wooden door and domestic architectural fittings. In the sixteenth century, carpet making became a state industry under Shah Abbas to meet the great demand of Europe. More dated and signed carpets were produced. The Polonaise carpet and vase carpet, for example, achieved great recognition in Europe.


سورة البقرة مدنية
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
الم ذلك الكتاب لا ريب فيه هدى
للمتقين الذين يؤمنون بالغيب ويقيمون
الصلوة ومما رزقناهم ينفقون
والذين يؤمنون بما انزل اليك وما
انزل من قبلك وبالاخرة هم يوقنون
فاتحة الكتاب مكية
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
الحمد لله رب العالمين الرحمن الرحيم
اياك نعبد واياك
اهدنا الصراط المستقيم
غير
ولا
الضالين

Qur'an
Iran. 1095 AH / 1684 CE
30cm x 19cm x 6.5cm

Safavid period Qur'an, copied by Muhammad Ibrahim for the Library of Shah Suleyman of Persia. Completed in the month of *Jumada al-Ukhra* 1095 AH.

▲ Qajar period (1779-1924)

After the disturbance caused by Nadir Shah (r.1736-47) of the Afsharids (1736-95), the Qajar dynasty who were originally a Turkmen tribe, assumed power in Iran. It was a relatively ineffective dynasty compared with other Persian dynasties and was further weakened by the European superpowers throughout the 19th century.

The European style of single page painting that had appeared in the Safavid period fully developed as a new style of oil painting under Qajar artists. Members of the Qajar royal family were frequently depicted with distinctive black beards and thick eyebrows. In contrast to former Persian manuscripts, Qajar manuscripts had a colour scheme emphasising black, red and white. Though a certain degree of European influence can be observed in Qajar painting, these heavy black eyes and black curls on the cheeks of faces are reminiscent of the iconography that had been practised during pre-Islamic Sassanian Iran.

As with most other dynasties around this era, textile production was active. Since the nineteenth century, large quantities of Central Asian *ikat*, tie-dyed cloth, have been found. The *ikat* technique, however, had already existed in pre-Islamic times. Varieties of usually abstract motifs were woven into *ikat* textiles, inspired by traditional accessories and flowers, some of which are comparable to motifs employed in Turkmen tribal carpets. Embroidered textiles were also an important part of Central Asian arts. One of the most striking products of embroidery is the *Souzani* (literally 'needle' in Persian) used as wall hangings and wedding bedspreads and often given as dowry gifts. *Souzanis* normally consisted of cotton panels embroidered with motifs of large and small stylised sundisk-like flower motifs in red silk. Samarqand and Bukhara were centres of production for both these types of textiles. A popular motif, the pear shaped *buteh*, is seen recurrently in Central Asian textiles, as well as in Iran. There are many different variations in its form, from highly naturalistic form to highly abstract. This popular motif is used repeatedly in Kerman and Kashmir shawls, eventually being produced in Scotland as the paisley motif and achieving widespread popularity.

Tile
Iran. 19th century CE
35cm x 25cm

Underglaze painted clay tile demonstrative of Qajar art at its height of sophistication. The seated princely figure in the garden presents a high degree of naturalism in posture, the rendering of light and shade, and the adoption of perspective.

▲ Ottoman period (1281-1924)

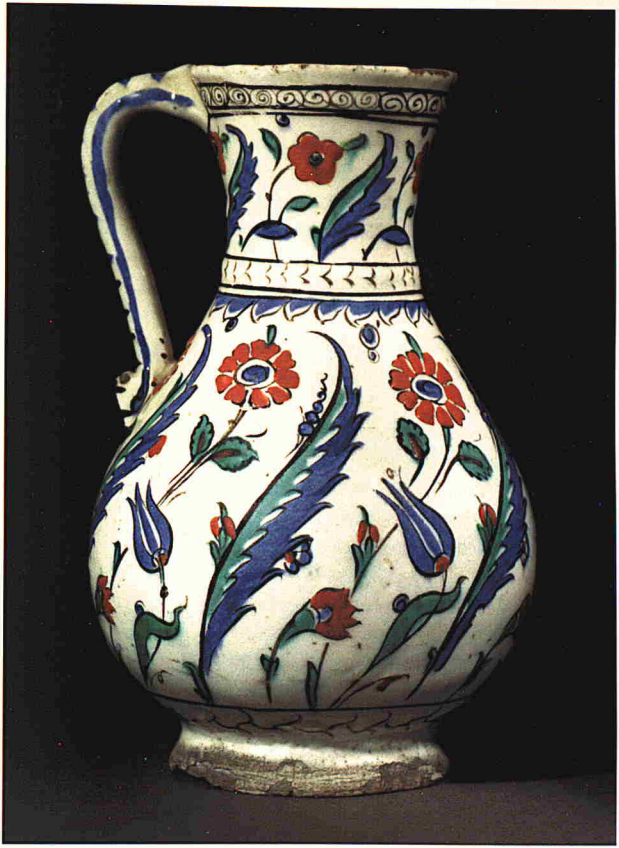
The Ottomans of Turkey were the longest ruling dynasty in Islamic history. They ruled as the guardians of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. The Ottomans, a well organised military bureaucratic empire, was one of the largest in world history, ruling lands from Hungary to North Africa. This huge land mass brought large tax revenues to the Ottoman Empire which accounts for its wealth. The arts of Ottoman Turkey developed with the growth of its court art workshops that were first established by Mehmet II (r.1444-46 and 1451-1481) and became very influential under Sülayman the Magnificent (r.1520-1566). With economical and military expansion during the reign of Sulayman, there was also much creative development in Ottoman art.

The Ottoman city of Istanbul had been one of the most important cities of its time and had thrived as Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, for more than a thousand years. When the great Byzantine capital fell to the Muslim conquerers, its name was changed to Istanbul. Enormous mosques began to be built, mainly as a result of politically motivated propaganda. Advanced architectural techniques were used lavishly in Christian buildings such as the Hagia Sophia, which was studied by Ottoman architects who introduced technological innovations. The Hagia Sophia henceforth became the most important model for Ottoman mosques. The most important architect of the Ottoman time was Sinan, the chief architect of the empire, who was involved in some one hundred buildings in his lifetime such as the Sulaymaniye Complex in Istanbul and the Selimiye mosque in Edirne.

Ottoman artists made fashionable certain decorative trends. Early Ottoman decoration shows a very settled balance between geometric patterns and naturalistic floral motifs. Under Sülayman the Magnificent, Ottoman classical decoration was established. The most prominent examples are flower motifs like the tulip, hyacinth, rose and prune. Ottoman artists developed Chinese motifs in a different way from the Timurid style. For example, the *Hatayi* or Cathay motif (Chinese in Turkish) and *Rumi* (arabesque in Turkish) were combined;

Ewer
Turkey, Iznik. 1585 CE
23cm x 16cm

Underglaze painted fritware ewer with motifs of rosettes, tulips and saz leaves in green, cobalt blue and sealing wax red.



whilst the *Chintamani* developed, originating from Buddhist art motifs. However, in Ottoman art these strips with three dots became a mere motif that lost its original implications and meaning. Ottoman arts show prominent influence from the Persian artistic tradition, owing to the presence of Persian artists with Timurid artistic backgrounds in the Ottoman court. Following the defeat of the Safavids by the Ottomans at Chaldian in 1514, more Iranian artists were brought to work in the Ottoman court workshops, resulting in Timurid Persian influences appearing in Ottoman textiles, ceramics, book illumination and woodwork.

One of the better-known forms of Ottoman arts is Iznik pottery. A great amount of pottery and tile work for architectural decoration was produced during the sixteenth century and also exported to Europe. As the demand for the pottery increased, a distinct colour scheme developed that was unique to Iznik ware; the varieties of design, however, were not widened.

The Ottoman Empire was the first Islamic dynasty to set up an organised archive system for documents and official papers. Significant Islamic manuscripts from Aq-Qoyunlu and the Timurid and Safavid periods were kept in the royal library. Ottoman miniature painting inherited the Timurid-Turkmen tradition just as the Safavids had. However, both arts developed in different ways. Ottoman miniature painting had a high sense of realism. The Ottoman court cultivated close relationships with European cities through trading — particularly in textiles — with Italian cites. Such trading encouraged further artistic exchanges, such as illustrated by the presence of the Venetian artists Gentile Bellini and Bartolommeo Bellano in the Ottoman court.

Ottoman calligraphers such as Shaykh Hamd Allah (1436-1520) improved the *divani* script, which was commonly used for chancery documents. The art of calligraphy was further developed in the Ottoman period, in part as a result of the contribution of Mamluk calligraphers brought to the Ottoman court after the conquests of Cairo and Damascus.

Ottoman court attire was highly developed, with a wide variety of materials and lengths of cloth. Besides supplying the court with textiles, the Ottoman textile industry brought prosperity to the Ottoman empire by exporting embroidered silks and brocaded silks and velvets to Europe. Ottoman textiles and carpets were highly prized in Europe as evidenced by the painting "The French Ambassadors" by the German painter Hans Holbein (1497-1543). The carpet was used as a table covering rather than on the floor as was customary, indicating the value with which the Europeans viewed the carpet. Western art historians began thus to refer to the motif in the Holbein painting as the Holbein carpet motif. The Ottoman court was also a big importer of fine Italian textiles from Venice and Genova. Diplomatic exchanges to China and Persia also brought rich collections of imported textiles.

▲ Mughal India (1526-1858)

Though Mughal India was active and one of the longest lived dynasties, they were not the first Islamic dynasty on the Indian subcontinent. Arabs had reached India as early as the eighth century. From the eleventh century, the Ghaznavids expanded their territories into Northern India. In the 1180s, the Ghurid empire displaced Ghaznavid rule and in 1192 the city of Delhi fell to the Ghurid general Qutb al-Din Aibak (r.1206-1210). He had achieved independence from his Ghurid overlords and proclaimed his own rule under the name of sultan. This marked the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate dynasty. Five dynasties, namely the Slave dynasty (1206-1290), the Khaljis (1269-1320), the Tughluqs (1320-1414), the Sayids (1414-1451) and the Lodhis (1451-1526), succeeded each other until the Mughals conquered all in 1526.

Reaching India from Ferghana (now in Uzbekistan), the founder of the Mughal dynasty, Babur (r.1526-30), was a descendant of Chingiz Khan and Timur. He defeated the Lodhis at Panipat in 1526. Yet this first victory did not consolidate the Mughals' power in India. The reign of Humayun (1530-40 and 1555-56), son of Babur, was made turbulent by Afghan threats for fifteen years. Humayun sought

Basin
India. 19th century CE
17cm x 38.5cm

Bidri ware basin, known as the *tasht* in Northern India and the *sailabchi* in the Deccan. An essential item with the ewer used for washing hands.

refuge at the court of Tahmasp, the Safavid ruler. When he returned to Delhi as sultan again in 1555, he brought with him top artists from Tahmasp's atelier. Persian painting in its mature stage of development thus arrived in India and had a great impact on Mughal miniature painting. During the reign of Akbar (r.1556-1605), Mughal rule expanded to north and central India and consolidated as an empire. His governmental body included Turks, Afghans, Persians and Hindus. Successors of the great empire, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, continued to expand their power. They were interested in royal portraiture as Akbar had been. Art patronage saw a decline, however, in the time of Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707) due to the emperor's extreme religious views.

The Mughal dynasty demonstrated its enjoyment of glamorous decorative art in the use of expensive material. Jade has held

significant meaning for the Mughal court ever since its dynastic ancestor Timur collected jade objects. Jade was used as a symbol of legitimacy of Timurid ancestry. Shah Jahan (r.1628-58) collected jade carvings that had belonged to the Timurids; whilst Jahangir (r.1605-27) commissioned carved jade works in many different shapes such as cups, dagger hilts, hookah bases, amulets, lidded jars and spittoons. Certain jade cups in particular were very similar to dragon jade cups, based on the Chinese models produced in the Timurid period. From the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, gems began to be set in jade and rock crystal. The gem setting of the Mughal Court was contemporary to that of the Ottoman Court but different techniques were employed by Mughal artisans.

Mughal craftsmen also developed various metal inlay techniques, setting up workshops, each with their own specialities. After the seventeenth century, a discernible European influence began to reach the Mughal court. Shah Jahan loved cameos that had been brought by the Europeans and their motifs began to appear on *cartouches* as decorations in his buildings. The Indian technique of setting, *kundan*, contributed to the development of jewellery encrusted or set with hard stones. The deeply rooted zeal for jewellery has existed since ancient times in India. Mughal India had a rich natural source of gems and also imported a great amount of stones such as emeralds from Egypt, red coral from the Mediterranean and turquoise from Iran and China.

Mughal arms and armour were also highly decorated with finely curved vegetal motifs and religious inscriptions. The blades were usually of watered steel inlaid with gold. Hilts were crystal or jade and sometimes set with precious stones such as rubies, emeralds and diamonds. Many daggers produced have survived. The most characteristic type of dagger is the *katar*. One of the most distinctive forms of Mughal Indian metalwork is the work known as *Bidri* ware, named after the Deccani town of Bidar. The technique spread from the Deccan to north India and grew in popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A variety of shapes such as jars, trays and hookah bases were produced. Wooden works inlaid with

mother-of-pearl and ivory were also very popular, while ivory inlaid in animal horns started to appear in the seventeenth century.

The marvelous inlay works of Mughal craftsmen were not merely restricted to the decorative arts. In the architecture of their magnificent monuments, precious and semi-precious stones were inlaid into white marble and red sandstone facades. The famed Taj Mahal epitomises the pinnacle of Mughal architectonic decoration with its wall surfaces inlaid in the *pietra dura* style and carved dadoes of floral sprays and floral arabesques. The passionate love of the Mughals for beauty extended to imperial gardens created in the image of paradise. Inspired by the Persian *Chahar Bagh*, the Mughal emperors introduced lavish gardens to the grounds of their funerary monuments as well as their imperial abodes, with geometrically laid out channels and waterways dividing garden plots, pools and fountains.

Pre-Islamic India has a long tradition of fine Buddhist, Jain and Hindu painting and manuscript production in bright colours. Whilst early Mughal painting developed under Safavid influence, from the fifteenth century, a European influence started to appear: three-dimensional representation, individual facial expressions and exotic landscapes. The Mughal's high concern for realism from European influence is not displayed in the paintings of any other Islamic dynasty. A critical point was the migration of Persian painters and calligraphers; for example, the coming of Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd al-Samad with Humayun to the Mughal court. These Safavid masters encouraged an enthusiasm towards painting and introduced such advanced techniques as shading and "feathery touch". Abd al-Samad, in particular, developed a very distinctive style with a leaning towards portraiture. He drew court events (royal portraits) and daily activities in the lives of emperors. His signed paintings are valued as works of biographical quality.

The arts of the book flourished under Mughal royal patronage. Th emperor Akbar was one of the greatest patrons of painting, with his court atelier producing the monumental *Hamzanama*. The manuscript has 1,400 illuminations and used large sheets of cotton,

a traditional Indian material for painting, taking about ten years to complete. During Akbar's reign, the royal atelier produced manuscripts of popular Hindu epics, demonstrating the active relationship between the Hindus and the Mughal court. Islamic miniature tradition brought an important change to the earlier trend of Jain painting, with landscapes starting to make an appearance, whilst portraiture albums increased in popularity. Under Jahangir, borders of such albums began to be decorated with landscapes, flowers, animals and human figures. To complete one painting, often more than one artist was involved and sometimes up to six artists were engaged only for the margins of portraits.

Mughal textile production greatly benefited from pre-Islamic weaving traditions and dying techniques. Therefore, it was conceivable that the Mughal court showed an active interest in textiles. The Mughal court developed very fine fabrics, such as semi-transparent cotton or silk textile, which were very unique when compared to other Islamic lands. Turbans, veils, Hindu girdles and the *jamah* — a variety of costumes were prepared with fine fabrics. Even though the knotted carpet did not originate in India, its production quickly expanded under Akbar's patronage. Carpets appeared in miniature illustrations during Akbar's time, suggesting how much he favoured carpets, possibly influenced by his preference for living in northern India with its considerably cool climate and range of plants and flowers.

■ Islam and Islamic Art in other areas

▲ The Far East

Islam started to expand outside Arabia just after the death of the Prophet. By the middle of the eighth century, the Islamic empire had expanded to Central Asia. Though China had never been conquered or ever became a part of the Islamic empire, contact between the two super powers of ancient times was established from the early days of the Islamic empire. One of the earliest Muslim envoys who was received by a Chinese emperor is believed to have been sent from the Caliph Uthman to the court of Tai Zong of the Tang dynasty in 651. The presence of a Chinese emperor among the other five great rulers of the world on a wall painting in the Umayyad desert palace of Qusayr Amrah also indicates an early awareness among Muslims of China. Together with contacts at court level, Islam expanded through trade over sea and land. China was to play an important role as a source of cultural stimulation for Muslim artists. The first battle between the Chinese and the Muslims occurred at Talas in 751 and resulted in the Muslim forces overcoming the Chinese. Chinese paper making techniques and Chinese silk weaving techniques were thus transferred to the Islamic lands. Chinese artists including papermakers and weavers were transported by Muslim armies to Samarqand and other cities where they eventually established factories. The increase of paper supply was a possible catalyst for the development of Islamic calligraphy and manuscript production.

Chinese fine objects, wood carving, silk and ceramics were always admired by Muslim artists. Besides the spreading of Chinese influence in the Islamic west following the arrival of the Mongols, Chinese travellers also accounted for forms of cultural exchanges. During the Ming dynasty, the Admiral Cheng Ho, a Chinese Muslim, commanded seven expeditions over 33 years. He visited more than 30 countries reaching Southeast Asia, Arabia and the east coast of Africa. Islamic influence on Chinese ceramic production became apparent by the end of the fifteenth century. Blue and white porcelain

Judz of a Qur'an
China. 1142 AH / 1730 CE
28cm x 19.5cm x 2cm

A page from one *judz* of a Chinese Qur'an, written in Chinese Arabic script and decorated with floral borders of peonies.

started to be manufactured in Islamic shapes with Qur'anic verses during the reign of Zhende (r.1506-21). The emperor himself displayed an avid interest in Islam, which suggests that the Muslim population of China was significant enough to be noted by him.

Chinese Muslims produced very unique art objects. The most prominent characteristic of these objects is evidence of a strict adherence to the faith. For example, though cloisonné or enamel ware shows ancient Chinese features in its shape, it usually also bears Qur'anic verse. Ceramic and metalwork also carry Qur'anic verses or the name of God. Chinese Islamic calligraphy developed along with Chinese calligraphic traditions.

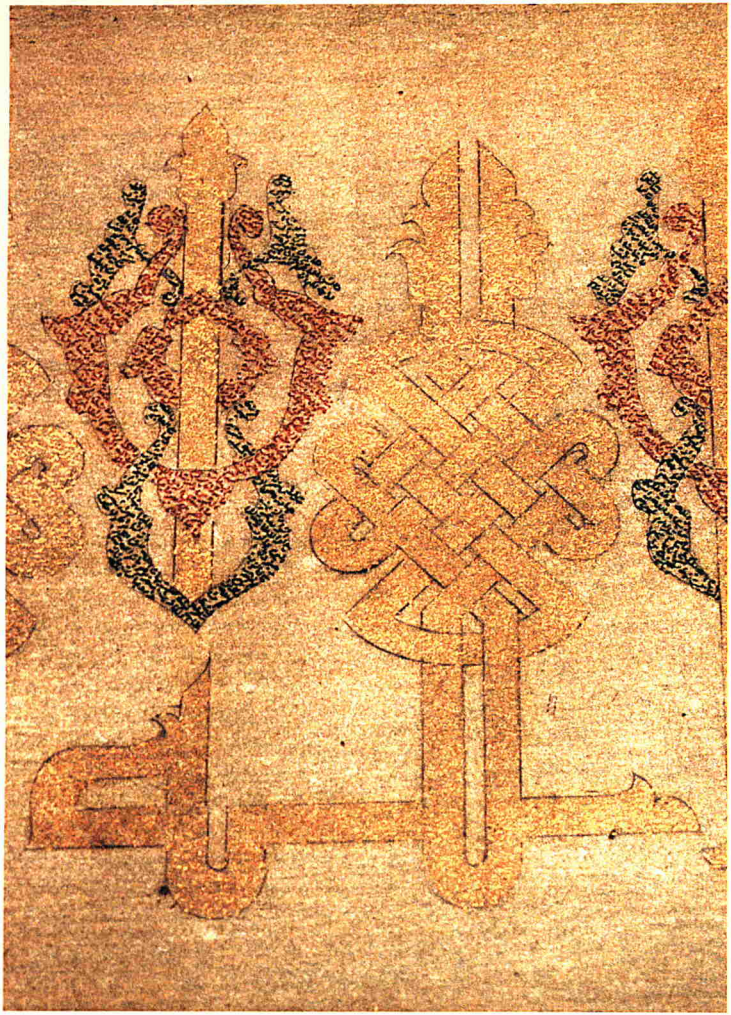
▲ Southeast Asia

Muslim traders started to appear in Southeast Asia as early as the seventh century. The earliest evidence of Islam in Malaysia was the inscribed stone of Terengganu dated 1303 but a few earlier examples can be found in Eastern Java in the eleventh century. Islam expanded in Southeast Asia through trading. The disintegration of the Song dynasty disturbed overland trading while the Yuan dynasty, the Song's successors, encouraged sea trading and brought more traders into this region. Long distance trading was dominated by Muslim traders. Therefore, the population of Muslim traders increased, especially along coastal areas. In the fourteenth century, Malacca became the first important Islamic kingdom in the archipelago and this encouraged the Islamisation of this area. The Majapahit prince, Parameswara (a Sumatran Hindu) fled to Malacca, converting to Islam around 1414 and, henceforth, became known as Iskandar Shah, the first Muslim ruler.

Islamisation can be seen in art production. Arabic inscriptions and aniconic motifs became the main form of decoration for Islamic art in the Southeast Asian region. The works that bear *Tauhid* (oneness of God) were held to possess talismanic magical powers beyond their functions. Figurative representations are rare. Wood carving, ceramics, metalwork and textiles, all kinds of art

production, mainly carry Qur'anic verses, abstract geometric decorations and foliated vegetal motifs.

Brass, a very popular material for metalwork with vegetal decoration, was used for both ceremonial and daily tools. East Malaysia in particular has a long tradition of brass works, especially in Sabah and Sawawak, where brass was equally valued as jewellery. Iron was another popular material. One of the most characteristic art forms in iron is the *keris*, a dagger with a wavy blade. The *keris* has been highly valued not only for its sophisticated appearance but also for the possession of its talismanic powers. The *keris* is imbued with this spiritual power through ceremonial rituals and believed to give protection to the owner. Like the weapons of many other Islamic communities, the blade of the *keris* is often inscribed with gilded Qur'anic verses for added protection. The oldest Malay manuscript can be dated to the early sixteenth century. Qur'ans are usually beautifully decorated as in other Islamic countries. Rectangular compartments with multiple cusped arches often accompany the main body of the text, and architectural wood carving motifs are popular forms of decoration.



Galleries of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

There are two floors of permanent galleries and two special galleries for temporary exhibitions. The permanent galleries are categorised by artefact material or field of study. Located on Level 3 of the IAMM are some exceptions, the India Gallery, China Gallery and Malay World Gallery. They serve to represent the diversity of Islamic peoples and the multi-cultural heritage of Malaysia. The majority of Malaysia's population comprises three ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese and Indians, and two theories of Islam's introduction to the Malay archipelago hypothesise that Islam arrived either through Arab and Indian merchants from the west, or from Chinese Muslims in the east. The remaining galleries of the IAMM are the Architecture Gallery and the Qur'an and Manuscript Gallery, also located on Level 3; and the Ceramics and Glass Gallery, Metalwork Gallery, Coin Gallery, Woodwork Gallery, Arms and Armour Gallery, Jewellery Gallery, and Textile Gallery, all on Level 4. Within each gallery, the collections are displayed thematically, according to chronology, region or technique of production.

The history of Islam and the amazing range of styles, techniques and trends are so varied that it is difficult to adopt a formal approach in the presentation of the collections. Gathered within the halls of the galleries are pieces that may or may not illustrate the most significant aspects of a particular region or dynasty. Some pieces come to be here through the generosity of private owners or lenders, others through the museum's acquisition policy. Collectively, they are organised to give the museum visitor a clearer idea of the multiple aspects of Islamic art and culture: the ethnographic artefacts of great civilisations, the decorative techniques and materials used and the characteristics of Islamic art.

The pages that follow present an introduction to each gallery laid out according to the visitor's movements within the museum. The first, the Architecture Gallery includes an introduction to the most important elements of mosque architecture as well as a brief mention of the Islamic palace and mausoleum, two other prominent forms of Islamic monumental buildings. A branch of the Architecture Gallery is the celebrated Standard Chartered Ottoman Room, sponsored by the Standard Chartered Banking Corporation. A nineteenth century room from an Ottoman Syrian noble house, its original panels and windows have been carefully reconstructed in the museum to create an example of the opulence and grandeur of the last magnificent empire of Islam. The introduction to each of the other eleven galleries in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is followed by a selection of some of the most significant and fascinating artefacts in their respective collections.

Architecture Gallery

■ Architecture Gallery

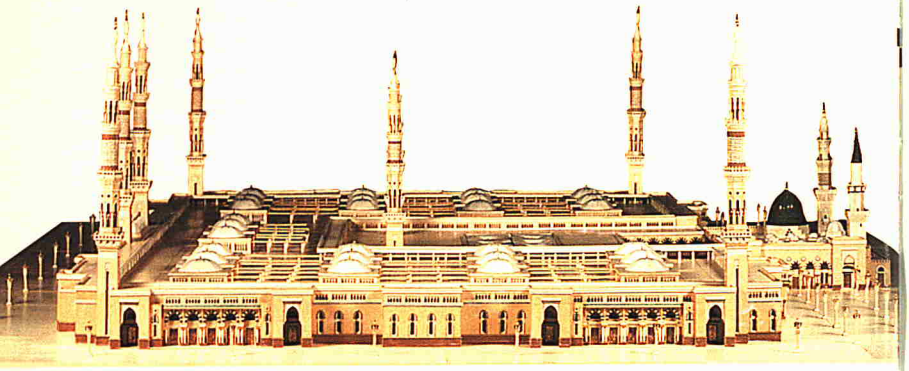
Architecture is best experienced in its original form and is not something easily conveyed within the confines of gallery walls and showcases. Nevertheless, the IAMM gallery devoted to architecture attempts to provide the viewer with a survey of Islamic architecture through models of prominent buildings in the Islamic world and information panels tracing the development of Islamic architecture, as well as original artefacts of Islamic architectural ornamentation such as tiles and carved wooden panels. Some of the most important buildings in Islam are displayed here in the form of three-dimensional architectural models: the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, site of the holy Kaa'bah, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, one of the first examples of Islamic architecture. Additionally, mosques and mausoleums from different periods and regions of the Muslim world offer a comparison in styles and design.

There are several ways to approach the architecture of Islam. From a technical and practical viewpoint, there are the techniques of construction and functionality of the buildings. The architecture of empires, their developments and innovations can be studied and compared historically. There is the aesthetic aspect of architecture in surface decoration as well as the design and form of buildings, an area that can be explored practically and philosophically through the symbolic interpretation of motifs, use of colour and other elements such as light and water.

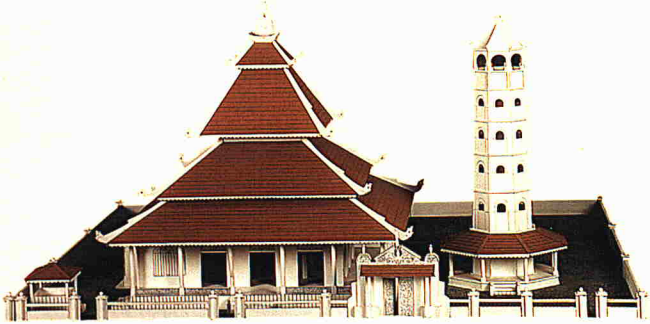
The most important building in Islam is the mosque, the house of prayer. It is, thus, the medium for some of the most impressive feats of Islamic architecture and ornamentation. All Muslims pray facing the same direction, that of Mecca. Known as the *qibla*, this point of prayer was first assigned to *Bayt al-muqqadas* (Jerusalem), until the year 629 CE, when the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., acting upon divine instruction, changed the direction of prayer to the Holy Ka'abah in Mecca. From that point onwards, the *qibla* was established in this direction, thus determining the orientation and spatial organisation of all mosques throughout the world. The structure of the mosque first developed in a rectangular plan as the congregation would position themselves parallel with the *qibla* wall.

The first mosque was the house of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., which consisted of a courtyard, lined at the sides with a row of palm trees, which then developed into a covered arcade. This rectangular hypostyle courtyard structure formed the prototype upon which the design of mosques was based. There are two main types of mosques, the smaller *masjid* and the Friday congregational mosque or *masjid jame'*. The latter can be seen in a variety of forms paying testimony to the great rulers who commissioned their building and the mostly unnamed artisans, craftsmen and builders who constructed them.

As Islamic empires expanded, distinct identities began to develop, many influenced by the earlier building traditions of the Byzantine and Sassanian empires. Following the plan of the first mosque as well as domestic architectural traditions of the land, mosques that developed in the regions of the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and the Mediterranean all incorporated the hypostyle courtyard plan. Mosques in other regions of the Islamic world, however, do not necessarily reflect this standard, mainly due to practical considerations of climate.



Model of the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, Saudi Arabia, which was founded in 622 and expanded in the following centuries.



Model of the Tengkera Mosque, frontal view with minaret, in Melaka, Malaysia. Constructed in 1728 during the Dutch colonial period.

The mosques in the Far East, for example, were commonly built according to vernacular traditions utilising indigenous materials. These regions of Asia never directly came under imperial Islamic influences, and their styles and trends gradually developed as a result of trade and commerce. The earliest mosques of Southeast Asia display the Hindu-Buddhist heritage of the region, especially timber constructions with centralised square-plan prayer halls and sloping tiered roofs. Islam reached China at a very early stage in the religion's development. A country as vast as China displays a certain amount of variety in its mosque construction which can be divided into two basic categories. Those of the northwest region display Central Asian characteristics while the mosques of greater China were often built in the pre-existing Chinese tradition. One of the best examples of the latter would be the Great Mosque of Xian built in the fourteenth century during the Ming Dynasty in the typical Chinese courtyard style. Such mosques serve as an example of how the architectural traditions of a place play a large role in determining their form and structure, although the basic rules of Islam and requirements of mosque architecture, such as *qibla* orientation and prayer hall, are successfully met by the builders.

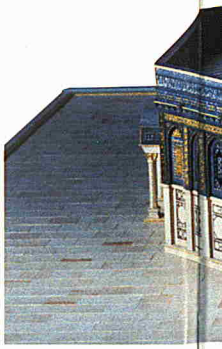
Several elements of the typical mosque that have become defining characteristics of Islamic architecture are found in monumental buildings, both religious and secular, throughout the Islamic world. The first of these is the dome. In mosques, domes were usually placed over the *qibla* wall, acting as an external marker of the most important area of the mosque. The symbolic use of domes as a point of emphasis has been a practice since pre-Islamic times.

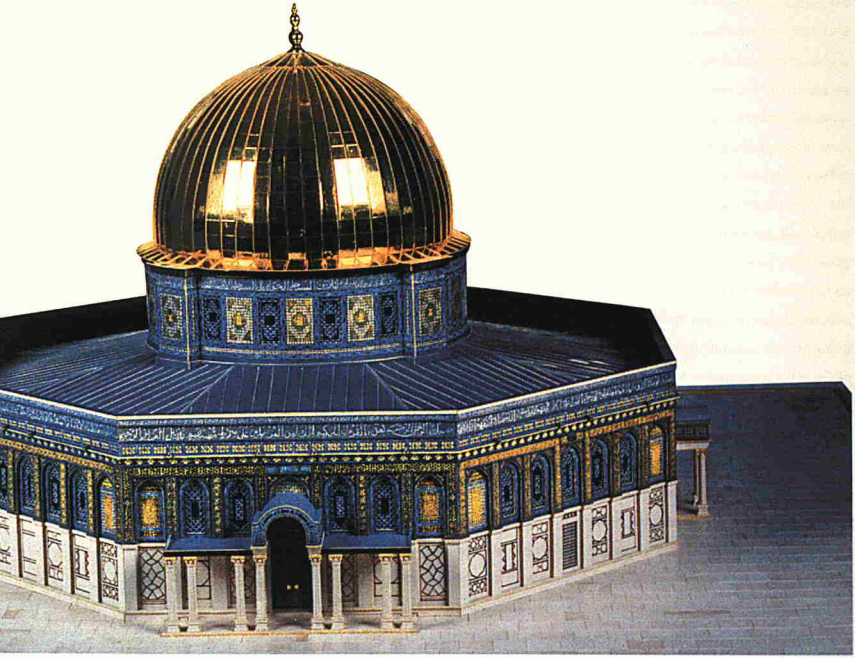
Frontal view, model of the Kampung Laut Mosque, Kelantan, Malaysia. Constructed in the first half of the 18th century, it is the country's oldest surviving wooden mosque.

The dome derives its origins from Roman, Byzantine and Sassanian building traditions. Muslim builders, however, were responsible for numerous innovations and advancements in both structural and decorative techniques. Early domes were made of wood and covered in metal sheets as seen in the Dome of the Rock, whilst others were made of baked brick. The structure of domes evolved with the use of the squinch and pedentives as zones of transition from a square base to the circular base of the dome, a method of dome structure that dates back to Sassanian times. The *muqarnas*, the use of repeated niches and squinches resulting in a stalactite appearance, came to be used extensively in dome architecture. These served either or both as a structural and decorative device, mostly on the inside of domes, but also on the exterior. The *muqarnas* which evolved into a purely decorative form popular in Islamic ornamentation was used as an element in *mihrab* niches, on the exterior of minarets, above doorways in building facades, adorning capitals and more.

The development of the outward appearance of domes came to define trends in the architecture of a particular period. Mamluk domes in Egypt were often constructed from stone, decorated in carved arabesques and geometric patterns, while the tomb complexes of the Timurids in the 14th and 15th centuries made extensive use of the double dome with its decorative outer melon-shaped dome and inner dome for structural support. The buildings of the 16th century Mughals of India were known for their bulbous domes as well as other related features such as *chattris* (domed pavilions). Under the Ottoman Empire, mosques were built reflecting the Byzantine heritage of Turkey, such as the magnificent Selimiye Mosque (1569-1674), inspired by the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, with its colossal dome ringed with smaller domes and half domes.

Regional and imperial styles can also be observed in the structure of minarets. The word minaret is derived from the Arabic word *menara*, meaning tower. The minaret is built near or connected to the structure of the mosque, from which the *muezzin* sounds the call to prayer, the *adhan*. The call to prayer for the first Muslim



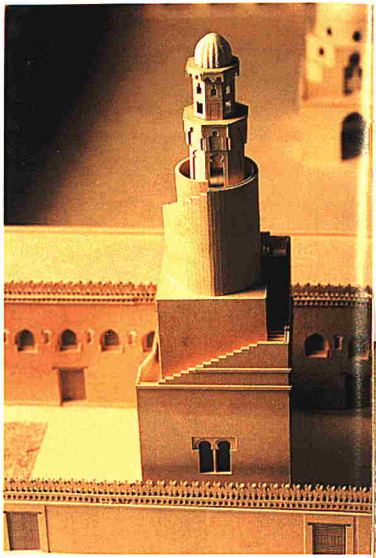


Model of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Israel. Built in the 7th century CE incorporating Byzantine mosaics and later Islamic tilework.

community of Medina, however, was uttered from the roof of the first mosque, the house of the Prophet. Besides being the point from which the call to prayer is emitted, minarets have also come to serve as a beacon to Muslims to indicate the location of a mosque, and eventually, as symbols of the supremacy of Islam in conquered lands.

The Abbasids were the first to implement the minaret and the Great Mosque of Samarra in Iraq illustrates the Abbasid tradition of hypostyle courtyard mosque with an immense spiral minaret. The later Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo has the same type of minaret form which is not typical of Egyptian mosques. During the reign of the Fatimids, minarets were not usually built, in defiance of the Arab tradition. During the Mamluk era, however, minarets developed into highly decorated structures, usually either square or circular, with a stepped zone of transition of three tiers, each decorated with *muqarnas* bands crowned by a dome or small pavillion. Over time, these came to include a bulb shaped finial at the apex. The surfaces of the minaret were usually decorated in carved geometric interlacing patterns. Some of the earliest minarets can be found in Syria. Influenced by church architecture, they were usually tall square structures with a lantern at their apex and decorated with blind niches and horseshoe arches. During the Ottoman period, the minaret developed stylistically into a taller and more slender form, often built in multiple numbers and became a characteristic feature of Ottoman mosques.

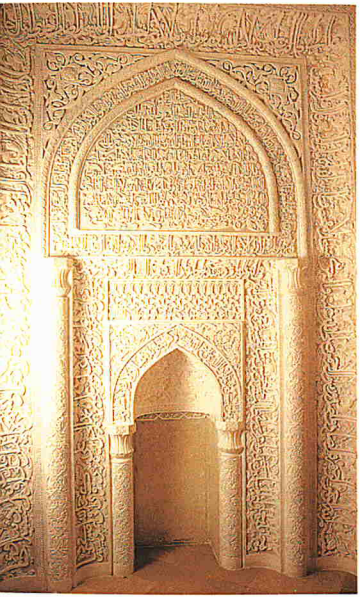
Another building trend that developed in mosque architecture was the use of the *iwan* in Iranian mosques. The *iwan*, an open vaulted hall with rectangular façade, has it roots in Sassanian Iran, but its use continued into the building traditions of Islamic Iran. The use of the *iwan* first developed in the four-*iwan* mosque-*madrasa* plan around the 10th century. The first *madrasa* arose during the Abbasid period and developed as a theological school in the four-part plan in Egypt, where teachings were divided according to the four schools of Islamic law. *Madrasas* were often built in relation to or within mosques, and under Seljuq rule in particular, the construction of *madrasas* saw a significant increase. In the large-scale mosque-



Model of the spiral minaret of the Ibn Tulun Mosque, Cairo, Egypt, constructed in the 9th century CE under the Tulunids.

madrasas, an *iwan* would be placed in the centre of each wall or arcade surrounding the central courtyard, with each hall designated for one of the four schools.

In one area of the Gallery is an alcove dedicated to the Art of the Mosque which displays examples of the most significant components of the mosque. The *mihrab* which developed as a niche in the wall to mark the direction of the *qibla* and as the primary focal point was usually the most highly ornamented aspect of the mosque. The original reason for the use of the niche *mihrab* is debatable. However, the success of this form in denoting the *qibla* led to its widespread acceptance in Islam and secured its integration as a permanent fixture of mosques around the entire Islamic world. The *minbar* or pulpit was officially incorporated as an accessory to prayer under the reign of the Caliph Mu'Awiya in 750. The *minbar* is always placed to the right of the *mihrab* and Friday sermons are delivered by the *imam* who would stand, not at the top of the *minbar*, but on a lower step as the uppermost step was symbolically reserved for the Prophet. All mosque prayer halls are equipped with prayer mats, Qur'ans and Qur'an stands or *rehal* for the congregation. Light as a symbol of God and the heavens plays a vital role, both symbolically as well as functionally. The great halls are always illuminated by numerous lamps with particular attention paid to the *mihrab* area.

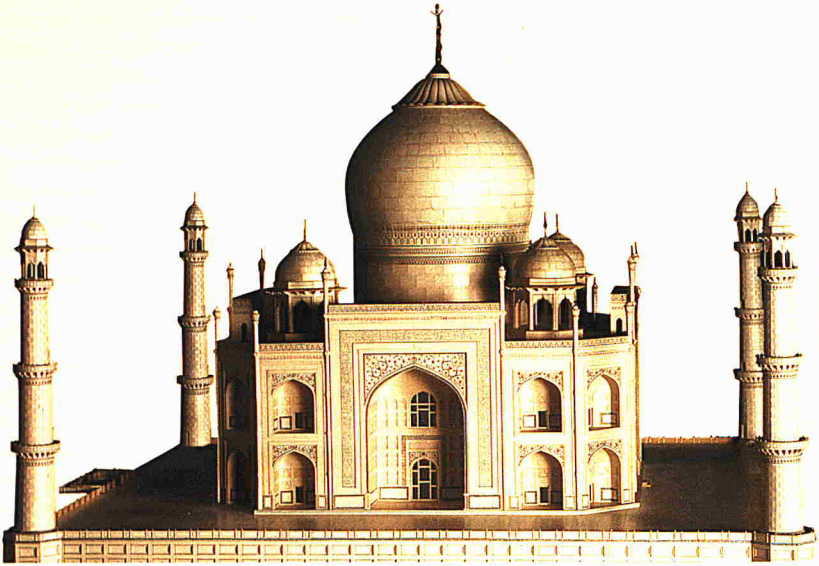


Replica of the *mihrab* of Masjid Jame' in Isfahan, Iran, built in 1310 and presented to the mosque by the Il-Khan ruler Uljaitu. Art of the Mosque, Architecture Gallery.

Aside from the mosque, two other fascinating genres of Islamic architecture are the mausoleum and imperial palace.

Despite the restrictions against the veneration of the dead, funerary architecture is a significant aspect of Islamic architecture. Islamic mausoleums can be seen throughout the Muslim world, but the majority are in Iran, Egypt and the steppes of Central Asia. Although the purpose of these constructions and Islamic funerary practices differ from those of their predecessors, the mausoleums evolved from a pre-Islamic plan with influences most probably derived from Roman, Sassanian and Christian architecture.

In Iran, two major types of tomb architecture developed: the square or octagonal dome mausoleum and the tomb tower. These early mausolea are relatively simple structures with minimal



Model of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. Built in the 17th century by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz.

ornamentation. The early Islamic tombs of Egypt were also plain and appear to have been built not for royalty but for various prominent members of society. These Fatimid buildings were of a similar plan to the domed square structures of Iran and often built in clusters or groups. Over time, mausoleum architecture became more elaborate as seen in the great funerary complexes of the Il-Khanid and Timurid empires of Iran and the Mamluks of Egypt. In order to justify the building of monuments to themselves, Mamluk rulers would often endow funds for the building of *madrasas* and other such religious buildings which would be incorporated into the tomb complexes. The Timurid tomb complex in Samarqand, the Shah I-Zinda, is made

up of about 30 mausolea, including a *madrasa*. The Mughal period surpassed the other empires of its time in the building of monuments to the dead. The emperors Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan all had massive tombs of marble and sandstone built in their names, as well as tombs for trusted ministers or beloved family members.

The early palaces of the first Islamic dynasties display a number of pre-Islamic influences such as corinthian columns, Byzantine mosaics and barrel vaults. The walls of the palaces are adorned with painted murals or mosaic ornamentation, deeply carved stone panels in geometric and vegetal motifs and also human depictions in either sculptural form or in mosaics and paintings on walls and floors. These palaces are now in ruins and fragments of these once impressive structures offer a glimpse into the lives of the medieval rulers. Later examples of Islamic palaces, however, survive in most of their original splendour to give us a vivid idea of the opulence and luxury of the Islamic court. One of the most well-known of these is the Alhambra of the Nasrids in Granada. The zenith of Islamic palatial architecture, its walls are adorned with carved stucco and tiles with calligraphic inscriptions, geometric motifs and arabesques and wooden marquetry ceilings. There are also elaborately decorated arcades and spectacular *muqarnas* in niches, domes and capitals. Gardens, pools and courtyards were an essential part of the imperial residence. The development of palatial gardens by the Persian Timurids influenced the architecture and landscaping of the Mughals of India, and in the time of Jahangir, as many as 777 gardens were said to exist in Kashmir.

In addition to religious and imperial structures, one finds across the steppes of Central Asia another significant form of secular Islamic architecture, the *caravanserai*. Mostly existing in various stages of decline today, the largest group of these medieval rest-stops for caravans and travellers were built during the Seljuq period. The unification of the lands from west to east encouraged the movement of caravans and facilitated trade, necessitating the establishments of points of rest for both travellers and their pack animals. Seljuq *caravanserais* were often built with a majestic portal opening into an

Inlaid stone tile
Iran, Kashan. c. 15th century CE
19cm x 46.5cm x 4.5cm

Calligraphic inlaid *mihrab* tile with *Thuluth* script of the *Shahadah* verse proclaiming "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger".

inner courtyard surrounded by double-storey arcades with niches or rooms for rest or storage. Stables for pack animals were usually situated below and water was always available. The basic form of the *caravanserai* is closely related to the *ribat*, the fortified enclosure found mainly in the *maghreb* regions of the Muslim world. The *ribat* served as a military post for fighters of the holy war (*jihad*) and included living quarters, stables for animals and a lookout tower.

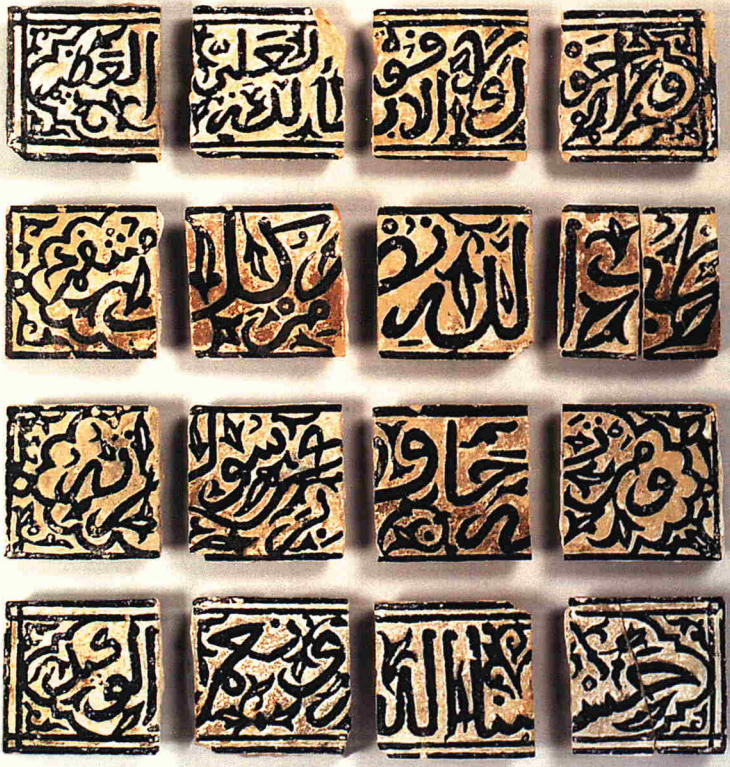
Islamic buildings, regardless of their function, display a uniformity of basic architectural forms and this can be seen throughout the Islamic world. The same can be said of the architectural ornamentation of these structures. Islamic ornamentation can be discussed as a subject in itself and the same patterns and motifs can be found not only in the architectonic form but also in the decorative arts. The IAMM Architecture Gallery incorporates a section devoted to architectural ornament, featuring mainly fragments of wall friezes, individual pieces of faience and stone or wood carvings. The motifs are characteristic of Islamic art: repetitive geometric patterns and arabesques, calligraphic inscriptions, and vegetal and floral motifs.

Fragment of wall frieze
Iran. c. 11th century CE
76cm x 52.5cm x 7cm

Section of a marble wall frieze carved with a floriated Kufic calligraphic band at the top and arabesque motifs.

Set of 16 tiles
Morocco. c. 13th-14th century CE
9.5cm x 9.5cm (approx.)

These square red earthenware tiles were covered with a thick manganese glaze on slip whitened ground, and cut away with a knife to create a *Naskh* inscription and leafy interlaced spandrels. The inscription is composed of a *doa'* and excerpts of the *Surah Al-Imran* (chapter 3 of the Qur'an).



1.

4.

2.

Four tiles from a frieze
Iran, Kashan. c. 1334 CE
29cm x 27cm

These four tiles are part of an epigraphic frieze from a yet unidentified building in Iran. The upper border is decorated with interlaced arabesques linking open palmettes and the calligraphy is painted in cobalt against a lustre painted ground motif of foliate scrolls and birds. Featuring verses from the *Shahnameh*, three of the tiles contain verses in Arabic, while the fourth is inscribed in Persian. The tiles are contemporary with the *mihrab* tiles of the Ali b. Jaafar mausoleum in Qom, thus datable to the end of the Il-Khan period, during the reign of Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan.

The tiles inscriptions are as follows:

Tile 1 (Arabic)
"*...bi'l maghfira wa'r-ridwa...*"

Tile 2 (Arabic)
"*...n al-mustarih fi...*"

Tile 3 (Arabic)
"*...('ala a) l-'arsh maktubun...*"

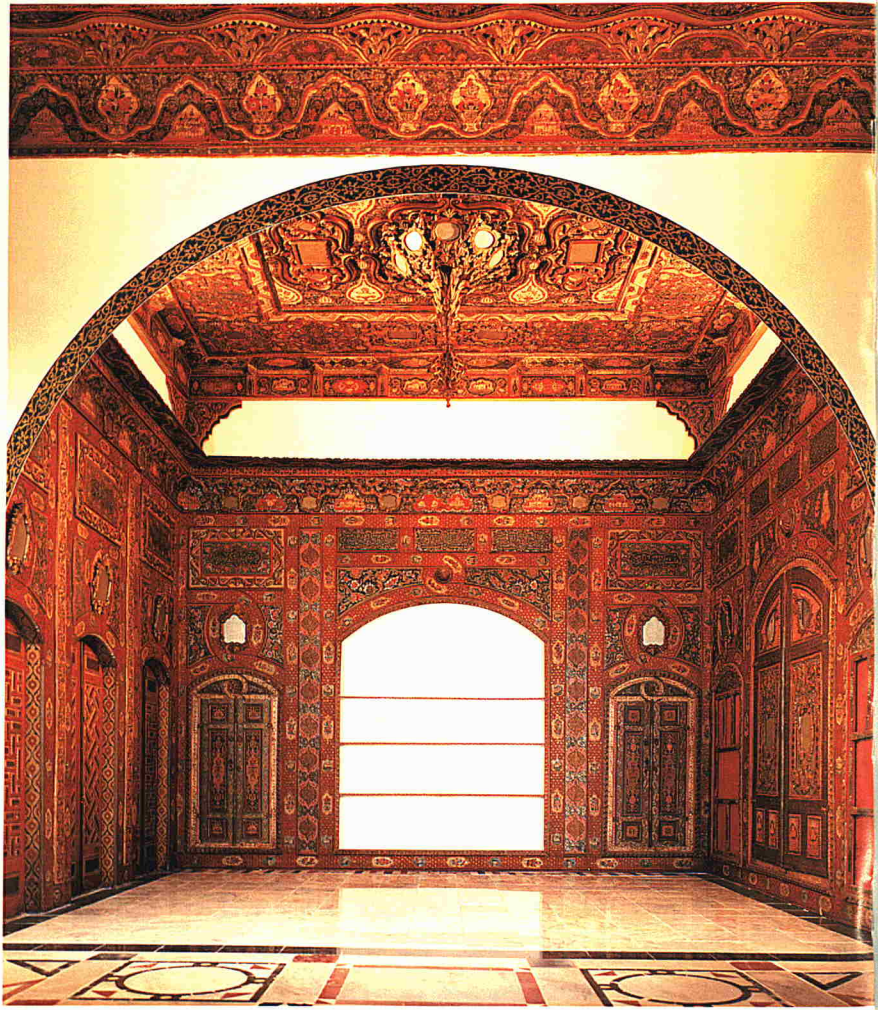
Tile 4 (Persian)
"*...(Na-ba) shad hami shade ma (n yek zaman)...*"

Note: English translation is not given due to the ambiguity of the incomplete Arabic and Persian phrases.

3.

Tile
India. c. 17th century CE
10cm x 39cm

A white marble tile frieze carved in relief in *Reqa'* script with verses from the Qur'an against a red ground.



■ Standard Chartered Ottoman Room
Syria. 1235 AH / 1820-1821 CE

The Ottoman room is a unique example of an art form from Ottoman Turkey. Such a sumptuously ornate room as this would have been found in Syria, especially in Damascus, in the residence of a rich merchant or an Ottoman governor. Well-known examples of such rooms are found in the Azem palace in Damascus and Hama and are reminiscent of the rooms in the pavilions and harem of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul.

There are different types of such rooms, for example, the main guest room, smaller guest rooms and women's rooms. The main reception area, called the *qa'a*, was the most important. It was usually situated at the same level as the courtyard. There was often a section called the *ataba* after the main door where sometimes a fountain was situated. The seating place was raised about 60cm from the *ataba* though it became lower in the nineteenth century.

Mihrab of the Standard Chartered Ottoman Room.

Left The Standard Chartered Ottoman Room has carved, painted and lacquered wooden wall, ceiling panels and window shutters. Its original marble flooring in geometric patterns is in the foreground.

Rooms in Islamic dwellings are usually multi-purpose and interchangeable as guest room, dining room and bedroom. Guest rooms were usually divided by gender. Men met in a men's guest room and women gathered in a women's guest room. Therefore, the furniture in a room was kept simple with cushions on low benches. There is a *mihrab* in the wall which would normally indicate the direction of Mecca for prayers. Usually concave with no interruption between top and floor, the *mihrab* of the Ottoman room in this museum has a platform of marble raised about 60cm from the floor, suggesting that it could have been designed for non-religious purposes and possibly as a place for storage or as a fireplace.

Walls and floors were often decorated with mosaic and carving. Stone inlay and *ablaq* (stone of alternating colours) may have originated in southern Syria during the Byzantine period. During the Mamluk period (the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) *ablaq* became the characteristic decoration of architecture in Syria, Egypt and Palestine. It remained as the main form of decoration into the Ottoman period. The main difference between Mamluk usage of

Carved wooden finials for chandeliers.

ablaq with Ottoman usage is that the *ablaq* was employed in floor and wall decoration by the Ottomans, whereas Mamluk *ablaq* was restricted to decoration around façades.

The Ottoman Room in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia can be dated to 1235 AH/1820-21 CE from an inscription on one wall panel which features the name of the owner. In addition to the epigraphic decoration, the walls are also decorated with paintings.These are raised from their base by a mixture of gesso and gum arabic and usually coated with a finishing of lacquer and gold.

There is variety in the decorative themes of the paintings and inscription panels. Most of the inscription panels with the exception of the one inscribed with the date, carry *doa'* (prayer) and *zikr* (remembrance). The most prominent themes are architectural paintings, landscapes, flowers and fruits. The incorporation of mirrors is also very different from the usual Islamic decoration. This is an unmistakable European rococo influence that reached Istanbul about 1730, and started to infiltrate Syria via Istanbul around 1830-1840 through Ottoman artists' own interpretations. Even the arabesque carvings are rococo influenced by the use of excessive curving than the more traditional Islamic style. The application of light pastel colours on the wall paintings can also be viewed as a further rococo influence. There are two finials remaining on the ceiling, indicating where chandeliers had once been suspended.

Detail of wall paintings shows cartouches of painted landscapes and flowers.

Painted and lacquered window shutters with a mirrored cartouche hanging above the window.

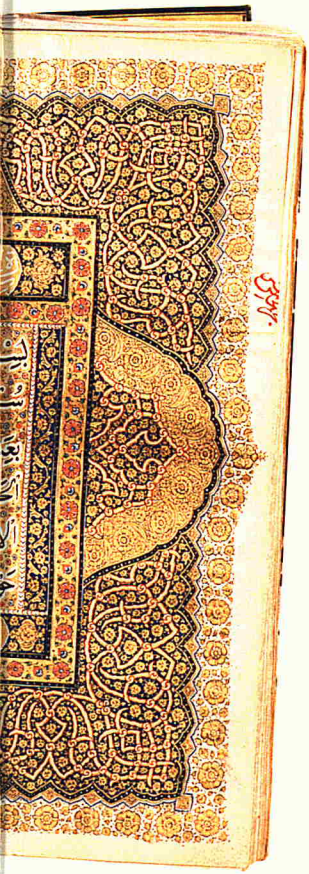
Qur'an & Manuscript Gallery

■ Qur'an and Manuscript Gallery

The Qur'an and Manuscript Gallery of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia features both religious and secular documents and books from all over the Muslim world. Copies of the Holy Qur'an, the most important book in Islam, occupy a prominent position in the gallery. The Qur'ans and manuscripts are displayed by region, highlighting the variety of scripts used and the differences in regional decorative styles. Calligraphers occupied the highest position in the community of Islamic artisans as their task was to copy the divine scriptures. The Arabic script underwent great developments because of its status as the language of the Qur'an. Islamic calligraphers created a number of scripts, some of which were reserved for specific purposes such as the *Naskh* script, the standard script for copying the Qur'an. Several others - mostly of Persian origin - were developed for secular and more decorative purposes. The Qur'an also displays the wealth of Islamic book decoration, although non-religious works also feature the art of illuminating or decorating manuscripts.

In the Qur'an and Manuscript Gallery, one can observe and compare the differences between the Sino-Arabic script of Chinese Qur'ans, the *Bihari* script of India and the *Naskh* script used throughout most of the Islamic world. The splendid gold and lapis lazuli illumination of Qur'ans were produced by royal ateliers and the simpler Qur'ans used by the common folk have inscriptions that give an insight into the lives of the people of that period. One of the oldest calligraphic pieces in the collection is the Abbasid Qur'an leaf on vellum, written in Kufic script and dating from the 8th to 9th century. Also displayed are examples of some of the most important scripts of Islamic calligraphy, such as *Thuluth*, *Muhaqqaq* and *Reqa'*, and the *Maghribi* script of North Africa. Works by some of the most famous Persian calligraphers of their time include the balanced compositions in *Naskh* by Ahmad Neirizi, the sweeping *Shekasteh Nastaliq* lines of Darvish Abdulmajid Taleghani and the lyrical strokes of Persian poetry in *Nastaliq* by the hand of Mir Emad. One can also view the *Firmans* of Sultans, marriage certificates of Persia, manuscripts on science, astrology and astronomy, and legal documents dealing with property and land.


إنه هو السميع البصير
وآتينا موسى الكتب
وجعلناه هدى لبني
إسرائيل ألا تتخذوا
من دوني وكيلا
ذرية من حملنا مع



Qur'an

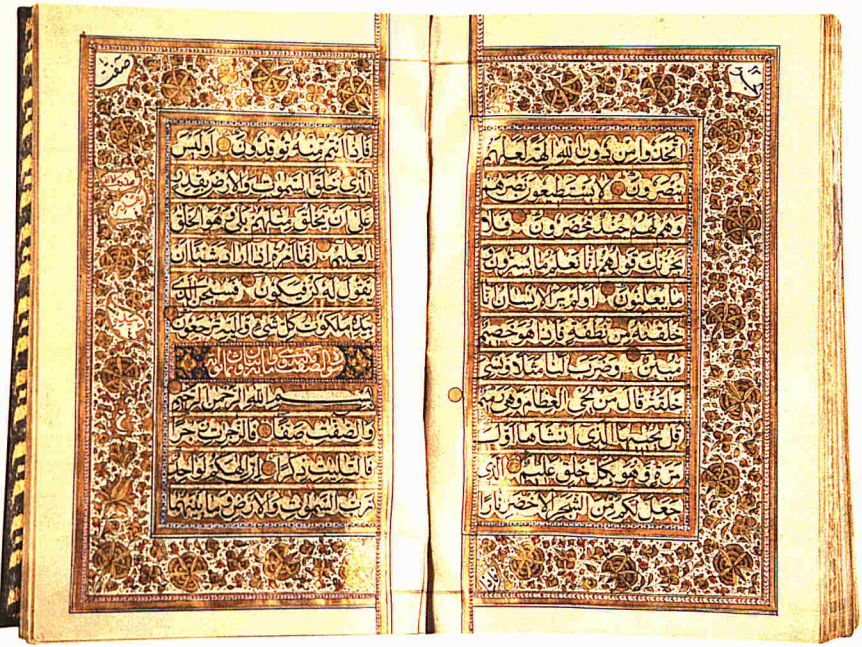
Turkey. 19th century CE

21cm x 13cm x 6.5cm

Ottoman illumination reached a high point between the 16th and 17th centuries and saw a decline in the 19th century. This Qur'an, however, stands contradictory to this fact. Heavily decorated with *tehzip* (gold illumination), it has 24 illuminated pages with particularly elaborate decoration for the opening and closing *surahs*.

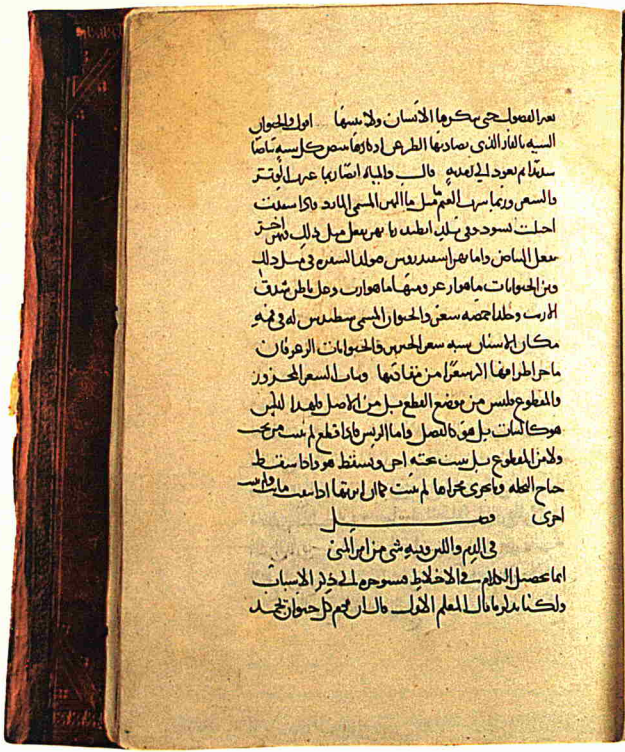
Bound in gold and green lacquered covers, the Qur'an has red paper and flyleaves decorated with a central floral design in gold. It has a matching sleeve of green dyed leather with the front and back adorned with panels of green and gold lacquer painted floral motifs. The Qur'an is written in black *Naskh* script with red vowel marks and gold circular verse makers. Each *surah* heading is written in white ink (Turkish: *ustubes*) on polychrome and gold illuminated panels. The *unwan* pages are elaborately illuminated with floral and arabesque patterns in gold and opaque water colour.

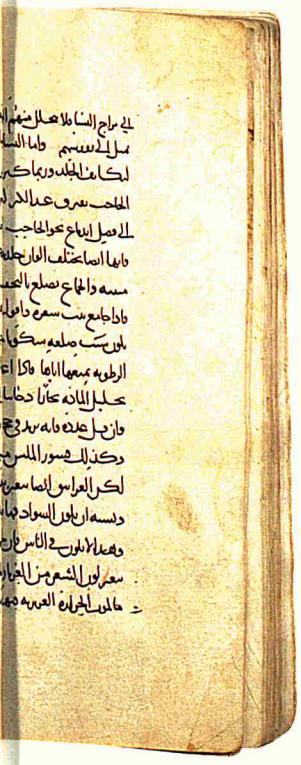
After the last *surah* - the *Surah An-Nas* - there are several *doa* (prayers) asking Allah for blessings upon mankind. It attributes a section of the *doa* to the narration of Ibn Sheikh al Jazari. The opening and closing pages are inscribed with selected Qur'anic verses written in white ink on gold medallions and richly illuminated with polychrome floral borders.



Illuminated pages of the Ottoman Qur'an.

Green and gold lacquered sleeve of the Qur'an.





***Kitab Al-Shifa'* (The Book of Healing)**
Iran or Near East. c. 15th century CE
26.5cm x 18.5cm x 4.5cm

The *Kitab al-Shifa'* is a philosophical encyclopedia written by Abu Ali al-Hussain Ibn Abdallah Ibn Sina (980-1037), also known as Abu Sina or Avicenna amongst western scholars. Born in Afshaneh in northern Iran, Ibn Sina was one of the greatest polymaths of the Islamic world, known for his work in physiology, philosophy, mathematics, medicine and astronomy. By the age of seventeen, he was a qualified doctor renowned for his success in restoring the King of Bukhara, Nooh ibn Mansoor, from an illness which other physicians had been unable to cure.

His greatest contribution to science was his book *Qanun fi al-tibb* (Canon of Medicine), a significant source of reference for Western medical students. While in Hamadan, he began the compilation of his monumental works, one of which was the *Kitab al-Shifa'* which came to be known as *Sanatio*, meaning 'healing' in its neo-Latin translation. It is a work embodying a vast field of knowledge from philosophy to science which Ibn Sina classified as theoretical knowledge. It incorporates schools of thought within the fields of physics, mathematics and metaphysics and practical knowledge such as ethics, economics and politics.

This fifteenth century edition is a compilation of the seventh and eighth volume of the *al-Shifa'* encyclopaedia devoted to metaphysics. In this field, Ibn Sina focuses and examines existence with Allah as the ultimate causation to explain and integrate all aspects in science and religion within a metaphysical context.

The other volumes of this encyclopaedic work elucidate phenomena relating to the unseen world such as evil, prophecies, miracles and the ultimate destiny of man. It also addresses problems within the political institution of the state and how to reconcile such issues under religious law.

Qur'an Leaf

Possibly Mecca or Medina. c. 8th-9th century CE

18.5cm x 27cm

This page from an Abbasid Qur'an has 16 lines of Kufic script, written on vellum with diacritical marks in red ink and a cluster of four brown strokes which serve as verse markers. The *surah* (chapter) heading is written in gold on a panel decorated with gilt roundels.

Kufic script derives its name from the Iraqi city of Kufa. Kufic was used as the main script of the Qur'an until the 13th century CE. It has a strong angular structure with mainly long horizontal and short vertical lines and was favoured for its neat, clear and well proportioned structure. Most vellum Qur'an leaves were written in black ink with red diacritical marks added at a later date. The diacritical mark to distinguish homographic letters were incorporated into the script during the reign of Abdul al Malik ibn Marwan (685-705).

This Qur'an leaf contains the first half of the *Surah Saba'* (Chapter 34, Sheba), verses 1-5, though the fifth verse is incomplete:

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Praise be to God, to whom belong all things in the heavens and on the earth. To praise be to Him in the hereafter. He is the wise one, the All-knowing.

He knows all that goes into the earth, and all that comes out thereof; all that comes down from the sky and all that ascends thereto and He is the Most Merciful, the All-forgiving.

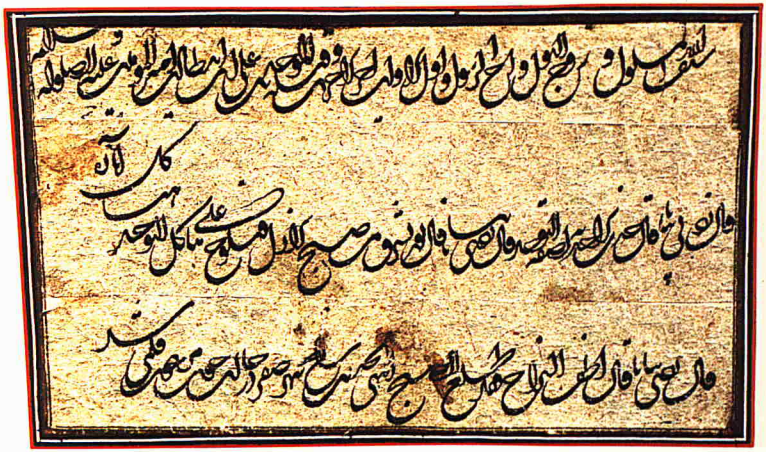
The unbelievers say, "Never to us will come the hour" Say, "Nay! But most surely by my Lord, it will come upon you; by Him who knows the unseen, from whom is not hidden the least atom in the heavens or on earth; Nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in the record perspicuous. That he may reward those who believe and work deeds of righteousness; for such is forgiveness and a sustenance most generous. But those who strive against our signs, to frustrate them, for such will be a penalty ..."

Qur'an Leaf
Iran. c. 18th-19th century.
31.2cm x 20.7cm

This page contains the complete *Surah Al-Adiyat*, chapter 100 of the Qur'an, written in *Naskh* script in red and black ink. The *surah* titles are written in illuminated headpieces in gold and ultramarine with the *khati* motif and geometric and polychrome floral patterns on yellow cross-shaped panels and ultramarine triangular panels at either end of the headpiece. The text is punctuated with gold, red and blue verse markers.

Specimen of calligraphy
Iran. c. late 16th century CE
11cm x 6.5cm

Three lines in the *Taliq* script written by Ikhtiar Monshi, one of the leaders of the *Taliq* style. This section would have been part of a larger document.



Akhlaq-i Muhsini
Iran. probably Herat.
Mid-16th century CE
21cm x 13cm

Text on ethics written by Muhsin Mirza and copied by Muhammad Husain Ibn Sultan Husain al-Hirawi. Written in *Nastaliq* script on paper finely sprinkled in gold within coloured margins flecked with gold.

Specimen of calligraphy
Iran. c. 1170-1185 AH / 1757-1771 CE

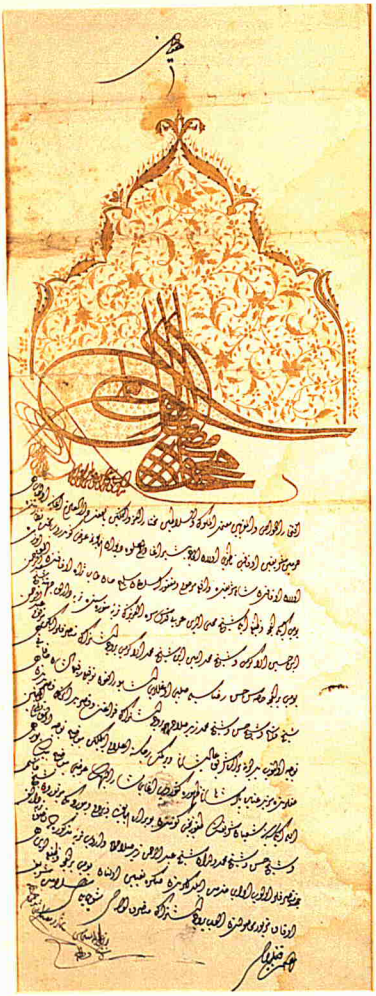
Persian poetry manuscript written in the *Shekasteh Nastaliq* script and signed by Darvish Abdulmajid Taleghani. 12 couplets of poetry, including verses by the 8th AH / 14th CE century poet, Hafiz. Mounted on board with illuminated borders.

Qur'an
Muslim Spain. Early 7th century AH / 13th century CE
23cm x 21cm

One page from a vellum Andalusian Qur'an containing a section of the *Surah Al-Anbiya* (chapter 21) written in the *Maghribi* script.

Qur'an
Egypt or Syria. Late 8th century AH / 14th century CE
24cm x 17.5cm

A page from one *judz* of an illuminated Mamluk Qur'an written in *Muhaqqaq* script.

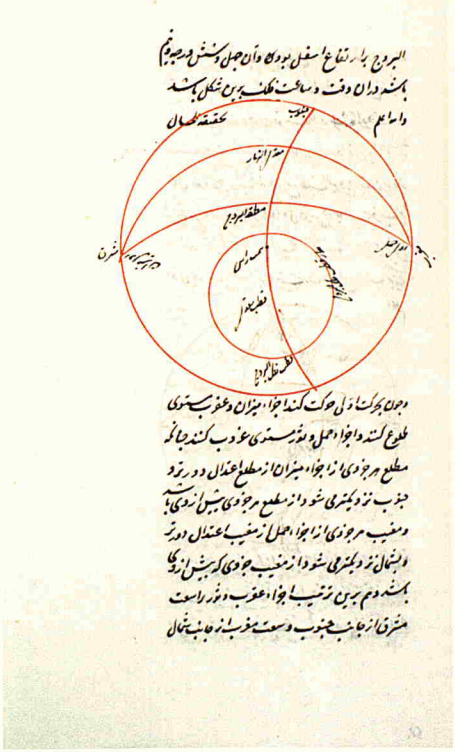


Firman
Turkey, Istanbul. 1152 AH / 1739 CE
63cm x 24cm

An illuminated *firman* (royal decree) from the court of Sultan Mahmud I (r. 1730-1754) adorned with a monumental gilded *Tughra* on a dome-shaped ground of gilt floral and foliate scrolls and written in Ottoman Turkish in the *Diwani* script.

Risalat mabadi 'al-aflak
Turkey. 963 AH / 1555 CE
18.5cm x 12cm

Ottoman treatise on astronomy by Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid ibn Mahmud written in the *Nastaliq* script with five illustrations of astronomical diagrams.

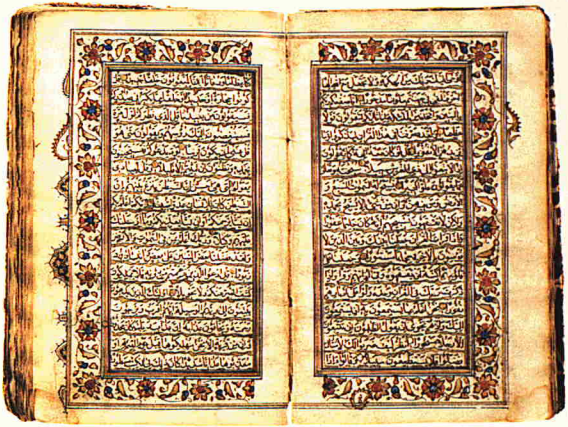


Leaf from a Qur'an
Israel, Jerusalem.
9th century AH / 15th century CE
41.5cm x 34cm

One leaf from a Mamluk Qur'an in 30 parts endowed to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem by Shaykh Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Marwan and his brother Ibrahim. The endowment is detailed in the *waqf* statement at the top of the page.

Qur'an
Uzbekistan, Bukhara.
c. mid 19th century CE
15.5cm x 10cm x 3.5cm

A complete Qur'an, written in black *Naskh* script with red diacritical marks within polychrome and gilt floral illuminated borders.



***Qalamdan* (Pen Box)**
Iran. c. 1860 CE
3cm x 22.8cm

Qajar lacquered papier-maché pen box, decorated in gilt and polychrome floral motifs.

India Gallery

■ India Gallery

The IAMM India Gallery is dedicated to the Islamic arts of India, in particular the spectacular objects of the great Mughal court. The museum's collection from this period in Islamic civilisation consists of a few pieces from the pre-Mughal era. Established in 1526 by the first emperor, Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, a Turko-Mongol prince from Central Asia, the Mughal dynasty reigned for over three centuries until 1858. During the reign of the great emperor Akbar, the empire stretched from Kabul in Afghanistan in the north to Bengal in the east down to Ahmadnagar in today's region of Maharasthra. Although not the first Islamic empire in India, the Mughals are remembered as one of the most magnificent and enduring dynasties of Islamic and Indian history.

The Indian Mughals were very much influenced by the culture of the Persians and Central Asians, particularly that of the Timurids. They readily adopted court customs and practices from the Timurid court and with their famed wealth, the artistic patronage of the Mughal emperors sparked the production of the most intricate and luxurious artefacts. Jade was highly prized by the emperors, imported from China and crafted into marvelous objects. Proud of their Timurid heritage, the Mughal rulers also collected fine jade pieces from this period. Marble, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, horn, ivory, gold and precious gems were also used in a wide range of innovative ornamental techniques such as inlay, overlay, niello-work, gemsetting, enamelling and lacquer painting. *Bidri* ware is a form of metalwork unique to Islamic India and a range of court items such as hookahs, ewers and basins still survive till today, illustrating not only the fine workmanship of the time but also the imperial habits of the Mughal rulers. Miniature painting also achieved great heights under Mughal patronage. Timurid book illustration was a major inspiration and early Indian miniatures strongly reflect the Persian influence. A great lover of literature and the illustrated book, the emperor Akbar commissioned albums and folios of manuscripts and literary works filled with beautiful, delicate, miniature paintings. It was during his reign that the Mughal miniature developed into its own distinctive style.

The India gallery displays a variety of objects including jewellery heavily encrusted with precious gems; arms and armour, often elaborately decorated; caskets made of wood inlaid with ivory, marble or enamel; metalwork, inlaid and decorated, and *bidri* ware; Qur'ans and manuscripts, some written in the Indian *Bihari* script; miniature paintings; and textiles.


شاہجہاں بابر شاہ صاحب قرآن

Portrait of Shah Jahan

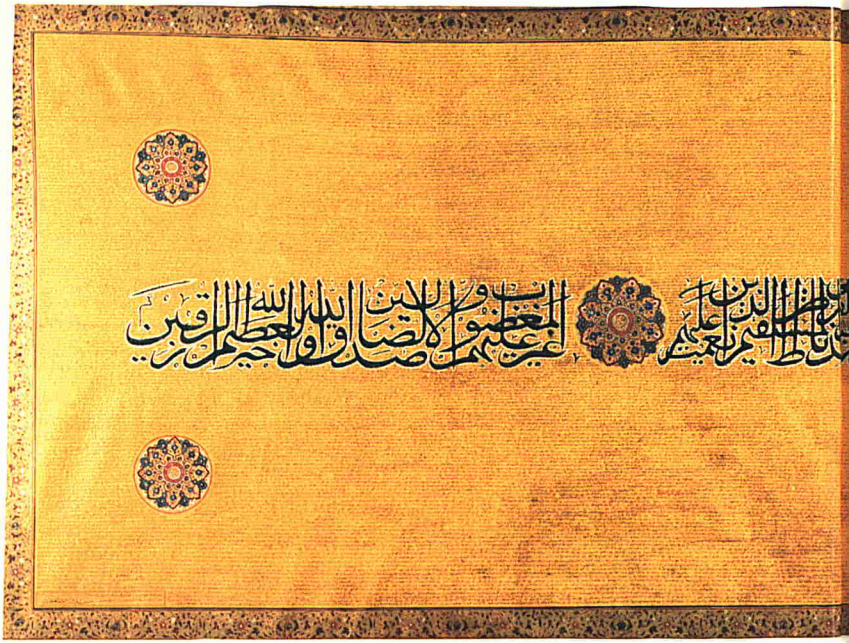
India. c. 17th century CE

19.6cm x 13.5cm

Mughal miniature paintings are characterised by their naturalism, often depicting historical events or court life. During the reign of Shah Jahan (r.1628-1658), miniature paintings developed an air of formality with meticulous attention to detail. The pigments are all derived from natural minerals: red and white lead, orpiment yellow, *terra verte* and *verdigris*, cinnabar and ultramarine.

This miniature painting in opaque watercolours and gold on handmade paper is a portrait of the emperor Shah Jahan in his later years, seated on a golden chair flanked by two attendants. The subject of the painting is identified in Persian and written in the *Nastaliq* script at the upper border in brown ink. Like most formal Mughal portraits, Shah Jahan is rendered in profile, and this painting depicts the emperor and his courtiers in the aloof manner characteristic of the portraits of this period. He is depicted with a halo encircling his profile, a trend in imperial portraiture introduced by the Emperor Jahangir, father of Shah Jahan. The refinement of features is also indicative of the European influence. The emperor is presented here with a shapely pointed nose, thoughtful eyes, artistically arched eyebrows and neatly down-turned moustache and his halo emits rays of light - features that suggest an intellectual and introspective man.

The attention to detail is demonstrated in the depiction of the intricate patterns of the gilded *Qatars* tucked into the gilt embroidered floral sashes of Shah Jahan and his attendants and from the gemset jewellery (pearls, rubies, diamonds and emeralds being the emperor's favourites) worn by the figures. The attendant on the left holds a fly-whisk while the emperor holds a back-scratcher in his right hand and a jewelled turban ornament in his left. The sumptuous splendour of this miniature painting portrays the emperor as a great connoisseur of gems and also indicates his appreciation of beauty, art and peace.



Qur'an

India. 1150 AH / 1738 CE

144.5cm x 246.5cm

This Qur'an on textile contains the names of the individuals responsible for its production in its lower left corner. The calligrapher was one Khajeh Maula Bakhsh Bijapuri, while the illumination is attributed to Atiq al-Rahman. The name of the Iranian Turkoman ruler, Nadir Shah, is also mentioned and it is possible that the Qur'an may have been commissioned by him.

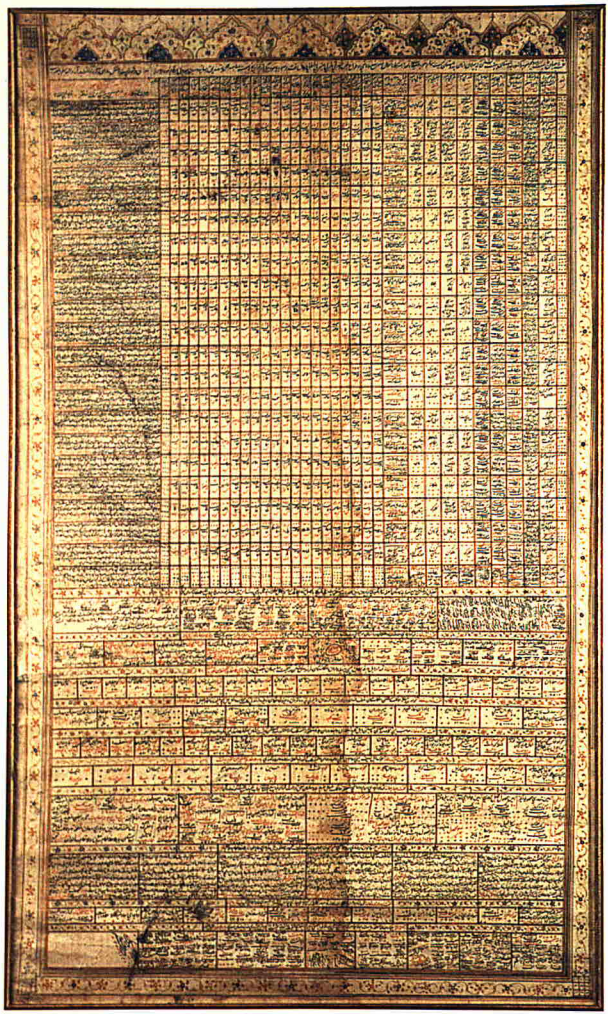
Containing the complete verses, this Qur'an is dated "5th *Ramadhan* 1150" AH and is written in black *Naskh* script on a ground of deep turmeric yellow. The centre of the text panel is inscribed with the *Surah Al-Fatihah* (the first chapter of the holy Qur'an) in a monumental band of elegant green *Thuluth*. The text incorporates five ornately illuminated calligraphic medallions inscribed with the words *Bismillahir rahmanhir rahim* (In the name of Allah) in the *Nastaliq* script. The borders are embellished with delicate gilt and polychromatic floral scrolls and each medallion is adorned with gold and blue petals with polychrome floral decoration. This piece is considered a fine example of a blend of Indo-Iranian art.

Nadir Shah of Iran (r.1736-47) was founder of the brief Afshar Dynasty deposition of Abbas III, last ruler of the Safavid Dynasty. In 1738-1739 Nadir Shah invaded Mughal India, via Delhi and Lahore, thereby encouraging an amalgamation of Indian and Persian art and an exchange of culture. He also took control of Bukhara, extending the boundaries of Iran to the greatest that they had been since the Sassanids. Nadir Shah was assassinated by his own officers during a campaign in 1747.

Celestial sphere
India. c. Mid-17th century CE
29.5cm x 15cm

Astronomy has always played an important part in the Islamic sciences, the Islamic calendar being a lunar one and the times of prayer determined by the movement of the sun. Islamic astronomers were influenced by the earlier teachings of the Indians, Persians and predominantly the Greeks, continually questioning and improving upon the theories of Ptolemy and Galen and translating texts into Arabic. Celestial spheres were used to note the position of the constellations, incorporating the information derived from the *Book of Fixed Stars* by Abd ar-Rahman as-Sufi (903-986). Prior to the inventions of the Italian astronomer Galileo in the early seventeenth century, astronomers worked without optical aids such as telescopes, marking the positions of the constellations based on the judgement of their own eyes.

On this celestial sphere, the composition of stars are represented by animals, human figures or objects from the Grecian tradition. Clearly seen on this globe are the constellations of Sagittarius (the centaur archer), Leo (the lion) and Gemini (the twins) with lightly engraved figural outlines and the stars marked by inlaid points of silver. As the marks indicating latitude and longitude are missing along the frame of the sphere, it suggests that this particular piece was not used for scientific purposes but perhaps served an ornamental function or provided references of the position of the constellations in relation to each other.



A section of government records
India. c. 1871-1878 CE
100cm x 60cm

This document is the 34th page of a set of records spanning a period from 1871-1878, written in Persian, the official language of the Mughal court. The document is divided into numerous grids and different sections and the information contained covers the entire land of India at the time. The ruling houses of various regions are listed and include details such as the names and brief history of their respective cities, the calculated boundary of their realms and the names and allocated tasks of their ministers.

Also included are:

~ detailed reports of annual income and the financial expenditure

~ population statistics by gender, race, religion and occupation

~ lists of tombs and their locations

~ lists of public facilities such as hospitals

~ information on agricultural productivity

~ estimated numbers for different breeds of livestock

~ lists of villages and the area of land each covers

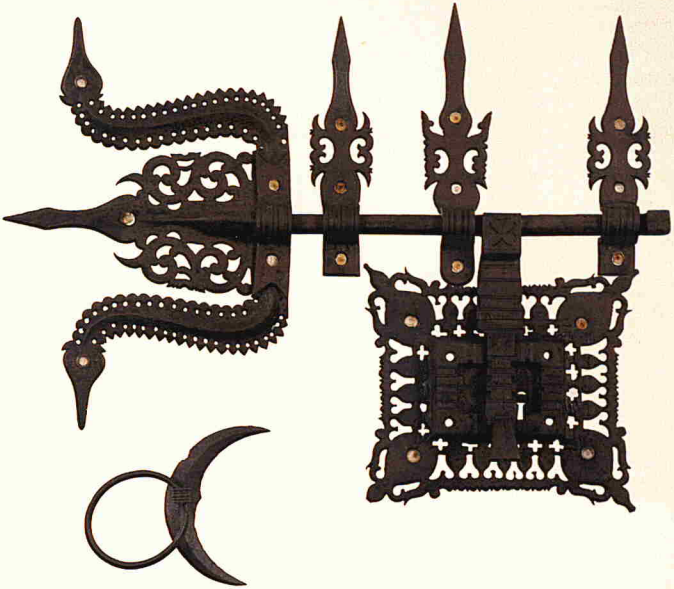
~ advice for criminal prevention and methods of preserving security within a city

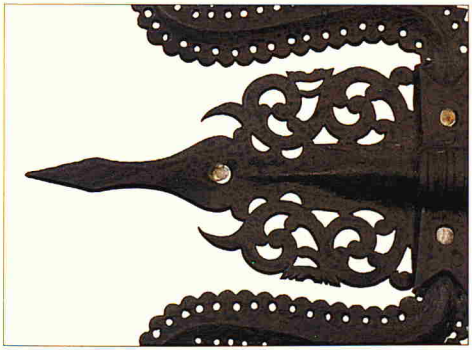
~ a short section listing the number of British people occupying the region and a recorded budget for British administration.

In the lower section of the document, the population of each non-Muslim group in India is described including Hindus, Christians, Chinese and others. A number of dates are mentioned providing a time frame for the compilation and writing of the document. The dates are interestingly written according to the Christian calendar, a possible indication of the changing times with the expansion of British presence on Indian soil. The document serves as a significant piece of historical documentation of late nineteenth century India.

Casket
India. c. 17th century CE
28cm x 32cm x 23cm

Wooden Mughal casket inlaid with ivory and tortoiseshell. The double front door is adorned with floral and foliate motif carved ivory panels, and the six drawers within the casket are decorated with openwork stained ivory panels. There are only two rows of drawers as the bottom row comprises three faux double drawers.





Lock and ring handle
India. c. 17th-18th century CE
32cm x 42.5cm

A sliding bolt lock of iron with ornamental openwork panels intricately adorned with a foliate tendril motif.

Whip handle
India. c. 18th century CE
17cm x 4cm

Mughal whip handle made of white jade and decorated with delicate gold inlay floral motifs. The end of the handle is heavily encrusted with emeralds, rubies and diamonds (see below).

Finial
Northern India. c. 1700 CE
8.6cm x 5.5cm

An octagonal domed marble finial inlaid with an orange agate flowerhead. Each facet is inlaid with cusped cartouches containing a single floral stem. This piece is believed to have been a staircase ornament from the Taj Mahal in India.

Bow and set of six arrows
India, c. 17th–18th century CE
Bow: 103cm

This Mughal dynasty bow is decorated in polychrome and gilt lacquer with a motif of two bands of floral vine scrolls. The ends are inscribed with Persian verses.

Katar
India. c. 18th century CE
41cm x 9cm

Double edged Mughal *Katar* dagger with a dual pronged grip, gilt inlaid with lobed calligraphic cartouches bearing the 99 names of Allah.

Necklace
South India. c. 18th century CE
10cm x 66.5cm

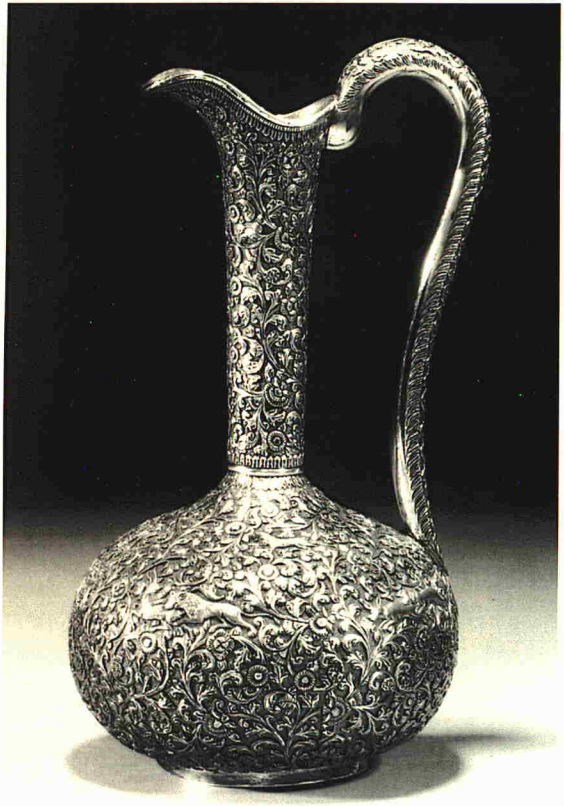
This gold necklace comprises pine cone shaped pendants with gemset flowerheads of diamonds and rubies at every interval. The centrepiece is a large floral pendant suspended from a triple braided gold chain, while the reverse is adorned with a motif of floral stems and birds.

Five archer's rings
India. c. 17th-19th century CE
4-5cm

Mughal archer's rings in jade, gold and rock crystal, decorated with polychrome enamel or encrusted with gems.

Ewer
India. c. 19th century CE
27.5cm x 15cm

Silver ewer from the Mughal period decorated with a chased scene of animals hunting on a ground of floral and foliate scrolls.



Amir Timur enthroned
India. c. Mid-late
17th century CE
24.6cm x 16.7cm

A portrait in opaque water colours and gold of Amir Timur enthroned on a terrace. The subject of the painting is identified in Persian at the upper border of the painting in gold.

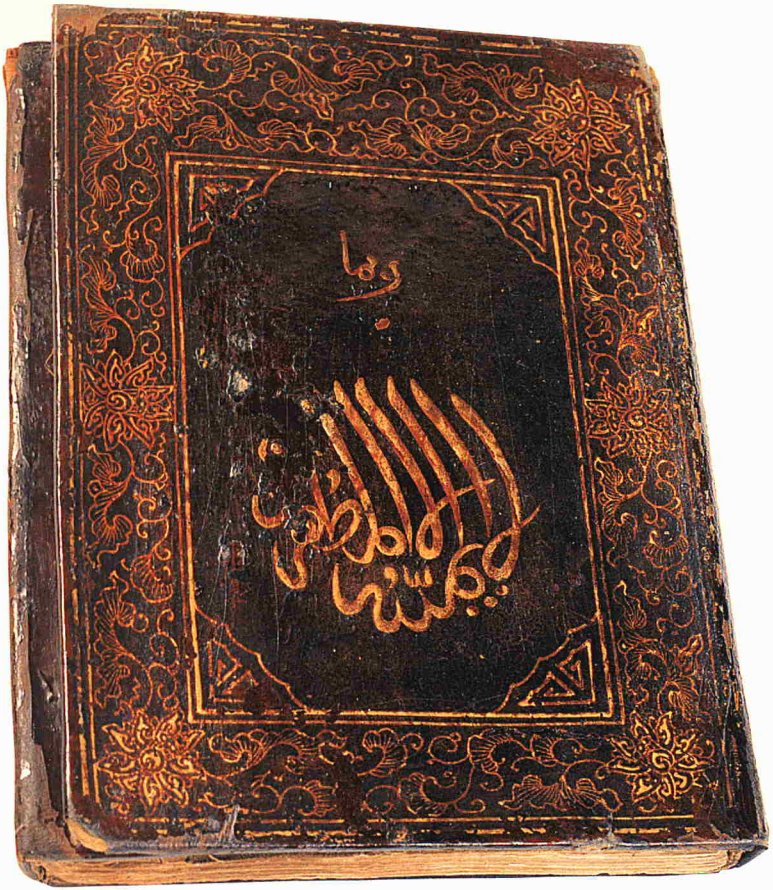
China Gallery

■ China Gallery

The IAMM's China gallery is dedicated to providing visitors with an insight into the history and art of China's Muslim population. Many of the pieces have very distinctive appearances. Some are characteristically Chinese in form and shape, others unmistakably Islamic with their Qur'anic calligraphic inscriptions. The strong trading links between China and the Islamic lands resulted in the export of many chinese wares, particularly porcelain, westwards. Some pieces in the collection were made specifically for export to Muslim buyers, while others were made for domestic use by Chinese Muslims.

For the most part, Chinese Muslim craftsmen developed techniques that were closely related to traditional Chinese non-Islamic techniques of production. What sets these pieces apart from their non-Islamic creations is mainly the use of particular decorative motifs and Arabic calligraphy. A great portion of the collection constitutes a number of ceramics and metalware: polychrome or blue and white over/underglazed painted porcelains, cast bronze incense burners and *cloisonné* ware. Islamic calligraphy in China developed into its own distinctive form, incorporating the fluid motions of Chinese brush painting with the Arabic alphabet and calligraphic techniques. The IAMM possesses a sizeable collection of decorative calligraphic scrolls in the unique Chinese Islamic script, large-scale pictorial arrangements, composed entirely of written Qur'anic verses. The Chinese Qur'an is also unique, usually consisting of a set of the 30 *judz* (chapters) of the Qur'an written in individual booklets. In the Chinese Muslim household the Qur'an would normally occupy a prominent place, kept in a special box in a setting reminiscent of the Chinese altar. The Chinese tradition of burning incense continued to be practised in Chinese Muslim culture, although in a context devoid of its ritual purposes.

This same adaptation of earlier practices and beliefs is seen in the use of Chinese motifs. The symbolic meanings of motifs such as the bamboo, lotus, bat or butterfly have become less significant over time, although a sufficient level of their auspiciousness remains for them to be continuously incorporated into Chinese Islamic art.



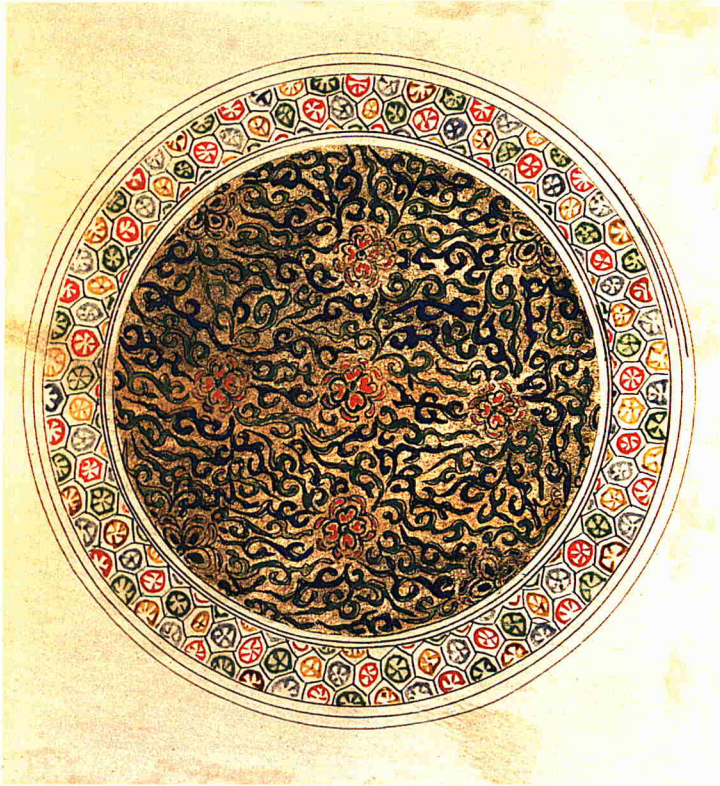
Qur'an

China. c. 17th century CE

27cm x 19.5cm x 3cm

This Qur'an from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) is in a complete set of 30 *judz* (volumes). Qur'ans in China were traditionally written as 30 separate booklets for each individual *judz* as opposed to the rest of the Islamic world in which the Qur'an was compiled into a single tome. Each volume is bound in varnished leather, gilt decorated with a motif of lotus blossoms, cloud scrolls and a central calligraphic medallion. The Chinese Muslims incorporate a wide variety of decorative motifs popular in traditional Chinese art, each with its own auspicious significance. The lotus blossom encompasses the spirit of incorruptible purity as it produces beautiful coloured blooms from its marshland habitat. The cloud scroll is alternately believed to be a stylisation of the floating *ju'i*, a sceptre used by the highest heavenly deity or a variation of geometric thunderbolt frets, often associated with happiness.

Arabic calligraphy is believed to have been brought to China by Arabic traders in the southern port cities during the 7th century. However, committing the divine scriptures to paper became a necessity during the *Qing* dynasty when political instability threatened the establishment and practice of Islam in China. For this reason, a script was required that was both easily legible as well as aesthetically worthy of adorning the most significant text in Islam. This Qur'an is written in Arabic executed in a Chinese Muslim script with polychrome and gilt rosette verse markers. Several sections of the text are illuminated with green, blue and red gouache and gold geometric decorated panels.



Frontispiece of a *judz*.

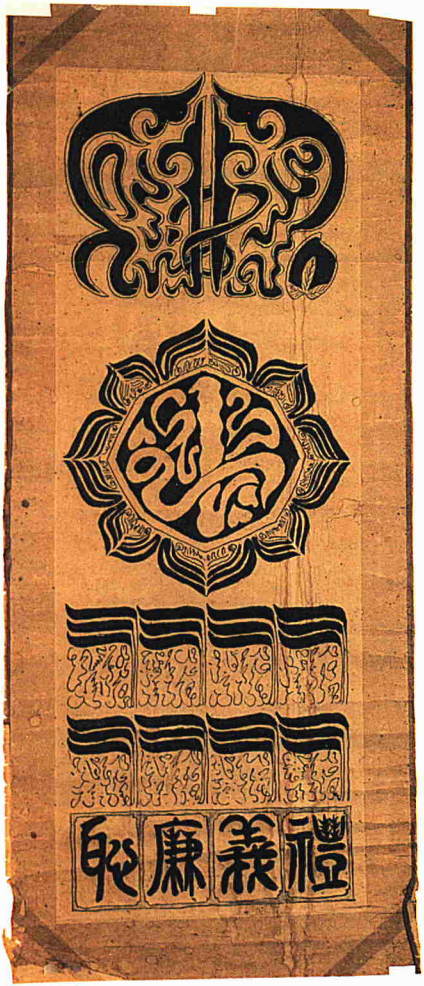
Sino-Arabic script with borders of illuminated cloud scrolls.

Incense burner set
China. c. Late 19th century CE
Box: 8cm x 12.5cm x 9cm
Incense burner: 31.5cm x 22cm x 16cm
Vase: 26.5cm x 7cm

The earliest example of Chinese *cloisonné*, attributed to the Tang dynasty, was found on a silver mirror in Nara, Japan. It is believed that no other known examples of Chinese *cloisonné* enamelled ware existed until the late Yuan dynasty in the 14th century. *Cloisonné* decoration reached a height of refinement during the reign of the emperor Jingtai (r.1450-1457). His fondness for *cloisonné* enamelled pieces sparked a surge of production and demanded further refinement of the technique. As the predominant and favoured colours for *cloisonné* pieces were turquoise and cobalt blue, this earned Chinese *cloisonné* the title 'jingtai blue' in the Chinese language.

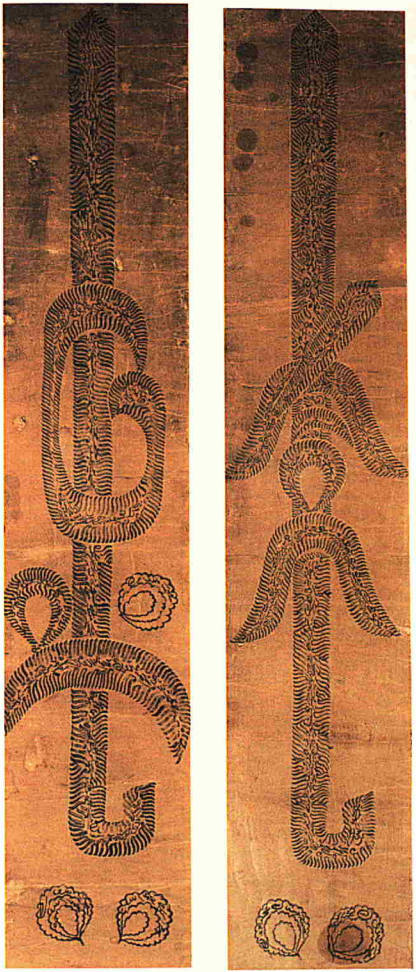
Cloisonné, meaning 'partitions' in French, is a process that involves outlining a design with wire strips soldered or glued on the vessel surface. The partitions are then filled with pulverised coloured enamels and fired at a relatively low temperature. After the piece has cooled naturally, the sunken compartments are refilled evenly and refired. It is then polished with emery, whetstone and hard carbon to create a smooth and lustrous surface. The design is finally gilded to create a defined outline.

This three-piece incense burner set known as the 'Mohamedan Three Offering' is inlaid with *cloisonné* enamels in shades of blue, green, yellow, red, pink, white and black. The lid of the central piece is decorated with openwork foliate motifs and gilded panels of Qur'anic verse, while geometric, floral and foliate designs adorn the main body. The height of *cloisonné* production occurred during the Ming dynasty and was characterised by its bold designs and striking palette of bright turquoise, deep cobalt blue, coral red, rich yellow, green, black and white.



Chinese calligraphic scroll
China. c. Late 19th century CE
Calligrapher unknown

Written in stylised Chinese Islamic script, it begins with *BismillahiRahmaniRahim* (In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful) at the top of the scroll and *Ya Mustafa*, another name for the Prophet, written in the centre of the scroll in a floral motif. This is followed by "There is no God but Allah" and "Prophet Muhammad is the last Messenger of God". There are Chinese Islamic characters written at the bottom referring to advice on manners and courtesy.



Pair of Chinese calligraphic scrolls
China. c. late 19th century CE
Calligrapher unknown

Both scrolls bear the phrase *Laillahaillllah* (There is no God but Allah) from the *Shahadah*, the Declaration of Faith and *Ya Wafi* (loosely translates as He Who Fulfills Promises), one of the many names of Allah, written in the shape of the sword of Ali, with the words *Muhammad, Rasul Allah* (Muhammad, Messenger of God) written within the sword shape. Originally a set of four scrolls.

Chinese calligraphic scroll.
China. c. 18th-19th century CE
Calligrapher unknown

Verse 125 from *Surah Al-Nahl* (chapter 16 of the Qur'an) written on brown paper: "Call to Allah (Ya, Muhammad) with your genius and advice and debate with them in good manners". An unusual script, possibly written by a Persian, as the top of the scroll bears the words *BismillahiRahmaniRahim* (In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful), written in the Persian language. The script is in reserve with black outlines on a black background.

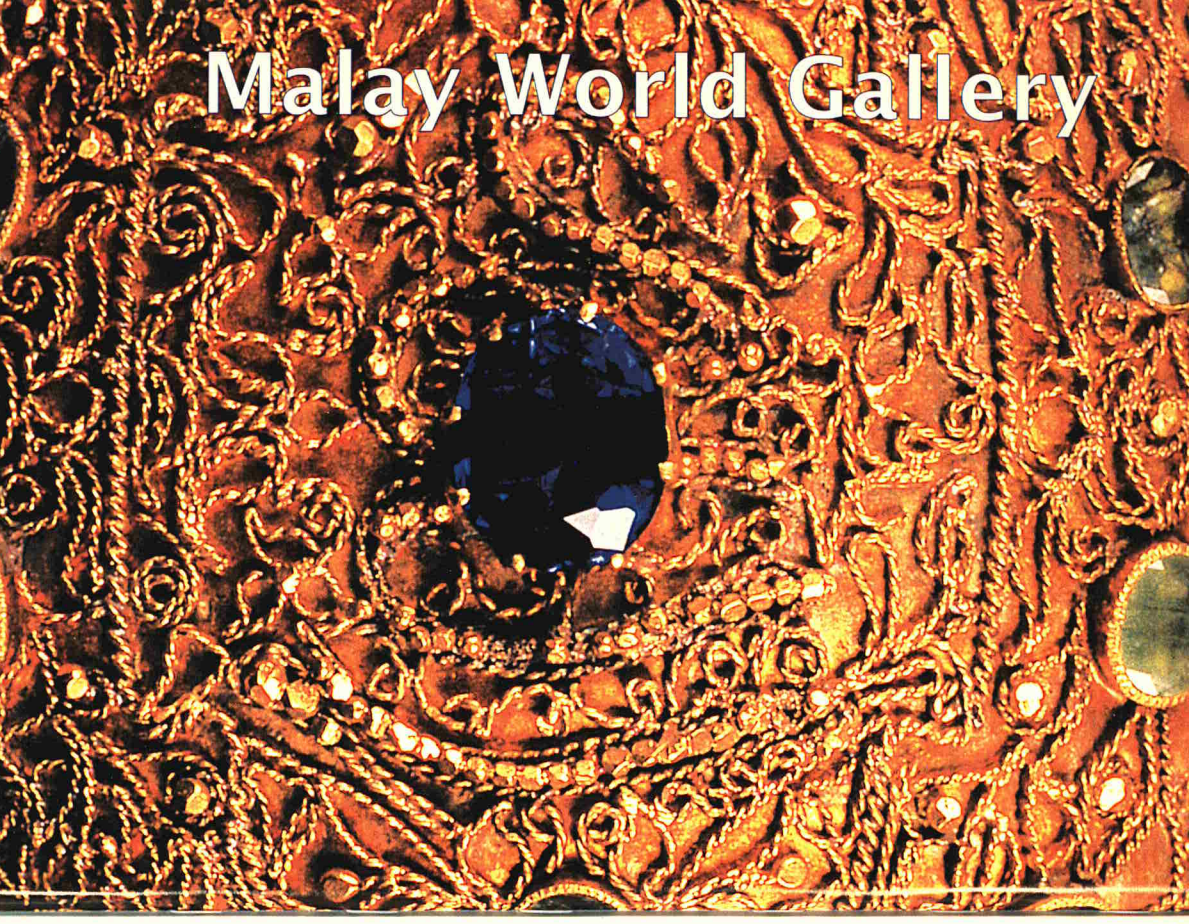
Chinese calligraphic scroll
China. c. 1970–1980 CE.
Calligrapher: Ma Tet Chang

Stylised Chinese Islamic script written to form a vase with flowers on a footed stand. The text in the flowers reads *"Laillahaillllah"* (There is no God but Allah) and *"Muhammad, Rasul Allah"* (Muhammad, Messenger of God). There are Arabic words at the right side of the scroll, written in the vertical Chinese Islamic character format, with phrases such as "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate" and "Blessings from Allah and Protection from Allah". Originally one of a set of four scrolls.

Chinese calligraphic scroll
China. c. 1970–1980 CE.
Calligrapher Ma Tet Chang

Stylised Chinese Islamic script written to form a vase of lotus flowers on a footed stand. The uppermost pod is made up of the names of five important individuals who represent characteristics of Allah, of which only four are legible: Ali, Isa (Jesus), Muhammad and Nuh (Noah). *Ali Raziulallah, Isa Roohallah, Muhammad Rasulallah, Nuh Najiullah.* There are also Arabic words written on the right side of the scroll, in the vertical Chinese Islamic character format, reading *Laillahaillllah* (There is no God but Allah) and *Muhammad Muhammad, Rasul Allah* (Muhammad, Messenger of God). Other phrases include "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate" and "Blessings from Allah and Protection from Allah". Originally one of a set of four scrolls.

Malay World Gallery



■ Malay World Gallery

Islam came to the region mainly as a result of trade and exploration. There was a steady flow of Muslim traders and merchants from the Arabian peninsula and India travelling eastwards via the Silk Route. These traders would stop at the various ports of call in the Malay peninsula and the islands of Sumatra and Java. The most significant of these was Melaka, founded in 1400, which grew into a bustling entreport for the exchange of spices, jungle produce, gold and other minerals, and Indian textiles.

Prior to the Islamisation of the Malay world, various early civilisations had already been established. Amongst the most significant were the Dongson or Dong Song civilisation of Annam (Vietnam), a people of the Bronze Age (150 BCE) whose artistic influences can still be found in indigenous tribal art forms; the Buddhist Srivijaya Empire of the 7th to the 14th century; and the Hindu Kingdom of Majapahit, which originated from the island of East Java and experienced its golden age in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The art of the region also derives inspiration from the art of India and China, as a result of the settlers who came from these lands with their native artistic traditions and cultural practices, which then influenced the art forms of the indigenous population. The influences occurred in both directions, and in turn, these outside traditions became modified by the local culture and eventually assimilated into the art of the region.

The Malay World gallery reveals the many different forms of artefacts relating to different aspects of culture and lifestyle of the Islamic Malay people. In this museum, the Malay world encompasses Peninsular Malaysia, the Indonesian archipelago, Patani (Southern Thailand), the island of Borneo and Southern Philippines. The majority of the pieces in the collection, however, originate from the Malay and Indonesian archipelagos.

***Songket* shawl**

Indonesia. 19th century CE

230cm x 66cm

The *songket*, usually of cotton or silk fabric and intricately woven with silver or gold thread, is one of the most prized of Malay textiles. Traditionally, Malay women would wear *songket* shawls over their heads when they appeared in public. The rich cloth has also been favoured as part of Malay bridal attire, worn by both bride and groom, who would be dressed in *songket* fully adorned with decorative motifs, known as the *songket bunga penuh*. The *songket* continues to be worn in modern Malay society, mainly for formal occasions and worn customarily by members of the upper class in different styles according to their purpose as dictated by the Malay customs or *adat*. Silk woven *songkets* were the favoured fabric of the Sultans and their wives during special ceremonies and by the 16th century, the *songket* became the official ceremonial cloth of Malaysian royalty.

There are three main sections of the *songket*: the field of the cloth (*badan kain*), the side borders (*tepi kain*) and the ends of the cloth (*punca kain*). The field comprises three quarters of the cloth and is generally less elaborate in its ornamentation than the side borders and ends. *Punca*, literally translated means the 'source' or the beginning of an object, refers to the two vertical and heavily decorated edges of the fabric. The side borders are always decorated in bands of different designs and normally fully patterned in intricate variations of chain motifs.

This *songket* has a central field adorned with a variation of diamond-shaped chain motifs known as the *corak teluk berantai* and other motifs such as the *pagar istana* (castle gates), *tampuk manggis* (the corolla of mangosteen), the *bunga pecah lapan* (eight-petalled flower), and the *awan larat* (scrolling cloud). The ends are decorated in a vast range of traditional motifs such as the *pucuk rebung* (bamboo shoot), *bunga kayohan* (rowing flower), the popular *awan larat* (cloud scroll), *tepi gunung* (mountainside) and *bunga bukit puteri* (the flower of Princess Hill). The central field of the *songket*, in turn, is decorated with motifs such as the *pagar istana* (castle gates), *tampuk manggis* (the corolla of mangosteen) and the *bunga pecah lapan* (eight-petalled flower), the *pagar istana* motif and the *awan larat* motif. The side borders of this specific narrow shawl are adorned with geometric motifs similar to the *tanduk rusa* (deer horn), a motif commonly used in Indonesia. *Songket* motifs originally derived from Indian cloths such as the *cindai* and the *limar* cloth, gradually evolving and incorporating the ideas of indigenous Malay design.

***Keris* Sultan Abdul Jalil**

Indonesia, Riau. c. 1124 AH / 1712 CE

14cm x 41cm

The *keris* is the traditional weapon of the Malay Archipelago. It is used for protection, traditionally for the Malay martial art, *silat*. The *keris* was also an intrinsic accessory of the Malay man's attire. Customarily a symbol of the rich and powerful, it was also believed to possess spiritual powers and was regarded as a symbol of courage. Certain rituals were carried out to treat the *keris* so as not to disturb the spiritual element, which was believed to inhabit the weapon – a practice still observed in the Malay archipelago today.

There are three sections to a *keris*: the hilt (*hulu keris*), the blade (*mata keris*), and the cover (*sarong keris*). Each curve along the edge of the wavy blade is called *luk*. The *keris* always sports an odd number of *luk*; the shortest having three and the longest 47. Historically the number of *luk* indicated the status of the owner. Kerises with nine *luk* traditionally belonged to the Sultan or Raja, while those with seven *luk* belonged to the *Permaisuri* (Queen), five *luk* kerises belonged to the *Putera Raja* (Prince) and a *keris* with three *luk* belonged to the *Panglima* (General).

The *Keris* Sultan Abdul Jalil is so named after the inscription on the blade of the *keris* attributing its ownership to Sultan Abdul Jalil. The Sultan to which this inscription refers is most likely Sultan Abdul Jalil IV of Johor. The end of the seventeenth century also marked the end of the Melaka-Johor Sultanate. With the death of the last Sultan, Mahmud Shah II, in 1699, the seat of the Johor empire was taken by Sultan Abdul Jalil IV, who reigned as the 11th ruler of Johor until his death in 1717.

This piece has a carved wooden hilt in a popular motif known as *Jawa Demam* (literally, the feverish Javanese). This Hindu-inspired hilt resembles a man with his head bowed down and his arms wrapped around his body. However, after the introduction of Islam, without compromising the original shape of the hilt, the human face and figure became stylised and were replaced with floral motifs. This hilt is ornamented with a silver chased cup at the hilt base. It also has a wooden sheath bound in sheet silver chased in floral scroll motifs along the shaft. The iron blade has seven *luks* and is inscribed in inlaid silver.

Prayer screen

Indonesia, Jambi. c. Late 19th century CE

143.5cm x 95cm

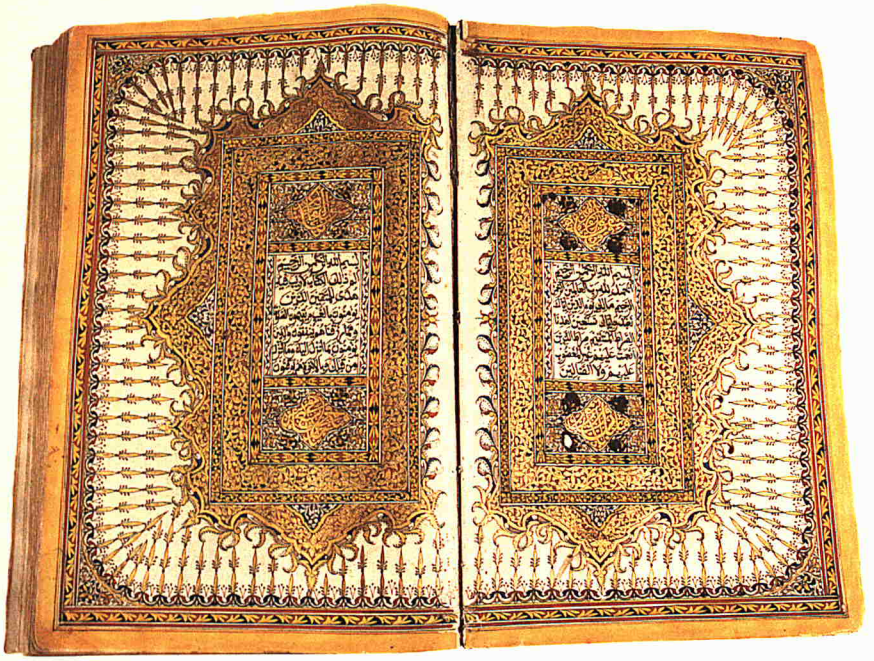
Prayer screens were often placed in front of the worshipper as a barrier to prevent people crossing directly in front during his commune with Allah. It was also often used as a section of a panel in mosques or houses to separate the men from the women during prayers.

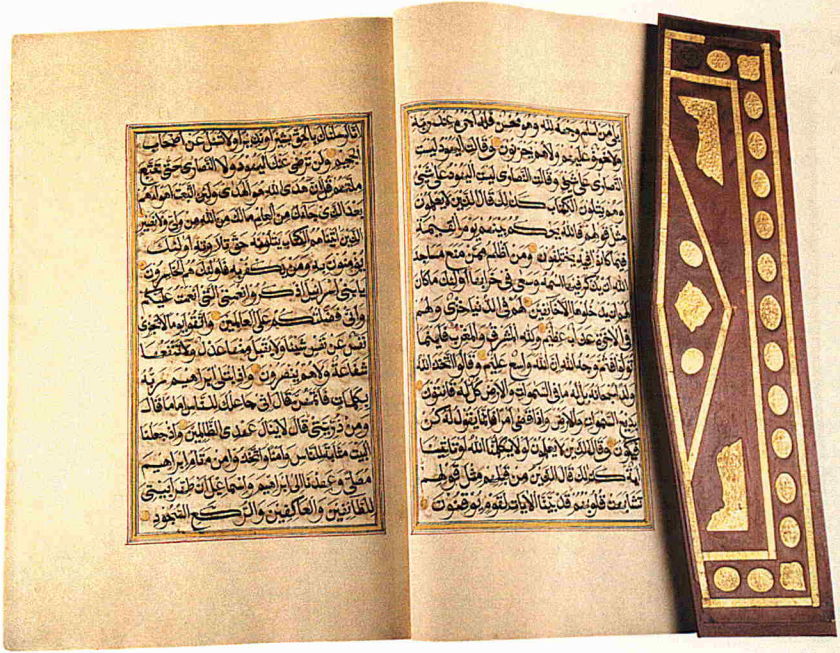
Carved into the shape of an ogee arch, this screen resembles a small *mihrab*. It is decorated with pierced motifs of coiling foliate tendrils and relief carved lotus motifs in each corner. The border panel is relief carved with floral roundels at intervals against a ground of cross-shaped punched patterns, a motif locally known as *isen*. The screen was once painted red, blue and gold. Now, only faint remnants of blue paint remain on the foliate tendrils, though red paint can still be seen on the borders and the roundels still bear gold paint.

The arch is divided into two sections, the centre of each bearing a relief carved calligraphic roundel of Qur'anic inscriptions written in *Thuluth* script. The inscription of the upper roundel is from the Qur'anic chapter *Surah Al-Imran*: "The only true faith in God's sight is Islam" (3.19). The lower roundel is from the *Surah Ya'sin*: "Peace! shall be the word spoken by a Merciful God" (36.58).

Qur'an
Malay Peninsula, Terengganu. c. Late 18th century CE
43cm x 28cm x 7cm

Known as the "Gold Edition", this Qur'an was specially copied for the Sultan of Terengganu, Sultan Zainal Abidin II, who ruled from 1793-1808. Decorated in gold with printed cloth linings, it is written in *Naskh* script, with gold borders on every page and gold roundel verse markers. The opening and closing *Surah* are decorated with foliated scroll motifs in gold, blue and red.





Qur'an
Malay Peninsula. c. 19th century CE
38cm x 25.5cm x 9cm

A complete holy Qur'an written in black *Naskh* script. Each *surah* is preceded with its respective title written in red and the place of revelation, either Mecca or Medina, the total number of verses contained and the volume number. The opening, central and closing *surahs* are illuminated with floral and foliate motifs and geometric patterns.

إن وليي الله الذي نزل الكتاب وهو يتولى الصالحين
والذين تدعون من دونه لا يستطيعون نصركم ولا
أنفسهم ينصرون وإن تدعوهم إلى الهدى لا يسمعوا
وتراهم ينظرون إليك وهم لا يبصرون خذ العفو
وأمر بالعرف وأعرض عن الجاهلين وإما ينزغنك من
الشيطان نزغ فاستعذ بالله إنه سميع عليم إن الذين
اتقوا إذا مسهم طائف من الشيطان تذكروا فإذا هم
مبصرون وإخوانهم يمدونهم في الغي ثم لا يقصرون
وإذا لم تأتهم بآية قالوا لولا اجتبيتها قل إنما أتبع ما
يوحى إلي من ربي هذا بصائر من ربكم وهدى ورحمة
لقوم يؤمنون وإذا قرئ القرآن فاستمعوا له وأنصتوا
لعلكم ترحمون واذكر ربك في نفسك تضرعا وخيفة
ودون الجهر من القول بالغدو والآصال ولا تكن من
الغافلين إن الذين عند ربك لا يستكبرون
عن عبادته ويسبحونه وله يسجدون

سجدة
الأولى
واجب

سورة الأنفال مدنية وهي سبعون وخمس آيات

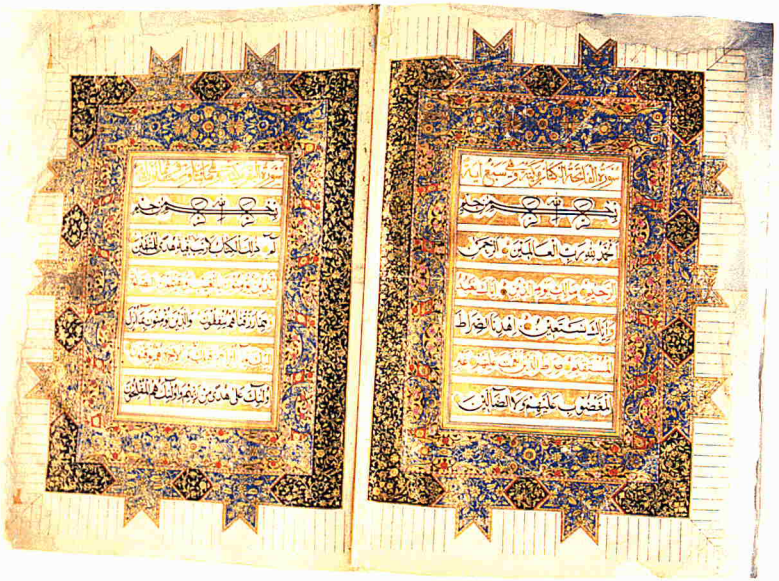
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

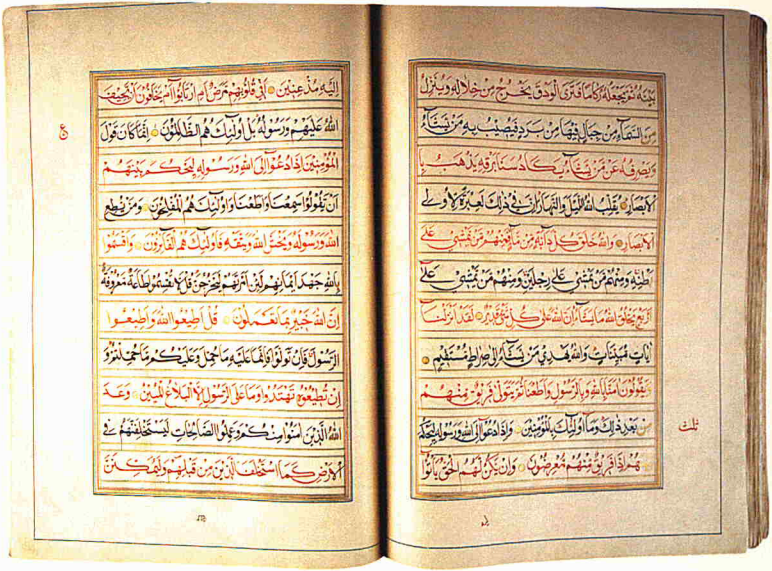
يسألونك عن الأنفال قل الأنفال لله والرسول فاتقوا
الله وأصلحوا ذات بينكم وأطيعوا الله ورسوله
إن كنتم مؤمنين إنما المؤمنون الذين إذا ذكر الله
وجلت قلوبهم وإذا تليت عليهم آياته زادتهم إيمانا
وعلى ربهم يتوكلون الذين يقيمون الصلوة ومما
رزقناهم ينفقون أولئك هم المؤمنون حقا لهم
درجات عند ربهم ومغفرة ورزق كريم كما أخرجك
ربك من بيتك بالحق وإن فريقا من المؤمنين لكارهون
يجادلونك في الحق بعد ما تبين كأنما يساقون إلى الموت
وهم ينظرون وإذ يعدكم الله إحدى الطائفتين أنها
لكم وتودون أن غير ذات الشوكة تكون لكم ويريد
الله أن يحق الحق بكلماته ويقطع دابر الكافرين
ليحق الحق ويبطل الباطل ولو كره المجرمون

ثلثة
وربع
ع

Qur'an
Malay Peninsula, c. 19th century CE
43cm x 29cm x 4.5cm

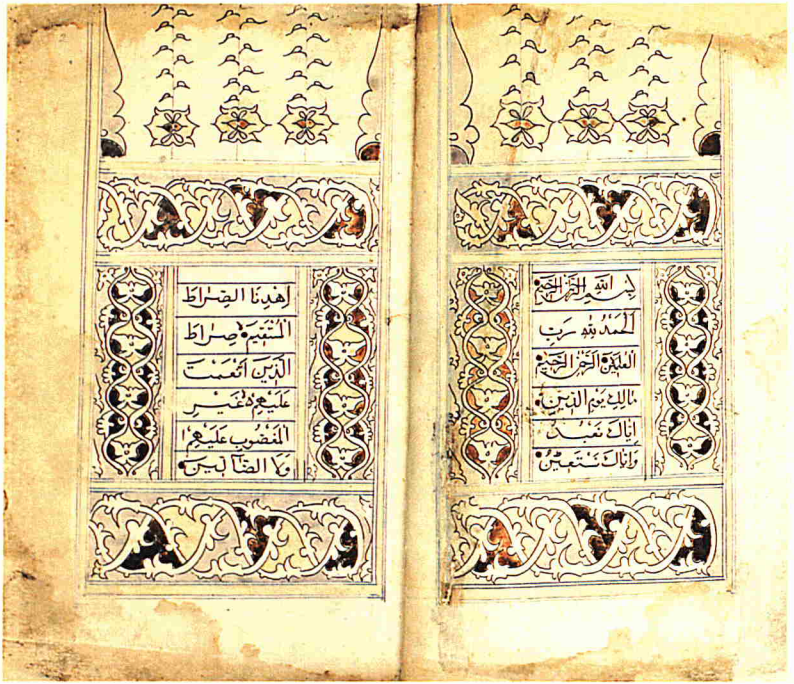
A complete holy Qur'an written in *Naskh* script in six different colours. The opening and closing pages are illuminated with gold floral and foliate scrolls on black, red and blue panels.





Qur'an
Phillipines, Mindanao.
1299 AH / 1881 CE
35cm x 22cm

Illuminated Qur'an with colophon remarks stating the name of the copier, 'Ali Dibr 'Abd al-Karim al-Khanja. Written in *Bolo Naskh* script with *Surah* (chapter) headings in *Thuluth*.



Qur'an case
Malay Peninsula, possibly Terengganu.
c. Late 19th century CE
42.5cm x 28cm x 6.5cm

Used to store the Qur'an, this wooden case is carved with cloud scrolls and vegetal motifs of coiling bean tendrils and wild violets and inscribed with a *doa'* (prayer) seeking Allah's assistance in the quest for knowledge.

Sheet silver tobacco and lime box
Malay Peninsula.
c. Late 19th early 20th century CE
Tobacco box: 3.5cm x 7.5cm x 5cm
Lime container: 3cm x 3.5cm

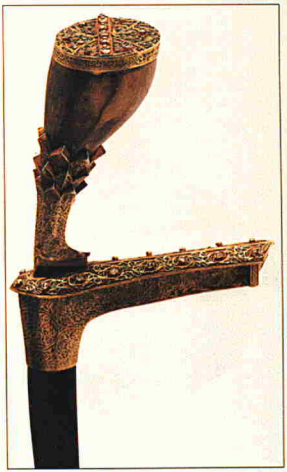
A sheet silver tobacco box accompanied by smaller globular containers attached on a chain. These smaller containers were used to carry lime paste.

Pair of sheet gold and
silver tobacco caskets
Malay Peninsula.
c. Late 19th-early 20th century CE
3.5cm x 7.5cm x 4cm

These tobacco caskets were used as ladies' trinket boxes on occasion. Two of these boxes are miniature sheet gold caskets, chased and pierced with floral motifs.

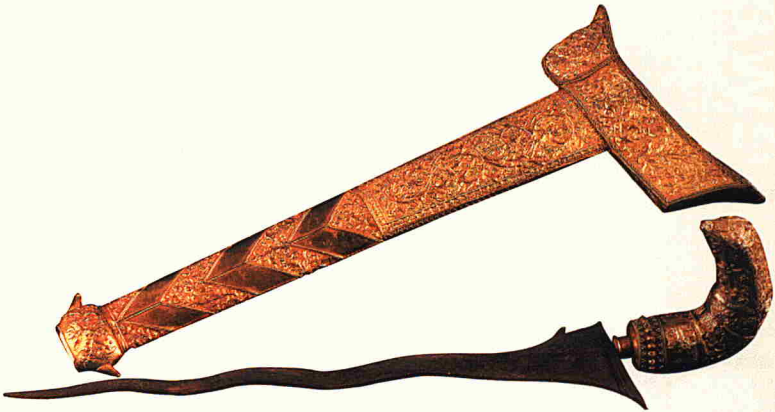
***Tumbuk Lada* (Pepper Crusher) dagger**
Indonesia, Minangkabau.
c. Late 19th century CE
18cm x 9cm

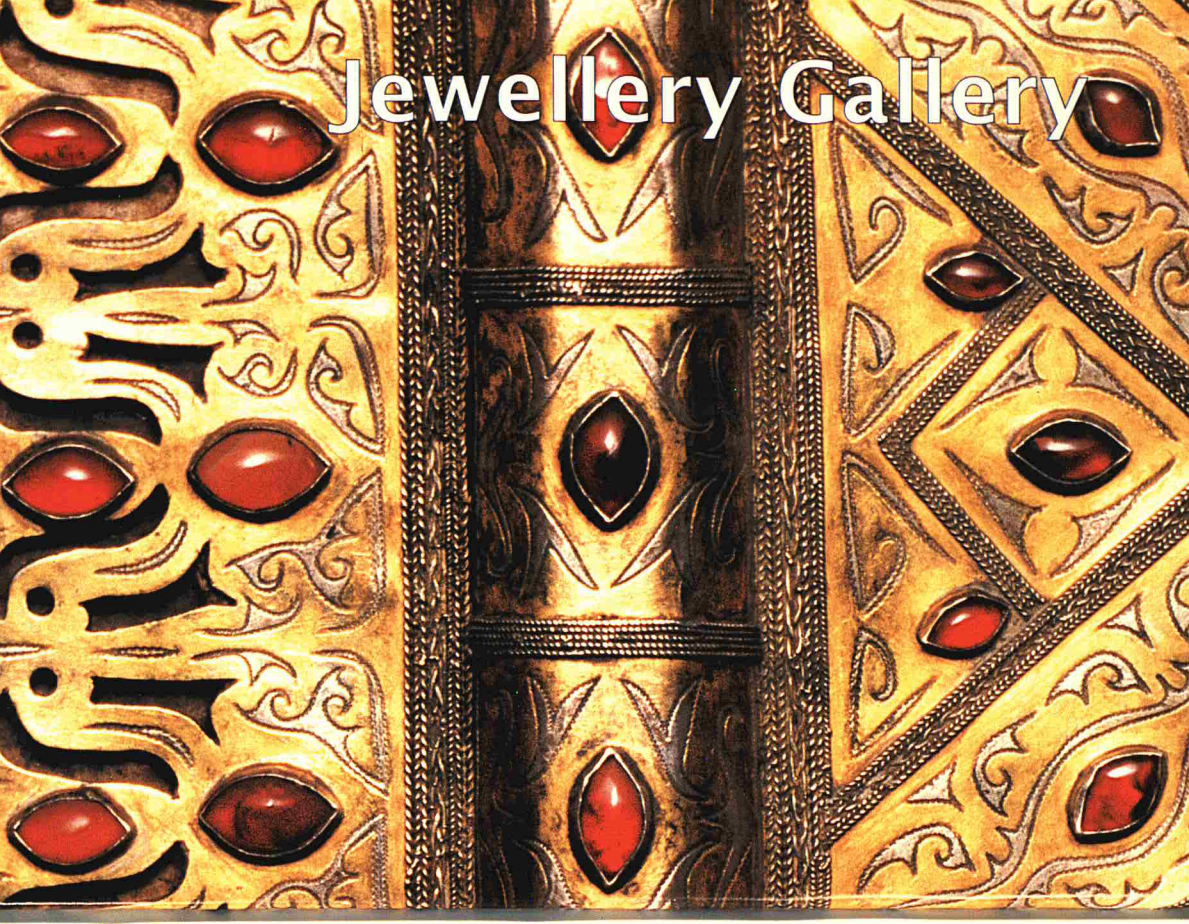
Dagger with a single-edged straight blade and a bulbous grip embellished with a three-tiered petalled collar of enamelled gold at the hilt. The wooden sheath is further enhanced with a gold crosspiece, lightly enamelled, chased and gemset with a delicate filigree foliate scroll motif.



Gold *Keris Gayang*
Indonesia, possibly Minangkabau.
c. 18th -19th century CE
48cm x 17cm

Owing to the unusual luxury and status of a gold *keris*, it is likely that a member of royalty or nobility owned this particular weapon. This *keris* is made of gold combined with copper to produce the alloy *suasa*. It has the Sumatran styled hilt *Jawa Demam* (Feverish Javanese) and a damascened blade with seven *lok* or waves, inscribed with the *Shahadah* verse *There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger* in *Naskh* script.




Jewellery Gallery

■ Jewellery Gallery

Jewellery plays an important part in personal adornment in the Islamic world. Just as textiles were much prized and served symbolic functions, so was jewellery. The great empires of Islam resulted in the creation of magnificent and lavish jewels and ornaments. Not to be forgotten also are the decorative ornaments of tribal communities, particularly the nomadic tribes of the Arabian peninsula and the steppes of Central Asia.

Most jewellery traditions hark back to pre-Islamic times and the techniques of embellishment can often be seen in metalwork and arms and armour decoration of the period. Gold, the favoured metal of rulers in most societies, was shaped into a variety of forms to create necklaces, earrings, headdress or turban ornaments, rings, bracelets, armlets, anklets and more. These were usually formed from gold sheets and decorated with granulation, filigree, repoussé, chasing or engraving and set with precious or semi-precious stones. India was a great source of precious gems, yielding diamonds, sapphires, amethysts, garnets and pearls. Rubies were found in Sri Lanka and Burma, while Afghanistan produced balas rubies or red spinels as well as lapis lazuli. From Egypt came emeralds, turquoise from Iran and China, and red coral from the Mediterranean. Lesser stones such as agate and carnelian were also used.

A large part of the IAMM jewellery collection comes from India, Persia and Central Asia. These include the elaborate jewels of the Mughals consisting of cabochon emeralds, rubies and table cut diamonds *kundan* set in gold to form necklaces, *bazubands* (arm bands) and turban ornaments. The reverse sides of many are fully enamelled in gem-coloured motifs of flowers and birds. Jewellery from the Persian empires are often not as heavily encrusted but present intricately decorated gold bangles and ornaments in gold with granulations and filigree work.

Tribal jewellery from Turkmenistan comprise a significant part of the collection. In distinct contrast to the rich gold of the imperial adornments are the silver brass-plated pectoral plates and bracelets worn by Turkmen women. Set with agate and coral, with chased or repoussé surfaces, they are illustrative of folk jewellery in both the relatively simple construction and high symbolism in motif and design. Jewellery from Southeast Asia is similar in this respect, although usually produced for the ruling classes. The form and motifs often have pre-Islamic origins laden with symbolic meaning and are comparatively simple in their construction in comparison with the jewellery of the great empires.

Turban ornament

India. c. 18th–19th century CE

12cm x 15.5cm

The turban ornament was an important part of Mughal court headdresses, with royal turban ornaments only permitted to be worn by the ruler and select members of the imperial court. The general term for turban ornaments is *sarpech*, which derives from the root words *sar* or *sir* meaning head, and *pech*, which translates as fastener. The turban ornament was worn pinned to the front of the turban and secured by strings around it.

This form of turban ornament known as *jigha* is characterised by its central plume-shaped ornaments. The inspiration behind the design originates from the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar Shah when feathers were inserted into gold stem-shaped holders placed at the front of the turban. The mimicry of the feather plume in jewels and gold first appeared during the reign of Shah Jahan. The ornament is composed of three hinged sections with each section a gemset openwork form of stylised floral elements surmounted by plume-like protrusions. The lower section is fringed with cabochon emeralds. The reverse is fully adorned with intricately enamelled birds and floral motifs.

This Indian turban ornament is fully set in the popular Mughal technique of gem setting known as *kundan* with table cut diamonds and cabochon emeralds and rubies. *Kundan* is a method of gem setting by the insertion of gold foil between the stones and mount. Specifically, this turban ornament uses the technique of *Mena Kundan*, a term used to describe jewellery that has brilliantly coloured enamel work on the reverse with a *Kundan* setting on the front.

Jewellery from the Mughal period was often fully enamelled in colourful, intricate motifs. The European jewellers who served at the Mughal courts in the early seventeenth century probably introduced this technique which was adopted by the Indian craftsmen in the embellishment of jewellery and other objects ranging from royal domestic utensils to weapon hilts to entire thrones.

Pair of earrings

Iran. c. 19th century CE

8.7cm

A distinctive feature of Qajar dynasty jewellery is the brightly coloured enamelled motifs and settings of vividly coloured stones. Earrings were often elongated or adorned with dangling beads or pendants. The pendants were shaped in a wide variety of forms encrusted with precious stones and hanging ornaments in the shape of leaves, fishes and twisted gold wire. Among the favoured colours used during the Qajar period were ruby red, sky blue and deep green enamelled in geometric forms and arabesques, the *gol-o boteh* (flower and paisley) and the *gol-o morgh* (flower and bird) motifs, popularised in the style of illumination of the Safavid and Qajar dynasties.

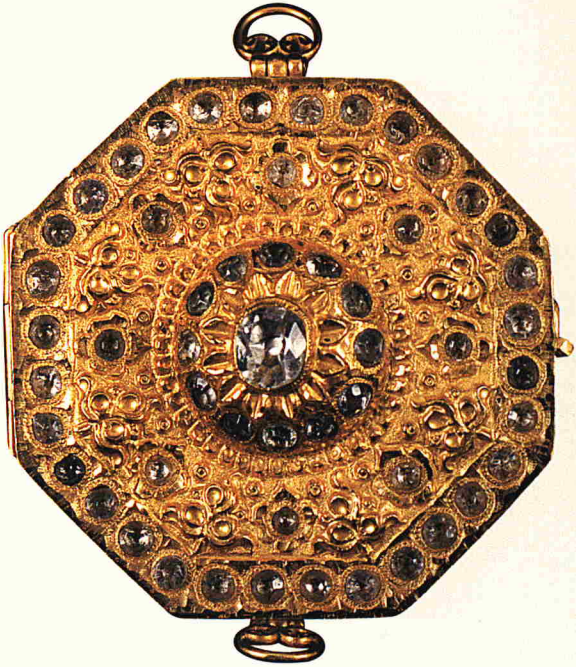
This pair of earrings was suspended from the earlobe with a bent wire hook. It is composed of two tiers of gold dome-shaped sections thickly painted with bright polychrome enamels in a motif of floral medallions. The interior of each dome is painted in sky blue enamel and the rim is trimmed with a border of seed pearls. The lowest tier has an enamelled gold almond-shaped pendant suspended from the interior and a fringe of tiny seed pearls and ruby beads.

Pair of anklets
Iran. c. 19th century CE
9cm

From the Qajar period of Iran, these anklets are constructed from twisted gold. The ends of the anklet terminate in a pair of stylised granulated and filigreed dragon heads linked at the mouth by a ring.

Qur'an box
Iran. c. 19th century CE
1.5cm x 6cm

This Qajar dynasty octagonal Qur'an box is adorned with central repoussé boss with foiled paste decoration and chased floral buds. The underside of the box is chased with a central rosette and foliate border. The pendant is structured as a floral medallion set with similar pastes. It has minimal openwork and chased decoration while the reverse side is repoussé decorated with an anthropomorphic solar symbol.



Gemset jade fragment
Turkey. Possibly 16th century CE
3.5cm x 13cm

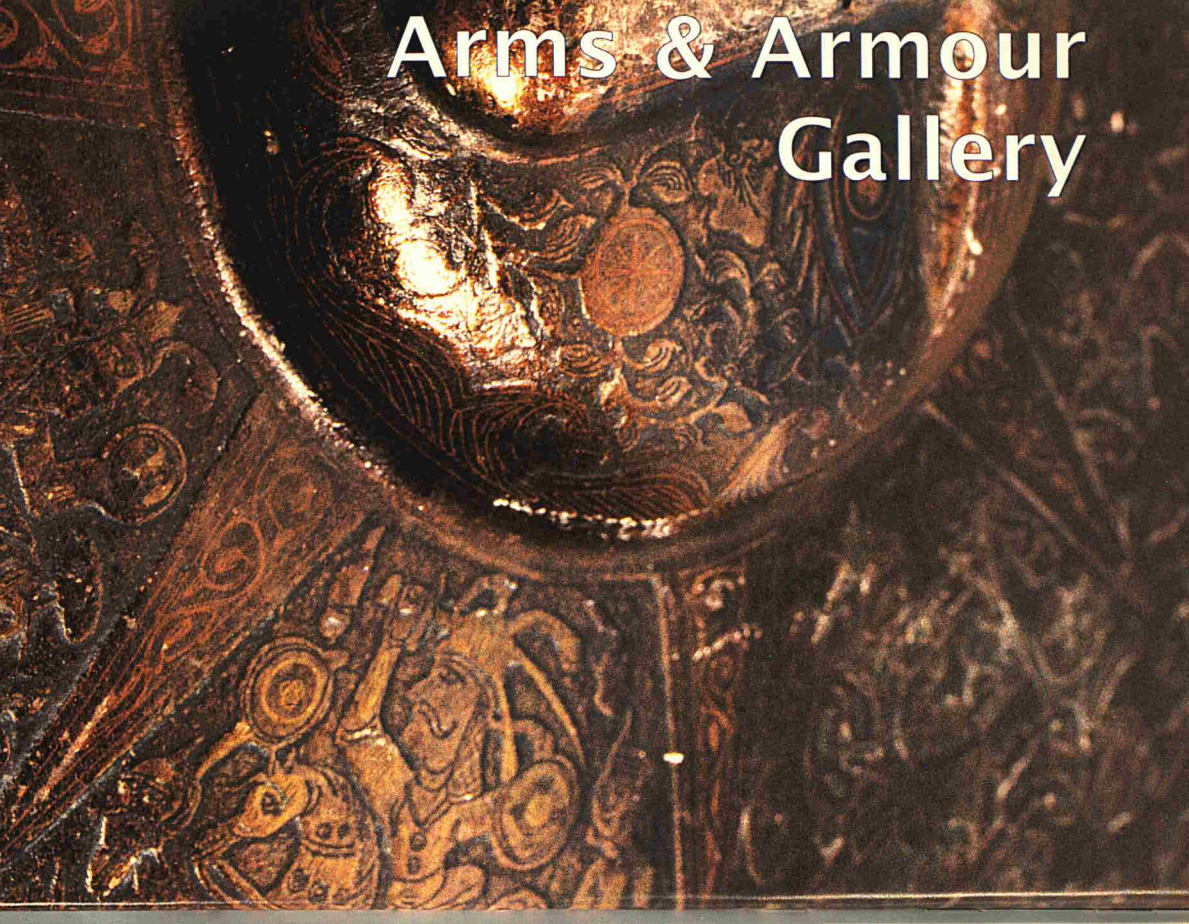
Semi-circular jade panel adorned with overlaid gold floral scrolls set with rubies.

Pair of earrings
Iran. c. 19th century CE
7.3cm

A pair of Qajar dynasty earrings, each with an upper and lower row of sheet gold foliate pendants. The central hexagonal faceted ornament is enamelled in a polychrome floral motif.

Set of six seals
Iran. c. 15th-16th century CE
2.7cm - 2.2cm

A set consisting of one hexagonal and five circular nephrite seals from the Timurid and Early Safavid dynasty.
Clockwise from top:
1. "Confident in the King of both worlds, the servant (of God), Yar Ahmad b. Adam b.Husayn, 888"
2. "Confident in the omnipotent King, the servant (of God), Bastam 'Ali b. Khabir"
3. "Confident in the independent King, Abu'l-Ma'ali b. 'Ali Ashgar al-Husayni"
4. "The one who is ready at the service of the King, Qasim b. Husayn Nasrullah"
5. "I put my trust in God" (in repetition, written with reflection on the lower half)
6. "Confident in the independent King, Muhammad b. Jalal Khurusani"


Arms & Armour
Gallery

■ Arms and Armour Gallery

The weapons and battle accoutrements of the Islamic world were often decorated and embellished to the degree of becoming works of art in their own respect. The skills of the Muslim smith and metallurgists have resulted in the most stunning weapons crafted in elegant forms and decorated with precious materials and worthy of sultans and emperors. The most common weapons include swords and daggers, spears and maces, and body armour and shields. Over the centuries, Islamic weaponry underwent minimal changes in shape and design, with some of the shapes of swords and daggers dating back to pre-Islamic times. By later centuries and with increased interaction between Islamic lands and the West, firearms came to be an important part of the Muslim army, particularly prominent in Ottoman Turkey.

Islamic swords and daggers are distinct for their blades made from watered steel, a form of steel with a high carbon content resulting in a textured appearance of wavy patterns in the grain of the metal, the darker high carbon areas contrasting against the lighter steel areas. Blades are also often decorated with gold, either inlaid or overlaid into the metal in arabesque or floral patterns or in calligraphic inscriptions. These usually either invoke the name of God for blessings or come in the form of calligraphic cartouches bearing the name of the craftsman. The shape and decoration of sword and dagger hilts vary across the Islamic lands and were defined by their place of origin. Sometimes crafted from luxurious materials such as bone, ivory or jade, the hilts are often inlaid with gold or studded with precious gems. The shape of the quillons, pommels and blade also helps to identify the weapons' provenance.

The IAMM Arms and Armour collection includes weapons from several Islamic regions: the *Nimcha* of Saudi Arabia which is often decorated with gold or silver mounts; the curving scimitars such as the *Shamseh* of Iran, the *Kilij* of Turkey and the *Tulwar* of India; the Caucasian dagger, the *Kindjal*, with its long two-edged blade; the *Khanjar*, curved dagger of India and Iran with its elaborate hilt; and the *jambiyya* of North Africa and Arabia, which are known for their decorated and sharply curved scabbards. The rest of the collection comprises smaller daggers such as the Iranian *Kard*, the *Tabar* and *Tabarzin* saddle axes; *Gurz* and *Shashbur* maces; various pieces of body armour; and Ottoman pistols and gun accessories such as gunpowder flask, flint striker, clippers and hooks.

Flint lock pistol

Turkey. c. 19th century CE

35.5cm

Pistols are believed to have been used from the seventeenth century though most surviving examples are attributed to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Fitted with miquelets or flint-locks, they may generally be divided into those of indigenous Turkish style and those of Western influence. One of a pair, this pistol is classified under the latter category with the standard form of down curving stock and prominent butt. The reassessment and ultimate Westernisation of Ottoman firearms were a result of a number of factors including the reformation of the Ottoman forces during the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) and the confrontation with the British and French forces in Egypt.

Highly decorative, this firearm has an inlaid stock with gilt metal and silver in floral designs and a star and crescent motif. The lock is covered in floral bands and attached below the European barrel are carved bone ramrods and mounts. The piece's elaborate and luxurious embellishment is characteristic of Islamic art. As in many cases, the utility and function of a weapon are subordinate to its decoration as this pistol portrays. The intentions of the maker are clear: to alarm and impress. The tiger's head, its most striking attribute, is exquisite and emphasises an imminent danger. The ramrods of bone are carved into a stylistic face to further complement the apparent deadliness of the weapon, evoking imagery of the face of death. The star and crescent motif stamps the prominent mark of Islam.

The decoration of such pistols offer an insight into the cultural charm of Ottoman society. While its features demonstrate an underlying ferocity, the skilled craftsmanship elevates this pistol to artwork, suggesting a ceremonial rather than utilitarian function. Rivalling the skilled craftsmanship of the Qajar Iranians and the Mughal Indians, this pistol represents the culmination of Eastern and Western influences for while it retains its oriental splendour of craftsmanship, the adoption of European barrels and structure signify the technological advancements of the West.

***Jambiyya* (dagger)**

Possibly Southern Yemen, c. 19th century CE

50cm x 15cm

The *jambiyya* is a double-edged blade, usually without a raised spine and has a tapered and gently curved form. Due to the length of its blade, the *jambiyya* has been referred to as a 'sword knife'. This dagger type is traditionally found in North Yemen, the Hijaz and Asir, and is considered a weapon of Western Arabia. In the Hijaz, it is called the *Sabak*; further south it is known as the *Sabik* and *Sabiki* at the Yemeni border.

In the Arabian peninsula, boys approaching adolescence were presented with these daggers as a symbol of manhood and social standing. It has been said that the poor may dress like the rich and chiefs may dress like their subjects but only a weapon will indicate social standing.

Jambiyya swordsmiths in Yemen and Western Arabia retained their techniques and craft skills as a family trade. As they migrated, so too did their traditional skills and designs resulting in an amalgamation of styles and forms. As a result of the expansion of trade routes and influence of the Arabs, this dagger type has been found in various areas stretching from Morocco to India.

Reminiscent of the Hijaz *jambiyya*, this dagger has a single-edged watered steel blade. It is almost straight up to half its length, abruptly curving into a double-edge and tapering to a point. The hilt is made of polished rhinoceros ivory. The wooden sheath is covered with green and purple silk, velvet and black cotton cloth and fitted with sheet silver with an openwork calligraphic and foliate scroll motif. It was normally worn vertically over the abdomen, tucked into a sash.

Talismanic tunic
Turkey. c. 16th century CE
Shoulder to shoulder: 90cm
Collar to hem: 74cm

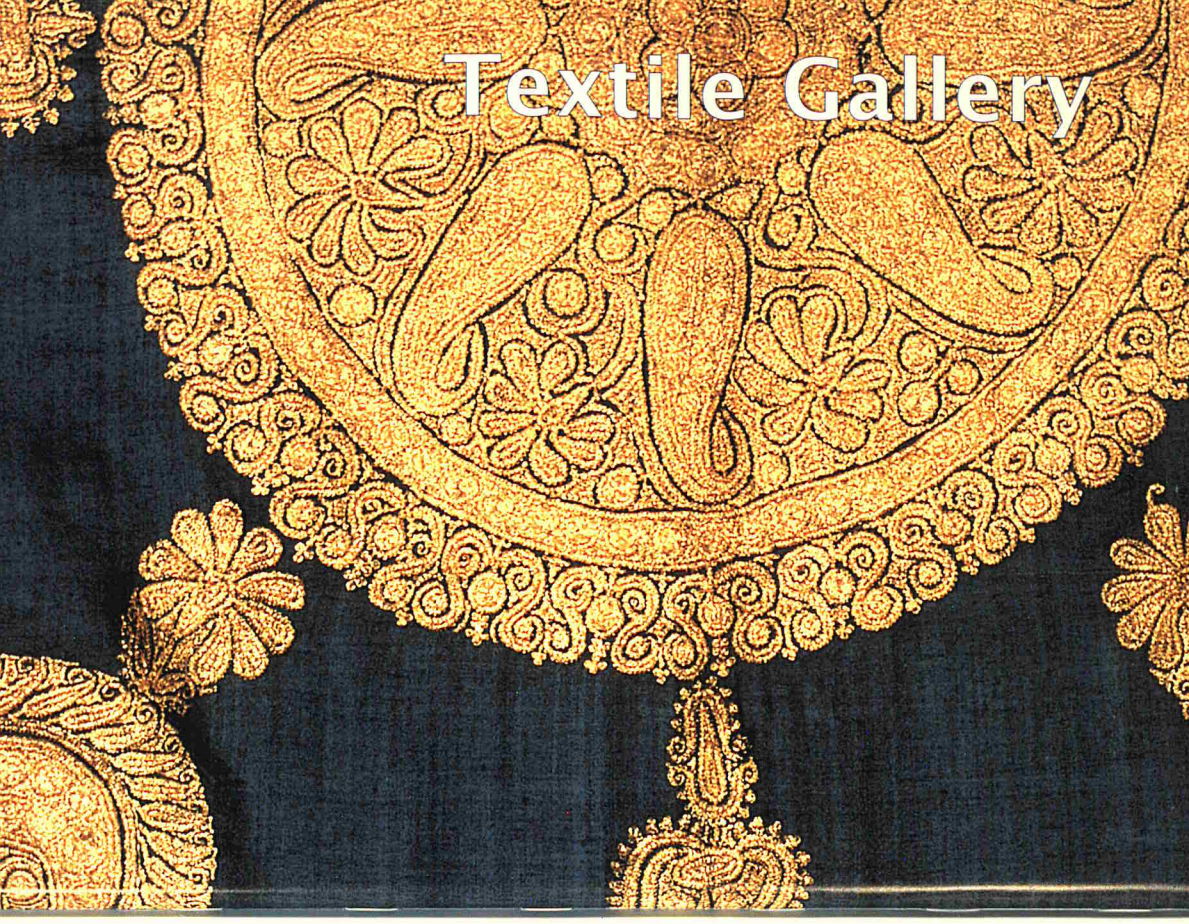
An Ottoman linen tunic inscribed with Qur'anic verses and tables containing alphabets and numerals in black and red ink. Such tunics were worn under armour and were believed to protect wearers from harm during battle.

***Khanjar* (dagger)**
Iran. c. 17th-18th century CE
39cm x 5cm

Dagger with a curved single-edge blade of damascened watered steel, grip of ivory carved in the shape of a horse head and a floral spray motif at its base.

***Khanjar* (dagger)**
Iran. c.18th-19th century CE
31cm x 4cm

Qajar dagger with grip and sheath adorned with polychrome enamelled floral motifs and portraits of a nobleman.


Textile Gallery

■ Textile Gallery

Clothing and textile production has a considerable history in the Islamic world with many techniques and styles dating back to pre-Islamic times. For centuries, textiles were highly valued as objects of luxury. Rulers used textiles as diplomatic gifts, tributes to reigning powers and rewards to subjects for outstanding service. Large imperial workshops called *Tiraz* controlled by the reigning caliph were responsible for the production of many of the rich Islamic textiles and carpets still in existence today. Opulent fabrics and dress were used to display the authority, prosperity and prestige of a regime, and it was possible to gauge a person's social grade, profession and religious affiliation through his costume. Clothing was especially significant as a mark of identity in traditional societies where it could be indicative of a person's age, gender, marital status, place of origin, social status or occupation.

One of the earliest textiles used in the Middle East was linen woven by the ancient Egyptians from flax. Wool, which was the predominant textile used in European clothing during the Middle Ages, was also widely used by the nomadic peoples in the Middle East, who beat the wool into felt from which they made clothing. In the Far East, silk was the major textile, while cotton popular for its lightness and airiness as a result of its simple weave was widely used in ancient India.

Islamic textiles can be recognised for their intricate patterns, symmetrical designs and balanced compositions. In Islamic culture, there is an emphasis on the inner section of the textile as well as the outer, stressing the Islamic teachings of purity of inner self than that which is viewed externally. Textiles were traditionally believed to have folkloric magical powers, hence its importance in ceremonies and rituals. Textiles were also used as a display of wealth and status and constituted a major part of trading.

The IAMM Textile Gallery has a wide collection of different types of textiles from the Islamic world. These include robes, coats and costumes, shawls, runners and covers, nomadic hangings, door panels, headdresses, tent bags and more. The techniques of production and decorative styles are emphasised and the pieces are grouped according to their provenance or style.

Mosque portiere
Iran. 19th century CE
300cm x 200cm

Shaped in the form of a crenellated arched doorway, it is possible that this portiere served as a *mihrab*, and was affixed to a wall as an indication of the *qibla* (direction of Mecca).

This purple velvet mosque portiere is fully embroidered with couched gilt metal threads. This particular technique known in Persian as *malileh duzi*, a form of textile embellishment practised during the Safavid dynasty, reached its height of popularity during the Qajar period. *Malileh* refers to a technique of gilt thread embroidery while *duzi* refers to the appliqué technique. The appearance of high-relief decoration is obtained by padding the motifs with cotton cord inlay, which are then embroidered over with gilt metal thread.

The black velvet border is adorned with a continuous band of plaited strapwork. The lower section is embroidered with a panel of geometric stellar and hexagon shapes. The inner border is inscribed with gilt embroidered Qur'anic verses rendered in *Thuluth* script against a dark purple velvet background. The *mihrab* arches are adorned with calligraphic roundels on a ground of arabesque scrolls and the lower edges are trimmed with a fringe of gilt thread.

The task of embroidery on textiles with religious association (such as mosque hangings and the *kiswah* used to cover the *Ka'aba* in Mecca) was one that was regarded with a significant amount of prestige because of the extreme technical skill required to produce such fine pieces and was designated to men only. The embroiderers were subject to close scrutiny when working to prevent any theft or illicit melting of the precious metals.

Woman's robe

Turkey. c. 18th-19th century CE

Lenght: 146cm

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the traditional costume of Ottoman Turkish women composed principally of an outer robe (*kaftan*) worn over loose-fitting trousers (*alvar*) and an inner robe (*entari*) under which they wore a long and flowing undershirt. However, the styles of dress varied and often other garments were worn in place of the outer robe. The style evolved into the nineteenth century, gradually adopting characteristic features of the European style. This later became evident in the incorporation of shortened cuffed sleeves, trailing hems, fitted forms and European produced or inspired fabrics and trimmings.

This robe of pale blue silk is embroidered with alternating gilt bands and embroidered floral scrolls in coral and green silk thread. By the eighteenth century, the large and bold textile patterns of the previous centuries began to make way for more refined and subtle designs. Delicate interspersed floral and foliate sprays often in combination with stripes were typical of this period.

The robe is lined with white cotton while the sleeves are lined with bright purple silk. The collar is high and fitted, dropping to a scalloped plunging neckline and a row of gilt frogging buttons. The sleeves are flowing and flared at the elbow, and the scalloped edges are trimmed with swirling wave-like gilt braids. Both sides of the robe are slit to the waist, in the style of nineteenth century Turkish women who wore them with as many as four slit panels on the skirt. These inner robes were typically worn with embroidered cashmere or silk sashes, or wide belts with elaborately ornamented buckles from which hung small purses or ornamental gemset daggers.

Jacket
Iran. c. 19th century CE
63cm x 185cm

This jacket of crimson silk brocade woven with gilt *boteh* motifs has tapering sleeves trimmed with gilt frogging and metal buttons.

Hanging
Turkey or Syria. 19th century CE
156cm x 182cm

A blue satin hanging from the Ottoman period embroidered in couched gilt thread with floral sprays and a central floral cartouche around a stellar medallion.

Mosque portiere
Turkey or Syria.
19th century CE
176cm x 294cm

Ottoman mosque portiere of crimson, pale green and bronze satin embroidered in couched gilt threads with hanging baskets over tulip motifs.

Saddle, cover and stirrups
North Africa. c. Late 19th century CE
103cm x 92cm

Raised seat supports of brown leather with a seat of olive green plush decorated in couched gilt threads and trimmed with green silk braids and fringes. The undercover and harness are similarly decorated.

Marriage tent
Egypt. c. 1900 CE
427cm x 701cm

Made of cotton appliqué, the Egyptian tents of this period were influenced by earlier Ottoman tents of the 16th and 17th centuries. This tent is reputed to have been used for the wedding of a daughter of the last Khedive of Egypt in 1903.

Hanging
Rescht, Iran. late 19th century CE
134cm x 190cm

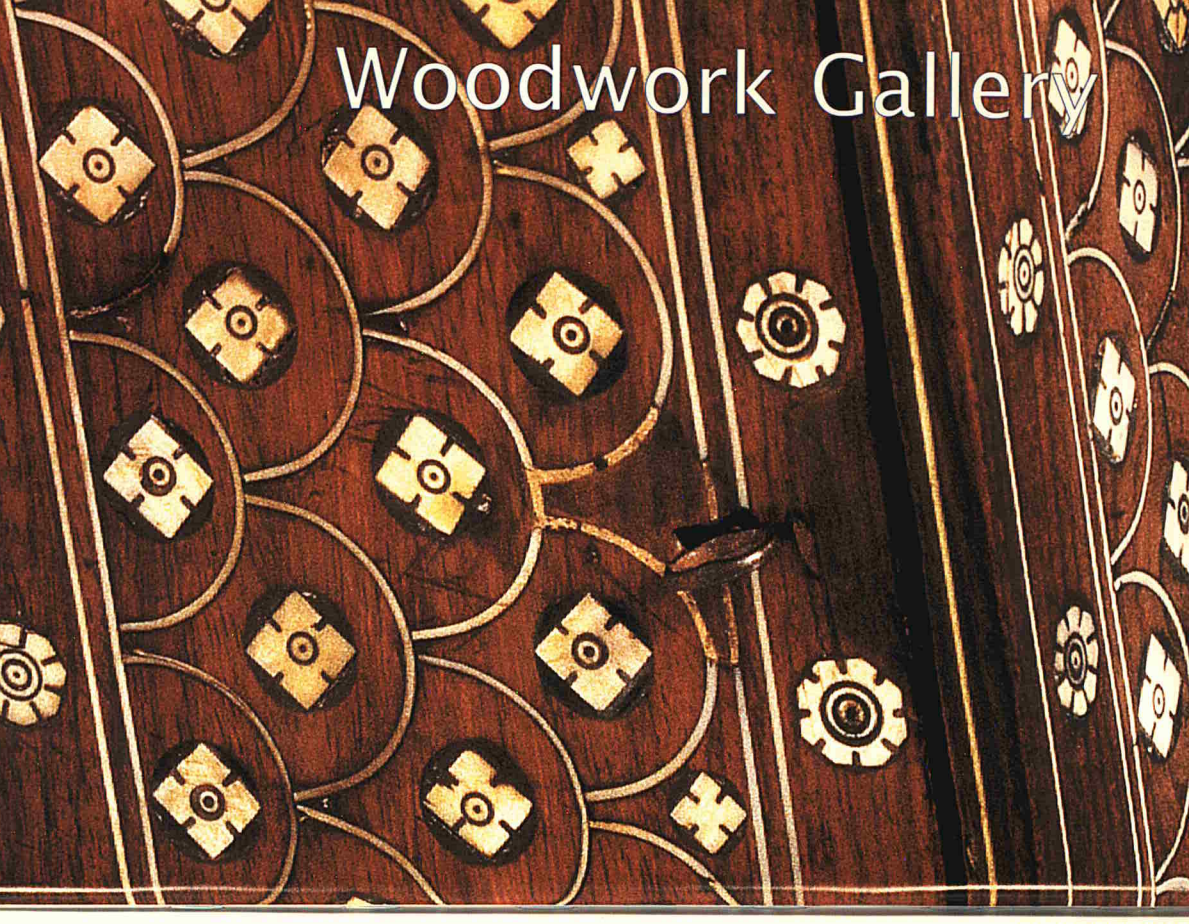
Red wool hanging embroidered in the Rescht technique which features a variety of polychrome floral motifs and a central ogival medallion.

Celebratory hanging
Rescht, Iran. 1313 AH / 1896 CE
174cm x 344cm

Dedicated to Tsar Nicholas II, emperor of Russia, and commemorated in embroidered calligraphic inscriptions, this piece has a central cypress tree calligraphic cartouche with outer floral motifs in embroidered polychrome threads.

Pair of *Kalimkari* hangings
Iran. c. 19th century CE
198cm x 118cm

Pair of identical cotton *kalimkari* hangings with a printed and painted motif of a central cypress tree flanked by a pair of smaller cypresses beneath a floral *mihrab* with a pair of peacocks and a pair of tigers pursuing deer. The left hanging is adorned with a calligraphic cartouche bearing the printer's mark.


Woodwork Gallery

■ Woodwork Gallery

Wood is not as commonly seen in the Islamic decorative arts compared to metal or ceramics. Even in architecture, the use of wood was more often confined to ceilings, beams and occasionally columns, depending on the region, and to the construction of *minbars* and *maqsuras*. Wood was also used extensively in the making of Qur'an stands or *rehals*.

The Woodwork Gallery in the museum features mostly marquetry boxes from different regions of the Islamic world. Most of the wooden objects in the gallery come from the Western parts of the Islamic world such as Spain and Turkey or the countries further to the east such as India probably because wood was found in more abundance in these areas. The objects are highly decorative but all have specific functions. A large portion of the collection consists of intricately decorated wooden boxes or cabinets with multiple drawers and boxes for scribes or for the storage of small items such as jewellery. Decoration is usually applied through inlay techniques with coloured woods, mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell arranged in geometric patterns

Included in the gallery are examples of Iranian and Indian lacquer ware as well. Lacquer ware objects from Iran can be found dating to the seventeenth century and the best work was achieved during the 19th century. The earliest pieces of lacquer ware are book bindings and lacquer was later used extensively in the decoration of pen boxes, mirror cases, small chests and wooden panelling. Items such as pen boxes were usually made of papier-maché and moulded into the desired shape. Delicate miniatures were painted over a base of either gesso or varnish and then finished with several layers of varnish. Some of the finest examples of Persian miniature painting of the Safavid period can be seen in lacquer ware. In India, lacquer work also extended to furniture.

Table cabinet

Spain. c. 18th-19th century CE

31cm x 42.5cm x 30.5cm

The last Islamic empire in Spain was the Nasrids of Granada (1238-1492) and their workshops were renowned for the production of luxury items that had gained popularity under the Muslim rulers. Early contact with the Byzantine empire encouraged an appreciation in the Islamic court for ornamented caskets as the receptacles of courtly gifts and similar pieces were commissioned in the royal workshops. Although less prominent a feature of Islamic decorative art, woodcarving was carried out mainly as architectural embellishment, with the ceiling panels of the great palaces of the Muslim west as fine examples. Cultural exchanges between the East and West occurred resulting in a distinctive style and motifs called *mudejar*, a blend of Islamic and Christian features, which continued to flourish even after the decline of the Islamic Spanish empires.

This table cabinet was created centuries after Islam had ceased to be a vital presence in Spain, yet it reflects the strong heritage of the land of its former Arab rulers. It may have served as a container for calligraphic instruments and has long been a feature in the Middle East in the form of scribe boxes. This type of cabinet became popular in Spain during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Known as the *vargueno*, the later European versions were often larger and built with legs.

The cabinet has a veneer finish and is typically decorated with inlaid coloured woods and bone, a technique practised as far back as pre-Islamic Egypt. The star-shaped panels decorating the cabinet were most probably constructed using the *taracea* technique, where strips of wood or other materials are glued together forming a mosaic pattern. Then, slices were cut from the block creating intricately patterned tiles that were laid onto the surface of the object. Geometric strapwork borders of inlaid coloured wood chevrons decorate the exterior of the cabinet while the inside of the drop-front panel has a broad border of stellar motifs in bone, wood and silver inlay, truncated four-pointed stars in bone and minute geometric strips of coloured woods. A calligraphic inscription "There is no God but Allah" in inlaid bone is enclosed within the border.

The cabinet holds six drawers, with the central deep drawer decorated with an architectural motif in the form of a lobed horseshoe arch. Carved openwork panels of foliate arabesques form the spandrels of the arch (the left section of which is now missing) and encloses a geometric composition of the earlier stellar motifs which adorn the other interior surfaces. The bottom drawer has three panels giving it the impression of comprising three individual drawers.

Pair of turban stands

Turkey. c. 19th century CE

56.5cm x 21cm

The Ottoman Sultans were renowned for their love of luxury and the imperial courts such as the Topkapi Saray reveal a wealth of opulent objects created for the rulers who were active patrons of the arts. As in most areas of the Islamic world, the costumes and accoutrements of the Ottoman Sultan were of utmost importance as symbols of power and prestige. The wearing of turbans was adopted following the Turkish conquest of Anatolia in the eleventh century. Prior to this, the Turks wore crowns, a custom possibly originating from the Sassanians. Turbans (*kavuk*) became symbols of rank and status, and officials of the Ottoman courts were identifiable by the type of turban they wore. The turban, usually of white cloth, consisted of layers of cloth assembled and sewn into shape. In the fifteenth century, Mehmed II Fatih (the Conquerer) introduced the *taj*, a red velvet cap around which the cloth of the turban was wound. At night, the turbans, in their assembled form, were placed on a *kavukluk* or turban stand.

This pair of wooden turban stands are inlaid with tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl, a technique first developed in Egypt. The use of mother-of-pearl as a form of ornamentation gained popularity in Turkey during the latter half of the sixteenth century, while tortoiseshell was used towards the end of the sixteenth century. This pair dates to the nineteenth century, a time when Turkey was absorbing influences from the West. Earlier decorative influences stem from Syria and Egypt during the Mamluk period (1250-1517).

The ornamented backs of the stands are in the form of a lobed arch enclosed within a tympanum. Inlaid in alternating tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl, the stands' base and underside of the shelf are decorated in a checkered pattern while the main body of the stands are decorated in a harlequin pattern. The backrest design is composed of two pillars each crested with a cypress tree ornament, flanking a lobed arch with fine mother-of-pearl inlaid spandrels. The tympanum is decorated with a radiating chevron motif and surmounted by a border of roundels and crenellations.

The turban stand would have been hung on a wall and thus only the front surface is decorated. The decoration of the underside suggests that the stand would have hung relatively high, enabling the lower section to be seen.

***Khatamkari* casket**
Iran. c. Early 19th century CE
23.5cm x 38.5cm x 26.5cm

Micro-mosaic veneer case with a drop-front panel revealing six drawers decorated in mosaic with minute six-pointed star-shaped motifs of ivory and coloured woods. There are six drawers, a long upper drawer disguised as three, four shallow drawers and one deep central drawer.

Casket
Turkey. c. 18th century CE
17cm x 31.5cm x 13.5cm

A rectangular Ottoman casket with a hinged arched lid and equipped with a built-in lock and a key. The surface has panels of tortoiseshell with mother-of-pearl in geometric and foliate motifs.

Tea caddy
India, Monghyr. c. 1867 CE
52cm x 34cm x 21cm

An ebony cabinet with ivory inlaid in a floral tendril motif and further embellished with carved foliate columns on the edge of the doors. The interior, similarly inlaid, is equipped with three miniature shelves on the doors, two long drawers and shelves behind a removable panel.

Mirror case
Iran. 19th century CE
20.2cm x 16.0cm

Qajar period lacquer papier-maché mirror case decorated with floral motifs and arabesques.

Printing block
Iran. 17th / 18th century CE
7.5cm x 18.7cm x 4.3cm

Wooden printing block inscribed in Arabic from the Safavid period. Containing *doa'* and verses of the Qur'an, the upper and lower bands are in *Naskh* script, while the central band is in *Thuluth*. The image is shown in reverse to enable the script to be read.

Comb
Iran. c. 17th century CE
11.5cm x 22.5cm

Safavid semi-circular wooden comb carved with calligraphic verses in low relief.

Coin Gallery

■ Coin Gallery

One of the smallest galleries in the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia, it nevertheless holds a substantial collection of coins. An important historical source, coins enable the dating of pieces when unearthed in excavations and record more precisely names and reigns of rulers than architectural sources. They also have intrinsic aesthetic value in the embossing techniques used for inscriptions and portraiture.

Imperial coins first came to be produced in the Muslim world under caliphal rule, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. Pre-Islamic coinage provided a basis for the coins produced by the Muslims. The fifth Umayyad ruler, Caliph Abd-al-Malik (685-705), introduced a number of reforms during his reign, one of the most important being the standardisation of Islamic coins, which set the precedence for all coins that followed. By 696-697, a new monetary system had been established. Additionally, Arabic was introduced as the official language of government.

The *Denarius* coin of Byzantium which had been the main form of currency in the region gave way to the Arabic *dinar*. During the Sassanian period, coins became less thick and adopted the shape of flat thin discs, which can be observed in most Islamic coins. Following the Byzantine example, the early coins were minted with an image of Heraclius flanked by two princes, but the Byzantine crosses were replaced with religious inscriptions in the Kufic script. Islamic coins refrained from the use of figural iconography, instead incorporating religious symbols such as the *mihrab* or the Prophet's lance, both symbols of prayer and the *qibla*. Abd-al-Malik's radical move to employ the exclusive use of calligraphy marked a turning point in Islamic coinage and full departure from the coins of Byzantium and Sassania. Inscriptions in Kufic, mainly the *Shahadah* - "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger" - were printed on the obverse side of the coins, and this continued to be the standard into the following centuries. The name of the caliph was not included during the Umayyad period, and pious invocations of God were the sole inscriptions. During the Abbasid period, the inscriptions were shortened to a single line and allowed for the inscription of the ruler's name and place of minting. Only rulers could have coins minted in their name, a practice called *sikka*. Smaller Islamic dynasties produced coinage with the names of their rulers existing side by side with the names of the caliph to whom they pledged allegiance, a mark of the degree of independence they enjoyed.

Dinars were minted in the capitals of the caliphates and by the ninth century, Islamic coins were also produced in Iran, Iraq and Egypt. With the Mongol incursion, Islamic coinage began to feature the Mongol script alongside Arabic. The Mongols also made reformations in the standard currency weights, introducing the half, double and triple *dirhams*. Under Timurid rule, numerals were introduced for dating. From the Safavid period on, coinage became more refined in their designs and inscriptions and by the time of the Qajars, detailed pictorial images were introduced. Ottoman coinage reached new heights of sophistication and by the eighteenth century began to feature the royal signature seal of the sultan, the *tughra*.

Umayyad *Dinar*

Hims mint (Emesa), 79 AH / 699 CE

Diameter: 19 mm

A gold *dinar* minted during the reign of the 5th Caliph, Abd-al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685-705). Inscribed in Arabic, the reverse of the coin features verses from the *Surah Al-Ikhlas* (Chapter 112 of the Qur'an) and the name of the mint. The obverse is inscribed: "There is no other God but Allah and He has no partner, there is only Him. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah".

Arab-Sassanian *Dirham*

Ardashir-Khurra mint, 156 AH / 773 CE

Diameter: 30mm

The early coins of Islamic empires were based on either Byzantine or Sassanian coinage. The coins from the Persian region drew from Sassanian influences and date mostly from the second half of the 7th century CE. They often feature the Pahlavi script and images of Sassanian rulers, the only Islamic innovation being the inclusion of Arabic script. This half *dirham* is inscribed with the date 121 Post-Yazdagird Era, equivalent to156 AH, and the name 'Umar' at the left of the bust in Pahlavi script. The name refers to Umar ibn al-'Ala, governor of Tabaristan from 155-160 AH/ 773-777 CE.

Seljuq *Dirham*

Siwas mint, 639 AH / 1242 CE

Diameter: 21 mm

The Seljuqs of Rum were established in 1080 in the Anatolian region of Turkey. This silver *dirham* was minted under the order of Ghiyas ad-Din Kay-Khusraw II (r. 1236/7 - 1245/6), the last Seljuq Sultan of Rum. The reverse of the coin bears a Kufic inscription, most likely in Arabic, but illegible. The obverse is inscribed with the name al-Imam al-Mustansir, the Caliph al-Muntasir, as well as the pictorial images of lion and sun. Both ancient symbols, the lion in ancient Mesopotamia was a metaphor for warlike kings and fierce deities, while throughout many cultures and civilisations, the sun has been constantly used as a symbol of power.

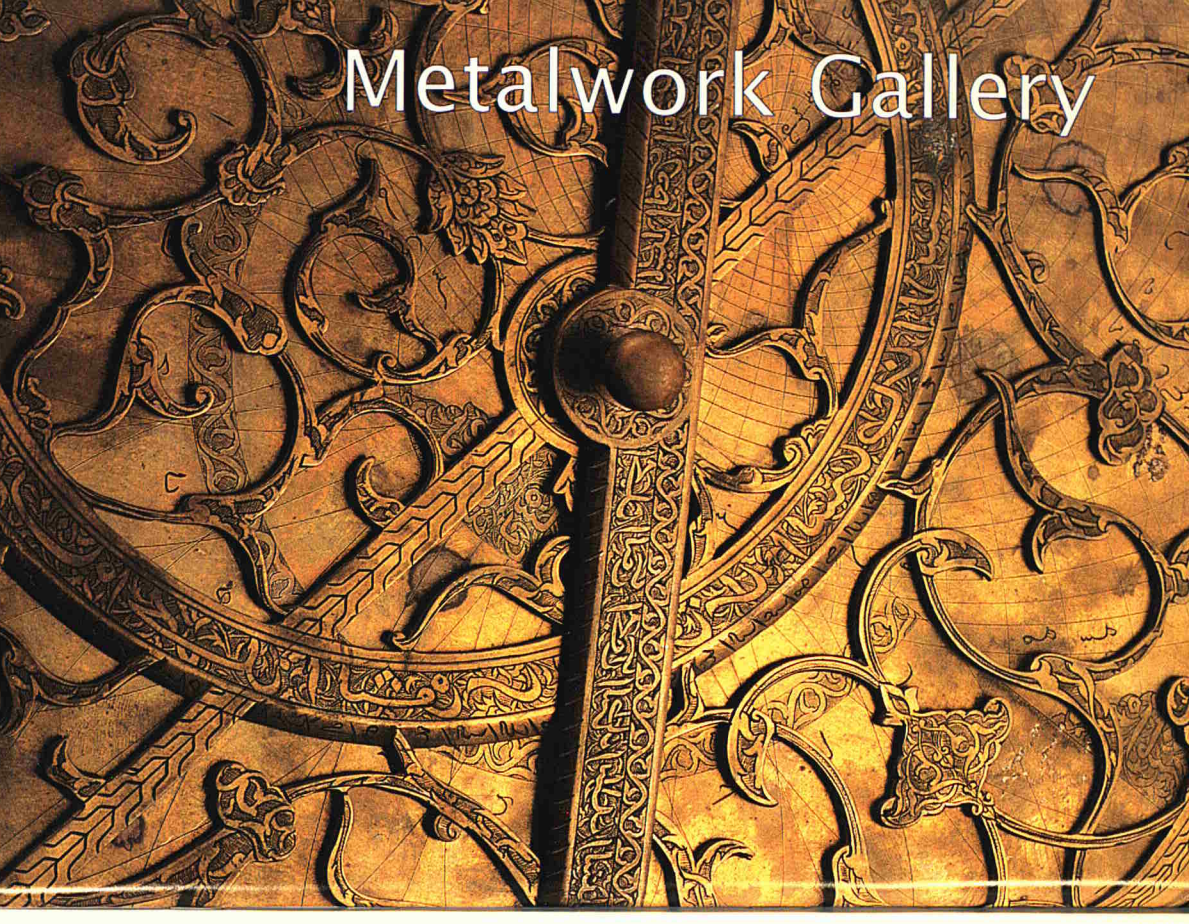
Ottoman *Fals*

Egypt, 1203 AH / 1789 CE

Diameter: 20 mm

A silver *fals* minted during the reign of Sultan Selim bin Mustafa III (1789-1807).The obverse is inscribed with the place of mint and date, while the reverse bears the name of the Sultan in the *Tughra* style.

Metalwork Gallery



■ Metalwork Gallery

In the Islamic world, metalwork was regarded as the most illustrious of arts after the calligraphic arts. A variety of objects in precious gold and silver, or the less valuable bronze or copper, were produced in city centres in Egypt, Syria and Iran. These include mostly secular objects such as vessels and utensils, coins, jewellery, arms and armour, tools and scientific instruments. A work of metal was often appreciated as an object of fine art in the Islamic world as a result of the Muslim craftsmen's love for surface embellishment and use of precious metals. Such objects of artistic and decorative as well as utilitarian value were usually made out of a combination of gold or silver, with a base metal such as iron, copper, tin or lead.

Metalwork that was made from precious metals often did not survive over the centuries as with each new dynasty, pieces would be melted down to be reconstructed in a form preferred by the new ruling powers. As a result, most remaining pieces of Islamic metalwork today are examples of inlaid metal.

The metalwork gallery of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia highlights the innovation of the techniques of embellishment on metalwork and the vast range of materials used in its decoration. Originating from a range of periods and provenances, the collection includes brass basins and vessels inlaid with silver or decorated in repoussé; dervish bowls carved and lavishly inlaid with turquoise and gold *koftgari* work; and various paraphernalia of the Islamic astronomical sciences comprising brass astrolabes, astrolabe quadrants and a silver inlaid celestial sphere. The ewers, candle stands, bowls and trays provide a comparison of the different forms and styles typical of Islamic provenances and dynasties.

Candlestand base

Syria or Egypt. c. 14th century CE

15.5cm x 17cm

During the Mamluk reign (1250-1517), candlestands were produced in large quantities as artefacts of almost nationalistic importance. The symbol of light developed a synonymous association with the dazzling glory of the sultan. Important court ceremonies involved gift presentations where elaborate candlestands such as the one here and intricately embellished and gilded candles were brought out in procession. The famous Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi describes such a ceremony where the Sultan sat at the palace gate as the amirs approached one by one according to rank bringing with them 3,030 candles presented in decorated candlestands.

Towards the late thirteenth to fourteenth century an increased demand developed for more conspicuously ostentatious pieces owing to the competition amongst the military and administrative powers. Commissioning pieces with larger and more elaborate benedictory inscriptions and personal blazons, each would try to outdo the other in vying for hierarchical status and the favour of the sultan. Islamic metalworkers employed a variety of techniques and luxurious materials to enhance the appearance of their work and hence ensure the patronage of the Mamluk amirs. This candlestand is characteristic of the later part of the fourteenth century in which there was a shortage of precious metals and the elements of *chinoiserie* were rendered with greater sophistication.

Missing its neck and socket, the candlestand has a sheet brass body chased, hammered and inlaid with sheet silver (some of which still remains). Monumental *Thuluth* calligraphy is lightly engraved against a ground of scrolling foliate tendrils punctuated with two central roundels bearing a motif of stylised lotuses. The decoration on this candlestand base demonstrates a contrast of the foliate scrolls inspired by Islamic arabesques with lotus blossoms, a motif of Chinese origin popularised during the later part of the Mamluk reign by the Il-khans.

Inkwell

Iran, Khorasan. c. 13th century CE

11cm x 9cm

Calligraphy has a place of central importance within the arts of Islam as the medium through which the word of God is rendered and calligraphers and scribes have always been held in high regard in the world of Muslim artisans and artists. Calligraphy used in the embellishment of architectural structures, ceramics, manuscripts and textiles are but a few examples of the scale in which it was used as a form of communicative and decorative art. As a result of the reverence with which calligraphy was regarded, the tools of calligraphy were often elaborately adorned.

The most important tool in calligraphy is the reed pen. No writing set was considered complete, however, without the inkwell which was usually made of metal, though ceramic or glass pieces did exist. A wad of raw silk fibre was placed inside the inkwell and the ink was then poured over it. This not only ensured that the right amount of ink was absorbed by the pen, but also prevented spillage in case the inkwell was over turned.

The body of this brass inkwell is divided into three broad bands of incised and silver inlaid decoration. The uppermost band is adorned with an undeciphered calligraphic script, while the lowest band is inlaid and incised in Kufic, the popular script during the eighth to the tenth century. Both are set against a ground of foliate spirals punctuated by interlaced knotted panels. The central band is decorated with an inlaid meandering vine scroll. The lid has an inlaid fluted dome with drop-shaped panels alternately containing floral roundel and knotted panels crested with a spherical knop.

Lampstand
Iran, Khorasan. c. 13th century CE
71cm x 29.5cm

Tri-legged sheet brass lampstand with pierced openwork lattice decoration and two bands of foliated Kufic calligraphy along the upper and lower section of the neck as well as at four intervals along the base.

Incense burner
Turkey. c. Mid 19th century CE
26cm x 22cm

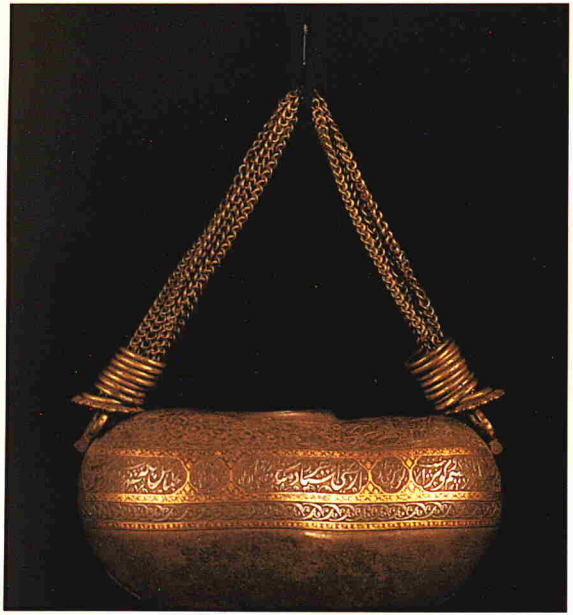
This Ottoman silver incense burner was constructed in individual sheets and assembled. The dome-like cover is pierced with a motif of floral and foliate scrolls as well as roundels of stylised Ottoman architecture. The incense bowl rests on a central structural support flanked by three silver ornamental legs connected to the base plate.

Bell
Iran. c. Late 17th–18th century CE
28.5cm x 14.5cm

Safavid period spherical bell of watered steel.

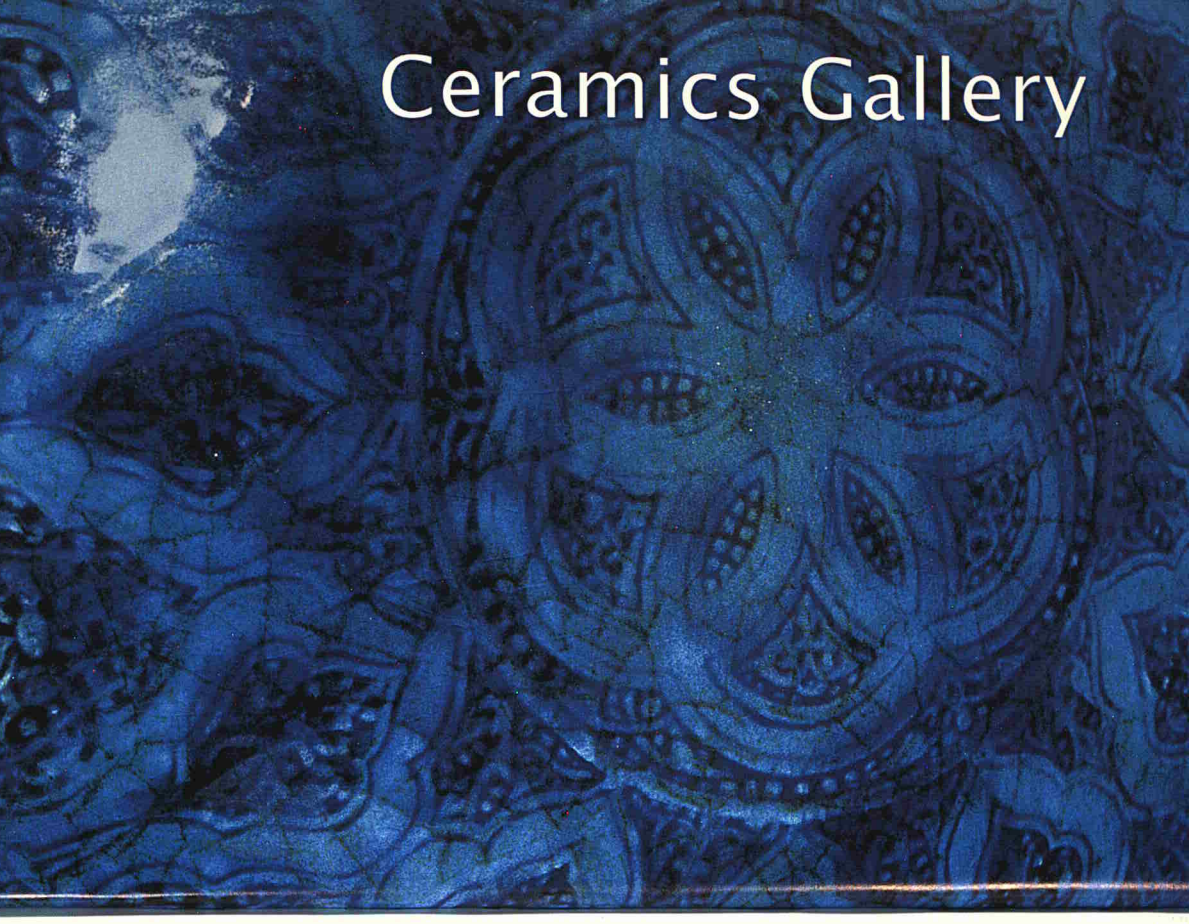
Bowl
Syria or Egypt. c. 14th century CE
11cm x 22.5cm

Mamluk brass bowl with geometric decoration of inlaid silver and calligraphic inscription in *Thuluth* script.



Dervish bowl & axe
Iran. c. Early 19th century CE
Bowl: 14cm x 26cm
Axe: 79cm x 16cm

Cast brass dervish bowl and axe both adorned with gold inlaid floral motifs. The bowl is lightly engraved with a calligraphic *Nastaliq* inscription along the shoulder of the bowl. The axe head is engraved on either side with an outdoor scene of six individuals reclining and smoking from a pipe. One side of the axe bears the name "Sheikh Abul Hassan" in gold *Nastaliq* script.


Ceramics Gallery


Ceramics Gallery


Ceramics Gallery

■ Ceramics Gallery

Ceramic production was an integral part of Islamic civilisation. Islamic pottery could have been simple domestic wares for the households of the common folk or elaborately decorated, fine pieces produced *en masse* under royal patronage for use at court or for the façade decoration of monumental buildings. Innovations and techniques were developed under the reign of almost every Islamic dynasty leading to the production of a range of impressive wares.

During the Abbasid period, tin glaze was developed in imitation of Chinese porcelain. Lustreware, the glazed pottery produced to rival metalware in shine and brilliance was one of the most important of Islamic inventiveness. Centres of production during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were Raqqa in Syria and Kashan in Iran. Lustreware also had quite an impact in the Western world, resulting in the production of European lustreware, two such pieces of which are in the IAMM collection. The blue and white technique was another significant Islamic contribution. Cobalt was used from early Islamic times, especially in the embellishment of tin glazed wares. Eventually, the export of cobalt oxide from Iran to China through trade links during the Ming dynasty led to the refinement and development of Chinese blue and whites. A pre-Islamic innovation, the alkaline glaze was developed by Sassanian Persians during the seventh century, but came to be identifiable with Islamic ceramics. By the eleventh to twelfth centuries with the invention of fritware, Muslim potters decorated the fritware vessel with copper added to alkaline glaze, producing a turquoise colour which soon became a hallmark of Persian faience.

The ceramics of the IAMM Gallery are organised to present the viewer with an overview of the different types of pottery in the Islamic world, while providing an insight to the different techniques of ceramic decoration and the periods in which these styles and motifs were popular. The collection currently features a comprehensive range of unglazed ware, tin glazed ware, slip-painted ware, *sgraffiato* ware, monochrome glazed ware, blue and white ware, lustreware, *minai* ware and underglaze painted ware.

The glassware section of the gallery houses a small though expanding display of artefacts from the Islamic world and Islamic-inspired European examples. There has been a relatively small number of surviving pieces not only owing to the fragility of the material but also on account of the practice of re-melting pieces as low-cost fuel in glass-making and the process of recycling pieces as ballast for ships. Among the displays is a collection of eighth to tenth century Eastern Mediterranean glass bangles which illustrate the different styles of glass decoration: trailing, marvering, enamelling, pincering and colouring.

Water container
Iran. c. 13th century CE
22.5cm x 32.5cm

One of the great innovations of Muslim potters, aside from the adoption of lustre painting on ceramics, was the development of fritware, a ceramic material developed in Iran in response to the demand for fine Chinese porcelains. According to a treatise by a Persian potter, Abu'l Qasim Kashani, the ideal composition of this stone paste was one part of ground glass frit, ten parts of ground quartz and one part of fine white clay. In the heat of the kiln, the glass and quartz would melt and blend with the white clay to produce a whiter, harder and finer body than that of earthenware. Though the glassy body of fritware made it harder to throw on a potter's wheel, it did allow for more delicate and innovative shapes to be moulded.

Alkaline glaze was developed in the seventh century by the Sassanian Persians. This glaze fluxed with soda or potash was coloured with copper to produce its turquoise hue — a hallmark of Persian ceramics and tiles since its introduction in the eleventh to twelfth century.

This fritware water container of compressed globular form is dual-spouted with flared spouts and a pair of small handles. The body is covered with turquoise alkaline glaze and adorned with cobalt glazed moulded studs. The upper spout was used as a means to fill the vessel while the lower spout was used when pouring out water. The shape of the vessel is unusual yet practical. It would have been held in both hands, with thumbs possibly slipped through the small handles to keep it steady, as well as to prevent it slipping out of grasp when pouring.

Bowl

Iran, Kashan. c. 13th century CE

8cm x 16.5cm

A major contribution and unique invention of the Muslim craftsmen, lustre was developed as an alternative to the Islamic doctrine discouraging the use of precious metals. The surfaces ranging from golden yellow and brown to red or green possess a glittering sheen that gained popularity by virtue of its versatility in artistic decoration as well as its resemblance to precious metals.

This late Seljuq dynasty fritware bowl is lustre painted with the figure of a courtier playing a *sitar*. The depiction of ideal feminine beauty is typical in the stylisation of the slanting almond-shaped eyes of the 'moon-faced beauties' of Il-Khanid poetry. The internal and external rim is adorned with a calligraphic band in reserve.

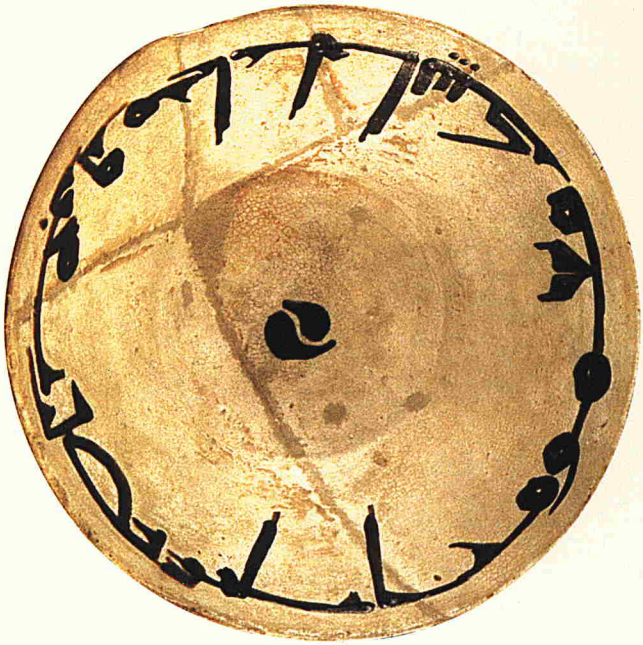
Lustre consists of a mixture of sulphur, silver oxide, copper oxide, and red or yellow ochre suspended in vinegar. This mixture is applied onto pottery already covered in tin glaze, and then fixed by a second firing in the kiln. This second firing is conducted at a lower temperature than the first firing in a reducing kiln with an atmosphere containing carbon monoxide, produced by damp fuel or a restricted air supply. This was a complicated process and there were few craftsmen who managed to become masters of the technique. Originally developed as a technique of glass decoration, it was first employed on ceramics in the ninth century in Samarra, Iraq. Though it is generally agreed that migrating Egyptian potters brought the technique of lustre painting on ceramics to Syria, its origins in Iran is less certain. Decorative themes between Egyptian and Persian lustreware suggest a connection between the two. During the Seljuq dynasty in Iran, Kashan, the major centre of lustreware production, reached its height of artistic development between the late twelfth to early thirteenth century until the Mongol invasion circa 1220.

Dish
Iran. c. 18th century CE
6.5cm x 36cm

A Safavid cobalt decorated dish depicting a pair of cranes in a Chinese landscape setting which might have been taken from a Chinese prototype. Vessels such as these were popularised during the Safavid dynasty and were significantly influenced by the blue and white porcelains of late Ming dynasty China.

Bowl
Iran, Nishapur. c. 10th century CE
6cm x 21.5cm

Bi-chromatic earthenware bowl with manganese slip painted Kufic calligraphy along its rim.



Bowl
Iran, Kashan. c. Late 13th century CE
10cm x 19cm

Underglaze painted fritware bowl painted with a cruciform radial design in the interior and decorated with a lotus petal motif on the exterior.

Dish
Turkey, Iznik. c. 1575 - 1580
6.5cm x 32cm

Underglaze painted fritware dish with motifs in sealing wax red, cobalt blue and green, a characteristic of Ottoman iznik ware.

Ewer
Iran. c. 17th century CE
24cm x 18cm x 14cm

This Safavid ewer is moulded in the form of a bird with human facial features. The entire surface of the ewer is cobalt glazed with faded lustre decoration.

Set of three oil lamps
Provenance unknown.
c. 8th-9th century CE
(1) 9cm x 13cm
(2) 8cm x 13cm
(3) 13cm x 13cm

These three green and turquoise glazed earthenware lamps are adorned with trough-like spouts and palmette finials adjoining single ring handles. The first lamp is further embellished with an elephant-like head while the third is surmounted with a goat-like head.

Glossary

Arabesque Originally an intertwining and curvilinear abstract vegetal motif, highly developed in Islamic arts and believed to have originated from Hellenistic works. The most prominent character of the arabesque can be described as stems that grow from one another rather than winding out from a single vegetal stem. It displays a wide variety in the forms of winding and coiling.

Bidri Decorative style on metalwork which is applied to a zinc predominant alloy. It is a combination of blackened background (niello) and inlaid silver within mainly floral motifs.

Byzantine (395-1453 CE) The empire came to light as a result of the division of the Roman Empire. Although the West Roman empire died out, the East Roman empire, the Byzantine Empire, stayed in power until the Ottomans finally destroyed their capital in 1453. After the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Byzantines were gradually weakened. However, the influence of their politics, religion and culture played a very important role in the region.

Caliph (also *Khalifa* - Arabic) Leader of the Islamic society (*umma*). Under the Umayyads, the position combined a spiritual and political (secular) function.

Cartouche Ornamental panel carrying an inscription, monogram or coat of arms. Usually framed in various forms such as the scroll, shell-shape, Chinese inspired shapes and ovals.

Coptic Of the Copts. The word Copt is derived from the pharaonic name for Egypt (*aigyptos* from the Greek) and the Arabic *qibt*, the word used by Muslim Arabs to refer to the Christian inhabitants of Egypt.

Cuerda seca A glaze technique frequently used on tiles during the Timurid and Safavid periods. Several opaque coloured glazes were separated from each other with the use of manganese oxide to create black lines between the colours.

Firman Decree from sultans.

Ghassanid Arab Christian Bedouin kingdom that lent military assistance to the Romans in their conflict against the Sassanian empire in the Arab lands.

Hadith (Arabic) Collections of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. Considered the second most important source of Islamic law.

Hookah Also known as *huqqa*, *kaliyan*, *narguileh* or *shisha*; originally an open bowl which developed into a vase for water pipes.

Hypostyle Architecture style in mosques, characterised as a building with a roof sitting on rows of columns. Seen in the early Islamic architecture of Iraq.

Imam (Arabic) "To head" or "to lead prayers". The role of the imam is basically to lead the prayer, with each mosque having its respective imam.

Iwan (***aiwan, eyvan, ivan***) A vaulted hall which has an open end. Usually associated with *pishtaq*.

Jamah A type of Indian men's costume that was introduced following the settlement of Muslims in India in the twelfth century. Consists of a long sleeve coat, sometimes reaching the knee or even further, sometimes worn belted with a sash. Usually worn with the wide trousers called *isar*.

Khanqah (Arabic, also *Khanagah* - Persian) Lodging for board and teaching for Sufis. Often a part of a mausoleum.

Kundan Technique of Indian origin to join hyper-purified gold. A unique form, it requires only power form pressured at room temperature to produce a small compartment on its surface.

Jihad (Arabic) From the word meaning "to strive", usually translated as Holy War. It is sometimes argued that the war is not meant as a war against non-believers but a campaign against injustice and wrong-doing. However, it is also historically true that it has been a war waged against non-believers. *Jihad* is also used in reference to a war waged against inner problems.

Lakhmid Strongest of the Bedouin kingdoms that lent military assistance to the Sassanian dynasty.

Madrasa (also *madrassah*, *medersa* and *medrese*) Literally a "place of study" in Arabic. Originally part of a

mosque, had become an independent institution as a theological school or college in Islam by the eleventh century. A *madrasa* consisted of an open (sometimes roofed) courtyard with large rooms for teaching and prayers and small rooms for accommodation. Students learned the Qur'an by heart and studied the *hadith*.

Maidan (also *meyden*) A large and open square or space for ceremonial purpose.

Majolica (also Maiolica) A type of tin glazed earthenware produced in Italy in the fifteenth century which was introduced from Islamic Spain to Italy via the island of Mallorca (Maiolica).

Mihrab A niche or panel in a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca for prayers (*qibla*).

Minaret Derived from the Arabic word *menara* for tower; commonly a tower attached to a mosque. Functions as a place from which to sound the call for prayer. Often considered a great achievement of Islamic architects. A wide range of minaret shapes exist from North Africa to China.

Minbar (Pulpit) One of the important pieces of furniture within a mosque. The Imam preaches sermons from the minbar.

Muezzin (*Mu'adhdhin*) Mosque official who performs the call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque.

Muqarnas Honeycomb type decoration on vaults, domes and doors, especially the upper part of the *mihrab* in Islamic buildings.

Nabatea One of the most powerful kingdoms in the ancient Near East that ruled Northwest Arabia. Nabateans were pastoral nomads who settled around the region of Petra. By the second century BCE, Nabatea was granted autonomous status by the Roman Empire; it remained strong until it was destroyed by an earthquake in 362 CE.

Niello Decorative style used to fill decoration that has been engraved onto the surface of metal objects. Mainly consists of silver or brass objects filled with a black amalgam of lead, borax, copper, sulfur and silver.

Pietra Dura (Italian: hard stone) Mosaic decoration with hardstones, also known as Florentine mosaic. Intended to imitate the quality of painting, resulting in the development of naturalism. Workshops were set up under Ferdinando de Medici in Florence and the technique was very fashionable in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Pishtaq (Persian: arch in front) Rectangular shaped arch frame; a distinctive form in later Islamic architecture in Iran and Central Asia.

Qibla The direction of the Kaa'bah and al-Masjid al-Haram, (the Great Mosque of Mecca) in Mecca, and direction of prayer. The *Qibla* had originally been Jerusalem but was changed to Mecca after the *Hijra* and this is recorded in *Surah Al-Baqarah* (chap. 2) of the Qur'an.

Rococo A decorative style used from the early to mid eighteenth century. Originating in France, the style became fashionable in South Germany and Austria. Characterised by asymmetry and naturalism, usage of light pastels, gold, white and ivory colours and an excessive use of curving.

Shah (Persian) King

Sgraffito A technique of decoration on ceramics with incisions under the glaze. The body is covered with slip and the incised decoration applied in pre-glaze stage.

Sufi Islamic mystic, Sunni or Shi'ite, seeking an individual scriptural path to achieve mystic union with God. The term possibly derives from the Arabic word *Suf* (wool), which referred to the garments of Muslim ascetics of early times.

Tiraz Derived from the Persian word for embroidery. Islamic textiles bearing Arabic inscriptions and sultan's names are added to an inscription band using a different technique from the main ground textile. *Tiraz* was produced in royal factories and its manufacture was supervised by the state.

Vellum Material prepared from calf skin. Although vellum and parchment were terms used interchangeably since medieval time, they are sometimes mistaken. Vellum is usually prepared from finer quality skins than parchment which is prepared from any animal skin particularly lamb.

Sassanian (224-631 CE) An ancient Iranian empire that encountered the Byzantine empire. It was ruled by an efficient hierarchical bureaucracy and the monarchs were given their power by the state religion of Zoroastrianism. They amassed their wealth by controlling trade with China. The empire was crippled by the invasion of Heraclius who destroyed Takht-i Sulayman in 624 and eventually fell to the Arabs in 631. Their influence continued to be seen along trading routes and especially in Islamic art.

Zoroastorian Pertaining to the religion based on the teaching of Zarathushtra (Zoroaster) which originated in Iran (Balkh, Afghanistan) and believed to have been consolidated under the Sassanids. The good spirit, Ahura Mazda (Lord of Wisdom), fights against Angra Mainyu (the Evil Sprit) and wins. The holy text is called the Avesta.

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In October 1996, the Albukhary Foundation was conferred the privilege of being the sole and independent executor and manager of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia by the Government of Malaysia. By 16th May the following year, work officially commenced at the building site on Jalan Lembah Perdana in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. A collaboration between European and Malaysian architects, the museum building was envisioned as a forward-looking institution constructed of modern materials and incorporating the elements and spirit of the great Islamic civilisations. Specialised craftsmen were flown in from Isfahan and Bukhara to work on the outer tilework and museum domes respectively. The orientation of the building and each level were planned in accordance with its environment and neighbouring buildings to subsist in harmony with its surroundings. The completed museum opened its doors to the public on 12th December 1998.

Since then, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia has seen considerable growth. Displays are changed regularly to reflect the ever-growing collection. The curatorial body is constantly striving to create new and inspired methods of exhibition and works closely with the museum's Education and Marketing Departments to find innovative and ultimately informative ways to reach out to the public.

Temporary exhibitions are staged at regular intervals throughout each year bringing in artefacts, often never before seen in Kuala Lumpur, of historical and artistic significance from around the world. Starting with the first exhibition of Islamic carpets from the Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait, "Reflections of an Ideal World" was launched in April 1999 and remained in the museum's temporary gallery until July 1999. Three months is the normal duration for such visiting exhibitions and it is the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia's intention to stage at least two to three major exhibitions each year, as well as additional shorter-term exhibitions. Following the first temporary exhibition, the museum has hosted the following:

From November 1999 until March 2000, the exhibition "Nur al-Qur'an" or "Light of the Qur'an", brought together exquisitely illuminated and historically significant Qur'ans from around the Islamic world. They came from the collections of the Beit al-Qur'an in Jakarta, Indonesia; the Isfahan Pious Foundation, Iran; the University of Melbourne Library, Australia; the Museum of Cultural Palace of Nationalities, Beijing, China; and local contributors such as the Mercu Salam Organisation of Kuala Lumpur.

From June till September 2000, the museum played host to the travelling exhibition "Dress for the Body, Body for the Dress - When Islamic and Western Styles Meet" from the Stibbert Museum of Florence, Italy. One of the most popular exhibitions held to date, the Malaysian public was treated to the extravagant and constricting costumes of 15th to 17th century Europe, juxtaposed against the free-flowing caftans and robes of the Islamic Near East and Central Asia of the same periods.

The ground-breaking ceremony at the museum site on 16th May 1997 was officiated by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad (seated at centre).

From December 2000 till March 2001, the exhibition "Sacred Art of Marriage - Persian Marriage Certificates of the Qajar Dynasty". Organised with the Iranian National Archives, it was the first time these precious documents had been catalogued and assembled for display, and the first time they had travelled outside Iran.

From March till September 2001, an exhibition of photographs "The Art of Living - Residential Architecture of the Islamic World" by the Italian photographer Ovidio Guaita was held. Illustrating the diversity in the palatial residences in Islamic lands from antiquity to the present, the exhibition was held in conjunction with the launch of the book of the same title.

From July till October 2001, the exhibition "Six Centuries of Islamic Art in China" highlighted the ethnic Muslim minorities of China through cultural, historical and artistic objects from the collections of the Museum of Cultural Palace of Nationalities, Beijing and the Northwest Minorities University, Lanzhou, China.

The first exhibition for 2002 was "Islamic Art of India" in March organised with the National Museum New Delhi, India. The collection showed artefacts from the National Museum New Delhi that cover the Delhi Sultanate period until the late Mughal period, comprising manuscripts, textiles, jewellery, weapons and more.

Both in conjunction with and independent of the major exhibitions, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia also stages lecture and forums on topics and issues related to Islamic art and history, conservation and museum studies. Scholars from leading academic and art institutions, both local and foreign, are invited to speak at the museum in an attempt to cultivate an environment of learning that encourages an active exchange of opinions and the dissemination of knowledge.

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is looking towards the future with optimism and high aspirations. Its collections will constantly evolve. The Museum Conservation Centre being developed will provide the care and restoration procedures necessary for the preservation of historical objects and works of art. The IAMM library for scholarly research, together with the Islamic Centre's collection of over 3,000 historical manuscripts in the museum's permanent custody will be an invaluable archive for the study of Islamic art.

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إِنَّ اللّٰهَ جَمِيلٌ وَيُحِبُّ الجَمَال

"God Almighty is beautiful and loves beauty."

- saying of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. (*hadith*)