

Tour Planning Worksheet

AUDIENCE: (Who is tour for?) Adult Public Tour

SUBJECT/THEME: Heaven on Earth: The Arts of Islam/The Art of Ornament

THEME STATEMENT: (In 1-2 sentences, expand upon the basic theme/title to describe what will be taught/learned on your tour.)

Heaven on Earth: Arts of Islam will explore the prevalence of ornament in religious and secular Islamic works of art. Through eight objects participants will discuss the purpose, countries of origin, and decorative elements that are found in the museum's diverse collection of Islamic arts.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION: (What sources will you consult to prepare for the tour? e.g. manual, textbook, class notes, Tour Office study files, specific books and articles; you should have at least 1 to 2 reliable sources for each object.)

MIA gallery didactics and label copy

Antenna Audio Guide

MIA www.artsconnected.org

MIA, World Religions in Art, www.artsmia.org/world-religions

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Islamic Art, www.lacma.org/islamic_art/islamic.htm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Timeline of Art History, Islamic Art related essays, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/orna/hd_orna.htm

Robert Jacobsen, The Asian Galleries, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts. 1982

Philip Wilkinson, Islam, Eyewitness Books, Dorling Kindersley Limited. 2002 (also see website) www.huntfor.com/arthistory/index.htm

Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, Cosmophilia: Islamic Art from The David Collection, Copenhagen, McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Distributed by University of Chicago Press. 2006 (also see website)

www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/artmuseum/exhibitions/archive/cosmophilia/index.html

Oya Pancaroğlu, Perpetual Glory: Medieval Islamic Ceramics from the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago, Yale University Press, 2007

ORGANIZATION:

1. Turkey (Northern Syria, Antioch), Birds with Foliage, mosaic, late 4th-mid 5th century, 69.49.1
2. Syria, Hexagonal Wall Tile, Ottoman Period, earthenware with underglaze blue and turquoise, 17.55
3. Turkey, Storage Chest, Ottoman dynasty, wood with mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell and ivory veneer with silver inlay, 2004.54
4. Persia (Iran), Rayy, Bowl Depicting Ladies on Horseback, Seljuk period, Minai ware, earthenware with overglaze polychrome colors, 50.46.432

5. Egypt, Page from the Koran, about 1350, Mamluk dynasty, ink, mid 14th century, ink, colors and gold on paper, 51.37.21
6. Spain, Lion Statuette, Hispano-Moorish, 11th-12th century, gold, 72.12
7. India, Architectural Relief Panel Depicting Lilies, Agra-Mathura region, late 17th century, mottled red sandstone, 2000.65
8. Morocco, Tiznit, Khamsa (Hand Amulet), North Africa region, Ida ou Semlal, silver, enamel, glass, 91.141.17

Substitutes:

1. Egypt, Door Panel, 14th century, wood and ivory, 83.79
2. India, Portrait of Fakr Kahn and His Sons, about 1690, ink, colors and gold leaf on paper, 89.107

INTRODUCTION: (in the lobby)

Hello, and welcome. My name is _____ and I'll be your guide for today's tour of the museum's collection of Islamic art. Thank you for joining me. Is this your first visit to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts?

Whether you are first time visitor or a long time friend of the museum, I would like to hear *your* thoughts. It is my hope to have a conversation about the eight objects we will explore during this hour, to share insights and observations about what we see and to share in the museum's vision of inspiring wonder.

We are fortunate to have such a fine collection of Islamic art and I ask you to join the museum in conserving these objects by reminding you not to touch the works of art. The museum rule-of-thumb is to keep one foot away.

Islam is one of the world's great monotheistic (belief in one God) religions along with Judaism and Christianity. It is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632). Islam is the world's fastest growing religion, with more than one billion adherents today, approximately one-fifth of the world's population.

We are going to take a journey through time and explore the diversity of cultures and styles of Islamic art through eight objects that share a penchant for ornament. Ornament is one of the most distinctive features of Islamic art and has been used from the very beginnings of Islam in the 6th century to the present. It is an art that reflects the beauty of the Muslim faith and Islamic culture—it is heaven on earth. We are going to begin at the beginning by taking a look at early influences on Islamic ornament from a mosaic from 4th-century Syria.

Our first object is just up this flight of stairs on the 2nd floor, unless you would prefer the elevator?

THEME INTRODUCTION: (in the galleries)

To begin with the origins of Islamic ornament we are going to Syria in the 4th century before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in 570 and subsequent founding of Islam. But first, I would like to consider the theme of this tour—the art of ornament as an expression of heaven on earth. What does the term *ornament* mean to you?

A famous Islamic saying (*hadith*) states, “God is beautiful and loves beauty.” Pattern is said to symbolize strength and love, fundamental to the relationship between humans and all creation to the divine. Ornament has the capacity to transform everyday utilitarian objects into a work of art, into something divine. The Arabic word for ornament (*Zakhrifa*) means, “to gild,” referring to the richness that permeates all forms of Islamic art.

Islamic art refers to works of art made by and for Muslims, followers of Islam, as expression of the Islamic faith. As we look at and discuss these eight objects on this tour it is important to remember that Islamic art also encompasses the secular, objects made by cultures that flourished under the traditions of Islam. It includes works made for the mosques as well as for coffee houses.

The art of Islamie draws on the creativity of many cultures and artistic traditions, however, despite the diversity of origins, functions, and materials, Islamic art is unified by an emphasis on ornamentation. This tour will explore both secular and religious works of art through four dominate types of ornament: geometric, vegetal (arabesque as a subset of these two types), figural and calligraphic.

TOUR DEVELOPMENT: (Use this section to outline the key points of the body of your tour and to map out your transitions between objects.)

Object #1: Turkey (Northern Syria, Antioch), Birds with Foliage, mosaic, late 4th-mid 5th century, 69.49.1

Questions and Activities:

Take a moment to look at this Syrian mosaic, a fragment of a larger mosaic that once decorated the floor of a 4th-century Christian church.

What images/motifs are included in this mosaic? Where else is the motif repeated? How has the artist made these images of birds and plants into a pattern? In what other ways has the artist created patterns in this work? How would you describe the colors?

This is a mosaic, an image made from many small pieces of cut stone, called *tesserae*, placed together in a certain order. How does the medium, this mosaic of small cut stones, relate to the concept of pattern?

Key Points: (List the main key points that you plan to make when talking about this object.)

Islamic art developed from many sources: Classical, early Christian and pre-Islamic Persia. Ornamentation based on plants, stems, leaves and flowers is one of the most popular forms of adornment. Muslim artists inherited pre-Islamic traditions of vegetal and floral decoration from two major sources: the Mediterranean basin (vine scroll and acanthus leaf, disseminated by the Greeks, Romans and Byzantines) and the Sassanian region of Iraq and Iran (abstract vegetal ornament). In this 4th-century mosaic we can trace how classical and early Christian artistic styles contributed to the love of scrolling vegetal ornamentation in Islamic art.

This mosaic exhibits a crucial point of transition between the end of the classical era and the transition to Byzantine art. The mosaic is a mix of classical and Christian—old and new. The

scrolls consist of two or three fronds of acanthus and vine. The vine was popular with believers in either Dionysus (classical) or Christ (Christian). Scrolls of vine and acanthus encircling human or animal figures are called rinceaux [ran-soh]. Here they enclose birds, which symbolize the soul (also a reference to the Greek god Psyche). The pomegranates refer to the annual return of spring (a classical reference to the goddess Persephone/Proserpina) and therefore the Christian hope in immortality and resurrection.

Based on the images and repeated patterns, this mosaic almost certainly formed part of the border of a larger composition. The birds are set at right angles, as if intended as a continuous pattern set in two directions. The mosaic is constructed in combinations of creams, reds and browns.

This mosaic was found in a church near Antioch, a city in the northern part of the Roman province of Syria, which is now Turkey. Syria stood at a crossroads of cultures with its strategic position on the caravan routes. Even before the rise of Islam in the 7th century, artistic styles would have migrated along these routes with trade goods.

Antioch was conquered by Arab forces in 637. Further Arab incursions brought about great territorial loss for the Byzantine Empire as well as the collapse of the Sassanian Persian Empire in Iran. Islam had begun its ascent as one of the world's major cultures.

Transition: Let's stay in Syria, but jump ahead in time to explore how vegetal and floral motifs were interpreted and translated 11 hundred years later during the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish Ottomans flourished for 800 years as one of three great powers during the Islamic age of Empire. The Safavids of Persia and Mughals of India comprise the other two major empires.

Object #2: Syria, Hexagonal wall Tile, Ottoman Period, 16th century, earthenware with underglaze blue and turquoise, 17.55

Questions and Activities:

In what ways, if any, are the 4th-century Syrian mosaic and this 16th century Syrian tile similar? How are they different?

Look closely at the way the artist has chosen to depict the floral arrangement on this tile. What words would you use to describe the ornamentation? How has the artist depicted the flowers?

How has the artist created details within the floral ornamentation? What types of details have been included?

How has the artist created a pattern? Where and how are the patterns repeated?

Key Points:

This brightly glazed tile probably once adorned the interior or exterior of a building. Like the mosaic, this tile may have served to ornament a place of worship, in this case a mosque, a place for worship for followers of Islam. Tile work in two shades of blue was produced at Damascus in Syria beginning around 1500. Several Turkish mosques and palaces of the 16th and 17th centuries incorporated these decorative tiles into their decor. Blue-and-white decor became universally

popular with the Ottomans, one of the great Islamic empires founded by the Turks in 1290 and the dominant political force in the Islamic world.

During the 15th century, floral ornamentation underwent a metamorphosis as traditional vegetal and flower designs were replaced with *chinoiserie*—Chinese inspired décor with flowers such as lotus, peony and chrysanthemum. This is called the Timurid style because it was developed during the Islamic Timurid dynasty, but flourished under the Ottomans.

Viewed as a singular object we can appreciate the floral motifs painted with striking detail, but it should be imagined with thousands of such pieces adjacent to each other to create a brilliantly complex pattern. The tile forms a singular radial pattern (circular, radiating out from a central point), but when placed with other tiles they come together to form a never-ending pattern of vines and flowers in repetition, known as the arabesque (see photo-prop). Arabesque is vegetal ornament that grows according to the laws of geometry rather than nature.

The arabesque in Islamic art is often used to symbolize the transcendent, indivisible and infinite nature of Allah. These forms, when placed together, constitute an infinite pattern that extends beyond the visible material world and therefore symbolize the infinite. The viewer can imagine how the pattern will grow in any direction.

The arabesque can be thought of as both art and science. During this period, considered the Golden Age of Islam, ancient texts were translated from Greek and Latin into Arabic. Like the following Renaissance in Europe, math, science, literature and history were infused into the Islamic world. The works of Plato and especially of Euclid (geometry) became popular among the literate. Muslim mathematicians during this period are credited with the development of algebra, algorithms and spherical trigonometry.

The arabesque is at the same time mathematically precise, beautiful and symbolic.

Transition: Through these first two objects we have examined the development of the vegetal and floral ornamentation from 4th-century Syria into the beautiful and symbolic arabesque of the Ottoman Empire. In the next work of art, also from the Ottoman Empire, we'll explore another popular method of ornamentation—the purely geometric.

Object #3: Turkey, Storage Chest, Ottoman dynasty, 17th century, wood with mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell and ivory veneer with silver inlay, 2004.54

Questions and Activities:

This is a storage chest, also from the Ottoman dynasty. What words would you use to describe this ornament? Where have the designs or patterns been repeated on this box?

How would you describe the shape of the box? How does the ornament correspond to the shape?

How is the ornament different from the ornament on the tile? How is it similar?

This is made of wood, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, ivory veneer and silver inlay, all materials that are considered to be prestigious. Based on this information and your observations, what types of things do you think might have been kept in this box?

What would you store in this chest if you owned it? Why would you choose to store (said item) in this chest?

Key Points:

This luxurious storage chest reflects classic Ottoman taste. Its sumptuous inlaid décor is comprised of expensive, exotic materials in perfect keeping with Ottoman aristocratic style. The geometric makeup of the pattern is based on simple shapes—linear, regular shapes such as circles, squares and triangles. Like the tile, it is a combination of rectilinear and curvilinear forms. Also like the tile, the closer you look the more complexity of detail you discover. The complex arrangement of geometric shapes and luxurious materials becomes a gleaming surface of intricate designs in the hands of Ottoman artisans.

Carved and inlaid woodwork was produced throughout the Ottoman Empire (1281-1924). The combination of mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell was extremely popular in furniture, storage chests, writing boxes, and bookstands. It was also used for architectural elements such as doors, window shutters, and cupboards in both secular and religious buildings.

Geometric designs lend themselves to symmetrical patterns, in this case bilateral symmetry, same on both sides of a central axis. Geometric arcs connect and converge into a central medallion with pendant elements and cartouche borders on the top cover, front and back. To either side, tiles of light and dark trefoils (three-lobed shapes) form a trellis pattern. Some patterns and shapes may have been adapted from Italian marquetry (inlay), which through trade was widely available at the Ottoman court.

Ottoman craftsmen used contrasting materials to heighten the effect of the geometric patterns. They did not consider wood alone to be a prestigious material. The rich surface is a combination of fine-grained wood, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell and ivory, with silver inlay. In some cases, the tortoise shell was placed over metal foil to further heighten its sheen (although it appears to have a high sheen, there is no documentation of metal foil used on this box). The decoration is made from thin sheets, called veneer, which are cut in shapes and fit together like a puzzle. The small tiles are glued onto a wooden surface. In addition to the inlay, the shape of the box is made special by the bracket feet and beveled cover.

We don't know what the box was meant to hold, but there are similar boxes in other collections that have been used as writing boxes. The art of beautiful writing, calligraphy, is considered one of the highest forms of Islamic art, and special boxes to hold the implements of calligraphy, such as pens, knives, inks and paints, were often kept in such a delightfully ornamented box.

Transition: In the 7th century, following the death of Muhammad, Arab forces conquered Byzantine lands, as we have explored in these three objects from Syria and Turkey. They also pushed east into Iraq and Iran to conquer the Sassanians. Artists working in these newly conquered lands continued their preexisting artistic traditions, as we will see in this next object from Persia, modern day Iran.

Object #4: Persia (Iran), Rayy Bowl Depicting Ladies on Horseback, Seljuk period, 12th-13th century, earthenware with overglaze polychrome colors, Minai ware, 50.46.432

Questions and Activities:

This painted ceramic bowl is from the Seljuk period, around the 11th and 12th century in Persia, in what is modern day Iran. The décor on this bowl is figural, images of people and animals, in this case, women on horseback. How has the artist created pattern or ornament on this bowl?

Look closely, what details do you notice on the women? What details do you notice on the horses? Beside the women on horses, what other types of figures do you see on this bowl?

Besides the figures, what other types of ornament do you notice on both the inside and outside of this bowl?

Key Points:

This painted ceramic bowl, called *minai* [mee-nī] ware, is from the Seljuk [sel-jook, hard “j”] period (1038-1194) in Persia, modern day Iran. Conquered by the Seljuks by 641, Islam came early to Persia. The Seljuks, Turkish warriors, ruled a Muslim empire that stretched from Iran and Iraq to the eastern Mediterranean. Seljuk artists were perhaps the most creative and innovative producers of Persian ceramics, including the development of minai ware, also known as *haft rang* (seven colors).

The production of minai ware is a complex process. This technique involves an initial firing in the kiln to establish the whitish ground color and the black, cobalt and turquoise blue details (underglaze). A second firing is required for applying additional colors, and some cases, gilt decor. The use of gold made minai wares the most costly type of ceramics during this period. The difficulty of ensuring the proper kiln temperatures and the various colored glaze formulas to produce them put minai wares in a technical league of their own. The multi-colored process enamel glaze ornamentation opened the door to a whole new category of figural ceramic decoration. The complexity of detail has been compared to fine miniature paintings (refer to examples in gallery), and many minai narratives come directly from literary sources.

Here we see eleven richly dressed figures on horseback, and one standing figure, all facing the same direction. The repetition of evenly spaced figures creates a decorative pattern. The narrative is based from the bowl’s center, so it can be read from any vantage point. Minai ware ornamentation with its images of equestrian figures and seated royalty (refer to other minai ware vessels in case) is “aristocratic” pottery.

The people depicted in this scene are a reflection of the probable owners of such ware. Certainly the act of women out riding is an aristocratic pastime, further supported by the sumptuous attire and noble horses brought to life through minute detailing of the artists’ brush. The scene may be a one of falconers on horseback with a bird in flight and standing attendant. The Arabian Gulf region is famous for its falconry traditions and many poems have been written about the pastime. Such hunting trips teach patience, endurance and self-reliance and bravery as demonstrated by the falcons. The Qur’an includes a verse that references falconry as a hunting method.

The very angular (*Kufic*) script inscribed on the inner rim of this bowl and the more cursive script (*Naskhi*) on the outside are likely blessings of prosperity and happiness bestowed upon the owner. Secular objects may include pious sayings, but verses from the Qur'an are reserved for religious objects.

It is a common belief that Islamic art forbids the representation of living beings, yet portrayals of human and animal forms in the secular sphere can be found in all eras of Islamic art. The Qur'an, the Islamic holy book, does not explicitly prohibit figural representation; it merely condemns idolatry for the purpose of worship. Muslims believe that God is without associate and therefore cannot be represented, except by his word as recorded in the Qur'an. Unlike Christian or Buddhist representational art, Islamic figural art is not intended to stimulate devotion, but serves instead as a decorative reminder of God. In short, Muslims—like any people who are associated by a common religion or political affiliation—hold a variety of beliefs, including their views on figural representation and approaches to art.

Transition: We have seen three of the four major categories of ornamentation—floral/vegetal, geometric, and figural. Now let's go to the fourth and most revered method of ornamentation in Islamic art—the written word.

Object #5: Page from the Qur'an, Egypt, about 1350, Mamluk dynasty, mid-14th century, ink, colors and gold on paper, 51.37.21

Questions and Activities:

This is a page from the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book. What words would use to describe this writing? What other types of things do you notice on this page? How has the artist filled/organized the page with ornament, including the script? What portions are left blank?

This type of writing is called calligraphy or “beautiful writing.” Imagine you are writing this script. What gestures are you making with your hand? What are your thoughts and concerns when putting the pen down on the paper?

Why do you think the artist took such efforts to create such a visually pleasing script and decorative page? What forms of documents might you be familiar with that give special attention or credence to the form of the script and ornamentation?

Key Points:

Calligraphy—the art of ornamental writing—has arguably become the most venerated form and most fundamental element of Islamic art because it provides a direct link to the religion of Islam. This is a page from the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an, from the Mamluk period (1250-1517). Mamluks were originally Turkish-speaking military slaves under the Ayyubid dynasty (1169-1250) who rose to power in the 13th century and ruled over Egypt and Syria for over 250 years.

The Qur'an is the heart and substance of Islam. The Qur'an is God's revelations transmitted in Arabic by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. Qur'an in Arabic means “recitations.” Muhammad could neither read nor write, but was able to flawlessly recite the Qur'an to his companions who wrote it down. The Qur'an is the final revelation of a series of divine messages that started with Adam, regarded as the first prophet. The sacred texts include the Scrolls of

Abraham, the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel. While these texts are not explicitly included in the Qur'an, they are recognized within.

To read the Qur'an is to become closer to the divine. There are translations of the Qur'an, but many Muslims believe they do not convey the true essence of the original Arabic text. The Arabic language lends itself to calligraphic ornamental script. Calligraphy has an aesthetic appeal but it also holds a spiritual component. It is read right to left towards your heart. Calligraphy, which means "beautiful writing," is a reflection of God's permanence and splendor to Muslims. The correct placement and positioning of the written word is extremely important and scribes held, and still hold, the greatest esteem among Islamic artists.

Calligraphic script during the Mamluk period was written in an easily read, large, crisp cursive style, called *muhaqqaq* [moo-hawk-kawk]. The art of putting ink to paper, which does not allow for any error, was an act of pure artistic and technical virtuosity during the Mamluk period (1250-1517).

The finest Arabic calligraphy reveals no traces of the physical actions required to make it. Arab calligraphers attempted to make their work look effortless, in contrast to examples of far eastern calligraphy, in which the reader is meant to relive the calligrapher's experience. Calligraphy in Islamic lands is meant to be timeless and cerebral, as a reflection on God. In order to facilitate proper reading and recitation diacritical marks, verse markers (rosettes), decorative stops (large medallions, not seen in this example but in other examples in the gallery), and chapter headings are incorporated into the verses. Wide margins allow the pages to be turned without touching the text.

This page contains text from chapters (Sura) 37 and 38. Multi-volume Qur'ans were popular during the Mamluk period. Sultans and amirs (rulers) often commissioned large Qur'ans for mosques and religious foundations. There was a higher rate of literacy in medieval Islamic lands than elsewhere and while European monasteries held of a few dozen books, libraries in the Muslim world regularly contained hundreds and even thousands of volumes.

Transition: Calligraphy is considered one of the most important elements of Islamic art because of its association with the Qur'an and the religion of Islam. Let's go now to a figural image, a lion, to explore the more secular side of the arts of Islam.

Object #6: Lion Statuette, Hispano-Moorish, 11th-12th century, gold, 72.12

Questions and Activities:

This small lion statuette is from the Spain around the 11th and 12th centuries. Look very closely at this figure. Where do you see ornament? How does the ornament correspond to the shape of this object?

How does the profusion of ornament effect how you think of this lion? How would the nature of this figure change for you without the ornamentation?

We don't know exactly what this was used for, but believe it may be used to burn incense. Based on the material (gold), the attention to detail and its function, who do you think might have owned such an object?

Key Points:

This charming gold statuette of a lion is elaborately decorated with ornate filigree (small thin threads) and fine granulation (tiny beads). Although sculpture was uncommon in Islamic art, vessels in the shape of animals were popular such as ewers in the shape of roosters and rams (refer to figure in case). Metalworkers made incense burners, often in the shape of lions. Although we do not know for certain what this figure was used for, it was likely an incense burner or candleholder based on the handle and receptacle on top. We are fortunate to have this object in the collection, as Islamic gold objects are exceptionally scarce.

As an incense burner, coals of alwood, frankincense, and amberris were burned. The tail functioned as a handle to move the hot vessel as needed. Animal-shaped incense burners may have provided the model for European animal-shaped bronze aquamanil through trade routes.

This small figure, measuring less than five inches high, is completely covered in ornament—head to toe. Intricate floral and tendril patterns of gold filigree and granulation. The delicate nature of the applied décor and all over patterning suggests a textile “coat” that softens the beast. The lion remains regal and refined but has been denatured by ornament. He becomes less animal-like and more decorative as the figure is taken out of this world and into the otherworldly. The Qur'an mentions gold as one of the pleasures and luxuries promised to believers in paradise.

This lion comes from Moorish Spain. In 711, Muslim forces invaded the Iberian Peninsula and by 720 Spain was largely under Muslim, or Moorish, control. The term Moors refers to North African Muslim populations who settled on the Iberian Peninsula. Muslim Spain was not a single period but a succession of ruling intervals. With the collapse of the Umayyad [oo-my-ahd] dynasty in 1031, a number of independent Muslim-ruled principalities, known as the *taifa* [tah-e-fah]. The aristocratic principalities competed among themselves for military supremacy and cultural prestige. The taifa made efforts to recruit the most famous poets and artisans to produce luxury gold and silver objects, such as this lion statuette, for their personal pleasure.

Transition: The last three objects we have explored fit neatly into the category of decorative arts, objects that are beautiful and also functional, such as a bowl, an incense burner, and a storage box. The next object we will see, is also beautiful and functional, but fits into the category of architectural art.

Object # 7: Architectural Relief Panel Depicting Lilies, India, Agra-Mathura region, late 17th century, mottled red sandstone, 2000.65

Questions and Activities:

As compared to the objects we have discussed so far, what surprises you about this object?

This is a panel from a building in India, a carved panel depicting lilies. How would you describe the pattern on this panel? How do the flowers, or lilies, create a pattern?

How is the floral decoration similar to the floral décor on the tile from Syria? How is it different?

Key Points:

This large red sandstone panel once adorned a building in India during the Mughal [mo-gull] dynasty in the late 17th century. Mughal architecture is an amalgam of Islamic, Persian and Indian Architecture. The Mughal dynasty, which extended over half of India, was consolidated with the great Mughal ruler Akbar [ahk-bar] in the 16th century.

Monumental architecture received tremendous patronage from Mughal rulers in the construction of mosques, religious and community structures. Beginning with the reign of Shah Jahan who commissioned the famous Taj Mahal in Agra as a tomb for his wife Mumtaz Mahal [moom-taz ma-hal].

Giving to the community, in the form of alms or public works is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. There are five religious duties that all Muslims perform as a profession of the faith. The first and foremost obligation is the profession of faith, second is prayer (five times a day), the third is giving to charity, the fourth is fasting during Ramadan, and the fifth is a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Most Mughal buildings, regardless of purpose, utilized geometric or floral decorative panels to ornament important buildings. The flowering plant became an important motif in Mughal arts and typical of Islamic architecture in general, the image retains a sense of geometric logic and order. The plant is almost perfectly symmetrical in design and neatly contained within its borders of meandering lilies to either side.

However, despite its highly decorative representation, the leaves and flowers on this panel are very natural in appearance and easily recognized as a lily plant. Five flowering stems of lilies in various stages of bloom emerge from a leafy base. The appearance of more naturalistic flowers in the 17th century may have been influenced by way of illustrated herbals brought to India by Jesuit missionaries.

Transition: Through style and ornamentation we have seen how the customs of Islam have impressed upon the cultures that they have integrated with and how those cultures have in turn influenced the arts of Islam. The last object on this tour will explore how a symbol may be used by different faiths and cultures, but generally hold the same message of protection to those who wear it.

Object #8: Ida ou Semlal, Khamsa (Hand Amulet), Africa, Morocco, North Africa region, Tiznit, about 1850, silver, enamel, glass, 91.141.17

Questions and Activities:

This is a khamsa or hand amulet. What aspects of this amulet are naturalistic, or remind you of a hand? How has the artist stylized this figure of a hand, or made it less naturalistic?

Get down and look closely. What types of patterns do you see? What types of decoration have been added?

Key Points:

The khamsa [hahm-sah] hand is an amulet for magical protection from the envious or evil eye. The words *hamsa* (Arabic) and *hamesh* (Hebrew) mean "five," referring to the digits on the hand. Widespread in Arabic countries, the khamsa is an old and very popular amulet, especially in North Africa. Some scholars believe there is good archaeological evidence to suggest that the protective hand predates both Judaism and Islam and may have originated with the Phoenicians to honor an ancient goddess.

This silver amulet comes from the dry, mountainous northwest region of Africa known as Ida ou Semlal [ēda oo sem-lahl] in Morocco. By 750, Islam had spread across North Africa from Egypt to Morocco with Berber and Tuareg [twah-reg] traders. The Berbers and Tuaregs adopted Islam, but held on to many of their local traditions, such as wearing bright colored clothing and silver jewelry.

The khamsa hand appears both in a two-thumbbed, bilaterally symmetrical form, as we see here, and in a more natural form in which there is only one thumb. Like the small lion statuette, this amulet is completely covered with ornamentation. Also like the lion figure, the stylized hand and proliferation of décor takes it out of the realm of nature and into something magical. Small dots and swirls are stamped into the silver in patterns that follow the lines of a hand. A large glass jewel lies at the center of the hand, in the palm, encircled by a ring of green and orange enameled décor. The dark red glass jewel may be a reference to carnelian because Muhammad is said to have worn a silver ring set with carnelian.

The khamsa is usually called the "Hand of God", but may also be called the Hand of Fatima, in reference to the daughter of Muhammad. (Also known in Jewish cultures as the Hand of Miriam, in reference to the sister of Moses and Aaron.) Fatima plays an important role in the history of Islam.

Muhammad died in 632, leaving no obvious successor. Abu Bakr [ah-boo bahk-r] a close companion of Muhammad was elected as his successor (Caliph). A division arose when some Muslims thought that Ali, Muhammad's cousin who married his daughter, Fatima, should be leader. (Ali did become Caliph in 656.) Followers who favored Ali and believed that the caliphs should be descended from Ali and Fatima became known as Shi'a [shee-ah] Muslims and those who favored Abu Bakr and believed that the leaders should be elected are known as Sunni [soo-nee] Muslims.

Conclusion: There are, and have always been, many interpretations of Islam. In spite of its enormous cultural and regional variations, there are common themes that unite the Muslim world. The art of ornament is one such common denominator, whether figural, floral, geometric or calligraphic. Together on this tour we have discovered how ornament goes beyond surface decoration to reveal the rich cultural and artistic traditions of Islam.

Thank you for joining me today in exploring the Arts of Islam, I do hope you will come back soon to explore the many and varied cultural treasures here at the MIA.