

**Jug**, early 13th century  
Syria  
Underglaze-painted fritware

**Dish**, 13th century  
Iran, possibly Kashan  
Underglaze-painted fritware

The striking contrast of black painted decoration under a vibrant turquoise glaze links these two objects. The jug was likely made in Raqqa, in present-day Syria, located on the banks of the Euphrates River. It features leaf-and-vine scrolls encircling the body with an unreadable inscription that imitates the *Kufic* style of calligraphy.

The interior of the shallow dish is filled with an arabesque pattern (rhythmic linear patterns of scrolling lines and leaves) while the smaller black band of text around the outer edge is a rather simplistic Naskhī script that repeats the word “glory.” The sense of proportion, striking color, and graceful embellishment transform these everyday items into objects that are indeed glorious.

Huntington Museum of Art  
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 2000.10.11, 13

***Bowl***, 10th-11th century

Nishapur, Iran, Seljuk period (1050–1300)

Glazed earthenware

***Bowl***, 9th-10th century

Nishapur, Iran

Underglaze-painted earthenware

Some of the earliest polychrome pottery in Southwest Asia derives from Nishapur, a trade center located along the Silk Road that flourished between the 9th and 13th centuries. The interior of one bowl is painted with swirling patterns in manganese, yellow, white, and red interspersed with tiny cross-shaped motifs. The primary decoration on the other vessel is a highly stylized *Kufic* script, an early form of Arabic calligraphy with thick strokes and angular, geometric shapes. These inscriptions could be manipulated to such an extent that they were at times nearly inscrutable even to Arabic readers.

A series of invasions and devastating earthquakes reduced the booming metropolis to ruins in the 13th century. It lay dormant until the 1930s, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art, working with the Iranian government, began excavating the site.

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Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 2000.10.23, 26

***Bottle***, 7th-8th century

Egypt or Syria

Blown and marvered glass

***Vessels***, 10th-12th centuries

Iran

Glass

The techniques of glass manufacture spread from their origins in the Mediterranean to lands farther east and were considerably developed in Muslim-ruled areas. Syria and Egypt were unrivaled in the art of glassmaking up until the 14th century. The substantial development of the glassmaking industry in Venice in the 14th century was facilitated by close trade contacts between Venice and the Mamluk and Ottoman empires, allowing for the import of raw materials as well as technical knowledge to Venice.

Glass exported from Syria and Iraq during the 9th century renewed interest in the medium in Iran. Some vessels were decorated by blowing molten glass into a mold carved with a decorative pattern. Another technique is seen in the wavy trails of the marvered glass here, made by applying a of molten glass in a spiral around the body which is then dragged up or down with a pointed tool.

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Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 2004.3.30, 29, 34

***Dishes***, c. 11600

Iznik, Turkey, Ottoman Empire (1299–1922)

Underglaze-painted fritware

Following the establishment of the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia (present-day Turkey), the production of arts flourished. Developments in architecture, manuscript painting, textiles, and especially ceramics, were particularly significant. Artisans in Iznik developed a recipe to imitate the highly coveted white body of Chinese porcelain. Iznik fritware, or stonepaste, was made of silica (typically sand or quartz) mixed with clay and finely ground frit, or glass fragments. The result was visually identical to the luxurious Chinese porcelains collected by the court and traded along the Silk Road. Both of these dishes showcase what would become the trademark color scheme of Iznik wares—cobalt blue, green, and a deep, vibrant red (after 1550), painted so thickly here that it appears in relief. Designs often feature stylized versions of roses, tulips, and hyacinths, as seen here. The influence of earlier ceramic examples can also be seen, as in the wave-and-rock border pattern on one dish, derived from a similar breaking-wave pattern found on 14th-century Chinese wares.

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Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2000.10.20, 21

***Pilgrims Encamped Near Cairo*, 19th century**

Antoni Badowski

Polish, dates unknown

Oil on panel

“Orientalism” is a Western art movement that disseminated fantastical portrayals of an “exotic” East. The movement perpetuated harmful racial stereotypes about Islamic cultures, many of which remain ingrained in popular imagination today. As scholar Edward Said defined it in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, the concept is a colonial invention built on binaries—between East and West, foreign and familiar, barbaric and civilized, self and “Other.”

Popular interest in Orientalism reached its height in the 19th century during the unraveling of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of French and British colonial ambitions in the Arabic speaking world. While some artists sought to capture a realistic view of everyday life in the region and worked from direct observation, others used a camera to record scenes as source material they later embellished in their studio at home. This painting by Polish artist Antoni Badowski depicts an encampment or *caravanserais* (roadside inn). It’s unknown if Badowski made the journey to Egypt or devised the scene from photographs and other paintings.

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Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2004.3.5

***Prayer Carpet***, late 19th century

Southern Transcaucasia (present-day Armenia,  
Georgia, and Azerbaijan)

Wool

The weaving of patterned carpets was traditionally prevalent in the so-called Rug Belt, which spanned North Africa, Southwest Asia, and parts of Central Asia and India. The region's temperate climate was ideal for wool production.

The significance of textiles in the Muslim world far surpasses the demarcation of domestic space. Textiles were crucial elements in decorating and furnishing architectural spaces, as well as in creating temporary structures outside the confines of brick-and-mortar architecture. Additionally, they played a vital role in the art of clothing and gift-giving, which was central to the politics of pre-modern Muslim courts. The subtle stylized square arch in the upper portion here was meant to denote the direction of prayer towards Mecca. An unreadable inscription in the white panel at the top was woven right side up when viewed by the weaver but appears inverted when correctly displayed with the arched shape at the top.

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Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2000.10.98

***Shield and Helmet***, second half of 19th century  
Iran, Qajar period (1794-1925)  
Steel damascened with gold and silver

Few objects embody the notion of power and military might as clearly as armor. While this pair are remarkable both in detail and craftsmanship, they were likely largely ceremonial. Their condition suggests these two objects never saw battle, though they may have been used during plays. Inscriptions on shields to be used in combat often invoked their strength or that of their owner and frequently employed talismanic inscriptions to empower and protect the wearer. The calligraphy around the rim here instead is primarily Persian poetry. The creation of these objects after they had become obsolete points to a desire to invoke earlier glory days. Qajar rulers tried to find their footing by referencing earlier successful regimes, just as early American architects borrowed elements from ancient Greece or paintings of Napoleon visually linked him to Hannibal crossing the Alps.

Huntington Museum of Art  
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 2000.10.68 and  
2000.10.69

***Firman***, November-December 1881  
Iran, Qajar period (1794–1925)  
Ink and pigment on paper

This lavishly adorned page features text written in the calligraphic style known as *shekasteh nasta'liq*, which emerged in the second half of the 17th century in Persia (present-day Iran). Over the centuries, Arabic and Persian calligraphy evolved into an art form with a variety of script styles tailored to their specific purposes, whether for the monumental inscriptions on towering structures or the graceful elegance of poetic stanzas. The fluidity and dissolution of the letters in the *shekasteh* style enhance the flow and speed of writing, making it both visually captivating and easily legible. This page contains a *firman* (from the Persian, "decree, order"), a document issued by royal mandate. At the upper right appears the tughra, or seal, of the Crown Prince Muzaffar al-din, who became the Shah of Iran in 1896. This page was an award for a local official commemorating his many years of service. Fittingly, the language was as florid as the undulating vine patterns that surround it, as this was a document that was meant to make a powerful impression, in the same way that certificates and diplomas today often feature gilded borders and ornate script.

Huntington Museum of Art  
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2000.10.99



***Dish***, late 19th or early 20th century  
Cairo, Egypt  
Brass inlaid with copper and silver

This impressive piece is indicative of the type of metalwork that flourished in Islamic states, with multiple types of materials inlaid within intricate designs. The central calligraphic shape is meant to represent a tughra. The tughra was originally the official signature of Ottoman emperors and was later used by rulers in other regions, appearing on stamps, coins, and official documents, like the one on view nearby. The design here was consciously made to invoke the notion of royalty, with its trademark upright strokes and swooping ovals, but its inscription is for good wishes. This allusion to regalia, coupled with the dish's pristine condition, indicates it was meant for display rather than use. This overt show of reverence for royalty came at a time when Arab nationalists in Cairo and Damascus were calling for a return to the glories of art forms as they had existed before the Ottoman conquest in the 16th century.

Huntington Museum of Art  
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 2000.10.49

***Pen Case***, 19th century

Iran, Qajar period (1794–1925)

Lacquered papier-mache and wood

Arabic has always been held in high esteem by Muslims, because it is the language of the Qur'an, which is understood by Muslims to be the direct word of God. Literary production was also held in high regard. Writing was central to the translation and dissemination of academic work, as well as poetry. The equipment of a scholar or calligrapher included a pen box, which usually held reed pens (aalam), a block to hold the pen while sharpening, a pen knife, and inkpot. The cover of this example is decorated with a vignette of a man, woman, and child holding a bird, probably a quail which is a symbol of fertility. The surface of the box imitates Chinese lacquerware. Whereas Chinese lacquer was made from tree sap, Iranian artists used a slightly golden varnish to cover the surface of the papier-mâché to produce a similar glossy sheen.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 1991.2.92AB

***Qibla Compass***, 19th century

Iran, Qajar period (1794–1925)

Brass, glass

Like the astrolabe and constellation bowls on view, this compass is a portable instrument that has many practical purposes. Though a compass typically points north, this tool was designed to determine the direction of prayer for Muslims. Muslims face the holy city of Mecca when they partake in daily prayers, one of the five pillars of Islam. The *qibla* refers to the wall with the mihrab, a space in every mosque that indicates the direction of prayer. Using this tool, travelers not near a mosque could find the correct orientation for worship and determine the time using the extendable pointer as a sundial. The names of several cities in Iran are inscribed on the exterior. By moving the pointer to the name of the user's current city, they could align it with the needle that points north.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2004.3.23

*Preparing for Prayer*, c. 1875

Filippo Bartolini

Italian, active 1861-1908

Watercolor on paper

Filippo Bartolini was one of many European artists who specialized in “Orientalist” paintings of scenes that depicted Muslim cultures, often in reductive and factually incorrect ways. Like the painting by Anthoni Badowski in the previous gallery, this Watercolor depicts a scene the artist may or may not have observed firsthand. Many such paintings were created in artists’ studios and were influenced by literary sources, secondhand knowledge, and sometimes firsthand observation of the culture they represented. Little is known about Bartolini’s life and whether he ever traveled beyond Italy. There are several details in the depiction that warrant further scrutiny and suggest the scene is one from the artist’s imagination rather than a reflection of reality. For example, individuals are depicted in different moments of prayer that would not happen simultaneously—some people are washing, an action that would occur before prayer, while others are already engaged in prayer. Those who are in prayer are shown in different actions, an inaccurate portrayal of the collective prayer ritual.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 1991.2.51

***Prayer Carpet***, 19th century

Western Iran, Kurdish

Wool and cotton

The weaving of carpets has traditionally been a female occupation, passed down over generations. Master designers often created the pattern which trained weavers then executed. Carpets were used in the home, for export, as gifts, as a portable means of creating a domestic space while traveling, and, as here, for prayer. The arch-like shape is reminiscent of a *mihrab*, a niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of prayer. Many such carpets also include vegetal motifs, such as the cypress trees that flank the central niche, to allude to the gardens of Paradise. For a religion that expanded into regions where shade and greenery were highly prized, it is no surprise that the notion of heaven would resemble an oasis brimming with flowing water, lush greenery, and exuberant flowers.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2000.10.96

***Icon of the Dormition of the Mother of God***, first  
half of the 19th century

Southwest Asia

Pigment on wood panel

This brightly painted icon illuminates the influence that different cultures and traditions have on one another. It comes from the Melkite community, a group of Byzantine Rite churches originating in Southwest Asia. Followers consider themselves to be the first Christian community, dating to the time of the apostles. Melkite icons bear some similarity to Russian and Greek versions but differ in the choice of theme, style, and use of Arabic inscriptions and dress. The Melkite icon type was adopted after the spread of Islam and the widespread use of Arabic. The scene depicted is one that does not appear in the Bible—the Virgin Mary's death and her soul's journey into heaven. Her soul is represented here as a newborn baby held by Christ. The apostles surround Mary's body, in accordance with tradition, and in the foreground an angel cuts off the hands of a man attempting to touch the Virgin's body.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2004.3.1

***Saint Christina of Tyre, 1757***

Syria, Ottoman Empire (1299–1922)

Gesso, pigment, and burnished gold leaf on canvas  
mounted to panel

Icons (from the Greek, meaning “image”) have been placed for centuries in Orthodox Christian churches and private homes as sacred objects for contemplation and veneration by Christian worshippers. These small images of saints and other biblical figures were also painted by minorities in the Muslim world, including the Melkite sect in Syria. This icon portrays Saint Christina of Tyre, who, inspired by her devotion to Christ, broke her father’s gold and silver idols and distributed them to the poor. She was cast into prison and martyred by decapitation around the year 200. The icon is inscribed in Greek on the front “Saint Christina, holding her holy head,” and “painted by Sylvester, Patriarch of Antioch, in 1757.” An inscription on the back identifies Nasrallah Suleiman as the owner of the icon.

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Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 1991.2.157

***Bhagavad Gita*, 1675–1710**

India, Mughal Empire (1525–1857)

Leather, ink, pigment, and gold  
on laid waxed parchment

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a 700-verse Hindu text that forms part of the *Mahabharata*, one of the foremost Indian epics. The *Gita* is one of the best-known religious texts of Hinduism, and its philosophical notions have had an impact on countless thinkers and creators, including Aldous Huxley and Henry David Thoreau. The text here is written in Sanskrit, a classical language, in a clear, bold Devanagari, an alphabet still used today to write Hindi, Nepali, and other South Asian languages. While many such texts also included illustrations, particularly of key figures like Krishna (an avatar of Vishnu) this page consists entirely of text and stylized decorations.

The illuminations that fill the borders would not look out of place in a Qur'an manuscript, and the golden arabesque shapes and curving vine motifs were likely influenced by Mughal miniature painting in India around the same period. The Mughals were the Muslim rulers of South Asia, whose championing of the arts and religious tolerance led to an innovative style that merged motifs, languages, and imagery from many cultures.

Huntington Museum of Art



***Charger***, first half of 18th century

Iran

Underglaze-painted fritware

Fritware, also called stonepaste, is made by mixing finely ground glass (frit) with quartz and clay. It gained popularity in the early 16th century as a visual imitation of Chinese porcelain. The design of this example speaks volumes about cultural exchange. Persia (present-day Iran) included several stops along the Silk Road, a network of trade routes that connected East Asia to Europe. For centuries, Persian potters sought inspiration from ceramic production in China; however, the expansion of the global market in the 17th century and the growing European demand for Chinese ceramics led to a trend in Iran's ceramic industry that favored imitating the highly sought-after blue and white porcelain. The motifs included on these dishes, like birds, fish, and flowers, were often drawn from earlier Chinese versions. The eight-point star on this plate, though, is a typical Islamic design element, particularly common on tiles.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 2000.10.3

***Tile***, 17th century

Syria, Ottoman Empire (1299–1922)

Underglaze-painted fritware

This object clearly displays motifs like other Iznik ceramics, also on view in this gallery. The trademark tiles and table wares produced in the town of Iznik, Turkey, became iconic artistic representations of the Ottoman Empire, adorning mosque and palace walls but also created for export. In the 16th century, craftspeople in Europe, as well as in other provinces of the Empire, began to imitate that signature style, with stylized floral motifs and rich, jewel-toned hues. This example comes from Syria, which became a center of tile production, used as facings on building walls. The symmetrical central medallion, with sprays of tulips and carnations, are in keeping with Iznik examples. What distinguishes this piece, though, is the distinctive vibrant shade of green and the absence of the deep red that often features in later Ottoman examples.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2000.10.2

***Ewer***, late 13th century

Central Iran, Ilkhanid period (1256–1353)

Underglaze-painted fritware

The delightful variation in both color and pattern elevates this everyday pitcher to a work of art imbued with a sense of rhythm and liveliness. The vertical bands alternate with scrolling vegetal patterns and blue or turquoise areas filled with Naskhī script, a widespread form of calligraphy that was found on everyday objects and documents. This ewer was most likely from Kashan, a desert oasis town on a major caravan route renowned for both ceramics and carpets. The position of this city, with its ready access to goods from neighboring regions, may help to explain this object's distinctive shape. As artists experimented with materials, they often drew inspiration from examples made of other substances. The lobed body, smaller round base, and relatively wide spout of this vessel were likely derived from metal prototypes, which would have been either hammered in silver or cast in other metals.

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Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Tuma, 2004.3.16



Attributed to Iran or Afghanistan, Khurasan or Herat. *Ewer*, c. 1180–1210. Brass, inlaid with silver and a black compound. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**Bowl**, 14th century  
Iran, possibly Jovein  
Underglaze-painted fritware

During the 13th century, the Mongols expanded their control over Asia, extending their empire from China to present-day Iraq, Iran, the Caucasus, and parts of Asia Minor. This facilitated the mobility of objects and people like never before. In Persia (present-day Iran), the ruling dynasty, the Ilkhanid (one of the four Mongol dynasties ruling over Asia), adopted Islam and patronized art. The increasing movement of people and objects translated to a growing exposure of Persian artists to Chinese products and patterns.

Porcelain was highly prized and used in wealthy Persian households, but more modest families would have owned less expensive fritware like this. The palette of this bowl was likely based on the typical blue-and-white Chinese examples, which also often featured floral and spiral motifs and bands of patterned squares. The central six-point star, though, was a motif more common to Persia and Southwest Asia, found in both Jewish and Islamic art throughout the region.

Huntington Museum of Art  
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 2000.10.22

***Mosque Lamp*, 14th century**

Syria

Glass with enamel decoration

In many Muslim-majority contexts, glass lamps decorated with verses from the Qur'an in stylized Arabic script were suspended from the ceiling in mosques and secular buildings. They symbolized divine light but also brightened what might have been an otherwise dim interior. Such lamps have been used for centuries and were often inscribed with a fitting line from the Qur'an. The inscription on the neck of this lamp reads, "The lamp belongs to the Mosque, and the Mosque to God, the Light of Heaven and Earth."

In 1400, invading Mongol forces destroyed many of the Syrian glass houses. The industry never recovered, and many of the techniques pioneered by Syrian glassmakers were mastered by Venetian artisans who would dominate the luxury glass market for the next several centuries.

Henry Clay Frick purchased this vase in 1903 from antiquities dealer Dikran Kelekian. The lamp, displayed in Clayton alongside Chinese porcelains and Turkish rugs, was prized for its decorative value and devoid of its original context.

The Frick Pittsburgh

***Vase in the Form of a Mosque Lamp,***  
19th-20th century

Europe

Polychrome enameled glass

Although these two vessels share several similarities, including handles for hanging and bands of calligraphy, the one on the right was created in the 14th century by Persian artists in Syria and the other is a decorative vase that was created in Europe five centuries later.

In the 19th century, European imperialism and expanded trade routes led to the influx of decorative artworks imported from Muslim regions to Europe and North America. Western artists sought to emulate the innovative techniques used in the creation of ancient and traditional objects from Islamic centers in the Middle East and Africa. French glassmakers revived the process of enameling glass and imitated the forms and decoration on examples they had ready access to. The vase on the left, with its stylized pseudo-Arabic script and scrolling botanical patterns, epitomizes that sense of artistic admiration and appropriation.

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma, 1999