

## MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART

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### Prayer niche from the Beyhekim Mosque

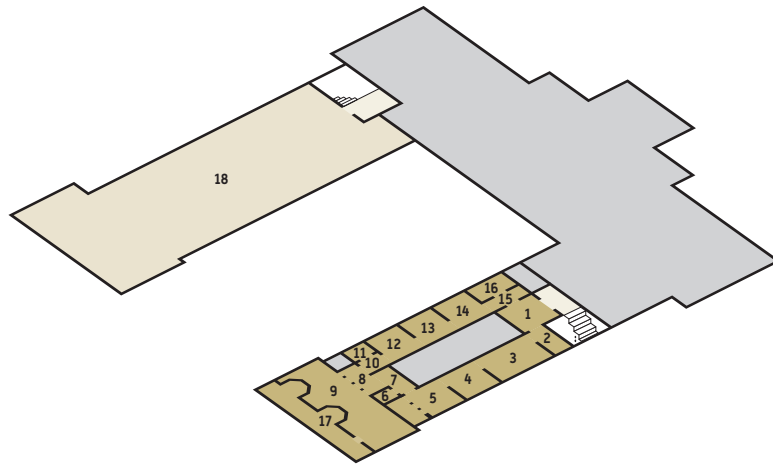
Turkey (Konya), 2. half 14th century

Faience mosaic, 3.95 x 2.8 m

Inv. I.7193



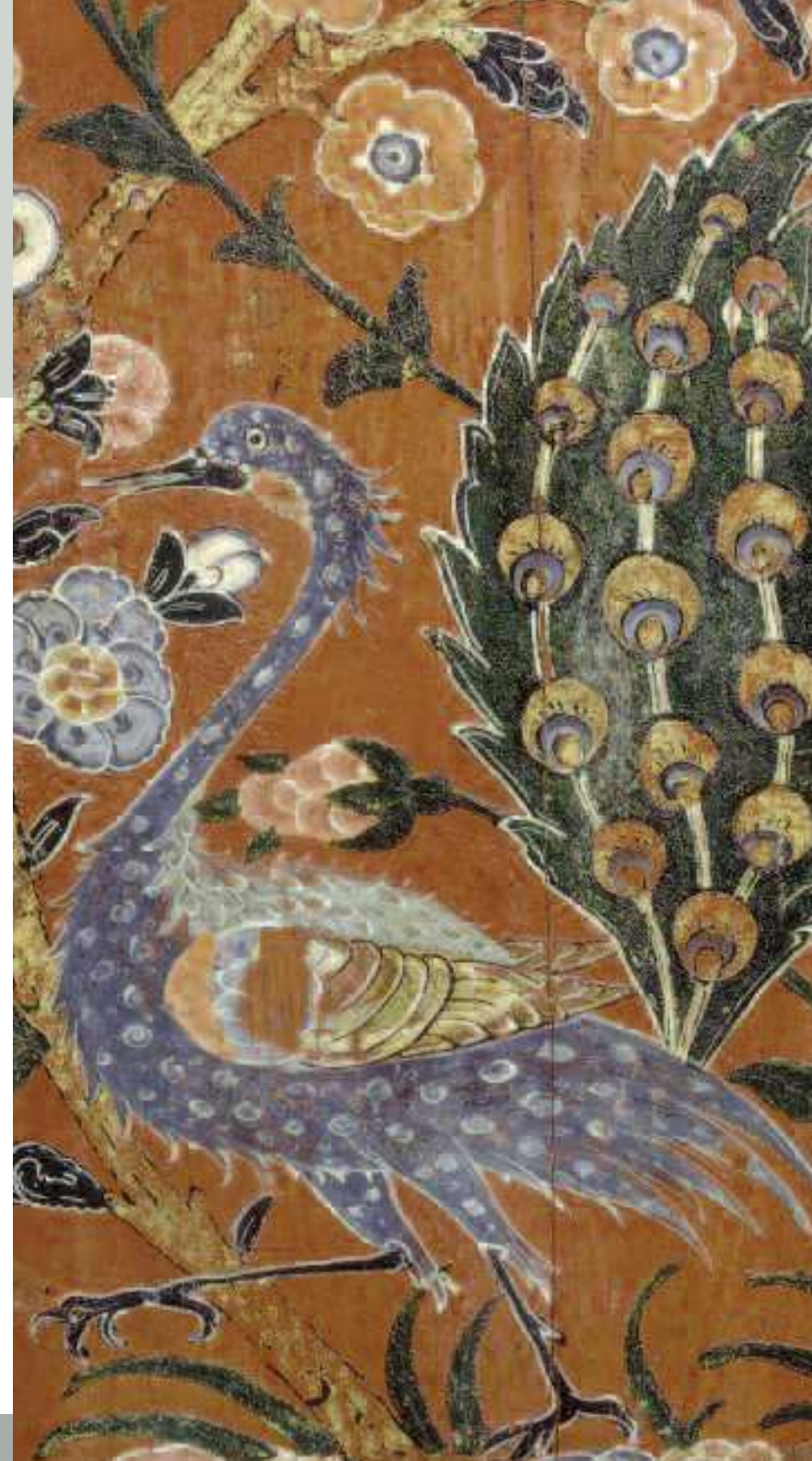
# MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART



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## Peacock in phantastic landscape (Aleppo Room)

Syria (Aleppo), dated 1600/01, 1603  
Painting on wood  
Inv. I. 2862





## The history of the collection

At the time the Kaiser Friedrich Museum (now the Bode Museum) opened in 1904, Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929) established a department for ancient Islamic art. Thanks to the gift from the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918) of the monumental palace façade from Mshatta, the collection acquired one of the key works of Islamic art. Excavations in the Ottoman Empire, for example, in the palace city of Samarra, together with a passion for collecting on the part of both Bode and the director, Friedrich Sarre (1865–1945), have made it one of the most important collections of its kind in the world. With the building of the Pergamon Museum, in 1932 the collection was provided with up-to-date exhibition spaces, but it would soon share the fate of many of Berlin's other museums: closure, destruction, division, restoration and rebuilding in East and West. In 2001 a portion of the reunited Berlin holdings was opened, one that is to be considerably enlarged by 2019 in the north wing of the refurbished Pergamon Museum. The holdings of the Museum of Islamic Art illuminate the art, culture and archaeology of Muslim societies from the southern and eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Central Asia from Late Antiquity to modern times. Geographically, as well as in terms of cul-

### The Islamic department in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum (after 1912)

Façade of the caliph's palace at Mshatta, gift of the Ottoman sultan to Kaiser Wilhelm II

tural history, they thus directly relate to the Pergamon Museum's collections of classical and ancient Near Eastern cultures that in pre-Islamic times survived in two empires: Byzantium (395–1453) in the eastern Mediterranean, with its capital, Constantinople, as heir to the Roman Empire, and the Sasanian Empire (224–624) in Mesopotamia and Iran in the tradition of the ancient Persian Empire. The early 7th century saw the development of not only a new religion on the Arabian Peninsula, namely Islam, but also a new political structure. Very early on the religion's founder, Muhammad (570–632), became a political and military commander, and under his successors, the caliphs, the young empire expanded explosively. Almost simultaneously, it began the conquest of the Byzantines' Syrian-Palestinian realm and North Africa to the west, and of Iran and portions of Central Asia to the east. In 711 Muslim units reached Spain, Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent.

Islamic cultures are rooted in the traditions of Late Antiquity. Ancient philosophy, science, city planning, architecture and art were



### The Islamic department in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum (c. 1910)

In the foreground southern Italian ivories, in the background splendid Persian carpets, some of which were lost in the Second World War





crucial to the development of the material culture of Muslim societies. This is true of the religion as well: according to Islamic thinking, Muhammad was the last of the prophets in the Abrahamic tradition, and the faith's religious notions are very similar to those of Christians and Jews. The Quran is all-important, and its teachings infused the art of Muslim societies as a unifying but not a binding tie. Religion contributes in only a limited way to an understanding of Islamic art. The Quran says nothing about art; it does not even impose a ban on human imagery, though such a ban is frequently invoked. The practice of eschewing figural representation in religious spaces developed at an early date, at the same time as Byzantine iconoclasm. But only in religious spaces – figural depictions are found on all sorts of materials in every century, and accordingly they are well represented in the Museum of Islamic Art.

Muslim-dominated societies, developed within distinct regional traditions and in constant contact with other cultures – especially those of Europe and China – would take on very different forms. They shared a preference for strong colours, probably owing to their similar geographical experiences; special forms of urban organisation; and a tendency towards abstraction. Their rich floral and geometric decoration, even on objects of everyday use, is striking. Among eastern Christians, Jews and Muslims crafts and architecture differ only slightly

The Museum of Islamic Art is arranged chronologically by dynasties. The early period of Islamic history (7th–10th centuries), which can be assigned to late antiquity, is especially well represented. The

**Display in the Pergamon Museum (1956)**

Stucco panels from the German excavation in the caliphate city Samarra (Iraq, 9th century)

**Display of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin-Dahlem (1971–1998)**

View of the entrance with carpets as partitions

façade of the caliph's palace at Mshatta (Jordan, circa 743/744) and of other residences of the 8th century, as well as finds from the palace city of Samarra (Iraq, mid-9th century), provide a unique panorama of early Islamic history (Rooms 2, 3, 9). The middle period (11th–15th centuries) is characterised by political fragmentation, owing to which regional differences become more distinct (Rooms 3 to 7, 12). The prayer niches from Kashan and Konya, the exquisite inlay work on metal vessels, and the Alhambra dome date from this period. The early modern period (16th–18th centuries) saw the dominance of three large empires: those of the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean, the Safavids in Iran, and the Mughal rulers in India (Rooms 13 to 16). A majority of Berlin's famous carpet collection serves as testimony to trade with Europe in this period, and the splendid Aleppo Room as evidence of the religious diversity of its urban cultures. In the 19th and 20th centuries, when increasing global networking as a result of the Industrial Revolution caused traditional design forms to decline in importance, Europeans began to collect and study the material cultures in the historical core regions of the Islamic world. Contemporary art from Muslim countries or by Muslim artists from around the world is not included in the historical-archaeological collections, and has yet to find a home in Berlin.

SW





## The Umayyads (661–750)

Following the death of the prophet Muhammad, four caliphs reigned until in 661 the Umayyad caliphate was established with Damascus as its centre. The Umayyads remained in power for only a brief 90 years, yet they set the course for the further development of the new empire. With the conquest of Spain in the west and central Asia and parts of India in the east, it achieved its greatest extent; Islam became a world religion. The reform of coinage and chancellery language under caliph

### **Plate with engraving**

Iran, 6th/7th century  
Bronze, height 9 cm, Ø 64.5 cm  
Inv.l. 5624



Abd al-Malik (685–704) sped up the process of Islamisation and Arabisation. The Dome of the Rock, erected during his reign and one of the most important architectural monuments of the Islamic world, continues to dominate the city of Jerusalem to this day. In the steppe regions of the greater Syrian realm the Umayyad caliphs built numerous palaces. In addition to the façade from Mshatta (see Room 9), the museum displays fragments of architectural decor and smaller finds from these “desert palaces”, as well as a wall-painting fragment in the late antique tradition from the small bathing palace Qusayr Amra. Under the Umayyads elements from late antique Christian and Sogdi-

### **Section of a wall painting from Qusayr Amra**

Jordan, 8th century  
Fresco, 210 x 102 cm  
Inv.l. 1264



**Lidded canister with grapevine decoration**

Egypt or Syria, 6th–8th centuries  
Ivory, bronze, height 10 cm, Ø at base 9 cm  
Inv. SK 2977



**Bowl with moulded relief discs depicting winged horses and notations and Arabic inscriptions**

Syria, 7th–8th centuries  
Glass, height 7.5 cm, Ø 10 cm  
Inv. I. 1537

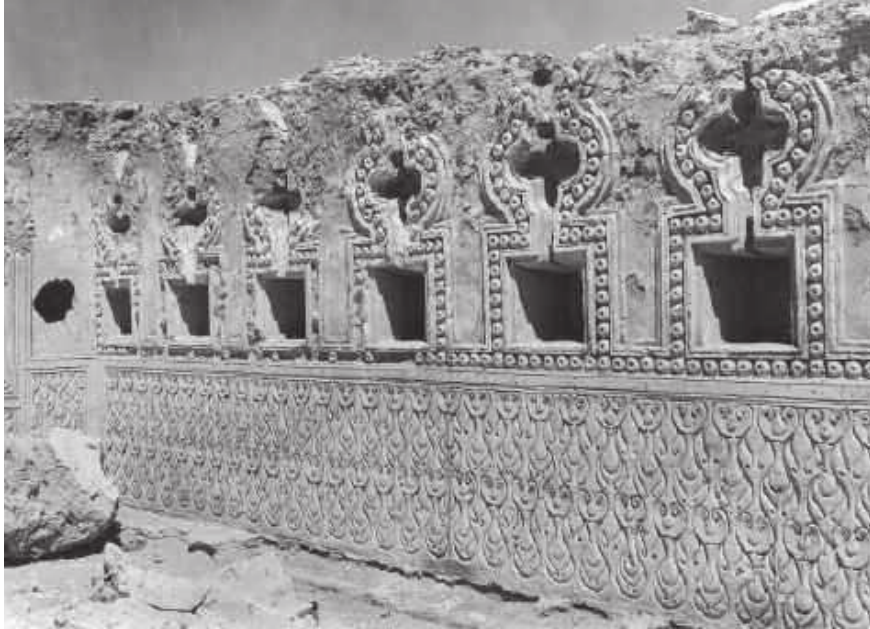
an-Persian-Sasanian art were blended, reworked and enriched with the addition of wholly new ones. A new ornament and the main conveyor of meaning was Arabic script. Many works from this period could conceivably have been produced in pre-Islamic times were it not for their inscriptions in Arabic, for the rest of the decoration largely conforms to the various pre-Islamic styles. As a decorative principle, the notion of endless, all-encompassing and constantly restyled ornament comes to prevail. For example, a pattern of stylised vine scrolls rising out of small vases can cover the entire surface of a lidded ivory pyxis modeled after Late Antique pieces made in Egypt of wood and bone. There the vine motif was interpreted as specifically Christian, but it was also important in early Islamic art as a symbol of paradise. GH



**Earring**

Egypt, 7th/8th century  
Gold, 6.5 x 5.8 cm  
Inv. I. 2333





## The Abbasids and Samarra (750–1258)

Under the Abbasids (750–1258), the political centre of the Islamic world shifted from Syria to Iraq and a new seat of government was founded with the city of Baghdad. From there, and from their temporary second capital, Samarra (836–883), the Abbasids ruled over an empire that stretched from North Africa to western Central Asia. For a brief period they maintained a second capital at Raqqa, in northern Syria. From there the caliph Harun ar-Rashid (766–806) organised his military expeditions against the Byzantine Empire.

The first three centuries of Abbasid rule are considered the Islamic world's "golden age". Baghdad, with the port of Basra in southern Iraq, developed into the economic centre of an international trading empire with contacts in the Far East and in Europe. Culture and science flourished at the court of the caliphs, which nurtured lasting achievements in geography, philosophy, medicine, astronomy and mathematics.

Beginning in the 9th century the Abbasids maintained a highly regimented court ceremonial. Like oriental rulers in antiquity, they

### **Balkuwara Palace, Samarra**

Wall revetment with carved stucco decoration in the so-called bevelled style  
Photograph by Ernst Herzfeld,  
1911–1913

resided in gigantic palaces consisting of a complex of courtyards, throne rooms and apartments. The caliphs contributed greatly to the revival of the arts. The textile industry was of major importance, producing fabrics of brocade and silk. Ceramic production experienced a virtual rebirth, utilising new decorative techniques such as lustre glazing. An important impetus behind these innovations were the Chinese wares that now found their way to the Near East.

Under the Abbasids, an entirely new style of art was developed that set the pattern for the entire empire. The study of Samarra has contributed greatly to an understanding of this development, for no vestiges of the Abbasid period have survived in Baghdad itself. Samarra was selected as a new seat of government by Al-Mu'tasim (833–842) in 836. Situated 125 kilometres north of Baghdad, the new residence developed into one of the largest cities of the ancient world, with expansive palaces, mosques, hunting grounds, racetracks and separate residential quarters for Turkish mercenaries. Financial crises forced the caliphs to return to Baghdad in 892.



### **Lustre bowl with depiction of a bird**

Iraq (Samarra), 9th century  
Earthenware with gold lustre painting  
Height 8.5 cm, Ø 26.7 cm  
Inv.Sam 1102



**Utensil in the form of a bird**

Iran (?), c. 800  
Bronze, formerly with inlaid decorations  
Height 34.5 cm  
Inv. I. 5623



Excavations in Samarra sponsored by the Museum of Islamic Art and carried out by Ernst Herzfeld and Friedrich Sarre in 1911 and 1912/13 brought important finds to the museums of Berlin, Istanbul and London: fragments of rare wall paintings, wooden wall panels, cut glass, countless ceramic shards – including wares imported from China – and especially stucco relief decor that once ornamented large surfaces of residential and palace interiors. Over time, Abbasid stucco workers employed three different decorative styles. The first two are still strongly rooted in the late antique, Umayyad tradition. However the third, the so-called bevelled style, evolved into a flat, modulated decor of abstract patterns that marks a significant change in Islamic ornament.

The influence of the Abbasid caliphs was weakened after the conquest of Baghdad by the Seljuks in 1055, and ultimately ended with the conquest of that city by the Mongols in 1258. JG

**Capital**

Syria, Raqqa 9th century  
Alabaster; 27 x 29 x 29 cm  
Inv. I. 2195





## The Mediterranean world at the time of the Fatimids (909–1171)

The Fatimids founded a Shi'ite caliphate in North Africa, centred in Cairo, following their conquest of Egypt in 969. For a time, large portions of Syria, the Arabian Peninsula and Sicily were a part of it. Alexandria and Cairo were lively trading centres linking the Mediterranean with the Near East, India and East Asia, and fostered the region's economic and cultural flowering.

Although surviving fortifications provide us with a good idea of their defensive architecture, little survives of the Fatimids' treasures

owing to the destruction of their palaces and libraries. Calligraphy is mainly preserved in stone inscriptions. Also preserved are fragments of architectural decor, painted wood and wood carvings. Textiles were produced in Egypt's important weaving mills, and precious materials like rock crystal and ivory were worked in Cairo as well.

The island of Sicily was part of the Muslim sphere of influence in the 9th to 11th centuries. One of its attractions for invaders from North Africa was its rich supply of wood for shipbuilding. But above all, Sicily served as the breadbasket for the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa.

With the establishment of Fatimid rule in Egypt and Syria, trade came to be more strongly oriented towards the western Mediterranean.

### **Ivory casket**

Southern Italy/Sicily, 11th–12th centuries

Ivory, 17.3 x 39.5 x 22.8 cm

Inv. K 3101



The Fatimids left clear traces on Sicily especially, even after its conquest by the Christian Normans (second half of the 11th century) and through the Staufen period up into the 13th century. One well-known example of the creative style combining Byzantine, Islamic and Romanesque elements is the cloak of Roger II, created with inscriptions in Arabic in Palermo in 1133/34 (now in Vienna), which later served as the coronation cloak for German emperors. *ThT*

**Dish with hare and palmettes**

Egypt (Fustat), 10th–11th centuries  
 Stonepaste ceramic, lustre painted  
 Height 8.5 cm; Ø 27.5 cm  
 Inv. I. 35/64



**Relief panel with hunting scenes (detail)**

Egypt, 11th–12th centuries  
 Ivory pierced  
 36.5 x 30.3 cm, width of frame 5.8 cm  
 Inv. I. 6375

**Inscription**

Egypt, 10th–11th century  
 Marble, 65 x 45.7 cm  
 Inv. I. 4466





## Iran and Central Asia in the 9th–13th centuries

The Islamisation of eastern Iran and Central Asia began in the 8th century under the Umayyads. The provinces of Khorasan and Transoxania, with their ancient oasis cities of Nishapur, Bukhara, Afrasiab (Samarkand), Merw, Herat and Balkh, were important strategically, and of interest economically owing to their positions along the Silk Road.

Under the independent Samanids (819–1005) and Buyids (932–1055), the ancient Iranian aristocracy was strengthened and the Iranian heritage revived. Persian came to be spoken along with Arabic at courts as an administrative and literary language. The *Shahnama* (*Book of Kings*) of Firdausi (died circa 1022) would become the first heroic epic

### Simurgh plate

Khorasan, 10th century  
Silver, partially gilt, embossed, punched, Ø  
35.8 cm  
Inv. I. 4926



written in Persian. In art older Sasanian and Sogdian traditions were blended with influences from the western Arabic world and China. Examples of this are the Simurgh a mythical creature from ancient Iranian mythology, and ceramics heavily based on Chinese precedents. Local styles were developed as well, for example, large, white-ground plates and bowls decorated with Arabic aphorisms. Architecture and urban planning show influences from Iran and Central Asia: the tomb of the Samanid ruler Ismail (892–907) in Bukhara is one of the earliest examples of a mausoleum topped with a cupola and with ornamental brick facing.

The expansion of Turkish tribes began at the end of the 10th century. At first, the mercenaries of the Samanid governors declared their independence. Mahmud of Ghazni (998–1030), extended the Ghaznavid empire (962–1186) as far as India. In the west, however, the Seljuks (1037–1157) assumed power. Their expansion was of decisive impor-

### Bowl with Arabic inscription

Samarqand (?), 9th–10th centuries  
Earthenware, white glaze, painting in manganese black,  
height 11 cm, Ø 36 cm  
Inv. I. 26/60

tance for the political and cultural development of the Islamic world. After the conquest of Baghdad (1055), the reorganisation of state structures began under the aegis of Nizam al-Mulk (1065–1092). As a result, a Turkish military aristocracy increasingly influenced by Iranian cultural tradition joined a Persian officialdom and the religious class.

The new political and economic stability and the fostering of Sunnite orthodoxy on the one hand and Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, on the other led to an upswing in the arts and sciences. In architecture, mosques topped by domes supplanted the older type with columned halls. The *iwan*, an open hall with barrel vaulting, became the most important feature of rooms grouped around a courtyard. The smaller arts show technological innovations, such as metal inlay and an expansion of the pictorial repertoire. Ceramic and metal vessels, as well as tiles, present verses from poetry and literature, and Arabic blessings and Persian signatures reveal the names of masters and patrons.

The greatest flowering of such work was already in progress in the later phase of the Seljuk Empire: in 1157 the Turkish Khwarezm Shahs conquered the eastern provinces, and after the invasion of Mongol hordes this important period of Islamic history ended around 1220. The prayer niche (*mihrab*) from the Maidan Mosque in Kashan is an outstanding example of the art of this time. The centre panel shows a threefold, graduated niche with pilasters and six bands of inscription. The latter, executed in Kufic and Naskhi scripts, contain the signature of the master Hasan ibn al-Arabshah, the date, as well as verses from Quran suras. The two inscriptions on the upper capitals relate to the Shi'ite faith. Dated 1226, the niche attests to the survival of the famous Kashan workshops after the Mongol invasion. UF



**Prayer niche from the Maidan Mosque**

Kashan, Iran, dated 1226  
Stonepaste ceramic, lustre decor; blue and  
turquoise underglaze painting, height 280 cm  
Inv. I. 5366





**Folding stand for a large Quran**  
**Carved by Abd al-Wahid bin Sulayman**  
Turkey (Konya), mid-13th century  
Walnut, 107 x 50 cm  
Inv. I. 584

## The Rum Seljuks (1071–1307) and their capital, Konya

Beginning in the mid-11th century the Seljuks, Sunnite Turks, assumed power over the eastern part of the Islamic world. They conquered Baghdad in 1055 and, as sultans, in fact ruled the empire of the caliphs. Again and again, Turkish-speaking tribal bands advanced into Byzantine Anatolia (Rum) until 1071, when the Byzantine army was defeated at the Battle of Manzikert. The Byzantine Empire was driven back to the coastline, and Asia Minor became Turkish.

The period of the Rum Seljuks in Anatolia in the 12th century was characterised by continuous wars with the crusaders, rival Turkish emirates and the Byzantine emperor. It was only under Sultan Ala al-Din Kayqubad I (1219–1236) that the empire attained its full splendour. With trading routes secured and the development of an outstanding infrastructure, its cities, especially the new capital, Konya, enjoyed enormous prosperity. Hospitals, schools and numerous other civil amenities were established along with splendid palaces and fortifications. Konya's most beautiful architectural monuments were erected even after the devastating defeat by the Mongols in 1243, yet the empire could not recover from that blow. The Ottomans, one of the many small Turkmen emirates, took over as heirs of the Rum Seljuks at the beginning of the 14th century.

Of particular importance for Konya was the great Persian-language poet and mystic Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207–1273), ancestor of the famous whirling dervishes. His mausoleum, visible from afar, would become the headquarters of the Mevlevi dervishes, one that attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to this day. The Rum Seljuks are famous for their buildings, particularly their architectural decor employing filigree and three-dimensional stonemasonry, elegant stucco work, underglaze painting and faience mosaics. Their furnishings were mainly made of wood, most with delicate carving. The Museum of Islamic Art displays a unique ensemble from Konya that includes a spectacular Koran stand. Decorated with verses from the Koran and filigree vinework on the foot, it is a masterpiece of Seljuk woodcarving. The intricately carved doors and ornate prayer niche with faience



mosaic decoration from the Beyhekim Mosque (third quarter of the 13th century) are part of this group. The technique of fitting together small pieces of glazed ceramics into mosaics was developed in Iran in the 11th and 12th centuries, and was employed with greatest artistry by the Rum Seljuks in Anatolia in the 13th century. SW

**Door knocker**  
South-east Anatolia, circa 1200  
Bronze, 27.5 x 24 cm  
Inv. I. 2242



**Relief slab with a lute player**  
Turkey, Anatolia, early 13th century  
Marble, 36 x 20 cm  
Inv. I. 7168





## The Ayyubids and Mamluks in Syria and Egypt (1171–1517)

The Ayyubids ruled in Syria and Egypt from 1171 to 1250. Their most important ruler was Salah ad-Din bin Ayyub (“Saladin”), who brought an end to the Fatimid caliphate in 1171 and expanded Cairo as the capital of his new empire. As a leader in the holy war against the crusaders, he reconquered Jerusalem in 1187. The Ayyubids distinguished them-

### **Ewer and basin**

Mosul, 3rd quarter of the 13th century  
Copper alloy inlaid with gold and silver  
Ewer: height 35 cm, basin: Ø 43 cm  
Inv. I. 6580, I. 6581

selves especially in the building of fortifications. In their cities they endowed numerous religious schools, so-called *madrasas*, as a means of strengthening Sunni Islam in opposition to the Shi’ite faith and the Christian crusaders.

A lavish courtly culture was developed in the Ayyubid residences. Aleppo and Damascus were famous for enamelled and gilt glassware, Raqqa for delicate ceramics with underglaze painting, Mosul and Damascus for luxury fabrics and brasswork with silver inlay. After 1250, following the Mongol invasion, many artists from Mosul fled to Syria and Egypt.



The Mamluks, former slave warriors, supplanted the Ayyubids as rulers. After their victory over the Mongols in 1260 and the final annihilation of the Crusader states on the Syrian-Palestinian coast, they managed to establish a relatively stable dominion in Egypt, Syria and the Arabian Peninsula. A shrewd tax policy and a monopoly on the trading of luxury goods and spices between India and Europe secured them high revenues, which allowed the ruling elite to undertake ambitious building projects in Cairo and in provincial capitals like Damascus, Aleppo and Tripoli. Mosques and palaces were furnished with great splendour, the former with donations of precious large-format Qurans, Quran chests and glass chandeliers. Metalwork, glass vessels, silks and wool carpets from manufactories in Damascus and Cairo were greatly sought after in Europe. *MK*

**Polo rider's flask**

Syria or Egypt, circa 1300  
Glass with enamel and gold painting  
Height 28 cm, Ø 19 cm  
Inv. I. 2573



**"Damascus Niche" from a private Samaritan house**

Damascus, 15th–16th centuries  
Marble and coloured stone, partially painted, 302 x 245 cm  
Inv. I. 583





## Arabs and Berbers on the Iberian Peninsula (711–1492)

The history of “al-Andalus” begins with the establishment of a province of the Umayyad Empire on the Iberian Peninsula. For a long time it was marked by conflict with the Christian kingdoms in the north and by conquests by the North African Berber dynasties of the Almoravids and Almohads. During the more peaceful era of the caliphate of Córdoba (929–1031), especially under the caliphs ‘Abd ar-Rahman III and al-Hakam II, the region enjoyed an enormous economic upswing as well as a flowering of science and culture. Works of art from the capital, Córdoba, and the caliphs’ residence

### **Domed roof from the Alhambra**

Granada, early 14th century  
Cedar and poplar, carved and partly painted, 190 x 355 x 355 cm  
Inv.l. 5/78

in Madinat al-Zahra were imitated throughout the Mediterranean region.

The Almoravid and Almohad Empires in North Africa were mainly centred on Kairouan, Tunis and Fez. In the 11th–13th centuries they expanded onto the Iberian Peninsula, and by the end of the 12th century had stabilised themselves, bringing North African influences to the architecture and art of al-Andalus. Despite the advancing Reconquista, which with the conquest of Córdoba in 1236 had penetrated far to the south, the emirate of Granada survived until 1492. Under the Nasrids (1232–1492), it achieved a late cultural flowering, documented above all in the magnificent architectural decoration of the Alhambra. The Museum of Islamic Art owns a Nasrid wooden domed roof from the Spanish palace. It belonged to the German banker Arthur Gwinner, who acquired portions of the Alhambra from the Spanish crown in the 19th century. When he presented the “Torre de las Damas” to the city of Granada, he was given the domed roof in exchange. It came to the museum from his family’s collection in 1978.

*ThT*



### **Lustre bowl**

Manises (Valencia), 15th-century earthenware, Ø 22 cm  
Inv.l. 1906.99



## The Il-Khanids and Timurids in Iran (1258–1506)

Nomadic Mongol horsemen from the Asian steppes under the leadership of Genghis Khan (died 1227) had overrun Central Asia and Iran by 1223. After conquering Baghdad in 1258, Hülegü, brother of the great khan Möngke, founded the empire of the Il-Khanids (1258–1335) with its capitals of Tabriz and Sultaniya (Iran).

The new political order and the “pax Mongolica” occasioned a flowering of culture and trade. Caravans and delegations of the Pope travelled to the Chinese emperor in search of new markets and political allies. Following the conversion to Islam of Ghazan Khan (1295–1304), intensive building activities began. The architectural ornament of the summer palace Takht-e Sulayman (north-west Iran), erected in 1275, documents the entry into Islamic art of such Chinese motifs as the dragon, the phoenix and good-luck symbols. Lajvardina ceramics, ornamented with gold leaf and overglaze painting on a blue ground, was another development of this time.

Another wave of Mongol invasions began under Timur Lenk (1370–1405), penetrating as far as the Volga delta in the west (Golden Horde, 1394) and India in the east (Delhi, 1398). Although we think of the Mongol storms as the ultimate in terror, the reign of the Timurids (1363–1506) was actually also a period of cultural splendour. Timur was a passionate builder although he spent his entire life travelling. In his capital, Samarkand, he erected any number of monumental struc-

tures with large domes and tall portals with towers. Their façades were adorned with faience mosaics and projecting bands of inscriptions, their interiors with sumptuous wall paintings.

Especially popular were exotic materials and blue and white porcelain, which was now being shipped from Chinese manufactories in untold quantities to the courts of Europe and the Islamic world. The most exquisite art of this time is seen in books. The greatest masters were lured to Samarkand from Baghdad and Tabriz. Under Prince Baysonqur, a famous library was established in 1414 in the new capital of Herat, where the miniature painter Behzad (1460–1535) was employed under Husayn Bayqara. Carpets, textiles, wood and metalworking, and ceramics were also of high quality, exhibiting a distinct Far Eastern influence. *UF*



### Wood panel with Arabic inscription (aphorism)

Iran (Mazandaran), 15th century  
Walnut, originally painted black,  
19.8 x 94.2 cm  
Inv. I. 30/75

### Lustre tile with hunting scene

Iran, 13th/early 14th century  
Stonepaste ceramic, overglaze  
painting, traces of gold leaf  
42 x 24.5 cm  
Inv. I. 6218





## The Mshatta Palace Façade

The façade of the Mshatta desert palace is the most important object in the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art and the largest example of Islamic art in any museum. Today, the palace lies next to the airport of the Jordanian capital, Amman. Its façade came to Berlin in 1903 as a gift from the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II to Kaiser Wilhelm II.

### **The Mshatta Palace Façade**

Jordan, 8th century  
Coquina ashlar, carved  
5 x 33 m  
Inv.l.6163

Mshatta was one of the multifunctional, part-time residences erected by the Umayyads in the 8th century in the Syrian-Jordanian desert and adjacent regions. They served as settings for strategic meetings with Bedouin tribal leaders, as bathing or hunting palaces and caravan stations. At Mshatta, twenty-three projecting semicircular towers gave the exterior walls, which are built of coquina ashlar, the appearance of a fortress. Since the structure, covering an area of more than 20,000 square metres, was never finished, only a few rooms were completed. These included a mosque and a central palace area with throne





**The Mshatta Palace Façade**  
Detail from the left part of the façade,  
Triangle H



**The Mshatta Palace Façade**  
Detail from the left part of the façade,  
Triangle I



room and a colonnaded courtyard that incorporated spoils from Roman-era structures. The palace area was adorned with statues and capitals with a rich relief decoration at the doorways. The sole entry into the complex was emphasised by relief decor. Above a base adorned with acanthus leaves and foliate friezes, a zigzag band of acanthus leaves structures the wall surfaces on either side of the gate into triangles filled with a pattern of grapevines. To the left of the gate the vines are enlivened by birds, animals, mythical creatures and even a few human figures. The reliefs, like the structure as a whole, were never finished. Precedents for the vine scrolls decor are found in late antique mosaics from the Near East, and single elements were taken over from Sasanian art. This blending of pictorial motifs from various neighbouring cultures is characteristic of early Islamic art from the mid-8th century.

### The Sasanians (224–651)

In Late Antiquity the Sasanian dynasty, a succession of autocratic great kings, ruled over a large empire which, in addition to its core regions in present-day Iran and Iraq, included large portions of western Asia. It was repeatedly at war with the neighbouring Roman and later Byzantine Empires. It was only during the course of the Islamic expansion that the Sasanians were defeated, and their subject territories incorporated into the Islamic Empire.

Sasanian art and architecture as well as court ceremonial exercised a lasting influence on early Islamic court culture with its love of ostentation. For this reason, the museum has always been eager to add Sasanian art to its collection. In 1928/29 and 1931/32 the museum undertook excavations in the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, in present-day Iraq. The houses unearthed there were decorated with stucco paintings and ornaments, since in this period stucco was the preferred medium for both statues and architectural sculpture. Based on this precedent, stucco decor was also employed in the buildings of the Umayyad caliphs. Among the showpieces of Sasanian art are partially gilt silver vessels, luxury wares created for the court and the aristocracy. Production of stone seals and textiles was also highly developed, examples of which brought elements of Sasanian design to Western Europe.

*KM*



**Sasanian bowl depicting the Persian king of kings on a hunt**

Iran, 7th century  
Silver, partially gilt, Ø 19 cm  
Inv. I. 4925



**Rock crystal ewer**

Egypt, c. 975–1025, with 19th-century  
French mounts, 30.7 x 15 cm  
Keir Collection Edmund de Unger /  
Museum für Islamische Kunst  
Inv.U.51

## Masterworks of Islamic art from the Keir Collection

A selection from the rich holdings of the collection of Edmund de Unger is displayed under the heading “The Joy of Collecting”. Known internationally as the Keir Collection, it is one of the largest private collections of its kind. Edmund de Unger (1918–2011) was raised in Hungary and later lived in England. He began collecting carpets as a young man, then in the late 1950s he discovered his love of Islamic art of all kinds, and he has since amassed his collection with the eye of a connoisseur. The display is organised in three areas. Featured to the right of the entrance is the world of the collector. Edmund de Unger lived with his objects, and each room in his London house is a gallery in itself.

The focus of the entry room is the object, where it was produced and where it ended up – for example, an extraordinary collection of priceless rock crystals is displayed, the production of which flourished during the reign of the Fatimids in Egypt (969–1171). They were produced for the court, for the wealthier classes and for export, and illustrate one of the most important features of Islamic art objects: mobility. Beginning in the mid-11th century in particular, Egyptian rock crystals increasingly found their way along trading and pilgrimage routes to Europe. Reused as reliquaries, they have survived to this day in church treasuries.

The collection itself is presented in the third room. Edmund de Unger has mainly collected according to groupings of materials. The core of the collection is made up of Ottoman, Persian and Indian carpets from the 16th century onwards. A second major interest has been the finely drawn gold lustre ceramics produced in Cairo in the 11th and 12th centuries. Unger has deliberately bought pieces that document the migration of this technique from Egypt by way of Syria into Iran. His collection of blue-and-white ceramics is also exquisite, and his collection of 18th-century ceramics from Kütahya (Turkey) is one of the most comprehensive in the world. The majority of his textiles, in addition to Spanish examples, are the most delicate fabrics from the Ottoman and Safavid period (16th/17th century). Other highlights are valuable works in calligraphy, elaborately decorated book bindings, and magnificent miniatures from Iran, Central Asia and India (16th–17th centuries). SW





**One of Edmund de Unger's  
Sitting rooms**

Ceramics from the  
10th to 14th centuries



**Night-time hunting scene  
with two Mughal princes**

India, late 17th century  
Paper, gouache, gold, 22.5 x 36.6 cm

(This picture, still in the London collection, is expected to come to Berlin  
on permanent loan along with a number of de Unger's other holdings.)



## Book arts

Books play an extremely important role in the Islamic world. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is based on a revealed sacred scripture, the Koran. Religious study fostered an openness to learning, and the Islamic world developed an outstanding culture of scholarship. Particular impetus came from Baghdad, both under the Abbasid caliphs (750–1258) and later as well. Many Muslim rulers owned fine libraries, and commissioned calligraphers, gilders, painters and bookbinders to produce exquisitely ornamented books for them. Calligraphers, who copied the texts in beautiful scripts appropriate to the text, were held in highest esteem. Bookbinders designed splendid bindings in leather or enamel, ornamenting them with various stamping, punching and cut-

### **Part of a Quran with text and opening page**

Iraq or Syria, 10th century  
Parchment with ink and gold illumination,  
21.5 x 32.5 cm  
Inv. I. 2211

out techniques or paintings. Of greatest importance in the production of books was the introduction of papermaking, taken over from the Chinese, in the 8th century.

In the West it is chiefly the books' exquisite miniature paintings that excite admiration. Most of these are illustrations of literary and scientific texts. The earliest surviving paintings were produced in Baghdad, Mesopotamia and northern Syria in the 12th and 13th centuries. After the Mongol conquest of Baghdad the centre of book illumination shifted to Persia, where a new style developed that was strongly influenced by Chinese art. Islamic bookmaking arts reached a high point under the Timurids (1363–1506), whose princes were major patrons. Later, important schools of painting were established under the Persian Safavids, the Indian Mughal emperors and at the Ottoman court in Istanbul.

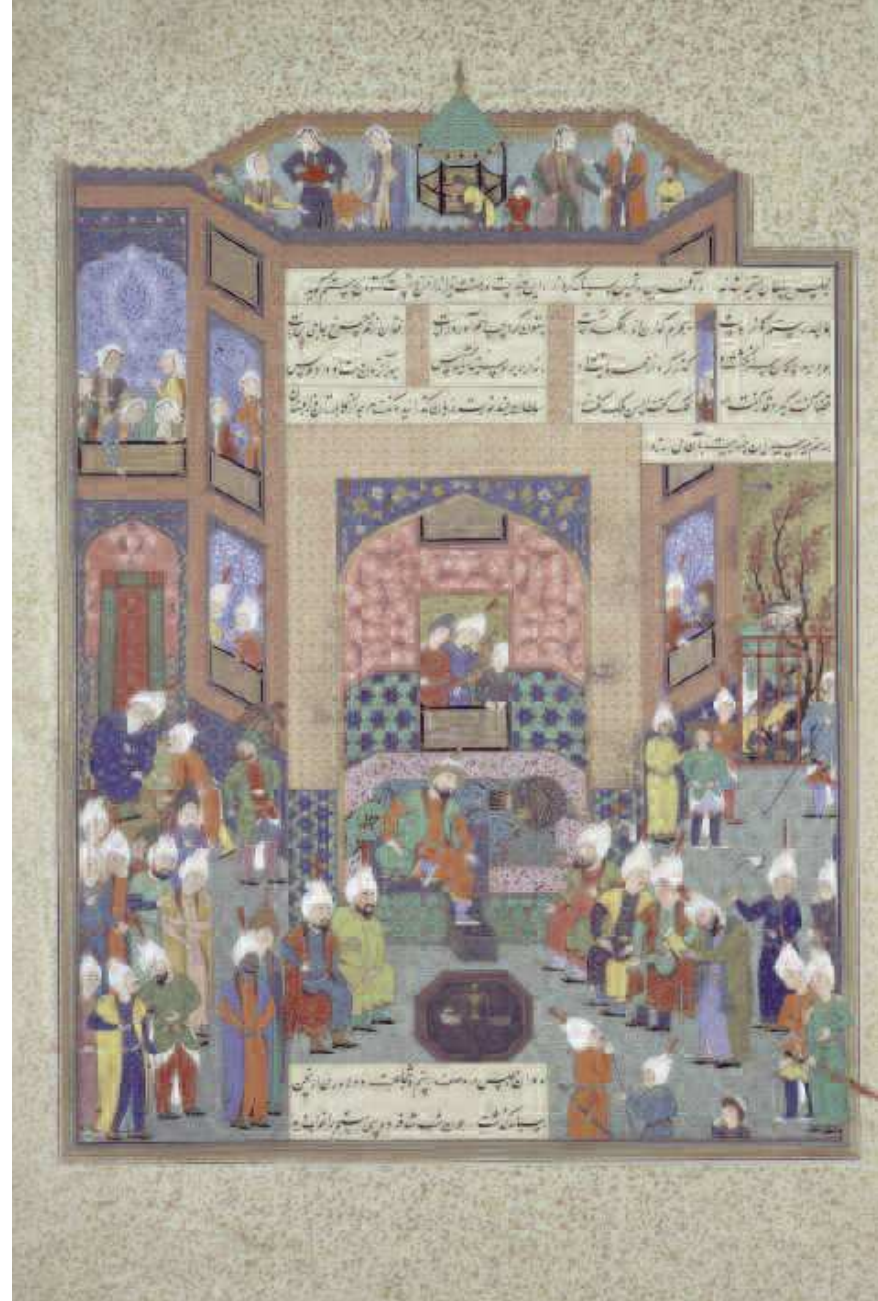




The museum owns an outstanding collection of Islamic book arts, including valuable Korans, calligraphy and important Persian, Turkish and Indian miniature paintings. Ottoman documents and bookbindings are also among its holdings. One important treasure is a series of collectors' albums with some 470 miniatures and samples of scripts which were assembled in Northern India during the second half of the 18th century. JG

**Emperor Jahangir (1605–1628)  
at prayer**

India (Mughal school), circa 1610  
Paper, gouache, gold, 33 x 19.3 cm  
Inv. l. 4596, fol. 13



**The poet Firdausi reciting from his work  
before the Ghaznavid sultan Mahmud**

Folio from Firdausi's Book of Kings (Shahname)  
produced for Shah Tahmasp (1524–1576)  
Iran (Tabriz), circa 1530  
Paper, gouache, gold, 47 x 31.8 cm  
Inv. l. 5/82



## Carpets

Carpets are central to Islamic culture, and it is not surprising that the Western public has always associated them with the Orient. Historical paintings and church treasuries attest to the extensive trade in carpets and their high esteem in the West since the Middle Ages. In the late 19th century, Oriental carpets became collectible art objects. The Museum of Islamic Art's collection is one of the most important ones in the world. It was started in 1904 with the gift of twenty-one carpets from Wilhelm von Bode.

The origins of carpet weaving are still obscure. The Pazyryk Carpet from the 4th century BC indicates that the art of knotting was already highly developed at that time. It was presumably produced in the southern Caucasus, Persia or Central Asia. In addition to a very early example of an Ottoman animal carpet from the 15th century, particularly important are Holbein and Lotto carpets (named after the painters Hans Holbein the Younger [1498–1543] and Lorenzo Lotto [1480–1557] from the 16th century). These typically have a geometric arrangement of panels containing a repeat pattern with interlaced borders derived from Kufic script.

Classic Ottoman carpets from the 16th and 17th centuries are often characterised by large centre stars or medallions. Following the expansion of the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century onwards, carpets were produced not only in the traditional centres, but also in Bursa and Cairo.

The courtly carpets of the Persian Safavids of the 16th/17th centuries are distinguished by symmetrical spiral vines, depictions of animals and hunting scenes. In colour and form, these resemble the animals and plants in contemporary miniatures, and they became the patterns for the carpets of the Indian Mughal dynasty. AB



### Dragon and phoenix carpet

Turkey, mid-15th century  
Wool, knotted, 172 x 90 cm  
Inv. I. 4





**Small-patterned Holbein carpet**

Turkey, 16th century  
Wool, knotted, 275 x 141 cm  
Inv. KGM 1882, 894



**Vase carpet (fragment)**

Iran, c. 1600  
Wool, silk, cotton, knotted, 249 x 144 cm  
Inv. I. 8/72





## The Safavids in Iran (1501–1737)

The Persian Safavid dynasty rose to become a great power in the 16th century. Its first residences were Tabriz and Qazvin. The empire attained its greatest extent under Shah Abbas I (1587–1629), and this was the period of its fullest flowering. Isfahan developed into its most important economic centre and was built up as the capital. A state monopoly controlled the most important branches of industry, foreign trade flourished and foreign merchants and artists were summoned into the country. There were especially close relations with the Mughal rulers in India.

To this day, Isfahan has one of the most beautiful squares in the Islamic world. The buildings are ornamented with colourful faience mosaics, compositions of painted tiles and wall paintings. Secular

### Zodiac plate

Iran (Yazd or Kirman), 1563/64  
Stonepaste ceramic, underglaze painting,  
Ø 41 cm  
Inv. I. 1292

### Candlestick

Western Iran, end of the  
16th/beginning of the 17th century  
Copper alloy, engraved, height 34.5 cm,  
Ø at base 19.5 cm  
Inv. KGM S1199

buildings present numerous figurative scenes. The Safavid residences attracted concentrations of bookmaking workshops that produced, in addition to masterpieces of Persian miniature painting and calligraphy, designs for the inscriptions on buildings. Carpets for the court and the great mosques were produced in the manufactories in Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan, Kirman and Herat. Safavid woodcarving and inlay work, instrument and weapon-making, and glass from Shiraz were all of the highest quality.

Inspired by Chinese porcelains and celadons, the ceramic masters of Kirman, Mashhad and Yazd developed a fine white ware with which they could imitate Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, but could also be used for vessels in their own Persian-Islamic tradition. The Museum's so-called Zodiac Plate is unique; presumably it was used in making astrological predictions. The sequence and naming of the twelve signs of the zodiac follow ancient tradition, yet the vine ornament and style of the pictures are wholly Islamic and Persian.

Exquisite botanical ornaments decorate numerous Safavid metal objects as well, at times supplemented by religious inscriptions or verses from the most famous Persian poets. The beauty and quality of Safavid copper work, with its precise and highly detailed engraving, were unmatched. *GH*







## The Ottomans (1300–1922)

The Ottomans, originally rulers of a small emirate in Anatolia, developed into a major power that would conquer Constantinople in 1453, Mamluk Egypt in 1517 and, finally, nearly the whole of North Africa, the Near East and the Balkan Peninsula. Constantinople, later renamed Istanbul, became their ultimate capital. The empire attained its greatest economic, political and cultural sway under Sultan Süleyman I (1520–1566) and again in the second half of the 17th century. Its defeat outside Vienna in 1683 ended its expansion into Europe. After the First World War the Ottoman Empire was dissolved.

High Ottoman style blended Turkish-Seljuk traditions, Arabic calligraphy, East Asian and Persian pattern elements, and floral motifs drawn directly from nature in a unique way. European influence becomes increasingly apparent beginning in the 18th century. The court workshop in Istanbul produced designs for architectural decor, art and crafts, and the capital continued to be the centre of Ottoman art production, although important works were also produced in cities like Damascus, Aleppo (see Room 16) and Cairo. The Balkans were known for outstanding works in silver, and up into modern times Bursa was the heart of Ottoman silk weaving. The sultan's palace, the Topkapı Sarayı, and the great mosques in Istanbul were patterned after structures

### Tile lunette with band of red clouds

Panel from the admiral Piyale Pasha I building complex in Istanbul, completed in 1573  
Turkey (Iznik), 2nd half of the 16th century  
Stonepaste ceramic, underglaze painting, 72 x 144 cm  
Inv. 1891, 102

in the previous capitals of Edirne and Bursa. Inspired by Hagia Sophia, high Ottoman mosques with their great domes and slender, tall minarets took on a new dimension.

In building decor, painted tiles from the workshops in Iznik in western Anatolia predominated from the end of the 15th century onwards. Along with calligraphic friezes, whole panels of tiles were composed, on which a lush ornamental floral world unfolded in blue, green and gleaming red bole on a mainly white ground. In addition to tiles, Iznik produced plates and other vessels ornamented with characteristic Ottoman floral decor. In the 16th century, Chinese porcelains from the Yuan and early Ming dynasties from the 14th and 15th centuries inspired the fashion for “Ottoman chinoiserie”, which was met by the masters of Iznik with magnificent imitations of Chinese precedents.

GH



### Vase in the Chinese style

Turkey (Iznik), early 16th century  
Stonepaste ceramic, underglaze painting,  
height 18 cm, Ø 17 cm  
Inv. I. 1994.36



## The Aleppo Room

The so-called Aleppo Room contains the oldest surviving and artistically most valuable painted wall panelling from the Ottoman Empire. It was created around 1600 for the reception room of a Christian residence in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, Aleppo was for thousands of years a crossroads of various trading routes. With its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire beginning in 1516, it experienced a flowering that left behind imposing architectural monuments. Like most of the cities in the Ottoman Empire, Aleppo was characterised by religious diversity, and Christians of almost all confessions lived in the branching alley-

### **The Aleppo Room in the Museum of Islamic Art**

Syria (Aleppo), dated 1600/01, 1603  
Painting on wood, 2,6 x 35 m  
Inv. l. 2862

ways. One of them, the broker Isa bin Butrus, was the owner of this house.

The reception room (*qa'a*) of his residence (Bait al-Wakil), now used as a hotel, and the rest of the living rooms are grouped around an interior courtyard. Guests entered from the courtyard into a marble-panelled threshold area where they removed their shoes, then settled on low divans on slightly elevated seating galleries. The entry area had a fountain and was roofed with a dome. The wall panelling is decorated with the most magnificent paintings. On the right at the back of the centre seating gallery are religious motifs (Jesus as a child in the Temple, the Last Supper, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and Salome's dance before Herod). On the left, in the Persian-Muslim painting tradition, are scenes of courtly life. In addition to Saint George killing the dragon,



there are religious scenes that would have been familiar to adherents of all Abrahamic religions in Aleppo. In Islamic belief, Abraham and Jesus were precursors of Muhammed as prophets. Mary and her child are pictured five times, as they were particularly venerated in popular belief. Christian and Islamic motifs are also taken up in the inscriptions, so that visitors of the various confessions might feel welcome in the room. The rich pictorial programme and the delicately calligraphed poems and aphorisms provide cultivated diversion, while onlookers find entertainment in the wrestlers, acrobats and literary motifs. Showy peacocks, birds of paradise, hares, ducks and other animals enliven the walls. Fabulous beasts derived from Chinese art, like the dragon, the mystical Persian bird Simurgh as phoenix, and the mythical Chinese Qilin, lead into a fantastic animal world that illustrates the wonders of Creation in the form of real and mythical realms. This is supported by a rich floral decor in the high Ottoman tradition that was probably inspired by textile designs. Specific flower forms like the characteristic tulips, carnations and hyacinths can also be seen on fabrics, carpets or the famous ceramics from znik (see Room 11).

The leading painter was probably of Persian origin. He and his workshop produced extremely high-quality paintings that borrow from diverse traditions and that are representative of Aleppo's common Muslim-Christian culture in the 16th and 17th centuries. In the 19th



**Visitors in an Aleppo home**

From: A. Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo*, London 1794



century especially, thanks to increased interchange with Europe, new dwelling forms and decorative styles were adopted. Wood panelling fell out of favour, and examples that survived were either sold or discarded. The Wakil family sold this ensemble to the Museum of Islamic Art in 1912.

SW

**Angel. Detail from the Aleppo Room**

Syria (Aleppo), dated 1600/01, 1603  
 Painting on wood  
 Inv. I. 2862