

Islam and the Arts of the Ottoman Empire



Acknowledgments

Packet written and coordinated by Brian Hogarth
Director of Education, Asian Art Museum

Section on Islamic Calligraphy written by Stephanie Kao,
Program Coordinator, Asian Art Museum

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Professor Irene Bierman, UCLA
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Why Islam? Why the Ottomans?

This packet accompanies the traveling exhibition, *Empire of the Sultans, Ottoman art from the Khalili collection*. The exhibition offers a glimpse of the artistic legacy of one of the great Islamic empires, the Ottomans. The Ottomans ruled over a vast empire that linked Europe, North Africa and West Asia for six centuries. Their history and art has had a profound influence on modern Europe and The Middle East.

To understand the Ottomans as an Islamic culture, it is necessary to provide some background on Islam and Islamic art in general. Teachers will find a summary of the beliefs of Islam as well as information on the Koran and on mosques. The Khalili collection is especially strong in the arts of the book, and for that reason we have included a section on Islamic calligraphy with related student activities.

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture contains a small but important collection of West Asian and Islamic arts, particularly ceramics. A previous packet—*The Islamic Arts of Asia*—covered some of these objects and provided some background materials on Islamic art. This packet, while concentrating on the Ottomans, includes a number of contextual slides that teachers can use in any lesson on Islamic history and culture.

Points for discussion

Aside from viewing the slides, here are some points to consider with your students:

- How did Islam (as a religion) influence the arts of the Ottomans?
- How did calligraphy assume such an important position in Islamic art?
- Compare the mosque with other forms of religious architecture. List the main parts of a mosque and describe its decoration
- Describe the role of the (Ottoman) sultans and their life at court
- How did science serve the interests of the Islamic faith?
- What accounts for the expansion of the Ottoman empire in the 1400s–1500s? What was the role of the military? The government? The sultan as leader?
- What impact did the rise of the Ottoman empire have on Europe?

Other suggestions:

1. Draw a timeline listing some of the Ottoman sultans and events mentioned in this packet; have the students research key dates for two other Islamic dynasties—the Safavids in Iran and the Mughals in India; now list some of the key names in European history during that time and see how they relate in time with the Ottomans

2. Have the students research words and objects associated with the Ottomans and the Ottoman period such as:

- turkey
- tulip
- ottoman
- divan
- sofa
- tents
- turban
- harem
- coffee
- croissant

Discuss the origin of these words, and how their meanings have changed (or not changed) over time.

3. Discuss the role of Islamic carpets in terms of trade and exchange, as a practical household objects and as works of art.

Introduction to the Islamic world

What is Islam?

Islam is one of the world's major religions. It shares with Judaism and Christianity a belief in a single god. The Arabic name for God is *Allah*. The word *Islam* means “surrender (to God).” The followers of Islam are called *Muslims*, which in Arabic means “one who surrenders to God.”

While Islam is mainly associated with the Middle East, its roughly one billion followers are found throughout the world. The largest Islamic communities exist in the nations of Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There are also sizeable communities throughout West Africa, India, and in parts of China.

Central to the beliefs of Islam is the idea of one, omnipotent God who transcends class, race, and national differences. All Muslims therefore share a sense of community beyond national or ethnic boundaries. The process of conversion to Islam is fairly simple: one merely has to declare one's faith. There is no need for formal confirmation by a religious authority.

Muslims believe in the word of God contained in the holy book called the Koran (sometimes spelled Qur'an or Kur'an), as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel between 610–623 ce in Arabia. They also follow practices known as the “Five Pillars of Islam.”

The Five Pillars of Islam

Central to the Islamic faith are the essential duties and practices known as the Five Pillars of Islam. These are:

- The profession of faith or *shahada*
- The duty to perform five daily prayers or *salat*
- The obligation to provide alms or *zakat*
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan
- Pilgrimage to Mecca

Profession of faith (*shahada*)

The profession of faith is known as the *shahada*. It is the prerequisite for membership in the Muslim community, and an affirmation of the faith. Muslims are required to declare this profession in public at least once in their lifetime, but most Muslims recite it daily as part of their prayers.

In Arabic, the *shahada* is as follows: “Ashhadu al-la ilaha illa-llah was ashhadu anna Muhammadar rasulu-llah” translated as “ I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Messenger” or more simply, “There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger.”

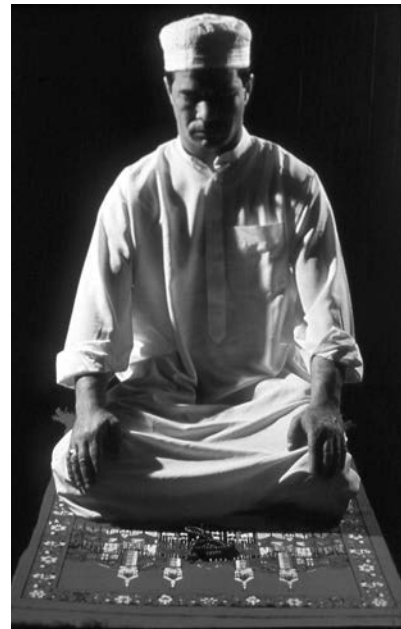
The profession of faith is designed not only for public affirmation, but also to encourage true conviction and sincerity of mind on the part of the worshipper. Seemingly simple, the phrase is absolutely central to the practice of Islam. Muhammad is reported to have said, “These few words are equal to one third of the Koran.”

Prayer (*salat*)

Prayer is an essential duty of every Muslim, and the second Pillar of Islam. It is performed five times a day. These times are dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. Before prayer, there is ritual cleansing and purification. Typically this means washing one's hands, mouth, nose, face, ears, forearms, head, and feet three times with the right hand. If there is no water is available, sand may be substituted.

Prayer itself consists of three or four cycles of ritual bowing and prostration along with recitation of parts of the Koran and other prayers in Arabic. All end with the phrase, "May peace, mercy and blessings be upon you."

Muslims can perform prayer just about anywhere, but the most favored place is in the mosque. A crier (*muezzin*) calls the faithful to prayer (*adhan*). The holy day each week is Friday. The congregation of worshippers at the mosque is led by the religious leader or *imam*. Prayers, wherever they take place, must be performed in the direction of Mecca. This direction is indicated by the *kiblah*, a word meaning "direction of prayer." It is indicated in a mosque by a wall (referred to as the *kiblah* wall) that is usually marked by a niche called the *mihrab*.



Almsgiving (*zakat*)

The third Pillar of Islam is a call to charity. There are two categories: compulsory and voluntary. Compulsory almsgiving resembles a tax for all Muslims, payable to either the community or state. It is calculated on the basis of one's possessions and income, and usually equates to 2.5% of a person's annually accumulated wealth. This system ensures that the poor will be at least partly provided for and encourages a sentiment of sharing among the various social classes. Almsgiving also has spiritual value, as a way of atoning for one's sins and ensuring salvation in the afterlife. Voluntary almsgiving (*sadaqa*) should be performed freely and spontaneously, with discretion and sincerity.

Fasting (abstinence)

Fasting (*sawm*) is a ritual observance during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims are required to abstain from eating, drinking, and sexual activities between sunrise and sundown. Nursing and pregnant mothers, the sick, and children up to the age of puberty are permitted to break the fast. Ramadan is important, because it marks the time in the year when the Koran began to be revealed to Muhammad.

Pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*)

All Muslims who have the physical and materials means to do so are encouraged to visit Mecca at least once in their lifetimes. The pilgrimage occurs during part of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. Modern transportation allows millions of Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca,

where the focus is the structure known as the Kaaba (see slide #1). Pilgrims wear white, symbolizing the equality of all Muslims before God. Having arrived at Mecca, each pilgrim typically walks around the Kaaba seven times. This is followed by a set of other ritual observances such as walking between the hills overlooking the Kaaba, standing on Mt. Arafat, and traveling to nearby Minah, all sites that commemorate aspects of Islamic history and faith. Pilgrims also frequently visit the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. Both the month of pilgrimage to Mecca and the month of Ramadan end in festive celebrations.

The Koran

The Koran is a record of the divine words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muhammad memorized these words and transmitted them orally. They were compiled in written form several decades after his death.

The word Koran means “recitation.” The Koran is recited by Muslims as an act of commitment in worship during prayer. The Koran is considered to be miraculous, and its divine authorship is proven by the principle of inimitability (*iʿjaz*); that is, no human can match its language and beauty.

Muslims believe that the Koran contains the last revealed words of God, updating earlier revelations given to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Because the Prophet Muhammad spoke God’s word in his native Arabic and the divine message was first written down in Arabic, the Arabic language is the one true language of the revelation. For Muslims, a true Koran is never translated into other languages, neither into Turkish, Persian, nor the languages of Southeast Asia or West Africa, despite substantial Muslim populations in these areas. All Muslims must recite the Koran and all prayers in Arabic. Arabic is therefore the central unifying force of Islam, serving to bind together believers throughout the world.

The Koran contains 114 chapters called *surah*. Except for the opening chapter, these are arranged according to length from the longest to the shortest. Initial chapters concern the legal and political problems of the original community of believers at Medina, while the later ones provide Muhammad’s ethical messages. Each chapter, except one, begins with the phrase known as *bismillah*: “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.” Traditionally, Korans were bound in either one or two volumes or separated into thirty parts.

The study of the Koran and its teachings was especially emphasized in *madrasa*, institutions of higher learning that were part of the complex surrounding every mosque. A thorough grounding in Arabic was either a prerequisite for entry into—or part of the core curriculum of—every *madrasa*. Writing practice was extremely important. Calligraphy became the most highly revered art form in the Islamic world.



Illustration of pilgrims en route to Mecca, 1200s.

Islamic law

Over the centuries following the birth of Islam, scholars worked diligently to establish the authenticity of various sayings attributed to the Prophet. Such sayings often emerged in support of the claims of various sects. Scholarly efforts culminated in the compilation of several collections known as *Hadith*, two of which are considered to be especially important. Islamic law developed principally from the Koran and the *Hadith* as primary sources of interpretation. If references could not be found in these primary sources, they were found by reference to legal analogy or *qiyas* (a precedent from a similar situation that arisen before), or through the consensus of the community or *ijma*. Islamic law is collectively known as the *Sharia*. *Sharia* literally means “ the path leading to water.” In other words, the law leads to the source of life.

In the West, church and state evolved in ways that govern different aspects of individual life, but in the Islamic world, religion permeates all aspects of one’s life. Islamic law determines such things as greetings, drinking and eating habits, dress, the relationship between men and women, and much more. This adherence to religious custom does not stem (as is sometimes the view from the West) from a willingness to live in a state of oppression, but rather proceeds from the belief that all life extends from the will of God, and to act in accordance with the divine will is to live in harmony with what is right and true. Thus, even the smallest mundane activities can be imbued with religious significance.

Mystics and scholars

Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, was a distinct tradition within Islam that aimed to cultivate inner spiritual life. Sufism probably derives from the word *suf*, meaning wool, a reference to the woolen clothing worn by early Sufi mystics.

The focus of Sufism changed over the centuries as Islam grew and expanded. Initially moved by the fear of God, Sufism eventually adopted an affirming doctrine of love, and later the concept of the spiritual journey of the individual towards God. Sufism certainly appealed to worshippers on an emotional level. Sufi masters or *shaikhs* attracted disciples. New practices such as singing, dancing, and the worship of saints were introduced into the faith.

Sufi claims to experience God directly led to conflicts with learned scholars or *ulama*, who insisted on faith based on learning the scriptures. The *ulama* focused their efforts on the transmission of knowledge through institutional means, through teaching in schools, and the administration of other social organizations such as hospitals and orphanages. Both Sufi mystics and *ulama* (scholars) traveled extensively throughout Arab lands and beyond in search of knowledge and to help spread the faith.

Islamic cultural achievements

Historians frequently remind us of the many contributions that Islamic peoples have made to world culture. Many argue that the Islamic world is at the heart of world civilization, particularly during the medieval period.

Historically, Arab scholars made their most significant achievements in the areas of science, mathematics, astronomy, geography, and medicine. These accomplishments include our present system

of numbers, the development of algebra and trigonometry, the beginnings of optics, and the development of various instruments for navigation according to stellar movement, tools that eventually aided western explorers. In medicine, Arab scholars kept alive the work of the Greek Hippocrates, advising that doctors observe the patient in order to determine the cause of illness. Arab medical texts were transmitted to Europe and were still in use there through the 1600s.

Other significant accomplishments include the organization of the military and state administration, textile and carpet production, the use of various spices for foods (which crusaders returning from the Holy Land introduced to Europe), and much more. (Islamic artistic achievements are explored elsewhere in this packet.)

The history of Islam (to the 14th century)

Beginnings: the life of Muhammad

Islam arose through the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, in the world of the Arabian peninsula. In the early centuries ce, the Arabian peninsula was home to various nomads, who later became known as Bedouins. By the 400s, some of these groups had established settlements such as the town of Mecca where Muhammad was born. Mecca was growing as an important stop on the caravan routes that linked Arabia with the present day regions of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. Political power at the time was split between two competing empires—the Sasanians to the north-east, and the Byzantines to the west. The rise of Islam would upset this balance of power and create a new order.

The inhabitants of Mecca believed in numerous gods. Despite the presence of Christianity and Judaism, many people had trouble accepting the idea of worship as a means to ensure salvation in an afterlife. When later Islamic writers and historians wrote about these pre-Islamic peoples, they characterized the non-believers as idol worshippers. Islam called the Jews and Christians “the people of the book” because they shared a similar heritage, even though the message of the Prophet supplanted their teachings.

Muhammad was born approximately 570 years after the birth of Christ. He was orphaned at the age of five or six and was subsequently raised by his grandfather and paternal uncle. He belonged to the Hashim clan, a sub-group of the Quraysh tribe that dominated Mecca.

During his early adult life, Muhammad was employed as a caravan driver for a rich merchant woman named Khadija. The two eventually married (despite the difference in age, Muhammad was twenty five, she was forty) and had six children (two of whom did not survive). Muhammad’s life was relatively unremarkable until the age of forty, when he began to receive revelations in a series of visions and angelic voices. Understandably, this caused a crisis in Muhammad’s life, but there was no denying the authority of the message, and so he began to preach.

The citizens of Mecca did not take kindly to the Prophet’s words, for he bluntly repudiated the prevailing practices (including the worship of tribal ancestors) proclaiming instead the omnipotence of the one true God. With a handful of followers, he was eventually forced to flee the city in 622. This journey is known as the *Hijra* and marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar (year 1). The city to which Muhammad fled—Yathrib—was renamed Medina, from *Madinat-al-Nabi*, “the city of the Prophet.” It was the first city to be guided by the new Islamic beliefs. Muhammad envisioned a social order based on equality and justice rather than on tribal and clan associations. The revelations he had received provided not only a vision of one God, but also guidelines for proper conduct and righteous living. All aspects of one’s life were to be lived as though in the sight of God. Worship was directed towards Mecca—the site of a holy sanctuary known as the Kaaba, which represented God’s presence on earth. The Prophet’s own house became the first *masjid* (mosque) where worship took place, and a freed black slave named Bilal was the first to call the faithful to prayer.

During his time in Medina, Muhammad was able to consolidate his followers and build allies. Commercial trade going to Mecca was disrupted to such an extent that he was able to negotiate a truce with the rival city. Roughly ten years after his flight, Muhammad returned with an army of

followers and conquered the city of Mecca, almost without bloodshed. Medina and Mecca were thus established as two of the sacred sites associated with the birth of Islam. By the Prophet's death in 632, the Muslim community dominated western Arabia.



The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is considered to be the third most sacred site in Islam. It marks the site where Muhammad miraculously journeyed to heaven one night. The structure was restored during the Ottoman period. Photo: Kathleen Cohen.

The spread of Islam—600s to 1300s

After Muhammad's death, the question of succession was the most pressing problem. Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father-in-law, became the first successor, later referred to as "caliph." He quickly subdued rival claims and opposition groups. By 634, the whole Arabian peninsula was brought under his control. Within a few decades, after remarkable victories against Byzantine and Sasanian forces, this territory had expanded to include most of present-day Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Fervent beliefs combined with military campaigns became known as *jihad*, the holy war designed to bring non-believers into submission. (The word *jihad* is used now more often to describe any struggle or effort that one goes through as part of the faith.)

The first major divisions of the faith occurred in 656, with the murder of the third caliph Uthman. Succession was the major problem once again. A man named Ali was proclaimed as the new caliph, but he was contested by leaders of the Umayyad clan. The Umayyads assumed leadership in 661 after Ali was assassinated. Followers of Ali, known as Shi'ites, rallied around Ali's son al-Husayn, but al-Husayn and his family were killed by Umayyad forces in 680. Shi'ites formed a separate branch within Islam. The majority of Muslims became known as Sunnis. Major divisions of the Muslim community to this day are still based on different interpretations of these events.

The period of the first caliphs and Umayyad dynasty came to end with the military takeover by the Abbasid family in 750, claiming descent from the Prophet's uncle. The capital moved from Damascus in Syria to Baghdad. The Islamic world was continuing to expand during this time. New campaigns brought North Africa under Islamic rule. Muslim forces reached into Europe, only to be halted in the Loire region by the Franks under Charles Martel. The areas around Bukhara, Fergana and Samarkand came under Islamic control, and Muslim armies pushed into Pakistan and the Indus river valley.

The Abbasid caliphs established a professional army made up of foreign soldiers called *mamluk*, and at one point, a new city had to be built to separate the non-Arab soldiers from the citizens of

Baghdad. By the middle of the 900s, the Abbasid caliphs were largely figureheads, with real power being held by powerful military figures. Later, the Mamluks would go on to establish their own dynasty.

Gradually, the Islamic world was breaking up into competing dynasties. In North Africa, descendants of the Prophet's daughter Fatima established a new dynasty based out of Cairo. In 756, an Umayyad prince who had escaped the Abbasid takeover founded a new dynasty in Spain that would lead to a great flowering of culture there from the 800s to the 1100s. Similarly, an Iranian dynasty arose in the east with the Samanids (819–1005). They were loyal to the caliphs, but essentially operated as an independent state. Under their leadership, there was cultural flourishing. For example, the Persian national epic, the *Shahnameh*, was written during this time. The Samanids were overtaken by the Ghaznavids and then by the Seljuks. The Seljuks and Samanids were the first groups to use the term “sultan” (“power”). From this time on, Turkish-speaking peoples continued to migrate into Islamic territory, and were to play an increasingly important role in the formation of succeeding dynasties.

The 1100s and 1200s brought significant changes throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. With the downfall of caliphs came an end to a period of single rulers overseeing all Islamic states. The dream of a single guardian of the faith, however remained a goal for many future dynastic leaders. For example, when the Ottomans later took control of Medina and Mecca in the 1500s, they assumed a role similar to that of the earlier caliphs in governing the area considered the heart of Islam.

From the west came the crusaders, bent on restoring Christian control over the Holy Lands. A Kurdish officer named Saladin seized the opportunity to take control of the region and defeated the crusaders at the battle of Hattin in 1187. Isolated pockets of crusader strongholds held out for another century. From the east came the invading Mongol forces. Sweeping down from northern Iran and the Caucasus, they defeated the Seljuks in 1243 and seized Baghdad in 1258. Their westward advance was finally halted in Egypt by Mamluk forces. A century later, Timur (Tamerlane) attempted to re-establish the Mongol empire from his capital at Samarkand, but his project was short lived. The Mongol invasions uprooted populations, including Turkish-speaking peoples, who were pushed into the region of Anatolia (present-day Turkey). This migration set the stage for the rise of three great Islamic dynasties—the Ottomans in Anatolia and the Middle East, the Safavids in Iran, and the Mughals in India. (The story of the Ottomans is described in a separate section of this packet.)

An Overview of Islamic Art

The term “Islamic art” is somewhat misleading, as it implies art produced only for religious purposes. In fact, what is described as Islamic art includes much more. Islamic art encompasses not only the arts of the mosque, the Koran, and other religious texts and artifacts, but also secular arts produced for the states, rulers, and dynasties that followed the Islamic faith. Islamic art includes many media, materials, and functions—in the arts of worship, the arts of trade and commerce, historical, scientific and government documents, items of personal adornment, metal arts, ceramics, woven textiles and carpets.

Some general characteristics of Islamic art are listed below, followed by a section on the mosque as an architectural form, and a discussion of Ottoman arts and patronage.

Some general characteristics of Islamic art

Among the many forms of Islamic art, high esteem is given to religious architecture, most notably the mosque. Among all the arts of Islam, religious writing is most revered, including writing and decoration of the holy Koran and calligraphy used on the mosque and other religious structures. Islamic art emphasizes the glorification of God’s words, and embellishing passages from sacred texts with beautiful images of geometric and floral designs.

Unlike Christian and Buddhist arts, for example, in which there are many representations of stories involving the depiction of human figures, Islamic art strongly discourages the rendering of the human figure for art that has a religious purpose. The worship of idols is especially taboo. One never finds a human statue in the mosque, or a painted figure illustrating the pages of the Koran. However, the representation of living things in visual art is not strictly forbidden. Rather, various scriptures suggest that the artist should not attempt to re-create what only God is capable of doing. The artist should not attempt to create something that gives the illusion or impression of a living creature.

Despite these beliefs, the human figure does appear in Islamic art, mostly in illustrated histories and literary works of a secular nature. These paintings and manuscripts were typically commissioned by the courts to glorify their position, or claim legitimacy by linking their exploits to famous people and legends of the past. These works were made for private viewing, not for use in public or in worship.

According to the Linda Komaroff, Curator of Islamic Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, “...in Islamic cultures, the so-called decorative arts provide the primary means of artistic expression, in contrast to western art, in which painting and sculpture are preeminent. Illuminated manuscripts, woven textiles and carpets, inlaid metalwork, blown glass, glazed ceramics and carved wood and stone all absorbed the creative energies of artists, becoming highly developed art forms. These works include small-scale objects of daily use, such as delicate glass beakers, as well as more monumental architectural decoration, for example, glazed panels from building facades. Such objects were meticulously fabricated and carefully embellished, often with rare and costly materials, suggesting that the people for whom they were made sought to surround themselves with beauty.”

An important role for the Islamic artist was to create a sense of wonderment (*ajib*) or astonishment.

Therefore, great emphasis was placed on the surface decoration of objects. Islamic art appears to revel in an extraordinary range of techniques and designs applied to practical objects, in addition to buildings and sacred writings. Many of these designs combine geometric and vegetal elements. One design in particular is emblematic of Islamic art: the arabesque.

The arabesque consists of leaf shapes and tendrils that have been stylized, abstracted, and interlaced into a geometric framework that appears to extend indefinitely in all directions. This patterning suited the decoration of buildings extremely well. It probably first appeared in Baghdad, the cultural capital of the Islamic world in the 900s. Later philosophers would extol the moral and philosophical virtues of such designs. To them, the degree of refinement demonstrated in these designs indicated the level and sophistication of the cultures that created them. Forms that repeated themselves in a seemingly endless pattern were likened to the infinite nature of God's creation. An emphasis on surface design may also have resulted from the accumulated expertise of artists concentrating on this type of art form, rather than on figurative arts.



Arabesque designs on tiles covering the dome of the Madrasa-i-Shah (mosque) at Isfahan, Iran.

Another important emphasis in Islamic art is the attention given to gardens, both to actual physical gardens, and to the representation of gardens in paintings, carpets, and in the layout and decoration of buildings. The aim, however, was not to create the illusion of a real garden on the surface of a building. The depiction of gardens was linked to the many vivid descriptions of paradise in the sacred writings. Such understanding of a transcendental paradise seems natural considering the extremely dry, arid, and mountainous regions that make up much of the Islamic world. In scripture, paradise is like a beautiful oasis. Those who pass the final judgment by living in accordance with the true faith, it is believed, will arrive in a lush garden, filled with abundant greenery and flowing water.

The mosque as architectural form

Buildings known as mosques (from the Arabic *masjid* meaning place of prostration) are associated with the presence of Islam throughout the world. The mosque is any place where worshippers convene to pray, as prayer is a requirement of their faith. Mosques should not be confused with holy shrines such as the Haram in Mecca that serve as sacred sites and focal points for pilgrimages.

The earliest mosques are thought to have been based on the Prophet Muhammad's seventh-century home in Medina (in present-day Saudi Arabia). Requirements for mosques included a space for congregational prayer, directed toward Mecca—the site of a sacred sanctuary—and covered to protect worshippers from the weather. Within a few years of Muhammad's death, mosques became such important symbols of the faith that when Muslim conquerors established themselves in any location, a place for prayer was created first and the military camp built around it.

The mosque did not evolve in isolation, but in many instances evolved from other religious structures in lands that were newly conquered or converted to Islam. These existing structures were adapted and reoriented for Muslim prayer. Many Christian basilicas in Syria and Anatolia were adapted for use as mosques in this way.

The building and upkeep of the mosque was traditionally seen as the responsibility of the state. Maintenance of the mosque was equivalent to maintaining the welfare of the community—indeed, a large mosque was originally designed to hold an entire community under its roof. Large mosques where one prayed and heard sermon were called *masjid al-jami* (the mosque of the community), also known as “the Friday mosque” because all adult males convened at the mosque on Fridays, the Muslim holy day

The exterior design of the mosque evolved from a simple structure consisting of a single domed roof set upon a square base. Domes remained prominent features as the mosque complex grew to include various buildings that served as hospitals, schools, libraries, inns, and soup kitchens. A well and fountains for ritual cleansing—required before prayer—are essential features of the mosque. The minarets, or towers, are both decorative and practical, as the call to prayer is issued from them. Very early mosques had no minarets. Some early minarets stood alone and may have been used as watchtowers or commemorative structures.

Inside the mosque, one wall (*kiblah*) with an elaborately decorated niche (*mihrab*) indicates the direction of Mecca, which is the direction that all worshippers bow to while praying. The orientation of the mosque is such that a line drawn from Mecca would hit the building at right angles. The floors of the mosque are covered with rugs placed side-by-side and end-to-end. Sermons are delivered from pulpits known as the *minbar*. The *imam*, or prayer leader, delivers his sermon from the lower steps; only the Prophet Muhammad preached from the top-most step.



Süleymaniye mosque in Istanbul.

Large mosques are designed to hold very large congregations. Some can hold thousands of worshippers. Unlike Christian cathedrals that feature long naves for processional worship, the mosque tends to be square-shaped or even wider in form, for the simple reason that most worshippers want to be as close to the *kiblah* wall as possible.

Even with these consistent features, mosques throughout Islamic countries vary considerably. Local history and traditions, building materials and styles, and aesthetic preferences have resulted in a great variety of structures. Ottoman mosques, such as the Süleymaniye (left and on slide # 7) were greatly influenced by the Byzantine basilicas that preceded them, such as the Hagia Sophia. The basic shape of the Ottoman mosque is a dome on a square. The interiors of these mosques contain large tile panels, resplendent with rich colors and designs. In earlier times, these tiles

were individually colored and applied. Later techniques allowed for multiple colors to be used on each tile. Underglaze coloring techniques were developed in the Ottoman period by Iznik potters who created wares for use in the palace.

Iranian mosques built around the same time as the Ottomans are distinguished by the presence of huge open porches called *iwan* that face on to a central open courtyard. The vaulting (*muqarnas*) above the doorway on the *iwan* is covered with glazed tilework and resembles a cascade of stalactites. The *iwan* symbolizes the transition point between the outer world of material concerns and the inner world of the spiritual realm. *Iwan* first developed in the *madrasa*, or schools that became part of the mosque complex. The classic example of this type of mosque is the Great Friday mosque in the center of Isfahan (Iran).

Ottoman art

The art of the Ottomans reflects the diversity of their empire. Artistic influences also came from neighboring cultures, and the nomadic, Central Asian origins of the Ottomans themselves. These influences infused the capital at Istanbul from as far away as China, Iran, Egypt, Syria and the Italian city-states of Genoa and Venice. Artistic styles were absorbed through conquest, through direct invitation of artisans, or through the migration of peoples. Artists, in turn, brought indigenous folk traditions and responded to the influence of trade and commerce as well as to standards set by the court.

The sultan as patron

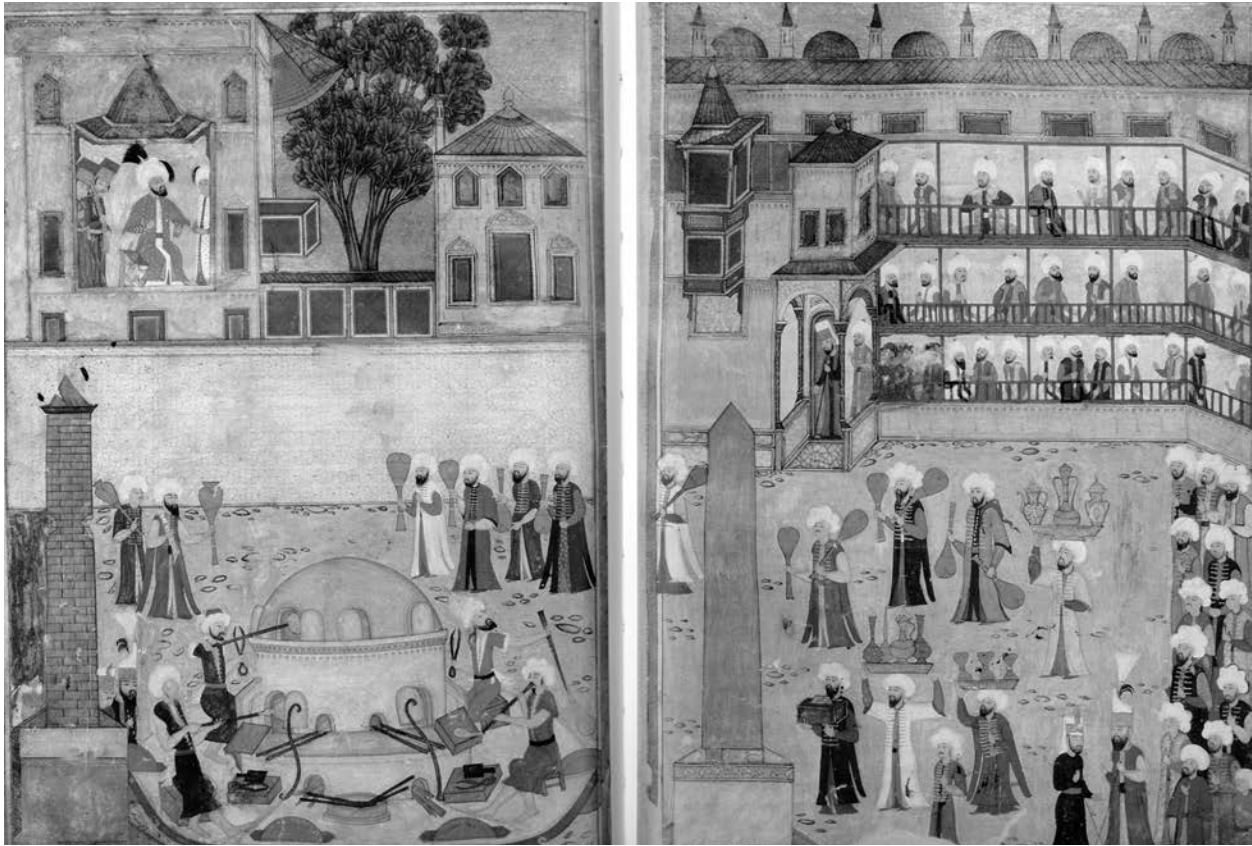
Although the sultan's palace was traditionally a center of artistic development, it was during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566) that the Ottoman court reached its zenith in this regard. Not only were the most celebrated painters, poets, architects, and calligraphers employed by the sultan, but virtually all members of the court—including Suleyman himself—were accomplished in one or more of the visual or literary arts. Initially trained as a goldsmith, Suleyman was also an accomplished poet who wrote under the pseudonym Muhibbi, meaning “beloved friend,” or “affectionate lover.” Later sultans such as Mahmut II (1807–1839) and his son, Abdülmecid I (1839–1861), were known as accomplished calligraphers.

The arts of the Ottoman court set the fashion for virtually all aspects of Ottoman culture. Throughout the empire's duration, countless artisans gravitated toward the capital city of Istanbul to supply the palace with all types of the highest quality objects. Filiz Cagman, Director of the Topkapi Palace Museum, has determined that in 1575, the palace enlisted the work of 898 artisans. These included painters, designers, tile makers, calligraphers, book binders, manuscript illuminators, goldsmiths, engravers, swordsmiths, bow and arrow makers, carpet and textile weavers, armorers, gunsmiths, furriers, ivory craftsmen, musical instrument makers, and potters.

The court was served by a highly organized artist's society, the *nakkashane*, or imperial painting studio. During Suleyman's reign, the *nakkashane* formulated an aesthetic vocabulary that would greatly impact all Ottoman arts. Three distinct styles of decoration emerged from the studio: the traditional style—which relied on early Islamic floral designs of intertwining branches, leaves, and blossoms; the lively *saz* style—which borrowed heavily from Eastern motifs and is recognizable for its Chinese lotus and dragon elements; and the naturalistic style—which depicted realistic garden flora marked by specific plants and trees. This naturalistic style eventually became the preferred Ottoman decorative theme for ceramics, textiles, and even architectural embellishment.

Artisans typically belonged to trade guilds, and their numbers were tightly controlled by the Ottoman bureaucracy. They were issued with warrants (*gediks*) that identified an individual's place of work and right to own appropriate tools. On occasion, artists were required to parade before the sultan. One manuscript in the Topkapi Palace collection shows seven hundred guilds marching in Istanbul before the sultan.

The fruits of the Ottoman sultans' patronage extended and were enjoyed far beyond the palace walls. In addition to sacred and memorial architecture such as mosques and tombs, they sponsored various utilitarian civic projects. Suleyman even facilitated the opening of the first Turkish coffee-houses and shadow theaters. Imperial patronage demanded workmanship of the finest quality, and



Parade of potters displaying their work before Sultan Murad III, 1582, Topkapi Library, Istanbul.

artists were rewarded accordingly.

On a personal scale

Since many of the artists employed at the Ottoman court came from the far reaches of conquered lands, diverse aesthetic styles and materials contributed to the development of uniquely Ottoman metalwork, textiles, ceramics, and carpets.

Meals at court were elaborate rituals with a multitude of gold, silver, and brass trays of foods and confections served from the royal kitchen in an endless procession. After the meal, richly dressed servants delivered silver pitchers and basins for washing, with towels embroidered with gold and silver threads for drying.

In the seclusion of the palace harem, Ottoman women wore beautiful and elaborate clothing with exquisite accessories according to their rank and the detailed customs of the court. Every event and ceremony was an occasion for displaying the most splendid costumes and objects from the treasury. The gold and silver brocades, fine satins, and silks seen in imperial costumes were created by skilled craftsmen for uses ranging from tents to palace decorations. In public, the sultan wore a floor-length, loose robe called a *kaftan*. His arms passed through slits in the shoulders, allowing the lengthy sleeves to fall behind. He wore a tall turban and carried an embroidered handkerchief. Many of these items were carefully preserved in the palace Treasury. Others were placed in the mausoleum where the sultan was buried.

Trade and commerce

The rich textiles, metal wares, and fine ceramics that were first produced for the use of the sultan, the court, and imperial mosques, later became a major source of income as export goods. High quality textiles of Ottoman workmanship found their way into European churches and wealthy foreign homes. Iznik ceramics were purchased by the Lord Mayor of London and the Hungarian princes of Transylvania. In this way, designs originated by Ottoman court artists became familiar outside the empire.



Iznik dish, Khalili collection, no. POT 1122

Ottoman ceramics continued the traditions of previous Islamic traditions, but they were heavily influenced by imported Chinese ceramics that came via Iran and by sea. Chinese porcelains in particular were highly sought after for their beauty and strength.

Muslim potters could not replicate the Chinese wares because they did not have access to some of the essential ingredients such as kaolin clay. They also did not use the high firing temperatures required to make porcelain. Rather than compete directly with Chinese wares, the Ottoman potters produced their own cheaper versions using different materials and designs. They used a lower-firing clay called earthenware, covered it with a white slip and then decorated under the glaze.

Ottoman imperial kilns were located at Iznik in western Anatolia. Vessels and tiles used for the decoration of buildings were made here for almost three centuries. At first, potters were interested in the Chinese blue and white color schemes, but by the 1500s, they had expanded their palette to include blue, green, black, and a distinct shade of red. Typical designs included bouquets of stylized foliage, surrounded on the edges by Chinese-inspired wave or cloud patterns. When court patronage of ceramic tiles declined in the 1600s, ceramic production at Iznik also declined.

Carpets

Carpets are perhaps the best-known form of Islamic art in the West, because of their long history as trade items, and their practical use as floor coverings.

Carpets were originally made by nomadic peoples who raised sheep. Dyed wool was hand-knotted on to a framework of threads (warp and weft) placed at right angles to each other. A wide range of patterns and designs could be arranged within a square or rectangular shaped border. The density of knots determined the value of the carpet as well as the amount of detail in the design. Large carpets were produced in urban settings or court workshops, since large looms could not be accommodated in nomadic tents or village houses.

Carpet designs allowed for a rich vocabulary of images—overflowing vases, floral patterns, trees,

and animals, as well as a host of geometric and abstract shapes. These designs enlivened the living environment, and they also had the advantage of being transportable. This meant that they were ideal for use as prayer rugs. They could be unrolled wherever prayer took place, providing a comfortable surface on which to bow down (see slide #20). In the Ottoman period as well, carpets were used in large tent enclosures that accompanied the sultan and his army on military campaigns. Such carpets beautified the interior of the tents, and also provided warmth underfoot.

Very few carpets survive from before the 1400s through the 1500s. However they appear in European paintings of the time, indicating that they were already being traded in areas outside the Ottoman empire. According to Islamic art historians Sheila Blair and Jonathon Bloom, “by the middle of the 15th century Anatolian (Turkish) weavers were producing large-pattern ‘Holbein’” carpets, many intended for export to Europe. The typical example, knotted in brightly colored wool in a variety of colors, primarily brick-red with white, yellow, blue, green, brown and black, has a rectangular field containing several large octagons inscribed in square frames. These are usually decorated with strap-work patterns and separated and enclosed by bands of smaller octagons. Several borders of varying width usually include an elegant band of pseudo-inscription in which the stems of the letters appear to be twisted together. These carpets get their name because many are depicted in paintings by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543) such as his *Ambassadors* of the year 1533 in the National Gallery, London. They first appear in European paintings dated to the 1450s, where they are shown on floors in patrician settings or as luxury table coverings.”

Calligraphy

The central and most venerated art of Islam is calligraphy, the art of beautiful writing. Because the word of God, received as revelations by the Prophet Muhammad, was transmitted and written down in Arabic in the Koran, the language and alphabet itself became sanctified.

The training of a scribe was strenuous. It involved not only learning to form the letters and words with the proper proportions for a particular style, but also developing the muscular control of the arm and shoulder necessary for the writing of monumental scripts.

As part of their training, students of calligraphy copied works by acclaimed masters of the art. In copying, they were taught to eliminate personal idiosyncrasies in their writing so that the particular qualities of the master’s hand could be more easily recognized. Once a great calligrapher established his reputation, he was able to demonstrate his creativity in an individual style of his own without losing the character of the copied work.

In Ottoman Turkey, the calligraphic tradition of Seyh Hamdullah, the renowned scribe of the 1500s, was most influential. The tradition of his style, renewed in the 1600s by Hafiz Osman (see slide # 6), was continued in an unbroken chain by the calligraphers of the 1700s and 1800s. Works by the renowned calligraphers—whether completed products, fragments, or practice exercises—were prized items. One of a scribe’s highest aspirations, even at the end of the Ottoman period, was to copy the work of a great master of the past to preserve it forever. Works executed on finely webbed leaves and in paper cutouts represented a further demonstration of calligraphy skills.

The Ottomans

For over 600 years, the Ottomans ruled the mightiest of the Islamic empires. At the height of its expansion in the 1500s, the Ottoman empire encompassed Hungary, the Balkans, Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, much of North Africa, and the area around the holy cities of Medina and Mecca. The Ottomans bridged three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa.

The Ottomans ruled a diverse population of Muslims and non-Muslims. These subject peoples provided the means to support the sultan and his court, the military, and a vast bureaucracy that provided the administration necessary to run the empire.

During much of their rule, the Ottomans coexisted with two other great Islamic dynasties: the Safavids in Iran and the Mughals in India. In creating their own identity, the Ottomans drew significantly upon the cultural heritage of Persia. However this emphasis shifted towards Europe from the 1600s through the 1800s. Indeed Europe's political fortunes and cultures owe much to the influence of the Ottomans.

What follows is a brief history of the Ottomans from their beginnings through the height of their expansion, including the nature of Ottoman rule, the military, and court life in the sultan's palace.

Establishment of the Ottoman dynasty

The Ottomans were descendents of Turkoman peoples who had migrated west (originally from the area of present-day China) into the Iranian plateau, and then advanced further west into Anatolia as result of the Mongol invasions of the 1200s. An earlier group of Turkish peoples had established the Seljuk dynasty that ruled Iran, Iraq, and most of Syria. One branch of the Seljuk family later took over parts of Anatolia from the declining Byzantine empire. The Seljuks, however, were soundly defeated in battle by the Mongols in 1243. As the Mongols themselves withdrew, a power vacuum was created that the future Ottomans exploited.

The Ottomans claimed descent from the founder of the dynasty, Osman Gazi (1280–1324). A chieftain from one of the many nomadic Turkish clans who lived on the eastern frontier of the Christian Byzantine Empire, Osman used his skills as a strong military leader and astute politician and diplomat to unite the clans and spread the influence of Islam. These clans were mainly small groups of *ghazi* or “warriors of the faith,” who lived on the frontiers of eastern Anatolia. As word spread of Osman's victories against a weakened Byzantium, his own growing empire, which became known as the *Ottomans* or “sons of Osman,” became feared and respected by enemies and allies alike.

Osman's reputation as a judicious and pious leader set the standard for his successors. Each of these successors served as both the supreme authority over the government and the military, and as the Chief Defender of the Faith. The prayer “May he be virtuous as Osman,” was invoked by religious leaders when a new sultan assumed the title. This particular hope was realized over the next few centuries during the reigns of several sultans who proved to be especially strong and capable rulers. It became the custom for new sultans to begin their reign with a military campaign of expansion. Osman's descendants consolidated Ottoman power and extended the empire's dominance until it reached its greatest power in the 1500s.

Growth of the Ottoman empire



The Ottoman empire at its height.

Osman's son Orhan continued the pattern of expansion set by his father, and established Bursa in 1326 as the first Ottoman capital. By 1345, the Ottomans had reached the coast and could look across the straits of the Dardanelles at Europe. They quickly began an invasion of the Balkans, where competing groups were unable to unify their forces to halt the Ottoman advance. The conquest of the Balkans continued under Murad I (1360–1389), who defeated the Serbs at the Battle of Kosovo but was killed in the process. Consolidation of these gains, as well as further expansion in Anatolia continued under Murad's son Bayezid I, known as "the Thunderbolt." His eastward expansion provoked the intervention of Timur (Tamerlane), a descendent of the Mongols who defeated the Ottomans in 1402 and took Bayezid prisoner. It proved to be a temporary set back. Ottoman fortunes were restored under the succeeding sultans Mehmed I and Murad II.

Murad II's son, Mehmed II (see slide #3) came to the throne in 1444 at the age of twelve. His father had hoped to retire to a life of religious detachment, but he was called up again almost immediately to repulse an attack on the European frontier. A military revolt followed, and the old sultan was placed back on the throne a second time. After Murad II's death in 1451, Mehmed II was finally reinstated. The young sultan set his sights on Constantinople.

Capture of Constantinople

Constantinople was all that remained of the Byzantine empire. The Byzantine empire had begun as the Eastern Roman Empire and had maintained control of the eastern Mediterranean for cen-

turies. The Byzantine capital of Constantinople had a symbolic and strategic importance that was essential to the Ottomans. The great city stood at the meeting point of the European and Asian continents. It was the commercial and cultural heart of the entire region. Founded by the Roman Emperor Constantine, it had prospered for 1100 years. With a population that had been declining for centuries, it was still a formidable city, enclosed by massive walls and protected by the sea. To the Ottomans, it was a jewel waiting to be captured. Mehmed roused his followers to battle, claiming that the capture of the city was a basic duty of every Muslim and critical to the success of the Ottoman state.

Ottoman forces besieged the city for over seven weeks. The Byzantine forces had strung a great chain across the inlet known as the Golden Horn to protect the inner harbor, but the Ottoman troops devised an innovative method to move their ships around the inlet overland on greased wooden planks. Meanwhile, Ottoman artillery pounded the outer layers of the city walls. In the early hours of the morning of May 29, 1453, Ottoman forces rushed through a breach in the walls to take the city. A Greek commentator later wrote:

“After this the Sultan entered the city and looked about to see its great size, its situation, its grandeur and beauty...its loveliness, and the costliness of its churches and public buildings...When he saw what a large number had been killed, and the wreckage of the buildings, and the wholesale ruin and desolation of the city, he was filled with compassion and repented not a little at the destruction and plundering. “



Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.

Immediately after his military victory was assured, Mehmed entered the great Byzantine (Christian) church of Hagia Sophia, and after bowing down in a gesture of admiration, proclaimed that it should be converted into a great mosque. Minarets were added to the structure to allow for the call to prayer.

Constantinople henceforth became ‘Istanbul’, the new capital of the Ottoman empire. Construction began on a new palace, repairs were made to the walls, and various ethnic groups were encouraged to re-settle

into the city. After a peace was concluded with Venice in 1479, the Doge sent his painter Gentile Bellini to paint portraits of the sultan and his court.

Europe was shocked by the news of the fall of Constantinople. During the siege, the Pope issued papal indulgences for the first time, promising absolution of sins for those who assisted in the defense of the city. Such indulgences became one of the rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation against the Catholic Church. From this time on, the fortunes of European states and rulers would be greatly influenced by the Ottomans. Europe had been weakened by a succession of internal wars and the Great Plague, and would remain fearful of Ottoman invasion for another two centuries.

Further expansion of the empire

Mehmed became known as “the Conqueror”, but not only for the capture of Constantinople. Mehmed called himself the “Sovereign of the Two Lands and the Two Seas” referring to Europe, Asia, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. His additional conquests included the Greek peninsula, the territories surrounding the Black Sea, and Bosnia. The impact of Islamic rule on the Balkan region had profound implications to this day. Future sultans would continue to use the word “conqueror” in their numerous titles.

Despite the earlier peace treaty, Mehmed set out to invade Venice in 1480, but he died en route. The Pope was busy preparing to flee to France. The attentions of the Ottomans turned east and Europe, for the time being, was spared.

Muslim ghazi tradition held that Muslims should not wage war on each other, only on non-Muslims. This situation changed in 1501 with the establishment of the Persian Safavid dynasty. The Safavids were Shi'ite Muslims, whereas the Ottomans were Sunni Muslims, each representing different sects of Islam. Selim I (1512–1520) took up arms against the Safavid rivals, earning the nickname “the Grim.” He also turned his attention south and attacked the Mamluks in Syria and Egypt. Here, religious differences were not the main issue. The Mamluks were perceived by the Ottomans as weak, not interested in the latest military technology, and therefore unable to defend the Islamic world from the Europeans, particularly the seafaring Portuguese. With the defeat of the Mamluks came control of the tremendous wealth of the Middle-Eastern caravan routes and the cities of Damascus and Cairo, as well as, very significantly, control of Islam's holy cities of Mecca and Medina. By the end of Selim's reign, the Ottomans ruled the most powerful of the Islamic empires.

Suleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566)

Selim's son, Suleyman, continued the expansion of the empire. Known as “the Magnificent” in the west, he was called by his subjects “the lawgiver” for his many additions and improvements to Ottoman law. Suleyman is the Arabic and Turkish form of the name Solomon. Suleyman considered himself a worthy successor to the biblical king, who was revered by both Christians and Muslims as a just ruler. Suleyman was responsible for refurbishing the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which was believed to stand on the site of Solomon's temple.

True to ghazi (warriors of the faith) traditions, the young Suleyman launched his first campaign in 1521 against the fortress of Belgrade. His victory here opened the door for further European invasions. The next year, the island fortress of Rhodes fell. Suleyman recruited the assistance of a North-African buccaneer known in the west as Barbarossa. This famed pirate used Ottoman ships and guns to ravage the coasts of Italy and Spain and take many of Venice's holdings in the Aegean, effectively securing the eastern Mediterranean for the Ottomans. Suleyman achieved a

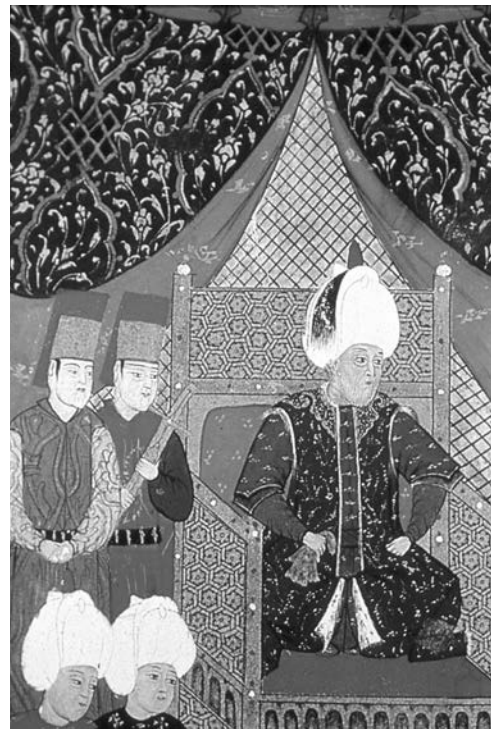


Illustration showing Suleyman and attendants in his tent.

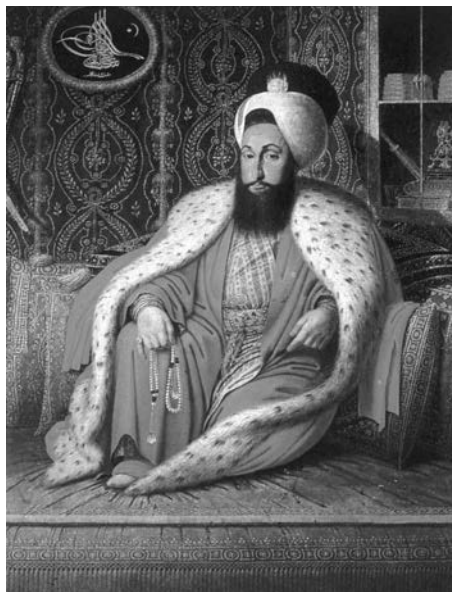
stunning victory against the Hungarians in 1526 at the battle of Mohacs. In 1529, Ottoman armies were fighting at the gates of Vienna. They were stopped short by bad weather, which prevented the use of artillery, and by the desire of the troops to return home for the winter.

In 1533, a peace treaty with Hungary allowed the Ottomans to focus their attention once again to the east. Successful campaigns against the Safavids led the Ottomans as far as the Persian Gulf, but border cities between the two empires would change hands frequently over the subsequent years. A third front emerged when regions on the northern edge of the empire around the Black Sea were annexed by the Russians during the reign of Ivan IV (the Terrible). Suleyman allied himself with the various forces of Europe and Russia that threatened his empire. He hoped to destabilize the competing states within Europe. At one point he believed that the Protestants would defeat the Catholics and pave the way for an Islamic conversion of the European continent. Suleyman renewed his campaigning efforts late in life, but he died on the battlefield just before the conclusion of his final victory.

Often considered the greatest of the sultans, Suleyman ruled over what history has termed the Golden Age of the Ottoman empire—a time of great artistic and architectural achievement as well as political expansion. At the time of his death, the Ottoman empire reached from Algiers to the Caspian Sea and from Hungary to the Persian Gulf.

The later Ottoman empire

In the decades that followed Süleyman’s reign, a series of weak rulers, military defeats, and worsening economic conditions caused the fortunes of the empire to change. The first major blow was at sea, when allied European forces defeated the Ottoman navy at the battle of Lepanto in 1571. Historians often speak of a slow decline, but it may be more apt to assume that such an enduring empire would be unable to sustain a policy of continuous expansion indefinitely. Furthermore, by the 1700s, European armies had begun to surpass those of the Ottomans in both tactics and technology.



Selim III.

In the 1600s through the 1700s, several attempts were made to reverse these trends. During the reign of Ahmet III (1703–1730), ambassadors were sent to France to observe western customs. This era is often called the “Tulip period” for the many celebrations that were held and gardens designed around the sultan’s favorite flower. Selim III (1789–1807) introduced a wide range of western-based reforms, but he was deposed in a mutiny. His successor, Mahmut II (1808–1839) had to put down a full-scale revolt by the Janissary army (see section below). Despite these changes, the empire steadily lost territory to Russia, the Hapsburgs of Austria-Hungary, and to newly emerging nations such as Serbia and Greece. The early years of the twentieth century were marked by revolution and increasing nationalism until 1922, when the last of the Ottoman sultans, Mehmed VI (1918–1922) was deposed, and all laws of his government were declared void. In 1923 the Turkish state was declared a republic, and Turkey ultimately became a secular nation.

The nature of Ottoman rule—the role of the sultan

What accounted for the early success and duration of the Ottoman empire? The Ottomans were clearly extremely successful in military terms. Perhaps more importantly, they were able to build an administrative apparatus under the sultan and his court that provided effective control over widespread domains and a diverse range of peoples.

Power was centralized around the sultan and his family. The sultan was, in effect, an absolute ruler. The Italian political writer Machiavelli observed that “the Ottoman empire is ruled by one man. All others are his servants.” The sultan arranged treaties, minted coins, appointed positions, and condemned men to death. He led armies into battle. He issued edicts (*ferman*) that were later gathered into legal codes (*kanuns*). He was the executor of God’s law (*sharia*). Officially, he held title to all lands under his control.

The Ottoman sultans came to view themselves as the inheritors of two great traditions. First, they assumed the role of *caliph*, the defender of the Islamic faith. They controlled the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and protected the Islamic world from infidel enemies. Secondly, they believed that they were the cultural heirs to both the Roman empire and to Persian culture. From their palace in Istanbul, it appeared that they stood at the center of the world’s cultures. Artists from both eastern and western traditions were encouraged to be part of the sultan’s court. The prestige of the sultans was further heightened by large public ceremonies that impressed foreign visitors, such as feasts celebrating important events in the life of the imperial family.

Theoretically, membership in the highest classes of Ottoman society required one to be a Muslim, to be loyal to the sultan, and to follow Ottoman codes of behavior. Ottoman court etiquette required one to speak in a highly formal Turkish with a blend of Persian and Arabic words. This meant that most of the sultan’s subjects were excluded from high social rank, not only because of class and cultural differences, but because many of the subject peoples were non-Muslims.

Running the empire

An Ottoman chronicler of the 1600s, Mustafa Naima, described the relationship between the state and its subjects as a cycle of five principles:

- 1) there can be no rule or state without the military;
- 2) maintaining the military requires wealth;
- 3) wealth is raised from the subjects;
- 4) the subjects can only prosper through justice;
- 5) without rule and the state there can be no justice.

As strict as this arrangement sounds, in fact Ottoman rulers were fairly tolerant (at least for most of their history) of the many non-Muslim peoples who made up their realm. All subjects were systematically taxed and surveyed. Detailed records were maintained by the court. Greeks, Jews, Slavs, Romanians, and Armenians—among others were all identified by their religious affiliation. However, each group was allowed to maintain its own religious, charitable, social, and educational organizations. Istanbul even became something of a refuge for various groups seeking asylum from persecution elsewhere, for example Sephardic Jews fleeing persecution in Spain.

How did the Ottoman state perform its duties? Given that so much power resided in the person of the sultan, it is not surprising that the fortunes of the state were largely dependent on the compe-

tence of each individual who came to the throne. In practice, power had to be shared with the military and with civic and religious leaders. Overtime, the sultans retreated more and more within the palace walls, leaving governance to various ministers and military commanders.

Below the sultan and his family were three other divisions of state: the administrative council (including the Imperial Treasury), the army, and the learned institutions or *ulama*—the men who interpreted the holy laws and were responsible for the religious education of future generations. Relationships between the sultan and the *ulama* were critical to the welfare of the state. Ottoman rulers, in contrast to some other Islamic states, were successful in gaining the support of the *ulama*, allowing the religious authorities to operate within certain jurisdictions without undermining or challenging the ultimate authority of the sultan. The central religious authority was the *Shaykh al-Islam*. At the provincial level, religious judges or *kadis* presided over the enforcement of religious and imperial laws.

The day-to-day affairs of state were handled by the council of ministers known as the *divan*. They held regular sessions at the palace, and were headed by a grand vizier or chief minister. The vizier had a tough job—he risked his life if he were to be incompetent, and at the same time, if he became too powerful, he might appear threatening to the sultan. During the reign of Selim I, the uncertainty of such positions gave rise to a popular curse, “May you be Vizier to Sultan Selim!” While some met untimely deaths, other viziers were more successful. One famous minister, Sokollu Mehmed Pasa, served three great sultans in the 1500s. Born a Serb, he was inducted into the civil service through an unusual system known as the *devshirme*.

The devshirme

The *devshirme* was a training institution unique to the Ottomans. It was an attempt—largely successful while it lasted—to control rival claims to the throne by building up a military and administrative bureaucracy based on slaves recruited from subject Christian families. These slaves were trained to be loyal to the sultan and placed in important positions, providing a safer alternative to rival family members who typically fought each other for succession of the throne.

Slaves were recruited as children through an annual levy, mainly in the areas of the Balkans and Anatolia. Parents with single children were spared. Only the most promising children were selected. Depending on their character and disposition, they would assume positions in either the military or in civil administration. The children were indoctrinated into Islam, given new names, and sworn to be loyal to the sultan for the rest of their lives. Though enslaved in the *devshirme* system children received the best training available at that time in the Islamic world. For many parents, it was probably the best future they could imagine for their children.

The *devshirme* system existed through the 1600s. Youths were trained in seclusion at court, and promoted on the basis of merit rather than class privilege. Civil officials in training were usually given provincial posts, and then the most capable were brought back to the capital. The practice of rearing slave children into positions of the highest authority baffled Europeans, who were accustomed to the idea that class and position in society were defined at birth. Eventually, the *devshirme* system did break down. As generations of officials considered their own achievements and the prospects for their offspring, hereditary privilege began to reassert itself as the means to success.

The military

Ottoman armies, like all Muslim armies, fought wars for the purpose of spreading Islam throughout the world. They believed it was their mission to extend the “Domain of Peace”—lands where Islam prevailed—and to push back the “Domain of War”—lands in the hands of unbelievers. This religious zeal unified and strengthened the Ottoman armies and contributed to their effectiveness in battle. It was believed that those that died fighting on the battlefield would be carried directly to heaven.

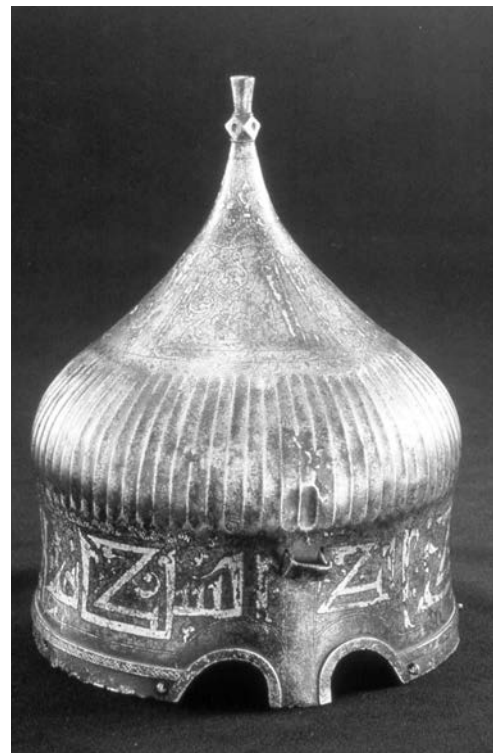
Ottoman armies were originally crusading groups of warriors on horseback. As the Ottoman empire rapidly expanded, the military grew in size and organizational sophistication. With the development of the *devshirme* (described above) an elite group of foot soldiers called “Janissaries” were added to the Ottoman fighting force. These forces swelled to as many as 15,000 during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent.

The Ottoman armies were among the first to use artillery and rifles. Although mounted warriors formed the core of the fighting force, the army also included smaller numbers of foot soldiers, artillerymen, and military engineers. For most of its history, however, the Ottoman army was on horseback. As many as 100,000 horses were used in military campaigns in the late 1500s. During battle, the cavalry typically waited on the sidelines for the enemy lines to weaken and then attacked. Military bands placed at the rear kept up a steady din with fifes, drums, and horns.

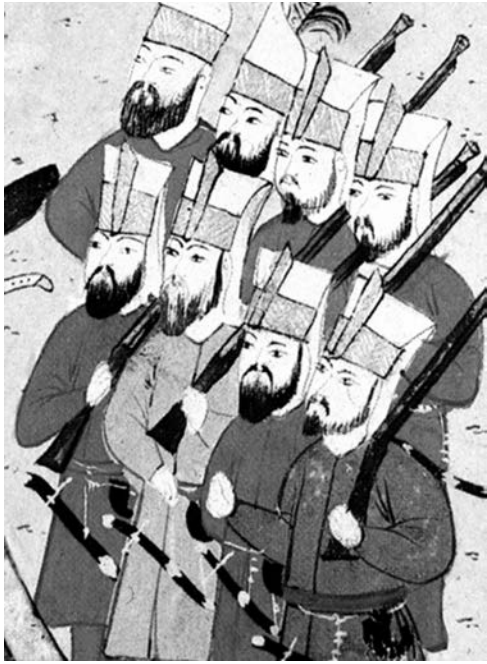
Western observers noted that the Ottoman armies relied less on organization and strategy, and more on large numbers, courage, and religious zeal. By contrast, Ottoman forces observed that European armies were overly disciplined, and behaved like automaton. In the early Ottoman period, troops were led into battle by the sultan himself, the chief warrior of his people, but in later times the sultan remained behind in his palace and sent his military commanders to the field.

Cavalry forces—*sipahis*—were made up of Turkish warriors recruited from the various provinces. They did not live in garrisons like the army, but lived off incomes from land grants (*timars*) in return for military service, much like the feudal arrangements of medieval Europe. Each *sipahis* provided its own horse and equipment. Cavalry troops fought with speed and precision, wielding the scimitar, or curved sword. They often wore breastplates and wound their turbans under pointed steel helmets.

Janissary forces were made up of boys recruited for the military under the *devshirme* system. The word janissary comes from Turkish words *yen* (new) and *ceri* (soldier). They were first organized under Murad I, when it became necessary to build forces of paid troops loyal to the sultan. Young recruits were provided with uniforms, trousers and boots. They wore tall caps with white neckcloths. They were assigned to a regiment (*orta*) that became a home for life. Only death, desertion, or transfer of command removed one from the regiment. Each regiment had an insignia above its barracks and on its silk banners.



Helmet, late 1400s, Khalili Collection, MTW773.



Janissaries going into battle.

The Janissaries were allowed some personal choice in weapons, but generally they used muskets and bows to keep a steady fire from a distance, and swords and maces for close combat. Ottoman armies steadily adopted firearms beginning in the 1500s. However by the 1700s, their weapons and tactics were becoming outmoded by those of the Europeans.

By the 1800s, Janissary numbers had grown so large that they began to pose serious problems for the state. By 1826, they numbered 135,000. They allied themselves with conservative political forces, supplemented their income through other means, and revolted when attempts were made to modernize them. Murad II was forced to crush this rebellion, and in the process, he dissolved the corps.

The palace

When Mehmed II, who had conquered Constantinople in 1453, began rebuilding the city (renamed Istanbul), he chose a spectacular site for his principal residence: the hilly promontory that marks the meeting point of the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara. The palace that he erected there was not a single structure like its European counterparts, but a vast walled complex of separate buildings and courtyards forming a virtual city unto itself. More than a residence, it was the seat of government and the very heart of the empire. In addition to the living quarters of the sultan and his harem, it contained offices, a school for training civil servants and the Janissaries, archives, treasuries, and council chambers. Approximately 4,000 people lived within the palace walls. Twenty-five sultans resided here over a period of almost 400 years.

The palace was designed as a series of pavilions contained by four large courtyards. Scattered throughout the courtyards were spacious gardens, reflecting the Islamic love of nature, along with fountains and trees to provide coolness and shade. Once considered haphazard in its design, scholars now interpret the layout of the palace as a royal encampment, each area like a tent with its own function, yet related to adjacent areas. (see separate diagram).

The First Courtyard surrounded the entire palace. Entrance was by the Imperial (first) Gate. This area functioned like a city center. There was an arsenal, mint, bakery, hospital, vegetable gardens, and other service-related buildings.

The Second Courtyard contained the seat of government, the *divan*, and was open to anyone who had official business to conduct. Entrance was through the Middle (second) Gate. Only the sultan could ride on horseback through this gate. The *divan* met four times a week in the Council Hall. The sultan had a special seat behind the Council Wall and could listen to the proceedings through a latticed grille whenever it suited him.

The Second Courtyard also contained the stables and a long row of large rooms used as kitchens, each reserved for the various classes that worked and lived in the palace. Chinese porcelains were

greatly admired by the Ottoman court and were used for dinnerware. Today this collection is still on display at the Palace and ranks as one of the most important of its kind outside of China.

Entrance to the Third Courtyard was marked by a pavilion-like gateway called the Gate of Felicity. Here the sultan appeared for ceremonial functions, such as welcoming foreign ambassadors and paying the salaries of the Janissaries. An Audience Hall just inside the gate was used to receive the most important visitors and officials.

The area within the Third Courtyard was the sultan's private domain. It was staffed by pages and "white" eunuchs (castrated Caucasian males). Today this area contains the library of Sultan Ahmed III and the Treasury or museum containing the palace's many precious objects. Originally, the Third Courtyard was the location of the sultan's private rooms, but these were moved during the reign of Murad III in the 1580s to the area called the *harem*.

The harem

Harem means "forbidden area." As the name implies, access to the harem was strictly forbidden to all except the sultan, his family, his female household and the "black eunuchs" (castrated black African males) who served them. For this reason, there are few reliable reports as to what took place inside. This lack of actual observation also accounts in part for the speculation and romantic ideas that became popular in the West, particularly the idea of the harem as a domain of unbridled pleasure.

Life within the harem was, in fact, more like a cloistered community, with very strict rules and a rigid hierarchy. Islamic law permitted Muslims to have up to four wives, as well as unlimited concubines and servants. The hundreds of women who lived in the harem were slaves, and since it was forbidden for Muslims to be enslaved, they were all non-Muslims. Most had been presented to the sultan as gifts or war booty. Remarkably, that meant that the Ottoman sultans were almost all the sons of foreign slave women from their father's harem.



Reception room in the harem.

The women of the harem were typically divided into four classes. The highest status was given to the wives of the sultan who had born him children. The most powerful woman overall was the reigning sultan's mother, the queen mother or *Valide Sultan*. Also powerful was the Chief Black Eunuch, since he had unrestricted access to all the goings-on in the harem.

The most famous woman associated with the harem was a Ukrainian named Hurrem (Roxelana). Brought to Istanbul as a slave girl, she completely surprised the court by marrying Sultan Suleyman. Furthermore, she was the first woman to bring her entourage from the Old Palace to take up residence in the new palace

(*Topkapi*). She was powerful and influential enough to convince Suleyman that his first-born son Mustafa was plotting to overthrow him, and the unfortunate prince was strangled. Hurrem's son Selim eventually became sultan after Suleyman's death.

Male offspring of sultans led rather precarious lives. When they reached an age where they could leave home, sons of the sultans were sent to live outside the palace. But later on, they were required to live inside the harem, becoming effectively prisoners in their own home. First-born sons were not automatically entitled to the throne. The greatest concern was what happened when the sultan died. After Mehmed III strangled all nineteen of his younger brothers in 1595, it became acceptable practice to eliminate rivals to the throne.

One report of life within the palace comes from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wife of a British ambassador to the Ottoman court. She was granted rare opportunities to meet with women of the empire in the early 1700s. Once, after visiting with a reigning sultana, she wrote letters that included an account of the woman's dress, her servants, and the decor: "I was led into a large room with a sofa the whole length of it ... covered with pale blue figured velvet on a silver ground." Lady Montagu described a dinner where she was served "fifty dishes of meats ... the knives were of gold, the hafts set with diamonds." The wealth of the Ottomans was evident throughout the entire palace. Walls were richly decorated with tiles, floors dressed with luxurious carpets, tables adorned with Chinese and Iznik (site of the imperial kilns) ceramics, libraries stacked with illuminated books, and treasuries filled with even more priceless objects.

As the Ottomans increasingly withdrew from contact with the outside world, power shifted to the leading women of the harem, eunuchs, military commanders and civic leaders. This isolation did not serve the interests of the state well, and it was often cited as a reason for the decline of the empire.

Though the sultans had other residences, none so effectively symbolized their power as the palace in Istanbul, and where they continued to live until 1853. In 1924, it was opened to the public as a museum. Called Topkapi Palace (*Topkapi Sarayı* in Turkish) much of it still survives today. Its colonnaded courtyards, elegant pavilions, and richly tiled interiors have made it one of the most popular tourist attractions in Istanbul.

Religion and the state

The Ottoman state was a complex fabric of interwoven spiritual, scientific, and administrative institutions and ideas. From the beginning, the sultan's armies were driven by both religious and economic motives, endeavoring to expand the Islamic faith while claiming land and, thus, wealth for the empire. An emblematic example of this sensibility is the imperial edict, or *ferman*, (see slide # 10) in which the sultan combined elegant golden calligraphy with religious invocations, all in the very matter-of-fact task of bestowing land and privilege upon his subjects.

Religion itself found its way into virtually every aspect of the daily life of Ottoman soldiers and citizens alike. Travelers relied on personal calendar scrolls, or *ruznames*, which were largely concerned with daily religious observances. Troops and sailors used precise navigational devices (see slide # 9) and treatises on geography and cosmology that were rarely without references to sacred destinations on earth or the extraterrestrial dimensions of heaven and hell. Knowledge and faith were embraced with equal fervor. As a result, meticulous maps intended for use as navigational aids were used

alongside talismanic shirts covered with sacred texts intended to protect the wearer from bullets, with no apparent ideological conflict.

Science and religion were both so deeply embedded in Ottoman thought and society that their relationship at times became problematic. In the 1400s, during the reign of Mehmed II, two competing views about the role of human reason were considered: Is logic necessary to understand and appreciate the wonder of God, or does it run counter to true understanding and, indeed, represent a possible threat when applied in such matters? In the end, the sultan and his religious advisors adopted the latter view, and it was established that, in order to protect Islamic orthodoxy, religion was not subject to philosophic or scientific standards or proofs.

The dervish orders

A dervish or Sufi is a Muslim mystic who is a member of a religious order, and who vows to lead a life of poverty and austerity. Dervish orders stressed the attainment of a state of ecstatic trance through recitation and dance, culminating in a closer union with God. Many dervish orders existed in Turkey under the Ottomans, and some wielded considerable political influence. The highly literate calligraphers who copied Korans and religious writings were often members of dervish fraternities or associated closely with them.

The *Mevlevi* order was one of the most powerful of these brotherhoods. It was founded by the great Persian Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) and was led by his descendants. The order was known for its piety, music, and the ecstatic dancing that gave rise to the term “whirling dervish.” The Ottoman sultans became the protectors of this order, endowing mosques for it and granting lands. Imperial support for the *Mevlevi* order grew over the centuries, and members were permitted to take part in important imperial ceremonies, including the investiture of a new sultan.

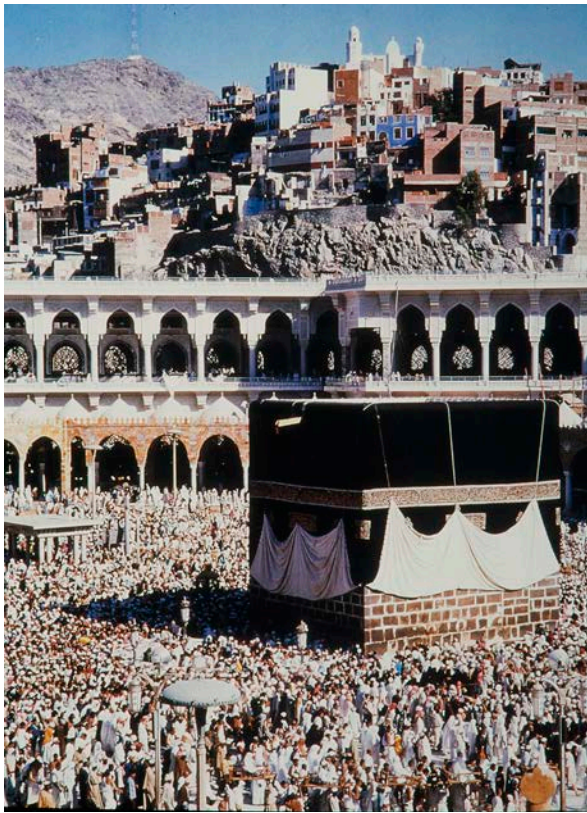
Another prominent Sufi order was the *Bektasi*, who accompanied the Janissaries, the sultan’s most highly disciplined warriors, on their military campaigns. The more than seven million *Bektasi* adherents in Turkey were strong political allies for the Janissaries, although the order was suppressed after the disbanding of the Janissary troops in 1826. Other dervish fraternities continued as a strong force in the empire until its end in 1922.



Sufis at prayer, Central Asia, about 1890.

Slide Descriptions

Slide no 1



The Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia
Photograph by Abdelaziz Frikhar
Bildarchiv Steffens

What does this photograph show?

The photograph shows pilgrims surrounding the Kaaba, the most sacred shrine in all of Islam. The shrine is located at the center of the courtyard of the Great Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Only Muslims can enter the sacred area. The city is nestled among hills, some of which can be seen in the background of the photograph.

What is the Kaaba?

The Kaaba is a small building that contains a black stone in one corner. It has no windows and only a small door above ground level. The black stone inside may be a meteorite. Pilgrims circle the Kaaba while praying and press themselves against the wall of the shrine.

The Kaaba is covered with a large cloth (*kiswa*) made of black brocade. There are quotations in Arabic from the Koran embroidered on the cloth. The *kiswa* is replaced every year at the time of the pilgrimage. The old cloth is cut up into many pieces that are sold to the pilgrims. The *kiswa*

was traditionally made in Egypt and brought by caravan to Mecca; today, however, it is made in Mecca.

When was the Kaaba made?

It is believed that the Kaaba was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael (the same figures familiar to westerners in the Old Testament). By the 600s, the Kaaba site had become a place where holy objects, including hundreds of idols of local gods, were placed and worshipped. The Prophet Muhammad, whose revelations form the basis of the Islamic faith, called on his followers to direct their prayers to the Kaaba in Mecca. The Kaaba was emptied of the statues and became the focal point of the new faith. (See introduction to Islam for more information on early Islam.)

What is Islam? Who are Muslims?

Islam means submission to Allah, the Arabic name for God. Islam is founded on the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and written down in the Koran. Muslims are followers of Islam, literally, “those who submit to the will of God.” Muslims believe in one God (Allah) and that Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets that included Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. When Muslims pray, they direct their prayers towards the Kaaba in Mecca.

What is the purpose of the pilgrimage?

Muslims are required by their faith to make a pilgrimage to the sacred sites of Mecca at least once in their lifetime, if they are physically able to do so. Pilgrims can come at other times of the year, but the month of pilgrimage (*Hajj*) is considered the most meritorious.

Pilgrims purify themselves before entering the sacred enclosure. Purification involves ritual cleansing, prayer, and the wearing of two pieces of white cloth. Wearing white is one way of showing that in the eyes of God, all are equal. Pilgrims circle the Kaaba seven times in a counterclockwise direction. The pilgrimage includes visiting other holy sites in and around Mecca.

The rapid growth of Islam over the centuries has meant that the city and its sacred sites are constantly expanding to accommodate increasing numbers of pilgrims. The present enclosure around the Kaaba can accommodate a half-million pilgrims at one time.

Slide no 2



Page from the life of the Prophet
By Mustafa Darir
Istanbul, about 1594-5
Gouache and gold on paper
Khalili collection no MSS 152.1

What is the subject of this painting?

The folio is part of an illustrated account of the life of Muhammad. It also addresses events in the early history of Islam that included many struggles to establish the faith's hegemony. This particular scene shows Abdallah ibn Johsh, bringing back booty to Medina from a raid by the companions of the Prophet. The written passages describing the scene are located above and below the painted portion. They are written in Arabic, and read from right to left.

Who was Muhammad? Why did his companions conduct raids?

Muhammad was born in Mecca around 570 ce. After his parents died, he was brought up by his grandfather and his uncle. As a young man, Muhammad worked with caravans and married a rich widow. At the age of forty, he began to hear voices proclaiming a new faith centered on the worship of one God. He preached to the people of Mecca, but his ideas angered many of the established merchants of the city. They chased him out of Mecca, and he and his followers established a new home for themselves at Medina, also in present-day Saudi Arabia. From there, they gained new

converts to their beliefs. They also launched raids on caravans headed for Mecca in order to disrupt trade and acquire the resources necessary to expand their following. Eventually, they re-entered Mecca and established it as the new center of their faith.

How has this scene been painted?

The image on this folio page was painted centuries after the event that it portrays. The artist has painted the figures according to the styles and fashions of his time. The mounted warriors resemble Ottoman cavalry. They wear chain mail over tunics, with plumed helmets. Merchants follow them with goods on the backs of donkeys. The presence of palm trees is an attempt to suggest the original location of the event (in western Saudi Arabia). Otherwise, the figures and the rather two-dimensional landscape behind them are painted in a style similar to paintings from Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid empire (area of present-day Iran). Sections of the painting are painted in gold, adding a decorative effect.

Where does this object come from?

This is a single page or folio from the fourth volume of a six-volume set commissioned by Sultan Murad III (reigned 1574–1595) in Istanbul. The set included 814 miniature paintings, one of which is this folio. Rulers of Islamic states were encouraged as part of their faith to patronize religious organizations. This often took the form of commissioned works of art, especially the arts of the book.

Slide no 3



Mehmed the Conqueror
By Sinan Bey
About 1480
Topkapi Palace Library, Istanbul

Who is depicted here?

This is a portrait of an Ottoman sultan named Mehmed II. It was painted when the sultan was 50 years old, at the height of his second reign (1451–1481). Mehmed is the Turkish form of the name Muhammad.

Who were the Ottomans?

The Ottomans were descended from nomadic Turkoman peoples in Central Asia. The Ottomans gradually created a centralized state and acquired territory in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions and the decline of the Byzantine empire. They eventually ruled over a vast area of the Balkans, Middle East, and West Asia for about 600 years. Sultans were the supreme rulers of the Ottoman empire.

What is this sultan famous for?

Mehmed II is famous for capturing the city of Constantinople in 1453. This brought to an end to the Byzantine empire, and established the city as the new capital of the Ottoman empire. From this point on, the city was known as Istanbul.

Mehmed was known as the “Conqueror.” His expansion of the empire included not only Istanbul, but also much of the Balkans. Those who succeeded him extended the empire even further to include Egypt, Syria, and parts of West Asia as far east as the Persian gulf.

How is Sultan Mehmed II depicted here?

The sultan sits cross-legged. He wears an outer, fur-lined *kaftan*, or ceremonial robe. He wears a turban consisting of white cotton wound round a crimson cap. In one hand, he holds a rose and in the other a handkerchief. The handkerchief symbolizes the authority of the sultan. The rose is a reflection of the sultan’s love of nature. Mehmed was also fond of tulips. He once wrote in a poem, “Footman, pour me some wine, for one day the tulip garden will be destroyed. Autumn will come and the spring season will be no more.”

What can we say about the sultan’s character?

Mehmed was an ambitious ruler and conqueror, and a tremendous lover of learning and the arts. He was an intense person who delved into the organization of his many military campaigns. He collected books, especially from Europe. He asked a Greek chronicler to write about his life as if he were writing about Alexander the Great. A Venetian visitor observed of the sultan, “Noble in arms, of an aspect inspiring fear rather than reverence, sparing of laughter, a pursuer of knowledge, gifted with princely liberality, stubborn of purpose, bold in all things...he speaks three languages, Turkish, Greek and Slavonic...Nothing gives him greater pleasure than to study the state of the world and the sciences of man. A shrewd explorer of affairs, he burns with desire to rule.”

The artist has captured some of the sultan’s intensity in this portrait. Mehmed’s eyes stare firmly ahead. His lips are tightly closed, and his one hand grips the handkerchief firmly. The portrait style may have been influenced by the Venetian artist Bellini, who was a visiting painter at the court of Mehmed II.

Slide no 4



View of the Topkapi Palace Harem
Photograph courtesy E-Stock Photo, New York

What is shown in this photograph?

The photograph shows the rooftops of one section of the palace complex known as the Topkapi or Topkapi Saray. Seen here are the private quarters known as the harem. The Topkapi is situated on a promontory overlooking the stretch of waters known as the Bosphorus. Part of the modern city of Istanbul can be seen on the opposite shore.

What was the function of the Topkapi Palace?

For centuries, the Topkapi was the residence of the sultan and his family, as well as the seat of government and the site of various ceremonies for the city and the state. Today, it is a museum and houses the precious objects collected by the sultans and their courts.

The Topkapi was begun by Mehmed II (see previous slide) as a series of pavilions enclosed by courtyards. These structures were augmented over the centuries by successive sultans to include additional living quarters, gardens, government buildings and service areas.

The Topkapi was not laid out around a single view, leading to a prominent structure. It is a more modest set of buildings, each with its own function. Privacy and seclusion, rather than grandeur, governed the layout of the palace. Access to each section was increasingly limited the further one progressed inside.

What was the harem?

The term *harem* means “forbidden.” The harem area of the palace was off-limits to all except for the sultan, his immediate family, and female household. The area was staffed by black male servants who had been castrated.

The sultan was allowed to marry up to four wives. In addition, he kept many slave women. Perhaps for these reasons, and because very few outsiders ever saw inside the harem, many fantastic imaginings of harem life circulated in the west.

What was a woman’s life like in the harem?

Women of the harem were either related to the sultan or were slaves. The most powerful woman in the harem was the Valide Sultan, or the Sultan’s mother. She was very influential and often advised her son about household matters and government issues. Most sultans also had relationships with the slave women in the harem. If a woman had a male child, she rose in stature because the boy could someday become the sultan. Ironically, many of the successive sultans were actually the offspring of Ottoman sultans and slave women.

The slave women usually had been bought or given to the sultan as gifts. Often they were captured in different lands as the empire grew. They could receive an excellent education and had opportunities to improve their status. Many were married off to governors, commanders, or other officials.

What about women’s lives outside the harem?

Muslim women could not be enslaved. Since they followed Islamic laws about female modesty, however, they rarely ventured outside the home. When they did leave home to pray at mosques or to bathe in public bathhouses, they wore long dresses and veils to cover their faces and hair.

At home, Ottoman women did the household chores, took care of their children, or supervised servants if they had them. Women also often sewed, embroidered, or played music. There wasn’t much opportunity for women to have jobs. But they could earn money by weaving carpets or embroidering—work that could be done at home. They could also work as midwives to help women deliver their babies.

A woman’s marriage was typically arranged. In most cases the man and woman would not meet before the wedding. Even though women were not considered equal to men, they had rights to divorce and to own property.

Slide no 5



Single-volume Koran, approximately 1470
Turkey, Istanbul
Gold, ink, pigment on wove paper
Khalili collection no QUR 34

What is this object?

Seen here are the opening pages (frontispiece) of a single volume of the holy Koran. The Koran (Kur'an, Qur'an) is believed by Muslims to contain the words of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It is written and recited in Arabic. The Koran is not only a sacred text, but also a sacred object. It can only be touched by believers, and those who are ritually pure.

This copy consists of 640 folio pages and is encased in a leather cover with an envelope flap for added protection. The calligraphy and decoration have been made by hand. The surface of the paper has been highly polished so that the letters and decoration will not bleed through to the other side.

Who made this copy?

Since the book is not signed, we do not know the name of the artists who worked on it. However, a surviving document indicates that it was made for a man named Mercan Aga in the years imme-

diately following the capture of Constantinople, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II (slide no 3). Mercan Aga was Chief of the White Eunuchs at the Topkapi Palace (slide no 4), an important position at court. Mercan Aga commissioned a number of buildings during his life. Like the sultans, important members of the court and Ottoman society were expected to make contributions to religious and social organizations. Often, hundreds of copies of the Koran were given to mosques or schools. Those who could not afford their own copy of the Koran could read copies at the mosque.

Who were the White Eunuchs?

White Eunuchs were castrated men, usually from the Caucasus region, who were the primary teaching staff at the palace. Eunuchs also commanded troops, guarded the harem and its women, and performed various administrative functions.

What is the purpose and style of the decoration?

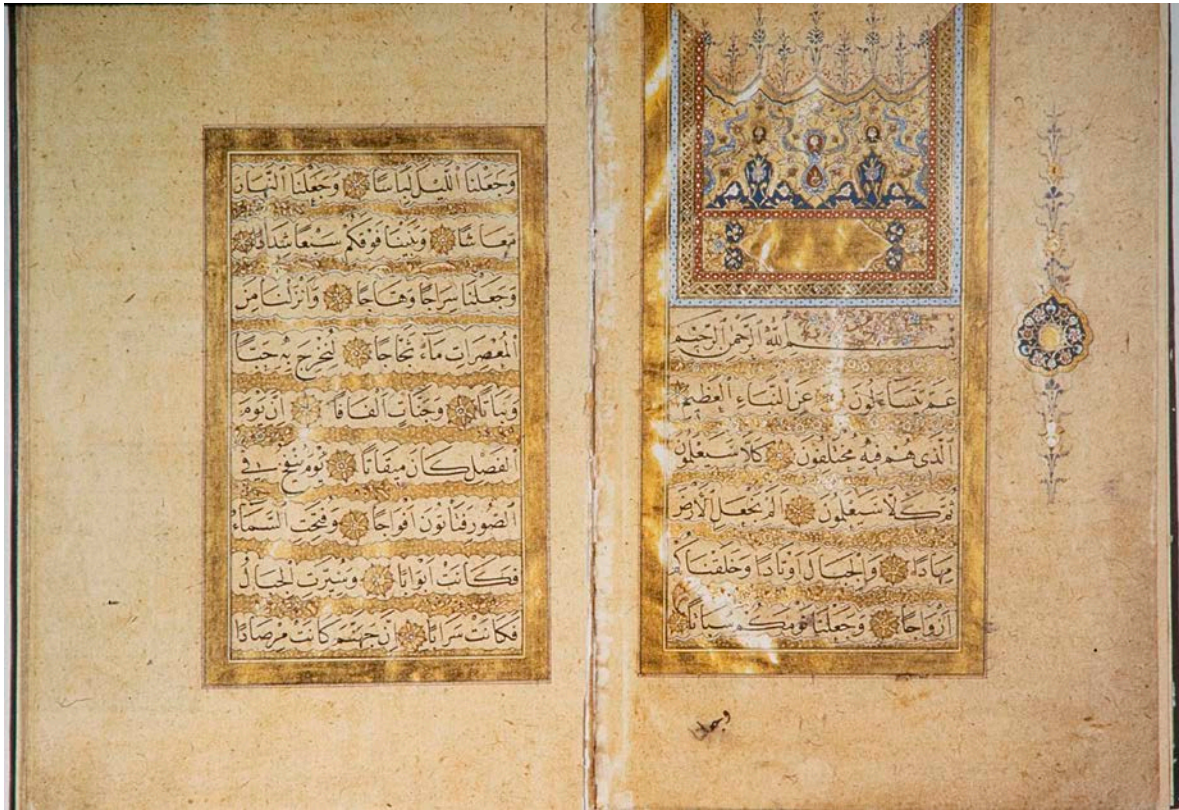
This is a rare surviving example of a Koran from the early Ottoman period. The pages are heavily decorated because they are the opening pages of the Koran. Since the words of the Koran are believed by Muslims to be the word of God, the decoration of the text is extremely important. The addition of bright colors and patterns is called illumination. The illumination dignifies the holy text.

Art historians tell us that the decorative motifs seen here are related to Timurid and Mamluk styles. Timurid is the name of a period (1370-1501) founded by Timur, a descendant of the Mongols. Timur ruled a vast area of West Asia until the time of the early Ottoman empire. The Mamluks ruled in the area of Egypt and Syria and are best known as the dynasty that fought the European crusaders. This area was taken over by the Ottomans in 1517.

Each page of this text is highlighted by intricate designs using green, blue, gold, and salmon colors. At the center of each page is a roundel (round form) made of swirling arabesques. Arabesques are tendril and leaf shapes that curve around each other. The arabesques are repeated in gold over green and around red and black motifs called palmettes on the outer border sections.

The Arabic inscriptions can be seen at the top and bottom of each page. The top part of the page is often reserved for chapter (*surah*) headings of the Koran.

Slide no 6



Thirtieth part of a multi-part Koran
Copied by Hafiz Osman, 1687–1688
Gold, ink, pigment on brownish laid paper
Khalili collection no. QUR 9

Why are there thirty parts to this Koran?

Korans can appear in single or multiple volumes. They can be divided into thirty parts, to be read over a thirty-day period. For example, a thirty-part Koran can be read publicly over the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during the daylight hours.

Why is calligraphy important?

Islamic art places a very high value on calligraphy because it is the means by which the word of God is transmitted to humanity. In the words of the Prophet Muhammad, “good writing makes the truth stand out.” During the Ottoman period, scribes assigned to writing the Koran worked separately from those writing official documents. Different scripts were used for different purposes. This script is called *nesik* or *nesih* and was often used for writing the Koran at this time.

What did the artist “copy” here?

The artist has copied the work of a famous calligrapher named Seyh Hamdullah (1436–1520). Seyh Hamdullah was the son of a Sufi (mystic within the Islamic faith). He taught Sultan Bayezid II calligraphy while the sultan was still a provincial governor. When Bayezid became sultan, Hamdullah accompanied him to the palace, and became famous as a calligrapher. Two hundred years later, Hafiz Osman copied Hamdullah’s writing in this Koran. Osman became known as the successor to the tradition established by Hamdullah, and continued to be the most influential calligrapher until the 1800s.

Copying the works of earlier masters was a sign of respect, a way of maintaining valued traditions, and a means of proving one’s abilities within the framework of established masters. Unlike many contemporary artists, who place a premium on originality, copying was a respected and consistent feature of calligraphic practice during Ottoman times. Successful imitation of the work of a calligraphy master was considered a significant achievement.

What are the different pictorial elements here?

Unlike the previous example (slide no 5), this Koran is more sparsely decorated. The calligraphy is what is most important. The script begins on the right page with the standard introductory phrase called the *bismillah*, “In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.” This phrase appears at the beginning of each chapter of the Koran. Above the calligraphy is an illumination that would have been made by a separate artist. The gold is applied either in powder form or in gold sheets attached with glue. The lines of script are surrounded by gold, and each verse is marked by a gold rosette.

The script is admired for its regularity and clarity, and for the beauty of its proportions. Proportion is the correct, balanced relationship between the different parts of each letter, for example the balance between the vertical, horizontal, descending and ascending parts of the letter, and the way the letters connect with one other. Space around the letters must be carefully considered as well. Years of practice are required to achieve success in this highly revered art form.

Slide no 7



Interior of the Suleymaniye mosque
1550–1557
Istanbul, Turkey
Photograph by Wolf-Christian von der Mulbe

What is a mosque?

A mosque (Arabic, *masjid*) literally means a place where one prostrates oneself in prayer. Mosques were constructed throughout the Islamic world as places of prayer. In large mosques such as this one, huge congregations of worshippers come to pray together, and to recite and hear passages read from the holy Koran.

Usually a mosque includes a courtyard where worshippers gather and ritually wash themselves before entering the prayer hall. Rising above the ground is at least one minaret, a tower from which the faithful are called to prayer five times a day. Inside the mosque, a small niche (*mihrab*) is placed on the wall that marks the direction of Mecca (*kiblah*).

Who built this mosque?

This mosque was designed by Sinan (approx. 1490–1588) a famous architect and engineer whose illustrious career included work on nearly 200 buildings. Sinan was a non-Muslim who entered the

service of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) through the training system known as *devshirme* that trained young men for military and civil service positions. Sinan entered the army and was chief engineer during the Ottoman siege of Vienna. He was inspired by the architecture of the Byzantine church Hagia Sophia (pronounced “Eye-ah Sophia”) that the Ottomans converted to a mosque shortly after their conquest of Constantinople. Suleyman launched an ambitious building program that included the mosque illustrated here, named after himself. It was begun in 1550 on prime property made available after a fire at the Old Palace. It was the most ambitious mosque constructed by the Ottomans.

What can we see in the interior?

The slide shows the main prayer hall inside the mosque. Above the hall rises the main dome to a height of 150 feet, the diameter measuring almost 90 feet. Four massive pillars support the main dome. A series of smaller domes cascades down from the main dome. The dome shapes are repeated on the surrounding buildings. A comparison with the dome of Hagia Sophia reveals that the Suleymaniye mosque has many more windows, giving a lighter feeling to the upper portions of the building. A phrase from the Koran written inside the dome reinforces this notion: “God is the light of the heavens and the earth.”

Where the four pillars meet the dome is a section of decorated stonework called a pendentive. The large roundels on each pendentive have been filled with calligraphy executed in a circular fashion. Smaller roundels on the walls have been filled with the names of Allah, Muhammad, and other leading figures (caliphs) of the founding period of Islamic history.

The kiblah wall is decorated with ceramic tiles. Above the wall are the original stained glass windows. Hanging down from the ceiling are rings of lamps that are lit in the evening, producing a luminescent effect. The floor is covered with rugs that are used by those bowing down in prayer while facing the *kiblah* wall. Against the right side of the kiblah wall is a stepped platform called a *minbar* that is used for giving sermons.

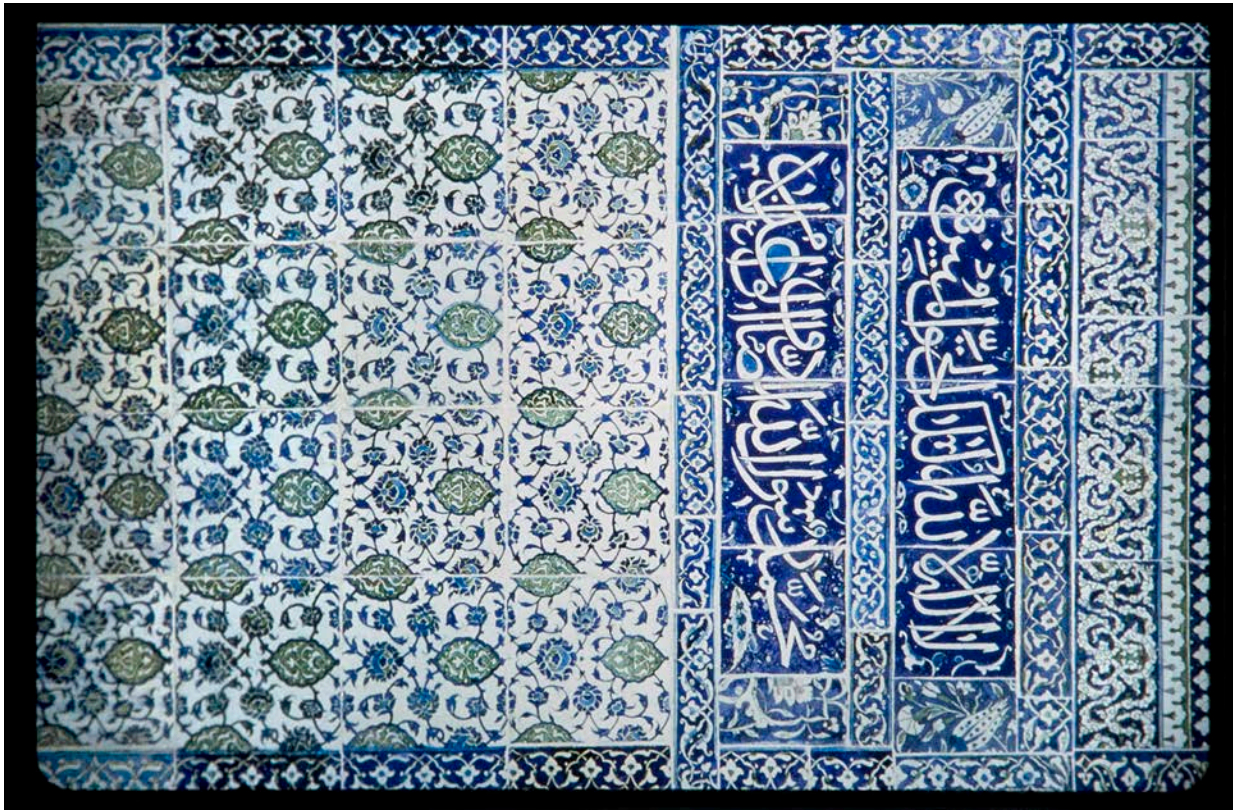
What else is contained in this mosque?

The Suleymaniye mosque is not just a prayer hall, but a vast complex enclosing eighteen major buildings. These include a hospital, four schools (*madrasa*), a cemetery, a guest house, and a kitchen for the poor, as well as the tombs of Suleyman and his wife Hurrem (see plan elsewhere in this packet). Each of the major buildings follows a layout similar to that of the prayer hall, with multiple domed rooms surrounding a rectangular or square courtyard. About 750 employees worked here. The foundation established to support the complex drew its proceeds mainly from village taxes collected in the European part of the empire.

How was the mosque built?

Ottoman records have left us detailed accounts of the building process. As many as 3,000 workmen labored at the site at any one time during its construction. The manual laborers included both Christians and Muslims recruited from around the city. The army was employed for various jobs. Materials came from all over the empire. Parts of old Byzantine or Roman buildings were employed in construction. Iron and lead came from the Balkans. Glass was produced in Venice. Ceramic tiles were manufactured in Iznik (see next slide). A calligrapher by the name of Hasan Celebi carved and painted most of the inscriptions seen in the mosque.

Slide no. 8



Tile panel
Approximately 1560–1700
Damascus, Syria
Underglaze-painted ceramic
Khalili collection no. POT 1325

What is this object?

This is a set of tile panels used to decorate a mosque in Damascus, Syria. The Ottomans conquered Syria in the 1500s, and in the process, restored many of the mosques in this region.

Why were ceramic tiles used as decoration?

Ottoman rulers, like their counterparts in Iran and India, used religious and secular buildings to enhance their imperial stature. Islam strongly discouraged the use of images of humans and other living creatures in religious settings, as well as in sacred art and writings. Therefore, places of worship such as mosques were enhanced with decorative elements and materials such as marble, mosaics, and glazed tiles. The surfaces of these materials incorporated calligraphy, geometric patterns, and repeated motifs called arabesques (see also slide no 5).

Where were the tiles placed?

Panels such as this decorated the kiblah wall (the wall indicating the direction of Mecca), and more specifically the niche or *mihrab* placed at the center of the *kiblah* wall. The photograph below shows an extensive arrangement of tiles in the Rustem Pasha mosque in Istanbul. Almost every part of the wall below the windows in this photograph is covered with tiles.



Tiles on the kiblah wall of Rustem Pasha Mosque, Istanbul, 1561.

What are the different pictorial elements seen here?

There are two Arabic inscriptions in two panels near the top. Translated, they read, “There is no God but God, the Lord, the Truth, Who makes all things manifest” and “Muhammad is the Apostle of God, true to what he promised, worthy of all trust.”

Below these tiles are twenty stenciled tiles with staggered green medallions interspersed with lotus motifs. The medallions are the same shapes often seen in the center (field) section of Turkish and Persian carpets. The lotus design is derived from Chinese works of art; hence the term “chinoiserie” is often applied to these designs. Arabesques can be seen in the many connecting leafy tendrils that curve around the other motifs. The overall effect is one of continual movement, animation, and liveliness.

These panels were painted before being glazed and fired, a process described by the term “underglaze.” Stencils were used to create patterns. Some panels in this work appear to be out of place. This may be an indication of restoration work, or even modern substitutions for the originals.

Slide no. 9



Kiblah compass and sundial (back left) Late 1700s
Wood with brass attachments in brown leather case
Khalili collection no SCI 149

Kiblah compass and sundial (back right)
Dated 1748
Brass attached to a wooden base
Khalili collection no SCI 270

Kiblah compass
Dated 1808–1809
Inscribed cardboard in brass case
Khalili collection no SCI 275

Objects photographed in their installation in the exhibition, "Empire of the Sultans"

What are these objects?

These three objects are scientific instruments designed to indicate to the user the direction of Mecca. Muslims must know the direction of Mecca, because that is the prescribed direction of prayer. Islam requires that its followers pray five times a day. Since Muslims often prayed (and still pray) at great distances from Mecca, compasses helped to determine one's position with respect to Mecca.

How did science serve the needs of the Islamic faith?

In Islamic cultures, science and faith often supported each other. Muhammad admired and urged the pursuit of knowledge: “He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in the path of God.” In the mid-600s, Arabs came into contact with Greek culture in Syria and were inspired to begin their own search for knowledge. By 850, Muslims had translated many of the classic Greek texts in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. During Europe’s medieval period, Arab scholars surpassed the west in their numerous advances in these fields.

Science supported the Islamic faith on several levels. For example, prayer required knowledge of the lunar calendar, which meant observing the heavens. The heavens, in turn, seemed to follow patterns that suggested God was like a grand mathematician or geometrician. Islamic science developed great proficiencies in these areas.

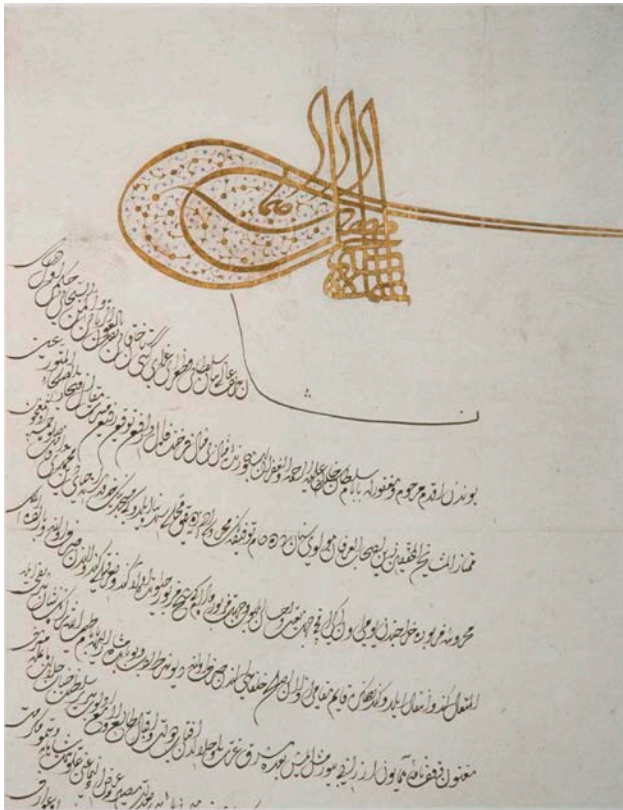
Early in Islamic history, astrology and astronomy were closely linked. By the 1200s–1300s, astronomy was becoming a more exact science. Determining one’s position in relation to Mecca not only affected prayer, but also the correct orientation of new mosques. Correct observation of the stars allowed for more accurate time keeping during the months of Ramadan and Hajj. Scientific instruments such as the ones shown here also helped to develop detailed accurate maps. Astrolabes and later sextants helped western sailors and explorers navigate their way around the globe.

How were the instruments used?

The small compass in the front of the case in the photograph may have been made for use at sea. At the center top of this object is an image of the Kaaba (see slide no 1) with small circles around it, indicating different winds associated with the primary directions of the compass. Place names are indicated around the edge of the card, which floats freely on a center pivot.

The compass on the right is a more complex version of the one on the back left. Both incorporate sundials. Around the base are place names and associated winds. The portions of the compass on top are adjusted for latitude. Parts are missing on each compass. All three compasses are signed by the individuals who made them.

Slide no 10



Decree (*ferman*) with the imperial monogram (*tugra*) of Suleyman the Magnificent
Dated 1521
Istanbul, Turkey
Two sheets of polished paper with 24 lines of script and black ink powdered with gold.
Khalili collection no. MSS 802

What is this object?

This is a type of official document produced by the Ottoman court. These decrees are called *ferman*. They were written confirmations that supported Muslim laws and imperial rule. They were written on long scrolls. The best have been collected not only as historical documents, but also as works of art.

How were these documents made “official”?

Documents were written in an official text and “signed” by the reigning sultan. The sultan’s signature took the form of an imperial monogram called a *tugra*. *Tugras* were written above the text and often richly illuminated. This example shows the *tugra* of Suleyman the Magnificent and is dated 1521. The official script for such documents is called *divani* and is written with flowing, slanted strokes of the pen. Each line was densely written, to prevent alteration.

How do you read a *tugra*? Who wrote them?

The sultan did not sign every document that was produced at court. The making of the sultan's *tugra* was assigned to a master scribe who specialized in this art. The *tugra* became highly sophisticated art forms. They appeared not only on official documents, but also on coins, buildings, and other objects.

The *tugra* is like an elaborate signature, specially designed for each sultan. The actual name of the sultan, including his father's name and associated titles, is contained in the lower right-hand section that resembles a knot. Above the name portion are three shafts. Two ovals fan out to the left. In the 1500s, it became fashionable to fill these ovals with decorative patterns.

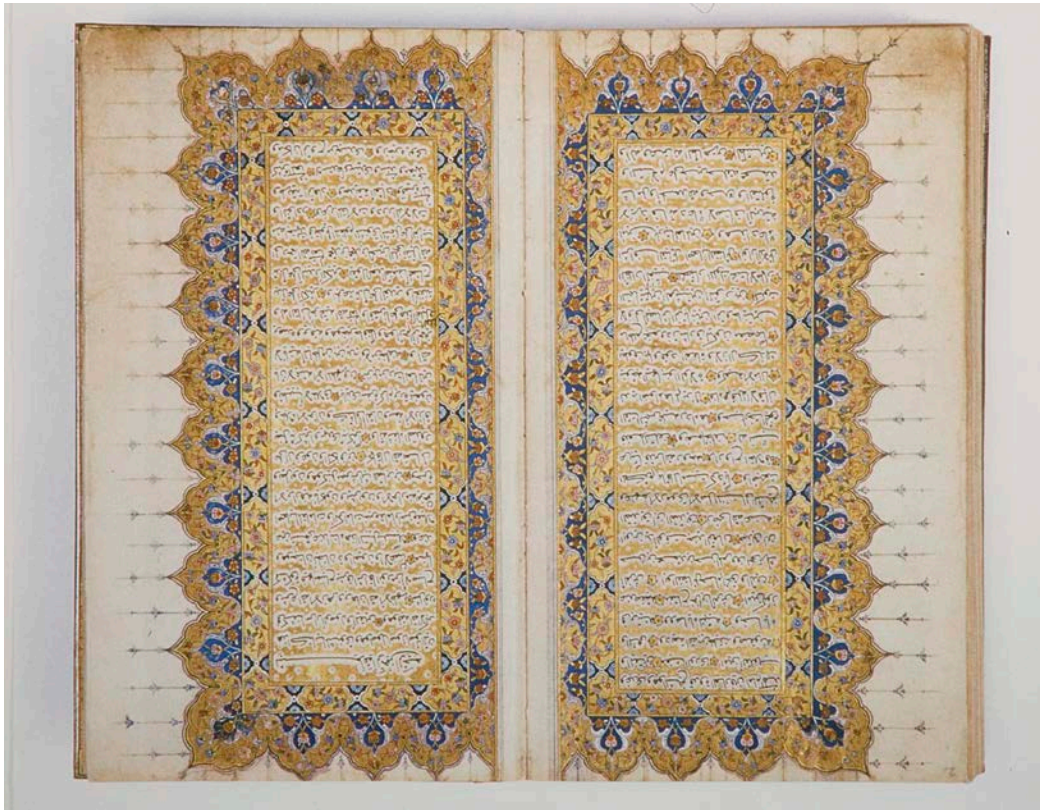
There have been many interpretations of the origin of the *tugra*, including the suggestion that they are based on shapes of the sultan's fingers (the shafts) and thumb (the ovals). Another theory suggests that they may have developed from standards carried into battle by Central Asian nomads who were the ancestors of the Ottomans.

What is written on this decree?

This document confirms arrangements made by the previous sultan (Suleyman's father Selim I) to extend the arrangements given to a Sufi *sheikh* by the name of Sinan Dede. The reason for the extension was to ensure the continuation of salaries and expenses needed to run a mosque at Erdine. A *sheikh* is a teacher or master within the Sufi tradition, the mystical branch of Islam. Among the Sufi orders, Sinan Dede was associated with the Mevlevi order of dervishes (see next slide for further information).

Ottoman sultans supported the religious life of the empire by giving leading subjects property that could be turned into "pious endowments." These gifts had to be re-confirmed by each sultan. Trustees of religious institutions acquired these degrees as official documents.

Slide no 11



Pages from *Poems of Inner Meaning* by Celaleddin Rumi
1653–1654
Ottoman provinces, probably Sarajevo
Gold, ink, and pigment on paper
Khalili collection no. MSS 156

What is this book?

The *Poems of Inner Meaning* (*Mathnavi- I Manavi*) is the most famous work written by Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), founder of the Mevlevi order of dervishes. The work consists of 27,000 couplets describing Sufi doctrine through poetry and fable.

Who was Rumi? What is Sufism? Who are dervishes?

Rumi was born in the area of present-day Afghanistan in 1207. His family moved to Anatolia (Turkey) because of Mongol invasions. Rumi was trained as a religious scholar and teacher. But his life changed forever at the age of thirty-seven after meeting a wandering dervish named Shams of Tabriz. From that point on, he devoted his life to teaching and writing about mysticism. He is known most of all for his Persian mystical poetry. His poetry is filled with references to the natural world, and seemingly simple, everyday things take on universal significance. Rumi poses surprising questions, using humor, metaphors, and allegories, and creating inner dialogues on perplexing matters (see sample quotations elsewhere in this packet). Sufi writers often expounded on beauty, and

the divine beauty reflected in the [visual?] arts. These Sufi poets believed that the works produced by artists were beautiful if they reflected the inner soul of the person making them.

Sufism refers to various mystical movements within the Islamic tradition. Some of these movements were considered dangerous to mainstream Islam, whereas others were widely adopted and supported by various regimes.

The goals of Sufi practice were an intense personal experience of God, and ultimately, the union of an individual's soul with God. Achieving these spiritual feats involved various stages of practice.

Sufi disciples worked with master teachers called *sheikhs*, and these teachers worked within the framework of *derwish* orders. A *derwish* is someone who follows a life of austerity under the direction of a *sheikh*. Sufi derwish orders helped to convert new peoples to Islam. Famous Sufi mystics were also revered as saints. Their tombs became pilgrimage sites imbued with spiritual power (*baraka*). Rumi's tomb at Konya in Turkey is revered in this way.



Painting of a young Mevlevi dervish holding a book and fan (detail), Khalili collection no. MSS 505.



What was the Mevlevi order of dervishes?

The Mevlevi dervish order made important contributions to Ottoman culture and government. Mevlevi dervishes wrote poetry and copied the Koran. They are best known for their whirling dances. Most Muslims do not use music as a way of expressing faith. But Mevlevi dervishes are recognized for making music a part of Muslim worship because their prayer ceremonies include dance, chanting, and musical instruments. Because they spin when they dance, they are known as the “whirling dervishes.” They wear conelike hats and full white robes that fans out when they dance. Some sultans would watch the dervishes’ spinning dance to relax and calm their minds.

Who wrote the text here?

According to an inscription, the manuscript in this slide was copied by a Serbian scribe, “in the new convent built and restored for the Mevlevi dervishes at Saray (Sarajevo).” The text is written in the same script as the Koran in slide no. 6. Illumination with gold and blue frames the text on either side.



Panel of prayers by Sultan Mahmut II
Istanbul
Gold on card painted in ultramarine
Khalili collection no. CAL 312

What is this subject?

This is a single panel of calligraphy written by Sultan Mahmut II, who reigned from 1807–1839. The name portion of his imperial monogram, or *tugra* (see slide no 10), appears in the lower-left-hand corner inside a laurel wreath.

The two lines of script read (from right to left, top to bottom) “My intercession will be for those of my community who committed great sins,” and “Intercede for me, O Prophet of God”. The first line is a saying or *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad. The second is a plea for the Prophet’s assistance.

Why did the sultans practice calligraphy?

Sultan Mahmut II was one of the most accomplished Ottoman monarchs to practice calligraphy. His work is considered by scholars to be equal in quality to many of the best calligraphers of his time. Mahmut studied under two masters, Mehmed Vasfi (d. 1831) and Mustafa Rakim (d.1826),

the latter considered a master of calligraphic composition. Rakim also designed Sultan Mahmud II's *tugra*.

Sultans were expected to practice at least one art form. Mahmut probably found the practice of calligraphy a welcome change from the many demands of his position. During his reign, for example, the Janissary army revolted and stormed the palace. A decade later, in 1826, they revolted again. This time, the Janissaries had to be crushed by a new army that the sultan organized. Thousands died in the revolt. Writing religious texts may have been an exercise in religious transcendence for the sultan during such difficult times.

What is the style and format of this panel?

During the later Ottoman period, calligraphy was practiced and collected in new ways, while still adhering to time-honored traditions. Larger pieces of paper were manufactured and mounted on sheets of cardboard. The calligraphic panel seen here is called a *levha*. *Levha* were typically made using *kalip* or perforated sheets that allowed one to copy calligraphic works. The sultan who created this work was probably copying the work of his master teacher as a demonstration of his own mastery of this form of calligraphy.

Large paper formats called for different calligraphic scripts. The script seen here is called *thulth* style, a larger script than those seen in the earlier Korans. The composition of the first line here is centered on the three vertical strokes in the middle. On the second line, these vertical strokes are more evenly spread across the line of text. Snake-like strokes connect several of the letters together in a distinct fashion. The overall effect is one of great compositional balance, coupled with strong, solid letters.

Slide no 13



Talismanic shirt
1500–1700
Ink on cotton
Khalili collection no. TXT 77

What is this object?

This is a cotton shirt covered with magical writing. Such shirts are often described as “talismanic.” A talisman is an object, sign, or symbol that has the power to protect against evil or bring good fortune. It is not clear what the exact function of the writing on this shirt is, but the shirt was probably worn under armor as spiritual protection in battle.

How do we know the shirt might have been used this way?

There are signs of wear on this shirt, for example perspiration marks under the arms. In addition we know that the Janissary Ottoman army were supporters of a particular dervish order (see slide no 11) having sympathies for the Shi’ites. The Shi’ites, one of the two major sects of Islam, were followers of Ali, a successor to the Prophet whose legitimacy is disputed by some Muslims. Shi’ite invocations to Ali appear several times on the shirt.

The strongest evidence that magical shirts were used as talismans in battle comes from a letter written to Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–1566) by his wife Hurrem. The letter accompanies a shirt she sent to her husband that was made by a holy man according to directions he had received from the Prophet in a dream. She urged her husband to wear the shirt, for “it had sacred names woven in it and would turn aside bullets.”

Talismanic shirts are found in Ottoman, Safavid (Persian), Mughal (Indian), and West African cultures. These shirts sometimes contain not only writing, but also protective amulets and other objects imbued with magical or spiritual power.

What does the writing say?

The shirt is covered with prayers, verses from the Koran, names of God, and invocations to Ali, the fourth caliph. A holy person would have executed the writing, but that person is not identified here. Some of the religious inscriptions appear in squares thought to have magical properties. The inscriptions are similar to those appearing on magical charts often carried in amulets. In some places, magic numbers and the ninety-nine names for God have been used. The purpose of such repetition is to spread the protective forces over a larger area of the body.

Slide no. 14



War mask
Approximately 1470–1500
Turkey, Russia, or Iran
Iron and steel, with beaten and engraved decoration
Khalili collection no. MTW 1390

How was this mask used?

This is a rare example of war mask in the shape of a human face. It is unusual to see a three-dimensional image of a human face in any kind of Islamic art. We know from a few other surviving examples that it was attached to a helmet using the hinge on the brow. Similarly, holes on the side of the face probably held circular devices to protect the ears. A warrior on horseback probably wore this mask to frighten his enemies. The face is rendered with a high degree of naturalism, with prominent features such as strong eyebrows and a long moustache.

Where did it come from?

It is not clear where this mask was produced and for whom. War masks have a long history, dating back to antiquity. They can be seen in the art of ancient Rome and ancient West Asia. They appear in miniature paintings from other Islamic cultures, as well as paintings depicting the Mongols. The style of the inscription on this mask (which is difficult to decipher) has been linked to objects from Derbend in present-day Russia. Derbend armorers were famous throughout the Muslim world,

although they did not convert to Islam until the 1300s. An Ottoman document that survives from the late 1400s authorizes a wholesaler to import armor from this region. Therefore, the mask may have been made outside of Turkey for use by the Ottomans, or it may have been captured from non-Ottoman forces.

What other arms did soldiers and armed horsemen carry?

Many of the soldiers and cavalry of this era would have been expected to bring their own arms and armor with them on military campaigns. The Ottoman cavalry and army carried bows, arrows, shields, swords, and maces until the 1500s, when muskets began to be used. Even when rifles were in common use, they were used at a distance, and swords were the preferred weapons for close combat (see the section on the military under “Ottoman history” elsewhere in this packet).

Arms and armor were often inscribed with religious invocations. Soldiers were accompanied on the field of battle by military bands and huge banners. Small copies of the Koran were sometimes attached to these banners or carried with the soldiers.

Slide no 15



Wall hanging
1500–1700
Probably Morocco
Silk brocade
Khalili collection no TXT 27

What is this object?

This is a large piece of silk used as a wall covering. The photograph has been taken in the exhibition to show the scale of the textile. Lights have been kept low to help keep the colors from fading.

What are the design elements and how do these suggest where the piece was made?

Textiles do not survive over time very well, and often art historians have to interpret textiles on the basis of a few examples or fragments. Sometimes textiles are re-used for other purposes and their exact origins and functions are obscured.

The most noticeable aspect of this textile is the many niches spread across the center. This is called a *saf* design. The niches represent the *mibrab* niche in the mosque (see slide no.7) Mosque lamps can be seen hanging down on several of the niches. The border of the textile contains a lively pattern in red, yellow, and black. Textiles like this were produced earlier in Spain.

When Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain in 1492, some textile production moved to Morocco. The colors, design, and finish of this textile suggest that it was produced in Morocco from the 1500s onward.

How was it used?

The most famous example of this type of textile was apparently used as part of an Ottoman military tent that was left behind at the siege of Vienna in 1683. Ottoman paintings of the 1700s show textiles were often used in complex architectural fashion, forming not just tents, but elaborate dining and ceremonial halls, for example. Textiles such as this would have hung on the lower parts of a wall, adding color and texture to the interior space.

Why were tents (and their decoration) important to the Ottomans?

The use of tents in Ottoman culture can be traced back to their nomadic origins on the steppes of Central Asia. Tents were very transportable and were decorated with textiles. The size of the tent reflected the status of the owner. Ottoman sultans ascended the throne under special tents constructed of silk, with silver and gold threads. The Topkapi Palace itself may have been modeled after a set of tent enclosures. Tent “cities” accompanied armies on the march. On longer campaigns, soldiers even planted gardens in front of their tents. Some western observers noted that the Ottomans “lodge more grandly in the field than at home.”

Tents left after the siege of Vienna were carried away by Europeans. As these textiles aged beyond practical use, their new owners created tent-like structures of more durable materials such as stone and brick. These evolved into the follies, pavilions, and bandshells that stand in western parks, houses, and gardens built in the 1700s and 1800s.

Slide no. 16



The Nur al-Din Room

1707

Damascus, Syria

Wood, marble, stucco, glass, mother-of-pearl, ceramics, tile, stone, iron, colors, gold

The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Gift of the The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, 1970 (1970.170)

What is this room and where is it from?

This is a reception room from the house of Nur al-Din in Damascus, Syria. It is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. (Photograph c. 1995, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, used with permission).

What is the layout of the room?

We are looking at the room from the courtyard. The front area with fountain is where the servants stood. The raised section is the reception area. The flooring in both areas is made of marble and highlighted by sections of colored geometric patterns. The extensive woodwork on the high ceiling and wall panels is lavishly painted and decorated. Each wooden panel is covered with gesso and then painted with abstract and floral patterns. Arabic inscriptions can be seen on the far wall. Gilding adds a touch of brilliance to the predominantly warm colors of the wood. The open niches on the wall show us how books and ceramics were displayed and stored in the home. The stained glass window provides a touch of color. Fresh air enters through the grilled sections of the lower windows. Cushions are arranged along the walls for seating.

What features of this room are typical of Islamic rooms?

Traditional Islamic homes are generally quite unassuming seen from the street. The emphasis is on the interior space. Lattice windows provide privacy while allowing air to circulate. Marble floors are cool for hot summers. Wool carpets can be added for warmth in the winter months. Rooms often face courtyards. Furniture is used sparingly. Inhabitants and guests sit on cushions lined along the walls called *divans*. Small tables or trays could be brought out for refreshments. Most of the decoration in these homes is achieved through tilework, woodwork, textile coverings, and carpets.

What does a Damascus interior have to do with the Ottomans?

The room is dated to the later Ottoman period, when Syria was a province of the Ottoman empire. Before this, Egypt and Syria were ruled by the Mamluk dynasty. The Mamluks were famous for repeatedly halting the westward advance of the Mongols during the 1200s. They also helped drive out the Crusaders. The Mamluks were finally defeated by the Ottomans in 1517. Syrian artists, renowned for their pottery, their enameled glasswares, and their woodwork, were absorbed into the greater sphere of Ottoman culture.

Slide no. 17



Flask or bottle
Approximately 1560–1580
Iznik, Turkey
Underglaze-painted ceramic
Khalili collection no.POT 1584

What is this object?

This is a long-necked flask or water bottle produced in Iznik, a town about 100 kilometers from Istanbul in northwest Turkey. It is painted with many colors on a white background. The decoration consists mainly of alternating hyacinths (in blue) and prunus blossoms (in red) on the main body of the vessel and top of the neck, with various abstract patterns in the middle of the neck. The floral designs on this bottle appear to have been hand-painted. Often Iznik wares have designs made from stencils. The hyacinth motif appeared in the 1540s, but it became increasingly popular between 1550 and 1600.

Why is Iznik important to Ottoman art?

Between the late 1400s and early 1600s, the kilns at Iznik produced some of the finest ceramics in the Islamic world. These kilns were patronized by the Ottoman court, but they also produced wares for a wider market. Early Iznik wares were largely decorated in blue and white color schemes, but later wares (such as this one) incorporated many colors, including a brilliant red and sage-green colors.

About the same time this bottle was made, Iznik potters began to shift their work towards the production of ceramic tiles for use on the walls of mosques, tombs, and other imperial building projects. They also faced competition from other ceramic wares being produced in Damascus (see slide no.8).

What influenced the style of Iznik wares?

Iznik forms were sometimes modeled on other decorative arts such as metalwork or glasswares. The form of this bottle is based on metalwork. This can be seen in the knot in the middle of the neck, and by the way the bottle shape appears to be constructed from distinct sections, rather than formed as one shape on the potter's wheel.

In general, Iznik wares were influenced by the fashions of the Ottoman court in Istanbul. They were also influenced by the desire to imitate Chinese porcelains. The first Iznik wares produced for court were called *cini-I Iznik*, *cini* meaning "China." (For more on the Chinese connection, see the next slide description.) Suleyman the Magnificent's court painter, Kara Memi (active 1545–1566), was responsible for introducing more naturalistic floral imagery into Ottoman designs at the same time as the color palette for Iznik wares was expanding. Thus, Iznik wares responded to domestic, internal fashions as well as to foreign influences.

How was this bottle made?

Since Iznik potters did not have access to the same ingredients and firing techniques that were used in China to make porcelains, they developed other techniques to make cheaper, competitive wares that resembled porcelain.

Islamic potters had a long tradition of covering earthenware vessels with a white slip (creamy mixture of clay and water), but earthenware is heavy and not very strong. By the height of the Mongol empire (1200s), potters were developing what is called "fritware." Fritware was an attempt to make lighter and thinner ceramics (to compete with Chinese high-fired wares) by creating an artificial clay body. Instead of using mostly clay, fritware uses only a small percentage of fine white clay, mixed with mostly ground sand or quartz (silica), and a small amount of glass frit (ground glass). Iznik wares utilized variations of this formula for the body, adding a brilliant white slip that was painted with floral scrolls and other designs, and then covered with a clear, shiny glaze.

Slide no. 18



Dish
Approximately 1530–1550
Iznik, Turkey
Underglaze-painted ceramic
Khalili collection no. POT 1123

What is this object?

This dish, like the bottle in the previous slide, was made at Iznik. It is a particularly fine example of Chinese-inspired wares. These types of dishes are often referred to as “Ming grape dishes” because they follow closely the design of dishes produced in China about a century earlier during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

In this dish, there are three bunches of grapes, surrounded by eight lotus sprigs. The rim is covered with a “wave and rock” scroll pattern. A comparison can be made with a similar Chinese dish from the Ming dynasty in the collections of the Asian Art Museum (below). Iznik designs tend to be freer in style than their Chinese counterparts. It could be that the Iznik potters were under less stringent guidelines, or that designs were more freely copied from Chinese originals.



Dish, 1400–1425, China, Ming dynasty,
The Avery Brundage Collection, B65 P6.

How did Chinese porcelains become so influential?

Chinese porcelains were highly prized in the Islamic world beginning as early as the 800s. Why? Porcelain is a high-fired ceramic that allows for delicate form combined with great strength. The white body provides an excellent surface for beautiful decoration. For centuries, the production of porcelain was a closely guarded secret in China. During the time this dish was made, cobalt blue (from Iran) was a popular colorant on porcelains since it could be used for painterly effects. At the same time, it could withstand the high firing temperatures used by the Chinese potters.

Ottoman sultans and Safavid (Persian) shahs coveted Chinese porcelains for use as fine dinnerware. They also collected porcelains as prized possessions. But the supply of Chinese porcelains was not always dependable. Limited or disrupted supply by sea or land meant that other ceramics had to make up for possible shortages. Iznik kilns met the challenge, and produced wares that initially (like this example) copied Chinese wares. Overtime, Iznik potters developed their own characteristic designs and color combinations. This dish reminds us of the important trade and cultural ties that existed between the Islamic world and China.

Slide no. 19



Carpet with star medallion
Approximately 1470-1530
Usak, Western Anatolia (Turkey)
Wool pile on a wool foundation
Khalili collection no. TXT 213

What is this object?

This is a section of a very large (430 cm x 96 cm) wool (piled) carpet produced in the town of Usak in the late 1400s or early 1500s. It is missing its outer guard border. Otherwise, it is an excellent state of preservation for such an old textile.

Why are carpets important in Islamic art?

Carpets and rugs are among the most familiar forms of Islamic art in the west. They are well-loved as floor coverings, and they are aesthetically pleasing to the eye with their rich colors and intricate designs. Traditional carpets are hand-made (piled) by tying thousands of knots on to a framework of opposing threads (called warp and weft) using a loom. Carpets were used to decorate interior spaces and they were used as export items. They were also used for prayer (see next slide).

Carpets are produced by nomadic peoples and at urban workshops throughout Islamic West Asia and Turkey. They are still in demand today. However, many rugs are now machine made and use commercial rather than natural dyes for their colors.

When and how were Usak carpets used?

In Anatolia (Turkey), the earliest surviving carpets date back to the early 1300s. Usak carpets were produced slightly later than this, for a period of about 200 years. Ottoman records indicate that Usak carpets were made to order for the sultans in order to furnish mosques. There is no evidence that they were used in a secular Ottoman context in the 1500s. Very few of these carpets survive in Turkey; however, many survive in Europe, particularly in Italy. Usak carpets can be seen in portraits of King Henry VIII of England, and related carpets appear in paintings by Hans Holbein (hence the term “Holbein carpets”) and by other European painters around the 1500s.

Carpets were imported as luxury items and used as table and furniture coverings. The early use of Turkish carpets for floor coverings seems to have been restricted to special events such as weddings and coronations.

What is the design on this rug?

Traditional carpets are named after the place they were made, or the nomadic tribe that produced them. Traditional designs and patterns give us clues as to where and when the carpet was produced. In modern rugs, this is more difficult because carpet designs have spread beyond the area of their origins and can turn up almost anywhere.

The designs on this carpet are variations on a “star medallion” type of Usak rug. A medallion is the most prominent design on a carpet, usually placed in the middle section or field of the carpet. The main motif on a star medallion is an eight-pointed star, formed by placing a diamond over a square. It differs from most Usak carpets that alternate medallions or a standard eight-pointed star with other designs.

The geometric and floral designs on Islamic carpets are not solely decorative. The images allude to Islamic visions of paradise as a vast garden. By placing such carpets around the home, in tents or in mosques, one is surrounded by the richness and bounty of nature that is God’s creation.

Slide no. 20



Rug, showing a niche on a plain field
Approximately 1570–1630
Cairo, Egypt
Wool and cotton pile, on a silk and wool foundation
Khalili collection no. TXT 198

Why is this piece called a rug?

Carpets are usually textiles over eight and a half feet long, whereas smaller pieces are called rugs. This type of textile is known as a prayer rug or “Ottoman.”

What is a pile? What is a foundation?

Rugs and carpets are “piled” by tying individual knots on to what is called a foundation of threads. More knots produce greater density and more detail, making the rug more valuable. After a row of knots is tied, the knots are cut off with a knife or scissors to the desired thickness of the rug. The knots that make up this rug have been made with dyed wool and cotton threads, tied to a foundation of warp and weft threads made of silk and wool. The warp threads are held taught along the length of the loom, which can be either vertical or horizontal. The weft threads are passed back and forth to the weaver’s right and left. The designs on the rug come from a combination of patterns produced by the intersection of weft threads and the knots that hold them in place. The weaver(s) produces these designs either from memory or from patterns.



Women weaving on a loom in the village of Orselli in western Turkey.

What is the design on this rug?

The design on this piece recalls the niche found in mosques (*mihrab*) that indicates the direction of prayer. This niche, with its wavy arch and the curving, lance-shaped leaves in the border are typical of the Ottoman court style. Lamps suspended from the arch are rarely found in actual *mihrabs*. The presence of lamps in such designs was influenced by a passage in the Koran that says,

The semblance of His light is that of a niche
In which is a lamp, the flame within a glass...

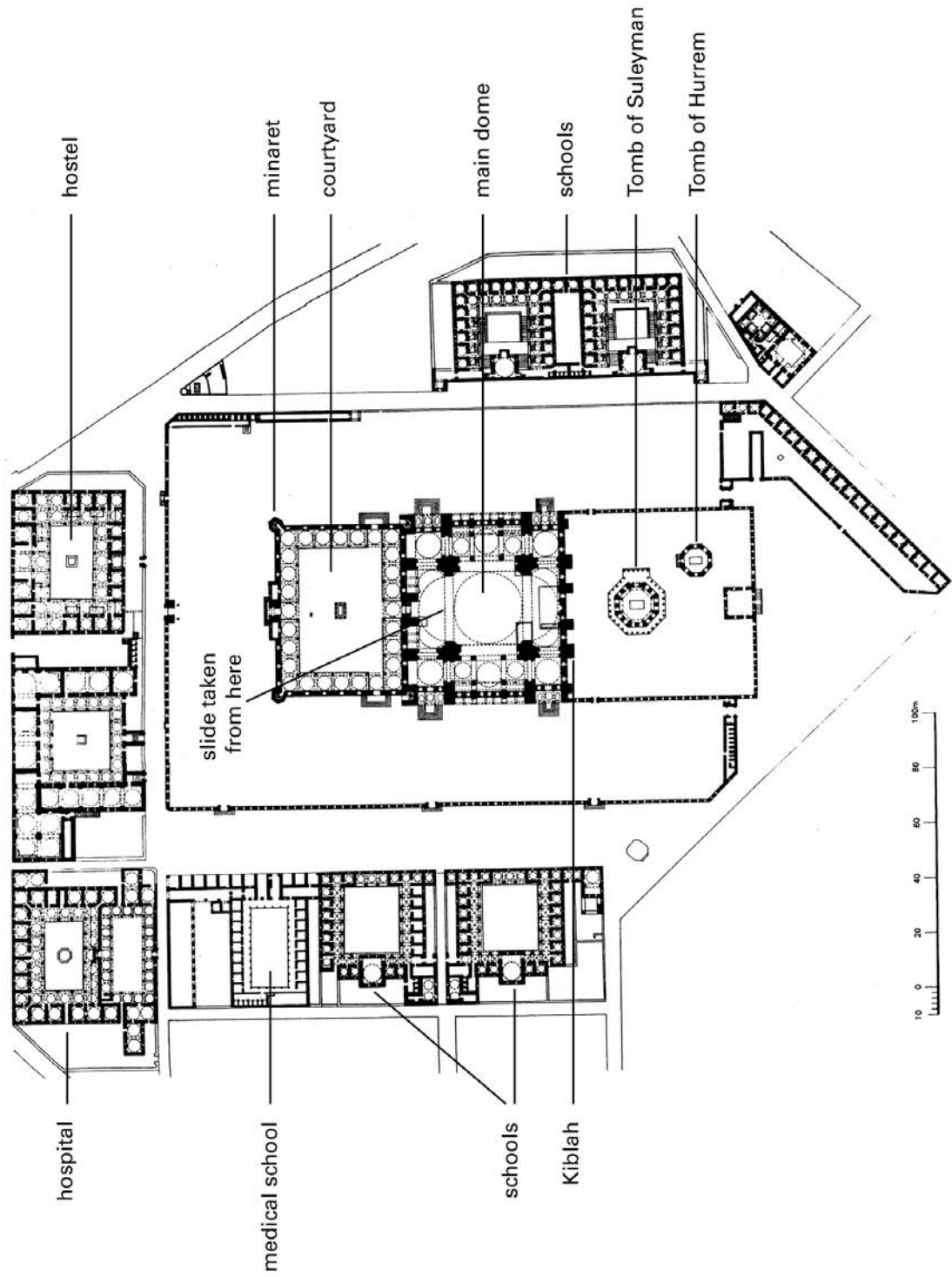
How was this rug used?

When laid with the arched niche and lamp pointing in the direction of Mecca, rugs like this were used to kneel upon when praying. They would be used at home, perhaps in a corner of the house reserved for prayer. They could also be rolled up and carried for the purposes of praying outside the home. At the community mosque where worshippers gathered for Friday congregational prayers, prayer rugs were usually supplied by the mosque.

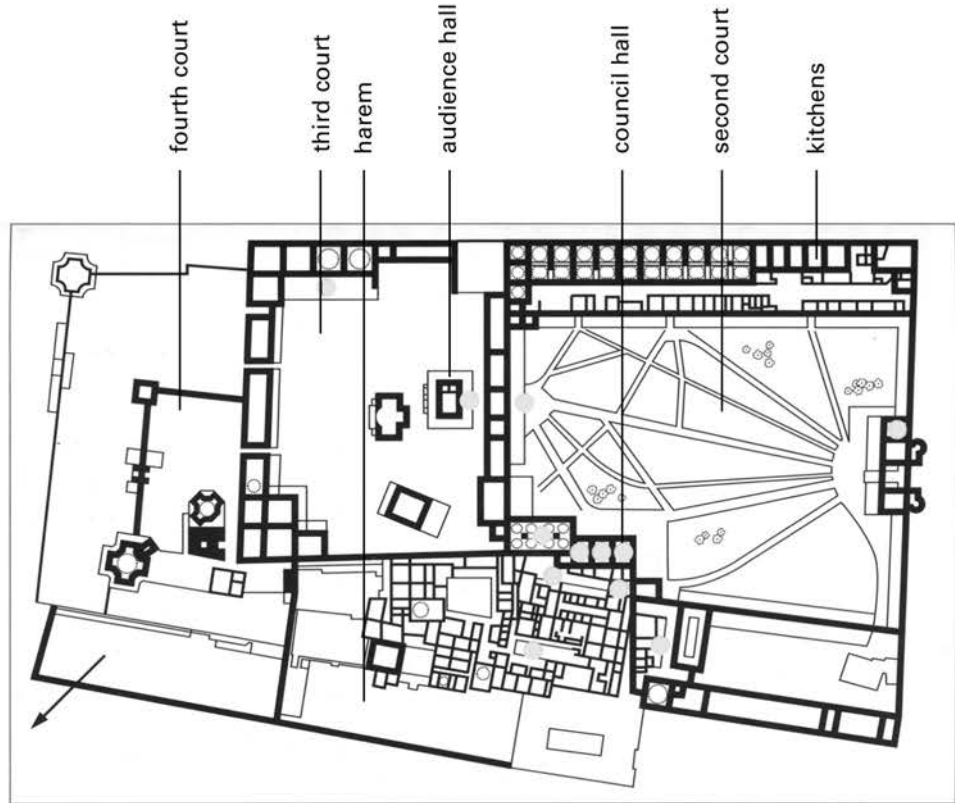
When and where were these type of prayer rugs made?

Prayer rugs, known in Europe as “Ottomans,” began to be produced in the 1500s. They first appeared in Cairo, where the designs probably originated from the period of Mamluk control in Egypt (before the Ottoman takeover in 1517). Scholars are not certain whether this rug was produced in Cairo and then brought to the Ottoman court, or produced in Bursa, the old Ottoman capital in western Turkey, where similar prayer rugs have been produced.

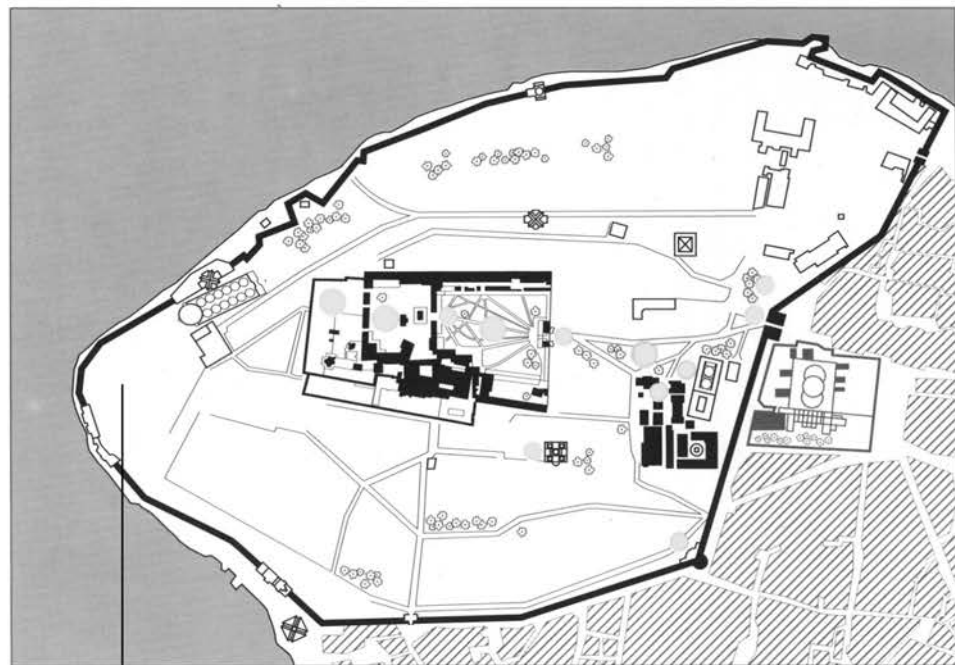
Plan of Suleymaniye Complex (see slide no. 7)



Topkapi Palace, Istanbul



Inner Courtyards



Overview



*The Ottoman Empire
in the mid-16th Century*

Islamic Calligraphy: The Art of the Divine

In the Islamic faith, the words of Allah are imbued with divine power, and so too is the act of writing. It is for this reason that the beauty of Islamic calligraphy takes precedence above all other art forms of the Islamic world. It is calligraphy that graces the sacred text of the Koran, adorns metal armor, is woven into imperial banners, and is inscribed in monolithic size on Islamic mosques.

The tradition of Islamic calligraphy and the power of the written word can be traced to the beginnings of Islam. It is said that Allah (God) revealed the sacred text of the Koran to the Prophet Muhammad (570–632) in the Arabic language. For over fifteen hundred years, followers of Islam have memorized the teachings of Islam—showing their religious devotion through the recitation and copying of the sacred scripture.

From its spiritual origins, Islamic calligraphy blossomed into a highly sophisticated art form uniting Muslims across vast geographical regions. In part because Islamic tradition largely forbids the depiction of human figures, Islamic artists chose to express creativity, refinement, and devotion through calligraphy. The religious prohibition against figural representation in art may be explained in part because the power of Allah’s word was believed to supersede that of any physical image.

The spread of the Arabic language and, in turn, Islamic calligraphy can be attributed to the growth of Islam. The Koran is always recited and read in Arabic, the language through which it was revealed to Muhammad, regardless of the worshippers’ native tongue. As a result, the arts of Arabic lettering can be seen in places as diverse as North Africa, Spain, and China.

The Arabic alphabet

In the 900s, the Ottoman Turks embraced the religion of Islam and thus inherited the tradition of Arabic writing. The Arabic script was so well-suited to Turkish, the language of the Ottoman Turks, that it was used until 1928 when the Republic of Turkey was established. The roots of the Arabic language are found in Nabataean, a West Aramaic dialect that predates Islam. This language belongs to the Semitic language family and is read from right to left. For example, to read the Koran, the spine of the book would face the right and the cover page flipped from left to right.

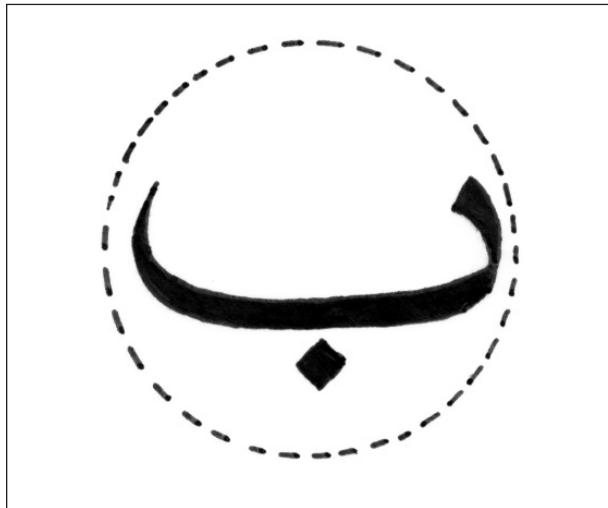
The versatility of Arabic can be attributed to the fact that it is a phonetic language. Its alphabet consists of 28 letters (three of which are long vowels) that can be easily adapted by many other languages. Similar to the English and Spanish language that share the Roman alphabet, the Ottoman Turks adopted the Arabic alphabet with the addition of diacritical marks, such as dots and slanting dashes above and below letters, to distinguish vowels and double consonants.

Another characteristic of Arabic letters is that they change form ever so slightly depending on their position in a word: initial, beginning, middle, or final. Arabic is only written in cursive form and traditionally has no capital letters. Each letter of the alphabet corresponds to a numerical number based on the 28 lunar stations. The letter, associated number, and the combination of these letters and numbers are believed to hold talismanic properties.

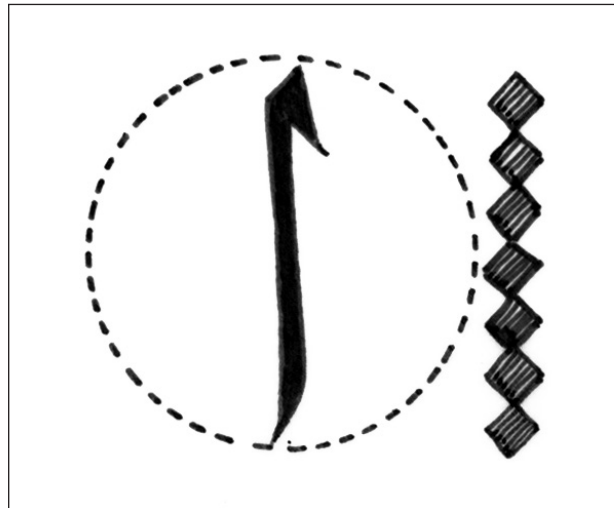
The history of Islamic calligraphy

The Arabic saying, “Purity of writing is purity of the soul” vividly describes the status of the master calligrapher in Islamic society. It was believed that only a person of spiritual devotion and clear thought could achieve the skill required for this supreme art. The most talented of calligraphers attained honorable positions as scribes in the Imperial Palace or as teachers of Imperial rulers. The foundation of Islamic calligraphy was laid down by the creative genius of three great calligraphers from Baghdad; the Vizier Ibn Muqla (886–940) of the Abbasid court, Ibn al-Bawwab, and Yakut al-Musta’simi of Amasya (d. 1298).

Ibn Muqla established the principles of calligraphy. To this day, Islamic calligraphers use his theory of proportion based on three sets of measurements: the dot, *alif*, and circle. The relationship of all letters of a script is determined by the width of the rhomboid dot produced by the pen nib. The letter *alif* can then be drawn based on a set number rhomboid dots determined by the type of script being used. Once the letter *alif* is formed, an invisible circle is drawn around the letter (the height of the *alif* is the diameter of the circle), serving the basis from which all letters of a script may be calculated.



The letter *alif* consisting of 7 rhomboid dots.



The letter *ba* based on the circle with a diameter of 7 rhomboid dots.

From the 700s, the Koran had been copied only in the *kufic*, a formal, rectilinear script associated with the city of Kufa in southern Iraq. By the 900s, however, a series of flowing curvilinear scripts evolved that came to surpass *kufic* in religious, government, and private use. Through the transmission of knowledge from teacher to pupil, the achievements of Ibn Muqla were refined by the calligrapher and illuminator Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022) and Yakut al-Musta’simi (d. 1298), the secretary to the last Abbasid caliph. These calligraphers contributed to the development of the *akalm-i sitte*, also known as the six major scripts: *sulus*, *nesish*, *muhakkak*, *reyhani*, *tevki*, and *rika*. Legend has it that Yakut instructed six disciples, each of whom mastered a script. Another great invention by Yakut is the cutting of the reed nib at an oblique angle, thereby accentuating the elegance and thinness of the vertical line.

Each of the *aklami sitte* (six major scripts) was utilized by calligraphers to serve varied functions based on their size and style. The names of some of the scripts refer to their size. For example,

sulus, also known as the “mother of calligraphy” is called the “one-third script.” Its rounded lettering lends itself to compositional techniques, including playful interlacing and interlocking of letters. *Nesih* is a small elegant script often used for secular writing. A derivation of this script is *gubari* (dust-script), a microscript so small that it was used to write carrier pigeon messages. *Muhakkak*, meaning “tightly woven” is perhaps the most angular of the six scripts and is used in copying the Koran. A smaller version of *muhakkak* is *reyhani*. *Tevki* is a chancellery script, used to record government documents. *Rika* is a smaller version of *tevki*. These six scripts dominated the arts of Islamic calligraphy up until the 1400s when Islamic calligraphy would transform itself yet again under the empire of the Ottomans.

Calligraphy in the Ottoman court

It is said, “The Koran was revealed in Hjaz, recited in Egypt, and written in Istanbul.” This ancient Arabic saying attests to the enormous impact of Ottoman Turk calligraphers on the art form. Under their guidance, calligraphic letters were transformed into musical notes harmonizing with one another in a visual symphony. Two great calligraphy masters of the Ottoman Court were Seyh Hamdullah (1429–1520) and Hafiz Osman (1643–1698). Seyh Hamduallah, the teacher of Sultan Bayezid II, is famous for his recreation of the *aklam-i sitte* (six major scripts). It is said that as a young prince the Sultan Bayezid II asked Hamdullah whether it would be possible to improve



Sahname of Mehmed III, approx. 1596, by Ta'likizade, Topkapi Sarayi Muzesi Library, Istanbul, inv. no. H. 1609, fol. 74a.

upon the *aklam sitte* (six major scripts). Legend has it that Hamdullah secluded himself for forty days to create a new style for the six scripts—infusing movement by slanting letters along an imaginary horizon line. The respect for this master calligrapher and teacher is demonstrated by the relationship between Hamduallah and the sultan—the sultan is known to have held Hamdullah’s inkpot for hours watching his teacher write.

Hafiz Osman (1643–1648) was the calligraphy teacher to the Sultan Mustafa II and Sultan Ahmed III. A century after Seyh Humdallah, Osman’s artistic style gained in popularity so as to be emulated by generations of calligraphers.

Most notable of Osman’s achievements was the creation of a fast-moving *nesih* script referred to as “spark” *nesih*. He was also the first calligrapher to compose a *hilye*, a calligraphic depiction of the Prophet Muhammad featuring a text within a large central roundel encircled by a moon crescent. In the corners, on either side of this text, are smaller roundels that contain the names of the first four caliphs.

The chain of transmission: calligraphy apprenticeship

Just as beautiful calligraphy is a reflection of a pure soul, the training to become a master calligrapher (*hattats*) symbolizes a religious pilgrimage. The pursuit to acquire exquisite penmanship brought one closer to spiritual perfection and to God. This is evident in the tradition of passing down knowledge from teacher to pupil. Following the structure set by the spiritual teaching of Sufism, it is appropriately called the “chain of transmission.” It is through this training process that

individual styles have been preserved and may be traced back through the centuries from a long lineage of calligraphers.

The journey to becoming a master calligrapher required patience, dedication, and a lifetime of practice. At a young age, children were introduced to calligraphy in school. There they would become familiar with the proportions and general aesthetics of the art. A student who exhibited natural skill and promise would be encouraged to pursue private instruction from a teacher. Even students who could not afford private lessons could obtain instruction. Osman started the tradition of selecting a day of the week to provide instruction to students who could not afford to pay. This practice endures to this day.

The process of learning calligraphy begins with the practice of *takild*. The student carefully watches as the teacher writes a *mesk* (model). A beginner receives a *mufredat* (basic lesson) made up of single or double letters. The next level of lesson is called *murekkebat* (words and Koranic verses). The student then takes the *mesk*, copies it, and then presents it to the teacher. With the great scrutiny, the teacher corrects the *mesk* by writing the correct form of a letter underneath the student's letter. The teacher also writes in with the correct number and placement of rhomboid dots (*nokta*) to guide the students in correct proportions. This is returned to the students who practice and repeat the exchange until the strokes are perfected. The next step is to try to create the arrangement of phrases in the paper in pleasing compositions.

After three to five years of weekly lessons, a student may graduate by earning an *icazetname* (permission document or diploma). The teacher chooses the work of a great master for the student to copy. The finished work is presented to a jury of master calligraphers who award the student who has demonstrated artistic achievement. The teacher completes the ceremony by writing in Arabic on the work, "I give permission to the writer of this beautiful *kit'a*, [insert student's name], to sign his name under his work. May God prolong his life and increase his knowledge. I am his teacher." The teacher then signs his name and along with the date. From this point forward, the calligrapher may sign an artwork followed by the word "*katabau*" or "he wrote it." The *icazetname* is the highest honor granted a calligrapher.

Materials and tools

In addition to giving artistic instruction on the art of writing, a teacher trained a student in how to prepare and use a multitude of materials and tools. Many of the items used were artistic works in their own right, made of precious materials and collected by calligraphers and rulers alike. Before a calligrapher writes the first letter, the reed nib must be cut, ink mixed, paper prepared and the writing area arranged.

The calligraphy pen (*kalem*) is made from a reed that grows around watercourses. Thick *kalem* may be made from bamboo and thin ones from the stems of roses. They are approximately 24–30 cm. in length, with the diameter varying depending on the type of script to be created. Once the reeds have been selected, they are seasoned—a process that requires burying them in horse manure for up to four years. The seasoned reed is cut by first placing it on a *makta* (a flat surface often made of ivory or wood). The reed is steadied by a small protruding groove at one end of the *makta*. The tip is cut with a razor-sharp penknife at an angle to reveal an oval shaped opening. It is shaped to form a flat tongue (*kalem dili*). The tongue is then split parallel to the pen. This opening will serve as a reservoir for the ink. Finally, the tip of the tongue is cut at an oblique angle. For very fine scripts, the thorn of a Malaysian palm tree attached to a reed body is used.

Knowledge of ingredients used to make calligraphic ink was a prized secret among calligraphers,

each of whom formulated a preferred recipe. The soot of a hemp oil lamp was collected and mixed with gum arabic. Added to this were items such as gallnuts, henna leaves, and indigo. After being stored for five days, the mixture was strained, perfumed, and thinned with water. A hedgehog quill was used to stir it to the correct consistency. The finished ink was poured into an inkwell that contained a small ball of raw silk (*lika*). The latter absorbed ink, preventing problems of spillage as well as monitoring the amount of ink taken up by a pen reed.

The introduction of paper from China at Saramkand in 751 revolutionized Islamic writing. It was a cheaper alternative to parchment, the material previously used for copying texts. Such raw paper undergoes a treatment process before it can be used for calligraphy. It is first boiled in vegetable dye made from pomegranate or onion skins. It may also be soaked in tea leaves to create a tan color. Calligraphy is normally not written on white paper because it is considered too stark a contrast to the eye. Once the paper is dried, it is coated with *ahar* (a gelatinous substance used to treat paper). A week later it is burnished with a polished flint. Only after the paper has aged for a year is it ready to be written upon.

The calligrapher prepares the layout of the lettering on the paper by using a *mistar* (guideline tool). This is a piece of cardboard through which a thin strand of thread is stretched through holes creating guidelines that center the horizontal baseline for the lettering and the outline of the margins. The placement of these lines is carefully calculated by the calligrapher, who estimates the size of script in relation to the surface. Lastly, the prepared paper is placed on top of the *mistar* and the calligrapher uses the index finger to gently press the paper against the thread. This process leaves a slight indentation that guides calligrapher when ink is ready to be applied.

In the Ottoman period, the calligrapher did not sit at a table. Instead calligraphy was done while sitting on a divan or cushion. The writing paper was placed on top of an *atlik* (pad of rough paper) that was then balanced on the artist's bent right knee. The flexible surface facilitated the creation of curving strokes. It was in this setting, with the correct material and tools, that the calligrapher could commence the art of writing.

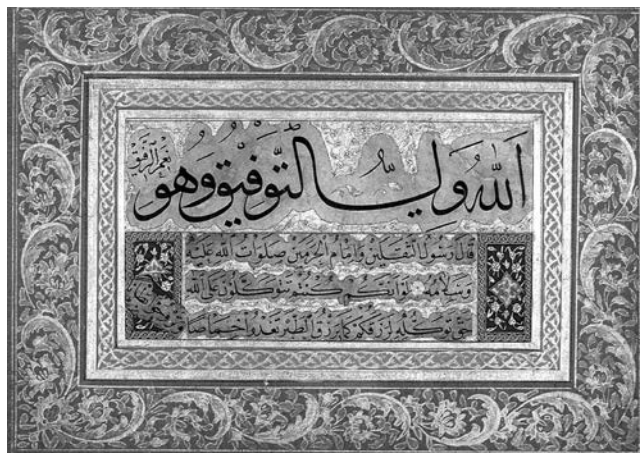
Personal Kit'alar Elementary School

A *kit'alar* is a calligraphic work written on a rectangular piece of paper pasted onto a cardboard backing. Equal margins are left around the calligraphy in which the artist decorates with marbled paper (*ebru*) or illumination.

Description: Students create a *kit'alar* composed of the initials of their first and last name in Arabic.

Materials: Arabic alphabet worksheet, rectangular cardboard, light brown paper (pre-cut so the dimensions are smaller than the cardboard), tempura paint, decorative wrapping paper, brushes, glue, and lined paper.

Looking at Art: As a class, examine calligraphic art during the Ottoman period.



Album of Calligraphy, early 1500–1600, by Seyh Hamdullah (detail), Ottoman Turkey, woven paper on pasteboard, calligraphy written in *sulus* and *nesih* script, and gold illumination, *The Khalili Collection*.

Discuss with students how calligraphers carefully laid out the letters in a symmetrical composition. The photo above shows a *kit'a* (panel section). The artist has chosen to decorate the margins with gold and silver floral designs. Often, the margins would be decorated with marbled paper called *ebru*.

Teaching Strategy: Describe to students the significance of calligraphy in Ottoman art and the high status of the calligrapher in Islamic society. Explain to students the characteristics of Arabic writing, stressing that it is written only in cursive and is read from right to left (a cover of a book is flipped from left to right as is done in Chinese).

Instructions:

1. Write your last and then first initial at the top of the paper.
2. Find the letters closest to your initials on the Arabic alphabet worksheet. The Arabic alphabet has only three vowels: a, i, and u. These long vowels can be changed into short vowels using diacritical marks. If you are not able to find an exact match, use the letter that sounds the closest.
3. Practice writing the Arabic equivalent beneath your initials.
4. Next, lightly sketch your Arabic “initials” on the brown paper in large lettering. You may want to imitate the calligraphic script varying the thickness of the line as shown on the worksheet.
5. Paint over the letters with black tempura ink. Next paint small flower and plant motifs around the letters. Set it aside to dry.
6. Cut a piece of decorative wrapping paper so it is one inch larger than the cardboard. Paste it onto the cardboard. Fold over the edges and glue them down.
7. Paste your painting in the center of the wrapped cardboard.

Personal Kit'alar
Middle School

A *kit'alar* is a calligraphic work written on a rectangular piece of paper pasted onto a cardboard backing. Equal margins are left around the calligraphy in which the artist decorates with marbled paper (*ebru*) or illumination.

Description: Students write their name in Arabic with a calligraphy reed and create a *kit'alar*.

Materials: Arabic alphabet worksheet, rectangular cardboard, light brown paper (pre-cut so the dimensions are smaller than the cardboard), tempura paint, black ink, decorative paper, brushes, glue, lined paper, scissors, exacto knife, sand paper, and tongue depressors.

Looking at art: As a class, examine calligraphic art during the Ottoman period. Discuss with students how calligraphers carefully laid out the letters in a symmetrical composition. Calligraphers utilized many different layouts that were based on structure of the human upper body. Spaces that are not written with calligraphy and reserved for decoration (not including the margin) are known as *koltuklar* (armpits). Ask students to locate the “armpits” in the photo detail shown in the previous lesson. The artist has chosen to decorate the margins with gold and silver floral designs. Often, the margins would be decorated with marbled paper called *ebru*.

Teaching Strategy: Describe to students the religious and secular significance of calligraphy in Ottoman art. Explain the materials, tools, and process of creating a calligraphic artwork. Emphasize to students the characteristics of Arabic writing: it is written only in cursive and is read from right to left, there are no capital letters, letters change form slightly depending on their position in the word, and short vowels are indicated by diacritical marks.

Instructions:

Step I: Writing Your Name

1. Write your name at the top of the lined paper. Below it, write your name backwards. For example, “Alison” will be written “nosilA.”
2. Find the equivalent letters and vowels on the Arabic alphabet worksheet. If you are not able to find an exact match, use the letter that sounds the closest.
3. Writing from right to left, practice writing the Arabic equivalent beneath your name.

Step II: Cutting and Writing with the Reed

1. Cut the end of a tongue depressor at angle about 35–40 degrees and then lightly sand it. On the cut end of the tongue depressor, make a one-inch slit using an exacto knife.
2. Dip the “reed” into the ink. When writing, hold it similar to the way Western calligraphy pen. Practice writing the name using the ink and “reed.”
3. Next, write your name on the brown paper. Use a brush to touch up the letters.
4. Using tempura ink, plain flower and plant motifs around the letters. Set it aside to dry.
5. Cut a piece of decorative paper so it is one inch larger than the cardboard. Paste it onto the cardboard. Fold over the edges and glue them down.
6. Paste your painting in the center of the wrapped cardboard.

Personal Murakkaalar High School

Students create a *murakkaalar* (calligraphy album) of their name and adjectives that describe their personality written in Arabic. They will make a calligraphy reed and learn to write with it. A *murrakkalar* is a series of *kit'alar* attached together in an album that resembles an accordion.

Materials: Arabic alphabet worksheet, rectangular cardboard, light brown paper (pre-cut so the dimensions are smaller than the cardboard), tempura paint, black ink, decorative paper, brushes, glue, lined paper, scissors, exacto knife, sand paper, black tape and tongue depressors.

Looking at art: As a class, examine calligraphic art during the Ottoman period. Discuss with students the training process of apprentice calligraphers. The photo above is a detail of a *kitap murakkaalar* (book album). It shows two *kit'alar* composed of *mufredat* (exercises) bound together. Circles, vertical and horizontal lines were drawn over the writing in red to note the correct proportion and placement of the letters.

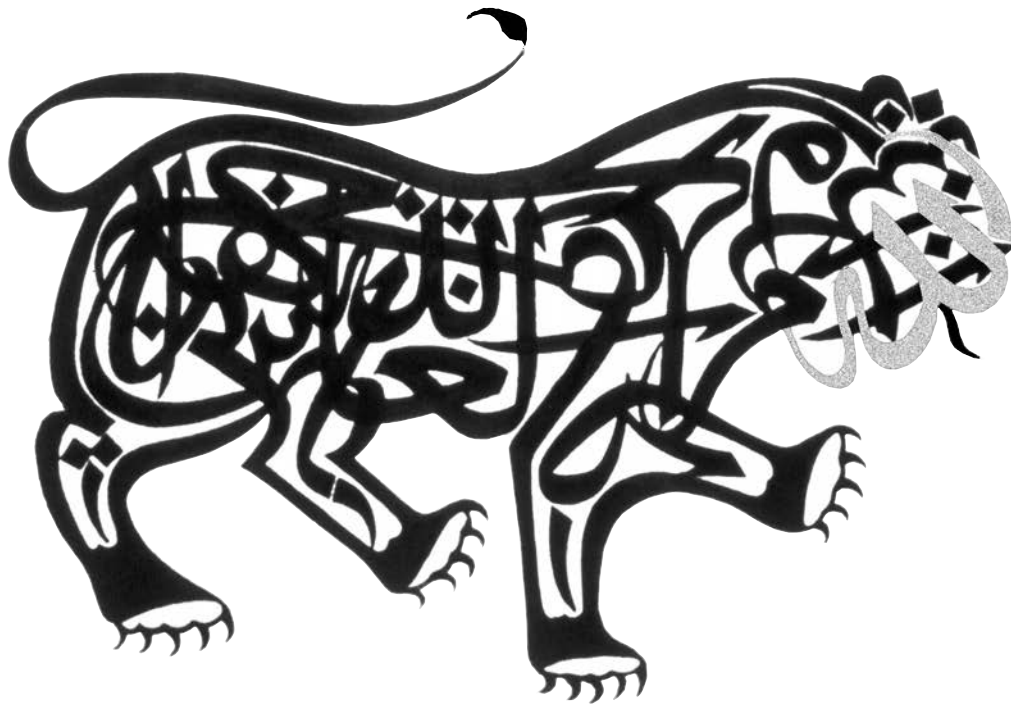


Album of Mufredat by Mehmed Sevki, 1866–1867, Ottoman Turkey, 11 folios written in *sulus* and *nesih* scripts, cream woven paper (detail), turquoise blue overlay and gold illumination, *The Khalili Collection*.

Teaching strategy: Describe to students the religious and secular significance of calligraphy in Ottoman art. Explain the materials, tools, and process of creating a calligraphic artwork. Emphasize to students the characteristics of Arabic writing: it is written only in cursive and is read from right to left, there are no capital letters, letters change form slightly depending on their position in the word, and short vowels are indicated by diacritical marks.

Instructions:

1. Create a *kit'alar* by writing your name in Arabic. Use the directions as stated in the Middle School lesson for making a “reed” and writing your name in Arabic.
2. Look up three adjectives that describe your personality in an Arabic dictionary. Make a separate *kit'alar* for each of these words.
3. Place the total of four *kit'alar* on the table with the one with your name on the far right. Tape them together with black tape.
4. Turn them over and glue the bare side of the sections with decorative paper.
5. Fold the sections together to make a small album.



Calligraphic Lion, 1913, by Ahmed Hilmi, Ottoman Turkey, Brownish cream card, written in *sulus* script, the tongue red and tip of the tail yellow, *The Khalili Collection*. *Please note that the image has been altered—the word “Allah” highlighted.

**Zoomorphic Calligraphy
Elementary School**

Turkish calligraphers were masters of transforming words and phrases into the shapes of animals. Artists achieved these effects by elongating, wrapping, and rotating letters to create the contour (outline) as well as details of the animal. Favorite animal shapes include the lion, peacock, and stork. They also created calligraphic compositions in the form of fruit, plants, and architecture.

These objects hold religious meaning and were often composed of Islamic sayings.

Description: Students will create a zoomorphic drawing composed of an adjective that describes the animal.

Materials: Photo of a favorite animal, color pencils, pencils, black marker, white paper, and scratch paper.

Looking at art: As a class, examine zoomorphic calligraphic art during the Ottoman period. Look together at the calligraphic lion in the above photo. The word “Allah” has been highlighted to show how the artists cleverly incorporated the letters in the lion’s face.

Teaching Strategy: Describe to students the significance of certain animals in Ottoman and Islamic art. For example, Ali is often represented as the lion. This is because his surname means “Lion of God.” Another animal commonly depicted in Ottoman art was the stork, which was associated with virtue and piety. Ask the students to name a few animals and the traits they associate with them.

Instructions:

1. Find a picture or download a photo from the Internet of a favorite animal.
2. Lightly sketch the contour of the animal on white paper. Make the image large.
3. On a piece of scratch paper write a word that describes the animal. Examples: ferocious, cuddly, or gigantic.
4. Look carefully at your contour sketch. Arrange and lightly sketch the letters inside the image. Feel free to experiment with the shape of the letters. They can be placed upside down, or incorporated into the contour itself.
5. “Widen” the lines of the letters. You may want them to look like bubble, block, or stylized letters.
6. Color in the letters and outline them with a black marker.

Zoomorphic Calligraphy

Middle and High School

Turkish calligraphers were skillful at transforming words and phrases into the shapes of animals. This was done by elongating, wrapping, and rotating letters to create the contour (outline) as well as details of the animal. Favorite animal shapes include the lion, peacock, and stork. They also created calligraphic compositions in the form of fruit, plants, and architecture. These objects hold religious meaning and were often composed of Islamic sayings.

Description: Students will write a descriptive sentence about an animal that they believe has virtuous qualities. They will create a zoomorphic pen and ink drawing composed of this sentence.

Materials: photo of a favorite animal, fine black uniball pens, pencils, white-out, white paper, and scratch paper.

Looking at art: As a class, examine zoomorphic calligraphic art from the Ottoman period. Look together at the calligraphic lion in the above photo. The word “Allah” has been highlighted to show how the artists cleverly incorporated the letters in the lion’s face. Using the Arabic alphabet worksheet, ask students to locate different letters in the lion.

Teaching strategy: Describe to students the significance of certain animals in Ottoman and Islamic art. For example, the lion is a metaphor of Ali. This is because his surname means “Lion of God.” The composition has show religious significance on many different levels. For example, in accordance with Bektasi theology, the five-clawed paws signify God, Muhammad, Ali, and Ali’s sons Hasan, and Husayn. The red tongue symbolizes Ali, “the spokesperson of Muhammad.” The calligraphy that makes up the lion is an Islamic prayer.

Ask students to name animals they believe to be virtuous and to describe why. Next have students write a descriptive sentence with which they will create a zoomorphic composition.

Instructions:

1. Find a picture or download a photo from the Internet of an animal that has virtuous qualities.
2. Lightly sketch the contour of the animal on white paper. Make the image large.
3. On a piece of scratch paper write a descriptive sentence about the animal.
4. Look carefully at your contour sketch. Arrange and lightly sketch the letters of the sentence inside the image. Feel free to experiment with the shape of the letters. They can be placed upside down, or incorporated into the contour itself.
5. “Widen” the lines of the letters. You may want them to look like bubble, block, or stylized letters.
6. Color in the letters with black pen. Neatly write the entire sentence below your animal composition.

Optional: This project may be done on black board, with gel pens, and gold paint.


Arabic Alphabet






Name	Transcription	Pronunciation	Final	Medial	Initial	Independent
alif	ā	fair	ا	ا	ا	ا
bā'	b	big	ب	ب	ب	ب
tā'	t	tell	ت	ت	ت	ت
thā'	th	think	ث	ث	ث	ث
jīm	j	pleasure	ج	ج	ج	ج
ḥā	ḥ	hotel	ح	ح	ح	ح
khā'	kh	Scottish loch	خ	خ	خ	خ
dāl	d	dead	د	د	د	د
dhāl	dh	then	ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ
rā'	r	rolled r	ر	ر	ر	ر
za'	z	zoo	ز	ز	ز	ز
sīn	s	sew	س	س	س	س
shīn	sh	show	ش	ش	ش	ش
ṣād	ṣ	***	ص	ص	ص	ص
ḍād	ḍ	***	ض	ض	ض	ض
ṭā'	ṭ	***	ط	ط	ط	ط
ẓā'	ẓ	***	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ
'ayn	'	***	ع	ع	ع	ع
ghayn	gh	***	غ	غ	غ	غ
fā'	f	fake	ف	ف	ف	ف
qāf	q	***	ق	ق	ق	ق
kāf	k	kitten	ك	ك	ك	ك
lām	l	love	ل	ل	ل	ل
mīm	m	mark	م	م	م	م
nūn	n	never	ن	ن	ن	ن
hā'	h	happy	ه	ه	ه	ه
wāw	w/ū	west, boot	و	و	و	و
yā'	y/ī	yell, freeze	ي	ي	ي	ي
lām-alif	lā	lah	لا	لا	لا	لا

*** There is no equivalent in English.

Arabic Vowels and Diphthongs

The squares indicate where the consonant before a vowel is placed

For example:  *ba*

Short Vowels	Transliteration	Pronunciation	Diphthong	Transliteration	Pronunciation
	a	pat		aw	pow
	u	put		ay	pie
	i	pit			

Poems by Rumi

Following are several poems by the Sufi mystical poet Rumi (1207–1273) Reprinted from *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks. New York: Castle Books, 1995.

Only Breath

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu,
Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion

Or cultural system. I am not from the East
or the West, not out of the ocean or up

From the ground, not natural or ethereal, not
composed of elements at all. I do not exist,

Am not an entity in this world or the next,
did not descend from Adam and Eve or any

Origin story. My place is placeless, a trace
of the traceless. Neither body nor soul.

I belong to the beloved, have seen the two
worlds as one and that one call to and know

first, last, outer, inner, only that
breath breathing human being

There is a way between voice and presence
where information flows.

In disciplined silence it opens.
With wandering talk it closes.

The Tent

Outside, the freezing desert night.
This other night inside grows warm, kindling.
Let the landscape be covered with thorny crust.
We have a soft garden in here.
The continents blasted,
cities and little towns, everything
become a scorched, blackened ball.

The news we hear is full of grief for that future,
but the real news inside here
is there's no news at all.

Friend, our closeness is this:
anywhere you put your foot, feel me
in the firmness under you.

How is it with this love,
I see your world and not you?

Listen to presences inside poems,
Let them take you where they will.

Follow those private hints,
and never leave the premises.

Dervish at the door

(note: a dervish is a sufi mystic who has embraced poverty)

A dervish knocked at a house
to ask for a piece of bread,
or moist, it didn't matter.

"This is not a bakery," said the owner.

"Might you have a bit of gristle then?"

"Does this look like a butchershop?"

"A little flour?"

"Do you hear a grinding stone?"

"Some water?"

"This is not a well."

Whatever the dervish asked for,
the man made some tired joke
and refused to give him anything.

Finally the dervish ran in the house,
lifted his robe, and squatted
as though to take a shit.

"Hey,hey!"

"Quiet, you sad man. A deserted place
is a fine spot to relieve oneself,
and since there's no living thing here,
or means of living, it needs fertilizing."

The dervish began his own list
of questions and answers.

“What kind of a bird are you? Not a falcon,
trained for the royal hand. Not a peacock,
painted with everyone’s eyes. Not a parrot,
that talks for sugar cubes. Not a nightingale,
that sings like someone in love.

Not a hoopoe bringing messages to Solomon,
or a stork that builds on a Cliffside.

What exactly do you do?
You are no known species.

You haggle and make jokes
to keep what you own for yourself.

You have forgotten the One
who doesn’t care about ownership,
who doesn’t try to turn a profit
from every human exchange.”

(from) **Chinese and Greek Art**

The Chinese and the Greeks were arguing as to who were the better artists.
The king said,
“We’ll settle this matter with a debate.”
The Chinese began talking, but the Greeks wouldn’t say anything.
They left.

The Chinese suggested then
that they each be given a room to work on
with their artistry, two rooms facing each other
and divided by a curtain.

The Chinese asked the king
for a hundred colors, all the variations,
and each morning they came to where
the dyes were kept and took them all.
The Greeks took no colors.
“They’re not part of our work.”

They went to their room
and began cleaning and polishing the walls. All day
every day they made those walls as pure and clear
as an open sky.

There is a way that leads from all-colors
to colorlessness. Know that the magnificent variety
of the clouds and the weather comes from
the total simplicity of the sun and the moon.

The Chinese finished, and they were so happy.
They beat the drums in the joy of completion.
The king entered their room,
Astonished by the gorgeous color and detail.

The Greeks then pulled the curtain dividing the rooms.
The Chinese figures and images shimmeringly reflected
on the clear Greek walls. They lived there, even more beautifully, and always
changing in the light.

The Greek art is the sufi way.
They don't study books of philosophical thought.

They make their loving clearer and clearer.
No wantings, no anger. In that purity
they receive and reflect the images of every moment,
from here, from the stars, from the void.

They take them in
as though they were seeing with the lighted clarity
that sees them.

Questions on the poems

1. Can each of these poems be considered religious? How so?
2. What is the subject of each poem? Who is the speaker and who is the listener?
3. How does each poem differ in its technique?
4. What advice does the poet offer for a more contented, happy existence?

Note: see the slide descriptions (number 11) for more information on Rumi and Sufism.

Key words

Allah	Arabic word for (the one) God
Arabesque	decorative motif consisting of repeated stems and leaves that appears on many forms of Islamic art
Byzantium	empire founded as the eastern portion of the Roman empire; ruled the eastern Mediterranean region from 330 until 1453, when the Ottomans captured the capital, Constantinople
Devshirme	system of training non-Muslim youths for service in the Ottoman army or court administration
Ferman	official decree issued by the Ottoman court, signed with the imperial monogram (<i>tugra</i>) of the reigning sultan
Harem	“forbidden”; area of Topkapi palace in Istanbul restricted to the Ottoman sultan, his family and female (slave) household
Islam	“submission to God”; monotheistic religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 600s in Mecca, Saudi Arabia; believers are Muslims who follow guidelines called the “Five Pillars of Islam”
Kaaba	cube-like structure in center of Mecca towards which Muslim prayers are directed; the most sacred site in Islamic world
Kiblah	direction of prayer, towards Mecca; one wall of a mosque indicates this direction
Koran	holy book of Islam; believed by Muslims to be a record of the words of God revealed to Muhammad (in Arabic)
Mihrab	recessed niche in wall of mosque; located on the Kiblah wall
Mosque	“place of prostration” (<i>masjid</i>) building where Muslims congregate to pray; can include subsidiary buildings that offer community and educational services
Muhammad	Prophet of Islam; transmitter of the word of God as written down in the Koran; born in Mecca around 570 ce
Muslim	“one who submits to God (Allah)” ; followers of the Islamic faith
Ottoman	Islamic dynasty of sultans that ruled large parts of the Middle East, West Asia, North Africa and the Balkans between the 1200s and 1900s; ruled from Istanbul (Constantinople) from 1453 to 1924.

Sufi follower of various mystical traditions of Islam

Sultan supreme ruler of Ottoman empire; originally a position of power under the caliph (defender of the Islamic faith) beginning in the 1000s.

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