

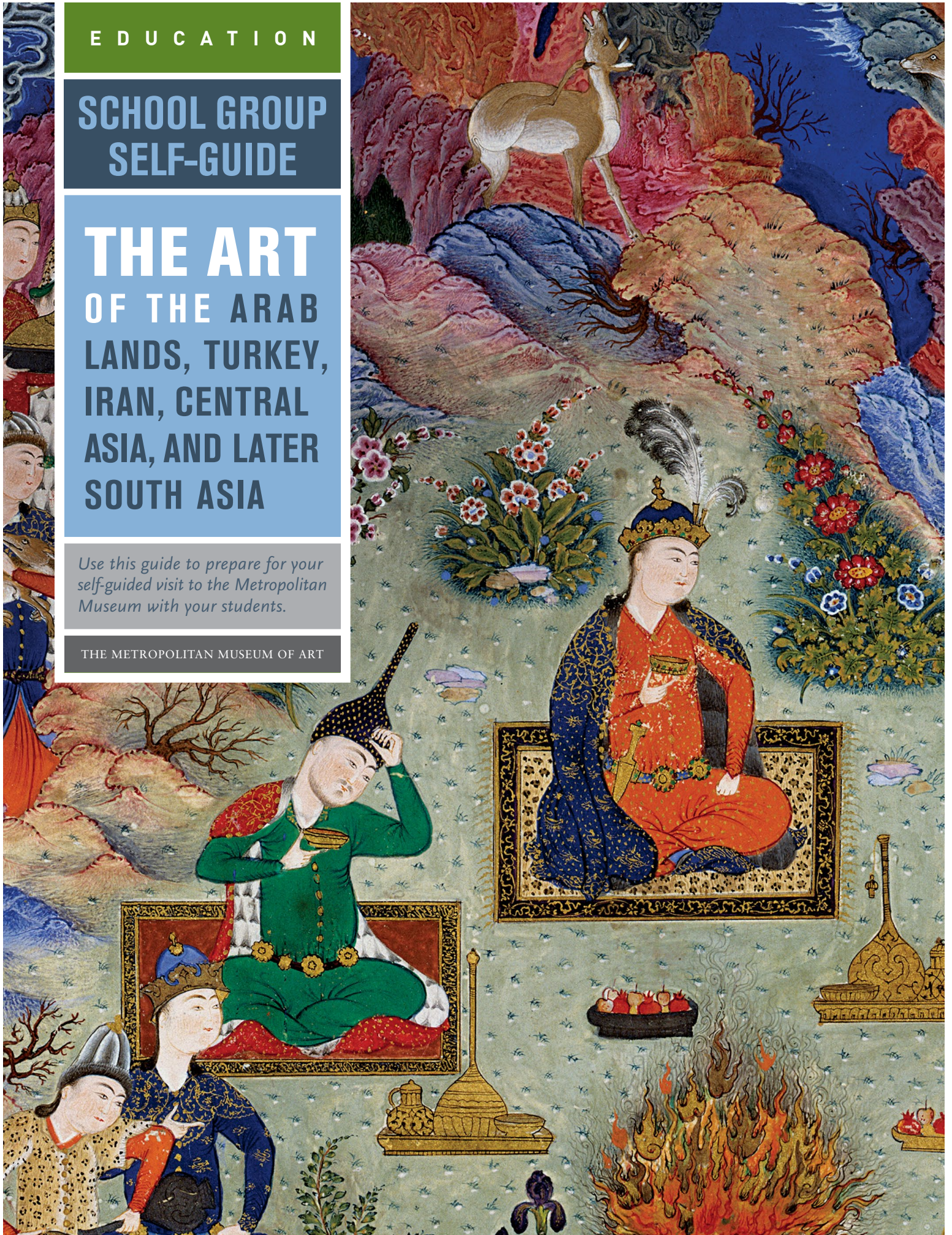
E D U C A T I O N

SCHOOL GROUP  
SELF-GUIDE

THE ART  
OF THE ARAB  
LANDS, TURKEY,  
IRAN, CENTRAL  
ASIA, AND LATER  
SOUTH ASIA

*Use this guide to prepare for your self-guided visit to the Metropolitan Museum with your students.*

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



*This guide will help you prepare for your self-guided visit to the Metropolitan Museum with your students. Use the links to the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, the curatorial department, and other areas on the Museum’s website to access descriptions of works of art, thematic essays, and further relevant content.*

## Introduction

More than one thousand works from the Metropolitan’s renowned collection of [Islamic art](#)—one of the most comprehensive collections of this material in the world—are on view in the New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia. The featured works of art, dating from the seventh century onward, reflect the rich diversity of the Islamic world. In spite of the expansive scope of the galleries, an extensive use of Arabic script and lavish embellishment, as well as the technical mastery of a range of media are evident in both secular and religious works spanning this vast time period and geographic expanse.

Highlights of the Museum’s collection include: the stunning Damascus Room, one of the finest examples of Syrian homes of the wealthy during the Ottoman period; notable early and medieval Qur’ans; pages from the sumptuous copy of the *Shahnama*, or Book of Kings, created for Shah Tahmasp (1514–76) of Iran; outstanding royal miniatures from the courts of the Arab World, Ottoman Turkey, Persia, and Mughal India, including paintings from the imperial “Shah Jahan Album,” compiled for the builder of the Taj Mahal; and architectural elements including a 14th-century mihrab, or prayer niche, from Isfahan decorated with glazed ceramic tiles, which would have served in a Muslim house of worship to indicate the direction to Mecca.

## The Galleries

The Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia are on the second floor on the south end of the Museum. The geographic orientation of the galleries signals a revised perspective on this important collection, recognizing that the monumentality of Islam did not create a single, monolithic artistic expression, but instead connected a vast geographic expanse through centuries of change and cultural influence. In sequence, the 15 new galleries trace the course of Islamic civilization, over a span of 13 centuries, from the Middle East to North Africa, Europe, and Central and South Asia.

**Gallery 450: Patti Cadby Birch Gallery**—the introductory gallery—showcases masterpieces from across the collection in a range of media.

**Gallery 451: Arab Lands and Iran in the Umayyad and Abbasid Periods (7th–13th centuries)** features early Islamic art, focusing primarily on the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), whose capital was Damascus, and the Early Abbasid dynasty (750–ca. 900), which was based in Baghdad. In addition, the gallery will include art reflecting pre-Islamic traditions from ancient Rome, Byzantium, and Persia that evolved into Islamic art under the Umayyads.

**Gallery 452: Nishapur and the Sabz Pushan Site** presents materials excavated by the Iranian Expedition of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in several digs from 1935 to 1947.

**Gallery 453: Iran and Central Asia (9th–13th centuries)** focuses on the impact of the Abbasid style in the eastern Islamic world.

**Gallery 454: Egypt and Syria (10th–16th centuries)** features a comprehensive display of the three major periods in the medieval history of Cairo: the Fatimid (909–1171), Ayyubid (1169–1260), and Mamluk (1250–1517). This gallery also provides a point of entry to the Orientalism gallery within the adjacent 19th- and Early 20th-Century European Paintings and Sculpture Galleries.

**Gallery 456: Patti Cadby Birch Court** based on Moroccan late medieval design was constructed by craftsmen from Fez as an intimate interior court. Nasrid columns define the patio space, and dadoes of custom-made glazed tiles in a traditional pattern frame a fountain.

**Gallery 457: Patti Cadby Birch Gallery**—Spain, North Africa, and the Western Mediterranean (8th–19th centuries) showcases the spread of Arab influence to the west through the rich material culture of Al-Andalus. The reciprocal creative exchanges between southern Islamic courts and northern Christian- and Judaeo-Spanish areas will be shown.

**Gallery 458: The Hagop Kevorkian Fund Special Exhibitions Gallery** will feature rotating exhibitions highlighting innovative, stimulating, and unexplored aspects of the field.

**Galleries 459 and 460: Koç Family Galleries**—Carpets, Textiles and the Greater Ottoman World and Arts of the Ottoman Court (14th–20th centuries)— present the rich diversity of Ottoman courtly, provincial, and village art.

**Gallery 461: The Damascus Room (18th century)** (previously known as the Nur al-Din Room) is a reception chamber from an upper-class home in Damascus and an important early 18th-century example of domestic Ottoman architecture.

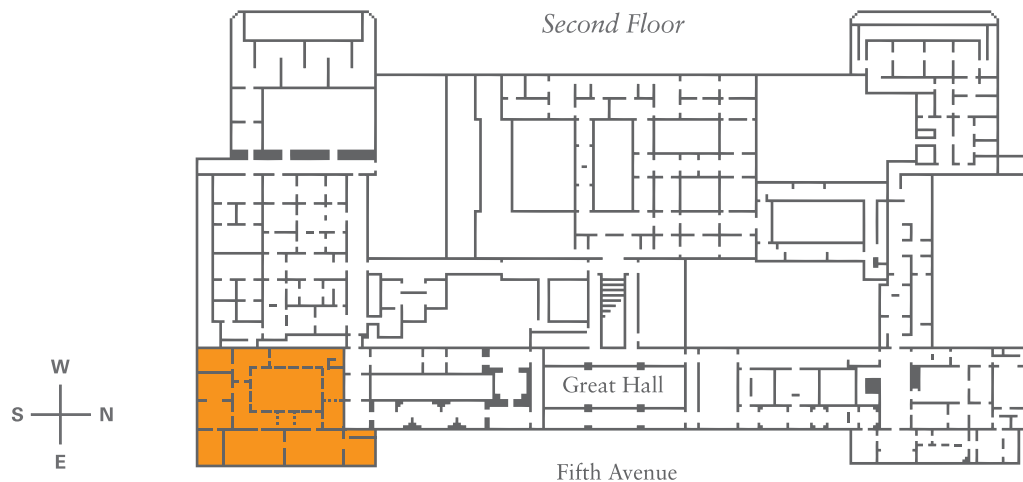
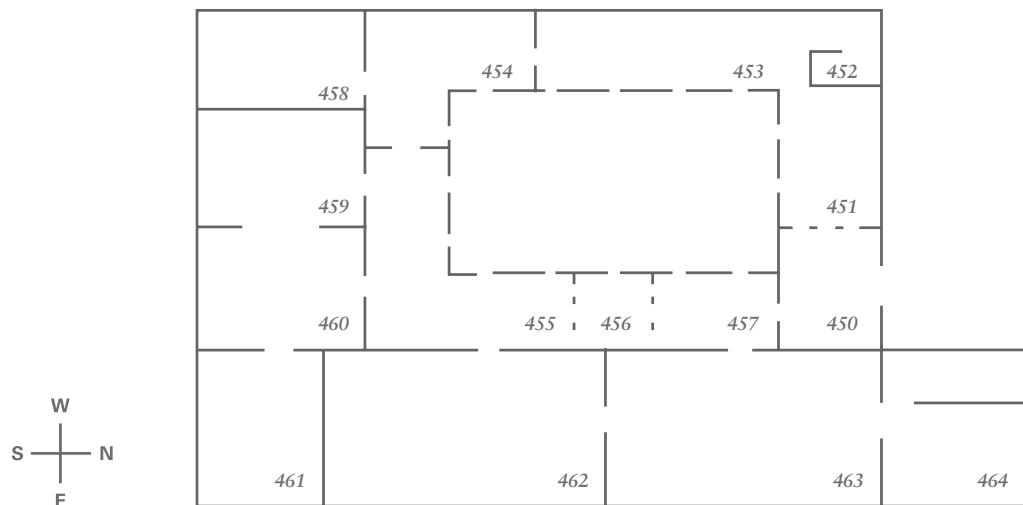
**Galleries 455 and 462: Iran and Central Asia (13th–16th centuries) and Safavid and Later Iran (16th–20th centuries)** these two galleries provide a chronological overview of the art of the Persian world, while underscoring its many connections with other cultures. Gallery 455 includes material from the 13th to the early 16th century under the Mongol, Turkmen, Timurid, and Uzbek dynasties while gallery 462, the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Gallery, features masterpieces created in Tabriz and Isfahan under the imperial Safavid dynasty in the 16th and 17th centuries and its successors.

**Galleries 463 and 464: Mughal South Asia (16th–19th centuries) and Later South Asia (16th–20th centuries)** highlight the artistic and cultural diversity of the Indian subcontinent and its wider connections with the Islamic world, Europe, and beyond.

Smaller installations on the balcony explore the relationship between Chinese wares and those made in Islamic cultures of the Near East.

**Please Note:** Most of the suggested works listed in this guide will be on view when you visit the Museum. However, certain gallery installations—such as those displaying textiles and works on paper—will change frequently due to the sensitivity of these materials to light. We recommend that you visit the Museum prior to bringing your school group to plan your tour or use the online [Search the Collections](#) tool to verify that each work of art is on view.

*New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia*



## Planning a Tour

**When visiting the Metropolitan Museum with your students, prepare your tour with the following in mind:**

- Less is more. Select five or six works of art to discuss over the course of an hour in the galleries.
- Choose works that are located away from doorways and areas that are heavily traversed by visitors.
- Include works that are visible to all students in your group for purposes of discussion and viewing.
- Make sure that there are enough chaperones in your group to divide the students into smaller groups for gallery discussions.
- While touring the galleries, please give priority to lecturers wearing Museum IDs who are guiding groups. If they are discussing a work that you would like your students to see, please select another work to view and discuss in the interim.

*The Metropolitan Museum of Art's school tour program is made possible by the generosity of Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman.*

## Background and Themes to Consider

Use the following links to content on the Museum's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History to help you prepare for your visit.

[The Birth of Islam](#)

[Calligraphy in Islamic Art](#)

[The Nature of Islamic Art](#)

[Vegetal Patterns in Islamic Art](#)

[Geometric Patterns in Islamic Art](#)

[The Arts of the Book in the Islamic World, 1600–1800](#)

[Figural Representation in Islamic Art](#)

## Questions for Discussion in the Galleries

- What stands out as you take your first look?
- What do you notice about the artist's selection and use of materials?
- Describe any text, imagery, or geometric forms you see. What do you notice about their arrangement?
- What function might this object have? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Who might own or use an object like this? What clues support your idea?
- If you were describing this work to someone who had never seen it before, what adjective would you use? Why?

## Suggested Works of Art to Explore

Please note that titles, dates, and other object information on the website and on gallery signage may vary as the result of ongoing research.



**Prayer carpet**, late 16th century; Ottoman;  
Attributed to Bursa or Istanbul, Turkey; Pile weave, wool and cotton pile on silk foundation, 288 asymmetrical knots per square inch; W. 50 in. (127 cm), L. 68 in. (172.7 cm); The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.51)

Learn more about the [The Art of the Ottomans before 1600](#)



**Textile fragment**, 14th century; Nasrid, Spain;  
Silk, lampas weave; 40 1/8 x 14 1/4 in. (102 x 36.3 cm); Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.22)

Learn more about the [Geometric Patterns in Islamic Art](#)

Learn more about the [The Nature of Islamic Art](#)

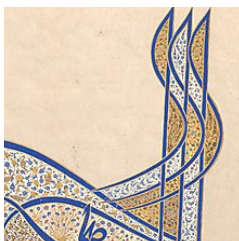
Learn more about the [Art of the Nasrid Period \(1232–1492\)](#)



**Bowl**, 10th century; Samarqand (Uzbekistan) or Nishapur (Iran); Earthenware, red body, white engobe, underglaze-painted; H. 7 in. (17.8 cm), Diam. 18 in. (45.7 cm); Rogers Fund, 1965 (65.106.2)

Learn more about the [Calligraphy in Islamic Art](#)

Learn more about [The Nature of Islamic Art](#)



**Tughra** (Imperial Cipher) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), ca. 1555; Ottoman, Turkey (Istanbul); Ink, opaque watercolors, and gold on paper; 20 1/2 x 25 3/8 in. (52.1 x 64.5 cm); Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1)

Learn more about [The Age of Süleyman “the Magnificent”](#)

Learn more about [The Art of the Ottomans before 1600](#)

Learn more about [Calligraphy in Islamic Art](#)

Learn more about [The Nature of Islamic Art](#)

Learn more about [Vegetal Patterns in Islamic Art](#)

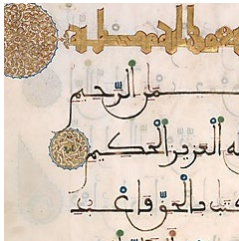


**Mihrab**, 1354; Isfahan, Iran;

Mosaic of monochrome-glaze tiles on composite body set on plaster; 135 1/16 x 113 11/16 in. (343.1 x 288.7 cm); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20)

*Learn more about* [The Art of the Ilkhanid Period \(1256–1353\)](#)

*Learn more about* [Vegetal Patterns in Islamic Art](#)



**Leaf from a Qur'an manuscript**, 13th–14th century; Attributed to Spain;

Ink, colors, and gold on vellum; 21 1/16 x 22 in. (53.5 x 55.9 cm); Rogers Fund, 1942 (42.63)

*Learn more about* [The Art of the Nasrid Period \(1232–1492\)](#)

*Learn more about* [Calligraphy in Islamic Art](#)



**Prince Khurram (Shah Jahan) with His Son Dara Shikoh: Leaf from the Shah Jahan Album**, Mughal, period of Jahangir (1605–27), ca. 1620;

By Nanha, India; Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; H. 15 3/8 in. (39 cm), W. 10 3/8 in. (26.2 cm); Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.36)

*Learn more about* [The Art of the Mughals after 1600 A.D.](#)

*Learn more about* [The Shah Jahan Album](#)



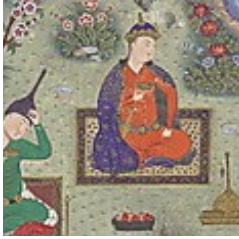
**Astrolabe of cUmar ibn Yusuf al-Muzaffari**, Rasulid period

(1228–1454), dated A.H. 690/A.D. 1291;

Yemen, Brass; pierced and engraved; (a) case: Gr. W. 7 5/8 in. (19.4 cm), Diam. 6 1/8 in. (15.6 cm), Th. 1/4 in. (0.6 cm); (b) bar: Gr. H. (with attached nail) 1 7/8 in. (4.8 cm), Gr. W. 1 1/8 in. (2.9 cm), L. 5 in. (12.7 cm); (c) net: Diam. 5 in. (12.7 cm); (d–g) plates: Diam. 5 in. (12.7 cm); (h) pin: L. 1 3/4 in. (4.4 cm), W. 1/2 in. (1.3 cm); Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.535a–h)

*Learn more about* [Astronomy and Astrology in the Medieval Islamic World](#)





**The Feast of Sada: From the Shahnama** (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, ca. 1525; Attributed to Sultan Muhammad (Iranian, active first half of 16th century); Iran, Tabriz; Colors, ink, silver, and gold on paper; 18 1/2 x 12 5/8 in. (47 x 32.1 cm); Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.2)

*Learn more about* [The Art of the Safavids before 1600](#)

*Learn more about* [The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp](#)



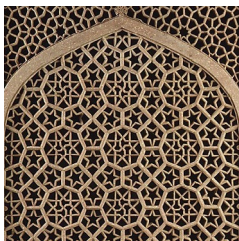
**Calligraphic Galleon**, Ottoman period (ca. 1280–1922), A.H. 1180/1766–67 A.D.; Calligrapher: Abdu'l Qadir Hisari; Turkey; Ink and gold on paper ; H. 19 in. (48.3 cm), W. 17 in. (43.2 cm); Louis E. and Theresa S. Seley Purchase Fund for Islamic Art and Rogers Fund, 2003 (2003.241)

*Learn more about* [Amulets and Talismans from the Islamic World](#)



**Plate**, second half of 16th century; Iznik, Turkey; Fritware, polychrome-painted under transparent glaze; Diam. 11 3/16 in. (28.4 cm); Gift of James J. Rorimer in appreciation of Maurice Dimand's curatorship, 1933–1959, 1959 (59.69.1)

*Learn more about* [The Art of the Ottomans before 1600](#)



**Jali screen** (one of a pair), second half of 16th century; Mughal, India; Carved red sandstone; H. 73 1/4 in. (186 cm), W. 51 3/16 in. (130 cm), Th. 3 9/16 in. (9 cm); Rogers Fund, 1993 (1993.67.2)

*Learn more about* [The Art of the Mughals before 1600 A.D.](#)

*Learn more about* [Geometric Patterns in Islamic Art](#)

*Learn more about* [The Nature of Islamic Art](#)

## Selected Resources

*These and many more resources are available in Nolen Library in the Ruth and Harold D. Uris Center for Education.*

*Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, edited by Maryam Ekhtiar, Priscilla Soucek, Sheila Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar. Yale University Press, 2011

*Islamic Arts*, by Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair. London: Phaidon Press, 1997

*Islamic Art in Context*, by Robert Irwin. Prentise Hall, 1997

*Islamic Art*, by Barbara Brend. Harvard University Press, 1992

*Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Middle East*, by Tim Stanley. V&A Publications, 2004

*'Islam: Empire of Faith'* – PBS video

Bloom, Jonathan and Sheila Blair. *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power*, New York, 2000. (This book was created as a handbook to the PBS video 'Islam: Empire of Faith')

*Islam: A Short History* (Modern Library Chronicles), by Karen Armstrong. Modern Library: 2002.

Oleg Grabar, Richard Ettinghausen & Marilyn Jenkins-Medina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 620-1250*. Yale University Press, 2003

Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250-1800*. Yale University Press, 1996