

ART OF THE
Islamic World

A Resource for Educators

Edited by Maryam D. Ekhtiar and Claire Moore

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

These educational materials are made possible by The Olayan Group.

Additional support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

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Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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Color separations by Professional Graphics Inc., Rockford, Illinois
Printing by Galvanic Printing & Plate Co., Inc., Moonachie, New Jersey

Photographs of works in the Museum's collections are by the Photograph Studio of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. For all other images: Figs. 3–6, 21–24, 31 Walter B. Denny; figs. 11–14 calligraphy by Ahmed Fares Rizq and Abdul Rahman Mahmoud; fig. 15 Nicky Davidov photography, Israel Antiquities Authority; figs. 16, 18, 32, 54 Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair; fig. 19 © George V. Kelvin; figs. 25, 27 akg-images/Gerard Degeorge; fig. 26 courtesy of the American Numismatic Society; figs. 36–40 The Metropolitan Museum of Art; fig. 43 Art & Architecture Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations; figs. 45, 47 Jon Thompson, after an image in the Prokhudin-Gorskii Collection, Library of Congress; fig. 53 Scala/Art Resource, NY; fig. 55 bpk, Berlin/Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Ruth Schacht/Art Resource, NY; fig. 56 Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

English translations of the Qur'an included in this publication are from Arthur J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (New York, 1966).

Front cover: *Mihrab*, from a religious school dated A.H. 755/A.D. 1354–55; Iran, Isfahan (image 4)
Inside flap: The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court, created onsite at the Metropolitan Museum by the Naji family and their company, Arabesque, Inc., Fez, Morocco, in 2011 (image 12)
Back cover: Planispheric astrolabe, dated A.H. 1065 / A.D. 1654–55; maker: Muhammad Zaman al-Munajjim al-Asturlabi (active 1643–89); Iran, Mashhad (image 16)

ISBN 978-1-58839-482-8 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
ISBN 978-0-300-19181-3 (Yale University Press)

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

Foreword

Art can be a dynamic and creative portal for students to gain an understanding of the world around them. Awareness of the global community is particularly essential in the current era of social, economic, and political change. We therefore take great pleasure in presenting to teachers and their students this publication, *Art of the Islamic World: A Resource for Educators*, which provides insight into the complexity and diversity of Islamic regions and cultures—from the Middle East to North Africa, Europe, and Central and South Asia—and illustrates the beauty and intricacy of their artistic production over the course of twelve centuries.

Since its founding, education has been at the core of the Metropolitan Museum’s mission. This institution has always been an important resource for educators and students in their exploration and study of world cultures. *Art of the Islamic World* exemplifies our continued commitment to support teachers in their efforts to bring art into their classrooms and excite their students with direct experiences of the works in our galleries through school visits. In fact, key to ensuring that this publication would be useful and relevant to classroom teachers was the focused involvement of an advisory group of their peers from New York schools, who helped develop and test the lessons with their students.

This project is also the result of a close collaboration among the Museum’s curators of Islamic art and educators and publications staff of the Education Department. We thank this team for successfully shaping this guide as an essential and practical introduction for K–12 teachers at all grade levels and across disciplines. We also thank The Olayan Group for its generous commitment to fostering a better understanding of Islamic culture in young people. In addition, we are grateful to the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for supporting this resource and thereby strengthening the diverse and vibrant cultural life of New York City and its schools.

We know that the educational value of this material will be realized in classrooms not only in New York but also across the globe, underscoring the interconnectedness of cultures today and fostering global awareness and understanding among students. We encourage teachers and their students to visit The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection, or that of a museum closer to home, as there is no substitute for the direct, intimate, and often transformative experience of seeing works of art in person.

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Acknowledgments

Numerous colleagues from across the Met contributed knowledge, ideas, guidance, and support to make this publication possible. In the Department of Islamic Art, warm thanks go to the curatorial staff, in particular Maryam Ekhtiar, who directed the project on their behalf. Deep appreciation also goes to Elena Chardakliyska and Kendra Weisbin for their research and writing, and their tireless work on all aspects of this publication. We thank Marika Sardar and Ellen Kenney for providing the original text upon which Chapters 1 and 2 in Unit 6 are based, and Denise-Marie Teece, Navina Haidar, and Deniz Beyazit for all their valuable contributions. We are also grateful for the assistance of others in the department, including Annick Des Roches, Melody Lawrence, Ria Breed, Courtney Stewart, and the fellows, interns, and volunteers who contributed in many ways, in particular Elizabeth Williams, Layla Hashemi, Ariana Muessel, and Eda Aksoy.

Heartfelt thanks go to the Education Department, especially Claire Moore, William Crow, and Merantine Hens, who were instrumental in the overall vision and realization of this publication; their writing, editorial contributions, and eye to educational content was vital during every step of the project. We are grateful to Donna Rocco for managing the myriad production aspects and supervising the printing. We also thank Vivian Wick for providing the video resources, Lucy Medrich for her editing and meticulous work on the bibliography, and Madeline Kloss for her keen eye and help in preparing the online version of this guide. We appreciate Sehr Karim-Jaffer's work on the "key words and ideas" and her willingness to test a number of the lessons during guided Museum visits for K–12 school groups.

We are pleased to acknowledge others who contributed significantly to the content and production. Senior consultants included Walter Denny and Priscilla Soucek, whose close reading, feedback, scholarly guidance, and unstinting support were invaluable. We are especially appreciative of Walter Denny's generosity in allowing us to publish his excellent photographs. Philomena Mariani ably edited the manuscript in its successive stages. Many thanks to Daud Sutton, Ahmed Fares Rizq, and Abdul Rahman Mahmoud for the beautiful calligraphic examples in Unit 2, and to Anandaroop Roy for making the maps specifically tailored to this publication. Natasha Mileschina conceived the playful design for the family guide. Special thanks to Miko McGinty and Rita Jules of Miko McGinty Inc. for the attractive and thoughtful design of the resource overall and for always keeping the needs of K–12 teachers in mind.

In the Digital Media Department we extend our gratitude to Christopher Noey, who helped launch the project with the curators at its inception. Eileen Willis, Anne Dolmatch, and Morgan Holzer expertly managed the content and production of the digital version on the Museum's website. We also appreciate the help of Freyda Spira in the Department of Drawings and Prints, and the assistance of Naomi Niles of the Museum's libraries. We thank Barbara Bridgers and the staff of the Museum's Photograph Studio for the exquisite images of Met objects included in this resource. As always, we are grateful for the continued support of Christine Begley and the Development staff.

As with any project of this scale, the Museum's donors were vital. We owe our appreciation especially to The Olayan Group for its generous support. The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and The Hagop Kevorkian Fund were all committed to the success of this project, for which we are most grateful.

Finally, we are especially grateful to our advisory group of New York K–12 teachers, who reviewed select units, identified key curriculum connections, and helped develop the lesson plans: Zakaria Baha, John Debold, Dr. Sujay Sood, Joanie Esposito, Erin Fitzgerald, Katherine Huala, Jesse Johnson, Jody Madell, Julie Mann, and Michael Wilkinson. We also thank Karen Rosner of the New York City Department of Education Office of Arts and Special Projects for her help in identifying several members of this group. These educators and those who participated in our educator's conference on Islamic art provided essential feedback on the content of this teacher kit to ensure relevance and applicability for use in the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

The Goals of This Resource

The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection of Islamic art is one of the most important and comprehensive in the world. It comprises more than 12,000 works of art created in a vast geographical area, stretching from Spain to India. The works were produced between the seventh century (the beginning of the Islamic period) and the nineteenth in a wide range of media, including works on paper (such as paintings and calligraphy), ceramics, glass, metalwork, lacquer, and textiles. Although this resource focuses on the strengths of the Museum’s collection—art of the Arab lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and later South Asia (particularly the Indian subcontinent)—it is important to note that Islamic art was also created in many parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, and China during this long period and continues to be produced today.

This guide and the organization of the Museum’s galleries emphasize the diversity of regional traditions and their cultural contexts, rather than presenting the art and culture of the Islamic world as a single monolithic entity dominated by religion. The art of these regions—both religious and secular—has been studied and presented together because Muslim dynasties ruled them for long periods of time and works of art were largely commissioned by Muslim patrons. Therefore, this art has traditionally been referred to as Islamic art. In some cases, the artists and craftsmen who created these works were non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. While Islam has been practiced in all of these regions since the seventh century, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists have also been a part of the communities within this geographic expanse. The common thread of Islam unites these regions and thus major recurring themes, forms, and modes of expression emerge. This guide aims to highlight these commonalities, while emphasizing the unique culture of each region.

Why Include Islamic Art in Your Teaching?

- ◆ Examining works of art from the Islamic world helps students meet National Learning Standards for world history, visual arts, English language arts, geometry, and science through dynamic lessons involving observation, investigation, and critical thinking skills.
- ◆ Exposing students to both religious and secular artworks produced in the Islamic world provides a more complete picture of global cultures and religions past and present. Islam is currently practiced by about 23 percent of the world’s population.
- ◆ Learning about the outstanding aesthetic and intellectual achievements of the inhabitants of the Islamic world over twelve centuries in the arts, sciences, and mathematics, as reflected in the Museum’s exemplary collection, will help students recognize ways in which these accomplishments continue to inform our lives today.
- ◆ While some of the works of art in this guide might be expected, others—including human figures and naturalistic renderings of the world—may be surprising. A close look at works of art from the many regions included in the Islamic world will help students recognize the breadth and diversity of these cultures and overcome misconceptions.
- ◆ Given the importance of these regions within current geopolitics and the role of history in elucidating our world today, this guide will help students understand the global context in which they live.

The Structure of This Guide

This resource is designed to help you incorporate works of art from the Islamic world into your teaching in the classroom or at the Museum. The thematic units in this guide each support one or more of the following subject areas: world history, visual arts, English language arts, geometry, or science; the table of contents will help you identify which units (and chapters) support each discipline. Each unit includes an introduction, featured works of art with detailed information, and a lesson plan aligned with the National Standards and Common Core State Standards (see also Curriculum Connections charts, pages 12–15). Some units have been divided into chapters that address different aspects of the unit theme. An overview of recurring themes and modes of expression in Islamic art (page 4) will help

you and your students make links among the units. Depending on your goals and available time, you might draw upon the contents of an entire unit or focus on a single work of art.

In addition, maps and a chronology provide useful geographic and historical context, and the Quick List of Featured Works of Art (Images) offers an easy overview of the focus objects. At the back of the guide, you will also find a list of general resources about the art of the Islamic world (units and chapters contain resources related to specific topics), and a glossary of key terms (each of these is underlined at first mention in each unit/chapter).

Supplemental materials included in this teacher resource packet:

- ◆ A CD including a PDF of the resource book and high-resolution images of the featured works of art for classroom viewing
- ◆ Two posters that can support your teaching of Islamic art in the classroom (images 3 and 27)
- ◆ A family guide, *Dazzling Details: Zoom in for a Close Look at Art from the Islamic World!*, presenting several ideas for engaging children ages seven through twelve in the Museum's galleries.

Dating and Transliteration Conventions Used in This Guide

This publication utilizes certain standardized dating conventions and spellings. All dates are given according to the Christian (or Gregorian) calendar (A.D.). In a case where we can ascribe an object with a precise date through an inscription or other material evidence, we offer both the Islamic calendar date (*al hijri*, abbreviated A.H.) and the Christian calendar date (for example, calligraphic galleon, dated A.H. 1180 /A.D. 1766–67).

Arabic, Persian, and some Turkish words are transliterated using a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* system. In certain instances, the authors of the sources we quote use a different transliteration system. This accounts for the occasional variation in spelling of the same foreign words or names (for example, *Shahnama* and *Shahnameh* or *Tahmuras* and *Tahmures*). The Arabic diacritical (accent) marks, *ayn* (for example, in *mi'raj*) and *hamza* (in *Qur'an*), are included, but other less-common accents are not. Certain transliterations are based on the phonetic conventions of individual languages. For example, the name *Sulaiman* is used in an Arabic or Persian context, but *Süleyman* in a Turkish one.

When an Arabic, Persian, or Turkish word is not found in *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*, we italicize it; if it is found in the dictionary we use the standard English spelling (thus *Qur'an* is not italicized, while *mihrab* is).

Recurring Themes in the Art of the Islamic World

The works of art featured in this resource reflect the diversity of the people and cultures of a vast area that includes Spain, North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. The common thread of Islam unites these regions, and thus recurring themes, forms, and modes of expression emerge. This guide highlights these themes while preserving an understanding of the unique cultural and artistic heritage of each region.

Religion

Perhaps the most significant shared feature of these regions is the presence of Islam. All the geographic areas discussed in this guide produced art for Muslim religious life. Many aspects of the religion naturally give rise to the creation of art, including, most notably, the production of manuscripts of the Qur'an, Islam's holy book. Presented in this publication are examples of Qur'an folios and manuscripts from regions as disparate as Spain, Syria, and the central Islamic lands. You will also see a proliferation of writing, or calligraphy, on many other works of art from across the Islamic world. The interest in calligraphy and its ornamental possibilities is directly linked to the exalted position of the Qur'an in all Muslim societies. (See "Islam and Religious Art" and "Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy".)

Mosques are also a common feature of all of these regions; many works provide a glimpse into the decorative and functional features of these structures, such as prayer niches (*mihhrabs*) (image 4) and mosque lamps (images 6, 45). In addition, the necessity of daily prayer influenced the artistic development of prayer rugs (image 24), as well as scientific instruments like astrolabes (image 16), which helped calculate prayer times and locate the direction of Mecca.

Ornament

Despite distinct regional variations, all of the religious art and much of the secular art in this guide share a common preference for calligraphic, geometric, and vegetal (plantlike) decoration. This type of nonfigural ornament abounds in art from the Islamic world and is present in a vast range of media—from architectural surfaces to small decorative objects. You will see such decoration on many, if not most, of the works in this guide, including the stylized floral ornament on the prayer niche (*mihhrab*; image 4), the geometric ornament on all the featured works of art in "Geometric Design in Islamic Art," and the calligraphic ornament on ceramics, textiles, and metalwork in "Arabic Script and the Art of Calligraphy."

Ornament in the form of animal and human figures is also present in the decorative margins of manuscript pages and on an array of objects.

However, this type of decoration is only found in secular (nonreligious) spheres, since figural representation is not deemed appropriate in religious contexts. (See also “Frequently Asked Questions,” page 9.) Examples of figural ornament in this guide include the margins of Mughal album pages (image 30) and the ivory panel from Spain (image 20). Figural representation is also seen in manuscript illustrations and sometimes appears in the form of statues of humans or animals. Examples in this guide include Persian and Mughal manuscript illustrations or album folios (images 27–29, 30, 32) and the Persian elephant-shaped drinking vessel (image 44), among others. In these works, figural representation, rather than ornamental surface decoration, is the primary focus.

Interconnections

The influence of trade, diplomacy, and cultural interconnections is another element reflected in the art of these regions. Trade was an important commercial and cultural factor because of the many vital trading posts and routes throughout the Islamic world, such as the Silk Road. Two chapters in this guide—“Ceramics in China and the Near East” and “Venice and the Islamic World”—focus specifically on the artistic ramifications of these types of interconnections. However, you will see evidence of artistic influence and exchange in many of the other chapters of this resource. For example, you will read about the influence of Persian painting and calligraphy on the art of Mughal India (see “The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation”) and the impact of fourteenth-century Spanish architecture on a sixteenth-century Ottoman prayer rug (see “Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court”).

Diversity of Patronage

People from many different walks of life in the Islamic world commissioned and bought works of art.

The patronage of the court, or ruler, was paramount in many areas. Court workshops—with unparalleled access to funds, fine materials, and the most talented artists—produced sumptuous goods and fostered the transmission of motifs and styles from one medium to another as artists worked together in a collaborative environment. The significance of court patronage is evident in the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) manuscript (images 27–29), the Ottoman royal emblem (*tughra*) and tile (images 23, 26), the Mughal decorative objects and paintings (images 15, 30), and the textile fragment from Islamic Spain (image 13 or 22).

The artistic patronage of nonruling classes—whether merchants, nomads, scholars, or members of a wealthy urban elite—demonstrates the overarching importance of art in daily life and the common desire for beautiful objects. Examples of works of art commissioned by nonruling

classes in this guide include ceramics from the mercantile city of Nishapur (image 33), nomadic Turkmen objects (image 40), and the Damascus Room (image 38).

Works of art were not only commissioned or bought for private use, but also as gifts. The importance of charity in the Muslim faith expresses itself in the practice of giving gifts to mosques and other religious institutions by those in all echelons of Muslim society in every region. Many of the objects discussed in this guide—such as the Qur’an stand (image 5), the mosque lamps (images 6, 45), the Spanish textile fragment (image 13 or 22), and the lamp stand (image 9)—were likely commissioned as gifts for religious institutions. Other works of art, such as *tiraz* (image 8), were likely given by rulers to subjects or visiting dignitaries as marks of honor.

Technical Innovation

Constant innovation in both materials and techniques characterizes the art of the Islamic world. Artisans from these regions were internationally renowned for their ingenuity in developing increasingly fine materials and experimenting with new and complex techniques to create works of art, from ceramics and metalwork to carpets and textiles. Because of the interconnections among many Islamic regions, innovations spread quickly and were often adopted and further improved far from their place of origin. The introduction of stonepaste as a medium for ceramics is one of the most important of these innovations (and further discussed in “Ceramics in China and the Near East”). Other artistic techniques—originating in Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia—such as opaque white glazes, underglazing, and techniques for inlaid metalwork, likewise revolutionized artistic production in many parts of the Islamic world and beyond.

Techniques conceived in the Islamic world found their way into Western artistic production, facilitated by trade routes between the East and West (see “Venice and the Islamic World”). Techniques for producing transparent glass, luster-painted ceramics, and certain types of textiles such as velvet are among the artistic innovations that had a global impact.

Frequently Asked Questions about Islam and Art of the Islamic World

These frequently asked questions provide a brief overview of some of the issues that arise when teaching about Islamic art and culture. These issues pertain to the full range of places and time periods covered in this guide.

Islamic Religion and Culture

Q: How many people practice Islam today?

A: According to most estimates, about 23 percent of the world's population is Muslim. In 2012, this constitutes approximately 1.6 billion people.

Q: What do the words Islam and Muslim mean?

A: The word *Islam* literally means “submission” in Arabic, referring to submission to God. *Muslim*, one who practices Islam, refers to one who submits to God.

Q: The term “the Islamic world” appears frequently throughout this guide—what area does this refer to?

A: This guide uses the term “the Islamic world” to refer to regions that have historically been ruled and/or inhabited predominantly by Muslims. This term generally encompasses lands reaching from Spain to Indonesia, from the seventh century to the present.

Q: How is Islam similar to other monotheistic religions?

A: There are several similarities among the three major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The most obvious is the belief in one God. All three religions consider certain figures from biblical history, such as Abraham and Moses, to have been true prophets of God. In addition, all three faiths originated in the Middle East and have holy sites in common (for example, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the Cave of the Patriarchs at Hebron). The concept of pilgrimage is also common to all three.

Q: Do Muslims consider Allah to be the same God worshipped in Judaism and Christianity?

A: Yes. Allah is simply the Arabic name for God, like *Yahweh* in Hebrew, *Dios* in Spanish, or *Dieu* in French. However, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity each characterize God and the qualities of the Divine somewhat differently.

Q: Are there different branches of Islam?

A: Within Islam there exist many different variations of faith, including two major branches—Sunnism and Shiism.

Q: What is the difference between Sunnism and Shiism?

A: The initial schism in the Islamic faith occurred after the death of the Prophet Muhammad as a result of the disagreement over who should succeed the Prophet as the leader of the Muslim community. Some believed that only a blood relative of the Prophet could lead the Islamic community; they believed ‘Ali, the Prophet’s cousin, should be his successor. They became known as Shi‘a, meaning “Party [of ‘Ali].” Others believed that leaders within the community should elect the Prophet’s successor based on merit; they became known as Sunni (meaning “way” or “path,” referring to the traditions of the Prophet, whose example all Muslims are to follow). About 80 percent of Muslims today are Sunni. Over time, differences in theology emerged, but both sects believe in the basic tenets of Islam (the Five Pillars; see “Islam and Religious Art,” page 30) and revere the Qur’an as divine revelation.

Q: What is Sufism?

A: Some Muslims practice Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism. The focus of Sufism, which is practiced by Sunnis and Shi‘is alike, is to attain unity with God. Its most notable practices include repeating the names of God, asceticism, and mystical dance.

Q: The numbers we use every day are called ‘Arabic numerals.’ Have Western languages also adopted words from Arabic?

A: Because of contact between the Islamic world and Europe at various junctures throughout history, many cultural and linguistic influences passed back and forth. For instance, a number of Arabic words were absorbed into the Romance languages, particularly Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. This was because of the proximity of Europe and the Arab world and the seven centuries of Muslim rule in southern Spain and Italy. Arabic words, such as apricot, alcohol, algebra, coffee, cotton, lute, sofa, and zero, made their way into English through Romance languages.

Q: What languages are spoken in the Islamic world?

A: Arabic is the language of the holy Qur’an. Muslims and non-Muslims alike in Arab lands speak Arabic. However, not all Muslims speak this language on a daily basis. Muslims in non-Arab regions, where the vast majority of Muslims live today, use Arabic for prayer and religious purposes only. Most of the works of art introduced in this guide were created in areas where Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu were, and still are, the primary spoken and written language. Arabic is a Semitic language similar to Hebrew, while Persian is an Indo-European language, like English or French. Turkish is related to neither and is an Altaic language. Though distinct

languages, both Persian and Turkish (until 1928) were written in the Arabic alphabet. Because of the interconnections within the Islamic world, the Arabic, Turkish, and Persian languages borrowed many words from each other.

Q: What countries comprise the region called South Asia in this guide?

A: South Asia consists of the subcontinental region south of the Himalayas including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives.

Art of the Islamic World

Q: How did The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquire all of these works of art?

A: The Museum started acquiring Islamic works of art as early as 1891. Since then many major collectors have donated objects or portions of their collections. The Museum's collection continues to grow through purchases and gifts.

Q: Many people say that Islam prohibits the depiction of figures (both people and animals). Why are there so many images of people in the Museum's galleries and in this guide?

A: Attitudes toward figural art in the Islamic world varied depending on period and location, and ranged from totally aniconic (no images of people or animals) to entirely accepting of figural imagery. There is no prohibition against the depiction of humans or animals mentioned in the Qur'an. However, the subject is discussed several times in the hadith (the sayings of the Prophet), in which the objections are based largely upon the role of God as sole creator. One tradition from the hadith states that Muhammad removed figural curtains from his home, saying that they would invite the temptation of idol worship. He asked his wife Aisha to turn the curtains into pillows instead, since an object on which one sits could not invite idolatry. This story illustrates the pervading Islamic attitude toward the use of figural imagery in art—that it depends entirely on function and context. In most Islamic regions throughout history, a common compromise was to use figural imagery in a secular context but not in a religious one, or to use images of people and animals on small-scale works of art intended for private enjoyment.

Q: What accounts for the Asian facial features of many people depicted in the works of art in the galleries of the Islamic department and in this guide?

A: From the eleventh century onward, the concept of human beauty in some parts of the Islamic world began to reflect Central Asian ideals, largely due to the westward migration of Turks from Central Asia. This convention endured in this region through the seventeenth century, after which new ideals of beauty emerged.

Q: There is calligraphy (decorative writing) on so many of the objects in the galleries and in this guide. Would the average person living in the Islamic world have been able to read it all?

A: Most educated people would have been able to read Arabic writing. However, some examples of calligraphy are so ornate that creativity was clearly favored over legibility. Calligraphy was, and is, appreciated above all for its aesthetic qualities and the skill of the calligrapher.

Q: Why are space and depth represented differently in works of art from many Islamic regions than they are in Western paintings?

A: Different cultures have different aesthetic values, ideals of beauty, and concepts of realism and space as represented in painting. Many Islamic paintings favor elements like color and detail, whereas many European painters and patrons of the same time were concerned with creating the illusion of spatial depth. Painters in Islamic and European countries were equally concerned with conveying stories through visual imagery. The differences derive from tradition and cultural conventions, and do not reflect fundamental differences in artistic skill.

Q: Why are there so many images of gardens, plants, and flowers in Islamic art and ornament?

A: Nature-based imagery is important in almost all artistic traditions. In Islamic art in particular you will see a broad range of garden imagery, as is evident in this guide. There are repeating patterns of flowers and plants, sometimes abstract and sometimes naturalistic, on everything from rugs and ceramics to manuscript ornamentation. You will also encounter narrative garden scenes, like those in Mughal and Persian manuscript illustrations. Some believe the pervasiveness of garden and plant imagery in Islamic art stems from the Qur'an's description of heaven as a lush garden paradise. There are also nonreligious factors at work—it is important to remember that many regions of the Islamic world are hot and dry, making images of verdant, water-filled gardens all the more alluring.

Q: How did most artists in the Islamic world work?

A: The modern artist working today uses a very different process than an artist working in the Islamic world during the seventh through the nineteenth centuries. Most artists belonged to workshops, in which groups of skilled craftsmen worked together on multiple projects. Some workshops were commercial, creating relatively large numbers of art objects, from carpets to ceramics, for sale on the open market. Other workshops belonged to royal courts. These employed the very best artists from throughout the empire, who each often had their own specialty. For instance, in a manuscript workshop one artist might specialize in calligraphy, another in painting figures, and yet others in making decorative bindings. The workshop system was not unique to the Islamic world; it also existed in medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Q: A number of the chapters in this guide mention courts. What were these like and who lived in them?

A: Most regions in the Islamic world until the nineteenth century, as in Europe at the time, were controlled by absolute rulers—kings or other leaders who attained their position through lineage (their fathers were the rulers) or conquest. The ruler lived at a court, a large complex with a palace for the ruler, his family, and other nobility. The court also accommodated traveling guests and foreign dignitaries, and usually included a royal workshop (see question above), a mosque, and other cultural institutions. Princes, regional governors, and other members of the nobility often had their own individual courts. Additionally, many rulers led a semi-nomadic life, traveling around their realms to maintain order or fight wars and insurrections.

Quick List of Featured Works of Art (Images)



1. Muhammad's Call to Prophecy and The First Revelation: Folio from a manuscript of the *Majma' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Histories), about 1425; present-day Afghanistan, Herat



2. The Night Journey of The Prophet Muhammad (*Mi'raj*): Folio from the *Bustan* (Orchard) of Sa'di, about 1525–35; calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur (about 1472–about 1536); penned in present-day Afghanistan, probably Herat; illustrated in present-day Uzbekistan, probably Bukhara, 1530–35



3. Folio from a Qur'an manuscript, late 13th–early 14th century; Spain



4. *Mihrab*, from a religious school dated A.H. 755/A.D. 1354–55; Iran, Isfahan



5. Qur'an stand (*rahla*), dated A.H. 761/A.D. 1360; maker: Hasan ibn Sulaiman Isfahani; Iran



6. Mosque lamp, about 1329–35; maker: 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Barmaki; Egypt



7. Bowl with Arabic inscription, 10th century; Iran, Nishapur



8. *Tiraz* fragment, late 14th–early 15th century; Spain



9. Lamp stand with chevron pattern, dated A.H. 986/A.D. 1578–79; Iran



10. Illuminated folio with poetic verses from the *Shah Jahan Album* (verso), about 1500; calligrapher: Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi (act. late 15th–early 16th century); India



11. Calligraphic galleon, dated A.H. 1180/A.D. 1766–67; calligrapher: 'Abd al-Qadir Hisari; Turkey



12. The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court, created onsite at the Metropolitan Museum by the Naji family and their company, Arabesque, Inc., Fez, Morocco, in 2011



13. Textile fragment, 14th century; Spain



14. Star- and hexagonal-tile panel, late 13th–14th century; Iran, Nishapur



15. *Jali* (screen), second half of the 16th century; India



16. Planispheric astrolabe, dated A.H. 1065/A.D. 1654–55; maker: Muhammad Zaman al-Munajjim al-Asturlabi (act. 1643–89); Iran, Mashhad



17. Perseus: Folios from the *Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabita* (Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars) of al-Sufi, late 15th century; Iran



18. Preparing Medicine from Honey: Folio from a dispersed manuscript of an Arabic translation of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, dated A.H. 621/ A.D. 1224; calligrapher: ‘Abdullah ibn al-Fadl; Iraq, Baghdad or northern Jazira



19. Mortar made for Abu Bakr ‘Ali Malikzad al-Tabrizi, late 12th–early 13th century; Iran



20. Panel, 10th–early 11th century; Spain, probably Córdoba



21. Capital, 10th century; Spain, probably Córdoba



22. Textile fragment, 14th century; Spain



23. *Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66), about 1555–60; Turkey, Istanbul



24. Prayer carpet with triple-arch design, about 1575–90; Turkey, probably Istanbul, possibly Egypt, Cairo



25. Fragment of a kaftan back with peacock feather design, mid-16th century; Turkey, probably Istanbul



26. Tile with floral and cloud-band design, about 1578; Turkey, Iznik



27. The Feast of Sada: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525; author: Abu’l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020); artist: attributed to Sultan Muhammad (act. first half 16th century); Iran, Tabriz



28. Tahmuras Defeats the *Divs*: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525; author: Abu’l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020); artist: attributed to Sultan Muhammad (act. first half 16th century); Iran, Tabriz



29. Siyavush Plays Polo: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525–30; author: Abu’l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020); artist: attributed to Qasim ibn ‘Ali (act. 1525–60); Iran, Tabriz



30. The Emperor Shah Jahan with His Son Dara Shikoh: Folio from the *Shah Jahan Album* (verso), about 1620; artist: Nanha (act. 1605–27); India



31. Dagger with hilt in the form of a blue bull (*nilgai*), about 1640; India



32. Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the *Shah Jahan Album* (verso), about 1615–20; artist: Mansur (act. 1589–1629); India



33. Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration, 10th century; Iran, probably Nishapur



34. Bowl with Arabic inscription, late 10th–11th century; Iran, excavated at Nishapur; probably made in Samarqand (in present-day Uzbekistan)



35. *Dado* panel, 10th century; Iran, Nishapur



36. Pendant, 10th century; Iran, Nishapur



37. Chess set, 12th century; Iran, Nishapur



38. The Damascus Room, dated A.H. 1119/A.D. 1707; Syria, Damascus



39. Storage bag face(s), early 18th–19th century; Central Asia, probably present-day Turkmenistan, Arabatchi tribe



40. Amulet, late 19th–early 20th century; present-day Uzbekistan, Karakalpak tribe



41. Bowl with cobalt-blue inscriptions, 9th century; Iraq, probably Basra



42. White bowl (*tazza*), 12th century; Iran



43. Tile with image of a phoenix, late 13th century; Iran, probably Takht-i Sulaiman



44. Elephant-shaped drinking vessel (*kendi*), second quarter of the 17th century; Iran, probably Kirman

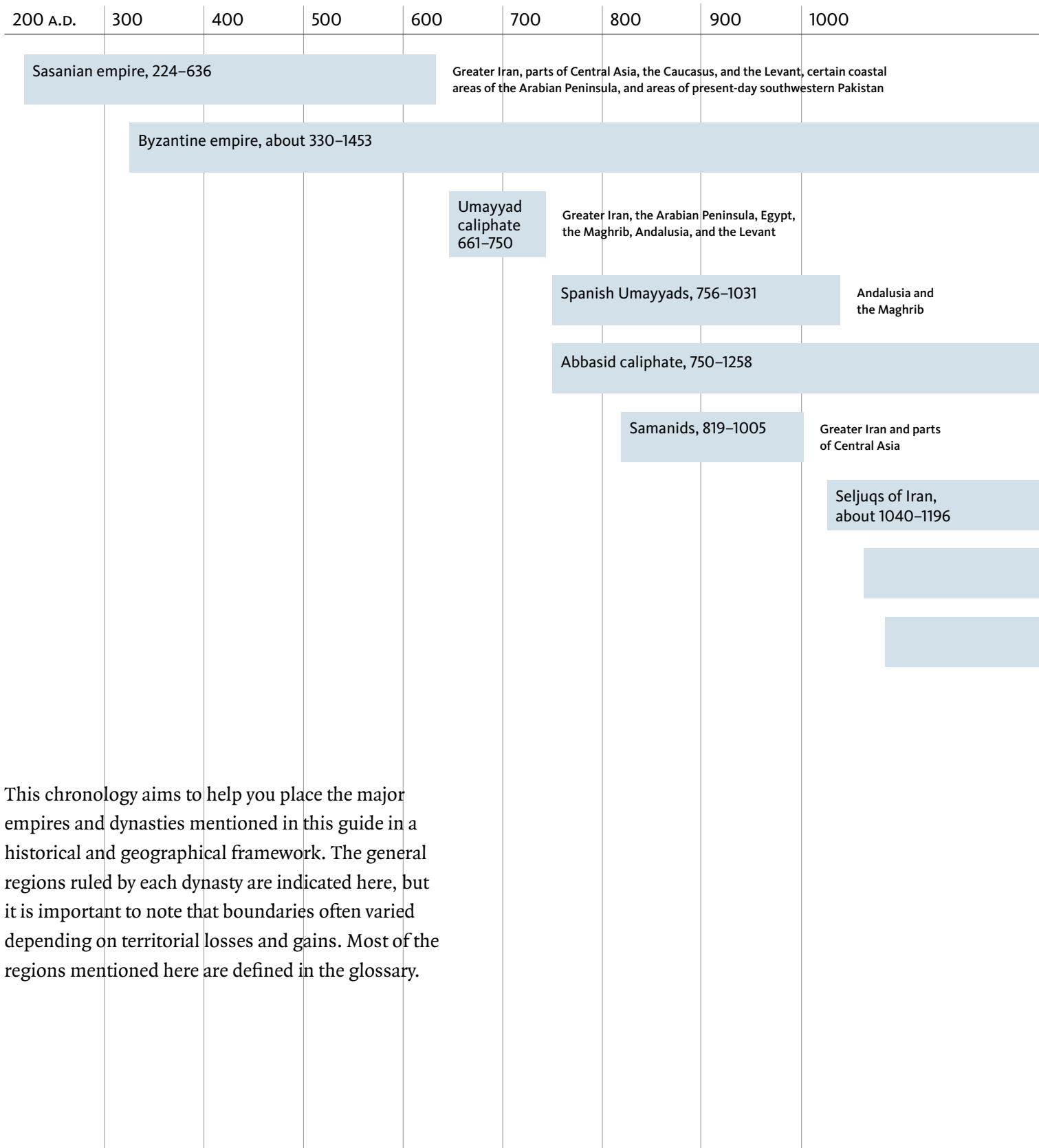


45. Lamp for the Mausoleum of Amir Aidakin al-'Ala'i al-Bunduqdar, shortly after 1285; Egypt, probably Cairo

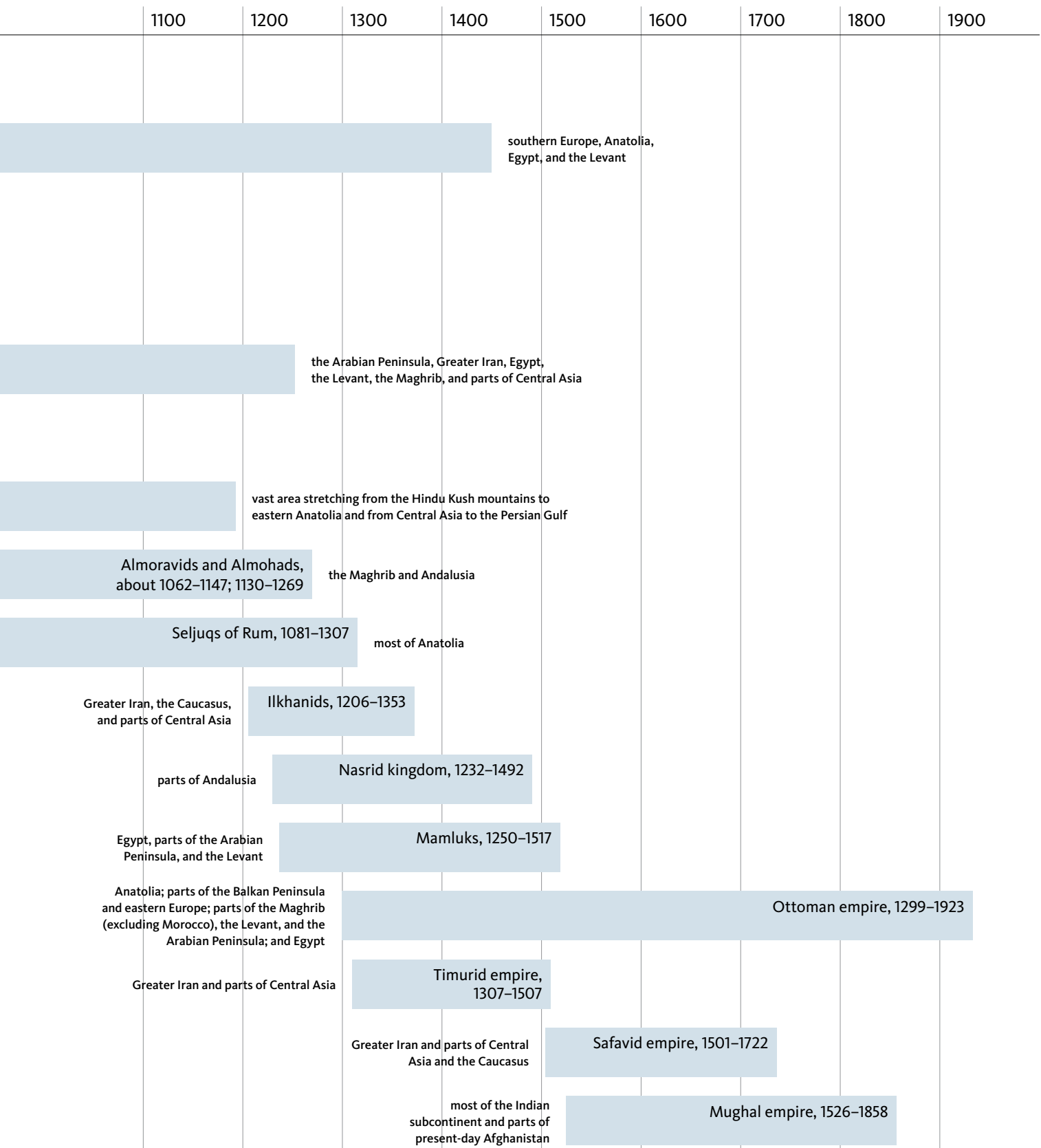


46. Velvet fragment, second half of 16th century; Turkey, Bursa

Chronology of Major Empires and Dynasties in the Islamic World



This chronology aims to help you place the major empires and dynasties mentioned in this guide in a historical and geographical framework. The general regions ruled by each dynasty are indicated here, but it is important to note that boundaries often varied depending on territorial losses and gains. Most of the regions mentioned here are defined in the glossary.



Major Empires and Dynasties of the Islamic World: Important Facts and Events

Sasanian empire (224–636 A.D.)

Internal struggles and wars with Byzantium weakened the Sasanian empire, leaving it open to defeat by Islamic armies in 642 A.D.

Byzantine empire (about 330–1453)

After the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he shifted the capital of the Roman empire to the east, making Constantinople the seat of the new Byzantine empire. The Byzantine empire came into constant conflict with expanding Islamic territories, and ultimately lost Constantinople to the Ottoman empire in 1453.

Umayyad caliphate (661–750)

As the first major Islamic dynasty, their art reflects an emerging Islamic aesthetic; they were centered at Damascus, Syria.

Spanish Umayyads (756–1031)

Established by the last Umayyad prince fleeing Syria after the Abbasid conquest, the Spanish Umayyads were the first of many Muslim dynasties to rule in Spain.

Abbasid caliphate (750–1258)

This caliphate was the second major Islamic dynasty and one of the longest in power. During the second half of their rule, the Abbasid caliphs were rulers in name only, having become the puppets of other princely states, such as the Buyids, the Samanids, and the Seljuqs.

Samanids (819–1005)

The Samanids were the first native Persian dynasty to rule Iran after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the Arab Muslim conquests. Their rule marked the beginning of a revival of Persian art and culture. The cities of Nishapur, Samarqand, and Bukhara thrived under the Samanids.

Seljuqs of Iran (about 1040–1196)

The Seljuqs were a Turkic people from Central Asia. Their art is notable for its synthesis of Persian, Islamic, and Central Asian–Turkic elements.

Almoravids and Almohads (about 1062–1147; 1130–1269)

The Almoravids and Almohads were Berber dynasties that ruled southern Spain after the collapse of the Spanish Umayyad regime in 1032. They created capitals at Marrakesh in Morocco and Seville in Spain.

Seljuqs of Rum (1081–1307)

Part of the Seljuq dynasty of Iran broke off and established control over a large portion of Anatolia. Anatolia was known as “Rum,” a derivation of “Rome,” alluding to the Byzantine empire’s former rule in that region.

Ilkhanids (1206–1353)

One of the khanates (principalities or kingdoms ruled by a khan) established by the descendants of the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan. “Il Khan” literally means “Lesser Khan,” because the Ilkhanids were subordinate to the Mongol Great Khans ruling China (also known as the Yuan dynasty).

Nasrid kingdom (1232–1492)

The Nasrids, centered at their capital of Granada, were the last of many Islamic dynasties to rule in Spain. Their reign ended in 1492, when most Muslims and Jews were cast out of Spain by the Castilian king and queen, Ferdinand and Isabella.

Mamluks (1250–1517)

The Mamluks (literally, “military slaves”) were originally Turkic military forces who served the preceding Egyptian dynasty. They overthrew their masters, establishing their own rule with an unusual political system in which slaves held positions of great power and were recruited into leadership.

Ottoman empire (1299–1923)

One of the longest-lasting dynasties in world history, the Ottomans ruled over a vast and varied territory with the help of a highly structured bureaucracy. Many of the Ottoman sultans were great patrons of the arts.

Timurid empire (1307–1507)

Named for the founder of the dynasty, Timur (called Tamerlane in the West), the Timurids were Turks who conquered much of Greater Iran and Central Asia. They were important patrons of the arts, commissioning architectural monuments as well as fine illustrated manuscripts.

Safavid empire (1501–1722)

The Safavids were a Shi’a dynasty that traced its lineage to an important Sufi mystic. Safavid palaces in Isfahan were known all over the world for their opulence and luxury. The Safavid *shahs* (kings) are renowned for the patronage of fine decorative arts and the production of luxury manuscripts.

Mughal empire (1526–1858)

The Mughals traced their lineage to the Mongol rulers of Iran. Their art and architecture is unique in its synthesis of Persian, indigenous Indian, and European influences.

See pages 26–27 for regions ruled by these empires and dynasties.