

## UNIT 5

# Courtly Splendor in the Islamic World

In most regions of the Islamic world, the patronage of the ruler and the court was vital to the production of fine works of art and led to important artistic innovations. The sponsorship of artistic activity was viewed as a privilege of kingship. Royal workshops had unparalleled access to funds, fine materials, and the most talented artists. These workshops supported the production of sumptuous luxury objects and fostered collaboration among artists, which resulted in the transmission of motifs and styles from one medium to another. The chapters in this unit highlight the art of two courts in Islamic Spain, the Umayyads (756–1031) and the Nasrids (1232–1492), and the court art of three later Islamic empires—the Mughals of India (1526–1858), the Safavids of Iran (1501–1722), and the Ottomans of Turkey (1299–1923). These chapters examine the role of the royal workshop in the production of art and the creation of distinct dynastic visual languages.



Detail, image 20

## UNIT 5: CHAPTER 1

# Court Arts of Islamic Spain

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- ◆ identify how the court art of Islamic Spain reflects a convergence of cultures; and
- ◆ understand the ways in which royal patronage of the arts reflected the visual identity and opulence of two dynasties in Islamic Spain.

### Introduction

For eight centuries, between 711 and 1492, Southern Spain was part of the Muslim world. A rich culture emerged around the royal and provincial courts in Córdoba, Granada, Toledo, and Málaga. Trade, intellectual life, and the arts flourished. The works of art featured in this chapter, from the Spanish Umayyad (756–1031) and Nasrid (1232–1492) periods, illustrate how elements from various traditions came together to create distinct styles that were both enduring and far-reaching.

## The Spanish Umayyads (756–1031)

In 711, less than a century after the birth of Islam, an army of Arabs and Berbers serving the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus (in Syria) landed in the Iberian Peninsula, ushering in a new phase of art and culture in the region. Within a period of seven years, most of the peninsula was under Muslim rule. These new territories came to be known by their Arabic name, al-Andalus.

In 750, the Umayyad dynasty in Syria fell to the Abbasids. The one surviving member, ‘Abd al-Rahman I (reigned 756–88), escaped to Spain and established autonomous rule there. He rebuilt Córdoba, the capital city, to reflect his Syrian heritage and the Byzantine roots of the Umayyad capital of Damascus. This influence can be seen in the architecture and surface ornamentation of the Great Mosque of Córdoba as well as other buildings in the city. Under ‘Abd al-Rahman III (reigned 912–61), who proclaimed himself caliph, al-Andalus grew into an empire with a diverse religious and ethnic population.



FIG. 21. Interior of the Salon Rico (a reception hall), Madinat al-Zahra, Spain, 953–58

From 945 to 1010, the court was centered in Madinat al-Zahra, a palace city on the outskirts of Córdoba built between 936 and 940 by ‘Abd al-Rahman III. The city became synonymous with opulence and sophistication (fig. 21). It consisted of hundreds of buildings and included inns, schools, and workshops. The architecture employed columns imported from North Africa and regions in the Byzantine empire as well as marble fountains from Syria. Distinct motifs and designs, such as symmetrically arranged vegetal scrolls and complex geometric patterns, covered the surfaces of objects and were carved onto the stucco and stone walls of mosques and palaces. Works of art made in Madinat al-Zahra were products of a Mediterranean taste that drew upon indigenous traditions of Spain as well as those of the Umayyads’ native Syria. Many of these masterfully crafted luxury objects, such as intricately carved ivory containers, illuminated manuscripts of the Qur’an, and lavish textiles, traveled via trade routes to other Mediterranean courts as gifts and tributes. However, the glory of the Umayyad court did not last; in 1010, Madinat al-Zahra was destroyed during a Berber revolt and its riches plundered. Many of its objects ended up in northern Europe, where they were admired, preserved, and emulated.

As a result of civil wars, Umayyad rule in Spain ended in 1031 and al-Andalus was divided among feuding city-states that faced constant attacks from northern Spanish Christian powers. Despite this upheaval, art continued to be created; artists from the Spanish Umayyad imperial workshops dispersed and their subsequent work in smaller courts ensured the survival and continuation of their outstanding craftsmanship.

## Alliances between Islamic Spain and North Africa

The divided and ambiguous allegiances of the numerous Islamic dynasties in Spain enabled the Christian forces from the north to overtake many Muslim territories. However, with military assistance from the North African Almoravid dynasty (1062–1147), which was also Muslim, al-Andalus was able to successfully drive out the Christian forces temporarily. This victory prompted a period of cultural, political, and artistic unity in North Africa and southern Spain that is evident in the shared visual vocabulary of the architecture and decorative arts. The Almohads (1130–1269), also a North African Berber dynasty, replaced the Almoravids by 1150 and came to control much of al-Andalus, establishing capitals at both Marrakesh in Morocco and Seville in Spain. After the Castilian and Aragonese armies of the North defeated the Almohads, Southern Spain again entered a period of warring principalities.



FIG. 22. View of the Court of the Lions, Alhambra, Granada, Spain, 1354–91

## Nasrid Rule in Spain (1232–1492)

By the thirteenth century, only one Islamic kingdom remained in Spain, the Nasrids of Granada (1232–1492). In spite of geographic gains by northern forces elsewhere, the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula flourished as an intellectual and artistic center as it had two centuries earlier under the Spanish Umayyads. The Nasrids built a palace in their capital, Granada, around an existing hilltop fortress, which came to be known as the Alhambra (from the Arabic word for red, *hamra*, referring to the color of its outer stone walls).

The Alhambra quickly became the most recognizable symbol of Islamic civilization in Spain. Its decoration is the result of a synthesis of preexisting local Spanish traditions and artistic influences from neighboring Christian regions, North Africa, Iran, and other areas of the Near East. This distinct Nasrid style is known for its slender columns, colorful geometric tilework, horseshoe arches, carved plaster walls with lacelike patterns and Arabic inscriptions, extensive use of *muqarnas* (small, honeycomblike niches used to decorate architectural surfaces), and four-part gardens (fig. 22). Known as Moorish, this style was used by Muslims and Christians alike in fourteenth-century Spain (see, for example, the similarities between the Alhambra [fig. 22] and the Christian King Pedro's Alcazar in Seville). The style eventually reached as far as Russia, England, Germany, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and the Americas as travelers' accounts of the Alhambra spread around the world. Nasrid rule in Spain ended in 1492, but the Christian conquerors from the North continued to use the Alhambra palace, and adapted many Andalusian forms and styles into their own visual culture (see, for example, the Museum's sixteenth-century Spanish ceiling [56.234.35.2]).

## 20 Panel

10th–early 11th century

Spain, probably Córdoba

Ivory; carved and inlaid with stone with traces of pigment;

4¼ x 8 in. (10.8 x 20.3 cm)

John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1913 (13.141)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

The lush vegetal designs on the surface of this plaque, drawn from the visual vocabulary of Umayyad Syria, symbolize abundance and fertility. Like many decorative motifs, these forms were incorporated into a variety of media, including ivory containers, stone architectural surfaces, and ceremonial textiles.

### FUNCTION

This ivory panel once decorated the side of a box. In Umayyad Spain, containers like this often held precious perfumes and cosmetics. Such elaborately carved boxes would have been ideal for presenting expensive and rare gifts, such as perfume. An inscription on a related example reveals that such boxes were commissioned as gifts for favored women in the royal household. After the fall of Islamic Spain, conquering forces from the north took many precious objects as booty. In Christian hands, boxes like this were often used as reliquaries for saints' remains.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Complex lacelike decoration, dancing figures, stylized trees, and an assortment of animals such as jackals, peacocks, and birds of prey cover this ivory panel. The dense composition is organized by vertical symmetry that creates a mirrorlike effect resembling the repeating patterns found on textiles. Two full repetitions of the symmetrical pattern cover the plaque, while the edges suggest the extension of the pattern on both sides.

The background, carved in deep relief, features an intricate pattern of scrolling leaves and stems that is characteristic of Spanish Umayyad ornament. Visible traces of pigment suggest the plaque was originally painted. Deep holes reveal where the eyes of the figures were once inset with tiny quartz stones.

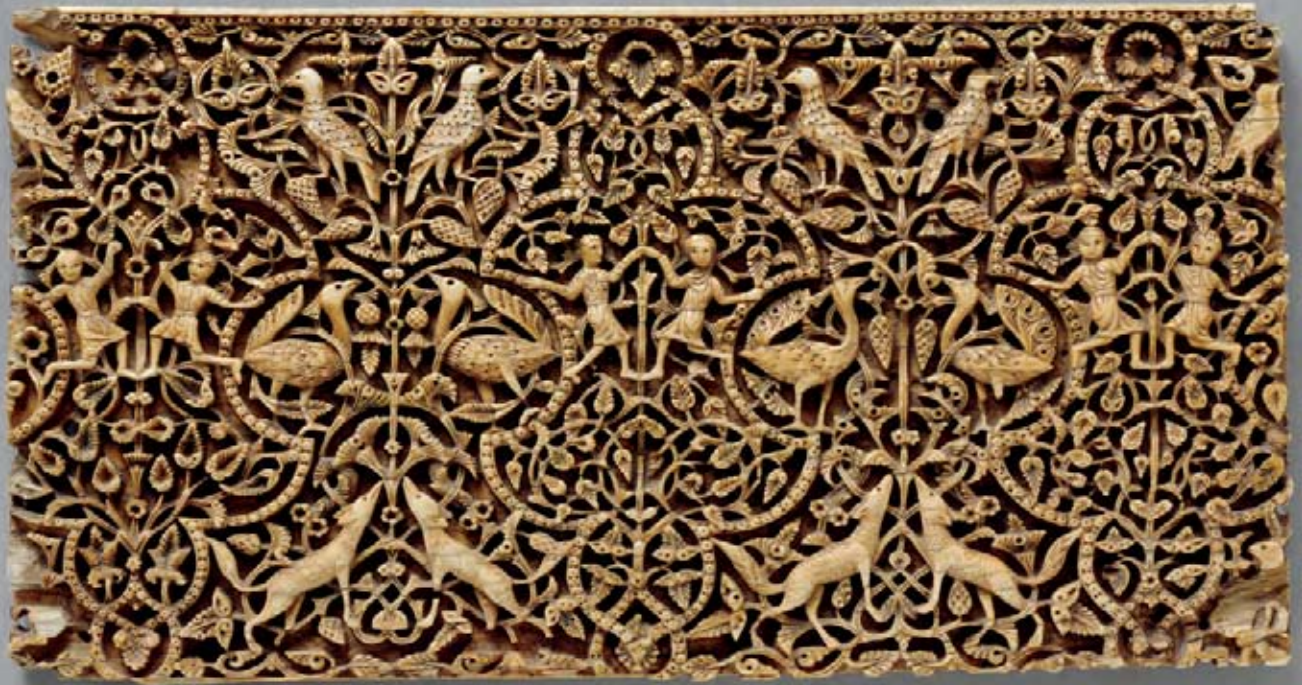
### CONTEXT

This ivory panel was carved from a single piece of elephant tusk. The use of precious elephant tusk made such vessels a popular choice for gifts destined for rulers in Byzantium and the Muslim West.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Umayyad Spain, court life, figural ornament, vegetal ornament, symmetry, cultural exchange, elephant tusk (ivory)





## 21 Capital

10th century

Spain, probably Córdoba

Marble, carved; 14½ x 13½ in. (36.8 x 34.3 cm)

Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis,  
1915 (30.95.134)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

The deep carving and symmetrical design of this Corinthian-inspired capital are distinguishing features of the courtly arts of Umayyad Spain. Buildings and palaces, such as those in Madinat al-Zahra were covered with intricately carved vegetal designs.

### FUNCTION

Capitals are the decorative tops of columns. Originating in ancient Greece, this architectural form was used all over the world and continues to be used today. This capital was part of the decorated colonnades in the palace city Madinat al-Zahra, near Córdoba (see fig. 21), where gardens with cascading pools, carved and painted stone arcades, capitals, and tiled wall panels combined Syrian, Byzantine, and local influences into a distinct Umayyad Spanish style.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Lacelike surface ornament became one of the distinguishing characteristics of Umayyad Spanish style; further examples can be seen in textiles and ivory carvings of the period (see image 20). This capital, which once crowned a column, has four identical sides. Decorative vegetal stems climb, intertwine, and spread out to the sides, giving the heavy marble a sense of lightness. Near the top, acanthus leaves, supported by elegant arabesque-like stems, form thick crowns. The name of the stone carver appears in an Arabic inscription on a boss at the top center of one side of the capital. Traces of paint on similar capitals suggest that they were originally painted.

### CONTEXT

Syria was a Roman, and later a Byzantine province before the Umayyads conquered it in 634. Capitals like this one, which combine Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic styles, are a testament to the rich artistic heritage of the Spanish Umayyads. This synthesis of influences distinguishes the decorative forms developed in Islamic Spain, and the ornate column capitals of Madinat al-Zahra tell us as much about the Spanish Umayyads' history as their taste for opulence in court architecture.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Umayyad Spain, ancient Rome, architecture, capital, vegetal ornament, marble



21. Capital

## Textile fragment

14th century

Spain

Silk, lampas; 40 $\frac{3}{16}$  x 14 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (102 x 36.3 cm)

Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.22)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This silk fragment is an example of the Nasrid court's production of luxurious textiles. The similarity between the woven decorative elements in this textile and the tile patterns adorning the walls in Nasrid palaces like the Alhambra reflect a unified aesthetic language that transcends media and in many cases geographic boundaries. The geometric motifs on this panel—especially the eight-pointed star—also emerged as favored decorative elements in nearby North Africa, which attests to the transmission of decorative motifs to surrounding areas and the indelible imprint of Nasrid visual culture in the region.

### FUNCTION

Silk textiles like this one were expensive luxury objects often commissioned by the court or other wealthy patrons. Its large size, the original edge preserved on one side, and the presence of fringe on the other suggest it likely served as a furnishing or space divider in the home of a court official or elite member of the community. Works such as this were also used in court ceremonies and presented as gifts to individuals or religious institutions.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The composition consists of colorful geometric interlacing based on a radiating eight-pointed star motif organized in wide horizontal bands. A decorative calligraphic band written in Arabic is skillfully incorporated into the design. The word “beatitude,” which means blessedness or happiness, is repeated across one of the rows in mirrored pairs of plaited *kufic* script on a red ground. The phrase “good luck and prosperity” woven in *naskh* script fills the narrow borders on both sides of the larger *kufic* band.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Spain, Nasrid dynasty, architecture, North Africa, Christian reliquaries, geometric ornament, calligraphy (*kufic* script), textile, silk

### CONTEXT

The royal textile workshops in al-Andalus were famous for their luxurious woven creations. Silk panels, used to adorn the interiors of affluent homes and palaces, were among the most precious objects produced in royal workshops. The star-shaped motifs and crenellations featured in this example resemble the ceramic tile mosaic *dadoes* (panels on the lower register of a wall of a room) in Nasrid palaces such as the Alhambra (fig. 23). This visual connection has aided scholars in dating and attributing these textiles to Nasrid Spain. In addition to their popularity in Muslim Spain, such textiles were prized by neighboring Christian communities, who often used fragments of them as linings for reliquaries (containers for saints' remains).

(See also image 13.)



FIG. 23. Detail of a tile panel from the interior of the Nasrid palace, the Alhambra, Granada, 1354–91



22. Textile fragment

## Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 1 Court Arts of Islamic Spain

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### FEATURED WORK OF ART

#### Textile fragment (image 22)

14th century

Spain

Silk; lampas; 40 $\frac{3}{16}$  x 14 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (102 x 36.3 cm)

Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.22)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History

**GRADES:** Middle School and High School

**TOPIC/THEME:** Art as a Primary Resource

### GOALS

Students will be able to:

- ◆ identify shared visual characteristics among several works of art from Islamic Spain;
- ◆ recognize ways designs are adapted across a range of media; and
- ◆ cite strengths and limitations of various materials.

### NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.1 Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- ◆ NSS-WH.5-12.5 Era 5: Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000–1500 C.E.

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARD

English Language Arts

- ◆ SL.CCR.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom

**MATERIALS:** Pencils (graphite and colored), paper, images of tilework from the Alhambra, magazines for collage work, glue, and an assortment of found objects or recycled materials such as bottle caps and cardboard boxes

### QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- ◆ Describe the various shapes you see. What patterns do you notice? What skills or tools might someone need to create these designs? What do you see that makes you say that?
- ◆ Artists in Islamic Spain often employed the same or similar motifs across a range of media. Compare and contrast this textile with tile panels from Spanish palaces of the same period such as the Alhambra (fig. 24). What similarities do you notice? What visual elements (colors, shapes, designs, etc.) are common in your community?
- ◆ Close cultural ties between Muslim states in Spain and North Africa led to the sharing of styles across the Strait of Gibraltar. Compare the featured work of art with The Patti Cadby Birch Moroccan Court (image 12), a space created in 2011 in the style of late medieval Islamic Spain and Morocco, with original Nasrid columns. What details, if any, suggest close ties between these two regions?
- ◆ This textile was likely used as a furnishing or space divider in Islamic Spain. In neighboring Christian lands, however, works such as this often lined reliquaries (containers to hold relics of holy individuals such as saints). Create a list of goods or ideas from other countries or regions that inform your life today. How, if at all, have people modified these items to support local interests, tastes, or needs?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History

**DURATION:** Approximately 90 minutes

A comparison of the featured textile and tile panels from the Alhambra, a Spanish palace of the same period (fig. 24), reflects the ways in which artists applied similar designs across various media. Explore the strengths and limitations of various materials as you translate a detail from this textile into another medium.

1. Identify a small area of the design you would like to concentrate on.
2. Before selecting the materials you plan to use, create a list of the potential strengths or limitations of two (or more) options—for example, colored pencil, collage, or an assemblage of found objects/ recycled materials. Imagine translating the design into each medium; consider what aspects of the design might prove challenging and how, if at all, you would need to adapt the design.
3. Select one material and use it to re-create the design.
4. Compare and contrast your work with that of your peers. Discuss the challenges that emerged during the process and the strategies you used to overcome them.
5. Revisit your initial list of strengths and limitations for each material and update it as necessary.



FIG. 24. Detail of a tile panel from the interior of the Nasrid palace, the Alhambra, Granada, 1354–91

## RESOURCES

Department of Islamic Art. “The Art of the Nasrid Period (1232–1492).” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nasr/hd\\_nasr.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nasr/hd_nasr.htm) (October 2002).

———. “Geometric Patterns in Islamic Art.” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd\\_geom.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd_geom.htm) (October 2001).

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Dodds, Jerrilynn D., ed. *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992.

“Building the Moroccan Court.” New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/new-installations/new-galleries-for-the-art-of-the-arab-lands-turkey-iran-central-asia-and-later-south-asia>

## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM’S COLLECTION

### RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Image 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; polychrome-glazed and cut tilework, carved stucco, carved cedar wood, carved marble

Dish, 14th century; Spain; earthenware, tin-glazed; overall: 2<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (6.7 x 31.4 cm); H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.96)

Panel, 14th century; Spain, Toledo; wood; carved and painted; L. 10 in., W. 5<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.; Gift of Dr. Walter L. Hildburgh, 1951 (51.45.8)

Deep Dish (*brasero*), about 1430. Spain, Valencia. Tin-enameled earthenware; Diam. 17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (45.1 cm). The Cloisters Collection, 1956 (56.171.162)

Tile with heraldic device of the Nasrid kings, first third of the 16th century; Spain; probably made in Seville; earthenware, impressed and glazed; 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> x 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (19 x 12.5 x 3.5 cm); The Cloisters Collection, 2011 (2011.153)

Author: Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher Jesse Johnson  
Date: 2012

## Unit 5: Chapter 1 Suggested Readings and Resources

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Department of Islamic Art. "The Art of the Nasrid Period (1232–1492)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nasr/hd\\_nasr.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nasr/hd_nasr.htm) (October 2002).

**HIGH SCHOOL**

Ecker, Heather. *Caliphs and Kings: The Art and Influence of Islamic Spain*. Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2004.

**HIGH SCHOOL**

Irving, Washington. *Tales of the Alhambra*. Granada: Ediciones Miguel Sánchez, 2002.

**HIGH SCHOOL**

A semi-fictional account of a nineteenth-century American author's sojourn at the Alhambra. The stories evoke the beauty and allure of the palace, though they take place well after the Nasrid period.

Islamic Arts and Architecture. "The Alhambra: A Virtual Walking Tour." Islamic Arts and Architecture, 2012. <http://islamic-arts.org/2011/the-alhambra-a-virtual-walking-tour/>.

**HIGH SCHOOL**

Jungman, Anne, and Shelley Fowles. *The Most Magnificent Mosque*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2004.

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

A children's story set in Muslim Spain that focuses on the Great Mosque of Córdoba, built by the Spanish Umayyad dynasty.

*The Moorish South: Art in Muslim and Christian Spain from 711 to 1492*. DVD. 51 min. New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2008.

An episode of the BBC series *The Art of Spain* featuring commentary by art critic Andrew Graham-Dixon as he examines Islamic art along his travels from Córdoba to Seville and Granada.

Rosser-Owen, Mariam. *Islamic Arts from Spain*. London: Victoria & Albert Publishing, 2010.

**HIGH SCHOOL**

*When the Moors Ruled in Europe*. DVD. 101 min. Silver Spring, Md.: Acorn Media, 2005.

A new interpretation of the effects of Islam on Spanish and European history and patrimony.

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### UNIT 5: CHAPTER 1 SOURCES

Aanavi, Don. "Western Islamic Art." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (November 1968), pp. 197–203.

Anderson, Glair D., and Mariam Rosser-Owen, eds. *Revisiting Al-Andalus: Perspectives on the Material Culture of Islamic Iberia and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Dodds, Jerrilynn D., ed. *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992.

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Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. nos. 36, 40, 48).

Mann, Vivian B., Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn D. Dodds, eds. *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: G. Braziller in association with the Jewish Museum, 1992.

Rosser-Owen, Mariam. *Islamic Arts from Spain*. London: Victoria & Albert Publishing, 2010.



## UNIT 5: CHAPTER 2

# Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- ◆ identify the visual qualities and functions of objects produced under Ottoman patronage; and
- ◆ understand the role of the Ottoman court workshops in generating a unified dynastic visual language, seen across a range of media, that spread throughout the empire.

### Introduction

At its height, the Ottoman empire (1299–1923) stretched across three continents and ruled over a linguistically, religiously, ethnically, and culturally diverse population (see map, page 125). Uniting and governing such a population was a challenging task for the sultan (ruler) and his vast administration. The development of a distinct visual language was just one of the ways the centralized government created and projected a shared identity. The finest examples of Ottoman art were commissioned and made for royal patrons in the capital city, Istanbul (in present-day Turkey). From there, the designs and decorative motifs spread throughout the empire and beyond. (See also “Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus,” page 183.)

## The Ottoman Empire

Osman Gazi (reigned 1299–1324)—known in Italy as Ottomano, hence the English term Ottoman—was a Turkish tribal leader and the founder of the Ottoman dynasty. Through both warfare and diplomacy, he was able to unify inherited and captured lands under his rule. Successful military campaigns by his successors extended the empire deep into the Balkans to the north, and into Egypt and North Africa to the west, and eastward into the Caucasus and Anatolia.

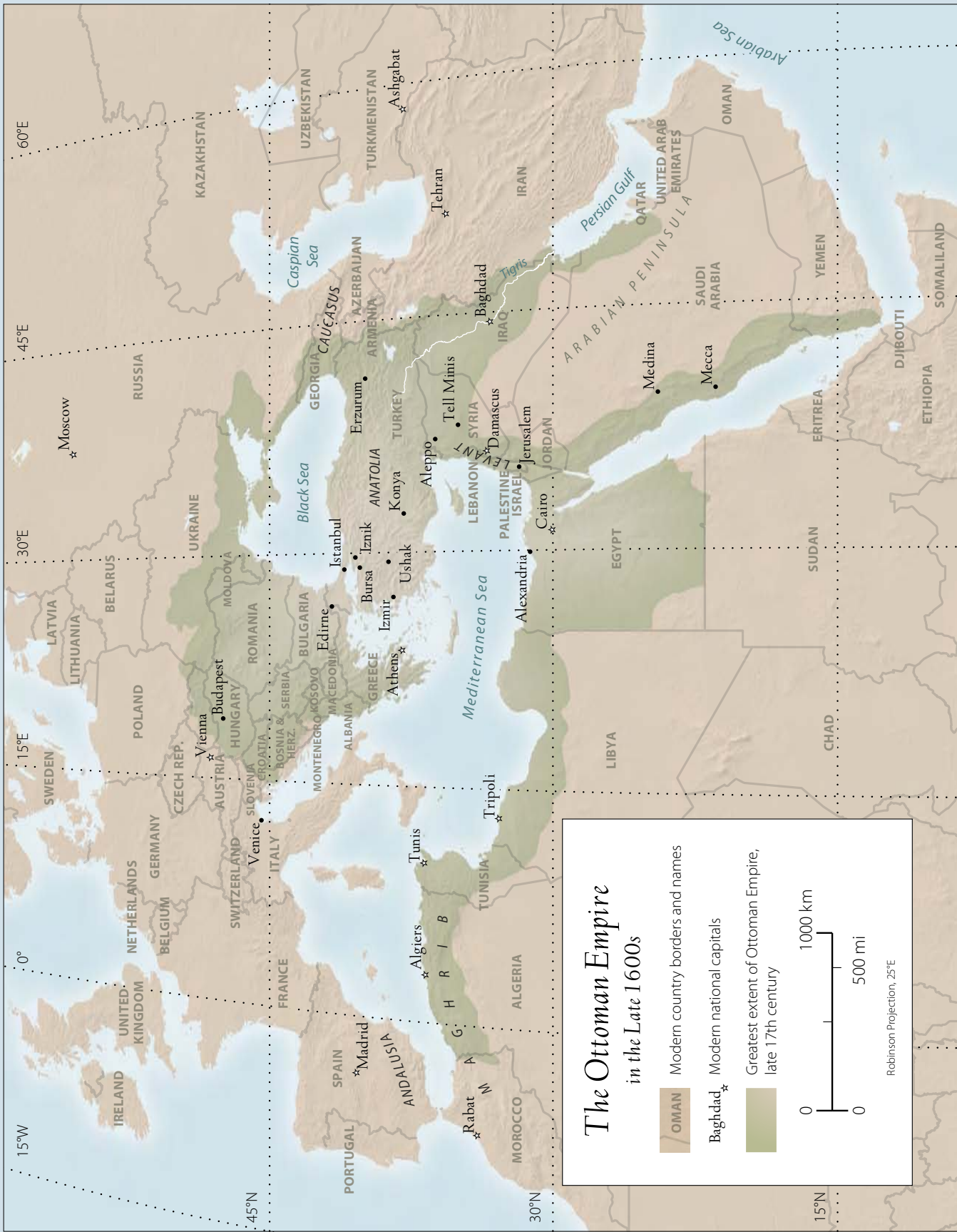
In 1453, the city of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), the capital of the Byzantine empire, was captured by the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II (reigned 1451–81). It remained the Ottoman capital until 1923. Mehmet II's leadership and legacy were instrumental in the steady growth of the empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Ottoman cultural, political, and economic power reached its zenith under Sultan Süleyman I (reigned 1520–66), his son Selim II (reigned 1566–74), and his grandson Murad III (reigned 1574–95), who all ruled from the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul (fig. 25). Süleyman I was known in Turkey as Kanuni (the Lawgiver) because of the numerous legal reforms he made that shaped Ottoman law for many centuries. In the West, where he was both admired and feared, Süleyman became known as “the Magnificent”—a testament to his political and cultural achievements and his reputation as a wealthy and powerful ruler.

By the eighteenth century, despite repeated efforts to reform and modernize the army and civil institutions, the vast Ottoman empire started to decline. By the nineteenth century, many of its territories in North Africa, Europe, and West Asia were lost. In 1923, the modern Turkish Republic, established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, replaced the Ottoman state.



FIG. 25. Topkapı Palace, Istanbul, Turkey, begun 1459



### The Ottoman Empire in the Late 1600s

- Modern country borders and names
- Modern national capitals
- Greatest extent of Ottoman Empire, late 17th century

0 1000 km  
0 500 mi

Robinson Projection, 25°E



## Ottoman Art

Two different but distinctly Ottoman styles emerged in the court workshop. The first, called *saz*, combined floral *palmettes* and curving, featherlike leaves. The second, called the floral style, featured flowers, namely carnations, hyacinths, honeysuckles, roses, and tulips. Together these two styles have come to epitomize Ottoman Turkish art.

The imperial workshop at the Ottoman court worked exclusively for the sultan, his household, and the highest ranking officials. The most talented artists, designers, weavers, bookbinders, and calligraphers were recruited from regions all over the empire. Successful designs were copied and used repeatedly. When an order for the court was especially large, the royal workshop would contract external craftsmen, who would then become familiar with the court's designs. Such interactions helped spread these patterns throughout the empire. As a result, works of art in the official court style were produced throughout the empire in many media, including carpets woven in Cairo and throughout Asia Minor, silk velvets woven in Bursa, and brilliantly colored ceramic wares and tiles made in Iznik, near Istanbul.

Mosques from Baghdad to Budapest used a distinctly Ottoman architectural style, developed in part by the famous Ottoman architect Sinan. This style, which features a central plan, lead-covered domes, and slender minarets, visually conveyed the identity of the Ottomans from the capital in Istanbul to the farthest reaches of the empire (see fig. 6).

## *Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66)

About 1555–60

Turkey, Istanbul

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 20½ x 25¾ in.

(52.1 x 64.5 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This *tughra* exemplifies the masterful calligraphy and illumination created by the Ottoman royal court. It illustrates the ways calligraphy visually conveyed the sultan's identity and showcased the talents of his court artists.

### FUNCTION

The *tughra* was a calligraphic emblem that appeared at the top of official documents, serving as the principal written symbol of Ottoman imperial authority. Each sultan had his own distinctive *tughra*, containing his name and titles, the name of his father, and the phrase “eternally victorious.” This *tughra* was formerly at the top of a long, scroll-like official document, known as a *firman*, of Süleyman I (reigned 1520–66). A court official, known as a *tughrakeş*, added the sultan's *tughra* at the top of all official decrees. In addition to official documents, the *tughra* was also stamped on some coins (fig. 26). *Tughras* deliberately included elaborate calligraphy that was hard to copy to help prevent forgeries.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Like the *tughras* of other Ottoman sultans, this example consists of vertical strokes and elongated lines, contrasting with wide intersecting ovals. The letters are written in blue and outlined in gold, and the inner areas are painted with patterns of blue and gold spiraling scrolls of stems, blossoms, plants, and cloud bands (between the strokes extending to the right).

### CONTEXT

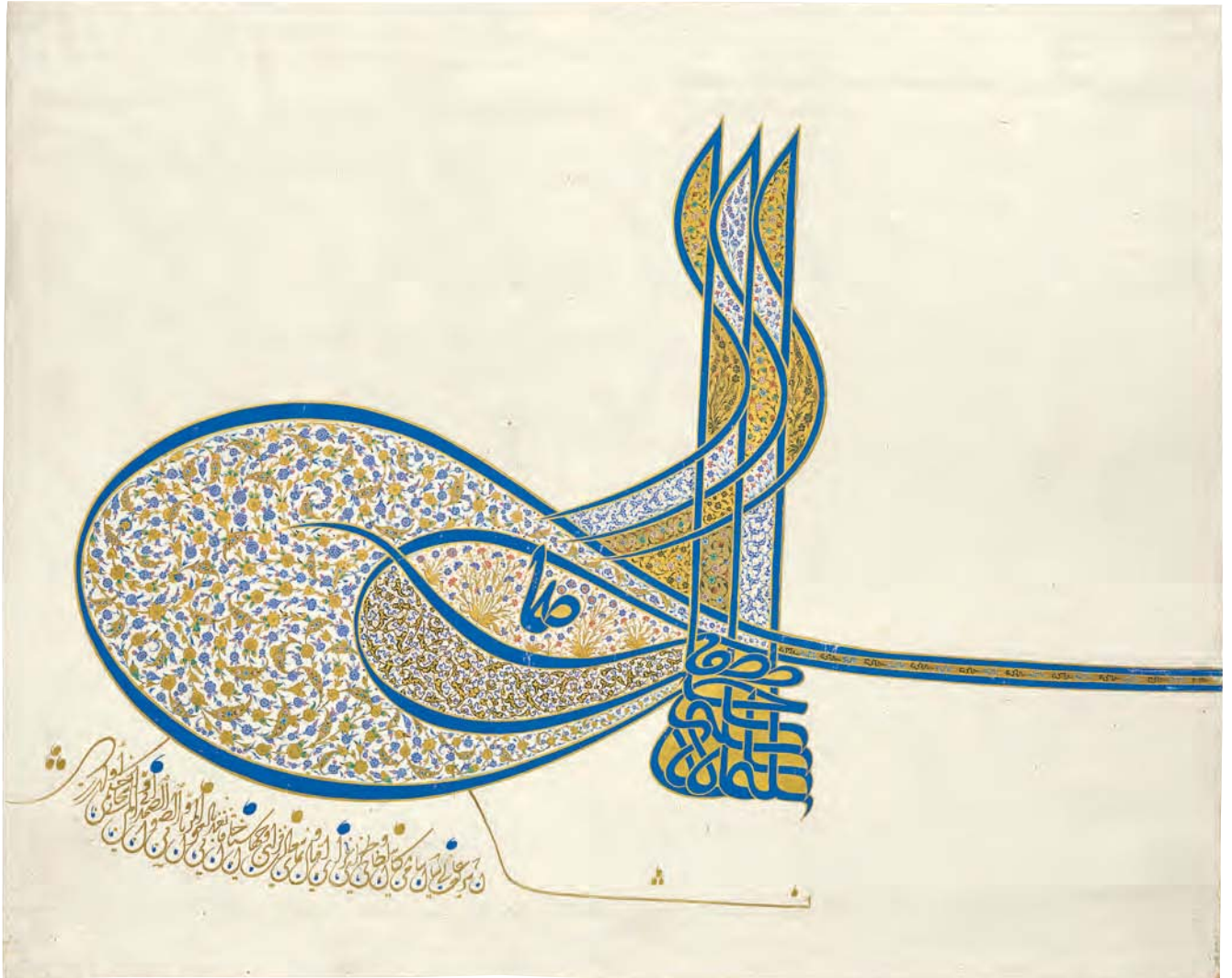
The personal involvement of Sultan Süleyman was a driving force behind what is frequently described as the “Golden Age of Ottoman Art.” In accordance with Ottoman imperial tradition, every ruler was required to learn a practical trade. Süleyman was a goldsmith as well as an accomplished poet who wrote in Persian and Turkish. His sophisticated taste and avid interest in the arts stimulated artistic activity and encouraged talented artists from all reaches of the empire to work in Istanbul. The court artists, organized into workshops according to media, were a linguistically and ethnically diverse group that brought an array of designs, motifs, and techniques from various regions of the empire into the capital. Süleyman's vision and patronage were instrumental in the formulation of a distinct Ottoman style in the mid-sixteenth century, characterized above all by masterful floral and vegetal forms. These uniquely Ottoman designs found their way onto objects in a variety of media, from ceramics to works on paper.



FIG. 26. Coin struck in Istanbul showing insignia of Sultan Mahmud I, A.H. 1143/A.D. 1730–31. American Numismatic Society, New York (1949.163.737)

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Ottoman empire, Süleyman I (reigned 1520–66), visual identity, emblem, royal workshop, ink



23. *Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66)

## Prayer carpet with triple-arch design

About 1575–90

Turkey, probably Istanbul, possibly Egypt, Cairo

Silk (warp and weft), wool (pile), cotton (pile); asymmetrically knotted pile; 68 x 50 in. (172.7 x 127 cm)

The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.51)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This rug exemplifies how Ottoman designs and motifs, originating in the court design workshop, were incorporated into religious as well as secular art. These designs and motifs represent collaboration in the royal workshop. Artists trained in the arts of ink and paper—calligraphy, painting, and manuscript illumination—worked with those who specialized in carpets, textiles, ceramics, ivory carving, stone carving, and metalwork.

### FUNCTION

A prayer rug is a small carpet on which one person can perform daily prayers. It usually includes an image of a niche, or *mihrab*, symbolic of the gateway to Paradise. Some examples, including this one, depict a mosque lamp hanging in the center.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This prayer rug is somewhat unusual in its depiction of a triple (as opposed to single) arch, which is supported by pairs of slender columns with faceted bases and ornate capitals. Four small domes, characteristic of Ottoman architecture, appear above the gateway, emphasizing the architectural design. A lamp, symbolizing the presence of God, hangs from the central arch. Tulips and carnations, typical of the Ottoman floral style, adorn the bottom of the gateway and the borders. The flowers may be a reference to Paradise, which in Islamic art is often represented by gardens and lush vegetation. Despite its modest size, the rug's sophistication, skillful execution, and fine materials suggest that a member of the royal court commissioned it.

### CONTEXT

This carpet exemplifies the multiculturalism of Ottoman society. The slender coupled columns are characteristic of the *Andalusian* architecture of southern Spain (see fig. 22). This motif's sudden appearance in Ottoman art has been linked to the immigration of Spanish Jews, who, after being expelled from Spain in 1492, found refuge in the Ottoman empire. The coupled-column motif likely migrated from Spain in the manuscripts and textiles of Spanish Jews, and was then adapted into the Ottoman visual repertoire.

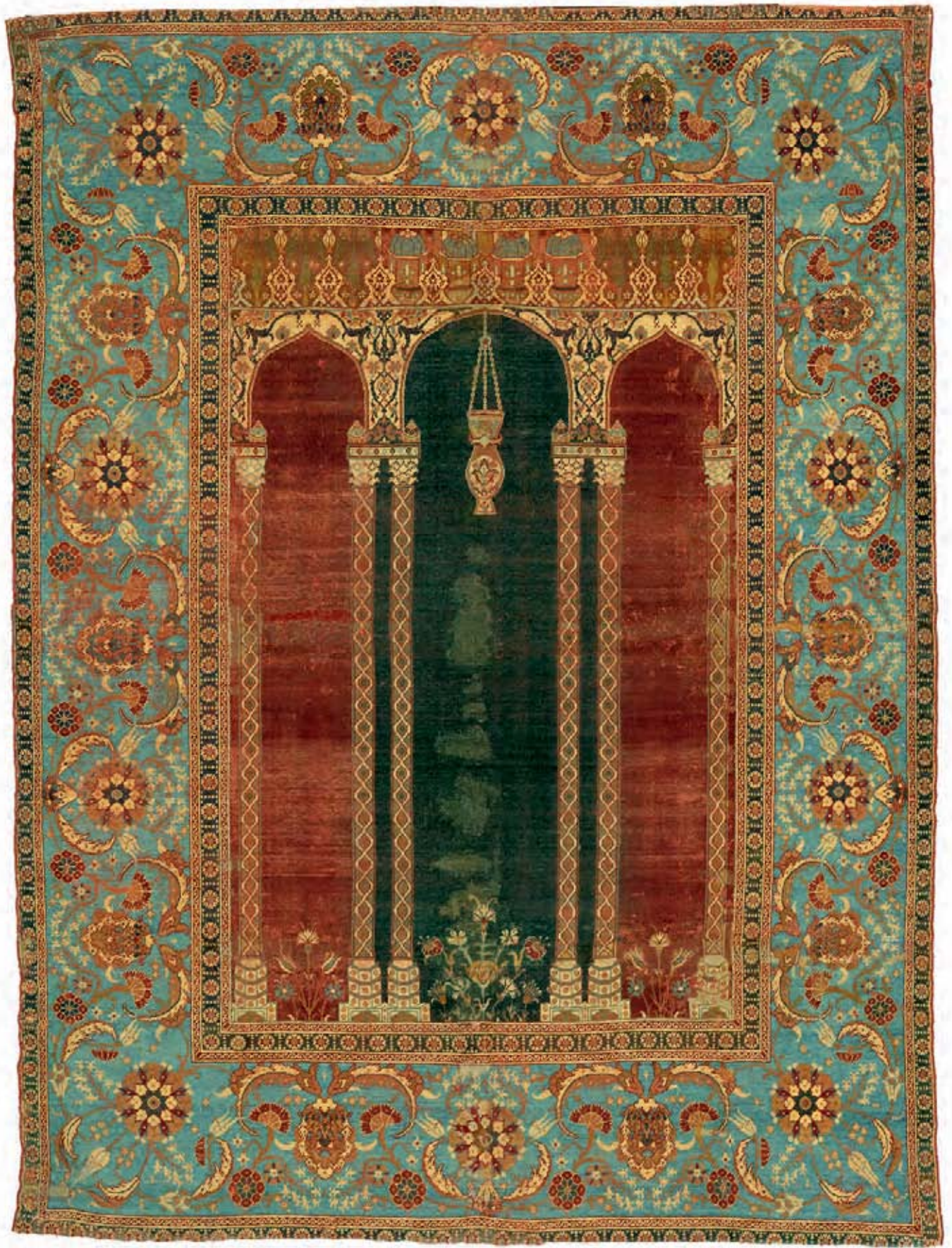
The physical make-up of the carpet also reflects cultural interconnections. Although the design is distinctly Ottoman, the technique and materials are typical of Egypt. This fusion of disparate traditions is due to the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman empire in 1517. This carpet reveals the collaboration between the royal Ottoman workshop in Istanbul and Egyptian weavers.

The design was enormously influential in later centuries; thousands of carpets with the same basic design were eventually woven in Turkish urban workshops, villages, and by nomadic tribes.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Ottoman empire, prayer, *mihrab*, floral and vegetal ornament, cultural exchange, textile, silk, cotton, wool





24. Prayer carpet with triple-arch design

## Fragment of a kaftan back with peacock feather design

Mid-16th century

Turkey, probably Istanbul

Silk, metal-wrapped thread; *taqueté* (*seraser*);

52 x 27 in. (132.1 x 68.6 cm)

Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1952 (52.20.15)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

Luxurious textiles are among the most well-known examples of Ottoman art. These fabrics, often fashioned into ceremonial garments, were admired by Ottomans and Europeans alike.

### FUNCTION

This cloth panel was once the back of a ceremonial robe, or *kaftan*, worn by an Ottoman sultan or a high-ranking official. The designs often carried symbolic meanings. In popular Islamic tradition, the peacock, whose features are emulated here, is an inhabitant of the Garden of Eden.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This fragment is woven of costly silver-wrapped silk thread. The main pattern consists of a trilobed form inspired by the feathers of a peacock's tail. The serrated edges along the outside of the large plumes and tear-shaped designs set against the peach background of their interiors evoke the texture of feathers. Small floral rosettes in the same colors appear on each side of the composition.

### CONTEXT

The Ottoman court placed great emphasis on public ceremonies in which the sultan and high officials wore garments crafted of expensive and sumptuous silk fabrics with ornate designs. Travelers' accounts frequently mention the opulence of the sultan's apparel and the splendor of the court. Colorful and festive public events, such as parades and diplomatic receptions, were occasions for the display of wealth. The large-scale patterns also helped audiences view the sultan from a distance during processions. To the Ottomans and their subjects, appearance spoke of one's rank in society. Regulations promulgated by the court specified a strict dress code for every echelon of society. For example, foreigners, non-Muslims, or people of low standing were not allowed to wear cloth of silver such as this.

Another important court practice involved the annual gift of ceremonial robes and textiles to individuals in the service of the sultan. Rank in the military and civil administration determined the number and quality of the gifts. For example, a *vizier* might obtain three robes and several yards of a fine textile along with material for turbans, while an ordinary soldier would receive a few yards of cotton. Foreign ambassadors were frequently given court robes to wear as they prepared for an audience with the sultan. Some of these, taken back to Europe, were subsequently made into dresses for the ambassadors' wives. It was the royal workshop's responsibility to respond to this huge demand and its craftsmen were almost always at work on imperial commissions.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Ottoman empire, courtly life, costume, textile, silk



25. Fragment of a kaftan back with peacock feather design

## Tile with floral and cloud-band design

About 1578

Turkey, Iznik

Stonepaste; polychrome painted under transparent glaze;

9<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 9<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (24.9 x 25.1 x 1.7 cm)

Gift of William B. Osgood Field, 1902 (02.5.91)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

Iznik, a town in northwestern Turkey, was the main center for the production of ceramic tiles and tableware in the Ottoman empire. These ceramics were highly valued luxury objects and have come to represent Ottoman visual culture at its height.

### FUNCTION

This tile is one of many commissioned in the 1570s (the height of Iznik kiln production) for a renovation of the sultan's private quarters. When placed next to identical tiles, the motifs that appear to be cut off here would be complete, and a larger design would emerge. A large panel of these tiles would have decorated the royal bedroom of Sultan Murad III, grandson of Süleyman the Magnificent (fig. 27).

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This tile features typical Ottoman motifs: lotus palmettes (the four here halved by the edges of the tile), serrated leaves known as *saz* leaves, and Chinese-inspired cloud bands. In the center, sinuous cloud bands are painted in thick red pigment against a solid white background.

The simple color palette of white, blue, green, and red is typical of later Iznik wares.

### CONTEXT

This tile exemplifies the mature style of Iznik wares; the cloud bands and *saz* leaves are typical of this phase of Iznik production. The technique used to create these tiles was complex and required multiple firings to ensure the highest level of clarity for both the colors and the design. Designs such as this were developed in the imperial design workshop in Istanbul and subsequently executed in Iznik.



FIG. 27. View of the bedroom of Sultan Murad III, about 1578, Topkapı Palace, Istanbul, Turkey, displaying the same type of Iznik wall tiles as image 26

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Ottoman empire, visual language, Iznik pottery, court life, *saz* (serrated leaves), cultural exchange, tile, stonepaste



26. Tile with floral and cloud-band design

## Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 2 Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court

### FEATURED WORK OF ART

*Tughra* (official signature) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66) (image 23)

About 1555–60

Turkey, Istanbul

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 20½ x 25¾ in. (52.1 x 64.5 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Visual Arts and World History

**GRADE:** Middle School and High School

**TOPIC/THEME:** Power and Leadership

### GOAL

- ◆ Students will be able to recognize ways a *tughra* functioned as a symbol of power and authority within a culturally diverse and geographically expansive empire.

### NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- ◆ NL-ENG.K-12.5 Communication Strategies

Visual Arts

- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- ◆ NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- ◆ SL.CCR.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and

Technical Subjects

- ◆ R.CCR.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text
- ◆ R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom

**MATERIALS:** Map of the Ottoman empire (page 125) and books, essays, or other informational texts about Sultan Süleyman (see suggestions in **RESOURCES** below).

### QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- ◆ Look closely at the materials and craftsmanship employed in this work. What qualities might distinguish this as something fit for a sultan?
- ◆ A *tughra*, a calligraphic emblem signifying the authority of an Ottoman sultan, most often appeared on royal decrees and coins. Why might a leader use a combination of ornament and words to convey his or her power? What organizations today effectively use imagery, such as logos, to quickly convey ideas and authenticity?
- ◆ *Tughras* were intentionally complex to prevent forgeries. What aspects of this design might be the most challenging to copy? Why? What are some strategies used today to prevent the forgery of documents, signatures, and money?
- ◆ What images are associated with the governing body of your community? What do they convey? Where do you most often see them?

## ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREA:** World History

**DURATION:** Approximately 60 minutes

Look closely at the map of the Ottoman empire; note the expanse and geographic features covered. Imagine ruling this enormous area. What challenges might you encounter? Why? Brainstorm several strategies for communicating a leader's power and decisions to a culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse community encompassing a broad geographic area. Consider how advances in technology have eased communications, if at all, among diverse peoples today. Present your ideas to your peers and include an outline of the pros and cons of each approach. Research ways Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–66) managed this challenging task using the suggested **RESOURCES** below as a starting point. (Hint: research the Divan and Janissary Corps as a starting point.)

## RESOURCES

Sardar, Marika. "The Greater Ottoman Empire, 1600–1800." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grot/hd\\_grot.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grot/hd_grot.htm) (October 2003).

Yalman, Suzan. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Age of Süleyman 'the Magnificent' (r. 1520–1566)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/suly/hd\\_suly.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/suly/hd_suly.htm) (October 2002).

———. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Art of the Ottomans before 1600." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/otto1/hd\\_otto1.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/otto1/hd_otto1.htm) (October 2002).

## OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

*Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent Wearing a Jewel-Studded Helmet*, about 1532; Venice; woodcut on paper; sheet: 36¼ x 21¼ in. (92 x 55.8 cm); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1942 (42.41.1)

*Procession of Sultan Süleyman through the Hippodrome*: From the frieze *Moeurs et fachons des Turks* (Customs and Fashions of the Turks), 1553; after Pieter Coecke van Aelst (Flemish, 1502–1550); woodcut; 11¾ x 15¼ in. (29.8 x 38.9 cm), b: 11¾ x 17¾ in. (29.8 x 44.1 cm); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928 (28.85.7a, b)

Image 26. Tile with floral and cloud-band design, about 1574–78; Turkey, Iznik; stonepaste; polychrome painted under a transparent glaze; 9¼ x 9¼ x 1¼ in. (24.9 x 25.1 x 1.7 cm); Gift of William B. Osgood Field, 1902 (02.5.91)

Author: Claire Moore, The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Date: 2012

## Unit 5: Chapter 2 Suggested Readings and Resources

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Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. "Style and Status: Imperial Costumes from Ottoman Turkey" Exhibition interactive. Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2005. <http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/styleandstatus/>.

### HIGH SCHOOL

See also the exhibition catalogue *Style and Status: Imperial Costumes from Ottoman Turkey* (London: Azimuth Editions, 2005).

Atil, Esin. *The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent*. Exhibition catalogue. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL

Macaulay, David. *Mosque*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL

An in-depth look at the building of an Ottoman mosque in sixteenth-century Istanbul.

*The Ottomans and Their Capital Istanbul*. DVD. 39 min. Falls Church, Va.: Landmark Media, 2006.

Showcases the glorious heritage of Ottoman artists and architects by focusing on the close connections between architectural splendor and the religious message of Islam.

Roxburgh, David J., ed. *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*. Exhibition catalogue. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005.

### HIGH SCHOOL

An important and comprehensive resource, especially for those interested in Turkish art and culture before the Ottoman period.

Ruggiero, Adriane. *The Ottoman Empire (Cultures of the Past)*. New York: Benchmark Books, 2002.

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Süleyman the Magnificent*. DVD. 57 min. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987.

Explores the political, social, and cultural background of the Ottoman empire, concentrating on the forty-six-year reign of Süleyman. Distributed by UCART, [musefilm.org/ucart](http://musefilm.org/ucart). Available in Nolen Library.

"*Tughra* (Imperial Cipher) of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) [Turkey (Istanbul)] (38.149.1)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/38.149.1> (October 2006).

See "Related Media" for a short video highlighting the different components of an imperial calligraphic emblem.

Yalman, Suzan. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. "The Age of Süleyman 'the Magnificent' (r. 1520–1566)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/suly/hd\\_suly.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/suly/hd_suly.htm) (October 2002).

See "Related Media" for a short video highlighting the different components of an imperial calligraphic emblem.

See "Related Media" for a short video highlighting the different components of an imperial calligraphic emblem.

### HIGH SCHOOL

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### UNIT 5: CHAPTER 2 SOURCES

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. *Style and Status: Imperial Costumes from Ottoman Turkey*. Exhibition catalogue. London: Azimuth Editions, 2005.

Atil, Esin. *The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent*. Exhibition catalogue. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987.

———, ed. *Turkish Art*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980.

Denny, Walter B. *Iznik: The Artistry of Ottoman Ceramics*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2004.

Denny, Walter B., and Sumru Belger Krody. *The Classical Tradition in Anatolian Carpets*. Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum in Association with Scala, 2002.

Ekhtiar, Maryam D., Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011 (cat. nos. 205, 237, 225, 218A).

Roxburgh, David J., ed. *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*. Exhibition catalogue. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005.



## UNIT 5: CHAPTER 3

# The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript: The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- ◆ identify some of the key themes and events presented in the Persian national epic, the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings);
- ◆ make connections between figures and events in the story and the illustrated pages of the manuscript produced for Shah Tahmasp; and
- ◆ understand the process and materials used to create a royal manuscript of this caliber.

### Introduction

This chapter explores one of the masterpieces of the Metropolitan Museum's collection, the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp (reigned 1524–76). Written by the poet Abu'l Qasim Firdausi in 1010, the *Shahnama* is one of the most celebrated works of Persian literature. The epic poem provides a history of Iranian kingship from the creation of the world to the conquest of Iran by Arab Muslims in the mid-seventh century. The *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp has been referred to as the finest and most lavishly illustrated surviving manuscript of Firdausi's epic ever produced. Beyond its great artistic value, the manuscript provides an important visual reference for the architecture, customs, decoration, ceremonies, and fashion of the court of the sixteenth-century Safavid ruler.

## The *Shahnama*

The poet Abu'l Qasim Firdausi did not invent the stories and legends that make up the *Shahnama*, but undertook the ambitious project of collecting them and setting them to verse. Firdausi was born in the town of Tus, in northeastern Iran, and devoted considerable energy to studying old texts in Persian and Arabic. Poets often dedicated works to rulers, who rewarded them with money in return. When Firdausi finally completed the *Shahnama* after roughly thirty-three years of careful labor, he set out for Ghazna (in present-day Afghanistan) to present it to one of the most powerful rulers of the period, Sultan Mahmud (reigned 999–1030). According to legend, when the sultan did not compensate Firdausi adequately, the disappointed and insulted poet gave the money away and wrote a scathing satire about the sultan. By the time Mahmud sent more generous payment under the advisement of his counselors, it was too late—Firdausi had just died.

The *Shahnama* consists of more than 50,000 rhyming couplets recounting the deeds and glory of the Iranian kings from the creation of the world to the Arab conquest of Iran in 642. The book is divided into three generally chronological cycles: the mythical past, the time of legendary heroes, and the recorded histories.

### Cycle I: The Mythical Past

At the dawn of creation, during the reign of the Pishdadians, the first dynasty, social order and religion (Zoroastrianism) were established. Fierce conflicts between the forces of good and evil—a recurring theme in the *Shahnama*—continued for centuries as heroic kings battled evil demons.

### Cycle II: The Time of Legendary Heroes

A turning point in the narrative occurs when the ruler Shah Faridun divided the world among his three sons. Two sons, Sam and Tur, united to kill the third, Iraj, who had been given Iran and Arabia to rule. This marks the beginning of a prolonged cycle of revenge between the Iranians (descendants of Iraj) and their archenemies, the Turanians (descendants of Tur). Among the numerous heroes that emerge, Rostam stands out as the epitome of courage and strength.

### Cycle III: The Recorded Histories

The last section of the epic, which corresponds with other written historical records, takes place during the rule of the Sasanian kings—a dynasty that ends with the Islamic conquest of Iran by the second Muslim caliph 'Umar.

## Themes of the *Shahnama*

Although the majority of the stories in the *Shahnama* involve battles and struggles between the forces of good and evil, other themes include love, humor, and the supernatural. One of the principal themes concerns kingship and the relationship between sovereigns and their subjects. Over time, the poem became an emblem of royal power and legitimacy, and a kind of didactic handbook for young princes and rulers. The book's inherent connection to kingship led many rulers of Iran to commission manuscripts of the *Shahnama* for their own royal libraries.

## The *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp

Around 1524, the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp (reigned 1524–76) commissioned an illustrated manuscript of the *Shahnama*. He recruited the most talented painters, calligraphers, illuminators, and binders to work in the royal workshop and spared no expense. The workshop in the Safavid capital of Tabriz produced the 759 folios of text in elegant *nasta'liq* script. Its 258 innovative and sumptuous illustrations far surpass those of any other royal Iranian manuscript in both number and quality. An undertaking of this scale and scope could only have been financially supported by a ruler; this *Shahnama* reflects the great wealth and sophistication of Shah Tahmasp's Safavid court. This commission can be interpreted as an act of legitimization, linking Tahmasp's dynasty to the legendary kings of Persia.

The completed manuscript was part of an opulent gift to Sultan Selim II (reigned 1566–74) on the occasion of his ascension to the Ottoman throne in 1566. The arrival of the Iranian embassy in Istanbul (in present-day Turkey) is well documented, and a number of gifts—this *Shahnama* among them—are mentioned in Ottoman and European sources. The manuscript remained well preserved in Ottoman hands before appearing in Europe in the nineteenth century. Its folios were later dispersed among museums and private collections.

کز آبا و کرون جبه شایان و کرد  
جانی بر نیکی از و یاد کرد



## Making a Royal Manuscript

In the royal Safavid workshop, the making of a manuscript—especially one as ambitious as this—drew upon the resources of the state to employ artists and supply materials such as paper, ink, gold leaf, pigments, and leather bindings. Production took place in the Safavid court’s “house of books” (*kitabkhana*), which was at once a library and a workshop. The process began with papermaking. Sheets made of the pulp of linen and hemp rags were custom-sized and coated with a starchy solution to prepare them for ink and paint. Multiple factors informed design and layout: the entire text had to fit in the allotted lines, the relationship between text and image had to be meaningful and balanced, and the illustrated scenes had to provide a compelling visual narrative. Once the layout was established, scribes wrote the text in the spaces designated by the director, who inspected every line for accuracy before passing the pages on to the painters.

The painters sketched out the entire composition with a light brush before focusing on specific areas. They often showed off their talent by incorporating minuscule details and playful visual elements (see detail opposite). They prepared their pigments from natural minerals, including semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli (blue) and malachite (green), as well as gold, silver, sulfur, and dyes from various plants and insects. Thanks to surviving contemporary accounts and stylistic analyses of the paintings, scholars have been able to distinguish the hands of many artists involved in producing the illustrations—some by name, though others remain anonymous.

When the paintings were finished, illuminators contributed to the overall sumptuousness of the manuscript by adorning the borders, chapter headings, and text frames with gold. Most importantly, they created the complex geometric designs on the opening page of the manuscript, called the frontispiece. Then the finished gilded pages were burnished with a smooth, hard stone such as agate or rock crystal to give them a polished effect.

Once all the pages had gone through this elaborate process, they were brought to a binding specialist who sewed and bound the leaves and attached a decorated leather or lacquer cover to the spine. Finally, the completed book was placed in a jeweled container and presented to the patron.

Detail, image 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 (active first half of the 16th century)

Iran, Tabriz

Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting:  
9½ x 9¼ in. (24.1 x 23 cm); page: 18½ x 12½ in. (47 x 31.8 cm)

Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.2)

(See poster included in this resource)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This page, from the first cycle of the *Shahnama*, illustrates the legend of the discovery of fire and subsequent celebratory feast. It was created by one of the most renowned painters of the time, Sultan Muhammad, who was also the first director of the project.

### FUNCTION

Like the other folios from the manuscript featured in this chapter, this illustration highlights specific themes from the text and enhances the beauty and value of the book. It celebrates the discovery of fire and the beginning of its worship as a divine gift—a core tenet of Zoroastrianism, the primary pre-Islamic religion of Persia. The Iranian feast of Sada still marks the occasion today.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Activity abounds in this lush and evocative painting. Wearing a gold-embroidered garment, King Hushang sits on an elaborate carpet in the center of the composition. He is offered a pomegranate by one of his two flanking courtiers, and the celebrated fire burns in red and gold just beneath him. The creatures in the foreground—whose careful and psychologically compelling portrayal is characteristic of Sultan Muhammad's style—recall the legend that animals were first domesticated by Hushang. The vibrant colors of the landscape create a magical atmosphere, reinforcing the mythical nature of the story it illustrates.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

*Shahnama* (Book of Kings), Iran, Safavid empire, storytelling, discovery, celebration, Zoroastrianism, figural art, royal workshop, watercolor, ink

### CONTEXT

During the reign of King Hushang of the first Iranian dynasty, humanity acquired useful knowledge of mining, irrigation, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fire. According to legend, one day King Hushang saw a gruesome monster peeking from behind a rock and hurled a stone to kill it. The monster disappeared and the stone hit the rock, creating a spark. The wise king immediately understood the significance of the accidental discovery and ordered a huge fire built and a feast to celebrate it, thus marking the beginning of the worship of fire as a divine gift.

Related excerpt from the *Shahnama*:

*When night fell he [Hushang] gave orders that his men produce sparks from the rock in the same manner. They lit a huge fire, and in honor of the divine splendor which had been revealed to Hushang, they instituted a festival of rejoicing. This is called the Sadeh festival, and it was celebrated with great reverence by the ancient Iranians, and the custom is still observed as a memorial of that night.*

—Dick Davis, *The Lion and the Throne: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 18



سزایا که درون حساب است و کرد  
 جاسینے بسے از رویا

بدان زین ماه و وقت یگان  
 نوشانی زید و زین کسب  
 بخت سب و وقت از یاد  
 بخت که کرد و خور و کسب  
 بخت از پیش بخت سالی اول

بختی که کرد و کوزن بیان  
 می خوشتر تاج از روز  
 چه دم دست کسب می کرم  
 بخت و خوار نام سب کسب  
 پر از شش نغز و پاره اول

بدان که در کجا دست کوفت  
 ز نوید کج هر دو پیش گوت  
 برین کوز از چسب دم کسب  
 سب تاج روانه از کجا  
 پریشانی شاد و کسب

بوز آوزید از کسب سوز  
 بخت از سب شاد و کسب  
 بخت سب با کسب کسب  
 با فون و اندیش بی شمار  
 از دور و جاد کسب می

27. The Feast of Sada: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

## 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 (active first half of the 16th century)

Iran, Tabriz

Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting:  
11 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 7 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (28.3 x 18.6 cm); page: 18 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 12 $\frac{5}{8}$  in. (47 x 32.1 cm)

Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.3)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting from the first cycle of the *Shahnama* vividly recounts the struggle between good and evil as the good king Tahmuras, son of King Hushang (see image 27), defeats the evil demons (*divs*).

### FUNCTION

This richly colored and illuminated page is one among 257 paintings that illustrate the epic and highlight specific themes.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This image, painted by Sultan Muhammad, bursts with energy and dynamism. At the center, the Iranian king Tahmuras (on horseback) strikes the demon with his ox-headed mace. His blue robe embroidered with golden threads and ornate crown capped by a tall plume add to the vibrancy of the illustration. In the lower left corner, anthropomorphic demons (*divs*) are outnumbered and bound in chains. On the right, a group of courtiers on horseback watches the scene unfold. The painter conveys his talent and sense of humor through the depiction of the demons: though representative of the forces of evil, they cower in fear, their faces twisted in an almost comical parody of the grotesque.

### CONTEXT

Although Tahmuras, the son of King Hushang, was a heroic leader, he could not escape falling under the influence of the evil *div* Ahriman. According to legend, when Tahmuras finally managed to defeat Ahriman and the army of demons, they offered to teach humankind the precious art of writing in exchange for their lives. According to the story, this is how people learned various alphabets, including Arabic, Chinese, Greek, and Persian.

The anthropomorphic depiction of the demons in this scene reflects the influence of works on paper and silk from Central Asia, suggesting that Eastern paintings and drawings were circulating in the royal workshop (*kitabkhana*) in Tabriz at this time.

Related excerpt from the *Shahnama*:

*On their side the demons and their magicians also prepared for war, crying out to the heavens and raising great clouds of smoke and vapor. Once again the prescient Tahmures resorted to sorcery; by sorcery he bound in chains two-thirds of Ahriman's army (and for this reason he was afterwards known as "Tahmures, the Binder of Demons"), and the other third he shattered with his heavy mace, laying them prone in the dust . . . Tahmures spared the [remaining] demons, and they too became his slaves . . .*

—Dick Davis, *The Lion and the Throne: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 22

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

*Shahnama* (Book of Kings), Iran, Safavid empire, storytelling, figural art, royal workshop, watercolor, ink





28. Taimuras Defeats the Divs: Folio from the *Shahname* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

## 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 (active 1525–60)

Iran, Tabriz

Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting:

11 $\frac{3}{16}$  x 9 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (28.4 x 23.7 cm); page: 18 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 12 $\frac{1}{16}$  in.

(47.3 x 31.9 cm)

Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.26)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting depicts a game of polo between Iranians and Turanians, legendary rivals of the second cycle of the *Shahnama*. It shows how contemporary tastes were reflected in the illustrations of the epic, as polo was a favorite pastime of the Safavid court.

### FUNCTION

This page of the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp illustrates a legendary encounter between two Iranian royal figures through the eyes of a sixteenth-century painter.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The circular arrangement of the figures in this illustration draws attention to the central action, where men mounted on horses scramble to gain control of a ball. The dynamic poses of the players and animals illustrate various moments during a polo game. Near the middle of the composition, a dark black horse and plumed headdress set one figure apart from the others; he is Siyavush, an Iranian prince lauded as an extraordinary polo player. In the upper right, a lone figure identified as Afrasiyab, a powerful Turanian king, sits on a brown horse watching the game. A large crowd of spectators looks on in the background.

### CONTEXT

The encounter between Siyavush, an Iranian prince, and Afrasiyab, the most distinguished and formidable of all Turanian kings, is a popular legend in Iranian history. In this rendition of the story, Afrasiyab asks Siyavush to play a game of polo. After playing for a while, Afrasiyab retreats to the sidelines to admire the prince's athletic skill. The Iranians dominate the game. The emphasis is not on illustration as a faithful record of historical events. Rather, the elaborate horse trappings, complex headdresses, and the fascination with polo reflect the sixteenth-century world of the patron and painter.

Related excerpt from the *Shahnama*:

*One evening the king [Afrasiyab] said to Seyavash, "Let's go up at dawn tomorrow and enjoy ourselves at polo; I've heard that when you play, your mallet's invincible." Seyavash agreed and the next morning they made their way laughing and joking to the field . . . At the field's edge drums thundered out, cymbals clashed, and trumpets blared. The ground seemed to shake with the din, and dust rose into the sky as the horsemen took the field.*

—Dick Davis, *Fathers and Sons: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 50

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

*Shahnama* (Book of Kings), Iran, Safavid empire, storytelling, sports, figural art, royal workshop, watercolor, ink



سیاهوش با اسبان کشتار  
 تو کتیستی بختی زمین درجا  
 برآمد فرخوش زمین بان  
 بر کوی بازی در انداختش کرد  
 لگ کویس بنزد سیاوش  
 پنداشت آن کوی لخی بوست

سوخان  
 بازی  
 سیاوش

سیاوش بر بخت سب نبرد  
 بنمود بس شهیار بلند  
 سیاوش ساسی کر زشت

یاران در آمد جانان پسند  
 بر انسان از چشم شد پدید  
 بر آمد فرخوشیدن باغی کوس

فرخوش تیر زمین بخت  
 از او از صبح و دو کم کردی  
 نکلند کویس پیدان  
 سپدار کویس زمین  
 و کر زو جانان پیدان  
 سیاوش ساسی کر ی بر و او کوس

وزان بس بچکان و کار کرد  
 جهان شک با ما دیدار کرد

سیاهوش

# Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 3 The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript: The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

## FEATURED WORK OF ART

### The Feast of Sada: Folio from the *Shahnama*

(Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp (image 27)

About 1525

Author: Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020)

Artist: Attributed to Sultan Muhammad (active first half of the 16th century)

Iran, Tabriz

Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 9½ x 9¼ in (24.1 x 23 cm), page: 18½ x 12½ in (47 x 31.8 cm)

Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.2)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** English Language Arts, Visual Arts, and World History

**GRADE:** Middle School and High School

**TOPIC/THEME:** Art and Writing

## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- ◆ identify some of the key events and figures presented in the Persian national epic, the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings);
- ◆ make connections between the text and the illustrated pages of the manuscript produced for Shah Tahmasp; and
- ◆ create a historical record of their community.

## NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- ◆ NL-ENG.K-12.2 Understanding the Human Experience
- ◆ NL-ENG.K-12.6 Applying Knowledge
- ◆ NL-ENG.K-12.8 Developing Research Skills
- ◆ NL-ENG.K-12.9 Multicultural Understanding

Visual Arts

- ◆ NA-VA.9-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- ◆ NA-VA.9-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- ◆ NA-VA.9-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- ◆ NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

- ◆ R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words
- ◆ W.CCR.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content
- ◆ W.CCR.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom

**MATERIALS:** Paper, pencils, newspapers and magazines from the past year (or computer with Internet access), and colored pencils (or paints and brushes)

## QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

Before looking at the featured work of art, read the following excerpt from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) describing the celebration that took place after King Hushang (first Iranian dynasty) accidentally discovered fire when a stone hit a rock and created a spark. Take a moment to visualize the scene. Share the image that came to mind with a classmate.

*They lit a huge fire, and in honor of the divine splendor [the discovery of how to light a fire] which had been revealed to Hushang, they instituted a festival of rejoicing. This is called the Sadeh festival, and it was celebrated with great reverence by the ancient Iranians, and the custom is still observed as a memorial of that night.*

—Dick Davis, *The Lion and the Throne: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1998), p. 18

- ◆ How does the painting compare to your image of the scene? What details in the painting does the text support? What aspects of the story does the writer leave open to our imagination?

- ◆ Describe this celebration. How might your community honor or celebrate a discovery?
- ◆ Look closely at the figures in the painting. What might their clothing, accessories, pose, and location suggest about their status and relationship to one another?
- ◆ Survey the setting. What aspects of the landscape has the artist emphasized? How? How would you describe the relationship between the figures and the landscape? Why?

#### ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Language Arts, Visual Arts, and World History

**DURATION:** Approximately 120 minutes

The featured work of art presents one event recorded in the “Book of Kings,” a history of Iranian kingship from the creation of the world to the conquest of Iran by Arab Muslims in the mid-seventh century. List the five most important events you would choose to record if you were writing this year’s history—consider politics, sports, technology, sciences, natural disasters, wars, economy, fashion, and arts and entertainment. Create an illustrated page with a short article describing each event and the reason for including it in your timeline. Post all of the entries created by the class in chronological order. Note trends among the group (such as event type) and compare and contrast the rationale presented in the submissions. Explore ways to group the works to create more focused timelines for the year (for example, the year in entertainment).

(Alternative: Each person creates a timeline for the year they were born or a timeline with one entry for each year since their birth.)

#### RESOURCES

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Yalman, Suzan. Based on original work by Linda Komaroff. “The Art of the Safavids before 1600.” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa/hd\\_safa.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa/hd_safa.htm) (October 2002).

#### OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM’S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Image 28. Tahmuras Defeats the *Divs*: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525; Iran, Tabriz; opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 11 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 7 $\frac{7}{16}$  in. (28.3 x 18.6 cm); page: 18 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 12 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (47 x 32.1 cm); Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.3)

Image 29. Siyavush Plays Polo: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, about 1525–30; Iran, Tabriz; opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; painting: 11 $\frac{3}{16}$  x 9 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (28.4 x 23.7 cm); page: 18 $\frac{5}{16}$  x 12 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (47.3 x 31.9 cm); Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.26)

Author: Adapted from lessons by classroom teachers Dr. Sujay Sood and Julie Mann  
Date: 2012

## Unit 5: Chapter 3 Suggested Readings and Resources

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metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shnm/hd\\_shnm.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shnm/hd_shnm.htm) (June 2008).

HIGH SCHOOL

*Persian Miniatures from the Shahnameh*. DVD. 30 min.  
New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1977.  
Traces the development of different styles of illustration of  
Iran's national epic over three centuries and three distinct  
dynasties: the Mongol, Timurid, and Safavid.

*Persian Miniature: The Gardens of Paradise*. DVD. 31 min.  
New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1997.  
Spotlights an outstanding Persian miniature from the  
Safavid period, which is in the collection of the Bibliothèque  
Nationale in Paris.

*Tales from a Book of Kings: The Houghton Shah-nameh*. Video.  
26 min. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972.  
Studies a selection of paintings from a sixteenth-century  
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University Press, 1997.

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Safavid Iran, 1501–1576*. New York: Skira with the Asia Society, 2003.

## UNIT 5: CHAPTER 4

# The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- ◆ understand the role of luxury objects in the Mughal court of India; and
- ◆ recognize how the precise and highly naturalistic depictions of animals, plants, and people demonstrate the Mughals' extraordinary interest in the natural world and the keen observational skills of Mughal artists.

### Introduction

The Mughal dynasty (1526–1858) was among the richest and longest ruling in India, and at its peak controlled large portions of the Indian subcontinent. The Mughals were Muslims of Central Asian origin, and Persian was their court language. Their intermarriage with Hindu royalty and establishment of strong alliances with the diverse peoples of the subcontinent led to profound cultural, artistic, and linguistic exchanges.

The Mughal dynasty claimed descent from the Mongols (“Mughal” is from the Arabized transliteration of “Moghol,” or Mongol). The Mughal emperors were among India’s greatest patrons of art, responsible for some of the country’s most spectacular monuments, like the palaces at Delhi, Agra, and Lahore (in present-day Pakistan) and the famous mausoleum, the Taj Mahal (fig. 31).

The tastes and patronage of the first six rulers, known as the Great Mughals, defined Mughal art and architecture, and their influence has endured to this day. The works of art featured in this chapter highlight artistic production during the reigns of Jahangir (1605–27) and his son Shah Jahan (1627–58).

Emperor Jahangir (fig. 28) remains best known as a connoisseur and patron of the arts. His memoirs, the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, describe opulent court events and sumptuous gifts in great detail. They also reflect the emperor's intense interest in the natural world—most evident in the meticulous descriptions of the plants and animals he encountered in India and during his travels. Jahangir is notable for his patronage of botanical paintings and drawings. In addition to works made at his own court, botanical albums with beautifully drawn and scientifically correct illustrations were brought to India by European merchants (see fig. 33). These inspired many of the works in Jahangir's court.

Emperor Shah Jahan's court was unrivaled in its luxury. Like his father Jahangir, Shah Jahan (fig. 29) also had a strong interest in the natural world and a taste for paintings, jewel-encrusted objects (fig. 30), textiles, and works of art in other media. In spite of his large collection of portable works, Shah Jahan is best known for his architectural commissions, which include a huge palace in Delhi and the Taj Mahal (fig. 31), a mausoleum built for his favorite wife. Shah Jahan's architectural projects also reflect the Mughal love of botanical imagery; many of the Taj Mahal's walls are carved with intricate images of recognizable flowers and leaves (fig. 32).

During the golden age of Mughal rule (approximately 1526–1707), the emperors had a marked interest in naturalistic depictions of people, animals, and the environment. They employed the most skilled artists, who documented courtiers and their activities as well as the flora and fauna native to India. Informed by Mughal patronage, a new style of painting emerged in illustrations made for books and albums, which combined elements of Persian, European, and native Indian traditions. These works demonstrate keen observation of the natural environment and the royal court. The emperors collected their favorite poetry, calligraphy, drawings, and portraits in extensive albums, which were among their most valued personal possessions and were passed down to successive generations.

In addition to works on paper, the decorative arts of the Mughal court engaged a broad range of natural forms in carpets, textiles, jewelry, and luxuriously inlaid decorative objects, and used precious materials ranging from gemstones and pearls to silk.



FIG. 28. Portrait of Jahangir (detail), about 1615–20; India; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 14 x 9½ in. (35.6 x 24.1cm); Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913 (13.228.47)

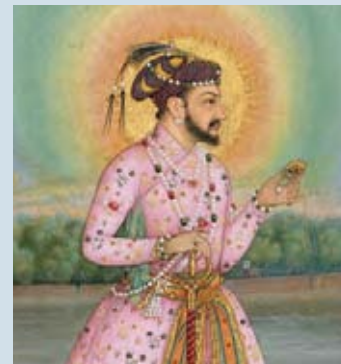


FIG. 29. Shah Jahan on a Terrace, Holding a Pendant Set With His Portrait: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (recto) (detail), dated 1627–28; artist: Chitarman (active about 1627–70); India; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 15⅝ x 10⅞ in. (38.9 x 25.7 cm); Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.24)



FIG. 30. Mango-shaped flask, mid-17th century; India; rock crystal, set with gold, enamel, rubies, and emeralds; H. 2½ in. (6.5 cm); Purchase, Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, 1993 (1993.18)

This small flask typifies the Mughal interest in natural forms and their transformation into richly decorated objects. The realistic mango shape was carved from rock crystal and encased in a web of golden strands of wire punctuated by rubies and emeralds. This flask is a practical vessel—possibly used to hold perfume or lime, an ingredient in *pan*, a mildly intoxicating narcotic popularly used in India—as well as a jewel-like decorative object that would have displayed the wealth and refined taste of its owner.



FIG. 31. Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632–53. Commissioned by Shah Jahan



FIG. 32. Detail of wall showing highly naturalistic floral decoration, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632–53.

## The Emperor Shah Jahan with His Son Dara Shikoh: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

About 1620

Artist: Nanha (active 1605–27)

India

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; margins:

gold and opaque watercolor on dyed paper;

15 $\frac{5}{16}$  x 10 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (38.9 x 26.2 cm)

Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift,  
1955 (55.121.10.36)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting demonstrates the Mughals' focus on portraiture as well as their love of precious objects (see fig. 30). It presents two realistic depictions of the Mughal royal family—the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his eldest son, Dara Shikoh, who are shown examining precious stones.

### FUNCTION

The painting comes from an album begun by Emperor Jahangir and continued by his son Shah Jahan. The album was created for private viewing and study by the emperor.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Two figures are seated on a golden throne furnished with luxurious cushions. Shah Jahan admires the large ruby clasped in his right hand, while his son—who is facing him—looks toward the bowl of precious stones resting in his father's left hand. The emperor is clad in a red and yellow striped turban with a plume, a white double-breasted gown called a *jama*, a richly embroidered sash, and a violet garment called a *pajama*. On his right thumb is a jeweled ring, which could be used to draw the string of a hunting bow. The handle of a jeweled dagger, signaling his supremely important position in the court, is visible just above his waist.

Prince Dara Shikoh is dressed in a yellow *jama* fastened with a sash. In one hand he holds a turban pin, in the other a fly whisk made from a peacock feather. Multiple strands of pearls adorn Dara Shikoh; under Mughal rule, pearls were a hallmark of nobility, and princes and princesses were almost always portrayed with them.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Mughal empire, courtly life, Emperor Shah Jahan, natural world, album, figural art, plants, birds, watercolor, ink

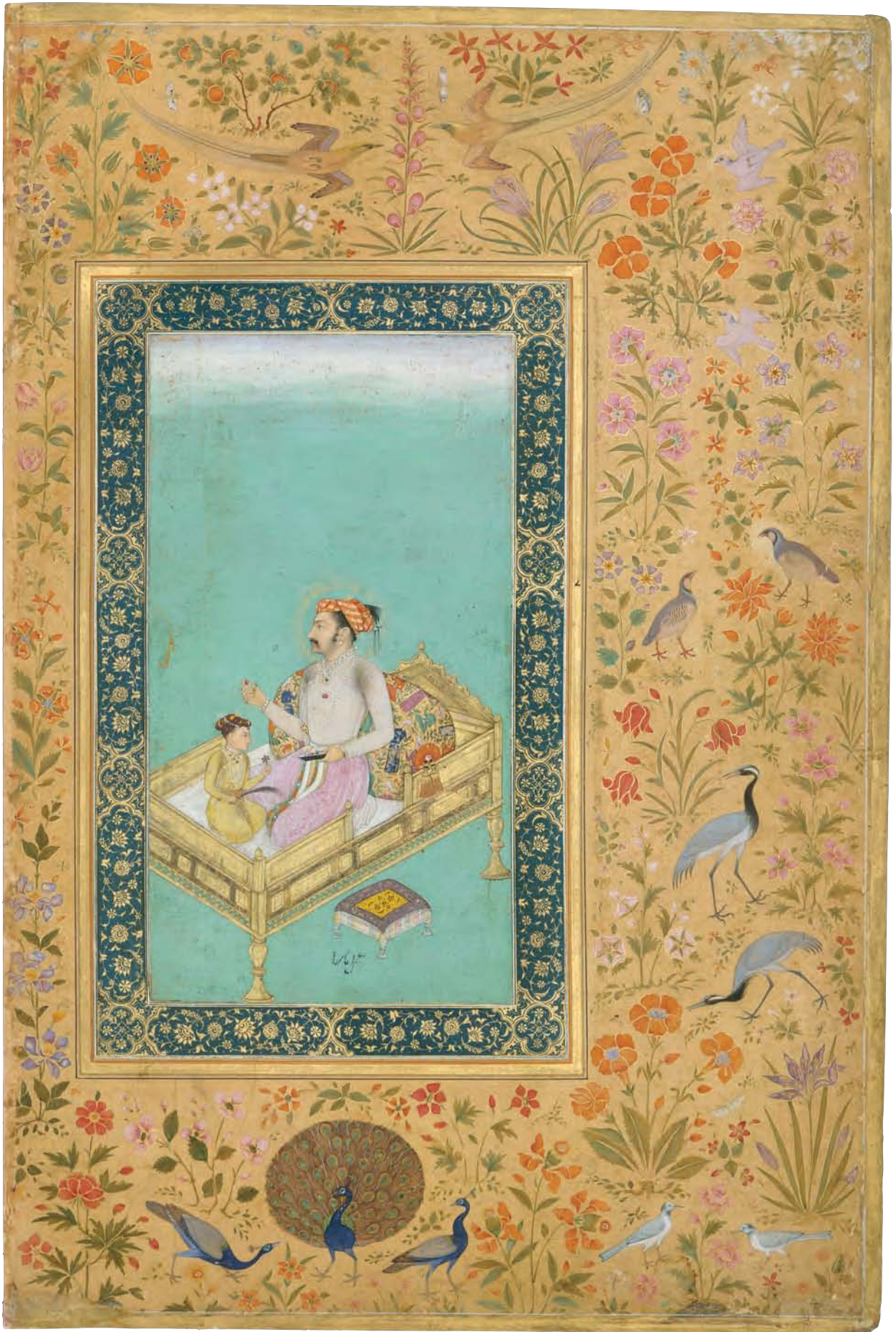
### CONTEXT

The patron of this painting was most likely Shah Jahan's father, Emperor Jahangir, who was interested in realistic and masterfully drawn depictions of people, animals, and plants. The wide border that frames the painting contains precisely rendered images of flowers and birds. In the upper right corner are flowers, including narcissus, roses, poppies, and crocus. The Mughal style of creating botanically accurate flowers was informed by the presence of European botanical prints in the court (fig. 33). Birds, such as chukar partridges, demoiselle cranes, pigeons, Indian peafowl, and Birds of Paradise (symbolizing royalty), are also depicted with skillful realism. All the birds are native to the Mughal territories and still exist in present-day India and Pakistan.



FIG. 33. Crocus, folio 61 of *Le Jardin du Roy tres Chrestien Henry IV Roy de France et de Navare*, 1608; designer: Pierre Vallet (French, about 1575–1657); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1935 (35.67.3)

This type of illustration, from a European botanical album, influenced the paintings produced at the Mughal court. Notice the crocus in the top right corner of the margin of image 30.



30. The Emperor Shah Jahan with His Son Dara Shikoh: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

## Dagger with hilt in the form of a blue bull (*nilgai*)

About 1640

India

Hilt: nephrite; blade: watered steel; 15 in. (38.1 cm)

Gift of Alice Heeramanek, in memory of Nasli Heeramanek, 1985 (1985.58a)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

Mughal emperors were keen observers of animals and the blue bull (*nilgai*)—a large antelope native to India—was among their favorites. The intimate familiarity with the features of the blue bull, as well as the fine quality of the carving, suggest that this dagger was made in the royal workshop by someone with access to the imperial zoo, which would have housed both native and foreign animals.

### FUNCTION

Finely carved daggers such as this were seldom used as weapons, but rather were part of the royal ceremonial costume of the Mughal court. Surviving daggers featuring animal heads are relatively rare, and were probably worn by those of the highest status at the Mughal court.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The head of the blue bull, which forms the handle of this dagger, features thin hollow ears, delicately carved facial features, and grooves along the neckline where the owner could rest his fingers. At the base of the hilt, a lotuslike flower rests in a leaf scroll, which bulges over the edge—a feature that prevents the hand from slipping from the smooth handle onto the sharp blade. The blue tone of the jade (nephrite) resembles the animal's coat, which was admired for its bluish gray hue.

### CONTEXT

The Mughal emperors' interest in animals might be considered paradoxical by today's standards. They admired animals for their beauty, enjoyed observing them in the wild and in the imperial zoo, but also were avid hunters and even held animal fights at the court where courtiers could place bets on their favorites. Court painters were often present during these fights and sketched the animals from life (fig. 34).

While the Mughals' Islamic faith informed their disapproval of large-scale figurative sculpture, India had a rich indigenous sculptural tradition, which influenced Mughal art. This figural tradition was transformed by the Mughals into objects such as this one—small in scale and finely executed. The genre of small-scale animal sculptures and depictions flourished in Mughal India, and the handle of this dagger, with its realistically carved head of a blue bull, is a prime example of this trend.



FIG. 34. Blue Bull (*Nilgai*): Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso), about 1620; artist: Mansur (active 1589–1629); India; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; 15 $\frac{5}{16}$  x 10 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (38.9 x 25.6 cm); Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.13)

According to Emperor Jahangir's memoirs, the blue bull (*nilgai*) was commonly encountered on royal hunts. This illustration is by the court artist Mansur, who often accompanied the ruler on his hunts. He had a special talent for observing and depicting nature, and shows how the bull would have appeared in the wild. Blue bulls still live in the grasslands of present-day India, Pakistan, and Nepal.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Mughal empire, royal hunt, dagger, Emperor Shah Jahan, natural world, album, animals, nephrite (jade), steel



31. Dagger with hilt in the form of a blue bull (*nilgai*)

## Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

About 1615–20

Artist: Mansur (active 1589–1629)

India

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper;  $15\frac{3}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{16}$  in.  
(39.1 x 25.6 cm)

Purchase, Rogers Fund and the Kevorkian Foundation Gift,  
1955 (55.121.10.12)

### LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This painting of two vultures reflects the Mughal emperors' interest in studying and visually recording animals and their behaviors and attributes.

### FUNCTION

This painting is one of many works from an imperial album commissioned by Emperor Jahangir. In addition to other depictions of animals, the album included portrayals of the royal household and central administration as well as lavishly illuminated pages of calligraphy containing poetic verses. Like a luxurious scrapbook, such royal albums reflect the range of interests and refined tastes of their owners.

### DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This scientifically accurate painting is the result of careful observation of two vultures. Close attention to detail is evident in the shape and color of the beaks, the proportions of the bodies, and the color and texture of the feathers, all of which help distinguish the birds as two different species: a red-headed vulture (on the left) and a long-billed vulture (on the right). Although the surroundings are minimal, they give a sense of the birds' habitat; one of the vultures perches on a branchlike formation, while the other appears to rest on a rocky ledge nearby.

### CONTEXT

The court painter Mansur was a favorite of Emperor Jahangir because of his ability to create highly realistic portrayals of animals and plants. His skill prompted Jahangir to take the artist with him on hunting expeditions and other journeys so that the painter could record the animal and plant species they encountered. Mansur also had access to the imperial zoo, which housed animals that had been captured or given to the emperor as gifts.

Sketching from nature was essential to Mansur's practice and Jahangir's zoo provided a perfect opportunity to draw a wide range of animals. He continually redrew his lines to account for the animals' shifts in pose and movement, resulting in sketches that appear both realistic and animated. In his studio, he used very fine brushes to apply opaque watercolor to selected drawings, creating a highly detailed finished product.

### KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Mughal empire, courtly life, natural world, observation, album, plants, birds, watercolor, ink



32. Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso)

## Lesson Plan: Unit 5, Chapter 4 The Mughal Court and the Art of Observation

### FEATURED WORK OF ART

**Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture: Folio from the Shah Jahan Album (verso) (image 32)**

About 1615–20

Artist: Mansur (active 1589–1629)

India

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper;  $15\frac{3}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{16}$  in. (39.1 x 25.6 cm)

Purchase, Rogers Fund and the Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.12)

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Science, Visual Arts, and World History

**GRADES:** Middle School and High School

**TOPIC/THEME:** Art and the Environment

### GOALS

Students will be able to:

- ◆ recognize ways works of art reflect an intense interest in observation of the human and natural world among Mughal leaders; and
- ◆ understand ways works of art from the past and present communicate ideas about the natural world.

### NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Geography

- ◆ NSS-G.K-12.5 Environment and Society

Science

- ◆ NS.K-12.3 Life Science

Visual Arts

- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- ◆ NSS-WH.5-12.6 Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

- ◆ R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

**ACTIVITY SETTING:** Classroom or Museum

(alternative activity: outdoors)

**MATERIALS:** Images of a red-headed vulture and a long-billed vulture (or computer with Internet access to screen video clip; see **RESOURCES**), and an image of the French botanical illustration (fig. 35)

### QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- ◆ Take a close look at the two birds in the center of the composition. What similarities do you notice? What differences stand out?
- ◆ Compare the painting of the birds with images or videos (see **RESOURCES**) of the same species, the red-headed vulture and long-billed vulture. What do you think this artist felt was most important to convey? What do you see that makes you say that?
- ◆ Turn your attention to the setting. What might it suggest about the birds' habitat?
- ◆ Investigate the flora and fauna featured in the surrounding borders. How does the presentation of the natural world in the borders compare to the central image?
- ◆ Imagine creating a work such as this. What research or planning might be involved?
- ◆ The Mughal empire (1526–1858) was one of the most powerful and longest ruling in India. Mughal court artists had many opportunities to sketch animals and plants; they often accompanied leaders during royal hunts and had access to imperial zoos, which housed both native and foreign animals. What are some ways people in your community learn about plants and animals in their immediate environment and other regions?



**FIG. 35.** Crocus, folio 61 of *Le Jardin du Roy tres Chrestien Henry IV Roy de France et de Navare*, 1608; designed by Pierre Vallet (French, about 1575–1657); Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1935 (35.67.3)



- ◆ European merchants brought botanical albums with beautifully drawn and scientifically correct illustrations to India (see, for example, fig. 35). What does the featured work of art share in common with this illustration? What unique features distinguish each work?
- ◆ Mansur, the Mughal court artist commissioned to create this work, was one of Emperor Jahangir's (reigned 1605–27) favorite painters. What might this image suggest about Emperor Jahangir's artistic preferences and outlook on the natural world?

#### ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Science and Visual Arts

**DURATION:** Approximately 30 minutes

Compare and contrast representations of birds in works of art from around the world (see **OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION**). Consider the following points:

- ◆ What aspects of the bird(s) does the work emphasize? How does it create that emphasis?
- ◆ How would you describe the relationship between the subject and environment? Why?
- ◆ What animal behaviors, if any, does the work suggest?
- ◆ Who purchased or commissioned this work? What might have motivated the artist or the buyer?

Based on the information you gathered, what might each work suggest about attitudes toward the natural world at that time and place?

#### ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Science and Visual Arts

**DURATION:** Approximately 60 minutes

Take a nature walk or visit a zoo to closely observe animal life. During your trip, select one animal and sketch the following: the animal in action, two of its distinguishing features (for example, the beak, paws, or wings), and the environment in which it lives. Use the information you collect as a foundation for a finished artwork that conveys one key idea about the animal, such as how it moves, its relationship to its surroundings, or how one of its features helps it survive in the wild.

#### RESOURCES

Alderfer, Jonathan. Waders and Waterfowl: Bird Illustration in Time-Lapse. Video. National Geographic Society, 1996–2012. [http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/animals/birds-animals/waders-and-waterfowl/full-timelapse-alderfer/\(2010\)](http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/animals/birds-animals/waders-and-waterfowl/full-timelapse-alderfer/(2010)).

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#### OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Constantin Brancusi (French 1876–1957). *Bird in Space*, 1923. Marble; (with base) H. 56¾ in. (144.1 cm), Diam. 6½ in. (16.5 cm). Bequest of Florene M. Schoenborn, 1995 (1996.403.7ab)

John James Audubon (American, 1785–1851). *Goshawk, Stanley Hawk (No. 29)*, 1829; 38¼ x 24¼ in. (97.2 x 61.6 cm); Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.2506)

*Bird (sejen)*, 19th–mid-20th century; Côte d'Ivoire, northern Côte d'Ivoire; Senufo peoples; wood, pigment; H. 59⅝ x W. 23½ x D. 14¼ in. (151.5 x 59.7 x 36.2 cm); The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.176)

Author: Adapted from a lesson by classroom teacher John Debold  
Date: 2012

## Unit 5: Chapter 4 Suggested Readings and Resources

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