About the Object

The minbar is the raised platform, or pulpit, from which the sermon is given during Friday prayers in the Mosque. Apart from prayer mats, this is usually the only piece of furniture in the Mosque. The idea of the minbar was inspired by the raised seat from which the Prophet Muhammad spoke to the Muslim community in Medina.

This minbar is carved in wood and is richly decorated in a variety of ways, including tiny geometric patterns of wood and ivory. The triangular sides are made from small pieces of wood cut individually and then fitted together like a mosaic. The design is based on a series of stars from which lines radiate outwards. Geometry is used in Islamic art for sacred reasons, and can be interpreted as representing universal, harmonious laws that express the unity within diversity in our world. The symmetrical pattern in the minbar could be seen as representing the Islamic principles of tawhid (the unity of all things) and mizan (order and balance). Repetition also plays an important part in Islamic design, as pattern, when repeated ad infinitum, could be seen as an attempt to represent the inexpressible endlessness of God.

This minbar was commissioned by Sultan Qa‘itbay who was a generous patron of the arts, and it was probably designed for a mosque that he built or restored in Cairo during his reign between 1468 and 1496. It includes carved inscriptions that praise the Sultan, as well as quoting verse from the Qur‘an. Because of this it holds a political as well as a religious role.

Activities

- (Art, RE, Maths) Look carefully at the intricate carving of the minbar. What do you notice about the shapes? Can you guess why repeated patterns might be so important in Islamic art?
- (Art, Maths) Find different shapes in the minbar panel: triangles, pentagons, hexagons, octagons, and stars. What is a tessellation and which shapes can be tessellated? Draw some examples of different four-, five-, and six-sided shapes. Prior to your visit, prepare some ready-cut geometric shapes on gummed paper. Working in small groups, lay the shapes onto squared or coloured paper to recreate a similar geometric pattern.
- (Citizenship) The sides of the minbar are inlaid with ivory. There are various other objects made of ivory in this exhibition. See if you can find them. What are some of the ethical issues surrounding use of ivory today?
About the Object

Accurate time-keeping is of vital importance to Muslims, as prayers, or Salah, occur five times a day. Complex scientific instruments such as astrolabes and specially adapted compasses were developed to make these time calculations. Knowledge of astronomy and other sciences is therefore very important in Islamic cultures. This unusual disc must have been part of a splendid astrological or astronomical instrument. Originally, it would have been flat and rectangular, so that it could receive the three dials that once covered the blank areas. At 12 o’clock a multi-armed figure represents Saturn; at 9 o’clock, a man takes a reading with an astrolabe. At 6 o’clock is a figure of Zodiac man, a motif of European origin based on the idea that the signs of the zodiac ruled different parts of the body. The ram of Aries lies on his head, the bull of Taurus is at his neck, the twins of Gemini recline against his arms, and other zodiac symbols appear on his body. Pisces, which ruled the feet, was lost when the plate was sawn into a disc.

Activities

- (Science) Find out how time has been measured throughout history. Design your own simple sundial by fixing a post into the ground and measuring the shadow it casts. How does it work?
- (Science) Do your own research on astronomy. What do we know about the movement of stars and planets? Look outside tonight. Do you know what any of the different constellations are called? See if you can find ‘The Plough’.
- (Literacy) Do you know the signs of the zodiac? What is yours? Do you know what the characteristics of your star sign are? Write an acrostic poem about yourself using the letters of your star sign. Have a go at writing a horoscope for a magazine.
- (Art) Design your own astrolabe using different symbols to represent times of your day or year.
Cope with scenes of the Crucifixion and Annunciation
Iran (Safavid), probably Isfahan, 17th century

Knotted silk pile and metal thread
V&A: 477-1894, T.30-1926, T.211-1930

About the Object
Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is a monotheistic faith with a belief in one God. Muslims consider Abraham, Moses and other prophets known from the Bible to be precursors of the Prophet Muhammad. Jesus is also honoured as a prophet, though not as the son of God. The Qur’an, the Muslim holy book, teaches respect for Jews and Christians as “peoples of the book”.

Some Christians and Jews in the Middle East were so assimilated into Islamic culture that the works of art made for them are often indistinguishable from those made for Muslims. However, several objects, such as this cope, can be identified as Christian by their inscriptions or imagery.

This fragmentary but magnificent church vestment is made of knotted silk in the manner of an extraordinarily fine carpet. Shah ‘Abbas I brought a large number of Armenians to Isfahan in Iran in 1604, and this cope, the principal vestment worn by Armenian priests during the Mass, was probably made for a church there soon after. The vestment was originally semi-circular and worn in the same way as a cape, with the Crucifixion scene at the back. The figures of the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, here seen along the top edge, are depicted with features in the Iranian style.

Activities
• (RE) Is there anything unexpected in seeing this object within Palace and Mosque? Why?
• (RE and Citizenship) This is a spectacular example of art made for a Christian community living under Muslim rule in the Middle East, where interaction and interchange between cultures was widespread. Can you think of examples of similar exchanges of cultures today?
• (Art) Design and make your own cape that contains symbols to express your own interests, beliefs and ideas.
About the Object

This tile depicts a bird’s-eye view of the Sanctuary at Mecca, represented diagrammatically. The stone building called the Ka’bah is at the centre, surrounded by various structures and arcades within the compound, which are all labelled. Immediately above the diagram is a quotation from the Qur’an exhorting all Muslims to undertake the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in their life, if they have the resources to do so.

Hajj is the fifth of the Five Pillars of Islam, or prescribed actions that all Muslims are required to undertake as part of their obligation to God. Each pillar is believed to be part of the supporting structure for Islam.

1. **Shahadah**: This is the profession of faith, “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah” and is the basis from which all the other pillars stem.

2. **Salah**: This is ritual prayer that is undertaken by every Muslim five times a day, facing Mecca. The times for prayer are called from the minaret (or tower) of the mosque.

3. **Zakah**: Muslims are obliged to help those in need by giving alms.

4. **Sawm**: Muslims have a duty to fast during the month of Ramadan between dawn and dusk. During this period, dates and water are often eaten and drunk before an evening meal after sunset.

5. **Hajj**: Pilgrimage to Mecca should be undertaken by all Muslims who are able to, at least once in a lifetime. Pilgrims wear white unsewn clothes that are later used as burial shrouds.

Activities

- (RE) Use this tile to explore various key themes in Islam: pilgrimage, prayer, the Five Pillars of Islam, the architecture of the mosque, and important places in Islam.
- (RE) Design a pilgrimage tour brochure for the Hajj based on this tile and other objects in the exhibition. Describe the wonderful places and things that a pilgrim would see.
- (Art) Paint and glaze a tile that represents a place that is important to you.
- (Geography) Find out where Mecca is. What sort of a place is it? Research the population, climate, principle forms of industry and the tourism that has grown up around the Hajj.
The Romance of Khusraw and Shirin
Illustrated by Riza ‘Abbasi (c. 1565 - 1635)
and his workshop
Iran (Safavid), Isfahan, 1632
Ink, gold, and colours on paper; stamped, tooled, and filigreed leather binding
V&A: 364-1885

About the Object
The romance of Khusraw and Shirin is a classic text of Persian literature. It tells the story of the courtship of the pre-Islamic king Khusraw Parviz and the Armenian princess Shirin. The poet Nizami created the romance for a local ruler in north-west Iran in 1184 and from the 15th century manuscripts containing the poem were often illustrated with miniature paintings. This miniature is by Riza ‘Abbasi, the greatest court painter of the early 17th century.

Shirin and Khusraw fell in love by seeing each other in portraits, but their first meeting was long delayed. Before Shirin agreed to marry Khusraw, there were obstacles to be overcome, including the vanquishing of Farhad, a rival for Shirin’s affections. In this night-time scene Khusraw slays a lion with his bare hands to protect his love.

Activities
• (Literacy, Art) Read the Romance of Khusraw and Shirin found underneath the interactive, and also produced in this pack. Illustrate the missing scenes. How do you think each character feels at different points within the story? What are your reactions to Khusraw?
• (History, Citizenship, Literacy) Khusraw and Shirin fell in love by seeing each other in portraits. Have you heard of any other stories of this kind? What might be some of the advantages and disadvantages of falling in love with someone in this way?
The Romance of Khusraw and Shirin

Khusraw was the son of the King of Iran. One day, Khusraw’s friend, Shapur, told him about the beautiful and virtuous daughter of the Queen of Armenia, whose name was Shirin. Shapur was sent to Armenia to find the beautiful princess for Khusraw. Once Shapur had found her, he showed Princess Shirin a picture of Prince Khusraw. Immediately she fell in love with the picture of the handsome prince.

Shirin and Khusraw both set out to look for each other, but were disappointed when they could not find one another. On the journey however, Khusraw did see a beautiful woman bathing in a pool, but didn’t realise that this was in fact Shirin.

Some time later there was a war in Iran, and Khusraw was forced to flee to Armenia. He at last met the beautiful Shirin, who was out hunting. They gazed at each other for so long that their eyes filled with tears of love.

Khusraw and Shirin spent their time together hunting, drinking wine and listening to stories. One day, while having a picnic feast on the bank of a river, Khusraw killed a lion with one blow of his fist.

But Shirin told Khusraw that she would not love him until he won back his kingdom. So Khusraw travelled to Constantinople to ask the Emperor for help. Followed by a huge army, Khusraw, riding an elephant, fought and won the great and bloody battle.

Because the Emperor had helped Khusraw to win back his kingdom, Khusraw was forced to marry the Emperor’s daughter in return. But Khusraw could not stop thinking about the beautiful Shirin.

In the meantime, Farhad, an engineer, fell in love with Shirin. Khusraw was very jealous. He hired Farhad to build a roadway through a mountain. This was a difficult and dangerous job. Khusraw lied to Farhad telling him that Shirin had died. Farhad was so upset that he fell off the mountain and died.

Khusraw’s wife also died, and Khusraw and Shirin were finally married.
About the Object
Carpets are the most familiar form of Islamic arts in Europe, especially those from Turkey, which have been imported since the Middle Ages. By contrast, Iranian carpets were little known in Europe until the 17th century. In the 16th century, the Safavid rulers of Iran set up workshops to make hand-knotted pile carpets for their own use, and the patterns for these were drawn by the best court artists.

The Chelsea carpet was made in the early 1500s and is one of the earliest, largest and most beautiful Iranian court carpets to survive intact. It is more than seventeen feet long, but little is known about its history before the Victoria & Albert Museum purchased it from a dealer in the Chelsea area of London over 100 years ago.

The presence of animals in the pattern suggests that the Chelsea carpet was not intended for use in a mosque and that it was probably made for a palace or a royal tent.

Activities
- (Art) Look closely at the carpet. What can you see? Choose a section of the carpet to draw and make into a repeating pattern using printing techniques.
- (Art) Compare this carpet with some of the other carpets in the exhibition. What similarities and differences do you notice?
- (Art) Look at different ways of making carpets. Some are woven on looms, while others are knotted by hand. Design and make your own carpet or textile-hanging based on your favourite exhibits within Palace and Mosque.
- (Maths) Look closely at the design of the whole carpet. Where are its lines of symmetry? How many can you find?
About the Object

Fire in the Kitchens of the Topkapi Palace

The vessels and tiles commissioned by the Ottoman imperial court from the potters of Iznik, a small town near Istanbul, were the greatest ceramics produced in the Islamic world. At the time, however, they had to compete with the blue-and-white porcelain imported from China. The porcelains were so highly regarded that they were kept secure in the strong rooms of the Topkapi Palace, the centre of the Ottoman court, while the Iznik wares were kept in the palace kitchens.

In 1574 a fire destroyed the kitchens of the Topkapi Palace and with them the everyday Iznik wares. Ironically these wares are now as highly esteemed as the Chinese porcelains that survived the fire because they were kept in the imperial treasury.

This flower vase is an outstanding example of Iznik pottery, which also includes bowls, dishes, bottles, ewers, carafes, jars and other objects used in the preparation and serving of food and drink. The patterns for these wares were created in design workshops at the court, and they often include naturalistic floral compositions of tulips, carnations, roses, and hyacinths, all of which are found on this vase. In both its form and decoration, the vase reflects the Ottoman court’s passion for flowers.

Activities

• (Art) Look at some of the different vases and vessels in the exhibition. What sort of patterns do you notice? Look at Islamic ideas about paradise. Bearing this in mind, why do you think floral decoration might have been so important in the Middle East?
• (Art) Make your own vase based on Iznik designs.
• (Literacy) Iznik wares were used as everyday objects, whilst Chinese porcelain was kept for special use. Imagine a conversation between an Iznik pottery vase and a Chinese porcelain vase as they discuss what they have seen on the day of the fire in the Topkapi palace.
About the Object
The Seven Sleepers

The presence of the names of the Seven Sleepers and their dog around the base of this fireplace hood was thought to ward off evil. This legend is shared by both Christians and Muslims. It relates to how seven young men, who were believers, were walled-up in a cave during a Roman period of religious persecution. Two hundred years later they awoke to a golden age of tolerance and universal belief.

The imperial kilns at Iznik and Istanbul made tiles for use as wall decorations in palaces as well as mosques. In keeping with the artistic style associated with the Ottoman dynasty, these wall coverings never include figural themes, but drew on natural patterns and calligraphy for decorative patterning.

Activities
- (Literacy) Create your own myth about an object in the exhibition which you think could have special powers to ward off evil.
- (RE) Can you think of any other examples of times when Christians and Muslims share stories and myths? Have a further look around the exhibition to help you.
- (Art) As a group, choose different sections of the fireplace to sketch. Reconstruct the fireplace back at school using templates of card and coloured paper.
Glass beaker with leather case

Egypt or Syria (Ayyubid or Mamluk), 13th century; the case English or French, 14th century

Enamelled and gilded glass; leather case

V&A: C.1-1959,
purchased with the assistance of the Pilgrim Trust, the National Art Collections Fund, the Goldsmiths’ Company, the Salters’ Company, the Drapers’ Company and the Merchant Taylors’ Company

About the Object

The Luck of Edenhall

This magical glass beaker has survived in perfect condition for over 700 years. It may have been brought back to England from the Crusades and was probably used as a chalice in Christian religious ceremony. A protective leather case was made for it, decorated with the sacred monogram IHS which is an abbreviation of the name for Jesus in Greek. Clear glass, exotically decorated with colour, was virtually unknown in northern Europe at the time, and it must have dazzled all who saw it.

The beaker belonged to the family of Edenhall, a house in the north of England, and, once its true origins were forgotten, a legend grew up around this beautiful and fragile object. The story says that a party of fairies was disturbed at a well near the hall and left the beaker behind as they fled, screaming out: “If this cup should break or fall, Farewell the Luck of Edenhall.”

The cup was placed on loan at the V&A in 1926 and Edenhall was demolished soon after.

Activities

• (Literacy) Many people are superstitious towards different objects or think certain things to be lucky or unlucky. Can you think of some of these objects? Do you know why they are believed to be lucky or unlucky? Try and find out.

• (Literacy) Write a poem imagining what might happen if the Luck of Edenhall were to ‘break or fall’.

• (Art) Decorate a vase with an enamel effect.

• (Literacy) Read the following extract and poem about the Luck of Edenhall and then write your own narrative poem about the events.

“… a party of Fairies were drinking and making merry round a well near the Hall, called St. Cuthbert’s well; but being interrupted by the intrusion of some curious people, they were frightened, and made a hasty retreat, and left the cup in question: one of the last screaming out ‘If this cup should break or fall Farewell the Luck of Edenhall’…”

Image © V&A Images
The Luck of Edenhall
Johan Ludwig Uhland
translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Of Edenhall, the youthful Lord
Bids sound the festal trumpet’s call;
He rises at the banquet board,
And cries, ’mid the drunken revellers all,
"Now bring me the Luck of Edenhall!"

The butler hears the words with pain,
The house’s oldest seneschal,
Takes slow from its silken cloth again
The drinking-glass of crystal tall;
They call it The Luck of Edenhall.

Then said the Lord: "This glass to praise,
Fill with red wine from Portugal!"
The graybeard with trembling hand obeys;
A purple light shines over all,
It beams from the Luck of Edenhall.

Then speaks the Lord, and waves it light:
"This glass of flashing crystal tall
Gave to my sires the Fountain-Sprite;
She wrote in it, If this glass doth fall,
Farewell then, O Luck of Edenhall!"

"'Twas right a goblet the Fate should be
Of the joyous race of Edenhall!
Deep draughts drink we right willingly:
And willingly ring, with merry call,
Kling! klang! to the Luck of Edenhall!"

First rings it deep, and full, and mild,
Like to the song of a nightingale
Then like the roar of a torrent wild;
Then mutters at last like the thunder’s fall,
The glorious Luck of Edenhall.

"For its keeper takes a race of might,
The fragile goblet of crystal tall;
It has lasted longer than is right;
King! klang!—with a harder blow than all
Will I try the Luck of Edenhall!"

As the goblet ringing flies apart,
Suddenly cracks the vaulted hall;
And through the rift, the wild flames start;
The guests in dust are scattered all,
With the breaking Luck of Edenhall!

In storms the foe, with fire and sword;
He in the night had scaled the wall,
Slain by the sword lies the youthful Lord,
But holds in his hand the crystal tall,
The shattered Luck of Edenhall.

On the morrow the butler gropes alone,
The graybeard in the desert hall,
He seeks his Lord’s burnt skeleton,
He seeks in the dismal ruin’s fall
The shards of the Luck of Edenhall.

"The stone wall," saith he, "doth fall aside,
Down must the stately columns fall;
Glass is this earth’s Luck and Pride;
In atoms shall fall this earthly ball
One day like the Luck of Edenhall!"
Bowl with lustre decoration
Malaga, second quarter of the 15th century
Earthenware with underglaze colours
and overglaze lustre
V&A: 486-1864

About the Object
The Málaga Ship Bowl

The lustre technique was invented in Iraq in the 9th century. It gave common earthenware dishes the appearance of being made from gold, and because of this quality of luxury, lustre wares quickly found an elite market across the Old World. They have been found as far apart as Portugal and Thailand. The Ship bowl, being very large, complete and of exceptional quality, is one of the most important surviving example of Málaga lustre ware.

Making lustre ware was difficult and labour-intensive and the skill was passed from craftsman to craftsman as a precious secret. In this way it travelled from Iraq to other centres of production in the Middle East, reaching the Muslim-ruled parts of Spain in the 13th century.

At this time, a flourishing lustre industry was established in the port of Málaga, on the southern coast of Spain. When the bowl was made, lustre production was still the preserve of Muslim potters, but it could well have been made for a Christian customer. Indeed, it depicts a type of ship used in international trade, with the arms of Portugal on its sail.

Activities
• (Geography) Find out about the trade routes for lustre ware and plot them onto a world map. What other commodities are traded across the world?
• (History) Research some of the historical trade routes between East and West, North and South. You might like to look at the Silk Route as a starting point.
• (Art) Using lustre powders, design and decorate a ceramic dish to commemorate the trade routes of different objects. Which symbols would you use to represent different trades and countries?

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