Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2014
The Arts of the Islamic World
Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art

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The Art of Islamic Calligraphy: A Journey through Time
Maryam Ekhtiar, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Key Works:

- Tiraz Fragment, Iran, Khurasan, dated A.H. 266 / A.D. 879–80 (MMA 31.106.27)
- Folio from the “Blue Qur’an, Tunisia, probably Qairawan, second half 9th–mid-10th century (MMA 2004.88)
- Bowl with Arabic Inscription, Northeastern Iran, approx. 900–1000 (SFAAM B60P6+)
- Bifolium from the “Nurse’s Qur’an” (Musaf al-Hadina), Tunisia, probably Qairawan, ca. A.H. 410 / A.D. 1019–20 (MMA 2007.191)
- Incense Burner of Amir Saif al-Dunya wa’l-Din ibn Muhammad al-Mawardi, Iran, dated A.H. 577 / A.D. 1181–82 (MMA 51.56)
- Folio from a Qur’an Manuscript, Spain, late 13th–early 14th century (MMA 42.63)
- The hero Rustam kills the White Demon, from a manuscript of the Shahnama (Book of Kings), Iran, possibly Shiraz, approx. 1580 (SFAAM 2005.64.162)
- Lamp stand, Iran, approx. 1575–1625 (SFAAM B62B34)
- Illuminated folio with poetic verses from the Shah Jahan Album (verso), Sultan ‘Ali al-Mashhadi (active late 15th–early 16th century), India, ca. 1500 (MMA 55.121.10.32v)
- Page of Calligraphy, Abd al-Majid Taleqani, Iran, dated A.H. 1176/A.D. 1763 (MMA 46.126.4)
- Tughra (Official Signature) of Sultan Süleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520–66), Turkey, Istanbul, ca. 1555–60 (MMA 38.149.2)
- Fragmentary Cenotaph Cover with Qur’anic Calligraphy, Turkey, 17th–18th century (MMA 32.100.460)
- Calligraphic Disc, India, Deccan, Bijapur, ca. 1600 (MMA 1983.227)
- Calligraphic Composition in Shape of a Peacock, Folio from the Bellini Album, Turkey, ca. 1600 (67.266.7.8r)

Bibliography:

### Glossary of Terms

**Bismillah**: the phrase, “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,” repeated before all but one chapter of the Qur’an (also sometimes spelled *basmala*)

**Dawat**: portable inkwell and penholder

**Illumination**: the practice of embellishing manuscript pages with gold. In Islamic art, it refers to gold decoration applied to paintings, calligraphy pages, and manuscripts of the Qur’an

**Khatt**: calligraphy

**Khattat**: calligrapher

**Liqa**: wad of silk used in an inkwell to absorb ink

**Mashq**: lesson or practice work

**Qalam**: reed pen

**Qalamdan**: inkwell

**Qīṭa**: small calligraphic work, generally rectangular and generally using two different scripts

**Tiraz**: Means “embroidery” in Persian; describes both inscribed textiles and the royal textile workshops where they were produced

**Tughra**: a stylized royal insignia containing the name of the Ottoman rule, names associated with his lineage, and the phrase “May he reign forever”

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#### FIG. 11. Kufic script variations, all reading *bismillah*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCRIPT NAME</th>
<th>USES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kufic</td>
<td>Qur’ans, architectural decoration, textiles, carpets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floriated kufic</td>
<td>Qur’ans, ceramics, metalwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knotted/plaited kufic</td>
<td>Qur’ans, architectural decoration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“New style” script</td>
<td>Qur’ans, architectural decoration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### FIG. 14. Examples of regional scripts, both reading *bismillah*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCRIPT NAME</th>
<th>USES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maghribi</td>
<td>Qur’ans and other manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasta’liq</td>
<td>Poetry (in manuscripts or on objects), album pages, textiles, carpets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>