

Fall 2025 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
It's Magic: Art and the Power of Transformation
Sponsored by the Society for Asian Art

Falnama: The Book of Omens

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Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art
Dec. 5, 2025

TERMS

Aja'ib: Wonder

Bibliomancy: Using books for prognostication and interpreting the future

Dabbat al-arz: Angel-beast, who will distinguish believers from the unbelievers

Falnama: Book of Omens, used for prognostication

Hadith: Traditions

Imam: successor of the Prophet Muhammad according to Shi'i Islam

Miraj: Prophet Muhammad's night journey

Niyat: Wish/question

Ottoman dynasty of Türkiye (1299-1922)

Shahnama: Book of Kings, composed by the poet Fersawsi in 1010

Shaytan: Satan

Sunni Islam: Predominant branch of Islam, which adheres to the traditions [*sunna*] and community consensus. Sunnis believe that the Prophet was succeeded by Abu Bakr, Omar, and Osman by leaders of the community.

Shi'i Islam: Second largest branch of Islam; believe that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, and his descendants, are the rightful heirs to Prophet; Shi'ism predominates in Iran, but also widely present in Iraq and Syria.

Safavid dynasty of Iran (1502-1722)

PERSONAGES

Imam Ali (d. 661): Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law and considered by the Shi'ites, the Prophet's successor.

Shah Tahmasb (1524-1576): second ruler of the Safavid dynasty of Iran.

Sultan Süleyman (1520-1566): Ottoman sultan

Sultan Ahmad I (1603-1617): Ottoman sultan

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Serpil Bagci, "Images for Foretelling: Two Topkapi Falnamas," *Dreaming Across Boundaries: The Interpretation of Dreams in the Islamic Lands*, ed. Louise Harlow, Cambridge, MA 20008, pp. 235-70.

Massumeh Farhad, "Between the Past and the Present. The Falnama (Book of Omens) in Safavid Iran and Ottoman Turkey," in *People of the Prophets House*, ed. Fahmida Suleman, London 2015, pp. 137-45.

Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bagci, *The Falnama: Book of Omens*, exhibition catalogue, Washington DC, 2009.

Christiane Gruber, "Signs of the Hour: Eschatological Imagery in Islamic Book Arts," *Ars Orientalis* 44 (2014): 40-60.