

Of the several places in Europe where we are giving glimpses of masterpieces of Islamic art from the collection of the future Aga Khan Museum in Canada, Toledo is incomparable. Its history, spanning more than seven hundred years during which different religious communities lived together in peace,



have made its name famous world-wide. Toledo reached its zenith and became one of the intellectual and scientific capitals of the world during the Islamic caliphate of Cordoba (929 – 1031).

'Convivencia' – the Spanish word for living together harmoniously – is not a simple concept. It is, of course, the term used to describe the co-existence of different faiths in medieval Spain. The code of 'convivencia' was about tolerance and much more. In Toledo, Córdoba and Granada it implied mutual respect as well as an appreciation of science and scholarship, and of different traditions. The acquisition of knowledge was not an end in itself, but rather a way to understand the beauty of God's creation.

Doubtless, during this long period, religious tolerance ebbed and flowed between opposing poles of admiration and hostility. But 'convivencia' implied norms of behaviour which had to be constantly reaffirmed through education and mutual understanding. It is encouraging to observe how the mix of peoples, cultures and faiths built an advanced society which was a beacon to the civilized world.

There cannot be any doubt that with more 'convivencia' the world today would be a better place, for us and for our children.

I believe strongly that the arts have a special and privileged role in fostering dialogue and knowledge. It is important, today, that the peoples of the Muslim world, their pluralism, the diversity of their interpretations of the Qur'anic faith, the chronological and geographical extent of their history and culture, as well as their ethnic, linguistic and social diversity be better understood. Without words and without proselytizing, art works from 'other' cultures bring discovery and understanding of the commonalities of our universal heritage. With this knowledge comes tolerance, hence 'convivencia'. The main aim and function of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto will be to offer a space for learning and tolerance, and I hope it will have a seed of Toledo in its foundations.

His Highness the Aga Khan

PEACE, PROSPERITY AND HARMONY

Following the El Greco show at the Roca Tarpeya Museum in Toledo, the museum faced the daunting task of organising a similarly prestigious exhibition, one that would be of equally high cultural interest and contain top-quality works of art. Those generously lent by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), selected from the Aga Khan Museum's collection of Islamic art, fit the bill perfectly. The Trust has already had exhibitions in Parma (Italy), the Louvre, the Ismaili Centre in London, and Lisbon's Gulbenkian Museum. Thus, first and foremost, we would like to express our deep gratitude to AKTC. We are once again indebted to this institution, having already honoured His Highness the Aga Khan in 2006 with an award for his invaluable work in revitalising our cultural heritage and for his institutions' exemplary action in such areas as community improvement and education.

The symbolic value of exhibiting these works in Toledo is enormous. This is one of the most important cultural initiatives related to the Islamic world that has been undertaken in Toledo for centuries, apart from the restoration of the remaining mosques. Let us glance backwards in history to gain deeper understanding of the significance of the events we are commemorating now.

During the Middle Ages, Toledo, like the rest of Spain at that period, stood out as a unique model of mutual understanding amongst different communities, transcending cultural and religious differences. Toledo, however, was not spared, as has been claimed, its own problems or strife, nor was it an idyllic paradise where peaceful co-existence reigned (something modern man would acknowledge to be unachievable today). Toledo went further: it was a social, political and religious entity with its share of burdens, conflicts and problems, but what made it truly exemplary was how the city dealt with them. In the words of Professor Francisco Marquez Villanueva, of Harvard University, the three Toledo communities - Christian, Moslem and Jewish - and their leaders opted to accept less-than-perfect compromises for the immediate common good. They chose to use all means possible to avert catastrophes, instead of provoking them. They used their intelligence, or rather, their understanding - which is a by-product of reflective thought - to weigh the pros and cons, to measure whether the respective sacrifices were actually needed. What predominated was a sense of responsibility and a pragmatic outlook, leading the three communities to yield in areas where at first sight it would seem impossible, on issues which we would, in current diplomatic parlance, call "non-negotiable", and to reject the alternative of violence which, once unleashed, knows no end.

The Medieval Toledans have also shown us the firmness of some contemporary prophesies on the inevitability of a clash between our own civilizations. In the Christian city of Toledo, churches stood side by side with synagogues and mosques. Moslems and Jews maintained cultural superiority in areas such as language, and social customs of the governing elite. Toledo was a city featuring minorities and freedom; it was a territory that was culturally and linguistically Arab, governed by Christians, where Jews attained political positions of great responsibility. This was possible because the Spanish Mozarabs had rejected the Carolingian tenets that triggered the Crusades, and the Andalusian Moslems had rejected the jihad.

A precious example of this past - that we would like to see re-enacted today - is seen in the Synagogue of Transit, one of the most beautiful works of architecture in Toledo. It was built at the beginning of the XIVth Century by Samuel Levi, an important minister under King Pedro I st. The synagogue is decorated, naturally enough, with the customary Hebrew biblical texts, but includes praise of the Christian king as well as other written texts referring to Allah. Moreover, the motto "Peace, Prosperity and Happiness" appears repeatedly on the walls written in Kufic script.

It was about this theme of Peace, Prosperity and Happiness, which also means harmony, that his Highness the Aga Khan spoke when he came to accept the Royal Toledo Foundation award in Toledo on March 2, 2006.

He said to us at that time that his religion, Islam, advocated the creation of prosperity, which should be shared in an equitable order of peace and harmony, adding: "I believe that conservation (of our cultural heritage) can play a central role in helping different civilisations understand each other, to appreciate how mutually enriching their historic interactions have been, and the contribution of each to the common heritage of humanity". Referring to the city of Toledo he noted that it had: "...so successfully preserved, over many centuries, the evidence of its three-fold culture: magnificent churches, synagogues and mosques. This was an era when each of these cultures, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, retained its independent identity while all worked and came together in a glorious intellectual and spiritual adventure. The legacy was a truly enabling environment conducive to prosperity, harmony, scientific discovery, philosophical insights and artistic flowering..."

We, like his Highness the Aga Khan, believe that the enriching history of humanity –made up of spiritual wealth and cultural heritage –should be harnessed to build a better future. This is the hope that we harbour as we launch this extraordinary exhibition.

Gregorio Marañón y Bertrán de Lis, Marqués of Marañón
Chairman of the Real Fundación de Toledo

GEOGRAPHIES OF ISLAM

The Aga Khan Museum (AKM) collection comprises over 700 works of Islamic art spanning the 7th through the 20th centuries and covering a geographic expanse from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa in the West to China and Southeast Asia in the East. In this more focused version of the AKM's exhibition of masterpieces from the collection, selected art works represent the wide-ranging geographic provenances and socio-cultural contexts of the Islamic world. Literally displayed upon a map of the earth, they stand as a testament to the vast and diverse nature of the "geographies of Islam" and Islam's inherent pluralism as signified by its different branches and by the many cultures and ethnicities it incorporates.

Given the ebb and flow of power and vested interests, territorial configurations of the Islamic world have varied widely over the centuries. There were periods of great tolerance for the mix of populations as well as times when persecution and displacement were a sober reality. Internecine strife among political dynasties or religious sects also occurred, but often resulted in the creation of new powers in several geographic areas. In the West, the Spanish

Umayyad dynasty was founded by a surviving prince of the Umayyads in Syria, whose power had been usurped by the Abbasids. The Abbasid caliphate, based in the central Islamic lands of Egypt, Syria, and modern Iraq, survived until the Mongol invasion in 1258, although (in its last centuries) mostly as a religious entity to legitimate other rulers, such as the Ismaili Fatimids or the Mamluk slaves.

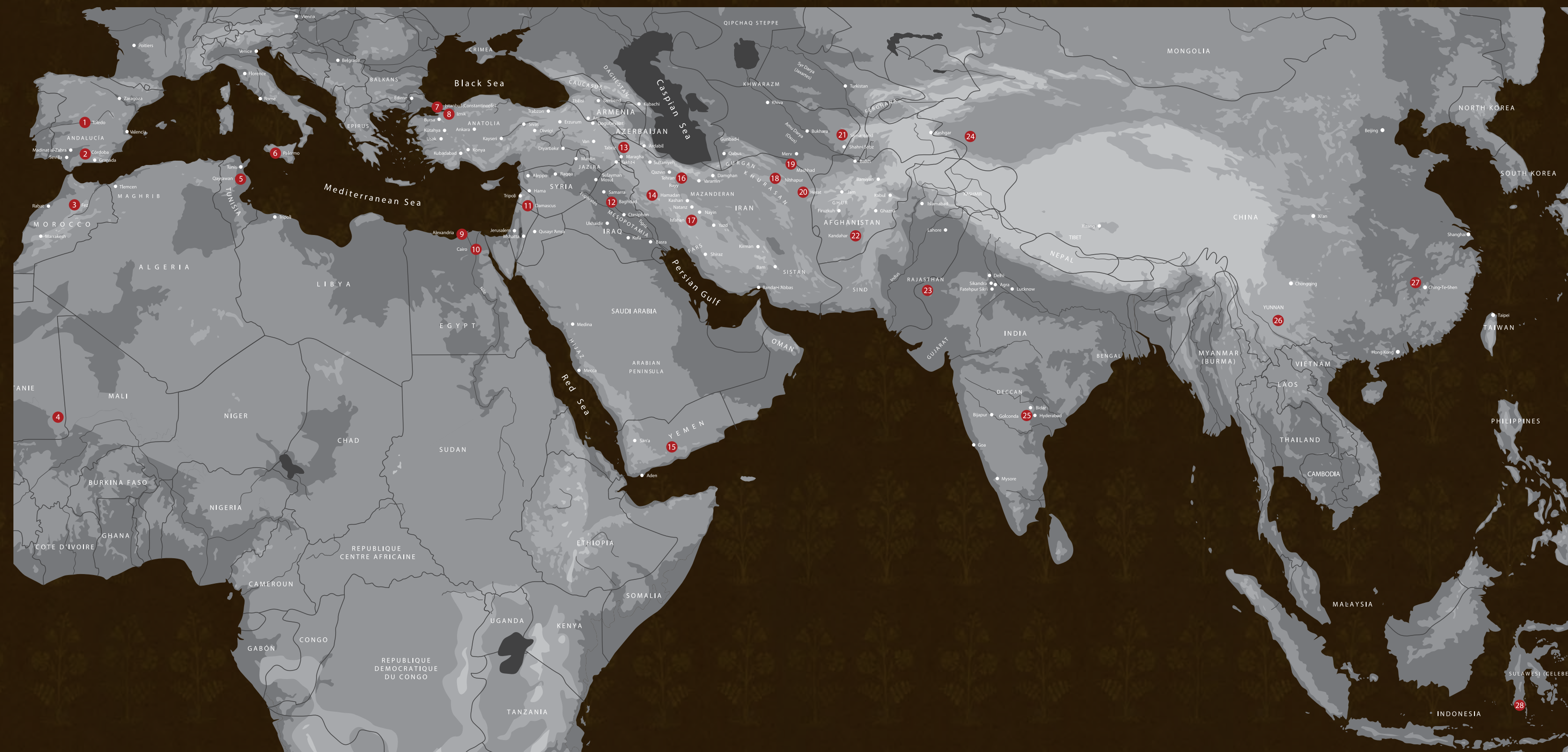
Ultimately, the Islamic conquests helped spread the new religion from its roots in Arabia in all directions. They also opened innumerable doors for the transmission of knowledge, technologies, and culture, much of which became reflected in the art and architecture of the different contexts involved. This is exemplified by the works on view, beginning with the gateway to the exhibition: an extraordinary planispheric astrolabe that bears witness to surviving traces of Islamic culture and scientific knowledge in 14th-century Toledo, long after the Reconquista. The eastern Islamic world is also recognized for its artistic contributions, especially in the figural arts, as exemplified by the stunning illustrated folio from the celebrated Safavid "Tahmasp" Shahnama. While the visual tradition of this region was anchored in Pre-Islamic Sasanian Iran, it incorporated several other religions and cultures coming from Central Asia and the Far East, especially China. Iran's multilayered visual culture moreover inspired the

artistic traditions of other regions, as suggested by the development of Iznik ceramics in the Ottoman Empire and by the art and architecture of Islamic India.

As His Highness the Aga Khan has expressed, the objective of the Aga Khan Museum collection is to showcase works of art that reflect the "geographic, ethnic, linguistic, and religious pluralism of the Islamic world." These visual reflections of the geographies of Islam are a reminder not only of Islam's inherent diversity, but also of the fact that no culture is isolated in itself – on the contrary, just as the works on view are linked by the map appearing underneath them, all cultures are interwoven in countless ways.

Ladan Akbarnia

Agog Kevorkian Associate Curator of Islamic Art
Brooklyn Museum, USA



- 1 Astrolabio
- 2 Candelabro
- 3 Viga con friso caligráfico
- 4 Manuscrito del Corán
- 5 Folio del Corán Azul
- 6 Incesario Scandarun
- 7 Yorgan Yüzü
- 8 Baldosa de Qibla
- 9 Panel con blasón epigráfico
- 10 Jarra
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- 12 Cuatro folios de Dioscórides
- 13 Manuscrito ilustrado
- 14 Viga con inscripción Cúfica
- 15 Manuscrito de Qazvini
- 16 Puertas
- 17 Pintura Camellos
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- 19 Incesario
- 20 Manuscrito disperso
- 21 Manuscrito del Corán
- 22 Plano campamento militar
- 23 Tambura
- 24 Calfán de seda
- 25 Retrato
- 26 Chao Jin Tuji
- 27 Plato
- 28 Manuscrito del Corán

This exhibition is not merely a showcase for beautiful objects produced in the Islamic world, at different points of the compass and at different moments in history. It is something more. All the works in it are material manifestations of a culture, and of a way of understanding the world. Although Islam is a religion, it is also a way of life. It permeates all aspects of the societies in which it develops, all the realms and every hour of man's existence, from dawn to dusk, from cradle to grave. Moreover, this presentation provides a demonstration of the versatility of Islamic art, which is able to convey a message, at times one that is only religious, by adopting different styles and combining – at times capriciously- elements from distinct cultural traditions ranging from the Roman, Persian, Turkish, Chinese, Maghreban and Hindu to the Indochinese. What is surprising is not that it copies these traditions. This would not give it any special merit. Its originality is found in its ability not only to transform what it imitates but to add its own unique personality and turn it, most naturally and without betraying its original cultural tradition, into something Islamic. That is where its genius lies.

It is significant that this very city of Toledo belonged to the Islamic World for a long period. It was part of al-Andalus and, with characteristic naturalness, changed its language, religion, culture and art. Gently. So much so that when European culture came to predominate over that of Asia, the legacy left by Islamic culture became an intrinsic part of its personality. Its imprint was so strong that the minority religious communities -Visigoth Christians, Moslems and Jews- continued to draft their most important documents in Arabic and used identical artistic forms to express distinct ideological content. Few are the cities such as Toledo where, as one strolls through medieval areas- be they sacred or secular, public or private- one cannot help but note the changes in artistic vocabulary. Not even the celebrated cathedral, a jewel in the crown of European culture, could elude the pervasive yet indelible mark of the Islamic world.

Yet, as we zoom in more closely to the objects, we should not allow our contemplation of the pieces in the collection to be de-contextualized, nor should we overlook what is reminiscent of al-Andalus. I am not merely referring to those probably or definitely from the Iberian peninsula - the Almo had wood-den beam, the bronze candelabrum, or the astrolabe - but those, from outside our geographical sphere, which allude to other pieces described in Arab documents that adorned mosques and palaces in al-Andalus. I am referring to the Qur'an manuscript leaf, dyed purple and with gold calligraphy, which is similar if not identical to the blood-spattered leaves in the Caliph Uzman manuscript, the most precious relic in the Aljama Mosque of Cordoba. Also to the bronze birds, that are similar to some of the figures that Caliph Omeya Abd al-Rahman III al-Nasir commissioned to adorn a baptismal font in his home city of Medina Azahara. And, thanks to their special significance, to the leaves in De Materia Medica, by Pedanius Dioscorides. The first copy of this book which arrived in al-Andalus was given as a present (in 949) by the cultured Byzantine emperor, Constantine VII Porfirogenetos, to the sovereign of Cordoba himself and it was translated, for the first time and almost immediately, thanks to the collaboration of an orthodox monk and to the scholar Hasdjad ibn Saprut, prince of the al-Andalus Jews. It is moving to note how a work of art created in Classical Antiquity shifted from the Greek to Arab tradition, thanks to the joint work of scholars of different religions and cultures, giving rise to a series of copies, such as the one presented here, that were then rendered into Latin to the greater glory of the Toledo or Palermo translators.

What we have before us is not merely an exhibition of masterpieces. This exhibition also bears witness to the fact that Toledo belonged to a cultural *koiné*, or lingua franca, between 711 and 1085, and that today, centuries later, this helps us understand the role that Islam played in our culture and our identity.

Fernando Valdés

Professor of Archaeology
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GEOGRAPHIES of ISLAM

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TIMETABLES

Monday to Saturday from 10h to 19h
Sundays from 10h to 15h
Closed 25th of December and 1st of January
Opened every Monday
Continues time

TICKETS

Normal: 3 euros
Reduced: groups prior request, students and over 65 years of age
Free: children under 12 years of age and friends of the Foundation

COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION AND RESERVATION

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GEOGRAPHIES of ISLAM

Islamic artworks from the Aga Khan Museum collection





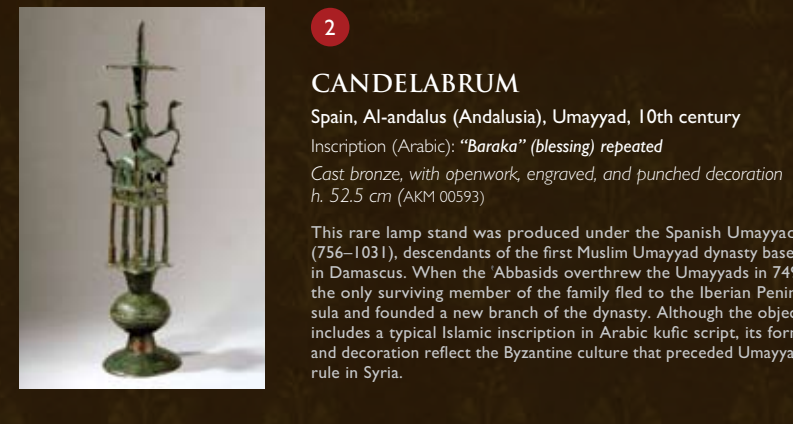
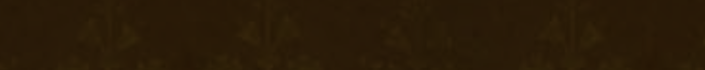
1
ASTROLABE
Spain, probably Toledo, 14th century
Inscription (Arabic): "Its owner [is] the poor Mas ud, confident in Him who should be adored"
Engraved copper alloy, inlaid with silver
Ø 13.5 cm (AKM 00611)

This exceptional object belongs to a group of only five known astrolabes from pre-15th-century Christian Spain; furthermore, it is unique as it is the only one not from Catalonia and is inscribed in Arabic and Hebrew in addition to Latin. Most extant astrolabes with Arabic inscriptions were produced in al-Andalus between the 11th and 14th centuries. The openwork decoration on the rete is in the style of Andalusian and Maghribin instruments. Several errors in the Arabic inscription suggest that its maker might have been a non-Arab, perhaps even a Jew, inspired by the work of his peers in the still-Muslim-controlled areas of the Iberian Peninsula and with limited knowledge of Arabic, perhaps a vernacular strain surviving the Reconquista. Toledo, captured from the Muslims by Alfonso VI of Castile in 1085, is nearly certainly its place of production.



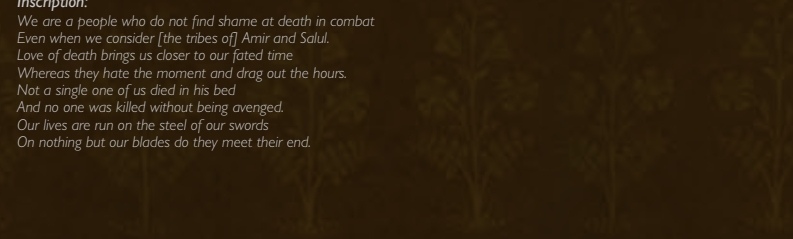
2
CANDELABRUM
Spain, Al-andalus (Andalusia), Umayyad, 10th century
Inscription (Arabic): "Baraka" (blessing) repeated
Cast bronze, with openwork, engraved, and punched decoration
h. 52.5 cm (AKM 00593)

This rare lamp stand was produced under the Spanish Umayyads (756–1031), descendants of the first Muslim Umayyad dynasty based in Damascus. When the Abbassids overtook the Umayyads in 749, the only surviving member of the family fled to the Iberian Peninsula and founded a new branch of the dynasty. Although the object includes a typical Islamic inscription in Arabic kufic script, its form and decoration reflect the Byzantine culture that preceded Umayyad rule in Syria.



6
"SCANDAROOM" INCENSE BURNER
Islamic Mediterranean, probably Sicily, 11th–12th century
Bronze
17 x 25.5 cm (AKM 00587)

Incense burners in the Islamic world were made of metal in a variety of animal shapes, often embellished with pierced decoration to allow pleasant fragrances of oils, frankincense, and ambergris to escape into the air (see #19). Although this pigeon species comes from Iraq, "scandaroom" refers to the Turkish town of Iskenderun, named after Alexander (Iskandar) the Great. It is possible that this object was produced in the late 11th or early 12th century in Arab and Norman-administered Sicily.



3
WOODEN BEAM WITH CALLIGRAPHIC FRIEZE
Morocco, Almohad, 12th–13th century
Pine, carved and painted
30.8 x 31.3 cm (AKM 00631)

In the 12th century, the Almohads conquered Morocco and Spain, creating a fervently religious kingdom that spanned the Maghrib from Libya to the Iberian Peninsula. While the foliated Kufic Arabic inscription appears to be part of a pre-Islamic panegyric and suggests the panel once stood in a palace, the scrolling bifurcated leaves and petals carved beneath the inscription are typical of Almoravid and Almohad designs, which continued under the later Nasrid dynasty in al-Andalus.



5
FOLIO FROM THE BLUE QUR'AN
North Africa, possibly Qayrawan, 9th–10th century
Inscription: Surat al-Baqara (The Cow), 2:148–150
Ink, opaque watercolour, gold, and silver (now oxidized) on blue-dyed parchment
28.6 x 25 cm (AKM 00248)

Only the finest materials were used to adorn the celebrated "Blue Qur'an," the exact origins of which remain a debate. Each folio is filled with angular Kufic script written in gold on indigo-dyed parchment. The unusual colour scheme may have been inspired by Byzantine manuscripts or documents, some of which were executed in silver and gold on similarly dyed parchment. The blue and gold mihrab (niche indicating the proper direction of Muslim prayer) in Córdoba's Great Mosque may also bear some relation to this manuscript.



4
JAR
Egypt, Fatimid, 10th–11th century
Inscription (Arabic): "Blessing," "perfect," and "complete," repeated several times.
Earthenware, painted in kufic on an opaque white glaze
h. 29 cm (AKM 00548)

This rare lustre-painted jar was probably produced in Egypt in the late 10th or early 11th c. based on similar decoration found on fragments excavated at Bahariya. The sherds were discovered in a house containing coins minted under the Fatimid rulers al-Aziz (r. 975–996) and al-Hakim (r. 996–1021). The object's decoration includes interlacing strapwork designs with interstitial scrolls, as well as repeated Arabic inscriptions appearing in a foliated Kufic script on the bottom register.



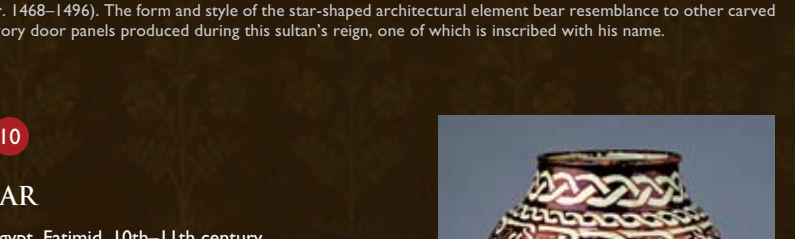
7
YORGAN YÜZÜ (quilt cover)
Turkey, Ottoman, late 17th century
Silk
209 x 137 cm (AKM 00706)

The pattern on this yorgan yuzü (quilt cover) recalls typical 17th-century Ottoman designs on silk and velvet textiles. Whereas earlier patterns include lattice designs enclosing floral motifs, later ones such as this panel show wavy parallel stems or vines, some of which form oval frames around grape clusters or tulips. The designs may also reflect Florentine tastes resulting from cultural exchanges westward.



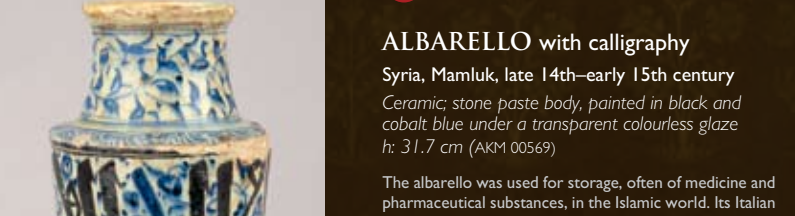
8
QIYLA TILE
Turkey, Ottoman, 17th century
Inscription: Surat al-Imrân (The Family of 'Imrân), 3:96–97
Ceramic stone paste body with polychrome under-glaze painting
52 x 32 cm (AKM 00587)

Decorated in a characteristic 17th-century Ottoman "lanik" palette of white, cobalt blue, turquoise, green, and red, this boldly coloured ceramic tile shows a diagram of the kiwa-covered Ka'ba in Mecca. The Ka'ba, a black granite cube-shaped structure located in the courtyard of the Great Mosque in Mecca, serves as the directional focus for Muslims' prayers as well as the site of their annual pilgrimage, the hajj. On this tile, important locations are labelled to avoid confusion and recall similar images in topographical manuscripts created by the Ottomans, known for their great accuracy in recording conquests and travels. Such a panel would have been situated in an architectural setting such as a mosque or madrasa (Qur'anic school).



9
STAR-SHAPED PANEL WITH TRIPARTITE EPIGRAPHIC BLAZON
Egypt, Mamluk, second half of the 15th century
Inscription (Arabic): "Al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf" aza nasrahu (The Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf, may God make his victory glorious)
Ivory, wood, and metal; carved and mosaic technique
Ø 22 cm (AKM 00703)

While several Mamluk sultans used the epithet al-Malik al-Ashraf, it is possible that the inscription carved into the tripartite blazon on this panel refers to Sultan Qaitbay (r. 1468–1496). The form and style of the star-shaped architectural element bear a resemblance to other carved ivory floor panels produced during this sultan's reign, one of which is inscribed with his name.



11
ALBARELLO with calligraphy
Syria, Mamluk, late 14th–early 15th century
Ceramic stone paste body, painted in black and cobalt blue under a transparent colourless glaze
h. 31.7 cm (AKM 00566)

The albarello was used for storage, often of medicine and pharmaceutical substances, in the Islamic world. Its Italian name is probably a result of its export to Europe, where albarelli were used or admired as luxury objects. This container represents a typical Mamluk albarello in form and colour palette, although cylindrical vessels existed in Iran as early as the 11th or 12th century and the black, cobalt blue, and white colour combination appears on medieval Iranian ceramics inspired by Chinese porcelain. The Arabic inscription in thuluth script might describe the contents that would have once filled the vessel.



12
FOUR FOLIOS FROM A MANUSCRIPT OF THE KHAWWAS AL-ASHJÄR (de materia medica) OF DIOSCORIDES
Eastern Iranian world (Iraq), c. 1200
Ink and opaque watercolour on paper
24 x 16.8 cm (AKM 00001–00004)

This treatise on medicinal plants was written by the Greek physician Dioscorides in the 1st c. and translated to Arabic via Syriac in 9th-century Baghdad. The four present folios belong to a rare dispersed 13th-century Eastern Iranian world (Iraq), c. 1200. This treatise on medicinal plants was written by the Greek physician Dioscorides in the 1st c. and translated to Arabic via Syriac in 9th-century Baghdad. The four present folios belong to a rare dispersed 13th-century Eastern Iranian world (Iraq), c. 1200.



13
"THE FIRST JOUST OF CHAMPIONS: FARIBURZ FIGHTS KULBAD"
Iran, Safavid, c. 1525–35
Folio from an illustrated manuscript of the Shāhnāma (Book of Kings of Firdaws) (d. 1010)
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
47.2 x 32 cm (AKM 00497)

This graphic depiction of a battle between Fariburz and Kulbad comes from the famous Shāhnāma commissioned by Shah Isma'īl I for his son and successor, Shah Tahmasp. The spectacular illustrations in this manuscript—eight others of which belong to the AKM collection—are arguably considered the apogee of Persian painting. Although the story illustrated here is recounted in a brief chapter, most of which appears on the present page, the painting suggests the significance of the episode, painted in the dynamic style inherited from the Turkomans in Tabriz.



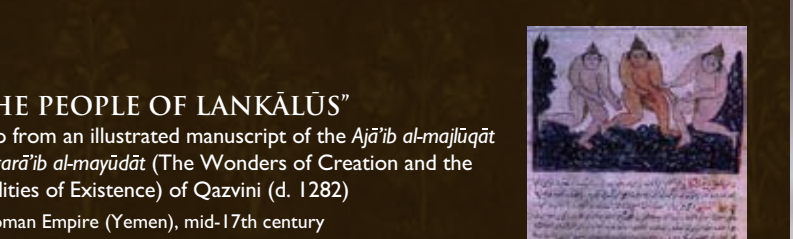
15
"THE PEOPLE OF LANKALÜS"
Folio from an illustrated manuscript of the Ajā'ib al-majma'āt wa garā'ib al-ahwāyāt (The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence) of Qazvini (d. 1282)
Ottoman Empire (Yemen), mid-17th century
Ink and opaque watercolour on paper
29.1 x 20.6 cm (AKM 00398)

This folio belongs to a manuscript of Qazvini's popular cosmography explaining the celestial and earthly worlds. The text on the present page comes from the section on the earth and its phenomena and describes the natives of the Southeast Asian islands, including the people of Lankalus depicted in the illustration. The subject matter depicted here reflects the curiosity about foreign peoples and cultures that accompanied increased maritime trade and resulting cultural exchanges in the Indian Ocean region during this time.



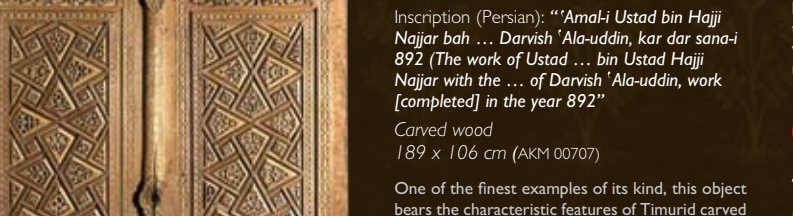
14
BEAM WITH KUFIC INSCRIPTION
Northwest Iran, Seljuq, 12th–13th century
Inscription (Arabic): "Til-mulk (for the ruler)" and "Til-mulk (for the kingdom)" or "al-mulk (sovereignty)," repeated
Carved wood
239 x 20.8 cm (AKM 00630)

The present beam recalls similar carved wooden panels that formed architectural elements for mosque minbars (pulpits) or mihrabs in the Seljuq Iranian world. Foliated kufic inscriptions—containing Qur'anic verses or praising the ruler—were carved into a vegetal background of palmette and split-palmette leaves, often in the bevelled style associated with Samarra in modern Iraq. Many examples were also signed by the artist.



16
PAIR OF DOORS
Iran, Timurid, 892 H/1487 CE
Inscription (Persian): "Amah Ustad bin Haji Najjar bath ... Darvish 'Alu-uddin, kar dar sanah 892 (The work of Ustad ... bin Ustad Haji Najjar with the ... of Darvish 'Alu-uddin, work [completed] in the year 892"
Carved wood
189 x 106 cm (AKM 00707)

One of the finest examples of its kind, this object bears the characteristic features of Timurid carved wooden doors: deep, intricately carved floral designs inherited from the preceding Ilkhanid period and reminiscent of Chinese lacquer wares; geometric patterns formed by the tongue-and-groove technique; plated borders; and panels inscribed with prayers and information about patrons, craftsmen, and dates of production.



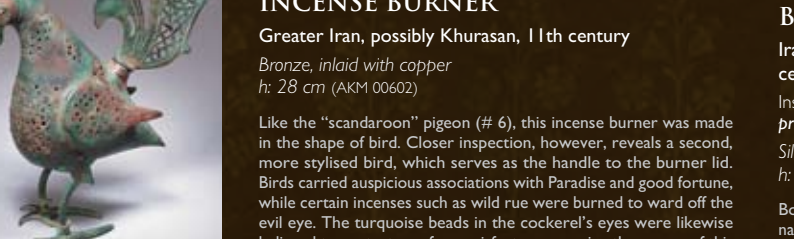
17
"FIGHTING CAMELS"
Iran, Isfahan, Safavid, circa 1630
Single-page painting (tinted drawing) mounted on an album folio
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Page 25.1 x 37.1 cm; image 10.9 x 17 cm (AKM 00075)

The image of two fighting camels is deeply rooted in the nomadic pictorial tradition of Iran, Central Asia, and the Eurasian steppe, the earliest example appearing on a pair of bronze plaques from the mid-first millennium BCE. This tinted drawing exemplifies the survival of this motif into 17th-century Iran, after single-page works and their assembly into albums had become customary even outside the royal court. The dromedary camels depicted here appear more graceful and harmless than fierce the artist seems to have devoted greater attention to the representation of the animals rather than to their state of action, perhaps inspired by the refined and elegant portrayal of camels by the celebrated artist Bihzad (d. 1535) or—as suggested by the emphasis on draftsmanship and texture—by his talented contemporary, Riza 'Abbasi (d. 1635).



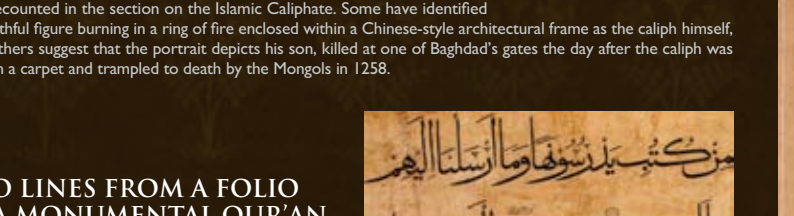
18
CERAMIC DISH
Greater Iran, Khurasan, possibly Nishapur, c. 10th century
Inscription: "Generosity is a disposition of the dwellers of Paradise"
Ceramic earthenware, polychrome slip decoration under a transparent glaze
Ø 32.8 cm (AKM 00541)

This vibrantly decorated dish was most likely produced under the Samanids, who ruled Iran and Central Asia from 819–1005. Like most Samanid ceramic wares, this object contains an Arabic inscription in brushed Kufic of a pious aphorism. It differs from the austere black and white slip-painted epigraphic wares, however, in its organized polychrome decorative scheme, with the inscription framing an interlacing strapwork star in the centre of the dish.



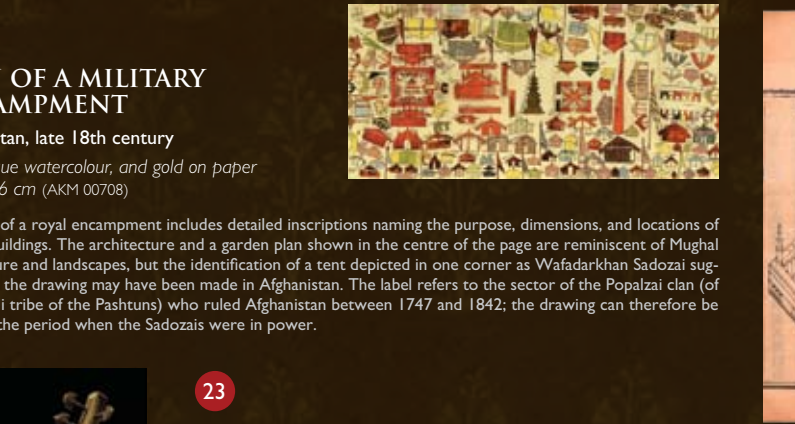
19
COCKEREL-SHAPED INCENSE BURNER
Greater Iran, possibly Khurasan, 11th century
Bronze, inlaid with copper
h. 28 cm (AKM 00602)

Like the "scandaroom" pigeon (# 6), this incense burner was made in the shape of a bird. Closer inspection, however, reveals a second, more stylised bird, which serves as the handle to the burner lid. Birds carried auspicious associations with Paradise and good fortune, while certain incenses such as wild rue were burned to ward off the evil eye. The turquoise beads in the cockerel's eyes were likewise believed to protect one from misfortune, assuring the owner of this object maximum security.



20
"THE CALIPH AL-MUSTA'SIM"
Greater Iran, Herat (Afghanistan), Timurid, circa 1425
Folio from a dispersed illustrated manuscript of the Majma' al-tawārīkh of Hafiz Abu (d. 1430)
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Page 42.9 x 30.2 cm; image 36.3 x 24.6 cm (AKM 00089)

This folio belongs to a well-known dispersed manuscript of the Majma' al-tawārīkh (Collection of Chronicles) commissioned by Shahrukh, the second ruler of the Timurid dynasty (1370–1507). The text covers the general history of the world from Adam through the reign of Shahrukh; its format and several illustrations follow the Ilkhanid historical model established by the Jam'ic al-tawārīkh (Compendium of Chronicles), written by Rashid al-Din (d. 1318). Here Al-Musta'sim's life is recounted in the section on the Islamic Caliphate. Some have identified the youthful figure burning in a ring of fire enclosed within a Chinese-style architectural frame as the caliph himself, while others suggest that the portrait depicts his son, killed at one of Baghdad's gates the day after the caliph was rolled in a carpet and trampled to death by the Mongols in 1258.



21
TWO LINES FROM A FOLIO OF A MONUMENTAL QUR'AN MANUSCRIPT
Central Asia, possibly Samaraqand (Uzbekistan), Timurid, circa 1400
Inscriptions: Surat al-Saba' (The Saba'), 34: 44–45
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
47.3 x 98.5 cm (AKM 00491)

This partial folio belongs to a dispersed giant Qur'an, the pages of which measured 177 x 101 centimetres and included seven lines each of monumental muhaqqaq script. Several folios from the manuscript include inscriptions attributing the copying of the codex to Prince Baysunghur, the bibliophile grandson of Timur, founder of the Timurid Dynasty (1370–1506). Yet it is also possible that Timur himself, known for his megalomaniacal obsession with building massive structures, would have commissioned a Qur'an of such immense proportions.



22
PLAN OF A MILITARY ENCAMPMENT
Afghanistan, late 18th century
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
27.9 x 26.5 cm (AKM 00708)

This plan of a royal encampment includes detailed inscriptions naming the purpose, dimensions, and locations of various buildings. The architecture and a garden plan shown in the centre of the page are reminiscent of Mughal architecture and landscapes, but the identification of a tent depicted in one corner as Wafadar Khan Sadozai suggests that the drawing may have been made in Afghanistan. The label refers to the leader of the Popalzai clan (of the Abdali tribe of the Pashtuns) who ruled Afghanistan between 1747 and 1842; the drawing can therefore be dated to the period when the Sadozais were in power.



23
TAMBURA OR TAMPURA
India, Rajasthan, circa 1800
Teak wood, calabash, metal, and bone
l. 126 cm (AKM 00706)

The long-necked, four-stringed drone lute known as the tambura or tampura is traditional to India and represented widely in the art of that country. This example, which resembles the star (lit. "three strings" in Persian), was probably produced in northern India. It includes a three-part resonator including a gourd or calabash. Both men and women play the tambura, although the men's version usually exceeds 130 centimetres in length.



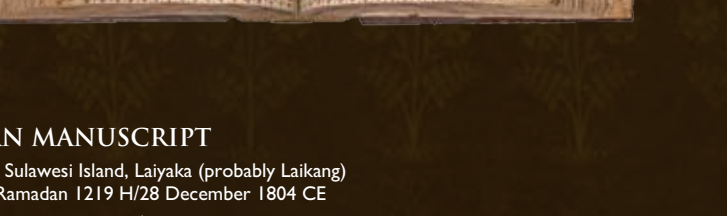
24
SILK ROBE WITH BIRDS
Iran or Central Asia, 8th–11th century or China, 8th century
Inscription (Arabic): "Glory and prosperity, long life to its possessor"
Silk and gold
h. 124 cm (AKM 00676)

Both the design and the material of this extraordinary robe are testament to the cultural transmission that took place along the Silk Road. Confronting animal pairs are common in Ancient Near Eastern and Central Asian art, although they are usually enclosed in roundels, and the pearl-like beads on the birds' wings recall similar Sassanian imagery. The Arabic inscription also encourages a Middle Eastern attribution, but certain motifs, such as the birds' phoenix-like plumage, betray Chinese inspiration. A halo on the garment implies the process of de-composition (Muslims would have been buried in simple white shrouds), suggesting China, known for its silk manufacturing, as another possible place of production for this robe.



25
PORTRAIT OF BAIRAM KHAN
India, Deccan, Golconda?, c. 1710–40
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
Image 22.6 x 15.5 cm (AKM 00458)

Golconda painting in the 16th–17th century reflected an eclectic combining elements of Indian, Turkoman, Shi'ite, and other styles, having been ruled by several different rulers with varying tastes. This portrait, however, was probably painted after the Mughals annexed Golconda or soon after the Asaf Jahs took control of the Deccan in 1724, as it recalls the Mughals' formal manner of depicting stately portraits.



26
CHAO JIN TU JU BY MA FUCHU
China, dated 1861
Woodblock on rice paper
15 x 26.5 cm (AKM 00681)

The Chao Jin Tu Ju is the travelogue of Ma Fuchu (Ma Dexin, 1794–1874), the celebrated Chinese Han scholar of Islam and Sino-Muslim philosophy. Originally from the Yunnan, his travels covered distances from China to Mecca and Cairo as well as the Ottoman Empire. Ma Fuchu also wrote over thirty-five works on metaphysics and history in both Chinese and Arabic. His work attesting to the several cultural networks existing between China and the Islamic world.

