

UNIT 6

From the City to the Steppe: Art Beyond the Royal Courts

Throughout the Islamic world, people from all walks of life bought, commissioned, and collected works of art. Artistic patronage by the non-ruling classes of society—such as merchants, nomads, scholars, and members of the wealthy urban elite—reflect the importance of art in daily life and the universal appeal of beautiful objects. The chapters in this unit explore the art of three disparate societies: medieval Nishapur, a mercantile city along the Silk Road; the nomadic Turkmen people of Central Asia; and the urban elite of eighteenth-century Damascus, a provincial center of the Ottoman empire.



Detail, image 35

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 1

Daily Life in Medieval Nishapur

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- ◆ identify how artifacts excavated in the medieval city of Nishapur (in present-day Iran) provide insight into the customs, activities, and environment of its residents.

Introduction

Nishapur, a city in northeastern Iran, was a prosperous commercial city from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries due to its prime location on the Silk Road. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's excavations at this site in the 1930s and '40s uncovered objects that reflect Nishapur's exposure to the cultures and artistic traditions of many different regions as a result of its key location. Observations and interpretations of these objects by archaeologists, historians, scientists, and art historians provide insight into the daily lives of Nishapur's citizens.



FIG. 36. View of The Metropolitan Museum of Art excavations at Sabz Pushan, Nishapur



FIG. 37. *Dado* wall fragments *in situ*, Tepe Madrasa, Nishapur



FIG. 38. Unearthed vessel at Tepe Madrasa, Nishapur

The City of Nishapur

Nishapur was founded around the third century A.D. By the eighth century, it flourished as a regional capital famous for its commercial and religious life. The city consisted of a walled citadel surrounded by a walled outer city that included a palace, mosque, marketplace, and other public buildings. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, Nishapur had a population of 100,000 to 200,000 people and covered an area of about six and a half square miles.

Nishapur was an important economic center due to its location on a trade route, known as the Silk Road, which extended from China to the Mediterranean Sea. Nishapur produced and traded raw cotton, silk and cotton textiles, turquoise, and earth with healing properties. These were traded throughout the region, bringing the city great prosperity. Invasions and earthquakes in the thirteenth century reduced the once bustling metropolis to ruin. The ruins of Nishapur remained underground until a team of excavators from the Metropolitan Museum arrived in the 1930s (fig. 36).

The Metropolitan Museum's Archaeological Excavations

The Museum's team worked at Nishapur between 1935 and 1940 and returned for a final season in the winter of 1947–48. The most significant finds came from two areas, Sabz Pushan and Tepe Madrasa. In the residential neighborhood of Sabz Pushan, the houses were connected to each other by narrow alleys and had three to four rooms each. Excavated materials from the houses included stucco wall panels, ceramic and metal household goods, cosmetic containers, glass vessels, beads and other items of personal adornment, gaming pieces, and coins (figs. 37, 38). Although archaeologists excavated only a small fraction of the city, their work gives us a sense of its architecture. The everyday objects found in Nishapur provide a glimpse into the daily lives of its inhabitants during the tenth through twelfth centuries.

Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration

10th century

Iran, probably Nishapur

Earthenware; white slip incised and splashed with polychrome glazes under a transparent glaze (*sgraffito* ware);

H. 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (7.3 cm); Diam. 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (26 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.40.137)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This bowl was excavated in Nishapur. The abundance of bowls with this type of decoration found there attests to their popularity. They were likely produced in Nishapur in large numbers.

FUNCTION

Bowls such as this would have been used in Nishapur homes in the tenth century. The craftsmanship and aesthetic appeal of the bowl would likely have made it a prized possession.

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This earthenware bowl has two separate layers of decoration. The top layer consists of translucent splash-color glazes in green, yellow, and purple brown. The layer below was created using so-called *sgraffito*, lines scratched into the clay through the thin coat of white *slip* covering the reddish tan earthenware body. Incised on the rim of the bowl is an alternating series of stylized flowers and other vegetal forms. A lattice pattern decorates the center.

FIG. 39. Ewer, Tang dynasty (618–906), late 7th century; China; earthenware with three-color (*sancai*) glaze; H. 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (28.3 cm); Gift of Stanley Herzman, in memory of Gladys Herzman, 1997 (1997.1.2)

The decoration and color palette of this Chinese ewer bear a strong resemblance to the bowl from Nishapur. It was made during the Tang dynasty, predating the period in which Nishapur was an active production center of ceramics. The two regions were actively engaged in trade, and Chinese splashwares were likely imported into Iran. Chinese ceramic shards found at Nishapur during the Metropolitan Museum's excavations provide evidence of this influence.

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, bowl, exchange, splashware, floral and vegetal ornament, earthenware

CONTEXT

The bowl's green-and-brown splashed-glaze decoration imitates a type of Chinese ceramic known as *sancai* ware (fig. 39). A few shards of Chinese ceramics with green and brown glazes were unearthed during the Museum's excavations at Nishapur, demonstrating the presence of Chinese imports in that city.

Splashwares emulating Chinese pottery were first produced in Abbasid Iraq and were the result of extensive trade in ceramics between China and Iraq. It is likely that the Abbasid ceramics made their way to Nishapur and were another important source of inspiration for the Nishapur splashwares. The incised decorations on the Nishapur splashware, however, were a local innovation not seen in either the Chinese originals or the Abbasid examples.





33. Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration

Bowl with Arabic inscription

Late 10th–11th century

Iran, excavated at Nishapur; probably made in Samarqand
(in present-day Uzbekistan)

Earthenware; white slip with polychrome slip decoration under
transparent glaze; Diam. 14 in. (35.6 cm), H. 4¼ in. (10.8 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1940 (40.170.15)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

The inscription on this bowl reads: “Blessing, prosperity, goodwill, peace, and happiness.” The bowl belongs to a category of pottery that uses inscriptions as the primary decoration. The inscriptions often include blessings or good wishes for the owner, or simple proverbs. Some directly relate to the function of the bowls (such as “eat with appetite”; see image 7). Inscriptions such as these reflect the values and culture of hospitality of the inhabitants of medieval Nishapur.

FUNCTION

The bowl was probably used for serving food, which would have been “blessed” by the good wishes written on the interior.

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The calligraphic text, outlined in white, runs along the interior rim. The words have been carefully arranged and spaced so that the vertical letters at the beginning of each word punctuate the horizontal flow of the text at rhythmic intervals. Between the words are alternating red and black strokes; at the center of the bowl is a large motif of interlacing vegetal designs on a stippled ground.

CONTEXT

Although this bowl was found in Nishapur, the style of the piece—with its interlaced design in the center and red and black lines above the words—suggests that it may have been made in Samarqand (a city on the Silk Road), where many vessels with this type of decoration and color palette have been unearthed. This work is a fine example of the calligraphic decoration popular in Iran in the ninth and tenth centuries. It was found near the center of Nishapur, where experts believe the governor’s palace was located. The buildings uncovered in this area were larger in scale and had thicker walls and more prominent facades than structures found in other neighborhoods. Like the building in which it was found, this bowl is larger and of better quality than many ceramics unearthed in other areas of the city.

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, bowl, exchange, calligraphy (“new style” script), earthenware



34. Bowl with Arabic inscription

Dado panel

10th century

Iran, Nishapur

Stucco; carved; $37\frac{1}{2} \times 92\frac{5}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in. (95.3 x 235 x 8.9 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.40.40)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This carved plaster panel, from one of the houses excavated at Nishapur, provides a sense of how urban residences were decorated in tenth-century Iran.

FUNCTION

This is one of several particularly well-preserved panels that adorned the lower part of the wall (*dado*) in a residential building in Nishapur. In the installation at the Museum, the panels from three separate rooms have been reconfigured in a single space approximately the same shape and dimensions as one of the rooms in the house from which they came (fig. 40).

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The primary decorative element of this panel is a six-petalled flower, repeated three times against a background

of roundels and swirling leaves and *palmettes*. A different abstract vegetal design appears within each petal.

Although the decoration in every panel varies, each derives from the same basic forms.

CONTEXT

The houses and other buildings in Nishapur were decorated with a variety of materials, including carved stucco and wall paintings. While some decoration emphasized abstract motifs, others—such as wall paintings—included figures. Excavations suggest that decoration changed frequently. In a bathhouse, for example, archaeologists discovered fifteen separate layers of painted designs.

The artist or craftsman who made this panel applied a thin layer of stucco (a form of plaster) to the wall, sketched its design on the surface, and then carved it by hand. Originally, panels such as this were painted in bright yellows, reds, and blues to accompany equally colorful murals on the plaster walls above. Once the excavated panels were exposed to air, the colors began to fade.



Fig. 40. *Dado* panels installed in the Metropolitan Museum's galleries, replicating their position in the rooms they originally decorated.

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, wall painting, vegetal ornament, stucco



35. *Dado* panel

36 Pendant

10th century

Iran, Nishapur

Bronze, cast; Diam. $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (2.4 cm), D. $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (0.5 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1940 (40.170.245)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This circular metal pendant is a personal accessory discovered during excavations of Nishapur; like other items from the site, it offers a glimpse into the daily lives of the city's inhabitants.

FUNCTION

Objects like this one were decorated with symbols believed to have magical powers. Because the meaning of these symbols has been lost over time, we can only speculate about their function. We know that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was believed that objects depicting zodiac signs like this pendant provided their owners with protection. This pendant, originally suspended from a chain, was likely worn as a talisman.

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The center of the circular pendant features an image of a lion and a scorpion with three starlike motifs; these figures are surrounded by a square frame that is enhanced by perpendicular lines reminiscent of writing. The figures may represent the zodiac symbols of Leo and Scorpio, which frequently appear on objects from this period.

CONTEXT

The pseudo-writing on the pendant is an important feature. Though illegible, the series of vertical strokes resembles the Arabic phrase known as the *shahada*, which states, "There is no god but God." This phrase has its own talismanic power, as belief in this concept is one of the basic tenets of Islam.

The inclusion of esoteric symbols and images indicates an early date for this pendant; later Islamic talismans usually feature signs with more obviously Islamic connotations, such as quotations from the Qur'an or letters representing the names of God.

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, medieval, daily life, jewelry, talisman, zodiac, bronze



36. Pendant

Chess set

12th century

Iran, Nishapur

Stonepaste, molded and glazed; largest piece (king) H. 2 in.

(5.5 cm), Diam. $2\frac{1}{8}$ in. (4.4 cm); smallest piece (pawn)

H. $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. (3.3 cm), Diam. $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. (2.9 cm)

Pfeiffer Fund, 1971 (1971.193a–ff)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER/FUNCTION

Chess was one of the most popular pastimes in the medieval Islamic world, enjoyed by people from many different echelons of society. Although the chess set was not uncovered during the Museum's excavations, a pawn similar in color and shape to those in this set was excavated at Nishapur.

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

This is one of the oldest extant chess sets and is one pawn short of being complete—it has sixteen turquoise pieces and fifteen dark purple pieces. Each figure is highly abstracted, and corresponds roughly to a piece in the modern chess set. The *shah* (king) and *vizier* (corresponding to the queen) take the form of thrones; the vizier is slightly smaller. To their sides are elephants (bishops in modern sets), comprised of circular bases and flat tops with tusklike protrusions. Nearby are horses (knights), reduced to triangular knobs, and *rukhs* (meaning chariots; rooks in modern sets), featuring inverted wedges atop rectangular bases. The pawns, the smallest pieces in the set, are each made up of a faceted dome crowned by a small knob.

CONTEXT

Chess, which originated in India, reached *Greater Iran* by the seventh century. The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), the Persian national epic, recounts that chess entered Persia through a royal challenge: an Indian ruler sent a chess set to the Persian court with the message that he would pay tribute to the Persian king only if the king figured out the goal of the game (fig. 41). The *Shahnama* also relates a story in which chess was invented as a way to explain to a grieving queen how her son was killed in battle. (See also “The Making of a Persian Royal Manuscript,” page 139.)

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nishapur, daily life, games, figural, stonepaste

This chess set is made of *stonepaste*, an eleventh-century innovation adopted by Iranian potters in the following century. That, paired with the use of turquoise glaze, dates this set to the twelfth century.

OTHER CHESS PIECES FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION

Both abstract and naturalistic pieces were popular in chess sets from the Islamic world. In the Museum's collection, you can find examples of both types. For more naturalistic versions of a *rukhs* piece and an elephant piece, see 1974.207 and 17.190.228, respectively. Other examples of abstract pieces are 1972.9.3 and 67.151.2



FIG. 41. Buzurgmihr Masters the Game of Chess: Folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp (detail), about 1530–35; artist: attributed to ‘Abd al-Vahhab; Iran, Tabriz; opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; entire page: $18\frac{5}{8} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$ in. (47.3 x 31.8 cm); Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.71)



37. Chess set

Lesson Plan: Unit 6, Chapter 1 Daily Life in Medieval Nishapur

FEATURED WORK OF ART

Bowl with green, yellow, and brown splashed decoration (image 33)

10th century

Iran, Nishapur

Earthenware; white slip incised and splashed with polychrome glazes under transparent glaze, (*sgraffito* ware); H. 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (7.3 cm); Diam. 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (26 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.40.137)

SUBJECT AREAS: Visual Arts and World History

GRADE: Middle School and High School

TOPIC/THEME: Art as a Primary Resource

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- ◆ recognize ways works of art reflect medieval Nishapur's status as an important center of trade;
- ◆ use visual evidence to support inferences; and
- ◆ apply an original two-dimensional design to a three-dimensional form (in alternative activity).

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.2 Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.5 Reflecting Upon and Assessing the Characteristics and Merits of Their Work and the Work of Others
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.6 Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

World History

- ◆ NSS-WH.5-12.4 Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300–1000 C.E.

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

MATERIALS: Pencil, paper, map of the Silk Road (see page 23), and images of the featured work of art and three related objects. For the alternative activity, you will also need one recycled (or inexpensive) household

object such as a heavy paper cup, bowl, or plate for each student, as well as paint, a container for water, and brushes of varying size or colored pencils and markers.

QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- ◆ Look closely at the glaze that colors the surface. How might you describe this style of glazing to someone who had never seen it? How might an artist achieve this effect?
- ◆ Turn your attention to the lines incised in the bowl; observe the rim and work your way to the center. What do you notice? What might have inspired these forms?
- ◆ What are some ways the artist has used the incised decoration to complement or emphasize the form of the bowl?

ACTIVITY

SUBJECT AREAS: Visual Arts and World History

DURATION: Approximately 40 minutes

Compare and contrast this featured work of art with the ewer (fig. 39; see **OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION**). Note similarities and differences in the coloring, decoration, and use of materials. While the featured work likely comes from Nishapur, where excavations have uncovered many bowls of this kind, the ewer comes from China. What might your observations suggest about ties between Nishapur (Iran) and China?

Print images of all the related objects included in the lesson. Note when and where each object was created and organize the images in chronological order. What stands out as you look at them in sequence? Consider the various locations in which they were produced (and found). How does this information challenge, support, or expand your initial inferences about connections between Nishapur and other regions? Why?

What are some ways regions may have shared or exchanged goods or ideas during this time period? (See map of the Silk Road, page 23) Read the description for image 33 (and, if possible, use the links throughout this text to the Museum's website) to learn more about each object and ways in which goods and ideas circulated among Nishapur (Iran), Iraq, and China. Consider how, if at all, innovations in technology had an impact on the

ways in which communities around the world share goods and ideas today.

KEY POINTS: Splashware originated in China. Splashwares emulating Chinese pottery were first produced in Iraq during the Abbasid reign (750–1258). Both Chinese and Iraqi splashwares likely influenced artists in Iran.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

SUBJECT AREA: Visual Arts

DURATION: Approximately 90 minutes

Closely observe the relationship between the shape of this bowl and the surface design. Note how the netlike pattern in a circular frame accentuates the flat base, the slightly rounded walls create an illusion of volume, and the curvaceous floral motifs that decorate the interior wrap around the form.

Try creating a surface design for a three-dimensional object that complements or emphasizes its form:

1. Select a recycled or inexpensive household object to decorate (for example, a paper bowl, coffee can, milk jug).
2. If the surface is already decorated, paint it white (or another neutral color) to create a solid ground.
3. Note the various planes of the object (i.e., the base, lip, rim, walls) and sketch several possible designs for each. As you consider the options, reflect on ways each selection will reinforce or complement the shape of the object.
4. Transfer the designs you selected onto the object using a pencil.
5. Share your work and preparatory sketches with a peer. Discuss aspects of the design you feel are most and least successful (and why).
6. Observe the works produced by the rest of your class. Identify one or more strategies that might strengthen an aspect of your design. Revise your work as needed; a quick coat of paint over areas you would like to revisit will create a fresh ground if you have trouble removing your pencil markings.
7. Once you have finalized the design, add color (using colored pencils, markers, or paint) as desired.

RESOURCES

American Museum of Natural History. *Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World*. Online educator's guide. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 2009. <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/traveling-the-silk-road/promos/traveling-the-silk-road-educators-guide>.

Sardar, Marika. "The Metropolitan Museum's Excavations at Nishapur." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nish/hd_nish.htm (originally published October 2001, last revised July 2011).

OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION

RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Fig. 39. Ewer, Tang dynasty (618–906), late 7th century; China; earthenware with three-color (*sancai*) glaze; H. 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (28.3 cm); Gift of Stanley Herzman, in memory of Gladys Herzman, 1997 (1997.1.2)

Fragment of an imported Chinese bowl, late 7th–first half of the 8th century; China; found in Nishapur, Iran; earthenware; applied relief medallion under three-color (*sancai*) glaze; Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.40.274)

Bowl with green splashes, 9th century; Iraq, probably Basra; earthenware; "splash-painted" on opaque white glaze; H. $\frac{5}{16}$ in. (.8 cm), Diam. 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (28.3 cm); Gift of V. Everit Macy, 1930 (30.112.46)

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

Unit 6: Chapter 1 Suggested Readings and Resources

American Museum of Natural History. *Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World*. Online educator's guide. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 2009. <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/traveling-the-silk-road/promos/traveling-the-silk-road-educators-guide>.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *MuseumKids: The Art of Chess at The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Online Museum family guide. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003. <http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-kids/family-guides/the-art-of-chess-at-the-met>.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Panchyk, Richard. *Archaeology for Kids: Uncovering the Mysteries of Our Past*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2001.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL

Sardar, Marika. "The Metropolitan Museum's Excavations at Nishapur." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nish/hd_nish.htm (originally published October 2001, last revised July 2011).

HIGH SCHOOL

The Silk Road Project, Inc. Website. Boston: The Silk Road Project, Inc., 2012. <http://www.silkroadproject.org/tabid/177/default.aspx>.

HIGH SCHOOL

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 1 SOURCES

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. no. 70).

Mackenzie, Colin, and Irving Finkel, eds. *Asian Games: The Art of Contest*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Asia Society, 2004.

Rawson, Jessica, M. Tite, and M. J. Hughes. "The Export of Tang *Sancai* Wares: Some Recent Research." *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 52 (1987–88), pp. 39–61.

Sardar, Marika. "The Metropolitan Museum's Excavations at Nishapur." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nish/hd_nish.htm (originally published October 2001, last revised July 2011).

Wilkinson, Charles K. *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973.

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 2

Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- ◆ understand how a reception room from the house of an affluent family in eighteenth-century Damascus reflects the tastes, interests, and life of the urban elite in a provincial city of the Ottoman empire; and
- ◆ identify key features of this domestic interior and their cultural and artistic significance.

Introduction

The Damascus Room is an early eighteenth-century residential reception chamber (qa'a) from Damascus, a provincial capital of the Ottoman empire. (For more on the art of the Ottoman empire, see “Art and Empire: The Ottoman Court,” page 123.) The space provides a vivid impression of the domestic setting of an affluent Damascus household during this period. Historical sources and travelers’ accounts from the period, as well as the various features of the room itself—such as the painted and gilded woodwork, extensive poetic inscriptions, and inlaid marble floors—shed light on its historical context, its use, and the symbolic significance of many of its decorative elements.

Eighteenth-Century Damascus

During the first half of the sixteenth century, successful military campaigns by the Ottoman empire added new territories to its already vast domain. In 1516, the Ottomans defeated Mamluk forces in Damascus, the provincial capital of southern Syria (which included parts of present-day Israel, Palestine, and Jordan; see map of the Ottoman empire, page 125). By the eighteenth century, Damascus was not only one of the most prosperous commercial cities in the empire, but a center of Islamic scholarship and worship. The population included sizeable Christian and Jewish communities, and the city attracted merchants, scholars, and pilgrims from all over the world.

FIG. 42. Damascus, 1857, Francis Frith (English, 1822–98); albumen silver print from glass negative; David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1966 (66.640.1.46)



Courtyard Houses in Damascus

Within the city walls, eighteenth-century Damascus was densely built (fig. 42). Palatial residences stood alongside more humble dwellings, bathhouses, mausoleums, schools, and places of worship, all within a grid of bustling market streets, narrow alleys, and cul-de-sacs. Courtyard houses, like the one that contained this room, traditionally accommodated an extended family,

FIG. 43. Interior view of a reception chamber (*qa'a*). Plate XLVI in *Architecture arabe; ou Monuments du Kaire, mesurés et dessinés, de 1818 à 1825*, by Pascal Coste (1787–1879). Engraving; 52.5 x 37 cm. New York Public Library, New York



often consisting of three or more generations, as well as domestic servants. Narrow winding entryways to these domestic residences—preceded by plain exterior doors—obscured views of the interior from pedestrians on the busy streets outside. The entrance created a dramatic effect as guests traveled from the simple exterior through a dark and narrow passage, which opened onto an airy, lushly planted courtyard surrounded by living spaces. Windows and balconies often lined the interior walls of the home, rather than the street, enabling its residents to take full advantage of the calm and quiet courtyard within. Foreign travelers frequently recorded their observations in accounts that serve as valuable sources of information about these houses and their surroundings (fig. 43). One nineteenth-century European visitor aptly described an interior courtyard in the dense city as “a gold kernel in a husk of clay.”

The Damascus Room

Dated A.H. 1119 / A.D. 1707

Syria, Damascus

Wood (poplar) with gesso relief, gold and tin leaf, glazes and paint; wood (cypress, poplar, and mulberry), mother-of-pearl, marble and other stones, stucco with glass, plaster ceramic tiles, iron, brass

Gift of The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, 1970 (1970.170)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This reception room sheds light on the interests, aesthetics, and culture of members of the urban elite living in Damascus in the early eighteenth century.

FUNCTION

The reception room served as a place to entertain guests or gather a family for festive meals. A visit to an eighteenth-century Syrian reception room engaged all of the senses. Upon entering the reception room (*qa'a*), visitors would remove their shoes, proceed into the main room, and ascend the high step under the archway to the seating area (*tazar*). Plush carpets covered the marble floor and guests could recline on the low sofa against cushions upholstered in patterned silks and velvets. In the background, one could hear the continuous sound of the gently splashing fountain and chirping birds. At mealtime, the reception room doubled as a dining area. Servants set large trays bearing platters of food on the floor or on low stands as the diners gathered around them. For a special occasion, the host might hire musicians and singers to provide entertainment. It was customary to sprinkle guests with perfumes; incense burners were used to diffuse aromatic smoke. These scents mingled with those of the fragrant blossoms floating in from the courtyard.

The display of objects was integral to the architectural design of a well-appointed reception room in Ottoman Damascus, which invariably included custom-made shelving, niches, and cupboards. From archival sources and historical descriptions by European visitors, we know that the shelves of the antechamber included functional possessions related to hospitality, such as wash basins and jugs, incense burners, and rosewater sprinklers (long-necked bottles with tiny openings to dispense drops of rose-scented water); coffee services (including a coffeepot, cups with holders, and a tray); sherbet services; water pipes; braziers; and candleholders.

In contrast, the shelves of the raised area displayed a range of prized possessions, heirlooms, and recent purchases according to the latest fashions. These reflected the owner's individual tastes and interests and often included ceramics, glass objects, and books. Inventories and descriptions provide evidence that the large cupboards stored textiles and cushions.

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Like others of its kind, this room is divided into two areas: a small entry space on the courtyard level and a raised square seating area. The wall paneling incorporates built-in shelves, cupboards, and shuttered window bays.

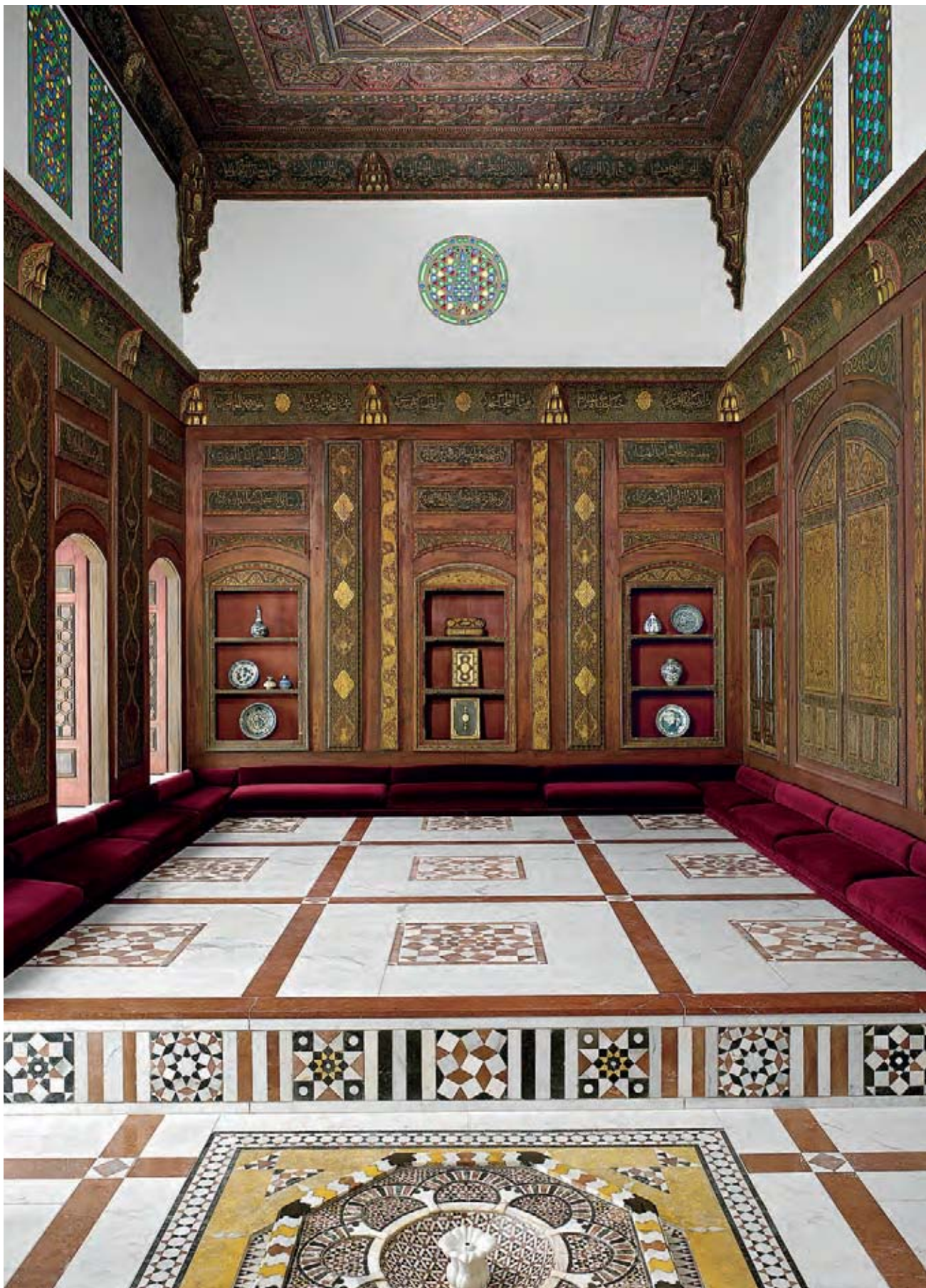
The owner ordered woodwork with densely patterned and richly textured designs produced using a decorative technique characteristic of Ottoman Syria known as *'ajami*. Craftsmen also included gilded *muqarnas*, architectural decorations known throughout the Islamic world (seen here in the upper sections of the woodwork). Craftsmen created some design elements in relief by applying a thick layer of *gesso* to the wood. They highlighted parts of this relief by applying tin or gold leaf, which they painted with tinted glazes to achieve a colorful and radiant glow. By contrast, they executed some elements of the decoration in egg tempera paint on the wood, which provided a matte surface.

In addition to decorative woodwork, calligraphic panels appear prominently on the cornices and wall panels. On the ceiling cornice, twelve verses of a poem complemented by surrounding floral imagery allude to a garden. On a nearby wall cornice, the next fourteen verses of the poem shift from images of nature to praise for the Prophet Muhammad. The final verses of the poem, on the walls of the room, praise the house and the nobility of its owner—"He who built you surpasses the planets and stars in glory."

Above the wood paneling and cornice, intricate stained-glass windows and densely carved woodwork on the ceiling complement white plastered walls.

CONTEXT

The courtyards of Damascus houses typically contained a summer reception space (a three-sided hall that was open to the courtyard) and a winter reception space (an interior chamber built on the north side of the court).



38. The Damascus Room

The Damascus Room (continued)

The location of the winter reception room was strategic; it provided optimal exposure to the sun, which helped heat the room. The Museum's room functioned as a winter reception space.

The decorative designs on the painted woodwork of the room closely reflect the fashions popular in eighteenth-century Istanbul (in modern-day Turkey), the capital of the Ottoman empire. For example, craftsmen incorporated European-inspired elements into the painted woodwork reflecting Ottoman interconnections with Europe. These include motifs featuring flower-filled vases, overflowing fruit bowls, and small landscape

vignettes that appear alongside more traditional Ottoman-style motifs, such as serrated leaf designs (saz), vegetal arabesques, geometric patterns, and calligraphy.

The calligraphic ornament, which plays an important role in Islamic architecture in general, also communicated the owner's literary taste, religious piety, and social affiliation in the context of eighteenth-century Damascus. Although the owner is unnamed, one verse states that the family "traces its root[s] to the most noble of men," a reference to the Prophet Muhammad. This indicates that the owner was probably a member of the local aristocracy, many of whom claimed descent from the Prophet.



Detail, image 38

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Ottoman empire, eighteenth-century Damascus, urban elite, daily life, furnishings, Islam, trade and exchange, calligraphy (*thuluth* script), architecture, wood, marble, stucco, ceramic, iron, brass, glass



Detail, image 38

Lesson Plan: Unit 6, Chapter 2 Domestic Life in Eighteenth-Century Damascus

FEATURED WORK OF ART

The Damascus Room (image 38)

Dated A.H. 1119/A.D. 1707

Syria, Damascus

Wood (poplar) with gesso relief, gold and tin leaf, glazes and paint; wood (cypress, poplar, and mulberry), mother-of-pearl, marble and other stones, stucco with glass, plaster ceramic tiles, iron, brass; H. 22 ft. ½ in. x 16 ft. 8½ in. (671.6 x 509.2 cm), D. from inside front entrance to back wall 26 ft. 4¾ in. (804.2 cm)

Gift of The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, 1970 (1970.170)

SUBJECT AREAS: Visual Arts and World History

GRADES: Middle School and High School

TOPIC/THEME: Identity

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- ◆ understand how a reception room from the house of an affluent family in eighteenth-century Damascus reflects the tastes, interests, and life of the urban elite in a provincial city of the Ottoman empire; and
- ◆ recognize ways interiors from different time periods and places (including their own) reflect the personal tastes, interests, and values of their inhabitants.

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding 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.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
- ◆ W.CCR.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation

ACTIVITY SETTING: Classroom or Museum

MATERIALS: Computer with Internet access ideal, but not required. For the alternative activity, you will also need paper, pencils, markers, poster board, magazines, glue, and fabric swatches.

QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- ◆ What are some ways your family entertains guests when they visit your home? What types of activities might take place in a room like this? How is this room, reflective of life in eighteenth-century Damascus, similar to or different from the place you use to entertain guests?
- ◆ As a prosperous commercial center and hub of Islamic scholarship and worship, Damascus attracted merchants, scholars, and pilgrims from all over the world. What objects or details in this room reflect these international influences? What do you see that makes you say that?
- ◆ Large, luxurious residences containing rooms like this stood alongside more humble dwellings, bathhouses, mausoleums, schools, and places of worship on a grid of bustling streets in Ottoman Damascus. Watch the video simulating the path used to enter such a home (see **RESOURCES**). What advantages might this design offer? Why might someone create such a plain exterior for such an elegant home?
- ◆ Rooms often convey information about the tastes, interests, and values of their inhabitants. What might you infer about the owner of a room such as this?

ACTIVITY

SUBJECT AREAS: Visual Arts and World History

DURATION: Approximately 30 minutes

Imagine someone you never met took a tour of your home. What might they infer about your tastes, interests, hobbies, personality, etc.? Why?

Explore ways the materials, ornamentation, layout, and furnishings employed in rooms from different places and moments in history (see **SPACES IN THE MUSEUM**) reflect the tastes, interests, and values of their times. Compare your inferences with the information provided on the Museum’s website; to learn more about the contents of each room select images of the gallery highlights at the bottom of each web page.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

SUBJECT AREA: Visual Arts

DURATION: Approximately 120 minutes

Design an entertainment room for a classmate that supports his or her tastes and lifestyle.

1. Interview a classmate to learn more about their interests, hobbies, and tastes; you will be designing an entertainment room to meet their needs. Work with your “client” to identify the various functions and activities the space will support and the message they hope to convey to their guests through the design. Make sure that you have a clear picture of their priorities before you end the meeting.
2. Develop three sketches for the floor plan and present them to your client. Discuss how each design would meet their needs. You will need final approval from the client to proceed with one of the designs; this may require making a few revisions on the spot.
3. Once the client approves your plan, consider how you might furnish and decorate the room based on the information you gathered during your initial meeting. Use magazines, newspapers, websites, and other such sources to gather inspiration for the furniture, wall colors, lighting, and other decoration. Create a presentation board for your client including a sketch or collage of the furnished interior, any photos or visuals that inspired your design, and fabric swatches.
4. Present your design to the client. Listen closely to his or her feedback and revise as necessary.
5. Share the final design with your class along with a profile of your client and their needs.

RESOURCES

Daskalakis Mathews, Annie-Christine. “A Room of ‘Splendor and Generosity’ from Ottoman Damascus.” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997), pp. 111–39.

Kenney, Ellen. “The Damascus Room.” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dama/hd_dama.htm (October 2011). (The video mentioned under “Questions for Viewing” is located about halfway down the page.)

SPACES IN THE MUSEUM RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Hôtel de Varengeville Room, French Decorative Arts
<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/galleries/european-sculpture-and-decorative-arts/525>

Rococo Revival Parlor, The American Wing
<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/galleries/the-american-wing/739>

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

Unit 6: Chapter 2 Suggested Readings and Resources

Burns, Ross. *Damascus: A History*. London: Routledge, 2009.

HIGH SCHOOL

Daskalakis Mathews, Annie-Christine. "A Room of 'Splendor and Generosity' from Ottoman Damascus." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997), pp. 111–39.

HIGH SCHOOL

Keenan, Brigid. *Damascus: Hidden Treasures of the Old City*. Photographs by Tim Beddow. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

HIGH SCHOOL

Contains many color photographs and is especially useful for contextualizing images of Damascus courtyards and buildings.

Kenney, Ellen. "The Damascus Room." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dama/hd_dama.htm (October 2011).

HIGH SCHOOL

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Conserving the Damascus Room at The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Video. 3 min.

New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.

Go to www.youtube.com/user/metmuseum and search for "Conserving the Damascus Room."

"Reception Room (Qa'a) [Damascus, Syria] (1970.170)."

In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1970.170> (October 2011).

HIGH SCHOOL

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 2 SOURCES

Baumeister, Mechthild, Beth Edelstein, Adriana Rizzo, Arianna Gambirasi, Timothy Hayes, Roos Keppler, and Julia Schultz.

"A Splendid Welcome to the 'House of Praises, Glorious Deeds and Magnanimity.'" In *Conservation and the Eastern Mediterranean: Contributions to the 2010 IIC Congress, Istanbul*, pp. 126–33. Istanbul: International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2010.

Burns, Ross. *Damascus: A History*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Daskalakis Mathews, Annie-Christine. "A Room of 'Splendor and Generosity' from Ottoman Damascus." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997), pp. 111–39.

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. no. 238).

Grehan, James. *Everyday Life @ Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.

Kenney, Ellen. "The Damascus Room." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dama/hd_dama.htm (October 2011).

"Reception Room (Qa'a) [Damascus, Syria] (1970.170)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1970.170> (October 2011).

Weber, Stefan. *Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation, 1808–1918*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2009.

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 3

The Nomads of Central Asia: Turkmen Traditions

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- ◆ identify ways the art of the Turkmen people of Central Asia reflects nomadic life; and
- ◆ understand the functional and symbolic role objects played in their lives.

Introduction

The history of Central Asia presents a constant political and cultural interplay between nomadic and settled peoples. Art museums have rarely displayed the material culture of nomadic peoples, even though their traditions exerted a powerful influence on art and culture. There were many tribal groups in Central Asia, and the Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs, among others, all have rich artistic traditions. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a particularly strong collection of Turkmen textiles and jewelry; an exploration of these everyday artworks can help us understand the lives and traditions of the Turkmen people.

The art of the Turkmen nomads serves specific practical purposes. Some works marked important life events, such as the ceremonies surrounding birth or marriage. Others were destined for use in portable dwellings or were bartered to townspeople for metal goods, such as dye pots or weapons. Turkmen artists are known for their skills in weaving carpets—largely the work of women artists—and making silver jewelry, which was the work of male artists.

Who Are the Turkmen?

The Turkmen art discussed in this chapter dates from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and the way of life described here pertains to the Turkmen who lived during that period. The Turkmen have a long history in Central Asia, but little is known about their early history because they did not keep written records. Although the Central Asian Turkmen still exist and some still live nomadic lives, most have permanently settled in and around the country of Turkmenistan. The Turkmen were historically pastoral nomads and herders of sheep. The people known as Turkmen are in fact made up of more than two dozen major tribal groups, and were documented as living in Central Asia as early as the ninth century. With the advent of Islam in Central Asia, the Turkmen people converted, combining Sunni Islam with elements of their pre-Islamic faith, known broadly as Shamanism.

For most of their history the Central Asian Turkmen were politically independent, largely existing outside the control of ruling dynasties. Despite this, the Turkmen played a significant role in shaping the cultural, political, and economic landscape of Central Asia. Turkmen herdsmen frequently provided transport and security for the caravans traveling from one city to another with valuable merchandise. Meat, cheese, wool, and leather from the Turkmen flocks found their way to towns and cities, and prized Turkmen horses were traded across Central Asia. The Turkmen were also warriors and occasionally plundered other areas for supplies and trophies.

The Nomadic Way of Life

Because the livelihood of the Turkmen depended on their livestock—including sheep, goats, camels, and horses—year-round access to pastures was essential. Every Turkmen tribe had its own pattern of migration and its own preferred winter and summer pastures and springs or oases for watering flocks. This way of life is called pastoral nomadism. It allowed tribal groups that depended on livestock to move where their flocks could graze as the seasons changed. To support this way of life, all their possessions had to be easily portable. Camels were the favored method of transportation because they could traverse rough terrains, carry heavy loads, and subsist on very little water.

The Dwelling

In addition to livestock, the most important Turkmen family possession was the housing unit: a fabric-covered domed tent fashioned from slender wooden poles that were tied together with rope each time it was erected. The dome of the wooden frame was covered with large, thick slabs of felt that were secured with fabric bands. The felt allowed for ventilation and protection from water during rare rainstorms.

The primary furnishing of the tent was a large carpet (known as a main carpet) that covered most of the floor, though less affluent families may have used felt floor coverings. Additional carpets served as doors and exterior decoration. The Turkmen hung storage bags filled with clothing, cooking utensils, bread, and tent pegs on the walls. The faces of these bags were woven in warm colors and elaborate patterns incorporating abstracted floral motifs, called *gul* (fig. 44), which are particular to each tribe and tribal subgroup. These textiles served both functional and decorative purposes in the Turkmen dwelling (fig. 45).

FIG. 44. Comparison of the Arabatchi (detail, image 39) and Salor (detail, 1974.149.46) *guls* in the Museum's collection

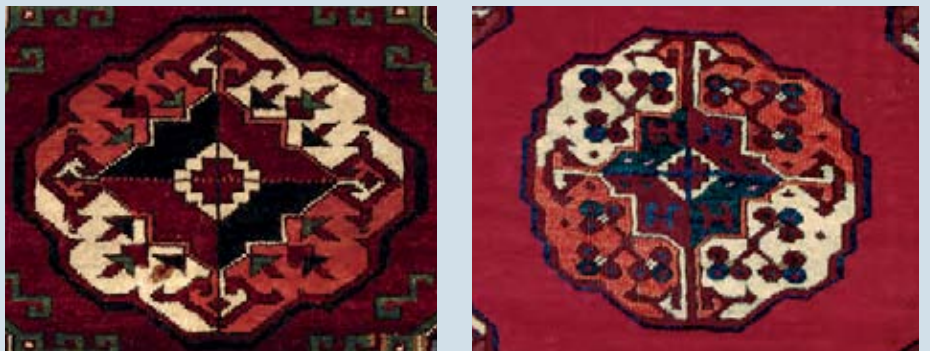


FIG. 45. A Turkmen family, about 1910–15





Weaving

The tradition of Turkmen weaving, dating back centuries, was a universally female practice and constituted a major part of women's contribution to tribal cultural and economic life. Weaving also played an important role in the socialization process; young women learned their art from their mothers and older sisters. By the time a girl was considered old enough to marry, often shortly before she turned twenty, she was already an experienced weaver. Women created many items for a dowry or as wedding decorations, such as the tasseled trappings (*asmalyk*) designed to decorate the camel that carried a woman from her father's tent to that of her new husband.

Jewelry Making

Unlike the women in the tribe who wove textiles, men made jewelry. The process required fire, chasing tools made of hardened steel, and an understanding of techniques for shaping and decorating silver. Although metalworking was a logistical challenge for those living a nomadic lifestyle, the Turkmen excelled in this medium.

In Turkmen society, jewelry served several functions. Its precious metal (silver) and semi-precious stones (carnelian was the favored gem) served as a tangible and convertible form of wealth, which in hard times could be sold or pawned to help the tribe or family. Jewelry was also a form of conspicuous consumption and an indication of status that proclaimed the wealth and prosperity of its wearer. Equally important in traditional Turkmen society was the apotropaic, or protective, power ascribed to jewelry—shiny silver, bright red or blue stones, and tinkling pendants were thought to protect against the malign influence of evil and envious spirits. Girls wore jewelry from an early age; it was thought to promote fertility and good health, and was given as gifts on important occasions, such as religious holidays and celebrations of rites of passage.

Detail, image 39

Storage bag faces

Early 18th–19th century

Central Asia, probably present-day Turkmenistan,

Arabatchi tribe

Wool (warp, weft, and pile), cotton (weft); asymmetrically

knotted pile; 29½ x 54½ in. (74.9 x 138.4 cm)

The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922

(22.100.40a,b)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

Like many Turkmen objects, this textile combines functionality and portability with striking decoration.

FUNCTION

Storage bags added to the comfort and beauty of the tents in which the Turkmen lived. The bag was hung from the interior structure of the tent and served as a portable wardrobe or cupboard.

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

Woven in woolen pile, the design consists of row upon row of tiny knots of wool yarn tied to a woolen foundation. Small quartered medallions, whose design is unique to each Turkmen tribe, rest on a grid formed by small octagons with green knotted extensions. The dyes used to color the wool are all traditional; some were bought in the marketplace (indigo) and some were harvested locally (madder). A variety of warm reds and reddish browns, obtained from madder root, dominate the color palette.

CONTEXT

The motifs decorating the field of these storage bag (*chupal*) faces are called *gul* (fig. 44), and their design is unique to the Arabatchi subgroup of Turkmen nomads. Each Turkmen tribe had their own individual *gul* that they used to decorate carpets and bags. This makes it possible to identify the tribal affiliation of the maker of a storage bag like this. Textiles were traditionally woven by women and furnished Turkmen tents; carpets covered floors and entryways, while smaller rugs were incorporated into bags of various sizes to hold a range of goods, architectural decoration, and animal trappings.

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nomads, Turkmen, daily life, visual identity, portable furnishings, weaving, wool, cotton



39. Storage bag face

40 Amulet

Late 19th–early 20th century

Present-day Uzbekistan, Karakalpak tribe

Silver, fire gilded with false granulation and twisted wire and beaded wire decoration, gilded and silver appliquéés, chain-link and cone-shaped pendants with slightly domed and cabochon-cut carnelians and turquoise beads; 9½ x 10½ in. (24.1 x 26.7 cm)

Gift of Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf, 2008 (2008.579.12)

LINK TO THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER

This amulet combines symbolic meaning, exquisite craftsmanship, and precious materials to create a wearable and portable object of both monetary value and talismanic power.

FUNCTION

Turkmen jewelry was not only decorative; it also was thought to have protective properties. This amulet, worn as a chest pendant, was designed to offer the wearer protection. The central hollow cylinder, which opens on either side, would have held a rolled paper scroll containing blessings, passages from the Qur'an, or prayers. The gentle sound produced by the many dangling elements was believed to ward off evil spirits.

The talismanic function of the amulet illustrates the Turkmen tribes' blending of pre-Islamic customs and beliefs with the Muslim faith.

DESCRIPTION/VISUAL ANALYSIS

The size and weight of this amulet contribute to its dignified appearance. The body is made of silver, which was gilded for a multicolored effect. Harmoniously placed throughout are orange-brown carnelian stones, which were widely prized for their protective properties. Tiny bits of turquoise provide blue accents. The solidity of the upper section is balanced by the hanging pendants extending below.

CONTEXT

Though men made Turkmen jewelry, most was worn by women. Jewelry indicated a woman's wealth, tribal affiliation, and social and marital status; one could tell if a woman was a young girl, newlywed, or long-married just by looking at her jewelry. Jewelry was often made of high-quality silver and there are documented cases of women selling their jewelry for the tribe in times of dire need.

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

Nomads, Turkmen, daily life, jewelry, talisman, silver, precious stones



40. Amulet

Lesson Plan: Unit 6, Chapter 3 The Nomads of Central Asia: Turkmen Traditions

FEATURED WORK OF ART

Storage bag face (image 39)

Early 19th century

Central Asia, probably present-day Turkmenistan

Wool (warp, weft, and pile), cotton (weft);
asymmetrically knotted pile; 29½ x 54½ in.
(74.9 x 138.4 cm)

The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard,
1922 (22.100.40a,b)

SUBJECT AREAS: Visual Arts and World History

GRADE: Elementary

TOPIC/THEME: Art as a Primary Resource

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- ◆ identify ways art of the Turkmen people of Central Asia reflects nomadic life; and
- ◆ understand the functional and symbolic role objects play in their lives.

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Visual Arts

- ◆ NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding 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
- ◆ NSS-WH.5-12.7 Era 7: An Age of Revolutions, 1750–1914

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

ACTIVITY SETTING: Classroom

MATERIALS: Graphite, colored pencils, markers, paper for sketching, at least three 5 x 7-inch note cards per student, a hole punch, one skein of yarn, and scissors

QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

- ◆ The Turkmen nomads of the eighteenth to early twentieth century moved throughout the year to ensure their livestock had pastures to graze and water to drink. What might you enjoy about this lifestyle? What, if any, drawbacks might a nomadic lifestyle present?
- ◆ As nomads who moved with herds of sheep throughout the year, the Turkmen had easy access to wool, which they used to make a large range of everyday items, from portable furnishings to animal trappings. What goods or products does your community make out of wool?
- ◆ What natural resources are available where you live? How do they support your daily life?
- ◆ Imagine creating a wool bag like this. What steps might be involved? What skills or qualities might someone need to create such a bag? What special skills are valued in your community?
- ◆ Bags like this were hung inside the Turkmen dwelling, where they were used for storage. Look closely at the photograph of a Turkmen interior (fig. 47). What other goods furnish this home? If you could only keep what you could carry, what items would you choose? Why?

ACTIVITY

SUBJECT AREAS: Visual Arts and World History

DURATION: 120 minutes

Small quartered medallions (*guls*), such as the one on this bag, convey the identity of each Turkmen tribe. Although Turkmen *guls* are similar, each is unique. Compare and contrast the *guls* featured on this bag with other Turkmen *guls* (fig. 46). (You may also refer to the flag of Turkmenistan, which features the five distinct *guls* of the five main tribes.) What do the designs share in common? What makes each unique?

What shared interests, beliefs, or ties bring people together in your community? What visual cues, if any, convey membership in each group? Design a quartered medallion for a group you belong to (your family, your class at school, a club, etc.). Consider how the colors you select, shapes you choose, and type of line you use will best express key qualities of this group. If you are a member of swim team, for example, instead of focusing

on water or swimsuits, think of ways line might show fluidity, speed, or strength. Sketch four to five possible designs for your medallion and present them, along with a written or verbal description of your decision-making process, to a peer. Create three different versions of the design he or she identified as the strongest, each on a separate 5 x 7-inch note card. (Make the image as large as possible on the card.) Select your favorite medallion and add color with markers or colored pencils. Next, cut out the design and punch a hole at the top. Thread a piece of yarn through the hole and tie the ends together to create a necklace (make sure the loop of yarn is big enough to fit over your head). When everyone is wearing his or her necklace, look closely at the medallions and form groups based on similarities in subject or design. Discuss the features or qualities each “community” has in common and present your findings to the rest of the class.



FIG. 46. Comparison of the Arabatchi (detail, image 39) and Salor (detail, 1974.149.46) *guls* in the Museum’s collection



FIG. 47. A Turkmen family, about 1910–15

RESOURCES

Department of Islamic Art. “Turkmen Jewelry.” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/turk/hd_turk.htm (August 2011).

Diba, Layla S. *Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.

Mackie, Louise W., and Jon Thompson. *Turkmen, Tribal Carpets and Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 1980.

OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM’S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Robe, first half of the 19th century or earlier; Turkmenistan; silk and cotton (lining only) with embroidery; L. 47¾ in. (121.3 cm), W. 89½ in. (227.3 cm); Purchase, Hajji Baba Club and The Page and Otto Marx Jr. Foundation Gifts, in memory of Newton Foster, 1999 (1999.141)

Tent door hanging (*ensi*), early 19th century; Central Asia, Turkoman/Saryk; wool, cotton; 74 x 54 in. (188 x 137.2 cm); The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.42)

Image 40. Amulet, late 19th–early 20th century; present-day Uzbekistan; silver, fire gilded with false granulation and twisted wire and beaded wire decoration, gilded and silver appliqués, chain-link and cone-shaped pendants with slightly domed and cabochon-cut carnelians and turquoise beads; 9½ x 10½ in. (24.1 x 26.7 cm); Gift of Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf, 2008 (2008.579.12)

Camel trapping, 19th century; Turkmenistan; wool embroidered with silk; 26¾ x 57½ in. (67.95 x 146.05 cm); Gift of Irma B. Wilkinson, in memory of Charles K. Wilkinson, 1989 (1989.383)

Tent door surround, 19th century; Central Asia, Turkmenistan; wool, goat’s hair; 52¹⁵⁄₁₆ x 51 in. (134.5 x 129.5 cm); The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.37)

Fragment of a storage bag, first half of the 19th century; Central Asia, Turkmenistan; wool (warp and weft), cotton (weft and pile), wool (pile), silk (pile); asymmetrically knotted pile; 32½ x 49¾ in. (82.5 x 125 cm); The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.43)

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

Unit 6: Chapter 3 Suggested Readings and Resources

Diba, Layla S. *Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.

HIGH SCHOOL

A comprehensive introduction to Turkmen jewelry with detailed color photographs.

Grass: A Nation's Battle for Survival. DVD. 71 min. Harrington Park, N.J.: Milestone Films, 1992.

A classic silent documentary film made in the 1920s that follows the nomadic Bakhtiari people of Iran on their annual migration. These are not Turkmen nomads, but the documentary provides a good general picture of nomadic life.

Mackie, Louise W., and Jon Thompson. *Turkmen, Tribal Carpets and Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 2008.

HIGH SCHOOL

Major, John S., Joan Barnatt, and John Bertles. *Silk Road Encounters Education Kit*. Providence, R.I.: Asia Society and The Silk Road Project, Inc., 2001. Online version: <http://www.silkroadproject.org/Education/Resources/SilkRoadEncounters/tabid/339/Default.aspx>.

See especially chapter 3 of the Teacher's Guide, "Trading in the Silk Road Cities."

Thompson, Jon. *Oriental Carpets: From the Tents, Cottages and Workshops of Asia*. New York: Dutton, 1988.

MIDDLE SCHOOL; HIGH SCHOOL

A broad introduction to carpet weaving in the Islamic world, featuring contextual photographs of nomadic life, information about how textiles are made, and a full chapter on nomadic weaving.

UNIT 6: CHAPTER 3 SOURCES

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