At the Crossroads

Spanning 4,000 years of history, the works of art in this gallery represent the many distinctive yet interconnected cultures of the Middle East.

The topographically diverse area that encompasses the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and the mountains of the Caucasus gave birth to some of the most sophisticated and dynamic societies in history. Over the course of centuries, war and colonization resulted in the annihilation of some cultures; others were assimilated into those of occupying rulers. Trade and travel along extensive and well-established networks disseminated technologies, religious beliefs, and artistic traditions, transforming cultures and societies throughout the region.

What do “BCE” and “CE” mean?

BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) refer to the same time periods as the more traditional BC (Before Christ) and AD (“Anno Domini,” which means “The Year of our Lord”).

In today’s global society, constant interaction between people of all religious beliefs requires a shared, or common, way of reckoning time. Although the terms BCE and CE have their origins in the Christian calendar, they are now widely used by people of many faiths and cultures.

For this reason, the Memorial Art Gallery has adopted BCE and CE for use in its galleries.
The Tethys Mosaic From Daphne

This mosaic depicting the head of Tethys, a Greek goddess of the sea, was discovered in 1939 in the ruins of Daphne, a wealthy suburb of Antioch.

Tethys may have been a special patron of Antioch, a wealthy and diverse seaside city located in Syria but founded by settlers from a variety of nations. Antioch’s central location on the coast of the Mediterranean, easily reached from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, made it a crossroads of cultures, religions, and languages.

Antioch-on-the-Orontes

Seleucus I, who had been one of Alexander the Great’s generals, founded Antioch on the Orontes River around 300 BCE. Settled by Macedonians, Athenians, and Jews, it maintained its reputation as a sophisticated and multi-ethnic city for centuries. At its peak, Antioch was the third largest city in the world, behind only Rome and Alexandria.

Rome annexed Antioch in 64 BCE and made it the Syrian provincial capital. Despite a sequence of political upheavals and repeated catastrophic earthquakes, Antioch and its suburbs remained luxuriant and lively, drawing from the best of the eastern and western worlds.

Tethys

The goddess Tethys, a figure from Greek legend, was also revered by the Roman citizens of Antioch. Born of Gaea, the earth deity, and Uranus, the god of the sky, Tethys was the wife of the sea god Oceanus, whose mythical river encircled the earth. She controlled the distribution of water throughout the streams of the world. She is often depicted with wings on her brow, possibly representing the winds that drove rainclouds.
The Tethys Mosaic From Daphne, con’t

Finding the Tethys Mosaic:

In 1939, an archaeological excavation in the area of Antioch uncovered the Tethys mosaic. It had been part of a floor in an opulent Roman-era villa in the luxurious resort town of Daphne. This mosaic was one of more than three hundred mosaic pavements discovered in the vicinity. The mosaics featured scenes of the gods, animals including fish and birds, and repeating decorative ornament.

The Memorial Art Gallery purchased this mosaic from Princeton University, one of seven institutions participating in the project. The excavations ended soon thereafter, as World War II destabilized the region. The province of Hatay, which includes Antioch and Daphne, is now part of northern Turkey.

Mosaics

Mosaics are designs made from tesserae, small pieces of colored stone or glass, embedded into a flat, prepared surface of damp concrete-like material. Although mosaics were first made before 1500 BCE, the Romans elevated the Greek art of mosaic, creating intricate patterns to cover floors of private homes as well as public buildings throughout the Empire.

Seleucus I, the founder of Antioch, commissioned the sculptor Eutychides to create a colossal bronze statue of Tyche, the Greek goddess of fortune. Tyche’s mural crown depicting city walls and towers identified her as the patron of Antioch and the bringer of its fortunes. Eutychides’ statue sat just inside the city walls, and became famous throughout the region due to the widespread distribution of copies like this sculpture from the collection of the Memorial Art Gallery.
Art Across Cultures

The works in this case represent the unique histories and artistic traditions of Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures and their confluence with those of Egypt, Asia, and the Mediterranean World.

These diverse cultures were linked through trade, travel, military conquests, and religious beliefs that spread throughout and beyond the region over the course of 4,000 years. As empires ebbed and flowed, artists and craftspeople responded to past traditions as well as those newly imported. The works they created reflect the transformative environment of the world at the crossroads between East and West.

The Fertile Goddess

Figures of nude females were among the most common small-scale sculptures created throughout the ancient world.

Archaeologists suggest several functions for these types of sculptures, which have been found in domestic settings as well as temples and tombs. The common emphasis on breasts and belly—the two great symbols of female fertility—suggest that they were used as votives, or offerings, to goddesses of fruitfulness and plenty. As symbols of the cycle of the seasons and the bounty of the harvest, the figures would have been as important to men as to women. Other uses might have been as protective talismans or ritual objects for working magic.

**Protome**, 450—425 BCE
Greek
Molded terracotta, polychromy; 88.5

A *protome* is a hollow-backed sculpture, formed by pressing a single slab of clay into a mold. Protomes often appear as votives in sanctuaries to the Greek goddesses, and in graves where they may have been associated with Persephone, the queen of the underworld.
The Fertile Goddess, con’t

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artwork</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Catalog Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standing Female Figure</td>
<td>Cypriot, 699—500 BCE</td>
<td>Molded terracotta</td>
<td>28.263</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Goddess Finial</td>
<td>Iranian, Luristan, 799—700 BCE</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>2007.36</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Figure</td>
<td>Sumerian, 3500—3000 BCE</td>
<td>Terracotta</td>
<td>73.16</td>
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<td>Figure of a Goddess of the Dancer Type</td>
<td>Egyptian, Predynastic Period, before 3400 BCE</td>
<td>Terracotta, paint</td>
<td>28.376</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standing Female Figure</td>
<td>Coptic Egyptian, 799—700 CE</td>
<td>Terracotta, polychromy</td>
<td>28.264</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Female Figure</td>
<td>Syrian, 799—700 BCE</td>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td>28.334</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Figure, Psi-type</td>
<td>Mycenaean, 1300—1200 BCE</td>
<td>Terracotta</td>
<td>2006.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Head</td>
<td>Egyptian, Hellenistic Period, 299—200 BCE</td>
<td>Terracotta</td>
<td>28.92</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Animals Across Cultures

Throughout history, artists have used images of real, mythological, and fantastic animals to ornament utilitarian and decorative objects.

Ancient cultures relied on animals for every aspect of their lives, including food, transport, and clothing. Animals were sacred beings, representing both good and evil forces in the natural world. Imaginary animals, like the sphinx with a lion’s body, eagle’s wings, and human head, appear in the myths and legends of most ancient cultures. The people of these cultures also revered the strength, speed, and utility of working animals such as the horse and ibex, and granted them similar magical and protective qualities.

Askos in the Form of a Horse
Carthaginian, before 146 BCE
Terracotta
25.41

Askos in the Form of a Ram
Persian, 999—700 BCE
Terracotta
67.39

Harness Ornament with Two Ibexes
Chinese, Ordos Plateau, 200—1 BCE
Gilt bronze
73.66

Bowl with Lion Tamer
Persian, 1100—1199 CE
Ceramic, pigments
25.2009L

Bird-headed Ewer
Persian, 1100—1199 CE
Ceramic, pigments
30.2009L

Bowl with Horseman and Sphinxes
Persian, Tehran Province, 1167—1199 CE
Ceramic
31.2009L

Bowl with Ibex
Persian, Khorasan Province, 900—999 CE
Ceramic, pigments
27.2009L
The Art of Empire

*Imperial artists created a common visual language that strengthened the ruler’s authority.*

Ancient rulers expanded the geographic regions of their empires through military occupation or the imposition of religious beliefs. They created bureaucratic and economic structures to unify and maintain the strength of their vast territories. They reinforced their supremacy through portraiture, emblematic motifs, and official inscriptions. These images were also symbols of oppression for the empire’s subjugated populations.

*Sgraffito Ware Pot, 1300—1400 CE*
Sharaf al-Abawani, Egyptian, 1293—1341 CE
Glazed ceramic
51.350

This chalice, made during the time that Mamluk sultans ruled Egypt (1250—1517 CE), contains inscriptions that identify the artisan and recipient as well as define the nature of their relationship. The calligraphic script on the exterior of the chalice reads “The work of the poor, humble servant Sharaf al-Abawani, the servant of all humanity.” The partial inscription on the interior names the patron Badr al-Din(?) and reads “From the things made by order of the most magnificent, the honored, the well served….” The blazon, or coat of arms, repeated three times on the inside suggests that the patron was an amir, or high-ranking commander.

*Jewish Hexagonal Jar*
Syro-Palestinian, 500—699 CE
Mold-blown glass
28.20

Although glass had been produced for millennia in Egypt and the Middle East, the industry developed rapidly during Republican and Imperial Rome. Skilled craftsmen set up workshops throughout the Empire, where they created mass-produced wares for myriad peoples and uses. This small jar, decorated with a menorah and probably used by Jewish pilgrims visiting holy sites in Jerusalem, was created long after the decline of Rome, though using the same advanced techniques developed under skilled Roman glassmakers.
The Art of Empire, con’t

**Coin of the Bar Kochba Rebellion against Rome, 133—134 CE**
Judaean, made in Judaea from a restamped Roman sestertius, bronze, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Alexander, 95.26

- *palm tree / grape leaf w/ inscription “For the Freedom of Israel.”*

During the Roman occupation of Judaea, Jews restamped foreign coins with Hebrew inscriptions and Jewish symbols, such as the palm tree signifying the holy menorah of the Temple. These coins provided financial and moral support to the rebellion against Roman in 133 CE.

**Conquest by Coinage**

Coins produced and distributed by the rulers of ancient empires consolidated economic and political power over vast territories and diverse populations. Imagery and inscriptions confirmed the ruler’s power through association with important deities, historical events, and significant local customs.

**Posthumous Drachm of Alexander III (the Great), 310—301 BCE**
Hellenistic Period (332—30 BCE), made in Lampsacus, Mysia, Anatolia (modern Lampseki, Turkey), silver, Bequest of Isabel C. Herdle, 2005.182

- *Hercules / the god Zeus seated on a throne*

Rulers of Alexander the Great’s divided empire continued to issue his coin types after his death to evoke his memory and reinforce their association with Alexander’s powerful kingdom.

**Commemorative Coin of Emperor Constantine the Great, ca. 330 CE**
Roman Empire, Constantine Period (306—364 CE), bronze, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Alexander, 95.27

- *Roma / Romulus and Remus with the she-wolf*

Constantine issued this coin commemorating the city of Rome simultaneously with a similar coin representing Constantinople, his new capital city. Together they symbolized the equality of the two imperial cities.
The Ancient Middle East

The rich flood plains, wide grasslands, barren deserts, and forested mountains of the ancient Middle East nurtured some of the world’s earliest civilizations and cultures.

Beginning at least 5,000 years ago, the people of this region developed cooperative societies that stimulated advances in technology and creative expression. Their art incorporates sophisticated visual forms that reflect a diversity of cultures, religious traditions, and lifestyles. The rulers of highly fortified city-states commissioned imperial sculptures, coins, and luxury objects that reinforced their power and wealth. Nomadic clan groups created functional tools, weapons, and other small objects ornamented with images representing both the natural and spiritual worlds.

Structured Societies

Domesticated livestock and improved farming methods encouraged early settlements along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the land known as Mesopotamia.

Established, stable populations fostered social structures such as division of labor, centralized government, and common cultural symbolism. As settlements grew into independent city-states, their bureaucratic and religious systems became increasingly complex, requiring forms of property identification and record-keeping. The first “age of information” began with the invention of cuneiform, one of the world's earliest forms of written language.

Winged Genius, ca. 865—860 BCE
Assyrian
Alabaster
44.10

This mythical guardian figure, called a Genius, wears a two-horned helmet and fringed garment and carries a double-handled dagger, all attributes of his divine nature. His hands gesture protectively toward a flowering tree, just visible at the right edge of the sculpture. The relief, originally brightly painted, is a fragment from the Northwest palace built by the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) in his capital city at Kalhu, now the Iraqi city of Nimrud. Dozens of huge stone slabs with scenes of human and divine figures decorated the palace walls.
Structured Societies, con’t

Worshipper Bearing an Animal Offering
Mesopotamian, ca. 1900—1800 BCE
Terracotta
45.60

Cuneiform Tablet with Case
Sumerian, Ur III, 2049 BCE
Clay; from Lagash
54.58.4.1-2

Cuneiform Tablet; “Messenger Text”
Sumerian, Early Dynastic Period, ca. 3000—2000 BCE
Clay
54.58.5a

Cuneiform Tablet
Sumerian, Ur III, ca. 2000 BCE
Clay
54.58.14

Cylinder Seal
Babylonian, 2000—400 BCE
Stone
28.311.4

Stamp Seal
Babylonian, 2000—400 BCE
Stone
28.311.6

Stamp Seal
Babylonian, 2000—400 BCE
Stone
28.311.7
Structured Societies, con’t

**Tribute Bearer: Median Holding a Covered Vessel**, ca. 358—338 BCE  
Achaemenid Persian Empire  
Limestone  
44.1

The *Tribute Bearer*, shown wearing a typical Persian costume and ascending a staircase with his offering, was one of hundreds of brightly-painted stone relief sculptures on the palace walls and stairways of Persepolis, the spiritual center of the Achaemenid Empire. The figure represents one of 23 tribute-bearing delegations from all parts of the Empire that arrived at Persepolis for the annual spring New Year’s festival.

**Pyxis (Toiletry Box)**  
Syrian, 899—700 BCE  
Red porphyry  
49.14

This small vessel, fashioned from a single block of stone to hold fine cosmetics or ointments, once included a lid which swiveled to one side. The carving on the pyxis shows two double-headed sphinxes, a deer gazing at a large bird, and two banqueters at a table piled high with loaves of bread.

**Bowl**  
Iranian, Susa I, 5000—3000 BCE  
Ceramic, pigments  
34.2009L

**Spouted Vessel**, ca. 1000—800 BC  
Iranian, from Tepe Sialk, Kashan  
Ceramic, pigments  
35.2009L

**Striding Feline**  
Persian, 200—299 CE  
Bronze  
52.49
Structured Societies, con’t

Coinage of the Sassanian Empire, 224 – 651 CE

The Sassanian Empire represented Persia’s last pre-Islamic kingdom. The ruler appears in profile on the obverse, or front side; the reverse, or back side, depicts a tall Zoroastrian fire altar flanked by two attendants. This powerful image symbolized the life-sustaining and purifying energy of the god of light, Ahura Mazda, and served as the main focus of worship for followers of Zoroastrianism, one of the world’s oldest religions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drachm of Shapur I, 241—272 CE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian, Sassanian Empire (224—651 CE); silver; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Alexander, 95.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A standard inscription inside the obverse border proclaims the king’s divine right to rule:

"The Mazda worshipper, the divine Shapur, King of the Kings of Iran, heaven-descended of the Gods."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drachm of Khusro II, ca. 613—616 CE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian, Sassanian Empire (224—651 CE); silver; Bequest of Isabel C. Herdle, 2005.183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sassanian kings wear crowns that incorporate symbols associated with the Zoroastrian religion and idea of divine kingship. Khusro wears a winged crown, in contrast to Shapur’s turret crown.
Nomadic Cultures

The distinctive nomadic cultures of the ancient Middle East inhabited mountainous regions stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea.

Unsuitable for growing crops, this arid and rocky region proved ideal for herding livestock such as goats, sheep, cattle, and horses. The nomads occupied seasonal settlements while following their herds, and traded with the river valley cultures to the west. They became master metalworkers, particularly in bronze, which they fashioned into portable and functional works of art. Items for personal adornment, weapons, and sacred objects featured intricate designs based on real and mythical bird and animal forms.

The Luristan Bronzes

By 3500 BCE, Middle Eastern metalworkers had discovered the benefits of bronze. Some of the Ancient Middle East’s most remarkable bronze objects come from a region known as Luristan, now in western Iran. These so-called Luristan Bronzes, mainly dating to about 1100 to 700 BCE, demonstrate a distinctive bronze-working tradition, as well as the durable and adaptable nature of this essential metal.

Master of Animals Finial
Iranian, Luristan, 1100—700 BCE
Bronze
48.5

Horse Bit with Cheekpieces in the Form of Winged Sphinxes
Iranian, Luristan, 1100—700 BCE
Bronze
48.39

Master of Animals Finial
Iranian, Luristan, 799—700 BCE
Bronze
2007.35

Pendant
Iranian, Luristan, ca. 700—500 BCE
Bronze
73.85
Nomadic Cultures, con’t

**Antelope Pin**
Iranian, Luristan, 1100—700 BCE
Bronze
60.9.1

**Belt Clasp with Horse, Bird and Goat**
Iranian, Luristan, 1—200 CE
Bronze
2007.34

**Torque Bracelet with Animal Heads**
Iranian, Luristan, 950—800 BCE
Bronze
2009.6

**Whetstone Handle with Recumbent Ibex**
Iranian, Luristan, after 707 BCE
Bronze
48.6

**Mace Head**
Iranian, Luristan, 1000—1 BCE
Bronze
SC74.2.1

**Pointed Axe Head**
Iranian, Luristan, 3000—2500 BCE
Bronze
SC74.2.2

**Dagger**
Iranian, Luristan, 3000—2500 BCE
Bronze
SC74.2.3

**Sword with Crescentric Reinforcements**
Iranian, Luristan, 500—BCE
Bronze
SC74.2.4

**Sword Blade**
Iranian, Luristan, 500—1 BCE
Bronze
SC74.2.5
Arts of the Islamic World

The term “Islamic Art” describes art created in the service of the Muslim faith as well as non-religious works created in Muslim lands, for Muslim patrons, or by Muslim artists.

Within a century of the birth of Islam around 600 CE, emerging art forms possessed unique Islamic characteristics, such as a preference for complete surface decoration and calligraphic ornament. Integration of pre-Islamic artistic traditions with these new styles developed into a visual vocabulary that met the requirements of Islamic religious beliefs.

Although figural representation is a contested issue in Islamic religious art, images of humans, animals, and vegetal forms frequently appear in manuscripts and on ceramics and metalwork. Because Islam is a way of life as well as a religion, a distinctive culture with its own artistic language still pervades the Islamic world.

Plate
Turkish, 1500—1599 CE
Made in Iznik
Painted and glazed terracotta
79.91
The Art of Ornament

*Diverse pre-Islamic artistic traditions, combined with new calligraphic, floral, and astral motifs, provided Islamic artists with rich sources of geometric and floral ornament.*

The visual elements that characterize secular Islamic art include images of people, animals, and mythological creatures, as well as non-figural decoration. The Islamic tradition discourages figural representation in sacred work such as the Qur’an and mosque architecture. However, these works are often richly colored and decorated with abstract and calligraphic ornament.

Islamic Ceramics

The demand for highly-ornamented and finely-made ceramic tiles and vessels permeated all areas of Islamic religious and secular life. Their form and decoration are rooted in both pre-Islamic pottery techniques and Islamic religious and literary beliefs. The Qur’an refers to the creation of humanity “from clay like earthen vessels,” while several poems of the great Persian poet Omar Khayyam depict pottery as the melding of the material and spiritual forces in life. The demand for these fine objects was extensive, and constant innovations among workshops throughout the Islamic world resulted in the development of new techniques such as metallic glazing and the use of minerals in the firing process.
The Art of Ornament, con’t

**Bowl with Acanthus Design**
Persian, 1200—1299 CE
Glazed terracotta
51.317

**Bowl (with arabesques)**
Persian, 1200—1299 CE
Glazed terracotta
52.52

**Bowl (with animals)**
Persian, 1200—1299 CE
Glazed earthenware
52.14

**Rhages Bowl**
Persian, 1200—1299 CE
Ceramic with over-glazed painting
27.10

**Bowl with Seated Figures**
Persian, 1200—1299 CE
Glazed ceramic
52.11

**Lusterware Bowl with Deer**
Persian, 1300—1399 CE
Glazed ceramic
52.12

**Pitcher with Birds, Arabesques, and Sphinxes**
Persian, 1200—1299 CE
Ceramic, pigment, gilding; from Rhages
26.2009L

**Bowl with Mounted Horseman**
Persian, Tehran Province, 1100—1199 CE
Ceramic, polychrome
28.2009L
The Art of the Word

*Calligraphy, which comes from the Greek word for “beautiful writing,” is one of the most important and fundamental elements of Islamic art.*

According to Islamic tradition, the Qur’an—the word of God as revealed to the prophet Muhammad—was recorded in Arabic scripts that were transformed and beautified to be worthy of divine revelation. Through the Qur’an, which was widely copied, these scripts spread to all Muslim areas and the letters were adopted for other languages such as Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. Calligraphic letters transmitted sacred and religious texts and, because the Arabic script is by its nature ornamental, artists frequently used calligraphic elements to decorate three-dimensional works as well as manuscripts.

*Astrolabe*
Persian, Isphahan Province, ca. 1697
Bronze
32.2009L

Astrolabes are hand-held ancient astronomical and astrological instruments used to measure the height of the sun or a star above the horizon. These measurements, made by manipulating a series of circular brass plates, show how the skies will appear at a specific place at a given time. Although the Greeks invented the basic astrolabe more than 2,000 years ago, Muslim scholars had created sophisticated instruments by around 800 CE. They introduced the devices to Europe through Islamic Spain, or Andalusia, in the early 1100s, where they became a basic component in scientific education.

*Bowl with Kufic Calligraphy*, 1100—1199 CE
Persian
Ceramic lustreware
33.2009L

Kufic refers to the earliest extant, or still existing, Arabic calligraphic script used by Muslims to record the Qur’an, beginning in the 700s CE. The name of this angular script, which was developed for religious and legal purposes, stems from its development in Kufah, an Islamic city founded in Mesopotamia in 638 CE.
The Art of the Word, con’t

Section from a Qur'an Endowed by Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri, 1366—1399 CE
Egyptian
Leather bound book with calligraphy, gold and color; 2008.69

Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri (r. 1501—1517), the last ruler of Mamluk Egypt (1250—1517), endowed a multi-volume Qur’an to the madrasah, or theological seminary and law school, located in his extensive mosque complex in Cairo. This section contains the text from Surah (chapter) 46, v. 1 (the Dunes) through Surah 51, v. 29 (the Winnowing Winds). Although the highly-decorated inscription on the opening folio reads that Qansu al-Ghawri presented the Qur’an on July 20, 1503 (Muharram AH 909 in the Islamic calendar), the style of script and illumination suggest that manuscript itself dates to the late 1400s.

Leaf from a Manuscript of Poetry by Umar Ibn al-Farid, 1600—1699 CE
Persian
Watercolor, ink and gold on paper 28.317

The large Arabic script and the Arabic in the “cloud” shapes are verses from the poet Umar Ibn al-Farid’s Wine Ode, the most famous mystical poem on wine in Arabic. Ibn al-Farid (1181—1235), who studied Islamic mysticism and Arabic literature in Cairo and Mecca, composed poems that generally embrace a view of existence in which creation is lovingly intimate with its divine creator. This richly decorated leaf, made in the 1600s, reflects the continued popularity of al-Farid’s poem.
This fragment of a calligraphic architectural frieze is characteristic of North Indian Islamic monumental architecture during the later Sultanate period (1206-1526). The inscription on this fragment, “To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on earth. No one may intercede…” is from Surah (chapter) 2:255 of the Qur’an. This verse, called the “Throne Verse,” was frequently used for architectural inscriptions in mosque complexes and tombs. The entire inscription would have been carved in sandstone on high friezes around the interior walls.

God. There is no deity but Him, the living, the eternal! Drowsiness does not overtake Him, nor sleep. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth. No one may intercede with Him save by His permission. He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, yet they comprehend nothing of His knowledge, save as He wills. His throne encompasses the heavens and the earth, and He does not weary of preserving them. He is the sublime, the magnificent!”

Prayer rugs are small weavings of wool, silk, or cotton that are laid on the ground or floor during Muslim devotional prayers. The devotee kneels on the rug and prays in the direction of the holy city of Mecca. This rug depicts a mihrab, or prayer niche, framed by architectural elements with a mosque lamp hanging at the center.