

 Smithsonian Associates  
**Islamic Art: A Global Heritage**

*Sean Roberts*

Monday, May 4, 2026 - 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET

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**Glossary for Week One**

**Allah** – The Arabic language form of the one God of the Abrahamic religions.

**Basmala** – The invocation “in the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate.” This begins the **surahs** of the **Qur’an** and is found inscribed on many objects.

**Caliph** – The caliph was the successor of the Prophet Muhammad and served as both temporal and spiritual leader of the community of Islam

**Hadith** – The collected sayings and biography of the Prophet. These serve as a crucial source for Islamic law, second only to the Qur’an.

**Hajj** – The pilgrimage to Mecca and its attendant activities. This journey is required once in the life of all Muslims who are financially and physically able.

**Hijrah**- The flight of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in 622. This is the starting point of the **Hijri** calendar, the lunar dating system used by the Muslim community.

**Imam** – A teacher. Islam has no clergy, but imams serve as leaders of prayer, give sermons, and supervise activities at mosques.

**Kaaba** – The pre-Islamic shrine at the center of Mecca’s Haram Mosque. Muslim prayer is directed toward the Kaaba, wherever the believer is in the world.

**Mosque/Masjid** – the primary place of collective prayer for Muslims. Mosques are divided between smaller neighborhood examples and congregational (Friday) mosques where the most important weekly prayer and teaching takes place for the entire community of a city.

**Qur’an** – The words of God revealed to the Prophet by the angel Gabriel/Jibril. The Qur’an is divided into **surahs**, and these are arranged not in narrative order, nor in sequence of their revelation, but by length from longest to shortest.

**Shahada** – The first pillar of Islam. The shahada is the believer’s proclamation that “There is no God but God and Muhammed is His messenger.”

**Tiraz** – Inscribed textiles made in dynastic and state workshops. The word is sometimes used to refer to these inscriptions themselves.

## **Further Reading For Week One**

### **General Introductions to Islamic Art**

Richard Etlinghauser, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture: 650-1250* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 1250-1800* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996).

Maryam D. Ekhtiar, 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: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012).

### **Ceramics**

Jessica Hallett, "Port of the Sea, Emporium of the Land, and Place of Manufacture: Basra as a Center of Mobility and Innovation in Ceramics in the Abbasid Period," in Radha Dalal, Sean Roberts, and Jochen Sokoly eds. *The Seas and the Mobility of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 120-141.

### **Glass**

Stefano Carboni and David Whitehouse eds. *Glass of the Sultans* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001).

### **Rock Crystal**

Cynthia Hahn and Avinoam Shalem eds. *Seeking Transparency: Rock Crystals across the Medieval Mediterranean* (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 2020).

### **The Arts of the Book**

Jonathan Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair eds. *By the Pen and What They Write: Writing in Islamic Art and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

### **Textiles**

Jochen Sokoly, *Textiles of the Early Islamic Caliphates: The al-Sabah Collection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2026).

### **Metalwork**

Eva R. Hoffman, "Christian-Islamic Encounters on Thirteenth-Century Ayyubid Metalwork: Local Culture, Authenticity, and Memory," *Gesta* 43 (2004), 129-142.

### **Major Dynasties of the Islamic Lands**

Many of these powers had vassal states and proxies. The Aghlabid's, for example ruled North Africa under the authority of the Abbadis. Some groups, like the Sajuqs, had multiple branches that ruled diverse territories. I have provided broad date ranges and indications of geographic limits of authority, but these are necessarily approximate and often overlap.

## **The Early Caliphates**

**Rashidun** – 633-661, Arabia

**Umayyad** – 662-750, capital in Damascus

**Abbasid** – 750-1258, capital in Baghdad

## **Later Dynasties**

**Umayyads of Spain** – Ruled from Cordoba, 756-1031

**Fatimid** – Egypt and North Africa, 909-1171

**Saljuq** – Anatolia, Iran, and Central Asia, 1038-1307

**Nasrid** – Spain, 1230-1492

**Ilkhanid** – Iran and its surrounding territories, 1258-1335

**Mamluk** – Egypt, Syria, and Arabia 1250-1517

**Ottoman** – Anatolia, the Mediterranean, and Near East 1281-1924

**Timurid** – Iran and Central Asia, 1370-1501

**Safavid** – Iran, 1501-1732

**Mughal** – Indian Subcontinent, 1526-1857