



NEW **ISLAMIC GALLERY** FOR
THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM



Printed cotton
fragment, Gujerat
c. 1275 AD

NEVER BEFORE has there been such an urgent need for the great contribution of the Islamic art to world culture to be seen, appreciated and understood in the West. With a splendid new Islamic Gallery planned for its northern development, the Ashmolean Museum is in a unique position to help meet that need.



Blue and white
ceramic jar, Basra
early 9th century AD

The Ashmolean has a world-class collection of Islamic art, of which at present only a tiny proportion can be displayed. Among its highlights is a **double leaf** from the earliest accurately datable Quran, given as *waqf* to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus between 869 and 877 AD. A superb **ivory lid** from Umayyad Spain, bears the name of Abu'l-Mutarrif ibn al-Mansur, otherwise known as Sanchuelo, the heir and vizier of the Amirid regent of the Umayyads, al-Mansur. Dated 389 H/999 AD, this is a rare example of the luxury crafts of Cordova and Medinat az-Zahra at a period when inter-faith and inter-cultural relations were at an all time high. Another treasure is an enamelled glass **mosque lamp** in the

name of the most powerful of the Mamluk Sultans of Egypt and Syria, al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qala'un (1301-1340). It bears a Qur'anic quotation above the titles of the Sultan, and was almost certainly made for the Congregational Mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad on the citadel in Cairo.

In terms of quantity as well as international importance, there are four major groups of Islamic objects in the Museum. The first is the collection of *ikat* (**tie-dyed**) **robes** from Central Asia, given to Robert Shaw in Kashgar and Yarkand in 1868-69, and therefore the earliest recorded examples known. Next, from the Newberry collection, come over **1000 embroidery fragments** from

Enamelled glass
mosque lamp, Cairo
1301-1340 AD



Embroidered fragment,
Egypt 13th-14th
century AD



Islamic Egypt, which are unique in both their number and their variety, as well as being of the greatest importance for the history of embroidery, and for the evidence of the impact of Mamluk taste on Renaissance Europe. From that same collection come over **1200 printed cotton fragments**, originally from Muslim Gujerat, but imported into Egypt in early Islamic times, the largest collection anywhere, and vital evidence of Indian Ocean trade, and of Egyptian Muslim taste. In addition, the Museum owns an extraordinarily large and important collection of **Islamic ceramics**, dating

from the 8th-19th century, from the different countries of the Islamic Near East. Numbering over 1500 pieces, this forms a major resource for research being used in regular seminars by Oxford University students and visiting student groups. This collection is backed up by extensive archaeological material from Islamic Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Ceramic dish, Iran,
c. 1700 AD

Ikat coat, Kashghar
mid 19th
century AD



Ivory lid, Cordova
or Medinat az-
Zahra, 389 H /999
AD (detail)

The new Ashmolean development presents a unique opportunity to increase the visual and educational impact of this major collection of Islamic art. The present Islamic gallery shows a mere 200 items from a collection of well over 4,000 pieces, a paltry 5%. The new Islamic gallery will be designed to exhibit a far larger number of objects, in particular rotating displays of textiles. It will be linked to a new orientation gallery, which will focus public attention on the role of the Islamic Near East as a cultural hub from the Muslim conquests in the 7th century to the 19th century. Meanwhile, in the secondary galleries there will be an entirely new cross-cultural display of ceramics from the Far East, the Islamic Near East and Europe, showing all the important artistic and technological links, including the unique contribution of the Islamic world in

developing tin-glazed ceramics and lustre decoration.

For their educational impact and scholarly interpretation, the Islamic collections in the Museum depend on the existence of a curator specialising in the arts of the Islamic world. The importance of the continuance of this post after the retirement of the present holder, Professor James Allan (the world's authority on the history of metalworking in the Islamic world), cannot be underestimated. Oxford University is a major world centre for research in Islamic art. Here Islamic art is taught at both undergraduate and graduate level, while the curator also provides the academic backing for the Museum's Educational Service and its outreach to primary and secondary schools, other tertiary educational institutions, and to the public at large.



Quran double-page,
Syria 869-877 AD

The
Ashmolean
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