



DISCOVER THE ARAB WORLD

Arab people have had a huge impact on the shaping of the modern world, from helping to introduce Islam to the Middle East, North Africa and beyond, to fostering important scientific and cultural achievements. However, the Arab world is often seen in stereotypical terms and is in danger of being misunderstood.

Discover the Arab World uses objects from the British Museum's unique collection to explore many aspects of this diverse, complex and fascinating region. These resources are designed to highlight important key themes, providing a platform for students to research, debate and discover the Arab world for themselves.

Note: these resources contain religious text.
Please treat them with respect.

Front: Mosque lamp. Enamelled glass. Mamluk dynasty. Cairo, Egypt, about AD 1350–55. Above: Chant Avedissian, *Umm Kulthum*. Print on paper. Egypt, AD 1990s. © Chant Avedissian.

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وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٠٠﴾ يٰمُنُوكَ عَلَيْهِ
 اِنَّا سَلَمْنَا اَوْلَادَنَا بِمَوَاعِدٍ اِنَّا لَا نَسْلَمُكَ
 مِنْ عَيْبِكَ مَكَرًا مَلَكُ لِلْاِيْمَانِ كَثِيرٌ
 صَادِقِينَ اِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ غَيْبِ السَّمَاوَاتِ
 وَالْاَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ يٰمَاعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

سورة الاحزاب

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَاللّٰهُ يَتَكَلَّمُ ذُرُوْقًا وَالْحَامِلَاتُ وُقُوْدًا
 وَالْحَارَاتُ يُسْرًا ﴿١٠٢﴾ فَاَلْقَيْنَاكِ اِعْرَابًا

تُعَدُّوْنَ لَصَارُفٍ ﴿١٠٣﴾ وَكَالَّذِيْنَ

لَوَاعِجٍ ﴿١٠٤﴾ وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ اَنْجَابٍ ﴿١٠٥﴾ اَنْكُرُ

لِيَقُولَ مُخْتَلِفٍ ﴿١٠٦﴾ يُؤْوِيْكَ عَنْهُ مِنْ اَوْلَادِ

مُنَالْحَرَامِصُوْنَ ﴿١٠٧﴾ الَّذِيْنَ هُمْ فِيْ غَمْرَةٍ

سَاهُوْنَ ﴿١٠٨﴾ يَسْلُوْنَ اَيَّانَ يَوْمَ الدِّيْنِ

Object

Pages from
the Qur'an

Description

Ink on parchment. Egypt
or Syria, 14th century AD.

Glossary

Aramaic: important
Middle Eastern language
in use between 1200 BC
and the 7th century AD

Nabateans: ancient
inhabitants of Petra
(now in Jordan) from
100 BC to AD 100

Note

**This card contains
religious text. Please
treat it with respect.**

Information

The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the Arabic language and later written down in the Arabic script. Because it is seen as the language of God, Arabic has always been highly respected by Muslims. As a result, when the Qur'an is copied the writing should be as beautiful as possible. From the late 7th century AD, Muslim calligraphers developed a series of scripts or lettering styles to copy the Qur'an. These styles were then used on documents, coins, gravestones, textiles and buildings.

Until the 6th century AD, Arabic was a spoken language only. It was the language of Arab tribal kingdoms in central Arabia, southern Iraq and Syria. The writing used for Arabic from the 6th century onwards is a form of Aramaic script used by the Nabatean people. Aramaic was the official language of the western Persian empire that included parts of Arabia. The use of written Arabic greatly increased with the spread of Islam as people wanted to preserve what had been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

The Arabic alphabet is written and read from right to left and consists of 28 letters created from 17 different letter shapes. The alphabet has been used and developed to write a variety of other languages, including Persian, Urdu, Dari and Turkish (up to 1928), and, until recently, the languages of Indonesia and Malaysia. Because of the importance of Arabic in Islam, all Muslims are expected to read the Qur'an in its original language. Today, Arabic is one of the most widely used languages in the world with millions of speakers and many Arabic words used in other languages.

Key questions and activities

1. Look closely at the picture and the text. Why do you think that Arabic use spread so quickly?
2. Search the internet, then on an outline map of the Arab world shade:
 - a) the countries where Arabic was first spoken in red
 - b) the countries where Arabic is spoken today in green
3. How is Arabic used in Britain today? Create a small booklet of evidence by collecting:
 - a) images of Arabic calligraphy used in mosque decoration
 - b) examples of printed Arabic, used on packaging and newspapers
 - c) examples of Arabic words and letters in modern art and design
 - d) examples of Arabic words used in English



وَمِنْهُمْ جِبْرِيلُ

بَابُ نَجْمَةِ امِيرِ الرُّوحِ وَخَازِنِ الْقُدْسِ وَيُقَالُ لَهُ اَيْضًا الرُّوحُ الْاَمِينُ وَالرُّوحُ الْقُدْسُ
 وَالنَّامُوسُ الْاَكْبَرُ وَطَائِرُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ جَاءَ فِي الْجُرْآنِ اَنْ اَللّٰهُ تَعَالَى اِذَا تَكَلَّمَ بِالرُّوحِ
 سَمِعَ اَهْلُ السَّمَاءِ صَلَافَةً كَجَرِّ السَّكْسَلَةِ عَلَى الصَّفَا فَيُحَقِّقُونَ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ كَذَلِكَ
 حَتَّى يَأْتِيَهُمْ جِبْرِيلُ فَاِذَا جَاءَ سَمِعَ فَرَجَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ فَالُوا يَا جِبْرِيلُ مَاذَا مَا لَدَيْكَ
 فَيَقُولُ الْحَقُّ فَنَادُوا لِلْحَقِّ الْحَقُّ وَجَاءَ بِالْجَنَانِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ
 قَالَ لَجِبْرِيلُ اِنِّي احْبَبْتُ اَنْ اَتَاكَ عَلَى صُورَتِكَ فَقَالَ اَنْتَ لَا تَطِيقُ قَالُكَ

Object

Page from *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence*

Description

A page from a manuscript,
The archangel Israfil.
Baghdad, Iraq,
15th century AD.

Glossary

Hadith: the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which form one of the major sources of Islamic law

Judgement Day: the day when God will judge everybody according to their behaviour in life

Information

In Islam, Israfil (Raphael) is one of the four archangels which also include Jibra'il (Gabriel), Mikail (Michael), and Azra'il (Azrael). According to the Hadith, Israfil is the angel responsible for signalling the coming of Judgement Day by blowing a trumpet and sending out a 'Blast of Truth'. In the illustration Israfil is shown standing on a cloud in a blaze of colour, wings and trailing sashes.

This page comes from *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence* written in AD 1270 by Zakariya Al-Qazwini, a judge living in Wasit in Iraq. It is an illustrated collection, which describes many amazing and mysterious things in the universe. The book covers geography, astronomy, astrology and natural history, through fact and myth. The sections on natural history were partly based on the tall tales of travellers returning from distant regions. Al-Qazwini divided the universe into three spheres: the Heavens (which included stars, planets and angels), Water (consisting of the seas, fish, the distant islands and their strange inhabitants) and the Earth (composed of animals, vegetables and minerals).

From the 9th century AD onwards there was an increase in the use and manufacture of paper in the Arab and Islamic world. This meant that books could be made more easily and more quickly. Authors dictated their books to a scribe (writer) who then might pass them to an illustrator. The author then listened to or read the book to check its accuracy and gave it a certificate of authorisation. The scribe then had the right to authorise new copies. Popular books like *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence* were copied by hand again and again over hundreds of years.

Key questions and activities

1. Look at the picture and describe the angel. According to the text, why do you think people wanted to know about angels?
2. Why were more Arab and Muslim people reading during the medieval period?
3. Books like *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence* were written to share what Arab and Muslim scholars knew about the world. Do some research on the methods we use to communicate knowledge today and compare these with the approaches followed in the medieval Arab world.



Object

Astrolabe
quadrant

Description

Brass. Damascus, Syria,
AD 1333–34.

Below: Astrolabe, silver
inlaid brass, Syria, 13th
century AD.

Glossary

Five Pillars: five
essential duties in the
life of a Muslim

Makka: birthplace of the
Prophet Muhammad, focus
of annual pilgrimage and
holiest city in Islam

Information

According to the Five Pillars of Islam, Muslims need to pray five times a day facing Makka (Mecca) in Saudi Arabia. These times depend on the position of the sun as prayers are at dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset and evening. Therefore Muslims need to know the time and the direction of Makka, known as the Qiblah, from anywhere around the world.

Astrolabes, which were invented in the early 1st century AD, are flat maps of the sky that are particularly useful to calculate the time and to find the Qiblah. By moving the sighting device on the back to find the height of the sun and then using this information to set the *rete* (web-like plate) on the front to the correct position, the time could be read off the rim of the astrolabe. The location of Makka could be found by using the features on the back of the astrolabe.

The astrolabe was introduced to Christian Europe in the 10th century AD from Islamic Spain. Europeans were travelling to the Arab world at this time and brought back translations of books on mathematics and astronomy. As this knowledge spread, the use of the astrolabe became common.

Astrolabe quadrants were first designed in the 11th and 12th centuries AD. They combine all the functions of an astrolabe but in a quarter of the space. These instruments proved useful for hundreds of years.

The quadrant in the main picture belonged to Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mizzi, the time-keeper of the Great Mosque in Damascus, Syria in the early 14th century AD.



Key questions and activities

1. Why do you think that Al-Mizzi in particular would need an astrolabe?
2. Why was the astrolabe quadrant such a useful instrument?
3. Do some research on the contribution to astronomy of Al-Battani (c. AD 858–929), Al-Biruni (AD 973–1048) or Al-Zarqali (AD 1028–1087).

وَهُوَ خَلٌّ مَجْلُوطٌ بِمَا الْجِرَادُ أَصَبَ عَلَى الْقُرُوحِ الْجَبِيثَةِ وَالْقُرُوحِ الْمَعْفَنَةِ وَعَضَّهُ
 الْكَلْبُ فَدَسَّتْهُ ذَوَابُّ السَّمُومِ نَفَعَتْ مِنْهَا وَقَدْ يُقَطَعُ زَوْفَ الدَّمِ الْعَارِضِ مِنْ



الشَّجَّةِ إِذَا صَبَّ وَهُوَ سَخْنٌ فِي الشَّجَّةِ وَقَدْ رَدَّ إِلَى إِجْلَالِ السُّرْمِ النَّائِي إِلَى الْخَارِجِ
 وَقَدْ حَقَّقْنَا بِهِ مَنْ كَانَ فِي أَمْعَائِهِ قُرْحَةٌ جَبِيثَةٌ يَلْبَسُ فِي الْأَمْعَاءِ وَيَبْغِي بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ
 يَحْتَقِرُهُ صَاحِبُ الْقُرْحَةِ الْحَقِيقُ بِلَبْسِ وَأَذَى الْجَسْبِيِّ وَتَعْرِعْرِيَةٌ قَبْلَ الْعُلُوِّ الشَّيْءِ
 بِالْجَلْقِ وَقَدْ نَفَى خَالَهُ الرَّاسُ وَالْقُرُوحُ الرُّطْبَةُ الْعَارِضَةُ فِيهِ م

Object

Page from
*De Materia
Medica* in Arabic

Description

A page from a manuscript,
*A discussion between
two doctors and a student.*
Possibly from Baghdad,
Iraq, AD 1224.

Glossary

Galen: influential Greek
physician c. AD 129–216
who worked for Roman
emperors

Hippocrates: important
Greek physician
c. 460–370 BC whose ideas
revolutionised medicine

Information

Arab people have always been very interested in the world around them. As their empire grew, Arab scholars and scientists collected information and learnt from other cultures. Rulers encouraged this and libraries were set up in Baghdad in the 9th century AD at the 'House of Wisdom' and then in Cairo in the 11th century AD at the 'House of Learning'. At these and other institutions, books from ancient Greece and Rome, Persia and India were translated into Arabic and copied for Arab and Muslim scholars to use.

As a result, doctors and scientists in the Middle East were able to read the works of ancient Greek and Roman doctors like Hippocrates, Dioscorides and Galen. This had an important impact on the study of anatomy and physiology, medicine and pharmacy.

Pedanius Dioscorides was a doctor in the Roman army in the 1st century AD. His book *De Materia Medica* was translated at the House of Wisdom in the 9th century AD. It describes how to make medicine from up to 500 plants, explaining where to find each plant, how to harvest it, how to prepare it as a drug, and which medical problems it will cure.

In the picture, two doctors sit on low couches, listening to the young apprentice seated on the floor between them. The book on the x-shaped bookstand beside the doctor on the left may be a medical handbook. The inscription on the page translates as:

'...vinegar mixed with salt water will help if poured on malignant ulcers, putrid or musty sores, dog bites and the bites of poisonous insects...'

Key questions and activities

1. Using the picture, describe how Arab and Muslim students learnt how to practice medicine.
2. Why do you think that Muslim scholars translated Greek and Latin books into Arabic?
3. What impact did books by Arab and Muslim scholars have on medicine over time? Do some research on Al-Razi (AD 865–925), Al-Biruni (AD 973–1048) and Ibn Sina (AD 980–1037).



Object
Jar (*albarello*)
with lustre
decoration

Description

Lustre painted tin-glaze earthenware. Spain, 14th–15th century AD.

Below: Lustre tile by William de Morgan. England, 19th century AD.

Glossary

Albarello: a cylindrical pottery jar used to store spices, medicines and precious goods

Majolica: a style of pottery made in Italy from the 15th century AD onwards that uses lustre



Information

In the 19th century AD, the ceramic artist William de Morgan successfully reinvented a technique for decorating pottery which gave it the appearance of precious metal, especially gold or silver. The quality of this work was extremely high and his tiles, plates and pots were popular with wealthy and artistic Victorians. Inspired by pottery from the Middle East, de Morgan had revived a complicated process that had been invented and developed by Arab potters in Iraq as early as the 9th century AD.

Considerable knowledge of chemistry and experimentation was needed to create this lustreware. Firstly, an earthenware pot was dipped in glaze made with tin oxide and fired in a kiln. Then a mixture of sulphur, silver or copper compounds, and ochre suspended in vinegar or grape juice was painted on to the glazed surface and fixed by firing the pot again. This left a thin layer of metal on the pot creating a beautiful lustrous or shiny effect.

The pottery was so popular that from the 10th century AD its production spread to Egypt, Syria, Iran and Muslim-ruled Spain. It is likely that craftsmen took the 'lustre secret' with them as they travelled on to these new places.

By the late 13th century AD, lustreware was being made in Spain at Malaga and Valencia. It became so fashionable that large quantities were exported across Christian Europe. Later, in Italy, rich and powerful families like the Medici ordered Spanish lustreware specially decorated with their own coats of arms.

In the 15th century AD, the technique was adapted at the Deruta and Gubbio potteries in Italy. The resulting style became known as maiolica or majolica.

Key questions and activities

1. Describe the colours and decoration used on the jar from Spain. Why do you think the *albarello* was decorated with lustre?
2. Look at how lustre pottery was made. What does this tell us about Arab understanding of chemistry at this time?
3. How have Arab and Muslim craftspeople influenced potters in Christian Europe? Do some research on Italian majolica and the work of William de Morgan and sketch out your own designs for a lustreware pot.



هاتين

في كل فرا

وهما اوقد اوقدك الالهيه لا

لله ايشاها شرا حاطو ايل

ارها صا

صا صا

Object

Appliqué hanging
for the doorway
of a tent

Description

Cairo, Egypt, early
20th century AD.

Glossary

Bedouin: traditionally,
Arab nomads and
animal herders

Day of Judgement: the
day when God will judge
everybody according to
their behaviour in life

Khiyamiya: traditional
tent-makers in Egypt

Information

As the Arabs carried Islam into the Middle East from the early 7th century AD, they adopted art-forms and designs that they found and combined them with their own. In time, Islam itself was to become an increasingly important influence on art across the new empire. Some Muslim artists followed very strictly the views of the Prophet Muhammad about representing people, 'Those who make these pictures will be punished on the Day of Judgement by being told: Make alive what you have created'. As a result, representation of living creatures was discouraged because it was felt that the artists were trying to take on the creative powers of God. Instead, artists developed other designs, using geometric patterns, plant-forms and Arabic to create beautiful work.

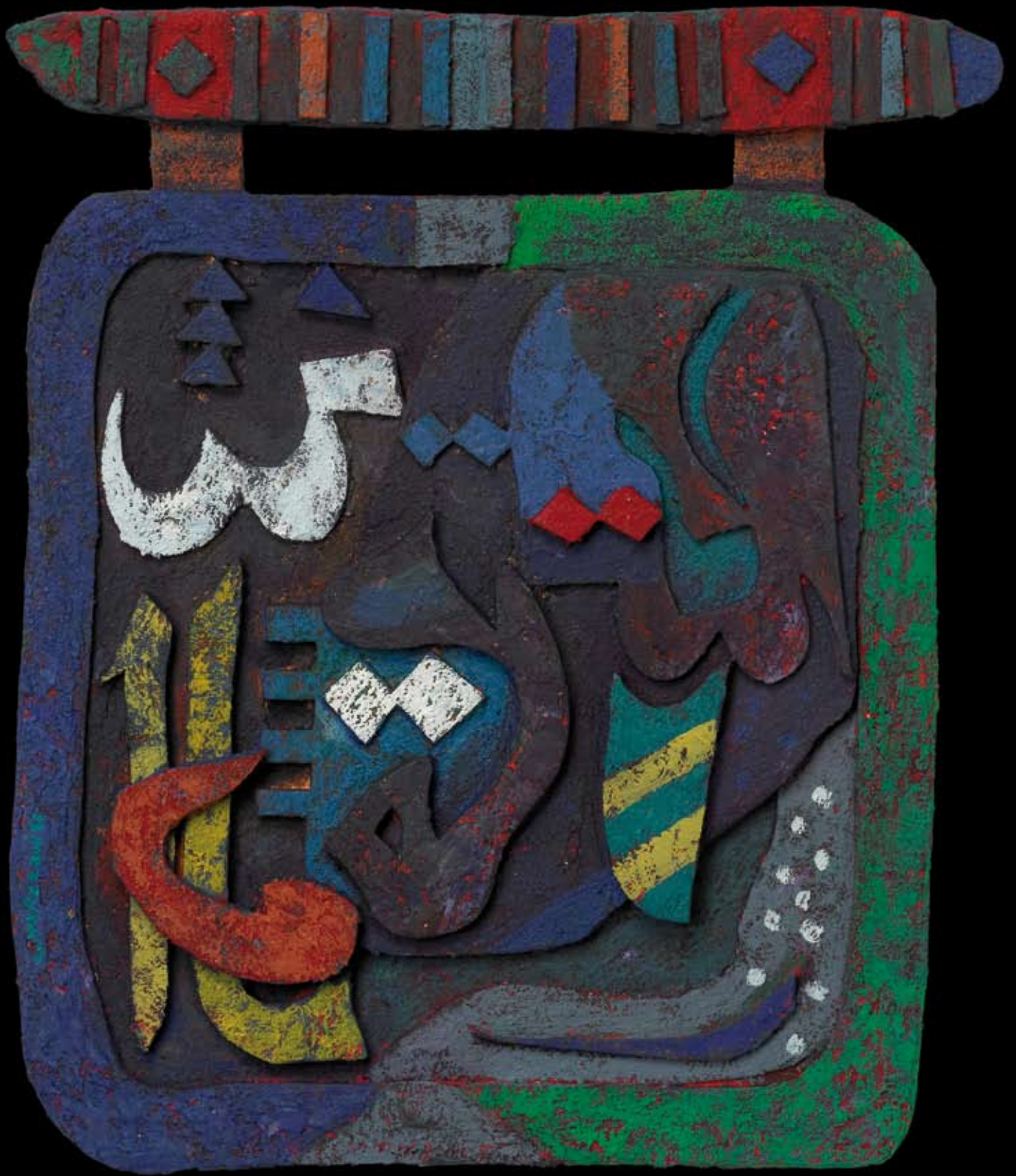
For thousands of years, tents have been used by Bedouin and Berber nomads when travelling with their animals in the desert fringes of the Arab world and North Africa. Their tents are often made from dark brown or black animal hair and white cotton. More colourfully decorated tents are used in cities like Cairo to accommodate people at important events like wedding celebrations.

The craft of tent-making in Egypt is a family business. The older master craftsmen draw and trace the design onto the canvas base using paper templates. The young apprentices sew coloured cotton pieces over the resulting lines to create specific patterns.

Since the late 1920s, tent-makers or *khiyamiya* have also applied their skills to making souvenirs for local people and tourists visiting Cairo. Wall-hangings, cushion covers and bedspreads are made with patterns inspired by ancient Egypt or daily life, or include the buyer's name in Arabic.

Key questions and activities

1. Look closely at the picture and describe the patterns used on the tent hanging.
2. Why do you think the tent-makers decided to use these patterns?
3. Do some research on the history of tourism in Egypt and find out what kind of souvenirs have been produced. How do you think that tourism has changed traditional crafts, like tent-making, in Cairo?



Object

Oriental scene

Description

Dia al-Azzawi.

Mixed media, acrylic
and foam board. Iraq/UK,
AD 1986. © Dia al-Azzawi.

Glossary

Suq: Arabic word for market

Information

This sculpture is one of a series of artworks by Dia al-Azzawi that explores the arrangement of Arabic letters in an abstract way. In these works the letters do not have any meaning in themselves but are used for the beautiful impression they create. They become, in his own words, 'like Baghdad streets and narrow alleys'. In this way the different word-shapes are used together to create an identity for the sculpture. Another feature of al-Azzawi's work is the rich colour that he uses. He believes that colour affects the way that we see and think about things; for example, black has been used for the background of the sculpture to represent the tragedies of Iraqi culture over time. For him, Iraq's history and ancient civilisations are a constant source of inspiration.

Baghdad, the capital of modern Iraq, is situated on the banks of the river Tigris. The city is divided into two main districts, Rusafa and Karkh. In Rusafa is Al-Rashid Street with its old townhouses and *suqs*, which runs between North Gate and South Gate. For centuries, Iraqis have walked from here to the Coppersmiths' Suq, the Clothiers' Suq and Shorjah Market to do their shopping. Although the city has been damaged by bombing since 2003, important historic buildings like the Abbasid Palace and the Caliph's Mosque can still be seen nearby.

Dia al-Azzawi was born in Iraq in 1939. He studied in Baghdad, graduating in Archaeology in 1962 and then in Fine Arts in 1964. His work includes paintings, sculptures, prints and drawings, as well as books which combine visual art with poetry and prose. He has exhibited in the Middle East, North Africa, the USA, India, Brazil and Europe and has received many awards for his art. Al-Azzawi lives and works in London.

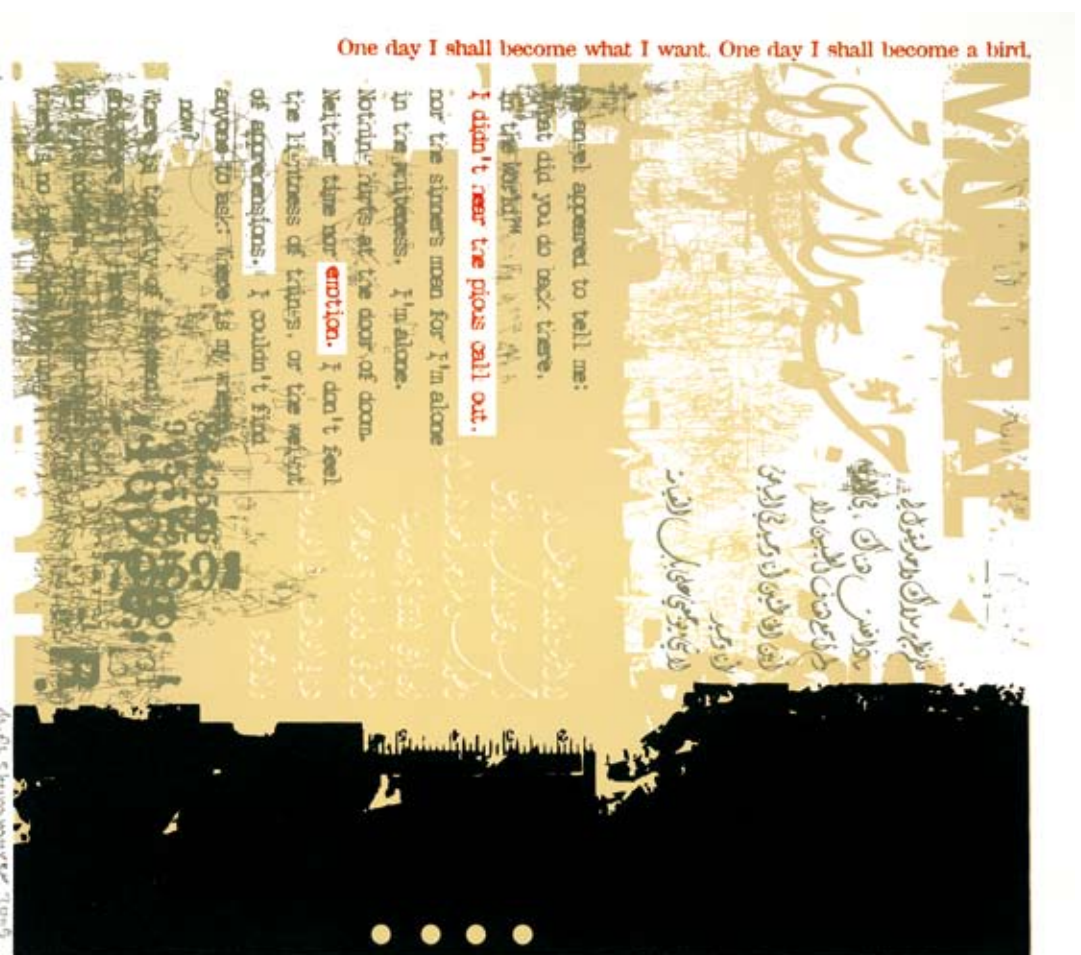
Key questions and activities

1. Look at *Oriental scene* and describe the elements that make up the sculpture, such as shapes, colour and materials.
2. Why do you think that history and ancient civilisations play such an important part in Dia al-Azzawi's artwork?
3. Research the appearance, layout and landscape of Damascus, Beirut, Amman or Cairo. Using a range of materials, create your own abstract impression of a city in the Arab world.

one day I shall become what I want... One day I shall become what I want



One day I shall become what I want. One day I shall become a bird.



Dr. Ali S. Al-Sayid, 2019

Object

Mural

Description

Mohammed al-Shammarey.
Book, 9 silkscreens. Iraq,
AD 2005. © Mohammed
al-Shammarey.

Glossary

PLO: Palestine Liberation
Organisation – group
of organisations originally
formed to free Palestinian
lands from occupation

Information

Since ancient times, the people of the Arab world have treated their dead carefully because many of them believe in the afterlife. In Islam and most sects of Christianity, human spirits or souls either spend eternity in a place of happiness like Heaven or torment like Hell. Both Christians and Muslims believe that before reaching the afterlife there will be a day when all humans will be judged by God according to their actions in life. On this Day of Judgement or Last Day, people will then be sent to Heaven or Hell. In Jewish tradition the souls of the dead, whether good or evil, go to a place called Gehenna to be judged. Some Jews believe that the souls will leave Gehenna when they have been purified.

The images form parts of a book of loose pages presented in a special wooden box. The book contains parts of the poem *Mural*, written by Mahmoud Darwish in 1999 after he suffered a near-fatal illness. Formerly a senior member of the PLO, Darwish is now the leading Palestinian poet and is famous throughout the Arab world. Although this is a very personal poem, his work is often read as expressing the feelings of the Palestinian people. For the artist Mohammed Al-Shammarey, who created the book, Darwish's questioning of life and death is similar to his own feelings.

Mohammed Al-Shammarey was born Baghdad in 1962 and is a self-taught artist. His work comprises book art, paintings and sculptures. He has won several awards and his work has been exhibited in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

Key questions and activities

1. Describe the design of the book. Does anything surprise you about it?
2. Looking at the text, what inspired Mahmoud Darwish to write the poem *Mural*?
3. Research the patterns and decoration used in the Arab world and design your own cover and page for the poem.



Object

Cairo Faces

Description

Sabah Naim. Painted photograph on canvas and newspaper. Egypt, AD 2005.
© Sabah Naim.

Information

Modern Cairo is the largest city in the Arab world and has a population of over 17 million. Most people living there have Arab or African heritage and follow Sunni Islam, but at least 6% are part of the Coptic Christian community. Over the centuries, medieval mosques, covered markets and modern office blocks have developed over the city which is accessible by road, river, rail and the underground. Many people take a black and white taxi as they travel to college, work or the shops. When relaxing, young Egyptians often sit in a café, go to the cinema or watch football at Cairo International Stadium.

When looking at *Cairo Faces*, Egyptian artist Sabah Naim would like us to think about the big difference between the international world of TV, newspapers and politicians, and the everyday world of ordinary people. For her, the daily struggle of getting through life in Egypt has taken the place of political struggles. At the same time, people now wait for things to happen rather than making things happen. Cairo in her work is neither rich nor poor, neither old nor new, but something in between, with its people making their way through the city, focused on their own lives. Although on first view the people and places look 'ordinary', Naim gives them character and importance by painting on to them.

Sabah Naim was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1967. She studied Fine Art at the College of Art Education in Cairo, focusing on the human body in contemporary art. Her work has been exhibited in Egypt, Cuba and Europe. Naim lives and works in Cairo.

Key questions and activities

1. Describe the people that you can see in *Cairo Faces*. Who else would you expect to see if you visited the city of Cairo?
2. Why do you think that Sabah Naim used newspapers in her picture?
3. Choose and research another capital city in the Arab world. Using the internet, Arabic newspapers and magazines, and other materials, create a collage that shows everyday life for the people living there.



Object

Poster of
Yasser Arafat

Description

Paper. Maghreb-Editions,
possibly from Tunisia,
c. AD 1990.

Glossary

Bedouin: traditionally,
Arab nomads and
animal herders

Fatah: The Palestine
National Liberation
Movement

Keffiyeh: headcloth
traditionally worn by
Arab men

PLO: Palestine Liberation
Organisation – group of
organisations originally
formed to free Palestinian
lands from occupation

Six Day War: war fought
from 5 to 10 June 1967
between Israel, Syria,
Egypt and Jordan

Information

Throughout his life, Yasser Arafat (1929–2004) worked to defend the rights of the Palestinian people. During the late 1950s, he helped create Fatah and later commanded its military wing which he led in the 1967 Six Day War. Two years later, due to his reputation as a leader, he became the Chairman of the PLO. After publicly rejecting violence, Arafat received the Nobel Peace Prize with Yitzak Rabin and Shimon Peres of Israel, for negotiating the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord. He was elected President of the Palestinian National Authority in 1996 and governed the Palestinian Territories until his death in 2004. Arafat became an icon for many Arabs and Palestinians and was rarely seen on posters, TV or in newspapers without his distinctive black and white headcloth.

Until the 1920s, the Bedouin were distinguished from Arab villagers and townspeople by their headcloths or *keffiyeh*. There are many different ways of wearing the *keffiyeh*, including across the face to shield it from sand or the sun, or even over the shoulders. In the late 1930s, headcloths were adopted by many villagers and townspeople as an expression of Arab nationalism. Photographs show that many headcloths were white, but later black and white and red and white checked patterns became popular. After the war of 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the black and white *keffiyeh* became a symbol of Palestinian national identity. Young Arab men wore it to show their allegiance, and since then it has become a popular element on posters, paintings and cartoons. Today it is also worn by foreign soldiers and student protestors, and it can be bought in clothes shops in the West in a variety of bright colours.

Key questions and activities

1. Look at the poster and describe your impressions of Yasser Arafat.
2. Originally, who wore the *keffiyeh*? Why did they wear it?
3. Using the *keffiyeh* pattern, design your own poster to highlight the United Nations' work with Palestinian refugees in the Arab world. Do some research into the UN on the internet to help you plan this.



Object

Painting of a battle beneath the walls of a town

Description

Painting on paper. Cairo, Egypt, late 12th to early 13th century AD.

Below: Detail from the Blacas ewer. Brass with silver and copper inlay. Mosul, Iraq, AD 1232.

Glossary

Ansar: soldiers or helpers of the Prophet Muhammad

Caliph: successor to the Prophet Muhammad as leader of Islamic lands and community

Fatimids: Muslim dynasty which ruled in Egypt and Syria from AD 969 to 1171



Information

During the 7th century AD, Muslim Arab armies took control of Arabia and then created a huge empire in a short period of time. Devoted to and inspired by God, the early Arab warriors, called the *Ansar*, fought under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, the first caliphs and experienced commanders. They fought in tribal groups and so were loyal to each other and their leaders. Units were identified by their own flags which could also be used as a rallying point in battle.

Arab soldiers rode to battle on camels or horses and were very well equipped. Some wore helmets, shields and armour made from chain-mail or small metal plates for protection. They fought with spears, short swords and bows, which they used to devastating effect.

Early Arab armies used traditional 'hit and run' tactics learned in Arabia. Later, these cavalry raids were used to weaken the enemy before a larger force of infantry attacked from strong positions, firing off arrows and then advancing in ranks or lines of soldiers.

At the beginning of the 7th century AD, the Byzantine and Persian empires were continuously at war with each other. Weakened by years of fighting, their forces could not hold back the Arab armies.

Some experts believe that the painting shows a battle between Christian Crusaders and Muslims in the 1160s, when King Amalric, the Christian ruler of Jerusalem, led an expedition against the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt. In the picture, infantry and cavalry can be seen fighting around the walls of a town or fortress.

Key questions and activities

1. Look at the battle scene and try to identify three different weapons being used.
2. How did the Arabs go into battle? Using the picture and the text, describe the tactics and methods that the Arab forces adopted.
3. Do some research into why early Arab armies were so successful. Imagine you are a member of the *Ansar* and write a letter to your family in Arabia telling them about your experiences and victories.



Object

Tiles showing
Saladin and
Richard I

Description

Lead-glazed earthenware.
Chertsey, England,
AD 1250–60.

Glossary

Philip II: King of France
from AD 1179 to 1223 and
known as Philip Augustus

Richard I: King of England
from AD 1189 to 1199
and known as Richard
the Lionheart

Saladin: Kurdish
commander and founder
of Ayyubid dynasty in
Egypt and Syria in the late
12th century AD

Information

The region of the Middle East consisting of the Palestinian Territories, Syria, Israel and Lebanon is often called the Holy Land. This is because many places important to Judaism, Christianity and Islam are located there. Between the 11th and 13th centuries AD, Christians and Muslims fought to control the area and so protect their holy sites. At the same time, parts of the region had fertile land, valuable resources and access to important trade routes with the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia.

Arab Muslim forces had taken Jerusalem from Byzantine Christians in AD 639. Over 400 years later, a combined force of western Europeans invaded the Middle East, captured Jerusalem in 1099, and divided up the Holy Land into new kingdoms. This campaign is now known as the First Crusade.

By 1187, Saladin (Salah al-Din in Arabic), a dynamic Muslim leader from what is now northern Iraq, had retaken control of the region. During the Third Crusade (1189–92), Philip II of France and Richard I of England led another army to recapture Jerusalem for the Christians. Although enemies, Saladin and Richard seemed to respect each other due to their positions of power, bravery and achievements. They exchanged gifts and Saladin's brother al-Adil and Richard developed a good relationship. At key stages of the Crusade, the fighting stopped as both sides tried to find a peaceful way to get what they wanted. Finally, with Richard sick and both armies severely weakened, discussions took place in summer 1192. Among the conditions of the truce that followed, Jerusalem was to stay under Muslim control but would be open for Christian pilgrims.

The following year, Saladin died peacefully, after an illness in Syria. Richard, his old rival, died in 1199 as a result of wounds received during a siege in France. The two men had never met.

Key questions and activities

1. Look closely at the picture. If the two leaders never met, why do you think the tiles show Richard defeating Saladin?
2. Use the text to explain why the Muslim and Christian armies stopped fighting during the Third Crusade.
3. Using the internet and other sources of information, do some research to investigate how the Crusades influenced technology, language, food and architecture in Europe.



DISCOVER THE ARAB WORLD

Stone relief of the siege of Lachish

Object

Stone relief of the
siege of Lachish

Description

From the South-West
Palace of Sennacherib.
The siege and capture of
Lachish in 701 BC. Assyrian,
Nineveh, northern Iraq,
about 700–681 BC.

Glossary

Lachish: ancient city in
the kingdom of Judah
(site in modern Israel)

Nineveh: ancient
capital city of Assyria
(site in modern Iraq)

Philistia: region of south
west ancient Palestine

Sennacherib: King of Assyria
from 705 to 681 BC with
capital at Nineveh

Information

The Assyrian Empire developed in what is now northern Iraq from about 1350 BC and spread into large parts of the Middle East. Assyria had no natural frontiers and so the empire acted as a protective ring around their fertile homeland. Conquering other lands also brought booty, like valuable metals, wood and livestock, and captives who could be put to work across the empire. In addition, military victories created wealth through the control of trade routes. In time, Assyrian armies used good organisation, innovative tactics and state-of-the-art technology to create a huge empire.

The Assyrians faced rebellions by people who resented being ruled by foreigners. One revolt began in Philistia during the reign of King Sennacherib. The king sent in the troops and little by little they stamped Assyrian authority over all the rebel cities except Lachish which resisted and refused to pay tribute. For this, the city was besieged, attacked and eventually captured by the Assyrians in 701 BC. This event is mentioned in the Bible, supported by archaeological evidence and commemorated in a series of stone panels from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.

In this panel, the Assyrian soldiers continue the attack on Lachish. They are also shown carrying away a throne, a chariot and other loot from the palace of the defeated governor. In front and below, some of the people of Lachish, taking what goods they can salvage, make their way through a rocky landscape with vines, fig and olive trees. Some of the prisoners may have been resettled and put to work on agricultural and building projects. Sennacherib records that as a result of the whole campaign he deported 200,150 people. Not all captives were so lucky though, as other panels show people being tortured and executed.

Key questions and activities

1. Use the picture and the text to identify all the different reasons why the Assyrians went to war.
2. Look closely at the picture. What can you see that shows the impact of warfare on the people of Lachish?
3. Do some research on the Assyrian Empire. Find out how long it lasted and which modern Arab states occupy the area today.



Object

*Uncle Najib's
suitcase*

Description

Saïd Farhan. Mixed media
on canvas. Iraq/Switzerland,
AD 1999. © Saïd Farhan.

Below: Anti-war badge.
Better Badges, UK, AD 2003.

Glossary

Baath Party: Iraqi political
party founded in AD 1951
and led by Saddam Hussein
from 1979

Coalition: group of armies
that invaded and then
occupied Iraq from 2003

Mesopotamia: ancient
Greek word for the
land between the Tigris
and Euphrates rivers,
now called Iraq

Information

During the First World War, British and Indian forces fought Turkish armies in Mesopotamia and suffered thousands of casualties. In 1920 Britain was given responsibility for governing the emerging state of Iraq but faced rebellion. After defeating the rebellion, the British installed King Faisal on the throne. Oil was discovered in 1927 in northern Iraq and a British company was given control, and kept it even after independence in 1932. The monarchy was violently overthrown in 1958 and Iraq became a republic. The Baath party came to power in the 1960s leading to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Under his regime thousands of Iraqis left the country to settle in other parts of the world, especially Europe.

On 15 February 2003, millions of people marched through London and other cities across the world in the biggest anti-war protest in history. They were trying to stop the invasion of Iraq aimed at the removal of Saddam Hussein by the US-led coalition, which included Britain. Despite the protests the invasion took place and, in the following years, an estimated two million Iraqis fled to neighbouring countries, particularly Syria and Jordan.

Saïd Farhan was born in Baghdad in 1955. He studied and then settled in Switzerland, teaching visual arts. His work includes paintings, drawings and prints. When he left Iraq, Farhan took only a suitcase containing his most treasured possessions, which years later inspired him to create a series of 'suitcases'. These represent exile – his own and that of countless others who have left their homeland. They contain familiar objects that provide comfort when there is nothing else. The signs marked on the cases have no alphabetical meaning but represent memories.

Key questions and activities

1. Look at and carefully describe Saïd Farhan's suitcase.
Compared with other bags, does anything surprise you about it?
2. Why do you think that so many Iraqis like Saïd Farhan left their home country?
3. Do some research on Britain and Iraq's shared history.
How has Britain been involved in Iraq since 1914?





Objects

Bronze figure
of Baal

Papyrus from the
*Book of the
Dead* of Hunefer

Stone relief of a
protective spirit

Description

Canaanite, Syria, about
1400–1200 BC.

From Thebes, Egypt, 19th
dynasty, about 1275 BC.

Nimrud (ancient Kalhu),
northern Iraq, Neo-Assyrian,
883–859 BC.

Glossary

Ancient Egyptians:

civilisation that developed
in the Nile Valley from the
late 4th millennium BC

Canaanites: indigenous
people of the southern
Levant (present-day Israel,
Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and
the Palestinian Territories)

Mesopotamia: ancient
Greek word for the land
between the Tigris and
Euphrates rivers, now
part of Iraq

Information

Until the idea of One God was widely accepted in the Arab world and Middle East, most people worshipped a variety of gods and goddesses. They were thought to influence all parts of daily life. Some of what we know comes from a large number of clay tablets found in Syria. These mention the supreme god, El, the 'father of mankind', who lived in the heavens. He had more than 70 children, including the god Baal and goddess Astarte.

Many different gods and goddesses were worshipped in the lands that were eventually conquered by the Muslim Arabs from the 7th century AD. Although most people became Muslims, the Jews and Christians, who also followed one God, continued to worship in the Middle East.

Baal was one of the major gods of the Canaanites and, later, Phoenicians in the ancient Middle East and represented royal power and authority. He is often shown as a warrior brandishing a weapon, but the figure in the picture may have held a thunderbolt. Canaanite gods and goddesses were worshipped in temples wherever the people settled across the Mediterranean.

The ancient Egyptians followed many gods, often depicting them as half human and half animal. The picture is from the *Book of the Dead*, a papyrus of spells which formed a guide to the afterlife that was placed in the tomb. This section shows the judging of the heart. If the dead person survived this, he or she could become a blessed spirit.

The people of ancient Mesopotamia thought that the universe was controlled by gods who had to be worshipped with prayers and offerings. They also believed in evil demons and placed carvings and statues of good spirits to protect the entrances to towns, houses and rooms with magic.

Key questions and activities

1. Using the pictures and the text, try to identify some of the evidence we have for religion in the ancient Middle East.
2. Why do you think that the people of the ancient Middle East worshipped so many different gods and goddesses?
3. How did religion change in the Arab world when Islam was revealed and spread? Research this topic using these objects, the internet and other sources you can find.



Object

Mosque lamp

Description

Enamelled glass.

Mamluk dynasty. Cairo,
Egypt, about AD 1350–55.

Glossary

Amir: Muslim prince,
governor or military
commander

Five Pillars: five essential
duties in the life of a Muslim

Mamluks: dynasty of
slave-soldiers who ruled
Egypt and Syria from
AD 1250 to 1517

Minaret: a tower from
which Muslims are called
to prayer

Note

This card contains
religious text. Please
treat it with respect.

Information

Islam was introduced to the world in Arabia, after the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the early 7th century AD. Within 20 years of his death, Muslim Arab armies had helped to spread Islam, making it the dominant religion in the Middle East and North Africa. Today, most Arab people are Muslims.

According to the Five Pillars of Islam, Muslims should pray at five fixed times every day, facing Makka (Mecca). Muslims can pray anywhere, even in the desert. The Prophet Muhammad's house in Madina is thought to have been the model for the first mosque. Later buildings were sometimes very simple while others, like the Great Mosque in Damascus, were heavily ornamented with mosaics, marble columns, Arabic inscriptions, domes and minarets.

Enamelled and gilded glass lamps like the one in the picture were made in large numbers to light the many mosques built in Cairo by Mamluk rulers between AD 1250 and 1517. A small glass container for oil with a floating wick would have been placed inside the lamp, and the lamp itself would have been suspended by chains from the ceiling.

This lamp is decorated with verses from the Qur'an and an inscription containing the name and titles of Amir Sayf al-Din Shaykhu al-Nasiri, and his heraldic badge, a red cup. Like other Mamluk commanders, Shaykhu spent a lot on art and architecture. This lamp was probably made for his mosque near the Citadel in Cairo which was completed in 1349 and was considered to be one of the finest of its time.

Key questions and activities

1. Look closely at the picture and read the text. Why do you think the lamp was made from glass?
2. Why might Muslim Mamluk sultans and amirs like Shaykhu have spent so much money on building and decorating mosques?
3. What evidence do we have from the medieval period that proves Arab people were devoted to following Islam? Research examples of the written word, art and architecture.



Object

Print of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem

Description

Louis Haghe. Print based on a watercolour by David Roberts. London, England, published AD 1842.

Glossary

Ka'ba: cube-like shrine in Makka, Saudi Arabia, towards which all Muslims pray and the destination of annual pilgrimage or *hajj*

Umayyads: Arab Muslim rulers (AD 661–750 in Syria and AD 756–1031 in Spain)

Information

The Old City of Jerusalem is sacred to three religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In its history, Jerusalem has been under the control of each faith, being both a religious centre and a place of economic and political power.

Jerusalem is one of the holiest cities in Islam. Early in the Prophet Muhammad's preaching, he identified it as a holy city. The direction of prayer was first towards Jerusalem before it was changed to Makka (Mecca).

Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was miraculously transported one night from Makka to Jerusalem, from where he rose up to Heaven to meet earlier prophets. The Qur'an says that the destination of the journey was al-Aqsa (the farthest) mosque. It is traditionally thought that one of Islam's most important buildings was constructed on the Temple Mount to commemorate this event – the Dome of the Rock, which stands over the stone from which the Prophet Muhammad is said to have ascended.

Jerusalem was captured by Arab Muslim forces in AD 639. Some time afterwards, the Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik ordered the Dome to be built. Completed in about AD 692, it is the oldest Islamic building to survive in its original form. Its circular dome sits on an octagonal base and is supported by 12 pillars and 4 piers. The outside of the dome is covered in gold leaf, and inside it is decorated with mosaic tiles. The building has been renovated and redecorated many times. Today, it is a place of pilgrimage rather than a place of daily worship.

Scottish artist David Roberts travelled to the Middle East in 1838 to paint landscape scenes. When Roberts got home, Louis Haghe made prints of the paintings and these were published in a book, *The Holy Land*, in 1842. The book proved very popular.

Key questions and activities

1. Looking at the picture and the text, why do you think people in Victorian Britain were so keen to buy David Roberts' book?
2. Why do you think the Dome of the Rock has been renovated and redecorated many times?
3. Research the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Describe the Night Journey and the Ascension and explain why the events are so important in Islam.



Object

Model of the
Church of the
Holy Sepulchre

Description

Olive wood.
Made in Bethlehem,
Palestine, late
17th century AD.

Glossary

Bible: Christian holy book
containing the Old and
New Testaments

Sepulchre: a tomb or
burial chamber

Information

The Old City of Jerusalem is sacred to three religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In its history, Jerusalem has been under the control of each faith, being both a religious centre and a place of economic and political power.

Jerusalem is important to Christians because of its role in the events recorded in the Bible. For example, according to the New Testament, Jesus was brought to the city not long after his birth. Later in his life he cleared the moneychangers from the Temple. The room believed to be the site of Jesus' Last Supper is located on Mount Zion in the same building that houses the so-called Tomb of King David. Also, the area below the Mount of Olives is thought to be the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot and arrested.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was built by the Roman emperor Constantine I in AD 325. It is believed to contain the site of the Crucifixion and the Tomb of Jesus. The building was beautifully decorated with marble walls and a ceiling painted in gold.

After the discovery and excavation of these holy sites, Jerusalem became a place of pilgrimage for Christians. Many churches, monasteries and hospices were built to shelter the thousands of pilgrims that came. The business that the pilgrims brought to Jerusalem and the Holy Land became very important to the local people.

The model in the picture is an example of a souvenir made for pilgrims to buy in the 17th century AD. It is made of olive wood inlaid with ebony, ivory and engraved mother-of-pearl. Expensive souvenirs like this were collected by royal and rich people in Europe.

Key questions and activities

1. Use the text to make a list of the reasons why Jerusalem is important to Christians. Find out more about the events on your list.
2. What do you think the different reasons are for why people buy souvenirs? Why would someone buy this particular souvenir?
3. Research Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land and describe the things pilgrims do and the places they visit. You could write this up like a travel guide.



Object

*The Prophecy of
Amos (Wailing
Wall No 2)*

Description

Louis Lozowick. Lithograph
with stencilled hand-
colouring. USA, AD 1970.
© Lee Lozowick.

Glossary

Holy Ark: ornamental
cupboard in a synagogue
that contains the
Torah scrolls

Nebuchadnezzar II:
king of Babylon from
604 to 562 BC

Wailing Wall: name
sometimes used for
the Western Wall, referring
to Jewish sadness at
destruction of the Temple

Information

The Old City of Jerusalem is sacred to three religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In its history, Jerusalem has been under the control of each faith, being both a religious centre and a place of economic and political power.

Jerusalem is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible over 600 times. Synagogues around the world are traditionally built with the Holy Ark facing Jerusalem. According to Jewish law, daily prayers should be recited towards Jerusalem and many Jews around the world have 'Mizrach' plaques that show its direction.

According to tradition, King David conquered Jerusalem in about 1000 BC. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to the city, and it became the political and spiritual centre for the Jewish people. Some believe that David's son Solomon built the First Temple at the place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. Inside was the 'Holy of Holies', the most sacred site in Judaism. In 586 BC the city was invaded by the Babylonians. At the order of King Nebuchadnezzar II the city was set on fire, the Temple destroyed, and the people taken into exile. The Second Temple was built from 516 BC but this too was razed to the ground by the Romans in AD 70.

The Western Wall is sacred to Jewish people because, of the Temple's surviving walls, it is located closest to the original site of the Holy of Holies. Jews have prayed at the Western Wall for centuries, believing that God's presence rests on it and that the gate of Heaven is situated above it. When visiting, many Jews place a prayer written on a small piece of paper into a crack in the Wall.

Key questions and activities

1. Look closely at the picture. Do you think that the Wall looks ancient? Describe how the artist has achieved this effect.
2. Read through the text. Why is the Western Wall so important to Jewish people?
3. Research Amos 7:9 in the Bible, the Temple of Jerusalem and Judaism in the 20th century. Why do you think Lozowick chose the Wailing Wall to represent the prophecy? What was he trying to say about the experiences of Jews in modern times?



Object

Stone marker
for Ghalilat

Description

Calcite-alabaster.
Kingdom of Saba,
possibly Marib, Yemen,
1st century AD.

Below: Incense burner,
Shabwa, Yemen,
about 3rd century AD.

Glossary

Athtar: ancient
South Arabian god
of thunderstorms

South Arabia: area
covered by modern
Yemen and Oman



Information

Before Islam, ancient South Arabia was divided into five kingdoms, one of which was Saba. Archaeological excavation and the translation of thousands of inscriptions have provided evidence of a wealthy region. These kingdoms were rich because they controlled the trade in frankincense and myrrh, tree resins that were burnt in religious ceremonies in the ancient world. The resins were taken by sea to Egypt or overland by camel to cities like Gaza (in the modern Palestinian Territories) and Petra (in modern Jordan). South Arabians used their profits to pay for luxuries in their homes, temples to the gods and expensive burials.

In about the 1st century AD, this carved stone was made for a tomb. Its inscription reads 'Image of Ghalilat, daughter of Mafaddat and may Athtar destroy he who breaks it.' Ghalilat is probably the figure on the top half of the stone. She is seated on a large chair with a footstool and is playing a lyre, a stringed instrument like a harp. The H-shaped and square panels decorating her robes are also found on Roman clothes at this time. The lower part shows a servant standing and a woman lying on a couch.

Rich South Arabian women were often commemorated in this way. We can learn about their appearance and importance from these tombs and inscriptions. They are shown wearing full- or calf-length robes and sandals with thick soles. Their hair is sometimes braided and hangs down their backs in a plait. Many different types of jewellery can be seen, including armllets, anklets and collar necklaces, and gold earrings, necklace beads and finger rings have been found by archaeologists.

Key questions and activities

1. Using the picture of Ghalilat and the text, write a paragraph to describe what women wore in South Arabia.
2. Why do you think the Romans called ancient South Arabia 'Arabia Felix' or 'lucky Arabia'?
3. Do some research to find out how Christians, Muslims and Jews use incense today.



Object

Stone memorial
for Tamma

Description

Limestone. Palmyra, Syria,
about AD 100–150.

Glossary

Aramaic: important Middle
Eastern language in use
between 1200 BC and the
7th century AD

Information

Before Islam, the Arabs were divided into two groups, those living in northern Arabia and beyond it in Syria, and those living in southern Arabia. The ancient oasis city of Palmyra (in modern Syria), with its mixed populations of Arabs, Aramaeans, Parthians and Phoenicians, stood at the crossroads of important trade routes which linked South Arabia, the Gulf, the Mediterranean and the Far East. Palmyra became famous for its wealth which was spent on temples, theatres, colonnaded streets, baths and monumental tombs. By the end of the first century AD, the city was part of the Roman Empire.

In AD 267 the ruler of Palmyra, Septimius Odaïnat, was assassinated with his eldest son. Zenobia, his wife, took control, declared her young son 'Augustus', and set off with her armies to conquer Egypt and Asia Minor (now Turkey). However, the Roman Emperor, Aurelian, defeated her forces and captured Zenobia and Palmyra in AD 272. Although the city was destroyed the following year after another rebellion, Zenobia's fame lived on and ancient writers described her beauty, leadership, language skills and passion for hunting.

According to the Aramaic inscription, the woman carved on this stone is Tamma, daughter of Samsiqeram, son of Maliku, son of Nassum. Tamma was buried in the cemetery at Palmyra, where different types of tombs were built for rich citizens. The tombs contained compartments for the dead which were sealed with a stone portrait. Tamma has been carved holding her veil open, revealing her face, hair, intricate jewellery and fine clothes. Surrounded by her worldly possessions, evidence of her success in life, Tamma also holds a spindle and distaff used for spinning thread, which may be symbols of her household position.

Key questions and activities

1. Why do you think that the Romans wanted to keep control of Palmyra?
2. Look at the portrait of Tamma. What evidence can you find that suggests she was from a wealthy family?
3. Research the life of Zenobia. Use your information to describe the role of women in ancient Palmyra.



Object

Details from the
Blacas ewer

Description

Brass with silver and copper
inlay. Mosul, Iraq, AD 1232.

Below: the Blacas ewer

Glossary

Badr al-Din Lu'lu:

ruler of Mosul for the
Zengid dynasty and
then independently

Blacas: the French Duc
de Blacas owned the
ewer until 1866 when
it came to the Museum

Ewer: a jug for water
or wine

Information

In April AD 1232, Shuja' ibn Man'a put the finishing touches to this ewer in his workshop in the city of Mosul. Now in modern Iraq, Mosul was an important administrative and trading centre during the medieval period. Situated in fertile land on the banks of the river Tigris, it also produced flour for Baghdad, among other things. When the ewer was made Mosul was ruled by Badr al-Din Lu'lu. Five brass vessels inscribed with his name have survived from this time. Objects like these were sometimes given as presents to neighbouring rulers.

Medieval Arab rulers spent a lot of time receiving visitors and listening to their requests. They also held important meetings with those officials who helped them to govern. Guests were often entertained with music and dancing. Banquets gave rulers and courtiers an important chance to relax from the pressures of life. Leisure time might also be spent listening to poets and storytellers. Sometimes an Arab lord would leave the capital to visit his lands. There, noblemen might go hunting with their courtiers. They rode horses and used spears or bows to attack animals like deer and hares. Trained dogs and falcons were often used in the hunt.

The Blacas ewer is covered with action scenes of rulers' lives created from silver and copper wire. Male courtiers are shown hunting, riding, fighting and feasting. Women also appear in several scenes: a lady admires herself in a hand mirror of polished metal while her maid holds a jewel casket; female musicians play the lute, flute, harp and tambourine; and a wealthy woman is shown travelling on a camel attended by two servants.

Key questions and activities

1. Look at picture and the text. How do we know that metalwork was popular in Iraq during the 13th century AD?
2. Using the pictures, describe the evidence that we have for the lives of women in medieval Iraq.
3. Research everyday life of kings and lords in medieval Britain. What similarities and differences were there between the lives of European and Arab rulers at this time?





Object

Hands of Fatima

Description

Laila Shawa. Oil and acrylic on canvas. Palestinian Territories/UK, AD 1989.
© Laila Shawa.

Glossary

Henna: plant dye used to stain beautiful patterns on to hands and feet in the Middle East

Information

During the 1980s, artist Laila Shawa created paintings focusing on women and the veil. This painting was the first of a series called *Women and Magic*. Colourfully dressed women hold up their hennaed hands that have been transformed into banners carrying the 'Hand of Fatima'. The Arabic words *ma sha'a Allah* ('as God wills') appear on some hands. As the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, Fatima is greatly respected across the Islamic world. The hand symbol, also known as *khamsa* ('five' in Arabic) is used on necklaces and even car stickers across the Arab and Islamic worlds to protect people against the 'evil eye' and bad luck. Brides, pregnant women and children are seen as particularly at risk and often wear amulets or charms in this shape. Shawa's interest in magic comes from her direct personal experiences when growing up in the Middle East.

Laila Shawa was born in Gaza, Palestine in 1940. She studied in Cairo, Rome and Salzburg in the 1950s and early 1960s, graduating in Fine Arts and later, Plastic and Decorative Arts. She uses a variety of media, including oils on canvas, photographs and silkscreens, and also designs stained glass windows. She has had solo exhibitions in Europe and the Middle East and participated in the exhibition *Dialogue of the Present, the Work of 18 Arab Women Artists in the UK*. She lives and works in London.

Key questions and activities

1. Describe the figures that you can see in the painting. Why do you think that Laila Shawa decided to paint the veiled women in such colourful clothes?
2. Looking at the text, explain why the 'Hand of Fatima' is worn to protect brides, pregnant women and children.
3. Do some research on other protective amulets or charms that are worn across the world. If you wear one yourself try to describe it in your answer.



Object
Embroidered dress

Description

Cotton and silk.
Southern plain of Palestine,
AD 1920s.

Glossary

Keffiyeh: headcloth
traditionally worn by
Arab men

Six Day War: war fought
from 5 to 10 June 1967
between Israel, Syria,
Egypt and Jordan

Information

This dress was made in the 1920s when Britain governed Palestine. Its style is typical of southern Palestine. Most of the dress is made from hand-woven cotton that has been dyed blue with indigo. Cotton with silk stripes and taffeta and silk cloth has been stitched on to this and the dress has been decorated with silk embroidery. Heavily embroidered dresses were particularly made for celebrations, especially weddings. Before 1948, the different styles and colours of embroidery and other features of women's costumes also showed which part of Palestine the person wearing it came from.

When British forces left Palestine in 1948, over 500,000 people fled or were driven from their homes in the territory that became Israel. Many of these refugees have since lived in camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, while other Palestinians are widely spread throughout the Arab world and in Africa, Europe and the Americas. A second major wave of Palestinian refugees was created by the Six Day War in 1967. In that year, Israel took control of the Golan Heights, West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Today, many Palestinian women wear western-style clothes but on special occasions put on traditional embroidered dresses. For them, this reflects their background, age, status and fashion consciousness. For others, these dresses have become a symbol of their Palestinian identity, and now are sometimes decorated with the red, black, white and green of the Palestinian flag and worn with the black and white *keffiyeh* headcloth.

Key questions and activities

1. What do you wear when you are going to a party or celebrating something special? Compare your clothes with the dress in the picture. Describe the colours, materials and style.
2. The Palestinian dress was made and embroidered by hand. Why do you think that so much effort went into making it?
3. Research the impact of conflict on the Palestinian people from 1948. What effect do you think this has had on traditional Palestinian weaving and dressmaking?



Object

Umm Kulthum

Description

Chant Avedissian. Print
on paper. Egypt, AD 1990s.
© Chant Avedissian.

Glossary

Imam: head of a Muslim
community and leader of
daily prayers in the mosque

Information

The Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, known to her fans as *Kawkab al-sharq*, 'star of the east', was one of the most famous and popular women in the Arab world. When she died in AD 1975 over 1 million people joined her funeral procession through the streets of Cairo. Even today her music is heard throughout the region. Songs like 'You are my life', 'I see you are refusing to cry' and 'A thousand and one nights' were sung in Arabic and were about love, patriotism, religion and specific events. During her life Umm Kulthum was often photographed wearing dark glasses.

Born in 1898, Umm Kulthum grew up in the Nile Delta of Egypt. Her father was the village imam who also sang at weddings and festivals, and took his daughter to sing with him when he discovered how strong her voice was. She dressed as a boy because people did not think it was right for girls to sing in public. The family moved to Cairo in the early 1920s and Umm Kulthum developed her singing style by learning from experienced performers. By 1930 she was already extremely popular and one of the best-paid musicians in the city.

Born in Cairo, Egypt in 1951, Chant Avedissian studied Fine Art and Printmaking in Canada and France before returning home to work in Architecture. From this time he developed a strong interest in traditional arts and local materials, which he uses in many of his works. He has worked with a wide range of media, including photography and textiles, and since 1990 has been using stencils on cardboard. The main theme of these recent images is the glamorous era of Egypt of the 1940s and 1950s which has been shown in many exhibitions around the world.

Key questions and activities

1. Looking at the picture, what distinctive features has the artist given Umm Kulthum?
2. Artists often use oil paints or photography to create portraits of famous people. Why do you think that Avedissian used stencils?
3. Do some research on Umm Kulthum. Compare her life, work and look with that of other Arab women.



Object

Brooch with coin
of the emperor
Philip I

Description

Gold coin (aureus).
Roman Empire, mid to late
3rd century AD.

Glossary

Hadrian's Wall: fortification
built by the Romans in
northern England between
AD 122 and 130

Palmyra: wealthy
trading city from 200 BC
(in modern Syria)

Information

In the first two centuries AD, Rome conquered large parts of what is now the Arab world. The empire's eastern provinces included Judea, Arabia Petraea, Mesopotamia and Syria. Control of the region's markets, like Palmyra, gave Rome considerable influence over the trade in luxury goods such as purple dye, incense, spices and silks, and a direct link to the important trade routes with South Arabia, the Indian subcontinent and China. Rome could tax this trade and use the revenue to fund the empire.

Philip I, sometimes called 'Philip the Arab', was emperor of Rome from AD 244 to 249. He was born near Damascus in south-west Syria and had a successful career in the Roman army. In 243, he challenged and defeated the existing emperor, the teenage Gordian III. During Philip's reign, there were many military campaigns. In the east, he made peace with the Persian king, Shapur I, by agreeing to pay him large sums of money every year. He then fought against Germanic tribes who had crossed the river Danube, and finally against his own generals on the northern frontiers of the empire. He was eventually murdered in 249 by Decius, the leader of one of these rebel armies.

Over 2,000 miles from Syria, Britain was also part of the Roman Empire. Rome's occupation had begun after the emperor Claudius' invasion in AD 43. When Britain was brought into Rome's huge empire, people from Syria and the eastern provinces came to Britain as soldiers (a unit of Syrian archers was based near Hadrian's Wall) and as traders (a gravestone to Barathes from Palmyra who sold military flags and standards has been found at Corbridge in Northumberland). They also brought their religions, building altars and temples to their gods, like Astarte and Virgo Caelestis.

Key questions and activities

1. Look closely at the portrait of 'Philip the Arab' on the coin. Describe how he looks as a Roman emperor.
2. Reading through the text, why do you think the Romans occupied the eastern provinces?
3. Research the relationship between the Middle East and Roman Britain. You could investigate the Roman army, trade goods and religion from the eastern provinces.



Object

Imitation *dinar*
of Offa

Description

Gold. England, AD 773–96.

Glossary

Abbasids: Arab clan descended from

the Prophet Muhammad's uncle, al-Abbas

Al-Mansur: Abbasid caliph of the Islamic world from AD 754 to 775

Mercia: Anglo-Saxon kingdom in the Midlands of England from the 6th to the 10th centuries AD

Offa: king of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia in England from AD 757 to 796

Information

Shortly after the Arab Abbasid dynasty took control of the Islamic empire in AD 750, its leader Caliph al-Mansur started building a new capital at Baghdad in what is now modern Iraq. He did this for many reasons but particularly because the site was at the crossroads of several important overland trade routes. It was also close to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which connected to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. The high quality of Abbasid gold coins known as *dinars* attracted many merchants to Baghdad and the city became a rich trading centre, with goods arriving from as far away as China, India and East Africa. Islamic silver coins known as *dirhams* found in Britain and Scandinavia show that trade between the Arab world and Europe was also developing from this time.

At the same time, Offa became ruler of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia in England. Famous today for the earth wall known as Offa's Dyke built between England and Wales, he held on to power by winning battles, making alliances, encouraging trade, and propaganda. By designing coins with his portrait or royal title, he tried to show people in Mercia, England and Europe that he was powerful. He was the first to make silver pennies in England and his wife even had her own coins. Perhaps the most amazing example is the unique 'Offa coin'. This looks just like the *dinars* of Caliph al-Mansur made in AD 773–4 in what is now Iraq.

Although the inscription is not copied perfectly and the Latin is upside down in relation to the Arabic, you can clearly read OFFA REX (King Offa) on the coin.

Key questions and activities

1. The Arabic is not correctly written on the Offa coin. What does this tell you about the person who made the coin?
2. Why do you think Offa had a coin made to look like an Abbasid *dinar*?
3. Do some research to find out about trade between Europe and the Middle East in this period. Investigate goods, money, markets, transport and trade routes.



Object

Treasure from
Salcombe
Cannon Site

Description

Morocco, 16th–17th
century AD.

Below: Gold *dinar* of
Muhammad al-Walid bin
Zaydan al Nasir, minted in
Marrakesh, Morocco in AH
1040 / AD 1631. Found in a
shipwreck in Salcombe Bay,
Devon, England.

Glossary

Barbary: North African
region, not including Egypt

Dinar: gold coins used for
trade in and with the Arab
and Islamic worlds

Levant: region including
modern Lebanon, Syria,
Jordan, the Palestinian
Territories, and Israel

Sharif: Muslim ruler
claiming descent from the
Prophet Muhammad

Information

In AD 1999, the British Museum acquired a group of over 400 gold coins, broken pieces of gold jewellery and ingots, as well as pewter, pottery sherds and a merchant's seal. The objects were brought up from the seabed by divers in Salcombe Bay in Devon. Many of the coins were made for the Sa'dian dynasty, who ruled Morocco during the 16th and 17th centuries AD and are famous for their wealth in West African gold and their palace in Marrakesh. The latest coin found was made for Sharif al-Walid in AD 1631. The ship the treasure came from has not yet been identified.

While the Sa'dians reigned in north-west Africa, the Tudors and Stuarts were ruling in Britain and Ireland. Under these monarchs there was increased maritime exploration and trade, and Elizabeth I and Charles II actively encouraged expeditions, companies and trading settlements. England particularly expanded its trade with southern Europe and the Mediterranean coast, Turkey and the Levant. English merchants exported cloth, fish, timber and guns, and by about 1650 increasing quantities of goods from the colonies like pepper, tobacco and sugar. In return, England imported Levantine silks, Spanish wool, Italian wine and leather and horses from Morocco.

Pirates from the North African or Barbary coast had occasionally captured English ships before 1600. However, when James I made peace with Philip III of Spain the attacks increased as Christian England then became the enemy of Ottoman Turkey and other Muslim powers around the Mediterranean. Between 1600 and the early 1640s, Barbary pirates seized over 800 English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish trading vessels in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, taking their cargoes and selling the crews into slavery. They even raided ports in Ireland, the Channel Islands and the south-west of England, carrying off hundreds of men, women and children into captivity.

Key questions and activities

1. Look at the picture and the text and describe the treasure that was found at Salcombe. How old were the coins and where did they come from?
2. Read the text again. How do you think the treasure got to Devon?
3. The British Empire was beginning to develop from the 17th century. Do some research into the British settlements of Virginia, Barbados and Tangier. Find out when and why they were set up and what impact they had on Britain and the local people.



BATAILLE DES PYRAMIDES.



Armée française, victorieuse à Chénouba, entre le 21 juillet 1798 au pied des Pyramides. Les Mamelouks au nombre de 15,000, appuyés sur le camp retranché d'El-Rahaba, où se trouvoit 30,000 Jasiars et Sepils, viret les piques de seson. L'armée
 eut assez facilement le Brève Mamelouk à leur tête. Bonaparte fut de son côté débarrassé tout habillement entrés, et se porta en avant, en leur disant : « Envoies-les s'en aller, que du haut de ces Pyramides quarante mille vous contemplant. » Les Mamelouks s'ébranlèrent
 et jetaient tout d'un coup sur le camp, comme sous les pieds, d'un camp et de l'autre à se qu'ils se trouvoient tout-à-coup assaillis sur le feu rouge de ses deux divisions. Les Mamelouks firent des efforts pour les entraves
 le premier fondroyé par le feu de nos canons, comme sous les pieds, d'un camp et de l'autre à se qu'ils se trouvoient tout-à-coup assaillis sur le feu rouge de ses deux divisions. Les Mamelouks firent des efforts pour les entraves
 Le camp des ennemis est entré à la hâte, ses braves, ses riches bagages, ses drapeaux, ses vivres sont les Français emportant depuis plusieurs jours, s'en vont en possession de la patrie de la Côte et de l'Asie.

Propriété de l'Éditeur. (Déposé.)

A. CHENOU, des Pyramides, Impression-Lithographie

Object

*Bataille des
Pyramides*

Description

Print on paper.
France, AD 1830.

Glossary

Acre: city now known as Akko in modern Israel
Mamluks: slave-soldiers who ruled Egypt and Syria independently from AD 1250 to 1517 and governed Egypt for the Ottoman Turks until 1811
Rosetta Stone: important ancient Egyptian object from el-Rashid (Rosetta) in the Nile Delta used in deciphering hieroglyphs

Information

In May 1798, Napoleon landed with 38,000 troops in Egypt, then a province in the Ottoman Turkish Empire run by the Mamluks. He aimed to cut off Britain from the overland route to India. If that was achieved, he would march to India and expel the British. The invasion was popular with the supporters of the French Revolution who thought that liberty could be brought to the tyrannised Egyptians, and also with French imperialists who wanted to humiliate Britain and develop French trade.

After capturing Alexandria, Napoleon's army was marching towards Cairo in July when it met the Egyptian forces between the Pyramids at Giza and the capital. The Mamluks had well-trained cavalry, and with the Turkish infantry they heavily outnumbered the French. However, Napoleon's infantry and artillery formed squares and gradually brought down the enemy cavalry as it charged. The Turkish infantry were then defeated.

Despite this, the French conquest greatly slowed down when their navy was defeated by the British at the Battle of the Nile in August 1798 and the army failed to capture Acre in 1799. Shortly afterwards, Napoleon decided to return to France. When their remaining forces were surrounded and besieged, the French signed the Treaty of Alexandria in 1801 and pulled out of Egypt.

Napoleon's expedition had included a large group of scholars, engineers, architects and artists. They collected a huge amount of information about ancient Egyptian culture, and their publication, *The Description of Egypt*, was to provide the basis for the future study of ancient Egypt in Europe and America. This, along with the objects brought back by the French and British, like the Rosetta Stone, created huge interest among the educated and rich. 'Egyptian style' became very popular and was used by artists, craftspeople, designers and architects throughout Europe.

Key questions and activities

1. Look closely at the picture of the battle and describe what is happening.
2. Why do you think Napoleon decided to invade Egypt in 1798?
3. Research Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. Find out about the work of the scholars and artists during the French occupation and the effect that this was to have on art and architecture in Europe.



Object

Excavations at
Tell es-Sa'idiyeh

Description

Photograph. Jordan,
AD 1989.

Glossary

Deir 'Alla: village in Jordan
near the excavation site
at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh

Information

Since it opened in 1753, the British Museum has displayed objects from the Arab world. As Britain's empire grew, diplomats, soldiers and traders collected and gave things to the Museum, including objects from ancient Egypt and the Middle East. Experts at the Museum became curious and travelled to collect, excavate and learn for themselves. In the 20th century this research became more scientific. After the First World War, Britain was given responsibility for governing parts of the Middle East, making more research possible. At this time, Museum staff helped to create some of the first museums in the Arab world.

Today, the British Museum continues to work closely with people from the Arab world to investigate and protect their history and culture. Every year, curators, education officers and conservators from the region visit London to share specialist skills and experience with staff at the Museum. Objects are regularly loaned to museums in the Middle East and the British Museum has organised exhibitions such as *Word into Art: artists of the Modern Middle East* in London.

A team from the British Museum has been excavating the ancient site of Tell es-Sa'idiyeh in Jordan since 1985. Before each season, the excavation director applies to the Jordanian Department of Antiquities for permission to work. The Department also sends two representatives to work on and help supervise the dig. About 100 local villagers are hired to dig, shovel and remove the earth in baskets. Over the years, some have become experts in excavating human remains. A cook, housekeeper, driver and maintenance man support the team at their base in Deir 'Alla.

Key questions and activities

1. Look at the picture and try to identify the type of people and their jobs on the excavation at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh.
2. Use the text to explain why the British Museum's collections from the Arab world and Middle East grew in the 19th century.
3. Today, the British Museum continues to have very valuable connections with the Arab world. Use the internet to research other examples of how people from the UK are cooperating closely with people from the Middle East.