

Cultural Exchange:

JEWISH AND MUSLIM CONNECTIONS



Curriculum Guide

T · H · E
JEWISH
MUSEUM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Carole R. Zawatsky
Director of Education

Jane Fragner
Assistant Director of Education/Project Coordinator

Debbie Krivoy
Curriculum Developer and Writer

Aviva Feit, Mohini Shapero
Researcher and Writer

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DEAR EDUCATOR:

The Education Department is delighted to introduce *Cultural Exchange: Jewish and Muslim Connections*, an education program for middle school and high school students. It is our hope that by exploring how Jews and Muslims shared artistic traditions and cultural practices in certain periods of history, students will recognize the possibility of working toward creating a community of tolerance and understanding in contemporary times.

In this education program, students will learn about the dynamic cultural exchange that occurred between Jews and Muslims in medieval Spain.

They will also view the adaptation by Jews of motifs from the dominant Muslim culture in countries such as Turkey, Syria, Persia, Morocco, and Tunisia primarily during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Through analyzing objects, hands-on activities, and group discussion, this education program provides students with opportunities to relate key concepts to their own experiences, as well as discuss new ideas with their peers and teachers.

Jane Fragner
Assistant Director of Education/Project Coordinator



The Jewish Museum
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This curriculum guide has been designed to help teachers prepare middle and high school students for the *Cultural Exchange: Jewish and Muslim Connections* program at The Jewish Museum. Choose the activities that best suit the needs of your students, subject matter, and individual teaching style.

PROGRAM GOALS

Through the *Cultural Exchange: Jewish and Muslim Connections* program, students will:

- view a variety of objects that provide insight into the shared artistic traditions and cultural practices of Jews and Muslims in specific periods of history
- identify the historic similarities between Jewish and Islamic culture as a model for cultural understanding
- assess the ways in which art reflects shared traditions across diverse cultures
- examine the dynamic cultural exchange that occurred between Jews and Muslims in medieval Spain
- explore the adaptation by Jews of motifs from the dominant Muslim culture in such countries as Turkey, Syria, Persia, Morocco, and Tunisia primarily during the 19th and 20th centuries

CONTENTS

This curriculum guide contains:

- ▮ Introduction with an historical background, timeline, map, and pre-visit activities
- ▮ Three subject areas (Cultural Folklore, Places of Worship, Traditional Texts) with:
 - Overview and historical background
 - Comparative Jewish and Muslim images
 - Discussion questions
 - Suggested activities

When these subject areas are studied sequentially, students will gain an understanding of the significant and vibrant cultural exchange that took place between Jews and Muslims during periods of interaction. Individual themes and activities can also be selected and integrated into an existing course curriculum such as social studies, history, creative writing, geography, humanities, and the arts.

- ▮ Glossary of terms
- ▮ Selected resources for further exploration



Historical Background

Jews and Muslims have been interacting since Muhammad's prophetic messages developed into the Islamic religion in the seventh century. By that time, the Jewish Diaspora was widespread, as a result of complex economic and political circumstances. Many Jews had left Palestine and joined existing Diaspora communities. The dispersion of the Jews across the Middle East and various parts of Europe and North Africa enabled them to contribute to the culture of their host societies while cultivating their own tradition through the incorporation of new cultural elements. Jews were an important minority in all the major cities of Islam, in Egypt, Iraq, and the Iberian Peninsula (the territory that today contains Spain and Portugal). During the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries in the Iberian Peninsula, the impressive achievements of the two groups included the development of new literary forms, intellectual investigations into religious law, advancements in science, medicine, and technology, and probing studies of language, literature, and philosophy. The Jews and Muslims of these lands also shared artistic techniques of expression in the areas of architecture, music, and design.

Beginning in the 11th century, however, internal strife, civil war, and opposing forces within the Muslim empire began to weaken the cultural openness of the region. Despite these negative forces, the Jewish community thrived until 1145, when a fanatical Islamic dynasty began to persecute Christians, Jews, and other Muslims in the southern Iberian Peninsula. Still Jewish life continued to thrive in the north for a couple of centuries. Eventually, the Christians began to re-conquer the Iberian Peninsula with the Inquisition, an effort introduced by the Roman Catholic Church to expose and punish heretics. In 1492, they forcibly expelled the Jews and a century later expelled a significant portion of the Muslim population. The multitude of Jews leaving the Iberian Peninsula at this time fled to areas across

the globe, but it was primarily in the regions under Ottoman rule, such as Turkey and Syria, where they once again came into cultural contact with Muslims. Jewish refugees also settled in areas of North Africa, including Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, where this cultural crossover began to flourish. This connection continued into the early modern period, an example being the heavy Turkish background evident in Hebrew mystical songs composed during this time.

By the 17th and 18th centuries, the Jews and Muslims of Morocco participated as both artisans and patrons of each other's art. The folkloric customs of the two groups followed similar beliefs and superstitions, and the artistic culture of Islamic Morocco was shaped by significant Jewish contributions. For example, in Morocco, metalwork and jewelry design were largely reserved for Jews because of Islamic disdain for such professions. The design and decoration of textiles and buildings are other areas in which Jews and Muslims collaborated to create the dynamic culture of Morocco.

The Moroccan encounter is only one of many historical examples that illustrate the culturally productive exchange that occurred between Jews and Muslims. The exploration of this cultural interchange contains positive value and consequence for contemporary times, as it helps impart a message of acceptance and sensitivity toward different cultures and national experiences.

70 C.E.	Destruction of Second Temple in Jerusalem.
570	Birth of Muhammad.
630-730	Expansion of Islamic empire from Persia to Spain.
ca. 650	Chapters of the Koran are collected.
711	Muslim invaders capture Spain, ending Visigoth rule and beginning a period of <i>convivencia</i> , or “living together,” of various religions and ethnic minorities.
1027	Rabbi Samuel Halevi ibn Nagrella (Samuel Ha-Nagid) becomes vizier of Granada. The first of the great poets of medieval Spain, he publishes Hebrew poems with Arabic superscriptions.
1139	Poet Judah Halevi completes his influential philosophy of Judaism known as <i>The Kuzari</i> .
1147	The Almohads, a dynasty from Morocco, conquer Spain.
1190	Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon (Maimonides), Córdoba-born philosopher and legal expert, writes <i>Guide to the Perplexed</i> in Arabic. The text is a reconciliation of Judaism with Aristotle's laws of nature. Considered the most important Jewish scholar of his lifetime, Maimonides and his family flee to Cairo after Córdoba is taken by the Almohads.
1190s	Abul Walid Muhammad Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Spanish-Muslim philosopher, jurist, and physician, writes <i>Incoherence of the Incoherence</i> . While he is a respected commentator of the philosophy of Aristotle, Averroes' view that reason takes precedence over religion leads to his exile in 1195 by the caliph of Morocco and Spain.
1200s	Rise of powerful new Muslim dynasties in Morocco. Islam expands in East Africa.
1347-1351	Bubonic Plague, or “Black Death,” strikes the Middle East and Europe, killing one-third to half of those infected.
1300s	The Alhambra Palace, one of the most widely known Islamic works of art, is built in Granada, Spain. The word <i>alhambra</i> comes from the Arabic <i>al-Hamra</i> , which means “red palace,” perhaps referring to the color of the mountain on which it is built.
1315	Córdoba Synagogue is constructed after the city's conquest in 1235-36. The patron, Isaac Muhibb ben Ephraim, uses craftsmen who work in Mudéjar style. The stucco walls and carved ceilings reflect the styles and techniques of the Alhambra.
ca. 1357	El Transito Synagogue is built in Toledo, Spain. Muslim influence can be seen in the Mudéjar lace-like carvings that wind their way through the alabaster stone. Hebrew and Arabic inscriptions are integrated into the complex stucco ornamentation, including verses from the Koran.
1378-1415	Rise of the Ottoman Empire from Turkey throughout Eastern Mediterranean.
1453	Ottoman Turks conquer Constantinople and seek to revitalize former Byzantine Empire.
1455	Production of Gutenberg Bible marks the beginning of the printing revolution. The first printing press arrives in Spain in 1473.
1492	The completion of the <i>Reconquista</i> drives an estimated 500,000 Jews from Spain. Some Jews migrate to Portugal where they remain until ordered to convert or die in 1496-97. Many Spanish Jews flee to Morocco; others journey to the Balkans and the Middle East.
1500-1630s	Hundreds of thousands of Spanish Muslim exiles make their way to ancestral homelands of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia.
1550-1800s	Moroccan mosques carry on the building traditions of the types found in Spain. Horseshoe arches, courtyard gardens, and elaborately decorated exterior walls are seen throughout the country. Jews and Muslims of Morocco participate as both artisans and patrons of each other's art and material culture.

Note: See glossary for further information about names and places listed in this timeline.



SUGGESTED PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to define *culture* and *cultural exchange*. Explore these concepts further by using the following questions, either as part of a group discussion or individual writing activity:
 - ▶ What are some ways that we can learn about a life and society that came before ours?
 - ▶ How do different cultures influence one another through everyday activities?
 - ▶ In thinking about our own lives, what is borrowed and shared from other cultures?
 - ▶ How do religious groups form positive relationships with one another in a larger societal context (establishing a climate of mutual respect and tolerance, benefiting from shared artistic and cultural traditions, etc.)?
 - ▶ How does material culture – the things that people use to adapt to the world around them – reflect shared values across diverse communities?
 - ▶ How do two distinct cultures exist side by side in a common land?
 - ▶ What can art convey about a culture (geographical information, religious traditions, folklore and legends)?
 - ▶ What are some concrete ways that we can learn about other cultures (paintings, photographs, jewelry, literature, ritual objects, religious texts, music, clothing, etc.)?
2. Ask students to trace the experiences of their own ethnic, cultural, or religious group. Have them place their family on a map and timeline and find out, if possible, why family members left a given area, where they settled, and how they maintained their cultural identity. How did they, for example, manage to preserve religious traditions, keep personal objects, or pass down skilled trades?
3. Distribute copies of the Glossary of Terms at the back of this guide. Encourage students to write a story, postcard, letter, or journal integrating several words from the glossary.
4. Discuss the ways in which New York City, San Francisco, Miami, or Los Angeles are examples of cultural coexistence, dynamic interchange, and shared aesthetics. Encourage students to pay attention to the particular cultures that have affected the city's customs, dress, traditions, professions, cuisine, music, building design, etc.



Cultural Folklore

The folkloric traditions (beliefs, legends, and customs) of Jews and Muslims have similar roots. As the two religious groups lived amongst one another and exchanged superstitious ideas and practices, local folklore became ascribed with religious significance. These superstitions are often expressed through the use of amulets, which are objects worn or used in the home as a charm against evil or injury. Amulets can take many forms, including jewelry, wall hangings, or the decoration of religious documents.

The use of charms and amulets are a central component of Islamic tradition and are thought to protect life and property and to guarantee safe travel. A passage of the Koran is frequently incorporated in the amulet, and may be found on the surface or interior of the object. The *mezuzah*, affixed to the doorposts of a Jewish home, similarly incorporates portions of religious text. A *mezuzah* is a scroll inscribed with passages from the Hebrew Bible that is contained in a small case often made of wood or metal. It serves as a reminder of God's love and providence, and ensures divine protection. Some Jewish travelers also carry small containers holding parchments of scripture to safeguard their journeys.

Amulets in the shape of a human hand are popular among both Jews and Muslims and are used for various purposes. According to Jewish tradition, this type of amulet is known as a *hamsa*. A *hamsa* depicts the right hand, which represents the hand of God, symbolizing honor and purity. Jews believe that the *hamsa* brings health and prosperity and guards against evil. In Islamic cultures, the same amulet is known as the “hand of Fatima” (the daughter of Muhammad) and represents the hand of God, divine power, generosity, and providence. Each finger signifies different pillars, or principles, of Islam and symbolizes Muhammad's familial relations. These amulets continue to be used by both Jews and Muslims, who trust in their protective powers.

Amulet (Hamsa)
Morocco, 19th-20th century
Silver: engraved
The Rose and Benjamin Mintz Collection, M411

**This hamsa amulet features
an intricate raised-design motif.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ What do you think *folklore* means? (Folklore can include stories, legends, customs, games, recipes, dances, proverbs, or songs passed on by oral tradition through friends, family, or community.)
- ▶ What is the significance of the hand in Jewish and Muslim cultures? (In Jewish tradition, the right hand represents the hand of God, symbolizing honor and purity. In Islamic cultures, the hand of God symbolizes divine power, generosity, and providence.)
- ▶ Compare and contrast the objects featured in this Cultural Folklore section. What unique forms, colors, styles, and patterns do the objects display?
- ▶ Do people today wear items that could be considered amulets? Are these things consciously thought of as warding off evil or bringing good luck, or do they serve another purpose?
- ▶ What things do you use in your life that are important to you and that might be seen as having a similar purpose to an amulet?
- ▶ How can music or dance be an expression of the historical, political, or geographical reality of a people or culture? (Consider the North American tradition known as the *blues* or Spanish *flamenco*.)

Salero o Especiero de Pellizcos (Salt or Spice Container)
Paterna, first half of the 14th century

Tin glaze pottery; painted in copper and manganese
Collection of the Ayuntamiento de Valencia, in deposit at the Museo Nacional de Cerámica "Gonzalez Marti," Valencia

This ceramic container was fashioned by Muslim craftsmen. The base features a six-pointed star on the Hand of Fatima.





SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

CREATIVE ARTS

- ▶ The genre of creative expression known as *flamenco* was born out of the common suffering of various groups in late medieval and early modern Spain. The art form consists of elements of Jewish, Arab, and Gypsy music. Have students research the development of *flamenco*, and then listen to musical selections or observe a live or videotaped dance performance. Ask students to point out areas in which the beat or lyrics of a *flamenco* piece reflect the historical circumstances that surrounded its creation. For example, an early type of *flamenco* song, a lament known as a *martinete*, originated amongst the Gypsy blacksmiths of Triana, and included the beat of a hammer striking iron. This accompaniment was meant to evoke the travail of the blacksmiths.
- ▶ Have students create a “cultural identity” accordion book that incorporates their own photos, letters, favorite poems, or other family/cultural artifacts. Have students begin by using a photocopier to enlarge or reduce images and text, then have them hand-color their selections with watercolor pencils. Provide 8^{1/2}" x 14" sheets of oak tag or card stock and accordion fold along the long edges to create book pages. Discuss strategies for structure, sequencing, and image/text combination and let students arrange materials as they like. Add a finishing layer with sponging, stamping, calligraphy, or watercolor painting.

Mosque Lamp with Pendant
Syria or Egypt, 15th century
Glass, enamel, gilt
©The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

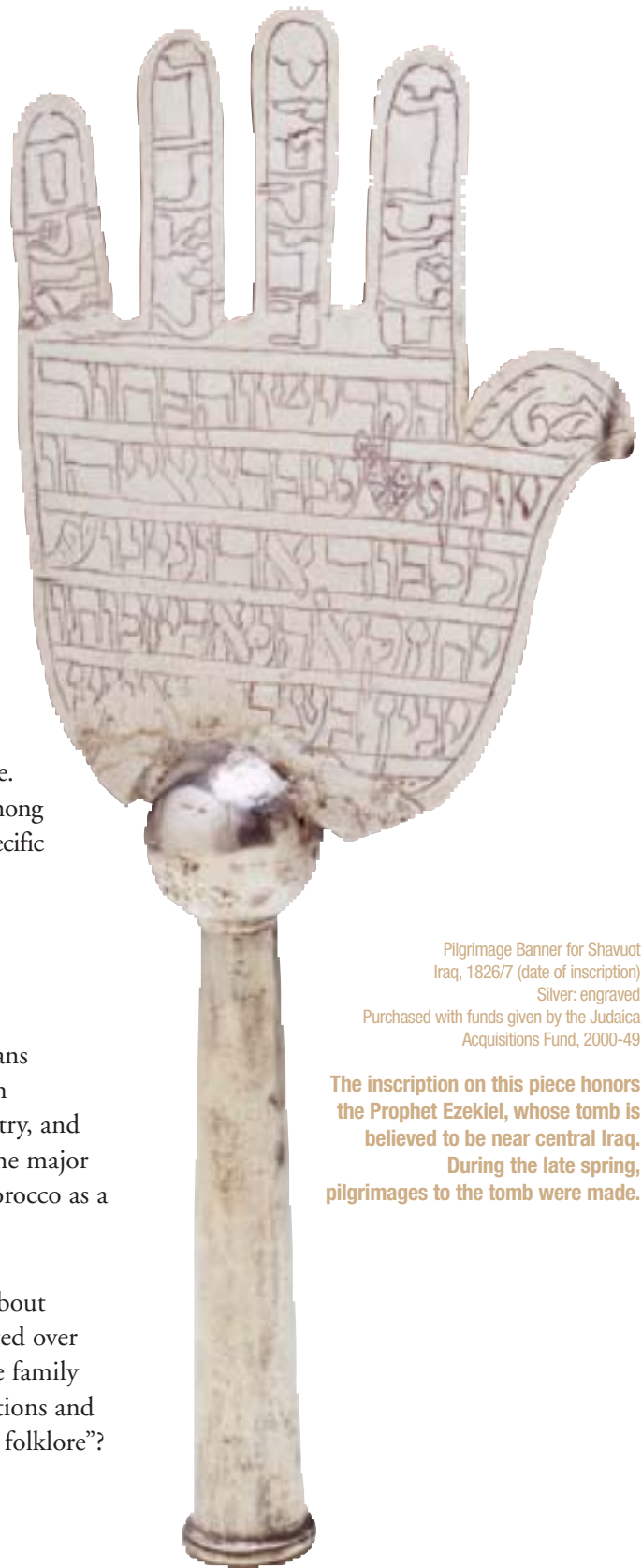
A lamp, whose light symbolizes the presence of Allah, is usually hung in the prayer niche of a mosque. This mosque lamp includes an enamel pendant that bears a strong resemblance to the Moroccan hamsa amulet.

SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

- Encourage students to conduct research on the use of amulets (or other folkloric devices) throughout history. For example:
 - What types of inscriptions are found on Jewish and Muslim amulets?
 - Do women wear amulets more than men? What forms could they take?
 - What ritual practices are associated with amulets?
 - How have different cultures interpreted the same symbols?
- Ask students to bring in an object that holds special meaning for their family, culture, or religion. Have students examine the diversity of objects, speculating on their source, meaning, and use. Focus discussion on the common elements that can be found among the objects (ceremonial objects for life-cycle events, the use of specific design motifs and borders, etc.).

LANGUAGE ARTS

- Morocco's official language is Arabic. However, many Moroccans speak French, Spanish, and/or Berber. Have students research the historical reasons for Morocco being a multilingual country, and investigate any regional dialects that are spoken along with the major languages. (For example, many Jews and Muslims fled to Morocco as a result of their expulsion from Spain in the late 1400s.)
- Ask students to collect oral histories from family members about how their cultural traditions have remained constant or shifted over time. Are there beliefs and customs of other cultures that the family has adopted? If so, how has the family adapted its core traditions and customs? What are examples of the family's unique "cultural folklore"? Have students conduct at least three interviews with written transcripts and reflection.



Pilgrimage Banner for Shavuot
Iraq, 1826/7 (date of inscription)
Silver: engraved
Purchased with funds given by the Judaica
Acquisitions Fund, 2000-49

The inscription on this piece honors the Prophet Ezekiel, whose tomb is believed to be near central Iraq. During the late spring, pilgrimages to the tomb were made.

The Jewish Museum Connection

Hanukkah lamps from countries under Muslim rule often feature hamsa design motifs, as well as birds and arabesques. Visit The Jewish Museum's extensive collection of Hanukkah lamps and see, for example, Muslim influenced designs from Morocco and Iraq.

Places Of Worship

The significant and long-lasting cultural connection between Jews and Muslims is clearly illustrated through common features in their places of worship. During specific periods in Spain, Turkey, Persia, and Morocco, Jewish and Muslim religious buildings shared similar forms of architectural structure and decoration, and also contained comparable ritual objects used in a religious or prayer experience.

The Jewish and Muslim traditions shared design techniques that were especially evident in the ornamentation of religious buildings. Whether through the use of mosaic tiles, or floral and geometric patterns, Jewish and Muslim builders honored their places of worship with similar forms of intricately carved decorations. In addition, Jewish and Islamic buildings in the same geographical area were often similar in structure and architectural plan. The style of rows of curved and pointed arches established open and airy sanctuaries ideal for the spiritual worship of both Jews and Muslims. Elaborate gardens often served as an architectural accent to the religious buildings.

Inside these religious buildings, a variety of ceremonial objects enhanced the worshiper's experience. One example of cultural crossover was the use of Turkish wool carpets by Jews as curtains for Torah arks (cabinets used to house Torah scrolls in synagogues) and by Muslims as prayer rugs. Muslim prayer rugs are typically decorated with a *mihrab*, or prayer niche, an arch-shaped design at one end of the carpet. The *mihrab*, which some believe is based on the prayer niche design in mosques, must point toward Mecca while the rug is used by a worshiper. Carpets that are used for Jewish ritual purposes often incorporate Hebrew inscriptions to fill the border panels. Just as the Muslim rug honors the prayer experience through its intricate design, a decorative curtain is hung on a Torah ark to demonstrate respect for the Torah and its important role in the Jewish religion.

Torah Ark Curtain
Gördes District, Western Anatolia,
Ottoman Empire,
early to mid-19th century
Wool; undyed cotton
Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman,
F5182

This wool carpet serves as a curtain to cover the ark, a cabinet in the synagogue that houses the Torah scrolls.



Prayer Rug
Gördes, Turkey, late 18th-early 19th century
Wool
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The James F. Ballard Collection,
Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922. (22.100.103)

Muslim prayer rugs are often decorated with religious symbols and images, including stylized hands to remind the worshiper where his hands should be placed during prayer.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ How are the ritual carpets used by Jews in synagogues different from those used by Muslims in mosques? (Jews have often used the wool carpets as Torah ark curtains; Muslims have used the carpets as prayer rugs). How are these carpets related in terms of design and decoration? (The carpets feature multiple borders of varying designs.)
- ▶ Architects have used design elements, such as niches, arches, and columns, as a way to organize the flow, design, and messages of their structures. How do the architectural elements used in the Isfahan Synagogue Wall (see p. 20) help organize the design and contribute to its meaning?
- ▶ What similarities do you notice between the Isfahan Synagogue Wall and the Shah Mosque (see pp. 20-21)? (For example, the use of the “niche” as an architectural design element, and the use of flowers and vines as decorative elements.)
- ▶ Have you been in a place that you have considered a sacred space? (Expand the discussion to include places other than formal places of worship.)
- ▶ In what physical places (buildings, structures, parks, etc.) have you experienced a sense of awe or wonder? What inspired these feelings?
- ▶ If you were to design a place of worship, how would you do it? What architectural style would you use? What colors would you feature? What decorative elements would you incorporate? How would the interior be furnished? What ritual objects would you include?

The Alhambra
Granada
Photo by Aviva Feit

This photograph shows part of the open-work stucco of an arcade in the Alhambra Palace. The decoration features interwoven motifs of floral, curving scrolls and geometric patterning formed out of intricately carved stucco. Variations of this style were in use during the Almohad period and evolved further in the Nasrid period.



Córdoba Synagogue
Córdoba, 1314-15
Photo © The Jewish Museum, New York, photo by Nicholas Sapieha

This photo is of the only surviving synagogue in Córdoba, founded by Isaac Mehab. Although of modest size, it displays finely crafted Mudéjar stucco carvings of the Nasrid style. The integration of calligraphic inscriptions with geometric patterning is typical of the Alhambra in Granada.

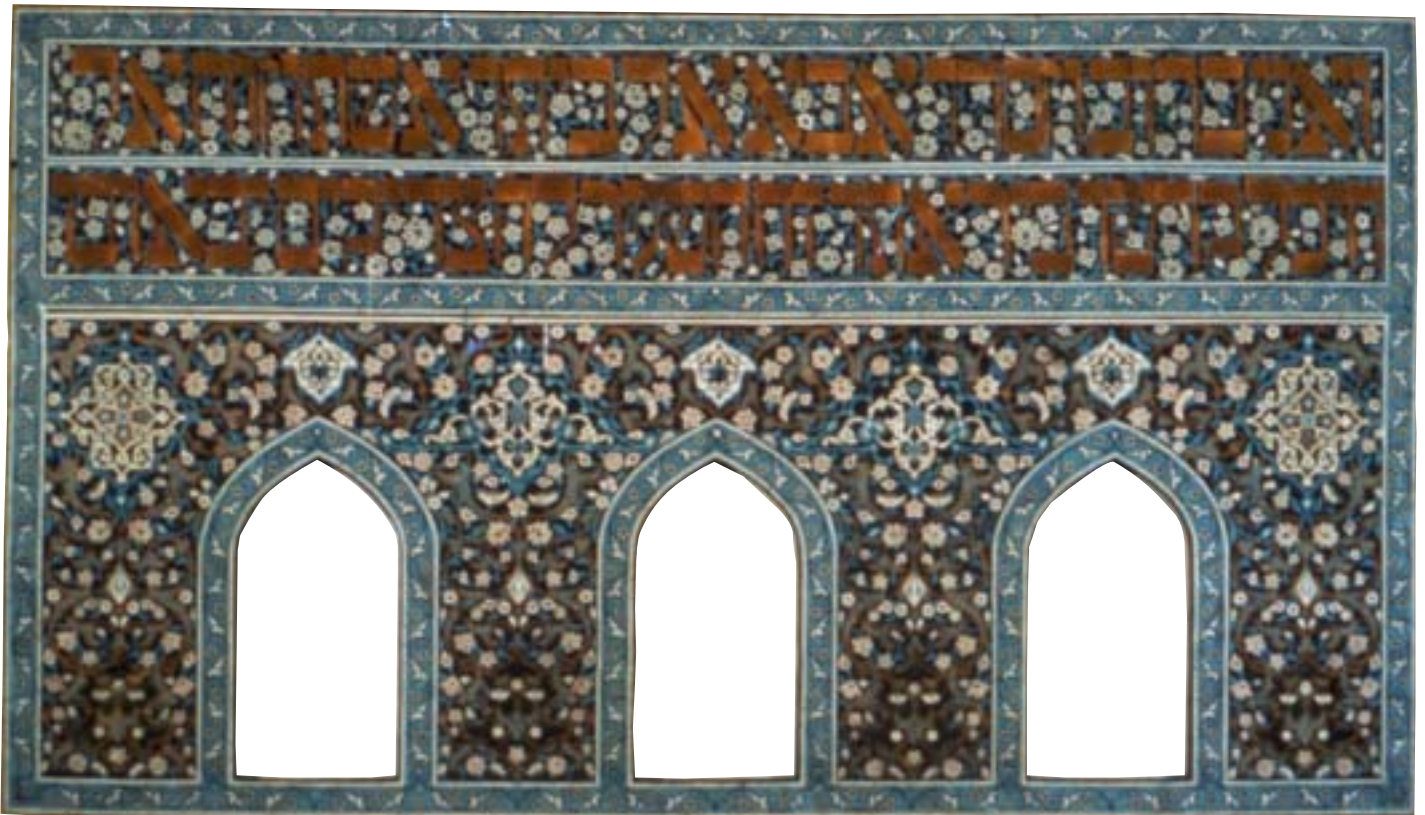
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

CREATIVE ARTS

- ▶ Have students create their own mosaic tile panel (roughly 8" x 8") as a way of applying what they have learned about architectural decoration, design motifs, and geometric patterns. Emphasize that just as making mosaics is a process of putting “bits and pieces” together, the shared culture between Muslims and Jews is a rich and textured amalgamation of history, rituals, and traditions.
- ▶ Point out the various patterns, borders, and curves of the niches in the Isfahan Synagogue Wall. Ask students to visualize the way in which the niches frame the cases that hold the Torah scrolls. Working in clay, or any another flexible material, have students create a niche to hold a small “treasure” – which could be an object, symbol, or photograph of personal value. If possible, students may fire and glaze their clay niches.

SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

- ▶ *Convivencia* is a Spanish word used to describe the coexistence and interchange among three major religious groups – Jews, Muslims, and Christians – in medieval Spain. Ask students to research the productive interchange that took place among disparate cultures during this time (particularly as this cultural exchange related to building design and decoration) and prepare an essay or presentation.



Portion of a Synagogue Wall
Persia, probably Isfahan, 16th century
Faience tile mosaic

Gift of Adele and Harry G. Friedman, Lucy and Henry Moses, Miriam Schaar Schloesinger, Florence Sutro Anspacher, Lucille and Samuel Lemberg, John S. and Florence Lawrence, Louis A. Oresman, and Khalil Rabenou, F5000

This mosaic wall has three niches in which to place the Torah scrolls. The use of flowers and vines to create an intricate pattern is suggestive of Islamic design motifs.

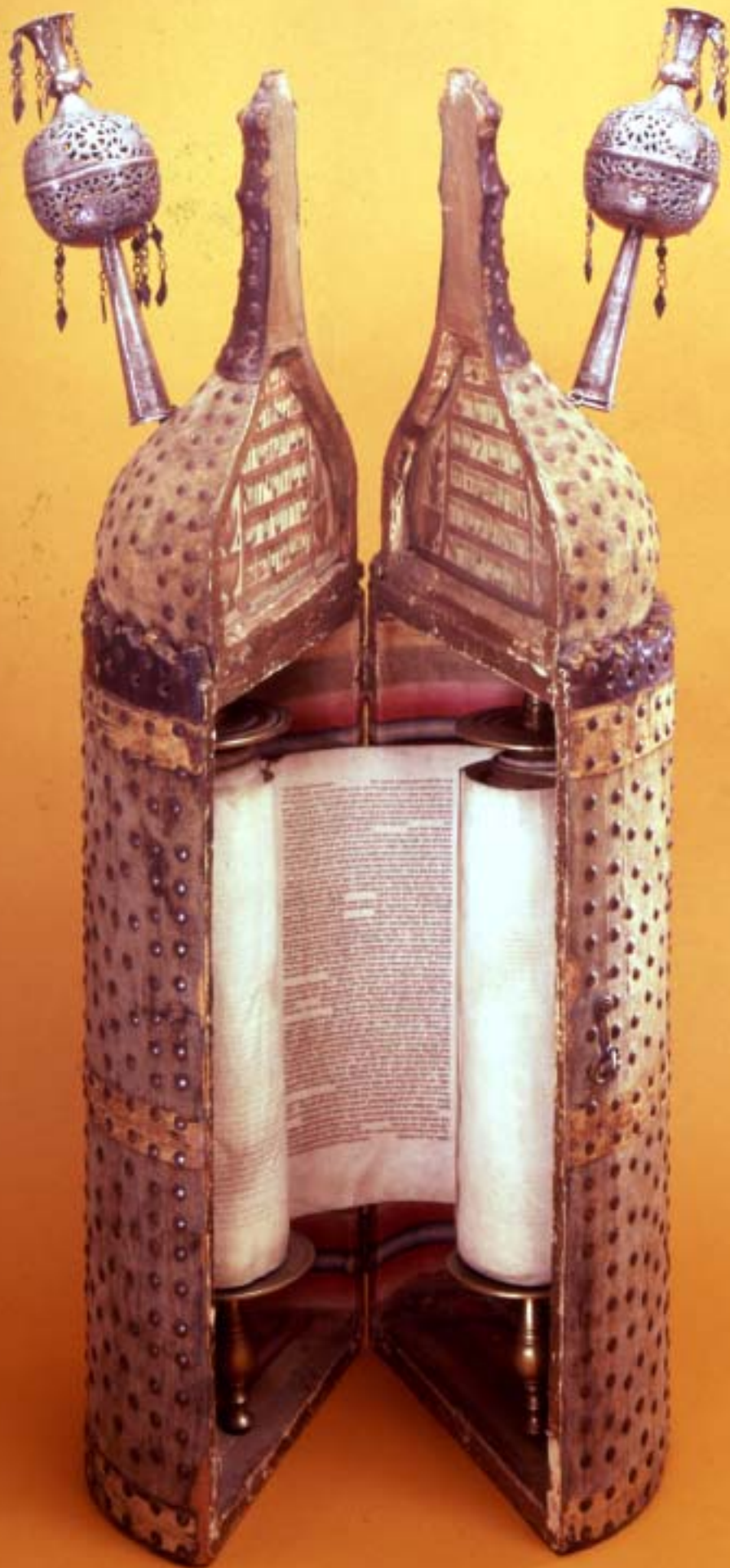
Masjid-i Shah
Isfahan, Iran, 17th century C.E.
SEF/Art Resource, NY

The Shah Mosque, built by Shah Abbas I in the Safavid dynasty, was designed with great concern for symmetry. This view is the entrance to a Koran student's room in the east madrasah (religious school).



LANGUAGE ARTS

- ▶ In medieval Islamic society, a garden was a place for social gatherings where guests could eat, drink, and exchange ideas. The garden also symbolized paradise for Muslims. Several of these meanings are reflected in the literary portrayal of gardens in both the Arabic and Hebrew poetry of Spain. Have students find examples of garden imagery in poetry or works of fiction and write an essay that synthesizes their understanding of themes, characters, settings, imagery, symbolism, and other important elements of the works. For example, the gardens of the Generalife, which border the Alhambra, inspired many important poets and authors, among them Washington Irving. *Recommended for high school students.*
- ▶ Instruct students to choose an architectural form in their neighborhood that they find compelling. Ask them to gather any necessary historical information and write a descriptive paragraph about what they choose, first focusing on the ways this building shares ideas or themes with other cultures, then listing the ways it is different (i.e., how the building or structure retains its own unique cultural characteristics).



Traditional Texts

Islam and Judaism share common roots, as they are the religious descendants of the prophet Abraham. For Jews, the revelations that followed came to be known as the Torah, and for Muslims, the Koran.

The Hebrew term Torah means “instruction” or “teaching” and refers to the section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Five Books of Moses. Together, the Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Kethuvim (Writings) make up the entirety of the Hebrew Bible. The Torah comprises the central text from which Jewish law, ethical and moral guidelines, and prescriptions for living are drawn.

In Arabic, Koran literally means “recitation” and is believed to be God’s word through the revelations of the prophet Muhammad. The Koran is the Muslims’ guide to all aspects of life and is both the contemporary world view and a reckoning of history.

Jews and Muslims do not believe in worshiping idols or in symbolic representations, and as a result they share a stringency regarding the decoration of traditional texts. In turn, Jewish and Muslim calligraphers and scribes have emphasized decorative scripts and beautiful inks and materials. For example, both groups have used arabesques (ornamentation in which flowers, foliage, fruits, and geometrical figures are represented in a fancifully combined pattern) to decorate their texts.

Both faiths also adhere to strict guidelines concerning the reproduction of traditional texts. The words of the Torah are treated with a special reverence because they are considered to be divine. According to Jewish tradition, a Torah scroll must be handwritten on parchment by a scribe. Similarly, many rules surround the handling and duplication of the Koran. For instance, touching the texts requires ritual purity and making copies of the Koran is considered a sacred task.

Torah Case (*Tik*)
Iraq, 1918/19 and 1919 (inscriptions)
Wood; textile; leather; brass; iron; glass;
gouache on paper
Gift of the Bevis Marks Synagogue,
JM 28-56

Torah Finials
Persia, late 19th-early 20th century
Silver: chased, pierced, die stamped
Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F5432a,b

**Sephardic Jews often protect
Torah scrolls in a wooden or metal
container called a *tik*.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ What practices have Jews and Muslims developed for protecting, decorating, and adorning their traditional texts? (Since Jews and Muslims have strict guidelines prohibiting symbolic representations, calligraphers and scribes emphasized decorative scripts and beautiful inks and materials.)
- ▶ What similarities do you notice between the Jewish and Muslim decorated texts? (Both texts use a design motif of interconnected, knotted lines.) What differences do you see? (The Hebrew Bible features a simple, monochromatic design; the Koran pages are more fanciful and use color inks.)
- ▶ What is arabesque and how is it used in traditional book decoration? (Often the first letter of each book chapter is written in large print with stems and leaves curling through the form.)
- ▶ How do traditional texts inspire respect and dedication within a family, community, or culture?
- ▶ What can the style or ornamentation of a book tell us about an individual? A group of people? A specific culture? (Book ornamentation may give us clues about religious traditions, folklore and legends, and textile design schemes, etc.)
- ▶ What books do you consider special or important in your life? How do you take care of these texts?
- ▶ Look around at the objects (clothing, furniture and decorative items) in your lives. How are the designs and patterns represented indicative of the culture to which you belong? How are they indicative of other influences?



Colophon pages from single-volume Qur'an
Valencia, Spain, AH 596/AD1199-1200
The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London
QUR 318, 121b-122a

This Koran manuscript shows an intricate pattern of interlaced knots, which are framed by borders of denser lines. The prominence of interconnecting lines is often typical of both Jewish and Muslim traditional texts.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

CREATIVE ARTS

- ▶ Play selections from Judeo-Spanish and Muslim-Spanish recordings that focus on religious themes. Consider the following: What is the music telling you? What is the timbre or mood of the instruments? Are they alone or together? What colors do you hear? How can you translate these sounds into a drawing? Have students make two drawings or paintings of a given musical piece, and then choose their favorite one. Alternatively, encourage students to develop a creative writing sample about their impressions of the music. *See Selected Resources at the back of this guide for suggestions.*
- ▶ Have students create a stylized initial (of their first or last name) similar to the ones that appear in illuminated manuscripts. Use pen and ink on heavy vellum, or choose alternative materials. Encourage students to incorporate motifs of interconnecting lines and geometric patterns, typical of both Jewish and Muslim religious books.

SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

- ▶ During the Muslim rule of the Iberian Peninsula, there was much parallel intellectual work done by Jews and Muslims in science, philosophy, scholarship, and religious commentary. Ask students to find instances of such intellectual parallels during this time period and prepare a critical essay. Examples might include the analysis of Aristotelian philosophy by Maimonides and Averroes, or advances in astronomy and mathematics by al-Zarqal, Maslama, Ibn Ezra, and Bar Hiyya. *Recommended for high school students.*
- ▶ By the end of the 15th century, the art of book decoration in general, and micrography in particular, attained its fullest development. Have students research a range of biblical manuscripts and discuss chronological, geographical, and stylistic developments that are typical of both Jewish and Muslim texts.



Isaac Sason
Bible, Córdoba, Spain, 1479
Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Hebrew Bibles and prayer books decorated in medieval Spain often employ geometric patterns of interwoven lines, as well as the use of micrography.

LANGUAGE ARTS

- ▶ Distribute copies of the following poem:

My heart can take any form: it is a pasture for gazelles
and a monastery for Christian monks. A temple for idols,
and for the Ka'aba of the pilgrims, and for the poles
of the Torah, and for the book of the Koran.
I follow the religion of love, whatever the direction of the
camels of my love, my religion and my faith are there.
*From The Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq by Spanish-Muslim poet
Ibn Arabi (1165-1240)*

Next, divide the class into small groups and ask students to write down examples of strong imagery, symbolism, allusions, and form as they contribute to the meaning of the poem. Encourage students to research unfamiliar terms and learn more about the poet Ibn Arabi. As a class, discuss the allusions to multiple faiths and the significance of such symbolic meaning within a context of cultural coexistence. *Recommended for high school students.*

- ▶ The Jewish poets of medieval Spain – most notably Samuel Ha-Nagid, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, and Judah Halevi – formed a vibrant new body of literature by fusing aspects of Islamic culture with existing Jewish customs and traditions. Research one or two of these poets and describe how their work serves as an example of positive cultural interchange and incorporates their love for the land of Israel.

Almohads – A Berber dynasty hailing from North Africa, the Almohads invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 1147. They conquered this area in response to what they believed were the excesses of the reigning Almoravid dynasty and the growing power of the Christian kingdoms to the north.

Amulet – An object worn or used as a charm against evil or injury.

Andalusia – Region in modern-day southern Spain whose provinces include Seville, Granada and Córdoba. The term (and its Arabic counterpart, al-Andalus) also refers to all of the areas of the Iberian Peninsula that were under Muslim control during medieval times. Historians suggest that, at the end of the 8th century, Andalusia was the most populous, cultured, and industrious land of all Europe, and remained so for centuries.

Arabesque – A kind of ornamentation in which flowers, foliage, fruits, and geometrical figures are represented in a fanciful pattern.

Architecture – The science or art of building; a style or special manner of building with qualities that distinguish the buildings of one time, region, or group, from those of another.

Avverroes – Also known as Ibn Rushd (1126-1198). A Spanish-Arab philosopher, jurist and physician, he is well known for his commentaries on Aristotle, which exerted a strong influence on medieval Christian theology.

Byzantine Empire – The eastern part of the later Roman Empire, dates from 330 CE when Constantine I rebuilt Byzantium and made it his capital. Its extent varied greatly over the centuries, but its core remained the Balkan Peninsula and Asia Minor. The empire collapsed when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Caliph – Supreme ruler in Islamic society, combining religious and political attributes of leadership.

Culture – A style of social and artistic expression particular to a society or class.

Diaspora – The dispersion of Jews outside of Israel from the sixth century BCE, when their ruling class was exiled to Babylonia, until the present time.

Folklore – The beliefs, legends, and customs of a people, tribe, or other group.

Hamsa – From the Semitic root meaning *five*, a hamsa typically depicts a hand with five fingers, and is used as an amulet intended to ward off the “evil eye” and protect against danger and disease.

Hebrew Bible – The five books, known in Hebrew as the Torah (which Jews traditionally believe were revealed by God to Moses) along with the Nevi'im (Prophets) and Kethuvim (Writings), make up the entirety of the Hebrew Bible. The commandments contained within the Bible offer moral guidelines and prescriptions for living.

Iberian Peninsula – Today, this territory consists of Spain and Portugal, while during the medieval period, it was divided into various Islamic and Christian states.

Islam – A monotheistic religion characterized by the doctrine of submission to God and by the belief that Muhammad is His prophet, through whom God revealed His word, the Koran.

Jew – A person descended from the ancient Hebrews, or one who has adopted Judaism through conversion. (See Judaism)

Judaism – The monotheistic religion of the Jews, tracing its origins to Abraham and having its spiritual and ethical principles embodied chiefly in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Talmud, and the Diaspora traditions that followed.

Koran (Qur'an) – The sacred book of the Muslims, which consists of revelations of Allah to the prophet Muhammad, and is the standard by which Muslims regulate their lives. The Arabic book was compiled after Muhammad's death, and is divided into 114 chapters.

Madrasah – A religious school for the study of Islam. The madrasah building has its own unique architectural style, centered on a court used for teaching.

Maimonides – Moses ben Maimon, also known as “Rambam,” lived from 1135 to 1204. A Spanish-born Jewish philosopher and physician, he was the most influential Jewish scholar in his lifetime. Maimonides codified the Talmud and in *Guide for the Perplexed* (1190) attempted to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Jewish theology.

Manuscript – A book, article, or paper written by hand.

Mecca – A city of western Saudi Arabia near the coast of the Red Sea, it is the birthplace of Muhammad. It is Islam's holiest city and a pilgrimage site for all devout believers of the faith.

Mezuzah – A scroll inscribed with passages from the Hebrew Bible that is contained in a small case often made of wood or metal. It is affixed to the doorposts of a Jewish home to remind the homeowner of God's love and providence, and ensures divine protection.

Micrography – The art of writing in very small letters. This minute script is often used to decorate documents or manuscripts with ornamental motifs or abstract figures.

Mihrab – A niche in the front wall of a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca. The design frequently found on prayer rugs is thought to be a representation of a *mihrab*.

Mizrabi – From *east* in Hebrew, refers to Jews with origins in Islamic lands, many having roots in the community since biblical times.

Mosaic – Decorative pattern created by arranging, side by side, small bits of colored stone or glass.

Mosque – A place of public worship for Muslims.

Mudéjar – Buildings and objects in Islamic style and technique but produced under Christian or Jewish patronage. Also refers to a Muslim living under Christian rule on the Iberian Peninsula.

Muslim – An adherent of Islam. (See Islam)

Niche – An alcove or recess in the wall.

Ottoman Empire – A vast Turkish sultanate of southwest Asia, northeast Africa, and southeast Europe, it was founded in the 13th century by Osman I and ruled by his descendants until its dissolution after World War I.

Persia – An empire in South Asia created by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BCE and destroyed by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE. It was Islamicized at the time of the Arab conquests in the 7th century CE and has been one of the most important centers of Islamic culture ever since. Iran, a modern-day republic in the Middle East, was once the core of the ancient Persian Empire. It was known as Persia until 1935.

Reconquista – The effort by the Christians to reconquer Spain from its Muslim rulers.

Semite – A member of a group of Semitic-speaking peoples of the Near East and northern Africa, including the Arabs, Arameans, Babylonians, Carthaginians, Ethiopians, Hebrews, and Phoenicians.

Sephardim – Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin or ancestry.

Synagogue – A building or place used by Jews for worship and religious instruction.

Torah Ark – A cabinet used to house Torah scrolls in a synagogue.

Tik – A rigid cylindrical container – used predominantly by Sephardic Jews – that holds the Torah scrolls.

Visigoth – A Germanic tribe that invaded the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE, settled in France and Spain, and established a monarchy that lasted until the early eighth century.

Vizier – The most important official in a Muslim government below the ruler himself.

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