

Precious & Rare: Islamic Metalwork

Take inspiration from an exquisite metalwork object made in Syria over 600 years ago! Can you guess what it is and the size?

This piece will be displayed, along with 9 others, as part of the Holburne's upcoming exhibition:

Precious & Rare—Islamic Metalwork from the Courtauld

(Jan 21—May 16, 2021)



This spherical object is an **incense burner** made about 1280. It is very small (5.3 cm diameter) and can be held easily in the palm of one hand. It has an internal structure where a hot coal and aromatics such as aloe and sandalwood would have been burnt. Incense burners like this were used to perfume the air (and possibly to warm hands) in mosques and private houses. Can you see the sun (top) and figures around the dome. These represent the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter. Those who originally used this would have seen the earth as being at the centre of this 'solar system'.

INLAID METALWORK: A decorative technique developed in eastern Persia in the early twelfth-century as a way of making more ordinary brass and copper objects increasingly ornamental and attractive, with detailed patterns and motifs.

Inlaid metalwork relies on the different tones and colours of the gold, silver and black inlays and the yellow brass to create shimmering contrasts. The pieces in this exhibition were prestigious luxury objects, and the skill and beauty of their craftsmanship made them sought after by rulers, aristocrats and merchants, with certain cities such as Mosul made famous for their wares.

Incense burner of pierced and engraved brass inlaid with silver, with images of the planets within roundels, Mamluk (Syria) 13th century. The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

Islamic pattern —Inspiration board



Take Inspiration from the bottom or sides of this incense burner. (detail from bottom)

Use intertwined and scrolling forms

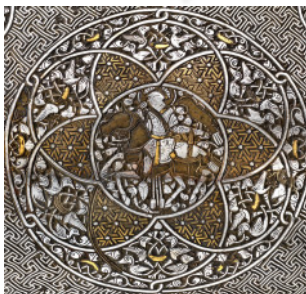
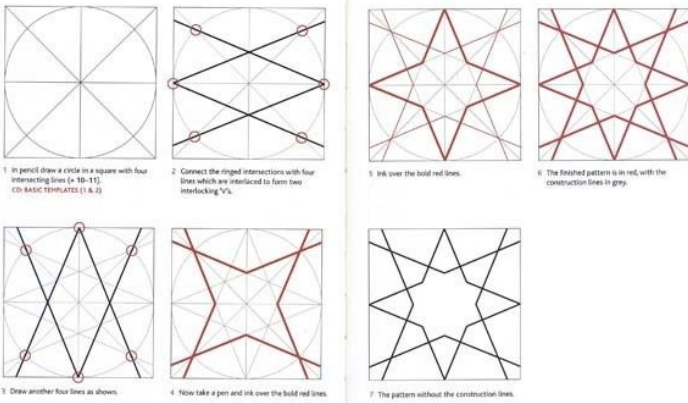
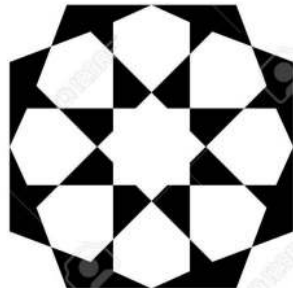
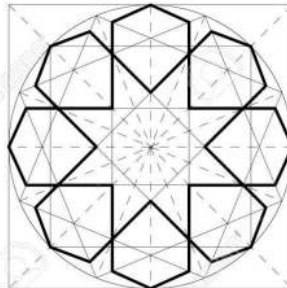
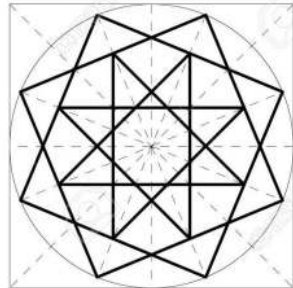
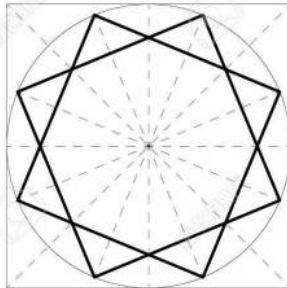
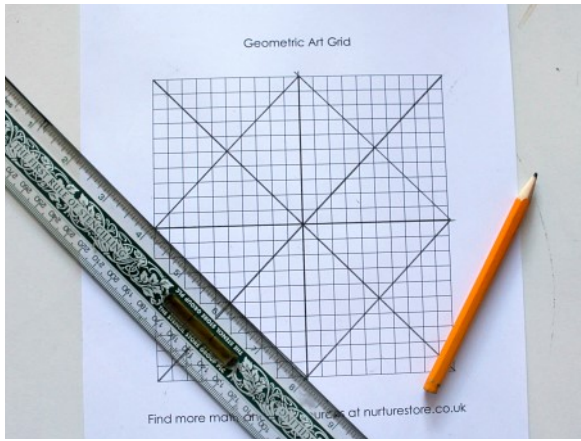
Pattern made from delicate scrolling forms is traditionally known as **the arabesque**, which is a later French term for “in the Arab fashion.” Forms such as leaves and tendrils are arranged to create intertwined surface decoration with an overall rhythm and balance.



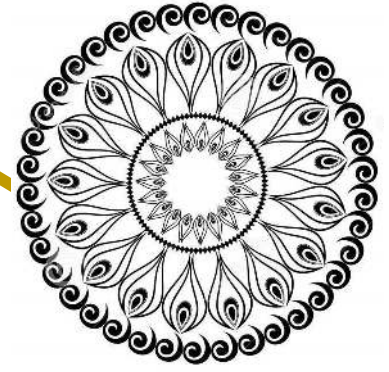
ORDesign Geometric patterns

Begin with a circle (or square!) and draw a grid or construction lines lightly inside this. Make patterns by combining and overlapping repeating shapes, usually squares and circles. You can make complex patterns and divide shapes just using a ruler and a compass or something circular to draw around.

The geometric patterns we see on Islamic metalwork objects tend to be arranged in bands.



Detail from **Islamic bag**
Early 14th century
Iraq, Mosul (Ilkhanid
dynasty, 1256–1353)
The Samuel Courtauld
Trust, The Courtauld
Gallery, London.



Activity

Create a circular pattern design inspired by the Islamic metalwork incense burner

Take inspiration from intertwining and geometric patterns

Start exploring on a rough piece of paper, think about the **size** of circle (or square!) you'd like to decorate.

- Begin by drawing around a circular object
- Use a ruler to divide it up and create simple repeating shapes by adding in lines and curves to build a pattern
- Now add COLOUR to your design

You could use black, gold, silver, metallic colours OR
Create your own colourway!

Have Fun!

You could use:

- Paper
- A ruler, pencil and rubber
- Something round (for outline)
- Coloured pens/ pencils
- Gold/ Silver pen
- Sequins to decorate?



Share a photo of what you make!
Send to e.blythe@holburne.org and check

Instagram [changing_lives_through_art](https://www.instagram.com/changing_lives_through_art)

