



Smithsonian  
*Freer Gallery of Art and  
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*

# News

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## **Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery Presents First Major U.S. Exhibition of Qur'ans**

***"The Art of the Qur'an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts" Will Be On View Oct. 22–Feb. 20, 2017***

The first major exhibition of Qur'ans (Korans) in the U.S., "The Art of the Qur'an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts," will open at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Oct. 22 and continue through Feb. 20, 2017.

The exhibition was organized by the Sackler in collaboration with the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul. It will feature more than 60 of the most important Qur'an manuscripts ever produced from the Arab world, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

Celebrated for their superb calligraphy and lavish illumination, these manuscripts span almost 1,000 years of history—from eighth-century Damascus, Syria, to 17th-century Istanbul. Many of the works, which will be on view outside of Turkey for the first time, are critical to the history and appreciation of the arts of the book.

This landmark exhibition tells the individual stories of some of these extraordinary manuscripts, their makers and their owners. Visitors will learn how the Qur'an was transformed from an orally transmitted message to a written, illuminated and bound text produced by highly accomplished artists from the Islamic world.

These Qur'ans were originally created for some of the most powerful rulers of the Islamic world. As the finest examples of their kind, long after their completion the manuscripts were sought out and cherished as prized possessions by the Ottoman ruling elite, whose power once extended from southeast Europe to northern Africa and the Middle East. They were offered as gifts to cement political

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and military relationships or recognize special acts, and they were also given to public and religious institutions to express personal piety and secure political power and prestige. Donations of Qur'ans to libraries and public institutions by royal women expressed their commitment to contemporary religious and social life.

Shortly before 1914, when the Ottoman Empire was in political turmoil, its government decided to transfer to Istanbul all valuable works of art that had been donated to mosques, schools, shrines and other religious institutions across the empire. These included thousands of the most ornate Qur'an manuscripts and loose folios, which are housed today in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, located in the heart of the historical city, opposite the so-called Blue Mosque.

“This exhibition offers a unique opportunity to see Qur'ans of different origins, formats and styles and begin to appreciate the power and beauty of the calligraphy as well as intricacy of the illuminated decoration,” said Massumeh Farhad, the Freer and Sackler's chief curator and curator of Islamic art. “Although each copy of the Qur'an contains an identical text, the mastery and skill of the artists have transformed it into a unique work of art.”

“The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul has one of the most extraordinary collections of Qur'ans in the world, yet its holdings are little known even to many experts,” said Julian Raby, The Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art. “This exhibition provides an unparalleled opportunity for audiences in the United States to appreciate the artistry of Muslim scribes and craftsmen over more than a millennium, in regions from North Africa to Afghanistan.”

The Freer and Sackler galleries have one of the most comprehensive collections of Islamic art in the U.S. A number of important Qur'ans from the museums' permanent collections will be on display in the exhibition.

A multi-author, full-color catalog published by the Freer and Sackler will feature a series of essays on the Qur'an, its calligraphy, illumination and organization as a text, as well an introduction to the formation of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts. The catalog will also include detailed discussions of each of the artworks in the exhibition.

A website will offer additional resources on the art of the Qur'an for online and on-site visitors. These include videos, “closer looks” at several manuscripts, an interactive map and curriculum plans. In addition to extensive public programs, an international symposium on the art of the Qur'an will be held December 1–3.

“The Art of the Qur’an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts” is organized by the Freer and Sackler and the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul. Koç Holding is the exhibition’s principal sponsor, with major support provided by Turkish Airlines and Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute and additional support from the El-Hibri Foundation. It has been curated by Farhad and Simon Rettig, assistant curator at the Freer and Sackler.

The Freer and Sackler have presented other major exhibitions featuring important religious objects and publications, including “In the Beginning: Bibles Before the Year 1000” in 2006 and “The Tibetan Shrine from the Alice S. Kandell Collection” in 2010. The museums most recently collaborated with the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul on “Style and Status” in 2005.

### **About the Freer and Sackler Galleries**

The Smithsonian’s Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., together comprise the nation’s museum of Asian art. It contains one of the most important collections of Asian art in the world, featuring more than 40,000 objects ranging in time from the Neolithic to the present day, with especially fine groupings of Islamic art, Chinese jades, bronzes and paintings and the art of the ancient Near East. The galleries also contain important masterworks from Japan, ancient Egypt, South and Southeast Asia and Korea, as well as the Freer’s noted collection of works by American artist James McNeill Whistler. The Freer, which will be closed during the exhibition, is scheduled to reopen in spring 2017 with modernized technology and infrastructure, refreshed gallery spaces and an enhanced auditorium.

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