



## Trans-Regional Exchange

Use this resource set to explore how art can illustrate various ways in which technologies, forms, images, symbols, beliefs and concepts are adopted, adapted, and/or reinterpreted by communities across the globe until 1500.

<b>Grade Level:</b>	Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12
<b>Collection:</b>	Ancient Art, East Asian Art, Egyptian Art, South Asian Art
<b>Culture/Region:</b>	China, East Asia, Egypt, Greece, India, Japan, Rome, South Asia
<b>Subject Area:</b>	Fine Arts, History and Social Science, Visual Arts
<b>Activity Type:</b>	Resource Set

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Trans-regional exchange through routes such as the Silk Road across Asia to the Mediterranean basin, maritime routes across the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and Trans-Saharan routes across North Africa allowed groups of people to exchange goods, knowledge, and ideas. Conflict and cooperation, economic pressures and political alliances, as well as conquest, migration, and trade have all resulted in rich cultural interchange. Use this resource set to explore how art can illustrate various ways in which technologies, forms, images, symbols, beliefs and concepts are adopted, adapted, and/or reinterpreted by communities across the globe until 1500.



## Relief Pithos (Storage Container)

ca. 675 B.C. , Greek (Cretan)

**Medium:** terracotta

**Accession ID:** 79.147

Geography often plays a significant role in cultural exchange. This was particularly true in antiquity for cultures that lived near the Mediterranean Sea. For example, although ancient Greece had rivers, they were smaller than great rivers like the Nile—and most of the land in mainland Greece was mountainous with relatively poor soil. But Greece has numerous peninsulas with good harbors and easy access to the Mediterranean and Black Seas, that allowed many Greeks to become seafaring traders. During the 8th – 6th centuries, these traders founded colonies along the coastlines, including Egypt, as well as on the islands of the Mediterranean. Greeks traders exchanged wine, olives, and pottery, for items such as grain, wood, and precious metals. As

goods were exchanged, so were artistic designs, technologies, stories and ideas.

This large amphora, or storage jar, comes from Crete, the largest of the Greek islands. Almost five feet tall, this decorated vessel is more than 2600 years old. The decorations include alternating knobs and rosettes at the base of the neck and rosettes stamped on the lip. Molds and stamps, which were used in making this amphora, were technological conventions found in Near Eastern and Egyptian art. These ornamentation, as well as the vertical bands on the body, also resemble patterns found on late reliefs from the Assyrian Empire of the Near East.

The mythological creatures in the band near the top are sphinxes. The concept of the sphinx, which has the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle, and the head of a woman, originated in ancient Egypt. The Greeks later incorporated this Egyptian monster into their own works of art and mythology. Ancient Greek sources relate a story about a sphinx who plagued the Greek city of Thebes. She would allow no one into the city who could not solve her famous riddle: "What goes on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening?" According to the story, Oedipus, who later became the king of Thebes, solved the riddle. He answered that it was man, who crawls on all fours as a baby, walks on two legs as an adult, and uses a cane in old age.

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: Ten Times Two](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-ten-times-two/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-ten-times-two/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: 30-second Sketch](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-30-second-sketch/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-30-second-sketch/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Lines, Shapes, and Pattern Hunt](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Creative Comparisons](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-creative-comparisons/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-creative-comparisons/>)

## Head of Dionysus

2nd century , Roman

**Medium:** marble



**Accession ID:** 64.12.2

Dionysos (sometimes spelled Dionysus), god of theater, wine and madness, is the most frequently represented deity in Greek and Roman art, and was among the most important gods of the Greeks and Romans.

Most ancient Mediterranean cultures were polytheistic, meaning that they worshiped a wide variety of gods; in the Graeco-Roman period, only the Jewish God (adopted by Christianity) required monotheistic devotion. Each god represented a force of nature, abstract concept, sphere of life or aspect of the cosmos, and it was necessary to honor them all. Special bonds might exist between regions, cities, families, or individuals and a particular deity.

As ancient cultures encountered one another, deities and religious practices often became intertwined and blended. From a very early period it appears that the Romans assimilated the gods of Greece to the point where the two cultures shared a common pantheon consisting of twelve principle gods Zeus (Jupiter), Hera (Juno), Athena (Minerva), Apollo, Artemis (Diana), Poseidon (Neptune), Aphrodite (Venus), Hermes (Mercury), Hephaestus (Vulcan), Ares (Mars), Demeter (Ceres), and Dionysos (Liber Pater), also known in both Greece and Rome as Bacchos/Bacchus.

While the origins of Dionysos are not fully known, evidence points to multiple origins. He could have originated to the east of Greece, or he could be a native Greek god. What is clear though is by the mid fifth-century B.C., he is considered one of the 12 Olympian gods of the Greeks.

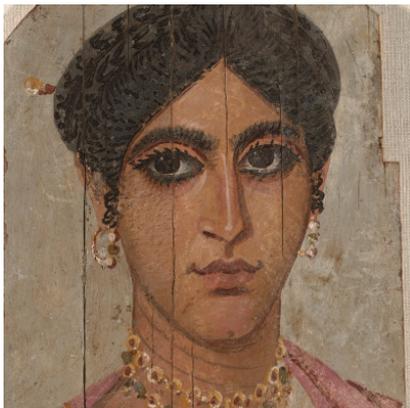
In Italy, the native Italian god Liber Pater, god of fertility and wine, ultimately became identified with Dionysos. He may have been introduced here in the early third-century B.C. by Greeks who settled in southern Italy or by way of Greek influences in Etruria (present day Tuscan region).

Over the course of the centuries, the way Dionysos is represented changes, at first he is first shown as bearded, older and clothed in a long robe. Later he is represented as beardless, youthful, and often nude. In this Roman image we have the second type, which dates to the second century A.D., possibly to the reign of the Emperor Hadrian (117-35 A.D.). He appears youthful with ivy in his hair and heavy lids that may imply an altered state. He also wears a mitra, or a type of scarf or headband often worn by Dionysos and his followers. The

philosopher Aristotle claims that this type of band would be worn to counteract the effects of wine.

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: Perceive, Know, Care About](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-perceive-know-care-about/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-perceive-know-care-about/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Strike a Pose](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Beyond the Frame](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-beyond-the-frame/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-beyond-the-frame/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Sensory Inventory](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-sensory-inventory/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-sensory-inventory/>)



### Fayum Portrait of a Woman

late 3rd-4th century A.D. , Roman (Egypt)

**Medium:** encaustic on wood panel

**Accession ID:** 55.4

Conquests change the cultural practices of both the conquered people and their conquerors. The history of Egypt provides numerous examples of this type of exchange, including the impact of Alexander the Great's occupation of the country in 332 B.C. Following Alexander's death in 323 B.C., one of his Macedonian generals became the ruler of Egypt as Ptolemy I Soter. The Ptolemaic dynasty ruled Egypt for the next 300 years, blending Greek and Egyptian customs.

As Roman power became the dominant force in the Mediterranean in the second and first centuries BC, Roman influences also affected cultural practices in Egypt. For example, the ancient custom of mummification began to undergo modifications after the Romans occupied Egypt in 30 B.C. During the first three centuries of Roman Egypt, the dead, from who could afford mummification were sometimes honored with painted portraits. These portraits are called Fayum portraits, after the Fayum Basin, 150 miles south of Alexandria, where the first examples were found. The population of Roman Egypt, particularly in the cities was truly multicultural. The style and technique of the portraits on wood panels is based on the Greek tradition of showing subject in three-quarter view. Since almost no panel paintings from the Greek world survive, the mummy

portraits, which were conserved by Egypt's arid climate, are the only examples of Greek panel painting, which was among the most celebrated art forms.

The clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry worn by the individuals display fashions that were popular across the Roman Empire, owing little to traditional Egyptian fashions and styles. However, in their original context, placed over the faces and fastened into the linen wrappings of Egyptian mummies, the portraits demonstrate clearly that the individuals represented in the paintings followed the traditional Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife and mummification. There, on high ground, safely away from where the Nile flooded every year, the Greeks and Hellenized people of the region buried their dead. Merging Egyptian funerary practices with Greco-Roman portraiture, these panels were placed over the faces of the mummies instead of the masks used earlier in Egypt. This example was painted using the encaustic technique, in which pigment was added to heated beeswax and applied to a wooden panel.

The subjects of Fayum portraits include Egyptians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Ethiopians, a diverse assortment of ethnic backgrounds typical of the population of Roman Egypt at that time. This portrait captures the bright eyes of a Roman Egyptian woman, an appropriate emphasis since the eyes were considered windows to the next life. She wears a rose-colored dress and a mantle (a sleeveless garment worn over the shoulders) edged with a broad, dark stripe, all marks of a fashionably dressed upper-class woman in Roman Egypt.

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: Perceive, Know, Care About](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-perceive-know-care-about/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-perceive-know-care-about/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Strike a Pose](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Beyond the Frame](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-beyond-the-frame/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-beyond-the-frame/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Haiku](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-haiku/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-haiku/>)



## Seated Buddha

2nd-3rd century , Indian

**Medium:** dark gray schist

**Accession ID:** 2002.556

Religious ideas and imagery are often modified by global interactions. Buddhism, which originated in ancient India (present-day Nepal), underwent significant changes over the centuries. Its basic teachings are attributed to the Buddha, a great teacher whose birth name was Siddhartha Gautama (traditional dates: 563–483 B.C.) Few, if any, sculptures of the Buddha date back to Siddhartha's lifetime. Before the late 1st century B.C., the Buddha was not represented in human form by Indian artists, probably for fear that he might be worshiped as a divinity. Early Buddhists regarded Buddha not as a god, but as a gifted mortal who taught a powerful spiritual message. As time passed, however, Buddhists began to think of him not as a mortal teacher, but as a god-like being worthy of adoration and worship. This devotion led to representations of the Buddha in an accessible human form. This image is from the Gandhara, an ancient Northeastern Indian state, which lies in present day Pakistan.

Gandharan Buddhas, like this one, are among the earliest known Buddha images in human form created in Asia. As artists began to represent the Buddha in human form, information derived from Buddhist scriptures, artistic influences that arose from the invasions of Alexander the Great, and contact with Silk Road kingdoms all contributed to the appearance of early sculptures. Buddhist scriptures describe 32 marks (lakshanas) that were thought to distinguish the Buddha from other people. One or more of these characteristics usually appear when the Buddha is depicted. On this sculpture, for example, he has the ushnisha, a fleshy bump (here shaped like a bun) on the top of his head that stands for superhuman wisdom. Another mark, depicted as a raised circle, is the urna, a whorl, or tuft, of hair between his eyebrows that symbolizes extraordinary insight. The draperies of his outer garment, which cascade from his palm and spread over the plinth below him, as well as the folds of his toga-like robes reveal Greek and Roman influences on the art of Gandhara. Buddha images in this style, which combines Asian and Hellenistic elements, was one of India's most significant artistic exports, providing the earliest models for a long tradition of imagery in Central and East Asia.

## Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: What Makes You Say That?](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Strike a Pose](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Hand and Voice](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-hand-and-voice/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-hand-and-voice/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Cinquain Poem](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-cinquain-poem/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-cinquain-poem/>)



## Bactrian Camel

7th century , Chinese

**Medium:** Earthenware with white glaze

**Accession ID:** 51.12.2

Beginning around the 3rd century B.C., a web of trade routes linked China with parts of Central Asia, the Mediterranean, Africa, Europe, and South Asia. This network was later called the Silk Road because silk was one of the most desired products that traveled from East to West. As goods were exchanged over these routes, technological knowledge, philosophical ideas, and artistic practices were also carried to distant places. Westbound camel caravans carried luxury items, including silk, precious tea, and ceramics, from Chang'an (present-day Xian, China) to Central Asia, and then traveled either south to India or farther west to the Mediterranean coasts. Various locations along the trade routes also had goods that might be traded. For example, Kashgar offered pack animals, dried fruit, herbs, and tea. Merchants in Ferghana, famous for its horses, also dealt in rugs, copper, and dried fruit and nuts. East-bound traders brought treasured glass, rare wool, exotic spices, and gold and silver vessels to China.

The best pack animals for many sections of the Silk Road were sturdy Bactrian camels, capable of carrying a great deal of weight over rough terrain, while enduring the extreme conditions of the Gobi desert, where it could be very hot during the day and very cold at night. This glazed earthenware sculpture represents one of these two-humped camels, which were so prized that they became a popular subject for Tang

dynasty funerary sculptures. The ancient Chinese believed in a life after death, so they buried their dead with things they thought would be needed in the afterlife. During the this time, models of camels, entertainers, and soldiers were made to accompany the burial of the wealthy. These objects were considered useful in the afterlife and signified the owner's importance, which was often based on wealth derived from trade along the Silk Road connecting China, the Middle East, and Europe.

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: I See, I Think, I Wonder](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-i-see-i-think-i-wonder/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-i-see-i-think-i-wonder/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Make It Move](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Before and After](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-before-and-after/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-before-and-after/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Sensory Inventory](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-sensory-inventory/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-sensory-inventory/>)



## Mirror with Grape Design

7th - 8th century , Chinese

**Medium:** Bronze with gold overlay

**Accession ID:** 2000.11

In eras when a powerful dynasty ruled China, the ancient trade routes later known as the Silk Road were safer for travelers, which encouraged the expansion of trade. In the early years of the Tang dynasty (618–907), military campaigns extended the Chinese empire to the north and west and established Tang control of the Central Asian sections of the Silk Road. The resulting growth in trade fueled an expanding Chinese economy and accelerated cultural exchanges between China and the West. Goods coming from China included tea, ceramics, rhubarb, paper, lacquer, gunpowder, and bamboo. Heading in the other direction, merchants traded gold, glass, various glazes, and grapevines.

This Chinese mirror back was produced during the Tang dynasty. Made of bronze coated with gold, the surface is adorned with five lions surrounded by birds and grapevines.

One lion is crouching in the center of the mirror, while the other four are arranged around him in lively poses. Lions and grapevines, which are not native to China, were introduced from the Mediterranean into Chinese culture by Silk Road traders around the 2nd century B.C. Artistic ornamentation featuring lions and grapes, however, did not become popular in Chinese works of art until after the 5th and 6th centuries, when Buddhist influences began to arrive in China—also by way of the Silk Road

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: What Makes You Say That?](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Hand and Voice](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-hand-and-voice/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-hand-and-voice/>)
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(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-creative-comparisons/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Make It Move](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/>)



## Standing Bodhisattva

ca. 550 - 559 , Chinese

**Medium:** Limestone

**Accession ID:** 56.9.2

Goods weren't the only items that spread via trade routes. Ideas, including religion and philosophy travelled along the Silk Road, much of which was in China. Buddhism was spread to China by way of merchants, missionaries and pilgrims. Buddhism, which originated in India, is one of China's oldest non-native, or foreign religions. The Indian emperor Asoka the Great (268-232 B.C.) sent missionaries to spread Buddhism across Asia eventually reaching China in the first-century A.D., where it merged with traditional beliefs, including Taoism.

This image is of a bodhisattva, or one who has postponed their own enlightenment, or nirvana, to assist others in reaching this stage. The bodhisattva stands barefoot on a base and wears a long gown, ornate jewelry, and a large rosette-shaped crown. One way to distinguish a bodhisattva from images of the Buddha, is that bodhisattvas still wear ornate jewelry, as they haven't given up all worldly pleasures.

The sculpture was made during the last years of the Six Dynasties Period (220-589 A.D.), a time period in which Buddhism and art flourished in China. This statue comes from Xiangtangshan (Mountains of Resounding Halls), a Buddhist cave complex in the Hebei province in Northern China. The entire cave complex was commissioned by devout Buddhist emperors and courtiers and demonstrates power, prestige and an appeal for divine protection. The caves also continued a long tradition which originated in India, of putting holy places deep within the earth. This particular bodhisattva is one of the earliest Buddhist statues from this complex and comes from a cave that was funded by Emperor Wenxuan (personal name Gao Yang) of the Northern Qi dynasty (ruled 550-559 A.D.).

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: What Makes You Say That?](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Hand and Voice](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-hand-and-voice/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-hand-and-voice/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Headlines, Tweets, and Memes](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-headlines-tweets-and-memes/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-headlines-tweets-and-memes/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Strike a Pose](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/>)



## Standing Buddha

8th century , Korean

**Medium:** Gilded bronze

**Accession ID:** 69.47

Buddhism continued to spread from China to Korea. It is thought Buddhism came to the Korean peninsula in 372 A.D. when a Chinese monk arrived bringing with him Chinese Buddhist texts and statues. At this time, the main religious practice in Korea was Shamanism, which holds that humans, animals, and natural forces, all possess spirits which must be appeased. The two traditions were not seen as being in conflict and blended to produce a uniquely Korean form of Buddhism.

In the 4th century, Korea consisted of three separate kingdoms. Koguryo to the north, Paekje to the south west and Shilla on the south east. Koguryo quickly adopted Buddhism and shortly

after, in 384 A.D. the King of Paekje was converted to Buddhism and decreed that his subjects do the same. Buddhism enjoyed support of many rulers and members of the upper classes and by the middle of the 500s, Buddhism was officially accepted by all three kingdoms which were ultimately unified in 668 A.D.

The Buddha shown here is standing on a lotus pedestal with his right hand raised in the gesture of "no fear", and his left hand extended to symbolize generosity. This statue may represent either Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Pure Land Buddhism, or Sakyamuni Buddha, the Historical Buddha. Pure Land Buddhists believe the world will always be corrupt, therefore we must strive for re-birth in another plane, known as the "Pure Land". Like other small gilded Buddhas, this statue may have been carried by a devotee during travel.

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: Perceive, Know, Care About](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-perceive-know-care-about/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-perceive-know-care-about/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: 30-second Sketch](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-30-second-sketch/)  
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- [Writing to Learn: Cinquain Poem](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-cinquain-poem/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-cinquain-poem/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Strike a Pose](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/>)



## Fugen (Bodhisattva Samantabhadra) on Elephant

14th century , Japanese

**Medium:** Wood with polychrome, lacquer, copper, crystal, glass

**Accession ID:** 66.73.2a-e

Major East Asian trade routes ran from northern China through the Korean peninsula and across the Korean Straits to Japan. Buddhism travelled along these routes and was introduced to Japan from Korea in 552 A.D.. Diplomats from Korea came and brought images of the Buddha as well as volumes of Buddhist texts. Most Japanese at the time were practicing Shinto, which was the native religion of Japan that involved ancestor worship, nature spirits and belief in kami, a sacred power of animate an

inanimate things. As in Korea and China before, syncretism allowed Buddhist and native traditions and teaching, (Shinto in this case), to co-exist and even blend.

By the seventh century, when Buddhism was firmly established, Japan had dozens of temple complexes, priests, and skilled artisans to craft sculptures, paintings and other regalia that was needed.

Here we see a bosatsu, or a bodhisatva in the Indian Buddhist tradition, on top of an elephant. Bosatsus (known as Bodhisatvas in India and China) were compassionate beings who postponed their own enlightenment in order to assist buddhists through difficulties and lead them to salvation. Bosatsus were regarded as embodiments of certain Buddhists virtues. This Bosatsu, known in Japanese Buddhism as Fugen, or in Indian Buddhism as Manjushri, was the Bosatsu of compassion. Fugen often appears with Monju Bosatsu in art, both flanking a figure of the Historical Buddha (Shaka, or Sakyamuni) in Japanese artwork.

Buddhism is one of China's oldest non-native, or foreign religions, originating in India. The Indian emperor Asoka the Great (268-232 B.C.) sent missionaries to spread Buddhism across Asia and it eventually spread to China in the first-century A.D. where it merged with traditional beliefs including Taoism. Buddhism was spread to China by way of merchants, missionaries and pilgrims across the Silk Road to China. From China, Buddhism made its way to Korea and from there Japan.

Elephants are not indigenous to Japan, China or Korea, and more than likely entered those nations in the form of imported art, including prints and sculpture. Therefore, the representation of the elephant in this sculpture was probably not based on first-hand knowledge of an elephant, but rather, images from other art works from India, China and Korea. This may account for some of the elephant's peculiar features.

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: Elaboration Game](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-elaboration-game/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-elaboration-game/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: 30-second Sketch](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-30-second-sketch/)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-30-second-sketch/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Sensory Inventory](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-sensory-i)  
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-sensory-i>)

Inventory/)

- [Moving to Learn: Strike a Pose](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/)

(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/>)



## Talismanic Shirt

ca. 1400-1550 , Indian

**Medium:** ink and opaque watercolor on cotton

**Accession ID:** 2000.9

Islam arrived in India via traders on the west coast in the seventh-century A.D. It wasn't until the 12th century that it entered Northern India from the Muslim conquest of North India in the late 12th century. This conquest ensured the lasting presence of a dynamic new religion in India. At the very center of Islam is the Qur'an which presents the religion's theological and moral bases. More than any particular content, it is the holy book's overall potency that is evoked by this fascinating object, a talismanic, or magical, shirt inscribed with nearly the entire text of the Qur'an. Such tunics might have been worn to avert illness and to ward off enemies and evil the sacred words functioning to protect wearers from peril.

Penned in fine black and red ink, the Qur'an text is organized within square compartments framed by gold margins and small red and blue roundels, as well as in elongated lappets along the bottom of the tunic. Larger roundels containing the name of God (Allah) cover the shoulders. Breast medallions feature the Islamic statement of truth ("There is no god but Allah: Muhammad is Allah's Messenger") An elongated cartouche on the back fittingly refers to God as the Protector while the collar, sleeves, sides, and front opening are surrounded by a wide band featuring a number of God's names in gold script.

### Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: I See, I Think, I Wonder](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-i-see-i-think-i-wonder/)

(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-i-see-i-think-i-wonder/>)

- [Moving to Learn: Make It Move](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/)

(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/>)

- [Sketching to Learn: Lines, Shapes, and Pattern Hunt](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/)

(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/>)

- [Writing to Learn: Headlines, Tweets, and Memes](#)



(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-headlines-tweets-and-memes/>)