Different Genres of Persian & Indian Manuscripts
Background

- Calligraphy, bookbinding, and painting are important aspects of Islamic Art
- The production of illustrated books was concentrated in royal workshops because of the large expense involved. Books were also financial investments, donated toward the endowment of charitable foundations, and status symbols, presented as gifts between heads of state

In this exhibit, you will be exposed to many different GENRES of Manuscripts
History

One of the main categories of Islamic manuscripts is HISTORY. Histories recorded the great events of their ancestors, and were often embellished a little bit beyond reality.

One of the most often copied histories in pre-modern Islamic art is the Shahnama, or the Book of Kings.

Written in 1000 by the poet Firdawsi, it tells the stories of ancient heroes and kings of pre-Islamic Iran; it is rich with exploits of love and betrayal, courage, and valor that lend themselves to illustration.
Biography

A biography is an account of someone's life written by someone else.

Here we see two historically documented scenes from the life of the first Mongol ruler of Iran, Timur. On the far right, ambassadors of Egypt present him with a giraffe!

There tend to be less people in biographical scenes, and a focus on a central figure, usually a king.
From as early as the time of Muhammad, Muslims wrote qasida (odes), or poems of praise for people they admired.

The love poems seen here in pink were written by a male poet about boys.

When there are images, they tend to be metaphorical.
Albums

Album books of beautiful art became especially popular in Mughal India. The single-page painting attains prominence in Mughal art from the mid-sixteenth century onward. These, along with pages of illuminated calligraphy, were often collected and bound into compilations, referred to as “albums,” or muraqqa’, a practice that originated in early fifteenth-century Iran. Under the Timurids, albums usually included existing works in the patron’s collection, as well as works created specifically for the album, such as paintings and drawings, folios from preparatory pattern books, and calligraphy specimens. Unlike earlier paintings which illustrated an accompanying text, sensitive studies of nature and individualized portraits predominate in this album. The picture is no longer subordinated to the text, and the figures are rendered with an emotional sensitivity not seen before in the arts of Mughal India.
Fables

a short story, typically with animals or symbolic people as characters, conveying a moral.

Kalila wa-Dimna was a popular one

It included popular stories of lions and foxes, the fox as a trickster

Who tricks the king lion into

Attacking the noble bull

The fox is then put on trial
Religious texts

The central holy book of Islam is called the Qur’an, and it is considered to be the very words of God.

There are complicated rules about figural representation in Islamic religious texts. Some traditions ban it altogether. All agree that God Himself is never to be depicted.

Clues: Man with white veil over face and halo of flames- the Prophet Muhammad

Use of beautiful Arabic Script

Angels, Halos and Holy Fire, and royal blue are all common themes.
Did you know that the way we write our numbers (0123456789) is called Arabic numerals?

Or that Algebra is an Arabic word?

Muslims are responsible for the preservation of ancient Greek and Roman science during the Middle Ages
**Naskh:** This thin, long script is the most popular script for Qurans.

**Regaa:** A quicker, easier way to write Arabic developed by Ottoman government officials for taking notes. We won’t see much of this style at the exhibit.

**Thuluth:** A huge, monumental script most often seen on large buildings. The letters get very decorative and complicated. Associated with religions and found on mosques and for writing holy names.

**Nastaliq:** A local Iranian script which we will see a lot of in this exhibit. Used to write things in the Persian language, which is separate from Arabic. Seen a lot in poetry.

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**Calligraphy & Genre**

**Kufic:** The first style of Arabic calligraphy developed, first used for Qurans but then for ornamentation, prizing visual ornamentation over legibility. Very vertical, geometric, thick.
Guessing game!

Whichever team gets the most right wins!

In order to get points, you have to come up with at least one clue why you think the page is from a certain genre- you can’t just guess randomly!
What genre is she?

Hint: Look how pretty the borders are
Last slide was from an album! It was a picture of a Houri, or fairy-like maiden of paradise. What’s this? Hint: Soldiers
25 Seconds

Last slide was an image from a HISTORY of a Thousand Years, commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the late 1500s, so at the time the book covered the entire history of Islam! Now what is this? (this one is tricky)

Hint: this is a symbolic hunting scene with extra fancy letters.
Last slide was from a book of poetry- the hunting is a metaphor. What's this one?

HINT: the old woman is begging before the king- think of the beginning of Beauty and the Beast. This is trying to teach us a LESSON.
That last slide was a scene from a fable.

What do you think this image is?
The last one was biographical!

What’s this one?
That’s right!
Scientific!

Last question!
It was a biographical portrait from an album, so either biography or album is correct! Great job, everybody!
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