Islamic World eye-opener tour

Rooms 42-43 (14.00-14.40)

Last updated SF October 2019

This list of key messages and visitor outcomes highlights the main points we'd like to communicate to visitors through the eye-opener tour, and what we'd like visitors to take away from it.

Key messages

- The displays here extend from West Africa to South East Asia (much more than the Middle East). The Islamic world is geographically and culturally diverse (different languages, traditions) etc.
- Islamic art developed from the 7th century onwards and was partly shaped by pre-existing traditions and ideas from other cultures.
- Historically, the rulers of major Islamic dynasties were great patrons of art and architecture.
- The Islamic world has always been in cultural contact and dialogue with other cultures, regions and religions, and non-Muslim peoples (and religions) have always played an important role in the Islamic world.
- The displays reflect the strengths (and weakness) of the Museum's collection. The Museum continues to actively collect, and it collects modern and contemporary art.

Visitor outcomes

- Be inspired to take a deeper interest in the displays (and the subjects it covers) after their tour.
- Leave feeling that they have seem some of the most significant objects in the Islamic World galleries and have gained a deeper understanding of their significance.
- Understand some of the ways the Museum collection has been assembled (and that the Museum still actively collects).
- Feel that the British Museum's collection has extraordinary breadth and offers a unique lens for exploring the Islamic world.

Object list *(bold = compulsory, not bold = optional)*

Room 42	Room 43
Welcome and introduction	**10) The Ottoman empire (choose one)** a) Ottoman Gravestone b) Iznik pottery – The 'Abraham of Kütahya' Ewer
1) Marble panel with basmala inscription	**11) Textiles from Central Asia (choose one)** a) Bridal headdress or married woman's hat b) Central Asian bridal headdress
2) Painted stucco from Samarra, Iraq	12) Jade terrapin
3) Indian cooking pot found at Siraf	13) Keris (ceremonial dagger
4) Stand for a water jar and ceramic water filters	**14) Contemporary artworks (choose one)** a) Suspended Together b. 21 stones by Idris Khan
5) Blacas Ewer	**Conclusion**
6) Chess	
7) Astrolabe	
8) Mosque lamp	
9) Mu'allaqa Church panels, Cairo, Egypt	

Welcome and introduction [start at the map just inside room 42]
My name is … and I am a volunteer at the British Museum. For the next 40 minutes I'm going to show a selection of around 8 key objects from this gallery. The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic world opened in October 2018. This was made possible thanks to a generous donation from the Albukhary Foundation. The displays showcase a broad and diverse spectrum of the material culture produced from the seventh century to the present day in the Islamic world, a series of regions stretching from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Today this area (refer to map) encompasses many different countries/nation states. Historically, large parts of what we see on this map were ruled at different times by major empires – we'll encounter some of these empires during our tour.

The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic world comprises two rooms. This first room begins around the early 600s and continues up to 1500. This second room covers the period from 1500 up to the present day. From archaeological material to contemporary art, from the paintings and vessels made for royal patrons to objects of everyday use, everything relates to cultures where Islam was particularly significant. The cases in the middle of the galleries provide a chronological history. The cases that run along the walls though are thematic – they include objects from a wide geographical and chronological spread. The wider focus in all the displays is the culture of the Islamic world. The gallery provides a broad cultural history of a vast geographical area where Islam is – or has been – particularly significant.

Stop 1 - Marble panel with basmala inscription
This marble panel was originally part of a cenotaph. There are three other panels from the cenotaph in different collections, all carved in Egypt in the 800s (or 9th century). The Arabic inscription – in a very elegant script known as kufic (named after the city of Kufa in Iraq) - consists of the beginning of the basmala (this inscription translates into English as 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate'). The basmala is used extensively in everyday Muslim life across the Islamic world – including daily prayers - and it is the most common phrase repeated in Arabic calligraphy. It is the phrase recited before each surah (chapter) of the Qur'an. It is also used widely in the constitutions of countries where Islam is the official religion. Until the beginning of Islam, Arabic was predominantly a spoken language. It was the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammed that provided the impetus for the development of Arabic script. The religious association of Arabic gave the script – and calligraphy - a unique significance in the Islamic world as you'll see throughout this gallery.

[Additional information: The cenotaph was taken apart at a later date and this panel was carved on the back with a funerary inscription – carved in a simpler form of kufic script that tells us that the panel was part of the tomb Muhammad ibn Fatik Ashmuni, who died in the month of Jumada II in the year 356 AH (AD 967). 'Ashmuni' indicates that he came from the settlement of Ashmun (or Ashmunein) in the Nile delta.]

Stop 2 – Painted stucco from Samarra, Iraq
Samarra, situated north of Baghdad on the banks of the river Tigris became the capital of the Abbasid caliph between 836 and 892. The site was vast – covering 57 square kilometres, including a palace and two congregational mosques. These stucco fragments (point) were part of the decoration of private houses in Samarra. The decoration of private houses and the Dar al-Khalifa palace included friezes with painted designs featuring animal, human and mythical monsters. The faces here probably portray servants, part of a scene of a paradisiacal scene. Today people sometimes assume that figurative imagery is forbidden in Islam. But the proscription applies to religious contexts. As you can see here – and from elsewhere in these displays – figurative imagery was widely produced in the Islamic world for secular contexts. These plaster fragments were acquired from excavations undertaken at Samarra between 1911-13 led by the German scholars Ernst Herzfeld and Friedrich Sarre.

Stop 3 – An Indian cooking pot found at Siraf (2007.6001.9858) [Optional]
Situated on the Persian Gulf coast in Iran, Siraf was a major port city of the early Islamic period. It was at the centre of a maritime exchange network from the 700s to 900s. This network reached most parts of the Indian Ocean world. Between 1966 and 1973, extensive excavations of this once-thriving cosmopolitan port produced vast quantities of finds, including over three million pieces of pottery. This work revealed the city's far-reaching connections and alluded to its diverse population. It also emphasised a complex local manufacturing industry that complemented foreign imports and the material cultural imprint of the central Abbasid state.

In contrast to the many fragmentary vessels found in contemporary coastal settlements in the Persian Gulf and East Africa, this Indian cooking pot stands out for its complete condition – it is dated to between the AD 600s–800s. Such vessels represent everyday household items belonging to South Asian emigrants involved in Indian Ocean trade, but they could also have been used by local residents of Siraf. It is fascinating to speculate on who used this pot – and if it was used by an emigrant from India – what brought them to Siraf and how their life developed there. The pot was acquired as the result of excavations in Siraf by David Whitehouse.

Stop 4 - Stand for a water jar and ceramic water filters [Optional]
This intriguing marble object – at the base of the case – was carved in Egypt in the 1100s. We can see that it is decorated with lions, fantastic beasts and blessings in Arabic script. It is actually a stand designed to hold a water jar. The Qur'an repeatedly instructs Muslims to provide water for the thirsty. It seems likely that this water stand – or kilga – was commissioned by an individual as an act of piety in order to provide refreshment for passers-by in a public setting. The intriguing ceramic fragments above the kilga also related to water – they are filters that were once part of water jars. Most were decorated with geometric designs but if you look closely you can see that some carry figural motifs or pithy aphorisms in Arabic. They are far more elaborate – and beautiful – than they need to be.

Stop 5 - The Blacas Ewer [Optional]
There was much interest in the Muslim world in the presentation of food, that it should be appealing to the eye as well as the palate and nose. Brass objects inlaid with silver, gold and copper which mimic the glittering effects of gold became very popular for the wealthy. This ewer is a fine example of inlaid brass. It was made in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, and it is signed and dated (9 April 1232) by the inlayer. The spout and the cover of the ewer are lost. It was probably used to pour water because brass has an adverse effect on wine. It is decorated with scenes of contemporary courtly life such as hunting, fighting, drinking and music making. Such objects were often given as diplomatic gifts to other rulers.

The inlay technique, developed in Herat, was adopted later in Mosul, a major centre of fine metalwork particularly in the 1200s (13th century). Fine silver wires are worked into intricate grooved lines, and small pieces of silver and copper are set in recesses cut into the brass. The figural designs include a story from the Shahnama (Book of Kings, completed about 1010) featuring Bahram Gur and Azadeh out hunting, a lady with her maid and a lady on a camel with her attendants.

Please choose one or two scenes from the ewer to illustrate the courtly scenes for visitors.
- Wealthy woman in a camel-litter attended by two servants
- Woman looking at herself in a mirror with servant standing by
- Iranian king Bahram Gur with slave girl Azadeh riding camel
- Pair of musicians (female) playing a tambourine and lute
- Pair of musicians playing harp and a small flute
- Horseman battling a foot soldier
- Two foot soldiers practising sword play
- Mounted hunter accompanied by his trained cheetah

The ewer is sometimes referred to as the Blacas ewer, taking this name from a previous owner - Pierre Louis Jean duc de Blacas (d.1866).

Stop 6 – Chess
Games offer much insight into people's lives. Beyond their appeal as pure entertainment, board games can be a mental exercise, a metaphor for war and power, or a setting for sociability. The importance of chess, backgammon and mancala is shown by the diverse origins of the items in this case, which range from India to Nigeria and from the early Islamic period to the present day.

This Nigerian chess set was made comparatively recently, but preserves many features of the game as it was played in the Islamic world, including pieces' shapes and rules. These rules were quite different from those of today – the queen, for example, was much less powerful. The pieces, although stylised, are still recognisable as figures on the battlefield that the game represents.

Chess was originally designed as a game of war or strategy. Developed in India around 500, it was quickly adopted in Persia and the early Islamic empires, spreading across Asia and into Africa and Europe. Over time, and with the diffusion of the game into different cultures, the pieces themselves changed in name and form. For example, what is now referred to in English as the bishop was originally the fil or elephant (the name deriving from the Persian pil) representing war elephants. This spread of chess mirrors the wider flow of cultural, scientific and philosophical concepts between east and west. A famous example of a chess set can be seen at the Museum just nearby in Room 41. They are the Lewis chessmen, which were found on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland. Dating from the period around 1150-1200, they are arguably one of the top ten treasures in the Museum.

Stop 7 - Astrolabe (Probably southeast Turkey, northern Iraq or Syria, 638 AH (AD 1240–41) [Optional]
Knowledge of the stars, now called astronomy and astrology, was an important element of Islamic culture. From the AD 700s onwards, scientists and thinkers built on pre-Islamic sources translated into Arabic to make significant advances in the study of the heavens. They used scientific instruments to gather information relating to timekeeping and the positions of the sun, stars and planets. Astrolabes, the name derived from the Greek astro labos (star-taker), were the computers of their time.

This astrolabe is one of the finest and most important scientific instruments to have survived from the medieval Islamic world. Like other astrolabes, the front is a two-dimensional map of the skies, with the different pointers – animals, leaves and other elements – each pointing to a specific star. The human and animal figures make this a particularly unusual example, as the star pointers are normally non-figural. The brass body is heavily inlaid with both silver and copper, a style which was particularly popular on luxury metalwork from northern Iraq, southeast Turkey and northern Syria during the thirteenth century.

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, this instrument is important for an inscription on its back, which provides information on both the maker and patrons. The craftsman is named as Abd al-Karim, who also signs himself al-asturlabi ('the astrolabist') and another word which is difficult to read but which could be al-madrabi ('the beater [of metal]'). Below his signature are the names of three patrons, which have been erased by filling in the engraving with brass. These patrons – al-Malik, al-Muizz, and Shihab al-Din – have been identified as rulers active in Syria, Turkey and the Caucasus, each of whom had their own court and who vied for the best scholars, artists and craftsmen. The fact that the names have been erased suggests that this might have been a presentation piece, intended to show what Abd al-Karim was capable of. Alternatively, it may have been repurposed as a gift after the deaths of these patrons, with the gift giver needing to disguise its second-hand status.

Stop 8 - Mosque lamp [Optional]

Glass lamps like these were made to light mosques and funerary complexes built by the sultans and their amirs. Suspended from the ceiling by chains, inside each lamp was a container for water and oil and a floating wick. Many lamps are inscribed with the 'Light verse' from the Qur'an (24:35, lines 1-4): 'God is the Light of the heavens and the earth, the likeness of His Light is a niche, wherein is a light, the light is a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star'.

Mosque lamps were made from colourless glass and free blown to shape, then painted with enamel colours. The blue comes from lapis lazuli, the red from iron and the white from tin oxides. Fastened to the end of an iron rod, the glass was inserted into a furnace until the enamels fused into place.

There is an example of a ceramic mosque lamp made of stonepaste painted in blue, green and black under a transparent glaze elsewhere in room 42, close to the main door to the gallery (object number: 1887,0516.1).

Stop 9 – Mu'allaqa Church panels, Cairo, Egypt, about 1300 (purchased from Charles H A Schefer)

Although Egypt by 1300 was predominantly Muslim – and had Muslim rulers – there were significant Christian and Jewish populations. The ten intricately carved panels that you can see here are from the Muʻallaqa ('hanging') Church in Cairo. They are carved with crosses and scenes from the life of Jesus, which include the Nativity and Entry into Jerusalem. The panels once formed part of a sanctuary screen inside the church. The church itself, built on the site of a Roman fortress, was constructed in 1300. As non-Muslims, the Copts had a special legal status (ahl al-dhimma) and were allowed to practice their faith freely. While the scenes on the doors are drawn from Byzantine art, the vegetal (or arabesque) motifs carved on the panels belong within the repertoire of Egyptian woodcarvers of this period.

As you can see from the other objects in this case, Egyptian artisans perfected sophisticated techniques for decorating wood, bone and ivory objects. These were applied to small household items, as well as to doors, screens, pulpits and furniture in mosques and other buildings. The wood that was used included rosewood, mulberry and sycamore. Precious cedar was imported from Lebanon and used for the doors of the al-Muʻallaqa church. The panels were made by craftsmen who would have worked for a range of clients, including both Christian and Muslim patrons.

Move to Room 43: Islamic world 1500 – Now

This room covers the period from 1500 to the present day – and includes the major empires – Ottoman Turkey, Safavid Iran, Mughal India as well as a focus on South East Asia and West Africa. The light levels are lower because this room includes light sensitive textiles and works on paper. Many of the textiles and works on paper will rotate – so there'll always be something new for visitors to see in this part of the gallery.

Stop 10 – the Ottoman Empire [pick one of the two objects]

With its beginnings in Northwest Turkey in the 1290s, the Ottoman Empire was the largest and longest surviving empire in the Islamic world. The Ottomans expanded their territories rapidly. In 1453 the sultan, Mehmed II 'the conqueror' (r.1444-81) captured Constantinople (to be renamed Istanbul). This marked the end of the eastern Roman empire in the East, the Greek speaking Byzantine Empire. One of Mehmed's first actions in Constantinople was to convert the great church of Hagia Sophia into

a mosque. Süleyman I ('the Magnificent', r. 1520–66), led Ottoman forces as far west as Vienna, where they were turned back in 1529.

The Ottoman Empire was a major political power for around 500 years. During the 19th century – however - the power of the Ottoman's began to wane. Seven years after the death of Seyyid Ahmed Beg, in 1830, Greece was recognised as an independent sovereign state after centuries of Ottoman rule having successfully fought for its independence. At the start of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was already in decline. Following the end of the war, most Ottoman territories were divided between Britain, France, Greece and Russia. The Ottoman Empire officially ended in 1922 when the title of Ottoman Sultan was abolished. Turkey was declared a republic in 1923.

a) **Ottoman Gravestone, dated 27 August 1823**
This is an Ottoman tombstone, made of limestone. The inscription tells us a great deal about the deceased, as does the headdress – or type of turban - placed at the top. The tombstone was made for Seyyid Ahmed Beg, former harbourmaster of Kuti. The main part of the inscription – which is in Ottoman Turkish – reads:

[He] performed more than 60 years of faithful service to the Ottoman State and [he was] in his retirement at the Sultan's command, attached to the Imperial Ottoman Navy, which had been ordered to cleanse the Mediterranean of traitors of the Greek community who at that time were in revolt. While the Imperial Ottoman Navy was on those shores he died a martyr.' It is dated 27 August 1823 (AH 1238).

NB. The tombstone facing the opposite side of the gallery is for a woman.

b) **Iznik pottery – The "Abraham of Kütahya" Ewer (G.1) (in The Ottoman world: politics and poetry case)**
The Ottomans established a distinctive court style that appeared on objects made across the empire. One of their greatest artistic achievements was the glorious pottery of Iznik, a centre of ceramic production established in the 1480s that continued for over 200 years. Over time, Iznik potters introduced different shapes, styles and colours, culminating in the 1550s with a brilliant red and a range of floral motifs, including the tulip, whose introduction to Europe led to 'Tulipomania.'

The Ottoman elite, including Muslims, Christians and Jews, all commissioned and consumed products such as Iznik ceramics. The ewer here, painted in cobalt blue is a good example. It has an Armenian inscription on its base which commemorates 'Abraham, servant of God, of Kütahya', and includes the date 1510. Kütahya was a thriving town under the Ottomans, with many Armenian Christians residing there.

Stop 11 – Textiles from Central Asia – Central Asian bridal headdress [pick one of the two headdresses, not both unless time permits]
The British Museum has an exceptional collection of textiles and costume from the Islamic world. Highlights are displayed here – and these displays rotate regularly (every two years) for conservation reasons – so if you come back occasionally, you'll sometimes find new pieces on display. We are going to look at two bridal headdresses, one from Palestine and one from Central Asia.

a) ***Bridal headdress or married woman's hat, Palestine***
This spectacular headdress is made of blue and brown cotton that has been embroidered, and lined with red satin. As you can see it is covered with coins and coral. During the 19th century and early 20th century, brides in the villages of the Hebron hills wore a ceremonial headdress called a 'wuqayat al-darahim' ('money hat'). With its densely-packed rows of Ottoman coins and numerous beads, charms and pendants, the headdress shielded a bride

from the ‘eye of envy’ when she was seen to be most vulnerable – on procession to her new home and at her second public appearance celebrating the consummation of the marriage known as the ‘going out to the well’ ceremony, Some of these headdresses were family heirlooms passed from one bride to another, with elements added whenever possible.

b) ***Central Asian bridal headdress***

Kyrgyz and Kazakh brides wore elaborate headdresses called *saukele* (‘beautiful head’) on their wedding day and on important occasions during the first year of marriage until the birth of the first child. Wrapped in wool and lined with silk ikat, the conical structure is ornamented with stamped and gilded elements, pearls, beads, strands of coral and silver tassels. All of these carried amuletic associations. An embroidered panel conceals the bride’s hair plaits and she would have draped a white veil from the gilded finial.

Central Asian textiles cover a wide spectrum of techniques, including felt making, weaving, embroidery and ikat dyeing. Ikat is a technique whereby thread is tied and dyed several times before being threaded on a loom and woven, resulting in patterns with blurry edges. The creation of the Soviet Union (1922-1991) had a profound impact on Central Asia’s traditional textile production, with centuries-old techniques at risk of disappearing as a move to mechanised textile production was effected. Since 1991 however, there has been a growing interest in traditional textile dyeing methods and embroidery techniques, leading to a resurgence of handicrafts. This piece was donated to the Museum in 1926.

Stop 12: Jade terrapin, 1600, Allahabad, northern India [Optional]

NB. This object has been displayed at a low height (along with a series of other objects) to give children something interesting to look (there are a series of labels for families in the gallery)

We’ll now focus on an object linked to the Mughal Empire which lasted from 1526 until 1858. In 1858 the British took control of the subcontinent until Indian Independence in 1947. This stone carving of a terrapin was found during engineering work in 1803 at the Mughal fort at Allahabad, northern India. Allahabad was fortified and named by the emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), who built a palace there as well. The Fort was occupied by his son who later became the emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). Jahangir, a patron of jade carving and a keen naturalist, may have commissioned the piece to decorate his palace gardens within the fort.

The detailed carving work allows the species to be identified as well as the gender, this is a female 'Kachuga dhongoka' native to the River Jumna which joins the Ganges at Allahabad. The stone is nephrite, one of two main varieties of true jade. The size and appearance suggests the raw material originated from an unusual source, namely Xinjiang, then an independent central Asian kingdom. During a hazardous journey, the raw jade would have been carried around the Taklamakan Desert to Kashgar and then over the Karakorum Mountains to Kashmir and northern India.

Nephrite is harder than iron so cannot be worked using metal tools. The carving was worked with diamond abrasives and the fine shaping achieved with diamond-pointed tools. Diamond is the hardest mineral known; its use in gem work in India has a history going back to the first millennium BC. Using hand-held tools this carving would probably have taken at least a year to create. Together with information about the source of the jade, and the quality of workmanship, this suggests a highly prestigious commission.

Stop 13 – Keris (ceremonial dagger) and sheath. Located in the Islam in South East Asia: Sumatra to Sulawesi case (As1972,Q.982.a) [Optional]

Islam probably reached Southeast Asia as early as 850 through maritime trade via India, China and the Middle East, and the gradual settlement of mercantile communities and religious scholars.

Following the conversion of the Sumatran kingdom of Pasai in the late 1200s, Islam spread eastward and was finally embraced by the kingdoms of Sulawesi in the early 1600s. From richly decorated textiles to weaponry, the art and material culture of Southeast Asia is regionally diverse and reflects centuries of maritime exchange.

Worn by people of different faith communities, the keris (ceremonial dagger) is a distinctive feature of Islamic societies throughout the islands of Southeast Asia. It is both an ancestral weapon and a spiritual object. This sumptuous example, made by the Bugis people during the 18th/19th century, has a carved ivory hilt embellished with diamonds and a gilded sheath with floral decoration. Its elaborate hilt and sheath are markers of regional identity.

The ivory hilt of the gold inlaid keris features a stylised figure (Jawa demam), possibly the legendary Garuda, a part-human, part-eagle figure from Southeast Asia's ancient past. The spiritual essence and power of a keris lies in its blade. An empu (blade-smith) folds layers of irons ore and meteorite nickel dozens or hundreds of times to create pamor (patterns) in the metal. Because of its ritual status, a person shares a unique connection with his or her keris.

Stop 14 – Contemporary artwork [choose one]
This section of the gallery focuses on modern and contemporary works. The Museum actively collects modern and contemporary artists of the Middle East and South Asia, living either in the countries of their birth or in diaspora. The display here present insights into artistic production and the interaction of artists with their heritage, while offering complementary narratives on the complex histories of these regions today. Such works often encourage us to reflect on relationships between past and present.

a) Suspended Together by Manal Dowayan
These two doves – one standing and the other pecking – were made by the Saudi Arabian artist Manal Dowayan (b.1973). They look like doves of peace but stamped upon them – if you look closely – are documents. These were the authorisation documents that Saudi Arabian women were required to have to travel until very recently. These documents had to be signed by a male guardian, regardless of the woman's age or status. In the case of these doves, the documents reproduced on them belonged to the artist. Dowayan used the doves to a find a peaceful way of drawing attention to the fact that at the time the works were made, Saudi Arabian women could not travel on their own. 'Suspended Together' was a larger installation created by Dowayan of 200 doves. These doves gave the impression of freedom and flight on first glance, but upon further inspection, were frozen with little hope of movement. Dowayan produces work in a number of different media, from photography to installation, and her subject matter is mostly concerned with issues faced by women in Saudi Arabia.

b) 21 stones by Idris Khan
This work, commissioned specially for the Albukhary Foundation gallery, consists of 21 stamped paintings. It was produced by Idris Khan (b.1978), an artist who lives and works in London. In 2017 he was awarded an OBE for his services to art. Each of the paintings consists of tiny stamped words. The title of the work – 21 stones - evokes the 'Stoning of the Devil', a ritual that takes place during the annual Hajj pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca.

One of the five pillars of Islam central to Muslim belief, Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim must make at least once in their lifetime if they are able. Today Hajj draws pilgrims from all over the globe. The rituals involved with Hajj have remained unchanged since its beginning, and it continues to be a powerful religious undertaking which draws Muslims together irrespective of nationality or sect, or wealth and status. During the 'Stoning

of the Devil' ritual pilgrims collect pebbles at Muzdalifa, outside Mecca, and go to Mina, where they stone the three pillars (now large walls) known as the Jamarat. It is a symbolic reenactment of Abraham's hajj, where he stoned three pillars representing the temptation to disobey God. It also symbolises the act of casting aside one's own low desires and wishes.

Idris Khan has spoken eloquently about the work and I'll quote him here: *'It is beautiful to imagine when a pilgrim releases a stone and it hits the wall, the words and prayers that the stone represents explode into a physical language. The words themselves are a personal reflection about my life to date and are mostly unreadable. I prefer the viewer to enjoy the image rather than try to understand its content'* (Idris Khan).

Conclusion

We have now used up our 40 minutes and are at the end of the tour. I hope that you have enjoyed it and that you feel inspired to stay and look further at the wonderful objects displayed here. If you have any questions, I'd be very happy to answer them. I would like to remind you that there are further eye-opener tours this afternoon, with more information about them available at the Information Desk. You may also like to visit the Islamic World hands on desk (if open), located in this gallery. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day at the British Museum.