ISLAMIC PATTERNS
DAGGER – 15TH CENTURY

This dagger is one of the older items in the Collection. It is made from steel, gold, silver, chalcedony, paste and bitumen.

The decoration on the blade is typical of manuscript illustrations from Herat (modern-day Afghanistan), where it was possibly made. It has delicate gold designs on one side, and lively vines and animals on the other. The little faces in the design reference the idea of the Waq Waq tree, a legendary tree that grows humans, situated on an all-female island found in medieval Arabic literature.

The beautiful details of calligraphy on the blade and the decoration on the hilt (the handle of the blade) are also worth noting. If you look closely at the hilt you can see a repeat pattern made up of stylised leaf and floral shapes.
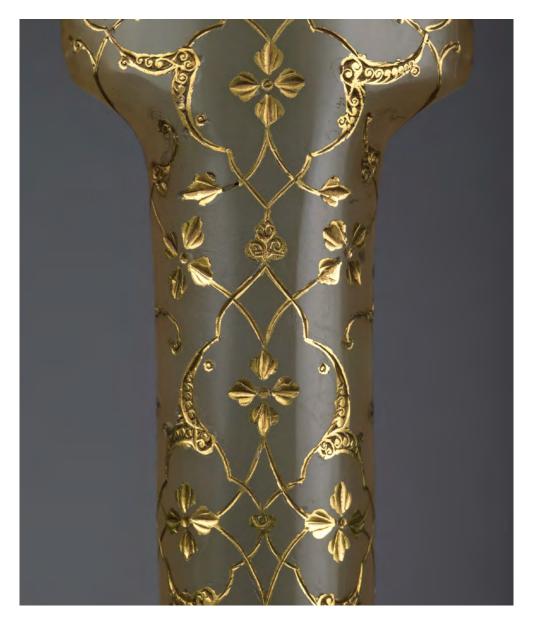
IN DETAIL

DATE	Late 15th century
MATERIALS	Steel, gold, chalcedony, paste, bitumen
SIZE	8.5 cm, blade length
MAKER	Unknown
PLACE	Iran or Central Asia

IN DETAIL

RESEARCH & DISCUSS

- What can you find out about legends of the Waq Waq tree? How do other depictions compare?

- What do you know about myths and legends from different cultures and traditions?

- What myths and legends do you think are being created today?

ACTIVITY   Creating a spiral pattern

There is a spiral vine-like pattern on the blade, on which you can see animals and flowers. Spirals and vines can be drawn freehand, but can also be constructed using circles and straight lines. You will need: a pencil, a compass, a ruler.

- Draw a straight line using the ruler.
- Open the compass to 3cm, and place the point on the line, and lightly draw a circle.
- Repeat this along the line, with the circles just touching each other, until you have a row of circles.
- Use the circles as a basis for the spirals, and draw them in so they alternate the way they face.
- Mark out spaces on the spirals to add elements in. Make sure they are evenly spaced.
- You can add in flowers, leaves, and even animals or other shapes as you feel inspired.