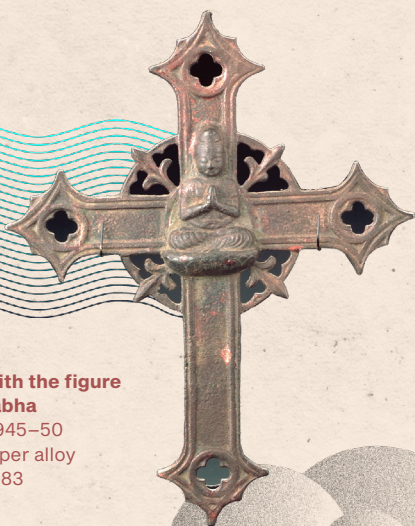


unexpected objects

This trail explores the intriguing stories behind some of our artefacts. Follow along as we shed light on what lies beneath the surface of selected objects from our collection – from the quirky to the unexpected.



**Cross with the figure
of Amitabha**
Japan, 1945–50
Iron-copper alloy
2011-02283

Christian, Buddhist, or a fake?

It's...complicated.

This cross with a Buddhist figure seated at its centre, is a curious mixture of Christian and Buddhist motifs. Hybrid crosses such as this were thought to have been used by Christians in Japan when Christianity was banned there between 1639 and 1873. More recently, however, it has been discovered that these hybrid objects were in fact made as curios in the 1940s, when there was a surge in interest in the Hidden Christian communities!

A book on religious instruction or scientific enquiry?

**Both! It is used to interpret dreams, which
requires religious knowledge yet is still a
science in its own right.**

This rare Malay manuscript written in Jawi script is a manual on dream interpretation. Divided into chapters that discuss various subjects dreamt of – scents, foods, various activities – it provides instructions on how to interpret them as signs and symbols! Many old Malay manuscripts are rare due to their limited production and perishability, so this complete example is quite special.



**Manuscript on the
interpretation of
dreams**
Malay Peninsula, Perak,
around 1900
Ink on paper
2000-06776



Trick cup
China, Fujian province, Dehua,
mid-17th century
Porcelain
Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley,
2000-03445

A porcelain masterpiece or a prank on the unwary drinker?

It's both!

This trick cup – called “fairness cup” or “justice cup” (公道杯 gongdaobei) – has a figure with a tube inside. A hole at the base of the figure connects to a hole under the cup. The cup empties out when it is filled above three-quarters full, creating a nasty surprise for the greedy drinker.



**Plate with the arms
of the Gyllenborg
family**
China, around 1755
Porcelain
2011-01504

Modernist coat-of-arms in the 18th century?

No, just a mistake!

The centre of this dish is decorated with the arms of the Swedish Gyllenborg family against smoky greyish “clouds”. Sending drawings from Europe to China for porcelain artists to copy was risky. In this case, a water-smudged drawing was dutifully copied onto porcelain. The smoky greyish form is thus the result of smeared ink, not any modernist artistic inspiration.



A gigantic necklace or wall art?

A necklace...but for a horse!

The large amulet box on this necklace is decorated with filigree, granulation, gemstones, and crested bird-head forms. A hinge at the top of the large central medallion opens the chamber, where Quranic verses or other protective items would be kept. This impressive piece might have been placed around the neck of a horse during special processions.

Amulet necklace
Uzbekistan, Bukhara,
19th century
Gilded silver,
turquoise, coral, agate
2011-01949

A cabinet made of wood and gold?



Cabinet and stand
Cabinet: India, Gujarat, around 1700
Stand: probably England, around 1720
Tortoiseshell, silver, ivory, wood, gold
2014-00315

Yes, and so much more!

This cabinet has a core of wood covered with polished tortoiseshell. It is further decorated with ivory borders, and the doors are hinged and secured with gilded silver fastenings. It was manufactured in India as a luxury item for the European market. The ornately carved and gilded stand, in a style popular in Europe at the time, was probably added in England to support and better display the cabinet.