

ART AND RE

AN INTRODUCTION

If you want to use objects from the Wallace Collection in your teaching, you may be ready to visit in person, or search the website and get going. This resource is for any Religious Education (RE) teachers with these questions:

- Where do I start?
- How can I make sure I know enough about the object?
- How would people have seen the object at the time?
- How can I make it relevant to RE?
- How can I help students make their own meanings of the object?

Humans have made art since the beginning of time. The earliest forms of art can still be seen today in caves, cliffs or sculpted out of natural resources like clay or bone. These artforms are often shrouded in mystery and can capture our imagination about who might have created them, interacted with them, and for what reasons. The earliest exhibit in the Wallace Collection is around 2,400 years old, while the majority of the Collection includes objects and paintings from between 1450 and 1900. Curators, restorers and art historians have studied these objects since the Collection began in the 18th century. Today, the Collection is available for the public to visit in person and through the website.

In this introduction, we take you through several ways to look at and think about art. Then we apply these approaches in depth to two objects that have been chosen to support the RE curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4: the **Mosque Lamp** and the **Good Shepherd** statuette, each explored in a separate resource.

The different ways of looking and thinking are explained first to familiarise you with the opportunities they provide when planning meaningful encounters for your students. Questions are posed to open up discussions that bring in students' experiences and reflections.

KEY WORKS



Bartolomé-Esteban Murillo
The Adoration of the Shepherds
c. 1665–c. 1670



Philippe de Champaigne
The Annunciation
c. 1648



Pax, mid-16th century



Serving knife, c. 1500



Manufacture de Sèvres
Ecritoire 'à Globes' Inkstand, 1759



Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rainbow Landscape*
c. 1636

THEMES

Art, whether a cave painting or a pop song, is a form of expression that relates to themes that reach into the past, present and future. Whether one is religious or not, the humanity of a figure, earthiness of a landscape, or exquisiteness of calligraphy may move us emotionally or prompt connection, alienation, wonder or curiosity.

Themes of birth, death, hope and courage run strongly through the pieces chosen here. This means they can be appreciated in terms of their expression of human experiences. Religious themes of worship, glorification, sacred texts and ritual can also be explored in a sophisticated way through these chosen objects to enrich understandings of the concepts of and disciplinary approaches to RE.

What kinds of things do all humans have in common?

Which of these things are seen and which are unseen?

Which of these have stayed the same and which have changed over time?

Do all humans share the same experience of birth and death?

Do humans share themes with the animal and plant world?

CLASSIFICATION

When we ask why an object is classed as religious or sacred, it is helpful to consider three categories. It is also important to remember that sometimes these categories overlap:

- Objects or artefacts used for religious practice, perhaps by a member of the religious community or religious leader
- Art to express belief
- Non-religious objects with religious decoration or inscription

SYMBOLS

Symbolism is perhaps the best way to recognise religious art. Symbols have power because of what they represent. Profane (not sacred) symbols can represent something which can often be expressed with words, like an arrow or road sign. A sacred symbol points to something beyond words and participates somehow in that reality or belief. When worshippers appear to pray to a religious image or object, some students might think they are worshipping the object or image itself. In fact, they are praying to what is being represented and, for this reason, the representation is sacred. Sacred symbols require understanding and are to be encountered respectfully. Students may find particular profane symbols carry a similarly sacred status!



Try having this discussion in reference to symbols of football clubs or flags to encourage reflection on visual language and meaning.

Some symbols are universal and found across cultures. For example, the rainbow in *The Rainbow Landscape* by Peter Paul Rubens (p.11) had a particular association with belief and peace for the artist and audience, and many global cultures have sacred stories where the rainbow is a bridge between heaven and earth, the divine and human. Today the rainbow has been adopted as a symbol of pride in the LGBTQ+ community and support for the National Health Service.

Do we need to know what symbols mean to understand them?

Why do the meanings of some symbols change and others stay the same?

What symbols do you know that have both religious and non-religious meanings?

Where and how do light, water and fire feature in secular and religious symbols?

If there were no symbols, what would change?

Why do you think humans developed and still use symbols?



OBJECT USED FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

This object was likely designed for use as a pax, a devotional object kissed by the priest and congregation during mass. The enamel depicts the Virgin mourning over the body of her dead son, Christ, at the base of the cross, accompanied by two other holy women or angels. This subject is known as the Pietà, which translates from the Italian as pity or compassion. Christ's crown of thorns and a small, covered vessel are on the ground in front of them. The vessel is a pyx, a container for the host (sacramental bread) used in Christian worship.

This object is used in a religious practice based on the belief in transubstantiation. Religious objects are a useful and fascinating way to study and reflect on the relationships between belief, practice and the role of art.



How does the image on the pax relate to the religious understandings and purpose of the object?

What do you notice about the use of colour in the image? How does this relate to the doctrine of transubstantiation?

DATE	Mid-16th century
MATERIALS	Copper, enamel, flesh tints, red details and gilding
SIZE	Height: 8.1 cm, width: 6.6 cm
PLACE	Limoges, France

MAKER Possibly Workshop of Pierre Reymond
DATES c. 1513–after 1584

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS



TITLE	The Adoration of the Shepherds
DATE	c. 1665–c. 1670
MATERIALS	Oil on canvas
SIZE	167 x 240 x 8cm
PLACE	Spain
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ARTIST	Bartolomé- Esteban Murillo
DATES	1617–1682

IN DETAIL



ART TO EXPRESS BELIEF

Mary displays the infant Jesus, allowing the shepherds to be the first to recognise him. They bring doves, the traditional offering for purification after birth, and a tied-up lamb. The lamb symbolises Jesus' later sacrifice, which he already contemplates in the vision of a cross which can only be seen at the top of the painting. Realistic details, such as the still life of the cushion and the straw hat and the dirty foot of the shepherd in the foreground, give the picture a feeling of naturalism and intimacy that makes its message more convincing for the Christian viewer.

DISCUSS



- Notice the sources of light in the painting. What does light symbolise here?
- Why is Jesus a source of light? What does this tell us about how Christian viewers may have explained this scene?
- Why do you think artists like Murillo included so many realistic details like dirty feet in a holy scene?
- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of combining natural and miraculous, or sacred, elements in a painting?
- Notice the diagonal line from Mary's gaze, to Jesus, to the tied-up lamb. What story and beliefs are being suggested here?

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS



IN DETAIL



SERVING KNIFE



TITLE Serving knife

DATE c. 1500

MATERIALS Iron or steel, copper alloy, antler, rosewood and gold, blued and engraved

SIZE At widest part 5.8 cm, blade 32.7 cm

PLACE Tyrol

MAKER Hans Sumersperger

IN DETAIL



NON-RELIGIOUS OBJECTS WITH RELIGIOUS DECORATION

This is an example of a non-religious item with a religious symbol, in this case, a depiction of Saint Barbara, carved in the ivory panels on the handle. Barbara is shown on the serving knife with her recognisable symbol of a tower.

The story of Saint Barbara is one of martyrdom and miracles. When she declared herself a Christian, Barbara was held captive in a tower by her father who eventually killed her for not renouncing her faith. He was then destroyed by a miraculous bolt of lightning which left nothing but smithereens.

DISCUSS



- Saint Barbara is the Catholic Christian patron saint for those working with military arms, gunpowder or explosives. She is prayed to for protection against sudden death in these working conditions. How does her role as a patron saint connect to the fate of her father?
- Although the serving knife would be used for feast days and religious ceremonies, it would be more commonly used for everyday purposes in the kitchen. Can you think of any other everyday objects that are decorated with important inscriptions or symbols?

INTERPRETATIONS, ETHICS AND VALUES

The way we 'meet' or discover objects and images can frame our interpretations.

'Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.'

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Deliberate interpretations of art allow us to value and prioritise different perspectives or concerns. As educators, we have choice and responsibility for how we introduce aspects of the RE curriculum. We can use art to amplify minority voices, reveal troublesome histories and promote values through the discovery of art.

RESEARCH & DISCUSS



- How do we face the troublesome histories in the RE curriculum? How does art fit into this endeavour?
- Explore ways to introduce art into the RE curriculum by teaching through, for and about social justice, human rights and environmental ethics.

BIG QUESTIONS

Big questions can help students reach beyond the topic and the artwork. They can serve as:

- Starters to open discussions, plenaries to reflect, or exploratory tasks
- Lines of enquiry to inform teachers' planning or students' independent work

What can we learn about the nature and function of art for the individual and society through our responses to these questions?

Where do we interact with art?

Why do humans make art?

Is art always for the greater good?

Do we need to know why the art was made to appreciate it?

Is all art created for a reason?

Do we all experience art in the same way?

THE RAINBOW LANDSCAPE



TITLE The Rainbow Landscape

DATE c. 1636

SIZE 137 x 233 cm

MATERIALS Oil on oak panel

ARTIST Peter Paul Rubens

DATES 1577-1640

PLACE Flanders

THE PAINTING

Rubens was painting for pleasure when he created this landscape. He had enjoyed a long and successful career producing commissions for patrons and working as a diplomat in Europe where he contributed to the peace process in the Netherlands. The area we see in the painting is the view from Rubens' home in Het Steen, near Brabant in the Netherlands, which he bought at the age of 58 to live in with his family.

In his retirement, Rubens spent time painting landscapes, and this is an idealised scene of working rural life in the local countryside. It is harvest time and we see the building of haystacks and farm staff bringing cows back to the field after milking next to busy ducks on the bank of a stream. A line of trees at the edge of the wood leads our eye to the horizon where it has just stopped raining and a bright rainbow now appears across the sky.

The rainbow is a natural phenomenon where sunlight is refracted by rain and splits into seven different colours. At the time Rubens was painting, the rainbow would have been associated with a Christian understanding of God's promise to care for humanity after the Flood in Genesis. After years of working as a diplomat, Rubens may well be bringing this symbol of hope and peace to his homeland. The prosperity suggested in this farm scene, coupled with the joyful use of colour, would certainly suggest this.

RESEARCH & DISCUSS



- What other possible interpretation do you and your students have of the colours, composition and subject matter in the scene depicted?
- The Genesis story of the rainbow is also in the Torah. How might we interpret this scene through a Jewish understanding of covenant?
- The rainbow is a universal symbol in the sacred narratives of hundreds of global cultures and usually signifies a bridge between heaven and earth or the divine and humanity. You might want to research the Norse, Buddhist or Vedic stories of the rainbow in search of common themes and differences.
- Today, the rainbow flag is a symbol of the LGBTQ+ community. The flag originated with Gilbert Baker who was invited by Harvey Milk to create a flag for the gay community to fly at the first Gay Pride march in San Francisco in the late 1970s. The rainbow flag continues to be a global symbol for pride of the LGBTQ+ community and its allies today.
- During the Coronavirus pandemic, the rainbow was adopted by supporters of the National Health Service in recognition of the huge efforts made by health workers.
- Do you think either of these secular interpretations of the rainbow have any connections to each other?
- What does the rainbow mean to you?
- Do we need to understand the artist's intentions when we look at a painting? What are the advantages and disadvantages of knowing why the artist made particular decisions about colours, symbols and settings?

THE ANNUNCIATION



TITLE The Annunciation
DATE c. 1648
MATERIAL Oil on canvas
SIZE 355 x 239 cm
PLACE France

ARTIST Philippe de Champaigne
DATES 1602-1674

THE PAINTING

This painting brings to life the moment in St Luke's Gospel in the New Testament when the Angel Gabriel tells Mary that the Holy Spirit, symbolised by the descending dove, will cause her to bear the son of God. We see the Virgin and the Angel involved in a silent dialogue. The Virgin is shown in front of her bed and her prayer stool with open scriptures, suggesting her awareness of the biblical foretelling of the Messiah, according to the Christian tradition. The scene is strongly lit by natural light, possibly from a window on the right, and light accompanying the Holy Spirit is emanating from God through the clouds.

The painting was probably made for the church of Saint Catherine-de-la-Culture in Paris, being listed among the parish's possessions after the French Revolution.



Mary, the angels and Angel Gabriel are all clothed in a deep blue. Consider why the artist might have made this decision. What is he suggesting?

MATERIALS AND COLOURS

The different materials used to make an object are very important for us to understand. It's easy to take materials for granted but that deprives us of knowing the whole story of an object. Natural materials are sourced before being crafted, shaped or carved to create the objects in the Wallace Collection. It's important to remember that in the past paint could not be bought and was usually made by adding oil or egg yolk to ground-up raw minerals, plants, sap and even crushed beetles. This means colour can also be considered as a material itself. By investigating the materiality of objects we can chart the journeys of the people and places that have been involved to create them.

The sourcing of natural resources, from diamonds to cobalt for microchips, is now heavily criticised for being controlled by a system that prioritises profit over human rights. Scarcity continues to mean high market prices in precious stones, regardless of exhaustible sources and unethical practices. Today, trade in the natural ivory of threatened species such as African and Asian elephants is illegal. In the UK, the purchase of objects by museums is one of the only exemptions to this law.



Many objects in the Wallace Collection are made of ivory.

Should museums highlight the ethical issues of environmental and human exploitation embedded in the materials they house in their collections?

Should museums take a stand against the historical trafficking of ivory?

WHY IS MARY OFTEN SHOWN IN BLUE?

The blue paint is made from a very rare metamorphic rock formation found in the caves of current-day Afghanistan. 'Lapis' is Latin for 'stone' and 'lazuli' is the Latin version of the ancient Persian name for an area where the stone was mined. Highly valued by many ancient civilisations including those from the Indus Valley, Egypt, Mauritania and Chile, lapis lazuli was deemed to contain magical properties.

When European traders during the Renaissance discovered lapis lazuli being traded along the Silk Road, it was soon prized higher than gold once it finally arrived by boat at the ports of Venice. Here it was ground into powder and became known as ultramarine or, literally, 'over the sea', which reminds us of its final journey to the European ports. Despite misconceptions about the reasons for the Virgin Mary's association with blue, the real reason is due to the extremely high value of lapis lazuli.

RESEARCH & DISCUSS



Patrons would specifically pay for lapis lazuli to be used in commissioned paintings, as a display of wealth and devotion.

In a religious painting such as this, colour and the use of specific materials are public acts of devotion.

- Can you think of other examples of colour or materials being used to demonstrate qualities or attitudes?
- Why do you think lapis lazuli captured the attention of so many civilisations and communities?
- Why is blue associated with magic and holiness?
- Krishna has blue skin in the sacred art of Hindu and Dharmic traditions, as a symbol of his irresistible call to devotion.
- Does blue have any other associations for you?



TITLE Inkstand, Ecritoire 'à Globes'
DATE 1759
SIZE 17 x 38 x 27 cm
MATERIALS Porcelain, gold, silver paint

MAKER Manufacture de Sèvres
PLACE France

DISCIPLINES

Museum curators arrange objects in different ways for many different reasons. They might be thinking in terms of places of origin, periods in history, style, religions, materials or types of objects.



How would you curate a museum?

What categories and lenses are important to you?

What kind of information would you include?

We can also use the lenses of the disciplines that form the school subject of RE. These include theology, philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, science and art, but this list could go on! You might also want to include the personal lens to encourage students to engage with the objects from their own perspective.

It can be a good idea to build students' visual literacy skills with a non-religious object before delving into a religious context. How can we use the disciplines of RE to ask questions about how the owners of this inkstand saw themselves in relation to others and the world?

THE OBJECT

This porcelain inkstand combines all the ingenuity, technical brilliance and vibrant colours for which the Sèvres manufactory was renowned in the 18th century. The two globes acted as containers for ink and sand (for blotting) while under the crown a bell was hidden for summoning a servant to take away the written letters.

One globe is the earth and the other is a celestial globe pricked with holes that match the position of the stars in the sky. The liner inside would have twinkled brightly through these holes when not in use. The gilding is high quality and includes inscriptions showing the longitude and latitude of major cities and the signs of the zodiac. It may have been a present from the French king, Louis XV, for his daughter Marie-Adélaïde.

RESEARCH & DISCUSS



Art and Science

What do the materials and colour tell us about the owner of this object?

- Find out where the materials might have come from, how much they would have cost and how long this would have taken to make.
- What can we conclude about the value for the owner?



Religion, Philosophy and Economics

Notice that there are no religious symbols in this object. We might call it a profane (not sacred) object. The two globes of the earth and the stars suggest that the object's owners knew about travel, empire and trade.

- Imagine what the owners might have thought about as they wrote their letters. What might have been their values and priorities?
- How would you design an inkstand for yourself? What symbols and images would you include and why?



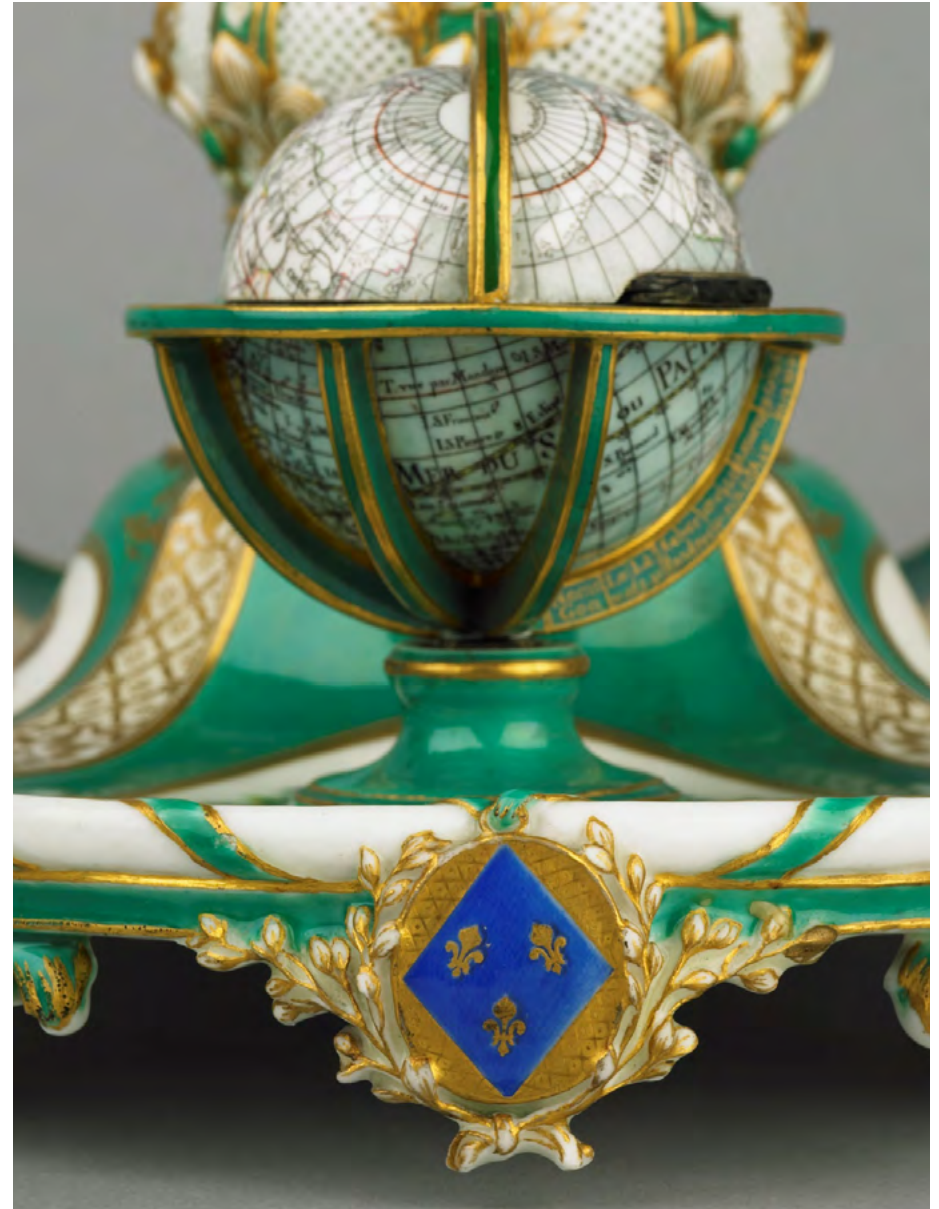
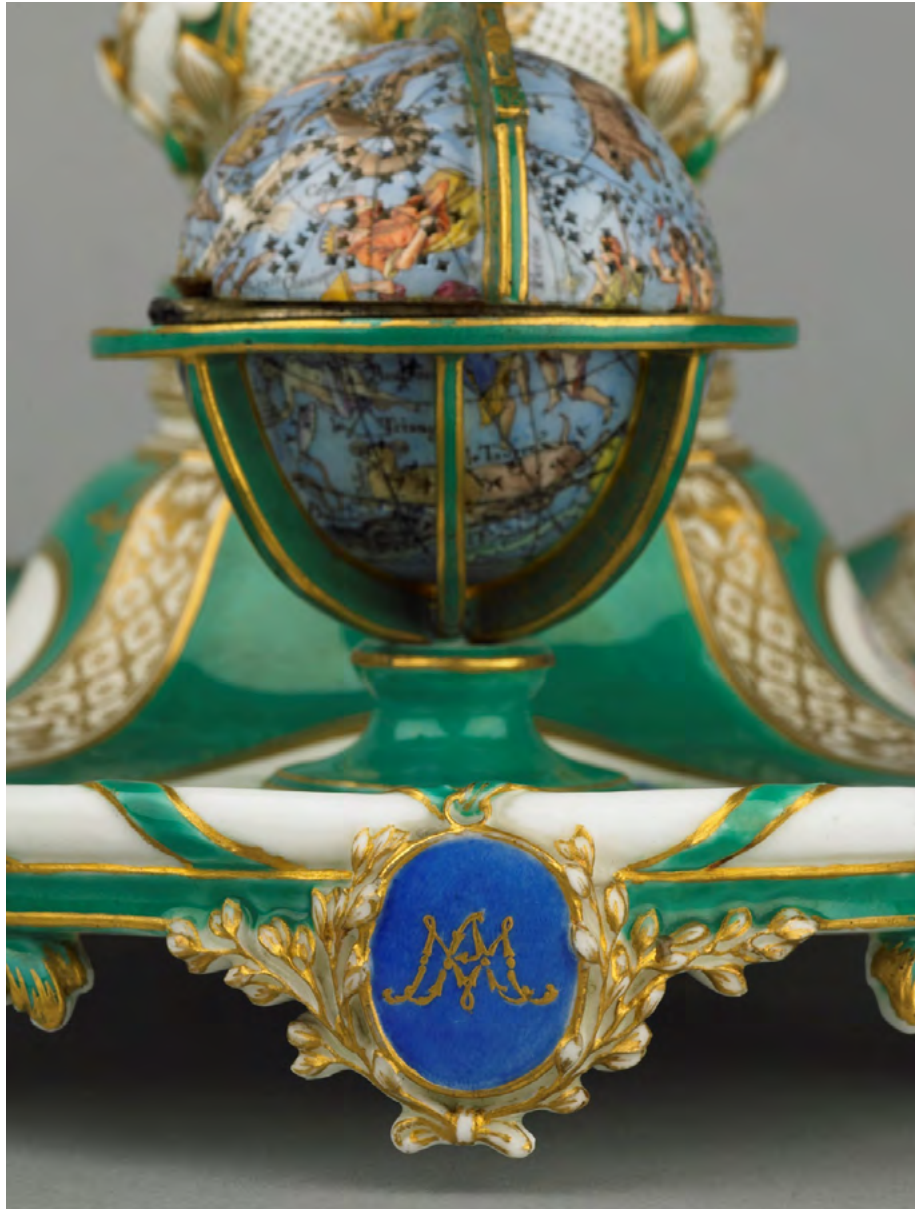
Geography, History and Sociology

The initial on the emblem belongs to the royal family of France and under the crown is a bell to call a servant to pick up the letter that had been written. Thirty years after this inkstand was made the French royal family met their end in the French Revolution of 1789.

- How does this inkstand represent some of the themes that led to the French Revolution?

INKSTAND

IN DETAIL



ART AND RE MOSQUE LAMP

Imagine you are in a mosque seven hundred years ago. It is early morning and still dark. You hear the beautiful sound of sacred prayers being sung and smell incense. As you look up, you see the bright glow of hanging lamps that remind you of the description of Allah's light in the holy Qur'an and you return to your prayers.

This mosque lamp is an iconic sacred object from the area of Egypt and Syria is an iconic sacred object from the sultans.

This mosque lamp is an iconic sacred object from the area of Egypt and Syria is an iconic sacred object from the sultans.

ART AND RE THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Here we see Jesus shown as the Good Shepherd, symbolising his care for and guidance of his flock. It belongs to a small group of rock crystal figures of Jesus portrayed as a child.

We know this figure was commissioned by the Umayyad caliph Umar al-Qasbi (military leader) and was brought to the mosque by a Shaykh.

This group of sculptures were produced in Goa or Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka). Images of Jesus as a child were introduced there by Christian missionaries who accompanied Portuguese invaders, in an effort to convert them. This image was assumed to appeal to local Buddhist people who were accustomed to similarly seated images of the Buddha.



After looking at the two focus objects in the following resources, take time to think about what you've learned about the role of art in faith and society.

These might be some things to consider:

- Personification of holy figures
- God described through metaphor
- Patronage
- Continuity and change
- Human and religious themes
- Does art enrich religion, cause problems, or both?