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Use the Fact-File and questions to help you find interesting objects and record ideas in your sketchbook to use back at school/college.

Fact File: Flowers in Ottoman art

- The Ottoman Empire lasted from the 1290s to 1923. It became an enormous territory spread over parts of Europe, Africa and Asia. From 1453 its capital was Istanbul in Turkey, formerly Constantinople. The Empire was particularly powerful in the period between 1500 and 1700.
- In the 16th century, many Ottoman artists started to decorate their work with flowers and blossoms that looked very real and naturalistic. You can see small sprays of tulips, rosebuds, hyacinths, carnations and other flowers in the designs of ceramic objects, wall tiles, textiles and many other decorative objects from this period.
- Arrangements of flowering plants became the central focus of the decoration at this time and not just a background pattern.
- Many Ottoman textiles contain symmetrical plant-based motifs. A symmetrical pattern may have been easier to weave.
- Over time, flower designs became more abstract. The example here shows a stylised motif which is based on the shape of a carnation.



Velvet with carnations, Turkey, 1600–50. Museum no. 96-1878

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1. Find the section of the gallery where Ottoman textiles and ceramics are displayed (use the map at the entrance to the gallery to help you). Look for bowls, plates and wall-tiles that are decorated with flower motifs.
2. Choose objects with flower designs you find interesting and make sketches of them.
3. Find one plant-based design on your object and make a detailed drawing of it.



Find out...

- ▶ What **motifs** can you see in the decoration?
- ▶ Are the designs **naturalistic** so they look like real plants? Or are they simpler, **stylised**, shapes which make you think of plants?
- ▶ How has the decoration been applied to the object?
- ▶ How is plant-based decoration part of the overall decoration of your object? Is the decoration solely plant-based or is it combined with other design elements such as **geometry** or **calligraphy**?
- ▶ Is there any **symmetry** in the motifs or overall design? Is it **reflective** symmetry where one half of the image is a mirror reflection of another, or **rotational** symmetry where the object would look the same after rotation?
- ▶ Has just **one colour** been used or **more** than one? Is the colour naturalistic or not?

Note that you can recognise the ceramics produced in the city of Iznik because of their bright colours: blue, turquoise, green, purple and red on a white background. Can you find an example?

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