

Objects of Personal Devotion

A Resource for Students

The practice of prayer is found in most faiths. The idea that gods or God is listening is both profound and comforting to someone. Prayers can be performed as a way of asking for something, giving thanks, or as a form of meditation. Throughout history, cultures and religions across the world have developed unique ways of connecting to their deities (gods). The combination of this desire to connect to a higher power and the human tendency to create beautiful things results in religious art. Religious art can be a painting, a sculpture, or a work of architecture. It can also be a vessel, a rug, or a book. Whatever its form or medium, religious art serves a use for someone who practices that faith. These uses may be physical, like a cup used for the pouring of libations or blessed liquids. They can also be symbolic; serving a spiritual or intellectual use that deepens a person's belief. Glencairn Museum is a museum of religious art. The collection, ranging from ancient to medieval, reveals the shared human experience of creating art that serves a higher purpose. This resource highlights religious art and objects in the Glencairn collection that functioned on a personal level. A book of hours, a prayer rug, and a votive statue connect with each other across cultural, historical, and geographical bounds due to their role in helping an individual person in their devotion to their god.



Raymond Pitcairn, the man who designed and lived at Glencairn, kept his Bible in this Bible niche in his bedroom. He received it as a gift on his ninth birthday in 1894 from his parents. Raymond, who was a member of the New Church (Swedenborgianism), valued the idea of having a personal relationship with the teachings of the Bible. To encourage this for his children, Bible niche's were built into each of the Pitcairn children's bedrooms at Glencairn.



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Book of Hours



Book of Hours

Tempera, ink and gold leaf on parchment
Northeast France (?)
First quarter of 15th century, CE
07.MS.639

Books of hours are small prayer books that were made for medieval Christians. They are named for the set of prayers they contain that would be said throughout the day called the Hours of the Virgin. These were shortened versions of the daily prayers said by monks and nuns, whose lifestyle of seclusion and constant devotion to God was viewed as the ideal way of Christian life. The market for books of hours was created by a desire to imitate the monastic lifestyle. In addition to the Hours of the Virgin, books of hours commonly feature other elements such as calendars and prayers to different saints called Suffrages. Books of hours are known for their beautiful illustrations that were intended to inspire devotion.

In this early 15th century book of hours, floral designs with animals decorate the margins (page edges) that surround the illustrations and text. The page is open to a section from the Hours of the Virgin. These prayers are typically accompanied by illustrations from the life of the Virgin Mary and the Christmas story. The book is open to a page showing the Flight into Egypt, a story takes place shortly after Christ's birth where the Holy Family flee Jerusalem to Egypt.

The book of hours became popular during the Middle Ages, but continued to be an important part of Christian's private worship well after the Renaissance. For scholars of medieval history, books of hours are considered a type of manuscript. The term manuscript is used to describe medieval books. It comes from the Latin word *manuscriptus*, which means handwritten - *manu* (hand) and *scriptus* (written). Medieval books were made of animal skin called parchment or vellum. Natural dyes from minerals, plants, and insects were used for the text and illustrations. Due to costly materials and extensive labor, medieval books were often made very large so that they could be shared. Books of Hours, however, were made for one person to use. They were made small so that they could be easily transported. Such personalized, handwritten prayer books were made for wealthy members of medieval society. As society developed, factors such as the printing press and the emerging middle class allowed for more people to own these personal prayer books. Prayer is a common way to connect with God and many faiths have prayers that are meant to be said in a certain way. Therefore, it makes sense to find prayer books in different faiths such as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.



[Explore the gallery at Glencairn where this Book of Hours is displayed!](#)

MORE RESOURCES

[The Book of Hours: A Medieval Best Seller](#)

[Medieval Prayer Books](#)

[Turkish Islamic Prayer Book](#)

[Iranian Islamic Prayer Book](#)

[Jewish Prayer Book \(Siddur\)](#)

Prayer Rug

In Islam, *salat* is the traditional act of praying five times a day. It is one of the 5 Pillars of Islam. The prayers are spaced throughout the day in accordance with the movement of the Sun - Fajr (dawn), Dhuhr (afternoon), Asr (late afternoon), Maghrib (after sunset), and Isha (nighttime). Cleanliness is an important part of the prayer practice. Muslims wash their hands, feet, and face before praying and use a rug to create a clean space. Islamic prayer consists of various positions between standing and kneeling. *Sujud* is the act of bowing during Islamic prayer. Muslims must always pray facing Mecca, where the Kaaba is located. The Kaaba is an ancient holy site at the center of the Sacred Mosque. This is where the Hajj (pilgrimage) takes place. This direction is referred to as the *qibla*. In mosques, there is always a niche in the wall that points in the direction of Mecca called a *mihrab*.

The various details on the prayer rug in the Glencairn collection reveal aspects of Islamic devotion. Firstly, the interior red part is in the shape of a *mihrab* and can orient the user to the *qibla*. There is also symbolism within the design of the rug. The rams horn design just outside the top of the *mihrab* may have been viewed as protective symbolism. The bird-like shapes could be symbols of spiritual enlightenment - a reminder of the goal of prayer. Near the top of the *mihrab*, there is Kufic script. In Islam, depictions of animals and humans are not typically used. Calligraphy (cursive text) and geometric or plantlike forms are preferred forms of decoration for architecture and art. Islamic script found on rugs or mosques are often quotes from the Quran, the holy text of Islam. Plantlike and geometric forms are viewed as artistic ways to express the complexity of Allah (God).

Prayer rugs like this would be owned by one person and used to perform *salat*. A rug with multiple *mihrabs* is called a *saf* and is meant to be used by multiple people. Safs may be found in mosques. It is not necessary to perform *salat* prayers at a mosque. Therefore, the individual ownership of this prayer rug means it was likely a central part of one person's regular spiritual practice. They would use it at a mosque or in their home. Its design, through shapes and symbols, helped to align one's body, mind, and intentions with their beliefs.



Caucasian Prayer Rug

Wool

South Central Caucasus, 1891 CE
10.CP.231



[Explore the space at Glencairn where this prayer rug is displayed!](#)

MORE RESOURCES

[Prayer Rugs](#)

[Turkish Prayer Rug](#)

[Bordjalou Kazak Prayer Rug](#)

["Bellini" Carpet](#)

[Muslim Prayer](#)



Female Votive Statuette with Tambourine

Limestone
Cyprus, ca. 575-525 BCE
09.SP.1519



[Watch a short video of the gallery at Glencairn where this statue is displayed!](#)

MORE RESOURCES

[Ancient Greek Religion](#)

[Greek Religion](#)

[Greek Gods and Religious Practices](#)

[The Votive Statues of the Athenian Acropolis](#)

[Kouroi and Korai: An Introduction](#)

[Sumerian Votive Statue](#)

[Buddhist Votive Stele](#)

[A Libation Bowl with the Goddess Hathor, "Lady of Heaven"](#)

Votive Statue

Ancient Greek religion was one of cult worship which was performed through the act of making offerings. "Cult" refers to the worship of deities who are believed to embody places and things, such as temples or statues. Ancient Greeks did not have sacred texts and although they did have priests and priestesses, there was not a strict social system of priesthood. Much of the modern understanding of ancient Greek religion comes from artwork that shows rituals taking place or that was used within ceremonial activities. Collectively, the Greeks would make offerings through sacrifices. Animal sacrifice was a regular part of public devotion. Some wealthy individuals may have performed an animal sacrifice on occasion. For most individuals, personal offerings of liquids (libations), coins, or statues were a common way of showing thanks or asking for something. Thousands of these types of votives (offerings) have been discovered at religious sites.

This votive statuette shows a woman holding a tambourine. Votive statues of people represented the person who dedicated them at the temple. Sometimes they were intended to look like the god or goddess they were offered to. Often the only way to tell this is by inscriptions or attributes on the statue. Attributes like this woman's tambourine may have helped identify her or represent an offering of a tambourine. Statues of men and women are referred to as *kouroi* (singular - *kouros*) and *korai* (singular - *kore*). These terms are used to refer to funerary statues as well as votive statuettes that would have functioned similarly to this statuette.

Small votive statues are found in many ancient cultures. In ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Rome, votives were made as a way for individuals to show their devotion to the gods. Votives still exist in living faiths in the modern world. In Buddhism, a votive can be made to be in a person's home or dedicated in a public space. They are believed to help the individual or their family earn good credit or spiritual blessings as they work their way toward enlightenment. In Christianity, votives may be brought to a church as a way of thanking God for answering prayers. Votive candles in churches may be lit as a way of keeping a person's prayer. Through each of these cultures or faiths, the concept of a votive is something that helps the person practicing their faith to connect with their higher power on a personal level.