



EARLY WINTER 2012

## Designing a Ship on a Platter

Unknown maker from Iznik, Turkey | *Dish*



### VISIT THE BMA

and find *Dish* in a wall case in the gallery near the top of the main staircase.

Unknown maker from Iznik, Turkey. Detail, *Dish*. 1650-1660. Painted earthenware. 11 1/4 inches diameter. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from Gift of Albert Hendler, Bernard R. Hendler, Bernice Hendler Kolodny and Florence Hendler Trupp, BMA 1957.82. Photo by Mitro Hood.

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The great sailing ships of yesteryear that carried trade goods from port to port around the globe were amazing constructions of wooden masts, ladders, ropes, pulleys, and pieces of canvas sewn together to capture the wind on the high seas. An experienced sailor would likely have known every inch of such a vessel. But the artist who decorated this dish seems to have had little interest in how a ship actually worked. Instead, he transformed the hull, masts, and rigging into a symmetric design rich with patterns that fit perfectly on a ceramic dish.

The wooden planks of the hull become a series of lines that roll and swell like the waves of the sea. Bright red circles replace the pulleys that controlled the rigging on actual 16th-century vessels. Rope ladders that allowed sailors to climb to the top of the masts are transformed into bundles of vertical stripes. Portholes appear as white dots, and carved ornaments become a row of comma-shaped designs. Spirals below the ship suggest the froth and foam churned up by the ship as it moves through the ocean waters.

In order to avoid overcrowding the design, the artist omitted numerous essentials that would make this ship seaworthy. Ropes that would secure the masts during howling storms are nowhere to be seen. Horizontal poles from which heavy sails were suspended have disappeared. And since the bow and stern of this ship are identically shaped, it's impossible to know which way the ship is heading. But none of these details matter. This lively ship-on-a-plate was built to delight the eye rather than circle the globe, and the artist designed it exactly as he wished.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Learn to identify the parts of a sailing ship and then design your own imaginary ship on a paper plate.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, explorers sailed the seas in three-masted ships called carracks. Christopher Columbus' ship, the *Santa Maria*, and Ferdinand Magellan's ship, the *Nao Victoria*, were both carracks. Compare the ship painted on the BMA's dish with a replica of Magellan's ship at [bit.ly/STqNLD](http://bit.ly/STqNLD)

Study the Nao Victoria's rigging and pulleys at close range at [bit.ly/Rnj7Da](http://bit.ly/Rnj7Da) Compare the ship on the BMA's Dish with an illustration of Magellan's ship on a 1590 map at [bit.ly/XOZiGE](http://bit.ly/XOZiGE)

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**



Unknown maker from Iznik, Turkey. *Dish.*

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