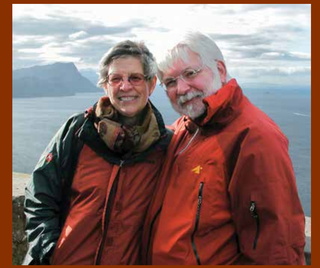

Co-authors and co-curators Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom share the Norma Jean Calderwood University Professorship of Islamic and Asian Art at Boston College as well as the Hamad bin Khalifa Chair of Islamic Art at Virginia Commonwealth University. Together and independently they are the authors and editors of over a dozen books, including Blair's *Islamic Calligraphy* (2006) and Bloom's *Paper Before Print* (2001), as well as hundreds of scholarly and popular articles on all aspects of Islamic art and architecture. Their joint work, *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 1250-1800* (1994), was a New York Times Notable Book, and their *Islam: a Thousand Years of Faith and Power* (2001), a companion to the acclaimed PBS series, *Islam: Empire of Faith*.

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COSMOPHILIA

ISLAMIC ART FROM THE DAVID COLLECTION, COPENHAGEN

Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom
McMullen Museum of Art

COSMOPHILIA

ISLAMIC ART FROM THE DAVID COLLECTION, COPENHAGEN

SHEILA S. BLAIR AND JONATHAN M. BLOOM

Ornament is one of the most characteristic features of Islamic art, a term that encompasses not only the arts made for the faith of Islam but also all the arts created in the lands where it was the principal religion. Spanning some fourteen centuries from Spain and West Africa to China and Indonesia, Islamic art is one of the world's great artistic traditions, although it largely eschews such familiar art forms as painting on canvas and monumental sculpture. Instead, artists and patrons favored beautiful, if smaller-scale and useful works often called the "decorative arts," in a range of media including textiles, calligraphy, book-painting, ceramics, metal, and carved and inlaid wood and ivory. The sometimes bewildering range of unfamiliar names, places, media, and functions can make Islamic art difficult for the uninitiated to grasp, and most exhibitions of Islamic art typically present works from one period or place or with a single function or made in a single technique.

Cosmophilia (literally "love of ornament") is the catalog of an exhibition of 123 of the finest examples of Islamic art from the C. L. David Collection in Copenhagen, Denmark organized by the McMullen Museum of Art in the fall of 2006 and also exhibited in the spring of 2007 at the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago. Since its founding in 1945, the David Collection has quietly grown to become one of the world's foremost collections of Islamic art. Its treasures are familiar to specialists but largely unknown to the public, even in Denmark, although individual works have been regularly loaned to traveling and special exhibitions. The museum, housed in two eighteenth-century townhouses opposite Copenhagen's Royal Gardens, closed in the spring of 2006 for a two-year project of renovation and reinstallation, allowing a generous selection of its best works to travel abroad for the first time.

An introductory essay by Boston College professors and co-curators Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom exploring the nature and meaning of ornament in Islamic art is followed by a completely illustrated catalog of the objects in the exhibition. The objects display the full array of Islamic art from its origins to modern times and represent vast spans of time (seventh-nineteenth centuries), space (Western Europe to East Asia), and medium (textiles; ceramics; metalware; carved ivory, wood, rock-crystal and stone; parchment; and paper). Rather than discussing these works in chronological order, the exhibition and accompanying catalogue present the objects visually in four sections to reveal how artists and artisans in the Islamic lands used figural ornament, writing, geometry, and vegetation and the arabesque. A fifth section explores how these themes were combined in single works of art. Three additional essays complete the volume: Kjeld von Folsach, Director of the David Collection, on the history and development of the collection; Nancy Netzer, Director of the McMullen Museum and professor of art history at Boston College, on comparison between Islamic and western medieval Insular ornament; and Claude Cernuschi, Associate Professor of art history at Boston College, on the reception of ornament in late nineteenth-century Vienna.

COSMOPHILIA

ISLAMIC ART FROM THE DAVID COLLECTION, COPENHAGEN

Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom

with essays by Kjeld von Folsach, Nancy Netzer and Claude Cernuschi

McMullen Museum of Art
Boston College

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This publication is issued in conjunction with the exhibition *Cosmophilia: Islamic Art from the David Collection, Copenhagen,* organized by the Charles S. and Isabella V. McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College.

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The presentation of the exhibition in Chicago is overseen by Anne Leonard, the Smart Museum of Art's Mellon Curator, and is made possible by a generous grant from the Women's Board of the University of Chicago.

Curated by Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *Cosmophilia* was organized in honor of Norma Jean and the late Stanford Calderwood by the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College in collaboration with the David Collection, Copenhagen. Major support has been provided by the Calderwood Charitable Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Patrons of the McMullen Museum. This exhibition is also supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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For Norma Jean and Stanford Calderwood

Preface

The story of this exhibition begins in 2003 when Kjeld von Folsach, director of the C.L. David Collection (C. L. Davids Samling) in Copenhagen, invited Boston College's Calderwood University Professors of Islamic Art, Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, to present papers at a conference on the ivories of Muslim Spain. Bloom and Blair had visited the David Collection eleven years before. This time they immediately noted that in the intervening years Folsach had enhanced the Islamic collection with an extraordinary number of fine objects in a broad range of media. They were eager to study them in greater detail and to make such a superb collection better known in North America. Upon returning from Copenhagen, they suggested that the David Collection lend the McMullen Museum several pieces for the exhibition *SecularSacred,* which was to be shown from February to May 2006, and for which they were co-curators with other medievalists on the Boston College faculty. Folsach replied that he could not in good conscience remove works of art from view before the David Collection closed in May 2006 for nearly two years of renovation and reinstallation. He offered instead to lend them anything they wanted when the David Collection was closed on the condition they organize a thematic exhibition. Bloom and Blair proposed the idea of examining ornament as a way of understanding works of art produced in the Islamic lands. With Folsach, Blair and Bloom set about selecting one hundred twenty-three splendid objects for display. The exhibition would be divided into five thematic sections and called *Cosmophilia*. Their expertise, extraordinary knowledge, superb judgment, and magnanimity, all conspicuous throughout the project, have made this a most joyous enterprise. Thus, it is to these three that we owe our greatest gratitude.

We also owe special thanks to Claude Cernuschi for contributing a most insightful essay on the scholarly debate on ornament at the end of the nineteenth century. It is with deep appreciation that we acknowledge the collaboration of our other esteemed colleagues at the David Collection in this endeavor: Joachim Meyer (curator), Anne-Marie Keblow Bernsted (conservator), Johannes Steffensen (conservator), and Mette Korsholm (exhibition coordinator). The value of their contributions is immeasurable. For impeccable advice, we also thank Jane MacAuliffe, Linda Komaroff, Venetia Porter, and Wheeler Thackston, all distinguished scholars in various fields of Islamic studies.

Once again, colleagues at the McMullen Museum, across our University and beyond have contributed their talents to a complex project. In particular, Diana Larsen designed the exhibition's exquisite installation, which not only displays these superb works to their best advantage, but also underscores and enhances the organizing principles of the exhibition. Vincent Marasa, Alessandra Mondolfi, Nell Gould, Stacey Small, Melissa McGrath, Giovanni Buonopane, Joseph Figueiredo, James Slattery, Robert Klaus, Hannah Pemberton, Mark Esser, and Garrick Manninen offered their various excellent skills to the installation. In designing this volume, the exhibition's graphics, and the website, John McCoy has transformed the ephemeral exhibition into a permanent record and ensured

broad access to a wide range of visitors. Pernille Klemp and Stephen Vedder supplied the excellent photographs of the objects in the catalogue. Naomi Blumberg's editing and design assistance on the catalogue, exhibition texts, and coordination of the exhibition were invaluable. Interns Charisma Chan, Vivian Carrasco, Emily Neumeier, and Debra Pino aided in the exhibition's overall organization; Samantha Koller designed and wrote materials to aid primary and secondary teachers incorporate the exhibition into their curricula. She was advised in this endeavor by Barbara Petzen of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University and aided by three students in Boston College's Lynch School of Education, Alexandra Lofredo, Allison Scalpato, and Rachel Yoffe. We are grateful also to Michael Prinn and Rose Breen for arranging insurance, to Rosanne Pellegrini for publicity, to Keith Ake for designing the brochure and banners, to Jonathan Sage for recording the audio guide, and to the members of our development office, especially James Husson, Katherine Smith, Catherine Concannon, Mary Lou Crane, and Joanne Scibilia who aided our funding efforts. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution to research for this exhibition by students in the various Boston College undergraduate seminars taught by Blair, Bloom and me: Ryan Aurori, Lily Beck, Laura Belden, Catherine Bennett, Anna Boisture, Meghan Boova, Ana Callahan, Caroline Cannizzaro, Karen Carpi, Charisma Chan, Feng Chang, Marissa Cohler, Louisa Crosby, Salvatore Fabbri, Laura Goodhue, Robert Heins, Danielle Huntley, Evelyn Kelty, Samantha Koller, Dwight Lee, Liam Derik van Loenen, Rebecca Madson, Jayshree Mahtani, Regan Murphy, Mara Medina, Emily Neumeier, Emilia Pappas, Sarah Pennington, Stephen Perazzelli, Patricia Pernes, Gabrielle Pittman, Elissa Quinn, Katharina Riehle, Marcela Robles, Nicholas Sarno, Elizabeth Schiavone, Brittney Silvestri, Margaret Walton, and Elizabeth Weyman. We also appreciate the support we have received from colleagues at the David and Alfred Smart Museum at the University of Chicago, the exhibition's second venue. We especially thank director Anthony Hirschel, curator Anne Leonard, and education director Jacqueline Terrassa.

We could not have attempted such an ambitious project were it not for the continued generosity of the administration of Boston College and the McMullen family. We especially thank President William P. Leahy, S.J., Provost Cutberto Garza, former Academic Vice-President John Neuhauser, Vice-Provost Patricia DeLeeuw, and Dean of Arts and Sciences Joseph Quinn. For major support of the exhibition, we are indebted to the Calderwood Charitable Foundation, particularly John Cornish and William Lowell; to the National Endowment for the Arts; to the Patrons of the McMullen Museum chaired by C. Michael Daley; and to the Indemnity Program of the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities.

Finally, we wish to salute our beloved former colleague Norma Jean Calderwood who taught the history of Islamic and Asian art at Boston College for many years. A passionate collector of Persian painting and ceramics, she inspired generations of students with her enthusiasm for the subject. Her husband Stanford, who died two years ago, was her greatest admirer and most loyal supporter. After Norma Jean retired from teaching, he endowed in her honor the University Professorship now held by Blair and Bloom. We hope that in dedicating this exhibition and catalogue to Norma Jean and Stan, we have created lasting tributes to the Calderwoods' generous contributions to the study of Islamic art at Boston College.

Nancy Netzer
Director and Professor of Art History

Note to Readers

Spellings: We have simplified our spelling as much as possible, trying to be user-friendly rather than absolutely consistent. As the languages of the Islamic lands have several sounds not normally encountered in English, specialists have devised different and sometimes confusing systems to transcribe the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish letters that represent them by using subscript and superscript dots, dashes, hooks, etc. As this catalog is intended for the general reader, we have chosen to use common English spellings for specialized names, terms, and places, such as Muhammad, Koran, and Delhi instead of Muḥammad, Qur'ān, and Dihlī. Those who know these languages don't need the diacritical marks; those who don't know won't care.

Dates: Muslims use a lunar calendar that dates from 622, the year of Muhammad's emigration, or hegira, from Mecca to Medina, and the beginning of the community of Muslims. The lunar year is more than a week shorter than the solar year, so that the lunar century is three years shorter than the solar century, and the dates do not overlap exactly. When objects are exactly dated, we have given the specific hegira date followed by the corresponding date in the Common Era, as with the bowl by Abu Zayd (no. 118) which is dated to the month of Jumada II 600, corresponding to February-March 1204. For simplicity's sake, we have given centuries only in the Common Era.

Place names: We have used geographical terms in their broad historical contexts, rather than their modern political entities. Thus, Iran corresponds generally to the Iranian plateau and may include various parts of what is now Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. Similarly, India refers to the subcontinent today encompassing Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

Cross references: Numbered plates **(no.)** refer to works in the exhibition. Additional images in the essay are designated as figures (fig.).

Selected Bibliography: For each item in the catalog, the selected bibliography includes only major publications. The two most common are abbreviated as *AWI* [Folsach (2001), *Art from the World of Islam in the David Collection*] and *Sultan Shah* [*Sultan, Shah and Great Mughal* (1996), ed. Kjeld von Folsach).

Sheila S. Blair & Jonathan M. Bloom

Ornament and Islamic Art

Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom

Ornament is one of the most distinctive features of Islamic art and architecture. It is found on all types of Islamic art, ranging from minbars (pulpits) to crockery, and on all types of architecture, from mosques to houses. It was used at all times, from the very beginnings of Islamic art in the seventh century to modern times, when it continues to fascinate artists working in a variety of media, whether ceramics or paper. Ornament was enjoyed in all parts of the Islamic world, from the Atlantic shores of the Iberian Peninsula and Morocco to the steppes of Central Asia and beyond. For most Westerners, exuberant ornament and pattern are what distinguish the arts of the Islamic lands from the world's other great artistic traditions.

The clearest way to see how ornament is an essential feature of Islamic art is by comparing a work of Islamic art to its Chinese prototype. The typical bowl made in ninth-century Iraq, when the region was the capital province of the vast Abbasid caliphate (749-1258), has a low hollow foot supporting a deep well with slightly rounded profile **(fig. 1)**. Its shape is clearly derived from the typical porcelain bowl made in ninth-century China under the Tang dynasty **(fig. 2)**.

Chinese porcelains were imported in significant quantities to the wealthy Abbasid caliphate, to judge from the shards discovered at excavations at the capital at Samarra.[1] They were shipped from Chinese ports via the Straits of Malacca around India into the Persian Gulf, a voyage of some 7,000 miles/11,000 km. Contemporary sources confirm the high esteem accorded these *sini* (a word literally meaning "Chinese" and the term used to refer to all Chinese ceramics, including porcelain). The Abbasid littérateur al-Tha'alibi (961-1038), writing in his *Book of Curious and Entertaining Information*, reported, for example, that "the Chinese have fine translucent pottery. The best are the delicate, evenly pigmented, clearly resounding apricot-colored ware, and after that, the cream-colored ware with similar characteristics."[2]

Not all patrons could afford such expensive Yue and Qingbai wares, so instead they turned to local imitations.[3] Iraqi potters, who did not have access to the fine white kaolin clay used by Chinese potters to make their porcelains, worked laboriously, if not particularly successfully, to imitate the brilliant white of the Chinese originals by covering the buff-colored earthenware body

Fig. 1. Profile of a typical Abbasid bowl, 9th century, Iraq, earthenware painted in blue in an opaque white glaze, 5.5 x 20.5 cm. David Collection, Copenhagen, 21/1965 Copenhagen,

Fig. 2. Porcelain bowl, 9th century, China, Tang Dynasty, porcelain with clear glaze, 4 x 15.9 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, Gift of Charles Lang Freer, 1914.450

with an opaque white glaze. More importantly, Iraqi potters were not content with the perfect shape and glaze of the Chinese originals, but felt they could improve on them by painting in the glaze with cobalt blue, sometimes with additional splashes of copper green **(no. 40)**. Still not content to leave well enough alone, Iraqi potters also adapted the luster technique, probably invented by Syrian glassmakers to decorate glass vessels, to decorate ceramics of the same shape **(no. 76)** on both the interior and exterior surfaces. In short, Abbasid taste was the antithesis of the modern Bauhaus aesthetic espoused by Mies van der Rohe, "Less is more." In Islamic art, "more is more."

Fig. 3. Interior view of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 692. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

The philosopher and historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) attempted to explain this approach in his *Muqaddima,* or *Introduction to History*:

> The crafts and sciences are the result of man's ability to think, through which he is distinguished from the animals. [The sciences and crafts] come after the necessities. The [susceptibility] of the crafts to refinement, and the quality of [the purposes] they are to serve in view of the demands made by luxury and wealth, then correspond to the civilization of a given country.

Therefore, for this great thinker, often considered the founder of social science, the degree of intricacy and high quality of finish was a cultivated taste that came to represent the triumph of sedentary civilization over a perceived nomadic past.[4]

Although Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis to a family forced to flee the advancing Christians in Spain and ended his days in metropolitan Cairo, his assessment is valid for most regions and times in Islamic history. Already by the middle of the Umayyad period (661-750), the extraordinary decoration covering the interior of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (begun 692) shows a taste for total ornamentation in multiple media (colored glass and gold-foil mosaic, veined marble, gilded bronze, painted wood, etc.), all combined in a rich panoply that provided—and still provides—a sumptuous feast for the eye **(fig. 3)**.

Terms, Terminology and the History of Ornament

The Arabic word for ornament, *zakhrafa*, derives from the verbal root *zakhrafa*, "to gild." The noun *zukhruf* refers to anything highly embellished, as with gilding, decoration by gilding, gold, and embellishment, either real, as the flowers of the earth, or figurative, as a flowery discourse.[5] *Tāj al-'Arūs*, the great medieval Arabic dictionary, states that the word was applied particularly to the decorations and pictures in gold with which the Kaaba was decorated in pre-Islamic times.[6] The Arabic word seems to be a deformation, via Syriac, of the Greek word *zōgrapheō*, "to paint."[7]

Although ornament is ubiquitous in Islamic art, the word for it is rare and pejorative in the Koran, the scriptures that Muslims believe God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the early seventh century. The Arabic noun *zukhruf* appears there only four times, all of them with negative connotations. For example, in Koran 6.112, it is stated that every one of God's messengers has an enemy, evil ones who inspire with flowery discourse (*zukhruf*) as a way of deception. In Koran 17.93, the unbelievers demand from the Prophet an ill-assorted and crude jumble of miracles, including a house adorned with gold (*zukhruf*), a symbol of rampant materialism. In Koran 43.35, *zukhruf* "adornments of gold" refers to false glitter, the transitory adornments of this world that often hinder more than they help. Finally, Koran 10.24, a parable explaining the nature of present life, describes the earth as clad with golden ornaments (*zukhruf*) that can be destroyed in a second because God has the power of disposal to make it like a harvest clean mown as if it had never existed the day before. The sources for the ubiquity of ornament in Islamic art therefore lie not in the Koran but elsewhere.

Ornament is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "something used to adorn, beautify, or embellish, or that naturally does this; a decoration, embellishment."[8] Some scholars have attempted to define the term more narrowly in reference to Islamic art. For example, Oleg Grabar, the noted historian of Islamic art, in his Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art in 1989, distinguished between the larger class of

decoration and the subset of ornament, suggesting that decoration is "anything applied to a structure or an object that is not necessary to the stability, use, or understanding of that structure or object," whereas ornament is "any decoration that has no referent outside of the object on which it is found, except in technical manuals."[9] Few other scholars have followed this distinction, which seems somewhat arbitrary if not obfuscating, and we prefer to follow common usage and employ these terms interchangeably.

The phrase "Islamic art" is more difficult to define. Grammar would suggest that it refers to the art produced by and for the religion of Islam, but this is not the case. The term is more encompassing, referring to "the art made by artists or artisans whose religion was Islam, for patrons who lived in predominantly Muslim lands, or for purposes that are restricted or peculiar to a Muslim population or a Muslim setting."[10] It is, therefore, quite different from terms such as "Buddhist art" or "Christian art," which are generally reckoned to deal specifically with the art of the faith. Islamic art includes works made for mosques as well as works made for coffeehouses. Some historians have tried to underscore this distinction by creating new adjectives such as "Islamicate" to distinguish the secular culture that flourished under the religion of Islam,[11] but these unwieldy neologisms too have not found widespread acceptance. Rather, most people tacitly accept that the convenient if incorrect adjective "Islamic" refers not just to the religion of Islam but also to the larger culture in which Islam was the dominant—but not the only—religion practiced.

Furthermore, Islamic art differs from the arts of the West in that the mimetic, or representational, arts play relatively minor roles. Much of what many historians of Islamic art normally study—inlaid metalwares, luster ceramics, enameled glass, brocaded textiles, and knotted carpets—is not the typical purview of the historian of Western art, who normally considers such crafts to be "minor" or "decorative" arts compared to the "nobler" arts of architecture, painting, and sculpture. While architecture is as important in Islamic culture as it was in Western Europe or East Asia, visual representation, which plays such an enormous role in the artistic traditions of Europe and Asia, is a relatively minor and limited component of Islamic culture, and sculpture is virtually unknown. In contrast, Islamic art accords writing an unusually prominent role, undoubtedly in accordance with the pivotal importance of the Divine Word. Unlike much art in other traditions, whose primary character is its inutility, much Islamic art involves the transformation of everyday utilitarian objects into works of art, often through decoration.

Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion, with more than one billion adherents today, approximately one-fifth of the world's population. Islam continues to be a major force in world events, but Islamic art is generally said to have ended at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the advent of European colonialism and the emergence of distinct national identities. Artists in the Islamic lands, as well as Muslim artists elsewhere, have continued to make art into the twenty-first century, so in that sense Islamic art continues to be made as it had before. Nevertheless, the combined effects of regional differences in artistic traditions and the powerful impact of European manufactures exported to the Islamic lands dramatically changed many traditional forms of Islamic art. For example, weavers in Iran and Turkey continued to produce knotted carpets in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but they increasingly made them to the designs and dimensions of European and American interiors. The Manchester firm of Ziegler and Company, for instance, commissioned Persian weavers to make carpets in standard sizes and coarser weaves using chemically-dyed yarns from British mills to better appeal to European taste.[12]

Paradoxically, this is just the moment when Europeans were "discovering" Islamic art, which they called by a variety of names—Arabian, Indian, Moresque or Moorish, Muhammadan, Persian, Saracenic, Turkish, etc. The most important figure for the study of ornament was Owen Jones (1808-74), who in 1842 published detailed designs of the Alhambra, the palace of the Nasrid sultans in Granada, in two atlas folios conceived as a pattern-book for architects.[13] His *Grammar of Ornament*, published fourteen years later in 1856, laid out thirty-seven axioms of design and was supplemented by one hundred color plates of historical examples, of which fully one-quarter were drawn from Islamic art.[14] Jones worked not only on the Great Exhibition of 1851, but also on many subsequent commissions, and hence his output was highly influential.

William Morris (1834-96), for example, owned a copy of Jones's *Grammar*. A poet, designer and theorist of the Arts and Crafts movement, Morris responded to the geometric

structure he perceived in Islamic art as the basis of pattern making, as well as to the role of the craftsman as artist. Morris used Islamic designs as inspiration; for example, his Bullerswood Carpet, woven in 1889 for the Sanderson family, was based on the design of a seventeenth-century Persian vase carpet (fig. 4).[15]

Fig. 4. Bullerswood Carpet (detail), designed by William Morris, woven by Morris & Co., Hammersmith, London, ca. 1889, cotton warp, jute weft, and woolen pile, 4 x 7.5 meters, V&A T31-1923

Morris and his contemporaries were reacting against the increasing mechanization of production in nineteenth-century Britain, romanticizing the role of Muslim craftsmen as heroes who resisted the forces of mechanization and capitalism. Like some of his contemporaries, Morris was also instrumental in helping European museums to acquire works of Islamic art. As advisor to the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum and now the V&A), in 1893 he recommended that the museum acquire the so-called Ardabil carpet, one of an enormous pair of sixteenth-century Persian carpets that had been brought to England by Ziegler, the Manchester carpet merchant.[16] The museum paid the princely sum of £2,500 (nearly half a million dollars today), five or ten times the price of the Museum's typical carpet purchases at that time. Even the "Chelsea carpet," the other fine early Safavid carpet in the Museum, had cost only £150 when it was acquired from Alfred Cohen's shop on the King's Road in 1890.[17] Morris himself contributed to the public subscription for the Ardabil carpet and encouraged the museum to up its share of the ante, as the public's wallet was not as generous as its appreciation of the carpet's splendid design.[18]

In contrast to the V&A, the C. L. David Collection in Copenhagen is a relative latecomer to collecting Islamic art (see the chapter by Kjeld von Folsach in this volume). Despite its late start, the works of Islamic art it holds rank among the world's finest, thanks to the perspicacious acquisitions by its directors, as interest in Islamic art has burgeoned in recent decades. The David Collection concentrates on the finest examples produced in a wide variety of media across the vast region from northwest Africa and Spain to India. Islamic art was also produced in other regions, notably west and east Africa south of the Sahara and southeast and east Asia, but the Collection does not normally extend that far; although at least one object in this exhibition, a tooled leather book cover from China **(no. 105)**, shows how traditional forms were adapted in outlying regions. In keeping with the traditional definition of Islamic art, most works in the Collection also date from before 1800, although a few works, like the charming tile panels with birds and flowers from Shiraz **(no. 87)** or the sinuous rosewater sprinkler **(no. 79)**, were probably made in the early nineteenth century. Since the Collection aims to present the finest examples of each type, most works in the present exhibition represent the arts of the court. As in all times and places, those with the most money could command the best quality. Nevertheless, some of the objects on display—especially the ceramics—probably represent the taste of the bourgeoisie. The white bowl decorated in cobalt blue **(no. 40)**, for example, is an Iraqi imitation of the Chinese porcelains enjoyed at court, and the Syrian luster bowl **(no. 51)** comes from a time and place when the very rich probably dined off decorated metalwares.

Collections of the Islamic arts of earlier times have been exhibited in the West for well over a century, beginning in 1878 with the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, where the national pavilions emphasizing contemporary manufactures and handicrafts were supplemented by a range of historic objects belonging to private collectors. A few years later in 1885, the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London exhibited more that 600 items belonging to several private collections, although the emphasis was on Iranian ceramics and their derivatives. The 1893 *Exposition d'Art Musulman* in Paris displayed over 2,500 items, accompanied by French Orientalist paintings. The first comprehensive exhibition in the modern sense was probably the *Exposition des Arts Musulmans*, held in Paris in 1903, which included a wide range of items lent by a large number of collectors.[19] Surely the most notable was the great Munich exhibition of 1910, *Meisterwerke Muhammadanischer Kunst*, which brought together 3,555 works from public and private collections. It even inspired the painter Henri Matisse to make a quick trip from Paris with his friend Albert Marquet to see Persian "miniatures."[20] Although several great exhibitions in the following decades

were devoted to specific aspects of Islamic art, whether by region or medium, only the great London exhibition, *The Arts of Islam*, held in 1976 at the Hayward Gallery as part of the Festival of Islam, was designed specifically to recall the encyclopedic Munich exhibition at a time when the skyrocketing price of oil had brought the Middle East to the center of global affairs and made London the center of the market in Islamic art.[21] The third gallery in the London exhibition displayed the four overarching themes in Islamic art, but much of the rest of the exhibition—like the catalog—was arranged by media and chronology, thereby leaving the viewer somewhat mystified.[22] Similarly, most temporary exhibitions of Islamic art have focused on particular media, countries, dynasties, rulers, or even single works of art, such as an individual manuscript. One exception was a series of four small exhibitions, *The Nature of Islamic Ornament*, organized in the late 1990s for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Kevorkian Gallery and devoted to the basic forms and sources of Islamic ornament.[23]

For this exhibition, we have taken up the idea proposed in the preface to the catalog from the London exhibition, "to define the essential character of Islamic art, to trace out the elements that are present in it, separately or more generally together. These characteristic elements were taken to be calligraphy, geometry, the arabesque, and the treatment of figuration."[24] To do so, we have selected 123 examples of Islamic art from the David Collection that represent the broadest possible range in medium, technique, place of origin, and date. They are displayed according to the four themes of decoration, which we call figures, writing, geometry, and vegetation and the arabesque. A fifth section of hybrids comprises objects in which some or all of these themes are present on a single object.

The Study of Islamic Ornament

The ornament on Islamic art has long fascinated outsiders. As early as the tenth century, Byzantine builders imitated Arabic inscriptions in the angular script, often called kufic, used to decorate Islamic buildings and other works of art. For example, on the exterior of the Theotokos church at the Monastery of Hosios Loukas constructed at Phocis in central Greece around 950, builders replaced the traditional decoration of bricks laid in bond that alternated with courses of stone with decorated bands of brick. The bricks were cut and laid in patterns that imitated the form of Arabic words. Modern scholars have termed this type of decoration "pseudo-kufic" or "kufesque"[25] **(fig. 5)**.

These Islamic-style designs were widely and wildly popular as similar "kufesque" motifs appeared in medieval art as far afield as France, Germany, England, and Italy in the west and as far east as at Bezeklik in the Turfan oasis in Chinese Turkestan, where a wall painting in Temple IV depicts a camel wearing a saddle blanket decorated with kufesque writing.[26]

Italy, which developed extensive trading links with the Islamic lands of the southwest Asia and North Africa, became a center for pseudo-Islamic decoration. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Venetian metalworkers decorated local metal shapes with the designs usually associated with Islamic engraved and inlaid metalwares, sometimes incorporating Western coats-of arms. The entire group is known collectively as "Veneto-Saracenic" ware, and scholars have just begun to distinguish the Venetian copies from the Islamic models by the Italian artisans' incomplete knowledge of the principles of the arabesque.[27] While Italian metalworkers were making Islamic-style wares for the Italian market, Italian weavers imitated Ottoman Turkish designs so successfully that they were able to sell their wares to Ottoman patrons. Like the metalwares, Italian silks

Fig. 5. Façade of the Monastery of Hosios Loukas constructed at Phocis in central Greece, ca. 950. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

are very difficult to distinguish from Ottoman originals, but recent technical analysis shows that the Italian silks were bound in the S-direction (i.e., with a counterclockwise twist) instead of the Z-direction used in Ottoman textiles.[28]

In designing book-covers for the local Italian market, which burgeoned after the invention of printing with moveable type in the mid-fifteenth century, bookbinders began adopting the vegetal designs characteristic of contemporary Egyptian bookbindings, along with the techniques of tooling in gold on leather, leather filigree (cut leather interlace against a colored background), and ornamented doublures (linings on the covers). The Paduan bookbinders Bartolomeo Sanvito and Felice Feliciano, for example, knew of contemporary Islamic centralized medallion designs enclosed within a rectangular frame.[29] Such centralized designs are typical not only of contemporary Islamic bookbindings but also of carpets, which began to be imported into Europe just about this time.

Fig. 6. Façade of the palace at Mshatta now installed in the Museum für Islamiches Kunst, Berlin. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

Italians called this type of ornament *rabesco*, a term Anglicized as *rebesk* as early as 1611 in Cotgrave's *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the word had become *arabesque*, defined as "rebesk work; branched work in painting or in tapestry," the form it has maintained to this day.[30] By the nineteenth century, musicians and dancers had appropriated the word for a variety of musical ornaments and complex figurations. Perhaps the most famous example is Robert Schumann's *Arabeske*, op. 18, composed in 1839, a rondo for piano with recurrent episodes in stark contrast to the main theme.[31]

Art historians soon took up the study of the arabesque. The Austrian scholar Alois Riegl (1858-1905), who had begun his career as Keeper of Textiles at the Austrian Museum for Applied Arts in Vienna, investigated the subject in his classic work, *Stilfragen* ("Problems of Style;" 1892), in which he traced the development of the acanthus motif from ancient Egypt through later periods, transforming the subject into an epic of vast dimensions.[32] He argued that the development was the result not of artists striving continually towards naturalism, but rather of their recognition of the possibilities of enriched formal ordering. Riegl noted that true arabesque ornament was based on the geometricization of the stems, a particular choice of vegetal elements, and the ability of these elements to grow unnaturally from one another rather than branching off from a single continuous stem. Riegl's most important observation, however, was that the true arabesque has what he called "infinite correspondence" (*unendliche Rapport* in German), meaning that the design can be extended infinitely in any direction. Riegl's analysis became the basis for most subsequent art-historical descriptions of the arabesque. As his English translator later noted, Riegl's German syntax was as convoluted as the ornament he attempted to describe: the first impression of bewildering complexity ultimately reveals a clear underlying structure to his thought.[33]

Riegl's great rival in Vienna was Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941), who—after being criticized by Riegl for lack of scientific rigor in his work—turned away from the classical world to study the arts of the East, making extensive expeditions through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Iran. Upon returning from his travels, Strzygowski urged Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, to accept the façade from Mshatta, a ruined structure in Transjordan, as a gift from the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909). The ruins stood along the proposed route of the Hijaz Railway, which German engineers were constructing to link Constantinople and Europe with the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, and the engineers wanted to crush the beautifully carved stones to make the railbed. The façade was saved when the sultan offered it to his friend Kaiser Wilhelm II, who presented the sultan with a fountain in return. Von Bode accepted the façade as a work of Late-Antique art to complement the series of great structures from Antiquity—including the Ishtar Gate from Babylon and the Pergamon altar—re-erected in the museum as the foci of its collection **(fig. 6)**.[34]

Since Mshatta lacked any inscriptions, scholars had widely divergent opinions about its date, considering it variously Sasanian, Byzantine, Ghassanid, Lakhmid, or early Islamic.

Strzygowski, for example, favored an attribution to the Ghassanids, the Christian Arab dynasty that ruled in Syria from the late fifth century to the Muslim conquest in the seventh century. The young German scholar Ernst Herzfeld (1879-1948), who had trained in Oriental languages and archaeology at Berlin, took up the challenge of its attribution. In his masterful article, *Die Genesis der islamischen Kunst und das Mshatta-problem* ("The Origins of Islamic Art and the Problem of Mshatta," 1910), Herzfeld argued that the palace had to be a work of Islamic art, dating precisely to the reign of the Umayyad caliph al-Walid II (r. 743-44).[35] Rather than compare an endless series of details from Mshatta with those from other places, Herzfeld launched a bold new attack on the problem. Working from what he believed to be securely dated monuments, such as the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of Ibn Tulun erected in Cairo in 879, he devoted the first part of his article to establishing the general characteristics of early Islamic art. In the second part he showed how all the features of Mshatta—from its techniques and materials of construction to its forms and decoration—were consistent only with an Islamic date.[36]

In discussing the ornament on the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, for example, Herzfeld developed Riegl's point that the difference between Late Antique and Islamic arabesque ornament is not fundamental, but only incremental (see Nancy Netzer's chapter in this volume) **(fig. 7)**.

The character of the arabesque, Herzfeld argued, lies in the transformation of the formal elements through the free play of fantasy, the principle of variation that creates new combinations and variants. The composition arises from the infinite repetition along one or two axes, as well as from the dematerialization of the elements that causes the complete disappearance of their vegetal or objective meaning and produces new abstract decorative values. In this way elements combine and coalesce, as vase, stem, leaf, blossom, and fruit unite without any accentuated separation. These features, in Herzfeld's view, characterize this ornament as true arabesque. From the ornament on the Mshatta façade, he then considered a wide range of comparable Islamic examples from Egypt, Syria, and Spain.

While scholars such as Riegl and Herzfeld were trying to disentangle the formal aspects of ornament, other figures such as the Austrian architect and theorist Adolf Loos (1870-1933), a pioneer of the modern movement, took up the subject of ornament as polemic, arguing that the level of a society's civilization was in inverse proportion to its use of ornament, a position exactly the opposite the one espoused by Ibn Khaldun several centuries before. Loos's 1908 essay *Ornament und Verbrechen* was distilled into the slogan that "ornament is crime." (see Claude Cernuschi's chapter in the present volume). In addition to its political, sexist, and anti-Semitic positions, Loos's views should be understood as a reaction to the debates surrounding the foundation of schools for the industrial, decorative, or applied arts in nineteenth-century Europe in which the study and use of ornament had played an essential role.

Sir Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001), born and trained in Vienna, became the next pioneer in the study of ornament. As a student at Vienna University, he took a seminar on general problems of method with Julius von Schlosser, a leading figure of the Viennese school of art history. Gombrich had done his class report on Riegl's *Stilfragen* and shared his teacher's ambivalent fascination with Riegl, whose theories were a hot topic of discussion among the younger art historians in Vienna. Like his teacher, Gombrich felt that Riegl's ideas "tended toward the interpretation of a sufficiently mythical Volksgeist, indeed of a highly suspect 'racial' psyche."[37] Gombrich eventually emigrated to London where he wrote *The Story of Art* (1950), the most widely used textbook in art history, running to sixteen editions in English and translated into eighteen other languages. In it, curiously, he dismisses all of Islamic art in a single paragraph, notable for its misconception that because image making was forbidden by the Prophet Muhammad, the mind

Fig. 7. Detail of the stucco decoration on the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, Cairo, 879. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

of the Islamic artist was directed away from the real world to a dream world of lines and colors.[38]

Gombrich returned to the study of ornament late in his long career. Having studied the nature of representation in painting and sculpture in his classic *Art and Illusion* (1960), Gombrich was somewhat needled by the criticism that he wanted to equate all art with illusionism, and his early interest in ornament and pattern eventually drew him back to the subject of ornament in his 1970 Wrightsman Lectures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, published in 1979 as *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psycholgy of Decorative Art*. In it, Gombrich realized that what had traditionally been described pejoratively as horror vacuii (the artisan's desire to fill any void) could also be seen positively as *amor infinitii* (love of the infinite).[39] Avoiding the traditional taxonomic approach of identifying and classifying formal elements, Gombrich turned instead to the organizational principles of ornament, namely framing, filling, and linking. He identified ornament through processes in the relationships to some object of its maker and user. In this way, he moved the study of ornament from an endless list of designs or from rhapsodic outpourings to an analytical level.

Gombrich's approach was not universally accepted. On the theoretical front, he was criticized for distinguishing symbolic art, which largely employed representation, from decorative art, which didn't, because he believed that design and meaning stemmed from two basic and separable psychological features, "the sense of order and the search for meaning."[40] On the practical front, he had based his analysis on Western art and was therefore criticized for limiting the scope of his analysis to the post-Renaissance tradition in Europe. His critics noted that many of the world's other artistic traditions did not make this distinction between types of art, and Gombrich's work and example inspired several scholars to take up the challenge of discussing ornament in other artistic traditions.

Gombrich's work was followed most closely in two exhibitions at the British Museum that explored ornament in Asia: in 1983, the narrowly focused *Islamic Art & Design, 1500-1700* presented the interrelationships between the arts of the three great Muslim empires in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in the following year, the more wide-ranging *Chinese Ornament: The Lotus and the Dragon* investigated how certain decorative motifs were carried back and forth across Asia.[41] Both of these exhibitions were devoted to showing visually how ornament functioned within specific traditions, but it fell to Oleg Grabar to take up the more general question of ornament in all types of art and the nature of its meaning in his 1989 Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Published as *The Mediation of Ornament* (1992), Grabar's lectures expanded the subject to a broader cultural perspective, "in order to test a hypothesis about the universal phenomenon of the visual perceptions and of the visual judgments made by historians and critics of art."[42] As could be expected from Grabar's training and interests as a leading expert on Islamic art and architecture, he focused his investigations on works of Islamic art, although he drew examples from other artistic traditions to meditate on larger issues of the perception, utilization, and fabrication of visual forms. Ornament, he argued, is a subset of decoration that does not appear to have any other purpose than to enhance its carrier and give pleasure, a concept for which he coined such terms as *calliphoric* (carrying something felt or understood as beautiful) and *terpnopoietic* (providing pleasure). Ornament, he felt, is found in every artistic tradition, but is particularly prevalent in Islamic art, and he hypothesized that an explanation of the phenomenon within the Muslim context would be of intellectual and hermeneutic value for understanding decoration everywhere. The examples he chose were drawn from writing, geometry, architecture, and nature, three of the four themes that had already been staked out in the 1976 *Arts of Islam* exhibition.

At much the same time that Grabar was engaged in theoretical musings, the Israeli scholar Eva Baer, who had previously written on the iconography of sphinxes and harpies in Islamic art as well as on Islamic metalwork, took up the subject of Islamic ornament from the diametrically opposite taxonomic perspective.[43] Deeply involved in the study of the individual object and its decoration, Baer—following directly in Gombrich's footsteps—serially discussed motifs and their transformation, the formation of order and the creation of repeat patterns, the meaning of ornament, and the principles and concepts that lay behind it. The purpose of ornament, she believed, was to create order and harmony, and therefore, ornament was organized according to the principles of geometry and symmetry using techniques such as linking and framing, which had already been enunciated by Gombrich.[44]

These two approaches—the theoretical and the taxonomic—were combined by the art historian James Trilling in his 2003 book on ornament.[45] At once speculative and practical, Trilling considered the cultural and symbolic significance of ornament, its rejection by modernism, and its subsequent reinvention. Like his predecessor Riegl, Trilling had previously worked as a curator of textiles, an experience that surely broadened his interest in ornament and pattern. His book is filled with textiles: it opens with a discussion of Matisse's *Woman in a Purple Robe* (a topic taken up in turn in the hugely successful 2005 exhibition about Matisse's interest in textiles that was shown in London and New York and at the Musée Matisse in France), followed by a comparison of a sixteenth-century Ottoman textile with a scarf woven in Scotland in 1980.

In the preface to his book, Trilling defined ornament as "the art we add to art" and stated that he wrote the book "to revive it," after it had been treated so shabbily in the past. The first part of his book shows how to look at ornament and "read" it for symbolic meaning; the second half concerns recent attitudes towards ornament, especially the reasons it fell into disrepute. According to Trilling, *cosmophobia*, the "fear of ornament, or, more loosely, prejudice against it" had a long history rooted in the old misgiving about art as deception and corruption. But ornament, he wrote, has the singular goal of giving visual pleasure. His neologism, cosmophobia, has led us to coin our own word, *cosmophilia*, to refer to its opposite, the love of ornament, and our exhibition is designed not only to instruct and inform but also to delight.

Ornament and Image in Islamic Art

Many people think that Islamic art eschews the representation of living beings in favor of abstract decoration that completely covers the surface of a given work of art, but this idea is simply not true. The Koran has very little to say on the subject of figural representation, although it does explicitly forbid idolatry, divination, drinking, gambling, and other vices. Making pictures of people was apparently not a topic of paramount importance in seventh-century Arabia when the Koran was revealed. Furthermore, Muslims have no reason to depict people in their religious art, because they believe that God is unique and without associate and therefore cannot be represented, except by His word, the Koran. This attitude explains the paramount importance of writing in Islamic art. Muslims worship God directly without intercessors, so they have no need for images of these figures as many Buddhists and Christians do. Muhammad was God's messenger, but unlike Christ, Muhammad was not divine. His deeds—not his person—represent the ideal to which Muslims aspire. Unlike the Bible, little of the Koran is narrative, so Muslims have no reason to use illustrations to teach their faith.

In time, this lack of motive and opportunity hardened into custom and then law, and the absence of figures (technically known as *aniconism*) became a characteristic feature of Islamic religious art. Thus, mosques and other buildings intended for religious purposes do not have representations of people in them. Palaces, bathhouses, and locales designed for other activities, however, often have figural decoration, although in later periods the aniconism of the religious milieu sometimes spilled over into the secular realm. According to the traditions of the Prophet, even Muhammad was aware of the difference between the religious and secular worlds: he ordered all the idols removed from the Kaaba in Mecca, but he is recorded to have decorated his house with curtains and cushions decorated with figures.[46] Over time different attitudes developed in different regions: Iran enjoyed a long and vibrant tradition of representational art, whereas in North Africa figural representations were rare, perhaps because of the conservative Maliki school of religious law that is followed there.

In some places and at some times the avoidance of images moved one step further to the actual destruction of images. That is, aniconism turned into iconoclasm (literally, the breaking of images). For example, on the double-page frontispiece **(no. 16)** depicting a garden scene in this exhibition, a later reader took offense at the depiction of people and drew a red pen line across their necks, figuratively chopping off all their heads. The iconoclast did not want to destroy the figures, but he wanted to render them lifeless and impotent. Perhaps the most extreme example of Muslim iconoclasm in recent memory is the Taliban's destruction of the two giant pre-Islamic statues of the Buddha at Bamiyan in 2001. Although the Taliban leader Mulla Omar had initially allowed the Buddhas to be preserved, since no Buddhists remained in Afghanistan, other clerics called for their destruction, worrying that the statues might be worshipped in the future. Even more recently, in 2006, Egypt's Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa, the country's top Islamic jurist,

issued a *fatwa*, or proclamation, declaring the exhibition of statues in homes as un-Islamic. He based his decision on the *hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad, but art lovers fear that Islamic extremists could use it as a justification to destroy Egypt's incomparable cultural heritage.

The recent controversies over the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad that were published in a Danish newspaper show how sensitive the topic of figural representation remains. Some Muslims object to all representations of any living being, while many Muslims accept them in non-religious settings, and certain Muslims have even found it acceptable to represent the Prophet, although never as a focus of worship like depictions of Christ or the Virgin Mary in Christian art. In fourteenth-century Iran, some artists represented the Prophet as an ordinary man, while others in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries veiled his face and hands, and Turkish artists of the sixteenth century surrounded his head or body with a flaming halo. Many Muslims, like people elsewhere, have believed that essential human character is revealed in the face. In the celebrated copy of the Persian national epic, or *Shahnama*, made for Shah Tahmasp in the early sixteenth century, there are literally tens of thousands of figural representations among the 258 paintings that originally illustrated its two volumes.[47] Clearly neither the patron nor the many artists who worked on the sumptuous manuscript felt any reluctance depicting people, animals, and birds. In all ten paintings depicting king Kay Kavus, however, including the one shown here, "Kay Kavus Entertaining his son Kay Khusraw" **(no. 5)**, the ruler's face and hands have been blackened. Kay Kavus, a major but unpopular figure in the Shahnama, has probably been painted black to underscore his foolish character.

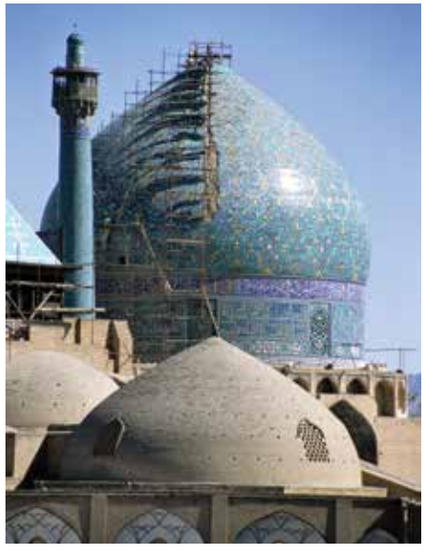

Fig. 8. Dome of the Shah (or Imam Khomeini) Mosque in Isfahan, Iran, 1611-30. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

In short, Muslims—like people everywhere—hold and have always held a variety of beliefs, not least about the legality of representation and the approach to art. Lumping everything in this exhibition together under the rubric "Islamic" might suggest that all Muslims today and in the past shared a similar perspective; in actuality there are and have always been many interpretations of Islam, just as Muslim artists, patrons, and viewers have approached the visual arts in many different ways. Nevertheless, there are common subjects and themes that do unite the visual arts of the Islamic lands. Over the centuries, artists from Spain to India and beyond have elaborated four major subjects of decoration—figures, writing, geometry, and vegetal ornament. Many of these same subjects are found in other artistic traditions—the acanthus scroll, for example, was widely popular in antiquity—but the balance is different in Islamic art. Figural art, because it is excluded from the religious sphere—traditionally one of the major settings of artistic endeavor—plays a much smaller role. Writing, by contrast, is much more important, due to the pivotal role of the word in Islam. Geometric designs were common in Roman art, but they became particularly important and complex in Islamic art, as artisans figured out ingenious new ways of combining and linking polygons and other shapes. The achievements of Muslim mathematicians were unparalleled in the medieval world—algebra and algorithm are, after all, derived from Arabic terms—but the degree to which the practical geometry of Islamic art derived from the sophisticated theoretical mathematics of the scholars remains to be determined, and many of the seemingly complex designs found in Islamic art can be realized with simple tools like a straightedge and a pair of compasses.[48] Similarly, vegetal ornament had been used in pre-Islamic times, but it surely achieved its apotheosis under Islam in the form of the arabesque.[49]

Ten Aspects of Islamic Ornament

In addition to these common subjects, many unifying principles characterize the arts of the Islamic lands. It would take a whole book to discuss them all in detail, so here we shall simply enumerate ten aspects that can be seen in many, if not all, the works in the present exhibition. There are surely others we could add. No exhibition of this modest size could claim to be truly encyclopedic, but we have attempted to select the widest possible range of examples in many media from different times and places.

Color is perhaps the most visible, and the exuberant use of color is a hallmark of Islamic art and architecture. Glittering azure domes and dazzling expanses of multicolored tile (e.g., no 60) decorate many of the best-known buildings, like the Shah (or Imam Khomeini) Mosque in Isfahan, Iran **(fig. 8)**.

The Arabic language has a particularly rich chromatic vocabulary, in which concepts can easily be associated through similarities in morphology. The Arabic root *kh-ḍ-r*, for example, gives rise to *khuḍra* ("greenness"), *akhdar* ("green"), *khuḍāra* ("greens or herbs") and *al-khiḍrā'* ("the Verdant"; hence, "the heavens"). Blue, the color of the sky in the Western tradition, is often conflated with green in the Islamic lands, where the spectrum is traditionally divided into yellow, red, and green. Tonality was less important than luminosity and saturation, probably because of the sun-drenched environment in much of the region.

In the early Islamic period, various philosophical schools elaborated the Aristotelian theory of color, and this interest in color was taken up by mystics, or sufis, who saw parallels between the phenomenon of colors and the inner vision of the Divine. The symbolic use of color runs through much Islamic literature. The great Persian poet Nizami (1141-1209), for example, structured his classic poem, *Haft paykar* ("Seven Portraits"), around the seven colors (*haft rang*, in Persian) traditional in Persian thought (red, yellow, green, and blue complemented by black, white, and sandalwood). In his poem the ideal ruler, exemplified by the Sasanian king Bahram Gur, visits seven princesses housed in pavilions of different colors; the princesses recount seven stories which can be interpreted as the seven stations of human life, the seven aspects of human destiny, or the seven stages along the mystical way. The seven colored pavilions of the *Haft paykar* became favorite subjects for book illustration in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Iran.

Brilliant color was not limited to fancy books made in the Persian world in the later centuries, for the spirited use of color is found in most Islamic art. From an early date potters in the Islamic world hid drab earthenwares under cloaks of brightly colored slips and glazes **(no. 37)**. The most significant invention for the future history of ceramics in the Islamic lands—as well as in China and Europe—was underglaze decoration, in which a fine and white ceramic body provided an ideal surface for painting in colored metallic oxides. This painted surface was then covered by a transparent alkaline glaze, which protected the painted surface, but unlike lead glazes, did not cause the pigments to run together during firing **(no. 119)**. Similarly, one the most important contributions of medieval Islamic metalworkers was the development of the inlay technique, in which the monochrome object, usually made from a copper alloy such as brass or bronze, was enlivened with inlays in gold, silver, and copper **(no. 112)**.

Various theories have been put forward to explain the extravagant use of color in Islamic art and architecture. It is often said to be a reaction to the dull and monochromatic landscape found throughout the traditional heartlands of Islam, but this explanation is simplistic. Colors also had a wide range of symbolic associations, but these were often contradictory and meaningful only in specific geographical or chronological contexts. Thus black was often associated with the mysterious Black Stone embedded in the Kaaba at Mecca toward which all Muslims pray, but the color was also associated with vengeance and revolt, as in the black flag that became the standard of the Abbasid dynasty. In North Africa black could be the accursed color of Hell, and in order to avoid pronouncing the name, the opposite (white) was substituted. Thus, coal is sometimes known as *al-abyaḍ* ("the white [thing]"). White conveyed a sense of brightness, loyalty, royalty and death, much the same values as in many other cultures. Two seamless white lengths of cloth made up the pilgrim's garment, and these were often saved for use as a burial shroud. White was also the color associated with the Fatimid caliphs, rulers of Egypt from 969 to 1171 and opponents of the Abbasids. Blue had prophylactic connotations, and many people wore blue, particularly beads, to ward off the evil eye. The magical power of blue made it the dispenser of evil fortune and at the same time a defense against it. Green, the color of plants, brought equilibrium, good luck, fertility, and youth. Green was the color of the

Fig. 9. Remains of the tile revetment in the tomb of Abd al-Samad at Natanz, Iran, 1307. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

Prophet Muhammad's standard and the cloak of his son-in-law and successor Ali. In later times, the Prophet's descendants wore green turbans, and the heavenly throne is said to have been carved from a green jewel. Tiled domes and roofs were most often green or blue, but the auspicious or heavenly associations may have been outweighed by practical considerations, since copper oxide, a ubiquitous coloring agent, produces a green color in a lead glaze and a turquoise blue color in an alkaline one.[50]

Fig. 10. Fin Garden, Kashan, Iran; begun 17th century. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

A second principle used to organize much Islamic art is REPETITION. Perhaps the simplest example is the hexagonal faceting on the early wheel-cut glass bowl **(no. 42)**, where the repeated grinding of shallow circular depressions in staggered rows creates a honeycomb pattern. On the set of six Ottoman tiles **(no. 86)**, the motif of a flowering tree occupies a set of two tiles set one above the other. By itself the set might appear almost naturalistic, but as the set is repeated, a more stylized pattern is created. Repetition was particularly suitable for textile designs where the weaver created a module that he (or she) could then repeat in various, often subtle, ways. The exquisite silk samite made in seventeenth-century Iran **(no. 73)** has a design based on a single upright sunflower that is repeated in staggered rows set first in one direction and then in the other. In the wool and linen hanging from Egypt **(no. 52)**, the pattern is created of repeating octagons. Repetition often involved alternation, for in both these two textiles the basic motif is repeated alternately in staggered rows to create the pattern. Other examples of alternation include the three star and cross tiles **(no. 111)** that were once part of a much larger set that would have covered an entire dado or wall **(fig. 9)**.

Such repetition was based in the nature of the craft process, in which works of art were made in multiples. Only one example may have survived the centuries, but we must imagine that many of these wonderful works were created in large sets.

Repetition often engendered a third principle, SYMMETRY. Mirror-imaging has been an organizing principle of art from earliest times, but it became particularly important in Islamic art, as artists played around with exact and inexact mirror-images, as in the marble panel from tenth-century Córdoba **(no. 84)**. The field design appears at first glance to be disposed symmetrically around a central stem, but closer examination reveals slight variation in the size, shape and placement of individual elements. These variations serve to enliven what might otherwise be a sterile image, as the stems intertwine around one another and flowers grow extra petals. In addition to bilateral symmetry, artists in the Islamic lands also exploited fourfold symmetry, so that the design repeats around both vertical and horizontal axes. This arrangement could be used on different scales. It was particularly popular for bookbindings **(nos. 95, 105)**, textiles **(nos. 55, 58)**, and gardens. The classical Persian garden is called a *chāhar-bāgh*, meaning a four[fold] garden, in which a quadrilateral enclosure is divided into parterres arranged around a central pavilion and separated by paths and watercourses, in which fountains play **(fig. 10)**.

Equally common was radial symmetry, in which the design revolves around a central point. Quite naturally, this organizing principle was particularly appropriate to round objects such as plates and bowls, whether metal **(nos. 53, 56)**, glass **(no. 110)**, or ceramic **(nos. 48, 51, 99)**. Radial symmetry can also be found on textiles, such as the stunning patchwork cloth probably used to cover a tray **(no. 47)**. This is a rare textile with radial symmetry, since the weaving technique did not readily lend itself to this approach to design.

As with color, scholars have proposed various explanations for the prevalence of symmetry, ranging from the symbolic to the practical. Fourfold symmetry certainly becomes more common in the later periods, when paper became increasingly available and artists used it to transfer designs from one medium to another.[51] It was a relatively simple process for an artist to create a cartoon showing a quarter of the finished pattern, which the artisan could flip and repeat to create the full design in wool, leather, or some other medium.

Despite the prevalence of symmetry, Islamic art often has DIRECTION. Psychologists and art historians have noted that works of art in the Western tradition are usually meant to be "read" from left to right, as this is the direction in which we are trained to read words. The opposite holds in Islamic art, for all languages written in Arabic script read from right to left. Hence, it is natural for someone raised in this culture to look at a work of art from right to left. Not surprisingly, this directionality is strongest in the pictorial arts associated with the book, since the words read in this direction. The viewer is meant to "enter" single- and double-page paintings, such as the scene of scholars from an unidentified manuscript on the wisdom of the ancients **(no. 4)**, from the lower right and move across the image to the left.

This sense of directionality was also extended to other objects. On the lacquer box cover **(no. 18)**, for example, the princess and her entourage move from right to left. Jugs and other portable objects are designed to be picked up with the right hand—thought to be "cleaner" than the left, normally used for personal hygiene. Hence, the main image is typically set to the left of the handle, as on the silver-inlaid bronze jug **(no. 50)**, where the first roundel depicts a seated figure holding a cup. Similarly, to read the aphorism on the small ceramic jug **(no. 39)**, one turns the vessel counterclockwise. To decipher the witty adage on the slip-painted bowl **(no. 29)**, one has to pick it up and turn it in one's hands, an action that forces the viewer to engage directly with the object.

JUXTAPOSITION is a fifth principle in Islamic decorative art, as different motifs or types of motifs are often placed side-by-side on the same object. On the Nasrid silk textile **(no. 109)**, for example, bands of writing are interspersed with bands of vegetal and geometric ornament. The individual motifs are separated by relatively plain bands, which themselves form another type of pattern. On the leaf of calligraphy from the album prepared for the Mughal emperor Jahangir (no. 123), the central quatrain written in a heavy dark script is inserted between smaller blocks of finer and more delicate script separated by small panels of arabesque; the whole is enclosed within a green and gold border of undulating vines and leaves, which in turn is mounted on a reddish ground decorated in gold with naturalistic sprays of plants and flowers. Neither texts nor images necessarily relate to each other, but they combine to form a visual feast. On an inlaid bronze casket from fourteenth-century Iran **(no. 112)**, roundels with figures are set on a scrolling arabesque ground within a fretted band below an inscription band with human-headed letters.

To the Western eye, often educated to distinguish vegetal and floral motifs from geometric ones, such combinations can seem somewhat excessive and jarring, but artists in the Muslim lands seem to have found their confrontation visually delightful. Moreover, in Islamic architecture, ornament rarely emphasizes the underlying structure and individual motifs rarely, if ever, are lined up architectonically as they normally would be in Western art, so that the "weight" of one element stands over the "support" of another. This approach is not new to Islamic art, for it already appears on the façade of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon in Iraq, on which the various registers of blind arcades do not line up one above the other. In Islamic times, builders often avoided coordinating the registers' elements even when they could, as for example, in the dome chamber of the congregational mosque at Ardistan in central Iran. It would have been easy enough for the builders to change the spacing of the arches in the lower story so that they stood under the returns of the arches in the zone of transition **(fig. 11)**.

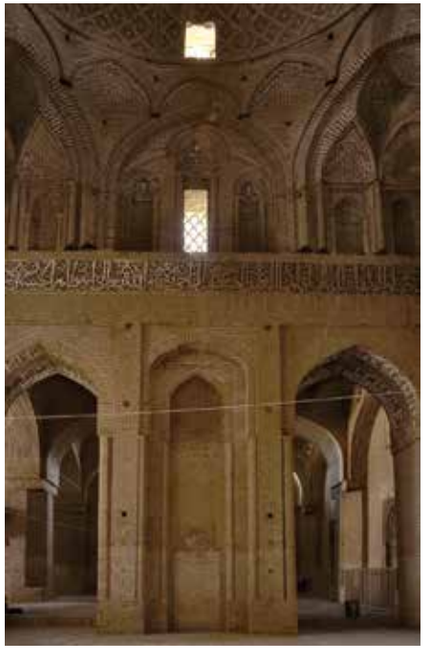

Fig. 11. Elevation of the dome chamber at Ardistan, Iran, ca. 1160. Photo: J. M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

Not only did the builder stagger the elements, but he deliberately interrupted the vertical flow by separating the lower storey from the zone of transition above with horizontal bands, including a large one bearing an inscription in relief. We know that contemporary builders could align the elements, since they had just done so at nearby Isfahan in a domed room added to the northern part of the mosque in 1084. In this building, which some Western architectural historians have considered the masterpiece of Iranian architecture,

all the parts of the interior line up into an unusually coherent whole **(fig. 12)**.

The pointed arches and alignment of parts initially reminded some scholars of Gothic architecture, misleading some to seek the origins of the Gothic style in medieval Persia![52] The similarities to Gothic architecture are quite coincidental and the north dome at Isfahan, moreover, is rare in Iranian architecture. Its unusual articulation of parts was copied only once, many centuries later, in the same town. The treatment of decoration as articulating structure and the consequent logical alignment of decorative parts clearly strike a chord to Western eyes, but appear to have made little if any impact on contemporary audiences.

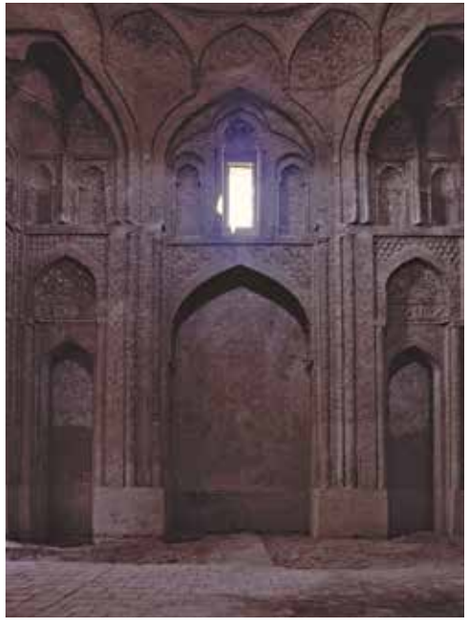

Fig. 12. Elevation of the north dome chamber at Isfahan, Iran, 1088. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

Whereas juxtaposition involves combining designs on a single plane, artists often went one step further to develop a sixth principle, that of LAYERING, which creates the illusion of several levels of design or designs working simultaneously. One of the simplest forms is strapwork, another pre-Islamic technique that continued into Islamic times, in which the artist creates the illusion of one band weaving under and over another. On the carved wooden beam from Córdoba **(no. 94)**, the angular geometric strapwork appears to intertwine with the curvilinear vegetal motifs; the conceit, which is delineated on the wood surface by shallow grooves, is heightened and emphasized by painting the angular strapwork in white and the vegetal motifs in color. In a similar way, the painter of the thirteenth-century fritware dish **(no. 48)** left stripes of white in reserve on the luster ground to create the illusion of interweaving ribbons; the spaces between them are geometric compartments filled with vegetal motifs that float against a spotted ground. Perhaps the most sophisticated use of layering in this exhibition occurs on the magnificent carpet from seventeenth-century Isfahan **(no. 65)**. Several levels of arabesques pirouette simultaneously across the red field: one is linked by faint white scrolls, another by delicate black scrolls. These two systems are anchored together by a regular pattern of large-scale palmettes, chinoiserie cloud-bands, lotus and peony flowers, and framed by an equally complex border.It is often unclear—or unspecified—where exactly in space these motifs might lie, for the overlappings are constantly contradicted in a way that might please M. C. Escher. At the same time, what might appear to be a cluttered and random assortment of motifs is actually a very carefully planned and structured design. In short, more is more!

One of the primary methods artists in the Islamic lands used to juxtapose various motifs was FRAMING. Primary motifs were often set into panels, medallions, cartouches, and arches created by other patterns or by strapwork designs, as on the luster dish **(no. 48)**. Again, framing is by no means new or unique to Islamic art, but artists exploited it and raised it to new levels of sophistication. For example, the lid and the sides of the small metal box **(no. 112)** are divided into rectangular panels, bordered by fillets enclosing a scroll frame. On the sides this scroll frame encloses, in turn, an inner fretted frame, while on the lid there is an additional inscribed band along the hip. The fields display two figures, each framed in slightly lobed roundels against a scrolling arabesque design that crosses between frame and framed. On the wooden door **(no. 41)**, artists stretched the limits of framing: while the overall disposition of the valve is a traditional arrangement of three panels—a larger one sandwiched between two smaller ones—within a frame decorated with chevrons, each of the panels is composed in turn of dozens, if not hundreds, of smaller framed elements arranged in a radial pattern. In a sense the "stars" are "framed" by polygons, and each of the elements itself is composed of a frame around a core, itself composed of multiple parts. The possibilities are infinite, and this sense of infinity is clearly what the artisan wished the viewer to appreciate.

The separation of surface decoration from underlying structure, be it on an object or a building, points to an eighth characteristic of Islamic ornament, the principle of TRANSFERABILITY. Since a motif was not tied to a particular type of structure, medium, or technique, it was easy for artists to move it from one medium to another. Although a few motifs are more characteristic

of one particular medium, such as the seaweed-like leaves on the rooster-shaped ewer **(no. 119)** that are characteristic of pottery from Kashan,[53] the vast preponderance can be found on any medium at different scales. The most striking example is the Beveled Style, a technique of decoration developed in ninth-century Iraq for decorating buildings with stucco molded with a particular slanted or beveled cut **(no. 74)**.[54] Since pre-Islamic times, builders in the region had traditionally rendered the mud-brick walls of their buildings with plaster to protect them from the elements. These plain surfaces might be painted or carved to make them more attractive, but both techniques were relatively time-consuming and hence expensive. Faced with the necessity of quickly decorating acres and acres of buildings in the newly-erected capital city of Samarra, artisans realized that molded decoration would be much faster (and cheaper) to execute than individually carved panels. Molds with designs cut on a slope were even more efficient, as they released the molded plaster more easily, allowing the artisan to get on with the next job **(fig. 13)**.

Artisans found that this technique was most successful for representing stylized and reciprocal vegetal forms, such as sinuous leaves and buds, with no distinction between figure and ground. Finishing details could, of course, still be added by hand while the plaster was still moist and yielding. The designs produced by this novel technique, which has a very practical basis in stucco decoration, were then transferred to other media in two or three dimensions, including ceramics **(no. 76)**, glass **(no. 13)**, stone **(no. 81)**, and wood.

In an era long before the profusion of images, which characterizes modern times, artists usually had to rely on their memories to transfer motifs from one medium to another. The potter who painted the luster bowl **(no. 76)** had surely seen similar designs on stucco before he began painting. To explain the transfer of motifs over longer distances and times, however, we need to find other mechanisms. One intermediary was cloth—which was, of course, the mainstay of the medieval Islamic economy and exported far and wide—for artists could adapt a pattern they had seen on a fancy textile and transfer it to whatever they were working on.[55] Metalsmiths, for example, adapted textile patterns to decorate the flanks of the bronze ram **(no. 20)** and the lion-shaped incense-burner **(no. 117)**.

Although its initial high cost kept artisans from using it freely until the thirteenth century, the introduction of paper further encouraged the transfer of designs from one medium to another.[56] The decoration on the inlaid box **(no. 112)**, for example, includes figures modeled on contemporary Persian manuscript illustrations, although it is more likely that the metalwork relied on intermediary designs rather than on the finished paintings themselves. Such workshop cartoons and drawings were eventually collected in albums for the delectation and delight of connoisseurs.[57] The type of ovoid medallion design found on the album leaf **(no. 120)** might have been reproduced on a small-scale book cover or a large-scale carpet. The use of paper for cartoons meant that the role of designer was increasingly separated from that of the craftsman, who was expected to realize the creative inspirations of another.[58] As a result, works of art from the later Islamic period (that is, say, after ca. 1500) generally show a higher level of finish but a lower degree of spontaneity than works produced in earlier times. Comparing the designs on the Ottoman jug **(no. 68)** with those on the fritware ewer **(no. 119)** shows what has been gained and what has been lost.

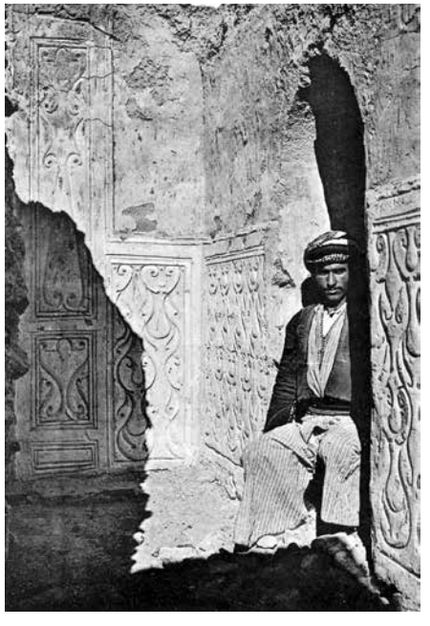

Fig. 13. After Ernst Herzfeld, *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra*.

The example of the Beveled Style raises a ninth principle in the ornament used in Islamic art, that of ABSTRACTION. A predilection for abstraction was already apparent in the ornament of pre-Islamic Iran, particularly when it is compared with the more naturalistic styles of decoration preferred in the contemporary Mediterranean lands, but the tendency to abstract and refashion natural forms became a hallmark of Islamic decoration. The bronze ewer **(no. 75)**, which may date as early as the eighth century, already shows a regularized and abstracted vine that scrolls on either side of a striking central palmette. Its abstraction is particularly striking when compared to the naturalistic vine on the roughly contemporary ivory fragment **(no. 114)**. Although this vine's scrolls enclose various animals, the flowers, leaves, and bunches of

grapes all display a certain degree of naturalism. The Ottoman velvet **(no. 45)** displays a pattern of paired wavy lines and three balls thought to be an abstract form of leopard spots and tiger stripes. The luxurious velvet was thus a sort of "faux" fur,

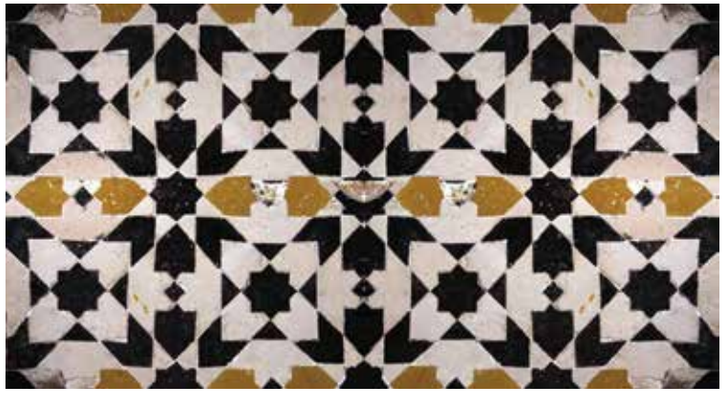

Fig. 14 Tile fragment from the Alhambra at Granada (no. 60), multiplied to show visual effect

which also conveyed to the wearer the strength of the wild beast. The trees and animals on the Caucasian embroidery **(no. 58)** have been abstracted into lollypops and stick figures.

In many cases the tendency towards abstraction resulted in the dissolution of any distinction between figure and ground. This dissolution is particularly apparent in the Beveled Style, where it is often impossible to say exactly what is the subject and what is the ground, but it is also true in many other cases. On the luster-painted bowl **(no. 51)**, is the "subject" the interlaced white bands or the radial design of brown shapes? On the patchwork tray cover **(no. 47)**, is the "subject" the red hexagonal figures or the salmon-colored chains? On the tile fragment from the Alhambra **(no. 60)**, what exactly is the subject?

The tendency toward the abstraction of vegetal ornament culminated in the so-called International Timurid Style, a style characterized by chinoiserie floral motifs—such as peony and lotus blossoms—integrated into languid arabesques **(no. 69)**.[59] Developed under the Timurids, rulers of Central Asia in the fifteenth century, it came to permeate the visual arts not only in its Iranian homelands but also in other regions, notably Syria, Turkey and India, as itinerant artists and their designs moved freely across south and west Asia. The blue-and-white bottle **(no. 89)** represents an early Syrian attempt to copy this style on a Chinese shaped vessel. The two blue-and-white tiles **(no. 88)** represent an Ottoman variant of the theme, while the encrusted rock crystal vessel **(no. 96)** represents its Mughal counterpart in the east.

Considering this long tradition of abstracting vegetal ornament, the sudden appearance of naturalistic floral motifs in seventeenth-century Indian art comes as all the more of a shock. The plants depicted on the shawl fragment **(no. 101)** and the borders of the album leaf showing King David **(no. 123)** grow up from the ground. Their stems terminate in single flowers; their differentiated leaves sway and bend with their own weight. This kind of ornament is clearly derived from a different source, namely European prints, particularly herbals, brought by Jesuit missionaries to the Mughal court.[60] It stands out as the exception to the rule.

A final principle found in the decoration used in Islamic art is willful AMBIGUITY. Already in the Beveled Style of ninth-century Samarra, artists exploited the ambiguities between subject and ground, and between abstraction and realism, as abstract lines sometimes appear to form the heads of birds and animals. Ambiguity is found in many other situations in Islamic art. Writing, for example can be ambiguous, as on the rosewater sprinkler **(no. 113)**, where the large band around the body of the piece can either be "read" as an inscription offering good wishes or as a procession of figures and birds, presumably offering the same meaning in a less verbal fashion. Similarly, in the Central Asian silk samite **(no. 92)**, the broad band near the top looks at first to be a stylized inscription, but actually it contains what might once have been a word or short phrase of blessing or good wishes that is repeated in mirror-reverse. To make the writing even less like writing, the designer has put animal heads at the ends of the letters. Was this meant to be an inscription? Was it just meant to recall an inscription?

Even architectural decoration could be ambiguous. The design on the tiles from the Alhambra **(no. 60)** can be read in several ways, all of them equally valid, particularly when the entire composition is considered **(fig. 14)**. It can be understood as a pattern of stars, composed of yellow, black, and white tiles around a central octagonal star, the whole enclosed in a diagonal grid. Alternatively, it can be understood as a grid of squares within a lattice composed of yellow, black, and white tiles; each square contains another smaller square enclosing a black octagonal star. There are other possibilities as well, and

the designer gives us no clue as to which one he prefers.

The wooden capital **(no. 59)**, the only example of *muqarnas* ornament in the exhibition, epitomizes ambiguity in architectural decoration. Muqarnas decoration was popular throughout the Islamic lands from Spain and North Africa to Central Asia **(figs. 15-16)**. Composed of many individual prismatic elements arranged in serried rows and often likened by observers to stalactites or honeycombs, the muqarnas gives an effect of weightlessness and infinite subdivision. It was typically applied to weight-bearing parts of buildings, such as cornices, capitals, and the undersides of vaults and domes, and yet it appears to be weightless. How is it that something so insubstantial can support a load?

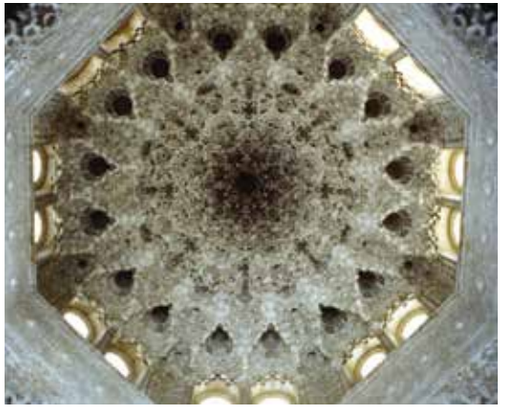

Fig. 15. Muqarnas dome in the Hall of the Two Sisters in the Alhambra Palace at Granada, 14th century. Photo: J.M. Bloom and S.S. Blair

Fig. 16. Muqarnas dome in the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan City, 1394-99. Photo: J.M. Bloom

Meaning

The insubstantiality of the muqarnas raises a final question in our discussion of the role of ornament in Islamic art, that of meaning. Does all this visual delight have some deeper significance or is it all just superficial candy for the eye? Some scholars, trained in the iconography of Western or Eastern art, have tried to find meanings in Islamic art that are comparable to the complex symbolic systems of Christian and Buddhist art. For example, the emergence of strapwork patterns and the development of the muqarnas have been linked to the revival of Sunni orthodoxy in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[61] Following this line of thought, these apparently abstract designs become equivalents to the saints and bodhisattvas displayed on Romanesque cathedrals and Central Asian grottoes. According to these theories, artisans in the Islamic lands, like artisans elsewhere, gave visual form to the ideas expounded by contemporary theologians. Thus these scholars propose that Islamic art has an iconography as complex and meaningful as other great artistic traditions, although most Western observers have been largely unable—or unwilling—to see it.

Surely the figural scenes on some of the objects in this exhibition have specific meanings beyond the type of figures represented in them. For example, the large fritware dish **(no. 2)** painted in luster with twenty-four small figures and one large one in the center is more than a random assemblage of people. Since the larger figure—the only one with a beard and turban—is set in the center among many other figures sitting with writing tablets or folding bookstands, it is likely to represent a school scene with a teacher surrounded by his pupils. In addition, only one of the small figures looks to the right—all the others face left. One interpretation is that this scene represents Layla and Majnun in school, an episode concerning a Romeo-and-Juliet-like pair of lovers best known from the *Khamsa* (Quintet) composed by the Persian poet Nizami. From its style, the dish should be dated to the late twelfth century, which would make this image not only contemporary with Nizami's poem but also the earliest such representation in Persian art. All of this is perfectly possible, but it is equally possible that the artist was illustrating a similar scene from another source that has not survived. It is further possible that the artist was simply representing a generic school scene, although why he should decorate a large dish with a school scene in the first place remains open. If he meant this scene to illustrate the poetry of Nizami or some other poet, it is curious that the artist did not inscribe the rim of the bowl with some of the appropriate verses—for Nizami's remain among the best-loved poetry in Iran to this day. We have no answers to these questions, and as the bowl is unique, we cannot generalize from it. In short, it could be iconographically significant, but then again, it might not be.

Paradoxically, the situation becomes even more complicated when we turn to "simpler" representations, such as single figures of birds, animals, or people. The earthenware bowl filled with a stylized depiction of a bird **(no. 14)** may just be a bowl with a picture of a bird. Millions of American and European households today own dishes decorated with flowers and/or animals; their owners give nary a thought to the meaning of the specific representation on them, so why must we demand meaning for medieval representations? For the medieval Islamic world, we have no contemporary source that explains the meaning of specific representations, and no image is accompanied by a text taken from literature that deals with the same subject. For example, the beautiful bowl painted in luster by Abu Zayd **(no. 118)** shows a seated couple in the center, apparently a prince and his consort, to judge from the quality of their clothing. The rim is inscribed with banal love poetry, the artist's signature, and the date, so it is difficult, if not impossible, to posit some more profound meaning to this scene beyond a generic one of felicity. Hence, some scholars have concluded that the representations of birds and animals commonly found on Islamic pottery convey a generalized sense of good wishes or blessing comparable to the sentiments sometimes expressed in words on similar pieces.

Other scholars, however, have suggested that specific motifs had very specific meanings. For example, the representation of men holding scorpions and other details on a thirteenth-century Persian enameled bowl have recently been connected to the ancient Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh.[62] Such explanations are often popular because they can provide easy answers to complex questions. In our view, however, such explanations are successful in inverse proportion to their scope—that is, that it may be possible to explain a motif or group of motifs at one particular time and place, but it is very dangerous to generalize and suggest that any motif, whether animal, vegetal, or geometric, had a constant meaning throughout all Islamic civilizations. Some artistic traditions have had religious or political institutions that were able to maintain meanings and interpretations over long periods and great distances—one thinks, of course, of the papacy—but the Islamic world was not one of them. It is difficult, if not impossible, to prove that any form or motif had the same meaning in Abbasid Baghdad and Ottoman Istanbul, let alone in nineteenth-century Java, and so iconographic arguments in Islamic art often end up as tautologies.

Scholars, particularly those with a mystical or sufi bent, can also find mystical meanings in everything they examine. This approach has become particularly popular among scholars based or interested in Iran, perhaps as a legacy of the long history of studying Iranian mysticism.[63] In a welcome desire to find meaning in art, but perhaps in reaction to the popularity of the mystical approach, other scholars have developed sectarian interpretations of Islamic art, hoping to see reflections of the many varieties of Islam in the many varieties of Islamic art. The Sunni-Shi'i split, which goes back to differing views about who should succeed Muhammad after his death in 632, is often cited as the cause for different artistic forms. These range from the keel-shaped arches, typical in Iran—the world's largest Shi'ite country today—and also in Egypt during the period of Fatimid rule (969-1171), to the popularity of the tomb and the tombstone, let alone the preference for angular or rounded scripts.[64] Other sectarian divisions, such as the different schools of Sunni law, have been linked to the different types of epigraphic **(no. 29)**, vegetal **(no. 98)**, and figural **(no. 14)** representations found on the same type of bowls made in eastern Iran during the tenth century.[65]

Sectarian ideas have always been important in Islamic discourse, as the learned class, or *ulema*, has devoted much time and energy to debating them. Sectarian studies of art presuppose, however, that the people who made art were theologically engaged and were inspired to do so by their sectarian ideas. There is little contemporary evidence to help determine the social and educational level of artisans in medieval society. Historians and chroniclers rarely mention them, perhaps with the exception of calligraphers, as the great mass of artisans, in general, belonged to the lower classes. Despite the great quantities of Islamic art that fill museums and galleries around the world, medieval Muslims had surprisingly little to say about the visual arts. The "chattering classes" in medieval society seem to have been far less concerned with writing about the visual arts than with religion, literature, and the responsible acts of individuals. Nevertheless, several scholars have mined these meager sources in attempt to establish and define an overarching esthetic of Islamic art.[66] Once again, in our view, the success of these studies depends upon their limited frame of reference.

Of the four major subjects of decoration explored in this exhibition, only one—writing—surely had meaning, for words not only look nice but also say something. Furthermore, writing in Arabic script was spread and maintained through the faith. Other subjects of decoration may have had meanings, but as yet we are unable to establish them with certainty and precision. For example, it seems likely that depictions of flowers and fruit-bearing trees probably evoked a sense of fertility, blessing, and even paradise, which is described in the Koran as a verdant garden. Since we have very little idea of the ways in which many of the items displayed in this exhibition were actually used, it is also difficult to connect possible meanings with functions. We assume that many if not all of the ceramics in the exhibition were designed as serving and eating vessels used when people ate communally from large platters and bowls. The large glazed earthenware dish **(no. 97)**, for example, would be ideal for serving a platter of cooked grain, which would have covered all the decoration. As the diners scooped away the food with their (right) hands, the arabesque design gradually became clear. Only when they had cleaned the plate, however, did they see the little hare hopping in the center. Did the hare have a special meaning or was it just a visual conceit? Similarly the contemporary bowl with written decoration **(no. 29)** might have been filled with some liquid like a stew or sauce. As the diners lowered the level of the contents, they would see more and more of the inscribed letters, and therefore be able to decipher the text, a tradition ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad that "He who believes in recompense [from God] is generous with gifts." The inscription was therefore a sort of individual "fortune cookie" offering advice to the satisfied diner.

Although the meaning of the decoration on many objects in this exhibition is unclear or ambiguous to us today, at least one object suggests that the primary meaning of decoration was simply to delight. It is an extremely rare case where contemporary written evidence explains exactly what the decoration on an object means. The distich on the fragmentary silk textile from Spain **(no. 109)** says succinctly that "I exist for pleasure; Welcome! For pleasure am I; he who beholds me sees joy and well-being." This otherwise-unknown verse was probably composed for this very textile; it is written in the first person, as if the textile itself were speaking to the viewer. The verses are set between bands of exuberant geometric and vegetal ornament. Such luxurious and brightly colored fabric might well have been used to cover mattresses and loose cushions, as well as walls in a fine house or palace, to judge from the fragments that have survived. With its repeated message, the catchy rhyming couplet would have mesmerized the viewer much as modern advertising on TV bombards us with slogans, images, and jingles.

Like this splendid textile, this exhibition exists not only to instruct, but also to please. Welcome! Contemplate the joy and well-being displayed by these magnificent objects that testify to the long and vibrant cultures and rich intellectual traditions of the Islamic lands. In our quest to find subtle and learned meanings for these extraordinary works of art, we may have overlooked their primary meaning as invitations to stop what we are doing for a moment and contemplate, think, and let our minds explore the beauties before our eyes.

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The David Collection: the Museum's History, Character, and Various Reflections on the Reinstallation of the Islamic Collection

Kjeld von Folsach

Although this article lies outside the present exhibition's subject examination of Islamic ornament, a brief account of the collection's founder and its history will illuminate the context that gave birth to this exhibition. Since the indirect impetus to the exhibition is that the museum will be closing for a period of two years so that its buildings can be remodeled and its collections reinstalled it might be appropriate to share thoughts about the collection that has emerged in conjunction with this work.

C. L. David and the David Collection in Brief

Christian Ludvig David (1878-1960) was one of several private collectors of Islamic and other art who eventually founded museums that came to bear their own name. Among the others with roots in the nineteenth century are Charles Lang Freer (1856-1919), Calouste Gulbenkian (1869-1955), Antonis Benaki (1873-1954), and Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1968). David is probably the least known of them, so little known that the institution and its founder are not even mentioned in Stephen Vernoit's recent study, *Discovering Islamic Art. Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850-1950*.[1]

C. L. David grew up in Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, where he lived his entire life. As his name indicates, he came from a religiously mixed background; his paternal grandfather, Christian Georg Nathan David, was born a Jew but had himself baptized. As a professor, a member of the constitutional assembly, and his country's minister of finance in 1864 and 1865, he placed his family firmly among the educated, respected, and wealthy Copenhagen bourgeoisie.[2]

C. L. David lost his father when he was only eleven, which may have been one of his reasons for choosing the sensible and safe study of law after he matriculated in 1897. In retrospect, David chose well, since, after he completed his studies in 1903, he became one of Denmark's most successful business lawyers and one of the profession's sharpest minds. Denmark was neutral during the First World War, and in a period when Danish commerce flourished and big new companies were founded through mergers of old ones, there was no lack of demand for a man with C. L. David's insight and abilities. He was elected to many corporate boards, while he simultaneously co-founded Dansk Vagtselskab, which later developed into the international security and cleaning company, ISS. By Danish standards, David was a wealthy man, and as he never married, his art collection and his

Fig 1. The David Collection was originally housed in the red building, Kronprinsessegade 30. Number 32—the white building on the left side of the picture—was purchased in 1986, and when the museum reopens in 2008, it will occupy both of them. Photo: Joachim Meyer

fortune were passed down in 1960 to the C. L. David Foundation and Collection, which he had founded in 1945. The collection was housed in a three-story townhouse at Kronprinsessegade, no. 30. It had been built in about 1800, had previously been owned by the David family, and had been bought back by C. L. David in 1917 **(fig. 1)**.

The decades around the turn of the century abounded in art collectors, not only in the big countries but also in Denmark, which at the time had been reduced to its smallest size ever, after the loss of Schlesvig-Holstein to Germany in 1964. Most Danish private collections were dispersed or incorporated into other collections, while a few became independent museums, including the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, the Nivaagaard Collection, the Faaborg Museum, the Hirschsprung Collection, Ordrupgaard, and the David Collection. Most of these institutions, which still exist today, are traditional art museums, with an emphasis on European painting and sculpture, the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, however, also has large collections of ancient art. The David Collection is the only one of these institutions that from an early stage placed its main emphasis on "decorative arts." Although C. L. David began by collecting contemporary Danish painting and sculpture, he took an early interest in eighteenth-century decorative arts, largely from Germany, France, Britain, and Scandinavia, supplemented by a number of European paintings from earlier periods. This special interest brought C. L. David in close contact with the Danish Museum of Art & Design (*Kunstindustrimuseet*). He served as chairman of the board of its friends' association from 1925 and chairman of the museum's board from 1942 to his death. Actually, for many years, David envisioned that his own collection would be incorporated into the museum's. There are many indications that it was the the Danish Museum of Art & Design's highly gifted and internationally respected director, Emil Hannover (1864-1923), who sparked David's interest in Islamic art—a field where the museum itself was weak, and he acquired his first piece of Islamic pottery in 1921. David was most interested, however, in the European collection, and at his death in 1960, only a small percentage of the institutions' works came from the Islamic world: 210 pieces of ceramics, one bronze, five manuscripts, three pieces of glass, and forty-one textiles, twenty-six of them carpets. Although this was not a large collection, the David Collection's future director, André Leth, was able to write in 1948:

> Heretofore, no public collection in the Nordic countries has been able to exhibit even a more or less representative sample of Muhammadan ceramic art, even though it occupies such an important place in world ceramics. The C. L. David Collection has met an urgent need here. The collection numbers over a hundred pieces, including several whose beauty and significance for art history can hardly be surpassed, even by the great museums abroad.[3]

This statement is correct, while the panegyrics should be understood within the context of the article's publication for David's seventieth birthday. The founder's preferences characteristically lay with Islamic ceramics, and, despite encouragement from the board, he was wary of moving into other media. The future was to take a different direction.

As long as David lived, no director was appointed for the David Collection, but in 1962, André Leth (1914-1992) left the Danish Museum of Art & Design to assume the position. It quickly became obvious to the museum that if the little but quite wealthy institution was to have a raison d'être in the Danish museum world, its collection would need to fill a void. David had emphasized the importance of having his collection of European art and decorative art displayed in harmonious, interior-like arrangements to give the visitor the impression of being in a home rather than a museum. In order to fulfill this wish, various pieces of furniture, especially English ones, were still acquired, and the collections of Meissen and Vincennes-Sèvres porcelain were supplemented.

The Islamic collection, however, was expanded in earnest. If a Scandinavian desired a reasonably complete picture of the art of the Islamic world, he was obliged to travel to Leningrad, Berlin, Paris, London, or even farther. So the choice to concentrate on amplifying the Middle Eastern collection was obvious. Under Leth's direction (1962-1985), the Islamic collection grew from 266 to 1055 objects and expanded to encompass all media, geographical areas from Spain in the west to India in the east, and periods from the first century of Islam to around 1800—at least in principle.

In 1973, a foreign public was able to see Islamic works of art from the David Collection for

the first time at the exhibition *Islamische Keramik* at the Hetjens-Museum in Düsseldorf. The museum's true international breakthrough came when it lent no fewer than nineteen works for the major exhibition the *Arts of Islam* in London in 1976, including the dragon door handle from Cisre, since used as the David Collection's logo **(fig. 2)**. In the ensuing years, objects from the David Collection have been displayed at many of the most important international exhibitions of Islamic art.

In the score of years that have passed since André Leth retired as director, acquisitions have concentrated even more on the Islamic collection. The 1,055 pieces had more than doubled by the end of 2005 to 2,555, including 117 objects and drawings deposited by the Danish Museum of Art & Design; the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Collection of Prints and Drawings; and the Royal Library. Although not overwhelming in number, their quality is high and an effort has been made to expand the scope of the collection, attaining a more even distribution chronologically, geographically, and among media.

The David Collection in Context

The David Collection has its origins in a private individual's collection, and the museum is still owned and financed by a private foundation. Though the David Collection gets no economic support from the state, it functions in most respects on an equal footing with such institutions and could be considered Denmark's unofficial "Museum of Islamic Art." Naturally, there are examples of Islamic art in other Danish institutions, but they are scattered among many different museums, each of which has its own history, character, and acquisition criteria.

In the Western world, there are three main museum types that deal with the Islamic cultural sphere in different ways: historical, ethnographic, and art museums. One can add various intermediate forms as well as special museums in the fields of music, science, weaponry, technology, etc. Moreover, there are extensive collections of Islamic manuscripts and individual folios in libraries.

Collections in national historical museums most often reflect the specific country's links with the Islamic cultural sphere, whether the pieces were acquired through trade, wars, or journeys of exploration, as diplomatic gifts, or in the form of incipient antiquities collecting, etc. They often come from cathedral treasuries, princely or private collections, and archeological finds and excavations in the country itself. [4] In modern times, "historically relevant" material has been purchased in some cases and excavations have been carried out in the Middle East. While the latter must be seen as the result of deliberate archaeological interest that seeks to clarify the past systematically, most of the other objects in historical museums would have entered their collections more or less at random. Their common denominator would not necessarily be value, rarity, or aesthetic qualities, but the fact that they arrived in the country through different routes and in different periods and thus became part of the nation's cultural heritage as a whole. Denmark has collections of this type in the National Museum, Rosenborg Palace, the Royal Danish Arsenal Museum, the National Archives, and the Royal Library, among others.

Ethnographic collections or museums are often the result of a more deliberate acquisitions policy than the ones pursued by historical museums. The nucleus of European collections may very well comprise material from Kunstkammers, where the pieces were included as curiosities, but acquisitions began in earnest in the nineteenth century, when scholars in the West sought to gain insight into their own early cultural development by studying "primitive" peoples. Later, however, it became completely natural to deal with the cultures of "foreign" peoples for their own sake. Most of the material that ethnographers collected—from the Islamic world as well—comprises all types of objects, from simple utility pieces to more elaborate decorative items. Aesthetic criteria play a less important role and since the goal is first and foremost to elucidate the culture from all its aspects, the typical is in principle given priority over the unique. There are Danish collections of this type in the National Museum and the Moesgård Museum in Århus.

Fig 2. Cast-bronze door handle in the shape of two dragons, made in southeastern Anatolia in the beginning of the 13th century. David Collection, Copenhagen, 38/1973. Photo: Ole Woldbye

In the mid-nineteenth century, many people—artists as well as critics - felt that Western art was in a period of crisis, and they turned largely to the past and foreign cultures to find inspiration for their own artistic rejuvenation. This provided an enormous stimulus for the study of art history, and art and decorative art museums sprang up everywhere. Soon, collections as sources of inspiration were no longer given priority; art for art's sake was given pride of place. While art museums concentrated on Western painting, graphics, and sculpture, museums devoted to "decorative art" exhibited beautifully executed objects from the same sphere, but also from the high cultures of Asia and the Middle East, where the Western distinction between art and decorative art was less clear or non-existent. Aesthetic qualities were given priority in making acquisitions, and the aim was to illustrate the history of aesthetics and art. There are collections of Islamic art of this kind in Denmark—apart from the David Collection—in the Danish Museum of Art & Design. In addition, there are a small number of drawings and miniature paintings in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Collection of Prints and Drawings, and in the Royal Library, and a few pieces have been acquired in modern times for the National Museum and placed in its Ethnographic Collection.

This latter group—art and decorative art museums—is the category to which the David Collection belongs, and the major Western collections of Islamic art are also largely found in museums of this kind.

Most of the large, old collections of Islamic art do their best to give a nuanced, encyclopedic picture of the development of art from the time of the Prophet Muhammad—or at least from that of the Umayyads—to the nineteenth century, and from Spain in the west to India in the east. The old collections of the great powers or colonial empires, however, often reflect the areas to which they had special ties: the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert to India and certain countries in the Middle East; the Louvre to North Africa and a number of countries in the Middle East; the Hermitage to Central Asia and Iran; the Berlin Museum to Turkey and the former Ottoman Empire, for example. The museum that probably has the most balanced and diverse collection is the "new-world" Metropolitan Museum of Art, while the most narrowly focused of the Western museums is probably the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, which limits itself almost entirely to Islamic material from the Iberian Peninsula.

The Spanish example is reminiscent of the old museums of the Islamic world, which were mostly founded by the European colonial powers or built up according to Western principles. Nearly all of them reflect their status as national museums. They exhibit local art and history, not the whole geographical or chronological range of Islamic art. On the other hand, they naturally often have a rich representation in their specific fields and are consequently indispensable for international specialists, and they meet local needs, enabling Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran to see themselves as cradles or important centers of Islamic civilization. Exceptions to this rule are the new museums in Malaysia, Kuwait, and Qatar, which all endeavor to cover Islamic culture as a whole—perhaps because they do not have a rich local Islamic cultural heritage, but either have very large, "young" Muslim populations that are seeking a cultural identity (Malaysia), or are so wealthy that they can afford to make numerous important acquisitions on the international art market (Kuwait and Qatar).

The museums mentioned so far, perhaps with the exception of the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait, are all official, national institutions that serve the country's interest, whether this might mean popular education, scholarship, or national prestige. Other museums were founded by private collectors and may, even more than official institutions, mirror the circumstances under which they were founded. Their collections were often assembled during a lifetime and frequently reflect the founder's preferences and resources. These are institutions like the collections mentioned above: the Freer Gallery in Washington, D. C.; the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon; the Benaki Museum in Athens; the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin; and the David Collection in Copenhagen. Some may no longer be altered after the founder's death, while others continue to evolve.

The Islamic Section of the David Collection: Goals for Reinstallation

When a museum's collection is reinstalled, it is natural to reevaluate the objectives of the collection and then examine whether they have been fulfilled. What initially was a cultivated private individual's desire to surround himself with aesthetically satisfying objects in time

became the connoisseur's more deliberate work of collecting. This deliberation increased when the private collection became institutionalized and professionalized, and today, the museum's collection of Islamic art is so extensive and its quality so high that it not only is the largest in Scandinavia, but also holds an important position internationally. This entails obligations that reach beyond those of the private collector, and it is crucial that the museum understand that collecting and amassing cultural objects is not meaningful unless they are guaranteed safekeeping, unless they are studied and made available via publications, and unless they are made accessible in the institution. The more important the content of a collection, the greater the responsibility for meeting these obligations.

The first obligation is safekeeping. The newly renovated buildings will provide increased safeguards against fire, theft, negative climatic effects, and other types of destructive factors, both in the exhibition areas and in the storerooms.

The second obligation—publishing the museum's works of art—is less important in considering how to reinstall the collections, even though research at the museum and various publications most often serve as the basis for educational activities in the permanent exhibition. At present, it is estimated that slightly less than half of the museum's Islamic works of art have been published, which, though not optimal, is reasonably good considering the situation in many comparable institutions. The level of information provided in the publications naturally varies considerably. A number of handbooks or introductions to Islamic art in the David Collection have been published over the years, the latest in 2001, containing 693 works.[5] These books are intended as appetizers for the public at large, but are also useful checklists for specialists in the field. Individual works are published in greater detail in both Danish and English in conjunction with a number of special exhibitions in which a large part of the exhibited works come from the David Collection. [6] There are, moreover, numerous exhibition catalogues, surveys, articles, and monographs in which one or more of the museum's works of art are illustrated and discussed in varying detail. In 2003, the museum began the publication of the *Journal of the David Collection*, a traditional scholarly museum publication that is essentially based on the institution's own collection. Two volumes have been published to date. In addition a limited selection of Islamic works can been found at www.davidmus.dk.

The obligation of making the David Collection's works of art both available physically and presented intelligibly is clearly most relevant in the present context.

When the museum reopens in early summer 2008, the space set aside for the Islamic collection will have more than doubled. This means that by far the majority of the objects will be directly accessible to the public, either in the chronological and geographical section, in the cultural-historical section, or in one of the special galleries (see below). The remainder will be placed in a capacious storage area, which can be visited in the company of museum staff by those with special interests.

Traditionally, there has been a tendency to provide little information on objects in art museums, since it is expected that the works of art on display will be somewhat familiar to the visitor, and because there is a wish not to mar the aesthetic experience with didactic texts. This tendency is less marked in historical and ethnographic museums, where the attitude toward objects on display is hardly as fetishistic, and where there seems to be a greater obligation and willingness to explain historical and cultural context to visitors.

The David Collection has always clearly belonged to the group of art museums, and the amount of information it has provided especially in the European section has always been limited, while the amount of explanatory written material has been greater in the less familiar Islamic collection. For many years, the typical David visitor has belonged to the educated upper and middle classes, a segment that was acquainted with European culture from earlier periods and if given a little assistance had a good background for understanding a foreign field like the Islamic sphere. This situation is gradually changing. A broader segment of the population visits the museum today, a phenomenon that can be explained partly by a steady increase in social equality and partly by the fact that Islam and Islamic culture have gained much more immediacy in our modern world. In addition, Denmark now has a segment of its population with roots in different parts of the Middle East. They have either moved to or grown up in Denmark in recent decades and now number over 300,000, or about six percent of the population. This segment is also increasingly finding its way to the museum. Having greater diversity among its visitors is encourag-

ing since the institution wishes to make as much of the population as possible aware of its collections. But this poses new challenges in providing information that should not be ignored.

The amount of data available today about nearly all aspects of society is enormous, and never before have so many Danes received a high-school or higher education. The wealth of information has, however, led to greater specialization and paradoxically to a decrease in what—using a rather old-fashioned expression—could be called "general knowledge." The broad, perhaps rather superficial body of knowledge that just a few generations ago was quite common has changed.

This shift requires the museum to make a deliberate effort to provide information on the often fairly difficult-to-understand material that is exhibited in the Islamic collection. Other museums in Denmark do not provide much information on Islam's religion and culture or on the history of the Islamic world. Providing information on the art and aesthetic of the many Muslim peoples over the past 1,400 years is a challenging and complicated, but essential, task if visitors are to receive the full value of the collection.

Muslim immigrants and their descendants, who have the immediate advantage of knowing about Islamic culture, pose another difficulty when it comes to providing information, in addition to the difficulties described above in relation to ethnic Danes. The most elementary is the problem that the generally accepted designation "Islamic art" offends many people, and especially Muslims. They justifiably point out that very little of what is labeled "Islamic art" has anything to do with the religion of Islam. It is important to explain in this context that what the museum presents is all art produced for Muslims in the Islamic world. The term Islamic art consequently does not refer only to art that is related to the religion of Islam. It refers to Islamic societies in the broadest sense, even to objects or customs that might be in contradiction to the Koran and prescripts derived from it. Furthermore, many of the Muslims that have settled in Denmark come from outlying regions of the Islamic world, and many of them have never been to a museum in their own homeland or learned about the rich and highly diverse culture from which they come. This problem is further aggravated by the fact that an art museum like the David Collection emphasizes the history of and changes in aesthetics, as they are most clearly expressed in the art of the princes and the upper and middle classes. For the ordinary Muslim whose roots are in a provincial agrarian society, being confronted with roaring lions, enticing houris, wine-drinking princes, figurative silks worked with gold, and magnificent works of art made of gold, silver, rock crystal, ivory, etc. might seem like pure Sodom and Gomorra. The experience might actually be more shocking and astounding than being confronted with Western art, which does, after all, emerge from a culture that to them is alien or at least different.

In the over sixty years that have passed since the museum was founded, society has changed, and the museum must change with it to keep from losing its raison d'être and becoming an unimportant relic of the past. The David Collection intends to remain an art museum where aesthetics is given priority and where the beauty of Islamic art can be appreciated. But it must be made clear to the public that it is largely the art of the upper and middle classes that is presented. In order for this art to be understood as well as possible, efforts must be made to initiate visitors into the culture and history of the Islamic world, and give them a better impression of the many peoples that have made their mark on both, each its own way. Another important goal must be to present unbiased information on Islamic culture to help break down the prejudices and negative images that often thrive best where ignorance prevails.

The Reinstallation of the Museum's Collections

When the reinstallation is completed in 2008, the newly remodeled David Collection will be housed in Kronprinsessegade 30, which was already partly adapted for use as a museum in C. L. David's own time, and in number 32, which was purchased in 1986. Both buildings date to the beginning of the nineteenth century and both are listed as a historical landmark. Before the process began, there was careful consideration of whether it would have been better to move to another location and build up the museum according to a modern and perhaps more rational plan than the old, listed buildings allow. This option was rejected for several reasons: because of veneration for C. L. David's attachment to Kronprinsessegade, because of the museum's early history on the site, because the European art is suited to the old buildings' interiors, and because

museums in historical settings are an attraction in themselves in a society that has largely modern institutional architecture.

The Islamic collection will be placed on the top two stories of both buildings, in the old rooms designed by the architects Carl Petersen, Kaare Klint, and Vilhelm Wohlert **(fig. 3)**, and in the new rooms furnished by Wohlert Architects. The basic features of the reinstallation are as follows: an introductory text will tell visitors what they can expect from the Islamic collection, explain how the museum defines the concept of Islamic art, provide a very brief description of this culture as a whole, and present a large map of the region. The primary collection will be divided into twenty sections of varying sizes. Objects will be presented in a traditional manner, as a combination of chronological and geographic segments, leading the public through the history of Islamic art up to 1850 and around all the areas that the museum has chosen to present - Africa south of the Sahara and Southeast Asia are not included. An information board in each section will review the period's and the geographic area's history, and highlight the most important artistic characteristics and innovations, and a coin cabinet will provide further historical commentaries on leading dynasties or rulers associated with the pieces on display. By placing the main texts and historical notes at the beginning of each section, it should be possible to keep the labels fairly brief in most cases. Each label will contain a summary identification of the object followed by supplementary information. The labels will be placed near the pieces, so that text and object can be examined from the same position. Photographs of related architectural monuments will also be shown, to broaden the range of artistic expression in the region in question.

In addition to the chronological and geographic sections, which form the backbone of the Islamic installation, there will also be a number of special galleries that in various ways will supplement them or take an interdisciplinary approach. Because of the buildings' original layout, the chronological review will unfortunately be interrupted several times.

The first gallery will deal with the Koran, describing the origins of the holy book and its position and fundamental significance for Islamic culture and art. Another room will be devoted to 1) the religion of Islam, 2) Muhammad, Mecca, and the Kaaba, 3) Sunni and Shia, 4) the mosque, 5) sufis, dervishes, and holy men, 6) sepulchral culture and superstition, 7) the "prohibition against images," 8) symbolism in Islamic art, 9) coins, measurements, and weights, 10) mechanics, 11) astronomy and astrology, 12) medicine, 13) weapons and the art of war, and—perhaps slightly out of place—14) Islam and China.

An information room with computers will allow visitors to explore Islamic architecture, history, religion, and culture in a broad sense. When the museum's own database of works of art is completed, it will also be possible to find supplementary information on the pieces on display.

A fourth room will focus on the phenomenon of revivals, forgeries, and restoration. The subject is controversial, but also fascinating. Initially, museums of decorative art were intended to exhibit works that could inspire artists. This was done so convincingly by some that it might be difficult today to tell the difference between the original and a copy. Others were tempted to make copies in order to sell them as originals. In between these extremes are objects that have been so heavily "restored" that it is very difficult to say whether they are originals or fakes. The museum has (unfortunately or fortunately) a good and varied group of objects that are able to shed light on this rather special, profoundly frustrating, but also exciting branch of art history and museum collections.

Fig 3. The gallery for Islamic miniature painting at Kronprinsessegade 32, designed by Vilhelm Wohlert in 1990. Photo: Antonio Wohlert

The fifth gallery will deal with artistic techniques. For several years, the museum has made good use of a room where the public is given detailed explanations of the various techniques that are utilized in Islamic art and the terms that are used in the literature. There is no doubt that the subject interests many people, and by presenting detailed technical descriptions in a special gallery, they will not take up space in the main exhibition.

Finally, there will be a study storage area containing fine examples of types already well represented in the main exhibition, objects of lesser interest, or pieces whose historical or geo-

graphical provenance has not yet been found or whose authenticity is still debated.

Study galleries for miniature painting, writing, and textiles will also be included. Representatives of these groups will be found throughout the chronological and geographical presentation, but the collections are so large that it will also be possible to feature a more educational exhibition that provides a unified presentation of the history of the Islamic book and calligraphy. This arrangement means that most of the museum's collection within these two fields will be directly accessible to the public in these galleries in display cabinets with drawers. Textiles take up a great deal of space, and with a special gallery furnished with drawers, it will be possible to make available far more of these fabrics, which were treasured as much or even more in their own time as they are today. It will also be natural to use this gallery to tell about and explain the often highly complex weaving techniques that were employed to make these textiles. All three galleries will have special facilities to control the amount of light and will thus additionally serve as "refuges" for light-sensitive works of art, which will be displayed in rotation.

Conclusion

Opponents of explanatory texts in museums—and in art museums in particular—often present two contradictory arguments. Either they claim that visitors do not want to read large amounts of written material—that they get tired—or they claim that visitors concentrate so much on the texts that they forget to look at the works on exhibit. Unfortunately, there might be something to both arguments. One should not, however, underestimate the public's ability to make choices. By systematically placing main texts on information boards and in coin cabinets, and by dividing regular showcase labels into primary and secondary information sections, it will be possible to satisfy most visitors' need for information without interfering with their immediate experience of the works of art.

It is our hope that a meeting with the foreign yet curiously familiar qualities of Islamic art and greater knowledge about the culture that produced them will be a source of joy, insight, and understanding for the museum's guests.

The article was translated from the Danish by Martha Gaber Abrahamsen.

Endnotes

1 Stephen Vernoit ed.: *Discovering Islamic Art. Scholars, Collectors and Collections,1850-1950,* (New York, 2000).

2 A more detailed article in Danish on C. L. David can be found in Kristian Hvidt, "C.L.David som menneske og kunstsamler," Kjeld von Folsach og Nana Lund red. *Dansk kunst i Davids Samling—fra Philipsen til Saxbo,* (Copenhagen, 1995) 7-33, and a corresponding article on the David Collection: Kjeld von Folsach, "Davids Samling 1945-1995," *Dansk kunst i Davids Samling—fra Philipsen til Saxbo,* (Copenhagen, 1995) 34-51. A brief introduction in English both to C. L. David's own history and to the institution's is found in Kjeld von Folsach, *Art from the world of Islam in The David Collection,* (Copenhagen, 2001) 29-35.

3 André Leth: "C.L.Davids Samling af Islamisk Keramik," *C.L.Davids Samling.* Nogle Studier, København 1948, p. 31. The article was published in a book in commemoration of C. L. David's seventieth birthday.

4 Naturally, references here are to countries in "the old world," which had links to the Islamic cultural sphere from early times. Even in Scandinavia, there are fairly rich finds from the Viking Age that bear witness to trade links with the Middle East.

5 Kjeld von Folsach, *Art from the world of Islam in The David Collection,* (Copenhagen, 2001). Earlier publications of this kind are Kjeld von Folsach, *Islamic art. The David Collection,* (Copenhagen, 1990) and André Leth, *The David Collection. Islamic Art* (Copenhagen, 1975).

6 "Art from the World of Islam 8th—18th century," *Louisiana Revy* vol. 27, no. 3, March, Humlebæk 1987; Kjeld von Folsach and Anne-Marie Keblow Bernsted, W*oven Treasures—Textiles from the World of Islam,* (Copenhagen, 1993); *Sultan, Shah, and Great Mughal. The history and Culture of the Islamic World,* eds. Kjeld von Folsach, Torben Lundbæk and Peter Mortensen, The National Museum, (Copenhagen, 1996).

Insular and Islamic Cosmophilic Responses to the Classical Past

Nancy Netzer

This catalogue and the accompanying exhibition are devoted to a wide-reaching exploration of the classification, development and uses of ornament in the Islamic lands. In their essay and catalogue entries Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom argue that the pervasive use of ornament on art and architecture between the seventh century and the modern era in Islamic lands from Spain to India is a pre-eminent factor unifying Islamic art. They demonstrate that ornament applied to objects made in the Islamic world may be divided roughly into four categories—figural, epigraphic, geometric and vegetal—and that each type develops in different ways over time, sometimes in response to the arts in neighboring cultures to the east and west. Moreover, Blair and Bloom examine how artisans in Islamic lands, by substituting decorative motifs from their own vocabularies and changing the relative importance of individual motifs, translate forms, inherited either from the Classical world of Greece and Rome or from China, into their own aesthetics (for example, **nos. 13, 84, 85, 95**).

These observations call to mind the use of ornament in another culture contemporaneous with the earliest Islamic objects. In the style of art usually referred to as "Insular," produced primarily in Ireland from the sixth to the beginning of the eleventh century and in Britain from the seventh to the ninth century, ornament is equally predominant and essential. In the Insular world, shared ornamental motifs unify secular and sacred objects—in this case Christian—as well as media ranging from metalwork to manuscripts to sculpture in stone, wood and bone. As in the Islamic world, so in the Insular world, there arose a decorative style that broke with conventions of ornament used in Classical antiquity.

The present exhibition includes a splendid doorhandle, a lion head with a knocking function (**no. 103**), probably made in Southern Italy (possibly in Sicily) in the late eleventh or early twelfth century.[1] This object enables us to assess in microcosm the role of ornament and the guiding principles of its use in Islamic and Insular works of art. It invites comparison with an Insular counterpart (fig. 1), a cast bronze, composite

Fig. 1. Lion doorhandle, early 8th centruy, Donore, County Meath, Ireland, copper alloy, tinned, glass, diameter 13.5 cm. National Museum of Ireland, 1985: 21b,d,e

lion-head doorhandle datable to the early eighth century, excavated from a bank of the Moynalty River at Donore (County Meath), Ireland, in 1985.[2] Both works derive from archetypes in pagan imagery of Classical antiquity that used lion heads with rings through their mouths as handles on doors and furniture. Both result from a selection of, and a recasting of, forms from the Classical past to create a functional object whose aesthetics resonated with the needs of their times and cultures. The craftsmen of both cultures remembered certain aspects of the visual language of the revered Greco-Roman world and remembered to forget other aspects.[3] Consequently, examination of the remembered and the forgotten reveals much about the function of ornament in each culture. I shall briefly describe lion handles from the pagan world of Antiquity, before discussing, first, the Insular and, then, the Islamic example.

Fig. 2. Lion Doorhandle, 4th century, Beisan (ancient Scythopolis), Palestine, copper alloy, 12.8 x 12.2 x 5.3 cm, diam of ring 7.3 cm. University of Pennsylvania Museum, 29-108-106

Lion heads with rings in their mouths, cast in bronze or lead, commonly decorate the doors of pagan, and later on, early-Christian funerary monuments, temples, and churches. The fierce and threatening "king of beasts" stares at the visitor, vigilantly guarding the inside. Only a small number of these early examples survives (fig. 2 provides an example),[4] but the type is known from reproductions of monuments on Antique ivories and stone sarcophagi. It follows a common formula. The naturalistic head is frontal with protruding muzzle, wide-open eyes, menacing teeth, and a ring suspended from its mouth; its three-dimensional tufted mane, realistic yet stylized in varying degrees of abstraction, gradually merges either into a flat, round flange or onto the door itself. The development of the lion handle from the fifth century BCE through Late Antiquity was first examined by the German art historian Erich Meyer.[5] More recently, Ursula Mende[6] reviewed the Greco-Roman history of the form. She extended the study through the Middle Ages by cataloguing all the then-known examples from about 800 CE (Charlemagne's monumental bronze doors on his Palace Chapel in Aachen) to the early sixteenth century. The catalogue of more than two hundred examples, published before the Donore discovery and before the David doorknocker came to the attention of scholars, reveals that the type was especially popular on both wood and bronze doors of German and Italian churches during the twelfth century, a period nineteenth-century art historians called Romanesque because of its dependence on Roman architectural forms and decorative motifs. Like most labels, Romanesque characterizes only a part of the style. It overlooks significant Insular and Byzantine influences that blend with artistic inventiveness to produce the prevailing style during this period.

Donore handle

The Donore handle is part of a hoard of nine bronze decorated backplates, rings, and frames. The pieces appear to be related to each other and to be fragments of doorhandles of various forms. Nothing is known of the reasons for, or the date of, their burial. Lack of wear, except on the ring pulls, suggests the Donore handles were used inside, possibly on an interior church door, a tomb-shrine, or a large tabernacle. Regardless of their placement, they appear to have been carefully removed, perhaps in anticipation of an impending Viking raid. From the nine fragments only one complete handle can be reconstructed (fig. 1). This handle comprises three pieces, each bearing the same incised "x" assembly mark: a circular back plate, a broken circular frame with four projecting lugs for nails, and a tang with lion head holding a ring in its mouth.[7] In its composite construction alone, then, the Insular example breaks with the Greco-Roman tradition of such handles, on which the lion and plate are cast as one and the ring, often made of iron, is added.[8]

The ornament on the Donore handle stems from a European tradition different from the Greco-Roman. A short survey of the characteristics of Insular ornament and its sources explains the relationship of the Donore handle to its Antique archetype. Some roots of the Insular ornament grew from the art of the Celtic peoples who populated most of Europe before the Romans, but who, by the fifth century CE, were restricted to the island of Ireland, Northern and Western Britain and the peninsula of Brittany in Northwest France. Ireland (the land of the Scotti, as the Romans called it) escaped invasion by the

Romans and maintained throughout the early Middle Ages a distinct artistic culture closely related to that of the Celts from the middle of the fifth century BCE. The style, based on varieties of interconnected curvilinear forms, is known as La Tène, after the site on Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland, where a significant hoard of objects bearing this type of ornament was excavated and the style was first identified. Established in Ireland and Britain in the second century BCE, La Tène style, which emphasizes non-figurative, abstract geometric ornament, survived in areas that escaped Roman occupation—i.e., Ireland and Northern Britain. The four ornamental elements of La Tène style (fig. 3) that become mainstays and strongly influence the development of what is referred to as the Ultimate La Tène subcategory of Insular style are (1) SPIRALS of various forms and complexities, (2) TRUMPETS, formed by two divergent curves linked by a lentoid feature or concave curve forming a mouth, (3) PELTAE, shaped from three arcs like a mushroom, and (4) TRISKELES, formed by three spirals radiating from a central point. Each of these elements can be linked to others, thus the decoration may expand or contract indefinitely to cover any surface. Such continuous linking forces the viewer's eye to wander in order to comprehend the design. Another aspect of the La Tène style, one that parallels a tendency in Islamic art, is that designs are often formed by both positive and negative spaces, what Blair and Bloom call "willful ambiguity"(p. 24).

The other principal component of the Insular ornamental synthesis derives from forms of decoration imported by Germanic (specifically Anglo-Saxon) raiders into the east of Britain beginning in the fifth century. Close contacts between the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century, due largely to missionary activity, are responsible for the amalgam that we know as Insular art. Among the techniques and motifs introduced into the mix by the Anglo-Saxons are gilding, filigree, faceted engraving, the juxtaposition of varied ornamental forms with each contained in a discrete panel, abstracted birds and beasts, and interlace. The latter device comes from the Classical world of the Mediterranean and may have been imported to Britain from Egypt, Byzantium, or Italy. Whatever its immediate source,[9] interlace was adopted and developed by Anglo-Saxon artists to decorate both positive and negative spaces of various sizes and shapes. Moreover, Anglo-Saxons marry interlace with their abstracted animals to create a unique form of zoomorphic interlace. The abstraction of the animals frequently deprives them of their identity as recognizable species; their bodies are often ribbon-like and contorted with heads and feet widely separated, limbs and jaws extended, and their joints indicated by spirals. In short, Insular artists were anything but mindless copiers.

As Christianity increasingly took hold in both Ireland and Britain in the sixth and seventh centuries, the blending of Celtic and Germanic motifs that characterizes Insular ornament was adapted to Christian iconography and objects. Like their Islamic counterparts, Insular artists rethought Greco-Roman illusionistic models, adapting them to achieve a solution of great complexity and refinement that met their own aesthetic needs.

For the Donore handle, the artist reinterprets the illusionistic effect of the Classical archetype by substituting, from the Insular repertoire, a beast head with small upright ears, scalloped rows of upper and lower teeth, and Ultimate La Tène decorative motifs. A stylized triangular nose has two circles with complex triskeles to approximate nostrils. Linked s-scrolls, expanding and contracting in size to fill the space, indicate hair on the muzzle, while the overall pattern of tightly wound and interlocked triskeles, spirals and trumpets on the top and back of the head that forms the mane, denotes wildness. The application of decorative motifs to approximate naturalistic features on figural forms is a use of ornament common in the Insular world.

Fig 3. spiral trumpet pelta triskele

Also in keeping with the Insular tradition is the division of the Donore backplate into discrete ornamental bands. Each of two concentric rings bears a different ornamental design cut away from the tinned surface to reveal the hatched ground below. Within the designs, positive and negative spaces are carefully balanced, with the dramatic effect heightened by the sharp contrast between the silver-colored (tin) positive pattern and gold-colored (bronze) negative ground. The design in the outer ring, carefully constructed with the aid of a compass and finished by hand, picks up the design on the mane in ten large spiral scrolls containing triskeles and various configurations of smaller linked trumpets and spirals. The ten scrolls are, in turn, linked to

each other by trumpets and smaller spirals. The design propels the viewer's eye around the disk in perpetual circular motion, an effect foreign to the more staid conception of the Greco-Roman lion handles.

Similarly, the inner ring of the Donore backplate forces the eye to move around to comprehend the logic of its even more complex and densely constructed zoomorphic interlace. Here six large beasts and six small beasts of multiple species are shown in profile. Their elongated bodies, limbs, tails, and jaws interlace with themselves and those of adjacent animals to create a dizzyingly energized and compelling, shining, gold and silver pattern whose construction and overall appearance provide a lively contrast to the curvilinear decoration on the outer ring. Both designs are perfectly balanced and appear symmetrical, yet in small details they whimsically defy symmetry. In place of a naturalistic lion's mane, one finds on the Donore backplate a virtual encyclopedia of the principal Anglo-Saxon and Celtic decorative elements that come together to form the Insular style.[10] The ornament seemed to convey to its viewers that it had something for everyone. It served as an analogue for the cultural and ethnic diversity of its eighth-century, east-midland Irish audience, likely to have been a mix of clerics of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon heritage. In adopting the Classical lion-headed form, the handle bespeaks an acknowledgment of the Roman origins of the church. The form's reinterpretation by an "overlay" of Insular ornament, however, triumphantly declares the autonomy of the church in Ireland.

David Doorknocker

The doorknocker in the David Collection (no. 103) falls chronologically into the Romanesque period in Western Europe, where it was made. A kufic inscription encircles the lion's head. Transliterated and translated, it reads, *bism Illah al-rahman al-rahim, ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah, wa-anna Muhammadan rasul Allah,* (In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; I attest that there is no god but God and I attest that Muhammad is the Prophet of God).

Although the doorknocker finds contemporary counterparts on Italian church doors, especially that from Canosa,[11] this inscription leaves little doubt that it was commissioned for use in a Muslim context in Southern Italy, perhaps in Sicily where Muslims, who had reigned over the island until 1091, dwelt peacefully under Norman rule until 1161. Blair and Bloom have observed that, written in the first person, the inscription makes it seem as though the lion proclaims his faith in God and His prophet Muhammad when, in use, the cock head on the ring strikes the backplate.[12] At a little over forty-one centimeters in diameter, the David example is much larger than the Donore handle (13.1 cm) and, in fact, larger than most on medieval church doors. It must have decorated the door of a luxurious and monumental building, be it a residence or a mosque. The inclusion of a concentric inscription on the backplate is without parallel among surviving Greco-Roman lion handles. Rather, it appears to be a western medieval invention of the Romanesque period, found on church doors in Italy, France, and Germany.[13] On many of these examples, the Latin inscription, usually identifying the donor and/or craftsman, is written in unadorned, evenly spaced letters, making it readily legible. The latter seems to have been a priority for the designer of the David doorknocker as well. Displaying the Islamic cosmophilia, the floriated kufic letters of the inscription are linked and energized by an underlying arabesque scroll that fills the interstices between letters. This arabesque keeps the eye moving clockwise as the viewer reads the inscription. As a result, the pronouncement of faith almost seems to swirl around the lion's head in a golden glow of metal, originally enhanced by niello (now mostly lost) in the background.

Although the figural design of the lion's head exhibits Classical impulses toward naturalism, the features have been simplified into geometric shapes with enlarged tear-shaped eyes, large, curved upper lips, and a long, wide nose. Such abstractions may recall those found on the head of a lion on a silver boss that was produced during the Sasanian dynasty in fourth-century Iran and is now in the British Museum.[14] However, there are no distinctive Islamic features on this rendering. Were the inscription missing, the object might well have been classified as coming from an Italian Romanesque church. This provokes the question of whether classifying this object, or any other for that matter, as "Islamic" on the basis of an inscription alone is justified. Moreover, the mirrored spirals, depicting pupils of the eyes, and the rows of triangles to emphasize facial contours are unusual features that find their closest parallels respectively on bronze Romanesque sculpture in Apulia, most notably a lion doorhandle on the cathedral at Troia, and on

a bronze lion (now on loan to the Metropolitan Museum, New York) attributed most recently to a South Italian workshop of the late eleventh or twelfth century.[15] The ornament on the backplate provides no illusion of depth. The head does not gradually merge into the plate by means of the mane. Rather, the lion's flame-like mane is indicated on the backplate by divided loops arranged in three concentric rows that curl in alternate directions. This abstracted mane, as well as the linked spirals etched on the side of the lion's head, and the cast, linked spirals, with trumpets flanking the naturalistic cock's head on the ring, may be seen as "cosmophilic" interpretations of the Classical model that one might well find on either an Insular or an Islamic object. Indeed, similar rows of curls, albeit all facing in the same direction, appear on perhaps the most splendid depiction of a lion produced in the Insular world, the Echternach Gospels,[16] datable to around 700 CE. The linked spirals and trumpets discussed above are omnipresent on Insular objects, including the Donore handle. The Insular component in the Romanesque decorative synthesis may explain the presence of these ornamental features on a doorknocker from Southern Italy. Such motifs, because of their similarity in outline and possibility for expansion to the arabesque (one of the principal forms of decoration on Islamic objects explored in this exhibition), may have seemed particularly attractive to the artisan, who may have been either Christian or Muslim.

Feasts for the eye, both the Donore and the David door mounts embody the concept of cosmophilia. The David example is more restrained in its application of ornament. The craftsman chooses to "remember" more of the Classical archetype. As is typical in Islamic art, the lion is imbued with greater naturalism, the head being subjected to minimal abstraction through the application of rows of simple engraved motifs. On the Donore example, lavish surface ornamentation of the backplate denies illusionism. The Donore metalworker "remembers" only enough to make his handle recognizable as an antique type, in effect making only a quick nod to the past. A distinctly Insular vocabulary of decorative motifs triumphs over Classical illusionism with the result that the Donore handle was not read like its Islamic counterpart. Rather, the Donore handle communicated as an image of contemplation; after close inspection it visually conveyed, through the juxtaposition of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon ornamental forms, the richness and vitality of the blending of Irish and Anglo-Saxon cultures taking place in monastic communities in Ireland at the beginning of the eighth century.

While very different in appearance and overall effect, the two door mounts nonetheless manifest several of the organizing principles of Islamic ornament that Bloom and Blair outline in this volume, namely, repetition of forms, apparent symmetry of design, juxtaposition of different motifs, layering of interlaced designs, framing in discrete panels, and predilection for abstraction.[17] The sharing of these features on two objects deriving from the same archetype produced in distant medieval cultures provides clear evidence that artists in the Islamic lands, who created their objects under the spell of love for ornament, were not alone. Craftsmen in at least one other area of the medieval world, one to the far north and west, manifested these same priorities, suggesting that it may be time to rethink our traditional division of works of art produced during the Middle Ages primarily along religious lines.

I thank Sheila Blair, Jonathan Bloom, and Naomi Rosenberg for comments that improved this essay. Errors are my own.

Endnotes

1 For detailed discussion of the dating, localization, style, function and composition of the David doorknocker, see Joachim Meyer and Peter Northover, "A Newly Acquired Islamic Lion Door Knocker in the David Collection," *Journal of the David Collection* 1 (2003) 48-71.

2 National Museum of Ireland acc. no. 1985:21b, d, e. The Donore hoard (acc. nos. 1985: 21a-l) was an accidental discovery made during preparation for drainage work. For discussion of the find-spot and excavation and full description of the objects, see Michael Ryan, "The Donore Hoard: Early Medieval Metalwork from Moynalty, near Kells, Ireland," *Antiquity* 61 (1987): 57-63; and Susan Youngs, ed. *The Work of Angels: Masterpieces of Celtic Metalwork, 6th -9th Centuries A.D.* (London, 1989) nos. 67-68.

3 For a general discussion of medieval uses of Classical forms, see Nancy Netzer, "Modes of Remembering the Classical Past." *Memory and the Middle Ages.* Eds. Nancy Netzer and Virginia Reinburg. (Chestnut Hill, MA, 1995) 7-16.

4 For reproductions of extant examples and discussion see Erich Meyer, "Antike Turzieher," *Festschrift Eugen von Mercklin* (Waldsassen, 1964) 80-89.

5 See Meyer.

6 Ursula Mende, *Die Türzieher des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1981) esp. 128-136.

7 Ryan 57-63.

8 For Greco-Roman examples, see Meyer; for discussion of fragments that may have come from similar Insular handles, see Ryan p. 62 and Youngs, nos. 67-68.

9 The first extant evidence of Insular interlace is in a mid-seventh-century fragment of a Gospel Book now in Durham Cathedral (A II.10, fol. 3v). See Jonathan Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts 6th to the 9th Century* (London, 1978) no. 5.

10 All of these motifs find close parallels on the splendidly illuminated pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels (London, British Library Cotton MS Nero D.IV.; Alexander 1978, no. 9.) produced in the monastic scriptorium at Lindisfarne in Northern England at the beginning of the eighth century. For discussion, see Michelle Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society Spirituality and the Scribe* (London, 2003) 291-296. Ryan (p. 62) points out that the closest comparison to Donore's outer ring of ornament is found on the back side of the splendid Tara brooch (National Museum of Ireland, acc. no. R4015) found in Ireland at Bettystown in County Meath.

11 Meyer and Northover 60-63.

12 See no. 103 in this volume; for other possible interpretations, see Meyer and Northover 55-59.

13 For examples, see Mende nos. 23, 25, 63.

14 BM (WAA) 134358. See J.P.C. Kent and K.S. Painter, eds. *Wealth of the Roman World: Gold and Silver AD 300-700* (London, 1977) 155.

15 For discussion, see Meyer and Northover 60.

16 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 9389, fol. 75v. See Alexander, no. 21.

17 See pp. 18-25 in this volume.

Adolf Loos, Alois Riegl, and the Debate on Ornament in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna[1]

Claude Cernuschi

In his controversial essay of 1908, "Ornament and Crime," the architect, cultural critic, and polemicist Adolf Loos proclaimed a culture's intellectual and moral development to be directly proportional to its rejection of decorative ornament. In our modern age, he wrote, "we have out-grown ornament, we have struggled through to a state without ornament. Behold, the time is at hand, fulfillment awaits us. Soon the streets of cities will glow like white walls!"[2] But the euphoric tone of this passage is deceptive. The modern city of "Ornament and Crime" bears little, if any, resemblance to the turn-of-the-century Vienna Loos made his home, a city slowly but gradually falling prey to the aesthetics of the Viennese Secession—Austria's own local version of Art Nouveau. Under the tutelage of Joseph Maria Olbrich, architect of the Secession's exhibition building, and Gustav Klimt, its intellectual and artistic leader, the Secession favored curvilinear forms, luxurious materials, decorative surfaces, and, of course, ornament. Loos's intent in writing "Ornament and Crime," then, was not to celebrate the implementation of a utopian ideal, but to decry its perversion, not to rejoice in the taste of his contemporaries, but to vilify and impede their increasing infatuation with the decorative. To be sure, the Secession proved controversial at first; to Loos's increasing dismay, however, it soon gained public recognition and even state sponsorship. The streets did not "glow like white walls" in fin-de-siècle Vienna, and the austere yet brilliant city of "Ornament and Crime" was nothing more than a fictive ideal. More than anything, Loos wrote to vent his frustration; he may have called for the removal of ornament, but by his own admission: "there are hob goblins who will not allow it to happen. Humanity is still to groan under the slavery of ornament."[3]

The very virulence of Loos's rhetoric—his explicit association of ornament with criminality in particular—suggests that there is more at stake in his argument than the mere presence of surface decoration on architectural sites or objects of every day use. Ornamentation, after all, can be considered criminal only if one assumes, as did Loos, that artistic decisions are moral decisions. To make this case, the architect takes his readers on a tortuous and complex route of arguments, directives, and value judgments. First, implicit in Loos's view that the evolution of culture is "synonymous with the removal of ornament,"[4] is the very assumption that culture is evolving in an incremental, cumulative manner, and that modern culture, per force, embodies its most advanced incarnation. In our present contemporary intellectual climate, many would readily find this position objectionable; but from an already tenuous assumption, another soon follows: though reflecting the moral and aesthetic precepts of one's culture is inevitable, borrowing the precepts of an earlier, "less sophisticated" culture is tantamount, for Loos, to both aesthetic and moral regression. Papuans, he proclaims, are "amoral" because they devour their enemies. Being amoral does not necessarily make Papuans criminal, but if a modern man devours his enemies he is not only amoral, he is a criminal as well. Thus, *mutatis mutandis*, it follows that although a Papuan "tattoos his skin, his boat, his oar, in short, everything that is within his reach," he cannot be considered "criminal."[5] But if a modern man

"tattoos himself," Loos asserts, he is "a criminal or a degenerate."[6]

Loos did not choose the word "degenerate" at random. According to Brigitte Hamann, it "was a fashionable term in fin-de-siècle Vienna…used in virtually all areas of life. It meant 'strayed from one's kind' or 'alienated from one's kind' and referred to behavior 'inimical to one's nature'."[7] In other words, to follow the precepts of one's culture may be amoral (assuming, of course, those precepts are so labeled by Loos), but infinitely worse is to descend the evolutionary ladder, to regress to an earlier, less advanced (and presumably even less moral) state of civilization. For Loos, such a course of action is nothing short of criminal. No wonder, he continues, "there are prisons where eighty percent of the inmates bear tattoos. Those who are tattooed but are not imprisoned are latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats. If a tattooed person dies at liberty, it is only that he died a few years before he committed a murder."[8] If Loos's polemic, full of sarcasm and irony as much as indignation, strikes a contemporary audience as somewhat perplexing, his intent is clear: to reform society by reforming art. Since ornament is a vestige of, and only appropriate to, an earlier, less "advanced" stage of civilization, then the Viennese Secession, by regressing to that stage, betrays both its responsibility to be modern, and the moral and intellectual level which is ostensibly its own. For Loos, the Secession threatened the moral fabric of culture the way a criminal threatens the ethical fabric of society.

If this point of view may seem somewhat unorthodox to us today, its effect on Loos's fellow Viennese was not altogether different. He may have decried the Secession's embrace of ornament, but the geometric severity of his own buildings (when he procured patrons interested enough for construction to proceed) was not enthusiastically received. Allegedly, the Emperor Franz Josef himself changed the very location of his Imperial living quarters in the *Hofburg* expressly to avoid seeing Loos's building on *Michaelerplatz* from his window, and, moreover, refused to leave the palace by any gate from which that same detested structure could be seen. The building was so controversial, in fact, that—even before its completion—a municipal order was drafted to suspend construction. The intensity of these scandals, however, should not, from the other side, hide the degree to which Loos was a child of his age. His views on architecture may have run afoul of Secessionist aesthetics, or even of contemporary Viennese taste in general, but underlying his association of ornament with crime was the Darwinian logic of late-nineteenth-century biological science: namely, the widely endorsed hypothesis that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. At the very outset of his essay, Loos writes: "In the womb the human embryo passes through all the development stages of the animal kingdom. At the moment of birth, human sensations are equal to those of a newborn dog. His childhood passes through all the transformations which correspond to the history of mankind. At the age of two, he sees like a Papuan, at four, like a Teuton, at six like Socrates, at eight like Voltaire."[9]

The inclusion of such evolutionary rhetoric in an essay on aesthetics may seem logically, even discursively misplaced. Yet against the assumption that the development of culture coincides with the elimination of ornament, Loos intimates that any recourse to ornament is tantamount to violating the biological order of nature, i.e., the very Darwinian evolutionary postulate upon which much of the Western late-nineteenth-century scientific and intellectual edifice rested. Loos thus cleverly sets up aesthetics, ethics, and biology in a triangular structure whose every part somehow interlocks with the other. His rhetorical move lies, not so much in attempting to validate his aesthetic judgments in a tangible or demonstrable way, but in putting *an ethical spin on the nature of these judgments*—judgments whose very legitimacy are made to revolve around the Darwinian pivot of evolutionary theory. In this way, ideological debates pretend to transcend their local, ideological character, and aesthetic choices are presented as unimpeachable by virtue of the very moral stances they uphold—stances, in turn, whose morality hinges on their reflecting and upholding the "natural order."[10]

Implicit in Loos's conflation of aesthetic regression and moral degeneracy, however, lies yet another argument: an epistemological one. This argument is not explicit in "Ornament and Crime," but it is clearly articulated in a host of previous essays where Loos construes decoration as a subset of deception. "Imitation," Loos regrets, "has dominated the entire building industry. Wall coverings are made out of paper, but this they may by no means show. They must retain the patterns of damask silk or Gobelin tapestries. Doors and windows are made out of softwood. But since hardwood is more expensive,

the softwood must be painted to look like it. Iron must be painted to look like bronze or copper.... It is characteristic of our Viennese situation that I who am against the violation of materials, who have combated imitation energetically, am dismissed as being a 'materialist.' Just look at the sophistry: these are the people who attribute such a value to materials that they have no fear of their becoming characterless and who freely resort to surrogates."[11] Since materials have their own intrinsic formal properties, violating these properties, in Loos's mind, is nothing short of forgery. Ethics and aesthetics are thus interchangeable because one's very choice and use of materials raises fundamental issues of truth versus falsehood, of the genuine versus the surrogate. Loos was so outraged over fin-de-siècle Viennese architecture that he even compared Vienna to the Ukrainian villages built by the Russian statesman Potemkin to impress Catherine the Great (the villages, though outwardly imposing, were actually made of nothing but canvas and pasteboard). "The Potemkin of which I wish to speak here," wrote Loos, "is none other than our dear Vienna herself [where]...in the interest of rentability, the landlord is forced to nail on [buildings] a particular kind of facade."[12] Loos thought he had seen through the deception, and chastised those deceitful enough to practice what he called a strategy of imitation by proclaiming: "The human soul is too lofty and sublime for you to be able to dupe it with your tactics and tricks."[13] For Loos, then, aesthetics and ethics were subsets of epistemology, of a theory of truth whose ultimate purpose was "to distinguish real from counterfeit."[14]

As if collapsing the difference between ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology were not convoluted enough, Loos's critique of ornament also raised a number of disconcerting political issues. The same disturbing anti-feminist rhetoric often spouted during the fin-de-siècle, for example, sometimes emerges in some of his critical writings. And given his predilections for Darwinian theory, it is perhaps unsurprising that Loos voiced these prejudices in an unmistakably Darwinian tone—i.e., a tone marked by the biologist's proclivity to ascribe an inferior position to women in the evolutionary scale.[15] The essay "Ladies' Fashion" is a case in point. "The clothing of woman," Loos writes, "is distinguished externally from that of the man by the preference for ornamental and colorful effects and by the long skirt that covers the legs completely. These two factors demonstrate to us that the woman has fallen behind sharply in her development in recent centuries. No period of culture has known as great difference as our own between the clothing of the free man and the free woman. In earlier eras, men also wore clothing that was colorful and richly adorned and whose hem reached to the floor.... The lower the culture, the more apparent the ornament. Ornament is something that must be overcome.... The march of civilization systematically liberates object after object from ornamentation."[16] (Given Loos's antipathy towards the ornamentation of Klimt's work, he might have felt his own intuition confirmed when the acknowledged leader of the Secession was often photographed in his long painter's coat, or in garments that reached to the floor.)

But if Loos's aesthetics were somewhat idiosyncratic, his association of women with ornament, and ornament with moral degeneration, was not. His connection between femininity and decoration, in fact, stemmed from a widely disseminated stereotype that women were avaricious and lusted for gold. In the second half of the nineteenth century, women had acquired a significant reputation for being both exceedingly materialist and the willing accomplices of capitalist consumerism. According to Abba Goold Woolson, "The majority of women seem to consider themselves as sent into the world for the sole purpose of displaying dry goods; and it is only when acting the part of an animated milliner's block that they feel they are performing their appointed mission."[17] In a more extreme manner—i.e., in a manner worthy of Loos—Tennie Claflin decried the "woman of fashion" as generating the contemporary taste for "vile bunches of hair, tortured into all conceivable, unnatural shapes, to transform the natural beauty of the head to a hideous, affected thing." "What right have you, Woman of Fashion," Claflin asks, "to thus consume wealth, while children on the next street are crying for bread? Your laces and diamonds, and other superfluous articles of ornamentation which you filch from the public welfare, seeking thereby to hide your deformities or to add to your attractions...".[18] In *The Sexes Compared*, moreover, Eduard von Hartmann, deeply influenced by Darwin and Schopenhauer, also reinforced the view that women were both psychologically disturbed and hungry for material possessions. A woman, he writes, will succumb to "hysteria and melancholy, which

constantly threaten to develop into madness if her will is not satisfied, and her depression dissipated by diversions. The husband has to strain every nerve to obtain the money necessary to satisfy her desires."[19] The obvious consequence of women's "irrational" quest for material possessions, Hartmann insisted, was moral degeneracy and economic waste. Loos's tactic of associating women with decoration, and of placing them on a lower evolutionary echelon, is entirely consistent with the opinions just cited. On this basis, one could make the case that Loos objected to the excessively decorative work of the Secession, not on exclusively aesthetic and epistemological grounds, but also because he construed its penchant for ornament as evoking the very effeminacy to which he and his culture were so opposed.

Looking at the political implication of Loos's critique of ornament from another side, it is no less significant to mention that the predilection for materialistic ostentation often attributed to women was also attributed to another marginalized group: Jews. Since both Jewish and women's emancipation were perceived as imminent threats to the established order, the same stereotypes used to denigrate women in fin-de-siècle culture were frequently applied to Jews; in fact, the characteristics expressed are so close as to be nearly interchangeable: physical frailty and deformity, intellectual backwardness and moral depravity, and, of course, avarice and passion for gold. The general consensus in Vienna 1900 that women were inferior, according to Hannah Decker, prompted "the insistent proclamation of anti-Semites that the proof of the Jews' deficiency lay in their exhibition of traits commonly associated with women. Thus did antifeminism and anti-Semitism unite at the turn of the century."[20] Along similar lines, Otto Weininger (whose book of 1903, *Sex and Character*, was spreading around Europe like wildfire, and especially admired in Loos's intellectual circle) insisted that "Judaism is saturated with femininity, with precisely those qualities the essence of which I have shown to be in the strongest opposition to the male nature... the Jew is more saturated with femininity than the Aryan, to such an extent that the most manly Jew is more feminine than the least manly Aryan."[21] The politician Georg von Schönerer, moreover, proclaimed that it is "unoccupied women who devote themselves to the idiocy of female suffrage, women who have failed in their calling as women or who have no wish to answer it—and Jewesses. They naturally get the support of all the old women of the male sex and of all 'feminists,' that is, those men who are no men."[22] And in 1912, Ludwig Langemann, editor of a journal published by the German League Against Women's Emancipation, wrote that the modern feminism movement, like social democracy, is "an international, foreign body in our national life.... Both movements are, considering the great participation of the Jewish element, international in origin and fight, with equal fanaticism, against all fundamentals of the people's life."[23]

Intriguingly, even if Loos's aesthetic critiques were not explicitly Judeophobic, his praise of functional simplicity at the expense of ornament parallels tendencies widely repeated in contemporary anti-Semitic rhetoric. In correspondence with the historian of literature Alois Brandl, for example, the poet Adolf Pichler decried pieces by a Jewish composer in a manner highly reminiscent of Loos: "Technical virtuosity, obtrusive, everything just pasted on the surface, nothing coming from inside, nothing but Jewish merchandise. How different was the appeal of Palestrina's missa brevis on Sunday: everything simple."[24] Pichler's remarks also typify the way the culture of the time targeted Jewish nouveaux riches for ridicule. In his *Austro-Hungarian Life in Town and Country* of 1905, for example, Francis Palmer describes a certain Baroness whose husband is one of the "great powers upon the Stock Exchange," and whose "annual dressmaker's bill alone would equal the salary of a Cabinet Minister. Red-faced and rotund in form, her figure is a striking contrast to that of the typical Viennese women of the higher classes, and her loud, harsh voice, no less than the splendor of her attire, her carriage, and the livery of her servants, betrays her Semitic origin.... The two greatest forces in Viennese society have come into conflict; the Old-World traditional pride of race, and the modern ideal of the supreme power of gold."[25] Likewise, in *Vienna and the Viennese* of 1902, Maria Hornor Lansdale writes that "Those women, decked out like the show windows of a jeweler's shop...[who wear] ear-rings in the form of hoops, or little coffers or bells, are Jewesses, bankers' wives and millionaires..."[26] Jews themselves, such as Ludwig Oppenheimer, were forced to admit that their coreligionists "affronted" Gentiles by "the provocative manner in which they paraded their wealth."[27] Even Theodor Herzl lamented that: "Fops, up-starts, [and] bejewelled women used to be regarded as representative Jews."[28]

Loos's condemnation of ornament, arguably, fits comfortably within this context. He also decried nouveaux riches and parvenus for their vulgar display of wealth: "The parvenu considers it disgraceful not to be able to adorn himself with diamonds, disgraceful not to be able to wear furs, disgraceful not to be able to live in a stone palace…those people whom he wants to deceive [however]…cannot be fooled."[29] When specifically targeting the *Wiener Werkstätte* and the Secession, Loos qualified ornament as criminal, not only because it ran afoul of his own modern aesthetic sensibilities, but also because of its generation of waste. By cloaking his arguments in economic garb, and, in the process, echoing his culture's nefarious propensity to associate Jews with materialism and profit-seeking, Loos felt justified in stressing that, by increasing the price of objects, ornament "is not only produced by criminals, it commits a crime itself by damaging [a society's] national economy and therefore its cultural development."[30] Since the monies squandered on excessive decoration played to dubious forces such as fashion and pretense, rather than satisfied genuine needs or practical functions, Loos argued that ornament corrupts a culture from within; it manipulates market forces by artificial means, and upsets the natural economic balance between supply and demand. "This," Loos continues, "appears to be the secret of the Austrian national economy."[31]

Given the above, it is not unreasonable to posit the argument that Loos's critique of Secessionist ornament was skewed by political motives. It was common knowledge in turn-of-the-century Vienna that the Secession was highly subsidized by Jewish patrons.[32] Karl Wittgenstein, for instance, the philosopher's father, provided the necessary funding for the completion of Joseph Maria Olbrich's Secession building; the *Wiener Werkstätte*, the Secession's sister organization, were lavishly financed, almost single-handedly, by Fritz Wändorfer—even if to the dismay and alarm of his own family. Of the three critics most supportive of the Secession, two were Jewish (Berta Zuckerkandl and Ludwig Hevesi), while Hermann Bahr, in spite of a early flirtation with anti-Semitism,[33] married a Jew and compiled 38 interviews in a book devoted to the implications and ramifications of anti-Semitism.[34] Many of the women who posed for Klimt's most famous portraits, Margarete Stonborough, Serena Lederer, Fredericke Maria Beer, Elisabeth Bachofen-Echt, and Adele Bloch-Bauer, were all of Jewish descent.[35] And when Klimt's proposed university paintings were causing scandal and controversy among the faculty, Klimt's opponents attempted to defame Klimt and his defender, the art historian Franz Wickhoff, by painting both men as the willing participants in a Jewish conspiracy—even though, as Carl Schorske has already noted, both were in fact Gentiles.[36] For his part, Loos declined to participate in Secessionist exhibitions until, in his own words, "the merchants will be chased from the Temple."[37] And in an essay on Jewish emancipation, he went so far as to say that, although he had nothing against Jews who held fast to their beliefs, those who patronized the Secession were another matter. "Jews who have long since given up the caftan," he writes, "are now happy to take it up again. Because these Secessionist apartment furnishings are nothing but disguised caftans, no less than the names Gold and Silberstein, or Moritz and Siegfried."[38]

Loos may not have been a fierce anti-Semite, at least not one who endorsed a racial definition of Jews (his two closest friends, the essayist Karl Kraus and the poet Peter Altenberg, as well as his second wife, Elsie Grünfeld-Altmann, were converted Jews). But this did not prevent his aesthetic diatribes from being inflected with political meanings. Those inflections may have been subtle, but an astute Viennese of the time would surely have detected them. Not long after its completion, for example, Loos's house of *Michaelerplatz* was referred to as "clean-shaven,"[39] a term that, according to Patrick Werkner, was not innocuous but referenced "the 'beardedness' of the Orthodox Jew." (The Jew, in other words, whose assimilation to modern culture, both symbolically and practically, was contingent on his shaving off his beard.) Werkner states, moreover, that Karl Kraus, who sought to eradicate ornament from language as fiercely as Loos did from architecture, specifically "mocked the Viennese Zionists who, like Theodor Herzl, defiantly grew beards to accentuate their Jewish solidarity." "The unornamented, 'unbearded' house," Werkner concludes, "thus could also be read as a [Loosian] statement against Jewish particularism."[40] Werkner's is a powerful point, which he reinforces by quoting the following passage by Kraus: "I am not taken in by the facade!… I can make tabula rasa. I sweep the street, I loosen the beards, *I shave the ornaments*! [italics mine]."[41] When applied to the Loos house, then, the term "clean-shaven" was far from an innocent metaphor. Indeed, Edward

Timms states that, for Kraus, beards symbolized "what wigs were for the rebellious young men of the eighteenth century: an ostentatious attempt to disguise the inadequacies of the wearer."[42] The psychological motivation behind Kraus's preoccupation with facial hair, he continues, "seems more likely to be ethnic rather than sexual. If shaving is an act of personal conviction, it is so because not shaving was also a matter of conviction, in the Orthodox Jewish tradition which Kraus repudiated. It was the anti-Semitic ambience of Austria-Hungary which gave beards their symbolic force.... He [Kraus] mocked the Zionists for the regressiveness of their 'Assyrian' beards and hair styles, as well as their ideas. Being clean-shaven was part of his attempt to divest himself of all traces of Jewish identity."[43] That contemporary observers referred to Loos's building on *Michaelerplatz* as "clean-shaven" suggests, especially in view of how loaded the term was in fin-de-siècle Viennese culture, that politically alert members of Loos's audience may very well have detected a subliminal anti-Semitic connotation underlying its dearth of ornament.

If the argument of this essay is at all persuasive, however—i.e., that the deprecation of ornament could have conveyed specific gendered and ethnically charged meanings in fin-de-siècle Vienna—then its opposite should also be the case. In other words, if aesthetic debates had a decidedly political edge, then apologias *for* should be no less ideologically charged than attacks *on* decorative ornament. To make this point, we need to turn our attention to a thinker at the opposite end of the spectrum from Loos: the art historian, curator, and theorist Alois Riegl. Given his curatorial experience in a museum devoted to decorative rather than fine arts, Riegl developed a great appreciation for the complexity of the decorative patterns and designs found on textiles and oriental rugs. In his seminal treatise *Stilfragen* (*Problems of Style*), he traced the migrations of ornamental motifs in Ancient vases and architectural structures from culture to culture and from chronological period to chronological period. Intriguingly, his methodological tools were no different from those a mainstream art historian would have brought to bear on issues of stylistic influence in representational art; they were different only insofar as Riegl applied them to allegedly "lesser" idioms such as abstract patterning. On the basis of his extensive formal analyses, Riegl argued that ornament not only had a complex history, but that it also could be studied on the same footing and with the same techniques as figuration: ornament, he wrote, undergoes "the same continuous, coherent development that prevails in the art of all periods, as in the historical relationship between antique mythological imagery and Christian iconographic types."[44]

By studying ornament from a scholarly perspective, thereby raising it to the level of a legitimate, serious art form, Riegl also sought to counteract the materialistic theory of art espoused by Gottfried Semper and his followers, a theory that saw in materials and technique the primary impetus behind art and ornament. In counter-distinction, Riegl introduced the term *kunstwollen* (usually translated as "artistic intention" or "artistic volition") to attribute artistic creativity to other (i.e., national or psychological) impulses. Unrestricted by practical utility or by the physical limitations imposed by materials, these impulses, according to Riegl, could trigger the creation of either representational art or abstract ornament. What is especially noteworthy about Riegl's text, however, is its refusal to praise figuration above abstraction, or to claim, as did Loos, that ornament was an anterior (and thus inferior) mode of representation. Instead, Riegl argued that three-dimensional sculpture could have emerged independently of, or even prior to, abstract patterning because artists could have been inspired to copy animals or human beings directly from nature. Since no models or prototypes existed for drawing, carving, or painting an animal on a flat surface, Riegl counted such a transposition as a "truly creative act."[45] But whether abstraction and figuration evolved autonomously or sequentially, in the end, each, according to Riegl, stands on equal footing. Even abstract patterns found on Greek Geometric vases, he wrote, were created in accordance with "the highest laws of symmetry and rhythm." Yet despite being "the most perfect of styles" from "the standpoint of regularity," Riegl lamented that: "on our scale of values...it occupies the lowest rank."[46]

It was thus among Riegl's self-appointed tasks to undermine the legitimacy of certain hierarchical distinctions. Why, he asked, should one mode be declared superior to another? In his view, all art vacillates between two poles: "at one end a decorative urge demanding a feast for the eyes and at the other a desire to give concrete expression to the most significant ideas and feelings of humanity."[47] Even if decorative patterns are not directly copied from nature, and may have

no visible connection to human affairs, Riegl insisted that the same symmetry and rhythm evidenced in geometric shapes are "apparent in the natural forms of humans, animals, plants, and crystals…it does not require any particular insight to perceive how the basic shapes and configurations of plane geometry are latent in natural things."[48] Since all art continually oscillates between the figural and the abstract, it is invalid to valorize one and impugn the other, or to describe any change between them in terms of an aesthetic "rise and fall." After originating in abstraction, he continues, Ancient Greek art had been characterized by a "drive to depict the objective world and…to master human anatomy and give concrete form to the religious, ethical, and political concepts motivating Hellenic culture. By the last third of the fifth century, this process had reached a point that could hardly be surpassed. Then the delight in decoration once again stirred, pressing toward the other of the two poles between which all art fluctuates."[49]

Both styles are not just equal from a qualitative point of view, but they can even co-exist simultaneously. Since Greek art focused on the human figure, it should hardly be surprising, according to Riegl, if the human figure would also enter "the realm of decoration. It was the task of Hellenic artists to find an appropriate means of combining human figures and tendril ornament."[50] What is most compelling about Riegl's concept of the *kunstwollen*, then, is the broad inclusiveness of its scope, a scope that makes no qualitative distinction between art and ornament. Like his compatriot, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, Riegl apparently rejected the view that works of art have inherent, objective meanings, arguing, instead, that all meanings and values are predicated upon context. (In the *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, Wittgenstein made that most un-Loosian of statements: "One may say of certain objects that they have this or that purpose. The essential thing is that this is a *lamp*, that it serves to give light; —that it is an ornament to the room, fills an empty space, etc., is not essential. But there is not always a sharp distinction between the essential and inessential."[51]) And unlike Loos, Riegl also rejected absolute distinctions between fine and applied art, declaring: "how senseless and unjustifiable it is from the scholarly point of view to make such a distinction."[52] Riegl, in addition, did not connect tattooing with criminal degeneracy, but with natural human impulses and inclinations. "The desire to adorn the body," he wrote, "is far more elementary than the desire to cover it with woven garments, and that the decorative motifs that satisfy the simple desire for adornment, such as linear, geometric configurations, surely existed long before textiles were used for physical protection."[53] For Riegl, then, "All of art history presents itself as a continuous struggle with material; it is not the tool—which is determined by the technique—but the artistically creative idea that strives to expand its creative realm and increase its formal potential."[54]

On his own account, Riegl was able to detect the cross-fertilization of ornamental motifs across different cultures and geographical locales precisely because his rejection of a progressive theory of aesthetics unburdened him from the biases commonly held against decorative abstraction. If Loos saw the appropriation of ornament as regressive, especially if its origins were foreign, Riegl was especially sensitive to the nuances of cross-cultural interchange; in fact, he devoted the entire last section of *Stilfragen*, "The Arabesque," to the relationship between Islamic and Western art. "I find it exasperating," Riegl admitted, "and explicable only as one of the many unfortunate consequences of the materialist theory of art—that even highly experienced specialists still blithely dismiss any possibility of a relationship between the Oriental Arabesque and classical antiquity just as there can be no relation between fire and ice."[55] Some decorative patterns characteristic of Islamic ornament, he continues, were "already latent in Greek art, waiting only to be sparked by the desire for greater abstraction" that would later promote them into "major formal element[s]."[56] Not only was it possible for cross-cultural interchange to have salutary results, but, for Riegl, social and religious motives (i.e., motives extraneous to the aesthetic) also had to factor into any persuasive explanation of stylistic change. Although he conceded how difficult it proved to identify the specific point at which ornament produced in regions from the Byzantine Empire annexed by Islam began to diverge from its Byzantine precedents—i.e., because art in both regions initially followed analogous lines of development irrespective of political boundaries—he nonetheless recognized that the drive towards ornament increased "in areas where figurative representation was deliberately inhibited, if not out-rightly suppressed by religious statutes and where art, as a result, was essentially limited to satisfying the decorative urge and to ornament

alone."[57] In other words, Riegl detected hitherto overlooked formal connections among the art of two separate cultures; and, more importantly, by refusing to judge art according to fixed, pre-established criteria, he was able to ascribe any formal divergences to the function the art serve in the specific culture's socio-religious dynamic. In so doing, he unhinged art from any universal, transcultural, or absolutist set of values, recognizing, instead, that creativity is subject to conditions that can only qualify as time-bound and context-specific.

Of course, Riegl's position is not free of problems: his interpretations are neither devoid of errors,[58] nor of a proclivity (typical of his time) to praise Greek artistic achievements with special vigor. The concept of the *kunstwollen*, moreover, is so nebulous that even Riegl's followers strongly disagree as to its precise meaning.[59] Yet what distinguishes Riegl from Loos is his greater sensitivity to the wide diversity and plurality of human creativity. For the likes of Riegl and Wittgenstein, conceptualizing a persuasive theory of representation precluded ascribing truth to one kind of artistic style and falsehood to another. If only on this basis, Riegl and Loos's positions are intellectually incompatible. But the emergence of Riegl's ideas in Viennese fin-de-siècle culture—a culture where aesthetics and politics formed such a strong alliance—invites further speculation as to whether Riegl's aesthetic inclusiveness also had notable *political* implications; and, more to the point, whether these implications could have opposed the very sectarian antifeminism and anti-Semitism so virulently espoused in the Habsburg Empire. In other words: if the aesthetic *exclusiveness* of Loos's critique of ornament reflected *political* exclusiveness, could the aesthetic *inclusiveness* of Riegl's apologia for ornament have reflected a desire for *political* inclusiveness?

To appreciate the specific ways in which Riegl's writings may have satisfied such an agenda, it is significant to mention Riegl's intellectual debt to his teacher Robert Zimmerman, a philosopher whose own formation was profoundly indebted to the worldview of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz. Leibniz is an important thinker to introduce in this context because his philosophy offered a clear counter-example to the vitriolic and divisive character of Viennese politics. In his "Monadology," Leibniz saw the universe as a harmonious system comprised of interconnected parts—what he called monads. "All matter," he declared, "is connected.... Not only is every body affected by those which are in contact with it," he argued, "and responds in some way to whatever happens to them, but also by means of them the body responds to those bodies adjoining them, and in their intercommunication reaches to any distance whatsoever. Consequently every body responds to all that happens in the universe..."[60] All of these elements fit together in what Leibniz calls a "preestablished harmony between all substances, since they are all representations of one and the same universe."[61] This harmony, moreover, functions like a perfect government under whose aegis no noble action goes "unrewarded and no evil action unpunished; everything must turn out for the well-being of the good."[62] In the Habsburg Empire, Leibniz had exercised a powerful influence during the early nineteenth century, especially among intellectuals and politicians eager to implement Enlightenment ideals of universal order and harmony. On a practical level, Leibniz's influence manifested itself above all in attempts to engender cooperation among the various nationalities and ethnic groups of the Empire—especially between Czechs and Germans—as well as to placate the very tensions that, with World War I, were to erupt with such destructive force. According to William Johnston, Robert Zimmerman, whose philosophical works count among the "last great treatises of the Leibnizian tradition...exerted his most lasting impact on [his pupil] the art historian Alois Riegl."[63]

In view of the frequent interconnections between aesthetics and politics in fin-de-siècle Vienna, Riegl's reluctance to privilege representational art over ornament could be construed as an aesthetic parallel to, and philosophical extension of, Zimmerman's fidelity to a Leibnizian view of universal interdependence and harmony. Riegl's breaking down of the barrier between fine and applied art—a barrier Loos sought to maintain at all costs—could also be seen as a counter-pole to what Johnston has called the typically Austrian "delight in polar opposites."[64] In the philosophical arena, resistance to Leibniz came from Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, two philosophers whose influence on the artistic and political currents of the period gradually overtook and eclipsed that of Leibniz. Instead of harmony, Schopenhauer stressed self-preservation as the pervasive principle in the universe.[65] Instead of interconnection and symmetry, Schopenhauer saw the world as driven by strife and division. And if Leibniz exercised a powerful influence on

Zimmerman and Riegl, Schopenhauer exercised his most powerfully on Richard Wagner. Wagner, in turn, provided an inspirational force behind the very German nationalism (and, ironically enough, Herzlian Zionism) scissoring the aesthetic and political landscape of Vienna 1900.[66] Through the example of Wagner, the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche substituted the Leibnizian view of mutual interdependence and harmony with a neo-Romantic cult of genius, a cult to which many members of the Viennese avant-garde subscribed.[67] Connected with that cult was a divisive belief in the superiority of a certain kind of stoic European, who, following the ideas of the Greeks, practiced a life of self-denial unknown to other cultures. Unlike the Greek, Nietzsche writes, "The Roman of the Empire ceased to be Roman through the contemplation of the world that lay at his feet; he lost himself in the crowd of foreigners that streamed into Rome, and degenerated amid the cosmopolitan carnival of the arts, worships and moralities. It is the same with the modern man."[68]

By the time he began articulating the key principles of his late philosophy, Nietzsche was arguing that the most powerful force behind existence—more powerful, even, than self-preservation—is the will to power. In the late nineteenth century, many politicians employed Nietzsche's subversion of Enlightenment ideals to attack the Liberal values that often accompanied them, emboldening those Viennese confident in the legitimacy of certain polar oppositions. Feminism and Jewish assimilation were often decried in the fin-de-siècle precisely because they blurred the distinction between men and women, Christian and Jew, obfuscating what were considered clear and unbridgeable boundaries and questioning the social order that empowered one group as opposed to another. The cult of genius came at the issue from the other side. It encouraged the isolation of the gifted individual from society as prescribed by Nietzsche (a recurrent theme in both the literature of the time[69] and in the work of avant-garde painters such as Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele); but it also contributed to the blind adulation of strong political personalities (e.g., Georg von Schönerer, Karl Lueger, and later Adolf Hitler). Like antifeminism and anti-Semitism, the cult of artistic or political genius managed to counteract the Leibnizian view of balance and consonance by exploiting rather than mitigating oppositions: oppositions between the self and society, the genius and the herd, one political party and another, one nation or race and another, and so on. Intriguingly, those demagogues who championed political or racial division often championed individualism—at least on a rhetorical level, and only insofar as it suited their purposes—which, given Nietzsche's opposition to both German nationalism and anti-Semitism, entailed a gross distortion of his ideas. Regardless, anti-Semitic writers such as Julius Langbehn were not above misusing Nietzsche and claiming individualism to be "the original motive force of all Germanness."[70] Riegl's closeness to Leibniz, of course, made him an altogether different animal. As Henri Zerner put it, he not only argued "for equal treatment for all historical periods," he also sought to "overthrow the supremacy of the individual creator as central to the significance of the work [of art] in favor of a higher communal point of view."[71]

From this perspective, the debate surrounding ornament in fin-de-siècle Vienna transcended the realm of mere aesthetics; or, to put it another way, this debate reflected the intimacy of the connection between ethics and aesthetics, epistemology and politics. For Loos, the division between the structural and the ornamental betrayed a distinction between the real and the illusory, the genuine and the counterfeit. His entire worldview hinged on maintaining strict demarcations between one domain and another. Riegl saw things differently. Which does not mean, of course, that he was intellectually committed to breaking down all distinctions. Refusing to privilege representational over ornamental forms of art, or the fine over the applied arts did not prevent him from endorsing other forms of binary oppositions. Yet those oppositions (e.g., between the optic and the haptic) did not disparage one art form at the expense of another. To fall on Riegl's side of the debate, therefore, does not mean that all categories and distinctions should be banned. Certain oppositions are entirely benign, and without making oppositions of any kind, human thought and intellectual activity would most likely grind to a halt. But others, especially when manipulated by a clever rhetorician, and introduced in a particularly divisive cultural climate, can take on highly charged political ramifications—as did the oppositions this essay has touched upon (structure and ornament, function and decoration, truth and falsehood, male and female, Christian and Jew, German and non-German, Western and

non-Western). And, as has often been stressed in post-structuralist and deconstructionist thought, most binary oppositions are not only arbitrary and culturally constructed, but they invariably tend to valorize one of terms of the opposition above the other. This observation applies to the Viennese fin-de-siècle culture with a vengeance, a culture that not only often exacerbated the oppositions between political parties, aesthetic camps, ethnic groups, but one that also fought to prevent the contamination of one group by the other. The frequency with which terms such as "feminized" or "Judaicized" were used to describe the degeneration of art, language, politics, or the human body itself, bespeaks the extent to which many turn-of-the-century thinkers exploited ethnic slurs and sexist rhetoric to uphold clear and distinct boundaries between the ostensibly "positive" characteristics of a culture and their "negative" counterparts. These oppositions were in place to prevent the "desirable" elements from being polluted by the "undesirable," and to allow those using such dyadic rhetoric to believe that they, and not their rivals, represented the "desirable" pole of the opposition. Riegl's defense of ornament may not have brought those oppositions crumbling down, of course, but it could be construed as a step in the right direction.

I would like to express my gratitude to Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom for their kind invitation to contribute to this catalog, and to Nancy Netzer, Naomi Blumberg, and Susan Forster for their help and assistance. Finally, I dedicate this essay, in friendship, to David Castriota.

Endnotes

1 This essay has been adapted from parts of my book Re/Casting Kokoschka: Ethics and Aesthetics, Epistemology and Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna (Madison and Teaneck, 2002).

2 Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime." The Architecture of Adolf Loos. Arts Council of Great Britain (London, 1985) 100.

3 Loos, "Ornament and Crime," 100.

4 Loos, "Ornament and Crime" 100.

5 Loos, "Ornament and Crime" 100.

6 Loos, "Ornament and Crime" 100.

7 Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship* (New York, 1999) 82.

8 Loos, "Ornament and Crime" 100. It may be significant to mention that Loos's equation of ornament and crime may have been borrowed from the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso who argued that born criminals possessed both nervous systems and bodily frames that resembled those of savages. This also explained, in his view, their predilection for tattoos, a tendency to decorate the body that has "fallen into disuse among the higher classes and only exists among sailors, soldiers, peasants and workmen." Cesare Lombroso, Introduction, *Criminal Man According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso*, by Gina Lombroso Ferrero (New York, 1911) 46. See also, Allan Janik's essay "Weininger and the Science of Sex." *Decadence and Innovation: Austro-Hungarian Life and Art at the Turn of the Century*. Ed. Robert B. Pynsent (London, 1989) 29.

9 Loos, "Ornament and Crime" 100. See also, Burkhardt Rukschcio and Roland Schachel, *Adolf Loos: Leben und Werk* (Salzburg and Vienna, 1982) 57, 59.

10 Loos's ideas may have appeared idiosyncratic to some, but the tone of his rhetoric relies on the popularity of the term "degenerate" in turn of the Century Viennese culture. As Brigitte Hamann writes in *Hitler's Vienn*a, p. 82: "The frequent use [of the word degenerate] around 1900 suggests the popularity of the great doctrine of faith of that time, Darwin's theory of evolution. Following Charles Darwin, who died in 1882, degeneration means the abnormal devolution of plants and animals. For example, everything that contradicted Darwin's law of progress and the permanent evolution toward a better state also was 'degenerate.'

Viennese modernism's turning toward the primitive was also termed 'degenerate' as well, looked upon as a regression that defied nature.... Modernism's appreciation of primitive art contradicted this alleged natural law, and was thus no longer viewed as progress or as an independent form of art, but as 'degeneration,' a fashionable aberration, a sign of decay..."

11 Loos, "Building Materials," Neue Freie Presse, August 28, 1898. *Spoken Into the Void: Collected Essays 1897-1900*. Ed. A. Rossi (Cambridge, MA, 1982) 64-65.

12 Loos, "Potemkin City," *Ver Sacrum*, July 1898. *Spoken Into The Void* 95, 96.

13 Loos, "The Principle of Cladding," Neue Freie Presse, September 4, 1898, *Spoken Into the Void* 69.

14 Loos, "The Principle of Cladding" 69.

15 Darwin, quoted in Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London, 1906) 71: "'If two lists,' Darwin wrote in the *Descent of Man*, 'were made of the most eminent men and women

in poetry, painting, sculpture, music...the two lists would not bear comparison."

16 Loos, "Ladies' Fashion," Neue Freie Presse, August 21, 1898. *Adolf Loos: Spoken Into the Void, Collected Essays 1897-1900*, 102. See also, J. Stewart, Fashioning Vienna: Adolf Loos's Cultural Criticism (London and New York, 2000), and Hélène Furján, "Dressing Down: Adolf Loos and the Politics of Ornament," *The Journal of Architecture* 8 (Spring 2003): 115ff.

17 Abba Goold Woolson, *Woman in American Society* (Boston, 1873) 103.

18 T. C. [Tennessee] Claflin, *Constitutional Equality, A Right of Woman* (New York, 1871), quoted in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York, 1986) 355.

19 Eduard von Hartmann, *The Sexes Compared; and Other Essays*, trans. A. Kenner (London, 1895) 42.

20 Hannah S. Decker, *Freud, Dora, and Vienna 1900* (New York, 1991) 40. See also, Hitler's Vienna 372ff. In *Modernity and Crises of Identity* (New York, 1993) 167, Jacques Le Rider also states: "from Schopenhauer to Baudelaire and Weininger, misogyny and antisemitism develop according to an analogous 'logic'."

21 *Sex and Character* 306.

22 Schönerer in the *Alldeutsches Tagblatt*, January 15, 1907, quoted in Peter G. J. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (New York, 1964) 222; see also, I. Belke's *Die sozialreformischen Ideen von Josef Popper-Lynkeus 1838-1921* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1978) 239.

23 Ludwig Langemann, *Auf falschem Wege. Beiträge zur Kritik der radikalen Frauenbewegung* (Berlin: 1913) 13, 25, quoted in Pultzer 222.

24 Letter of Adolf Pichler to Alois Brandl, Letter 178, 10 April 1886, quoted in S. P. Scheichl, "The Contexts and Nuances of Anti-Jewish Language: Were all the 'Antisemites' Antisemites?" *Jews, Antisemitism and Culture in Vienna*. Eds. Ivar Oxaal, Michael Pollak, and Gerhardt Botz, (London, 1987) 101.

25 Francis Palmer, *Austro-Hungarian Life in Town and Country* (New York and London, 1905) 187-88.

26 M. Hornor Lansdale, *Vienna and the Viennese* (Philadelphia, 1902) 117.

27 [Oppenheimer, Ludwig John] *Austriaca: Betrachtungen und Streiflicher* (Leipzig, 1882) 193. Hugo Bettauer, in his satrical novel *Die Stadt ohne Juden* (New York, 1936) 12, describes a scenario where the chancellor of Austria proposes and then implements a law to expel all Jews from Austria. In his speech, he proclaims: "Who has piled billions upon billions since the ill-starred year 1914? The Jew! Who controls the tremendous circulation of our money, who sits at the director's desk in great banks, who is the head of practically all industries? The Jew? Who owns our theaters? The Jew! Who writes the plays that are produced? The Jew! Who rides about in automobiles, who revels in night resorts, who crowds the cafés and fashionable restaurants, who covers himself and his wife with pearls and precious stones? The Jew!"

28 Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land*, quoted in Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington, 1993) 75.

29 Loos, "Building Materials," *Spoken into the Void* 64.

30 Loos, "Ornament and Crime" 101.

31 Loos, "Ornament and Crime" 102.

32 Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln and London, 1964) 21-22.

33 See George E. Berkley, *Vienna and its Jews: the Tragedy of Success 1880s-1980s* (Lanham, Md, 1988) 73, and Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation top Zionism*, 51.

34 See Bahr's *Der Antisemitismus: ein internationales Interview* (Berlin, 1894).

35 Stephen Beller, V*ienna and the Jews 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1989) 28.

36 Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1985) 239.

37 Loos, "Keramika" *Die Zukunft* 13 (1904), quoted in *Adolf Loos: Leben und Werk*, 55.

38 Loos, "Die Emanzipation des Judentums," Undated Typescript, quoted in *Adolf Loos: Leben und Werk*, 70.

39 Patrick Werkner, "The Child-Woman and Hysteria: Images of the Female Body in the Art of Schiele, In Viennese Modernism, and Today." *Egon Schiele: Art, Sexuality, and Viennese Modernism*. Ed. Patrick Werkner (Palo Alto, 1994) 66.

40 Werkner, "The Child-Woman and Hysteria," n 18, 138. For another point of view, see also, Burkhardt Rukschcio and Roland Schachel, *Adolf Loos: Leben und Werk*, 295.

41 Werkner, "The Child-Woman and Hysteria," n 18, 138.

42 Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (New Haven, 1986) 132.

43 Timms, *Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist* 133-34.

44 Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain and annotated by David Castriota (Princeton, 1992) 8.

45 *Problems of Style* 14.

46 *Problems of Style* 16.

47 *Problems of Style* 82.

48 *Problems of Style* 15.

49 *Problems of Style* 215

50 *Problems of Style* 210.

51 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York, 1958) 30.

52 *Problems of Style* 31.

53 *Problems of Style* 5, 6.

54 *Problems of Style* 33.

55 *Problems of Style* 239.

56 *Problems of Style* 254.

57 *Problems of Style* 287.

58 See David Castriota's annotations in *Problems of Style* 307-96.

59 See Erwin Panofsky, "The Concept of Artistic Volition." *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Autumn 1981): 17-33; and Henri Zerner, "Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism." *Daedalus* 105 (Winter 1976): 177-88.

60 Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, "The Monadology," *The Rationalists: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz* (Garden City, New York, 1974) 465.

61 "The Monadology" 468.

62 "The Monadology" 470.

63 William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938* (Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1983) 288, 289.

64 Johnston, *The Austrian Mind* 1.

65 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols. (New York, 1966) 2: 184, 338; see also Johnston, *The Austrian Mind* 283ff.

66 Michael Pollak, *Vienne 1900: Une identité blessé* (Paris, 1984) 69-71.

67 See *Le Rider, Modernity and Crises of Identity* 26.

68 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York, 1957) 28-29.

69 See the chapter "Individualism, Solitude and Identity Crisis," in Le Rider's *Modernity and Crises of Identity* 30ff.

70 Quoted in *Modernity and Crises of Identity* 59.

71 Zerner, "Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism" 179.

FIGURES

Most people know little about Islamic art, but if they claim to know anything, they know that Islam prohibits figural representation. Not only Westerners but also many Muslims, who aver that the Koran prohibits figural images, repeat this bit of common wisdom, but, as this section of the exhibition readily demonstrates, this statement cannot be true. The Koran, the Muslim scripture, certainly bans idolatry, or the worship of images, so images are not found in mosques and other religious settings. Like people everywhere, Muslims often enjoyed representations of people and animals. Sometimes figures are shown realistically, while in other cases the figures are more abstract, making it possible to interpret the representation in several ways. Because of the fear of idolatry, three-dimensional sculpture is extremely rare in Islamic art, except in cases where the figure is transformed into a useful object, such as a ewer or a fountainhead. Even then, the surface is often denatured with vegetal or arabesque ornament.

Not all Muslims enjoyed figural representations with the same relish. Some pious individuals extended the ban on religious imagery to the secular realm, as in the defaced frontispiece (**no. 16**). Artists in North Africa rarely produced figural imagery, while Iranians produced it constantly. Egyptians (**no. 10**) seem to have liked it only until the twelfth century, although the reasons for the change remain to be uncovered. In India, local traditions of representation were combined with Persianate styles to create a vibrant and distinctive idiom (**no. 18**).

Figural images in Islamic art represent a wide range of subjects. Most surviving works were made for rulers and the wealthy, those classes of society who had the resources to pay for art. It should be no surprise that many of the representations are therefore courtly figures, like the enthroned ruler on the tapestry roundel (**no. 3**), the seated ruler on the bidri flask (**no. 9**), or the royal couple on the enameled bowl (**no. 7**). Other scenes represent courtly pleasures, such as processions and hunting (**no. 18**), drinking (**no. 10**), or feasting (**no. 16**). Animals were perennially popular, whether birds (**nos. 13** and. **14**), peacocks (**no. 19**), rabbits (**no. 15**), rams (**no. 20**), lions (**no. 17**), or mythical combinations of all of the above (**nos. 11** and **21**). Genre scenes also became popular from the eleventh or twelfth century and may represent the emergence of a new bourgeois class of patrons or the illustration of contemporary literature. The scene of a school on the inside of a bowl (**no. 2**) may illustrate a contemporary poem, but the enormous size of the bowl suggests that it was made for a very wealthy patron. The image of scholars on the frontispiece to a manuscript (**no. 4**) evokes the subject of the text, the wisdom of the ancients. But what are we to make of the mother and child on a sumptuous velvet (**no. 6**)? Sometimes these animals are depicted realistically (**no. 20**) while at other times they are transformed into abstract decorative motifs, whether singly (**no. 14**) or in bands (**no. 13**).

In some cases the meaning of these figures seems clear: for example, the fantastic animals on the dagger hilt (**no. 21**) were meant to protect the person who wielded it. At other times, however, it is quite unclear what these figures meant, particularly when they have been stylized

almost beyond recognition (**no. 19**) or on objects that were presumably made in multiples, like ceramics or textiles. Is the lady in a large niche (**no. 1**) simply an idealized figure or is it a portrait of a particular person? Is she meant to represent a woman in this world or a beautiful houri in the next? Was the owner of this textile meant to be surrounded by a dozen panels rather than the single one that has miraculously survived? Given the limited information at hand—medieval authors rarely, if ever, wrote about such matters—we can only speculate about answers to these intriguing questions.

1

VELVET WITH STANDING WOMAN

first half 17th century, India or Iran
Silk and metal lamella spun around silk, 143 x 69 cm
37/1995

This stunning cut-and-voided velvet is a conundrum that illustrates the difficulty of interpreting figural representations in Islamic art. A complete loom width woven in green, red, brown, and two shades of yellow against a silver ground, it shows a life-size female standing in a scalloped niche and holding a flower. Her face is shown in three-quarter profile, but her feet—with delicately drawn toenails—point sideways in a pose reminiscent of ancient Egyptian art. Flowering plants, birds, and animals surround her.

In technique, the velvet is comparable to those made in Iran during the period of Safavid rule when the art of velvet weaving reached its apogee. Despite its Persian technique, the iconography of this piece is distinctly Indian. The cusped arch and naturalistic plant growing from a small clump of earth are typical of architecture and its decoration under the Mughal emperor Shahjahan (r. 1628-58). Both are found, for example, on the Taj Mahal, the monumental tomb Shahjahan built for his wife, which was completed in 1647. The lady's dress, jewels, and coiffure are typically Mughal as well, including the transparent blouse (**no. 18**), the tiara with precious stones and a feather plume, and the hair flowing down her back. Also characteristically Indian is the mark on the woman's forehead, so typical that it was sometimes crudely embroidered on Iranian velvets exported to India, as on a stunning velvet with ladies in a garden once thought to have been in the collection of the Maharajahs of Jaipur (Thompson, no. 8).

The composition of this velvet is also distinct. Typical Safavid cut-and-voided velvets (**no. 6**) show repeated single or paired figures that are smaller (about 30 cm) and set in staggered rows facing in opposite directions. This one, by contrast, shows a single life-size figure. At least one other velvet incorporates Indian-style figures into the standard composition in rows (see Kahlenberg; Spuhler 1978, no. 119), but the scale of this piece is distinct. So is its quality, for other examples (e.g., McClean) are cruder.

The composition of this velvet most closely resembles the type of fabric panels set up to form the royal encampment (**no. 67**). In this case, however, the scalloped niche is filled with not only flowering plants but also a tall female figure. The tall figure fits within a long tradition in the Islamic lands of using such large figural representations to decorate palace walls. The Dar al-Khilafa, the palace at Samarra in Iraq built by the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim (r. 833-42), for example, had many figural murals including one measuring 50 x 50 centimeters, depicting two female dancers carrying wine bowls (Sourdel-Thomine and Spuler 1973, pl. XXIII). The Abbasids' protégés in Afghanistan, the Ghaznavids, imitated metropolitan fashion in the palace at Lashkar-i Bazaar, their capital in southern Afghanistan founded by Mahmud (r. 998-1030). There, an even larger figural mural (Sourdel-Thomine and Spuler 1973, pl. XL) has life-size depictions of the Turkish guard standing at attention behind the throne. This velvet hanging would have been a woven equivalent to a painted mural, a textile substitute for the painted plaster used elsewhere in the Islamic lands.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 663

2

LARGE DISH

late 12th century, Kashan, Iran
Fritware painted in luster over opaque white glaze, outside glazed blue, 11 x 47.5 cm
50/1966

This dish is unusual for its size and complex figural iconography. Most pieces of lusterware painted in reserve on white (the "monumental" style) bear a large depiction of a single seated figure, a horseman, or an animal which occupies most of the surface and is set against a background filled with scrolling arabesques and isolated leaves (Watson 1985). This dish belongs to a small group with more particular scenes and individual designs. Its size (it is one of the largest known: another dish in the Ashmolean Museum (1956-183) is comparable, but most are three-quarters the diameter) allowed the painter space to depict a crowded schoolroom. The figure in the center is a schoolmaster, distinguished not only by his size and position but also by his attributes: he is bearded, wears a turban, and holds a rod in his right hand, and a writing board *(lawh)* in his left. His pupils surround him. Those with shoulder-length hair are presumably boys; those with long plaits are presumably girls. The background is filled not only with bits of scrollwork and scattered leaves but also props typical of a schoolroom: a bookstand, what appears to be a cock-headed ewer at the top (**no. 119**), and a dozen more writing boards. As in modern times, students learned Arabic calligraphy by writing one letter connected to successive letters in the alphabet in the calligraphic exercise known as *mufrada*.

We do not know whether this scene is generic, meaning that it is emblematic of any school, or narrative, meaning that it is intended to illustrate a particular story. Several details suggest the latter reading. All of the children stare to their right into space, except for the pair just above the master's rod, who face each other. They might possibly represent Layla and Majnun, the star-crossed lovers who met first at school and whose Romeo and Juliet-like tale was made famous in the lyrical poem composed by Nizami just at this time. Scenes on other vessels and tiles recall other literary tales, and such a scene could have evoked the story in the viewer's mind, in the way that a line of verse can call to mind an entire poem. In the Islamic lands, illustrated manuscripts of romantic epics are known only from later times. The earliest to survive is a copy of Ayyuqi's tale of the lovers Warqa and Gulshah made around 1250. As the first illustrated manuscripts of Nizami's poetry date from the fourteenth century, the scene on this dish—assuming the children are Layla and Majnun—would be the earliest evidence for the illustration of Nizami's writings.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 344; *Lousiana Revy* 1987, no. 75; *Sultan Shah*, no. 273; *AWI* 2001, no. 151

3

TAPESTRY ROUNDEL

first half 14th century, Central Asia
Woven of silk and gold thread of animal substrate spun around cotton core, diameter 69 cm
30/1995

The enthroned prince flanked by courtiers was a common motif in courtly art produced for Muslims, but this unique roundel is one of the finest examples from the Mongol period in Iran. The central figure can be identified as a Mongol prince by his caftan, crown, hairstyle, and position seated on a cushioned throne under a parasol, a sign of rank particularly important to the Mongols. His courtiers surround him: to his left is an Arab or Persian vizier, identified by his turban and tabouret, or bench. To the ruler's right is a Mongol amir, identified by his flapped hat and folding stool. These two courtiers symbolize the two branches of government: the men of the pen and the men of the sword.

The rich animal vocabulary on this roundel is even more inventive. The throne is set above a fishpond, a motif found on many ceramics produced at Kashan (**no. 7**), against a ground dotted with plants and animals, including several peacocks, a crane, and a turtle. Bordering the central scene is a vine scroll inhabited with twelve real and imaginary animals. At the top are a sphinx and a griffin; others include deer, ibex, and mouflon. Most are winged. A larger outer border comprises six roundels enclosing warriors with swords and shields alternating with six running animals frolicking on a flowering scroll.

In style and technique, this extraordinary piece relates to *kesi*, tapestry-woven silks woven with portraits in China and with depictions of lively animals against dense foliate grounds in Central Asia. This roundel, however, is woven of silk wrapped around cotton; in addition, the warp threads are sewn to a coarse tabby-woven cotton backing to hold them in place. The backing has been carbon-dated to the same period as the silk. The use of cotton, like the iconography, suggests a provenance in Iran.

Woven in black and white and at least eighteen different shades of green, blue, red, brown, and beige, as well as gold, this roundel virtually reproduces a painting in silk thread. Since it is unique, we can only speculate about its function. Can we imagine that it lined a royal canopy like the one depicted on it? Used this way, the blue and gold edge would have hung down so that the viewer could have read the Arabic inscription around the rim. Written in gold on blue, the same colors used for the border of the parasol over the ruler's head, the inscription offers good wishes of perpetual glory, perfect prosperity, wealth, happiness, wellbeing and ease. The roundel would then be a fitting tribute to the ruler depicted on it, a visual pun alluding to his fame, and a local parallel to Chinese emperor portraits woven in silk.

4

DOUBLE FRONTISPIECE

ca. 1600, Isfahan, Iran

Ink and opaque pigments on paper, 42 x 28.5 cm (each)

18/1970; 29/1962

Most Persian paintings depict generic princes or heroes in an idealized mode; a few, like this one, differ in both content and style by depicting figures more realistically. This double-page frontispiece, once divided into two paintings and now re-united, comes from an unidentified manuscript that, to judge from the title on the back of the left-hand page, is an anthology compiled from the wisdom of the ancients. On stylistic grounds the painting can be associated with the court style practiced about 1600 under the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas at his new capital of Isfahan. The large turbans with voluptuous folds and ends fluttering in the breeze, for example, are typical of the style associated with the court painter Reza (for his biography, see Canby). The scene depicts sixteen scholars, a sort of Persian version of Raphael's famous fresco, *The School of Athens*, in the Vatican.

The artist placed the figures in a generic setting. The type occurs, for example, in the double frontispiece to the luxurious copy of *Sa'di's Bustan* (Orchard) made for the Timurid prince Sultan Husayn Mirza in 1488 with paintings signed by the most famous Persian painter Bihzad. In the sixteenth century it was commonly used for individual paintings, as in the similar setting for **no. 5**, a miniature from a copy of Firdwasi's *Shahnama*. The fence, here a brilliant red, is set halfway up the picture plane. While it unites the two folios into a single composition, it also divides the space into interior and exterior. On the near side is a large open terrace; on the far side, a mountainous landscape whose craggy cliffs with gnarled tree and golden sky with Chinese-inspired clouds is typical of the Isfahan school. The fence thus symbolically separates the world of the mind from the world of nature, the world of Islam from the world of ignorance.

The figures, grouped in loose circles on each page, can be identified as scholars by their poses, portfolios, and other accouterments. Some are seated, engaged in serious discussion with each other. Others are deep in contemplation. The two main figures are set in the center of the left page. They stand out not only by the color of their garments, bright red and blue robes, but also by their position. Persian paintings, like the written texts they accompany, should be "read" from right to left, and these two figures are placed at the turn in the fence in the spot filled by the sultan in the *Bustan* frontispiece. They are sufis, or mystics. Intoxicated by knowledge, these devishes "dance to the music of time."

The double-page painting is further enhanced by magnificent illuminated borders. Such borders were used in all kinds of manuscripts, both sacred and secular. A comparable set is found, for example, on the opening pages to a contemporary copy of the Koran (**no. 122**). God's word was never illustrated, but there was no problem in depicting philosophers and other men of this world.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 240; *Sultan Shah*, no. 281; *AWI* 2001, no. 45

5

PAINTING OF KING ENTHRONED

1515-1535, Tabriz, Iran
Ink and opaque pigments on paper, leaf: 47.5 x 32 cm, miniature: 27 x 20 cm
30/1988

This painting, in which king Kay Kavus's face and hands have been blacked-out, shows how Persian Muslims believed faces and physiognomy to be the most revealing part of a person. This leaf comes from one of the most ambitious Persian manuscripts ever made: a copy of the Persian national epic, the *Shahnama*, prepared for the Safavid shah Tahmasp in the first third of the sixteenth century (Dickson and Welch). The text of 50,000 couplets, which had been composed by Firdawsi about 1000, recounts the history of Iran from the legendary creation of the world to the coming of the Arabs in the seventh century. This manuscript was copied in four columns on 742 large folios that were embellished with superb gold-flecked margins, countless illuminations, and 258 illustrations, many of them nearly full page. This one, folio 218 of the original two-volume codex, depicts the inept king Kay Kavus greeting his grandson and eventual heir Kay Khusraw.

The long reign of Kay Kavus is one of the most thoroughly recounted in the whole poem, as the poet questions the meaning of authority and hierarchy. Punctuated by a series of near-disasters, the shah's reign provides the setting for many of the most memorable episodes in the epic, including the heroic feats performed by the mighty Rustam as he repeatedly rescues the hapless king and Rustam's tragic duel with his son Sohrab. Under Kay Kavus, the war between Iran and its long-time enemy Turan flares up, due in part to the quarrel between the king and his son Siyavush, who has fled to the court of the rival Turanian king Afrasiyab. While there, Siyavush marries the king's daughter, but is later treacherously murdered by his father-in law. Their son, Kay Khusraw, manages to escape back to the homeland of Iran, eventually succeeding his grandfather as king and putting an end to the war between Iran and Turan.

The painting, as indicated by the title at the top, depicts Kay Kavus welcoming his young grandson. The two are seated together on a golden throne in a garden pavilion. Servants (coming in from the left, or margin side) transport food and drink for a royal banquet, and courtiers, some identifiable by the tall batons on their turbans, cluster around. The most spectacular part of the painting is the stunning vegetation that even projects through the window behind the royal couple, with tall plants and irises swaying like the feathers of the prince's turban. Kay Kavus, a major but unpopular figure in the epic, is depicted in ten paintings in this extravagant copy of the text, and in each of them, as here, his face and hands have been carefully painted black to underscore his foolish character. As opposed to the slashes delicately added by a later iconoclast to figuratively decapitate the figures in the frontispiece to the copy of Jami's *Yusuf and Zulaykha* (**no. 16**), the faces and hands here were originally painted black to depict evil. Color is used to render character.

Selected bibliography: Dickson and Welch, no. 134; *AWI* 2001, no. 32

6

VELVET

early 17th century, Iran
Silk and metal lamella woven flat, 83 x 32.5 cm
1/1988

This velvet, like its counterpart (no. 1), is a conundrum, a remarkable variation on a well-known theme whose figural iconography brings to mind as many questions as it answers. Technically, it is woven using the most advanced technique ever developed for velvet, one devised at the court of the Safavids in seventeenth-century Iran. These silk velvets were also the most expensive type of textile woven there, due both to the large amounts of gold and silver needed for the metallic facing wefts (the silver ground has all but disappeared on this fragment) and the labor-intensive technique of cut and voided velvet. This fragment is one of four known bearing the same design, and each repeat is woven using different colors, at least ten in total. This piece shows two repeats, with the beginning of a third in a different color visible at the top (note the colored toenails). Produced as interior furnishings for palaces and royal quarters, these velvets were replaced when fashions changed, and few have survived in their original context. Some were sent as royal gifts to India and Europe, where a few more are preserved. The largest and most important group comprises the sixty-one fragments now in Rosenborg Palace in Copenhagen, probably sent by Shah Safi as a gift to Friedrich III, Duke of Holstein, as part of the Persian embassy that left Isfahan in December 1638 (Bier 1995). These velvets, however, are woven with lamella spun around silk. This one uses an unusual technique of lamella woven flat.

Despite the different technique, most Safavid cut and voided velvets, like this one, show staggered rows of single or paired figures facing in alternate directions and set in idealized landscapes. The design makes sense as the weavers had only to flip over the design for each row. Typical Safavid pieces show elegant, slightly mannered courtiers similar to those found in contemporary book painting made at the court of Shah Abbas (r. 1588-1629). This piece, while maintaining the typical composition of staggered rows, shows a completely different—and somewhat unclear—iconography. The female here is heavy set and solemn, and she wears a veil that calls to mind classical drapery. Instead of the typical flower or bottle, she carries an infant in her arms, a combination reminiscent of Madonna and child. At her feet is a seated dog (an animal often considered unclean by Muslims), with a spotted feline prancing above. She faces a cypress tree, often used in Persian poetry as a symbol of death, entwined with a flowering tree.

Comparisons to other similar velvets raise more questions. The closest parallel to this fragment is one with a similarly statuesque woman in classical dress, holding a flask and fluted cup (Bier 1987, no. 55). It is inscribed with the name Abdallah in kufic script. His name, written in this distinctive way, is found on a small but stylistically eclectic group of three figured silk textiles including a satin lampas with a Safavid-style rider leading a bound prisoner and a pink and yellow doublecloth with Mughal-style motifs (Bier 1987, no. 22).

We do not know, therefore, where this textile or other similar ones were woven. Both Safavid Iran and Mughal India have been proposed. Nor do we know its intended audience. Was it made by or for the Armenian market in Isfahan, where, according to the traveler Cornelius le Bruyn who visited the city in 1704, the Armenian quarter of New Julfa was full of weavers, including Frenchmen? Or was it intended as an export to India or even woven there, where, according to Akbar's court chronicler Abu'l-Fadl Allami (1:93-94), masters had been settled to teach people an improved system of manufacture and the imperial workshops produced all those stuffs made in other countries? In either case, the velvet's superb quality shows that there was no bar to figural representation at the richest Muslim courts of the seventeenth century.

Selected bibliography: *Woven Treasures*, no. 34; *Sultan Shah*, no. 260; *AWI* 2001, no. 665

7

BOWL WITH PRINCELY COUPLE

ca. 1200, Kashan, Iran

Fritware with polychrome decoration and gold leaf in and over an opaque white glaze, 8.5 x 21.7 cm

34/1999

The technique of polychrome painting on ceramics seems to have emerged in the late twelfth century in the city of Kashan. Located near the site of fine clay deposits, this city in central Iran was the center of the ceramics industry during medieval times. Kashan was renowned especially for its fine fritwares, in which quartz pebbles were ground to a powder and combined with small amounts of clay to create a stonepaste from which extremely fine pottery could be made. Vessels and tiles made there were painted over the glaze in the two most expensive techniques known: luster (**no. 2**), and polychrome and gold, a technique known as *minai* (from the Persian word for "enameling"). To make minai wares, the potter first covered the vessel with an opaque white glaze. Next he painted directly into the glaze with turquoise, blue, and purple, and fired the vessel to fix these colors in the glaze. Then, the potter painted in other enameled pigments, and, as with lusterware, fired the object a second time at a lower temperature. These enameled colors included a sharp black and a bright red, the most difficult color to control, as well as leaf gold.

The minai technique flourished at Kashan for only a half century. Dated wares range from 575/1180 to 616/1219, and there is no evidence that the technique was practiced much beyond these dates (Watson 1994). The technique may have been invented by Abu Zayd, the most famous potter of medieval Iran who signed and dated both types of overglaze-painted fritwares, including a luster bowl dated 600/1204 in this exhibition (**no. 118**). Potters at Kashan used both overglaze techniques on vessels of the same shape. This rounded footed bowl, measuring nearly twenty-two centimeters in diameter, is typical. Potters executed similar compositions and imagery in both techniques. This scene of a seated couple is common, as are the decorative details used to fill the space, such as the fishpond at the bottom (compare **no. 8**), the framing trees, including the one on the right with a diaper pattern, and the palmette and fluttering birds floating above the figures' heads. As with contemporary lusterwares, we do not know whether the scenes on most vessels and tiles are meant to be generic or narrative.

Compared to its luster counterpart, the minai technique allowed for far more precision and detail. On this bowl, for example, the male figure on the left sports a mustache and goatee. Both figures wear unusual robes with geometric strapwork designs, and the pattern on the consort's robe seems to meld into the stem cup that she holds in her left hand. This precision allowed painters to develop a sense of space on the curved surface of the bowl. The boot on the male figure, for example, projects forward in front of his caftan, as does his consort's toe. These experiments on curved surfaces, however, were short-lived, as artists' increasing adoption of paper as a medium meant that painters soon shifted their attention from ceramics to manuscripts (Bloom 2001).

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 166

8

STAR TILE

second half 13th century, Kashan, Iran
Fritware, underglaze painted in blue and turquoise, overglaze painted in luster, diameter 21 cm
37/2000

Fancy buildings in medieval Iran, especially shrines and palaces, were decorated on the interior with tile revetments commonly comprising eight-pointed stars and crosses that could be assembled into panels (**no. 111**). The star tiles typically show a floral or figural scene painted in reserve (Watson 1985, 122-31; Porter 39-46), while the cross-shaped tiles might be similarly decorated or simply glazed in a monochrome turquoise (see figure on page 16). The unusually elaborate scene on this tile depicts two figures sitting in front of a two-story building surmounted by a parapet. They seem to represent the typical couple (see **no. 7**), for the figure on the right appears to have a small beard. The closest parallels to this scene can be found on a large panel of fifteen tiles, some dated 664 or 665 (1266-67), removed from the Imamzada Ja'far, the shrine to a descendant of one of the Shi'ite imams, in the city of Damghan in northeast Iran (now in the Louvre, no. 6319; Watson 1985, fig. 110). The Damghan tiles are done in the same technique and show many similar iconographic details, such as the fishpond with one or two fish, often truncated. One of the Damghan tiles has a similar pair of figures with haloes outlined in blue, another has a single figure set in an arched building with a parapet similar to the one on this tile.

What sets this star tile apart, however, is its lack of a border. Virtually all other star tiles have a border inscribed in luster in a scratchy hand on the white ground (**no. 111**). The texts are either Koranic verses or Persian poems that often have nothing to do with the subject depicted in the center. In this case, however, the artist has expanded the figural scene to fill the whole surface and added a band below the parapet with an inscription offering generalized good wishes ("perpetual glory and prosperity ..."). A half of a star tile also without an epigraphic border (Boston Museum of Fine Arts, see Pope and Ackerman, pl. 706) has a tag identifying it as the scene of Iranians leaving the fortress of Firud. It therefore illustrates one of the most dramatic episodes in the *Shahnama*, the Persian national epic, in which Bizhan kills Firud, son of Siyavush and half-brother of Kay Khusraw (for an earlier scene from the same story, see **no. 5**). The standard good wishes here, however, do not help us identify the scene on this tile. We do not know, therefore, whether it was simply a generic scene or a commission to fit a specific program of decoration. In either case, it exemplifies the new interest in figural representation that burgeoned with the development of illustrated manuscripts in Iran during the fourteenth century.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 210

9

BOTTLE

second half 17th century, Deccan, India
Bidri metal, inlaid with silver, brass, and rubies,
H 13.7 cm
I/1993

Artisans in India delighted in playing with figural representation for both form and decoration. This small container is designed to hold the lime paste (*chunam*) made from ground seashells and spices used in the preparation of betel (called *pan* in north India). The paste was mixed with thin slices of the nut from the areca palm (*supari*) and the whole wrapped in a fresh leaf of the betel tree. Often appreciated after meals for its alkaline content, betel was enjoyed at court and by the upper classes. During the royal audience (*darbar*), for example, the ruler would chew betel to show his detached and therefore superior judgment (Zebrowski 229-30).

The container is made of the distinctive decorated metal alloy known as *bidri* after Bidar, the city in the Deccan where the technique is thought to have originated. Objects made in this technique are cast from an alloy of zinc mixed with copper, tin, and lead; then inlaid with silver or brass, occasionally with gold; and subsequently coated with a paste of mud containing sal ammoniac. When the coating is removed and the piece polished, the base metal takes on a rich matte black finish that provides a foil to the shiny inlays. The technique was used to produce a variety of day-to-day objects—bowls, jugs, lidded containers, trays, and spittoons—but the most common were the rounded bowls that served as the bases for water pipes (hookahs) used for smoking hemp or tobacco. Virtually all of these objects are decorated with flowers or imbrications (**no. 56**), except for a handful with figural decoration attributed to a single hand or workshop active in the second half of the seventeenth century. This lime paste container is the smallest and finest of the group.

The container is decorated on one side with a depiction of wild animals set amidst graceful vegetation and on the other with one of an enthroned prince attended by a lady. Seated in a scalloped golden niche, he sniffs a flower. Details of the garments and throne are delicately engraved in the silver to show patterns and folds. With its rich decoration and minute detail, the figures are reminiscent of contemporary paintings on paper. The object thus makes an ingenious play between media, as *bidri* objects are commonly depicted in Persian and Mughal paintings from the early seventeenth century and in Deccani paintings from the late seventeenth century.

The container's form is a further double entendre. It is shaped like a mango, a form used in other media for lime containers (**no. 96**, for a contemporary Mughal version in rock crystal). But here the metalsmith has fashioned the stopper as a leafy stem whose end is transformed into the head of a bird, perhaps a parrot, with rubies inset as eyes. In form the container thus merges a bird with a fruit, and its skin further provides a surface for representation.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 346; *AWI* 2001, no. 537

10

BOWL

11th-12th century, Egypt
Earthenware painted in reddish-brown luster over opaque white glaze, 5.5 x 20.5 cm
4/1992

Figural art flourished in Egypt in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a late flowering of a continuous tradition going back to early Christian, Roman, and Hellenistic art. This earthenware bowl is painted in reserve in luster over an opaque white glaze. The reserve technique, in which the background is painted to silhouette the figure left in white, recalls the style of painting on Greek red-figure vases. The luster technique, however, is distinctly Islamic, having been developed at Basra in Iraq in the ninth century (**no. 76**). Potters attracted to the burgeoning city of Cairo, which had been founded by the Shi'ite Fatimid dynasty in 969, brought the technique to Egypt. Although the technique is similar on Iraqi and Egyptian pieces, the designs are decidedly different. In marked contrast to the arabesques and abstract designs typical of Iraqi lusterwares, Egyptian lusterwares are often remarkably naturalistic. The painting on this bowl shows a single male figure wearing a turban, the tail of which drapes artfully over his raised arm. He pours liquid from a carafe (the center of the bowl is restored so his right hand and the glass are hypothetical). To judge from the brownish color of the luster, the liquid represented is not water but wine, a liquid prohibited in the Koran but readily consumed in private, as shown not only by many literary references to drinking, but also by the many drinking vessels and representations of drinkers known in Islamic art. The drinker's casual pose, with raised knee and delicately curved toes, further suggests a man at leisure. To accompany his drink, a pyramid of pastries or fruit piled on a stand fills the left side of the composition. The pyramidal motif is known from an Abbasid wall painting that depicts two dancing figures pouring wine, but here the fruit sprouts a scrolling vine, whose serpentine curves echo the twist of his turban tail and equally fill the otherwise-empty space.

This bowl belongs to a small group of Fatimid lusterwares painted with naturalistic representations of people (Philon, figs. 462-65; Grube 1984). Some bear similar representations of drinkers, dancers, and musicians. For example, two in Washington D.C. (Freer Gallery of Art 46.30) and Cairo (Museum of Islamic Art X 15950; both illustrated in Grube 1984, figs. 1-2), show large single figures of female dancers, whose scarves perform the same space-filling effect as the drinker's turban tail and where jugs replace the pile of fruit or pastries. But others depict cock-fighters, wrestlers, and a man with a leopard. The exact meaning of these scenes remains open to interpretation, as does the intended audience for these bowls, but they nevertheless show that in medieval Egypt relatively wealthy patrons (lusterwares are expensive because of their materials and their double firing) enjoyed seeing pictures of people on their pottery.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 254; *AWI* 2001, no. 129

11

CARPET FRAGMENT

ca. 1600, Mughal, India
Wool pile on cotton foundation, 78 x 67 cm
Tex. 32

Artists in India incorporated the grotesque motif into works of art made for the Mughal court. This fragment of a pile carpet comes from an enormous pair that have been cut up into some fifteen sizeable pieces and other tiny fragments scattered around the world. The design, knotted in blue, beige, crimson, brown, black, green, white, ochre and up to five other colors against a wine red ground, comprises a menagerie of real and imaginary animals, birds, and monster masks that issue from each other's mouths on a field strewn with plants, flowers, and vases. The pattern can be reconstructed as four grids combined in rows and repeated vertically in reversed and staggered positions, creating an extended alternating point repeat. The pattern is derived from the in-and-out-palmette design of carpets, with monster masks substituted for palmettes. This type of repeat pattern is typical of drawloom weaving, but has no technical justification in a knotted carpet. The design therefore must have been adapted from textiles. Furthermore, based on the direction of the design and the knots, the two carpets must have been woven from the same cartoon, but in opposite directions. Based on a probable loom width of four pattern repeats, the original fields would have measured at least 9.6 x 3.8 meters without border (Cohen; Walker 33-37).

Both technique and design suggest that this is one of the earliest pile carpets woven in India. Woolen carpets are unnecessary in such a hot climate, and Muslims from Iran or Central Asia must have introduced carpet weaving there sometime after they conquered the region. This piece is rather coarsely woven (there are some 210 knots per square inch/32.5 knots per square centimeter); the knotting is sometimes jumbled when seen from the back, and the color is experimental and shows no shading. Instead, the weavers have inserted a stripe or two of unrelated color between the main color of an animal and its dark blue outline. These features all point to a relatively early date. In later carpets, by contrast, several shades of the same color were used to provide a more naturalistic effect.

This pair of carpets is generally attributed to the patronage of the emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), who encouraged an eclectic combination of elements from different traditions. The design and technique are Persian. The grotesques are probably derived from the local architectural element of a *makara-torana* arch, which is composed of elephant-headed crocodiles whose mouths emit scrolling vines that culminate in a monster mask (kīrtimukha) at the apex. Although these animal forms had religious significance in their original context, over time they became purely decorative. The large scale and bizarre character of the animals on this fragment connect these carpets to the *Hamzanama*, an enormous manuscript written and painted on paper sheets backed with cotton for Akbar that depicts the adventures of the Prophet's uncle in a wild fantasy populated by outlandish beasts. The animals here evoke a similarly nightmarish world, but one that clearly delighted its audience, for the pile is well worn, showing that the carpets, despite their brilliant color, were often used.

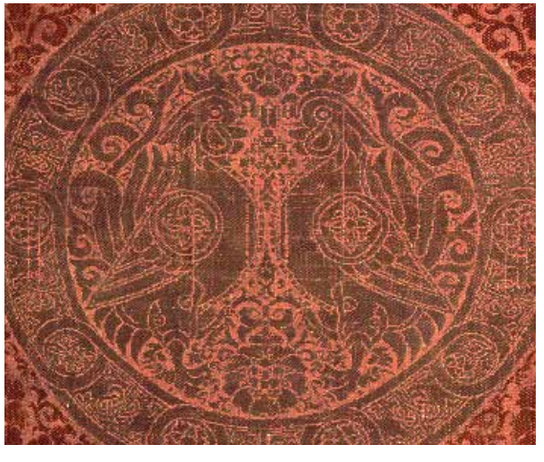
Selected bibliography: Cohen 1996; *Sultan Shah*, no. 306; *AWI* 2001, no. 692

12

LAMPAS TEXTILE

first half 14th century, Central Asia
Silk with gilded paper strips both spun around silk and woven flat, 228 x 63.5 cm
40/1997

During the Mongol period Muslim weavers in Central Asia incorporated various sorts of animals from different artistic traditions into their designs. Representing one half of the original loom width, this spectacular silk panel is part of an extraordinary set of six full panels that once comprised a baldachin or tent (Thompson). These complex lampas silks were woven on drawlooms with two sets of warps and wefts for ground and pattern. Each full panel was made up of two tall niches filled with vegetal scrolls comprised of stylized lotus flowers and peonies containing roundels with phoenixes and roosters. Large roundels enclosing confronted birds are set against this dense background design and alternate with pairs of smaller lobed medallions, each enclosing a coiled dragon.



The animals on this silk reflect the myriad sources available during the century between about 1250 and 1350, when the descendants of the Mongol warlord Genghis Khan (d. 1227) ruled much of Eurasia and men, merchants, and ideas traveled freely between East and West under the so-called "pax Mongolica." The static confronted birds are drawn from the Persian tradition, whereas the phoenixes and the coiled dragons are taken from the Chinese repertory, though imbued with a vitality not seen in the originals. Of all the works of art shared among the various branches of Mongols in this period, the most important were these textiles woven with gold-wrapped thread. Known as *nasij* in Arabic, *nakh* in Persian, and panni tartarici in medieval inventories, these cloths were praised and collected as far away as England: Chaucer mentioned "cloth of Tartary" in his *Knight's Tale*.

The Mongols deliberately encouraged the production of such textiles from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Genghis Khan ordered weavers captured in Central and West Asia sent to his capital at Karakorum in Mongolia; by the time of his son Ögödei (r. 1229-1241), three thousand households from Samarqand were weaving cloth of gold at Xunmalin, and three hundred households were at work in Hongzhou, west of Beijing. The technique of making gold thread by wrapping a silk core with gilded paper strips suggests that this group was produced in Central Asia, the region corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan. Altogether, this piece attests to the staggeringly rich figural tradition in this once-vibrant area at the crossroads of Asia.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 641; Komaroff and Carboni, no. 73

13

BOTTLE

9th-10th century, Iraq or Iran
Colorless glass with relief-cut decoration in a green overlay (modern neck), H 15 cm
3/1971

The birds on this bell-shaped bottle show how artisans in Islamic lands stylized natural forms. It is executed in the cameo technique mastered first by the Romans around the time of Christ and then again in the fourth century and probably rediscovered by Muslims in the ninth century. To make this piece, the glassmaker blew a bottle of transparent colorless glass and then dipped it into molten green glass. After the bottle had cooled, the glassmaker drew the design on the bottle and then cut away all the unnecessary green glass by laboriously grinding, cutting and drilling, leaving the green design standing proud of the underlying base.

The design here, framed by horizontal bands at the shoulder and base, comprises two pairs of confronted birds separated by single birds. All the birds wear collars consisting of two parallel lines and have eyes represented by single dots, but the single birds and pairs are stylized in different but complementary ways. The single birds stand upright, stiffly, their tails pointed downwards like a thick back leg that contrasts with the clawed foot projecting in front. In contrast, the confronted birds have tails that bifurcate like fishtails and their feet, as well as their beaks, are distended with a graceful curving line that intersects to form a palmette set over a teardrop motif. To balance the long beak, each confronted bird also has a crest that terminates in a tendril. The artist has thus taken the components of a bird—head, feet, tail, crest—and elaborated them to fit the rectangular space with an almost abstract design of lines and curves.

Many fragments done in the laborious but flashy cameo technique were discovered in the ruins at Samarra, the ninth-century capital of the Abbasid caliphs in Iraq. As with the pieces discovered there, the design on this bottle is cut on a slant, with the edges beveled so that the intensity of the green color fades towards the edges. The beveled style was developed at Samarra for molded stucco wall decoration (**no. 70**), perhaps because the beveling would have released the plaster more easily from the mold. This style of design was then used in Iraq for other materials such as wood, stone (**no. 81**), and glass; it was also flattened into a two-dimensional style (**no. 76**) and exported as far as Egypt in the west and Central Asia in the east. The abstracted birds and vegetal ornament were also adopted for other media, as with the slip-painted earthenware bowl decorated with a bird made in tenth-century Iran or Central Asia (**no. 14**). This bottle was reportedly found at Nishapur in northeastern Iran, one of the major centers of medieval ceramic production, but we do not know whether this bottle would have been made there or if it was an import from Samarra. Some scholars have even suggested it could have been made in Egypt, another center known for its vivacious animal style. Whatever its origin, the bottle shows how the realistic representation of animals known from classical times was replaced by a more abstracted style that became popular across the Islamic lands in the late ninth and tenth centuries.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 131; *Sultan Shah*, no. 142; *AWI* 2001, no. 308; Carboni and Whitehouse, no. 89

14

BOWL

10th century, eastern Iran or Central Asia
Earthenware covered with brown slip and painted with white slip under transparent glaze (now completely decomposed), H 8.5; diameter 17.2 cm
10/1975

Potters in the eastern Islamic lands in the tenth century adapted the abstracted style that had been developed in Iraq in the ninth century to local materials and techniques. The earthenware body and slip-painted decoration of this bowl exemplify the type of ceramic produced in eastern Iran and central Asia when the area was under the control of the Samanid dynasty (Watson 2004, 232237, type G). Hundreds of examples have been excavated at Nishapur in eastern Iran and Afrasiyab (old Samarqand) in Uzbekistan. Many bear epigraphic designs (**no. 29**), but some are decorated with abstract designs or animals. This one, for example, has a bird with soaring wings. Similar birds are found on several similar bowls in the Sabah Collection (Watson 2004, no. G.c.1) and the Louvre (MAO 860; *L'étrange et le merveilleux*, no. 48).

This bowl and its epigraphic companion shown here (**no. 29**) reveal how Samanid potters could achieve abstraction by very different means. Both bowls exemplify the technical proficiency and aesthetic sophistication of Samanid potters. Precisely thrown to the minimum thickness the earthenware body would allow, these bowls represent some of the most striking ceramics from the Islamic lands. The epigraphic ones are typically painted in black/brown and red against a white ground, while the ones with zoomorphic decoration are reserved in white against a dark ground. The epigraphic friezes typically ring the sides of the bowl, while the animals generally comprise a large single figure in the center. Their forms differ as well: the epigraphic bowls typically have flat sides, whereas those with animal designs are often rounded, sometimes with a flaring rim. Some of the differences may be due to the models. The contour panels that surround the bird and the scalloped borders show that the animal bowls are modeled on Iraqi lusterwares (**no. 76**). On the bird bowl, the central figure is poised between realism and abstraction. The bird's neck is grotesquely elongated and its wings morph into palmettes decorated with dotted bands. The strong calligraphic quality of this design parallels contemporary developments, for this was the period when calligraphers embellished writing with a variety of decorative devices. The calligraphic spirit clearly invigorated the potter as he painted this stunning bird.

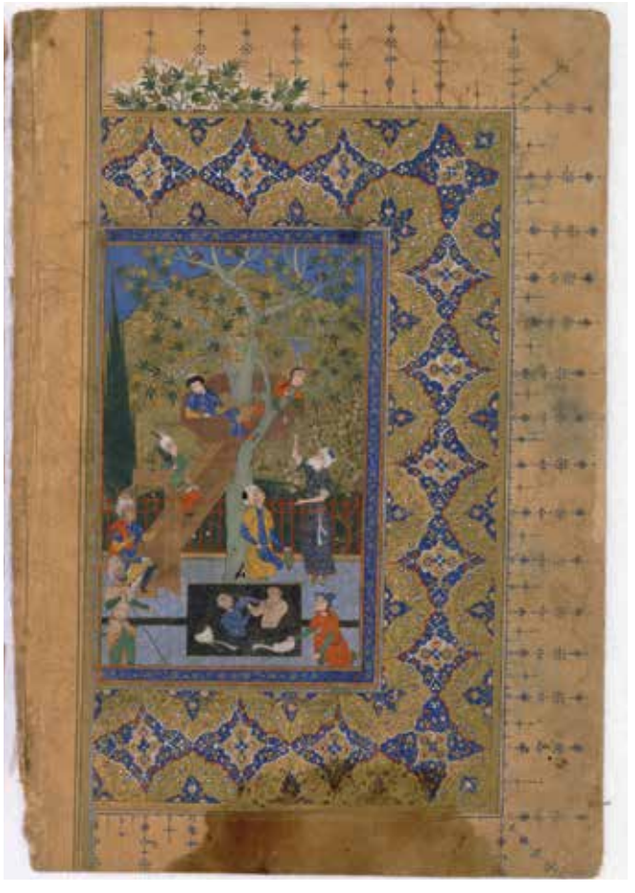
Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 35; *AWI* 2001, no. 118

15
BOTTLE
9th-10th century, Iraq or Iran
Colorless glass, H 12.6 cm
3/2000

The most striking feature of this small glass bottle is the lively line of rabbits hopping around the body. Its shape is typical of a group with flat bottoms, bell-shaped bodies, and flared necks. Created from both glass and metal, they are generally attributed to the ninth or tenth century. The technique of cutting the glass with a grinding wheel is also typical of the period. A large group of blown bottles, bowls, beakers, and goblets is decorated with similar relief-cutting in the form of various types of quadrupeds including bulls, lions, and ibexes, as well as birds of prey. A bowl in Berlin, for example, is decorated with running horses, bearing similar large, circular eyes and curly tails (Carboni and Whitehouse, no. 82). Apparently these animals were meant to evoke the good life, for they are sometimes accompanied by good wishes to the owner or exhortations to drink. Here, the glasscutter alternated each rabbit with a stylized inscription in angular script that repeats the word "blessing" (in Arabic, *baraka*). Other pieces are inscribed with similar hortative wishes such as long life, happiness, and good fortune.

The glassmaker was a master who reveled in displaying his consummate skill at cutting. On the one hand, he created smooth rounded surfaces for the rabbits' eyes and tails, the ring of four-petaled rosettes around the shoulder, and the facets on the flaring neck. On the other hand, he meticulously depicted small details such as toes, notched the circular bands and letters, and hatched the rabbits' ears to suggest their fur. The deliberate contrast of light and shade created by such techniques brings these rabbits to life as they cavort about this bottle, offering blessing.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 312



16

DOUBLE FRONTISPIECE

1560s, Qazvin, Iran

Ink, opaque pigments, and gold on paper, 28.5 x 19 cm (each)

51-52/1980

Individual Muslims, as in any heterogeneous society, adopted various stances towards figural representation, and a few people (the relative proportion varied at different times and places) were opposed to it because they felt it usurped God's prerogative of creation. On this double page a later reader symbolically decapitated the figures by drawing a thin red line through their necks. This is not the only manuscript to have suffered in this way. One of the earliest illustrated Arabic manuscripts, a fine copy of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* ("Assemblies") made in Iraq in the 1240s and now in Leningrad, suffered the same treatment, as a later reader slashed the necks of virtually every figure in the ninety-six paintings with a jerky black line. In this case, the work was more discrete but no less thorough, as the iconophobe decapitated not only each of the human figures, but also the calf awaiting slaughter. Figural representation, though acceptable in one venue, was clearly distasteful in another.

The frontispiece comes from a copy of the long allegorical romance centered on the temptation between Yusuf, the Biblical Joseph, and Zulaykha, Potiphar's wife. These would have been the opening pages of the manuscript and the text of the poem, composed by the fifteenth-century Persian mystical poet Abd al-Rahman Jami, begins on the back of the left page. The double-page painting, however, has little to do with the subject of the poem. Instead, the painting depicts a generic scene of court feasting (*razm*). On the right, a couple lounges in a tree house, above a pair of youths who roughhouse in a pool, thereby losing their turbans. To the right, a greybeard hands up an object, perhaps a loaf of bread as suggested by the scene of cooking on the left page. There, servants are preparing the meal that presumably will be served to the royal couple. Some tend large boiling cauldrons ready to cook the calf being prepared for slaughter below. The painting is signed under the tree house by Ali Beg, who says he is the son (presumably meaning descendant) of Mani, the legendary figure eulogized as the paragon of Persian painters. The artist identifies himself as the painter from Isfahan, but the style of the painting suggests an attribution to Qazvin, the city that served as the Safavid capital in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Like many Persian manuscript paintings, the scene represents the good life of eternal spring in which everything is at its most perfect: flowers blossom forever, and the sun shines eternally. Such an outdoor scene of picnicking in a garden was popular in Persian painting from the fifteenth century, and this variation with the tree house is found in a handful of manuscripts and drawings made from the late sixteenth century onwards in both Iran and India (Brend). After it was finished, the painting was set within fine illuminated borders, but to keep up the illusion of eternal springtime, the painter has the leaves of the plane tree poke up in the upper margin.

Selected bibliography: Robinson, no. 20; *Sultan Shah*, no. 45

17

ROSEWATER SPRINKLER

second half 12th century, Afghanistan
Embossed, engraved and punched brass, inlaid with copper and silver, H 15.3 cm
15/1991

Metalsmiths in the eastern Islamic lands delighted in fashioning figural ornament despite enormous technical challenges. This object is part of a small group of metalwares that are raised from a single sheet of brass using a "snarling iron." The sheet was worked from both front and back and raised in high relief to form a bottle decorated with a row of ten lions around the body and six birds around the lip. In doing so, the artisan stretched the metal to its limit. Once formed, the bodies of the animals as well as the surface of the bottle were further enhanced with chasing to render such details as the fur of the lions' manes and tails. The rows of animals are set off between bands of geometric decoration, including braided and guilloche bands and rosettes, themselves engraved and inlaid in silver and copper. The rosettes, for example, have a central copper dot surrounded by six silver dots, the uppermost one extended like a flame. The top of the object is pierced with a six-pointed star inlaid with silver. The object's condition is no less surprising than its manufacture: the inlay is entirely intact.

This object belongs to a small group of high-relief bronzes with inlaid decoration (Atıl, Chase, and Jett 95-101). The group includes seven candlesticks with rows of animals very similar to the ones on this piece as well as a related candlestick without animals that was made in Rabi' I 561/January 1166 for a vizier to the Ghurids, who controlled an empire stretching from the Caspian to northern India from their capital deep in mountainous Afghanistan (Forkl, figs. 82-83). The group also includes a series of ewers with similar lions around the shoulder. One of them in Tblisi (Museum of the History of Georgia, MC 135) was made in 576/1181-82 by Mahmud ibn Muhammad al-Haravi ("from Herat"). The dated pieces allow us to attribute the entire group, including this exquisite smaller object, to the region around the city of Herat in the second half of the twelfth century.

In form and function, however, this object is distinct. The other pieces in this group are either a well-known type of conical drum that served as a candlestick (**no. 30**) or the base of an oil lamp (**no. 27**), or spouted pitchers for pouring water (**no. 119**, for an example in ceramic). This piece may have been a rosewater sprinkler. Rosewater, used frequently in Persian cuisine, was also sprinkled on clothes at parties from bottles with a perforated cover (**nos. 79** and **113**, for other examples in different media). Unlike the candlesticks, which were meant to rest on the floor, this piece, like the ewers, was meant to be lifted. The user would have grasped the bottle around the neck, with the rosewater issuing from the covey of birds encircling the top. Their vitality is complemented by the lions, which have pointed and perked ears and sparkling eyes. These lively animals attest to the superb artisanship and good life enjoyed in the late twelfth century in what is now a remote area of western Afghanistan.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 138; *AWI* 2001, no. 494

18

BOX COVER

first half 17th century, Deccan or Sind, India
Wood, painted and lacquered, 20 x 31 cm
56/1999

Muslims often decorated their personal objects with figural representation. This wooden panel depicts a princess and her entourage. She is seated in a wheeled cart pulled by paired white bullocks and surrounded by her guard, who carry accouterments such as a gun, a pennant, and a flywhisk. Other female attendants ride or walk beside her. The panel's beveled sides indicate it was once part of a box, perhaps owned by the very person depicted on it. On the basis of the style and accouterments, it can be attributed to the Deccan or Sind in the early seventeenth century. It clearly depicts a Muslim procession, for the men wear turbans.

The painting is protected with a layer of resin varnish in the technique known as Islamic lacquer (to be distinguished from Chinese lacquer which is carved in lac, the resin-like substance produced by insects). The painting shows how artists in India combined figural elements and themes from many traditions. Scenes of a procession, perhaps of a bride, are known already from album paintings made in Iran or Central Asia in the fifteenth century when the area was under the control of the Mongols. The tall slim figures, notably of the female attendant on horseback, are also Persian. Other features such as the figures in full profile, the cavorting bullocks, and the flowing sashes are distinctly Indian. The transparent skirt on the male figure looking back over his shoulder at the woman in the cart is known from Deccani painting. Yet other elements, such as the flying stork, the striated hills and the fishpond, are Chinese. The perspective is also ambiguous. A stream flows along the bottom, but most of the painting is set against a flat gold ground strewn with plants, except at the top where small architectural vignettes introduce a sense of depth. As opposed to the formal portraits of rulers common at this time, this painted panel offers rare insight into daily life.

Selected bibliography: AWI 2001, no. 75

19

EARRING

11th century, Egypt?
Sheet and filigree gold with granulation, 3.6 x 4.2 cm
5/1988

Affluent Muslims often wore clothing and jewelry decorated with representations of living things. This gold earring with two facing birds was probably made for a wealthy woman. The Koran mentions gold as one of the pleasures and luxuries promised to believers in paradise, and like silk, gold became part of the category of things condemned in this world. According to the Prophetic traditions and Koranic commentary, the wearing of gold is prohibited for men, but permissible for women. This object is probably an earring rather than a pendant, for pendants are typically flat on one side and hang from a single loop. This one, by contrast, is decorated with granulation on both sides and has two loops for suspension. It was therefore one of a pair.

The earring is constructed using a complicated technique. Transverse ribbons of sheet gold form the contour of the framework and the inner designs. Narrower ribbons hidden within these contours hold soldered filigree decoration consisting of dense figure eights made of thin gold wire, with hollow gold-sheet hemispheres soldered on top. Attributions for similar pieces range from Iraq (Jenkins and Keene, no. 46) to Syria (*Islamic and Hindu Jewellery*, no. 14).

This one, however, may be an Egyptian copy, for it is slightly different from the others in this small group. They are normally convex, in cross section wider at the center and middle and tapering to a point at the edges. This one, by contrast, is flat. The others have granulations around the exterior rim. This one has twisted wire around the edge. But the biggest difference between this earring and others in the group is its iconography. The other examples have geometric decoration, notably truncated five-pointed stars. This one has stylized figures, although they are so abstracted that they can be interpreted in different ways. The authors see them as a pair of peacocks, whose large tails rise on either side of a central post; others may see a pair of lions facing each other on either side of a tree.

Particularly fine filigree and granulation are hallmarks of works attributed to the period when the Fatimid dynasty ruled from North Africa and Egypt (909-1171), as shown by caches of jewelry discovered in the mid-twentieth century in Tunisia and Caesariyya in earthenware jars alongside coins struck for Fatimid caliphs who reigned during the eleventh century. Based on the dated coins associated with these excavated pieces, Jenkins and Keene (1983) posited that Fatimid craftsmen progressed from multi-size granulation to equal amounts granulation and filigree to total filigree. Wherever this earring was made, it attests to the regular use of figural imagery in day-to-day life in the Muslim lands.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 150; *AWI* 2001, no 582

20

RAM FIGURINE

12th-13th century, Iran

Bronze, hollow cast and engraved, 13.3 x 14.5 cm

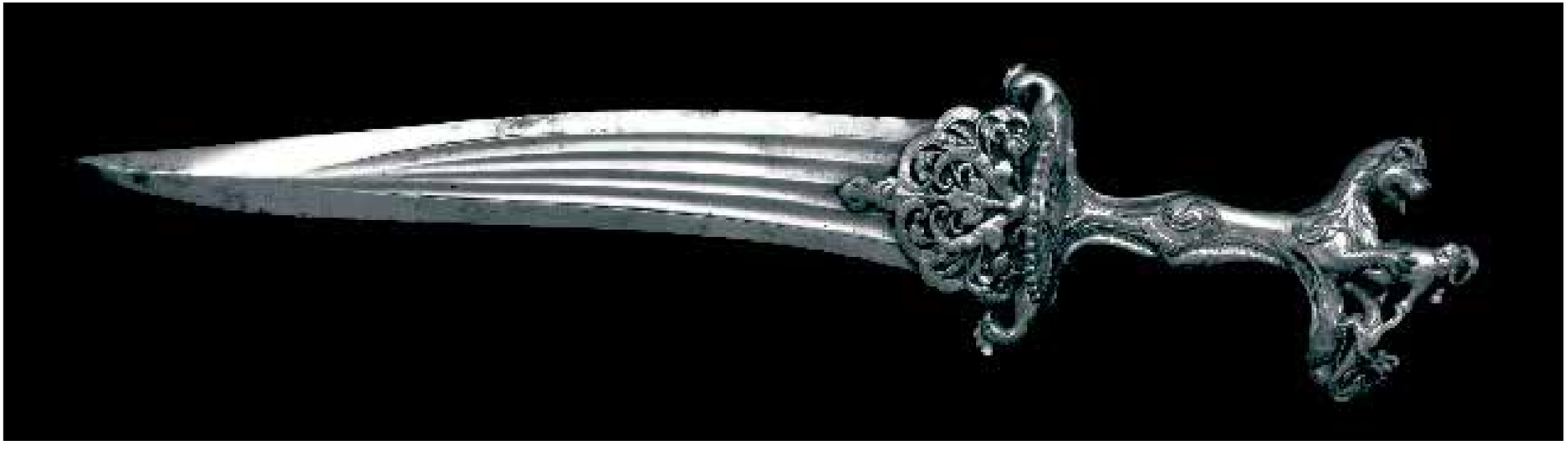
31/1972

This endearing figurine belongs to a large group of metal vessels hollow-cast in the shape of animals. Most, like the large incense burner **(no. 117)**, are stylized and denaturalized by their ornament. This small figure, by contrast, is far more realistic. It represents a fat-tailed sheep, with long curving horns and huge genitals depicted in detail. It is clearly a ram. Yet the wonderfully naturalistic modeling contrasts sharply with the very fine engraving of arabesque scrolls in panels on the body. The ram is draped with ornament. An inscription crudely incised on the ram's chest says that this is the work of Ahmad (*'amal ahmad*).

Comparing the larger incense burner to the smaller ram shows distinct differences, particularly in decorative vocabulary. Both pieces are hollow cast, but the ram, unlike the larger incense burner, is cast in a single piece, including the attached legs. As a result the forms are also more rounded because the artisan did not have to join pieces together. On both objects the decoration is engraved in panels and cartouches, but the symmetrically arranged palmettes on the lion have given way to more flowing spirals with smaller leaves on the ram. The looser decoration suggests a later date, probably in the twelfth or thirteenth century.

The two bronzes also differ in function. The lion was clearly an incense burner, used to perfume the air, probably in a domestic setting. In contrast, this little ram, about half the size of the incense burner, belongs to a small group of objects whose function is unclear. Some, although not this one which lacks provision for piping, might have been intended as fountainheads. The ring cast on the back of this one would allow it to be suspended. It could have then been used as a weight, but a similar ibex in the British Museum (1966.7-28.1; unpublished) lacks the ring. Whatever its function, this ram is a charming rendition of an animal typical of the eastern Islamic lands and a rare example of figural sculpture in the round from medieval Islamic times.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 93; *Sultan Shah*, no. 43; *AWI* 2001, no. 473



21

DAGGER WITH ZOOMORPHIC HANDLE

second half 16th century, Deccan, India
Gilded bronze hilt, set with rubies, L 42 cm
36/1997

The gilded bronze hilt of this dagger, a seething mass of fantastic animals, fuses the rich sculptural tradition typical of south India with the Islamic arabesque. The grip is composed of a lion grasping a tiny elephant on one side and a phoenix and dragon snarling at each other on the other. The guard consists of two peacocks whose long tails merge into the grip. The quillon is formed of two grotesque masks, a motif with a long history in India, but particularly popular in the sixteenth century (see **no. 11**, for its appearance in a contemporary carpet from Northern India). The gilded bronze is set with rubies, most of which have fallen out, leaving only those in the lion's haunches intact (Michell and Zebrowski 231).

The hilt is notable for its tremendous vitality. Similar animals are found in other examples of Deccani art made of metal as well as other materials. A series of bronze incense burners, for example, show similar elephants and lions. The dagger must have been a treasured royal possession, for a portrait of Sultan 'Ali I, Adil Shahi ruler of Bijapur (r. 1558-79), painted ca. 1600, wears almost this identical dagger (Michell and Zebrowski, fig. 170). Similar bronze examples, but without the precious stones, were produced for rulers in southern India. The Tanjore armory in southern India contains a bronze hilt showing a dragon-headed bird (Zebrowski, fig. 218) and a similar one in the government museum in Chennai (Elgood 16.24) is still united with its faceted rock crystal blade. These hilts were clearly made for wealthy patrons, for whom the fabulous animals added apotropaic power.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 568

WRITING


فطر الناس عليها لا تبديل لخلق الله ذلك
القيم ولكن أكثر الناس لا يعلمون منيبين

Arabic belongs to the Semitic family of languages, which also includes Hebrew and Syriac. Like these others, Arabic relies on a system of verbal roots, usually composed of three (sometimes four) phonemes or consonants, which are inflected to form different but related parts of speech. Arabic must have been spoken many centuries before the first surviving evidence for writing it down—an inscription (328 CE) from Namara in Syria, in which Arabic words are written in the alphabet used by the Nabataeans of Petra in Jordan. The oldest examples of the Arabic script are three inscriptions dating between 512 and 568 found near Damascus and another found near Aleppo.

Arabic script, like other Semitic scripts, is written from right to left. It has an alphabet of twenty-eight distinctive sounds that are represented by only eighteen forms, so the same letter has to be used for as many as five different sounds. From the seventh century, these forms were sometimes distinguished by additional strokes or points to avoid confusion, but early readers of manuscripts like the Koran, who knew in advance what the text would say, did not always need such aids (**no. 33**). Similarly, Arabic script normally provides only the long vowels; the morphemic structure of the language makes them redundant, although later writers sometimes provided vocalizations to aid reading, especially of difficult words. While many other systems of writing have at least two distinct modes, a monumental form in which the letters are written separately and a cursive form in which they are connected, Arabic has only the connected form, although there are many different scripts. Furthermore, Arabic script requires that some letters connect to others and some letters change shape depending on their position in a word. Fortunately, there is no distinction between lower- and upper-case letters.

Arabic script grew in importance following the revelation of the Koran (from the Arabic *qur'an*, "recitation") to the Prophet Muhammad. Even before his death in 632, his followers and associates had begun to transcribe the revelations. Calligraphers soon began to transform Arabic writing into an art form. The angular scripts of the early period (seventh-tenth centuries) used for copying the Koran (**nos. 33-34**) are generally known as kufic, after the city of Kufa in southern Iraq. It was an important center of learning, but all early manuscripts were certainly not penned there. Blocky forms and even spacing between all unconnected letters characterize these manuscripts, which were copied on parchment made from the skin of various animals. While calligraphers always preserved the integrity of the Koranic text, artisans working in other media—ranging from carved stone to painted pottery—embellished the basic angular forms with a variety of leaves, flowers, stems, knots, and decorative tails (**nos. 25, 28-29**).

Kufic manuscripts of the Koran were intentionally difficult to read—in order to slow down readers of God's word—and so by the tenth century, as a truly Islamic society began to emerge, calligraphers came to adapt the common scripts used for other kinds of writing to transcribe the Koran, thereby making it more legible and accessible. This second period—from the tenth to the fifteenth century—witnesses the triumph of the

Six Pens, a group of rounded scripts that enhanced readability by providing the reader with a full range of diacritical marks and vocalizations (**nos. 22, 26**). This period also coincided with the abandonment of parchment and papyrus (which had been used for letters and records) and the total adoption of paper. Calligraphers often played one script off another, using one for display and a second for the text, or alternating scripts within the same text. Originally developed for writing with a reed pen on paper, these scripts were transferred to other media, such as metal (**nos. 27, 30-32**) and textiles (**no. 24**). At this time Arabic script was also adopted for writing other languages, beginning with Persian, an Indo-European language that has some sounds not found in Arabic. Writers adapted Arabic letters by adding, for example, two additional dots to transform the letter "b" into a "p."

From the fifteenth century, calligraphers began to transform these rounded styles of writing into pictures that merged images and writing. An early example is the style of writing known as square kufic, in which the letters of words are rearranged to fit a grid (**no. 35**). Since these texts were so difficult to read, they always contained well-known phrases, in which recognizing one word would provide the key to deciphering the whole text. Calligraphers then created word-pictures, sometimes known as calligrams, in which the letters are manipulated to form an image, for example, a lion (**no. 121**).

At all times and places, calligraphers attempted to make their work look effortless. In contrast to Far Eastern calligraphy, in which the reader is meant to relive the calligrapher's experience putting brush to paper—and hence sense his personality—calligraphy in the Islamic lands was meant to be timeless and cerebral, a reflection of God's permanence and immutability. The finest Arabic calligraphy reveals no traces of the physical actions required to produce it; the best calligraphers aspired to make their work indistinguishable from that of their masters.

Given the importance of writing to Islamic culture, its use spilled over from the religious into the secular sphere, and many objects of daily life were decorated entirely or partially with writing. These texts might include pious aphorisms (**nos. 29, 37, 39**), signatures of artists (**no. 40**), or poetry (**no. 36**), but Koranic verses were reserved for objects that would be used in religious settings (**nos. 23-25**). While there was certainly a higher rate of literacy in the medieval Islamic lands than elsewhere, not everybody could read. Nevertheless most people, particularly in cities, would have been able to recognize writing and perhaps even decipher some distinctive words or phrases like *allah* or the *basmala*. Writing permeated the culture, and, from a very early date, virtually all coins struck in the Islamic lands were decorated exclusively with writing. Even today, many Muslims are likely to decorate the walls of their houses with examples of calligraphy, whether written with a pen or stitched in gold thread on cloth, where others might put a picture.

22

FRAGMENT OF FOLIO FROM A KORAN MANUSCRIPT

ca. 1400, Samarqand
Ink and gold on paper, 45 x 98 cm
20/1987

[...Establish God's handiwork according
To the pattern on which] He has made
mankind:
Let there be no change in what God has
wrought:
That is the standard Religion:
But most among mankind do not understand
Turn back in repentance to Him....

These two lines, with verses 30-31 from Chapter 30 (al-Rum,) come from the largest Koran manuscript known. It was copied for the Turko-Monglian warlord Timur (Tamerlane) by the calligrapher Umar Aqta ("'Umar the amputee"), who had lost his right hand and therefore wrote with his left. Like the patron's ego, everything about this manuscript is gigantic. Each page had seven lines written in black script of the style known as *muhaqqaq* ("indubitable"). This large variant, called *jali* ("clear" or "plain") and later *jalil* ("great" or "glorious"), was written with a reed pen whose nib measured a full centimeter wide. The text now appears within a panel that measures 165 x 99 centimeters, but the wide margins on either side have been trimmed and the original pages would have contained seven lines of text and measured a whopping 2.2 x 1.55 meters.

To make such large sheets of paper, artisans, perhaps brought to Timur's capital at Samarqand after he had conquered Damascus, needed to resort to the older process of making paper in floating molds. While allowing the production of suitably large sheets, this method rendered one side of the sheet rough and unsuitable for writing, so there is text only on one side. The original manuscript must have been copied on some 1,500 sheets of this large size, which required vast quantities of white rags and fresh water to produce, but only about two-dozen pages or parts have survived from this gigantic manuscript. The loose-leaf pages, which seem never to have been bound in a book but kept in a portfolio or two, were read on the large marble Koran stand that still survives in the congregational mosque at Samarqand (James 18-25; Blair and Bloom 2006).

The major impact of this fragmentary page derives from the thick black strokes, highlighted delicately with lighter red punctuation indicating pauses and stops in recitation: in two cases in the top line *ṭa'* for *muṭlaq* (free or unrestricted, a pause indicating the end of a sentence but not of an argument) and in one case in the bottom line with *qaf* for *qila 'alayhi waqf* (a possible pause). The last is next to the small gold circle indicating the end of the verse, the sole illumination within the text. The calligrapher's virtuosity is clear from his mastery of parallel strokes, such as two sets of tails in the bottom line, which show absolutely no trace of uncertainty or wiggle. Altogether, the page exemplifies the triumph of calligraphy over decoration. It trumpets the word of God.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 102; *AWI* 2001, no. 11

23

SLAB

ca. 1100, Ghazna, Afghanistan
Carved marble, 52 x 34 cm
74/1979

Muslims sometimes added pictures of inanimate objects to illustrate God's word. The outside of this marble panel is framed with the *basmala,* the ubiquitous invocation in God's name, followed by a well-known verse from the Koran. The text, from verse 18 of Chapter 9, says that the people who inhabit God's mosques are those who believe in God and the Last Day, perform prayer, give alms, and fear God alone. The text, which encapsulates several of the five so-called Pillars of Faith fundamental to Muslim belief, was the one most commonly used on mosques, particularly since it is one of only three Koranic verses that refer to God's mosques (*masajid allah*), a special term distinct from any *masjid* or place of prayer (Blair 1998, 69).

The Koranic text shows that the slab came from a religious context. It probably served as a *mihrab,* the niche in the wall that points toward the Kaaba in Mecca. Style and materials suggest that the panel was carved about 1100 at Ghazna, the city that served as the capital of the Turkish Ghaznavid dynasty from 977 to 1163. The Ghaznavids were the first Muslim dynasty to expand from their base in Afghanistan into northern India. Many such inscribed marble panels have been found at their capital. The most famous encircles the court of the palace of Mas'ud III, ruler there from 1099 to 1115: a long (250-meter) band carved with a Persian poem extolling the virtues of the sultan (Bombaci).

Early photographs of Ghazna show carved marble mihrabs *in situ* (Flury pl. XIII/2 and no. 10). Like this one, they are decorated with polylobed horseshoe arches supported on plump columns. The hood of the niche on this slab is inscribed with scrolling vegetal ornament. Often this decoration has a central palmette; here it is wheel-shaped, emanating from a central point. Many of these features have parallels in Indian art, which is not surprising considering the historical situation. What is most distinct about this slab, however, is the lamp suspended in the center, flanked by the word *allah* (God). This image of the hanging lamp, often suspended over two lamp stands, typically occurs in funerary contexts—in concave mihrabs in tombs or in flat panels designed to be used as mihrabs, tombstones, or cenotaphs. The image often accompanies the so-called "Light Verse" (Koran 24:35), in which God is extolled as the light of the heavens and the earth. Muslim mystics (sufis) in South Asia often used light imagery to express God's unfathomable qualities. The image therefore may denote God's power over life and death, a message expressed verbally in the accompanying Koranic text.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 46; *Sultan Shah*, no. 24; *AWI* 2001, no. 393

24

TOMB COVER

dated [1]153/1740, Kashan, Iran
Polychrome taqueté (weft-faced compound tabby) silk, 118 x 91 cm.
30/1971

This large and sumptuous textile is almost entirely covered with inscription bands that mix various scripts and subjects into a veritable patchwork. The large texts are written in bold *thuluth*, the script typically used for inscriptions and notable here for the unauthorized connections between the letters *alif* and *'ayn*, the same connection found in contemporary manuscripts of the Koran (**no. 122**). The smaller texts are written in *nasta'liq*, the hanging script developed for writing Persian. The large boxes in the top and third rows contain the opening phrase of the Nad 'Ali, the Shi'ite prayer invoking the aid of 'Ali, revealer of miracles. The texts in the second and bottom row continue the same theme using Koranic texts such as Koran 110:1 about the advent of God's help and victory. In the smaller boxes, the text written horizontally contains the *basmala*, the invocation to God, while the text written vertically contains Koran 61:13 about God's help and a speedy victory as well as the signature of the calligrapher, Muhammad Mu'min.

This large but generic and repetitive pious text was then sandwiched between horizontal bands that provide historical information. The inscription in cartouches in green on pink at the bottom and pink on green at the top gives the name of the woman who endowed the textile. She is identified as a pilgrim who had made the hajj (*hajjiyya*), daughter of a *khwand* (*mulla* or religious figure) named Qasim Ibanaki (the last word is unclear). This information is followed by the date in numbers 153, to be interpreted as 1[0]53, corresponding to 1643-44, or more likely as[1]153, corresponding to 1740-41. The text repeated across the band at the very bottom gives the name of the artisan Muhammad Husayn ibn Hajji Muhammad al-Kashani. He is credited with making (the word is *'amal*) the silk and was probably the director of the workshop perhaps in Kashan, a city in central Iran that was known in the Safavid period for its fine silk textiles. The textile was woven on a drawloom, which allowed these bands with personalized information to be "mailmerged" into an otherwise standard design. No other examples of such a personalized inscription, however, are known.

All these inscriptions make this textile a rare historical document and show how many people were involved in making this luxury product. First, the bold calligraphic design must have been penned by a major calligrapher (there were several named Muhammad Mu'min at this time). His designs, undoubtedly drawn on small pieces of paper corresponding to the individual cartouches, was then handed to the workshop or artisan, Muhammad Husayn ibn Hajji Muhammad al-Kashani, who transferred the design to the loom. In doing so, he must have flipped over one piece of paper, for the inscription with the second half of the Koran verse 61:13 is written backwards. The textile was then endowed by a woman, who had probably commissioned it in the first place. It was likely destined for a Shi'ite shrine, for the prayers and Koranic verses on it were dear to Shi'ites. The same ones are found, for example, on the begging bowl made for a Shi'ite shrine in the Deccan (**no. 36**). The textile would have covered a cenotaph or grave marker, and the fervent tenor of the inscriptions, with its marching vertical strokes, would have called attention to the piety of the donor and her faith in the God and the Twelve Imams.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 80; Welch 1979, no. 62; *Woven Treasures*, no. 41; *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 238; *Sultan Shah*, no. 381; *AWI* 2001, no. 651

25

WOODEN PANEL

Muharram 503/August 1109, eastern Iran

Carved cedar, 60.5 x 62 cm

11/1977

The text on this cedar plaque, perhaps the end of a cenotaph, is rare evidence for popular piety in medieval times. Timber was scarce in many of the Islamic lands, where fine and exotic woods were typically reserved for minbars, mihrabs, cenotaphs, and other furnishings in mosques and shrines. This plaque, dated Muharram 503/August 1109, may have come from such a piece of furniture that was, to judge from the style of its carved inscriptions, made in Iran.

The line at the top contains the *basmala*, or invocation to God, along with the phrase "O noble one" (*ya karim*) added to fill out the line. The text is written in the rectilinear kufic script distinguished by the intertwined stems, particularly of the *alif-lam* pair that makes up the definite article and the opening letters of *allah* ("God"). Interlaced kufic was developed in eastern Iran in the tenth century, as shown by the inscriptions on Samanid ceramics (**no. 29**), but it also made the text difficult to read, and by the early twelfth century interlaced kufic was reserved for well-known (and hence readily readable) phrases like the *basmala*.

The main text on the panel continues below in eight lines inscribed within a rectangular panel with pointed projections at the top. Following the exclamation "O God," it asks the reader to pray for Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as he was the one who brought Your revelation and delivered Your treatise (*ka-ma hamala wahika wa balagha risalataka*) and the one who made lawful Your lawful actions and made unlawful Your unlawful ones (*ka-ma ahala halalaka and harama haramaka*). The short, rhyming phrases are heart-felt. Like the prayers inscribed on contemporary textiles and metalwares, they exemplify the popular prayers whose content often differs from the official versions canonized in sermons and other written sources. Works of art, in short, are also instructive for the history of religion.

These inscriptions show the increasing veneration of the Prophet and his family, a trend that would culminate during the Safavid period with the acceptance of Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran. The text is written in a superb floriated kufic, in which the extra spaces above and around the letters are crammed with flowers, palmettes, and tear-drop shapes. Robust floral arabesques fill the larger spaces around the inscription and the four corners, and the whole is outlined with a line of drilled dots. Humble though the content may be, it was carved by a master craftsman.

Selected bibliography: Ghouchani 1987; *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 63; *Sultan Shah*, no. 243; *AWI* 2001, no. 419

26

FOLIO FROM A KORAN MANUSCRIPT

11th century, Iran

Ink and opaque pigments on paper, 31.1 x 20.9 cm

6/2004 (Side B)

...and they bow down humbly (in worship)
As to those who turn to God and His Messenger
and those who believe
Certainly the party of God must triumph.
O ye who believe!
Take not for friends and protectors those who
take [your religion for a mockery or sport]

This folio, with a text admonishing believers to avoid associating with those who mock the faith (5:55-59), belongs to the most elaborate of the Koran manuscripts penned in "broken" cursive. It has been disassembled and the leaves are now dispersed (see Saint-Laurent). The stylized script is characterized by strokes of varying thickness, left-facing serifs, diagonal tails, and a spur on final *alif*. Connecting letters are set flat on a horizontal line that intersects the rigidly vertical ascenders. The rectangular grid is interrupted by diagonal tails that descend below the line and the bold, pincer-like strokes of *lam-alif*, as on the bottom line of Side A (below) . Unlike early parchment manuscripts of the Koran (e.g., **nos. 33** and **38**), in which the copyist broke lines in the middle of a word, here each line ends at the end of a word. The calligrapher therefore had to squeeze in the last letters, as for example, the serpentine final *nun* at the end of lines one and three. (Compare the same letters with boat-shaped tails in the middle of lines two and three). The breaks, along with the careful pointing and vocalization in red, show that these paper manuscripts in broken cursive were meant to be read, in contrast to the parchment manuscript designed for recitation.

This script was particularly popular for 30-part Koran codices made from the late eleventh to the early thirteenth century (Blair 2006). Like this one, they are typically written on paper in a vertical format and of medium size, but each page appears larger for it has only three or four lines of widely spaced script. The opening and closing spreads in each volume were often elaborately decorated, but what makes this manuscript so special is that every page—and there must have been some 4,500 pages in the entire manuscript—is laboriously decorated with scrolling arabesques, framing bands painted in gold, and elaborate verse markers, including circles to indicate the end of every verse and marginal boxes like the one at the top left to indicate the end of every five verses. This manuscript marks the melding of decoration with calligraphy.

Selected bibliography: Falk 1985, no. 13

(Side A)

27

LAMP STAND

1470s, western Iran or eastern Turkey
Brass, engraved and inlaid with silver, H 101 cm
45/1999

This magnificent lamp stand exemplifies the power of piety. It is composed of two parts: a base that can be used independently as a candlestick, and a baluster-like shaft that ends in a bowl-shaped oil lamp. Both are decorated with bold inscriptions, and the long and unprecedented texts help us unravel the history of this object. The body is decorated with cartouches containing an inscription asking God to perpetuate the sultanate of Abu'l-Nasr Sultan Hasan Beg. Better known as Uzun Hasan (r. 1453-78), he was a military commander and statesman of genius who extended the territories of the Aq Qoyunlu ("White Sheep") by subduing not only their fellow Turkoman, the Qara Qoyunlu ("Black Sheep") of western Iran, but also the rival Timurids of eastern Iran. Under Uzun Hasan, the Aq Qoyunlu became an international power and opened relations with Venetians against their common enemy, the Ottomans. On this candlestick Uzun Hasan is identified as *bahadur* ("hero"), a title he used on coins from 1470, when Tabriz became the Aq Qoyunlu capital.

The inscription around the shaft tells us that Uzun Hasan ordered the lamp stand for the shrine of a sufi named Bayram Baba Vali, probably to be identified with Haji Bayram Vali, founder of popular Bayramiyya order of mystics (Melikian-Chirvani 1987, 126-31). His tomb in Ankara was deep in Ottoman territory, and ordering such a gift must have been something of a slap in the face to the reigning Ottoman sultan, Mehmed II (the Conquerer). The lamp probably never reached Ankara since Mehmed defeated Uzun Hasan at Tercan in 1473, and he never regained his strength. The inscription around the top is a poem extolling God's light. Although composed in Persian, the poem uses Arabic words like *misbah* (lamp), a noun that evokes the famous Light Verse (Koran 24:35), in which God is extolled as the light of the heavens and the earth. The poem thus alludes to the sacred context in which the lamp was used, and, like the Ghaznavid mihrab (**no. 23**), underscores how sufis used the imagery of light to express God's unfathomable qualities. This lamp was probably one of a pair, for such stands were often set up to flank the mihrab in a tomb or shrine.

Comparing this lamp stand to the contemporary candlestick (**no. 30**) also illustrates the difference between objects that were specifically commissioned, often by courtiers, and those made for the market. In both cases, Arabic writing forms the main subject of decoration, but this lamp is larger (the base is twice the diameter of the pierced example) and made of more expensive materials and techniques (brass inlaid with silver rather than pierced copper). This one has a long inscription composed specifically for the object; the other has a generic text with a poem offering good wishes to the anonymous owner. In both cases, the inscriptions are written in *thuluth* script set off by floral motifs drawn from the repertory of book illustration, but on the large lamp stand the words are set in cartouches formed by interlacing bands to highlight the longer and specifically commissioned text. They are also framed by elegant vine scrolls. The texts underscore the distinction of this object.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 525

28

IKAT TEXTILE

10th century, Yemen
Tabby woven of resist-dyed cotton and embroidered,
32 x 51 cm
47/1992

For Muslims, the word was of paramount importance, even if unreadable, as on this sturdy striped textile that was a specialty of the Yemen, a type praised in early texts for its durability and its suitability for cloaks. It is made of thick, Z-spun cotton warps that were tie-dyed before weaving in shades of blue, brown, and white, resulting in a finished cloth with splashed arrow patterns. The resist-dyed threads were usually set up on the loom in wide stripes alternating with narrower ones of a plain color, often, as here, white. The technique of resist-dyeing later became popular in Indonesia and became known as ikat, from the Malay word "to fasten or tie."

After weaving, Yemeni ikats were typically decorated with a horizontal band containing a single line of text, either painted in gold outlined in black or, as here, embroidered in white cotton (Golombek and Gervers). Four examples contain historical inscriptions giving the name of the patron, either the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tadid b'illah (r. 892-902) or one of the Zaydi imams who ruled in Yemen (Blair 1989), written in a relatively simple gilded script. Most of the other examples, however, contain common Koranic citations or pious invocations written in an extremely elaborate script that is notable for the flag-like stems of the letters and the extraordinary number of extraneous arcs, bumps, diamonds, circles, and other decorative devices inserted between and around the letters. Such decoration makes the texts difficult to decipher, and there is often dispute about what an individual example actually says. Some contain repeated blessings that are readily readable, and it is possible that this piece was meant to contain a similar repeated blessing but that it had become illegible after repeated copying.

This fragment represents about two-thirds of the original loom width. The center is indicated by another set of words, also illegible but perhaps further blessings, written upside down at the bottom. The power of writing has superseded what the text actually says.

Selected bibliography: *Woven Treasures*, no. 5; *Sultan Shah*, no. 68; *AWI* 2001, no. 628

29

BOWL

10th century, eastern Iran or Central Asia
Earthenware covered with a white slip and painted in brown and red slip under a transparent glaze, H 10; diameter 26.5 cm
22/1974

This type of pottery, decorated elaborately and often exclusively with Arabic inscriptions, strikes an almost modernist note. The style was developed by potters working in the cities of Nishapur and Samarqand under the patronage of the Samanids, rulers of eastern Iran and Transoxania from 819 to 1005 (Watson 2004, 206-19; type Ga). This large bowl is decorated solely with a large inscription that runs around the walls of the interior. Although the Samanids oversaw a renaissance of literature in the New Persian language, the texts on these pieces, mainly bowls and plates, contain moralizing aphorisms in Arabic. The inscriptions are like puzzles, written in a decorative kufic script embellished with extraneous knots, bumps, and flourishes that make the texts extremely hard to read, much more difficult to decipher than the earlier ones from ninth-century Iraq written in cobalt blue on white (**no. 40**).

The inscription on this bowl, written clockwise starting from six o'clock, records a well-known saying that "He who believes in recompense [from God] is generous with gifts" (*man ayqana bi'l-khalaf jada bi'l-'atiya*). The proverb is a *hadith,* or Tradition, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and also to his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali. The same proverb appears on other vessels, including a plate in the Freer Gallery of Art (52.11; Quchani, pl. 25) and a bowl once displayed in the Khalili Gallery in London (Ghouchani 1986, pl. 102). To help the reader decipher this pithy saying, the potter of this bowl inserted four dots to mark the beginning of the sentence and used red to indicate the first letter of the other four words in it. The reader would have had to turn the bowl counter-clockwise to decipher the inscription. These bowls and plates were probably used to serve communal dishes of food. As other bowls were inscribed with aphorisms encouraging the reader to eat with enjoyment and fulfillment, we can speculate that deciphering the inscription was a sort of after-dinner parlor game.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 282; Welch 1979, no. 10; *Sultan Shah*, no. 242; *AWI* 2001, no. 115

30

CANDLESTICK

15th century, Iran

Copper alloy with openwork and engraved decoration, H 23.8; diameter 20 cm

26/1994

Muslims used the word for decoration, even on objects made for daily life. This type of candlestick, with a bell-shaped base and matching neck socket designed to hold a large taper, was commonly produced in the eastern Islamic lands beginning in the twelfth or thirteenth century, but the shape, proportions, and decoration vary in groups made at different times and places. Examples like this one from fifteenth-century Iran are distinguished by a tapering base that splays outward toward the bottom, shoulders whose sides are chamfered or cut at a right-angle to make a sloping edge, and a socket whose base takes the form of a low inward-slanting cylinder that was either screwed into or soldered onto the low base (Komaroff, esp. pp. 28 and 58). One sub-group has sockets in the form of intertwined dragons whose open-mouths provide the holder for the candle. Another sub-group of four or five examples, including this one, has large openwork inscriptions around the base. Some, like this one, were probably tinned to give the surface a silvery finish. The text here contains an Arabic poem offering good wishes to the owner: "To its owner, happiness, well-being and life as long as a pigeon coos, eternally, endlessly, until Judgment Day." Used already in the twelfth century, this poem was typical of wares made in the fifteenth century. Like the fabric of copper alloy, the generic inscription suggests that this candlestick was made for the market and used in a domestic setting.

We do not know exactly where in Iran candlesticks with such openwork decoration were made, and both eastern and western Iran are possibilities. The braided and fretted bands on the shoulder and bottom of the base and the placing of the last syllable of a work in the upper zone are typical of Khurasani wares made for the Timurids, but the foliate palmettes resemble those found on the lamp stand commissioned by the Aq Qoyonlu ruler Uzun Hasan in the 1470s (**no. 27**). Such wares probably had a wide currency.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 524

31
DERVISH STAFF
18th–19th century, Iran
Wrought steel, 68.5 cm
15/1994

Metalsmiths in the last centuries in Iran could transform humble objects like this steel rod into exquisite calligraphy with letters ingeniously fitted to accommodate its prosaic function. This staff was carried by itinerant dervishes, who might lean on it to keep awake during meditation. Such objects are known in other materials like wood and are depicted in paintings and described by travelers, but this is one of the most artistic extant examples.

Here, the smith ingeniously adapted the T-shape of the usual staff into clearly legible writing. Viewed sideways, the rod spells out the word Ali, the name of Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law and the fourth caliph whom Shi'ites believe to be the Prophet's rightful successor and the first imam. The initial letter, *'ayn,* provides a hand grip; the tall projecting stroke of the middle letter, *lam,* makes the rest for the arm, chin, or forehead; and the tail of the final *ya'* bends backwards to provide the main vertical shaft. The name Ali shows the owner's adherence to Twelver Shi'ism, the sect that became the main religion in Iran under the Safavids in the sixteenth century and continues to be so today.

To judge from descriptions by European travelers, by the nineteenth century, dervishes were often well equipped with elaborate metal paraphernalia, ranging from axes, maces, knives, clubs, and horns to begging bowls (**no. 36**). Many such items could be purchased in specialty shops found in most towns. The owner of this staff was clearly well off, for it is beautifully fashioned. The calligraphy is exquisite, with a marked tension between the rounded, almost closed circle of the grip and the sweeping straight stroke of the shaft. Though itinerant, this dervish did not revel in poverty!

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah,* no. 283; *AWI* 2001, no. 528; Allan and Gilmour, G. 11

32

PLAQUE

late 17th century, Iran

Steel with openwork decoration, surrounded by six smaller, parcel-gilt steel plaques, mounted on a gilded copper plate, 14.8 x 42.5 cm

25/1994

Muslims embellished objects and furnishings with sacred names to enhance their holiness. This steel plaque comprises a rectangular steel frame consisting of six pieces, some bearing remains of parcel (selective) gilding. The central panel is pierced with a delicate, scrolling arabesque that supports a bold inscription of thick, round letters that stand out in relief when viewed against the gilded copper plate. The steel plate has been cut away with consummate artisanry, leaving an exquisite filigree to support the writing. The text, *wa akhihi asad allah musamman bi-'ali* ("and of his brother, the lion of God, named Ali"), is a verse from an Arabic poem in honor of the Fourteen Innocent Ones (Muhammad, Fatima, and the Twelve Imams venerated by Shi'ites). Poems venerating these figures as intercessors on the Day of Judgment became popular in Iran during the period of Safavid rule (1501-1732), when Shi'ism was introduced as the state religion. Such poems adorn, for example, the interior of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, erected in the opening decades of the seventeenth century on the main square in the new capital at Isfahan, the city where steel-making became a prominent industry in this period. Pierced rectangular plaques like this one were used as fittings, especially in mosques and shrines, where they were set vertically in rows on the wooden valves of doors, but the most elaborate examples, like this gilded one, were incorporated into the metal grilles (*ḍarīḥ*) that enclose the cenotaphs of revered saints like Imam Riza, buried in the Astan-i Quds at Mashhad. The old steel one there, for example, was replaced in 1962-64.

This plaque clearly belonged to a set; another one from the same set that sold in London at Christies (April 23, 1996, lot. 224) was signed "the work of Muhammad Riza," to be identified with Muhammad Riza al-Imami, the renowned Safavid calligrapher who signed at least sixty inscriptions in Iran dated between 1628 and 1677 at Isfahan, Natanz, Qazvin, Qum, and Mashhad, including the tomb of Imam Riza there. Although he took credit for the work, Muhammad Riza was clearly in charge of designing the steel plaques, not the artisan who spent untold hours drilling and filing them to perfection. Several sets of these plaques are known (Allan and Gilmour 292-302), but this is the only one that preserves its original copper backing. At least one other set of eight plaques has the same poem, including a plaque (V&A M5.1919) containing the same verse but laid out slightly differently. In both cases, the text is written in a bold *muhaqqaq*, the script used for luxury Koran manuscripts elaborately decorated in gold (**no. 122**). This particular plaque is distinguished by the traces of the original gilding on the rectangular frame and the large rectangular backing sheet made of gilded copper. This plaque suggests that some of these texts, especially the fanciest ones, were meant to be seen against a gold ground. The sacred names were thus lit up in lights!

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 265; *AWI* 2001, no 526

33

FOLIO FROM A KORAN MANUSCRIPT

8th century?, Syria

Ink on parchment, 46.5 x 39.9 cm

26/2003 (Side A)

From the beginning of Islam, Muslims appreciated ornament, even for the sacred word. This folio belongs to a very early copy of the Koran that is transcribed on parchment in brown ink (the reverse has been re-inked with black carbon ink). Each full page in the codex would have contained twenty lines of blocky, rectilinear script written freehand without a ruling, although on this page two lines are taken up with delicate bands of decoration that separate chapters in the text. The letters are not pointed (that is, there are no dots distinguishing letters like *ba'* from *ta'* or *ya'*), but short strokes are sometimes added to indicate unwritten vowels. This page contains all of Chapter 91 (Surat al-Shams, The Sun) as well as the end of the preceding chapter and the beginning of the following one. The other side continues with Chapter 92 and the opening five verses of Chapter 93. Although near the end of the 114 chapters in the Koranic text as it was codified during the reign of the third caliph Uthman (r. 644-56) with the chapters organized in order of decreasing length, these short chapters were among the first that were revealed in Mecca and are some of the most poetic. Chapter 91, shown here, opens with short rhyming passages about nature and ends with a dire warning about the consequences for those who do not fear the Hereafter.

The squarish but still vertical format and blocky script without pointing show that this page comes from one of the earliest known manuscripts of the Koran. It is comparable to a handful that can most likely be attributed to eighth-century Syria. Very similar fragments with the same dimensions, number of lines per page, and decorated border with red corners were part of the cache of fragments discovered in the roof of the Great Mosque at San'a in Yemen in 1993 (see Pitorovosky and Vrieze, nos. 42-43). The script there, however, is more curvilinear and slanted to the right, and this folio seems to be by a different hand. The upright script on this page is closest to a dispersed manuscript that the French scholar François Déroche (2002) has dubbed the "Damascus Umayyad Koran."

What makes this page so special is its illumination. The upper band dividing the chapters has a lozenge pattern in red and green; the bottom one has a zigzag pattern of leaves in yellow and white. Red circles indicate the ends of every five verses (here 91:5 and 15). More complicated markers are used at the end of every ten verses (here, 90:20 and 91:10): circles inscribed in squares with protrusions to form star shapes that are painted green, red and yellow. These markers are similar, though not by any means identical, to the markers dividing sections of text in the mosaic inscription around the Dome of the Rock built in Jerusalem in 72/692, the earliest example of Islamic architecture. A green frame with a white twist pattern and red boxes at the corners surrounds the written surface on this page. Perhaps the most unusual element is the green and red arrow filling out the line at the end of Chapter 90.

Unpublished

(Side B)

34

WOODEN PANEL

ca. 879, Egypt

Pine, 29.5 x 123 x 1.8 cm

1/2002

This carved wooden panel is one of the finest examples of the rectilinear kufic script to survive from early Islamic times. It comes from the congregational mosque built in the new district of al-Qata'i', part of Old Cairo, on the orders of the 'Abbasid governor of Egypt, Ahmad ibn Tulun (Creswell 1932, 2:345). Constructed between 876 and 879, this large hypostyle building was a local interpretation of the great congregational mosques in the Abbasid capital at Samarra in Iraq, which had a covered area comprising a rectangular hall with arcades supported on piers surrounding a central open court. The narrow frieze, illustrated *in situ* in the *Description de l'Egypte* (vol. 1, pl. 31 and vol. 2, pls. c, d, and e), the record of the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt at the turn of the nineteenth century, was nailed around the top of the arcades supporting the roof. This fragment was bought in Cairo in 1848 by P. H. Delaporte, French consul in Egypt. All other surviving fragments remain *in situ* except for one in the Louvre and five in the Islamic Museum in Cairo (Anglade, no. 6).

The inscription, which originally measured almost two kilometers in length, was often said to contain the entire text of the Koran, but as Creswell pointed out, there is space for only about 1/15 of the full text. Most published pieces contain passages from Sura 2 (al-Baqara, "The Cow"), the longest chapter of the Koran whose 286 verses reputedly encapsulate the entire Koranic message. The Koran is often divided into 30 parts (*juz'*), to allow the entire text to be read in one month, and the amount in this frieze therefore would be equivalent to about two sections.

This panel contains three words from Koran 2:133, part of a long passage about earlier revelation. This phrase comes from the section in which Jacob addresses his sons, asking them "What will you worship after me?" To which, they reply: "We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers, Abraham, Ismael, and Isaac." The text is written in the so-called *scriptio defectiva* in which long *alif* is omitted, as here in the words *aba'ika* and *ibrahim*. The letters are posed firmly on the baseline. Tails descend only a little below the baseline, concentrating most of the weight of the letters in the upper part of the band. The tall and upright stems contrast with the rounded bodies. The only ornamentation is the slightly tapered serif at the ends of the letters. Otherwise, the band is totally plain, without interlacing or arabesque. It shows no traces of paint, although it may have been painted. Although this molding would have been nearly invisible at eight meters above the ground, its presence was symbolic, for it consumed a wealth of timber in a land without forests. Its text and placement show that God's word reigns supreme.

Selected bibliography: *Calligraphie islamique*, no. 1

35
SEAL
14th century, Iran
Cast bronze, 5.8 x 5.7 cm
7/1996

Muslims in Mongol Iran adapted the rectilinear kufic script used in early Islamic times (**nos. 33-34**) to imitate the script introduced in China under the Mongols. The small plaque is decorated solely with an inscription in relief written in Arabic letters in mirror reverse. Starting from the center outwards, the text reads Abu Ishaq, the shaykh, the spiritual guide, may God sanctify his soul (*abu ishaq al-shaykh al-murshid qaddasa allah ruhah*).

Abu Ishaq (963-1033) founded the sufi order, known eponymously as the Ishraqiyya after his given name, the Murshidiyya after his title *murshid* (father or shaykh), or the Kazaruniyya after his birthplace at Kazarun in southwestern Iran. It became a major example of institutional sufism, instrumental in spreading mysticism to Anatolia and Southeast Asia. Abu Ishaq's hospice (*khanaqah*) at Kazarun became a major shrine and center of manuscript production until its destruction in the sixteenth century. The shaykh was considered to have possessed spiritual powers, and the order functioned as a sort of insurance company. According to the Moroccan globetrotter Ibn Battuta, who visited Kazarun in 1347, travelers on the China Sea who feared pirates or ill winds would pledge sums of money to Abu Ishaq. When their ships docked safely, members of the order would collect on the vows. The members were equipped with pledges issued by the shrine that were sealed in red wax with a carved silver die containing the name of the shaykh. This small plaque, made of cast bronze, rather than the silver mentioned by Ibn Battuta, is a more modest example. It has an integral loop on the back to hold while stamping and to
attach to a cord for carrying and must have been used by one of the itinerant members of the order to seal pledges or other sorts of documents or manuscripts while traveling.

The angular Arabic script used here copies Phagspa, the script drawn up by the Tibetan lama Phagspa, adviser to the Great Khan Qubilai, and introduced in 1269 in China to write the diverse languages of the empire, including Tibetan, Uighur, Mongolian, and Chinese. From his capital at Khanbaliq, the Great Khan sent a royal seal written in Phagspa to mark the investiture of his nominal subordinates in Iran, the Ilkhanids. There, the seal was entrusted to the minister of finance, who was authorized to stamp all fiscal decrees. Once the Ilkhanids converted to Islam in 1295 and declared their independence from the Great Khan in China, they introduced their own seals written in Arabic in the script closest to Phagspa, square kufic, and used on official decrees (Blair 2006, 271-272 and fig. 7.13). This script, in turn, was imitated on non-royal seals issued by local authorities, such as this sufi order. Phagspa is written vertically in columns from left to right. Although similarly rectilinear, this script is written in a square and shows how Muslims could regularize and geometricize the flowing shapes of Arabic letters and their diacritical points to fill all the spaces in a grid.

Selected bibliography: Komaroff and Carboni, no. 167

36

BEGGING BOWL

ca. 1600, Deccan, India
Cast, engraved, and tinned bronze, 16.7 x 38.5 cm
61/1998

Mystics, or sufis, often invoked the word in their quest to find God. This distinctively shaped object is known as a *kashkul*, a begging bowl made in the form of a boat (in Persian, *kashti*). It is inscribed around the interior and the rim of the exterior with religious texts, including the prayer known as Nad 'Ali invoking the aid of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali (**no. 24**); a Koranic verse invoking victory from God (61:13); and invocations to God the Creator, Muhammad, Ali, and Fatima. The object's shape derives from Iranian prototypes, but the thick, superbly cast bronze mellowed to a rich chocolate-brown patina suggests that it was made in Hyderabad, the new city outside Golconda in the Deccan that served as the capital of Qutbshahi dynasty (1496-1687). Other details of the decoration confirm its Indian provenance, including the bold *thuluth* inscriptions on the interior and exterior, a sign of the technical virtuosity, and the lively dragons with upturned noses and open mouths (Zebrowski 335-59).

These bowls were often carried by itinerant dervishes as part of their elaborate paraphernalia that included other metal objects, such as staffs (**no. 31**). However, the weight of this large and bulky bowl and the lack of rings for a chain from which to suspend it suggest that this one might have been made to grace one of the many shrines erected by these fervently Shi'ite rulers. The largest was the Ashur-khana, built at Hyderabad in 1596 to celebrate Ashura, the day commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn on the tenth (*ashara*) day of the month of Muharram in the year 61 (October 10, 680). The shrine was decorated with large metal standards (in Persian, '*alam*), many decorated with dragon-heads like those on the bowl. In the flickering light such metalwares boldly inscribed with pious invocations would have stirred the believers.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 551

37

SMALL DISH

8th–9th century, Iraq

Earthenware with molded decoration, glazed in yellow and green, diameter 16.8 cm

50/1999

For Muslims, the word was so important that even everyday objects like this dish were embellished with adages. It belongs to a rare group of wares made in eighth- or ninth-century Mesopotamia that are distinguished by lack of articulation between bowl and rim, low-relief decoration molded with great precision, and a fine glaze that covers both interior and exterior. The shape and decoration derive from metalwork prototypes, and this group of molded and glazed ceramics can be seen as continuations of a style popular since Roman times.

The decoration, however, is typically Islamic. Several pieces show geometric patterns, notably palmettes surrounded by intricate interlaced knots. A few dishes bear inscriptions in kufic script. A well-known example in the British Museum contains a distich by the Umayyad poet, Muhammad Bashir ibn al-Khariji, stating that patience will bring joy or relief from suffering (Pinder-Wilson 1963-64). This dish, the only other example with a complete inscription, contains an aphorism on a similar theme. Reading from top to bottom, it says that "Patience is the key to victory; blessing" (*al-sabr miftah al-zafar; baraka*). To underscore the meaning of the phrase, the potter highlighted the word "victory" with green. One must imagine this plate covered with food; as the food was consumed, the adage would have gradually been revealed to the patient diner, granting him victory and blessing.

The potter, nonetheless, may not have been literate, for even this simple phrase, like the distich on the dish in the British Museum, contains mistakes. Here, for example, there is an extra *alif* at the end of the second line to fill out the space. This type of aphorism, used on ninth-century Mesopotamian wares, set the precedent for those inscribed on tenth-century slip-painted wares made in eastern Iran and Central Asia (Quchani 1986). The one in this exhibition (**no. 29**), for example, is inscribed with a similar phrase about rewards for the generous, but the elaborate knotting there makes the text much more difficult to decipher.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 99

38

FOLIO FROM A KORAN MANUSCRIPT

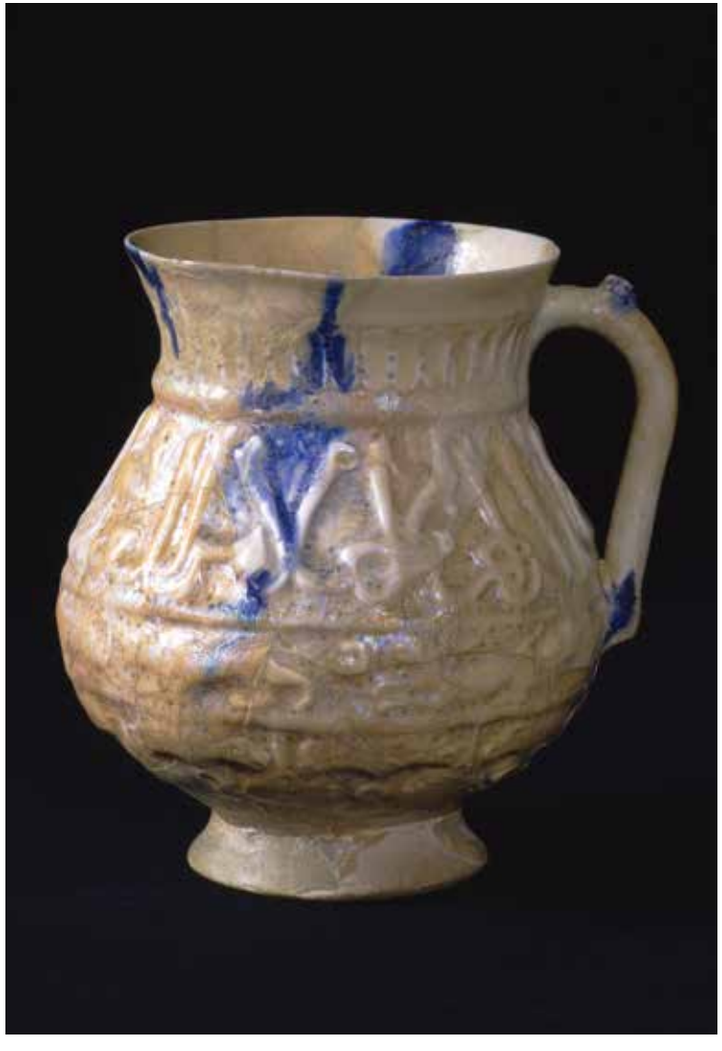
ca. 950, Tunisia
Gold and silver on parchment stained blue, 28.6 x 38 cm (trimmed)
77/2004 (Side B)

This folio, from one of the most sumptuous Koran manuscripts known, exemplifies how Muslims glorified God's word. Like the enormous manuscript made for Timur (**no. 22**), this one is immediately recognizable, even to the causal viewer, by its remarkable color. The parchment has been stained a vivid blue that contrasts with the gold writing outlined in black ink made from gallnuts. The ends of verses (2:187-190 [A] and 190-194 [B]) are marked with small silver roundels (now tarnished); a large silver circle in the margin marks the end of ten verses. At the top right of side B, for example, the large circle indicates the end of what is now counted as verse 190 of Chapter (*sura*) 2 in the standard Egyptian edition of the Koran, part of a text that urges believers to strive on God's path. Curiously, however, the verse is counted in this manuscript as 170, as indicated by the alphanumeric (*abjad*) in the same circle within the text, with *qaf* (hundred) and *'ayn* (seventy).

The anonymous calligrapher wrote in the angular script generally known as kufic. The letters are rectilinear and blocky, most of the diacritical marks have been omitted, and the spaces between words are collapsed to the same size as the spaces between letters. All these features make the script extremely difficult to read, except by someone who knew the text by heart. This was a manuscript made for public recitation by someone who had already committed the text to memory.

Now trimmed, the folio originally measured at least 31 x 41 centimeters and was one of some 650 folios that were probably bound in seven volumes (Bloom 1989). This manuscript consumed the skins of some 325 sheep, a material testament, like the precious metals used for the inks, to the wealth of its patron, presumably either the Fatimid caliph al-Mansur (r. 946-53) or his son al-Mu'izz (r. 953-75), before the latter moved the Fatimid court from Tunisia to Egypt in 969. The manuscript was recorded in the library of the congregational mosque of Kairouan, Tunisia (ca. 1300), and some pages still remain in Tunisian museums. The manuscript's unusual color is thought to have been an imitation of Byzantine imperial manuscripts that were dyed purple with murex, dye from a mollusk that was unavailable to the Fatimids. The regal combination of blue and gold make it a tribute worthy of God's enduring word.

Selected bibliography: Falk 1985, no. 3



39
JUG

second half 12th century, Iran
Fritware with molded and openwork decoration and with splashes of blue under transparent glaze, H 15 cm
40/1966

Potters in the Islamic lands had made fine molded wares since earliest times, but the development of fritware (also known as stonepaste), an artificial body made from ground quartz with small amounts of fine clay, allowed them to make detailed designs that included not only figural, floral, and geometric patterns but also writing. This small jug is decorated with bands containing all four kinds of decoration and small pierced holes filled with glaze to show off the fineness of the potting and the transparency of the glaze. At the top around the rim is an arcaded band. At the bottom of the body is a floral band surmounted by a running frieze of animals. But the largest band around the upper part of the body is decorated with words written in the rounded script called *thuluth*.

The texts often suit the function of these small jugs that would have held water or wine. Some (e.g., Watson 2004, no. L.3) are inscribed with the phrase "Drink with enjoyment and fulfillment" (*ishrab haniyyan mariyyan*). Others have repeated benedictions, such as "wealth" (*dawla*), "power" (*al-'izz*), and the like. This one has a well-known proverb: "Clemency's taste is at first bitter, but at last sweeter than honey" (*al-hilm awwaluhu murrun madhaqatuhu lakinna akhirahu ahla min al-'asali*). This proverb is already found on several slip-painted earthenwares made in eastern Iran during the tenth century (Quchani 1986, nos. 31 and 59), on which it is followed by a single word invoking blessing (*baraka*) or health (*al-salama*). It also occurs on molded fritwares like this one (Quchani 1986, no. 94), where it is followed by another proverb: "Diligence [is a praiseworthy action]" (*al-jidu [ahmadu 'amalin]*).

The jug can be attributed to Kashan on the basis of the fabric, technique, and style. This city in central Iran was the center of the ceramic industry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the site where the finest fritwares were produced. Several similar pieces of molded wares with piercing and a splash of cobalt decoration are known, including a group of octagonal bowls in the Freer Gallery (55.9; Atıl 1993, no. 22), Louvre (MAO 2016), and elsewhere that are signed by Hasan al-Kashani. Kashan was the main center of the fritware industry, but it was not the only place that such glazed wares were made. A mold with a poem about wine written in a stunning human-headed script and two glazed jugs made from it are signed by someone with the epithet Samarqandi (Watson 2004, 136-38), suggesting that such wares were made elsewhere in the eastern Iranian lands. The prominence of the inscriptions on these wares shows the importance of writing in daily life.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 73; *AWI* 2001, no. 147

40

BOWL

9th century, Iraq

Earthenware with opaque white glaze, painted in blue, diameter 20.5 cm

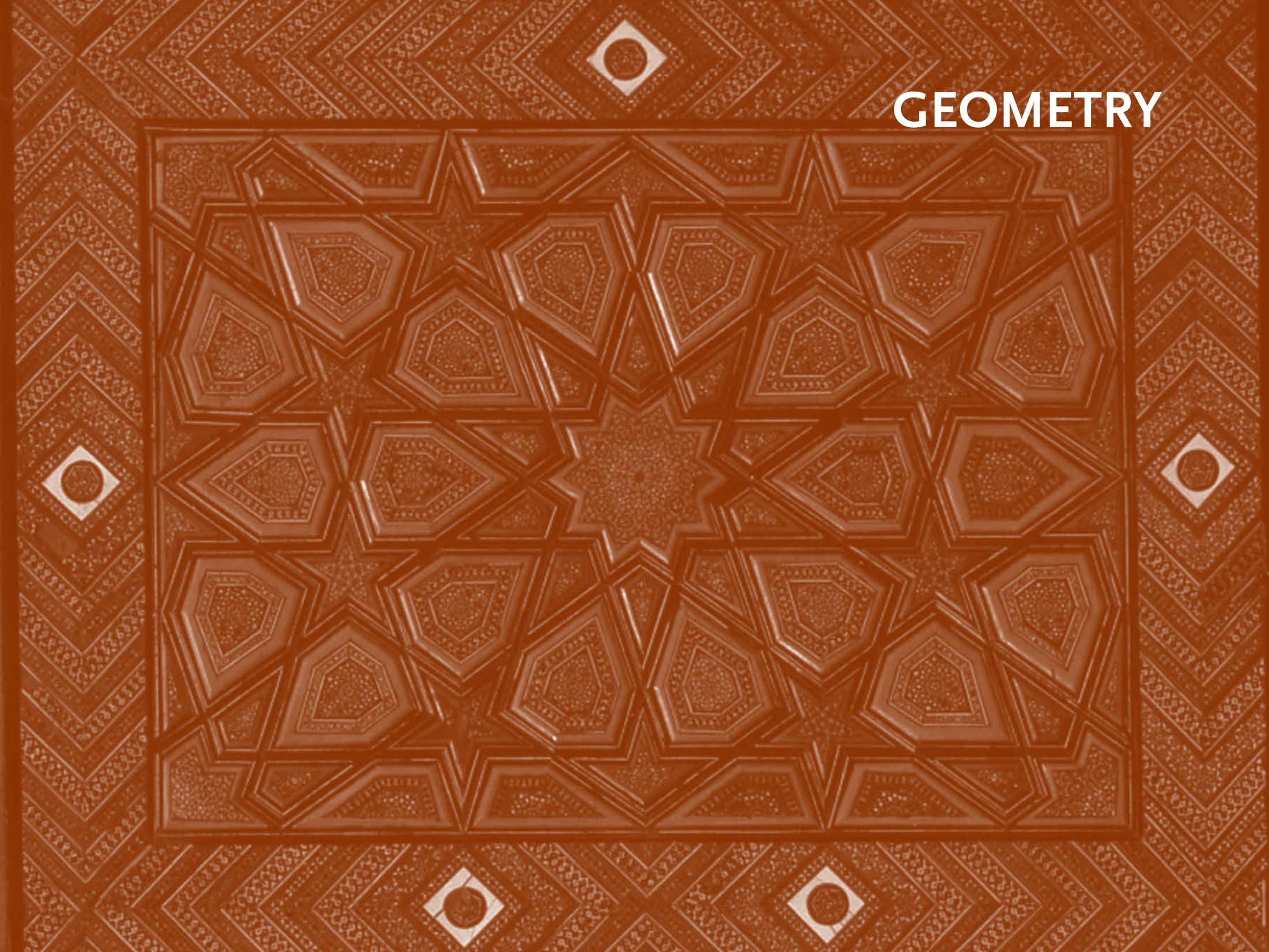
21/1965

Arabic writing was a key element in the decorative repertory adopted by Muslims for objects modeled on foreign prototypes. In shape (notably the deep well, curved walls, and rounded flared rim) and color (obtained by an opaque white glaze that covers a fine yellow fabric), this bowl emulates imported (and therefore expensive) Chinese porcelain. The decoration, however, is purely Islamic.

Like many bowls of this type, this one is decorated in blue derived from cobalt, a material over which Iraqi potters seem to have held a monopoly in the ninth century. Cobalt was mined in the mountains of central Iran near the city of Kashan. Some bowls are decorated with palmettes, others with abstracted floral or geometric designs, but many, like this one, are decorated with writing
in the angular kufic script (Tamari 1995). The short but prominent phrases sometimes contain blessings to the owner, but many contain the names of the potters in the form "work of so-and-so" (*'amal* ...). At least nine names are recorded. This one contains the name Abu'l-Baqi, the same name found on a smaller bowl in the Keir Collection. Such prominent signatures are not found on contemporary lusterwares (**no. 76**), and we do not know whether these signatures reflect the prestige of the potters or the importance of this type of ware, or whether they were simply an idiosyncrasy of this type of ceramic. They do show, however, that writing was a key element in adopting a foreign aesthetic to local taste.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 4; *Sultan Shah*, no. 294; *AWI* 2001, no. 100

GEOMETRY



Geometric ornament is as old as ornament itself, but under Islam, artisans exploited its possibilities in a particularly wide range of designs. Using simple dots, lines, chevrons, polygons, circles, etc., they developed a virtually infinite variety of patterns. These can be grouped in several ways. Some were based on the repetition of a single form or motif in staggered rows, such as the facets on the glass bowl (**no. 42**) that create a honeycomb pattern or the sunflowers on the Persian silk samite (**no. 73**). Motifs such as dodecagons are often overlapped to create patterns of intersecting wheels as on the sandstone screen (**no. 46**) or the star motifs on the *cuerda seca* tile (**no. 57**). In many cases, overlapping led to strapwork, in which the lines of the pattern are drawn so that they appear to go over and under each other, creating the illusion that they are woven together, whether in metalwork (**no. 53**) or ceramics (**no. 48**). In other examples, such as the cut and voided Ottoman velvet (**no. 45**), two motifs alternate, in this case three circles and two wavy stripes, perhaps derived from a leopard's spots and a tiger's stripes, to create a stunning abstract pattern. Many others are made up of combinations of different forms, such as the mosaics of brightly colored bits of tile that cover the walls of the Alhambra (**no. 60**). As in this case, color often emphasized pattern by creating illusions of transparency and overlay.

Geometric designs lend themselves to symmetrical arrangements so that Islamic art, unlike Japanese art, makes little use of asymmetry. Some patterns are bilaterally symmetrical, particularly those used on borders, while many others display fourfold symmetry (**nos. 41, 55, 58**). Radial patterns were also popular in many media, ranging from ceramics (**no. 51**), metalware (**no. 56**), to textiles (**no. 47**).

The most common geometric patterns were based on hexagonal or octagonal grids (**no. 52** or **61**), which were very easy to generate by inscribing a hexagon, square, or octagon in a circle and extending the sides. Other more complex designs were based on pentagonal or decagonal grids (**no. 41**), which required the designer to inscribe a pentagon in a circle. To do this accurately required a level of geometric sophistication far beyond the expertise of a simple craftsman, but artisans developed ingenious ways to draw almost exact pentagons and ensure that the grids stayed in line (Critchlow 86). Pentagonal grids were particularly attractive as they produced the famous ratio known as the Golden Mean (1:1.618). Medieval mathematicians sometimes wrote about the correct ways of constructing these complex figures, but there is little, if any, evidence that craftsmen knew of these complex solutions or would have been able to understand them if they did. Instead they developed practical approximations that would have been good enough for everyday use in such "forgiving" materials as wood or plaster, where the experienced craftsman could always make slight adjustments to keep the pattern in line. Such knowledge was passed from generation to generation as one of the tools of the trade. Craftsmen were so sophisticated that they could fit the geometric designs to curved surfaces on ceramic (**no. 43**) or glass (**no.**

42), fooling the eye to think that the pattern was perfectly regular.

Whereas most aspects of Islamic ornament developed from earlier traditions, one is a distinctly new creation of Islamic times: *muqarnas,* tiers of niche-like elements that have been stacked to resemble honeycombs or stalactites. Muqarnas appears first during the tenth century in Iranian and Central Asian architecture, in which it is used to separate parts of buildings like walls and ceilings or roofs. It was soon elaborated to fill squinches (the arches thrown over corners of rooms to support domes) or the concave hoods over portals, in which the dripping stone elements seem to float miraculously over the entry. Eventually entire vaults were constructed of plaster or wooden muqarnas elements, creating the impression of a starry vault. Muqarnas was also applied to capitals, the broader section at the head of a column, from early times when they were carved from a single block. In later times they were assembled from many pieces of wood (**no. 59**). Muqarnas spread as far west as Spain, but remained—with only a very few exceptions, such as the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo—a feature exclusively associated with Islamic art.

Geometric principles often underlie other kinds of ornament popular in Islamic art, especially vegetal motifs. Sometimes geometry is juxtaposed to vegetal motifs, as on the octagonal wooden panel (**no. 54**) from the side of a minbar, in which the austere geometric frame of the individual panels contrasts with the richly textured vegetal ornament contained within them. When vegetal ornament begins to grow according to the laws of geometry rather than of nature, it has evolved into arabesque, the subject of the next section.

41

DOOR

17th century, Iran
Several types of ivory and wood; brass inlay,
242.5 x 74 x 8.7 cm
35/2000

This magnificent door exemplifies the inventive tradition of geometric decoration used in the Islamic lands. It comprises one leaf of a double door, and its counterpart seems to have been cannibalized so that pieces from it could be used to restore this one. Wood was a rare resource in the arid lands of west Asia, and woodworkers developed techniques to make the most of this valuable commodity. Rather than large single planks, door valves were typically made of smaller panels joined together and themselves made of marquetry or inlay. This is one of the finest examples of this long tradition, with both sides decorated, although the back is done with a much simpler design. Though generous in size, this panel is too small to have served as one of the principal doors to a mosque or palace; it was probably placed at the entrance to a shrine or tomb.

In this case, the small pieces on the front are done in the meticulous inlay technique known in Persian as *khatamkari* or *khatambandi* (see the description in Wulff 92-97), in which a craftsman bundles together many thin rods of various woods (including dense redwood of the jujube tree, light-colored orangewood, dark rosewood, medium brown teakwood, walnut, and ebony) along with ivory, bleached camel bone, and brass or silver rods. He arranges them in contrasting patterns of light and shade, slices the bundles horizontally, and glues the triangular or diamond-shaped pieces together. A square inch of average-quality inlaid work of this kind might have as many as six hundred individual pieces. This inlay is still used for small boxes, but large doors such as this one were special commissions reserved for the finest mosques, shrines and palaces. In 1937, when Reza Shah Pahlavi wanted four-hundred square yards of this inlaid paneling to decorate his new palace in Tehran, it took seventy masters and their assistants three years to complete the order. Working at that rate, it would have taken a single craftsman and his assistants two years to make just this one valve.

The tall rectangular field on this door is divided into three panels: a larger one in the center sandwiched between narrower ones at the top and bottom. All three are laid out on a pentagonal grid emanating from a central star decagon around which are displayed pentacles, or five-pointed stars. The stars are linked by intersecting strapwork moldings between which are a range of shapes, including irregular hexagons, almond-shaped quadrilaterals, large arrows, and broad arrows. The overall effect is at once ordered and kaleidoscopic, as the eye picks out pleasing and overlapping patterns amidst the confusion.

The design is firmly rooted in relatively simple geometry, but only with careful study does the viewer discern the underlying pentagonal grid, itself related to the Golden Mean, or the ratio 1:1.618 (Critchlow 76). The pointed pieces suggest movement within a static geometric form. Some pieces lead the eye inward toward the star, but others lead the eye in different directions. Furthermore, the pieces at the edge, not only the pointed ones but also the truncated shapes, suggest that the pattern could go on forever. This suggestion of centrifugal expansion is held in check by the narrow frame band created in the same inlay technique, with the smaller pieces of various colored wood set in chevrons around large ivory diamonds, themselves inset with small circles of various woods. The chevron pattern leads the eye around the door, and the large white insets pop out like stars in the sky. The door is thus a tour-de-force of the woodworker's art, exploiting both technique and color to evoke the firmament.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 448

Front

Back

42

BOWL

6th–7th century, Iran or Iraq

Thick colorless glass, facet-cut, H 8.3; diameter of rim 11.5 cm

6/1969

Geometry was a popular motif for decorating glassware in Iran and Iraq at the rise of Islam in the seventh century. The hemispheric shape and facet-cut decoration of this bowl exemplify the best-known type of glassware made during the period of Sasanian rule (224-631). Similar pieces have been excavated at a wide variety of sites, ranging from the Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon to peripheral sites in Armenia, Georgia, and western Xinjiang (see the list of sites collected by Whitehouse and Brill, 43). Several examples preserved in tombs in China and Japan, including the Shoso-in treasury at Nara, show that these bowls were exported across Asia.

These hemispheric bowls are decorated with an all-over pattern of contiguous hexagonal facets created by grinding the curved surface of the glass vessel with slightly convex cutting wheels to produce areas that are flat or slightly concave. The facets are polished to further reflect light. Typical bowls (e.g., Whitehouse and Brill, nos. 46 and 47) have five rows of facets, with seven in the bottom row and nineteen in the upper rows set in staggered fashion to produce a diagonal pattern.

The glasscutter subtly varied the shape and layout of the facets to keep the pattern in line as the surface area of the bowl diminished. Most of the facets appear hexagonal, with those in one row set below and between those in the row above. Those on the top row remain slightly rounded from the grinding wheel, but sometimes the glassmaker produced facets that are more pentagonal or rounded as he altered the number of facets to fit the reduced surface. Here, for example, he reduced the number of facets from nineteen in the upper row to thirteen in the row below. Each facet therefore does not fit exactly between two facets in the row above. Such variation shows the skill of glassmaker who was able to work out a suitable design in the medium itself.

This type of faceted pattern continued to evolve on glassware produced in Islamic times (**no. 44**). The facets on wares attributed to the Islamic period are usually circular or oval, rather than hexagonal. Furthermore, they are not contiguous but spaced separately, so that the pattern is perceived not as an all-over honeycomb but as a repetition of individual motifs. Shapes evolved as well, as the hemispheric bowl gave way to the long-necked globular bottle typical of the ninth and tenth centuries. This small bowl shows the origins of that style and how Muslims adapted the taste for glassware with geometric ornament inherited from the Sasanian vocabulary.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 299

43

JUG

ca. 1575, Iznik, Turkey

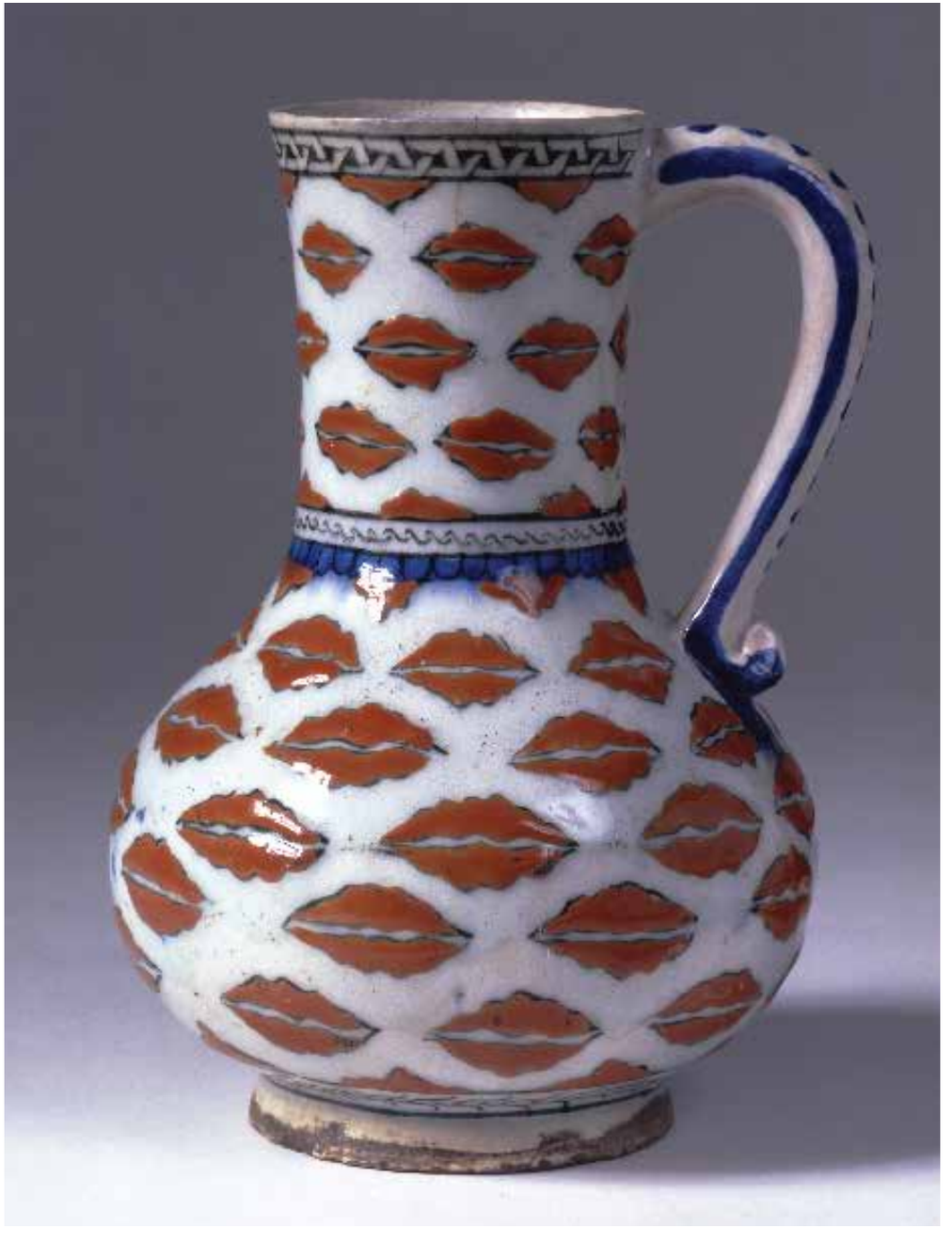
Fritware painted in black and blue, with a red slip under a transparent glaze, H 21 cm

1/1962

Artists at the Ottoman court experimented with both form and color. The shape of this drinking vessel with a bulbous body, flaring neck, and rounded handle had been known in ceramics (**no. 68**) but is ultimately derived from metalwares (see, for example, the similar metal jug attributed to thirteenth-century Anatolia, **no. 50**). The decorator even emphasized the relationship by adding blue and black bands where the neck would have been joined to the body on the metal prototypes.

The main design painted on this ceramic example is a variation of the classical *çintamani* pattern (**no. 45**) ultimately derived from tiger stripes. Here, the three balls have been omitted, and the pairs of wavy stripes turned to the horizontal axis and set widely apart in diagonal rows on a white ground. The stripes are painted in a thick red pigment known as Armenian bole, introduced to Iznik workshops in the 1550s under the patronage of Sultan Süleyman. Slightly raised from the surface and shiny under the transparent glaze, the stripes appear like the traces of kisses in an apparently modernistic rendition of a traditional design.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 208; *Soliman le Magnifique*, no. 225; *Sultan Shah*, no. 367; *AWI* 2001, no. 263



44

BOTTLE

9th–10th century, Iran
Yellowish glass with facet- and relief-cut decoration, H 17.5 cm
9/1963

Glassmakers in Islamic times adapted earlier traditions, playing with geometric shapes to create pleasing patterns that could be manipulated to fit a three-dimensional surface. These hand-sized objects, ranging from bottles to more open beakers, bowls, vases, and jars, were first blown of translucent glass and then decorated by cutting. They all have thick walls that could withstand the pressure of grinding, but that also reduced the interior volume, allowing for only small quantities of liquid to be contained within them.

These objects are typically decorated with staggered rows of bosses in relief. This bottle has three rows of such protruding roundels. The top two rows have ten roundels; the bottom row has five, separated by tear-shaped lozenges. Each roundel (diameter approximately 2.0 cm) was created by grinding down the body, leaving a flat disc-like protrusion with a central dot, or prunt, a small blob of glass. The discs are typically circular, and hence this is sometimes called the omphalos pattern.

Such a design was typical of the Iranian lands in the early period. Many miniature examples were found at Nishapur (Kröger 1995, nos. 174-184), and others are usually attributed there (e.g., Carboni and Whitehouse, no. 16a-d). The circular motif seems to have been a creation of Muslim craftsmen, for no examples can be definitely dated to pre-Islamic times. The design derives from the facet-cutting typical of Sasanian times, in which hexagonal facets were set in staggered rows to create an all-over honeycomb pattern (**no. 42**). Here, the motifs are round, set separately, and distinguished by a central dot that creates the impression of a doughnut or eye. Such a motif was easily adaptable, and could be used for details like the eyes of creatures (see the rabbits' eyes on **no. 15**).

Simple, yet effective, this type of decoration required the steady hand of a skillful craftsman who could create regular and even discs in high relief from a thick globe of blown glass. Furthermore, it shows how craftsmen in Islamic times played with shapes. The round and rather clunky bowl is transformed into a more elegant bottle whose faceted neck adds height and elegance to the round body. The design of separate circles creates an ambiguity between ground and pattern; and the outlining of the boss, suggestive of an eye, blurs the distinction between abstraction and zoomorphic motif.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 300

45

FRAGMENT OF A VELVET TEXTILE

mid-16th century, Turkey
Silk and metal lamella spun around silk, 95 x 114 cm
25/1962

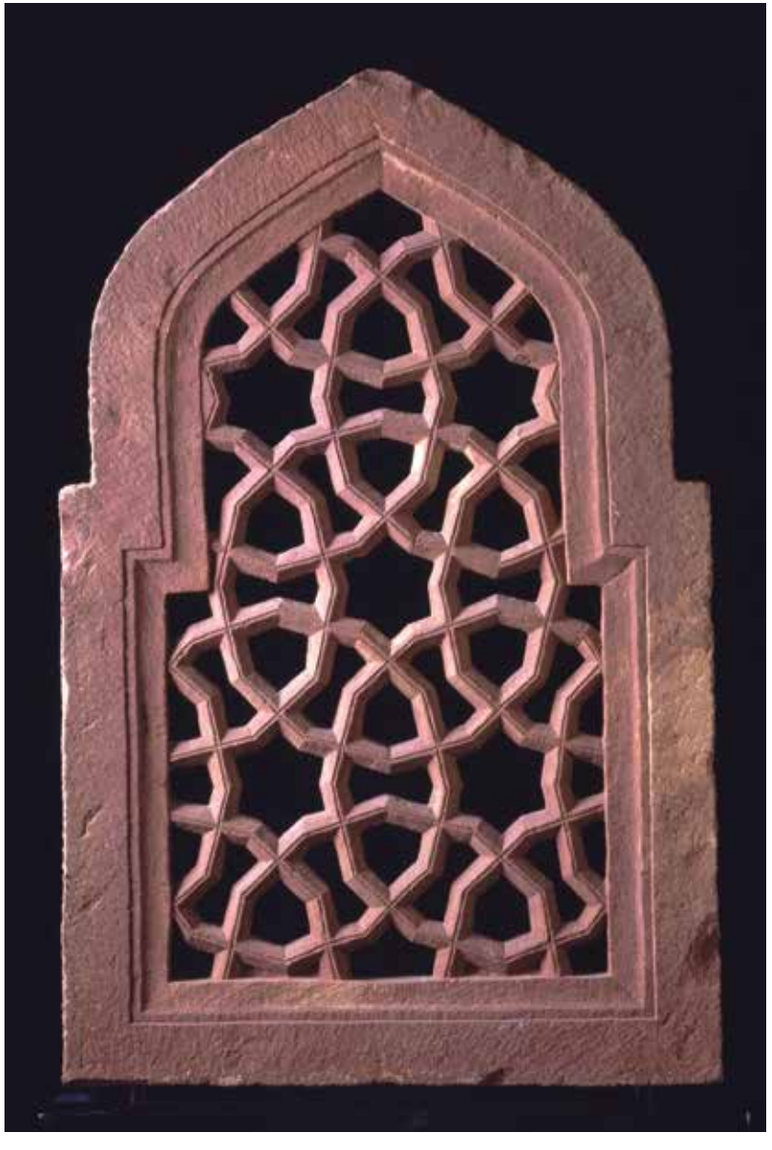
The striking pattern combining three balls with wavy stripes is one of the most distinctive motifs associated with the patronage of the Ottomans. It appears in a variety of forms. Typical pieces like this stunning cut-and-voided velvet have a pair of stripes, but other examples in compound-woven and brocaded silks have one or three stripes. Sometimes the stripes are shown without balls, both in textiles and on ceramics (**no. 43**).

The origins and meaning of this motif are hotly debated. It is known as *çintamani,* from the Sanskrit meaning "auspicious jewel," a halo-like emblem of three pearls that gave off a mystical flame, one of the attributes of the Buddha. A ninth-century mural in a Buddhist cave temple at Bezeklik near Turfan shows a man wearing a striped tiger skin and spotted leopard skin and loin cloth that combined the two motifs: two wavy stripes and three spots. Persian painters in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries picked up the design, though probably without its original meaning, regularly depicting the legendary hero Rustam in a tiger-skin tunic with wavy stripes and a leopard-skin hat with a pattern of three dots. By this point, it clearly represents manly courage and strength. Timurid rulers of Iran and Central Asia adopted it on their coinage, presumably as a symbol of good luck.

In the sixteenth century, the design became a hallmark of the Ottoman court. Sultan Mehmed III is depicted carrying a cloth with this pattern on parade returning from his victorious campaign in Hungary (Atasoy et al., fig. 13). It was also used to decorate many caftans made for the Ottoman court in the second half of the fifteenth century. Probably a royal emblem at first, it soon devolved, and by the end of the sixteenth century the spots and stripes often appear by themselves on both textiles and ceramics.

This particular textile, which is divided among several collections (see, for example, Thompson, no. 5), has one of the most striking variants of the pattern. The wine-red ground contrasts to the shiny metal of the balls and stripes contoured with edges of beige velvet. The interstices are filled with small cloud patterns whose jagged outlines contrast to the smooth lip-like stripes. The varieties of shape and scale make this voided velvet a triumph of color and design.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 201; *Sultan Shah*, no. 366; *AWI* 2001, no. 652



46

SCREEN

late 16th century, Delhi region of India
Sandstone with openwork decoration, 84 x 53.5 cm
2/1986

Interlocking geometric shapes were common forms of decoration in Islamic architecture. Latticed screens were traditionally used in Islamic buildings because of their versatility: not only did they modulate light and allow air to circulate, but they also provided privacy. Their material varied according to location. Those found in Syria in early Islamic times, for example, were typically made of stucco or marble, continuing the classical tradition. Those made in Egypt and the Mediterranean lands from medieval times onward were of turned wood and known as *mashrabiyya*. Tile examples are known from Iran. In northern India the preferred material was stone. Red sandstone was used in palaces and other secular buildings, while white marble was used for tombs and other religious structures. They became increasingly elaborate over time. Those from the period of Akbar's rule (1556-1605), like this one, were plainer, while marble examples from the seventeenth century were often embellished with sumptuous floral decoration. These stone screens are commonly known as *jali*, from the Persian word meaning shining or polished or evident, perhaps because of their clear forms.

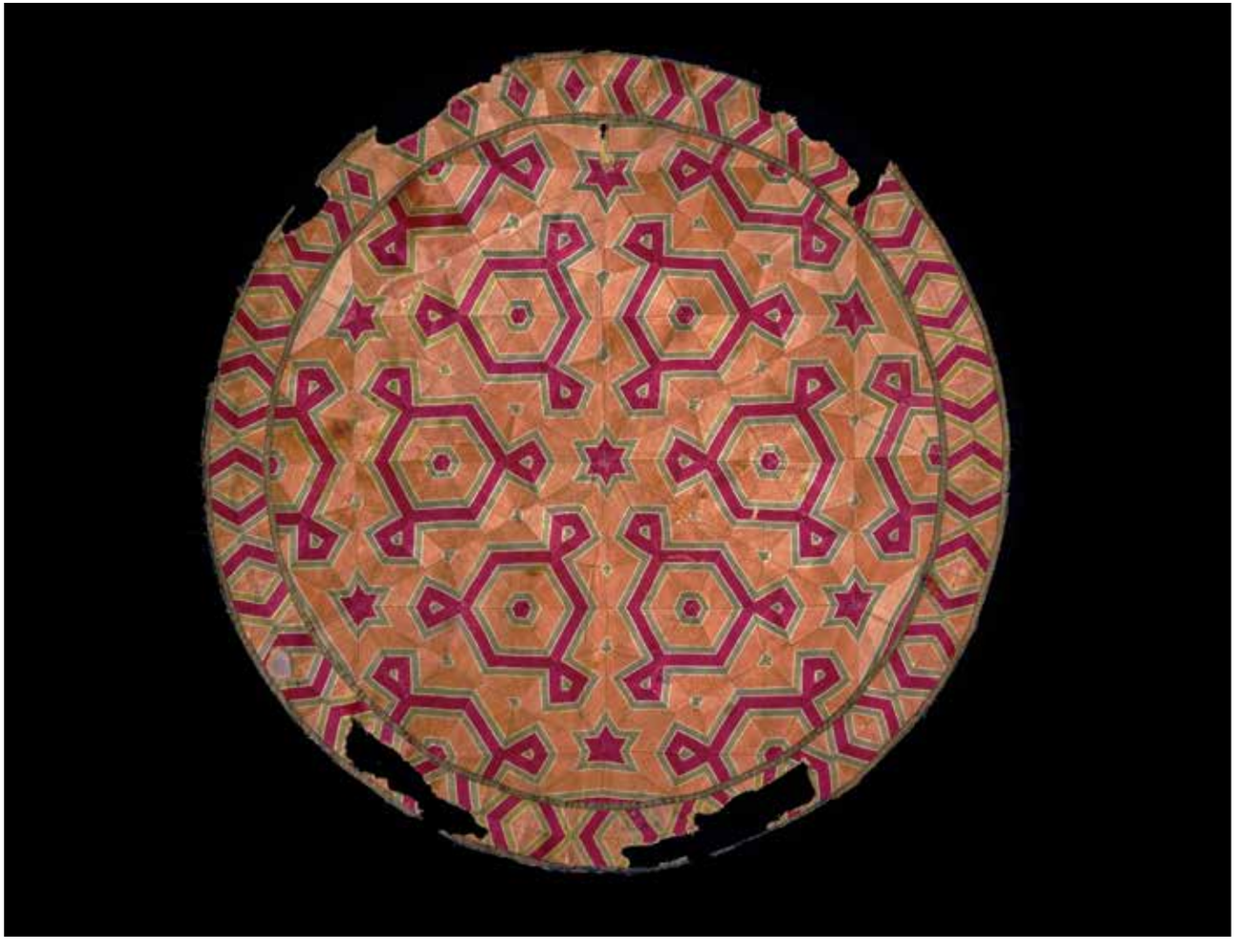
The design on this screen is based on a hexagonal grid with intersecting dodecagons. The center of each dodecagon is filled by a hexagram, which also marks the approach of two adjacent dodecagons. The dodecagons are neatly fitted to fill the segmented keel-shape arch, a form used on the so-called House of Raja Birbal and other buildings at Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's new capital west of Agra. Other screens from the site were designed using more complicated shapes. The white marble screens around the tomb of Salim Chisti (Blair and Bloom 1994, pl. 341), considered some of the finest of their genre, have patterns of decagons. The interlaced dodecagon with inscribed hexagram was a particular favorite, used for example on the sandstone screens in both the Diwan-i Am and the Diwan-i Khass. The crispness of the design is enhanced here by the narrow line incised along the middle of each segment that creates additional patterns of light and shade.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 305; *AWI* 2001, no. 402

47

PATCHWORK TRAYCLOTH

18th–19th century, Iraq?
Silk satin woven in red, olive green and cream against a salmon ground and patched; diameter 73 cm
92/2003



This cloth, which might have served to cover a large brass tray, represents another and more complicated variation on the radial design. It is composed of small pieces of striped silk satin—red, olive green, and cream stripes on a salmon ground—patched to form the design. The field is composed of a six-pointed star surrounded by six polygons, themselves comprised of hexagons with polygonal appendages at three of the points. These six are surrounded by another row of partial polygons cut in half by the border of alternating chevrons framed by narrow bands of brocaded ribbon. At one point (between eleven and twelve o'clock in the photo), the border design is modified, perhaps because of a shortage of material.

The design is thus a variant of the radial composition used for centuries on open bowls and dishes, notably on the Kashan luster dish dated 687/1268 (**no. 48**), but without the strapwork or trellis. The design appears more complex than those used on ceramics or glass because of the additional colors. Not only is the silk striped with three colors against the ground, but also the way the satin was patched adds subtle variations in shade. It creates a kaleidoscopic effect, as the figures literally seem to dance and twirl before our eyes.

The piece is unique, so it is difficult to localize. It is said to have come from Iraq. It is quite unlike the textiles with figural and vegetal motifs so admired by the Safavids (**no. 6**) and Mughals (**no. 101**). The closest published parallel is an embroidered circular Sabbath-cloth with a patchwork border from eighteenth-century Iran now in the Jewish Museum in New York City (Sarshar, fig. 1113). Although striped fabrics are known from the Islamic lands (**no. 28**), the striped satin fabric of this piece might well have been woven in Lyons or some other French city and exported to the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century. Tavernier, the seventeenth-century French traveler to Iran and India, already speaks of Armenian women richly dressed in striped satins pearled with gold. In the eighteenth century the Ottoman court deliberately cultivated a taste for European goods as part of their campaign to modernize, and women's dress, like that of men, showed the increasing influence of European fashion for light-colored striped silks trimmed with silk ribbon. Pastel shades became popular as well. This piece shows how craftsmen (or women?) transformed European materials into Islamic art.

Unpublished

48

DISH

667/1268, Kashan, Iran
Fritware painted in luster over an opaque white glaze, H 6.5; diameter 29.5 cm
Isl. 95

Iranian potters in the late thirteenth century ingeniously adapted geometric designs typical of Islamic wares for forms typical of Chinese pieces. One of the first dated pieces of lusterware made at Kashan after a thirty-year hiatus due to disruptions caused by the Mongol invasions, this dish offers a new Chinese-inspired shape (Watson 1985, pl. 89). Open and flat with gently rounded cavetto, it copies Chinese celadons, which also became popular in Iran at this time. Most celadon dishes of this shape (e.g., Komaroff and Carboni, no. 128) are decorated with a large central motif such as a coiled dragon. Here the Kashan potter developed a more complex version of the radial design used on Syrian wares of the previous century (see **no. 51**, for a simpler Syrian example).

The design centers on a six-petaled rosette loosely modeled on the peonies so beloved in Chinese art. The rosette is inscribed in interlaced bands that circumscribe five rows of compartments containing various types of flowers. The first row contains eight flowers of the typical Kashan type, each with four lobes, "eyes," and small dots. These flowers alternate with eight more examples of the same shape set between the first eight in a second row. So far the design apes that on the earlier Syrian piece, but the Kashan potter has added three more rows of flowers. The third row from the center contains eight three-lobed flowers inscribed in broad compartments. The fourth row contains eight six-petaled rosettes similar to the one in the center. As with the inner row, these eight are interspersed with eight more examples of the type set between the first eight. The cavetto is decorated with forty-eight compartments filled with braiding that bridge the space between base and articulated rim and, like arrows, draw attention to the complex design on the base. The design is therefore coordinated to the shape.

Despite the complexity of the design, the painter worked freehand, painting much of the design in reserve against the white ground. We can see this most clearly on the rim. It displays eighteen rosettes alternating with leaves, but in two places (between six and seven o'clock in this photo) the painter had to fill out the design with two adjacent leaves, as he had no space for the intervening flower. Similarly, the geometric framework on the base is not entirely symmetrical.

The design is a masterful variation on a theme. It plays hexagons against octagons, with the strapwork outlining compartments with complex shapes that contrast to the regular rectangles on the cavetto. Unlike the single design on the earlier Tell Minis bowl (**no. 51**), the design here is fitted to the three parts of the vessel (base, cavetto, and rim), with a braided band neatly separating base from cavetto and echoing the shape of the rim. The central design also pushes the centrifugal idea further, for the outer compartments are left open and the flowers in the outermost row are cut off by the braided circular band marking the outside rim of the base. On the one hand, the design evokes the unfolding of a peony; on the other, it creates an impression of infinite expansion. Such synecdoche—cutting off a motif at the border to create the impression that the design continues past the frame—foreshadows one of the seminal developments of Persian painting in the early fourteenth century.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 130; *Sultan Shah*, no. 251; *AWI* 2001, no. 212

49

BOX

late 15th or early 16th century, Granada, Spain
Wood inlaid with bone, ebony, and metal,
20.5 x 43 x 28 cm
84/2003

This small writing box revels in geometric designs that seem severe at first glance but are actually full of variation. It belongs to a type of a portable writing desk, with handles on the sides for transport and an interior divided into compartments. Smaller spaces on the left would have contained drawers, while the other spaces were meant to hold writing instruments or pots of ink. A box of exactly the same dimensions and similar technique is preserved in the Archeological Museum in Madrid (Dodds 53).

The decoration on this box is made from rods of contrasting colors of wood and bone that are glued together and then sliced into tiles that were glued onto a wooden surface (for a description of this technique, see **no. 41**). Known in Persian as *khatamkari* or *khatambandi*, the technique was practiced as far west as Spain at least since the twelfth century. Each large rectangular panel forming the base and lid is divided into smaller fields that are filled with elongated hexagons made of slices of bone and ebony. These bold black and white fields are framed with chevron bands, themselves bordered by narrow dentilated bands. The whole is framed by a broad outer band in which diamonds alternate with hexagrams, itself again framed by the black and white dentilated band. A curved border with alternating bone and ebony pieces encircles the base and lid, picking up the bichromy used in each of the smaller fields. The interior is simpler, displaying plain fields outlined by another sort of decorative band with interlaced diamonds and punctuated by inlaid octagons and hexagons. The box is thus a masterpiece of theme and variation, in which a few materials are juxtaposed to create overall geometric patterns.

Unpublished

50
JUG

13th century, Siirt, Turkey
Cast, high-tin bronze inlaid with silver, H 16.8; diameter, including handle, 15 cm
48/2002

Metalsmiths in medieval Islamic times delighted in all-over decoration. This small drinking vessel belongs to a group of objects with a bulbous body, flaring neck, splayed foot, and heavy cast handle. Many have been attributed to Siirt (medieval Is'ird) in eastern Turkey, a town known as a center of production from both texts and extant objects. The fourteenth-century geographer Hamdallah Mustawfi, for example, noted that good vessels of copper or copper alloy were produced there and that the town was famous for its splendid drinking cups. Several craftsmen with the epithet al-Is'irdi ("from Siirt") also signed inlaid bronze drinking cups and pen cases dated or datable to the late thirteenth century.

Inlaid metalwares from this period are richly decorated with a variety of patterns and motifs, many derived from textiles. Craftsmen enjoyed mingling and juxtaposing different designs from a wide repertory. Each part of this jug, for example, has a different overall pattern. The body is decorated with roundels enclosing eight-pointed stars, with silver inlay set to form the center and petals. A rope-like interlace fills the ground and connects the roundels, forming a dense jungle-like background to the pinwheels. The ridge connecting body to neck is decorated with a guilloche band. The foot has a band with a running arabesque scroll. Much of the original silver inlay, which would have given the vessel a much shinier appearance, has fallen out.

Perhaps the most unusual decoration is reserved for the splayed neck. It shows three large roundels enclosing male figures alternating with smaller roundels enclosing swastikas. The ground between the roundels is densely packed with an arabesque scroll, and another dense scroll fills the ground behind the three figures in the larger roundels. Each seated figure holds a drinking cup. The vignette is a sort of visual pun, showing that drinking from the jug was part of the good life. Other jugs are decorated with the verbal equivalent: inscriptions invoking glory, wealth, prosperity, and long life to the owner. These jugs handsomely decorated with a variety of scenes and motifs were part of the good life enjoyed by wealthy patrons in medieval times.

Selected bibliography: Sotheby's London 16 October 2002, lot 50, pp. 54-55

51

BOWL

ca. 1150, Syria

Fritware painted in luster over an opaque white glaze, H 7; diameter 20.3 cm

Isl. 196

The interior surface of an open bowl with flaring sides provides a ready surface for geometric ornament emanating from a central point. Potters in different areas adapted different radial designs to fill the broad surface. This bowl exemplifies an intermediate stage in this development. It is derived from simpler designs used on earlier Fatimid lusterwares, but is bolder and less complicated than those used on later Iranian ones (**no. 48**).

The bowl belongs to a group of Syrian ceramics dubbed Tell Minis ware because a group of thirteen pieces offered for sale in 1960 were reportedly part of a cache of approximately one-hundred pieces found in a cave at Tell Minis, not far from Ma'arrat al-Numan, a town in central Syria between Hama and Aleppo (Watson and Porter). The group was ultimately divided between the V&A and the David Collection, including this fine example.

Tell Minis wares are all finely potted from a fine-grained, dense, hard and pure white artificial paste body. This piece exemplifies the most common shape: a standard-size (20 cm in diameter) open bowl with flat base, flaring sides and a distinctive foot that cuts sharply inwards at the bottom. Some are monochrome-glazed and incised, but many of the most sophisticated pieces in the group, like this one, are overglaze-painted in luster, typically a strong orange. Motifs on these wares run the full gamut from figural and epigraphic to geometric and arabesque themes, but all display a common style. Altogether, material, shape, glaze, and decorative design suggest that these distinctive wares were first produced by potters emigrating from Egypt to Syria in the twelfth century.

This bowl, one of the finest from the group, displays a sophisticated design created in reserve, the only one of the Tell Minis group executed in this technique. Lusterwares produced in Egypt show similar but simpler designs. Bowls and fragments in Kuwait (Watson 2004, no. Ja9) and Athens (Philon, nos. 521-27), for example, are decorated with analogous designs of a central motif, typically a quatrefoil, surrounded by flowers or petals outlined in reserve. As on this bowl, the luster ground is regularly scratched with spirals.

The design on this bowl is more sophisticated, as the decorator plays with the positive and negative spaces. He first traced thin lines of luster on the white ground to create the effect of interlacing, but by painting the background in solid luster, he emphasized the central quatrefoil and surrounding dagger shapes alternating with lanceolate leaves in the negative space. The potter then scratched faint spiral designs in the negative spaces, turning them into positive leaf-shapes. At the same time, the radial design creates the impression of a sunburst expanding from the central point. The integrated design is thus brilliantly balanced between center and periphery, light and dark, and realism and abstraction.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 299; *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 54; *AWI* 2001, no. 134

52

LEFT SIDE OF A CURTAIN

late 7th–early 8th century, Egypt or Syria
Undyed tabby linen with inlaid pattern weft of dyed wool and undyed linen, 106.5 x 84 cm
12/1988

Weaving, with its intersection of longitudinal warp and transverse weft threads, lends itself to rectilinear geometric patterns. Since textiles were the engine that drove the economies of many Islamic lands, comparable in importance to the heavy industries of today, it is no surprise that geometric patterns were common. This curtain is one of the earliest examples to survive. Even more surprising is its condition: it comprises a complete loom width.

Material and technique suggest an attribution to Egypt. Linen, the strongest of the four basic fibers used in the Islamic lands (the other three are cotton, silk, and wool), is also the most difficult and labor intensive to prepare, requiring large amounts of fresh water to transform the raw flax into linen fiber. The great rivers of Egypt and Mesopotamia made these areas natural centers of production. Linen fibers, which rotate naturally to the left, are best spun counterclockwise to produce an S-twist, a feature characteristic of Egyptian work since the fifth century BCE and used here. The linen fibers, which are naturally gray-brown, require strong sun for bleaching, another natural asset in Egypt. Linen fibers are, however, difficult to dye, and so decoration had to be added with other fibers. Here, supplementary wefts in beige, orange, light blue, dark blue, and green, as well as white linen were inlaid as a design in the ground weave. This technique originated in the fifth or sixth century, and many examples have been excavated in Egypt.

The pattern, however, relates more closely to the Syrian world. The linen textile is decorated with an all-over field comprising octagons set next to each other to create interstitial rhombi. Each geometric shape, in turn, contains further geometric patterns. On all four sides, the field is bordered by a band of smaller octagons. The asymmetrical layout, with one set of rhombi cut down the middle, suggests that the textile might have been used as one of a pair, probably curtains. Comparable geometric patterns are found in the mosaic floors of early Islamic palaces, notably the bath hall at Khirbat al-Mafjar in Jordan (e.g., Hamilton, pl. LXXVII). The stone pavements there were conceived as textiles, and the floor mosaic in the *diwan* even has tesserae set to imitate a fringe, showing that it was meant to look like a carpet. Geometric borders like the field design on this textile are also found on the parchment Koran page attributed to eighth-century Syria (**no. 33**). The front has a border with lozenges and the back an even more similar one of tangent and inscribed octagons.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 35; *AWI* 2001, no. 621

53

LIDDED BOWL

15th century, Syria

Cast brass, engraved, punched and inlaid with gold and silver, H 6; diameter 12.8 cm

24/1970

Craftsmen in the Islamic lands reveled in mixing and matching all-over patterns on various parts of objects. The lid of this hemispherical bowl is decorated with a radial pattern emanating from a central, six-pointed star. The angular strapwork was once inlaid with silver and gold, but only small traces remain. The base of the bowl is decorated with a fretwork design surrounded by an arabesque that is worked with a reddish substance and inlaid like the black bituminous substance used earlier, but without gold. The interior is decorated with six fish set in a whorl, a motif evoking a fishpond and suggesting that the bowl was designed to contain liquid.

These motifs are part of the standard repertory used by metalsmiths working in Egypt and Syria during Mamluk times, but this type of object was probably made for export to Europe. Late fifteenth century inventories of the Medici and other European collections list such imported objects, and new shapes of vessels appear during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They include not only this type of lidded hemispherical bowl but also small candlesticks with flaring rims and spherical trays and incense burners, the latter designed to be used as hand-warmers in colder European climates. Many of these objects bear blank European shields that could be filled in when the object was purchased. An identical hemispherical bowl with flat lid in the British Museum (Ward no. 92), for example, has such a blank shield. In the fourteenth century, craftsmen in the Islamic lands had produced inscribed metalwares as special commissions for European patrons like Hugh IV of Lusignan, ruler of Cyprus and Jerusalem from 1324 to 1357. In the fifteenth century, Venetian merchants came to dominate trade in the eastern Mediterranean, and they may well have ordered new shapes popular among Europeans, but decorated with standard Islamic geometric designs.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 521

54
OCTAGONAL PANEL
696/1296, Cairo, Egypt
Sycamore wood, diameter 27.5 cm
7/1976

Craftsmen in the Islamic lands often used the octagon as a frame to circumscribe different types of decoration, geometric and vegetal. This superbly carved panel comes from the large *minbar*, or pulpit, that the Mamluk sultan al-Mansur Husam al-Din Lajin endowed to the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo in 696/1296. A drawing of the minbar, made *in situ* in 1845, shows it as a large (about 4 meters high) stepped construction with two triangular side panels and a staircase along the hypotenuse crowned by a *muqarnas* canopy (see **no. 59**, for an example of muqarnas). The sides were composed of several hundred pieces of at least ten different polygonal shapes fitted together to form a continuous pattern. At some point later in the nineteenth century, the minbar was dismembered, and pieces are now scattered in museums around the world, including the Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Islamic Museum in Berlin (see the list given in Anglade, no. 48).

The minbar was the largest, and sometimes, the only piece of furniture placed in a congregational mosque or other major religious buildings. Derived from the judge's seat in pre-Islamic Arabia, the minbar was used in early Islamic times to make important community announcements and to deliver the Friday sermon. Since the name of the reigning sovereign was typically mentioned in the sermon, the minbar quickly became one of the two public signs of political authority (the other is the inclusion of the ruler's name on the coinage). Minbars were installed in virtually every Friday mosque as well as in *madrasa*s and other sites where religious orations were made. They are typically placed, as in the mosque of Ibn Tulun, against the *qibla* (Mecca-facing) wall of a prayer hall to the right of the *mihrab* (prayer-niche). Rulers also endowed minbars to earlier buildings as a sign of political power. Sultan Lajin endowed this one, for example, to mark his restoration of one of the oldest and most venerated mosques in the city, a building that had been constructed some six centuries earlier (see **no. 34**).

These elaborate wooden constructions were expensive and time-consuming to make. According to the twelfth-century Sicilian geographer al-Idrisi, it took six craftsmen and their apprentices seven years to make the inlaid wooden minbar installed in the Great Mosque of Córdoba in the tenth century. That *minbar* was destroyed in the sixteenth century, but we can get an idea of its construction from the fabulous minbar made about 1125-30 and installed in the Kutubiyya Mosque in Marrakesh (Bloom, et al.). As part of a recent reconstruction, it took a Moroccan craftsman one week to carve a coarse copy of a single hexagonal panel.

Like many of the panels from the Kutubiyya *minbar*, this one, made a century and a half later in Cairo contains complex arabesques intertwined on several levels. Including the front and back planes, there are five levels of relief (see diagram below). The design is vertically symmetrical, as the left half mirrors the right. The design emanates from a central palmette set within a bowed and fluted hexagon, which is delineated by a pearl band. The palmette sprouts flowers, tendrils, and leaves that are set symmetrically, and yet simultaneously grow organically under and over each other as though bursting to escape the confines of the pearled frame. The decoration thus integrates the vegetal with the geometric, as formal shape delimits nature. Angles balance curves. The pearled hexagon with its slightly bowed sides mediates between the curvaceous palmette in the center and the angled sides of the octagon. Nature is confined by abstraction.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 148; *Sultan Shah*, no. 59; *AWI* 2001, no. 431

Drawing of levels by Salvatori Fabbri: the red shading represents the front plane, the green shading represents the rear plane, and the blue, beige, and purple shadings represent intermediate levels.

55

PILE CARPET

first quarter 16th century, Egypt
Wool, 199 x 145 cm
1/1987

The distinctive design centered on the carpet's large octagon immediately strikes the viewer. The carpet belongs to a group of several dozen so-called Mamluk carpets, all of which show a field with one or more large octagons surrounded by filler motifs of minutely drawn stars, rosettes, octagons, triangles, and rectangles of different size that create a kaleidoscopic effect. The technical structure of this group of carpets is equally distinct. With one stunning exception (a silk example in Vienna), all the others are woven of wool, with S-spun warps, usually three or four plied with a Z-twist, and asymmetrical knots open to the left. They all are knotted in a restricted palette of lac-dyed red, rich blue, and green, with touches of yellow and ivory.

The provenance of this group of Mamluk carpets has been a matter of lively debate, but Cairo seems the most likely place. Spinning with an S-twist has been a peculiarity of Egypt since the time of the Greek geographer Herodotus, and several of the motifs, such as the little umbrella that resembles a papyrus plant, can be connected to that region. Travelers to the region in the fifteenth century and Italian inventories from the sixteenth also mention Cairene carpets. Furthermore, the layout mimics the ceilings of the typical Cairene reception room (*qa'a*), which was covered by a flat wooden roof and had a raised octagonal lantern in the center. This is the case, for example, in the funerary complex erected in the northern cemetery of Cairo by the Mamluk sultan Qa'itbay between 1472 and 1474. The frontispieces to manuscripts made for this sultan are also decorated with a comparable design of a central octagram surrounded by small filler motifs and bands with running floral designs, all executed in a similarly restricted palette of red, blue, green, and gold. All of these works evoke a common aesthetic in which bold geometric designs based on the octagon are juxtaposed to smaller curvilinear forms.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 199; *Sultan Shah*, no. 135; *AWI* 2001, no. 686

56

TRAY

second half 17th century, Deccan, India

***Bidri* metal inlaid with silver and brass, diameter 31 cm**

16/1987

The radial designs used to decorate dishes and other open shapes made in glass and ceramic could also be adapted for metalwares. This tray is made of so-called *bidri* (see **no. 9**, for a description of this distinctive technique), an alloy whose blackened surface provides a foil for the inlay in silver and brass. It probably served as the base for a hookah, or water pipe, made with a matching design. Such smoking sets comprise several parts, including the hookah base for water, its ring, if the base were round, and the *chillam*, a fire-cup containing burning charcoal and tobacco, all set on a tray like this one.

Rather than a strapwork or trellis enclosing flowers (see **no. 110**, for a contemporary glass example), the radial design here is organized as a flower itself. At the center is a stylized lotus, a motif considered as one of the Buddha's auspicious signs. Images of the Buddha and *bodhisattva*s often sit or stand on stylized lotus leaves, and the motif was frequently placed in the center of round or scalloped dishes and other vessels (many examples given in Rawson). Typically, these lotus flowers have an even number of petals, often eight, sometimes six or ten. Here, however, the lotus has seven petals, an unusual odd number that is not symmetrical. The seven-pointed lotus, in turn, generates a fourteen-pointed flower inscribed in the central boss. As on the contemporary glass dish, this central boss is circumscribed by a circular band, here enclosing a scroll design with four dots connected by S-curves.

The field of the tray is made up of five rows of petals, each with thirty-eight lappets of increasing size. These lappets are outlined in brass and inlaid in silver with either three or five strokes. A circular band with alternating silver and brass quatrefoils marks the end of the base, and the sides end in thirty-eight points that correspond to the thirty-eight lappets in the central field.

This piece fits within the well-established repertory of *bidri* trays (Zebrowski, ch. 17). All are circular, some with scalloped or pointed rims. Many are the same size and have similar layouts with a central boss surrounded by a floral field. Some even have similar details like the circular border with four-leaf clovers. A few have radial designs, some even with rows of flowers. In the powerful conception of its stunning design and the careful use of color, however, this dish stands apart from others. The designer cleverly exploited the two colors of brass and silver to highlight the petals of the lotus. The outer yellow rims evoke a sunburst, but, at the same time, the spreading lappets evoke a flower unfolding. It combines the sun with what grows in its light.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 348; *AWI* 2001, no. 538

57

HEXAGONAL TILE

ca. 1400, Central Asia
Earthenware painted with gold and colors, diameter 30.2 cm
48/2001

Potters in Central Asia used color to enhance the traditional radial design emanating from a rosette. The convex tile is painted in the *cuerda seca* (Spanish, for "dry cord") technique, in which potters used an oily substance mixed with manganese to prevent the colored pigments from running. After firing, it left a dark outline. On this tile, for example, the craftsman painted the design in light blue and white, separated from the dark blue ground by a thin dark line, as, for example, around the white rosette in the center. After the first firing, the potter then painted a second design over the first. The second stage includes not only a second network set at a thirty-degree angle from the first and painted in red, gold, and apple-green, but also details like the red "eyes" of the rosettes. He then re-fired the tile. Originally the double red strapwork lines would have appeared entirely gold. Since this tile is not flat, but instead slightly convex in order to fit around a column, the added details, which are raised from the surface, would have glistened all the more brightly in the strong sun.

The *cuerda seca* technique was developed by craftsmen in Central Asia during the later fifteenth century. The mausoleum of Qutluq Aga (1361) in the Shah-i Zinda cemetery outside Samarqand already shows a wide range of colors and motifs. Tiles in this technique appear on many of the finest buildings made for the Timurids at the end of the century, such as the Aq Saray, Timur's palace in Shahr-i Sabz (1379-96), and the congregational mosque he built in Samarqand known as the Mosque of Bibi Khanum (1398-1405). A fragment from a convex tile in the British Museum, said to be comparable to columnar tiles from the Mosque of Bibi Khanum (Porter, no. 66), is very similar to this one, but is about half the size and lacks the red "eyes." With its large size, double-firing, and attention to detail, this tile is a masterpiece of its type.

Craftsmen from Central Asia seem to have taken the *cuerda seca* technique westward. It may have been used in late fifteenth-century buildings in Tabriz that are now destroyed, for fine examples of *cuerda seca*, using the same two-stage firing as on this piece, in the tomb in the Yeşil complex at Bursa (1421) are signed by craftsman from Tabriz. *Cuerda seca*, which allowed potters to use several bright colors simultaneously without danger of mixing, became a common technique in Iran since it was a cheaper alternative to tile mosaic. The palette regularly included seven colors, and hence it became known in Persian as *haft rangi* ("seven colors").

As on the Kashan luster dish (**no. 48**), the design on this convex tile comprises a strapwork arrangement emanating from a central rosette, but the ceramicist here has used color and level to complicate the decoration. The overglaze painting makes the second network in green, red, and gold stand out above the first one in light blue, cobalt, and white. It creates the impression that the stars whirl. The loopy quality of the red line adds an organic sense to the second design, as the green, leaf-like palmettes seem to grow. Enhanced by the sparkling of the gold and relief glaze, the decoration comes alive.

Unpublished

58
COVER
early 18th century, Caucasus
Silk embroidery on cotton, 149 x 135 cm
37/1969

The technique of embroidery allowed the embellishment of a plain cotton fabric with a striking octagonal design of animals and other motifs in a stylized garden. This piece belongs to a large group of eye-catching embroideries that began to enter European collections in the 1870s. The V & A Museum in London, for example, holds some sixty examples (Wearden). All of these textiles are executed on a cotton plainweave ground with embroidery in two-ply, S-twisted silk. The black outlines are always worked first, usually in running stitch, as here, but occasionally in cross-stitch. These embroideries can be divided into three groups, based on the technique used to execute the filler designs. In one small group, probably the earliest and dating from the late seventeenth century, the design is worked in cross-stitch, and in another small group, the design is done in surface darning, but most examples, probably the latest, are done using surface darning on the diagonal. This piece belongs to the intermediate group, with the design executed in surface darning.

Technique, in turn, influenced materials and design. Cross-stitching, worked diagonally over two threads in each direction, uses an extravagant amount of silk and requires a slightly coarse ground, with matching slightly coarse silk thread. In comparison, surface darning, executed with only a single thread, uses less silk and is more effective when worked on a finer ground. Cross-stitched designs can be worked from a squared chart on which the pattern has been plotted stitch by stitch, whereas darned designs were probably transferred to the ground fabric freehand or pounced with charcoal dust through pricked drawings. Although both types of embroidery are worked in predominantly dark color schemes, often arranged around a central octagon, the darned designs include a new range of roundels, cartouches, and various figures, including humans, angels, birds, fish, and animals—motifs that originated in Safavid court workshops and were probably introduced before the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813, when the territory north of the Aras River, including the Caucasus, was ceded to Russia.

In this stunning piece, the central red eight-pointed star, perhaps containing an octagonal pool, is decorated with various geometricized motifs, including black and white ibexes that face each other over a stylized tree. The corners are filled with tall cypresses and four-part flowers surrounded by smaller quadrupeds. All these natural motifs, which are normally characterized by curved lines, have been geometricized into abstract patterns. In Persian culture, cypress trees are often emblematic of death, and the image may be intended to evoke the Garden of Paradise.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 252;
AWI 2001, no. 674

59

CAPITAL

18th century, Baghdad, Iraq?

Wood, 54 x 36 x 21 cm

79/2003

The decorative device known in Arabic as *muqarnas*, which comprises tiers of niche-like elements that project out above each other, became one of the characteristic features of Islamic architecture from Spain to India. Developed at least from the eleventh century in stucco and often likened to stalactites or honeycombs because of its pendant and geometric qualities, the device was adopted by builders across the Islamic lands in local materials, including brick, stone, and wood. Muqarnas were used as cornices to separate the parts of buildings, to fill cavities, and create vaults. Over time the muqarnas also became increasingly elaborate, as the number of units increased and their forms varied. The simple arch-shaped niches of the earliest pieces gave way to pendants and various star shapes.

Whereas muqarnas compositions in stone or plaster were assembled from elements carved or molded from solid blocks, wooden muqarnas were additive compositions of prismatic rods of varying length. This capital from an attached colonette, for example, is composed of many little pieces nailed together around a semi-dodecagonal core. The first row includes alternating triangles and diamonds; the second row, alternating hexagons and pentagons; and the third row, heptagons, with the corners filled out by subsidiary elements. An octagonal wooden boss is nailed to the front. The play of light and shade over the suspended elements creates the impression of the starry sky, an effect that would have been heightened by wood-filler and paint when this piece was new.

Unpublished

60

PANEL OF TILE MOSAIC

14th century, Spain

Earthenware with white, black, and ochre glaze,

29 x 15.7 x 5 cm

42/2002

Artisans in the western Islamic lands were able to cut several colors of glazed tile—here, white, black, and ochre—into a relatively narrow range of simple geometric shapes—such as triangles, squares, octagonal stars, vees, arrows, etc.—and combine them into complex patterns that could be repeated infinitely in any direction (see figure below). This fragment comes from one of the large tile panels that formed the dadoes on the lower part of the interior walls of the Alhambra Palace at Granada. A paper label once pasted to its back states that it was acquired as a souvenir by the German Prinz Leopold von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1835-1905), (a candidate for the Spanish throne in 1868, who was not elected due to French influence) during a visit to the site in 1856, although no surviving panels preserve this particular design. The pattern is based on a forty-five degree grid in which horizontal, vertical, and diagonal bands of equal width intersect to form a matrix of eight-pointed stars. A smaller square inscribed between the stars and another star in its center add to the design and create a sense of transparency, as the bands appear to change from white to black as they cross over each other. The ochre arrows enliven the otherwise-somber palette, and the slight variations in shape and color make the design vibrant and keep it from appearing mechanical.

Panels of shaped pieces of tile arranged in patterns, known as *zalij* in Arabic and *alicatado* in Spanish, were popular in the western Islamic lands from the fourteenth century, and square and shaped tiles eventually became so identified with Spanish architecture—whether Muslim or Christian—that, in the sixteenth century, they were brought to the New World, where they became characteristic of Latin American architecture. The word *zalij* is etymologically related to the Persian word *lajvard*, which refers to the bright blue stone we know as lapis lazuli. The name *lajvard* has given us—in addition to *lazuli*—the words *azure* and *azul* (Spanish for "blue") as well as *azulejo* (Spanish and Portuguese for glazed ceramic tile). Although glazed tiles had been known for millennia in the Near East, patterns of shaped and glazed tiles first appeared in western Islamic lands in the eleventh century, and the pattern of large interlaced octagons nailed to the cornice of the Kutubiyya minaret at Marrakesh in Morocco is the oldest surviving example of the technique in the region. In the present case, the appropriate design was first laid out on a flat surface. Large pieces of white, black, and ochre tile were cut to shape and the small pieces laid face down on the surface. Once all the pieces had been laid, the back was covered with several layers of plaster, perhaps reinforced with straw, to create a stable panel that could be inserted in the wall.

The Alhambra, the palace that served the Nasrid rulers of Granada from 1232 until the Christian conquest of the city in 1492, was preserved intact by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella as an exotic trophy of their triumph over the Muslims. Although the Hapsburg ruler Charles V (r. 1516-56) began to construct a Renaissance palace there in the sixteenth century, it was never completed and the site fell into semi-ruin. During the nineteenth century, the Alhambra became a popular tourist destination, fueled by the romantic fantasies created by European and American literati, such as François-René Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Théodore Gautier, and Washington Irving. Artists, such as David Roberts, Girault de Prangy, Owen Jones, and Jules Goury, made drawings and lithographs that only increased its fame and disseminated its exotic "Moorish" decoration to eager European and American audiences.

Unpublished

Design photographically expanded

61

PEN CASE

17th century, Turkey
Wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ivory, tortoiseshell, ebony and zinc, 9 x 35 x 12 cm
39/2000

Ottoman craftsmen often used contrasting materials to heighten the effect of complex geometric patterns. They did not consider wood alone a sufficiently prestigious material from which to make furniture, and instead Ottoman craftsmen turned to inlay with ivory, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, and precious metals, sometimes further encrusted with hardstones. Fine pieces of inlaid wood were already produced from the beginning of the sixteenth century, as shown by a superb Koran chest made for Sultan Bayezid II in 911/1505-06 (Blair and Bloom 1994, fig. 296). Over the course of the sixteenth century, mother-of-pearl gradually replaced ivory in importance, as on the lid of this box, in which pieces of mother-of-pearl are set beside plaques of tortoiseshell, which are applied over metal foil to further heighten the sheen. The surrounding frame and sides, in contrast, are made of small rods of wood and metal that are banded together and sliced into tiles (for a description of the *khatamkari* technique, though with a different effect, see **no. 41**).

In addition to differing materials, the top and sides of the pen case show different geometric designs. The lid displays an interlaced strapwork design formed of hexagrams (six-pointed-stars) with radiating polygons, a type of design known from architectural manuals such as the scroll discovered recently in the Topkapı Palace (Necipoğlu). The central panels of the base of the penbox, by contrast, display hexagons interlocked with triangles to form hexagrams. The use of white for the hexagrams links the two patterns visually. To further complicate the surfaces, the main fields are delineated by a number of bands with smaller diamond, cross, or rhomboidal patterns. Such angular meander borders may have been adapted from contemporary North Italian marquetry, which was widely available at the Ottoman court. The whole pen case is then delicately set on little white feet to raise it off the surface. A keyhole at one end provides access to the interior, which would have held reed pens, an inkwell, and a container for cotton.

This pen case belonged to the French painter Félix Ziem (1821-1921). A member of the Barbizon school, he traveled widely around the Mediterranean. He visited Venice more than twenty times and is known, above all, as a painter of that city. The pen case would have appealed to him particularly since he was also an Orientalist painter of some renown and, in 1861, had a studio built in the Oriental style in Martigues (the so-called Venice of Provence) that is now part of the Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 443

62

BOWL

14th century, Syria

Fritware, painted in blue and black under a transparent glaze on a white ground, diameter 35 cm

21/1992

This large bowl presents a variant on the radial design shown on the Kashan luster dish dated 667/1268 (**no. 48**). This vessel can be attributed to Syria in the following century on the basis of its technique. Ceramics made in Egypt and Syria during the period of Mamluk rule (1260-1517) typically, as here, have a coarse off-white body, which the potter concealed beneath a thick slip or coating of fine clay. He then painted the designs in combinations of blue and black, sometimes with the addition of turquoise and green, under a transparent glaze, a technique that had been perfected at Kashan in the thirteenth century. The shiny transparent glaze on these Mamluk wares often turns iridescent or matte or simply decomposes over the centuries, but in this case it has remained in superb condition and gives some idea of how glorious other similar but degraded examples might have been (**no. 93**).

The shape and design of this bowl, too, are loose reinterpretations of the earlier luster dish made in Kashan. This bowl, for example, has the same curved sides and everted rim, as well as a high foot with a potter's mark in the glaze. As on the luster dish, the design emanates from a six-petaled rosette, but the elaborate interlacing of the earlier luster dish has been simplified to a single six-pointed star painted in blue. This motif, now associated with Judaism, is common throughout Islamic art as a simple geometric adaptation of the rosette and carries no religious connotation. The cavetto, which is bigger on these Mamluk wares, is filled here with eight large fans that alternate with eight thinner, plant-like motifs. These fans are common on Mamluk ceramics (e.g., Atıl 1981, nos. 68 and 69). With their curved edges here, they resemble scallop shells, but in many cases have pointed ends and varying numbers of lobes so that they look more like fans. They are probably simplifications of the lotus blossom, a motif introduced to Iran from China during the Mongol period. What is interesting in terms of layout is that the potter here used the same juxtaposition of eight and six found on the Kashan luster dish in which the central six-pointed rosette was surrounded by a design based on eight.

Small details of the decoration on this bowl are also derived from the Kashan style. The triangular spaces around the central star, for example, are decorated with elaborate knots filled with stippling on a white ground, devices derived from the "panel style" used at Kashan. Indeed, the stylistic similarities between wares made at Kashan in the thirteenth century and those made in Syria in the fourteenth are so close that they suggest that potters may have emigrated from Iran to Syria and then to Fustat in Egypt, where large quantities of this type of ware have been found. This western movement parallels in reverse the eastern dispersal of fritware and luster painting from Egypt to Syria and Iran that took place in the twelfth century.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 128; *AWI* 2001, no. 202

63

FRAGMENT OF A LAMPAS TEXTILE

mid-13th century, Central Asia
Silk and gilded lamella of animal substrate both spun around silk and woven flat, 113 x 32 cm
14/1992

Weavers could create elaborate strapwork patterns. This stunning textile belongs to a handful of lampas (warp-faced tabby) textiles said to have been preserved in Tibet and now divided mainly between the David Collection and the Cleveland Museum of Art (*Woven Treasures* 44-61, nos. 14-18). On technical, stylistic, and epigraphic grounds, the group is usually attributed to eastern Iran and Central Asia during the Mongol period. Several of these textiles, including this one, have a pseudo-inscription near the top, woven with two kinds of metal thread: gilded animal substrate woven flat and gilded animal substrate spun around a silk core. Rashid al-Din, vizier to the Mongol rulers of Iran, described two tents that the Mongol ruler Hulegu received in 1255 and 1256 as woven from light-weight cloth of "gold on gold" (*Sultan Shah*, no. 254). This is precisely the effect that these lampas weaves would have created when glitteringly new. A thirteenth-century date for this group can be confirmed by a comparable lampas in the David Collection (20/1994; Watt and Wardwell, fig. 63), whose inscription names sultan Abu Bakr ibn Saud, the Salghurid ruler of Fars province in southwestern Iran (r. 1226 –1260), who had long-standing connections with Central Asia. Fars had been annexed by the local rulers there, the Khwarazmshahs, and Abu Bakr's sister was married to the Khwarazmshah Jalal al-Din, so his textile might have been a gift from these rulers of Central Asia.

Most of this group of lampas weaves with two types of gold thread show rows of roundels containing animals, such as double-headed eagles, griffins, and lions. This one, by contrast, displays a geometric pattern of a hexagonal lattice created by diagonal stripes that appear to intersect with vertical stripes to create staggered rows of hexagons. Each hexagon, in turn, is filled with flowers containing four or eight heart-shaped petals. The quatrefoils and octafoils are surrounded by arabesque scrolls of the type that often are used to set off the animals in other textiles in the group.

Geometric patterns of this type are rare on textiles, but more common in other media. Two eleventh-century tomb towers at Kharraqan in western Iran show staggered rows of hexagons created by laying the bricks in relief (Baer 1998, figs. 53-45). Strapwork patterns continued to be popular in Anatolian architecture, but were also used on metalwares and ceramics made in Iran. The closest comparison in this exhibition is the strapwork design painted in reserve on the luster bowl made at Kashan in 667/1268 (**no. 48**). This superb lampas weave therefore seems to represent the transfer of strapwork design to the new media of cloth of gold designed to suit the taste—and pocketbook—of the new Mongol rulers of Eurasia.

Selected bibliography: *Woven Treasures*, no. 16; *Sultan Shah*, no. 254; *AWI* 2001, no. 637

VEGETATION AND THE ARABESQUE

Ornament based on plants, stems, leaves, and flowers is unquestionably the most popular form used in Islamic art. Nearly one-third of the objects in this exhibition belong to this section. Vegetal ornament is found on many of the works in other sections as well, and the lines between the types are often blurred. This is particularly true with geometric ornament, where it is often impossible to distinguish between vegetized geometry and geometricized vegetation, and we have assigned objects to different categories arbitrarily to illustrate different principles. Similarly, vegetal ornament can grow out of writing (**no. 29**), but we have arbitrarily chosen to give priority to the semantic content, although such a design could equally have been presented in this section. Many other examples of vegetal ornament will be found in the section of hybrids (**nos 103-23**). Vegetal ornament is found on some of the earliest objects in this exhibition (**no. 114**) as well as the latest (**no. 87**), and it is found in every medium from large-scale architectural revetment in stone (**no. 84**) or tile (**no. 64**) to exquisite containers of rock crystal, gold, and rubies (**no. 96**).

Artisans in the Islamic lands inherited pre-Islamic traditions of vegetal and floral decoration, as they had figural and geometric motifs. There were two primary and contrasting sources for this vegetal decoration, one in the late-Antique world of the Mediterranean basin and the other in the Sasanian lands of Iraq and Iran. To simplify a complex topic, in the lands around the Mediterranean, artisans inherited a rich tradition of naturalistic vegetation based on such motifs as the vine scroll and the acanthus leaf. These motifs had been widely disseminated by the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines so that they formed the bread-and-butter of the artistic repertory in the region. By contrast, in the lands to the east that Muslims conquered from the Sasanians, artisans inherited a more abstract tradition of vegetal ornament, in which motifs such as flowers and leaves had been dematerialized into patterns of medallions, rosettes, etc.

The first truly Islamic style of decoration only emerged in the ninth century, when the Abbasid dynasty (r. 749-1258) moved the capital from Syria to Iraq, and artists combined the two earlier traditions. This development is epitomized in the stucco decoration recovered from the ruins of the capital city of Samarra, founded in 836, where three styles of decoration show increasing levels of abstraction, culminating in the Beveled Style (**no. 74**). Derived from leaf forms, the style is characterized by rhythmic and symmetrical repetitions of curved lines with spiral terminals and by the total dissolution of any distinction between subject and ground. It may have been developed for practical reasons—because molds cut on the slant allowed the plaster to be released quickly, making fabrication of extensive revetments easier and cheaper. It was soon adopted by craftsmen in other media, including stone (**no. 81**), wood, glass and—in a linear interpretation—ceramics (**no. 76**). The style remained popular for centuries, and its legacy persisted at least until the fourteenth century as far afield as Spain (**no. 85**).

The tendency toward abstraction was one feature of the Beveled Style; another was its

tendency toward infinite expansion and growth in any direction, a characteristic that culminated in the type of ornament now known as the arabesque, which flourished in the Islamic lands between the tenth century and the sixteenth. The arabesque was composed of the same elements inherited from pre-Islamic traditions—vines and leaves, stems, flowers, rosettes, etc.—but rather than being appended to a geometric framework, they became the framework itself. The full-blown arabesque can have infinite correspondence along all axes of the underlying geometry, allowing the viewer to imagine the pattern extending infinitely, as on a dish (**no. 97**) or a bookbinding (**no. 95**); but many examples, such as the carved marble panel from Córdoba (**no. 84**) or the mihrab tile (**no. 64**), are symmetrical along only one axis.

In the fifteenth century, the arabesque underwent a metamorphosis as the traditional leaves and flowers were replaced with chinoiserie elements—lotus, peony, and chrysanthemum flowers and cloud bands—to create a distinctive new idiom (**no. 69**). This is known today as the International Timurid Style because it was developed under the patronage of the Timurid rulers of Iran and Central Asia. This style not only persisted in the region under the subsequent rule of the Safavids (**no. 65**) and Uzbeks, but was also exported to the Ottoman Empire in the west (**no. 88**) and the Mughal Empire **(no. 96)** in the east. Chinese motifs remained popular as blue-and-white porcelains remained the most sought-after tablewares, which ensured the persistence of individual chinoiserie vegetal motifs into later times (**no. 102**).

This style of abstracted floral decoration became so common that the appearance of naturalistic flowers and plants in seventeenth-century Indian art (**nos. 101, 123**) comes as a shock. The new style was the result of a new source of inspiration: European prints, particularly herbals, that Jesuit missionaries brought to India. In the eighteenth century, another wave of European imports, particularly manufactured goods, inspired Iranian artists to develop similar naturalistic representations (**no. 87**).

64

MIHRAB HOOD

ca. 1300, Kashan, Iran
Fritware cast in two parts and painted in blue and turquoise and in luster over an opaque white glaze,
76 x 74 cm
1/1968

This pair of large tiles presents a classic example of the arabesque. The set originally comprised the hood of a *mihrab*, the niche in the wall of a mosque or shrine that points toward Mecca. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, potters in the city of Kashan in central Iran created large ensembles of such tiles painted in luster, an expensive technique that had been developed at Basra in Iraq (**no. 76**), passed to Egypt in the Fatimid period (**no. 10**), from whence it was carried to Syria (**nos. 51, 93**) and then to Iran at the very end of the twelfth century. Tile mihrab ensembles might comprise as many as seventy or eighty individual tiles and measure as much as 328 x 212 centimeters (Watson 1985, fig. 120). Most of the individual tiles were relatively flat, but some deeply concave hoods were fitted into the wall, such as the one dated 707/1307 removed from the tomb at Natanz and now in the V&A (Watson 1985, pl. 117).

Luster tiles were not only extremely expensive to make, but also complicated. The artificial body made of ground quartz pebbles mixed with fine clay was molded with two levels of twining ornament, left to dry in the sun, covered with an opaque white glaze, painted using copper oxides for the turquoise and cobalt oxides for the blue, and then fired. Tiles like these and another one with the same dimensions in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.73.5.1) are so large that they had to be fired upright in the kiln, and hence the colors ran and the left one warped. Once fired, the pair was ready for a second painting using silver and copper compounds finely ground together in a refractory earthy medium. The tiles were then refired in a smoky reducing kiln that "robbed" the oxygen from the oxides, leaving a thin film of brownish metal after the glaze was polished. The construction of the special reducing kiln, the expense of the additional materials, the extra fuel required for double firing, and the difficulty of controlling all the variables, particularly in such large pieces, make these tiles the acme of the potter's art.

The molded decoration on these tiles contains two levels of ornament, the upper one painted in cobalt blue, the lower one in turquoise. The higher one emerges near the center at the bottom and bifurcates to make two large vines that interweave. The lower turquoise one seems to grow more organically behind this higher blue vine to create a three-dimensional effect against the brownish ground painted in reserve with myriad little spirals. Although the design on the two tiles appears to be rigidly symmetrical, it is actually more flowing, but still more constrained than the wild and exuberant arabesque on the large underglaze-painted bowl made at Raqqa in the early thirteenth century (**no. 93**). The design balances the rigidity of a geometric framework with the organic growth of nature.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 363; *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 132; *Sultan Shah*, no. 55; *AWI* 2001, no. 206

65

CARPET

early 17th century, Iran
Wool pile on cotton, 464 x 287 cm
15/1967

This large and stunning carpet shows how elaborate the arabesque scroll could become. It belongs to a well-known type with several borders surrounded by a field decorated with two lattices of scrolls, here one black and one white, which support small flowers and leaves and very large, peony-like blossoms. The spaces between the spiraling vines are filled with cloud bands, often rendered in several colors. The design is symmetrical around the central vertical axis, but unlike the medallion design (**no. 95**), which was also adopted for carpets, is not symmetrical along the horizontal axis. Rather, the pairs of vines, which are repeated two and one-half times vertically, scroll alternately inward and outward and vary in their floral decoration. The palmettes are cut at the sides to give the impression that the vine could scroll infinitely.

Scholars have developed a variety of names for this distinctive pattern. It is often called an "Isfahan carpet" after the city in central Iran that became the capital in 1598 under Shah Abbas. To encourage capital investment, the monarch established royal workshops there and elsewhere in the realm that produced carpets woven from cartoons drawn up by professional designers in the royal studio. Based on affinities to the style of painting and illumination that developed under the Timurids, the design has also been linked to Herat, the city now in western Afghanistan (Dimand and Mailey 66-72). The design also seems to have been copied in Mughal India, though with different materials, motifs (grape clusters and wisteria), and techniques, notably color mixing in which the weavers juxtaposed knots of different colors (Walker 57-67). Given the variety of geographical sites associated with this pattern, other scholars have turned to formal names for this design, including "in-and-out" (Beattie 57), spiral-vine (Spuhler 1998, nos. 20-21), and scrolling-vine-and-blossom (Walker 57-67).

The group with this design assigned to Iran comprises several dozen carpets and fragments. All have symmetrically disposed scrolling vines with leaves, palmettes, and blossoms that adopt highly complex and fantastic forms. Pairs of palmette blossoms that turn inward alternate with pairs that turn outward. Some, though not this one, also have birds and animals hidden in the foliage, and all have elaborate cloud bands. As in this example, the field is usually red, and the border, which is also strewn with flowers, is dark green. The best known is the huge (752 x 330 cm) silk-and-wool pair dubbed the "Emperor's Carpets," supposedly a gift from Peter the Great of Russia to Leopold I, emperor of Austria, in 1698 (Dimand and Mailey 53-54 and no. 12), but other smaller examples are woven of silk, wool, and cotton. The design was clearly executed in a hierarchy of materials, sizes, and complexities from the mid-sixteenth century through the early seventeenth to meet the demand of a burgeoning market, both local and foreign. This carpet, though about one-half the area of the Emperor's Carpets, is still so large that, since its acquisition in 1967, it has never been displayed, whether in the David Collection or elsewhere.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 691

66

TWO FRAGMENTARY ASTRAGALS

first half 16th century, Istanbul, Turkey
Carved fruitwood, inlaid with other types of wood, ivory and a black, pitch-like substance (1) 94.7 x 7.4 cm; (2) 92.5 x 7 cm
1/1995 and 2/1995

The International Timurid Style, developed in Central Asia in the fifteenth century, flowered under the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, as shown by the decoration on these carved and inlaid doorposts. They functioned as astragals, narrow convex moldings attached to one side of a pair of double doors to prevent them from swinging and to keep out drafts, light, noise, and smoke. Such posts are depicted in contemporary paintings, as in the detail from a painting (right) from a copy of the history of Sultan Süleyman, showing the Ottoman princes departing for the provinces. These two are particularly elaborate and must have come from a palace or mansion. Although the designs differ, similarities of size, technique, and style of the two posts suggest that they came from the same room or suite. Both, for example, share the same scrolling arabesque inlaid along the side of the upper section.

Topkapı Palace Library H. 1517, f. 445a

The lower section of each post is carved in relief with an overall arabesque design typical of the International Timurid Style, in which chinoiserie floral motifs are integrated into languid arabesques. This style appeared in wood and stone objects made for the Timurids in the mid-fifteenth century, such as a sandalwood box made for the ruler Ulugh Beg (Lentz and Lowry, no. 49). Adapted for other media (**no. 69**), the style appears in Istanbul from the 1460s, following Mehmed the Conqueror's establishment of a royal design studio under the directorship of the court artist Baba Nakkaş ("venerable/old Master Designer"). The style remained popular until the sixteenth century, as shown by several carved ivory mirrors made for Sultan Süleyman (Atıl 1987, nos. 73-74).

In contrast to the lower sections of the posts, which have monochrome relief carving that casts shadows, the upper sections are colorful and smooth. The sides show vine scrolls set in reserve with a black pitch-like substance. The faces are inlaid with ivory and other contrasting woods. One shows a geometric interlace of the type used centuries earlier at the opposite end of the Mediterranean (**no. 94**); the other is decorated with winged palmettes. This type of inlay became popular in the Ottoman lands in the first half of the sixteenth century where it was used for precious objects likes thrones and Koran boxes (Atıl 1987, nos. 107-11). It too may be indebted to Timurid tastes, for the carved wooden box made for Ulugh Beg is edged with a thin band of ivory and ebony marquetry. Probably taken to Istanbul as booty, the box, along with imports from northern Italy, may have inspired the development of the inlay industry under the Ottomans. Such elaborate craftsmanship for such a mundane object is typical of the court arts produced in the Islamic lands.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 391; *AWI* 2001, no. 440

67

TENT PANEL

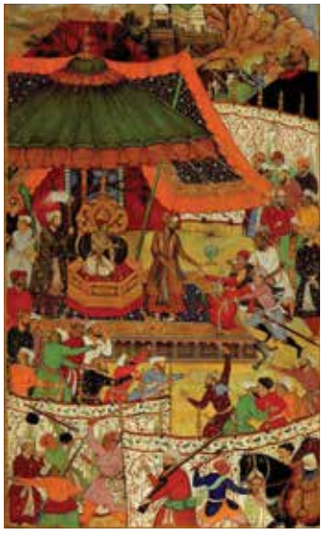
ca. 1700, India

Cotton, quilted and embroidered in silk, 175 x 71 cm

5/2005

The motif of a naturalistic flowering plant, introduced dramatically to Mughal art in the early seventeenth century (**no. 101**), became increasingly stylized by the early eighteenth century. This large panel is made of red cotton quilted in a delicate (about 0.6 cm) diaper pattern in red and then embroidered in very fine chain stitch, using polychrome silk thread in three shades of green (dark, medium, and light), gold, and beige. The design comprises a large cusped arch containing flowering plants in a vase. The motif derives from the naturalistic single plants which were illustrated in European herbals brought by merchants and missionaries to India and which came to dominate the artistic vocabulary there.

In composition, the fabric panel resembles most closely the type set up to form the royal encampment.



From a copy of the *Akbarnama*, c. 1530, India. Art Institute of Chicago

According to the French traveler François Bernier who accompanied the progress of the emperor Awrangzeb from Delhi to Lahore and Kashmir in 1665, the royal apartments were set out in a great square enclosure of cloth some 2.25 meters high and hung from poles set in the ground at regular intervals. The outer faces of these screens were red, the Mughal imperial color; the insides were lined with calicoes printed with large vases of flowers. These tent panels represent a long-standing Mughal tradition, for an illustrated copy of the royal chronicle known as the *Akbarnama* made about 1590 shows a royal encampment composed of textiles decorated with such scalloped niches on a white ground with red trim (see detail below).

The panel exhibited here shows that the tradition continued into the eighteenth century. The panel can be dated to about 1700 on the basis of the stylized vase motif. Compared to the realistic plant with drooping buds on the fragmentary Kashmir shawl done in the late seventeenth century (**no. 101**), the plant on this panel has been abstracted and formalized. The plant no longer grows directly from the ground, but is set in a vase that has been dissolved into angles and curves, with regular foliage sprouting above it. As on the contemporary Persian tile panels with a similar vase design (**no. 87**), the one on this tent panel shows the impact of European painting. The sensitive working of the chain stitch, for example, adds to the ensconced impression of shading and three-dimensionality. Strung up in multiple repeats to form a large enclosure, the panel would create the impression that the user was set in an idealized garden where flowers bloom forever.

Detail

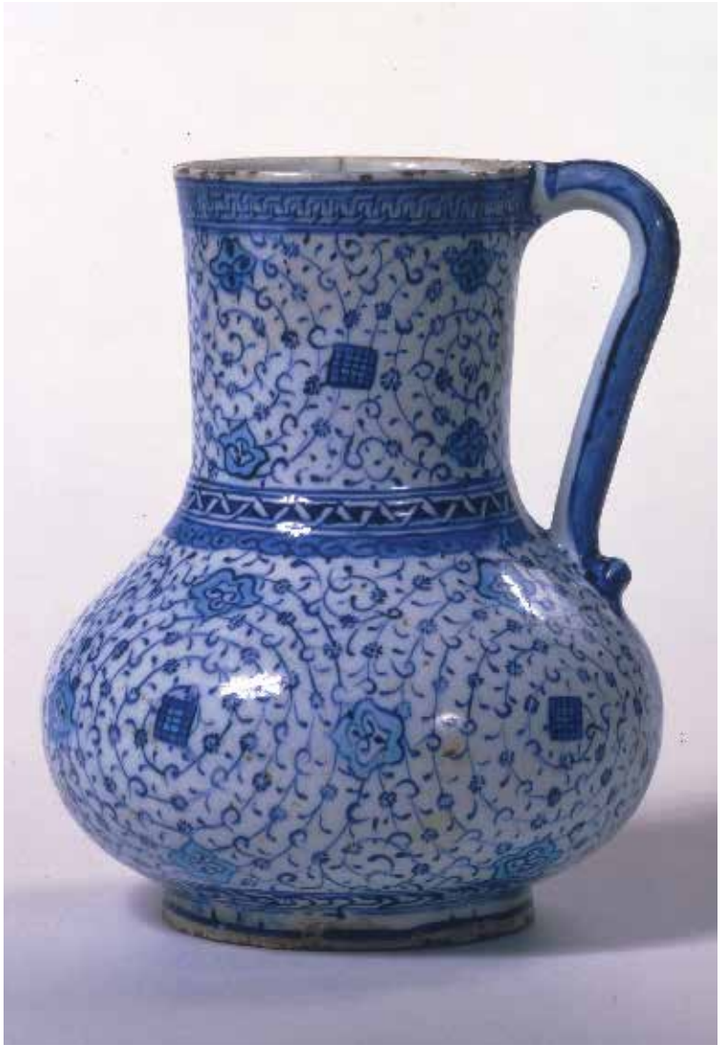
68
JUG

ca. 1540, Iznik, Turkey
Fritware, painted in blue and turquoise under a transparent glaze, H 18 cm
11/1970

In the early sixteenth century, the Ottomans transformed the style of scrolling arabesque with blossoms that the Timurids had developed in Central Asia in the fifteenth century. The shape of this small ceramic jug copies that of metal jugs, the most common type of vessel made for the Timurids (see **no. 69**, for a post-Timurid example). Other examples made for the Ottomans were also done in silver (for example, *Sultan Shah*, no. 293), as well as ceramic. This fritware example has a slightly taller neck than the average metal jug and is therefore more elongated. The change from metal to ceramic also entailed some simplification. The handle, for example, has been reduced from a serpentine dragon with open jaws to a simple S-curve. Nevertheless, the general shape with a globular body and cylindrical neck mimics the metal original, down to the bands around the neck and rim that echo the molded collar and rim on the prototype. The main difference is the lack of lid on the ceramic example.

This jug is decorated with a scrolling arabesque bedecked with blossoms and squares. The freewheeling arabesque characteristic of the International Timurid Style has been tightened into a rigid spiral that unfurls in concentric circles. The thin line is spiked with tiny rosettes, alternating with nervous flicks of comma-shaped leaves that branch to the left and right. This type of ceramic with spiral decoration was once known as Golden Horn ware, because the seventeenth-century Turkish traveler Evliya Celebi had mentioned potteries on that fresh water estuary in Istanbul and some shards were found there. The name is misleading, however, as the ware was probably made at Iznik, the city near Bursa that became the center of the ceramics industry under the Ottomans. The style has also been called "Tuğrakeş" Spiral Style, since the tight spirals resemble the background on the emblems, or *tughra*s, used by the Ottoman sultans to verify decrees (Atasoy and Raby 1989, 108-14). Developed in the late 1520s, this abstract and retrospective style of decoration was popular until the 1550s, when it was replaced by a new floral style with serrated leaves (**no. 91**) and a wide range of colors, including tomato red.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 195; *Sultan Shah*, no. 394; *AWI* 2001, no. 255



69
LIDDED JUG

918/1512, Herat, Afghanistan
Cast brass, engraved and inlaid with gold and silver, H 16.5 cm
34/1986

The arabesque scroll could be used to create allover decoration, as on this small pot-bellied jug with dragon handle. It is the most popular shape of metalware made under the Timurids, Mongol rulers of Iran and Central Asia from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century (Komaroff 1992, 53-55). At least fifty examples are known. They are all about the same size, though the height can vary by a few centimeters, as in this example, which is three centimeters taller than the average. All have a globular body, with a molded collar joining body to cylindrical neck, which in turn has a molded rim. Most of them, like this one, have a short, slightly splayed foot ring that seems to have been cast separately. This jug is one of the few that has preserved its original rounded cover with knobbed finial. The handles on these jugs always take the shape of an open-mouthed dragon with serpentine body. The prototype for the shape of both body and handle lies in Chinese blue-and-white porcelains, and the earliest copy made for the Timurids was a jade (nephrite) jug carved for prince Ulugh Beg sometime between 1419 and 1447 (Lentz and Lowry, fig. 46).

Metal jugs of this shape were produced in the eastern Islamic lands from the second half of the fifteenth century into the sixteenth. This one bears an inscription incised under the foot saying that it was the work of the needy, humble servant, Ali ibn Muhammad Ali Shihab al-Ghuri on the first day of Jumada II in the year 918, corresponding to 14 August 1512. His epithet, al-Ghuri, shows that he came from Ghur, the mountainous region east of Herat in Afghanistan. The date, shortly after the fall of Timurid dynasty in 1506, shows that these wares continued to be popular in spite of political upheavals.

Despite the Chinese prototype for the shape, the decoration of this jug is strictly Islamic. The surface is divided into bands. Narrower bands containing an arabesque scroll alternate with wider bands, which are filled with quatrefoil cartouches against a scrolling arabesque ground. The small-scale, allover decoration envelops the surface in a dense web of patterning. Like an elastic mesh, the pattern expands to fit the swelling surface of the body and lends vitality to this handy little drinking vessel. This style of scrolling arabesque, typically with large blossoms rather than cartouches, developed in the fifteenth century under the Timurids of Central Asia and was soon exported across the Islamic lands. Variants of the so-called International Timurid Style were commonly used to decorate objects made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from Syria (**no. 89**) and Turkey (**no. 68**) to India (**no. 70**).

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 190; *Sultan Shah*, no. 258; *AWI* 2001, no. 523

70

PEN CASE

early 17th century, Gujarat, India
Wood, overlaid with mother-of-pearl in black lacquer, painted inside in red, black and gold, 8 x 30 x 8 cm
35/1976

The arabesque scroll could easily be adapted to different techniques and scales. This small box made of wood overlaid with mother-of-pearl in black lacquer exemplifies a technique that was popular in the cities of Cambay and Ahmedabad in Gujarat from the late sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth. The wooden furniture produced there (about thirty pieces are known; Digby) ranges in size from canopies over tombs still *in situ* and huge storage chests (David Collection 22/1983; Blair and Bloom 1994, fig. 382) to writing boxes and small rectangular cases, like this one designed to hold pens. The interior still contains the original loose tray with a circular hole on the right side for the inkwell and room underneath for several reed pens. The lid is inscribed with the *basmala*, the invocation to God that Muslims invoke before they begin any pious act, showing that this pen case was intended for a Muslim patron. To judge from the decoration on the interior of stylized lotus flowers with buds and little leaves painted in gold and black on a red ground, the pen box was made for export to the Ottoman empire. Other pieces of this type of work entered German and Hapsburg princely collections as early as 1600.

Muslims consider calligraphy the highest art form, and consequently they often had pen cases made of the fancy materials, such as inlaid bronze or wood with elaborate decoration (see **no. 99**, for a contemporary lacquered example). In addition to the inscription on the lid, which is written in a fat *thuluth* script typical of Ottoman times, this pen case is decorated with geometric and floral ornament. Rows of small crosses and fleurons frame the main fields on the sides. They are filled with cusped and curvilinear leaves on a regularly spiraling vine, with the interstices packed with comma-like motifs, reminiscent of the spirals on the ceramic jug from Iznik (**no. 68**). Smaller versions of the same split-leaf arabesque fill the eight-pointed stars on the lid. Other examples made in this technique are decorated with figural scenes of animals and hunts, but the invocation on the lid as well as the exclusively geometric and floral ornament make this box suitable to store pens used for writing God's word.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 111; *AWI* 2001, no. 442

71
BOWL
9th-10th century, Iraq or Iran
Colorless glass with relief-cut decoration, H 10.5; diameter 13.8 cm
70/1998

Artisans in early Islamic times gradually stylized the naturalistic vegetation that had been used in classical times. The glassmaker decorated the body of the bowl with hanging bunches of grapes interspersed with winged palmettes. The palmette, a motif used since the Bronze Age, was common in early Islamic art, as on the contemporary bronze ewer (**no. 75**), but the realistic bunches of grapes, which look as though they could fall from the stem at any moment, are more unusual. To fill the space between the palmettes near the rim, the artisan cut away ovoid shapes that hang like tongues from the rim on both interior and exterior. Style and technique suggest an attribution to Iran or Iraq in the ninth or tenth century.

The decoration makes this bowl, despite its fragmentary condition, a masterpiece of the glassblower's art. The realistic grapes, each one carefully detailed with faceting, contrast with the bold palmettes, which are cut on a slant. The tongue shapes at the top, meanwhile, are cut into the surface. In addition to contrasts in surface, the decoration also plays with contrasting forms. The grapes are highly realistic, whereas the palmettes and tongues are stylized.

We can only speculate about how this bowl was used. It sits on a small foot comprising two concentric rings, the inner one higher than the outer, so it was clearly meant to rest on a flat surface. Other bowls (e.g., Carboni and Whitehouse, no. 18a) are taller and narrower like regular drinking glasses. A few (e.g., Carboni and Whitehouse, no. 84) are shorter and wider like this one. Their diameter makes them too wide to be grasped easily with one hand, so they must have been held with two hands. They may have been ceremonial cups for communal drinking.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 310

72
CUP
8th–9th century, Syria or Iran
Molded and pinched glass, 9 x 12.4 cm; diameter, including handle, 14 cm
51/2004

Artisans in early Islamic times adopted and adapted pre-Islamic methods and motifs. Glass blowers had developed the technique of blowing glass into a patterned mold early in the first century CE, soon after the invention of glassblowing itself. It spread quickly throughout the Roman world, as it was an efficient method of producing multiples. To do so, the glassmaker blew the parison, or gather of glass, into a mold. The glass cooled rapidly as it touched the mold. He then cracked the parison off from the blowing iron at the point of inflation, creating a space that provides the vessel opening. Such a technique could be used only for closed forms with small openings. To produce open shapes like cups and bowls, the glassmaker would attach the still-hot parison to a solid metal rod known as a pointil, or punty, that was attached opposite the spot where it was connected to the blowing iron. The glassmaker then cracked the parison off the blowing rod. While it was still attached to the pointil, he could further decorate the surface. In the case of this cup, for example, he pinched the hot surface with a pair of tongs to fold and tool the rim and attached glass coils, colored purple with manganese to serve as handle and foot.

Already known in Roman times, the use of the pointil became widespread in the early Islamic period, and its use here suggests a dating for this cup to the eighth or ninth century. The decoration suggests this date, as well; a vine scroll undulates rhythmically around the surface of the cup, supporting bunches of hanging grapes. Over time, the classical vine scroll became increasingly stylized and abstracted into a pattern (**no. 71**), but the one on this cup still grows organically.

Although much of the surface has been iridized from burial in the earth, it is still apparent that the use of color was meant to heighten the impact of the decoration. The vine scroll already suggests wine, and the color of the handle and foot imitate the red liquid that would have filled this cup. Although later Muslim exegesis prohibits the consumption of wine (in Arabic, *khamr*), the Koran presents a highly nuanced and largely ambivalent attitude toward this beverage and its effects (McAuliffe, s.v. "Wine"), and the numerous shards of ceramic wine bottles found at Samarra, some even labeled with the vintage, show that the Abbasids readily consumed this beverage at court. The decoration, then, is a visual allusion to the function of this vessel as wine cup.

Unpublished

73
FRAGMENT OF A SAMITE TEXTILE
first half 17th century, Iran
Silk and metal lamella spun around silk, 77 x 70.5 cm
23/1997

Designers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during the age of empires, could incorporate both realistic and abstract features in a single floral motif. The design on this striking silk comprises a single flowering plant with a very tall stem set against a once-silver ground. Woven of silk and metal threads, the silk is particularly lustrous because of the longer weft float possible using this technique, a samite or weft-faced compound twill (single-faced) with two sets of warps and wefts. Metal-ground textiles with single plants like this one were popular with weavers in both Iran and India (Bier 1987). The plants were typically set in alternate directions in staggered rows. This repeat made the most of a simple composition, as the designer had only to plan out a single flower.

The flower on this textile is extraordinary. At first glance, the plant seems realistic, as it grows from a tuft, with several green leaves at the bottom. At the top of the stem is a large flower, set frontally like a sunflower, from which a few green sepals emerge. Another smaller flower, still budding and seen in profile, grows out of the same tuft. These realistic features are countered by other abstracted ones. Halfway up the extraordinarily attenuated and straight stem, for example, is another profiled bud that seems to float in space, hovering above the sinuous leaf that not only bends in two directions, but is itself also decorated with smaller flowers.

Textiles were the mainstay of the economy in the age of empires. These luxurious fabrics became popular trade goods with the English, Portuguese, and Dutch who established trading stations in the region in a global network. It is somewhat ironic, then, that this type of design is echoed most closely in the stylized foliate patterns of the Scottish artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928), whose botanical studies of individual flowers and shrubs document all stages in a plant's development while drawing attention to its structure.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 671

74

FRAGMENTARY PLAQUE

9th century, Iraq
Molded stucco, 34.5 x 29 cm
43/1992

This fragmentary plaque once decorated a wall and epitomizes the abstracted style of decoration that became popular under the Abbasids (r. 749-1258), the second dynasty of caliphs who made their capital in Iraq. Stucco was a common material for wall decoration, especially in Iraq and Iran where building stone was scarce and the typical material of construction was brick. Huge quantities of molded and carved stucco have been excavated at Samarra, the new capital founded in 838 by the Abbasid caliph al-Muta'sim, sixty miles (100 km) upstream from Baghdad. Constructed mainly of mud brick, the capital sprawled for some thirty miles (50 km) along both banks of the Tigris. Its enormous scale can be gauged from a single palace known as the Dar al-Khilafa (House of the Caliph), a complex of courts and gardens that covered over four hundred acres (125 hectares) and measured near one mile (1,400 meters) from the riverbank to the viewing stand, overlooking an even more enormous cloverleaf racetrack. It is only one of 5,700 buildings that have been identified at the site.

Scholars have divided the stucco excavated at Samarra into three, increasingly abstract styles. The first is a carved technique clearly derived from the geometricized vegetal ornament that had been popular since the Umayyad period (**no. 72**). The second is characterized by somewhat simplified subjects that can still be distinguished from the background and the extensive use of cross-hatching for details. This fragment exemplifies the third and most distinctive of the Samarra styles: the Beveled Style. A molded technique, the Beveled Style uses a distinctive slanted cut that allowed the plaster to be released easily from the mold, making it useful for decorating the enormous surfaces at the site. Finishing details could be added with a tool in the still-moist plaster.

The Beveled Style is characterized by rhythmic and symmetrical repetitions of curved lines ending in dots that form abstract patterns in which the traditional distinction between subject and background has been dissolved. Undoubtedly developed for stucco, it was soon applied to wood and other carving, particularly rock crystal and stone (**no. 81**). It was also imitated in other media, such as painting on ceramics (**no. 76**). Developed first in Iraq, the Beveled Style spread quickly throughout the vast Abbasid realm to become a hallmark of Abbasid taste.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 62; *AWI* 2001, no. 390

75

EWER

9th century, Iran or Iraq
Cast and engraved bronze, H including knob 27.7 cm; diameter 14 cm
17/2001

This ewer is an imaginatively decorated variant of a relatively large group made in early Islamic times. Cast in a single piece, each of these ewers has an ovoid or globular body with a low foot ring and a straight, slightly flaring neck that is marked off from the shoulder by a low relief molding. The neck ends in a flat or rounded lip. On this example it is flat and scalloped. The handles on these ewers are typically decorated in the middle with four to six modeled balls or beads, but here the handle is twisted. In both cases, the irregular surface made the handle easier to grasp. The handles are typically decorated with a thumb rest in the shape of a projecting knob. In some cases it takes the form of a pomegranate; here it is flatter.

Most of these ewers, such as one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Baer 1983, fig. 70) or another in the Keir collection (Fehérvári 1976, no. 5), have fluted or faceted necks set between bands with engraving. The highly decorated necks are juxtaposed to smooth bodies. On this ewer the contrast is reversed: the neck is smooth, whereas the body is sublimely decorated with a wonderful scrolling vine. The vine spirals around spade-shaped palmettes, leaving space at the front and back, opposite the handle, for large winged palmettes. This motif, popular in the arts produced in pre-Islamic Iran under the Sasanians (224-631), was adopted in early Islamic times, as on the mosaic decoration on the interior of the Dome of the Rock, erected in Jerusalem (begun 692). Here, however, the winged palmette has become much more stylized: the wings have swollen and are almost palpable, as their rounded surface catches the light. The effect is enhanced by the color of the patina since the greenish surface has been worn down to show the underlying reddish brown. Poised between realism and abstraction, the decoration is vibrant.

Unpublished

76

BOWL

9th–10th century, Iraq
Earthenware painted in luster over an opaque white glaze, diameter 20.5 cm
26/1962

Potters in Iraq could adapt the abstract Beveled Style that had been developed for stucco (**no. 74**) to a two-dimensional curved surface. Using the typical shape that had been taken from Chinese prototypes, the potter covered the bowl with materials and techniques typical of Islamic ceramics: a lead glaze made opaque by adding tin and painted decoration over the glaze in oxides of silver or copper that turned lustrous after a second firing. Muslim craftsmen in Syria and Egypt had developed this technique for decorating glass by the eighth century; during the ninth century, potters at Basra in Iraq, the center of the Abbasid ceramic industry, learned how to apply it to ceramics, decorating pieces with one or more colors of metallic luster. From there, the technique, which seems to have been a closely guarded secret often passed down in families, was taken to Fatimid Egypt (**no. 10**) and then eventually east to Syria (**no. 51**) and Iran (**nos. 2, 8, 48, 64, 111, 118**) and west to southern Spain (**no. 90**).

The potter covered the open face of this bowl with abstracted palmettes painted in yellow-brown luster. He made the split palmette, shown here at the top, more realistic by adding curved edges and dots that delineate leafy forms. The rest of the design is more abstracted. Just as with the stucco plaque, the tails of the palmettes on the bowl curl in on themselves and the shapes interlock. Like the molded stucco, the painting on this bowl leaves the viewer in doubt as to which elements comprise the pattern and which the ground.

The potter further played with abstraction and reality in the forms he chose. By adding the curved tails and long pointed beaks, he hinted at bird-like shapes. Confronted birds were a favorite motif of Muslim artists, used, for example, on the gold filigree earrings (**no. 19**). However, the birds are also denatured, as the curves at the top dissolve into nothing. The painter thus played with shape and line to suggest real, yet abstracted, forms.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 265; *Lousiana Revy* 1987, no. 26; *Sultan Shah*, no. 65; *AWI* 2001, no. 106

77

CYLINDRICAL BOX

first half 11th century, Córdoba or Cuenca, Spain
Carved ivory, H 7.1; diameter 5.8 cm
45/1998

Artists in the western Islamic lands could also adapt the arabesque to different scales and surfaces. The marble panel carved earlier in the same region (**no. 84**) is large and flat. By contrast, this ivory box is tiny and three-dimensional. The large panel was to be mounted on the wall and viewed from afar. This box is meant to be picked up and rotated in the hand, and the wear around the middle of the base and on the bellies of the animals on the lid shows that it was repeatedly handled. The softer material and smaller scale of the ivory allowed the carver to create more playful motifs and details, from the animals to the notched leaves.

The surface of this little container is encased in a web of vegetation in which the tendrils grow over and under each other to form a geometric lattice. The pattern of vines around the body can be expanded laterally, but it is constrained in the vertical direction, so that it does not yet fully have the quality of infinite expansion in either direction, which is the key feature of the true arabesque. At the same time, the rigid symmetrical framework is countered by the organic nature of the foliage, which grows alternately under and over the stems. The ivory carver notched the leaves to resemble veins and drilled small holes to articulate the edges. Furthermore he added three pairs of gazelles who inhabit the thicket of vegetation on the lid. Indeed, he has so skillfully carved the levels that the gazelles seem to munch on the vines, which also weave between the animals' legs. The decoration is thus posed between realism and abstraction.

This box is one of a series of twenty-nine superbly carved ivory boxes made in the Iberian peninsula between the mid-tenth century and the mid-eleventh (latest publication, *Journal of the David Collection* 2005). Forty percent (thirteen examples) are cylindrical like this one, but most are much larger (typical dimensions 18 x 10 cm) and have an inscription around the base of the lid. This one is closest to a cylindrical box now in Narbonne made at Cuenca for Isma'il ibn Yahya al-Ma'mun, governor of the city for his father, the local Dhu'l-Nunid ruler of Toledo from 1043 to 1075 (*Journal of the David Collection* 2005, no. 28). Similar designs are also found on a larger rectangular box now in Palencia, a casket made in 411/1049-50 at Cuenca by Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayyan for the same person. (*Journal of the David Collection* 2005, no. 29). While this tiny box shares the same repertory of motifs, the design is livelier, and the box seems to be the work of another hand or school.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 406

78
PLAQUE
13th–14th century, Egypt
Carved ivory, 8.2 x 7.9 cm
48/1978

Sophisticated carvers in the Islamic lands could elaborate the arabesque on different levels. This almost square plaque displays a symmetrical design, in which delicate tendrils radiate from a central axis marked by a palmette. The tendrils spiral over and under each other to make at least four levels of scrolling arabesque. The ground was once colored, and the ends of the palmettes are marked by small drill holes. Color and texture would have heightened the impact. Design and technique suggest an attribution to Egypt in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Despite its small size—it is easily grasped in the hand—this plaque shows an extraordinary level of workmanship. Compared to the arabesque on the contemporary Iranian mihrab (**no. 64**), this one is tighter and more controlled, a difference due in part to the technique of manufacture. Unlike the molded ceramic panels of the minbar, this plaque is carved of ivory, one of the hardest animal substances known. It was probably made from the tusk of an African elephant. Already prized in Pharaonic times, the tusks of African elephants are normally larger and of better quality than the those from Asian elephants.

The plaque was designed for insertion into a larger wooden armature as part of a larger composition. Some comparable plaques still retain their wooden frame. These panels were once part of doors or other pieces of important furniture such as a pulpit (*minbar*) or Koran stand (*rahla*). The warm glow of the cream-colored ivory would have contrasted with the rich sheen of the dark wood. This technique also made the most of small pieces of precious ivory. A single tusk will yield only a few cylindrical boxes (**no. 77**), but far more flat plaques. Several of these plaques survive, but this is one of the most delicately carved, as the arabesque on it has become almost three-dimensional.

Some comparable pieces with arabesques that also include crosses must have been made for Christian contexts, showing that "Islamic art" was not only made for Muslims.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 149; *Sultan Shah*, no. 140; *AWI* 2001, no. 412

79

BOTTLE

18th–19th century, Iran
Yellow-green glass, partly mold blown, H 36 cm
39/1967

Vegetal ornament was so versatile that it could be translated into three dimensions and adapted for everyday objects, like this bottle that probably served as a rosewater sprinkler. In Iran, rosewater (in Persian, *golab,* distilled from the water in which rose petals have soaked) was often sprinkled on both hands and food, and hence rosewater sprinklers were common. Inlaid metal versions made in medieval times (**nos. 17, 113**) were often decorated with figures, writing, and geometry. This glass example from the eighteenth or nineteenth century exploits a sinuous vegetal shape that lends a tactile feeling to the piece. Its organic quality is heightened by the delicate spirals on the swaying neck and the upper edge of the mouth that is drawn up to resemble a delicate flower petal. Such organic shapes inspired European and American glassmakers in the nineteenth century, such as Louis Comfort Tiffany.

The bottle was made by blowing the parison (gather of glass on the blowpipe) into a dip mold with ridges. The glass was then inflated to the desired size and shape, here a globe, measuring about ten centimeters. During this inflation, the ribs were eliminated from the wall but remained on the neck. Technique is thus exploited to lend a sense of drama and movement to a stable object.

By the eighteenth century, Iran was importing much of its glass from Europe, especially from Russia and Venice. Local manufactories concentrated on two traditional types of object: bases for hookahs or waterpipes, and bottles for storing wine and other precious substances. Shiraz was one of the main centers of production, especially for long-necked bottles designed to contain rosewater and other locally made perfumes. These were wrapped in wicker covers and exported widely, overland and by sea via the Gulf port of Gombroon.

This type of long-necked bottle is sometimes called an *ashkdan* (literally, "container for tears"), since it was said that a lover would weep into the eyecup when the beloved departed. Such bottles were made of clear glass that was tinted a range of colors, from yellowish brown to green, purple and dark blue (for examples, Carboni and Whitehouse, nos. 145 and 147). Many museums in Europe and the United States acquired examples in the late nineteenth century, probably soon after they were made.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 359

80

TURBAN COVER

second half 16th century, Turkey
Silk embroidery on fine linen, 119 x 124 cm
17/1994

Garden or "florists'" flowers appeared as a decorative motif in Ottoman art during the sixteenth century. The design on this embroidered cloth comprises a border with bouquets of stylized flowers surrounding a central field built up symmetrically along two axes around a central octafoil. A red lattice of stems encloses tulips, carnations, hyacinths, and cypress trees artfully embroidered in red, blue, yellow, orange, green, and brown. Arrangements of florists' flowers growing from grassy tufts appeared around 1540, and the style quickly spread through the arts of the Ottoman court, particularly in the hands of the court artist and illuminator, Kara Memi (**no. 86**).

Embroidered cloths like this one were used to decorate walls, drape over furniture, and wrap precious items. To judge from its nearly square shape and fine embroidery, this cloth was designed to be a cover for a large and complex ceremonial turban (*kavuk*). Rather than the loose piece of cloth used in earlier times, the Ottoman turban was sewn together after tying and could not be washed. Hence it had to be wrapped in a cover when not in use. It was often installed on a wooden stand (*kavukluk*), typically a wooden bracket that attached to the wall with a projecting shelf. The stands were often elaborately decorated with inlay and gilding.

Remarkably intact and of extremely fine quality, this embroidery must have been made for the palace or another well-to-do household. The pattern was first drawn on the linen, mainly in orange, and traces of the underdrawing are still visible on the finished piece. According to sixteenth-century sources, the young women in the sultan's harem learned to embroider, but it is impossible to distinguish their work from that of professionals.

One of the earliest examples of such embroideries to survive, this cloth can be dated on the basis of its lattice design. In later examples from the seventeenth century, the lattice is broken apart into wavy parallel lines that run the length of the fabric. Often the stems become secondary as the lattice is engulfed with a profusion of large and colorful blossoms and flowers (Ellis and Wearden, pl. 20). In this case both lattice and flowers share equal weight, thereby creating a pleasing and delicate design.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 398; *AWI* 2001, no. 660

81

CAPITAL

8th–9th century, Raqqa, Syria?
Carved alabaster, H 26 cm; upper diameter 29 cm; lower diameter 17 cm
2/2001

Formally, this alabaster block displays the Beveled Style developed for stucco and used to decorate the enormous wall surfaces at the new Abbasid capital founded at Samarra in 836 (**no. 74**). This capital is carved alabaster rather than the molded stucco used there, but it shows the same curved tails and dissolution of the differentiation between subject and ground.

The capital resembles others found at Raqqa, a city in Syria 150 miles (250 km) east of Aleppo on the east bank of the Euphrates River near the junction with its tributary, the Balikh. This strategic and well-connected site has been occupied since the third century BCE. In 639, Muslim forces took the city of Nikephorion from the Byzantines and renamed it al-Raqqa ("morass") in reference to the marshy surroundings at the juncture of the two rivers. In 772, the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur ordered a new city constructed immediately to the west. First called al-Rafiqa ("companion"), the new settlement later assumed the name of nearby Raqqa. Although al-Mansur's successor Harun al-Rashid, disliking Baghdad, made Raqqa his capital for twelve years (796-808), it was soon abandoned for the new Abbasid capital at Samarra. By the early twentieth century, the site was virtually deserted when Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, the German archeologists who later excavated at Samarra, visited the area. Their description of the ruins contains drawings of several capitals, including one in the Beveled Style very similar to this (Sarre and Hertzfeld, fig. 320).

What makes this example particularly interesting is the cross carved in the center of the palmette along one side. The cross shows that the capital must have come from a Christian building. Christians maintained a strong presence in the region for centuries after the Muslim conquests. Texts reveal, for example, that a bishop resided at Raqqa until the twelfth century, and recent German excavations have uncovered the site of four monasteries there. Some of the potters who worked for the Abbasids were also Christians. This capital shows that the Beveled Style did not carry specifically religious associations and that what we today call "Islamic art" includes works made for or by non-Muslims.

Selected bibliography: *Ex Oriente*, no. 573, p. 146

82

DOORKNOCKER

first half 13th century, northern Iraq or Syria
Cast and engraved bronze, 41.5 x 25.5 cm
2/1993

The Beveled Style continued to have a long life after its invention in ninth-century Iraq, as artisans across the Islamic lands found new ways to use it in a variety of media. Developed for molding stucco (**no. 74**), it became increasingly stylized, as shown by this stunning doorknocker from thirteenth-century Syria. Its central section is decorated with a dense, almost chaotic openwork scroll of split palmettes with curled lobes and ends that morph into tendrils. Emanating from a central axis, the tendrils intertwine over and under each other on several levels.

The doorknocker belongs to a small group of metalwares that can be assigned to Iraq in the first half of the thirteenth century. The group includes several sets of doorknockers and other objects, but the key to dating is an astronomical table, made by Muhammad ibn Khutlukh al-Mawsili in 639/1241-42 and now in the British Museum (*L'Orient de Saladin*, no. 222), whose handle is decorated with a dense vegetal scroll similar to the one on this doorknocker. The group is often assigned to the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. Located on the west bank of the Tigris River, opposite the ancient city of Nineveh, it was the most important metalworking center in the region. The city was so prestigious that the epithet *al-mawsili* ("from Mosul") came to be associated with the finest practitioners of the craft, borne even by artisans who worked elsewhere, including Muhammad ibn Khutlukh, who signed another incense burner at Damascus. This style was clearly used by several craftsmen, for the closest parallel to this particular doorknocker is a cast bronze handle in the Khalili Collection (*L'Orient de Saladin* 2001, no. 221) signed by one Shakir ibn Ahmad.

The arabesque scroll in the center of this doorknocker is set within a heavy lyre-shaped frame composed of split palmette elements. The frame tapers at the bottom to an elegant double palmette, while at the top it ends in unusual forms made up from split palmette elements. They recall the stylized dragon- or snake-heads found on more naturalistic doorknockers in the region, whose yawning jaws frame the solid pin that connects knocker to door, as on another example in the David Collection not in this exhibition (see fig. 2 on p. 29 in Kjeld von Folsach's essay in this volume). The motif clearly served an apotropaic function to ward off evil. It also functions formally, as the solid frame sets off the scrolling arabesque that makes this doorknocker a tour-de-force of three-dimensional vegetal ornament.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 71; *AWI* 2001, no. 505

83

CARPET

first half 18th century, India
Pashmina wool pile on cotton foundation,
166 x 120 cm
Tex. 31

This exquisite carpet belongs to the "millefleurs" type, a name applied to a sizeable group of carpets with strictly floral patterns that incorporate a profusion of tiny blossoms, often clustered in groups of three, five, or seven. Many have an allover pattern of tiny flowers, but a small group of about a dozen, including this one, display a niche filled with tiny blossoms growing out of a vase or hillock at the bottom of the field (Walker, 119-29). The niche is cusped, as in other textiles made during the period of Mughal rule in India, such as the cut-and-voided velvet (**no. 1**) and the embroidered tent panel (**no. 67**), and the columns are bulbous and notched, like stylized cypress trees. The flowers are densely packed, and the clusters of blossoms are highly regularized and arranged in a stiff schematic pattern. The central field is always enclosed by a border with more tiny blossoms of the same type.

Millefleurs carpets were made in Kashmir and possibly also at Lahore, using pashmina (from the Persian *pashm*, "wool"), the fine winter underhair of the Asian domestic goat, specifically those raised at over 14,000 feet above sea level. The lustrous and fine wool can be worked with 150 knots per square inch, making them appear as if they were knotted of silk. These carpets seem to have been made over a 150-year period from the second half of the seventeenth century through the eighteenth. The design developed from the realistic plants introduced from European art in the middle of the seventeenth century (**no. 101**), but the decoration is reduced in scale, and the drawing becomes increasingly stiffened and regularized.

Because of their niche design resembling a mihrab, millefleurs carpets were once thought to have been used as prayer rugs. While this is certainly possible, they also may have also been used as hangings, as were contemporary Kashmiri twill textiles with similar designs that are not sturdy enough to work as prayer mats. Similarly, the quilted cotton hanging (**no. 67**) probably served as a tent panel, for the Mughals often transformed textiles into architecture.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 6; *AWI* 2001, no. 693

84

PANEL

second half 10th century, Córdoba, Spain
Carved marble, 51.8 x 28.2 x 6 cm
86/2004

Artists in the western Islamic lands transformed the naturalistic vine scroll into the abstract arabesque. Carved from a large slab of marble, this superbly worked panel must have been part of a wall revetment. The bottom and sides are finished, and only the upper part is missing. A frieze of four-petaled flowers runs along the bottom; the left side is filled with a meandering vine; and the main field is composed of a vine whose tendrils grow back on themselves to support and frame a large, double palmette. The various designs could be expanded indefinitely in one direction, and hence they mark an intermediate stage in the development of the arabesque as it was first defined by the Austrian art-historian Alois Riegl over a century ago in his classic work, *Stilfragen*. For him, the true arabesque has *unendliche Rapport* ("infinite correspondence"), meaning that the design can be extended indefinitely in any direction. Riegl's analysis is the basis for most later art-historical descriptions of the arabesque.

The arabesque, like many other decorative devices and techniques, probably evolved in Baghdad, the cultural capital of the Islamic world in the tenth century, but was quickly disseminated throughout the Islamic lands. The earliest datable examples of this distinctive and original development may be found in the marble panels carved in and around Córdoba in southern Spain during the second half of the tenth century. The lower walls of the so-called Salón Rico, the magnificent audience hall built by the neo-Umayyad caliph Abd al-Rahman III in the 950s at Madinat al-Zahra, the caliphal residence outside of Córdoba, was covered with such panels. Other carved panels flanked the mihrab added to the Great Mosque of Córdoba in 354/965. The mosque panels are particularly relevant, as they too have a frieze of flowers (at the top rather than the bottom) and a border carved as part of the panel. To judge from the material and design, the David Collection panel is contemporary to them.

All these marble panels from Córdoba are deeply carved with a straight cut that imparts an almost graphic quality to the design. The rigidity of the design is softened by its slight asymmetry: the foliage on either side of the central axis in the field, for example, is not identical. The star-shaped flowers at mid-height are different: the one on the left has six petals, the one on the right has seven. Similarly, the frond on the right extends slightly higher than the one on the left. These small differences lend a feeling of life and movement to the geometric frame.

Unpublished

85

CAPITAL

14th century, Granada, Spain

Carved marble, 32.5 x 30 cm

10/2001

This object epitomizes the evolution of the composite capital, one of the ubiquitous forms of late Antique architecture in the Mediterranean basin, by craftsmen working in the Iberian Peninsula under Islamic rule. Many such capitals remain *in situ* at the Alhambra, a series of palaces built by the Nasrid rulers of Granada (r. 1232-1492) and elsewhere in their capital city. The style of carving suggests that this particular capital was carved for one of the palaces built by Yusuf I (r. 1333-54). Some examples, like this one, were removed long ago and reused in other buildings, as shown by the damage sustained by one corner.

Composite capitals, which had been invented by the Romans, combined features of the Greek Ionic and Corinthian orders. They blend the volutes (a scroll-shape derived from a roll of papyrus) of the canted (i.e. with four identical faces) Ionic capital with two rows of supporting acanthus leaves typical of the Corinthian. The type remained popular over the centuries as artisans in the Islamic lands dematerialized the original by flattening the sculptural forms, stylizing the leaves, and reversing the direction in which the volutes rolled. In this example, the supporting leaves around the shaft have been turned into austere U-shaped supports from which emerges an exuberant square block of closely imbricated foliage. Although the technique differs from the earlier Beveled Style of ninth-century Mesopotamia (**no. 81**), it shares the earlier style's abandonment of a clear distinction between subject and ground in favor of superimposed layers of leaves that obey visual, if not natural, logic. Each volute terminates in an eight-lobed, three-dimensional rosette that resembles a scallop shell. Just as they had abstracted and transformed the individual elements of the composite capital, Muslim craftsmen in Spain and northwest Africa from the twelfth or thirteenth century had assimilated and geometricized the shell motif, perhaps ultimately derived from the scallop shell carried by Christian pilgrims returning from Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, into a distinctively Islamic decorative form.

Unpublished

86

PANEL OF SIX TILES

ca. 1540, Iznik, Turkey

Fritware painted in blue, turquoise and sage green with black outlines under a transparent glaze, 61.2 x 79 cm

Isl. 182

The decoration on this stunning set of six tiles exemplifies the new range of colors and the naturalistic style of decoration based on garden or "florists'" flowers introduced into Ottoman court art about 1540. The palette expanded from the earlier cobalt blue and white (**no. 88**) to include turquoise blue and mossy green. On dishes, these colors were sometimes supplemented by a purplish color produced from manganese. From the 1550s, a thick tomato red was included as well. The flowers and plants became livelier and fuller than in earlier work. They grow from grassy tufts, and the branches interweave, often asymmetrically. The style is associated with the court artist and designer Kara Memi, who became head painter in the 1550s under Sultan Süleyman and illuminated many of the finest manuscripts made for the court, including a copy of the sultan's poems written under the penname Muhibbi (Istanbul University Library T.5467; Denny 35). The closest parallel to the flowers on these tiles is the illuminated lacquer binding on a collection of Traditions made for Prince Mehmed about 1540 (Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Library EH 2851; Atasoy and Raby, fig. 229).

This set of tiles is said to have come from one of many baths in Topkapı Palace in Istanbul. These baths, in which the water was heated by fire, were often subject to extreme temperatures and humidity, and the tile revetments were replaced, especially at the end of the seventeenth century, when tiles of poorer quality were installed. Many of the salvaged earlier tiles were then reinstalled in other parts of the palace, while others were removed completely. Sets of similar though slightly later tiles decorated with flowering cherry trees are found in several places within the palace; a panel with twelve tiles in the Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, shows a design very similar to this one. These tiles have sometimes been linked to the baths built for Selim II (r. 1566-74), but the style of the decoration suggests that they date from some three decades earlier.

The design on this panel, whose basic outlines would have been transferred to the surface with the aid of a stencil or pricked drawing before being filled in by a painter, comprises two tiles, each about thirty centimeters tall, set one above the other. At the bottom, a luscious turquoise clump of serrated leaves sprouts two feathery tulips with green leaves as well as the white trunk of a cherry tree that bursts into blossom above. At the bottom left is a flowering hyacinth, while the top right-hand corner is filled with a tiny Chinese cloud. Leaves and blossoms sway in the breeze in a tentative illusion to three-dimensionality, achieved also by the interweaving of branches. The design is at once realistic and denatured, particularly through the repetition of multiple sets of tiles that would have covered an entire wall or room. The flowers and plants are not just a self-contained garden, but also an excerpt from an infinite naturescape.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 197; *Sultan Shah*, no. 399; *AWI* 2001, no. 254

87

TWO TILE PANELS

19th century, Shiraz?, Iran
Fritware, underglaze painted in colors,
81.5 x 30.5 cm (each)
44/2002

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Persian painters integrated Western motifs and styles into the traditional genre of flower-and-bird painting. Each panel of this charming set shows a large vase with roses and irises set against a cobalt blue arabesque scroll. Birds cavort in the foliage. Each panel is composed of four square and four rectangular tiles based on a module twenty centimeters (eight inches) square. Although the rectangular tiles are always on the left, the design was flipped for one set so that the arabesque scrolls and birds face in opposite directions. They were clearly made as a pair to be set on either side of a door or arch.

At this time, flowers and birds became favorite subjects for Persian painters, who executed them in a variety of media including oil, enamel, and lacquer on various small objects from boxes to mirror covers and pen cases. Tileworkers, particularly in the southern city of Shiraz, adopted these motifs for architectural revetment as well. The city flourished under the enlightened patronage of the local regent (in Persian, *vakil*) Karim Khan Zand (1750-79), who founded the large Vakil Mosque there, and tileworkers in the nineteenth century produced colorful ensembles, including those added to the mosque in 1247/1831-32. These tiles are marked by the introduction of rose pink, a color emblematic of Shiraz, known as the city of roses and nightingales (see **no. 79**, for a contemporary rosewater sprinkler, perhaps made in Shiraz). The ample palette included cobalt blue, turquoise, olive green, pink, purple, and yellow, with black used for outlines, hatching, and shading, all set against a white ground. The use of shading was borrowed from European art, for Persian artists had traditionally preferred to use unmodulated local color. Such polychrome tiles continued to be popular on local constructions throughout the nineteenth century, as on the mosque built by Nasir al-Mulk that imitates features of the nearby Vakil Mosque. Popular patterns for these tile sets included floral arrangements issuing from fluted vases, which were sometimes decorated with small landscape scenes. In this period, figural representation was permissible even in sacred settings. In addition to shading, these designs also show how Persian artists assimilated European modes of representation in the baroque shape of the vase.

Three inscriptions at the bottom provide unrecorded documentation about the patronage and manufacture of tiles in nineteenth-century Iran. Reading from the right, they say that the set was made in the factory (*karkhana*) of the master Ibrahim on the order of the pilgrim to Mashhad (*mashhadi*) Lutf-'ali, the zenith of bakers (*khabbaz-i awji*), for a construction by the pilgrim to Mecca (*hajji*) Ali Muhammad Husayn, the builder. The tiles therefore represent the popular taste of pious Muslim patrons in nineteenth-century Shiraz.

Unpublished

88

TILE

ca. 912/1506-07, Iznik, Turkey

Fritware painted in blue under a clear glaze, 9.5 x 36 cm

93/2003

This rectangular tile, one of a pair in the David Collection, documents the development of the arabesque under the Ottomans. These blue-and-white, underglaze-painted tiles provide an important chronological benchmark, as they are similar to those from the tomb of Prince Mahmud in Bursa, which has an inscription over the doorway dated to 912/1506-07 (Ataosy and Raby, nos. 81-82). This style was once associated with Abraham of Kutahya, a patron mentioned on a tiny ewer in the British Museum, probably a wine cruet for the Mass, that bears an Armenian inscription under the foot commemorating this otherwise-unknown patron in the year 959/1510 (Atasoy and Raby, fig. 96). More recently, it has been shown to be a second phase of the blue-and-white style developed by Baba Nakkash, a designer working in the Ottoman court studio. From the 1480s, he introduced an Ottoman variation of the International Timurid Style of floral arabesque, in which the languid scrolls of the prototype have been transformed into a more forceful design created by white decoration reserved on the blue ground. In the earliest examples of the Baba Nakkash style, designs are more compact. By the opening decade of the sixteenth century, a second phase had evolved in which designs appear more spacious due to a lighter tone of blue, an increase in the size of minor motifs, and an introduction of contrasting zones of white ground. This openness is particularly noticeable on this tile, in which the main motifs do not overlap and the pattern is separated by bold white cartouches.

The floral motifs on this tile and its stylistic mates have also changed from the earlier Ottoman designs. While the pattern still includes volutes or coiled scrolls that grasp at passing tendrils, the blossoms are more complex, fleshier, and more assertive than the soft and rounded leaves used in the earlier period, especially under Mehmed the Conquerer (r. 1451-81). Details heighten the contrast. The eccentric peonies, for example, have dark blue lines outlining the petals and are articulated with bright ovals shaped like the eye of a needle. Ottoman artists would soon exaggerate these tendencies toward openness, contrast, and intricacy in the so-called *saz* style that came to the fore in the middle of the sixteenth century (**no. 91**).

Unpublished

89
BOTTLE
early 15th century, Syria
Fritware, painted in blue under a transparent glaze, H 28 cm
29/1988

Artists in the Islamic lands often looked to Chinese art for inspiration, but then transformed the models with local decorative motifs such as the arabesque. In both form and decoration, this bottle imitates Chinese blue-and-white porcelains, but both material (fritware) and glaze (now degraded, but originally shiny) show that it was made in Syria in the first part of the fifteenth century. In some cases, artists in Islamic lands copied only decoration from Chinese wares (many examples in Carswell). This bottle represents a rare case, in which they also copied a Chinese form. It is modeled on the pear-shaped vase known as *yuhuchun*, although the body is slightly more globular. Some Chinese porcelains were made for export: one Ming vase of this shape dated 1552 is inscribed in Portuguese (Carswell, fig. 9). By the end of the fourteenth century, Chinese porcelains were exported to Syria where artists began to make local imitations.

The body of this bottle is decorated in dark blue with a scrolling floral arabesque supporting three large chrysanthemum flowers. The chrysanthemum, a late-blooming flower that indicated longevity in the Chinese tradition, was brought to Islamic art in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, following the Mongol invasions. Introduced through textiles and porcelains, it became a standard motif in the International Timurid Style, although we have no evidence that it maintained its symbolic connotations. Rather, it seems to have become popular for its painterly possibilities. On this bottle, for example, the artist carefully reserved the outlines of the individual petals on the heavy head of the flower that contrasts to the delicate curving line of the vine scroll.

The main field with the scrolling arabesque is sandwiched between borders. The lower one around the base contains repeating lotus petals that have been transformed into pseudo-writing. They contain the letters *lam* and *alif*, a combination often used for borders and friezes (Ettinghausen). The one around the neck contains a wavy scroll, and the band below the lip contains repeated plantains, another motif typical of Chinese blue-and-white wares.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 297; *AWI* 2001, no. 205

90

ALBARELLO

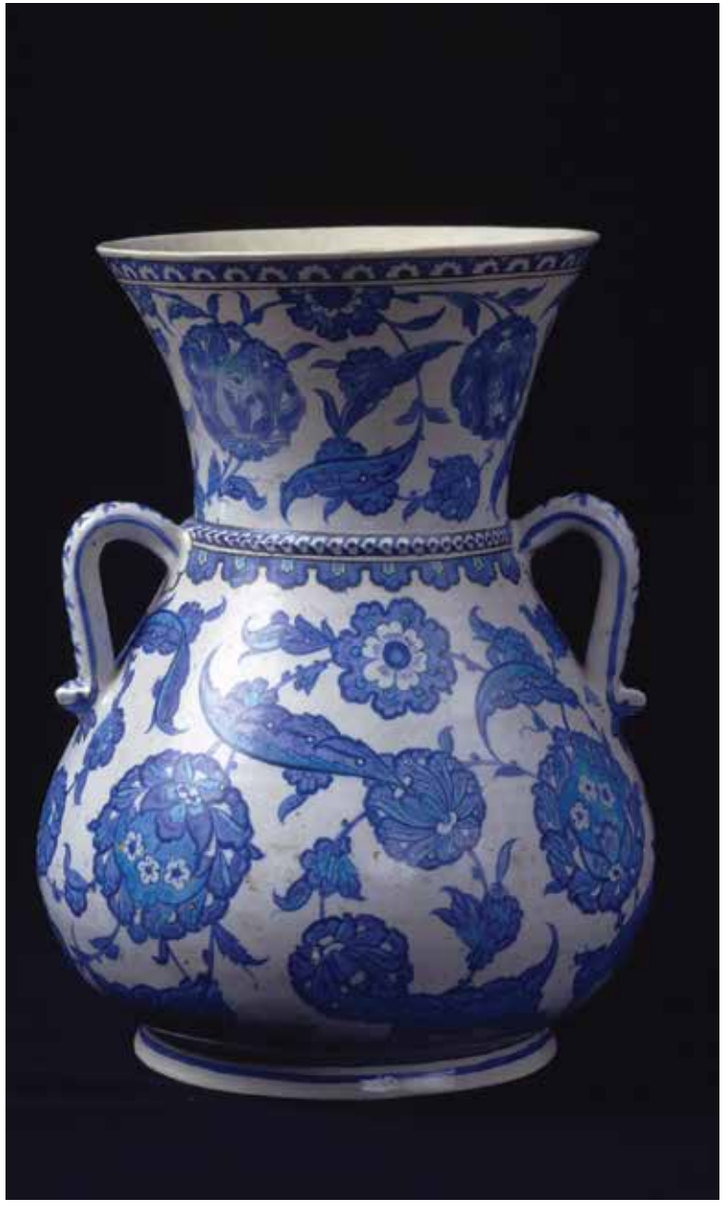
first half 15th century, Manises, Spain
Earthenware painted in blue in and with two tones of luster over an opaque white tin glaze, H 29.5 cm
14/1990

Potters in the Iberian Peninsula adapted the naturalistic vine scroll to decorate utilitarian ceramics. The form immediately identifies this object as an apothecary jar for medicaments. Its gently curving concave sides make it easy to grasp when standing beside several similar jars on a shelf. This form was popular in Syria in the fourteenth century, and such jars were made in large quantities both for the home market and for export to Europe. A large jar attributed to Damascus in the first half of the fifteenth century, for example, is decorated with the Florentine lily that appears on florins, or gold coins, minted there (Mack 2002, no. 91). This shape became known in Italian as an *albarello*, from the Andalusian Arabic *al-barrāda*, a drinking jar. Many survive in pristine condition as they were not buried in the ground but preserved in pharmacies or palaces.

Potters in ninth-century Iraq had developed an opaque white tin glaze (**no. 40**) along with the technique of painting an earthenware body with luster (**no. 76**). The luster technique was exported not only eastward to Iran (**nos. 111**, **118**) but also westward, first to Egypt (**no. 10**) and then to Spain. By the mid-thirteenth century, high quality lusterwares were produced at Málaga on the southern coast of the peninsula, and by the early fourteenth century, potters had emigrated further north to the area around Valencia, which had been incorporated into the kingdom of Aragon by James I in 1238. The major site for the production of lusterwares was Manises, a village up the Turia River, a few kilometers west of Valencia, whose rich clay-beds provided potters with abundant material. The glazing on this albarello shows that it was made at Manises in the early fifteenth century. Typically decorated with floral and geometric pattern, lusterwares from Manises were exported all over the Mediterranean, especially to Egypt and Italy (many illustrated in Ecker, 78-101).

Documents list the names of many Muslim potters, but they often worked for Christian patrons, as shown by the coats-of-arms and Christograms decorating many pieces. Such jars were made in great quantity, and hence potters developed efficient ways of organizing the decoration. They often divided the surface into bands filled with floral or geometric motifs that would have been painted (in blue) under the glaze and (in luster) over the glaze. This jar, for example, is decorated on the front with large four-petaled flowers painted in blue; after it was fired other flowers were added in brown and gold luster. This motif was one of the most popular in the Manises repertory, used not only on many albarelli (e.g., one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection 56.171.92; *Arts of Fire*, no. 33 and Hispanic Society of America, E597; Ecker, no. 72) but also on large plates and basins.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 200; *AWI* 2001, no. 112



91

LAMP

mid-16th century, Iznik, Turkey
Fritware, painted in blue and turquoise under a transparent glaze, H 35 cm
18/1967

In the 1530s and 1540s, the spiral style (**no. 68**) that had been popular in the Ottoman lands was replaced by a new style of floral decoration. Characterized by feathery, saw-toothed leaves and composite blossoms, it is often known as the *saz* style from the Turkish word for reed. Like the earlier style, this one can also be painted in blue and turquoise, but was also executed in a range of colors, including sage green, purple, and a striking tomato red. Drawn up on paper cartoons prepared in the imperial design studio by such masters as the head designer Şahkulu, the *saz* style was used in a variety of media, ranging from manuscript illumination, tiles, and crockery to textiles. Perhaps the most stunning example of the *saz* style is a kaftan woven in seven colors of silk and gilt-metal thread for Sultan Süleyman's son Bayezid in about 1550 (Blair and Bloom 1994, fig. 301).

In shape, this ceramic lamp echoes the glass lamps made in huge quantities during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries for the Ayyubid and Mamluk rulers of Egypt and Syria. The glass examples also have a bulbous body, but are decorated with three or six applied handles for chains from which they were suspended from the ceiling. Rulers and courtiers commissioned hundreds of them, painted in enamel with their names, titles, and emblems as well as an appropriate Koranic verse, to decorate their mosques and shrines. This ceramic lamp has three handles set asymmetrically at nine, twelve, and three o'clock. The asymmetrical placement of the handles and the opaque body render it useless for suspension or lighting. Such objects were not meant to be suspended, but rather placed decoratively in a niche or on a shelf.

The glory of these ceramic lamps is the painterly design. The arabesque stem has diminished to such a thin line that could not possibly support the varied and pendulous flowers that grow from it. They include fleshy peonies and stylized carnations as well as the long serrated leaves that weave across the curved surface. The composite flowers and leaves resemble the elegant decoration on the magnificent set of five tiles that today decorate the Circumcision Pavilion (Sünnet Odası) in Topkapı Palace in Istanbul (Blair and Bloom 1994, fig. 298), but there the painter included birds and Chinese deer-like creatures on the large flat surface. The availability of pricked paper designs allowed Ottoman artisans to adapt such floral motifs to a range of surfaces, scales, and media.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 198; *Sultan Shah*, no. 390; *AWI* 2001, no. 258

92

TWO FRAGMENTS OF A SAMITE TEXTILE

13th century, Central Asia or eastern Iran
Silk and silvered lamella on paper spun around silk, upper piece 37.5 x 25.7 cm, lower piece 63 x 43.5 cm
12/2002

Over time the arabesque scroll became increasingly complicated. It was combined with other elements or, as here, served as a framework that could be inhabited by real and imaginary beasts. This example comprises two fragments pieced together from the same textile. The smaller, upper fragment bears a pseudo-inscription band whose short text in mirror-reverse is woven in silver. It was probably stylized from a short phrase of blessing. The larger, lower fragment displays a red scroll inhabited by flowers and felines woven in red, brown, white, and light blue against a yellow ground. The colors are striking. The design comprises a row of left-facing lotus blossoms surmounted by a row of right-facing rampant griffins whose wings and tails intersect with a third row of right-facing peonies surmounted in turn by a row of left-facing rampant lions. The rows of both flowers and felines thus face in alternate directions.

These two fragments surely come from the same textile, as parts of the arabesque scroll seen in the lower fragment—quite apart from the animals' hindquarters—peek out above the inscription in the upper fragment. This arrangement, with a pseudo-inscription band near the top below a small fragment of the repeating pattern, is known on a group of silk textiles, many of which are reported to have been found in Tibet (**no. 63**). Unlike this samite (a weft-faced compound tabby), woven with silver threads, however, they are all lampas weaves, woven with gold thread on two sets of warps. Furthermore, the group of lampas-woven textiles has inscriptions with plaited kufic; in contrast, the inscription on this textile is more rounded. Despite these differences, this textile shares some common features with several of the lampas weaves. At least one of the lampas weaves (*Woven Treasures*, no. 17) has similar animal-headed letters and friezes of running animals. Another (*Woven Treasures*, fig. 7) shows griffins and lions. The group of lampas textiles is generally attributed to the eastern Islamic lands in the thirteenth century, and this unique textile is probably contemporary with them.

What sets this textile apart, in addition to the distinct weave, is the lively design. The vine scroll seems to twine up the length of the fabric, and the animals cavort over and around it. The serpentine curves of the scroll are echoed in the curls of the griffins' tails and wings that loop around the vine. The design of all these textiles was inspired by Chinese silks in which the pattern is laid out in staggered horizontal rows against a plain ground (Watt and Wardwell, nos. 28-34); but the pseudo-inscription, the arabesque scroll, and the lush ground show that this sumptuous and otherwise unpublished piece was made to suit Muslim taste.

Unpublished

93
DISH

13th century, Raqqa, Syria
Fritware painted in blue, black and brownish red under a transparent glaze, diameter 50 cm
Isl. 1

This imposing dish shows how Syrian artists released the arabesque from its geometric girdle. Materials, technique, form, and motifs confirm that the vessel was made at Raqqa in the early thirteenth century. Potted of a coarse, creamy body made from ground quartz with an admixture of fine clay, the body is painted in polychrome and covered with the typical Syrian transparent glaze that has a tendency to irridesce and decay over time. (The bowl has been covered with a protective varnish to preserve its glaze.) The hemispheric shape with a flat everted rim is also typical, as is the kufesque decoration on the rim that looks like writing, but isn't. Similarly, the back is decorated with an almost illegible inscription written in black on a scrolling ground that offers good wishes to the anonymous owner.

What is extraordinary about the dish is its size. Typical Raqqa dishes (e.g., *AWI*, nos. 192 and 194; Watson 2004, K.5) measure slightly less than thirty centimeters in diameter. This one is almost twice as wide and would have contained several times the quantities as the smaller bowls. More importantly, extraordinary skill and experience were required to throw and fire such a large vessel, especially one that is so beautifully potted. This dish is one of the masterpieces of medieval Syrian pottery.

The wide surface may have freed the potter to create the striking decoration: the finely composed but completely unruly arabesque that fills the interior. The large, single plant grows from the base, scrolling in and around itself to cover the interior surface. Painted in a dark blue, black, and brownish red, the motif resembles a sea plant that swirls in the current. The large scroll marked with a single axial line is then set against smaller scrolls. Both the details of the design, such as the two separate networks of spirals, large and small, and the large lobed leaves decorated with tiny spirals recall the classic style of painting used to decorate the lusterwares made at Kashan in central Iran, as on the large mihrab panel (**no. 64**). Whereas the arabesque on the Iranian piece is regular and disciplined, the one on this dish is unfettered and carefree. Such freedom of hand is also found on other pieces assigned to Raqqa (e.g., Watson 2004, K.3) and prefigures developments in the arabesque as seen in the arts of Iran after the country recovered from the Mongol invasions.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 308; *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 86; *Sultan Shah*, no. 56; *AWI* 2001, no. 195; *L'Orient de Saladin*, no. 169

94

FRAGMENTARY BEAM

second half 10th century, Córdoba, Spain
Carved and painted wood, 21.5 x 127 x 13 cm
2/2002

Artisans working in the late tenth century under the neo-Umayyad rulers of the Iberian Peninsula developed the naturalistic vegetal scroll. This fragmentary beam was once part of the ceiling to the expansions to the Great Mosque of Córdoba carried out under the caliph al-Hakam II in the 960s or the regent al-Mansur in 987–88. Described glowingly by the twelfth-century chronicler al-Idrisi as made of pine from Tortosa at the estuary of the Ebro, the wooden ceiling fell into disrepair, and in the early eighteenth century was replaced by thin lath and plaster vaults. These vaults have since been removed, and a new wooden ceiling installed on the model of the original. It comprised closely placed transverse beams supporting planks, the whole protected by a gabled roof covered with tile. This arrangement allowed for an insulating layer of air between the ceiling and the roof. By preventing the sun from penetrating, it kept the interior cool.

More than fifty of the carved and painted beams from the original ceiling have survived. This one shows a geometric interlace interweaving with a vegetal scroll. The geometric interlace is marked by sharp angles at the corners, the scroll by curving half-palmettes. The contrast between the two subjects is emphasized by color: the geometric interlace is painted white and the floral arabesque, yellow. The two networks not only intersect, but also grow over and under each other, just like the stems of the plant on the contemporary marble panel (**no. 84**). Both wooden plank and marble panel are carved with the straight cut that distinguishes them from the Beveled Style developed under the Abbasids in Iraq (**no. 81**). The deep straight cuts thrust the carved motifs into sharp relief, setting them off by shadow. The vegetal motifs are similar on both marble plaque and wooden beam. They comprise curving leaves whose multiple lobes are delineated by incised lines. Whereas the marble panel shows a single central plant, the beam is decorated with a repeated pattern that could be extended the length of the beam. The naturalism of the foliage, however, makes this a distinctly western Islamic example of the developing arabesque.

Unpublished

95

BOOKBINDING

early 16th century, Iran

Stamped and gilt leather, 35.5 x 24 cm

Isl. 163

Craftsmen in sixteenth-century Iran transformed the vegetal arabesque with the addition of chinoiserie cloud bands. This glittering binding encloses one section (*juz'*) from a thirty-volume copy of the Koran. The text of the scripture, which is about the same length as the New Testament, was often divided this way so that believers could read one section each day during Ramadan, the ninth month of the year when they are enjoined to fast. In this fine manuscript, the calligrapher copied the text in seven lines of *muhaqqaq* script on the individual pages, which were then bound as separate volumes, each with a fancy binding. The individual bindings comprise front and back covers as well as a fore edge flap (*lisan*, literally "tongue"). Attached to the back of the volume, the flap was folded around the fore edge and under the front cover to protect the book. The exteriors of this dark brown leather cover display a field surrounded by cartouches, all decorated with stamping and gilding. The inside faces, or doublures, are equally elaborate: the corners and central medallion are covered with fine filigree scrollwork made of gilt leather, which is pasted over colored paper.

This binding, of fine but not superb quality, shows how the styles produced for the court were then reproduced on a commercial scale. The most ambitious manuscript produced for the Safavids in the sixteenth century—the monumental copy of the *Shahnama*, or Book of Kings, made for Shah Tahmasp (see **no. 5**, for a detached painting)—is encased in a similar but fancier binding (Thompson and Canby, fig. 6.6). Twice as large, it is mold pressed and painted with two colors of gold. This binding shares the same layout of cartouches surrounding a field with central lobed medallion that supports leaf-shaped pendants and encloses cloud bands. This composition was used for bindings on many manuscripts made in the first half of the sixteenth century (Thompson and Canby, figs. 6.5, 6.9, 6.10, 6.17). The cloud bands that decorate this binding become a hallmark of the Safavid decorative style, not only incorporated in the arts of the book, but also transferred to other media like carpets (**no. 65**) and incorporated into the commercial style that was exported to India (**no. 122**).

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 106; *AWI* 2001, no. 96

96

MANGO-SHAPED CONTAINER

mid-17th century, Mughal, India
Rock crystal, inlaid with gold and rubies, H 6 cm
35/1980

The scrolling arabesque traveled as far as India, where it took on an organic and realistic aspect, as shown by this exquisite container made for the Mughal court in the seventeenth century. It is carved from a solid block of rock crystal, a naturally occurring transparent, colorless stone. The mango-shaped container was then engraved with lines that were inlaid with gold and rubies. The center of the block has been hollowed out to form a cavity, which would originally have been fitted with a stopper. A container in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1993.18), very similar in shape and decoration but made of two pieces of rock crystal, still retains its stopper made of enameled gold. Such containers might have held one of the many perfumes treasured at the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar as described by the chronicler Abu'l-Fadl Allami (1:73-82) or the lime paste used in the chewing of betel (**no. 9**).

Of all the Islamic dynasties, the Mughals were the fondest of containers and vessels carved of hardstones such as jade (nephrite) and rock crystal. These were sometimes left plain, but often inlaid with semi-precious jewels, like emeralds and rubies. The effect parallels the *pietra dura* work on contemporary buildings, in which the polished white marble was inset with hard and rare stones such as lapis, onyx, jasper, topaz, carnelian, and agate. This technique, probably introduced by Florentine craftsmen who flocked to the wealthy and discriminating court of the Mughals, was first used to make geometric and representational designs of wine cups, vases with flowers, and cypress trees, as on the tomb of I'timad al-Dawla, Jahangir's finance minister who died in 1622. Under Jahangir's son and successor, Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58), the technique was adopted for inscriptions and scrolling arabesques. The best known example is the Taj Mahal, the tomb that Shah Jahan built for his wife Mumtaz Mahal at Agra, in which the inlaid hardstones form slender arabesques that sprout delicate flowers. On this small but exquisite container, the effect is even more sculptural as the arabesque scrolls in three dimensions and the leaves are dotted with ruby eyes.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 347; *AWI* 2001, no. 370

97

DISH

10th century, eastern Iran or Central Asia
Earthenware with a white, olive green, and red slip, and transparent glaze, diameter 38 cm
27/1962

On this large open dish, artisans adapted the palmette scroll to a geometric framework with an unusual twist on a well-known style. Materials and technique show that the dish was made in eastern Iran or Central Asia in the tenth century. The body is the standard reddish earthenware, visible on the back, where the white slip has disappeared. Other examples made in the same technique (**no. 14**) are typically covered with a colored slip, on which the design is painted in white. Here, by contrast, the bowl has been covered with a white slip and the design is painted in reserve by filling the background with the darker green slip. The painter then added red to highlight details of the main reserved design.

The design is equally unusual. Many other examples of this slipware show a large single bird. In this example, the central motif has been reduced to a small rabbit; it is set within a complicated interlace pattern that grows from two intertwined triangles and form a central hexagram. From its angles and points sprout trefoils that, in turn, sprout large, wing-shaped split palmettes with wings that intertwine to form a net. The concentric network of tendrils, large and smaller trefoil leaves, and split palmettes seem to grow infinitely from the center like an arabesque, but they turn inward at the rim to form a closed design. To heighten the contrast between infinitely expanding arabesque and closed form, the artisan decorated the rim in an angular geometric design based on triangles.

The unusual shape and design seems to have been adopted from metalwares (e.g., a cast plate in the David Collection, 5/1967; *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 39; *AWI* 2001, no. 468). The concentric pattern emanating from a hexagram is found on other ceramics (**no. 48**), but the organic nature of the design on this plate sets it apart from others.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 38; *Sultan Shah*, no. 54; *AWI* 2001, no. 124

98

BOWL

10th century, eastern Iran or Central Asia
Earthenware, white slip, with splashes of color in a transparent glaze, diameter 25.5 cm
2/1965

Craftsmen in the Islamic lands could easily adapt the type of decoration and color to fit the shape of an object. With its flat bottom and straight flaring sides, this large bowl belongs to a well-known type commonly produced in eastern Iran or Central Asia in the tenth century, when the area was under the domination of the Samanid dynasty. Some are decorated solely with an elaborate inscription band painted in red and brown around the interior walls (**no. 29**). This one, by contrast, is incised and decorated with splashes of green, yellow, and brown. During firing these bowls were stacked in the kiln. Some, like this one, were fired face up so that the glaze pooled at the bottom. Others were fired faced down, and a few were even fired on their sides. Many, like this one, show the circular scars left by the three-pronged spur that separated the pieces in the kiln.

While Chinese wares with colored splashes over molded decoration, such as those found at Samarra (Sarre, pl. 25), might have provided the initial inspiration for these brightly colored ceramics, potters in the eastern Islamic lands added the linear incised decoration. The well of the bowl is filled with a hatched pattern. The main band around the interior walls is vegetal, and the narrower band around the rim is a twisted cable. This type of decoration is characteristic of many pieces found during excavations at the sites of Nishapur in eastern Iran (Wilkinson) and Afrasiyab (ancient Samarqand) in Central Asia (*Terres Secretes*).

On some bowls of this type, incised decoration predominates; in others, splashed decoration stands out. Here, the two types of decoration are balanced. The main band around the walls is filled with a symmetrical design, in which eight large, leafy forms alternate with irregular compartments filled densely with scrolls. A free interpretation of the scroll and palmette design (for a more naturalistic version, see **no. 72**), the loosely drawn foliate forms combined with green overtones produced by the liberal use of copper, creates the impression of a flower unfolding.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 103

99

PEN CASE

first half 18th century, Turkey

Papier mâché, painted and lacquered, L 31 cm; diameter 4 cm

43/1977

The decoration on this pen case exemplifies the love of flowers that peaked in the Ottoman Empire during the so-called Tulip Period—the early eighteenth century, particularly under the patronage of Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703-30). Unlike most pen cases made in the Islamic lands, which are rectangular (**no. 70**), this one is a cylindrical tube, divided into two parts that can be separated to take out the reed pens. The base of the larger part also unscrews. It contains two brass containers for ink, a larger one for the black ink used to pen the main text and a smaller one for the red ink used to add punctuation. The brass containers, which are set with diamonds on the latches and frog-shaped clasps, provide weight so that the pen case can stand upright.

The cylinder is made of papier mâché and painted with large, fleshy flowers outlined in gold and set against a brilliant red ground. They are reminiscent of the work of Ali Üsküdari, who signed various examples of lacquer work made between 1723 and 1757, including the binding of an imperial album with the emblem (*tughra*) of Ahmed III, now in the Topkapı Palace Museum (A.3652; Atıl 1980, fig. 123). Ahmed and his minister, Nevşehirli Ibrahim Pasha, sponsored the revival of artistic patronage intended to recall the heyday of the Ottoman Empire two centuries earlier. The architecture of the period is epitomized by the construction of seven grand fountains in Istanbul decorated with vases of flowers and vine scrolls. A great lover of books, the sultan also had a new library added to the Third Court of Topkapı Palace in 1719.

These decades were known retrospectively as the Tulip Period because the cultivation of this flower became something of a craze. Floral motifs dominated the artistic vocabulary. Familiar flowers from earlier centuries—tulips, carnations, and hyacinths (**no. 86**)—continued to be used, but the floral forms became simplified and more stylized, as naturalism gave way to a more abstract vision that included the large, exuberant peonies set on a delicately scrolling vine, inherited from the International Timurid Style and used for carpets and other objects in sixteenth-century Iran and elsewhere (**no. 65**).

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 113; *AWI*, no. 93

100

MOLD

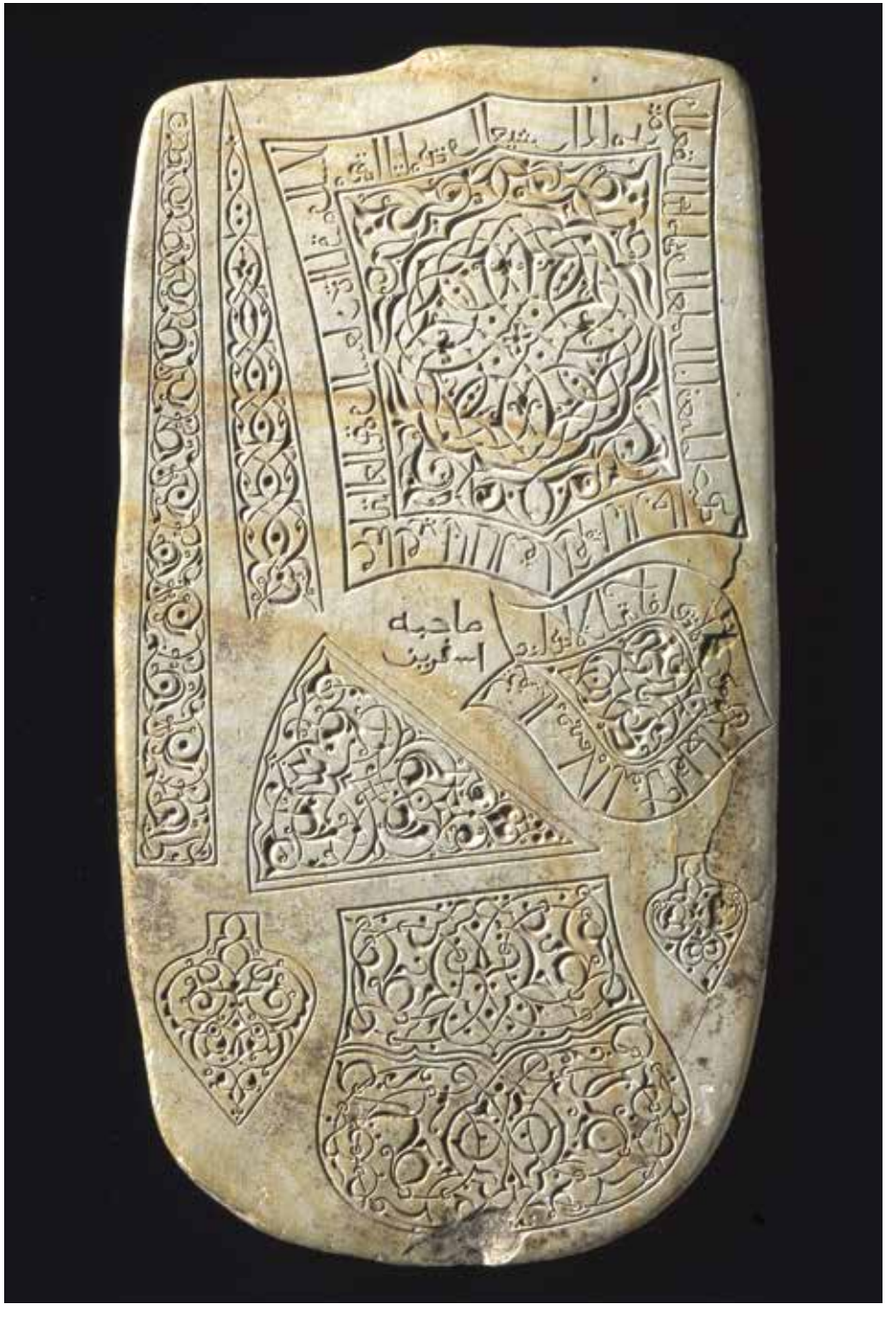
12th–13th century, eastern Iran or Afghanistan
Carved limestone, 33.5 x 18.5 x (approx.) 2 cm
4/2000

The arabesque scroll was so versatile that it could be adapted to decorate day-to-day objects such as this little mold. Carved of gray-green limestone, it contains thirteen designs meant to be pressed into leather. The designs are carved in mirror-reverse, as revealed by the inscription bands that are written backwards. The mold was owned by someone called Isfarin, whose name is inscribed in the proper direction in the middle of the front side.

A handful of these molds and the leather wallets produced from them survive (Folsach 2003; another was acquired by the Louvre in 2003). Approximately rectangular in shape (straight sided, hour-glass shaped, or lyre-shaped) with fold flaps, the wallets, which measure between ten and seventeen centimeters high, were meant to be worn suspended from a belt. One is shown this way, hanging from the belt of a guard depicted in a mural in the palace erected for the Ghaznavid rulers in the early twelfth century at Lashkar-i Bazaar in southern Afghanistan (Folsach 2003, fig. 6). The group as a whole is therefore attributed to eastern Iran in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, an attribution confirmed by the decoration and names of other owners, one of whom has been identified as a Ghurid general and governor of the city of Herat in Afghanistan, who died in 607/1210-11.

The designer of this mold reveled in playing with the arabesque scroll. It can fill a band. Alternatively, it can spiral to fit virtually any type of polygon—circle, rectangle, triangle, keyhole, or ogive. The scroll not only fills the space but also lends an air of dynamism and texture to the surface, especially when molded in relief, as it would have been on the leather wallets produced from this mold.

Selected bibliography: Folsach 2003



101

FRAGMENT OF A SHAWL

second half 17th century, Kashmir, India
Twill-woven wool, 19.5 x 37 cm
35/1992

The arabesque scroll is so ubiquitous throughout Islamic art that the presence of naturalistic plants, like the three on this fragment of a Kashmir shawl, demands an exceptional explanation. Unlike the denatured arabesque scroll (for a contemporary example, see **no. 96**), the three plants are firmly rooted on the ground and grow from a single stalk that produces leaves and flowers, all of the same type. Such realistic depictions of single plants were probably introduced to the Mughal court in the early seventeenth century by Jesuit missionaries who brought European printed and illustrated herbals. From the mid-seventeenth century, the flowering plant became an important motif in Mughal arts and crafts, ranging from architectural revetment to textiles. Stunning examples are carved in relief on the marble walls of the Taj Mahal, completed in 1647, beside the arabesque scrolls worked in inlaid stone. The examples on this fragmentary shawl, by contrast, are brilliantly colored. The dark green plants with orange flowers outlined in red are set against a pale green ground, and the narrow stripes in the border include dark blue silk. The fragment retains the right selvage, and the original loom width would have contained five or six of the same plants.

Such shawls, worn by men around the shoulders or in narrower widths as sashes, were made at least from the sixteenth century. According to his court chronicler, Abu'l-Fadl Allami (1:92-98), the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) owned several. He also bestowed them as *khil'at*, garments presented as marks of favor. The emperor is said to have encouraged the production of superior shawls woven in Kashmir and favored those woven with many different ground colors. The finest are woven from pashmina, also used for fine carpets woven in the area (**no. 83**). The earliest Kashmir shawls that survive, however, date from the end of the seventeenth century. Most of the shawl was plain; only the two ends have woven decoration, as in this fragment, typically with gracefully swaying flowering plants, often with a drooping bud. Over time, the motif was increasingly abstracted. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the flowers were set in a vase (**no. 67**), and, by the mid-eighteenth century, the motif was stylized into a stately teardrop shape known as the *buta* (Persian for "shrub"). By the end of the century, these shawls attracted the attention of European traders. Imitations were manufactured in Paisley, Scotland, and hence the pattern came to be known as Paisley.

Selected bibliography: *Woven Treasures*, no. 51; *Sultan Shah*, no. 335; *AWI* 2001, no. 683

102

DISH

17th century, Kirman?, Iran
Fritware with decoration cut through a blue slip under a transparent glaze, diameter 46.5 cm
1/1986.

Potters in Iran could combine foreign, especially Chinese, elements with the traditional arabesque scroll. Like many Iranian ceramics from the seventeenth century, this dish copies Chinese blue-and-white porcelains, which were widely exported to Europe and West Asia. Persian monarchs avidly collected Chinese porcelains: in 1611, the Safavid shah Abbas dedicated a huge collection of 1,162 pieces to the dynastic shrine at Ardabil (Pope). There, installed in the "Chini-khana" (literally, "House of Ceramics/China"), the collection contained four hundred early blue-and white wares, including more than two hundred large dishes measuring up to 62.5 centimeters in diameter, some decorated with floral sprays. Local potters in Iran produced their own imitations of these blue-and-white porcelains, painting the design in cobalt blue on a white, artificial paste body. This dish and a small group of related wares, however, reverse the traditional technique and palette: the fritware vessel was covered with a blue slip, which was then carved to reveal the design in the white body underneath.

The flowering plant on the well of this dish is inspired by the type of Chinese plants often found on such large open pieces. It displays a rather nervous peony, with leaves like cloud bands filling the interstices. The design around the rim, by contrast, is purely Islamic. It displays a split-leaf issuing from a five-petaled rosette. A number of similar, though slightly smaller, dishes of this type are known. One in Kuwait (Watson 2004, U.31), for example, shows a similar split leaf on the rim. On many other examples, the well, like the rim, is filled with a stylized arabesque. On this one, by contrast, the Chinese model is clearer.

These slip-carved ceramics were probably made at Kirman, a city in central Iran that seems to have became a major center of ceramic production after Shah Abbas reestablished control of the Persian Gulf in 1622. Kirman potters developed innovative designs contrasting chinoiserie elements with other floral designs whose crispness and botanical likeness also recalls that of contemporary Mughal decoration (**no. 101**).

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 249; *Sultan Shah*, no. 263; *AWI* 2001, no. 247

HYBRIDS

Many works of Islamic art show some—or occasionally all—of the themes discussed in the previous pages. The combination of themes was not limited to any particular place, time, or medium, for the objects in this section come from the Mediterranean (**no. 103**) to China (**no. 105**), from the eighth century (**no. 114**) to the nineteenth (**no. 121**) and include ceramics, glass, inlaid metalwork, carved ivory, carved wood, carved stone, and textiles. They were made for a range of tastes, from the bourgeois to the royal and for a range of settings from daily life to death (**nos. 106, 116**).

In most cases, the entire surface of the work of art has been divided into zones and different types of decoration applied to each zone. We have already written in the Introduction about the way craftsmen took delight in juxtaposing different types of decoration. In some other cases, however, two types of decoration are combined. Writing can be combined with vegetal ornament in foliated and floriated scripts (**nos. 29, 106**) or combined with figural decoration in zoomorphic or human-headed scripts (**nos. 112, 113**). Writing can also become figural ornament in calligrams, or word-pictures (**no. 121**), which became particularly popular in the later centuries from Morocco to India. The arabesque, discussed in the previous section as a type of vegetal ornament, can also be understood as the combination of vegetal ornament and geometry. Similarly square kufic (**no. 35**) and similar scripts (**no. 106**) can be understood as the intersection of writing and geometry.

It is clear that artisans from all periods and places reveled in showing off their skill and ingenuity in combining motifs in new and eye-catching ways. We are by no means the first to notice this feature of Islamic art, for as we already noted in the Introduction, the great fourteenth-century polymath and historian Ibn Khaldun found this willful intricacy and complication the mark of a truly civilized society.

Viewers might have understood the decoration on the objects in this exhibition in many different ways, from pietistic exhortations to visions of paradise and symbols of power. At least one object in this section, the fragmentary silk textile from Spain (**no. 109**), states unequivocally that contemporary audiences actually understood this decoration as visual delight:

> *I exist for pleasure; Welcome! For pleasure am I;*
> *He who beholds me sees joy and well-being.*

Let us take its advice and enjoy.

103

DOORKNOCKER

late 11th to early 12th century, southern Italy
Cast and engraved bronze, partly inlaid with niello, diameter 44.3 cm
50/2000

Craftsmen in the Islamic lands could integrate all four of the major themes of decoration—figures, writing, geometry, and the arabesque—on everyday objects. This spectacular doorknocker comprises two pieces cast in the lost-wax process: a disk with an inscription band surrounding a lion's head and a separate ring that hangs from the lion's jaws with a knocker in the shape of a cock's head. When struck, the cock's head hits a boss centered at the bottom of the disk. The inscription in kufic on a floriated scroll is carefully positioned around the boss. Reading clockwise from the bottom left, it contains the *basmala* (the invocation to God), followed by the *shahada* (the profession of faith that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His prophet) written in the first person singular as though the knocker itself were speaking. The inscription is thus a visual pun, written so that when the cock's head strikes the boss on the plate, it is as though the lion were roaring forth, attesting to its faith in Islam.

This metal doorknocker is similar to other lion-headed examples made during the twelfth century for Romanesque churches in Apulia, the boot heel of the Italian peninsula, but the Arabic inscription with its religious text shows that this one must have been made for a Muslim patron. It may have been intended for a private residence or for a mosque, despite its representational design. The well-known doorknockers from the mosque at Cizre in Turkey, one of which is in the David Collection (see fig. 2 on p. 29 of Folsach's essay in this volume), are decorated with dragons and griffins' heads, so at least some medieval patrons thought that this type of fantastic figural ornament was appropriate for a mosque.

This doorknocker is remarkable for its lively visual power. The plasticity of the surface, enhanced by the engraved curved lines to indicate pupils, whiskers, and mane, is quite distinct from the panels of stylized palmettes and arabesques engraved on bronzes from eastern Islamic lands, such as the large incense burner (**no. 117**) or the smaller ram (**no. 20**). Its liveliness is enhanced by the use of niello—a black compound of silver, lead or copper—to set off the aureole of spiraling curls and the letters of the inscription. The lion stares forth, ready to roar its message of belief in God and His Messenger.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 458; Meyer and Northover 2003

104

LEAF FROM A POETIC MANUSCRIPT

Calligraphy: 964/1556-57, Bukhara, Central Asia; borders, late 16th or early 17th century, India
26.3 x 15.4 cm
32b/1987 (front)

Manuscript production reached an apogee in the eastern Islamic lands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when calligraphy, painting, and illumination were melded into a unified whole that included writing, figures, geometry, and arabesques. This folio has been detached from a manuscript containing five of the seven *mathnavis* (long rhyming poems) in the *Haft Awrang* (Seven Thrones, or Constellation of the Great Bear) by the great poet and mystic Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492). This page comes from the section including the most famous of the poems, the allegorical romance between Yusuf and Zulaykha, in which the story of the biblical Joseph and Potiphar's wife is transformed into a metaphor for the mystic's search for truth and union with God. This particular copy was once in the collection of the great German scholar of Islamic art, Friedrich Sarre. Now dispersed, with fifty-five folios and the colophon in Berlin (Kröger 2004), it was transcribed by Mahmud ibn Ishaq al-Shihabi in 964/1556-57.

The calligrapher was a master of the sixteenth-century style of hanging script known as *nasta'liq* (Bayani, no. 1313). A native of the village of Siyavushan (hence he is sometimes called Mahmud Siyavushani) outside of Herat, he was taken to Bukhara in 1528-29, when the Uzbek Ubaydallah Khan conquered the area. There, Mahmud studied calligraphy with the master Mir Ali Heravi, another forced émigré from Herat, and according to some, even surpassed his teacher's style. After the death of Ubaydallah Khan in 1539, Mahmud then moved to Balkh, where he worked for Shah Husayn Balkhi Shihabi, from whom he gained the epithet Shihabi. Mahmud died some time after 994/1585-86. This page exemplifies the local Bukharan calligraphic tradition, itself inherited from Herat, in which the narrow written surface (approx. 7 x 15 cm) is divided into two columns set within gold borders.

What distinguishes this manuscript is the superb marginal illustration painted in gold on different colors of paper, including light and dark brown, blue, gray, green, pink, ochre, and white. The text is virtually engulfed in illumination, which was designed to be seen in successive pairs of facing pages. One set, exemplified by the front of the folio exhibited here, has lively scenes in which animals and birds cavort among trees and clouds. The next set, found on the back of this folio, has arabesque designs with stylized flowers, including plants that end in different animal heads that grasp escaping birds. Oddly enough, the marginal decoration appears to have absolutely no relationship to the text on the page, although one could easily imagine some reader being inspired to flights of imagination by the cavorting animals and birds.

Back

Based on the lively style of drawing and the variety of animals, including rhinoceroses, cobras, and fantastic beasts of the type found on the carpet fragment with grotesques (**no. 11**), these borders can be attributed to the early Mughal period in India. The plain borders of the original manuscript were trimmed and the calligraphy inserted into these exquisite frames. The manuscript was a prize possession of the Mughal imperial library there, for it was stamped with the seal of the emperor Shahjahan in 1653 and rebound in a new lacquer cover (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art 49.10). Collectively, text and illumination work together to create a sublime masterpiece of the arts of the book.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 105; *AWI* 2001, no. 17

105

BOOKBINDING

17th century, China

Stamped leather, 28.2 x 20 cm

1/2000

Artisans in the outlying Islamic lands hybridized local and pan-Islamic decorative themes and motifs. This blind-stamped, reddish leather bookbinding is laid out with an octagonal rosette within a rectangular hatched frame as the central field. This, in turn, is surrounded by additional ovoid, teardrop, triangular, and smaller motifs, all enclosed within a double fillet. The teardrop at the top contains the Koranic phrase from Chapter 56, verse 79: "none shall touch it but those who are clean." The other side with the flap contains the following verse: "it is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds." These two Koranic verses were standard on bindings for manuscripts of the Koran, which were often made up in thirty-volume sets. The fifty-six folios of text in this volume open with Chapter 3, verse 181. They probably comprise the fourth section, although in other manuscripts, the section usually begins slightly earlier at Chapter 3, verse 92.

By the sixteenth century, the typical Islamic bookbinding in eastern Islamic lands had evolved to have a rectangular carpet-like design with an arabesque medallion in the center and often quarter-medallions in each of the four corners, the whole enclosed within a rectangular frame (**no. 95**). While this example generally conforms to the model, the individual elements are imperfectly understood and combined in a simple additive fashion. The individual stamps are relatively small and none (apart from the rectangular block) was multiplied to create a larger composition. The central medallion is no larger than the "subsidiary" ones at top and bottom, and the empty space is filled with a random assortment of little stamps. The style of the designs indicates that the binding was made in seventeenth-century China: the triangular motifs in the corners resemble Chinese cloud collars, and the writing in the teardrop, with its tall wavy verticals, resembles the style of script known as *sini* ("Chinese"). A comparable phrase is tooled in gold on a contemporary binding in Malaysia (Porter and Barakat, no. 50). The binding shows how artists in the outlying Islamic lands could adopt local idioms to a standard form.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 95

106
TOMBSTONE
12th century?, Iraq?
Stone, 72 x 48 x 8.5 cm
28/2001

This stone slab special is superbly carved using different styles and motifs. The front—the side with the arched niche—and the edges contain an inscription in floriated kufic in which several of the letters are interlaced with and surrounded by vegetal elements. On the back (see below), by contrast, geometry reigns supreme. Artisans of the period were clearly skilled in a variety of motifs.

The fragment comprises the upper part of an upright stele that may have served as a headstone; a corresponding stele would then have marked the foot of a grave. The two Koranic verses carved in relief on the front side are appropriate for such a function. The frame band opens with Koran 16:128, saying that God is with those who are godfearing and those who do good. The text continues, seamlessly, on the right side and then in the central arch with further qualifications of believers taken from Koran 39:9: he who is obedient in the watches of the night, bowing himself and standing, he who is afraid of the world to come and hopes for the mercy of his Lord; only men possessed of minds remember. Another inscription in a similar style runs around the three edges of the stone, but the base line has been eroded and the brief text is illegible.

The back of the slab contains the classical frame called a *tabula ansata* (because of the little triangular "handle" [in Latin, *ansa*] projecting from the top) enclosing a field of interlaced six-petal rosettes. The border contains a grooved band that divides the surface into panels with the signature of the artisan in a floriated and interlaced script: "...allah ibn Muhamad ibn Abdallah, the stucco-worker (*al-jissas*)."

The slab is not dated but can be attributed to twelfth-century Iraq by comparison to several flat mihrabs of bluish-marble made for shrines in Mosul, some now in the Baghdad Museum and others in the Mosul Museum (Janabi). Like this one, they are typically decorated with polylobed niches supported on columns, strapwork patterns, and floral arabesques. This stele is comparable but different: the carving here is crisper; the niche is supported on single rather than double columns with oval rather than vase-shaped capitals; and the vegetal scrolls are more naturalistic. It is signed by an otherwise unknown artisan who considered himself a stucco worker, a medium with a long tradition in the area. The so-called Abbasid palace in Baghdad, to be identified with the Sharabiyya madrasa founded in 628/1230, for example, is lavishly decorated with stucco carved in similar strapwork and arabesque patterns.

The craftsman here reveled in displaying his talents. He carved the back in a flatter geometric pattern, adding his signature in the border. The niche on the front is more three-dimensional, and the inscriptions bands there and on the edges are elaborately decorated with flowers. In the inscription on the upper edge, he even transformed the letter *lam-alif* in a design that resembles a praying figure with his hands raised. This is a master at work.

Unpublished

(back)

107

CYLINDRICAL BOX

mid-14th century, Egypt?

Ivory, carved, openwork decoration and inlay with a black, pitch-like substance, H 9.2; diameter 9.2 cm

25/1999

By juxtaposing different kinds of ornament, craftsmen could show off their skills in various techniques of carving. This small box belongs to a group of eleven such containers, all small, cylindrical boxes with flat lids that originally had a knob in the center (Carboni 2005). All are carved from a single block of the elephant's tusk, with the lid and base circumscribed by inscription bands carved in relief and sides drilled with fine openwork. Surfaces are often highlighted in color, painted in blue or green and inlaid with a black pitch-like substance. Some are still lined with their original metal container.

These ivory boxes were definitely made in the fourteenth century in the western Islamic lands, but exactly where is open to question. Some are known to have been made in Mamluk, Egypt, because an example in the Rothschild Collection bears the name of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Salih (r. 1351-54). The openwork decoration also recalls *mashrabiyya*, the turned woodwork that was popular in Egypt. Others of the group have been preserved in European cathedrals, making Nasrid Spain another possibility for their provenance, particularly for those that bear inscriptions carved in a thinner script, including one in Kuwait inscribed with the typical Nasrid motto "there is no victor save God." Only one container is not pierced; it may be a Nasrid copy of a Mamluk model. The one exhibited here is thought to be a transitional piece, but may be tentatively assigned to Egypt on the basis of its thicker script.

The openwork on these cylindrical boxes is based on a grid generated by intersecting octagons. The center of each octagon is filled with a small cross, and the intersection of two contiguous octagons forms a diamond. Four of these diamonds make up a larger cross with a circle in the center, a form echoed here by the prominent "eyes" on the lappets above and below the openwork. The dark ground of the openwork is a foil to the reflective smooth surface of the relief carving. On the lid, the openwork pattern expands from the central boss with nineteen lappets, each marked with a small black eye, through a series of rhomboidal compartments points to nineteen points between scallops, each marked with a bull's-eye. Geometry is juxtaposed to writing.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 408

108

BASIN

16th century, Iran

Cast copper alloy with engraving, originally tinned, H 16.5; diameter 33 cm

9/1970

This large bowl is virtually enmeshed in ornament. The decoration is so dense, particularly on the bulbous base, that it is difficult to distinguish the individual elements of writing, geometry, and arabesque. A band around the neck contains cartouches with an inscription in a rounded *thuluth* script. The Arabic text, which stands out against the scrolling arabesque, offers blessings to Muhammad and the Twelve Imams, believed by Shi'ites to be his rightful successors. A small circle at the end, inscribed in a smaller version of the same script, gives the name of the bowl's owner, one Mas'ud ibn Abdallah.

The base is even more densely covered with smaller-scale patterns. The design comprises a pattern of alternating roundels and lobed cartouches set in staggered rows. The roundels are filled with palmette designs, the cartouches with Persian poetry in the hanging *nasta'liq* that relate to the object's function. The poem, beginning below the small roundel with the owner's name, for example, says:

> *O master of the bowl (ṭās), may you forget every sorrow;*
> *May what your soul yearns for ever be in your fold;*
> *As long as the bowl of heaven and the globe of the sun exist,*
> *May everything you taste from this bowl be to your health.*

The interstices between roundels and cartouches are filled with a third type of ornament, a spiraling arabesque.

This type of large open bowl with hemispheric base, flat bottom, and everted rim made of copper alloy that was engraved and tinned became common in the fifteenth century under the patronage of the Timurid rulers of Iran, but the inscriptions and design show that this bowl dates to the sixteenth century under their successors, the Safavids (1501-1732). The Safavids established Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion in Iran, which continues to be the major Shi'ite country in the world today, and hence inscriptions invoking the name of the imams became common on metalwares, including coins, as are Persian verses with a mystical tinge invoking wine and heaven. This same verse, for example, is found on several other bowls from sixteenth-century Iran (Melikian-Chirvani 1982, nos. 126 and 134).

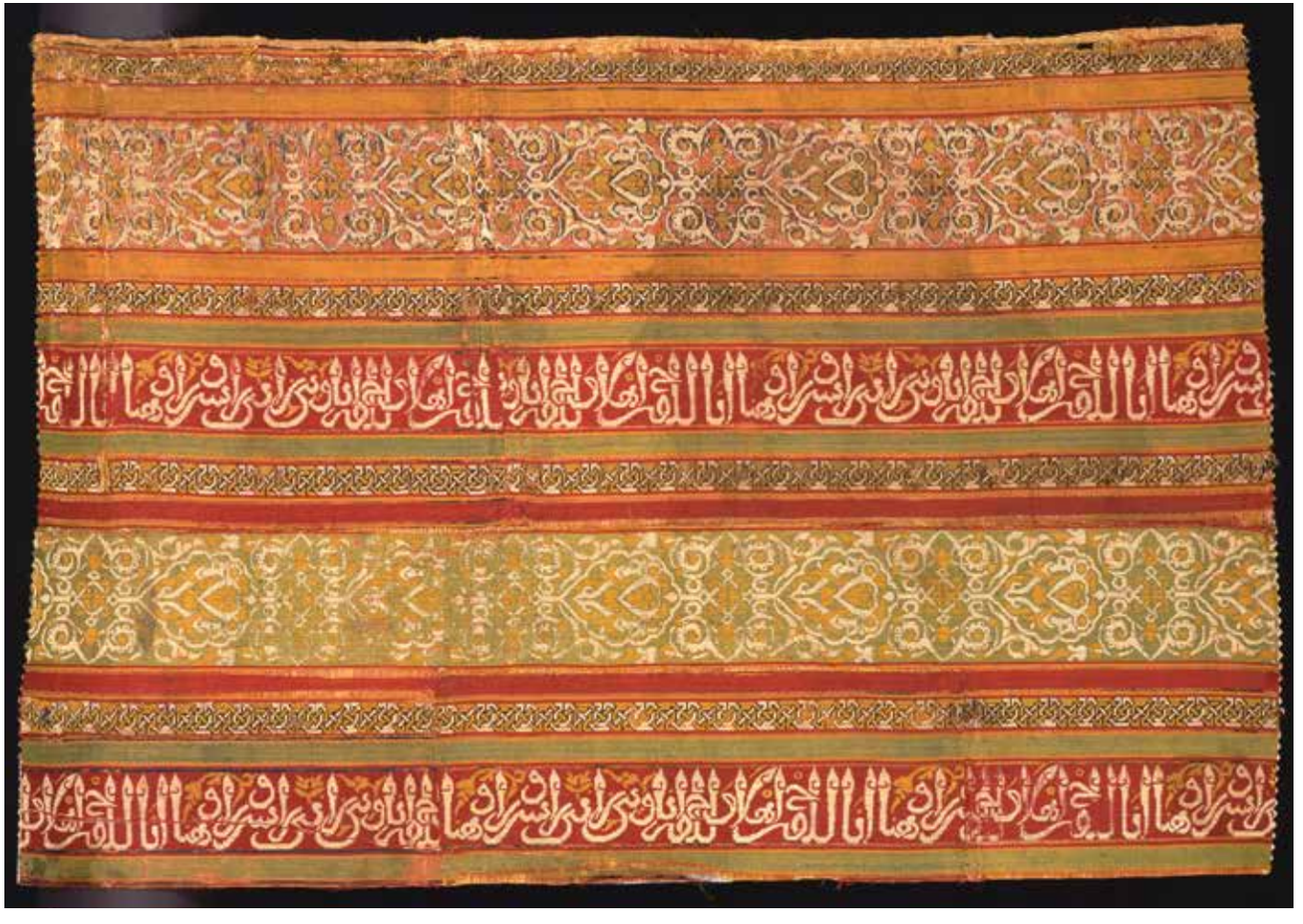
The decoration is equally distinctive. Metalwares made in the sixteenth century continue the tendency toward a compressed network of design in which the system of cartouches, roundels, and quatrefoils is often barely distinguishable from the overall patterning. Delicate sinuous arabesques with interlaced leaves are juxtaposed to more formal palmettes. Round inscriptions with Arabic invocations are played off against hanging ones with Persian poems. These designs could be worked out in inlay (**no. 69**) or engraved in a copper alloy that was then tinned, but all together they show the love of all-over decoration to envelope the shiny tablewares of sixteenth-century Iran.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 529

109

FRAGMENT OF A LAMPAS TEXTILE

late 14th or early 15th century, Spain
Silk, 36 x 53 cm
2/1989



The poetic inscription woven into this silk made in southern Spain during the period of Nasrid rule (1232-1492) is a key to understanding how such luxurious goods were originally perceived. The technology of weaving on a drawloom lends itself to repeating patterns, and the ones on this silk comprise parallel bands of varying widths containing different sorts of geometric, floral, and epigraphic decoration in bold colors of red, yellow, green, violet, and white. Each band in turn is filled with repeating motifs. Whereas the two arabesque bands, which are woven in slightly different colors, line up exactly, the two repeats of the epigraphic band are spaced differently. The epigraphic bands contain a poem woven in white against a brilliant red ground with a yellow floral scroll. The text repeats: "I exist for pleasure, welcome, for pleasure am I; he who beholds me sees joy and well-being" (*ana li'l-farah alhan li'l-farah ana; wa man ra'ani ra sururan wa hana*).

The inscription is distinctive in both style and content. The letters, written in a variant of the thick rounded script called *thuluth*, are distinguished by curls on the top of the vertical stems. The poem, hardly a masterpiece of the Arabic literary style, is composed as though the object itself were speaking. Similar texts were often used on objects of daily use like jugs, plates, and doorknockers (**no. 103**). The economics of weaving meant that such textiles were often regularly woven in multiples. A larger piece with same design, for example, is preserved in the Textile Museum in Washington, DC (Welch, no. 18). The layout could also be readily adapted to fit different motifs. A similar silk lampas textile, later made up into a bishop's cape or pluvial in Burgos (Dodds, no. 98), contains blessings to an anonymous sultan written in the same style of script. Clearly the meaning of the text did not impair its reuse in a different religious and social context. Repeating texts in cartouches, often with invocations to the sultan, are inscribed in carved stucco cartouches all over the walls of the Alhambra, and the inscriptions show us that these luxurious textiles, too, were intended for a courtly audience.

Selected bibliography: *Woven Treasures*, no. 19; *Sultan Shah*, no. 198

110
DISH
ca. 1700, India
Colorless glass gilded and decorated with yellow, light green, blue, and red enamel, diameter 28.4 cm
37/1999

Artisans working in India around the turn of the eighteenth century integrated flowers into geometric compositions. The trellis design on this stunning glass dish marks another stage in the development of the radial design with flowers found on ceramics made in Syria (**no. 51**) and Iran (**no. 48**) in earlier centuries. As on the thirteenth-century Kashan dish, which is approximately the same size as this glass example, the surface is divided into three zones, though straight sides here replace the curved cavetto of the luster one. The otherwise flat base has a swelling boss in the center. The boss is decorated with a quatrefoil, enclosing four sprays and surrounded, in turn, by a scroll from which sprout eight five-petaled flowers. A wide, gold band separates the central boss from the rest of the field, which is decorated with a floral trellis. It comprises three rows of flowers, each with nineteen five-petaled rosettes set in ogival compartments. Another broad, gold band marks the edge of the base, but the same trellis design continues up the walls of the vessel.

An overall pattern of a floral lattice can be found on wares in various media produced in India during the Mughal period, ranging from glass to textiles and metalwares, whether enameled, engraved, or inlaid. Most pieces have quite rigid designs, with an angular trellis, but the same curvilinear ogival compartments can be found on a small spittoon of blue glass in Kuwait (Carboni and Whitehouse, no 139; Carboni 2001, no. 105). There, however, the gold latticework encircles stylized irises in white enamel rather than the five-petal rosettes found here. But the closest parallels for the design on this glass dish can be found on a large copper tray in the Khalili collection (Zebrowski, pl. 442). It is decorated with a similar central boss and trellis with ogival compartments, but these enclose eight-pointed stars.

What makes the trellis design on this glass dish so special is the glassmaker's skill at using color and gold on transparent glass. The decorative effect was achieved by applying yellow enamel to the exterior of the dish, and gilding and enameling the interior with yellow, light green, blue, and red for the flowers, creating a sense of three-dimensionality that energizes a potentially static design.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 353

111

THREE TILES

ca. 1260, Kashan, Iran
Fritware, painted in luster over an opaque white glaze, diameter 31.5 cm (each)
Isl. 171, 172, 170

Craftsmen in Iran used epigraphic and vegetal decoration to cover the interior walls of religious structures. These tiles belong to a group removed in the late nineteenth century from the dado of the Imamzada Yahya, a tomb for one of the descendants of the imams, at Varamin (see below). Over 150 examples are known from some two dozen collections (Watson 1985, no. 27), including a set of fifteen, some dated between Dhu'l-Hijja 660 and Safar 661 (October-December 1262), now in London (V&A 1937-56; Watson 1985, color plate K; Stanley, fig. 65). To judge from the identical dimensions and motifs, these three tiles must have come from the same setting.

Overglaze painted in luster, these tiles represent one of the two most expensive types of ceramic available in medieval Iran to decorate the finest buildings. Made in star and cross shapes that could be fitted together in panels, they could be ordered by the yard to fit the specific setting. They were, in short, the expensive wallpaper of their time. These tiles came in figural, floral, and geometric patterns, most with borders containing both Persian poetry and Koranic inscriptions. Those with figural scenes, with or without Persian poetry in the borders (**no. 8**), were standard for secular settings, like palaces. Those with floral and geometric patterns, especially ones like these with Koranic quotations in the borders, were more suitable for sacred settings, such as mosques and shrines.

The Koranic inscriptions on these tiles are typical and show how potters chose from a limited range of verses, probably those they knew by heart. The star tile on the left is inscribed with Koran 1 and 112 (Iklas), two of the shortest, most famous, and most poetic chapters from Koran that speak about God's unity and omnipotence. The cross tile in the middle repeats the same verses and adds a phrase from Koran 65:203 about God's sufficiency for the godfearing. The star tile on the right continues the same theme with Koran 18:45-47, three verses about God's power over life and death. The hasty writing is serviceable, but not to be considered calligraphy.

The floral decoration, all painted in reserve against the white ground, similarly shows how potters in mid-thirteenth century Kashan could create variations within a single vegetal theme. The star tile on the right has the most realistic variant: a naturalistic plant grows from a single stem over a fishpond, one of the standard motifs in the Kashan repertory (**nos. 7-8**). Large comma-like leaves fill the corners. Its counterpart on the left is more abstracted. The field is filled with large-scale palmettes, with the leaves on the right tile transformed into a C-shaped band setting off the four major points of the star. The pattern on the central cross tile is the most stylized. It shows a symmetrical arabesque scroll that sprouts smaller leaves of the same type. These are only three of the many variants on the same theme that show how painters could transform nature into an arabesque, thereby illustrating metaphorically how God has power over all things.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 133; *Sultan Shah*, no. 250; *AWI* 2001, no. 211

Exterior view of the Imamzade Yahya

112

BOX

first half 14th century, southwest Iran
Engraved brass inlaid with gold, silver, and a black bituminous substance, 12.8 x 15.5 x 12.4 cm
24/1962

Crasftsmen in fourteenth-century Iran, the time when the art of book painting came to the fore among all of the arts, integrated figures into other decorative themes. This small box was probably used to store jewels or other precious goods. Containers of this type, made in wood, ivory, metal, and other materials, were popular in Islamic lands, but this box belongs to a group of inlaid brass boxes that can be attributed to southwest Iran during the first half of the fourteenth century because of its form and decoration. The group is fairly large and contains many variations on a theme. The British Museum, for example, owns three similar boxes (Ward, fig. 67), including one that could be a virtual mate to this piece. Poised on short legs, these boxes have straight sides and a pitched lid. They are covered with all-over decoration that includes the full array of figural, epigraphic, vegetal, and geometric themes, but the most striking elements are the figures displayed on each side of the box.

The sides of the box are conceived as single panels framed by bands, here an arabesque scroll and a key motif. Each panel encloses roundels that contain a single seated figure. The top of the lid is organized in the same way, but the sloping sides are decorated with a frieze of pseudo-writing resembling the well-known type offering repeated blessings to its owners. Each decorative element is carefully set off in its own compartment, but the individual elements show the merging of categories. The legs of the box, for example, resemble the legs of an animal. The writing is human-headed and set on arabesque scroll of the same type used as a frame. Similarly, the individual motifs could be combined in different ways on different boxes. Two of the caskets in the British Museum, for example, have zigzag motifs filling the central fields, but figures or arabesques in the framing bands. None of these boxes bears the name of an owner, and they were probably made for the market. Using a standard form, the artisan thus picked motifs from his repertory to suit his mood.

This box, like its mate in the British Museum, is remarkable for its fine state of preservation, making it possible to see the full effect of the inlay. The people, all musicians or drinkers, for example, are set off by the large gold halos framing their heads. Chasing enhances their silver garments to indicate the richly patterned robes. The copper used earlier (**no. 17**) has been replaced by gold. The artist is virtually painting with metal.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 169; *Sultan Shah*, no. 139; *AWI* 2001, no. 513

113

ROSEWATER SPRINKLER

ca. 1200, eastern Iran or Afghanistan

Cast and engraved bronze inlaid with silver, H 12.8 cm

65/1998

Metalsmiths working in eastern Iran in the late twelfth century transformed writing into figures, as shown by this small but exquisite bronze vessel used for sprinkling rosewater to perfume hands and food. The exterior is completely encrusted with bands of geometric, figural, and epigraphic ornament inlaid in silver. The top is decorated with braided designs, the shoulders and foot with friezes of running animals, but the largest and most distinctive is the band around the round body, which is filled with zoomorphic script in which the ends of the letters are transformed into human heads. The letters around the bottom of the band offer glory, prosperity, wealth, happiness, well-being, providence, and long life. The stems of the letters widen at the top to form human and animal heads, and the interstices between the letters are filled with lively animals and birds.

Such animated inscriptions, in which the letters or parts of them assume animal or human forms, are distinctive to metalwork (Blair 1998, 114-16). Craftsmen then copied them occasionally in other media, such as the so-called Baylov Stones, a stone frieze retrieved from a fortress on an island in the bay of Baku (Azerbaijan) and now exhibited in the palace of the Shirwanshahs there, or contemporary textiles like the colorful silk samite in this exhibition (**no. 92**). Not suitable in a religious context, such animated writing was used only in secular contexts. This type of script seems to have evolved from ornithomorphic writing in which letters are transformed into birds or end in birds' heads. Metalworkers in eastern Iran and Afghanistan gradually expanded the repertory of creatures and transformed the ends of the letters into the heads of other types of animals, both real and imaginary, and humans. The best-known example is found on the pen box made by an artisan named Shadhi in 607/1210-11 for Majd al-Mulk al-Muzaffar, vizier to the last of the Khwarazmshah rulers of Central Asia (Freer Gallery 36.7; Atıl, Chase, and Jett, no. 14).

The human heads here are set in profile facing left, the direction of the writing, and adorned with spit curls and wing-like eyebrows. These fairy-like creatures, like the expressions of good wishes to which they are attached, were meant to bring auspiciousness to the owner of this delightful vessel.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 495

114

FRAGMENTARY PLAQUE

early 8th century, Egypt or Syria
Carved ivory, 11.5 x 7.7 cm
20/1978

Already in early Islamic times artists stylized naturalistic designs. Carved from a section of elephant tusk with a semi-circular profile, this small plaque is decorated with four rows of vine scrolls. They issue from a vessel at the bottom that is ornamented with crosshatching, resembling basket weaving. The scrolls on the third tier are filled with deer, the rest with flowers. To enhance the surfaces, the carver has detailed the individual elements with hatching and randomly drilled dots.

The plaque was used to decorate a piece of wooden furniture. It has a mounting hole in the middle of the right side. The top is hollow, perhaps for inserting a dowel. The bottom shows a lip for mounting. This kind of ivory plaque had been used to decorate furniture in Egypt as early as the second millennium BCE. Recently, a set of carved ivory plaques was discovered at the Abbasid family homestead at al-Humayma in Jordan; they are believed to have decorated a throne, showing that the tradition continued through the eighth century (Foote). Elephant ivory, which had to be imported from the headwaters of the Nile or from east Africa, was expensive, and craftsmen learned to make the most of this precious material by incrusting it on wooden furniture and inlaying little pieces of it into wood.

On the basis of the motifs and style, this ivory plaque can be dated to the early eighth century (Pinder-Wilson 2005). In composition and technique, the carving is closest to that found on the southern façade removed from the palace from Mshatta and installed in the Museum für islamisches Kunst in Berlin (see Introduction, fig. 6). The palace was first thought to belong to the late Antique period, but Ernst Herzfeld showed that it must be Islamic, probably built by the Umayyad caliph al-Walid II (r. 743-44). A zigzag molding on the limestone façade divides the surface into forty triangles, each decorated with a large rosette in high relief set against a ground carved in low relief with a regularly spiraling vine. The scrolls are filled with chalices, lions, birds, and griffins, except on the area behind the mosque, where the decoration is limited to vegetal ornament. To judge from the animals on this plaque, it must have been used to decorate a piece of secular furniture such as a throne. Both façade and plaque share the same regularized scroll, in which nature has been captured in a pattern.

The motif of the vine scroll issuing from a vase, fashionable in early Islamic times, reappears nearly a millennium later on tiles (**no. 87**) and textiles (**nos. 67, 83**) made in eastern Islamic lands. On these later examples, birds flutter amidst the foliage, but here the figural representation is limited to tiny deer. Such inhabited scrolls continued to have a long history in the arts of Islamic lands.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 34; *AWI* 2001, no. 405

115

CANDLESTICK

ca. 1300, northwest Iran
Brass, engraved and inlaid with gold, silver, and a black bituminous substance, H 19.4; diameter 24.5 cm
27/1972

Virtually every element of the brass surface on this candlestick is decorated with one of the four main types of ornament. On the middle of the base, for example, bands encircling the top and bottom contain confronted ducks. Another band around the waist contains an Arabic inscription of good wishes set on a scrolling arabesque. The ground between these bands is filled with a geometric fretwork dotted with small circles containing rosettes and punctuated by large roundels containing more arabesque scrolls, confronted ducks, and hexagrams with fretwork and a geometric interlace. The neck is equally lavishly decorated with similar patterns, and one can imagine that the socket, now missing, must have been similar. When the candle was lit in the stand, the silver and gold inlay would have glowed against the matte black.

The base of this candlestick is a variant of the drum shape whose straight sides (**no. 27**) seem to have first become concave or waisted (**no. 30**) and then articulated with nine facets, as here. It belongs to a small group of such nine-sided candlesticks (Baer 1983, 31), which differ in materials and technique. Most are inlaid only with silver or a black substance; many have figural decoration. The group seems to have been produced over a wide area during the course of the thirteenth century. This one, for example, has been attributed to both Syria (Baer 1983, fig. 25) and northwestern Iran, and many ornament details are also found on metalwares made in Mosul, now in northern Iraq.

This candlestick is distinguished by the organization of its decoration. The others typically have a single panel of decoration—whether an ogee arch, a pentagon, or a large roundel—repeated on each of the nine sides. Here, in contrast, the large roundel with the hexagram is spaced out so that it repeats six times around the nine sides in a 1-2 rhythm. Roundels that occupy a single side alternate with roundels that spread over the juncture between flanges. The designer clearly envisioned the composition in sets of three.

The anonymous inscription on this candlestick suggests that it was made for the market. It, or one just like it, ended up in Anatolia in the nineteenth century, as depicted in a oil painting of the tomb (below) known as the Yeşil Türbe in Bursa, as painted in 1890 by the Turkish painter, archaeologist, museum director, and founder of the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts,

Osman Hamdi, *Türbedar* ("Guardian of the Tomb"), 1890, oil on canvas, Museum of Painting and Sculpture, Istanbul

Osman Hamdi (*Sultan Shah*, no. 255). We do not know whether the candlestick was a prop acquired by this Orientalist painter or whether it, like

the fifteenth-century lampstand made in northwest Iran (**no. 27**), had been given to the Anatolian tomb. In any case, the lavish decoration on this fine candlestick must have appealed to a broad variety of tastes.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 125; *Sultan Shah*, no. 225; *AWI* 2001, no. 509

116

PANEL

ca. 1100, Iran and Central Asia
Wood, 112 x 157 cm
1/2004

Artists in eastern Islamic lands combined different kinds of decoration not just for this world, but also for the next. This large, softwood panel comes from a cenotaph, or empty box over the spot where a body is inhumed. According to the inscription in *thuluth* script around the upper three edges, it marks the grave of the noble woman Bakra bint Ishaq ibn Marvdawij, client of the Commander of the Faithful (*mawla amir al-mu'minin*). The line along the bottom, which asks for blessings upon the deceased woman, does not read in the right direction and appears to have been cannibalized from another panel of the cenotaph and added here to restore a damaged section (notice the wear on the lower right and left corners).

The deceased woman's grandfather Mardawij (Persian, literally meaning, "man assailant") is probably not to be identified with the well-known figure of that name, a virulent anti-Muslim who founded the Ziyarid line on the Caspian littoral and was assassinated in 935. A more likely person is the Mardawij ibn Bishui mentioned briefly by the chronicler Ibn al-Athir as a former Ghaznavid commander who was installed as deputy of the Saljuq sultan Tughril at Gurgan in 433/1041-42. The title "client of the Commander of the Faithful," granted to Turkish generals and other favorites of the caliph, was also used by non-Arab rulers of successor states. If this Mardavij is indeed the deceased lady's grandfather, then she probably would have died around 1100.

Such a date is confirmed by the style of the script. Round scripts came to the fore in Iran during the second half of the eleventh century, when foundation inscriptions in round *thuluth* script were often juxtaposed to Koranic inscriptions in angular kufic script (Blair 1992, 13). Inscriptions in a similar thick script, which almost looks like toothpaste and in which the letters between words virtually connect, can be seen in Ghaznavid inscriptions, such as on the marble mihrab in this exhibition (**no. 23**). These inscriptions were often set on an undulating arabesque scroll, as with the magnificent Koranic band added to the south dome at Isfahan by the Saljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk in 479/1086-76. On the cenotaph, the vine scroll is even more complex, for it interweaves in and around the letters. The absence of mitering at the corners also suggests an early dating, for initially designers of such inscriptions had not discovered how to turn the corner of an inscription without breaking it off abruptly and starting again at a ninety-degree angle. Such a dating for the panel was confirmed by radiocarbon testing, which yielded a date of 1030-1260 at the 95 percent confidence level.

The round inscription on a scrolling arabesque is juxtaposed to a bold geometric pattern of an eight-pointed star surrounded by hexagonal panels, themselves filled with interlaced stars, flowers, and palmettes. A similar geometric frame enclosing floral patterns can be seen on the stucco mihrab installed in the mosque at Dandanaqan in Central Asia around 1100 (Blair 1992, fig. 144). Large, wooden cenotaphs were popular in the Caspian provinces of Iran where wood was plentiful, but few have survived the ravages of time. This panel is therefore a rare example of the early tradition of woodworking there. It also testifies to the role of women, who became important patrons of art and architecture in the eastern Islamic lands just at this time (Blair 2005).

Unpublished

117

INCENSE BURNER

11th–12th century, Afghanistan or eastern Iran
Cast bronze with openwork and engraved decoration,
24.8 x 29.5 x 10 cm
48/1981

Although true sculpture was uncommon, vessels fashioned in the shape of animals were popular in the Islamic lands. Potters made ewers in the shape of roosters (**no. 119**), metalworkers made incense burners in the shape of lions, and vice versa. In most cases, the animals were denatured by their ornament. This bronze object, probably made in the eleventh or twelfth century in the province of Khurasan in eastern Iran and western Afghanistan, was hollow-cast in two pieces: one for the body and tail, the other for the neck and head. Each was then pierced and chased with a scrolling palmette design. The two pieces were hinged at the breast so that the user could insert a shallow dish filled with coals and incense (in Arabic, *luban*), typically made of aloeswood, but sometimes mixed with frankincense and ambergris that was burned in the vessel. When the head was closed and the coals lit, the fragrant smoke would waft through the pierced holes along the neck and body and perfume the air. Unlike incense burners used in Europe that were wafted, those in Islamic lands were set on a solid surface, though the tail would have provided a handle when the hot object needed to be moved.

This lion-shaped incense burner is one of a group of eight datable to eleventh- or twelfth-century Iran and made to suit a variety of patrons and pocketbooks (Baer 1983, 57-58). A similar example in the Hermitage (IR-1565; Ward, fig., 3) is about twice the height and has decoration inlaid in silver and copper, including an inscription on the breast that gives the name Ali ibn Muhammad al-Taji, either the maker or the owner. It is particularly lively, as is a similar example in Cleveland (48.308; Baer 1983, fig. 41). A huge (85 cm tall and 82.6 cm long) but more static example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (51.56), with bosses on the body and upright ears, has multiple inscriptions giving the names of the patron (an amir named Sayf al-Din Muhammad al-Mawardi, meaning "the rosewater seller") and the artisan (Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Ali) and the date (577/1181-82). This example provides a date for the group.

These lion-shaped incense burners may have been imported into Europe, where they provided the model for a group of lion-shaped bronze aquamanilia made in Lower Saxony and elsewhere from the twelfth or thirteenth century. In transference, the function, style, and decoration changed. The European examples were used for washing hands during mass. By contrast, Islamic bronzes were used in the Islamic lands in domestic rather than religious settings, where both figural imagery and olfactory enhancement were discouraged. The European pieces, which are pierced only for filling and pouring, more realistically depict the lion, including an elaborately curled mane. The Islamic ones, by contrast, are pierced in many places and stylized, with all-over patterning that suggests a textile "coat" or livery. The symmetrical and stylized decoration carefully arranged in panels, along with the bird's head at the end of the tail, denaturalize the beast.

Selected bibliography: *Louisiana Revy* 1987, no. 47; *Sultan Shah*, no. 136; *AWI* 2001, no. 471

118

BOWL

Jumada II 600/February-March 1204, Kashan, Iran
Fritware overglaze-painted in luster, H 9.5; diameter 19.7 cm
45/2001

A new "Kashan" style of painting was developed on Iranian ceramics at the end of the twelfth century, probably at the hands of Abu Zayd, the most innovative potter of medieval Iran and the maker of this bowl. It is one of some fifteen vessels and tiles signed by Abu Zayd, the potter responsible for the most signed works. The inscription around the rim, scratched somewhat awkwardly due to the constraints of writing with the right hand within the bowl, contains an amorous Persian quatrain followed by his characteristic signature, "written by Abu Zayd in his own hand" (*bi-khattihi*), and the date Jumada II 600/February-March 1204. It is signed again on the exterior. The bowl thus falls in the middle of Abu Zayd's working life, for he was active for forty years: dated pieces range from 576/1180 to Safar 616/April 1219 (Watson 1994). Another hallmark of his work may be the tall bird painted in luster inside the foot ring.

Abu Zayd worked during one of the most creative periods in ceramic production anywhere in the world, when the new artificial body led potters to use an extraordinary range of decorative techniques. The two most expensive were luster, used on this piece, and overglaze polychrome enamel known as *minai* (**no. 7**). Abu Zayd worked in both, and his signatures are the key reason that minai, like luster painting, can be attributed to Kashan. His most famous work is the large, scalloped lusterware dish dated 607/1210 and decorated with horse and sleeping groom in the Freer Gallery of Art (41.11), whose signature has recently been deciphered by Ghouchani (1992, 1-8). Abu Zayd also collaborated with Muhammad ibn Abi Tahir on the two most important luster tile projects of the period: the decoration of the tomb chambers in the shrines of Fatima at Qum and Imam Riza at Mashhad.

Abu Zayd was not only a skillful potter but also an accomplished draughtsman. His moon-faced figures, including the two shown on this bowl, are distinguished by a curious thick neck supporting a tilted head with forward-jutting chin and mouth drawn as an inverted *V* with a dot placed beneath it. He worked first in the miniature style and then in the Kashan style, in which figures are drawn in reserve on a luster ground relieved by scrollwork and a series of small spirals or commas scratched through the luster to lighten the texture (Watson 1985, 80-84). This new style, with its concern for overall texturing, shows off the luster technique to greatest advantage. Abu Zayd's innovation was decisive, for this new style lasted for 150 years.

Unpublished

119

EWER

early 13th century, Kashan, Iran
Fritware, molded and painted in black and blue under a transparent turquoise glaze, H 35.5 cm
Isl. 23

This whimsical ewer shows how medieval Persian potters used decoration to delineate but also deny shape. With the artificial body introduced at Kashan in the late twelfth century, potters were able to develop new shapes. Many vessels resemble animals and functioned as pitchers. A few, known mainly from single examples, are cows or bovines, but the most popular shape was the rooster or cock, in which the cock's body forms the base of the ewer, his tail forms the handle, and his head is the spout. When used for pouring, liquid issues from either side of the beak. These cock-shaped ewers exist in a variety of glazes and formats. At least one example in London (V&A C160-1928; Watson 1985, fig. 31) is decorated in luster, but most, like this one, are painted in black under a transparent turquoise glaze. Some, including ewers now in Washington (Freer Gallery of Art 49.19; Atıl 1973), Paris (Louvre MAO 442; *l'Etrange* 2001, no. 123), and the Keir collection (Grube 1976, no. 137), are double-shelled or reticulated, with an inner container encased in a pierced decorative shell. Others, like this one, are molded.

The potter deliberately decorated the ewer to exploit the difference between molding and painting. The body is divided into a dozen vertical stripes, all painted with the waterweeds typical of the Kashan style. Half the stripes are molded with a formal symmetrical design. These raised bands alternate with flat bands painted with looser, more organic designs. The collar around the neck is molded with a pseudo-inscription, perhaps meant to resemble the common phrase *al-mulk li'llah* (Dominion is God's [alone]). The handle is artfully shaped to show the cock's feathers, which are highlighted in black, the same treatment found on the similarly shaped handle on the double-shelled ewers in the Freer Gallery and the Louvre. Altogether, this ewer shows that there was no bar to figural representations in everyday life.

Selected bibliography: *Arts of Islam*, no. 358; *AWI* 2001, no. 172

120

ALBUM LEAF

second half 15th century, Iran

Paper with ink and opaque pigments, 22.3 x 16.8 cm

20/1992

Pages from albums allowed for great variety in subject matter and decoration, as they were composite works of art. This leaf, for example, is made of at least seven strips of paper bearing examples of calligraphy, illumination, and drawing. The scraps have been pasted both vertically and horizontally on another sheet and the whole mounted on a heavy backing sheet of greenish-blue paper with gold so the back is not visible. The calligraphies seem to have been chosen mainly for size to act as frame and fill out the page. The band of large Arabic script at the top, for example, has been trimmed at the sides, and smaller lines of Persian poetry from different manuscripts have been mounted to frame the medallion and cavorting boars.

The medallion in the center of the leaf represents the typical design used for book covers (**no. 95**) and frontispieces, but here it has been reoriented ninety degrees and set horizontally. Its slim elongated shape with pendant fleurons in blue and gold is typical of those used in Ottoman books produced in the mid-fifteenth century (Tanındı). The center field is filled with flowers set on a scrolling arabesque, a design typical of the International Timurid Style that was exported from Iran to Syria (**no. 89**) and Turkey (**no. 88**). Altogether it represents the abstracted vegetal style. The drawing might have been used in a workshop as a basis for developing another work, such as a book illumination or tooled leather binding.

The drawing below is quite different. It is notable for its realism and attention to details like the fine hairs on the boars' back, their snarled teeth, and their twisted, jumping bodies that appear frozen in time. An identical drawing of two boars is incorporated in a large album in Istanbul (Topkapı Palace Library, H2153, fol. 19b) that was probably compiled in north-west Iran for the Aqqoyunlu sultan Ya'qub (r. 1478-90) and then entered the Ottoman royal collection under Selim I (r. 1512-20). The album and its mate H2160 include sixty-five paintings and drawings—mostly of demons, nomads and workers—that are ascribed to Siyah Qalam ("Black Pen"). His identity, or even whether he is a person or a school, is unclear and the subject of much scholarly debate, but this drawing is a good representation of his style. Though torn, it was clearly treasured, for it was carefully feathered into the surrounded scraps to prepare this page.

This leaf belongs to the type of scrapbook album known as *muraqqa'* (literally, patchwork), in which dissimilar pieces including calligraphies, paintings, maps, stencils, and designs are pasted at various angles on a single page. Such scrapbook albums became popular in Iran during the fifteenth century (Roxburgh), but were later replaced by planned albums in which double pages of calligraphy with figural borders alternated with double pages of paintings framed by floral borders (**no. 123**). The pages in these scrapbook albums were clearly intended to juxtapose different subjects and styles from different places and periods, but at the same time unify their appearance within a common frame.

Selected bibliography: *AWI* 2001, no. 51

121

CALLIGRAM

1280/1863-64, Turkey
cut paper, 33 x 45.5 cm
21/1974

This cut-out exemplifies the transformation of writing into pictures. It is a calligram, a calligraphic picture in which words are laid out in the shape of a figure, in this case a lion. The text invokes the name of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib, hailed as God's victorious lion (*asad allah al-ghalib*) and Commander of the Faithful (*amir al-mu'minin*), who receives God's blessing (*karrama allah ta'ala wajah wa radiya allah 'anhu wa karrama*).

This zoomorphic design was popular among the Bektashis, a sufi order that became widespread under the Ottomans (de Jong 1989). The Bektashis venerate Ali as the manifestation of the Divine on earth, and like Shi'ites, personify him as the lion of God (see **no. 32**, for a plaque made for a Shi'ite mosque or shrine with a similar verse about Ali as the lion of God). Bektashi art was replete with mystical symbolism. Here, for example, the lion's face is made up of the word Ali repeated in mirror-reverse, an allusion to the exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin)* aspects of existence. The two eye sockets formed by the letter *'ayn* (literally, "eye") are identified with Hasan and Husayn, Ali's two sons. The lion's five toes are said to represent the pentad of God, Muhammad, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn. This calligraphic design was often repeated, sometimes in color with equally explicit symbolism (the lion's red tongue, for example, was used to show that Ali was the spokesman [*natiq*] of Muhammad).

What makes this example singular is that it is cut out from a single sheet of once-white paper that has discolored to beige from acidity. Paper cutting was first applied to calligraphy in Arabic script in the fifteenth century. Examples of both collage (cut-out letters pasted on to a background of contrasting color, usually light on dark) and, more rarely, *découpage* (a sheet of contrasting color mounted behind a sheet from which letters are cut out) became popular under the Timurids in eastern Iran in the fifteenth century. The art of paper-cutting then spread to Turkey where it reached dazzling heights under the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, when cut-out writing in different scripts was incorporated into elaborate pages with marbled and gilded papers decorated with miniature gardens replete with flowers, shrubs, and trees, all done in collage. In this piece, by contrast, the background has been cut away leaving the design, which is signed in the cartouche in the bottom left corner, the work of Sulayman, and dated 1280/1863-64. Sulayman was justly proud of his work, which seamlessly joins word and image.

Unpublished

122
Two leaves from a Koran manuscript

late 16th century, Shiraz, Iran, or India
Ink and colors on paper, 38.3 x 24 cm
26/1980

Muslims elaborated the sacred word with non-figural illumination. The text of the Koran is often divided into thirty parts (*juz'*; pl. *ajza'*) to facilitate reading one part per day and finish within a month, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims are enjoined to fast and read scripture. This elaborate double-page spread, resembling the frontispiece to a book, contains Sura 39: 24-41 and marks the opening to section 24, as indicated by a small note written in red in the margin at the bottom right.

The physical composition of each page shows the elaborate preparation of this code. The calligrapher first wrote the text in black ink on brownish polished paper with ten lines per page. He used the round script known as *muhaqqaq* ("indubitable"), the same flowing script used for the gigantic Koran manuscript made for Timur (**no. 22**) and one notable for the unauthorized connections between letters that are not usually joined, as with *alif* to *'ayn* twice in the seventh line of the right page. The written area was then set within a frame. Before binding, a third sheet of paper was set down the gutter, probably because the illumination on a double page made it so heavy.

The illuminator's work on this double page is equally elaborate. He surrounded the ten lines of text with cloud bands, reserved in gold decorated with floral arabesques that embellish the space around but do not ever touch the sacred text. He decorated the frame with a scalloped border painted in bright blue, then gold, vivid red, white, and others colors including two shades of pink and pale blue, and next outlined the whole with an extremely fine black line. The illuminator also added fine blue sprays to make the transition between decorated written area and blank margins, and then sprinkled gold over the whole. The pages have now been trimmed at least four centimeters on each side, but each page in the codex once measured on the order of 46 x 32 centimeters. Someone has scrawled the page numbers 527 and 528 at the top, so we can calculate that originally there would have been some 690 pages in this deluxe codex.

Despite the complex of production and the richness of the decoration, the workmanship is not of the finest quality. Rather, this double page, like the comparable codex in Berlin (Nr. I.42/68; Déroche and von Gladiss), bears witness to the commercial school of production that thrived in southwestern Iran during the second half of the sixteenth century and was soon exported to India. Similar illumination was also used for secular manuscripts, as can be seen in the double-page frontispiece (**no. 4**) in this exhibition. Even in manuscripts made for the market, Muslims venerated God's word with exquisite decoration.

Selected bibliography: *Sultan Shah*, no. 103; *AWI* 2001, no. 13

123

Album leaf

1630-40, northern India
Paper with opaque pigments, page: 38.5 x 26.5 cm; miniature: 21 x 13.2 cm
31/2001

Artists compiling the planned albums made for the Mughals and their contemporaries in the seventeenth century freely mixed subjects and styles. In contrast to the earlier scrapbook type of album with pages of mixed content (**no. 120**), these planned albums have double-page spreads with paired borders enclosing samples of calligraphy alternating with similar double-page spreads with figural paintings. The front side of this page (see below), for example, bears a quatrain in *nasta'liq* script signed by Mir Ali Haravi, the early sixteenth-century Persian calligrapher whose work was especially prized at the court of the Mughals. The back side, shown in the exhibition, contains a painting of King David playing the harp. The number 4 has been added in the right border, and the leaf must have been fourth folio in one of the sumptuous albums prepared for the emperor Shah Jahan in the 1620s and 1630s (Leach 380). It was at this time that the two separate sheets of paper with calligraphy and painting were set within the frame painted with carnations, tulips, and other flowers in green, blue, pink, crimson, light blue, and gold on a beige ground. At least eight such albums are known (Leach 372), of which the most famous are the Minto, Wattage, and Kevorkian Albums (Welch et al. 1987).

Front

The painting in the center of this side depicts the enthroned King David playing his angel-headed harp. An inscription scrawled on the base of the throne, perhaps added by the emperor, who was famed as a connoisseur, ascribes the work to Manohar, the Mughal painter active from 1580 to 1620 under Shah Jahan's father Jahangir. The composition is based on Johannes Sadeler's engraving "Performance of a Motet of Orlando di Lasso," itself a copy of a painting by the Flemish artist Peter Candid (Esterly and Sayce). Jesuit missionaries must have brought the engraving to the Mughal court, where Manohar copied it. The complex iconography of the original was simplified by eliminating the heavenly seraphim, flattening the perspective, and setting the throne with a brilliant red platform against a green ground.

Johannes Sandler: Performance of a Motet

The fabulous floral borders are the work of Shah Jahan's court painters. The plants grow from thin straight stems, and the flowers are carefully painted with contrasting centers and gold outlines. Their heavy rich blossoms differ from the more delicate ones used under his father, a change in taste perhaps produced as a result of the court's trip to Kashmir in 1620. This new floral style permeated the arts of the Mughal court throughout the seventeenth century (**no. 101**), and the leaf, which combines calligraphy, figural painting, and floral decoration illustrates the combination of European and indigenous traditions that characterize Islamic art during the Mughal period.

Selected bibliography: Flores and Silva, no. 92

Glossary

alif the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, normally written as a straight vertical stroke

arabesque vegetal ornament that grows according to the laws of geometry rather than nature. One of its chief characteristics is infinite correspondence, meaning that the viewer can imagine how the pattern will grow in any direction.

basmala the invocation to God, used at the beginning of most chapters of the Koran, utterances, etc. The word comes from the Arabic *bism allahi al-rahman al-rahim* (in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate).

calligraphy beautiful writing

cenotaph a box-like construction of wood, tile or stone over the actual grave of the deceased

chinoiserie ornament incorporating Chinese motifs

cloud band a wavy **S**-shaped decorative motif with a scalloped edge derived from Chinese art

Deccan region of south-central India

dado decoration covering the lower half of an interior wall

fritware artificial ceramic body made from ground quartz with small amounts of fine clay; also called stonepaste

hadith report about the sayings, actions, and life of the Prophet Muhammad

Khurasan region of northeastern Iran and Central Asia west of the Amu Darya (Oxus) river

kufic angular script

lam-alif a ligature of two Arabic letters with strong verticals, often written like an open pair of scissors or set of tongs

lamella thin strips of paper or animal membrane that are gilded (or less frequently silvered) and spun around silk to make the metallic threads used to weave cloth of gold

lampas complex technique of weaving textiles with two sets of warps and two sets of wefts

luster a technique of decorating ceramics over the glaze with metallic oxides, usually of silver and/or copper. After a second firing in a special smoky, or reducing, kiln, a thin film of metal is deposited on the surface, giving a lustrous effect.

madrasa a theological college

mihrab niche in the qibla or Mecca-facing wall of a mosque

minai from the Persian *mīnāī,* "enameled;" pottery that has been decorated—usually with figural scenes—over the glaze with multiple bright colors and gold

minbar triangular stepped pulpit from which the weekly sermon is given; often made of wood, ceramic, or stone, it usually stands in a mosque to the right of the mihrab.

muqarnas tiers of small niche-like elements resembling stalactites or honeycombs

nasta'liq a "hanging" script used to write Persian, especially poetry

palmette fan-shaped and lobed ornamental motif; often divided down central vein to form split palmettes

parcel gilding selective gilding where only certain areas are covered with gilt

qibla relative direction of Mecca

reserve technique of decoration in which the major elements of the design are left undecorated and only the background is filled in

samite a weft-faced compound twill fabric, from the Greek *hexamiton*, "six threads"

saz Turkish "reed"; a style of vegetal ornament popular in Ottoman art of the sixteenth century characterized by feathery saw-toothed leaves and composite blossoms

stonepaste (see fritware)

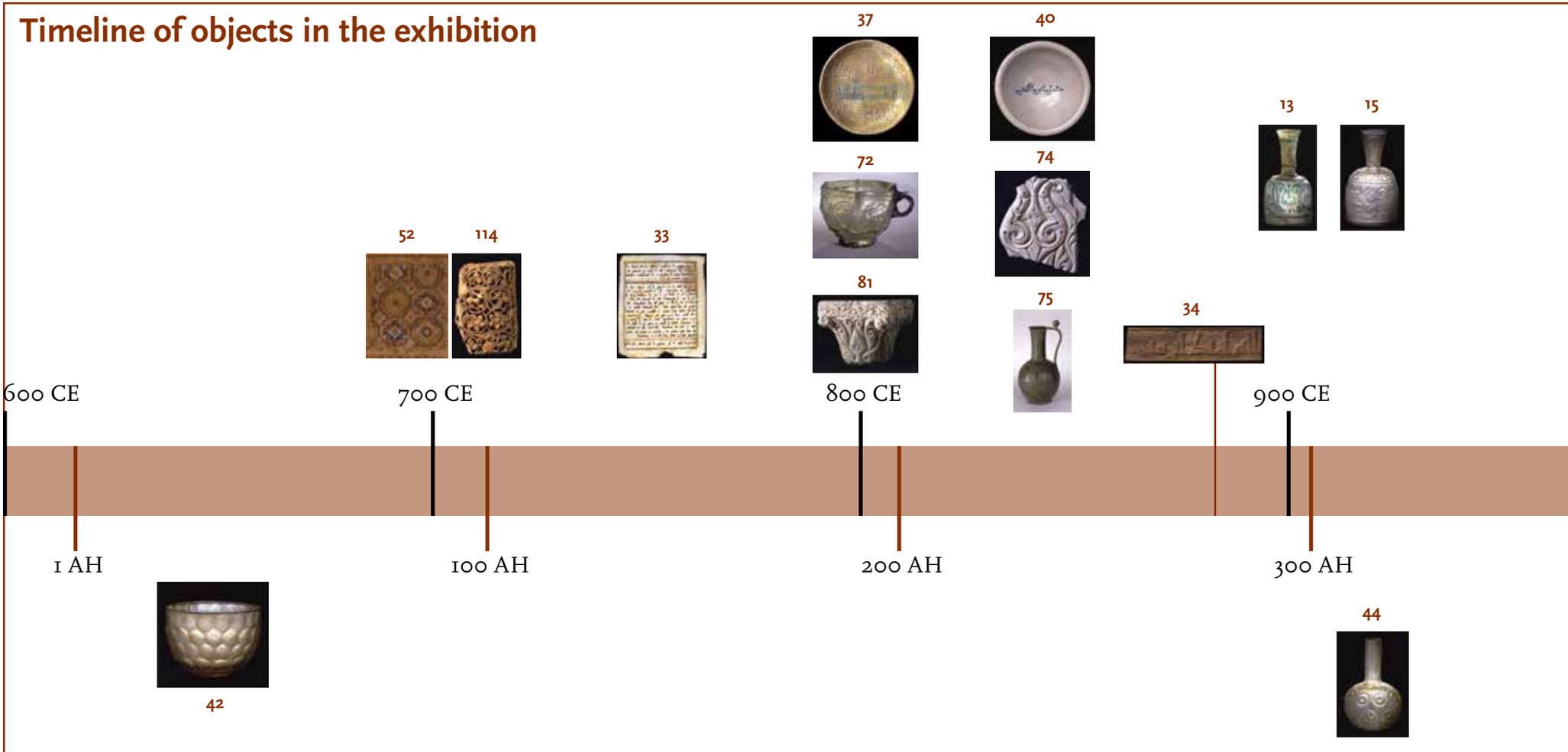
S-twist thread spun with a drop spindle turning counter-clockwise, so that when viewed in profile, the fibers are arranged like the diagonal bar of the letter S; compare Z-twist

sufi mystic

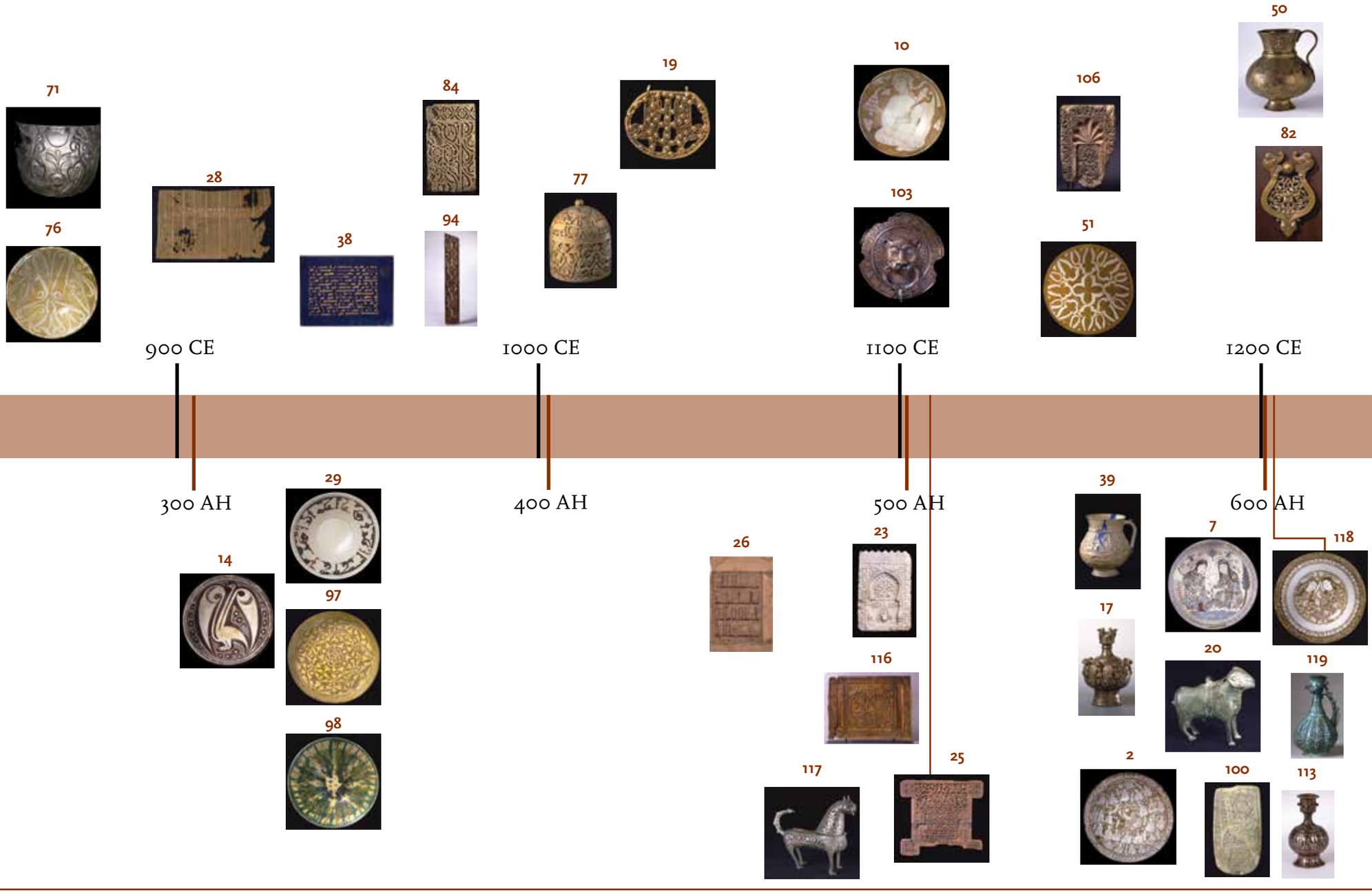
thuluth a thick round script with hooked ends on the tails of descending letters, often used for inscriptions and display text

Z-twist thread spun with a drop spindle turning clockwise, so that when viewed in profile, the fibers are arranged like the diagonal bar of the letter Z

Timeline of objects in the exhibition



Years above the timeline are given according to the Western solar calendar (CE, Common Era). Years given below are according to the shorter Islamic lunar calendar (AH, anno Hegirae), which is counted from 622 CE when Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. One hundred lunar years equal only ninety-seven solar ones, so the difference between the two calendars is not constant. Objects depicted above the timeline are generally western Islamic (i.e. Arab and Turkish); those below the timeline are generally eastern (i.e. Persian and Indian). For most objects the dating is approximate; those that can be dated to a specific year are connected by a line to the timeline.


71
76
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84
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103
106
51
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82
900 CE
1000 CE
1100 CE
1200 CE
300 AH
400 AH
500 AH
600 AH
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100
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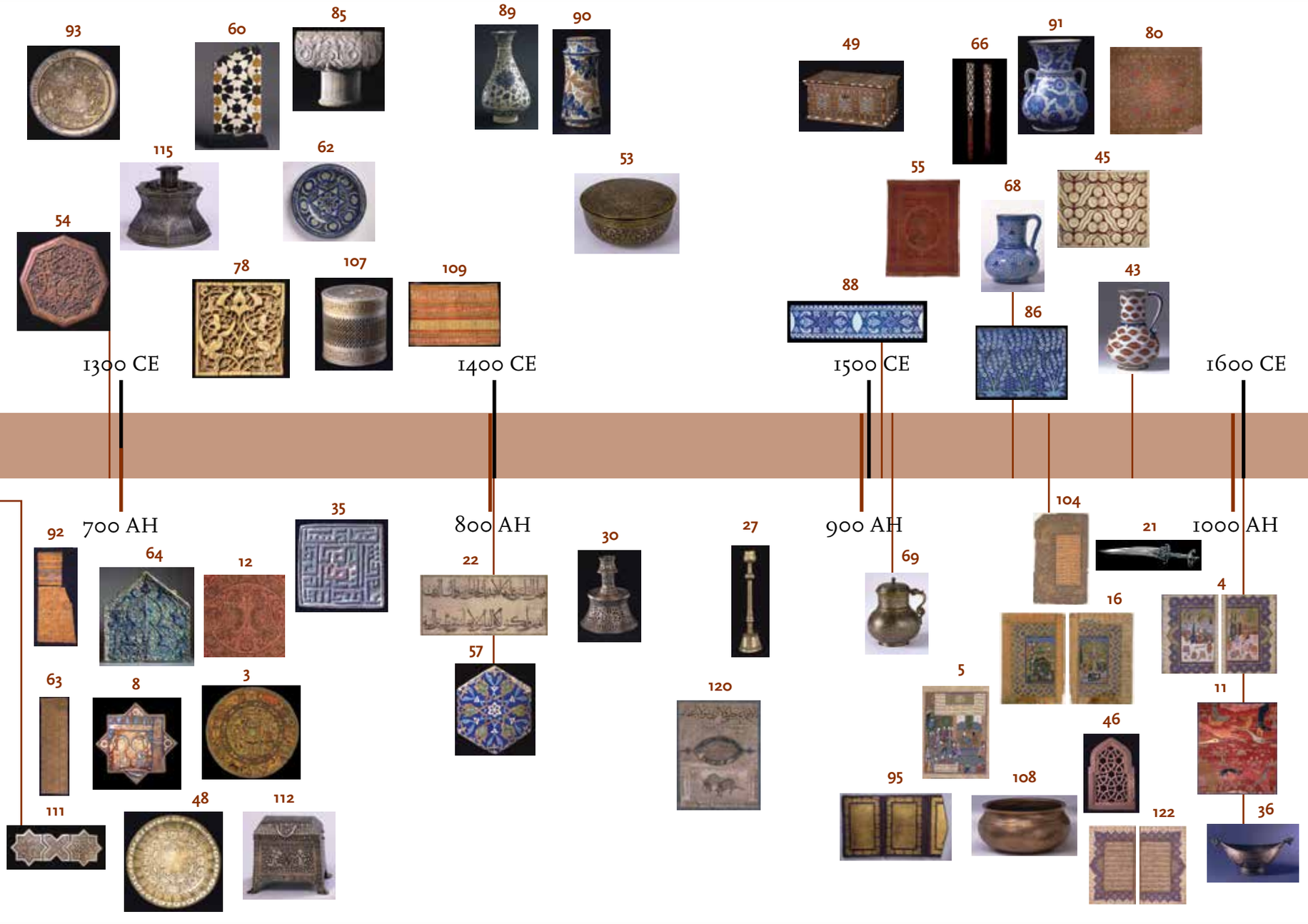
113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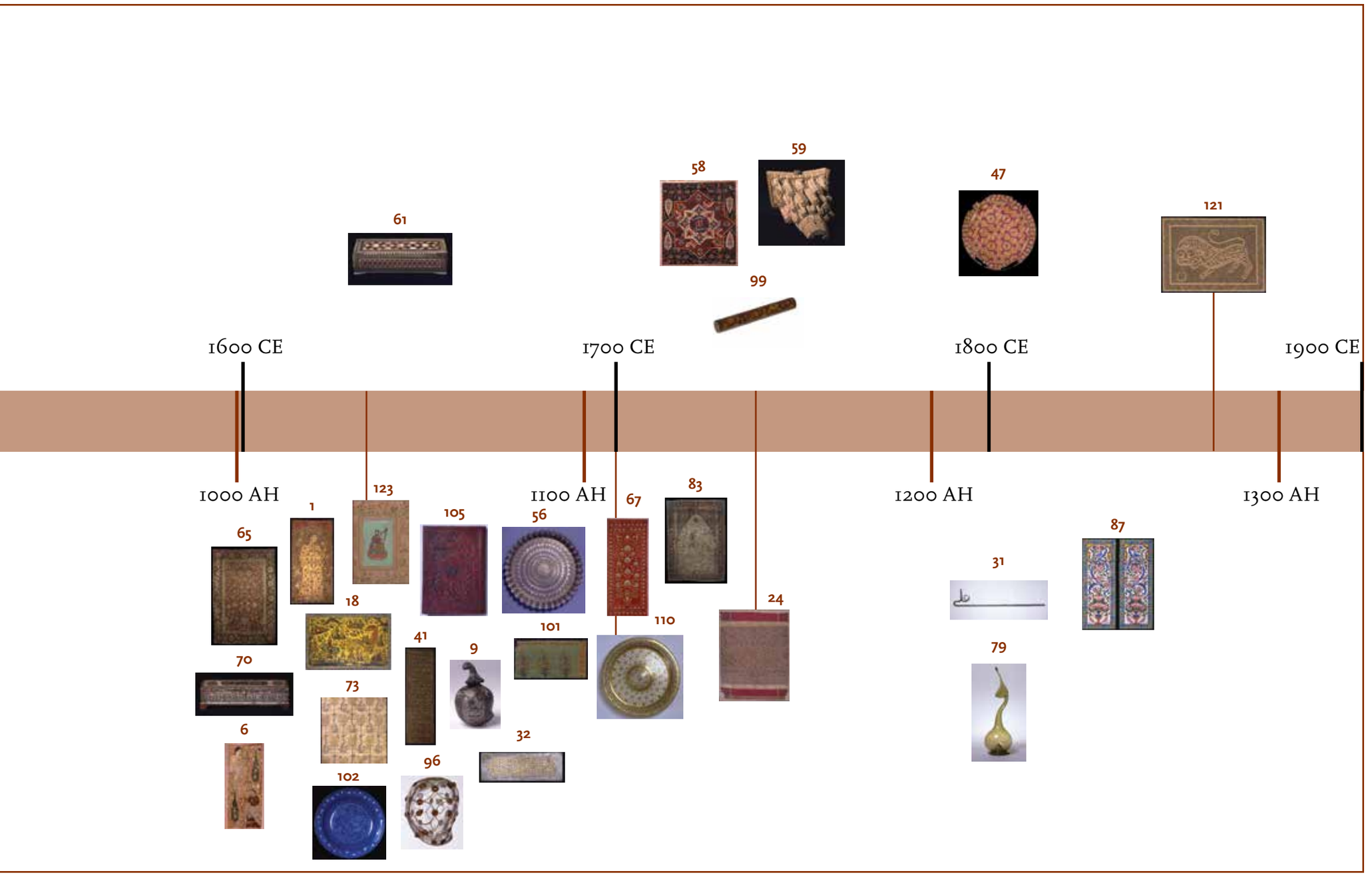
1000 AH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87
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102
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Appendix

David Collection accession numbers correlated with *Cosmophilia* catalog numbers

Accession No.	Cat. No.
1/1962	43
1/1968	64
1/1986	102
1/1987	55
1/1988	6
1/1993	9
1-2/1995	66
1/2000	105
1/2002	34
1/2004	116
2/1965	98
2/1986	46
2/1989	109
2/1993	82
2/2001	81
2/2002	94
3/1971	13
3/2000	15
4/1992	10
4/2000	100
5/1988	19
5/2005	67
6/1969	42
6/2004	26
7/1976	54
7/1996	35
9/1963	44
9/1970	108
10/1975	14
10/2001	85
11/1970	68
11/1977	25
12/1988	52
12/2002	92
14/1990	90
14/1992	63
15/1967	65
15/1991	17
15/1994	31
16/1987	56
17/1994	80
17/2001	75
18/1967	91
18/1970; 29/1962	4
20/1978	114
20/1987	22
20/1992	120
21/1965	40
21/1974	121
21/1992	62
22/1974	29
23/1997	73
24/1962	112
24/1970	53
25/1962	45
25/1994	32
25/1999	107
26/1962	76
26a-b/1980	122
26/1994	30
26/2003	33
27/1962	97
27/1972	115
28/2001	106
29/1962; 18/1970	4
29/1988	89
30/1971	24
30/1988	5
30/1995	3
31/1972	20
31/2001	123
32b/1987	104
34/1986	69
34/1999	7
35/1976	70
35/1980	96
35/1992	101
35/2000	41
36/1997	21
37/1969	58
37/1995	1
37/1999	110
37/2000	8
39/1967	79
39/2000	61
40/1966	39
40/1997	12
42/2002	60
43a/1977	99
43/1992	74
44/2002	87
45/1998	77
45/1999	27
45/2001	118
47/1992	28
48/1978	78
48/1981	117
48/2001	57
48/2002	50
50/1966	2
50/1999	37
50/2000	103
51-52/1980	16
51/2004	72
56/1999	18
61/1998	36
65/1998	113
70/1998	71
74/1979	23
77/2004	38
79/2003	59
84/2003	49
86/2004	84
92/2003	47
93a/2003	88
Isl. 1	93
Isl. 23	119
Isl. 95	48
Isl. 163	95
Isl. 170, 171, 172	111
Isl. 182	86
Isl. 196	51
Tex. 31	83
Tex. 32	11