

Persian Tiles

The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Persian Tiles

by **Stefano Carboni and Tomoko Masuya**
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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Front cover: Luster frieze tile with a phoenix (cat. no. 19)

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Preface

Many of the Persian tiles in the Museum's collection have been considered before in the context of Islamic ceramic history, an entirely justifiable approach. After all, the techniques employed in their manufacture essentially match those utilized in the production of ceramic vessels. It is the special function of tiles as architectural decoration (and the two-dimensionality that this function necessarily encourages), on both religious and secular buildings, that sets them apart from other ceramics. For obvious reasons, museum collections, even those extremely rich in portable objects, generally lack the architectural material that is such a vital element of material culture (and also the original context for the decorative arts). Tiles provide a window onto that aspect of the artistic imagination, and much knowledge can be derived from their study and appreciation.

The present catalogue accompanies an exhibit in the Hagop Kevorkian Special Exhibitions Gallery of the Department of Islamic Art. The exhibition has been made possible by the Hagop Kevorkian Foundation Fund, which has generously provided an endowment for exhibitions in that gallery. This catalogue has been published in order to provide both scholars and the general public with a written and photographic record of the objects included in "Persian Tiles," since many of them are usually kept in storage.

This exhibition and the catalogue are the result of Tomoko Masuya's research on the subject during her internship in our department as Kevorkian Research Fellow this academic year. Both were organized and prepared under the thoughtful supervision of curatorial assistant Stefano Carboni, who also contributed entry numbers 30 to 40. George Berard and Trish Sclater-Booth were particularly helpful in organizing the exhibition, and special thanks are due to Lisa Pilosi of Objects Conservation for the treatment she performed so skillfully on a number of the tiles.

Daniel Walker
Curator in Charge
Department of Islamic Art

Introduction

Tilework has been widely used to adorn the surfaces of Persian architecture since ancient times. In the Islamic period of Persia tiles lavishly decorated the interior and exterior walls of religious buildings, imperial palaces, and residences of dignitaries.

The oldest known tiles produced in Persia are square molded and glazed wall tiles with a knob in the middle from the temple at Choga Zanbil in Khuzistan, datable from the thirteenth century B.C. A number of square, polychrome tiles molded in relief were found at Susa in Luristan; their dates range from the twelfth to the seventh century B.C. They are usually painted in enamel and represent figures of animals and winged genii. Other square tiles, probably coming from a ceiling, were found in Luristan at Bābā Jān Tepe: they date from the eighth century B.C. and are made of baked clay painted with red geometrical designs. After its initial success, this type of tilework seems to have become less popular. During the Achaemenid and Sasanian periods architectural decoration was produced mostly by the use of glazed bricks, painted stucco, carved stone, marble mosaic, or mural painting.

It was not until the middle of the ninth century A.D., two centuries after the advent of Islam, that tilework was revived in Mesopotamia. Excavations at Samarra, the capital of the Abbasid dynasty from 836 to 883, unearthed a fragment of a square, polychrome-luster tile depicting a bird. Tiles, possibly produced by potters at Samarra, were also exported to Tunisia, where about 150 square, polychrome-luster tiles are still visible around the top of the mihrab (prayer niche) of the Great Mosque at Qayrawan.

In Islamic Persia tile production is virtually unknown before the eleventh century. The tiles found at Ghazni, the capital of the Ghaznavid dynasty (977–1187), presently in Afghanistan, are the first such objects recorded in excavations (cat. no. 1). Although those tiles were excavated in post-Ghaznavid layers and none of them was found in situ, they can safely be dated before the second decade of the thirteenth century. In addition, they show some affinities with the above-mentioned tiles excavated at Susa, such as the pearl borders and the animals seen in profile.

However, the earliest evidence of the use of tilework on architectural surfaces is datable from about 1058: it is found on the minaret of the Friday Mosque in Damghan. The surface of this cylindrical tower is covered with a geometrical decoration in brickwork, except for the inscriptional frieze composed of turquoise-glazed tiles running horizontally just below its top: the letters in Kufic script with ornamental endings are molded in relief and glazed, while the marginal areas are left unglazed. The dome chamber of the Friday Mosque in Qazvin, dated 1115, includes a border decoration in which small turquoise tiles are set: this is the earliest known example of interior tile decoration in Islamic Persia. Turquoise tiles on external walls were also used almost in a manner of mosaic as components of geometrical patterns in contrast with the reddish color of unglazed baked bricks. The proportion of turquoise and of the increasingly popular cobalt blue colors set against the unglazed bricks increased noticeably in the twelfth century: a number of frieze tiles, carved and turquoise-glazed, survive from this period (cat. nos. 2–3).

By the early thirteenth century, during the domination of the area by the Seljuks, pottery production expanded greatly in Persia. The main center, Kashan, now in

central Iran, was the major producer of tiles, a role it maintained for many centuries. Its name literally became a synonym for tile production: by the end of the thirteenth century the word *kāshī*, an abbreviation of *kāshānī*, was already commonly understood as “tile” in Persian. A wide range of tiles varying in both shape and technique were produced in Kashan. The profession of potter was often inherited from father to son, as their patronymics indicate: for example, we know from the written sources that the family of Abū Ṭāhir produced at least four generations of potters.

As for shapes, eight-pointed star and cross-shaped tiles, and six-pointed-star and hexagonal tiles were combined to form dadoes inside buildings. Other complicated polygonal tile shapes were also used. Square or rectangular frieze tiles were used above the dado panels. The surface decoration of mihrabs was formed by a combination of large rectangular panels in the center surrounded by frieze tiles. Some tiles were molded in relief, others were flat and paint-decorated; carved tiles became rare; some angular tiles were curved into the shape of small niches to fill corners and squinches. The technique incorporated three different processes: monochrome-glaze, overglaze-enamel painting, and overglaze-luster painting. Some of these techniques are explained in a treatise on pottery written by Abū al-Qāsim °Abdallāh b. °Alī b. Muḥammad b. Abī Ṭāhir, a court historian of the Ilkhanids (a Mongol dynasty ruling Persia from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century), and the descendant of a famous family of potters from Kashan mentioned above (he was the brother of the maker of tile cat. no. 23). Abū al-Qāsim’s treatise was written in A.H. 700/A.D. 1300–1301. Monochrome-glaze is obviously a continuation of previous traditions, but in the Seljuk period the range of colored glaze also included a cream color in addition to turquoise and cobalt blue. Abū al-Qāsim mentions some of the various substances used to obtain these colors.

The technique of overglaze-enamel painting usually known as *mīnāī* is called by Abū al-Qāsim *haft-rangī* (“seven-colored”). It was very popular for a relatively short period between the mid-twelfth and the early thirteenth century. By the time Abū al-Qāsim wrote his treatise, the *mīnāī* technique had already been lost. The colors used in this enamel technique, painted over a white or sometimes turquoise glaze, were many, and gold paint was also popular. While objects of common use, such as bowls and ewers, were produced in large quantity, tiles in the *mīnāī* technique are quite rare (cat. no. 5).

The most common and best-known technique for tile decoration was overglaze-luster painting, which Abū al-Qāsim called “enamel of the two firings.” After an opaque white glaze is applied and fired on the body of a tile, it is painted over with a pigment containing silver and copper, and then it is fired a second time. When the object is ready, the painting over its surface shows a metallic shine. The earliest known luster tiles in Persia, according to their iconography, which shows figurative rather than vegetal patterns, seem to have been used on secular buildings. The smaller tiles are eight-pointed stars measuring 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 cm) and depicting animals or seated human figures (cat. no. 6). The larger are eight-pointed star and cross tiles, whose size appears standard since they all measure about 12 1/4 inches (31.1 cm); they often include court scenes (cat. nos. 7–8). The eight-pointed star tiles are bordered by inscriptional bands containing Persian quatrains. Sometimes the inscription includes a date (cat. no. 7): all the dated tiles known of this type range from A.H. 600 to 609 (A.D. 1203–13). Some of them are also signed by a certain Abū Zayd, who, as we know from the written sources, worked on the decoration of shi’ite saints’ shrines with Muḥammad b. Abī Ṭāhir, another master potter who was a member of the well-known Abū Ṭāhir family. Together, they completed the decoration of the dado and the mihrabs in the shrine of Fāṭima (the sister of the eighth imam °Alī al-Riḍā) in 602/1206 and in the shrine of the imam

°Alī al-Riḍā in 612/1215. Unlike secular tiles, which included figural decoration, these tiles appropriately contain only vegetal, geometric, and religious inscriptional patterns. Figural rather than vegetal or geometric decoration seems to be the means of distinguishing whether a particular set of tiles comes from a secular or a religious building; the latter, for iconoclastic reasons, permitted only nonfigural subjects.

The devastation brought about by the Mongol invasions in Persia in the mid-thirteenth century affected tile production for only a short period. As a matter of fact, no dated tile survives between 1243 and 1255. The Persian cities quickly recovered, and the new Ilkhanid rulers began to build monuments and restore old ones. As a result, tile production gained new force, and the Ilkhanid period can be regarded as the most prolific era of Persian tile-making. A great number of dado and frieze tiles for both religious and secular buildings were produced. The *mīnāī* technique disappeared, but it was replaced by another type of decorated pottery, the so-called *lājvardīnah*, in addition to monochrome and polychrome glaze, luster, and underglaze painting. *Lājvardīnah* is a modern term designating a certain type of wares which are molded, cobalt- or less often turquoise- or white-glazed, fired a second time with added red, black, brown, and white over the glaze, and often gilded. Kashan remained the major pottery production center. Apart from the broad decorative distinction between secular and religious buildings, the same techniques, shapes, and subjects were present ubiquitously in Persia in the Ilkhanid period. Eight-pointed star and frieze tiles were employed in all buildings; some secular frieze tiles and mihrab tiles in monochrome glaze, painted in luster, or in the *lājvardīnah* technique even come from the same molds. It is very likely that the Kashan potters monopolized tile production all over the country in this period and made full use of their wide range of techniques and repertoire.

In the early Ilkhanid period luster was applied over the glaze with no additional colors (cat. nos. 10–11, 15), but in the last quarter of the thirteenth century it was combined with sparingly used turquoise and cobalt-blue paints (cat. nos. 12–13, 16–23). As the fourteenth century neared, cobalt blue became ever more popular (cat. no. 24). Finally, luster painting was replaced by underglaze painting in cobalt blue with touches of red, black, and other colors, commonly known as the “Sulṭānābād” type (now Arak, the site where this type of pottery was allegedly first recovered; cat. nos. 25–26). The production of *lājvardīnah* ware was as short-lived as the *mīnāī*. It appeared in the third quarter of the thirteenth century and was obsolete by the mid-fourteenth (cat. nos. 27–29).

Among the best-known religious buildings with lavish tile decoration from the Ilkhanid period are the Imāmzādah (“shrine of the descendant of the imam”) Yaḥyā at Varamin, dated 661/1262–63, which once included a complete set of luster eight-pointed-star and cross tiles with vegetal and geometric patterns and Qur’anic inscriptions (cat. no. 10); the tomb of °Abd al-Šamād at Natanz, with a luster frieze dated 707/1307–8 (cat. no. 20); and the Imāmzādah °Alī ibn Ja°far at Qumm, which contained a mihrab dated 734/1334 (cat. no. 23).

The most important secular building with tiled decoration is the palace of the Ilkhanid ruler Ābāqā at Takht-i Sulaymān, now in northwestern Iran. It is the only surviving secular structure with tile decoration from the Ilkhanid period and is datable to the 1270s. Found among the ruins of the palace were a pottery-kiln complex and molds for tiles, thus making it clear that potters were taken to this site to produce the decorative tiles. Tiles recovered at Takht-i Sulaymān show various shapes and techniques, including monochrome and polychrome glaze, luster, and *lājvardīnah*; the subjects depicted include scenes inspired by Persian epic literature (cat. no. 18), dragons and phoenixes influenced by Chinese models (cat. nos. 19, 28), and verses from a Persian epic. Some of these tiles are also dated, all of

them between 670 and 674 (1271–75).

The golden age of tile production declined with the fall of the Ilkhanid kingdom in the mid-fourteenth century. The monumental luster panels and friezes were replaced by minute monochrome-glazed mosaic tiles of various colors arranged in complex patterns to decorate, especially, mihrab surfaces. Such a technique had first appeared in the Ilkhanid period on the Imāmzādah Ja^cfar at Isfahan, dated 725/1325, but it found full expression between the second half of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries (cat. nos. 31–33). Initially the combination of colors was limited to turquoise, cobalt blue, and white, but it was progressively enlarged to include yellow, black, brown, aubergine, and other colors in order to obtain complex polychrome effects.

Because mosaic-tile setting was time-consuming, a cheaper substitute was used beginning in the late fourteenth century: the so-called *cuerda seca* technique, which allowed several colors to be combined on one tile. The colors did not run together as they were separated by a painted line of manganese mixed with grease which burnt itself out in the kiln, thus leaving a matte line (the “*cuerda seca*”) between them. The tile panel decoration was revived on many Timurid monuments of the fifteenth century, as for example in the *madrasa* (Qur’anic school) al-Ghiyāthiyya at Khargird completed in 1442 (cat. no. 34).

The *cuerda seca* technique was also widely used in the Safavid period (sixteenth to seventeenth century) when square tiles arranged in large panels formed figural scenes with various characters set in a landscape (cat. no. 35). These panels decorated residential palaces, especially those built at the beginning of the seventeenth century at Isfahan and Na’in. Each tile was therefore painted as an element of a larger composition and reflected the contemporary style of miniature painting in Safavid Persia. The dark lines of the *cuerda seca* replace the black outlines, while the palette is large though usually set on a dull yellowish-green background (cat. no. 36). A much less common but interesting group of Safavid tiles reflects contemporary pottery production: they are generally painted in blue and white under a transparent glaze. This type of pottery is known as “Kubachi ware” after the name of a town on the Caspian Sea where the first objects were discovered (cat. no. 38).

In the Qajar period (eighteenth to nineteenth century), *cuerda seca* and—to a lesser extent—mosaic tiles continued to be employed, but the most common technique was underglaze paint on molded tiles. The palette of colors used on these molded tiles includes cobalt blue, soft greens, mauve, aubergine, turquoise, yellow, and black for the outlines; they are square or rectangular, and their subjects are always figural (cat. nos. 39–40).

In conclusion, we have seen that tilework closely mirrors contemporary pottery techniques, reflects the changing tastes of patrons, and reveals the function of the buildings on which tiles were set. Since tiled walls greatly contributed to the way interior and exterior architectural spaces were created, it was necessary that they satisfy both artistic and functional demands. In this way, the study of Persian tiles helps to give insights into how Persian princes and dignitaries in their palaces, as well as all Muslims in their mosques, used to live and act in such architectural spaces.

1.

a. Green-glazed tile with a winged lion

Composite body, molded and glazed
Before 1221, from Ghazni
4 3/8 x 4 3/8 in. (11 x 11 cm)
Gift of Marjorie Schwarz, in memory
of Herbert F. and Dorothy C.
Schwarz, 1975 (1975.193.2)

b. Brown-glazed tile with a quadruped

Composite body, molded and glazed
Before 1221, from Ghazni
4 1/8 x 4 1/8 in. (10.5 x 10.5 cm)
Gift of Marjorie Schwarz, in memory
of Herbert F. and Dorothy C.
Schwarz, 1975 (1975.193.4)

c. Yellow-glazed tile with a running animal

Composite body, molded and glazed
Before 1221, from Ghazni
4 1/2 x 2 1/4 in. (11.4 x 5.7 cm)
Gift of Marjorie Schwarz, in memory
of Herbert F. and Dorothy C.
Schwarz, 1975 (1975.193.7)



The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns seven tiles that belong to a series found at Ghazni, the capital of the Ghaznavid dynasty (A.D. 977–1187) now in Afghanistan; other tiles are exhibited in Galleries 3 and 4b. The tiles are mostly square in shape, some polygonal, and molded in relief with animals, plants, or occasionally inscriptions. They are all monochrome-glazed in green, yellow, brown, red, blue, or turquoise. During the excavations at the site by Italian archaeologists, these tiles were found in post-Ghaznavid layers and among the ruins of a house destroyed by the Mongol invasion of 1221. Thus, they have been dated between the second half of the twelfth and the early thirteenth century, when the city had to pay tribute first to the Ghurids and then to the Khwarazm Shahs. As none of the tiles was found in situ, one can only speculate on their use to cover either floor or wall, or on how they were arranged. In fact, these tiles are unique in style and there are very few comparable tiles from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Their decoration shows affinities with pre-Islamic motifs of tiles from Susa, such as

the “pearl” borders present on cat. no. 1.b or an animal in profile confined in a frame. The fragments of linen fabric with stamped decoration exhibited in Gallery 3 (31.106.64)—which show a checkered pattern with lions inside each square—give the idea of a tile composition, but their date and provenance (Iran, tenth–eleventh century) are so uncertain that they do not provide a good comparison.

Literature:

Grube, 1966, Fig. 8.

2.
Turquoise-glazed frieze tile with
inscription
Composite body, molded and glazed
12th century
10 3/4 x 10 in. (27.3 x 25.4 cm)
Gift of Mrs. George W. Kern, 1964
(64.110)



This is one of the earliest surviving frieze tiles from Islamic Persia. As is commonly seen on these tiles, the surface is divided into two horizontal fields; the upper band is occupied by an ornamental vegetal motif and the lower by an inscription. But unlike later works, this tile is unusually thick and the letters used in the inscription are stocky. The Arabic words read: *al-ašamm rajab*, meaning “the deaf, rajab.” Rajab is the seventh month of the Arabic lunar calendar; *al-ašamm* is an epithet often added to this month according to a tradition established before the advent of Islam. It was called “deaf” because in this sacred month the cry for aid, the commotion due to fighting, or the clash of arms were not heard. The only two surviving words of the inscription do not allow us to determine whether this tile comes from a religious or a secular building. The use of the epithet *al-ašamm* is very unusual to indicate a date; therefore, this text could also be part of a poem.

Unpublished.

3.
Fragment of a turquoise-glazed frieze
tile with inscription
Composite body, carved and glazed
12th century, excavated at Nishapur
11 x 10 in. (27.9 x 25.4 cm)
Excavations of The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, 1936
Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.40.24)



This tile was found at a mound in Nishapur during the excavations conducted by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1930s and 1940s. The upper and lower parts of this tile are missing. Its body is thick and is carved in high relief. Standing out from the background relief of vegetal scrolls, the inscription is probably a quotation from the Qur'an, and seems to read: *...Allāh ʿinda(hu)...* "...God close to him..." a phrase so common in the Qur'an that it is not possible to establish its exact collocation or from which *sūra*, or chapter, of the Qur'an it was copied. It is nevertheless clear that this tile used to adorn a religious building.

Literature:
MMA, 1981, no. 35; Wilkinson, 1987, p. 116, fig. 1.116.

4.
Star-shaped tile with vegetal scrolls
Composite body, carved and partially
glazed
Early 13th century
Max. W. 11 1/4 in. (28.6 cm)
Gift of Charles B. Hoyt, 1932 (32.41.1)



Like cat. no. 3, this tile is also carved in high relief but the turquoise glaze is applied only partially on the main motif while the details are left unglazed. Such a contrast of unglazed earthen color and turquoise glaze is often seen on architectural tilework and brickwork from the late twelfth to the early fourteenth century. Since the points of the star shape do not form right angles as eight-pointed star tiles usually do in order to be combined with cross tiles, this tile was probably an element of a more complicated geometrical scheme.

Literature:
Jenkins, 1983, no. 35, p. 32.

5.
Turquoise-glazed frieze tile with Kufic inscription
Composite body, molded, overglaze painted, and gilded; broken and repaired
First half of 13th century
14 3/8 x 14 in. (36.5 x 35.6 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1911 (11.74.1)



This is a rare example of a frieze tile in the technique of overglaze-enamel painting (so-called *mīnāī*). The upper and lower borders are raised from the main field and are decorated with gilded patterns. The main inscription in relief is in a stylized Kufic script outlined in brown. Gilded foliated ornaments are on the background. The inscription is probably from Qur'an 15:92 (*fa-wa rabbika lannas'i*) *lannahum ajma'īna*, meaning "[So, by your Lord,] We would [most certainly ques]tion them all." Because of the religious nature of the inscription, we can surmise that this tile was probably set in a frieze around a mihrab. Other tiles probably from the same frieze, according to the style of calligraphy and of the border decorations, are preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.

Literature:
Bowie, 1970, no. 216.

6.
a. Luster hexagonal tile with the figure of a boar
 Composite body, overglaze luster-painted; broken and repaired
 First half of 13th century
 Max. W. 3 3/4 in. (9.5 cm)
 Gift of Rafael Guastavino, 1928
 (28.89.8)

b. Luster eight-pointed star tile with the figure of a hare
 Composite body, overglaze luster painted
 First half of 13th century
 Max. W. 5 1/2 in. (14 cm)
 Bequest of William Milne Grinnell, 1920 (20.120.72)

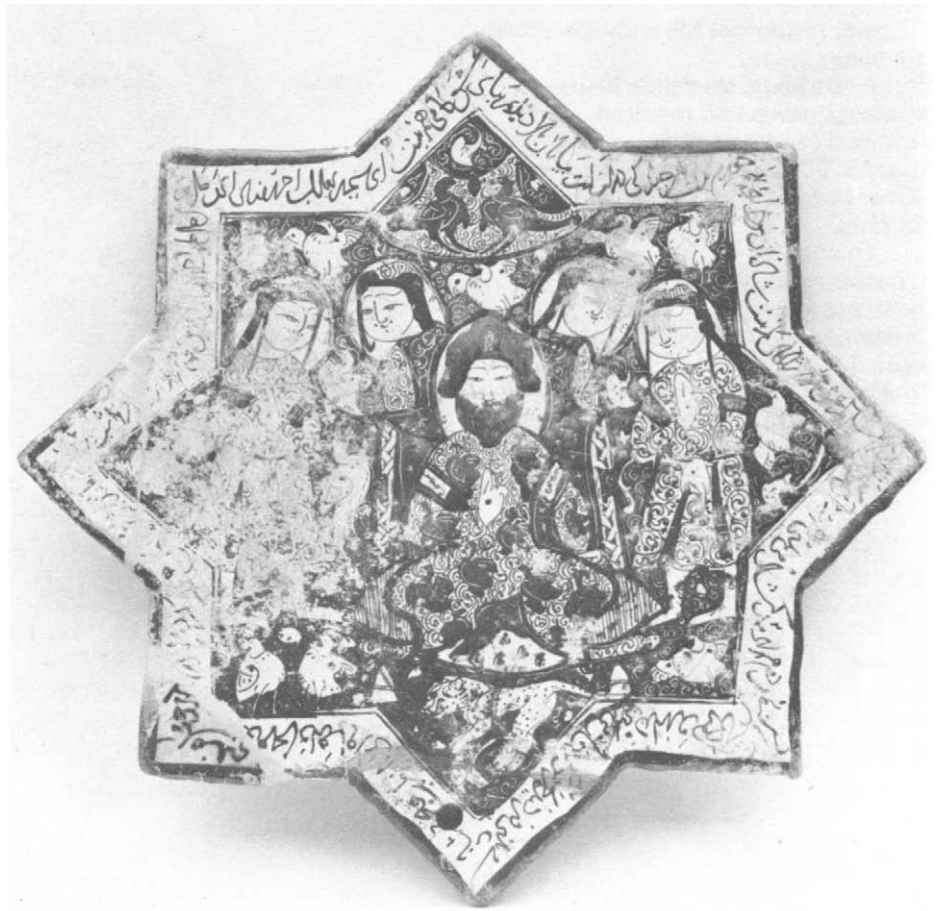


Luster tiles decorating secular buildings in the pre-Ilkhanid period (before the Mongol invasions in the mid-thirteenth century) can be roughly divided into two series: small polygonal luster tiles, measuring 3 3/4 to 6 inches (9.5 to 13.2 cm), as represented here, and large star and cross tiles, measuring about 12 1/4 inches (31.1 cm) like cat. nos. 7 and 8. The most common shape of the smaller tiles is the eight-pointed star; they were combined with monochrome-glazed tiles as seen in a panel in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; other shapes are six-pointed stars, or sometimes hexagonal tiles, like cat. no. 6.a. The figures on them are usually small animals or seated men; inscriptions are rare on these tiles. Two styles of painting are recognized: minute painting in thin lines accompanying vegetal decoration and scratched spirals on the luster background as on cat. no. 6.a (the “Kashan Style,” according to Oliver Watson); and rougher paintings in bold lines accompanying vegetal scrolls painted on solid backgrounds as on cat. no. 6.b (the “Monumental Style”).



Unpublished.

7.
Luster eight-pointed star tile with a royal scene
 Composite body, overglaze luster-painted with touches of turquoise color; broken and repaired
 Dated A.H. 608 / A.D. 1211–12
 Max. W. 12 3/8 in. (31.4 cm)
 Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1940
 (40.181.1)



This tile belongs to the larger type of secular pre-Ilkhanid tiles, i.e., eight-pointed luster-painted star tiles showing human figures, measuring about 12 1/4 inches (31.1 cm). These tiles usually contain a border inscription of quatrains in Persian; nine of these tiles are dated and four are signed by Abū Zayd. As their dates range from A.H. 600 to 609 (A.D. 1203 to 1213), it is clear that they were not all used on one building. The painting of this tile shows a traditional scene: a bearded ruler seated under a canopy and attended by four courtiers. The presence of a leopard crouched in front of him, together with bird motifs, may imply that the scene is set out-of-doors. The style of painting is Oliver Watson's "Kashan style" with minute depiction. Although the inscription here is written in a highly running cursive style and is in bad condition, it is possible to distinguish three quatrains, one of which has been read by Mehdi Bahrami, and a date of A.H. 608 (A.D. 1211–12). The translation of one of the Persian quatrains is as follows: "In the realm of love, sadness is not less than happiness; / Those who are not happy with sadness do not know happiness; / However long

the desert of evil might be, / we saw it is less than a step, comparing to love." The painting does not illustrate the text of the inscription. Strangely enough, Persian quatrains written on tiles usually express the agony of love but have no relationship to the paintings except in a very few cases.

Literature:
 MMA, 1931, no. 48; Bahrami, 1936, p. 185, pl. LXVI.c; Bahrami, 1937, pp. 57–58, fig. 22; Ettinghausen, 1939, p. 1675, no. 29; Dimand, 1941, p. 70, fig. 1; Dimand, 1944, fig. 117; Papadopoulo, 1978, p. 432, no. 444.

8.

a. Fragment of a luster cross tile with human figures

Composite body, overglaze luster-painted

First half of 13th century

4 1/8 x 3 1/4 in. (10.5 x 8.3 cm)

Purchase, 1911 (11.142.4)

b. Luster cross tile with human figures

Composite body, overglaze luster-painted; restored

First half of 13th century

12 1/2 x 12 1/2 in. (31.8 x 31.8 cm)

Fletcher Fund, 1964 (64.60.4)

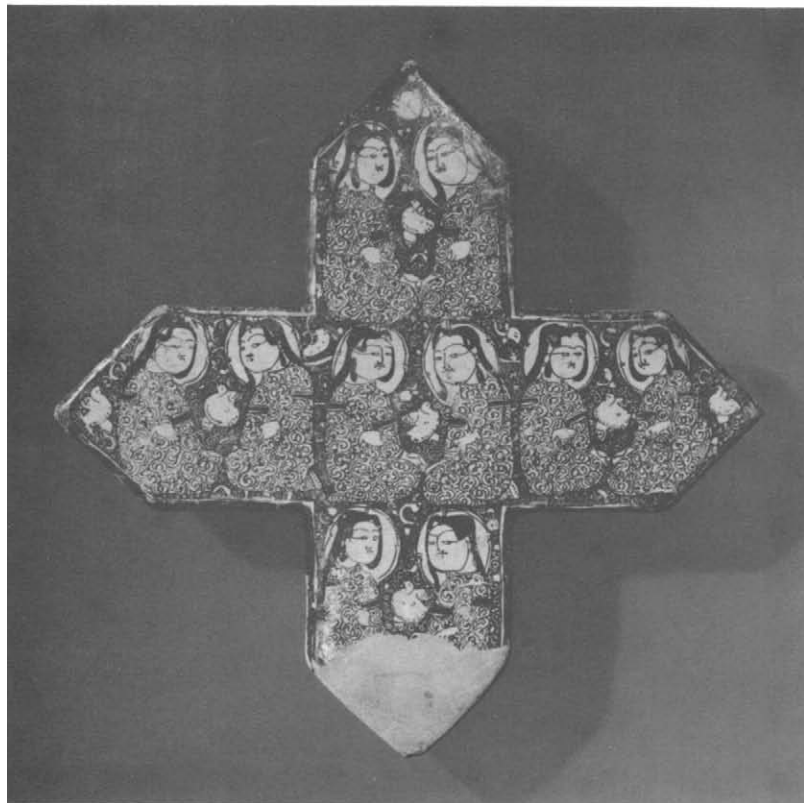


These cross tiles were probably combined with large eight-pointed star tiles, such as cat. no. 7, to form a panel since their shape, style of painting, and size fit well with them. These are among the earliest surviving cross-shaped tiles. Both these tiles include pairs of confronted, seated figures with halos, painted in reserve. The background pattern is formed by scrolls scratched into the luster ground; the same treatment is visible on the men's robes; and small flying birds and leaves are painted in reserve in the background. The border inscription on these two cross-shaped tiles is missing. As a matter of fact, it is usually present only on the star tiles that are combined on a panel with the cross-shaped tiles.

Literature:

8.a. Unpublished.

8.b. *Asia House*, 1963, p. 133 no. 68; Grube, 1965, pp. 221–222, fig. 22.



9.
Fragment of a luster eight-pointed star
tile with a human figure
Composite body, overglaze luster-
painted
First half of 13th century, excavated at
Nishapur
3 3/4 x 3 1/2 in. (9.5 x 8.9 cm)
Excavations of The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, 1937
Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.40.223)



According to its probable reconstruction, the original shape of this fragmentary tile excavated at Nishapur was an eight-pointed star. Its style of painting clearly belongs to the same group of the above-mentioned large star and cross tiles (cat. nos. 7–8); this tile shows the upper part of the body of a haloed human figure, a flying bird, and vegetal ornament; the background is formed again by spirals scratched into the luster field. This star-shaped tile, however, does not contain a border inscription.

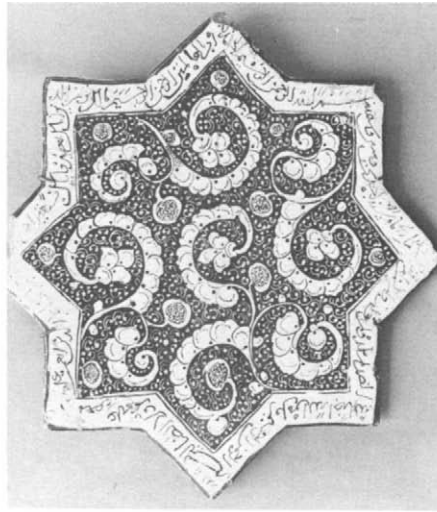
Unpublished.

10.

a. Luster eight-pointed star tile with vegetal decoration

Composite body, overglaze luster-painted; restored

Ilkhanid period, dated A.H. 661 / A.D. 1262–63, from a dado of the Imāmzādah Yaḥyā in Varamin
Max. W. 12 1/4 in. (31.1 cm)
Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.100)



b–c. Two fragments of luster cross tiles with abstract patterns

Composite body, overglaze luster-painted

Ilkhanid period, from a dado of the Imāmzādah Yaḥyā in Varamin, dated Dhū al-ḥijja 660 to Ṣafar A.H. 661 / October–December A.D. 1262

Larger fragment: 4 1/8 x 3 1/2 in. (10.5 x 8.9 cm)

Smaller fragment: 3 x 3 1/2 in. (7.6 x 8.9 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1908 (08.169.4)



The earliest dated Ilkhanid luster tiles form the combination of star and cross tiles from the decoration of the dado at the Imāmzādah Yaḥyā in Varamin. According to the inscription on a tombstone now in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, this building in Varamin enshrined the body of the Imām Yaḥyā, whose biography is unknown. More than 150 tiles are known from the dado of the building, and they have found their way into museums all around the world. They are eight-pointed star or cross tiles with vegetal or geometric designs on the main field, measuring about 12 1/4 in. (31.1 cm), painted in monochrome luster without touches of other colors. Both star and cross tiles are bordered by Qur'anic inscriptions; some of them have dates ranging from the months of Dhū al-ḥijja 660 to Ṣafar A.H. 661 / October–December A.D. 1262. The inscription running around the border of cat. no. 10.a is from Qur'an 1:1–7 followed by 112:1–4, and finally by the date *bi-ta'riḫ māh-i sana iḥdā wa sittīn wa sittumī'a* ("in a month of the year one and sixty and six hundred [A.D. 1262–63]"). It is interesting to note that the word *māh* for "month" is Persian, while the rest of the date is in Arabic.

The use of Persian is highly unusual for a date, or part of it, on tiles in this period. The two pieces in cat. no. 10.b-c are fragments of arms of cross tiles of the same series. The border bands contain Qur'anic inscriptions: the larger fragment 1:6-7, followed by the *basmala* (the formula that opens all suras of the Qur'an except sura 9: *bismillāh al-rahīmān al-rahīm*, "In the name of God, the Clement, the Merciful"), and by the words *wa man* (meaning "and he who," probably the beginning of another section of the Qur'an); the smaller fragment contains Qur'an 2:255.

Literature:

10.a. Dimand, 1928–29, pp. 99–113, no. 1, fig. 1; Dimand, 1930, p. 130, fig. 72; Ettinghausen, 1936, pp. 50–51, note 15; Ettinghausen, 1939, p. 1678, no. 49; Dimand, 1944, fig. 130; Bowie, 1970, no. 214.
10.b–c. Unpublished.

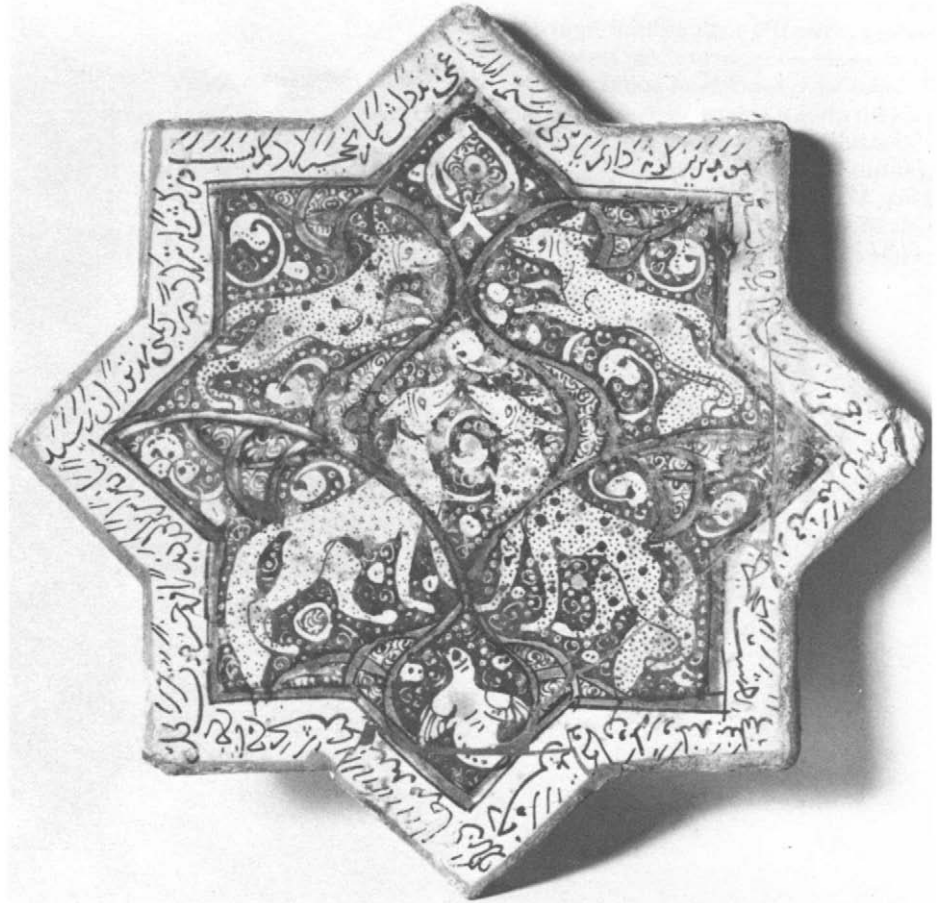
11.
Luster eight-pointed star tile with
Qur'anic inscription
Composite body, overglaze luster-
painted
Ilkhanid period, dated Ramaḍān A.H.
663 / June A.D. 1265
Max. W. 8 1/8 in. (20.6 cm)
Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest
of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.105)



This tile belongs to another set of smaller star and cross tiles with similar vegetal and abstract designs as those from Varamin (cat. no. 10) and Qur'anic inscriptions. Several of these tiles are owned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art (see a panel in Gallery 4c). This tile is dated Ramaḍān A.H. 663 / June A.D. 1265. From about this date on, the size of star and cross tiles was standardized to about 8 inches (20.3 cm). The inscription includes the entire first sura of the Qur'an. There is a rough sketch of a seated man on the unglazed back side—it is probably just an exercise by an artist in the workshop because the drawing is neither finished nor luster-painted.

Literature:
Dimand, 1928–29, no. 2, fig. 2; Ettinghausen, 1939, p. 1679, no. 55; Watson, 1985, p. 191, Appendix III, No. 31; Schimmel, 1992, no. 36a, p. 28, p. 30.

12.
Luster eight-pointed star tile with animal figures
 Composite body, overglaze luster-painted with touches of cobalt blue and turquoise colors; broken and repaired
 Ilkhanid period, dated Sha^cbān A.H. 665 / April–May A.D. 1267
 Max. W. 8 in. (20.3 cm)
 Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1941
 (41.165.17)



In general, star and cross tiles with animal or human figures are regarded as coming from secular buildings, such as palaces and residences of dignitaries (see a panel in Gallery 4b). The border inscriptions, which are present exclusively on star tiles, are either a combination of quatrains or quotations from epic literature. The quotation on this tile is from the beginning of the story of Rustam and Suhrāb from the *Shāhnāmah*, “The Book of Kings,” by Firdawsī. In these verses, the hero Rustam is setting out for the hunt in a sad mood that foreshadows the kidnapping of his steed Rakhsh. These verses are the most popular citation from the *Shāhnāmah* on tiles and other ceramic products from this period; however, the reason why they were so prevalent is not yet clear. The painting shows two pairs of confronted foxes with humorous facial expressions, a subject that is not related to the contents of the inscription. The tile is highlighted by touches of turquoise and cobalt blue colors. An imprint showing a seated couple on its back was transferred from another tile stacked under it during the firing process. The imprint is slightly offset,

which gives us an idea about how potters in this period arranged tiles in their kilns for firing.

Literature:
 MMA, 1981, no. 36; Watson, 1985, pl. 5.

13.

Luster cross tile with animal figures
Composite body, overglaze luster-
painted with touches of cobalt blue
and turquoise colors
Ilkhanid period, second half of 13th
century

Max. W. 8 in. (20.3 cm)

Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1941
(41.165.36)



Luster eight-pointed star tiles containing figural images and secular inscriptions such as cat. no. 12 were combined with cross tiles to form a dado panel. The cross tiles were decorated with small animals, birds, plants, or sometimes abstract motifs. The four animals depicted here, each in one arm, are probably foxes. The upper and lower, the right and the left form pairs; each pair is represented in a symmetrical posture. This tile also has an imprint of another cross tile with a similar composition on the back.

Unpublished.

14.
**Fragmentary eight-pointed-star tile
with human figures**
**Composite body, underglaze luster-
and cobalt-painted over white slip;
broken and repaired**
**Ilkhanid period, dated A.H. 665 / A.D.
1266-1267**
4 7/8 x 6 5/8 in. (12.4 x 16.8 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1971 (1971.235.4)



In this piece, although the motif is typical of the period, the technique appears to be unique. The luster is painted over the white slip and under the transparent glaze, unlike almost all luster wares where luster is applied over opaque white glaze. The painting shows two haloed seated figures in the act of drinking under a tent; in front of them is a pond where a fish swims; horses' heads are visible on both sides of the tent; the background is filled with dots and spirals. The style is minute and careful, certainly belonging to the finest pottery drawing of the period. This tile shows one of the earliest examples of the use of a cobalt blue background for the inscribed border. The calligraphy is more legible than on later works with a blue background. The glaze over the inscription is damaged, therefore it is not possible to identify the Persian poem it contains. However, the date of A.H. 665 is legible. This tile also has an imprint of another star tile with vegetal decoration on the back.

Unpublished.

15.
Luster mihrab tile
 Composite body, molded and over-
 glaze luster-painted; broken and
 repaired
 Ilkhanid period, second half of 13th
 century
 14 x 14 in. (35.6 x 35.6 cm)
 Bequest of William Milne Grinnell,
 1920 (20.120.219)



The column in relief on the right side of this tile indicates its position on the lower central part of a mihrab. Usually a complete mihrab formed by luster tiles consists of a few large square or rectangular tiles mounted so that they form a rectangular central section surrounded by a few layers of inscriptional friezes. This central section is in the shape of a pointed arch made of an inscriptional band in relief and supported by two half-columns. The pentagonal field enclosed by the arch is filled with vegetal scrolls as seen on cat. nos. 16 and 25. The space between the two half-columns usually contains a second pointed arch, two half-columns, and a surrounding inscriptional frieze in a reduced scale; sometimes this unit is duplicated in a further reduced scale between the two smaller half-columns, thus giving the idea of several mihrabs inside mihrabs. The present tile constitutes one of these smaller units of a mihrab. The original color of the luster was probably close to the one on the tiles from Varamin (cat. no. 10); the abstract pattern on the half-column is almost the same as that on cat. nos. 10.b-c, datable to about 1262; the use of lotus flowers is recorded after the middle of the thir-

teenth century when Chinese motifs were brought to Persia. Therefore, this tile also can be dated from the second half of the thirteenth century. There are four Qur'anic inscriptional bands: at the top in large letters is 59:22; in the border running at a right angle beneath it is 59:21; in the inner stepped border is 9:109; a small inscription sandwiched between the first and the second band is 59:22 and 24.

Literature:
 Bowie, 1970, no. 220.

16.
Luster tile from a mihrab
Composite body, molded, overglaze
luster-painted with touches of cobalt
blue and turquoise colors; broken and
repaired
Ilkhanid period, second half of 13th
century
13 x 13 1/2 in. (33 x 34.3 cm)
Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest
of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.1525)



The main pattern of this tile is a large vegetal scroll design in relief painted in cobalt. The background is filled with smaller vegetal scrolls in reserve on luster with touches of turquoise. The design is typical of tiles set in the central part of a mihrab; it is usually surrounded by an inscriptional border band forming a pointed arch and supported by two half-columns as described in cat. no. 15 (see also cat. no. 25). This tile is reported to have come from Isfahan; the British Museum owns another tile in an almost identical style and design.

Unpublished.

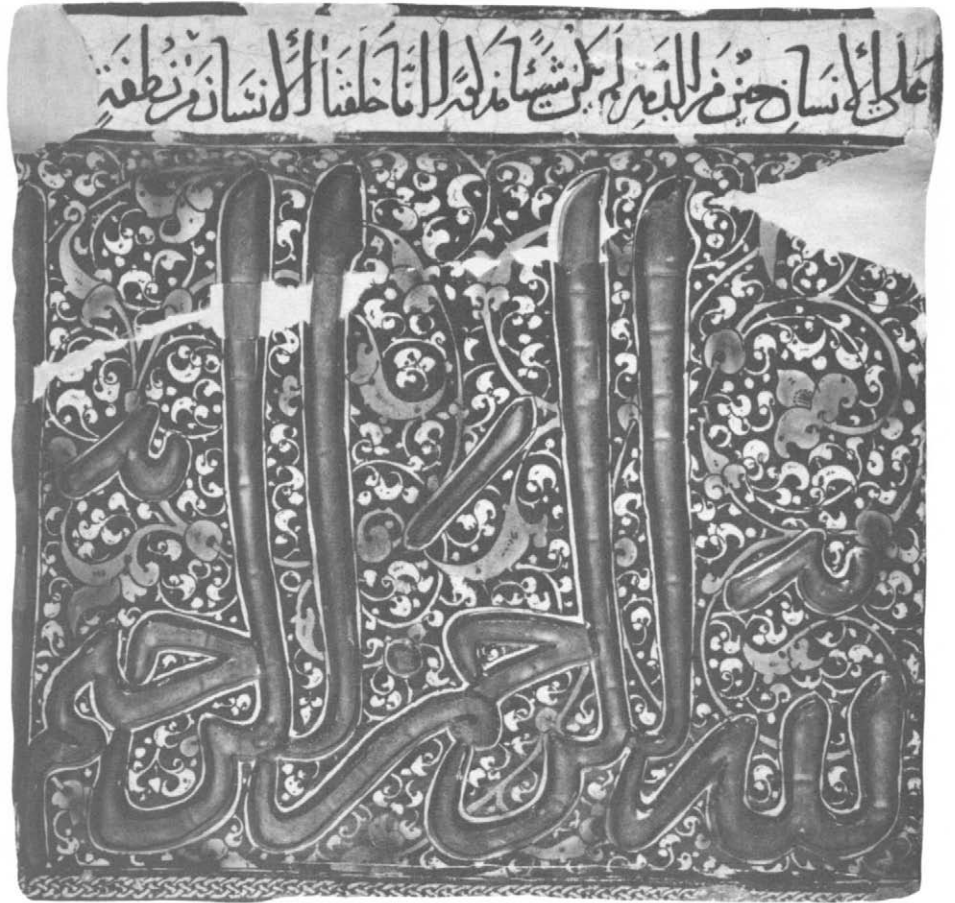
17.

Luster frieze tile with Qur'anic inscriptions

Composite body, molded, overglaze luster-painted with touches of cobalt blue and turquoise colors; restored Ilkhanid period, second half of 13th century

15 7/8 x 16 in. (40.3 x 40.6 cm)

Edward C. Moore Collection, Gift of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.109)



This large religious tile was once part of a monumental frieze. The surface is divided into three fields: the upper and the middle are inscribed, the lower field is decorated with interlocking ribbons. The background of the central field is filled with vegetal scrolls in reserve, highlighted in turquoise color. On the upper field is a quotation from Qur'an 76:1–2, minutely written in a clear cursive handwriting. The main inscription is in relief and painted in cobalt blue, containing the second half of the *basmala* formula: “. . . God, the Clement, the Merciful.” Two other tiles from the same frieze are known in the Godman Collection at the British Museum and in the L. A. Mayer Memorial Collection in Jerusalem. They include inscriptions from sura 76 on the upper field and from sura 17 on the main field.

Unpublished.

18.

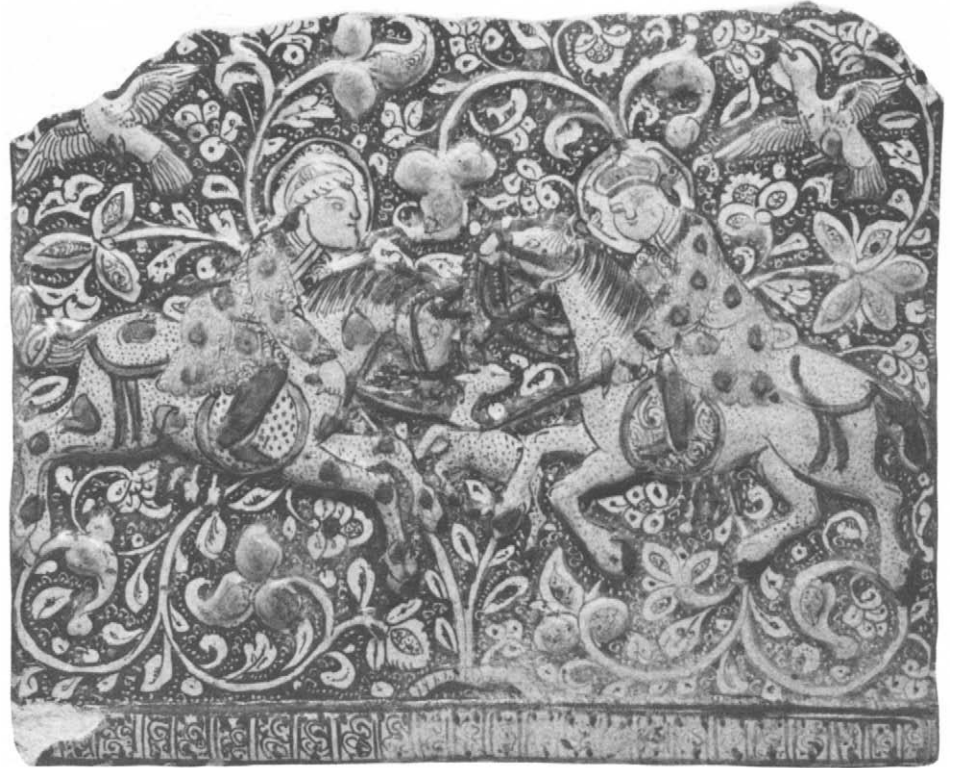
Fragment of a luster frieze tile with two hunters

Composite body, molded, overglaze luster-painted with touches of cobalt blue and turquoise colors

Ilkhanid period, second half of 13th century, probably from the palace of Takht-i Sulaymān

10 3/4 x 13 1/4 in. (27.3 x 33.7 cm)

Gift of George Blumenthal, 1910 (10.9.1)



This tile shows two horsemen hunting a deer; it is molded in relief and painted in luster with touches of turquoise and cobalt blue. Both style and subject are very similar to those found on the tiles excavated at Takht-i Sulaymān, a ruined Ilkhanid palace in Azerbaijan, built in the 1270s. A kiln was excavated within the walls of Takht-i Sulaymān and pottery appliances and some molds were found. Therefore, it is clear that some tiles were produced at the site. Another similar tile depicting Bahrām Gūr and Azādah in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (10.56.2, Gallery 4a) seems to have come from the same palace. The surface of a typical frieze tile from Takht-i Sulaymān is divided into three fields: the upper field contains a procession of animals; the main field depicts a scene of battle or hunting, sometimes taken from the *Shāhnāmah*; and the lower field shows a narrow band of vegetal or geometric decoration. Thus, it is most likely that the missing upper part of this tile once showed a procession of animals.

Literature:
Riefstahl, 1922, fig. 13.

19.
Luster frieze tile with a phoenix
Composite body, molded, overglaze
luster-painted with touches of cobalt
blue and turquoise colors
Ilkhanid period, from the palace of
Takht-i Sulaymān, ca. 1270–80
14 1/4 x 14 3/4 in. (36.2 x 37.5 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.49.4)



The main field of another type of molded frieze tile from Takht-i Sulaymān shows a dragon or a phoenix in relief in the Chinese style and set on a background of Chinese clouds. Although all the tiles with this motif excavated at the site are in the *lājvardīnah* technique, luster versions apparently made from the same molds are known from various collections. This tile is an important testimony to the transmission of Chinese motifs, including the dragon and phoenix of imperial symbolism, during the early Ilkhanid period in Persia. It is known that the Mongols brought Chinese craftsmen to their court in Persia; however, since the technique used here is totally Persian, it is likely that Persian craftsmen produced this tile in imitation of Chinese models.

Literature:
Dimand, 1936, fig. 13; Dimand, 1944, fig. 132;
Melikian-Chirvani, 1991, pp. 102–103, pl. XI,
fig. 19.20.

20.

Luster frieze tile

Composite body, overglaze luster-painted with touches of cobalt blue and turquoise colors; restored Ilkhanid period, dated Shawwāl(?) A.H. 707 / March-April(?) A.D. 1308, from the shrine of ʿAbd al-Ṣamād at Natanz

15 x 15 in. (38.1 x 38.1 cm)

Gift of Émile Rey, 1912 (12.44)

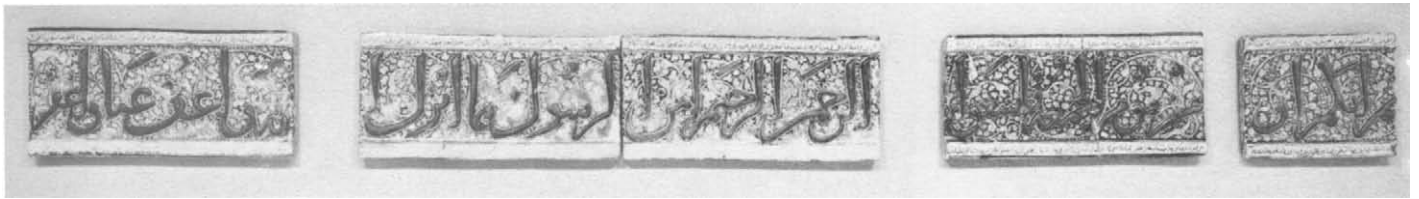


This tile is divided into three horizontal fields: the upper field forms an ornamental border with plants and confronted birds, which are unusual for tiles of a religious nature and probably for this reason they have been defaced; the larger central field contains an inscription in relief painted in blue and the background is filled with birds, again defaced, and scrolls; the lower field forms a narrow register of patterns set in compartments. The Arabic inscription reads: ...l sana sab^c wa sab^ctumi^ʿa (“...l, the year seven and seven hundred [A.D. 1307–8]”). The “l” before the year is probably the last letter of the name of the Arabic month “Shawwāl”; if this is the case, the date would be limited to March 25–April 22, A.D. 1308. Although the presence of the birds would suggest its use on a secular building, this tile belongs to a frieze of the tomb of the sufi shaykh ʿAbd al-Ṣamād at Natanz. Sheila Blair suggests that this frieze used to run atop six rows of star and cross tiles on the wall of the shrine.

About twenty tiles in various collections are known from this frieze, which contains quotations from sura 76.

Literature:

Dimand, 1928–29, no. 3, fig. 3; Dimand, 1930, p. 130; Ettinghausen, 1939, p. 1684, no. 101; Dimand, 1944, p. 202; Watson, 1985, p. 195, Appendix III, no. 103; Blair, 1986a, pp. 50, 64, pl. 53; Blair, 1986b, p. 394, n. 21.



21.

Luster frieze tiles with Qur'anic inscription

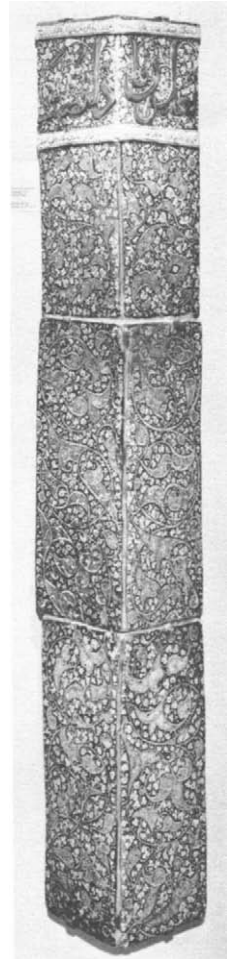
Composite body, molded, overglaze luster-painted with touches of cobalt blue and turquoise colors; restored Ilkhanid period, early 14th century

- a. 7 1/2 x 9 in. (19.1 x 22.9 cm)
Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1940 (40.181.13)
- b. 7 1/2 x 15 3/4 in. (19.1 x 40 cm)
(X.111)
- c. 17 1/4 x 9 in. (43.8 x 22.9 cm)
Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1940 (40.181.9)
- d. 17 1/4 x 9 in. (43.8 x 22.9 cm)
Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1940 (40.181.7)
- e. 17 1/4 x 9 in. (43.8 x 22.9 cm)
Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1940 (40.181.8)
- f. 7 1/2 x 15 5/8 in. (19.1 x 39.7 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Frederick F. Thompson, 1915 (15.76.4)
- g. 7 1/2 x 15 7/8 in. (19.1 x 40.3 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Frederick F. Thompson, 1915 (15.76.5)
- h. 7 1/2 x 15 5/8 in. (19.1 x 39.7 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Frederick F. Thompson, 1915 (15.76.6)

All these tiles belong to the same decoration of a building, whose location is unknown. According to the inscriptions, it is possible to say that the first two frieze tiles (a–b) were separated from the last three (f–h) by the three corner tiles (c–e). About twelve more tiles are known from the same series in addition to these eight in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Six of the twenty known tiles are corner tiles (cat. nos. 21.c, d, e here, exhibited in Gallery 4b; one in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; and two in the Godman Collection at the British Museum, London); therefore it may be suggested that the frieze once decorated wall surfaces with corners as dadoes. According to Sheila Blair, these tiles may, instead, have covered the cenotaph of the tomb of ‘Abd al-Šamad in Natanz mentioned in cat. no. 20 (Blair, 1986a, p. 65). The surface of each tile is divided into two border fields and a large central one, each carrying Qur’anic inscriptions. The quotations are selected from various verses of suras from the Qur’an, although none of them forms a complete sura.

The upper inscription: 48:25 (a); 55:44–50 (b); 55:65–70 (c); 34:37–38 (f); 34:39–40 (g); 34:40–42(h). The main inscription: 42:6 (a); 42:9 (b); 42:9–10 (c); the second half of the basmala and 2:285 (f); 2:285 (g); 2:286 (h). The lower inscription: 56:52–56 (a); 34:12–13 (b); 34:18–19 (c).

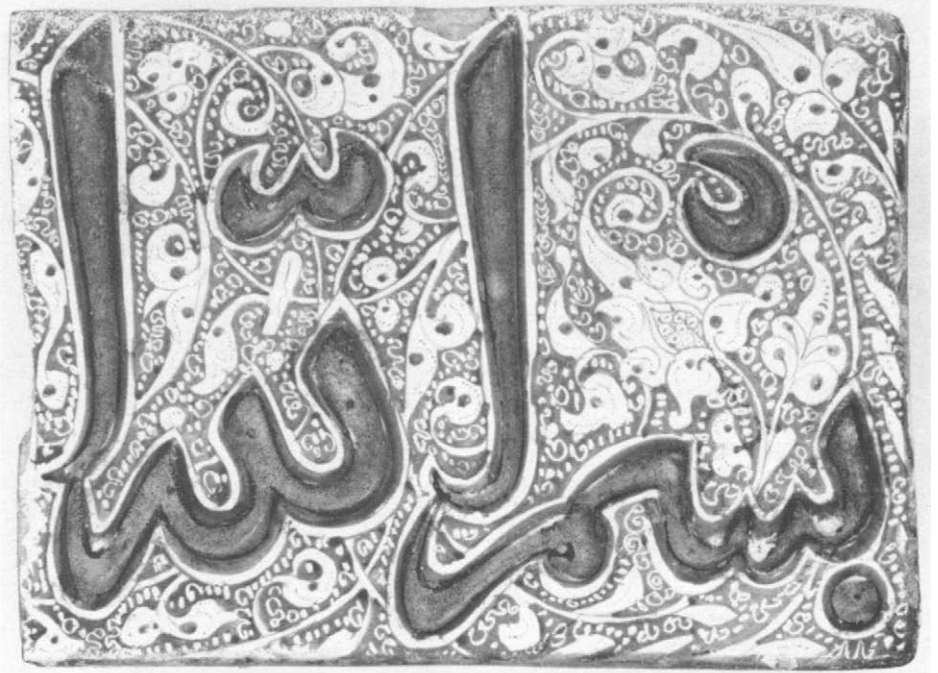
Literature:
MMA, 1931, nos. 78–80 (c, d, and e); Dimand, 1941, pp. 70–73 (a, c, d, and e), fig. 2 (c); Asia House, 1963, no. 66 (b); Bowie, 1970, no. 215 (h); Schimmel, 1992, no. 35 (f).



22.

Luster frieze tile with Qur'anic inscription

Composite body, molded, overglaze luster-painted with touches of cobalt blue color; broken and repaired
Ilkhanid period, early 14th century
5 7/8 x 8 1/8 in. (14.9 x 20.6 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1975 (1975.117.2)



This is a frieze tile with an inscription containing the first half of the *basmala*: “In the name of God . . .” The letters, written in *thuluth* (one of the cursive styles of Arabic calligraphy), are molded in relief and painted in cobalt blue. The background is filled with vegetal scrolls, palmettes, dots, and spirals in reserve on the luster. There are two more tiles that seem to come from the same frieze in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.181.14 and 40.181.15), and others in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Österreichischen Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna, and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence. All those tiles contain quotations from Qur’an 36:7–28. Sheila Blair suggests that these are also from the tomb of ‘Abd al-Şamād in Natanz, but from the south wall (Blair, 1986a, p. 64).

Unpublished.

23.

Two tiles from a mihrab

Composite body, molded, overglaze
luster-painted with touches of cobalt
blue and turquoise colors

Ilkhanid period, from the Imāmzādah

ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar at Qumm, dated

Ramaḍān A.H. 734 / May A.D. 1334

17 1/4 x 15 1/2 in. (43.8 x 39.4 cm)

Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1940

(40.181.5 and 6)

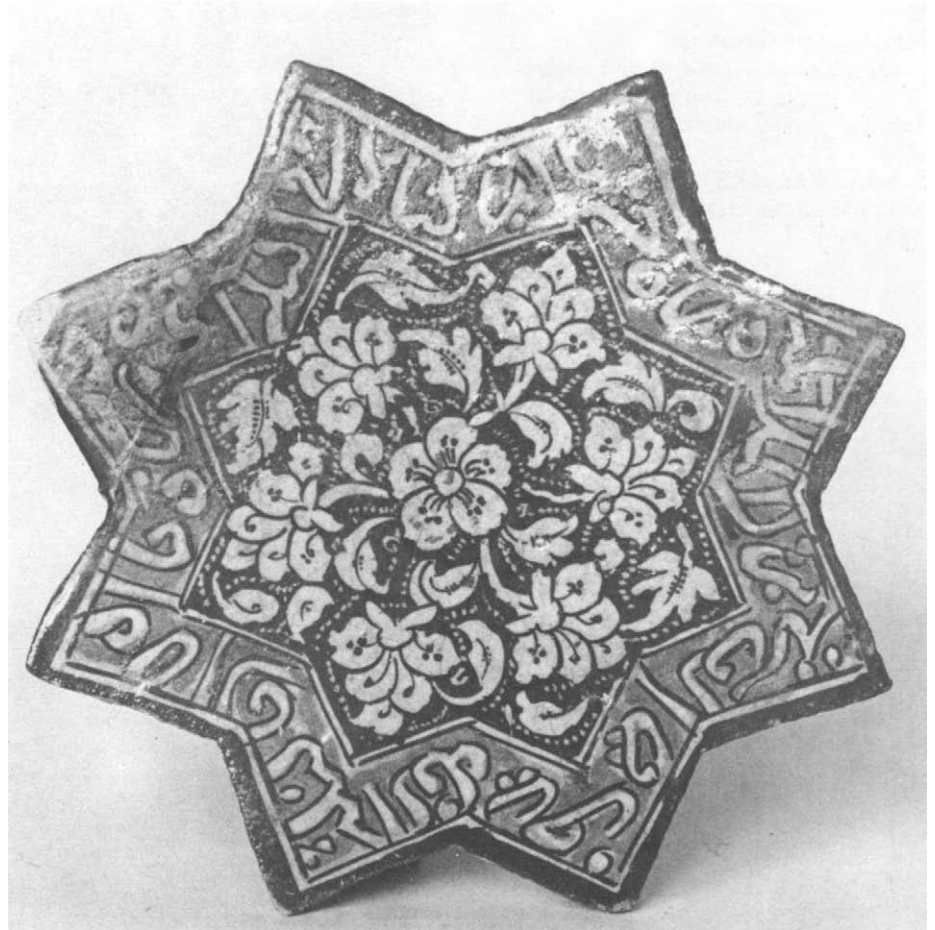
These two tiles come from the mihrab of a building now known as the Imāmzādah ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar in Qumm, which is actually a tomb of two shiʿite saints: ʿAlī, the son of the sixth imam Jaʿfar al-Šādiq, and Muḥammad, the son of the seventh imam Mūsā al-Kāzim and nephew of ʿAlī. This mihrab is now in the Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran; the first five tiles of the inscriptional frieze surrounding this mihrab are a modern replacement, according to photographs taken in the 1930s in which they are missing. The mihrab bears the date A.H. 734 / A.D. 1334 and the signature by Yūsuf ibn ʿAlī Muḥammad ibn Abī Ṭāhir, a member of the fourth and last generation of a well-known family of potters from Kashan. Six works, including this mihrab, are known to be by Yūsuf and their dates span the years from A.D. 705 to 734 / A.D. 1305 to 1334. Indeed, these two tiles are examples of the last stage in the production of luster tiles from Kashan: the decorations of the upper field and the background of the main field follow typical decorative treatments of Kashan pottery, but they lack the precision and care in drawing as apparent in earlier tiles. The inscriptions of the two tiles containing the second half of the *basmalav* “the Clement, the Merciful” and Qur’an 7:54, indicate that 40.181.5 is the second tile, and that 40.181.6 is the fifth of the original five now missing from the mihrab in the Iran Bastan Museum. The remaining three have not yet been recorded in the literature.

Literature:

MMA, 1931, nos. 76 and 77; Dimand, 1941, p. 73; Grube, 1962, p. 173, figs. 17 and 18; Watson, 1985, p. 196, Appendix III, no. 123.



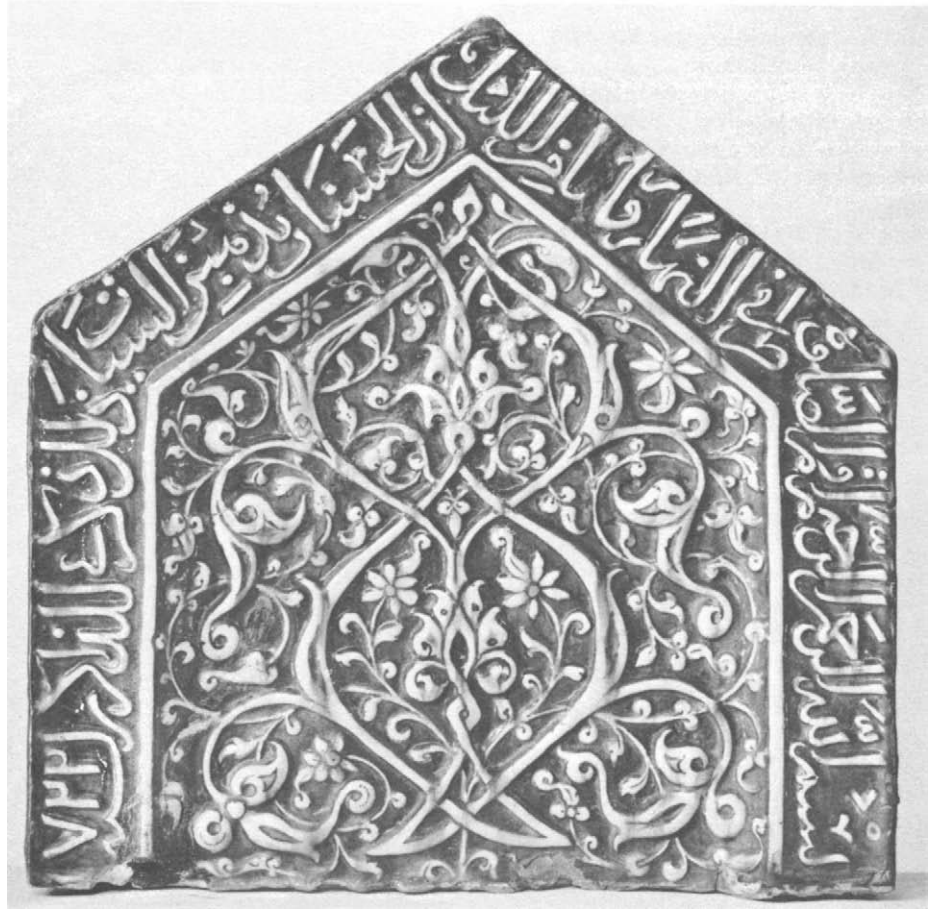
24.
Luster eight-pointed star tile with
Qur'anic inscription
Composite body, overglaze luster-
painted with touches of cobalt blue
color; broken and repaired
Ilkhanid period, first half of 14th cen-
tury
Max. W. 8 1/4 in. (21 cm)
Bequest of William Milne Grinnell,
1920 (20.120.50)



In the fourteenth century, most of the eight-pointed star tiles have inscriptional borders reserved in white on a cobalt blue background. This extensive use of cobalt on this type of tile provides a link between luster tiles of the previous century and tiles in the so-called Sultānābād style of the fourteenth century (see cat. nos. 25–26). The inscription is here outlined with luster pigment but the writing is often too hurried, and some diacritical marks are wrongly indicated. The inscription contains sura 97:1–4 of the Qur'an. Because of the wide border, the central image becomes smaller and less elaborated. Six flowers extending from the central flower are irregularly disposed within the frame of the eight-pointed star, showing a somewhat careless drawing. The background of the main field is filled with dots.

Unpublished.

25.
Polychrome mihrab tile
Composite body, molded and under-
glaze-painted; broken and repaired
Ilkhanid period, dated A.H. 722 / A.D.
1322
27 3/8 x 26 in. (69.5 x 66 cm)
Gift of William Mandel, 1983
(1983.345)



Cobalt blue pigment became much more extensively used in the early fourteenth century. In the so-called Sultānābād pottery, the patterns are usually painted in reserve on a cobalt-blue background with touches of turquoise, black, green, and aubergine. This is one of a few surviving examples of mihrab tiles in this style. As already noticed on the luster mihrab tiles cat. nos. 15 and 16, this polychrome tile has an inscriptional border forming a pentagon and is patterned with vegetal scrolls; only the technique is different. The inscription is from Qur'an 11:114; the date A.H. 722 (A.D. 1322) is given in Arabic numerals.

Literature:
Welch, 1983–84, p. 36; Schimmel, 1992, pp. 29–30, pl. 29.

26.
Polychrome eight-pointed star tile
with vegetal decoration
Composite body, molded and under-
glaze-painted
Ilkhanid period, first half of 14th cen-
tury
Max. W. 7 3/4 in. (19.7 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1908 (08.110.14)



Eight-pointed stars of the so-called Sulṭānābād type show simpler and less crowded motifs than those in luster technique. On this tile the image includes a branch with a large flower, smaller flowers, and leaves; the background is matte cobalt blue without any dots or spirals; the border is a white line painted in reserve. Although the tile is painted in several colors, their chromatism is cool, a taste that will continue in the Timurid period in the fifteenth century. Such tiles were usually combined on a dado with turquoise-glazed cross tiles. While all eight-pointed star tiles in this technique lack inscriptional borders and usually show vegetal decorations, the cross tiles combined with them have animal figures in relief. Therefore, they probably come from secular buildings.

Unpublished.

27.

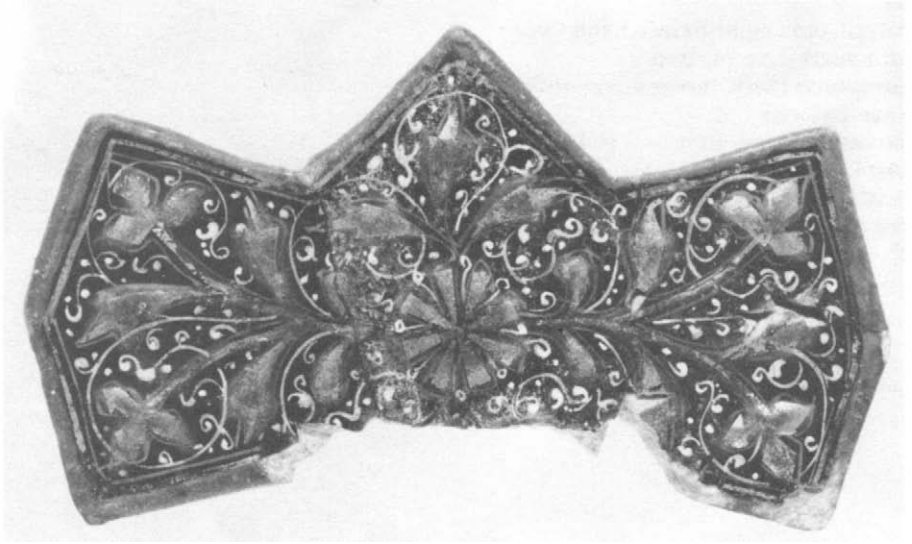
Fragmentary “*lājvardīnah*” polygonal tile with vegetal decoration

Composite body, molded, overglaze-painted, and gilded; broken and repaired

Ilkhanid period, second half of 13th century

4 1/8 x 6 1/8 in. (10.5 x 15.6 cm)

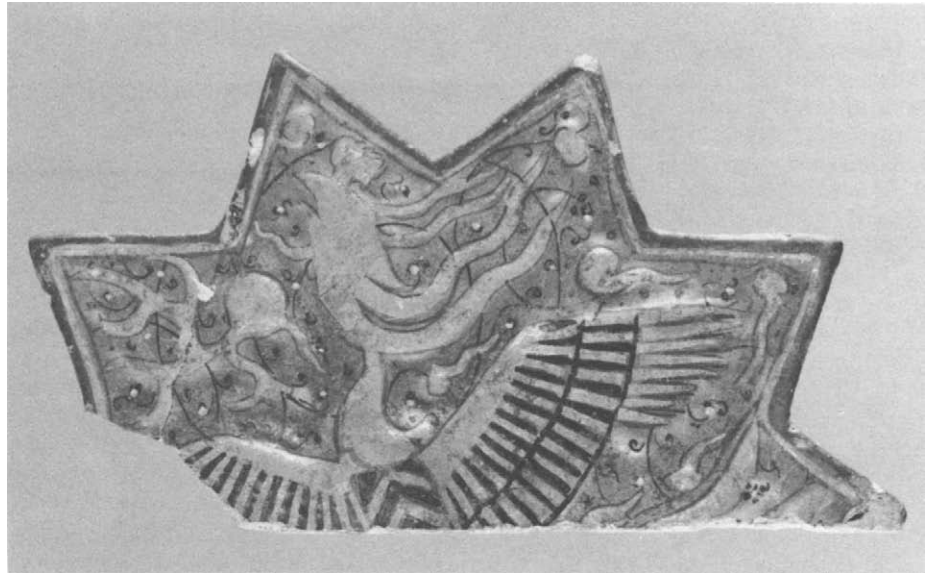
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Sidney A. Charlat, in memory of Richard Ettinghausen, 1991 (1991.224.1)



The original shape of this tile can be described as a twelve-sided polygon with symmetrical axes. Branches with leaves extend from a central rosette within a gilded border. Both the rosette and branches with leaves are gilded and in relief. The background is filled with scrolls and spirals, overglaze-painted in red and white. Although cross and five-pointed star tiles in the *lājvardīnah* technique with similar vegetal ornaments have been excavated at Takht-i Sulaymān, the present shape has no parallel. It is most likely that this tile was combined with others in the *lājvardīnah* technique and in various shapes to form a dado composed of a rather complicated geometrical pattern.

Unpublished.

28.
Half of a "*lājvardīnah*" ten-pointed
star tile with a phoenix
Composite body, molded, overglaze-
painted, and gilded; broken and
repaired
Ilkhanid period, second half of 13th
century
4 x 6 3/4 in. (10.2 x 17.1 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1966 (66.95.8)



As does cat. no. 29, this *lājvardīnah* tile again shows affinities in technique and design with the tiles excavated at Takht-i Sulaymān. Only half of a ten-pointed star tile is left here, but the straight cut at the bottom probably indicates that it was broken deliberately to insert it at the bottom of a dado. Depicted here is a flying phoenix with flowing head feathers among flamelike clouds, a rather common Chinese motif (see cat. no. 19). The background is filled with scrolls painted in black and reddish brown.

Unpublished.

29.

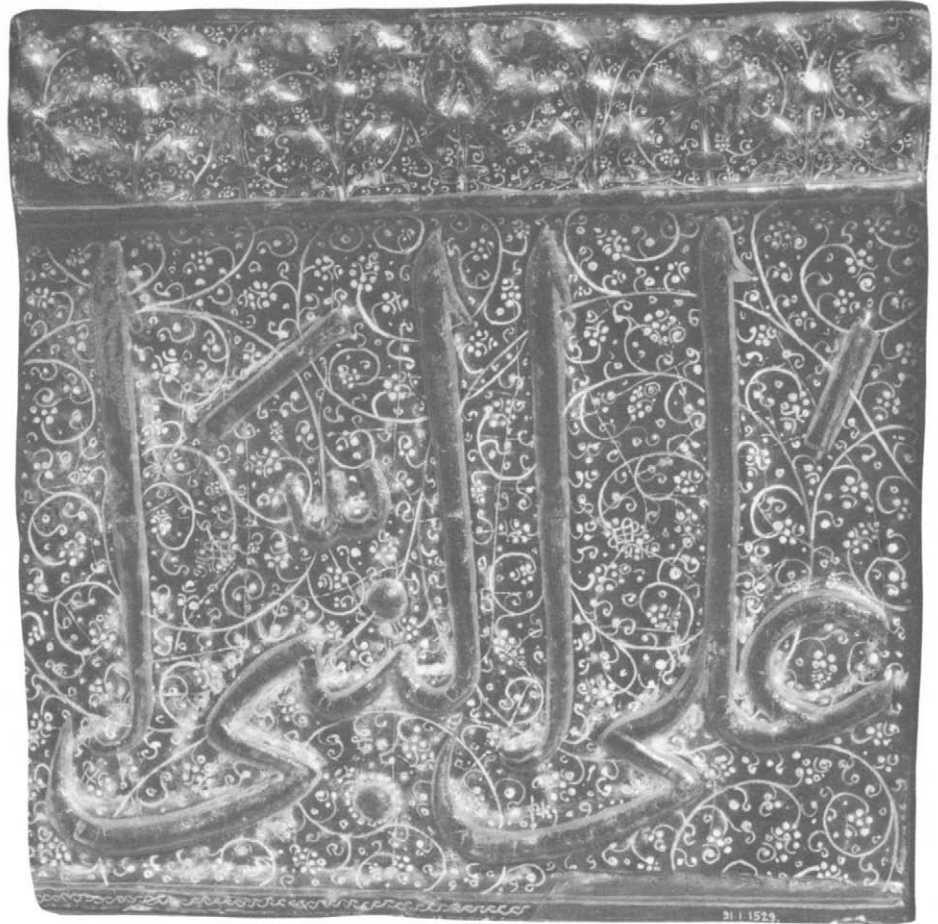
“*Lājvardīnah*” frieze tile with a religious inscription

Composite body, molded, overglaze-painted, and gilded; restored

Ilkhanid period, early 14th century

12 3/4 x 12 1/2 in. (32.4 x 31.8 cm)

Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.1529)



Several *lājvardīnah* frieze tiles with Qur’anic inscriptions are known; they are all similarly executed and show small differences. In these tiles, the glaze is always cobalt blue. The surface is divided, as usual, into three fields; the upper contains a floral decoration, the main field an inscription, and the lower a chainlike decoration. The floral decoration and the inscription are in relief and gilded; the vine scrolls in the background in the upper and main fields are painted over the glaze in red and white. The inscription of this tile reads: *‘alā al-nabī a...* (“[bless] the Prophet...”); the initial *alif* after the word “Prophet” suggests that the inscription is from Qur’an 33:56. As this sura does not appear on any other *lājvardīnah* frieze tile, it is impossible to associate this tile with others in order to establish its provenance.

Literature:

Dimand, 1930, p. 132, fig. 76; SPA, 1939, vol. V, pl. 752a; Dimand, 1944, fig. 133.

30.
 Turquoise-glazed tile
 Composite body, molded and glazed
 Ilkhanid period, dated A.H. 712 / A.D.
 1312-13
 33 1/2 x 19 1/2 in. (85.1 x 49.5 cm)
 Gift of V. Everit Macy, 1925 (25.93)

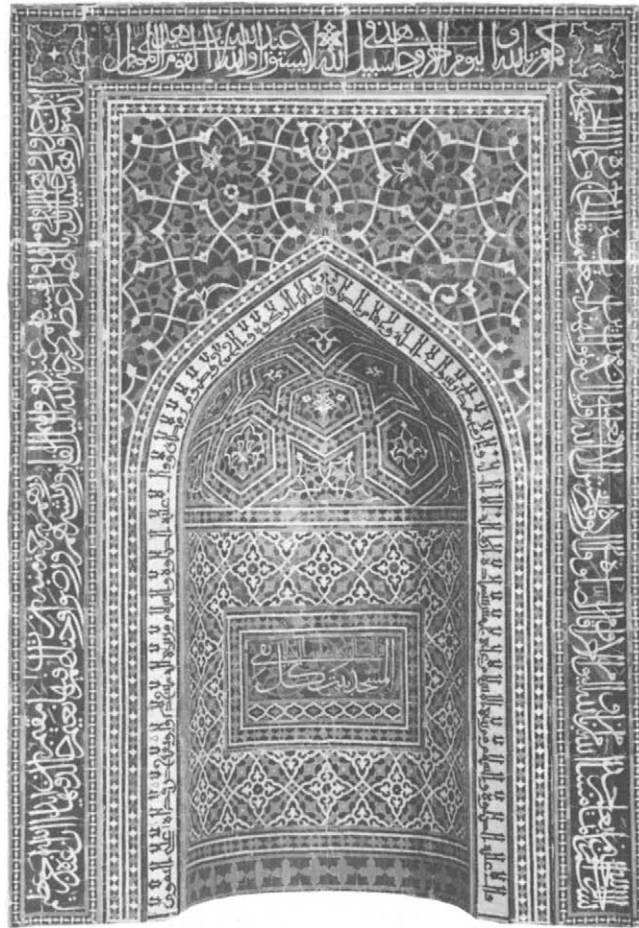


This large rectangular tile is in the shape of a mihrab whose top ends in a lobed pointed arch surmounted by two slender columns. The tile is molded and entirely filled by an inscription in *naskh* (“cursive”) script that starts at the bottom right, runs all along the border, continues horizontally inside the lobed arch, and comes to an end at the bottom of the space inside the niche. A vegetal decoration fills the space left between the arch and the inscripational border. The inscription itself is of shi’ite content since it is in praise of the Twelve Imams: “Oh God, pray for Muḥammad the Chosen, ʿAlī the Favored, Fāṭima the Radiant, Ḥasan the Elect, Ḥusayn the Martyr of Karbalā, [ʿAlī] the Most Beautiful of the Believers, al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq, al-Kāzim, al-Riḍā, al-Taqī, al-Naqī, al-Zakī, and [al-Mahdī] the Standing Proof, the Successor, the Imām, the Master of the Time. Blessings of God upon them all. In the year twelve and seven hundred (A.D. 1312–13).” The date is interesting because it fits in the period of rule of the Ilkhanid Ūljaytū (1304–17), who, born as a Christian, embraced Islam first as a shi’ite, then became an adherent of the *sunna*, only to join the *shīʿa* once more

toward the end of his life. This tile is reported to come from Sulṭānābād (modern Arak) but it could also come from a shi’ite building at Sultaniyya, the new capital founded by Ūljaytū in 1305–6 on the occasion of the birth of his son Abū Saʿīd.

Literature:
 Dimand, 1928–29, no. 4, fig. 5; Ettinghausen, 1939, no. 159, p. 1690; Dimand, 1944, p. 135.

31.
Mosaic tile mihrab
Mosaic of monochrome-glaze tiles on composite body set on plaster; restored, areas of modern replacement
From the madrasa Imāmī in Isfahan, dated A.H. 755 / A.D. 1354
11 ft. 3 in. x 7 ft. 6 in. (343.1 x 288.7 cm)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20)



This monumental mihrab is one of the earliest and finest examples of the complex and time-consuming technique of mosaic tilework, which started in the Ilkhanid period at the beginning of the fourteenth century at Sham, Tabriz, and Sultaniyya. The date of the madrasa Imāmī this mihrab came from indicates that it was produced during the period when the Injuīd Abū Ishāq took refuge in Isfahan before he was captured by the Muzaffarid Mubārīz al-Dīn Muḥammad in A.H. 757–758/A.D. 1356–57. The polychrome composition is made of tiny pieces of monochrome-glaze tiles cut to shape and size from larger tiles in order to fit into the pattern of the mihrab. The curvature of the central niche adds to the technical difficulties. The complex pattern was probably planned with the help of colored cartoons. The colored glazes used in this mihrab are turquoise, cobalt blue, milky white, ochre yellow often shading into brown, and dark green. Around the mihrab there is an inscriptional frieze in *muḥaqqāq* script running from the bottom right to the bottom left, containing Qur’an 9:18–22; a second inscription in Kufic script with sayings of the Prophet borders the pointed arch

of the niche; a third inscription is set in a frame at the center of the niche and reads: “The Prophet said, peace upon Him: ‘The mosque is the dwelling place of the pious.’” The vegetal decoration above the niche contrasts with the two different geometrical patterns seen inside the niche itself. The overall chromatic effect, based mainly on the contrast turquoise-white-cobalt blue but enhanced by the yellow and green colors, is extremely rich. In its present condition, the mihrab is extensively restored. A photograph taken probably in the mid-1920s for the American Institute of Iranian Art and Archaeology shows the mihrab still in situ in the madrasa Imāmī in Isfahan. The bottom part of the niche, just below the central inscription, and a substantial part at the beginning and at the end of the main inscription are missing. This part was restored by very skillful potters in Isfahan; they worked so well that it is now difficult to distinguish the modern replacement from the original. In the late 1920s the mihrab was removed and shipped to Philadelphia, where it was stored in the University Museum until The Metropolitan Museum of Art bought

it in 1939. In addition, it was also sent to London for an exhibition held at Burlington House in 1931. A photograph published in 1931 shows that the mihrab had partially collapsed: most of the vault of the niche and large sections of the upper part are missing in the photograph. This means that between 1931 and 1939 the mihrab was once again extensively restored, this time probably by making use of the original mosaic pieces that had fallen off during the voyage from Iran. In spite of its troubled history of restoration, this mihrab nevertheless remains one of the best examples of the mosaic tile technique in fourteenth-century Persia.

Literature:
American Institute of Iranian Art and Archaeology, photograph accession no. 186978; Pope, 1931, figs. IV–V; Burlington House, 1931, fig. 57; SPA, 1939, vol. IV, pl. 402; Crane, 1940, fig. 1; Schimmel, 1992, fig. 38.

32.

Three fragments of mosaic tile wall decoration.

Mosaic of monochrome-glaze tiles on composite body set on clay
Timurid period, last quarter of 15th century, probably from a building in Isfahan

- a. Corner piece,
10 x 6 in. (25.4 x 15.2 cm)
 - b. fragmentary tile,
Max. W. 11 1/2 in. (29.2 cm)
 - c. fragment of a panel
9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
- Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.270)



These three fragments were selected from the more than five hundred pieces kept in the Museum's storage rooms since 1907 and given little consideration over the years. The fragments are all composed of monochrome-glaze elements in a large variety of colors: white, turquoise, cobalt blue, aubergine, yellow, green, brown, mauve, and black. The three fragments presented here have been chosen to give an idea of the lavish decoration of the building they came from: a corner-piece, possibly from the squinches of a domed chamber; a fragmentary six-pointed star tile with a Kufic inscription in yellow repeating the name of the Prophet Muḥammad; and the fragment of an inscriptional panel in white letters set on a cobalt blue background and interlaced by turquoise and brown tendrils, containing the names of the tenth and eleventh shi'ite imams, al-Naqī and Ḥasan (al-Zakī). These three and the remaining hundreds of fragments in storage are datable to the late fifteenth century, according to a similar mosaic panel recently reconstructed in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and to six other panels that were exhibited in New York in 1940 but whose present whereabouts are

unknown (Golombek, 1982; Golombek and Wilber, 1988).

A proper reconstruction of the Metropolitan Museum mosaic "jigsaw puzzle" would reveal more about the nature of the decoration of the wall these fragments were once set in. However, at first glance the chromatic composition of the inscribed frieze and of its aubergine border with flowers—although not identical—seems very close to the Toronto panel. In addition, the inscription is of shi'ite content in both panels. Lisa Golombek concludes that the Toronto panel almost certainly comes from Isfahan, possibly from a mausoleum dated 1480–81 in the Darb-i Kūshk quarter. In the records of the Metropolitan Museum, these fragments are reported to come from the mihrab of a mosque in Isfahan, thus supporting their original location in this town in Iran. As these fragments were purchased by the Museum in 1907, they do not belong to the same six-panel group exhibited in New York in 1940 which was removed from a ruined mausoleum in old Isfahan in 1908. Consequently, they represent the earliest such fragments that came on the market at the beginning of this century.

Unpublished.

33.

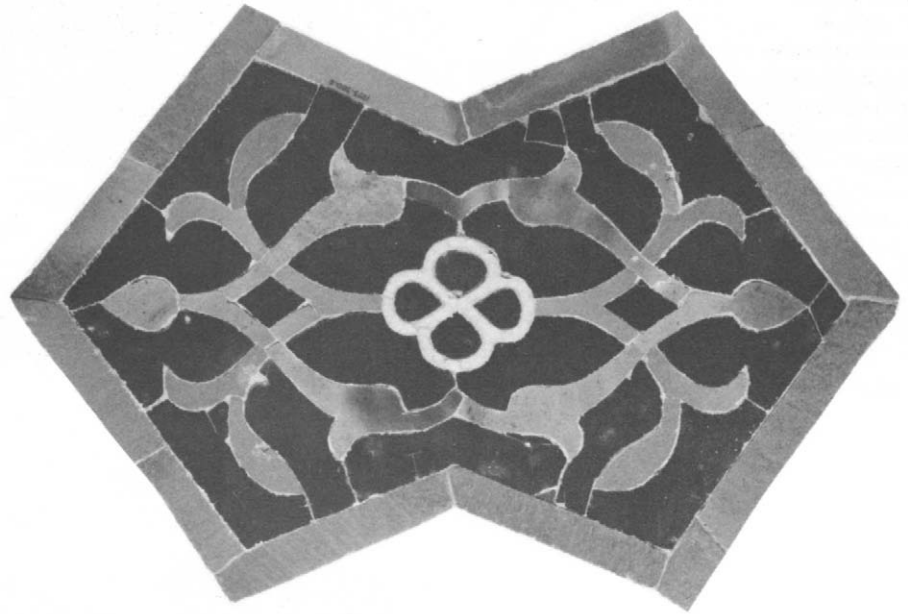
Eight-sided tile

**Composite body, mosaic with mono-
chrome-glaze elements**

Timurid period, 15th century

7 7/8 x 11 7/8 in. (20 x 30.2 cm)

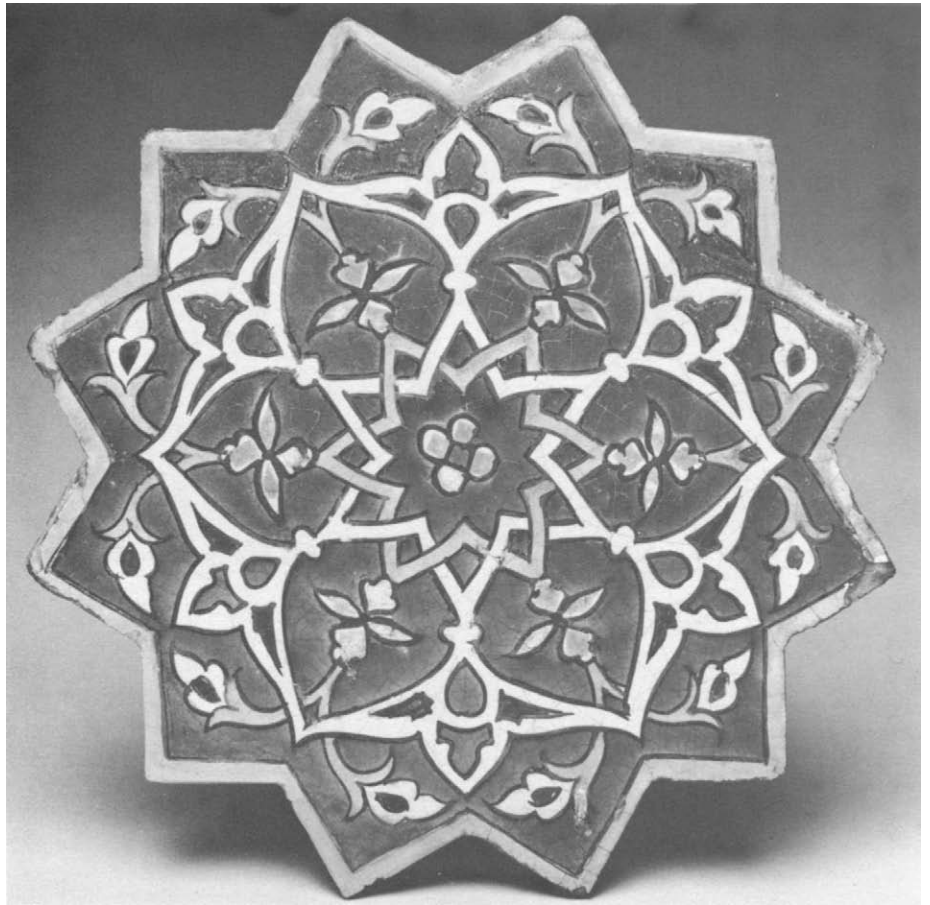
Fletcher Fund, 1975 (1975.350.6)



This tile is an eight-sided polygon in a bowknot shape. The monochrome-glaze elements forming the vegetal pattern are turquoise and pale brown with a central white flower and are set on a cobalt blue and aubergine background; the border is turquoise. The making of mosaic tiles to be set in panels on wall surfaces is obviously much less time-consuming than the complex mosaic composition seen on the mihrab produced in the previous century (cat. no. 31). Each tile covers a small surface, and the cutting and shaping of the single small elements were identical for a large number of tiles, and thus the operation was repetitive and easier to perform. Nonetheless, tile panels for Timurid buildings were composed of many differently shaped polygonal tiles; therefore the work of the tile mosaicists was sometimes as painstaking as that of the mosaicists.

Unpublished.

34.
 Twelve-pointed star tile
 Composite body, painted and glazed in
 cuerda seca technique
 Timurid period, from the madrasa al-
 Ghiyāthiyya at Khargird, dated A.H.
 846 / A.D. 1442–43
 Max. W. 15 1/4 in. (38.7 cm)
 Gift of Philip M. Lydig, 1917
 (17.143.1)



This large tile is one of four that found their way to museums in the Western world early in this century; the other three are in the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Kunsthistorische Institut in Vienna. They were originally set in the West *īvān* (a vaulted room with an open end) of the madrasa al-Ghiyāthiyya at Khargird in northeastern Iran. The building was finished in 846/1442–43 for Ghiyāth al-Dīn Pīr Aḥmad Khvāfī, one of the viziers of the Timurid Shāh Rukh. The building was begun by the architect Qavām al-Dīn Shīrāzī, who died in 1438, and it was then completed by Ghiyāth al-Dīn Shīrāzī.

Different techniques of tile decoration were used at the madrasa al-Ghiyāthiyya. The *cuerda seca* technique used in the present tile can be considered a cheaper substitute to time-consuming mosaic tilework, although the latter type of decoration is also present in the madrasa. This tile was combined on the wall of the *īvān* with smaller pentagonal, hexagonal, bow-knotted, and other polygonal tiles to form a complex geometrical pattern; the twelve-pointed star tiles constituted the

central elements of the composition. The decoration on this tile can generically be described as a complex six-petaled flower set on a cobalt blue background; the single elements of the flower are in white (sometimes highlighted in gold paint), turquoise, and brick red; the border of the twelve-pointed star is turquoise.

Literature:
 D'Allemagne, 1911, II, pl. p. 123; O'Kane, 1976; Hayward Gallery, 1976, no. 393; Jenkins, 1983, p. 1 and no. 38; O'Kane, 1987; Golombek and Wilber, 1988, no. 84; Lentz and Lowry, 1989, no. 23.

35.

Wall panel composed of 28 square tiles
Composite body, painted and glazed in
 cuerda seca technique over white slip,
set on plaster; areas of restoration
Safavid period, first quarter of 17th
century, probably from a garden
pavilion in Isfahan
panel 38 x 63 in. (96.5 x 160 cm); each
tile 8 7/8 x 8 7/8 in. (22.5 x 22.5 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.9b)



The *cuerda seca* technique continued to be popular in the Safavid period (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries). During the reign of Shāh ʿAbbās I (1583–1627), both religious and secular buildings were erected by members of the royal family and by dignitaries. The Safavid capital Isfahan and Naʿin were the two main centers where those buildings were lavishly decorated with tilework. The old tile-making tradition of composing repetitive geometrical or vegetal patterns was kept alive on mosques and madrasas, but an important innovation on secular buildings was a composition of square tiles individually painted as single elements of an outdoor scene with characters set in a garden landscape. In the royal garden pavilions of secular buildings from the time of Shāh ʿAbbās to that of Shāh Sulaymān (the last example being the Hasht Bihisht of 1669), we can refer to true painting on tiles in the same style of the contemporary miniature painting and frescoes. The *cuerda seca* technique was suitable for tile painting because painters had few technical problems with the different medium; the only difference was that the outlines had to be painted with a special substance (usually a mixture of

oil and manganese) that burnt in the kiln leaving the *cuerda seca* . Complete panels showing such scenes are in various museums in Europe (one in the Louvre is virtually identical to the present one) and the United States, some are still in situ. The Metropolitan Museum owns three of these panels, all purchased in 1903 (03.9 a–c), and reported to come from “a palace pavilion built by Shāh ʿAbbās on the garden avenue of the Chahār Bāgh at Isfahan.” The panel selected here is of good artistic value according to its style, composition, and to the chromatic choices made by the painter. It shows three men (two of them sitting in conversation, one of the two in the act of writing) and a woman in a garden; such scenes were among the most frequent and fashionable subjects chosen by miniature painters of the Safavid period. The panel is datable to the first quarter of the seventeenth century according to its style and the frequent use of such panels in this period.

Unpublished.

36.
Square tile with the head of a man
Composite body, painted and glazed in
 cuerda seca technique over white slip;
broken and repaired
Safavid period, 17th century
8 x 8 in. (20.3 x 20.3 cm)
Bequest of William Milne Grinnell,
1920 (20.120.171)



This single square tile was once the element of a panel showing a garden scene (as in cat. no. 35). Only the upper part of the body of a young man is visible, his head bending toward the ground in a posture typical of Safavid painting. The background is—as usual in seventeenth-century tile painting—yellowish- or apple-green; leaves and branches of a tree are painted on the left side of the tile and over the head of the man. The *cuerda seca* technique is the same as seen on the panel discussed above and is the one most commonly employed for such compositions.

Unpublished.

37.
Rectangular inscripational tile
Composite body, painted and glazed in
 cuerda seca technique
Safavid period, 17th century
11 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (29.2 x 24.1 cm)
Museum Accession (X.315)



Inscripational tiles in the *cuerda seca* technique from the Safavid period are rare. The present tile includes an inscription in *naskh* in white over a cobalt blue (now corroded) background, inside a pointed and lobed cartouche. The border of the cartouche is yellow while the field outside it was once green, which has turned into a dull pale greenish color. The inscription—which is religious—reads *yā qāḍīn al-ḥājāt* and can be translated as: “Oh you who fulfills the needs!” This tile was probably set on a mosque or a madrasa built in seventeenth-century Persia. An identical tile is now in the Hetjens Museum in Düsseldorf; it is published together with a group of tiles dated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Isfahan and Shiraz (Hetjens Museum, 1973, no. 397). The compiler of the catalogue of the Hetjens Museum wants to read a date—A.H. 1001 / A.D. 1592–93—on the tile in question, but he has mistaken the diacritics and vowel marks contained in the inscription for the numbers composing such a date.

Unpublished.

38.
Octagonal tile with the bust of a woman
Composite body, underglaze painted in Kubachi style in blue, turquoise, black, and white colors
Max. W. 8 3/8 in. (21.3 cm)
Safavid period, late 16th–early 17th century
Gift of Johanna Garz, 1961 (61.149)



This octagonal tile belongs to the so-called Kubachi pottery group. Kubachi is the place-name of a village in Daghestan where many of these pieces were found, although it is believed that they were actually produced elsewhere in north-western Persia. This distinctive technique is rarely used for tile production: it usually consists of a limited palette of colors, white, black, blue, and turquoise painted under a transparent whitish or greenish glaze; however, the majority of tiles also include orange-yellow, red, and green colors. This tile is one of the very few produced in the classical chromatic Kubachi style. The scene depicts the bust of a young woman with typical Safavid features; on the blank background are a bottle, an iris, and small clouds; the whole painting is enclosed in a multi-lobed blue border. The tile, itself a finished painting, was probably part of a panel where each element contained the bust of a figure, as can be seen on a panel in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; the whole panel, therefore, produced a composition rather different

from the large garden paintings made in the *cuerda seca* technique described above (cat. no. 35).

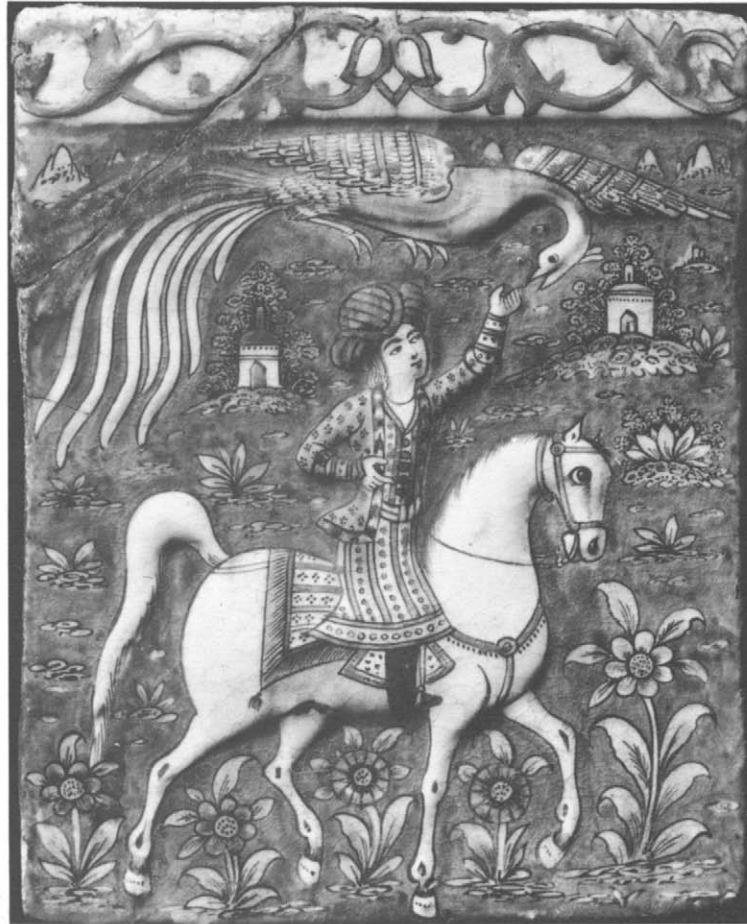
Unpublished.

39.

Rectangular tile with the figure of a horseman and a bird
Composite body, molded and underglaze painted; broken and repaired
Qajar period, third quarter of 19th century

13 1/2 x 10 3/4 in. (34.3 x 27.3 cm)

Gift of George White Thorne, 1883
(83.1.67)

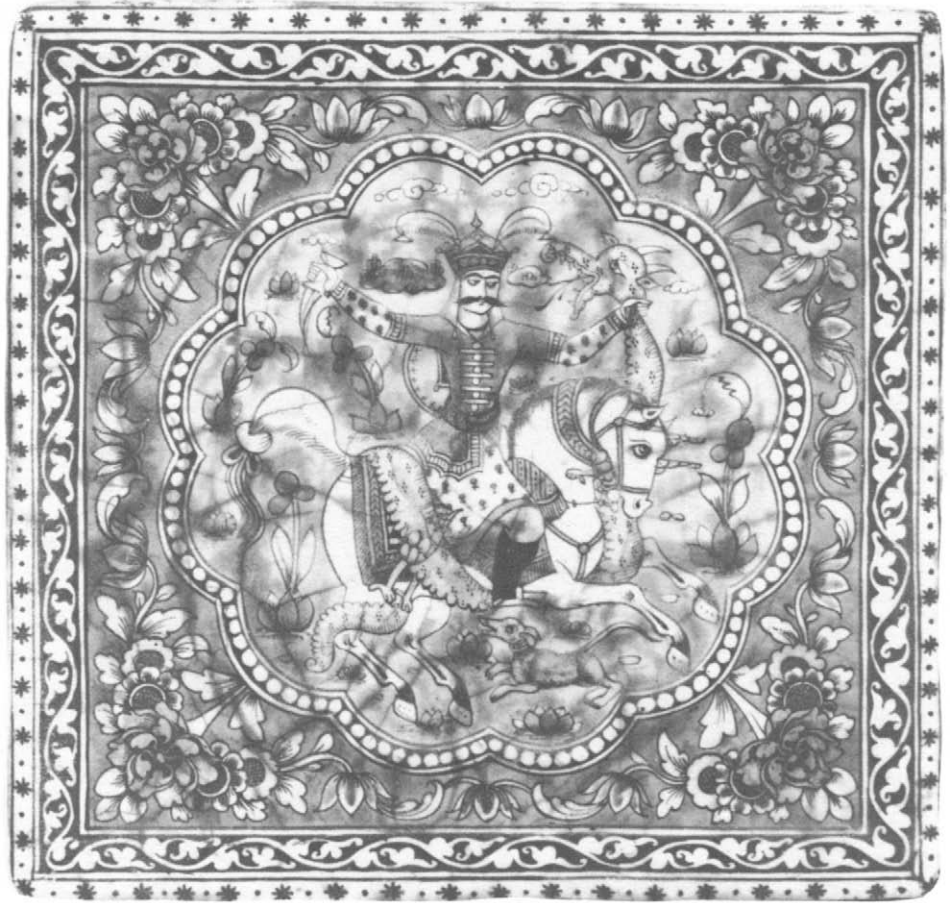


During the Qajar period in the nineteenth century, tilework was extensively used to decorate both religious and secular buildings, especially in the Qajar capital Tehran and in Isfahan. Different techniques were used, such as mosaic, *cuerda seca*, and underglaze painting. The most common was probably the *cuerda seca*, but underglaze painting had an important role because painters could feel more free to create miniaturelike compositions. ^cAlī Muḥammad Iṣfahānī was the most famous tile painter of the second half of the nineteenth century. Underglaze-painted tiles were either flat (thus leaving full creative freedom to the painter) or molded in relief. This tile, once part of a frieze for the upper border, is molded and shows a horseman greeting a large bird provided with a long feathered tail. The man is probably a prince, since the animal can be identified as the fabulous bird Humā, whose shadow was cast only over persons of royal status. A complex hilly landscape with buildings completes the background. In the palette of colors, blue dominates the background but white, turquoise, aubergine, mauve, and pale brown are also used extensively. Another tile com-

ing from the same mold but painted in different colors is in the Museum of Oriental Art in Moscow. This tile entered the Metropolitan Museum's collection as early as 1883 and was once set in a wall; consequently, its date of production is likely to be not later than the third quarter of the nineteenth century. In the Qajar period tiles were produced mainly in Tehran, although Isfahan and Shiraz were also active centers.

Unpublished.

40.
Square tile with the figure of a horse-
man killing a dragon
Composite body, molded and under-
glaze painted
Qajar period, third quarter of the 19th
century
8 1/2 x 8 1/2 in. (21.6 x 21.6 cm)
Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest
of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.182)



As in the previous entry (cat. no. 39), this square tile is molded and underglaze painted. It was once part of a panel. The central figure, enclosed in a multilobed medallion, shows a horseman with a dagger in the act of killing a dragon entwined around his horse; a small dog is depicted under the horse. The man is probably Bahrām Gūr or another epic hero of the *Shāhnāmah*. The revival of Sasanian times and of the Persian national epic marked the entire Qajar period, and these illustrations were used throughout Persia, especially on buildings and rock reliefs in Tehran and Shiraz. In the present painting the horseman, although dressed in Qajar robes, wears a headdress inspired by Sasanian crowns. The remaining surface of the tile is filled by flowers on a blue background and by two borders in dark brown decorated with semipalmettes and small stars.

Unpublished.

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