



Mosques and commemorative shrines: Piety, patronage and performativity in religious architecture

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The practice of Islam does not require architectural inhabitation. A Muslim may pray in her home or out on a patch of grass under the sky; she may memorialise her loved ones through charitable giving or through rituals of devotion. Nonetheless, people have always turned to architecture to monumentalise their religion and to commemorate their dead, and Islam is no different. Buildings as geographically and historically different as the Great Mosque in Córdoba and the tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran are nonetheless linked by the manner in which they express the ideologies of their builders, the social contexts of their construction, and the enactment of the beliefs that they physically manifest (figs 1 and 2).¹

Islam does give attention to the individual human being and his or her place in society. The primary figure for emulation is the Prophet Muhammad, known in mystical discourse as the *insan-i kamil*, or the ‘per-



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fect man.’² As the messenger of God, Muhammad is given a high status; yet as an ‘unlettered prophet’ Muhammad is represented in the Qur’an as a simple man, one whose life and behaviour were worthy of praise. Thus his *sunna*, or exemplary model, was recorded by early Muslims and continues to be central to modern debates about Islam and the expectations related to its practice.³ When considering the built environment, then, it is important to be aware of the relationship between the individual – as patron, devotee, builder – and the construction of religious sites.

The Ka‘ba in Mecca, the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem are buildings that serve as architectural archetypes because of their relationship, either direct or indirect, with the life of the Prophet Muhammad. As important links to the history of Islam, they are models for the construction of Muslim religious buildings throughout the world. The Ka‘ba, believed by Muslims to have been built by the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) and his son Isma‘il, is the destination for pilgrims commemorating the annual Hajj pilgrimage, a duty incumbent on all Muslims. It is also the focus for devotees hundreds of thousands of miles away from Mecca, who turn in its direction to perform their daily prayers. The Prophet’s mosque in

Figure 1. Córdoba, Great Mosque. Spanish Umayyad structure with later intervention, ninth–tenth and sixteenth centuries. Photograph by Mohammad al-Asad, 1986, courtesy of the MIT libraries, Aga Khan Visual Archive.

Figure 2. Tehran, Tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini. Designed by Mohammad Tehrani, construction begun 1989. Photograph by the author, 1994, courtesy of the MIT libraries, Aga Khan Visual Archive.

Medina, initially his residence, is the key source for understanding the conceptual foundations of Islam, in particular the emphasis on community and devotion, both of which are exemplified in its design and function. The Dome of Rock, built in 691 by the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, is also an important pilgrimage destination for Muslims and its location in Jerusalem situates Islam firmly within the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism and Christianity. For Muslims, it is associated with the Prophet Muhammad’s night journey (the *isra’* and *mi‘raj*) and marks the site from which he ascended to the seven heavens. Subsequent religious structures would be influenced in varying degrees by these three early archetypes of Islamic architecture. The aim of this essay is to introduce general themes that pertain to mosque and shrine architecture, while linking them to some of the works of art gathered in this exhibition catalogue. The early modern period is chosen here as one in which some of the most vibrant examples of religious architecture were built, and a period which is well-represented through visual documents, extant objects, and buildings.

The sixteenth century has been understood by modern historians as the age of the great empires of the Middle East and South Asia. Three powerful dynasties ruled the majority of the Islamic world at this time, namely, the Ottomans in Turkey (1299–1923), the Safavids in Iran (1501–1722), and the Mughals in India (1526–1858). Often in combat over territory or political legitimacy, the rulers of these empires also forged important connections amongst themselves, gifting books and precious wares, exchanging embassies, and entering into marriage alliances. Their relationships with each other were finely balanced, as the dynasties at once attempted to find common ground and to distinguish themselves. The arts, in particular literature and poetry, shared many common ideals derived from older Persianate and Islamic traditions.⁴ Architectural forms, too, would find commonalities through the particularities of use and function; references were brought in from distant locations and the historical past in sophisticated ways that helped actualise the identities of the rulers and their subjects. For example, the sixteenth-century tomb of Sultan Süleyman in Istanbul referenced the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and Mughal mosques in India were indebted to their central Asian predecessors. Nonetheless, as a discipline deeply rooted in its geographical location, many features of the architecture commissioned by the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals were unique to the regions in which they were built (for example, the Ottoman tile revetments produced at Iznik: see cat. nos 34 and 61).

The Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal courts were distinguished by their ideological differences and imperial ceremonials.⁵ In the sixteenth century, the Ottomans ruled over the Muslim holy sites in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, and presented themselves as the ‘rightly guided’ caliphs. Their neighbours, the Safavids, originated as a fourteenth-century Sufi order and professed genealogical links to the Prophet Muhammad through the seventh Shi‘i imam, Musa Kazim. The Indian Mughals were the descendants of Chengiz Khan and Timur Lang (Tamerlane), whose dynasties ruled Iran in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and were the cultural progenitors of all three great empires. Despite the shared legacies and religious ties between them, the courts chose to distinguish themselves through political rhetoric and public institutions. For example, the Ottoman sultans constructed monumental mosques in their capital cities as a sign of their power and legitimacy to lead the Muslim community. As descendants of the Prophet and pious Shi‘i devotees, the Safavids

repaired and augmented the shrines of their ancestors, and placed emphasis on pilgrimage to these holy sites. The Mughals ruled over a diverse and populous empire, forging their regal authority through Indic and Muslim symbols. Their fortress-palaces were the sites of imperial splendour, where the king presided as a semi-divine godhead. Architecture was a fundamental means of distinguishing the great empires from each other. The mosques and shrines constructed by those dynastic rulers served simultaneously to monumentalise their faith and to augment their authority. Architectural representations, in deluxe manuscripts and encomiastic poetry written in praise of the ruler, were equally powerful modes of propagating the imperial message, and provide important clues for understanding their significance.

The Mosque

The primary goal of the mosque is to provide a communal gathering space for Muslims to pray together, following the example of the Prophet and his house/mosque discussed above. The mosque is understood by Muslims to be the ‘House of God’ where His divine aura may be felt, and where prayer is performed in God’s presence. Thus devotion connects the believer to divinity, while enabling her to re-enact the rituals institutionalised by Muhammad many centuries earlier. The five daily prayers that are incumbent on each Muslim may be performed anywhere, but the Friday afternoon prayers are a communal obligation. There is no prescribed liturgy, *per se*; nonetheless, many Muslims gather for the Friday midday prayers at the main congregational mosques in their neighbourhoods and cities. The congregational mosque, or *jami‘ masjid*, is the site in which the Friday sermon is read: traditionally, this was the time when the name of the ruler was announced by the leading cleric, or imam (fig. 3). This ritual made the mosque a desirable object of patronage for the ruling elite, augmenting their political authority as well as fulfilling their pious obligations.

Architecturally, the only requirement for the builder of the mosque is to orient the building in such a way that the direction towards Mecca, or the *qibla*, is clear. A further marker is provided by the mihrab, an empty niche often placed at the centre of the *qibla* wall.⁶ The niche is sometimes the most highly decorated element in the mosque, and sometimes remains enigmatically abstract, a simple dent in the planar surface of the wall. Decorative motifs, such as mosque lamps and flowering vases, symbolise God’s divine light and the Paradisal rewards awaiting the faithful believer (fig. 4). A minbar (pulpit) for the imam (see fig. 3) and, later, a *maqsura* (imperial enclosure) were additional architectural features that would come to characterise the interior of a congregational mosque.⁷ From the exterior, a mosque could often be identified by a tall minaret, used in the early days of Islam as a platform for the call to prayer. The minaret also symbolised the Muslim presence in a city and was an urban marker which oriented citizens and travellers alike.



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Figure 3. Cat. no. 16, a prince hearing a sermon in a mosque (detail showing minbar). Folio 245r from an illustrated manuscript of the *Nigaristan* of Ghaffari; Shiraz, Iran, dated 980 H/1573 CE.

Figure 4. Cat. no. 12, ceramic tile panel with depiction of mihrab (detail showing hanging lamp inscribed with part of the *Shahada*). Damascus, Syria, c. 1574–1580.

Figure 5. Istanbul, Süleymaniye complex. Ottoman period, completed 1559. Photograph by the author.



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Ottoman mosques built after the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 by Mehmet Fatih ('the Victorious') emulated the form of the city's Hagia Sophia Church, constructed in 537 by the Byzantine ruler, Justinian. The church's large centrally domed hall was supported by ancillary galleries and heavy buttresses, and its east-west axial direction cohered well with the orientational requirements of a mosque. Henceforth, the Ottoman mosque would be inspired by this Christian type, and would itself serve as a model for religious institutions from the early modern to the contemporary period. The Ottoman architect Sinan (d. 1588) was among the greatest designers of the early modern period, and has left us with a vast corpus of architectural and engineering projects. He is most well known for his imperial mosques, notably the Süleymaniye complex in Istanbul and the Selimiye in Edirne (completed 1574) (fig. 5).⁸ Commenting on the latter, Sinan noted that his goal was to surpass the Hagia Sophia and build a monument that would honour the Muslims.⁹

The Ottoman mosque was thus also a symbol of Islamic authority over a diverse and multi-confessional society, similar that ruled by the Mughals in India. The Ottoman sultans built congregational mosques to mark their legitimacy to rule over their vast dominions. An architectural iconography was developed, inasmuch as the patronage of mosques could be understood through their formal composition and location. An eponymous mosque would be built by the ruling sultan in the capital city from funds accrued through conquest. Only the major mosques of the ruling sultan could have four minarets – while princes, viziers, and queen mothers could have two or one depending on their status – and the number of balconies employed would be dependent on the ruler's dynastic rank.¹⁰ The ruler would ultimately be buried in the mosque complex, or *küllîye*, which also consisted of ancillary social institutions such as theological colleges (*madrasas*), hospitals, and Sufi convents. These complexes were funded by sultans as well as other wealthy patrons through pious endowment, or *waqf*, and they served multiple functions that went well beyond daily prayer services. The mosque was a sanctuary, whose doors were open to all Muslims, regardless of social status. They

were often located in or close to commercial centres, or bazaars, the shops of which sometimes contributed to the financial upkeep of the institution. As such, mosques were integral to the cities in which they were built, and their architectural forms and decoration reflected the prosperity of their patrons. Imperial mosques were thus important palimpsests of society, representative of the community they served.

The Commemorative Shrine

Like the mosque, shrines are a common architectural type, found throughout the Muslim world. Built to commemorate a person or sometimes an event, they are often sites of pilgrimage, with differing rituals and conventions. In general, the shrines of Sufi shaykhs, theologians and, in particular cases, the Shi‘i imams, are repositories of the charisma associated with the person buried within. Like mosques, shrines are sacred precincts, where a devotee must enter in a state of spiritual and physical purity. They are similarly places where people pray, make vows and gift generous endowments for the upkeep of the building. The holy figure buried within a shrine is venerated as an intercessor between the pilgrims and the divine, their piety and esoteric knowledge giving them a status higher than that of ordinary people.

In the early modern period, shrines were popular sites for the dissemination of political allegiance and provided a means for publically showing a patron’s religiosity. For the Safavid rulers of Iran, shrines were important sites for the performance of their authority and charismatic power. Unlike the neighbouring Ottoman rulers who built grand congregational mosques, the Safavids favoured the renovation and construction of shrines. The Safavid shahs were descendants of the eponymous founder of the dynasty, Shaykh Safi al-Din Ishaq (d. 1334), a Sufi mystic whose order was based in Ardabil, in northwestern Iran (fig. 6). As the order flourished and gained wealth through the generous gifts of a wide segment of society, its power localised on the tomb and sanctuary of the shaykh (fig. 7). By 1501 the leader of the order, Isma‘il, was able to conquer the



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Figure 6. Cat. no. 31, Shaykh Safi dancing in the *khanqa* (detail). Folio 28or from an illustrated manuscript of the *Tazkira* of Shaykh Safi; Shiraz, Iran, dated 990 H/1582 CE.

Figure 7. Ardabil, Shrine of Shaykh Safi: view of the *Dar al-Huffaz* with the tomb tower of Shaykh Safi visible at right. Timurid period, fourteenth century (other parts of the complex completed later). Photograph by the author.

Figure 8. Mashhad, Imam Riza shrine complex. Timurid and Safavid periods, and later. Photograph by Baroness Marie-Therese Ullens de Schooten, Courtesy of Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.



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capital, Tabriz, and declare himself ruler. At his advent, he established Shi‘ism as the religion of his empire, bringing Shi‘i clerics to help convert the populace which had been primarily Sunni. His descendants expanded the shrine complex and transformed it into a majestic institution monumentalising the Safavid dynasty.¹¹

The Safavids focused their attention on the shrine of their ancestor, as well on those shrines associated with their Sufi and Shi‘i genealogy. As professed descendants of Muhammad they patronised the tombs of his descendants, the imams.¹² The most prominent shrine in Iran was that of the eighth imam, ‘Ali Riza, in Mashhad, which was the locus of Safavid attention throughout the sixteenth century (fig. 8). The great Safavid ruler Shah ‘Abbas (d. 1629) was renowned for his barefoot pilgrimages to the shrine and his gifts of precious manuscripts and objects from his personal collection to the shrines in Ardabil and Mashhad.¹³ He portrayed himself as a humble supplicant and devotee of the imam, despite being among the most successful and powerful monarchs of the early modern period. In 1601 Shah ‘Abbas ordered that the dome above the tomb of Imam Riza, the *haram*, be re-gilded. In subsequent years, he also ordered that the shrine precincts be expanded and channels of water be constructed in the newly broadened roadways.¹⁴

The shrine of the Imam Riza was a singular structure, yet it shared many architectural features with commemorative buildings in the region. In this model, the centre of the complex was the tomb of the holy person, often under an ornate, domed structure. In some cases, the grave was constructed within an enclosure open to the sky, in compliance with orthodox interpretations that forbade the covering of graves or the ostentatious displays suggested by monumental tombs (fig. 9). A shrine’s prominence was thus displayed ar-

chitecturally, but also in less obvious ways. Endowments to the shrine would stipulate not only the upkeep of the building, but would also provide money for the feeding of pilgrims and indigents, as well as supporting and housing the Sufi initiates. Large spaces for rituals were often part of the shrine complex, as were individual meditation cells. The resulting architectural ensembles were often aggregates, built over time, and thus often quite unique. Nonetheless, shrines in the early modern period were built for the enactment of rituals of piety as well as the display of sovereignty and power. They were places of asylum and devotion where diverse segments of society came together, men and women, Shi‘i, Sunni, and sometimes, non-Muslims as well.

The mosque and commemorative shrine are two primary examples of religious architecture in the Islamic world. A broader study might look more closely at other institutions such as *madrasas* and Sufi lodges, in addition to exploring the profound differences between regional types and their historical developments. Indeed, the boundaries between what is religious architecture and what is not were often blurred purposefully. For example, a room in a domestic residence could serve as an *imambarga* commemorating Shi‘i history, just as any clean floor surface could serve as a *sajjada* (place of prostration). Rulers such as the Ottoman sultan Süleyman would build their own tombs as part of their mosque complexes, in order to receive the blessings of those who prayed there (fig. 10). Similarly, palaces of the Safavid shahs were viewed as sacred precincts, where visitors would kiss the thresholds and give pious donations. The sacrality of a building was thus constructed less through bricks and mortar, and more through the rituals and customary practices of those who patronised the spaces of devotion.



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Figure 9. Cat. no. 30, a sage in a courtyard (detail). Folio 129v from an illustrated manuscript of the *Kulliyat* of Sa‘di; India, c. 1604.

Figure 10. Istanbul, tomb of Roxelana with tomb of Süleyman visible at right. Ottoman period, sixteenth century. Photograph by the author.

- 1 See Jerrilynn D. Dodds, 'The Great Mosque of Cordoba', in *eadem* (ed.), *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), pp. 10–25; Kishwar Rizvi, 'Religious Icon and National Symbol: The Tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran', *Muqarnas*, 20 (2003), pp. 209–224.
- 2 R. Arnaldez, 'al-Insanal-Kamil', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second ed., vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 1239.
- 3 The designation 'Sunni' thus marks an affiliation used by the majority of Muslims who see themselves as following the example of Muhammad.
- 4 In particular see, David Roxburgh (ed.), *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600* (London: Royal Academy, 2005); Thomas Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Court Arts of Timurid Iran* (Los Angeles/Washington D.C.: LACMA/Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1989).
- 5 Recent art historical studies have focused on the comparative dimensions of Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal art and architecture. See, for example, Gülru Necipoğlu, 'Qur'anic Inscriptions on Sinan's Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with their Safavid and Mughal Counterparts', in Fahmida Suleman (ed.), *Word Of God – Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), pp. 69–104.
- 6 On the significance of the mihrab, see Nuha Khoury, 'The Mihrab Image: Commemorative Themes in Medieval Islamic Architecture', *Muqarnas*, 9 (1992), pp. 11–28.
- 7 For general discussions as well as specific case studies, see Martin Frishman (ed.), *The Mosque: History, Architectural Development & Regional Diversity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002); Renata Holod and Hasan-Uddin Khan, *The Mosque and the Modern World: Architects, Patrons and Designs since the 1950s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997).
- 8 Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Reaktion, 2005).
- 9 'Sinan: On building the Selimiyye Mosque', in D. Fairchild Ruggles (ed.), *Islamic Art and Visual Culture: An Anthology of Sources* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 143.
- 10 See Gülru Necipoğlu, 'Dynastic Imprints on the Cityscape: The Collective Message of Funerary Imperial Mosque Complexes in Istanbul', in Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont (ed.), *Colloque Internationale: Cimetières et traditions funéraires dans le monde islamique* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1996), pp. 23–36. For these orthodox Sunni rulers, the 'body' of the mosque was seen as representing the prophet Muhammad, and the four minarets as his successors, the caliphs, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali.
- 11 Kishwar Rizvi, *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine: Architecture, Religion and Power in Early Modern Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
- 12 The Safavids venerated the descendants of Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, and son-in-law, 'Ali, whose descendants were known as the imams. For a general history of the Safavids, see Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
- 13 Sheila Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London: British Museum, 2009).
- 14 Eskandar Beg Munshi, *The History of Shah 'Abbas the Great: Tārīkh-i 'ālamāra-yi 'Abbāsi*, trans. and ed. Roger M. Savory (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1986), p. 535.

CERAMIC TILE PANEL WITH MIHRAB DESIGN

Damascus, Syria; Ottoman period, c. 1574–1580
 Glazed fritware with polychrome underglaze painting against white
 123 x 62 cm
 AKM 585

Publ: Makariou 2007, pp. 200–201 (no. 72); AKTC 2008a, pp. 76–77 (no. 18); AKTC 2009a, pp. 68–69 (no. 35); AKTC 2009b, pp. 68–69 (no. 35); AKTC 2010a, pp. 70–71 (no. 36)

While the mihrab – the arched niche on the *qibla* wall that indicates the direction of prayer in virtually every mosque – is in essence a very simple architectural feature, the motif quickly came to have such profound sacred significance in Islam that an elaborate iconography developed around it. Images of single arch-shaped niches appear in a variety of religious contexts, sometimes with additional elements that came to have further meanings of their own.

This panel of eighteen tiles is extremely closely related to a pair of similar tile friezes found in the late sixteenth-century mosque commissioned by the Ottoman governor Darwish Pasha in Damascus. The Darwish Pasha panels are located in the courtyard of the mosque, on the wall that contains the entrance to the prayer hall. Like this piece, both of them bear images of a hanging lamp suspended by chains from the apex of a marble arch, with the image of the sandals of the Prophet below, and one panel also depicts a pair of lighted candles in candlesticks of a similar appearance to those seen here. In addition to the items contained within the arches, similarities in the architectural detailing of the arches themselves on both the Darwish Pasha panels and this piece – joggled voussoirs in alternating colours, slender columns of dappled marble, and ornate acanthus capitals – strongly suggest that all three pieces came from the same workshop. A further tile panel of a different but related type in the Darwish Pasha mosque has an inscription dating it to 1574–75, and a similar date can probably be assumed for this frieze (Carswell 1987, p. 205).

The Noble Footprints (*Qadam sharif*) and Noble Sandals (*Na'layn sharif*) of the Prophet came to be the focus of a special reverence, particularly from the sixteenth century in the Ottoman Empire but also in India and the Safavid world (Hasan 1993). The shape (*mithal*) of a pair of stylised sandals like those seen on this panel can be found in sacred and apotropaic contexts from Iran (cat. no. 15) to Ottoman North Africa (Jones 1978, p. 16). Damascus had its own relic of the Prophet in the form of a sandal that was transferred to the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul in the nineteenth century, so the image may have held particular resonance in that

city (Gruber 2009b, pp. 136–137). The hanging lamp, meanwhile, had been associated with the mihrab image since the twelfth century or earlier, and the ensemble of lamp and niche is often implicitly associated with Qur'an 24:35, the so-called *Ayat al-nur* ('Light Verse'), which begins 'God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light may be compared to a niche that enshrines a lamp...' The inscription depicted on the lamp of the present panel is not the Light Verse but a section of the *Shahada*, the Muslim profession of faith: 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God'. This inscription is relatively unusual on true lamps, but the same formula appears on one of the lamps depicted in the Darwish Pasha tile panels.

The two candlesticks, like the hanging lamp above them, carry spiritual significance – through the metaphor of illumination – when placed in the mihrab image (see cat. no. 14). In this instance one horizontal line of tiles may have been lost, affecting the appearance of the upper parts of the candles: a comparison with one of the Darwish Pasha panels suggests that the candles may originally have been taller, with more fully defined flames (Makariou 2007, p. 200). Perhaps most interesting of all, though, are the little images that have been included within the 'marble' of the depicted columns. Close examination reveals hidden fish, ducks and unidentifiable animals painted into the fictive marble itself, as if petrified within the stone. The painted 'marble' borders of some tile panels in the Darwish Pasha mosque contain similar hidden creatures, and one can only guess at the artist's motivation for incorporating images of living creatures into tiles specifically designed for a mosque, where such imagery would normally be forbidden. An ancient conception of marble as a 'frozen sea' may have informed these designs, as fish predominate here; alternatively, the intention may be to suggest an actual fossiliferous marble (see Barry 2007, pp. 627–631, and Milwright 2007). In either case, the painter of these tiles has shown a surprisingly playful take on a serious subject.



VASE-SHAPED LAMP WITH SHORT FOOTRING

Possibly Iran; tenth–twelfth century (?)
 Light blue blown glass with cobalt trailed glass bands
 Height: 14.7 cm
 AKM 645
 Unpublished

Although early representations of round-bottomed hanging lamps, hung in arcades, are known from the famous architectural frontispieces of the San‘a’ Qur‘an (Grabar 1992, pl. 16, 17), the history of the flat-bottomed vase-shaped lamp with a spherical body and flaring conical neck, exemplified by this piece, is not easy to reconstruct from material remains. A fragmentary example was excavated at Nishapur (Kröger 1995, p. 179), while other pieces (most often without scientific excavation records) are generally attributed to tenth- or eleventh-century Iran: for example, lamps in the Glass and Ceramics Museum, Tehran (no. 846), and the David Collection (14/1962), are both of similar dimensions to this example, with trailed glass handles (the latter is illustrated in von Folsach 2001, p. 215). Larger, pierced metal examples of the vase-shaped form are known from eleventh-century North Africa and thirteenth-century Anatolia (Rice 1955, pp. 207–217), as well as a famous depiction of a vase-shaped hanging lamp painted on the interior wall of an eleventh-century Seljuq tomb tower at Kharraqan (Grabar 1992, fig. 163). There is of course a spiritual dimension to the imagery of the lamp: the iconographic unit of the lamp hung in a mihrab appears in architectural contexts from the twelfth century onwards (see cat. no. 12, and Khoury 1992), and has often been associated with textual sources such as the famous ‘Light Verse’ of the Qur‘an (24:35) and the mystical *Mishkat al-Anwar* (‘Niche of Lights’) of al-Ghazali (d. 1111).

Lamps of vase-shaped form are often referred to as ‘mosque lamps’. The association between this form of hanging lamp and sacred space was well established by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A useful visual reference to this practice is provided by the surviving thirteenth- and fourteenth-century illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, a text which details the exploits of a smooth-talking rogue across much of the Arab world, and gave artists an unprecedented opportunity for the inventive depiction of medieval Islamic society and its environments. Several of the narrative episodes described within the *Maqamat* take place inside mosques, and in the

less finely-executed copies of the text the schematic rendering of architectural space leaves multiple vase-shaped hanging lamps as the only consistent sign in many episodes that the setting is to be understood as a religious environment (for example Paris BNF Arabe 6094, fol. 49v).



CANDLESTICK WITH REPOUSSÉ DESIGNS

Khurasan (northeastern Iran/Afghanistan), possibly Herat;
late twelfth or thirteenth century
Chased and beaten brass
Height: 35 cm; diameter: 46.5 cm
AKM 884
Unpublished

This piece is one of a small group of repoussé candlesticks thought to come from late twelfth- or thirteenth-century Khurasan (an area roughly comprising northeastern Iran and Afghanistan), and quite possibly linked to production at Herat. The repoussé technique involves beating shapes into sheet metal from the reverse side, and is normally practiced in conjunction with chasing, by which the design is refined on the front side with further beating and engraving, using punches and sharp tools. Through such means the artist has here exploited the plasticity of brass, creating a complex design of lions in high relief at top and bottom, with a central frieze of plain hexagonal bosses belted in by two thin bands of scrolling vegetal arabesque panels and round studded knobs. The lions' heads project boldly from the candlestick, while their bodies are in much lower relief, sitting up in tight formation around the object. The refinement of the repoussé technique was one of the singular artistic achievements of the period, and in the right hands it could elevate brass to the status of a luxury medium. A repoussé and inlay ewer in the Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi – one of a group of fine vessels of this type – bears an inscription that names Herat as the site of its production, and it is possible that the present candlestick may also be of Herat manufacture (Ward 1993, pp. 76–77).

There are a handful of other brass candlesticks that share this design of repoussé animals and hexagonal bosses: several of those are somewhat more elaborate than the present example, inasmuch as they are inlaid with silver, and often bear inscriptive panels and pyramidal bosses that decorate the socket (see Freer Gallery, ill. Hattstein – Delius 2004, p. 345; Hermitage Museum, ill. Piotrovsky – Pritula 2006, p. 27; Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, ill. O'Kane 2006, p. 265; Linden Museum, Stuttgart, ill. Forkl 1993, p. 85; al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, ill. Jenkins 1983, p. 71; a piece that is missing the shaft and socket in the Victoria and Albert Museum, ill. Melikian-Chirvani 1982, pp. III–III; Louvre, acc. no. OA6315; and a piece advertised by the Mahboubian Gallery, London, in *Apollo*, April 1976,

p. 97). A further example in the David Collection, without inlay, may be more closely compared with this piece, although like the inlaid examples it also has chased decoration on each of the hexagonal bosses, distinguishing it from the present example (see von Folsach 2001, p. 305). Another related example, without any repoussé animals, was photographed in the Pars Museum, Shiraz (Melikian-Chirvani 1982, p. 143). The Aga Khan Museum's candlestick has a slightly more flared outline than the other known examples of this form.

The enormous religious significance of light meant that commissioning light fittings, including candlesticks, for mosques, tombs and shrines was a sacred act in the medieval period and indeed later (see cat. nos 12 and 13). The mystical dimensions of the candle as a pious object are exemplified in a poem in the twelfth-century *Diwan* of Khaqani, composed on the occasion of a princess' return from pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina: 'Your eye like a candle shed the tears of necessity/ And from so much light in it/ the Prophet's mausoleum turned into a candlestick' (Melikian-Chirvani 1987, p. 120). It is also possible that the presence of lions – an ancient symbol of the sun – on these repoussé candlesticks is intended to add a further layer of light symbolism to the light fitting (see Hartner – Ettinghausen 1964).







BLUE-AND-WHITE PLATE WITH ARCHITECTURAL IMAGERY

Probably Iran; seventeenth century

Glazed fritware with blue underglaze painting against white

Diameter: 42 cm

AKM 589

Publ: Makariou 2007, pp. 52–53 (no. 15); AKTC 2008a, pp. 152–153 (no. 55); Farhad 2009, pp. 146–147 (no. 35)

Farhad has suggested that the highly unusual imagery in the central area of this blue-and-white dish should be understood as a schematic representation of a shrine complex, and, by extension, that the piece was created to commemorate an act of pilgrimage (Farhad 2009, p. 146). The central space has been divided with thick blue double-lines into a series of different architectural elements and areas, with structures stacked up disconcertingly in the awkward round space of the dish, conveying a sense of progression through space.

There are several indicators that this is sacred space, both in generic architectural signs – bulbous domes, hanging lamps and a tall thin structure that could represent a minaret – and more particular religious symbols. The sandals (*Naʿlayn sharif*) of the Prophet, or more properly their image (*mithal*), here enshrined in niches underneath the bulbous dome at centre foreground, represent one focus of veneration (see cat. no. 11). To the right of the sandals is the image of the legendary double-pronged sword of ‘Ali, the *Dhuʿl-fiqar*, a particularly potent symbol for Shiʿi Muslims as it is inseparably linked with the deeds of ‘Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and the first Shiʿi imam. In addition to these there is an image of a minbar (the stepped structure used to address the crowds in a mosque) immediately above the sword of ‘Ali, complete with a domed cupola on top like those seen on many extant large wooden minbars. A second minbar, along with domes, banners, hanging lamps and what may be a candle in a candlestick, occupies the top central panel of the outer ornament, providing the only architectural decoration on the rim. What may be a third minbar is depicted on the right-hand side of the central field.

Most of the rim is decorated with arched or scalloped panels copied directly from the designs used in the Chinese export porcelain known in the seventeenth century as ‘Kraak’ ware. Chinese export porcelain was extremely popular and influential in Safavid Iran, where local potters were swift to respond to the competition by creating similar fritware objects with derivative designs. The orna-

mental plants and trees, growing from the ground around the rim or, in one panel, from pots, show some borrowings from Chinese ceramics (particularly evident in the scrolling vegetal designs in the narrow panels) but also relate to Iranian and Indian painting traditions, and possibly even to carpet designs (Makariou 2007, p. 52). The design of the dish as a whole is perhaps unique in its marriage of different stylistic elements, fitting an illustrative style apparently derived in part from topographical representations in pilgrimage records and manuals into an overall composition borrowed from Chinese ceramics.



Folio 245r from an illustrated manuscript of the *Nigāristān* of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ghaffārī
 Shiraz, Iran; dated 980 H/1573 CE
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper
 Manuscript: 38.7 x 24.9 x 6.4 cm
 AKM 272

Publ: A. Welch 1978b, p. 79 (not ill.); AKTC 2010b, p. 303 (binding only; no. 131)

The present volume of the *Nigaristan* – a collection of stories about figures from the early history of Islam – is remarkable for both the quantity and the quality of its forty-four miniatures (see also cat. no. 5) and fine illuminations. Other Safavid illustrated versions of the text are known (Christies, 16 October, lot 71) but the present text, with its beautiful original lacquer binding with leather doubleures, stands as an exemplar of luxury illustrated manuscript production in Shiraz. This tradition of book-making reached something of a peak in the 1580s: a large body of top-level work was produced in imitation of courtly models, much of which found its way into royal circles, and this book represents an art in the ascendant (Uluç 2000).

The relatively unusual setting of a mosque interior is depicted here largely without specific architectural signifiers, with the obvious exception of the minbar, on which the holy man sits to deliver his message to the crowd. The young prince seated at centre stage on his prayer rug, and the assembled courtiers in rich robes – some of them wearing the red *qizilbash* in their turbans as proclamations of their Safavid Shi‘i identity – cover their mouths with their sleeves out of respect, to avoid polluting the sacred space with their breath. The minbar, seat of spiritual authority and community leadership from the early Islamic period onwards following a precedent set by the Prophet Muhammad, is normally positioned against the *qibla* wall to the right of the mihrab. If one were to follow the logic of the image’s spatial arrangement, this would suggest the mihrab to be located directly in front of the prince, hidden from our view by the minbar.

While minbars are most commonly made from wood, the bright blue patterning of this example suggests either a fantastic interpretation of the form, or, more likely, the representation of a tiled minbar. A small number of extant tiled *minbars* from Iran are known, and one of the most spectacular is that of the *Masjid-i maydan* in Kashan. Dated by Bernard O’Kane to c. 1468 – approximately one century before this painting was created – the Kashan tiled minbar is decorated on its sides with a star-and-polygon

pattern, and has an arch-shaped void in the lower bottom section (O’Kane 1986, pl. XLI). The presence of the framed floral panel, like a small door, in the same position on the minbar in this painting suggests that the artist may have had a similar model in mind. However, a closer parallel for the simple geometric tiling of this painted image of a minbar can be seen in the later tiled minbar of the *Masjid-i jami* in Kuhpaya, Iran, dated 1528–1529 (*ibid.*, pl. XLII).



IMĀM ‘ALĪ SLAYS MURRA IBN QAYS

Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Fālnāma* ('Book of Divinations')
Qazwin, Iran; mid 1550s – early 1560s
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper
Page: 59.5 x 45 cm
AKM 96

Publ: A. Welch 1978a, pp. 67–71; Welch – Welch 1982, pp. 79–81 (no. 25);
Canby 1998, pp. 54–55 (no. 31); Tokatlian 2007, no. 7; AKTC 2007a, p.
184 (no. 161); AKTC 2007b, pp. 178 and 187 (no. 161); Farhad 2009, pp.
128–131 (no. 27)

This monumental image comes from a dispersed outsize manuscript of the *Falnama* that is thought to have been commissioned by Shah Tahmasp in the early 1550s, during a period when the Safavid ruler was becoming increasingly conservative in his religious outlook and being visited in dreams by holy figures. The *Falnama*, or 'Book of Divinations', was a popular text in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iran and Turkey and was used to predict the future, or to enable the seeker to decide how to proceed on a difficult decision. To use the text, the seeker would perform ritual ablutions and prayer before opening the manuscript to a random page, where the resultant verses would provide an omen that had to be interpreted with the help of the accompanying image. While such practices may seem at first glance hard to square with religious conviction, the *Falnama* in fact contains important lessons in religion and morality, with a focus on the deeds of prophets and holy men. The accompanying text for this image, found on the back of the following folio (now held in the Freer Gallery, Washington D.C.) explains the iconography of this painting of a dark-skinned man trying to leave a majestic mausoleum, as a hand emerges from the grilled cenotaph and shoots flames towards him, to the horror of the other visitors to the tomb:

'O augury user, know that in your augury has appeared the sign of the miracle-manifesting, Khaybar-conquering two fingers of His Majesty the Lion of God, the Conqueror 'Ali ibn Abu Talib – upon him be mercy and peace – which appeared from the blessed grave of His Majesty and struck in two the accursed Murra ibn Qays' (Farhad 2009, p. 129)

The identity of the wicked Murra ibn Qays remains unclear, although it has been suggested that he defiled of the tomb of 'Ali, the first Shi'i imam, and was cleaved in half by the two fingers of 'Ali: the hand of the imam thus parallels his famous twin-pronged sword, the *Dhu l-fiqar* (Farhad 2009, n. 24; see also cat. no. 15). A separate copy of

the *Falnama* (Topkapi H. 1702) confirms the tomb of 'Ali in Najaf as the location of the narrative.

Although heavily schematised, the tiled dome and two slender minarets with balconies seen in this painting are quite closely matched in photos of the tomb at Najaf taken in the 1930s, prior to its more recent renovations (Matson Photographic Collection, www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/matpc). However, the architectural similarities between this image and a *Falnama* painting in the David Collection, showing the tomb of Imam Husayn, suggest that this architectural arrangement was a standard model for representations of Shi'i shrine structures (von Folsach 2001, p. 76). As such, the artist may not have been concerned with topographical reality and instead was working to a standardised type. In addition to the external signs of sacred architecture – the dome and the minarets – the interior of the tomb in this painting is also hung with elaborate vase-shaped lamps decorated with tassels. The mystic smoke that fills the tomb appears to be emanating from the flames of 'Ali's hand and the central hanging lamp simultaneously. Hanging lamps are prominent in other images of sacred tombs, both in the *Falnama* manuscripts and elsewhere, and countless images from pilgrimage manuals (see Witkam 2002). As such, the lamp must be understood as an important indicator of sacred space in funerary architecture and its representations.







Syria or Egypt; fifteenth century

Glazed fritware with cobalt underglaze painting against white

20 x 20 cm

AKM 570

Publ: Makariou 2007, pp. 88, 92–93 (no. 29); AKTC 2009a, p. 130 (no. 89);
AKTC 2009b, p. 130 (no. 89); AKTC 2010a, p. 130 (no. 91)

The architectural model represented on this spectacular tile is somewhat enigmatic. The domical structure could easily be interpreted as a fantastic or even paradisaal pavilion, surrounded by otherworldly blooms. On the other hand, Juvin has pointed out a formal similarity between the pointed shapes of the two smaller flanking structures and certain tombstones (Makariou 2007, p. 92), and the tapering shapes of their finials might additionally refer to cypress trees, an evergreen associated in the Mediterranean world with funerary and spiritual contexts since ancient times, and sometimes also found in Mamluk prayer rugs (Brend 1991, p. 121). Such a reading would subsequently suggest the self-contained central building – with its large lobed dome and window grilles – as a tomb, one of the archetypal uses of the domed cube in Islamic architecture (see cat. no. 17).

A small number of tiles bearing closely related images of buildings surrounded by plant sprays, in blue on white, are attributed to late Mamluk Syria or Egypt. Of two of these held in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, one has been cut to a hexagonal shape, but the other is remarkably close to this example in both dimensions and imagery, down to the diagonal division of space seen in the lower level of the structure, possibly an abstract representation of a staircase (Carswell 1972, pp. 119, 122). A further tile of this type, photographed by Carswell, is embedded in the wall of the late fifteenth-century minaret of the Mosque of al-Qal‘i, Damascus, and that example appears to be an explicit depiction of a mosque, with a minaret and a dome surmounted by a crescent finial (Carswell 1987, p. 211).

Extremely finely executed and yet freely drawn, this tile would appear to owe a considerable debt to Chinese blue-and-white ceramics both technically and stylistically, and Ming-era ceramics have indeed been found in Syria (Carswell 1972, p. 102). However, unidirectional plant sprays, like those shown here surrounding the building, have been suggested by Golombek to have arrived in fifteenth-century Syria tilework via the intermediary of Timurid painting, rather than through direct contact with Chinese

ceramics. She has proposed that a large group of motifs found on the Syrian blue-and-white tiles of the fifteenth century, of which further examples are illustrated in cat. no. 57, can be traced stylistically to frescoes of trees and plants painted in the mausoleums of Timurid noblewomen, and that such designs were circulated through Timur’s habit of collecting artists from the lands he conquered, and the subsequent release of those artists from Timurid Samarqand following his death in 1405 (Golombek 1993). The Timurid *paysage* frescoes, often including images of wavy trees flanked by cypresses, can be interpreted from their largely funerary contexts as evocations of paradise, and perhaps this reading should also be applied here.



THE TOMB OF ISKANDAR (ALEXANDER THE GREAT)

Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Khamṣa* ('Quintet') of Amīr Khusraw Dihlavi
 Sultanate India; first half of the fifteenth century
 Opaque watercolour and ink on paper
 Page: 34.1 x 25.2 cm
 AKM 15
 Unpublished

Amir Khusraw Dihlavi (1253–1325), the 'Parrot of India', was perhaps the greatest medieval Indian poet to work in Persian, and his compositions remain a rich source of information on the concerns and ideals of the wealthy educated classes in medieval Indo-Muslim society. In the *Khamṣa* ('Quintet'), written between 1298 and 1301, Amir Khusraw demonstrated the mastery of the poetic arts that allowed him to skilfully emulate the earlier five-poem *Khamṣa* of Nizami (completed by the beginning of the thirteenth century).

From the fourth poem of Amir Khusraw's *Khamṣa*, the *A'ina-i Iskandari* or 'Mirror of Alexander', comes this image of the final resting place of the great warrior king. While the origins of this manuscript were at one point much debated, most scholars now agree that it is definitely Indian in origin and can probably be dated to the first half of the fifteenth century, and possibly ascribed to Gujarat (Brac de la Perrière 2001, pp. 40–41). In the unique milieu of Sultanate India the influence of earlier styles of Persianate painting mingled with the traditions of Jain arts to create manuscript paintings that were both colourful and unique; however, very little book art has survived from pre-Mughal India, making the reconstruction of artistic developments during this period rather difficult. The brilliant pigments used in the illustrations in this manuscript include orpiment yellow, indigo, azurite, lapis lazuli and minium or 'red lead' (Beach 1981, pp. 43–44).

Within this striking painting, the central division of the picture space into two equal squares creates a simple but powerful contrast between the darkened, domed interior housing the draped sarcophagus of Alexander the Great, and the lighter exterior space in which three men approach the tomb across a green and yellow groundline against a red background. The bulbous dome of the tomb building, outlined in bands of bright colour (see also the treatment of the sky in the left-hand corner of cat. no. 95), contains within its pointed apex a partial florette that appears to sit within a green disc. This can be compared with

the central lotus disc found inside the domes of Gandharan Buddhist structures and subsequently adapted for use in the medieval sacred architecture of north India (Soper 1947, pp. 228–229; Sahni 1915–16, pp. 52, 54). The placement of the lotus flower at the centre of the dome in certain locations has also been understood as a reference to the *gunbad-i nilufari* or 'blue lotus dome' of Persian poetry, a metaphor for the sky (Melikian-Chirvani 1986, p. 75). The ancient connection between architectural domes and the dome of heaven may well have significance for this simple yet arresting image of a funerary building.

ز غم بر کس با پسینه کاسی
مردم بر خواره کرد
بیا کار آنچه میخواهند
در آن مرقد کوسری نجو
کشدند برون نثار افکند
بیاده همه بستان سپاه
کسی با نهر یاد یارابند
و هم که چون مرده شد
ای که زبان ام جویند

میان و از منتهی
حقیت را نداده صد جای
بر اندوه او مرغ و ماهی
سمن را چو صد بر یک صد پاره کرد
بر این شایان برادر استند
محیطی شده غرق در درنا
بعمر او شامه از افکند
خرامان چو سپاه بر کرد
که غم بود لیک اشک را بنود
در آن زند کی هست مرد عالم
کوش غم خیزت من ندان

شاد روی آکاس از خود ندان
زاد شفتی کشت لرزان جوید
زادار کلبر بر کشتش
جان میکشید که بیند خال
در فتنه در جی در شامه
گرفته می در ترابست
کسی که کبی یافت کان داز
ز غم بملکان را جگر خسته
یکی آمد در راه و در سم پرا
چون نام او را نند پانیدگان
بیک چشم ز با چنان غرو باز

غم عالم از نیکو از بد ندان
ز مادر کس می کند می سپید
بخون غرق میشد سر خنک
که می زد بخور میشد و در یک
بر تخت کوسری کاره
کشاده و دوسر چون نراده
تماشای او کرد و بر خود کرد
ولیکن بسیار لب و دوحه
نه شیون بود شیوه همرا
ندارد کسی ماتم زندگان
بخاکش سپردند و گشتند باز



دگر کوه فرمود پر کهن
که اسکندر خفته را جای
چو کشتی و ان شط در یار

ز آرامگاه پیکر سخن
در آن خبر بر است بر شط
زیارت کند مر که اینجا رسد

مرگفت او با و را عا
جزیره که اسکندر فرستد تمام
من اینجا بکشتی خازانم

که از دیده نه از شنید
بهرای مغرب است که شام
و چه پدیدم که آنجا که باز

Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Zafarnāma* ('Book of Conquest')
of Sharaf al-Din 'Alī Yazdī
Mughal India; c. 1595–1600
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper
Page: 28.1 x 20 cm
AKM 900
Unpublished

The *Zafarnama* of Sharaf al-Din 'Alī Yazdī, probably completed in 1424–25, details the achievements of Timur (also known in the West as Tamerlane), eponymous founder of the dynasty which ruled Central Asia and Iran from c. 1370 to 1507. The text of the *Zafarnama* is largely concerned with the conquests of the Timurid progenitor, including his invasion of India in 1397–1399, and it appears to have formed the basis of the passages on Timur's reign that are included in Abu'l-Fazl's *Akbarnama* (see cat. no. 41). The Mughal dynasty of India was founded by Babur (1482–1530), a great-great-great grandson of Timur, while Timur himself claimed to be descended from Genghis Khan: the very name 'Mughal' – which is not how the dynasty referred to itself but a name given to it by outsiders – is a reference to the Mongol heritage of Babur's lineage.

The direct line of descent from Timur to the Mughals makes the production of an illustrated version of the *Zafarnama* for the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1564–1605) a natural undertaking, particularly as several other imperial illustrated dynastic texts were also produced for Mughal patrons in the 1590s (Losty 1982, nos 62, 63, 70, 71). The early development of the imperial illustrated book in Mughal India saw the assimilation and adaptation of Persianate modes of painting: Akbar's father Humayun had attracted painters from Safavid Iran to his court in Delhi in the mid-sixteenth century, but it was not until the period of Akbar's prolific patronage of the illustrated book that the synthesis of a new Mughal style got truly underway.

This painting illustrates the visit of a prince of the Jochid Mongols, Ibjā Oglan, to pray at the tomb of Imam Husayn – the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and one of the most important figures in Shi'i Islam – in Karbala, Iraq. The revered tomb of Imam Husayn has been one of the major sites of Shi'i pilgrimage since the first centuries of Islam, and the shrine around the tomb had been destroyed and rebuilt several times by the medieval period (Sindawi 2006, pp. 235–237). By the time this manuscript was created the tomb was contained within a large

complex with a magnificent dome and two minarets (see the *Falnama* painting of the tomb of Husayn, from Iran, c. 1550, in von Folsach 2001, p. 76). Here, it is here depicted as a simple white stone cenotaph under a domed canopy, mounted on a larger plinth of white marble within a walled garden. This appears to be a standard model for the depiction of tombs in Mughal painting, rather than any attempted historicist recreation of Husayn's resting place as it might have appeared at the time of Ibjā Oglan's visit: similar tomb types, albeit without honorific canopies, are used to show the graves of Majnun's father and Layla in the *Khamṣa* of Nizami painted for Akbar in 1595 (Brend 1995, pp. 30, 32).

و از آنجا با سایر امراران شده باشند تا بان فرقد امام معصوم ابی عبد الله حسین بن علی المرتضی
علیهما السلام رسیدند و با حرا از پیادگان ایشان بوسی آن موقف مقدس و میامن آن زیارت کرد



از جمیل فتوحات ارجندست فایز شده بر مخالفان پیروزی یافند و علاءالدوله پسر سلطان احمد
و بعضی فرزندان و زمان و متعلقان او را اسپیر کردند سلطان احمد از پیچیدن دل زدنگ

THE CREMATION OF TALHAND AND THE GRIEF OF HIS MOTHER

Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsi;
 this illustration signed in lower margin by Mu' in Muṣavvir
 Isfahan, Iran; believed to date to 1077 H/1666–67 CE
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper
 Page: 35.9 x 22.6 cm
 AKM 448
 Publ: A. Welch 1972a, p. 203 (not ill.)

In the early eleventh century the poet Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsi completed his epic poem narrating the legends of the pre-Islamic kings and heroes of the Iranian plateau, from the creation of the world to the coming of Islam. This monumental literary work, entitled the *Shahnama* or 'Book of Kings', was written in New Persian, and remains the most important achievement of what has been described as a 'renaissance' of Persian language and culture in the medieval period. Among the countless episodes of the Iranian national epic are stories that recount the genesis of various landmarks and traditions.

The present scene comes from the story of two warring half-brothers from al-Hind (India), Gav and Talhand: after long and bitter fighting, Talhand was accidentally slain in battle by Gav. Mourning his brother, Gav created a coffin of ivory and precious materials for Talhand, but when their mother learned of her son's death at the hands of her other son she ran to the palace of Talhand in a frenzy, setting it on fire and also raising a pyre upon which to annihilate herself. Her self-immolation was stopped at the last moment by Gav, who invented the game of chess to explain the tragic events of the battle to his distraught mother.

Like cat. no. 109, this painting comes from a manuscript of the *Shahnama* that is thought to have been illustrated by the prolific painter Mu' in Musavvir, a student of the famous Safavid court painter Riza 'Abbasi, in 1666–67 (Farhad 1990, n. 10). In this dramatic image, which has suffered somewhat from deliberate damage to the faces of the figures, Talhand's coffin, cloak and crown are consumed within the pyre while Gav restrains his frantic mother. The architecture of the palace is constructed in a manner similar to that of other, more cheerful scenes in the same manuscript (see cat. no. 109), with the division of space ordered by the text blocks, and patterned panels indicating a luxurious environment. However, while the setting may have been rendered in a fashion somewhat stereotypical of Persianate miniature painting, the story

of the burning coffin and the funeral pyre reflect an early interest amongst Iranian audiences in the burial customs of the Hindus, particularly the practice of *sati* or the self-immolation of a recently-widowed woman on her husband's funeral pyre (Flood 2009, pp. 78–79; see also Farhad 2001 on a seventeenth-century Safavid poem dealing with this subject). For a further example of Muslim interest in Hindu subject matter see cat. no. 29.

[illegible]

Probably Iran; fourteenth century
 Carved wood with traces of original paintwork
 20.8 x 239 cm
 Inscription: *al-mulk* [*li'llah*] ('Sovereignty [belongs to God]')
 AKM 630

Publ: AKTC 2007a, p. 189 (cat. F); AKTC 2007b, p. 191 (cat. F); AKTC 2008b, no. 14; AKTC 2009a, p. 174 (no. 128); AKTC 2009b, p. 174 (no. 128); AKTC 2010a, pp. 175 (no. 130)

The inscription on this beam is executed in a form of Kufic so close to that found on the lower part of the wooden corner posts also published here (cat. no. 23) that it has been conjectured that all three pieces may have originally come from the same structure, quite possibly a cenotaph (Christie's 5 October 2010, lot 119). The inscription appears to be a repetition of the word *al-mulk*: the interlaced verticals at the start of each unit are confusing, but probably represent a decorative elaboration of the definite article *alif-lam* (transliterated as 'al'), rather than an actual *lam*-

Unlike a sarcophagus, a cenotaph – a box-like structure – does not actually contain the body. Muslim burial practice normally requires the body to be interred below ground, so the cenotaph is in effect an empty signifier of the dead person. Although the Qur'an gives little instruction regarding burial *per se*, early legal texts (*fiqh*) and passages in the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet) stipulate rapid burial in the ground, and condemn the marking of the grave in any significant way. As several scholars have noted, burial is an area where theory and practice diverge,



alif ('la'). *Al-mulk* is a very common expression found on all media of the medieval Islamic world, and is a contracted form of the extremely widely used pious phrase *al-mulk li'llah*, 'Sovereignty belongs to God' (see cat. no. 26).

The simplicity of the textual content is here matched by the relative plainness of the inscriptive style, a short and rather blunt Kufic script with some foliation of the letter shafts, against a background of simple vegetal decoration with little bevelling or detailing. Given the relative modesty of this piece, particularly when compared with the much more ornate carving found on the upper parts of the corner posts, it is possible that this may have represented the lower side strut of a cenotaph, while the upper strut would have carried a more complex inscriptive programme (see also a fourteenth-century cenotaph at Qaydar, northwestern Iran, in Curatola 1987, p. 107).

and from the early Islamic period graves have in fact frequently been marked by structures of various types (Blair n.d.). The use of cenotaphs as grave-markers appears to have been a reasonably widespread practice in the early and medieval Islamic world: in addition to the material remains, a fragment of an early unidentified manuscript shows two stepped brick or stone cenotaphs, and the same form functioned as a near-universal symbol for a burial place in subsequent book painting (Rice 1959, pp. 210–213; see the image of the tombs at Medina in cat. no. 2). Cenotaphs of wood were naturally used only in tomb interiors; even so, few examples from the early and medieval periods have survived, even in fragment form.



Probably Iran; fourteenth century

Carved wood

Height: 123.8 cm

AKM 831

Unpublished

On the basis of similarities in script style, apparent textual content (*al-mulk*, 'Sovereignty [belongs to God]') and arabesque decoration that can be drawn between the lower sections (not shown here) of these two posts and the beam presented in cat. no. 22, it is plausible to suggest that these corner posts and the beam all come from the same workshop, perhaps even the same structure; however, further testing will be needed to confirm this.

While the beam alone could have taken any one of a number of architectural roles, the corner posts are certainly suggestive of a cenotaph (see cat. no. 22). The early fourteenth-century cenotaph or *sandūq* ('chest') of the Imamzada Qasim, at Qaraqush in northwestern Iran, bears corner posts that display a different but closely related form of deeply carved interlace decoration to that seen on the middle section of these posts, integrated within a dense decorative programme of interlace panels and an attractive Kufic inscription giving a Qur'anic text on the cenotaph's upper edges. The Qaraqush cenotaph perhaps represents the best published example with which to compare the Aga Khan Museum's fragments (Curatola 1987, p. 107). An interesting feature of the present pieces is that they come from an object where inscriptions clearly continue over the corner posts, with a complex cursive inscription running around the top edge (illustrated) and a simpler Kufic inscription below. This wrapping of the text around the corner posts, suggestive of a more holistic decorative conception of the finished object, is seen on later cenotaphs such as that of Taj al-Mulk Abu l-Qasim, from Mazandaran in northern Iran and dated 1473 (Lentz – Lowry 1989, p. 207). However, the paucity of surviving dated examples of medieval Iranian woodwork makes the reconstruction of this art extremely difficult, and much work remains to be done in this area.



MOULDED CERAMIC TILES WITH QUR'ANIC INSCRIPTIONS

Iran, possibly Kashan; early fourteenth century
 Glazed fritware with cobalt and turquoise underglaze painting against
 white and lustre overglaze decoration
 AKM 565, 796
 565: 18.6 x 43 cm; 796: 17.5 x 38.1 cm
 Text: 565 central band: Qur'an 62:8; upper: 55:32–35; lower: 34: 7–9

796 central band: Qur'an 62:8; upper: 55:14–19; lower: 34: 2–3
 Publ: 565 only: AKTC 2010b, p. 86 (no. 37). 796 only: A. Welch 1978b,
 pp. 172–173 (no. P.70); Geneva 1981, no. 90; Falk 1985, p. 235 (no. 237).
 Both together: AKTC 2007a, pp. 51–52 (no. 21); AKTC 2007b, p. 21 (no. 21);
 Makariou 2007, pp. 120–121 (nos 40a–b); AKTC 2009a, p. 50 (nos 19–20);
 AKTC 2009b, p. 50 (nos 19–20); AKTC 2010a, p. 52 (nos 20–21)

Both of these architectural tiles are decorated with moulded central inscriptions in a fluid and well-balanced *thuluth* script, in cobalt blue, which manages to hold its own against the busy background of tiny plant designs in white reserved against lustre and scrolling turquoise vegetal sprays. Each one also carries smaller, densely and quickly executed inscriptions that have been painted in golden-brown lustre in a *naskh*-type cursive script onto the narrow projecting bands at top and bottom of the main inscription. The two tiles appear to be part of the same frieze, although not quite contiguous, and their inscriptive content is closely related: both bear in their central panels sections of Qur'an 62:8, while their upper and lower sections carry inscriptions from the fifty-fifth and thirty-fourth Suras respectively. The overall effect is a visual polyphony of sacred texts, and yet it remains harmoniously dominated by the elegant cobalt *thuluth* script.

Tiles of this type would originally have formed part of a long calligraphic frieze of Qur'anic inscriptions, ornamenting the inner wall of a tomb or shrine, framing a mihrab panel, or possibly decorating a cenotaph. Several very closely related examples are held in other collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the group as a whole is believed to have come from the tomb of the Sufi master 'Abd al-Samad at Natanz in Iran, where it may have formed part of a wall frieze that was completed around 1308 and stripped out and sold to collectors in the nineteenth century, or may possibly have covered the cenotaph (Masuya 2000, p. 41). Similar tiles with inscriptive borders, making up a quotation from the sixty-second Sura of the Qur'an, were reportedly taken from Natanz, as well as a mihrab panel now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 09.87 (Blair 1986, pp. 64–65). The lustre tilework that was so popular in Ilkhanid Iran would have gained an extra dimension when viewed in lamp or candlelight, which would have caused the surface to glitter, while flickering light would at the same time have created a play of light and shade upon the raised central inscription.



MOULDED CERAMIC TILE

Iran, possibly Kashan; late thirteenth or early fourteenth century
 Glazed fritware with cobalt and turquoise underglaze painting against
 white and lustre overglaze decoration
 19.5 x 40.8 cm
 AKM 859
 Unpublished

Like cat. no. 24, this large inscriptive tile would have been part of an architectural frieze, created in Iran during the period of Mongol rule (c. 1256–1353). Tilework production in Iran, well established by the end of the twelfth century, was disrupted by the Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century and the subsequent establishment of the Ilkhanid dynasty of Mongol rulers in Iran and the surrounding area. The ceramics industry at Kashan (near Isfahan) was particularly highly regarded in the medieval period, and is most famous for its high-quality lustre wares: such was its fame, it is thought that the Persian word for tile, *kashi* or *kashani*, is derived from the name of the town (Watson 1973–75, p. 3). This has led to the attribution of most medieval Iranian lustre ware to Kashan, although some scholars have argued that the volume of lustre objects and fragments apparently found at sites all over Iran indicates that there must have been other, less well-documented centres of production (Redford – Blackman 1997, p. 235). At any rate, production at Kashan appears to have virtually ceased for some forty years during the crisis of the Mongol invasions, only to start again around 1260 with a reinvigorated style, of which this piece is a good later example: the density of the background patterning and the combination of golden lustre, turquoise and cobalt blue is absolutely typical of Ilkhanid ceramic tiles (Watson 2004, p. 373).

Borderless tiles of similar type to this example but of slightly narrower dimensions, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, are proposed to have functioned as a frame around a large ceramic mihrab in the shrine of ‘Abd al-Samad at Natanz in Iran (see cat. no. 24). Blair has hypothesised that tiles of this type bearing popular Qur’anic inscriptions may have been kept in stock by lustre potters, to be worked into frames for ceramic mihrab panels, dadoes and possibly cenotaphs, although such inscriptions would need to fit the space exactly, which would suggest standardised dimensions. The expense of lustre tiles meant that they were used for interior decoration only, while glazed tiles in solid/void or mosaic patterns were used for exteriors (Blair 1986, pp. 40–41, 63–65).



Western Central Asia, possibly Samargand; late fourteenth century
 Carved and moulded earthenware with opaque turquoise glaze
 51.8 x 37.5 x 6.4 cm
 Inscription: *al-mulk [li'llah]* ('Sovereignty [belongs to God]')
 AKM 827
 Publ: AKTC 2010b, pp. 54–55 (no. 26)

Glazed tile, already established as a sophisticated and expensive form of wallcovering in Iran under the Ilkhanids (c. 1256–1353; see cat. nos 24 and 25), underwent rapid developments in technique and aesthetic under the Timurids (c. 1370–1507) and emerged as the medium of some of the Islamic world's most breathtaking architectural decoration. The extraordinary Timurid predilection for turquoise and lapis lazuli blues, often highlighted with white, is apparent in both the extant tilework revetments found at sites such as the funerary complex of Shah-i Zinda (Samargand, c. 1370–1425), and in tile panels that are now dispersed in museums around the world.

The technique of carving precise and intricate motifs in high relief into thick earthenware to create designs which, although largely monochromatic, make a great play of light and shade, was perfected in western Central Asia in the fourteenth century and seems to have been largely abandoned in favour of newer methods in the fifteenth century. This example boasts both a panel of the finely carved interlace palmettes that are a hallmark of the genre (see cat. no. 28, and Pancaroğlu 2007, pp. 151–152), and a more unusual plaited Kufic inscription of remarkable complexity that forms part of the common pious phrase 'Sovereignty belongs to God'. Elaborate and dominating inscriptions are a notable feature of imperial Timurid architectural decoration, and this tile would have been part of a larger frieze, itself possibly only one element amongst a larger programme. Carved, turquoise-glazed tiles with comparable inscriptions in plaited Kufic are held in the Metropolitan Museum (no. 2006.274) and the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (illustrated in Kalter – Pavaloi 1997, p. 90).



INCISED GLAZED TILE WITH ARCH MOTIF

Western Central Asia, possibly Samarkand;
late fourteenth or early fifteenth century
Carved and moulded earthenware with opaque blue, turquoise and white
glaze
56 x 39 cm
AKM 572

Publ: AKTC 2007a, p. 176 (no. 152a); AKTC 2007b, p. 176 (no. 152a); AKTC
2008a, pp. 278–279 (no. 110); AKTC 2009a, p. 185 (no. 140); AKTC 2009b,
p. 185 (no. 140); AKTC 2010a, p. 185 (no. 145)

Like cat. nos 26 and 28, this ceramic tile is a product of the early part of the Timurid era (c. 1370–1507) in Iran and Central Asia, when glazed tilework, particularly in shades of turquoise and blue, became the supreme medium of elite architectural decoration. This individual tile is of particular interest as it demonstrates two different styles and techniques in one object. In the field surrounding the arch, high-relief scrolling vegetal ornament with split-palmettes and trefoils has been finished with a turquoise glaze, similar to that which can be seen in cat. no. 28. However, the field of the arch is decorated in a completely different fashion, with a lightly incised strapwork design based around a common star-and-honeycomb pattern that can be seen in various media across the Islamic world from the twelfth century onwards (an early example is visible on a Fatimid wooden mihrab; O’Kane 2006, p. 59). In an attempt to keep the colours from bleeding into each other the geometric design appears to have been executed in something akin to the *cuerda seca* (‘dry cord’) technique developed in Central Asia in the second half of the fourteenth century, whereby the design was drawn onto the surface of the tile with a greasy substance which kept individual colour fields from mingling during firing (see cat. no. 85).

Tiles bearing arches of very similar outline, but decorated with carved vegetal interlace rather than the geometric strapwork design seen here, are held in the Louvre (OA 6440) and the Plotnick Collection (Pancaroğlu 2007, p. 152); those examples are in turn very similar to tiles that are still in situ on the tomb of Shad-i Mulk Aqa (d. 1371) at Shah-i Zinda, near Samarkand, and on other monuments of the same Timurid funerary complex (Lentz – Lowry 1989, p. 41).

The funerary monuments of Shah-i Zinda – most of them variants on the architectural model of the domed cube and built for various nobles and relatives of Timur – exemplify the extensive use of glazed tile in the Timurid period which came to function as ‘a veil between a building and the person looking at it’ (Hillenbrand 1979, p. 547).

Monuments were draped in shimmering colour through the use of glazed brick (*banna’i*), incised and glazed earthenware, mosaic, *cuerda seca* and underglaze painted tiles. However, one result of this increased focus on tilework was a decreased interest in structure, leading to a certain poverty of ideas in Timurid architectural design. Simultaneously, the use of non-structural architectural forms as ornament – a recurring feature in Islamic architecture of many different cultures – came to particular prominence in Timurid architectural decoration. The form taken by the ornamental arch on this tile is divorced from architectural function and could not work as a true load-bearing arch, just as the glazed ceramic capitals illustrated in cat. no. 28 are similarly non-functional.



Western Central Asia, possibly Samarqand;
late fourteenth or fifteenth century
Carved and moulded earthenware with opaque turquoise glaze
Dimensions: 573: height 31.5 cm; 574: height 30 cm; 575: diameter 26 cm;
576: diameter 26.5 cm
AKM 573, 574, 575, 576

Muqarnas is a uniquely Islamic architectural form found across the Islamic world. A decorative system of connected 'honeycombed' cells often used to articulate the transition from one plane to another, *muqarnas* can be constructed from diverse media, including wood (see cat. no. 67), stone, stucco and, as here, glazed earthenware. These two glazed ceramic *muqarnas* pieces were probably used to break up a zone of transition such as the hood over an arched portal (like that of the fourteenth-century tomb thought to be for Qutlugh Aqa at Shah-i Zinda, Samarqand) or the underside of a projecting lintel or drum.

The two *muqarnas* elements in this group display different styles of high-relief interlace in their central panels, and even if such cells were only used with others of the same type, the overall effect must have been powerful. The receding and projecting curved facets making up the *muqarnas* would have been further enhanced by the carved high-relief decoration and the subsequent play of light and shade that such forms are designed to manipulate. The decoration of one *muqarnas* element shown here is considerably more complex than that of the other. The more elaborate example is arranged around a vertical symmetrical axis and composed of coiled interlace with a central design that refers to Chinese images of lotus flowers with curling leaves, a form of decoration that arrived in the Persianate world with the advent of the Mongol Empire (Crowe 1992, p. 176). The other *muqarnas* cell, decorated with a simpler repeating pattern of split-palmette stems and little buds, can be compared with a glazed *muqarnas* element of similar dimensions, said to come from Samarqand and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (20.120.189). That piece bears a comparably repetitive design based on interlacing circles and small pairs of buds like those seen on the AKM piece.

The two glazed earthenware capitals, meanwhile, would probably have originally been placed above engaged pilasters of brick, as their material and scale would prevent them from acting as true supporting elements in any monumental architectural construction. Thus they

Publ: AKTC 2007a, pp. 176–177 (no. 152); AKTC 2007b, pp. 176–177 (no. 152); Makariou 2007, p. 96 (no. 31); AKTC 2009a, p. 185 (nos 141, 142); AKTC 2009b, p. 185 (nos 141, 142); AKTC 2010a, p. 184 (nos 146, 147)

form another example of the fictive tendency in Islamic architectural decoration: presenting the appearance of a structural element, the capitals are in fact a simulation, contributing to the impression of monumentality while providing yet another surface for ornament.

Although it has been suggested that these pieces were created using moulds, it is very hard to see how such high relief and fine lines could have been successfully produced on a rigid mould. Pickett makes the more plausible argument, based on an examination of pieces that combine glazed and unglazed areas, that Timurid incised tilework was carved with a knife when the clay was soft, then air-dried, smoothed off and sharpened up prior to glazing and firing (Pickett 1997, pp. 138–139).





SA‘DĪ AND THE IDOL OF SOMNĀTH

Folio 68v from an illustrated manuscript of the *Kulliyāt* ('Collected Works') of Sa‘dī, inscribed 'Dharm Dās' in lower margin

Mughal India; c. 1604

Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper

Page: 41.7 x 26.4 cm

AKM 284

Publ: Welch – Welch 1982, p. 194 (no. 64); Falk 1985, p. 158 (no. 134);
Goswamy – Fischer 1987, pp. 180–181 (no. 88)

Like cat. nos 30, 45, 52, 73, 78 and 82, this painting comes from the *Kulliyat* of Sa‘dī. Claiming to have travelled extensively throughout the Islamic world and beyond, Sa‘dī records in his long poem the *Bustan* ('Garden of Fragrance') an encounter that allegedly took place between himself and the Brahmin priests of the famous Hindu temple at Somnath, in Gujarat. Entering into a religious discussion with the Brahmin priest, Sa‘dī waxed lyrical in praise of Islam. In response, the Brahmin capped his arguments by telling him that the statue in the Somnath temple miraculously gestured in response to the prayers of Hindu believers. Initially confounded, Sa‘dī became suspicious and returned at night to inspect the statue, only to discover that its arms were operated by a mechanical device (Hart Edwards 1911, pp. 106–109).

While the story may be dismissive of Hinduism, the accompanying painting betrays a deep fascination with India's most populous religion – an interest that was very much in keeping with the personal passions of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, and to a certain extent also maintained by his son Jahangir. Prior to his death in 1605 Akbar had spent many years cultivating a syncretistic vision of India and conversing with holy men of all faiths, and was actively engaged in a patronage of arts that would reflect this breadth of cultural awareness (Bailey 1998, p. 24). As Goswamy and Fischer have noted of this image, the point of the story is in fact somewhat undermined by the painting, which was perhaps the intention of the painter: rather than establishing a superiority of Muslim over Hindu, the painting presents an exchange between equals, both of them earnest and sincere, while the finely-drawn observers at the temple appear neither gullible nor gross. The idol itself is appealingly represented, but it is the architecture of the temple that really takes centre stage. The polygonal form of the building may be familiar from other, more standard images of pavilions in the same manuscript (cat. no. 82), but the artist has added a spectacular double dome and fluttering red pennants with bulbous masts to anchor the image within Hindu architectural practice.



A SAGE IN A COURTYARD

Folio 129v from an illustrated manuscript of the *Kulliyāt* ('Collected Works') of Sa'di
 Mughal India; c. 1604
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper
 Page: 41.8 x 26.2 cm
 AKM 284
 Unpublished

Shaykh Sa'di (d. 1292), one of the most celebrated poets in Persian literary history, was the author of the famous *Bustan* ('Garden of Fragrance'), completed c. 1257, and the *Gulistan* ('Garden of Flowers'), completed shortly afterwards. Those two long poems are here collected together with Sa'di's other writings, including his celebrated *ghazals* (elegiac poems), into a single-volume *Kulliyat* or 'Collected Works' (see also cat. nos 29, 45, 52, 73, 78 and 82). This manuscript also presents some other works which are not always included in modern editions of the *Kulliyat*, including the poem illustrated here which is of the type known as a *tarji'-band*.

The great length of the *Kulliyat* meant that lavishly illustrated manuscripts of the complete text were rarely commissioned, and this appears to be the only imperial Mughal version now in existence, although several related illustrated manuscripts of the *Bustan* and the *Gulistan* made for Akbar and Jahangir date from around the same time (Welch – Welch 1982, p. 191). The page dimensions of the Aga Khan Museum's *Kulliyat* are larger than most illustrated books of the period and it contains twenty-three full-page paintings, now detached from the binding, as well as five illuminated title pages, making it a very important manuscript for the study of the development of book arts in Islamic India. The seal of emperor Shah Jahan on folio 1r suggests that the book was held in the Mughal royal libraries, but the colophon unfortunately does not name the patron or the artists, nor give the date or place of production. It does however name the copyist as 'Abd al-Rahim al-Haravi, a scribe also known as 'Anbarin Qalam ('Amber Pen').

The illustrations of the *Kulliyat* are closely comparable with those seen in other manuscripts created around the time of Akbar's death in 1605, and mark the aesthetic transition between the ateliers of Akbar and his son Jahangir. The re-injection of Persianate styles that came from Jahangir's atelier, under the influence of the master-painter Aqa Riza Jahangiri, was absorbed into the pre-existing Akbari school of painting, which merged Persianate, In-

dian and European styles into an intensely focused, highly colourful painterly idiom (Canby 1998, p. 105). The representation of architecture is a prominent aspect of the paintings of these early Mughal manuscripts: spatial construction was no longer enacted through the patterned panels of Persianate miniature painting, and images of buildings began to have more heft and solidity as a greater interest in modelling and linear perspective developed.

The mystic-romantic themes of much classical Persian poetry are sometimes illustrated in a rather elliptical manner, as has been the case with this image. The lines of the poem that are included on the illustration refer to the pain and servitude the lover is forced to undergo, suggesting that this is an ennobling experience, and the 'wise man' referred to in the poem, who knows that 'the sigh of lamentation is nothing but a burning heart', has been embodied here as a sage in what seems to be the courtyard of a shrine or an institution of learning (trans. Will Kwiatkowski). Great attention to the details of everyday life can be seen throughout this manuscript: here, the careful depiction of the dovecot next to the boy on the roof catching pigeons, the men carrying melons and drink to the enclosure, and the acolyte who eats the cut melons, build up a picture of everyday activity around the central figure of the sage in the domed pavilion, as he dispenses advice.



SHAYKH ŞAFĪ DANCING TO THE WORDS OF SHAMS AL-DĪN TŪTĪ

Folio 280r of an illustrated manuscript of the *Tazkirā* [Biographical Accounts] of Shaykh ṣafī al-Dīn Ishāq Ardabili
 Shiraz, Iran; dated Sha'ban 990 H/August – September 1582 CE
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper
 Manuscript: 35.4 x 22.7 x 7.5 cm
 AKM 264

Publ: A. Welch 1972b, pp. 48 and 57; AKTC 2007a, p. 69 (no. 38); AKTC 2007b, p. 65 (no. 38); Canby 2009, pp. 130–131; Rizvi 2011, p. 40

The text of the *Tazkira* records the life and miracles of Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardabili (1252/3–1334), the founder of the Safavid order of Sufis and ultimately of the Iranian dynasty of the same name, which ruled Iran from 1501 to 1722. As Canby notes, by the time this manuscript was created the Safavids had been in power for more than seventy years and the legends of Shaykh Safi would presumably have been established as part of the education of the Safavid elite (Canby 2009, p. 130). Given his pivotal status for the Safavid ruling house, and the existence of various other texts concerned with the life of Shaykh Safi (such as the *Safwat al-safa*), it is perhaps surprising that there are not more illustrated versions of the life of the dynasty's founder: to date, this is the only illustrated manuscript of the *Tazkira* in the scholarly realm. The manuscript contains fourteen miniatures, one of which is illustrated elsewhere in this catalogue (cat. no. 48), and the cycle also includes a unique painting fusing eschatological and ascension imagery (fol. 115v) as well as more standard battle scenes and palace interiors.

In this textual episode, Shaykh Safi and other disciples met in the *khanqa* (a lodge and space of worship and instruction for members of Sufi orders) to listen to the Sufi master Shams al-Din Tuti. The master's words became so esoteric that none save Shaykh Safi could understand them; the latter was moved to ecstasy and began to dance frenziedly. Safi's ecstatic removal to a spiritual plane illustrates central tenets of Sufi practice, known as *dhikr* (the act of reminding oneself of God through repetition) and *sama'* ('hearing' or 'listening'), the practice of dancing and listening to music to induce an ecstatic state.

In the painting the Shaykh's abandon to the state of proximity to God is shown in the wild oscillating motion of his body, exaggerated by the long trailing sleeves of his robe, while his dark outfit makes an intentionally sharp contrast with the pale floor. The geometric patterning of the floor, also seen elsewhere in the same manuscript (see the upper storey illustrated in cat. no. 48), is rather different from the repeating tiles often used to represent floors

in Safavid miniature paintings of palaces, and it may be intended to depict rush matting or some other type of simple floor covering. Images of *khanqas* are extremely unusual, and, as Canby has observed, this painting provides a rare insight into life in the Sufi orders of Safavid Iran. The presence of the four seated veiled women, prominently arranged at the back of the hall, suggests female participation (albeit of a restrained kind) in the Safaviyya order and their practices. An earlier but comparable image of Sufis dancing ecstatically before a shaykh, from a copy of the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi dated 890 H/1485 CE, is held in the Chester Beatty library (Wright 2009, p. 222).



Egypt; ninth or tenth century

Carved wood, possibly sycamore or pine

Length: 120 cm

Inscription: Sura 67 (*al-Mulk*), verses 13–14

AKM 701

Publ: AKTC 2009a, pp. 114–115 (no. 64); AKTC 2009b, pp. 114–115 (no. 64);

AKTC 2010a, pp. 116–117 (no. 65); AKTC 2010b, pp. 28–29 (no. 5)

Woodwork from the early and medieval Islamic periods is very rare today because of its perishable nature. While more early fragments of carved wood have survived in Egypt than elsewhere, knowledge of the subject is still nowhere near complete. This wooden beam is one of only a scarce handful of surviving inscribed wooden elements thought to have been produced under the Tulunids (868–905), the first independent dynasty in Egypt to wrest control from the ‘Abbasid caliphate. The best-known example of the inscribed woodwork that became popular under the Tulunid dynasty is an extremely long Qur’anic

although the line between architecture and furniture becomes rather blurred in the case of such monumental constructions as minbars, Qur’an stands, and ornamented mihrabs. The strong baseline and gravity of the angular Kufic script made it eminently suitable for the communication of the Qur’anic message, and in time the script itself seemed to acquire something of an aura of sanctity through association with the sacred text. The use of a Kufic script for the Qur’anic inscription that decorates this beam demonstrates the broad application of that script type in sacred contexts above and beyond the manuscript



inscription running around the interior arcade of the Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo (built 876–879). A few fragments from that enormous frieze are now held in museums; a piece in the Louvre shows a related but more sombre and widely spaced script than the present example (Anglade 1988, p. 21). The script on this beam has rather prominent exaggerated peaks, almost like horns, on many letters, signalling perhaps an embryonic development towards the more ornamental foliated Kufic script, and it may be slightly later than the inscription in the Ibn Tulun Mosque.

The Qur’anic inscription on this piece contains verses 13–14 from Sura 67: ‘And whether ye hide your word or publish it, He certainly has [full] knowledge, of the secrets of [all] hearts. Should He not know, He that created? And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries [and] is well-acquainted [with them]’. The beam may have been originally intended to form part of a mosque furnishing, rather than functioning as an architectural element,

tradition, and recalls the early development of Kufic as an epigraphic and architectural script: the first dated appearance of fully-refined Kufic was made in the mosaic decoration of the earliest extant monument of Islam, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.



Syria; late twelfth or early thirteenth century

Carved wood

11.2 x 122 x 7 cm

Inscription: Sura 2 (*al-Baqara*), verse 255

AKM 632

Publ: Makariou 2007, pp. 118–119 (no. 39); AKTC 2008a, p. 73 (no. 17);

AKTC 2009a, pp. 110–111 (no. 62); AKTC 2009b, pp. 110–111 (no. 62); AKTC

2010a, pp. 112–113 (no. 63); AKTC 2010b, pp. 84–85 (no. 35)

The inscription on this beam is a section of the famous ‘Throne Verse’ (verse 255) from the second and longest Sura of the Qur’an, *al-Baqara* (‘The Cow’): ‘[His is what is in the heavens and what is in] the earth! Who can intercede with Him save by His permission?’ It can be assumed that the piece originally formed part of a larger arrangement of similarly carved beams, together making up the entire Throne Verse. This is one of the passages of the Qur’an most often used in a funerary context, although it has a much wider architectural application as well; it

this example. As well as verses from the Qur’an, the names of patrons and rulers were also recorded, complete with honorific titles *ad infinitum*. The visibility of the written word when displayed in places of public veneration has always ensured that such architecture and its fittings will be treated as appropriate surfaces for textual inscription, both religious and political.



appears in the Dome of the Rock, and is frequently used in inscriptions found on mihrabs.

Juvin has suggested that this beam may originally have formed part of the short end of a cenotaph, as a very similar piece – most likely from a cenotaph – was discovered in the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi‘i in Cairo, and a near-identical style of inscriptive frieze appears on the fragmented cenotaph of Fakhr al-Din Isma‘il, dated 1216 and now in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Makariou 2007, p. 118; ill. Anglade 1988, p. 51). The Ayyubid period (late twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries) in Syria saw something of a vogue for the commissioning of expensive wooden furnishings and architectural fittings for mosques and tombs: mihrabs, minbars, cenotaphs, lintels, doors, screens, beams and brackets have survived, often carved with lengthy inscriptions in an attractive cursive script similar to that of



Iznik, Turkey; c. 1561
 Glazed fritware with polychrome underglaze painting against white
 c. 25 x 24.5 cm each
 AKM 583, 584, 862
 Publ: Makariou 2007, p. 98 (no. 32; 584 only)

The Iznik potteries of Ottoman Turkey produced a vast quantity of high-quality ceramics in the sixteenth century, from vessels to tile friezes of repeating designs (cat. no. 61). Initially most of the ceramics produced at Iznik were vessels, but from the middle of the sixteenth century tile production for the Ottoman empire began in earnest as the demand for wall decoration was accelerated by the initiation of large-scale construction projects by Süleyman the Magnificent and his ministers in Istanbul and throughout the empire. While the vogue for tilework in Ottoman imperial mosques and other buildings generally took the form of intense but focused tile friezes used to direct the eye to specific areas, such as the mihrab, a few buildings have interiors that are almost completely covered in tilework. Chief amongst these is the Istanbul mosque of Rüstem Pasha (d. 1561), the chief vizier of Süleyman the Magnificent and notable patron of architecture.

Completed not long after its patron's death, the mosque of Rüstem Pasha is one of the works of the great architect Sinan, and the interior decoration combines panels of different repeating tile friezes to dazzling effect. The project was probably pushed to completion by Rüstem Pasha's widow Mihrimah Sultan, the daughter of Süleyman the Magnificent and also one of Sinan's major royal patrons. The three tiles in the AKM collection are identical with a group mounted on the back wall of the Rüstem Pasha Mosque, allowing a fairly secure date of c. 1561 to be ascribed, although Denny notes that this design may have elicited later copies (Denny 1977, pp. 55–56). However, it seems most likely that these tiles are 'overruns' left over from the original Ottoman project, as the practice of producing extra tiles was not uncommon; other tiles from this group are now in the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon (Denny 2004, pp. 208–210), the David Collection, Copenhagen (von Folsach 2001, p. 193), the Sadberk Hanim Museum, Istanbul (Soustiel 2000, p. 70), the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and elsewhere.

When viewed *en masse* on the wall of the mosque, the centrifugal design of the intertwining leaf sprays of these tiles is almost hypnotic and makes an extremely effective repeating pattern. The palette of dark blue and turquoise on a clean, bright white background is characteristic of earlier Ottoman tastes, apparently stemming in part from an interest in Chinese porcelain (Porter 1995, p. 104). A highly distinctive innovation of this period is the bright red colour that stands slightly proud of the surface, here used sparingly as a highlight on the central veins of the leaves and calyxes of the flowers, but later to play a greater role in the palette of Iznik ceramics (see cat. no. 61).



Pakistan, possibly Multan; sixteenth century or later
 Panel of twenty-eight tiles, glazed earthenware with underglaze painting
 in cobalt and turquoise against white
 124 x 226 cm
 AKM 582

Publ: AKTC 2007a, p. 185 (cat. A); AKTC 2007b, p. 190 (cat. A); AKTC 2008a,
 p. 254 (no. 190); AKTC 2008b, p. 254 (p, 190); AKTC 2010a, pp. 270–271
 (no. 208)

Fourteen individual ceramic tiles make up each half of this panel, which would have once been mounted on the spandrels above an arched doorway, window or recessed niche. The tile panel is thought to have come from Multan in Pakistan. The city was one of the first Muslim capitals in the area after the Arab invasion in the eighth century, and continued to operate for many centuries as an important site in the flexible frontier between Indic and Persianate territories. The melding of artistic tastes and practices from the Iranian and Indian cultural spheres makes the small group of Sufi tombs that survive at Multan and the surrounding areas a fascinating case study in Islamic architecture and architectural decoration.

Early medieval connections with Iran and Afghanistan are evident in the best-known of the mausolea at Multan, that of Rukn-i 'Alam (fourteenth century), which can be related in its overall form to tomb architecture of eleventh- and twelfth-century Iran and Afghanistan. The extraordinary thirty-five metre-high tomb of Rukn-i 'Alam is octagonal in plan, with corner buttresses, an eight-sided drum and an enormous hemispherical dome. The octagonal ground plan was widely imitated throughout the region in later periods, and several closely related tombs were built at Multan and nearby Uchchh Sharif. Tombs of square or rectangular footprint also existed and were also extensively decorated with tilework; however, the structure of the octagonal tomb-type provides a series of facets, each with its own arched opening, giving excellent scope for the inventive use of glazed earthenware tile which characterises both the Rukn-i 'Alam monument and its later imitators.

In particular, these eight-sided tombs commonly have spandrel revetments of ceramic tile, like this example, above arched doors and windows on each of their eight sides, at each level. Many of these have been replaced at various points over the centuries, but the blue and white palette that continues to dominate the tilework of these tombs has been linked to Central Asian tastes (Hillenbrand 1992b, pp. 166–167). The present example, with its tightly drawn pattern of angular rosettes and

eight-pointed stars bound in scrolling curvilinear forms, is rather more complex in design than many of the spandrels that survive on the monuments, although comparable tiles can be seen in the David Collection (von Folsach 2001, p. 197).



