EPIC IRAN

EPIC IRAN

5000 YEARS OF CULTURE

John Curtis Ina Sarikhani Sandmann Tim Stanley

V&A Publishing

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IRAN HERITAGE

THE SARIKHANI COLLECTION

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

EPIC IRAN COVERS a remarkable five millennia of art and design. For the V&A, exhibitions of such extensive time scale and breadth of material are a rarity. Yet for one of the most mesmerizing civilizations, this comprehensive approach is entirely befitting.

For many, Iran's monumental artistic achievements still remain surprisingly unknown and its importance as a distinctive civilization often obscured. While other areas of Asia are treated as a single tradition – as in the case of China, Korea or Japan – coverage of Iran is almost always broken down into constituent parts; the study of Iranian antiquity and of the Islamic period form two distinct disciplines. In an emphatic restatement of the richness and importance of Iran's material heritage, the exhibition reunites the story of this complex heritage through a single, coherent sequence.

From the Ardabil Carpet to our Safavid ceramics, the V&A's collections owe so much to Iranian and Persian culture. Since the days of William Morris and Owen Jones, the V&A's extensive collections from the Islamic Middle East have played a signal role in the development of British design. Collecting began in earnest in the 1870s, and today, our renowned collections from the Islamic Middle East traverse some twelve centuries. Now, as home to one of the most important collections of Iranian artefacts of the Islamic period outside Iran, the V&A is perfectly placed to tell the story of this remarkable tradition.

Over the last decade and more, the V&A has striven to enhance our Iranian collection through research and publication, through the digitization of our collections, and through our public programme. Along the way we have received moral, financial and intellectual support from individuals from Iran, the UK and elsewhere, and in part the exhibition is a culmination of this co-operation. Two key partners, the Sarikhani Collection and the Iran Heritage Foundation, have made an outstanding contribution to these advances. It is therefore with the greatest pleasure that I acknowledge the major contribution that they have also made to *Epic Iran*.

The Sarikhani Collection have generously allowed the V&A unprecedented access to their holdings of Iranian art. Items from the Collection were chosen by the curators to enhance the exhibition display and complement the narrative, providing visitors with a unique opportunity to experience significant and rich examples of Iranian art and design in one place. At the same time, the Collection has made an intellectual contribution through the role of its Director, Ina Sarikhani Sandmann, as the curator of the modern and contemporary section of the exhibition.

Meanwhile, the Iran Heritage Foundation, in the person of Dr John Curtis, has provided the curatorial expertise on pre-Islamic Iran, without which it would have been impossible to address the first three and a half millennia of the exhibition's story. Indeed, given the Foundation's commitment to and success in promoting knowledge and appreciation of everything Iranian, and in particular of the whole of Iran's long and productive history, the exhibition can be seen as an important outcome of its encouragement and support of the V&A's activities in this field over many years.

The V&A's own curatorial contribution to the exhibition has been led by senior curator Tim Stanley, as a specialist in the Islamic period. He has overall responsibility for the museum's Middle Eastern collection, and I thank him for his part in raising the profile of our important Iranian holdings, which has culminated in the staging of *Epic Iran*.

Finally, we are especially grateful to several individuals and private foundations for their generous support and enthusiasm in realizing this exhibition.

When Western audiences are too often offered just one narrative, we want to help those in Britain and beyond to learn about the incredible art and design from one of the world's greatest historic civilizations. I am delighted that we now have the opportunity to honour Iran's epic cultural story.

TRISTAM HUNT
Director, V&A

PARTNER FOREWORDS

THE IRAN HERITAGE FOUNDATION was set up in 1990 with the mission to promote the cultural heritage of Iran through partnerships with universities and museums, organizing and sponsoring exhibitions, arranging lectures and seminars, and publishing books.

Exhibitions organized or sponsored by IHF have included *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch 1785–1925* at the Brunei Gallery in SOAS in 1999, *Iranian Contemporary Art* at the Barbican Centre in 2001, *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* at the British Museum in 2005–6 and *Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* also at the British Museum in 2009. More recently, in 2015, the IHF initiated and organized a five-city tour in the United States of the famous Cyrus Cylinder and the Oxus Treasure, on loan from the British Museum, for a travelling exhibition which introduced the American public to the richness of the Persian empire.

All of these exhibitions were very successful, but each has told just one small part of the rich story of Iranian cultural heritage through the ages. Since as early as 2013, therefore, IHF had conceived the bold idea of organizing a major international exhibition about Iran that would trace the development of its art and culture from prehistory up to the present day. An exhibition covering more or less this ground, epoch-making in its day, was organized at the Royal Academy in 1931, but there has been nothing comparable since that date, at least in the UK, and the time is surely ripe for a reappraisal. Therefore, when the IHF was given the opportunity to collaborate with the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Sarikhani Foundation in organizing just such a major exhibition about Iran, it accepted with alacrity.

The IHF is proud to have enjoyed a fruitful and long-standing relationship with the V&A. In 2005 we organized a season of events and installations around the work of the Iranian artist Abbas Kiarostami, and from 2011 onwards there has been an IHF curator of Iranian art at the V&A, firstly Moya Carey and more recently Sarah Piram. It is also gratifying that the IHF has close connections with the Sarikhani Foundation: Ali Sarikhani was until recently a trustee of IHF and Chair of its Advisory Board, and Ina Sandmann, the director of the Sarikhani Collection, is presently an IHF Trustee.

In the organization of this exhibition IHF has been represented by Dr John Curtis, chief executive officer, and Astrid Johansen, cultural heritage manager. Their role has been to develop the ancient part of the exhibition, and although it has not been possible to include objects from the National Museum of Iran, as originally intended, enough objects have been sourced from elsewhere to show that the development of civilization in Iran was on a par with that in the neighbouring regions of Mesopotamia and Egypt. In addition, the National Museum of Iran has been very generous in supplying images for inclusion in this catalogue. The scope of the exhibition serves to demonstrate the unique contributions of Iran to the development of art, architecture and literature with its influences stretching from China to Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East. The exhibition will show that from these early beginnings up to modern times – some five millennia – a discernible thread can be traced in the artistic developments throughout this period, giving Iran the cultural legacy that is rightly celebrated around the world.

ALIREZA RASTEGAR and ALI RASHIDIAN
Joint-Chairs, Iran Heritage Foundation

IT MUST BE MORE THAN TEN YEARS now since I first saw the Sarikhani Collection of Iranian art. Not knowing what to expect and bringing very little knowledge of the artefacts of this ancient land I was immediately bowled over by the sheer quality of what I saw. It seemed unbelievable that a new collection should have accumulated so much beauty in so short a time. The inherent quality of the objects which Ali Sarikhani and his daughter Ina Sarikhani Sandmann had brought together shone out in a way that was at once instantly seductive and deeply fascinating.

A growing fascination with the material culture of Iran, a sense of dislocation from heritage and a desire for self-expression were impulses for the beginning of the Sarikhani Collection, which now contains over a thousand objects. Begun in a spirit of amateur enthusiasm, intense research and passion – and the rich opportunities provided by the European and American collections created since the vogue for Persian art took off in the nineteenth century – resulted in a determination to create a representative collection of the very highest quality. Not just for personal enjoyment, it also provided a resource for academics and enthusiasts. Understanding that successful projects and productive research come through collaboration, the Sarikhani Foundation has built partnerships with other institutions, including the V&A, the Courtauld Institute, the Ashmolean Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Pergamon Museum. And with them it has worked to promote research in the culture and arts of Iran by supporting academic posts, research projects, loans, exhibitions, publications and philanthropy.

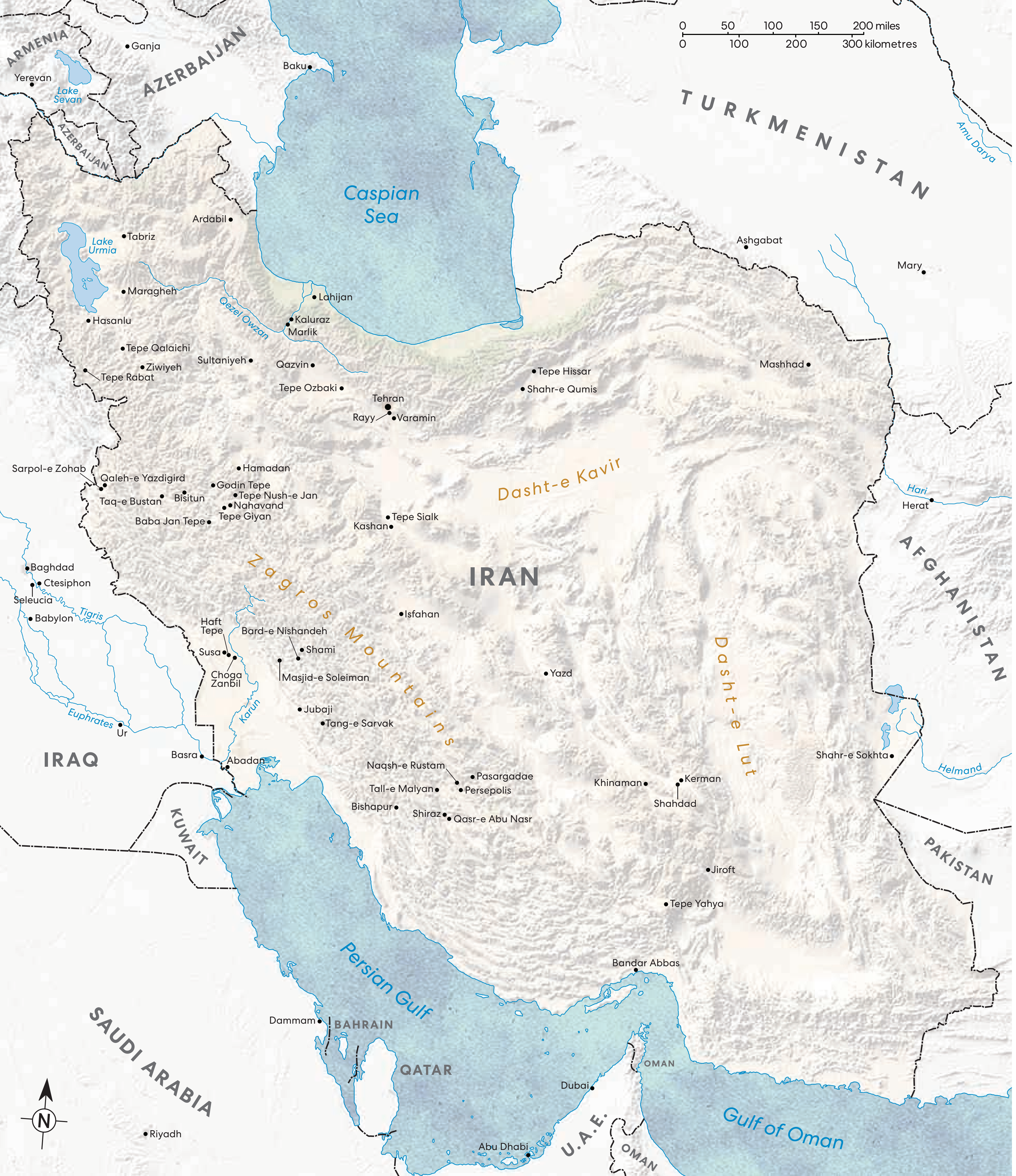
There is a view that we can respond only to things we know about. That it is accumulated knowledge and deepening familiarity that open the way to aesthetic response. There is of course some truth in this. But, as *Epic Iran* demonstrates, there is nothing more exciting than the appeal of the previously unencountered, the unmediated call of one human spirit to another across the gulf of time and cultural difference.

Of all the world's major cultures Iran is and has always been the least familiar to us in Britain. There have been embassies in both directions, since the sixteenth century, and moments of rapport. The visit of Shah Naser al-Din in 1873 aroused such enthusiasm that the streets were lined with cheering crowds, and even the patients in St Thomas's Hospital roused themselves to give a welcoming hurrah. Visiting the sights, the Shah was impressed by the Crystal Palace, the railways, and the coal-blackened faces of Mancunian workers, but puzzled that a people which set such store by saving life should give honour to those who invented machines for slaughtering people in war.

One of those who translated for the Shah was Ismit Sahib, otherwise know as Major Murdoch Smith, Royal Engineer and director of the Persian Telegraph Company. Museum collections are based more largely than their curators are sometimes happy to admit on the knowledge of collectors. In Murdoch Smith the V&A harnessed the energy of such a collector, who in his turn acquired the collections of others and was reported in the press, two years after the Shah's visit, to have despatched a caravan carrying 'a Persian repertory' in 62 cases. The scale of Murdoch Smith's collection was impressive, and was displayed in both London and Edinburgh, while an admiration for Persian art was evidenced by William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and the Ionides family in their loans to the Burlington Fine Arts Club's exhibition of Persian and Arab Art in 1885. Despite this, the media were surely right to assert, on the eve of the great Persian Art exhibition held nearly fifty years later at the Royal Academy in 1931, that its contents would come as a revelation to the public.

The same is I think true of this exhibition now. And precisely because there are fewer state visits and less cordial embassies than in the past it is has become all the more welcome and important that we have the chance to see the long continuities and boundless variety to be found in the culture of Iran.

MARK JONES
Trustee of the Sarikhani Foundation
and Former Director of the V&A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Lake Urmia
Ashgabat
Mary
Maragheh
Lahijan
Qezel Owzan
Hasanlu
Kaluraz
Marlik
Tepe Qalaichi
Sultaniyeh
Qazvin
Mashhad
Ziwiyeh
Tepe Rabat
Tepe Hissar
Shahr-e Qumis
Tepe Ozbaki
Tehran
Rayy
Varamin
Sarpol-e Zohab
Hamadan
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Godin Tepe
Taq-e Bustan
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Baba Jan Tepe
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Tepe Sialk
Kashan
AFGHANISTAN
Baghdad
Ctesiphon
Seleucia
IRAN
Zagros Mountains
Babylon
Tigris
Isfahan
Haft Tepe
Bard-e Nishandeh
Susa
Shami
Dasht-e Lut
Choga Zanbil
Masjid-e Soleiman
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INTRODUCTION

TIM STANLEY

Iran has been home to rich cultural and artistic traditions for at least 5,000 years, spanning the ancient, medieval and modern worlds, and its creativity continues to flourish. *Epic Iran* evokes this outstanding heritage by presenting not only treasures from the past but also those of the present, which illustrate Iran's contribution to international art movements as well as emphasizing distinctive local idioms.

The physical setting in which Iranian culture has prospered during its long history is the same upland plateau that occupies most of the territory of Iran today. It lies at about 900 metres above sea level, with two great deserts – the Dasht-e Kavir and the Dasht-e Lut – at its centre. The plateau is framed by mountains that rise to a height of 5,000 metres and more: to the west and south-west are the Zagros Mountains, while to the north is the Alborz Range, which is continued in the north-east by the mountains of Kopet Dagh. The plateau is less well defined to the east, where it extends into the mountainous regions of Afghanistan and western Pakistan. Overall, this vast landscape is bounded by alluvial lowlands, watered by major river systems (those of Iraq in the west, and of Central Asia to the north-east), and by two seas (the Caspian Sea to the north and the Persian Gulf to the south).

Political frontiers in this region, however, have shifted repeatedly, and in some periods the area controlled by the rulers of the plateau reached far beyond it. Iran was first united politically under the Persian empire established by the Achaemenid dynasty (550–330 BC), which at its greatest extent covered the whole of the Middle East and stretched as far as the River Indus in the east, to the lands east of the Aral Sea in the north and into North Africa in the west. A thousand years later Iran was ruled by another Persian dynasty, the Sasanians, one of whose kings, Khosrow II (r. AD 591–628), briefly controlled an empire that was almost as large, extending from Egypt in the west to what is now Afghanistan. Yet another thousand years later, under the rulers of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722), Iranian forces contested control of Iraq with the Ottoman Turks in the west; in the east, they fought with the Mughal emperors of South Asia over Qandahar in southern Afghanistan; while their northern borders reached as far as the Caucasus Mountains and the River Oxus. Subsequently, in the century up to 1860, the borders of Iran retracted to their current position. Yet it is still an extensive land of more than 1.6 million square kilometres, the second largest in the region, after Saudi Arabia.

Iranian languages have been spoken on the upland plateau since about 1200 BC, and they continue to be used by the majority of the population. Among these languages it is Persian that enjoys particular cultural prestige. The Achaemenid kings of the sixth to the fourth centuries BC were ethnic Persians who had settled in what is now the province of Fars in south-west Iran, and they were the first to use Persian as a written language. The form they employed, now called Old Persian, was written in a type of cuneiform script. The Sasanians, who ruled Iran from AD 224 to 651, were also Persians from Fars, and they employed a new linguistic form, written in a version of Aramaic script, for administration and business. It was also used in the creation of a wide range of literary texts.

From the ninth century this medium, now called Middle Persian (or Pahlavi), was gradually displaced by Modern Persian (also called New Persian), written in the Arabic script. This most recent form became the vehicle for literature that was composed, read and debated over a vast stretch of the Islamic world, from the Balkans to the Bay of Bengal, as well as in Iran itself, retaining its international importance for a thousand years. It still serves as Iran's official language, and literature written in Persian still plays an immensely important role in the cultural life of Iranians today, 2500 years later. Few other nations can rival this degree of continuity.

The religious history of Iran is also exceptionally rich, both in the variety of faiths practised there, at one time including Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Manichaeism, and in the development locally of important religious ideas. In particular, Iran was the home to the sophisticated belief system called Zoroastrianism, its roots dating back so far into the past – some 3500 to 2500 years – that it can claim to be the world's oldest monotheistic faith. From the seventh century AD, however, Zoroastrianism's primacy was challenged

Fig. 1
Map showing important archaeological sites and centres of production within and near modern Iran.

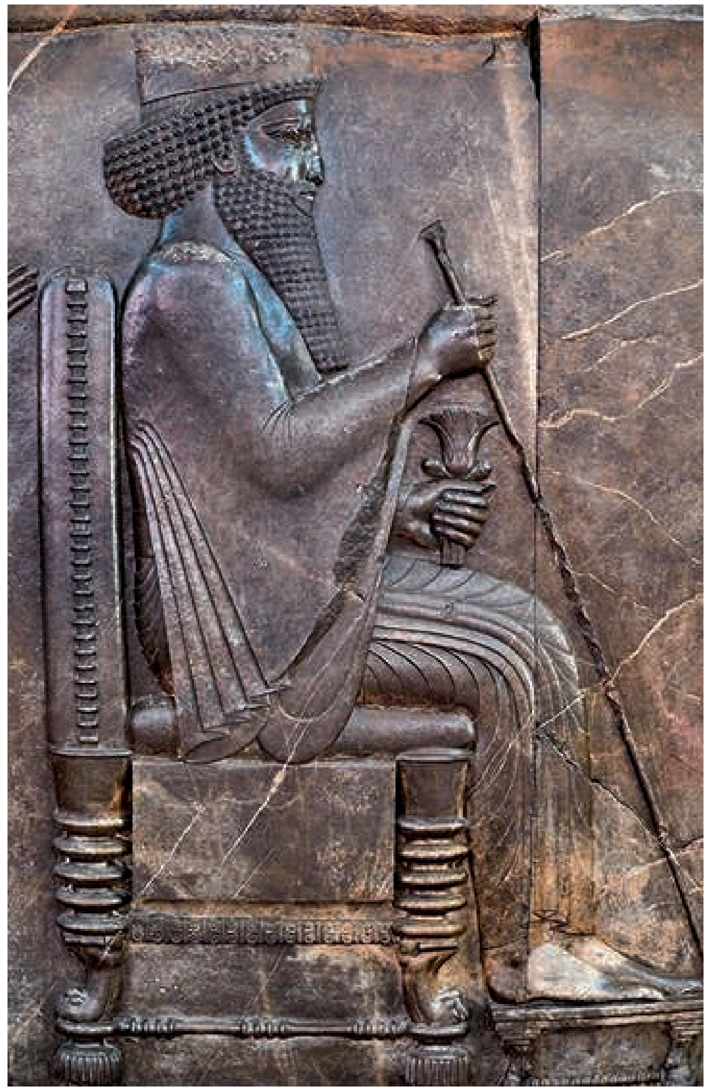


Fig. 2
Relief carving at Persepolis of Xerxes on his throne holding a sceptre and a lotus, about 480 BC
National Museum of Iran, Tehran

Fig. 3
Dasht-e Lut desert, Kerman province

by the conversion to Islam of an increasing percentage of the population, which reduced it to the religion of a minority. Islam in medieval Iran was also marked by diversity, but in 1501 one form, the Imami Shi'ite tradition, was made Iran's official religion, and it has remained so ever since, providing another key facet of the nation's character.

Together with the Persian language and its literature, and distinctive forms of religion, the Iranian identity today is built on an awareness of its rich historical legacy. The inhabitants of Iran have called themselves 'Iranians' at least since the reign of the Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BC). In Darius's time the term used was *ariya*, usually translated as 'Aryan', and in an inscription on his tomb at Naqsh-e Rustam, an ancient necropolis near Persepolis, he declares:

> I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings,
> King of countries containing all kinds of men,
> King in this great earth far and wide, son of
> Hystaspes, an Achaemenian, a Persian, son of
> a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage.[1]

The word *ariya* changed over time, and by the Sasanian period the collective term for the populace had become *eran* (Iranians) and for their country *eranshahr* (empire of the Iranians). This latter term is first attested about AD 262, when King Shapur I used the title 'ruler of Eranshahr'. The Sasanians felt they were the heirs of the Achaemenids, and it is therefore no coincidence that these words appear in inscriptions King Shapur added to another Achaemenid monument at Naqsh-e Rustam, the stone tower known as the Ka'beh-ye Zardusht. Eventually, in the Islamic period, *eran* became the geographical term 'Iran' and in time was used once more by Iran's rulers for the lands they governed.

But what of Persia? A territory known as 'Parsua' is mentioned in the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BC).[2] Then in 744 BC, during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, an area called Parsua became an Assyrian province, probably the region around Sanandaj in what is now Iranian Kurdistan. Not long after, in the reign of King Sargon (721–705 BC), the same name began to be applied to an area roughly equivalent to the modern province of Fars. Both names reflect the presence in these places of Persians, and probably chart their progress through Iran, taking the place name with them.[3] Exactly when these 'Persians' settled in the province of Fars is not clear, but they certainly arrived there well before the time of Darius I, whose inscriptions refer to the country as 'Parsa'.[4]

'Parsa' gave way to 'Pars' and then 'Fars', a term that Iranians have only ever applied to the south-western province of that name, and to their language, which they call Farsi. So, in Persian the Persian Gulf is actually the Gulf of Fars (Khalij-e Fars). However, the Greeks and Romans changed 'Parsa' into 'Persia' and applied the name to the whole country, and in due course this became the standard European designation for Iran. It was not until 1935 that Reza Shah Pahlavi officially asked other states to use the name Iran instead of Persia.

Iranian culture spans not only an enormous geographical range but also one of time, hence the study of the subject is divided between different disciplines: one dealing with ancient Iran, another with the Islamic period, and a third with contemporary realities. The division between the ancient and Islamic worlds is reflected in museum displays both in Iran itself and throughout the world, and it is only in international exhibitions such as *Epic Iran* that the entire course of Iran's history and the astonishing extent of Iranian artefacts – from ancient grave goods to silk carpets to oil paintings on canvas – has been presented as a single sequence. Such exhibitions have been few and far between, especially in the United Kingdom, where the last such example, *The International Exhibition of Persian Art*, took place at the Royal Academy of Arts in London as long ago as 1931.[5]

The 1931 exhibition was enormous in size, with more than 2000 objects on view. The displays followed a roughly chronological sequence, but little information was offered. Instead, the emphasis was placed on density, designed to overwhelm visitors visually. The official aim of the exhibition, supported by the government of Reza Shah Pahlavi, was to promote Iran as a land of art, and in this the exhibition was successful. It also served to inspire the academic study of its subject, aided by the publication of *A Survey of Persian Art*, a vast, multi-volume, multi-authored work that was intended to accompany the exhibition but which did not appear until the end of the decade.[6]

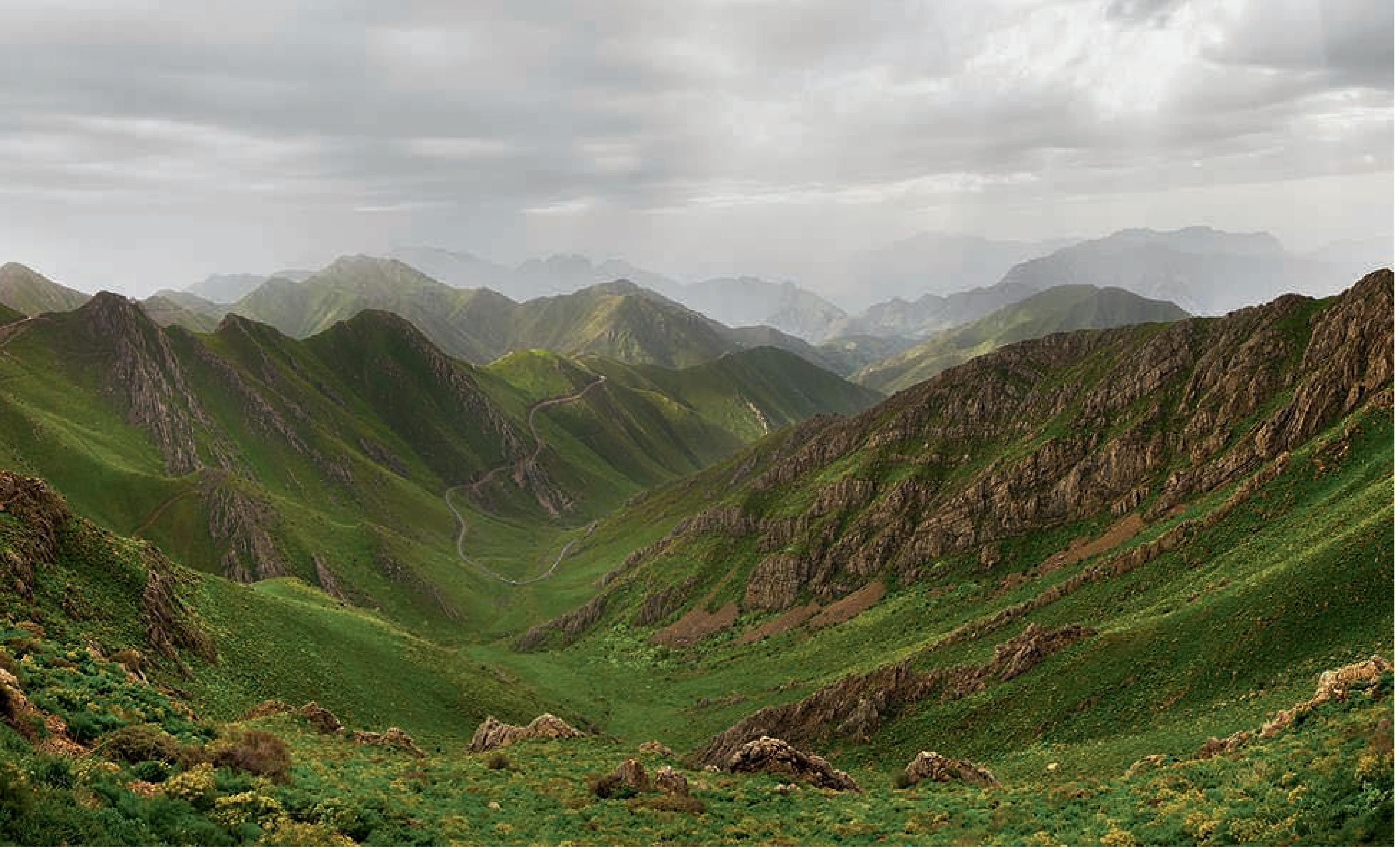


Fig. 4
The Zagros Mountains near Uraman Takht, Kurdestan province

Epic Iran places much greater emphasis on antiquity than the 1931 exhibition. In the 1930s Iran was seen as a poor relation to the esteemed civilizations in the Fertile Crescent to the west, particularly those of Mesopotamia and Egypt, but that perception has been discredited by archaeological discoveries made from the 1960s onwards. It is now clear that in the third millennium BC there was a vibrant and dynamic civilization in East Iran, manufacturing goods of an artistic quality equal to those found in Mesopotamia – in the Sumerian royal cemetery at Ur, for example. There have been similarly dramatic revelations about the pre-Achaemenid Elamite civilization in West Iran, where tombs have been found replete with astonishing grave goods. Had these discoveries been made in the 1930s, when the artistic canon for the wider region was being defined, our view of the cultural development of the ancient Near East would be very different, with Iran holding a position in the first rank.

In 1931, too, there could be no presentation of modern art from Iran – it had yet to manifest itself. Painting in oils, for example, had appeared in Iran in the seventeenth century and had flourished in the nineteenth century under the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925). However, skill in painting was transmitted through a chain of master–pupil relationships that required the apprentice painter to emulate the master's work rather than to seek a route to self-expression. In addition, in the early twentieth century the system of patronage that had made nineteenth-century painting so dynamic had greatly weakened. As a result, late nineteenth-century traditions of realism in oil painting were still being taught in 1931, and there was no mechanism for change. As we shall see, new methods of art education were introduced in the 1940s, after the opening of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Tehran, which is when Iranian modern art was born.

Since the 1930s the study of the Islamic art of Iran has changed, too. It has moved away from the formalist approach dominant in the mid-twentieth century. At that time, scholars mostly ignored the Persian text that accompanied manuscript illustrations, for example, and judged the paintings by their own aesthetic values, divorcing them from the physical and social context in which they were created. More recently scholars literate in Persian have begun to reconnect Iranian art with an understanding of the society that produced it and, in the case of illustrations, with the fine books for which they were created.

Epic Iran presents an impressive selection of works made over the course of five millennia. The story starts about 3200 BC, when the first rudimentary writing appeared in Iran – an event that is usually taken to signal the beginning of the country's history. It concludes with works of art made in our own time. The creation of the exhibition has therefore required a purposeful selectivity. It does not include the so-called Oxus civilization of the third millennium BC, for example, as this was based in modern Turkmenistan, not in Iran. Nor does it cover the art of the Seleucid empire, even though this Hellenistic state, which had its centre in the Fertile Crescent, ruled Iran in the fourth and third centuries BC. On the other hand, it does include objects of the Achaemenid period from the Oxus Treasure, which was found on the north bank of the River Amu Darya in what is now Tajikistan. We may not know precisely where they were made, but they are indistinguishable from similar objects produced in Iran.

The selection of objects the authors have made is designed to bring home the extraordinary richness of Iran's artistic heritage. Each of our contributions has its own points to make, but they are also intended as components of a single story. As we have seen, the first part of *Epic Iran* sets out the case for the Iranian plateau as one of the great centres of civilization in antiquity, equivalent in many respects to the more renowned civilizations of the Fertile Crescent. The great art of the Achaemenid period (sixth–fourth centuries BC) did not spring up out of nothing but was formed within a tradition that had already existed for two-and-a-half millennia. The achievements of the Achaemenids and of the later Iranian dynasties, the Parthians and the Sasanians (third century BC–seventh century AD), built up a great store of history that proved literally unforgettable.

In most other parts of the Middle East, the Islamic conquests of the seventh century reforged the identity of the population so radically that most no longer had a connection with whom they had once been. In Iran, though, while the conquerors swept away the Sasanian empire, they could not eliminate the memories of past glories. The population continued to speak Iranian languages, eventually absorbing the Arab elements who had settled among them, and in the tenth century, as the Persian literary language was reborn in a new Islamic guise, it gave rise to the world's greatest epic poem, the *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*), founded on the historical writings of the Sasanian period.

The completion of the *Shahnameh* by its author, Firdowsi, in 1010 was followed by half a millennium in which Iranian culture flourished. Nevertheless, political allegiances shifted in a way that did not allow the development of a single, lasting entity called Iran. Then, in 1501–10 the territory of modern Iran was re-unified under the rule of the Safavid dynasty, who simultaneously began to lead the population in conversion to the Imami form of Shi'ism. An Iranian state exists today in more or less the same geographical space, with the same distinctive religious allegiance, and with a pride in its long history as well as a literary and visual culture of global importance.

The vital energy of today's Iran is given substance in the last section of the book, and of the exhibition, which outlines the development of modern and contemporary art there since the 1940s. The art of the Islamic Republic and the Iranian diaspora has been attracting international notice for over two decades, but taking a longer retrospective view shows how despite the violent storms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the art life of Iran has flourished when conditions were right, remaining engaged and critical.

1

EMERGING IRAN: SILENT TREASURES FROM THE DAWN OF HISTORY

John Curtis

From the eighth millennium bc onwards, there were settled communities dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains. Where before people had hunted wild animals and gathered plants and fruit, now they began to domesticate animals, principally sheep and goats, and plant wheat and barley. These people lived in small mud-brick villages, and became increasingly proficient at making pottery. The painted pottery of the fifth and fourth millennia bc is particularly striking with representations of animals such as gazelles, deer, leopards and lions, testifying to the close relationship that these early villagers had with the natural world. With the passage of time they began to dabble in metalworking, and there were also some long-distance trade contacts, but for all this Iran at the time was basically a rural society.

Towards the end of the fourth millennium bc the situation changed with the growth of large urban settlements such as those at Susa and Tall-e Malyan (ancient Anshan) in south-west Iran, Tepe Sialk in central Iran, and Tepe Yahya in eastern Iran. Clay tablets written in Proto-Elamite, the earliest writing system known in Iran, have been found at all these places, indicating the development of sophisticated economies. It is no coincidence that writing systems appear independently in Mesopotamia, Iran and Egypt within a few hundred years of each other, testifying to the growth of complex administrative systems and the need for transactions to be recorded. It could be said that history begins in Iran in about 3200 bc with the introduction of these first written records. It used to be thought that these 'Proto-Elamite' centres in Iran were offshoots from the Late Uruk civilization of Mesopotamia, but while there were certainly some connections the centres in Iran were independent entities that belonged to a trading network extending across the Iranian plateau.[1]

By the middle of the third millennium bc there were trade contacts not only across Iran but also extending much further afield to Mesopotamia in the west and in the east as far as the Indus Valley. Settlements in eastern Iran that had good access to water supplies and were on long-distance trade routes between east and west were able to prosper, and wealthy civilizations developed at Shahdad, Shahr-e Sokhta and Jiroft, for example. Such places were virtually unknown before the 1960s, and the wealth and diversity of the material culture is simply astonishing. Our view of the growth of civilizations in the ancient Near East is largely shaped by discoveries in the 1930s, such as that of the Sumerian royal cemetery at Ur in Mesopotamia, but, as we are now aware, the civilization of Iran at this time was every bit as advanced. The culture was not only fairly homogenous across south-east Iran but also embraced central and south-west Iran. As far as we know, most of the people in Iran at this date spoke Elamite, an unclassified language that belongs to no known language family.

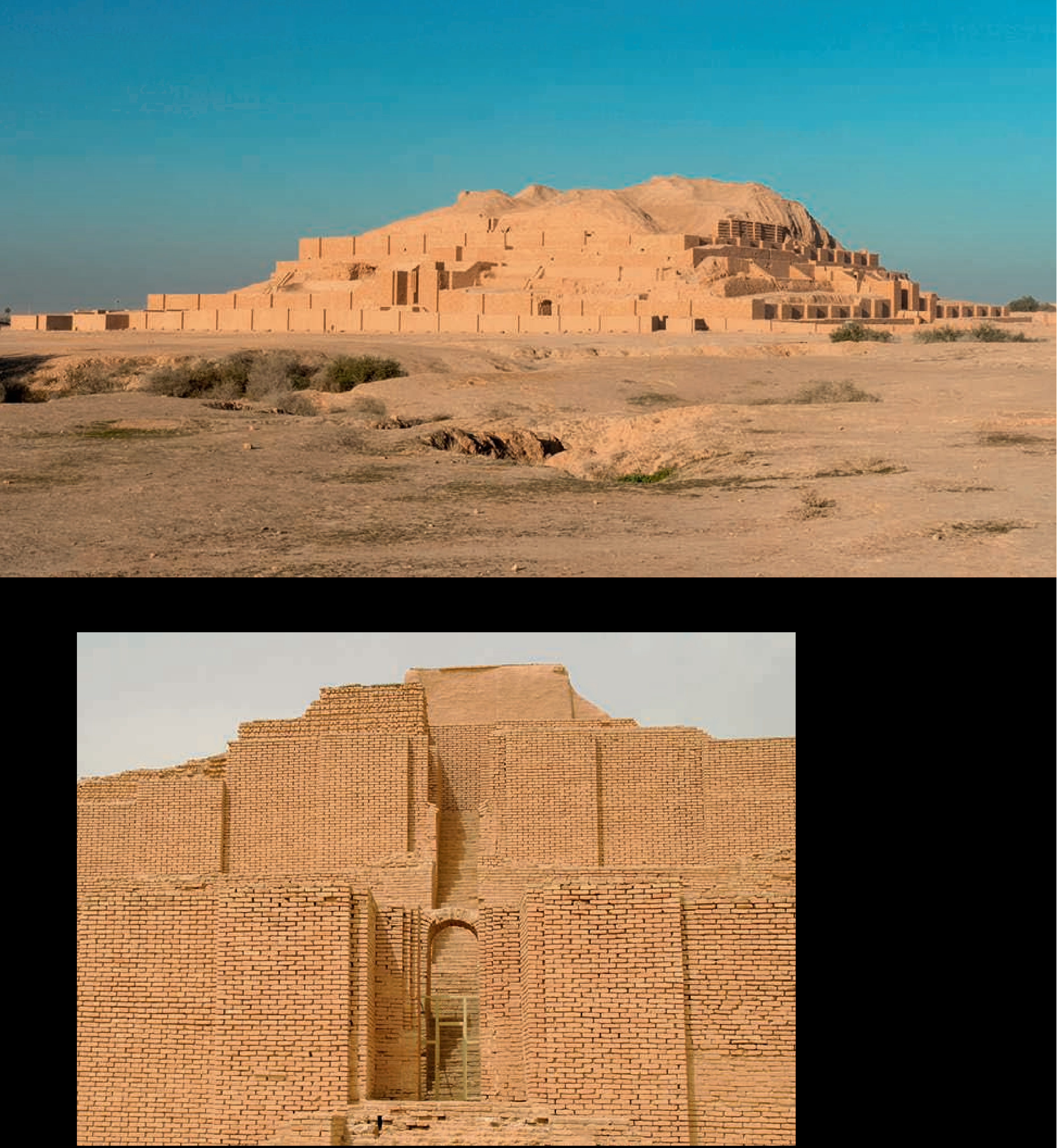
In the period from about 2500 bc to the early second millennium the cities of eastern and south-western Iran had close contacts with Central Asia. Here, the so-called Oxus civilization, otherwise known as the Bactria-Margiana archaeological complex, flourished in the countries now known as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Although there have been important excavations at sites such as Gonur Tepe in Turkmenistan, the art of this region is largely known through objects that have appeared on the art market. Particularly distinctive are 'Bactrian princesses', seated chlorite figurines with limestone heads, male figurines with scaly skins and scarred faces, silver basins with embossed decoration, and bronze openwork stamp seals. There are close connections with the art of Iran, and a few overlaps, but the Oxus civilization is an independent culture that is not part of the story of mainstream Iran.[2]

Soon after the close of the third millennium bc the remarkable civilizations witnessed at sites such as Tepe Yahya, Shahr-e Sokhta and Shahdad petered out, for reasons that are not yet fully understood. Instead, the period spanning the end of the third millennium bc and the first half of the second millennium bc is mainly documented by means of archaeological discoveries in other parts of Iran such as Susa, Tepe Hissar just to the south-east of the Caspian Sea and situated on an important East-West trade route (cat. 14), Tepe Giyan in Luristan (see cat. 15) and Khinaman in eastern Iran.[3]

From about 1500 bc it is thought that newcomers arrived in Iran, coming from Central Asia and speaking a language or languages belonging to the Indo-Iranian group. These are the people who would later be called Iranians, and they include the groups later known as the Medes and the Persians. The name 'Iran' derives from the term 'Aryan' in reference to the Iranians. Thus, in his inscription at Naqsh-e Rustam, an ancient necropolis at Persepolis, Darius I (r. 522–486 bc), third king of the Achaemenid empire, describes himself as 'an Aryan, having Aryan lineage'.[4] The arrival of these people on the plateau during what archaeologists call the Iron Age I and II periods (about 1350–800 bc) is sometimes thought to be marked by the introduction of new pottery types, such as grey ware (for example, cat. 36) or painted beak-spouted jugs (such as cat. 50), and the introduction of new burial customs. It now became common for the dead to be buried in extramural cemeteries rather than under the floors of houses as previously. However, it is not accepted by all scholars that there is any clear break with earlier Bronze Age traditions, particularly in pottery manufacture, and the debate continues as to whether the arrival of the newcomers can be identified in the archaeological record and also whether there is a direct link between language and ethnicity. However, there is no doubt that Iranian languages were introduced at this time and it is likely they were introduced by newcomers.

After 1500 bc the Elamite civilization continued to flourish in south-west Iran at places such as Susa, Anshan and Chogha Zanbil, but elsewhere new local cultures emerged, particularly in western Iran. Small kingdoms including Mannaea and Ellipi developed their own distinctive art styles. Apart from the Elamites in south-west Iran, peoples elsewhere on the plateau were apparently illiterate, and the few inscriptions that have been found are in other languages, such as Assyrian or Aramaic. We therefore have no written information about matters such as religious beliefs, but it is likely that some at this time followed an early form of Zoroastrianism (see p. 124). A number of architectural innovations also occurred during this period. Thus, we find the construction of columned halls at various sites such as Hasanlu, Ziwiyeh and Godin Tepe. Such buildings are a hallmark of the Iranian Iron Age, although whether columned halls were an Iranian invention is a matter of dispute. In any case, they later became the standard building plan of the Achaemenid period (550–330 bc).

To the east of Mannaea and Ellipi, and stretching across the Iranian plateau, lived the Medes. For modern historians the Medes remain an enigma. They are first mentioned in Assyrian texts of the ninth century bc, and later they became well established in an area around modern Hamadan. However, archaeological excavations at Tepe Nush-e Jan, Tepe Sialk, Tepe Ozbaki and Godin Tepe have not provided much information about Median culture, history and civilization. This, coupled with the fact that the Medes were apparently illiterate, has led some modern historians to suggest that they were nothing more than a loose coalition of tribes with no state structure. A counter-argument contends that by the seventh century bc they were powerful enough to sign vassal treaties with the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 bc), promising to recognize the succession to the Assyrian throne. In 614–612 bc they joined forces with the Babylonians to defeat Assyria and sack the main Assyrian cities. Their forays to the west brought them into contact with the kingdom of Lydia in west and central Anatolia, and in 585 bc, after five years of warfare, the frontier between the Medes and the Lydians was established on the River Halys (now known as the River Yeşilırmak in Turkey). All this would scarcely have been possible without a well-established political structure, and when Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid empire, deposed the Median king Astyages in 550 bc he probably inherited a substantial political legacy, not least control of the Iranian plateau and possibly territory extending as far as the Aral Sea. His debt to the Medes may well have been as great as his debt to the Elamites.



THE EARLY HISTORICAL PERIOD

As we have seen, towards the close of the fourth millennium BC, from about 3200 BC and continuing into the third millennium BC, evidence of a new civilization appears at sites across Iran, characterized by clay tablets written in Proto-Elamite (cats 1, 2), and cylinder seals with designs that are labelled Proto-Elamite after the contemporary script. These tablets have been found at Susa and Tall-e Malyan in south-west Iran, Tepe Sialk and Tepe Ozbaki in central Iran, and Tepe Yahya, Shahr-e Sokhta and Jiroft in eastern Iran. The script, consisting of a mixture of numerals, pictograms and cuneiform signs, is still imperfectly understood, but most of the tablets seem to record transactions involving animals and foodstuffs.

The similarities between this 'Proto-Elamite' civilization, if it may be called that, and the Late Uruk civilization of neighbouring Mesopotamia, noted earlier, have long been recognised, and have led some scholars to suggest that the sites in western and central Iran, at least, were outposts or colonies established by merchants from Mesopotamia. It now seems more likely, however, that the sites on the Iranian plateau were independent entities, enjoying trade connections with each other and further afield.

The story for much of the third millennium BC is largely taken up at sites in eastern Iran, in the provinces of Kerman, Hormuzgan and Sistan-Baluchistan. The archaeological potential of this region was first identified in the 1930s by Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943), who was known for his discoveries in Central Asia, but it remained largely unexplored until the 1960s and 1970s, when excavations were undertaken by Iranian and foreign teams. More recently, Iranian archaeologists have again been working in the area.

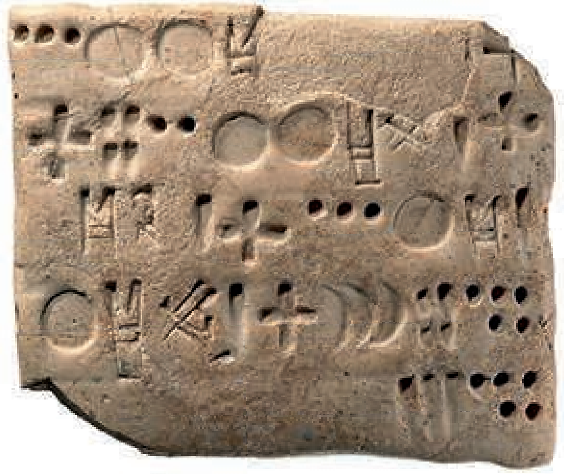
A picture emerges, then, of large and flourishing settlements that around the middle of the third millennium BC were not only in contact with each other but were also part of a trading network that extended westwards to Sumer in southern Mesopotamia, northwards to Central Asia, and eastwards to Afghanistan and the Indus Valley. Semi-precious stones and minerals from the east were much in demand by the Sumerian city-states, and sites in Iran became not only entrepôts but also manufacturing centres. As far as the Sumerians were concerned, the lands to the east were places of fabulous wealth, for which they had names such as Aratta and Marhashi. Although they had traits in common, however, the centres in eastern Iran each developed along distinctive local lines.

One of the most important of these centres was Shahdad, 95 kilometres from Kerman, where Iranian excavations took place between 1968 and 1977, directed by Ali Hakemi (1915–1997) of the Iranian Archaeological Service.[5] In addition to providing evidence for various industrial activities, such as the working of metals and semi-precious stones including lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, the excavations produced a number of nearly life-size clay statues of men and women that had been placed in tombs (cat. 10). Another remarkable find was a bronze standard, unique for the period, which seems to depict some sort of ceremony.

Italian and later Iranian excavations at Shahr-e Sokhta in Sistan-Baluchistan show it to have been, at around 150 hectares, one of the largest settlements in the world at this date. The contents of many graves discovered here testify to a number of long distance contacts, particularly with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Perhaps the most remarkable discoveries, however, come from looted cemeteries in the Halil Rud Valley near the modern town of Jiroft.[6] Hundreds of carved chlorite items including vases, bowls, jars, goblets, 'handbag weights' and even gaming boards have allegedly been found here (cats 6–8), although it is by no means certain that all the pieces are genuine. Sadly they have been distributed far and wide, although many are still in Iran or have since been returned. For example, in 2004, 118 items from Jiroft en route to the Gulf States were impounded at London's Heathrow Airport and later returned to Iran, where they were the subject of a special exhibition at the National Museum of Iran in 2005,[7] and in the same year (2005) – after legal action – the Iranian government managed to retrieve a further 19 objects from an international art-dealing firm.[8] Excavations at the main site in the region, Konar Sandal, have not produced comparable material, but there can be little doubt that the Jiroft civilization, as it is being called, was a remarkable phenomenon that was largely unknown until recently. Evidence for the working of chlorite actually comes from contemporary levels at the site of Tepe Yahya, some 90 kilometres to the south-west.

Fig. 5
The Elamite ziggurat of Chogha Zanbil,
Khuzestan, Iran



1

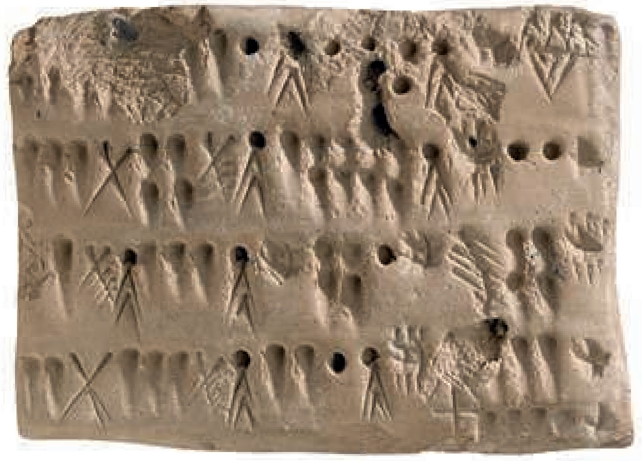
Proto-Elamite tablet

about 3200–2900 BC

Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Clay, 7 × 7.2 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 6392

This tablet, written in Proto-Elamite script, gives on one side an account of five fields and their yields with the total written on the reverse. Also on the reverse is a seal impression showing a lion. It was excavated by French archaeologist Jacques de Morgan (1857–1924) in the Acropolis Mound at Susa in around 1905.

Vincent Scheil, *Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse* VI (Paris 1905), pp. 68, 125, tablet no. 221



2

Proto-Elamite tablet

about 3200–2900 BC

Excavated at Tepe Sialk,
Isfahan province, Iran
Clay, 6.2 × 8.3 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, AO 18173

This numerical tablet is written in Proto-Elamite script that is not yet completely understood but apparently records the numbers of items in three batches of different substances. It provides evidence for a sophisticated accounting system at Tepe Sialk in central Iran in the Early Bronze Age. From the excavations of French archaeologist Roman Ghirshman (1894–1979) at Tepe Sialk, South Mound, Period IV, Level 2.

Roman Ghirshman, *Fouilles de Sialk* I (Paris 1938), pl. XCII, no. S.28; Pierre Amiet, *Elam* (Auvers-sur-Oise 1966), no. 51 on p. 98

3

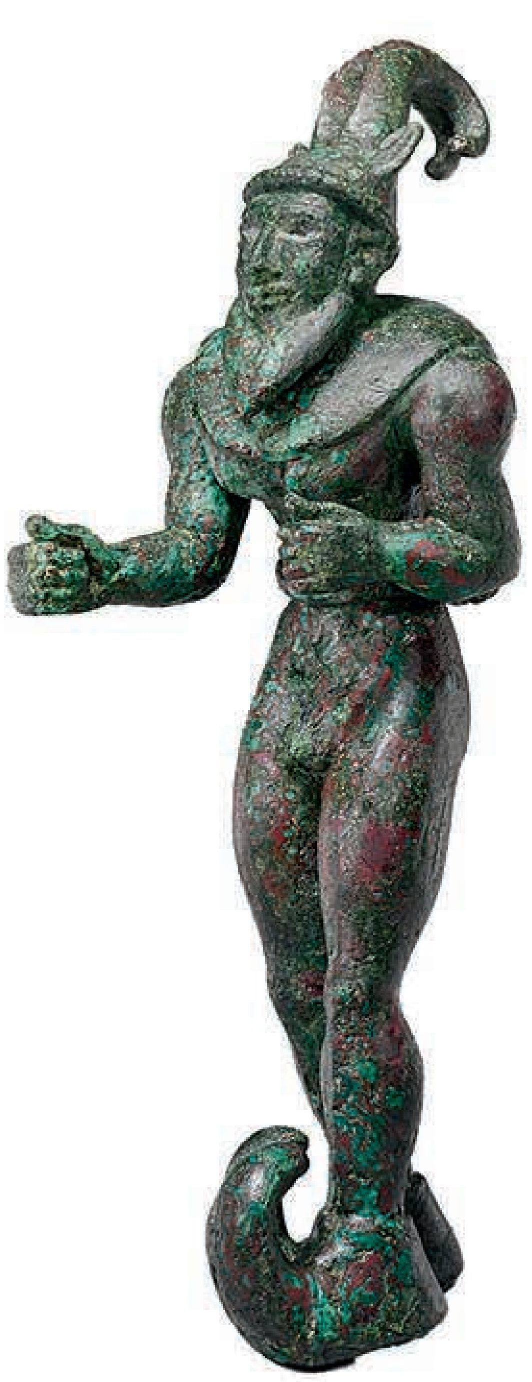
Bulla

about 3200–2900 BC

Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Clay, diameter 6.8 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 1926

Small tokens for accountancy purposes are contained in this clay bulla ('sealed envelope'). It bears on the outside two seal impressions, one showing animals – a boar, a goat, a lion and a bull – with a human figure, and the other a file of four captives with their hands tied behind their backs. Small clay tokens of various shapes were used to keep numerical records before the introduction of writing. In the Proto-Elamite period (about 3200–2900 BC) both systems were in use at the same time. From the excavations of French archaeologist Roland de Mecquenem (1877–1957) in the Acropolis Mound at Susa in 1924.

Denise Schmandt-Besserat, *Before Writing: from Counting to Cuneiform* (Austin, Texas 1992), p. 183, fig. 112



4

Figurine of a man

about 3200–2900 BC

Bronze, height 17.5 cm
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007.280
Purchased 2007 (Lila Acheson Wallace gift)

This bronze figure of a semi-naked bearded man dates from the Proto-Elamite period. He has a cap with ibex horns on his head and the body and wings of a bird of prey are draped around his shoulders. He wears a belt and boots with exaggeratedly curled toes that are associated with mountainous areas. The blending of human and animal forms is possibly an indication of shamanistic beliefs. This figure is a product of the remarkable metalworking industry that developed in Iran and Mesopotamia at this time and coincided with the creation of the earliest cities.

Richard Barnett, 'Homme masqué ou dieu-ibex', *Syria* 43 (1966), pp. 259–76, pl. XXI

5

Pottery jar

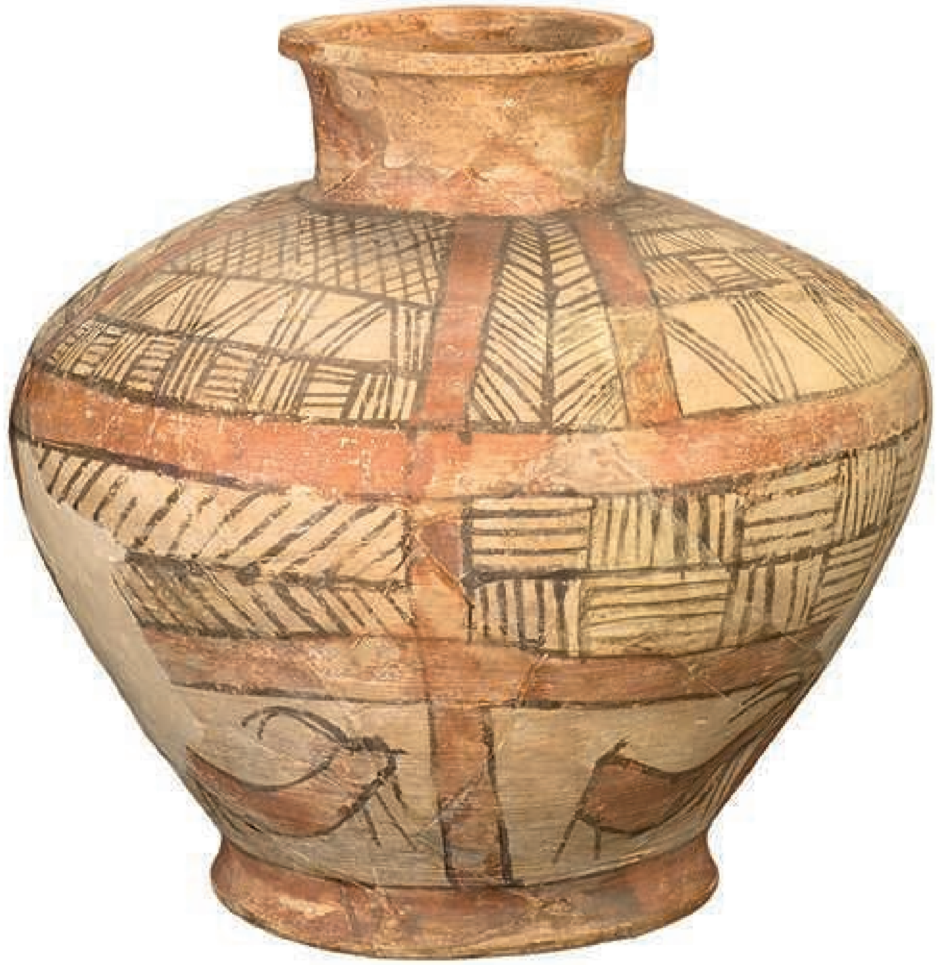
about 2900–2600 BC

Excavated at Kalleh Nisar,
Luristan province, Iran
Clay with painted decoration,
height 25.8 cm

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.1513

This pottery jar has red and brown painted decoration showing linear designs and at the bottom horned animals that are probably ibexes or goats. It dates from the first part of the Early Bronze Age in Luristan. It can be compared with the contemporary 'scarlet ware' pottery of the Diyala region in neighbouring Mesopotamia and testifies to contacts between the two regions. There is also comparable pottery of similar date from Susa.[9] This jar was excavated in a collective tomb at Kalleh Nisar in the western part of the Pusht-e Kuh, Luristan, by a Belgian expedition directed by Louis Vanden Berghe (1923–1993) in 1968.

Ernie Haerinck and Bruno Overlaet, *The Kalleh Nisar Bronze Age Graveyard in Pusht-i Kuh, Luristan: Luristan Excavation Documents VII* (Leuven 2008), pls XXI–XXII; Eric Gubel and Bruno Overlaet, *Trésors de l'Antiquité Proche-Orient et Iran: de Gilgamesh à Zénobie* (Brussels 2007), no. 155 (*Trésors* 2007 *et seq.*)



6

Goblet

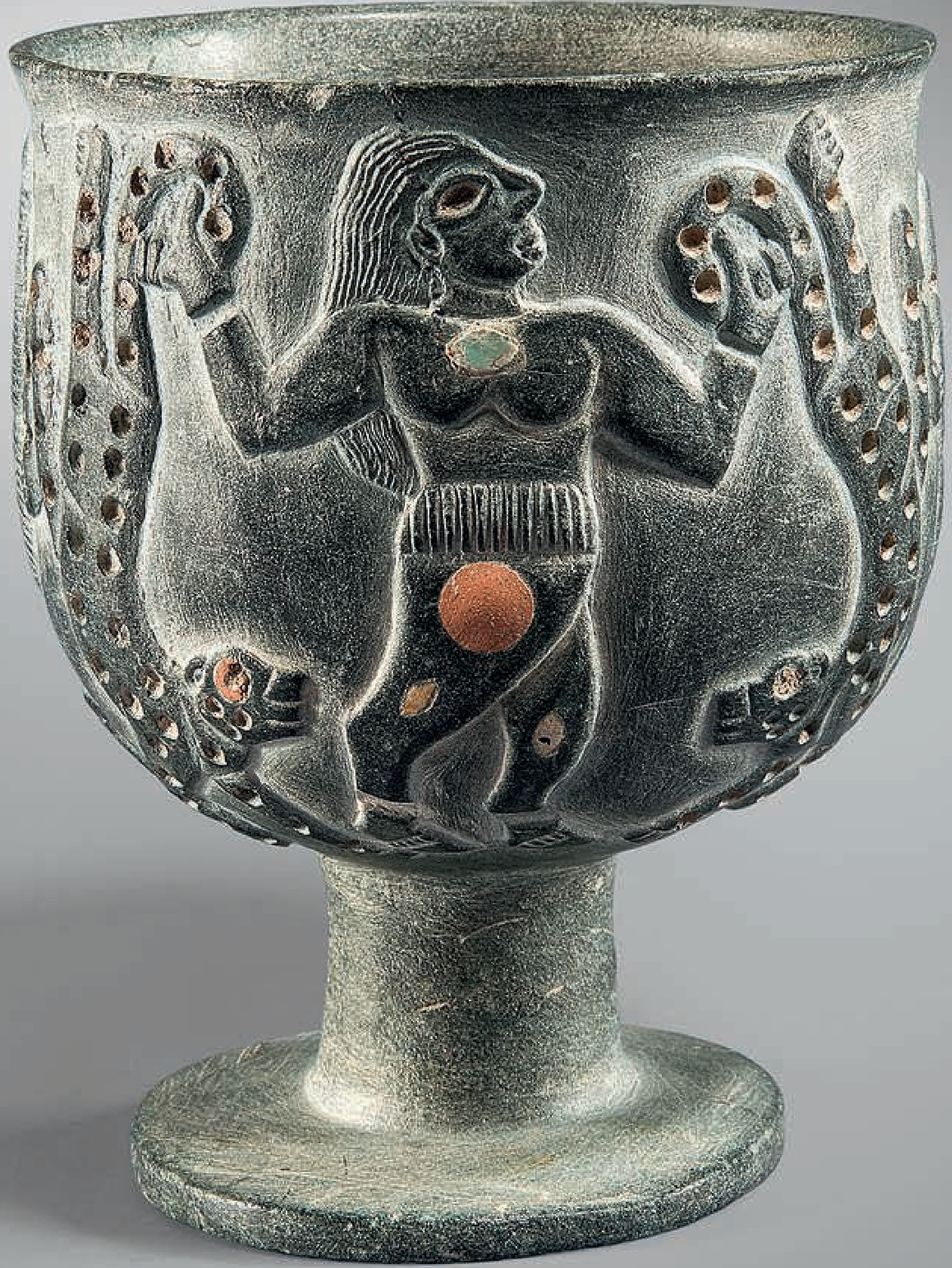
about 2500 BC

Possibly Jiroft, Kerman province, Iran
Chlorite, height 14.7 cm,
diameter 11.8 cm

National Museum of Iran, no. 197
Unprovenanced

Carved goblets of this shape are popular among the chlorite objects attributed to Jiroft, usually engraved with animal scenes.
A soft greenish-grey stone, chlorite occurs naturally in eastern Iran. This goblet is inlaid with carnelian and turquoise. It has a flat disc-like base, short stem and cup engraved with a scene showing two semi-naked human figures with long flowing hair, each holding by their tails two inverted felines that are probably lions or (if the inlays are meant to represent spots) leopards. Between two of the four upside-down animals (not visible here) is a large scorpion. One of the human figures wears a girdle and the other wears a skirt. Figures such as this in Iranian art are often referred to as 'the master of animals'.

Barbara Helwing (ed.), *Iran: Frühe Kulturen zwischen Wasser und Wüste* (Bonn 2017), pp. 116, 267, no. 25 (Bonn Catalogue 2017 *et seq.*); Yousef Majidzadeh, *Jiroft: the Earliest Oriental Civilization* (Tehran 2003), photographs and drawings on pp. 11–12 (Majidzadeh 2003 *et seq.*)



7

Weight

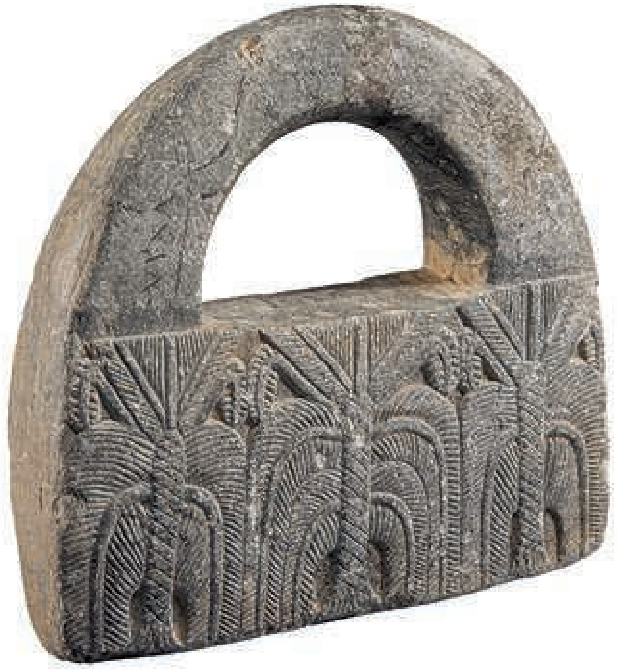
about 2500 BC

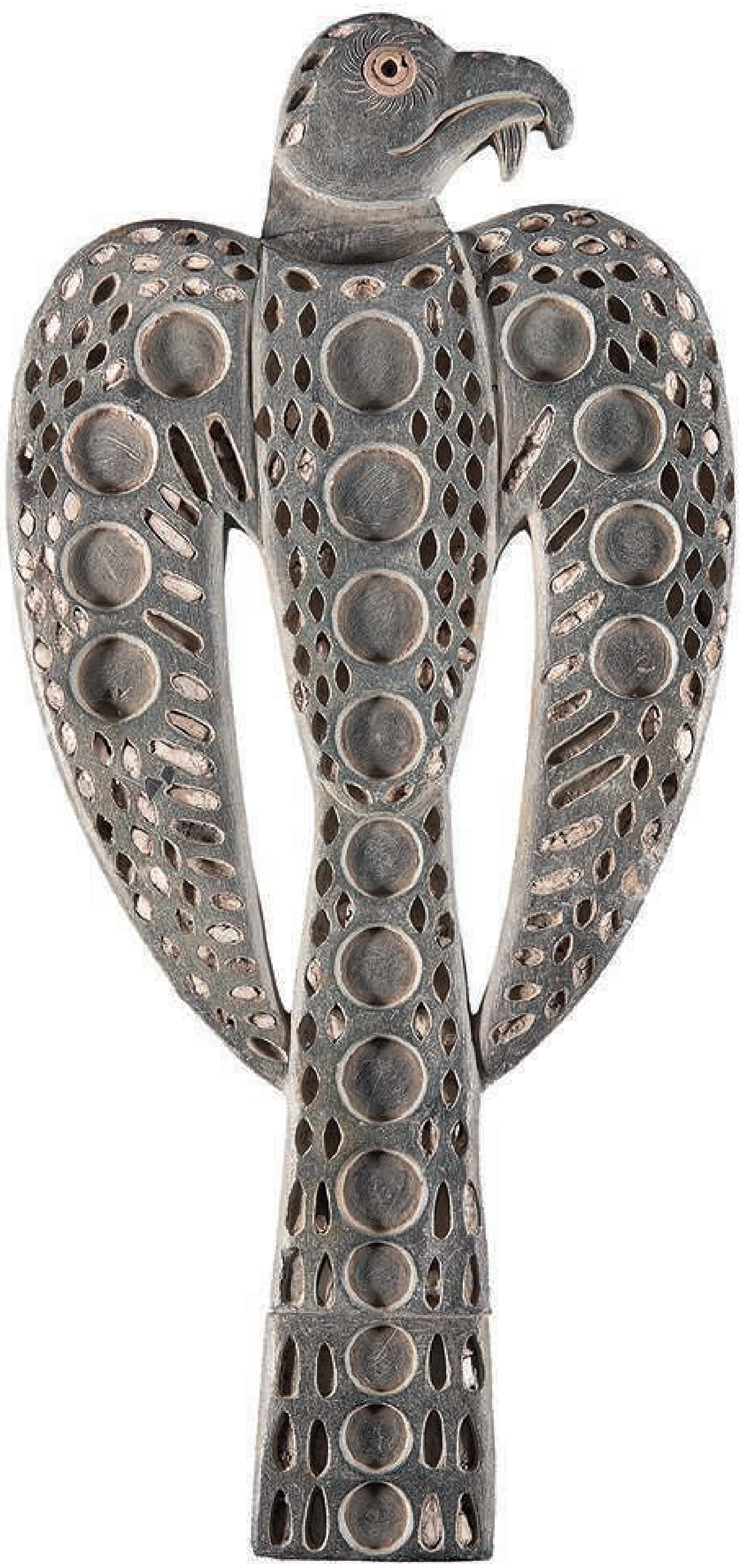
Possibly Jiroft, Kerman province, Iran
Chlorite, 18.4 × 18.1 × 3.7 cm

National Museum of Iran, no. 8475
Unprovenanced

This curious piece in the shape of a modern handbag with semi-circular handle, the rectangular lower part engraved with date palms, is among the objects attributed to Jiroft. It is often suggested that these objects are weights but it has not been proven that they fit with any kind of known weight standard, although the handles might allow them to be suspended from the arm of a balance. Another suggestion is that they were foundation deposits for shrines.[10] Apart from Iran, examples have been found in southern Mesopotamia, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, carved in the so-called 'intercultural' style. Other 'handbag weights' supposedly from Jiroft have elaborate human and animal figural decoration as well as floral and geometric patterns.[11]

Bonn Catalogue 2017, pp. 112, 368, no. 39





8

Board game

about 2500 BC

Possibly Jiroft, Kerman province, Iran
Chlorite, 36 × 17.2 × 1.5 cm

National Museum of Iran, no. 92
Unprovenanced

This board game attributed to Jiroft is in the shape of a bird of prey and is made of chlorite with limestone inlays. The positions for the pieces are shown by circular depressions. This is a race game for two players in which the objective is for each player to move all four (presumably) of their pieces down the track in the centre. Among the chlorite objects allegedly from Jiroft are other gaming boards in the shape of a bird of prey, some of which incorporate scorpion figures and part-human shapes.[12] Simpler versions with 20 holes also exist.

Bonn Catalogue 2017, pp. 82, 268, no. 42; Majidzadeh 2003, pp. 139, 200, fig. p. 130

9

Vase

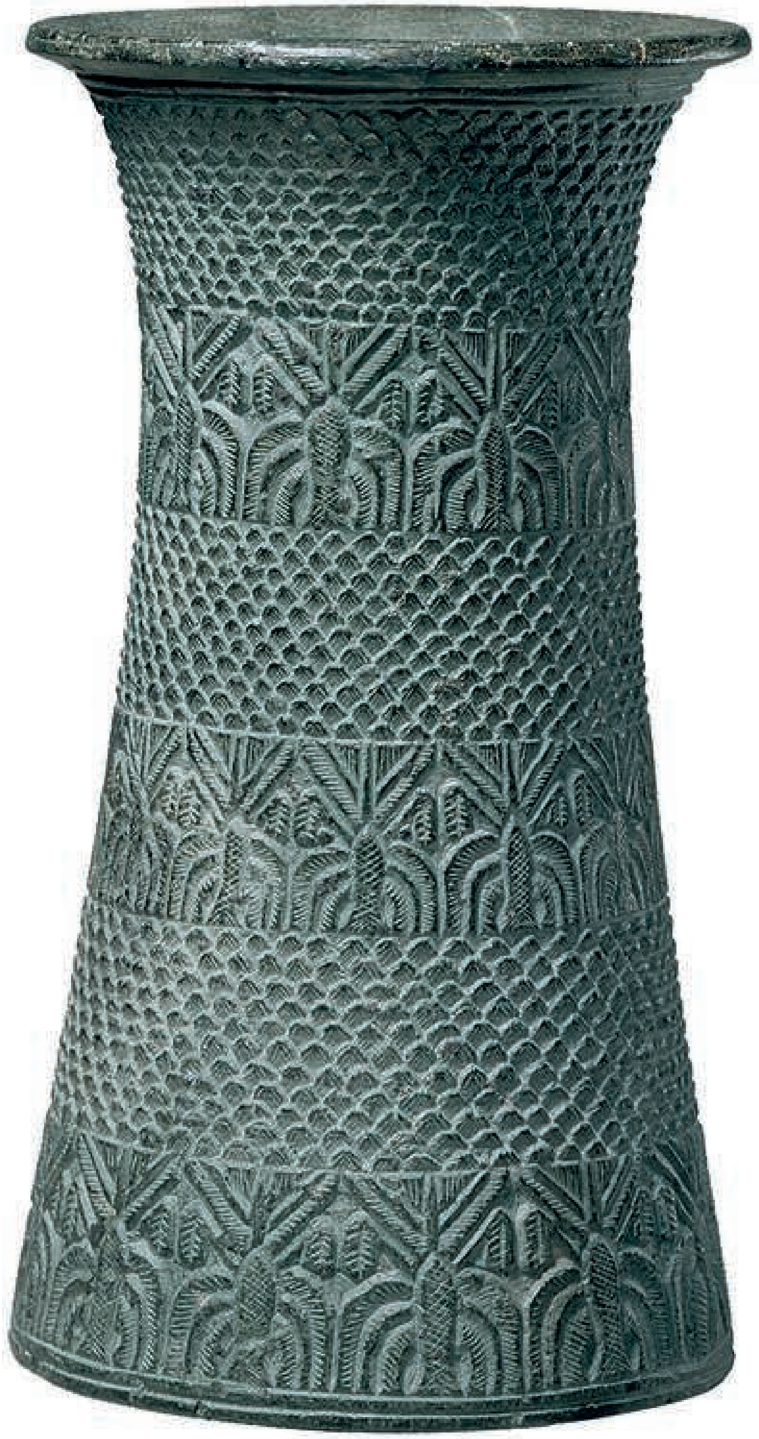
about 2500 BC

Chlorite, height 23.5 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, 17.190.106
Bequest of J. Pierpont Morgan 1917

This tall vase with concave sides and flaring rim with carved decoration shows three registers (bands) of date palms separated by bands of an imbricate pattern, sometimes thought to represent mountains. A workshop for making objects in chlorite, dating from around 2500 BC, was found at Level IVB at Tepe Yahya in Kerman province, where excavations took place from 1967 to 1975, directed by American archaeologist Carl Lamberg-Karlovsky (b. 1937).[13] Vessels made of chlorite have been found over a wide area of the ancient Near East, particularly Iran, southern Mesopotamia and the Gulf States, testifying to extensive trade connections in this period.

Holly Pittman, *Art of the Bronze Age: Southeastern Iran, Western Central Asia, and the Indus Valley* (New York 1984), fig. 1



10

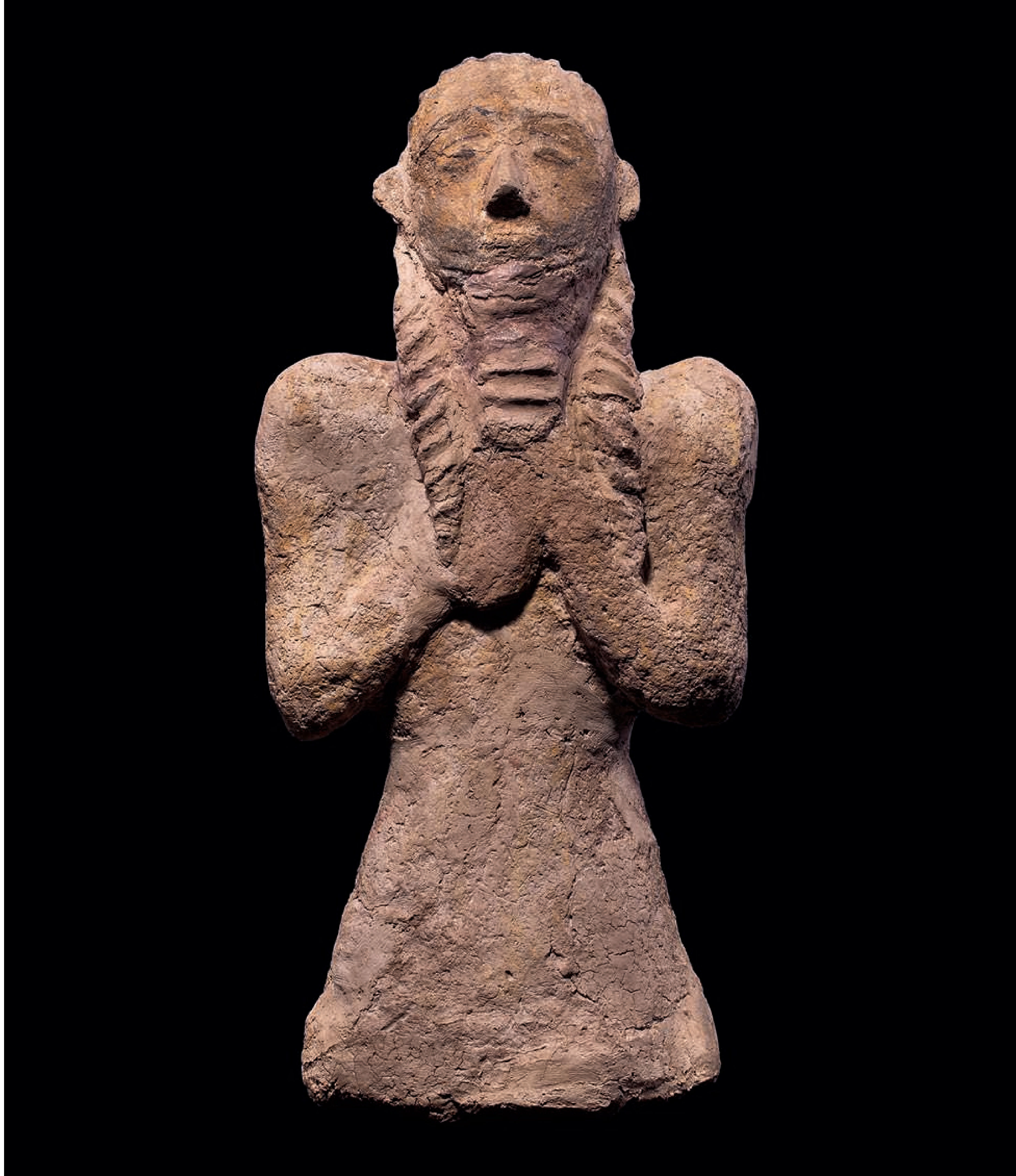
Statue of a man

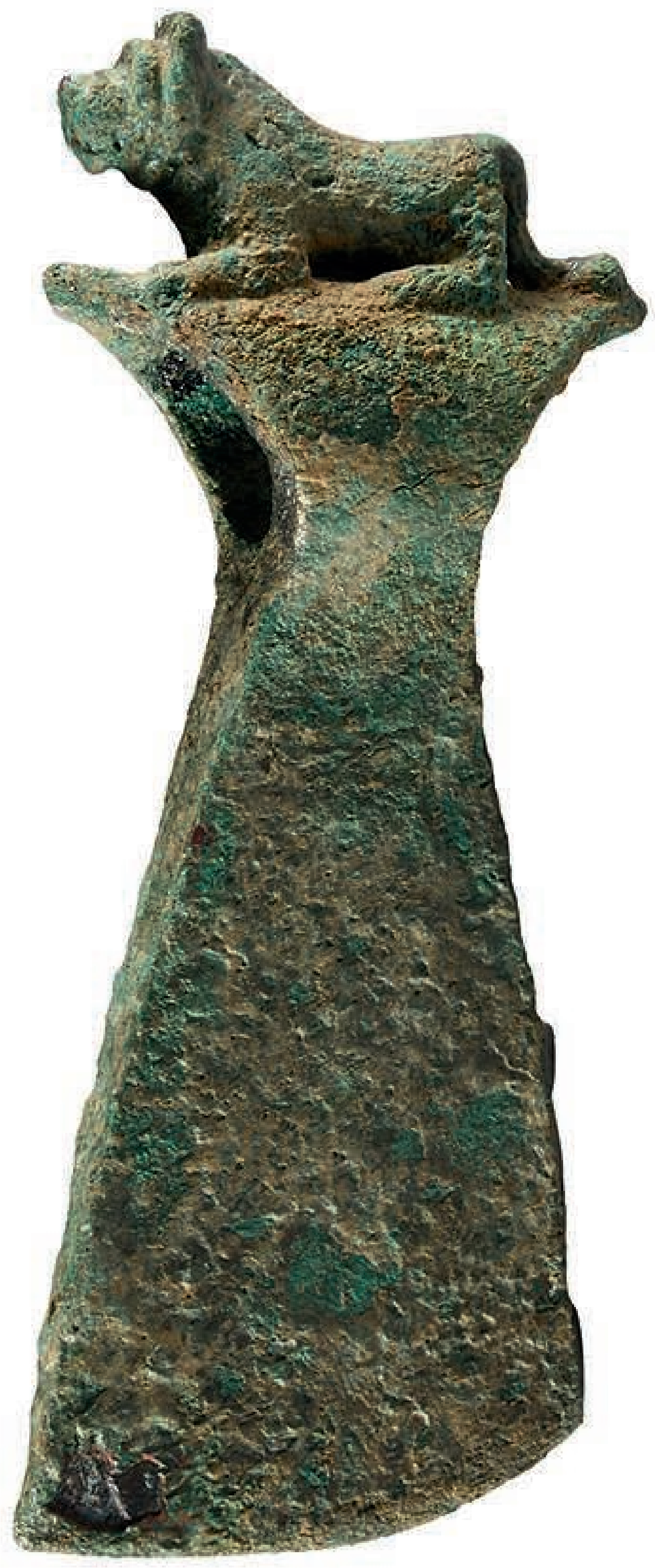
about 2500–2000 BC

Excavated at Shahdad,
Kerman province, Iran
Clay, 56.5 × 26.5 cm
National Museum of Iran, no. 10123

This unbaked clay statue of a man, one-half to three-quarters life-size, was found in grave no. 292 at Shahdad. It is of the upper part of the body only, and shows a man with long hair falling in front of his shoulders and a long beard. He holds his hands against his chest. There are traces of black paint on the face and the eyebrows. The body is schematic and highly stylized, but as with other statues found at Shahdad the head is realistically modelled and is probably intended to portray a particular person. Twenty-four clay statues of men and women were found in graves at Shahdad, an important Early Bronze Age site on the western edge of the Dasht-e Lut desert.

Ali Hakemi, *Shahdad: Archaeological Excavations of a Bronze Age Centre in Iran* (Rome 1997), pp. 64, 466, 469 (Hakemi 1997 *et seq.*); Bonn Catalogue 2007, pp. 121, 281, no. 281





11

Axe-head with lion

3000–2000 BC

Excavated at Shahdad,
Kerman province, Iran
Bronze, length 13.8 cm

National Museum of Iran, no. 7745

This bronze axe-head from Shahdad has a figure of a lion couchant (?) on the back of the socket, presumably cast in one piece with the blade and socket. It comes from grave no. 363 at Shahdad. The practice of decorating axe-heads with figures of animals on or around the socket can also be seen on an axe-head in the British Museum from a cemetery at Khinaman, about 65 km north-west of Kerman;[14] the figures in this instance are those of a winged goat and a lion.

Hakemi 1997, pp. 540, 542, 638; Bonn Catalogue 2007, pp. 119, 280, no. 269

12

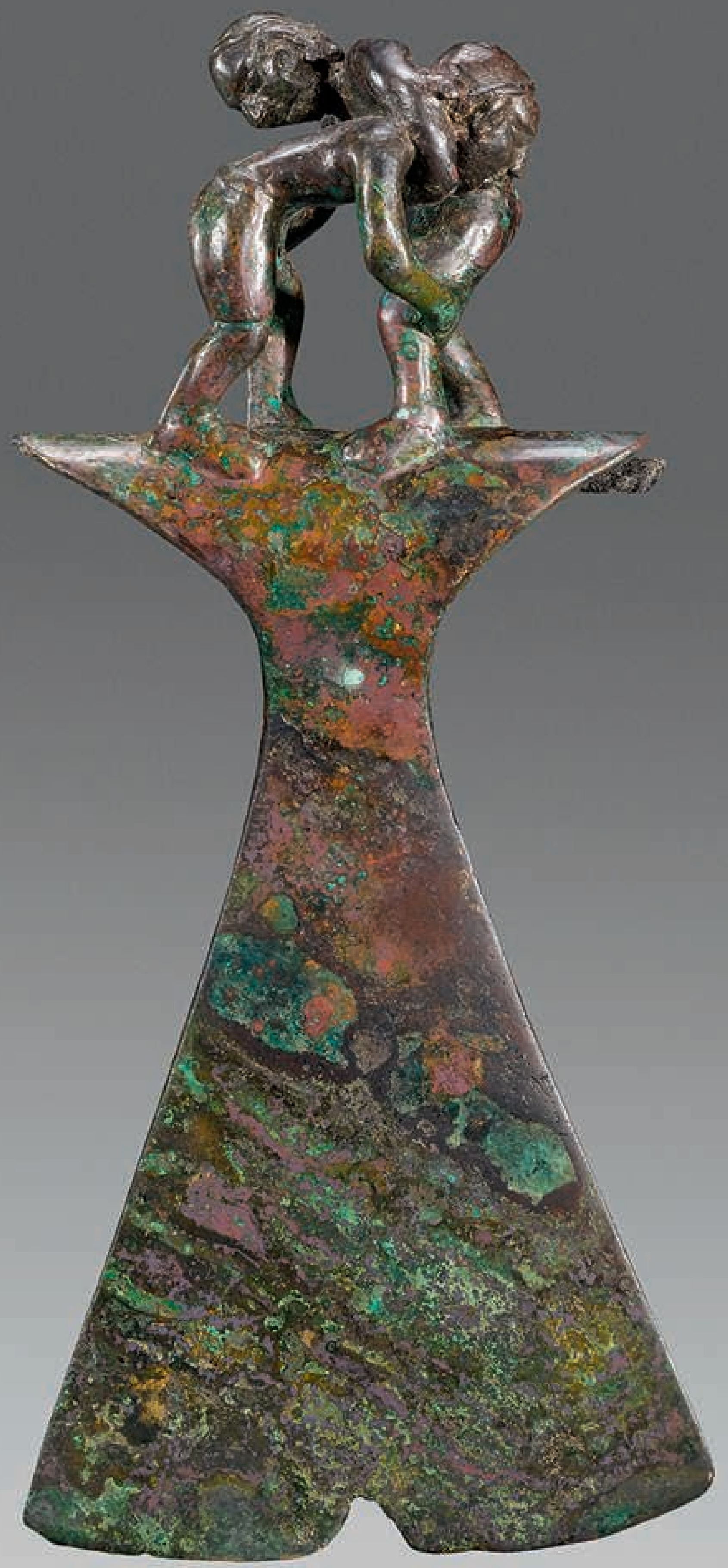
Axe-head with wrestlers

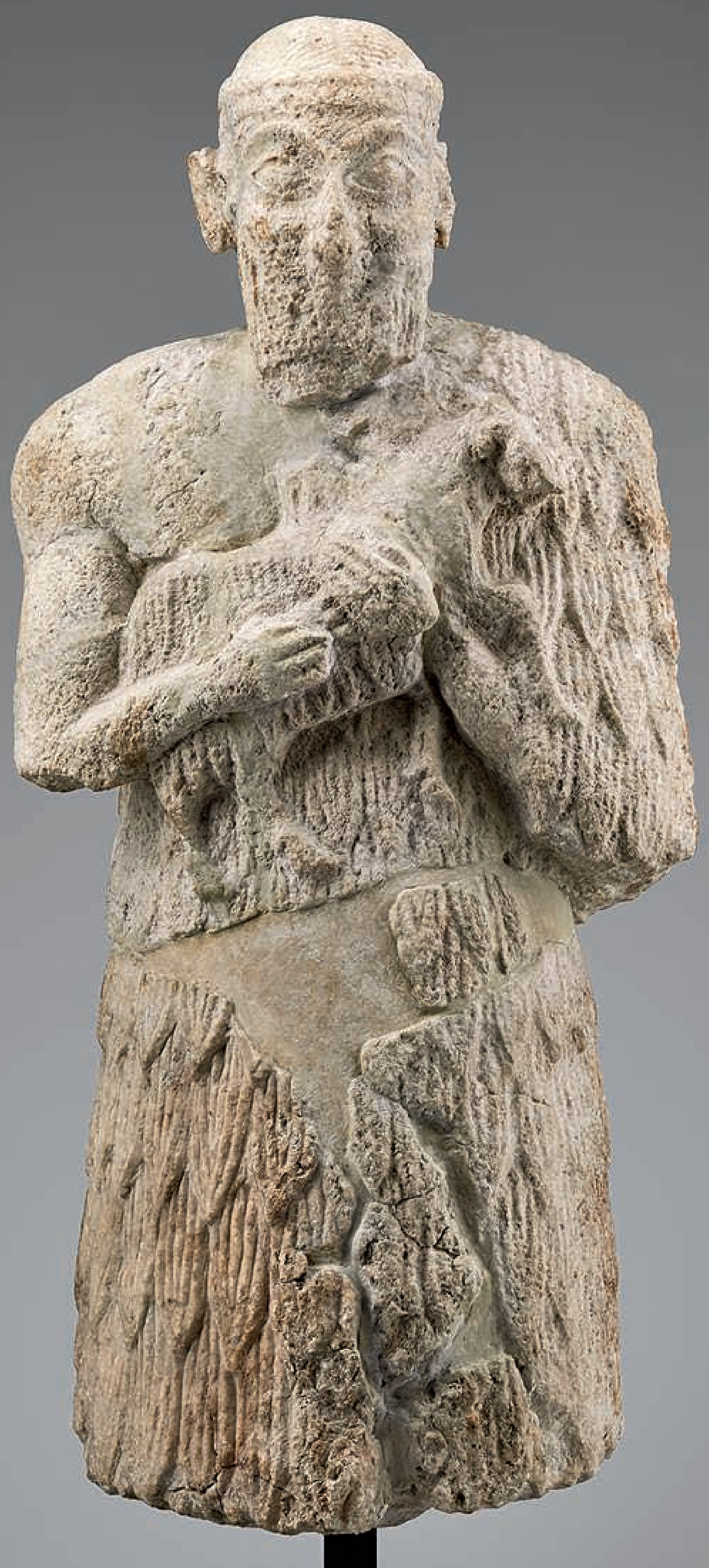
2250–2000 BC

Bronze, width 18.5 cm,
width of blade 8.1 cm (max.)

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2051
Purchased 2007

This bronze shaft-hole axe with flared blade has on the back of the socket a pair of wrestlers in the round, grappling with each other. The decoration with figures on the back of the socket suggests a date in the 3rd millennium BC. Each of the wrestlers is wearing a short skirt with a belt and is naked from the waist up. They both have hair ribbons that are knotted at the back of the head. One wrestler has the other in a headlock and grasps his opponent's leg with the other hand, while the wrestler in the headlock has one hand on the other's leg and one hand on his back. This is an extremely complicated casting and shows the extraordinary skill of the metalsmiths of the time. It is unclear whether it was all done in a single casting or whether the wrestlers were cast separately and then applied to the socket.





13

Statue of a worshipper

about 2700–2340 BC

Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Alabaster, height 43.8 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 84

This alabaster statue presumably represents a worshipper who is presenting an animal, in this case a kid, to a deity or shrine. The man is in dressed in a sheepskin cloak. In contrast to earlier figural art from Iran and Mesopotamia this statue is quite realistic in the way in which the man's face, his dress and the animal have been represented. From the excavations of Jacques de Morgan in the Acropolis Mound at Susa, Period IVa.

Pierre Amiet, *Elam* (Auvers-sur-Oise 1966), pp. 190–1, no. 141

14

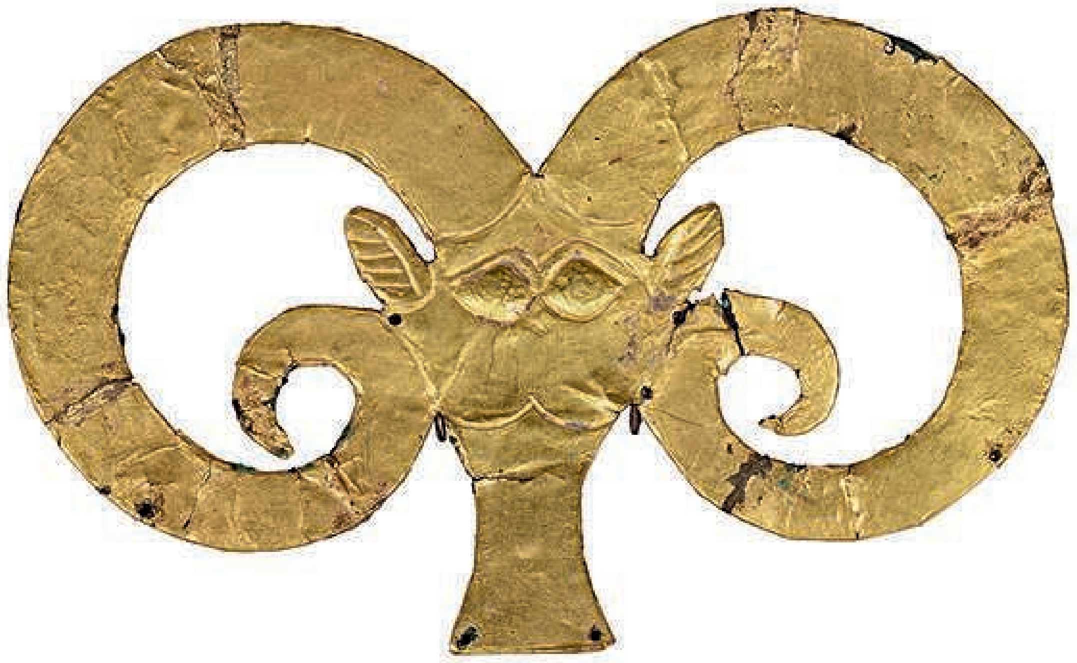
Mouflon head

about 2200–1700 BC

Gold and copper, 9.2 × 15.4 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1071
Purchased 2014

This cut-out gold figure, showing the head of a mouflon (wild sheep) with curled horns, ears and beard, is very similar to a gold ornament excavated at Tepe Hissar in north-east Iran, now in the National Museum of Iran, and dated to the period 2200–1700 BC.[15] The present piece is made of thin gold sheet wrapped over copper. The eyes and decoration on the ears are indicated by chasing. There are small holes around the outside of the horns and at the bottom of the beard showing that this ornament was once fixed to a backing.



15

Pottery jar

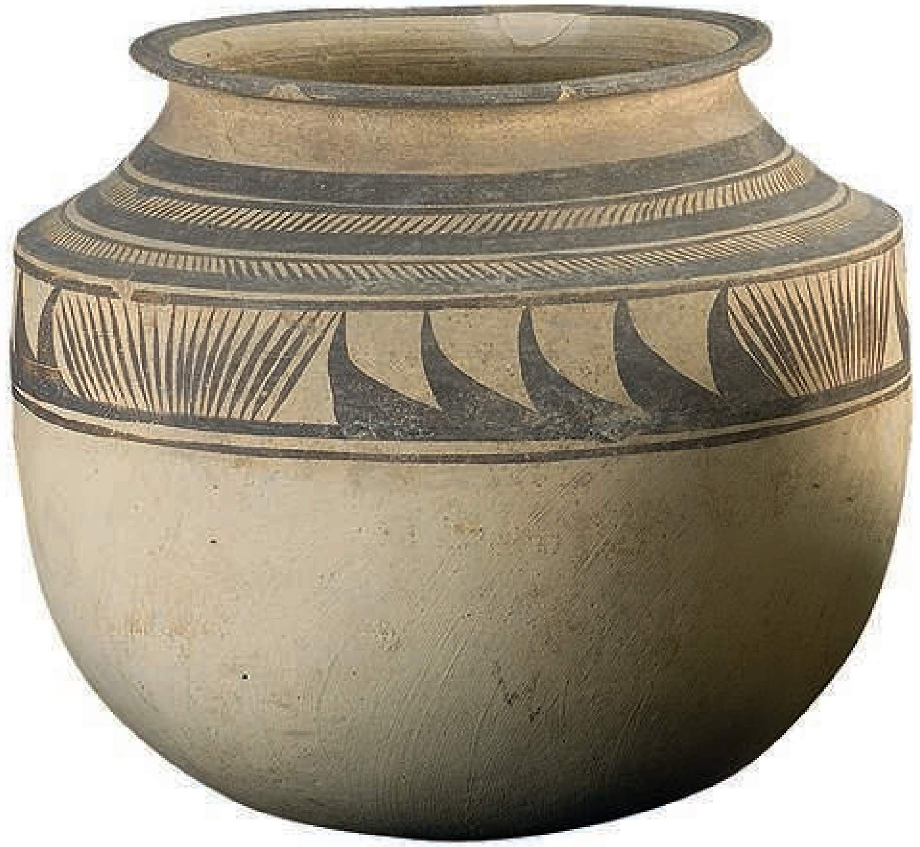
about 2250–1750 BC

Probably Tepe Giyan,
Luristan province, Iran
Clay with painted decoration,
height 26 cm, diameter 30 cm

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.152
Acquired 1932

This large pottery jar is decorated on the shoulder and neck with a design of stylized birds in the form of a cockscomb and bands of cross-hatching in brown paint on a buff ground. Pottery of this kind is believed to derive from unofficial excavations at Tepe Giyan in Luristan. Scientific excavations were undertaken here by Roman Ghirshman in 1931–2, and it became, together with Tepe Sialk, one of the most important type-sites for the archaeology of Iran. Painted jars like the present example are associated with Level IV at the site, dated to the late 3rd and beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.

Trésors 2007, no. 158



ELAMITE ART AND CULTURE

The Proto-Elamite script was superseded by Elamite cuneiform, introduced in the second half of the third millennium BC. This writing system used signs derived from Akkadian, the language and writing system of neighbouring Mesopotamia, but local dynasts continued to use Sumerian and Akkadian as the common languages for administrative texts and other inscriptions. For much of the second millennium BC the state of Elam, now restricted to south-west Iran with a lowland centre at Susa and a highland centre at Malyan, was dominated by neighbouring Mesopotamia, but in the period known as Middle Elamite (about 1500–1100 BC) it enjoyed a period of great prosperity.

This is documented by the rich archaeological record at centres such as Susa, Haft Tepe and Chogha Zanbil. Towards the end of the Middle Elamite period, in 1168 BC, the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte (r. about 1190–1155 BC) invaded Mesopotamia and brought back from Babylon important monuments including the famous set of laws known as the Code of Hammurabi, which was discovered during French excavations at Susa and is now in the Louvre. A counter-invasion by Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylon (r. 1125–1104 BC), however, brought the Middle Elamite period to an end, and darkness fell over the Elamite state for several centuries.

Nevertheless, outdoor sanctuaries with rock carvings at places on the edge of the Izeh Plain continued in use, and some fine works of art (for example, cat. 22) survive from this subsequent Neo-Elamite era (about 1100–550 BC). This period witnessed a great rivalry with Assyria, culminating in an attack on Elam by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (r. 668–627 BC). In a battle at Til-Tuba on the River Ulai in 653 BC the Elamites were roundly defeated, as recorded in graphic detail in Assyrian palace reliefs from Nineveh, now in the British Museum. In 646 BC Ashurbanipal returned to sack Susa.

It used to be thought that Elamite culture and civilization were brought to an end by these Assyrian onslaughts, but it is now known that there were kings of Elam until around 585 BC, and after that there were several small kingdoms in the same region. Dating from this last period of Elamite civilization in the late seventh and sixth centuries BC are some remarkable recent discoveries, made in tombs at Arjan and Jubaji in Khuzestan and supposedly in a cave at Kalmakarra in Luristan. The first discovery in 1982 was that of a tomb at Arjan,[16] on the outskirts of Behbahan. The body had been buried in a bronze coffin, accompanied by a bronze offering stand, a large bronze bowl with incised decoration, and much jewellery. Four objects in the tomb bear Elamite inscriptions with the name of Kidin-Hutran, son of Kurlush, who probably reigned in the period 650–525 BC. The second chance discovery was made in 2007 during construction work near the village of Jubaji on the Ramhormoz Plain (see cats 25, 26).[17] Within a Late Elamite tomb containing the coffins of two women a gold bracelet was found, inscribed with the name of the Elamite king Shutur-Nahhunte, who reigned in the middle of the sixth century BC.

Lastly, extraordinary discoveries were allegedly made in Kalmakarra Cave in the Rumishgan area of southern Luristan, 15 kilometres north-west of Pol-e Dokhtar, in the late 1980s and early 1990s; unfortunately all the 'Kalmakarra' material is plundered, and some of the pieces may be modern fakes, so any conclusions are tentative, but the hoard appears to consist of an extraordinary collection of gold and silver masks (cat. 28), and silver vessels ranging from bowls with lobed decoration and flared rims (cat. 27) to rhytons (drinking horns) with bizarre shapes.[18] Stylistically many of the pieces in this hoard seem to date from late in the sixth century BC, so they belong to the last days of the Elamite kingdom or even to the early Achaemenid period, when local kings might still have ruled in some inaccessible parts of the Zagros Mountains.

Such was the survival of Elamite traditions that when he created the Achaemenid empire in 550 BC, Cyrus the Great was able to draw on various elements of Elamite culture and civilization, to the extent that its legacy can be clearly identified in the succeeding Achaemenid dynasty.

16

Tankard

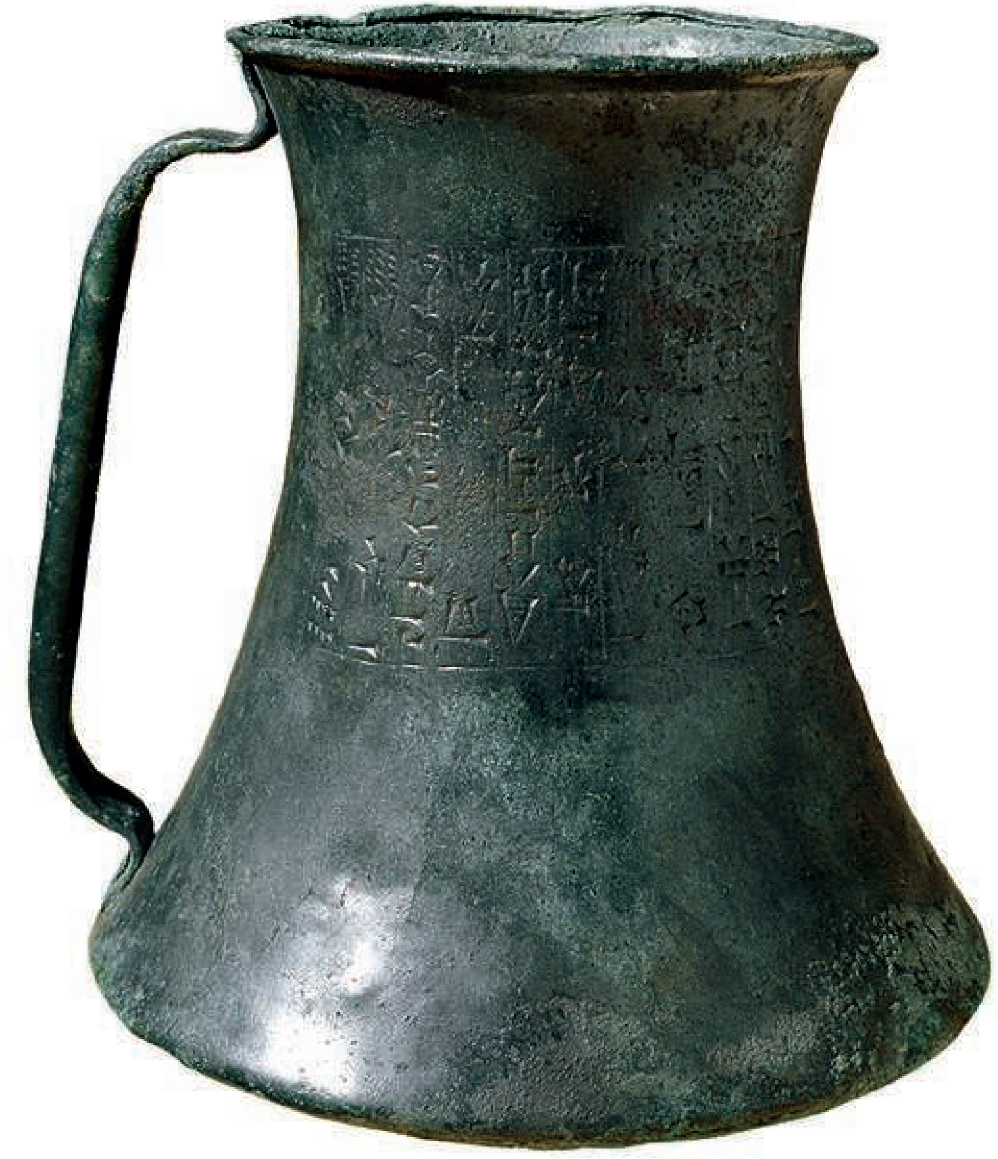
about 1900 BC

Bronze, height 15.2 cm,
diameter 13.7 cm (max.)

British Museum, London, 134884
Purchased 1966

This bronze tankard is made from hammered sheet metal and has a handle attached with rivets. Its cuneiform inscription records that a scribe, Ibni-Adad, presented this tankard to Attahushu who was a local ruler of Susa in the first part of the 19th century BC. The inscription is written in a mixture of Sumerian and Akkadian that is typical for Susian royal inscriptions at this period and demonstrates the close connections with neighbouring Mesopotamia.

Edmond Sollberger in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol. 22 (1968), pp. 30–33



17

Inscribed brick

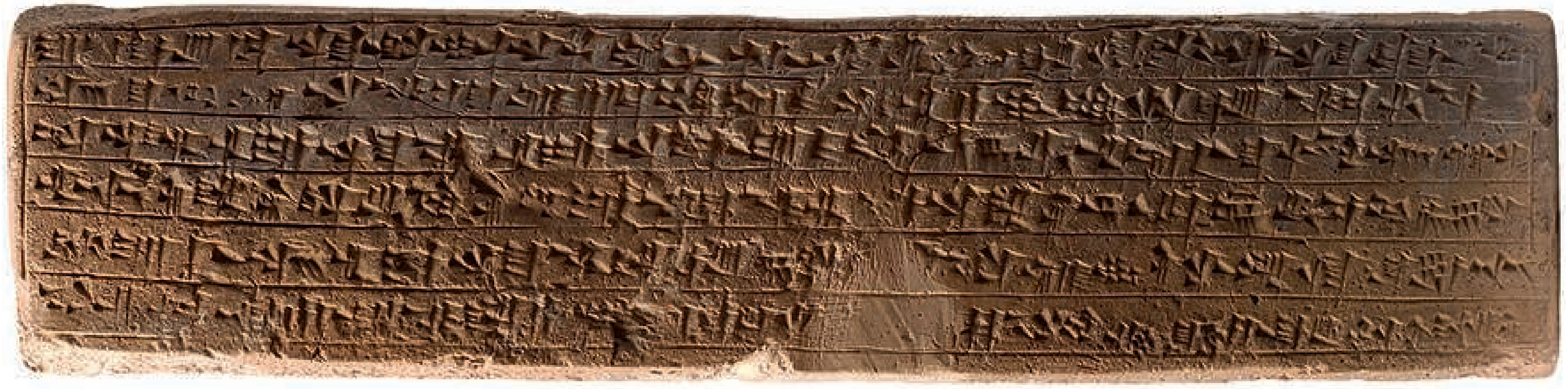
about 1340–1300 BC

Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Clay, 38.5 × 17.5 × 9 cm

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire,
Brussels, IR.2

This baked brick with Elamite inscription was excavated at Susa by Jacques de Morgan and acquired by the Royal Museums in Brussels in 1908. The inscription records that Untash-Napirisha, son of Humban-numena, king of Anshan and Susa, has built for the god Sin a temple in baked brick and has placed therein a gold statue of Sin and asks for prosperity and long life for himself and his dynasty. Untash-Napirisha's reign as king of Elam would last for some 40 years. His name derives from that of the Elamite deity Napirisha.

Trésors 2007, no. 179



18

Wall plaque

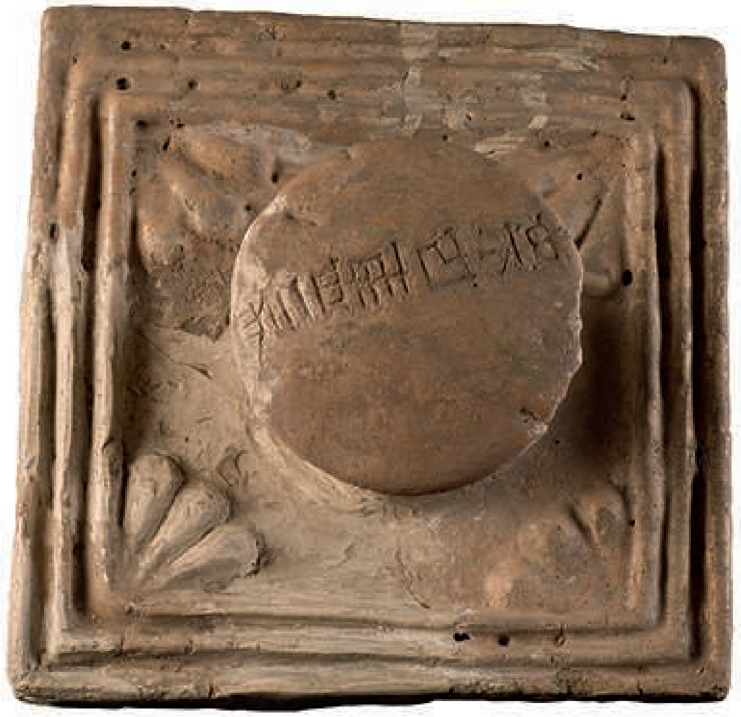
about 1340–1300 BC

Excavated at Chogha Zanbil,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Clay, about 37 cm square

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR. 1760

This baked clay wall plaque has a central knob inscribed on the top in Elamite cuneiform script with the name of Untash-Napirisha, king of Elam (r. 1340–1300 BC). The new city of Dur-Untash (modern Chogha Zanbil) was founded by Untash-Napirisha 40 km south-east of Susa. The wall plaque was found at Chogha Zanbil during the excavations of Roman Ghirshman. Nowadays the site boasts the best preserved ziggurat in the Middle East.

Trésors 2007, no. 176



19

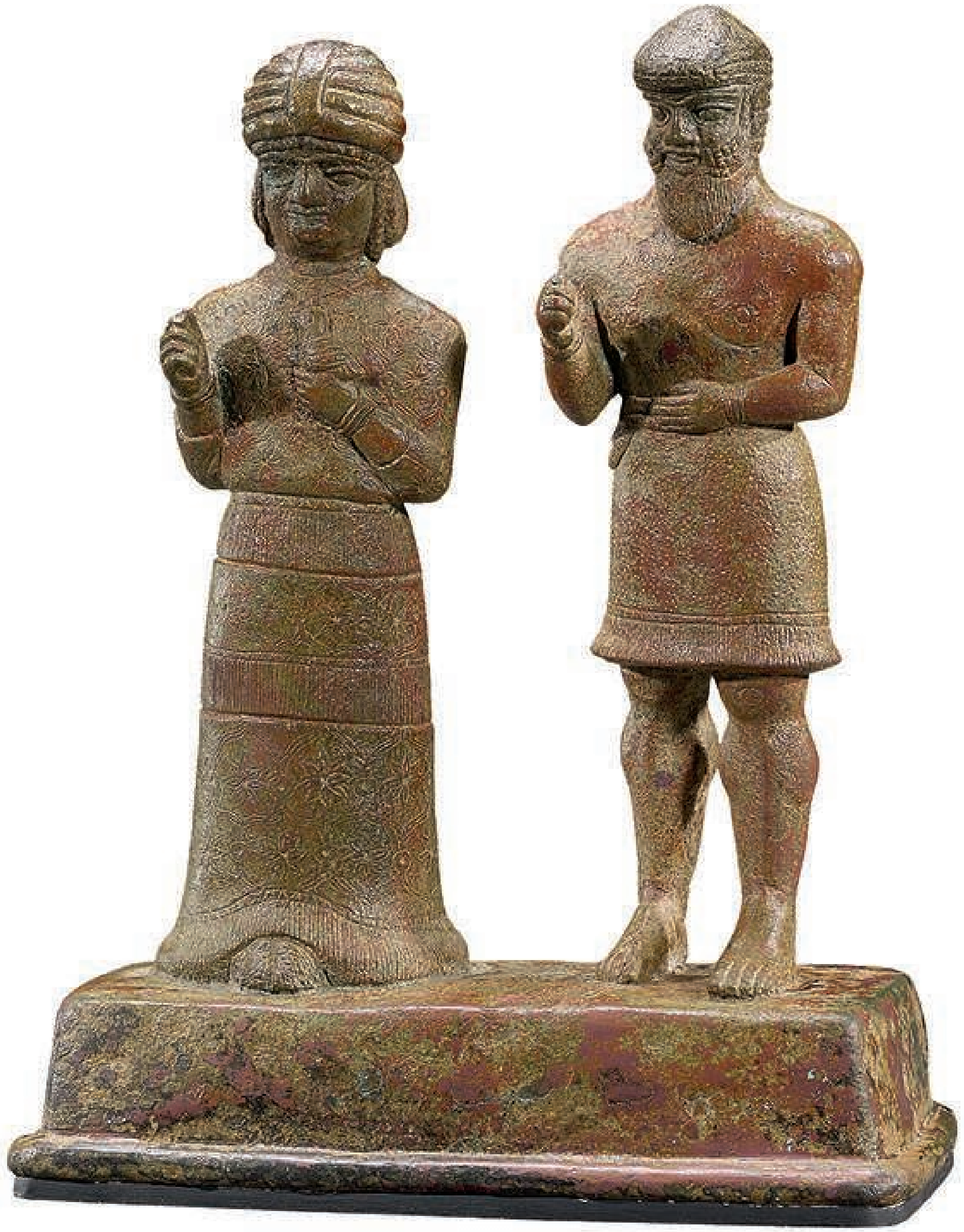
Group of two figures

about 1500–1100 BC

Bronze, height 16 cm,
width 13.5 cm (max.)

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2061
Purchased 2007

This superb bronze casting dates from the Middle Elamite period. It shows two figures standing on a rectangular plinth. The richness of their costume suggests they might be a king and queen, and the attitude of the figures suggests this this might be a votive figurine. The woman on the left has an elaborate hairstyle and is wearing a long dress, richly ornamented with three bands of fringed decoration and a design of stars and dotted circles. She wears patterned shoes and has bangles on her wrists. In her left hand she holds a bird against her chest, and her right hand is raised, her clenched fist originally holding something which is now missing. The man on the right is naked from the waist up and is wearing a short skirt that is cut off just above the knee. It is secured by a knotted belt, probably consisting of two strands of rope. He has bangles on his wrists. He is bareheaded and barefooted. He has his left hand placed on his stomach, and his right hand is raised, its clenched fist originally also holding something which is now missing. This is a solid casting presumably made in one piece.



20

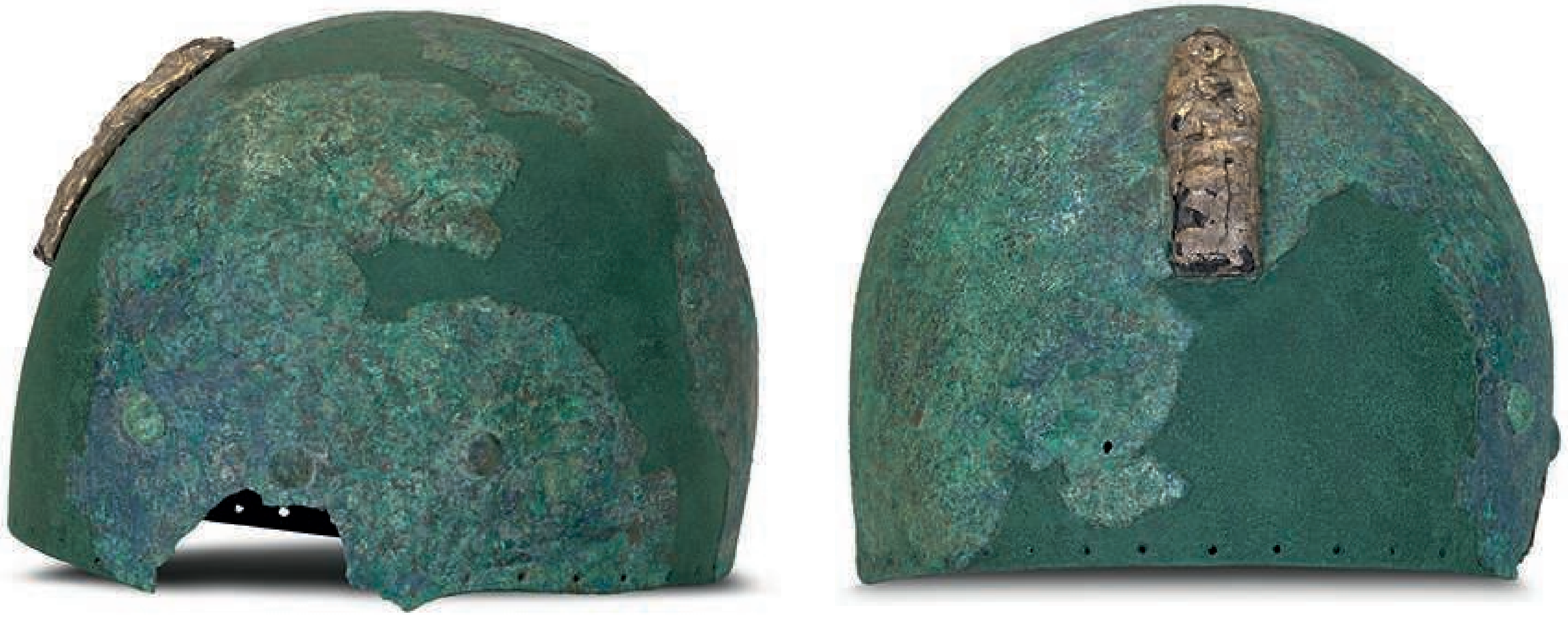
Helmet

1500–1100 BC

Bronze, height 17 cm,
width 22 cm (max.)

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1072
Purchased 2011

Bronze helmets of this kind were probably ceremonial. This example has a central female figure, fashioned from gold foil over bitumen, mounted on the front and dates from the Middle Elamite period. The figure is shown wearing a headdress and a long dress with a belt; her hands are clasped together on her chest in an attitude of prayer. This figure is in poor condition and some of the details (such as the headdress) are not clear. The helmet has been restored but the holes around the base, presumably for fixing it to a backing, remain. There are also four holes (two pairs) on the top, possibly for the attachment of a crest or similar. There are four bosses or studs on the helmet, whose bottom rim is lower at the back than the front. There is a very similar helmet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, but with three figures at the front surmounted by a bird of prey.[19]



21

Three figurines of naked women

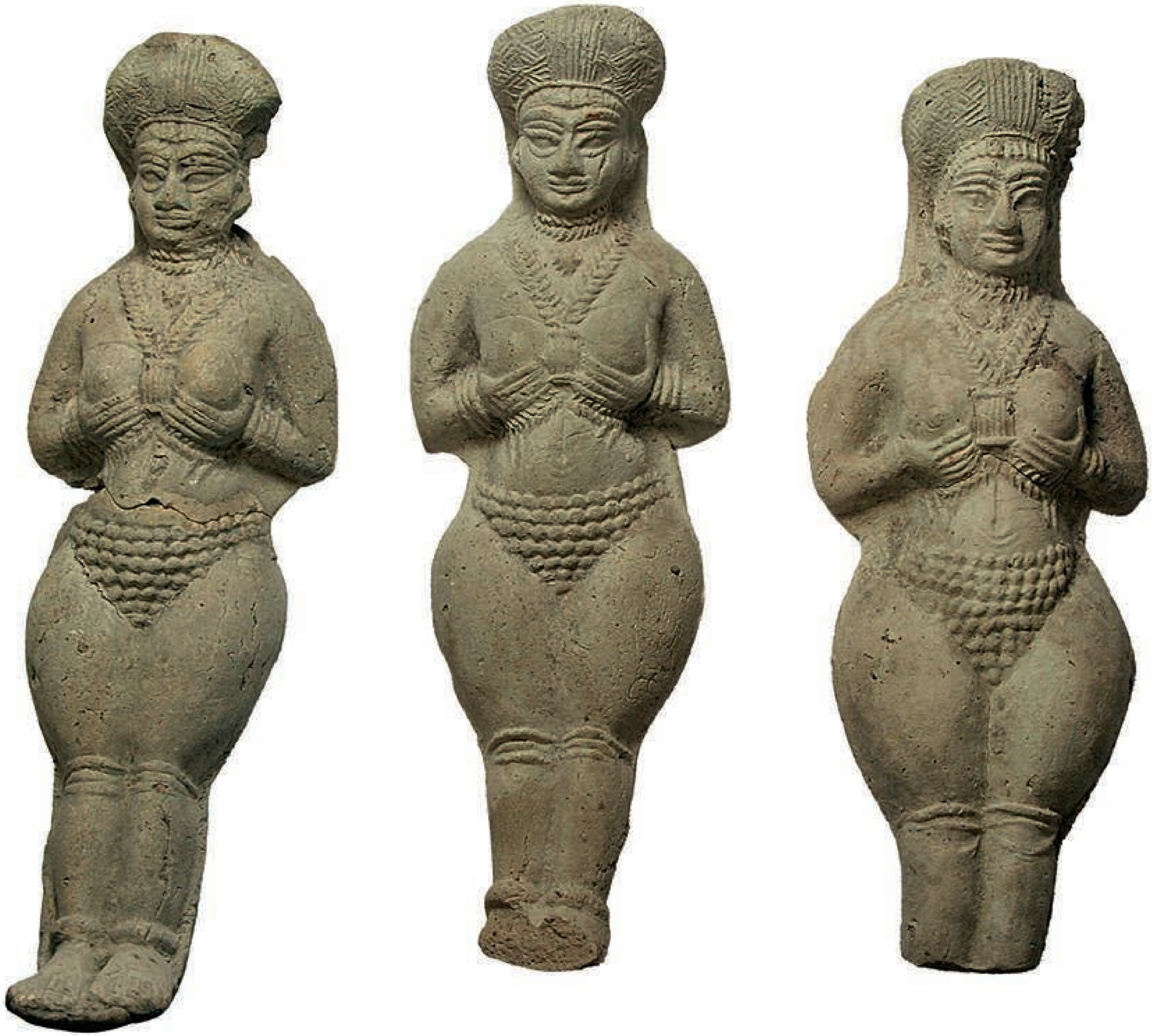
1500–1100 BC

Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Clay, heights 14.1–16.1 cm

Great North Museum: Hancock. Collection of the National History Society of Northumbria
H251, H248, H250

These three terracotta figurines of naked women with their hands cupped beneath their breasts date from the Middle Elamite period. Each wears a tall elaborate headdress and a necklace from which is suspended a small star-shaped ornament. Between the breasts is a large squarish ornament mounted on a harness of plaited cord or chain that goes around the neck and under the breasts. Bangles are worn on the wrists and the ankles. The pubic triangle is greatly exaggerated, and there are stretch marks on the belly, presumably indicative of childbirth. The figurines are made in single-piece moulds and are flat at the back. They are part of a group of about 200 similar figurines found by the British archaeologist William Kennett Loftus (1820–1858) at Susa in 1851; around 40 are now in the British Museum, which sponsored the excavation, and Loftus donated 11 examples (including the present pieces) to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, which was his home town. These figurines are obviously connected with fertility and childbirth, but their exact function is obscure. Loftus assumed he had discovered 'the image-maker's store', but it is equally likely that he had found a shrine to which the figurines had been presented by women hoping to give birth.

John Curtis, 'More figurines from Susa', in Sébastien Gondet and Ernie Haerinck (eds), *L'Orient est son Jardin: Hommage à Rémy Boucharlat* (Leuven 2018), pp. 129–35



22

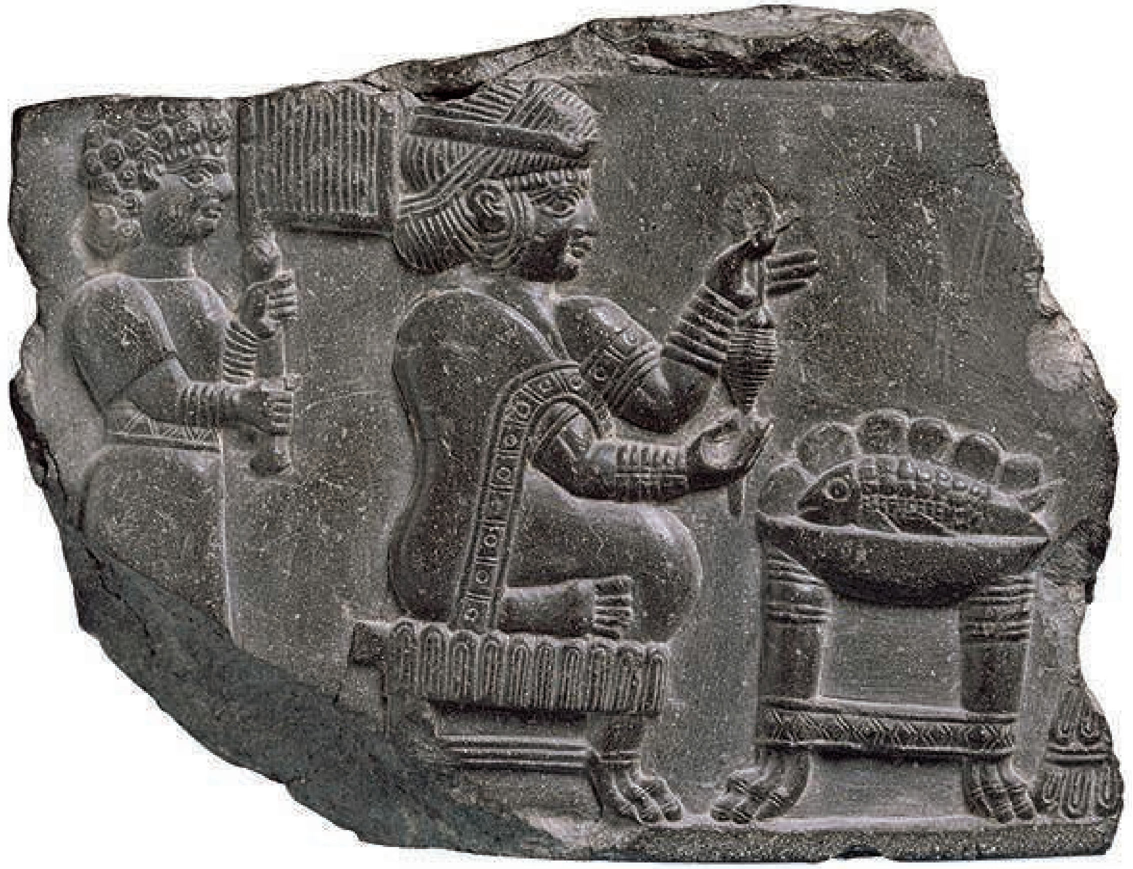
Bas-relief showing a woman spinning

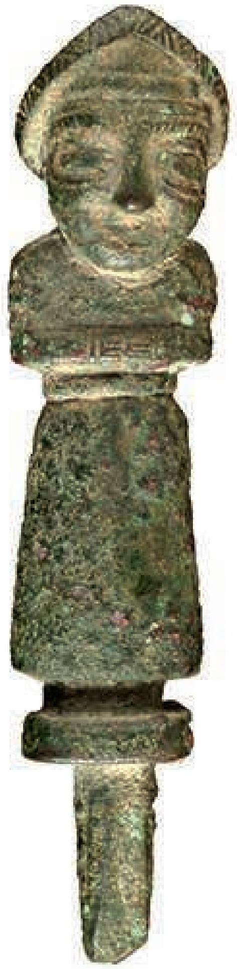
about 800–700 BC

Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Bitumen, width 13 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 2834

This bitumen plaque in low relief showing a woman spinning is perhaps the decoration from the side of a box or a container. In this composition the woman sits cross-legged on a stool with lion's-paw feet and holds in her hands a spindle with wool wrapped around it. In front of the seated woman is a table, also with lion's-paw feet, on which lies a fish and unidentified circular objects. The woman seems to be showing the spindle to someone who is perhaps seated on the other side of the table, in a part of the plaque that has broken away. Behind the woman is a servant with a large fan. This piece was found in the excavations of Jacques de Morgan at Susa and comes from a Neo-Elamite period context.

Pierre Amiet, *Elam* (Auvers-sur-Oise 1966), p. 540, no. 413





23

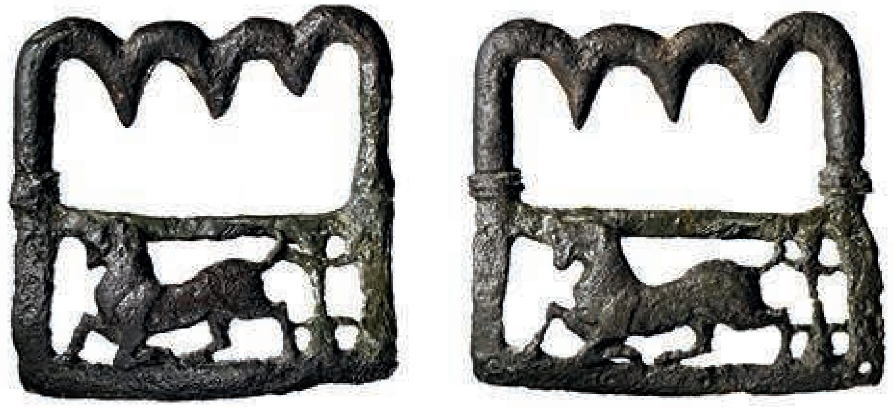
Figurine of woman

about 900–700 BC

Bronze, height 6.5 cm
Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR. 722
Acquired 1956

This bronze figurine, probably of a woman wearing a long dress, has an elaborate hairstyle that is full and rounded at the sides with a peak at the front. Such hairstyles are typical of the Neo-Elamite period during the 9th–7th century BC. The hands are clasped together in an attitude of prayer. At the bottom of the figurine is a peg, probably to enable it to be placed upright in soft sand or mud. This would suggest that it was a votive figure, intended to be deposited in a shrine or sanctuary where it would represent the worshipper in perpetuity. This interpretation is supported by the excavation of comparable bronze figurines with clasped hands at the sanctuary site of Surkh Dum-e Luri in Luristan, but in that instance they formed the heads of iron pins.[20]

Trésors 2007, no. 298



24

Handle attachments with bulls

about 800–550 BC

Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Bronze, heights 10.5–11.2 cm
widths 10.6–10.9 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 3748 A–B

This pair of openwork bronze handles comes from a large bowl. Each handle has indentations for fingers at the top and below a kneeling bull facing left with raised tail. They were found by archaeologist Roland de Mecquenem at Susa in 1925 in a level to the east of the Palace of Darius in the Ville Royale Mound. In this level De Mecquenem found many burials of the Neo-Elamite period, together with pottery and glass vessels, jewellery, cylinder seals and oxidized copper vessels. These handles can be compared with others from different parts of the ancient Near East (Hasanlu in Iran, Nimrud in Assyria and Lori Berd in Armenia) featuring birds of prey or a kneeling hero, showing that at this date there were close connections between different parts of the region, whether through trade, seizure of booty or payment of tribute.

Pierre Amiet, *Elam* (Auvers-sur-Oise 1966), pp. 476–7, nos 358 A–B

25

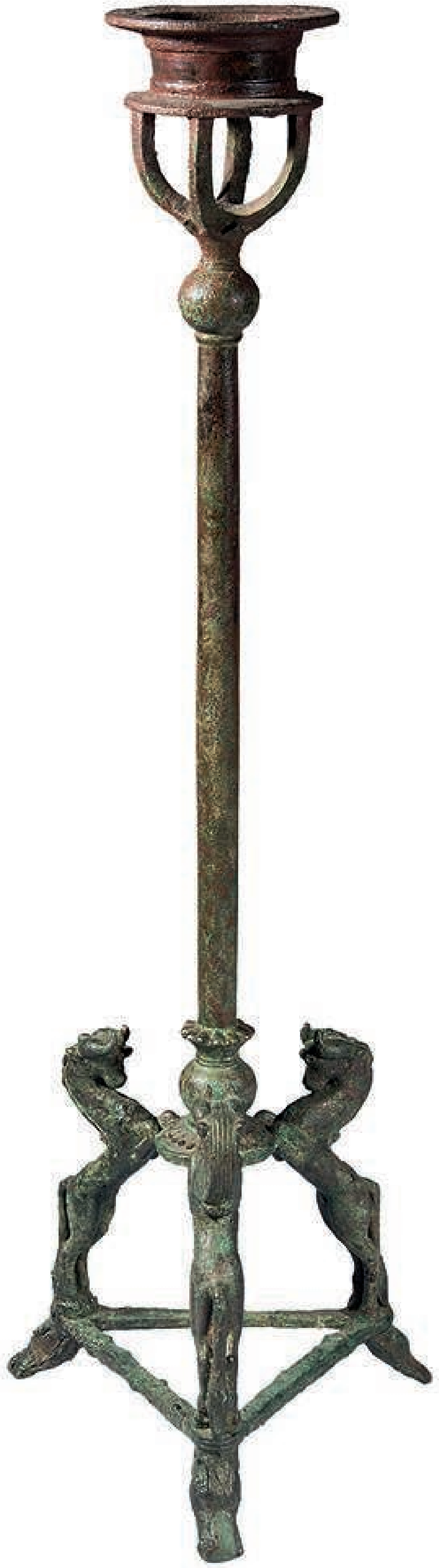
Offering stand

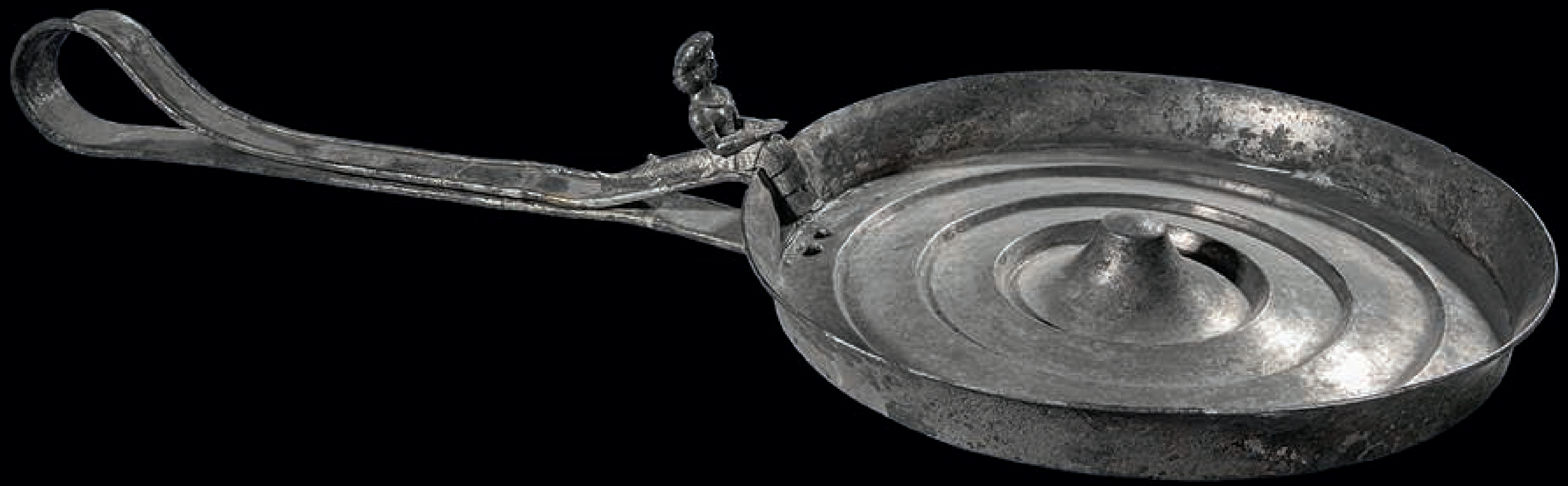
about 650–550 BC

Excavated at Jubaji,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Bronze, height 62 cm
National Museum of Iran, no. 2905

This spectacular bronze offering stand from Jubaji consists of a pan at the top supported by a tall column standing on a tripod base with three rampant bulls. It was found in a rich tomb with two coffins containing the bodies of Elamite princesses, discovered during construction work near the village of Jubaji in Khuzestan in 2007. A gold bracelet in the tomb was inscribed with the name of the Elamite king Shutur-Nahhunte, who ruled in the period between about 585 and 539 BC.

Bonn Catalogue 2017, p. 209, fig.12





26

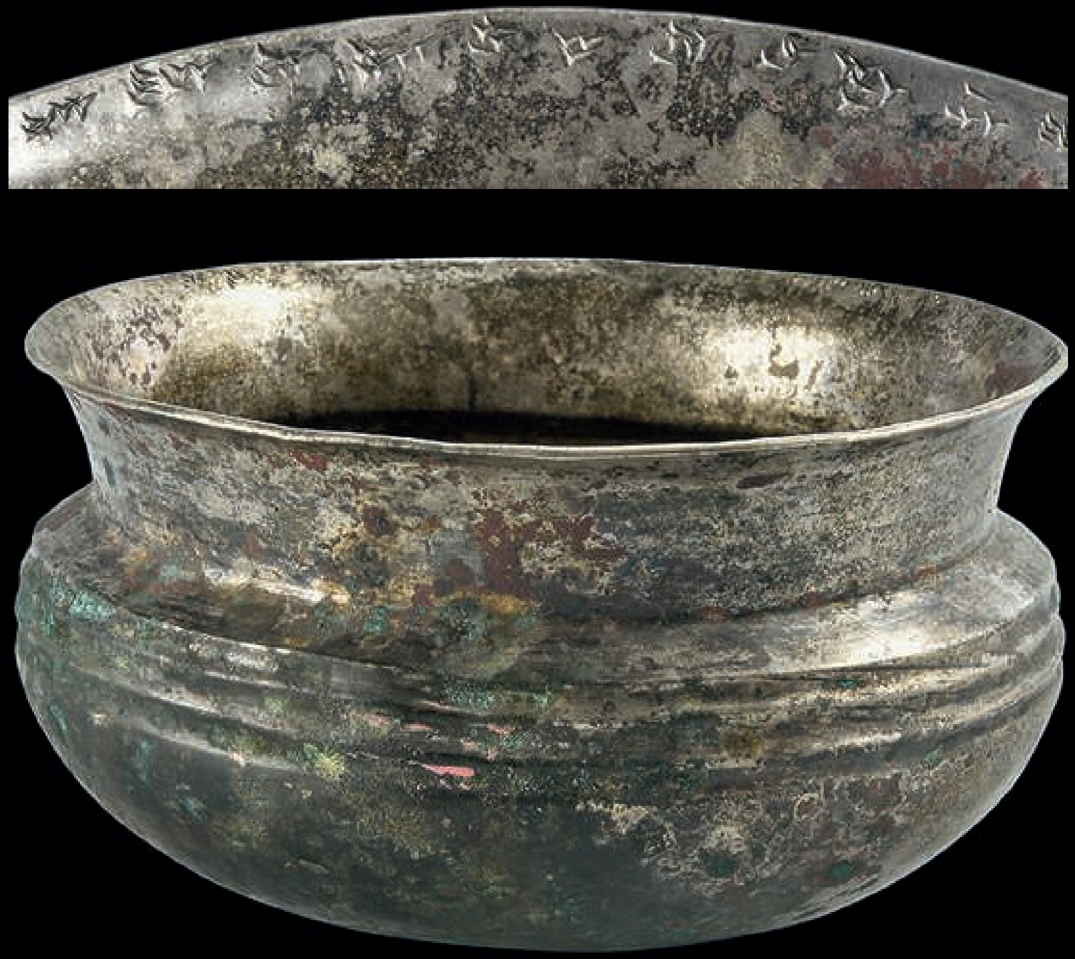
Long-handled pan

about 650–550 BC

Excavated at Jubaji,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Silver, overall length about 75 cm
National Museum of Iran

This silver pan with ridged decoration from Jubaji has a long looped handle with the figure of a seated woman at the junction of pan and handle. The woman wears a tiered dress and her body is fixed at the back to a headless fish. She is sometimes referred to as a 'fish-tailed goddess'. She has a typical Elamite hairstyle and wears an elaborate necklace and bracelets. The symbolism of the fish, and the significance of this figure on the rim of the pan, is unknown. Five bronze pans of this kind and one silver example were found in a Late Elamite tomb at Jubaji that contained two bronze coffins with the bodies of women, a large amount of gold jewellery, and a tall offering stand with bull figures at the base (cat. 25). An isolated example of the fish-tailed goddess figure from elsewhere in Iran is now in the British Museum.[21]

Bonn Catalogue 2017, p. 208, fig. 10



27

Bowl

6th century BC

Probably Kalmakarra Cave,
Luristan province, Iran
Silver, height 7.5 cm, diameter 13 cm
National Museum of Iran, no. 9664
Unprovenanced

This silver bowl has a flared rim and three grooves around the shoulder. Around the inside of the rim is an inscription in Elamite cuneiform which includes a reference to Ampirish. King of Samati, son of Dabala. The bowl is part of a large hoard, which is alleged to have been found in Kalmakarra Cave in southern Luristan and which is now widely dispersed. About 65 pieces are in the Falakol-Aflak Castle Museum in Khorramabad,[22] a number of them with inscriptions mentioning Ampirish. The shape of this bowl suggests it should be dated to the 6th century BC.

Leila Khosravi, *Treasure of Kalmakarra Cave* (Tehran 2013), pp. 15, 221

28

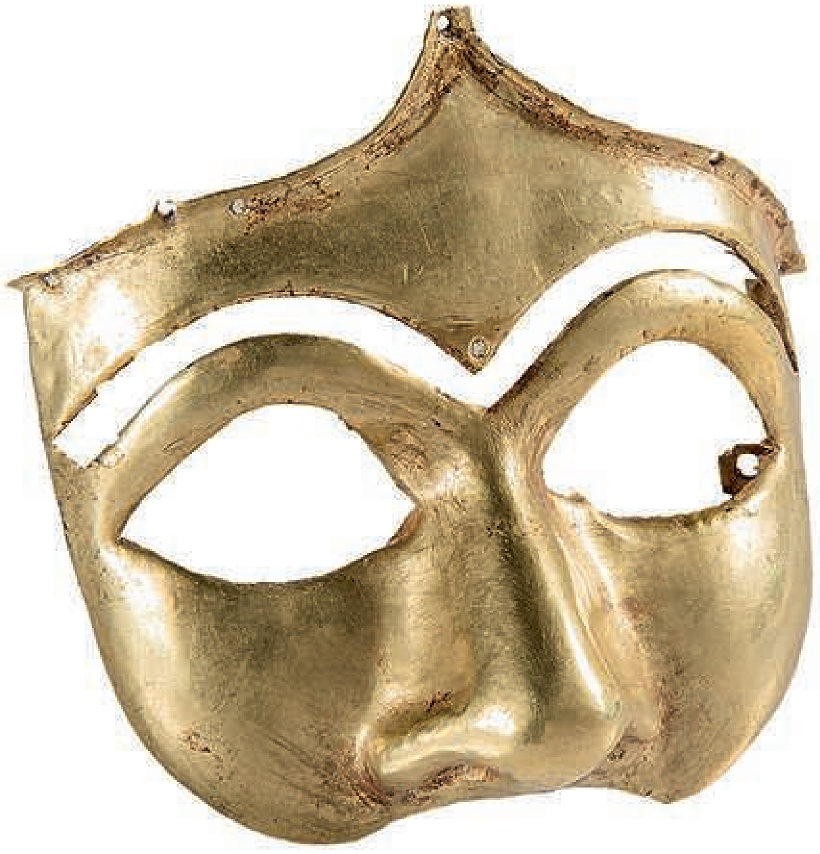
Mask

about 600–550 BC

Probably Kalmakarra Cave,
Luristan province, Iran
Gold, 10.5 × 8.1 cm
National Museum of Iran, no. 9818
Unprovenanced

This gold mask is rather smaller than life-size and represents the upper part of a face with cut-out shapes for the eyes and the eyebrows. It was allegedly found in Kalmakarra Cave in southern Luristan together with a large number of silver vessels, some of them with Late Elamite inscriptions and apparently dating from the 6th century BC. There are 10 gold or silver masks of this type in the National Museum of Iran and the Falakol-Aflak Castle Museum, Khorramabad, but their association with the silver vessels is unclear. Their purpose is obscure – they are too small to have served as face masks, which suggests they might have had a votive function, perhaps for presentation to a shrine.

Leila Khosravi, *Treasure of Kalmakarra Cave* (Tehran 2013), pp. 24, 223



AGE OF MIGRATIONS

From the late second millennium BC onwards a series of very remarkable civilizations, often producing very distinctive works of art, sprang up in western Iran on the east side of the Zagros Mountains and to the west of the Great Salt Desert. As discussed earlier, these centres are often associated with the arrival in Iran of new peoples speaking Indo-Iranian languages, but, while there may indeed be links in some cases, more research needs to be done to provide us with a full picture. Dating from the period about 1200–1000 BC is one of the most extraordinary and also one of the most enigmatic of these civilizations. In Gilan, to the south-west of the Caspian Sea, excavations in cemeteries at places such as Marlik and Kaluraz have produced richly decorated gold and silver vessels (cats 31–3), vessels in the shape of hump-backed bulls (cat. 29), and stylized pottery figurines of naked women (cat. 30). The finds in these cemeteries testify to the extraordinary wealth of those buried here – one explanation is that the tombs are those of robber barons who controlled the lucrative East-West trade route that passed to the south of the Caspian Sea.

To the south of Gilan, in the province of Azerbaijan, is the important archaeological site of Hasanlu, where a team from the University of Pennsylvania worked from 1956 until 1974 under the leadership of Robert H. Dyson, Jr (1927–2020). In around 800 BC, or a little later, this site was destroyed by a fierce fire and thousands of artefacts were found buried in the debris (cats 36–38) together with the bodies of inhabitants who had not been able to escape the blaze. It is likely that Hasanlu was an important centre of the kingdom of Mannaea, one of the petty kingdoms and tribal centres on the east side of the Zagros Mountains. Much of our information about these small states comes from the written records of the powerful kingdom of Assyria in northern Mesopotamia (Iraq) to the west that between the ninth and seventh centuries BC launched numerous campaigns into western Iran in search of horses, minerals and booty. From these we learn that among the small kingdoms in the Zagros region were those of Mannaea and Ellipi, sandwiched between Urartu to the north and Elam to the south and with Median tribes to the east.

Apart from Hasanlu, other Mannaean sites include Tepe Qalaichi (near Bukan)[23] and Tepe Rabat.[24] At both places, polychrome glazed tiles with designs that are derivative of Assyrian art have been found, testifying to close contacts with Assyria (cat. 41). Another important centre is Ziwiyeh[25] in Iranian Kurdistan, near Saqqez, which became notorious for the alleged discovery in about 1947 of a bronze coffin filled with fabulous gold and silver objects (cats 39, 40). Subsequent Iranian excavations have shown that Ziwiyeh was a flourishing fortified citadel in the eighth to seventh centuries BC. The objects found at Mannaean sites, for example the glazed bricks and also incised ivories and pottery, show strong Assyrian influence, but at the same time local elements play an important role in Mannaean art. Inscriptions in the Mannaean language do not survive, if they ever existed, but Mannaean personal names in Assyrian and Urartian inscriptions show that the Mannaean language belonged to the Hurrian language family.

The kingdom of Ellipi was based in the modern provinces of Luristan and south Kurdistan. It is from this region that the very distinctive Luristan bronzes come, in the form of horse trappings (cat. 45) and standards (cat. 46), among other objects. Unfortunately very few of these canonical bronzes have been found in scientific excavations, such as those at Baba Jan, the sanctuary site of Surkh Dum-e Luri, and those of the Belgian mission in Luristan between 1965 and 1979. From Baba Jan there are bricks or tiles with painted patterns (cat. 42) as well as the distinctive buff pottery with red or brown painted decoration that is known as 'Luristan genre' (cats 43, 44).

In the west part of the Iranian central plateau were the Medes, who for reasons explained earlier remain elusive. Median pottery is distinctive and at Tepe Sialk bricks stamped with figural and geometric designs have been identified as Median. This, and their evident contribution to later Achaemenid art, suggests that in due course a canon of Median art will become established.

29

Hump-backed bull

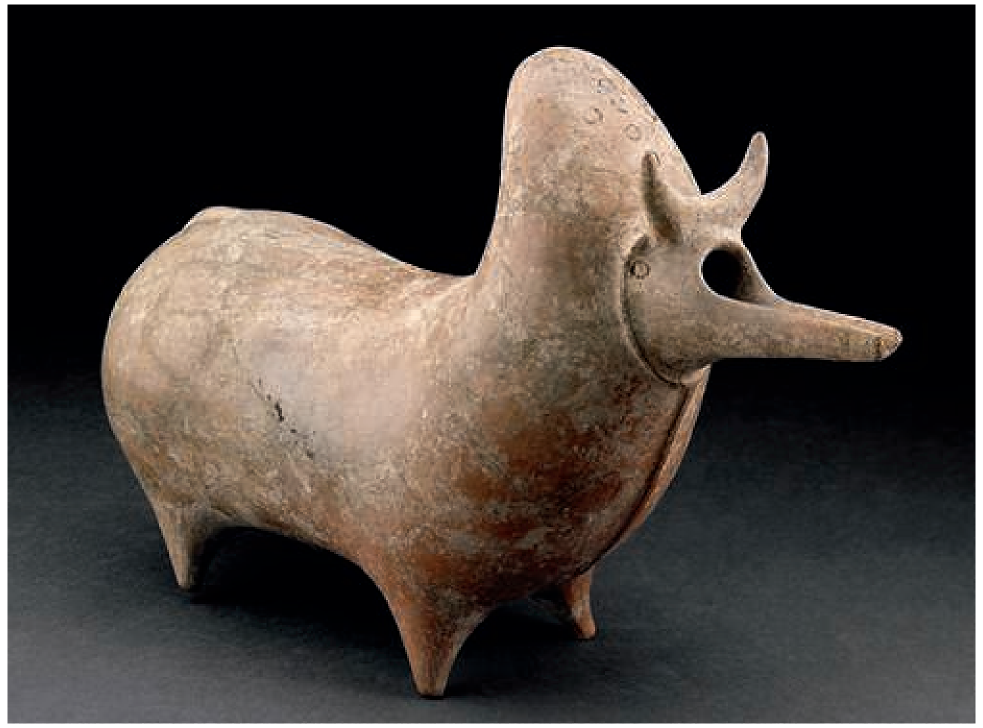
about 1200–800 BC

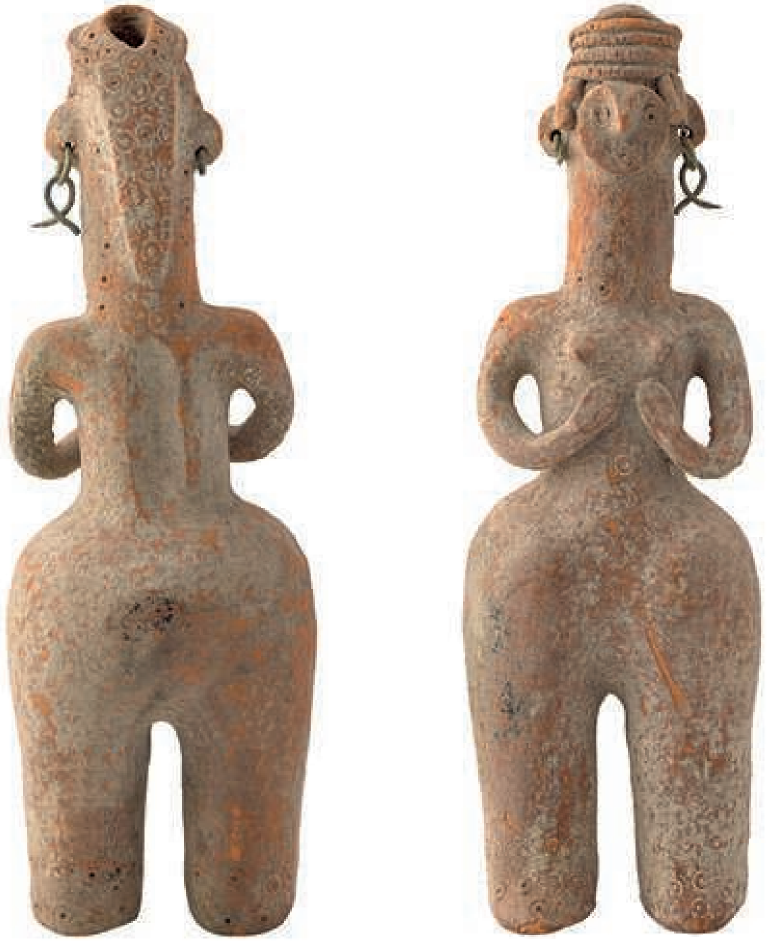
Clay, length 26 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN 1964.347

This grey burnished pottery figure in the form of a hump-backed bull (*zebu*) is hollow. There is a pouring spout at the top of the animal's head. The authenticity of this vessel has been established by a thermoluminescence test. Similar bulls in both grey or black and red burnished pottery have been found at Marlik in Gilan, between the Elburz Mountains and the Caspian Sea, in a cemetery excavated by the Iranian archaeologist Ezat O. Negahban (1926–2009) in 1961–2, but no doubt they have also been found at other sites in Gilan. The significance of the bull shape for these vessels is not known, but they might have been used in particular ceremonies.

Roger Moorey, *Ancient Iran* (Oxford 1975), pl. XVIII





30

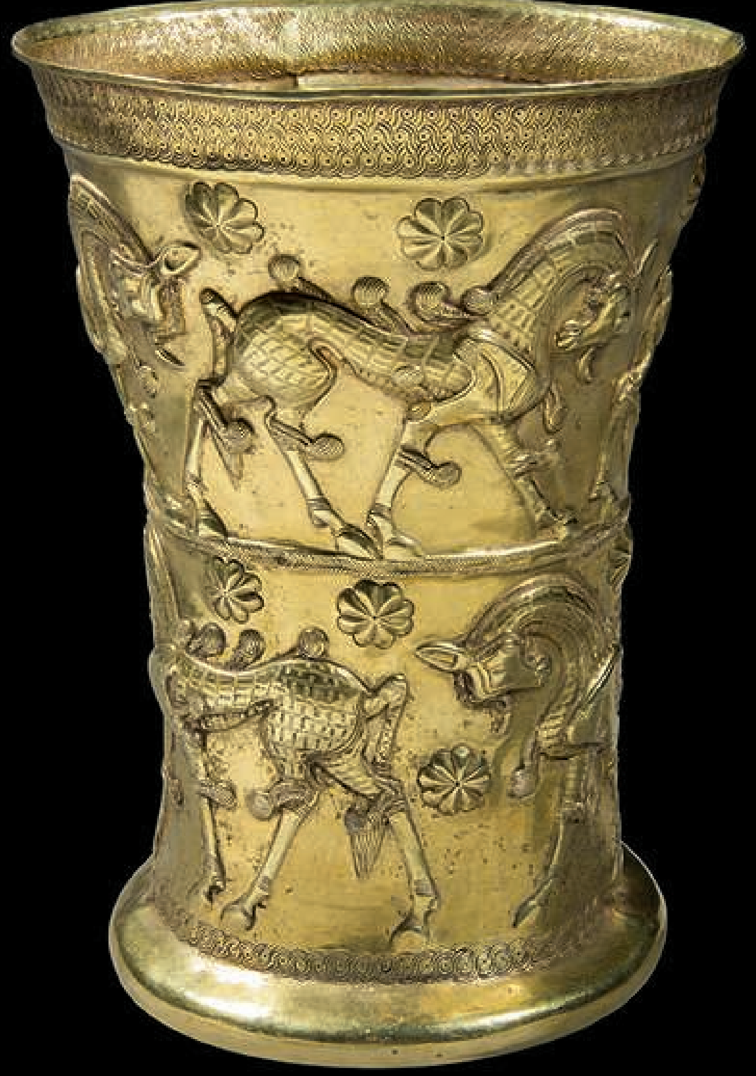
Naked woman figurine

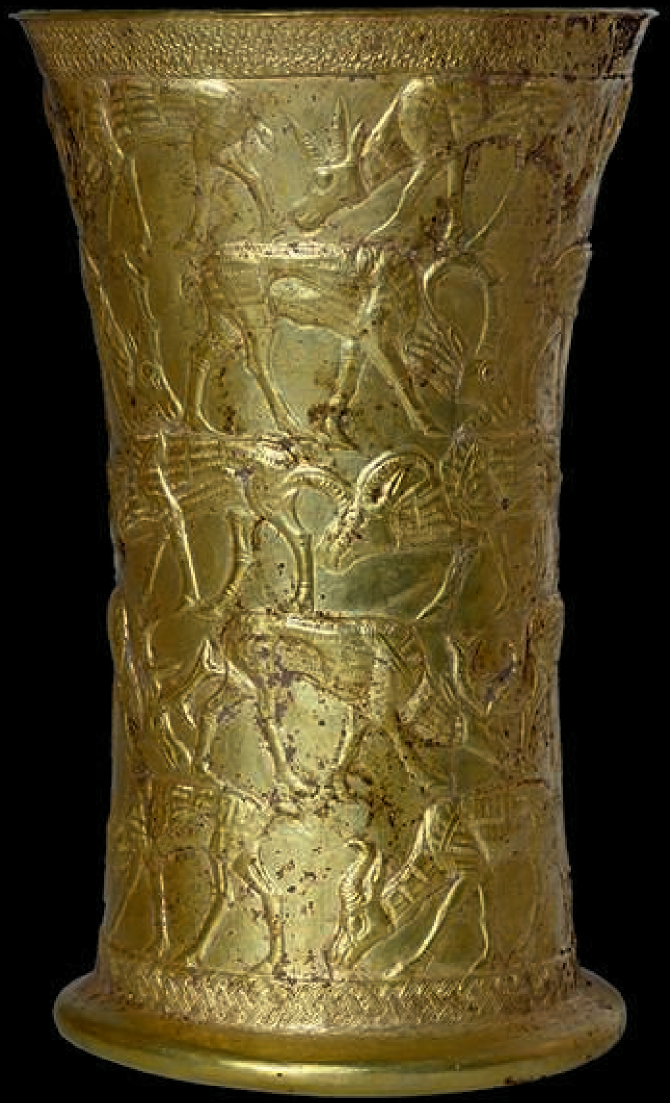
about 1200–800 BC

Clay, height 26 cm,
width 8.5 cm (max.)

The Sarikhani Collection, A.CE.1020
Purchased 2015

This stylized figurine in red burnished pottery shows a naked woman with enormous buttocks and thick thighs, holding her hands beneath her breasts. She has a long cylindrical neck and her face is represented by an applied disc. The hair is braided on the top of the head and falls down the back of the neck. There is ring-and-dot decoration on the neck, on the hair at the back and at the bottom of the legs. She wears bronze wire earrings. This figurine appears in part to be hollow. Similar figurines have been found at Marlik[26] and Kaluraz,[27] giving a possible date range for these works of 1200–800 BC.





31 (opposite left)

Beaker

about 1200–1000 BC

Excavated at Marlik,
Gilan province, Iran
Gold, height 17.5 cm
National Museum of Iran, no. 7698

Embossed decoration showing a horned animal is repeated three times in each register on this gold beaker with slightly concave sides. The animal has a long curved neck, a slender waist and tufts of hair on its back and legs. It has been variously interpreted as a horse (or unicorn) or a bull. There is added decoration in the form of rosettes. At the top and bottom of the beaker are bands of cable pattern (guilloche), while the two friezes of animals are separated by a band of cross-hatching. This gold beaker was found in tomb no. 45 at Marlik during the excavations of Iranian archaeologist Ezat Negahban. There is a comparable silver beaker, unprovenanced, in the British Museum.[28]

Ezat O. Negahban, *Marlik: the Complete Excavation Report* (Philadelphia 1966), vol. 1, pp. 63–7, vol. 2, pl. XIVA-B; Bonn Catalogue 2017, p. 196, no. 199

32 (opposite right)

Beaker

about 1200–1000 BC

Gold, height 20.7 cm, diameter 12.8 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1076
Purchased 2016

This tall gold beaker with slightly concave sides has embossed and chased decoration showing five different kinds of horned animals in five rows (21 animals in all). There are bands of cable decoration at the top and bottom of the beaker, and the base is decorated with the usual dotted floral pattern. This example is comparable with a gold beaker from Ezat Negahban's excavations at Marlik (Cheragh Ali Tepe) and may well have come from this site, although it was not retrieved in the official excavations.[29]

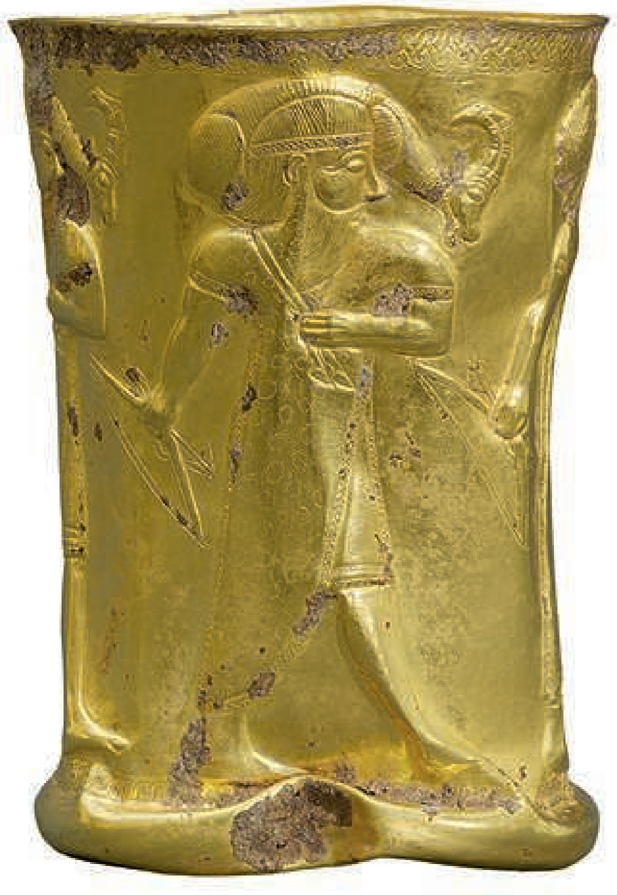
33

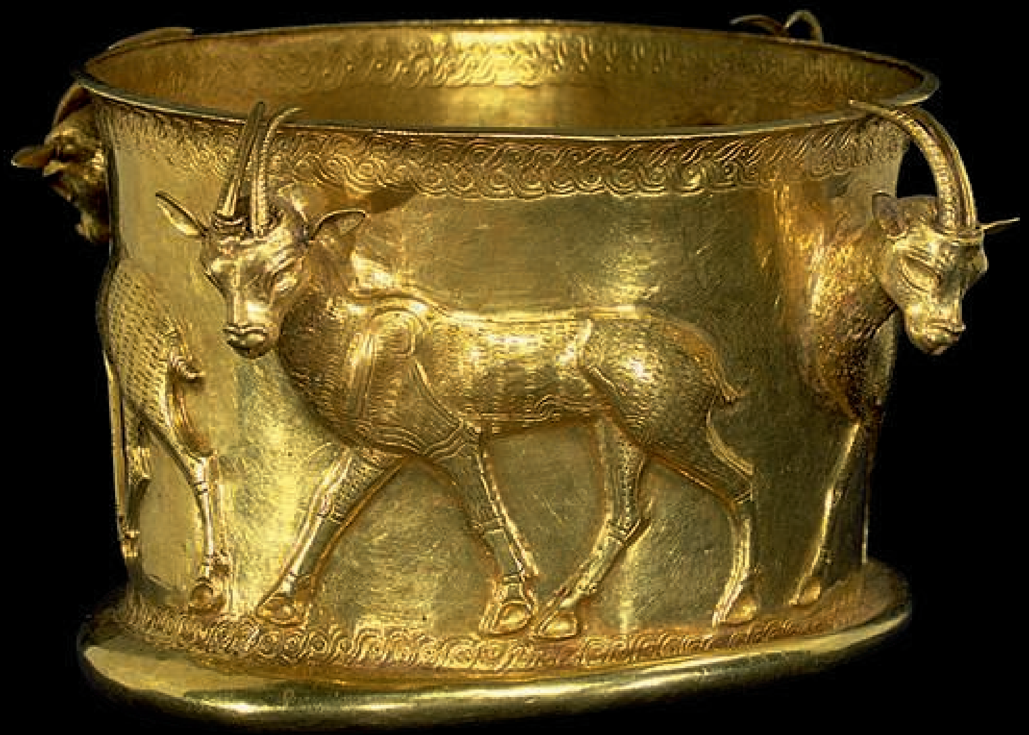
Beaker

about 1200–1000 BC

Gold, height 13.2 cm, diameter
about 9 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1021
Purchased 2008

This gold beaker has embossed and chased decoration showing four bearded huntsmen carrying ibexes on their shoulders. Each of the huntsmen wears a hair band and a short-sleeved fringed garment, decorated with incised circles. Each carries a bow and arrow in his right hand and places his left hand on his chest. All the huntsmen are barefooted. There are bands of cable decoration at the top and bottom of the beaker, and the base is decorated with the usual dotted floral pattern.





34

Bowl

about 1200–800 BC

Gold, height 6.5 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 62.84
Purchased 1962

A frieze of gazelles in high relief decorates this high-sided gold bowl. The heads, horns and ears of the animals were made separately and then applied. There are bands of cable pattern at the top and bottom of the bowl. Gold vessels with animals in high relief are known from Marlik[30] and Kelardasht in Mazanderan[31] and probably date from the late 2nd–early 1st millennium BC.

35

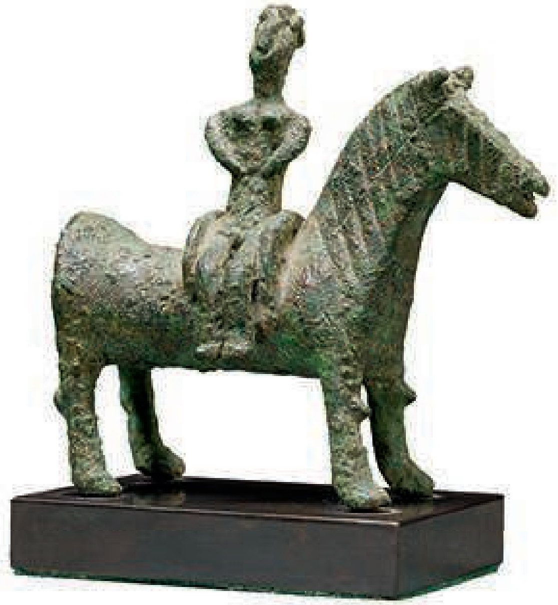
Figurine of horse and rider

about 800–600 BC

Bronze, height 9 cm, length 9.3 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2033
Purchased 2007

This small bronze figurine shows a horse with rider sitting side-saddle on its back. There are incised lines on the neck and face of the horse. The rider has prominent breasts and may therefore be a woman who is naked. The saddle is indicated by high ridges on either side. A similar bronze figurine was found in a tomb at Kaluraz in Gilan by Ali Hakemi.[32] The saddle is similar, with high sides, but in this instance the figure is clearly male.



36

Pottery jar on stand

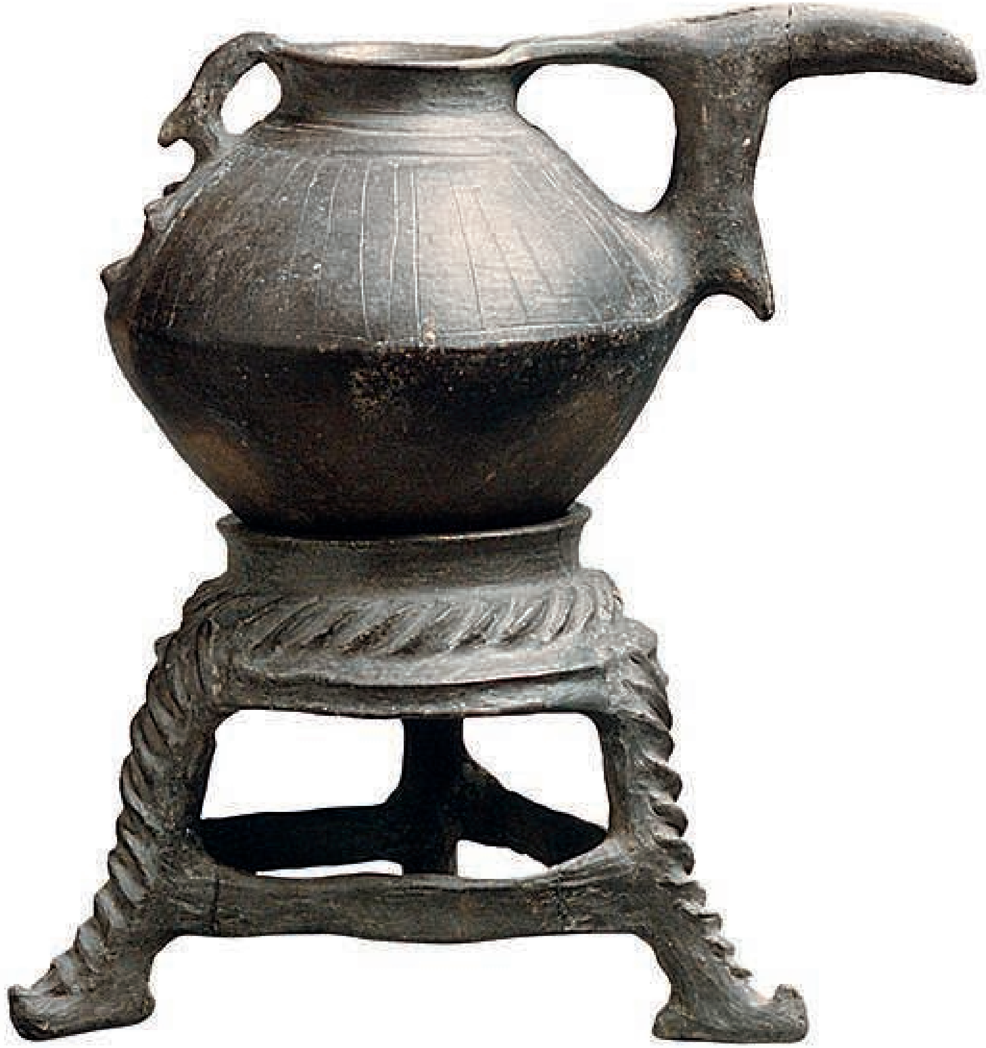
about 1000–800 BC

Excavated at Hasanlu,
West Azerbaijan province, Iran
Clay, height 41.6 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 60.20.15-16

This beak-spouted jar and the three-legged stand are both made of grey burnished ware pottery. They were found together during the excavations at Hasanlu, undertaken in 12 campaigns between 1957 and 1975 by the University of Pennsylvania team, directed by Robert H. Dyson, Jr. They date from the Iron Age II period, about 1000–800 BC. It used to be thought that the use of grey ware pottery of this kind, together with a change of burial customs, was a hallmark of the newly arrived Indo-Iranian peoples, but some scholars now argue that such pottery is a continuation of Iranian Bronze Age forms.

Vaughn E. Crawford, 'Hasanlu 1960', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 20 (1961), p. 88, fig. 2



37

Lion pin

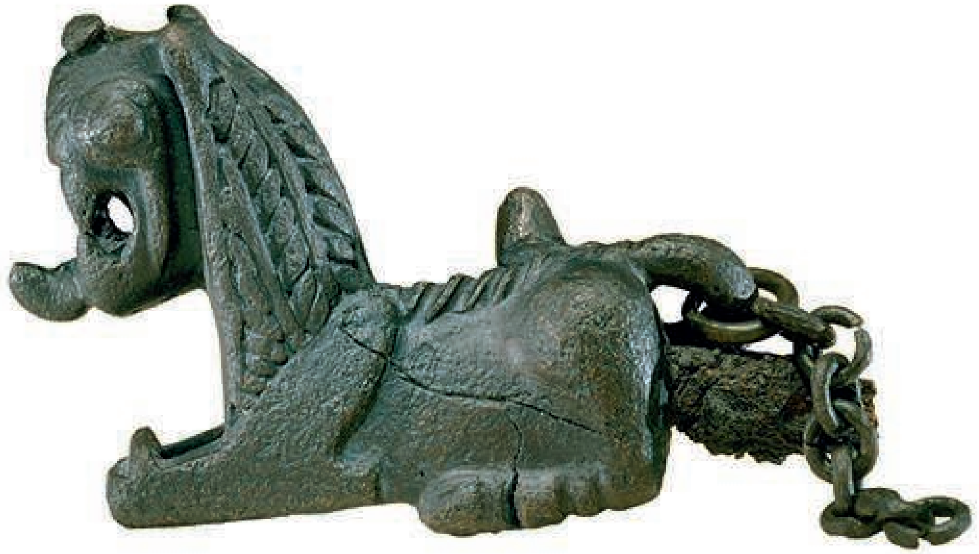
about 1000–800 BC

Excavated at Hasanlu,
West Azerbaijan province, Iran
Bronze, length 13 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 61.100.10

This bronze lion pin, presumably used to fasten a garment, would have been attached at the rear to a long iron rod that has now corroded away. The lion is recumbent with extended front legs. It is roaring with open mouth and a protruding tongue. A bronze chain is fixed to its tail to hold the pin in position. It comes from Level IV at Hasanlu. Over 60 examples of these lion pins were found at the site, many of them associated with skeletons of people who were killed in the destruction that overtook the settlement in about 800 BC. The large number of these pins found at Hasanlu, and the relatively small number found elsewhere, suggests that they were a local product.

Oscar W. Muscarella, *Bronze and Iron: Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York 1988), no. 42



38

Pair of bird-shaped handles

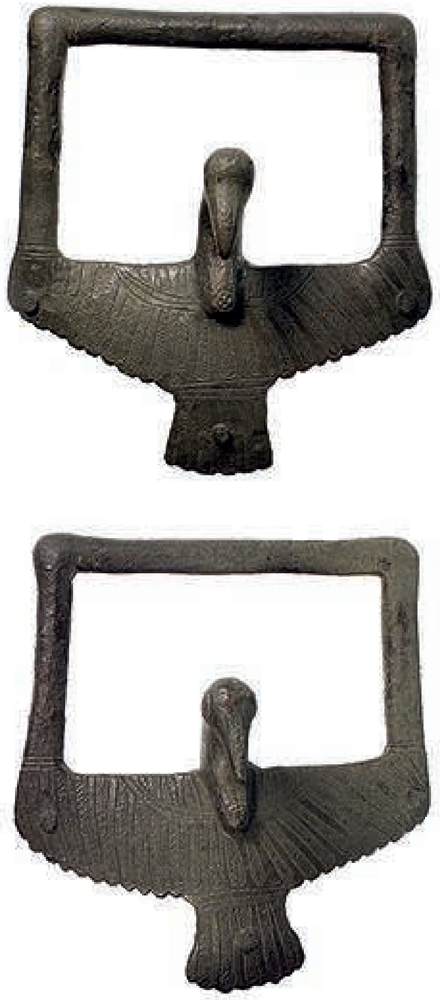
about 1000–800 BC

Excavated at Hasanlu,
West Azerbaijan province, Iran
Bronze, 10.8 × 10 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 61.100.3a, b

When found, these handles were attached to a large bowl, about 40 cm in diameter, which was in poor condition. They were fixed in position with rivets. Each handle has a straight top with the lower part in the form of a bird with outstretched wings and tail. The bird has a long arched neck and large beak, and is presumably a bird of prey such as an eagle. The handles were found in a Period IV building at Hasanlu, thought to have been destroyed in about 800 BC. These handles belong to a different tradition to those with the indented tops (see cat. 24) and are probably earlier.

Oscar W. Muscarella, *Bronze and Iron: Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York 1988), no. 6



39, 40

Belt fragments

about 800–600 BC

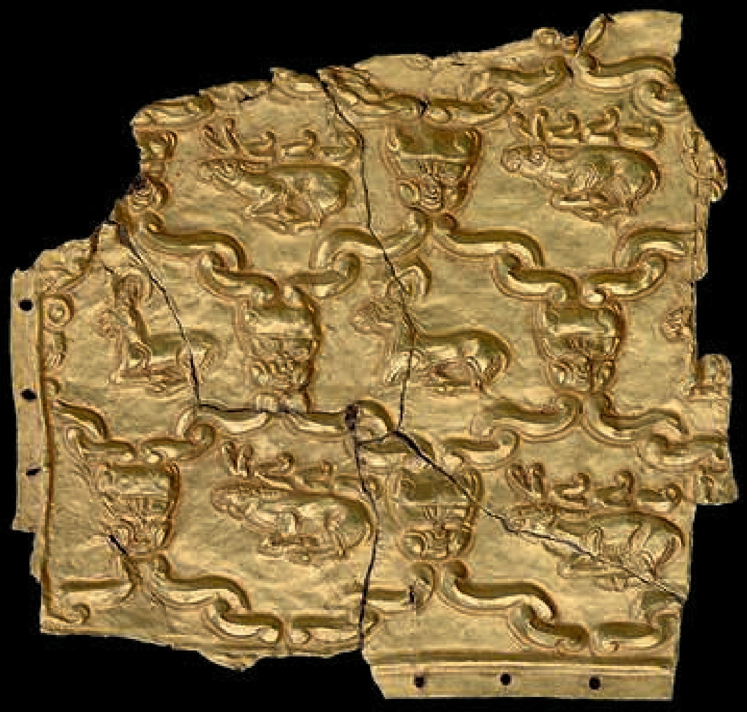
Probably Ziwiyeh, Kurdistan province, Iran
Gold, 9.6 × 9 cm; 15.6 × 8.6 cm

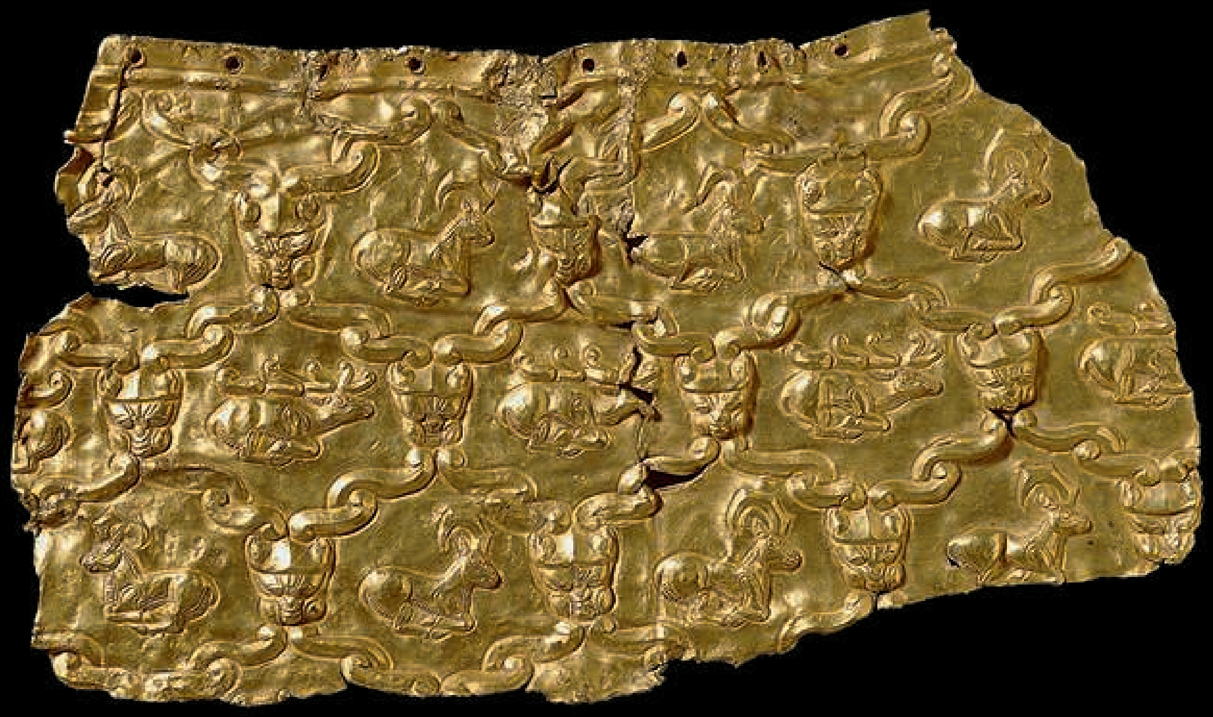
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1079, purchased 2017 (cat. 39, above)

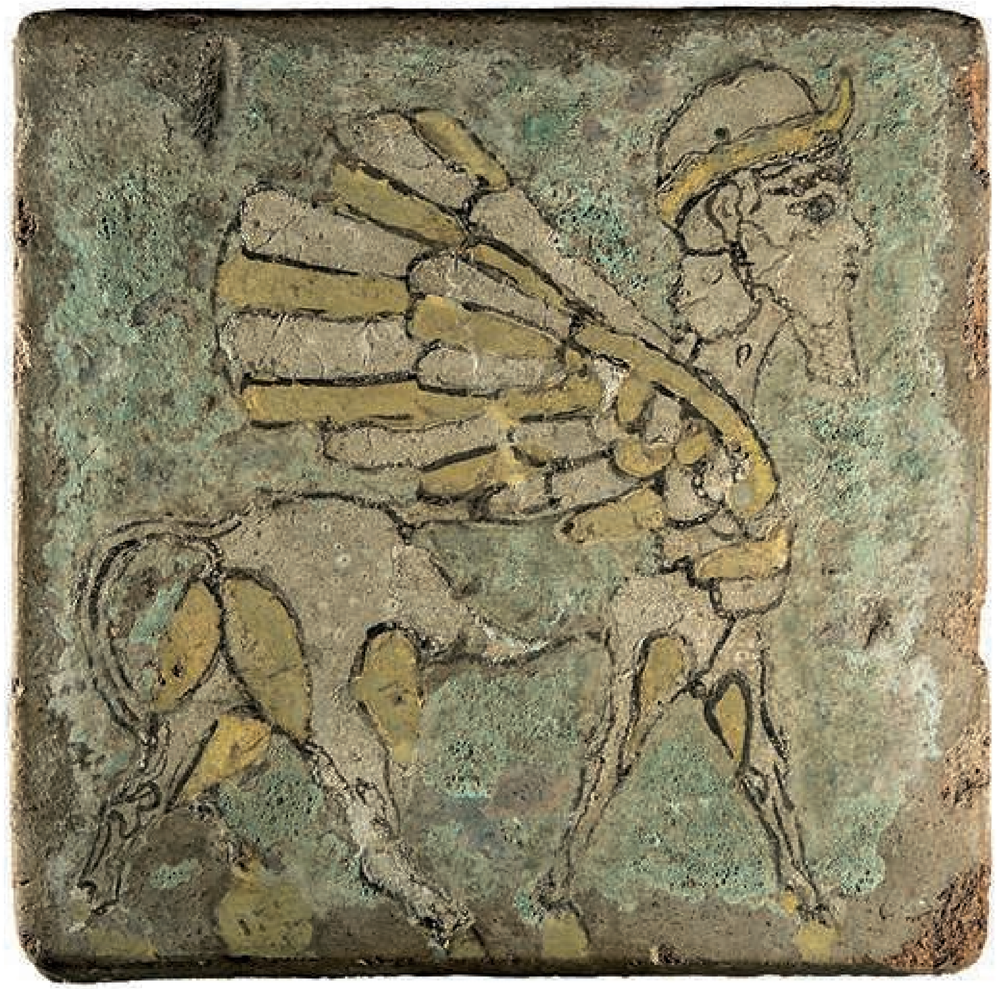
British Museum, 132825, purchased 1960 (cat. 40, below)

These two fragments belong to the same gold belt, embellished with embossed and chased decoration featuring recumbent stags and ibexes in alternate rows. The animals are set in panels that are framed by cable-pattern designs and lion's heads. The fragments have borders perforated by small holes indicating that they were attached to a leather or cloth backing. There are at least eight more pieces of this same belt in private collections and museums around the world including the National Museum of Iran and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The belt is thought to have been found in an unofficial excavation at Ziwiyeh in Iranian Kurdistan in about 1947, allegedly in a bronze coffin with other valuable gold objects. After its discovery the belt was presumably cut into pieces to increase its saleable value. The recumbent stags and ibexes, with their legs folded beneath them, show Scythian influence.[33]

Pierre Amandry, 'À propos du trésor de Ziwiyé', *Iranica Antiqua* 6 (1966), p. 116, fig. 4 for a reconstruction of the fragments







41

Pottery tile

about 750–650 BC

Excavated at Tepe Qalaichi,
West Azerbaijan province, Iran
Clay, glazed, 34 × 34 cm, thickness
about 9 cm

National Museum of Iran, no. 13653

This glazed clay tile from Tepe Qalaichi in the ancient kingdom of Mannaea has polychrome decoration showing a human-headed winged bull wearing a horned cap, a mark of divinity in Mesopotamia. This is one of a large number of glazed clay tiles from Tepe Qalaichi, near Bukan in West Azerbaijan province. The tiles come from a building that was probably a small palace, and many of them are decorated, as is the present example, with figures that are based on Assyrian originals but interpreted in a local Mannaean manner. In the early 1980s many tiles of this type were looted from Tepe Qalaichi and are now widely dispersed. From 1985 onwards official excavations were undertaken by the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization, which resulted in the discovery of more examples.

Gareth Brereton (ed.), *I am Ashurbanipal, King of the World, King of Assyria* (London 2018), p. 171, fig. 189

42

Pottery tile

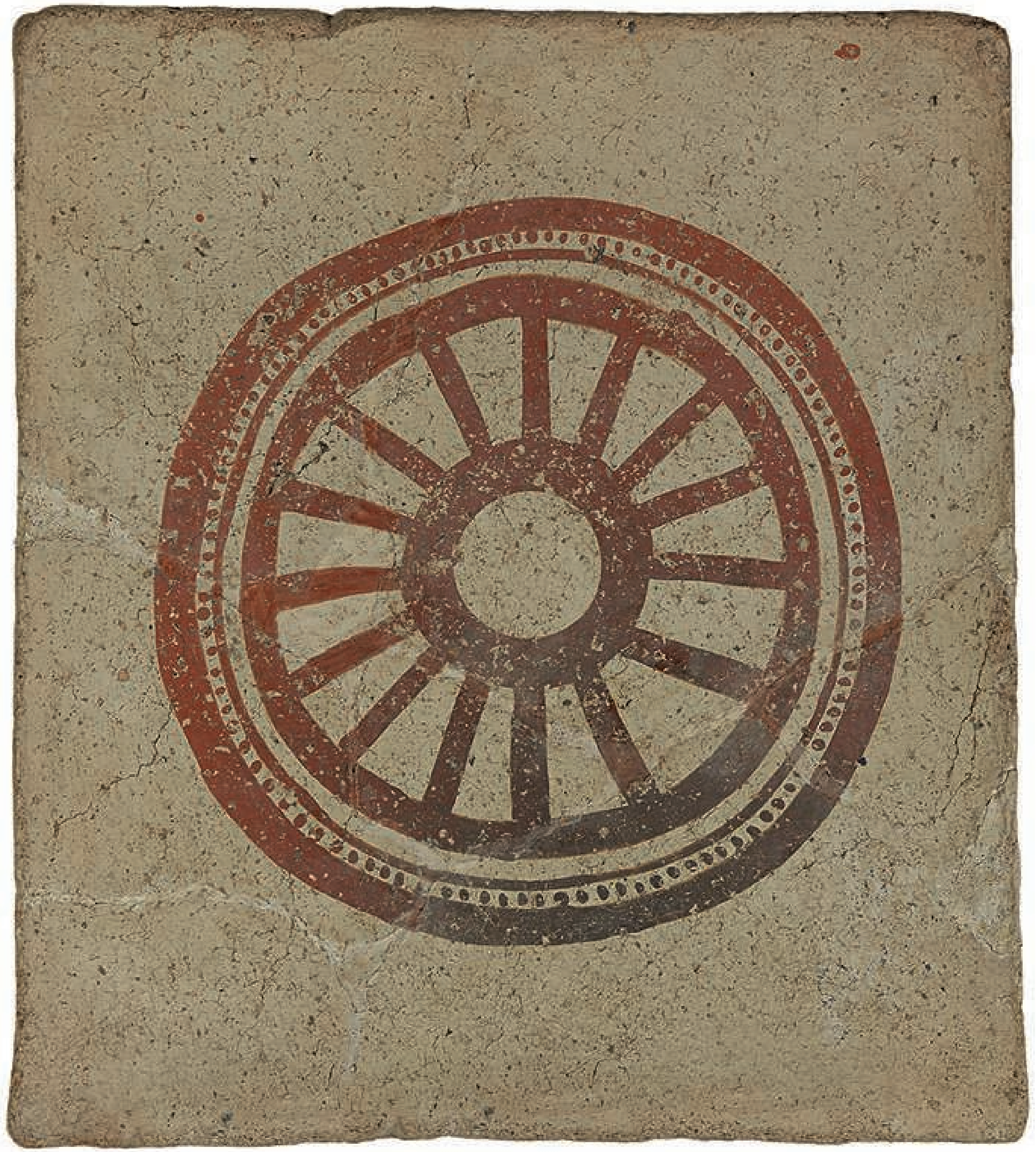
about 800–700 BC

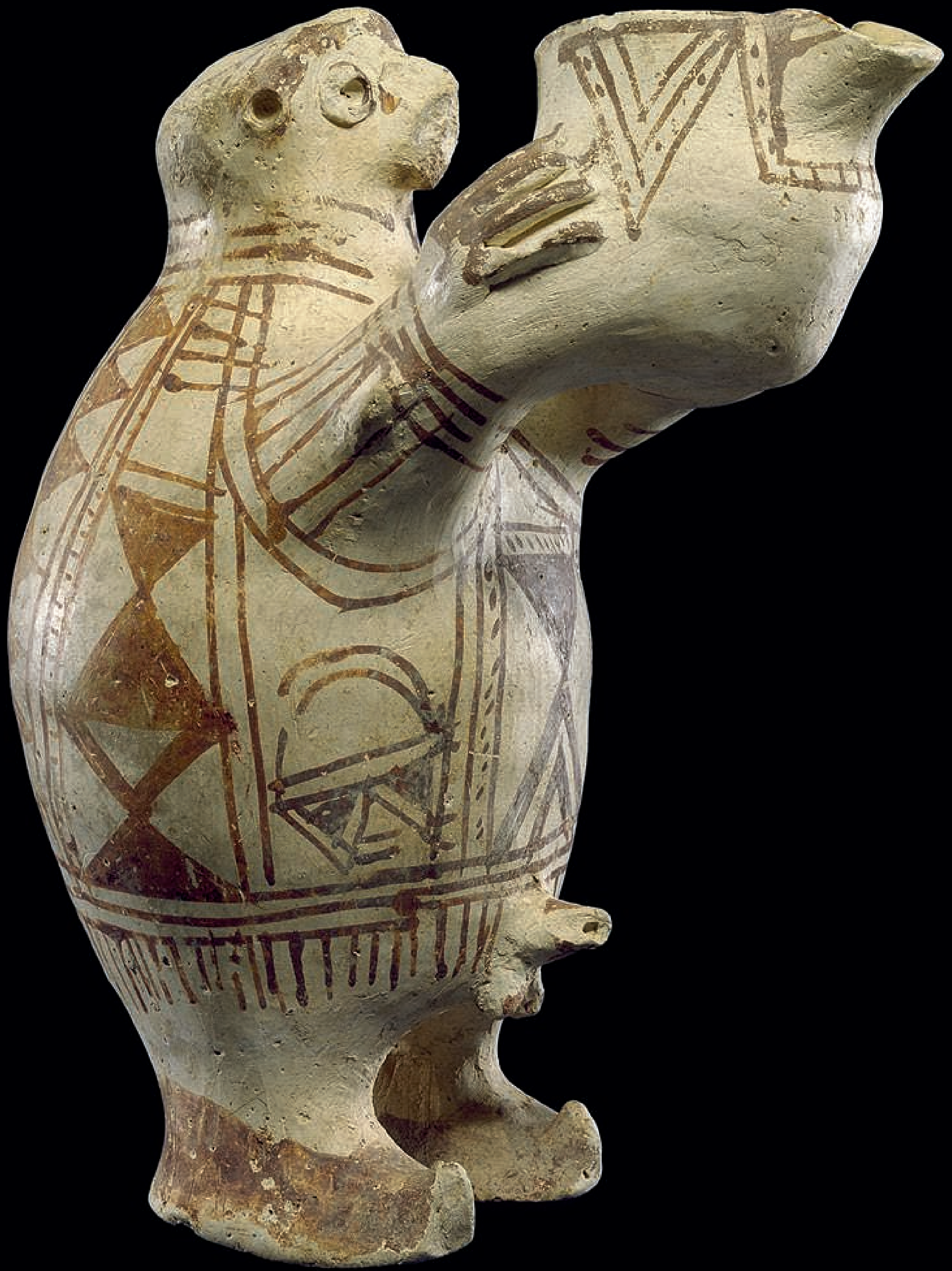
Excavated at Baba Jan Tepe,
Luristan province, Iran
Clay with painted decoration,
47 × 51.5 × 6 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN1969.34

This baked clay tile has red painted decoration showing a wheel with 15 spokes. About 176 tiles of this size were found in a single chamber at Baba Jan Tepe in north-east Luristan during excavations by Dr Clare Goff (b. 1936) between 1966 and 1969. The tiles come from a room on the East Mound known as 'the painted chamber' on account of the red and white paint on the walls. It had been destroyed by fire at the end of the 8th century BC. The tile designs are either arrangements of squares or wheels. It is thought they decorated a ceiling and would have been held in place by a lattice of wooden supports.

Clare Goff, 'Excavations at Baba Jan: the architecture of the east mound, Levels III and II', *Iran* XV (1977), pl. XIX





43

Anthropomorphic pottery vase

about 800–700 BC

Clay with painted decoration,
height 24.2 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN1971.982

This pottery vase is in the form of a semi-naked man with a prominent penis, holding a jug from which he is about to pour a libation. The vessel is buff-coloured with orange-painted decoration of triangles and linear designs in typical 'Luristan genre' style. The man is wearing shoes that are turned up at the front, a feature that often appears in the art of the mountainous regions of Iran. A comparable anthropomorphic pottery vase was found in the excavations at Baba Jan Tepe, dating from 800–700 BC.[34]

Roger Moorey, *Antiquities from the Bomford Collection* (Oxford 1966), no. 280, pl. XXIII;
Roger Moorey, *Ancient Iran* (Oxford 1975), pl. XIX

44

Pottery jar

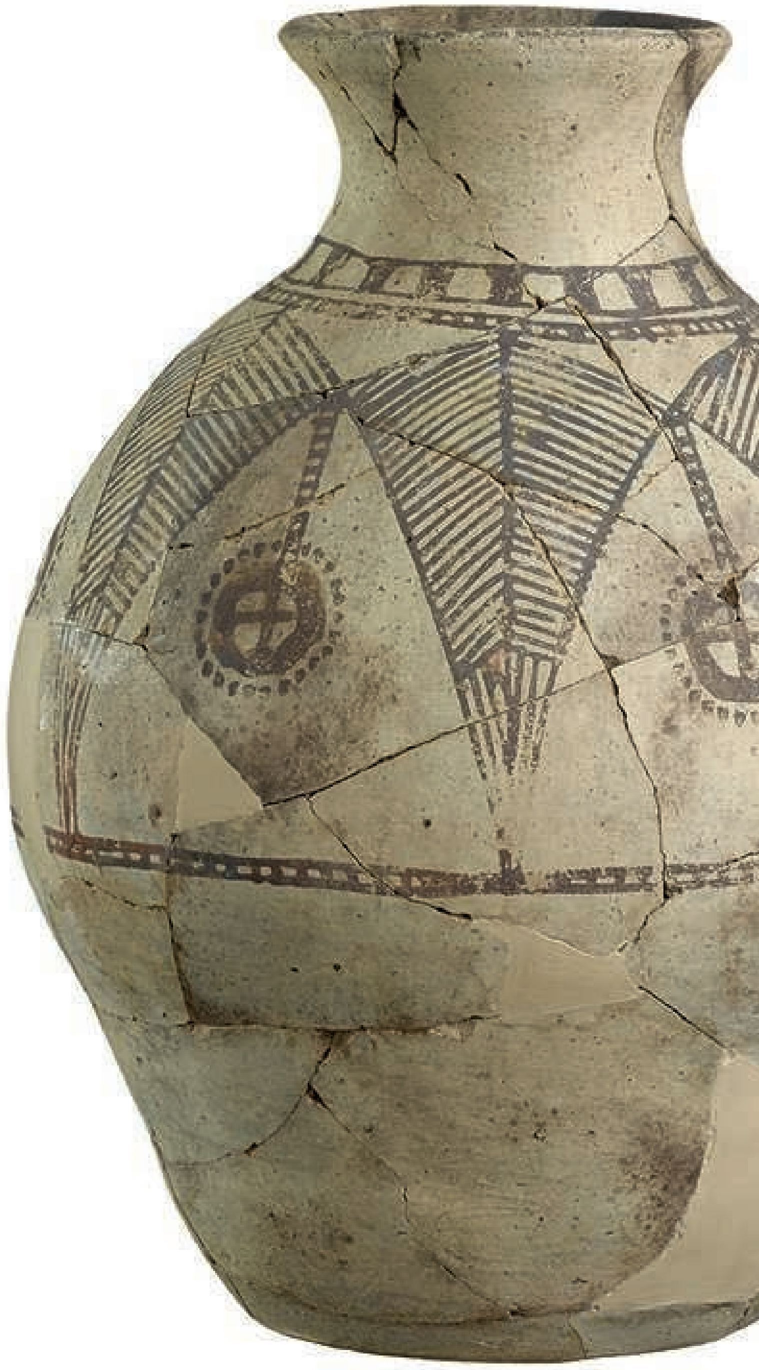
about 800–700 BC

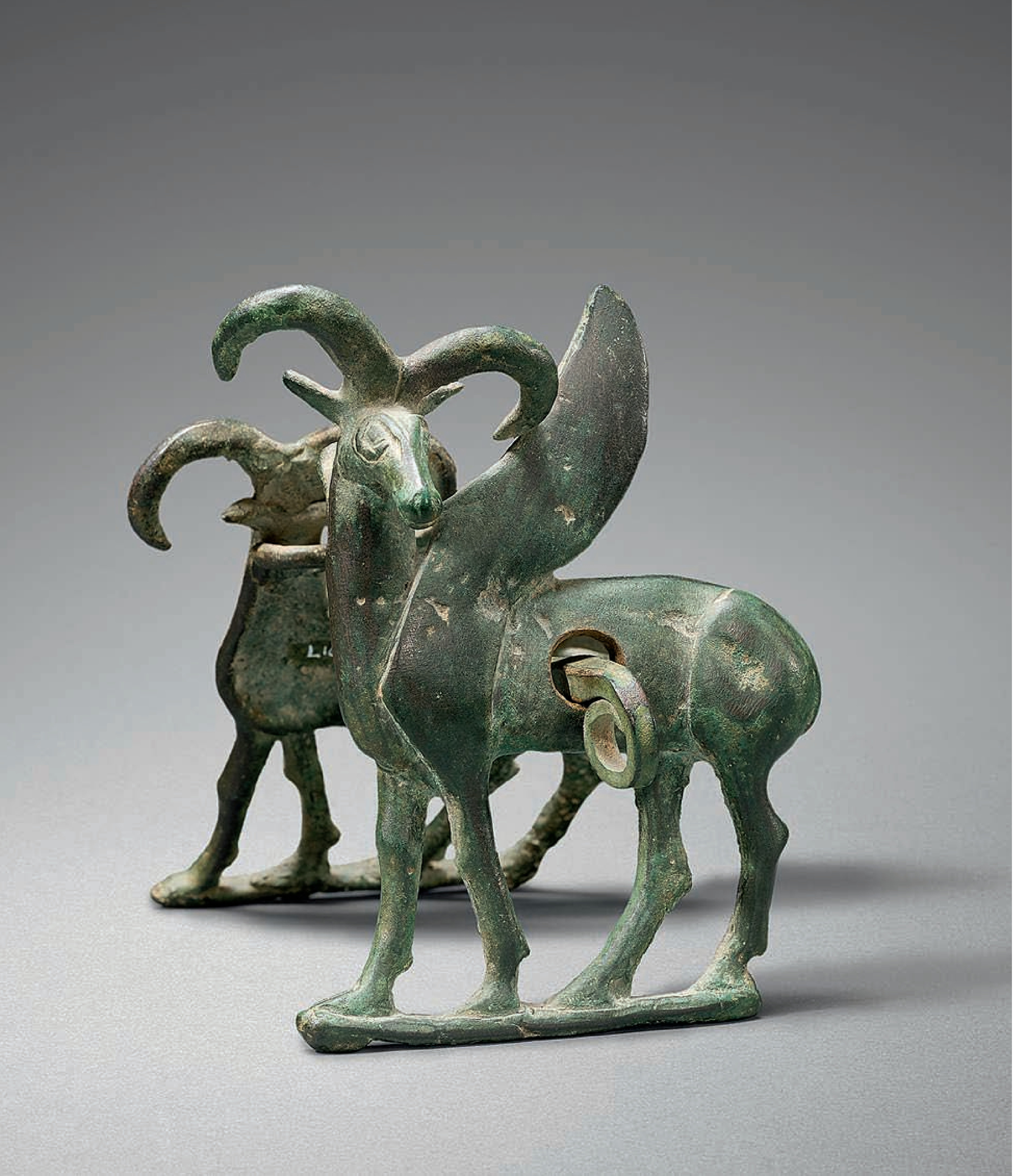
Excavated at Baba Jan Tepe,
Luristan province, Iran
Clay with painted decoration,
height 29.2 cm, diameter 10.3 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN 1969.1

This pottery jar is decorated in brown paint with a ladder design around the neck and pendant wheel designs between hatched 'kites' on the body. It was found in Room 5 of the East Mound at Baba Jan Tepe. This type of buff-coloured pottery with distinctive designs in red or brown paint, known as 'Luristan genre', is typical of the region in the 8th century BC. By contrast, the canonical 'Luristan bronzes' (see cats 45–8) have only rarely been found in scientific excavations.

Clare Goff, 'Excavations at Baba Jan: the pottery and metals from Levels III and II', *Iran* XVI (1978), pl. IVb





45

Horse-bit

about 900–700 BC

Bronze, height 12.5 cm, length 11 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2015
Purchased 2007

This bronze bar-shaped horse-bit has cheek-pieces in the form of winged mouflons, and is a type associated with Luristan. Elaborate horse-bits such as this example, with cheek-pieces in the form of real or imagined animals, form a distinctive group among the so-called 'Luristan bronzes'. Although they have seldom, if ever, been found in scientific excavations, it is assumed that they come from the graves of warrior nomads. It has been widely reported that they have often been found in graves, placed under the head of the corpse like a head-rest.

46

Standard

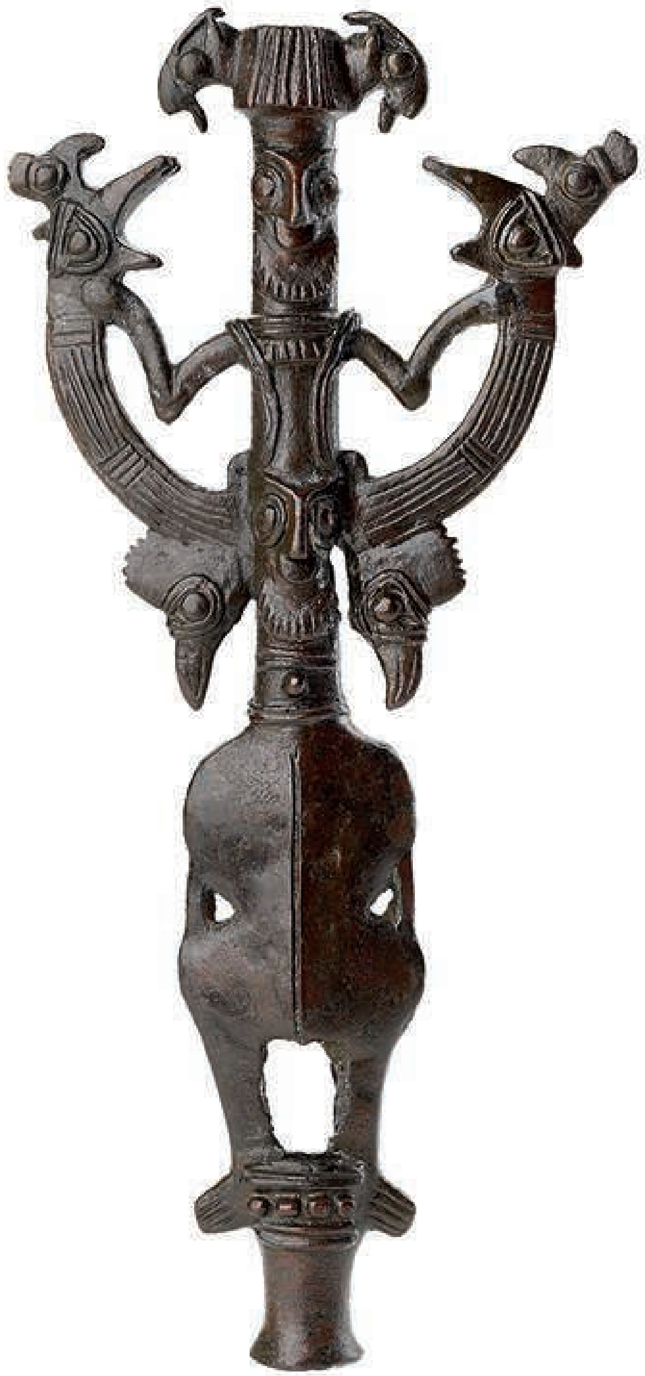
about 900–700 BC

Bronze, height 19.5 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN1965.794

Bronze objects of this kind are usually called 'master-of-animals' standards and are traditionally associated with Luristan. This example consists of a central tube with a human-faced figure at the top who grasps by the neck two composite beasts. There is another human face halfway down the tube, and goats' heads and cocks' heads are added to the composition at the top and on either side of the lower human face. The tube at the base is hollow, indicating that such standards were mounted on a pole or a stick. Their function is not clear, and the meaning of the imagery is obscure. Such standards have only rarely been recovered in excavations but a few examples are known from the Belgian excavations in the Pusht-e Kuh (western Luristan) while a fragmentary piece came from Baba Jan Tepe.[35]

Roger Moorey, *Catalogue of Ancient Persian Bronzes in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford 1971), no. 180



47

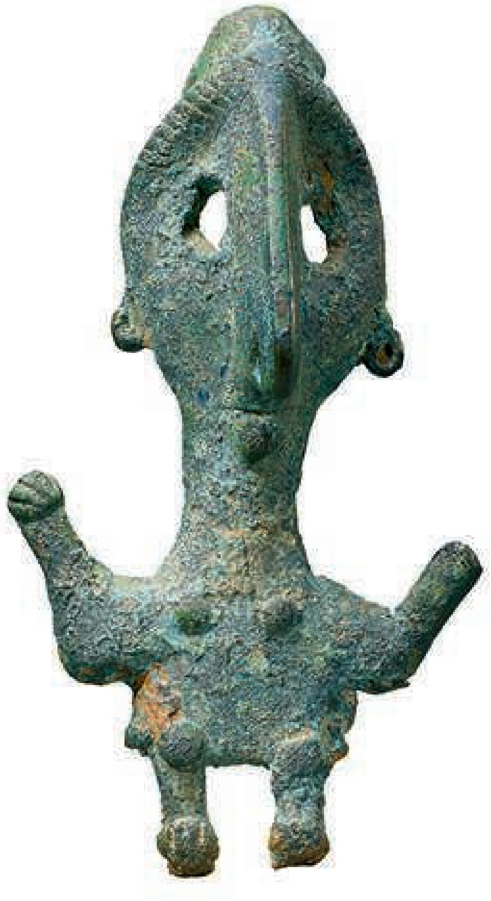
Figurine

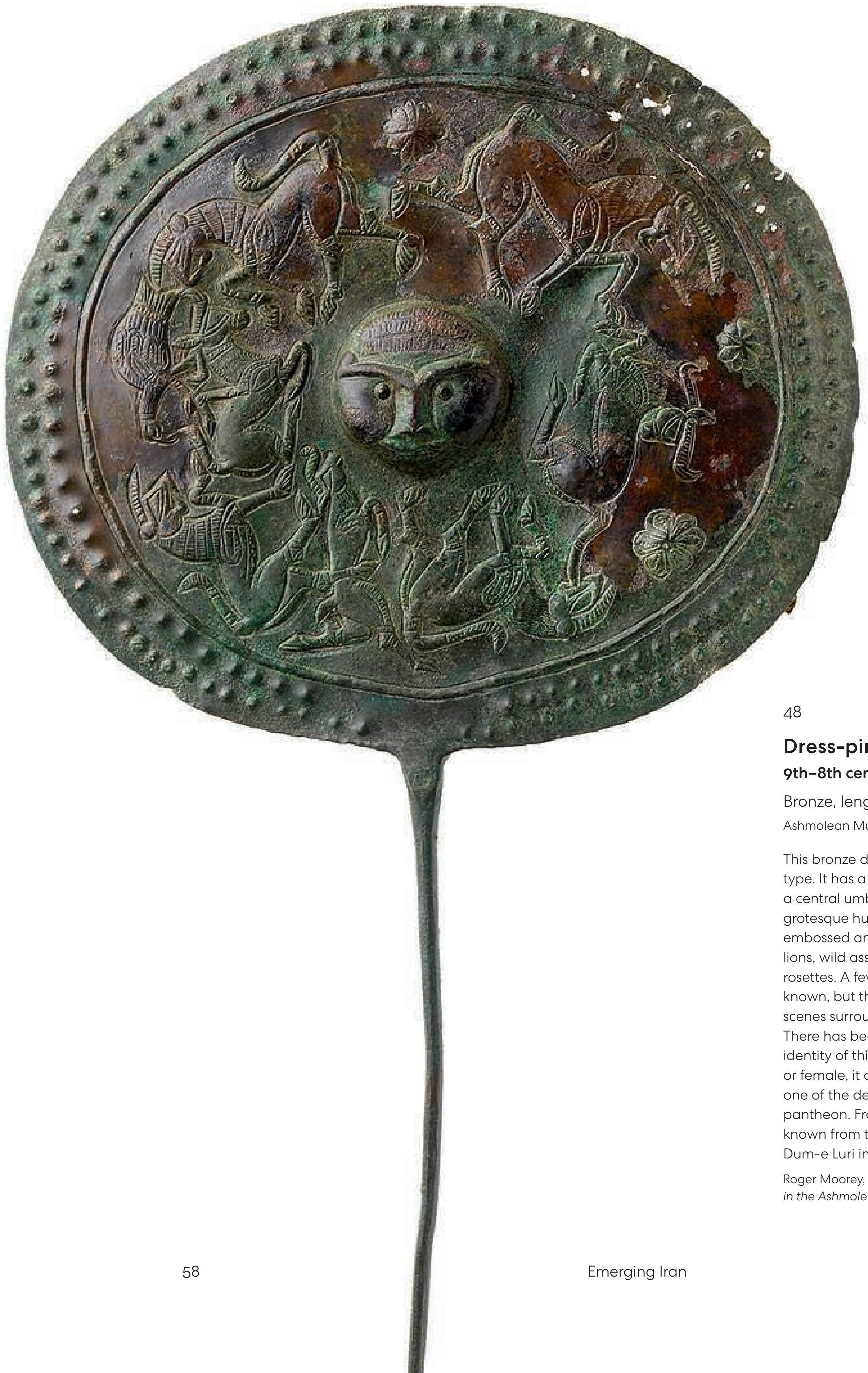
about 900–700 BC

Possibly Piravend,
Kurdistan province, Iran
Bronze, height 14.6 cm, width 8 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2045
Purchased 2007

This stylized bronze human figurine belongs to a group associated with Luristan. This example features a large head with empty eye sockets, set on a small stumpy body with upraised arms and short legs. There are four circular blobs on the front of the body. The figurine is hollowed out at the back and has three band-shaped holders, suggesting it could have been mounted on a stick or similar. Distinctive objects of this type are known as 'Piravend figurines', after the town in southern Kurdistan where they were reputedly found in unofficial excavations. It is sometimes assumed that they are idols, or representations of gods, but they are just as likely to be votive figures for presentation to a shrine.





48

Dress-pin or hair-pin

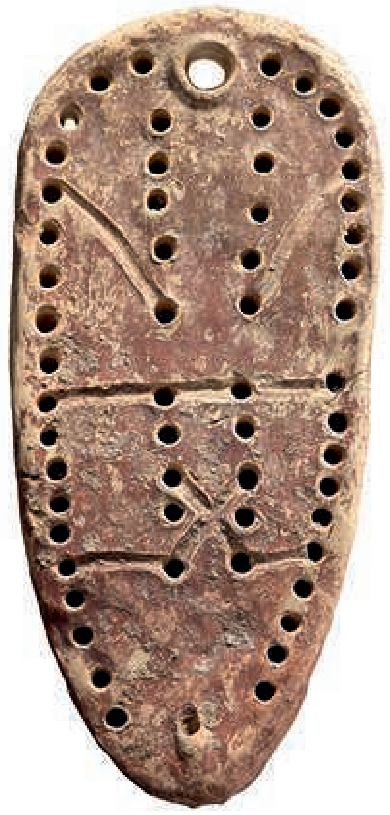
9th–8th century BC

Bronze, length 20.7 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN 1951.358

This bronze dress- or hair-pin is of Luristan type. It has a large disc-shaped head with a central umbo, or boss, in the form of a grotesque human face. Around the umbo the embossed and chased decoration features lions, wild asses, a goat, a vulture and rosettes. A few other pins of this type are known, but they have different narrative scenes surrounding the head in the centre. There has been much speculation about the identity of this central figure. Whether male or female, it could possibly be identified as one of the deities of the ancient Iranian pantheon. Fragmentary pins of this type are known from the sanctuary site of Surkh Dum-e Luri in Luristan.[36]

Roger Moorey, *Catalogue of Ancient Persian Bronzes in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford 1971), no. 361



49

Board game

about 800–600 BC

Excavated at Tepe Sialk,
Isfahan province, Iran
Clay with painted decoration,
length 24 cm, width 11 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris, AO 19438

This red-painted terracotta board for playing the 'game of 58 holes' comes from a tomb in Necropolis B at Tepe Sialk, excavated by Roman Ghirshman in 1933–7. The two players would move along their respective tracks marking their positions with pegs, and the objective was to be the first to get to the finish, marked here by the large hole at the top of the board. Knuckle-bones (astragals) were often used as dice. Although in this case the presence of a board game in a tomb might suggest it was a leisure item, to be used in the afterlife, such games were also used for divination.

Roman Ghirshman, *Fouilles de Sialk* II (Paris 1939), pl. XXII.8

50

Pottery jug

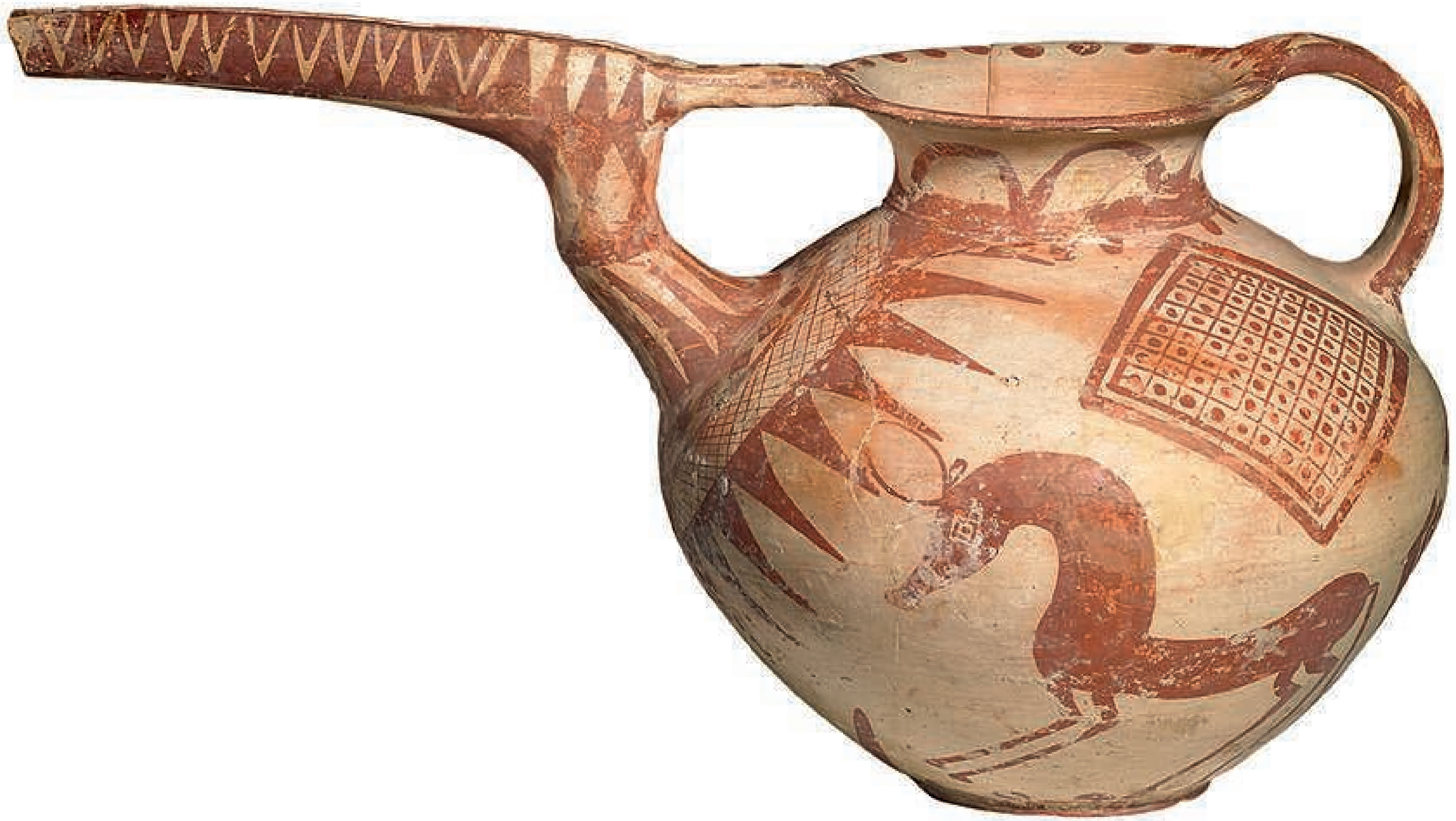
about 800–600 BC

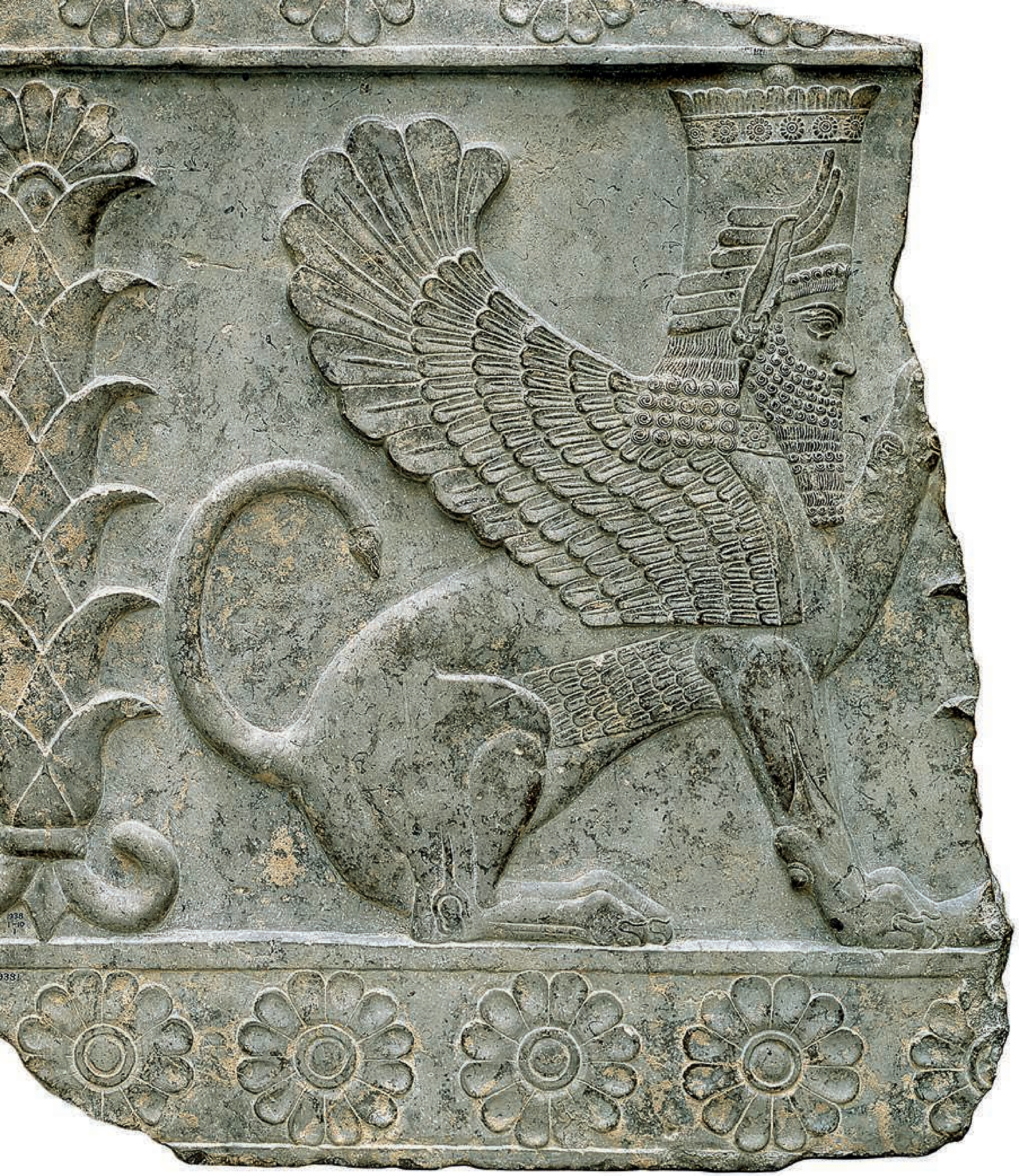
Clay with painted decoration,
height 19.4 cm

British Museum, 129072
Purchased 1937

This beak-spouted pottery jug has red-painted decoration on a cream background showing horned animals and geometric motifs. Although this jug does not come from the official excavations at Tepe Sialk of Roman Ghirshman between 1933 and 1937, Ghirshman was drawn to the site by the reported discovery there of jugs such as this. There was a settlement at Tepe Sialk from about 6000 BC until at least 550 BC, making it arguably the most important pre-Achaemenid site in Iran. In Necropolis B, dating from about 800–600 BC, Ghirshman excavated 218 graves, some of them containing distinctive beak-spouted vessels of this type.

John Curtis, *Ancient Persia* (London 2013), fig. 23





2

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

John Curtis

For the 220-year period during which the Persian empire held sway, Iran was ruled by the Achaemenid dynasty, named after its eponymous founder Achaemenes. In 550 BC Cyrus the Great, the king of Anshan in south-west Iran, overthrew Astyages, the king of the Medes, so establishing himself as ruler over the now united Medes and Persians.[1] Cyrus was in a unique position to bring this coalition of territories and peoples together, as according to classical sources his father was Persian and his mother was the daughter of the Median king. With this single stroke Cyrus gained control over much, if not all, of the Iranian plateau. Then, in 547 or 546 BC, he defeated Croesus of Lydia, bringing much of Turkey and probably north Mesopotamia within his jurisdiction. This rapid expansionism brought him into conflict with the powerful Babylonian empire, which was overthrown by Cyrus's forces when he captured Babylon in 539 BC. He now held sway over the whole of South West Asia from eastern Iran to the Mediterranean. Egypt was added to the empire during the reign of his son, Cambyses I (530–522 BC), but with Cambyses's death civil war broke out within Iran. Darius, a distant relative of Cyrus according to his own testimony, emerged victorious.

Darius I (r. 522–486 BC), as he then became, was arguably the greatest of the Persian kings and under him the empire reached its greatest extent, stretching from North Africa (Egypt and Libya) to the Indus Valley and covering an area of approximately 5.5 million square kilometres. It was thus by far the largest empire the world had seen up until that time. But towards the end of Darius's reign the conflict known as the Graeco-Persian wars began, initiated when the Ionians in Asia Minor, supported by Athens and Eretria, revolted and sacked Sardis. The Persians launched a punitive campaign in 490 BC, capturing Eretria on the island of Euboea and invading mainland Greece. On this occasion they were turned back at Marathon, but the conflict was renewed by Darius's son, Xerxes I (r. 486–465). In 480 BC a Persian army defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae and advanced towards Athens, which was sacked and burned down. However, the Persians subsequently suffered defeats on land at Plataea and on sea at Salamis and Mycale, thus ending the Persian attempt to overrun Greece. Much has been made of this Greek victory, sometimes represented as a triumph of democracy over despotism, which it assuredly was not. Popularly, the significance of this war is overblown. For the Persians it may have represented little more than a skirmish on their western frontier, and there is no reason to suppose that the Persians intended to maintain a permanent presence in Greece in any event.

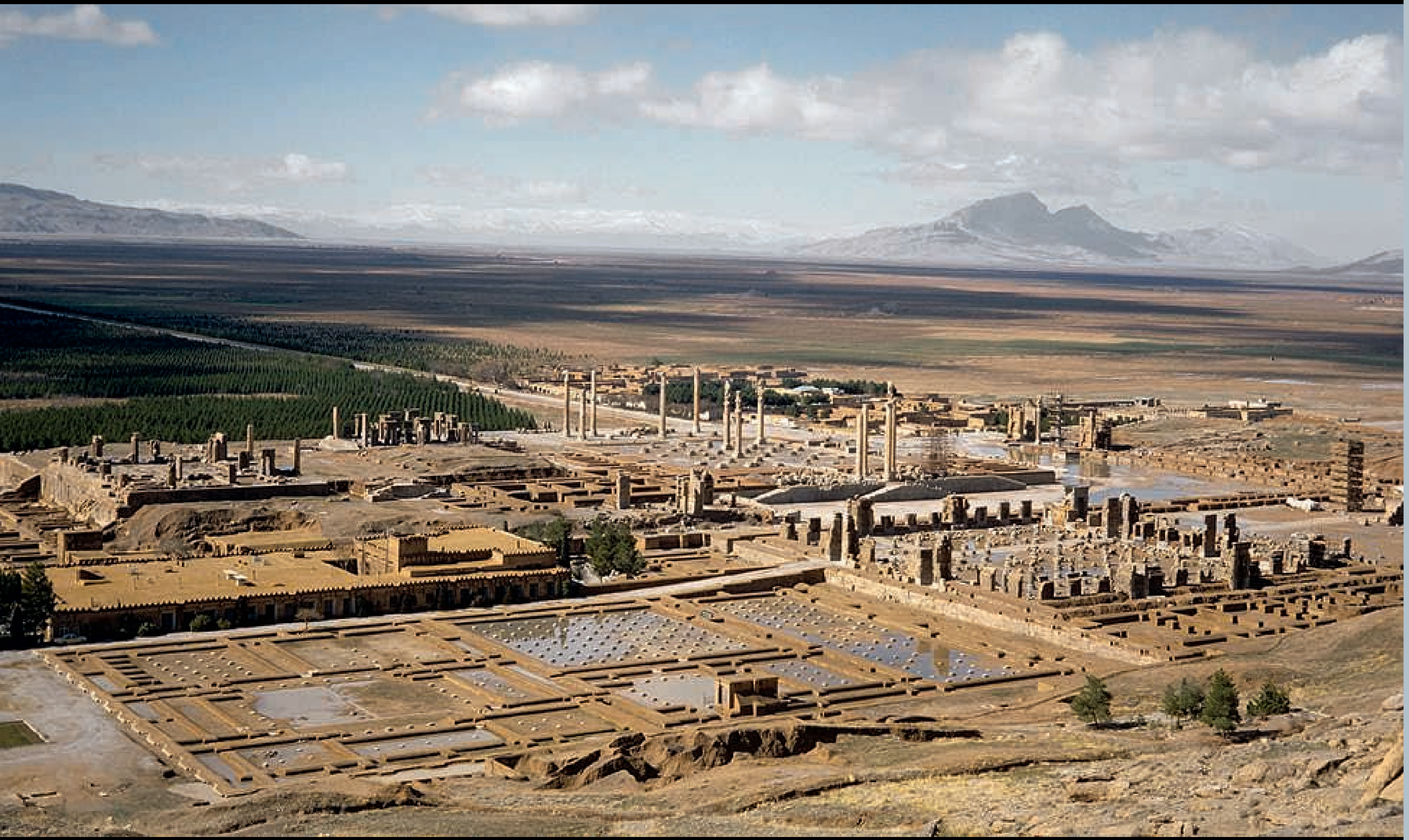
Among the successors of Xerxes, Artaxerxes II and III made their mark, but the later history of the Persian empire was marred by leadership disputes and revolts. After just over 200 years the empire was brought to an end when Alexander III of Macedon, together with his fellow adventurers, secured a decisive victory at Gaugamela, near Erbil, in 331 BC. The royal treasury at Susa was looted and, in what was probably a symbolic act, Persepolis was burned down.

A number of the Persian kings were great builders, starting with Cyrus. He established his capital city at Pasargadae in Fars and there, in the Murghab Plain, he built several palaces and laid out splendid gardens, often interpreted as early evidence for the classic *chahar bagh* form of Persian garden. Cyrus was buried at Pasargadae in an imposing stone tomb with gabled roof. It is not impossible that it was Cyrus who initiated the building programme at Persepolis, but the credit for this is usually given to Darius. He and Xerxes were responsible for most of the building work at the site. Darius also constructed for himself a vast palace at Susa, which is part columned hall in the Iranian tradition and part brick-built palace in the Babylonian tradition with glazed brick decoration. Other Persian capitals were established at Hamadan, where an Achaemenid palace is yet to be located, and at Babylon, now in Iraq.

From the time of Darius onwards the Persian kings paid homage in their official inscriptions to Ahuramazda, later revered as the god of the Zoroastrian religion. Thus, in an inscription at Naqsh-e Rustam, Darius recorded: 'A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many'.[2] Two more Zoroastrian deities were introduced by Artaxerxes II (r. 404–358 BC), who refers to Mithra and Anahita, helper gods of Ahuramazda.[3] In line with the texts, are there iconographic elements in Achaemenid art that can be allied with Zoroastrian tradition? On his great rock relief at Bisitun in the Zagros Mountains,[4] where he is shown with his foot on the defeated Gaumata (the pretender to the throne) and behind him nine rebel kings roped at the neck, Darius raises his hand in obeisance to a figure in a winged disc. This is a motif that occurs earlier in Egyptian and Assyrian art, but here the figure must be identified in an Iranian context. It is either a personification of 'kingly glory', the *khvarenah*, or Ahuramazda himself. In later years Ahuramazda himself is never depicted, but in these early days the Zoroastrian religion was presumably at a formative stage and had not yet been codified. The winged disc is frequently represented in Achaemenid art, not only at Bisitun but also on stone reliefs at Persepolis and in the minor arts. A major hoard of artefacts from the Achaemenid period now known as the Oxus Treasure (see p. 72), discovered between 1877 and 1880, probably at Takht-e Kavad on the north bank of the River Oxus in what is now Tajikistan but was then part of the Persian empire, contained a gold plaque with a figure holding a bundle of sticks (or *barsom*) of the type carried by later Zoroastrian priests (cat. 76).

We can reasonably conclude, then, that the Achaemenid kings from the time of Darius onwards were believers in the deity Ahuramazda, but this does not mean they were Zoroastrians in the modern sense of the word. Zoroastrianism is named after the prophet Zoroaster (his dates are disputed, ranging between about 1500 BC and the sixth century BC), who codified the religion and is said to have been born in Central Asia, possibly Kazakhstan. There is no evidence that the Achaemenid kings knew either of Zoroaster or his teachings, so it would be speculative to call their belief Zoroastrian, but both Achaemenid and Zoroastrian religions are predicated on a belief in Ahuramazda. But what of Cyrus? It is certainly true that the surviving iconography at his capital city of Pasargadae is based on Egyptian and Assyrian religion, and on the famous document known as the Cyrus Cylinder (cat. 75), which records the capture of Babylon in 539 BC, he pays homage to the Babylonian god Marduk and not to Ahuramazda. However, this may simply reflect the fact that he was 'parvenu' and anxious to appease all the gods of the major civilizations with which he came into contact. The likelihood is that he respected the ancestral Indo-Iranian religion and its belief in the omnipotence of Ahuramazda. It is sometimes suggested that because cuneiform tablets dealing with local administration, found at Persepolis and written in Elamite, refer to a number of other (Elamite) gods, the Persian kings cannot have been Zoroastrian or exclusively Zoroastrian.[5] This is a false premise. There was no expectation at the time that everyone should subscribe to one religion, and doubtless within the empire, even within Iran itself, a number of different religions co-existed.

Our knowledge of Persian society is patchy owing to the limited number of inscriptions that have survived from Iran itself. It is often assumed that women had a subordinate status, partly because they are only very rarely depicted in Achaemenid art, but it would be wrong to draw hasty conclusions from this. It is clear from the Persepolis tablets that Persian women could own property and sometimes occupy important official positions, as was the case with their counterparts elsewhere in the ancient Near East. It is likely that most of the population, at least in Fars province, spoke Persian, but the language for daily administration seems to have been Elamite. In the time of Darius, Persian, written with a newly developed cuneiform script, was introduced, but only for monumental inscriptions.



THE GLORY OF PERSEPOLIS

Persepolis is rightly regarded as one of the finest and best-preserved sites in the whole of the ancient world. The buildings are arranged on a terrace or platform (*takht*) measuring 455 metres by 300 metres, which is cut from the natural rock and is overlooked by the Kuh-e Rahmat (Mountain of Mercy). The earliest buildings to survive on the terrace date from the time of Darius I and include his palace and part of the royal treasury. His son Xerxes was the most energetic builder at Persepolis, and buildings from his reign include the Apadana, the Palace of Xerxes and the Gate of All Nations. He also started to build the Hall of 100 Columns that was completed by his son, Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BC). The last king to make his mark at Persepolis was Artaxerxes III (r. 359–338 BC). Many of the buildings at Persepolis loosely follow the so-called 'apadana' plan that is so characteristic of Achaemenid architecture. It consists of a central columned hall with corner towers surrounded by columned porticoes. The columns, in wood or more commonly stone, sit on stone bases and have at the top very elaborate stone capitals with back-to-back protomes.[6] There are four different types at Persepolis, namely bulls, lions, griffins (homa birds) and human-headed bulls.

The grandest of the buildings at Persepolis is the Apadana, or Audience Palace, started by Darius and completed by Xerxes. This vast building, measuring about 140 metres square and with columns up to 20 metres high, could hold up to 10,000 guests at ground level alone. On the north and east sides of the Apadana are double staircases lined with reliefs that are mirror images of each other. Each series of reliefs shows files of nobles, guards and attendants and 23 delegations from around the empire all bringing presents for the great king. Each delegation is introduced by a figure in Persian or Median dress and the tributaries wear their distinctive local costume and bring gifts that are typical of their region. For example, a Central Asian delegation brings a two-humped Bactrian camel and Ionians bring balls of wool. In the centre of each facade originally sat the enthroned king.

Other buildings at Persepolis have carved stone reliefs showing processions of nobles in Median and Persian dress, and figures climbing stairs and carrying food, drink and live animals. Such figures are either servants (carrying food) or priests (carrying offerings). A number of buildings have stone reliefs in the doorways, sometimes showing the king or the Persian 'royal hero', who has king-like attributes but may not actually be the king himself, fighting with bulls or monsters. Others depict the king and his attendants, or the king and the crown prince. The most elaborate doorway reliefs are in the Hall of 100 Columns, and show rows of subject peoples supporting the king on his throne, with the figure in the winged disc (representing Ahuramazda or the *khvarenah*, the 'kingly glory') above.

Much of the stonework at Persepolis, the reliefs themselves and the different parts of the columns, was originally painted in brilliant colours. Very little paint is now visible to the naked eye, but analysis has shown traces of a number of different colours, principally blue, green, yellow, red, white and black. This love of colour is also reflected in glazed brick decoration, rare at Persepolis but well represented at Susa.

Fig. 6
The site of Persepolis, as seen from the Kuh-e Rahmat, Fars province

51

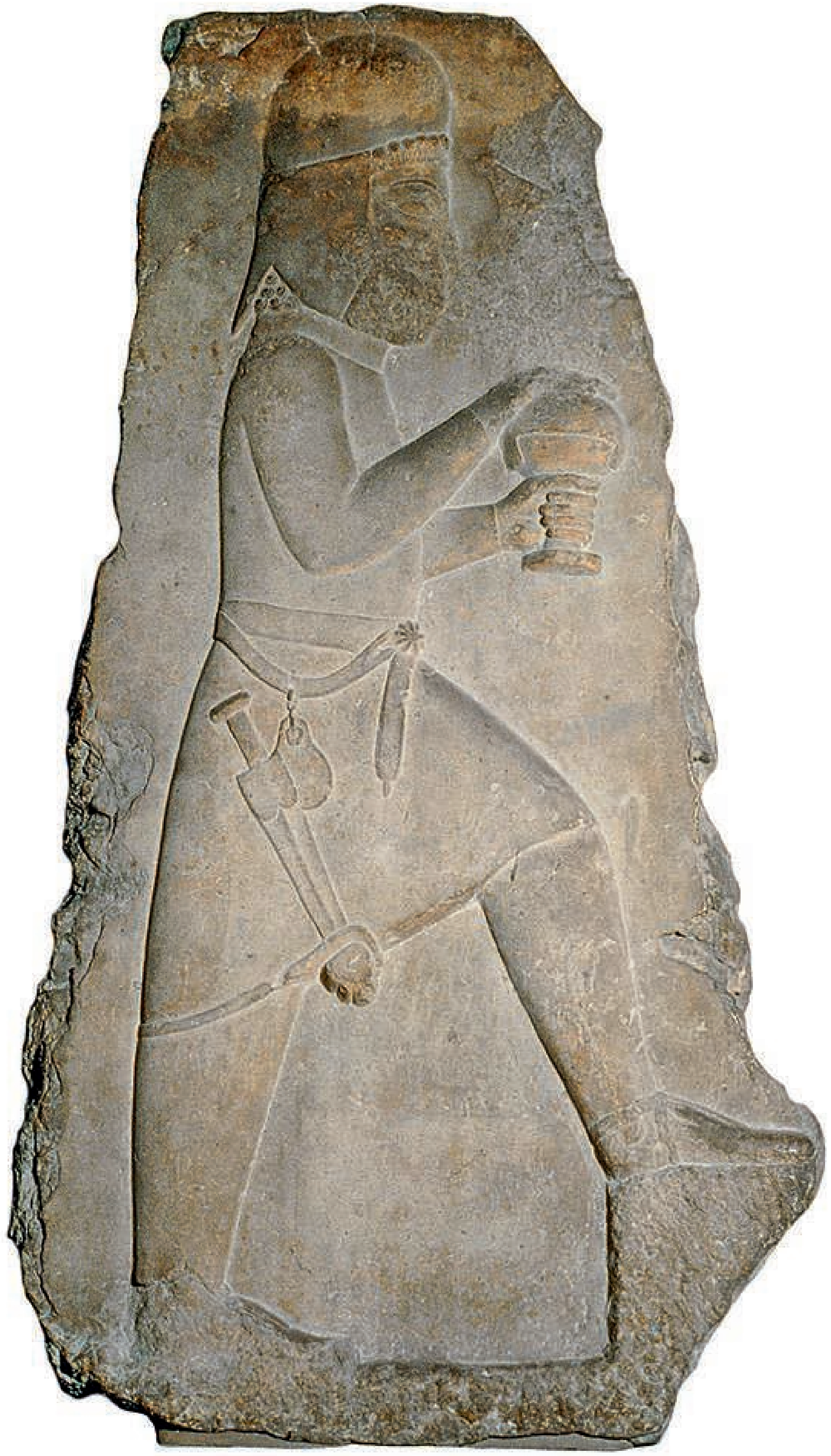
Relief with servant climbing stairs

about 359–358 BC

From Persepolis, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 75 cm
British Museum, 118868
Purchased 1894

The figure on this stone relief is shown ascending a flight of stairs. He wears the so-called Median costume of belted tunic and trousers and a helmet with chin-guard. From his belt hangs a short sword of distinctive Persian type known as an *akinakes*. He is carrying in his left hand a stemmed goblet, its lid or cover held in place by his right hand. Whatever he is carrying – food or drink – is evidently intended for a banquet or a religious ceremony that is taking place on the roof of the building. This relief is thought to come from the Palace of Darius, probably from the north wing of the west staircase, and dates from the reign of Artaxerxes III.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 40



52

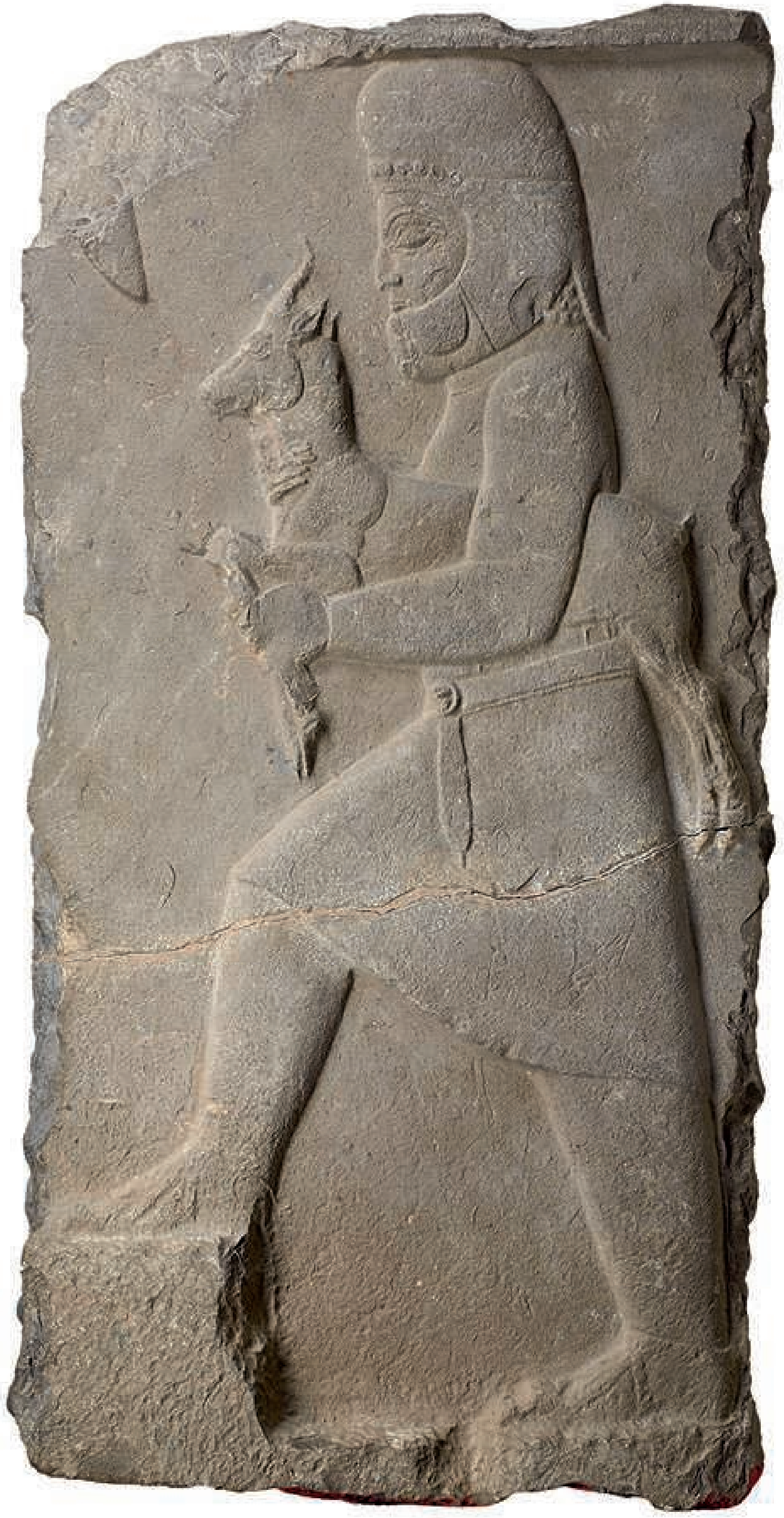
Relief with servant climbing stairs

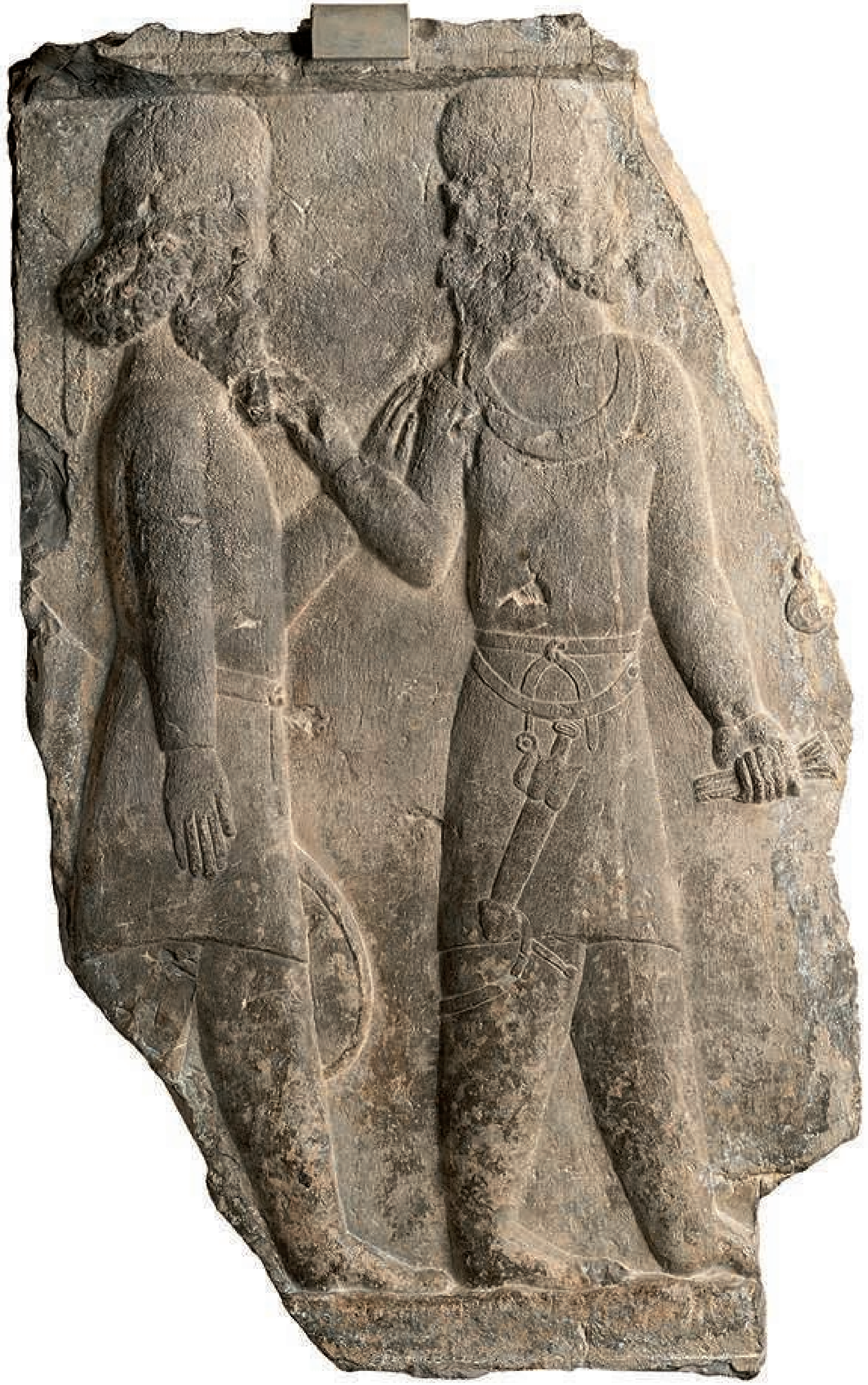
about 359–338 BC

From Persepolis, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 72 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, AO 14050
Purchased 1931

The figure on this stone relief, shown climbing a staircase, wears so-called Median dress of a belted tunic, trousers and helmet with chin-guard. He carries a small goat or kid. Figures such as this, carrying food or live animals, are known from several of the buildings at Persepolis, and it is not certain whether they are servants providing the ingredients for a banquet or priests bringing animals for sacrifice. The precise provenance of this piece is unknown but it probably comes from Palace G at Persepolis, built by Artaxerxes III, most of which no longer survives.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 47





53

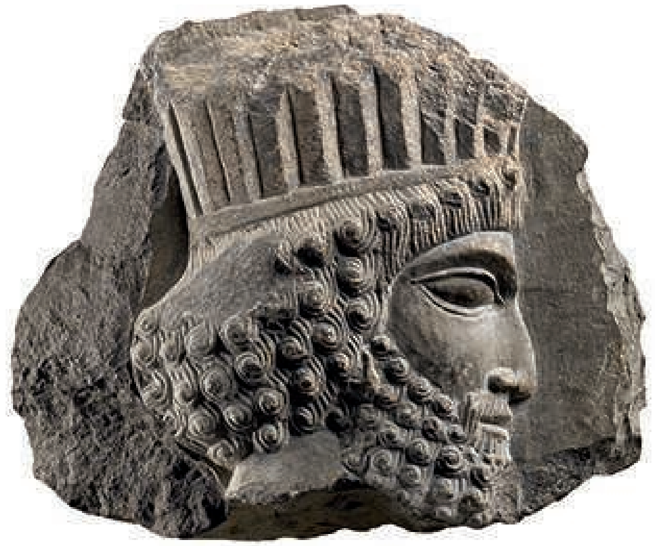
Relief with two Persian courtiers

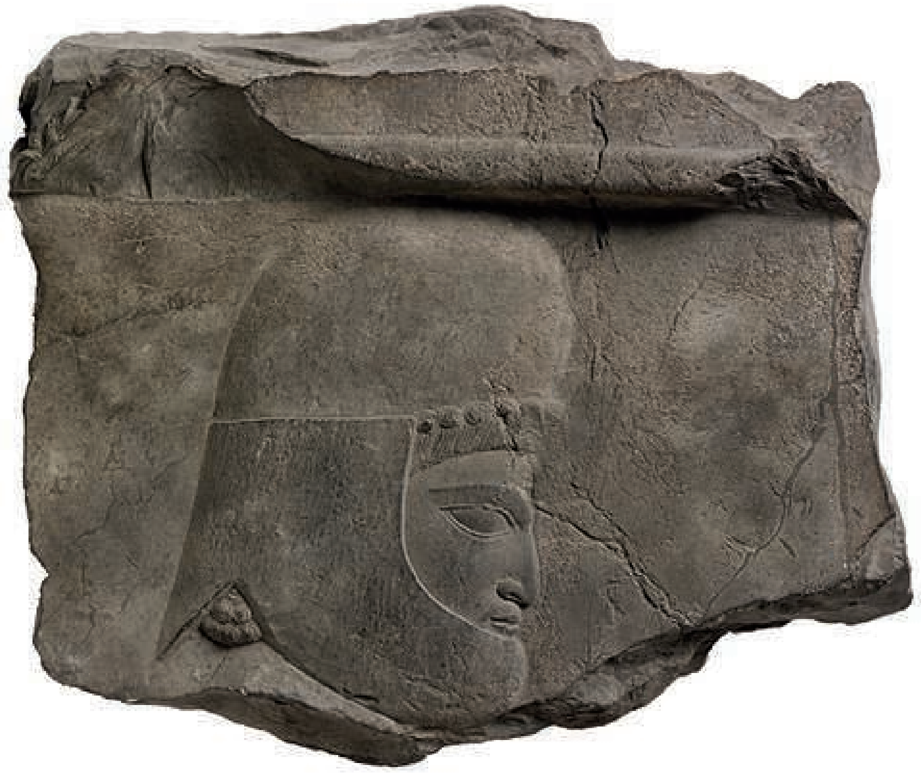
465–424 BC

From Persepolis, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 71.4 cm
Fitzwilliam Museum, ANE.43.1927
Purchased 1927

This carving shows two figures wearing the so-called Median clothing of belted tunic and trousers and round hat, probably of felt. The leading figure wears a torc, probably of gold or silver, around his neck, he carries a flower in his left hand, and a Persian-style short sword (*akinakes*) is suspended from his belt. He looks back and touches the beard of the following figure. The latter has a bow-case fixed to the far side of his body, the end of which can be seen in front of his leg, and in an intimate gesture he touches with his left hand the shoulder of his companion. There is a mason's mark in the shape of the letter Y in front of the head of the left-hand figure; such marks were made by teams of sculptors to identify the stretches of relief carving for which they were responsible.[7] This relief comes from the northern stairway of the Central Building (once a small palace known as the Tripylon) at Persepolis and probably dates from the reign of Artaxerxes I.

Richard Nicholls and Michael Roaf, 'A Persepolis Relief in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge', *Iran* XV (1977), pp. 146–52





54

Relief showing head of a Persian

515–480 BC

From Persepolis, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 12.3 cm
Ashmolean Museum, AN 1982.944

The head of a bearded man is shown on this stone relief fragment. He is wearing a fluted headdress of the type that is associated with Persian dress. This may be the head of a Persian guard who would have been holding a spear. The Apadana at Persepolis is a possible provenance. This sculptural fragment belonged to John Charles Edward Bowen, who was a member of the British diplomatic mission to Iran between 1938 and 1947.

Paul Collins, 'Five unpublished Persepolis relief fragments in the Ashmolean Museum', in John Curtis (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Persia and the Achaemenid Period* (Cambridge 2020), fig. 1

55

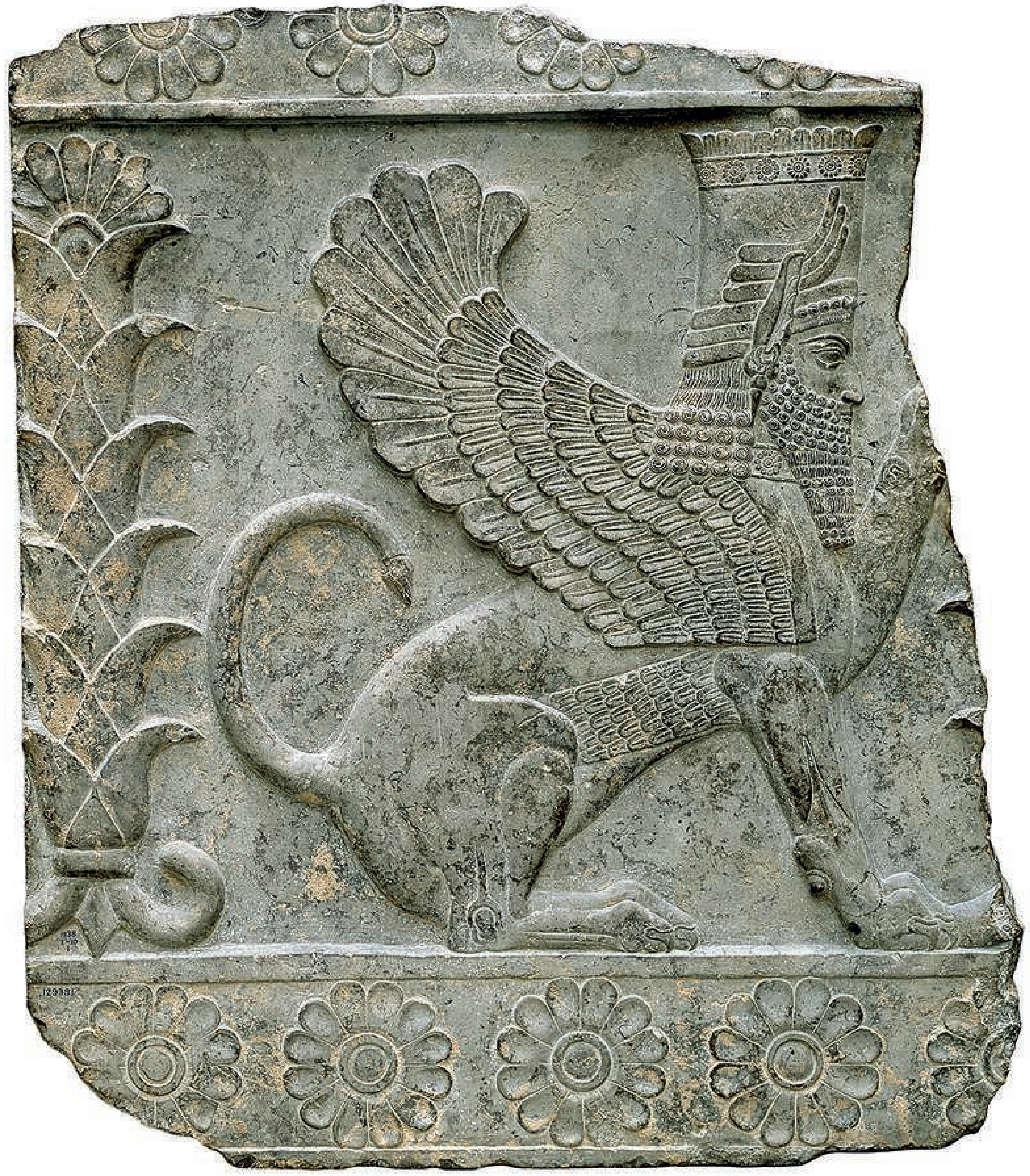
Relief with head of man in Median costume

486–465 BC

From Persepolis, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 19 cm, width 24 cm
V&A: A.13-1916
Transferred from the Architectural Association in 1915

This stone fragment has relief decoration showing the head of a man wearing a helmet with chin-guard. Headgear such as this is associated with figures wearing so-called Median dress. It seems certain that it comes from Persepolis, but there is no information about when it was removed from the site or how it came to Britain. This fragment probably comes from the Palace of Xerxes (486–465 BC), and it would have been one of a series of figures shown climbing a staircase and carrying provisions either for a banquet or for a religious ceremony.

Lindsay Allen, 'From silence: a Persepolis relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum', *V&A Online Journal*, issue no. 5 (autumn 2013)



56

Relief with sphinx

about 359–338 BC

From Persepolis, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 82.1 cm, width 75 cm

British Museum, 129381
Presented by National Art Collections Fund in 1938

This stone slab is carved with the figure of a seated male sphinx, facing right, its bearded head capped with a horned headdress. It is framed above and below by a horizontal border of rosettes, and to the left by a stylized palm tree. Originally, this sphinx was one of a pair flanking a figure within a winged disc, that of Ahuramazda, or the 'kingly glory' (the *khvarenah*). The horned headdress, a sign of divinity, is indicative of Assyrian influence, while the sphinx itself is a well-known Egyptian motif. The slab was originally set up in Palace G and later transferred to Palace H. It dates from the period of Artaxerxes III. The slab was removed from Persepolis by British diplomat Sir John McNeil in 1828.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 46

57

Relief with winged figure

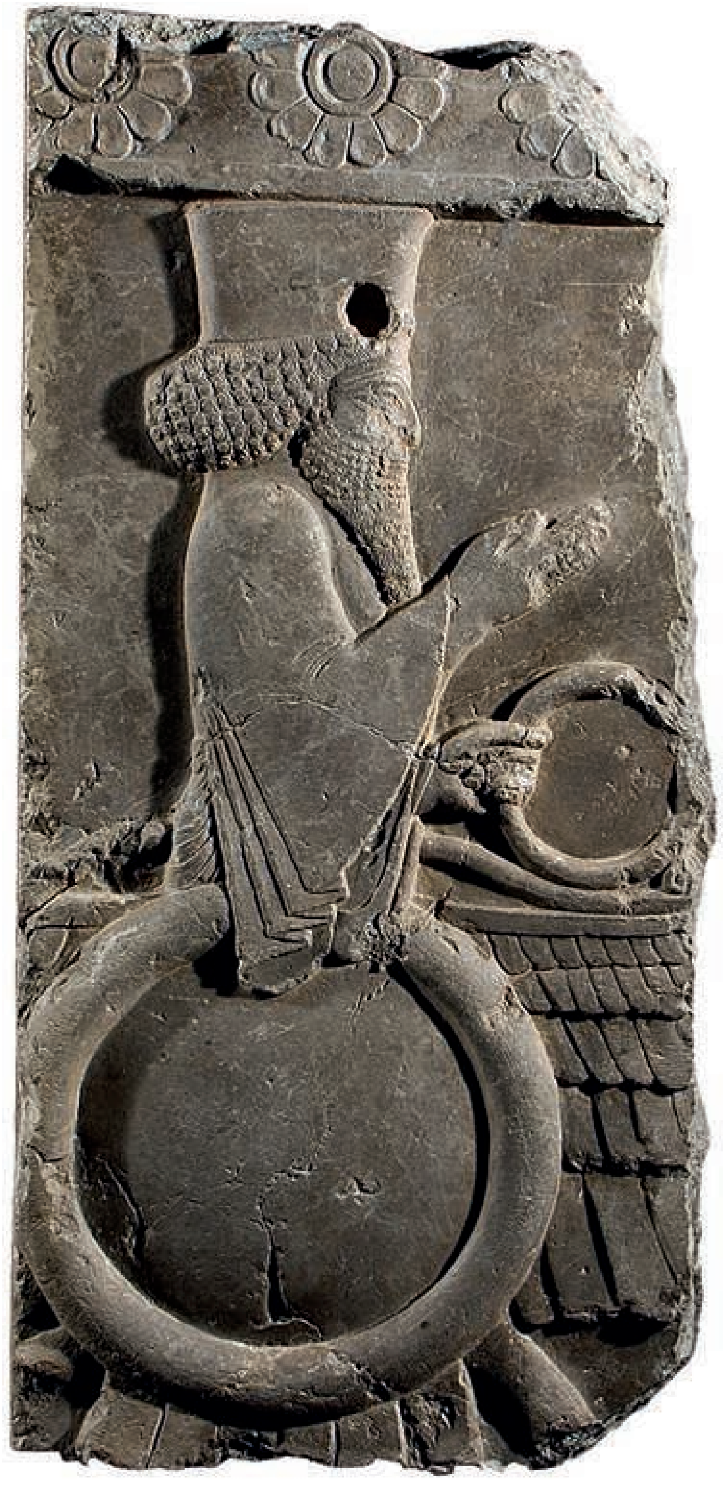
about 359–338 BC

From Persepolis, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 68 cm, width 33 cm

National Museum of Iran, no. 8

This stone relief shows the upper part of a bearded male figure rising from a winged disc, which is mostly missing. The figure wears a flat-topped hat and holds the ring of kingship in his left hand. Figures within winged discs occur in both Egyptian and Assyrian art, where they are associated with the gods Horus and Ashur/Shamash respectively. The identity of such figures in Achaemenid art is not certain and is probably not always the same, but here it is likely to be either Ahuramazda or the 'kingly glory' (the *khvarenah*).[8] This relief probably comes from Palace G at Persepolis, founded by Artaxerxes III.

Sarah Stewart, Ursula Sims-Williams, Firoza Punthakey Mistree, *The Everlasting Flame Supplement* (New Delhi 2016), no. 30



THE ART OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

The artistic and architectural styles of the Persian empire were eclectic, with inspiration coming from a number of different sources. We can see influence from Ionia, Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt and even Scythia. As examples of Assyrian influence we have the doorway reliefs at Pasargadae, the winged human-headed bulls at Persepolis, and even the Persepolis bas-reliefs themselves, although here there is a crucial difference: in Assyria the reliefs were inside buildings while at Persepolis they were generally on the outside. From Babylonia comes the tradition of glazed bricks, but in Babylonia they are made of clay whereas in Iran, best exemplified at Susa, they are made of sintered quartz. From Egypt comes the figure of the dwarf-god Bes, who often appears in Achaemenid art, and there is Egyptian influence in the architecture at Persepolis, especially in the column decoration just below the capitals. In the early period of the Persian empire Ionian stonemasons were at work in Pasargadae, while the form of Cyrus the Great's tomb derives from Asia Minor. All these external influences were combined with native Elamite and Iranian traditions, such as the predilection for columned halls, to produce a style that is distinctively Achaemenid Persian. This is immediately recognizable through the distinctive iconography, for example in clothing styles and types of material culture, including vessels and weapons. At Persepolis the stonemasons developed a style that is quite different from that of Assyria, and although there is a great deal of repetition in the carvings there is a surprising degree of naturalism, so that the sculptures can be seen as intermediate between the seventh-century Assyrian reliefs and the reliefs of fifth-century Greece. It is not impossible that the sculptors of the Parthenon reliefs may in some small measure have been influenced by Persepolis.

In the minor arts, too, there were innovations. For example, the tradition of inlaying gold jewellery with semi-precious stones has its origins in the Achaemenid period. Arguably the finest collection of *objets d'art* to survive from this time is the so-called Oxus Treasure.[9] This collection of about 180 exquisite gold and silver objects and a large number of coins was allegedly found on the north bank of the River Oxus in present-day Tajikistan between 1877 and 1880. The discovery was made by local villagers who sold the objects to merchants from Bokhara. While crossing Afghanistan the merchants were robbed of the treasure, but it was rescued and restored to them by a British political agent named Captain F.C. Burton. In due course the bulk of the objects were offered for sale in Peshawar and Rawalpindi, then in British India, and after being acquired by the scholar-curator Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks they were bequeathed to the British Museum in 1897. Most probably the treasure consists of votive objects that were presented to a temple, possibly dedicated to the god of the River Oxus. Among the Oxus Treasure objects evidence can be found for many of the artistic styles that were blended together to produce the distinctive style that we now recognize as Achaemenid Persian. This is sometimes referred to as a 'court style' or 'international Achaemenid style', but we should be careful about using such terms as they imply that all artistic production was controlled by the state. This is not likely to have been the case, and it is more probable that uniformity of style came about through taste and fashion, at least as far as the minor arts were concerned.

58

Panel showing a guard from the Palace of Darius

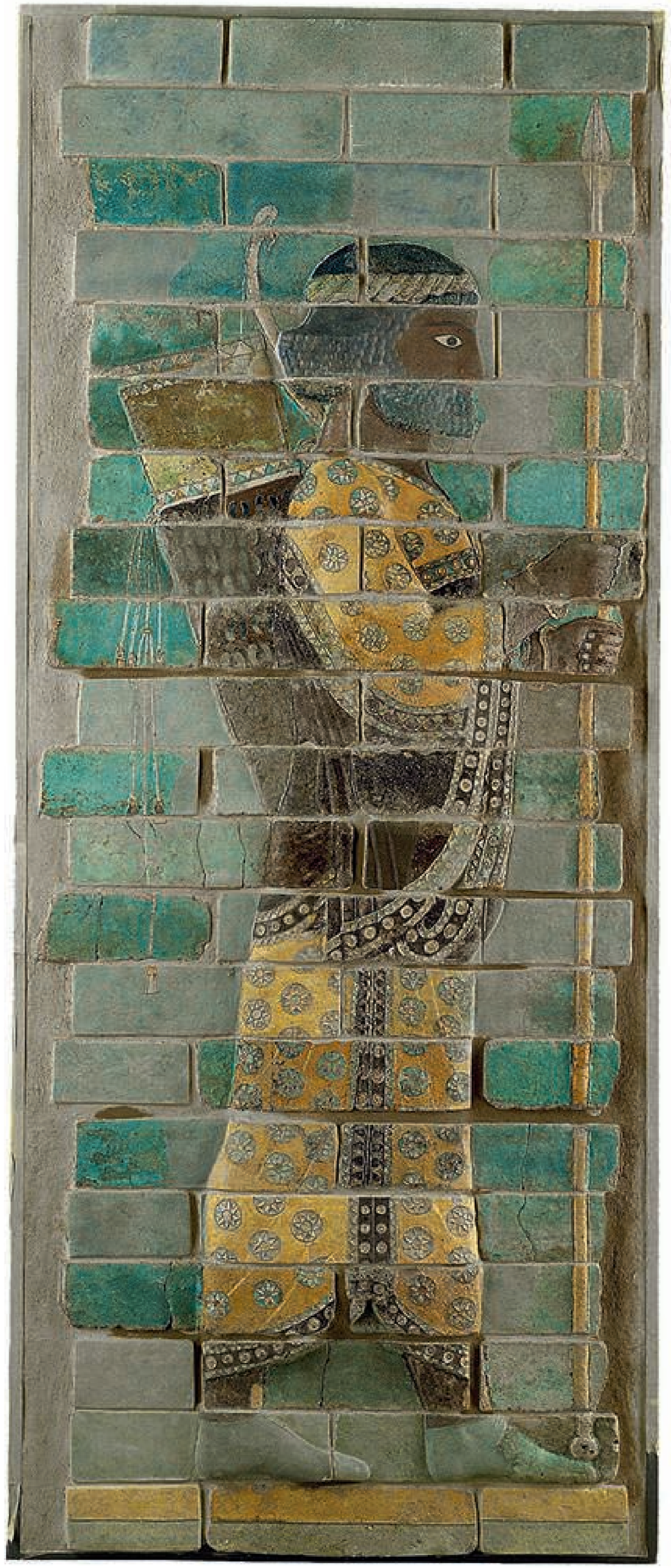
about 522–486 BC

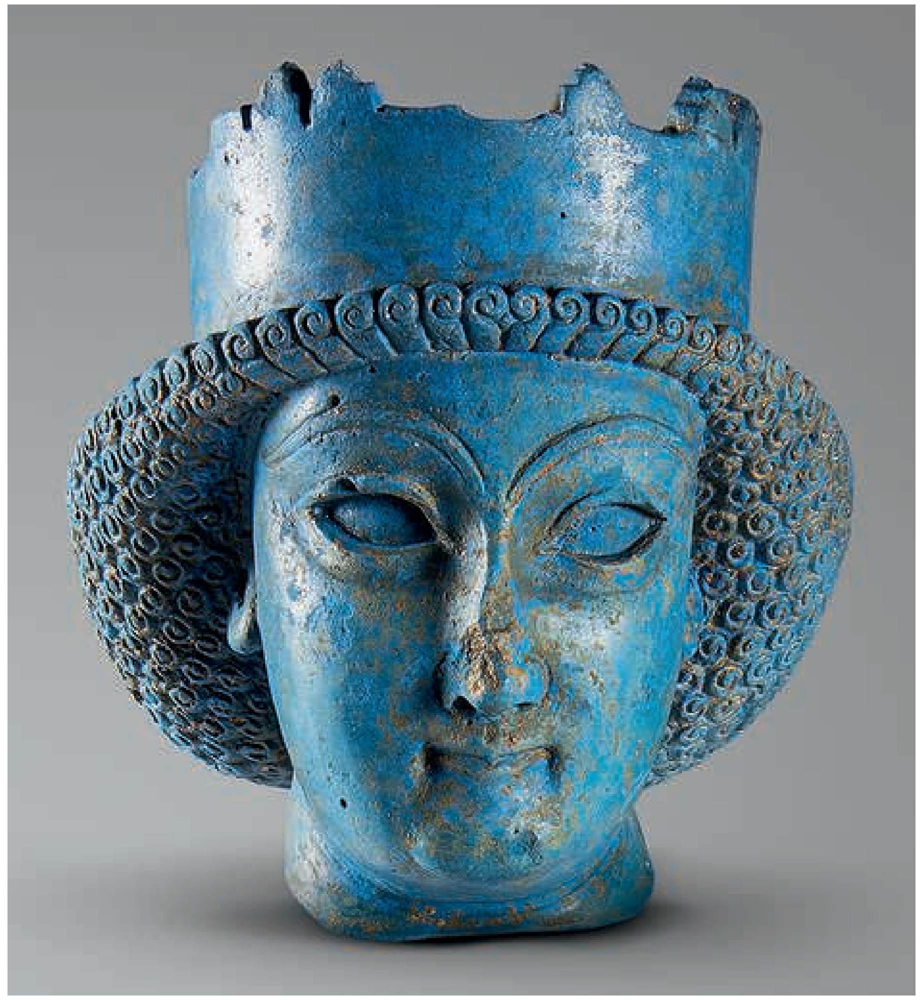
Excavated at Susa,
Khuzestan province, Iran
Glazed brick, height 194.6 cm,
width 81 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 21965

The polychrome glazed bricks making up this panel come from the Palace of Darius at Susa. The guard, shown facing right, is dressed in Persian costume richly decorated with appliqués and embroidery, and is equipped with a bow, quiver and spear. The bricks are made of sintered quartz in the Iranian fashion (rather than clay as in Mesopotamia) using the colours green, yellow, white and black. Originally this figure would have been part of a procession of similar guards, perhaps the Immortals who formed the king's bodyguard. Part of the Palace of Darius at Susa (a columned hall) is built in the Iranian tradition while part is built in the Babylonian style. The glazed brick panels were set up in the Babylonian part. The bricks in this panel were found during the various French excavations at Susa.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 82





59

Head

about 500–330 BC

Excavated at Persepolis, south-west Iran
Lapis lazuli or 'Egyptian blue',
height 6.6 cm, width 6 cm

National Museum of Iran, NMI 1294-7719

This head made of lapis lazuli or 'Egyptian blue' (a compound sometimes erroneously referred to as 'frit') comes from a small statue. It is beardless, has a bushy hairstyle with spiral curls in the typical Achaemenid style, and wears a crenellated crown. It is unknown whether this head comes from a statue of the same material or whether it might have been composite. In any case, the now empty eye sockets would once have been inlaid with a different material. Crenellated crowns are associated in Achaemenid art with the king or the crown prince, which has led many authorities, including the Iranian excavator Ali Sami (1910–1989), to identify this figure as a crown prince. However, there is an equally strong argument in favour of the figure being a woman, perhaps even a queen. Statues in the round are rare in Achaemenid art, and their purpose is usually obscure. One possibility is that this head may be from a votive statue. It was found at Persepolis in 1946 in the Hall of 32 Columns.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 87

60

Model of a chariot

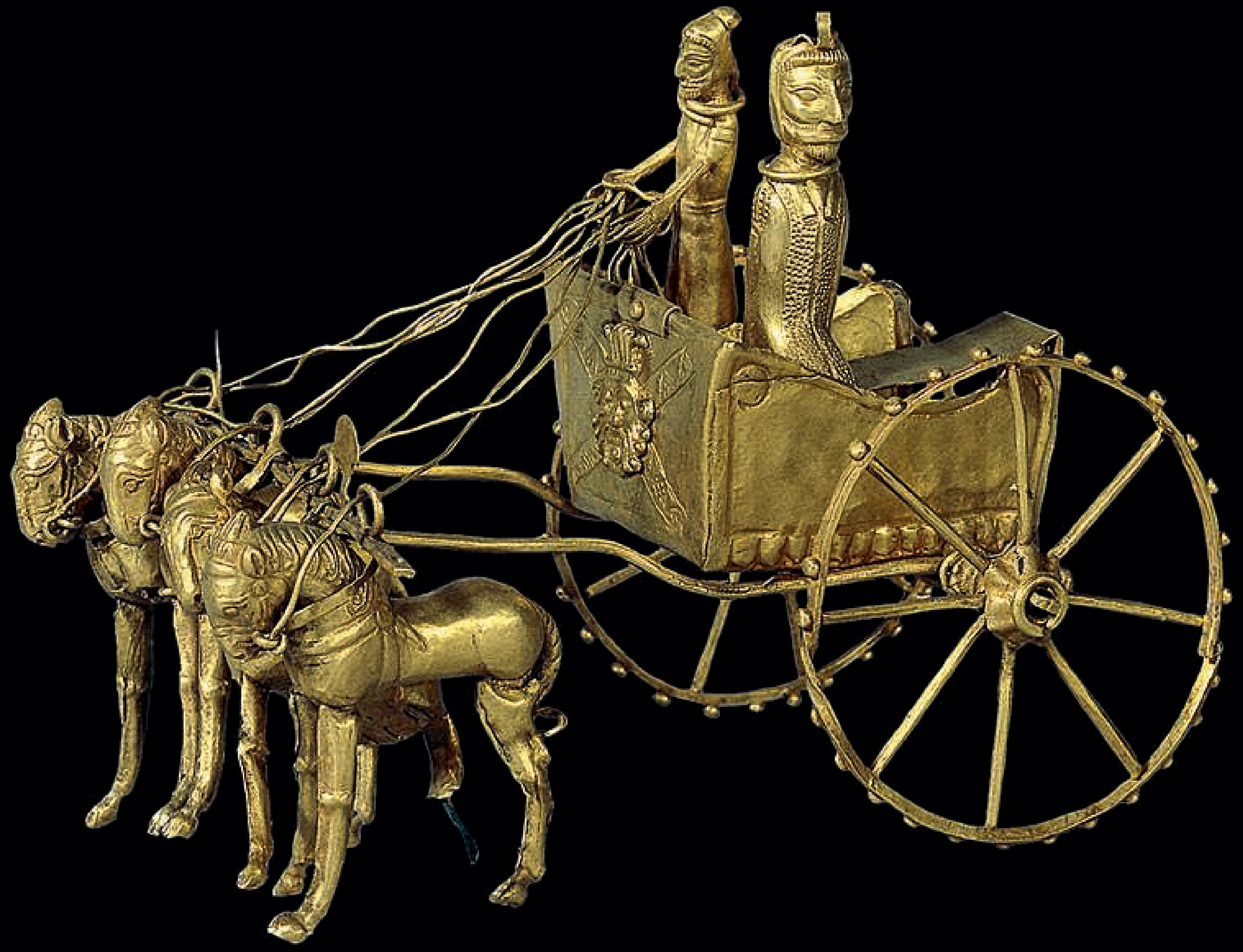
500–330 BC

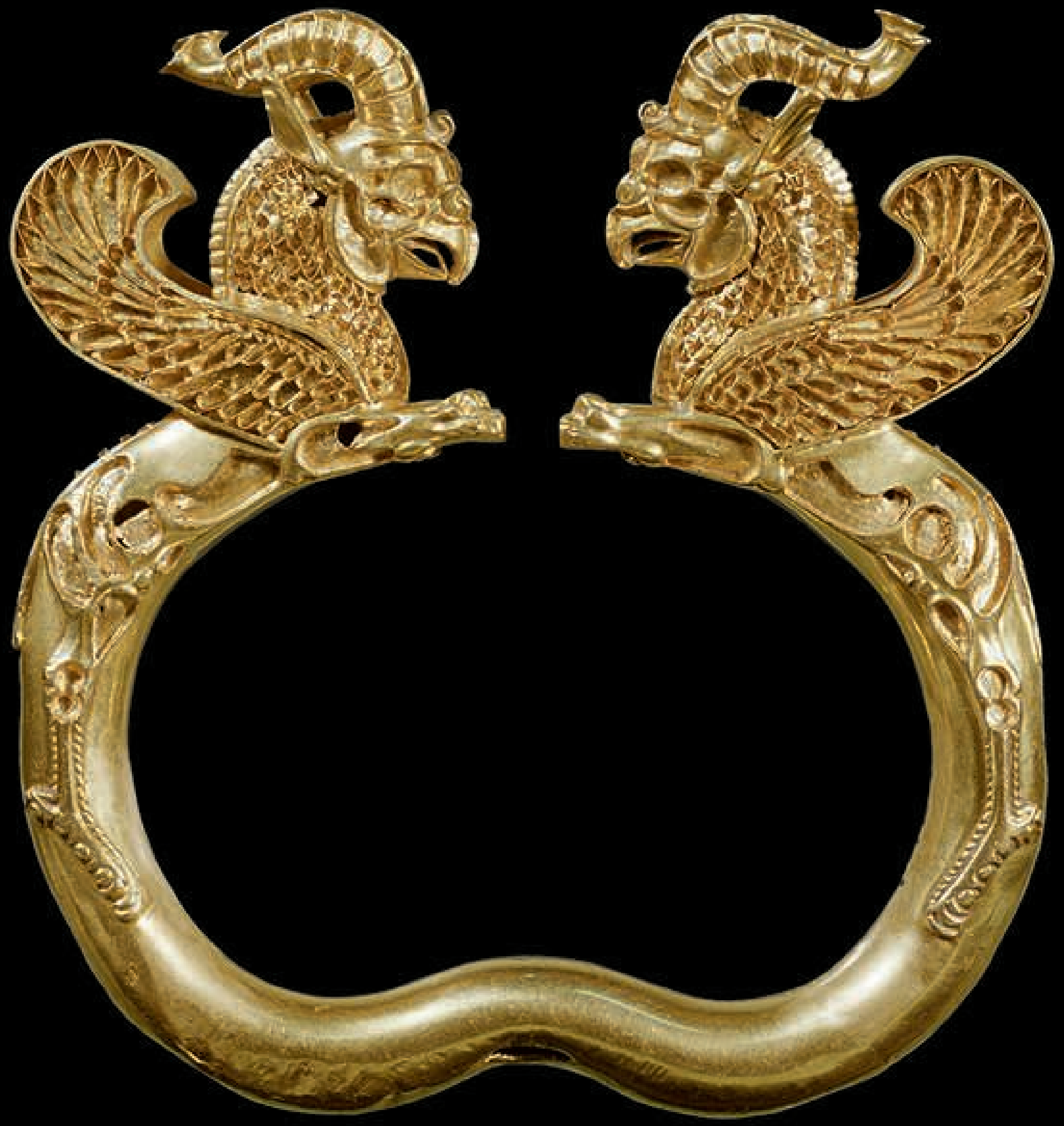
From the Oxus Treasure, found in
present-day Tajikistan
Gold, length 18.8 cm

British Museum, 123908
A.W. Franks bequest 1897

Among the objects in the Oxus Treasure, one of the most intricate is a gold model of a two-wheeled chariot pulled by four small horses, possibly of 'Caspian' breed. On the front of the chariot is a representation of the Egyptian dwarf-god Bes, who was thought to provide protection from evil spirits. Both the driver and passenger in the chariot wear Median-style costumes of belted tunic, trousers and hood, with the addition of an overcoat (*kandys*) in the case of the passenger. Chariots of this type, as seen on the Persepolis reliefs and on the royal seal of Darius, are clearly intended for the use of the king so it is likely the passenger here is a royal or noble figure.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 399.





61

Armlet

500–330 BC

From the Oxus Treasure, found in present-day Tajikistan
Gold, height 12.4 cm, width 11.7 cm
V&A: 442-1884

Originally inlaid with semi-precious stones such as turquoise, lapis lazuli and carnelian, and coloured glass and faience, this massive gold armlet from the Oxus Treasure has terminals in the form of winged griffins. Gold armlets were among the gifts that were particularly valued at the Persian court, and large animal-headed examples such as this are shown being presented to the king by four of the delegations on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis. This armlet is one of a pair, the other being in the British Museum. It was bought by Captain Burton from the Bokhara merchants after he had restored the treasure to them, and was sold by him to the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) in 1884 for the then very considerable sum of £1,000. This armlet was included in the *International Exhibition of Persian Art*, held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 1931.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 153b; *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Persian Art* (London 1931), p. 21, case 22B

62

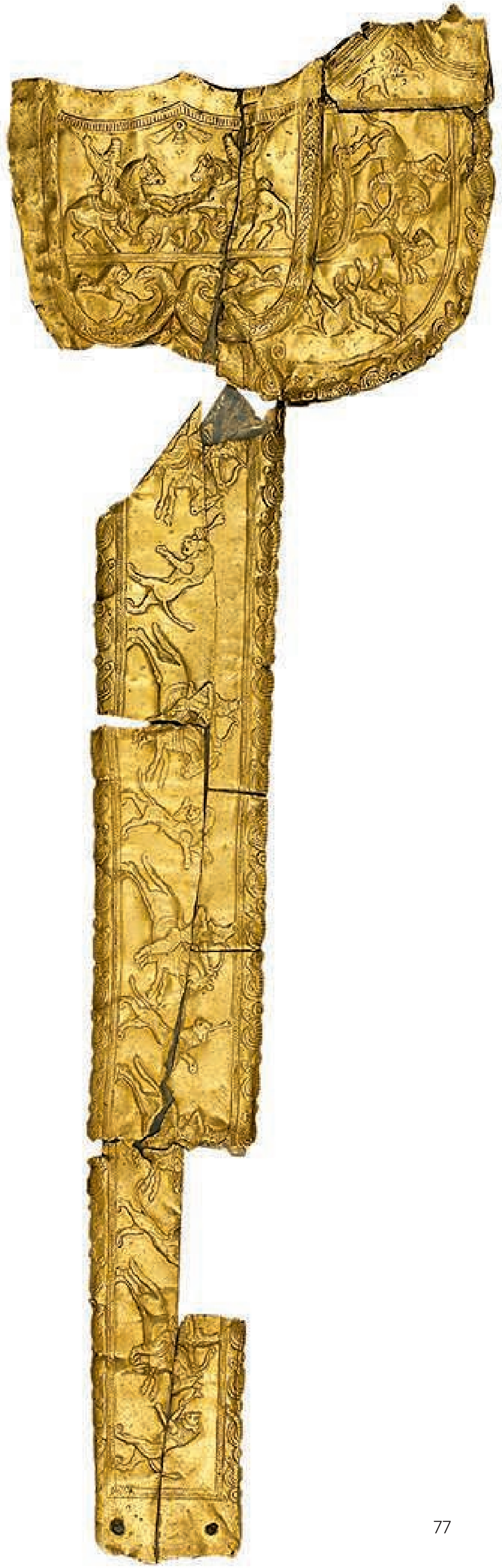
Scabbard

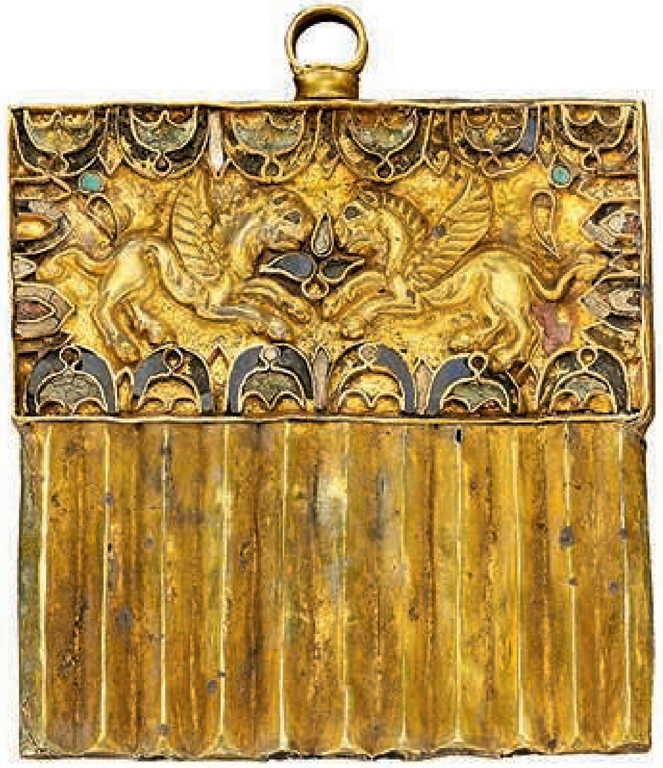
500–330 BC

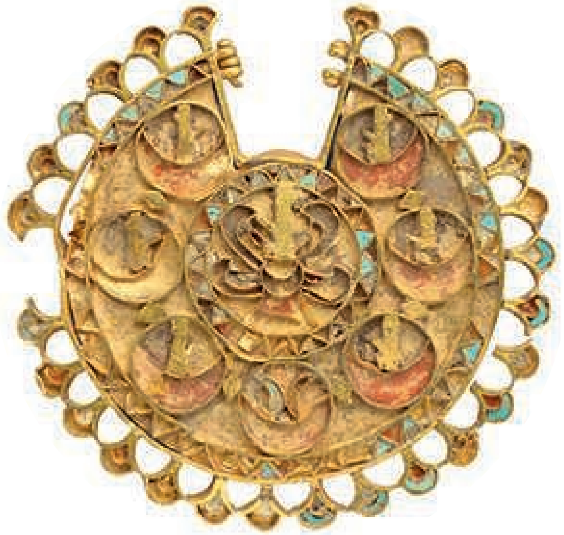
From the Oxus Treasure, found in present-day Tajikistan
Gold, length 27.6 cm
British Museum, 123923
A.W. Franks bequest 1897

This scabbard from the Oxus Treasure would have held a short sword of Persian type (*akinakes*). The scabbard would probably have been made of wood overlaid with a thin layer of gold, its embossed and chased decoration showing the different stages of a lion hunt. Mounted horsemen are depicted spearing lions or shooting them with arrows in scenes reminiscent of the lion hunt reliefs of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. This has sometimes led to suggestions that the scabbard is of pre-Achaemenid date. However, the distinctive shape, the fact that the riders wear trousers, and other iconographic details, indicate that the scabbard is indeed of Achaemenid date.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 431







63

Pendant

500–330 BC

Gold, height 10 cm, width 8.5 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1044
Purchased 2007

This rectangular sheet-gold pendant is decorated on both sides with a pair of confronted winged sphinxes (winged lions with eagles' heads) in repoussé. They are surrounded on all sides by *cloisonné* decoration (see cat. 64) showing lotus flowers. The inlays are mostly missing, but turquoise, shell, and dark blue and white paste seem to be present. The lower part of the pendant has a corrugated shape, and there is a suspension ring at the top.

64

Earring

500–330 BC

Gold, turquoise inlay, diameter 6 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1989.281.33
Presented 1989

This circular disc-shaped gold earring has a wedge-shaped opening at the top for the pin that secured it to the ear. It is a splendid example of the inlaid polychrome decoration that is characteristic of the Achaemenid period. In this technique, known as *cloisonné*, gold jewellery is inlaid with pieces of stone (usually turquoise, lapis lazuli and carnelian), glass, faience (paste) and perhaps enamel, all of different colours. The inlays were fitted into cavities on the surface of the gold and held in place with red-coloured cinnabar. This earring has a border of lotus flowers, and in the centre is the bust of a figure within a winged disc, either the spirit of kingship (the *khvarenah*) or Ahuramazda. This central motif is surrounded by smaller figures in crescent moons raising their hands to pay homage to the figure in the centre.

Oscar W. Muscarella, *Ancient Art: the Norbert Schimmel Collection* (Mainz 1974), no. 156

65

Rhyton

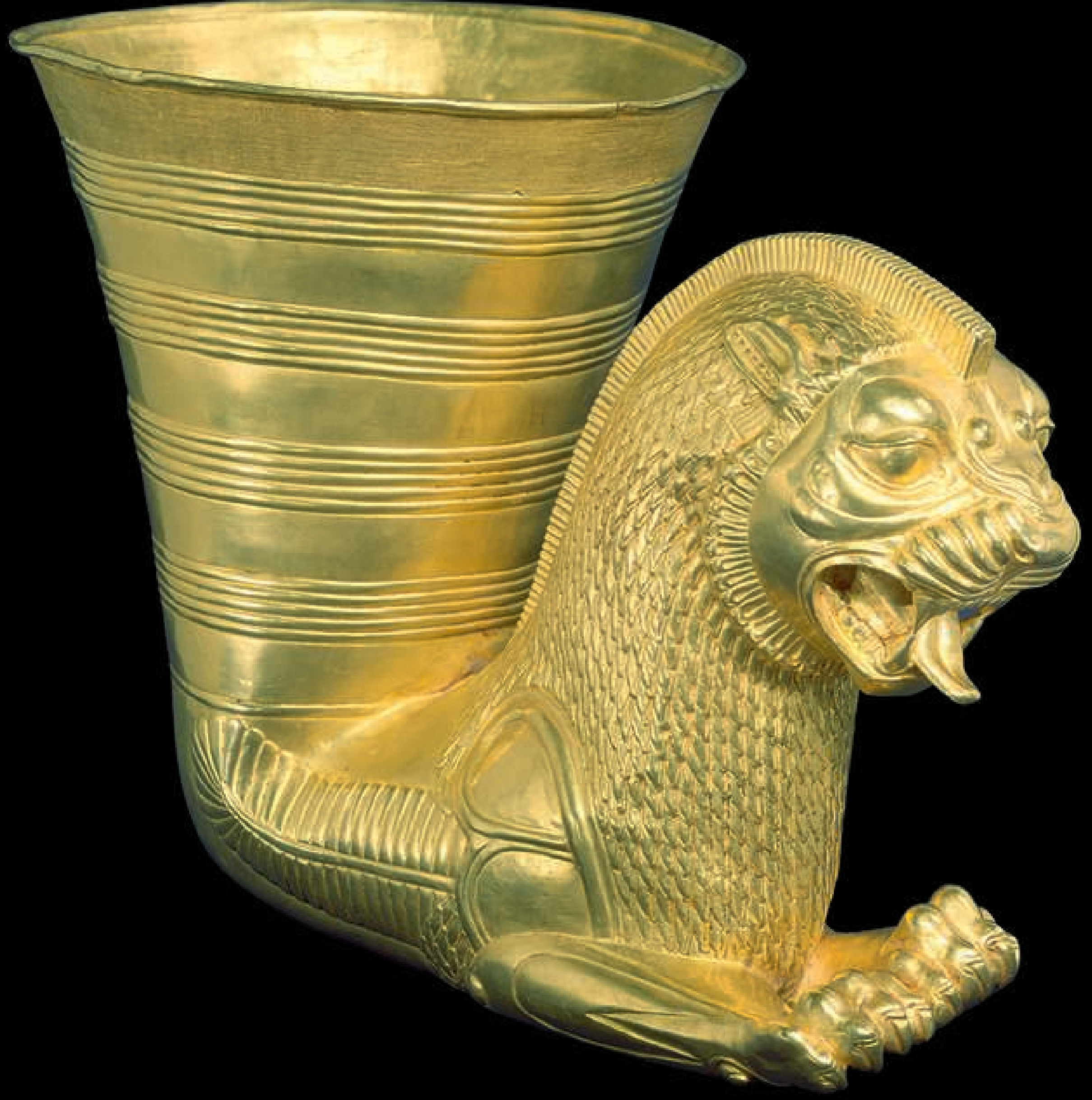
500–330 BC

Gold, height 17 cm, width 13.8 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 54.3.3
Purchased 1954

Persian kings were renowned for their use of sumptuous rhytons (or pouring vessels) in gold and silver such as this gold horn-shaped example, ending in the foreparts of a winged lion with a crest running down its back from the top of its head. The workmanship involving the application of twisted wire is of a very high standard. There is no pouring spout at the front of the animal, and the protome is separated from the horn by an internal divider. The vessel would therefore have been used like a drinking-horn. This rhyton may be compared with another gold example in the National Museum of Iran, also in the form of a winged lion.[10] Both are said to have been found in Hamadan, but although Hamadan was an important administrative centre in the Achaemenid period, and the king and court spent part of each year there, no certain evidence has been found to date for the location of the Achaemenid city.

Edith Porada, *Ancient Iran: The Art of Pre-Islamic Times* (London 1965), pl. 47; *Cambridge Ancient History, Plates to Vol. IV* (Cambridge 1988), no. 106a



66

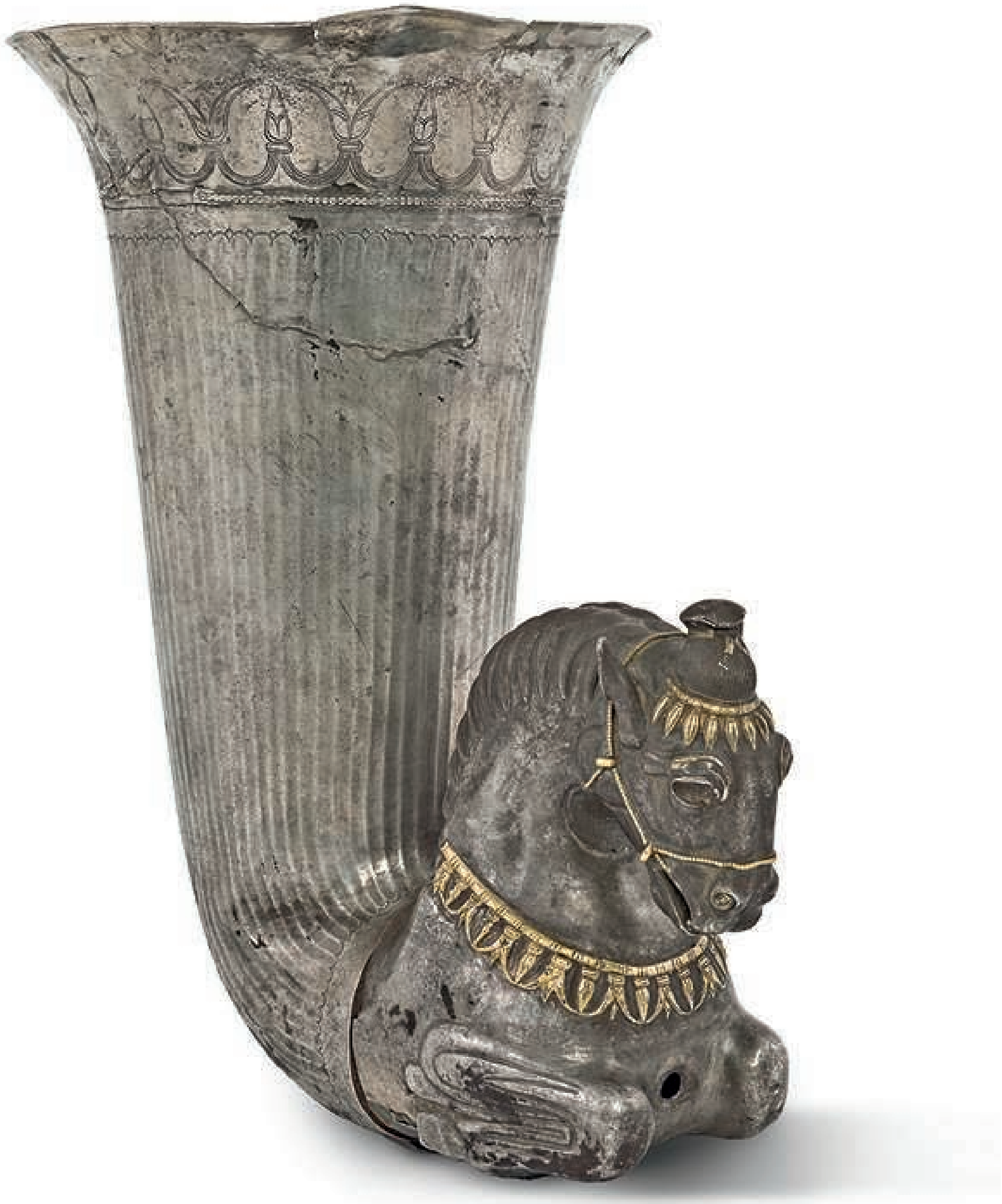
Rhyton

500–330 BC

Silver gilt, height 22.5 cm, width 19 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1070
Purchased 2013

This silver rhyton has a protome in the form of the foreparts of a horse with its front legs bent underneath it. Vessels of this shape are know as 'bent-horn rhytons' (see also cats 65, 67). The horn part of the rhyton is finely fluted and around the outside of the flared rim is an incised frieze of lotus and bud decoration. The protome was made separately. The horse has a bridle of gold wire, and a breast band decorated with a lotus and bud design. It has an Achaemenid-style topknot, below which is a circlet with pendant lotus buds. There is a pouring hole in the centre of its chest.



67 (opposite)

Rhyton

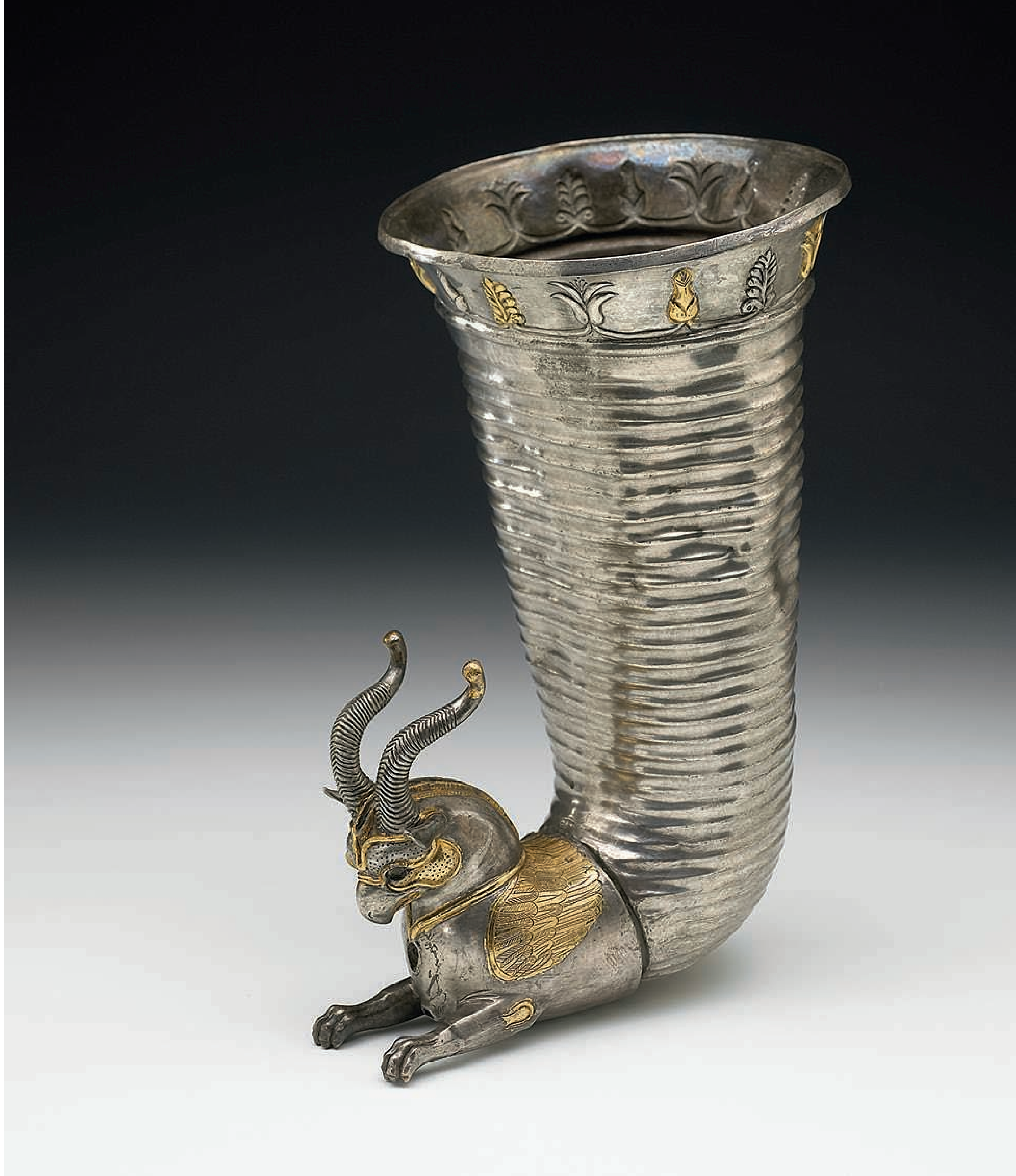
500–330 BC

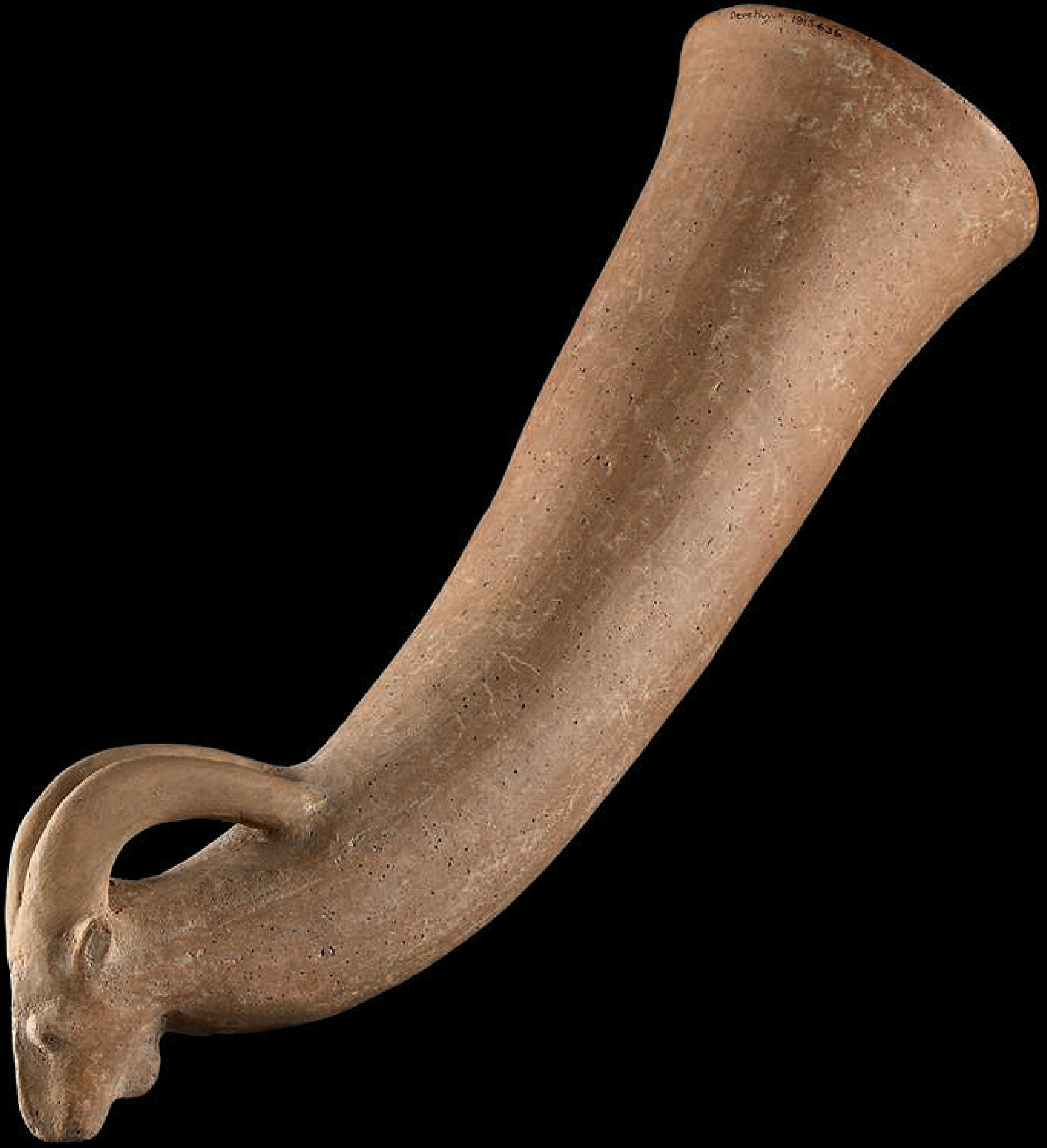
Silver, partly gilded, height 23 cm

British Museum, 124081
A.W. Franks bequest 1897

This silver-gilt horn-shaped rhyton ends at the base in the foreparts of a winged, horned griffin with lion's paws. There is horizontal fluting on the upper part of the vessel and floral decoration around the rim. A pouring hole is situated in the centre of the animal's chest. Horn-shaped rhytons ending in animal's heads or fantastic creatures are a distinctive feature of the Achaemenid period and occur in gold, silver, glass, pottery and other materials. This example was obtained in Erzincan in eastern Turkey and is probably from the ancient site of Altıntepe, where there was Achaemenid period occupation. Rhytons are shown on banqueting scenes from south-west Turkey but not on the Persepolis reliefs.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 119





68

Pottery rhyton

500–330 BC

From Deve Hüyük, near Carchemish, on the Turkish-Syrian border
Terracotta, length 34.6 cm, width 10.9 cm
Ashmolean Museum, AN 1913.636

Ending in the head of a goat with beard and swept-back horns, this horn-shaped rhyton is made of reddish-brown burnished pottery. There is a hole through the mouth of the goat. Rhytons were presumably a luxury item and therefore usually produced in precious metals, such as gold or silver (see cats 65–7), but this is an example of how sometimes a popular item was reproduced in a cheaper material, such as pottery. This rhyton was among the objects from Deve Hüyük on the Turkish-Syrian border (together with the bowl, cat. 73, and the figurine, cat. 74) purchased by Sir Leonard Woolley and T.E. Lawrence in 1913 from local villagers, who had looted an Achaemenid period inhumation cemetery of the 5th century BC. Although it was not properly excavated, the site of Deve Hüyük provides excellent evidence for Achaemenid period material culture in an outlying part of the empire.

Roger Moorey, *Cemeteries of the First Millennium B.C. at Deve Hüyük* (Oxford 1980), no. 66; *Cambridge Ancient History, Plates to Vol. IV* (Cambridge 1988), no. 88

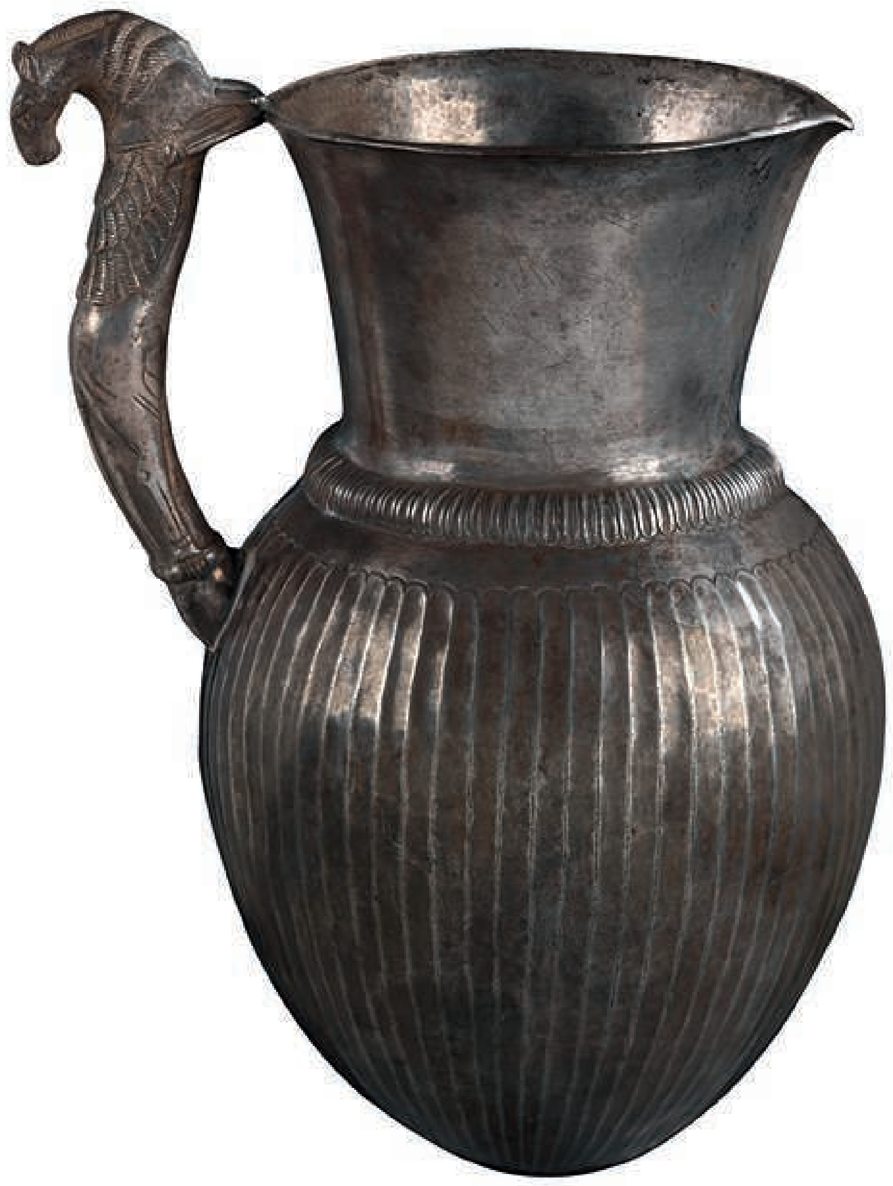
69

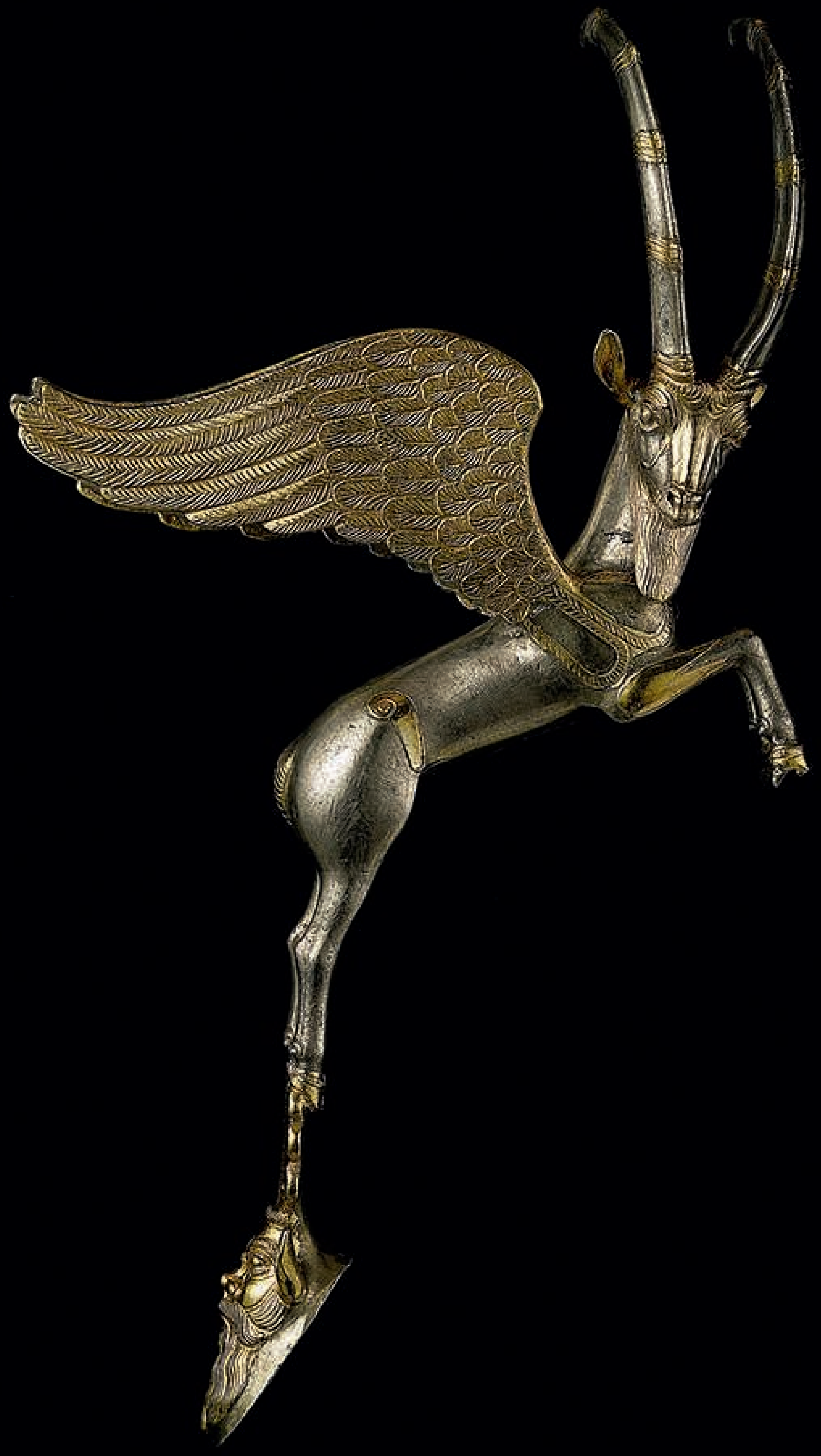
Jug

500–330 BC

Silver, height 17 cm
Wyvern Collection, 2556
Purchased 2018

This silver jug has a pouring spout and a single handle in the form of a winged horse with folded front legs and turned back head. The jug has a tall flared neck and a bulbous lower body with vertical fluting. There is a raised band between the neck and the body with vertical ribbed decoration. The horse has its front legs on the rim of the jug.





70, 71

Two winged ibex handles

about 500–330 BC

Silver, partially gilded,
heights 26.5 cm, 27 cm

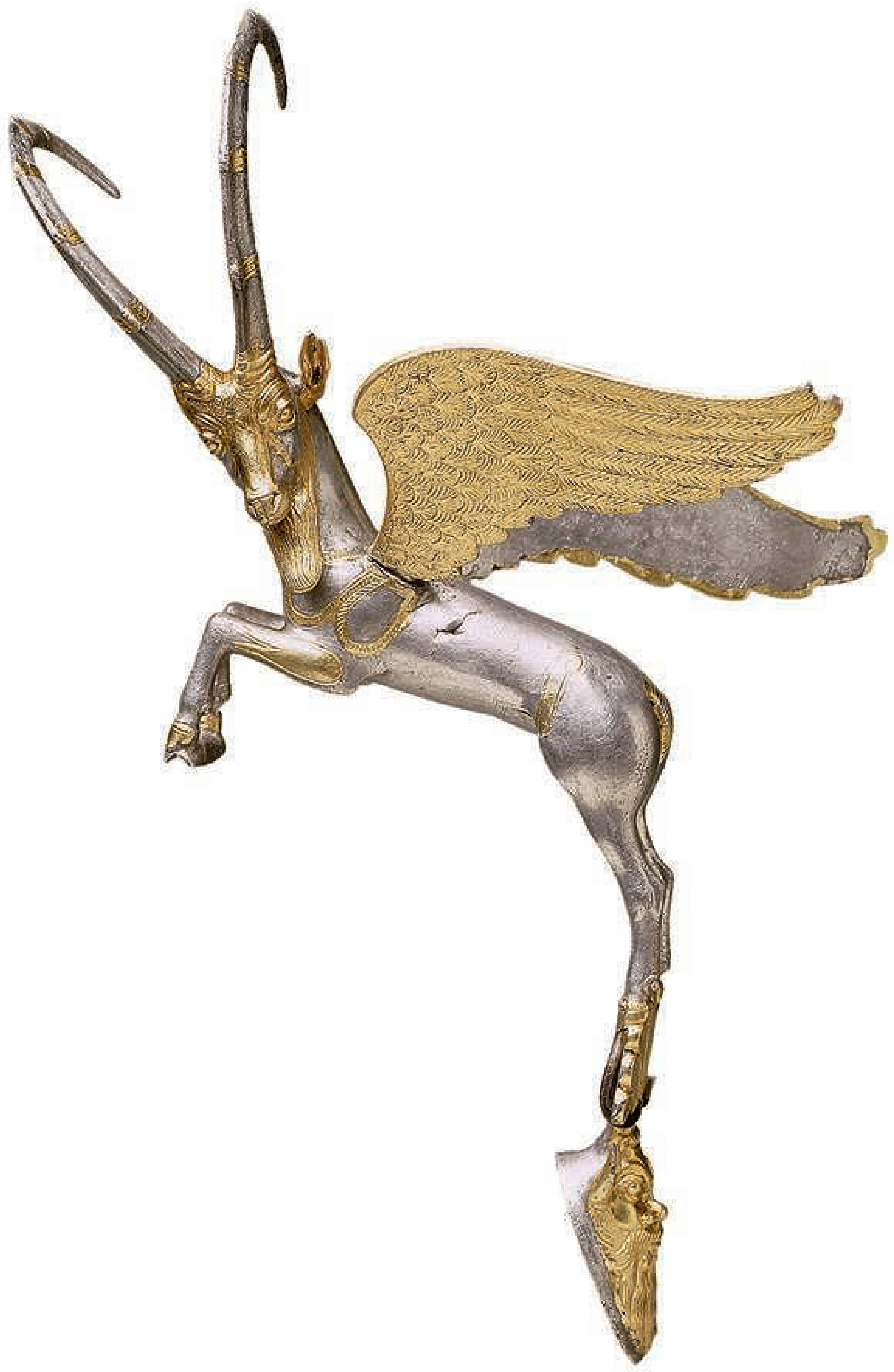
Musée du Louvre, Paris, AO2748
Purchased 1898 (cat. 70, right)

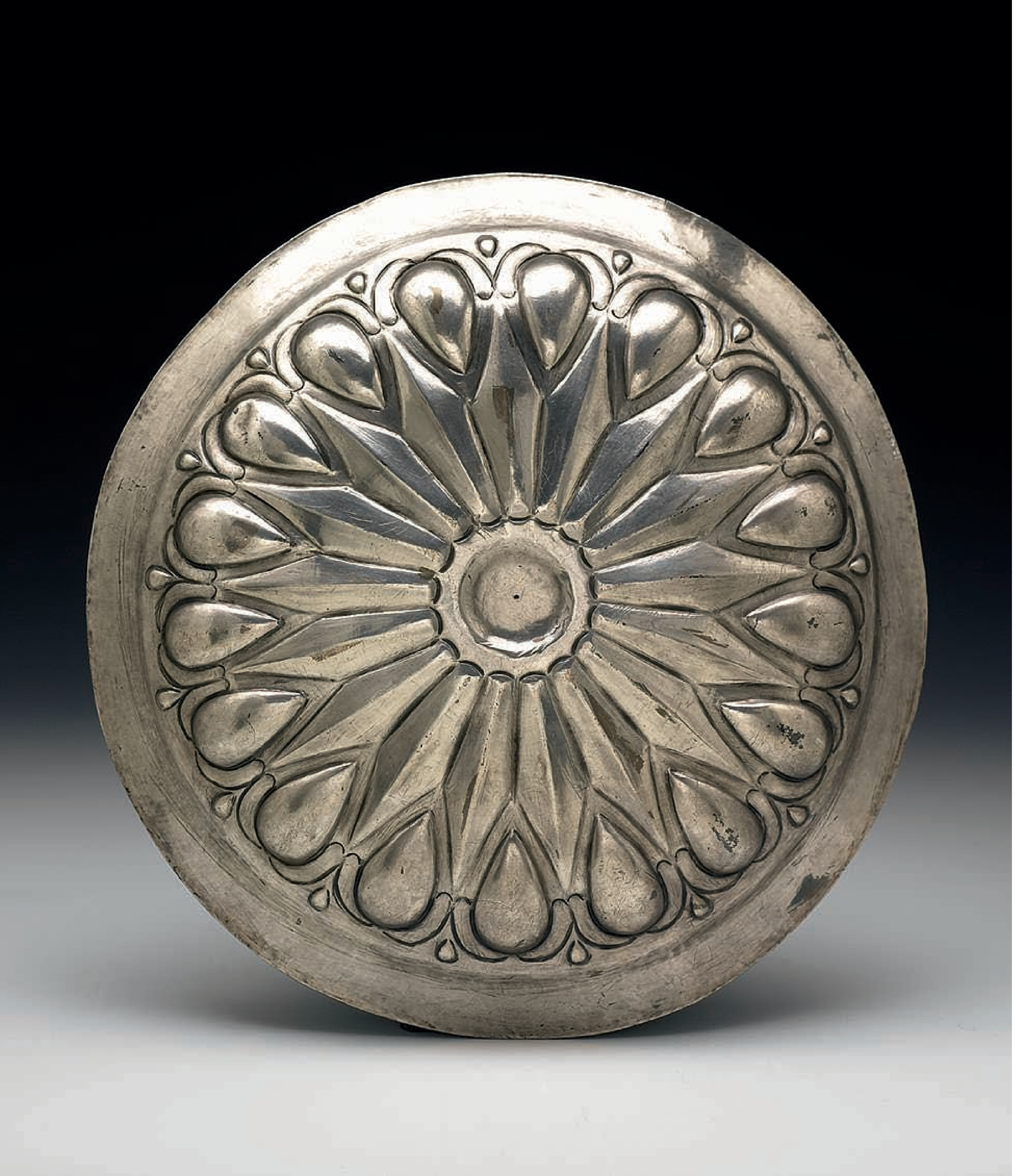
Altes Museum, Berlin, misc 8180a
Acquired 1891 (cat. 71, opposite)

Belonging to the body of a silver amphora (a vessel with two handles), which has not survived, are a pair of silver-gilt handles (one in the Louvre, Paris, and the other in the Altes Museum, Berlin). Each is in the form of a winged ibex. The animal has its head turned to the side, and is represented as leaping through the air. The ibex is bearded and stands on the head of an old man with beard and long ears who has been variously identified as Bes (the Egyptian dwarf-god) or Silenus (in Greek mythology a companion of Dionysus, the god of wine and festivity). This suggests to some scholars that the handles combine elements of Persian and Greek style. They would have been attached at top and bottom to the amphora. Such vessels are shown on the Persepolis reliefs, being brought as presents for the king by three delegations (I, III, VI, or Medes, Armenians and Syrians).[11] The Louvre example comes from the Tyzskiewicz Collection and was acquired in 1898. The Berlin example supposedly comes from Erzincan, then in the Ottoman empire, and was shown in the *International Exhibition of Persian Art* at the Royal Academy, London, in 1931.

Cat. 70: *Forgotten Empire* 2005, no. 128; John Boardman, *Persia and the West* 188, fig. 5.70a–b; Kamyar Abdi, 'Bes in the Achaemenid Empire', *Ars Orientalis* 29 (1999), fig. 8/3

Cat. 71: *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Persian Art* (London 1931), p. 21, case 22A





72

Bowl

about 500–300 BC

Silver, diameter 25.8 cm

British Museum, 124082
A.W. Franks bequest 1897

This silver bowl has embossed decoration in the form of a stylized lotus flower. Bowls of this type, often with a raised boss (*omphalos*) in the centre and decorated with lobes and petals, are a well-known form from the Achaemenid period, both in gold and silver. Some bear inscriptions, such as a group of four silver bowls with the name and genealogy of Artaxerxes I,[12] while others seem to have been made to a prescribed weight standard. This bowl is believed to have been found near Erzincan, then in the Ottoman empire, so the findspot could be ancient Altıntepe, which is known to have been an important centre in the Achaemenid period.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 104

73

Bowl

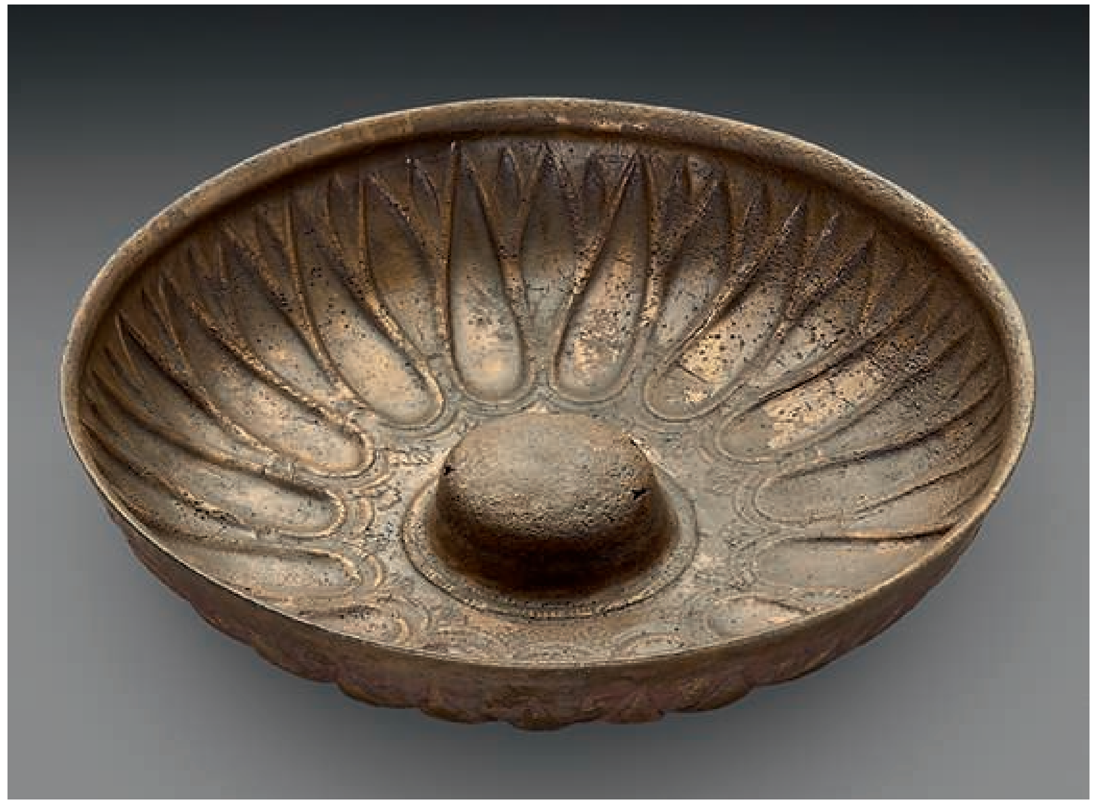
500–330 BC

From Deve Hüyük, near Carchemish,
on the Turkish-Syrian border
Bronze, height 4.2 cm, diameter 19.1 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN 1913.673

This bronze bowl, with a central raised boss (*omphalos*), has embossed and chased decoration showing 15 petals with stylized lotus flowers between them. This form of bowl was popular during the Persian empire, particularly when fashioned in silver (see cat. 72). The shape derives from Assyria, where shallow bowls with a shoulder and flared rim were popular; the shoulder becomes less pronounced in the Persian period. This bowl was among those objects from Deve Hüyük (together with the rhyton, cat. 68, and the figurine, cat. 74) that were purchased by Sir Leonard Woolley and T.E. Lawrence in 1913 from local villagers, who had looted an Achaemenid period inhumation cemetery of the 5th century BC.

Roger Moorey, *Cemeteries of the First Millennium B.C. at Deve Hüyük* (Oxford 1980), no. 85



74

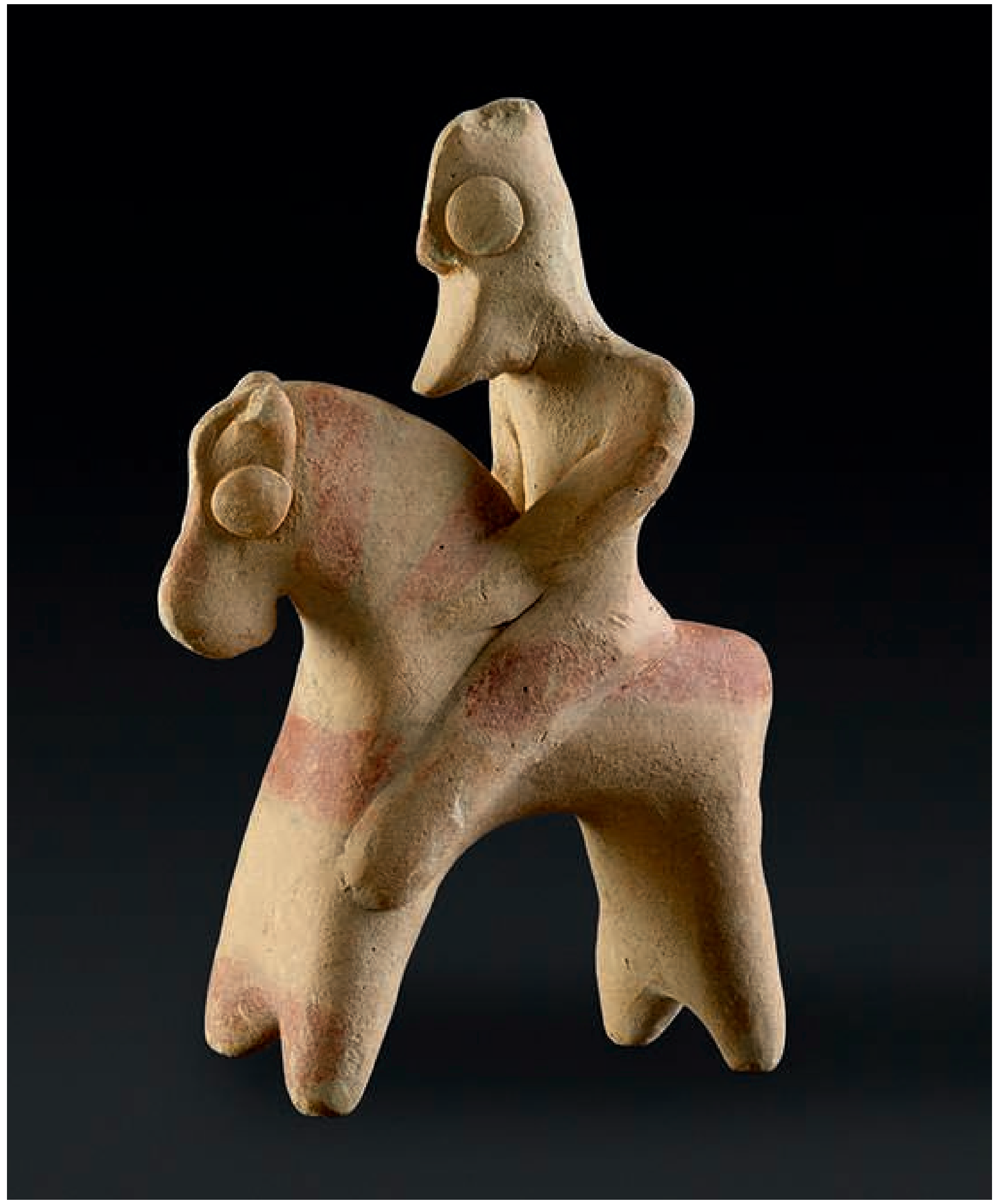
Figurine of horse and rider

500–330 BC

From Deve Hüyük, near Carchemish, on the Turkish-Syrian border
Terracotta, height 12.2 cm, length 8.1 cm
Ashmolean Museum, AN1913.648

This buff-coloured figurine from Deve Hüyük shows a horse and rider with bands of red paint on the horse's body. The eyes of the horse and rider are represented by blobs of clay, and the back legs of the horse are joined together. The rider wears a helmet, and he is either bearded or has a chin-guard. He grasps the lower mane of the horse. Terracotta horse and rider figurines were popular during the Persian empire and have been found in many graves, particularly those of children, suggesting that they were simply toys. This figurine was among the objects from Deve Hüyük (together with the rhyton, cat. 68, and the bowl, cat. 73) purchased by Sir Leonard Woolley and T.E. Lawrence in 1913 from local villagers who had looted an Achaemenid period inhumation cemetery of the 5th century BC.

Roger Moorey, *Cemeteries of the First Millennium B.C. at Deve Hüyük* (Oxford 1980), no. 433; Roger Moorey, *Ancient Near Eastern Terracottas* (Oxford 2005), no. 360



RUNNING AN EMPIRE

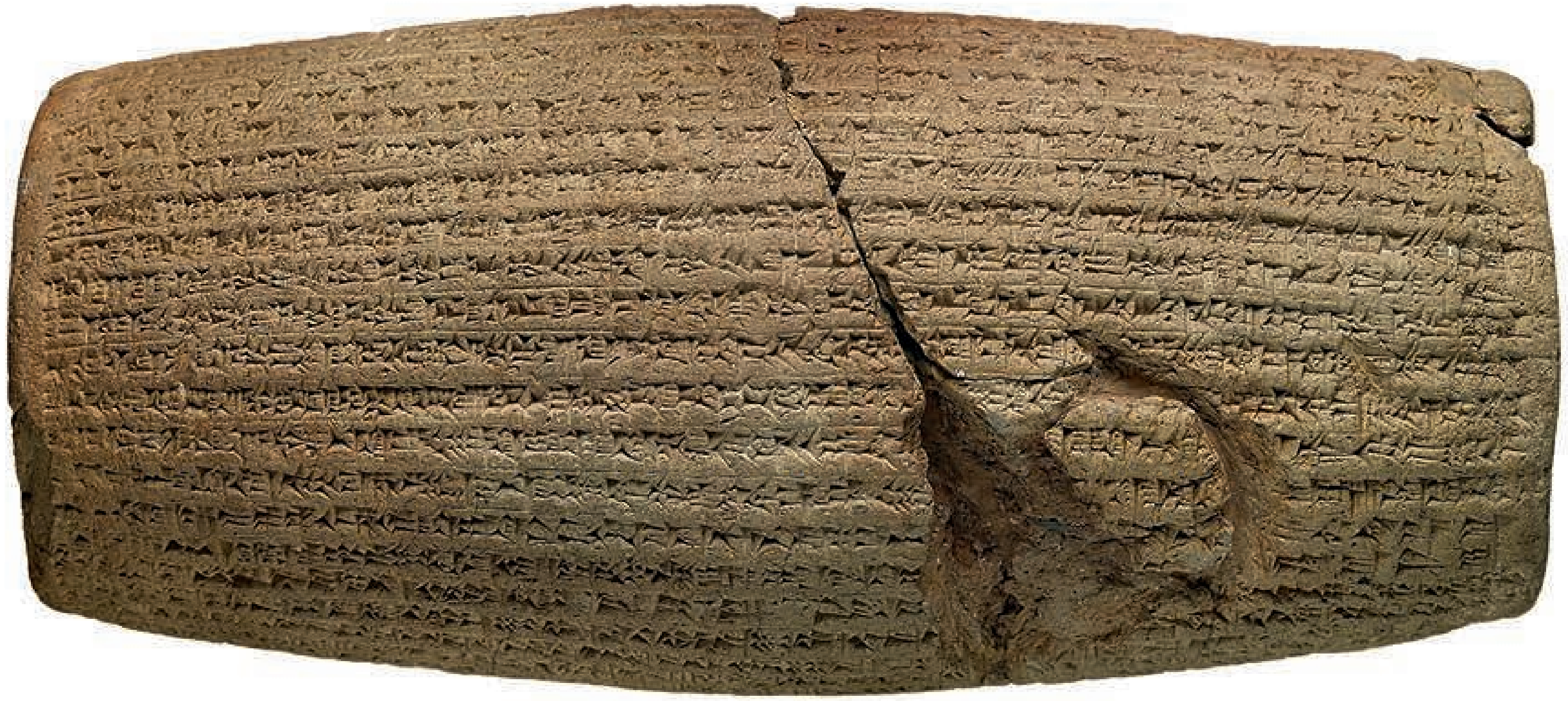
The sources for the administration of the Persian empire are various and include a small number of monumental inscriptions in Old Persian cuneiform, clay tablets from Persepolis written in Elamite cuneiform, tablets and cylinders from Babylonia written in Babylonian cuneiform, papyri from Egypt written in hieroglyphic and demotic scripts, Aramaic inscriptions, coins minted in the western provinces governed by satraps, and the accounts of Greek authors, particularly Herodotus and Xenophon. The picture they present is incomplete, but what is clear is that the great king was the ultimate authority and all power flowed down from him. He was presumably advised by nobles, counsellors and family members, but as far as is known there was no kind of assembly that shared the responsibility of government.

Among the cuneiform documents from Babylonia the most significant is the Cyrus Cylinder (cat. 75). This cylinder of clay is more than a building inscription, as is sometimes supposed, and part of the text may have reproduced some kind of edict. Thus, a clay tablet in the British Museum duplicates part of the text in the Cylinder, and we know that the Persian kings sometimes issued proclamations. Parts of the great inscription of Darius I at Bisitun appear on a stela (or stone slab) found at Babylon[13] and in Aramaic on a papyrus found at Elephantine in Egypt. In the text inscribed on the Cylinder, Cyrus adopts what appears to be a liberal policy, allowing deported people to return home with their god statues. He also says he did not sack and destroy Babylon after capture, which is borne out by the archaeological evidence. The implications of all this are that Cyrus was a benevolent ruler, at least by the standards of the time, and that he preferred to govern by consent rather than by oppression. This is also the impression given by biblical accounts, where he is credited with allowing the Jews to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. As one historian has commented, the Persian empire (as opposed to the Athenian) 'was politically, religiously and linguistically inclusive'.[14]

A loose division of the empire into provinces, some under the charge of a satrap or provincial governor, was probably first put in place by Cyrus, but the arrangement was apparently put on a more formal footing by Darius. According to Herodotus, there were 20 'financial districts', which were each assessed for tax purposes and paid different amounts of annual tribute. It has been estimated that the total amount of tribute collected annually in this way was 380,799 kilograms of silver,[15] which gives us some notion of the wealth of the Persian empire. The satrap, or sometimes a client king, was responsible for the collection and payment of the tribute, in return for which the provinces had some guarantee of security and central government maintained communications around the empire. For example, Herodotus describes the road from Susa to Sardis in Asia Minor, a distance of around 2575 kilometres, which had posting stations throughout its length.

Administrative arrangements at Persepolis are graphically recorded in about 30,000 clay tablets found at the site in two principal caches in the 1930s (referred to as the Fortification Archive and the Treasury Archive). They show that at Persepolis, at least, the language of everyday business was Elamite, whereas in Mesopotamia it was presumably Babylonian. Further west, Aramaic seems to have been the lingua franca. This use of different languages (together with Old Persian cuneiform for monumental inscriptions) could be taken as a demonstration of the lack of homogeneity within the Persian empire, but on the other hand it shows the diversity and inclusiveness that characterized it. The clay tablets of Iran and Mesopotamia generally contain impressions from cylinder or stamp seals, which effectively gave the documents a seal of approval. By the time of the Persian empire, cylinder seals had largely been replaced by stamp seals in the ancient Near East, but under the Persians the cylinder seal made a comeback. Many of these cylinder seals are engraved with intricate and informative scenes and designs that are distinctively Achaemenid (see, for example, cats 78, 79).

With regard to the domestic economy within the Persian empire, there were different arrangements in east and west. In the eastern part, in Iran itself and Mesopotamia, payments were made in commodities or in silver bullion. The Persepolis tablets show that these commodities were in the form of provisions such as wine, beer and foodstuffs. In the western part, on the other hand, particularly in Asia Minor and the Levant, coins were minted and circulated (cats 80–3). These could be either royal issues, or so-called satrapal coins, issued by provincial governors.



75

Cyrus Cylinder

539–538 BC

Excavated at Babylon, Iraq
Clay, length 22.9 cm
British Museum, 90920

The Cyrus Cylinder is a barrel-shaped baked clay cylinder that was inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform with an account of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great in 539 BC. It was buried as a foundation deposit under the inner city wall that Cyrus had restored. On the Cylinder Cyrus justifies his overthrow of the Babylonian king, Nabonidus. He also records that he returned statues to the shrines from which they had been seized, and that he allowed deported peoples to return home. The Cylinder is sometimes described as the first declaration of human rights, which is misleading, but it is certainly more than a standard building inscription in the Assyrian or Babylonian tradition, as some scholars have claimed. It was found at Babylon in 1879 in excavations undertaken by Hormuzd Rassam on behalf of the British Museum. Hormuzd Rassam (1826–1910) was a native of Mosul, who assisted Sir Henry Layard in his Assyrian excavations at Nimrud and Nineveh, and was later hired by the British Museum to conduct excavations on its behalf in Mesopotamia. He later settled in England.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 6; John Curtis, *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia* (London 2013); Irving L. Finkel (ed.), *The Cyrus Cylinder* (London 2013)

76

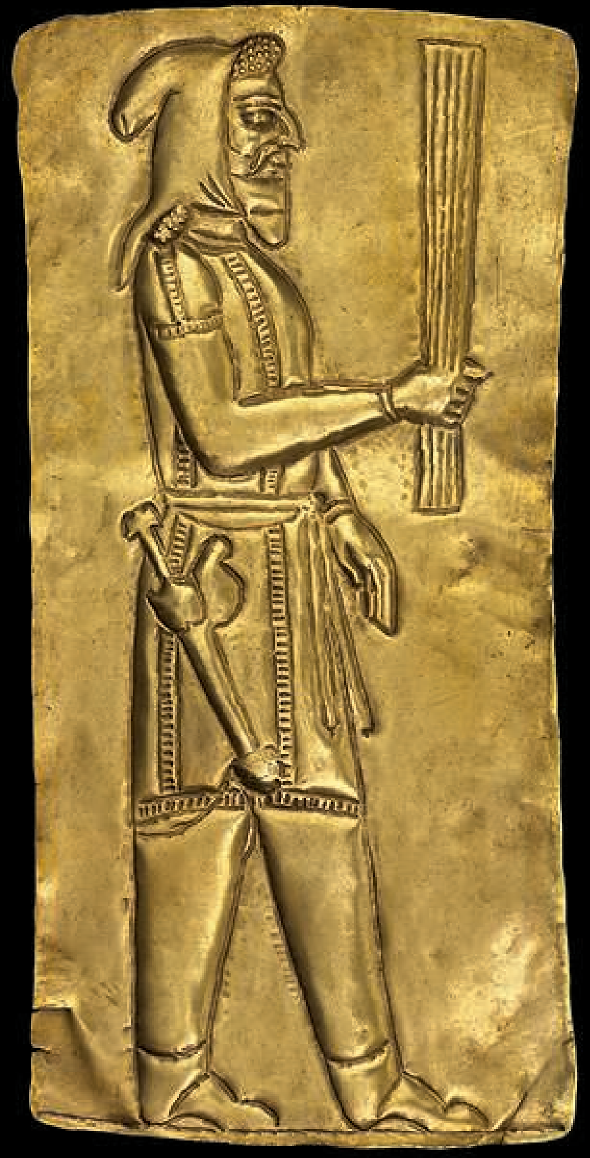
Plaque with priest

about 500–330 BC

From the Oxus Treasure, found in present-day Tajikistan
Gold, height 15.1 cm
British Museum, 123949
A.W. Franks bequest 1897

A man wearing a Median-style costume of short belted tunic and trousers is shown on this gold plaque from the Oxus Treasure. His apparel includes a hood and chin-guard, and he carries at his side an Achaemenid-style short sword (*akinakes*). The chin-guard, which could be pulled up to form a mouth cover (*padam*), and the bundle of sticks (*barsom*) that he holds, suggest that he is probably a priest. A total of 51 gold plaques were associated with the Oxus Treasure,[16] all but three with representations of human figures, some of them extremely crudely depicted. The presence of these gold plaques supports the view that it is a collection of votive objects.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 213



77

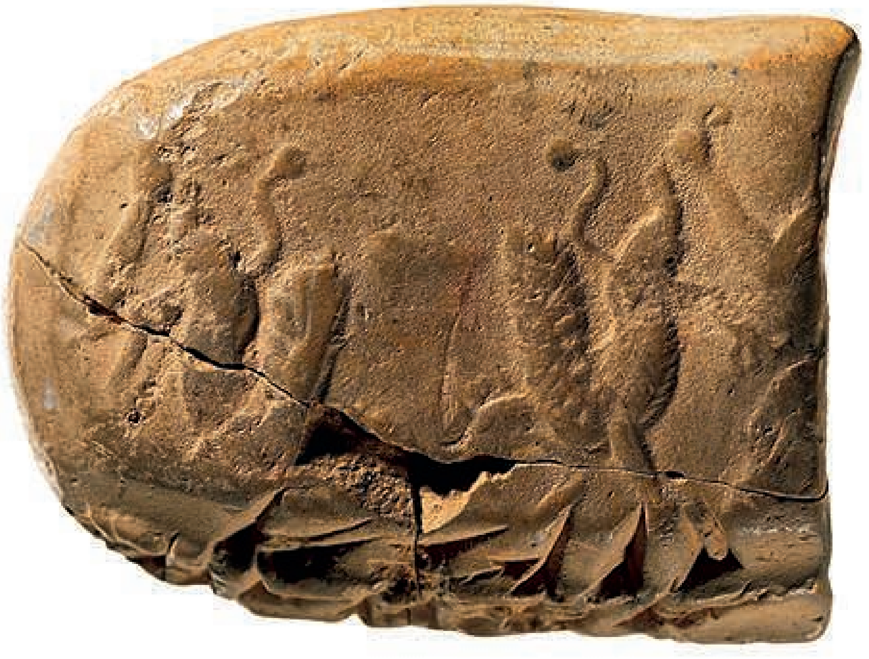
Cuneiform tablet

about 500 BC

Excavated at Qasr-e Abu Nasr,
Shiraz, Iran
Clay, 3.4 × 2.6 × 1.7 cm
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 36.30.62

Inscribed in Elamite cuneiform and with seal impressions, this tongue-shaped clay tablet is of the Achaemenid period and dates to about 500 BC. The text is administrative and refers to 60 rams, 95 ewes, and 50 lambs being allocated by somebody called Hinduš in the 21st year. The main seal impression shows a hero grasping winged lions or bulls by the hind leg. This tablet is very similar to those found at Persepolis in the Fortification Archive. Excavations at Qasr-e Abu Nasr, 6 km east of Shiraz, were undertaken by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, from 1932 to 1935, the date when this object was found.

Ira Spar and Michael Jursa, *Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. IV (New York 2014).



78 (opposite, above)

Cylinder seal

500–330 BC

Chalcedony, height 2.2 cm,
diameter 1.1 cm
British Museum, 132505
Bequeathed by Miss M.F.T. Ready, 1959

Made of pale blue chalcedony, this cylinder seal features a figure in Persian dress and dentate crown. This figure often makes an appearance in the iconography of the Achaemenid period, and while he may represent the king he is usually referred to as 'the Persian royal hero'. We are confronted with a battle scene. The royal hero is stabbing an enemy dressed in pointed hat and trouser suit; he is probably a Scythian. Another Scythian has already been vanquished, and a lion is standing over him. A captive is roped to the royal hero. Hovering above a palm tree is the figure within the winged disc, either the 'kingly glory' or Ahuramazda. In some respects the scene on this seal is reminiscent of the great rock relief of Darius at Bisitun.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 415; Parvine Merrillees, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum VI (Pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid Periods)* (London 2005), no. 65

79 (opposite, below)

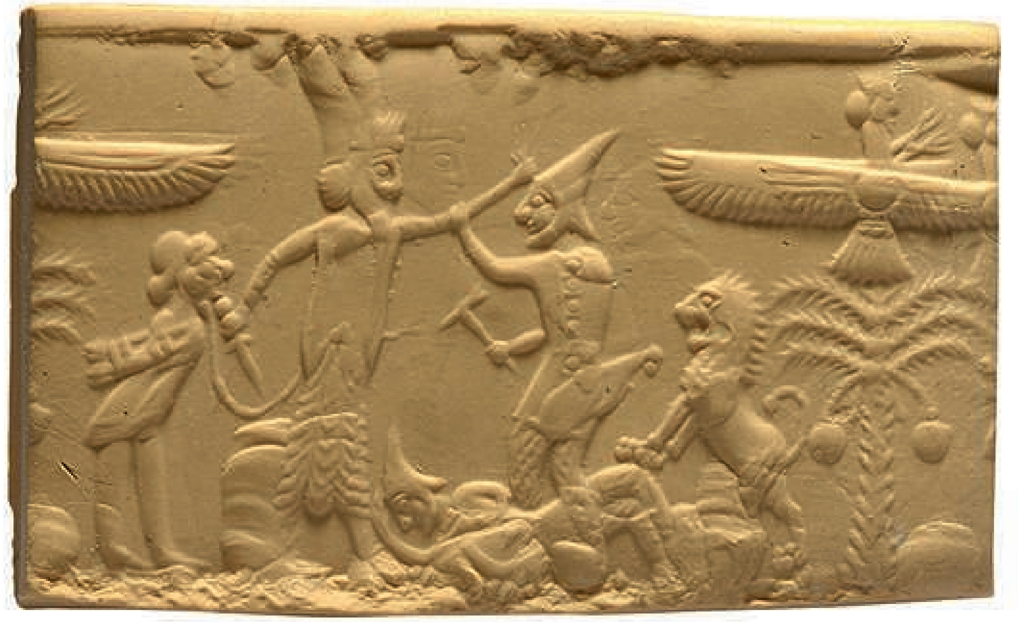
Cylinder seal

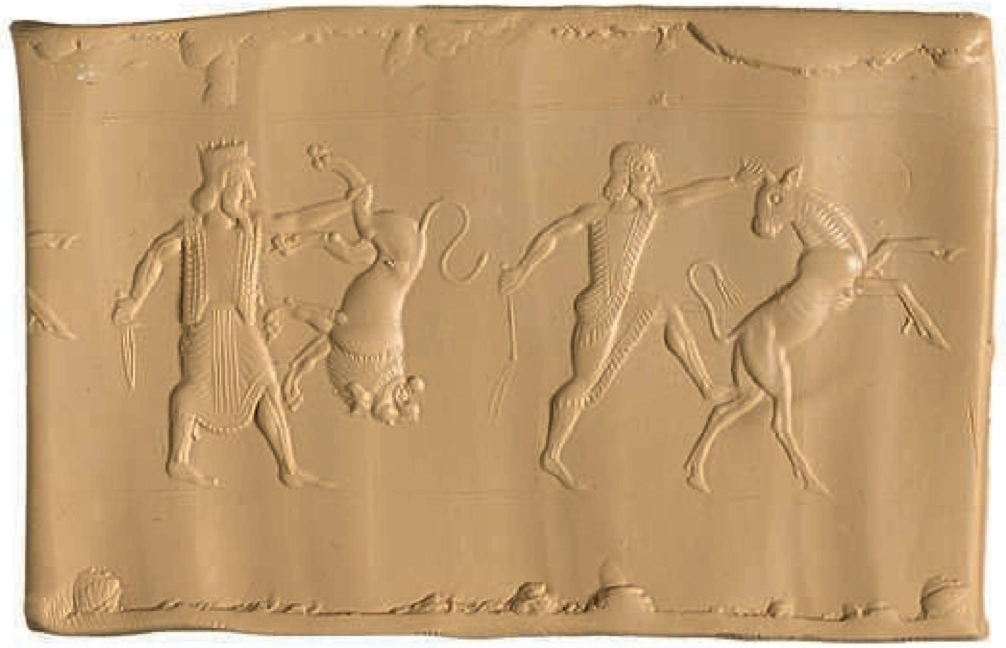
500–330 BC

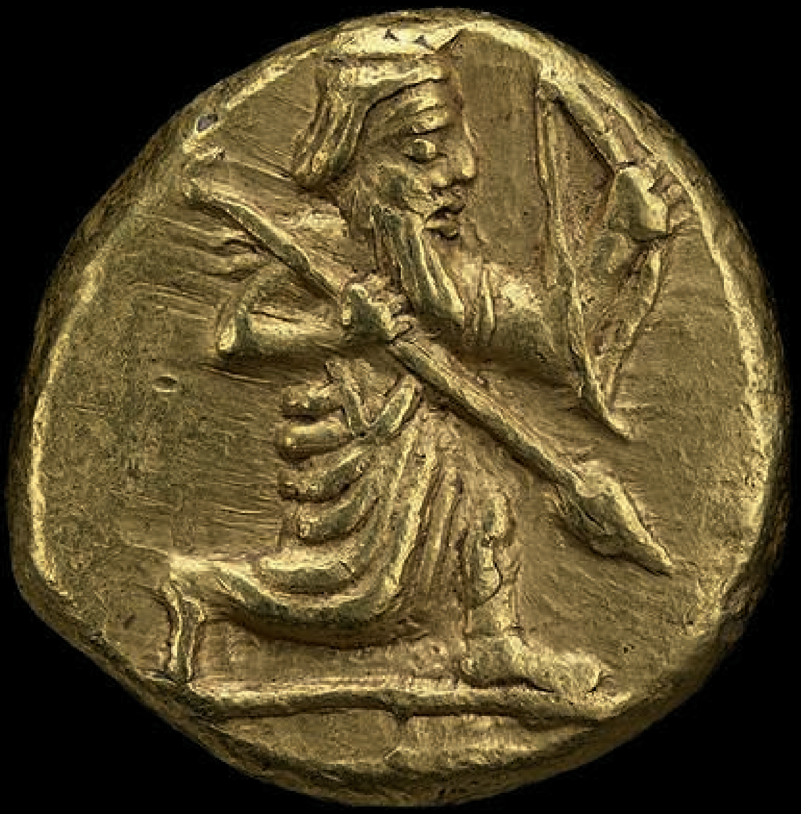
Chalcedony, height 4.9 cm,
diameter 2.3 cm
British Museum, 89337
Purchased 1825 (C.J. Rich collection)

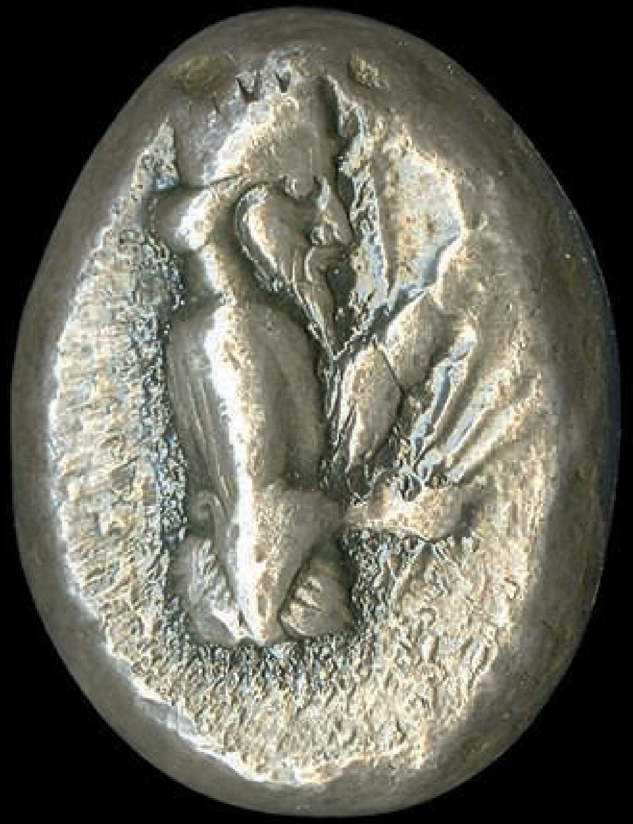
Made of grey-brown chalcedony, this cylinder seal shows a double combat scene. To the left we see a figure (the 'Persian royal hero') wearing a dentate crown and a form of Persian dress. He holds a dagger in his right hand, and with his left hand he grasps the hind leg of an upside-down snarling lion. In the combat scene to the right, a figure wearing a fringed dress holds a whip in his right hand and with his left hand he holds a bull by the horn and places his left foot on its leg. This seal was collected by the British antiquarian scholar Claudius James Rich, and is said to come from Borsippa in Mesopotamia.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 72; Parvine Merrillees, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum VI* (*Pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid Periods*) (London 2005), no. 30









80

Daric coin

about 400–375 BC

Gold, diameter 1.6 cm

British Museum, 1915,0108.28
Purchased 1915

On the obverse of this gold daric coin is a kneeling royal figure wearing a crown and a long dress. He holds a bow and a spear. There is an oblong incuse (hollow mark) on the reverse. The Persians were introduced to coins when Cyrus the Great conquered Croesus of Lydia in 547 or 546 BC. The first Lydian coins (electrum, gold and silver staters) showed a lion and bull. Production of these coins continued after the Persian conquest until new types, showing the archer king, were introduced by Darius I. Such coins were minted in western Asia Minor.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 323

81

Siglos coin

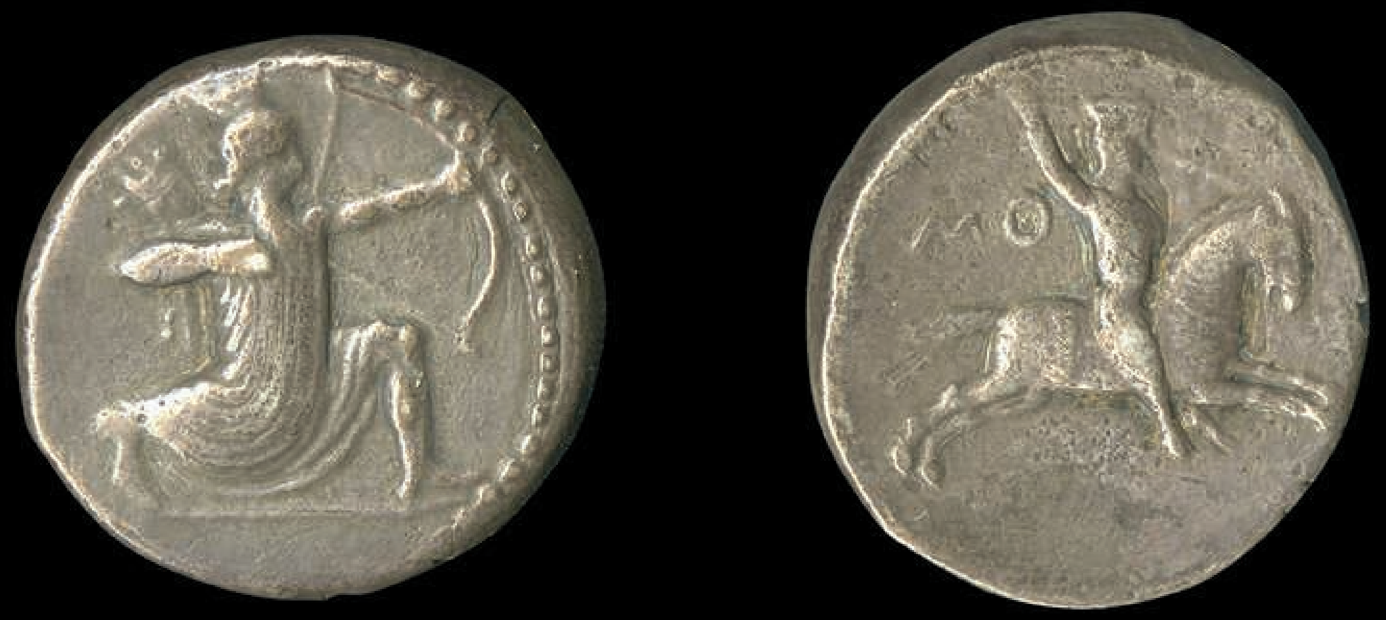
about 520–500 BC

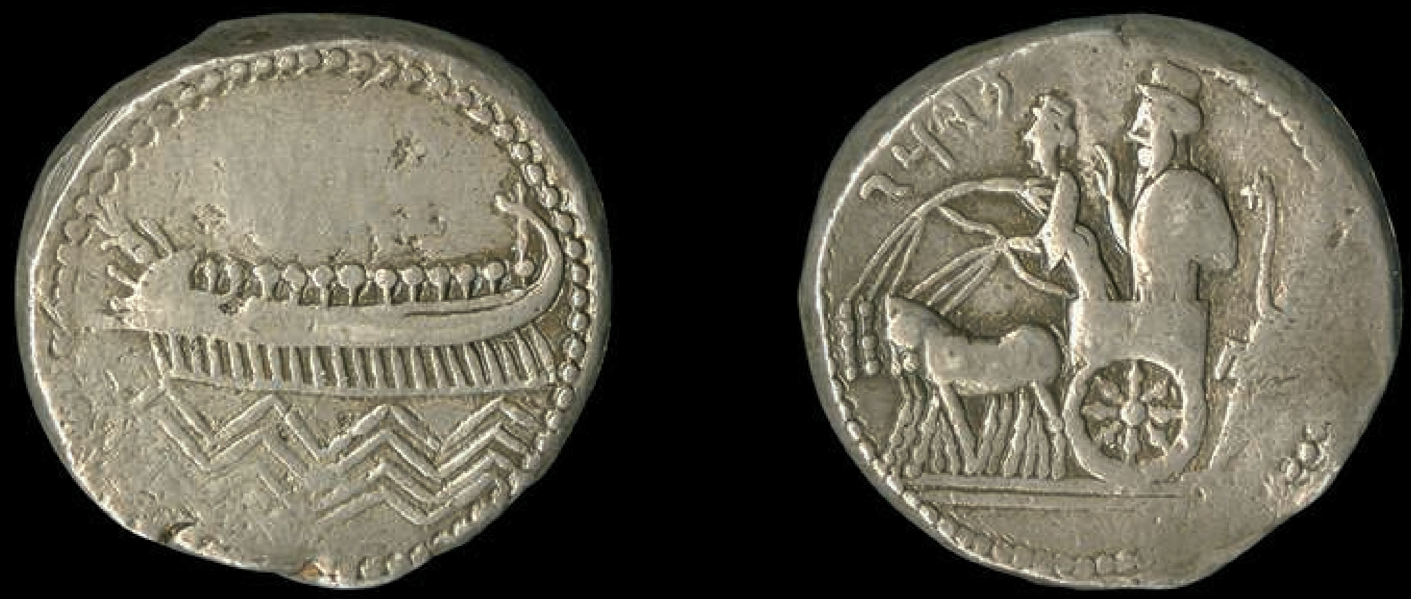
Silver, diameter 1.6 cm

British Museum, 1852,0902.110
Purchased 1852

This silver coin, a siglos, shows a bust of a royal figure holding a bow on the obverse with the usual oblong incuse on the reverse.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 318





82

Stater coin

about 361–330 BC

Silver, diameter 2.2 cm

British Museum, 1905,1006.25
Purchased 1905

On the obverse of this silver coin, or stater, of Evagoras II is a royal figure kneeling and drawing a bow. On the reverse is a royal figure on horseback with a spear. Evagoras II (r. about 361–351 BC) was the pro-Persian king of the Greek city-state of Salamis in Cyprus. After he was deposed by the local populace because of his Persian sympathies, he was appointed governor of Sidon in Phoenicia by Artaxerxes III in about 349 BC, a post that he held for three years. Sidon was one of the most important harbour sites in the eastern Mediterranean, and supplied ships for the invasion of Greece.

Forgotten Empire 2005, no. 327

83

Double shekel coin

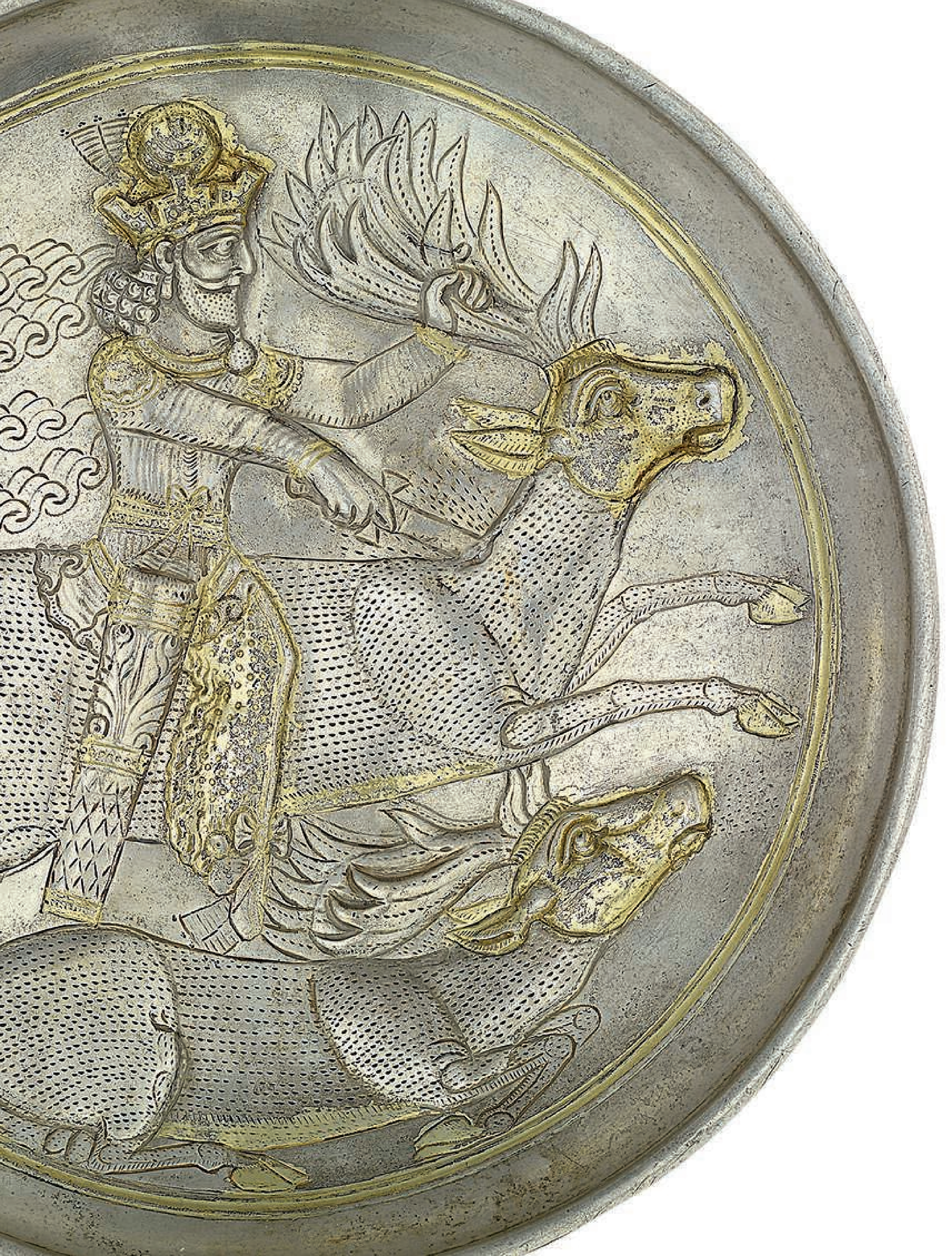
about 352 BC

Silver, diameter 2.9 cm

British Museum, 1870,0501.1
Acquired 1870

This silver double shekel coin of Mazaeus (Persian, Mazdai), an Achaemenid noble and satrap of Cilicia and later Babylon, shows on the obverse a warship above zig-zag waves and on the reverse a god riding in a chariot drawn by four horses, together with an Aramaic inscription reading 'MZDY' (Mazdai). The chariot is of a similar type to the model from the Oxus Treasure (cat. 60) and that shown on the Darius Seal (British Museum).[17] This coin was minted in Sidon, which continued to be an important city in the Achaemenid period. It had an apadana, or columned hall, and according to the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, there was also a royal park (*paradeisos*) for the pleasure of the Persian kings.

George Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia* (London 1910), p. 154, no. 81



3

LAST OF THE ANCIENT EMPIRES: THE IRANIAN RENAISSANCE

John Curtis

Whatever hopes Darius III may have had for saving his empire after the reverses at the River Granicus and Issus, they were shattered at Gaugamela (now in northern Iraq) in October 331 BC, when the Persian army was decisively defeated by the Macedonians under Alexander the Great. Darius fled the battlefield and was later murdered by Bessus, the satrap of Bactria. Meanwhile, Alexander proceeded to Babylon and then to Susa, where he looted the royal treasury. From there he hurried to Persepolis where he remained for five months, after which he set fire to the city, according to the Greek historian Arrian, in retribution for the sacking of Athens in 480 BC. After a lengthy campaign in Central Asia, and a foray into India as far as the River Ganges, at which point his men refused to go any further, he returned to Susa in 324 BC. In an attempt to reconcile his Persian subjects, Alexander appointed many Persians to positions in the Macedonian army and organized at Susa a mass marriage of his officers to Persian noblewomen. His reputation in later Persian literature is mixed. In the Zoroastrian tradition he is referred to as 'Alexander the Accursed', as the Zoroastrian sacred texts were burnt when Persepolis was destroyed, an act for which he is also criticized by the Iranian scholar Tabari (about AD 839–923). On the other hand, the Persian poets Nizami (about AD 1141–1209) in the *Iskandarnameh* (or *Book of Alexander*) and Firdowsi (d. 1020) in the *Shahnameh* (or *Book of Kings*) on the whole paint a favourable picture of Alexander, and in the latter source he becomes the half-brother of Darius III, the last Achaemenid king, thus legitimizing his claim to the Persian throne. Alexander died in Babylon in June 323 BC at the age of 32.

After his death, there was a struggle for power among his generals and assorted rivals (the Diadochi). Following years of fighting, Seleucus (who had previously served as an infantry general under Alexander) emerged victorious and would eventually establish the Seleucid empire. By 305 BC he was in control of much of the eastern part of Alexander's territory, comprising Iran, Mesopotamia and northern Syria. The centre of his empire was Seleucia-on-the-Tigris to the north of Babylon in Mesopotamia, and it would appear that southern Mesopotamia was its heartland. Nevertheless, Susa in south-west Iran was re-founded as a *polis* ('city' in Greek) – Seleucia-on-the-Eulaios – and there were other important Greek foundations at Hamadan (Epiphaneia), Rayy (Europos) and Shahr-e Qumis (Hecatompylos), and at Charax Spasinu on the Persian Gulf. How much Greek influence there was outside these centres is questionable. While Hellenistic pottery is widespread at archaeological sites throughout Iran, apart from at Susa significant finds of Hellenistic art and architecture are few and far between. In the ceremony at Susa in 324 BC Seleucus had married Apama, daughter of Sogdian warlord Spitamenes, and when Seleucus was assassinated in 281 BC their eldest son, Antiochus I Soter (r. 281–261 BC), succeeded him. Hellenistic control of Iran would be short-lived, however.

By 238 BC a nomadic Iranian tribe from Central Asia had seized control of the satrapy of Parthia to the east of the Caspian Sea and became known henceforth as the Parthians or the Arsacids, after the eponymous founder of the dynasty, Arsaces I (r. about 238–211 BC). The Parthians spoke a north-west Iranian language related to Median that was written in the Aramaic script. Early Parthian capitals were established at Nysa, now in Turkmenistan, and at Shahr-e Qumis, near Damghan in Iran. The Parthians gradually extended their control over Iran and Mesopotamia. In 141 BC Mithradates I (r. 171–138 BC) was re-crowned at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris on conquering Babylonia and during his reign Parthia was transformed from a small kingdom into a major political power. While Greek influence was strong in the Early Parthian period, and Mithradates I and some of his successors used the title 'philhellene' on their coins, it gradually waned. Mithradates II (r. about 122–91 BC) extended Parthian control to the River Euphrates, which was to become the effective boundary between east and west for the next 750 years. In recognition of his successes, Mithradates II was called 'king of kings' on coins and on cuneiform tablets. Parthian expansion westwards,

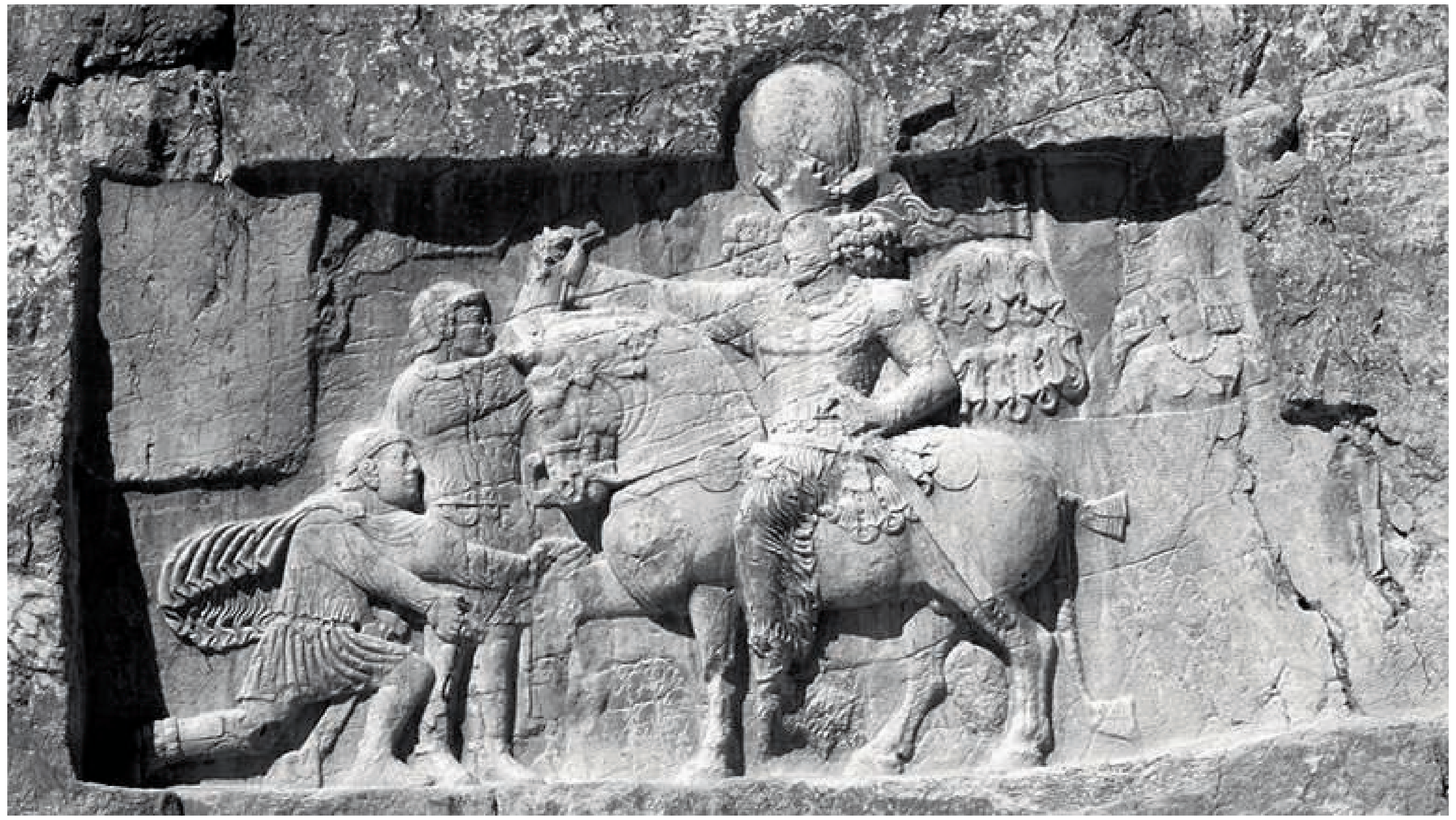


Fig. 7 Rock relief at Naqsh-e Rustam showing the Sasanian king Shapur I commemorating his victories over the Roman emperors Philip the Arab and Valerian

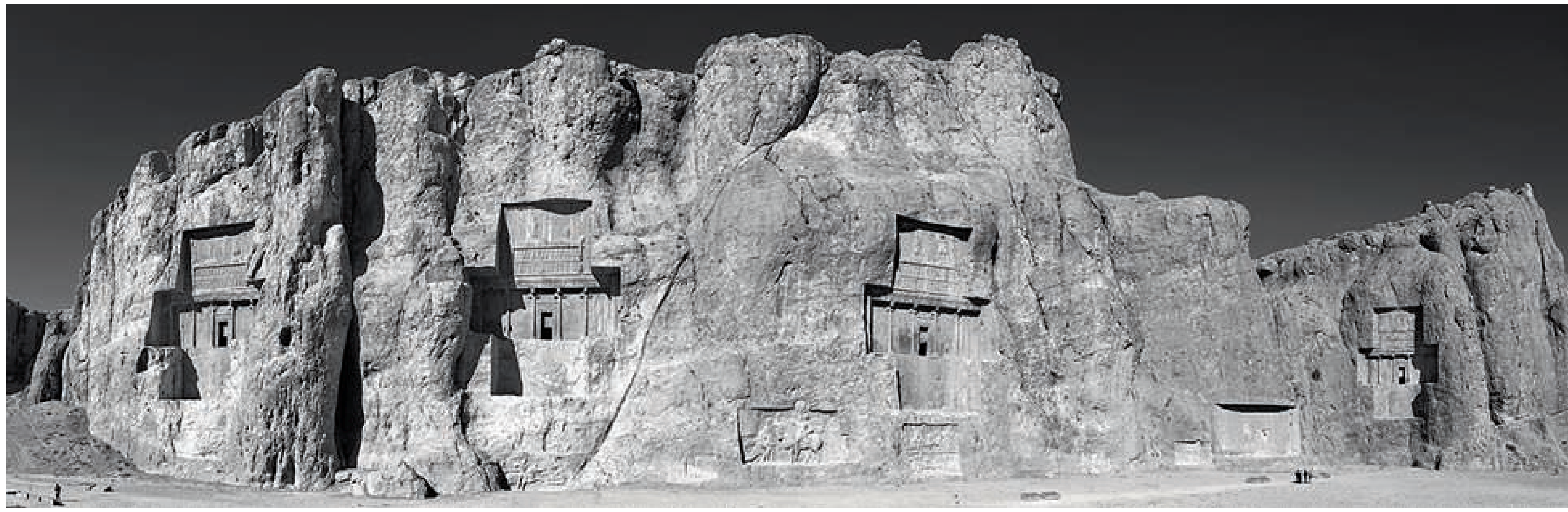


Fig. 8 View of the cliff at Naqsh-e Rustam with Achaemenid tombs above and Sasanian rock reliefs below.

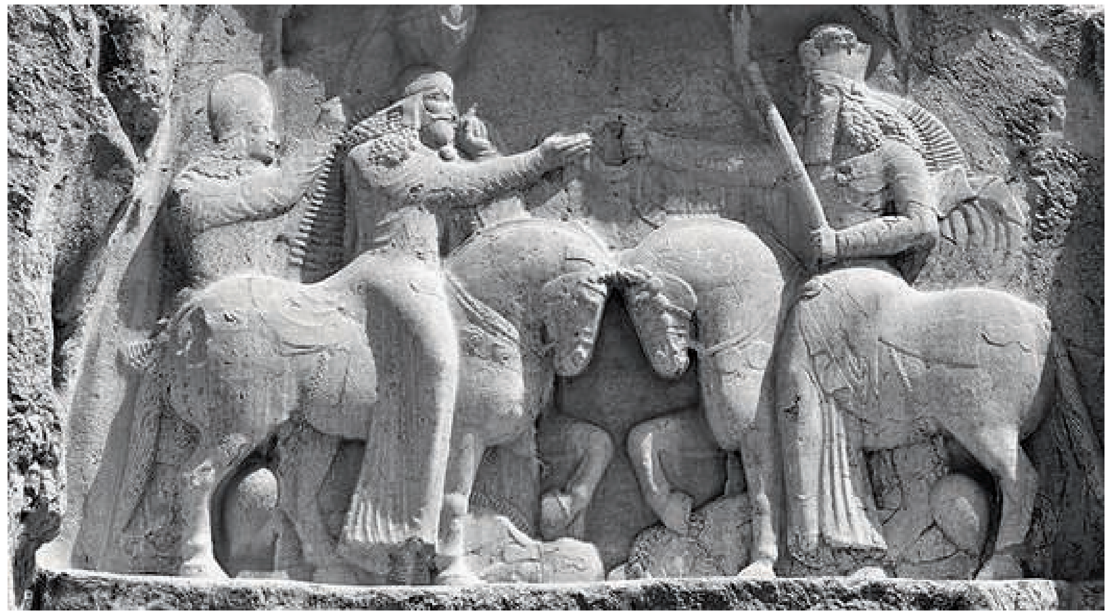


Fig. 9
Rock relief at Naqsh-e Rustam showing the defeated Parthian king Artabanus IV being trampled by the horse of his successor the Sasanian king Ardashir I (left) who is being invested by Ahuramazda (right).

and attempts to gain influence in Armenia, brought Parthia into conflict with Rome. Although a Roman army under the command of Crassus was roundly defeated at Carrhae (modern Harran in Turkey) in 53 BC, when the 'Parthian shot', a technique of shooting arrows backwards from horseback, proved decisive, the conflict was never quite resolved. In AD 116 the Roman emperor Trajan, as part of his Parthian campaign, captured Ctesiphon in southern Mesopotamia and reached the Persian Gulf. But after his death, and under Emperor Hadrian and his successors, Rome abandoned attempts to conquer Parthia.

In AD 224, however, the Parthians were overthrown by another Iranian dynasty, the Sasanians, who took their name from their eponymous founder, Sasan. The first Sasanian king was Ardashir I (r. AD 224–40), who had been a local ruler in Fars. He centralized the government, reformed the coinage and made Zoroastrianism the state religion. But this resurgence of Iranian fortunes, and a desire to control the lucrative trade route that brought silk, spices and other luxury goods from the east to the west, led to renewed conflict with Rome. Ardashir's successor, Shapur I (r. AD 240–72), not only defeated three Roman emperors (Gordian III, Philip the Arab and Valerian), but also conquered Armenia and subdued the Kushan empire in Central Asia. By the end of his reign, the Sasanian empire stretched from the Euphrates to the Indus and included much of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The capital was at Ctesiphon on the River Tigris, on the opposite bank from Seleucia, and the remains of a massive Sasanian palace are testimony to the former grandeur of the city. Struggles with Rome, and later Byzantium, were a recurrent theme during the Sasanian period, and there were successes on both sides. Thus, in AD 363 the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate managed to reach Ctesiphon, and in AD 614 the Sasanian king Khosrow II (r. AD 591–628) captured Jerusalem, carrying off what was said to be 'the true cross'.

Sasanian rule over Iran and Mesopotamia came to an end in the reign of Yazdigird III (r. AD 632–51), when Sasanian forces were defeated by invading Arab armies at Qadisiya near Ctesiphon in AD 637 and at Nahavand in AD 642. How it was possible for the mighty Sasanian empire to be brought down in this way is one of the greatest historical enigmas, and has been much debated. Possible reasons are social discontent within a society that was rigidly hierarchical and prohibited movement between different classes; support for a form of communism as advocated by the prophet Mazdak in the reign of Kavad I (AD 488–531); oppressive taxation; drought and famine; and exhaustion after the long struggles with Rome and Byzantium. Also, the Arabs had been making inroads into Mesopotamia for some years but the potential threat had been ignored. Lastly, we should not ignore the strong appeal that the new Islamic religion may have had in these circumstances.

PARTHIAN POWER

In the early part of the Parthian period there are many indications of Hellenistic influence. This is particularly noticeable at Nysa in Turkmenistan, the Early Parthian capital city and a major trading hub. Here, ivory rhytons (drinking-horns), for example, were mainly decorated with Greek mythological scenes.[1] We also have evidence from coins. Mithradates I described himself on his coins, in Greek, as 'a philhellene' (cat. 84), an inscription that was accompanied by an image of the Greek mythological hero Herakles. While it is possible that Herakles is here syncretized with the Iranian god Verethragna, the image is still in every way Greek. Even in the first century AD Parthian kings were still using Greek on their coins, but now, a century later, the image on the obverse (cat. 85) is characteristically Parthian. Thus King Artabanus II (r. about AD 10–38)[2] is shown front-facing, an artistic innovation introduced in the Parthian period; previously heads had been shown in profile. He wears a diadem and his hair is arranged in two large bunches on either side of his head, the so-called tripartite hairstyle. In addition he wears a typically Parthian crossed-over jacket.

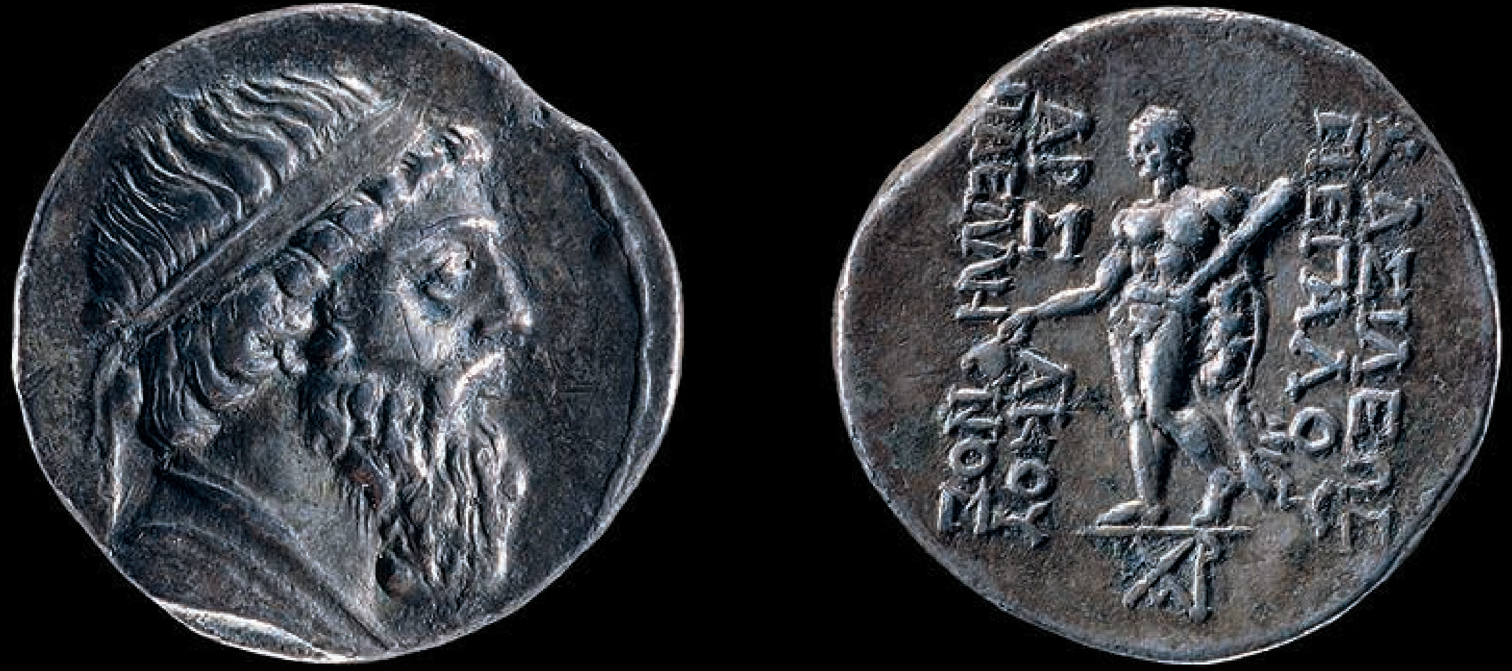
Characteristically Parthian iconography and style in works of art from this date can be clearly seen in the bronze and limestone statuary from a shrine at Shami, near Izeh. A large bronze statue from this site shows a ruler wearing a Parthian outfit of belted crossed-over jacket and leggings pulled up over his trousers.[3] His hair hangs in the usual bunches beneath a headband and he wears a moustache. A smaller alabaster head from Shami is in a similar style but the figure also sports a beard (cat. 90). Similar figures dressed in Parthian costume can be seen in rock reliefs at Bisitun[4] and Sarpol-e Zohab in western Iran. They illustrate scenes of investiture, combat and worship. In this period too, from the time of Vologases I (r. AD 51–78/9), Parthian inscriptions written in Aramaic replaced the Greek inscriptions on coins.

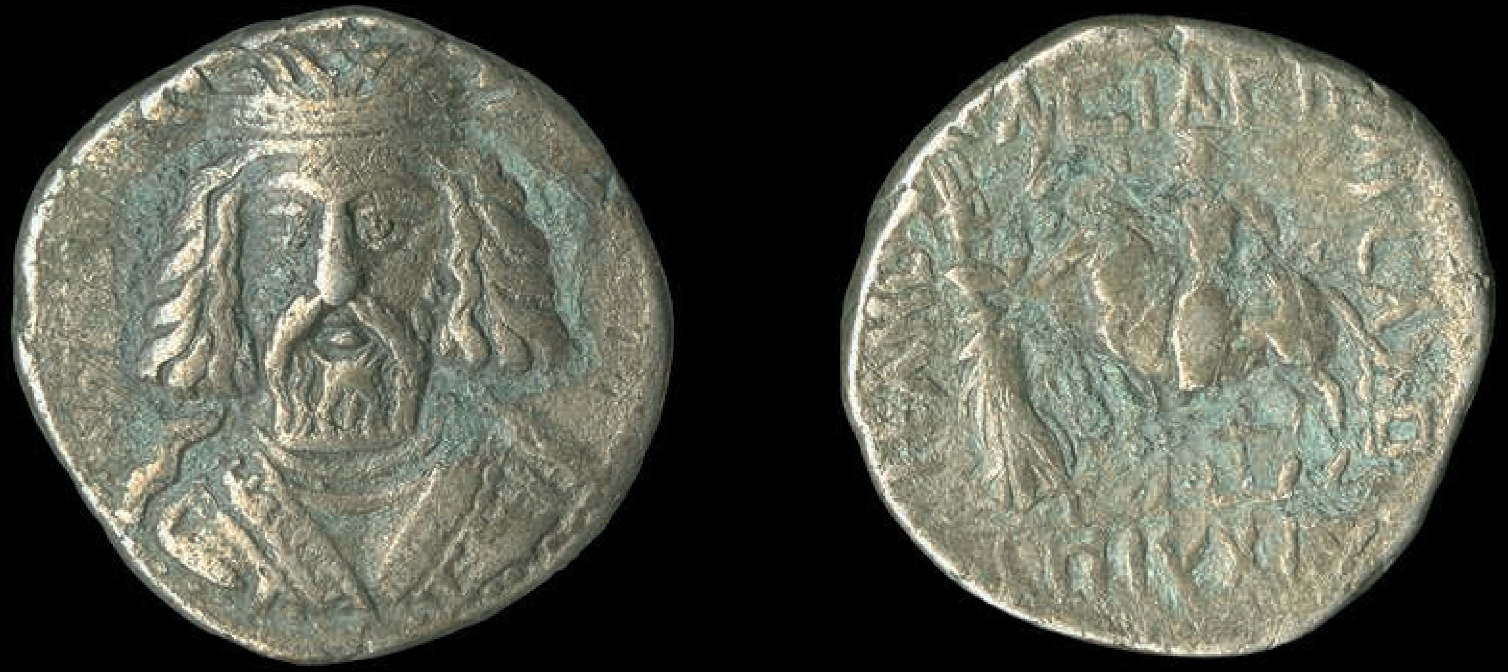
Evidence for art in the Late Parthian period comes mainly from semi-autonomous regional centres such as Elymais in Khuzestan (see cat. 86). Here, many reliefs and statues showing worshipping figures were found at the terraced sanctuary sites of Masjid-e Soleiman and Bard-e Nishandeh, dated to late second–early third century AD.[5] The figures are all represented frontally, and most wear the Parthian tunic and trousers (see cats 87, 88). Elsewhere in Elymais there are rock reliefs of this period at sites including Tang-e Sarvak, Hung-e Nauruzi and Shimbar.[6]

In the minor arts Parthian jewellery is of a high technical standard and often is almost indistinguishable from contemporary Roman jewellery. Gold necklaces, earrings and finger-rings make lavish use of granulation and filigree work and are often inlaid with turquoise and garnets. The latter appear for the first time in the ancient Near East in the Hellenistic period, having been introduced from India by Alexander the Great. Characteristic of the Parthian period in Mesopotamia are slipper-shaped coffins in green-glazed pottery, decorated with figures in high relief representing variously warriors wearing Parthian belted jacket and trousers, naked women, or people reclining on banqueting couches.[7]

In architecture, the iwan, or *ayvan*, became a widespread architectural form. This was a great hall, open on one side, with a high barrel-vaulted roof that became a distinctive feature of Parthian monumental buildings, particularly in Mesopotamia. This development was made possible by the use of fast-setting gypsum mortar. Probably allied to the increasing use of gypsum mortar at this time was the development of gypsum stucco decoration, which had also been attested in the Hellenistic period at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. There are fine examples of stucco wall decoration at Qaleh-e Yazdigird, near Qasr-e Shirin, in a palace dating from the Late Parthian period.[8]

Parthia benefited greatly from its strategic position between Rome and China, and was in close contact with other cities on the East-West trade routes, such as Palmyra and Dura Europos in Syria and Hatra in northern Mesopotamia. At all these places there is a good deal of Parthian influence, particularly at Hatra[9] and Palmyra,[10] where life-size worshipper figures often appear in Parthian dress. Many of the costumes are elaborately decorated and accompanied by exquisitely designed belts with animal figures.





84

Tetradrachm of Mithradates I

about 141–139/8 BC

Minted at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Iraq
Silver, diameter 2.9 cm

British Museum, 1848,0803.22
Purchased 1848

The obverse of this silver tetradrachm of Mithradates I (r. about 171–138 BC) shows the king wearing a diadem, his head in profile. The diadem (ornamental headband), with its long ties, represents the *khvarenah*, or 'kingly glory'. On the reverse is a standing figure, that of the syncretic Herakles-Verethragna, wearing a lion's skin and holding a cup and a club (see cat. 89). The Greek inscription on the reverse reads: '[Coin of the] Great King Arsaces, [the] Philhellene'.

Warwick Wroth, *Catalogue of the Coins of Parthia*, Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum, vol. 23 (London 1903), p. 12, no. 48; pl. 3.7

85

Tetradrachm of Artabanus II

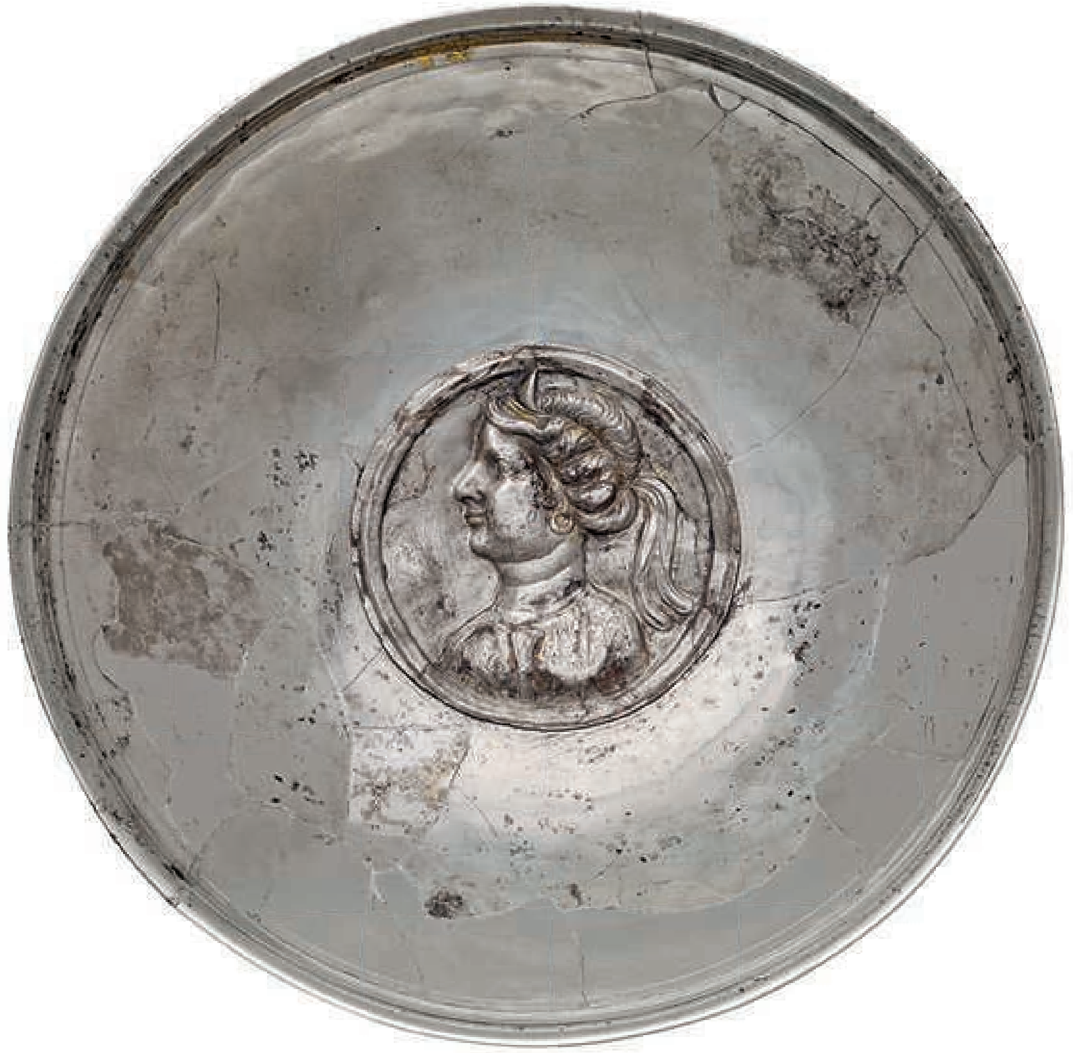
AD 27

Minted at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Iraq
Silver, diameter 2.7 cm

British Museum, 1887,0502.16
Obtained by H. Rassam 1887

On the obverse of this silver tetradrachm of Artabanus II (r. about AD 10–38) is a bust of the king wearing a diadem and crossed-over jacket. On the reverse, the king on horseback receives a palm branch from a goddess. The Greek inscription on the reverse reads: '[Coin of] King Arsaces, the Just, the Illustrious'. This coin was minted in the month of Gorpiaios (August) in the Seleucid year 338, which is equivalent to AD 27.

Warwick Wroth, *Catalogue of the Coins of Parthia*, Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum, vol. 23 (London 1903), p. 149, no. 30



86

Bowl with bust of a woman

AD 177

Silver, height 5.2 cm, diameter 25 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1077
Purchased 2016

A separately applied medallion in the centre of this silver bowl shows the head and shoulders of a woman in high relief with an elaborate hairstyle, earrings and a low-fitting dress. It is unclear whether the figure is embossed or cast. On the reverse of the bowl (which has been pieced together from fragments) is a dotted three-line Elymaean inscription. According to Professor Nicholas Sims-Williams,[11] this inscription is a dedication by Kamnaskires, king of Elymais, for his life, his wife's life and his children's lives, and is dated to 488 Seleucid era, which is equivalent to AD 177. There are comparable Elymaean texts on four bowls in the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait.[12]

87

Relief with male worshipper

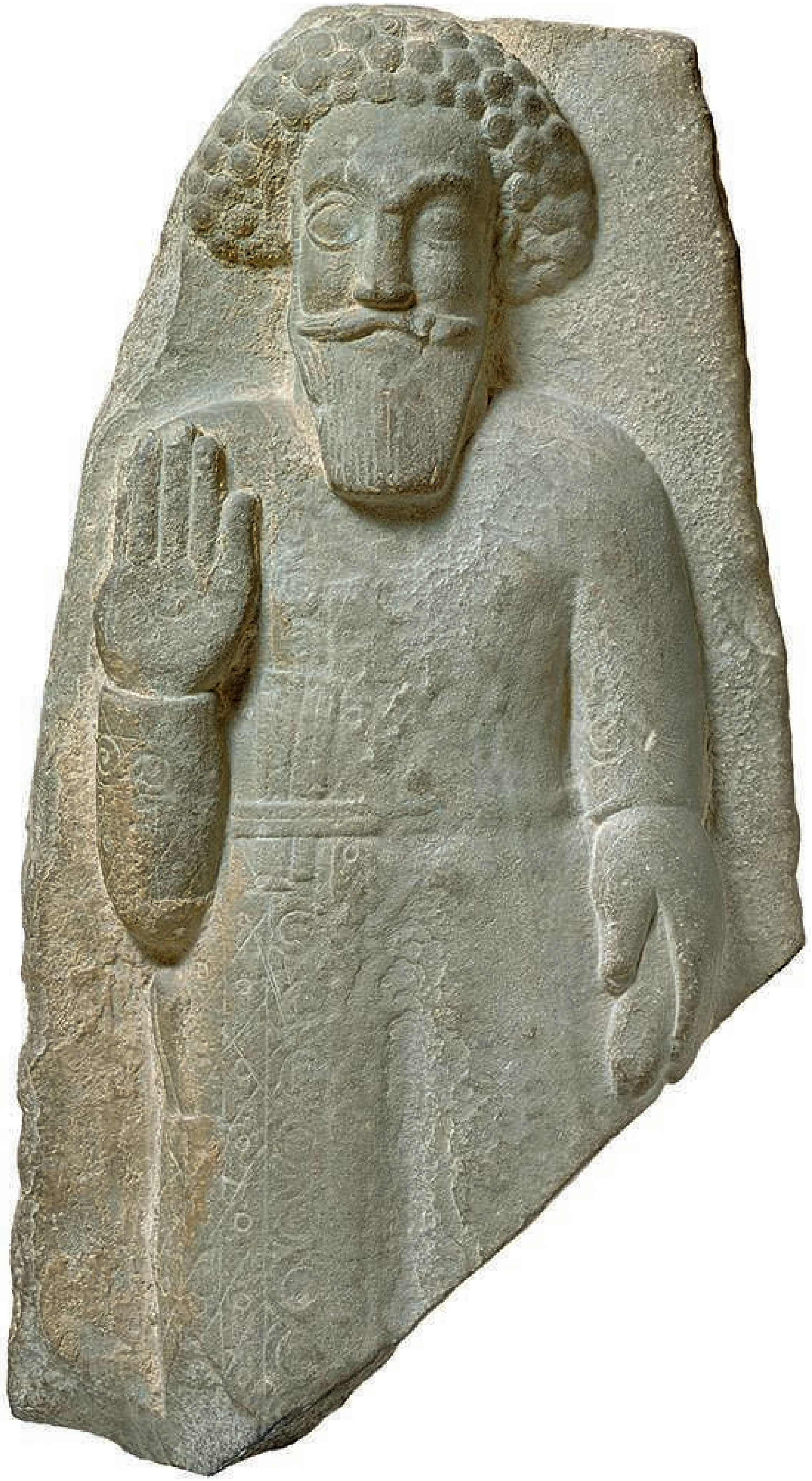
about AD 100–200

Calcareous sandstone, height 76.8 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 51.72.1
Purchased 1951

This stone slab of the Parthian period shows the figure of a standing man, carved in low relief. He has a bushy hairstyle arranged in spiral ringlets, a beard and a prominent moustache. One hand is raised in a gesture of adoration. He wears a richly patterned belted tunic, which, although the bottom part of the figure is missing, would have been knee-length and worn over trousers. Tucked into his belt are two items that may be book-rolls. He faces to the front in the characteristic style of the Late Parthian period. This relief is unprovenanced but may be compared with worshipper figures at the sanctuary sites of Bard-e Nishandeh and Masjid-e Soleiman.

Blair Fowlkes-Childs and Michael Seymour, *The World between Empires: Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East* (New York 2019), no. 180



88

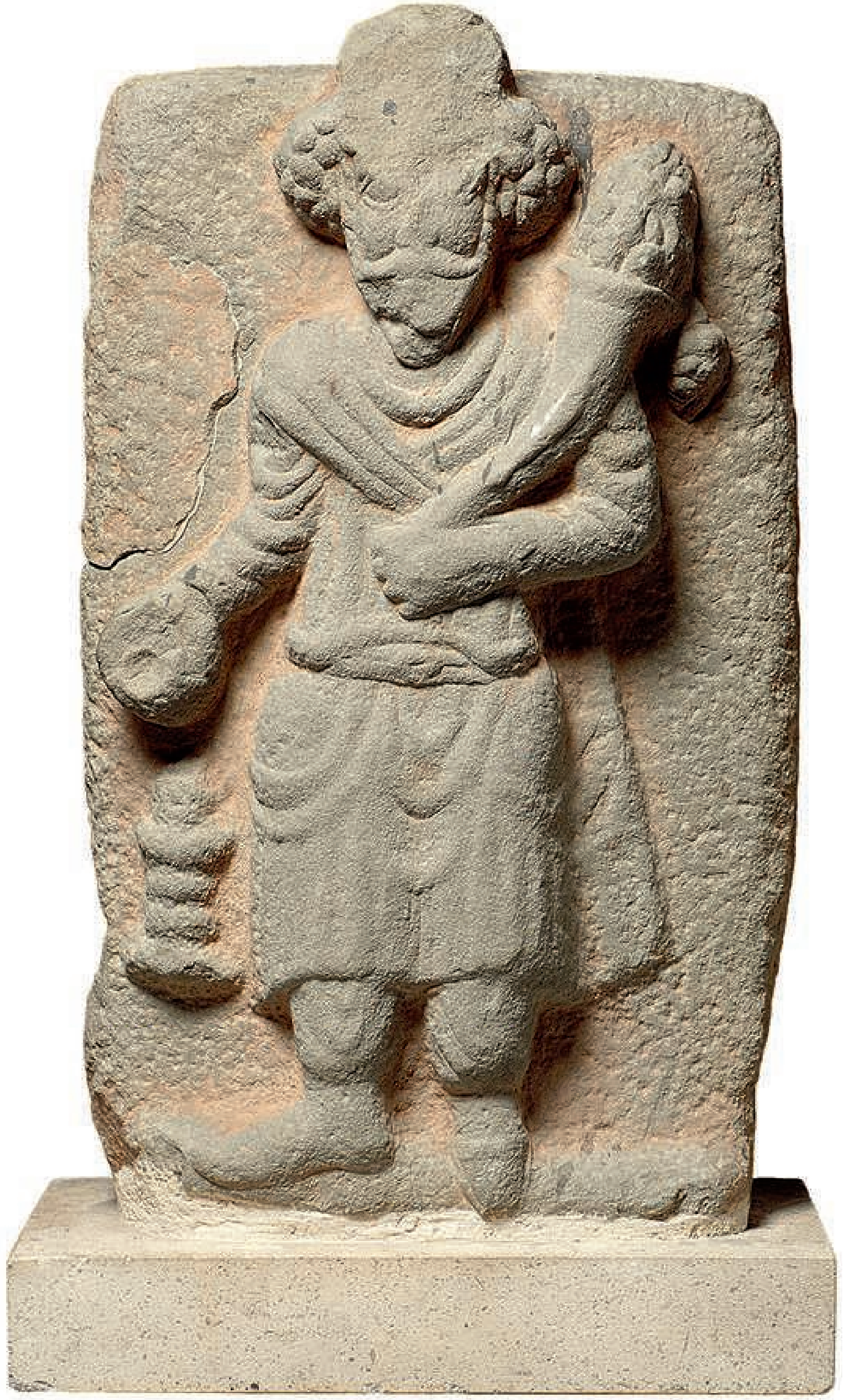
Relief with figure performing ritual

about AD 100–200

Excavated at Masjid-e Soleiman, Khuzestan, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 36.8
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 7302

The figure shown frontally in high relief on this stone slab is thought to be a Parthian king. He has a typical tripartite Parthian hairstyle, with his hair arranged in three bunches on the top and sides of his head, and is shown with a moustache and pointed beard. He wears a belted tunic over baggy trousers with a cape over his shoulders. In his left hand he holds a cornucopia, or 'horn of plenty', and his right hand is placed just above a small fire-altar or incense-burner. He is performing a ritual and making an offering. This figure was found in Room 13 of the temple dedicated to Herakles-Verethragna at Masjid-e Soleiman, during excavations directed by Roman Ghirshman between 1964 and 1972. The relief was presumably placed there by the king as an act of piety.

Roman Ghirshman, *Terrasses sacrées de Bard-è Néchandeh et Masjid-i Solaiman* (Paris 1976), vol. 2, pl. LXXIX, no. 2 and pl. 32



89

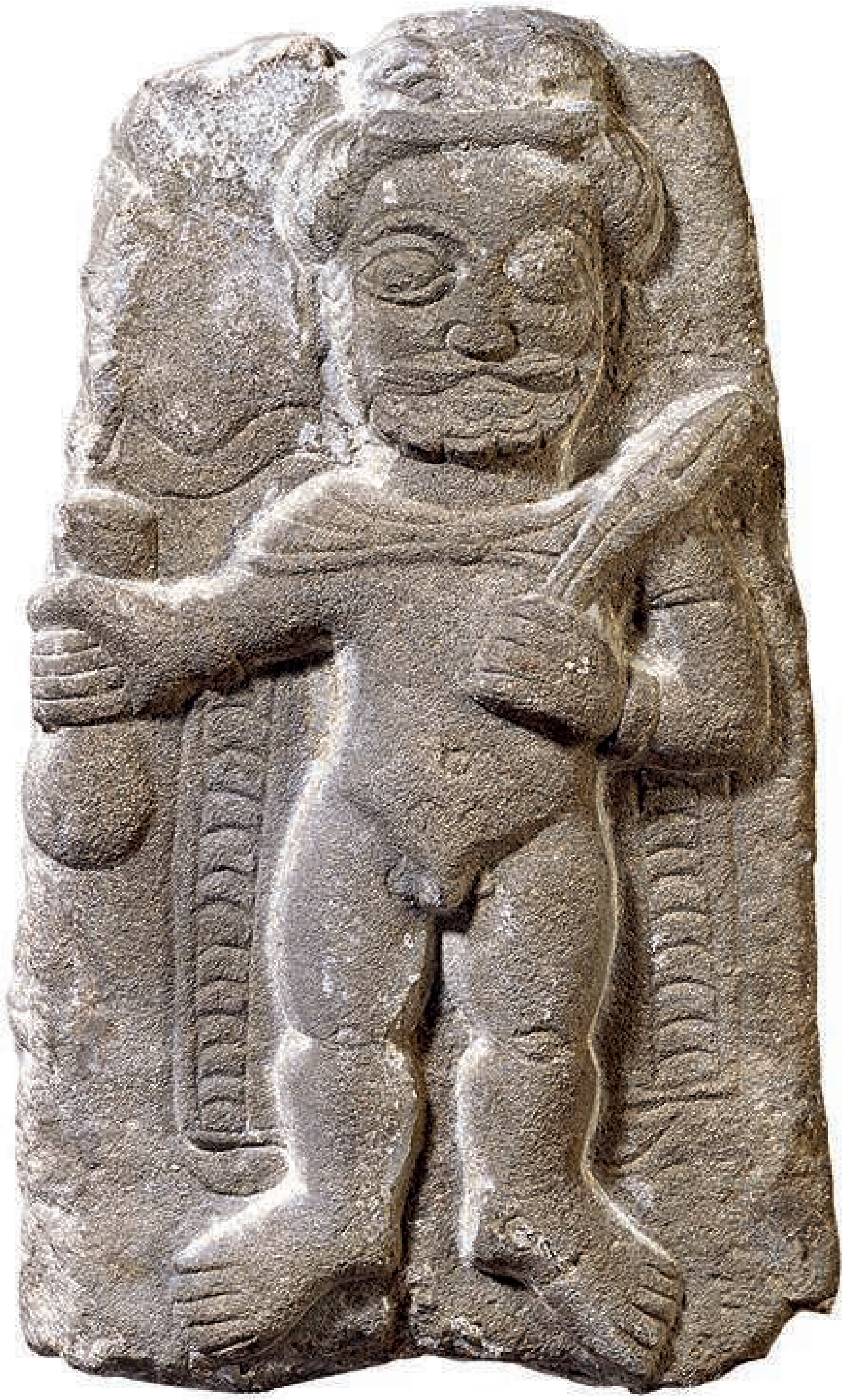
Relief of Heracles-Verethragna

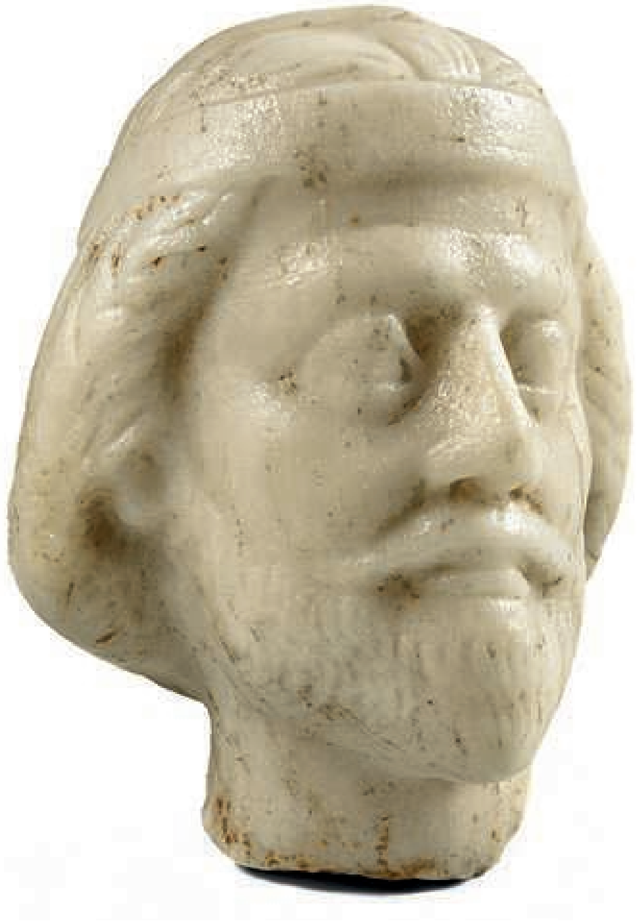
about AD 100–200

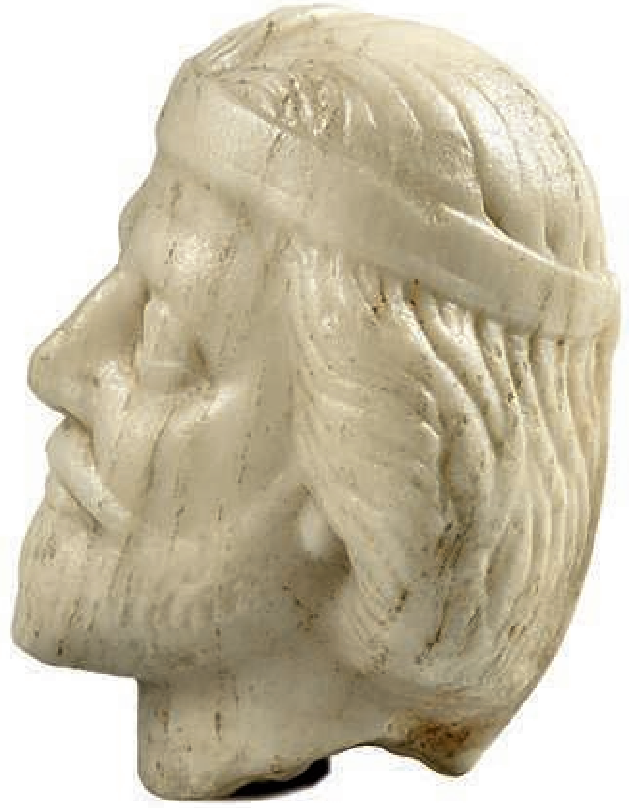
Probably from Masjid-e Soleiman, Khuzestan, south-west Iran
Limestone, height 30.4 cm
British Museum, 127335
Presented 1920

The male figure shown on this stone slab faces to the front and wears only a cloak, fixed at the neck and covering the back of his body. His front is exposed. He is bearded with a moustache and wears a diadem on his head. In his left hand he carries a club, which has led to his identification as Heracles-Verethragna. In the art of this period, the Zoroastrian deity Verethragna – the victorious warrior-god and one of the protectors of the 'kingly glory' – is thought to be syncretized with the Greek hero Heracles. This slab is said to be from Masjid-e Soleiman, where excavations were undertaken between 1964 and 1972, led by Roman Ghirshman.

John Curtis, *Ancient Persia* (London 2000),p. 69, fig. 77







90

Head of a male statue

about AD 0–200

Found at Shami, Khuzestan,
south-west Iran
Alabaster, height 11 cm
National Museum of Iran, 2087

This head of an alabaster statue shows a Parthian nobleman, with moustache and beard, wearing a diadem. It was recovered by local villagers from a shrine at Shami, near Izeh/Malamir, in Khuzestan together with other stone and bronze statuary. The bronze finds include a life-size statue of a Parthian ruler, which is now one of the treasures of the National Museum or Iran in Tehran. These finds were seen by the British archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein in Malamir in 1936 before being transferred to Tehran. Stein went on to make a plan of the looted shrine, which seems to have been in use from the Hellenistic period into Parthian times. Stein described this alabaster head as being 'unmistakably Iranian in type but treated in good Hellenistic style'.

Aurel Stein, *Old Routes of Western Iran* (London 1940), pls 48–9; Malcolm Colledge, *Parthian Art* (London 1977), pl. 8c

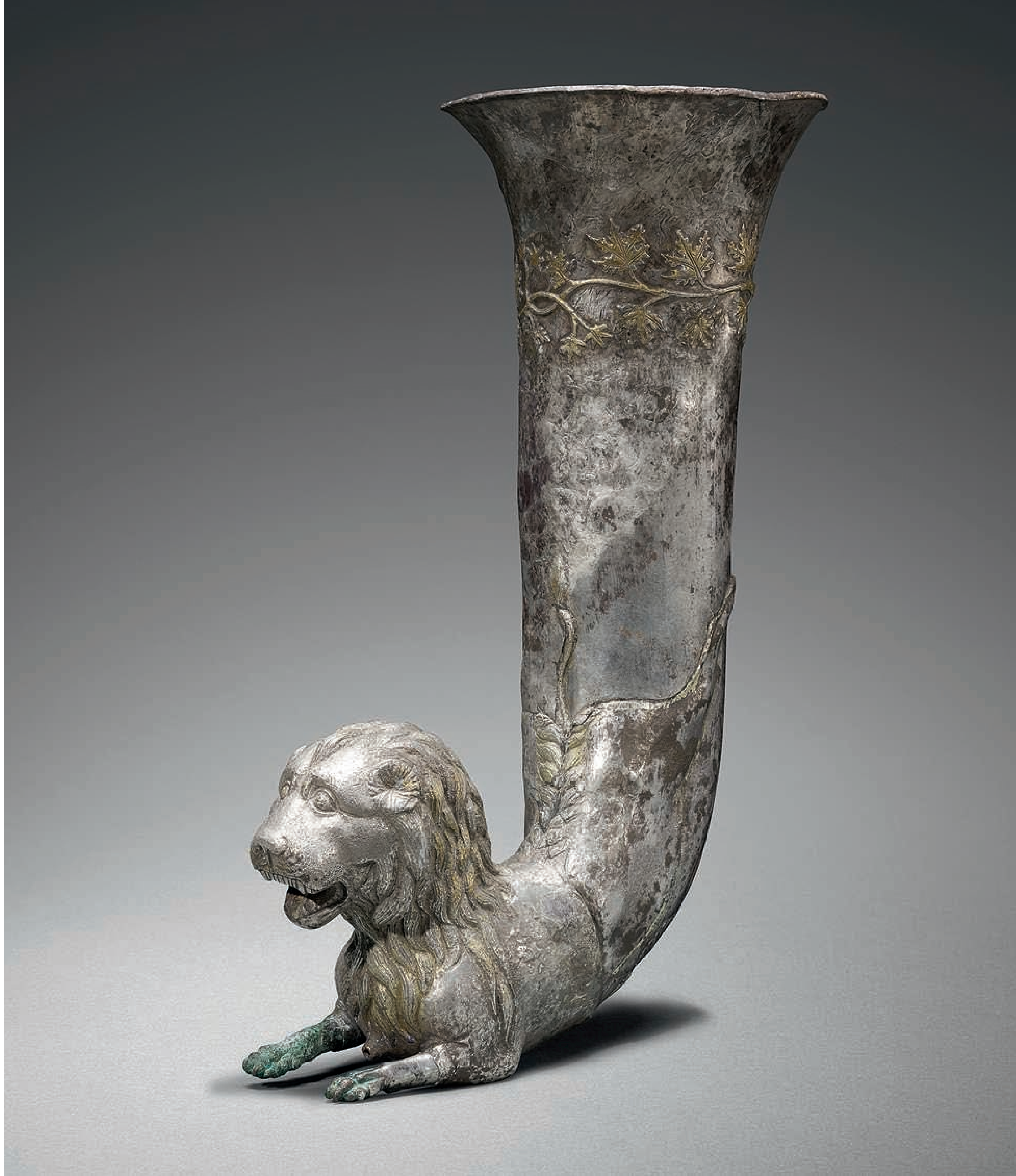
91

Rhyton

about 200 BC–AD 100

Silver gilt, height 30.7 cm, width 21 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1030
Purchased 2007

The protome of this silver-gilt rhyton is separately made and is in the form of the foreparts of a snarling lion with outstretched legs. The back of the lion and its rear legs are shown in low relief at the bottom of the horn. The naturalistic way in which the head and foreparts of the animal are depicted is reminiscent of Hellenistic art. The top of the horn is decorated with vine leaves around the circumference. There is a pouring spout in the centre of the animal's chest. A similar rhyton with lion protome is in the Freer Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C. Parthian period rhytons with protomes identified as 'caracal cats' or Persian lynxes are to be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and in the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait.[13] The al-Sabah Collection also holds a Parthian rhyton with vine leaf decoration around the top of the horn, but there the protome is in the form of a horse.



SASANIAN SPLENDOUR

The splendour of the Sasanian period is reflected in the grand palaces that have survived, in whole or in part, at Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and at Firuzabad and Bishapur in Iran. These palaces are characterized by *ayvans*, great halls with barrel-vaulted roofs, introduced during the Parthian period but by now reaching massive proportions. Architectural innovations included domes, built up from squinches in the corners of square rooms, which were to become very popular in the Islamic period. Internal wall decoration was often in the form of stucco mouldings and panels (cats 93, 109), the latter showing elaborate jousting, investiture and religious scenes, or more usually animal figures, human busts, and geometric and floral motifs. Exceptionally there are Roman-inspired mosaics, as at Bishapur,[14] but it is suggested they may have been laid by Roman prisoners. Wall paintings were probably widespread but few have survived except in dry areas such as Sistan, where there are splendid paintings in a sacred precinct at Kuh-e Khwaja.[15]

A characteristic feature of the Sasanian period are the rock carvings in different parts of Iran.[16] Here, the Sasanian kings were following an Iranian tradition that goes back to the third millennium BC. These reliefs were carved alongside prominent highways, in places of religious significance, or at sites where there were earlier monuments such as Naqsh-e Rustam, where Sasanian reliefs were carved beneath the rock-cut tombs of the Achaemenid kings. In this way, the Sasanian kings were associating themselves with their illustrious ancestors. The Sasanian reliefs again show investiture scenes (in which the king is being given the authority to rule, usually by the supreme god Ahuramazda) and jousting, religious or victory scenes, such as a relief at Naqsh-e Rustam that shows King Shapur on horseback with the vanquished Roman emperors paying obeisance.[17] The carvings in a rock-cut *ayvan* at Taq-e Bustan are particularly magnificent, showing the investiture of Khosrow II on the back wall and on the side walls boar hunts and deer hunts.[18] These hunting scenes are apparently taking place in a game reserve or a paradise (pleasure garden).

Among the artistic products of the Sasanian era pride of place should go to the decorated silverware for which this period is renowned. Popular shapes included dishes, flasks and ewers (cats 95–9, 103–7). The bowls typically show the king on horseback hunting lions and other wild animals, as well as investiture, religious and banqueting scenes, birds, or less often human busts. Sometimes the bowls have Middle Persian (Pahlavi) inscriptions giving personal names. Most of the bowls are gilded and usually the decoration is on separate pieces of metal that are crimped onto the basic shape. The result is a triumph of the silversmith's art and these silver vessels were as highly prized in antiquity as they are today. They have been found throughout the length and breadth of the Sasanian empire with most examples coming from Central Asia, which accounts for the fact that the finest collection of Sasanian silver is now in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. There are also remarkable bronze castings from this period (cats 92, 94), while among glassware bowls with faceted decoration (such as cat. 100) were popular.

The many luxury goods in circulation in the Sasanian empire included pearls, semi-precious stones, ivory, ostrich eggs and silks. The production of silk became possible in the Sasanian period when the secret of silk farming (sericulture) was learned from the Chinese. Sasanian silks were widely traded and examples have survived in religious establishments in Europe and North Africa. They are brilliantly coloured and designs feature birds with diadems tied around their necks and the mythical Senmurv (cats 107, 108).

92

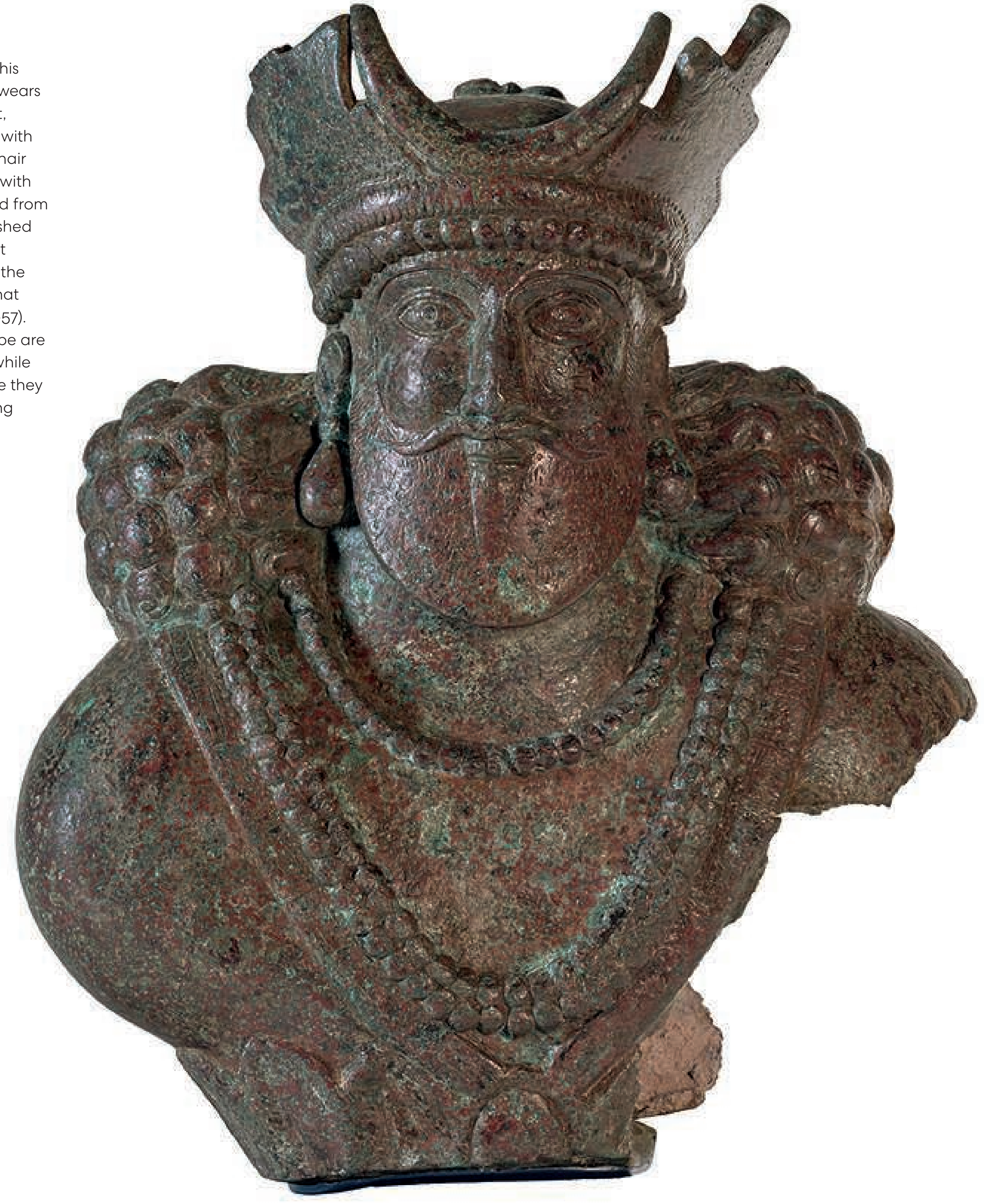
Royal bust

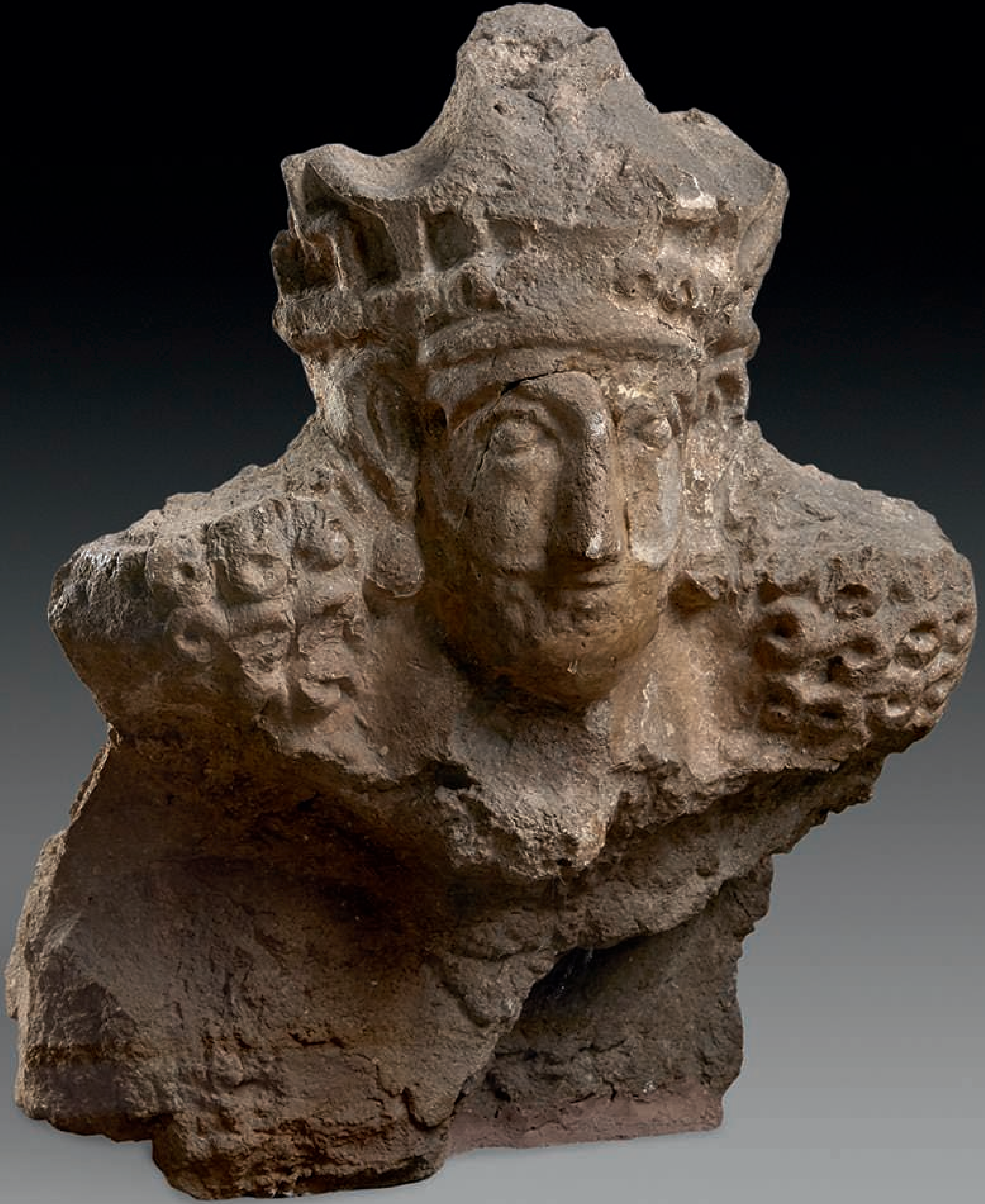
about AD 439–57

Bronze, height 31.2 cm, width 24 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2065
Purchased 2016

The bust of a Sasanian king or prince emerging from lotus petals is shown in this heavy bronze hollow casting. The figure wears a crown with crescent moon at the front, flanked by crenellations, and a diadem with ties that fall down his back. Bunches of hair rest on his shoulders and he is adorned with three necklaces. A pendant is suspended from a ribbon around his neck. There is a finished edge to the bottom part of the bust that still survives. The form of the crown and the arrangement of the jewellery suggest that the king might be Yazdigird II (r. AD 439–57). Some six other Sasanian busts of this type are known,[19] not all of the same date, and while they may not all be genuine it is possible they all come from the same shrine containing busts of Sasanian kings.





93

Bust of a king

about AD 400–500

Excavated at Kish, Iraq
Stucco, height 45 cm

Ashmolean Museum, AN 1932.980
Presented by the Oxford Field Museum Expedition, 1933

A Sasanian king is shown in this nearly life-size stucco bust from Kish in Mesopotamia. He wears a crown with stepped crenellations and pearl earrings, and two large bunches of hair rest on his shoulders. The type of crown dates from the reign of Bahram V (AD 420–38). There is a comparable stucco bust, also from Kish, in the Field Museum of Natural History.[20] Kish had been a major city in the Sumerian period (third millennium BC) and again became an important centre in the Sasanian period. It lay a short distance to the south of the Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon, and several Sasanian palaces with stucco statuary were discovered there. Stucco architectural and figural decoration had been introduced in the Parthian period and became widespread in the Sasanian period.

Roger Moorey, *Ancient Iran* (Oxford 1975), frontispiece

94

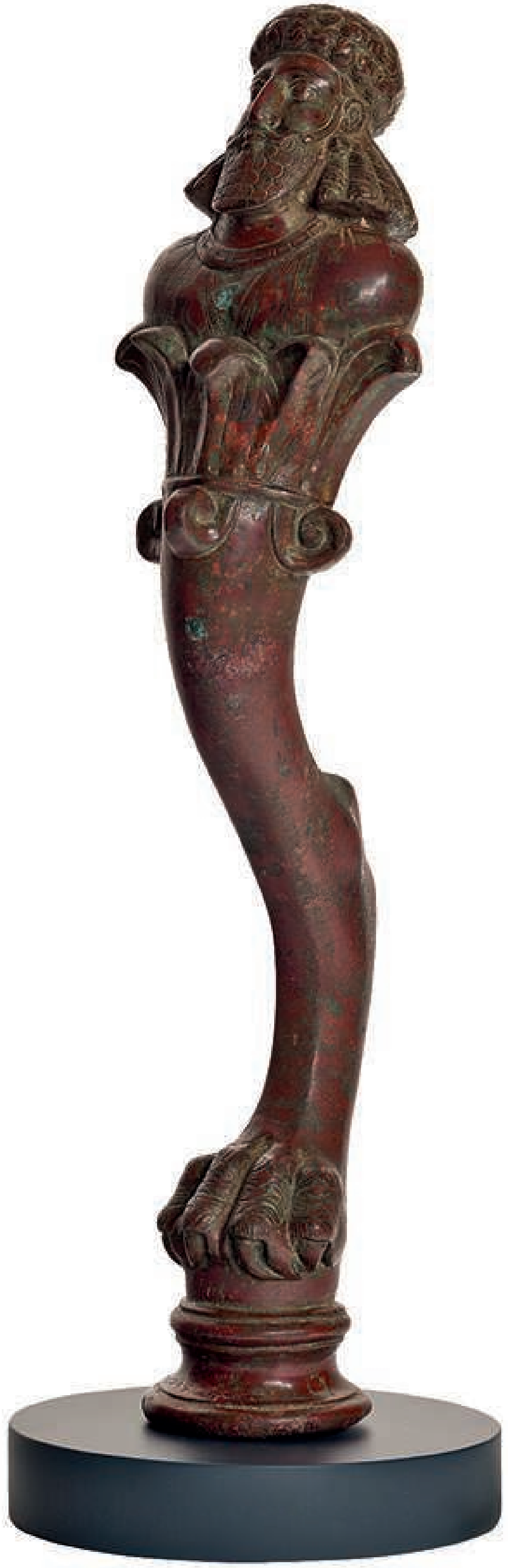
Furniture leg

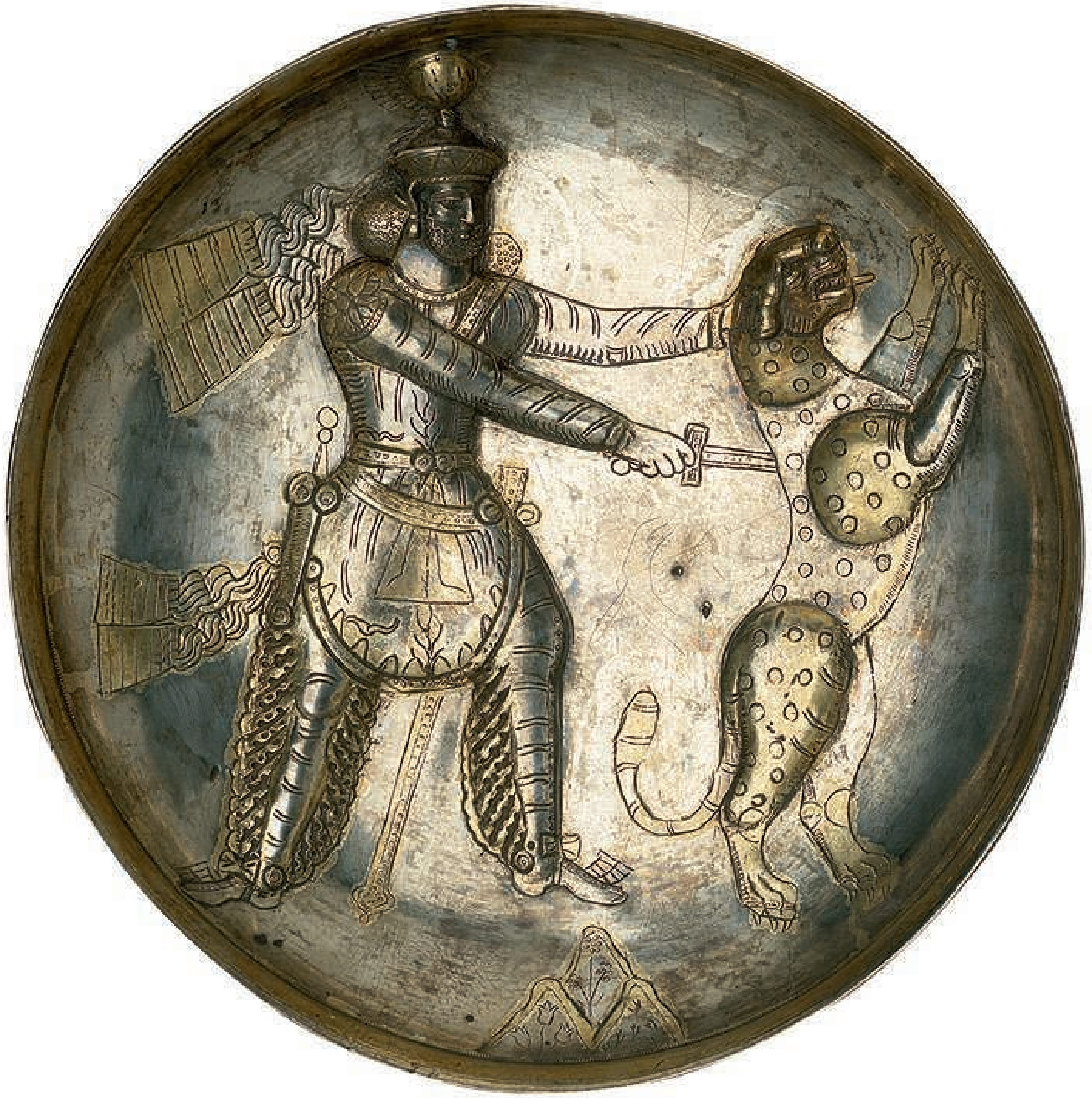
about AD 250–400

Bronze, height 36 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2064
Purchased 2014

At the top of this cast bronze furniture leg is the bust of a bearded Sasanian nobleman, arising out of a lotus flower beneath which is a lion's leg with a paw at the bottom. The nobleman has a full head of hair, arranged in ringlets, and a beard, and wears a tunic on which there is incised decoration. He wears large pearl earrings and has a torc around his neck. At the back there is a broken bar by which this leg was attached to another piece. Other Sasanian bronze furniture legs standing on lion's paws are known, but usually incorporate griffins rather than human busts. Such furniture legs might have supported bench thrones or tables.





95

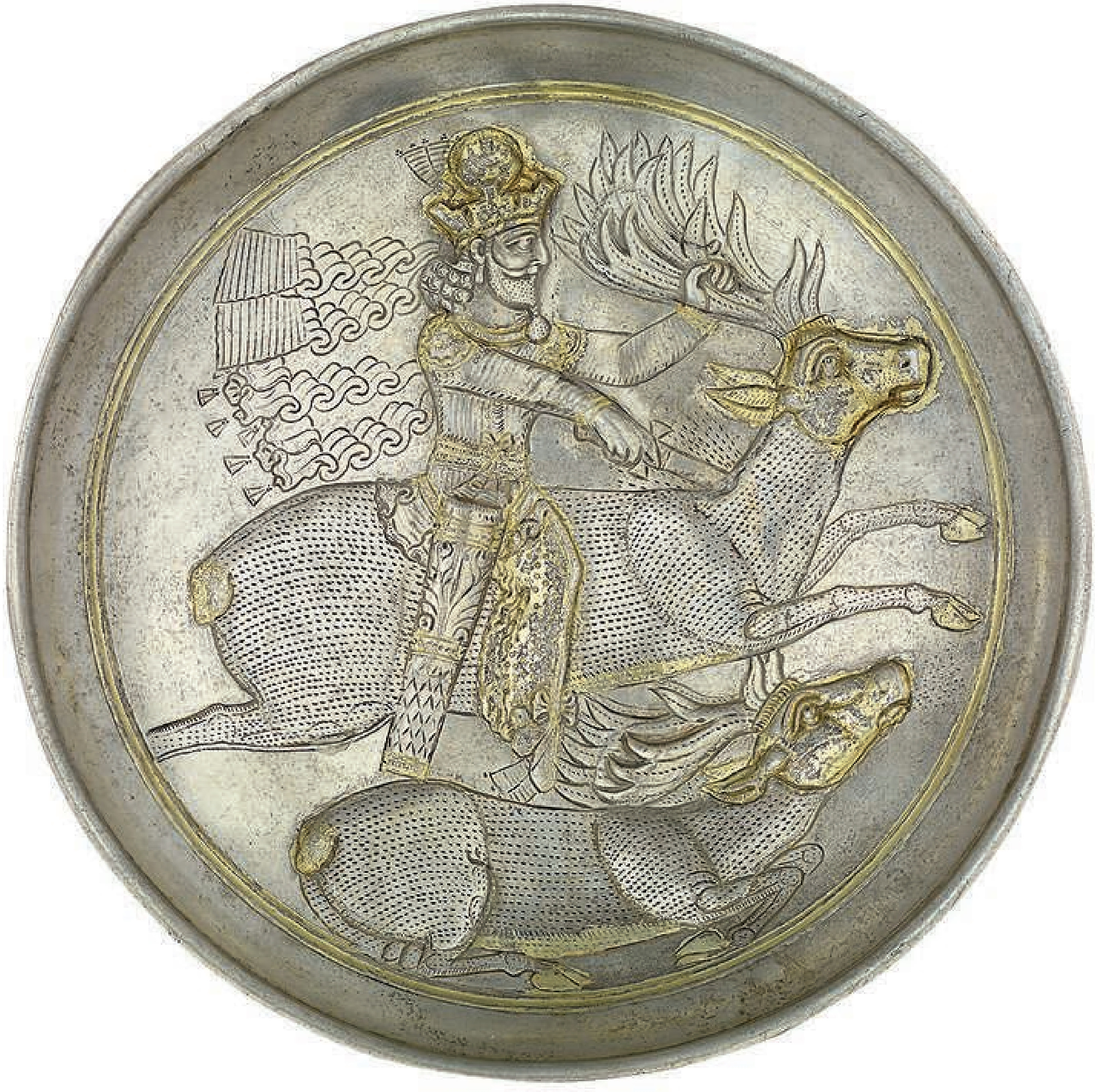
Dish showing a king killing a leopard

about AD 309–79

Found near Perm, Russia
Silver gilt, diameter 21.7 cm
State Hermitage Museum, s-42

A Sasanian king killing a leopard is represented on this silver-gilt dish. The standing king grasps the leopard by the ear and plunges a dagger into its side. The king can be identified by the cloth-covered globe on top of his crown as Shapur II (r. AD 309–79). There are diadem ties behind his head and attached to the dagger sheath at his side; a scabbard for his sword can be seen between his legs. The leopard's spots are indicated by small circles. Leopards are known in Iran, the Caucasus, Afghanistan and Central Asia. The three humps at the bottom of the dish show that the scene is set in mountainous country. An inscription on the back of the dish in cursive Sogdian records the weight. It was found in 1907 in the environs of the village of Klimova, near Perm in Russia, just to the west of the Ural Mountains.

Prudence Harper, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian period, Vol. 1: Royal Imagery* (New York 1981), pp. 74–6, pls xv, 24; *Splendeur des Sassanides*, exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 58



96

Dish showing a king hunting stags

about AD 309–79

Silver gilt, diameter 18 cm
British Museum, 124091
Acquired 1908

This silver dish, partially gilded, shows a Sasanian king hunting stags. The king has leapt onto the back of a stag and, grasping its antlers with one hand, stabs it in the neck with the other. A second stag, represented beneath the first one, is dead or dying, with blood streaming from its mouth. The king wears a diadem with flowing ties and a crown with stepped crenellations surmounted by a cloth-covered globe. This type of crown belongs to the period AD 240–72, the reign of Shapur I, but the style of the dish and the dress of the king point to the reign of his successor, Shapur II (AD 309–79), suggesting that this piece was made in the later period and was deliberately archaising. It is said to have been found in Turkey.

Prudence Harper, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian period, Vol. 1: Royal Imagery* (New York 1981), pp. 57–60, pl. 13; *Splendeur des Sassanides*, exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 59

97

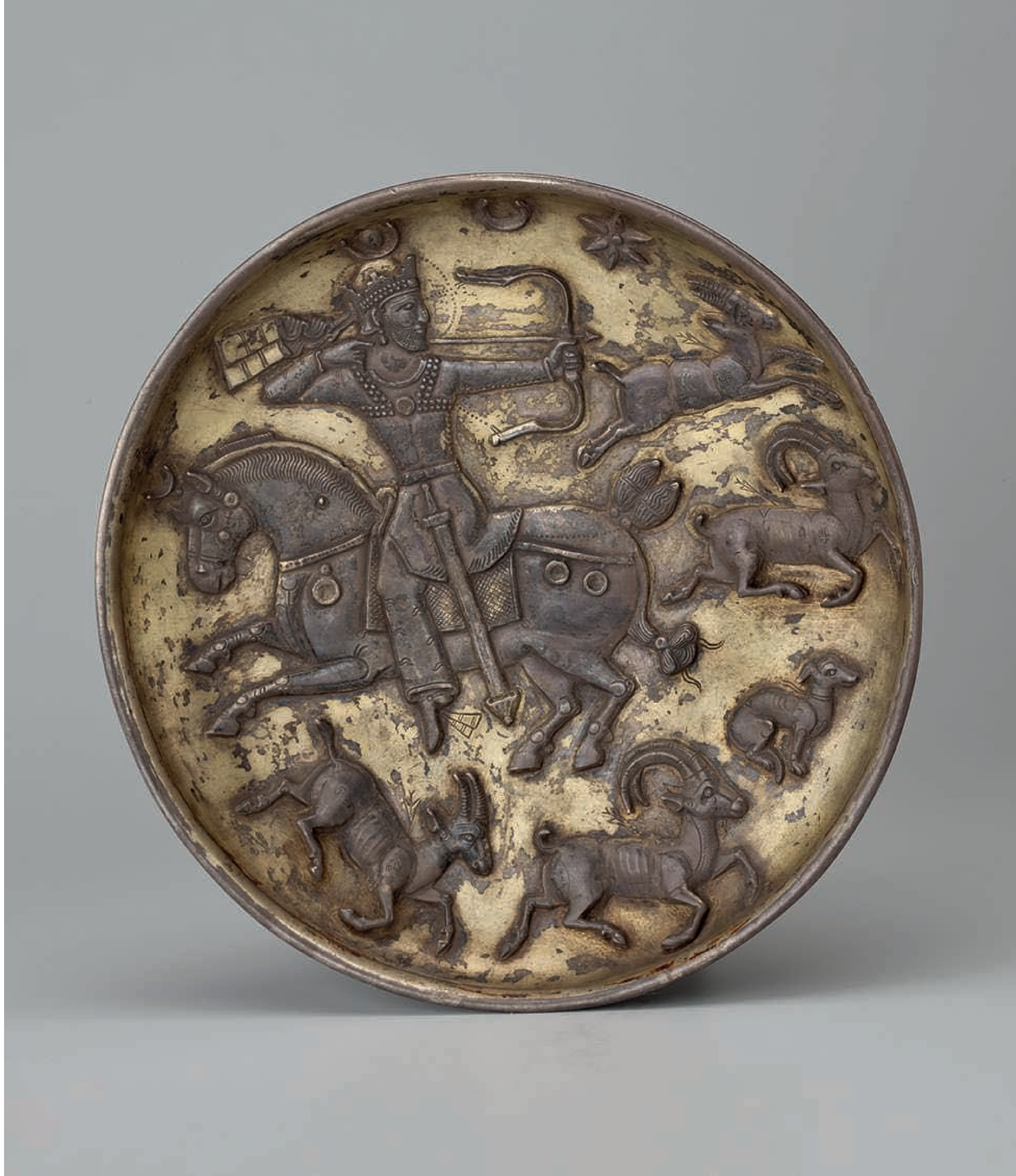
Dish showing a king hunting ibexes and gazelles

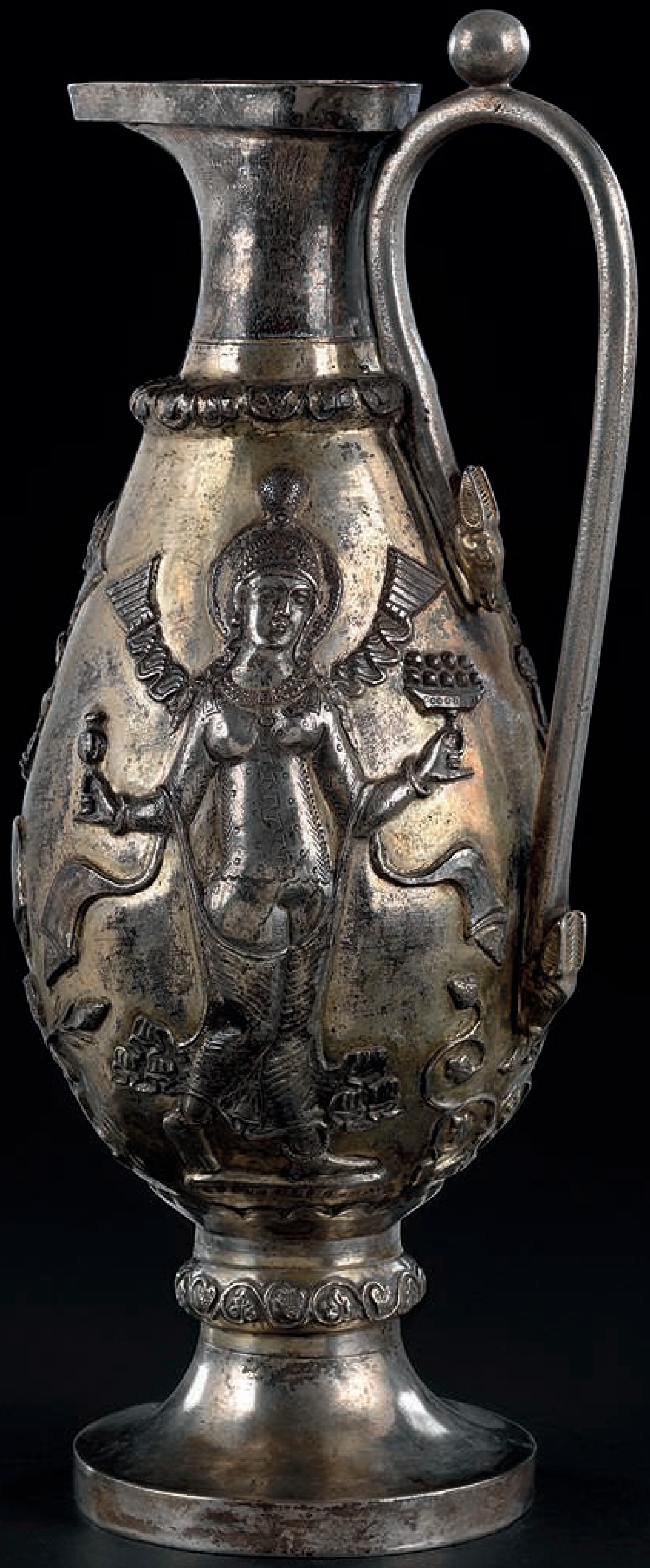
about AD 484–629

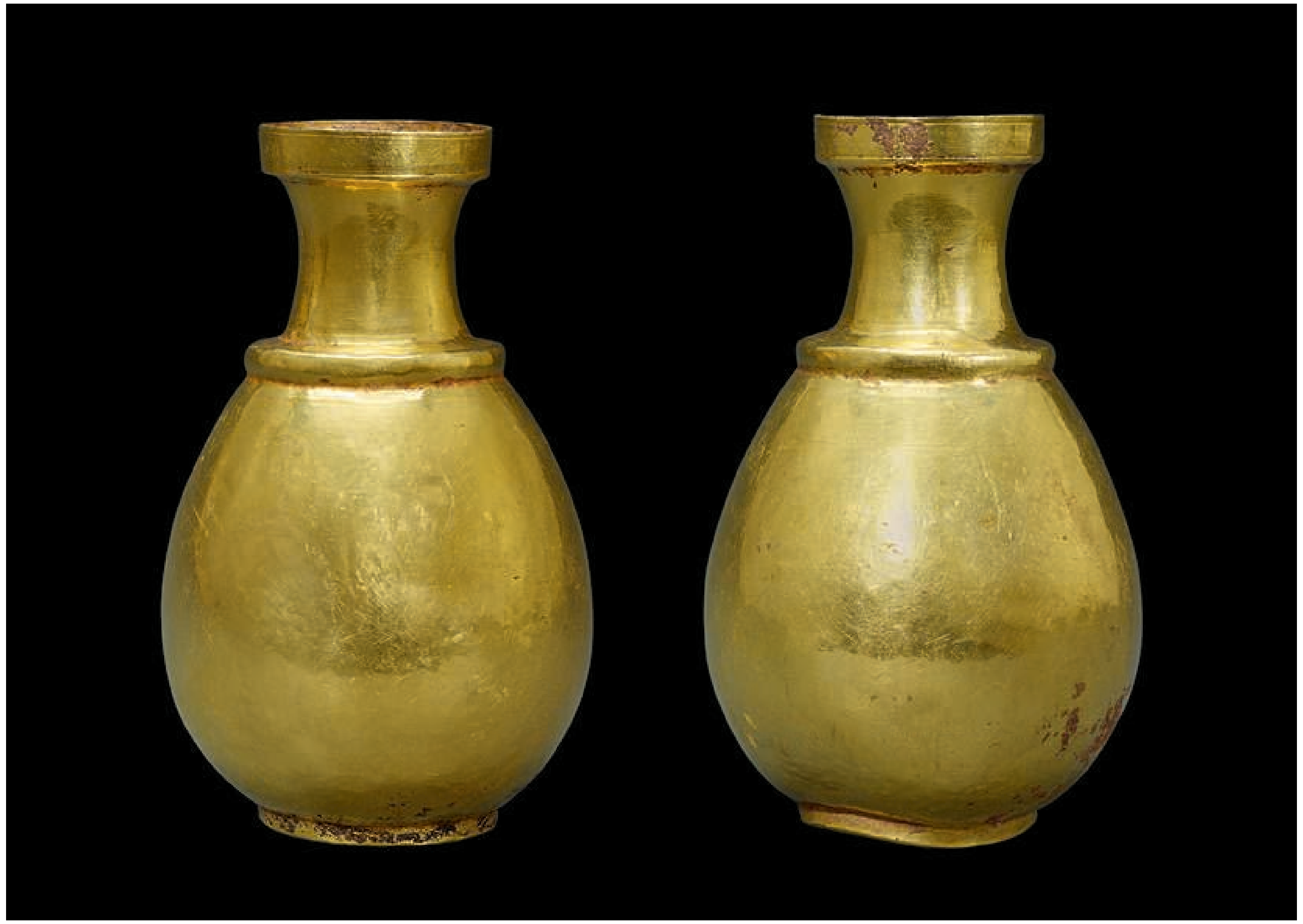
Found near Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia
Silver gilt, diameter 20.3 cm
State Hermitage Museum, s-297

A Sasanian king on horseback hunting a pair of ibexes and a pair of gazelles is shown on this silver-gilt dish. All the animals have already been struck by arrows and the two at the bottom of the dish are dead or dying. In the middle of the group is a saluki (hunting dog). The king has drawn his bow and is preparing to shoot an arrow backwards (the so-called 'Parthian shot'). He wears a diadem with ties attached and his crenellated crown, surmounted by a crescent and a disc, identifies him as either Valakhsh (r. AD 484–8) or Ardashir III (r. about AD 628–9). The king's horse is richly caparisoned, and a ball of hair is attached to the tail. A crescent moon and a star (creations of Ahuramazda) can be seen to the right of the king's head. The dish was found in 1941 around the town of Ufa in the Republic of Bashkortostan, Russian Federation, between the River Volga and the Ural Mountains.

Prudence Harper, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian period, Vol. 1: Royal Imagery* (New York 1981), pp. 66–67, pls. xiii, 18; *Splendeur des Sassanides*, exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 50







98

Ewer showing dancing women

about AD 400–650

Silver gilt, height 32 cm

Wyvern Collection, 2349
Purchased 2016

This silver-gilt ewer has a single handle, terminating at the top and bottom in goats' heads, with a ball on top of the curved part of the handle. There are collars in the form of a vine frieze at the top and bottom of the body of the vessel, and between them is relief decoration in the form of three dancing women. They wear necklaces and have elaborate hairstyles with a ball on the top. Diadem ties float from behind their shoulders. They are wearing tight-fitting patterned vests under diaphanous robes, which they have slipped off their shoulders and dropped to their thighs. The women are bearing sweetmeats or fruits and drinks, and one is holding a peacock. Extra motifs include a young boy carrying a sprig of foliage, a dog and vine scrolls. The representation of dancing women bearing food and drinks and other marks of abundance is a common theme on Sasanian silver vases and ewers. While there are echoes here of Graeco-Roman art, it is likely the scenes have some special significance in Zoroastrianism.

99

Pair of flasks

about AD 400–650

Gold, height of each 15.5 cm, diameter about 9.5 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1011; A.MW.1012
Purchased 2007

These two gold flasks each have ribbed shoulders and funnel-shaped mouths. Both are quite plain with no decoration. Flasks of this shape, more commonly of silver than of gold, are often decorated with scenes of grape harvesting or women dancing. These forms of decoration were influenced by Greek and Roman art.

101

Stamp seal

about AD 439–57

Carnelian, 4.6 × 3.8 cm

British Museum, London, no. 119994
Purchased in 1863

The head and shoulders of a Sasanian nobleman are engraved on this large carnelian stamp seal. His hair is arranged in five ringlets and he wears a hat or helmet with a border of pearls. Three ornaments, each in the form of a pair of wings with a floral spray, are fixed to a diadem with ties at the back. He has a pearl earring and another pearl is suspended from a torc around his neck. A crescent moon and a star are on either side of his head. A Pahlavi inscription around the edge of the seal reads: 'Vehdin-Shapur, the chief storekeeper of Iran'. He is thought to have been an official under Yazdigird II and his rank is indicated by the elaborate headdress.

A.D.H. Bivar, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Stamp Seals II: the Sassanian Dynasty* (London 1969), p. 49, pl. 3

102

Drachm of Khosrow II

about AD 625

Silver, diameter 3.6 cm

British Museum, 1935,0303.1
Presented by Dr C.D. Sherborn 1935

On the obverse of this silver drachm of Khosrow II (AD 591–628) is a bust of the king, front-facing and wearing a winged, crenellated crown with a crescent moon and star above. On the reverse is a representation of the Iranian goddess Anahita, wearing a diadem with a halo of flames. The Pahlavi inscription on the obverse records that Khosrow, king of kings, has increased the royal glory, and the Pahlavi inscription on the reverse records the 36th regnal year and states that Khosrow has increased Iran and is well-favoured by the omens.

Robert Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (Braunschweig 1971), pl. IV/5

100

Bowl

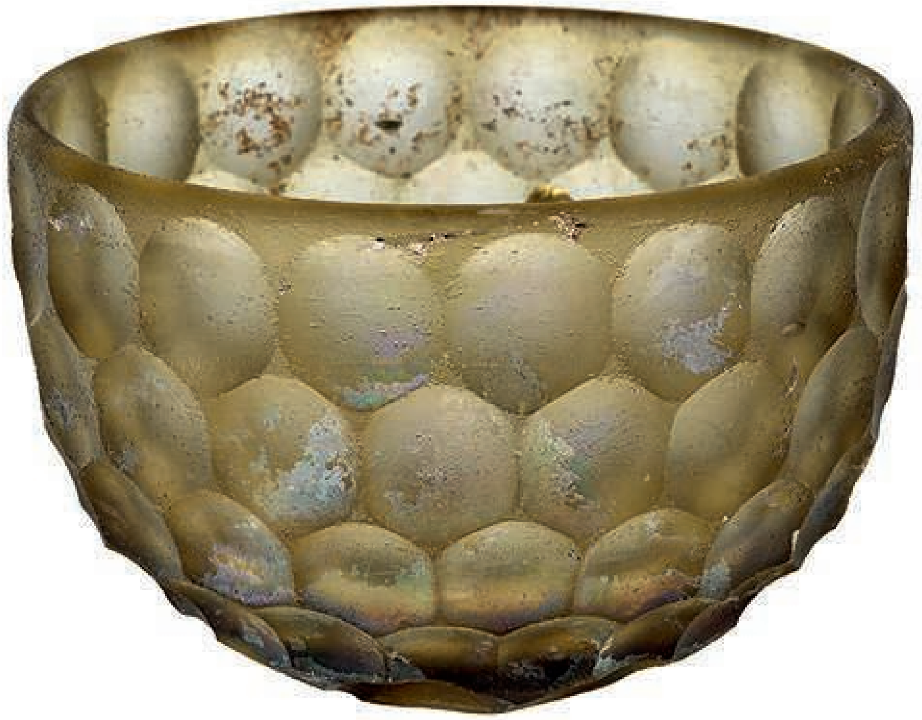
about AD 250–650

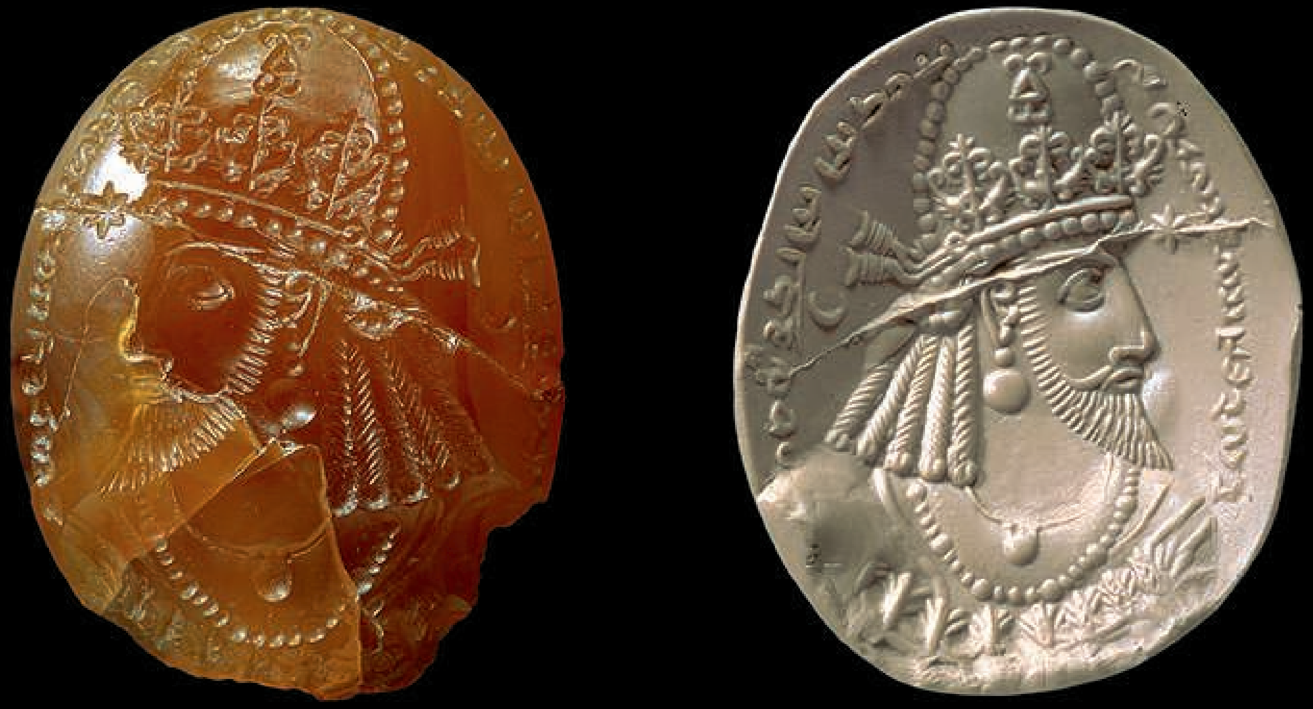
Glass, height 8.3 cm, diameter 12 cm

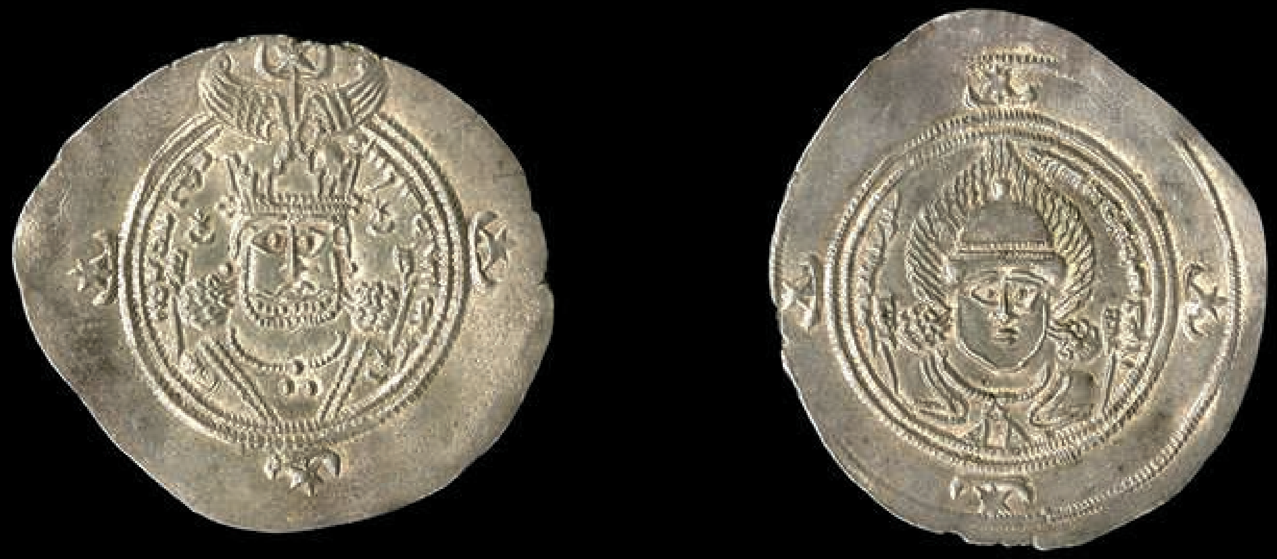
The Sarikhani Collection, A.GL.1009
Purchased 2017

This hemispherical bowl is made of amber-coloured translucent glass with faceted decoration on the outside and is smooth on the inside. The glass would have been blown into an open mould and the facets cut with a wheel and then polished. Faceted bowls of this kind were popular in the Sasanian period and were also highly valued to the east of the Sasanian empire. Examples were traded to China, Japan and Korea, where they have been found in tombs and temples. This particular glass bowl, then in a private collection in Japan, was published in a volume entitled *Persian Glass* by Professor Shinji Fukai (1924–1985) of Tokyo University, who was a member, and later director, of the Tokyo University Iraq-Iran Archaeological Expedition 1956–79.

Shinji Fukai, *Persian Glass* (New York 1977), pl. 1







ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

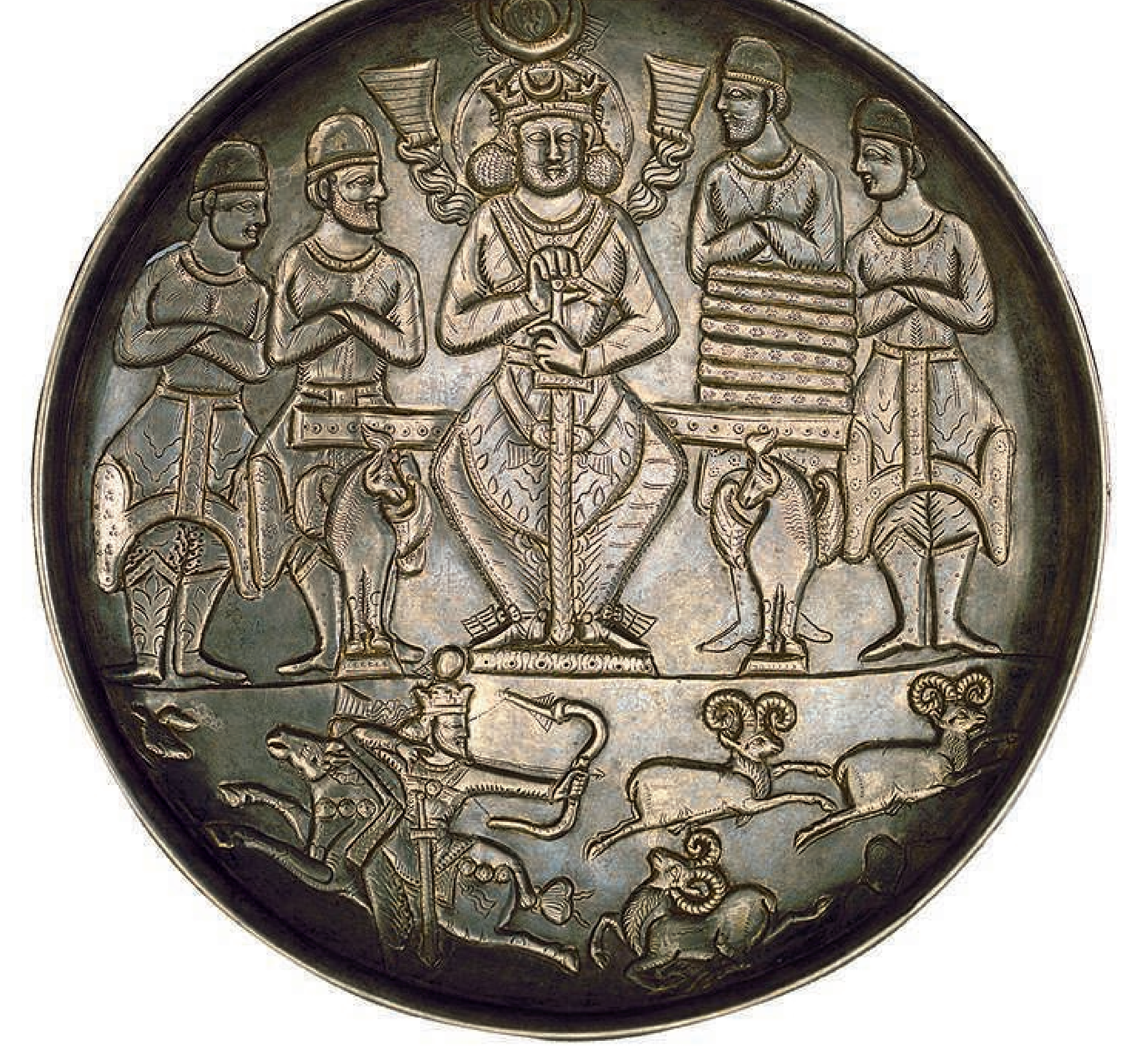
Throughout the Sasanian period the dominant religion was Zoroastrianism.[21] It takes its name from the prophet Zarathustra (Greek Zoroaster). The birthplace of the prophet, and his dates, are disputed. He is traditionally regarded as having lived in the period 628–551 BC, but some modern scholars believe he flourished much earlier, perhaps around 1500 BC. He was familiar with Avestan, a north-eastern Iranian language, which suggests he hailed from eastern Iran or Central Asia.

According to Zoroastrian religion, Ahuramazda, the Wise Lord, is the creator of all things. He is opposed by the evil spirit, Ahriman. In his struggle with Ahriman, Ahuramazda is assisted by divine beings (helper gods or *yazatas*) such as Mithra, Anahita and Verethragna. Ahuramazda works through the *amesha spentas*, divine entities emanating from him such as 'devotion', 'immortality' and 'truth'. *Asha* (the truth) is always in conflict with *druj* (the lie), and devout Zoroastrians are guided by the precepts of 'good thoughts, good words, good deeds'. The four elements of earth, wind, fire and water have a particular significance in Zoroastrianism and fire (the son of Ahuramazda) is not only a cleansing agent but also provides light. For this reason it is held to be particularly important, and fire temples are a standard part of Zoroastrian ritual. In order to maintain the purity of the earth, dead bodies must be exposed and the bones picked clean before they can be buried, often in ossuaries in ancient times. The teachings of Zarathustra are recorded in the Avesta, a holy book that was assembled in its present form in the Sasanian period[22] and written in Avestan. By contrast, most official inscriptions of the Sasanian period are written in Middle Persian (Pahlavi). The Avesta includes the Yasna, the texts recited during the Yasna service that in turn incorporates the Gathas, 17 hymns believed to have been composed by Zarathustra himself. Some elements of Zoroastrianism, both philosophical and ceremonial, have been incorporated into other religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, and the cult of Mithra spread westwards to become the Mithraic religion in the Roman empire.

In the Sasanian period, Zoroastrianism was enthusiastically promoted. Thus, the first two Sasanian kings, Ardashir I and Shapur I, describe themselves on their coins as 'Mazda worshippers' (cats 111, 112). In the reigns of Bahram I and II there was persecution of all religious minorities, particularly the Manichaeans (followers of Mani), who were regarded as heretics by orthodox Zoroastrians. This persecution was orchestrated by the high priest Kardir. At other times, however, such as in the reigns of Shapur I and Narseh, son of Shapur (r. AD 293–302), a degree of religious tolerance existed, so that for much of the Sasanian period Jews, Christians, Manichaeans, Mandaeans and Buddhists were allowed some freedom of worship. This tolerance did not, however, extend to Mazdak, a Zoroastrian *mobad* (priest) who advocated a new socialist interpretation of Zoroastrianism during the reign of Kavad I.

Zoroastrian religious imagery is evident in Sasanian art throughout the period, on rock reliefs, wall paintings, stucco, silverware, seals and coins. There are investiture scenes showing Ahuramazda and divine beings (*yazatas*), including Mithra and Anahita, in which the king is invested with the 'kingly glory' or *khvarenah*. A variety of symbols are associated with the *yazatas*, whose task it is to protect the kingly glory. These include the royal falcon (the Veragna bird), the boar (which represents Verethragna) and crescent moon and star symbols. Also commonly depicted are fire-altars, and the diadem with long ties that represents the *khvarenah*. Religious symbols are often incorporated in the crowns of Sasanian kings.

Following the Arab conquest of Iran, over the course of several centuries the majority of the population converted to the new Islamic religion, but Zoroastrianism was never entirely eradicated and there is still a flourishing community in Yazd while others have moved to Tehran. Towers of Silence, where dead bodies were once exposed for the bones to be picked clean by vultures, are still in evidence in Yazd but they are no longer in use. To avoid persecution after the Muslim conquest of Iran, many Iranian Zoroastrians fled to southern India between the eighth and tenth centuries AD.[23] Their descendants are known as Parsis. Nowadays the highest number of Parsis in India are to be found in the Mumbai area. There are smaller communities of Zoroastrians in various countries around the world including the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. The total number of Zoroastrians worldwide was estimated as 300,000 in 2020.



103

Dish with enthronement and hunting scenes

about AD 488–579

Found in the Perm region, Russia

Silver gilt, diameter 26 cm

State Hermitage Museum, s-250

Two scenes are shown on this silver-gilt dish, an enthronement scene above and a hunting scene below. In the enthronement scene a Sasanian king, probably Kavad I (r. AD 488– 531) or Khosrow I (r. AD 531–79), sits on a bench throne supported on either side by winged horse figures. The king wears an elaborate crenellated crown with a crescent below and a larger crescent and globe above. There are two conspicuous balls of hair on either side of his head. The king is flanked on either side by two nobles, who have their hands in their sleeves as a mark of respect and submission. In the scene below a king on horseback turns in the saddle to shoot arrows at three rams; two are fleeing while one is already dead or dying. A Hephthalite inscription on the back of the dish records the name and titles of the owner. The dish was found in 1908 near the village of Strelka in the Perm region of Russia.

Prudence Harper, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian period, Vol. 1: Royal Imagery* (New York 1981), pp. 67–8, pl. 19; *Splendeur des Sassanides*, exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 61

104

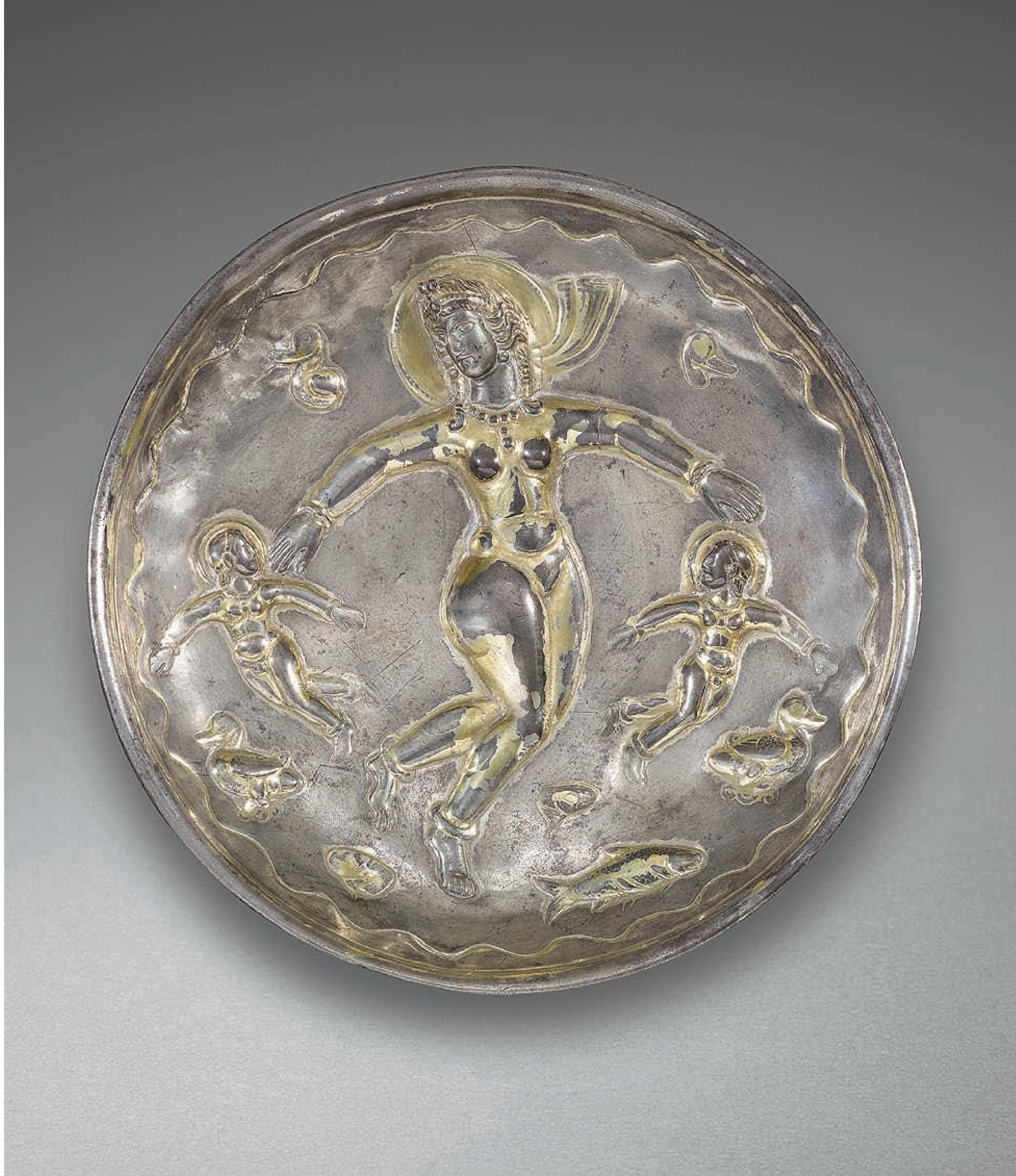
Dish showing a dancing woman

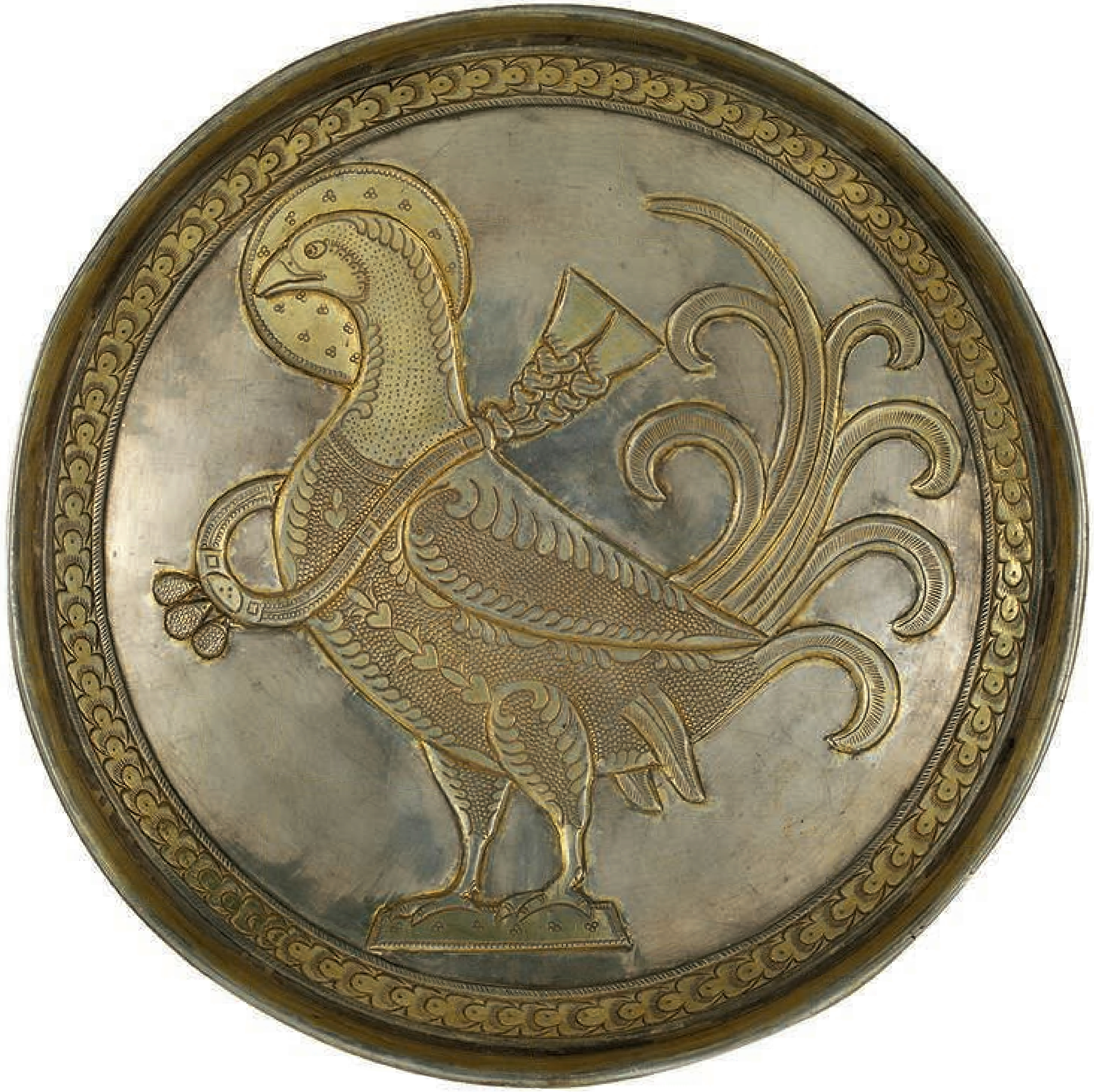
about AD 400–650

Silver gilt, height 3.1 cm, diameter 18.8 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1049
Purchased 2008

This Sasanian silver dish on a ring base shows a dancing woman, apparently naked, with outstretched arms and wearing bangles on her wrists and ankles. She wears a hairpiece and necklace. A halo surrounds her head, and attached to the back of her head are diadem ties. To either side of her are cupid figures (small naked boys) and there are further motifs in the form of ducks and fishes. In Sasanian art a sole, naked woman of this kind is usually interpreted as a priestess or as the goddess of all waters, Anahita.[24]





105

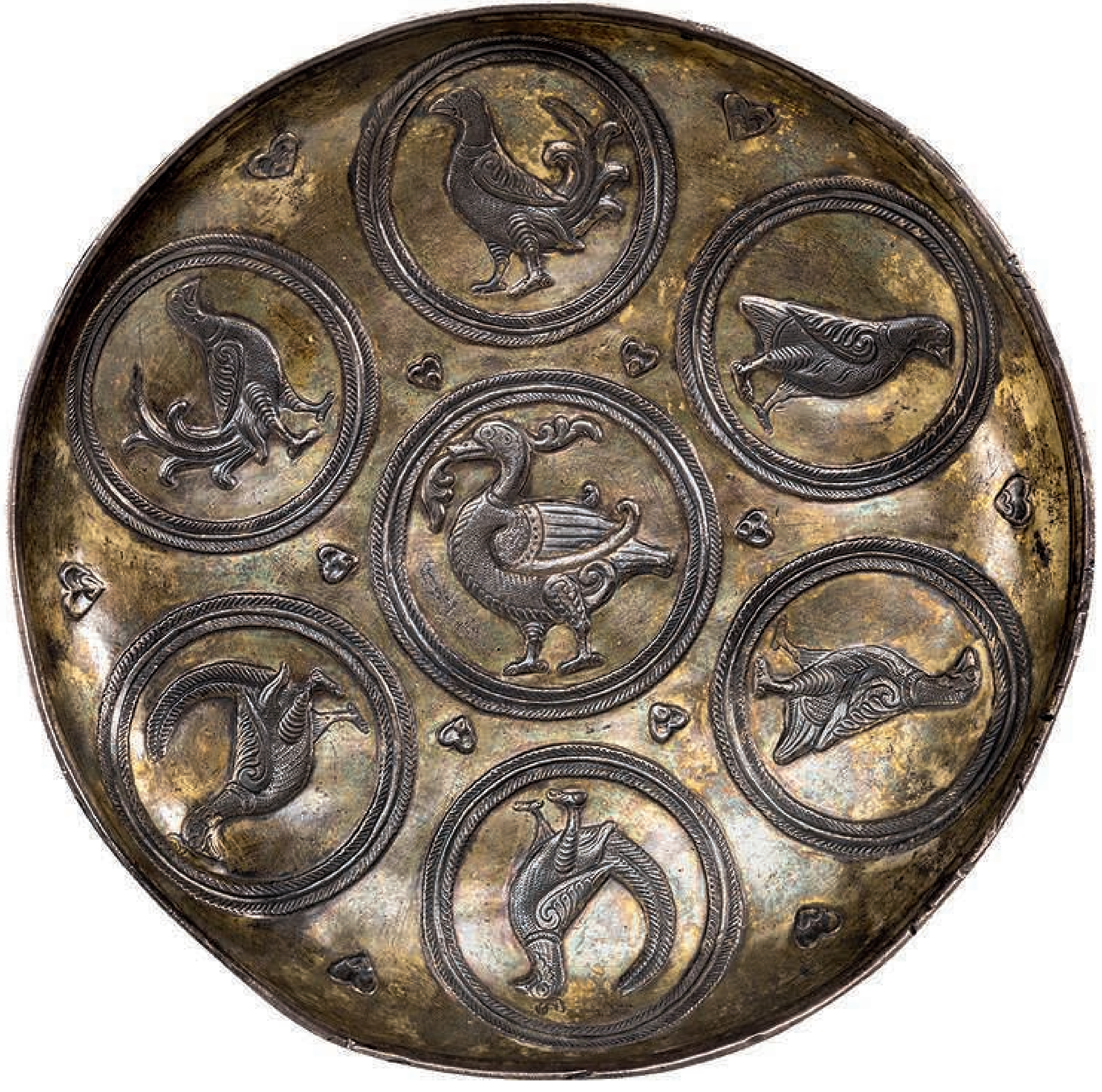
Dish showing a bird

about AD 500–750

Silver, diameter 21.6 cm

Wyvern Collection, 2411
Purchased 2017

This silver dish is slightly concave, with a raised rim around the edge and a ring foot. A bird, probably a pheasant, is shown standing on a platform with two humps, set within a circular chain-link border framed by two thin bands of rope pattern. It has a halo above while a diadem with three pendants at the front is tied around the bird's neck, ending in two ribbons behind its head. A stippled inscription in Middle Persian around the outside of the ring foot gives the name of the owner and the weight of the dish.



106

Dish showing birds

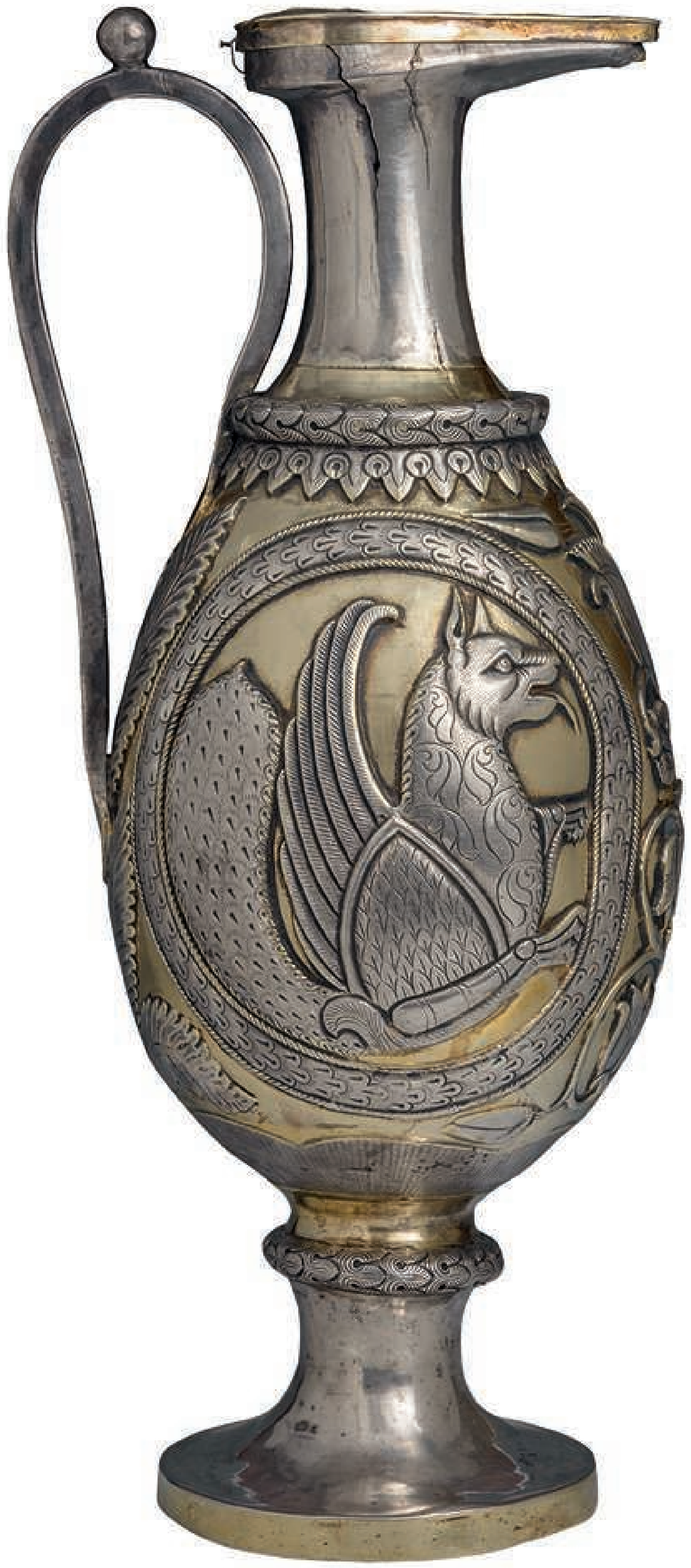
about AD 500–750

Found in the Perm region, Russia
Silver gilt, diameter 21.4 cm

State Hermitage Museum, s-48

Seven birds in medallions are represented on this silver-gilt dish. In the centre is a duck, surrounded by pheasants, cockerels and quails. There are heart-shaped motifs between and around the medallions. On either side of the duck's head there are what may be the ends of a diadem, suggesting that the bird is holding in its beak a symbol of the 'kingly glory' or *khvarenah*. Ducks were a popular ornamental motif in Sasanian art, occurring on textiles, silver vessels and seals.[25] The dish was found in 1913, near the village of Peshnigort, Perm region, Russia.

Splendeur des Sassanides, exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 70



107

Ewer showing Senmurvs

about AD 500–600

Found in the Kharkov region, Ukraine
Silver gilt, height 33 cm

State Hermitage Museum, S-61

This silver-gilt ewer, standing on a circular foot, has a lid and a single handle with a ball on top of the curved part of the handle. On either side of the ewer are medallions containing representations of a Senmurv (or Simorgh, modern Persian), the legendary bird of Iranian mythology and literature that has the head of a dog, the claws of a lion and the body of a peacock. The Senmurv is probably to be equated with the Saena bird (Avestan) mentioned in Zoroastrian texts.[26] This is a great falcon that sits on top of the 'tree of all seeds' and scatters the seeds by beating her wings. On the lid of the vessel and between the medallions are floral motifs and sacred trees. It was found in 1823 near the village of Pavlovka in the region of Kharkov, Ukraine.

Splendeur des Sassanides, exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 96; *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination*, exh. cat., Brunei Gallery/SOAS (London 2013) no. 87

108

Textile showing Senmurvs

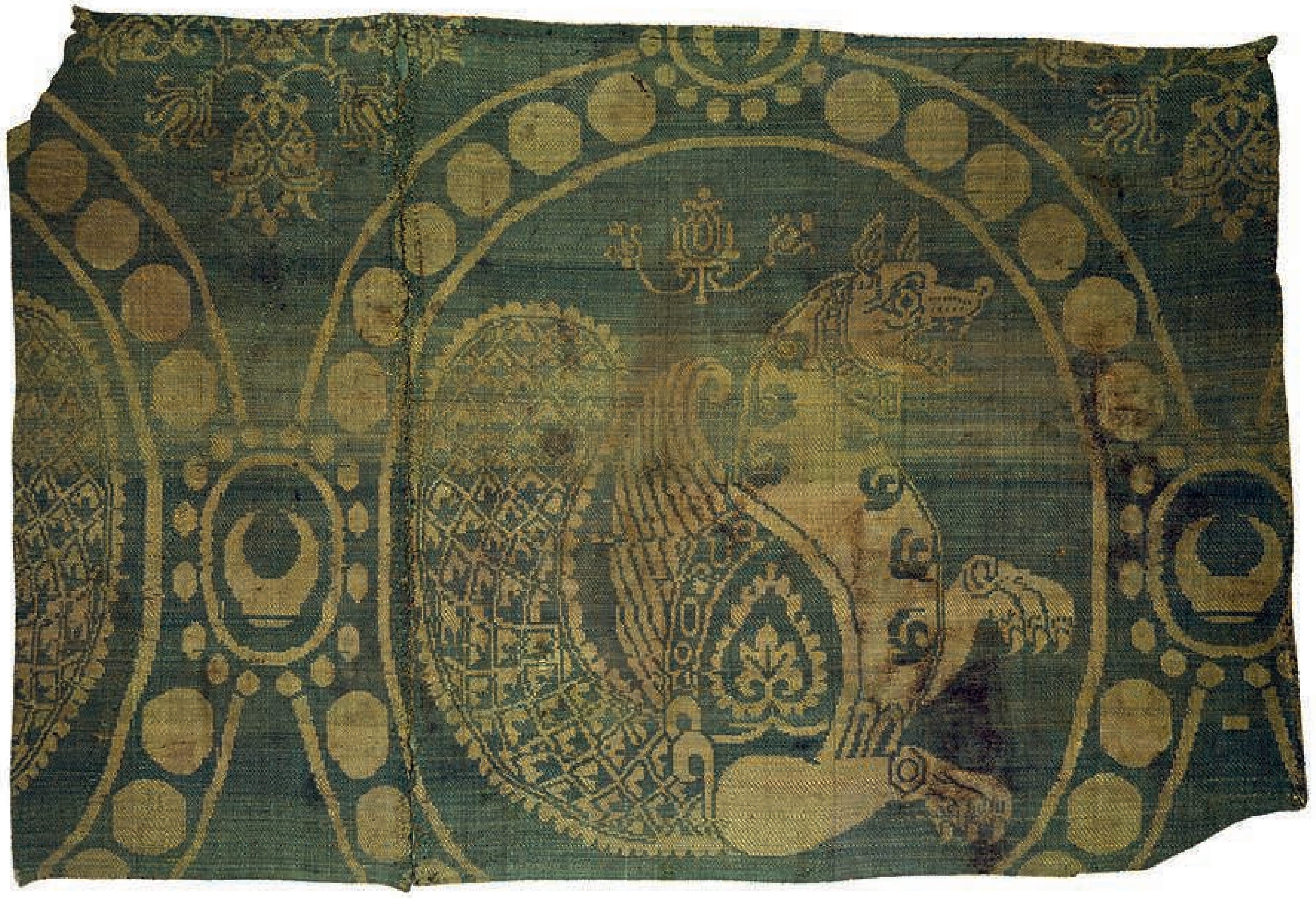
about AD 600–900

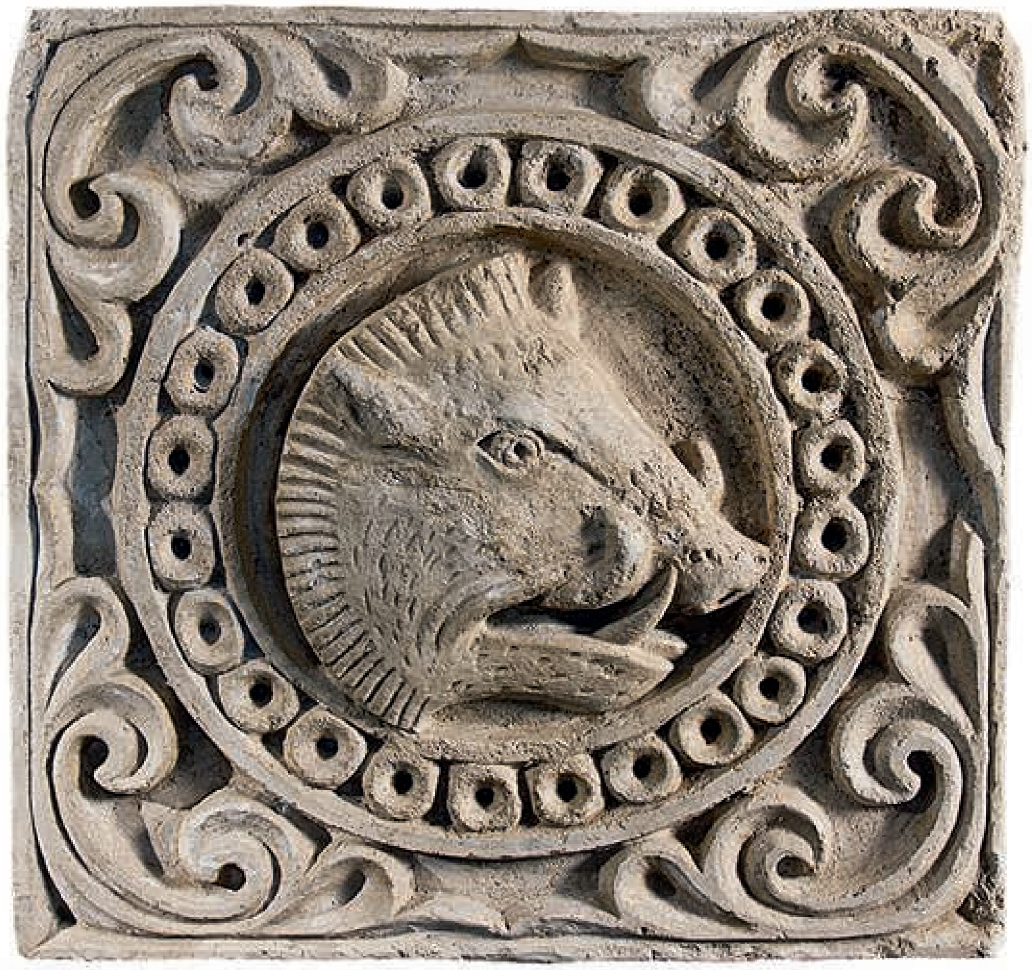
Silk, 36.5 × 54.3 cm

V&A: 8759-1863

This fragment of silk textile, with a design in yellow on a green background, shows a fabulous creature, a Senmurv (or Simorgh), set inside a medallion with a pearl border. The complete textile would have had a series of adjacent medallions, all containing Senmurvs facing in opposite directions. Representations of these creatures also occur on silverware (cat. 107) and stucco, and in the large grotto at Taq-e Bustan, a complex near Kermanshah, north-west Iran, dating from the time of Khosrow II (r. AD 591–628), Senmurv motifs are shown on some of the fine clothing. This textile is thought to have been produced in Iran or Central Asia. Relics, sometimes brought back to Europe by the Crusaders, were often wrapped in precious silks such as this example, which comes from a reliquary in the church of St Leu, Paris.

The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire, exh. cat., Asia House Gallery (New York 1978), no. 60; *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination*, Supplement, exh. cat., Brunei Gallery/SOAS (London 2013), no. 13





109

Plaque showing a boar

about AD 600–900

Excavated at Tepe Hissar,
Semnan province, Iran
Stucco, 40 × 38 cm
National Museum of Iran, no. 609

A boar's head is shown on this square stucco plaque. It is set within a circular medallion, bordered by small circles and with floral decoration around the outside. The boar's head is depicted with a remarkable realism that is often found in the stucco plaques of this period. This example comes from a Sasanian palace that was excavated a short distance to the south-west of the main mound at Tepe Hissar, south of Damghan. Tepe Hissar is one of the most important archaeological sites in Iran (see cat. 14). In the Avesta, the boar is one of the ten manifestations of Verethragna, a divinity associated with victory and strength.

The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination, Supplement, exh. cat., Brunei Gallery/SOAS (London 2013), no. 29

110

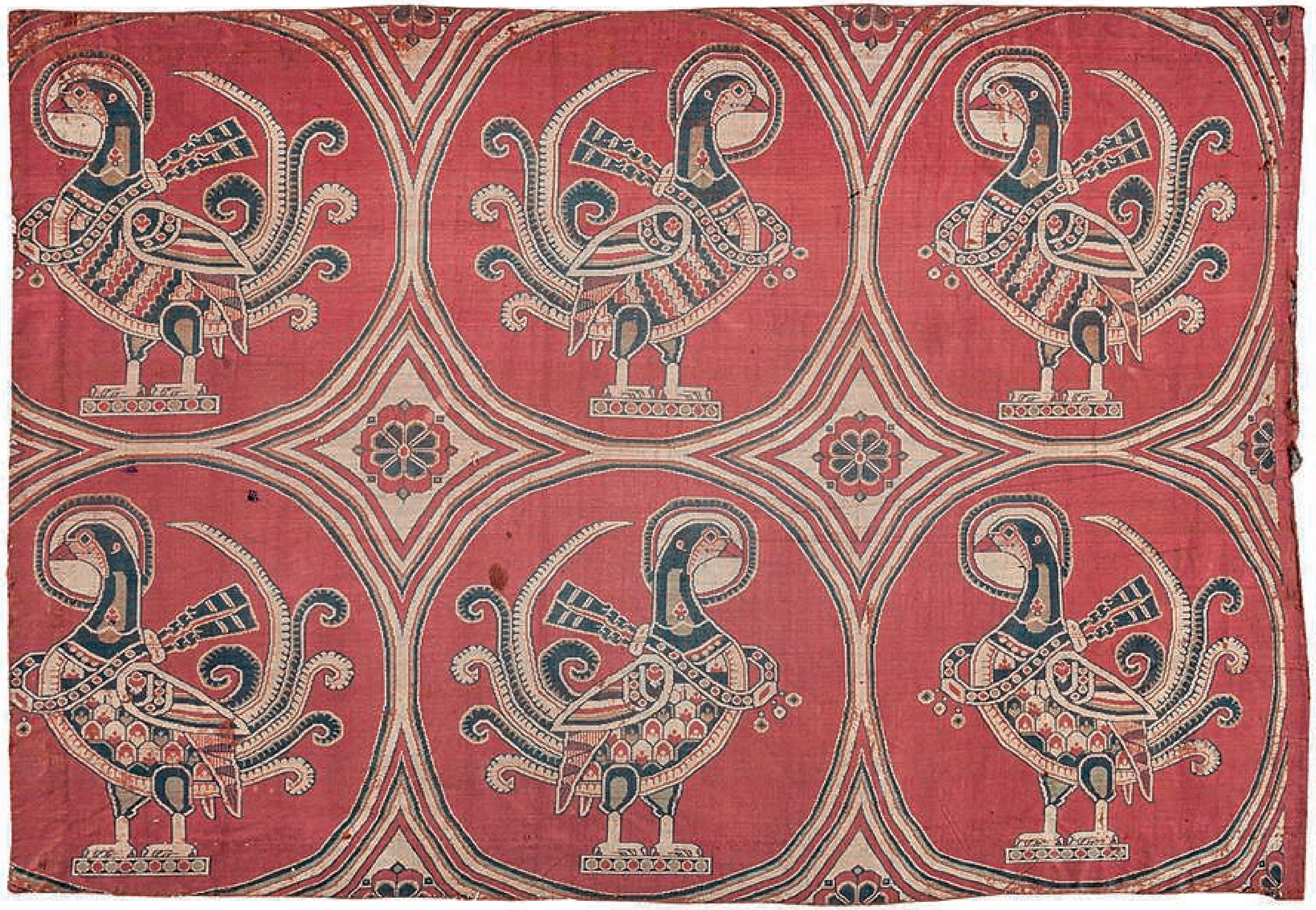
Textile showing birds

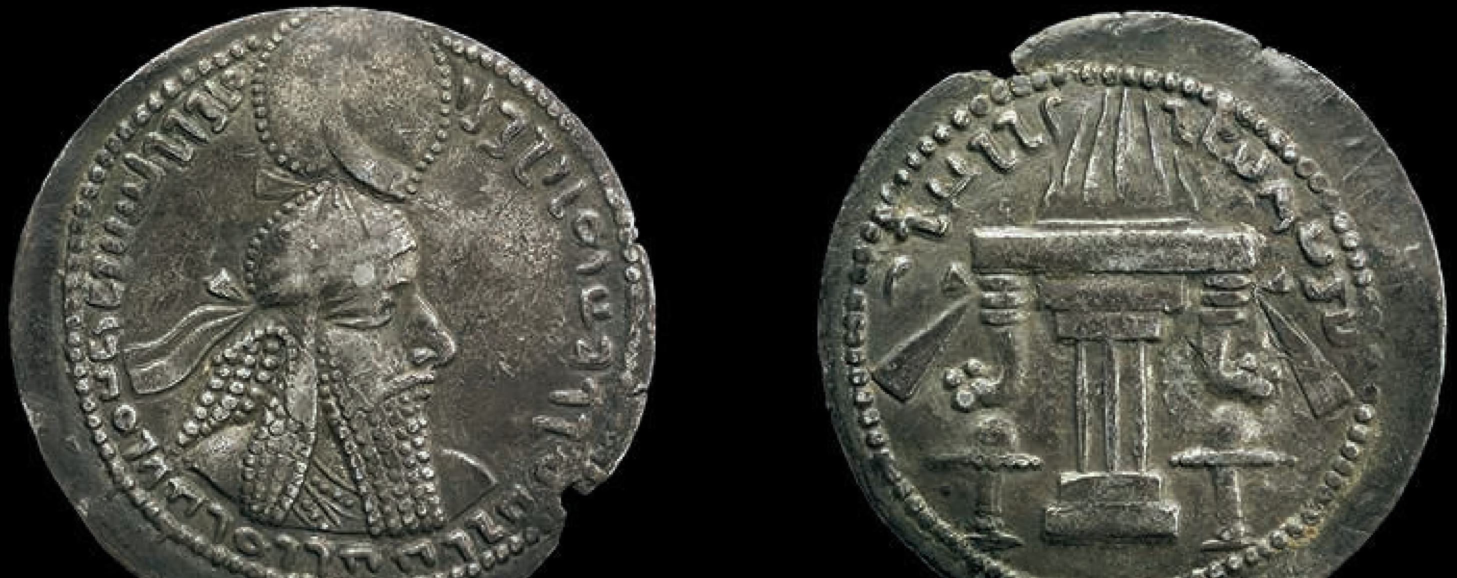
about AD 600–900

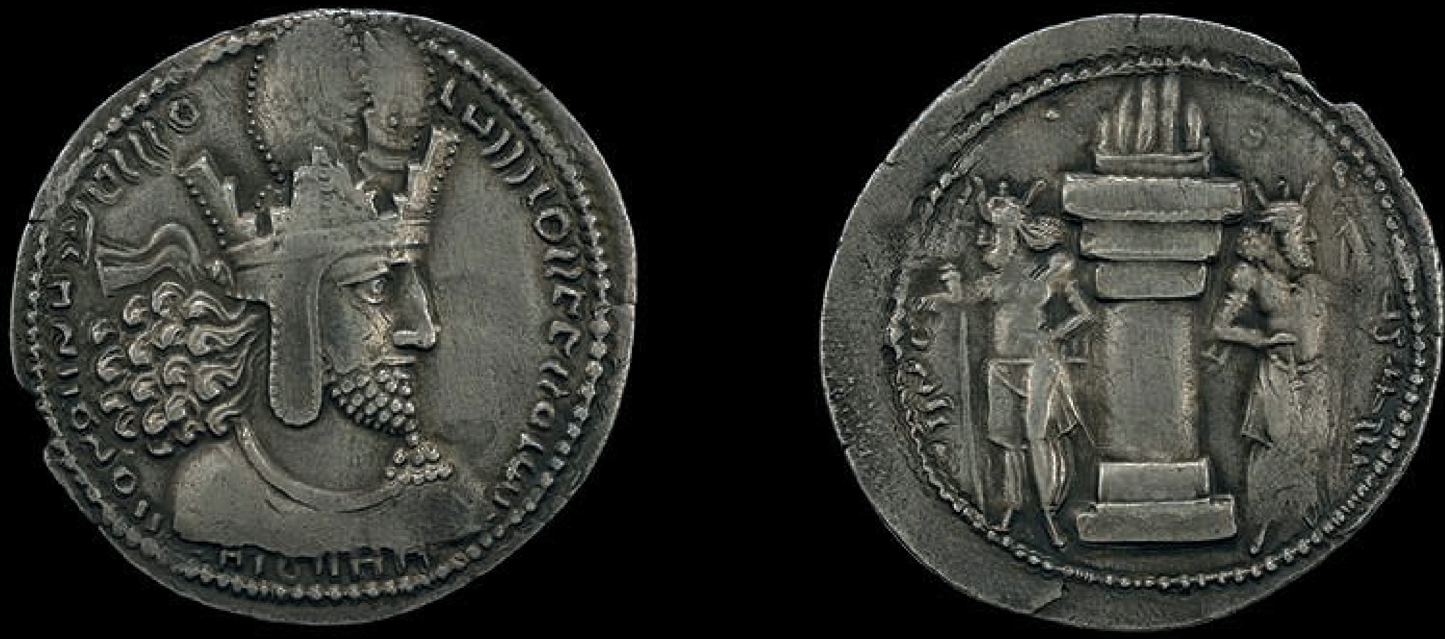
Silk, 64 × 96 cm
Jouarre Abbey, Seine-et-Marne, France
Acquired before AD 1000

This piece of silk textile is woven with designs in yellow, olive-green and brown on a red background. Six pheasants, enclosed within contiguous roundels, stand on platforms with pearl decoration. They have a halo surrounding their heads and a diadem around their necks, from which three pendants are suspended at the front with ties at the back. This motif is found on coins of Ardashir III (r. about AD 628–9) and its use continued into the Umayyad period. Between the roundels are rosette designs. The haloes surrounding the birds' heads are associated with royalty. This textile is known to have been in the Benedictine abbey at Jouarre, Seine-et-Marne, since before the 11th century AD.

Splendeur des Sassanides, exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 129







111

Drachm of Ardashir I

AD 224–40

Minted in Ctesiphon, Iraq
Silver, diameter 2.7 cm

British Museum, London, 1862,1004.4
Presented 1862

This silver drachm, dating from the reign of Ardashir I (AD 224–40), shows a bust of the king wearing a cap with earflaps and a large ball of hair above, together with a diadem that ties behind his head. On the reverse there is a fire-altar mounted on a throne with lions' paws, which in turn rests on incense burners. Diadem ties are also attached to the throne. The Pahlavi inscription on the obverse reads: 'The Mazda-worshipping lord Ardashir, king of kings of the Iranians, whose lineage is of the gods'; the Pahlavi inscription on the reverse reads: 'Fire of Ardashir'.

Robert Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (Braunschweig 1971), pl. III/1–2

112

Drachm of Shapur I

AD 242–72

Silver, diameter 2.7 cm

British Museum, 1843,0620.5
Purchased 1843

The obverse of this silver drachm, dating from the reign of Shapur I (AD 240–72) shows a bust of the king wearing a crenellated crown with earflaps and a large ball of hair above. He also wears a diadem and has a tied beard. On the reverse there is a fire-altar flanked by two armed figures leaning on long staffs, looking away from the altar and wearing what may be spiked crowns. A Pahlavi inscription on the obverse reads: 'The Mazda-worshipping lord Shapur, king of kings of the Iranians, whose lineage is of the gods'. The Pahlavi inscription on the reverse reads: 'Fire of Shapur'.

Robert Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (Braunschweig 1971), pl. I/1

113

Zoroastrian manuscript

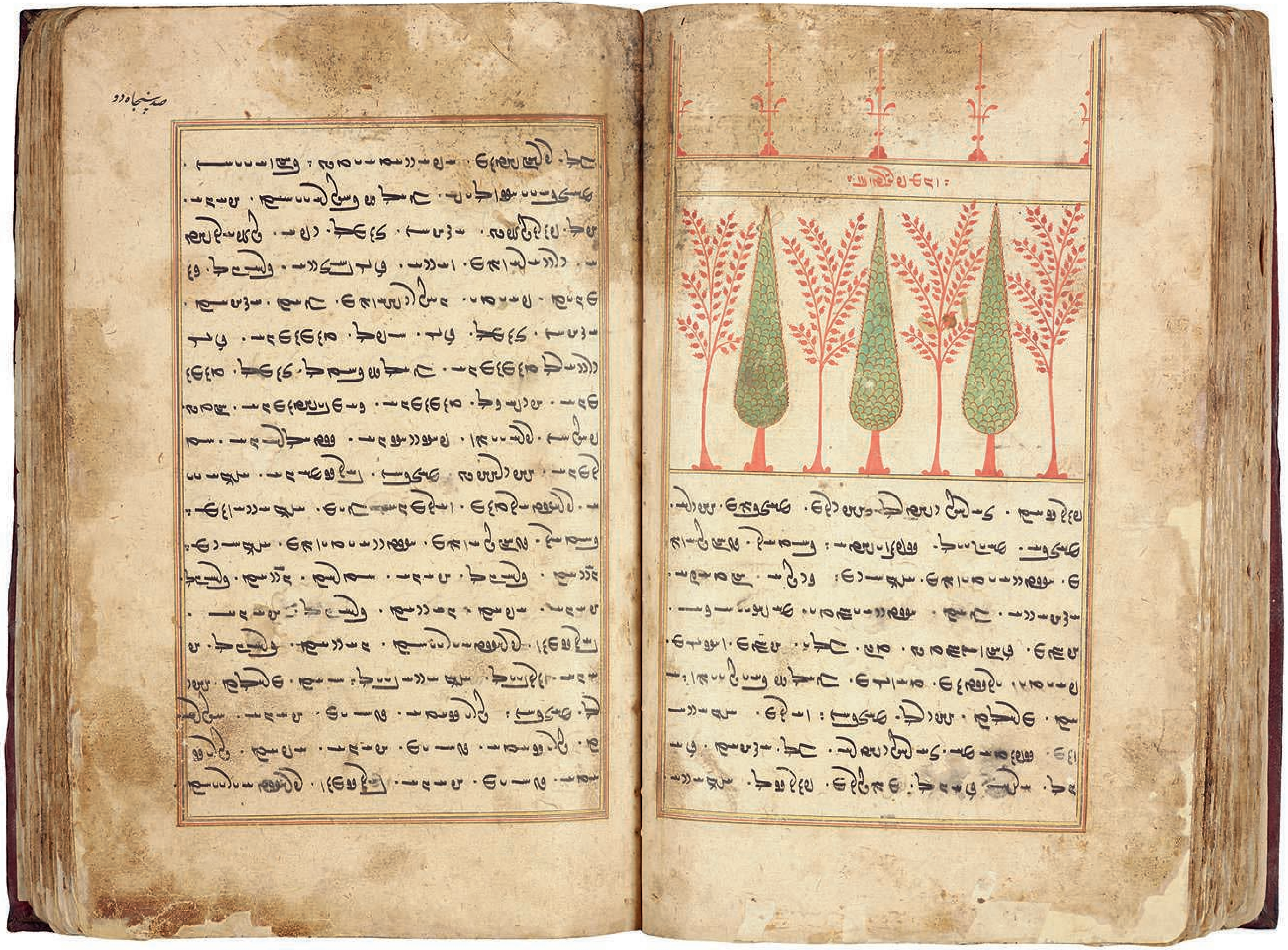
AD 1647

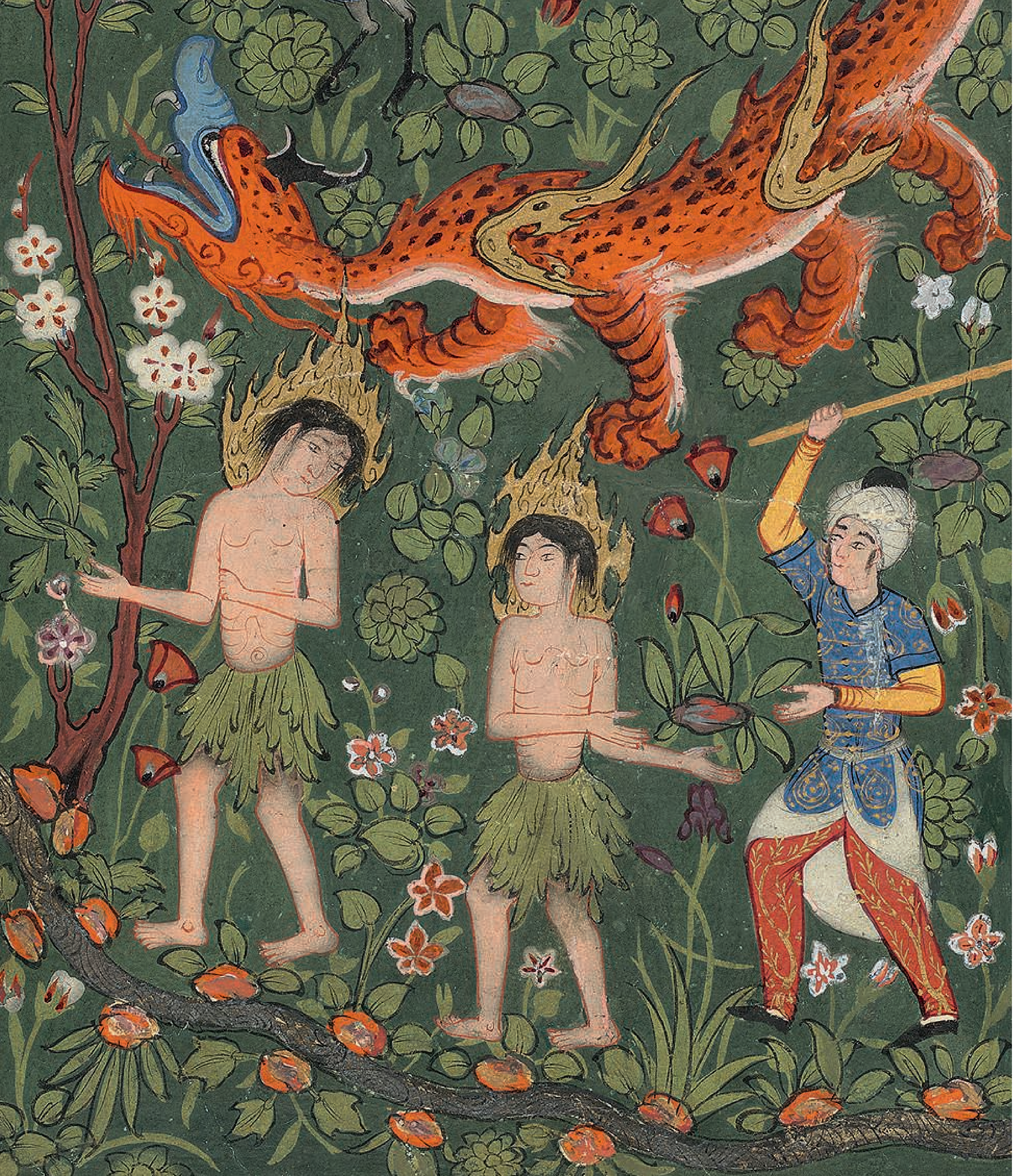
Yazd, Kerman province, Iran
Black and red ink on paper, 40 × 26 cm

British Library, RSPA 230, folio 151v–2r
Incorporated 1982

Written in Avestan, this manuscript copy of the *Videvdad Sadeh*, a Zoroastrian law book, describes the nine-night purification ritual to be undergone by anybody who has come into contact with a dead body. The ritual would have been recited and performed by a priest inside a fire temple. This copy was made in Yazd for a Zoroastrian of Kerman in 1647. The seven coloured illustrations in this manuscript are all of trees. This manuscript was donated to the Royal Society of London by Burjorji Sorabji Ashburner of Bombay between 1864 and 1866, and was then transferred to the India Office in 1876. It was incorporated in the British Library collection in 1982.

Sarah Stewart (ed.), *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination* (London 2013), no. 18





4

CHANGE OF FAITH: THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

Tim Stanley

The greatest interruption in the history of Iran was the Islamic conquest in the mid-seventh century AD. After the Prophet Muhammad's death in Medina in 632, his successors organized invasions of the lands north of the Arabian peninsula, including Iran. By 651 the Arab invaders had overthrown the Sasanian empire and occupied much of its territory. The conquest took decades to complete, but once achieved, its effects proved permanent. Most significantly, within three centuries most Iranians had become Muslim, and still are. This was not simply a change of faith, since by replacing Zoroastrianism with Islam as the religion of the majority the conquest swept away one of the building blocks of Iranian identity. Despite this upheaval, Iran survived as an ideal and was eventually resurrected as a political reality, in a new Islamic guise.

This combination of adherence to Islam with loyalty to non-Arab national traditions was certainly not foreseen by the caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), who were Iran's rulers in the first century after the conquest. These men and their tribal allies from Arabia saw themselves as an exclusive ethnic and religious elite. Their disdain for their subjects, including newly converted Muslims of non-Arab origins, provoked a great uprising that began in East Iran in the 740s. The revolt swept westwards, bringing to power a new dynasty of caliphs, the Abbasids (750–1258), and initiating a more inclusive approach to converts of non-Arab descent.

During the early Abbasid period, the conversion rate among Iranians increased markedly, so that by the tenth century perhaps 80 per cent of the population was Muslim. Over the same period many Iranians became enthusiastic participants in the life of Islam and fluent in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. One area in which they made an important contribution was the development of a supranational high culture, expressed in Arabic. Iranians excelled in fields such as philosophy and the formal and mathematical sciences. Astronomy provides one example, illustrated here by the *Book of Constellations* (*Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabitah*) of Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi (d. 986). This work (cat. 132) was a summation and reformulation of both Greek and Arab knowledge in the field of astronomy, written by an Iranian, but in Arabic.

From the thirteenth century onwards, this work was translated into Persian on several occasions (cat. 133), making it more accessible to readers in the eastern half of the Islamic world, where Persian had replaced Arabic as the cultural lingua franca (see p. 167). Just as significantly, it was also re-cast in Latin versions in medieval Europe, making it a foundational text for astronomy over enormous swathes of the Old World.

Abd al-Rahman's work provides the reader with a guide to the constellations through texts and images, which could also be used as a model when manufacturing celestial globes (such as cat. 135). In their turn, the globes could be employed in making calculations with a variety of purposes. Some related to religious practice, such as setting the times of the five daily prayers. Others were astrological in nature – informing a monarch when he should set out on a military campaign, for example, or casting a horoscope for a new-born prince (cat. 134). Nevertheless, for medieval astrologers, as for Muslims in general, their fundamental understanding of how the Universe works was derived not from human enquiry but from Islamic doctrine. The two basic principles on which this was based are expressed in the *Shahadah*, the Muslim creed: 'There is no god but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God.'

Muslims believe in the unity, uniqueness and omnipotence of God. This contrasts with the Christian belief in the Trinity, which allowed three 'persons' in one godhead, and the Zoroastrian concept of a cosmic battle between Good and Evil in which humans can play a part. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims believe that God communicated with humans through a series of prophets. For Muslims, this series concluded with the Prophet Muhammad, who received the revelations brought together in the Qur'an. To Muslims the Qur'an is perfect, and further divine revelations were therefore unnecessary.

These and many other tenets of Islam are shared by the vast majority of believers, and there is a degree of conformity, too, in religious practice. The shared rites include the observation of a fast during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan, and the performance of the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to the holy places in Mecca, at least once during a lifetime. There are many differences in the detail, however, both in practice and belief. In some cases, such as interpretations of Islamic law, variations were tolerated, while other differences of opinion led to schism, as in the split between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims in their attitudes to who should be the Prophet's successor. Sunnis support the status quo, while Shi'ites believe that the Prophet designated his cousin and son-in-law Imam Ali and his family as future leaders of the Muslim community, a designation that was not acted upon (p. 151).

A lustre tile (cat. 117) exemplifies both the consensus on some issues and the irreconcilable differences with regard to others. The inscriptions include three excerpts from the Qur'an, the common source of Islamic belief. By contrast, the text of the *Shahadah* has been extended with the phrase, 'Ali is the friend of God'. As we have seen, all Muslims believe that there is only one God, and that Muhammad was His messenger, but this added phrase, which gives Imam Ali an elevated status almost equal to Muhammad, is used only in a Shi'ite context. It marks the tile out as a partisan object.

Until the sixteenth century the Iranian world was a patchwork of different traditions within Islam, a majority of the population following the Sunni view. They generally adhered to one of two schools of Islamic law, the Shafi'i and the Hanafi, which were mutually compatible in theory but not always in practice. The minority who followed Shi'ite teachings were divided into distinct sects, of whom the Isma'ilis and the Imamis were the most prominent. Both groups shared a belief that Ali was the Prophet's rightful successor, but they disagreed as to which descendants of Ali were his rightful heirs.

Another pattern of allegiances was based on membership of Sufi fraternities, which engaged in a variety of mystic practices. Originally, those seeking instruction would gather around an individual guide but would then disperse upon his retirement or death. Gradually, these groupings began to develop formal structures, allowing the position of leader, or *sheikh*, to be passed from one generation to the next, and the founder's practice to be perpetuated. The methods adopted to achieve a higher state of awareness might include seclusion in a dark room for long periods, reciting poetry, taking hallucinogens, or participation in dances, all designed to free the mind from earthly concerns. In addition, Sufi groups were important in providing a social network whose members could assist each other in everyday life.

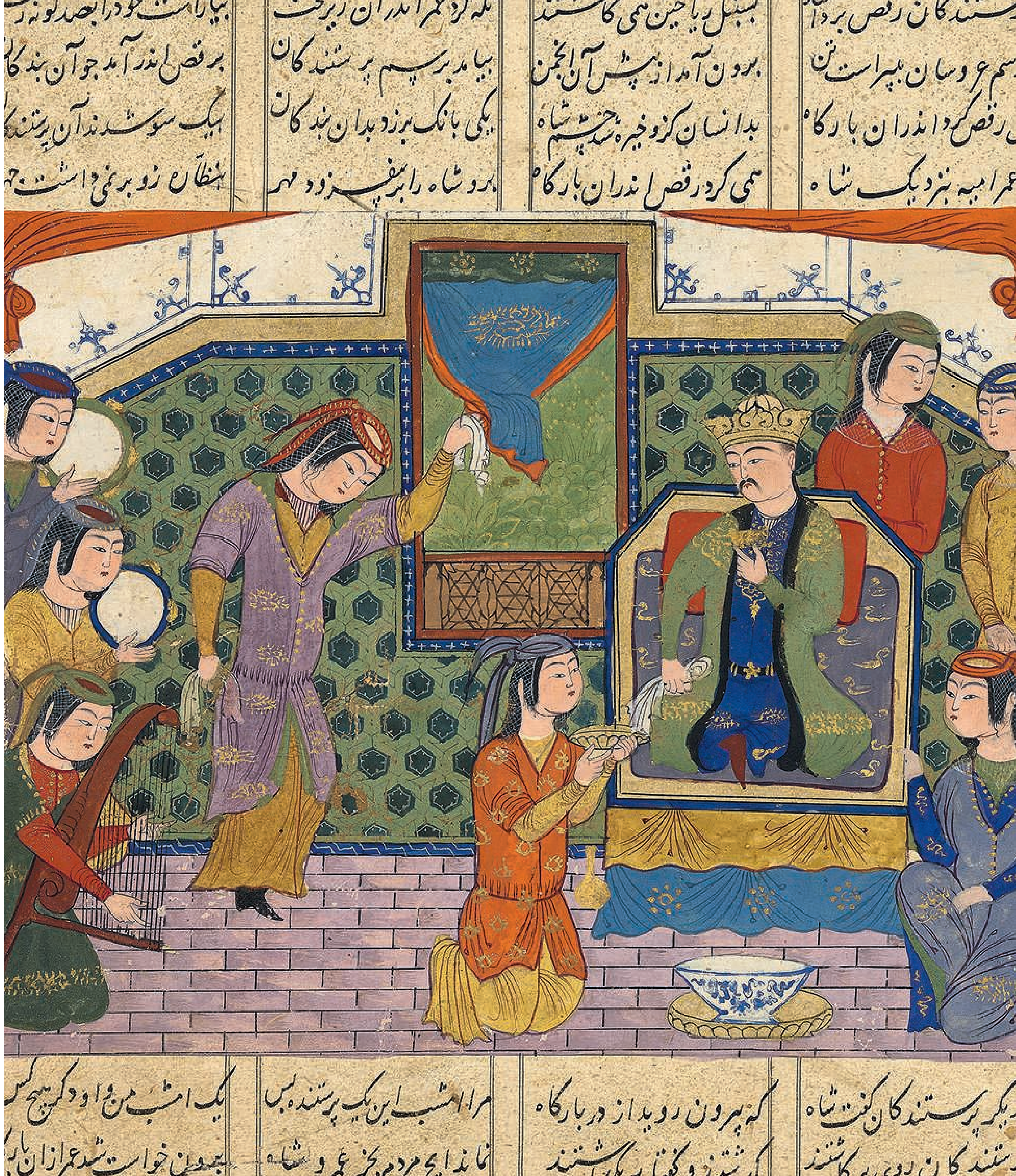
One Sufi order was established by Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili (d. 1334) in his home city of Ardabil in north-west Iran. In this case, the leadership of the order was passed down through his family over many generations. In Safi al-Din's time his order, the Safaviyah, was a conventional Sunni grouping. In the fifteenth century, however, his successors adopted a radical form of Shi'ism and converted the order into a military organization, drawing their main support from Turkish tribal groupings in Anatolia and Syria. Their growing strength was seen as a threat by the rulers of West Iran, but the order survived their attacks. In 1501 its youthful leader, Isma'il (d. 1524), overthrew his persecutors and established the Safavid state, with himself as shah, or king. Within ten years, Isma'il's armies had conquered the whole of Iran.

Isma'il's most important act on seizing power was to declare Shi'ism the state religion. The form of Shi'ism practised by Isma'il and his followers was seen by others as unorthodox – his adherents regarded the new shah as an incarnation of God, for example. This creed fitted a military force of enthusiastic devotees, but it clashed with the values of the civil society they now ruled, and which generally followed the guidance of Muslim jurists. Isma'il's solution was to introduce Imami Shi'ism, which was based on a comparable legal system. Most of the Safavids' subjects had converted to this more conventional form of Islam by the end of the sixteenth century. The population's new devotion to the Twelve Imams recognized by Imami Shi'ism tended to simplify the pattern of religious allegiances, which was also affected by the deliberate elimination of some rival Sufi orders and the gradual fading away of others. Indeed, over the centuries that followed, the Imami religious authorities took over the persecution of Sufis, whose aims and methods many of them reviled.

Taken together, the re-unification of Iran under the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722) and the introduction of Imami Shi'ism as the state religion formed the most important event in the country's history since the Islamic conquest. Iran was reborn as an enduring political entity with a sense of its own history, drawn from the pre-Islamic period. At the same time, this new Islamic Iran gained an Imami Shi'ite identity that distinguished it from its great Sunni neighbours: the Ottoman empire in the west, the Shaybanid khanate in Central Asia, and the Mughal empire established in South Asia later in the sixteenth century.

The adoption of Imami Shi'ism had long-lasting implications for political power, however. In this belief system, as we shall see (pp. 151), Imam Ali and eleven of his descendants retained the right to lead the Muslim community, but this sequence of imams is now in abeyance as the Twelfth Imam has been 'in occultation', that is, concealed by God, since 874. At first, the imam communicated with the world through deputies, but since 941 his concealment has been total. The imam will come again at the end of time as the Mahdi, the redeemer of the faithful, but until then, the exercise of power has devolved to qualified authorities, not kings and sultans but Shi'ite clerics. The clergy's position was reinforced in the late eighteenth century, when a debate about its power to interpret the law ended with the triumph of the Usuli school, which freed clerics from close adherence to their sources.

From the founding of the Safavid empire in 1501 until the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, the Shi'ite clergy generally accommodated themselves to the existence of kings, who were seen as useful agents for enforcing Islamic law. The secularist policies of shahs of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–79) breached this principle over an extended period and was one of the many factors that provoked the Islamic Revolution, which restored the Shari'ah and installed the clergy as the rulers of a Shi'ite state.



THE HOLY QUR'AN

The Qur'an contains the revelation God made to the Prophet Muhammad, which forms the basis of Islamic belief. As the literal Word of God, the Qur'an has a sacramental role in Islam, equivalent to the Mosaic Law in Judaism and the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross in Christianity. Therefore, the accurate preservation of the Qur'anic text has always been of the utmost importance to Muslims, and the precision and clarity required in writing it have often given rise to works of great beauty.

For most of Islamic history, the Qur'an was preserved in manuscript form – that is, in books written by hand. Considerable care was taken in designing scripts and training scribes. The text was often written on parchment or paper of the highest quality, decorated with non-figural designs in colours and in gold, and bound in fine covers of tooled or stamped leather. Reverence for the holy text was also evident in the slow rate of change: generally, new materials and new styles were introduced into the production of Qur'an manuscripts only after they had been dignified by use in other respectable contexts.

The earliest Qur'an manuscripts (see cat. 114) cannot be associated with certainty with particular places of production. It may be that they were all made in the central Arab lands (the Arabian peninsula, Syria and Iraq), from where some would have been exported to Iran. By the tenth century, however, fine copies of the Qur'an were being made in Iran itself, and copies continued to be produced there – almost without interruption – until the twentieth century, when printing of the Qur'an became standard practice.

From the 1250s, however, Iran was ruled by non-Muslim Mongols, descendants of Genghis Khan (see p. 225). Court patronage of Qur'anic manuscripts ceased for several decades. In 1295, however, the Mongol emperor Ghazan converted to Islam, and the position was reversed. The main patron was Ghazan's brother Öljeytü (r. 1304–16). He erected a huge mausoleum for himself at the new capital of Sultaniyeh, north-west of Tehran, and, with the enthusiasm of a convert, stocked it with some of the most magnificent Qur'anic manuscripts ever made (see cat. 116).

Qur'anic calligraphy was not confined to manuscripts, and many objects bear inscriptions that are relevant to the context for which they were made. As noted above (p. 141) an inscription on an Iranian tile (cat. 117) is explicitly Shi'ite and links it to the period after the Mongol conquest in the 1250s, when the Shi'ite sector of the population was treated with a new tolerance. There was a boom in creating lustre-decorated tilework for Shi'ite monuments (see also cat. 193).

114

Folio from a Qur'an manuscript

about 700

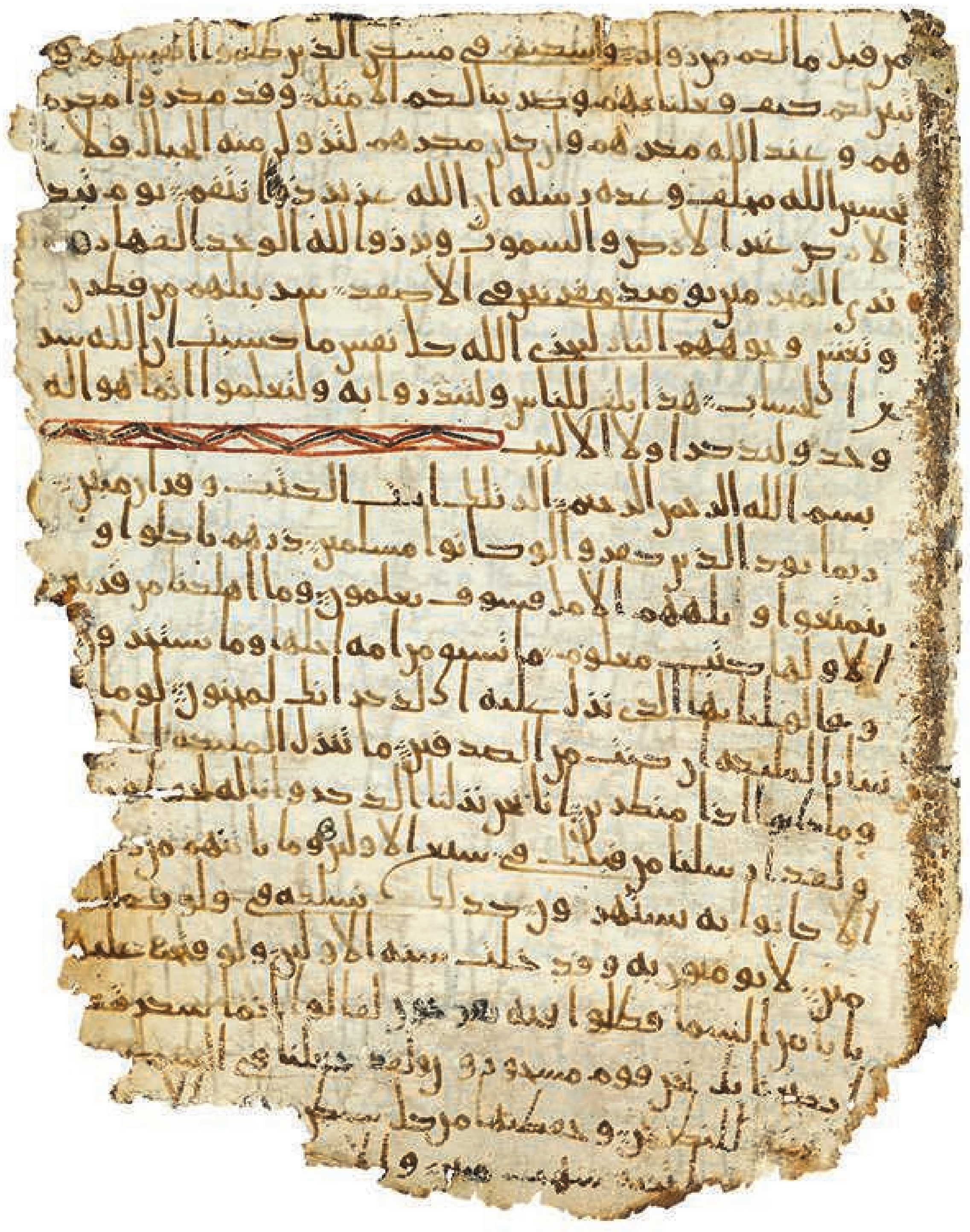
Central Arab lands
Ink and colour on parchment,
35 × 28 cm

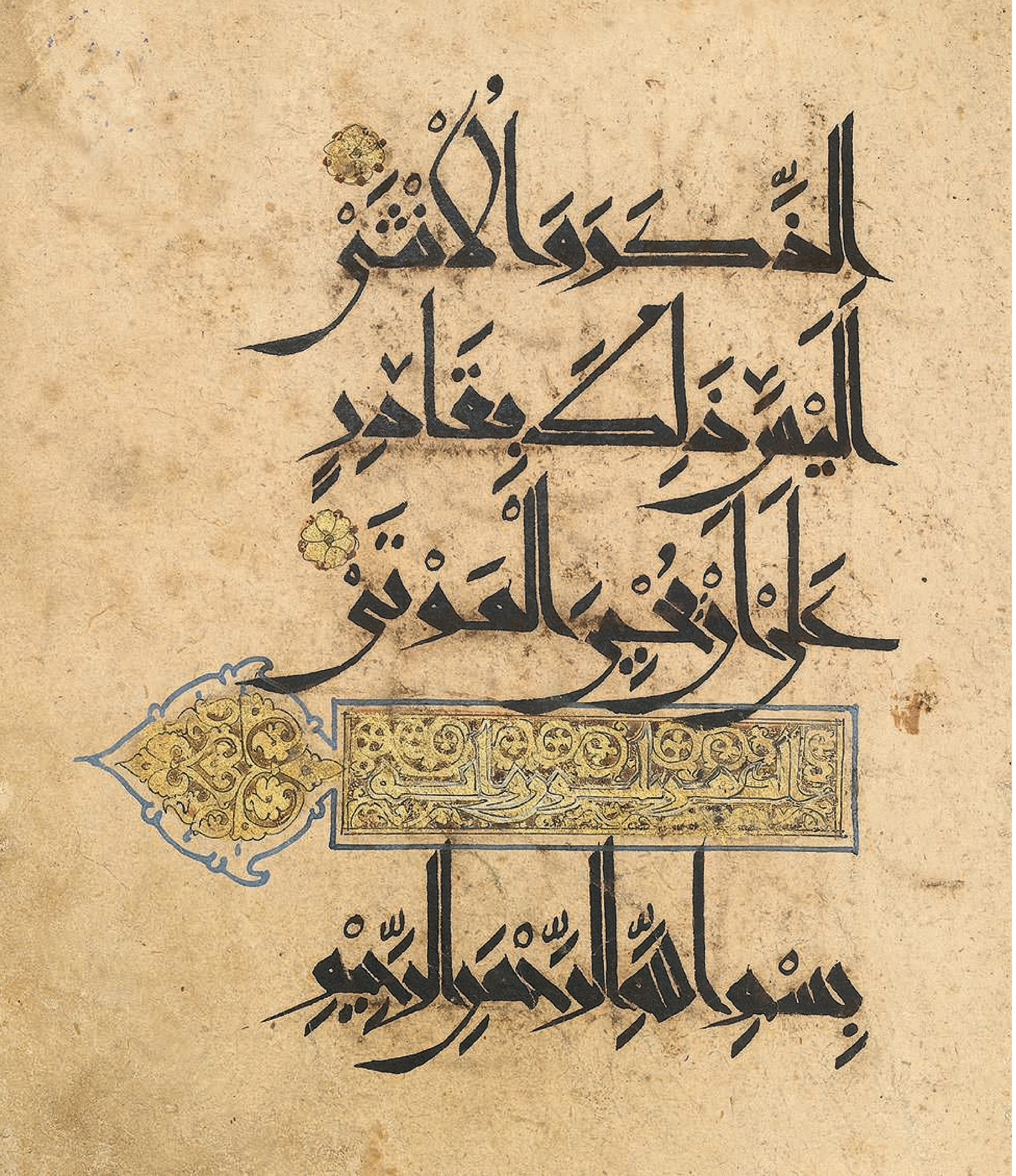
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1010
Purchased 2006

Copies of the Qur'an contain the literal Word of God, and when they reached the end of their useful life, they could not be destroyed. Instead, they were put away out of sight, and, as in this case, many ancient fragments survived to be rediscovered in later centuries.

The text is copied in a very clear, straightforward way, without the sophistication seen in later examples (see cats 115, 116). The simple band of ornament in red and black was added to fill a blank space left by the scribe when he began a new chapter, or *surah*.

Marcus Fraser, 'The Earliest Qur'anic Scripts', in *Islamic Art, Architecture and Material Culture: New Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Graves (Oxford 2010), pp. 121–3





الذكر والأنثى
أليس ذلك بقادر
على أن يحيي الموتى

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

115

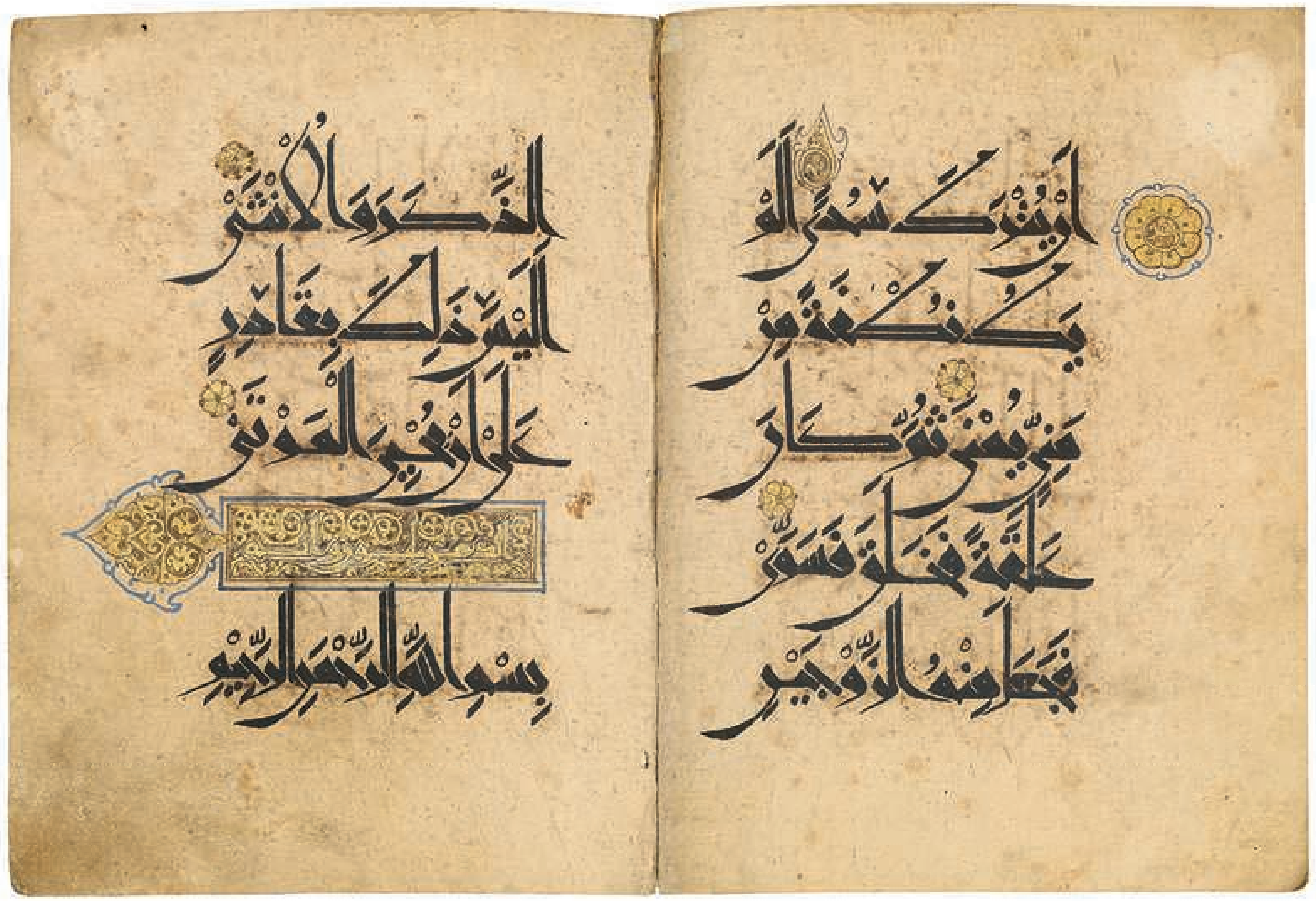
Part of a Qur'an manuscript

about 1000–1200

Central Arab lands or Iranian world
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
28 folios, each 18.1 × 13 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1031
Purchased 2009

The presentation of the text here is much grander than in the previous example. Each page is laid out according to a regular plan, with only five lines of mannered and elegant script. The clarity of the text is ensured by the diacritical marks placed above and below the letters. Verses are now punctuated with gold rosettes, and the chapter title (for surah 74, 'The one wrapped up') is written in gold script within a panel of illumination.



116

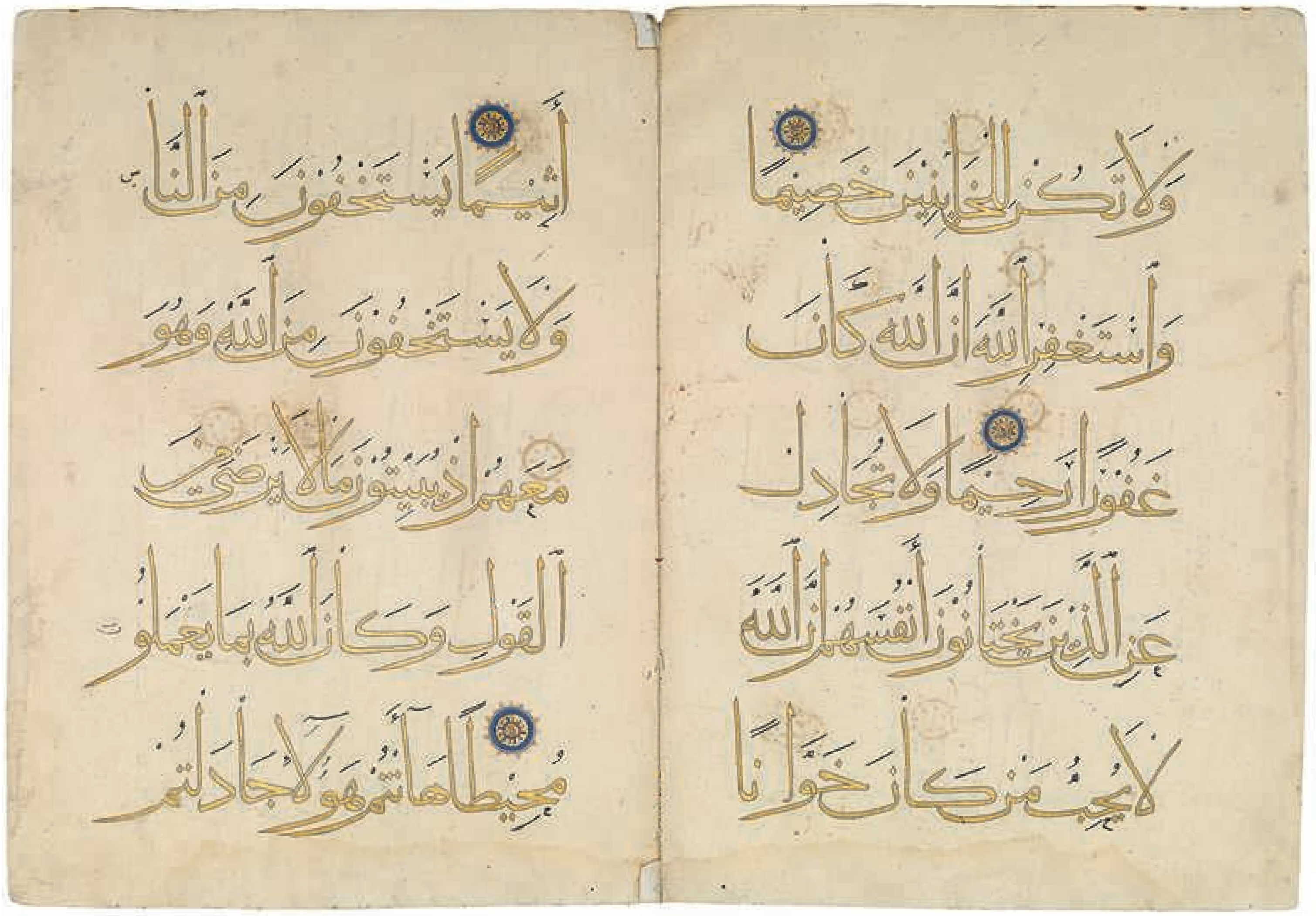
Fifth part of a copy of the Qur'an in 30 volumes

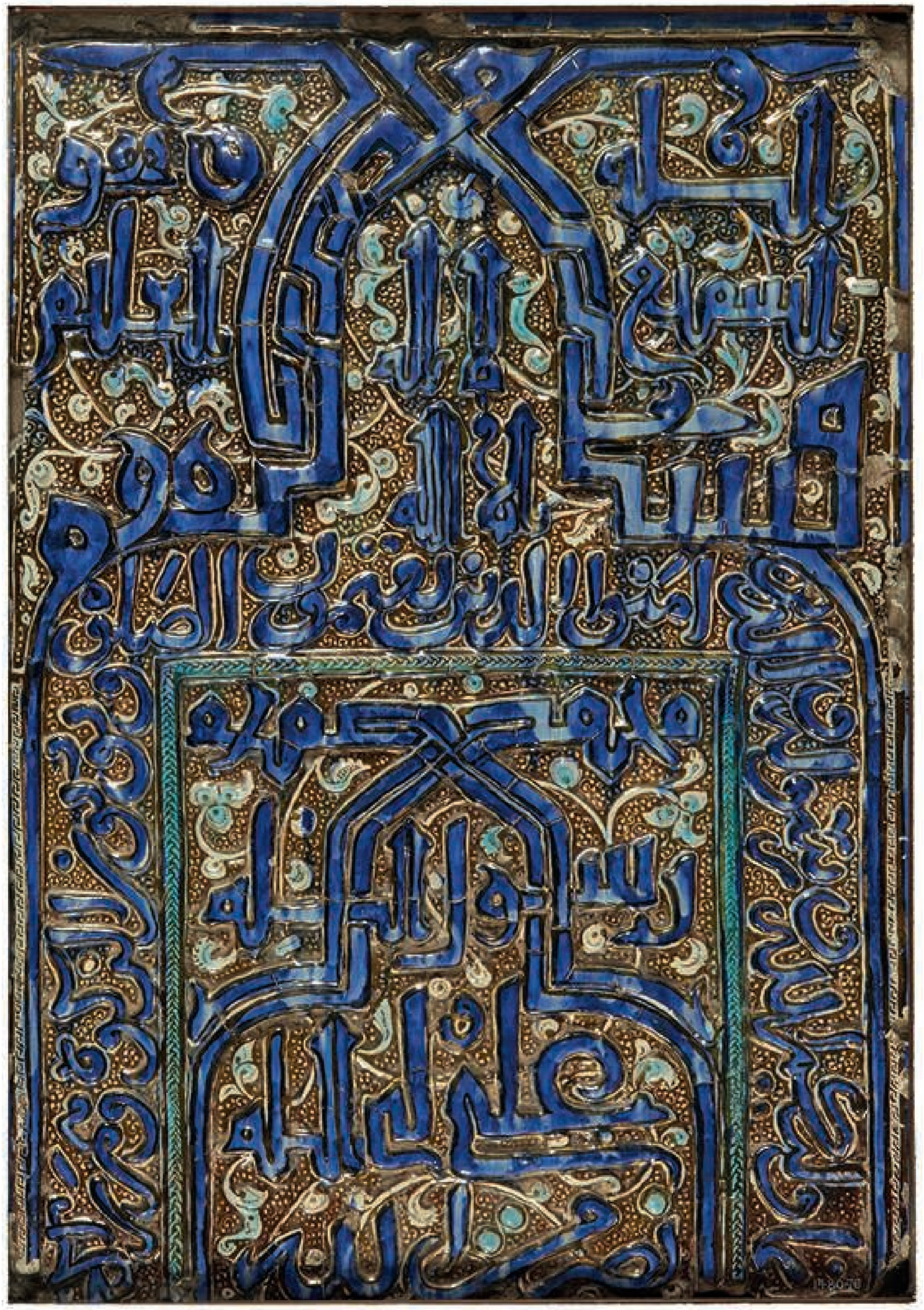
1306–7

Signed by Ali ibn Muhammad al-Huseini
Mosul, Iraq
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, 57 folios, each 47.7 × 34.2 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1030

This manuscript was one of several that the Mongol emperor Öljeytü (r. 1304–16) commissioned from calligraphers in Iraq for his mausoleum in Sultaniyeh in north-west Iran. Its imperial quality is evident in the materials used, including the superb paper and the gold lettering. The style of script employed is usually called *muhaqqaq*, 'established beyond doubt', which aptly describes the disciplined way in which it conveys the Qur'anic text. The strong emphasis on the horizontal is characteristic of later Qur'anic hands developed in Iran.

Originally the manuscript was much larger, with luxuriously wide margins, but the edges of the leaves presumably became damaged through constant use and were trimmed.





117

Tile with calligraphic decoration

1250–1300

Iran, perhaps Kashan
Moulded fritware, colours painted in the glaze, lustre painted over the glaze, 78.7 × 54.9 cm
V&A: 1480-1876

The design is formed almost exclusively from religious texts, two of which have been organized as arch motifs. The Qur'anic quotation at the top (from surah 2, verse 137) contains the long Arabic word *fasayakfikahum* ('And He will suffice thee against them'), which forms the outline of the larger arch. Within the pattern below, a prominent place is given to the three phrases that make up the *Shahadah*, the basic text of Muslim belief, in its Shi'ite version: 'There is no god but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God. Ali is the friend of God.'

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

The mission of the Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur'an were historical events, and so a new understanding of history was implicit in the adoption of Islam. Muhammad was the last in a chain of prophets, which overlaps with those found in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Adam, the first man, was included (see cat. 118), while Jesus, son of Mary, was presented as Muhammad's immediate predecessor. Naturally, the greatest attention was given to the events of Muhammad's own life, about which there was a general consensus. One such was his Night Journey, during which he travelled to the highest Heaven and then to the depths of Hell (cat. 119). By contrast, the interpretation of what happened after the Prophet's death is affected by sectarian allegiance.

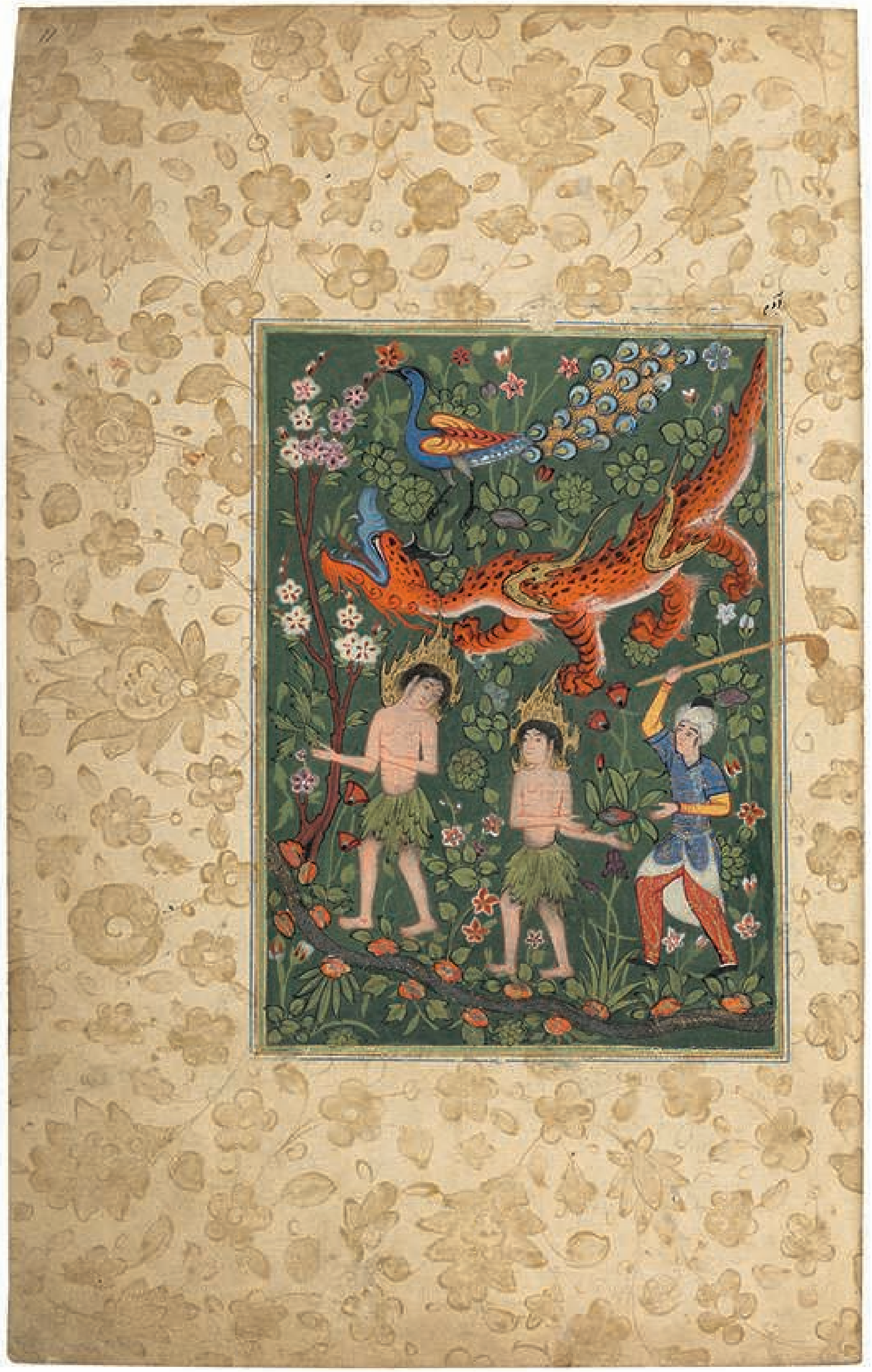
Shi'ites believe that Muhammad designated his cousin Ali as his successor in March 632. This was not enacted when the Prophet died the following June. Instead, a group of leading Muslims appointed one of their number to lead the community as caliph (*khalifah*). When the third caliph, Uthman, was assassinated in 656, Ali was chosen to succeed him. His accession was disputed, however, and in 661 he, too, was assassinated. Power then passed to Uthman's relations, the caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty, who, as we have seen (pp. 140), were succeeded by the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258).

Shi'ites count Ali as the first imam, or leader. His imamate is seen as a divinely sanctioned appointment, hence his special status as God's friend, or *vali* (cat. 117). Ali's charisma was inherited by his sons Hasan (d. 670) and Husein, who succeeded him as imams. In 680 Husein, his family and followers were slaughtered at the battle of Karbala near the River Euphrates in Iraq, an event that Shi'ites commemorate annually during Ashura, the tenth day of the Muslim year (see cat. 129).

Different branches of Shi'ism recognize different patterns of succession to the imamate in later generations. The most widespread view is that of Imami Shi'ism, also known as Ithna'ashari, or Twelver, Shi'ism. This acknowledged Husein's descendants over nine generations until the Twelfth Imam was concealed by God in the ninth century. This imam will re-appear at the end of time as the Mahdi, the redeemer who will bring peace and justice to the world in the company of Jesus. Until the sixteenth century, Shi'ite beliefs of this kind were held by a minority of Iranians. The Sunni majority accepted the validity of the caliphate. This situation was reversed by the first Safavid shah, Isma'il, when he assumed power in 1501 and introduced Shi'ism as the state religion.

To an extent, the new Iran that Shah Isma'il created was a realization of the aims of the militarized Sufi order he led, now transformed into a military elite. Isma'il gained control of Iran in the manner of a powerful warlord, but if he wanted to create a state strong enough to withstand his enemies, he would need to build alliances with the native population and create an administrative system that gave them confidence in his rule. For this reason, as we have seen (pp. 141–2), he adopted the Imami form of Shi'ism as the official religion of his new empire. Iran thereby became the most important Imami Shi'ite state in history, and his role in its creation gave Isma'il an added source of legitimacy as its ruler. He enhanced this position by publishing a genealogy showing that he was a descendant of the seventh imam, Musa al-Kazim, and through him of both Imam Ali and the Prophet. The Safavids thereby acquired a place in the religious history of Islam that more than matched the position they claimed in Iran's dynastic history of kings and khans.

The importance of the Shi'ite version of the Islamic past is signalled by the number of manuscript illustrations depicting episodes from the lives of prophets and imams that were produced in the Safavid period (cats 118, 120, 121). After their fall in 1722, the Safavids retained some fame as heroes of Iran and of Imami Shi'ism, especially Shah Abbas I, known as the Great (r. 1588–1629), the most successful of them all.



118

Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise

about 1550–1600

Shiraz, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 40 × 30 cm
British Library, Add. ms. 18576, folio 11a

Adam and Eve are being chased out of Paradise because they were beguiled by Satan and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. Their appearance reflects a passage in the Qur'an (surah 20, verses 120–21), which describes how 'their hidden parts were exposed to each other. And they patched the leaves of the garden to hide them'. The fiery haloes indicate that Adam had not lost his status as a prophet. The other figures – the peacock, the dragon and the irate gardener – were created to flesh out the Qur'anic story.

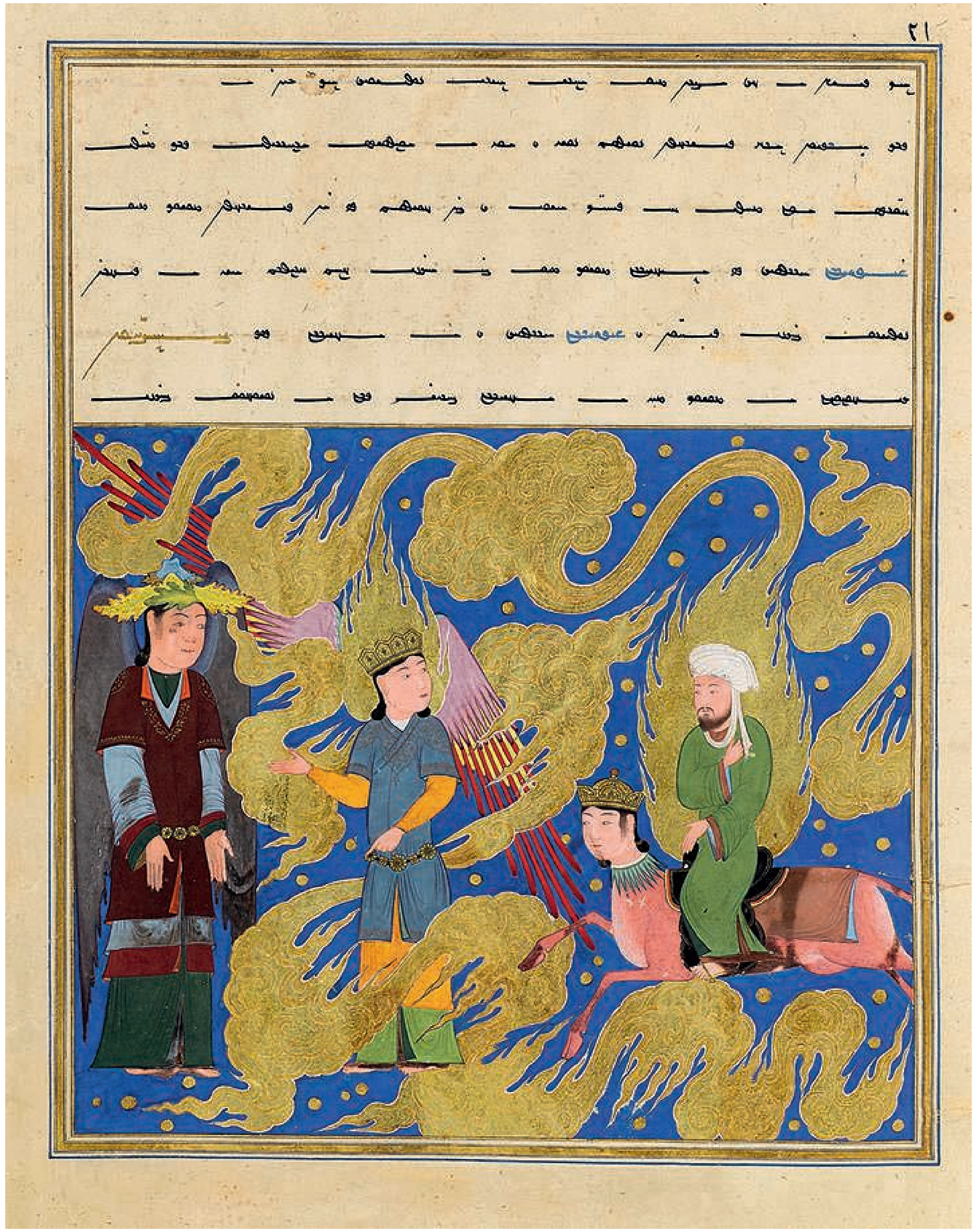
119

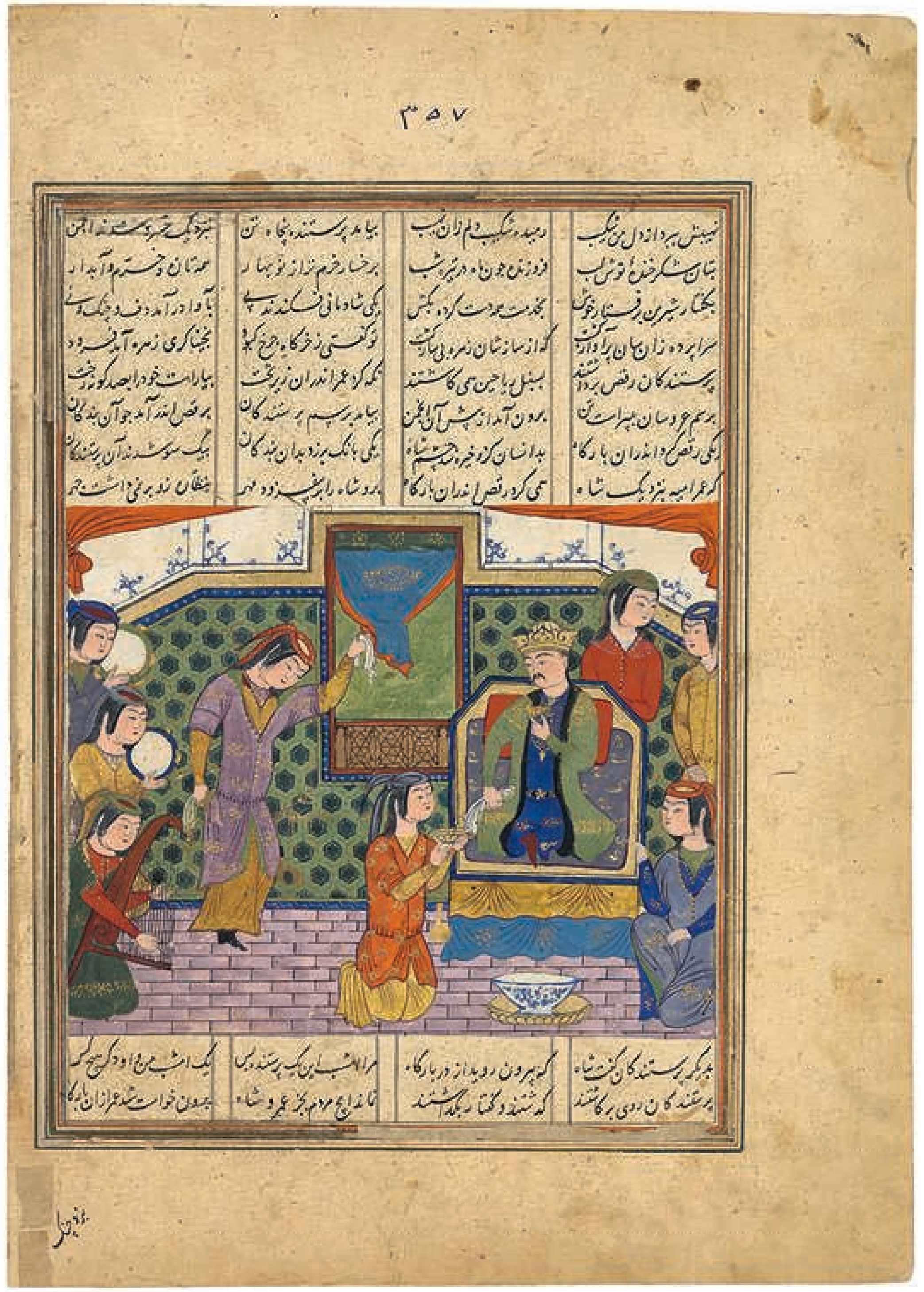
Gabriel Presents the Prophet to the Archangel Azrael

from a manuscript dated 1465–6

Herat, now in Afghanistan
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper, 41.2 × 29.8 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4070
Purchased 2013

This painting depicts a stage in the miraculous Night Journey of the Prophet, when he ascended through the Heavens and then, on his return journey, visited the different levels of Hell. The work sets out a vision of how the Universe is organized and explains how Muhammad gained knowledge of it. The text, *The Path to the Heavens* (*Nahj al-Faradis*) by Mahmud Sarayi, is in a Central Asian Turkic language called Khwarazmian, written in the Uyghur alphabet, but this copy was commissioned by a ruler of East Iran, Abu Sa'id Mirza (r. 1458–69), in his capital of Herat.





120

Umar Dances before Tahmas

1475–1500

Shiraz, Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
39.3 × 28.3 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.40791
Purchased 2017

The episodes depicted in the two preceding works were based on events related in the Qur'an, and, where possible, details were added by mining other reputable sources. By contrast, this illustration comes from the *Khavarannameh* (*Book of the East*), a work dedicated to purely imaginary exploits of Imam Ali and his companions. The author, Ibn Husam (d. 1470), set the exploits in Iran and used the same verse form as the *Shahnameh* (or *Book of Kings*) of Firdowsi (d. 1020). Here, in a particularly unlikely act of daring, a Muslim warrior, Umar, dressed as a beguiling female dancer, performs before Tahmas, an idol-worshipping king.

121

Imam Reza saves the Sea People

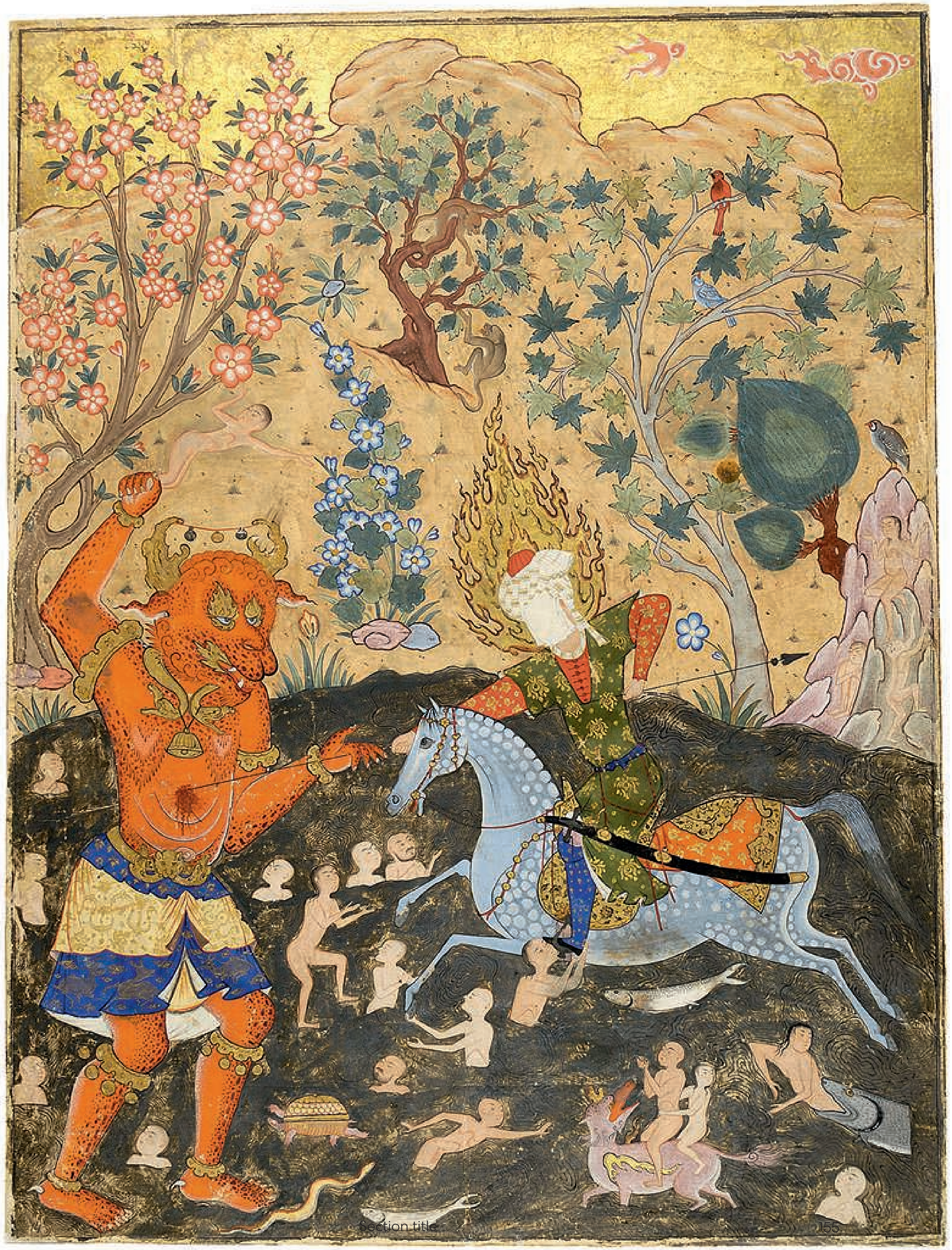
1550–60

Iran, probably Qazvin
Watercolour and gold on paper,
59 × 44 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris, MAO 984

This folio comes from a manuscript probably commissioned by the second ruler of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76). Iran was now governed by Imami Shi'ites, and the tales of the imams had moved from the margins of society to the very centre. This image represents an imaginary exploit of the eighth imam, Ali Reza. It comes from a copy of the *Falnama* or *Book of Omens*, used in telling fortunes. The book would be opened at random, revealing an image matched to the fortune detailed opposite. The victory of the imam against the red demon indicates good fortune.

Sophie Makariou (ed.), *Islamic Art at the Musée du Louvre* (Paris 2012), pp. 424–6



A SHI'ITE CULTURE

The conversion of the majority of Iranians to Imami Shi'ism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave rise to a distinctive visual culture that conveyed an allegiance to this form of Islam, both through calligraphic inscriptions and through imaginary portraits of its leading figures. After Iran was re-united under the Qajar dynasty in the late eighteenth century (see p. 264), the new rulers also supported Imami Shi'ism, which bound the Shi'ite clergy and the population at large to their cause. This is reflected in the Shi'ite themes that continued to be expressed in painting and calligraphy. Even Sufism, which had been violently suppressed from the late Safavid period on, re-emerged in an avowedly Shi'ite form and became popular, in defiance of the religious authorities.

Male social groupings were an important part of life in nineteenth-century Iran. Some organized processions at Ashura, for example, while others gathered in traditional gymnasia, or *zurkhanehs* (see cats 125, 126). These groups were not mutually exclusive so, for example, men from the *zurkhanehs* would carry the heavy standards (fig.10, cat. 129) at Ashura. Both might also be members of Sufi orders. In this way, the social complexity of pre-Safavid Iran, and the systems for mutual aid, appeared in reconfigured forms.

The main Sufi organization in Iran in the nineteenth century was the Ni'matullahi order, which, like the Safaviyah, had been founded in the fourteenth century. The hostility of the Safavid government led the order to move to South Asia in the seventeenth century, but in the late eighteenth century it returned to Iran, where one of its leading figures was Nur Ali Shah (d. 1801) (cat. 127). Although persecuted, the order survived and eventually developed a *modus vivendi* with the authorities, especially after Muhammad Shah, the third Qajar shah (r. 1834–48), became a member.

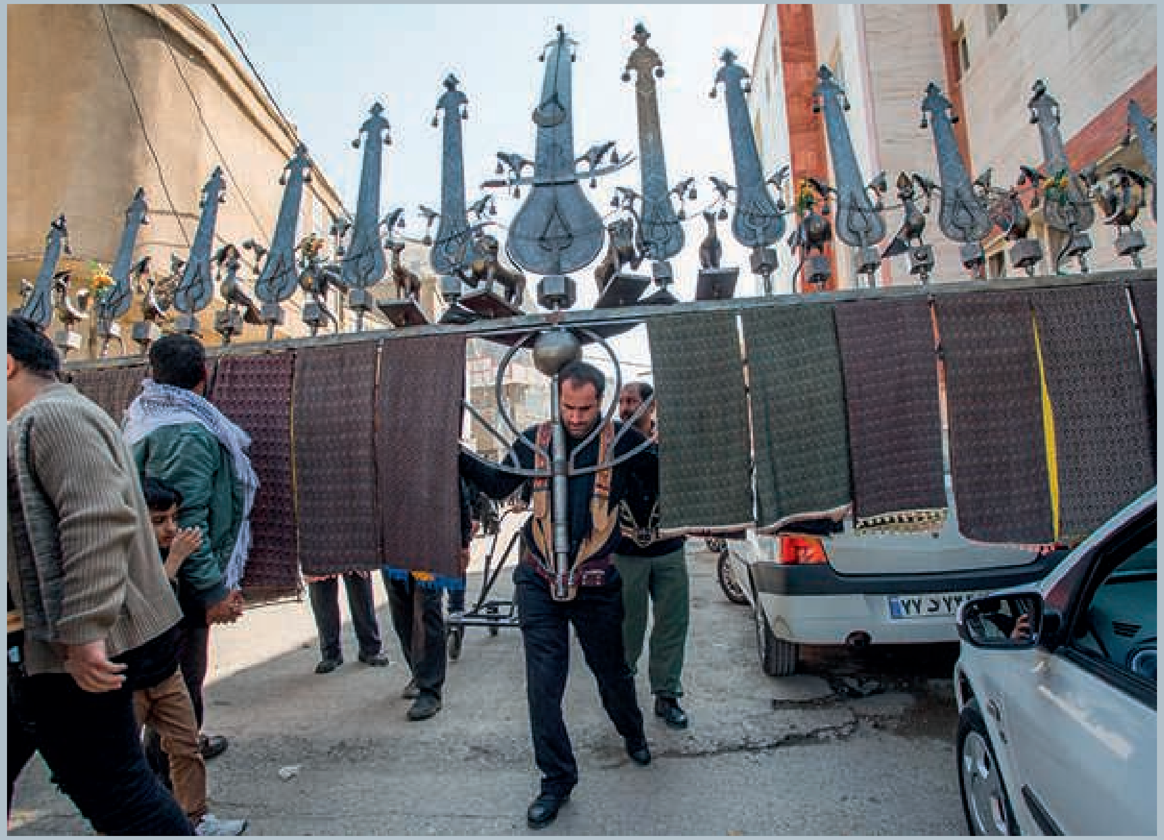


Fig. 10
Man carrying an *alam* for a Shi'ite ceremony, Khorramabad, Lorestan province

122

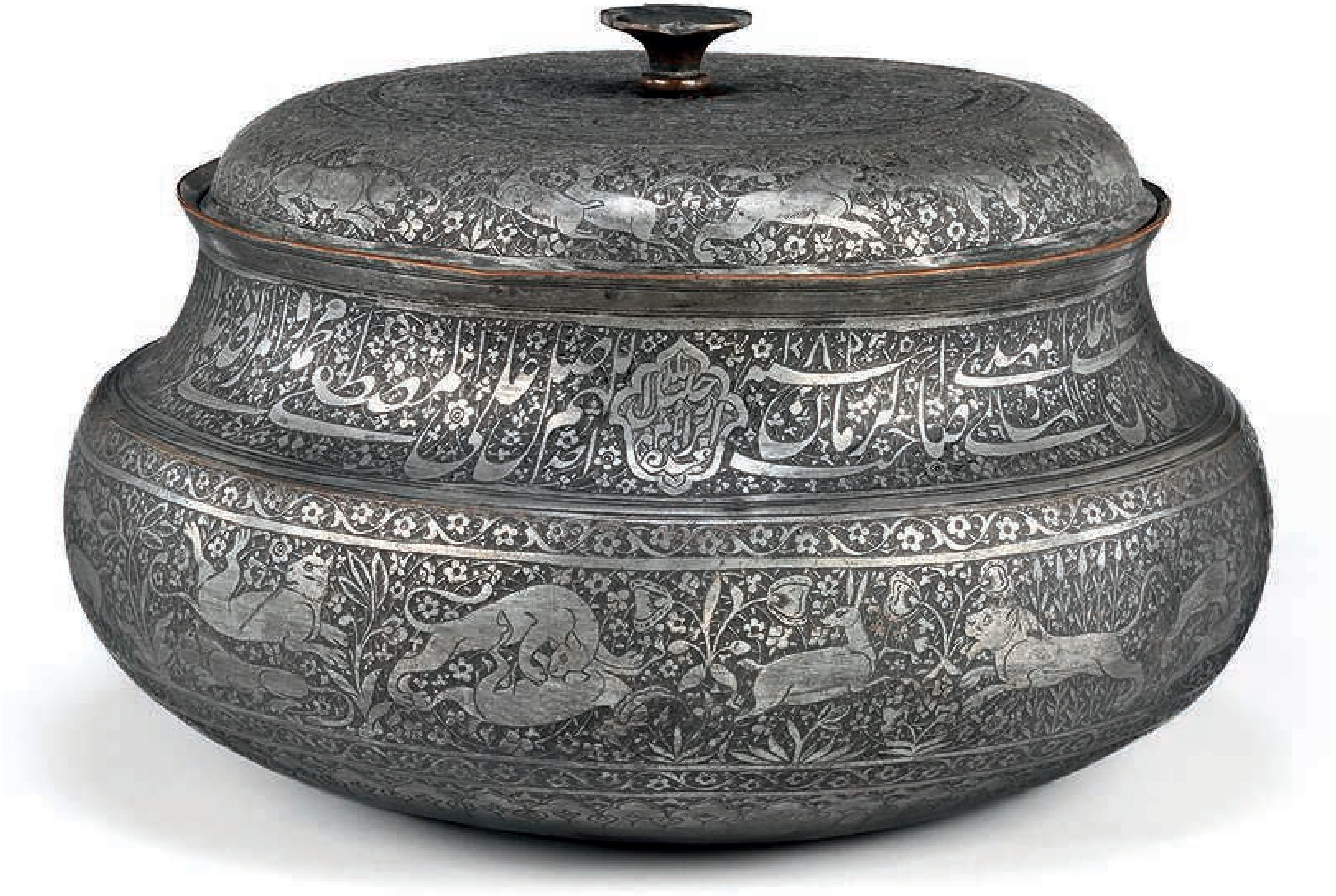
Covered bowl

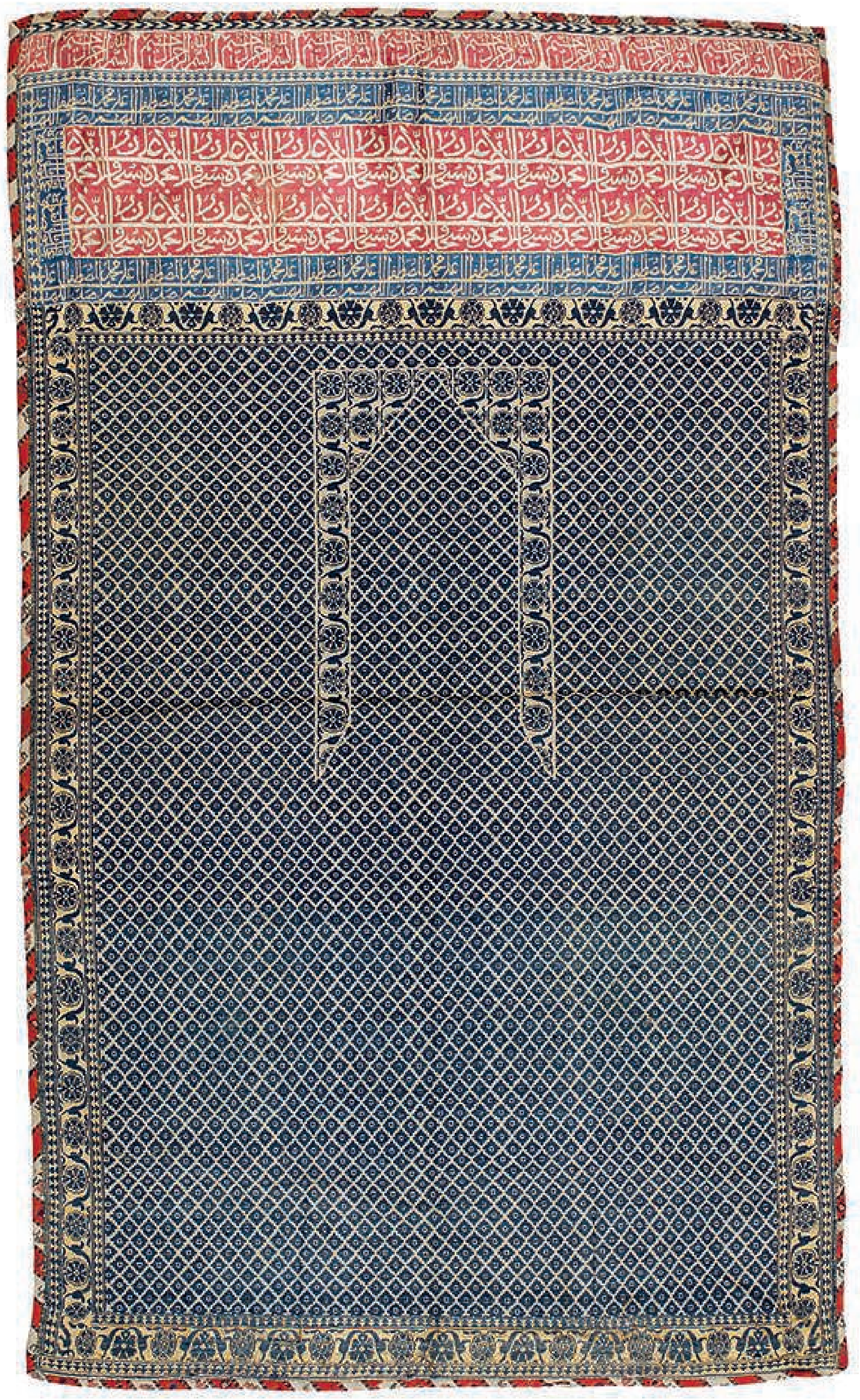
1678

Iran, perhaps Isfahan
Copper, engraved, tinned and the background to the decoration filled with a black material, diameter of body 35 cm
V&A: 983-1886

This bowl and cover both bear inscriptions of a distinctly Shi'ite character that came into general use in the Safavid period. A wide band below the rim of the bowl contains a text calling God's blessing on the Fourteen Immaculates. These were the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatimah and the Twelve Imams. On the lid is a prayer urging reliance on the first imam, which begins, 'Call upon Ali, in whom wonders are made manifest. You will find him a help to you in times of distress.' There is also an inscription naming the first owner, Ibrahim, son of Khalilallah.

Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th–18th Centuries* (London 1982), no. 155





123

Prayer mat (*janamaz*)

1800–1900

Iran
Silk warp, cotton and silk weft,
printed cotton backing, wool trim,
111 × 66 cm
V&A: 1069-1900. Given by Dudley B. Myers

The function of this mat is indicated by its design. The arch motif that interrupts the blue and white ground pattern refers to the mihrab, the niche in a mosque that indicates the direction of prayer. During the prayer, the worshipper makes two full prostrations while saying in Arabic the phrase: 'Glory be to my Lord, the Most High, and praise be His.' These words form a calligraphic repeat pattern at the top of the mat, in white on a panel with a red ground.

Jennifer Wearden and Patricia L. Baker, *Iranian Textiles* (London 2010), p. 74 and pl. 25

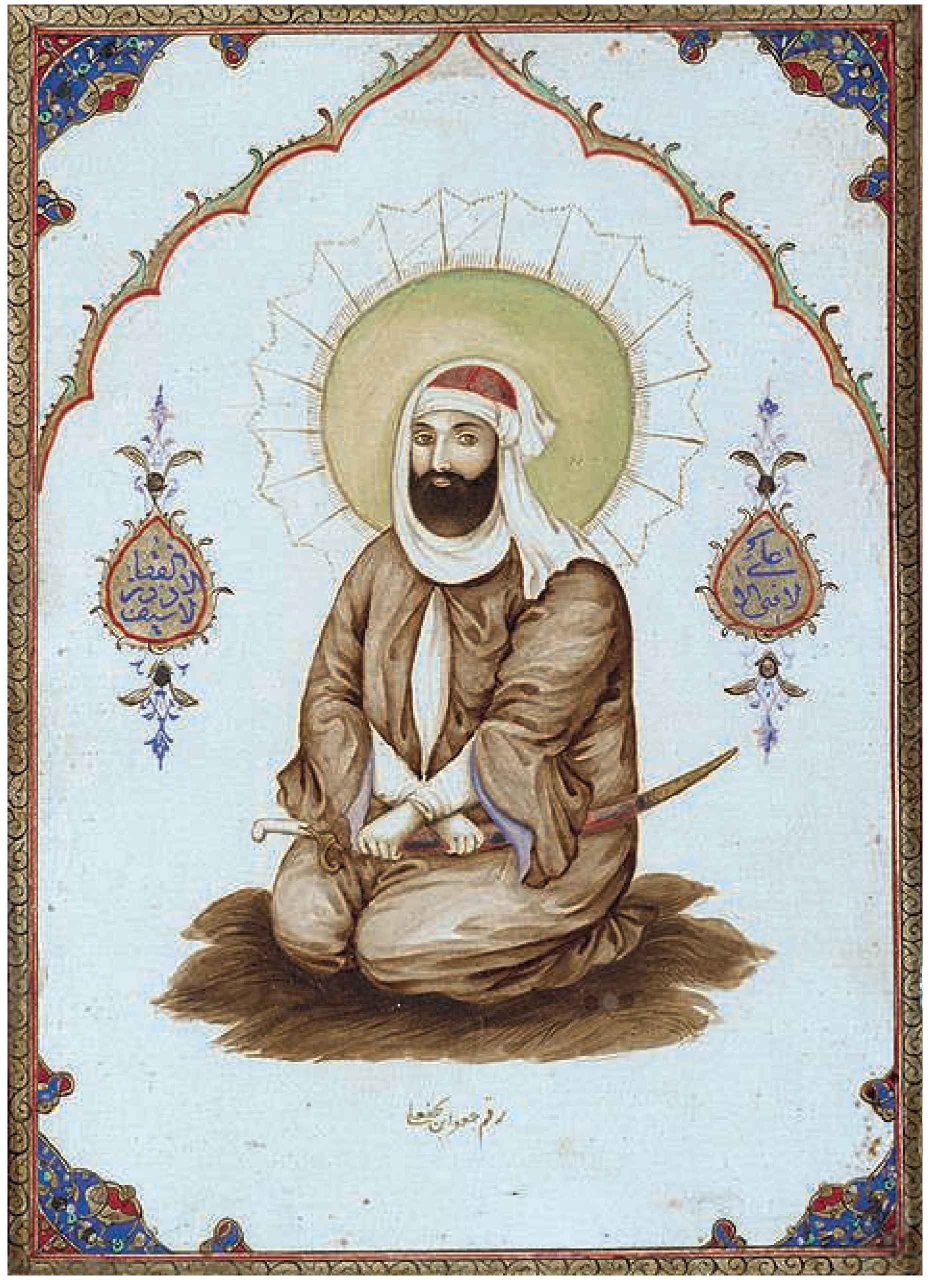
124

Mirror case with a portrait of Imam Ali

1850–70

Signed by Ja'far, son of Najaf Ali
Iran
Steel case overlaid with gold;
watercolour, gold and ink on paper,
17.1 × 13.1 cm
V&A: 504-1874

In the 19th century, Shi'ite religious imagery began to appear in many different styles and formats. This imaginary portrait of Imam Ali shows him seated, with a sword lying across his lap. He is flanked by two cartouches containing a text that identifies both: 'There is no hero but Ali. There is no sword but Dhulfiqar.' The weapon marked Ali's special status, as it was believed to have been delivered to him by the Archangel Gabriel.



125

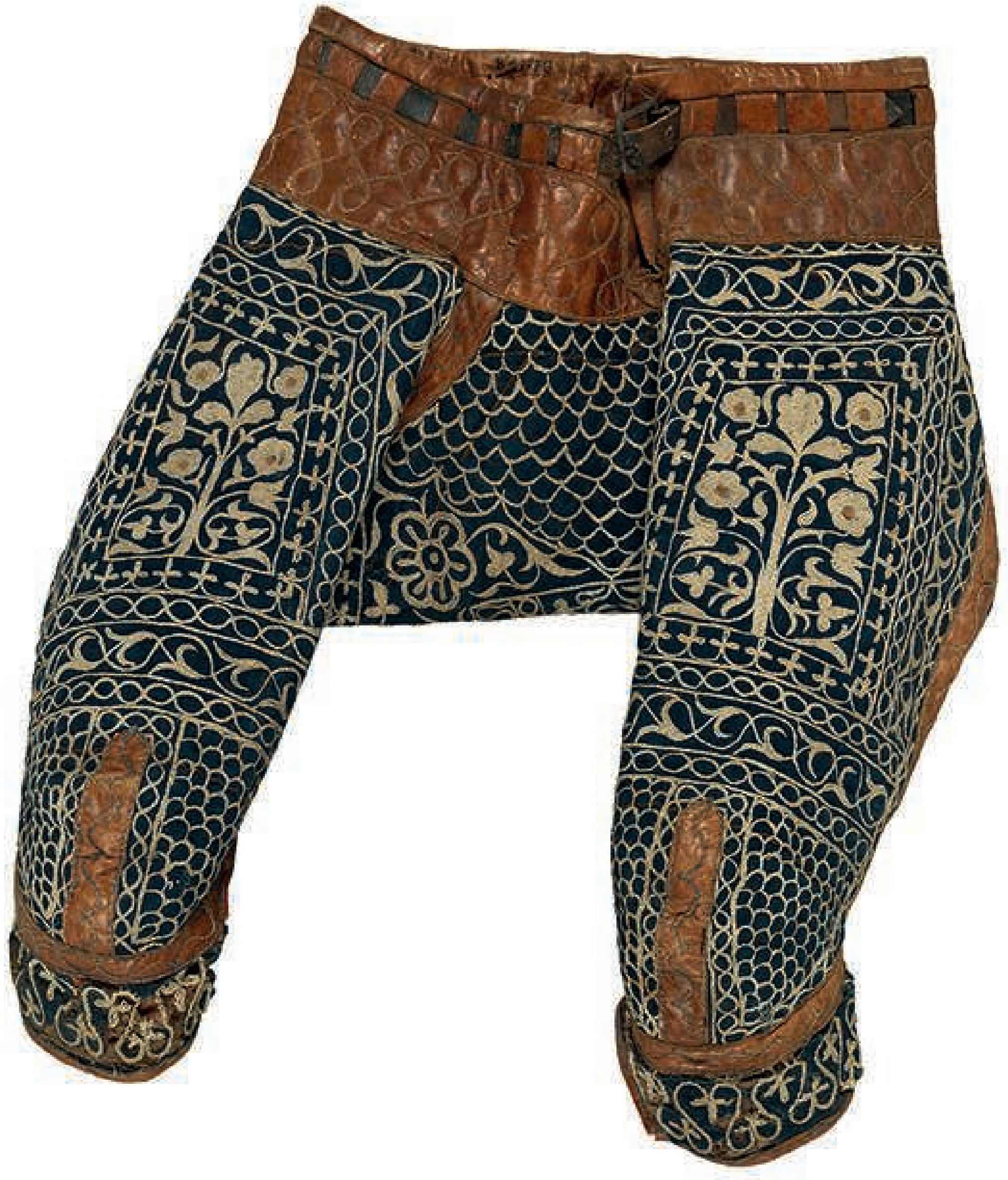
Leather breeches

before 1876

Iran
Leather and woven cotton, the lining printed, the facings embroidered in cotton, stiffened, padded and sewn, length 68 cm
V&A: 841–1876

Breeches of this type were worn in the traditional gymnasia (*zurkhanehs*), where men trained to increase their bodily strength in preparation for a variety of public activities, including wrestling and weight-lifting (see cat. 126). It also prepared the members of the *zurkhaneh* to carry heavy standards (such as cat. 129) in the processions at Ashura.

Jennifer Wearden and Patricia L. Baker, *Iranian Textiles* (London 2010), pl. 72



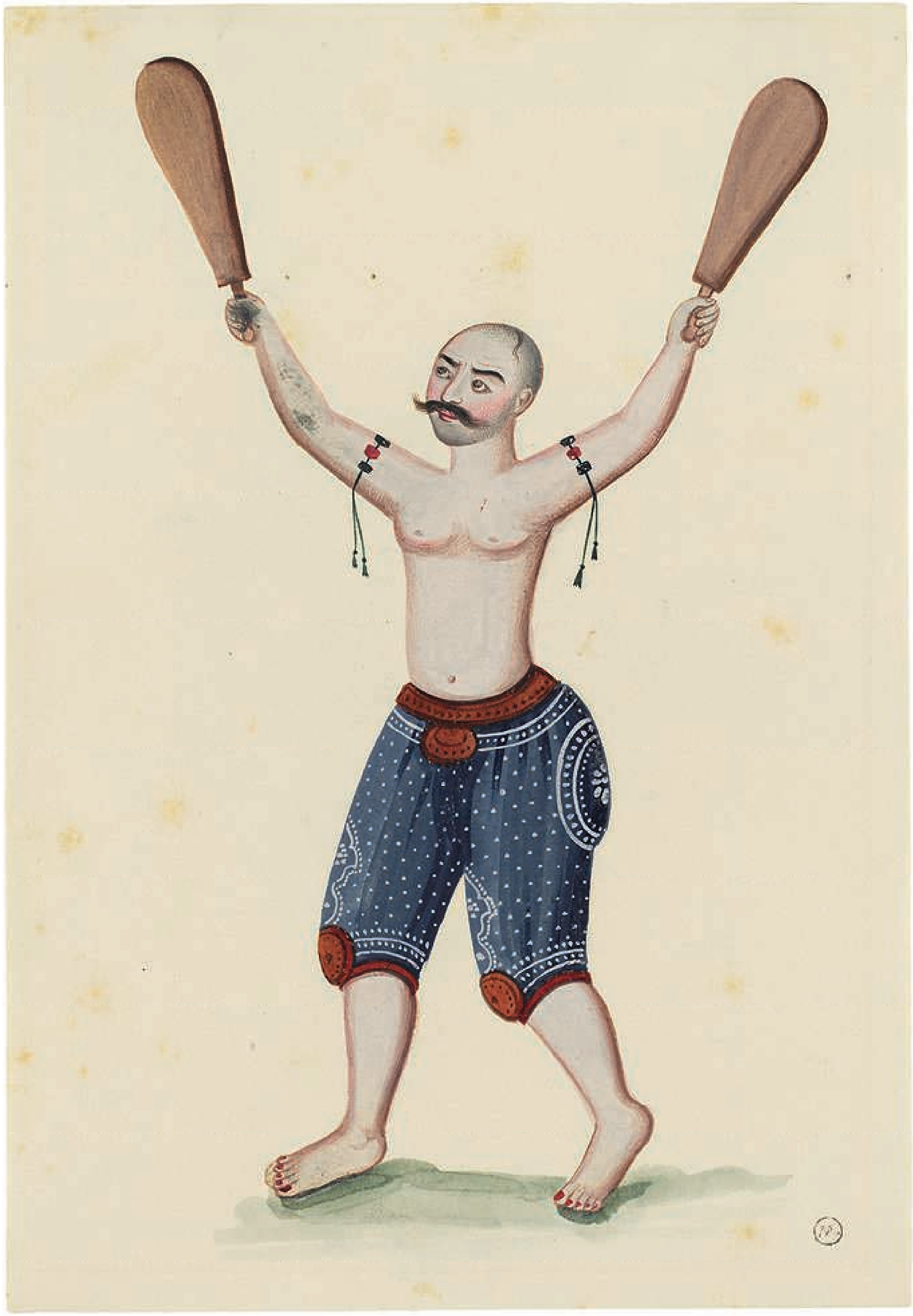
126

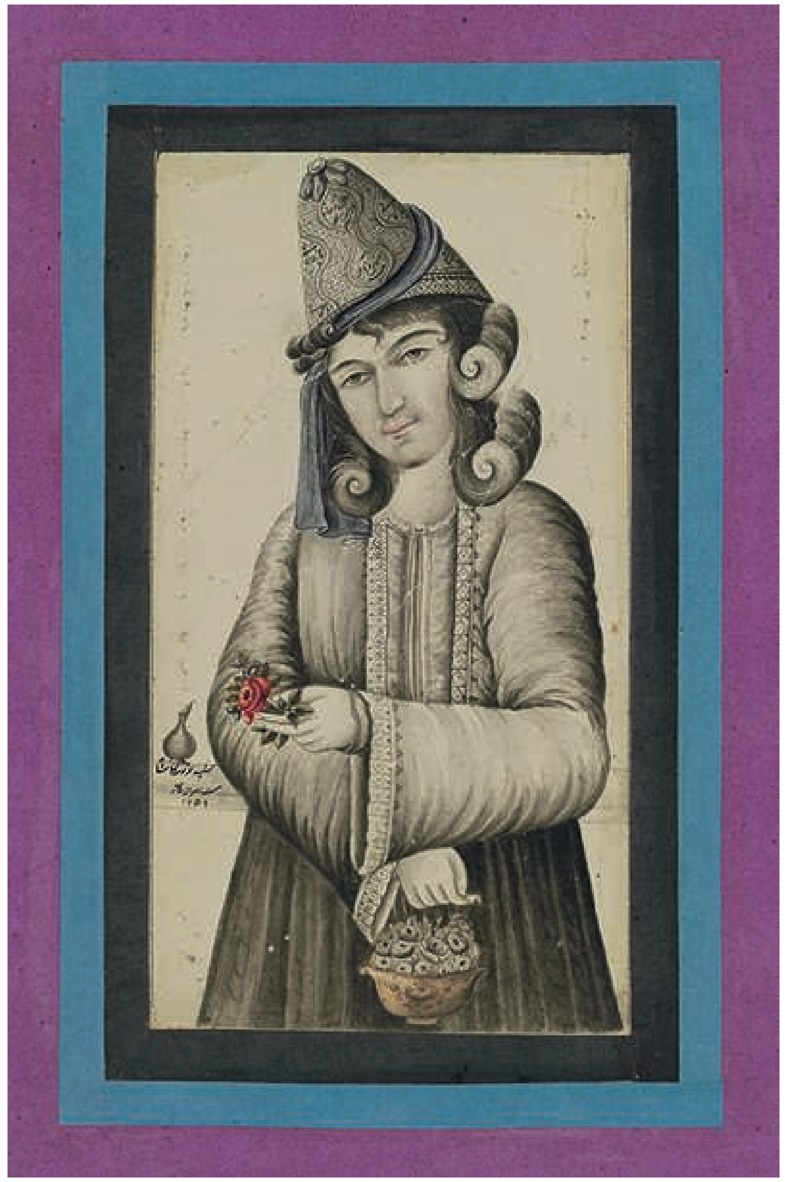
A gymnast (*pahlavan*)

1800–1900

Iran
Watercolour on paper, 21.7 × 15 cm
V&A: D.60-1907

This painting was probably part of a series of watercolours of Iranian characters that was made for sale to a foreign visitor to Iran. It depicts a gymnast wearing the type of breeches seen in cat. 125 and swinging the large clubs called *mil* that were used to increase the strength of the arms. The armlets, or *bazubands*, he wears may have been awarded to him for an outstanding performance in a wrestling match or weight-lifting contest.





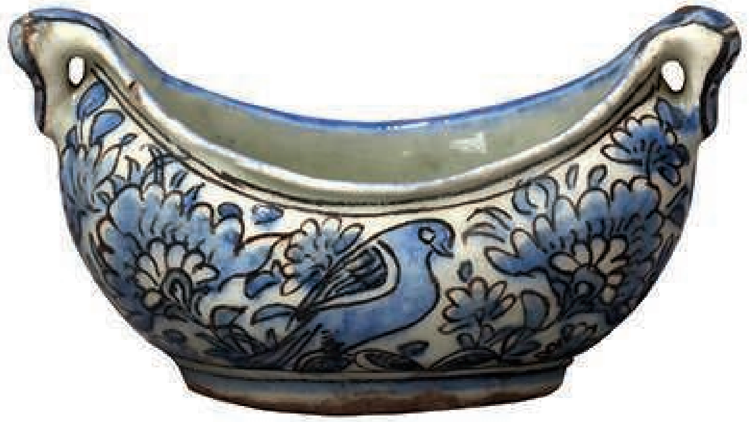
127

Portrait of Nur Ali Shah

1843

Signed by Nasrallah Qajar
Iran
Watercolour on paper,
mounted on card, 34.6 × 21 cm
V&A: 692:24-1876

Nur Ali Shah (d. 1801), a prolific writer in prose and poetry, was a leading figure in the revival of Ni’matullahi Sufism in the late 18th century. His portrait as a handsome youth was produced in considerable numbers and in many formats. This image was made for inclusion in an album, and may have functioned as a focus of meditation, since the contemplation of beauty was an important part of Sufi practice. He is shown carrying a begging bowl (see below) filled with roses, one of which he offers to the viewer, a metaphor for the higher awareness of truth achieved through devotion to him.



128

Begging bowl (*kashkol*)

1600–1800

Iran
Glazed fritware, painted
under the glaze, length 14.4 cm
V&A: 914-1876

Begging bowls for Sufi mendicants were produced in a wide range of materials. Many have this boat shape, which finds a parallel in the bowl full of roses held by Nur Ali Shah in cat. 127. The bowl would have had a chain, as in the painting, and the lugs for it at either end are in the form of birds’ heads.Elegant *kashkols* such as this may have been made for display next to other objects signalling piety in the homes of the richer sympathizers of Sufi orders.

129

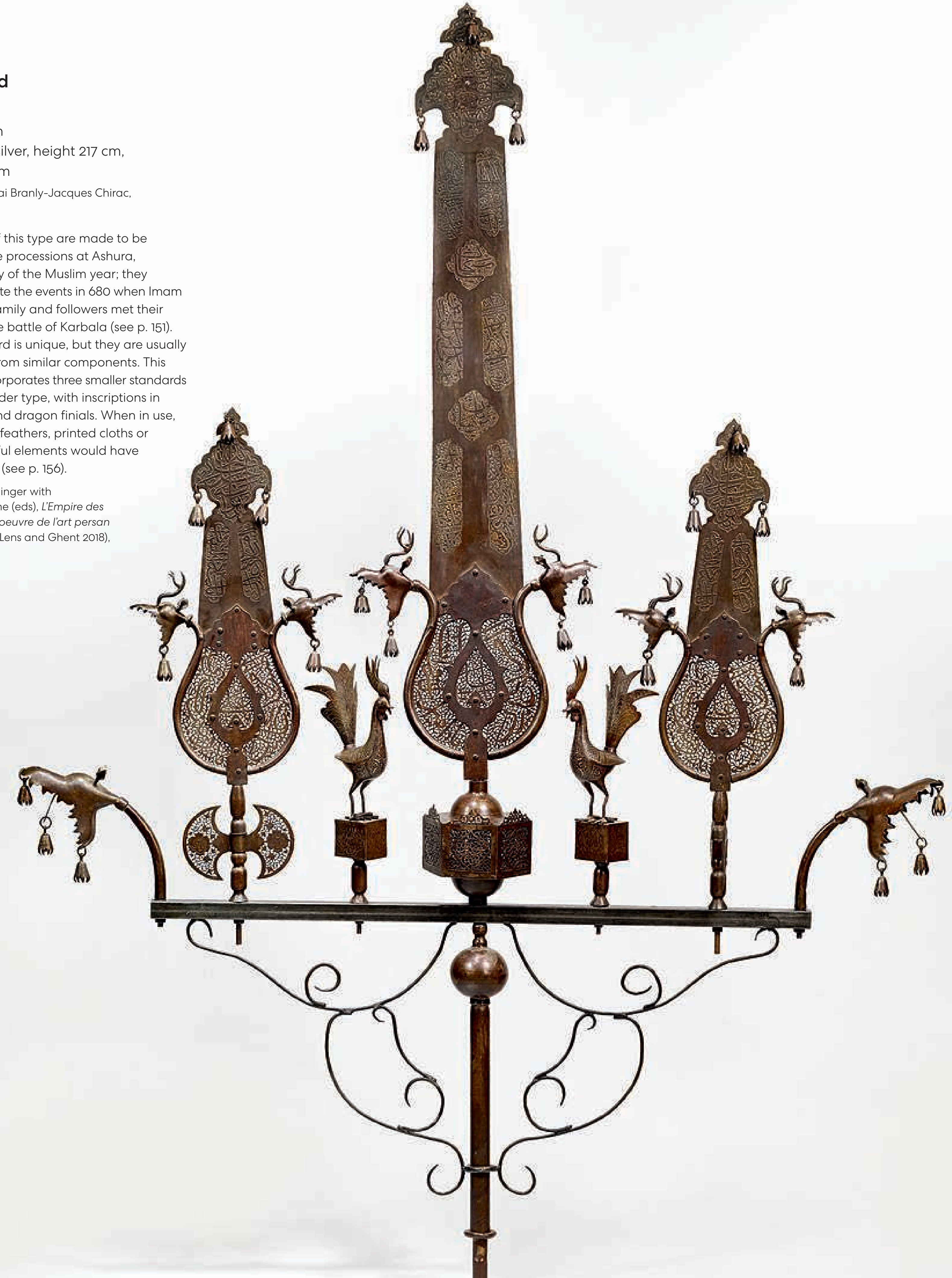
Standard

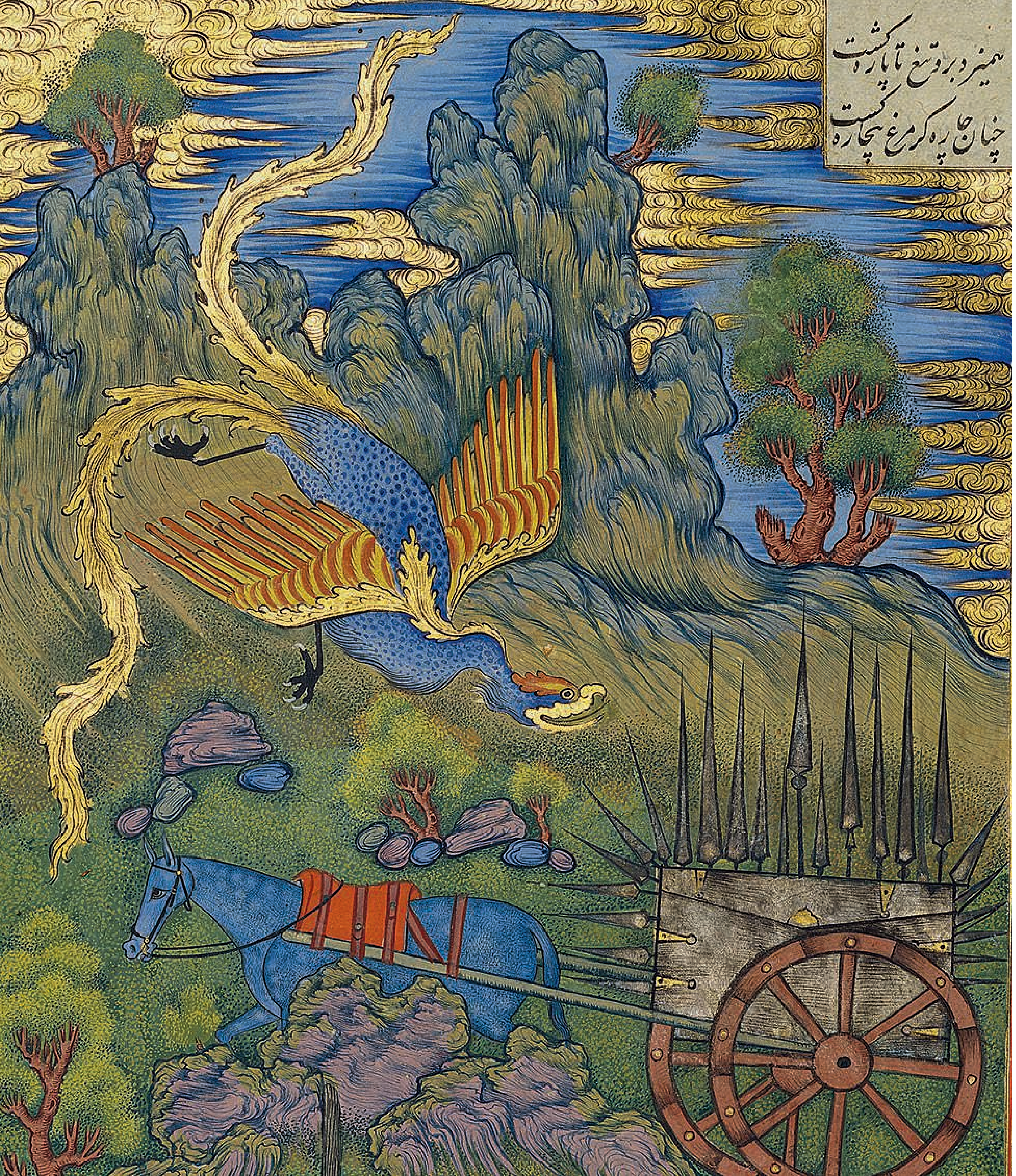
1900–20

Tehran, Iran
Iron, steel, silver, height 217 cm,
width 153 cm
Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac,
70.2013.4.1

Standards of this type are made to be carried in the processions at Ashura, the tenth day of the Muslim year; they commemorate the events in 680 when Imam Husein, his family and followers met their deaths at the battle of Karbala (see p. 151). Each standard is unique, but they are usually assembled from similar components. This example incorporates three smaller standards of a much older type, with inscriptions in openwork and dragon finials. When in use, dyed ostrich feathers, printed cloths or other colourful elements would have been added (see p. 156).

Gwenaëlle Fellinger with Carol Guillaume (eds), *L’Empire des roses: Chefs-d’oeuvre de l’art persan du XIX^{e} siècle* (Lens and Ghent 2018), no. 90

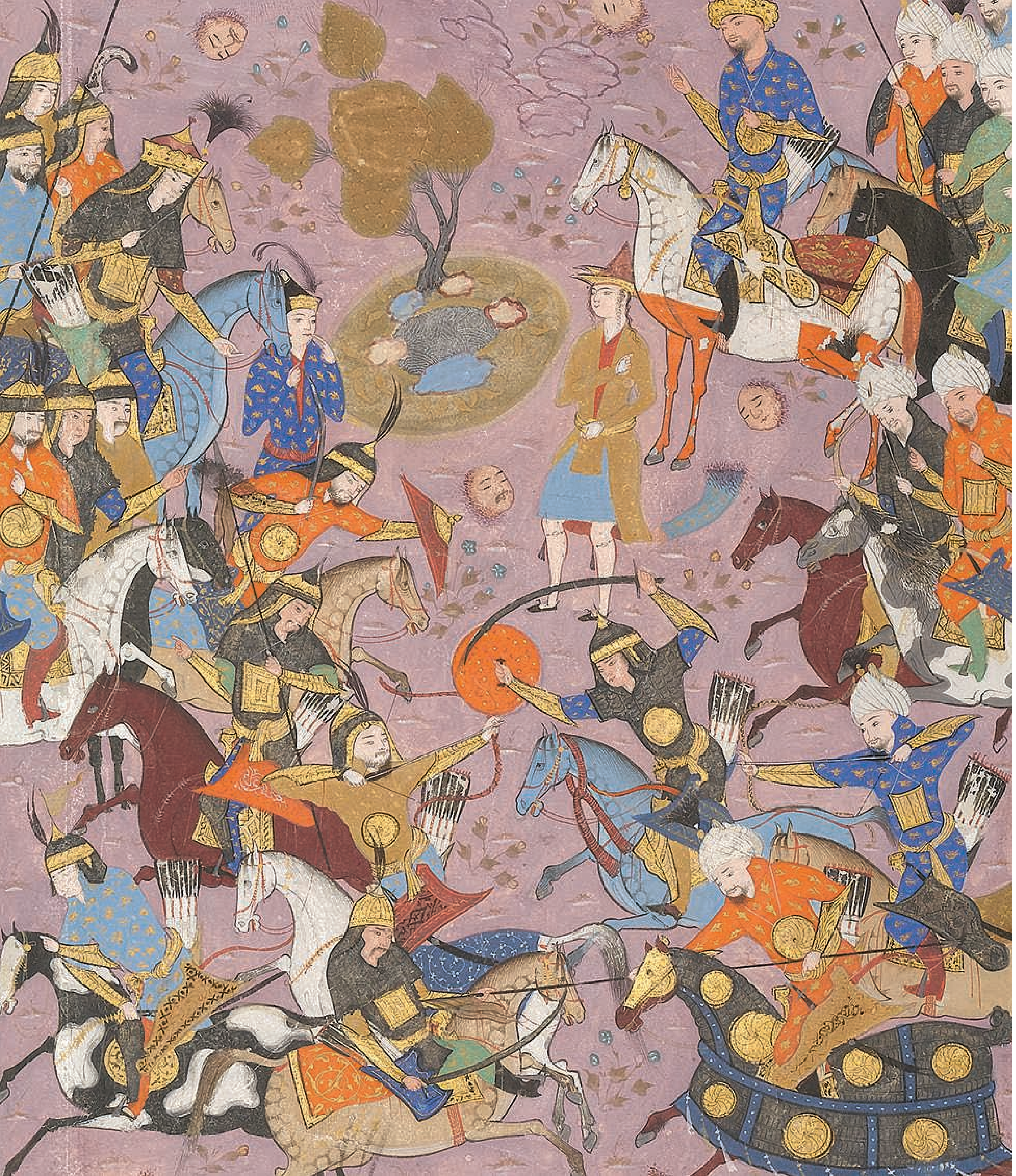



همیزد برو تیغ تا پاره گشت
چنان چاره گر مرغ بیچاره گشت

5

THE IRANIAN SYNTHESIS: AN IDENTITY REBORN

Tim Stanley



After the Islamic conquest (see p. 124), there were major changes in the written languages used in Iran. The literary Persian of the Sasanian period, written in the Pahlavi script (see p. 112), continued in use, particularly among Zoroastrians, but as more and more of the population converted to Islam, the literate among them adopted Arabic as their written language, even as they continued to speak Persian and other Iranian languages. Indeed, as already noted, Iranian intellectuals contributed a great deal to the development of Arabic literature in many fields (cat. 132, for example). In East Iran, however, Arabic began to lose ground to a new form of Persian in the ninth century.

The historical region of East Iran (Khorasan in Persian) was a huge area stretching from what is now southern Kazakhstan to the Indian Ocean. Persian was not native to the region, but it was probably already in use there in the Sasanian period among the region's ruling elite. This group was reinforced by the arrival of large numbers of Persian-speakers in the seventh century, some of whom had fled the Arab occupation of the lands to the west, while others, as newly converted members of the invading Muslim armies, made East Iran a part of the growing Islamic empire. Conversion occurred more quickly than in the west, but, being located much further from the centre of the caliphate in Iraq, the region developed an identity of its own, as a land dominated by Persian-speaking Muslims. A distinctive material culture also emerged there (cats 130, 131).

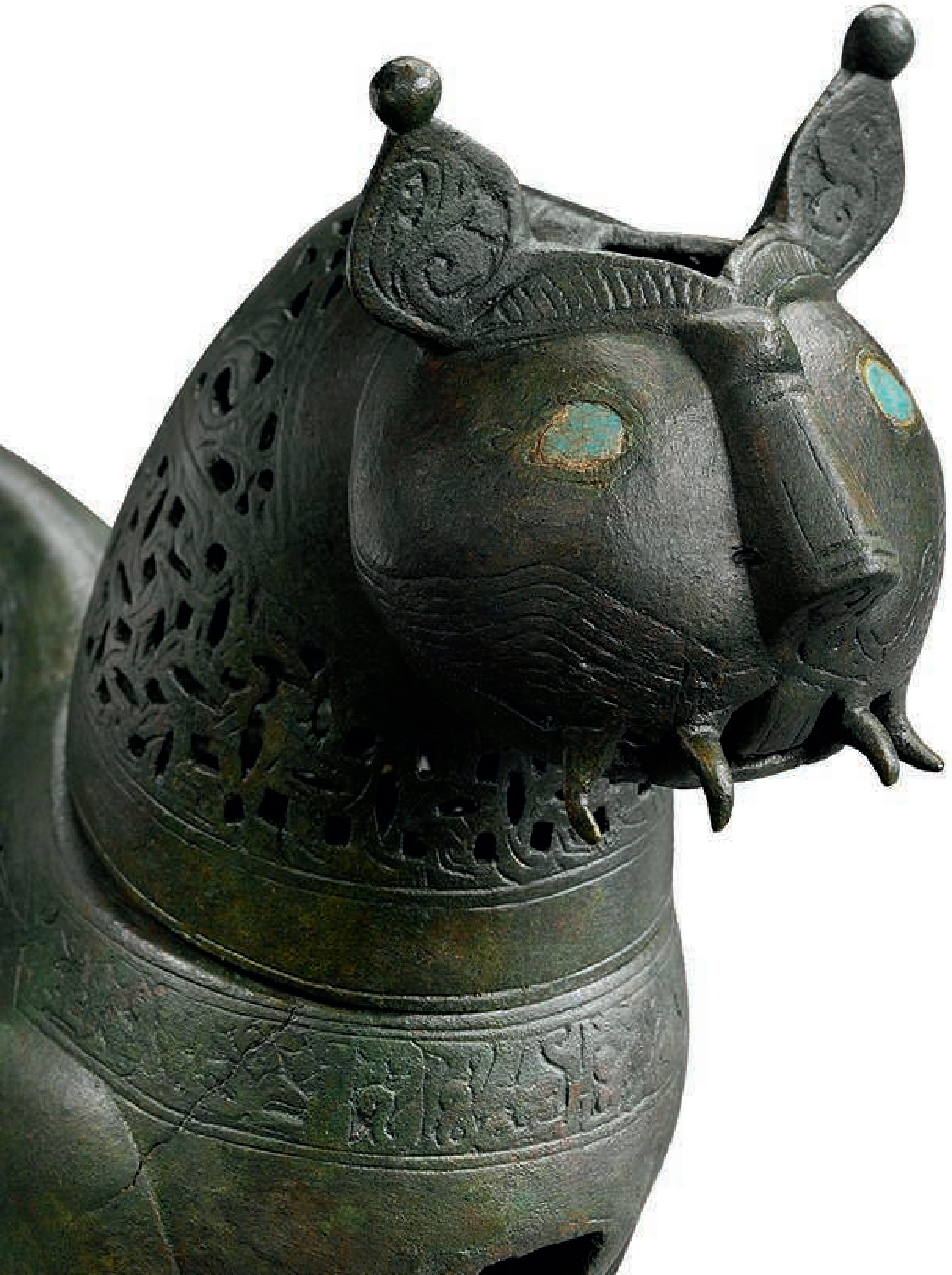
In the ninth century, the power of the caliphate began to fade, and local dynasties became increasingly powerful in East Iran. At court, business was often conducted in Persian, which began to be written down using the Arabic script. In this way, a new, Islamic literary language was created, distinguished, too, by an increasing number of Arabic loanwords. The new type of Persian soon became the vehicle for poetry, including, most famously, the *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*) of Firdowsi (pp. 175–83). From the late tenth century prose works in Persian also began to appear. By the eleventh century, the Persian of East Iran was a mature literary language, and it was ready for two developments that would revolutionize its status.

One was the conquest of a large part of what is now Pakistan and north-west India by armies from East Iran. Muslim rule was established there for the first time, and the new elite introduced their preferred literary language, which was Persian rather than Arabic. The use of Persian extended eastwards and southwards as more of South Asia came under Muslim rule, and the language retained its importance there until the nineteenth century.

While this eastward expansion was underway, East Iran itself was invaded by Turkish-speaking nomads from the steppes to the north. The Turks were led by Muslim chieftains, who rapidly transformed themselves into a great imperial dynasty. An important element in their success was their decision to co-opt the Persian-speaking bureaucracy of East Iran as their administrators.

Taking their name from the clan leader from whom they were descended, the Seljuqs began to expand westwards, bringing their Iranian bureaucrats with them, thereby introducing the reborn Persian language to West Iran, Iraq and Anatolia. By the end of the fifteenth century, Persian was used throughout a vast region stretching from the Balkans to the Bay of Bengal, and it was the vehicle for one of the greatest literary traditions in the world (see pp. 195–221). Over time, it gradually displaced Arabic from an ever-increasing number of cultural domains (cat. 133).

Persian was not unchallenged, however. From the eleventh century, the Muslim Turkic states of Central Asia began to sponsor literary languages of their own, which emulated Persian in many ways. These included Khwarazmian (cat. 119) and Chaghatai (cat. 162). Over the same period, Iran itself was submerged politically within empires ruled by alien dynasties, where the Persian, Arabic and, to a lesser extent, Turkic literary languages were used in different contexts. In 1501–10, however, the founder of the Safavid dynasty re-united Iran under his rule. The Safavids were not native speakers of Persian, but under their rule the Persian literary language held the position of dominance that it retains today.



130

Incense-burner in the shape of a lion

1000–1100

East Iran
Copper alloy, cast, engraved and pierced, glass inlay, height 28.5 cm, length 32.5 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris AA 19
Gift of D. David-Weill

This incense-burner is characteristic of metalwork made in East Iran while the region was the centre of a distinctive Muslim culture, which expressed itself in Persian. Like cat. 131, however, it shows how Arabic held its ground, as it bears a blessing for its owner in Arabic, inscribed across the lion's breast. It reads: 'Divine grace, felicity, glory, long life.'

Sophie Makariou (ed.), *Islamic Art at the Musée du Louvre* (Paris 2012), pp. 111–13

131

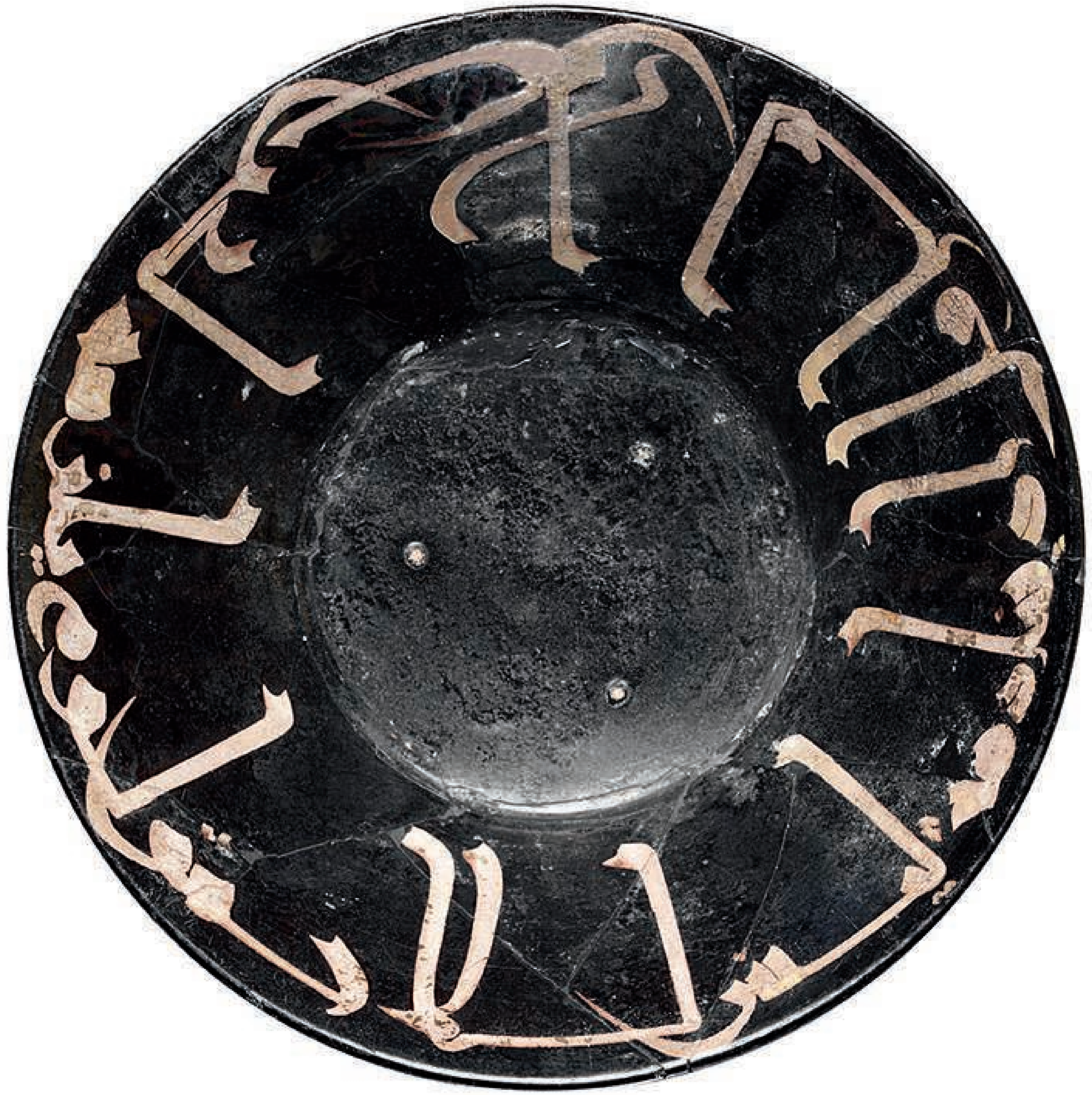
Bowl with inscription in Arabic

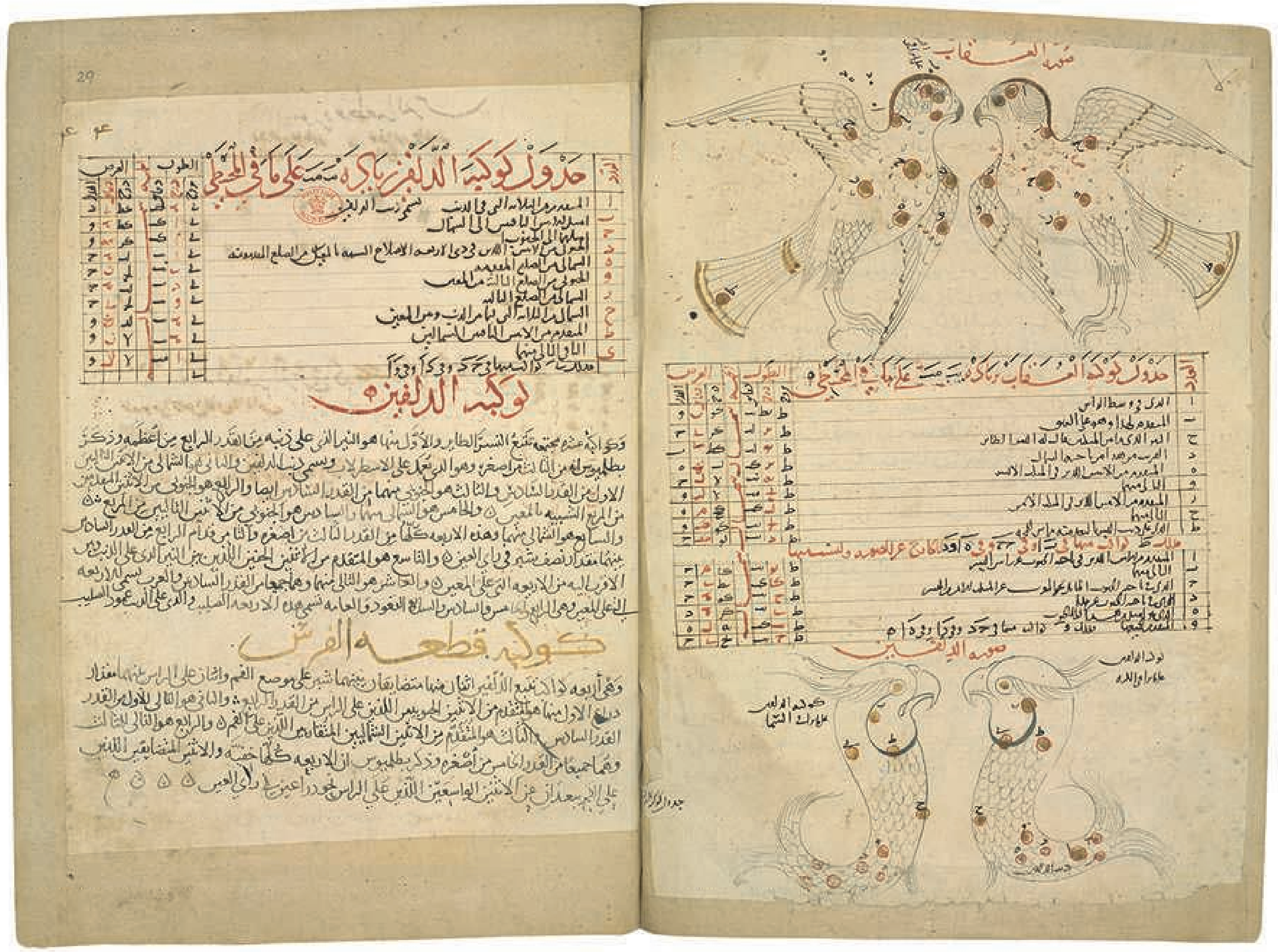
900–1000

East Iran
Earthenware, decorated with slip under the glaze, diameter 27 cm

V&A: C.131–1963

Luxury ceramics were first made in East Iran in the 10th century, when distinctive types decorated with coloured slips (liquid clay) were produced. As here, the potters sometimes imitated local silverware that bore beautifully written aphorisms in Arabic, making them important evidence for the practice of calligraphy in the region. The inscription on this example reads: 'The fool never receives the reproaches he deserves, but the wise man does who keeps him company.'





132

Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabitah or *Book of Constellations*

1260–80

Iran, perhaps Maragheh
Bound manuscript with ink, gold and watercolour on paper,
each folio 24 × 33.5 cm
British Library, Or. ms. 5323

The Iranian scholar Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi wrote this great work in Arabic in 964. It is devoted to the 48 constellations of classical astronomy. Each entry consists of a short discussion in Arabic, a table giving the celestial co-ordinates and magnitude of each star, and two drawings, one showing the constellation as it appears in the sky and the other seen from above, as it appears on a celestial globe (see cat. 135). On folio 29a, for example, the two figures on the right show the constellations Aquila and Delphinus as they would appear on just such a globe.

133

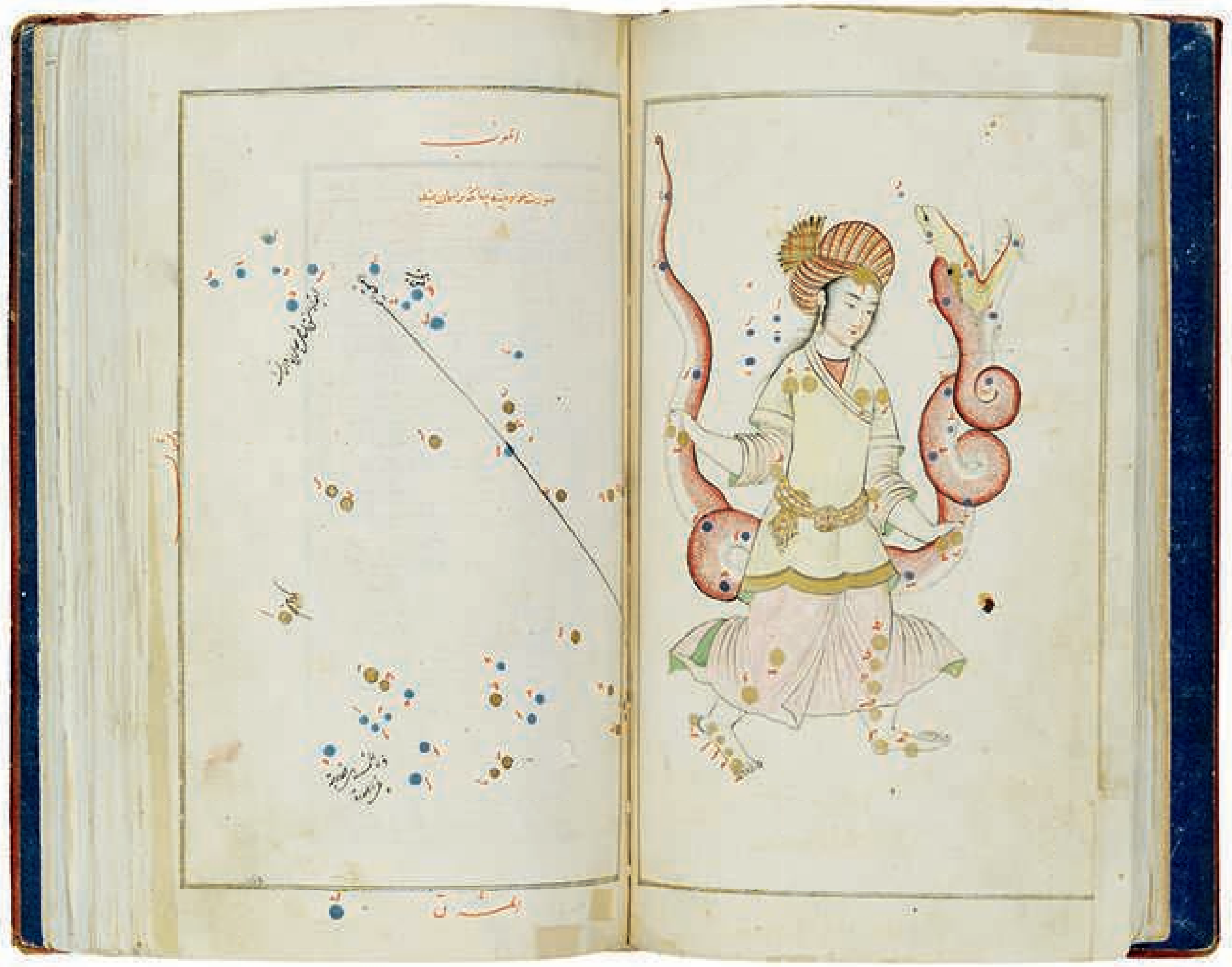
Persian translation of the *Book of Constellations*

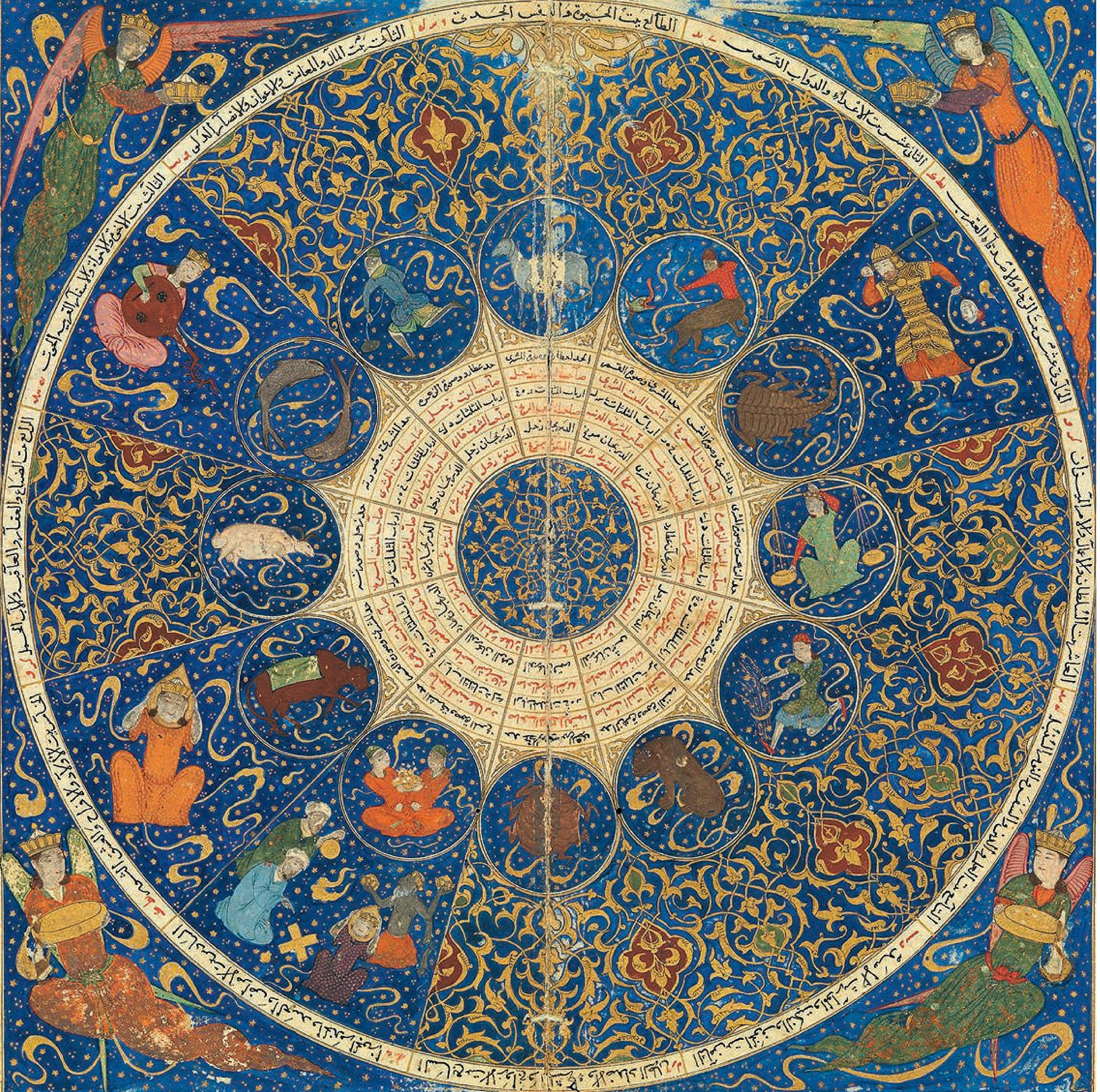
1630s

Iran, probably Mashhad
Bound manuscript with ink, gold and watercolour on paper,
each folio 26.6 × 15.7 cm
V&A: IS.2325-1883

Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi's *Book of Constellations* was in use for many centuries, but it had to be amended periodically because of the gradual shift in the positions of the stars. On these occasions, beginning in the 13th century, it was often translated into Persian. This translation was produced on the initiative of Manuchihr Khan, the governor of Mashhad, and was completed in 1631.

Illustrated here is the constellation Ophiuchus (Serpentarius). In this copy of al-Sufi's work each constellation is shown four times, with pairs of both coloured figures (right) and diagrams (left).





134

Horoscope of Iskandar Sultan

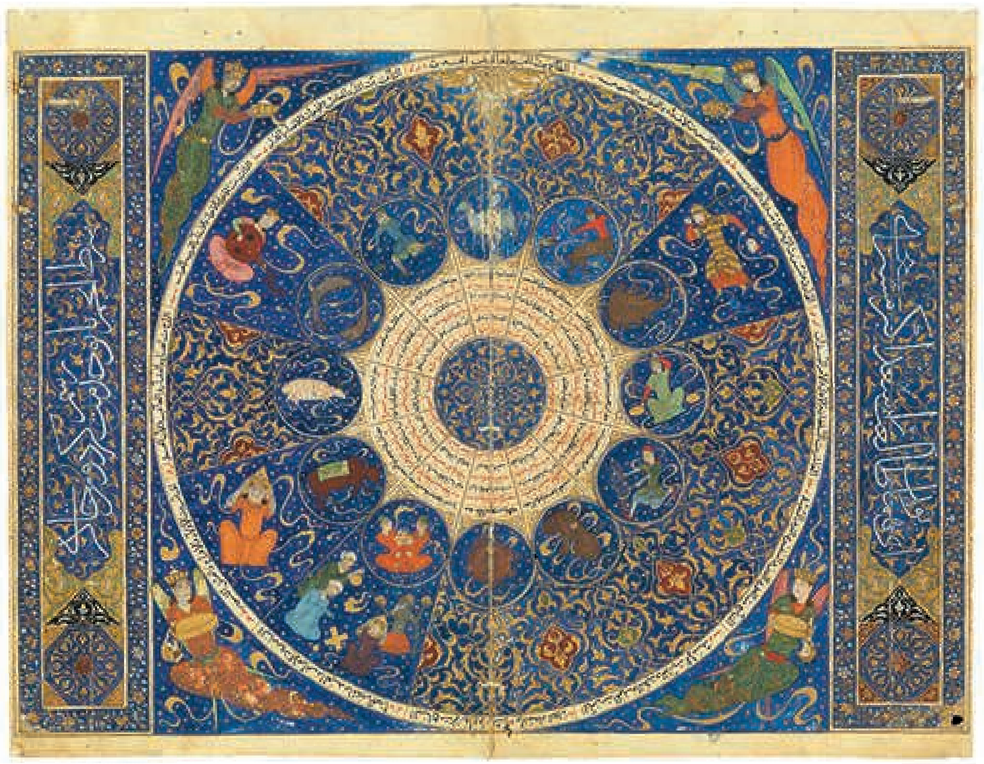
1411

Shiraz, Iran
Bound manuscript with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 26.5 × 16.7 cm
Wellcome Collection, Ms Persian 474

One of the operations carried out with a celestial globe (such as cat. 135) was that of casting a horoscope. Astrologers were widely respected in Iran, not least at royal courts, and the birth of royal princes was a particular focus for their prognostications.

This exceptionally grand copy of his own horoscope was commissioned by Iskandar Sultan, a grandson of the great Central Asian warlord Timur (d. 1405), while he was governor of Shiraz. The double-page painting represents the position of the heavens on the day he was born – 25 April 1384.

Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles 1989) no. 36



135

Celestial globe

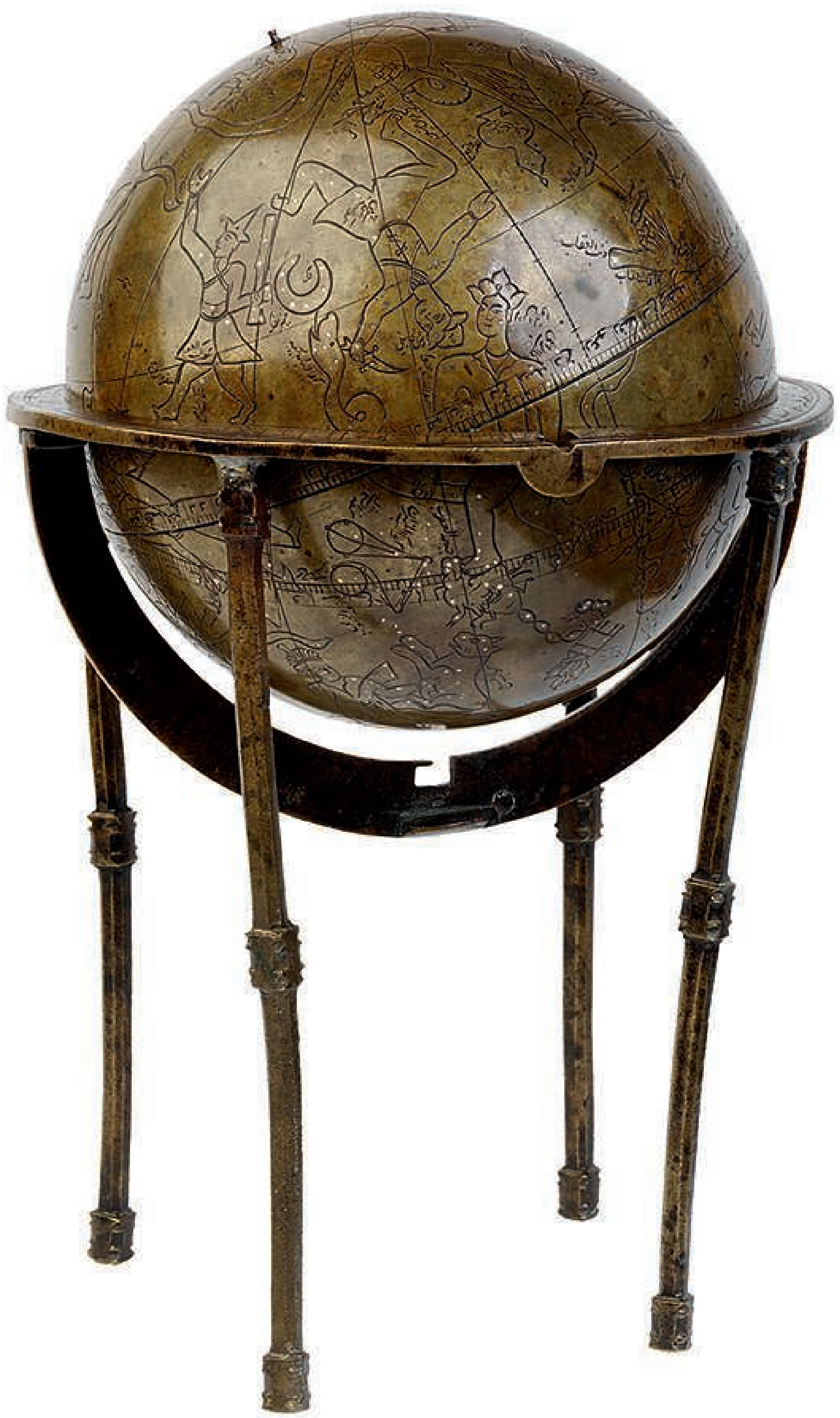
1640

Signed by Muhammad Zaman
Mashhad, Iran
Cast brass, the globe engraved and inlaid with silver, diameter 17.9 cm

V&A: M.827-1928.
Given by Sir Charles Marling GCMG, CB

This globe was made using the star charts in the updated, Persian version of Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi's *Book of Constellations* (see cat. 133). Originally it was a working instrument, used for making astronomical and astrological calculations, but eventually it went out of use and was preserved as a curiosity. The globe has a stand, which may be original, but the meridian ring that once spanned it has been lost, making the instrument non-functional.

Emilie Savage-Smith, *Islamicate Celestial Globes: Their History, Construction, and Use* (Washington, D.C. 1985), no. 16



THE BOOK OF KINGS

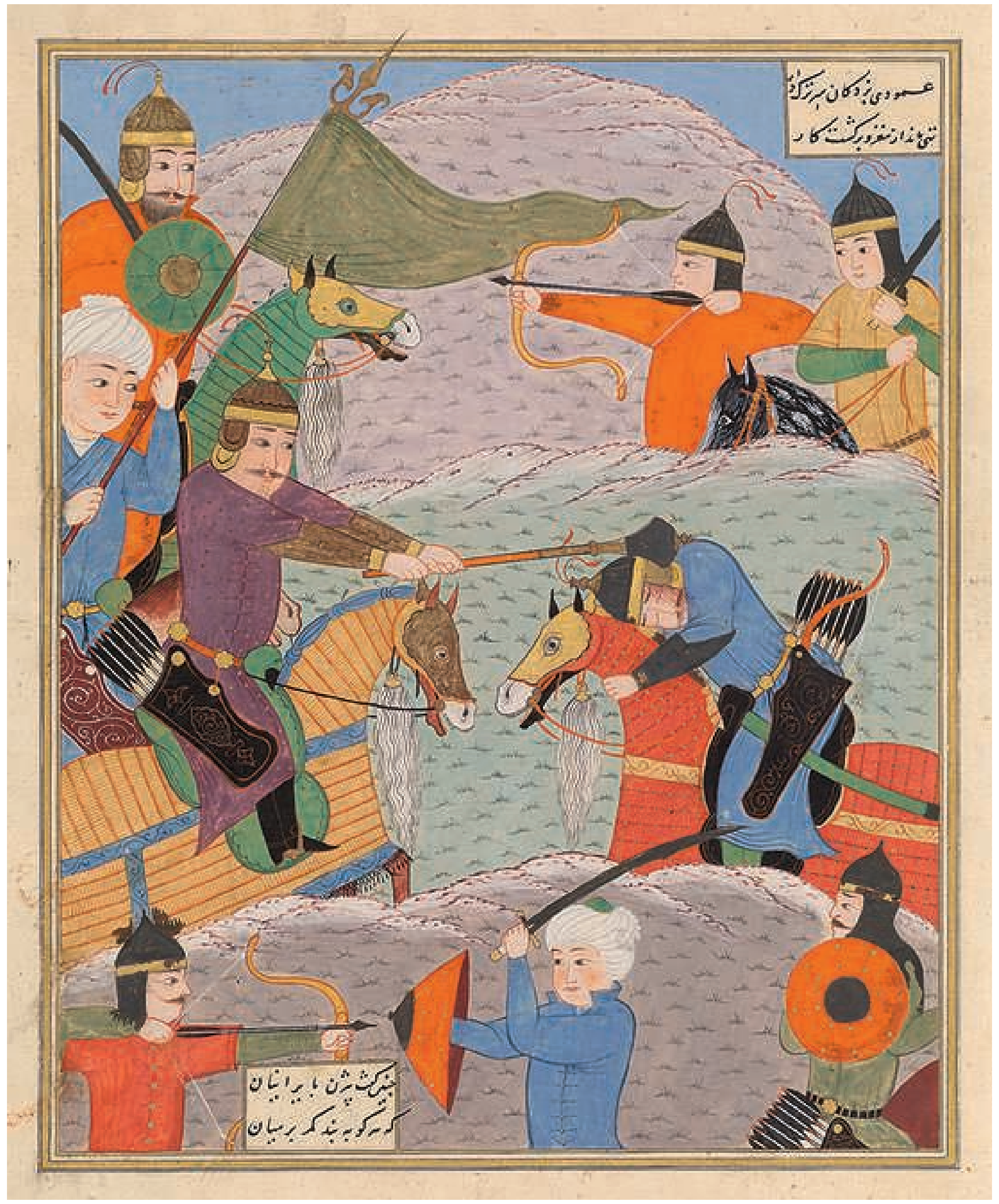
In Iran, knowledge of the past was never confined to the historical traditions tied to Islam, as set out earlier (pp. 151–5), since another well-developed view of history was inherited from the pre-Islamic period. The Sasanians had a vivid sense of their own place in the world, which was informed by works of history written in the Middle Persian language. Most of these books have been lost in their original form, but, before they disappeared, many were translated into Arabic and (Modern) Persian, and the stories they told lived on. Then, in the late 900s, these tales were combined in a great epic poem in Persian that is no less than 50,000 couplets long. This is the *Shahnameh*, or *Book of Kings*, composed by the poet Firdowsi (d. 1020). It is the greatest work of its kind in the world, and one of the outstanding masterpieces of Persian literature. It looks back on Iran's history, providing a partly fanciful but nevertheless widely honoured and therefore powerful version of events.

The *Shahnameh* was conceived as a sequence of reigns of monarchs, who were variously drawn from myth, legend and history. The work begins in the very remote past with the first king, called Kayumars, and ends with the Islamic conquest in 651 and the death of King Yazdigird III. At first Iran is ruled by figures from Zoroastrian myth transformed into kings. Kayumars, for example, was derived from the Gayomart, who plays a role in an ancient creation myth roughly equivalent to that of Adam. Later we enter the world of the Kayanian kings who had peopled the legends of the Parthian and Sasanian periods. A major figure is the hero Rustam, who famously wore a tiger's skin. His adventures are thought to have been drawn from a lost epic cycle of the pre-Islamic period. This was told by the nomadic Saka, an Iranian people who settled in what is now Afghanistan in the second century BC.

About halfway through the work, a Kayanian prince called Gushtasp appears as a royal protagonist for Zoroastrianism. He is soon followed by kings based very loosely on the Achaemenids. The last of them is Dara (Darius III), who is overthrown by Iskandar (Alexander the Great). The next Iranian dynasty, the Parthians, receive summary treatment. This may be because many of the stories of the Parthians had been absorbed into the tales of the earlier Kayanian kings. With the defeat of the last Parthian, Artabanus IV, by the first Sasanian, Ardashir I, we enter a recognizable world of Sasanian monarchs. The epic exploits of historical figures such as Bahram Gur (see cat. 140) and Khosrow Parviz are followed by the dire events that occurred under Yazdigird III, Parviz's grandson. He is defeated by an invading Muslim army, and fleeing them, is murdered by a miller. So the history of Iran ends.

The *Shahnameh* is not, then, a history in any scientific sense. It is Iran's national epic, showing the country as the centre of the known universe, populated by leaders who are often of outstanding wisdom and bravery. When Firdowsi wrote this work, Iran had not existed as a political entity for more than three centuries, but his work helped to bring it back to life. In his time, there were rulers of Iranian origin who linked themselves to the ancient kings in various ways. This reached a new peak when Hulagu, a pagan Mongol, united Iran under his rule in the 1250s. His dynasty used the name Iran for the new realm, and from this point on, an illustrated copy of the *Shahnameh* was a regular component of royal libraries.

Illustrated copies probably existed at an earlier date, but the first to survive were made about 1300 (cats 156, 157). The examples that follow, produced between this date and the seventeenth century, either detached single leaves or whole books, show idealized, imaginary depictions of ancient Iran. They are important as works of art, but they are also important for whom they belonged to. They were made for great kings, for minor dynasts and provincial governors, who all saw the *Shahnameh* as an instrument of power. It helped to legitimize their rule over all or part of the land of Iran by making concrete Iran's long and glorious history, in which they aspired to play a role.



136

Bizhan Slays Nastihan

1493

Lahijan, Gilan province, Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
34.4 × 24.4 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4022
Purchased 2008

A major theme of the *Shahnameh* is the clash between Iran and the enemy kingdom of Turan. In one episode, the Iranian hero Bizhan kills a Turanian, Human, in single combat. Seeking revenge, Human's brother Nastihan mounts a night attack on the Iranian camp, but Bizhan picks out Nastihan and slays him with a great blow of his mace.

This illustration is from the 'Big-Head' *Shahnameh* prepared for Sultan Ali Mirza, the ruler of Gilan in north-west Iran (r. 1478–1505).

137

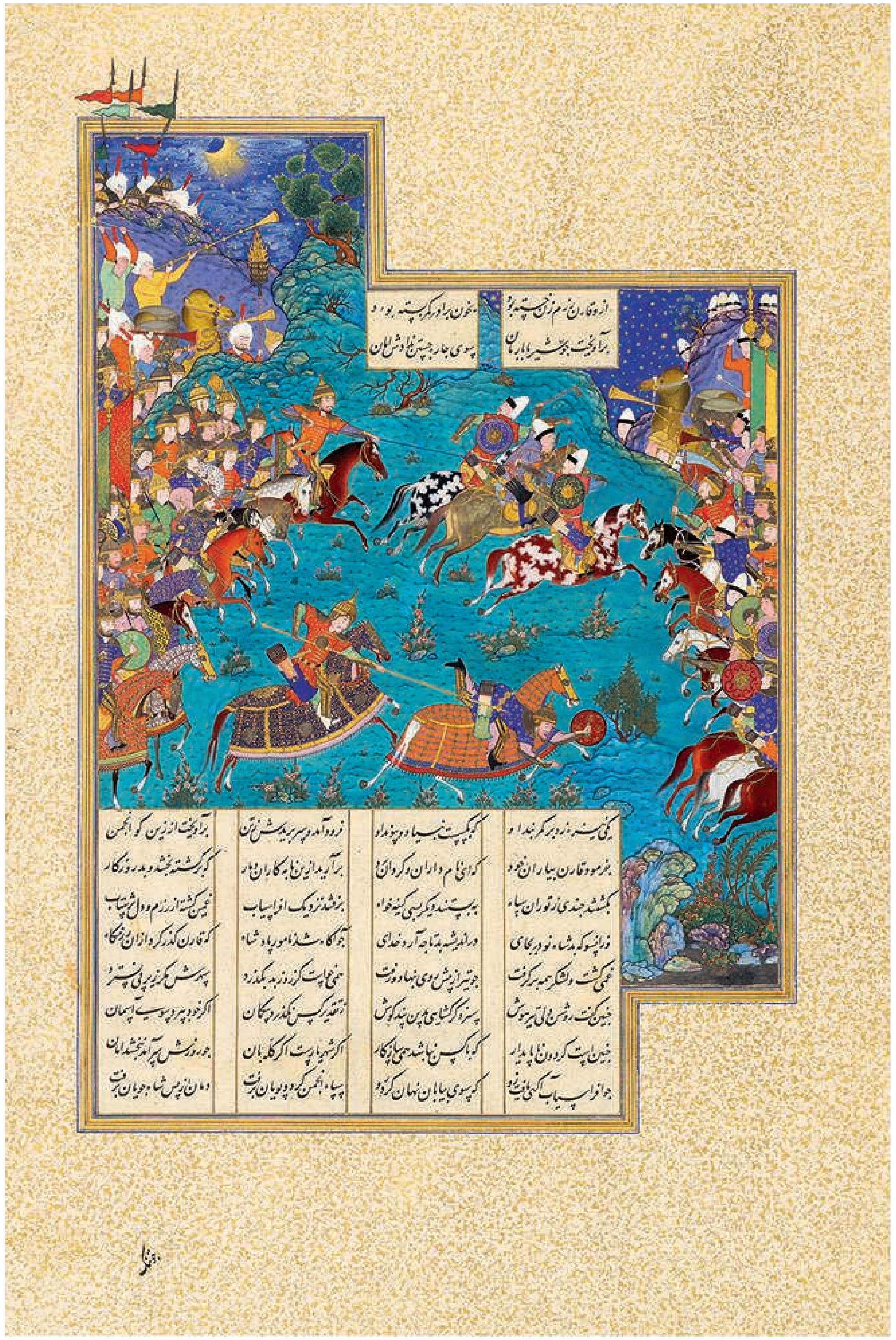
Qaran Unhorses Barman

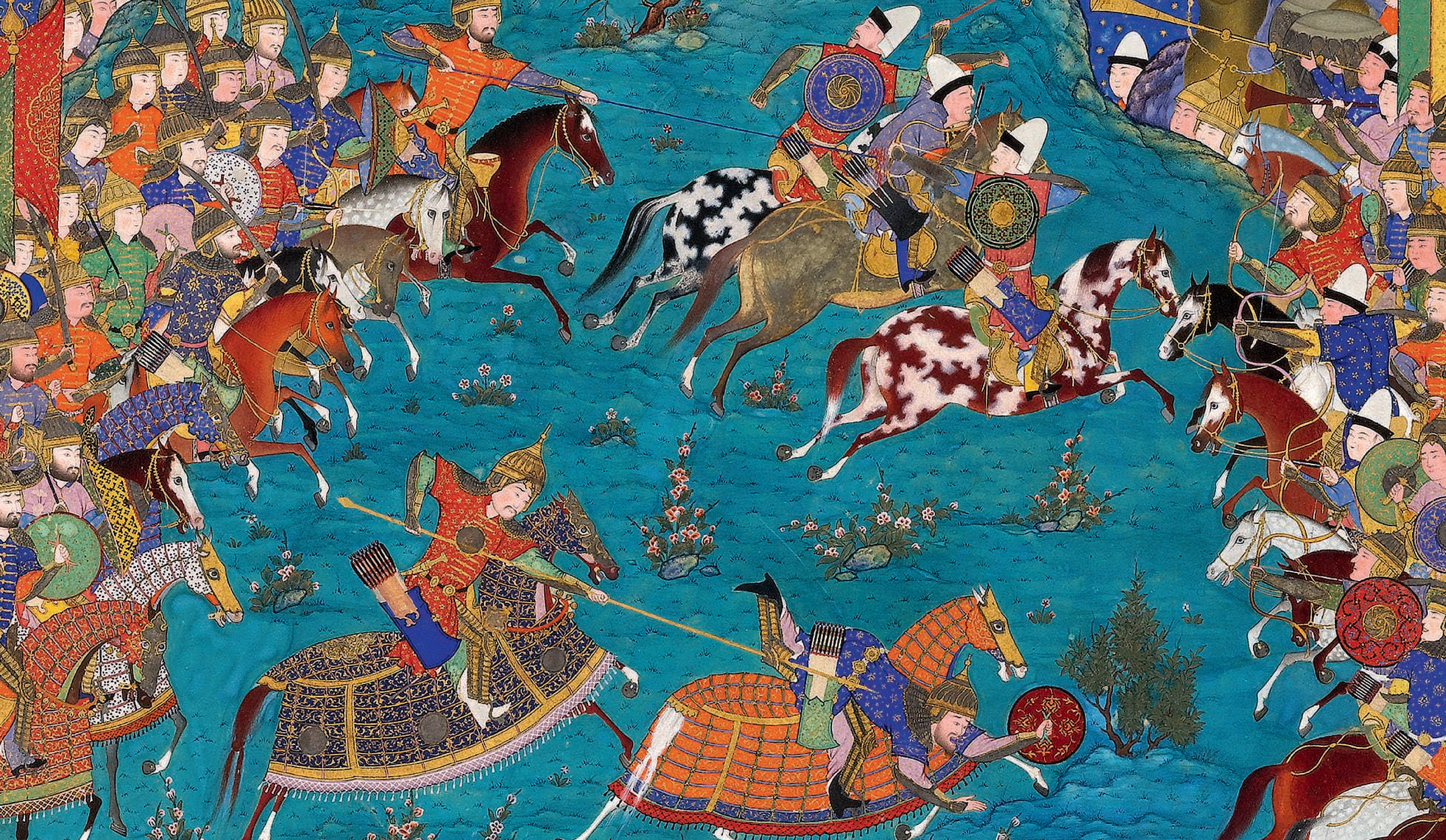
about 1525–35

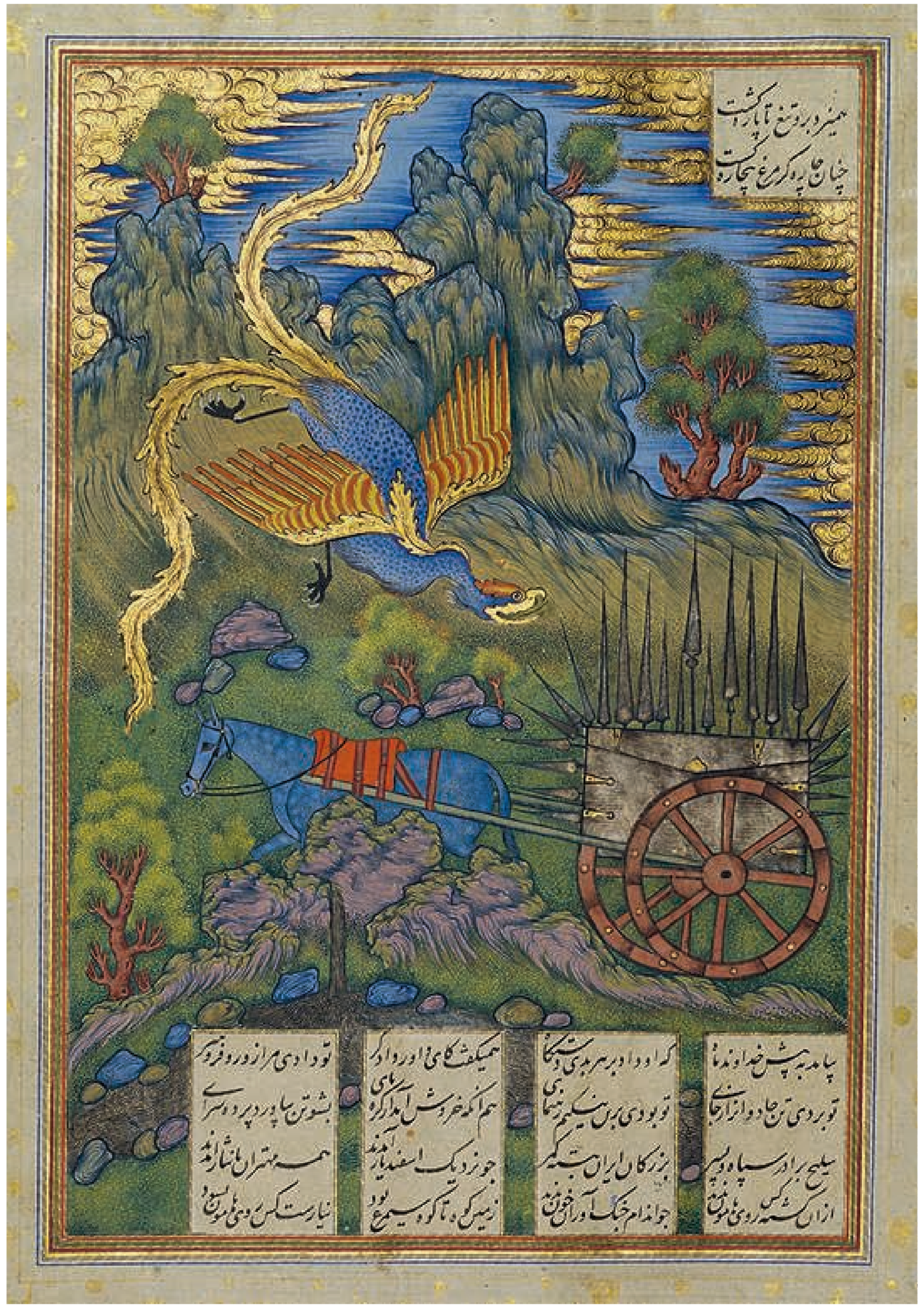
Tabriz, Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
47 × 31.5 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4025
Purchased 2008

Under a moonlit sky, an Iranian force (on the left) makes a night attack on its Turanian foes. Their commander, Qaran, has targeted his Turanian equivalent, Barman, who killed Qaran's brother. We see the moment when, with one blow of his lance, Qaran strikes Barman's belt and sends him flying. A moment later he dismounts and severs Barman's head from his body.

This painting comes from one of the most splendid copies of the *Shahnameh*, made for the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76; compare cats 159–61).







138

Isfandyar Encounters the Simurgh in an Armoured Chariot

1648

The text signed by Muhammad Hakim al-Husayni
Iran, perhaps Mashhad
Bound manuscript with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 45.7 × 28.4 cm
The Royal Collection/HM Queen Elizabeth II, RCIN 1005014, folio 439a

In a later clash between Iran and Turan, the enemy captures the two daughters of the Iranian king Gushtasp. To rescue them, their brother Isfandyar must pass seven stages, comparable to the Twelve Labours of Hercules. At the fifth stage Isfandyar's way is blocked by a monstrous bird, the Simurgh, whose deadly attacks he avoids by enclosing himself in an armoured chariot (folio 439a).

The manuscript was commissioned by Qarajaghay Khan, the governor of Mashhad. His father Manuchihr Khan had paid for an updating and translation of Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi's *Book of Constellations* (cat. 133).

B.W. Robinson, Eleanor Sims and Manijeh Bayani, *The Windsor Shahnama of 1648* (London, 2007)

139

Rustam Slays Isfandyar

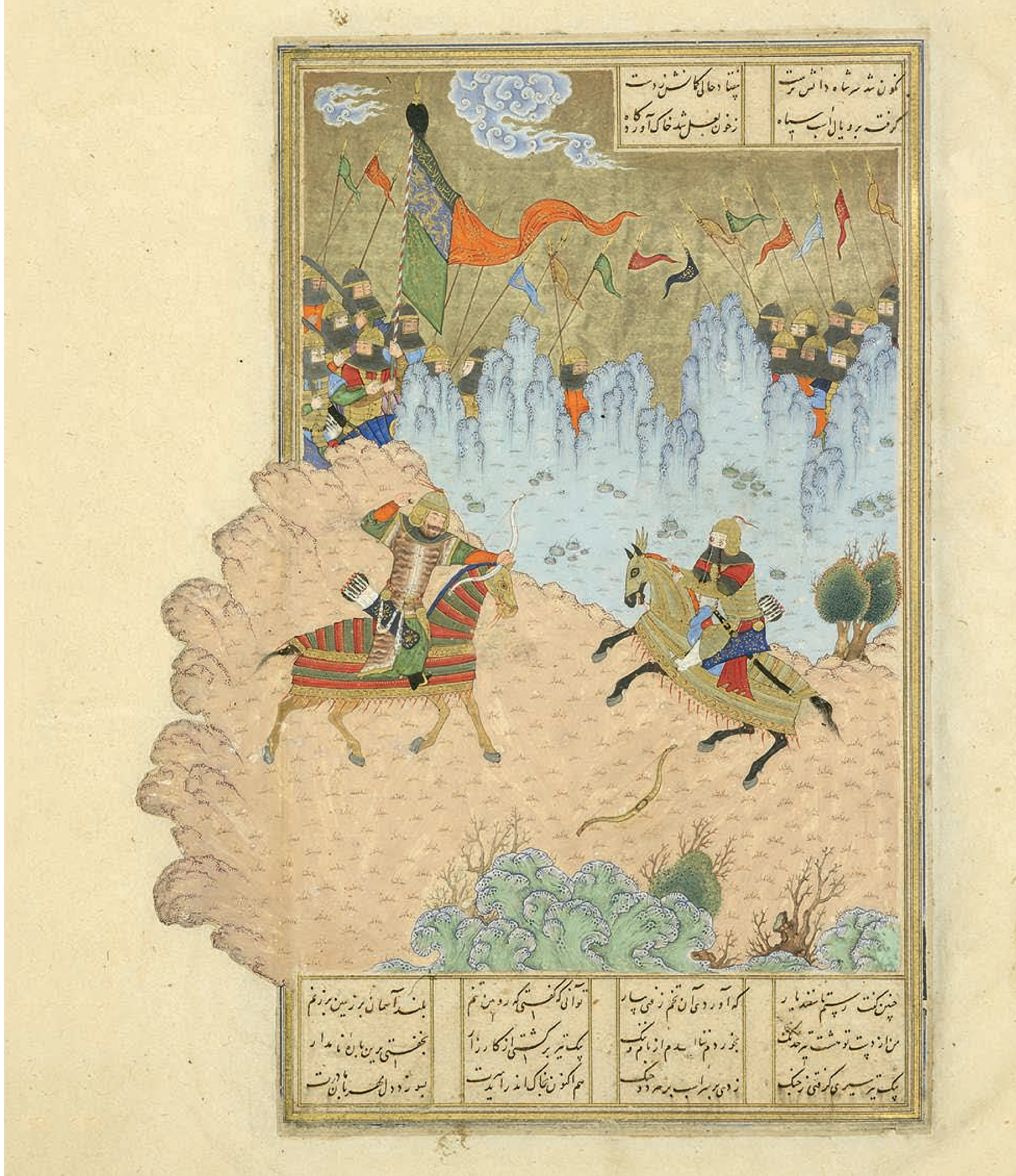
about 1444

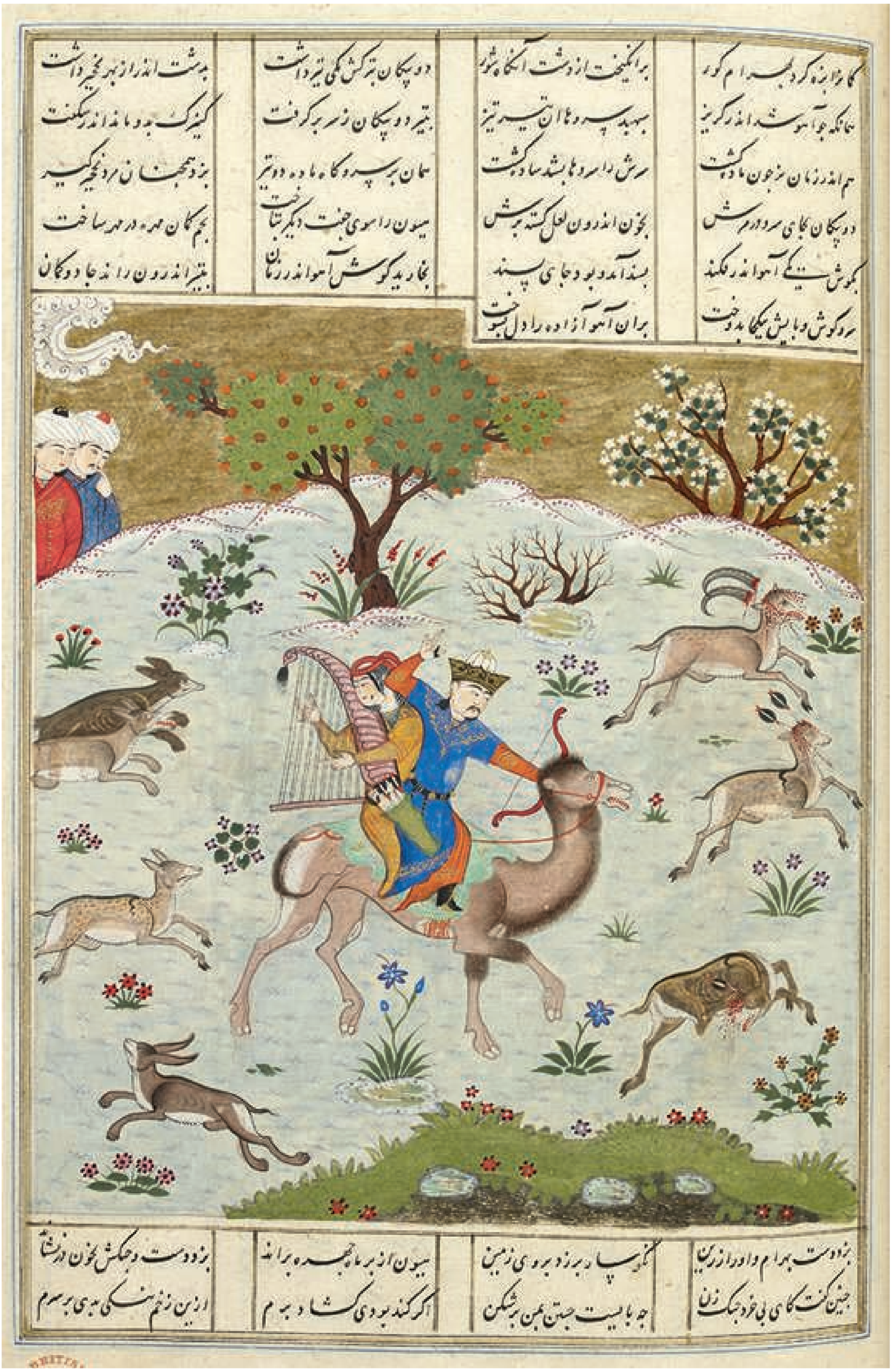
Herat, now in Afghanistan
Bound manuscript with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 36.8 × 23.2 cm
Royal Asiatic Society, Persian ms. 239, folio 296a

The baleful last stage in the clash of two heroes is shown here. Rustam, in his coat of tiger's skin, has fired a magic two-headed arrow at Isfandyar, striking him in both eyes with a single shot. Isfandyar, blinded, has dropped his bow and is grasping his horse's mane.

The great banner that flies against the golden sky at top left bears the name of the Timurid prince Muhammad Juki, who must therefore have commissioned this copy of the *Shahnameh*. Later owners removed other references to the prince from the manuscript but the insertion of his name in this illustration has preserved his connection with it.

Barbara Brend, *Muhammad Juki's Shahnamah of Firdausi* (London 2010)





140

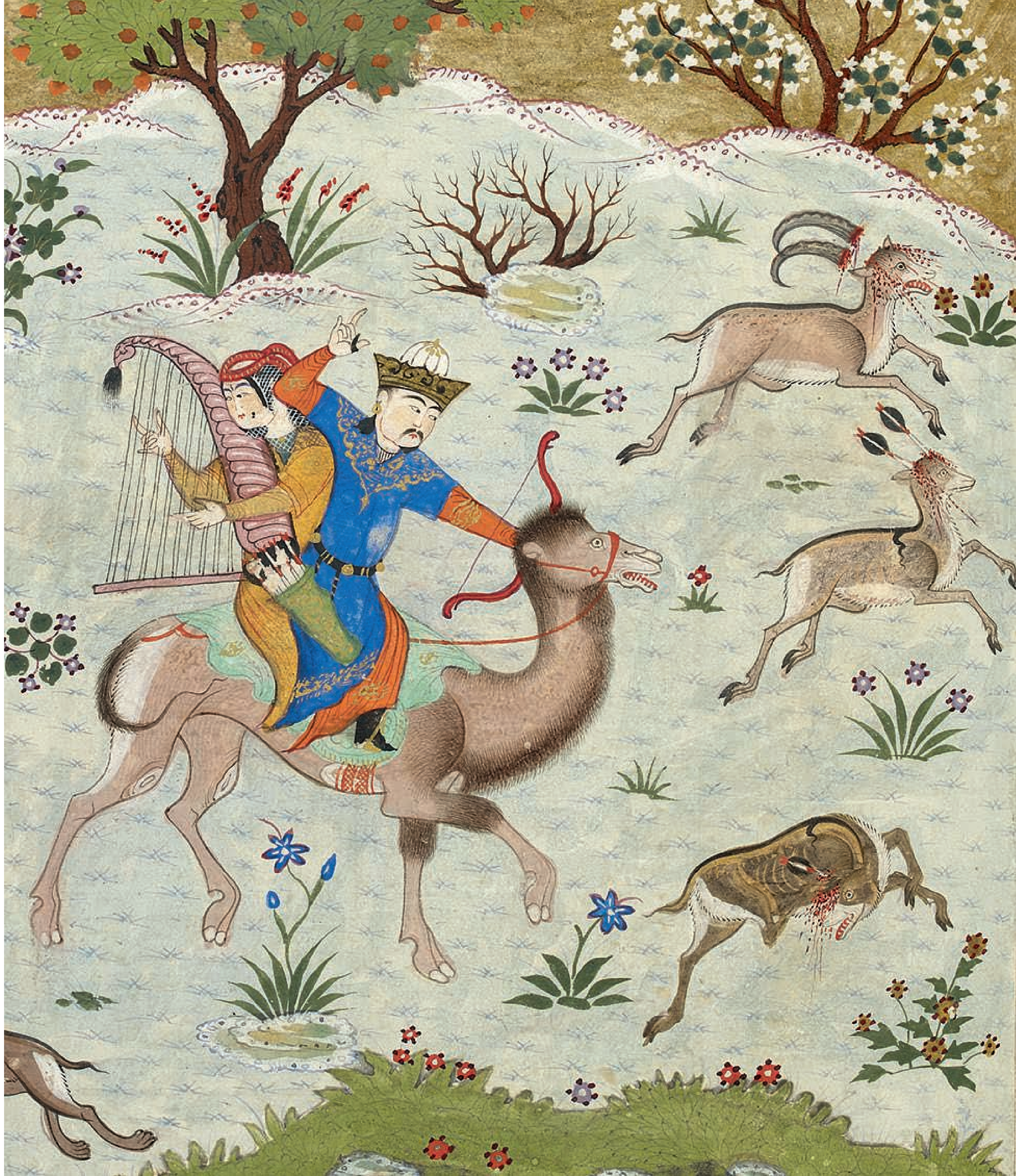
Bahram Gur Hunts with Azadeh

1486

The text signed by
Ghiyath al-Din ibn Bayazid Sarraf
Iran
Bound manuscript with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 35 × 24.1 cm
British Library, Add. ms. 18,188, folio 353a

A popular tale from the *Shahnameh* concerns the Sasanian prince Bahram Gur, who went hunting on a camel with his favourite slave girl, Azadeh. Bahram was a skilful huntsman, and Azadeh challenges him to accomplish three feats. The painting shows the result. Bahram has turned a buck into a doe by removing his horns with a single shot; he has turned a doe into a buck by lodging two arrows in her head as 'horns'; and he has pinned a doe's hind foot to her ear when she went to scratch it.

The real Bahram Gur ruled as Bahram V (420–38).



ART, ARMOUR AND IMAGINING THE PAST

The recording of historical events was an important discipline in Iranian intellectual life, giving rise to works that still frame our understanding of the medieval and modern periods. An example is the *Habib al-Siyar* (*Friend of Moral Deeds*) of Khwandamir, a general history completed in 1524. The work is an important source for the author's own time, but his approach was clearly swayed by the political agenda of his patron, Shah Isma'il (r. 1501–24), the first ruler of the Safavid dynasty. Khwandamir's presentation of the distant past incorporates epic tales drawn from the *Shahnameh* of Firdowsi (see pp. 175–83), for example, allowing him to graft the new dynasty onto the ancient Iranian tradition of kingship.

An illustration from a late sixteenth-century copy (cat. 142) depicts a feat of the great Iranian hero Rustam, shown wearing a tiger-skin coat. He has lassoed his enemy, the Emperor of China, and is pulling him from his white elephant. We see a variety of weaponry – bows and arrows, swords, a lance and a dagger, as well as the lasso used by Rustam. By the date the painting was executed, however, the lasso had not been used as a weapon of war for several thousand years. Modernity is also present, though, in the form of the musket being fired by a young soldier in the Emperor's army. The combination is possible because, like the earlier sections of Khwandamir's work, the painting is a work of imagination, not of record.

In another painting from later in the same manuscript (cat. 143), the artist's imagination was applied to one of the first major victories of Shah Isma'il. The figures on the left wear helmets and body armour of mail and plate recognizable from surviving examples (cats 141, 144). These men were on the losing side, however. By contrast, the winners – Isma'il and his followers – wear no armour. They had no need of it as they believed the Shah was an incarnation of God (see p. 151). It is notable, too, that in the same period the increasing use of firearms was making bodily defences of mail and plate obsolete, as they were ineffective against musket balls.

Why, then, is a single, youthful warrior on the Safavid side shown wearing armour? This, too, may have had a supernatural explanation, for there was, and still is, a presumption that the heroes of the early Islamic period also wore such armour (cat. 146). As mail and plate lost their primary, defensive functions because of the spread of firearms, they changed into a mode of dress associated with the glorious deeds of the Prophet and the imams. The youth shown wearing armour may therefore have had a talismanic role, invoking good fortune in battle through reference to the holy ones of Shi'ite belief.

In 1722, the Safavid state collapsed, and the void was filled by a military adventurer who ascended the throne as Nadir Shah in 1736. Three years later the new monarch led a momentous invasion of India that resulted in a flow of booty, and of captive craftsmen, into Iran. This completely altered the type of armour made there. The main component, for example, was a set of hinged breast-, side- and back-plates known as the 'four mirrors' (*chahar ayineh*; cat. 148).

Half a century later another new dynasty, the Qajars, came to power (see pp. 263–75). When the second Qajar ruler, Fath Ali Shah, acceded to the throne in 1797, the dynasty's authority was still in need of reinforcement, and he used any means available to equate himself with the great rulers of the past. One way of doing so was to commission portraits of himself wearing mail and carrying historic arms (cat. 199), as well as commissioning actual arms and armour, so that he could recreate the physical appearance of the great warriors of the past, including the Shi'ite heroes of the early Islamic period, those of the *Shahnameh*, and successful heroes of the more recent past.

This revival was conceptual rather than literal since, as already noted, the armour Fath Ali Shah had made was of an Indian type relatively new to Iran. Yet it had a widespread effect in Iran, not least because actors dressed in armour of this type appeared in the plays called *ta'ziyeh*, which portrayed the dreadful events of Ashura (see p. 156). This is one more factor that accounts for the long history of traditional armour in Iran, centuries after it had lost its credibility as a bodily defence.

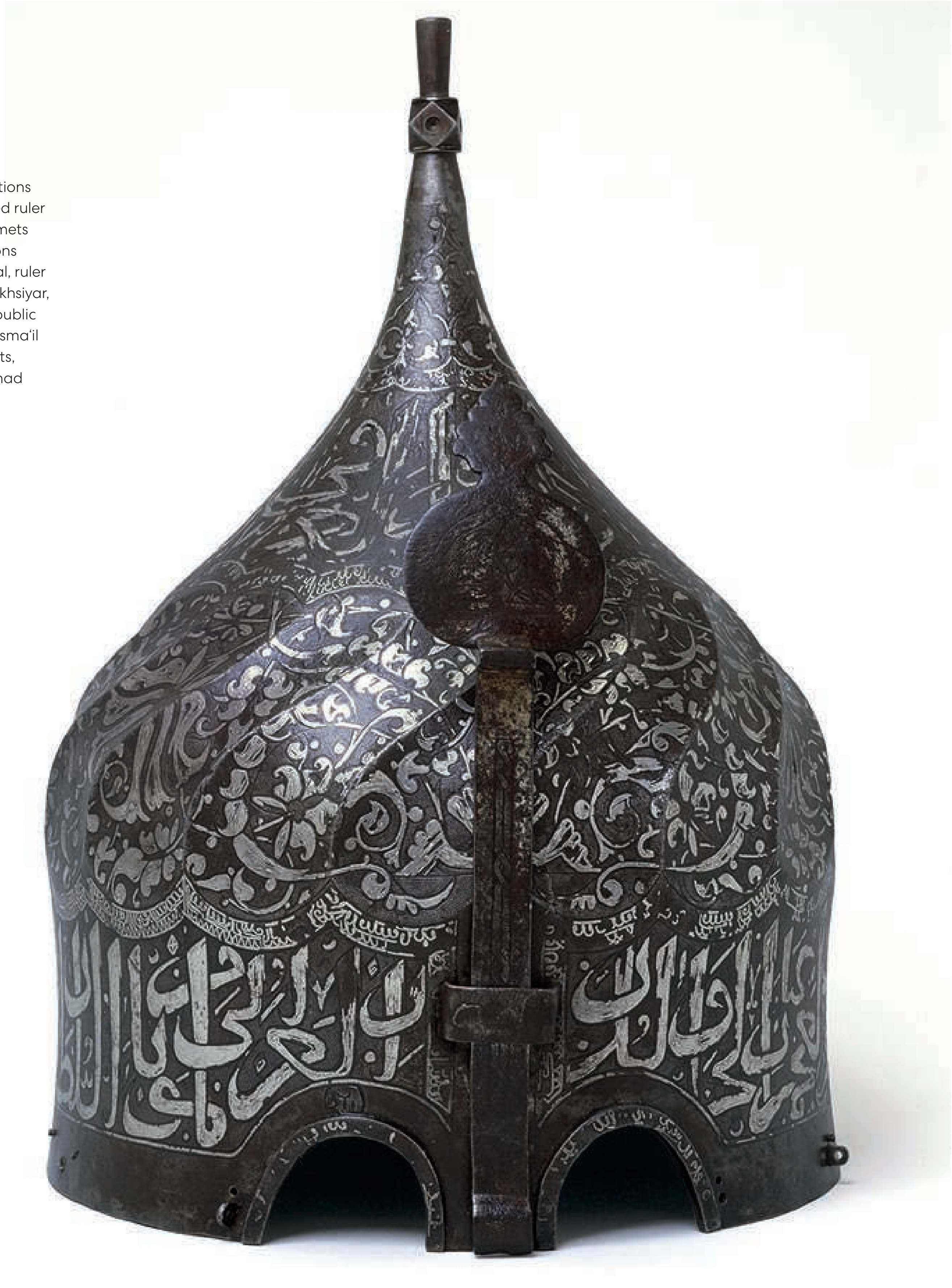
141

Helmet

about 1500

West Iran
Iron or steel, silver, height 34 cm
V&A: 399-1888

The inscriptions are based on acclamations in Arabic calling glory upon an unnamed ruler (as they are, too, in cat. 144). Other helmets of this and related types bear inscriptions naming a monarch, including Sultan Inal, ruler of Egypt and Syria in 1453–61, and Farrokhsiyar, who ruled Shirvan (now part of the Republic of Azerbaijan) and was killed by Shah Isma'il in 1500. This suggests that these helmets, and the armour that went with them, had an international currency.



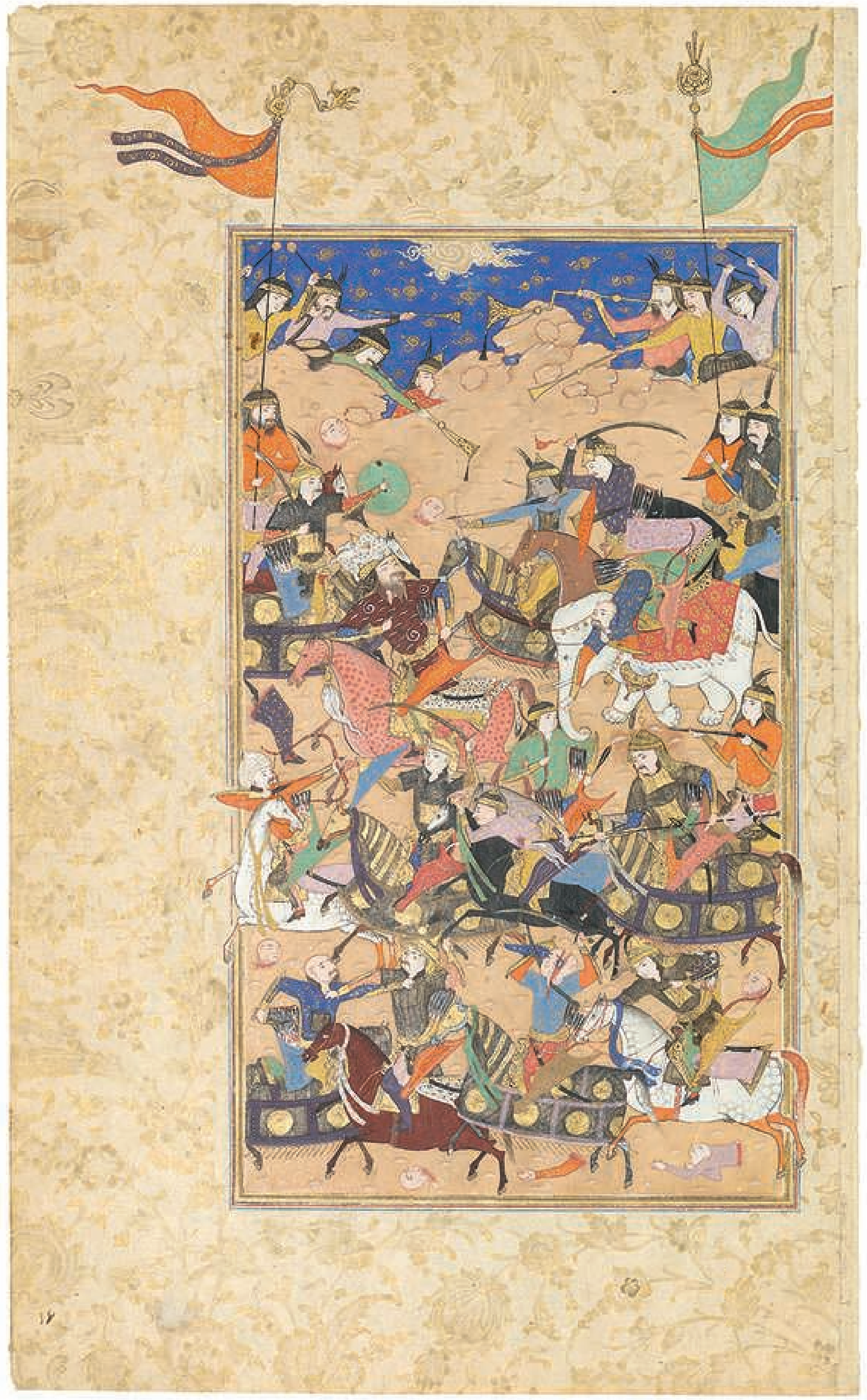
142

Rustam Drags the Emperor of China from his Elephant

1590–1600

Iran
Watercolour, ink and gold on paper,
39 × 23 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4040
Purchased 2008

This illustration is from a historical work, *The Friend of Moral Deeds* by Khwandamir (d. 1534). It relates to a legendary event in the remote past when the hero Rustam was engaged in a war with the Emperor of China.



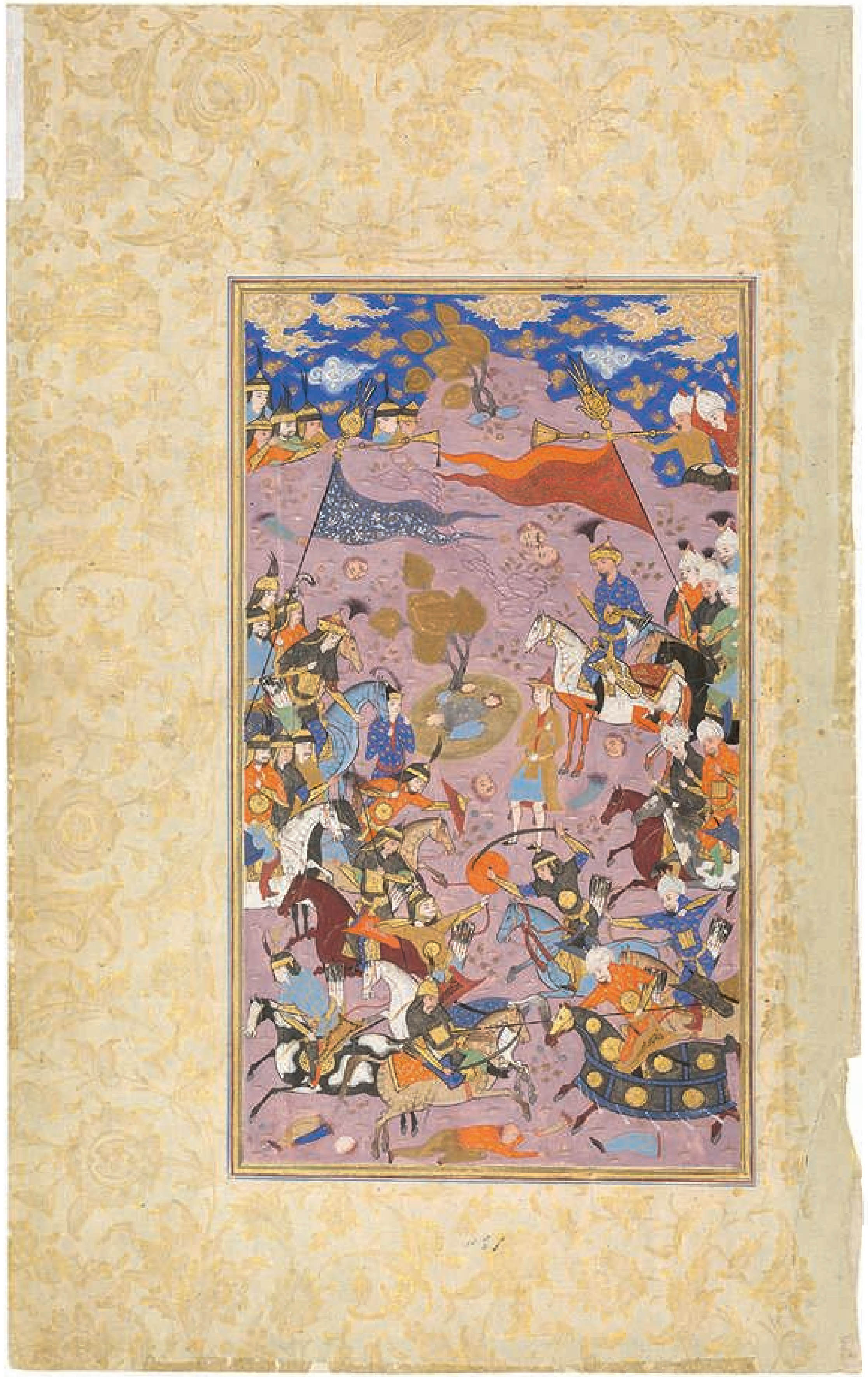
143

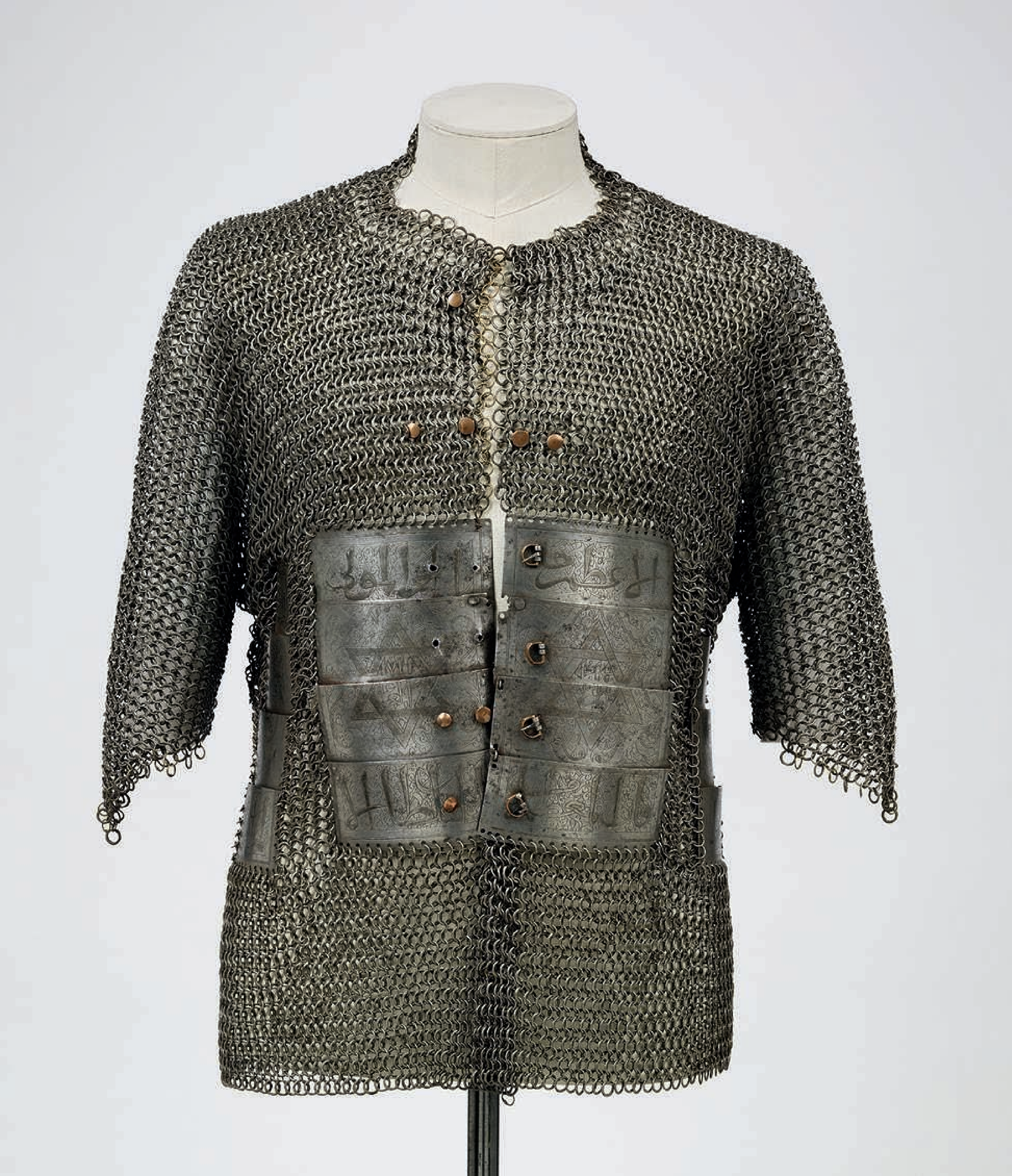
Shah Isma'il Safavi Defeats the Aqqoyunlu

1590–1600

Iran
Watercolour, ink and gold on paper,
43.1 × 27.2 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4057
Purchased 2010

This painting is from the same manuscript as cat. 142. The work it contains, *The Friend of Moral Deeds*, was completed in 1524, shortly after the death of Shah Isma'il, and it contains one of the first accounts of his reign. The painting records one of Isma'il's initial successes, when his troops (seen on the right) defeated the Aqqoyunlu, a tribal confederation of Turkish-speaking nomads who ruled West Iran from 1467 to 1501.



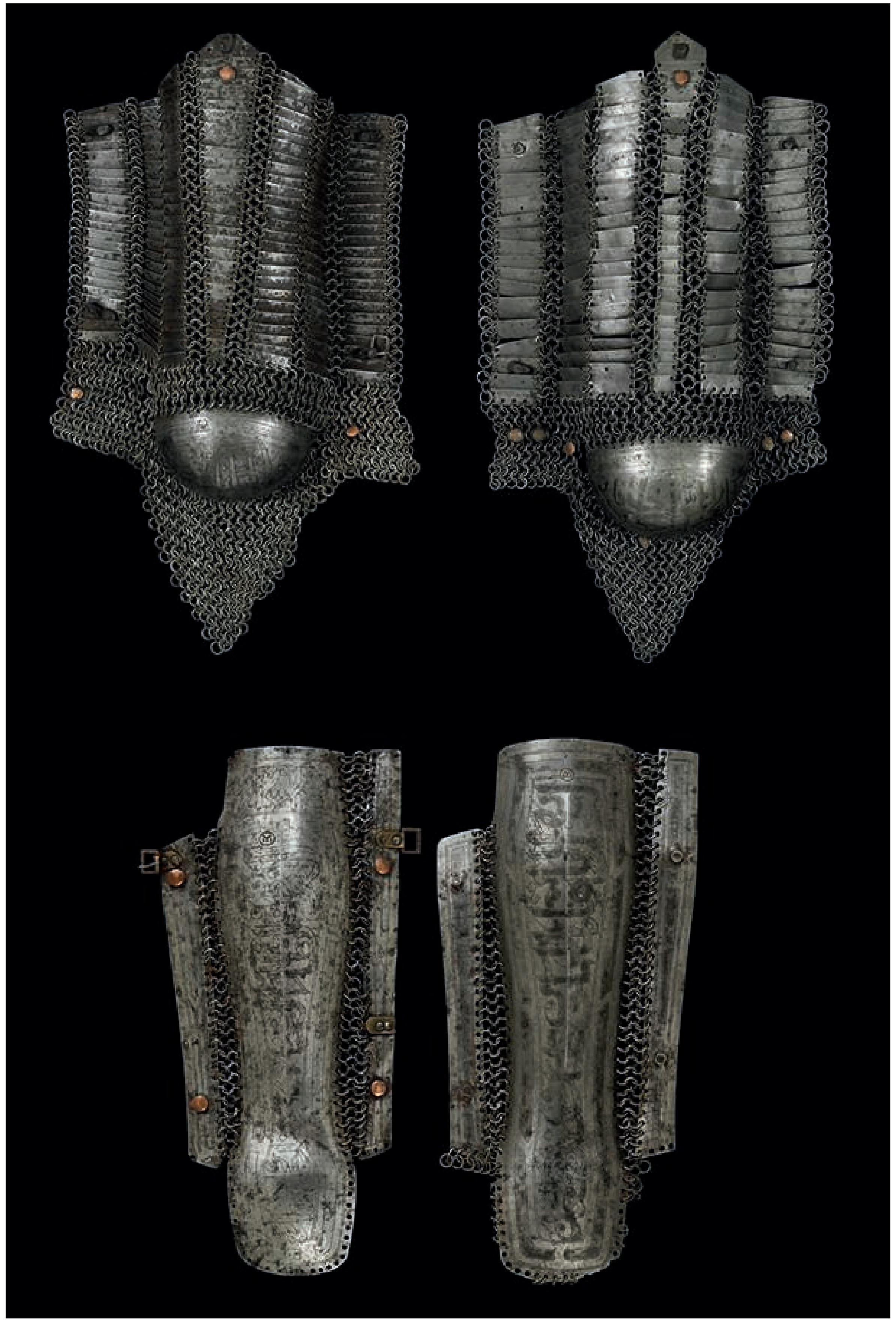


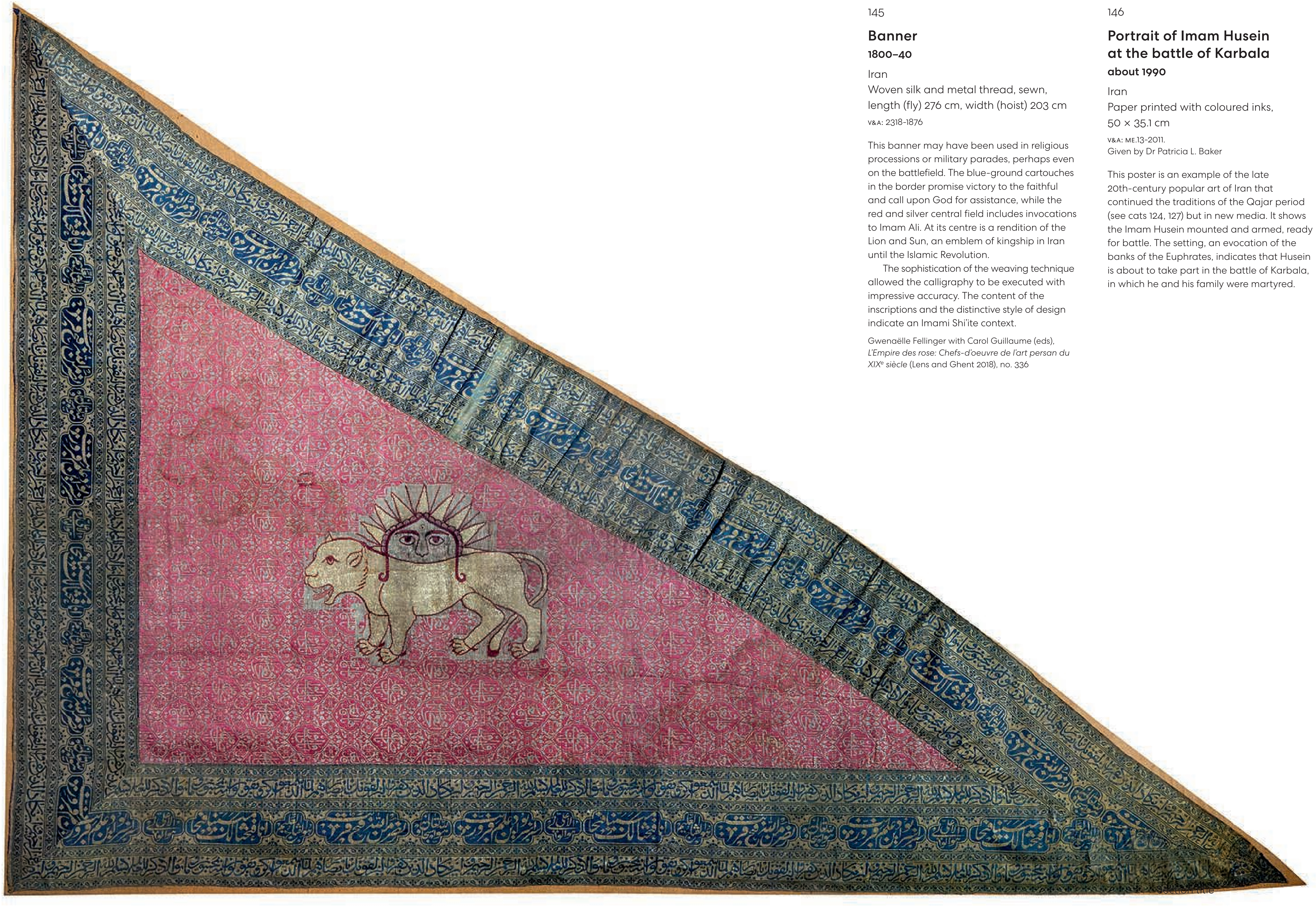
144

Armour for the body, the thighs and knees, and the arm

about 1500

West Iran
Plate and mail of iron or steel, engraved decoration artificially darkened, copper rivets, length 80 cm (body armour), 53 cm (leg defences), 39.5 cm (arm defence)
V&A: 330A,C to E-1898





145

Banner

1800–40

Iran
Woven silk and metal thread, sewn,
length (fly) 276 cm, width (hoist) 203 cm
V&A: 2318-1876

This banner may have been used in religious processions or military parades, perhaps even on the battlefield. The blue-ground cartouches in the border promise victory to the faithful and call upon God for assistance, while the red and silver central field includes invocations to Imam Ali. At its centre is a rendition of the Lion and Sun, an emblem of kingship in Iran until the Islamic Revolution.

The sophistication of the weaving technique allowed the calligraphy to be executed with impressive accuracy. The content of the inscriptions and the distinctive style of design indicate an Imami Shi'ite context.

Gwenaëlle Fellinger with Carol Guillaume (eds), *L'Empire des rose: Chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art persan du XIXᵉ siècle* (Lens and Ghent 2018), no. 336

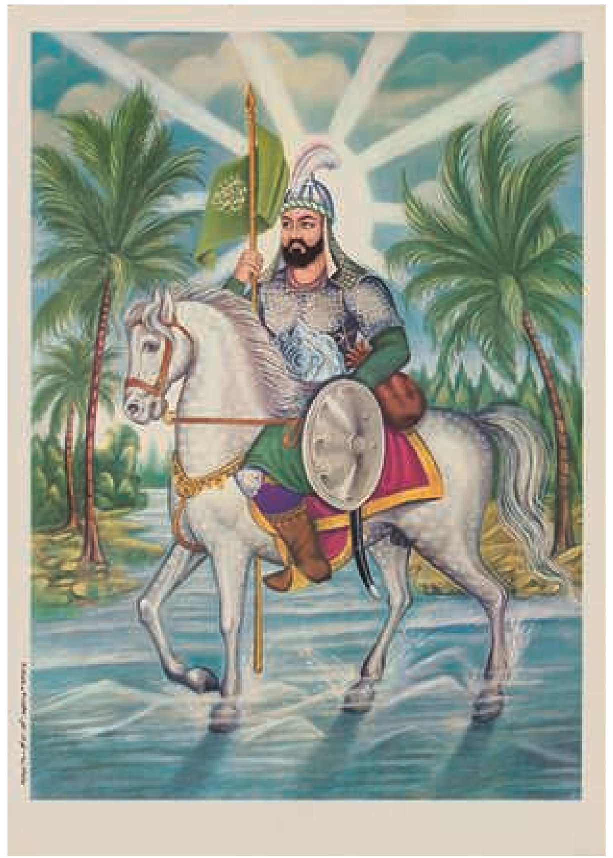
146

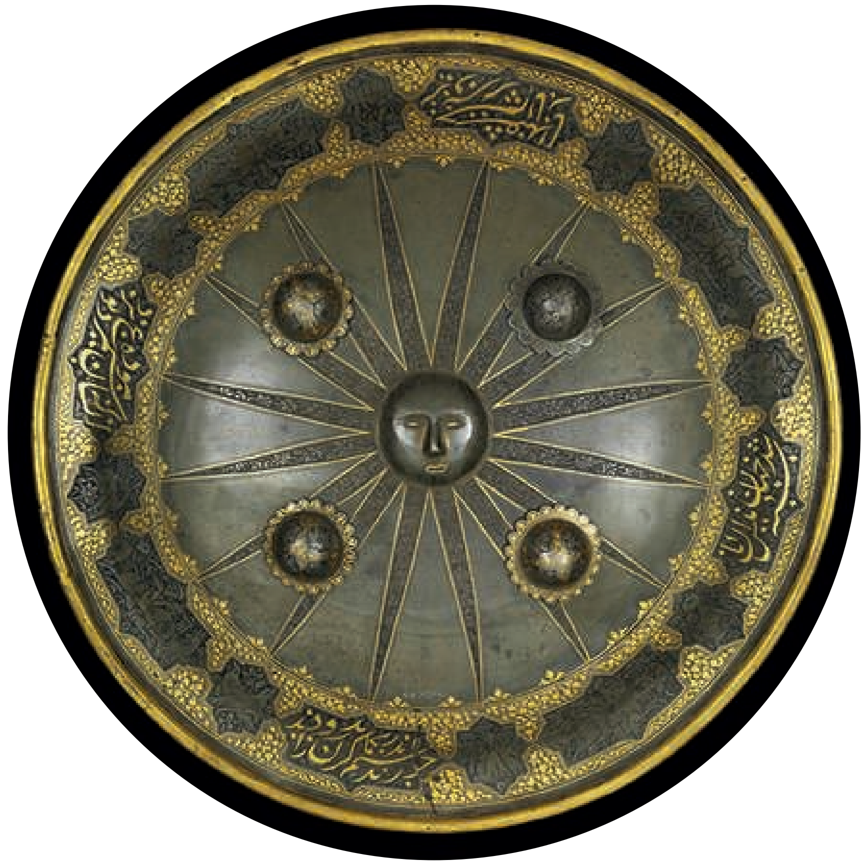
Portrait of Imam Husein at the battle of Karbala

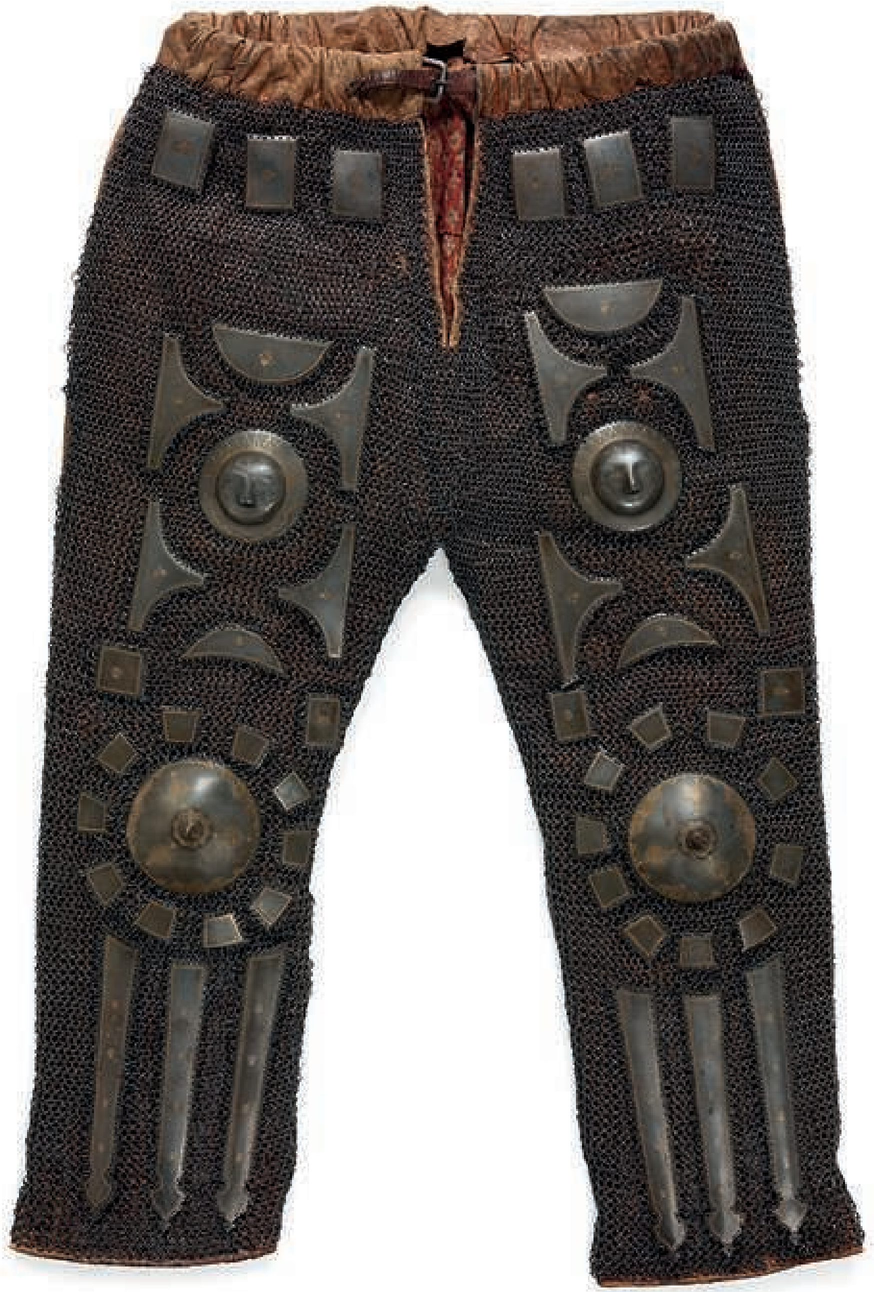
about 1990

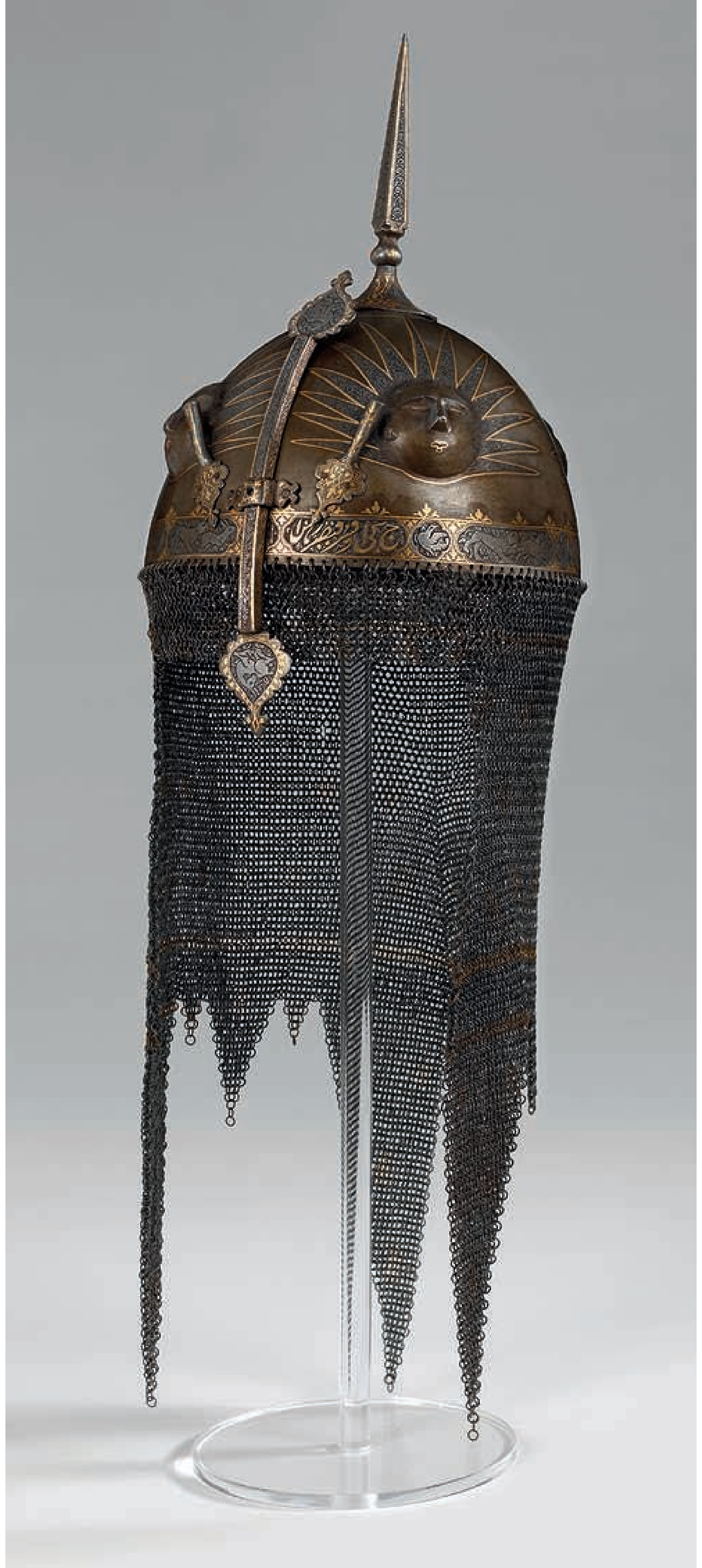
Iran
Paper printed with coloured inks,
50 × 35.1 cm
V&A: ME.13-2011.
Given by Dr Patricia L. Baker

This poster is an example of the late 20th-century popular art of Iran that continued the traditions of the Qajar period (see cats 124, 127) but in new media. It shows the Imam Husein mounted and armed, ready for battle. The setting, an evocation of the banks of the Euphrates, indicates that Husein is about to take part in the battle of Karbala, in which he and his family were martyred.









147

Helmet, shield and leggings

leggings dated 1803–4

Iran
Steel plate and mail, decoration
engraved and overlaid in gold,
leather lined with woven cotton;
height (with aventail) 67 cm,
diameter 20 cm (helmet);
diameter 39.3 cm (shield);
length 90 cm (leggings)
V&A: 487 A, B, C-1874

The round face seen on this set of armour is a representation of the Sun, which had appeared on Iranian armour since ancient times (see cats 142, 143). The two sockets on the front of the helmet were to take the plumes that marked royal status (see cat. 199).

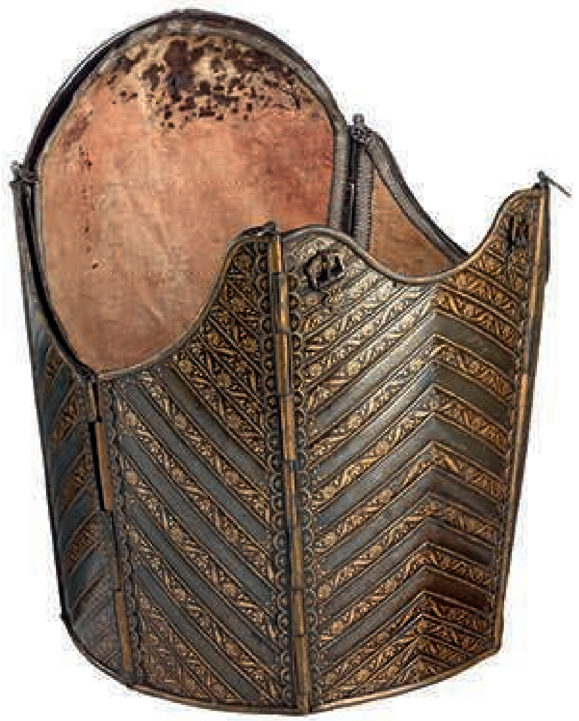
148 (below)

Body armour

1800–10

Iran
Steel plate and mail, decoration
overlaid in gold, height 38 cm (max.)
V&A: 635&1-1876

The body armour produced in large quantities in the early 19th century consisted of four hinged plates for the breast, the back and the sides. In Persian it was called 'four mirrors' (*chahar ayineh*).



6

LITERARY EXCELLENCE

Tim Stanley

Persian literature, by which we mean principally Persian poetry, is one of the greatest literary traditions in the world, and it has been long-lived. Having emerged in East Iran in the ninth and tenth centuries (see p. 167), it is still a vibrant tradition in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. In the past its geographical range was even wider, due to the events of the eleventh century that made Persian a language of high culture from Anatolia eastwards to the plains of Pakistan and northern India. As a result, in the thirteenth century great poetical works in Persian were written in both Konya in central Anatolia and Delhi in northern India, as well as in Iran itself. The past importance of Persian literature outside Iran is still evident in the huge numbers of literary manuscripts in the language found in the libraries of Istanbul and the great cities of South Asia. The demand for fine manuscripts in Persian across this vast area stimulated export-oriented book production in Iran, particularly in the southern city of Shiraz, from the late fourteenth to the early seventeenth century.

The manuscripts produced for export, and even more so those produced directly for royal patrons in Iran, are often works of art of great virtuosity, combining the output of specialists in several disciplines. Paper-making, for example, was introduced from China in the early Islamic period, and by the time Persian literature emerged, it was established as the standard material for manuscripts. As the popularity of paper rose, its main rival, parchment, was relegated to specialist functions. The quality of Iranian paper was generally very high, and its surface was coated with size and burnished, providing a smooth surface for the reed pen dipped in ink, the main tool used by calligraphers.

Calligraphy in the Arabic script developed in Iran in parallel to the emergence of Persian literature, and Iranians made great contributions to the field, both as practitioners and connoisseurs. For poetry, the style of calligraphy employed at first was *naskh*, or 'book-hand' (cat. 150), in which the text was tied to a horizontal (and invisible) base line. The aim was legibility (see, for comparison, cat. 114). For the scripts used in chancery documents, however, the paramount goal was to prevent tampering with the text, and this gave rise to the *ta'liq* or 'hanging' style, in which groups of words were arranged at an oblique angle to the overall base line. In the fourteenth century elements of this 'hanging' script were merged with *naskh* to produce the *nasta'liq* style, which has elegant, and legible, groups of letters arranged obliquely in this way. *Nasta'liq* subsequently dominated the production of fine literary manuscripts, such as the work of two Persian poets from Shiraz: Hafiz (d. about 1389) and Sa'di (d. 1291) (see cats 151–3).

Fine manuscripts had a consistent and orderly page layout, with relatively wide margins and a set number of lines to the page. In poetic manuscripts, the text area was also divided into columns to accommodate the pairs of half-lines, or hemistichs, that constitute the verses (see especially cat. 150). These relatively complex layouts were often indicated by rules in colours and gold, and the same materials were used for the illumination. This decoration is usually non-figurative and mostly consists of formal patterns derived from plant forms, although animals and humans are sometimes depicted in the gold work used for page margins (see cats 160, 161). Illumination was most often concentrated in a double-page set piece at the beginning of a book, which is one of the glories of Iranian book production (cat. 159). It was also used to mark divisions within the text. In a manuscript of 1313–15, for example (cat. 150), which features the work of a series of poets, an illuminated panel introduces each section with the name of the featured poet, followed by his collected works, known as his *divan*. In this way, illumination both enhances the beauty of the manuscript but also expresses its structure.

When all these operations were complete, the leaves were assembled in 'gatherings', which were sewn together to form a self-contained block. This was then encased in either a binding of fine, exquisitely worked leather or, from the later fifteenth century onwards, in covers of bookbinder's lacquer (cat. 181). Unlike medieval Western manuscripts, in which the gatherings were sewn into the binding, in the Islamic world the text block as a whole was simply glued to the binding, a practice later adopted in Europe.

Another notable feature of many poetic manuscripts is their illustrations, which, taken together, constitute the largest group of Iranian paintings to survive. Some examples are double-page set pieces, usually placed at the beginning of a book. Most, though, relate directly to the text that surrounds them, and the details of a scene were often matched to a single line falling immediately before or after the illustration. This is most starkly evinced by a painting, *Prince Humay Reaches Princess Humayun's Castle* (cat. 158), in which a single couplet is set within a composition of great lyrical beauty that has many elements added by the artist but stays true to the essential theme.

An illustration in the collection of *divan*s of 1313–15 (cat. 150) shows the poet reading his work before his patron, the Seljuq sultan Sanjar. This courtly setting framed the development of Persian literature, which from the tenth century was dominated by the production of panegyric odes dedicated to the ruler. There are many similarities with Arabic panegyrics, including the three-part poetic form, the system of meters, the use of rhyme, and the imagery employed. It is not clear, though, whether these were imported wholesale from Arabic or were based on Persian forms adjusted to conform with an Arabic model, which would itself have been influenced by pre-Islamic Iranian forms. In any case, the panegyric ode in Persian had already reached maturity in the work of Rudaki (d. 940), the first famous poet of Islamic Iran, where it was fully integrated into courtly life for a millennium.

The first section of a panegyric ode often had a love-related theme and, in both Arabic and Persian forms, this developed into a short, freestanding lyric called the *ghazal*. In part, poets drew on their own experience to write of love, but to a great extent, too, their understanding of love and its role in the world was drawn from the complex philosophical ideas current in Iran in the Islamic period. Love, then, is part of a wider theory of how the world works, and the poet's skill was to express eternal realities in stylish and entertaining verse. Indeed, modern Iranians are most likely to absorb these philosophical ideas from the work of Hafiz (cat. 152). He is universally considered the greatest exponent of the *ghazal* form, and he retains an unrivalled popularity.

Hafiz has many rivals, however. His predecessor Sa'di, for example, wrote *ghazal*s with an outstanding sweetness and clarity that leave the reader certain of the poet's intention. This is certainly not the case with Hafiz, whose audience can never be sure whether they have caught all the meanings intended (see cat. 165). Unlike Hafiz, too, Sa'di wrote on subjects other than love. His *Bustan* (*Garden of Scented Herbs*), for example (cat. 153), is a compilation of moral narratives written in the *masnavi* form, which can be translated as 'rhyming couplets'. *Masnavi*s were written on a great range of topics and include the *Spiritual Masnavi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi, called Mowlavi (d. 1273), a great mystical examination of Islamic teaching; the *Khamseh* (*Five Tales*) of Nizami of Ganjah (d. 1209), a series of sophisticated romances (cats 159–61); and Firdowsi's epic *The Book of Kings* (see pp. 175–83).

Epic verse was certainly a feature of Persian literature in the pre-Islamic period, and this also seems to be true of the quatrain, or *roba'i*. In the Sasanian period, poetry was mainly an oral tradition, and, despite the development of a sophisticated book culture in the Islamic period, the reciting of poetry learned by heart has remained an important feature of Iranian culture. An unusual witness to this custom is provided by the ceramics of Kashan in Iran dating from the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (cat. 149). The vessels produced there are often inscribed with quatrains in the decorators' normal hand-writing, and there is every reason to believe that they knew these texts by heart.

149

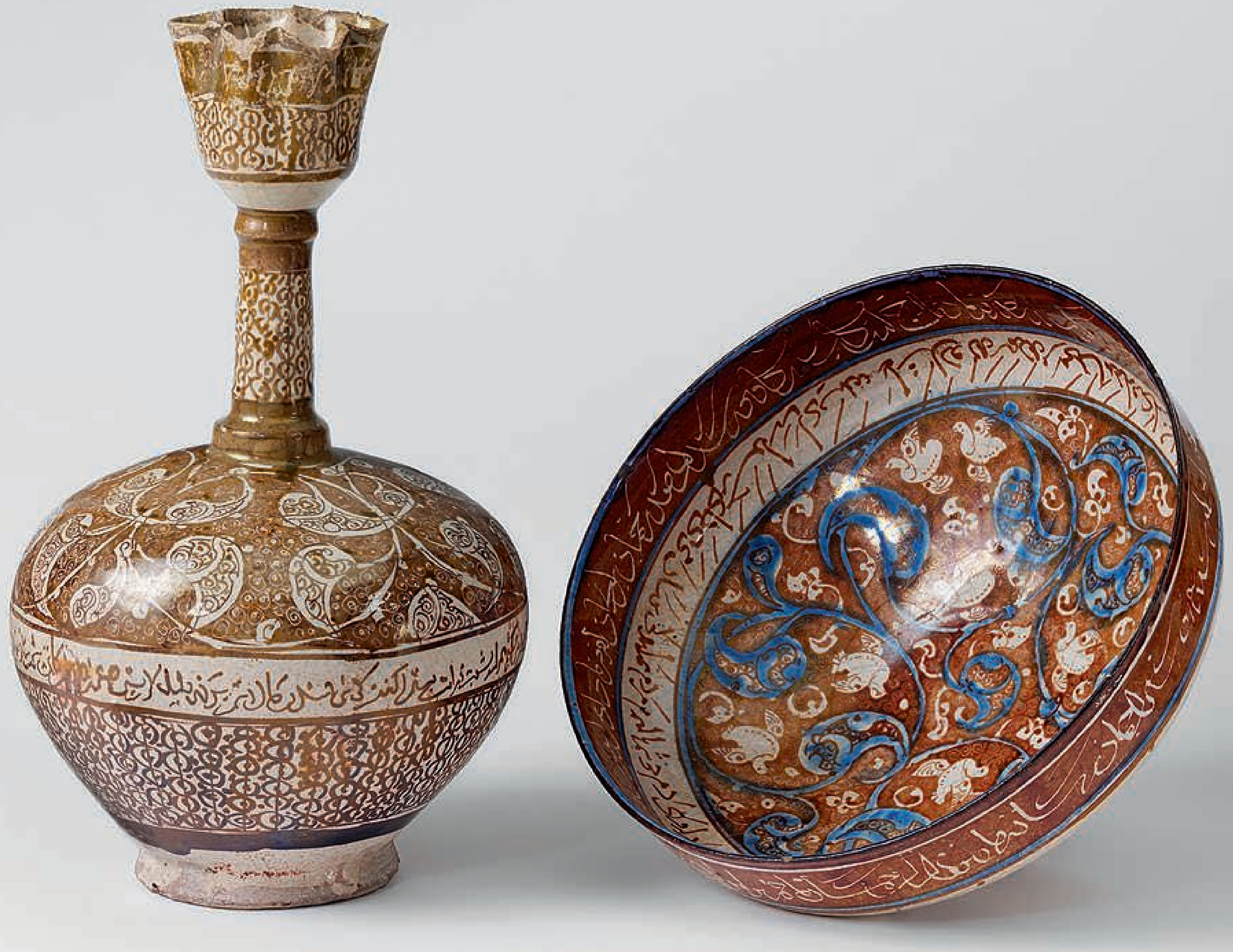
Bottle and bowl with poetry in Persian

1180–1220

Kashan, Iran
Fritware, lustre decoration over the glaze, height 26 cm (left)
Fritware, blue painted into the glaze, lustre decoration over the glaze, diameter 20.5 cm (right)

V&A: C.37-1978 and C.161-1977.
Given by Mr C.N. Ades MBE in memory of his wife, Andrée Ades

These wares were first produced as glazed white blanks, with only those patterns in blue on the bowl added at this stage. The two pieces were then decorated in lustre pigments painted over the glaze and re-fired to give them a metallic gloss. The final result is remarkable for its combination of ornamental patterns and texts in Persian, which are mostly quatrains (or *roba'i*). The inscriptions show that the makers knew how to write a good hand in the Arabic script, but they are not carefully designed examples of calligraphy in the manner of cat. 131. Instead, the potters wrote in an extempore manner, filling in the end of the line with brief snatches of Arabic or Persian when there was a gap.



150

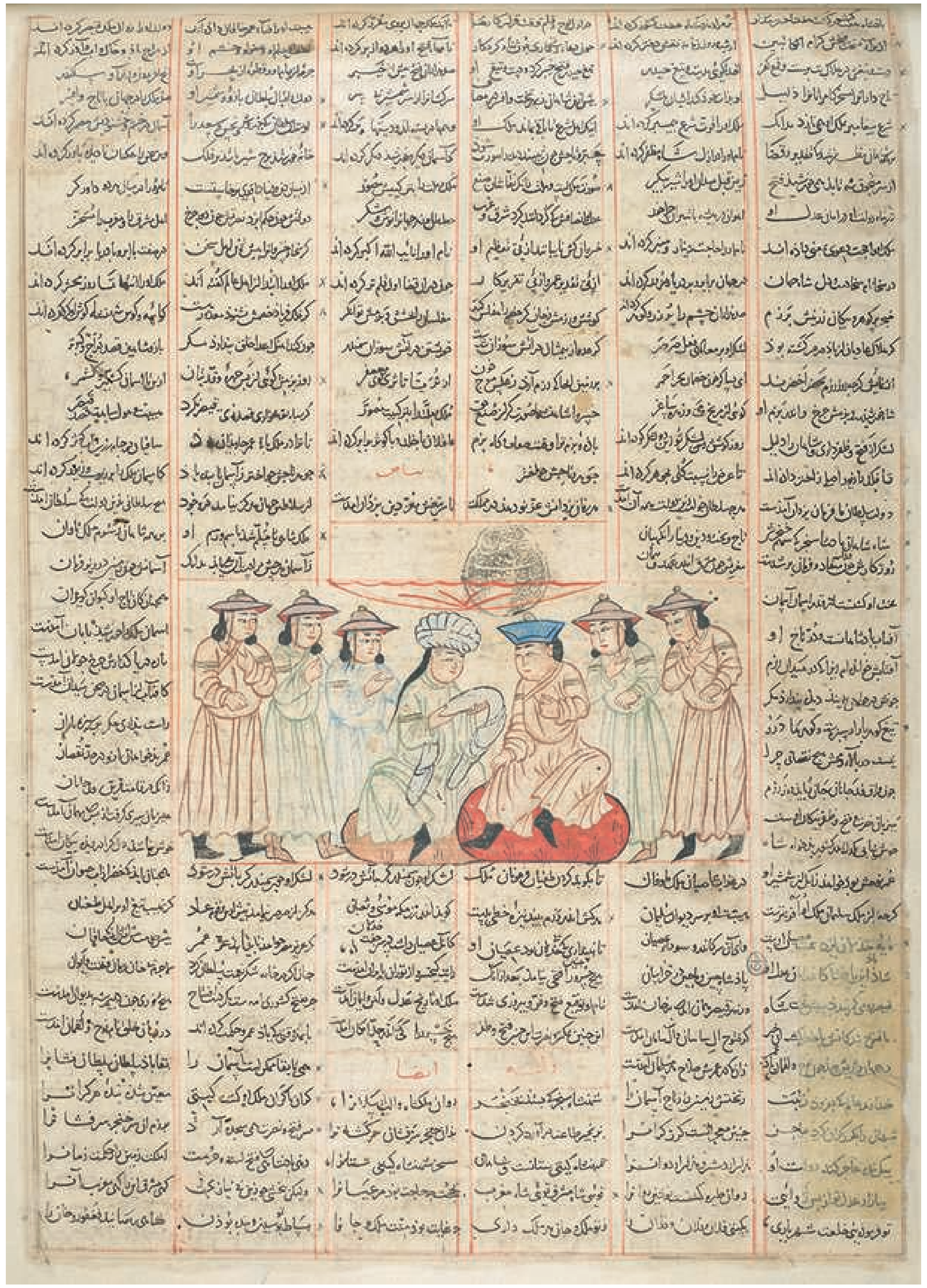
Collection of *divans*

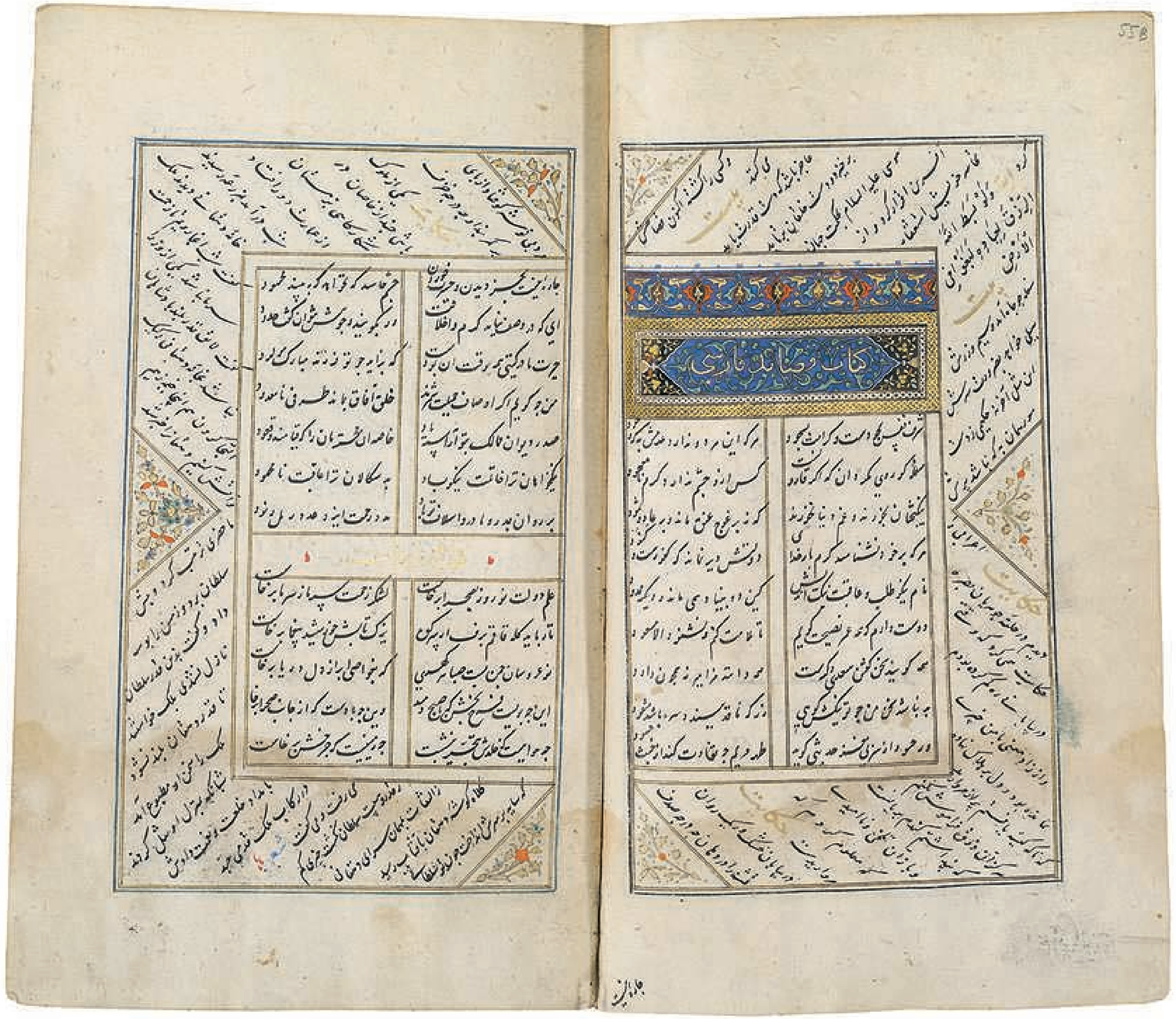
1313–15

The text signed by Abd al-Mu'min al-Alawi al-Kashi
Tabriz, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 40 × 27.9 cm

British Library, I.O. Islamic ms. 132, folio 49r

Once a poet had written a substantial body of verse, his or, less often, her work was sorted by genre and brought together in a book called a *divan*. This unusual manuscript contains the *divans* of a series of poets, including Adib Sabir. Adib served as both a highly regarded panegyrist and diplomat to the Seljuq ruler Sultan Sanjar (r. 1115–57), as is related in his biography above the heading. The poems on the page shown are interrupted by a painting of the poet at court, reading his work to the sultan.





151

***Divan* of Sa‘di**

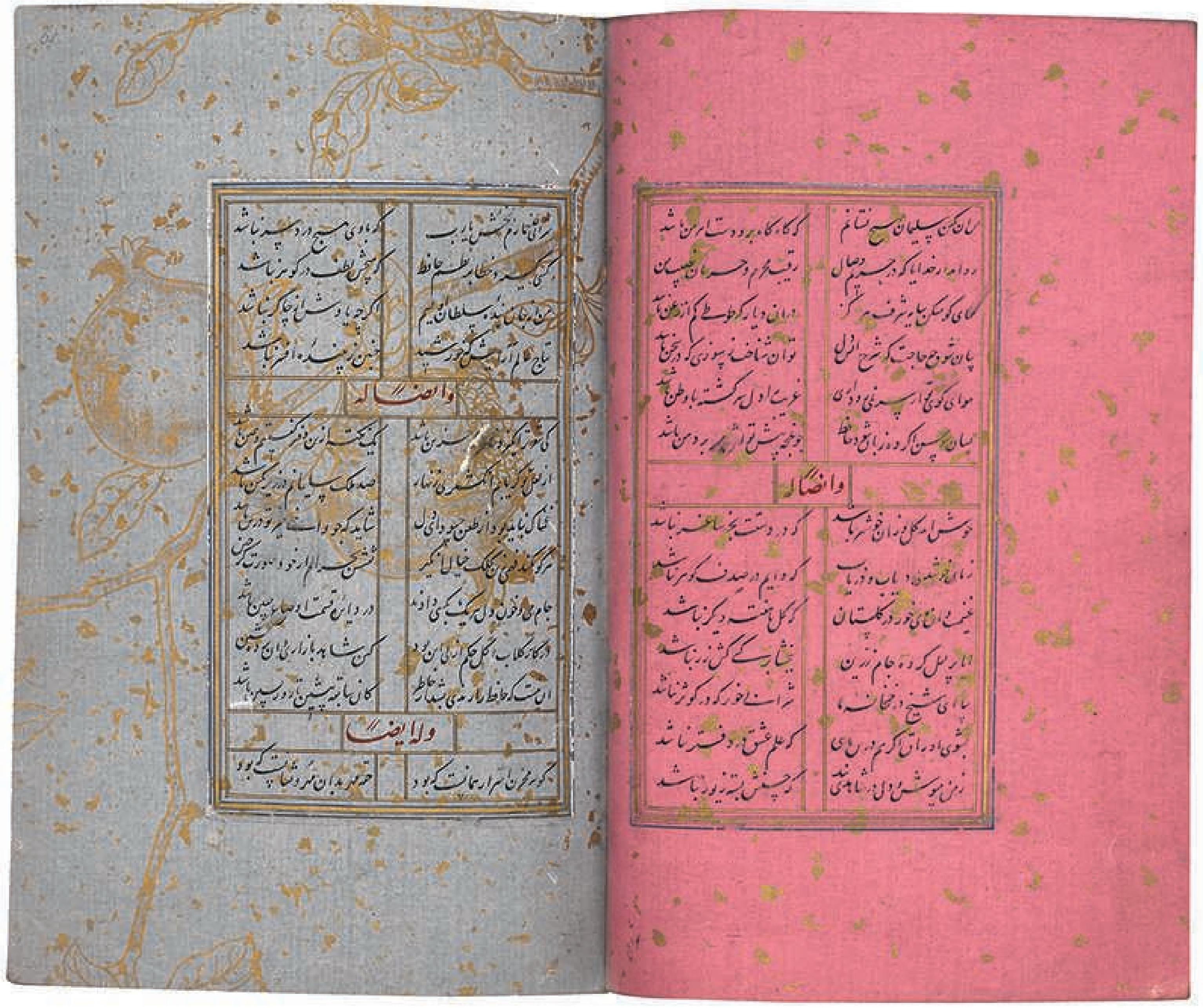
1456

Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 20.8 × 11.5 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.2025, folios 55b–56a
Purchased 2008

The main contents of this manuscript are the *divan* of Sa‘di (d. 1291). Books were expensive items, and in the interests of economy a second text was written diagonally in the margins. This is a copy of Sa‘di's *Golestan* (*Rose-garden*), which he completed in 1258, a year after his *Garden of Scented Herbs* (see cat. 153). It is a mixture of prose and verse, but the moral anecdotes it contains are in the same vein as the earlier work.

The illuminated heading (right) is for the section of Sa‘di's *divan* devoted to his panegyric odes (*qasideh*). Quotations from panegyric poems were rarely used as inscriptions on objects. Yet the same celebratory imagery was used both on objects and in verse.



152

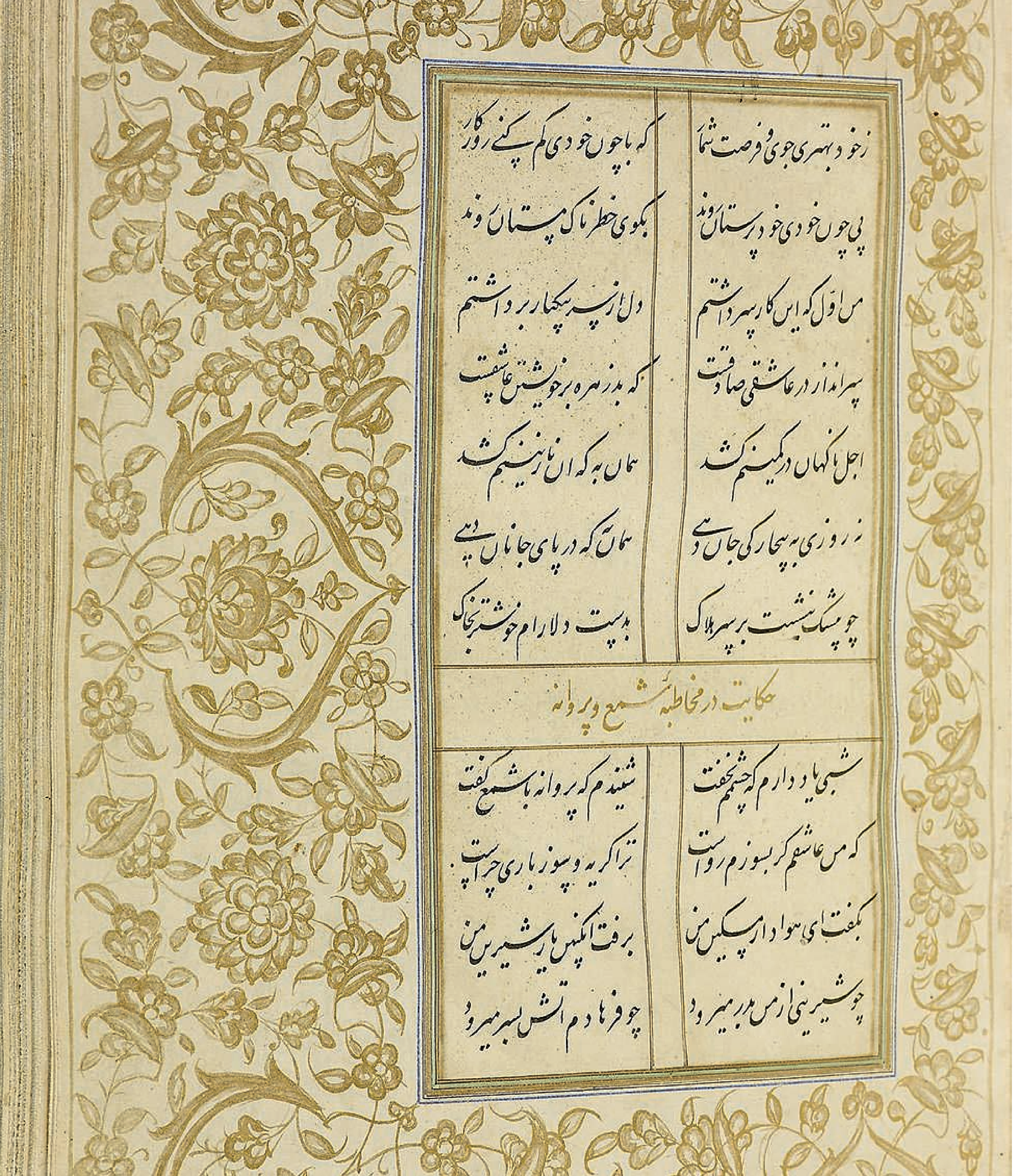
***Divan* of Hafiz**

October 1451

Manuscript signed by Suleiman al-Fushanji
Iran or Afghanistan, perhaps Herat
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on ‘Chinese paper’, each folio 17.1 × 10.8 cm

British Library, Add. ms. 7759, folios 60b–61a

Hafiz (d. about 1389) is regarded as the greatest lyric poet in the Persian language. Manuscript copies of his *divan*, or collected verse, are therefore relatively common. Some stand out for the materials used. Here, a manuscript of generally good quality has been made exceptional by the use of luxury paper imported from China, which was made in large sheets, prepared with a lead-based dressing, and dyed in a single colour. The manuscript was compiled by cutting up the sheets and arranging them so that contrasting colours appear on facing pages. Here, both folios are spattered with flecks of gold, while that on the left contains a pomegranate design.



ز خود بهتری جوی و فرصت شمار   که با چون خودی گم کنی روزگار
پی چون خودی خودپرستان روند   بکوی خطرناک مستان روند
من اول که این کار سر داشتم   دل از سر بیکبار برداشتم
سرانداز در عاشقی صادق است   که بد زهره بر خویشتن عاشق است
اجل ناگهان در کمینم کشد   همان به که آن نازنینم کشد
ز روزی به بیچارگی جان دهی   همان به که در پای جانان دهی
چو بی‌شک نبشتست بر سر هلاک   بدست دلارام خوشتر هلاک

حکایت در مخاطبهٔ شمع و پروانه

شبی یاد دارم که چشمم نخفت   شنیدم که پروانه با شمع گفت
که من عاشقم گر بسوزم رواست   ترا گریه و سوز باری چراست
بگفت ای هوادار مسکین من   برفت انگبین یار شیرین من
چو شیرینی از من بدر میرود   چو فرهادم آتش بسر میرود

153

Bustan (*Garden of Scented Herbs*) of Sa'di

1610

Signed by Imad al-Hasani
Iran, probably Isfahan
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 23.8 × 14.8 cm

Royal Collection/HM Queen Elizabeth II, RCIN 1005015, folios 84b–85a

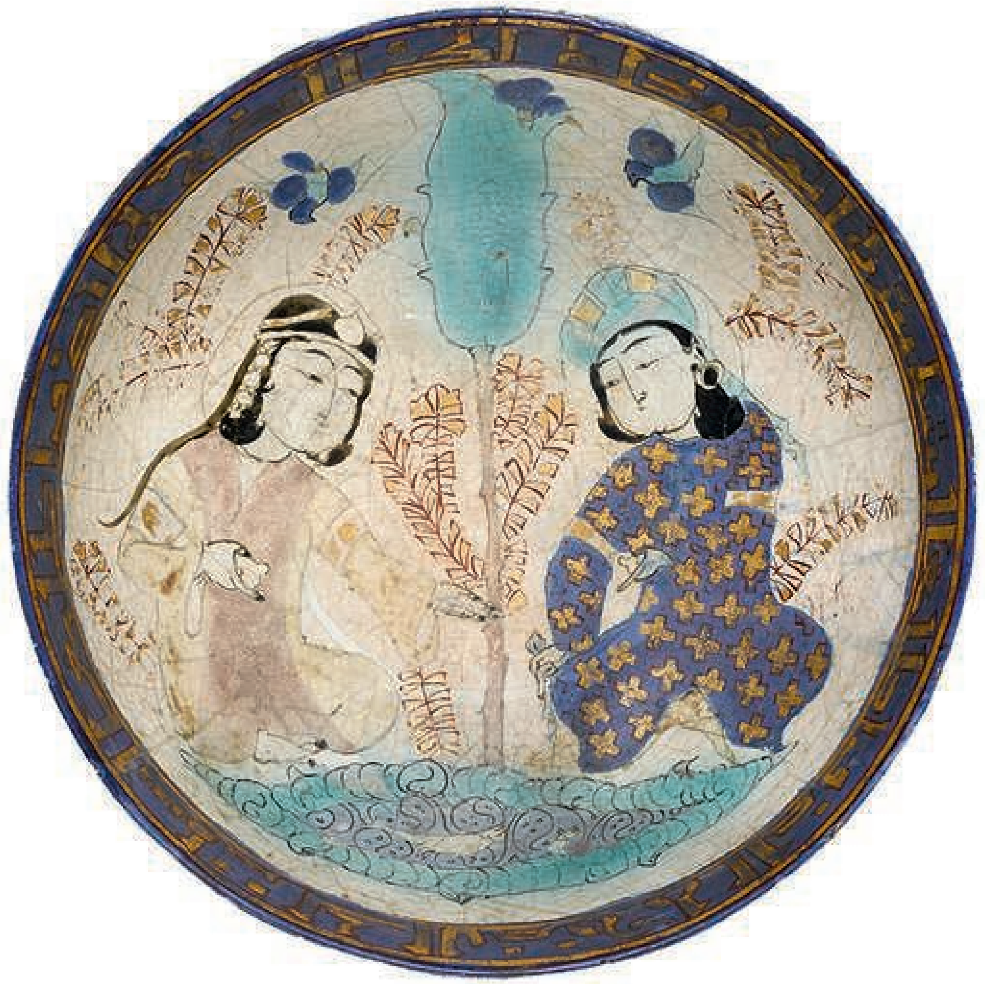
This peripatetic manuscript shows the value given to Persian literature beyond the borders of the Iranian world. It was copied in Iran by Imad al-Hasani (d. 1615), the most famous practitioner of the *nasta'liq* style of calligraphy. It was later taken to northern India, where, in the 18th century, the margins of the manuscript were renewed, the decoration in gold was added, and the manuscript was rebound with fine gilded leather covers.

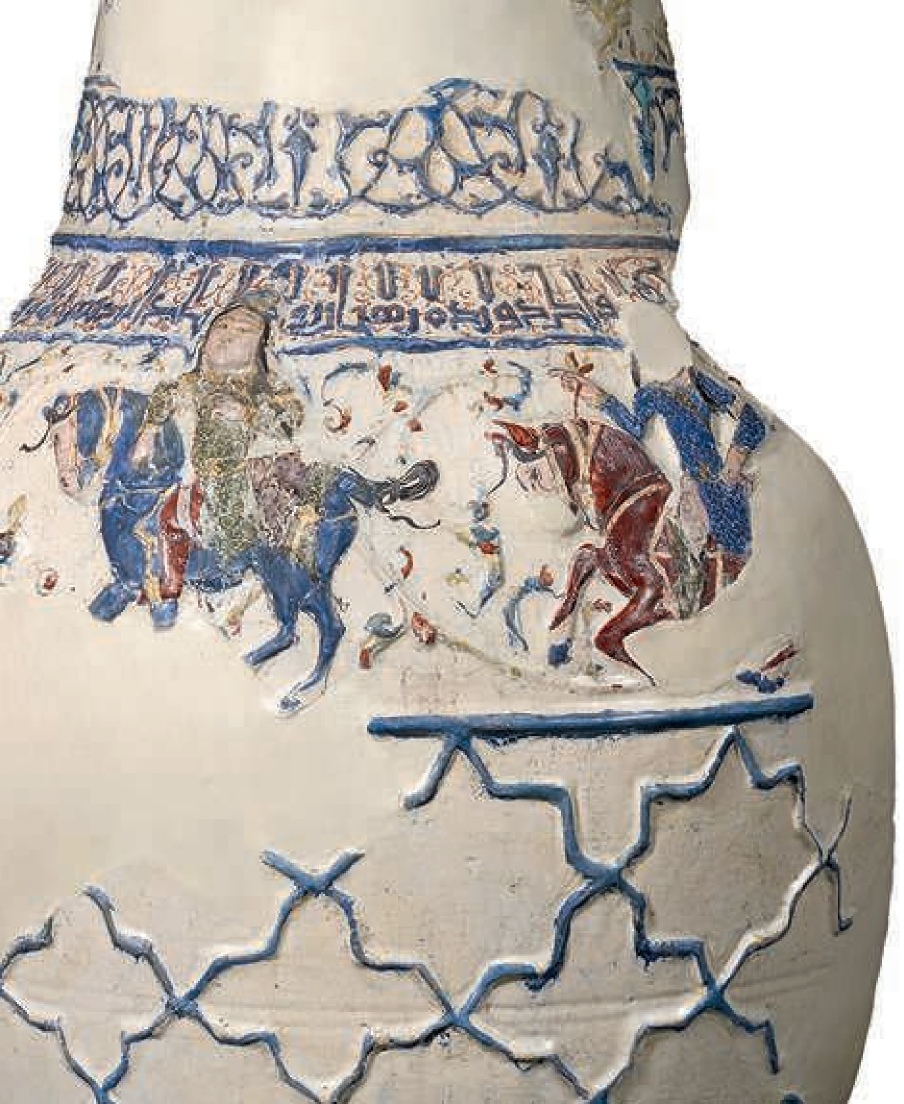
154

Bowl and fragment of a large storage jar

1180–1220

Kashan, Iran
Fritware, colours painted into the glaze, enamel colours and gold applied over the glaze, diameter 20.5 cm (right), height 87.5 cm (below).
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.2154 and I.CE2223
Purchased 2001 and 2011

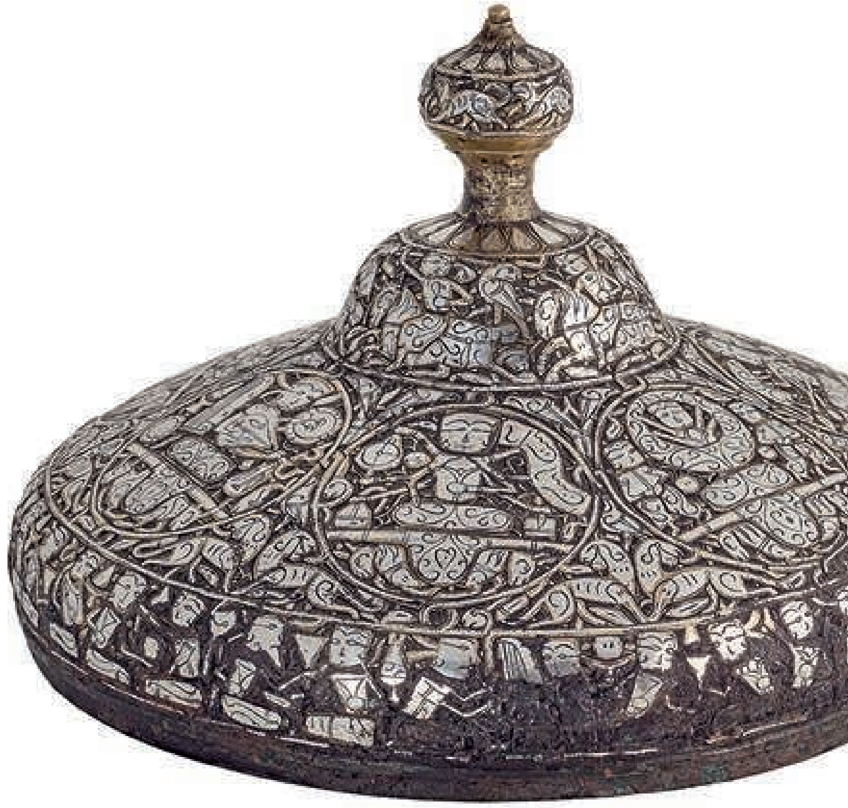




Very few Persian manuscript illustrations survive from before 1300, but Iranian ceramics show that images with figures were widespread in the 12th and 13th centuries. Among them are these two polychrome 'Mina'i' ceramics, in which most of the colours were applied as over-glaze enamels (*mina* in Persian).

On the bowl, the interior surface is divided by a cypress tree. It grows by a pool edged with grass and inhabited by fish. The youthful figures depicted reflect the ideal of beauty celebrated in contemporary verse, where no gender is attributed to the poet's object of desire. The two shown here are dressed in expensive clothes, with their hair in long locks, and we understand that the poet's beloved is unobtainable in part because of his or her superior social rank.

On the fragmentary jar, the same type of glamorous youth re-appears in the row of horsemen, decorated beneath with a star and cross pattern. Originally, there was a frieze of running animals below the rim, with the bands below containing a pattern of scrolling arabesques and a line of decorative script.

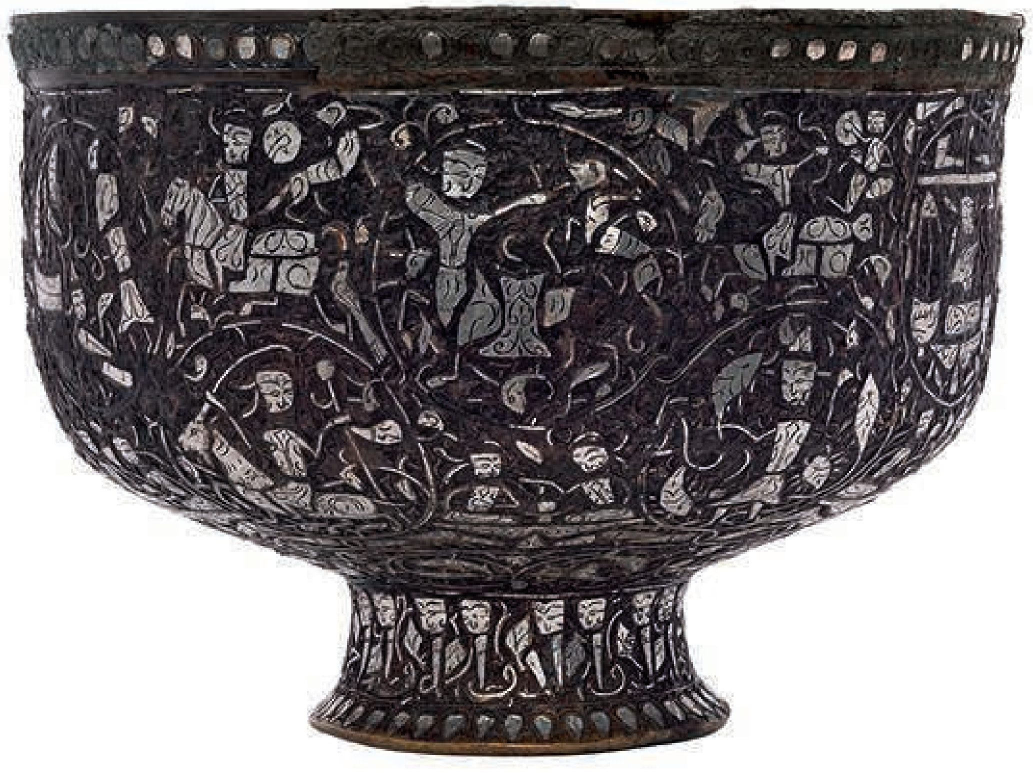


155

Footed bowl and cover,

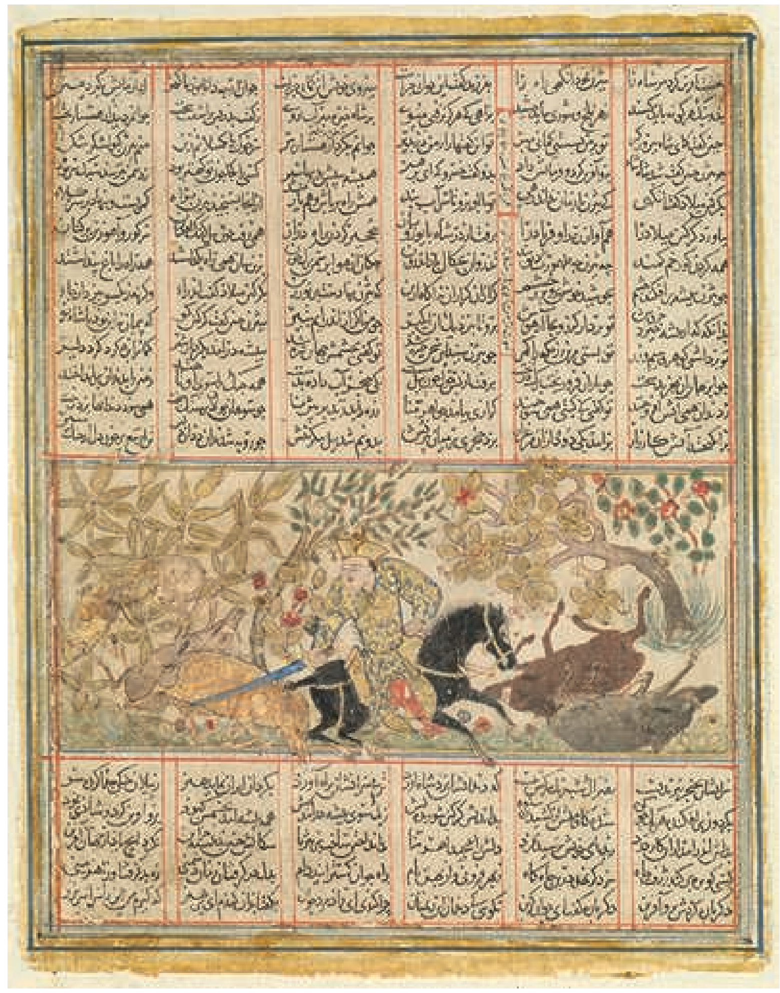
1190–1210

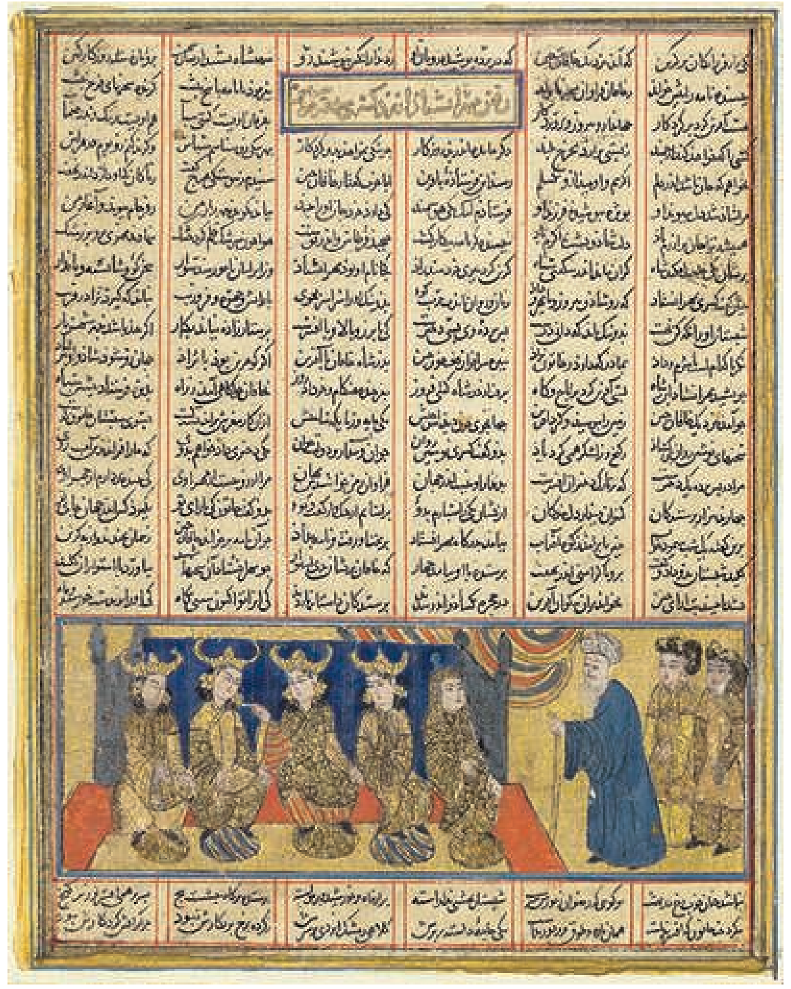
East Iran
Copper alloy, engraved and inlaid with silver, diameter of both 18.2 cm
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MW.1035 and I.MW.1037
Purchased 2014

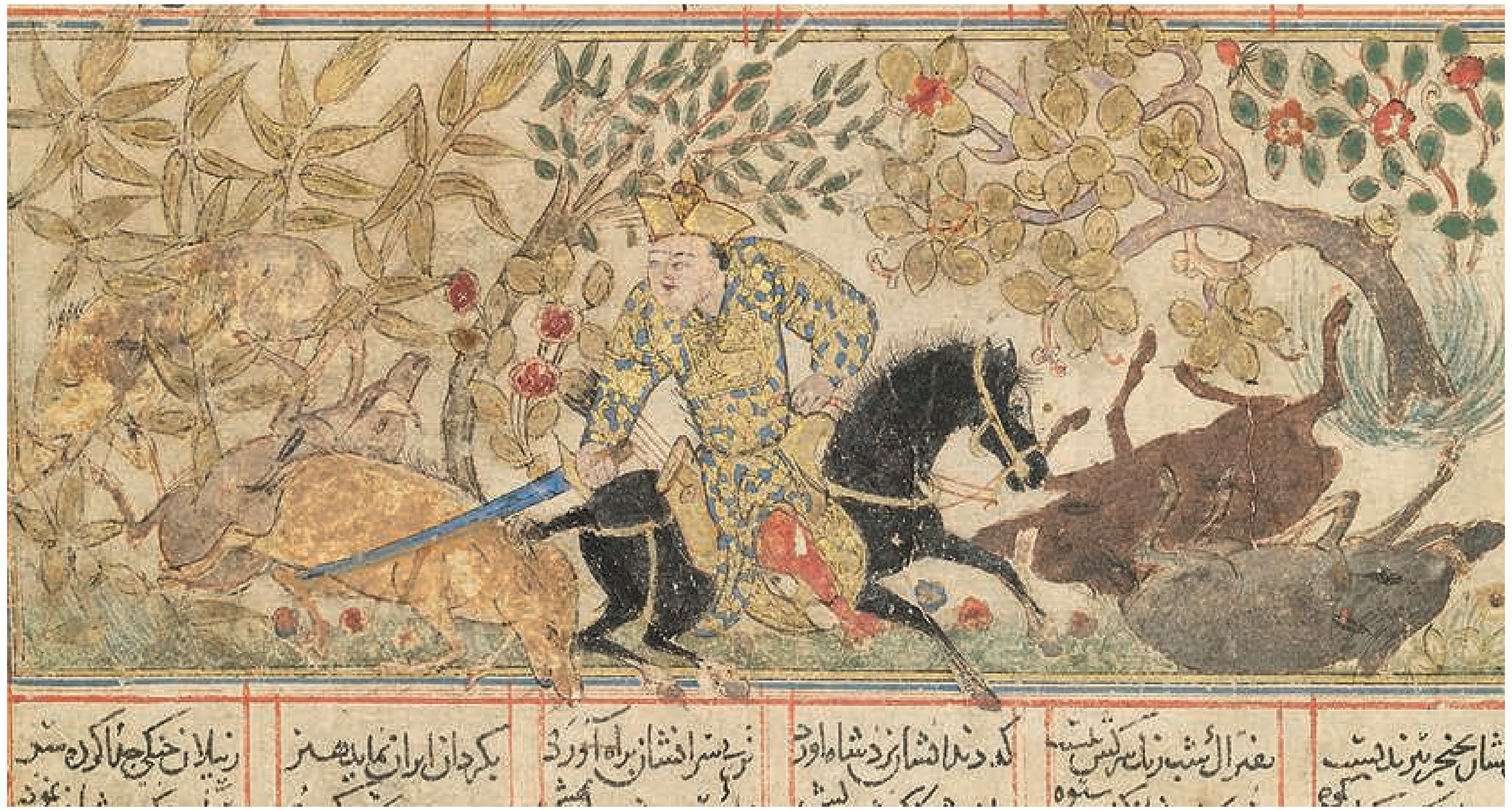


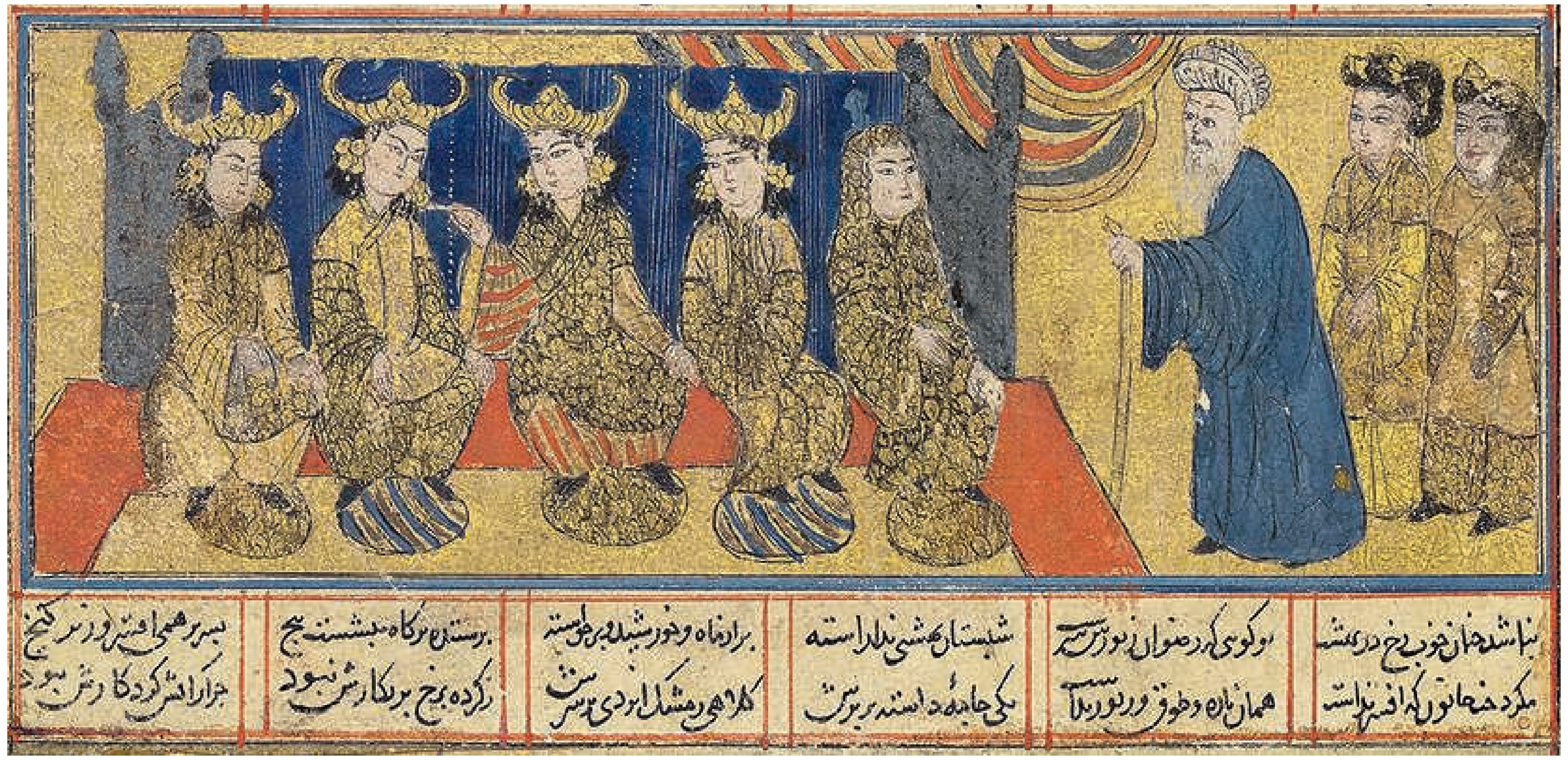
In East Iran, at about the same time that the polychrome ceramics (cat. 154) were produced, scenes with figures appeared on objects made from copper alloy. Using a newly developed technique, craftsmen engraved an overall design into the metal, and the voids were then filled with precious-metal foil, in this case silver, and a black substance, now lost. Details were incised into the foil.

The scenes shown here are taken from a diverse range of themes. The lid has a frieze of horsemen around the base of the knop, for example, and a band of wine-drinkers around the edge. On both bowl and lid, however, the main theme appears to be astrological, with representations of the planets and the signs of the zodiac.









156, 157

Two illustrations to Firdowsi's *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*)

about 1300

Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
the text areas 16.3 × 13.2 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4058 and I.MS.4067
Purchased 2011 and 2012

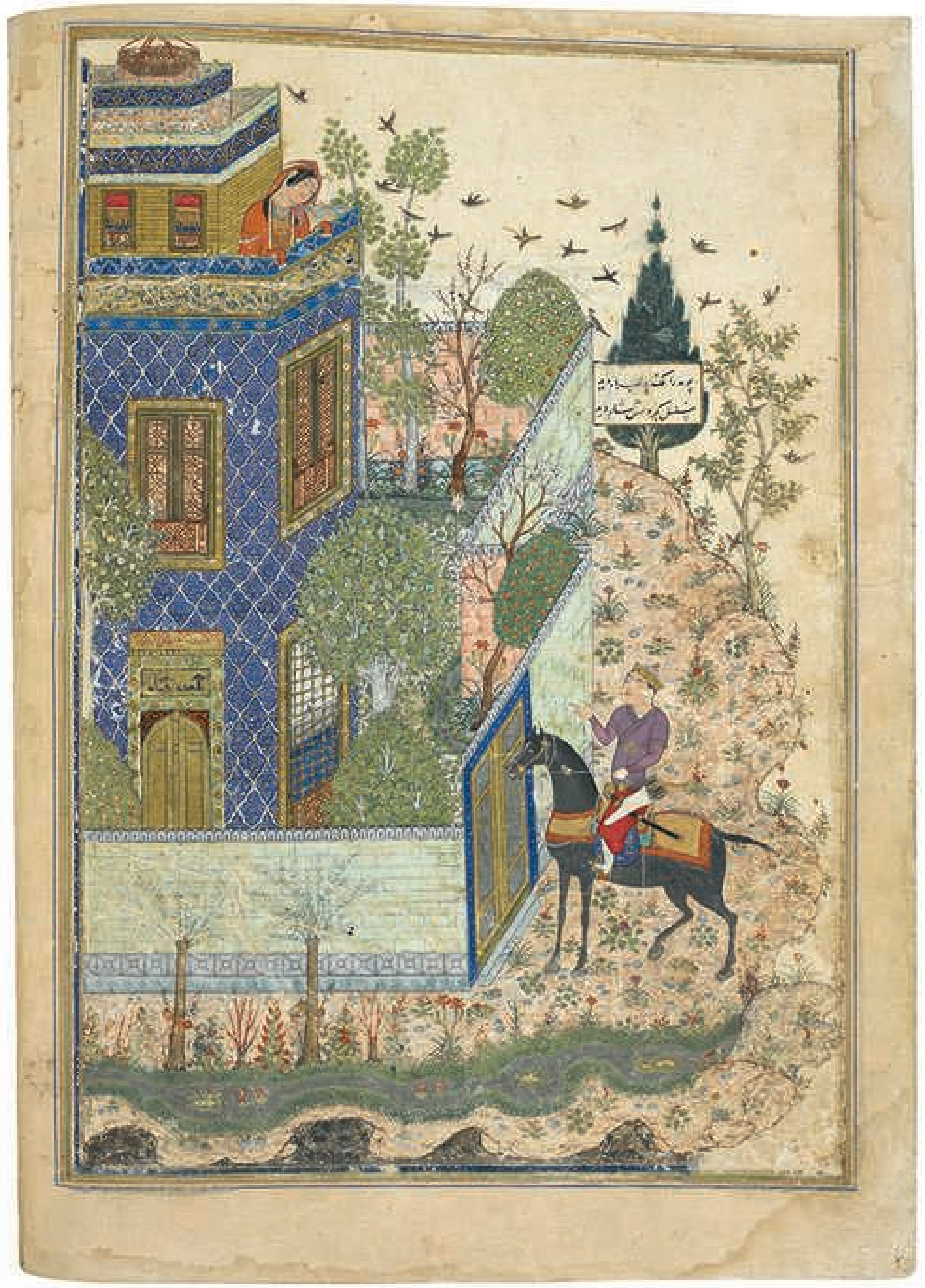
Hero Bizhan Rids Irman of Wild Boar

The earliest surviving illustrations to Firdowsi's *Shahnameh* are small-format manuscripts of the type shown here. The painting is contained in a strip across the text area, with a single plane of action: plants and trees fill the space without creating an illusion of depth. This is very different to the more sophisticated structure of illustrations from the late 14th century, when painters revelled in creating complex settings for the action (see cat. 158).

Here, we see the adventurous Bizhan, shown riding a black horse, having accepted the challenge of removing dangerous wild boar from the forests of Irman.

Envoy Mihran Sitad Selects a Wife for King Khosrow I

Unlike Bizhan, a figure from the heroic age of Iranian legend, the Parthian nobleman Mihran Sitad was a historical personality, who played a significant role as advisor to King Khosrow I (r. 531–79) and his son Hormizd IV (r. 579–90). The story shown here is a fantasy, although based on a real event. In it, Mihran Sitad is sent to the court of the Emperor of China to select a wife for Khosrow I from among the ruler's daughters. Four are dressed in gorgeous apparel, but Mihran Sitad chooses the fifth, more plainly dressed candidate, as he wisely detects that only she has a mother who is also of royal descent.



158

Prince Humay Reaches Princess Humayun's Castle

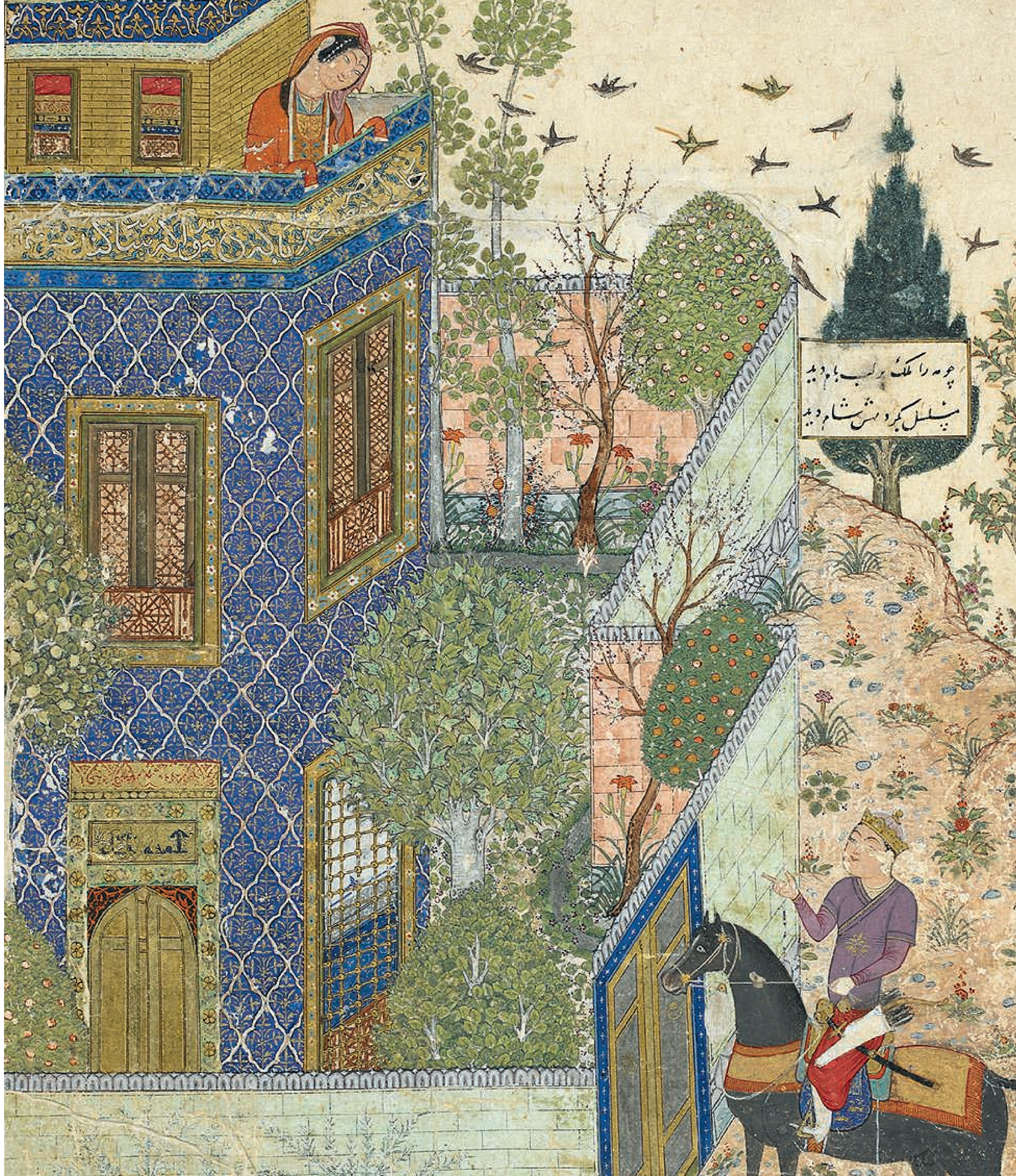
1396

Signed by Mir Ali ibn Ilyas
Baghdad, Iraq
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper,
each folio 32.4 × 23.5 cm
British Library, Add. ms. 18113, folios 18b–19a

The Persian romance *Humay and Humayun* was written by the poet Khwaju Kirmani (1290–?1349) in 1331. His hero, Prince Humay, falls in love with Humayun, the daughter of the Emperor of China. Eventually he wins her hand, overcoming her father's hostility and succeeding him as emperor. The painting shows the lovers' first encounter. It is a magnificent visual elaboration of the single couplet lodged within it, which describes Humayun's moon-like face and the black hair that surrounds it:

> The prince spied the moon at the edge of the roof.
> Plaited round his moon he saw the evening.

Set in a delightful spring garden, the tower-like mansion is modelled on an actual Iranian building type.


چو مه را ملک بر لب بام دید
مسلسل بگرد مهش شام دید

Khamseh (*Five Tales*) of Nizami

1525–50

Tabriz or Qazvin, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 36.8 × 25.4 cm
British Library, Or. ms. 2265

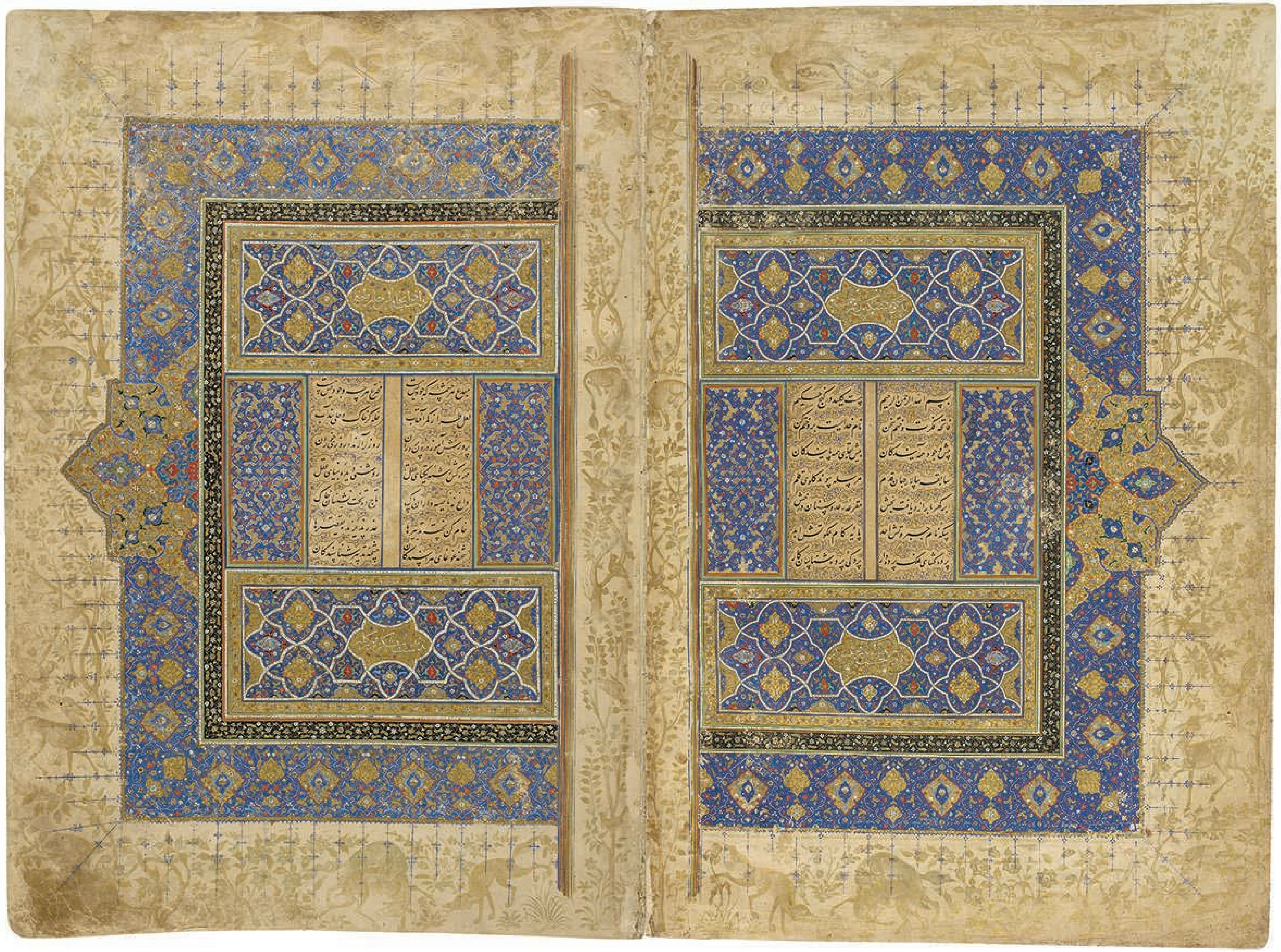
159

The opening illumination, folios 2b–3a

The text begins top right. On these opening pages it is limited to seven couplets arranged in two columns, while the two outer columns are filled with illumination. Horizontal panels with more complex designs are set above and below the text. Together these elements form a symmetrical composition across the two facing pages. They are surrounded by a wide double border, interrupted by triangular elements that extend into the outer margins. Unusually, gold decoration fills the margins with scenes of animals and birds among flowering plants and trees.

This illuminated composition, and most of the illustrations in this manuscript, were commissioned by the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp (ruled 1524–76).

Priscilla Soucek and Muhammad Isa Waley, 'The Nizami Manuscript of Shah Tahmasp: A Reconstructed History', in J.-C. Bürgel and C. van Ruymbeke, *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakim: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizami Ganjavi's Khamsah* (Leiden 2011), pp. 195–210



OVERLEAF

160 (left)

Prince Khosrow Spies Princess Shirin Bathing (folio 53b)

Attributed to Sultan Muhammad

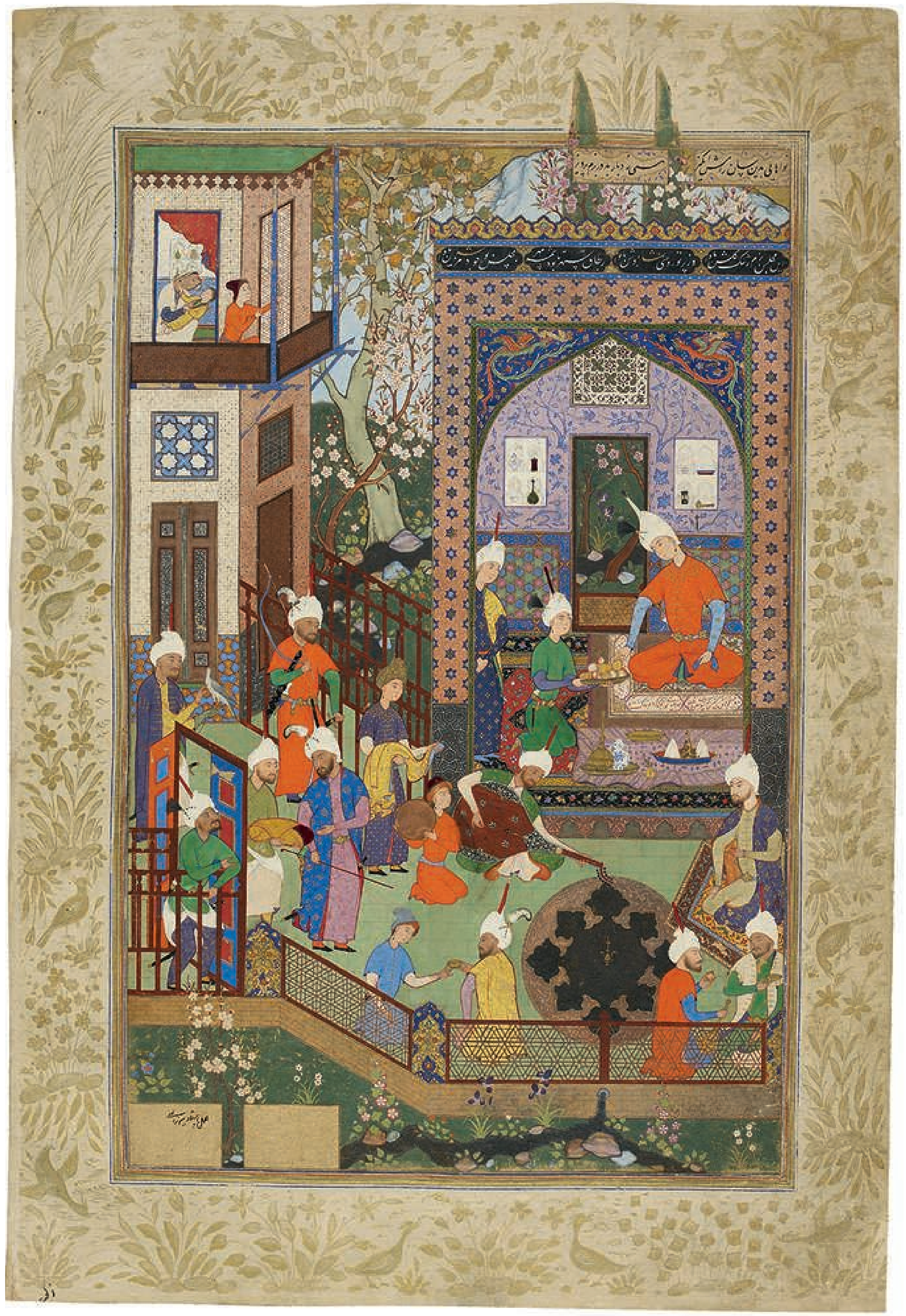
Nizami's romance, 'Khosrow and Shirin', completed in 1191, is the second of the poet's *Five Tales*. This scene occurs while the beautiful Armenian princess Shirin is travelling alone to Iran, where she hopes to find her handsome suitor, Prince Khosrow. On the way, she stops to bathe in a pool. Her clothes are piled on a branch, with her boots nearby, alongside her beautifully caparisoned horse, Shabdiz. Meanwhile Khosrow has incurred his father's wrath and flees the court. He rides by the pool, and, seeing Shirin, applies his finger to his lips in a gesture of astonishment. Khosrow fails to recognize her, however, and passes on. Their union must wait.

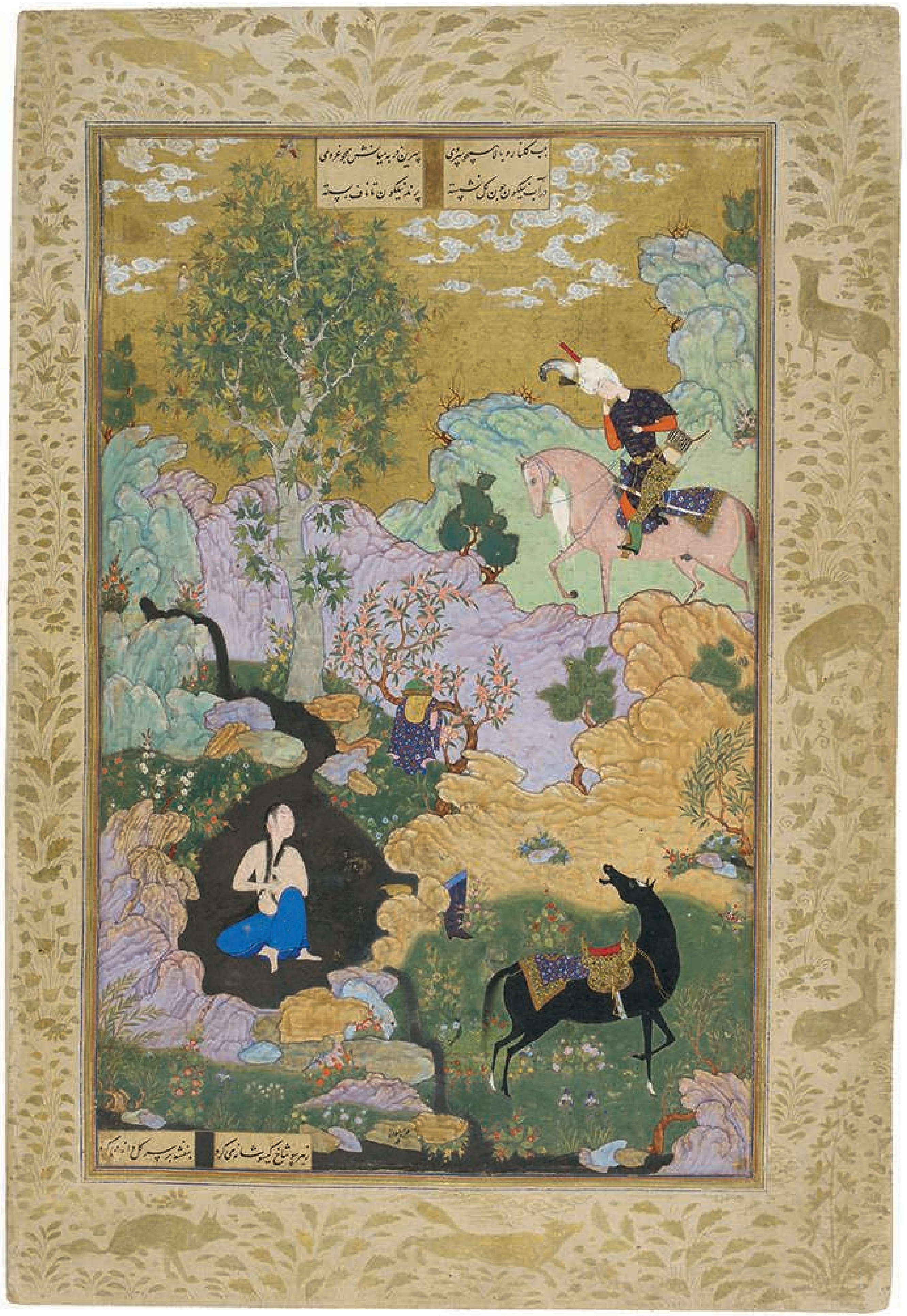
161 (right)

Khosrow Listens to Barbad Playing the Lute (folio 77b)

Signed by Mirza Ali

Eventually, after many adventures, Shirin is united with Khosrow, who has become the ruler of Iran as King Khosrow II. The brilliance of his court is enhanced by the presence of the great minstrel Barbad, who accomplishes many musical feats in his service, as when he composed an air for each day of the month. The scene shows Barbad seated by the pool, playing a large lute (*barbat*). He is accompanied by a page playing a tambourine.





POETRY AND ART

The manuscript illustrations seen earlier show how closely this form of painting was tied to the text it accompanied (see cat. 158). All these examples come from narrative poems written in the *masnavi* form, that is, with rhyming couplets. In this type of poem, the two half-lines of the couplet rhyme with each other but not with the lines that come before and after. To a degree, the couplets have a separate identity, as evidenced by the way that illustrations generally refer to a single couplet and not to a block of text. Nevertheless, the couplets convey a continuous narrative, which forms a strong thread that unites them. In some other poetic forms, however, the couplets are not linked to each other by the thrust of a story: instead they complement each other. In the same way the images associated with them are complementary rather than illustrative. This is the case with the *ghazal* verse form, the importance of which is so great that the practice of juxtaposing appropriate elements became a strong tradition in the visual arts. It is exemplified by the compilation of albums, but it is also found in other media.

In the *ghazal* form, there are relatively few verses. The poem by Hafiz quoted on an Iranian carpet (cat. 165), for example, is composed of eight couplets, of which five were used on the object. The two half-lines of the first couplet rhyme with each other, and this rhyme is repeated at the end of each subsequent couplet, a pattern that can be represented as A A/B A/C A/D A etc. Despite this formal unity, and the overarching theme of love that can be assumed for all *ghazals*, the content of each couplet is distinct. Indeed, three of the couplets could be removed from the *ghazal* on the carpet without interfering with the poem's meaning, even though this might undermine the poet's original intention. From this we can appreciate that the lines of the poem are artfully juxtaposed in a manner often compared to stringing a row of pearls. Similarly, the designer of the carpet juxtaposed a large part of the poem with the decorative patterns found in the main field, just as the compilers of the album pages (cats 162–4) placed paintings of handsome youths and beautiful young girls next to poems and other texts that referred to such beauties.

Another important theme of Persian verse was the praise of the ruler, found in panegyric odes. In this case, it was never the norm to quote these poems on objects. Acclamations in Arabic, however, asserting the ruler's ideal qualities, appear on objects from the eleventh century onwards, as evidenced by the large copper and silver tray from West Iran (cat. 170). Nevertheless, the ideals of princely conduct described in the panegyrics, and the comparisons made between the ruler and, for example, celestial bodies, are played out on objects such as this.

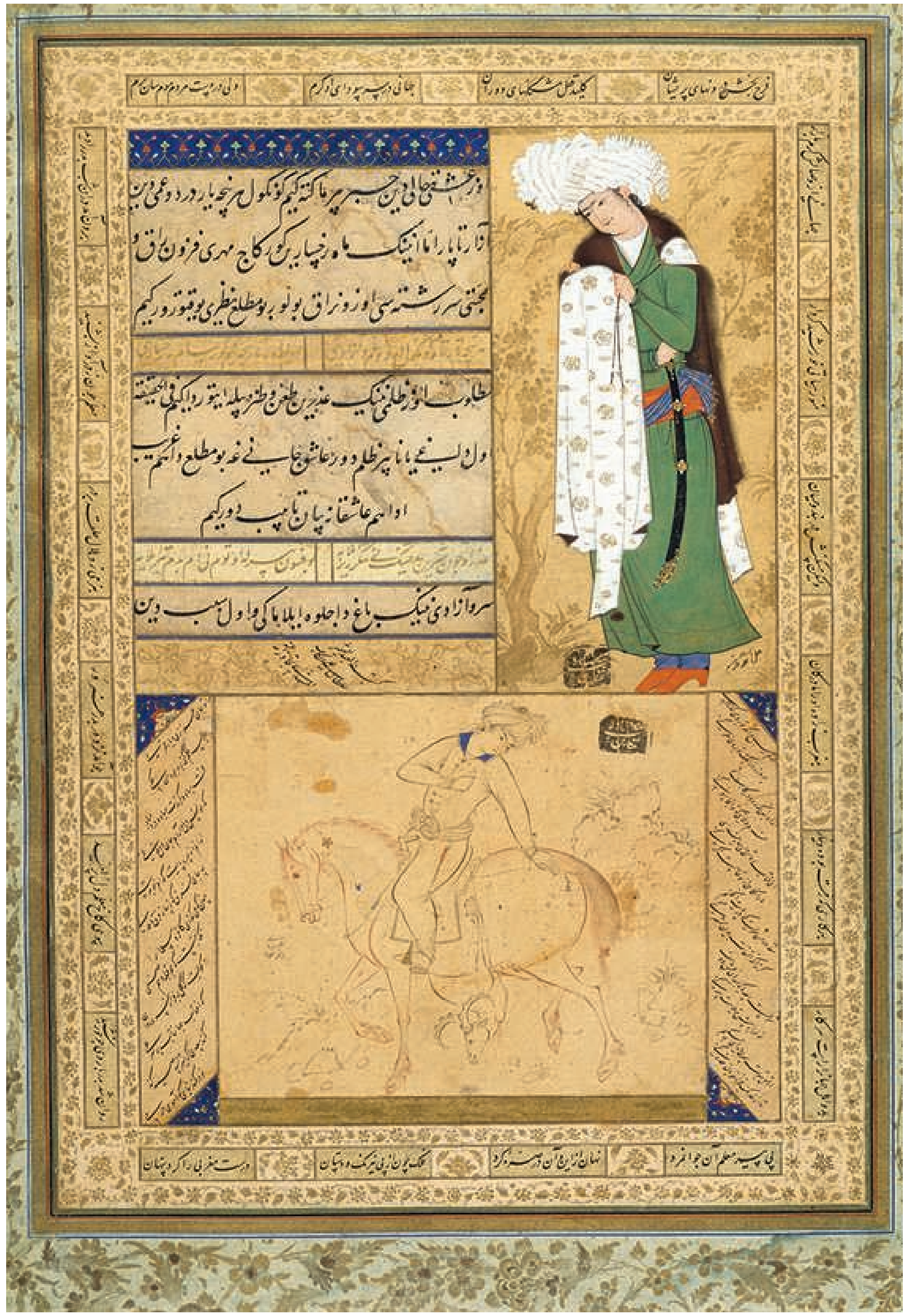
162

Album leaf

1600–1700

Isfahan, Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper, mounted on board, 40.2 × 26.3 cm
V&A: MSL/1980/6964

By the 17th century Iranian albums of calligraphy and painting were being assembled with great care. This drawing of a horseman by Riza Abbasi (d. 1635), the greatest artist of his time, and the painting of a standing youth by Riza's student Muhammad Qasim, set above it, both show upper-class boys who represent the paradigm of beauty. They were meant to steal your heart, as is made clear by the texts that surround them. These include a love lyric by the poet Sa'di, placed either side of Riza's drawing, and an excerpt in prose, top left, which evaluates a poet's treatment of love. This latter text is in Chaghatai Turkish (see p. 167).



OVERLEAF

163 (left), 164 (right)

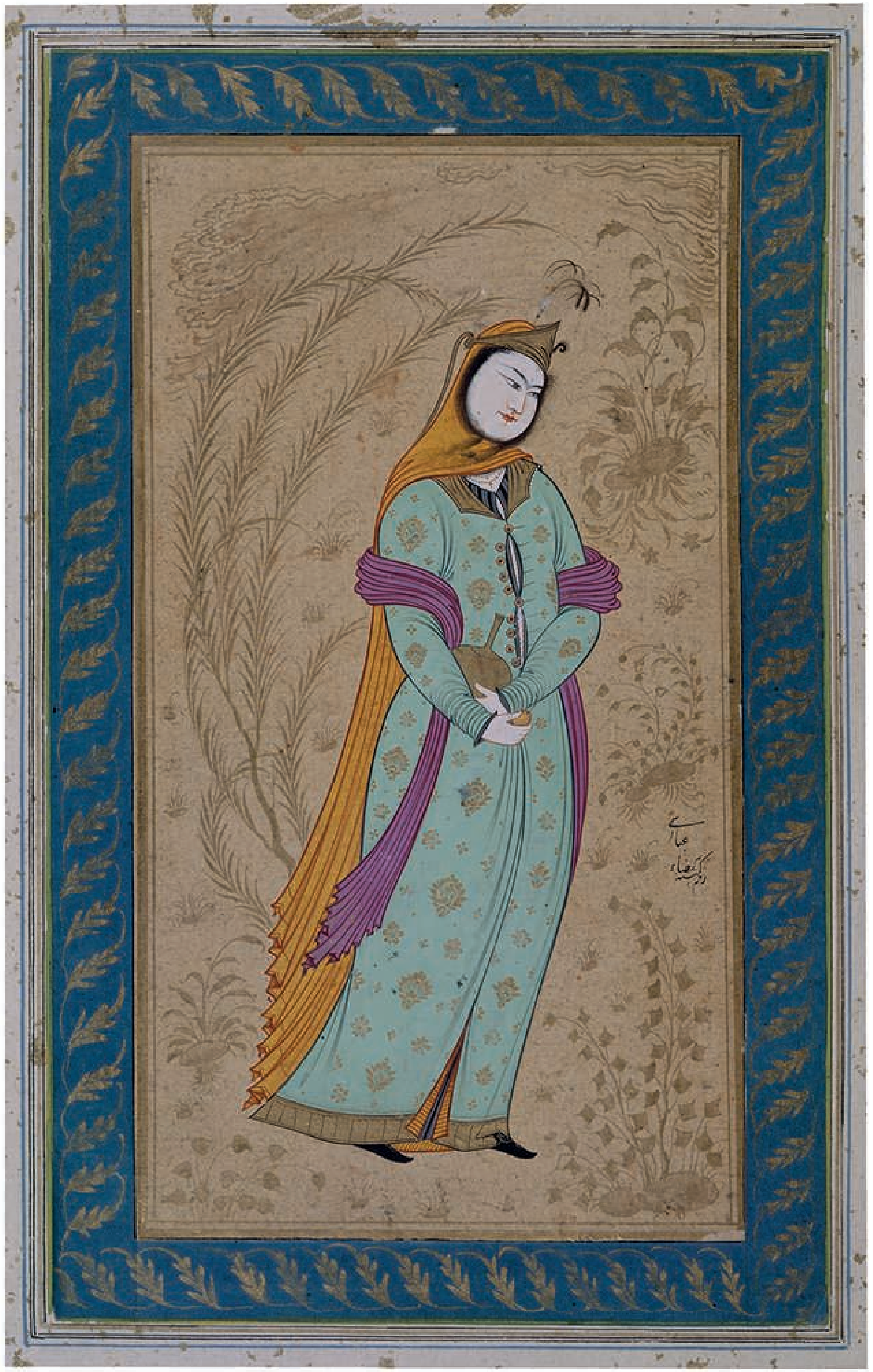
Two paintings in an album

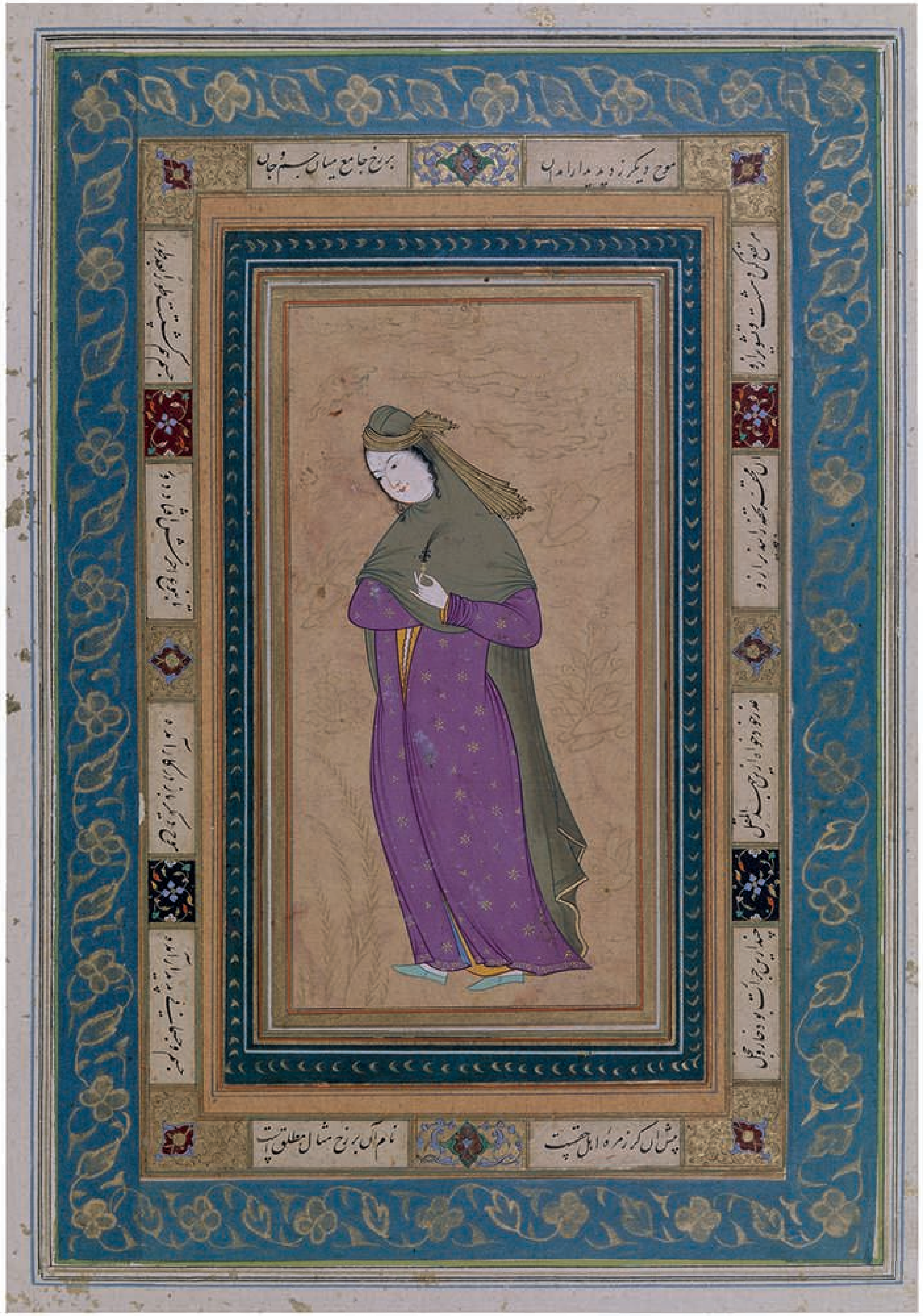
1600–1700

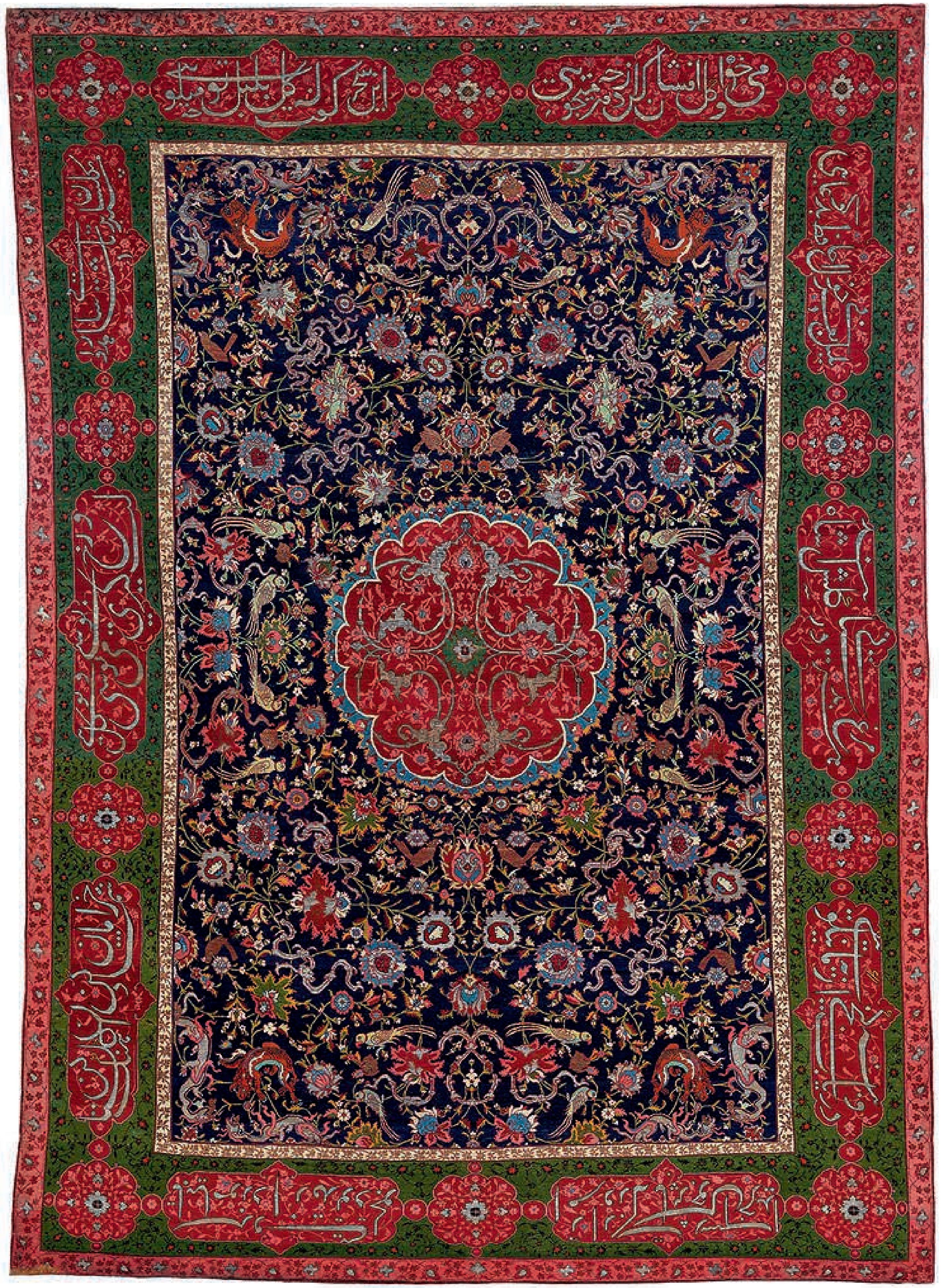
Isfahan, Iran
Bound manuscript, ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 49 × 34 cm
V&A: IS.133-1964, folios 47b–48a

In terms of theme, these two paintings are very similar to those on the album leaf (cat. 162), except, of course, that the subjects are beautiful upper-class girls rather than youths. The scrapbook-like approach seen on the leaf has been replaced by the pairing of complementary images on facing pages of the album. The individual half-lines of a poem have been cut up and pasted in the illuminated frame around the image on the right.

This album was probably compiled in South Asia in the 18th century. It is associated with Robert Clive (d. 1774), one of the architects of British colonial power in South Asia, and belonged to his descendants until 1964.


عباسی
رقم کمینه رضاء


برزخ جامع میان جسم و جان
پیش از آن کز زمره اهل حقیقت
نام آن برزخ مثال مطلق است



165

Carpet, with verses by Hafiz

1550–1600

Iran
Silk warp and weft, knotted wool pile, areas brocaded with metal thread, 231 × 165 cm
V&A: T.402-1910. Bequeathed by George Salting

The carpet's border contains six couplets selected from a *ghazal* by Hafiz (no. 486). The first reads:

> Call for wine. Scatter blossoms. What more
> do you want from your time here?
> At dawn, the rose spoke these words,
> 'Nightingale, what are you talking about?'

The poet's enigmatic imagery takes us as far as a busy marketplace before returning to a flower-garden populated by birds.

When we turn to the pattern of the main field, we find not only fantastic blossoms and birds, but also dragons, Chinese *qilins* (mythical hooved creatures) and stylized clouds. The pattern does not illustrate the couplets, nor does the poetry describe the pattern, rather they complement one another.

166

Torch stand

about 1600

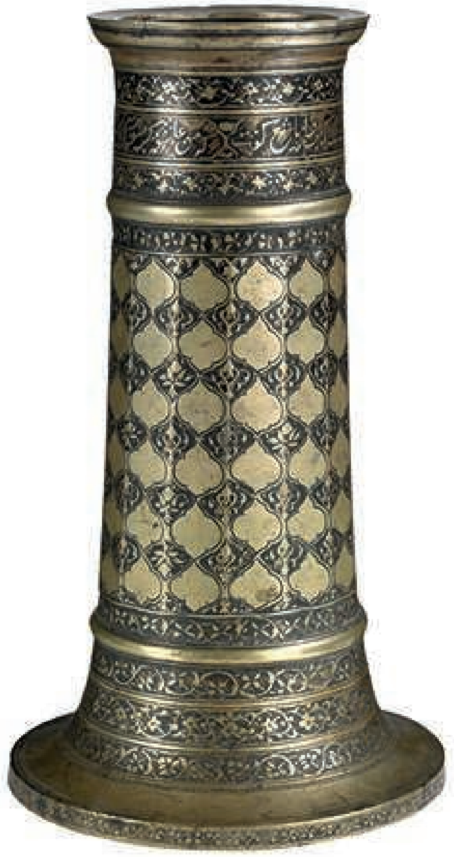
West Iran
Copper alloy, cast and engraved, inlaid with a black substance, height 28 cm
V&A: 481-1876

Two sections of Sa'di's *Garden of Scented Herbs* are devoted to stories of the moth and the candle (see cat. 153, which is open at the relevant page). The second begins:

> I remember that one night when I lay awake
> I overheard a moth in conversation with
> the candle,
> 'I'm love-struck,' he said. 'So it's right and proper
> I should burn.
> But you, why these tears? Why burn yourself up?'

These two couplets are engraved around the top of this torch stand, or *mash'al*, which once had a fitting for a torch, lamp or candle inserted at its top.

Assadullah S. Melikian Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th–18th Centuries* (London 1982), no. 138



167

Wine bowl

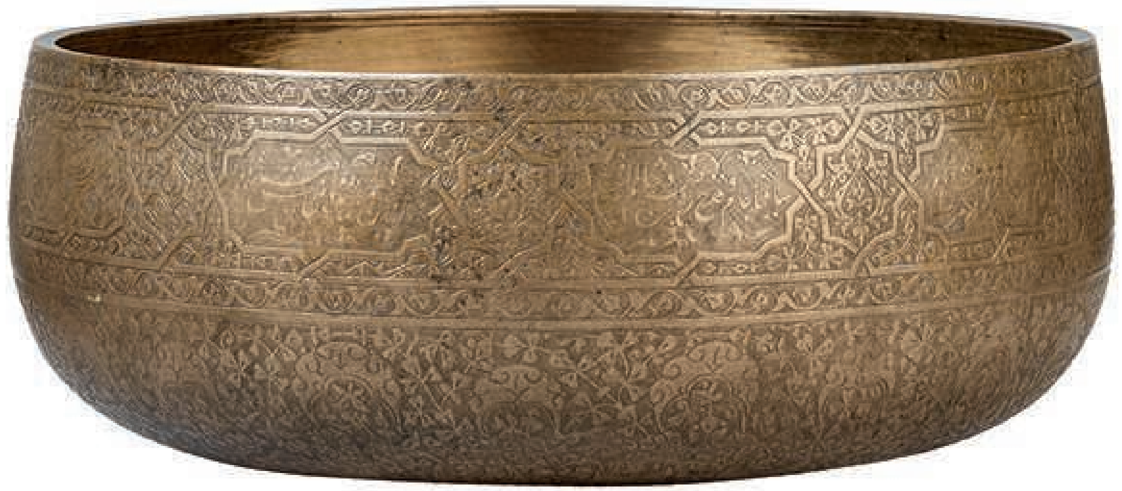
1510

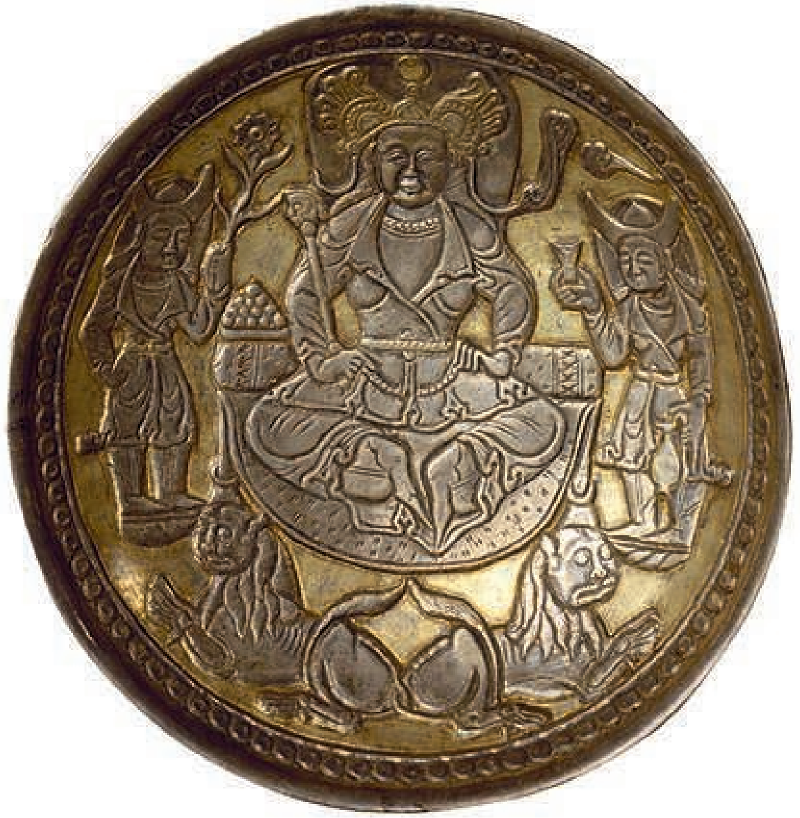
Signed by the calligrapher Sultan Muhammad and the maker Ustad Mahmud Ali
East Iran or Afghanistan, probably Herat
Bell-metal, cast, spun and engraved, diameter 30.2 cm
V&A: 1191-1854

This is a rare object signed by both the designer of the inscription and the maker. The decoration was once sharper, as the background would have been filled with a black substance that has since been rubbed away. The inscription around the exterior is a complete *ghazal* by the poet Hilali (d. 1536), from which we gather that the bowl's function was connected with serving wine. It begins:

> When the beloved observes his rose-coloured
> cheek in the wine-cup,
> The reflection of his face makes it a fountain
> of the Sun.

Assadullah S. Melikian Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th–18th Centuries* (London 1982), no. 117





168

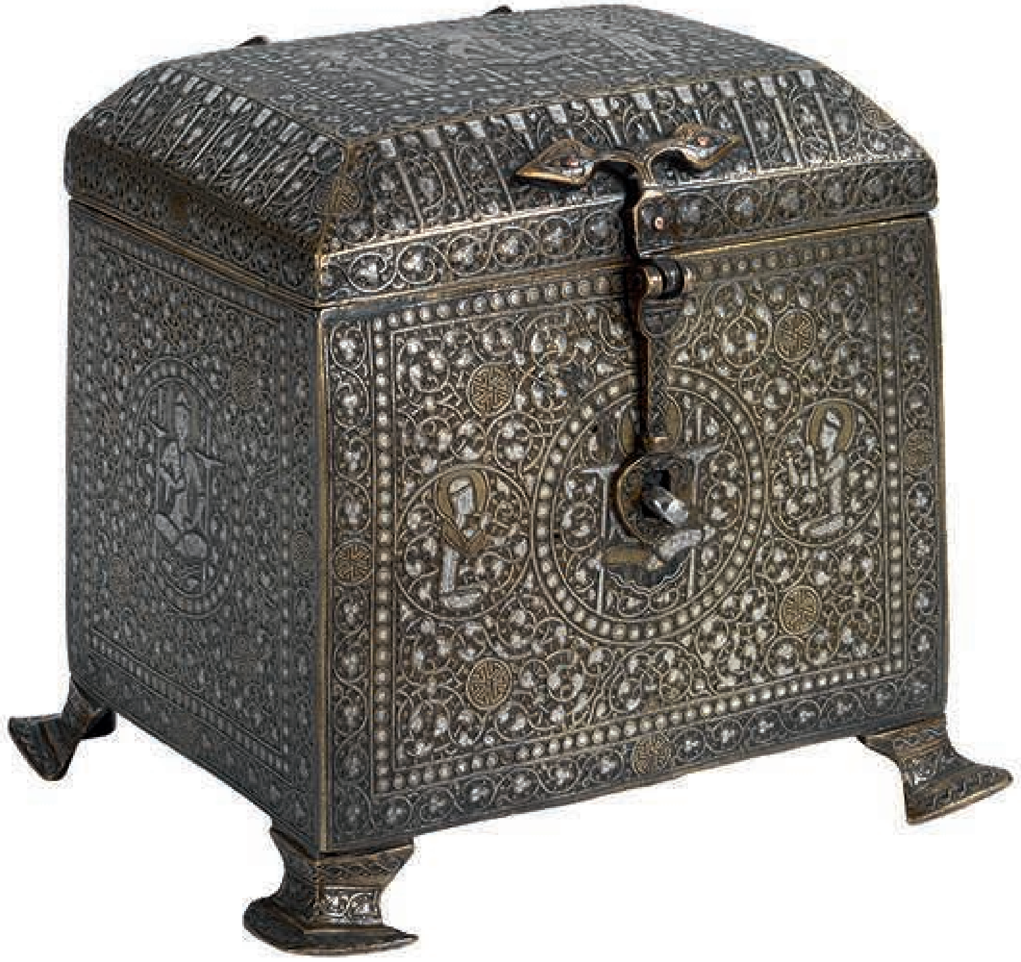
Silver dish

1000–1100

East Iran
Silver, the background gilt,
diameter 10.3 cm

Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, s-499

This small dish shows how Sasanian traditions associated with kingship survived well into the Islamic period in East Iran. Silver dishes decorated in relief with scenes of court life were characteristic of the Sasanian period. They were also used at the court of the Abbasid caliphs in Iraq, who demanded them as tribute from vassal rulers in Iran in the 8th and 9th centuries. This dish comes from a later period, and the enthroned figure is thought to be a member of the Ghaznavid dynasty, which ruled East Iran from 977 to 1186. He wears an extraordinary winged crown that is based on – but differs from – Sasanian models.



169

Casket

early 1300s

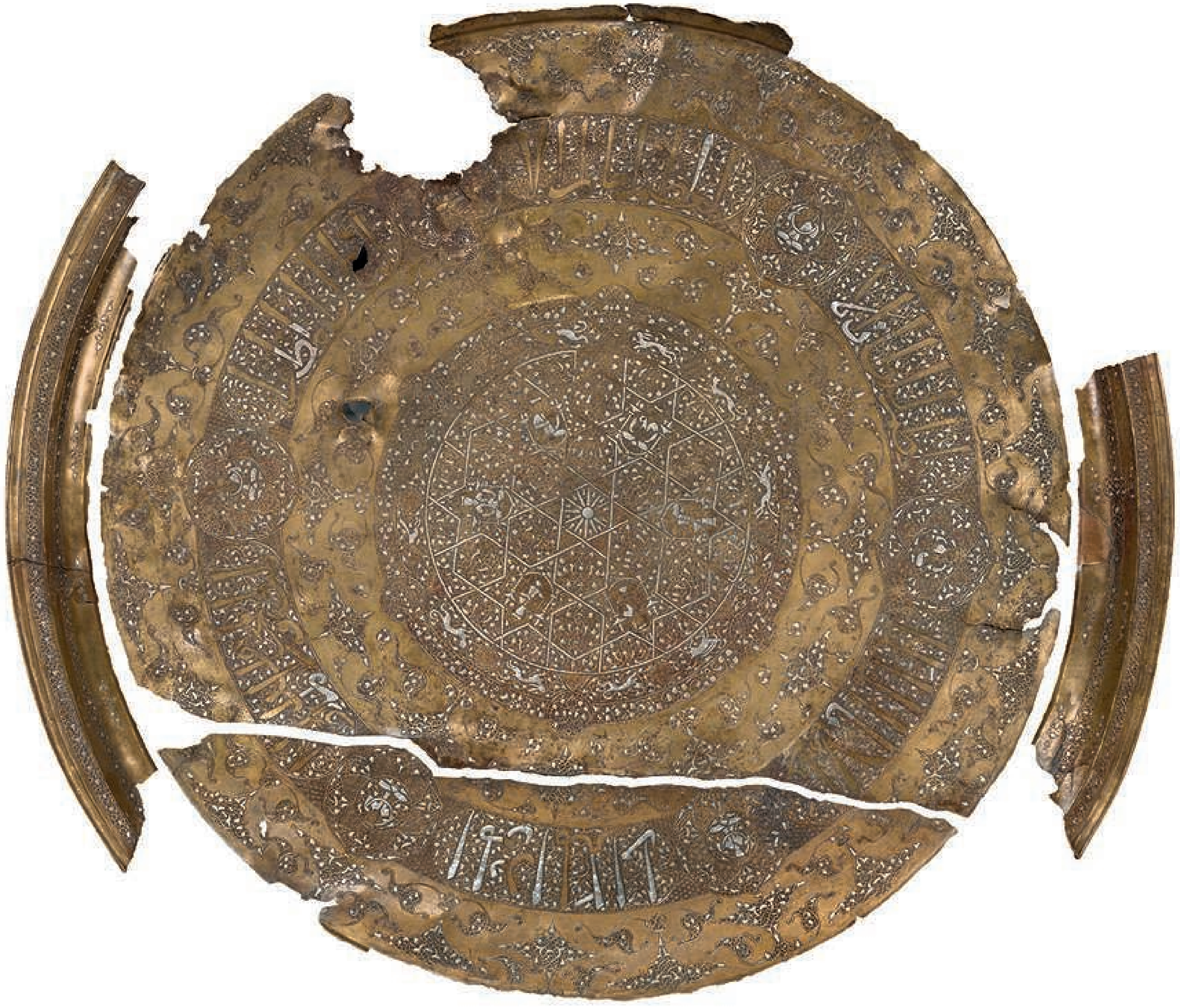
West Iran
Copper alloy, engraved and inlaid with silver, gold and a black substance, height 18 cm

V&A: M.710-1910

This casket is remarkable for the degree to which the precious-metal inlays have been preserved (as also on cat. 155). We can see how the details of the design were delicately incised into the silver foil. A black substance once completely filled the spaces between the inlays, all but hiding from the observer the fact that the casket is made of a base metal. This has now largely disappeared.

The main subject, seen on five faces of the casket, is an enthroned monarch attended by pages (top) and musicians (sides). These are idealized celebrations of royal dignity in the manner of panegyric odes.

Assadullah S. Melikian Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th–18th Centuries* (London 1982), no. 89



170

Tray

1300–10

West Iran, probably Shiraz
Copper alloy, engraved and inlaid with silver, gold and a black substance, diameter 73.5 cm

V&A: 717-1897

Circular designs divided into bands and medallions may have originated in manuscripts devoted to astrological themes (see cat. 134). They were readily adaptable to round trays such as this example. The content of the astrological designs was also adapted in a way that reflects the rhetorical strategies of Persian panegyric verse. The Sun at the centre represents the sultan, who is referred to in the Arabic acclamation on the tray. This Sun is surrounded not by the other six planets but by six enthroned monarchs, while the framing band has 12 figures, not the signs of the zodiac but running beasts associated with the hunt, a royal prerogative.

Assadullah S. Melikian Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th–18th Centuries* (London 1982), no. 94

7

ROYAL PATRONAGE

Tim Stanley

After the collapse of the Sasanian empire in 651, Iran was ruled almost continuously by Muslim dynasties until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. During this period of more than a thousand years, there were competing ideas about who had the right to rule. This is reflected in the titles used. Some were as modest as 'governor' or, most unusually, 'son-in-law', while others were as grandiloquent as 'king of kings' and 'shadow of God on earth'. Caliphs were succeeded by sultans, who were followed in turn by khans and eventually by shahs.

At first, in the seventh century, the former Sasanian territories were incorporated into the Islamic empire, an enormous entity that by the eighth century extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the River Indus. The empire was ruled over by a sequence of caliphs, as 'successors' of the Prophet. Even at this stage the validity of the caliphate was rejected by Shi'ites, who, as we have seen (p. 151), believed that the political and religious roles of the Prophet should have been inherited by his son-in-law Imam Ali and his descendants alone.

The caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) chose Damascus in Syria as their capital, but their successors, the caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty (750–1258), moved the centre of the caliphate eastwards to Iraq. There Baghdad was founded in 762, close to the former Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon. During this period Iranians began to play an important part in running the Abbasid empire, and many Sasanian ideas were incorporated into governmental practices and the ceremonial of the caliphal court. To an extent, then, the caliphs behaved like Iranian monarchs.

The caliphs appointed governors for their numerous provinces, over whom they exercised a great degree of central control at first. The empire flourished, giving rise to an unrivalled degree of wealth and cultural sophistication. In the ninth century, though, the more distant provinces began to act independently of the centre. This change was evident in East Iran, where governors from the local Muslim population had assumed authority. As we have seen, their patronage gave rise to a new Persian literary language written in the Arabic script (p. 167), as well as a distinctive East Iranian material culture (cats 130, 131). Generations of governors rose and fell without the direct intervention of the caliph in Iraq, but there was a convention that their assumption of power needed his formal approval (see cat. 171).

This conventional humility did not prevent the governors of East Iran from presenting themselves as kings in the Iranian tradition. It is presumed, for example, that a small silver dish showing an enthroned monarch wearing a winged crown represents one of the rulers of East Iran in the first half of the eleventh century (cat. 103). He may even have been Mahmud of Ghaznah, the person shown donning the caliph's robe of honour in cat. 171. Mahmud was well known as an advocate for Sunni Islam, in sharp contrast to his main rivals in West Iran and Iraq. There, Ali, son of Buyah, a Shi'ite military adventurer from the mountains of northern Iran, had founded the Buyid dynasty (934–1062). The Buyids were freeborn men of Iranian descent, and they were proud of their Iranian heritage, on occasion issuing coins on which they are shown wearing a winged crown, and using the title of 'king of kings' (*shahanshah*).

In the mid-eleventh century the revival of Iranian power in an Islamic guise came to an end. This reflected a marked change in the population of the steppe zone to the north, a vast region stretching from the Black Sea to Mongolia. There, during the first half of the first millennium AD, the Iranian peoples who had previously been dominant were replaced by other groups, most notably those speaking Turkic languages. In 999 the northern part of East Iran was annexed by the Karakhanids, a confederation of Turkic tribes whose supreme leader was referred to as the Khaqan. Later interventions, in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, went much further.

From the 1030s to the 1050s a Turkic confederation, led by members of the Seljuq dynasty, created a great empire centred in Iran but eventually stretching as far west as Anatolia. The Seljuqs, like Mahmud of Ghaznah, were avowedly Sunni, and in 1055 their leader, Toghrıl, ended the Shi'ite Buyids' control of Baghdad, providing the caliph with a restrictive form of 'protection'. In return, Toghrıl assumed the title of Sultan, literally 'authority', which signalled that he and his successors exercised temporal power in the caliph's name. Although this empire disintegrated in the twelfth century, the prestige of the Seljuq dynasty outlived its demise, and many of the smaller states that succeeded it remained loyal to Seljuq traditions.

This dispensation was shattered by the Mongol invasions, which began in 1219. At first they took the form of hugely destructive raiding parties, sent by Genghis Khan (r. 1206–27) to avenge the murder of his envoys. Later their aim was to bring local rulers under Mongol suzerainty. Finally, in 1256, there was a full-scale campaign of conquest, designed to incorporate Iran into the Mongol empire. As non-Muslims, the first Mongol rulers of Iran sought legitimacy by reviving pre-Islamic traditions as presented in the *Shahnameh* and other sources. For the first time since the Islamic conquest, they referred to their domains as 'Iran'.

In 1258 the Mongols overthrew the Abbasid caliphate, destroying the mechanism by which Iran's rulers had long sought legitimacy. Instead, the Mongol rulers of Iran were vassals of the great khans in Mongolia and then China. In 1295, however, Ghazan Khan, the seventh ruler of Mongol Iran, converted to Islam and threw off allegiance to the great khan. The rule of these Muslim Mongol khans came to an end in 1335, but, as with the Seljuqs, their immediate successors stayed loyal to Mongol tradition.

This is evident from the case of Amir Timur, who re-created the Mongol empire in Iran and western Central Asia between the 1370s and his death in 1405. Timur, the son of a tribal leader from what is now Uzbekistan, sought legitimacy by marrying a female descendant of Genghis Khan and taking a Mongol title that meant 'son-in-law'. Yet the dynasty founded by Timur, which lasted until 1507 in East Iran, acquired its own prestige, especially through cultural patronage (see cat. 134), and was emulated by other Muslim rulers, including the Safavid shahs of Iran, in the sixteenth century.

The Seljuq and Mongol invasions changed Iran's ethnic make-up, as very large numbers of nomads speaking Turkic languages entered the country. Many moved further west into Iraq, Syria and Anatolia, but others stayed. In some regions, including Azerbaijan in the north-west, Turkic languages came to dominate. In addition, almost all subsequent rulers of Iran were drawn from these Turkic-speaking populations. Nevertheless, the Iranian concept of kingship that had proved useful to the pagan Mongols was also taken up by these rulers, along with aspects of Islamic history and Mongol tradition.

This was the triple framework adopted by the Safavid dynasty when they re-united Iran in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Their primary source of legitimacy was linked to Islam (see p. 151), while their practice of rulership was adapted from that of their Turkic predecessors, and they also presented themselves as the successors of the great monarchs of ancient Iran. This contributed to their use of the title of shah, or 'king', which also had a religious meaning associated with Imam Ali. Under later dynasties, the title remained prominent but lost this religious connotation.

Despite the different ways in which their position was legitimized, these rulers made common assumptions about their role that were also shared by those around them. They knew that they held power by virtue of God's favour, and that they shared this divine approval with other members of their family, and sometimes with their lineage more broadly. They therefore expected their rulership to be hereditary. They liked to presume, too, that while they lived they would be the sole repository of royal power, which was absolute in character. In practice, of course, a ruler's authority was limited by a multitude of factors, from his personal competence to the precepts of Islamic law. Similarly, other figures, such as an unusually powerful vizier, or minister, sometimes exercised power on an imperial scale. Nevertheless, absolute monarchy was generally presented as the only viable political system.

This ideal view of kingship was expressed in panegyric poetry and in court art, where, for example, the monarch

Fig. 11 (p. 222).
Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, commissioned by
Shah Abbas I in the early 17th century

Fig. 12
Courtyard of the Great Mosque of Isfahan

could be represented symbolically by the Sun, the only astral body seen in the daylight hours (cat. 170). Of course, not all art of the Islamic period was produced for rulers, but it was usually affected profoundly by artistic conventions established at their courts. This is why metalwork with royal images (such as cats 169, 170) cannot be attributed to the patronage of a ruler simply on account of this iconography, since almost all luxury wares of this kind were decorated in a manner that followed the court.

The same was true of expensive imported goods, which the ruler was usually the first to acquire. In the late eighth century, for example, the governor of East Iran sent the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809) a group of 20 Chinese high-fired ceramics of imperial quality. This was the first recorded presence in Iran of Chinese ceramics, which, despite fluctuations in supply, remained a desired feature of court life for a thousand years. Similarly, the imitation of Chinese models remained a recurring feature of Iranian ceramic production over the same period (see p. 236). This allowed those who could not afford imported Chinese stoneware and porcelain to own something similar to the ceramics used at court.

The expression of absolute monarchy was not, then, limited to the occasional motif. It determined the very nature of artistic production, not least because the ruler had a vastly greater command of resources than anyone else in his territory. Nevertheless, rulers were expected to act as good Muslims with an eye for their fate in the afterlife. Their acts of charity and their patronage of Muslim institutions were expected to be commensurate with their extraordinary level of wealth. This meant that while palaces were the primary locations for conspicuous consumption, rulers knew that they would be judged retrospectively on their patronage of public buildings (see pp. 247–8).

ROBES OF HONOUR

One of the longest-lived of royal traditions in Iran was the awarding of robes of honour. The first evidence for the practice comes from the Sasanian period, and it continued until the end of the Qajar period in 1925. Its origin seems to have lain in a rather dramatic custom in which the ruler removed his own outer clothing (and other personal items such as his sword) and gave them to a favoured official or a guest at court to put on. Indeed, the term *khel'at*, which was the name for robes of honour in the Islamic era, comes from an Arabic verb meaning 'to undress'. By taking off his own clothes and giving them to another, the ruler was not only doing that person a great honour; he was also signalling that the recipient was subject to the ruler as a vassal or court servant.

Clearly the frequency with which a ruler could disrobe as a public gesture was limited, and it became the custom to have a stock of grand robes available to give directly to those to be honoured in this way. The textiles used – generally expensive silks or even more expensive silk velvets – were made under court control, and their designs were specific to the ruler or his dynasty. The splendid effect intended is conveyed by the English word 'gala', which is derived from the same Arabic source as the Persian *khel'at*.

Relatively few robes of honour survive intact. Some were preserved as exotic items in European royal or noble collections, as in the case of a robe forwarded by the Russian tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich to Queen Christina of Sweden in 1644 (cat. 172), while two fine velvet examples, sent by the Safavid ruler Shah Muhammad Khudabandah (r. 1578–87) to the Ottoman sultan, were put away unworn, presumably because donning them would have been a sign of submission to the Safavids.

Other robes of honour survive in altered forms. A seventeenth-century Safavid example was made of superb cloth of silver, in which expensive metal-wrapped thread ran across the full width of the textile, forming the shimmering background to a pattern of flowering plants. Equally impressive, the repeat in the pattern ran the full length of the robe. At a later stage, the robe was cut up and re-made as an Orthodox church vestment, and it is as a vestment that it has survived (cat. 174).

Images of the ceremonial that accompanied this tradition are also relatively rare. An exceptional example occurs in a copy of the *Jami' al-tawarikh* (*Compendium of Histories*) of Rashid al-Din (d. 1318). One illustration (cat. 171) shows Mahmud, the eleventh-century ruler of Ghaznah, putting on a robe of honour sent to him by the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir. In this case, although it was executed more than 280 years after Mahmud's death, the painting reflects his policy of celebrating his formal subservience to the caliph, a major source of his legitimacy as a Sunni ruler.

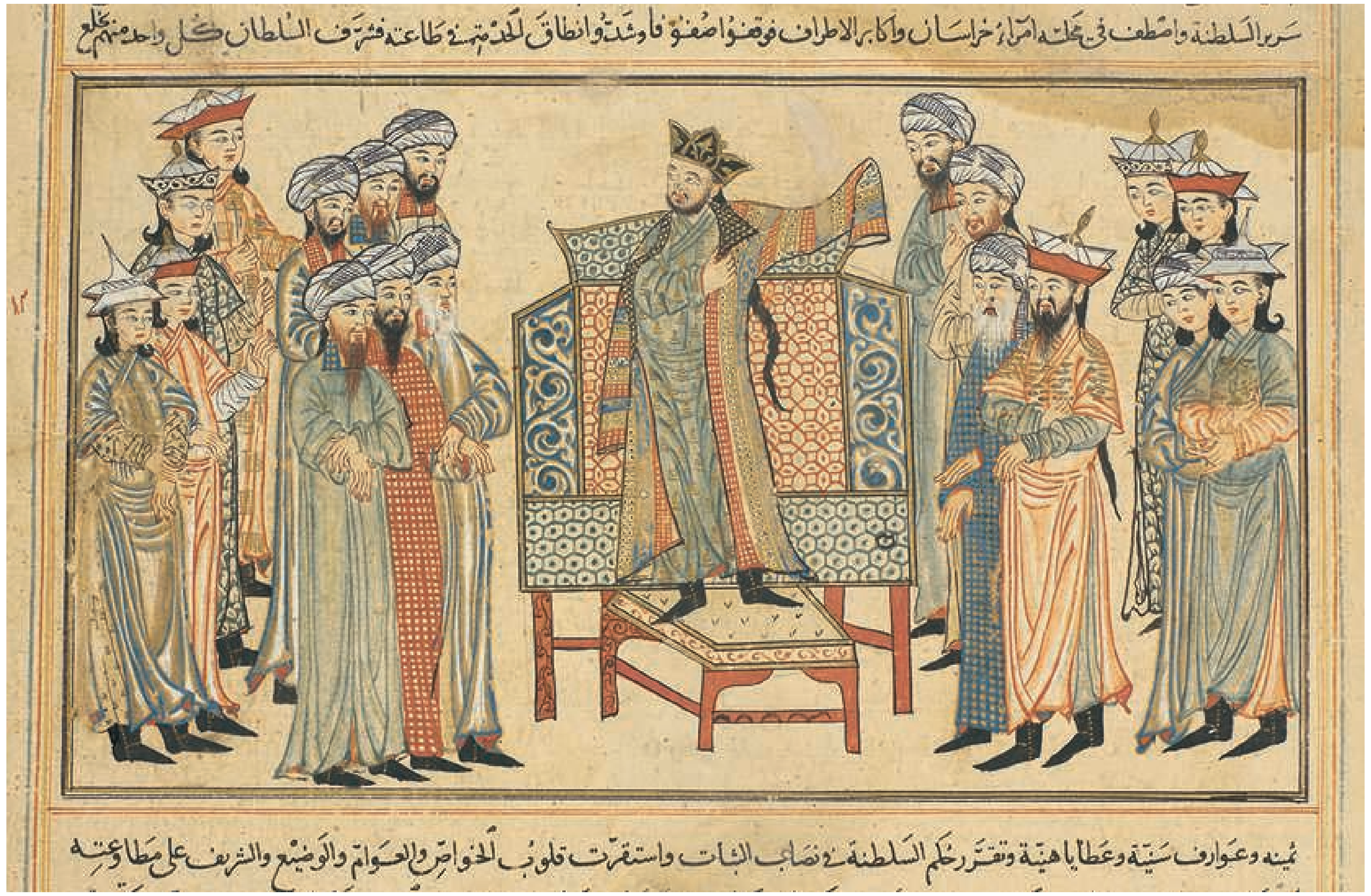
171

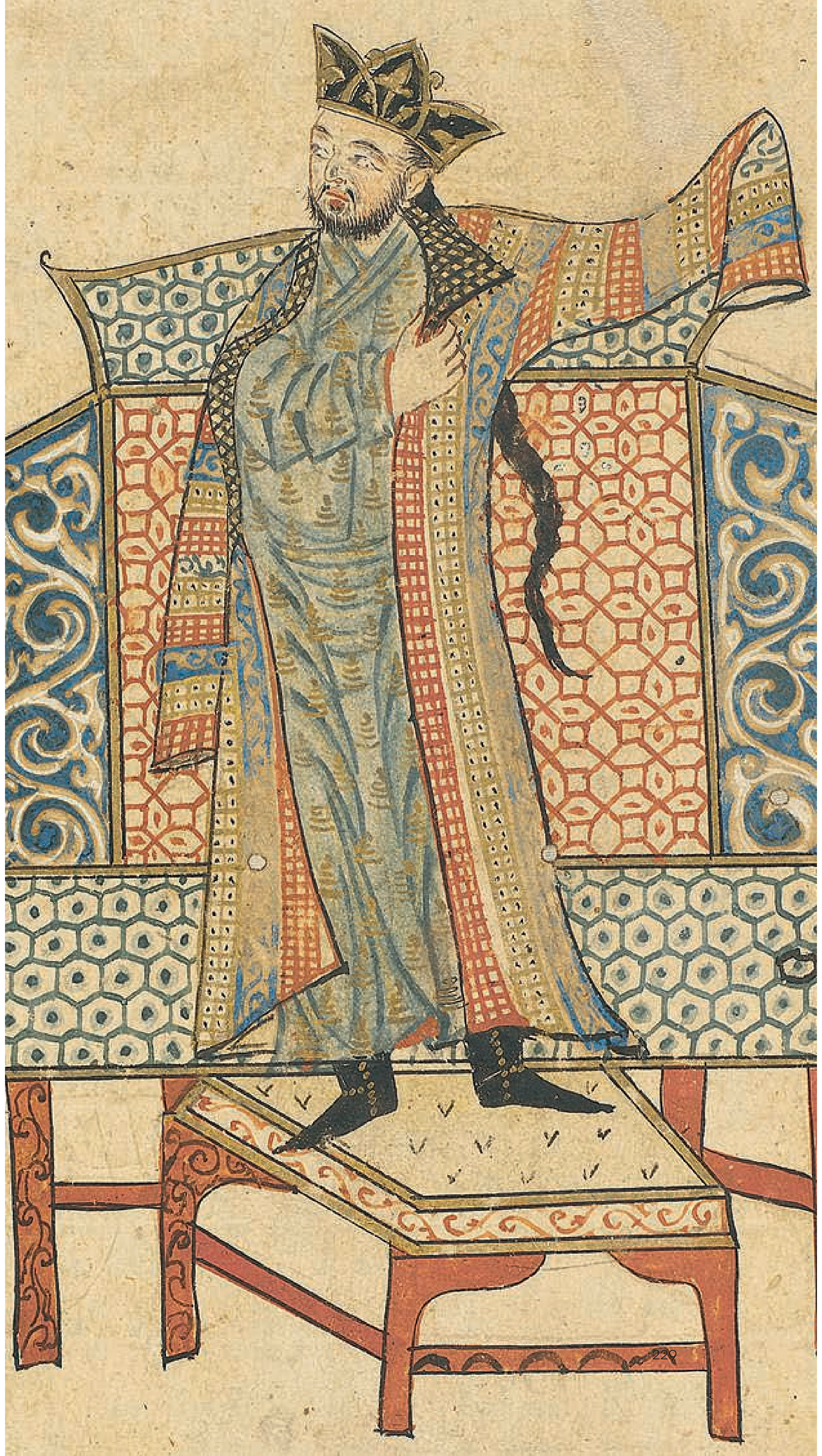
Mahmud of Ghaznah Putting on a Robe of Honour

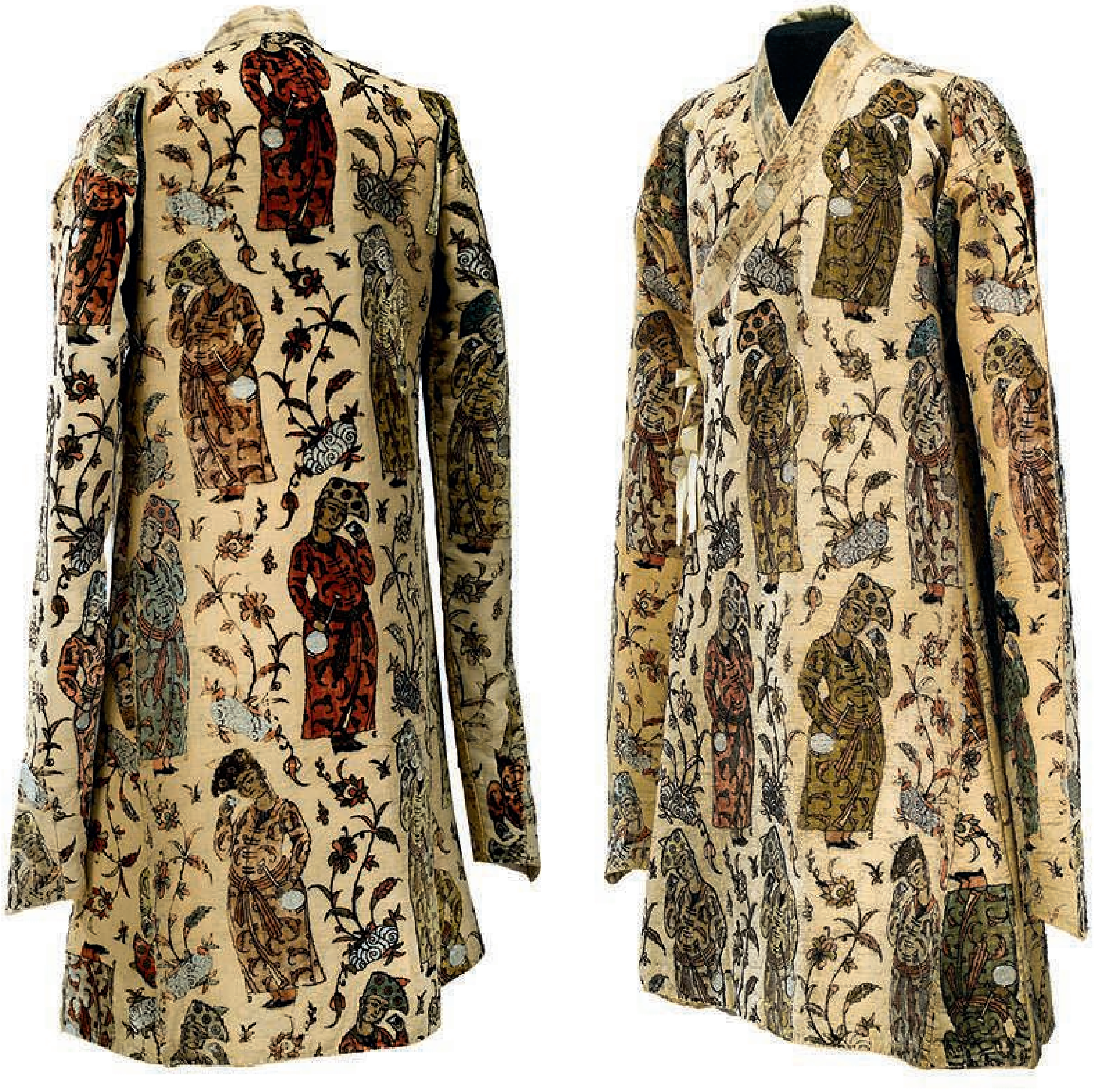
1314

Tabriz, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 41.5 × 34.2 cm
Edinburgh University Library, Or. ms. 20, folio 121r (detail)

Mahmud of Ghaznah ruled East Iran from 998 to 1030, and during that time he extended his authority into what is now Pakistan and northern India. Although he controlled a mighty empire, his legal status was merely that of governor on behalf of the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir, who sent Mahmud his diploma of appointment and a robe of honour in 999. This illustration shows Mahmud donning al-Qadir's robe, a public statement of his allegiance to the caliph and of his right to rule the easternmost part of the Islamic world. The setting reflects the Mongol court in the early 14th century.







172

Robe of honour

before 1644

Iran, probably Isfahan
Silk velvet and metal-wrapped thread,
length 123 cm
Royal Armoury, Stockholm, 3414

Robes of honour decorated with large-scale human figures were characteristic of Safavid court dress, and they showed the wearer's allegiance to the dynasty. Here, richly dressed youths appear in staggered rows, grasping a silver wine-bottle by the neck with one hand and holding a wine-cup to their lips with the other.

Several contemporary images, including the portrait of Naqd Ali Beg (cat. 173), show coats of this type being worn in the manner of robes of honour, thrown over the shoulders as though the ruler has just had them placed there.

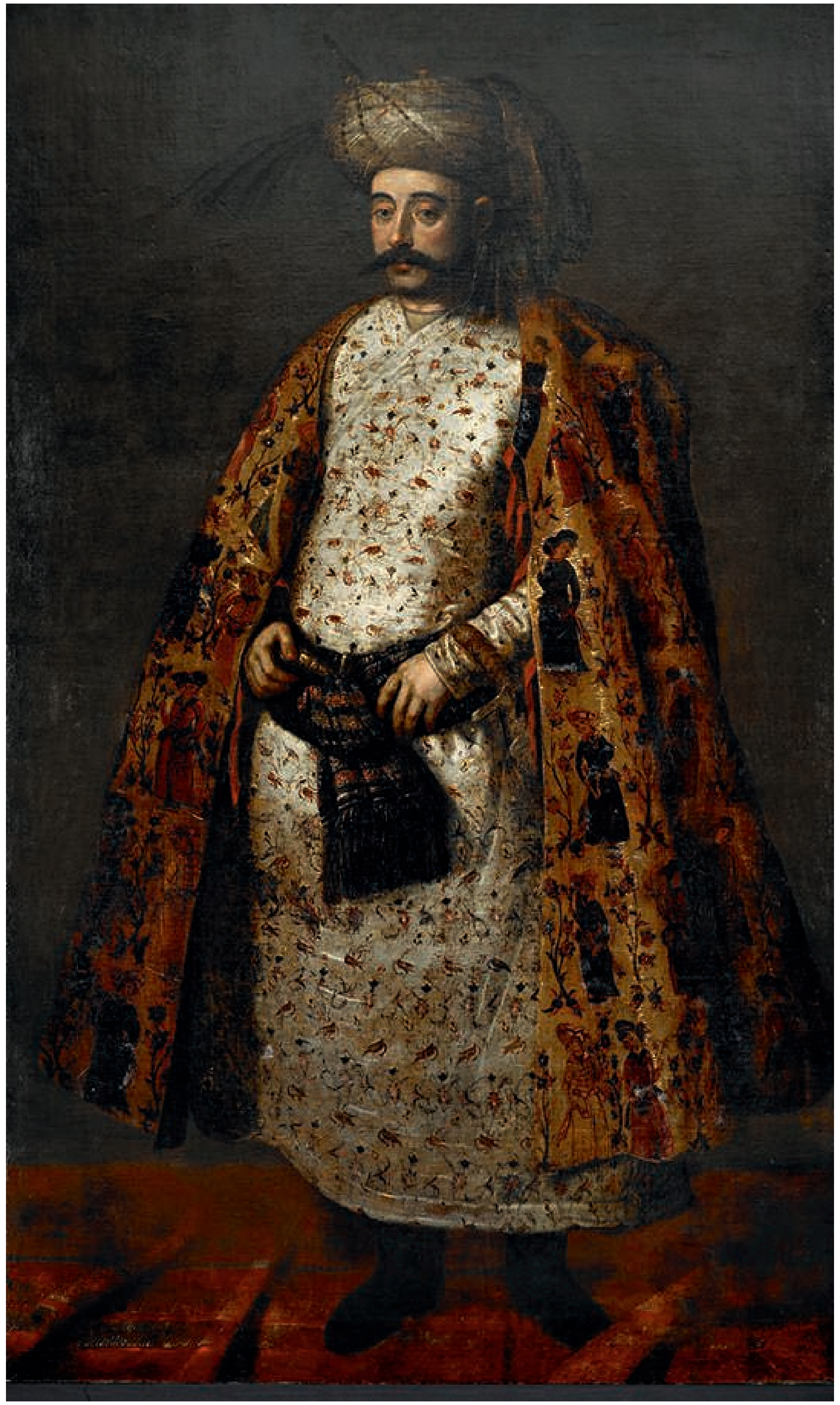
173

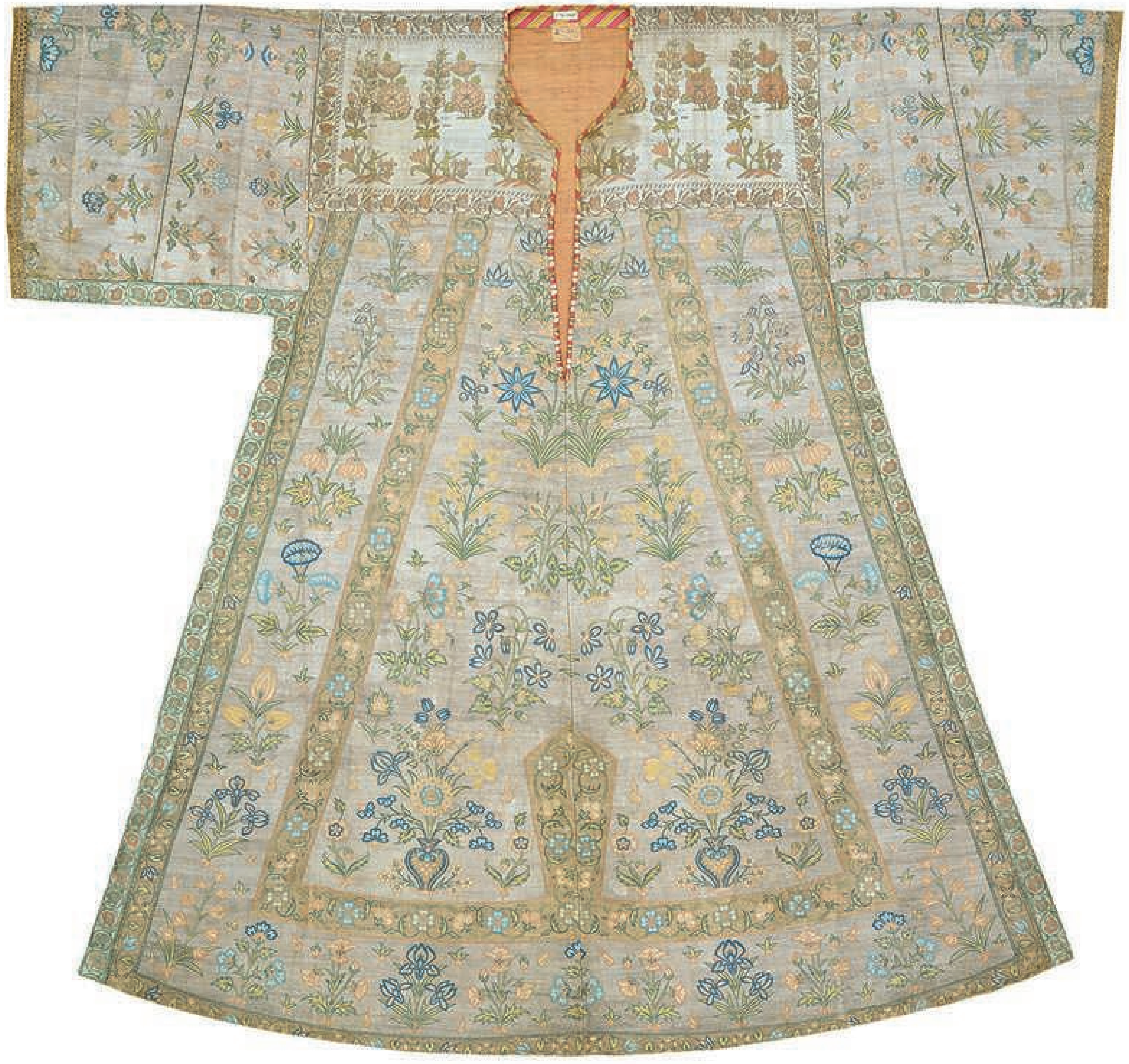
Portrait of Naqd Ali Beg

1626

Signed by Richard Greenbury
London
Oil on canvas, 213 × 129.5 cm
British Library, F23

This portrait was commissioned by the East India Company, the monopoly that controlled English trade with the Indian Ocean region, when Naqd Ali Beg visited London as the envoy of Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629). The subject wears a velvet robe of honour, similar to the example once owned by Queen Christina of Sweden (cat. 172), over a robe made of cloth of silver (compare cat. 174). Unfortunately, Naqd Ali Beg's embassy ended in humiliating failure because of internal disputes among his English hosts, and he committed suicide during his return journey in 1627.

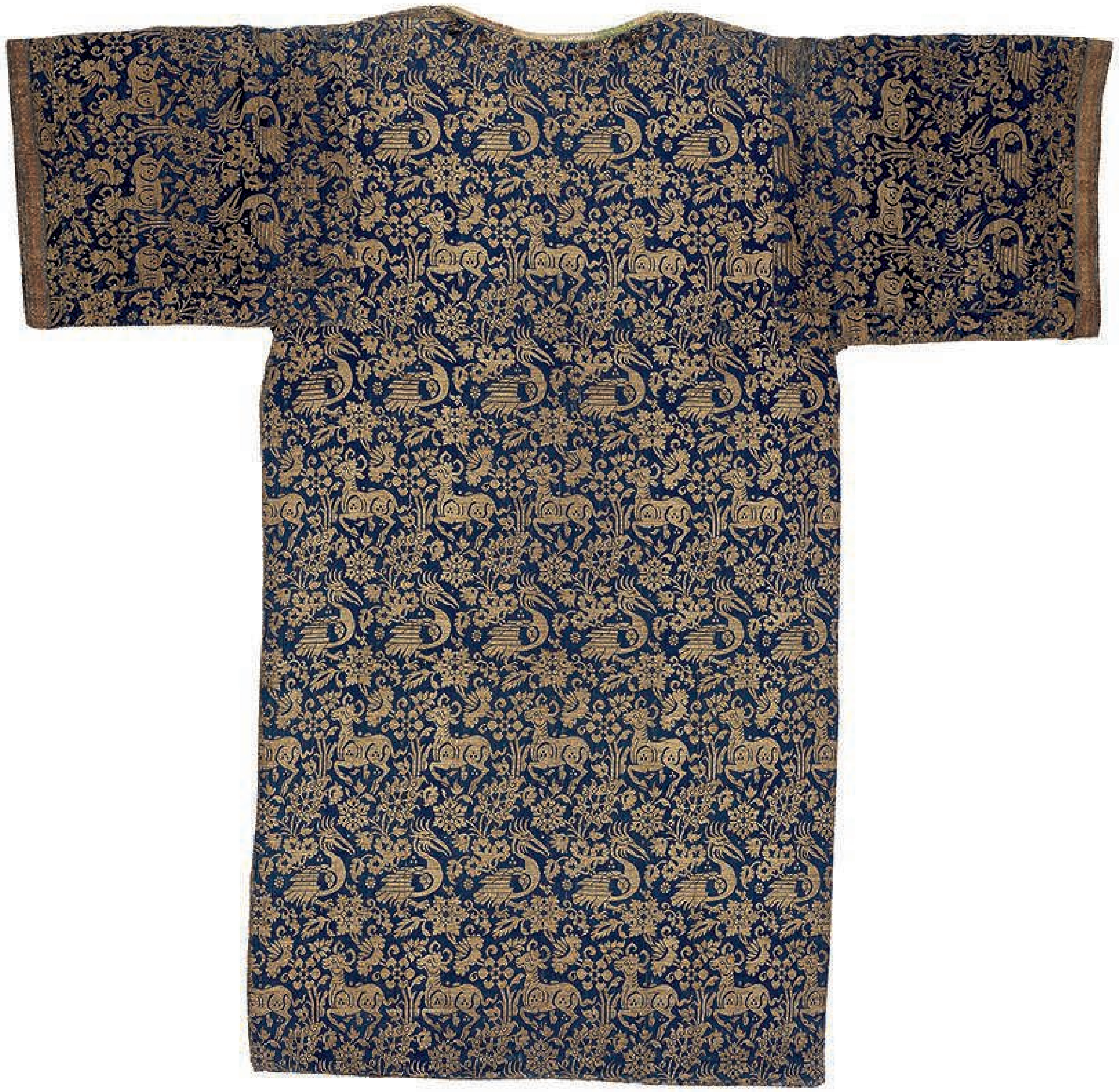




174

Liturgical garment (*sakkos*)
1600–1700 (textile)
Iran
Woven silk and metal-wrapped thread, length 126.2 cm
V&A: 576–1907

The *sakkos* is the main vestment worn by bishops in the Orthodox Church during the liturgy. This example was made from two different Iranian silks. One forms the yoke over the shoulders; the other, which comprises most of the vestment, was made by cutting up and re-assembling a Safavid robe of honour of astonishing luxury. The pattern, which has no repeated elements, was woven into the cloth, including the bands forming the borders. When reconstructed, the layout of the garment matches that of two complete velvet robes of honour in the Topkapı Palace collection in Istanbul (see p. 227). Overall, though, the pattern takes second place to the splendid sheen of the textile.

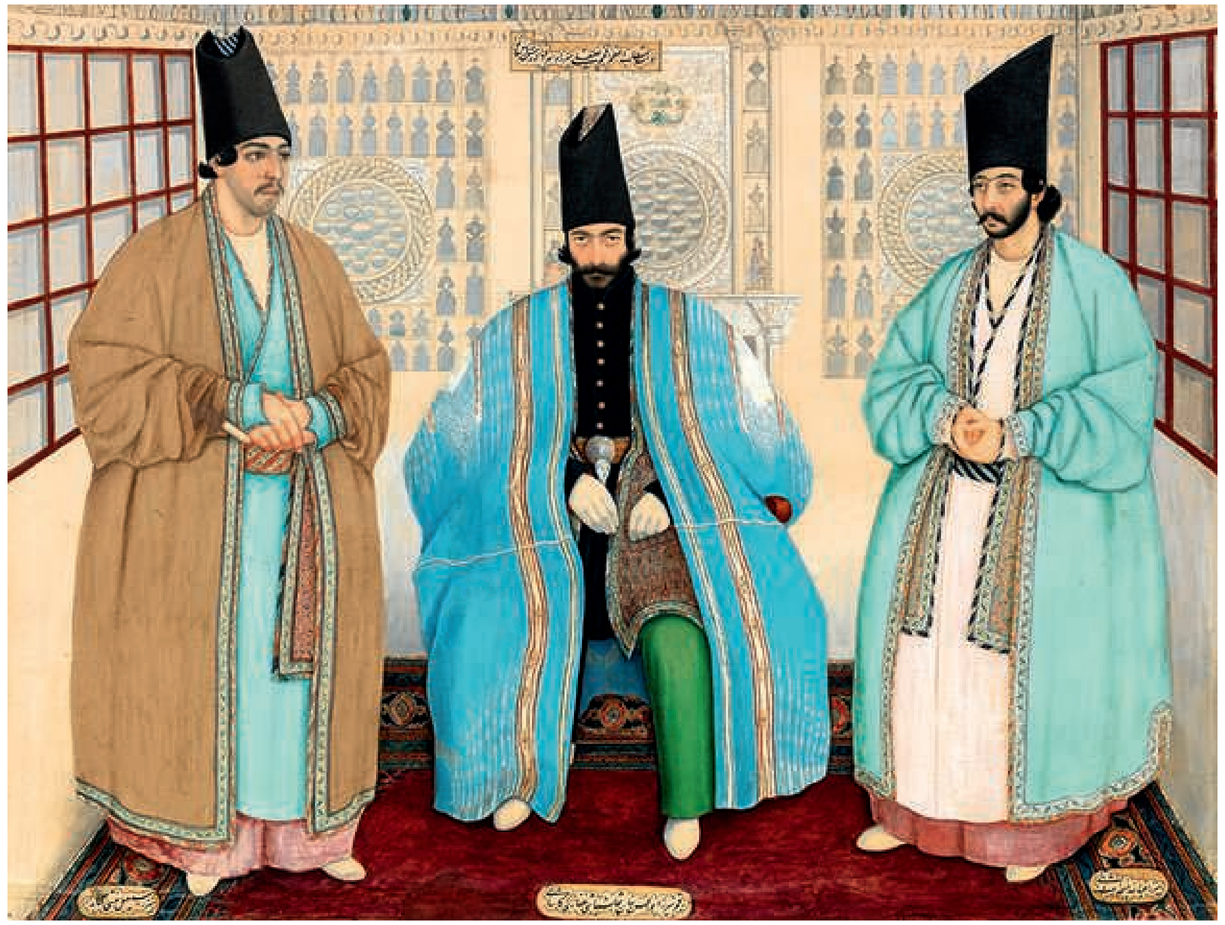


175

Liturgic vestment (dalmatic)
1300–1400
Iran (textile) and Germany
Woven silk and metal-wrapped thread, length 171.5 cm
V&A: 8361–1863

The use of Iranian textiles for Christian vestments is docmented over a very long period. This example is made from a type of silk textile produced in the 14th century from China in the east to Italy in the west. In this case, the presence of the pelican motif in the design would suggest an Italian provenance, as the pelican occurs in Catholic iconography, but the internal structure of the cloth shows it to have been woven in Iran. From there it was traded to Germany, where it was made up into a dalmatic, the main vestment worn by Catholic deacons during the liturgy.

Anne E. Wardwell, '*Panni Tartarici*: Eastern Islamic Silks Woven with Gold and Silver (13th and 14th Centuries)', *Islamic Art*, III (1989), pp. 95–173, fig. 63



176

Portrait of Prince Aliquli and two attendants

about 1855

Signed by Abu'l-Hassan Ghaffari
Tehran, Iran
Opaque watercolour and
gold on paper, 51 × 38 cm
Malek National Museum and Library, Tehran, 1393.02.00045

The seated figure is Prince Aliquli (1822–1880), the 47th son of Fath Ali Shah, and an important figure in the intellectual and scientific life of Tehran during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah. He is shown wearing a silk *aba* (compare cat. 177) over his shoulders in the manner of a robe of honour. The other two figures were leading members of his household – the *pishkhedmatbashi*, or 'chief lord-in-waiting', Mirza Abdallah on the right, and his librarian Mirza Isma'il Munshi on the left

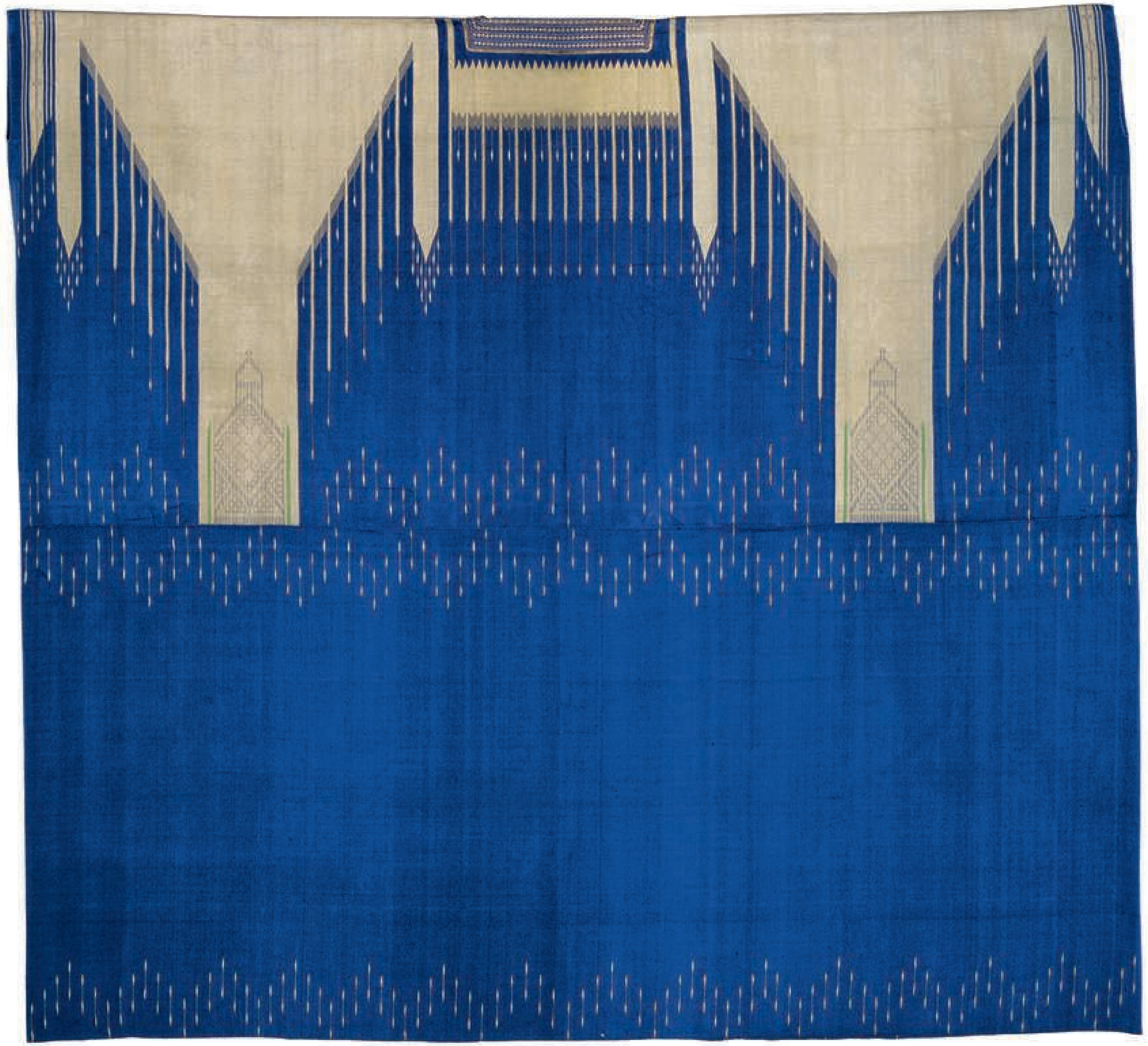
177

Aba

before 1877

Kashan, Iran
Woven silk and metal-wrapped thread,
length 132 cm
V&A: 883-1877

The *aba* is a sleeveless outer robe that forms part of Bedouin male dress. Fine examples were produced in Kashan in Central Iran, and this *aba* was part of a consignment of Iranian textiles donated to the South Kensington Museum by Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar in 1877. The *abas* made in Kashan provided the Qajar court with robes of honour suitable for Bedouin tribal leaders in south-west Iran or Iraq. Some were certainly presented to other recipients, including, in one case, the Qajar prince Aliquli Mirza, who was depicted wearing it in the manner of a robe of honour in the 1850s (cat. 176).



IRAN AND THE WORLD

The rulers of Iran were by far the richest men in their realm, and they were expected to own the best of everything available, including exotic luxuries. The country's geographical position close to the centre of the Old World allowed its rulers to acquire items from many different sources, which they did through trade, diplomacy and war. The most important relationship by far was with China, beginning in the first millennium BC. It had a decisive impact on Iranian art in the Mongol period (1256–1335), and it was still active in the nineteenth century, when ceramics with inscriptions in Persian were imported from Guangzhou.

One of the most celebrated aspects of the interaction between Iran and China was the development of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain in the fourteenth century (see cat. 178). The subsequent popularity of these wares in Iran stimulated local production of blue-and-white ceramics over many centuries (see cat. 179). Other Chinese artefacts also sparked changes in Iranian design. *Tianqi*, a type of lacquer decorated in colours and gold (see cat. 180), inspired a new form of painted and varnished decoration for bookbindings in the later fifteenth century. Such innovations, begun at court, set the standard for production more generally, as can be seen from bindings of this type made for the commercial market in the second half of the sixteenth century (cat. 181).

Relations with China were not always peaceful, however. In 1405, for example, the warlord Amir Timur was planning an invasion of China when death overtook him. His successor Shahrukh (r. 1405–47) was less belligerent, and communication with the Ming emperor improved markedly. Over the following decades Shahrukh and his sons received many gifts from China to mark the rapprochement. These certainly included silks, gold, silver and jades, and it also seems likely that carved lacquer arrived at this time. Its impact can be observed in the dense style of carving used in Timurid woodwork and stone from this period.

Even at this date European goods were entering Iran, and perhaps having an effect on the art and design produced there. One striking example is a grand set of European tapestries seized by the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I when he defeated the King of Hungary and his army at the battle of Nicopolis in Bulgaria in 1396. Six years later, in 1402, Bayezid was himself defeated at the battle of Ankara, and the sultan's tapestries passed into the possession of the victor, who was the same Amir Timur, ruler of Iran.

A century later the Portuguese took control of the sea routes through the Indian Ocean, which were afterwards patrolled by the Dutch, the French and the English. From this point on European goods entered the Indian Ocean region in greater quantities. One novel type of merchandise that European merchants were able to supply were engravings and other forms of printed image, either loose or in illustrated books. Their presence can be detected in the effect they had on Iran's own artistic traditions (cats 185–7).

Yet it is not always clear if the European motifs and the Europeanizing mannerisms we see in seventeenth-century Iranian paintings were taken directly from this source or came indirectly via South Asia. At this time, the courts of South Asia were immensely rich and impressively dynamic in artistic terms, absorbing both Iranian and European ideas. As a result, Iranian and South Asian production in many fields were so closely connected that it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart.

Europe's rulers also developed a great interest in Iran in the seventeenth century. King Louis XIV of France, for example, had a liking for the high-heeled footwear worn at the Safavid court (see cat. 184, for example). He began to wear high heels himself, making them fashionable across Europe. His contemporary, the Stuart king Charles II, introduced the waistcoat, or vest, in 1666, thereby inventing the three-piece suit. The diarist John Evelyn says he wore his vest, 'after the Persian mode with girdle or shash'. By this time the appearance of Iranian male court dress was known from the dress of visiting dignitaries and envoys (cat. 173), from examples brought back by returning travellers, and from images such as Markos's portrait of Qizilbash Riza (cat. 184).

178

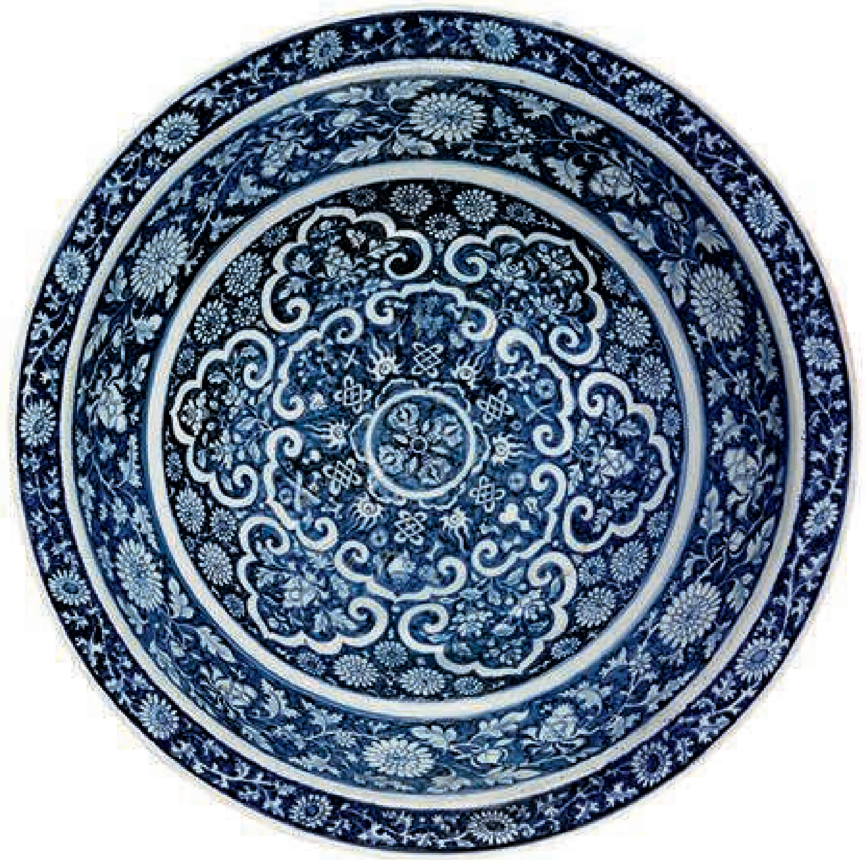
Deep dish

about 1350

Jingdezhen, China
Porcelain painted under the glaze,
diameter 46 cm

V&A: C.10-1954

The idea of decorating white wares with designs painted under the glaze in blue appeared in Iran in the late 12th century. The technique was transferred to China after the country was conquered by the Mongols under Kubilai Khan in 1279. At the time Kubilai was also the overlord of Iran, which had been ruled by his younger brother Hulagu since 1256, and the development of blue-and-white porcelain was instigated at least partly with an eye to the Iranian market. Some early pieces were based on Chinese shapes, but the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen in southern China also produced very large dishes of this type for export to Iran.



179

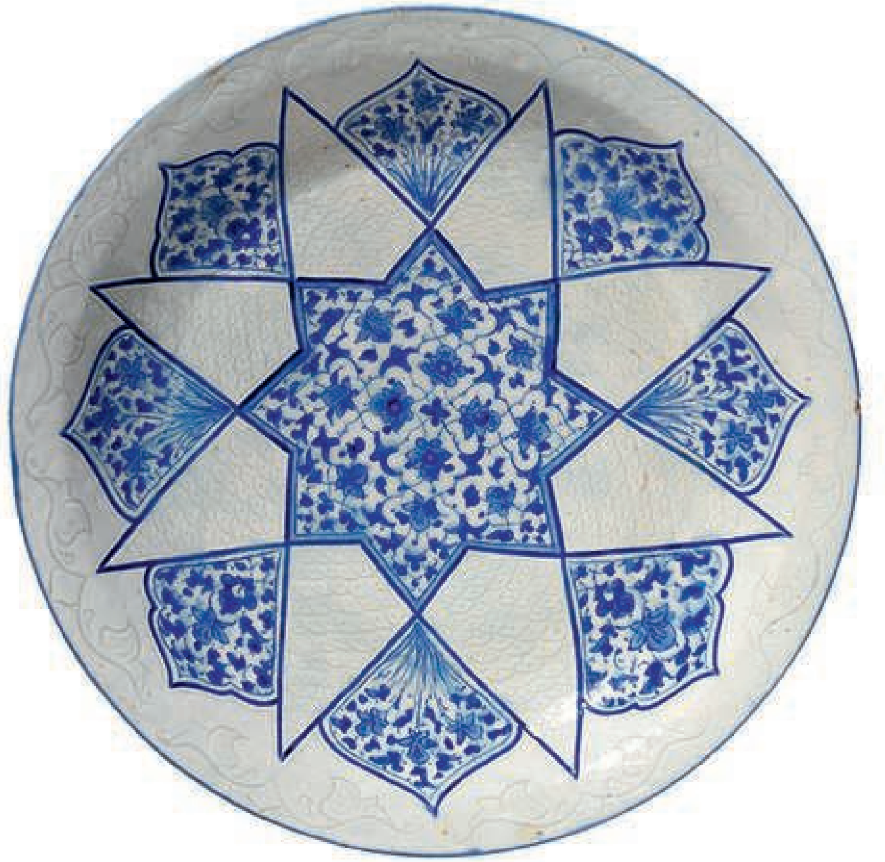
Dish

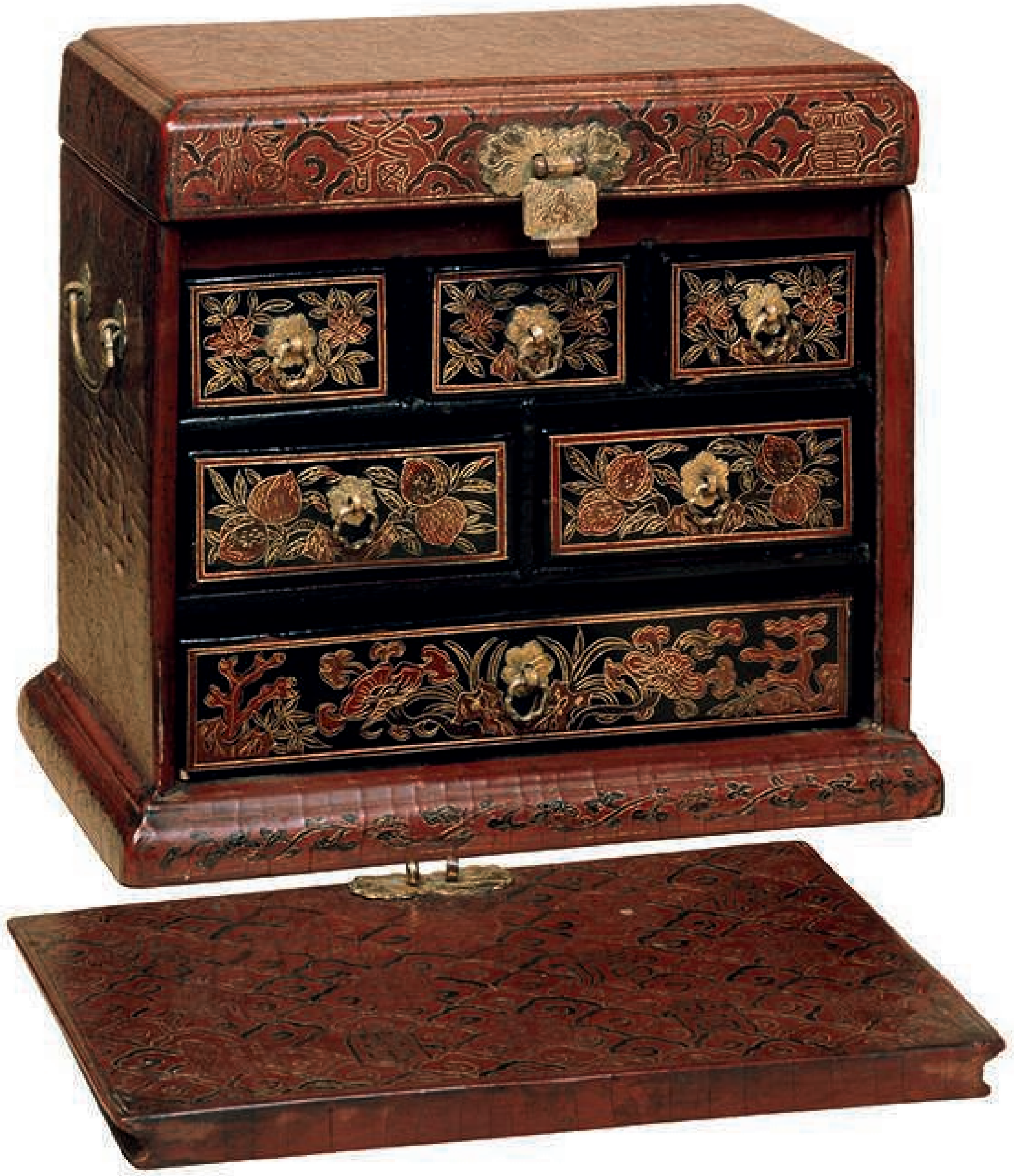
about 1650

Iran
Fritware painted under the glaze,
diameter 49.9 cm

V&A: 890-1876

Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was greatly admired in Iran, and local imitations were produced in some quantity in the 15th and 16th centuries. Neither the raw materials nor the kiln technology for making high-fired porcelain were available in Iran, and potters there improvised a white, low-fired body called fritware (or stone paste). In the mid-17th century production ceased at the kilns at Jingdezhen, which had produced blue-and-white porcelain. One result was a great increase in the production of blue-and-white fritware in Iran. This was made as a response to European demand or, as in this case, for the local market.





180

Cabinet with a drop front

1522–66

China
Polychrome lacquer and gold on wood,
gilded metal fittings, height 25.4 cm
V&A: FE.88-1974.
Given by Sir Harry and Lady Garner

For thousands of years, the processed sap of the Chinese lacquer tree, *Toxicodendron vernicifluum*, has been used as a hard, waterproof coating for objects of wood and other materials. The glossy lacquer improved the object's appearance, which was further enhanced by a variety of techniques. This cabinet is an example of *tianqi* or 'filled-in' lacquer. The wooden carcass was dressed with multiple layers of coloured lacquer, parts of which were cut away; lacquer of a contrasting colour was then applied; and finally details were incised into the surface and filled with gold. In Iran *tianqi* lacquer inspired the decoration of bookbindings (see cat. 181) and other objects.

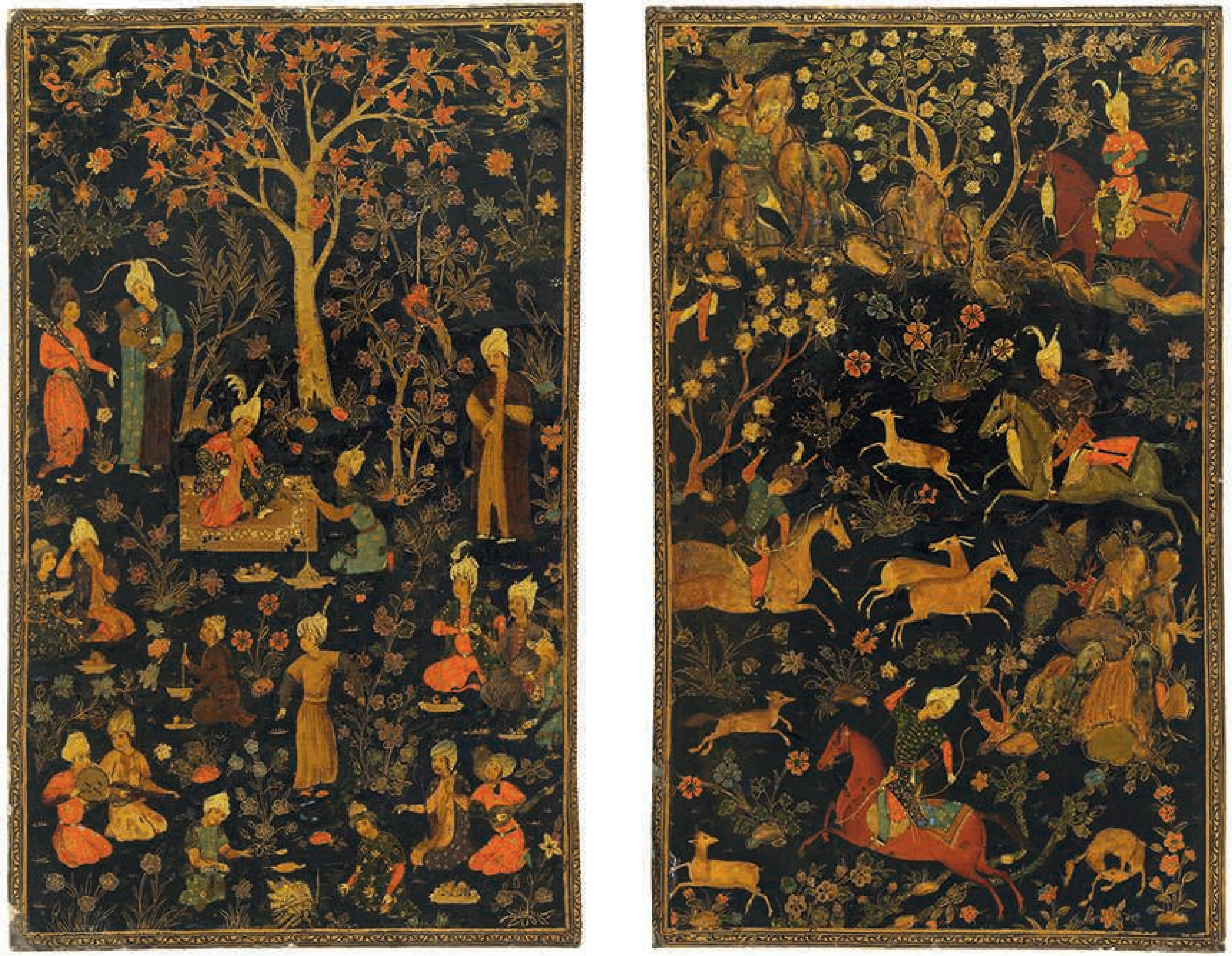
181

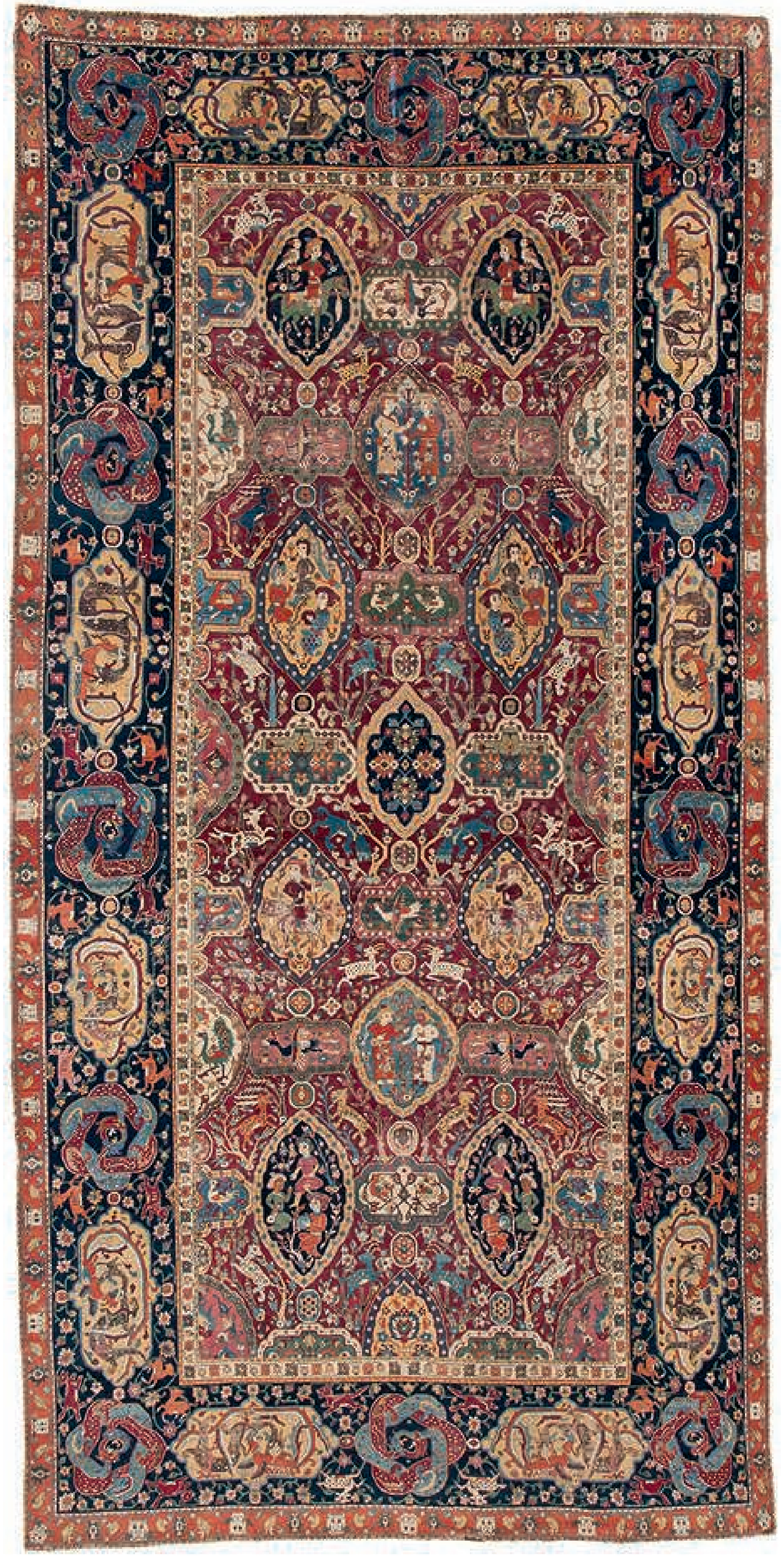
Pair of book covers

1550–1600

Iran, probably Shiraz
Pasteboard, primed with gesso,
painted in colours and gold, varnished,
each board 30 × 19 cm
V&A: 353&A-1885

These covers show the integration of Chinese design ideas with Iranian painting traditions to produce a distinctive style of decoration for bookbindings. On one cover (right), a prince and his companions enjoy a meal in the countryside. On the other, a similar royal party is shown hunting. The background is a solid black colour, and minor motifs – principally the lush vegetation – were executed in colour with outlines and details in gold, in the manner of Chinese *tianqi* lacquer (see cat. 180).





182

Carpet

1575–1600

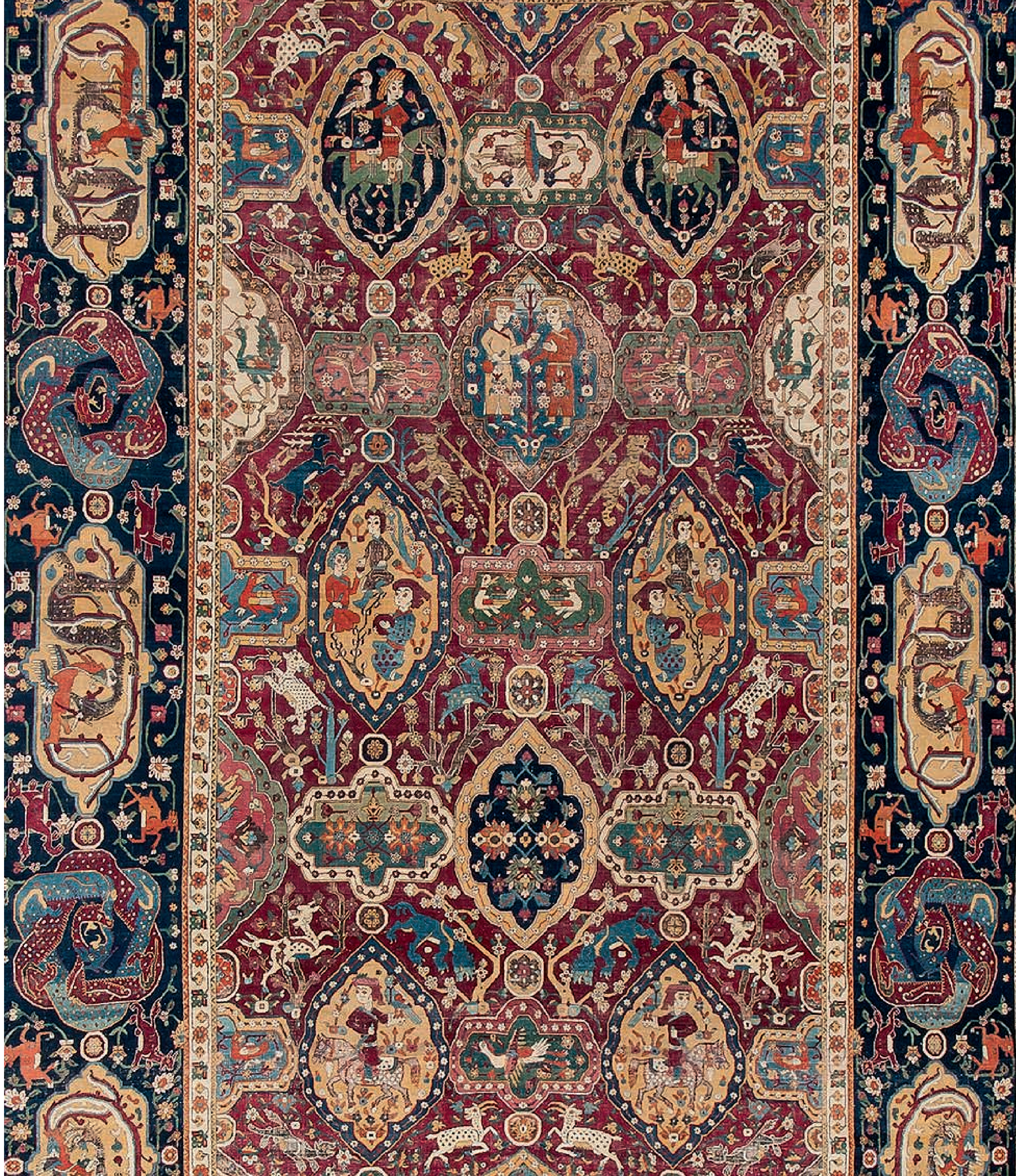
Iran

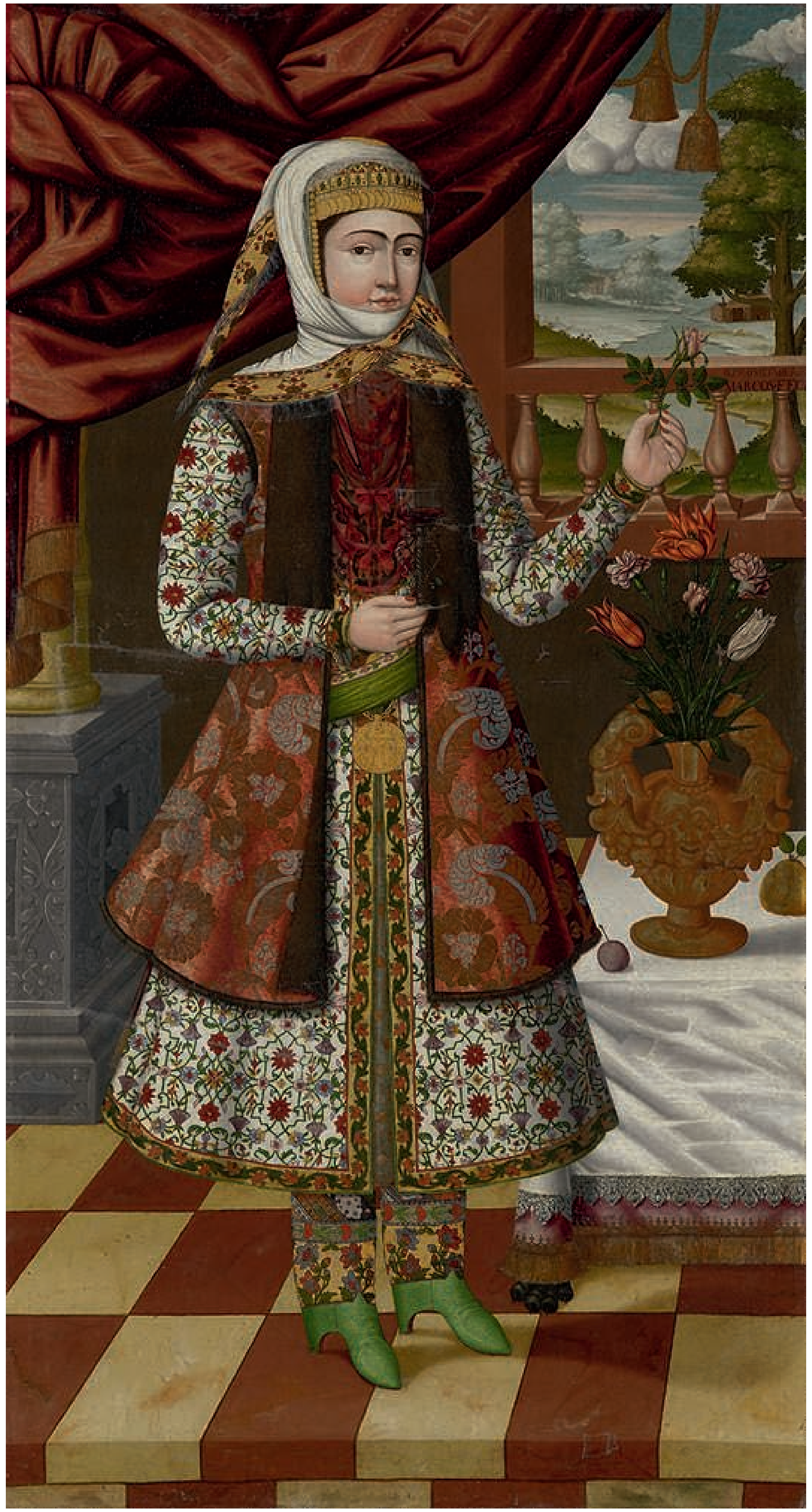
Wool pile on a cotton, silk and wool foundation, 452 × 226 cm

Boughton House, Northamptonshire, B.H.502 (12), BH/CAR/1. By kind permission of His Grace, The Duke of Buccleuch & Queensberry, KT, KBE, and The Trustees of the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust

The carpet belongs to the so-called Sanguszko group. The black border has cartouches containing a battle between a dragon and a phoenix, originally a Chinese motif, each separated by entwined blue and red dragons. The red field is covered by an overall symmetrical pattern with staggered rows of pointed ovals and horizontal cartouches. Ten of the pointed ovals contain scenes with human figures, and numerous beasts and birds fill other spaces within the design.

This carpet has probably been at Boughton House in Northamptonshire since Ralph Montagu (later 1st Duke of Montagu) rebuilt the house on a palatial scale in the decades before his death in 1709.





183

Portrait of a woman from New Julfa

1650–1700

184

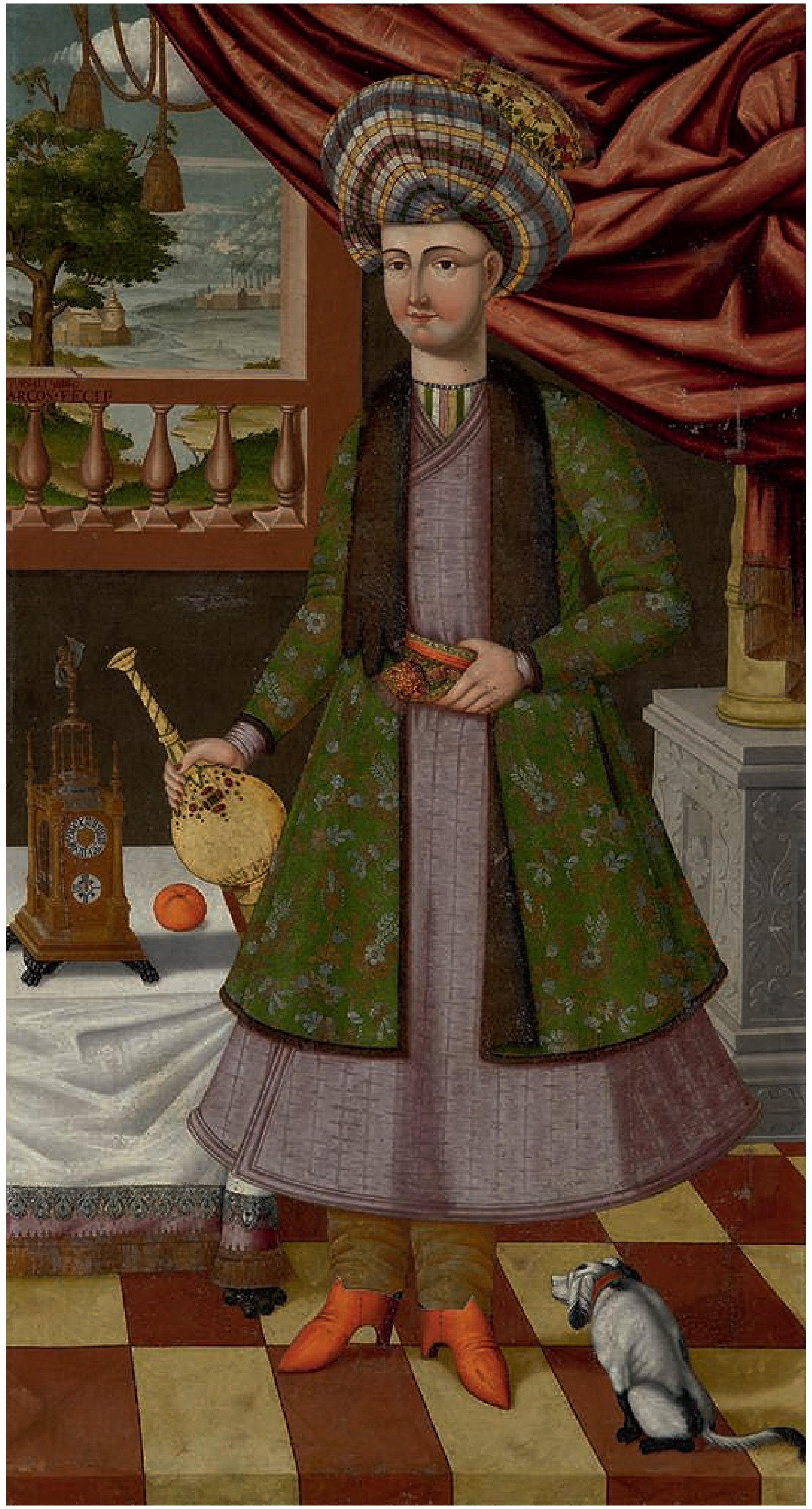
Portrait of Qizilbash Riza

1650–1700

Both signed by Markos
Isfahan, Iran
Oil on canvas, both 163.5 × 87.4 cm
Royal Collection/HM Queen Elizabeth II
(images taken during restoration)

Painting in oils was introduced to Iran in the 17th century, when the capital, Isfahan, was a hub of international trade. A major role was played in this trade by the Christian Armenian merchants settled in the suburb of New Julfa, and Armenian painters there developed an illusionistic style of painting, which was then taken up by the Safavid court (see cat. 187). The painters also seem to have supplied freestanding portraits of beauties of Isfahan for the European market. These examples are two of three in the British Royal Collection signed in Armenian and Latin by a painter called Markos. The paintings were not inventoried until 1872, but their chinoiserie frames resemble others made for the British court at the beginning of the 18th century.

The background settings, with European-style drapery and a display of prestigious imported objects, connect these paintings with others in the group. In these cases, the subjects are identified in Armenian on the back. The portrait of Qizilbash Riza in court dress echoes the youths on the velvet robe of honour preserved in Stockholm (cat. 172), but here Riza is ready to serve wine to his master rather than to drink it himself.



185

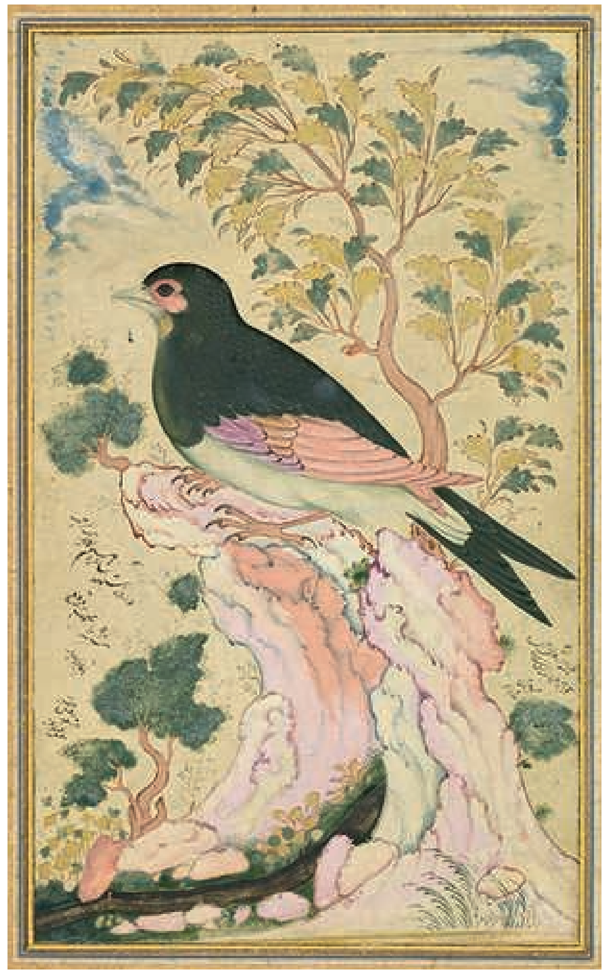
Bird on a Rock

8 June 1686

Signed by Mu'in Musavvir
Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour and gold on paper,
folio 33 × 21.9 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4012
Purchased 2007

Images of single birds first appeared in Iran in the 17th century. They may have been inspired by European prints, or by bird paintings produced by Mughal court artists earlier in the century. Both these traditions valued the accurate recording of nature. Here, though, the bird is a visualization of a type of beauty equivalent to the images of human beauty found on other album leaves (compare cats 162–4).



186

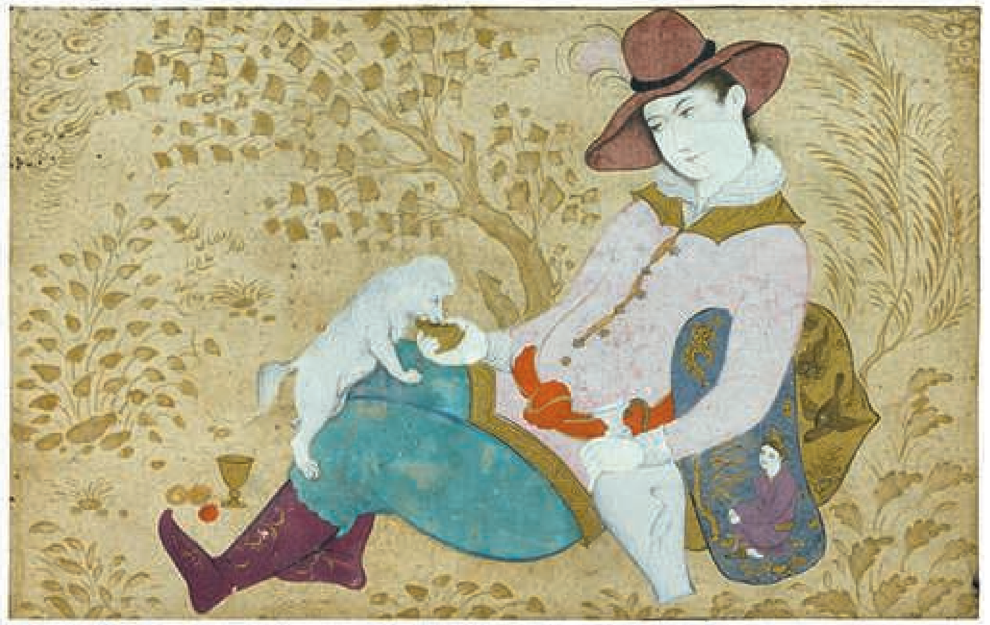
European Youth with a Dog

1672

Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour and gold on paper,
painting 11.2 × 17.4 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4003
Purchased 2004

The arrival of Europeans in Isfahan in large numbers, and of prints depicting European subjects, was followed by the appearance of paintings of youths and girls in versions of contemporary European dress. Here, an air of exotic licentiousness is created by the boy's recumbent pose, which was probably borrowed from a European depiction of a nude (compare cat. 188); by the presence of a lapdog, a novelty in Iran; and by the consumption of wine, which the boy allows the dog to drink from his own cup. The image is copied, reversed, from an original by Riza Abbasi, the greatest painter of early 17th-century Isfahan (see cat. 162).



187

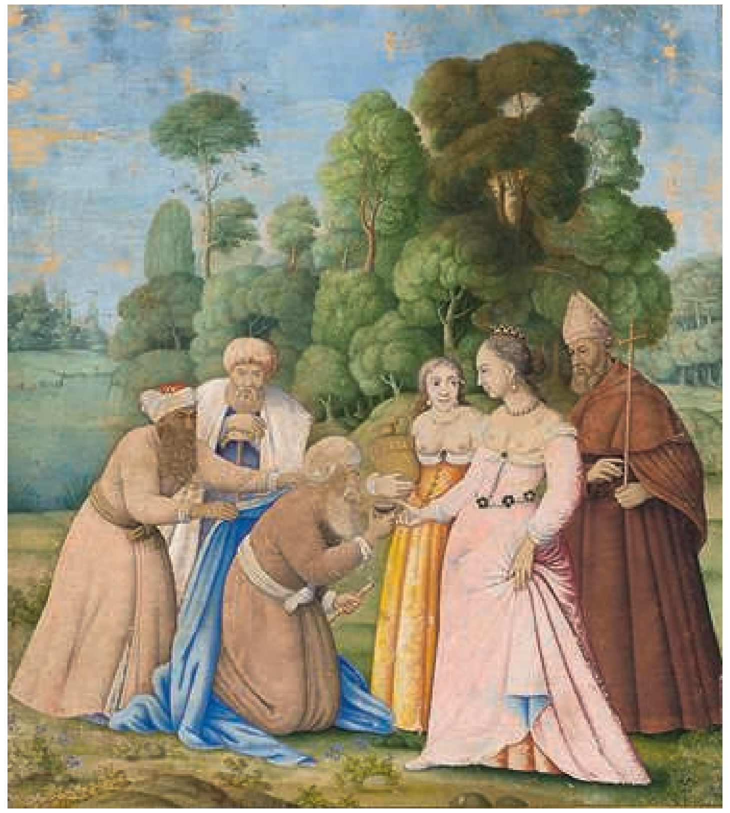
Sheikh San'an Encounters the Christian Maiden

1676

Signed by Muhammad Zaman
Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour and gold on paper,
painting 14.5 × 13 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4073
Purchased 2016

By the 1670s the illusionistic style of painting pioneered by Armenian artists in Isfahan (see cats 183, 184) had been adopted and refined by the Safavid court artist Muhammad Zaman, who used it in works on paper and in other media. In this album painting, he depicted a famous scene from the *Mantiq al-tair* (*The Conference of Birds*) of Farid al-Din Attar (d. 1221), a narrative poem devoted to Sufi themes. On his travels, a celebrated mystic called Sheikh San'an comes across a Christian girl with whom he falls in love. This leads him to abandon Islam, but he is eventually saved from apostasy by the prayers of his followers.



188

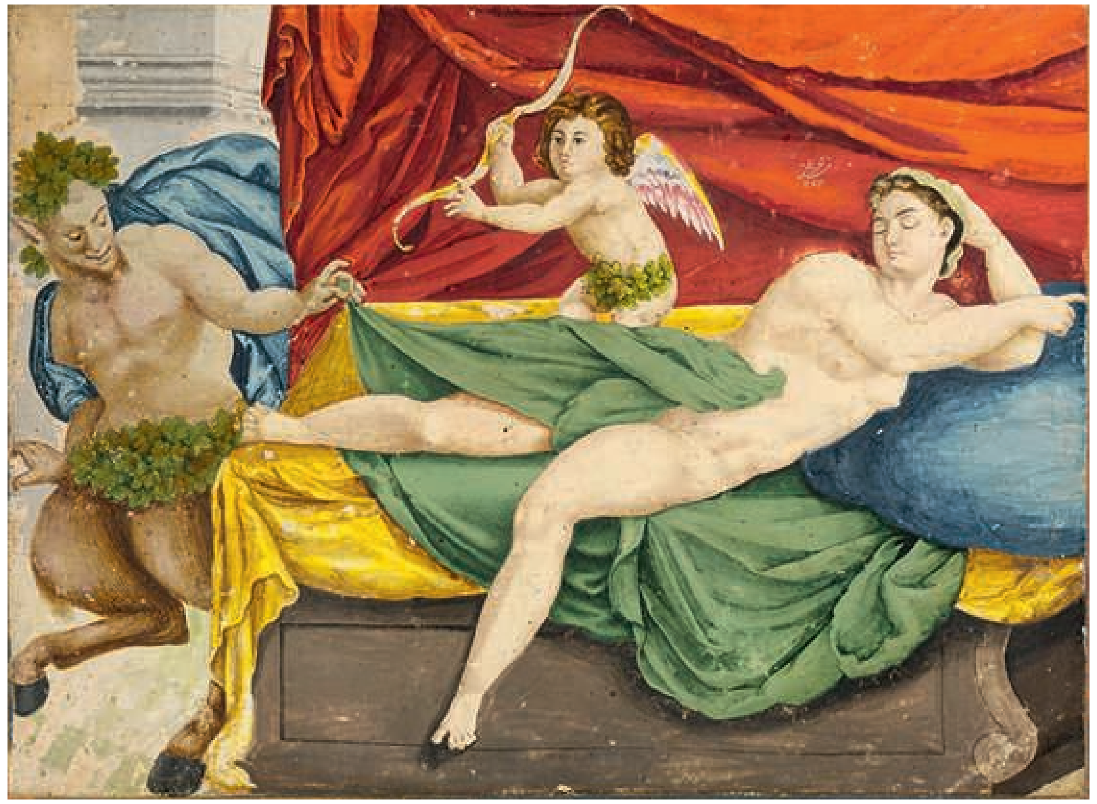
Venus and Cupid with a Satyr

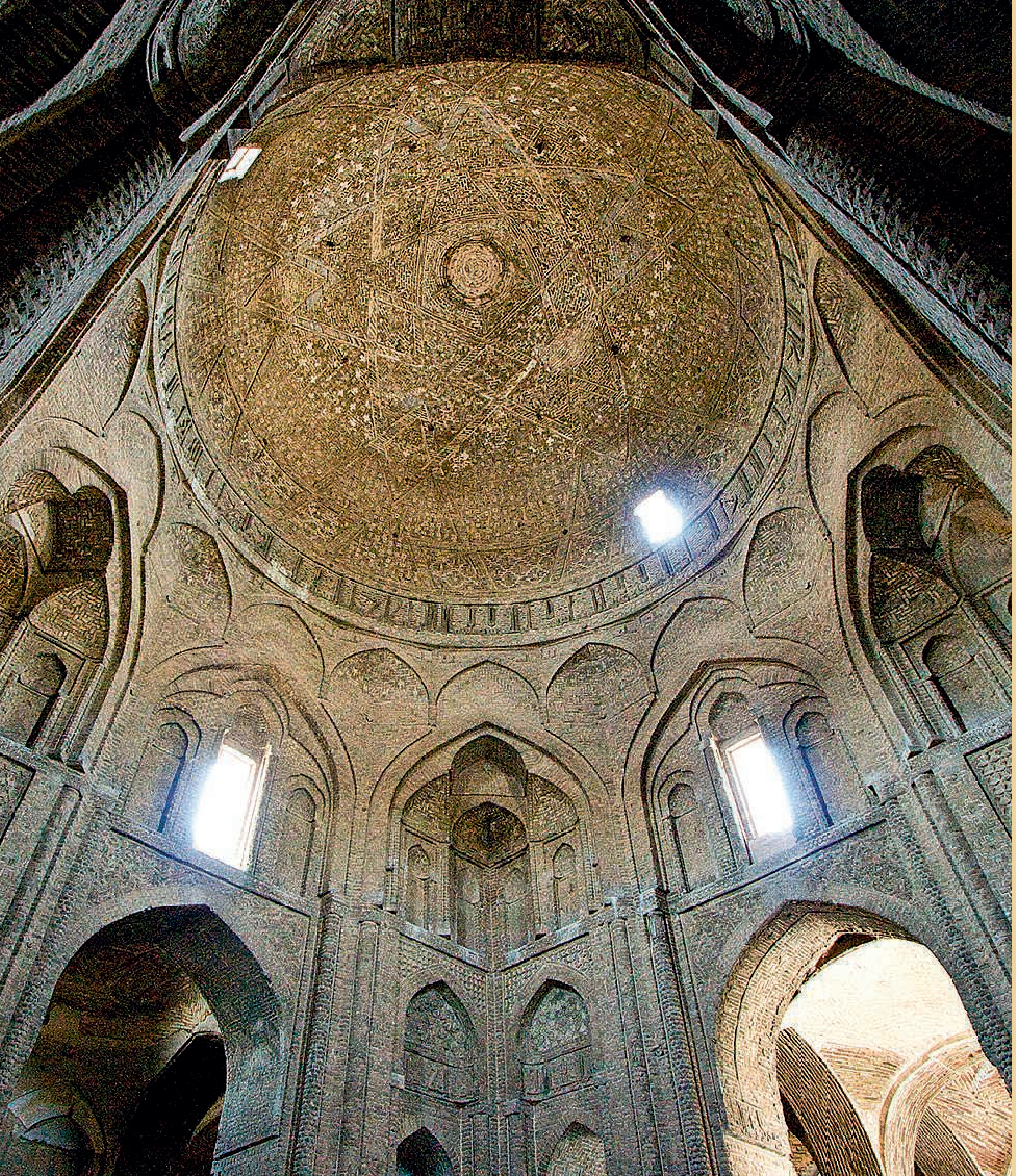
1733

Signed by Muhammad Ali
Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour on paper,
mount 23 × 28 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4027
Purchased 2008

This painting is an accurate rendering of an engraving by the Netherlandish printmaker Raphael Sadeler (d. 1628), with the colour restored. A satyr is attempting to pull a cover off the otherwise naked Venus as she sleeps, watched by Cupid. The copying of European prints in this way was a feature of artistic practice in Iran in the 18th century, when the illusionistic style pioneered by Muhammad Zaman and his colleagues in the 17th century was still dominant. Indeed, the painter of this scene, Muhammad Ali, may have been Muhammad Zaman's son.





ARCHITECTURE

At the beginning of the Islamic period Iran had a strong architectural identity based on the inventiveness of Parthian and Sasanian builders. They had created distinctive forms such as the dome resting on squinches (fig. 14) and the iwan, or *ayvan*, which was a rectangular, barrel-vaulted hall completely open on one side. The great Sasanian *ayvan* near Ctesiphon called the Taq Kasra, or Arch of Khosrow, stood as a challenge to later architects, but, with a height of 35 metres, it has remained the largest structure of its kind in the world. Where the builders of the Islamic period surpassed their forerunners was in the refinement and complexity of their work. Geometric representations on paper of elaborate vaulting systems survive from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century (cat. 190); drawings of this type would not have been required for the straightforward systems used by Sasanian or the earliest Islamic builders.

The coming of Islam required the construction of mosques. Some were built following entirely local traditions, but the interregional standard was the hypostyle hall, with a flat roof resting on regularly spaced supports. Hypostyle mosques were built using the materials and techniques inherited from the Sasanian period, and eventually the dome and the *ayvan* too were integrated into their layout, producing a characteristically Iranian form of mosque.

The key example is the Great Mosque of Isfahan, where reconstruction began under the Seljuq sultan Malik Shah (r. 1072–92). At its centre is a vast rectangular courtyard with an *ayvan* set in the middle of each side, rising the full height of the building (fig. 12), and there are two great dome chambers at either end of the central axis (fig. 13). Five hundred years later a similar plan, but with only one great dome chamber, was employed for Isfahan's second great mosque, the Masjid-i Shah, commissioned by Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629). The appearance of the Masjid-i Shah (now the Masjid-i Imam) is strikingly different in many ways, however, not least because of the tilework that envelops the building both inside and out.

Isfahan also contains a number of palace buildings erected by Shah Abbas and his successors in the seventeenth century. They are the earliest to survive in something like their

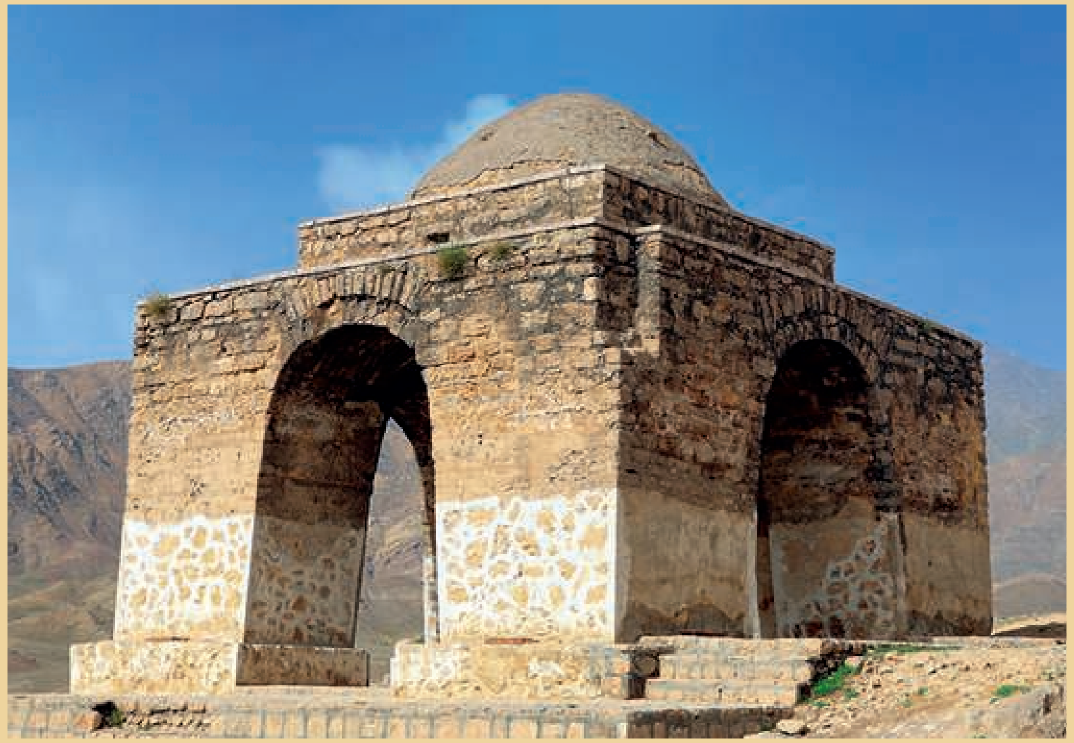


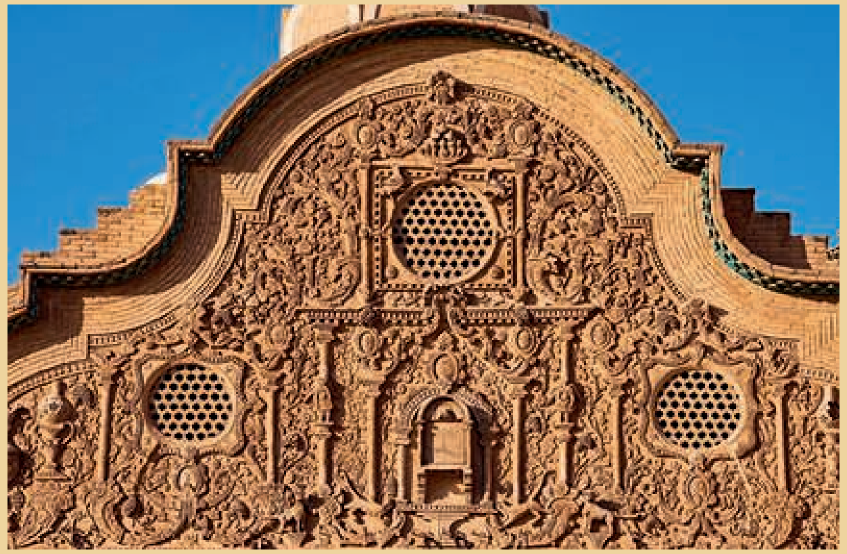
Fig. 13 (opposite)
Northern dome chamber in the Great Mosque of Isfahan, 1088

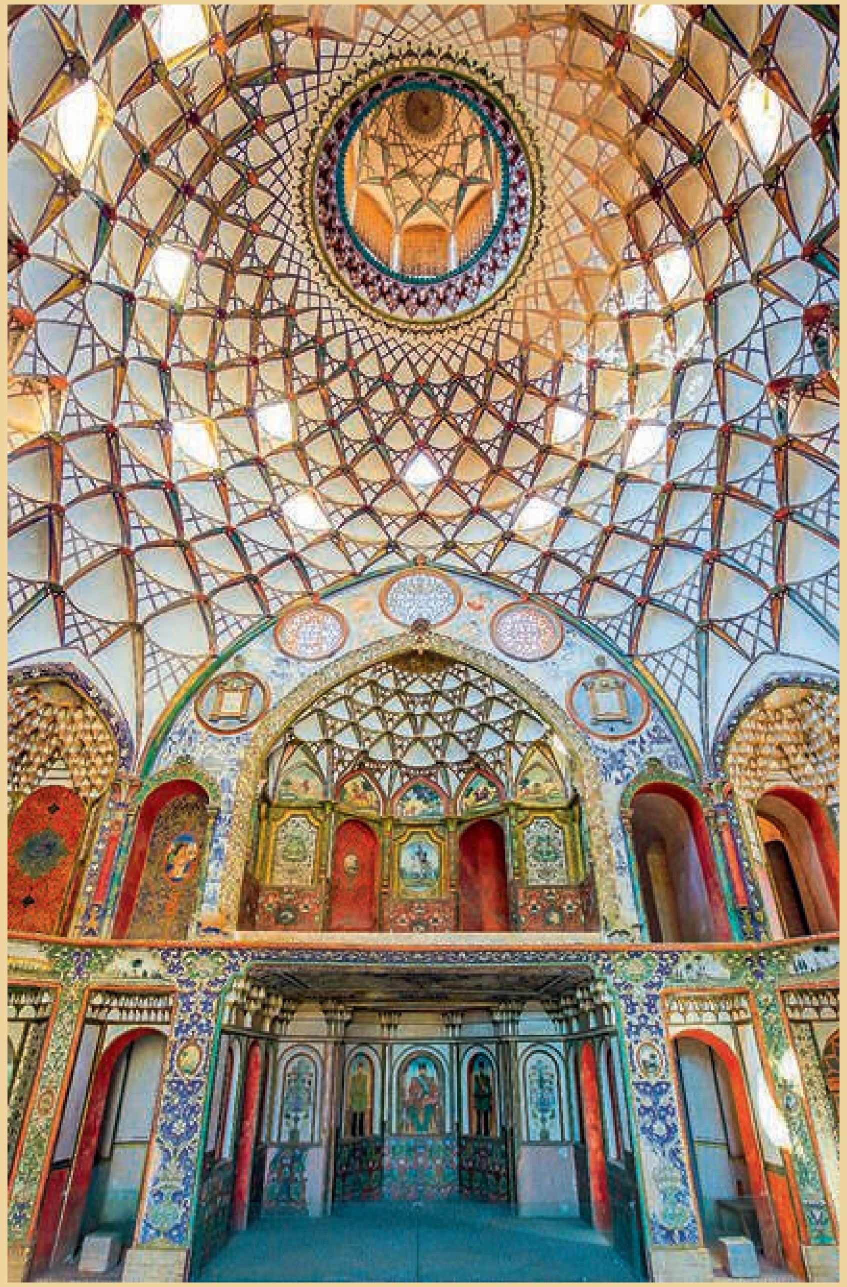
Fig. 14
Sasanian domed structure (*chahartaq*), Niasar, Isfahan province, 3rd century AD

original context, but we are better informed about palaces of later periods, and even the homes of richer subjects, such as the fine merchants' houses of Kashan (fig. 15). For earlier periods, information is provided by manuscript illustrations (cat. 158, for example). In one extraordinary painting from the 1490s (cat. 189) the artist ignored the author's text, which describes the finished building, and showed the construction work in progress. This emphasizes the role of baked brick (*khesht*) as the primary building material for major monuments in the Islamic period.

For decorative effects, the brickwork could be covered with stucco, which would then be carved, painted and gilded, or it could be laid in complex courses that created pleasing patterns through the contrast between light and shade. Yet, as baked brick was made in a kiln, it was possible to coat the exposed part of the block with a coloured glaze or, in a further development, to produce monochrome glazed tiles that could be cut to shape after firing. From the twelfth century onwards, sophisticated effects were achieved by combining these coloured elements with patterned brickwork and, in interior spaces, with carved stucco.

The use of tilework increased step by step in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The range of colours expanded, as did the range of techniques employed. As a result, it was possible to cover very large surfaces with complex patterns, allowing buildings to be covered all over with tiles. This approach was canonized by Timurid patrons in the fifteenth century, and it continued to hold sway into the nineteenth century, as the reproductions of the tilework in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Isfahan show (cat 190). Whereas the glazed elements had originally been contrasted with bare brick or plain carved stucco in the same surface, these later buildings covered with polychrome all-over tile decoration stood out as oases of colour in urban or rural surroundings dominated by buildings of dun-coloured brick (figs 11, 16).





Figs 15, 16
Stucco facade (15) and interior of domed hall (16), Borujerdi house, Kashan, Isfahan province, 19th century

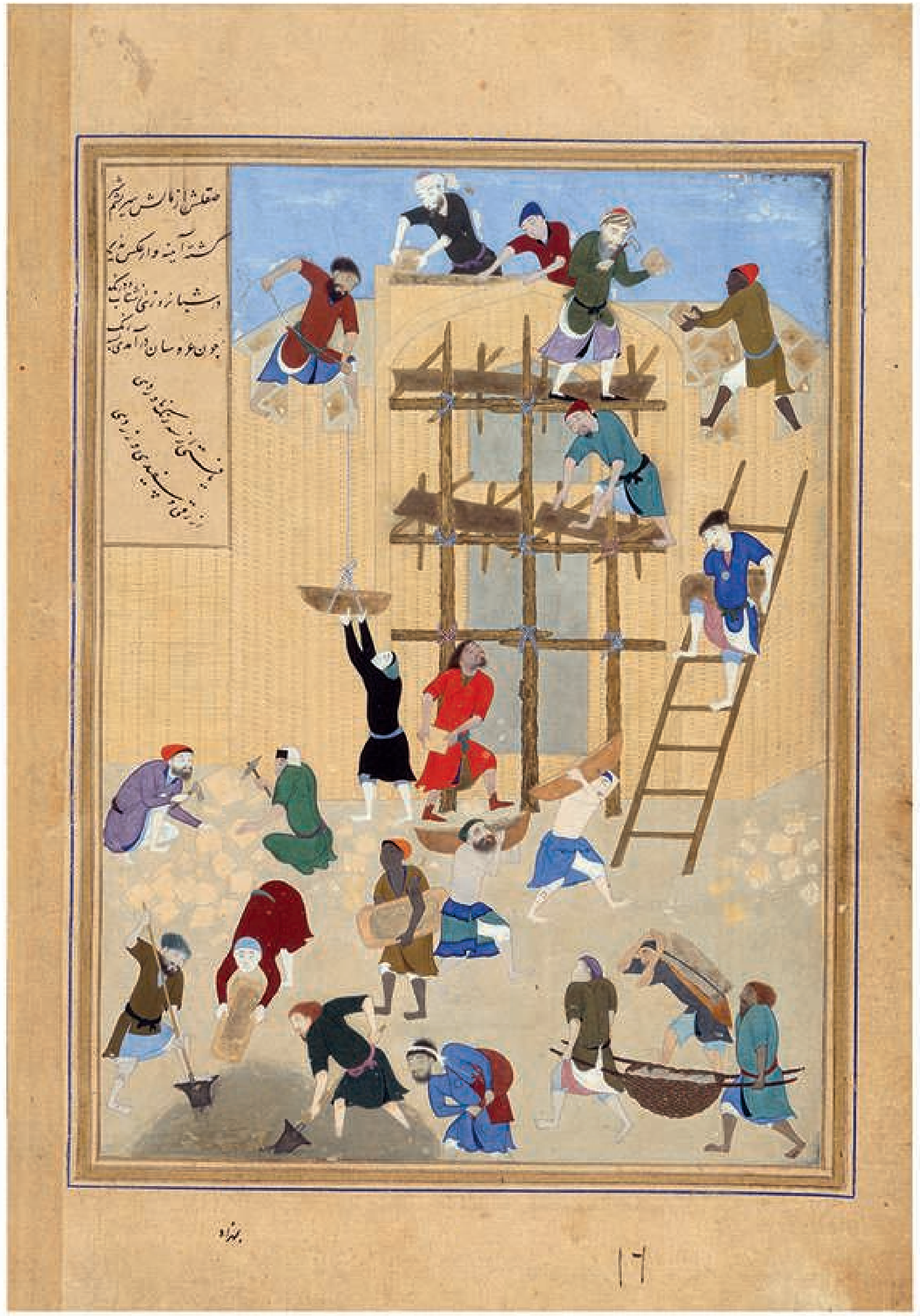
189

Construction of a Palace

about 1495

Attributed to Bihzad
Herat, now in Afghanistan
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper, each folio 24.3 × 17 cm
British Library, Or. ms. 6810, folio 154r

In 'The Seven Beauties', one of the *Khamseh* or *Five Tales* of Nizami of Ganjah (compare cats 159–61), an Arab king orders the construction of the magnificent Palace of Khavarnaq for his overlord, the Shah of Iran. This painting shows its construction, providing us with a vivid testament to pre-modern building practices. Men with spades mix mud mortar, using water delivered in animal skins. Bricks – either sun-dried or baked – are brought in a wicker container and, once delivered, are chipped into shape. The materials are hoisted or carried up to the bricklayers at work on the walls, while the master builder directs the operation from the top of the wooden scaffolding.



190

Full-size reproductions of tilework designs

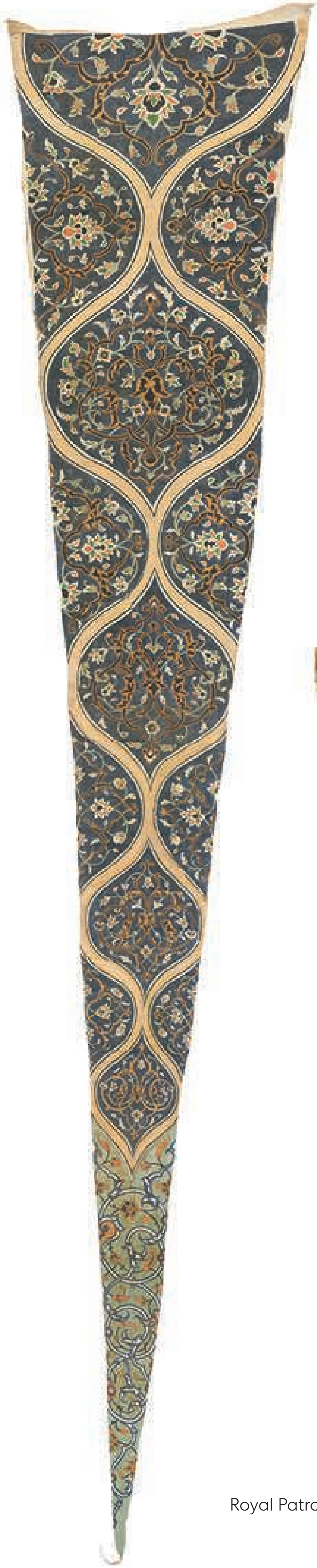
1877

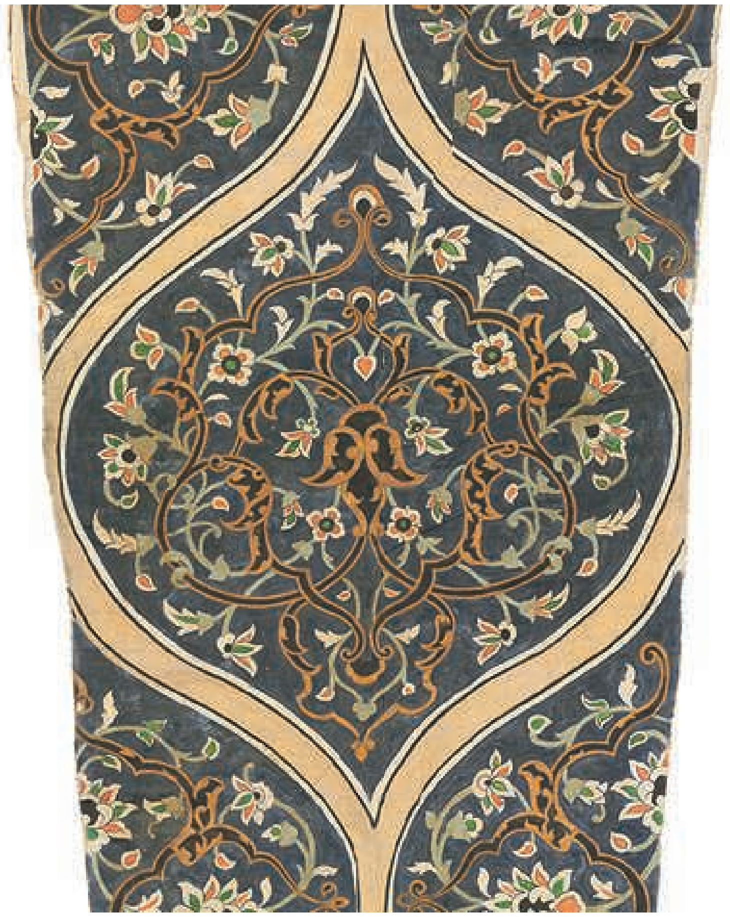
Isfahan, Iran
Oil pigments on canvas, length 1024 cm, max. width 216 cm (this page), max. dimensions 515 × 382.5 cm (opposite)
V&A: 646-1876 and 668-1876

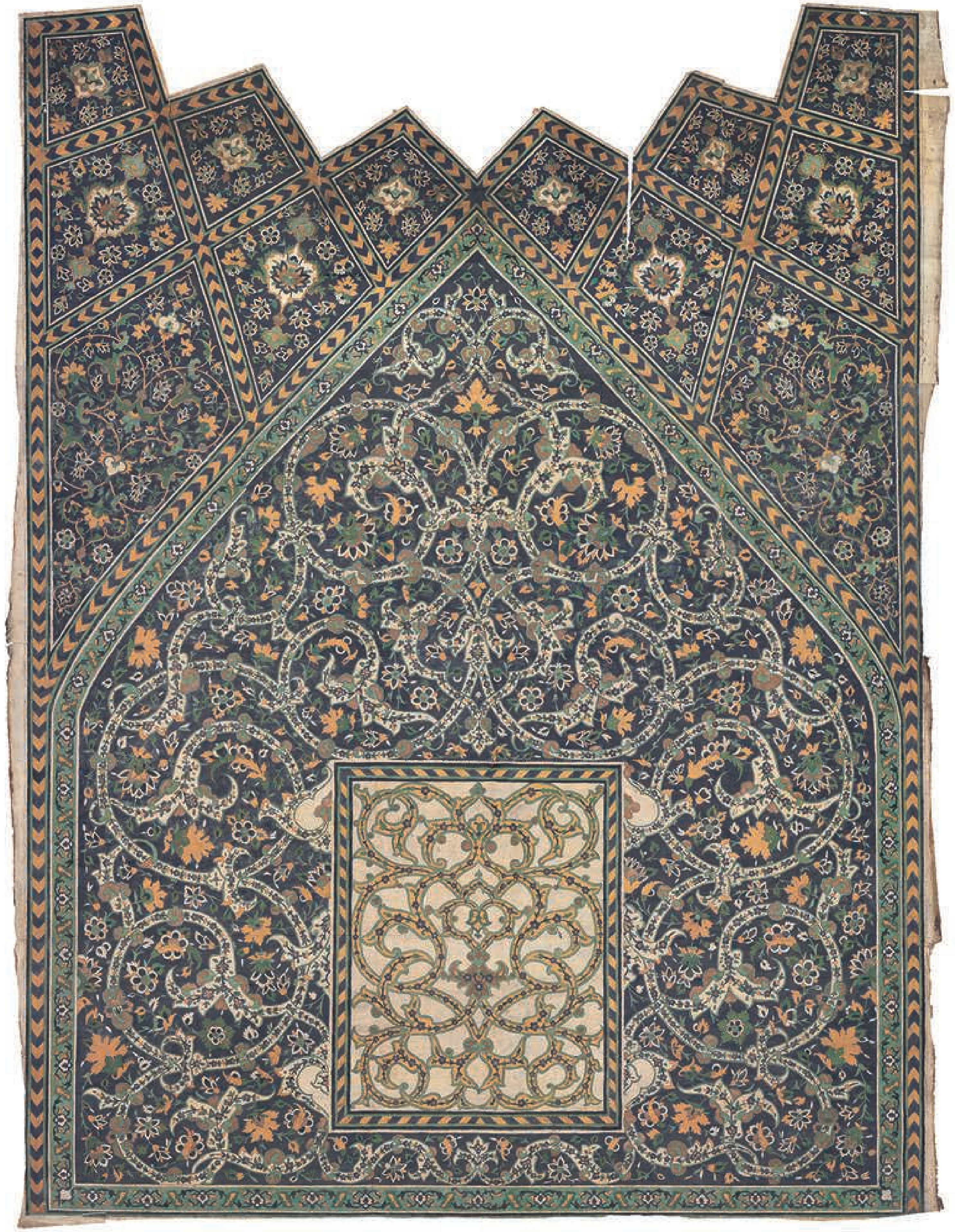
Among the first new buildings to be decorated with all-over tilework (see p. 249), once Isfahan became the capital of Iran, was the mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, commissioned by Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629) and completed in 1619 (this page, fig.11). Five generations later, Shah Sultan Husein (r. 1694–1722) erected an impressive complex of public buildings that included the Madrasah-i Madar-i Shah, completed in 1710 (opposite).

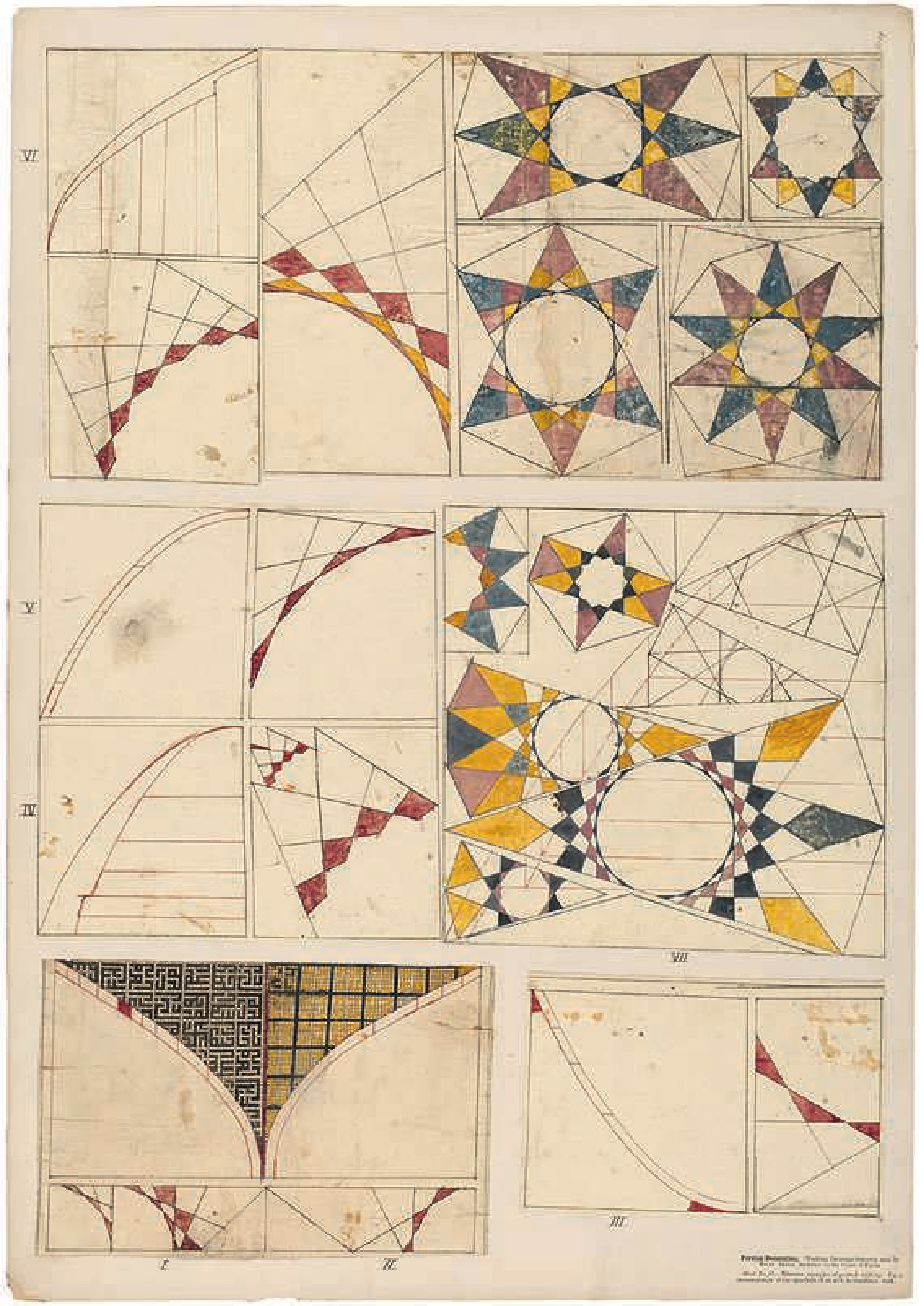
These full-size paintings were designed to capture the decorative qualities of this form of architectural decoration for display in a museum. This page records the interior of the main dome of the mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah. The painting shows only one of the 32 sectors, or gores, into which the dome can be divided, but it contains all the elements of the design. On the painting on the facing page, the lower half represents a section of a flat wall, featuring a window with an arabesque grill at its centre. In the madrasah, the upper, triangular part of the main design slopes inwards and, with the 12 shaped elements that flank it, forms the lower part of a complex vaulting system (compare cat. 191).

Moya Carey, *Persian Art: Collecting the Arts of Iran for the V&A* (London 2017), pp. 134–45









191 (left)

Architectural drawings

before 1870

Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
heights 22.3 to 27.5 cm,
widths 13.3 to 39 cm
V&A: AL.8309:1–6

192 (opposite)

Architectural drawing

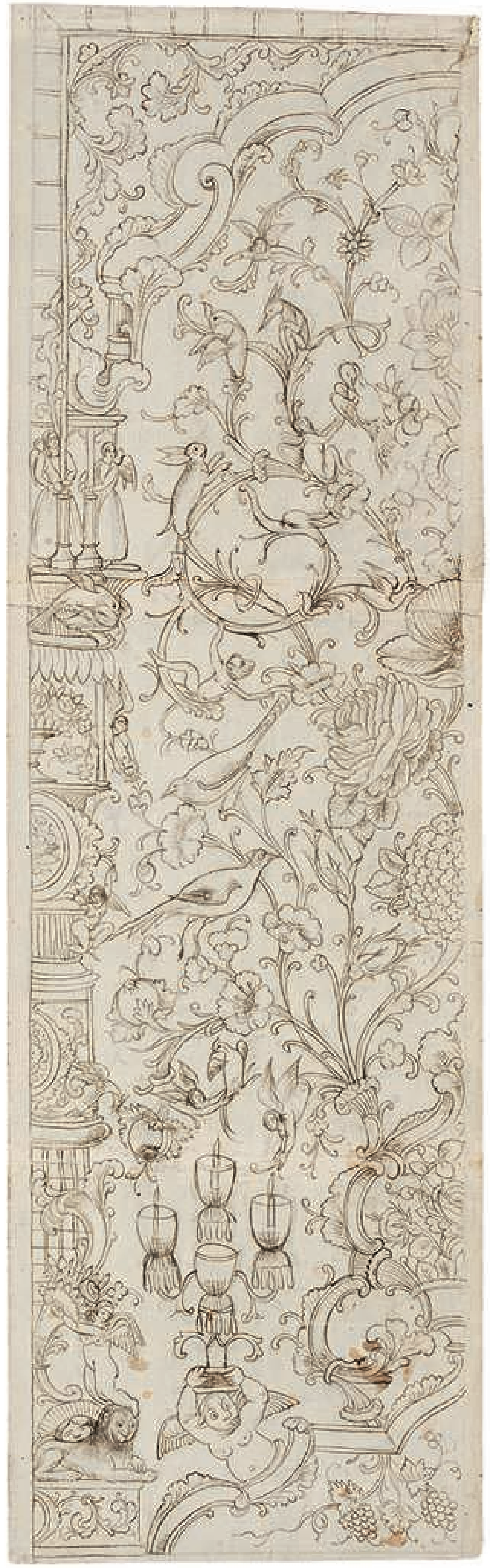
before 1870

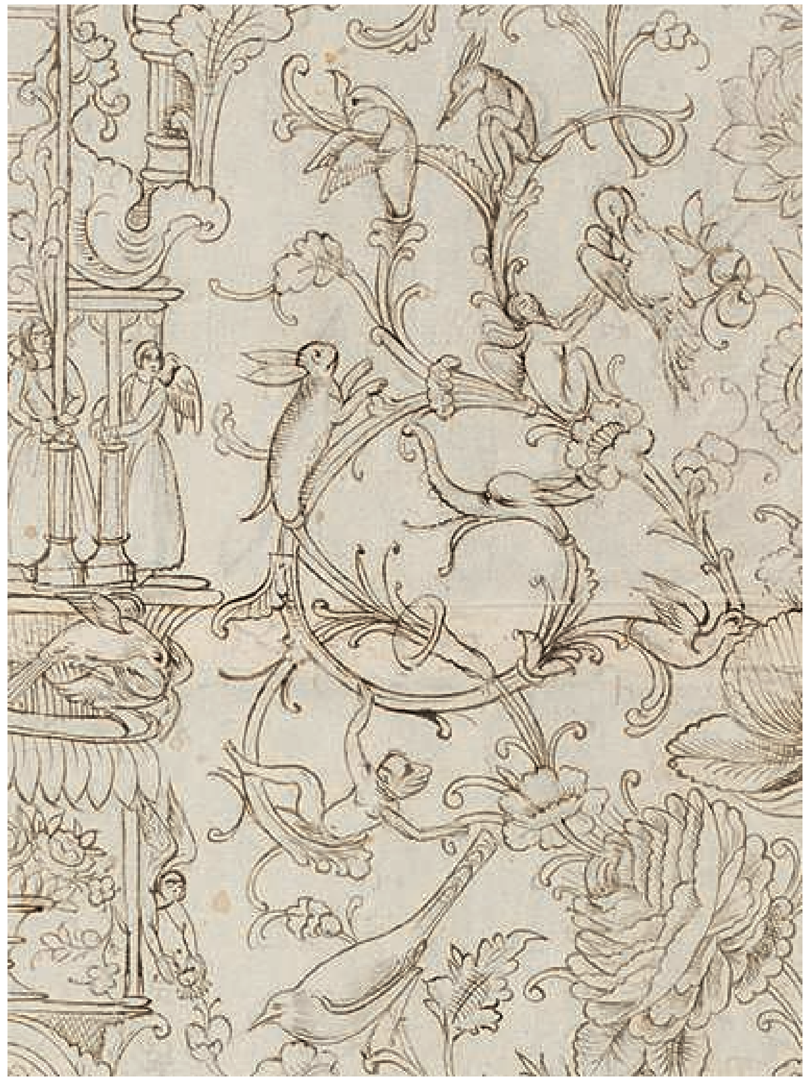
Iran
Graphite and ink on paper,
61.2 × 18.6 cm
V&A: AL.8281:1

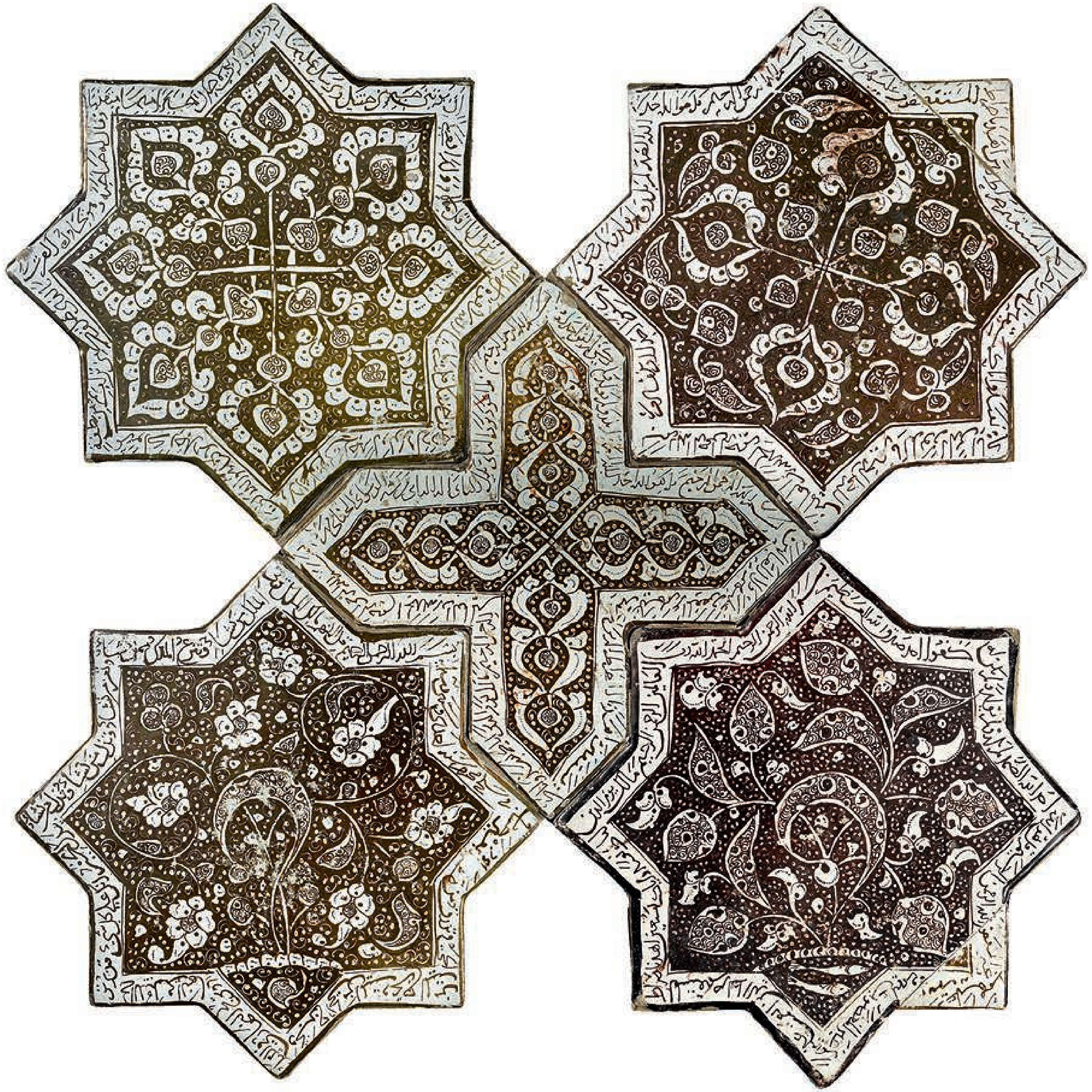
These items were once part of a series of scrolls containing different types of architectural drawings. They were acquired by a British architect, Caspar Purdon Clarke, in Tehran in 1875. Clarke then cut up most of the scrolls, in order to group the drawings typologically, before selling them to the V&A in 1877.

Cat. 192 records wall decoration in the style current in the 19th century, and which survives, for example, in the exuberant stuccowork of the merchants' houses in Kashan (see fig. 15). Cat. 191 relates to the complex vaulting systems used in Iranian buildings in the 19th century following a tradition that had already reached a high degree of sophistication in the 11th century. Yet, although parallels in surviving buildings can be readily found, and the three-dimensional features depicted in two dimensions can be reconstructed in detail, it is not clear how the drawings were integrated into architectural practice, which was conducted within a guild system and dominated by oral instruction and the craftsmen's ability to memorize large quantities of data.

Moya Carey, *Persian Art: Collecting the Arts of Iran for the V&A* (London 2017), pp. 47–53







193

Five tiles from a wall revetment

1262

Iran, Kashan or Varamin
Fritware painted over the glaze in lustre,
the panel 62 × 62 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1006
Purchased 2005

The Mongol conquest of Iran in the 1250s was followed by a period of rule by non-Muslim khans. There was greater religious freedom for Shi'ites, and one result was that their shrines were given splendid revetments of lustre tiles. These examples come from the shrine of Imamzadah Yahya at Varamin, south-east of Tehran. Each tile has a narrow border containing a quotation from the Qur'an, which surrounds one of a great variety of formal patterns.

As with cat. 194, these tiles may have been produced in Kashan, the great centre for lustre ceramics in the 13th and 14th centuries; equally, the potters may have moved to Varamin to execute the commission.

194

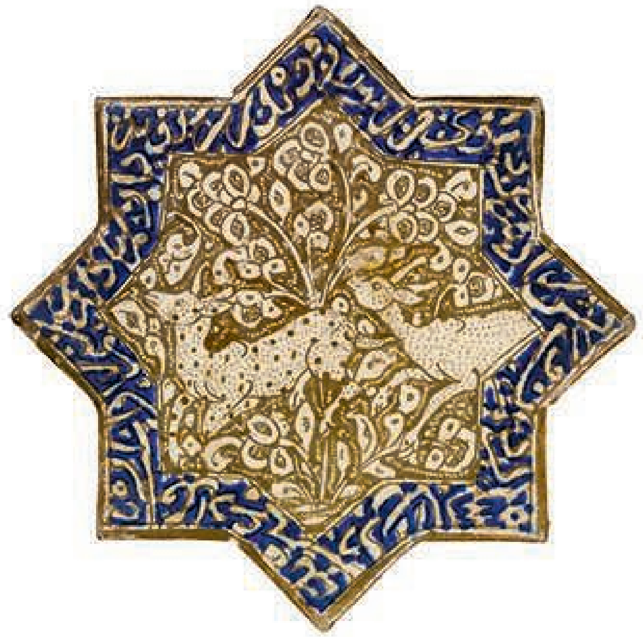
Tile from a wall revetment

1300–30

Iran, probably Kashan
Fritware painted in the glaze in
blue and over the glaze in lustre,
20 × 20 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1045
Purchased 2009

This lustre tile represents a later type than cat. 193, and was made for a secular context. It seems to have been produced in considerable numbers, usually with a quatrain in Persian in the border. The tile was executed in two stages. The potter painted the blue background into the glaze before the first firing, leaving the text in white. Then the lustre outline was painted over the hardened glaze before a second firing. At this second stage, the decoration in the central field was also added. Here, it consists of two gazelles drawn against a background of vegetation.



195

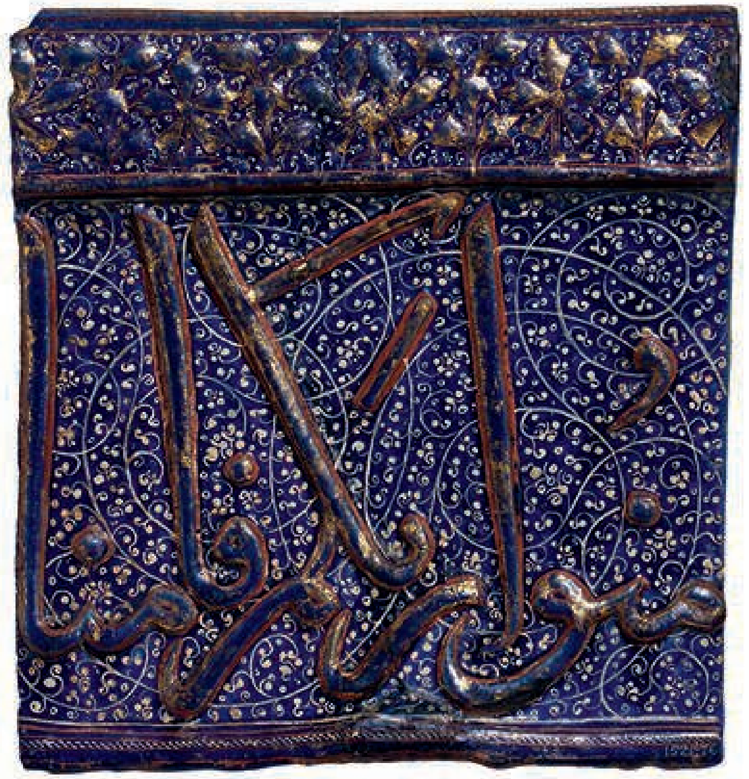
Tile from an inscription frieze

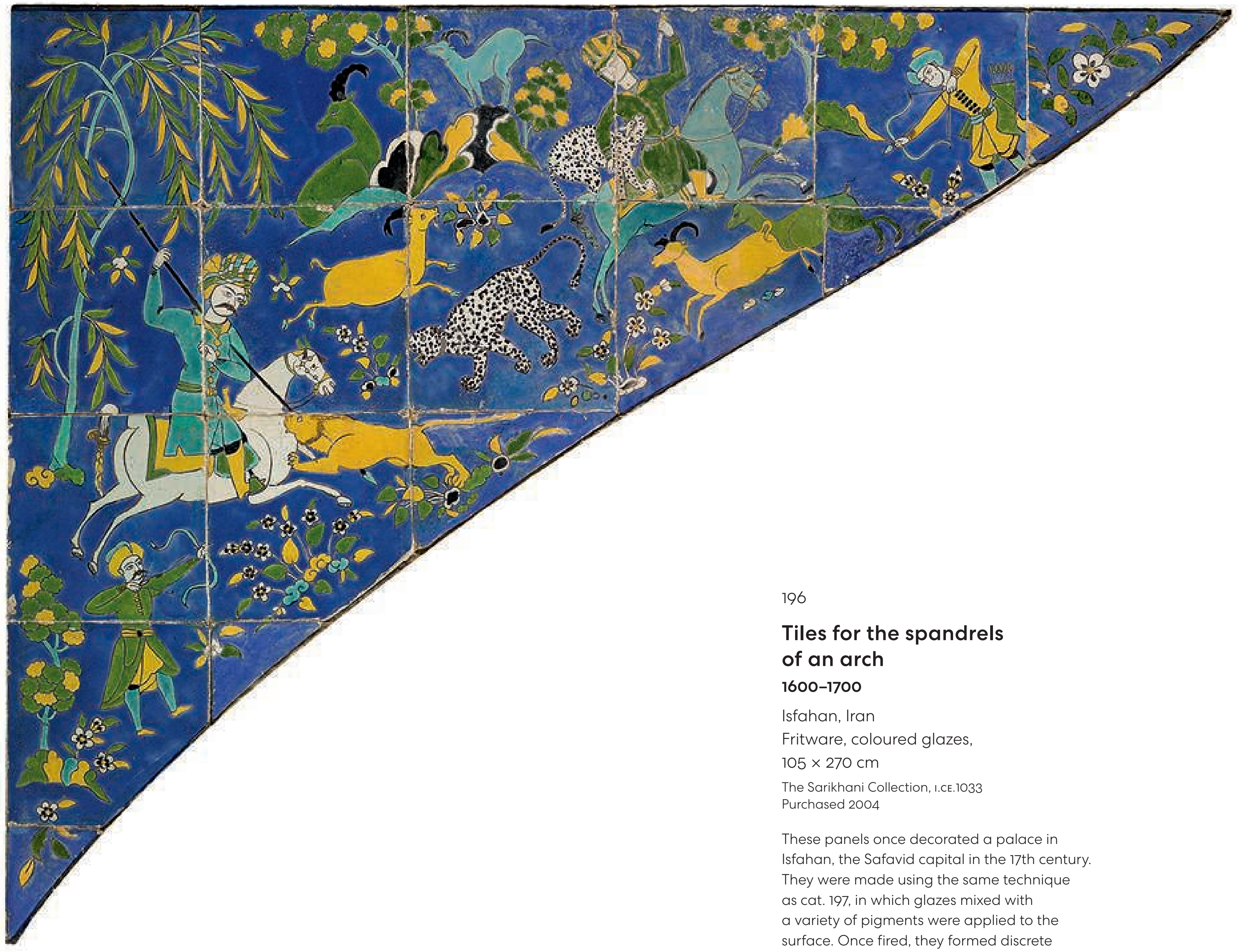
1200–1400

Iran
Fritware, moulded, painted in enamel
colours over the deep-blue glaze,
gold leaf, width 33 cm

V&A: 1521-1876

This tile once formed part of a magnificent frieze in a religious building. It bears a frieze of lotus flowers above a fragment of the Qur'anic text: 'Believe in your Lord, and we have believed' (surah III, verse 193). The deep blue (*lajvardineh*) colour was achieved by adding cobalt oxide to the glaze. This was fired before a background pattern in white and the red outlines for the script were added in enamels, which required a second firing. The red enriched the tone of the gold leaf that was applied as the final stage.





196

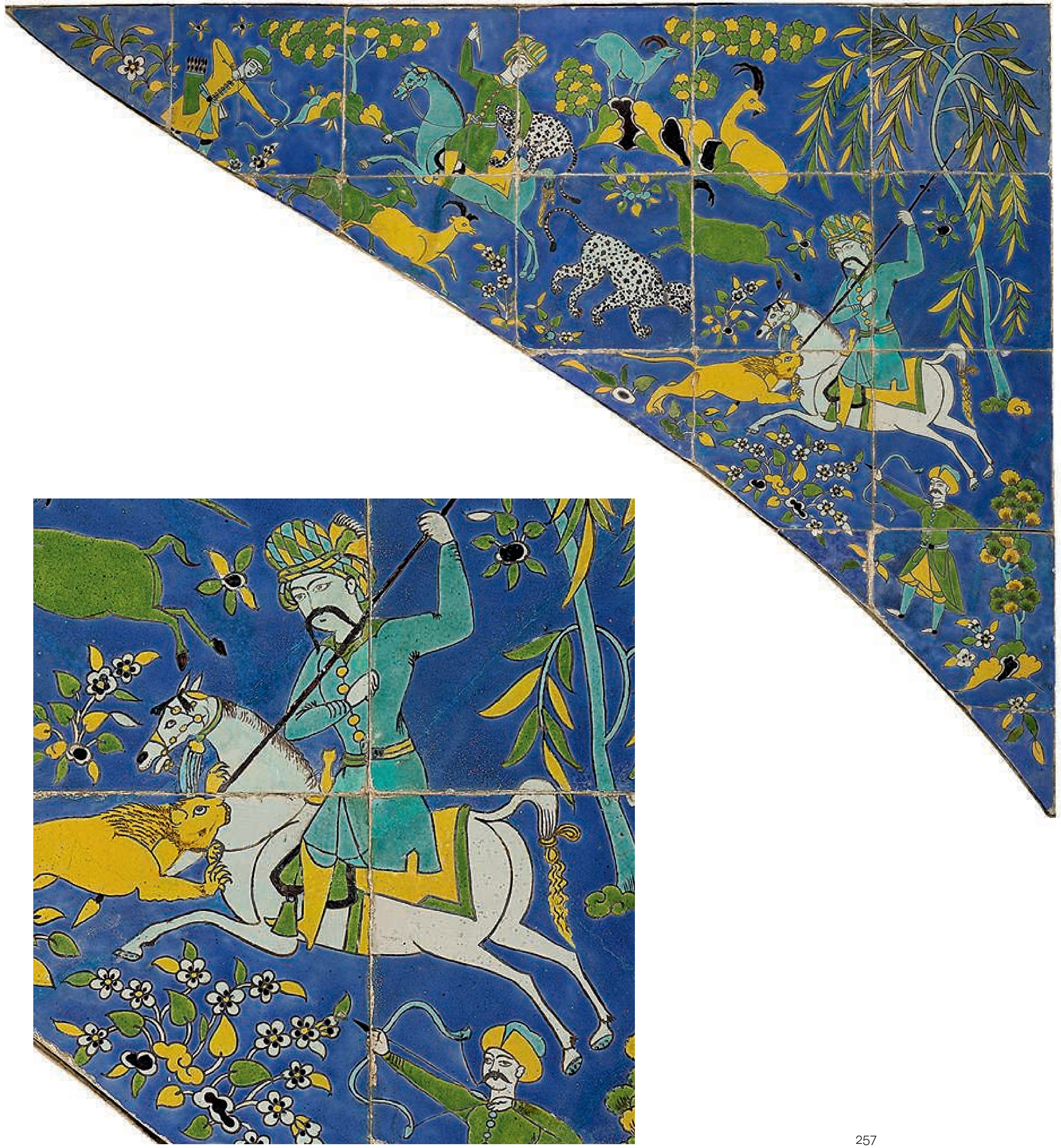
Tiles for the spandrels of an arch

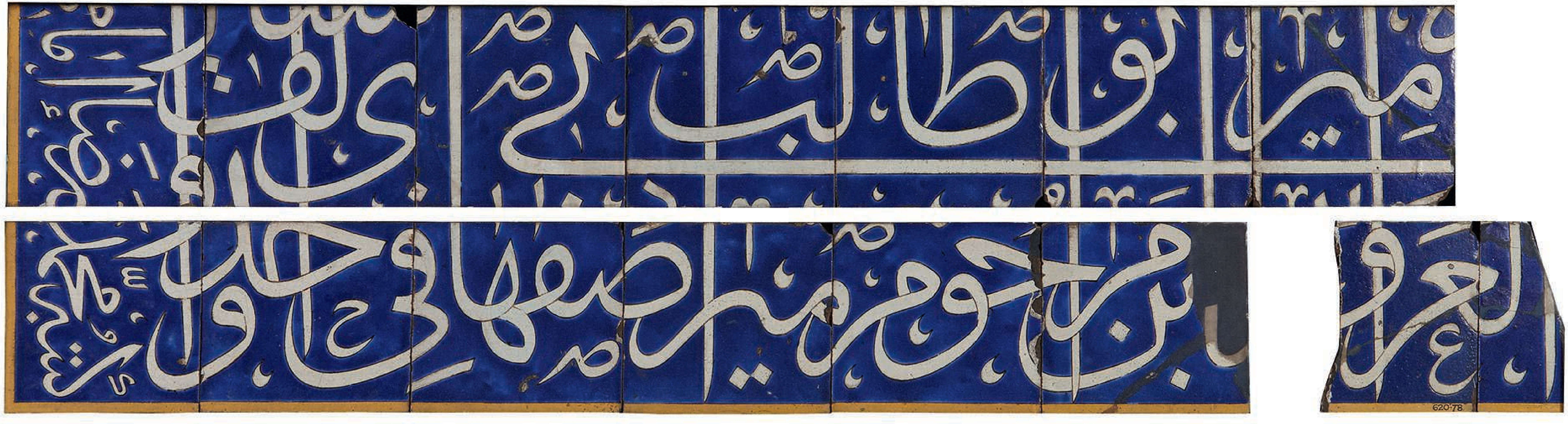
1600–1700

Isfahan, Iran
Fritware, coloured glazes,
105 × 270 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1033
Purchased 2004

These panels once decorated a palace in Isfahan, the Safavid capital in the 17th century. They were made using the same technique as cat. 197, in which glazes mixed with a variety of pigments were applied to the surface. Once fired, they formed discrete blocks of colour. Here six glazes – blue, yellow, green, turquoise, white and black – were used to create a hunting scene, which is repeated in reverse across the central axis.





197

Part of a tilework inscription

1622

Signed by Muhammad Riza Imami
Isfahan, Iran
Fritware, coloured glazes,
47.5 × 166.7 cm
V&A: 620-1878

This is the bottom left part of an imposing inscription, which was probably set relatively high on a building. It was written in a grand and eminently legible style of script. The surviving text records the last part of a man's name, telling us that his deceased father was called Mirza Abu Talib Isfahani. The date follows, while the signature of the calligrapher who designed the inscription is written vertically on the left, in a smaller and more fluid hand.

198

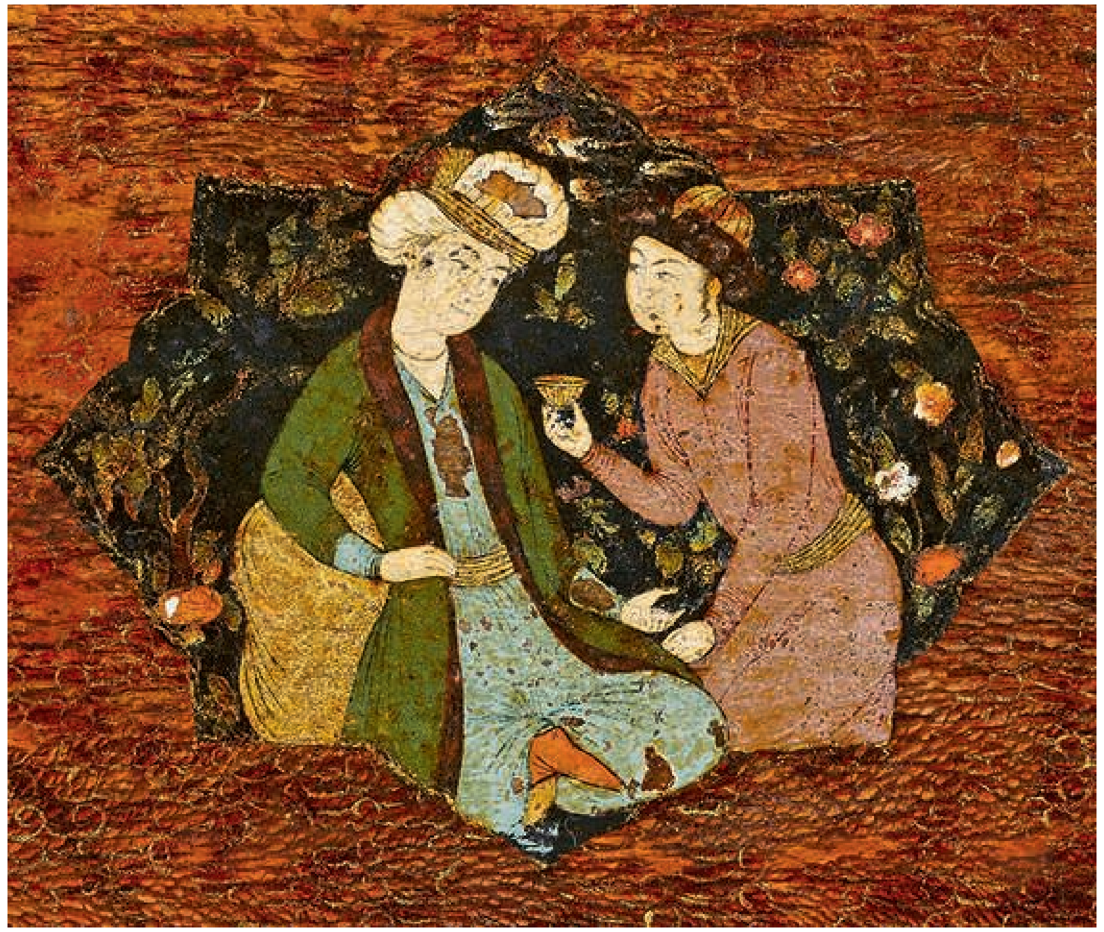
Pair of doors

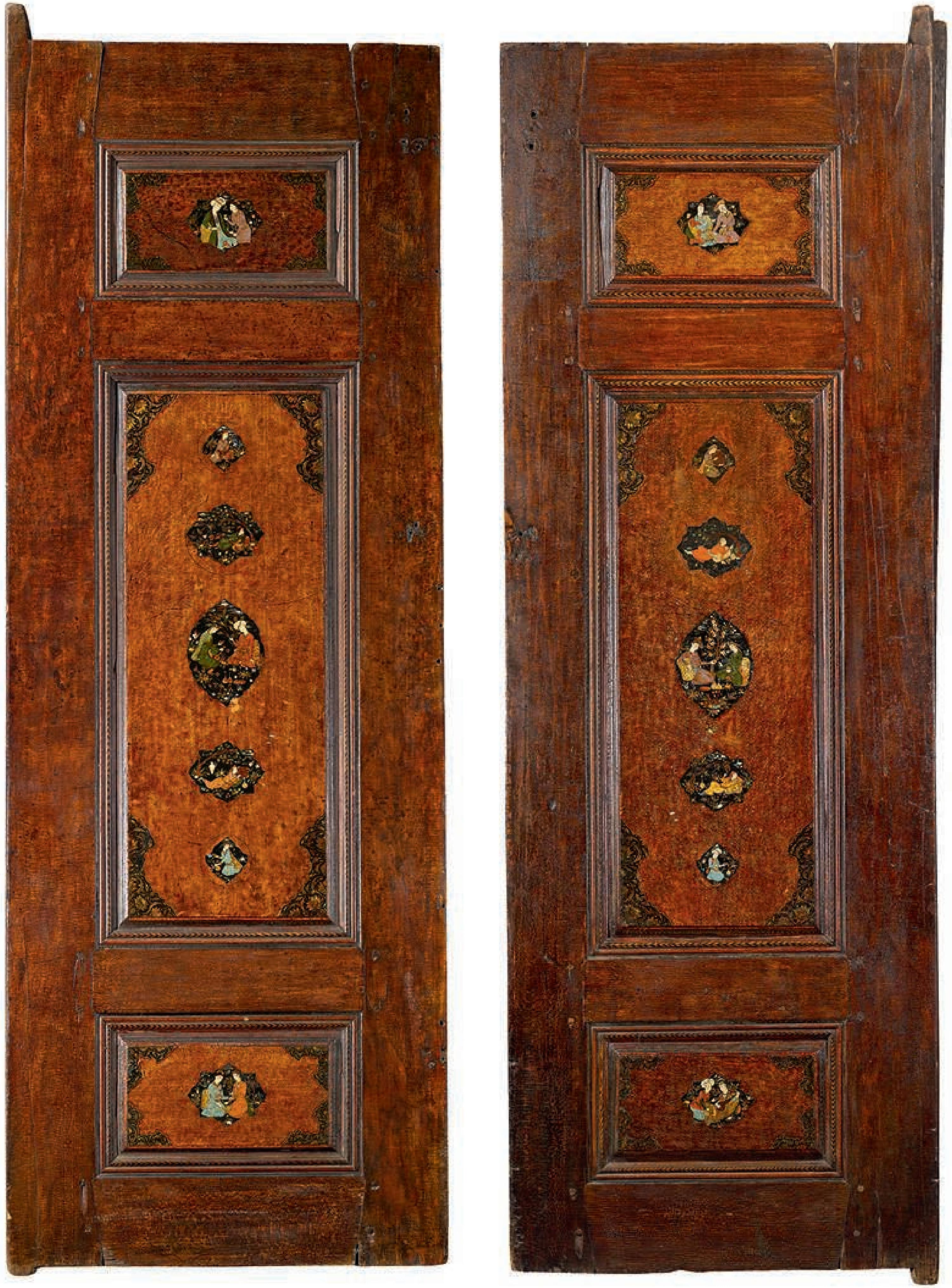
1600–1700

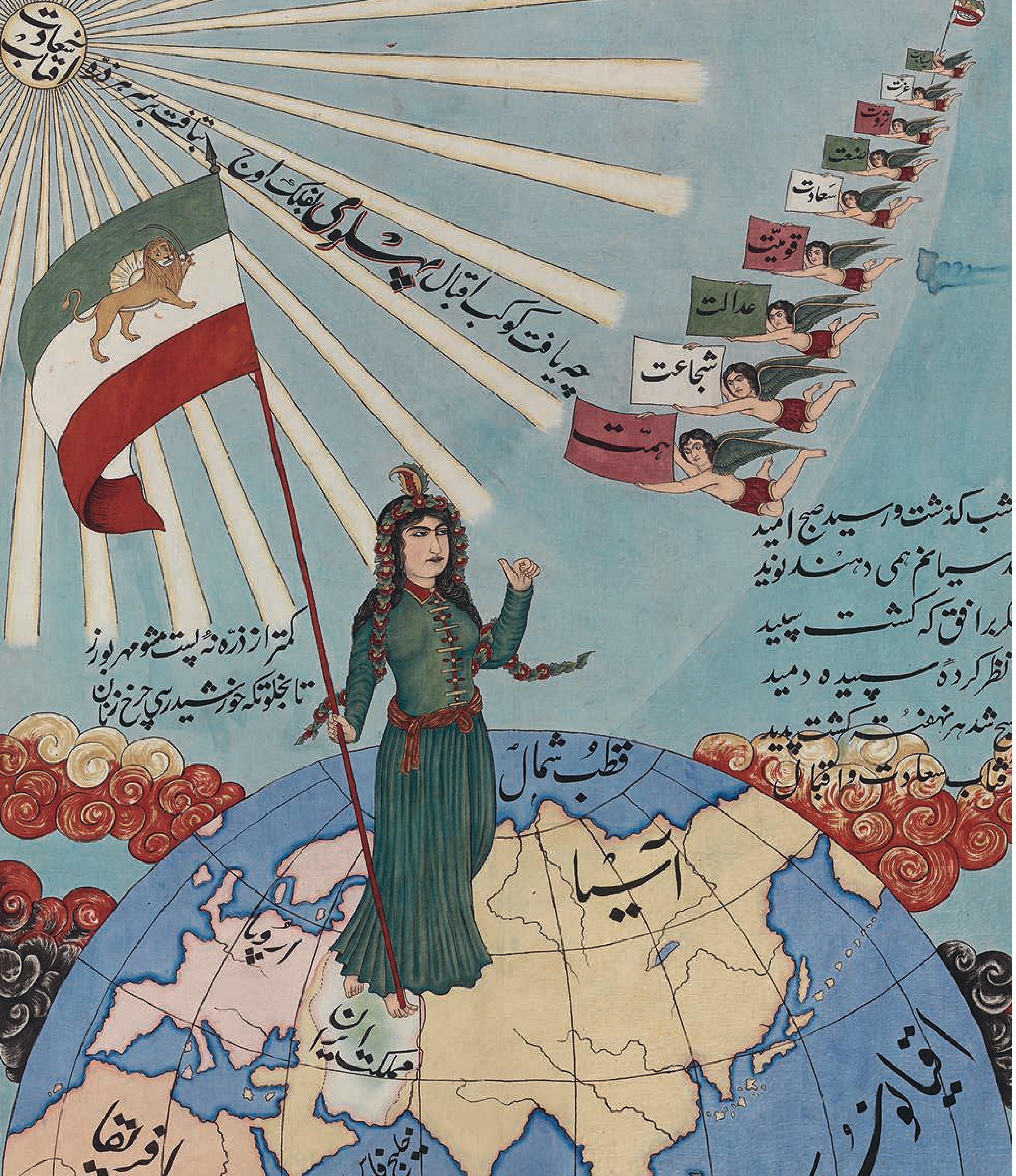
Isfahan, Iran
Wood, painted and varnished,
each 189 × 67 cm

The Sarikhani Collection, I.WD.1003
Purchased 2000

Like cat. 196, these doors probably came from one of the Safavid palaces in Isfahan. They are painted with areas of ornament and figurative vignettes that echo the earlier design on the carpet from Boughton House, Northamptonshire (cat. 182), while the background is painted with a woodgrain pattern in gold.






آفتاب سعادت
همّت
شجاعت
عدالت
قومیّت
سعادت
صنعت
ثروت
کمتر از ذره نه پست مشو مهر بورز
تا بخلوتگه خورشید رسی چرخ زنان
قطب شمال
آسیا
اروپا
مملکت ایران
افریقا
خلیج فارس

8

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Tim Stanley

Over the course of the sixteenth century, the Safavid dynasty created a unified Iranian state in which Imami Shi'ism became the faith of the majority. There are clear connections between this empire and the modern Islamic Republic of Iran, which occupies much of the same territory and is based on the same faith. Yet more than 250 years passed between the fall of the Safavids in 1722 and the Islamic Revolution of 1979, during which the survival of Iran as a unified, independent country was not always certain. The threat of disintegration was greatest in the second half of the eighteenth century, but the unity of Iran was preserved by the Qajar dynasty, which established control of the country in the 1780s and 1790s. The traditional monarchy they created endured until the early twentieth century. It was overthrown by Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–41), an army officer who assumed royal titles in a pattern of long standing, but who can also be seen as a military dictator with a mission to turn Iran into a modern state.

The dissolution of the Safavid empire began in 1709, when the Ghilzai Afghans of the Qandahar region (now southern Afghanistan) rebelled against Safavid rule and began to create an expansionist state of their own. In March 1722 an Afghan army besieged the Safavid capital, Isfahan, which capitulated in October. Once inside the city, the Afghans seized the shah, who promptly abdicated. Members of the Safavid dynasty acted as figurehead monarchs between 1729 and 1736, but their power was gone.

Afghan rule lasted only seven years, and it was followed by the rise of a military commander, who ascended the throne as Nadir Shah in 1736. His many successes in war included a momentous invasion of India from which he returned with great booty, including the gems worn by his less glorious successors (cat. 199). In 1747 he was assassinated, and Iran entered the period of turmoil referred to earlier. This ended only in the 1790s, when the country was finally re-united by Agha Muhammad Khan, the intelligent and utterly ruthless leader of the Qajar tribal confederation in north-east Iran.

Agha Muhammad, too, was assassinated in 1797, but he had laid the foundations of an enduring political system. The new dynasty operated in a very traditional way as absolute monarchs, but they had to deal with a world that had changed radically since the heyday of the Safavids. In the seventeenth century the rulers of Iran had dealt with European powers on their own terms, but by the 1790s Britain, France and Russia had the advantage. Iran was not colonized directly in the Qajar period, but after the fall of Napoleon in 1815, its rulers had to neutralize as best they could the aggressive policies of the British in South Asia and the growing Russian empire to the north. It was not in the interests of either power that Iran should develop and prosper. Nor was it a priority for the Qajar monarchs, who frequently solicited foreign subsidies and loans to spend in pursuit of their own narrow interests. These included bolstering their military forces and financing their elaborate households, with its many court artists and craftsmen.

The Qajars' interest in artistic production was strong, and the reigns of the three shahs who ruled for most of the nineteenth century were each marked by a distinctive approach. In 1797 Agha Muhammad was succeeded by a young nephew, Fath Ali Shah. The new monarch had to establish his right to rule, and the royal portrait played a particularly significant part in this. Fath Ali Shah's uncle had been castrated as a youth by one of his father's enemies, and he grew into a beardless adult with a strikingly ugly appearance. There was an ancient prejudice that a man who was physically deficient in some way could not be a king. Agha Muhammad had successfully defied this convention, but Fath Ali Shah felt the need to compensate for it on a grand scale. Throughout his reign he commissioned a multitude of portraits of himself in which he is always shown as the physical antithesis of his uncle, namely, a handsome, youthful king whose long and impressive black beard signals his virility (see, for example, cat. 199). Although he ruled for almost four decades, dying in 1834 at the age of 52, his portraits never show any sign of his ageing.

Another notable feature of the portraits of Fath Ali Shah is the flat, hieratic style used by his court artists. This way of painting has been interpreted as a form of naive art, as though the painters were unable to model figures in an illusionistic manner. Yet, as the work of Isfahan painters of the seventeenth century shows, the use of modelling had been current in Iran since that time (see cats 183, 184, 187). Its absence from the portraits of Fath Ali Shah was a deliberate choice, perhaps inspired by the absence of illusionism in Iranian painting before 1600. If so, the new style can be seen as part of a wider programme designed to connect the shah's rule with the past greatness of Iran. His predilection for elaborate sets of armour, one of which he is shown wearing in his portrait by Mihr Ali (cat. 199), reinforces this view. In 1814, when the portrait was painted, armour was no longer a viable form of bodily defence, but it evoked the glories of the past (see p. 184).

In 1834 Fath Ali Shah was succeeded by his grandson, Muhammad Shah. The new monarch abandoned his grandfather's antiquarian approach and had himself presented in a 'modern' illusionistic style and in contemporary court dress. The latter was soon given a new form, which combined a version of a European officer's uniform with a high astrakhan hat. Nevertheless, like his grandfather, the shah's elevated status was indicated by his jewelled accoutrements, and by his seeming ability to avoid ageing.

Diplomatic contacts with foreign powers, especially Russia and Great Britain, led to an exchange of gifts that brought many novelties to the Qajar court. By 1845 Muhammad Shah had received photographic equipment as gifts from both Queen Victoria and Tsar Nicholas I, and, once he had found someone who understood how it worked, he commissioned daguerreotype portraits of members of the royal household, now lost. The shah's son Nasir al-Din was one of the subjects. In 1848 the prince succeeded his father, and in the 1860s Nasir al-Din Shah took up photography himself. Over the rest of his long reign (1848–96), he made large numbers of images of his own household.

Nasir al-Din Shah's painted portraits are notable for their photographic realism. In those depicting him as a young man (cat. 200), this realism often crosses the line to become hyperrealism, with the image enhanced to increase its emotional impact, but a more sedate approach was adopted as the shah grew older. Photography, it seems, scuppered the practice of showing the ruler in unchanging youthfulness, replacing it with a sequence of images that tracks his increasing maturity. All official portraits of Qajar rulers after 1797 were united, however, in showing their subjects' undiminishing virility – a sign of their fitness to rule.

The impact of photography on painting can also be seen in the work of Isma'il Jalayir, an artist who flourished between 1862 and 1889. In *Ladies Around a Samovar*, which shows members of a great man's harem assembled on a terrace (cat. 202), the women's faces have a mysterious impassivity. This suggests that Isma'il painted the figures after photographs of a specific harem, as the female sitters reflect the stillness required during the long exposure time of photographs of the period. The most likely source was Nasir al-Din Shah himself, given the grandeur of the setting, including the park filled with huge trees that forms the background, and the shah's penchant for photographing his own household.

The painting reflects other innovations of the period. Some of the women are drinking tea, for example. This practice became widespread in Iran only in the mid-nineteenth century, when the use of the samovar (Persian *samavar*) was introduced from Russia. Another novelty of this date is that of the relatively short skirt, worn by the women in this work.

As surviving examples demonstrate (see cat. 203), upper-class women had been accustomed to wearing very full, floor-length skirts during the reign of Muhammad Shah, but in Nasir al-Din Shah's reign hemlines rose, first reaching a point midway between ankle and knee, as in Isma'il's painting. A popular but unsubstantiated explanation for this change is that the shah ordered the rise in skirt lengths after he had attended the ballet on his first trip to Europe in 1873 (see cat. 201). The skirts in the painting do indeed echo balletic costumes but rather the bell shape of the 'Romantic' tutus worn from 1832, and which the shah may have seen in European illustrations before his visit some 40 years later. What is more, hemlines later rose even further, shadowing the shortening of the ballet tutu in Europe in the 1870s (cat. 204).

Drinking tea and putting women in tutus did not contribute to Iran's overall progress towards modernity, however, and when Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896, he left a country marked by indebtedness and underdevelopment – there were only eight miles of railway in the entire country. One of the shah's solutions to his financial woes had been to cede control of parts of the economy to foreign capitalists, and in 1890, he granted a monopoly over Iran's large tobacco industry to a British concern, putting local producers at a grave disadvantage. The result was a popular movement, supported by the Shi'ite authorities, which brought the consumption of tobacco to a halt. The trade collapsed, and the concession was cancelled in January 1892. It was by means of events such as these that a new Iran was born.

Popular dissent over individual issues grew into a more coherent demand for reform, to which Nasir al-Din Shah's successor, Muzaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1896–1907), was eventually forced to give way. A new constitution was declared, and in October 1906 the new parliament opened. Photography had long passed beyond the confines of the court, and during the Constitutional Revolution, as the reforms became known, it played a role in promoting the reformers' cause, as events in Tehran could be communicated rapidly to the provinces through the medium of the postcard (cat. 206).

Muzaffar al-Din Shah's son and successor, Muhammad Ali Shah, led a counter-revolution, but popular action brought about the deposition of the shah in 1909, and the re-opening of parliament. The renewal of democracy did not provide any solution to Iran's problems, however, and the First World War and the Russian Revolution of 1917 led to greater and greater foreign intervention and the collapse of central authority. This turmoil was the setting for the *coup d'état* led by Reza Khan in 1921, and the deposition of Ahmad Shah, the last Qajar ruler, in 1925.

Reza Khan's regime aimed to modernize Iran along the lines being pioneered by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in Turkey, with one major difference: instead of making himself president of a republic, the new ruler recast himself as Reza Shah, and a new dynasty, the Pahlavis, was born. Reza Shah's resources were limited, however, and the break with the past was not as abrupt as he would have liked. This is evinced by a large banner presenting the principles of the new government's policies, made in Isfahan in 1932 (cat. 207). The ideas are new, but the production technique and most of the design are entirely traditional.

199

Fath Ali Shah in Jewelled Armour

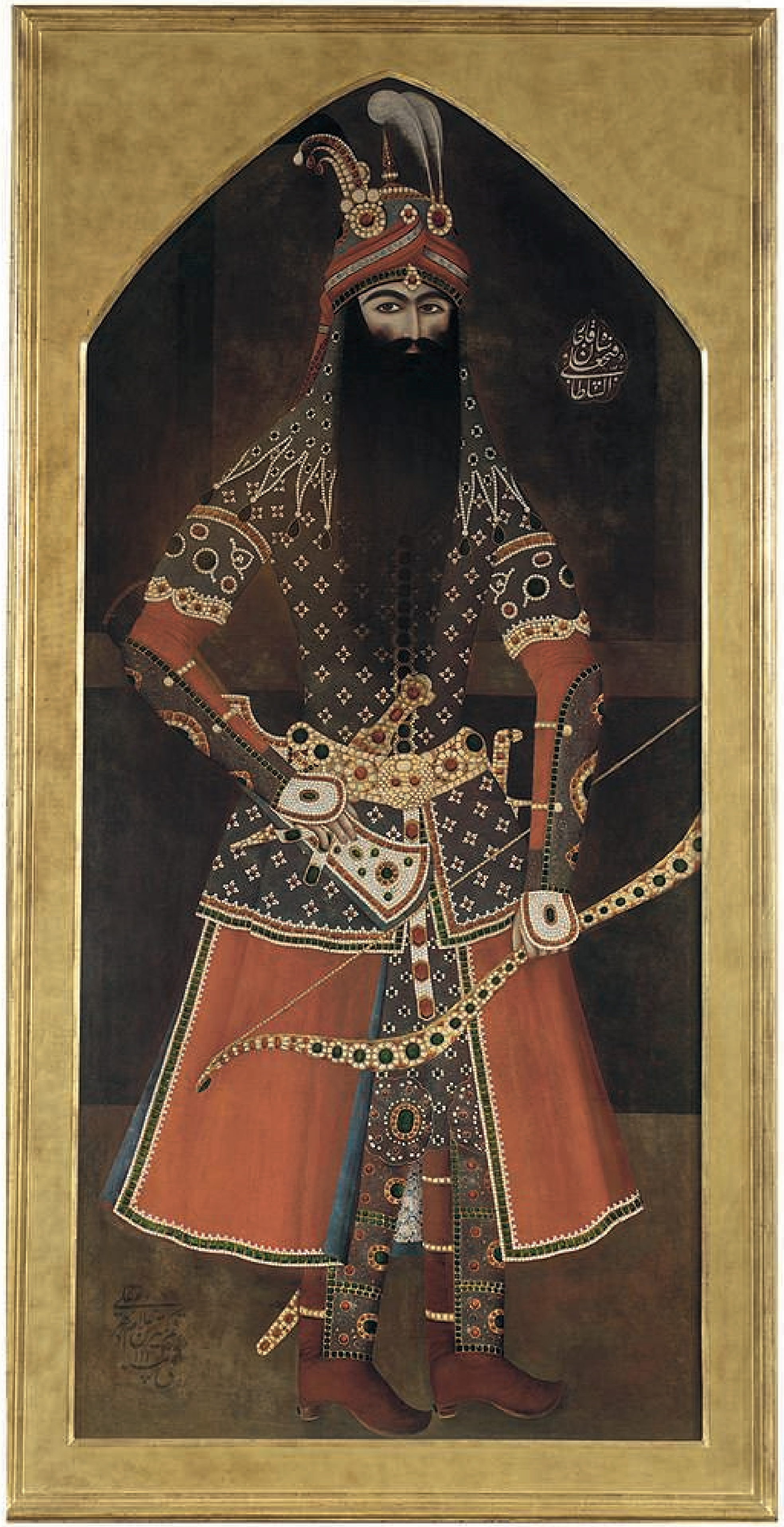
1814

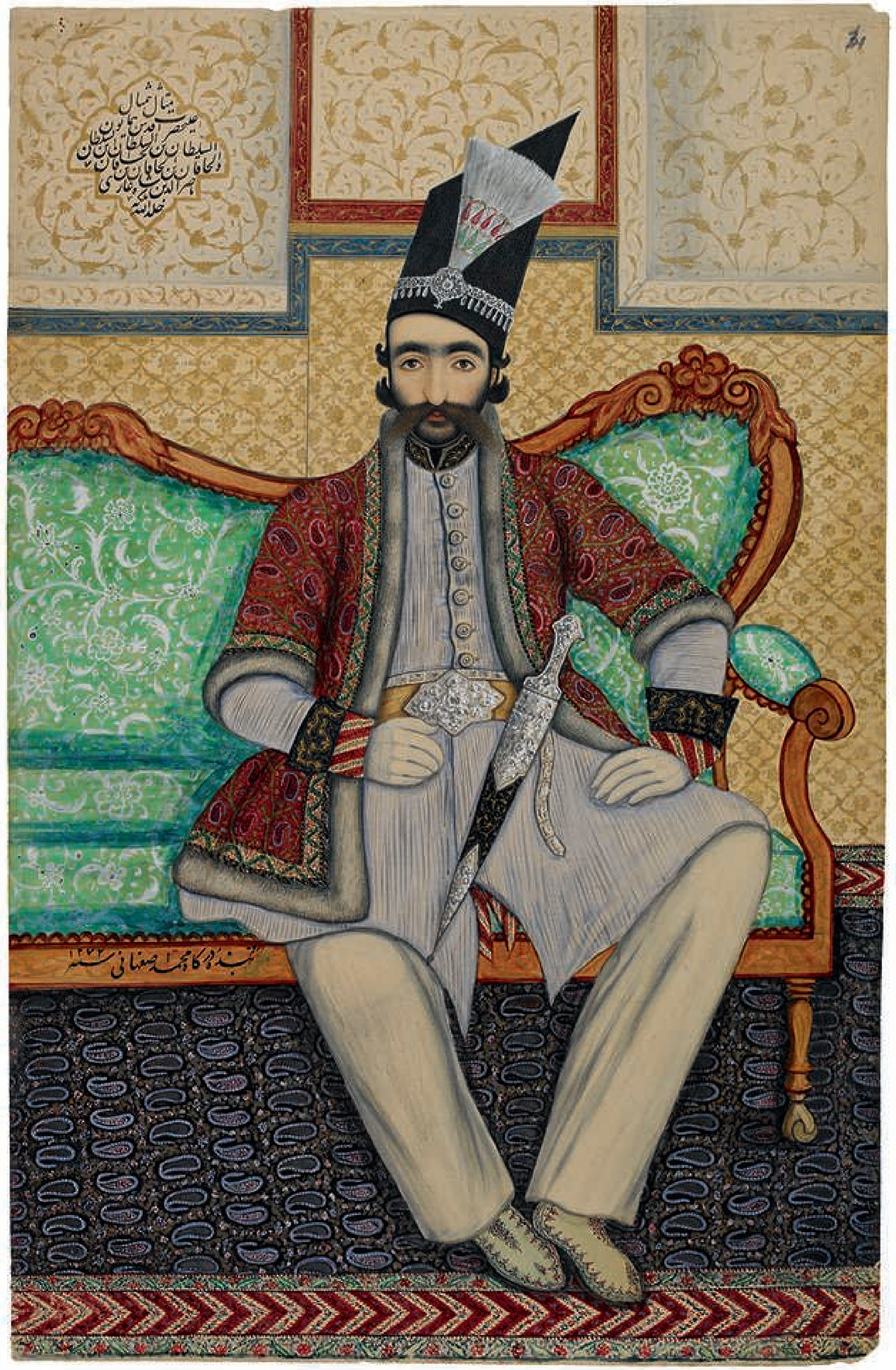
Signed by Mihr Ali
Tehran, Iran
Oil on canvas, 224 × 103 cm

Art and History Trust, courtesy of the National Museum of Asian Art, Washington D.C., LTS 1995.2.122

This portrait of the second Qajar ruler, Fath Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834), is signed by his court painter. The shah is depicted wearing a helmet, a coat of mail and defences for the lower arms, thighs and knees (these can be compared to cats 141, 144). In this case, however, Fath Ali Shah's armour, and his other accoutrements, are studded with pearls and other jewels, to magnificent effect. The armour provided no defence against contemporary weapons, but it linked the shah to the warriors of the early days of Islam in the 7th century, and to the great Iranian heroes of even earlier times (p. 184).

Layla Diba with Maryam Ekhtiar (eds), *Royal Persian Paintings. The Qajar Epoch, 1785–1925* (Brooklyn, NY and London), 1998, no. 41





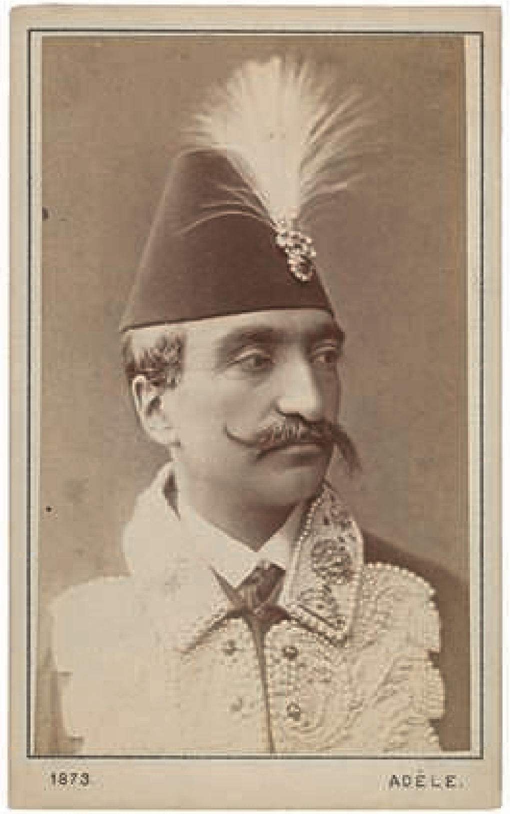
201

Portrait of Nasir al-Din Shah

1873

By Atelier Adèle
Vienna, Austria
Albumen photograph mounted onto card, 10.6 × 6.5 cm
V&A: RPS.1735-2017

In 1873 Nasir al-Din Shah left Iran for the first of three tours of European capitals. Vienna was among the cities he visited, and it was here that this portrait was taken by the court photographers Atelier Adèle. Adèle Perlmutter-Heilperin, whose studio operated between 1862 and 1908, was the only woman photographer to hold a court patent in the history of Austria-Hungary. The photograph marks a commercialization of the royal image, as numerous copies were made in this *carte de visite* format for sale to the public, who may have wondered why Adèle did not get the shah to fix his moustache!



200

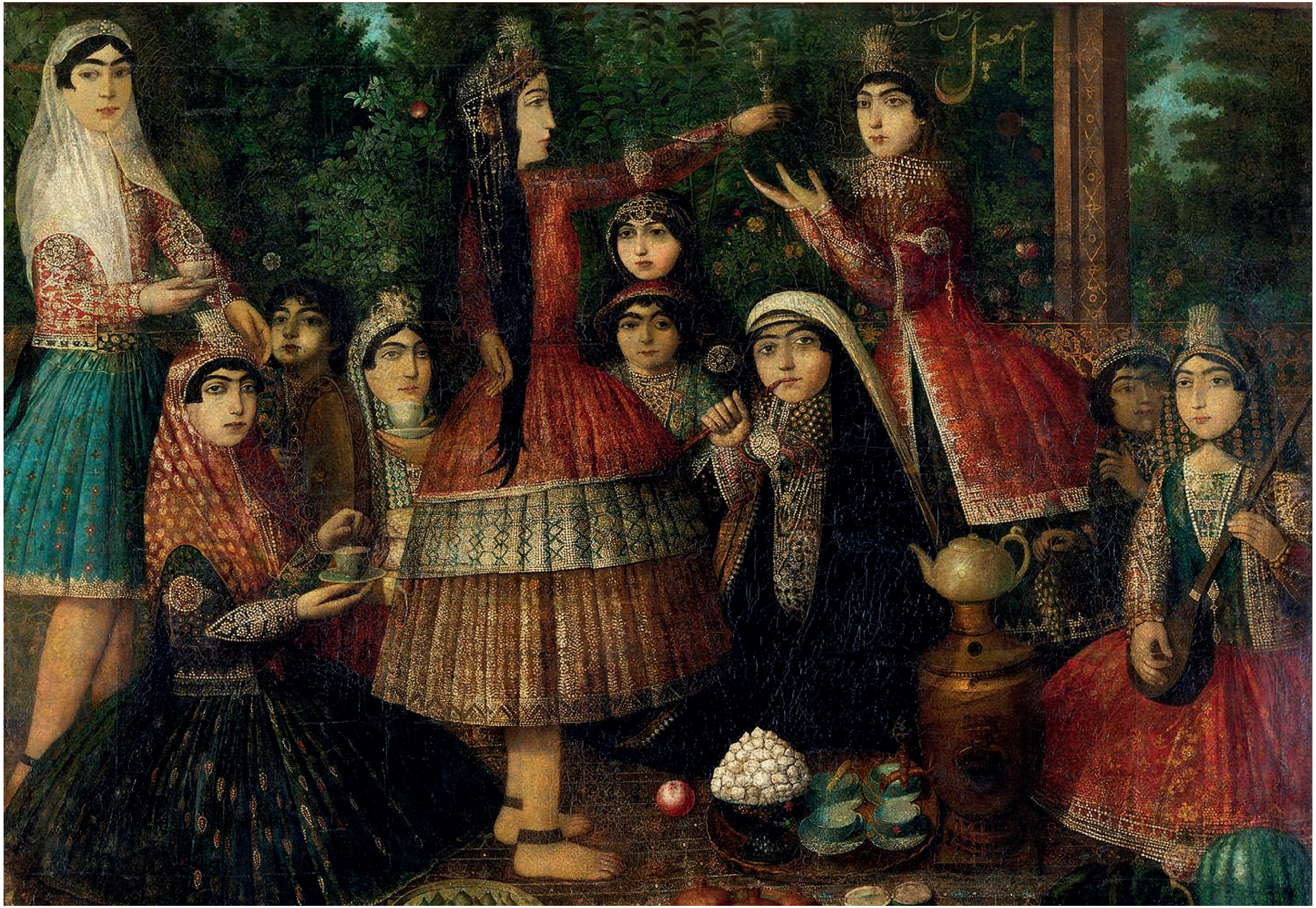
Portrait of Nasir al-Din Shah

1856

Signed by Muhammad Isfahani
Iran, probably Tehran
Opaque watercolours on paper, 45 × 34 cm
British Library, Or. ms. 4938, folio 4

In Iran, people traditionally sat at floor level, and the ruler's throne, if used, was a relatively low platform. In the Qajar period, however, chairs of a European type began to be used in royal portraits, which was one way of indicating that Iranian rulers were equal in dignity to their European peers. Here Nasir al-Din Shah is shown sitting on a sofa in court dress but in a relaxed pose. The painting was almost certainly based on a photograph, and the pose assumed may have been the result of the long exposure time.

Julian Raby, *Qajar Portraits* (London and New York 1999), no. 124



202

Ladies Around a Samovar

probably 1870s

Signed by Isma'il Jalayir
Tehran, Iran
Oil on canvas, 156.5 × 213 cm
V&A: P.56-1941

The painting shows members of a great man's harem gathered on a terrace that overlooks a park with huge trees. The women are taking tea, smoking and listening to the music of a stringed instrument called the *tar* and a tambourine. The painting's dream-like, melancholy air is characteristic of the work of Isma'il Jalayir (active 1862–89). Here, though, this atmosphere is partly due to the stillness of the women's faces. These figures were probably based on photographs, which required a long exposure time. The women may well have been in the harem of Nasir al-Din Shah, who was a keen photographer.

Layla Diba with Maryam Ekhtiar (eds), *Royal Persian Paintings. The Qajar Epoch, 1785–1925* (Brooklyn, NY and London), 1998, no. 86

203

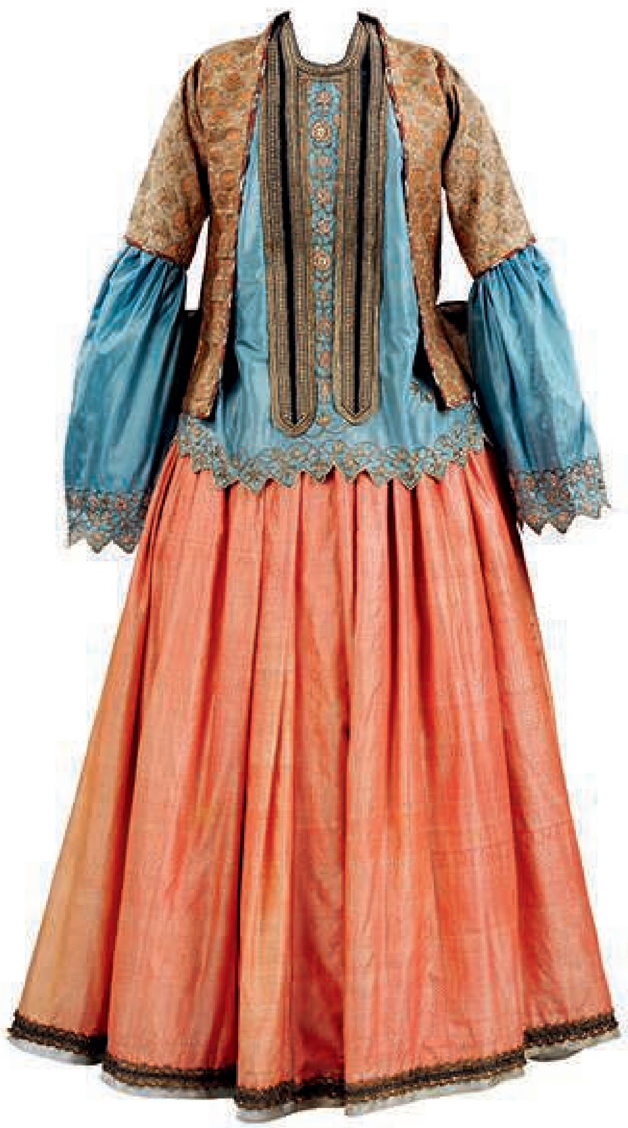
Woman's jacket, blouse and skirt

1800–50

Iran
Jacket of silk and metal thread, printed cotton lining, woollen trim; blouse of silk embroidered with metal thread, silk and pearls, trimmed with needle lace, partly lined with silk, the neck and double front opening faced with braid of metal thread and silk, trimmed with lace; the skirt of silk lined with unbleached cotton, the hem trimmed with silk and metal thread over silk padding; lengths 59 cm (jacket), 67 cm (blouse), 100.5 cm (skirt)
V&A: 730-1884, T.57&A-1979

The skirt is very full, being made of ten-loom widths of coral-coloured silk, gathered at the waist by a drawstring. The blouse has a pair of long vertical openings at the front. Slit down to the waist, with an embroidered panel between them, they are attached to the neck by a braid button and loop.

Full skirts and blouses with two openings at the front appear in paintings of court ladies from the second quarter of the 19th century, and these examples were reportedly owned by Sir Justin Shiel, who was British ambassador in Tehran from 1844 to 1854.



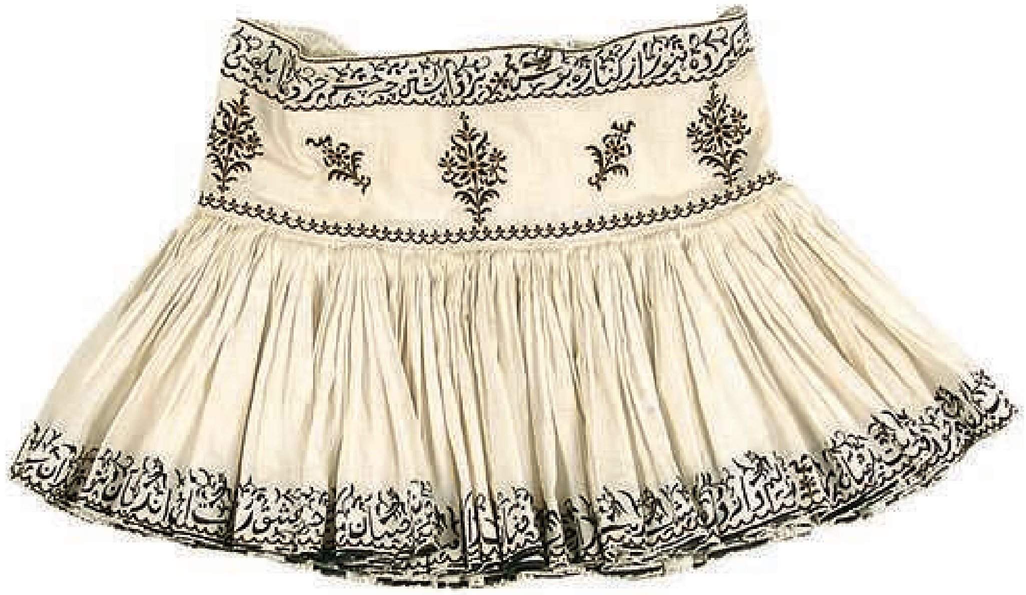
204

Woman's short skirt (*shaliteh*)

1870–1900

Iran
Cotton embroidered with silk, length 38 cm
Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, Paris, 71.1966.128.122

This skirt is only one-third the length of skirts from earlier in the 19th century (see cat. 203, for example) and is evidence of the gradual rise in hemlines, the most striking change in women's fashion at court over the course of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign. This rise seems to have mirrored the increasingly short skirts worn by European ballerinas on the stage, from the première of *La Sylphide* in 1832 to that of *Swan Lake* in 1877 (see pp. 265–6).



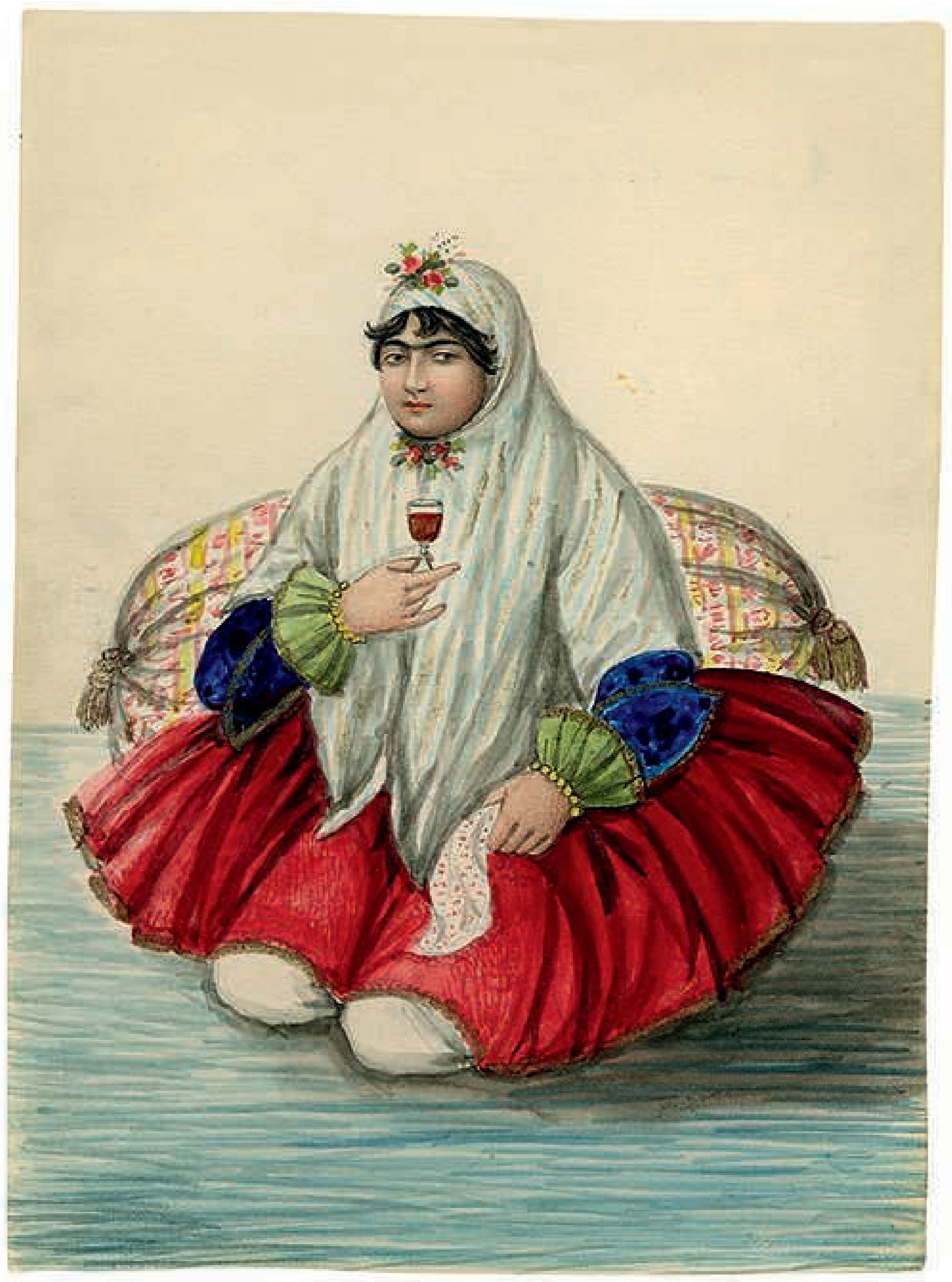
205

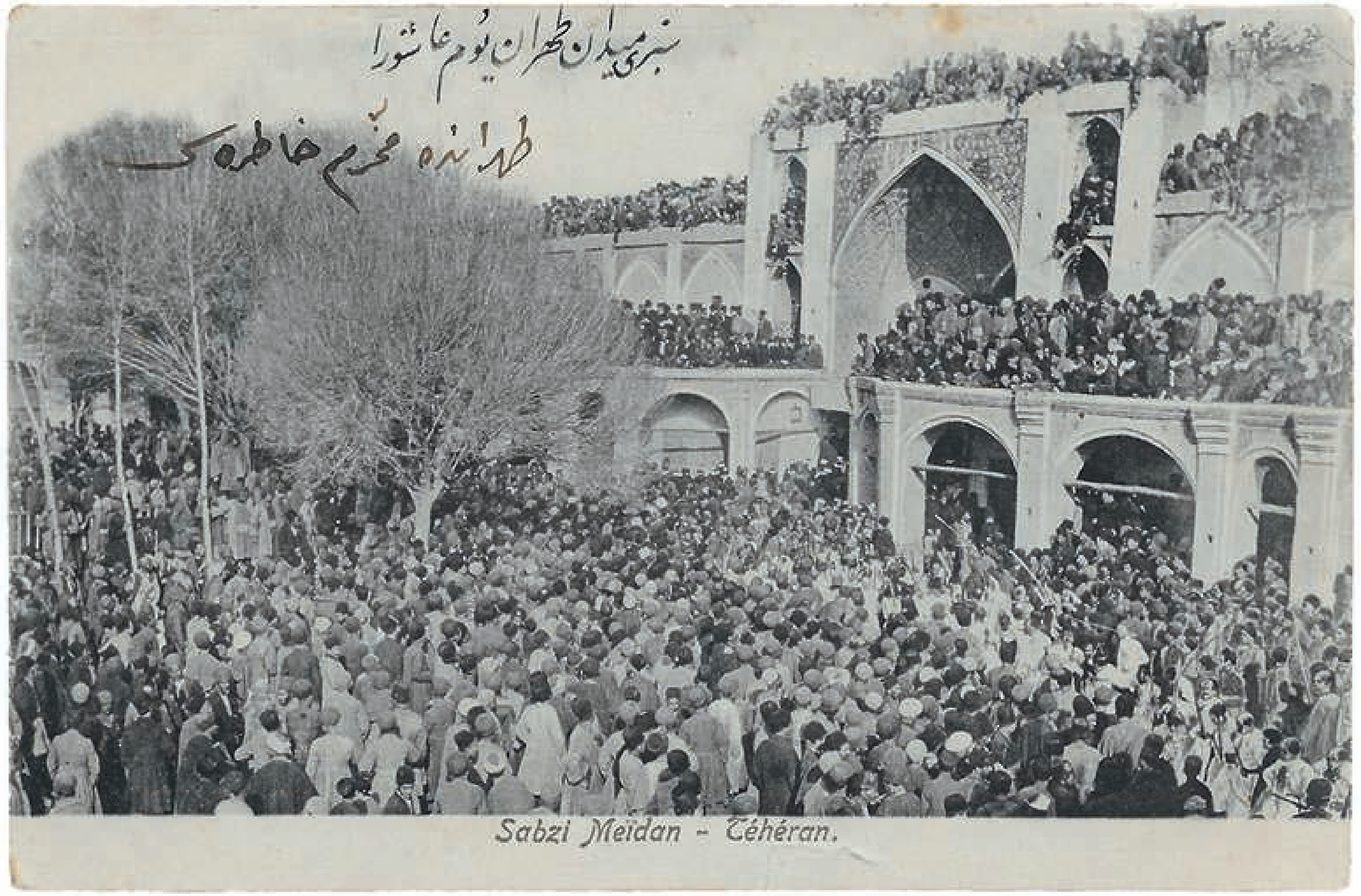
Qajar Woman Dressed for a Festive Occasion

1850–1900

Iran
Watercolour and ink on paper, 15.3 × 11.3 cm
British Museum, 2006,0314,0.19

This painting shows how changes in Iranian women's fashions were communicated to outsiders in the 19th century, for this type of modestly sized watercolour was produced in considerable quantities, in large part for sale to foreign tourists. The subject of the painting wears a short skirt closer to the white *shaliteh* (cat. 204) than the bell-shaped skirts in *Ladies Around a Samovar* (cat. 202).




سبزی میدان طهران یوم عاشورا
Sabzi Meïdan - Téhéran.

206

Photograph of a mass gathering on Ashura

about 1906

Iran
Printed on card, 9 × 14 cm
Kimia Foundation

The Qajar monarchy opposed any proposal to limit their absolute authority, and reform of the way in which Iran was governed only came through a popular revolt. The Constitutional Revolution began in 1905 and concluded with the final defeat of the forces of reaction in 1911. By this period, photography had escaped the confines of the palace and had assumed a wider role in Iranian society. It was therefore available to promote the Revolution in the provinces, communicating the scale of public support in the capital and relating events through the mass production of postcards.

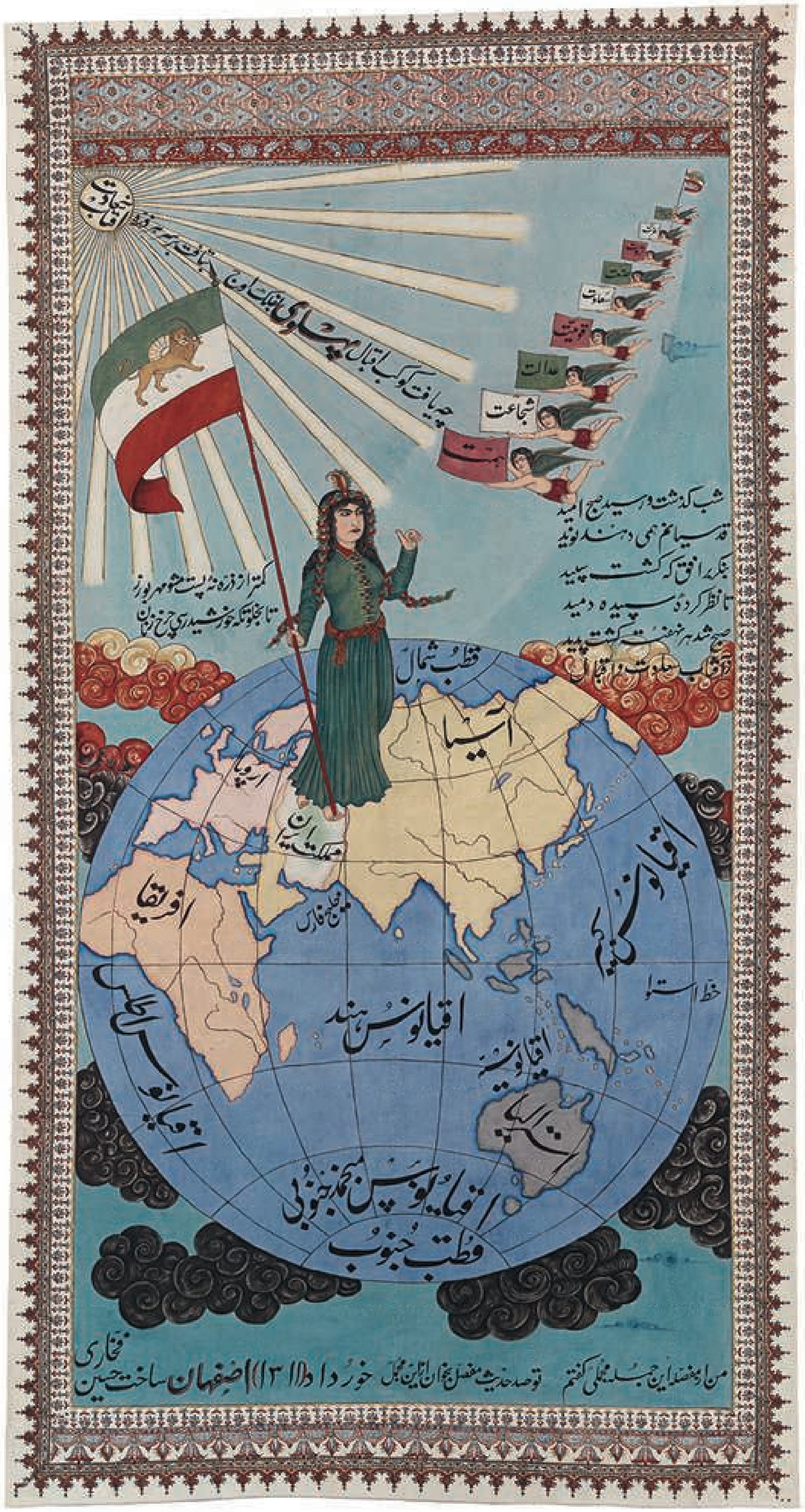
207

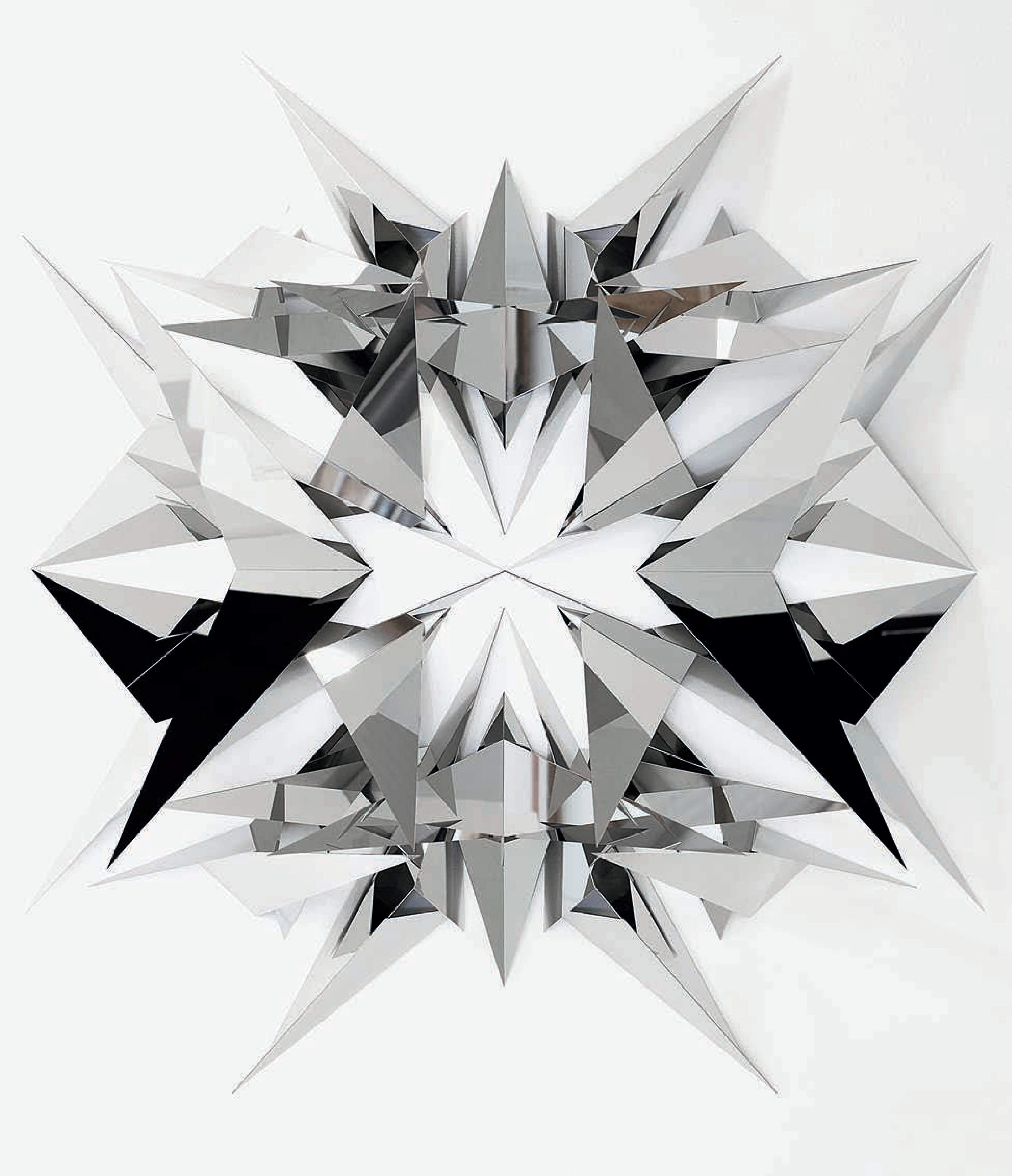
Political banner

1932

Signed by Husein Fakhkhari
Isfahan, Iran
Cotton, block-printed and painted,
283 × 150.6 cm
V&A: ME.1-2003

Reza Khan's first great political act was the staging of a *coup d'état* on 21 February 1921, when he became commander-in-chief of the army. In 1923 he assumed the role of prime minister, and in 1925 he became head of state as Reza Shah. His modernizing agenda is set out on this political banner, with principles such as nationalism (*qowmiyat*) held aloft by putti. The production technique and many elements in the design are traditional, but the female figure representing Iran is new. Despite her modest clothing, her appearance must have been shocking in a provincial city such as Isfahan, which may explain why the poster shows no sign of use.





9

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY IRAN

Ina Sarikhani Sandmann

Dramatic changes in early twentieth-century Iran radically challenged the political, economic and social structure of the country. The Constitutional Revolution of 1905 onwards, resulting in a parliament and a constitution, the military coup of 1921 leading to the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, and the discovery of oil, initially in Masjid-e Soleiman in the south-west province of Khuzestan in 1908, were all highly significant. Changes were further propelled by Iran's shah, Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–41), whose programme of modernization often employed foreign technical expertise: investment in infrastructure, education and healthcare; rapid urbanization; and political and economic reform. His vision extended even to dress codes: the veil was banned, and turbans became the preserve of clergy. Ever more Iranians travelled abroad for education and inspiration as the nation became more outward-looking. It was the dawn of a new era.

However, relationships between Iran and the West remained ambiguous, since positive influence came at the price of economic exploitation. The 1941–6 occupation of neutral Iran[1] by an Anglo-Soviet alliance in order to secure military supply lines and access to oil – whose quite differing ideological stances rubbed off on the domestic intelligentsia[2] – occurred at enormous national cost.[3] Later, in 1953, Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh, who had been democratically elected two years earlier, was ousted by a coup led by Britain and the United States when he nationalized Iran's oil industry.[4] These interferences by foreign powers fired intellectual circles in Iran to re-engage in ideological discussions on the nature of sovereignty. Republican, democratic and leftist criticism dominated, alongside – particularly after the coup – a rising tide of a firebrand, populist Islam seen as an antidote to western corruption.[5]

Innovation in the arts was also considerable. Painting and photography had been taught at universities since 1860 and 1861 respectively, and its approach later revised by legendary artist Kamal ol-Molk, head of the School of Fine Arts in Tehran at the turn of the century. Under his direction artistic production moved away from traditions of abstraction and conceptualism to embrace a European-inspired realism.[6] His death in 1940, and the establishment of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran in the same year, under the supervision of archaeologist and architect André Godard and based on the École des beaux-arts system of ateliers,[7] epitomised the new positioning of art in Iran: technically innovative, engaged with the international art scene, intellectually involved. The age of patronage was over: art became democratic.

This period witnessed a fertile explosion of exhibitions in Tehran, for example, the 1946 Iran-Soviet Exhibition, and artist-led galleries and cultural societies such as Jalil Ziapour's radical arts organization Korous-eh Jangi (Fighting Rooster), Mahmud Javadipour's Apadana Gallery and Marcos Grigorian's Galerie Esthétique.[8] By the early 1950s over 700 newspapers existed in Iran. A rapid flurry of translations on a wide range of subjects from the East, Russia and the West stimulated creativity, with artistic, literary and political circles overlapping. Cinema flourished both as entertainment and art, and national television was launched in 1958. The Ministry of Arts and Culture, increasingly guided by the liberal avant-garde vision of Queen Farah Diba (b. 1938), established new institutions throughout Iran, including Tehran's College of Decorative Arts in 1961 and in 1977 the Museum of Contemporary Art, which housed the largest collection of western contemporary art outside Europe and America.[9]

There was ambition in these projects. In 1958 Grigorian headed the first Tehran Biennale, which would showcase Iranian art in a thematic and technical way, locating Iran within Asia, concentrating especially on its neighbours from Turkey to India. Winners went on to participate in international biennales, such as those in Paris and Venice. In 1967 the Tehran Biennale was replaced by the Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis. Strongly focused on the performing arts, and set against the backdrop of the ancient site of Persepolis and in Shiraz itself (fig. 18) it provided a platform for traditional and contemporary Iranian music, dance and theatre, as well as performing artists from the Americas, Africa and Asia. The festival reoriented Iran to the centre of an international arts scene, reclaiming the post-colonial discourse. Often wildly experimental, and publicly broadcast on television, it became a target of anti-monarchical Islamic rhetoric.[10]

Indeed, the political backdrop was one of increasing protest and escalating repression. Social reforms had alienated not only the clergy and *bazaaris* (the mercantile trading classes), but also landowners. The extravagance of Muhammad Reza Shah's celebration of 2,500 years of empire, held at Persepolis in 1971, attended by heads of state and royalty and televised internationally, offended many. Feverish debates now involved the elite, bored by the self-aggrandizing Shah. Satirical newspapers, such as *Towfiq*, and graphic artists, such as Ardeshir Mohasses, gave wry expression to widespread political dissatisfaction. Persecuted, interrogated and punished, ever more Iranians went into exile.

By the late 1970s this state of unrest was out of control. The unexpected speed and success of the Islamic Revolution has been well documented elsewhere.[11] A failing economy despite the oil industry, a disenfranchised population, a silenced lay opposition, the strength of the pulpit, mass telephony, television and publishing, and a cancer-stricken monarch, all contributed to this end. In brief, between mid-1978 and February 1979 the Pahlavi dynasty and with it the Iranian monarchy fell, and, in time, nationalists, republicans, constitutional monarchists, Marxists and urban intelligentsia would give way to the victor: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The success of Khomeini (Supreme Leader 1979–89) lay not in a retreat to a romanticized past. Instead, it was due to revolutionary innovation: a marriage, in the Shah's own apocryphal words, between 'the Red and the Black,'[12] that is, Marxists and clerics. While no Marxist, Khomeini had read and taught western philosophy in his early years, and was astute enough to make use of leftist methods.[13] Traditionally trained, Khomeini's radicalism emerged when, as an appointed Ayatollah, he disrupted centuries of conventional respect between religion and state by stating that government and society should be conducted according to Islamic law, and that a Jurist, a *velayat-e faqih*, should provide guardianship over the people.[14] This heady mix of reinterpretation and a mystical reverence for a Shi'a past led to a new vision with Islam at its core, and a messianic Shi'a Islam at that.[15] Within a year of his return, there was a referendum, a constitution and a new parliament, a Guardian Council and Assembly of Experts.[16] These were supported by the ancillary, leftist-inspired, tools of the Revolutionary Guards, the Revolutionary Courts and the dreaded *komitehs*, self-imposed committees in charge of moral behaviour.[17] Not only the elite but also hundreds of thousands of middle-class Iranians went into exile.[18]

The Islamic Republic was reinforced by the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). Saddam Hussein attempted an invasion of the oil fields of Khuzestan in September 1980, little suspecting that early territorial gains would give way to eight years of entrenched warfare, cost half-a-million lives, and end in stalemate.[19] The experience was defining for the new regime. Firstly, the support that Iraq received from both Arab neighbours and western powers, fearful of the contagion of Islamic revolution even as Saddam used chemical weapons against his own minorities as well as Iranians, consolidated a feeling of isolation and self-preservation in Iran. Secondly, the war enabled the fledgling Islamic Republic to expand its armies and bureaucracies in 'defence' of the nation, including the military division of the Revolutionary Guards bolstered by enormous cadres of volunteers, many of them very young. Graveyards of martyrs sprang up in every city.[20] The nationalist rhetoric propagated by Khomeini was reinforced by trauma, and blame was externalized to the Other.

The Islamic Revolution, and the Iran-Iraq War that followed, defined the beginning of a new epoch. Great photojournalists bore witness to these tumultuous changes, including Abbas (fig. 17), Reza, Manoocher Deghati, Kaveh and Hengameh Golestan, Bahman Jalali and Rana Javadi, and Abbas Kiarostami. Reportage would infiltrate Iranian visual culture for years to come, as if news photographs and film footage had become imprinted on the nation through the work of cinematographers and artists from this period onwards.

The rupture caused by these cataclysmic events was severe and adjustment harsh. Since the 1990s there have been considerable attempts to normalize the Islamic Republic. The free-market years of President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's stewardship (1989–97) were followed by the moderate leadership of Muhammad Khatami (1997–2005). The former Minister of Culture headed a great plan of liberal internal reform, alongside the opening up of

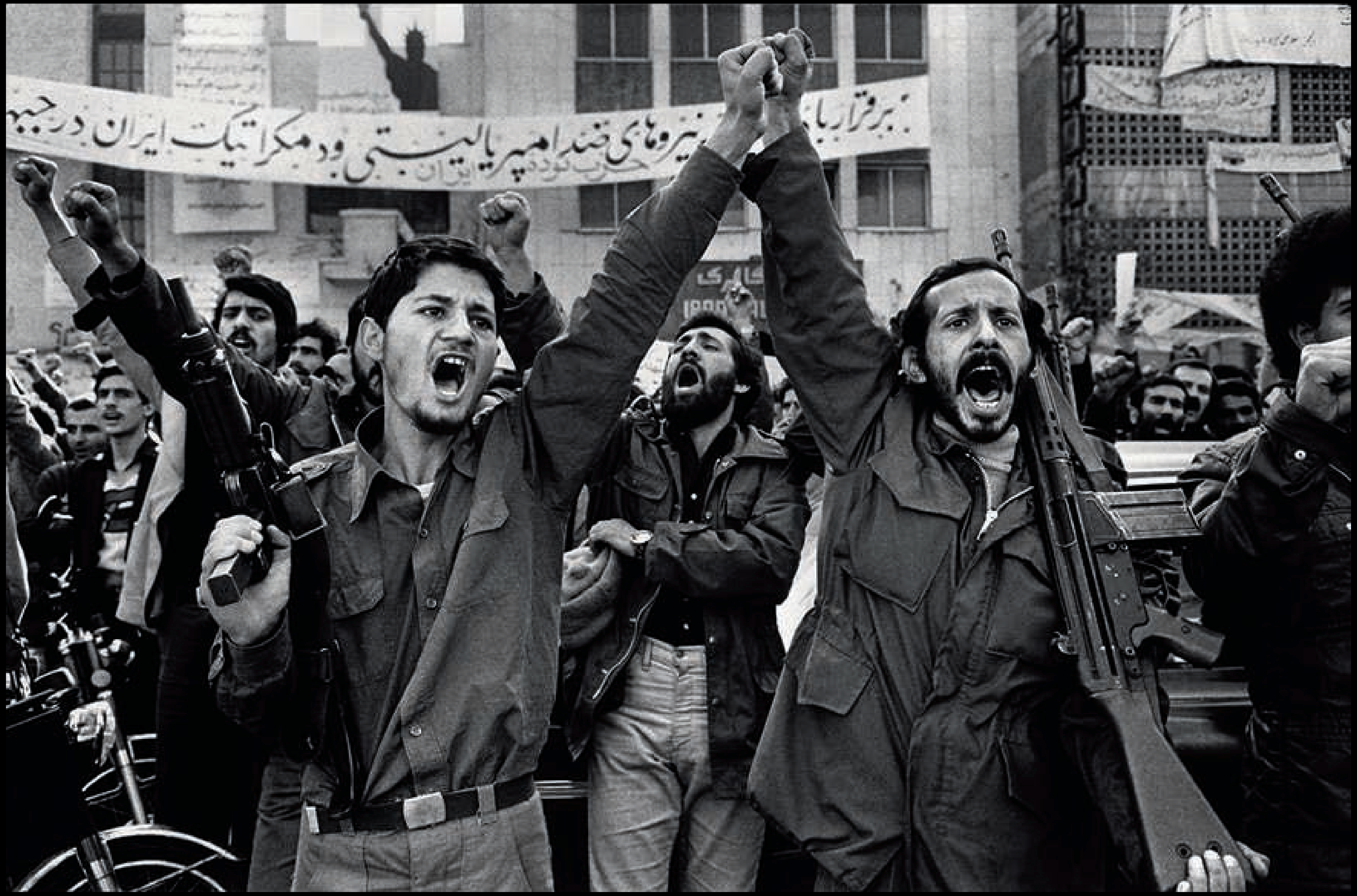

برقرار با
یروهای ضد امپریالیستی و دمکراتیک ایران در جبه
حزب توده ایران

Fig. 17
Abbas, Armed militants outside the United States Embassy, where diplomats are held hostage, Tehran, 1979; photograph from the series *Iran Diary*

international relationships. The economy, bolstered by the world's third largest oil and natural gas reserves,[21] enabled huge infrastructure programmes, as well as technological, social and educational reforms. The populist vision of the Revolution especially benefited rural communities and the lower classes. By the year 2000 over 94 per cent of the population had access to medicine and safe water – no mean feat in this vast and geographically diverse country. Literacy below the age of 30 was nearly 100 per cent, and women made up 63 per cent of university students and 45 per cent of doctors. Mortality rates were the best in the Middle East.[22] The population explosion that occurred after the Revolution, rising from 35 million to 80 million, has since slowed down as a result.

It is of note that the Islamic Republic is not iconoclastic. Initially, statues were torn down and street names changed as a means of sanitizing the royal past. Some early extremist calls for the destruction of ancient monuments, such as those by the cleric Sadegh Khalkhali for the bulldozing of Persepolis,[23] were opposed both by the local inhabitants and the determinedly nationalistic Khomeini himself, who forbade such acts.[24] Instead, symbols of power were reinvented. For example, the Shahyad Tower (its name means literally the 'memory of kings'), inaugurated in 1971 by the Shah, was simply renamed the Azadi (or 'freedom') Tower, and remains an iconic image of Tehran today. Ministers of State now sit in former royal palaces. Despite conservative dress codes, figurative representation proliferates visual culture, both high and low. One can even walk into a bazaar and buy a carpet depicting the Prophet Muhammad. The important work of museums has continued, through research, conferences and publications. A burgeoning commercial art scene has given voice to a young generation of artists and garnered the interest of savvy collectors, both at home and abroad.

However, the battle for political and ideological control in Iran remains vibrant and often violent. Khatami's attempts at reform and international re-engagement were hindered by the hardline Guardian Council, whose members saw their domestic support rise after US President George W. Bush's 'Axis of Evil' speech, which gave credence to notions of western untrustworthiness and destabilized reformist ambitions. Despite the election of the hardline president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad (r. 2005–13), it became increasingly clear that Iranians, especially the urban youth, were not seduced by the vision of their leaders, but wanted 'liberalisation, democracy and accountability'.[25] The millions who turned out to protest against apparent election fraud in 2009, in what would become known as the Green Revolution, bore witness to that.[26]

Internationally, too, relations remain volatile. The deal spearheaded by Iranian president Hassan Rouhani (r. 2013–present) and US President Barack Obama in 2015 held the promise of halting Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for the partial lifting of sanctions. However, the hoped-for economic expansion did not materialize, largely due to key American restrictions that made international banking almost impossible for Iranians. When President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018, citing his hopes that hardening sanctions would lead to 'regime change', both the domestic economy and international relations plummeted.

As this exhibition opens, it is the year 1399, according to the Iranian calendar.[27] Over the last century Iran has witnessed the dying embers of the Qajar dynasty, the rise and fall of the Pahlavis, the coup that toppled the government of Mossadegh, the Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The decades of rebellion since, including the Green Revolution and protests in 2020, hint that all is not settled. The Covid-19 outbreak, brutal in Iran in its earlier stages, again raised questions of trust in authority. But despite all differences, Iranian identity and a sense of belonging remain startlingly strong, due to a common language, geography, history, culture and literature, the Shi'a religion, an awareness of its ancient past and the experiences of recent decades. As the year draws to a close, many now ask what awaits Iran and Iranians, at home and abroad, in the fifteenth century. For, in the Sufi words echoed by artist Hossein Valamanesh, 'This will also pass' (cat. 235).

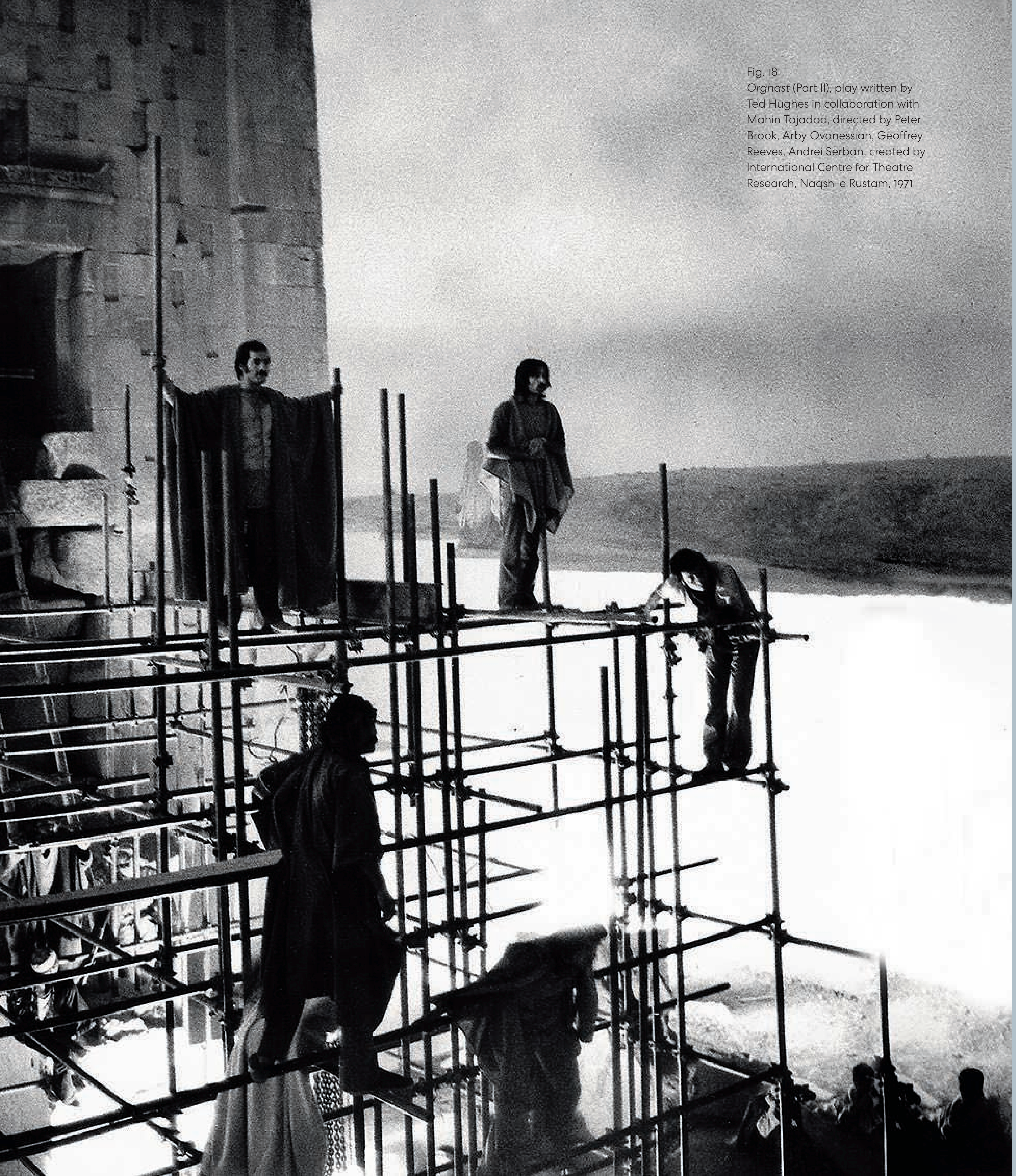


Fig. 18
Orghast (Part II), play written by Ted Hughes in collaboration with Mahin Tajadod, directed by Peter Brook, Arby Ovanessian, Geoffrey Reeves, Andrei Serban, created by International Centre for Theatre Research, Naqsh-e Rustam, 1971

MID-CENTURY MODERNISMS

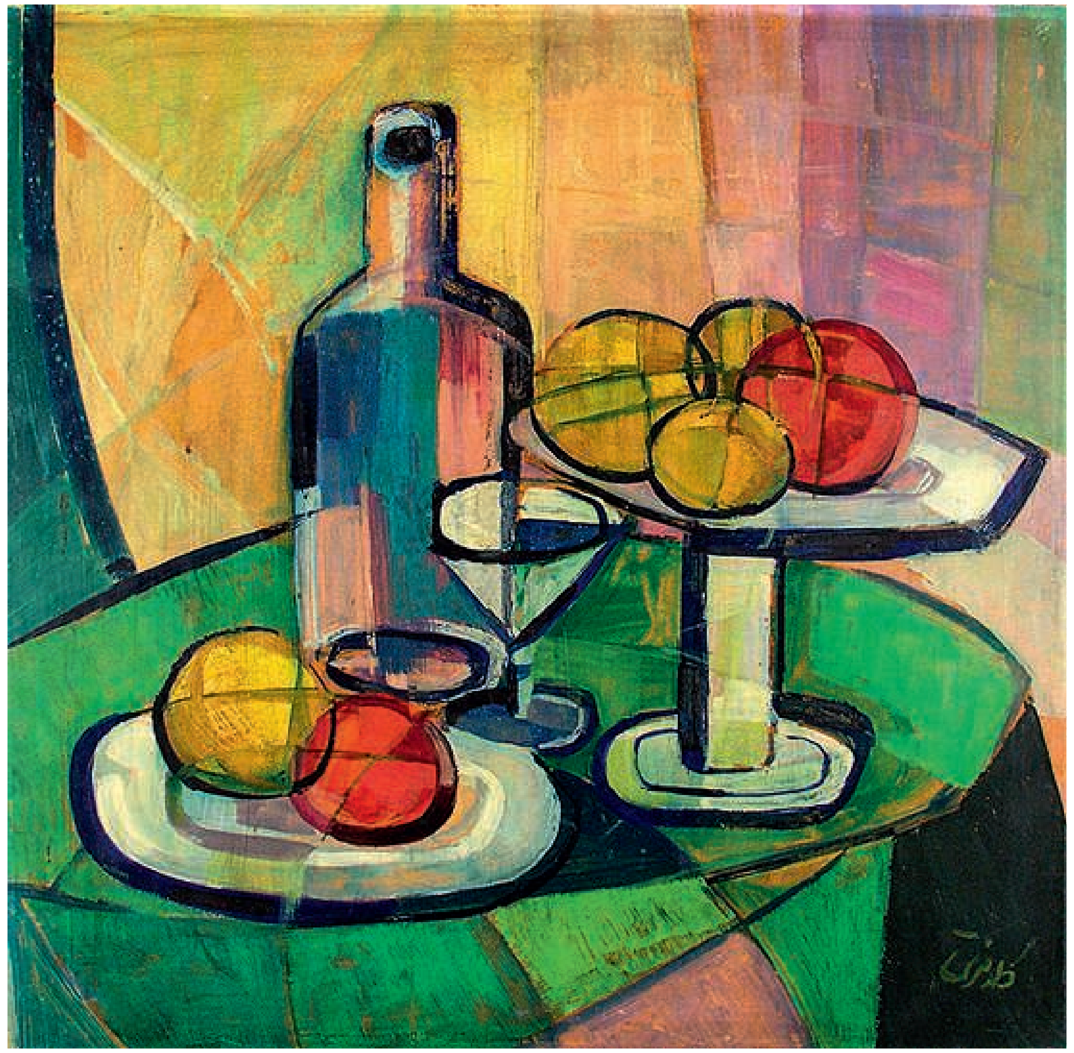
After the Second World War, Iran saw an explosion of different artistic styles. A vogue for abstraction and Cubism was spurred on by foreign teachers at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Tehran and through study abroad, where these forms of painting were experiencing a revival, especially in liberated, nationalistic Paris. Parviz Kalantari's early untitled painting expresses this trend (cat. 208). However, questions of location and authenticity – encouraged by dynamic intellectual, literary and political debate – pervaded the art world too. Long before the critic Jalal Al-e Ahmad coined the term *Garbzadeghi*, to identify that fear of loss of identity through a rush to imitate western modes, when 'the Iranian intellectual turns insane, or a heroin addict, or a phony, or a modernist, or crazy, or *westoxicated*',[28] artists had begun to look inwards. 'One must be of one's time,' stated artist and gallerist Marcos Grigorian. The debate led to profound contemplation and divergent schools of modernism.[29]

Sirak Melkonian's *Two Veiled Women*, depicting figures from the impoverished Aziz Khan neighbourhood in southern Tehran, is one such localizing rendition (cat. 209).[30] Other artists, such as Charles-Hossein Zenderoudi, Mansour Ghandriz, Parviz Tanavoli and even Siah Armajani in his early years, would experiment with native and found themes and media. A loose movement became known as the Saqqa-khaneh school, a term referring to the public water fountains whose practical use was overlaid with mystical religious references including the battle of Karbala, so important to Shi'as (see p. 151). However, these were definitively not religious artists. In using traditional, religious and non-religious motifs – including calligraphy, talismanic tables, religious symbols and superstitious signs – to build complex artistic constructs, they were playing with their native archive. Critic Karim Emami would come to label this trend as Iran's Pop Art.[31] Other artists, such as Massoud Arabshahi (cat. 210) and Maliheh Afnan, looked back further to the traditions of ancient Iran, to cuneiform, archaeology and Zoroastrianism.[32]

Alternate experiments in abstraction and the use of different media are exemplified in the work of two female artists. Behjat Sadr created abstract rhythms in oil that evoke landscape and natural resources, the ebb and flow of power in an Iran that she found dystopic (cat. 217). Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian utilized the architectural tradition of mirror work, once used in palaces and shrines, to create sculptural works of art that exemplify the tense relationship between beauty and conceptual art (cat. 216). Both artists exhibit a highly individualized method, with a focus on reworking material traditions.

As the 1960s and 1970s progressed, intellectual activities fed each other. Cinema and music, theatre, dance and performance art, the Biennales and the Shiraz-Persepolis Festival were joined by graphic arts, satirical newspapers and progressive, experimental television productions, viewed against a backdrop of increasing political volatility (see pp. 278–9). This combination of increased platforms for artistic voices together with more travel abroad and additional visitors to Iran led to a frenzied cultural milieu, which encouraged artistic pluralism. Sohrab Sepehri looked East: his landscapes and abstractions are inspired by Buddhist silence and contemplation (cat. 212). Other artists, including Bahman Mohasses (cat. 213), Leyly Matine-Daftary (cat. 218) and Parvaneh Etemadi, who had studied in Europe and then returned to Iran, explored art that was more nuanced and subtle in its appropriation of different tools, techniques and identities. Mohasses's metamorphic, displaced paintings are a critical voice, echoing an alienated trope that became increasingly articulated during the 1970s.

The Revolution brought a dramatic end to this vibrant epoch, caught between the Second World War and the end of monarchy. The artistic experimentation across many forms of media, the excitement at the promise of oil wealth, the increased international standing of Iranians at home, and those visiting from elsewhere, has been acclaimed by many and also vilified by critics who deemed it immoral and decadent. But these artists remain celebrated for their radical approach and are still iconic today.



208

Still Life

about 1959

Parviz Kalantari (1931–2016)

Oil on canvas, 57 × 57 cm

The Farjam Collection

Born in Zanjan in northern Iran, Parviz Kalantari became a graduate and then teacher of fine arts at the University of Tehran. *Still Life*, executed early in his career, epitomizes the Cubist revival that occurred both in Paris and in Iran after the Second World War. Kalantari's work evolved and he went on to play a major role in the domestic Land Art movement, part of an environmentally concerned international trend using found objects – most notably materials of the natural world – in art, and which gathered momentum alongside the Saqqa-khaneh school (see p. 283). Rejecting the commercial, Kalantari chose to use local materials such as adobe and thatch in his canvases. Unlike his peer Marcos Grigorian (cat. 211), who also experimented with environmental themes, Kalantari's work was less abstract and more suggestive of figurative forms and landscapes. A writer and educator as well as an artist, he later died in Tehran.

209

Two Veiled Women

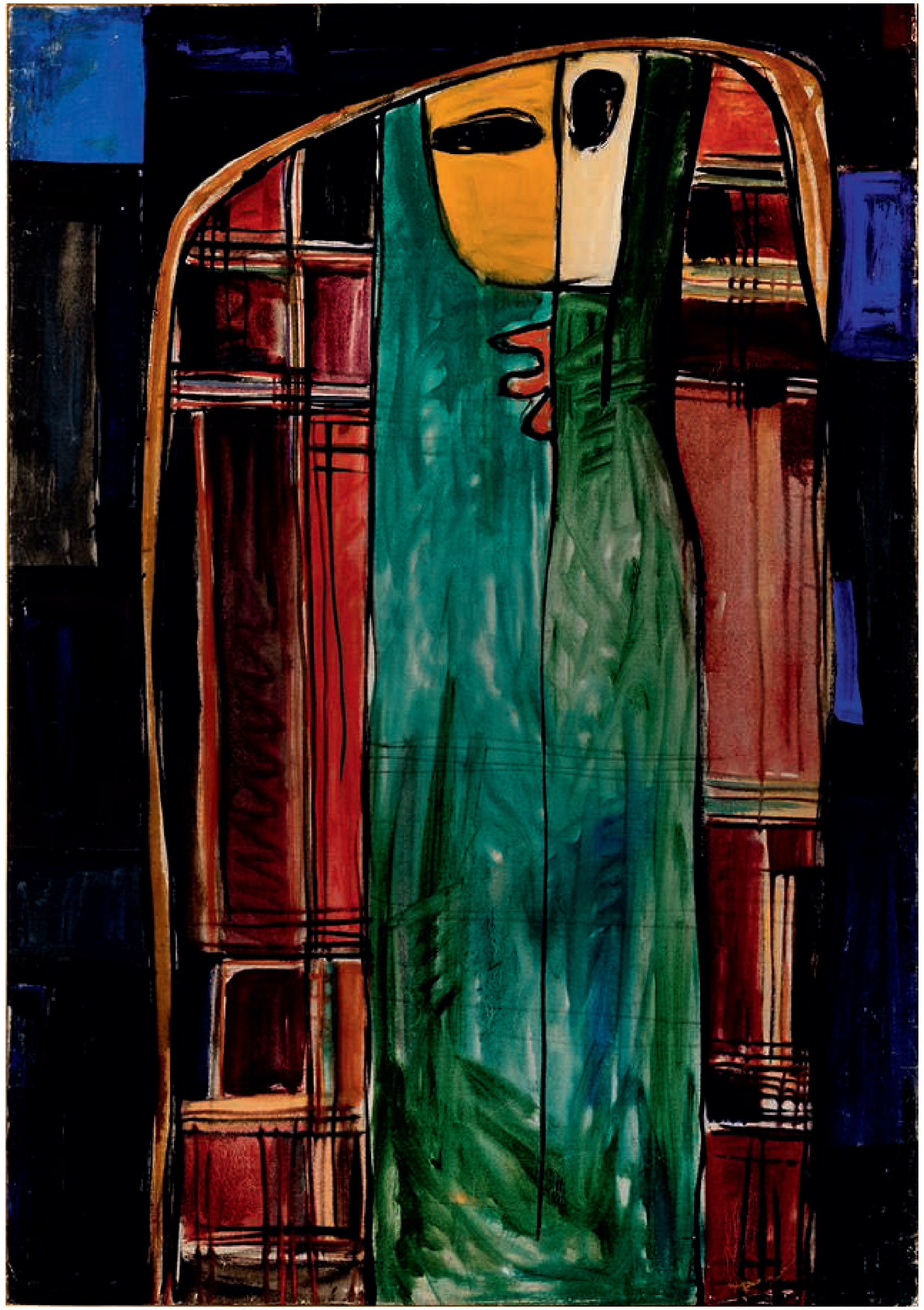
1957

Sirak Melkonian (b. 1931)

Oil on canvas, 127 × 83 cm

Private collection

Sirak Melkonian's radical departure from his classical European training, under Russian émigré artists,[33] is illustrated in this painting from 1957, one of a series completed after visiting impoverished neighbourhoods in southern Tehran. This abstracted, stolen moment of gossip between two women, wrapped in the traditional robe, the *chador*, conveys the native themes that had gained momentum among the Iranian avant-garde. The flattened planes on the canvas, and the almost unfinished feeling evoked by the swift application of colour, articulate his experimentation in Expressionism, and hint at his future interest in nature and the melding of landscape with the body. The painting would win first prize at the inaugural Tehran Biennale in 1958 and the Paris Biennale in 1959. Melkonian became a leading member of the more conceptual and performative Azad (Free) art group in the 1970s.



210

Farvahar

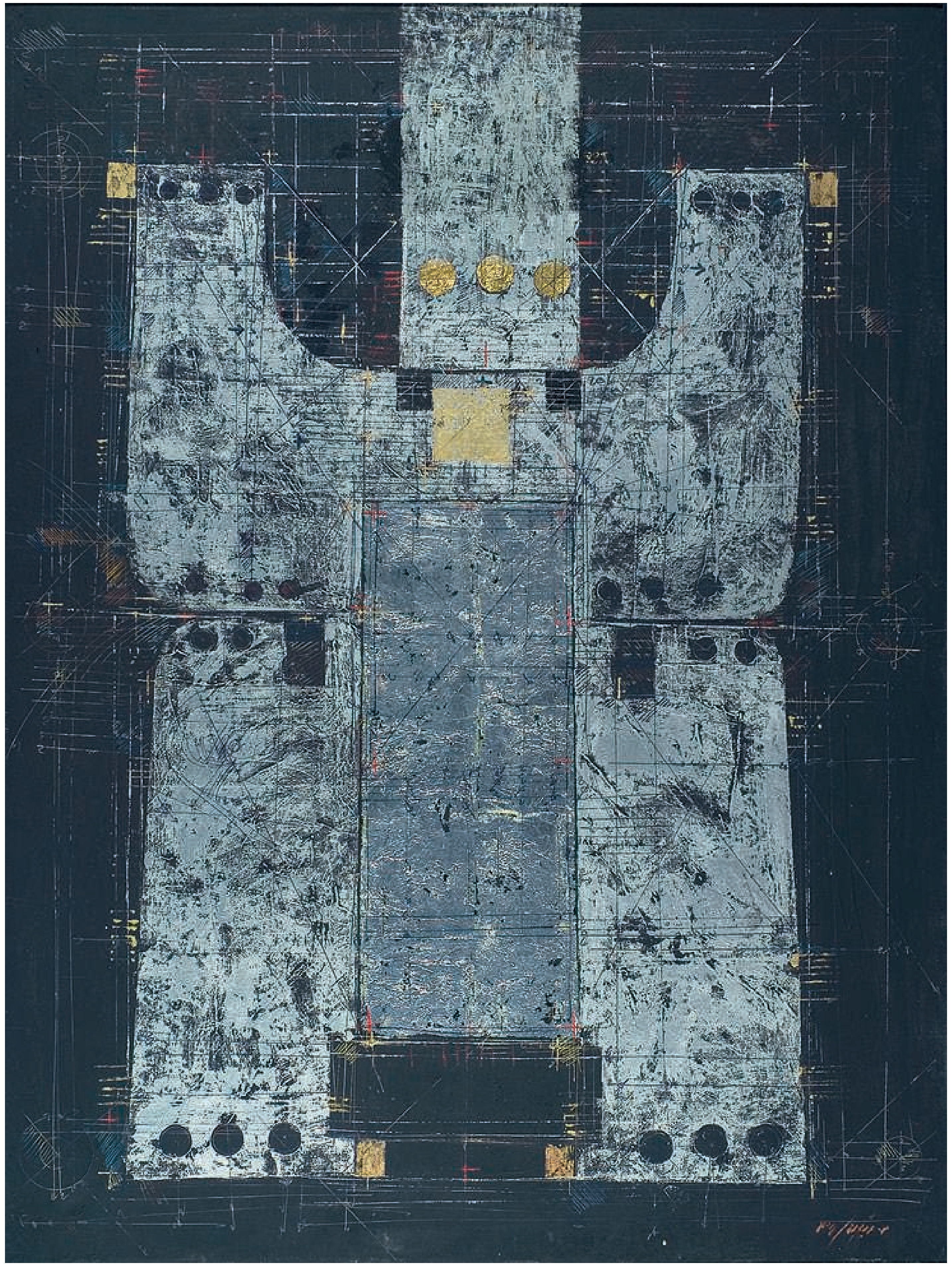
1977

Massoud Arabshahi (1935–2019)

Oil, acrylic, gold, silver and pen
on canvas, 180 × 135 cm

Mohammad Afkhami Collection

Part of his *Avesta* series,[34] this ambitious work, monumental in scale, is a mature rendition of the artist's intellectual obsessions and artistic skill. Having studied painting, sculpture and interior design at the College of Decorative Arts in Tehran, Arabshahi was associated with the Saqqa-khaneh movement, whose artists re-appropriated religious and spiritual symbols and gave them an abstract, modernist stance. However, his interests lay not in Shi'ism or calligraphy or Pop culture but in the ancient world. The *farvahar* is the symbol associated with the divine in Zoroastrianism: the elevation of the soul to higher purpose. Here it is deconstructed and given almost architectural dimensions. Embellished with silver and gold, it is also an example of Arabshahi's preoccupation with material experimentation.



211

Creation of the Planet (from the *Earthworks* series)

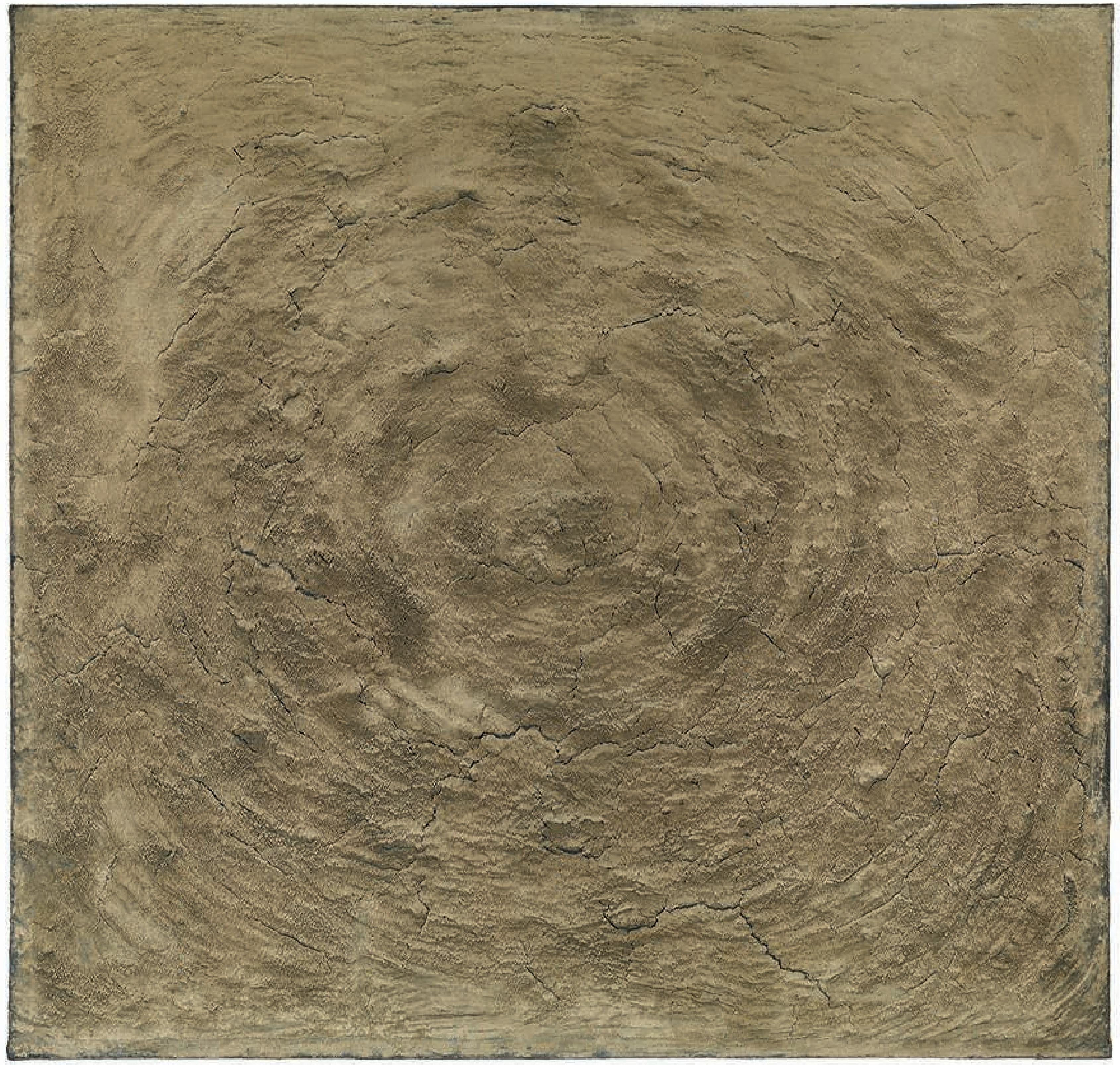
1963

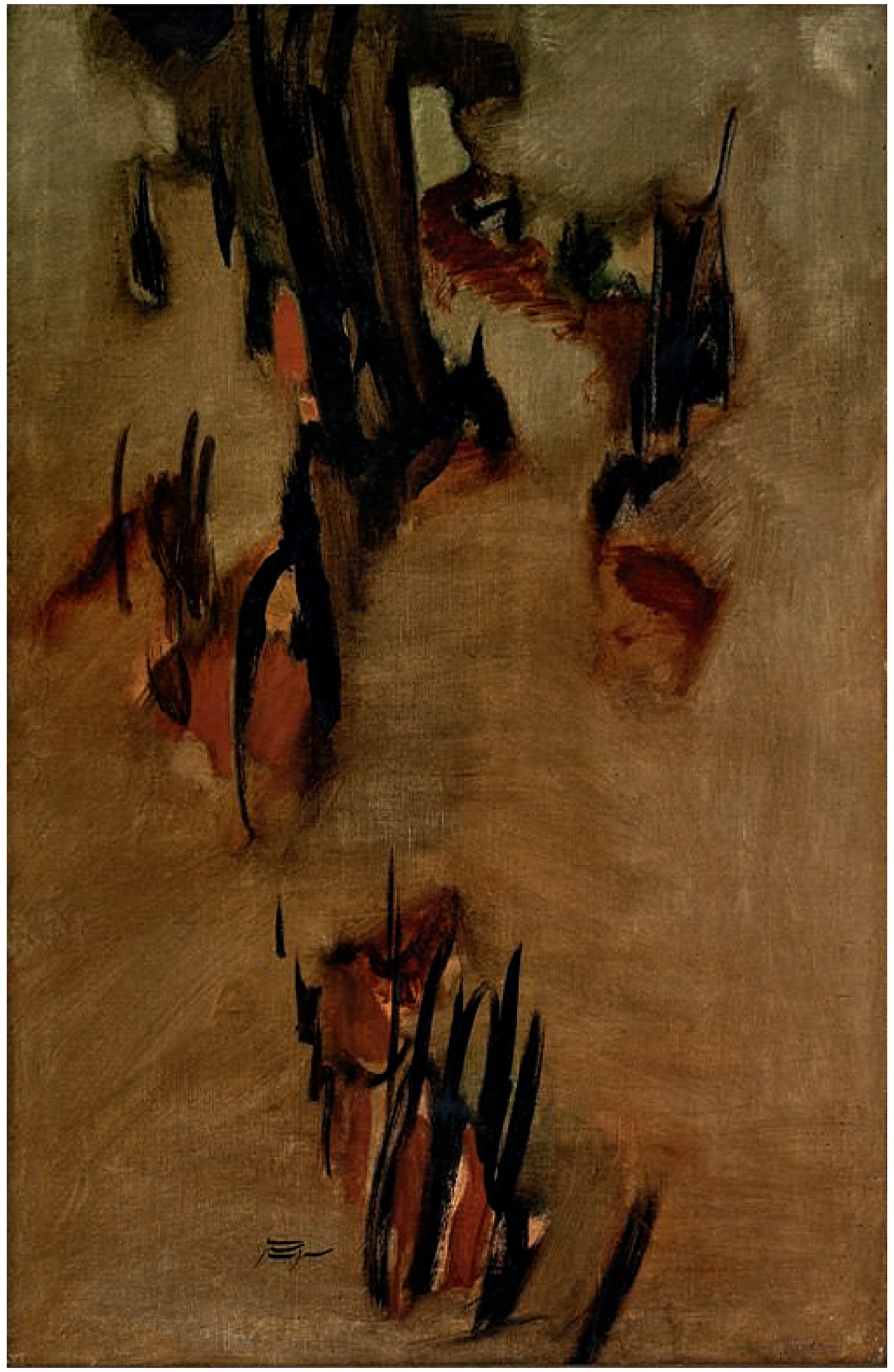
Marcos Grigorian (1925–2007)

Soil on canvas, 114.5 × 118.6 cm (framed)

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Middle East North Africa Acquisitions Committee 2014. T14104.

Born in the Russian Caucasus, raised in Iran and trained at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome, artist, curator, writer and teacher Marcos Grigorian exemplifies how multi-dimensional and international the artists and intelligentsia of mid-century Iran often were. While radically espousing traditional arts, Grigorian also delved into Expressionism and played with Pop Art. However, he gained global status with his *Earthworks* series, abstract landscape renditions made of straw, mud and earth, almost sculpturally thick in texture. Keen to publicize the work of fellow artists, he established the Galerie Esthétique in 1954, chaired the first Tehran Biennale under the Ministry of Culture in 1958, and helped to arrange exhibitions abroad including the United States; he also consistently taught and mentored younger artists. After the Revolution he moved to Yerevan, Armenia, and established a Near East Art Museum, comprised mostly of his own collection.





212

Trees

1960s

Sohrab Sepehri (1928–1980)

Oil on canvas, 116 × 75 cm

The Farjam Collection

Painter, poet and philosopher, Sohrab Sepehri trained at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, and then travelled widely before studying at the École des beaux-arts in Paris. But it was his lengthy stays in Japan and China in 1964–5, and later India, that were critical to his perspective, infusing his Sufi beliefs with Buddhist and Hindu philosophies. His muted palette and restrained abstractions on the themes of nature and landscape are reflected in this painting of trees. With its delicate brushwork and cascading composition, this early work foreshadows his later, more formal works. Sepehri is also widely celebrated for his poetry, which is equally infused with mystical and spiritual longing.

> Tonight I must go.
> Tonight I must take a suitcase
> The size of my shirt of solitude
> And travel in a direction
> Where epic trees can be seen,
> Towards the wordless space that continually calls me.
> Someone again called, 'Sohrab'!
> My shoes, where are my shoes? [35]

213

The Beach

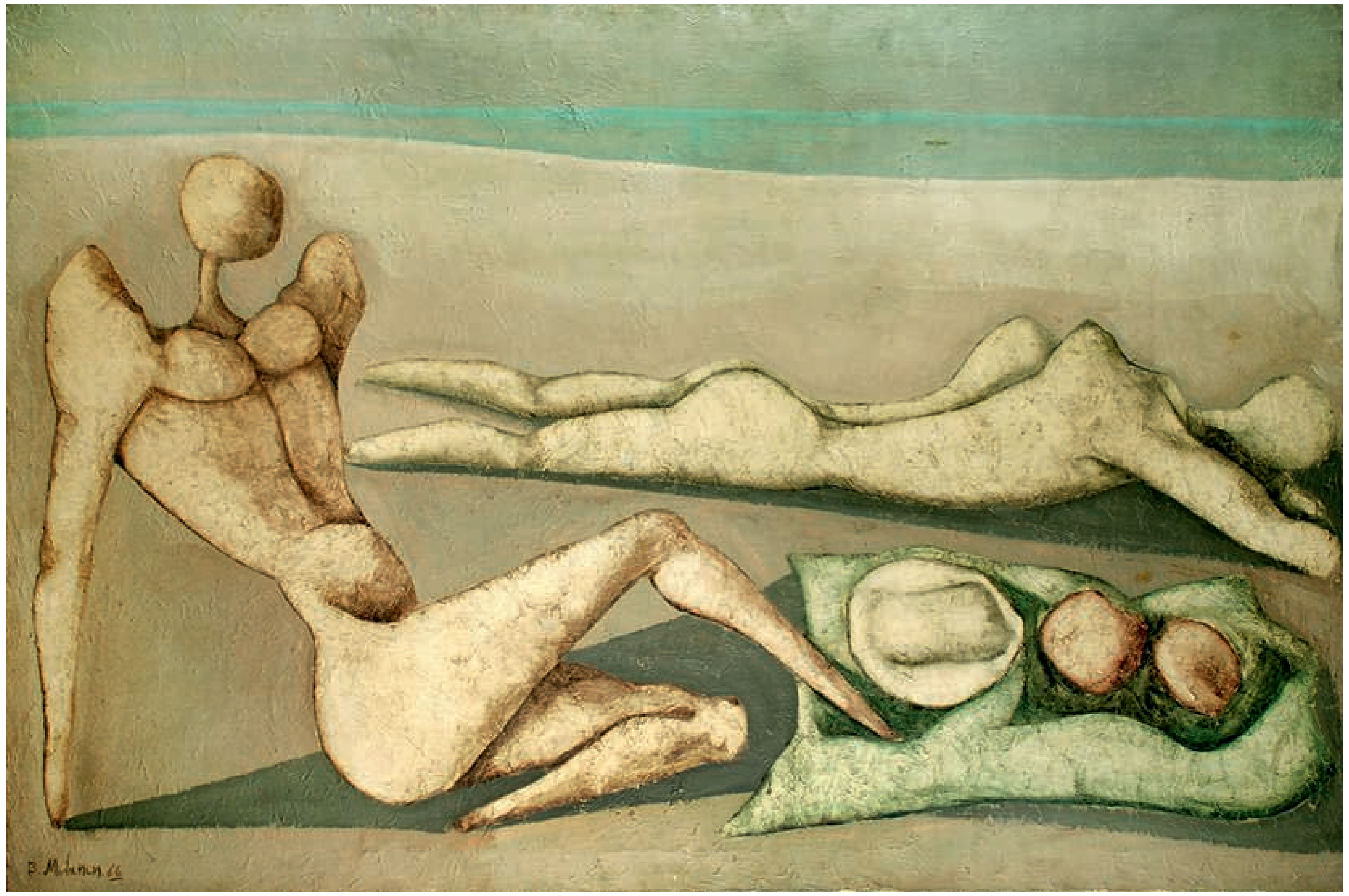
1966

Bahman Mohasses (1931–2010)

Oil on canvas, 100 × 165 cm

The Farjam Collection

Avant-garde, gay and deeply intellectual, Bahman Mohasses spent most of his life in Italy where he studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome, despite contact with, and commissions in, Iran. He was fascinated by mythology, performance arts and the (anti-) heroic. A painter and sculptor, he referred repeatedly to figures in turmoil, expressing both existential pain and social criticism. This painting, executed while still resident in Iran, is unusual in its bucolic joy, the languorous sunbathing with picnic possibly recalling outings at the Caspian Sea, which had become fashionable. Profoundly literary, Mohasses translated many works into Persian, and was a close friend of writers such as the celebrated poet Nima Yushij. He also directed plays and designed stage sets, alongside contemporaries such as Bijan Saffari and Fereydoun Ave. Censored immediately after the Revolution, Mohasses's work is nonetheless shown at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and was highlighted in an exhibition there in 2017.



214

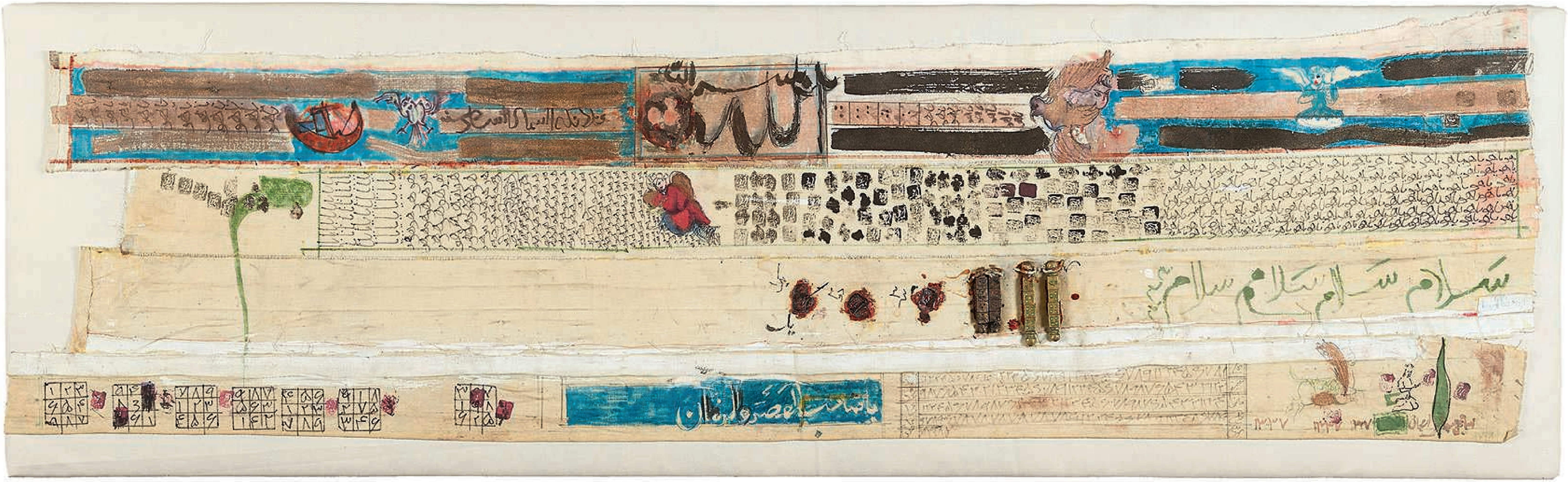
Meem

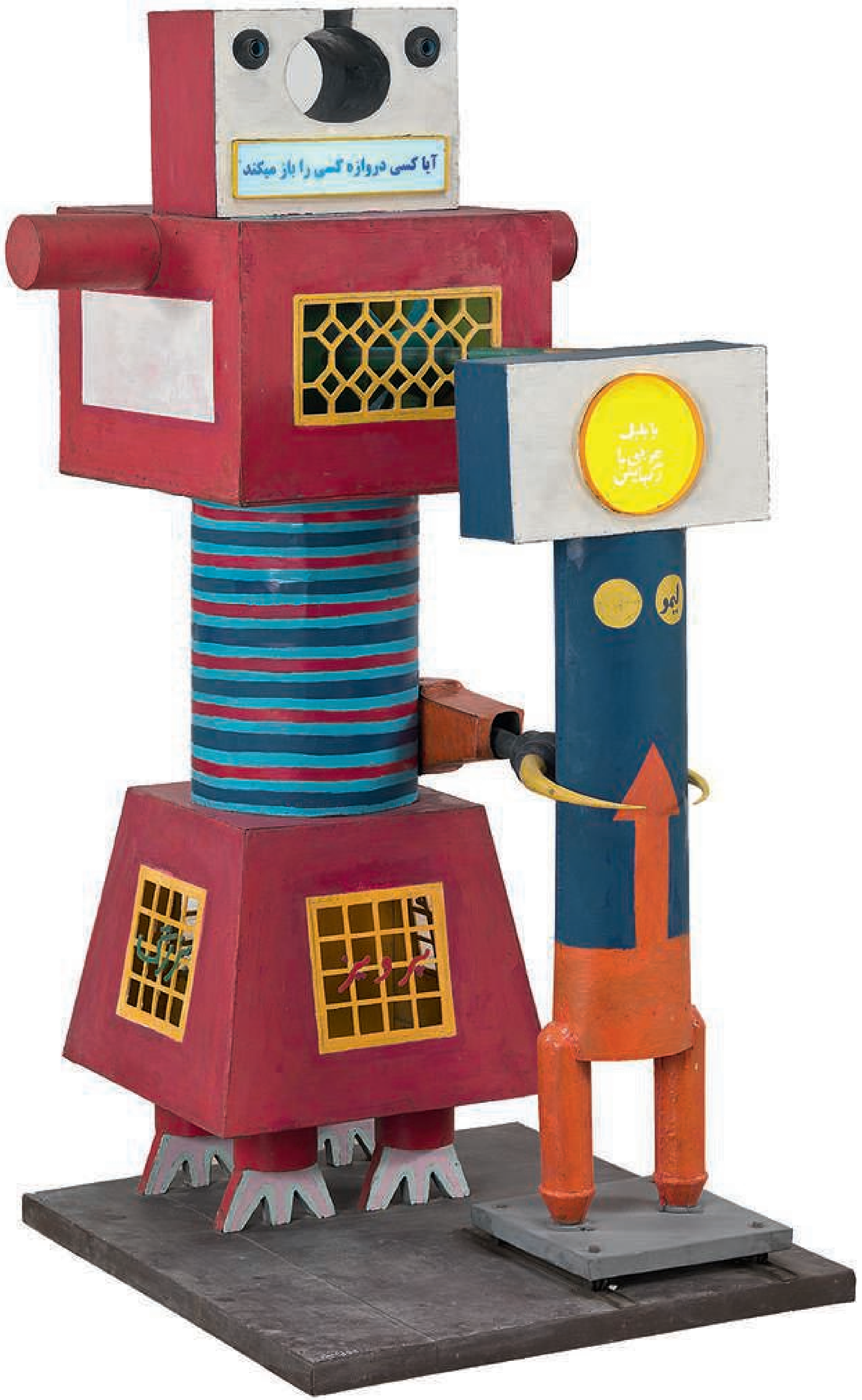
1958

Siah Armajani (b. 1939)

Ink, sealing wax and paint on muslin
37.5 × 138.8 cm
British Museum, 2007,6031.1

This early work differs from the conceptual, spatial and performative works for which Siah Armajani has become known, testing the relationship between sculpture, architecture and public art.[36] However, it illuminates his political starting point: 'Meem' is the first letter of the name of the Prophet Muhammad, yet this collage of prayer, Sufi incantation, the Archangel Gabriel and Noah, numerology and his grandfather's seal is complex. In playing with high art and local culture, the personal, the sacred and profane in this way, Armajani – a Marxist activist who went into exile in Minnesota in 1960 – was reworking the political broadsheet for the street. The fragmentation of the work, the recalling of labour-intensive traditions of bookmaking and the work's repeated plaintive cries to Allah of 'Ya Hoo' were intended as a critique of the failure of modernism in Iran. However, as his retrospective at the Walker Arts Center (Minneapolis 2018) and the Met Breuer (New York 2019) show, ideas of exile and the refugee remain central to his work.




آیا کسی دروازه کسی را باز میکند

215

The Poet and the Beloved of the King

1964–6

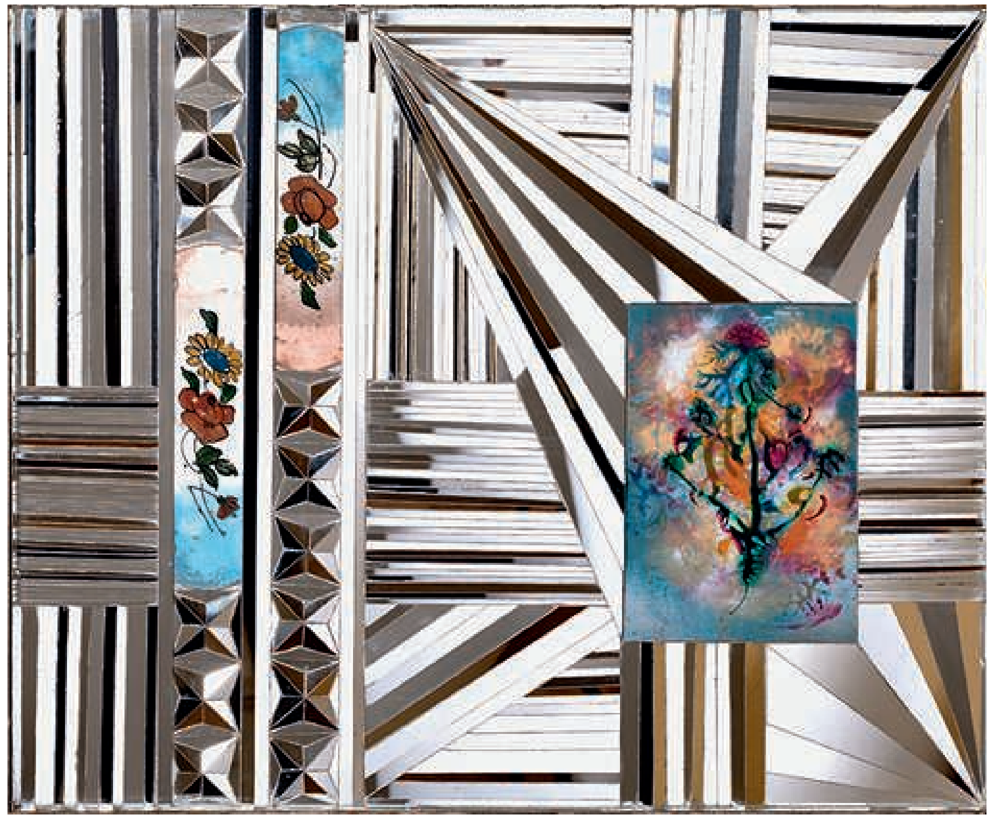
Parviz Tanavoli (b. 1937)

Wood, tin-plate, copper, steel, fluorescent light, Perspex and oil paint; 189.7 × 108 × 107 cm

Tate: Purchased with funds provided by Edward and Maryam Eisler 2012. T13684

Studies abroad inspired Parviz Tanavoli to search for more local antecedents for his sculptural work. He found the answer in Farhad – an architect and sculptor who was also the hero of the epic *Khamseh* (*Five Tales*) by Nizami, who sought the love of Queen Shirin. Farhad became a recurring theme. Unlike the original, in this particularly humorous rendition the Poet (Farhad) ensnares his Beloved (the Queen): his grip around her waist, the Persian word *limoo* (colloquial for breasts) inscribed on the yellow discs, and the phallic red arrow indicate satisfaction.

A key proponent of the Saqqa-khaneh movement, Tanavoli roamed southern Tehran to feed his hunger for local idioms.[37] An artist, writer and collector, he established a bronze foundry, launched his studio – Atelier Kaboud – in 1960, and later, in 1966, initiated Rasht 29, an intellectual meeting ground, together with architect Kamran Diba and musician Roxanna Saba. His work continually tests the material boundaries of art and the relationship between art, history and the future.



216

Untitled

1974

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian

(1922–2019)

Mirror with reverse glass painting
50 × 60 cm

Private collection

After living in New York from 1945 to 1957, where she befriended artists from Jackson Pollock to Andy Warhol, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian returned to Iran. A visit to the shrine of Shah Cheragh in Shiraz, with its 'high ceilings, domes and mirror mosaics with fantastic reflections',[38] prompted her to reinvent the traditional craft of *ayneh-kari*, or mirror mosaics. Traditionally used in palaces and mosques, its strict discipline of geometry is here combined with the spontaneity of Expressionism and reverse-glass painting. The artist was a native of Qazvin, known for its abundance of flowers, and her earlier works attempted to 'capture the passing and short-lived moment'.[39] Here she freezes the floral motif in glass. Her ambition was boundless, playing with architectural scale and sculptural form. She held monthly salons and collected widely before returning to post-Revolutionary Iran.

217

Untitled

1974

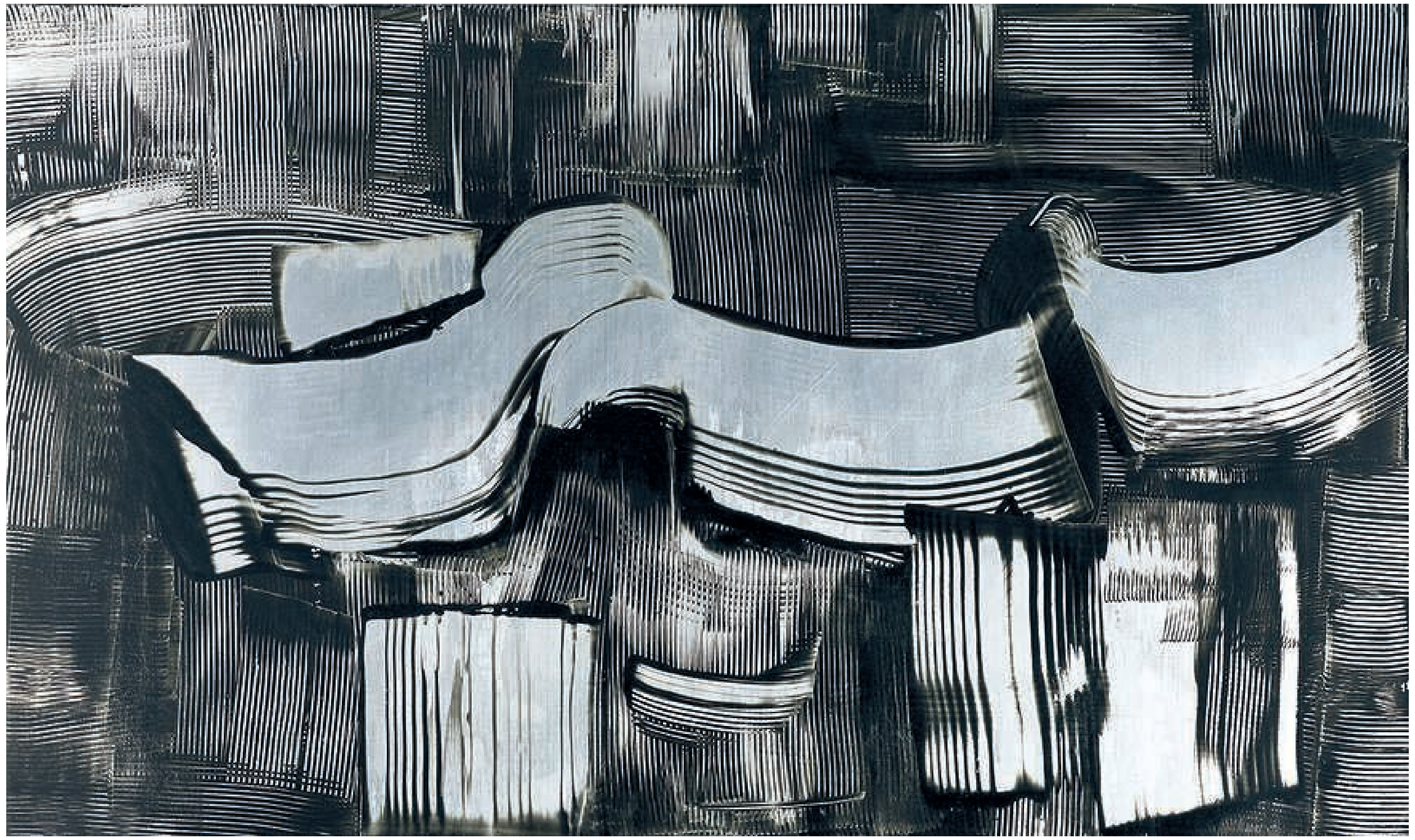
Behjat Sadr

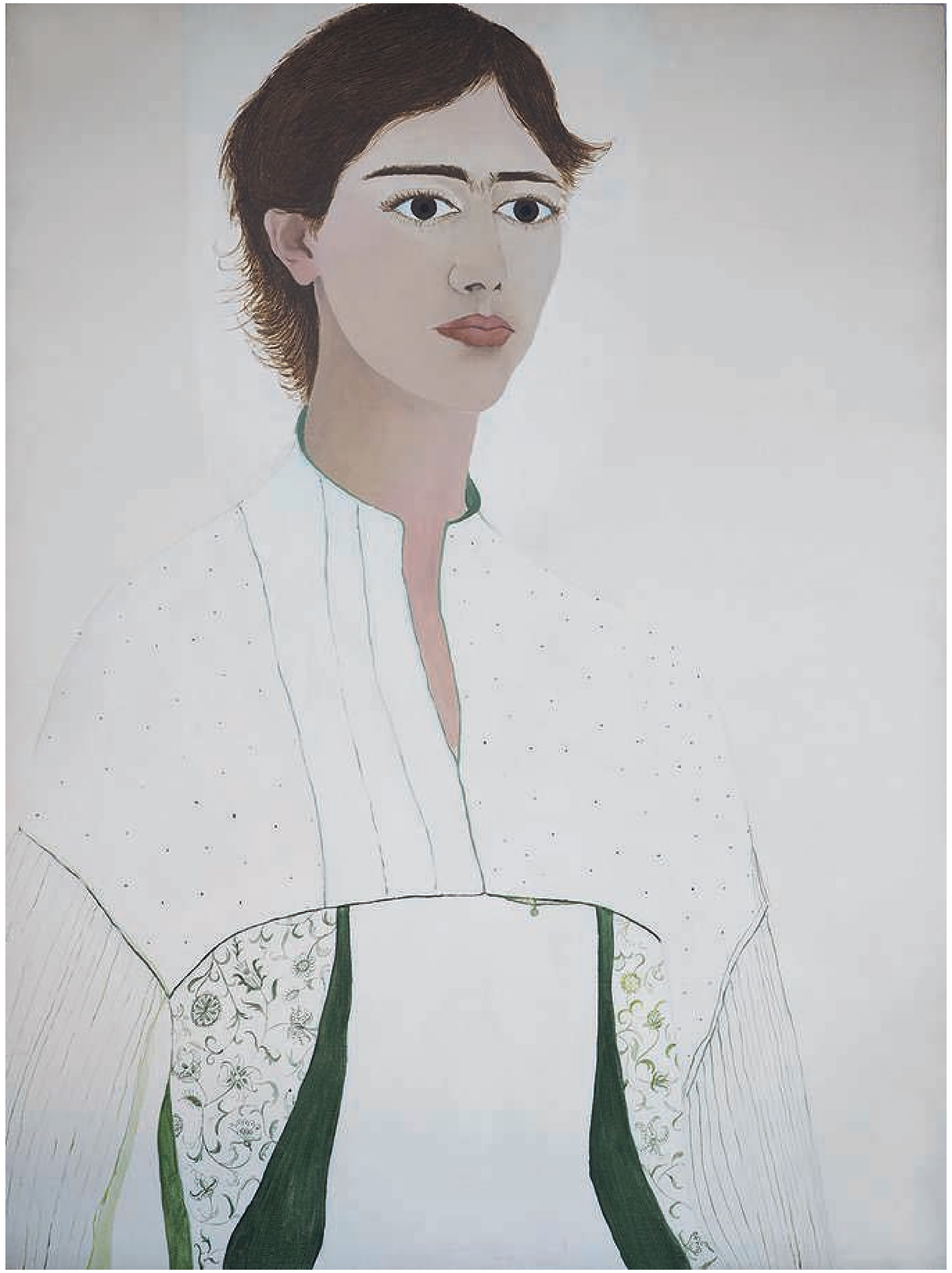
(1924–2009)

Oil on aluminium, 61 × 102 cm

Behjat Sadr Estate

Trained in Tehran and Rome, a close friend of rebel poet Forugh Farrokhzad and critic Jamal al-e Ahmad, as well as writers and artists, Behjat Sadr explored the dark side of inheritance and of futurism. She rejected both the formalism of figurative painting, practised by traditionalists and leftists, and the ethno-Pop Art of many of her contemporaries. Despite plaudits at various international Biennales, Sadr remained distant and followed her own path. When she referenced abstraction and calligraphy it was as a gesture, a mark, an austere composition. Here, in a work executed at the height of the oil crisis, her lines are slick, impatient, leaving a residue on the background, resulting in what she termed 'out-of-canvas' experiences. Hers was a global, dystopic, political voice. 'I am the progeny of my century,' she stated. 'I feel this century's anxiety.'[40]





218

Portrait of Suri, the Artist's Daughter

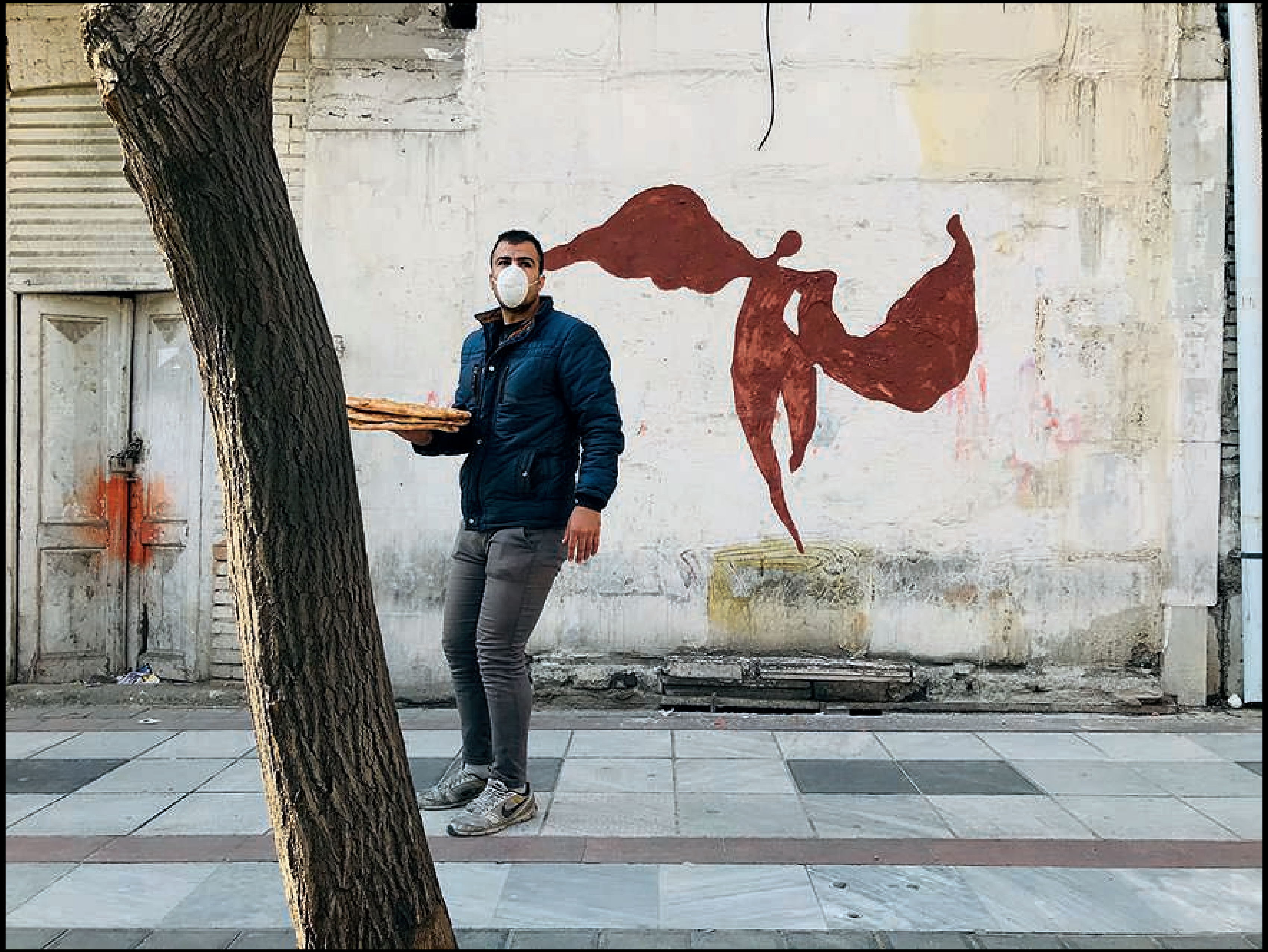
about 1978

Leyly Matine-Daftary (1937–2007)

Oil on canvas, 130 × 97 cm

Collection of Suri Farman-Farmaian

Educated at the Slade School of Fine Art in London in the 1950s under Lucian Freud, Matine-Daftary was an intellectual, collector and teacher of painting and sculpture. In her own work she determinedly broke with the formal aspects of Iranian art to embrace a pure, abstract minimalism. Her often deceptively simple still lifes, landscapes and portraits juxtapose flat planes with joyous colours, evoking the sun and nature, but they also hold much drama and meaning. This portrait of her daughter Suri is imbued with the subtle light and gentle observations characteristic of her work. However, as befits her status as the granddaughter of Mossadegh (see p. 278), Matine-Daftary's intellectual interests were national and political, and she contributed to both the Tehran Biennales and the Shiraz-Persepolis Festivals. She went into exile in Paris after the Revolution.



NEW REALITIES, NEW IDENTITIES: BREAKING BOUNDARIES IN CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN ART

The rupture and trauma of the Revolution and Iran-Iraq War gave way to a new social and political reality in Iran. Gone was the monarchy and its place was an Islamic Republic overseen by a Supreme Leader.[41] The Islamicization of civil society meant radical changes to the way people behaved, interacted and dressed. Even the way people perceived life was affected: a decade of war photography and film footage, propaganda and censorship had made its visual impact. The 1980s were defined by brutal reality not fine arts, an unmitigated alteration for Iranians at home, in exile or in-between. 'My return to Iran in 1990 changed my life . . . the country had been transformed completely,' said artist Shirin Neshat,[42] whose work would go on to be defined by photography and film (cat. 219).

Isolated from the world and from their own history and culture, artists devised strategies for survival. The easing of restrictions, especially after the election of President Khatami in 1997, saw a flowering of activities from the relaunching of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art's public programming under the directorship of Alireza Sami Azar[43] to private exhibitions and galleries. By 2001 some 50 galleries had opened in Tehran alone, including the Seyhoun Art Gallery and Assar Art Gallery (1999), Mah Art Gallery (2004), Silk Road Gallery, devoted to art photography (2001), Aaran Gallery (2008), Dastan Gallery (2012) and Ab-Anbar Gallery (2014) to name but a few,[44] many participating in international art fairs. Encouraged by a vibrant market, and a cultural scene encompassing music, cinema and performance, artists engage critically and self-critically. Street art proliferates, both that sanctioned by the government under its 'edification programme' and free-spirited graffiti, by artists such as Icy and Sot, Black Hand and Hamid Mirza (fig. 19). Gender, politics, religion and identity issues are frequently multi-layered and often approached with humour and irony, testing the boundaries of censorship and control.

The twenty-first century is a global Google age, where contemporary art is situated within a world without boundaries. Long after the 1979 Revolution, and the narrow prisms of art history of the past, consciousness is now transnational.[45] Despite domestic isolation, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter allow connectedness and young Iranian artists – even those within the borders of the Republic – reject ethnocentric paradigms. They mediate freely within global technologies and frameworks as well as familiar local practices, and there is a rebellious irreverence in certain modes of expression. Despite international rhetoric, Iranian culture, even beyond fine art, travels well: Asghar Farhadi's film *A Separation* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2012, cementing an international fascination with Iranian cinema; Tehran-based artist Mehdi Ghadyanloo was commissioned to create a 186 square metre triptych with the theme 'Finding Hope' at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2019; and Iranian cuisine is popularly celebrated by chefs such as Sabrina Ghayour, Najmieh Batmanglij and Samin Nosrat.

Tehran continues to act as an epicentre for all Iranians. The massive population increase, which quadrupled to over 12 million after the Revolution – the vast majority are under 30 years of age – has resulted in a vibrant, dynamic metropolis, a magnet for a modern discourse. The uneasy bustle of the streets, and the intellectual, political and cultural debates, reflect the concerns of young Iranians – survival, the desire for freedom and a sense of domestic and global anxiety, especially since the Green Revolution. Technology, art and media give public expression to private turbulence. At the heart of it remains the big question: what does it mean to be Iranian today? Not only the future, but also the present, is uncertain.

Fig. 19
Hamid Mirza, *Red Soil*, Tehran, 2020

219

Turbulent

1998

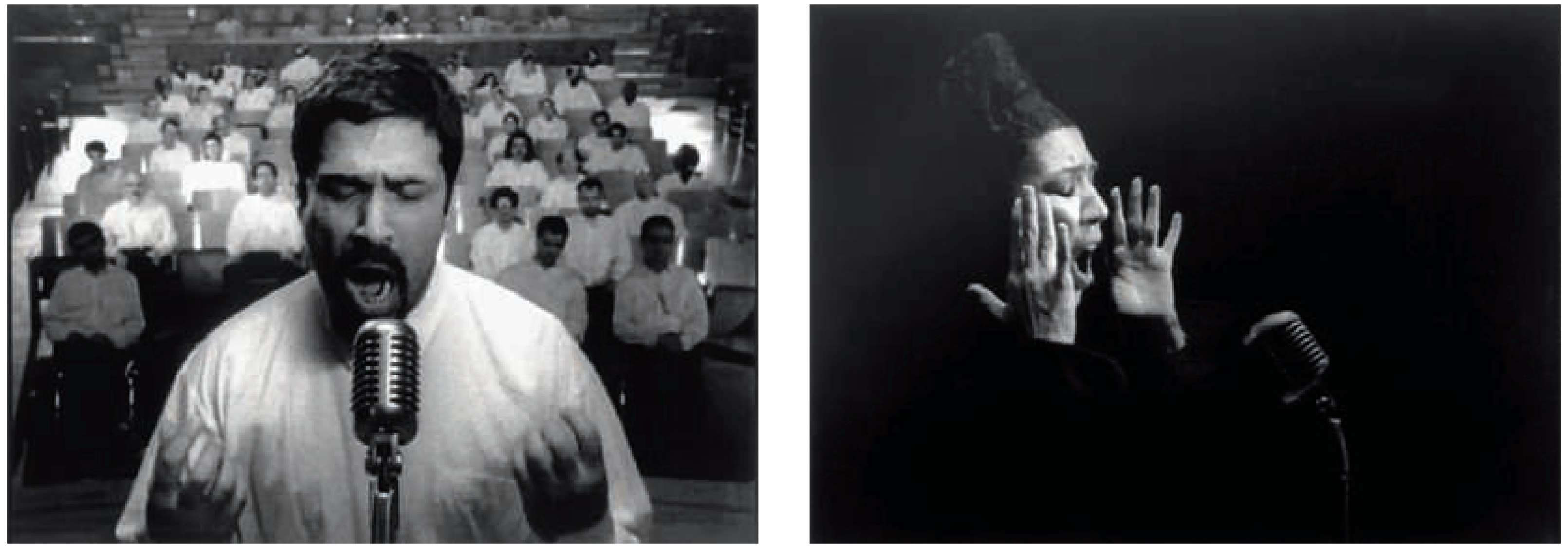
Shirin Neshat (b. 1957)

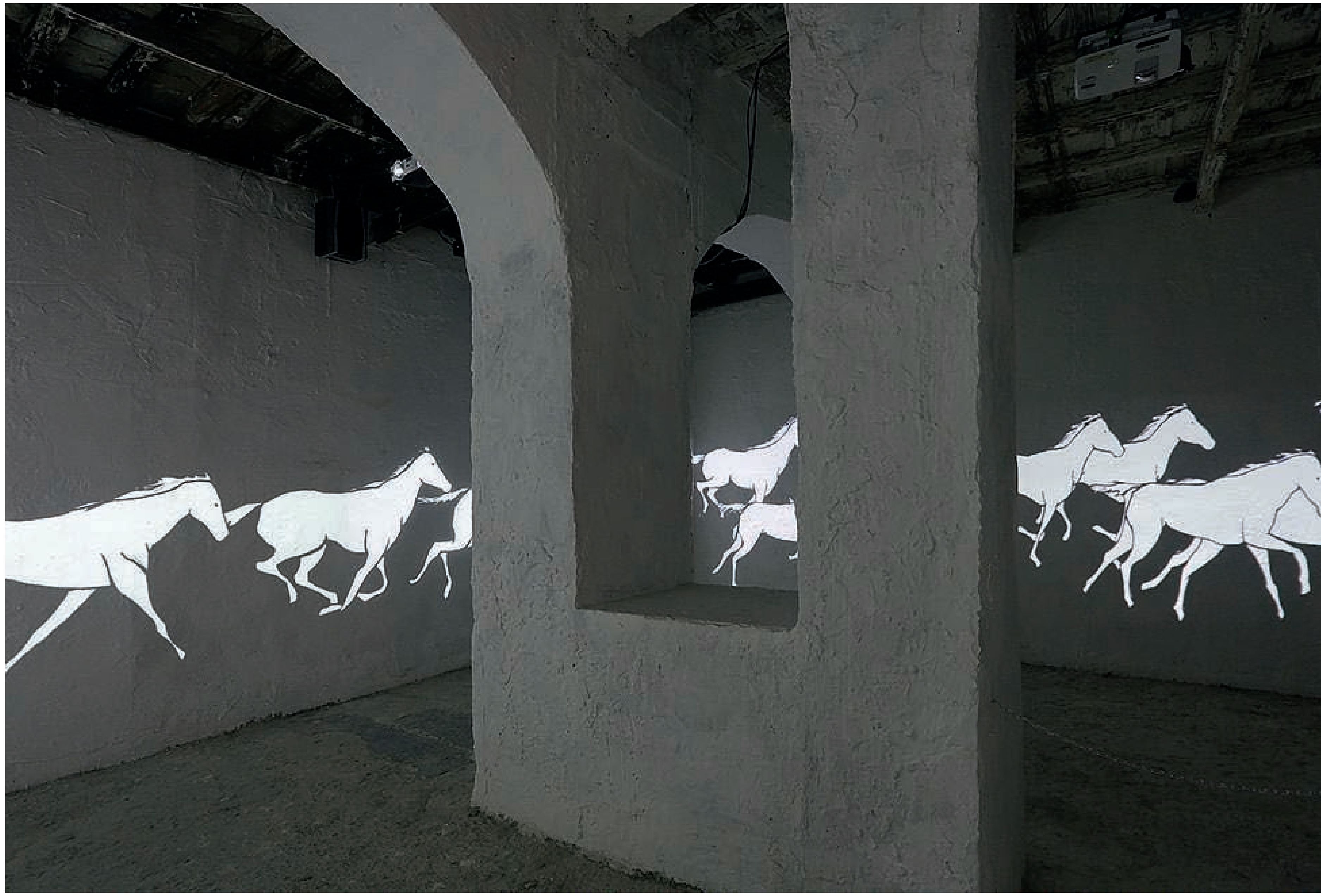
Two-screen video installation,
black and white (9 mins 38 secs)

Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

Two screens face one another. On one screen, we see a man in a white shirt before a male audience; on the other, a veiled woman, alone. The man sings a love poem by the 13th-century poet Jalal al-Din Rumi and as his song finishes, the woman, radical sound artist Sussan Deyhim, begins her song, an atonal, wordless, panting, hissing cry – at once terrifying and yet liberating and defiant.

Shirin Neshat's work radically shifted on her return to her beloved Iran in 1991, after 12 years abroad, in response to the shock of the country's new, post-Revolution reality. Her subsequent photographic series *Women of Allah* (1993–7) intermingled gender issues, the western gaze, the female body, and women's voices, from the 1950s rebel poet Forugh Farrokhzad to her contemporary, Sussan Deyhim. *Turbulent*, which was awarded the First International Prize at the 1999 Venice Biennale, articulates a specific point in Iranian culture, while simultaneously being a universal cry for human dignity.[46]





220

All the White Horses

2016

Avish Khebrehzadeh (b. 1969)

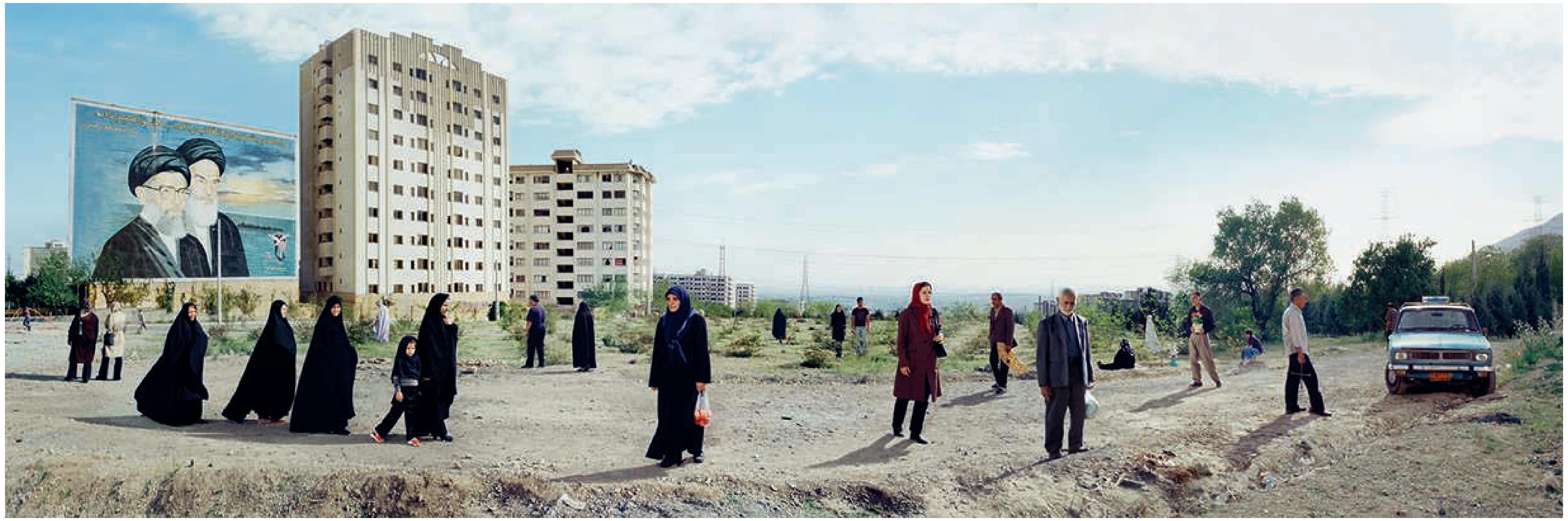
Hand-drawn multi-channel video
animation (8 minutes)

Produced by Dan Sallick; courtesy of the artist

A herd of white horses, ever increasing in number, gallop and gather momentum, the hypnotic rhythm of their hooves punctuated by the sound of an unseen gong and accompanied by a whistling breeze. Just as the viewer is captivated, the horses dwindle in number and fade from sight, leaving an impression of almost divine being. They are creatures between the earth and the sky, utterly free.

Avish Khebrehzadeh's fascination with horses was first inspired by her father reciting the *Shahnameh* to her as child by the Caspian Sea – tales of Rustam and his mighty colt Rakhsh (p. 175). This early influence was shifted by her reading of Albert Camus and Fyodor Dostoevsky on themes of power, domination and the urge towards freedom, and also by Greek myth. She says of the work: 'We don't know whether they are like Rakhsh, galloping through the desert plain, or like the mythological Pegasus, moving through the sky… [The horse] tells of challenges that are seemingly impossible but that are taken up and won.'[47]

A painter as well as a film-maker, Khebrehzadeh employs her drawing mastery to freely layer media and techniques to explore the subconscious realms of dreams, stories and memory in an open-ended way: 'I want each viewer to participate and finish the story with his or her own imagination.'[48]



221 (left)

Tehran 2006

2006

Mitra Tabrizian (b. 1964)

Photograph, 101 × 302 cm

V&A: E.470-2008

A dystopic scene is set on the outskirts of Tehran, of civilization. A seemingly random moment in the day is captured: a child holds her mother's arm, individuals return with shopping, or take a stroll, or sit; each is apparently unaware of the others. Above them rises a billboard picturing Iran's two Supreme Leaders, Khomeini and Khamenei, beneath the slogan: 'We shall continue the path of the martyrs of Revolution.'

Deliberately testing the boundaries between photography, documentary and fiction, in *Tehran 2006* Mitra Tabrizian explores political, social and personal tensions in the year in which Iran announced its success in enriching uranium, heightening political tensions with the United States. The individuals caught in her tableau seem suspended in time, alienated, the dreams of the Revolution forgotten yet with nothing new awaiting. Small signs, such as the girl's red shoes and the young couple walking side by side, hint at hidden dreams and unseen rebellion.[49]

222 (right)

***Marzieh Ahmadi Oskuie, Tehran, 26 April 1974* (*By an Eyewitness* series)**

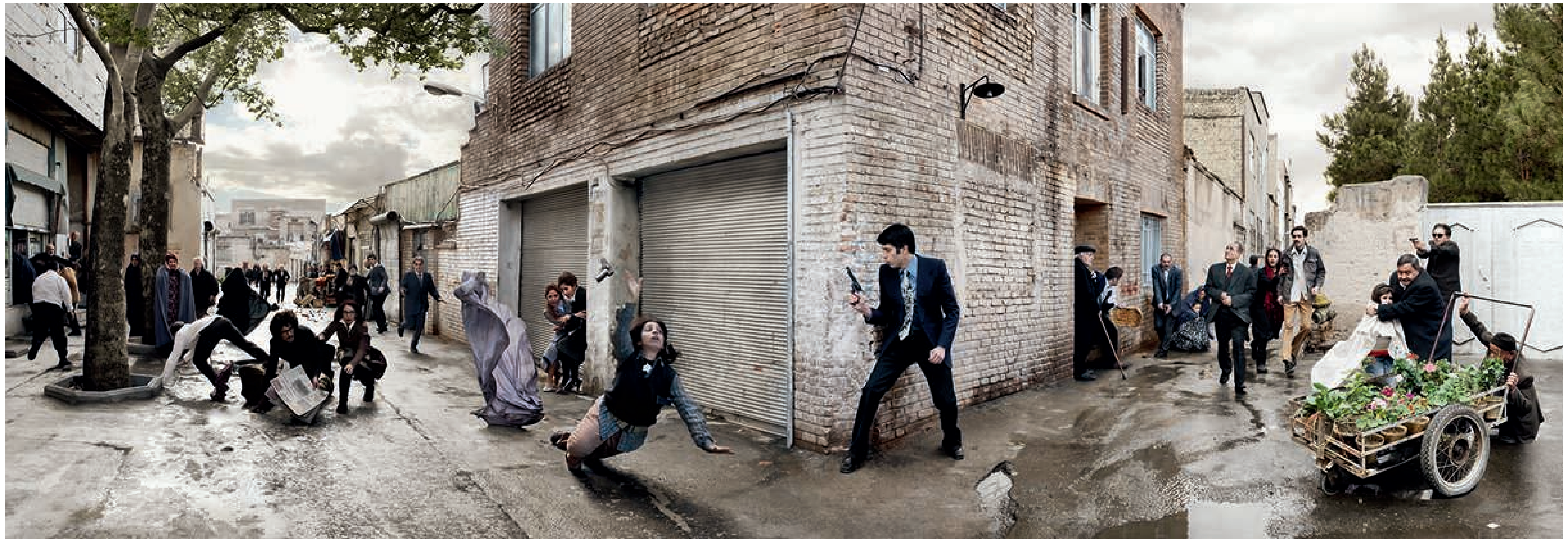
2012

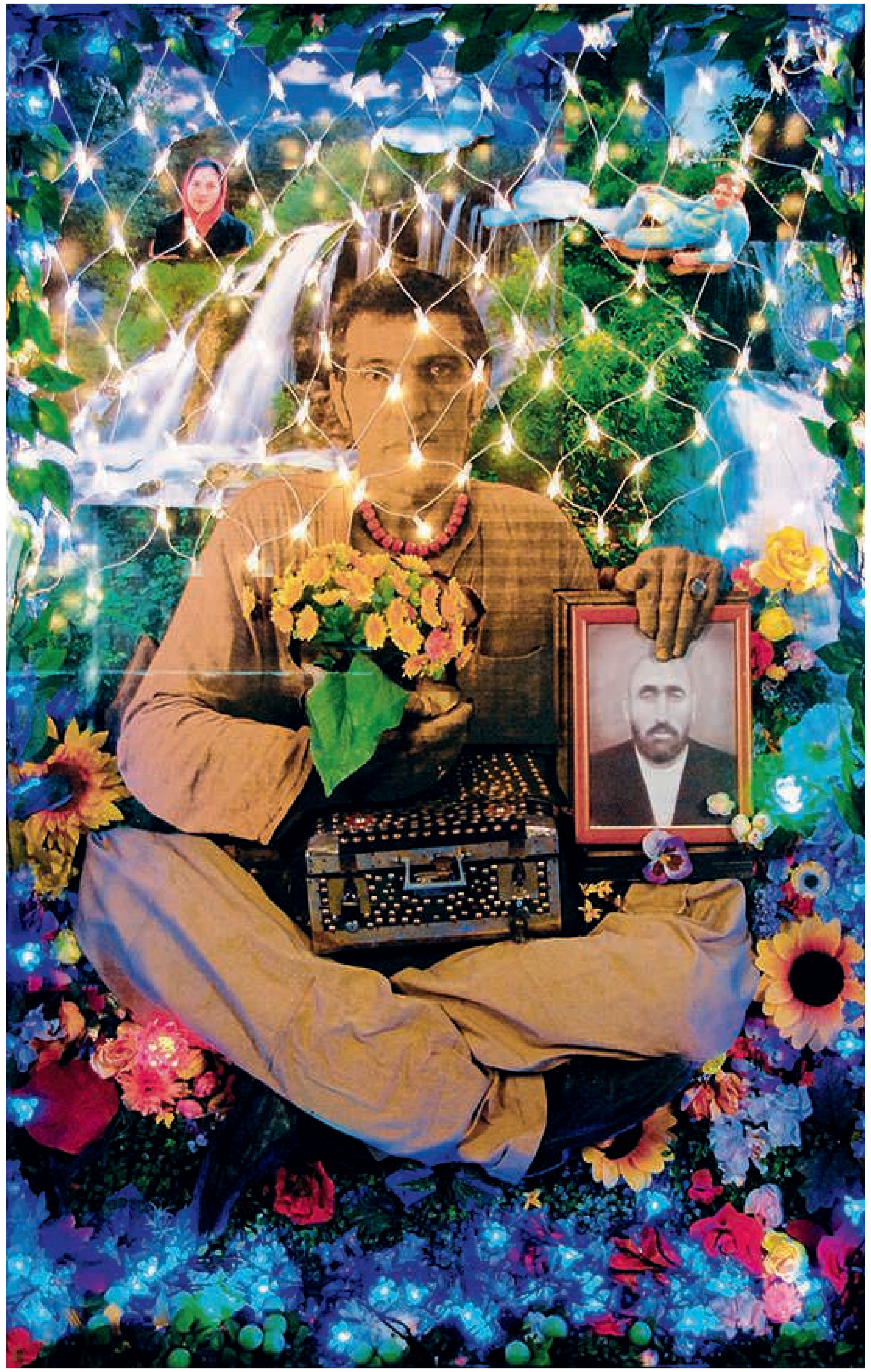
Azadeh Akhlaghi (b. 1978)

Photograph, 88.5 × 123.6 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Cinematic in form, epic in rendition and historic in subject, Azadeh Akhlaghi's dramatic stagings of key assassinations between Iran's 1905 Constitutional Revolution and the 1979 Islamic Revolution are nothing if not dramatic. This vibrant work captures the moment when Marzieh Ahmadi Oskuie, a leftist student activist, was assassinated by the SAVAK, the Shah's secret police. The victim falls to the ground, her gun and undercover *chador* flying away, as bystanders watch in horror. Photographed on the streets of Tehran, Akhlaghi had to work quickly to circumvent official attention. Challenging the fine intersection between documentary and art, in recreating these political moments she is re-enacting them, a performative ritual much like those conducted at the Ashura, the Shi'a day of mourning. However, in 'witnessing' Oskuie's death at the hands of the political establishment, it is hard not to recall Neda Agha-Soltani, whose assassination during the 2009 Green Revolution went viral, and who became a symbol of resistance.





223

Khosrow
(*Ready to Order* series)

2007–8

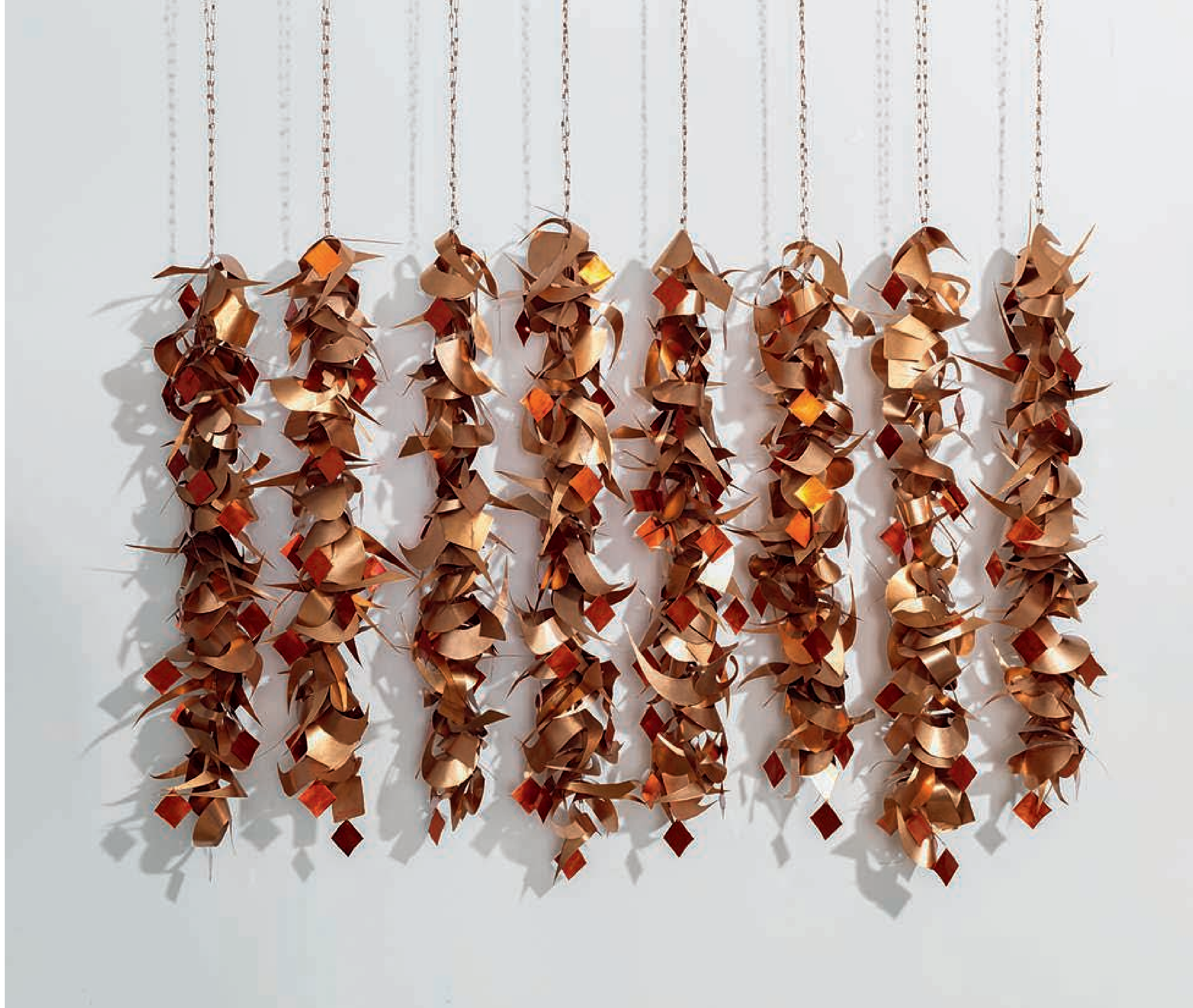
Khosrow Hassanzadeh (b. 1963)

Mixed media, 199 × 135 × 55 cm

Private collection

This humorous self-portrait by irreverent artist Khosrow Hassanzadeh plays with some very serious themes. The first impression is one of joyful kitsch: the artist sits cross-legged holding his grandfather's portrait, his children above him in an inverse family tree. The backdrop is a bright waterfall, like those seen in downtown Tehran photography shops, adorned with plastic flowers and a curtain of fairy lights. Yet on his lap is a box, holding secrets, and the work alludes to an earlier self-portrait entitled *Terrorist: Khosrow*.[50]

Reclaiming the right to self-representation, challenging western views of Iranian 'otherness' and expressing anxiety in a transcultural world, Hassanzadeh's work returns over and over again to themes of memory, ritual and identity. A volunteer in the Iran-Iraq War, he subsequently studied art. In this work he is clearly referencing not only Pop culture, but also the shrine portraits of martyrs. Underlying it all is the impossibility of knowing both oneself and others.[51]



224

Hanged series

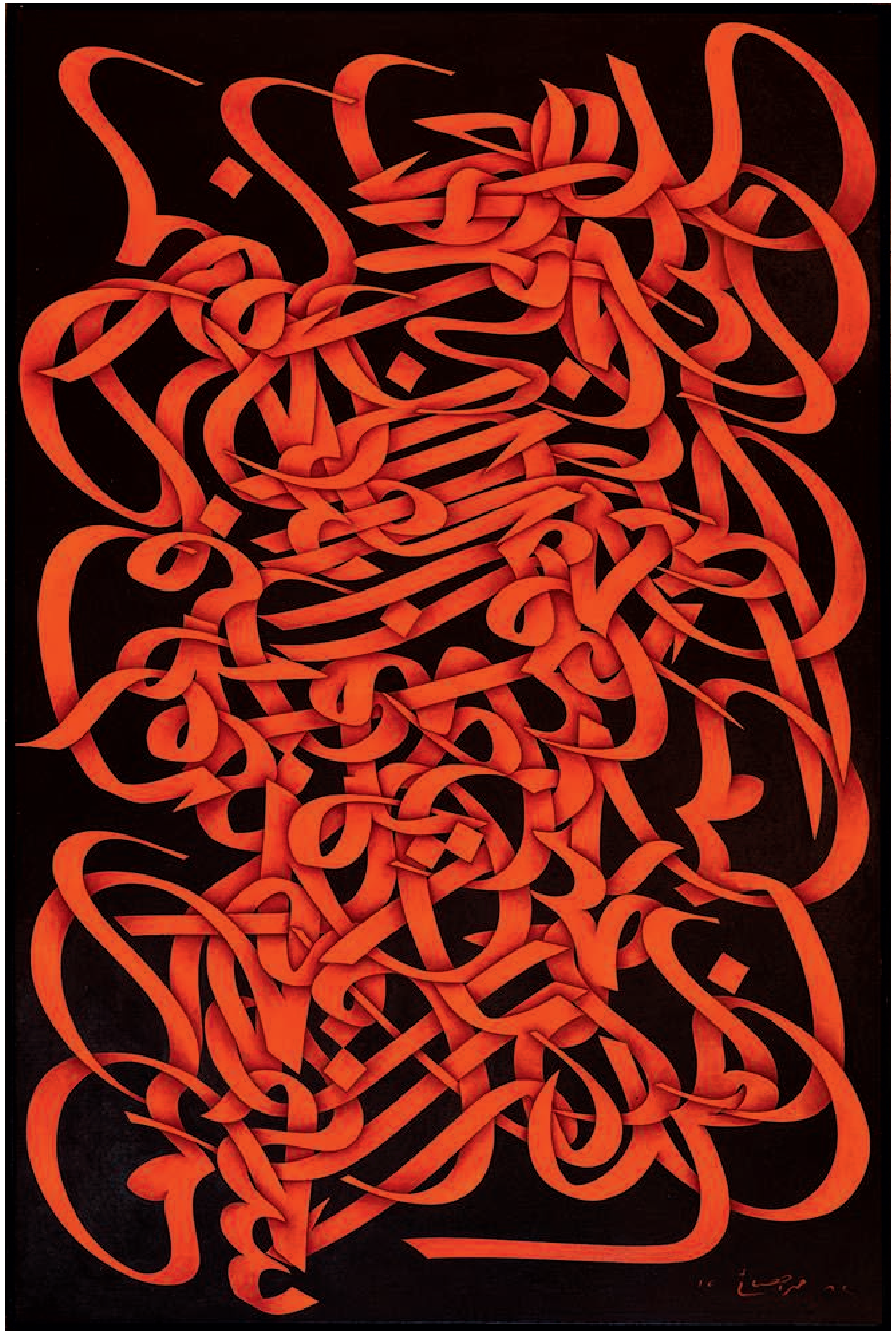
2015

Pouran Jinchi (b. 1959)

Copper, paint, metal wire, copper safety pins, 150 × 150 cm (variable)

Courtesy of the artist and Third Line, Dubai

Pouran Jinchi trained in traditional calligraphy as a child in Mashhad, north-eastern Iran, before studying sculpture and painting at the University of California. She tests the theoretical and material possibilities of these disciplines in this masterful work – a calligraphic sculpture that is immediate in its beauty and violence. Drawn out on copper sheets and then painstakingly cut by hand, each thread is a line of calligraphy – some longer, some shorter – from the first page of Sadegh Hedayat's modernist classic *The Blind Owl* (1937). The letters are suspended and punctuated by red diamonds, reminiscent of drops of blood at a knife's edge, recalling the cuts experienced by Jinchi herself as she made the piece. The series title, *Hanged*, refers to its physical presence and also to other themes of the novel, such as execution, and existential doubt.



225

Oo Bakhshandeh Ast

2003

Mohammad Ehsai (b. 1939)

Oil on canvas, 305 × 200 cm

The Farjam Collection

Trained in classical calligraphy and, later, modern art at Tehran University's Faculty of Fine Arts, Mohammad Ehsai's work tests the boundaries of calligraphic form and design. Despite utilizing a minimal palette and being restricted to the written word, the works are ambitious, as in this example. Here, the layering and repetition of form, the enlargement to monumental scale and use of contrasting colours touch on Abstract Expressionism, charge the work with a kinetic power and lend it an architectural structure. This is not writing to be read, but rather a meditative aesthetic to be perceived and felt.

The title, *Oo Bakhshandeh Ast* (*He is Forgiving*) touches on Ehsai's mystical leanings. The Sufi message is clear.

226

Eshge (Love)

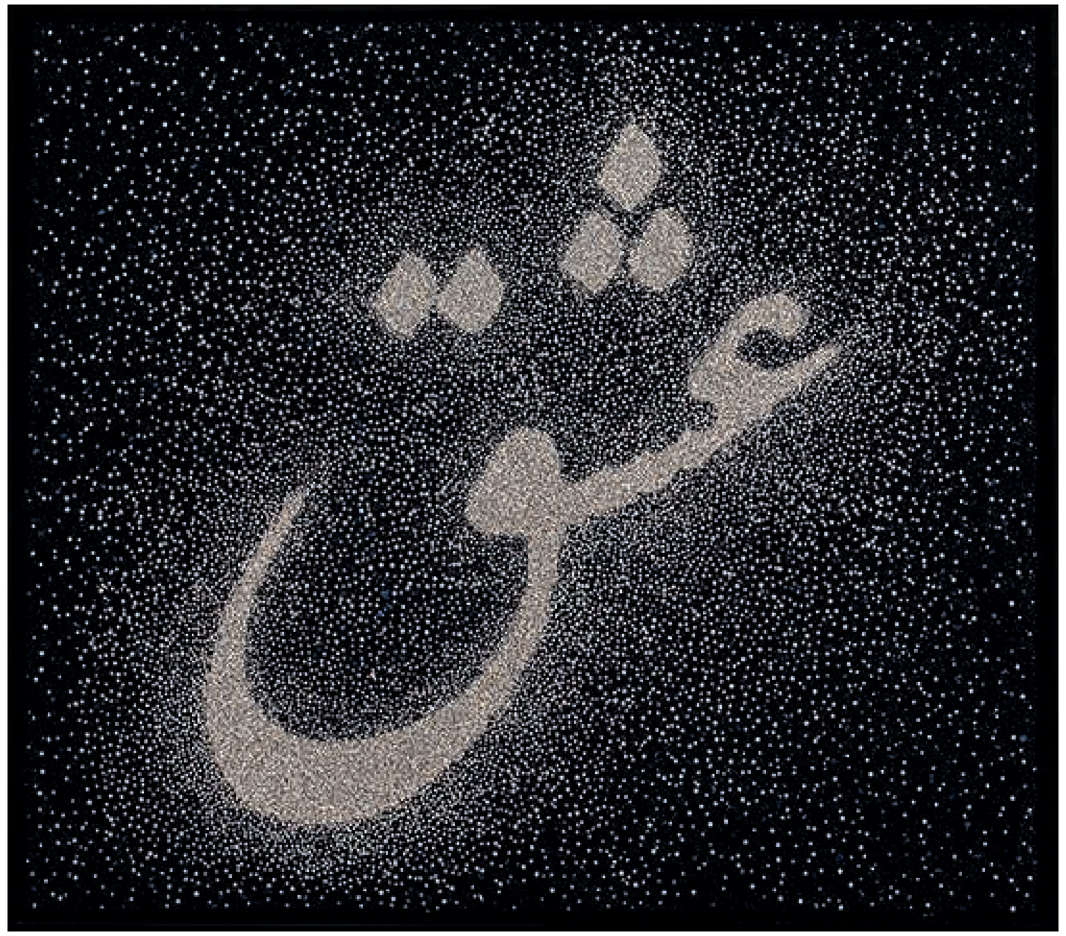
2007

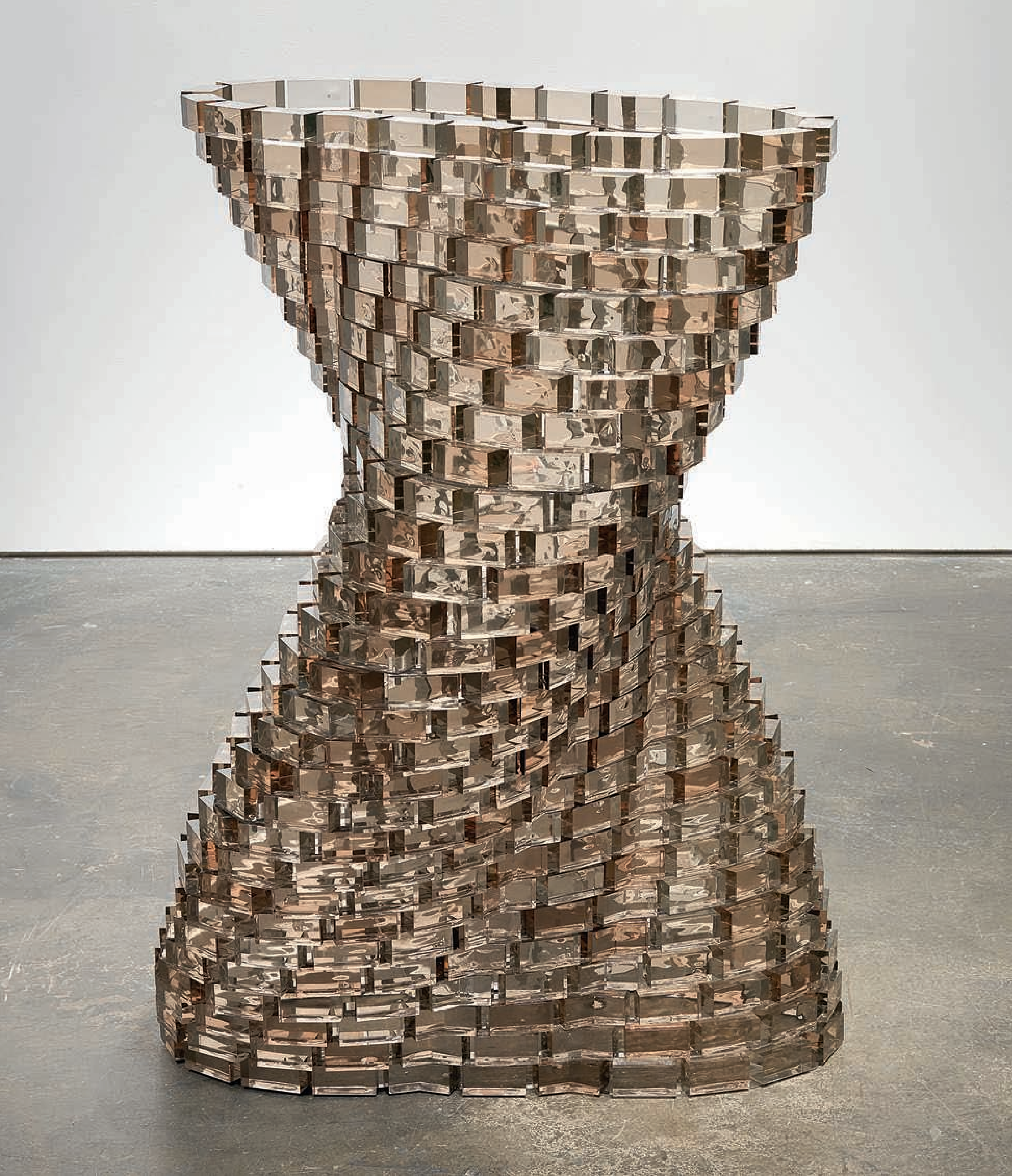
Farhad Moshiri (b. 1963)

Swarovski crystals and glitter on canvas, with acrylic on board, 155 × 176 cm

The Farjam Collection

The playful and decorative elements of Farhad Moshiri's works belie the immense, ever-inventive thinking behind them. On returning to Iran after the Iran-Iraq War, and while staying at his family home in Shiraz, Moshiri and his archaeologist-artist wife Shirin Aliabadi (cat. 234) began to collect architectural debris and ceramics on their journeys exploring the country, leading to his famous *Jars* series, capturing the artist's fragmentary perception of history and identity. But it is Moshiri's equal fascination with global consumerism and pop culture that is seen here, after he made, in his own words, the switch from 'cracks to crystals'.[52] *Eshgh* ('Love'), the traditional theme of Persian poetry and at the heart of the sufi mystical journey, is here recast in crystals and glitter, recalling the yearnings of teenagers and catchy pop songs. Moshiri is playing with the commodification of desire, the commercialism of the art market as well as what it means to be human. Endlessly ambitious, Moshiri uses his skill across different media to comment critically on contemporary life, in his own flamboyant and spirited language.





227

Pupa

2014

Shirazeh Houshiary (b. 1955)

Amethyst glass and mirror-polished stainless steel, 116 × 87 × 48 cm

The Mohammad Afkhami Collection

The spiritual journey is central to the artistic explorations of Shirazeh Houshiary, whose works reach to the boundaries of existence. Her concern is the universe and, in her minimalist approach and mathematical conceptualism, she is likened to Mark Rothko and Tony Cragg. In this sculpture, Houshiary uses the ancient form of the brick to raise a structure that twists, swells and moves, a fluid vortex to unknown places. The shape of the tower has biblical connotations, but *Pupa* captures the moment of transformation in the constant cycle of life. Links between different planes of existence spark Houshiary's interest, and by reducing her medium to the essentials, she 'strives for a space shared by all humanity.'[53]

228

Glance #10

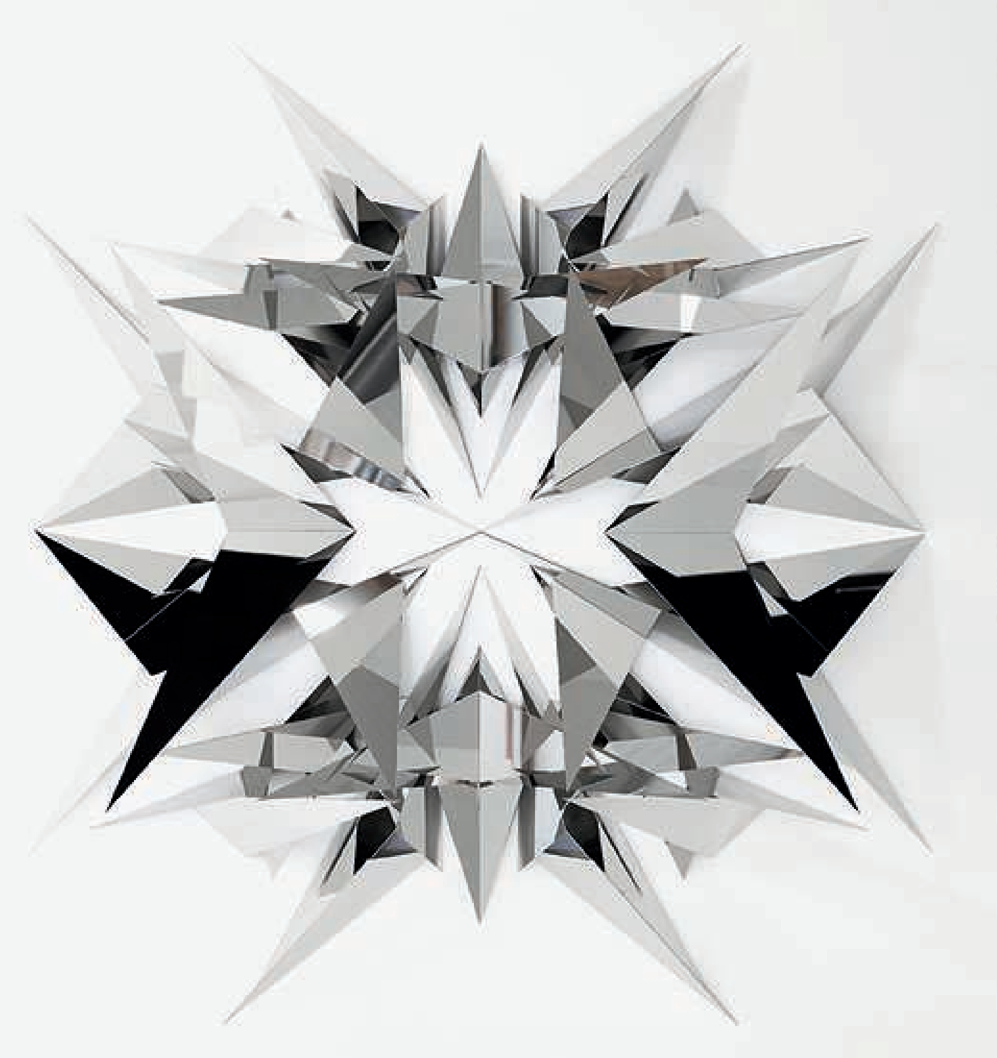
2010

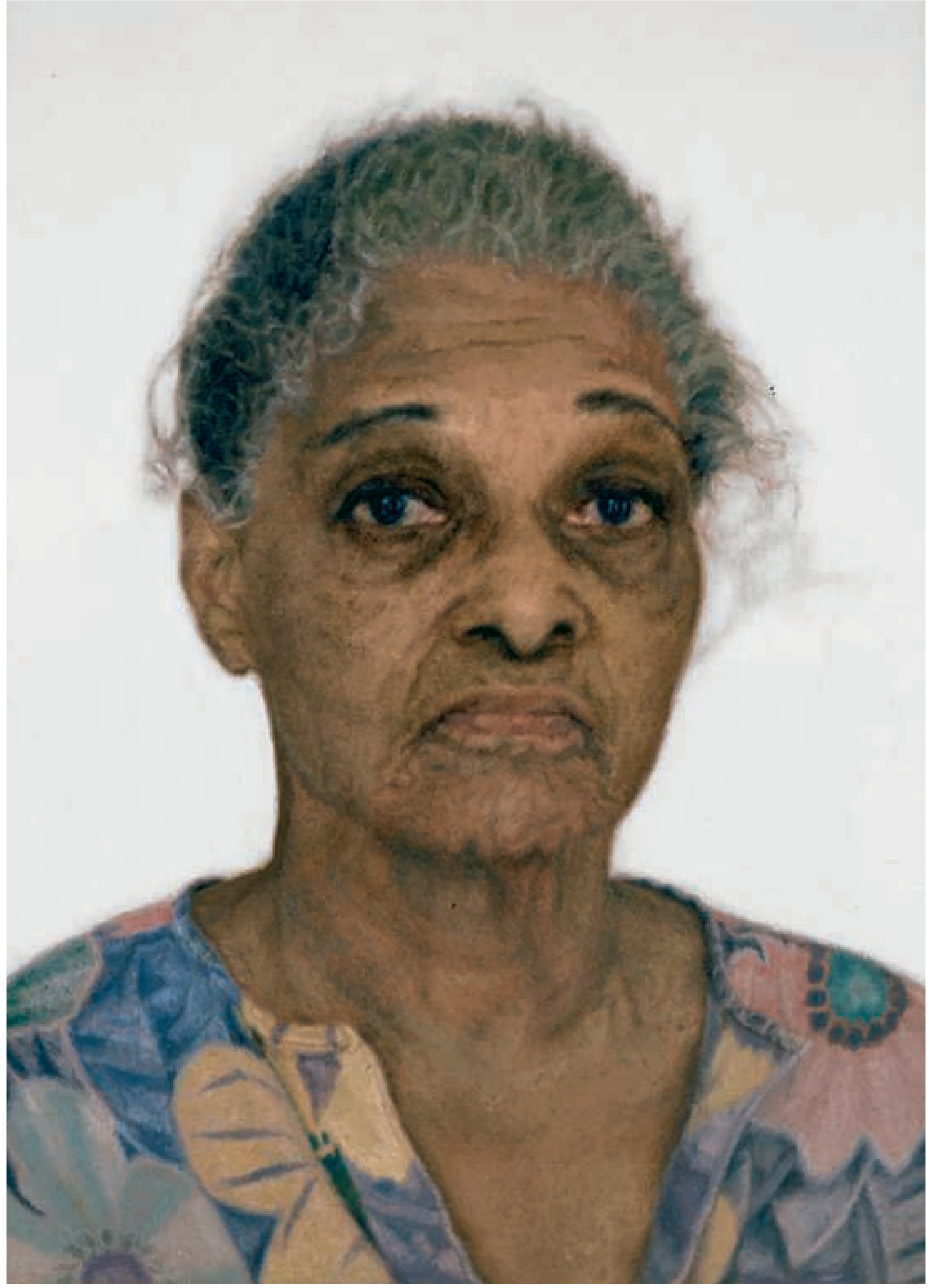
Timo Nasseri (b. 1972)

Stainless steel, 91 × 99 × 19 cm

Private collection

In this futuristic, explosive expression of Islamic philosophy, mathematics and art, Timo Nasseri attempts to unravel the conundrums of form and space. Born and raised in Berlin, on a trip to Iran in 1997 Nasseri was overwhelmed by the rich art and architecture he encountered: domes, calligraphy, the honeycomb structures of the ornamented vaulting known as *muqarnas*. The reflective surfaces of the steel in *Glance #1* also echo *ayneh-kari*, the cut-mirror work traditionally used in Iranian architecture.[54] But it is his deep analytical explorations that make his work so exciting, combining an aesthetic approach with a desire to explore the universe: in his own words, 'sensorial representations of unlimited possibilities of the imagination and of existence created out of chaos'.[55]





229

Untitled

2000

Y.Z. Kami (b. 1956)

Oil on canvas, 106.7 × 76.2 cm

The Gibson Family Collection

Informed by studies in philosophy and Sufism and encounters with Fayyum paintings at the Louvre in Paris in the 1970s,[56] New York-based Y.Z. Kami's oeuvre includes meditations on spirituality, be they in the form of domes, prayers or, as in this instance, portrait studies of the ephemerality of human existence. Kami's explorations in portraiture were prompted when, on a trip back to Iran, he found a photograph of himself as a boy, which tested the relationship between memory and identity. In the gentle treatment of his unnamed subject and without clues to her identity, this painting seems to belie the very function of portraiture: to elucidate someone. Despite recognizing the grace and strength of age and experience, we cannot grasp her: her direct gaze seems to travel beyond, as if she is intensely occupied with something else, giving prominence to her inner consciousness. Through delicate application of pigment, and the tension between hyper-realism and focal blurring the artist's subject slips from view.[57]

230

Qajar #19

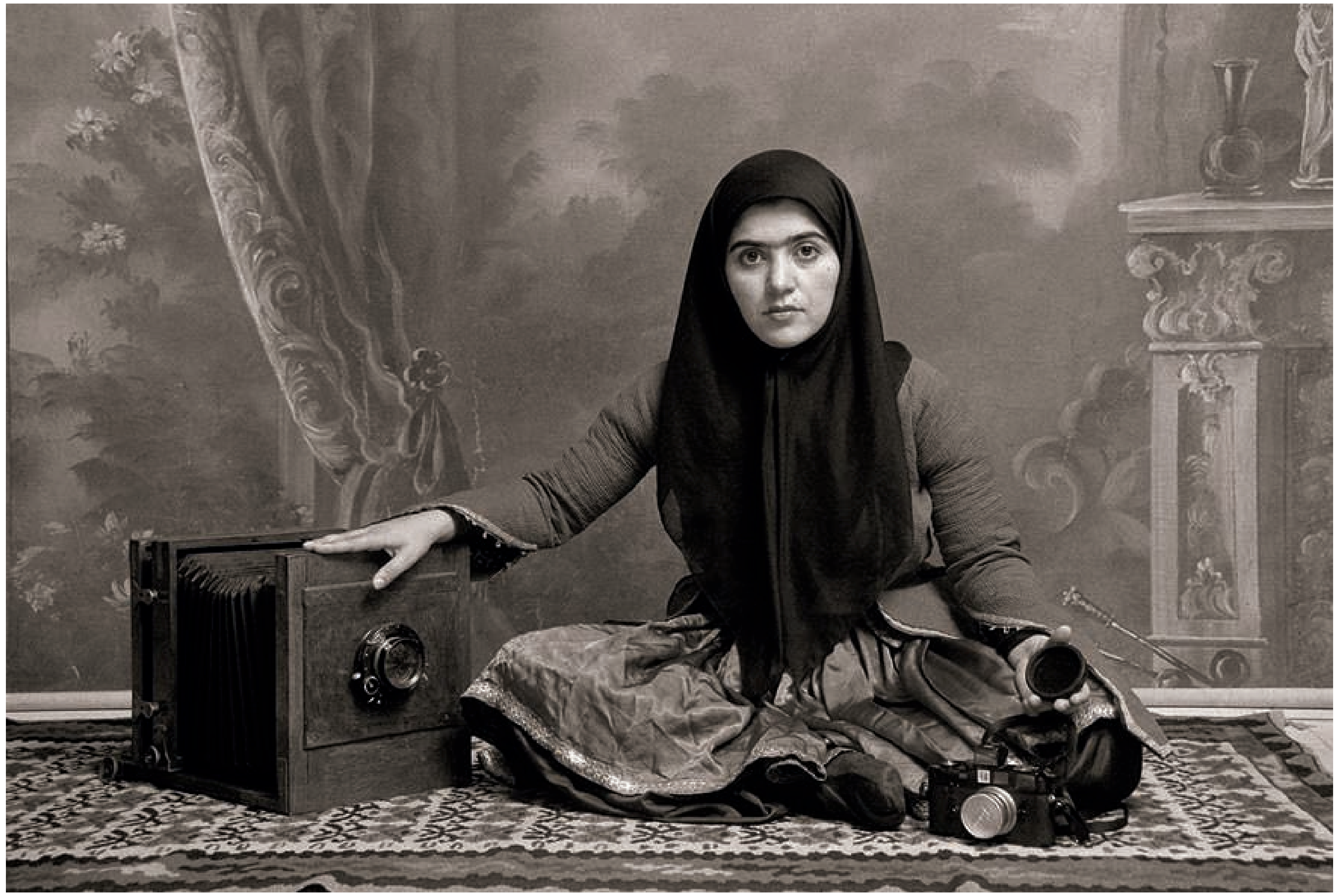
1998

Shadi Ghadirian (b. 1974)

Photograph, 60 × 90 cm

Private collection

This series was created in the 1990s, after Shadi Ghadirian had explored the photographic archives of Tehran's Golestan Palace with her teacher, legendary photographer Bahman Jalali. Amazed by the wealth of material amassed due to the 19th-century court fashion for the medium (see p. 265), Ghadirian was intrigued to find evidence of things forbidden to women post-Revolution: short skirts, make-up, bicycles. But her *Qajar* series is much more than a historical exploration. Although the tone is set by the gentle monochrome of early photography, in the anachronistic juxtaposition of modern props, such as a Pepsi can, or a boom box, or sunglasses, she is challenging our perceptions of time and gender. In this particular work, the sitter is seen with a 19th-century studio camera and a modern Leica, suggesting a feminist critique of subject-object relations and asserting the female gaze. It is gently but firmly liberating.[58]



231

Mossadegh

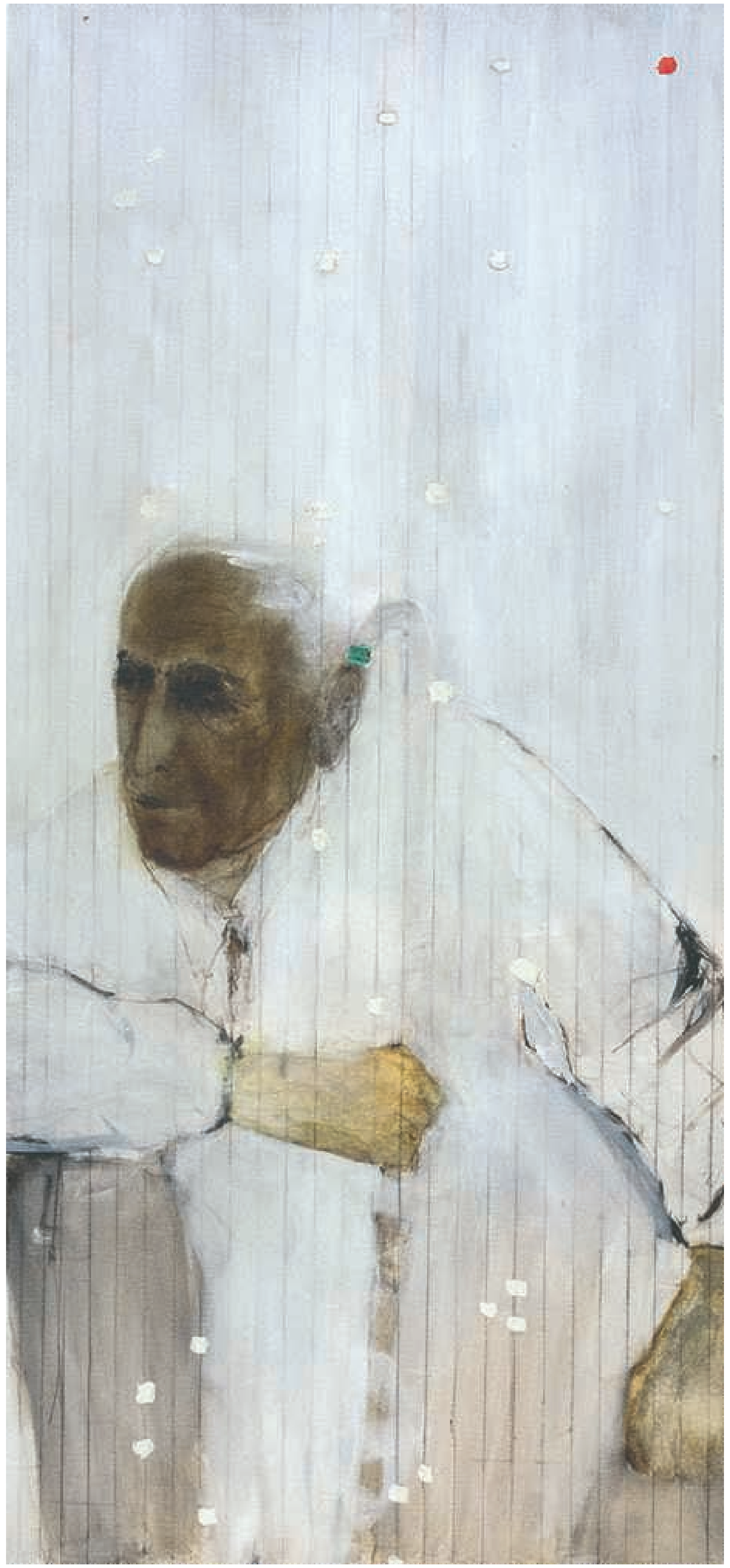
2009

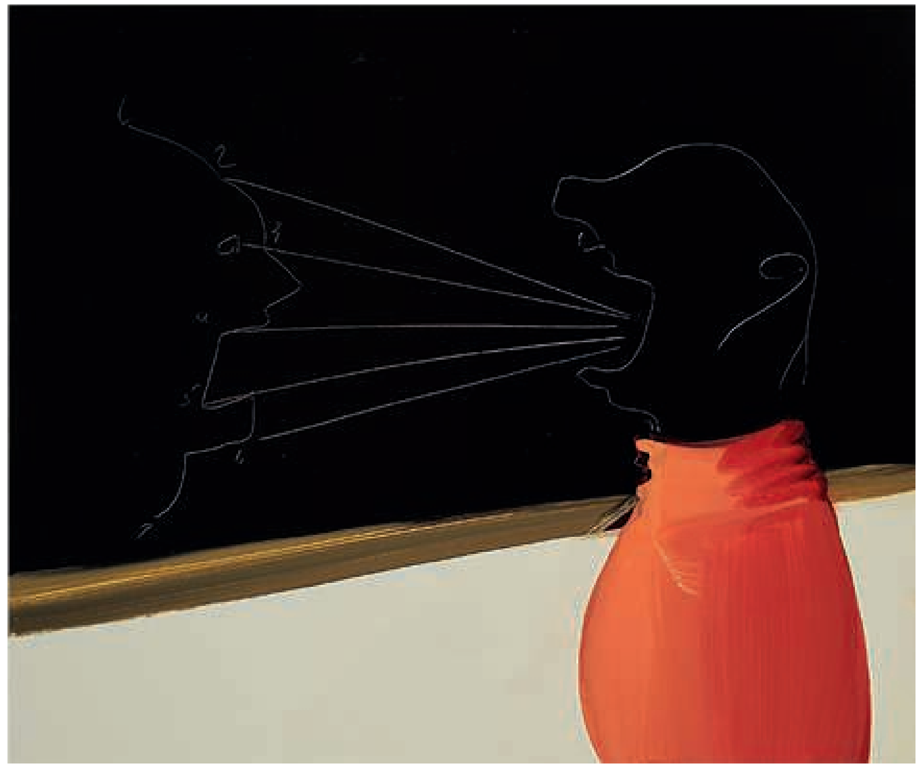
Farideh Lashai (1944–2013)

Oil on canvas, 190 × 90 cm

The Farjam Collection

Painter, sculptor, film artist and writer Farideh Lashai is best known for her Abstract Expressionist rendering of landscapes and still lifes, using highly diluted oil paint to create layers of shimmering colour. However, her reinterpretations of stories and fables, from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) to Francisco Goya's *Los desastres de la guerra* (1910–20) and Edouard Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862–3), also interweave political figures, gender politics and contemporary settings to effect social critique. This portrait of Muhammad Mossadegh, Iran's prime minister from 1951 to 1953, was one of a series she made during a period of ill health, in which she shifted her focus to nostalgia, history and loss. The delicate layers of thinned paint and pale colour palette hint at the compromises of memory; Mossadegh's pose, the clenched fist, the drape of his shoulder, all speak of defeated hope (see p. 278).[59]





232

Making Faces

2008

Tala Madani (b. 1981)

Oil on wood, 25 × 30 cm

Loaned from the collection of Vali Mahlouji

Born in Tehran, Tala Madani left for the United States to study political science, then art. Deeply intellectual and extremely articulate about her work, she is known for her wildly inventive, satirical, cartoon-like and often psychologically provocative explorations of power, fear and identity. The spare lines and bright colour that activate her paintings are even more apparent in her animations, ambiguous narrations on the darker side of humour.

This work, one of her small-scale, more intimate renditions, shows a man in front of a blackboard. He is scream-drawing, as if a self-portrait is vomiting out of him. Using the blackboard as a frame within a frame, and articulating that thin line between the hidden inner and expressed outer self, Madani seems to be peering into a private moment. The balding, middle-aged male obsessed with power, submission and lust is her frequent subject, as she undermines the absurdities of the patriarchy.[60]

233

The Anniversary of the Islamic Republic Revolution

2007

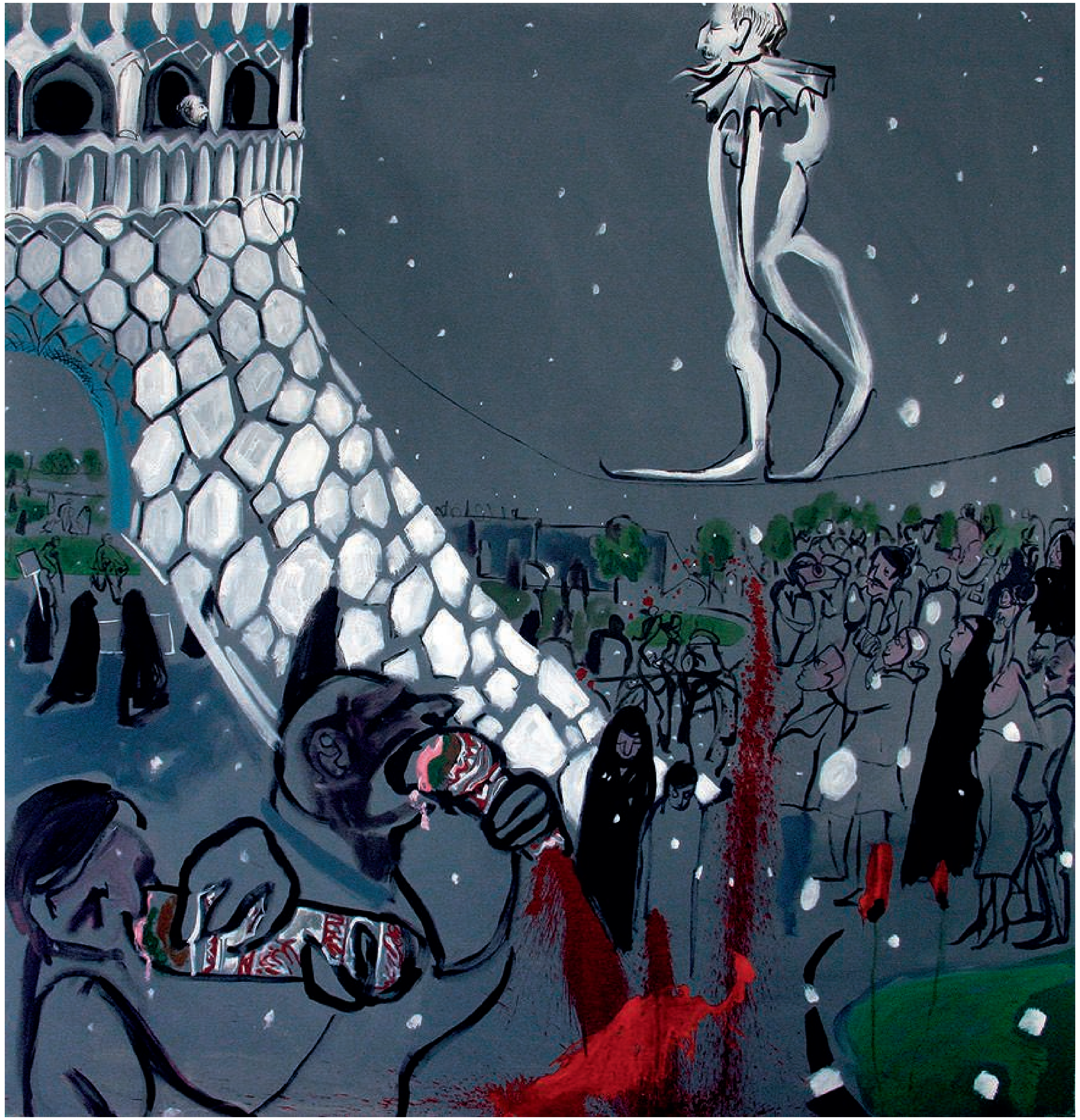
Rokni Haerizadeh (b. 1978)

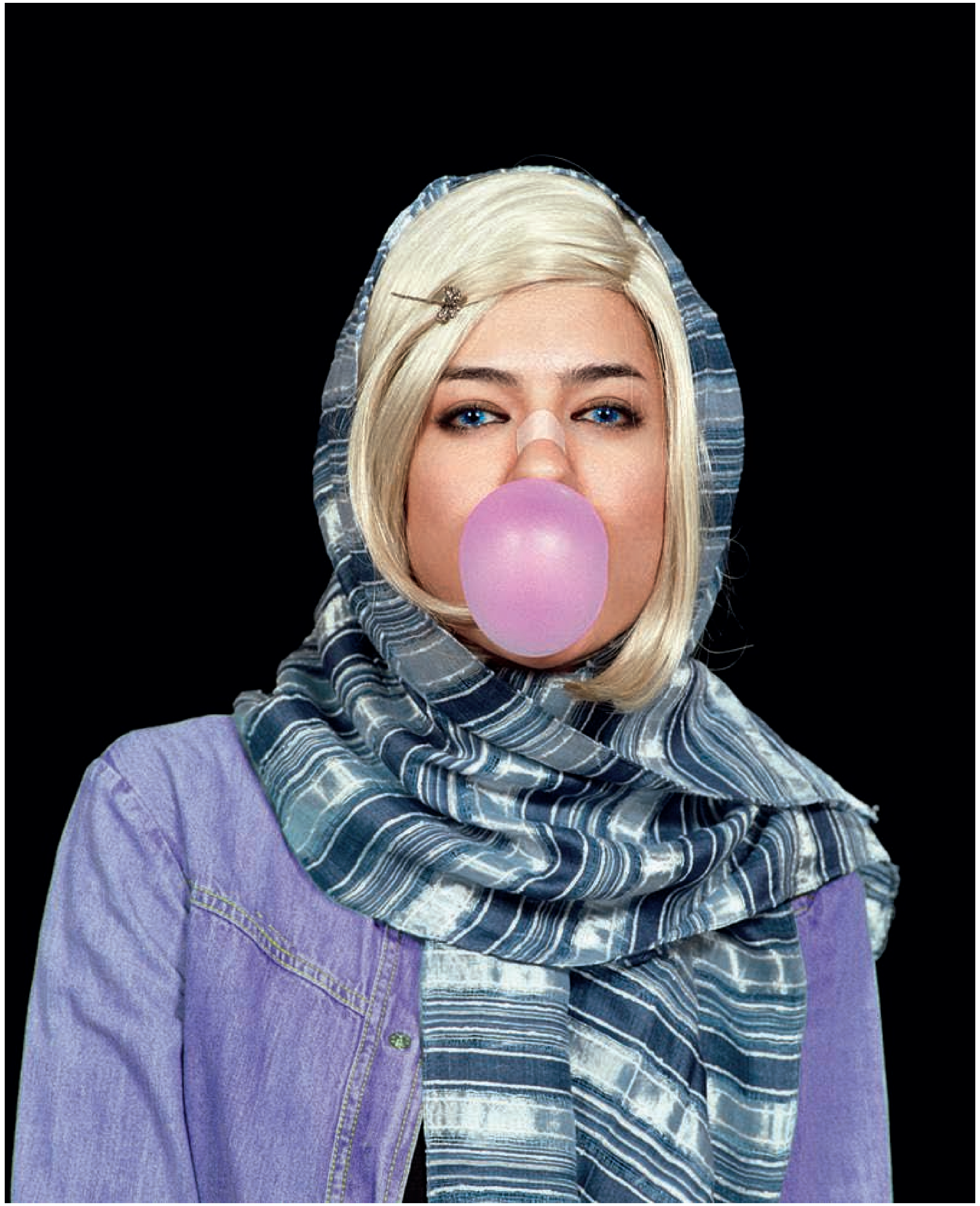
Oil on canvas, 200 × 200 cm

The Farjam Collection

A crowd of people has gathered, seemingly to mark an occasion. Men and *chador*-clad women wander around, eating and chatting beneath the iconic symbol of Tehran, the Azadi (Freedom) Tower (see p. 281). The title of this work, *The Anniversary of the Islamic Republic Revolution*, indicates celebration. But the splash of red over the foreground and precarious balance of the acrobat hint that all is not as it seems. The tension is palpable.

Called the 'bad boy of contemporary Iranian art',[61] Rokni Haerizadeh now lives in a collective in Dubai, with his brother Ramin and colleague Hesam Rahmanian, and the three often collaborate on irreverent, subversive and challenging artworks, installations and performances, using satire to express social and political critique. As an independent artist, Haerizadeh mines Iranian literature and culture, as well as deploying wry observation and humour in his ambitious canvases.





234

Miss Hybrid #3

2008

Shirin Aliabadi (1973–2018)

Lambda print, 150 × 120 cm

The Farjam Collection

A blue-eyed blonde glares defiantly out of the photograph. Her hair slips carelessly out of her blue-and-white headscarf and a sticking plaster boasts a recent nose job. She blows a bubble as she sums you up. Shirin Aliabadi's *Miss Hybrid #3* represents 21st-century urban youth: she is aware of global trends and fashions, and sees herself as a transnational being, demanding the right to self-expression. Her interest lies less in emulating the West and more in testing government-decreed dress codes. Above all, she wants freedom.

Educated in France, archaeologist, artist and curator Aliabadi returned to an Iran that was exploring identity in the 1990s. Often working with her husband, the artist Farhad Moshiri (cat. 226) she was engrossed in communicating the nuanced lives of the young, juggling the political and the playful. As she said before her untimely death, 'the concern of these young women is not to overthrow the government but to have fun'.[62]

235

This Will Also Pass

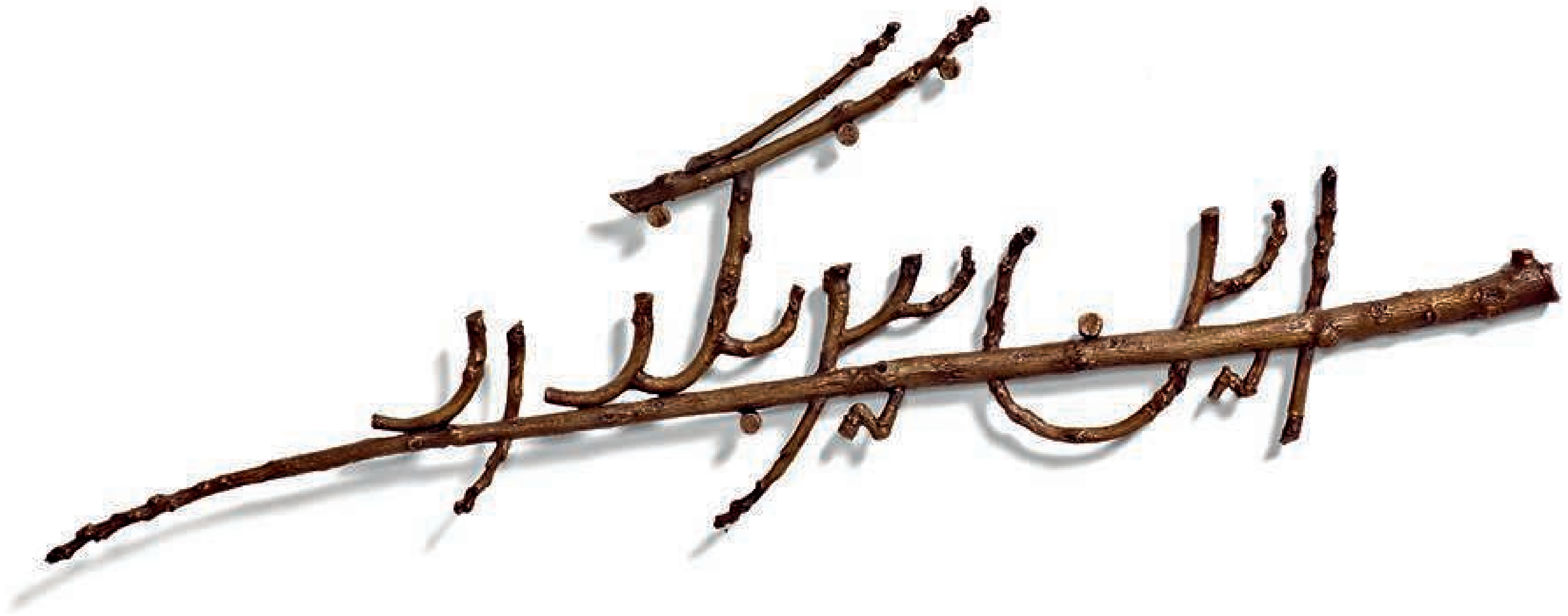
2013

Hossein Valamanesh (b. 1949)

Bronze, 23 × 68.5 × 1.5 cm

The Farjam Collection

The enormous versatility of Hossein Valamanesh's work ranges from radically influential experimental theatre, such as *Shahr-e Ghesseh* (*City of Stories*) in the late 1960s, to sculpture, installation work, painting and public art, often in earthy tones that recollect the *khak*, or earth, of Iran and that of his chosen home, Australia. Deeply philosophical in his approach, Valamanesh explores the relationship between nature, culture and the cosmos through works that deploy the elemental and the personal: wood, earth, bark and leaves; light and shadow; chair, carpet and slipper. From his days as a young Marxist to his later explorations of Buddhism, the works of Rumi have been his constant companion, with their Sufi messages of love, loss and the interconnectedness of the universe. In this work a bronze branch is twisted to form words in his native *farsi*, annunciating: 'This will also pass'. The message of the ephemerality of existence is one for all mankind.[63]



NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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2 Cambridge Ancient History III, part 1, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1982), p. 265.
3 Mohammad T. Atayi and Michael Roaf, 'The arrival of the Persians into Fars', in Yousef Hassanzadeh, Ali A. Vahdati and Zahed Karimi, *The Iron Age In Western Iran and Neighbouring Regions*, vol. 2 (Tehran 2019), pp. 175–90.
4 Kent (cited note 1), DB1, S6.
5 Barry D. Wood, '"A Great Symphony of Pure Form": The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and Its Influence', *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 30, (2000), pp. 113–30.
6 Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackermann (eds), *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, 6 vols (London and New York 1938–9).

1
EMERGING IRAN: SILENT TREASURES FROM THE DAWN OF HISTORY

1 Barbara Helwing, 'Proto-Elamite sites in highland Iran: the state of research at Tappeh Sialk and Arisman', in Jebrael Nokandeh, John Curtis, and Marielle Pic, *Tappeh Sialk: the Glory of Ancient Kashan* (London 2019), pp. 21–6.
2 For a description of the Oxus civilization, see Massimo Vidale, *Treasures from the Oxus: the Art and Civilization of Central Asia* (London 2017).
3 John Curtis, 'A reconsideration of the cemetery at Khinaman, South-East Iran', *Iranica Antiqua* XXIII (1988), pp. 97–124.
4 Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (2nd edn, New Haven, CT 1953), DNa, S2.
5 Ali Hakemi, *Shahdad: Archaeological Excavations of a Bronze Age Centre in Iran* (Rome 1997).
6 Yousef Majidzadeh, *Jiroft: the Earliest Oriental Civilization* (Tehran 2003).
7 *Culture around Halil Roud and Jiroft: Catalogue of Exhibition of Selected Restituted Objects* (Tehran 2005).
8 Daryoosh Akbarzadeh, *Objects from the Jiroft Treasury. Soft Stone and Alabaster Objects (Recovered Collection) from the Halil River Basin in the National Museum of Iran* (Tehran 2013).
9 For a comparable jar from Susa, see Edith Porada, *Ancient Iran* (London 1965), pl. 7.
10 Julian Reade, 'The early Iranian stone "weights" and an unpublished Sumerian foundation deposit', *Iran* XL (2002), pp. 249–55.
11 Majidzadeh (cited note 6), pp. 123–9.
12 Majidzadeh (cited note 6), pp. 130–6.
13 Benjamin Mutin, *The Proto-Elamite Settlement and its Neighbours: Tepe Yahya Period IVc* (Oxford and Oakville, CA 2013).
14 John Curtis (cited note 3), fig. 2, pl. Ia.
15 For an example from Tepe Hissar see Vincent van Vilsteren and Jebrael Nokandeh, *Iran: Bakermat van de Beschavung* (Drents Museum 2018), fig. on p. 67.
16 Javier Alvarez-Mon, *The Arjān Tomb at the Crossroads of the Elamite and Persian Empires*, Acta Iranica 49 (Leuven 2010).
17 Arman Shishegar, *Tomb of the Two Elamite Princesses of the House of King Shutur-Nahunte son of Indada* (Tehran 2015) (in Persian); Mohammad R. Ahmadinia and Arman Shishegar, 'Jubaji, a Neo-Elamite (Phase IIIB, 585–539 BC) tomb in Ramhurmuz, Khuzestan', *Iran* LVII (2019), pp. 142–74.
18 For an account of the Kalmakarra discovery, see Wouter Henkelman in Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Michael Roaf and Robert Rollinger, *Continuity of Empire(?): Assyria, Media, Persia* (Padua 2003), pp. 214–27.
19 MMA 63.74. For the helmet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, see Oscar W. Muscarella, *Bronze and Iron: Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York 1988), no. 331. The MMA example was purchased from K. Rabenou in 1962.
20 Erich F. Schmidt, Maurits N. van Loon and Hans H. Curvers, *The Holmes Expedition to Luristan* (Chicago 1989), pl. 182.
21 John Curtis, *Ancient Persia* (London 2013), p. 16, fig. 14.
22 Leila Khosravi, *Treasure of Kalmakarra Cave* (Tehran 2013) (in Persian).
23 Yousef Hassanzadeh and Hekmatollah Mollasalehi (eds), *An Archaeological Exploration of the Mannaean Site of Qalaichi* (Tehran 2017).
24 See Yousef Hassanzadeh, *A Survey of Mannaean Art and Culture* (Tehran 2016).
25 John Curtis, 'Ziwije (Ziwiyeh)', *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 15 (2017), pp. 336–8.
26 Ezat O. Negahban, *Marlik: The Complete Excavation Report* (Philadelphia 1966), vol. 2, pl. 34 and col. pl. XXII.
27 Barbara Helwing (ed.), *Iran: Frühe Kulturen zwischen Wasser und Wüste* (Bonn 2017), p. 240, no. 188.
28 Curtis (cited note 21), fig. 29.
29 For a similar gold beaker from Marlik, see Negahban (cited note 26), vol. 2, pl. XVIIB and Helwing (cited note 27), p. 198.
30 Helwing (cited note 27), nos 196, 198.
31 Helwing (cited note 27), no. 193.
32 For the Kaluraz figurine see Ali Hakemi, *Archaeological Excavations in Rudbar, Gilan, Iran* (Tehran 2017), figs on pp. 147, 291 (in Persian).
33 See also Alireza Hejebri Nobari et al., 'A chronological view of some Ziwiye belts', *Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 3 (3) (2015), pp. 186–92.
34 For the comparable anthropomorphic vase from Baba Jan, see *Iran* XVI (1978), p. 55, fig. 13.
35 Clare Goff, 'Excavations at Baba Jan: the pottery and metal from Levels III and II', *Iran* XVI (1978), fig. 14, no. 26.
36 Schmidt, Van Loon and Curvers (cited note 20), pls 208–9.

2
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1 For an authoritative history of the Persian empire, see Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: a History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN 2002).
2 Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (2nd edn, New Haven, CT 1953), DNa, S1.
3 Kent (cited note 2), A2Sa.
4 John Curtis, *Ancient Persia* (London 2000), fig. 42.
5 See Shahrokh Razmjou, 'Religion and burial customs', in John Curtis and Nigel Tallis (eds), *Forgotten Empire*: *the World of Ancient Persia* (London 2005), pp. 150–6.
6 Protomes were decorative elements that took the form of the head and upper torso of an animal or person.
7 Michael Roaf, 'Sculptures and Sculptors at Persepolis', *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* XXI (London 1983).
8 *Khvarenah* is an Avestan word, equivalent to Old Persian *farnah* and New Persian *farr*. The winged symbol pendant, often worn nowadays by Iranians and Zoroastrians, is known as the *farvahar.*
9 For publications see Ormonde Dalton, *The Treasure of the Oxus* (3rd edn, London 1964) and John Curtis, *The Oxus Treasure*, British Museum Objects in Focus (London 2012). It is sometimes claimed that the Oxus Treasure is not a hoard but a collection of miscellaneous objects that were not found together. This assertion has been refuted in John Curtis, 'The Oxus Treasure in the British Museum', *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia*, vol. 10 (2004), pp. 293–338, where it is demonstrated that contemporary 19th-century sources corroborate the account of the discovery given in Dalton.
10 John Curtis and Nigel Tallis (eds), *Forgotten Empire*: *the World of Ancient Persia* (London 2005), no. 118.
11 Gerold Walser, *Die Völkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis* (Berlin 1966), pls 8, 10, 13, 38–9.
12 John Curtis, Michael Cowell and Christopher Walker, 'A silver bowl of Artaxerxes I', *Iran*, vol. 33 (1995), pp. 149–53.
13 Ursula Seidl, 'Ein Monument Dareios I aus Babylon', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, vol. 89 (1999), pp. 101–14.
14 Andrew Meadows in Curtis and Tallis (cited note 10), p. 181.
15 Andrew Meadows in Curtis and Tallis (cited note 10), p. 183.
16 Curtis and Tallis (cited note 10), nos 213–57.
17 Curtis and Tallis (cited note 10), no. 398.

3
LAST OF THE ANCIENT EMPIRES: THE IRANIAN RENAISSANCE

1 Georgina Herrmann, *The Iranian Revival* (Oxford 1977), pp. 41–6.
2 For the most recent estimates of Parthian dates, see Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Alexandra Magub, *Rivalling Rome: Parthian Coins and Sculpture* (London 2020), pp. 97–9.
3 Herrmann (cited note 1), p. 25.
4 Louis Vanden Berghe, *Reliefs Rupèstres de l'Iran Ancien* (Brussels 1984), nos 21–2.
5 Roman Ghirshman, *Terrasses sacrées de Bard-è Néchandeh et Masjid-i Solaiman* (Paris 1976), 2 vols.
6 Louis Vanden Berghe and Klaus Schippmann, *Les Reliefs Rupèstres d'Elymaide (Iran) de l'Epoque Parthe* (Ghent 1985).
7 John Curtis, *Ancient Persia* (London 2000), fig. 78 (from Warka); Blair Fowlkes-Childs and Michael Seymour, *The World between Empires: Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East* (New York 2019), no. 179 (from Nippur).
8 Herrmann (cited note 1), pp. 67–72.
9 Fuad Safar and Muhammad Ali Mustafa, *Hatra: the City of the Sun God* (Baghdad 1974).
10 Malcolm Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra* (London 1976).
11 Pers. comm.
12 Martha L. Carter, *Arts of the Hellenized East: Precious Metalwork and Gems of the Pre-Islamic Era* (London 2015), pp. 288–9.
13 Carter (cited note 12), pp. 88–97.
14 Roman Ghirshman, *Bichapour*, 2 vols (Paris 1971).
15 Trudy S. Kawami, 'Kuh-e Khwaja, Iran, and its Wall Paintings: the Records of Ernst Herzfeld', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 22 (1987), pp. 13–52.
16 Vanden Berghe (cited note 4).
17 Curtis (cited note 7), fig. 89.
18 Curtis (cited note 7), figs 91–2.
19 Cf. Roman Ghirshman, *Persian Art: the Parthian and Sasanian Dynasties 249 BC–c.AD 651* (New York 1962), figs 267, 269.
20 Prudence Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York 1978), no. 41.
21 For further information about Zoroastrianism, see Sarah Stewart (ed.), *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination* (London 2013).
22 Later sources suggest that the Parthian king Vologases I (AD 51–78/9) started to collect together Avestan texts that had been dispersed during Alexander's conquest of the Achaemenid empire. See Almut Hintze, 'The Avesta in the Parthian period', in Josef Wiesehöfer (ed.), *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse* (Stuttgart 1980), pp. 147–61.
23 Khojeste Mistree, *Zoroastrianism: an Ethnic Perspective* (Mumbai 1982).
24 For a comparable dish in the Cleveland Museum of Art, see *Splendeur des Sassanides,* exh. cat., Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels 1993), no. 75.
25 Christopher J. Brunner, *Sasanian Stamp Seals in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York 1978), pp. 109–10.
26 See Vesta Curtis, *Persian Myths* (London 1993), pp. 21–2, and Stewart (cited note 21), p. 133.

CHAPTERS 4–8

In addition to the publications listed after the work entries, the author would like to credit the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* [https://iranicaonline.org] for the source material it provided.

9
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY IRAN

1 Wary of Britain after it had secured so many extremely favourable concessions, Reza Shah Pahlavi attempted to keep a balance of influence between Iran and Britain and Iran and Germany but this deteriorated in a rapid downward spiral, both in terms of national autonomy and personal reputation. See Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History* (New Haven, CT and London 2017), pp. 493–9; Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1797* (3rd edn, London 2019) pp. 184–9; Kaveh Farokh, *Iran at War 1500–1988* (Oxford 2011) pp. 221–4. In the end, 'Iran became one of the allies!' (see Ansari, p. 187).
2 Franciszek Machalski notes that between 1941 and 1946 there were 22 significant political parties, 'each with a comprehensive political programme'. Ansari (cited note 1), p. 180.
3 See Amanat (cited note 1), pp. 502–61.
4 For further information on Mossadegh see Christopher de Bellaigue, *Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup* (London 2012).
5 For an overview of the intellectual debates in the Pahlavi era see Ervan Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge and Princeton, NJ 2018), pp. 100–58; Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* (New York 1996).
6 Kamal ol-Molk's uncle, Sani ol-Molk, during the reign of Muhammad Shah (1834–48), had been sent to Europe to study painting, as had Mozzayen al-Dowla, his teacher at the Dar ul-Funun, Iran's first modern university (established 1851). Kamal ol-Molk himself travelled to Vienna, Florence and Paris in the 1890s.
7 Ordered by the Minister of Education Esma'il Mer'at, who had spent years in Paris. See Javad Mojabi, *Pioneers of Contemporary Persian Painting* (Tehran 1998), p. 7.
8 For an interesting discussion of this period, including firsthand accounts by Ziapour, see Mojabi (cited note 7), pp. 9–25.
9 The museum remains active both in showing its international collections and in exhibiting Iranian contemporary artists, although some more risqué works remain hidden from view.
10 Of the 510 performances held over the lifetime of the Festival of Arts, more than half were Iranian. In 1977 Khomeini issued a fatwa on the festival, and as the Revolution heated up, the scheduled 1978 programme was aborted. It remains an iconic and singular project in the Middle East of the 20th century. See Vali Mahlouji, *Unedited History: Iran 1960–2014* (Paris 2014), pp. 52–9 and http://valimahlouji.com/archaeologyofthefinaldecade/ restaging-the-festival-of-arts-shiraz-persepolis-167-77/ (accessed 4 November 2020). See also the information on the 2013 Asia Society symposium: https://asiasociety.org/new-york/symposium-shiraz-arts-festival (accessed 4 November 2020).
11 See Abrahamian (cited note 5); Amanat (cited note 1).
12 See Minister Hoveida's article in the newspaper *Etela'at*, 8 January 1978, quoted in Ansari (cited note 1), p. 303.
13 For a fascinating account of his life see Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London 2009).
14 As expressed in his 1970 book *Velayat-e Faqih*, *The Guardianship of the Jurist*, or, as more commonly translated, *Islamic Government*. A modified version of this was adopted after the Revolution, with Khomeini as the first *faqih*, or Supreme Leader.
15 For the development of radical Islamic thought in Iran see Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Selangor 1982; reprinted 2004); Abbas Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism* (London 2009).
16 For a very neat description of the new system of government, including how universal suffrage over the age of 16 was compromised by other considerations, see Abrahamian (cited note 5), pp. 166–73.
17 For background information on the ideology of the early years, including the Cultural Revolution purges, see Abrahamian (cited note 5); Amanat (cited note 1), pp. 809–17.

18 Amanat (cited note 1), p. 774.

19 For an overview of the war see Farokh (cited note 1), pp. 342–415. For statistical information on the death toll see Ansari (cited note 1), p. 341.

20 Amanat (cited note 1), p. 837.

21 According to OPEC, after Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. See https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm for oil and http://energyatlas.iea.org/#!/tellmap/-1165808390 for gas data (accessed 4 November 2020).

22 Abrahamian (cited note 5), p. 194.

23 See Amanat (cited note 1), p. 781.

24 Ansari (cited note 1), p. 327.

25 Amanat (cited note 1), p. 895.

26 For the 2009 Green Revolution see Amanat (cited note 1), pp. 894–6; Ali M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (London 2019), pp. 365–460; and Pouya Alimagham, *Contesting the Iranian Revolution: The Green Uprisings* (Cambridge 2020).

27 The Iranian Jalali calendar is a solar calendar based on that used since pre-Islamic times, reset to the date of Arab conquest. Each year has 365.25 days, and the new year is marked by the exact moment of the spring solstice, which corresponds to 20–22 March in the Gregorian calendar. By contrast, the Arabic calendar is a lunar one of 12 months (or 354/5 days) and dates from Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina.

28 Quoted in Fereshteh Daftari, *Persia Reframed: Iranian Visions of Modern and Contemporary Art* (London 2019); see also Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York 1996), especially pp. 66–9.

29 It barely needs to be mentioned that these are not artists copying 'western modernism,' as used to be the orientalizing view, but artists participating in mid-century modernism as equal agents. See Finbarr Barry Flood, *From the Prophet to Postmodernism: New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art* (New York 2007); Sussan Babaie, 'The Global in the Local: Implicating Iran in Art and History', in *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East,* ed. Anthony Downey (London 2015); Shiva Balaghi, 'Iranian Visual Arts in "The Century of Machinery, Speed and the Atom": Rethinking Modernity', in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, ed. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London 2002); Hans Belting, *Art History after Postmodernism* (Chicago 2003); Daftari (cited note 28); and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York 1994).

30 Reza Barahani and Dariush Kiaras, *An Overview of Iranian Modern Art 1: Sirak Melkonian* (Tehran 2015), p. 12.

31 Karim Emami, 'Saqqakhaneh School Revisited', *Saqqakhaneh*, exh. cat., Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977; reprinted in Fereshteh Daftari and Layla Diba, *Iran Modern* (New York 2013). See also Houra Yavari (ed.), *Karim Emami on Modern Iranian Culture, Literature and Art* (New York 2014).

32 For more on the Saqqa-khaneh see Daftari and Diba (cited note 31); Balaghi and Gumpert (cited note 29); Daftari (cited note 28); Sussan Babaie with Venetia Porter and Natasha Morris, *Honar: The Afkhami Collection of Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art* (London 2017).

33 Reza Barahani and Dariush Kiaras, *Sirak Melkonian*, exh. cat., Sazmanah Center for Contemporary Art/Ab-Anbar and Aria Gallery, 2015, p. 11.

34 *Avesta*: the ancient book of Zoroastrianism.

35 From the poem 'Primeval Call', quoted in *Three Pioneers of Iranian Modern Painting: Houshang Pezeshknia, Sohrab Sepehri, Hossein Kazemi* (Tehran 2001), p. 135.

36 For detailed analysis see Venetia Porter, 'Meem 1958: By Siah Armajani', in Venetia Porter and Mariam Rosser-Owen (eds), *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft and Text* (London 2012), pp. 461–7.

37 See Emami (cited note 31).

38 Hans Ulrich Obrist and Karen Marta (eds), *Monir Shahroudy Faramanfarmaian: Cosmic Geometry* (Bologna 2011).

39 Houra Yavari (ed.), *Karim Emami on Modern Iranian Culture, Literature & Art*, compiled by Goli Emami (California 2014), p. 158.

40 Quoted in Morad Montazami and Narmine Sadeg (eds), *Behdjat Sadr: Traces* (Paris 2014), p. 36.

41 Since the death of Khomeini in 1989 there has been only one Supreme Leader: Ali Khamenei. He is both Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the army, making him the most powerful man in Iran.

42 'Women without Men: A Conversation with Shirin Neshat', in Lila Azam Zanganeh (ed.) *Uncensored Iranian Voices* (Boston 2006), p. 45; also quoted in Talinn Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio* (London 2014), p. 213.

43 See Hamid Keshmirshekan, 'Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art: Developments and Challenges', in Hossein Amirsadeghi (ed.), *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art* (London 2009), p. 33.

44 See Grigor (cited note 42), p. 138.

45 For example, Hans Belting argues that the relevance of art history is challenged not only by modern modes and practices – the deconstruction of boundaries between high and low art; the temporality of (multi-)media art; the transformational practices of contemporary museums/galleries – but also because 'world art is on the rise, a chimera of global culture that challenges our well-trained Western definition of art'. Belting (cited note 19), p. ix.

46 See Arthur C. Danto and Marina Abramovic, *Shirin Neshat* (New York 2010) and Ed Schad, *Shirin Neshat: I Will Greet the Sun Again,* with essays by Godfrey Cheshire, Layla S. Diba, Farazaneh Milani and Ed Schad (Munich, London and New York 2019).

47 Email from the artist to the author, October 2020.

48 Quoted in Hossein Amirsadeghi (ed.), *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art* (London 2009), p. 196.

49 Homi K. Bhabha, David Green and Hamid Naficy, *Mitra Tabrizian: Another Country* (Berlin 2012); Rose Issa, *Mitra Tabrizian: This Is That Place* (London 2008); Parveen Adams and David Bate, *Mitra Tabrizian: Off Screen* (Berlin 2020).

50 Made in 2004 and in the Mohammad Afkhami Collection. See Sussan Babaie, Venetia Porter and Natasha Morris, *Honar: The Afkhami Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art* (London 2017), p. 144.

51 See Mirjam Shatanawi, *Tehran Studio Works: The Art of Khosrow Hassanzadeh* (London 2007).

52 Farhad Moshiri in *Farhad Moshiri*, vol. I, ed. Dina Nasser-Khadivi (Milan 2016), p. 31.

53 Daftari (cited note 28), p. 184.

54 As explored by fellow artist Monir Farmafarmaian.

55 Quoted in Roxane Zand (ed.), *Geometry and Art in the Modern Middle East* (Milan 2019), p. 134.

56 Lifelike funerary panel portraits that were attached to mummies of high-ranking Roman Egyptians, mostly found in the Faiyum Basin.

57 See Robert Storr, Laura Cumming and Elena Geuna, *Y.Z. Kami Works 1985-2018* (Milan 2019).

58 See Rose Issa, *Shadi Ghadirian: A Woman Photographer from Iran* (London 2008).

59 Negar Azimi and Paloma Martin Llopis, *Farideh Lashai: Which Road do I Take* (New York 2013).

60 John Peter Nilsson, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Daniel Birnbaum and Julia Bjornberg, *Tala Madani: Rip Image* (Cologne 2013).

61 Daftari (cited note 28), p. 144.

62 https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/19/obituaries/shirin-aliabadi-dead.html (accessed 6 Oct 2020).

63 See Mary Knights and Ian North, *Hossein Valamanesh: Out of Nothingness* by (Adelaide 2011).

EXHIBITED WORKS

All pre-Islamic objects included in the exhibition have been subjected to a rigorous due diligence process to establish that they were exported from Iran before 1972. In that year Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi signed a firman prohibiting the export of antiquities. In a number of cases objects may have been through several hands since leaving Iran, and it is noted below when objects entered the collection to which they now belong. The date of acquisition is only recorded if this is not evident from the acquisition number or if the objects are officially excavated

The information below is correct at time of going to press and follows the shape of the exhibition. The wording may vary from that of the catalogue captions.

Room 2

(cat. 1)
Proto-Elamite tablet
about 3200–2900 BC
Susa, Iran
Clay
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 6392

(cat. 2)
Proto-Elamite tablet
about 3200–2900 BC
Tepe Sialk, Iran
Clay
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, AO 18173

(cat. 3)
Bulla
about 3200–2900 BC
Susa, Iran
Clay
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 1926

Animal pendant
about 3100–2900 BC
Provenance unknown
Silver
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 47.100.89

(cat. 4)
Figurine of a man
about 3200–2900 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007.280

(cat. 5)
Painted pottery jar
about 2900–2600 BC
Kalleh Nisar, Iran
Clay
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.1513

(cat. 9)
Vase
about 2500 BC
Provenance unknown
Chlorite
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 17.190.106

Axe-head with lion
about 2250–2000 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, 1951.156

(cat. 12)
Axe-head with wrestlers
about 2250–2000 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2051, purchased 2007

Axe-head with man killing a monster
about 2250–2000 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2022, purchased 2007

Pottery spouted goblet
about 2500–2000 BC
Yanik Tepe, Iran
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1962.383

Pottery bowl
about 2500–2000 BC
Yanik Tepe, Iran
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1962.385

(cat. 13)
Statue of a worshipper
about 2700–2340 BC
Susa, Iran
Alabaster
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 84

Statue of a worshipper
about 2700–2340 BC
Susa, Iran
Alabaster
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 83

(cat. 14)
Mouflon-head ornament
about 2200–1700 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold and copper
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1071, purchased 2014

Painted pottery bowl
about 2000 BC
Geoy Tepe, Iran
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1949.1033

(cat. 15)
Painted pottery jar
about 2250–1750 BC
Probably Tepe Giyan, Iran
Clay
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.152, acquired 1932

Painted pottery jar
about 2250–1750 BC
Probably Tepe Giyan, Iran
Clay
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, ANE.3.1968

(cat. 16)
Tankard of Attahushu
about 1900 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
British Museum, 134884, purchased 1966

Cylinder seal
about 1900–1600 BC
Provenance unknown
Faience
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 56.81.44

(cat. 17)
Inscribed brick
about 1340–1300 BC
Susa, Iran
Clay
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.2

(cat. 18)
Wall plaque
about 1340–1300 BC
Chogha Zanbil, Iran
Clay
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.1760

(cat. 19)
Group of two figures
about 1500–1100 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2061, purchased 2007

Worshipper figurine
1500–1250 BC
Susa, Iran
Bronze
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 2747

Worshipper figurine
1500–1250 BC
Susa, Iran
Bronze
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 2826

(cat. 20)
Helmet
about 1500–1100 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze, gold, bitumen
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1072, purchased 2011

Roundel with animal decoration
about 1400–1200 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold, silver, bronze, bitumen
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 62.115

(cat. 21)
Three figurines of naked women
about 1500–1100 BC
Susa, Iran
Clay
Great North Museum: Hancock. Collection of the Natural History Society of Northumbria, H248, H250, H251

Cylinder seal with offering scene
about 1480–1450 BC
Provenance unknown
Apatite
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 43.102.39

Standard top
about 1500–1100 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 57.13.1

(cat. 22)
Bas relief of a woman spinning
about 800–700 BC
Susa, Iran
Bitumen
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 2834

Figurine of a woman
about 900–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.721, acquired 1956

(cat. 23)
Figurine of a woman
about 900–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.722, acquired 1956

Cylinder seal with monstrous animals
about 900–550 BC
Provenance unknown
Bitumen
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 43.102.40

(cat. 24)
Handle attachments with bulls
about 800–550 BC
Susa, Iran
Bronze
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 3748A–B

Inscribed dagger
about 1099–1082 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2066, purchased 2016

Bronze beaker with hunting scene
about 1000–800 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 48.178.1

(cat. 29)
Hump-backed bull
about 1200–800 BC
Provenance unknown
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. AN1964.347

(cat. 30)
Naked woman figurine
about 1200–800 BC
Provenance unknown
Clay
The Sarikhani Collection, A.CE.1020, purchased 2015

(cat. 32)
Beaker decorated with animals
about 1200–1000 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1076, purchased 2016

(cat. 33)
Beaker with a hunting scene
about 1200–1000 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1021, purchased 2007

(cat. 34)
Bowl with gazelles
about 1200–800 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 62.84

(cat. 35)
Figurine of horse and rider
about 800–600 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2033, purchased 2007

(cat. 36)
Pottery jar on stand
about 1000–800 BC
Hasanlu, Iran
Clay
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 60.20.15, 60.20.16

(cat. 37)
Lion dress pin
about 1000–800 BC
Hasanlu, Iran
Bronze, iron
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 61.100.10

(cat. 38)
Pair of bird-shaped handles
about 1000–800 BC
Hasanlu, Iran
Bronze
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 61.100.3a,b

Gold earrings
about 1000–800 BC
Hasanlu, Iran
Gold
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 65.163.62a,b

(cat. 39)
Decorated belt fragment
about 800–600 BC
Probably Ziwiyeh, Iran
Gold
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1079, purchased 2017

(cat. 40)
Decorated belt fragment
about 800–600 BC
Probably Ziwiyeh, Iran
Gold
British Museum, 132825, purchased 1960

(cat. 42)
Painted tile
about 800–700 BC
Baba Jan Tepe, Iran
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1969.34

Painted tile
about 800–700 BC
Baba Jan Tepe, Iran
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1968.1527

(cat. 44)
Painted pottery jar
about 800–700 BC
Baba Jan Tepe, Iran
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1969.1

Painted pottery beaker
about 800–700 BC
Baba Jan Tepe, Iran
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1970.61

Lamp
about 800–700 BC
Baba Jan Tepe, Iran
Bronze
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1971.1561

(cat. 43)
Anthropomorphic pottery vase
about 800–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1971.982

Pottery tripod jar
about 800–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1967.1452

(cat. 45)
Horse-bit
about 900–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2015, purchased 2007

Whetstone handle
about 900–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, ANE.19.1981

(cat. 46)
Standard
about 900–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1965.794

(cat. 48)
Dress-pin
about 900–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1951.358

(cat. 47)
Piravend figurine
about 900–700 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2045, purchased 2007

Jar with animal decoration
about 1000–800 BC
Provenance unknown
Bronze
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.257.1a,b

(cat. 49)
Board game
about 800–600 BC
Tepe Sialk, Iran
Clay
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales AO 19438

(cat. 50)
Painted pottery jug
about 800–600 BC
Probably Tepe Sialk, Iran
Clay
British Museum, 129072, purchased 1937

Currency hoard
about 600–550 BC
Tepe Nush-e Jan, Iran
Silver
British Museum, 135072–85

Pottery jar
about 600–550 BC
Tepe Nush-e Jan, Iran
Clay
British Museum, 135947

Room 3

(cat. 52)
Relief with servant climbing stairs
359–338 BC
Persepolis, Iran
Limestone
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, AO 14050, purchased 1931

(cat. 53)
Relief with two courtiers
465–424 BC
Persepolis, Iran
Limestone
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, ANE.43.1927

Relief with two Persian guardsmen
515–480 BC
Persepolis, Iran
Limestone
British Museum, 118844, presented 1818

Relief with Persian guardsman
515–480 BC
Persepolis, Iran
Limestone
British Museum, 118866, presented 1861

(cat. 54)
Relief with head of a Persian
515–480 BC
Persepolis, Iran
Limestone
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1982.944

(cat. 55)
Relief with head of man in Median costume
486–465 BC
Persepolis, Iran
Limestone
V&A: A.13-1916

Relief fragment with part of man's face
359–338 BC
Persepolis, Iran
Limestone
V&A: 986-1886

Modern casts of reliefs on western façade of west staircase of Palace of Darius
Original reliefs 359–338 BC, moulds made in AD 1891
Persepolis, Iran
Plaster
British Museum
C.226.5A, 6A, 7A-B, 8A-B, 9A-B

Modern cast of relief showing servants climbing a staircase
Original relief 359–338 BC, mould made in AD 1891
Persepolis, Iran
Plaster
British Museum, C.227

Modern cast of relief showing nobles in Persian and Median dress
Original relief 515–480 BC, mould made in AD 1891
Persepolis, Iran
Plaster
British Museum, C.229.1, 2A, 3

Modern cast of relief showing decorated canopy
Original relief 470–450 BC, mould made in AD 1891
Persepolis, Iran
Plaster
British Museum, C.225.7A, 8A

Glazed brick panel with guard
522–486 BC
Susa, Iran
Sintered quartz
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 23177

Replicas of glazed brick panels in Louvre showing guards
Original panels 522–486 BC, copies made in AD 1889–91
Susa, Iran
Plaster, paint
V&A: REPRO.1891:1 to 8-87

(cat. 60)
Model of a chariot
500–330 BC
Oxus Treasure, Tajikistan
Gold
British Museum, 123908, bequeathed 1897

(cat. 61)
Armlet
500–330 BC
Oxus Treasure, Tajikistan
Gold
V&A: 442-1884

(cat. 62)
Scabbard
500–330 BC
Oxus Treasure, Tajikistan
Gold
British Museum, 123923, bequeathed 1897

Gold scabbard
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1033, purchased 2007

(cat. 63)
Pendant
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1044, purchased 2008

(cat. 64)
Earring
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1989.281.33

Lion appliqué
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 55.186

(cat. 65)
Lion rhyton
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 54.3.3

(cat. 66)
Horse rhyton
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Silver gilt
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1070, purchased 2013

(cat. 67)
Griffin rhyton
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Silver gilt
British Museum, 124081, bequeathed 1897

(cat. 68)
Goat-headed rhyton
500–330 BC
Deve Hüyük, Turkey
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1913.636

(cat. 69)
Jug with winged horse handle
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Silver
Wyvern Collection, 2556, purchased 2018

Jug with ibex handles
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Silver
Wyvern Collection, 2375, purchased 2017

Vase handle
500–330 BC
Oxus Treasure, Tajikistan
Silver
British Museum, 123911, bequeathed 1897

Large bowl
500–330 BC
Susa, Iran
Bronze
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 13757

***Omphalos* bowl**
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Gold
Wyvern Collection, 2100, purchased 2015

(cat. 73)
Bowl
500–330 BC
Deve Hüyük, Turkey
Bronze
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1913.673

Beaker
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Silver
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1967.819

(cat. 74)
Figurine of horse and rider
500–330 BC
Deve Hüyük, Turkey
Clay
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1913.648

(cat. 75)
Cyrus cylinder
539–538 BC
Babylon, Iraq
Clay
British Museum, 90920

Pair of shovels
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Silver
British Museum, 123263, 123264, bequeathed 1897

(cat. 77)
Cuneiform tablet
about 500 BC
Qasr-e Abu Nasr, Iran
Clay
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 36.30.62

Foundation slab
522–486 BC
Susa, Iran
Limestone
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 9770

Cylinder seal
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Agate
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, ANE.509.2.1954

(cat. 78)
Cylinder seal
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Chalcedony
British Museum, 132505, bequeathed 1959

(cat. 79)
Cylinder seal
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Chalcedony
British Museum, 89337, purchased 1825

Cylinder seal
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Agate
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, ANE.56.1982

Cylinder seal
500–330 BC
Provenance unknown
Lapis lazuli
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, IR.31, acquired 1932

(cat. 80)
Daric coin
about 400–375 BC
Minted in Asia Minor
Gold
British Museum, 1915,0108.28

Daric coin
500–330 BC
Minted in Asia Minor
Gold
British Museum, 1906,1103.2703

(cat. 81)
Siglos coin
about 520–500 BC
Minted in Asia Minor
Silver
British Museum, 1852,0902.110

Siglos coin
about 500–480 BC
Minted in Asia Minor
Silver
British Museum, 1845,1217.272

(cat. 82)
Stater coin of Evagoras II
about 361–330 BC
Minted in Cyprus
Silver
British Museum, 1905,1006.25

Stater coin of Evagoras II
about 361–330 BC
Minted in Cyprus
Silver
British Museum, RPK,p167B.3.Pho, bequeathed 1824

Stater coins of Tiribazus
about 387–380 BC
Minted in Issus, Turkey and Soli, Cyprus
Silver
British Museum, BNK,G.1157, RPK,p166E.13.Pho, presented 1877 and bequeathed 1824

Stater coins of Mazaeus
about 361–333 BC
Minted in Tarsus, Turkey
Silver
British Museum, 1848,0819.51, 1922,0418.2

(cat. 83)
Double shekel coin of Mazaeus
about 352 BC
Minted in Sidon, Lebanon
Silver
British Museum, 1870,0501.1

Double shekel coin of Mazaeus
about 352 BC
Minted in Sidon, Lebanon
Silver
British Museum, 1906,0712.53

Room 4

(cat. 84)
Tetradrachm coin of Mithradates I
about 141–139/8 BC
Minted in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Iraq
Silver
British Museum, 1848,0803.22

Tetradrachm coin of Orodes II
37 BC
Minted in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Iraq
Silver
British Museum, 1891,0603.10

(cat. 85)
Tetradrachm coin of Artabanus II
AD 27
Minted in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Iraq
Silver
British Museum 1887,0502.16

Tetradrachm coin of Artabanus II
AD 27
Minted in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Iraq
Silver
British Museum, 1887,0502.13

(cat. 86)
Bowl with bust of woman
AD 177
Provenance unknown
Silver
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1077, purchased 2016

(cat. 87)
Relief with male worshipper
about AD 100–200
Provenance unknown
Sandstone
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 51.72.1

(cat. 88)
Relief with figure performing ritual
about AD 100–200
Masjid-e Soleiman, Iran
Limestone
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 7302

(cat. 89)
Relief of Heracles-Verethragna
about AD 100–200
Masjid-e Soleiman, Iran
Limestone
British Museum, 127335

Head of a worshipper
about AD 100–200
Bard-e Neshandeh, Iran
Limestone
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 6760

Head of a worshipper
about AD 100–200
Bard-e Neshandeh, Iran
Stone
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités orientales, Sb 6759

Arm fragment
about 100 BC – AD 100
Probably Shami, Iran
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2070, acquired 2012

(cat. 91)
Lion-headed rhyton
about 200 BC – AD 100
Provenance unknown
Silver gilt
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1030, purchased 2007

Horse-headed rhyton
about 200 BC – AD 100
Provenance unknown
Silver
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1055, purchased 2008

Vase handle
about 100 BC – AD 200
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2021, purchased 2007

(cat. 93)
Bust of a king
about 439–57
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2065, purchased 2016

(cat. 94)
Furniture leg
about 250–400
Provenance unknown
Bronze
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.2064, purchased 2014

(cat. 96)
Dish showing a king hunting stags
about 309–79
Provenance unknown
Silver gilt
British Museum, 124091, acquired 1908

(cat. 97)
Dish showing a king hunting ibexes and gazelles
about 484–629
Ufa, Bashkortostan, Russia
Silver gilt
State Hermitage Museum, S-297, found in 1941

Dish showing a king hunting a boar and a lion
about 500–750
Provenance unknown
Silver
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1060, purchased 2008

Goddess seated on a lion, surrounded by cupid figures and dancers
about 500–600
Provenance unknown
Silver gilt
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1075, purchased 2016

Vase with harvest scene
about 500–650
Said to be from Mazanderan, Iran
Silver
British Museum, 124094, bequeathed 1897

(cat. 98)
Ewer showing dancing women
about 400–650
Provenance unknown
Silver gilt
Wyvern Collection, 2349, purchased 2016

(cat. 99)
Pair of flasks
about 400–650
Provenance unknown
Gold
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1011, A.MW.1012, purchased 2007

(cat. 100)
Bowl
about 250–650
Provenance unknown
Glass
The Sarikhani Collection, A.GL.1009, purchased 2017

Lion-headed disc
about 300–400
Provenance unknown
Silver
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1062, purchased 2008

Sword with scabbard
about 500–650
Provenance unknown
Iron, gold
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1057, purchased 2008

(cat. 101)
Stamp seal
about 439–57
Provenance unknown
Carnelian
British Museum, 119994,
purchased 1863

(cat. 112)
Drachm coin of Shapur I
about 242–72
Probably minted in Iran
Silver
British Museum, 1843,0620.5

Drachm coin of Bahram V
about 420–38
Minted in Ohrmazd-Ardakshir, Iran
Silver
British Museum, 1913,0601.1

Drachm of Khosrow I
about 570
Minted in Raay, Iran
Silver
British Museum, 1928,0606.290

(cat. 102)
Drachm coin of Khosrow II
about 625
Minted in Iran
Silver
British Museum, 1935,0303.1

(cat. 103)
Dish with enthronement and hunting scenes
about 488–579
Perm, Russia
Silver gilt
State Hermitage Museum, S-250,
found in 1908

(cat. 104)
Dish showing a dancing woman
about 400–650
Provenance unknown
Silver gilt
The Sarikhani Collection, A.MW.1049,
purchased 2008

(cat. 105)
Dish showing a bird
about 500–750
Provenance unknown
Silver
Wyvern Collection, 2411,
purchased 2017

(cat. 106)
Dish showing birds
about 500–750
Perm, Russia
Silver gilt
State Hermitage Museum, S-48,
found in 1913

(cat. 108)
Textile showing Senmurvs
about 600–900
Provenance unknown
Silk
V&A: 8759-1863

(cat. 110)
Textile showing birds
about 600–900
Provenance unknown
Silk
Classified as a French Historic
Monument 26th August 2003;
Jouarre Abbey, acquired before 1000

Drachm coin of Ardashir I
224–40
Minted in Ctesiphon, Iraq
Silver
British Museum, 1862,1004.11

(cat. 111)
Drachm coin of Ardashir I
224–40
Minted in Hamadan, Iran
Silver
British Museum, 1862,1004.4

Drachm coin of Bahram II
276–93
Probably minted in Iran
Silver
British Museum, 1862,0714.14

Drachm coin of Bahram II
276–93
Minted in Raay, Iran
Silver
British Museum, 1845,BdB.2

Dinar coin of Khosrow II
about 611
Probably minted in Iran
Gold
British Museum, 1923,1105.58

Ashem Vohu
800–900
Dunhuang, China
Bound manuscript, with ink on paper
British Library, Or. 8212/84 (Ch.00289),
transferred from the British Museum
to the British Library 1972

(cat. 113)
Zoroastrian manuscript
1647
Yazd, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink on paper
British Library, RSPA 230, folios
151b–152a, transferred from the India
Office to the British Library 1982

Bundahishn
1600–1800
India
Bound manuscript, with ink on paper
British Library, Mss. Avestan 22, folios
82b–83a, transferred from the India
Office to the British Library 1982

Room 5

Afrasiab Plays Polo with Siavash
about 1300
Iran or Iraq
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4063,
purchased 2013

Faramarz Brings the Captive Surkheh Before Rustam
1576–7
Iran, probably Qazvin
Attributed to the painter Zain
al-Abidin
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4077,
purchased 2017

(cat. 136)
Bizhan Slays Nastihan
1493
Lahijan, Gilan province, Iran
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4022,
purchased 2008

(cat. 137)
Qaran Unhorses Barman
about 1525–35
Tabriz, Iran
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4025,
purchased 2008

(cat. 138)
Isfandyar Encounters the Simurgh in an Armoured Chariot
1648
Iran, perhaps Mashhad
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
Royal Collection/HM Queen
Elizabeth II, RCIN 1005014, folio 439a,
presented 1839

(cat. 139)
Opening illumination of a *Shahnameh*, and *Rustam Slays Isfandiyar*
about 1444
Herat, Afghanistan
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain
and Ireland, Persian ms. 239, folios
3b–4a, 296b–295a, presented 1834

(cat. 140)
Bahram Gur Hunts with Azadeh
1486
Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
British Library, Add. ms. 18188, folio
353a, transferred from the British
Museum to the British Library 1972

Room 6

(cat. 114)
Folio from a Qur'an manuscript
about 700
Central Arab lands
Ink and colour on parchment
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1010,
purchased 2006

(cat. 115)
Part of a Qur'an manuscript
about 1000–1200
Central Arab lands or Iranian world
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
28 folios
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1031,
purchased 2009

(cat. 116)
Fifth part of a copy of the Qur'an in 30 volumes
1306–7
Signed by Ali ibn Muhammad
al-Huseini
Mosul, Iraq
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1030,
purchased 2009

Three lines from a Qur'an manuscript
about 1306–11
Attributed to the calligrapher
Al-Suhrawardi and the illuminator
Muhammad ibn Aybak
Baghdad, Iraq
Fragments from a manuscript, with
ink, watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1003,
purchased 2000

Copy of the Qur'an
1325
Tabriz, Iran
Signed by the calligrapher Abdallah
Ibn Mahmoud Ibn Muhammad
al-Sayrafi
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.1035,
purchased 2010

Tomb-marker in the form of a *mihrab*
about 1305
Iran, probably Kashan
Fritware painted in the glaze in blue
and over the glaze in lustre
V&A: 1527-1876

(cat. 123)
Prayer mat (*janamaz*)
1800–1900
Iran
Silk warp, cotton and silk weft,
printed cotton backing, wool trim
V&A: 1069-1900

(cat. 118)
Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise
about 1550–1600
Shiraz, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
British Library, Add. ms. 18576, folio 11a,
transferred from the British Museum
to the British Library 1972

(cat. 119)
Gabriel Presents the Prophet to the Archangel Azrael
1465–6
Herat, Afghanistan
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4070,
purchased 2013

(cat. 120)
Umar Dances before Tahmas
1475–1500
Shiraz, Iran
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4079,
purchased 2017
(cat. 121)

Imam Reza saves the Sea People
1550–60
Iran, probably Qazvin
Leaf from a manuscript, watercolour
and gold on paper
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département
des Arts de l'Islam, MAO 984,
acquired 1992

(cat. 124)
Mirror case with a portrait of Imam Ali
1850–70
Signed by Ja'far, son of Najaf Ali
Iran
Steel case overlaid with gold;
watercolour, gold and ink on paper
V&A: 504-1874

(cat. 127)
Portrait of Nur Ali Shah
1843
Signed by Nasrallah Qajar
Iran
Watercolour on paper, mounted
on card
V&A: 692:24-1876

(cat. 128)
Begging bowl (*kashkol*)
1600–1800
Iran
Glazed fritware, painted under
the glaze
V&A: 914-1876

(cat. 142)
Rustam Drags the Emperor of China from his Elephant
1590–1600
Iran
Leaf from a manuscript, with
watercolour, ink and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4040,
purchased 2008

(cat. 143)
Shah Isma'il Safavi Defeats the Aqqoyunlu
1590–1600
Iran
Leaf from a manuscript, with
watercolour, ink and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4057,
purchased 2010

(cat. 141)
Helmet
about 1500
West Iran
Iron or steel, silver
V&A: 399-1888

Helmet
about 1500
Iran
Iron or steel, silver
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MW.1040,
purchased 2016

(cat. 144)
Armour for the body, the thighs and knees and the arm
about 1500
West Iran
Plate and mail of iron or steel,
engraved decoration artificially
darkened, copper rivets
V&A: 330A, C to E-1898
(cat. 145)

Banner
1800–40
Iran
Woven silk and metal thread, sewn
V&A: 2318-1876

(cat. 147)
Helmet, vambraces, leggings, shield and axe
leggings dated 1803–4
Iran
Steel plate and mail, decoration
engraved and overlaid in gold,
leather lined with woven cotton
V&A: 487&A, B, C, E-1874, 488B-1874

(cat. 148)
Body armour
1800–10
Iran
Steel plate and mail, decoration
overlaid in gold
V&A: 635&1-1876

(cat. 129)
Standard
1900–20
Tehran, Iran
Iron, steel, silver
Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques
Chirac, Paris, 70.2013.4.1

(cat. 132)
Kitab suwar al-kawakib al-thabitah* or *Book of Constellations
1260–80
Iran, perhaps Maraghah
Bound manuscript with ink, gold
and watercolour on paper
British Library, Or. ms. 5323, folios
28b–29a, transferred from the British
Museum to the British Library 1972

(cat. 133)
Persian translation of the *Book of Constellations*
1630s
Iran, probably Mashhad
Bound manuscript with ink, gold
and watercolour on paper
V&A: IS.2325-1883

(cat. 134)
Horoscope of Iskandar Sultan
1411
Shiraz, Iran
Bound manuscript with ink, gold
and watercolour on paper
Wellcome Collection, London,
MS Persian 474, acquired 1932

(cat. 135)
Celestial globe
1640
Signed by Muhammad Zaman
Mashhad, Iran
Cast brass, the globe engraved and
inlaid with silver
V&A: M.827-1928. Given by Sir Charles
Marling GCMG, CB.

Planispheric astrolabe
about 1700
Isfahan, Iran
Signed by Khalil Muhammad son of
Hasan Ali and 'Abd al-A'immeh
Copper alloy
History of Science Museum, University
of Oxford. Presented by J. A. Billmeir.,
1957-84/7 (33739)

Room 7

(cat. 130)
Incense-burner in the shape of a lion
1000–1100
East Iran
Copper alloy, cast, engraved and
pierced, glass inlay
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département
des Arts de l'Islam, AA 19,
acquired 1933

(cat. 131)
Bowl with inscription in Arabic
900–1000
East Iran
Earthenware, decorated with slip
under the glaze
V&A: C.131-1963

Bowl with inscription in Arabic
900–1000
East Iran
Earthenware with slip decoration
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.2227,
purchased 2011

(cat. 149, left)
Bottle with poetry in Persian
1180–1220
Kashan, Iran
Fritware, lustre decoration over
the glaze
V&A: C.37-1978. Given by Mr C.N.
Ades MBE in memory of his wife,
Andrée Ades.

(cat. 149, right)
Bowl with poetry in Persian
1180–1220
Kashan, Iran
Fritware, blue painted into the glaze,
lustre decoration over the glaze
V&A: C.161-1977. Given by Mr C.N.
Ades MBE in memory of his wife,
Andrée Ades.

(cat. 150)
Collection of *divans*
1313–15
The text signed by Abd al-Mu'min
al-Alawi al-Kashi
Tabriz, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
British Library, I.O. Islamic ms. 132,
folios 48b–49a, transferred from the
India Office to the British Library 1982

(cat. 152)
***Divan* of Hafiz**
October 1451
Manuscript signed by Suleiman
al-Fushanji
Iran or Afghanistan, perhaps Herat
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour
and gold on 'Chinese paper'
British Library, Add. ms. 7759, folios
60b–61a, transferred from the British
Museum to the British Library 1972

(cat. 153)
***Bustan* (*Garden of Scented Herbs*) of Sa'di**
1610
Signed by Imad al-Hasani
Iran, probably Isfahan
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
Royal Collection/HM Queen
Elizabeth II, RCIN 1005015, folios
84b–85a, presented about 1799

Ewer
1220–1310
Iran, probably Kashan
Fritware, moulded decoration under
blue glaze
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.2125,
purchased 2006

(cat. 154)
Bowl and fragment of a large storage jar
1180–1220
Kashan, Iran
Fritware, colours painted into the
glaze, enamel colours and gold
applied over the glaze
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.2054,
I.CE.2223, purchased 2001 and 2011

(cat. 155)
Footed bowl and cover
1190–1210
East Iran
Copper alloy, engraved and inlaid
with silver
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MW.1035,
I.MW.1037, purchased 2014

Two illustrations to Firdowsi's *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*)

(cat. 156)
Hero Bizhan Rids Irman of Wild Boar
about 1300
Iran or Iraq
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4058,
purchased 2011

(cat. 157)
Envoy Mihran Sitad Selects a Wife for King Khosrow I
about 1300
Iran or Iraq
Leaf from a manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4067,
purchased 2012

(cat. 158)
Prince Humay Reaches Princess Humayun's Castle
1396
Signed by Mir Ali ibn Ilyas
Baghdad, Iraq
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
British Library, Add. ms. 18113, folio 18b,
transferred from the British Museum
to the British Library 1972

(cats 159, 160, 161)
***Khamseh* (*Five Tales*) of Nizami**
1525–50
Tabriz or Qazvin, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
British Library, Or. ms. 2265,
transferred from the British Museum
to the British Library 1972

The opening illumination
folios 2b–3a

Prince Khosrow Spies Princess Shirin Bathing
folio 53b
Attributed to Sultan Muhammad

Khosrow Listens to Barbad Playing the Lute
folio 77b
Signed by Mirza Ali

(cat. 162)
Album leaf
1600–1700
Isfahan, Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper,
mounted on board
V&A: MSL/1980/6964

(cats 163–4)
Two paintings in an album
1600–1700
Isfahan, Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
V&A: IS.133-1964, folios 47b–48a

(cat. 165)
Carpet, with verses by Hafiz
1550–1600
Iran
Silk warp and weft, knotted wool pile,
areas brocaded with metal thread
V&A: T.402-1910. Bequeathed by
George Salting.

(cat. 166)
Torch stand
about 1600
West Iran
Copper alloy, cast and engraved,
inlaid with a black substance
V&A: 481-1876

(cat. 167)
Wine bowl
1510
Signed by the calligrapher Sultan
Muhammad and the maker Ustad
Mahmud Ali
East Iran or Afghanistan,
probably Herat
Bell-metal, cast, spun and engraved
V&A: 1191-1854

(cat. 151)
Divan of Sa'di
1456
Iran
Bound manuscript, with ink,
watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.2025,
folios 55b–56a, purchased 2008

(cat. 168)
Silver dish
1000–1100
East Iran
Silver, the background gilt
State Hermitage Museum, S-499,
acquired 1951

(cat. 169)
Casket
early 1300s
West Iran
Copper alloy, engraved and inlaid
with silver, gold and a black substance
V&A: M.710-1910

(cat. 170)
Tray
1300–10
West Iran, probably Shiraz
Copper alloy, engraved and inlaid
with silver, gold and a black substance
V&A: 717-1897

Candlestick
1300–1400
North-west Iran
Copper alloy, silver and gold inlay
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MW.1018,
purchased 2006

Candlestick
1400–1500
Iran or Central Asia
Copper alloy, tinned
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MW.1043,
purchased 2015

Room 8

(cat. 174)
Liturgical garment (*sakkos*)
1600–1700 (textile)
Iran
Woven silk and metal-wrapped thread
V&A: 576-1907

(cat. 177)
Aba
before 1877
Kashan, Iran
Woven silk and metal-wrapped thread
V&A: 883-1877

(cat. 175)
Liturgic vestment (dalmatic)
1300–1400
Iran (textile) and Germany
Woven silk and metal-wrapped thread
V&A: 8361-1863

(cat. 178)
Deep dish
about 1350
Jingdezhen, China
Porcelain painted under the glaze
V&A: C.10-1954

(cat. 179)
Dish
about 1650
Iran
Fritware painted under the glaze
V&A: 890-1876

Ewer for serving cold drinks
1600–1700 (porcelain), 1800–1900 (mounts)
China and Iran
Porcelain with copper alloy mounts,
engraved
V&A: 476-1876

(cat. 180)
Cabinet with a drop front
1522–66
China
Polychrome lacquer and gold on
wood, gilded metal fittings
V&A: FE.88-1974. Given by Sir Harry
and Lady Garner.

(cat. 181)
Pair of book covers
1550–1600
Iran, probably Shiraz
Pasteboard, primed with gesso,
painted in colours and gold,
varnished
V&A: 353&A-1885

Pen box
1717
Signed by Muhammad Ali, son of Muhammad Zaman
Iran, probably Isfahan
Pasteboard body, gold, watercolour and varnish
The Sarikhani Collection, I.LQ.1003, purchased 2008

(cat. 185)
Bird on a Rock
8 June 1686
Signed by Mu'in Musavvir
Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4012, purchased 2007

(cat. 186)
European Youth with a Dog
1672
Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4003, purchased 2004

(cat. 187)
Sheikh San'an Encounters the Christian Maiden
1676
Signed by Muhammad Zaman
Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour and gold on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4073, purchased 2016

(cat. 188)
Venus and Cupid with a Satyr
1733
Signed by Muhammad Ali
Isfahan, Iran
Watercolour on paper
The Sarikhani Collection, I.MS.4027, purchased 2008

(cat. 182)
Carpet
1575–1600
Iran
Wool pile on a cotton, silk and wool foundation
Boughton House, Northamptonshire. B.H.502 (12), BH/CAR/1, probably acquired before 1709 By kind permission of His Grace, the Duke of Buccleuch & Queensberry, KBE, KT and the Trustees of the Buccleuch Chattels Trust.

(cat. 183)
Portrait of a woman from New Julfa
1650–1700
Signed by Markos
Isfahan, Iran
Oil on canvas
Royal Collection/HM Queen Elizabeth II, RCIN 407299, acquired before 1872

(cat. 184)
Portrait of Qizilbash Riza
1650–1700
Signed by Markos
Isfahan, Iran
Oil on canvas
Royal Collection/HM Queen Elizabeth II, RCIN 407811, acquired before 1872

(cat. 189)
Construction of a Palace
about 1495
Attributed to Bihzad
Herat, now in Afghanistan
Bound manuscript, with ink, watercolour and gold on paper
British Library, Or. ms. 6810, folio 154b, transferred from the British Museum to the British Library 1972

(cat. 190, p. 250)
Full-size reproduction of dome interior: Mosque of Sheikh Lutfallah, Isfahan (completed 1619)
1877
Isfahan, Iran
Oil pigments on canvas
V&A: 646-1878

Full-size reproduction of dome interior: Mosque of the Shah (now Masjid-i Imam), Isfahan (begun 1611)
1877
Isfahan, Iran
Oil pigments on canvas
V&A: 633-1878

Full-size reproduction of dome interior: Sayyid Mosque, Bidabad, Isfahan (begun 1829)
1877
Isfahan, Iran
Oil pigments on canvas
V&A: 645-1878

(cat. 190, p. 251)
Full-size reproduction of tilework: Madrasah of the Shah's Mother (Chaharbagh Madrasah) in Isfahan, completed in 1710
1877
Isfahan, Iran
Oil pigments on canvas
V&A: 668-1876

(cat. 191)
Architectural drawings
before 1870
Iran
Ink, watercolour and gold on paper
V&A: AL.8309:1–6, acquired 1875

(cat. 192)
Architectural drawing
before 1870
Iran
Graphite and ink on paper
V&A: AL.8281:1, acquired 1875

Tile with openwork arabesque
about 1200
Iran
Fritware, with turquoise glaze
V&A: 253-1902

(cat. 193)
Five tiles from a wall revetment
1262
Iran, Kashan or Varamin
Fritware painted over the glaze in lustre
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1006, purchased 2005

Tile from a wall revetment
about 1275
Iran, probably Kashan
Fritware painted in the glaze in blue and over the glaze in lustre
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1022, purchased 2008

Tile from a wall revetment
1300–30
Iran, probably Kashan
Fritware painted in the glaze in blue and over the glaze in lustre
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1044, purchased 2009

(cat. 194)
Tile from a wall revetment
1300–30
Iran, probably Kashan
Fritware painted in the glaze in blue and over the glaze in lustre
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1045, purchased 2009

(cat. 195)
Tile from an inscription frieze
1200–1400
Iran
Fritware, moulded, painted in enamel colours over the deep-blue glaze, gold leaf
V&A: 1521-1876

Star-shaped tile
about 1444
Iran, perhaps Khargird
Earthenware, coloured glazes
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1013, purchased 2006

(cat. 196)
Tiles for the spandrels of an arch
1600–1700
Isfahan, Iran
Fritware, coloured glazes
The Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.1033, purchased 2004

(cat. 197)
Part of a tilework inscription
1622
Signed by Muhammad Riza Imami
Isfahan, Iran
Fritware, coloured glazes
V&A: 620-1878

(cat. 198)
Pair of doors
1600–1700
Isfahan, Iran
Wood, painted and varnished
The Sarikhani Collection, I.WD.1003, purchased 2008

Room 9

(cat. 202)
Ladies Around a Samovar
probably 1870s
Signed by Isma'il Jalayir
Tehran, Iran
Oil on canvas
V&A: P.56-1941

(cat. 203)
Woman's blouse and skirt
1800–50
Iran
Blouse of silk embroidered with metal thread, silk and pearls, trimmed with needle lace, partly lined with silk, the neck and double front opening faced with braid of metal thread and silk, trimmed with lace; the skirt of silk lined with unbleached cotton, the hem trimmed with silk and metal thread over silk padding.
V&A: T.57&A-1979

(cat. 204)
Woman's short skirt (*shaliteh*)
1870–1900
Iran
Cotton embroidered with silk
Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, Paris, 71.1966.128.122

Woman's jacket
1800–1900
Iran
Silk, cotton, metal thread, printed cotton lining
Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, Paris, 71.1989.24.44

Face veil (*ruband*)
1800–1900
Iran
Cotton embroidered with silk
V&A: 129-1901

Woman in Outdoor Clothes
1825–75
Signed by Mirza Aqa Isfahani
Iran
Watercolour and ink on paper
V&A: D.57-1907

(cat. 205)
Qajar Woman Dressed for a Festive Occasion
1850–1900
Iran
Watercolour and ink on paper
British Museum, 2006,0314,0.19

Portrait of Fath Ali Shah Qajar in court costume
1813
Mihr Ali
Iran, probably Tehran
Oil pigments on canvas
Private collection formerly in the Amery Collection

Divan of Khaqan
1802
The text signed by Muhammad Mahdi al-Tahrani
Iran, probably Tehran
Bound manuscript with ink, watercolour and gold on paper
Royal Collection/HM Queen Elizabeth II, RCIN 1005020, folios 7b–8a, presented 1811

An Iranian Army Defeats the Russians
1810
Iran, probably Tehran
Bound manuscript with ink, watercolour and gold on paper
British Library, I.O. Islamic ms. 3442, folios 387b–388a, transferred from the India Office to the British Library 1982

(cat. 200)
Portrait of Nasir al-Din Shah
1856
Signed by Muhammad Isfahani
Iran, probably Tehran
Opaque watercolours on paper
British Library, Or. ms. 4938, folio 4, transferred from the British Museum to the British Library 1972

(cat. 201)
Portrait of Nasir al-Din Shah
1873
By Atelier Adèle
Vienna, Austria
Albumen photograph mounted onto card
V&A: RPS.1735-2017

(cat. 206)
Photograph of a mass gathering on Ashura
about 1906
Iran
Printed on card
Kimia Foundation

Photograph of constitutionalists
about 1906
Iran
Printed on card
Kimia Foundation

Tile panel for a table-top
1887–8
Signed by Ali Muhammad Isfahani
Tehran, Iran
Fritware painted under the glaze
V&A: 561-1888

Pigments from the workshop of Ali Muhammad Isfahani
1887
Tehran, Iran
Wood, glass, pigments
V&A: 450-1888

On the Manufacture of Modern Kashi Earthenware Tiles and Vases in Imitation of the Ancient
Published in 1888
Written by Ali Muhammad Isfahani, translated by J. Fargues
Tehran, Iran
Printed book
V&A: 38041800383549

A manuscript of Nizami's *Khosrow and Shirin*
1630–50
Signed by Muhammad Muhsin
Isfahan, Iran
Leather, pressure-moulded, gilded and painted
V&A: MSL/1885/364

A Persian translation of Queen Victoria's *Our Life in the Highlands: More leaves from the journal of a life in the Highlands, from 1862 to 1882*
1884
Signed by Razi Taliqani
Tehran, Iran
Leather, areas of filigree, gilded and painted
Royal Collection/HM Queen Elizabeth II, RCIN 1005029, presented 1885

Bookbinding centrepiece
1500–1600
Iran
Leather with cut patterns
V&A: 395-1885

Bookbinding stamps
1800–1900
Iran
Metal with engraved patterns
V&A: 383-1885, 384&A-1885, 385&A-1885, 390-1885, 393D to F-1885

Panel decorated with binder's stamps and filigree
1800–1900
Signed by Razi Taliqani
Iran
Leather, pressure-moulded, gilded and painted
V&A: 372-1885

Four bookbinder's tools: burnisher, two paring tools and an awl
1600–1900
Iran
Hardstone, brass, wood; steel, mother-of-pearl; steel; iron, bone
V&A: 401-1885, 402-1885, 403-1885, 404-1885

Sample sheet of illumination
1880s
Signed by Razi Taliqani
Tehran, Iran
Watercolour, ink and gold on paper
V&A: E.451-1888

Lacquer mirror case
1880s
Attributed to Razi Taliqani
Tehran, Iran
Mirror glass, painted lacquer
V&A: 766-1888

Khosrow Kills a Lion with his Bare Hands
1632 (painting) and 1884–5 (illumination)
Painting signed by Riza Abbasi; illumination by Razi Taliqani
Painted in Isfahan; mounted and illuminated in Tehran, Iran
Leaf from a manuscript, with watercolour, ink and gold on paper and pasteboard
V&A: L.1613-1964

Paintings of polo players
about 1880 and 1950
Iran
Watercolour and gold on paper, mounted on card
V&A: E.4585-1910, E.4879-1968

The Exorcist
about 1900
Attributed to Kamal al-Mulk or his circle
Tehran, Iran
Oil on canvas
Private collection

(cat. 207)
Political banner
1932
Signed by Husein Fakhkhari
Isfahan, Iran
Cotton, block-printed and painted
V&A: ME.1-2003

Room 10

Untitled
1965
Charles Hossein Zenderoudi (b. 1937)
Gouache on paper
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 208)
Still Life
about 1959
Parviz Kalantari (1931–2016)
Oil on panel
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 209)
Two Veiled Women
1957
Sirak Melkonian (b. 1931)
Oil on canvas
Private collection

(cat. 210)
***Farvahar* (*Avesta* series)**
1977
Massoud Arabshahi (1935–2019)
Oil, acrylic, gold, silver and pen on canvas
Mohammad Afkhami Collection

(cat. 211)
Creation of the Planet
1963
Marcos Grigorian (1925–2007)
Soil on canvas
Tate: Purchased with funds provided by the Middle East North Africa Acquisitions Committee 2014. T14104

(cat. 212)
Trees
1960s
Sohrab Sepehri (1928–1980)
Oil on canvas
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 213)
The Beach
1966
Bahman Mohasses (1931–2010)
Oil on canvas
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 214)
Meem
1958
Siah Armajani (b. 1939)
Ink, sealing wax and paint on muslin
British Museum, 2007,6031.1

(cat. 215)
The Poet and the Beloved of the King
1964–6
Parviz Tanavoli (b. 1937)
Wood, tin-plate, copper, steel, fluorescent light, Perspex and oil paint
Tate: Purchased with funds provided by Edward and Maryam Eisler 2012. T13684

(cat. 216)
Untitled
1974
Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (1922–2019)
Mirror with reverse glass painting
Private collection

(cat. 217)
Untitled
1974
Behjat Sadr (1924–2009)
Oil on aluminium
Behjat Sadr Estate

(cat. 218)
Portrait of Suri, the Artist's Daughter
about 1978
Leyly Matine-Daftary (1937–2007)
Oil on canvas
Collection of Suri Farman-Farmaian

(cat. 219)
Turbulent
1998
Shirin Neshat (b. 1957)
Two-screen video installation, black and white (9 mins 38 secs)
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

(cat. 221)
Tehran 2006
2006
Mitra Tabrizian (b. 1964)
Photograph
V&A: E.470-2008

(cat. 222)
***Marzieh Ahmadi Oskuie, Tehran, 26 April 1974* (*By an Eyewitness* series)**
2012
Azadeh Akhlaghi (b.1978)
Photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Felt Memories III
2008–9
Bita Ghezelayagh (b. 1966)
1001 metal prints, embroidery and silk screen on felt
V&A: ME.49-2020

(cat. 223)
***Khosrow* (*Ready to Order* series)**
2007–8
Khosrow Hassanzadeh (b. 1963)
Mixed media
Private collection

(cat. 224)
***Hanged* series**
2015
Pouran Jinchi (b. 1959)
Copper, paint, metal wire, copper safety pins
Courtesy of the artist and Third Line, Dubai

(cat. 225)
Oo Bakhshandeh Ast
2003
Mohammad Ehsai (b. 1939)
Oil on canvas
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 226)
***Eshge* (*Love*)**
2007
Farhad Moshiri (b. 1963)
Swarovski crystals and glitter on canvas, with acrylic on board
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 227)
Pupa
2014
Shirazeh Houshiary (b. 1955)
Amethyst glass and mirror-polish stainless steel
Mohammad Afkhami Collection

Oil Barrel #17
2010
Shiva Ahmadi (b. 1975)
Oil and Swarovski crystals on steel
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 228)
Glance #10
2010
Timo Nasseri (b. 1972)
Stainless steel
Private collection

Forough (Cardboard Maquette)
2016
Sahand Hesamiyan (b. 1977)
Cardboard and gold leaf
Mohammad Afkhami Collection

(cat. 229)
Untitled
2000
Y. Z. Kami (b. 1956)
Oil on linen
Gibson Family Collection

(cat. 230)
Qajar #19
1998
Shadi Ghadirian (b. 1974)
Photograph
Private collection

(cat. 231)
Mossadegh
2009
Farideh Lashai (1944–2013)
Oil on canvas
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 232)
Making Faces
2008
Tala Madani (b. 1981)
Oil on wood
Loaned from the collection of Vali Mahlouji

Stardust
2011
Ali Banisadr (b. 1976)
Oil on linen
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 233)
Anniversary of the Islamic Republic Revolution
2007
Rokni Haerizadeh (b. 1978)
Oil on canvas
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 234)
Miss Hybrid #3
2008
Shirin Aliabadi (1973–2018)
Lambda print
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 235)
This Will Also Pass
2013
Hossein Valamanesh (b. 1949)
Bronze
The Farjam Collection

(cat. 220)
All the White Horses
2016
Avish Khebrehzadeh (b. 1969)
Hand-drawn multi-channel video animation (8 minutes)
Produced by Dan Sallick;
Courtesy of the artist

Cat nos. 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 41, 51, 56, 57, 58, 59, 70, 71, 72, 76, 90, 93, 95, 107, 109, 117, 122, 125, 126, 146, 171, 172, 173, 176, 199 and 203 (jacket) are not exhibited works.

TIMELINE

IRAN **4100 BC** First urban settlement at the site of Tepe Sialk, near Kashan.	**3200 BC** The earliest written records in Iran – history begins.	**2500 BC** Rich burials in cemeteries at Shahdad and Shahr-e Sokhta.	**2100 BC** Puzur-Inshushinak becomes king of Susa and south-west Iran.	**1500 BC** Iranian-speaking peoples arrive on the Iranian plateau from Central Asia.	**about 1300 BC** Elamite king Untash-Napirisha builds ziggurat at Chogha Zanbil.	
WORLD	**about 3000 BC** Earliest evidence of construction at Stonehenge, England.	**about 2580 BC** Construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza.			**about 1300 BC** Mayan civilization flourishes in the Americas. In 1342 BC Tutankhamun becomes pharoah in ancient Egypt.	**about 1200 BC** The Vedas are composed in ancient India – they are the founding texts of Hinduism.

about 478 BC Xerxes I completes major works at Persepolis, including the Gate of All Nations and the Apadana.	**about 343 BC** Artaxerxes III suppresses rebellions throughout the Persian empire.	**330 BC** The Macedonian army under its leader Alexander the Great sets fire to Persepolis.	**305 BC** Seleucus, a general under Alexander, establishes the Seleucid empire.	**about 240 BC** A nomadic tribe from Central Asia invades Iran and forms the Parthian dynasty.	**about 141 BC** The Parthians become a major political power under Mithradates I.	
about 432 BC The Parthenon in Athens is rebuilt under the artistic supervision of the sculptor Phidias.	**338 BC** Philip II of Macedon expands his control into central Greece.			**about 230 BC** The Great Wall of China is consolidated under the rule of Qin Shi Huang.	**218 BC** Hannibal and the Carthaginian army march on Italy.	**54 BC** Julius Caesar lands in Britain.

637 Sassanian forces are defeated by the Arab armies at Qadisiya near Ctesiphon under Yazdigird III.	**819** The Samanid dynasty appears in eastern Iran and helps to create a new Islamic form of Iranian culture.	**934** Ali ibn Buyah founds the Buyid dynasty. Iraq and western Iran come under the rule of Shi'ite Iranians.	**1010** Firdowsi completes the *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*).	**1055** The Seljuq Turks conquer Baghdad, uniting Iran and Iraq under Sunni rule.	**1256** The Mongol prince Hulagu begins the conquest of Iran. In 1295, the Mongol ruler converts to Islam.	**1312** The mausoleum of the Mongol emperor Öljeytü is completed. It still stands in the town of Sultaniyeh in Iran.
632 The Prophet Muhammad dies in Medina. The whole of Arabia has accepted Islam.	**800** The Pope crowns Charlemagne as emperor. The Roman empire in the West is restored.	**871** Alfred the Great becomes King of the West Saxons.	**960** The Song dynasty is founded in China. Song emperors rule until the Mongol conquest in 1279.	**1066** The Battle of Hastings. The Normans overthrow the Anglo-Saxon kings of England.	**1227** The death of Genghis Khan, who turned the Mongols into rulers of a vast empire.	**1302** The Ottoman Turks defeat the Byzantines in battle. The rise of the Ottoman empire begins.

1813 The Treaty of Gulistan sees Iran lose its territory to Russia.	**1856** The Anglo-Persian War, a dispute over Iran's eastern border, begins.	**1885** The Imperial Bank of Persia is founded under British control.	**1892** The British tobacco monopoly in Iran is cancelled due to popular revolt.	**1905** The Constitutional Revolution begins, leading to the limitation of royal power.	**1925** Reza Shah founds the Pahlavi dynasty. His modernizing policies are based on secular nationalism.	**1941** Reza Shah is forced to abdicate following the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran.
1829 The Greeks win independence from the Ottoman empire.	**1868** End of the Edo period in Japan, marking a new period of modernization.	**1876** Queen Victoria named Empress of India as the country becomes Britain's 'jewel in the crown'.	**1889** The Eiffel Tower opens in Paris.	**1914** The First World War begins.	**1923** Establishment of the Soviet Union, following the Russian Revolution.	**1939** The Second World War begins.

672 BC The Medes become vassals of Assyrian king Esarhaddon.		**550 BC** Cyrus the Great overthrows the Medes and establishes the Persian empire.	**539 BC** Cyrus's forces conquer Babylon.	**525 BC** King Cambyses takes control of Egypt.	**515 BC** Darius I starts building work at Persepolis.	**490 BC** The Persians are defeated by the Athenians at the Battle of Marathon.
	612 BC Assyria is destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians.	**551 BC** Birth of Confucius in Zou, in modern Shandong province.	**about 520 BC** End of the prosperous Hallstatt culture of Western Europe – ancestors of the Celts.	**509 BC** Establishment of the Roman Republic.	**about 500 BC** The rulers of Aksum, the first Ethiopian kingdom, claim descent from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.	**about 475 BC** The Warring States period starts in China.

AD 53 The Romans are defeated by the Parthians at Carrhae.	**AD 116** The Roman emperor Trajan captures Ctesiphon and reaches the Persian Gulf.	**224** The Parthians are overthrown by the Sasanians.	**about 240** Zoroastrianism becomes the state religion under Ardashir I.	**about 260** Shapur I defeats three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab and Valerian.		**614** Khosrow II captures Jerusalem during struggles between Iran and Byzantium.
		220 The prosperous Han period ends in China.		**330** Constantine moves the capital of the Eastern Roman empire to Constantinople.	**476** The Roman emperor Romulus Augustus abdicates. The fall of the Western Roman empire.	**618** The Tang period begins in China. Buddhism will become a major influence.

1334 Sheikh Safi al-Din dies in Ardabil. This Sufi leader is the ancestor of the Safavid dynasty.	**1427** Ibn Husam completes the *Khavarannameh*, or *Book of the East*, relating the exploits of the Prophet's family.	**1501** The Safavid Shah Isma'il begins his conquest of all Iran. He declares Imami Shi'ism the country's official religion.	**1598** Shah Abbas I moves the capital to Isfahan, the city becomes the centre of Safavid arts and architecture.	**1704** Construction begins of the Madar-i Shah madrasah in Isfahan, the last great building project of the Safavids.	**1789** The Qajar dynasty comes to power. This ensures that Imami Shi'ism remains the majority religion.	**1797** Accession of the second Qajar ruler Fath Ali Shah. The Qajar dynasty is firmly established under his rule.
1346 The Black Death arrives in Crimea. As the disease spreads, it kills up to a quarter of the world's population.	**1403** Beijing becomes the capital of China. The Ming dynasty rules from the city until 1644.	**1488** The first printed edition of Homer's *Odyssey* in the original Greek, is published in Florence.	**about 1574** The Mughals translate the *Mahabharata* into Persian. This new version of the epic poem is called the *Razmnameh* (*Book of War*).	**1703** Peter the Great founds St Petersburg as the new capital of Russia. Russia becomes a force in European – and Iranian – history.	**1789** The French Revolution. France later seeks Iran as an ally against Britain and Russia.	

1953 Muhammad Reza Pahlavi gains in power after the overthrow of Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh.	**1958** The first Tehran Biennale, organized by Marcos Grigorian, is held at the Golestan Palace.	**1971** A lavish celebration of 2,500 years of the Persian empire provokes criticism of the Pahlavis.	**1979** The Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini founds the Islamic Republic.	**1980** The Iraqi army invades Iran. The Iran-Iraq War begins and will last eight years.	**1997** Muhammad Khatami becomes fifth President of the Islamic Republic.	**2009** Re-election of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad as president disputed by the Green Movement.
1953 Coronation of Elizabeth II at Westminster Abbey.	**1958** The Treaty of Rome establishes the European Economic Community.	**1968** A period of liberalization follows the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia.		**1991** Dissolution of the Soviet Union.	**2001** September 11. Attacks on the United States by al-Qaeda.	**2010** Start of the Arab Spring uprisings.

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