

Huqqa Base, 19th Century
Iran, Qajar period (1794–1925)
Copper and painted enamel

Huntington Museum of Art
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
2004.3.28

The huqqa (or hookah) is a water pipe used for smoking tobacco. Introduced in Iran during the 16th century, the practice spread throughout the Safavid empire (present-day Iran). During the 17th century, glass huqqa bases were commonly imported from Venice to Safavid Persia. The earliest smoking devices were carved from coconut shells, and later objects like this one retained a distinctive tapered oval shape. The vibrantly colored base is enameled with flowers and female faces on blue and green panels. Enameling, a technique of applying powdered glass to a metal surface and firing, was introduced in Iran via European and Russian diplomatic gifts in the 17th century. It was a less costly alternative to other techniques. During the Qajar era, decorating utilitarian objects with a bright palette of enamel colors was popular.



Qajar School, *Persian Costumes*
(*Man Smoking Hookah*), late 19th
century, paper. The British Museum.

Covered Vessel, c. 1860
Iran, Qajar period (1794–1925)
Brass

Huntington Museum of Art
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
1991.2.8

The openwork decoration on this vessel is typical of incense burners produced in 18th century Persia, present-day Iran. However, there is no evidence of burning in its interior. It could have been used for decoration or ventilated storage. A misconception about Islamic art is that depictions of figures are forbidden. However, this brass vessel, and other objects in the exhibition, refute this false claim. The body contains cartouches depicting elegantly dressed figures reclining in lush gardens, as well as hybrid forms, anthropomorphic creatures with animal heads in full dress. These fearsome figures represent *divs* (demons) or *djinn* (supernatural creatures). Both are mentioned frequently in the *Shah-nama*, the Persian book of kings. This vessel was produced in the 19th century, but its design is imitating earlier 14th-century Persian styles.



Attributed to Abd al-Vahhab and Mir Musavvir, *Rustam's seventh course: He kills the White Div, folio 124* from a *Shah-nama (Book of Kings)* of Firdausi (Persian, about 934–1020) (detail), 1522-37. Gum tempera, ink, gold, and silver on paper. The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Bowl, 19th century

Egypt or Syria

Brass with silver and copper inlay

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
2000.10.57

Vibrant reds and blues accentuate the interlacing scrollwork and playful animal forms on this small, intricate bowl. The band of calligraphy just below the upper rim is in *Thuluth*, a script that emphasizes verticality and is often featured in architecture. The text itself offers conventional good wishes, a common practice on household serving ware. The technique of inlaying bronze, and eventually brass, with copper and silver began in the 12th century and became one of the hallmarks of metalwork created in Southwest Asia. Egypt's independence from the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1867, coupled with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, exposed Egypt to Western culture and its taste for products from Central and East Asia. The technique of inlaying metal was revived in Egypt, Syria, and Jerusalem for export during the 19th century.

Bowl, 6th century

Iran, Sasanian period (224–651 CE)
Silver

Huntington Museum of Art
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
2004.3.25

The Sasanian period was the transition between ancient and medieval Iran. This bowl dates to just before the advent of Islam in the 7th century. The Sasanian kings were powerful rulers and the keepers of the state religion, Zoroastrianism. Their empire included present-day Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and controlled much of the Silk Road. Sasanian art reflected the lavish tastes of its rulers. Dishes made of precious metals were decorated with royal themes and used or gifted by the kings. Eventually, silver was used by the nobility as well. This dish, used for eating and drinking, is decorated on the outside with a radiating pattern of shallow lobes. Later Islamic (as with Christian and Jewish) texts would denounce the accumulation of precious metals, but it was still used in jewelry and often inlaid in objects made primarily of other materials.

Star-shaped Luster Tile,

14th century

Iran

Underglaze-painted fritware

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
2004.3.22

One distinctive form of art and adornment in Muslim majority contexts is architecture. The techniques of producing tiles with a lustrous sheen like this one had significant implications for the appearance and visual impact of buildings whose surfaces were covered with tiles. Due to extensive looting fueled by a hungry market in Europe and North America, few buildings retain their complete tilework. Eight-point stars were placed alongside interlocking cross pieces to cover walls. During this period, tiles used for mosques were decorated with calligraphic script relating passages from religious texts and abstract patterns, while secular buildings like palaces were decorated with poetry, people, or animals. The figure seen here is typically Central Asian in style, indicating that this tile was made after the Mongol invasion of Iran in the 13th century.



Imprints of the luster tilework (mihrab, epigraphic frieze, dado) that once decorated the tomb of Shaykh Abd al-Samad (707/1307-8) in Natanz, Iran. Photograph by Keelan Overton, 2016.

***Set of Bowls with
Constellations, 1761***

Iran
Brass

Huntington Museum of Art
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
2000.10.90

This unusual object consists of three bowls inscribed in Farsi with an astrological chart, horoscope, signs of the zodiac, alphabet, and the words “made by Iskandarani” in the Islamic year 1175 (1761 CE). The underside contains images of the sun and planets. Before the rise of modern science, what we today call astrology and astronomy were often conflated since both required an in-depth knowledge of the stars and celestial bodies. The individual plates fold into the center and can thus be stacked vertically. Though the intended function of the piece is unclear, great care was taken in crafting and inscribing each of the brass dishes. The shape itself seems to have been preserved over time, as similar sets of bowls are still in use in Iranian households today, often as serving dishes for sweets or pastries.

***Astrolabe*, 1717-18**

Iran
Brass

Huntington Museum of Art
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
2000.10.91

An astrolabe is a tool that shows how the sky would look at a particular time and location, like the celestial globe on display nearby, but flattened to be portable. It can indicate times of sunrise and sunset as well as the direction of Mecca, essential for the performance of daily prayers. The sky is illustrated on the face of the object and the engraved metal discs can be adjusted to specific dates and times. The technology needed to create the astrolabe was rediscovered by Muslim scholars in the 8th and 9th centuries through the translation of Greek texts. This discovery was just one of many ideas produced from ancient texts that might have been lost without the tireless efforts of Arab intellectuals. This astrolabe is inscribed with references to many cities, including Baghdad, Basra, Herta, and Kabul, and is signed “the work of ‘Abd al-Aymina’.”

Quadrant, mid-19th century
Turkey, Ottoman Empire (1299–1922)
Wood, paper, and lacquer

Huntington Museum of Art
Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
2000.10.89

The quadrant, a simple navigational tool for measuring the altitude of celestial objects, takes its name from its quarter-circle shape. The tool was used to record the location of stars and planets, the shape intended to mimic the domelike expanse of the stars in the sky when seen from earth. The curved edge of the quadrant is graduated from 0° to 90° and a metal plumb line is attached at the intersection of the straight edges. The straight side includes two holes for sighting. To take a reading, the viewer would sight along the straight edge, causing the plumb line to fall across the appropriate degree marking, indicating the angle of elevation. This example is signed “Yusuf from Ankara.”

Celestial Globe, 19th century

Iran

Brass

Huntington Museum of Art

Gift of Drs. Joseph B. and Omayma Touma,
1991.2.175

Stars shine on the surface of this globe, which depicts the constellations in the sky as though seen from above, rather than from the surface of the earth. Celestial globes were first used during the 2nd century BCE in Greece. The production of these functional objects was adopted by many cultures worldwide over the centuries. Scientific instruments like this served as teaching devices and desirable decorative objects well into the 19th century.