



Safavid Qalyan (Water-pipe)

Circa: Iran, 16th / 17th century

Iran, 16th / 17th century

21cm x 17cm

Stock no.: A5057

This ceramic *qalyan* ("water-pipe"), in the shape of a seated elephant, is decorated with floral motifs divided into separate panels of vertical and horizontal bars executed in underglaze cobalt blue with black-line technique. The spout and neck of the vessel was mended at a later date with engraved and inlaid brass; in particular, the s-shaped brass spout skilfully revived the elephant's ceramic tusk.

Safavid potters meticulously copied water-pipes from the Jingdezhen region of China, which had been exported to the Middle East since the early years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Commonly known by the Malay name of *kendi*, the Safavids were clearly influenced by the Chinese designs of these vessels, including zoomorphic dispositions (such as elephants and frogs) and the details of decorations.¹

There is a similar elephant-shaped *qalyan*, without brass additions, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Accession Number 68.180) as well as a mended *qalyan* with brass in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Accession Number 1020-1883).

Footnotes

1. Patty Proctor. "The Measure of Faithfulness: The Chinese Models for Safavid Blue-and-White". In *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, edited by Lisa Golombek, Robert B. Mason, Patricia Proctor, and Eileen Reilly, 123-168. Leiden: Brill. p. 143.