



Safavid Blue-and-White Bottle

Iran, 17th century

Ceramic decorated in underglaze cobalt blue

36.5cm high, 21cm wide

Stock no.: A5097

This Safavid bottle is painted in several tones of underglaze cobalt blue with decorations in the chinoiserie style. On one side of the object a man is depicted approaching two seated figures dressed in Chinese-style clothing, one of which is portrayed with her legs bare; there are also trees, dwellings and hillocks surrounding this main scene. The two seated figures are repeated on the opposite side of the bottle but are positioned to the left with a moon shape above them; in addition, there are more trees, hills and dwellings which dominate the tiered and elongated landscape.

Since the seventeenth century Safavid potters had aimed to imitate Chinese porcelain, especially once the Ming dynasty fell in 1644 and the imperial patronage of the Jingdezhen potteries diminished, severely disrupting the flow of the export trade. Hence, the production of chinoiserie blue-and-white objects in Iran filled the void in domestic markets and, to some extent, abroad, enabling patrons who could not obtain Chinese porcelain or access the Chinese porcelain market to own prestigious imitations.¹

In the Victoria and Albert Museum in London there is a Safavid bottle with an almost identical depiction of the two seated figures, but only on one side of the object (Accession Number: 1245-1876);² in addition, the motif of two seated figures also appear on a seventeenth century Safavid dish (Accession Number: 2721-1876).³

Footnotes:

1 Lisa Golombek and Eileen Reilly. 2013. "Safavid Society and the Ceramic Industry". In *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, edited by Lisa Golombek, 13-56. Leiden: Brill. p.22.

2 See also, Yolande Crowe. 2002. *Persia and China: Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum 1501-1738*. Geneva: La Borie. p.151, no. 236.

3 *Ibid.* p.115.