

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Calligraphic Terracotta Tile

Persia, probably Nishapur, 13th/14th century

Terracotta

17.5cm high, 24cm wide, 4.5cm deep

Provenance: Purchased in Tehran c. 1935 by Claude Clarac and André Godard, director of the Iranian Archaeological Service.

Collection of Claude Achille Clarac, French ambassador to Iran. Held in Haute Roche.

Stock no.: A4575

This terracotta tile carries an inscription in Thuluth script, against a background of curling stems and vegetal ornamentation, reading **أُولَئِكَ أَنْ يَكُ** "those who-". This corresponds to verse 18 of Surah 9 (*At-Tawbah*) which says that the mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, establish prayer, give zakah, and do not fear except Allah. The use of a verse relating to who may enter a mosque suggests that this tile may have been positioned around the door of a mosque.

Terracotta tiles from Tepe Madraseh, Nishapur, bear a striking resemblance to this example. Tepe Madraseh was a city existing from the Sasanian dynasty until its destruction by the Mongols during the Seljuk period (1050-1300).¹ A joint excavation of the site was led by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Museum of Iran. Artefacts were split between the two institutions, so comparative tiles can be viewed in both the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession nos [39.40.58](#), [39.40.61](#), 39.40.62, 39.40.59, 39.40.64) and the Iran National Museum, illustrated in Charles Wilkinson's 1986 study of the site.²

This panel was purchased by Claude Achille Clarac, the French ambassador to Iran, with André Godard, the director of the Iranian Archaeological Service, in Tehran. Along with his wife, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who he met in the French embassy, Clarac drove through Iran in a Buick. The pair documented their adventures, Annemarie by writing and Claude through his collection.

¹ Wilkinson, Charles K. *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings and Their Decoration*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986. p. 11.

² *Ibid.* 113. See figure 1.104.