



Safavid Sūrahi with Qajar Mounts

Kirman, Safavid Iran, 1650-1700 (the base)

Qajar Iran, 19th century (the mouthpiece)

Polychrome glazed fritware with metal and turquoise mouthpiece

32cm high (including the mouthpiece); 18cm high (the base); 16cm diameter

Stock no.: A5746

Provenance: UK private collection since the early 1940s.

This huqqa base (*kalian*) is made from a ceramic bottle (*sūrahi*) to which a 19th century metal mouthpiece ornamented with turquoise has been added. The base was made in Kirman, South-eastern Iran. It depicts an incident from the epic poem Khusrow and Shirin, where Khusrow catches Shirin unclothed as she washes her hair in the river. This scene has been widely depicted in illuminated manuscripts (for example, a 16th-century manuscript in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no [13.228.7.3](#)).

Kirman polychrome is a subcategory of Safavid blue-and-white ware, adding splashes of distinctive

tomato reds, and small amounts of black, chocolate-brown, and green to the colour palette. The blue-and-white sections are generally treated with ornament drawn from late Ming blue-and-white ceramics.¹ Polychrome areas, conversely, feature more indigenous designs. Such motifs include cypress trees, peacocks, pheasants, and less frequently, as in the present example, galloping gazelles. These gazelles are also seen on a *kalian* in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. [611-1889](#)).

Both the colour and the somewhat primitive form of the gazelles provide contrast to the detailed floral and figural ornamentation of the rest of the base. Their inclusion may be an allusion to the poetic subject matter, as the similarity between the Farsi word *ghazaal* (gazelle) and *ghazal*, a form of Perso-Arabic love poem, has led to the depiction of deer in courtship scenes.

The designs almost always featured a stylised makers mark, derivative of the Chinese reign marks (*nien-hao*). Pieces from Kirman typically carry a blue tassel mark. This piece can be comfortably dated to the 17th century. Only one piece of Kirman pottery, dated by its maker to 930 H (1523 CE), is currently thought to survive from the 16th century. Equally, no examples are assigned to the eighteenth.²

A *kalian* in the British Museum (accession no. [1890.0517.13](#)) from 17th century Kirman depicts the same scene. The composition of Khusrow hunting in the forest when he finds Shirin is strikingly similar to the present example. Khusrow, with a quiver slung across his back, rides a black horse decorated with ornamental bridles. His left hand outstretched, he stumbles across Shirin, who sits cross-legged in a river. A *kalian* in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. [615-1889](#)), dated to 1650-1800, depicts another horseman, presumably Khusrow. Though very similar blue floral decoration has been applied, the figures are less refined than the present example.

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

[1] Watson, Oliver. *Ceramics from Islamic Lands*. London: Thames & Hudson in association with The al-Sabah Collection, 2004. p. 471.

[2] Lane, Arthur. *Later Islamic Pottery: Persia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957. pp. 82-83.