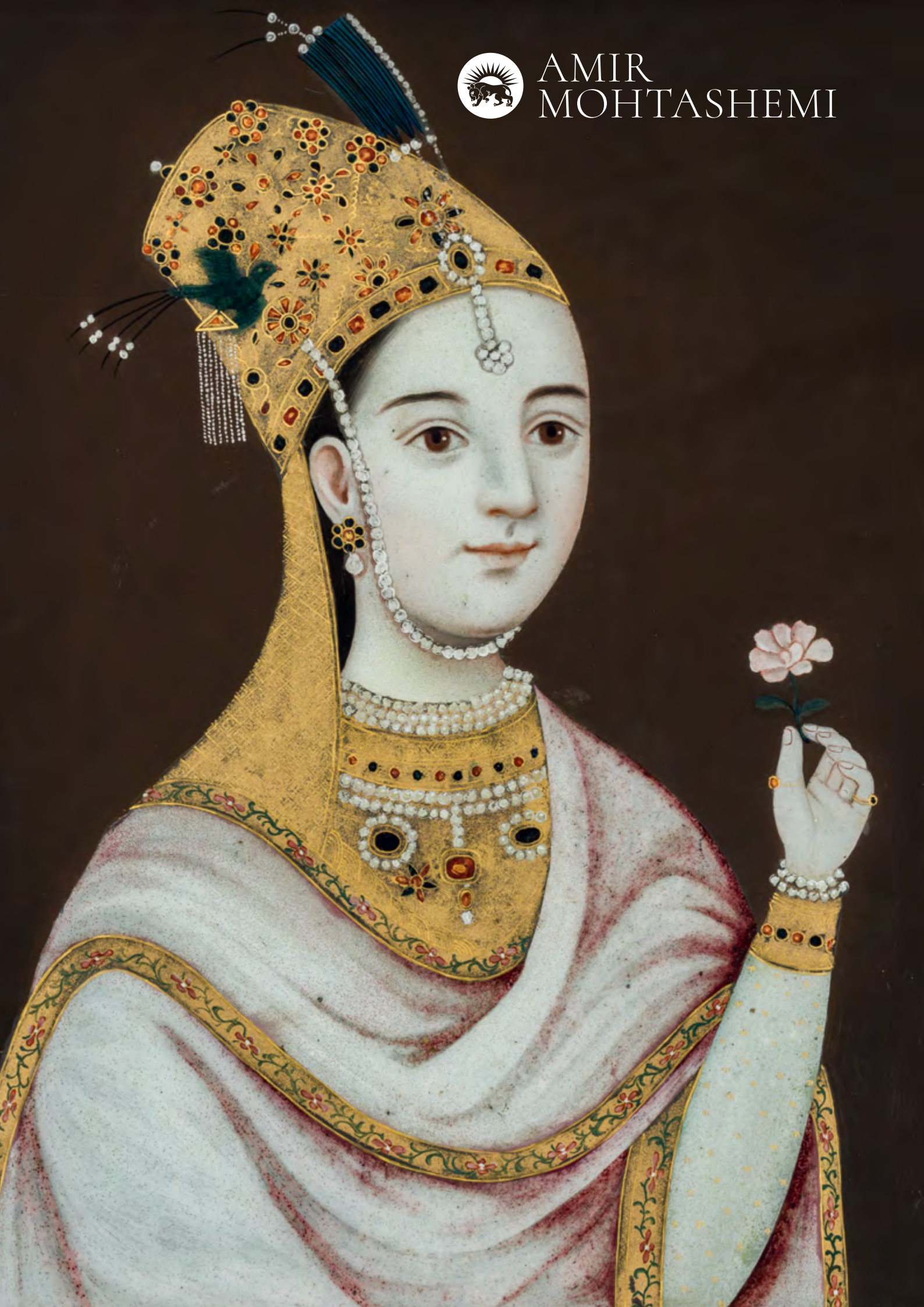
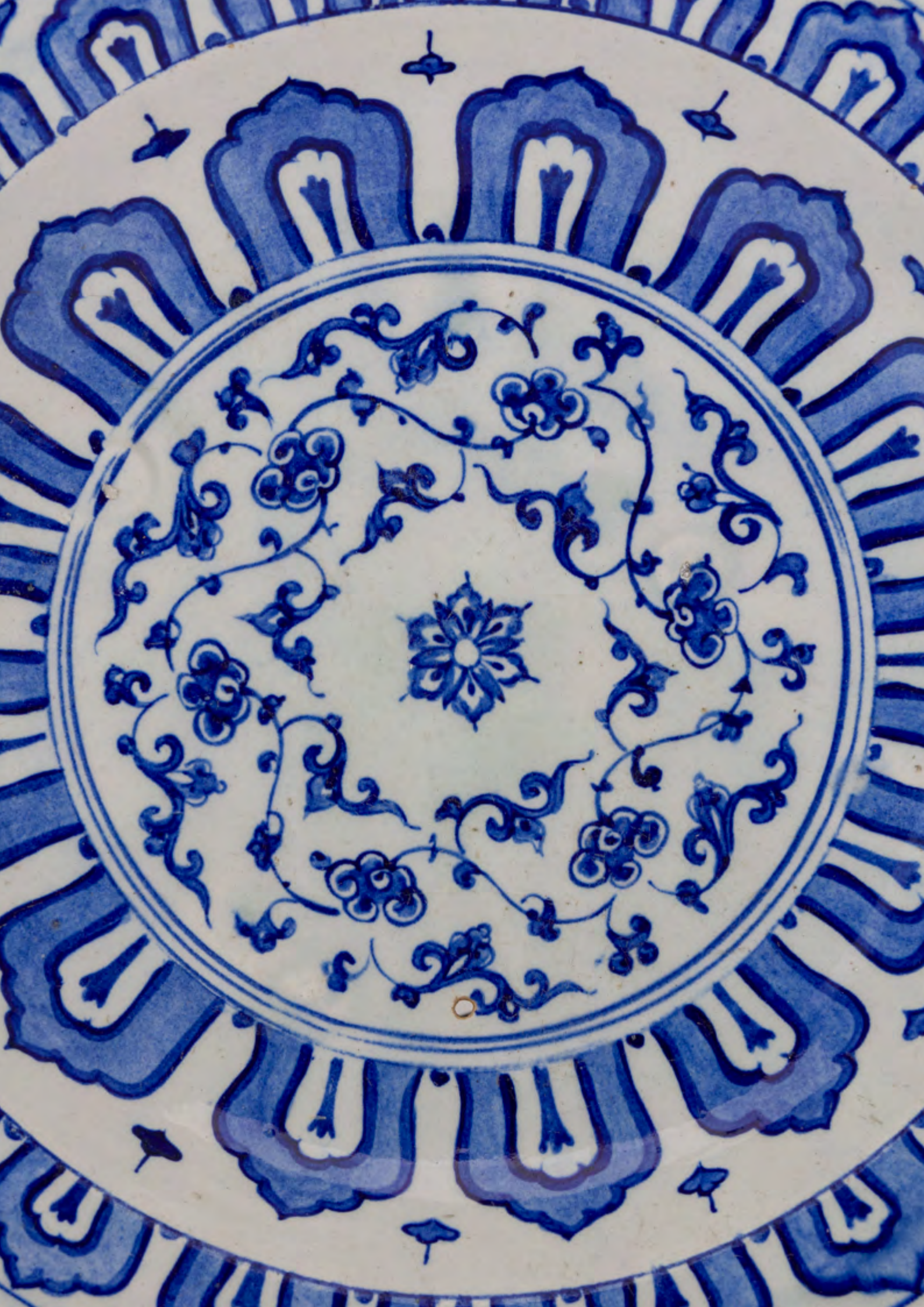

AMIR
MOHTASHEMI



AMIR MOHTASHEMI

Amir Mohtashemi Ltd.
69 Kensington Church Street, London W8 4BG

info@amirmohtashemi.com
www.amirmohtashemi.com
+44 (0)20 7937 4422

1

Unique Gold-Inlaid Walrus-Ivory Chair Signed by Muhammad ibn Hasan

Kubachi, Dagestan, Second half of the 19th century

Walrus ivory, gold, silver, niello
96cm high, 51cm wide, 48cm deep (the seat)

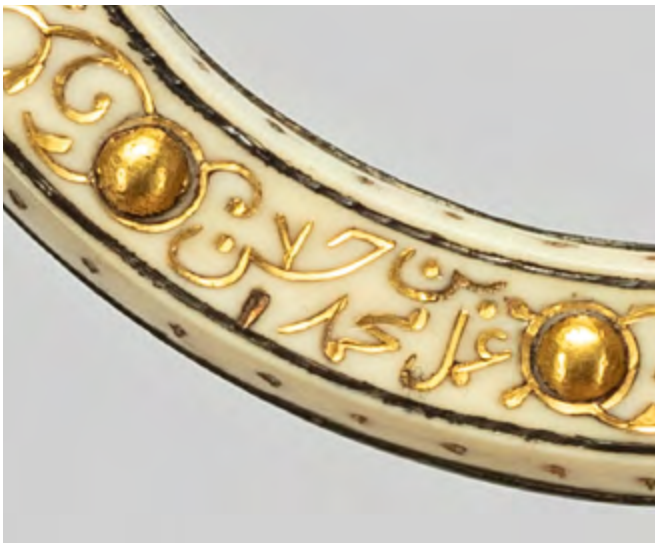
Provenance: With M. Harris & Sons, London, 1924.
Sotheby's, London, 6 December 1974, lot 92.
The Hochschild Collection; Sotheby's, London, 1 December 1978, lot 164.
With Mallett, London.
Sotheby's, London, 12 June 2002, lot 140.

Made in the village of Kubachi in the Darghin region of Dagestan, a Republic in the North Caucasus, this chair represents a unique marriage of modern Western European design and Caucasian decorative tradition. The chair's out-turned legs, high support stretcher, scrolled arms and open back enclosing two confronted S-scrolls, are almost identical to the Bentwood (no. 04) and the armchair (no. 01) designed by the Austrian cabinet-maker Michael Thonet, which can be seen in the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession nos JS 24.05.2010 and W.30-2011 respectively). Chair no. 04 was commissioned by the popular Viennese café Daum in 1849, and armchair no. 01 was designed in 1859, suggesting that this walrus ivory chair was made in the latter half of the 19th century.[1]

The only part of the chair devoid of ornamentation is the padded seat, which is upholstered in later caramel cotton. Dagestan was most famous for producing highly decorated arms. Multiple villages could be involved in the production of a single weapon; Amuzgi and Kharbuk craftsmen manufactured the raw weapons, before they were sent to Kubachi for decoration.[2] Typical Kubachi inlay and carving techniques have been used to finish this chair.[3] The main body is comprised of walrus ivory, into which thin gold wire has been hammered into engraved patterns. This technique is known as *koftgari* and laid out in a strictly symmetrical pattern known as тутта (*tutta*), or 'branch'. Niello, a black mixture of sulphur, copper, silver, and lead, is inlaid to the etched silver of the stretcher, seat frame, and mounts. The twisting concentric vegetal motifs, formed from interweaving leaves and flowers, are known to Kubachians as мархарай (*markharai*/ 'thicket'). Inscribed in *koftgari* amongst the *markharai* on the left S-scroll of the back of the chair is a maker's signature, reading عمل محمد بن حسن (*'amal-i muhammad ibn hasan*), "the work of Muhammad ibn Hasan". This combination of inlaid ivory and niello is also seen on a flintlock rifle in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 31.35.2), the barrel of which has an almost identical *koftgari* pattern. A series of *shashkas* (sabres) at the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, have damascened ivory hilts and scabbards (accession nos B.O.-1916, B.O.-3806, B.O.-2184, B.O.-1920, B.O.-3803). A pair of flintlock pistols (accession nos B.O.-5356 and B.O.-4723) are similarly ornamented, and even signed by "Muhammad", though there is no evidence to suggest that it is the same Muhammad ibn Hasan.

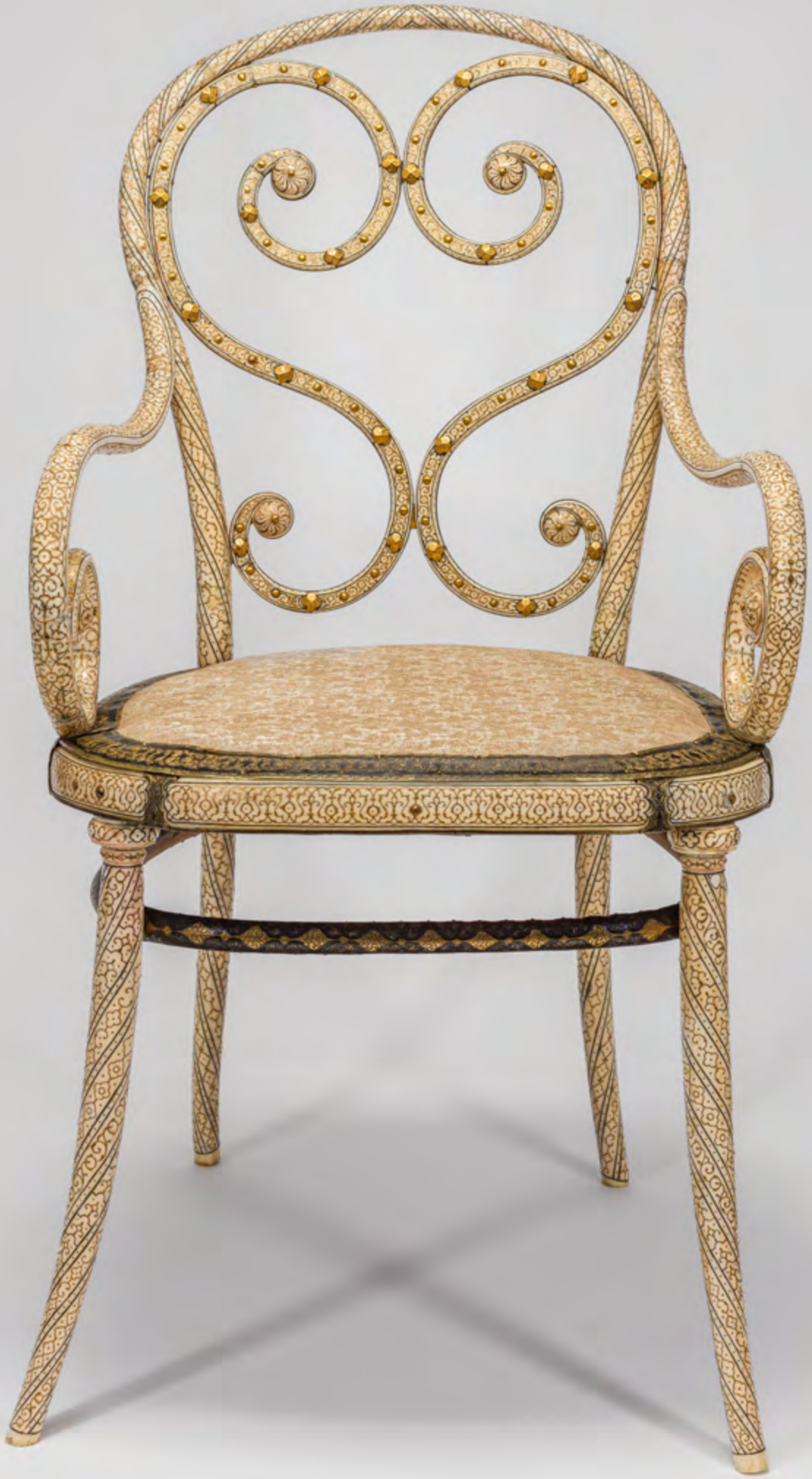
Such richly decorated items were used ceremonially, and often given as diplomatic gifts to royalty. A kindjal from Kubachi, decorated with koftgari and niello, was given to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany in 1886, by the Russian Imperial family.[4] Larger items such as cabinets, ewers and chargers were also occasionally made.[5] An oval tray produced in Kubachi in 1898 made from damascened ivory and nielloed silver was sold by Christie's, London, in 1989. It was given as a gift by Sultan Abd al-Hamid Khan as an endowment to the people of his village in 1898.[6] As Mongolian authority in the region waned, Russian and Persian rule of Dagestan alternated. Finally, following the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, Russian rule was consolidated. Dagestani towns started to make more commissions for Russian officers. It is likely that this chair was a commission piece, perhaps as a royal or diplomatic gift. So fine was the chair's craftmanship that it was displayed at the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London, in 1924 by the dealers M. Harris & Sons.[7]

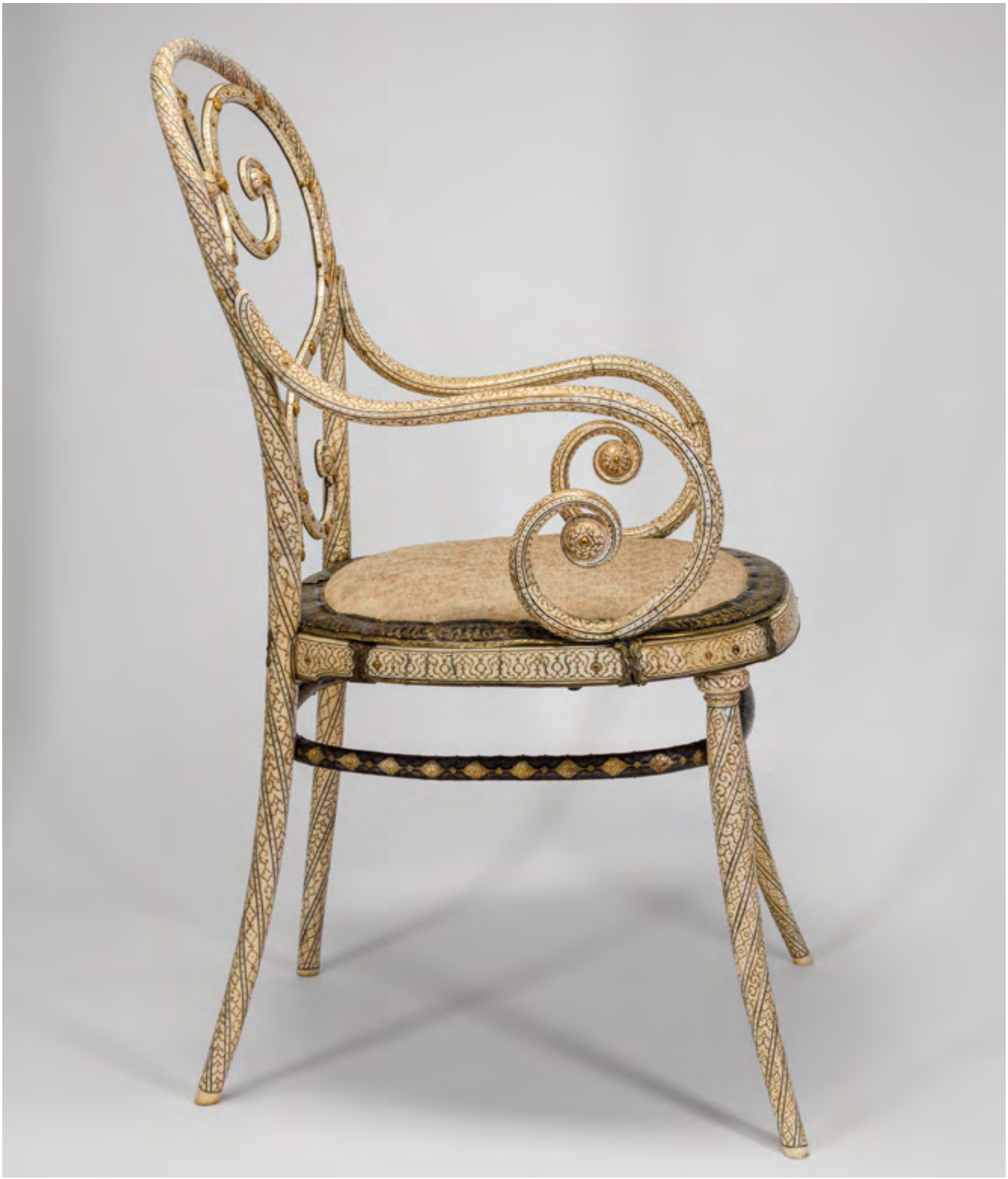
M.L.



Signature of Muhammad ibn Hasan.

The M. Harris & Sons stand at the British Empire Exhibition, featuring the walrus-ivory chair. London, 1924.





Notes:

1 'Café Daum', Thonet, retrieved online via https://thonet.com.au/products/no-4-cafe-daum/.

2 Chirkov, D. (ed.) *Daghestan Decorative Art*. Moscow: Sovietsky Khudozhnik, 1971. p. 130.

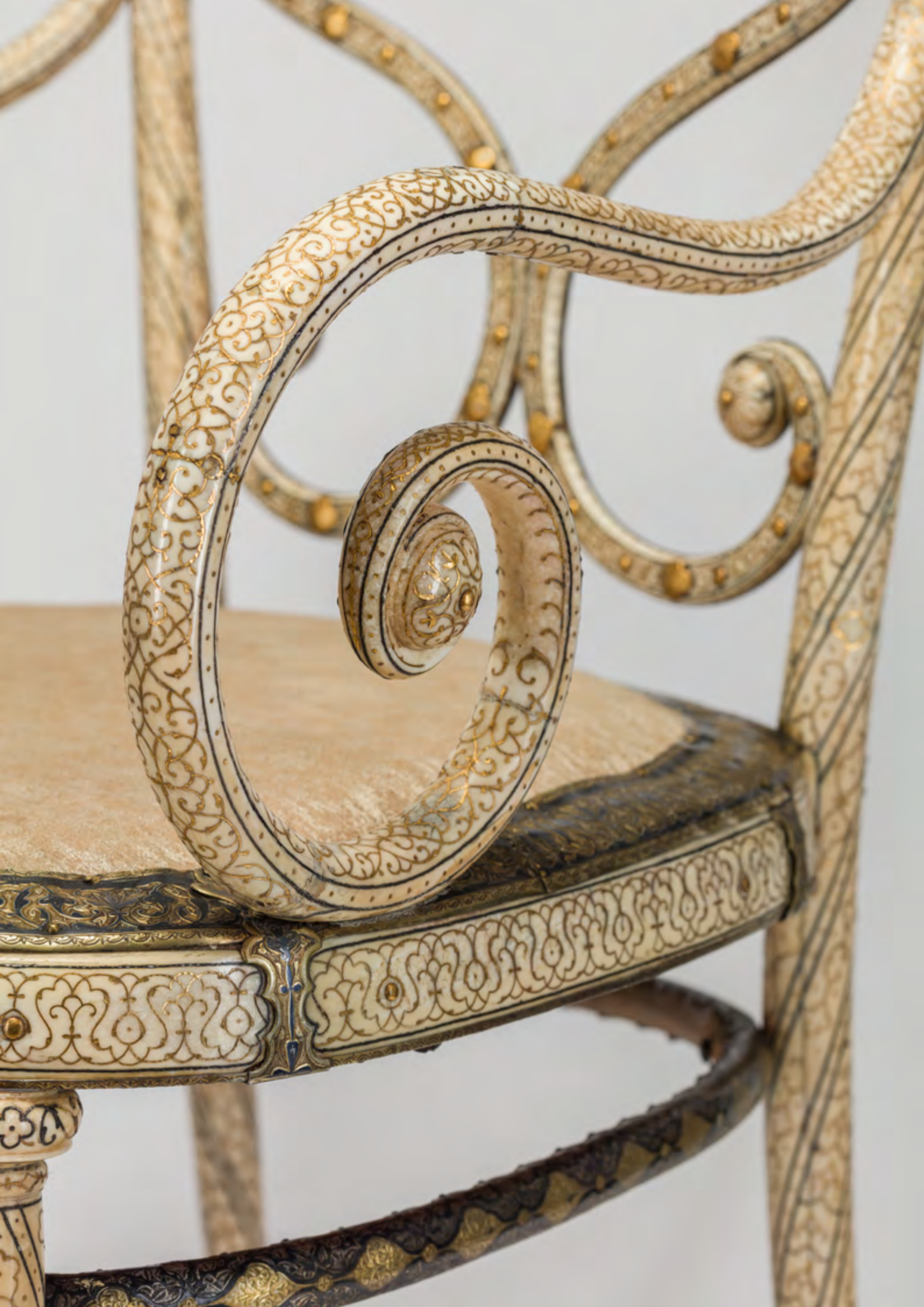
3 Rivkin, Kirill. *Arms and Armor of Caucasus*. USA: 2015, First Edition. p. 105.

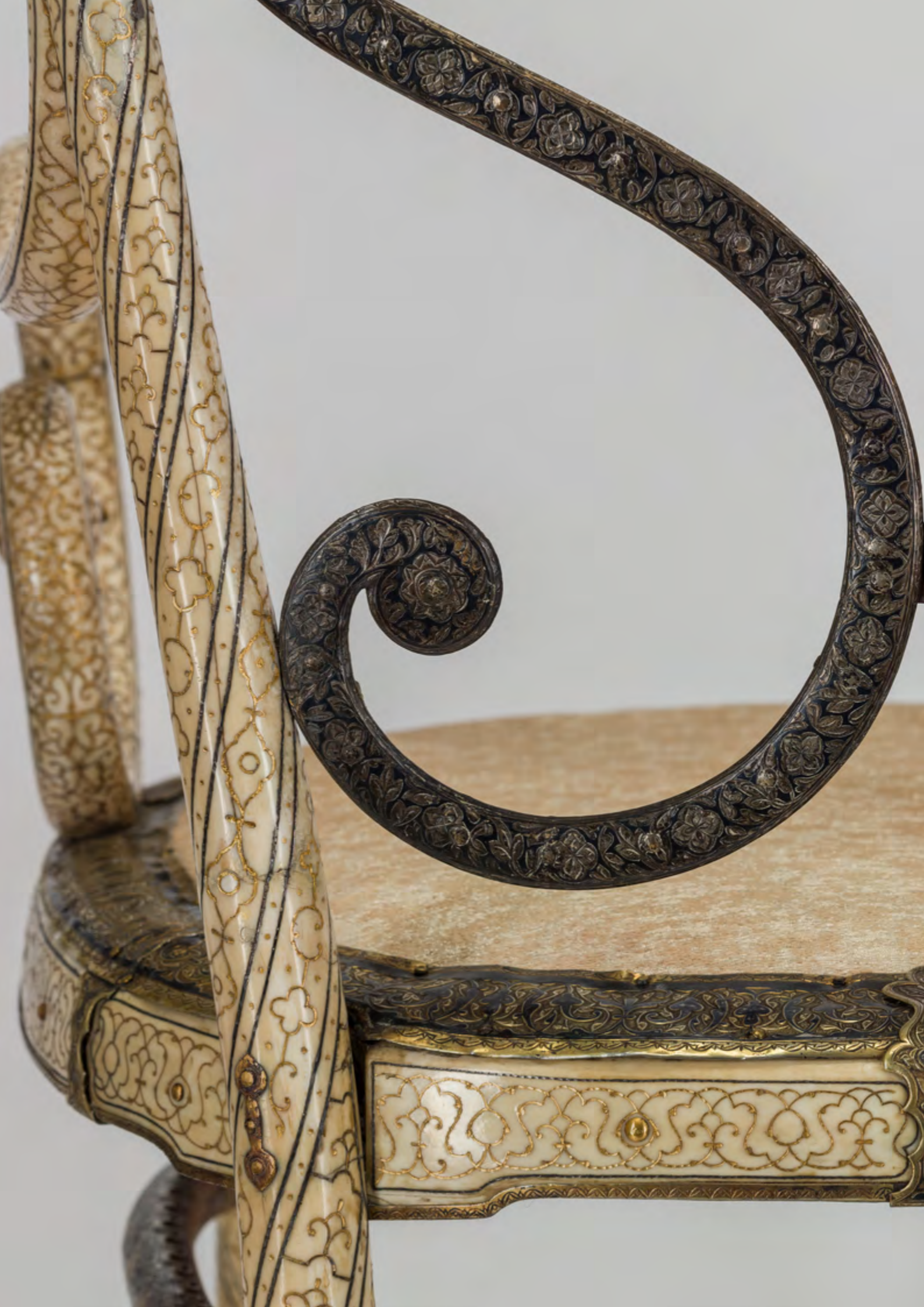
4 Askhabov, Isa, and Askhabov, Khamzat. *Поиски утраченных реликвий / Searching for Lost Relics*. Moscow: Cultural Heritage, 2016. pp. 358-59.

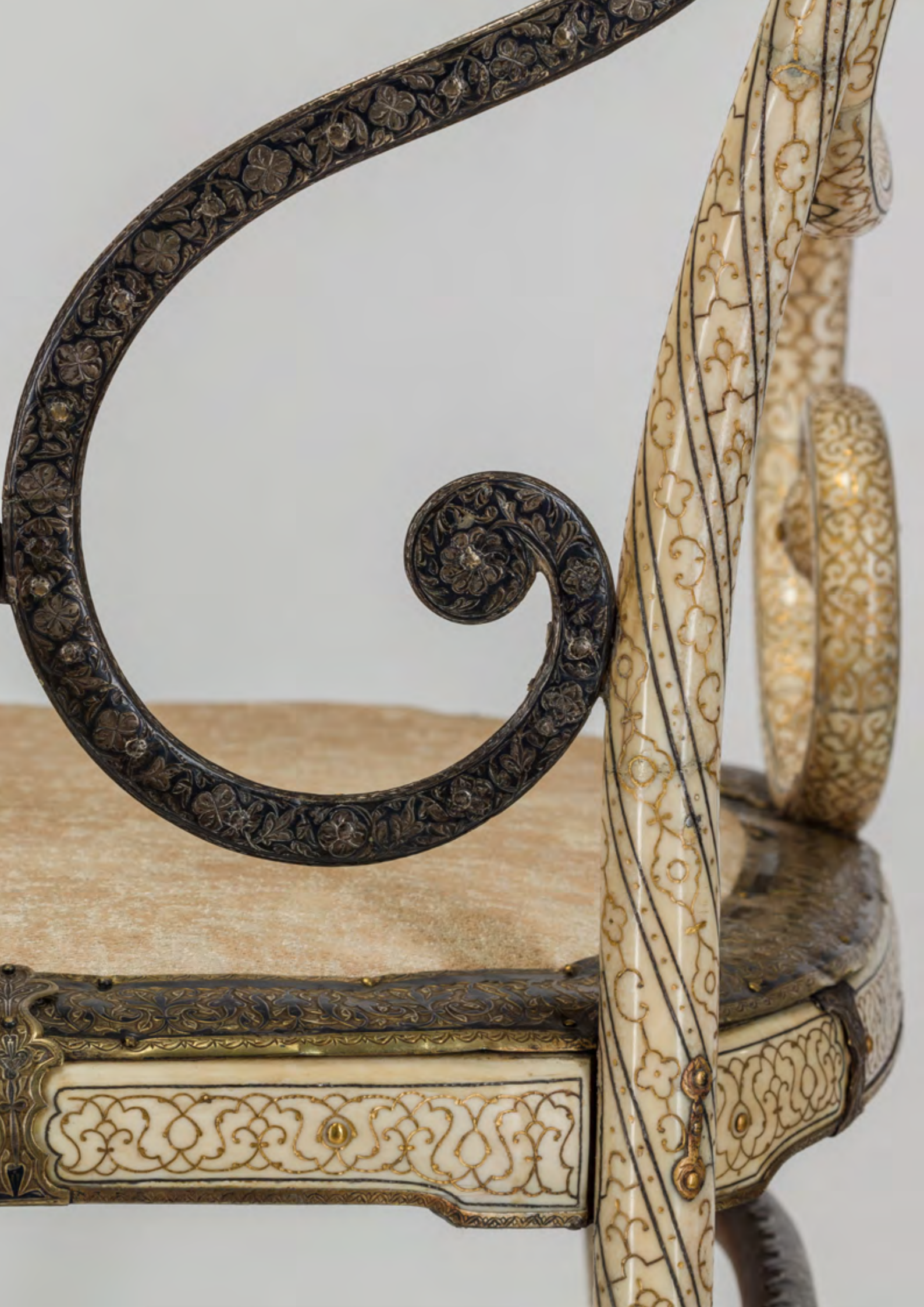
5 Ibid. 138.

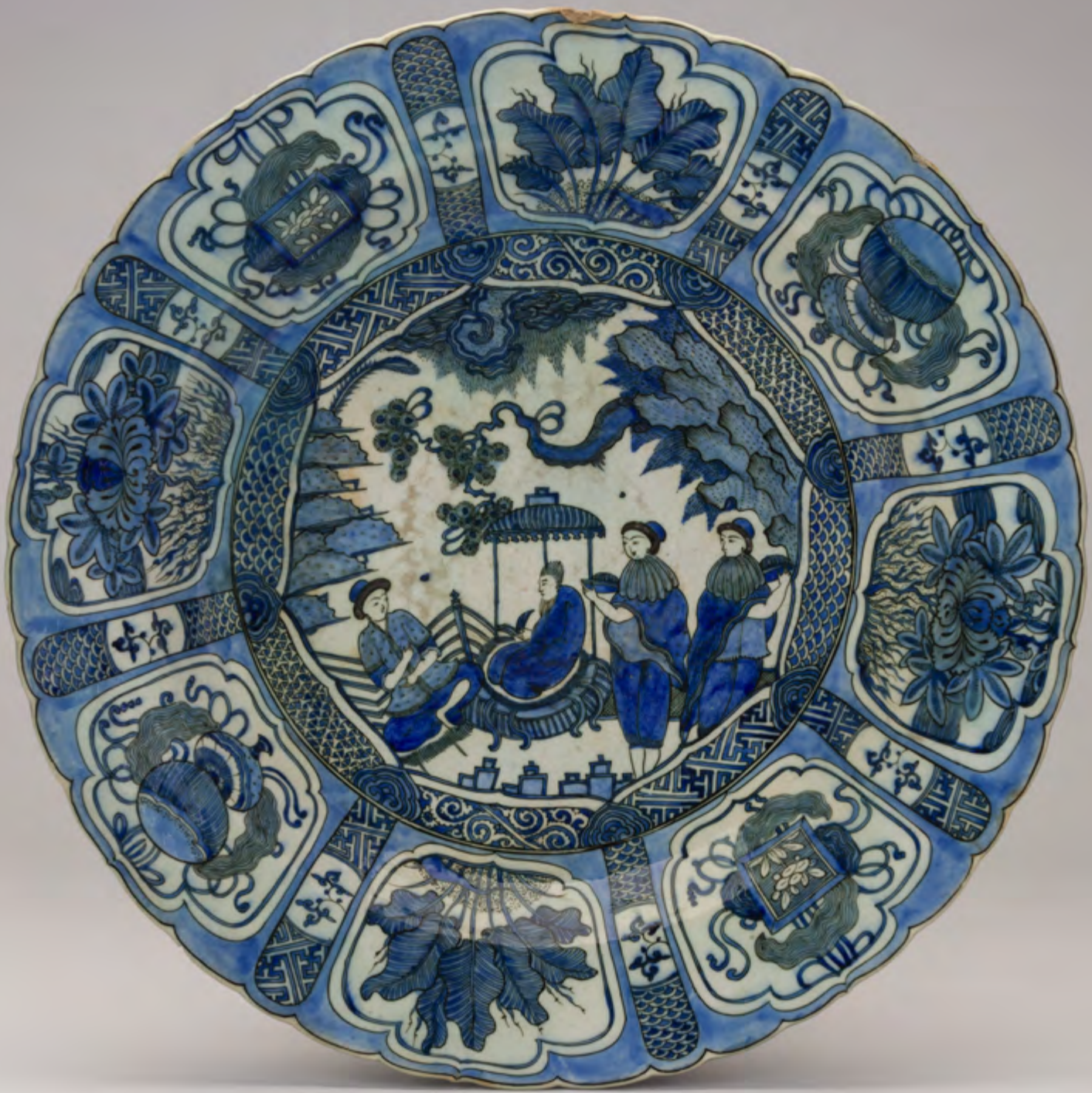
6 Christie's. *Islamic Manuscripts, Miniatures and Works of Art: London, Tuesday, 10 October 1989 at 2.30pm*. London: Christie's, 1989. p95, lot 437.

7 M. Harris & Sons. *An Abridged Introductory Catalogue of Antique Furniture and Works of Art*. London: c.1924. p. 81.









2

Safavid Blue-and-White Charger

Iran, probably Kirman, First half of the 17th century

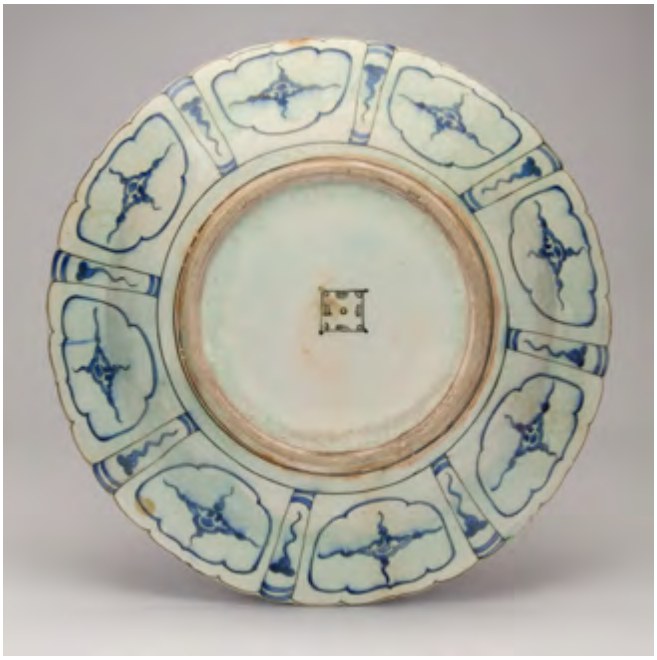
Fritware decorated with oxide glazes
47cm diameter, 9cm deep

Provenance: Sold at Sotheby's 'Autumn Islamic and Iranian Sales', 10th October 1978, Lot no. 147.
Asian private collection.

This large charger with a flat foot ring and notched rim is an outstanding example of 17th century Safavid blue-and-white ceramics. Modelled on Chinese Kraak dishes, Persian potters mimicked the translucent, bright white appearance of Chinese porcelain by applying oxide glazes over faience, a mixture of ground glass (frit), quartz, and clay. Kraak was a subcategory of Jingdezhen porcelain produced during the late Ming dynasty for the European export market. Though its etymology is disputed, the word 'Kraak' may derive from the Dutch word for 'carrack', the type of Portuguese cargo ship from which hundreds of examples of the Chinese porcelain were looted by the Dutch East India Company in 1630. En route to Europe, ships carrying Chinese porcelain sold some of their cargo in Persian and Middle Eastern ports, exposing Persian potters to Kraak ceramics.[1] Greater interest was stimulated in blue-and-white ceramics following a visit by Shah 'Abbas I to the Safavid ancestral shrine at Ardabil in 1604, where he left gifts including antique Chinese porcelain. The recapture of the Persian Gulf in the same year allowed the city of Kirman to grow and its ceramics industry to flourish. Safavid imitations of Ming porcelain were so accurate that they could pass for originals both in Persia and Europe.[2]

The wide rim and cavetto are decorated with eight lobed petal panels, each depicting different plants borrowed from contemporaneous Wanli porcelain. Depicted are plantain leaves, an unusual bulbous fruit, a flower, and a floral plaque. The ribbon dividers cover both flange and well. They are filled with geometric patterns, alternating between fish scales and an interlocking diaper design, which derives from a simplified version of the Chinese character 壽 (*shòu*), meaning 'longevity'.[3]

Seventeenth-century Persian potters transplanted human figures from Chinese ceramics and relocated them to more local settings. Under the shade of a leafy peach tree, a popular motif in both Chinese and Persian culture, a bearded scholar reads a book under a canopy. The remaining three figures appear to be Portuguese, recognisable by their European dress composed of wide-brimmed hats and breeches. The Portuguese army conquered the Persian port island of Hormuz in 1507, thus starting over 100 years of conflict between the two nations. Contemporaneous Persian manuscripts illustrating clashes between Safavid and Portuguese troops, such as the Capture of Hormuz held in the British Library (MS Add. 7801, f. 44v), depict Portuguese soldiers with similar hats and trousers.[4] At the time of this charger's manufacture, Safavid-Portuguese conflict was reaching its climax. In 1602, the Persian army expelled the Portuguese from Bahrain. A decade later, the Portuguese Empire took the city of Gombroon and renamed it Comorão. Two years later, 'Abbās the Great recaptured the city, naming it Bandar-e 'Abbās. In 1622, with the help of the English navy, 'Abbās retook Hormuz from the Portuguese.[5] The central medallion therefore documents Iranian and Portuguese interaction, perhaps even illustrating a specific diplomatic meeting.



This charger is an excellent imitation of Ming porcelain. It is only distinguishable from Chinese porcelain by subtle details, notably its maker's mark and black outlines. On the reverse of the charger is a square seal mark designed to imitate a Chinese framed reign-mark, or *nien-hao*. It has been thought until recently that pottery with square seal-marks originates from the city of Mashhad, whereas tassel-marks were used in Kirman. However, both Kirman and Mashhad used square seal-marks in the first half of the 17th century, with the square seal-mark only abandoned in Kirman in 1660. The formal square seal-mark seen on this charger, with symmetrical marks on each edge, is most consistent with seals used between 1573 and 1620 in Kirman.[6] The details are outlined in black, and the appearance of shade is given with black dots, to imitate the rich blue outlines found in Jingdezhen porcelain. It is possible that the black outline comes from the Persian tradition of drawing in black ink. Towards the middle of the 17th century, black outlines disappeared in favour of cobalt pigment in most Kirman workshops, indicating that this piece was likely completed before 1650.

A dish dated between 1600 and 1640 with an identical square seal-mark is found in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. 244-1884).[7] Both dishes are ornamented with plantain leaves and the same unusual bulbous fruit. This may indicate the same artist or shared source material. The dividers on the reverse of both dishes are ornamented with identical comma motifs. Another dish belonging to the same group of blue-and-white ware in the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. 243-1884) has a similar square seal-mark. It too is ornamented with the unusual fruit, flowers, and plaque in its petal panels. A leafy peach tree decorates its central medallion, and the reverse features almost identical comma and cloud motifs.[8]

M.L.

Notes:

1 Macioszek, Amelia. 'Negotiating Appropriation – Later Safavid Adaptations of Chinese Blue-and-white Porcelain', *Art of the Orient* 8 (2019), pp. 75-92. P. 76.

2 Crowe, Yolanda. *Persia and China: Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1501-1738*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2002. P. 21.

3 Macioszek, Amelia. Op. cit. p. 83.

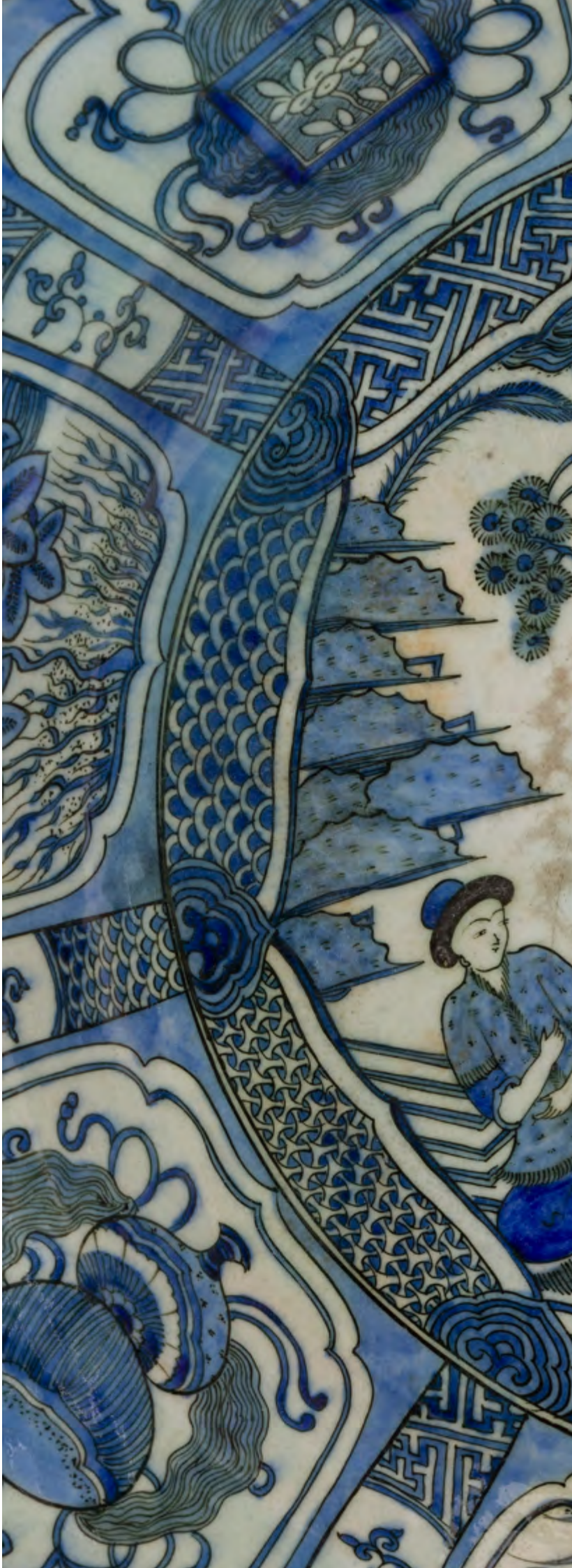
4 Sardar, Marika. 'Two Paintings Reflecting the Portuguese Presence in Iran and India', in Peck, Amelia (ed.) *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013.

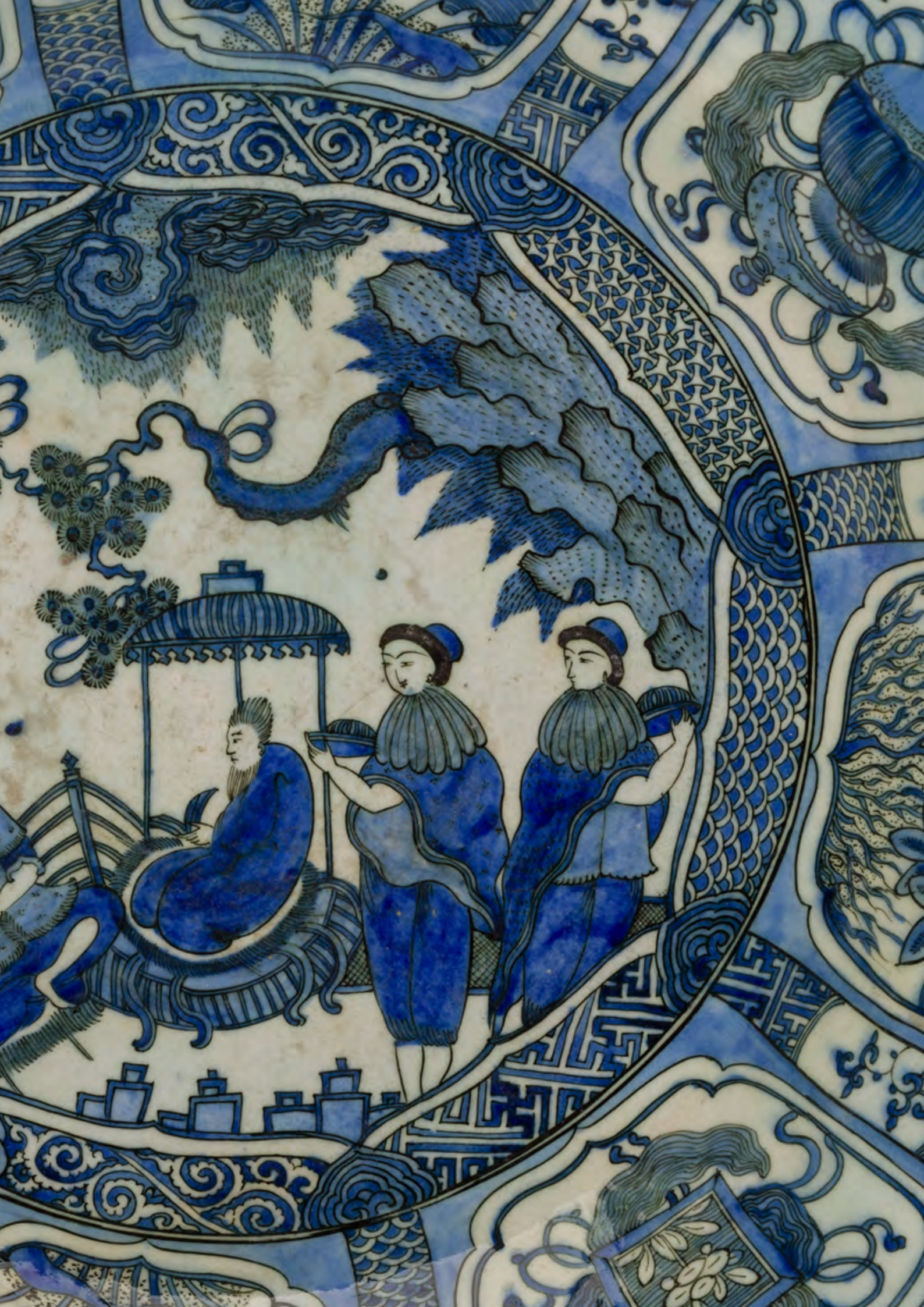
5 Teles e Cunha, João. 'Portugal I. Relations with Persia in the Early Modern Age (1500-1750), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2009. Retrieved online https://iranicaonline.org/articles/portugal-i 22/10/23.

6 Golombek, Lisa, Mason, Robert B., and Proctor, Patty. 'Safavid Potters' Marks and the Question of Provenance', *Iran* 39 (2001). pp. 207-236.

7 Reverse of V&A 244-1884 pictured in Golombek et al. op. cit. 211, fig. 1, and in Crowe. Op. cit. p. 66, fig. 32.

8 See Crowe. Op. cit. p. 62, fig. 24 for reverse.





3

Calligraphic Terracotta Tile

Iran, perhaps 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.

This terracotta tile carries an inscription in Thuluth script, against a background of curling stems and vegetal ornamentation, reading أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَن 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]

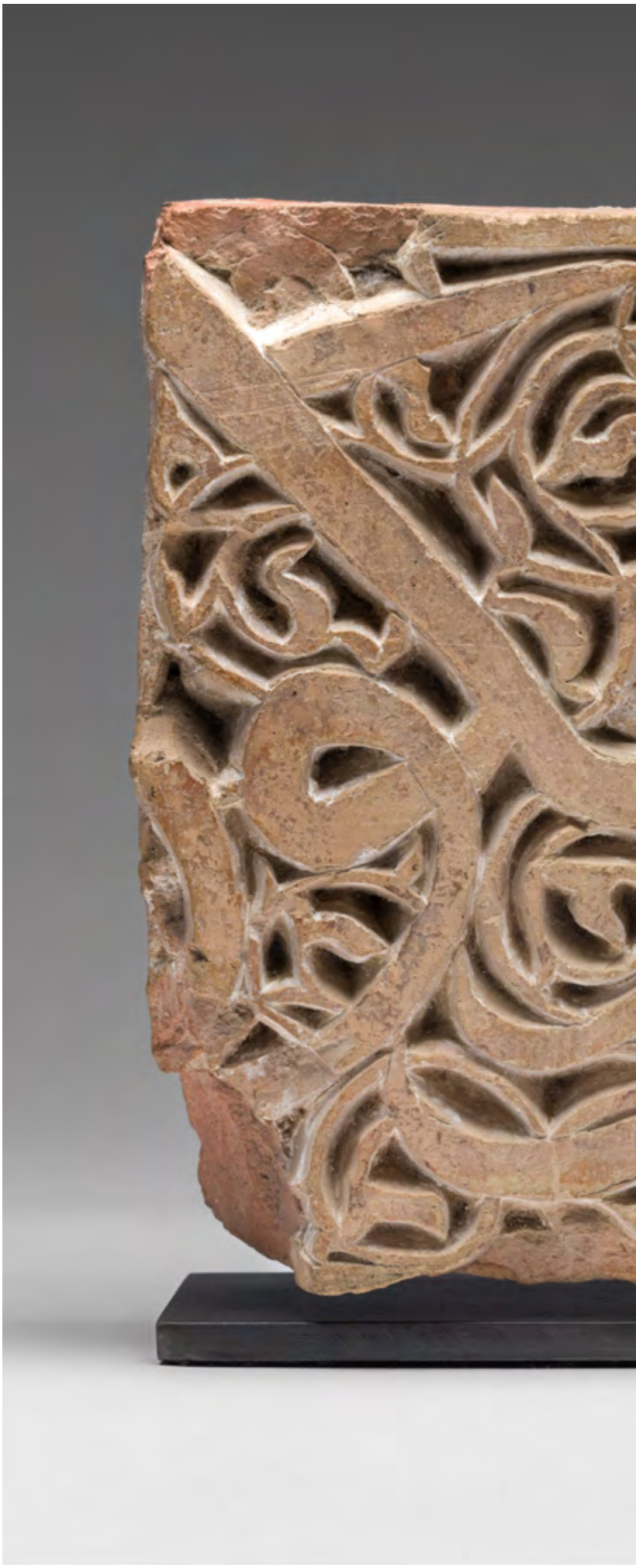
This panel was purchased by Claude Achille Clarac, the French ambassador to Iran, with André Godard, the director of the Iranian Archaeological Service, in Tehran. Along with his wife, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who he met in the French embassy, Clarac drove through Iran in a Buick. The pair documented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

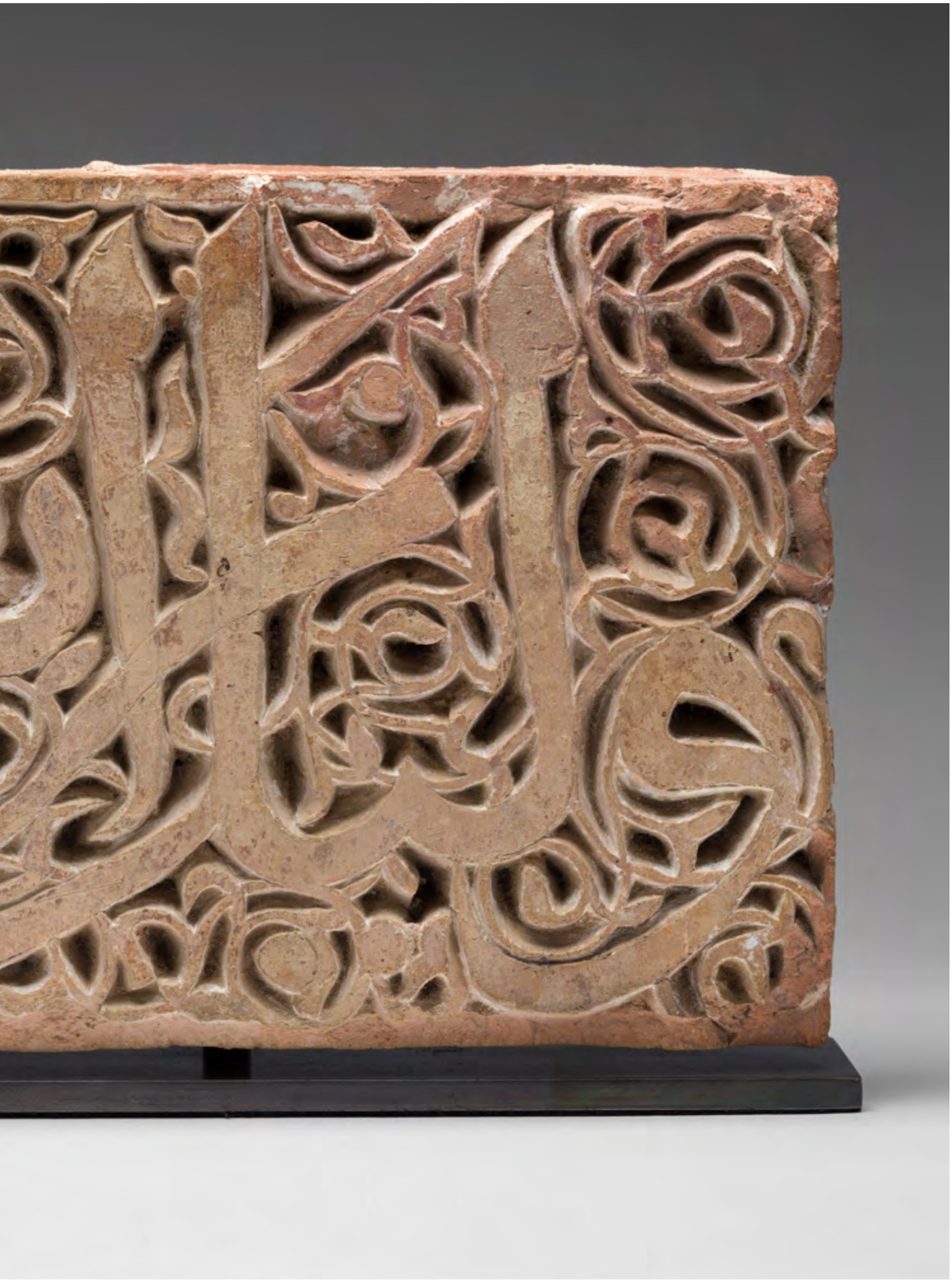
M.L.

Notes:

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.





4

Safavid Ewer

Iran, Late 16th to early 17th century

Brass
34.5cm high, 18cm maximum diameter

Provenance: UK private collection.

This elegant ewer (*āftābe*) would have been used for bathing, handwashing or *wudu*, the Muslim practice of ritual ablutions before prayer. The ewer's pyriform body rests upon a raised splayed foot, with a faceted spout of serpentine form, and its neck interrupted by a central bulbous ring. The body was cast in one, with the foot and spout soldered on afterwards. Areas of abrasion to the engraved decoration around the neck reveal where hands over the last 400 years have held the ewer.

The ornamentation on the body consists of interwoven vegetal arabesques, closely relating to contemporaneous illuminated manuscripts. It is inlaid with a black bituminous substance, most of which survives, to add definition. A horizontal band of lotus blossoms in ace-of-spades-shaped cartouches divides the body from the neck.[1] From this band sprout cypress trees, a motif seen in Safavid lustreware. The foot is engraved with columns of palmettes, which draw the eye upwards toward the body. A rope pattern encircles the rim of the foot. The inner walls of the neck are decorated with two carefully incised lines below the edge of the neck and two further down. The spout terminates in a dragon head, a motif seen commonly in Iranian decorative arts.[2] A symbol of protection, it was perhaps included to imbue the ewer's user with its apotropaic powers.

Both the form and ornamentation of the ewer are typical of the Shah 'Abbas period (r. 1588-1629).[3] A contemporaneous ewer found in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. M.111-1909) shares many stylistic similarities. Identical details include the band separating the body and the neck, and the incised lines inside both ewers.

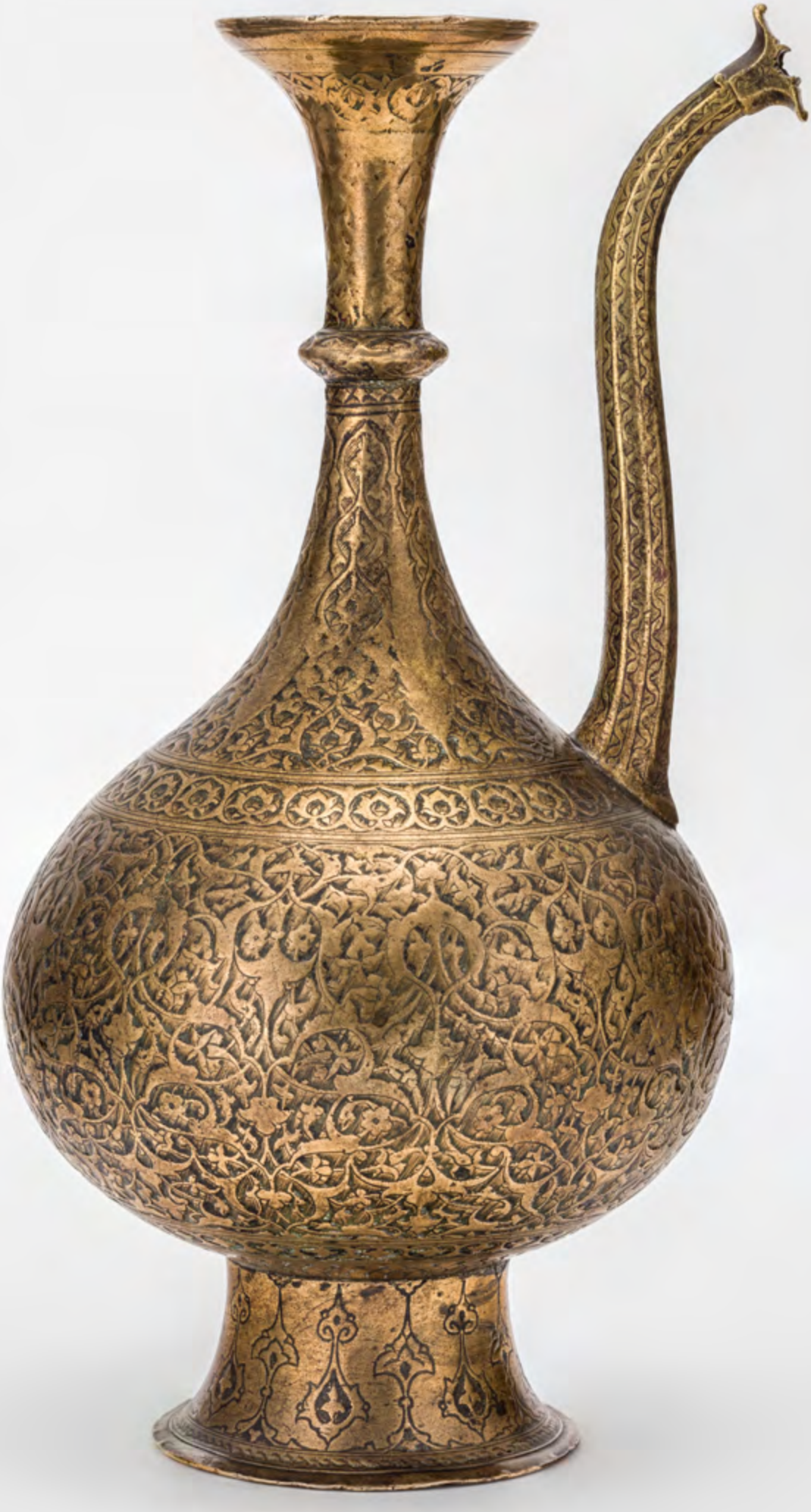
M.L.

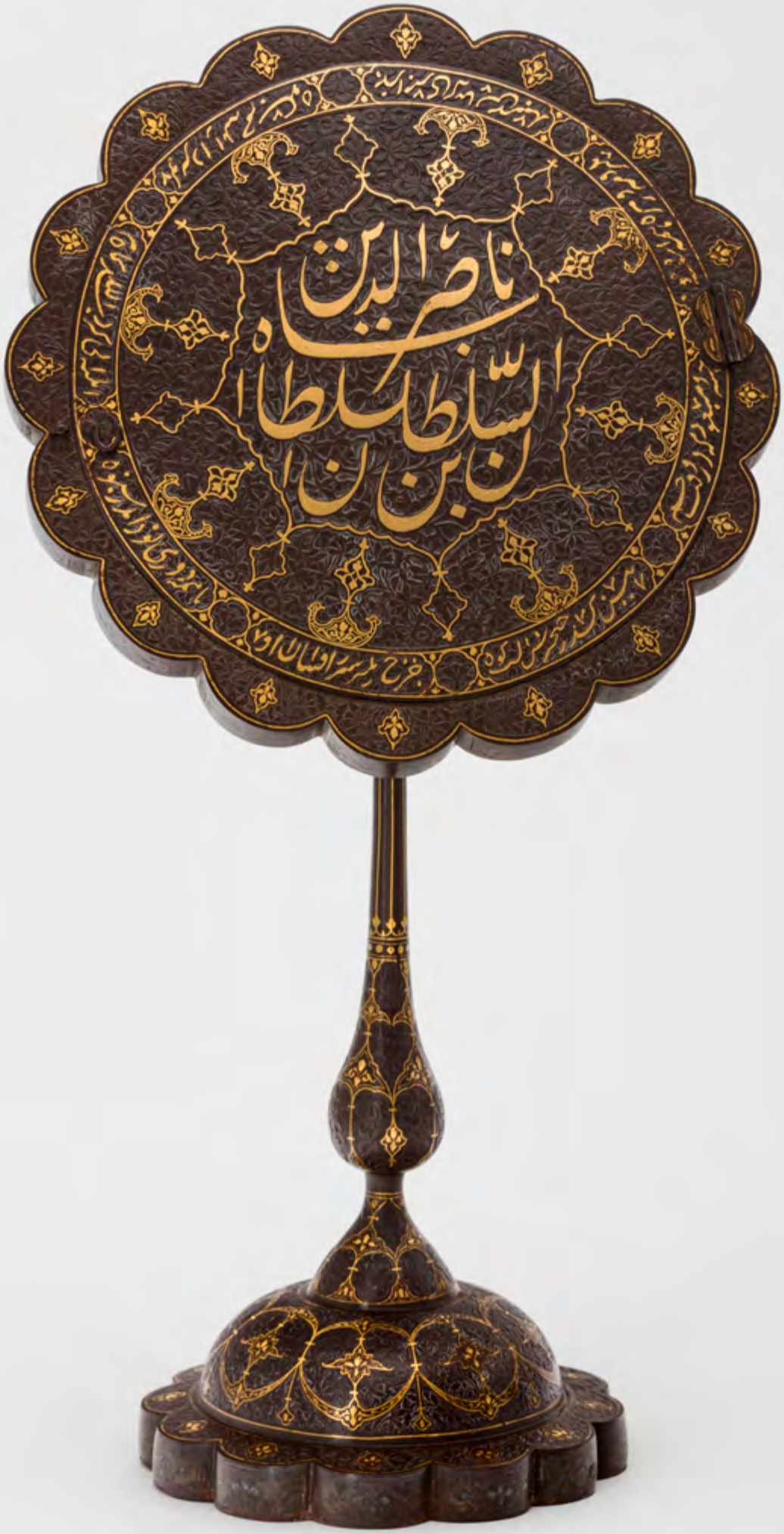
Notes:

1 Melikian-Chirvani, A.S. *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World 8-18th Centuries*. London: 1982. p. 316.

2 See Metropolitan Museum of Art accession no. 91.1.607, Victoria & Albert Museum accession no. 458-1876, British Museum accession no. OA+.739.

3 Melikian-Chirvani, A.S. Op. cit. pp. 316-317.




ناصر الدین
السلطان ابن السلطان

5

Qajar Steel Mirror

Iran, 19th century

Steel, silver, gold, glass
57cm high, 28.5cm diameter of mirror,
19cm diameter of base

Provenance: UK private collection.

Atop an elegant stand, this mirror of cusped circular form with a hinged door is made from silver and gold-damascened steel. No surface is left plain, with vegetal engravings filling the gaps between the symmetrically arranged gold arabesques. A similar decorative scheme can be observed on a Qajar mirror in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art (accession no. 1983.1111).

A border around the edge of the door covering the mirror is formed from cartouches holding Persian verses in praise of the mirror. They are garbled in places, suggesting that the craftsmen were copying a language which they did not understand. The mirror is one of the most recurrent symbolic features in Persian poetry, particularly the work of Hafez, representing the inner quality of a person.[1] At the centre of the mirror a large Arabic inscription in gold damascene reads "the Sultan, son of the Sultan, Naser al-Din Shah":

السلطان ابن السلطان ناصر الدين شاه

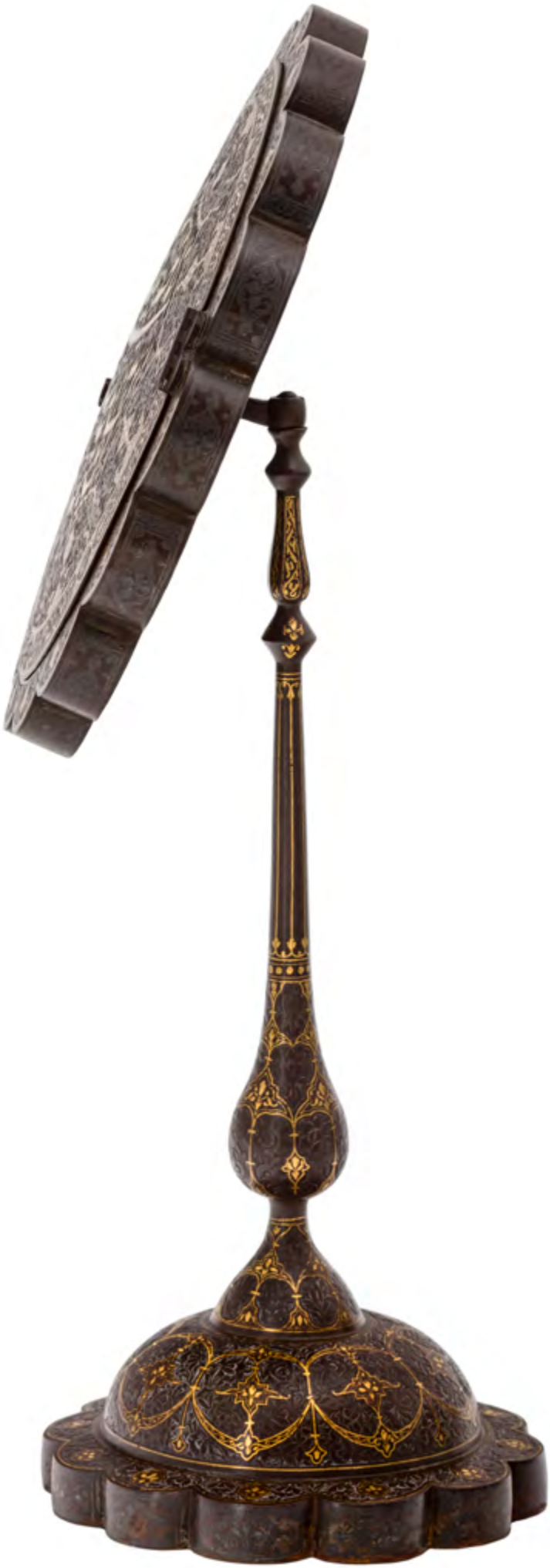
Naser al-Din Shah was the fourth Shah of Qajar Iran, reigning from September 1848 until his assassination in May 1896. He was a serious patron of the arts, leading them to flourish under his reign.[2] Another mirror inscribed with his name is in the collection of the British Museum (accession no. 1967,0718.1). Unusually for Qajar metalware, the date cited on the object matches its production date. This suggests that it could have been made for use in the court of Naser al-Din Shah.

M.L.

Notes:

1 Davoudimoghadam, Farideh, and Eshaghi, Zahra. 'Representation of the Mirror Motif in Hafez's Lyric Poems', *Literature in the Iraqi Period* 2.4 (2022). pp. 1-15.

2 Ekhtiar, Maryam, and Sardar, Marika. 'Nineteenth-Century Iran: Art and the Advent of Modernity', in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000.



6

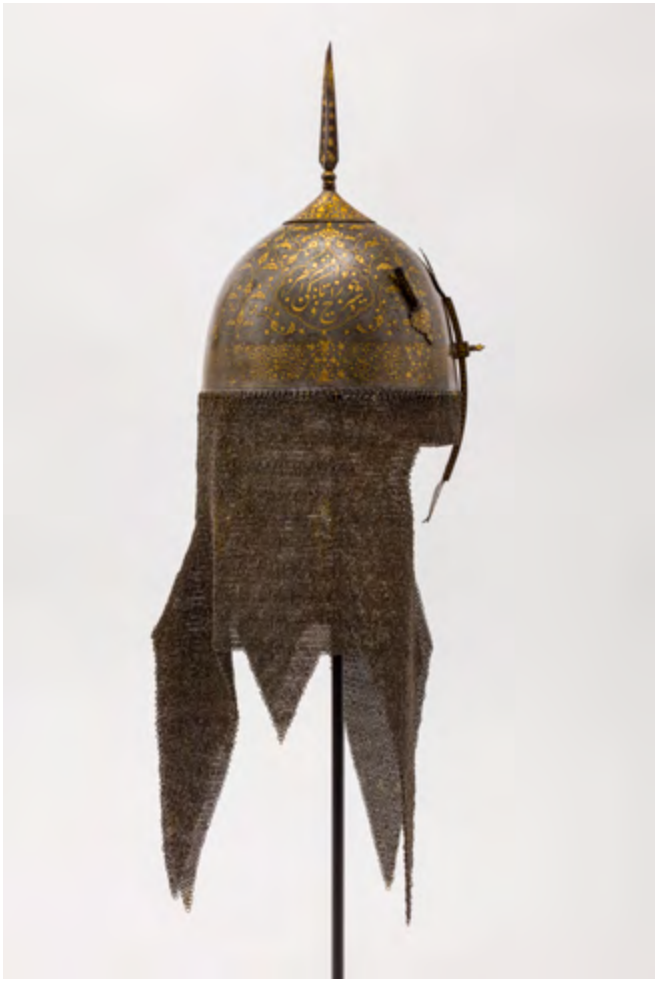
Late-Safavid or Early-Qajar Helmet

Iran, 18th century

Steel overlaid with gold
69cm high, 20cm diameter

Provenance: From the estate of Albert Joseph Gasteiger von Raabenstein and Kobach, General and engineer at the court of the Shah of Iran. Thence by descent.

The long spike, distinctive nose guard and two angled feather holders of this Persian helmet create the unmistakable silhouette of the *kulāh-khūd* (کلاه خود), sometimes known as a devil mask amongst English-speaking arms and armour collectors for its fearsome appearance.[1] Of watered steel, the elongated domed form is consistent with helmets dating to the late Safavid era. The 11cm-tall pyramidal spike is screwed into the helmet, which is characteristic of helmets from the 18th century.[2] Riveted at the front of the skull is a screw bracket that secures a sliding nose protector (*damāghak*). On either side of the nose protector are two small porte aigrettes (*jā parī*) with flattened lobed bases, used to mount feathers (*ablaq*) from birds such as the heron, egret or peacock.[3] The feathers taken from the helmets of vanquished enemies were sometimes displayed in the *jā parī* as a trophy.[4]



A long mail aventail, intended for neck protection, is attached through holes around the rim of the bowl. The lower edge of the aventail is vandyked, terminating in four long triangular points and two shorter ones. Hours of skilled labour were required not only to mesh the unwelded rings, each only 4mm in diameter, but also to add contrasting golden brass rings to the dark grey steel mail to create diamond patterns in the aventail.

The helmet is decorated with *koftgari*, a technique of inlaying gold into watered steel. The ornamentation consists of interweaving vines with characteristic polylobed Saz leaves and buds.[5] As is typical for Safavid helmets, the densest area of decoration is found below the spike. Persian verses are inscribed in large polylobed cartouches on the crown, reading:

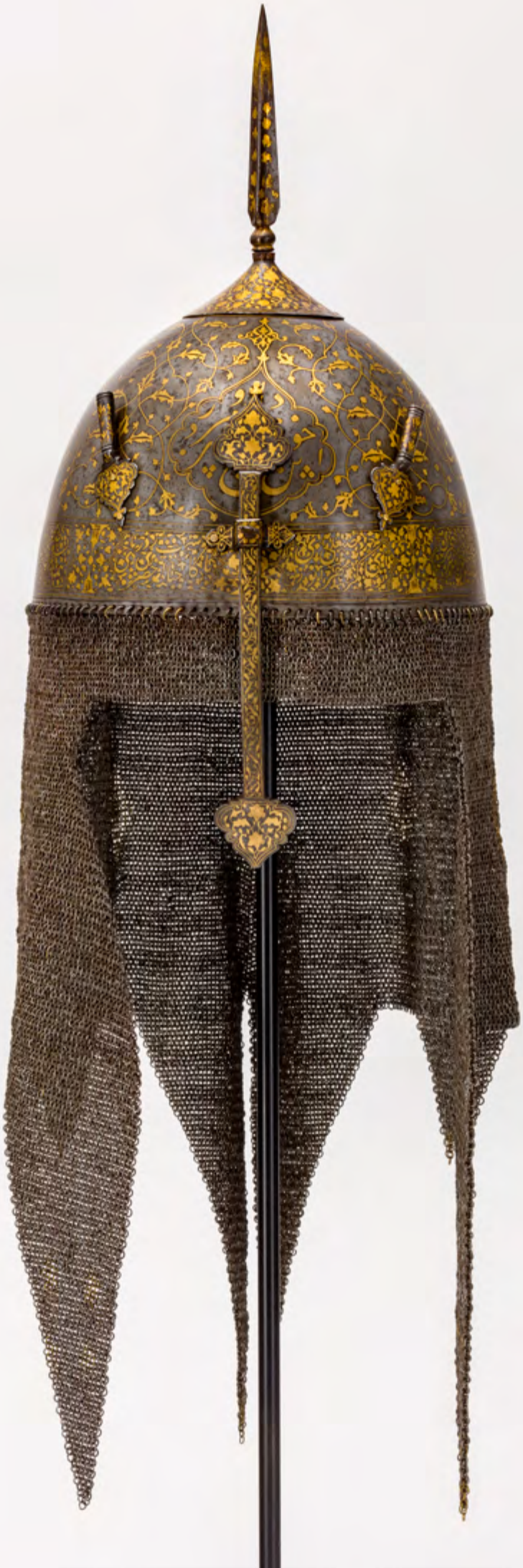
این خود [مرصع] بسر مرد دلاور
خوشتر بود از تاج کی و افسر قیصر
ز آهن بود و گشته مرصع بزر [و] سیم
همچون فلک هشتم از آرایش اختر

'This inlaid helmet on the head of the brave hero,
Is more beautiful than a mighty king's crown or a Caesar's diadem.
It is made of iron and set with gold and silver,
It is adorned with stars like the Eighth Heaven.'

The border of the helmet bowl is composed of 8 cartouches, damascened with more verses:

ای خود صیقلی تو مگر مهر انوری
یا کاسه حیات ز دریا اخضری
رستم طبیعتان همه را بر سری کلاه
بهرام صولتان همه را زیب افسری
صهرابرا [کذا] بخونه [کذا] زین از تو صد شکوه
دارابرا بمعرکه سدی [کذا] اسکندری
جوزا اگر نه ز چه شمشیر میکشی
مریخ اگر نه ز چه خون ریز خنجری

'O polished helmet, surely you are the resplendent sun?
Or a cup of (the water of) life from the dark blue sea?
You are the headdress on the head of all those who have the nature of Rustam,
You are the ornament of the crown of all those who have the ferocity of Bahram.
Suhrab in his saddle has a hundred splendours thanks to you,
For Darab on the battlefield, you are like the wall of Alexander.
If you are not Orion, then why do you draw a sword?
If you are not Mars, then why a blood-thirsty dagger?'

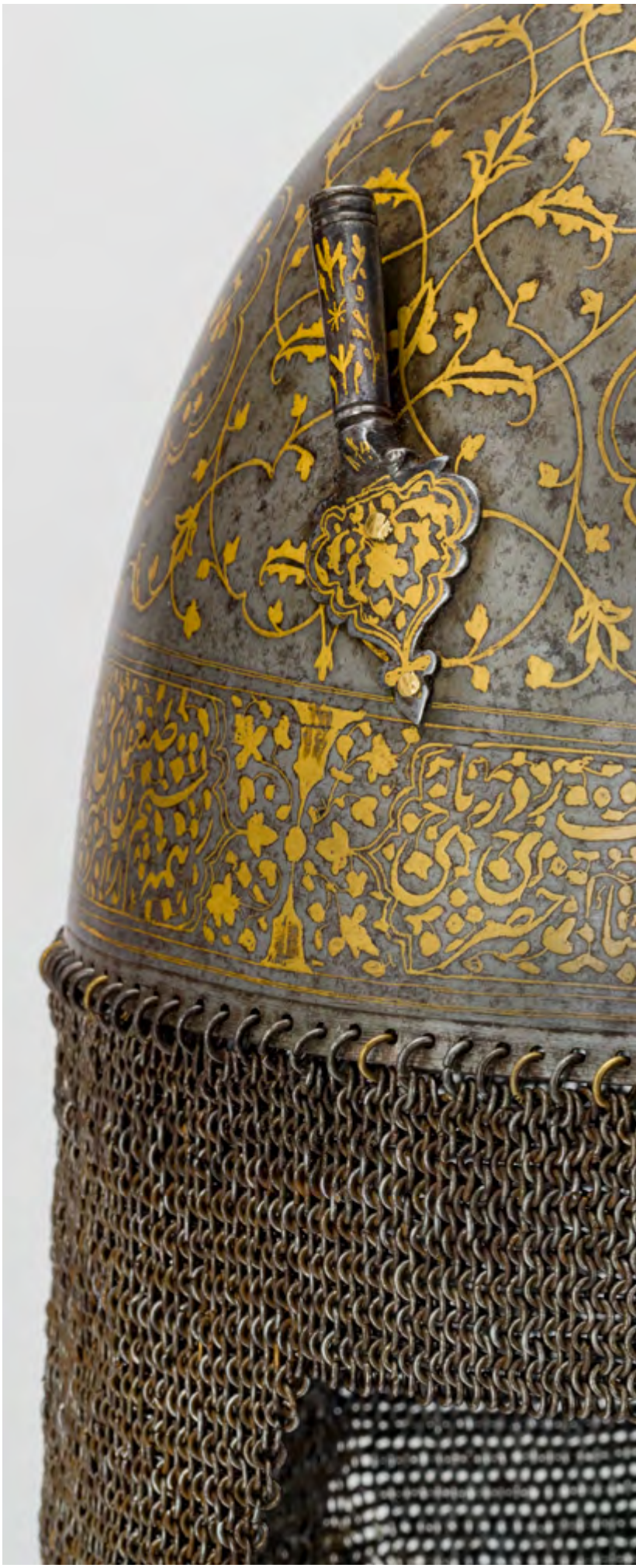


These verses are commonly found on helmets dating from the Qajar period (1789-1925). By invoking such figures as Mars, the Roman god of war, Suhrab, a legendary warrior from the Shahnameh, and Alexander the Great, the wearer might hope to assume some of their bravery on the battlefield.

A helmet in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, also dated to the 18th century shares very similar dimensions as well as similar swirling vegetal *koftgari* ornamentation (accession no. 693-1889). Large calligraphic medallions feature on the body of the helmet, as well as cartouches around the rim. A late Safavid helmet in the collection of the Military Museum Tehran (inventory no. 11) features similar floral arabesques, interspersed with birds and bunches of grapes.[6] A helmet with such similar ornamentation that it could come from the same workshop as the present example, in the National Museum of Scotland (accession no. A.1890.266), is dated to the early Safavid period.

This helmet comes from the collection of the Albert Joseph Gasteiger von Raabenstein and Kobach (1823-1890) in Tyrol. Gasteiger was hired by the Persian government in 1860 to oversee major modernisation of the roads, bridges, and buildings. He was an instructor at the Dar ul-Fonun University. As a civil servant, he oversaw the reorganisation of the Persian army. He was the first European to be given the title of "Khan", known in Persian as Gāstager Khan.[7]

M.L.



Notes:

1 Gahir, Sunita and Spencer, Sharon (eds). *Weapon – A Visual History of Arms and Armor*. New York City: DK Publishing, 2006. P. 23.

2 Moshtagh Khorasani, Manouchehr. *Arms and Armour from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period*. Tübingen: Legat, 2006. P. 718.

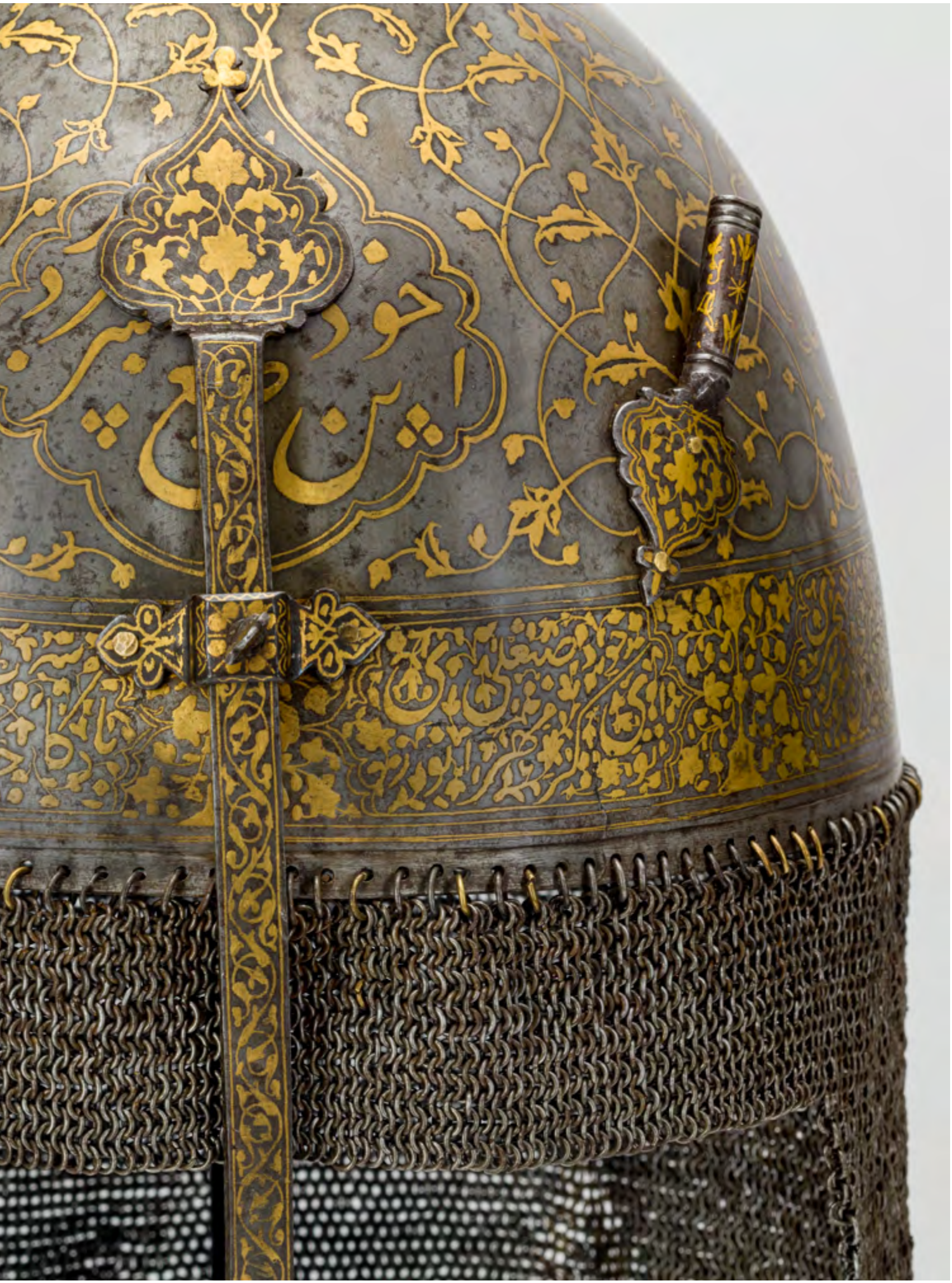
3 Ibid. p. 268.

4 Ibid. p. 284.

5 Abdullahi, Yahya and Rashid Embi, Mohamed. 'Evolution of Abstract Vegetal Ornaments in Islamic Architecture', *International Journal of Architectural Research* 9.1 (2015). pp. 31-49, 43.

6 Moshtagh Khorasani, Manouchehr. op. cit. p. 718.

7 Slaby, Helmut (2000). 'Gastgeiger, Albert Joseph', in Yarshater, Ehsan (ed.) *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Volume X. London: Routledge. Pp. 320-321.



7

Enamelled Jambiya

Iran, dated 1792–1793

43cm long
Enamel, steel, wood, gemstone

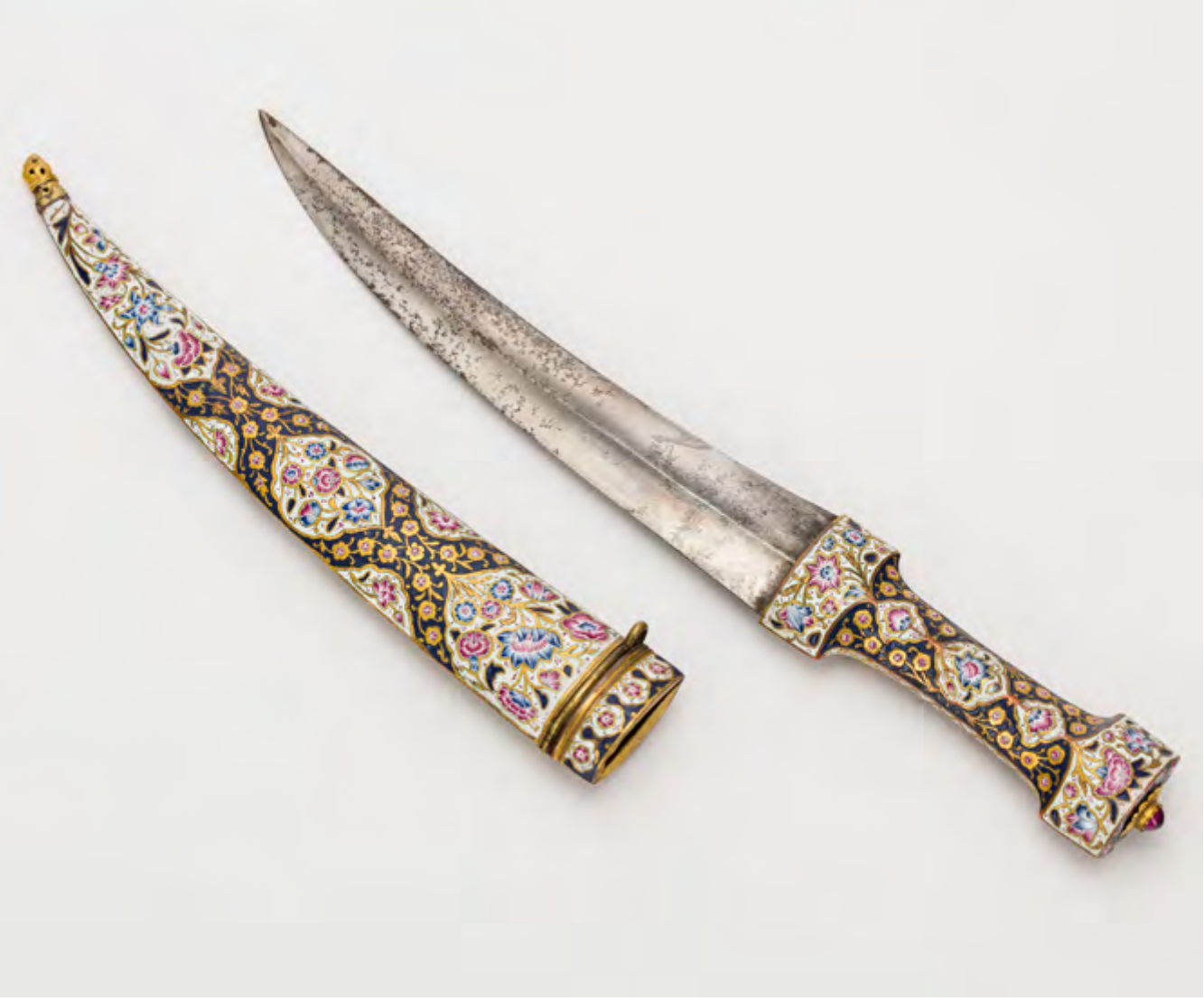
Provenance: Spanish private collection.

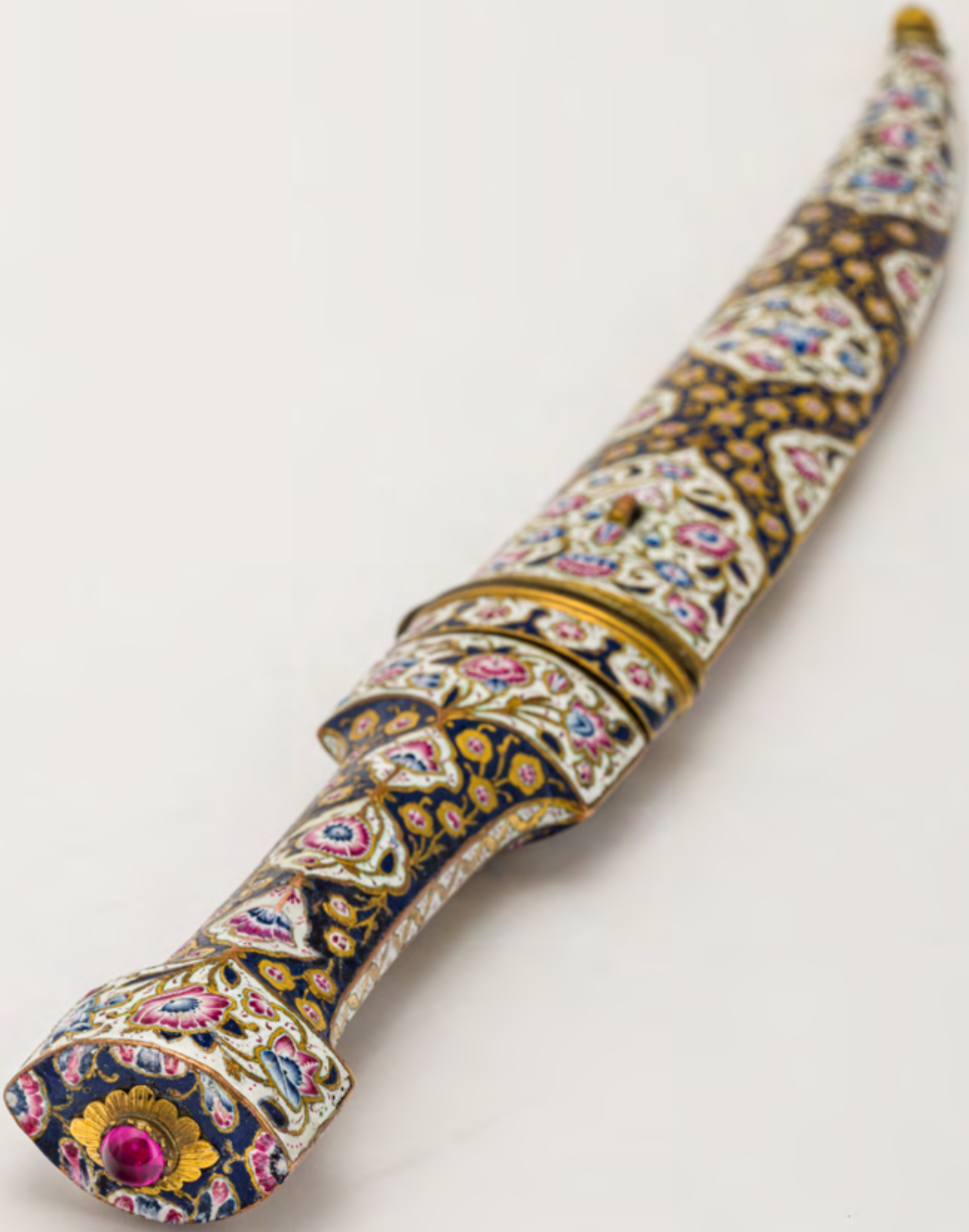
With a curved double-edged watered-steel blade with a median ridge, this dagger features champlevé enamel decoration, typical of the time and the region. The hilt is in the H-shape characteristic of *jambiyas*. The surface of the hilt and sheath are richly decorated with polychrome floral enamel on symmetrical, gilt bordered panels of white ground and an interlacing, surrounding dark green ground. The floral design features rosettes and buds, delicately depicted in blues and pinks, with connecting scrolling vines. The scabbard ends in a delicate gilt rosebud chape. The pommel features a small, raised cut glass pink stone set in a gilt floral design. A small inscription in a cartouche on the scabbard reads:

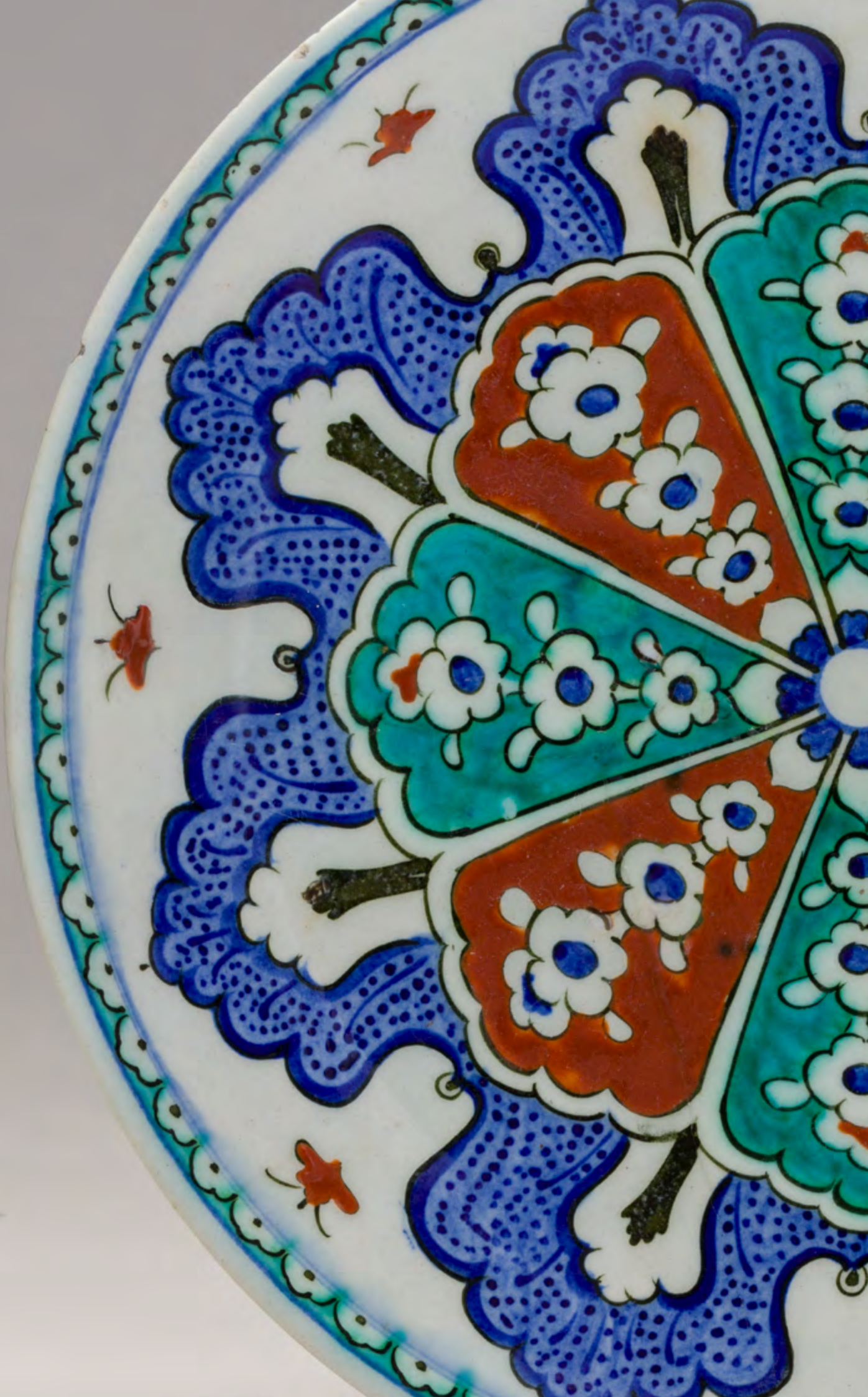
يا عزيز ١٢٠٧
‘O Mighty! 1207 (1792-3 CE).

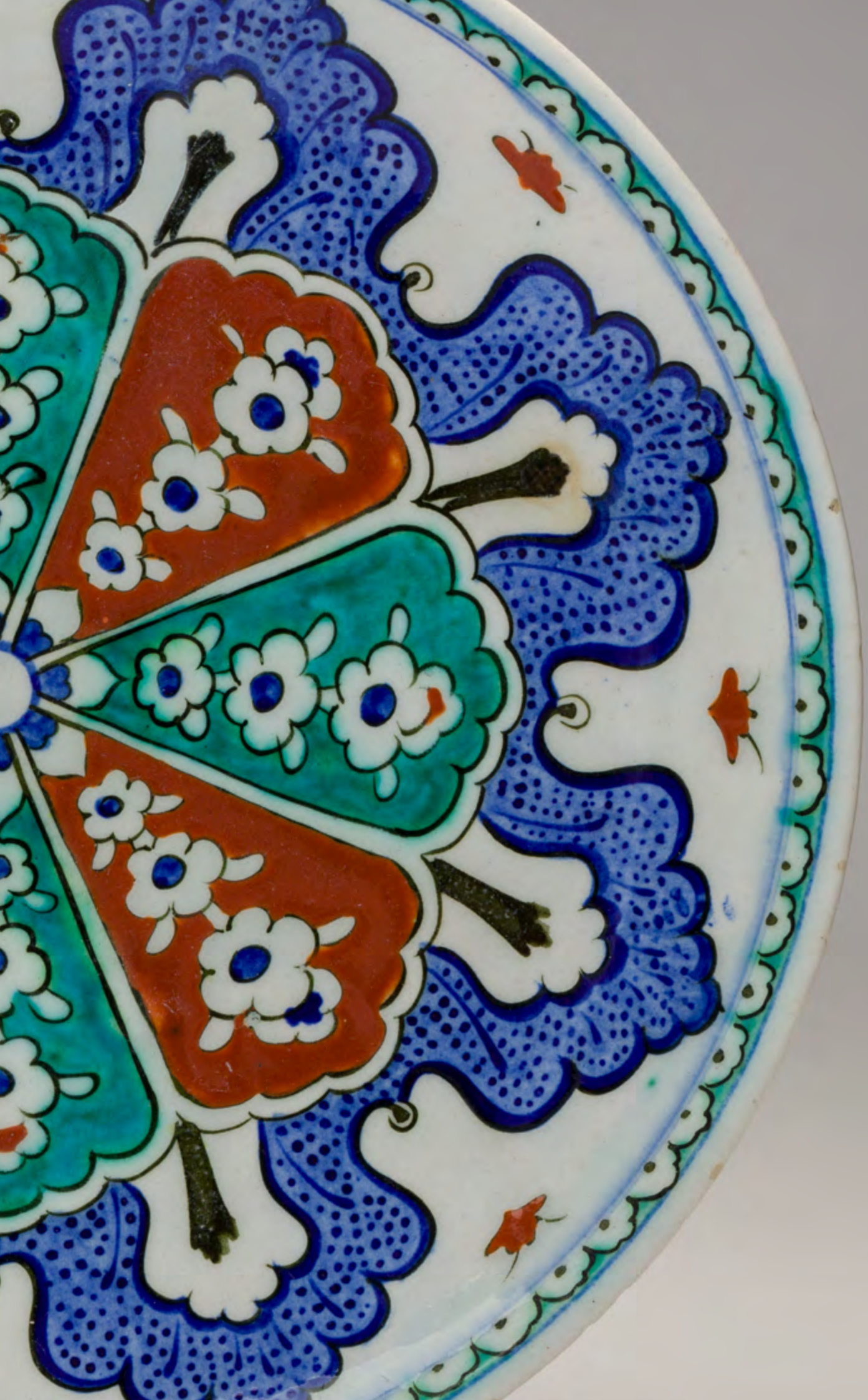
Qajar jambiyas in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 36.25.684a,b) and The British Museum (accession no. 1878,1230.903) provide excellent examples of this champlevé enamel style. Another example is in the Royal Collection Trust (RCIN 37879); the sheath, however, is missing the chape. A dagger with a scabbard of similar design to the present example, but with a jewelled hilt, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (1602&A-1888).

A.S.









8

Iznik Dish

Ottoman Turkey,
Second half of the 16th century

Fritware with underglaze decoration
30cm diameter, 4.5cm high

Provenance: French private collection.

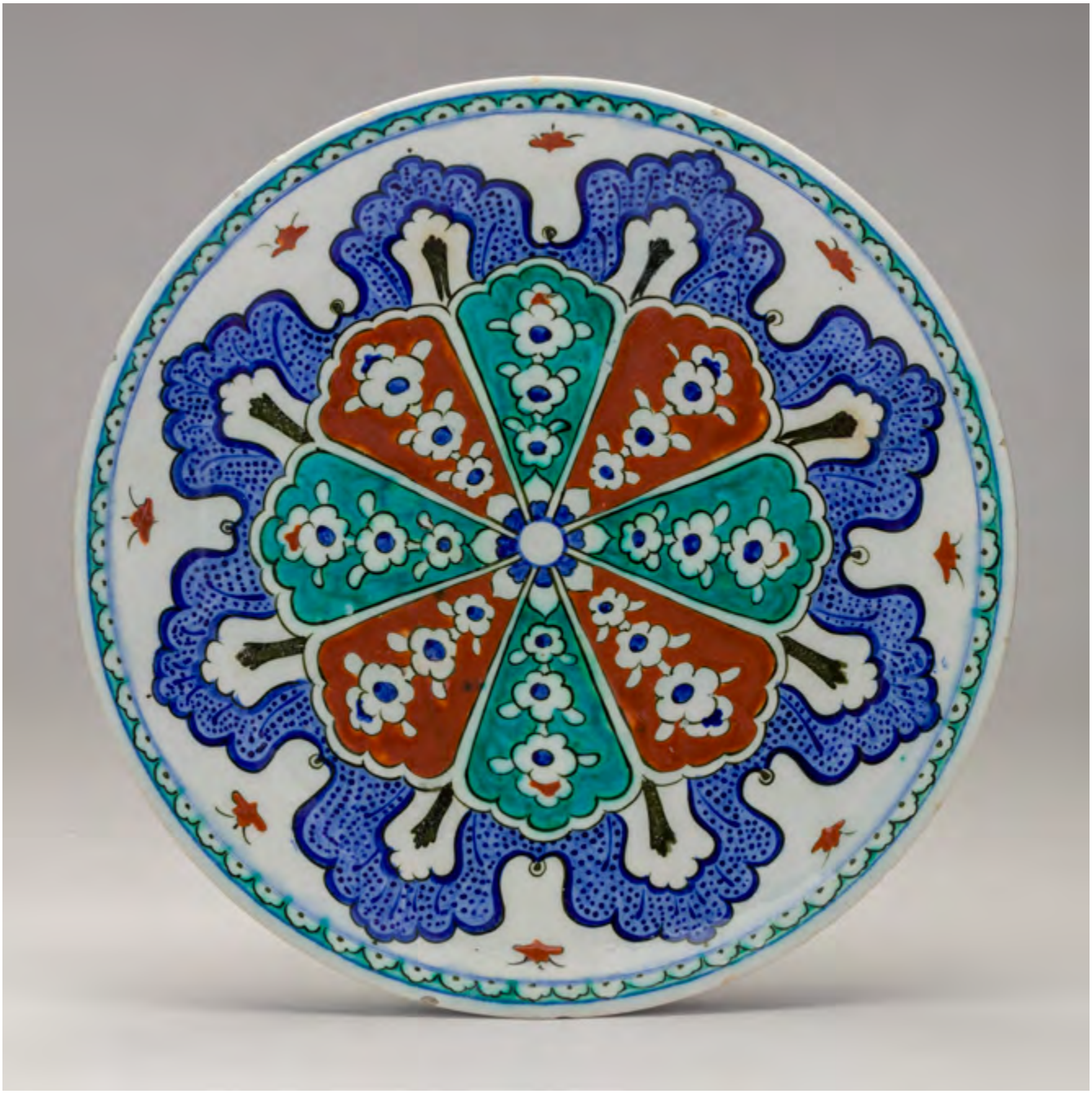
Decorated with an abstract, radial motif against a white ground, this shallow dish is characteristic of the reign of Murad III (1574-1595).[1] White blossoms are placed in the alternating red and green compartments of a large rosette, which radiates from a central octofoil lotus flower. Eight stylised lotus panels, reminiscent of polylobed ogee-shaped arches, form a border around the central rosette. Eight small red quatrefoils fill the remaining white space in the cavetto. The rim of the dish is decorated with small trefoil arches each housing a black dot, on a thin green border. The reverse of the dish is simply decorated with a pair of cobalt blue rings around the rim and the foot, and alternating blossoms and pairs of tulips on the cavetto.

Dishes of similar design and date are found in the Musée national de la Renaissance in Écouen, France (accession no. E. Cl. 8244) and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (accession no. 125-1870). The cavetto of a plate dated to c. 1575 (accession no. 11127) in the Benaki Museum in Athens, is very similarly ornamented with cobalt-blue stylised lotus panels and red quatrefoils.

M.L.

Notes:

1 Hitzel, Frédéric and Jacotin, Mireille. I*znik. Les céramiques ottomans du musée national de la Renaissance Château d'Écouen*. Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2005. p. 229.



9

Blue-and-White Iznik Dish

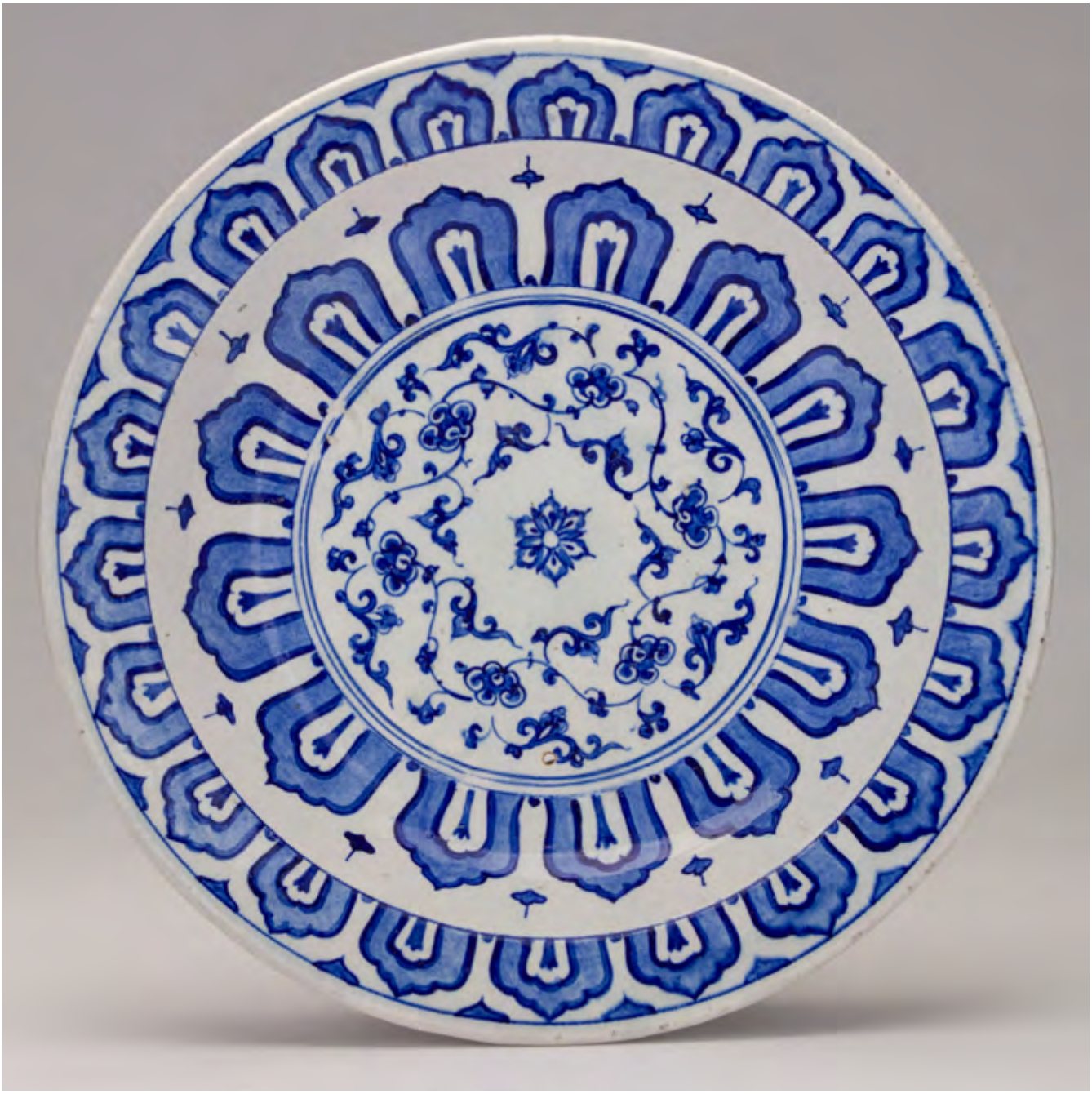
Ottoman Turkey,
Second half of the 16th century

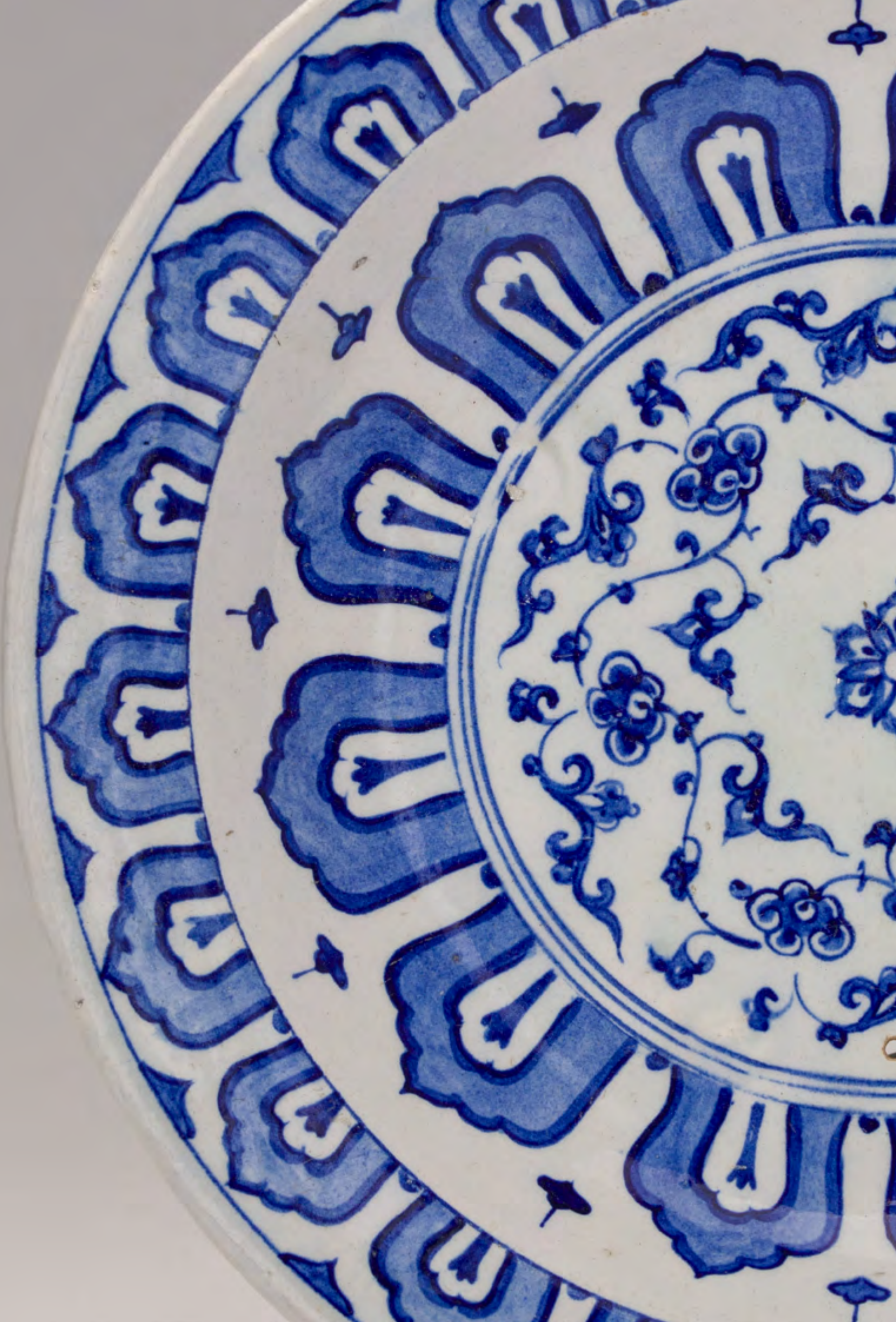
Earthenware with underglaze decoration
32.5cm diameter

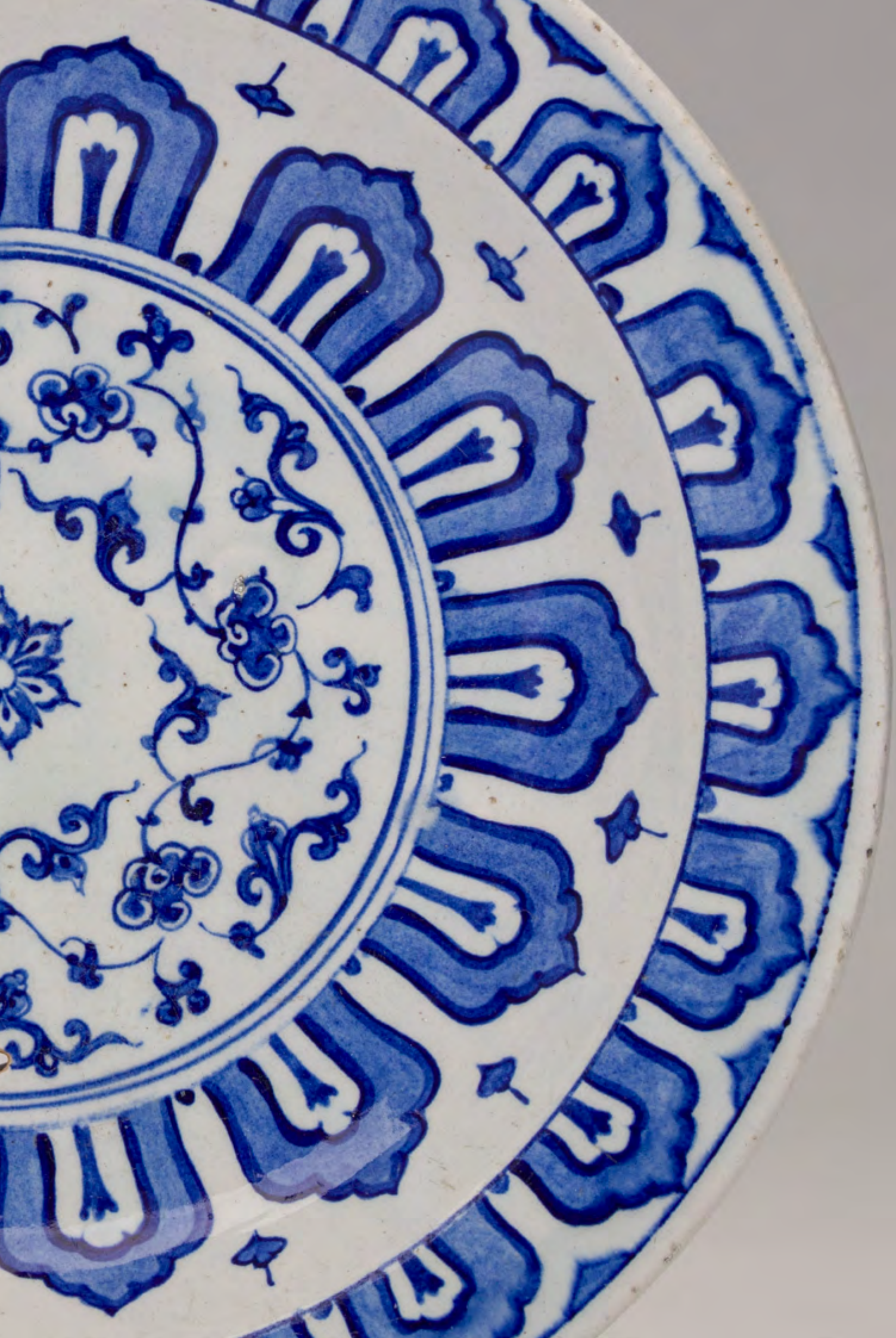
Provenance: From the estate of Baron von Schoen,
Schloss Wildenstein in Switzerland.

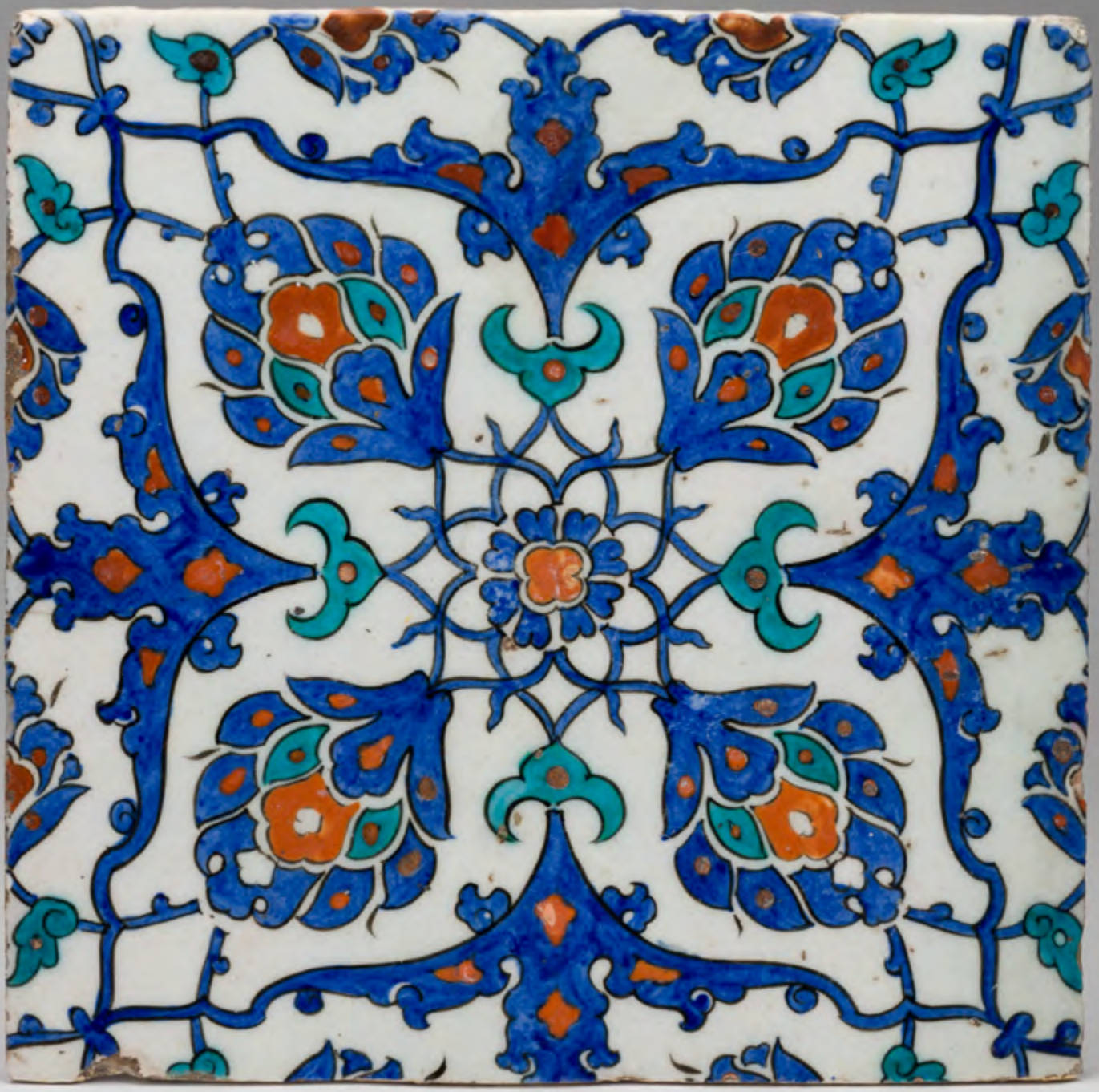
This 16th century Iznik dish in cobalt blue and white dates to the reign of Murad III. Like the polychrome Iznik example (no. 8 in this catalogue), this dish displays radial patterns and abstract arches which are characteristic of this period. However, the blue-and-white colour scheme and the central medallion were inspired by Chinese prototypes. At the centre of the dish is a small, cinquefoil flower, surrounded by swirling clouds and floral scrolls. Two rows of cusped arches decorate the cavetto, with tiny quatrefoils between them. Similar designs can be seen on dishes in the Benaki Museum, Athens, dating to c. 1570 and c. 1575 (accession nos 1416 and 11144), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 1991.172). The Louvre, Paris, also holds a dish with monochrome decoration and two concentric rings of arched panels but with a different design in the centre (accession no. AD 27706). Though the clouds and blossoms are suggestive of Chinese inspiration, the borders of cusped arches are reminiscent of Islamic architecture, providing a marriage of two cultures on our dish.

M.L.









10

Iznik Polychrome Tile

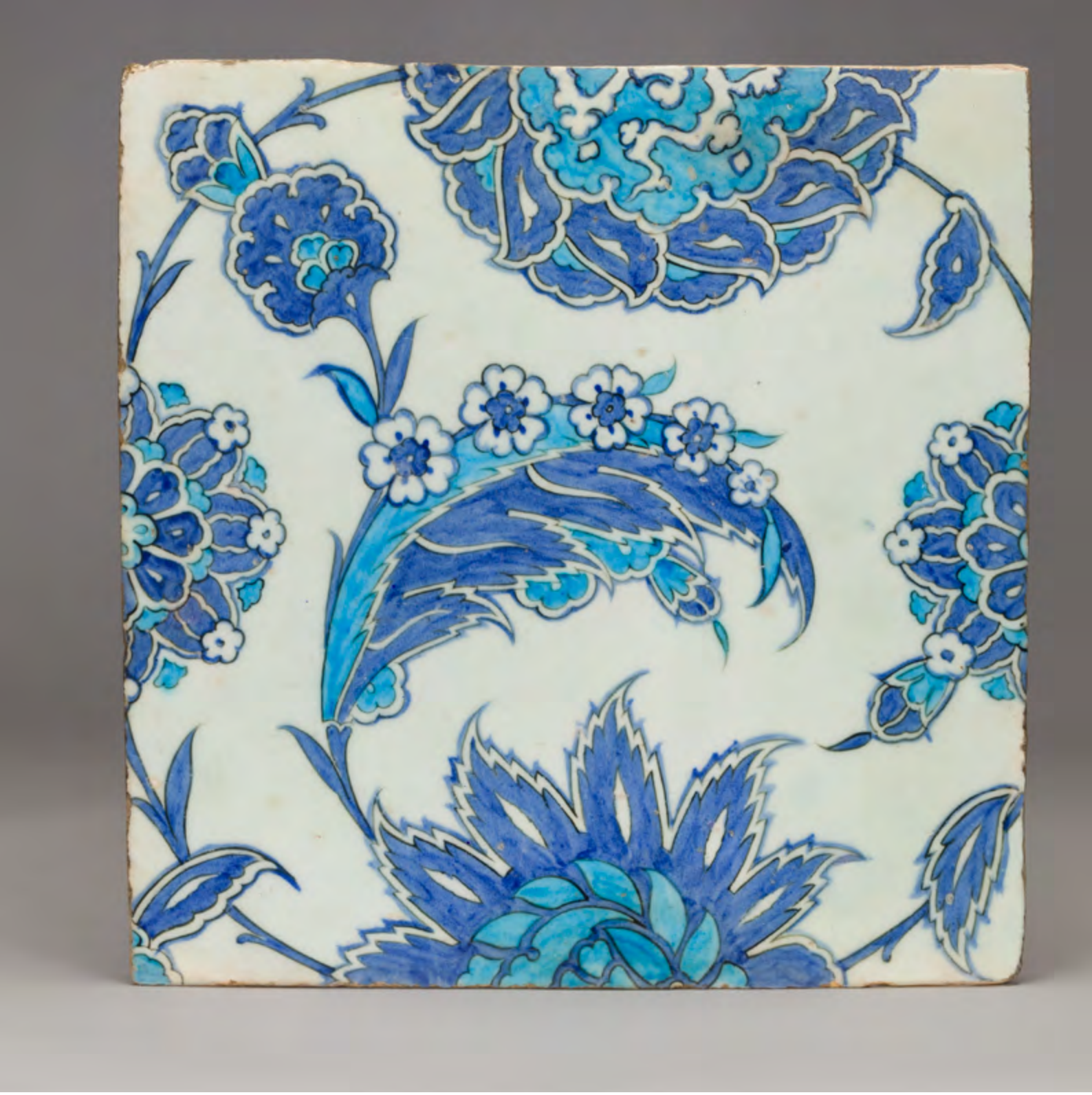
Ottoman Turkey, Second half of the 16th century

Fritware with underglaze decoration
26cm high, 26cm wide

Provenance: Sold at Sotheby's London 'Arts of the Islamic World', 24 October 2007, lot no. 282.
European private collection

A polychrome Iznik fritware tile of square form painted with cobalt blue, turquoise, and red bole on a white slip ground. Ottoman Rumi scrollwork frames Hatayi (Chinese-inspired) floral motifs, notably four stylised lotus flowers, and at the centre of the tile, a small bicoloured prunus blossom. Tiles featuring similar Rumi-Hatayi motifs dating to the second half of the 16th century can be found in the Louvre, Paris (accession nos AD5980.8 and AD27747).

M.L.



11

Iznik Tile

Ottoman Turkey, c. 1550

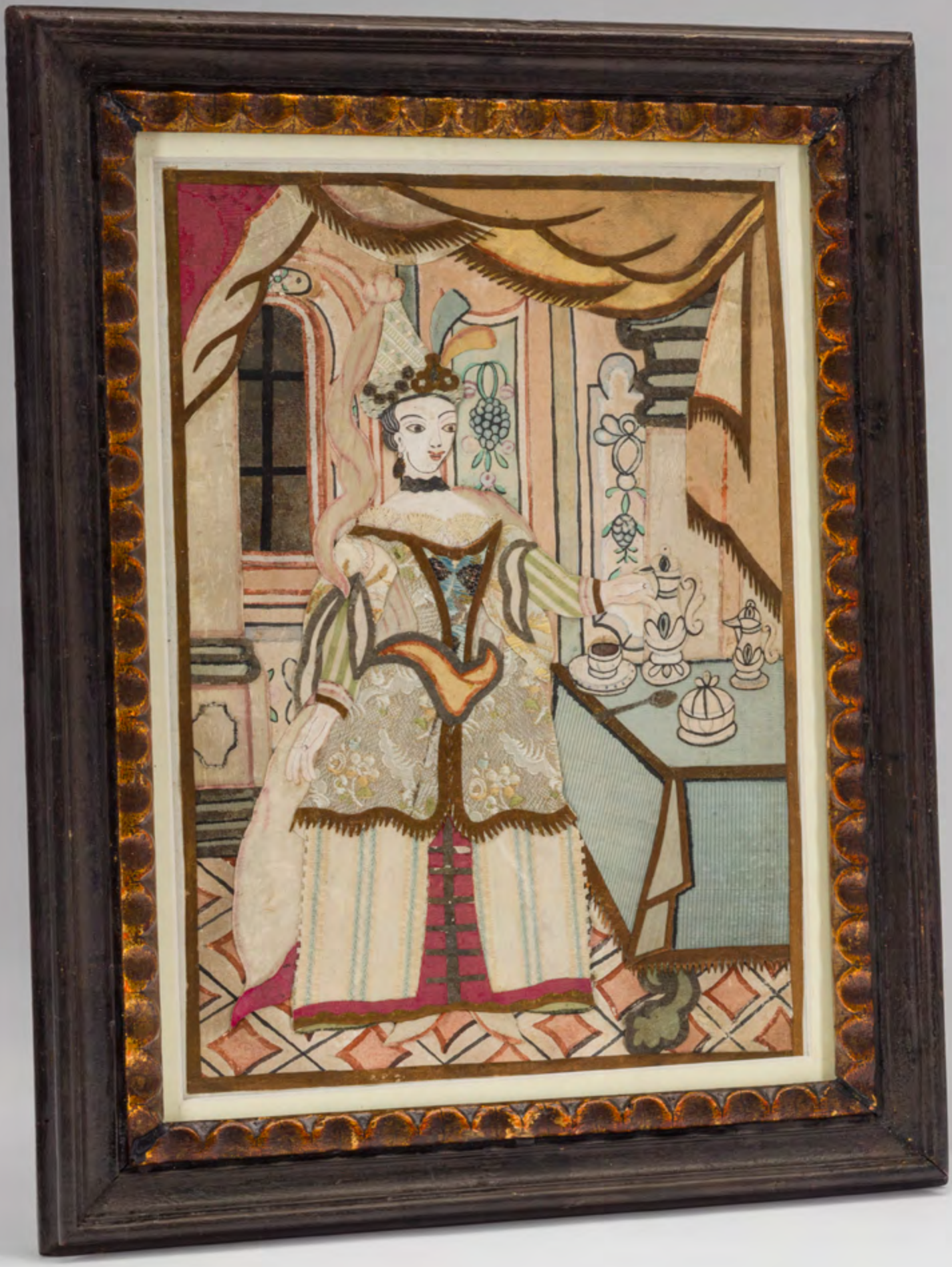
Fritware with underglaze decoration
33cm high, 33cm wide

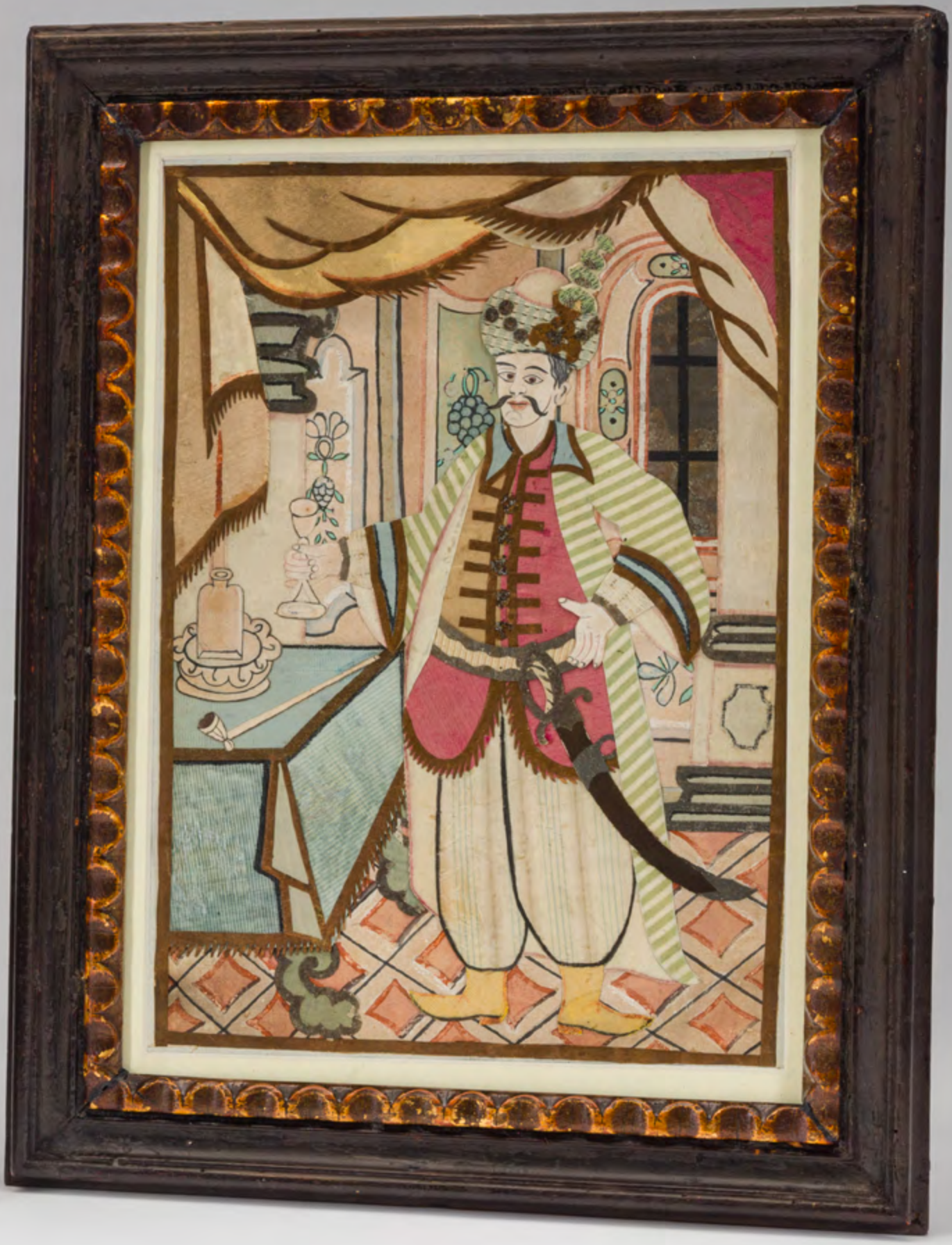
Provenance: Dutch private collection.

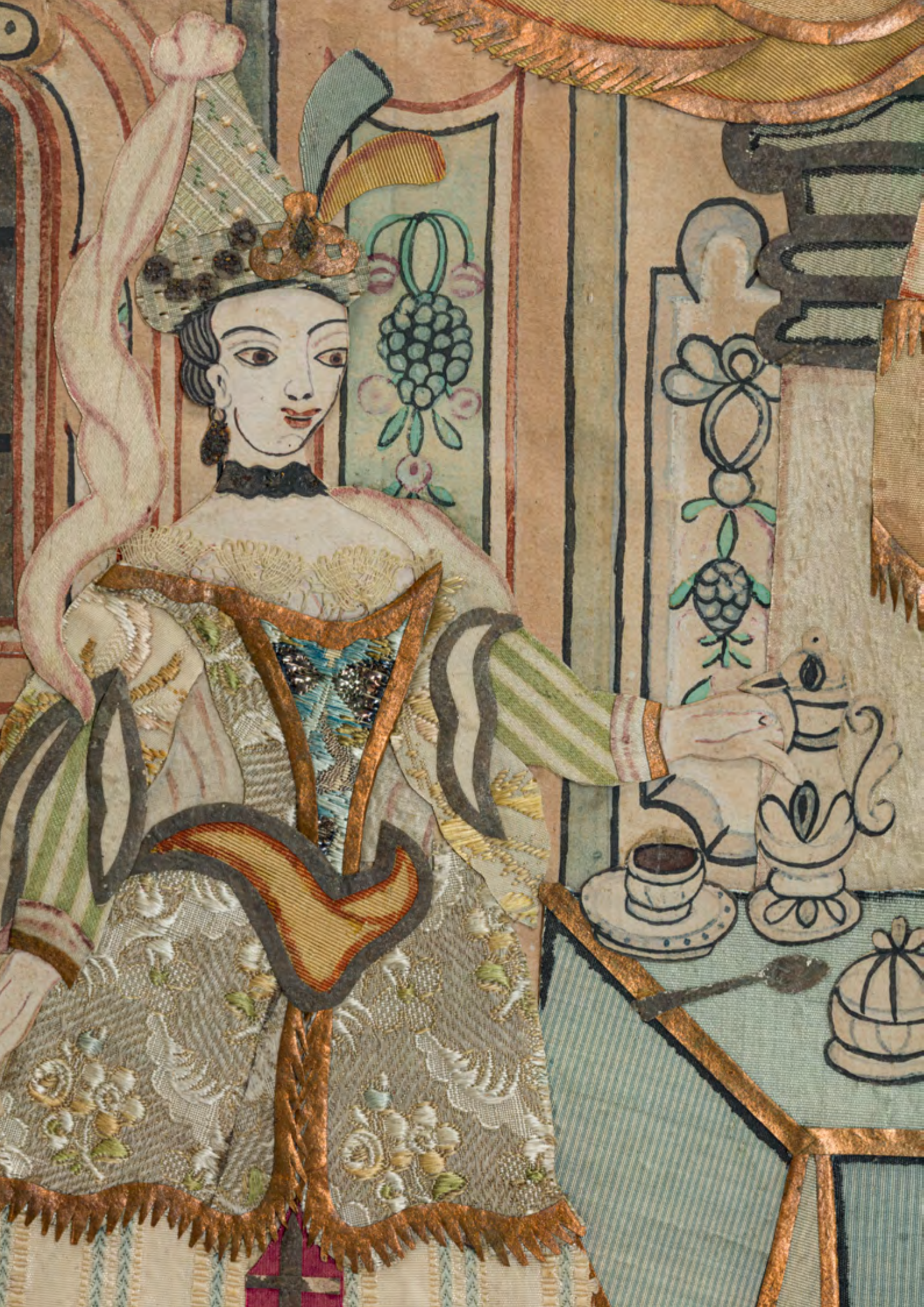
A square fritware tile painted in shades of cobalt and turquoise blue on a white ground, with a pattern consisting of portions of stylised flowers at the sides resting on a circle of vines, and a string of small white flowers set amidst a large saz leaf and flowers in the middle. The flower petals and leaves all feature white outlines, thus giving a strong graphic appearance. One edge has a flower with multiple inner compartments in turquoise and serrated petals surrounding it. A sense of symmetry is maintained with two similar flowers on opposite ends.

This tile design can be seen in the Eyüp Sultan Tomb and Mosque, Istanbul, where Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, is said to be buried. Examples of tiles of this design can also be found in the Louvre, Paris (AD10477.1), Victoria and Albert Museum, London (412-1905, 1684-1892) and the British Museum, London (1878,1230.534.b, 1878,1230.534.c), and on a wall in the Arab Hall of Leighton House, London.

A.S.







12

Pair of Collages of a Sultan and Sultana

German-speaking world, probably Austro-Hungary, 18th century

Gouache, paper, textiles
Each 37cm high, 28.5cm wide

Provenance: Baronial German family collection since c. 1900.

Collages, the application of fragments of textile and paper to painted backgrounds, flourished as a form of folk art in the German-speaking world in the late 18th century. The surviving examples can be categorised into three broad themes: religious scenes, such as the scenes from the story of Abraham in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession nos 64.101.1393 and 64.101.1394); courtly life, such as the depiction of the wedding of Leopold II and Marie Louisa in Vienna in the British Museum (accession no. 2011,7060.1); and costume studies, like the study of a young girl in a dress at the Berlin Art Library (accession no. 14137111). The depiction of Ottoman royalty is therefore unusual, lying beyond the usual purview of folk art. That these collages originate from the German-speaking world is confirmed by a barely decipherable inscription on the reverse of portrait of the woman, reading "auf Papier legen, in alte Sch." / "on paper, in an old …". The final word is likely an abbreviation for the word "Schachtel", an archaic word for a wooden frame. The handwriting is in *Kurrentschrift*, a script used in German-speaking countries from the late Middle Ages to the early 19th century.

The beginning of the Early Modern period was dominated by the so-called *Türkenfurcht*, or 'fear of Turks'. However, the Habsburg Empire's victories over the Ottoman Empire, namely the Siege of Vienna in 1683 and the Victory of Belgrade in 1717, diminished the image of the omnipotent Turk. Instead, an image of a Turkish 'Other', a form of Orientalism known as *turquerie*, was created.[1] The Ottomans were seen as exotic neighbours, to be studied and admired, rather than enemies to be feared. 17th and 18th century Austrian School paintings of Turkish subjects highlight the luxurious fabrics and rich colours in the Ottoman court. *A Scene from the Turkish Harem*, a 17th-century oil painting by Franz Hermann, Hans Gemminger, and Valentin Müller, depicts intricately decorated rugs and textiles. The addition of silk, lace, tulle, and brocade to this pair of collages only serves to enhance the tactile experience.

Mehmed IV reigned from 1648 to 1687, making him the second-longest-reigning sultan in Ottoman history. His forces were defeated by the Holy League at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. He was almost always depicted wearing a turban and a military coat with brocade fastenings, such as the copperplate engraving in a leaflet of 1683 held in the Wien Museum (accession no. 16153, figure on the right), and the Austrian portrait, also in the Wien Museum (accession no. 103949). His Haseki Sultan (chief consort), Gülnuş Sultan, is often illustrated wearing conical headdresses and rich costume (see British Museum accession no. 1982,U.3005).

Although the collage-maker may have worked from a woodcut or engraving, few artists would have had the opportunity to draw the Sultan from life. Furthermore, no men, apart from husbands or close family, were permitted to see the uncovered faces of women in the Sultan's harem.[2] Both the face of the Sultan and his consort are therefore fabricated. The thick eyebrows, bulging almond eyes, and exaggerated moustache are merely a caricature of the exotic 'Other'. The woman's corseted waist, scooped neckline, and petticoat, belong to Western European fashion of the 17th century. Both rooms, which are mirror images of each other, are populated with items with which Westerners would have been familiar. Atop the Sultan's table is an elongated tobacco pipe, of the type commonly seen on the canvases of orientalist artists such as D. Lynch at the Wellcome Collection (accession no. 25462i). The woman stands beside a table holding coffee-making paraphernalia, which matches the form of 18th century Meissen ceramics for the Turkish market.[3]

M.L.

Notes:

1 Theilig, Stephen. "Guerres et guerriers dans l'iconographie et les arts plastiques XVe – XXe siècles", *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 83 (2011). Pp. 61-68.

2 Madar, Heather. "Before the Odalisque: Renaissance Representations of Elite Ottoman Women", *Early Modern Women* 6 (2011). 1-41; p. 24.

3 King, Rachel. "What's in a name? The trouble with Türkenbecher & European trade ceramics", *The French Porcelain Society* (3 July 2020). Retrieved online from https://www.thefrenchporcelainsociety.com/news/whats-name-trouble-turkenbecher-european-trade-ceramics/ on 27/10/23.

13

Panel of Nine Delft Tiles with Ottoman Figures

The Netherlands, Late 19th century

Tin-glazed earthenware
45.5cm high, 45cm wide

A selection of nine Delft tiles featuring hand-painted figures copied from illustrations in *De schipvaert ende reysen gedaen int landt van Turckyen*, Willem Silvius' 1577 Dutch translation of Nicolas de Nicolay's 1568 *Les Quatre premiers livres des navigations et pérégrinations orientales*. Nicolas de Nicolay, royal geographer and allegedly a spy for the French crown, embarked on a diplomatic voyage to Istanbul.[1] He chronicled the journey in *Les quatre premiers livres*, recording the costumes and customs of the Ottoman world. The engravings were by Louis Danet based on de Nicolay's in situ sketches.[2] Although the exotic elements were often heightened, the illustrations and accompanying text provided some of the first descriptions of people from the Islamic world to reach the West, becoming the basis of ethnographic studies for the next two centuries.[3] These tiles depict Ottoman citizens of all classes, ethnicities, and professions. From left to right, top to bottom, they depict:

1 A woman from the Sultan's court
2 Young woman from Paros, an island in the Archipelago
3 An Emir, descendant of Mohamed.
4 Solachi or Solacler, ordinary archer of the guard of the Great Turk (the Sultan)
5 An Agha, or Captain General of the Janissaries
6 A young Greek girl from the city of Gera (Lesbos)
7 A middle-class Turkish woman in domestic costume
8 A woman from the island of Chios
9 A Persian woman

Though they feature three women from the Greek islands of Gera, Chios and Lesbos, the Aegean islands came under Ottoman rule in the 16th century. The central figure is an Agha, or Captain of the janissaries, the group in which de Nicolay was most interested. The book had four depictions of janissaries, with the captain the highest ranking. Janissaries were recruited by the *devşirme* system, whereby boys from the Christian Balkan lands conquered by the Ottomans were kidnapped and forcibly recruited as soldiers. They dressed in large turbans with a jewelled pendant in order to emulate the Sultan.

Between 1880 and 1900, the tile factory of Ravesteijn in Utrecht produced two series of tiles depicting animals and Ottoman subjects for export to Britain. The six-inch square shape made them ideal for use in fireplace surrounds. Though records of the manufacture of these tiles do not survive in Ravesteijn catalogues, stencils with these designs have been preserved.[4] British interest in blue and white tiles grew in the late 19th century due to the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. The fireplace of Red House, the home of the designer William Morris, was decorated with Delft tiles.[5]

M.L.

Notes:

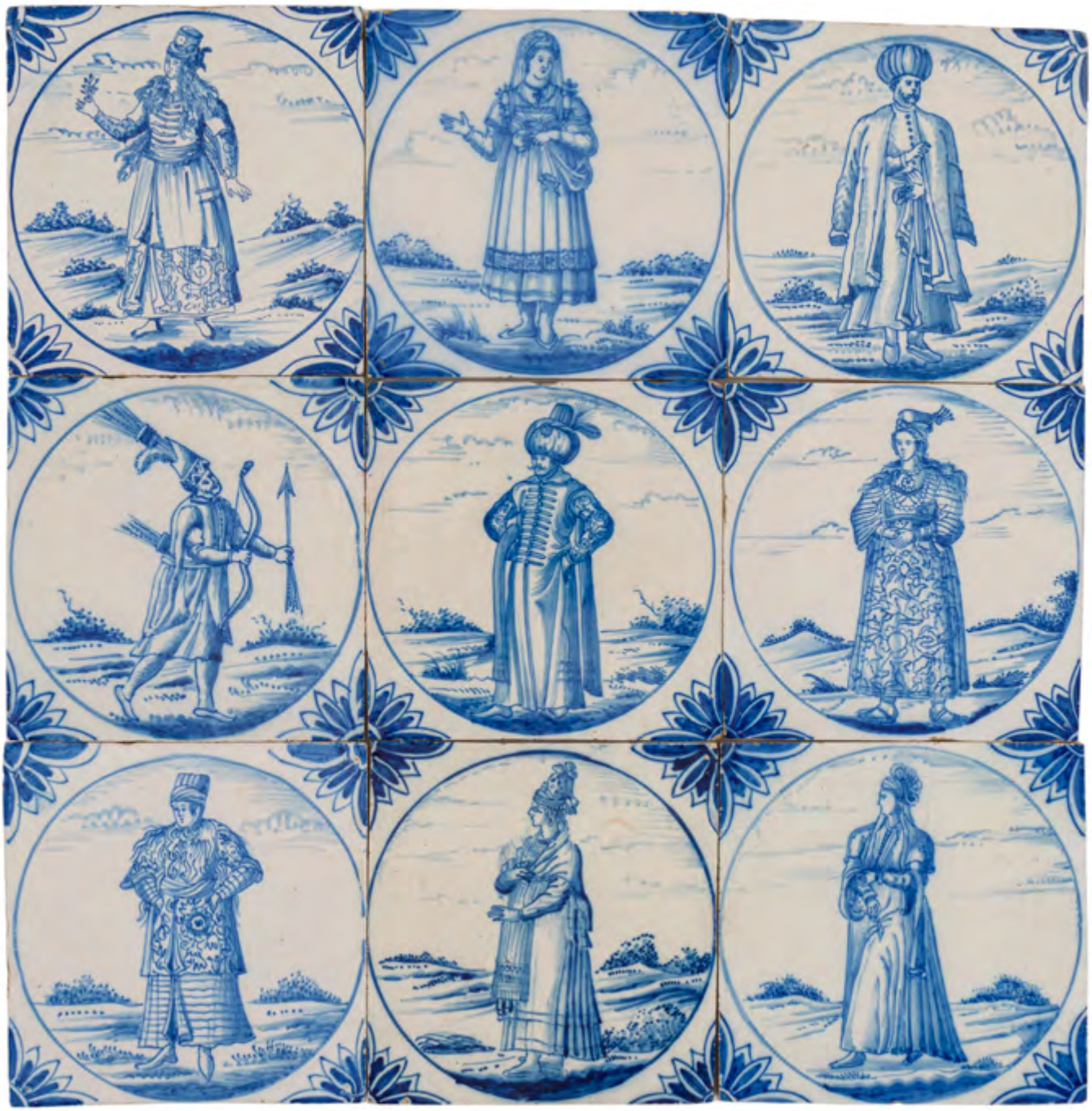
1 Keller, Marcus. 'Nicolas de Nicolay's *Navigations* and the Domestic Politics of Travel Writing', *L'esprit créateur* 48.1 (2008). 18-31.

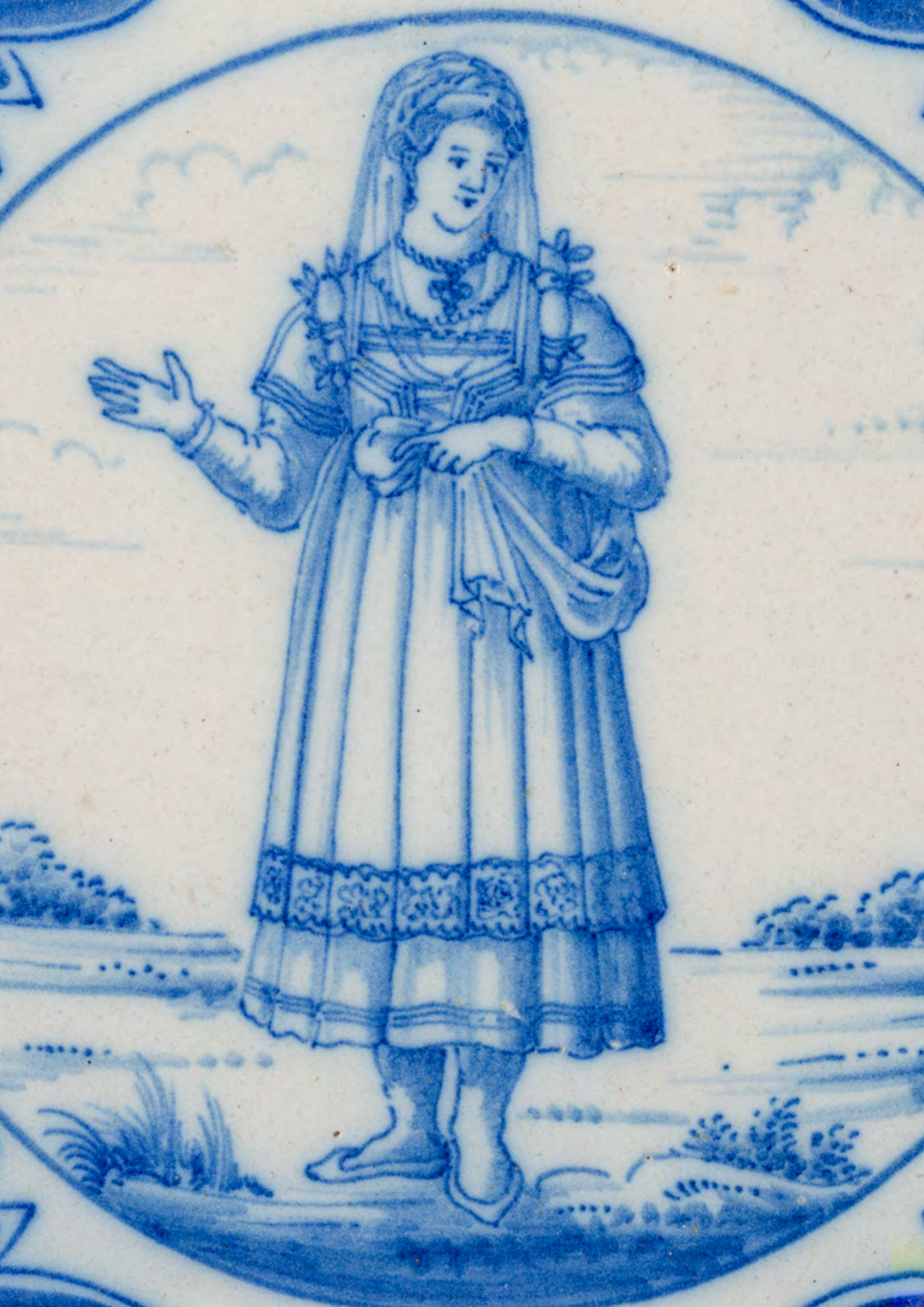
2 Brafman, David. 'Facing East: The Western View of Islam in Nicolas de Nicolay's *Travels in Turkey', Getty Research Journal* 1 (2009). 153-160, 153.

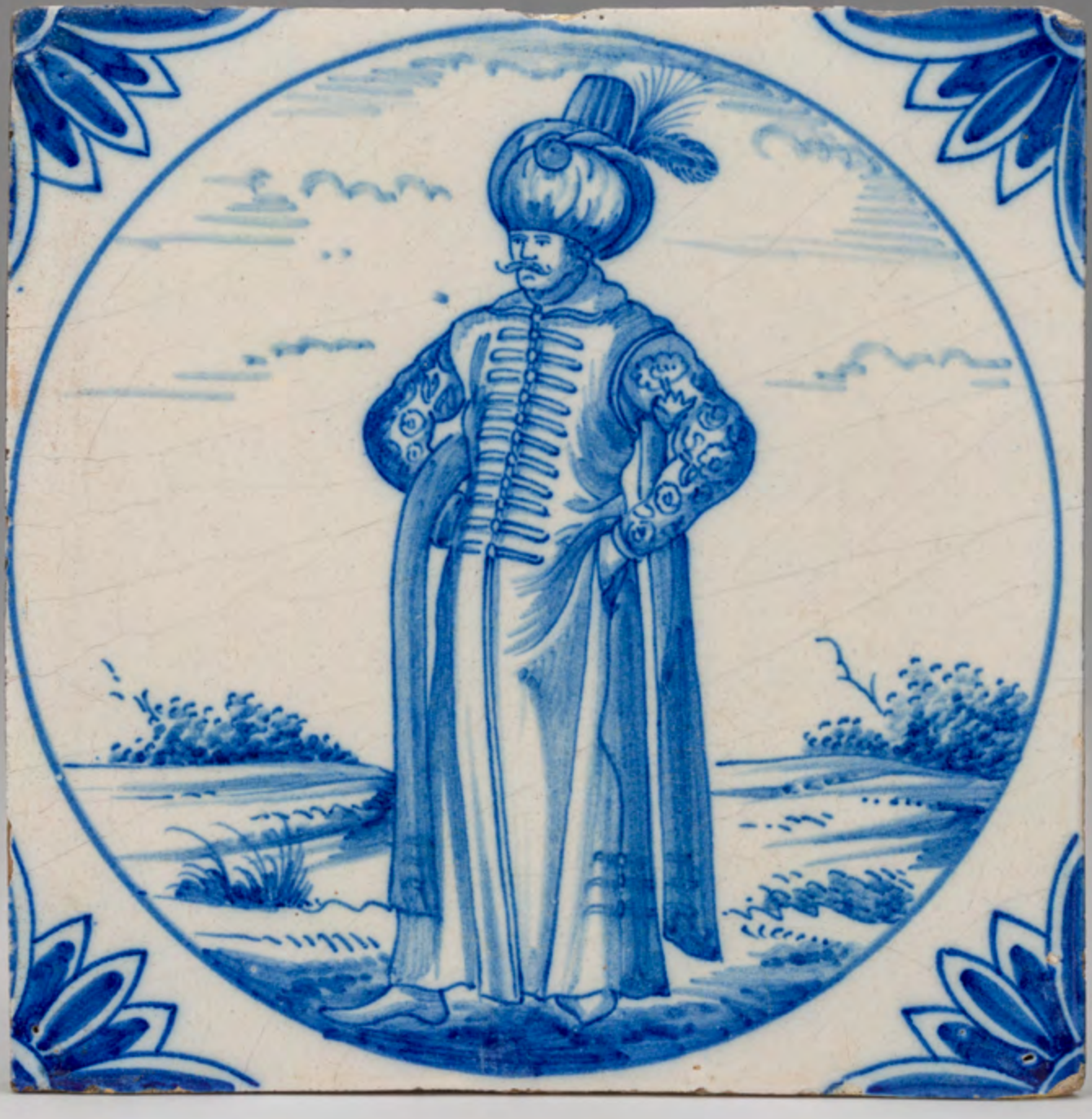
3 Ibid. 153

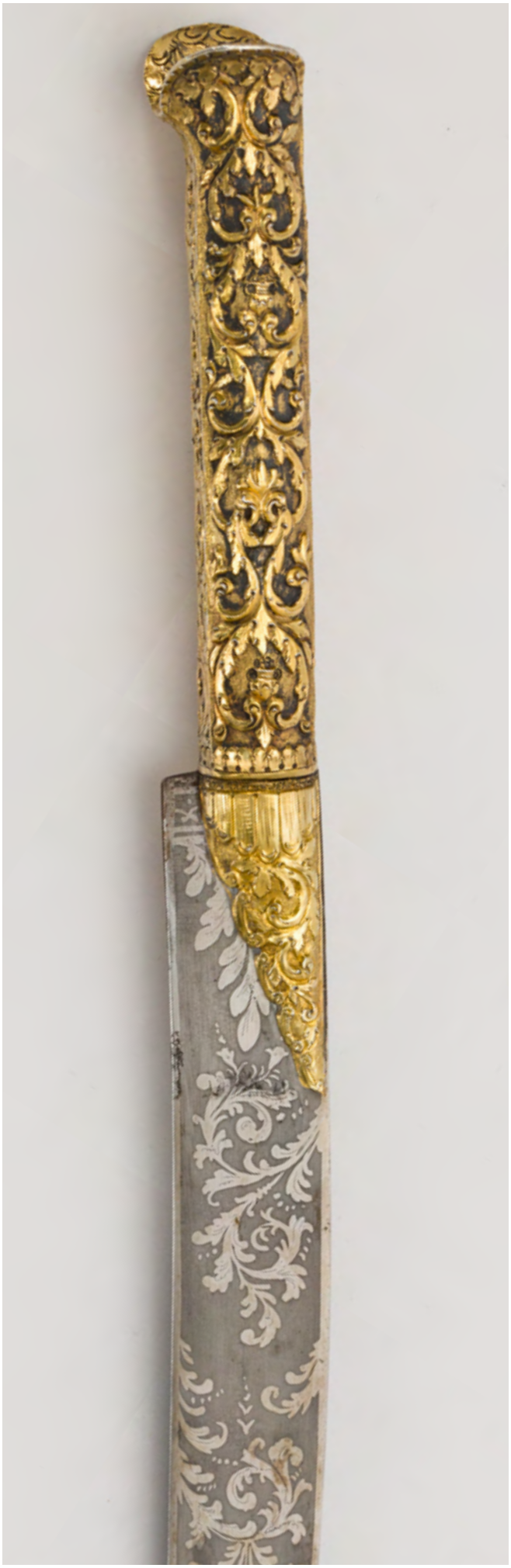
4 Van Lemmen, Hans. 'Six-inch Ravesteijn tiles depicting animals and Turkish men and women', *Tegel* 25 (1997) 34-39.

5 'Delftware: tin-glazed earthenware tiles', *Victoria & Albert Museum*, retrieved online via https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/delftware-tiles.









14

Early Victorian Silver-Gilt Dagger and Scabbard

Joseph Willmore
Birmingham, England, 1843-1844

Silver gilt, steel
37.5cm long in scabbard, 35cm long without scabbard

Modelled after an Ottoman *bichaq*, this intricately patterned dagger and scabbard was made by the silversmith Joseph Willmore of Birmingham in 1843/1844. Five small hallmarks are found below the locket. From left to right, they are a woman's head in profile, a lion statant guardant, the initials JW, an anchor, and the letter 'U' in gothic typeset. These indicate, respectively, that this item was made during the reign of Queen Victoria, of Sterling Silver .925, by Joseph Willmore, in Birmingham, and was assayed in the years 1843–1844.

Willmore (1773–1885) began his career as a buckle maker but had registered as a maker of silver gilt cutlery in Birmingham in the 1830s.[1] The swirling baroque foliate decoration for which the handles of his cutlery were prized is replicated in this dagger. This is the only weapon that Willmore is known to have made. Furthermore, though a handful of nineteenth-century French replicas of *yatagan*-style daggers exists, this is the only known British example. In the centre of the scabbard, on both sides, there is a bird with its wings outspread. The positioning of the bird, with its wings displayed *abaissé*, suggests that it is heraldic insignia. Thus, the dagger may have been a special commission for an individual from a British noble family, perhaps as a souvenir from his Grand Tour.

The silver gilt wooden scabbard protects a single-edged flat steel blade, which is etched with floral motifs. The locket is decorated with three horizontal bands of detail. A small loop attachment below the locket allows the dagger to be hung from the waistband, as it was traditionally worn by Ottoman soldiers. The scabbard terminates in a delicate openwork finial formed by two scrolls. The rococo ornamentation indicates that the source material is a Balkan *bichaq*. Neoclassical motifs such as laurel wreaths, an amphora, and a cornucopia, are nestled between the baroque foliation of the scabbard.

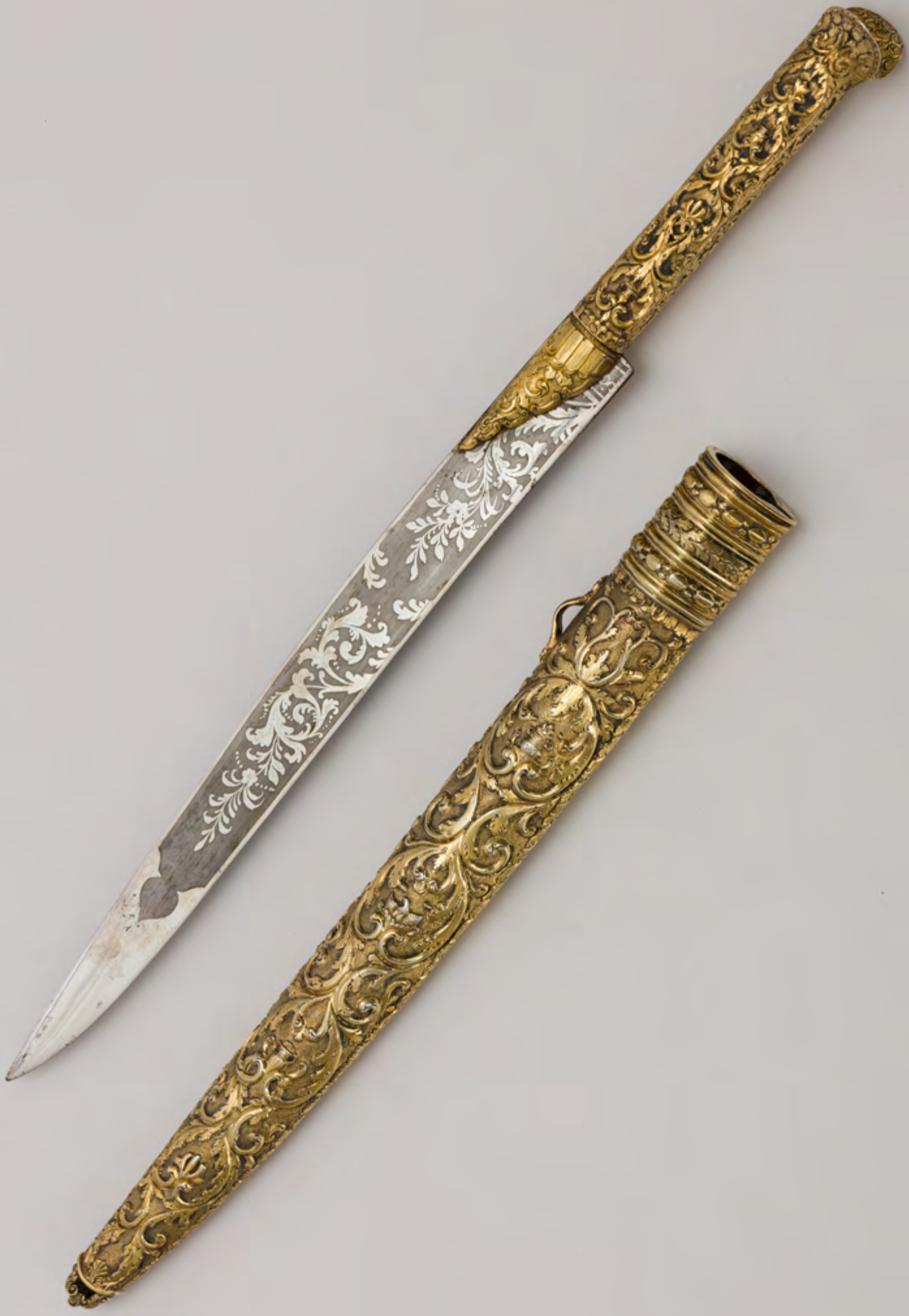
Meaning literally 'knife', the term *bichaq* is used to refer to daggers shaped like yatagans, light Ottoman swords. Their distinctive form evolved through practical use. The v-shaped pommel prevented the hilt from slipping in the hand during use, and their lightly recurved shape, similar to that of a machete, elongates the blade and thereby increases the pressure on the sharp edge. They were particularly useful for slashing at neck plates, a weak point in western suits of armour. Decorative *bichaq* were also worn by men as a status symbol, with highly ornamented examples found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 36.25.685a, b) and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 1573 to B-1888).[2]

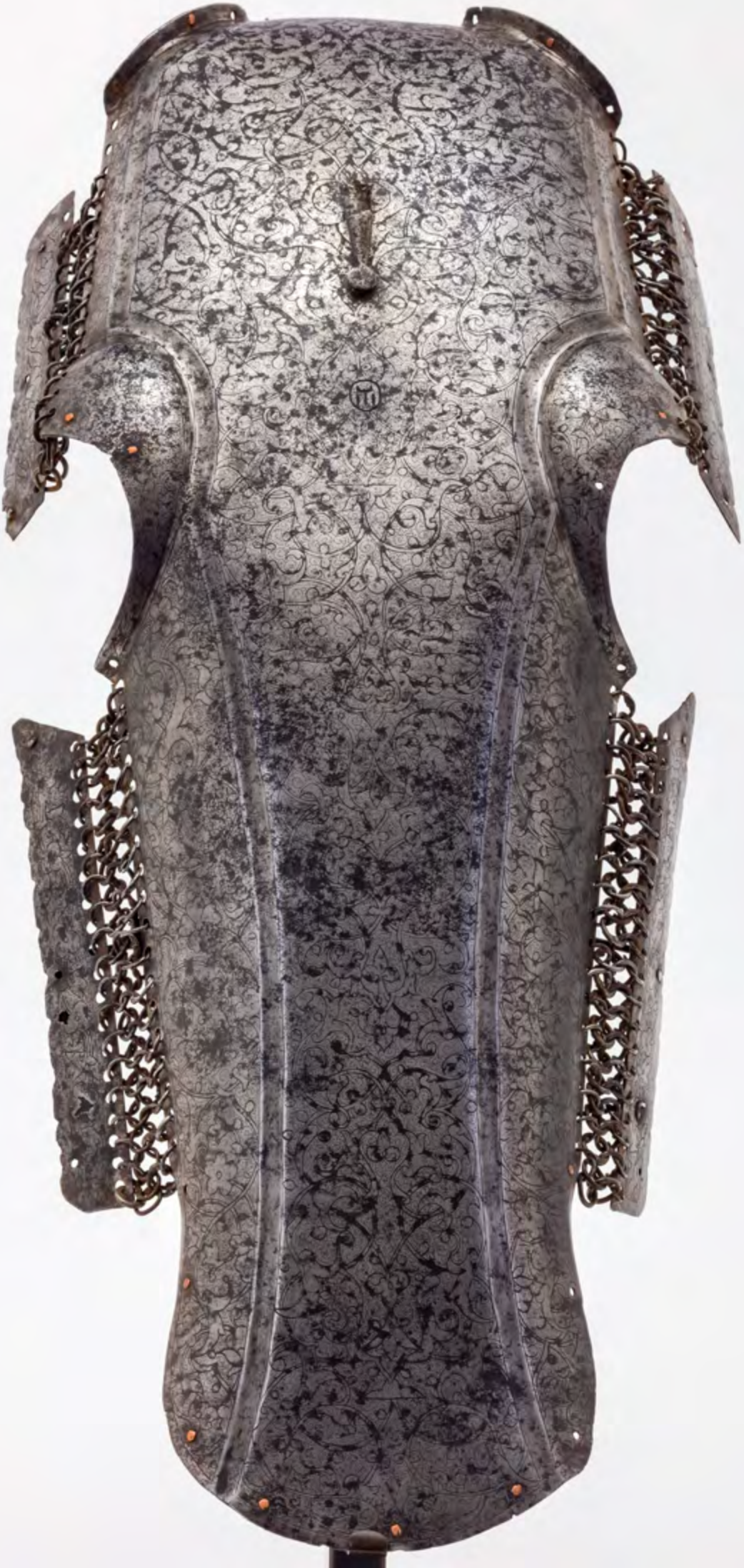
M.L.

Notes:

1 'Birmingham Silversmiths: The Willmores and the Linwoods', *History West Midlands*, retrieved from https://www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk/birmingham-silversmiths-the-willmores-and-linwoods/ on 28/09/23.

2 Atıl, Esin. *The Age of Süleyman the Magnificent*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987. P. 147.





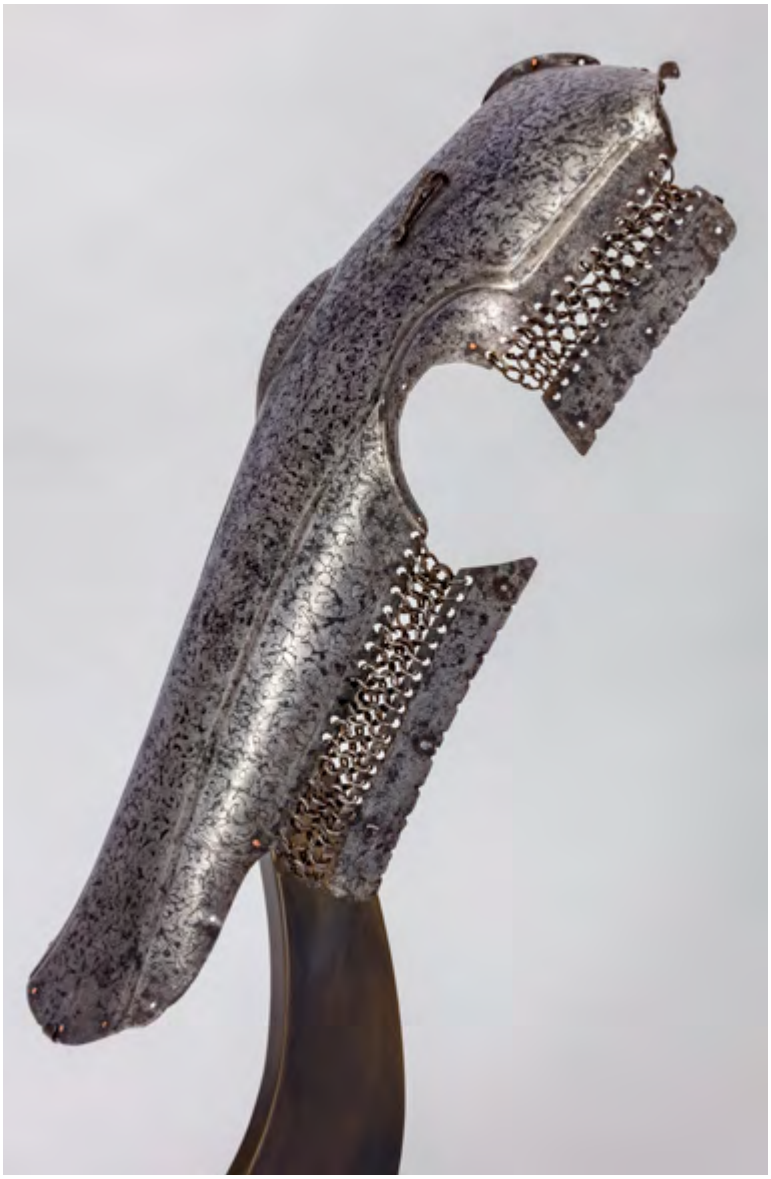
15

Rare Early Ottoman Shaffron

Ottoman Empire, 16th century

Steel
59cm high, 22cm wide

Provenance: Old Swedish collection by repute.



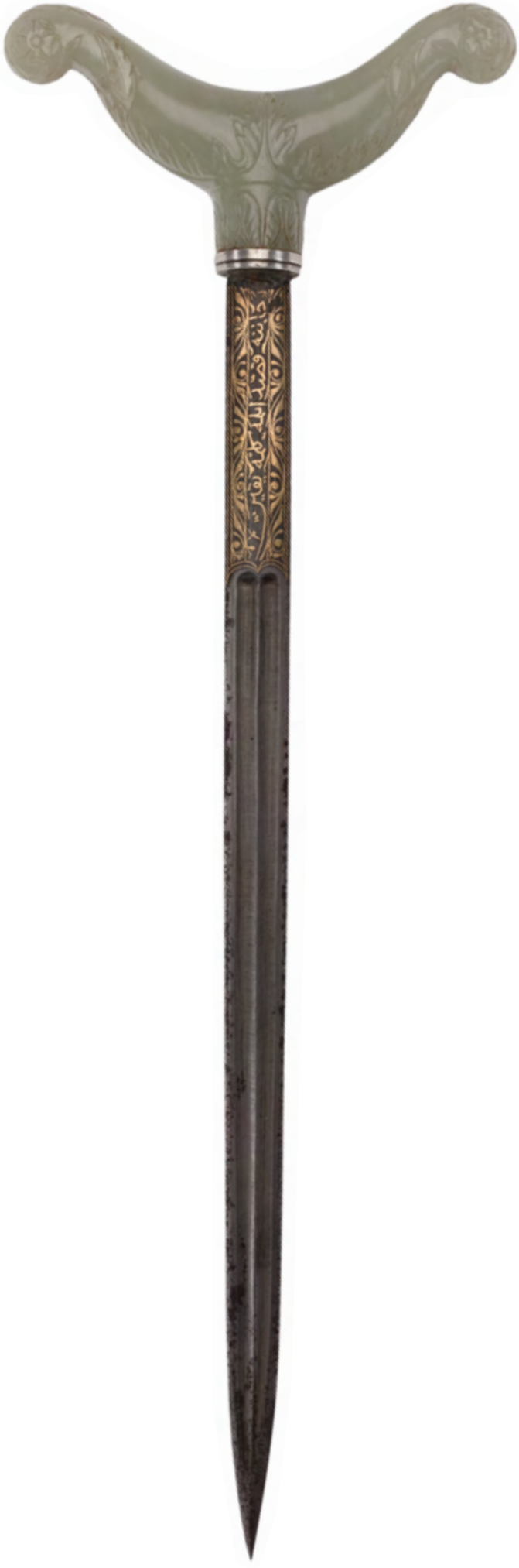
An impressive shaffron (also known as chanfron, chamfron, or *baraki*) with eye guards, fitted with two cheek pieces and two temple pieces attached with mail links to the central plate on each side. The central piece is formed of a single piece of steel and tapers towards the bottom by the nose. The plate is flanged at the ears and wide, shallow grooves on the plate follow the contours of the eyes and ears, and continues to the muzzle. At the top of the plate is a raised crest holder or plume socket, and beneath it appears the engraved Ottoman arsenal mark (*tanğa*) of Saint Irene. The plate features split palmette decoration and engraved scrollwork.

This shaffron would have covered the forehead of the horse belonging to an Ottoman heavy cavalryman. It was an essential piece of armour in battle. Some shaffrons were made of *tombak* (gilt copper) while others were made of steel. Those made of *tombak*, such as an example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 36.25.496), were much lighter than steel ones, and were used more often at parades and ceremonies. A shaffron like this would have been used primarily in battle, as it would have provided more protection. It would have once been a part of full horse armour of mail and plate, and the rider would have been similarly protected. A number of comparable shaffrons are held in the Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection, Vaduz, notably accession nos R-977, R-1577, R-159, and R-158.[1]

A.S.

Notes:

1 *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection*. New York: Skira, 2008. pp. 339-342.



16

Zafar Takiya with Jade Handle

Mughal India, 18th century (handle)
Ottoman Turkey, 19th century
(scabbard and blade)

Jade, silver, steel, niello.
34cm long without sheath, 52cm long with sheath,
handle 14cm wide

Provenance: French private collection.

A *zafar takiya* (lit. 'throne of victory') is a chin or arm rest set on a cane used by Sufi saints and mendicants when they sat cross-legged on the ground. The concealed blade would be used for protection from wild animals the saints might encounter while travelling and meditating. The *zafar takiya* might have been used as a symbolic gift at the Ottoman court or among the nobility. This example is a composite piece, with an Indian jade chin rest, fitted with an Ottoman sword and sheath.

Of light greyish green colour, the jade crutch handle curves outwards to rounded terminals, each ornamented by a five-petalled flower. The base of the handle is surrounded by acanthus leaves, which complement the vegetal ornamentation elsewhere on this *zafar takiya*. The sheath is constructed from wood coated in silver, terminating in a bulb. It is decorated with niello, a technique whereby engravings are filled with a black mixture made of sulphur, silver, and copper or lead. Concealed within the sheath is a steel blade with double hollow grind. The 8cm long *ricasso*, the unsharpened portion of the blade above the hilt, is damascened with swirling vegetal motifs and a Turkish couplet. Split between the two sides of the blade it reads:

جاننه قصد ایلمه کلمه یقین
دشمانک رحم ایلمز کندینی صقین

'Do not make an attempt on [the owner's] life, do not come close! The enemy is merciless, protect yourself!'

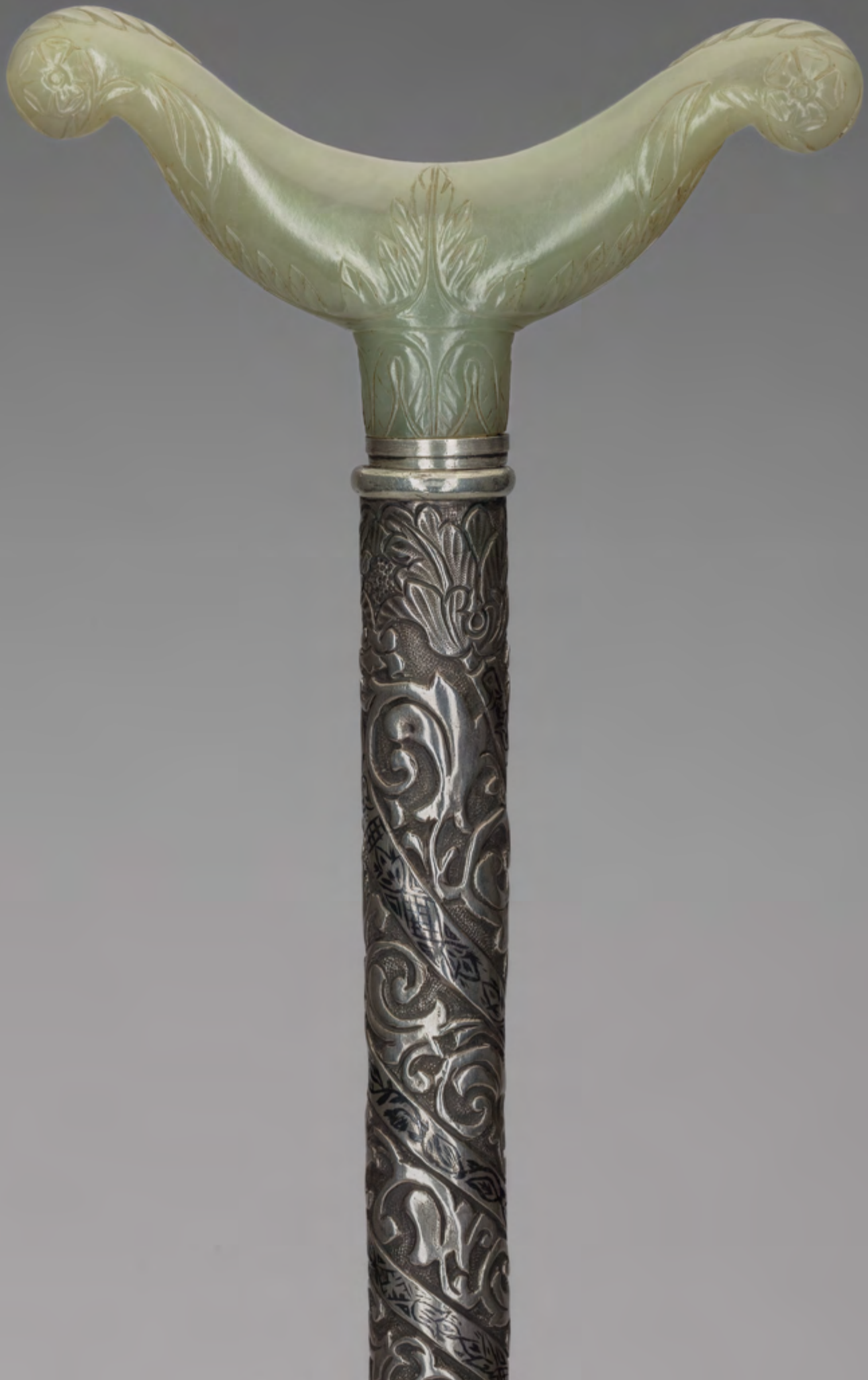
A Mughal jade crutch handle together with its jade shaft is illustrated in Teng Shu-p'ing, *Exquisite Beauty: Islamic Jades, National Palace Museum*. Taipei: 2012, p. 116, pl. 137. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, holds two examples of jade handled *zafar takiya* (accession nos 36.25.734 and 36.25.1001a,b).

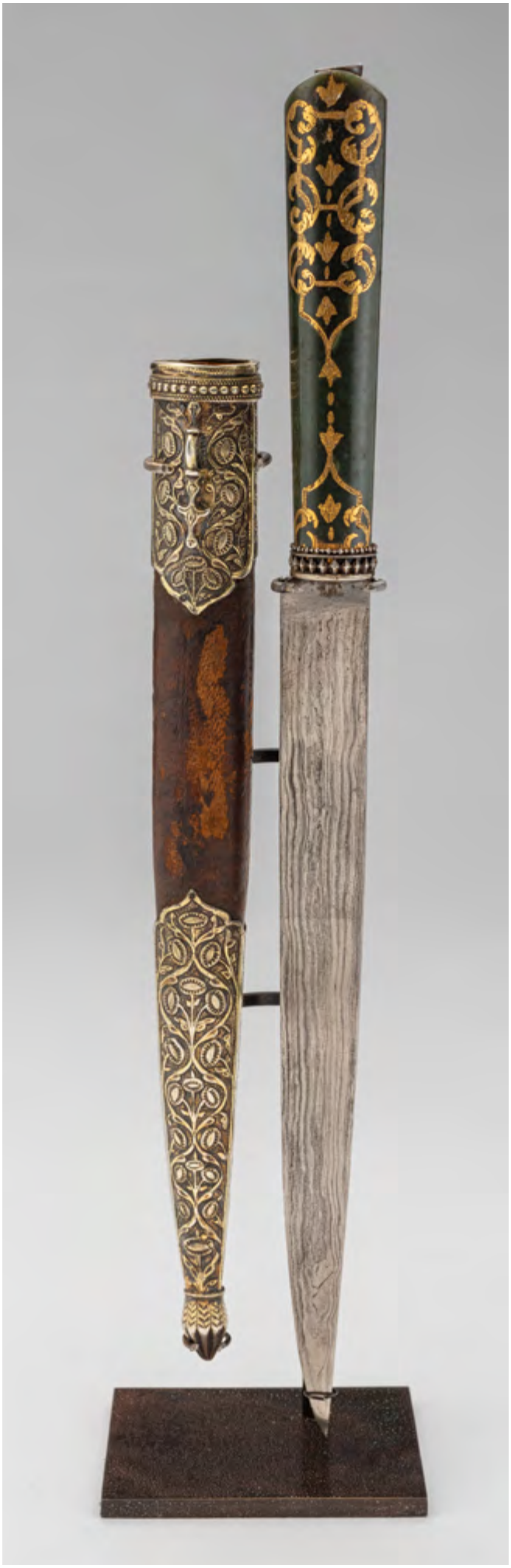
Zafar takiya are truly cross-cultural items, crafted by Armenian Ottomans from recycled Indian jade handles, which had entered the Ottoman Empire with families such as the Chalebi merchants of Surat.[1]

M.L.

Notes:

1 Afzal Khan, Mohd. 'The Chalebi Merchants at Surat 16th – 18th Centuries', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 40 (1979). pp. 408-418: p. 408.





17

Ottoman Dagger (*Kard*)

Ottoman Turkey, 18th century

Jade inlaid with gold, steel, gilt silver, leather
28.5cm long without sheath, 31cm long with sheath

Provenance: French private collection since the end of 19th century.

A dagger or *kard* with a hilt of jade inlaid with symmetrical gold foliage and floral scrolls and a slim, tapering, single-edged wootz blade resting within a leather sheath. Typically worn on the left side of the belt, kards were used as a covert weapon. Highly decorative models like this one, however, would likely have been purely ceremonial. *Kards* were generally fitted with smooth, rounded handles of precious stone, bone, or ivory, for the tactility this afforded their user. A blackened silver chape and throat are applied to the sheath, which are richly decorated with floral vines and scrollwork. The tip of the sheath terminates in a gilt silver-fluted rosebud with a chevron collar. An Ottoman *kard* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 36.25.727a,b) shows clear similarities in form. Its dimensions are close to those of the present example, measuring 31cm in its sheath. Its handle is of dark green bloodstone, a semi-precious stone not dissimilar in appearance to jade. The sheath has gold lobed mounts applied at chape and throat, terminating in a rosebud finial.

M.L.

18

Dagger with Jade Handle

Ottoman Turkey, 19th century

Jade, steel, silver
53cm long with scabbard, 51cm long without scabbard

With a hilt made of green jade that has a narrow bar in the middle and a broader, scalloped pommel, the double-edged blade is made of watered wootz steel and tapers to a sharp point. The blade features a deep ridge running through both sides. The scabbard is covered in red velvet with two gilt silver mounts and ends in a silver bud. The mounts are both decorated with bands of floral decoration and have hallmarks. Distinct *sah* marks (the zigzag and the word *sah*) prove the quality of the silver. The other two silver marks on the mounts are likely to be the *tügra* of Abdulmejid (1839-1861).[1] A small semiprecious stone is fixed on the jade hilt.

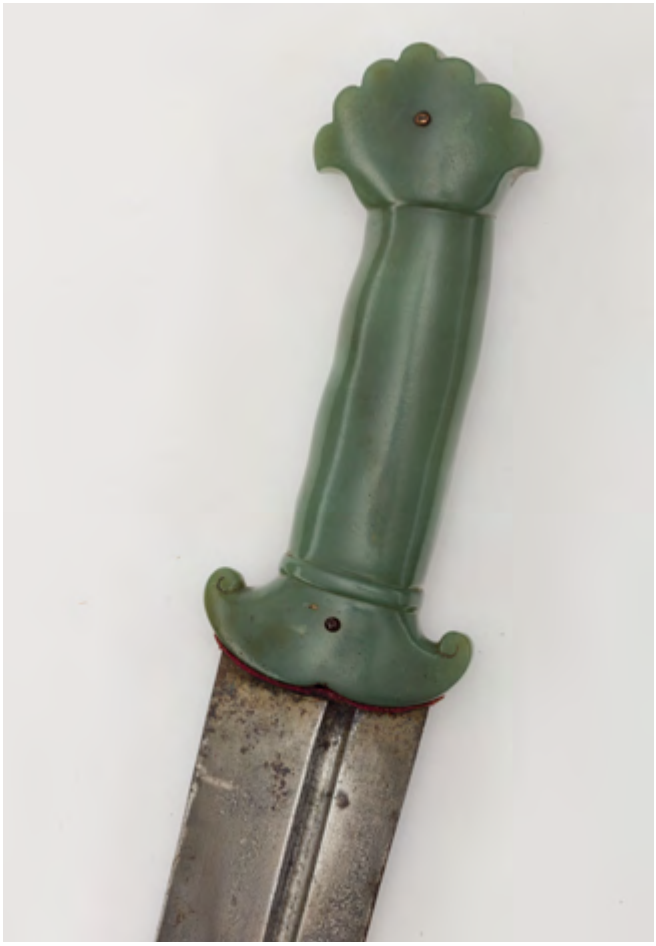
Turkish *kindjals* can be identified by their narrow hilts and broad pommels. On *kindjals* from the first half of the nineteenth century, the scabbard is usually covered with velvet or engraved silver sheet, ending with a small ball like-tip.[2] Jade hilts on *kindjals* are rarely found as they were typically made of ivory or steel.

A.S.

Notes:

1 Kürkman, Garo. *Ottoman Silver Marks*. Istanbul, 1996. Pp. 46-47.

2 Rivkin, Kirill. *Arms and Armor of Caucasus*. First Edition, 2015. P. 247



19

Hispano-Moresque Charger

Manises, Spain, c. 1500

Tin-glazed earthenware with lustre decoration
46cm diameter, 5cm deep

Provenance: French private collection.

This large, shallow charger might once have been the centrepiece of a wealthy European family's table, its metallic lustre shimmering in the flickering light of a candle. The dish is decorated with brown copper lustre with cobalt blue highlights against a creamy-white tin glaze. A central raised boss features a heraldic eagle, sinister, rising, wings displayed and inverted. This emblem is likely to be the Eagle of St John, a Spanish heraldic emblem associated with the Catholic kings and adopted by the nobility. The raised part of the boss is moulded with radiating lines. These lines alternate in blue and brown. Surrounding the raised boss are three concentric circles filled with typical late 15th or early 16th-century Valencian patterns, notably network, which resembles fish scales, and flowerhead work.[1] The flowerhead ring is further decorated with six blue quatrefoil rosettes.

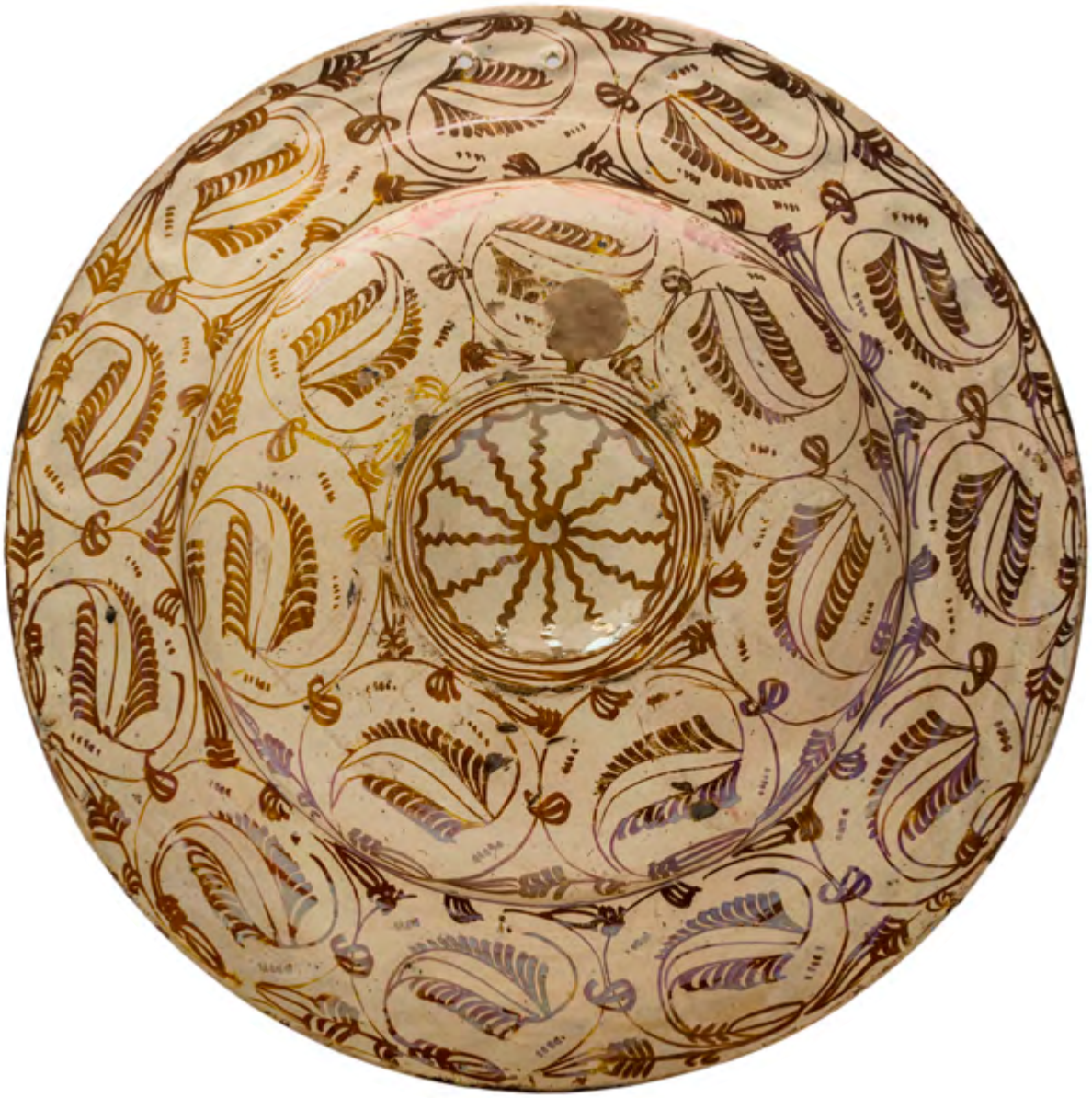
The cavetto of the dish is filled with 32 slanted gadroons, alternately outlined in cobalt blue. The gadroons are filled with the same Valencian decorative motifs, in addition to wheels, which resemble orange segments. The gadroons are very shallow, and the back shows the indentations where the clay was raised by a finger.[2] The reverse of the dish is decorated with ferns, and a radial rosette on its foot. A number of similar dishes from Manises are found in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum. A dish with 29 gadroons (accession no. 25-1907) dating to c. 1500 shares a similar repeating wheels, network, and dot and stalk pattern every three gadroons. At the centre of the dish is an armorial device surrounded by concentric rings of pattern. Its reverse has a similar pattern of ferns with a rosette at the centre. Dishes 15-1907 and 168-1893 in the same collection are also patterned and gadrooned.

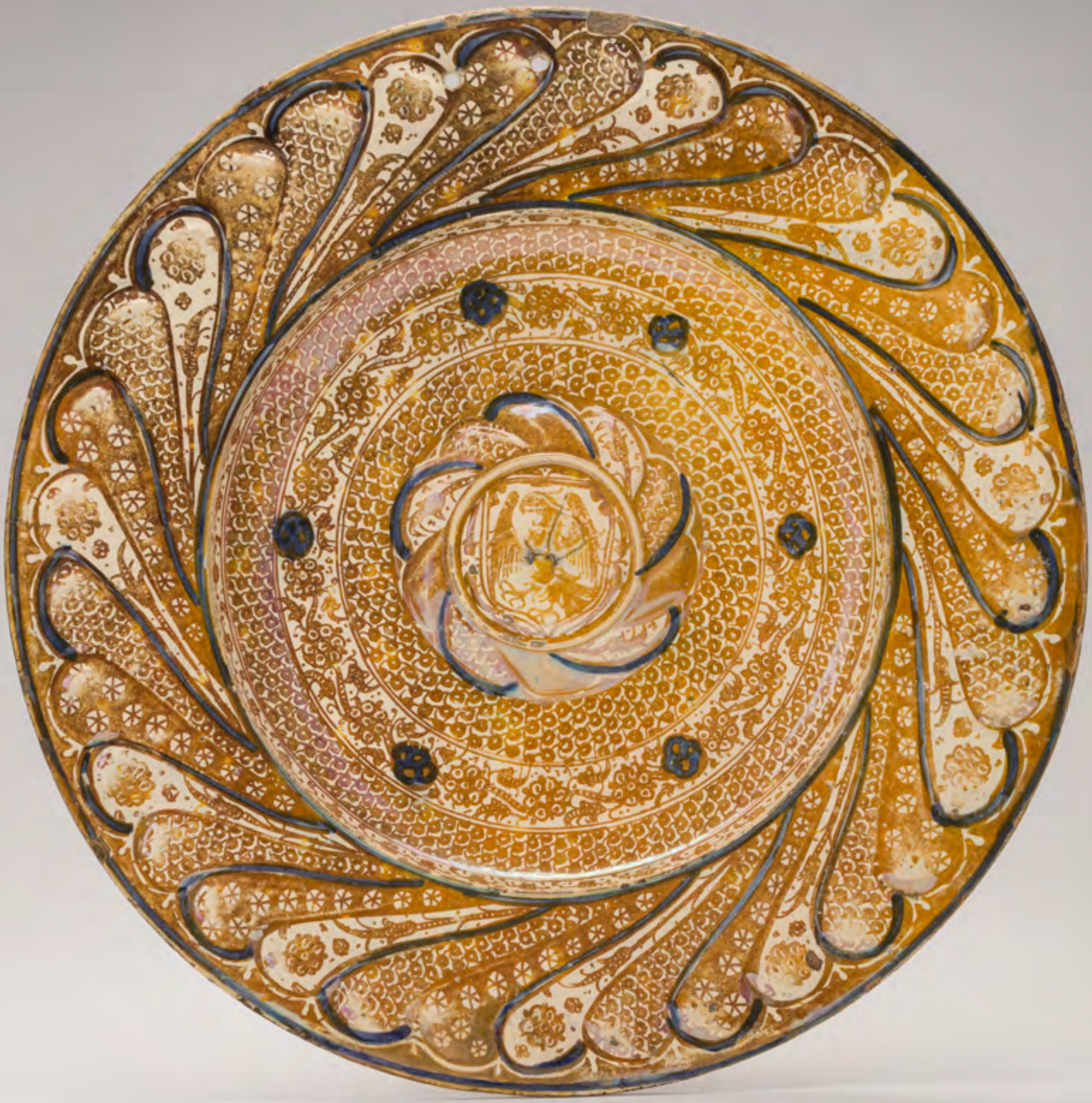
A.S. & M.L.

Notes:

1 Ray, Anthony. *Spanish Pottery 1248-1898*. London: V&A Publications, 2000. P. 91.

2 Ibid. P. 91.





20

Pair of Gold-Splashed Incense Burners

China, 18th century

Bronze and gold
Each 17.5cm high, 17.5cm wide

Provenance: Purchased at Speelman (London) in 1974.
From a Swiss private collection.

This pair of imposing incense burners with bulbous legs, straight body and high loop handles must have been made for an important temple or palace hall. On each side of their bodies is a lobed panel bearing an inscription in Arabic: "قا ل النب يع س م(ع ليهِ السلا م ا) فضل الذك/ر لا الها لا لله مح م درس و لله"/ The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "The most excellent remembrance (of God) is There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God". This is the Islamic confession of faith, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, and part of the call to public prayer in a mosque recited by a muezzin at prescribed times of the day.

Why were Islamic inscriptions cast into Chinese bronzes, and also inscribed on Chinese porcelains? Some scholars opine that they were not made for export to the Middle East, India, or Southeast Asia, because they are not found in extant collections such as those from the Ardebil Shrine in Iran and the Topkapi Palace in Turkey. Rather, they served Muslim administrators at the Chinese court, or foreign merchants in China's ports.[1] Other experts have proposed that they were simply fashionable decorations for Chinese clients, the exotic script adding excitement and allure to objects.[2] However, whether they were made for Muslim clients or Chinese, these paired censers were luxury products. They were cast from a dense, brass-like bronze and had their surfaces augmented with splashes of gold. This was achieved by fire gilding, in other words by applying gold in the form of a gold/mercury amalgam and then heating the vessel to drive off the mercury. A small amount of gold was left adhering to the base metal since this method was especially suitable for the application of very thin layers.[3] The process could be repeated several times to build up layers of gold. Bronzes with gold-splash decoration are highly regarded by collectors.[4]

It is likely that Chinese craftsmen worked from drawings or models to reproduce inscriptions in languages unfamiliar to them. Small mistakes on some pieces indicate their difficulty in transcribing unfamiliar scripts, though the inscriptions on these two incense burners are correct. For this reason, there are a number of Chinese objects bearing similar inscriptions to these two pieces, many of them in the form of incense burners. An almost identical censer in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, bears the same inscription.[5] There are many vessels in different forms with the same inscription, for example one in the C.L. David Foundation and Collection in Copenhagen (accession no. B62B31) and one in the Robert H. Clague Collection in Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona (accession no. 7/1971). The present pieces were sold in London in 1974, and then housed in a private collection in Switzerland, the "Asia-Africa Museum Genève", whose labels anoint the bases. A photo of one of the incense burners was published in a Portuguese magazine, Casa & Jardim (House & Garden) in November 1999.

R.K.

Notes:

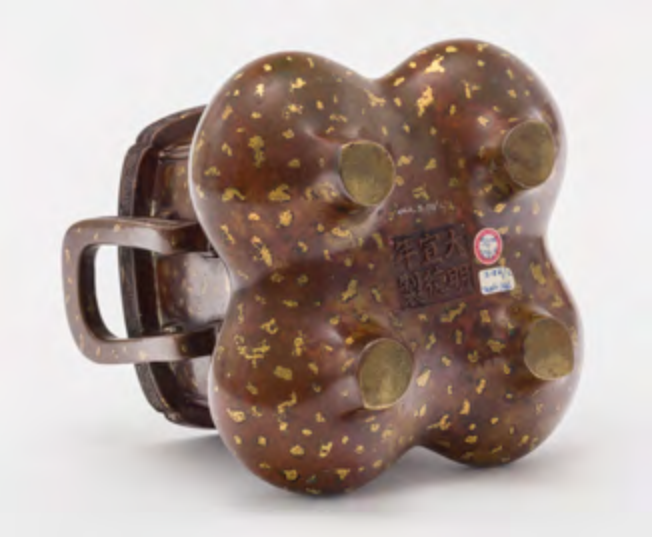
1 Harrison-Hall, Jessica. Ming *Ceramics in the British Museum*. London: British Museum Press, 2001. Pp.192-199.

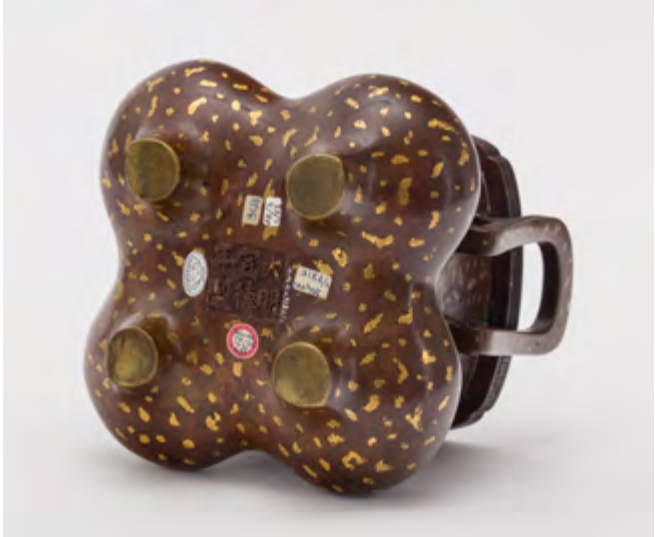
2 Clunas, Craig. *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008. P.103.

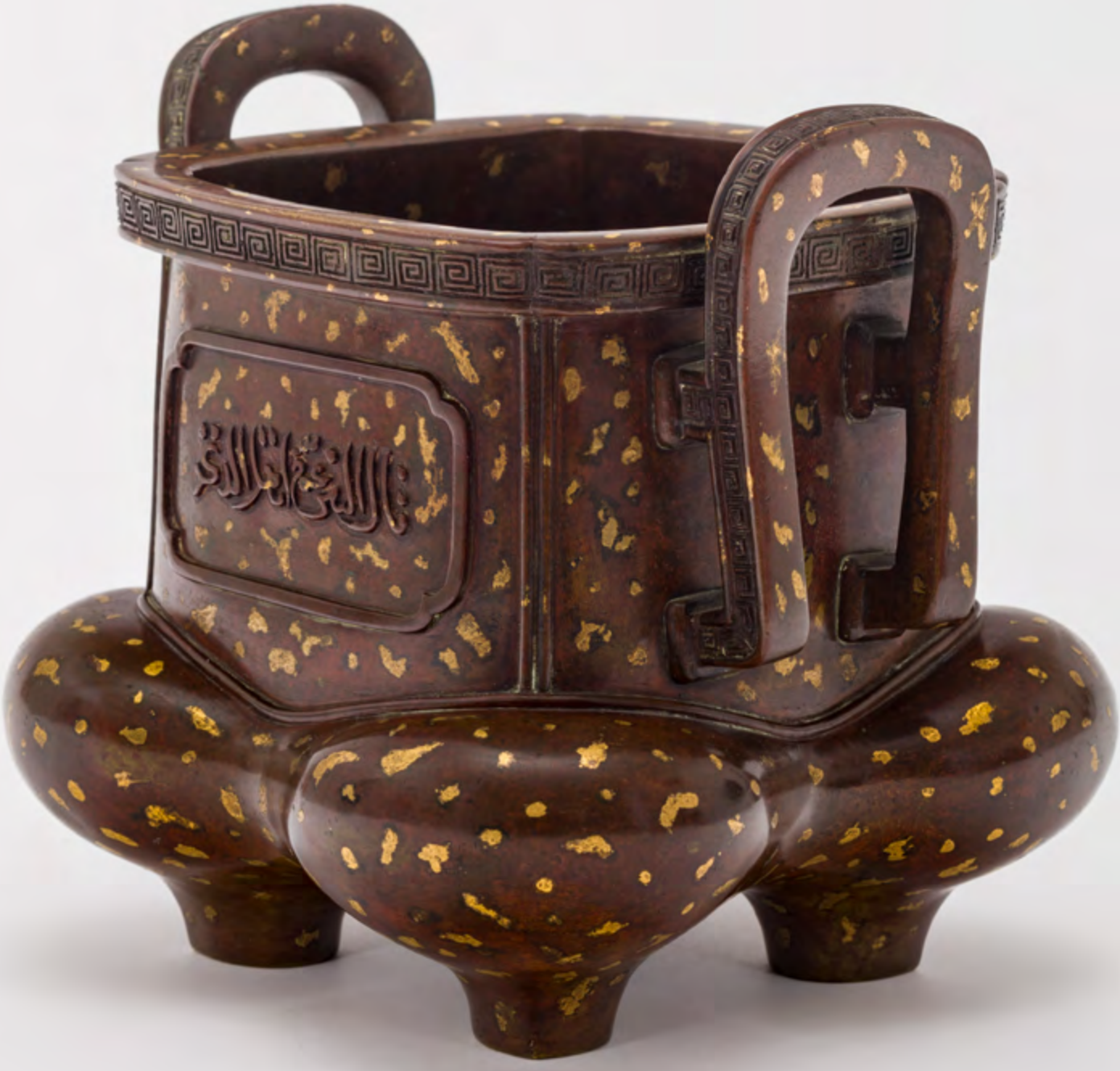
3 Kerr, Rose. *Later Chinese Bronzes*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum Press, 1990. P.39.

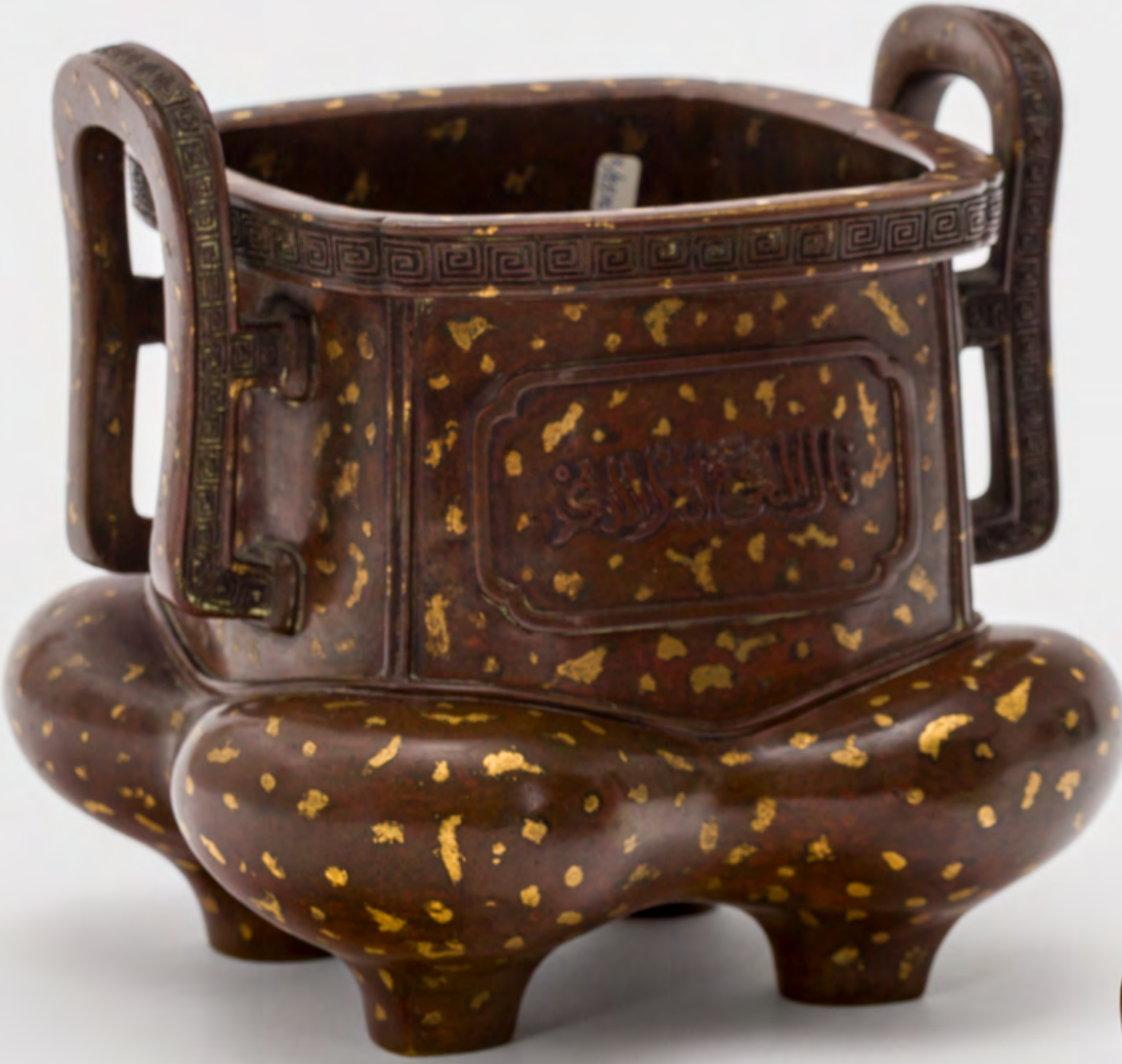
4 They are also valued by museums. For example, bronze wares collected by Randolph Berens, alongside other gold-splashed bronze wares, were exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in 1915, and published by E. Mew, 'Gold-splash Bronzes in the Collection of Mr. Randolph Berens', *The Connoisseur*, November 1915 (London). Pp.131-144, pls.10,11, 13, and 19.

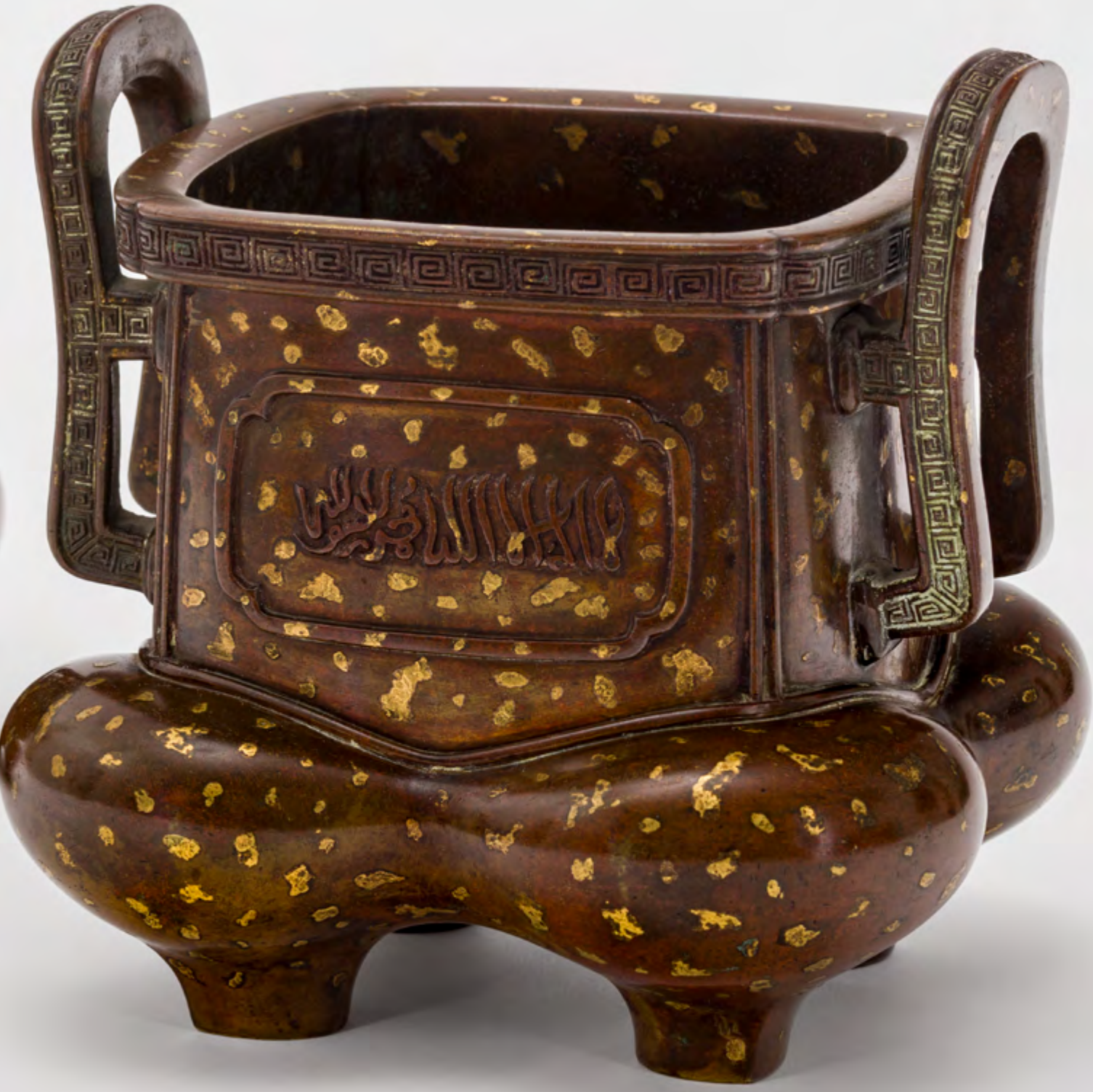
5 Mowry, Robert D. *China's Renaissance in Bronze. The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes 1100-1900*. Phoenix: The Phoenix Art Museum, 1993. Pp.126-130, no. 25.











21

Blue-and-White Albarello

China, Daoguang period (1821–1850) with period reign mark Made for the Islamic market

Porcelain
29cm high, 14.5cm diameter

Provenance: Acquired in Hong Kong between 1904 and 1920. Scandinavian private collection.

A jar in this shape is called an albarello; its form derives from apothecary jars first used in the Middle East. Ultimately the shape probably goes back to an Egyptian precious metal form of the Roman period. Cylindrical jars were employed by physicians and herbalists and since they needed to be easy to hold, to use, and to shelve, their basic form was cylindrical but incurved for grasping and wide-mouthed for access.[1]

A revolution in Islamic pottery production occurred in the 10th century, when a new material called stonepaste (also known as faience or fritware) was invented. This hard, white ceramic was composed of calcareous clays, quartz sand and powdered glass and it may have been developed by migrant Iraqi potters in Egypt. The ceramic was refined in the 11th century and its manufacture spread eastwards to Iran and to Syria in the late 11th century.[2] The new material was ideal for making and decorating vessels including albarello jars, which were made at many kilns. Extant examples include a mid-12th century albarello with carved decoration from Syria or Persia (accession no. C.129-1934) and a late 12th century jar with black painting under turquoise glaze from Kashan in Iran (accession no. 325-1903), both in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Another apothecary jar in the V&A (accession no. 369-1892), with panelled decoration painted in lustre and blue, dates to the late 12th or early 13th century. In decorative terms, the distinctive Islamic qualities of the vessels' surface patterning reflect the application of Islamic principles in artistic production, which in turn were the result of a long and complex process in which both political realities and religious ideals played an important part. As a whole, Islamic art was not entirely religious, as it was formed in a non-doctrinal context. Nor was it entirely secular, since it included the art produced for personal and communal devotions.[3]

The albarello arrived in Europe following the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. The form was introduced into Italy through Sicily, an area of Islamic settlement, sometime before the 15th century, and quickly spread throughout Europe. The shape thereafter became popular throughout Europe, and vessels were made at many factories.

Cultural exchange between the Middle East and China goes back centuries. In the case of ceramics, Chinese fragments of porcelain alongside sherds of local pottery have been excavated in the 9th century, at sites in present-day Egypt and Iraq.[4] This magnificent Chinese porcelain albarello was made much later, during the Daoguang reign period (1821-1850). As far as is known, its period mark is unique. The jar is a direct imitation of albarello jars first made at the Chinese imperial kiln in the early 15th century.[5] At that time, during the early Ming dynasty, Middle Eastern art objects were treasured by the emperor, and copies were made. Court taste was quite conservative, and in later times many shapes and patterns were meticulously reproduced, including albarellos like this piece which is painted in vivid cobalt blue with waves, lotus, and honeycomb pattern.

R.K.

Notes:

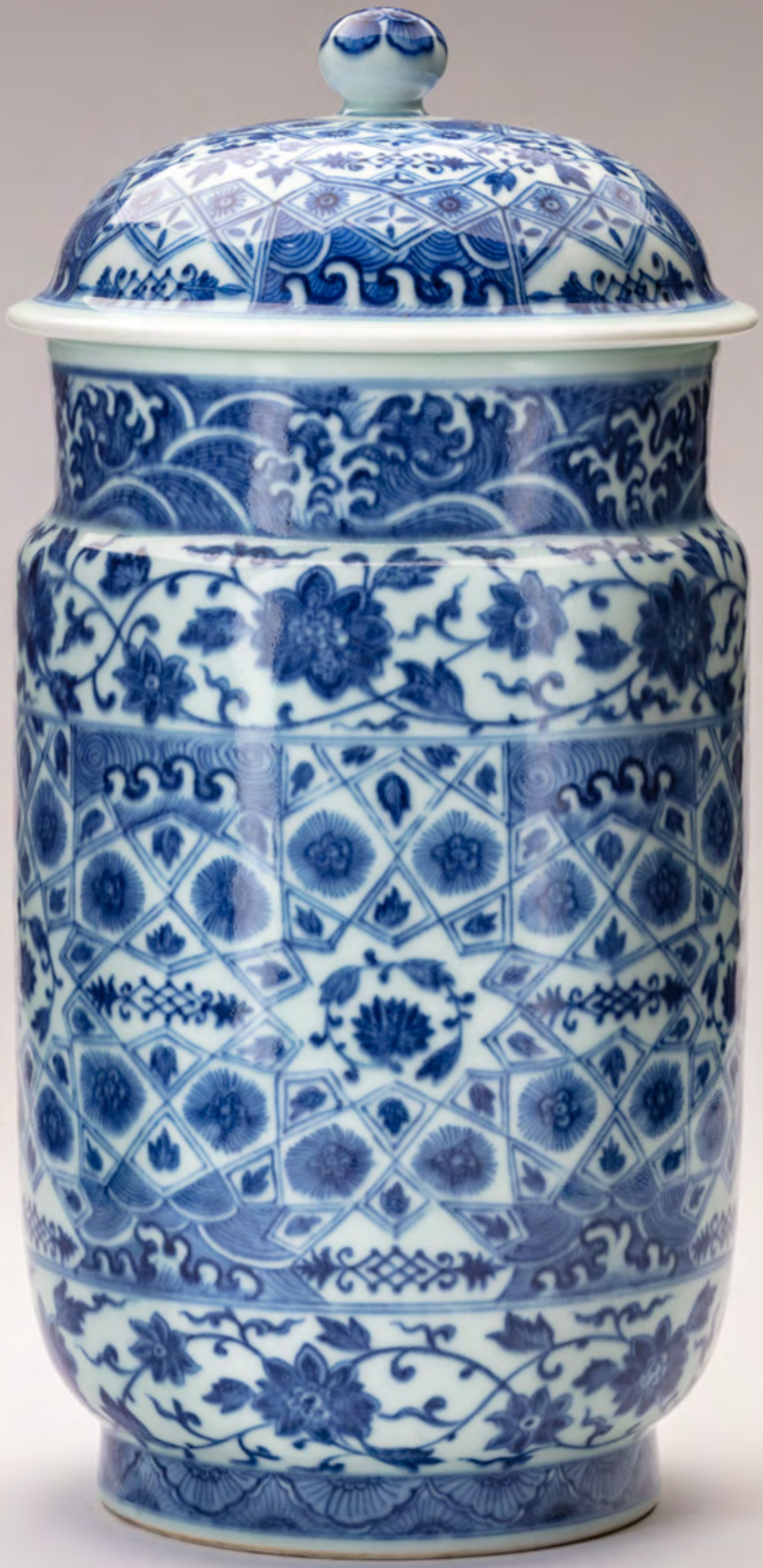
1 Allen, James. *Islamic Ceramics*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1991. p.26.

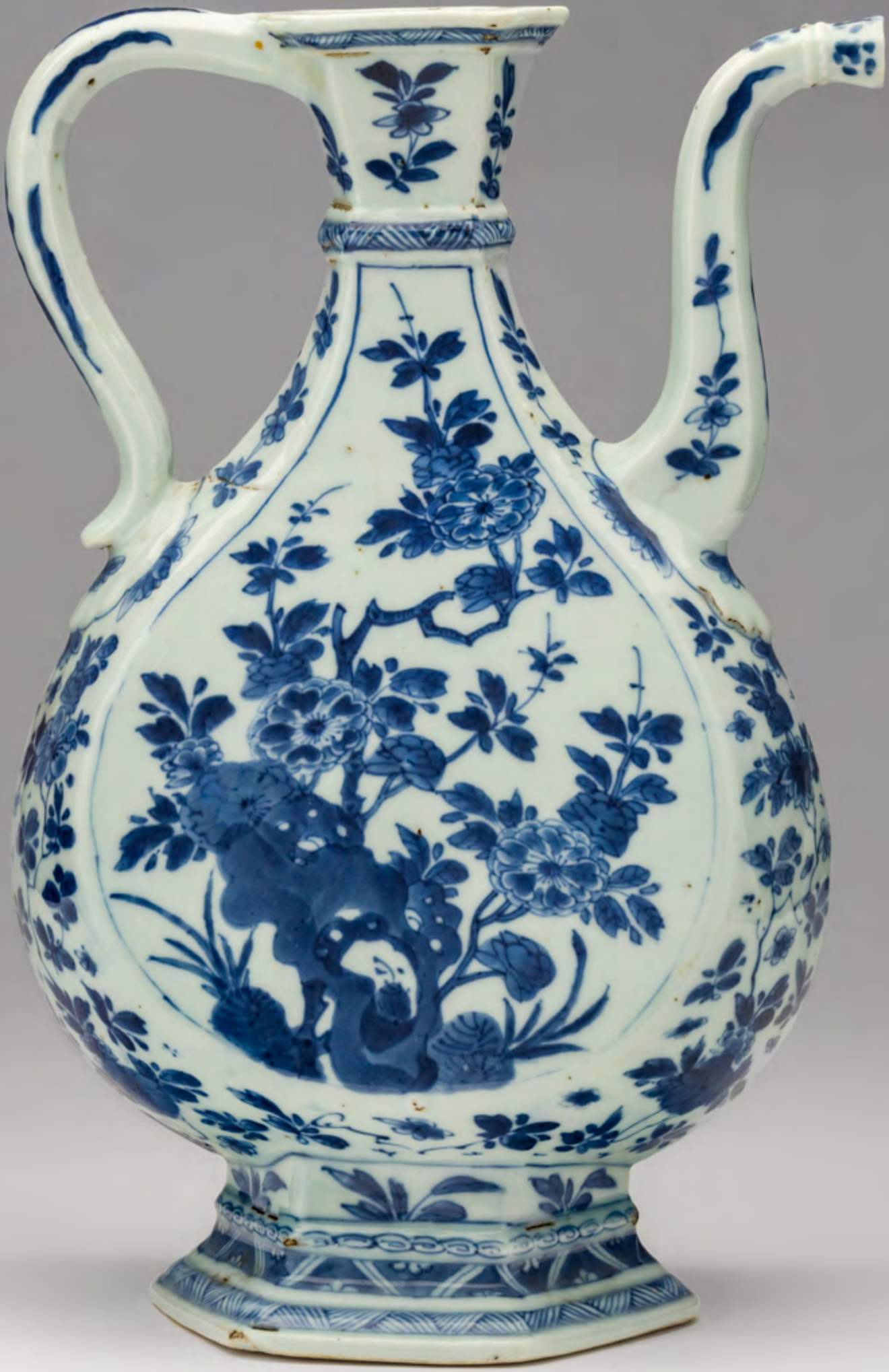
2 Mason, Robert, and Tite, Michael S. 'The beginnings of Islamic stonepaste technology', *Archaeometry* 36.1 (1994). Pp.77-91.

3 Stanley, Tim. *Temple and Mosque. The Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: V&A Publications, 2004. P.37.

4 Khalili, Nasser D. The *Timeline History of Islamic Art and Architecture*. Hertfordshire: Worth Press, 2005. P. 90.

5 A Chinese porcelain albarello dating to the Yongle period (1402-1424) in the imperial collections is illustrated in 故宫博物院藏文物珍品全集 青花釉里红1 (*The Complete Catalogue of Treasures of the Palace Museum Blue and White Porcelain with Underglaze Red*, volume 1) (Hong Kong: 2000), no.43.





22

Blue-and-White Ewer

China, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

Made for the Indian market
Porcelain with cobalt blue underglaze
28cm high, 18cm wide

A blue-and-white ewer with a pear-shaped body with flattened, tapering sides, a flaring neck, flattened hexagonal mouth and splayed foot which both have horizontal collars, and a short curving spout. The design in blue on the ewer is similar to the one kept in the Topkapi Saray Museum (accession no. TKS 15/4576) which has its lid intact with flowering trees growing behind pierced rocks.[1] The ewer here is bordered on both sides by thin branches of flower sprays, the spout features cloud motifs, flowers and dots. The rim, the foot, and the collar of the ewer are decorated with a chevron hatch design.

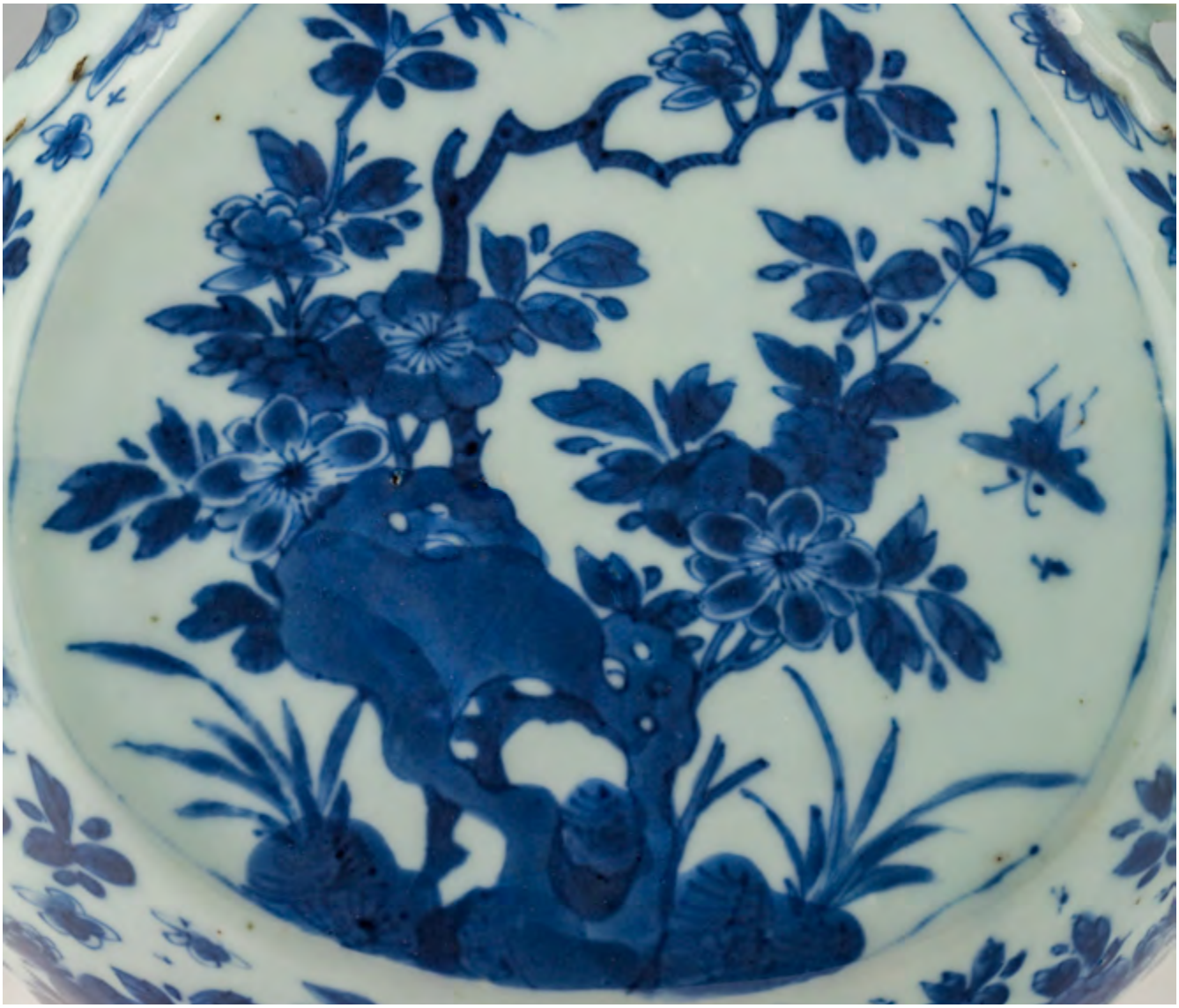
This form is also seen in Indian metalwork, for example, the Bidri ewer in the Jagdish & Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art (76.1226. ME.5).[2] The form is also seen on ewers made in North India, see Mark Zebrowski. *Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India*. London, 1997, pp. 162-163. These indicate the inspiration and influence of Indian forms on Chinese porcelain craftsmen when producing for the Indian market.

A.S.

Notes:

1 Krahl, Regina, Nurdan Erbahar, and John Ayers. *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul: A Complete Catalogue III*. London: published in association with the directorate of the Topkapi Saray Museum by Sotheby's, 1986. P. 1009 (no. 2153).

2 See Mittal, Jagdish. *Bidri Ware and Damascene Work in Jagdish & Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. Hyderabad, 2011. P. 58.



23

Mamluk Bowl

Egypt or Syria, Early 14th century

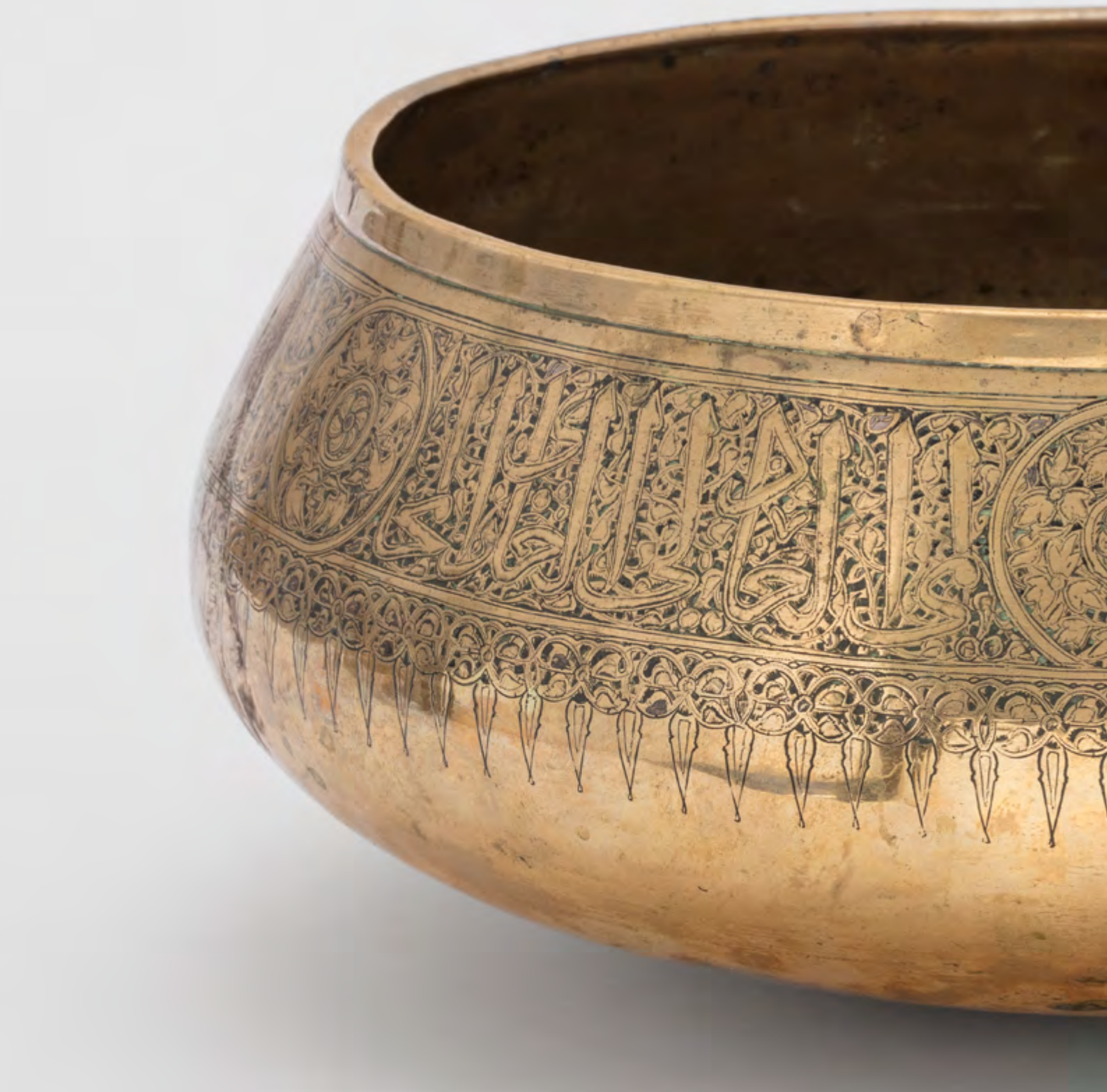
Brass with traces of silver inlay
32cm max diameter, 13cm deep

Provenance: UK private collection since the 19th century.

This large, round-bottomed bowl with bulging sides and a thickened straight rim dates from the turn of the 14th century, when, according to its inscription band, it was owned by an officer of al-Nasir Muhammad, the ninth Mamluk Sultan. Also known as Ibn Qalawun or by his kunya Abu al-Ma'ali, he ruled Egypt intermittently between 1293 and his death in 1341.

Written in thuluth Arabic script, the inscription reads:

"The High Authority, the Honourable, the High, the Lordly, the Great Commander, the Learned, the Just, the Conqueror, the Holy Warrior, the Defender, the Protector of frontiers, the Aided (by God), the Helper, the Protector, the Counsellor, the Administrator, the Valiant, (an officer of) al-Malik al-Nasir, may his glory be everlasting."



Officers frequently commissioned metal objects for their personal use and chose to have the blazons of the sultan they served, rather than their own names, inscribed, in order to benefit from the cultural capital derived from the association with royalty.

The body of the bowl is made from brass, and the ornamentation band is inlaid with a black substance with traces of silver inlay. The six roundels which break up the inscription are filled alternately with flowers and flying birds. The birds would have been inlayed with silver, adding details of the wings and beaks, an example of which can be seen on a basin in the British Museum (accession no. 1878,1230.686). At the centre of each roundel is a six-petalled whirling rosette, a symbol thought to be associated with the house of Qalawun.[1] A floral arabesque with lancet leaves adorns the lower edge of the inscription band.

The inside of the bowl is decorated with another whirling rosette, this time with twelve petals. It is surrounded by six fish tail to nose. The depiction of fishponds at the bottom of basins is a traditional Islamic motif seen in metalwork ranging from the twelfth century to the sixteenth century.[2] Though there is no trace of silver on the inside of the bowl, the double line around the fish suggests that silver inlay was considered.

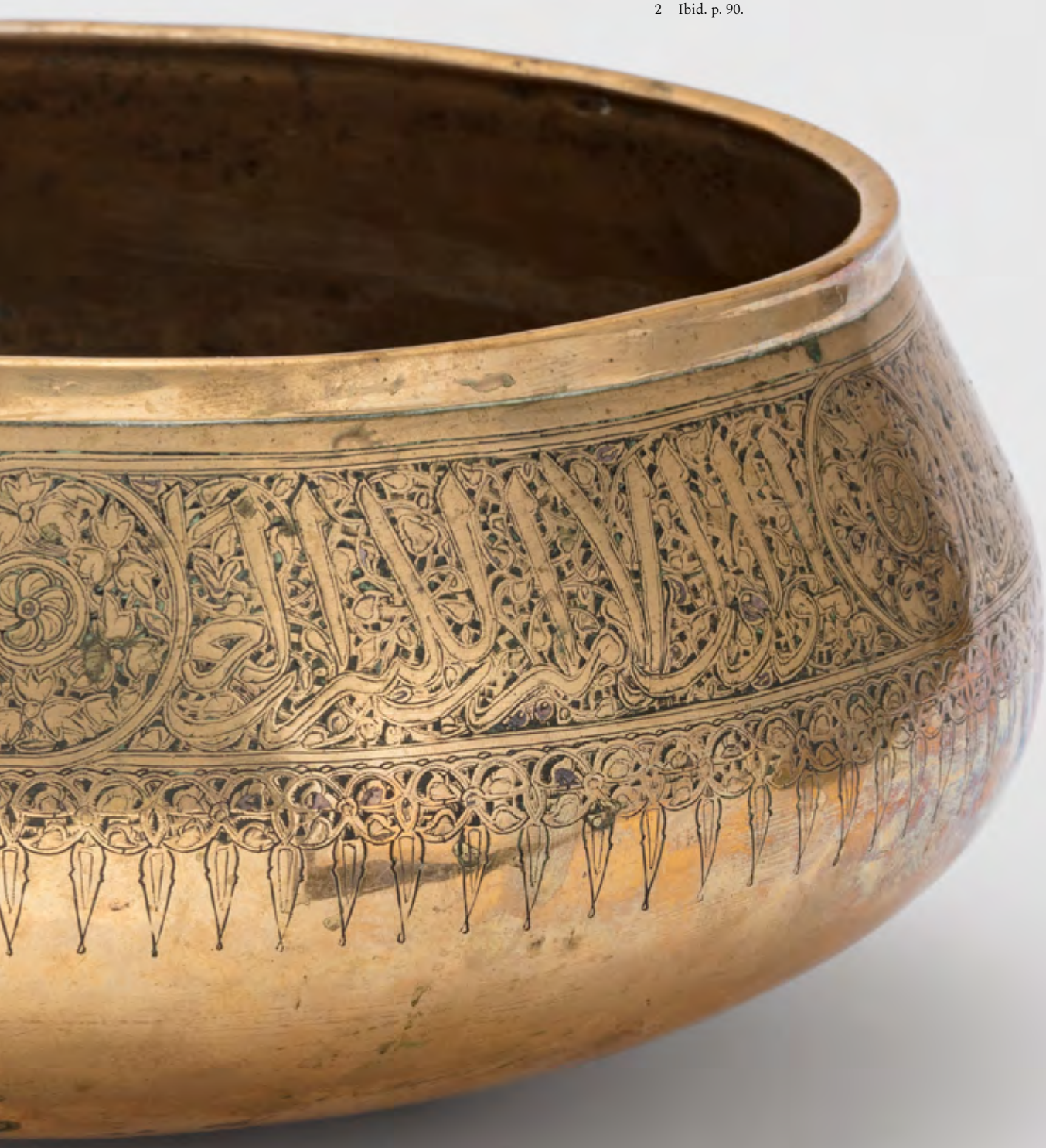
A bowl in the British Museum (accession no. 1866,1229.63) of similar form but smaller size gives a rough idea of how this piece would have looked with its inlaid silver intact. It also shares the lancet leaf decoration below the inscription band, and the inside of the bowl features a twelve petalled whirling rosette, surrounded by six fish tail to nose.

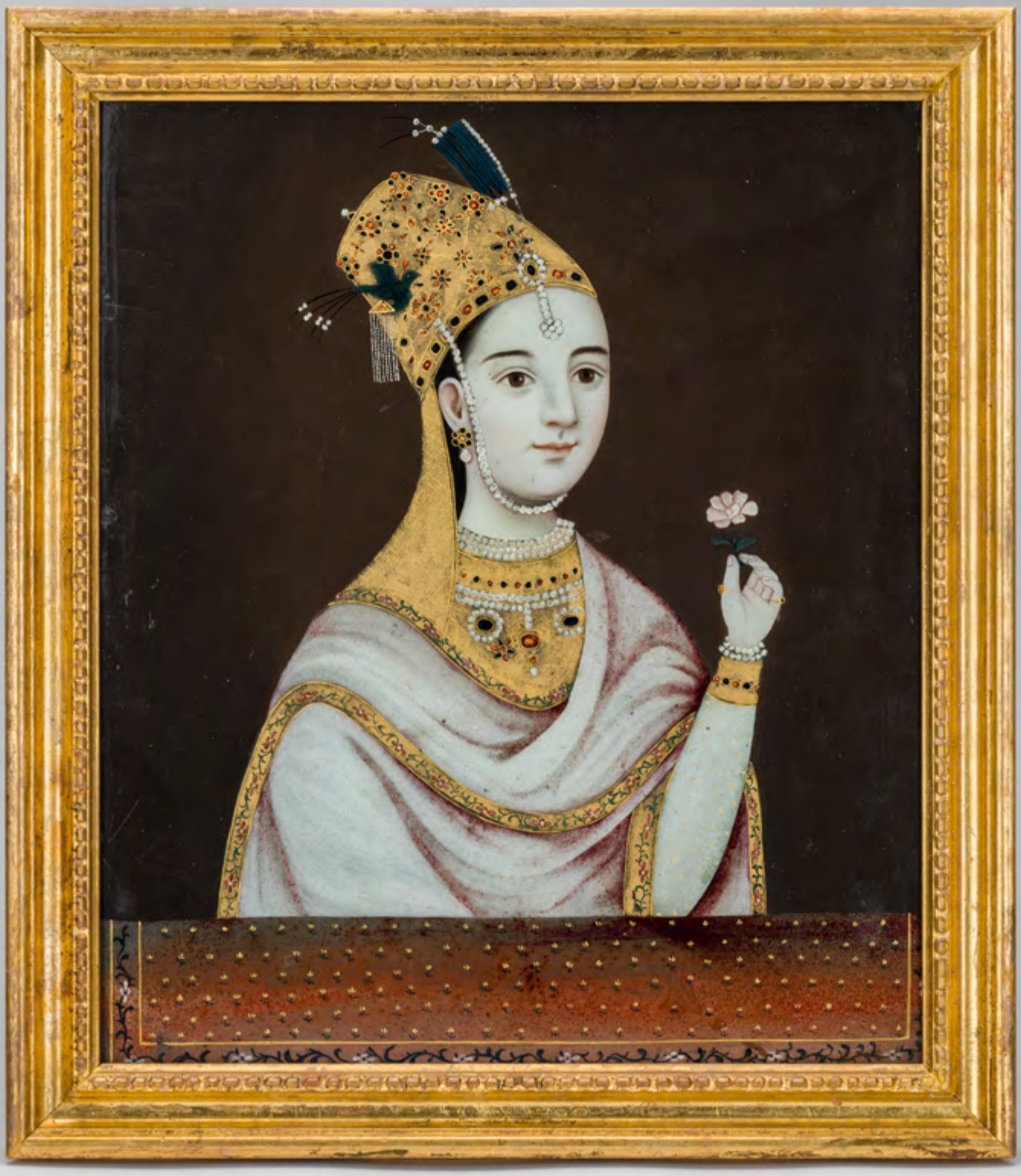
M.L.

Notes:

1 Atıl, Esin. *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 1981. P. 67.

2 Ibid. p. 90.





24

Reverse Glass Painting

India or China, 18th century

Oil paint on glass
41cm high, 36cm wide (framed)

Provenance: Purchased in India by a British sailor in the 1920s and brought to the UK, thence by descent.

This delicate reverse-glass painting depicts a princess wearing a *chaghtai cap*, a flat-topped headdress worn in the eastern Mughal Empire. She is likely an archetype of a beautiful woman, rather than a portrait of a real person. Though she wears Indian clothes and is pictured holding a rose in a clear allusion to Mughal royal portraiture, her luminous pale skin and small almond eyes reveal that she was painted by a Chinese artist.

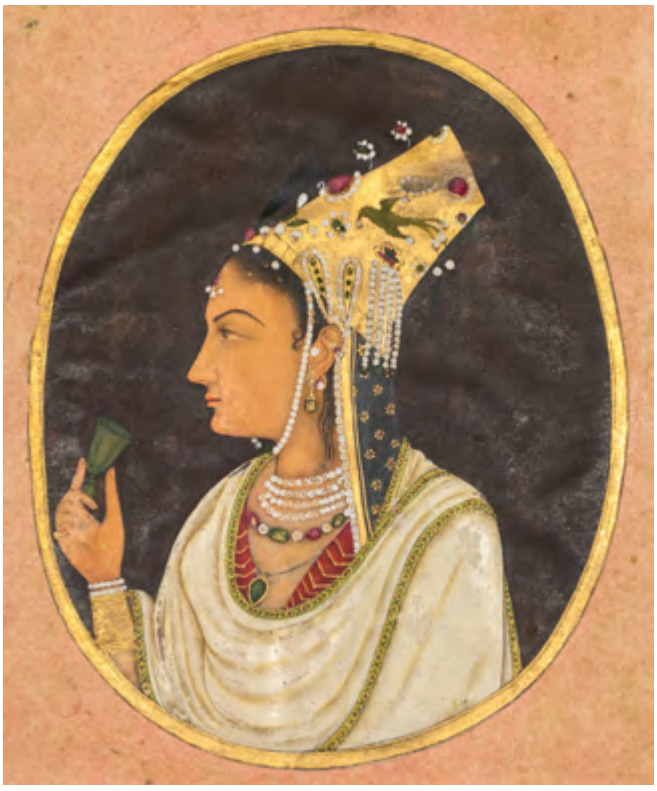
Reverse-glass painting originated as a folk art in Early Modern Europe. The technique was probably brought to China by Jesuit missionaries as early as the 1720s.[1] Foremost amongst them was the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), who had worked as a muralist in Italy and Portugal before his appointment as court painter by Emperor Qianglong.[2] Within a few decades, Chinese artists were producing reverse glass paintings for both European and Indian markets.[3] Initially, the paintings were produced in the Canton workshops and imported into India. However, Chinese reverse glass painters were soon appointed to the courts of princely states such as Satara, Kutch, and Mysore.[4]

Painting on the reverse side of flat glass requires a skilled artist. The final details must be applied first, then the middle layers, then the background, that is to say, the reverse order from that of an oil painting. The application of an outline, usually with tempera, was a crucial step as alterations could not be made later.[5] The finished result would be very delicate, due to both the fragility of the glass and the tendency for the many layers of paint to flake off.

The composition of the painting, with the woman in three quarter profile and holding a rose, makes reference to Deccani royal portraiture, such as the paintings of Shah Suleiman I of Persia and Shah 'Abbas II in the British Museum (accession nos 1974,0617,0.4.1 and 1974,0617,0.4.2). Deccani artists, particularly of Bijapur, frequently painted their subjects as if captured in a window.[6] Fittingly for a painting behind glass, the princess is depicted looking out from a terraced window, bearing a close resemblance to a portrait of Nawab Nasir ud-Daulah in the collection of the British Museum (accession no. 1955,1008,0.23).

The clothing and headdress worn by the princess is very similar to that seen in the oval portrait of a woman in a *chaghtai* hat in the Cleveland Museum of Art (accession no. 1920.1967). Both women wear a feather in their golden flat-topped hats, which are ornamented with a green swift, flowers, precious stones, and pearls. The hats are fastened under their chins with a string of pearls. Their gowns, embroidered with flowers around the hemline, drape to reveal rows of necklaces. Rather than holding a rose, the woman in the oval portrait holds a small jade cup, for which the Mughals were famous.

M.L.



Oval portrait of a woman in a Chaghtai hat, Mughal India, c. 1740-50.
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Notes:

1 Audric, Thierry. *Chinese reverse glass painting 1720-1820: An artistic meeting between China and the West*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020. Pp. 11, 26-27.

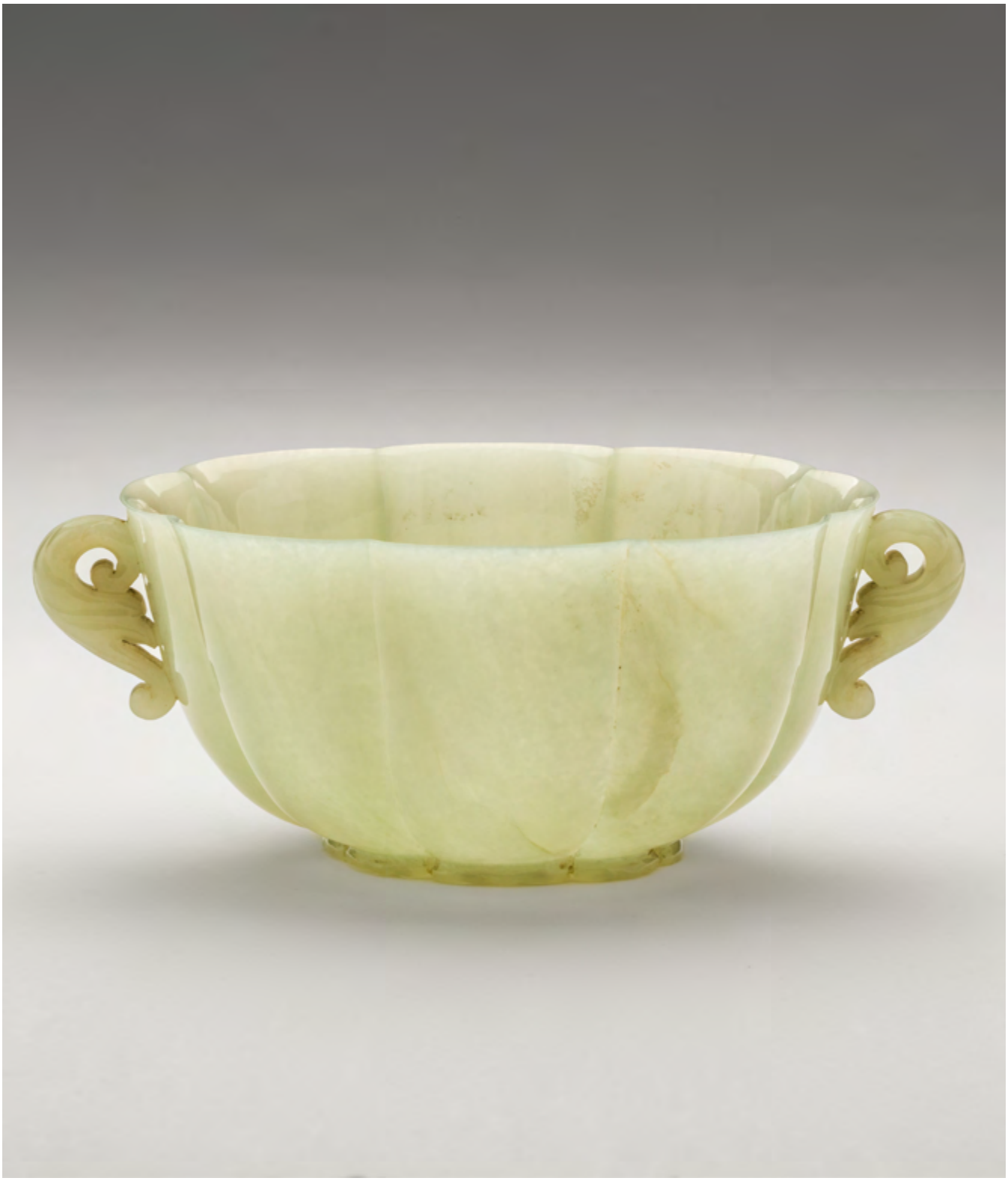
2 Dallapiccola, Anna L. *Reverse Glass Painting in India*. New Delhi: Niyogi, 2017. Pp. 12-13.

3 Ibid. p. 13.

4 Thampi, Madhavi. 'Sino-Indian Cultural Diffusion through Trade in the Nineteenth Century', in Anne Cheng and Sanchit Kumar (eds.) *India-China: Intersecting Universalities*. Paris: Collège de France, 2020. P. 86.

5 Eswarin, Rudy (ed. and trans.). *Reverse Paintings on Glass: The Ryser Collection*. New York: The Corning Museum of Glass, 1992. P. 35.

6 Zebrowski, Mark. *Deccani Painting*. London: Philip Wilson, 1983. P. 140.



25

Mughal Jade Bowl

India, Late 17th century to early 18th century

Jade
19.5cm wide, 7.5cm deep

Provenance: R.M.W. Walker Collection.
The Choice Collection of Old Chinese Porcelain and Objects of Art formed by the late R.M.W. Walker, Christie's London, 12 July 1945, lot 145.
With John Sparks Ltd, 128 Mount Street, London, W1.
John Sparks Ltd Insurance Valuation, dated 1953, listed as number 7.
Collection of Robin Marx (1923-1975), UK, and thence by descent within the family.

The first jade objects in Islamic lands were made when the Chaghtais lost the jade mines of Khotan on the Southern Silk Road, in today's Xianjiang autonomous region, China, to the Timurids.[1] Jade was valued not only for its cool, silky texture, but for the manhours needed to fashion it; jade cannot be worked by chipping, but only by time-consuming abrasion.[2] Surviving Timurid jades are inscribed with names of members of the family, suggesting royal associations.[3] The enthusiasm for jade was exported to India with the invasion and subsequent foundation of the Mughal Empire by Babur, a Central Asian prince and descendant of Timur. By the reign of the fifth Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658), a recognisable Mughal jade style had been established.[4] Distinctive not only for its purity and thinness, for which it was praised by the Chinese emperor Qianlong, Mughal jade may be recognised for its floral ornamentation.[5] The influence of both Persian painting and European botanical studies resulted in the movement known as "floral naturalism", which pervaded almost every art form by the reign of Shah Jahan.[6] The large collection of Mughal jade preserved in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan, displays an excellent variety of bowls with lotus handles, poppy and chrysanthemum bases, and carved leaf and flower ornamentation.[7]

Of grey-green colour and translucent when held up to the light, this unusually large oval bowl is carved from a single piece of jade. Two openwork acanthus leaf handles transform the eight-lobed vessel into a flower. It stands on an octofoil poppy foot, at the centre of which is a hatched star. It closely resembles a bowl belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with eight lobes and acanthus handles (accession no. 02.18.756), dating to the 17th century. A 12-sided jade bowl dating to the mid-17th century with lotus bud handles is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (accession no. IS.25-1997), alongside a late 17th or early 18th century salver containing a carved flower, the detail of which resembles the flower on the bowl above (accession no. 765-1903).

M.L.

Notes:

1 Blair, Sheila S. 'Timurid Signs of Sovereignty', *Oriente Moderno* 76.2 (1996). pp. 551-576, 569.

2 Sax, Margaret et al. 'The identification of carving techniques on Chinese jade', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 31.10 (2004). pp. 1413-1428.

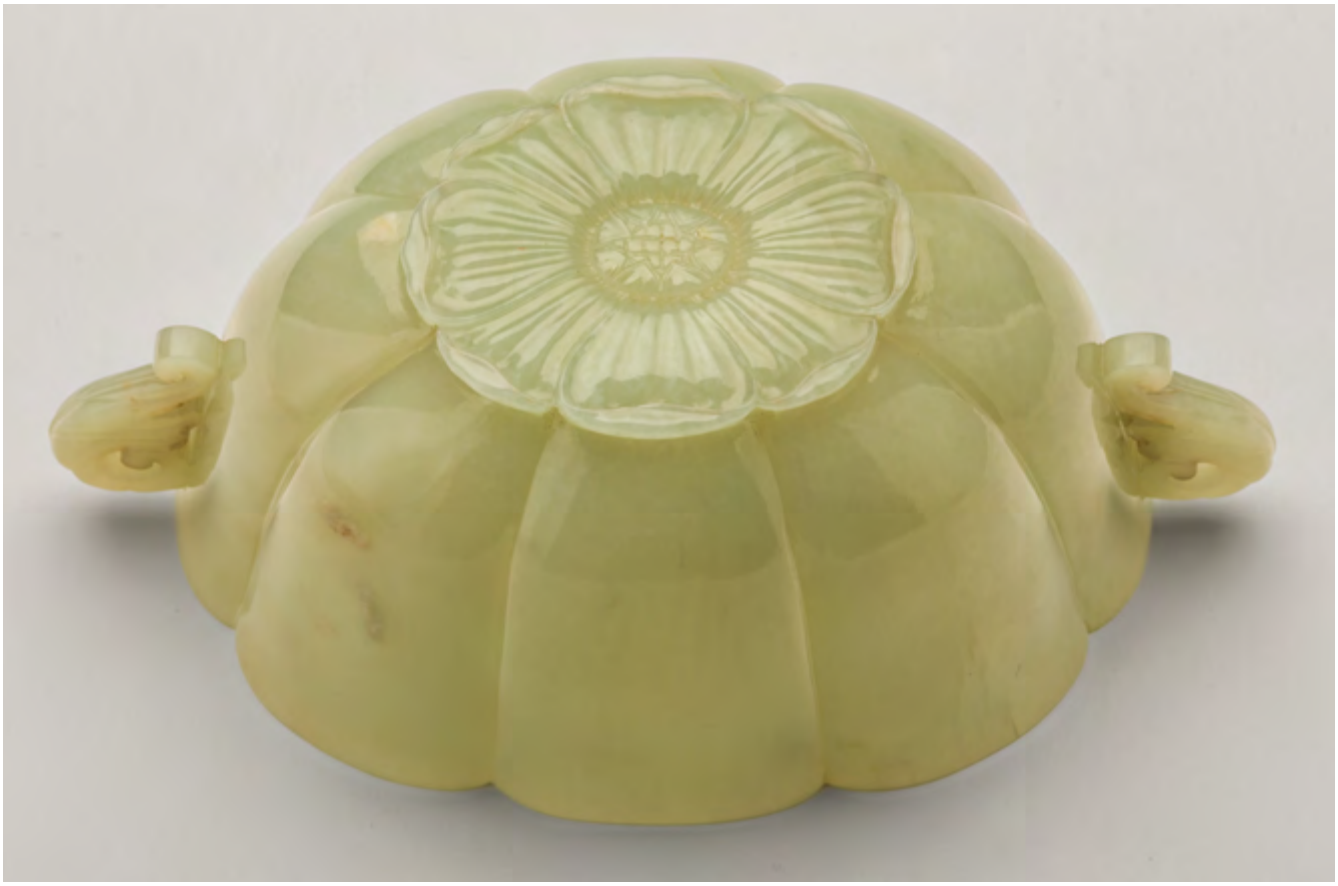
3 Ibid. p. 570.

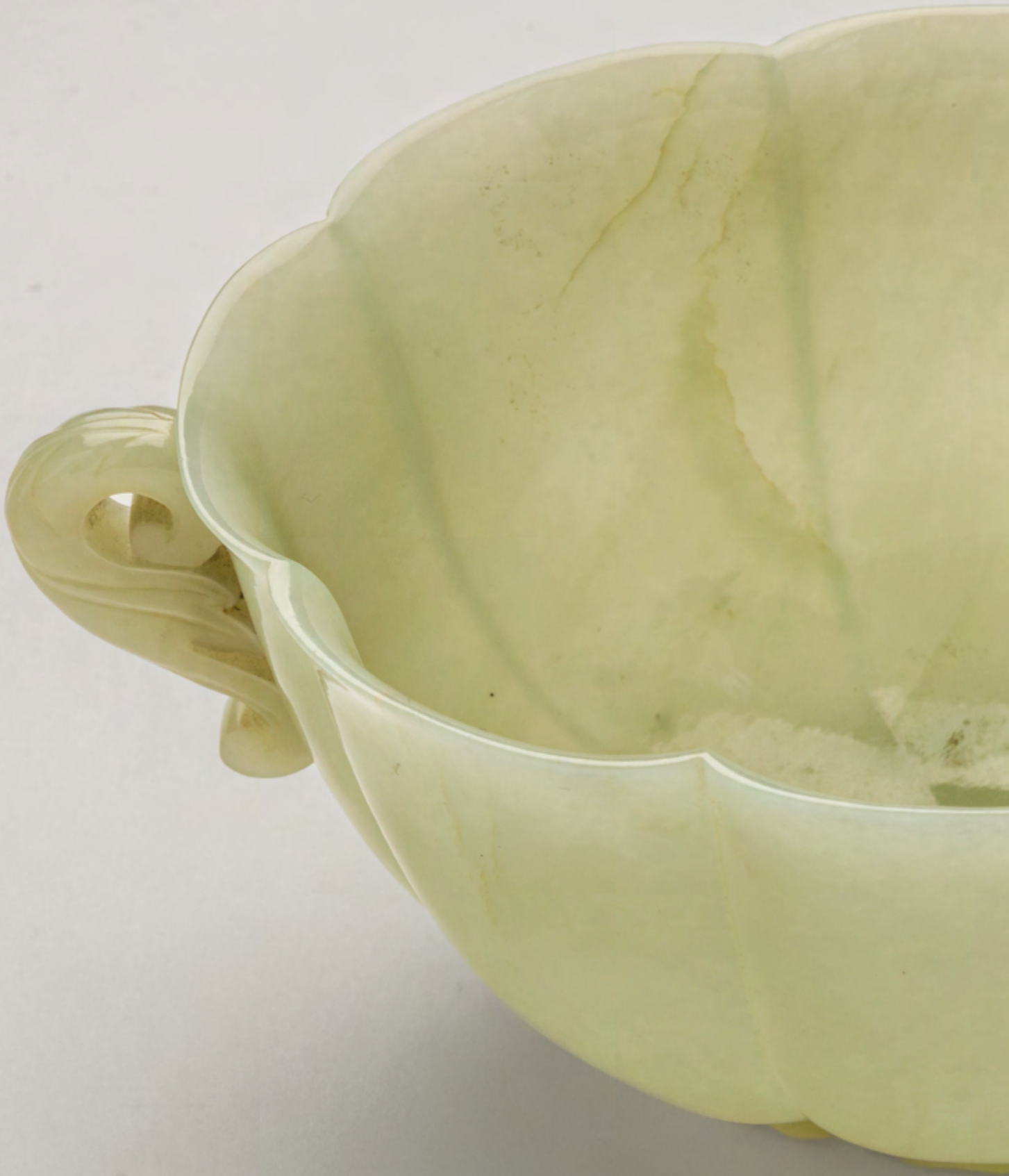
4 Stronge, Susan. *The Indian Heritage: Court Life Under Mughal Rule*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1982. P. 105.

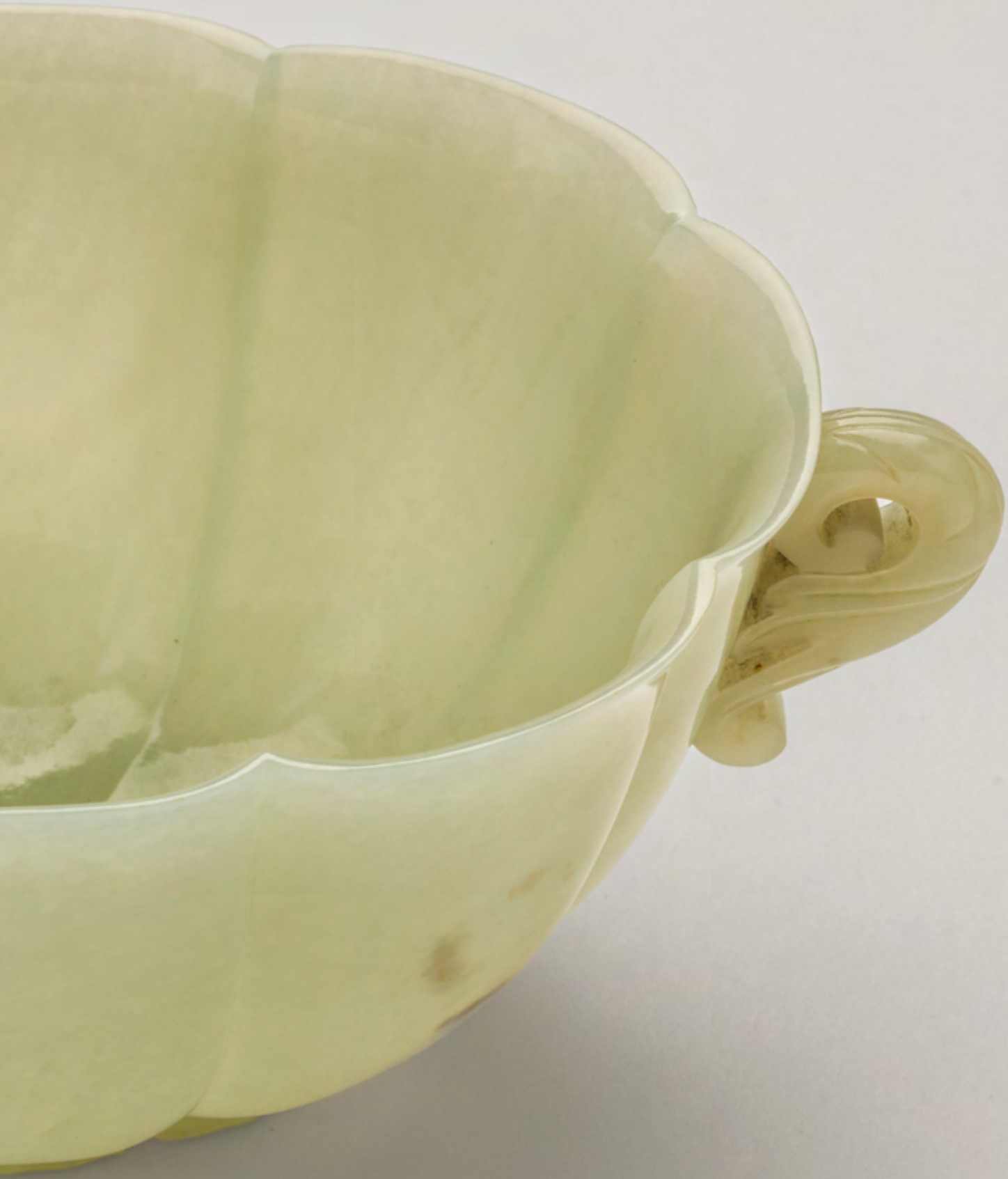
5 Teng Shu-ping 鄧淑蘋. *Exquisite Beauty – Islamic Jades* 國色天香: 伊斯蘭玉器. Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2008. P. 54.

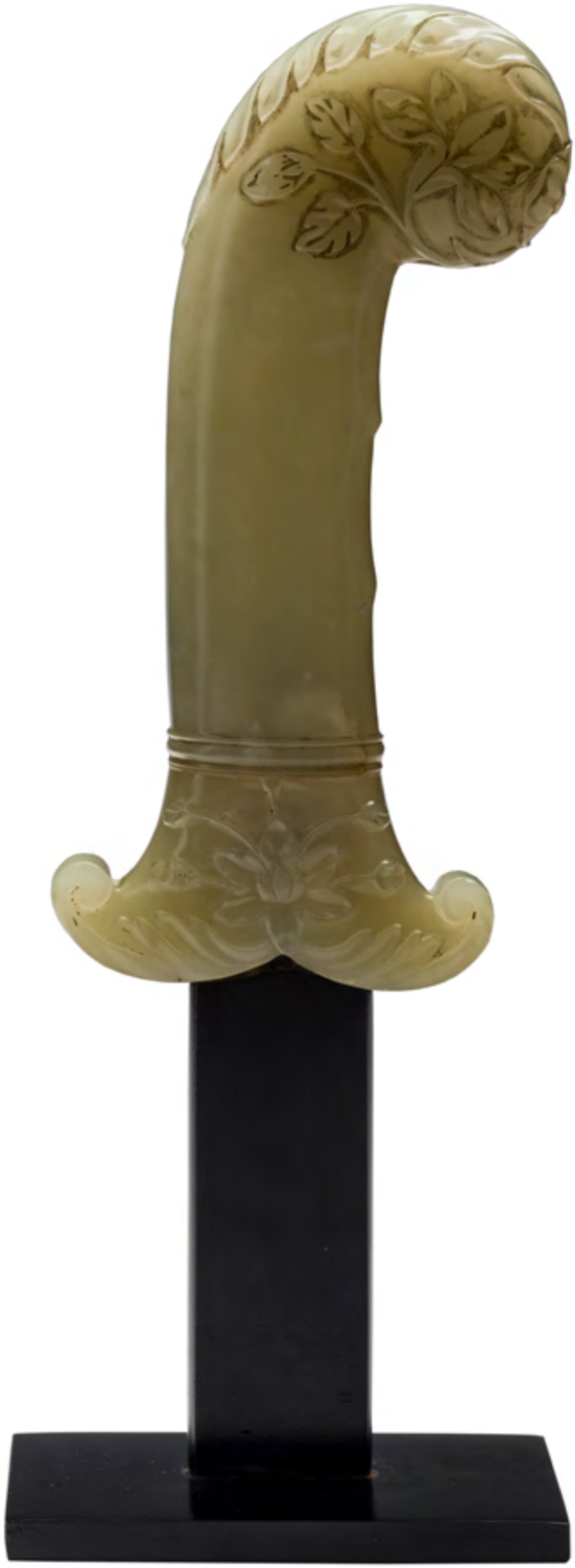
6 Ibid. p. 105; Skelton, Robert. 'A Decorative Motif in Mughal Art', in Pratapaditya Pal (ed.) *Aspects of Indian Art: Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 1970*. Leiden: 1972. Pp. 147-52.

7 Teng Shu-ping 鄧淑蘋. Op. cit. no.47, no.58, no.59.









26

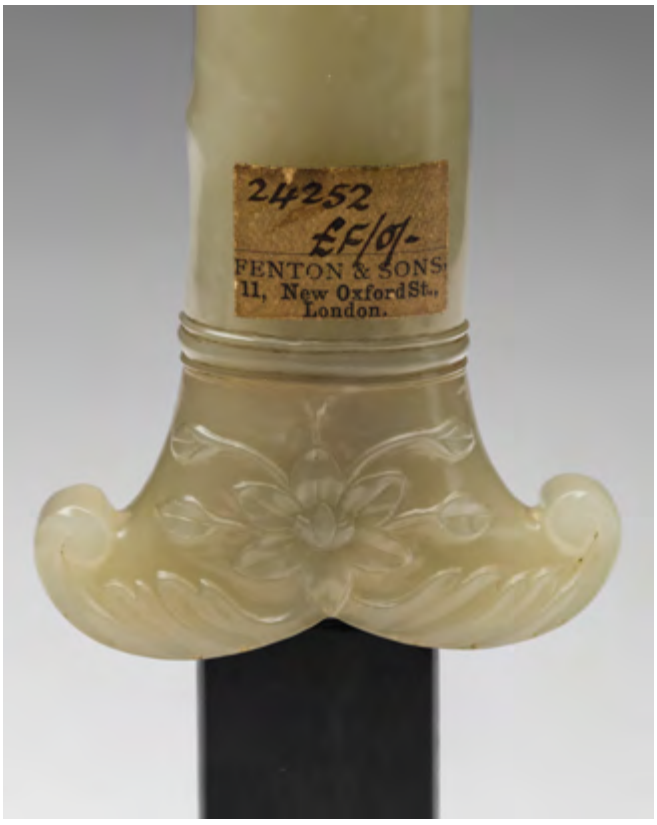
Jade Dagger Handle

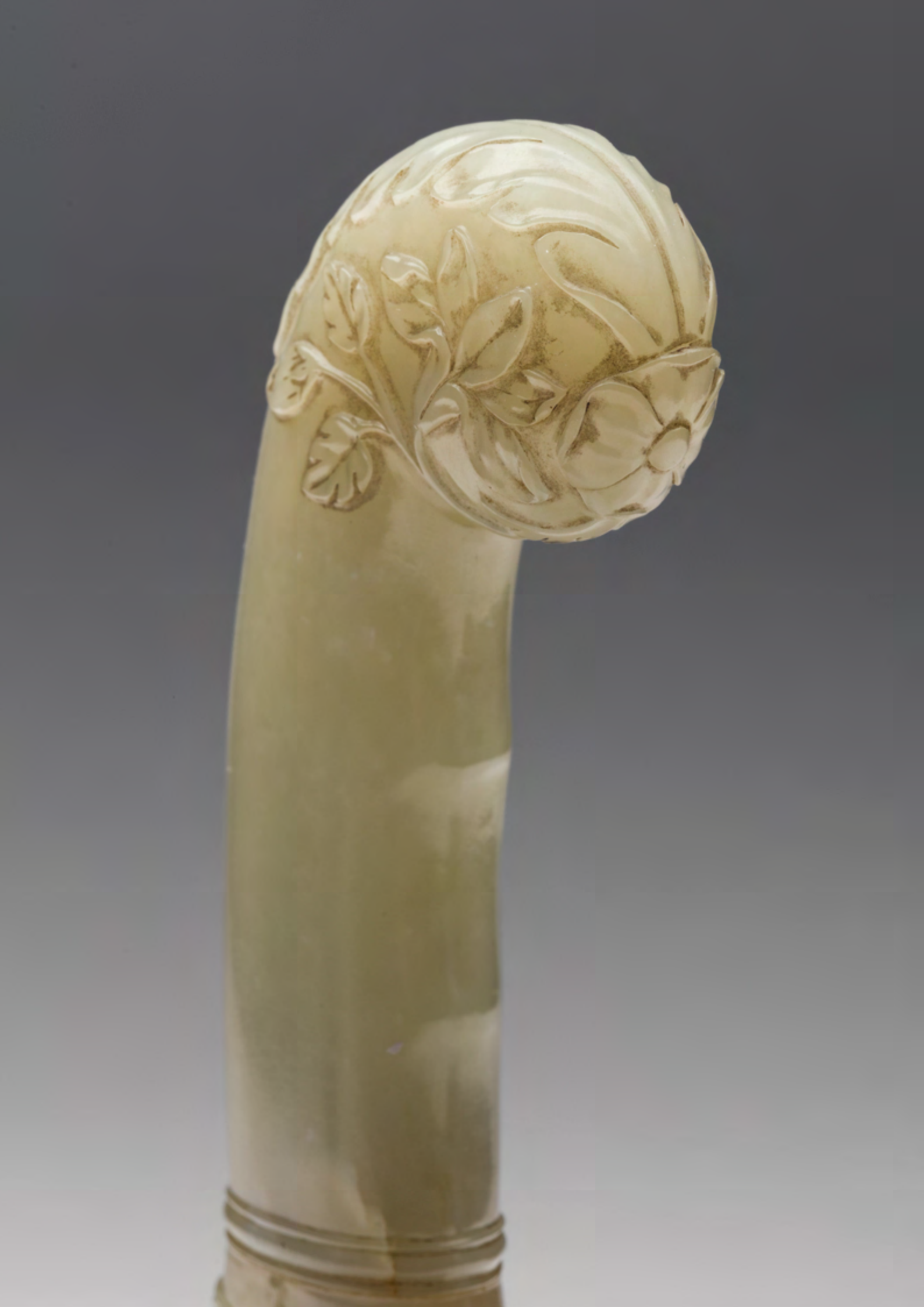
India, 18th century

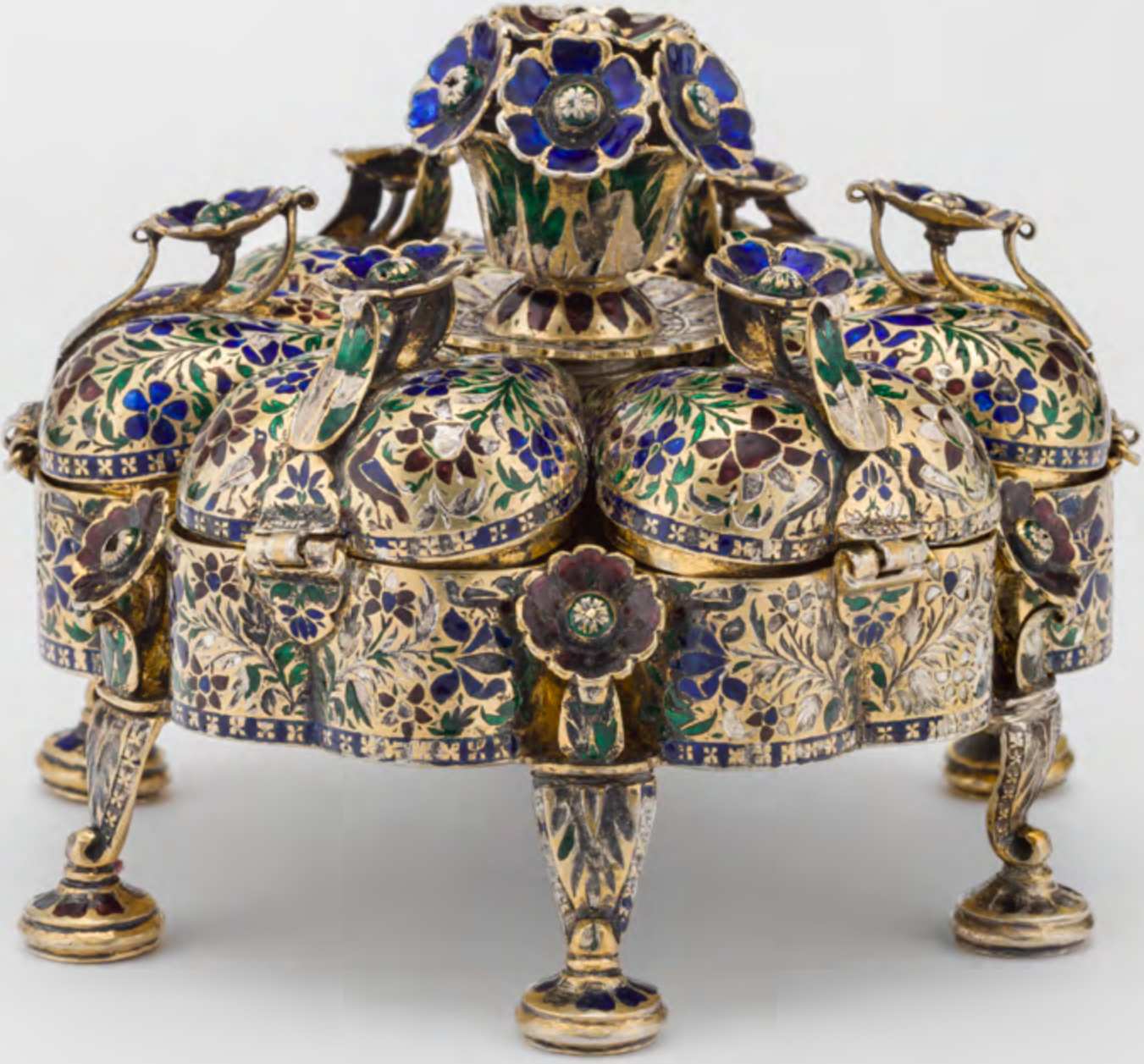
Jade
12.5cm high, 7.5cm wide

Provenance: Fenton & Sons (ceased trading in 1927).

The light green jade dagger handle has been carved in a well-proportioned and elegant form. The jade handle comprises two pieces and is carved and decorated with raised flowers and foliage. On one side of the jade handle is attached an old label which reads: "Fenton & Sons, 11, New Oxford St, London". In the inner grip, there are three subtle indentations accommodated for the grip. The auction house and dealership, Fenton & Sons, was active in England from 1894 until 1927. The British Museum acquired various pieces from Fenton & Sons during this period. A similar Mughal jade dagger handle, 13.1cm in height, is illustrated in Teng Shu-p'ing. *Exquisite Beauty: Islamic Jades, National Palace Museum*. Taipei: 2012, p. 118, pl. 141. A slightly smaller example, 12.2cm long, is in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number 1982.321.







27

Enamelled Spice Box

Lucknow, 18th century

Silver-gilt, enamel
10.5 cm high, 14cm diameter

Provenance: North American family collection for several generations.

Spice boxes appear in Mughal miniatures from the late 16th century onwards (see accession no. 1999,1202,0.5.2 in the British Museum, London). The individual compartments of this box would have been used for storing chopped betel nuts, mixed spices, slaked lime, tobacco, and betel leaves, which the heart-shaped lids of this box resemble.

Of silver-gilt, set with crystals and enamelled in blue, green, and red, the ornamentation of this spice box closely resembles the renowned *champlevé* and *basse-taille* enamelware made in 18th century Lucknow, in the state of Uttar Pradesh. When the central knop, itself resembling a vase of flowers, is unscrewed and removed, each of the heart-shaped lids is free to open. An ogival pandan in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (accession no. AC1993.137.1.1-2) has similarly brightly coloured floral sprays, and mostly notably, both have two birds with maroon bodies and blue wings standing aspectant.

A significant part of Lucknow's vegetal imagery was the acanthus leaf, a decorative motif originating in Corinthian capitals around 9000 years ago, which assimilated into Asian art.[1] The acanthus bract, pairs of leaves branching from a stalk, can be seen throughout this spice box. Similar use of this motif is seen on a tray made in Lucknow in the LA Country Museum (accession no. M.76.2.27a-L). The underside of the box is decorated with a large floral rosette, inside an ornamental cartouche formed from split acanthus leaves.

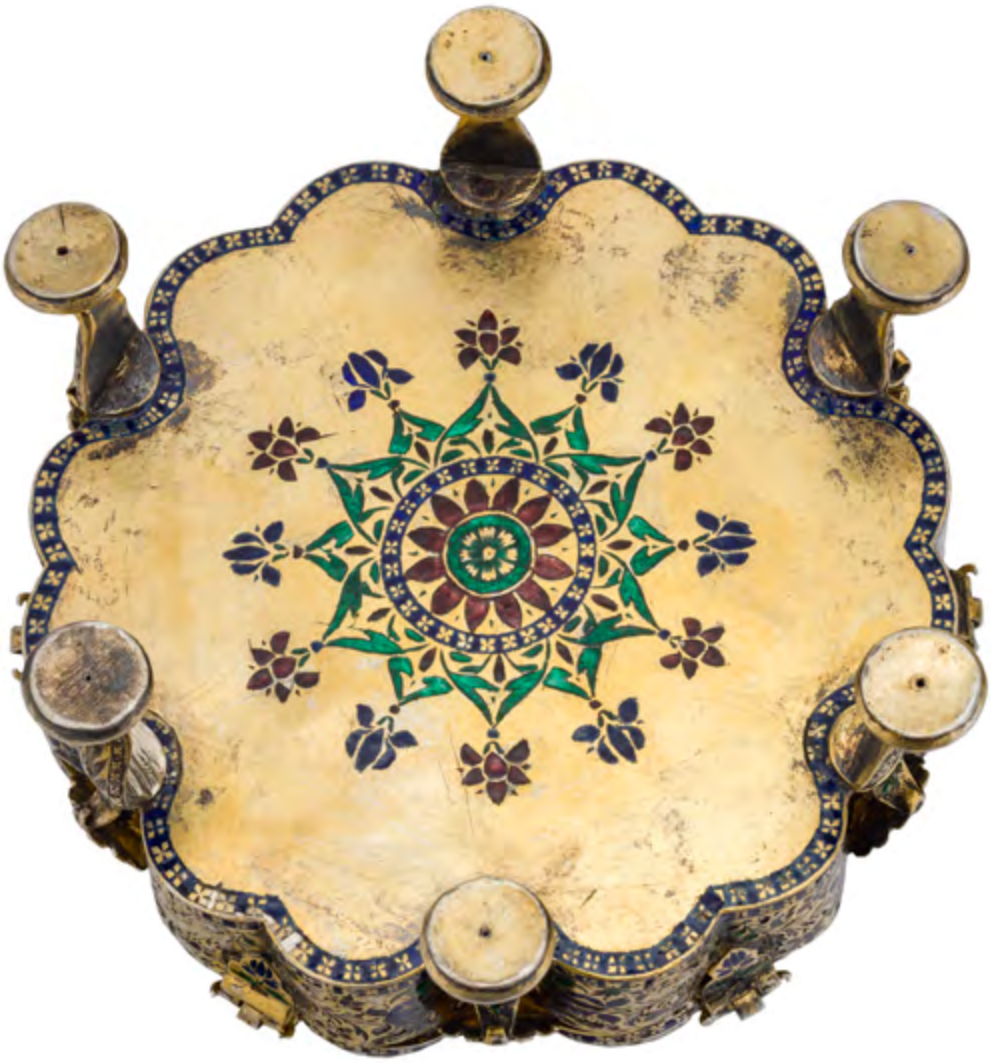
A silver enamelled spice box of similar form and ornamentation, originating from mid-19th century Lucknow, can be found in the collection of the V&A (accession no. 131-1852). This form takes inspiration from Rajasthani prototypes, such as those on pages 158-161 of *Mughal Silver Magnificence*.[2]

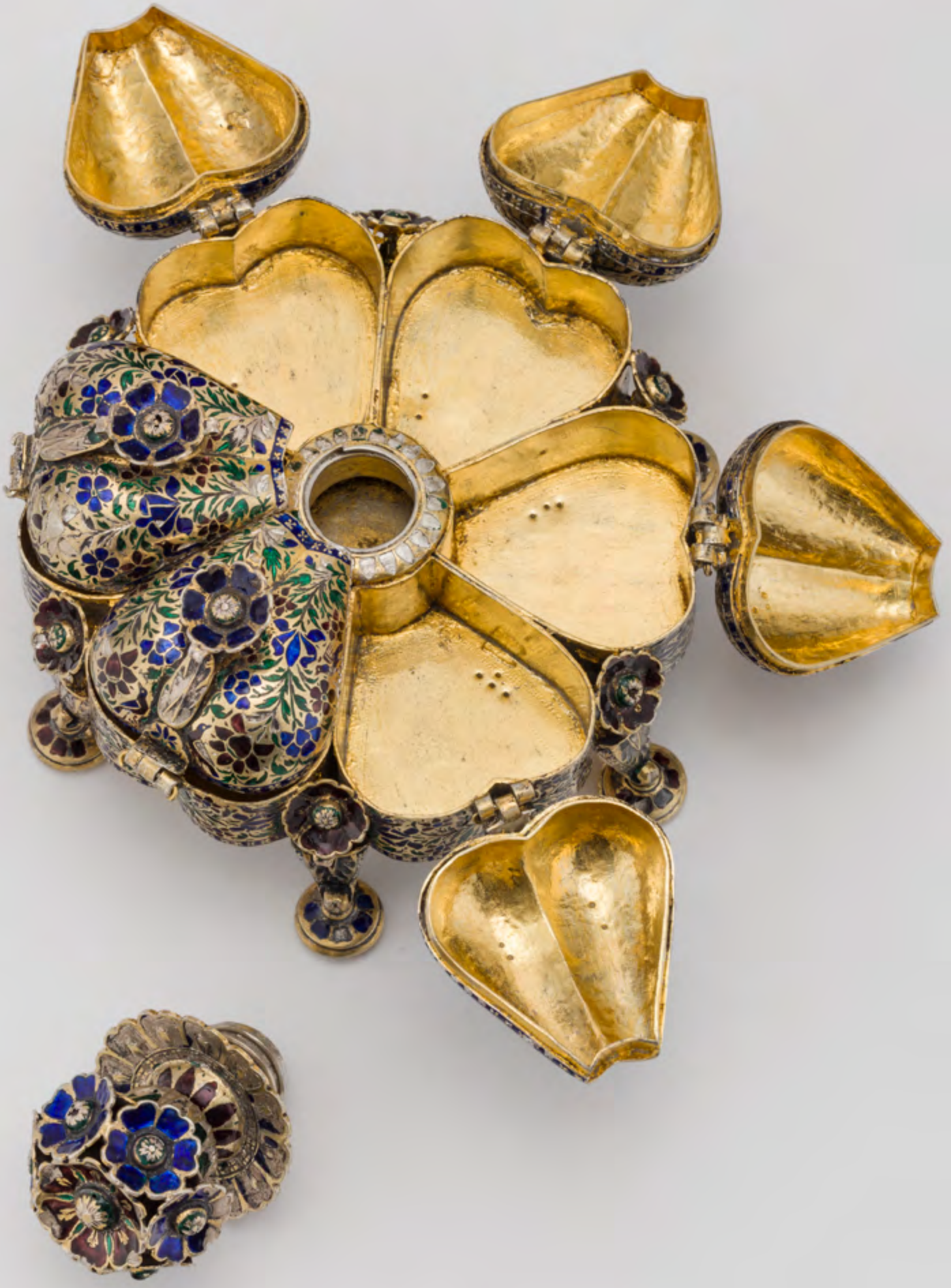
M.L.

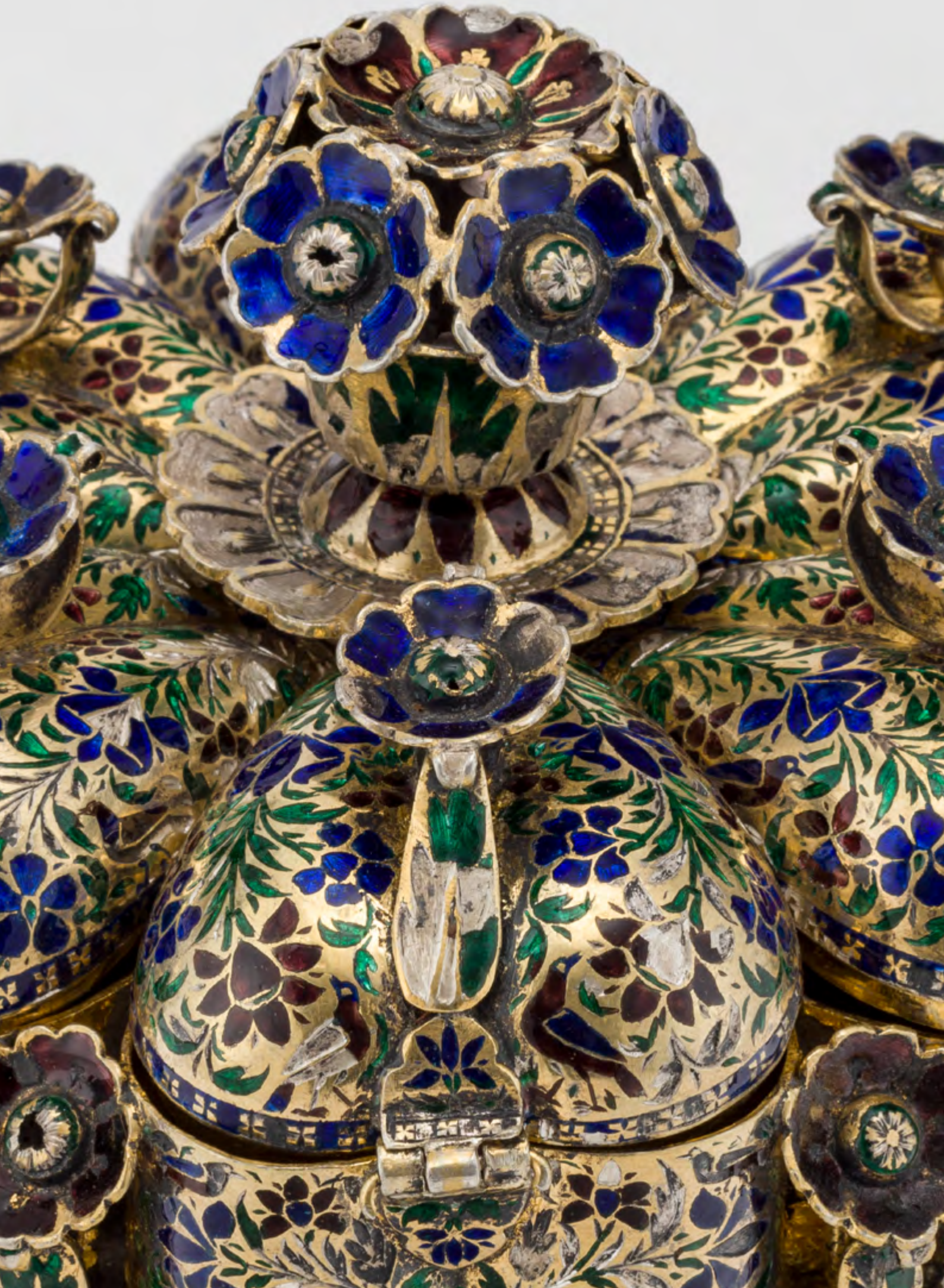
Notes:

1 Markel, Stephen. *India's Fabled City: The Art of Courtly Lucknow*. Los Angeles: DelMonico Books and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010.

2 Terlinden, Christiane et al. *Mughal Silver Magnificence (XVI-XIXth C)/ Magnificence de l'Argenterie Moghole (XVI-XIXème S.)*. Geneva: Antalga for the Museum of Art and History of Geneva, 1987.







Bidri Pandan

Bidar, India, 17th century

Zinc alloy, silver, brass
9.5cm high, 14.5cm diameter

Provenance:
Raymond and Pierre Jourdan-Barry Collection, Paris.
Edith & Stuart Cary Welch collection.

Bidri ware originates from the city of Bidar, in the state of Karnataka. Objects such as huqqa bases, ewers, spittoons and *pandan* were made from bidri from at least the beginning of the 17th century.[1] The desired form is cast in an alloy of copper, tin, and principally zinc, using the *cire perdue* or lost wax method.[2] As zinc is soft, detailed patterns can be engraved onto the surface of the object with relative ease. Inlay of silver or brass is applied to the engraved areas, in the form of sheet metal or wire. Following this, the surface of the vessel is blackened with the application of a mud paste to provide greater contrast with the inlay. After washing off the paste, the piece is oiled.[3]

This box was designed to hold *pan*, a mixture made from chopped betel nuts, spices, slaked lime, and sometimes tobacco, wrapped in a betel leaf. As this *pandan* only has one compartment, it can be surmised that it was used for holding the pre-wrapped quid, rather than the individual components.

Floral motifs appear in much of the decorative arts of the Deccan during the Mughal period, emerging under the influence of Persian painting and European botanical studies.[4] This *pandan* is richly decorated with clusters of *tehnishan*-work (flush inlay) flowers and leaves, with interweaving stems of *tarkashi* (wire inlay). It was less common to have both brass and silver inlay applied to one object, making the decorative scheme of this box rather unusual.[5] Eight heart-shaped silver petals surround each brass centre, forming daisy-like flowers. The ledge running below the domed lid is decorated with an alternating brass and silver teardrops, and the band below that alternating palmettes. Similar designs can be seen in Owen Jones' *The Grammar of Ornament*, copied from bidri huqqas at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London.[6]

An octagonal bidri *pandan* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, also attributed to the Deccan, has a similar decorative scheme (accession no. 1996.3a,b). A rounded pandan in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (accession no. EA1993.392) has similar clusters of three daisies but does not share the swirling *tarkashi* stems. Bearing a similar pattern, but in the more common monochrome bidri, a round *pandan* is found in the collection of the Louvre, Paris (accession no. MAO 2254 b).

M.L.

Notes:

1 Stronge, Susan. *Bidri Ware: Inlaid Metalwork from India*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1985. P. 9.

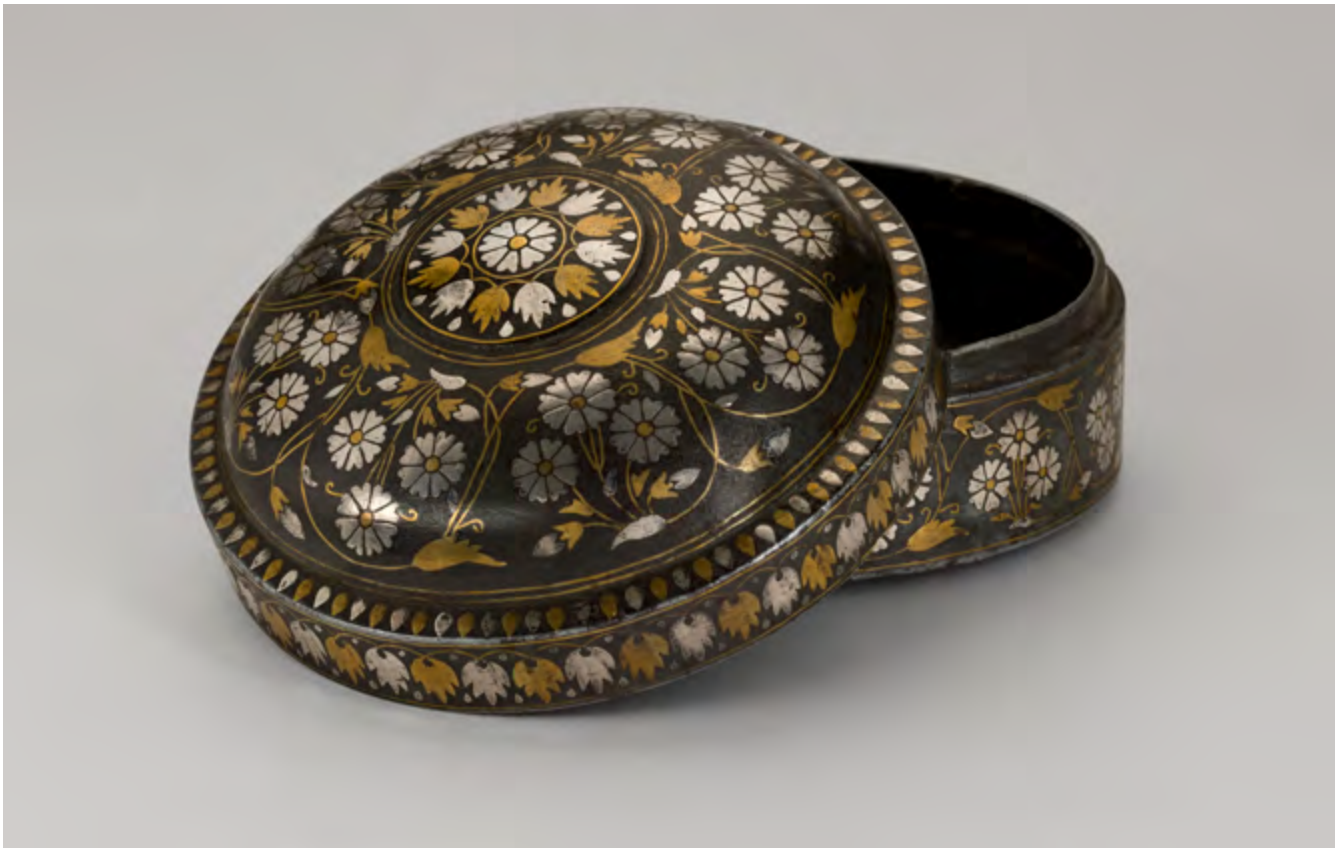
2 Mittal, Jagdish. *Bidri Ware and Damascene Work in Jagdish & Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. Hyderabad: JKMMIA, 2011. P. 15.

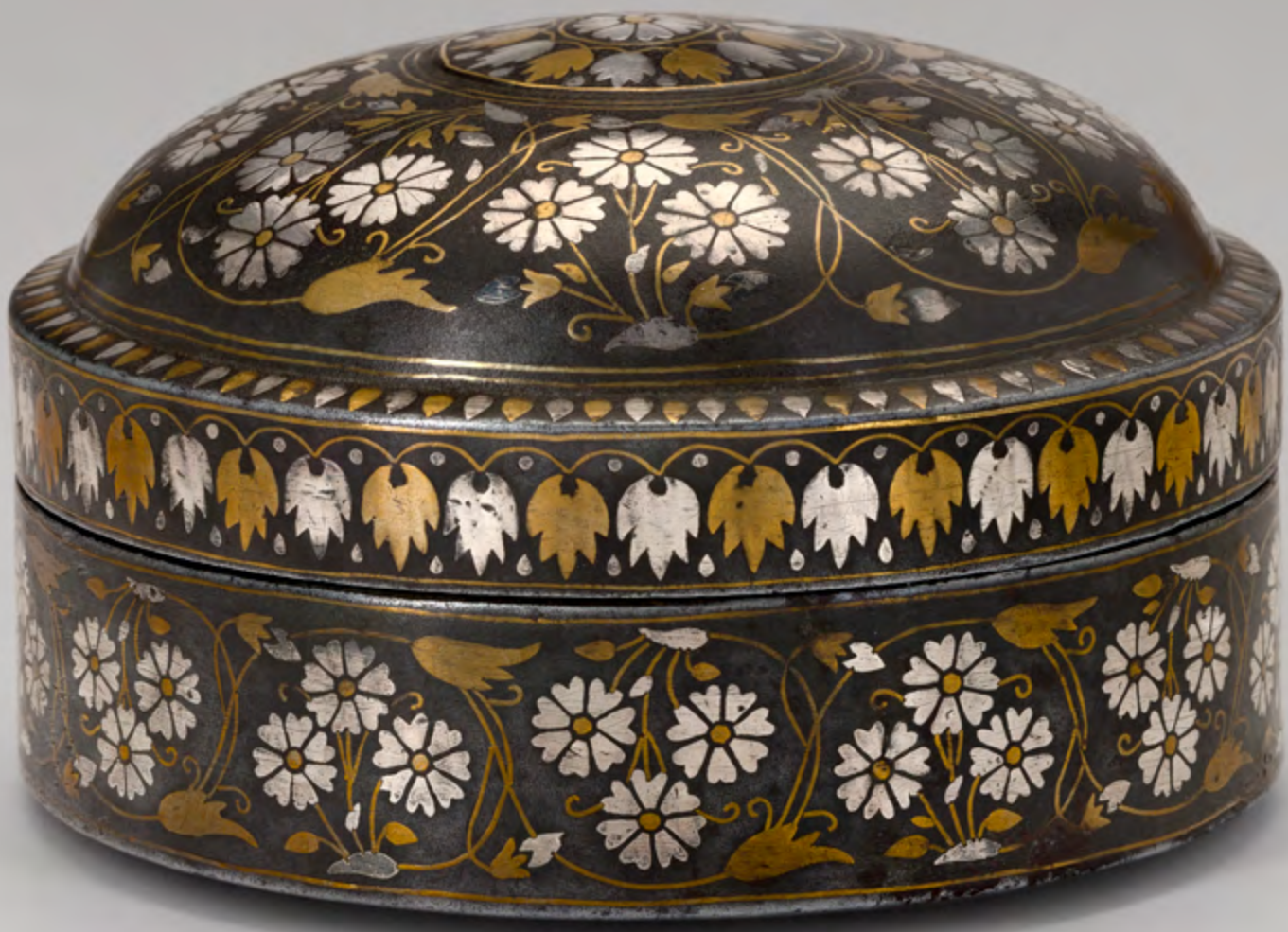
3 Stronge, Susan. op.cit. p. 11.

4 Robert, 'A Decorative Motif in Mughal Art', in Pratapaditya Pal (ed.) *Aspects of Indian Art: Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 1970*.

5 Stronge, Susan. op. cit. p. 9.

6 Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London: 1856. pl. XLIX.



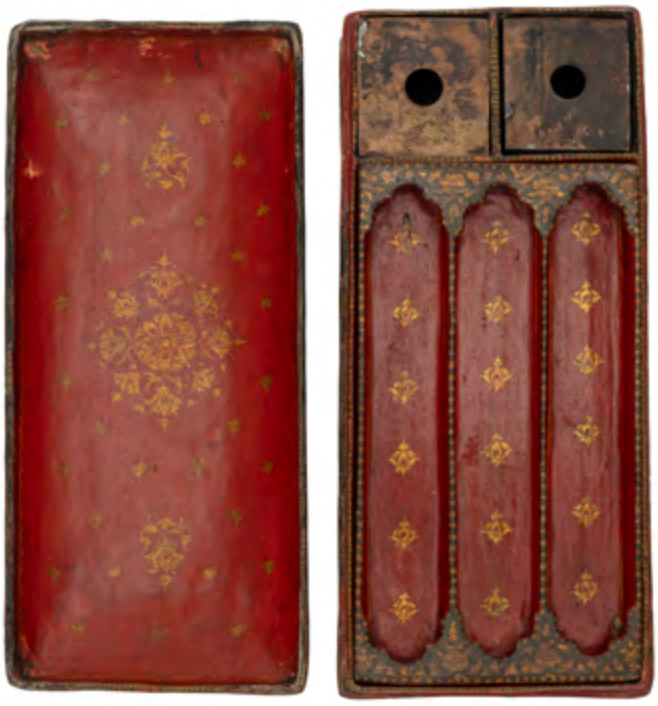


29

Lacquered Pen Box

North India, 19th century

Wood, papier mâché, lacquer
9cm high, 29.5cm wide, 13cm deep



The ornamental pen box (*qalamdan*) originated in Iran, where they were worn on the owner's belt alongside daggers as status symbols.[1] Of oblong form with four small feet, the base of the box is constructed from a low-density wood. This structure is covered in a thin layer of papier mâché, over which paint and lacquer have been applied. The removable pen tray is also made from wood to which paint has been directly applied. It has not been lacquered, nor does it have the fine finish of the rest of the pen box. The lid, whose concave form would have been difficult to construct with wood, has been made entirely from papier mâché. Papier mâché (lit. 'chewed paper') is a technique originating in Iran, entering India via Kashmir in the late 14th century. Legend has it that the Kashmiri prince Zain-ul-Abadin was imprisoned in the Persian city of Samarkand, and having been so impressed with their papier mâché, brought the craft back to his homeland.

The lid and sides of the pen box are richly decorated with a variety of flowers and their leaves including lotus, peonies, catkins, and roses. A pink chrysanthemum at the centre of a polylobed golden rosette forms the focal point of the lid. A single bird is seen amongst the flowers. These flora and fauna are outlined and highlighted with gold. A hidden compartment, decorated with a baroque floral burst and small palmettes, is revealed when both the pen tray and metal inkwells are removed. This motif is echoed on the underside of the box. The similarity of this ornamentation on floral borders of late 18th and early 19th century Mughal calligraphy panels, such as those seen in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession nos IM.11:2-1913 and IM.131-1921) is striking.

On completion of the paintwork, several layers of lacquer varnish have been applied. Much like the effect of East Asian lacquer, this gives depth and sheen to the finish. However, unlike East Asian lacquer, which is derived from the resin of the *Rhus verniciflua* tree, Indian lacquer derives from the secretions of the *Kerria lacca* or *Coccus laccae* insect.[2]

Similar lacquer pen boxes were made in Kashmir due to the influence of Persian art on the region.[3] However, these tend to comprise a single pen and inkwell (see, for example, the one in the Ashmolean EA1966.59). This example, with space for three pens and two removeable inkwells, is far more consistent with Mughal *qalamdans*, like those in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (accession no. M.86.190.3a-d) and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 02549(IS)).

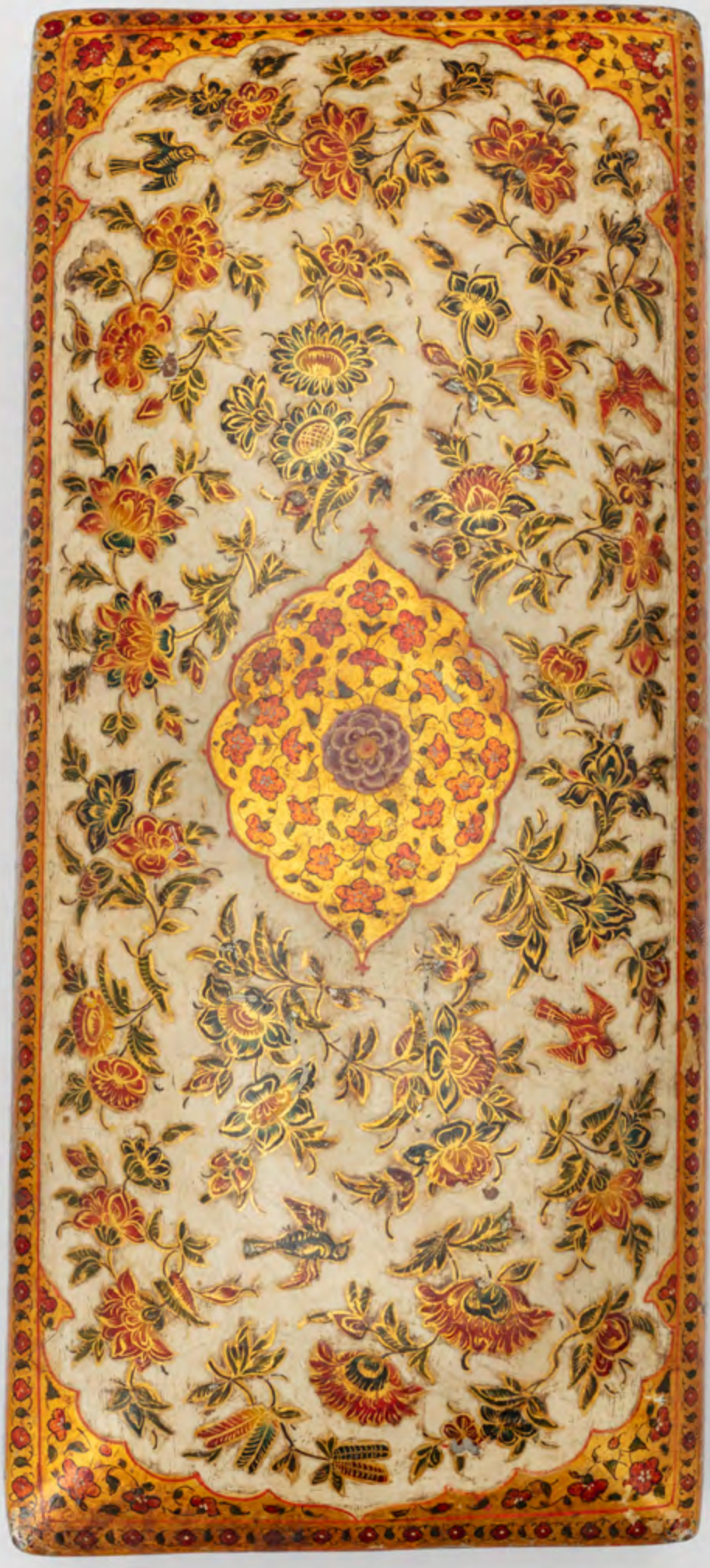
M.L.

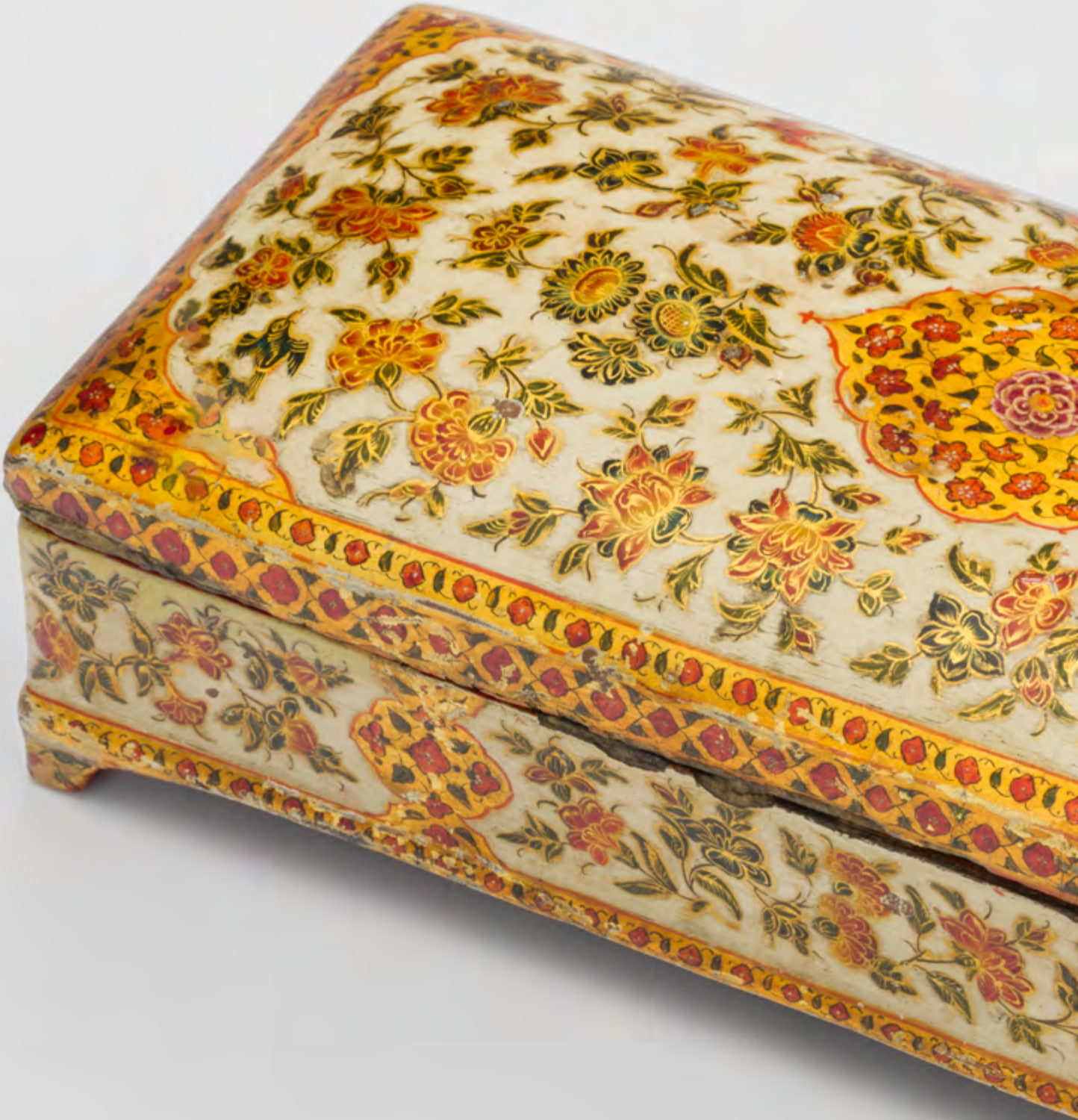
Notes:

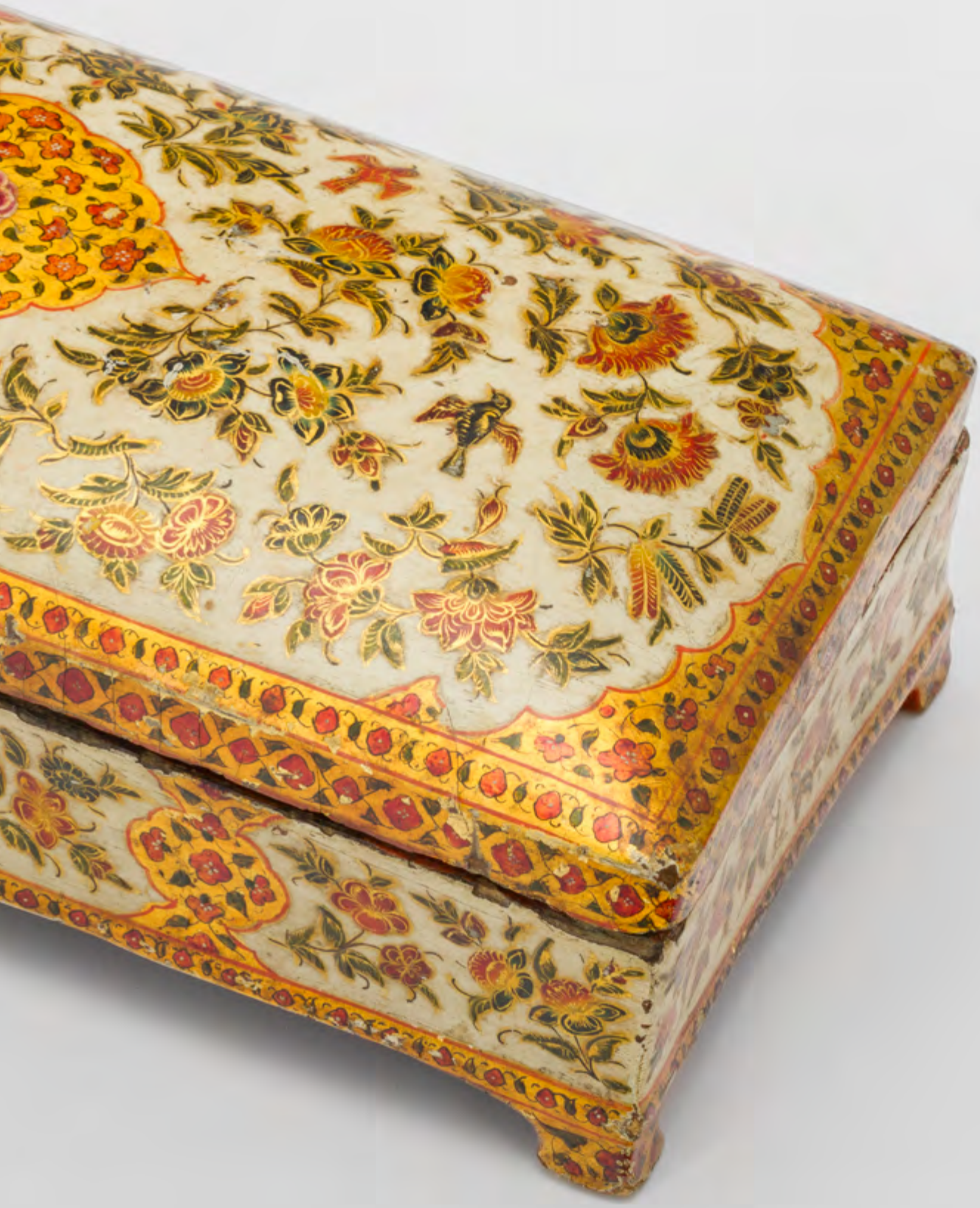
1 Savasere, Renuka. 'Cradle of Craft', *India International Centre Quarterly* 37.3 / 4 (Winter 2010 – Spring 2011). Pp. 286-306; 287.

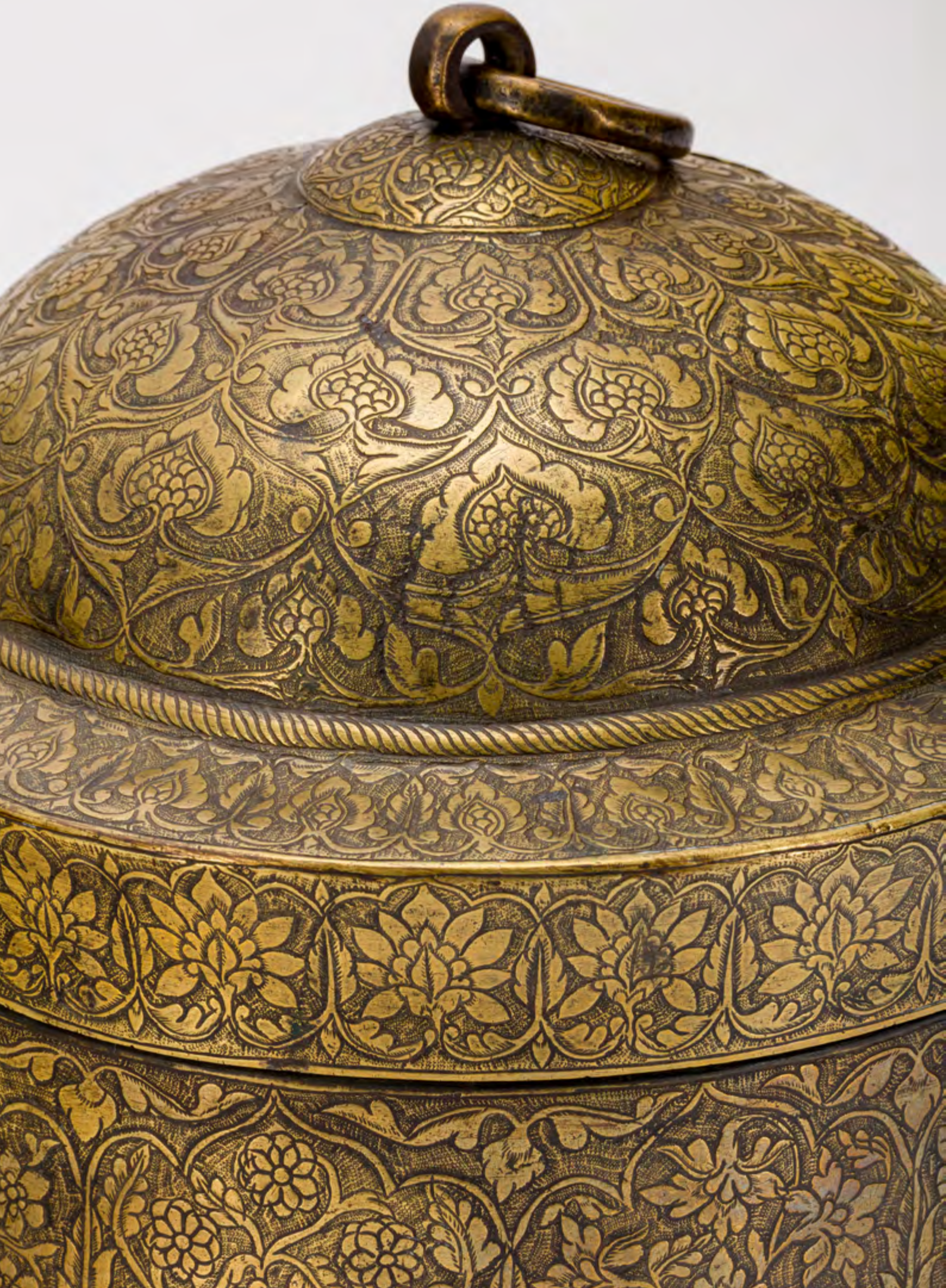
2 Shah, Haku. 'Lacquerwork in India'. In Monika Kopplin (ed.) *Lacquerware in Asia, Today and Yesterday*. Paris: Unesco Publishing, 2002. Pp. 191-203; 191.

3 Shookoohy, Mehrdad. 'Persian Influence on Kashmiri Art', *Encyclopædica Iranica* Vol. XVI, Fasc. 1. Pp. 61-64.









30

Engraved Indian Container

Northern India, 17th Century

Brass
22cm high, 27cm diameter

Provenance: Acquired from the collection of Dr William Ehrenfeld of San Francisco in the 1970s.

A large, richly engraved brass container with a domed lid. On opposing ends are hinges and a clasp to lift the lid. Across the base and lid, floral designs dominate. The body of the container has a repeating pattern of large lobed cartouches filled with branches of flowers. Around the cartouches are vines and scrolls, and each cartouche is separated by five pairs of leaves. Smaller cartouches, each housing a lotus, run across the rim of the lid. The lid, which is topped with a ring, is decorated with a leaf diaper pattern. Brass boxes of this form were typically used as pandans; however, this container is nearly twice the size of those examples.[1] Like a box illustrated in Zebrowski (1997, nos 457a and b), it is possible that this box is so large that it was intended to be a turban box rather than a pandan.[2]

With regards to the decoration of these brass boxes, boxes made for Muslim patrons usually only had vegetal ornamentation whilst, "Hindu patrons – especially those far from the Mughal and Deccani courts – preferred objects decorated with figures."[3] Often, these would depict scenes of Krishna and the *gopis*. Rajasthani boxes frequently depicted animals as well as human figures. Interestingly, although the present example appears to be covered only in floral decoration, on closer inspection a single human figure can be found on the side of the box. Rather than as part of a scene, she is depicted alone, immediately to the left of one of the hinges. The figurative decoration suggests that the box could be Pahari (from the northern Indian hills).

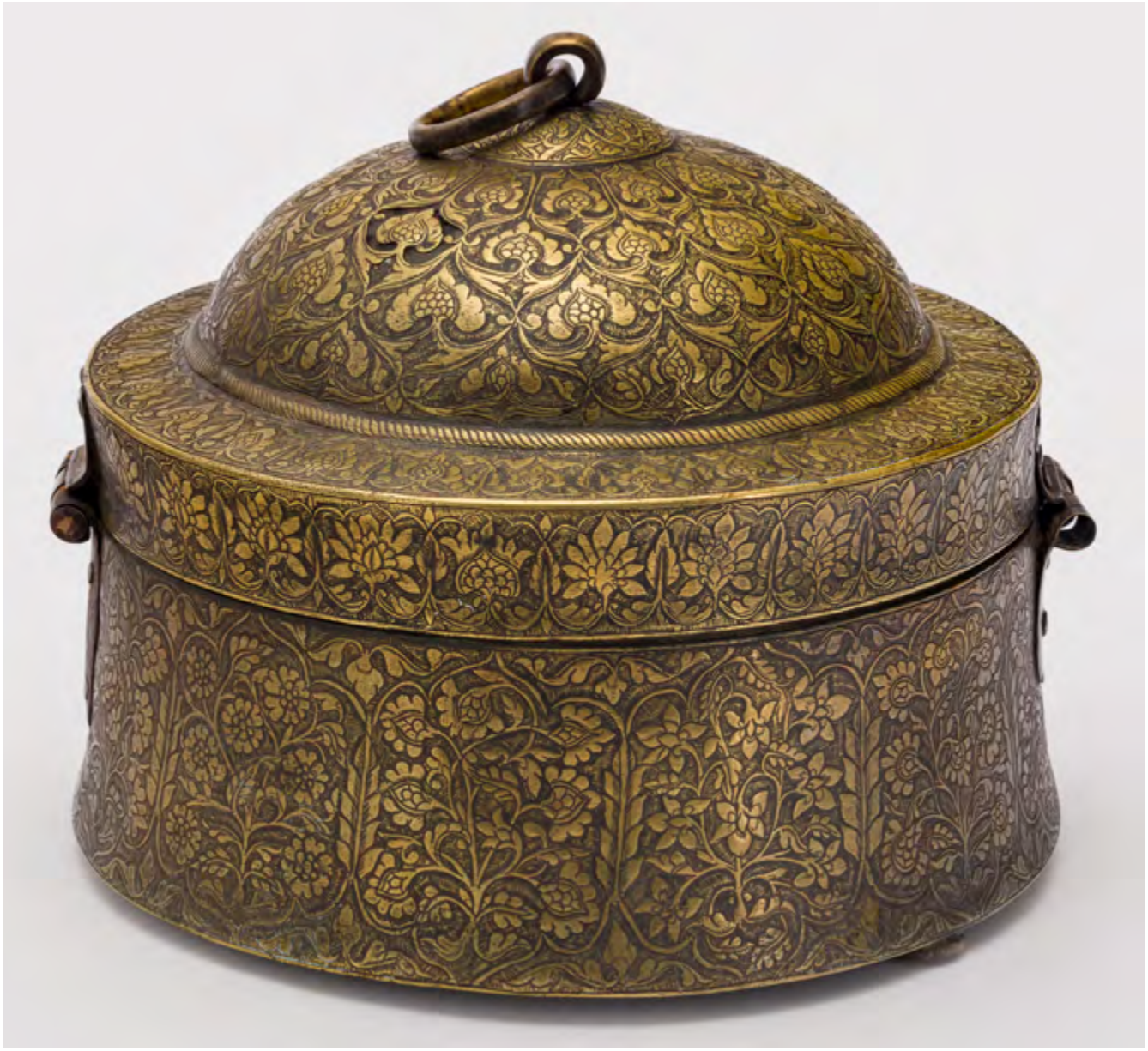
A.S.

Notes:

1 Zebrowski, Mark. *Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India*. London: Alexandria Press in association with Laurence King, 1997. P. 267

2 Ibid. p. 272

3 Ibid. p. 272



31

Bidri Tray

Deccan, India, 18th century

Alloy of copper, lead, zinc, and tin, inlaid with silver (bidri)
25.2cm diameter, 1.6cm deep

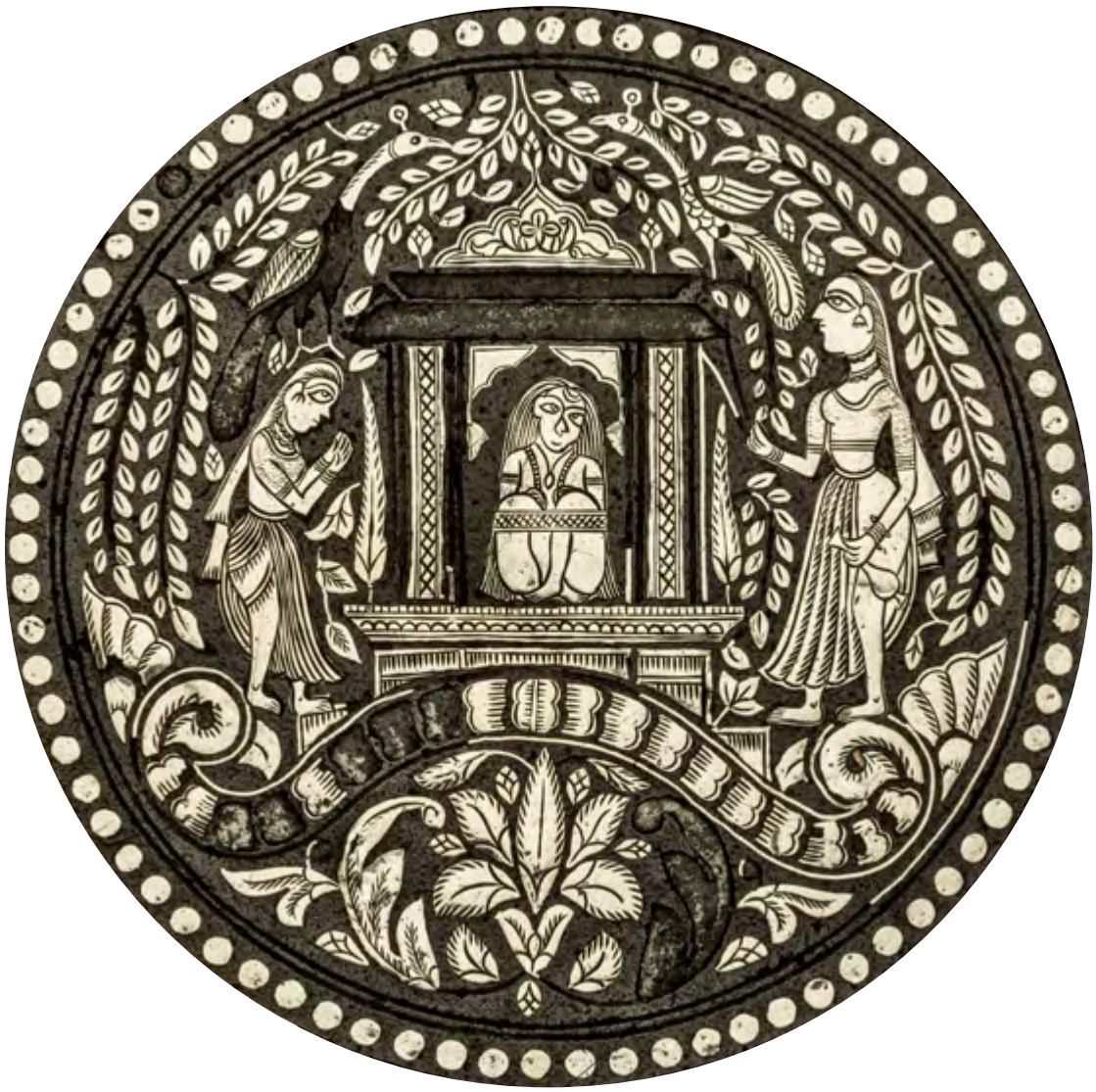
This circular salver has a central design of two women standing on either side of a domed pavilion. One woman is bowing with hands folded while the other holds a vase in one hand and an unidentifiable object in the other. The person inside the pavilion is of unknown identity. The figure has long hair and sits in a manner that appears to be resting their hands on their knees. The figure's legs seem to be bare, with a strip of cross-hatching running across the legs. There are trees, vines, and floral scrolls surrounding the pavilion and the two standing women.

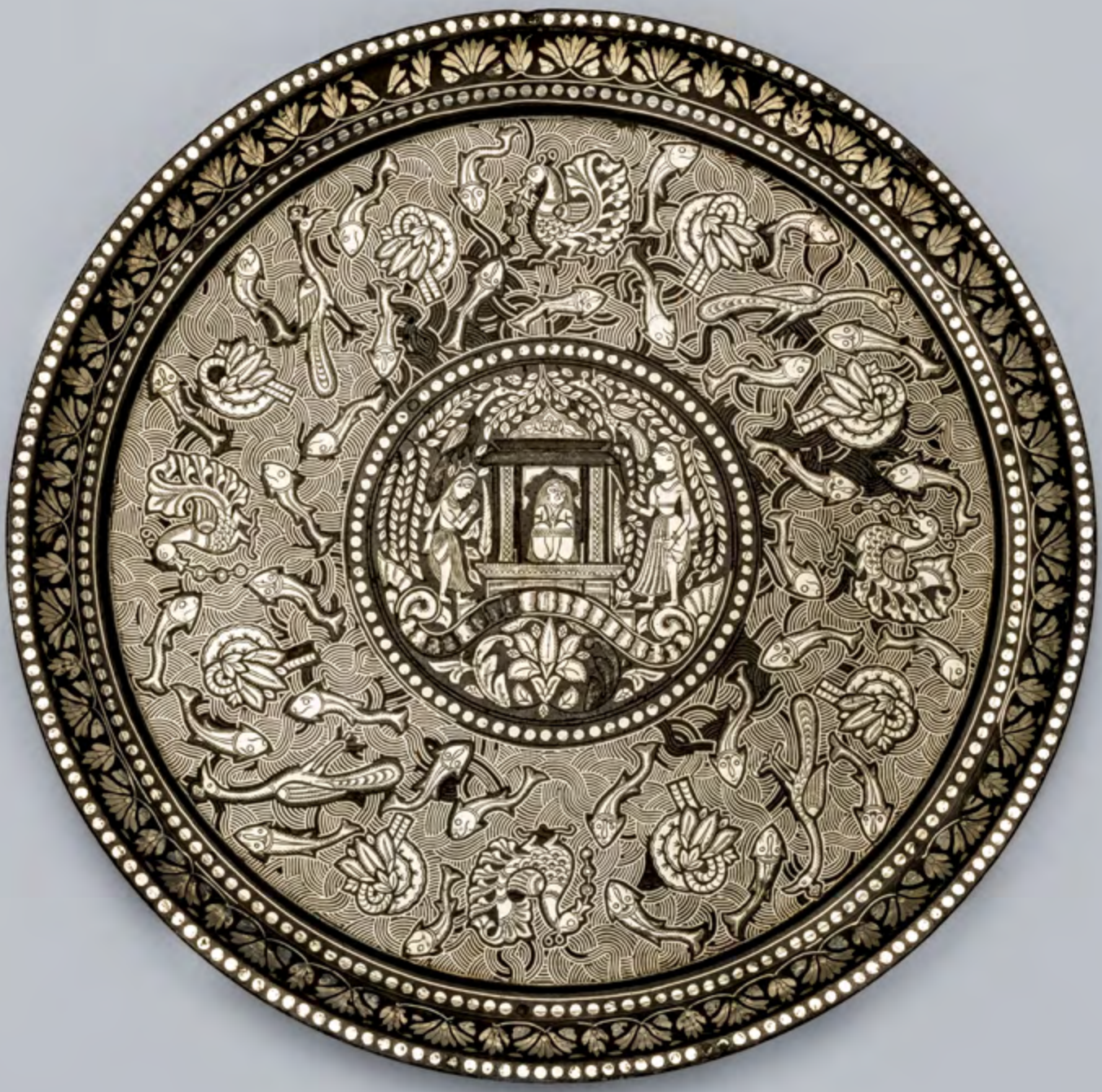
A broad ring surrounds this central design and is richly decorated with the pattern of swirling waves of water. Within the water are depicted several distinct fish, storks, *hamsa* and stylised lotuses in bloom. These are all flora and fauna associated with water. It is thus possible the person in the central design is connected with riverine bodies. Running across the outer rim of the dish is a ring of trefoil motifs. The rim of the dish is decorated with tiny circular silver discs or dots, repeated in two concentric rings. This design is seen on a dish (76.1231 ME.10) and a ewer (accession no. 76.1226 ME.5)[1] in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art as well as on a salver published in Susan Stronge. *Bidri Ware: Inlaid Metalwork from India*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1985, p. 56. The swirling wave pattern with fish and other amphibious creatures with a dotted rim can be seen on a Bidri tray in the Salar Jang Museum, Hyderabad (inv. no. 56.229) and on a tray depicting calmer water and lotus blossoms in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (accession no. M.89.19). Fish have been incorporated into Bidri design in many instances including the one mentioned earlier as well as a fish-shaped box in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 19.135.15a, b) which is decorated with a similar style of whiskers and face as those in the present dish.

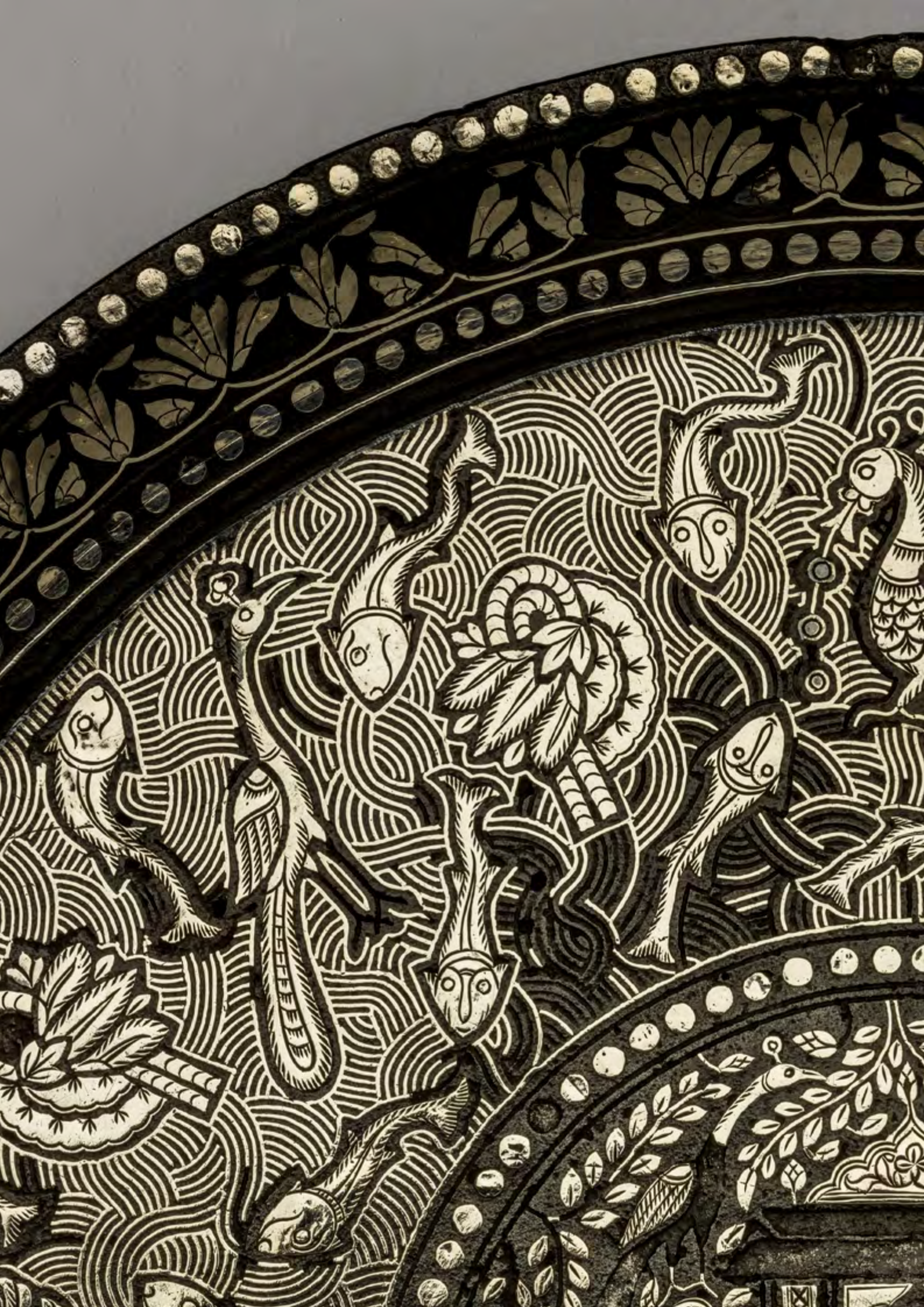
A.S.

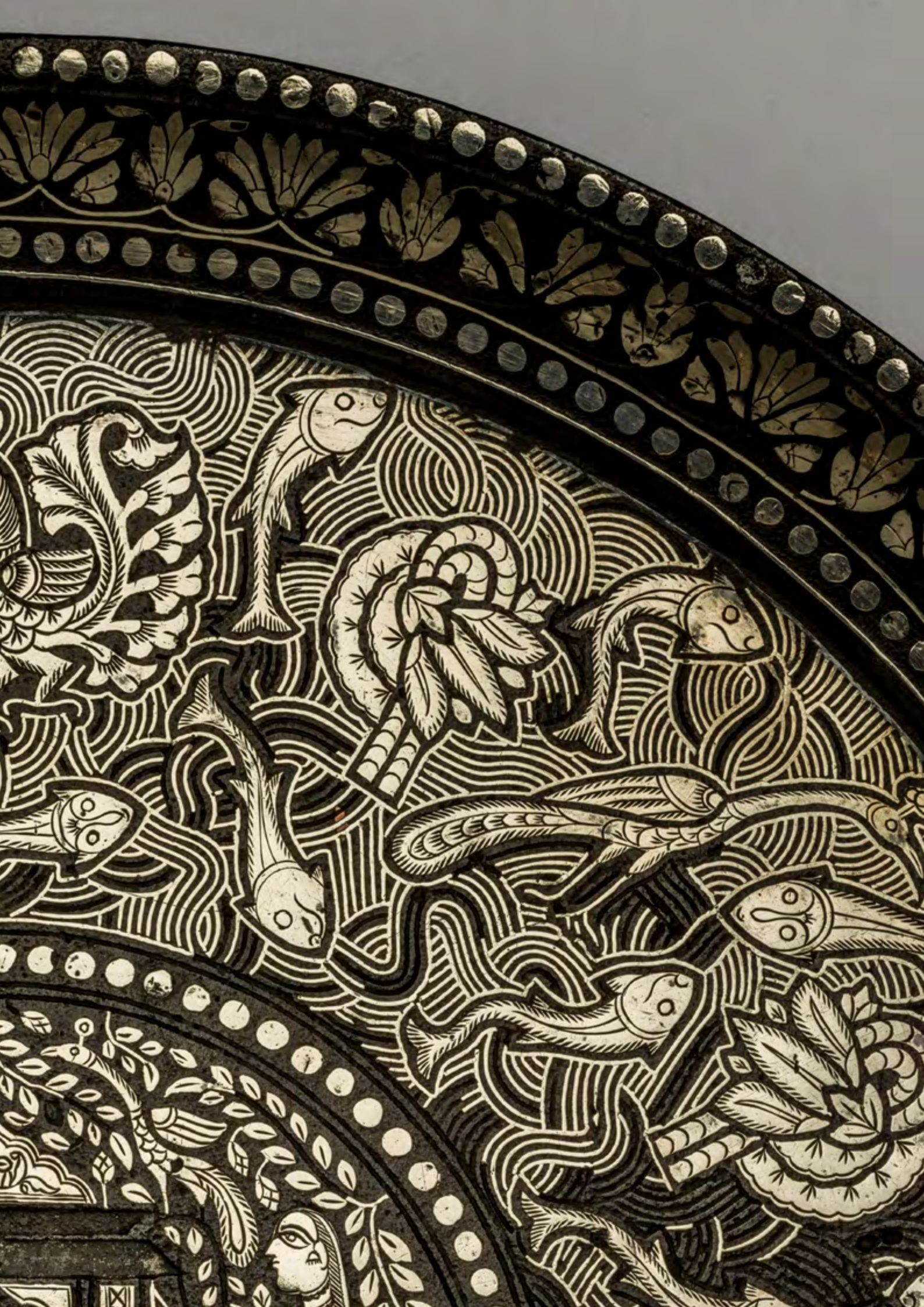
Notes:

1 Mittal, Jagdish. *Bidri Ware and Damascene Work in Jagdish & Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. Hyderabad: 2011. pp. 58-59, pp. 68-69.









32

South Indian Carved Box

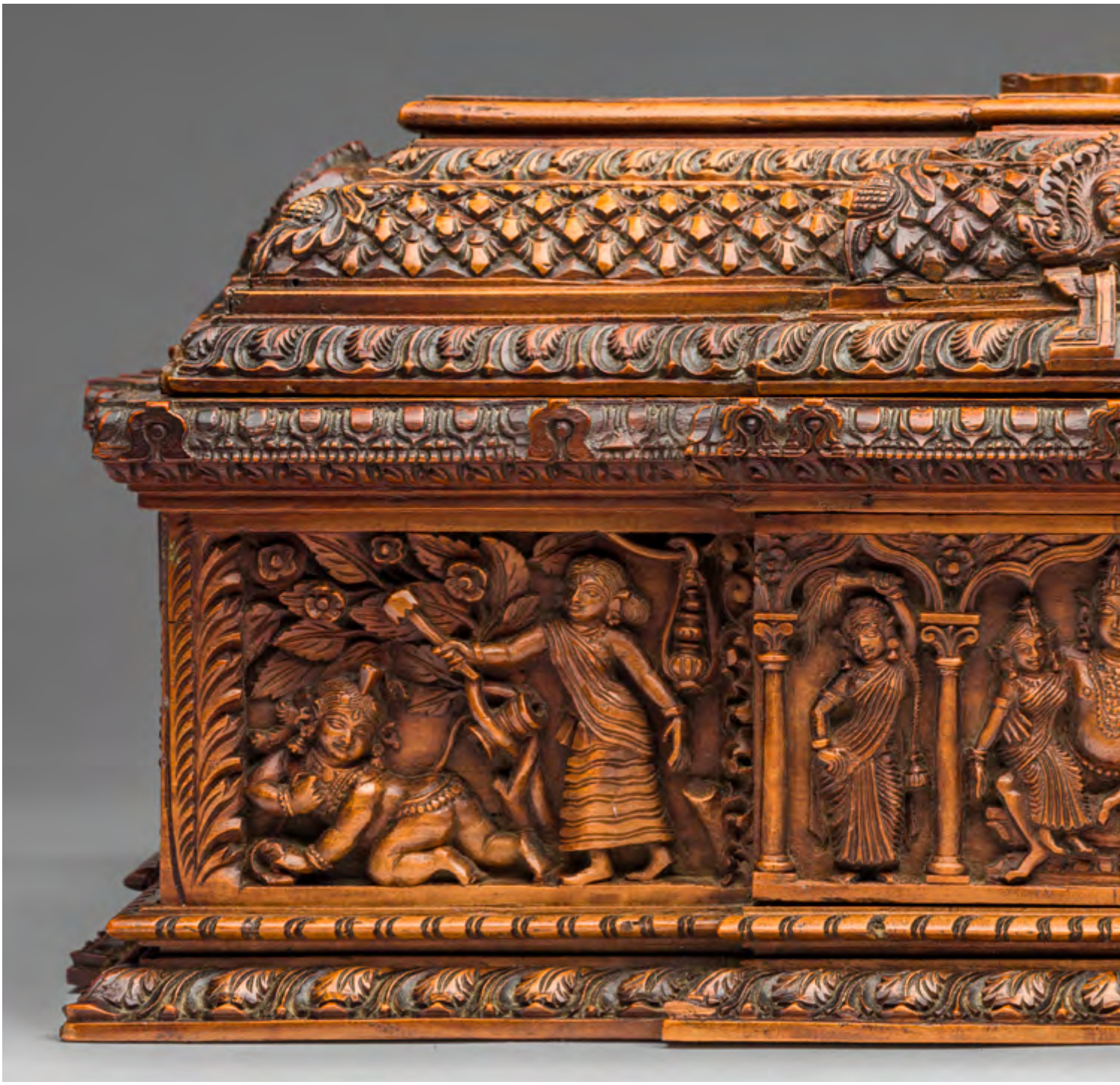
South India, possibly Mysore, 19th century

Wood
19cm high, 43.5cm wide, 32.5cm deep

Provenance: French private collection.

A wooden box richly carved with scenes from Hindu mythology, with structural elements reminiscent of South Indian temple architecture. The lid is carved with swirling, floral and vegetal ornamentation. At the centre, a raised monogrammed plaque reads "SPB" and features a small fleur-de-lys. This European heraldic element suggests a colonial commissioner, perhaps a member of the British East India Company. The back of the box is decorated with a full panel of high-relief flowers, vines, leaves, a squirrel, and a bird. The other three sides depict scenes from the life of Krishna.

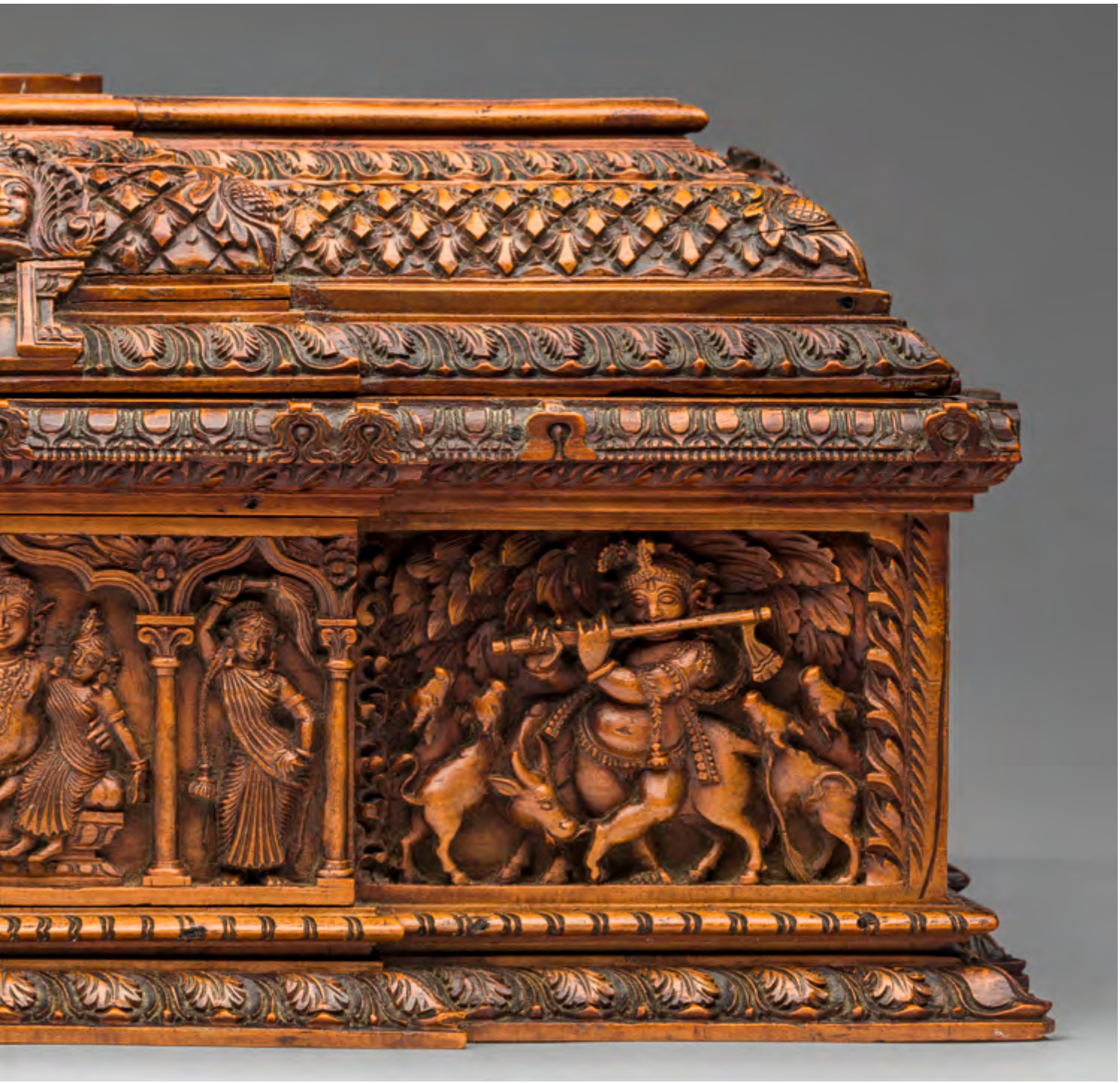
On the front, the middle panel shows Krishna seated and holding his two wives, flanked by two attendants standing near the pillars in the palace. The panel to the left shows *Balakrishna* or young Krishna in the *Makhanchor* or butter-stealing scene, where his mother Yashoda catches him eating freshly churned butter from a pot. They are surrounded by flowers and tendrils. The panel to the right shows him as Govardhan, playing the flute amongst the cows. The central panel on the right side of the box shows the scene of Krishna stealing the *gopis*' clothes and hiding in a tree while they appeal to him to give them back. The panel to its right depicts Yashoda feeding the child Krishna while the

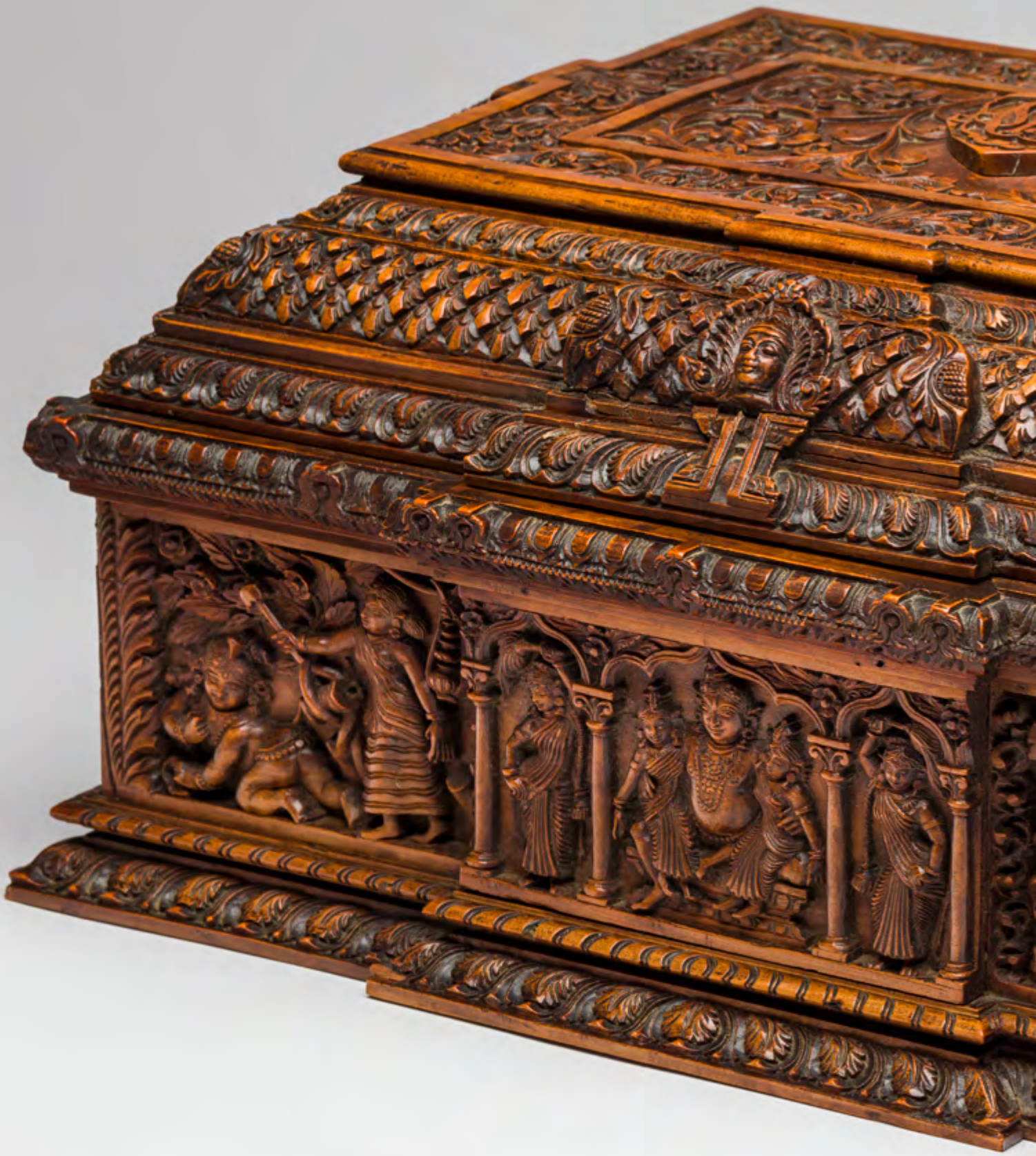


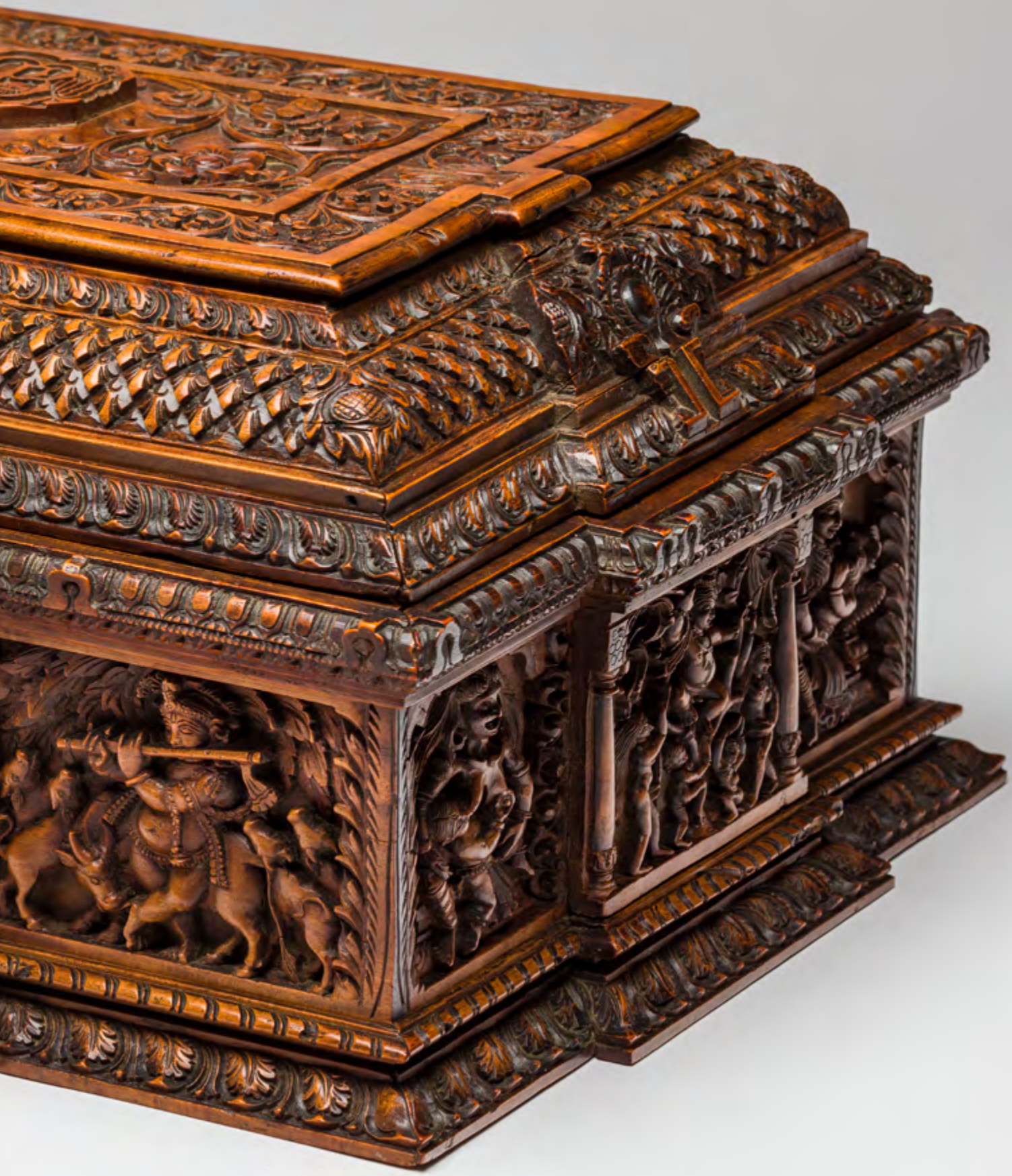
one on the left shows the demoness Putana, sent by Krishna's uncle to kill Krishna, being drained of her life when she tried to poison the baby Krishna by breastfeeding him, only to fail and be killed instead. On the left side of the box, the central panel appears to depict Krishna atop the snake Kaliya's head while his wives beg Krishna for his mercy. The panel to the left shows a seated Krishna with the hood of *sheshnag* above him, possibly to highlight the link between Krishna and Vishnu. The panel to the right shows a seated Krishna within a room with an arch above him, while an attendant holds a peacock by his side.

The tiered lid of the box, with floral and vegetal carving at each level, resembles a South Indian temple *gopuram*. The three protruding niches at the centre of the three narrative sides of the box are reminiscent of *deva koshtas*, which house carved deities on the outer wall of temples. Above the niche on the front of the box is the carved face of a god with an arching headdress design. The spaces above the other three niches have merely the carved arched design over them. When the lid is placed on the box, these central raised sections line up with the central section of each panel of the box, enhancing the architectural theme and giving it a strong appearance of a temple design. Three large sandalwood models of Indian temples, with a similar tiered structure and carvings of Hindu Gods surrounded by flowers and plants, are in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. IM.6-1926). They were acquired by the British engineer John Alfred Jones when he was working in the Madras Presidency in South India.

A.S. & M.L.







33

Company School Painting of a Spotted Dove (*Cheetal Purdook*)

India, c. 1800

Gouache on paper
56.5cm high, 46.5cm wide

Provenance: Purchased from Toby Falk in 1975.
UK private collection.

A highly detailed painting of an Indian Spotted Dove perching on a branch, inscribed above with the English 'Species of Dove...' and below with 'Cheetul Pundook', a rough approximation of the species name in Hindi, चतिरोख या चत्रिपक्षपण्डुक (Chitarokh Pundook).[1] Spotted doves (*Spilopelia chinesis*) are a small bird in the family *columbidae* native to the Indian subcontinent, most recognisable for their white-spotted black collar patch, from which their name derives.[2] The bird has been painted with gouache on European cartridge paper, watermarked with a fleur-de-lys and the letters GR, the cipher of King George III (r. 1760-1820).

Company paintings were so-called because they were commissioned by the members of the British East India Company, documenting the new flora and fauna they encountered in India to send home.[3] The artists were local Indians, whose names have generally been lost in favour of the commissioning Company men and women. As the first capital of British India, Calcutta was one of the early production centres. Calcutta School avifauna paintings can be distinguished by the absence of background or shadows cast by the birds, as well as the great attention paid to the plumage. Artists were hired to paint the menageries and botanical gardens of wealthy patrons like Lord Impey, Chief Justice of the High Court, and the Marquess Wellesley, Governor General.[4] This painting comes from an album of bird paintings commissioned by a wealthy British patron. Other pages, including studies of a swift in flight, a woodpecker, a grey-headed myna, and an unidentified black bird, have been sold at auction over the past decade. The Calcutta School was, however, short lived, dwindling when photography was introduced to India in the early 1840s.

M.L.

Notes:

1 With thanks to Ananya Sharma.

2 Ali, Salim, and Ripley S. Dillon. *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, Together with Those of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Ceylon*. Vol. 3. 10 vols. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. 152-153.

3 Sardar, Marika. 'Company Painting in Nineteenth-Century India.' In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2004.

4 Ibid.


Species of Dove...
Chutul Pundook..


Totee

34

Company School Painting of a Cuckoo, Labelled *Totee*

India, c. 1800

Gouache on paper
56.5cm high, 46.5cm wide

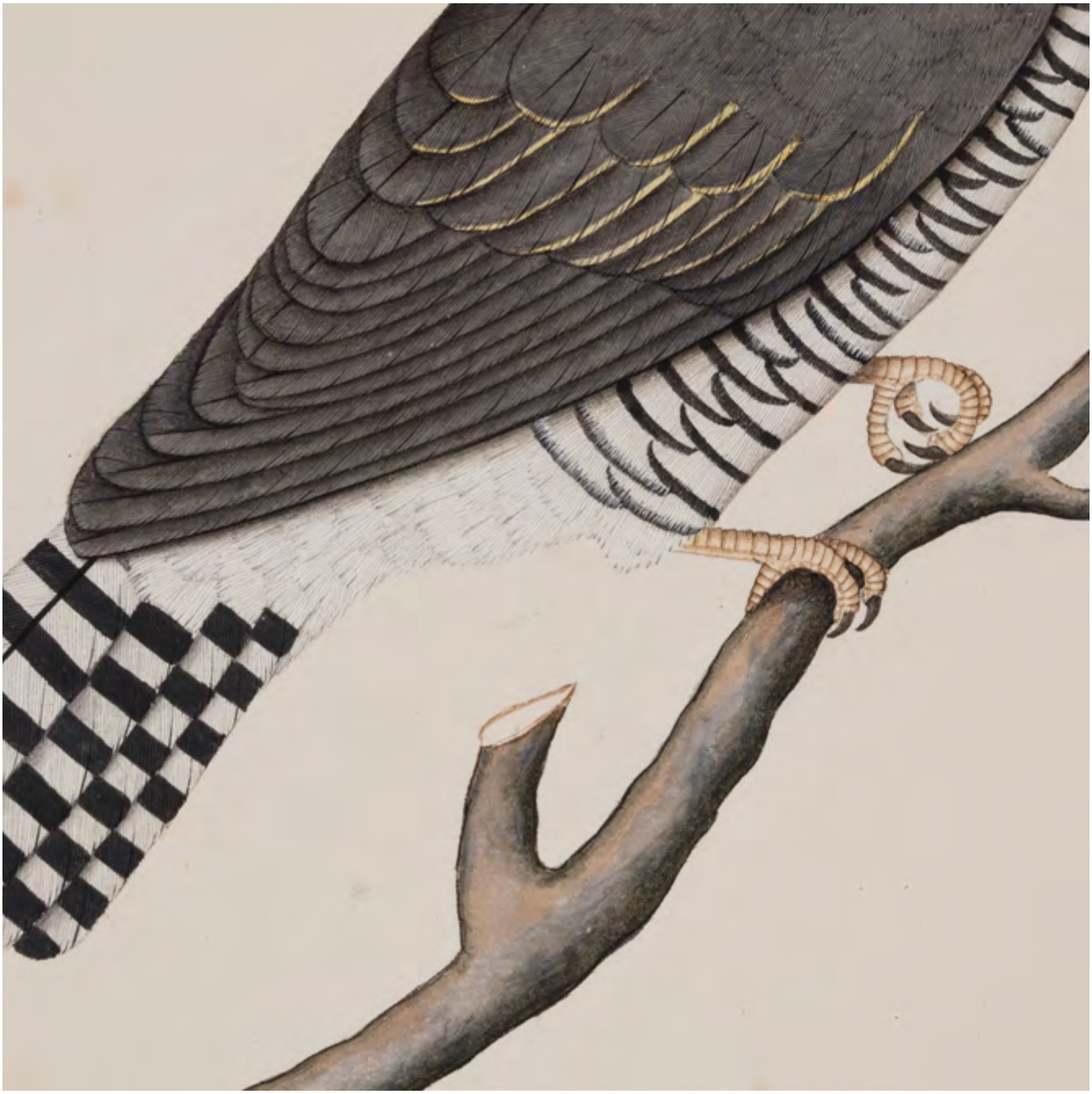
Provenance: Purchased from Toby Falk in 1975.
UK private collection.

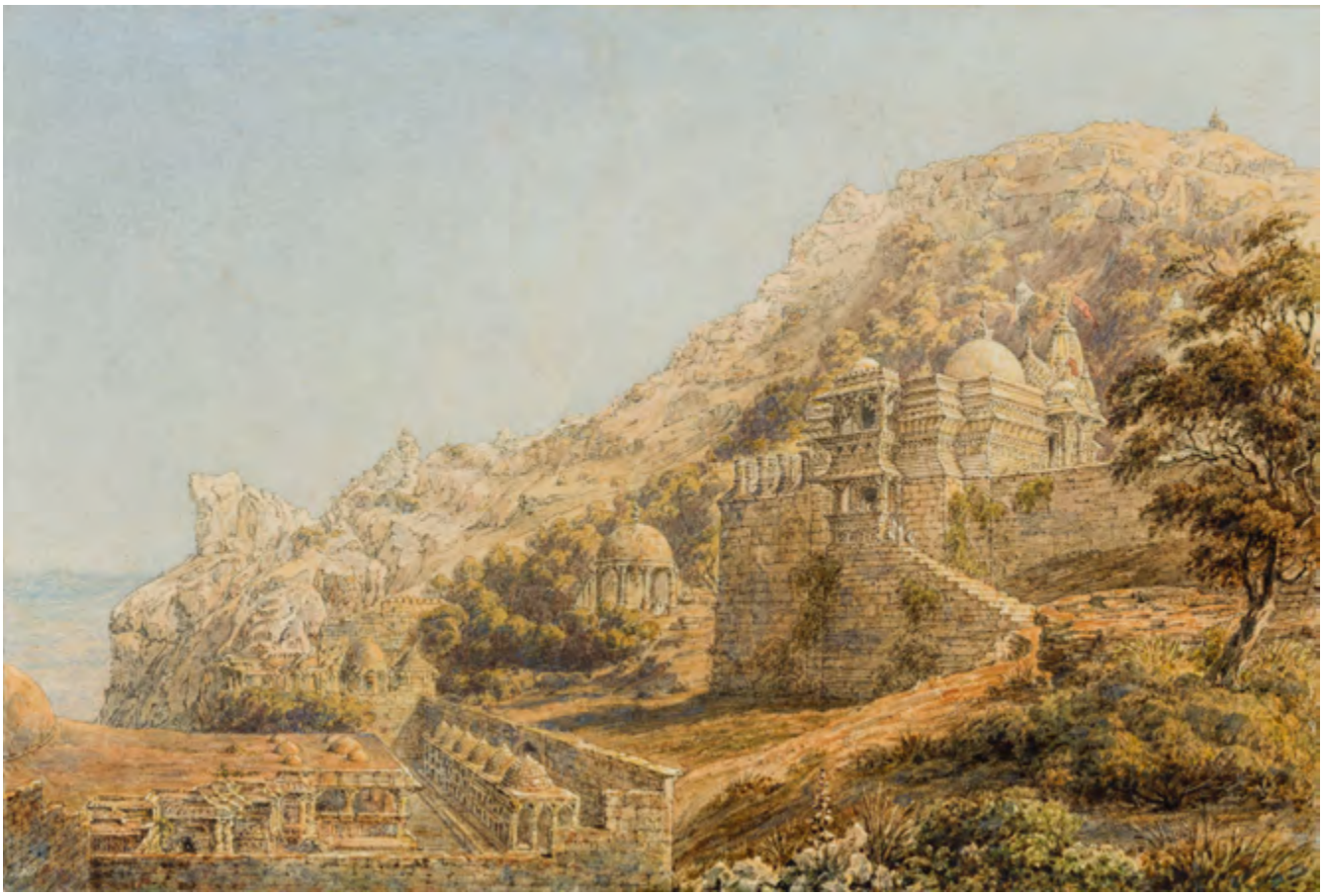
Though it is rather charmingly labelled 'Totee', a transliteration of the Hindi word तोता meaning 'parrot', this painting depicts a member of the cuckoo family. Several members of the Cuculidae family native to India, including the Himalayan (*Cuculus saturatus*), Oriental (*C. optatus*), and Indian Cuckoos (*C. micropterus*), feature black barring on white breasts and black banding on their tail feathers.[1] All of these species are, however, solitary birds, found in hilly wooded areas, suggesting that the artist drew from a captive bird rather than a wild one. The bird is painted with gouache on European cartridge paper, watermarked with a fleur-de-lys and the letters GR, the cipher of George III (r. 1760-1820). Particularly fine brushwork can be observed under the chin of the cuckoo, where a single strand of hair has been used to paint fine ruffled feathers. The cuckoo's left foot is raised, and the middle toe of its right foot is lifted off the branch, as if ready to take flight.

M.L.

Notes:

1 Ali, Salim, and Ripley S. Dillon. *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, Together with Those of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Ceylon*. Vol. 3. 10 vols. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. 204-215.





35

Watercolour of a View of Chittorgarh Fort

William Simpson
Rajasthan, India, 19th century

Watercolour on paper
14.5cm high, 21.5cm wide

A scene depicting a view of the famous fort at Chittor, Rajasthan. The fort stands on a hill and acted as a palace complex; it also served as the capital of Mewar. Within the fort lie several temples and water tanks. This watercolour pays close attention to the architectural structures whilst also depicting the landscape in an evocative way. The fortress walls above and the recessed temple structure below highlight the fact that the structure is built on a hill. The intricate detail of the stonework of the walls and the *chattris* (cupolae), as well as the texture of the rock face is worthy of attention.

Although the watercolour is not signed, the style of painting closely resembles that of the Scottish artist William Simpson, who was born in Glasgow on 28 October 1823. Simpson's London employers, the lithography firm Day and Sons, commissioned him to travel around India sketching well-known sites. He spent time in and around Delhi in 1857, sketching battle damage inflicted during the Siege of Delhi. He arrived in Calcutta in 1859, travelling widely before returning to London in 1862. In his autobiography, there is a mention of him going to Rajasthan (Rajpootana), first to Udaipur (Oodeypore) and then to Chittorgarh (Chittore Ghur). He described the latter saying, "this place is all Hindu architecture" and refers to the "flat topped hills."[1] It is thus possible that this watercolour was inspired by a visit to the famous fort in Chittor.

Other Simpson paintings and watercolours from this time, in his inimitable style, can be viewed in the Victoria & Albert Museum. The highly detailed architectural work in combination with the slightly grainy texture created with very wet paint is mirrored in a painting of the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora (accession no. 1167-1869). A series of landscapes shows very similar attention to the rocky outcrops (accession nos D.630-1900 and D.628-1900).

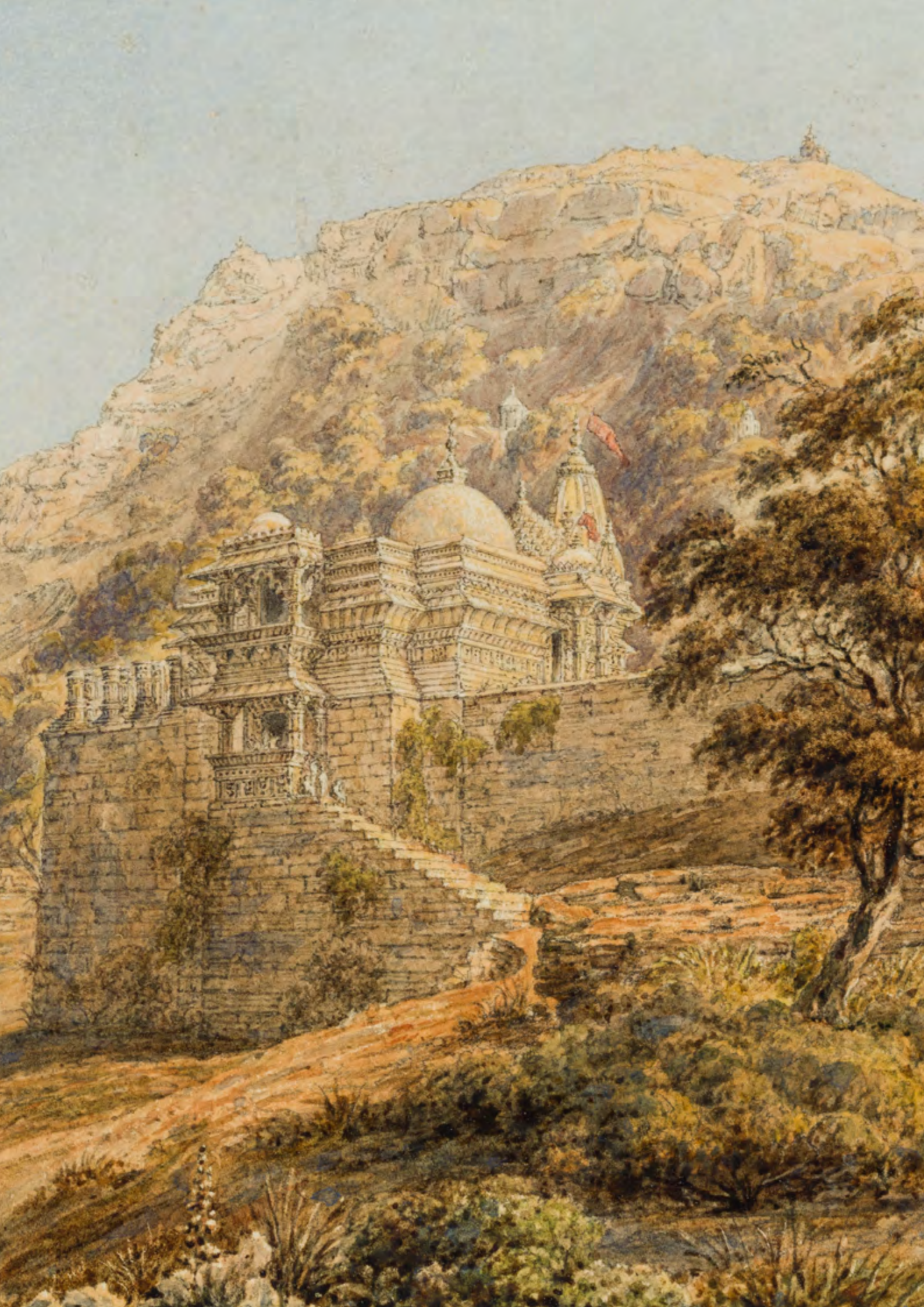
Though this watercolour is unsigned and undated, of Simpson's 248 recognised works, 35 have no signature, and a further 19 have neither date nor signature. Amongst these are a series of watercolours completed during his travels in India, including studies of members of the Bengal Infantry and Cavalry, a view of the Malabar Hill in Bombay (Mumbai), and a painting of Agra Fort. Furthermore, he documented the British Eclipse Expedition at Bekal, in a dated, but unsigned sketch of 1871.[2]

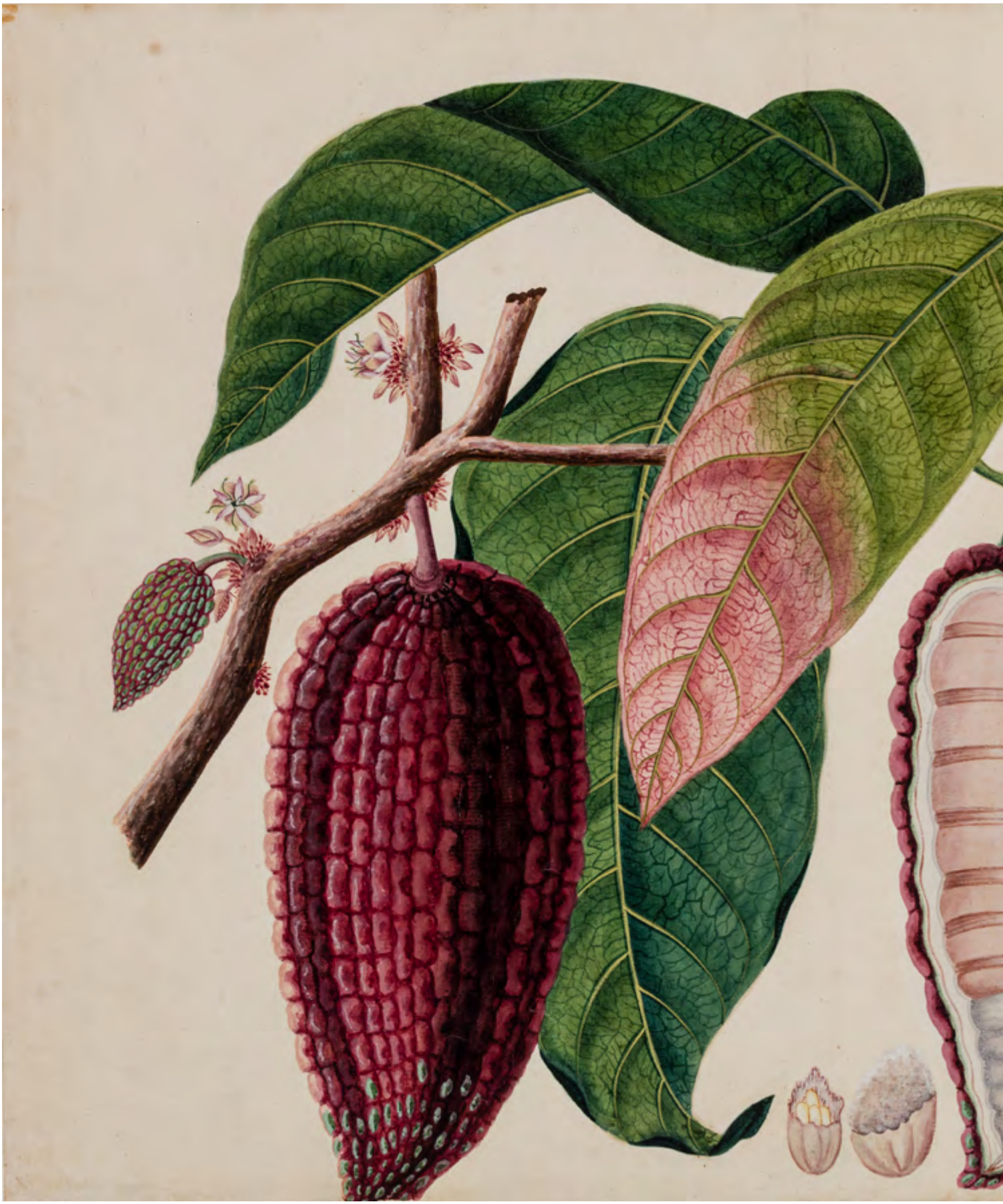
A.S. & M.L.

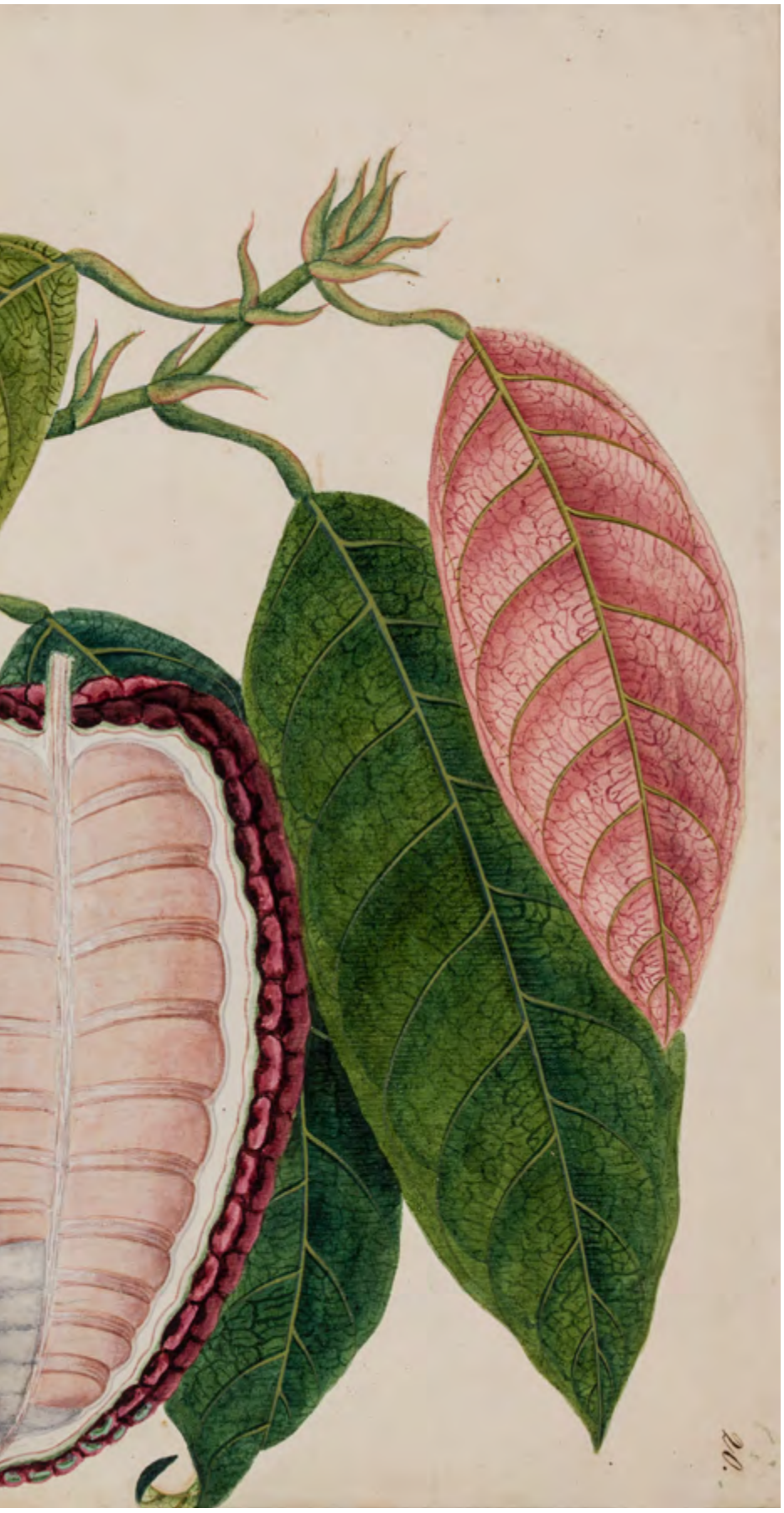
Notes:

1 Simpson, William. *The Autobiography of William Simpson*, RI. Edited by George Eyre-Todd. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903. pp. 139-140

2 'William Simpson list of paintings', The Mitchell Library, retrieved from https://libcat.csglasgow.org/documents/836643/988153/William+Simpson+Collection+list+of+paintings/ccb0355a-4147-42f8-a1e0-5d0ed4f41d64 on 9/11/23.







36

Study of Cocoa Pods and Leaves (*Theobroma cacao*)

Malay Peninsula, c. 1805–1825

Watercolour and gouache over pencil
on European paper
36cm high, 48cm wide

Provenance: UK private collection
for at least 30 years.

Cultivated by the Mayans and the Aztecs for its edible fruit, the cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*) was brought from Central America to Southeast Asia by Spanish galleons. Though it was successfully cultivated earlier in the Philippines, the first recorded cacao trees in the Malay peninsula were in Malacca in 1788, quickly followed by Penang in 1802.[1]

This study is painted in watercolour and gouache over a pencil outline, probably darkened with thick acacia gum. It was painted on European cartridge paper, watermarked on the right-hand side with a large shield containing a fleur-de-lys topped with a crown, and on the left, a date beginning '18-'. Intended to aid scientific study rather than to be enjoyed for their aesthetic appeal, paintings like this accompanied samples of indigenous plants collected by European botanists in colonised territories back to the universities and botanical gardens of Europe. For this reason, the painting is highly detailed, including the veins of the leaves and stamens of the flowers.

Though the *mise-en-scène* of this painting looks natural, the composition has been carefully considered so that the plant is shown at all stages of its life. Three stages of the leaf's maturity are shown, from the vibrant pink juvenile leaf to the mature deep green leaf. To the left of the image, tiny pink buds and fully-bloomed blossoms show the life cycle of the cacao flower. The cacao fruit, or pod, is shown in its juvenile state, with vibrant turquoise nodules. The focal point of the painting is two mature pods, one with its casing intact and the other bisected so that its inner flesh is visible. Between the two pods are the seeds, for which the cacao plant is cultivated.

Variations of this image exist in several important collections of botanical paintings, notably the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings at the National Museum of Singapore (accession no. 1995-03021), the Wellesley Collection at the British Library (accession no. NHD 17.28), and the Court Collection at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.[2] Most similar of all is a study of a cacao plant in the Raffles Collection (British Library, accession no. NHD 48.35), in which almost all elements are positioned and proportioned identically to those in the present example. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was a British colonial administrator who governed several regions in Southeast Asia in the early 19th century. From 1805 to 1807 he was stationed in the government of Prince of Wales Island (Penang), one of the early sites of cacao trees in Asia. Most of the paintings in the Raffles Collection were commissioned whilst Raffles was Governor of Bencoolen (Bengkulu) in Sumatra, to replace an earlier collection lost at sea in 1824.[3] Since the present example is so close to the painting of cacao in the Raffles collection, it is likely that it was created in the same workshop, contemporaneously either to the original collection c. 1805-1910 or the replacement set c.1824.

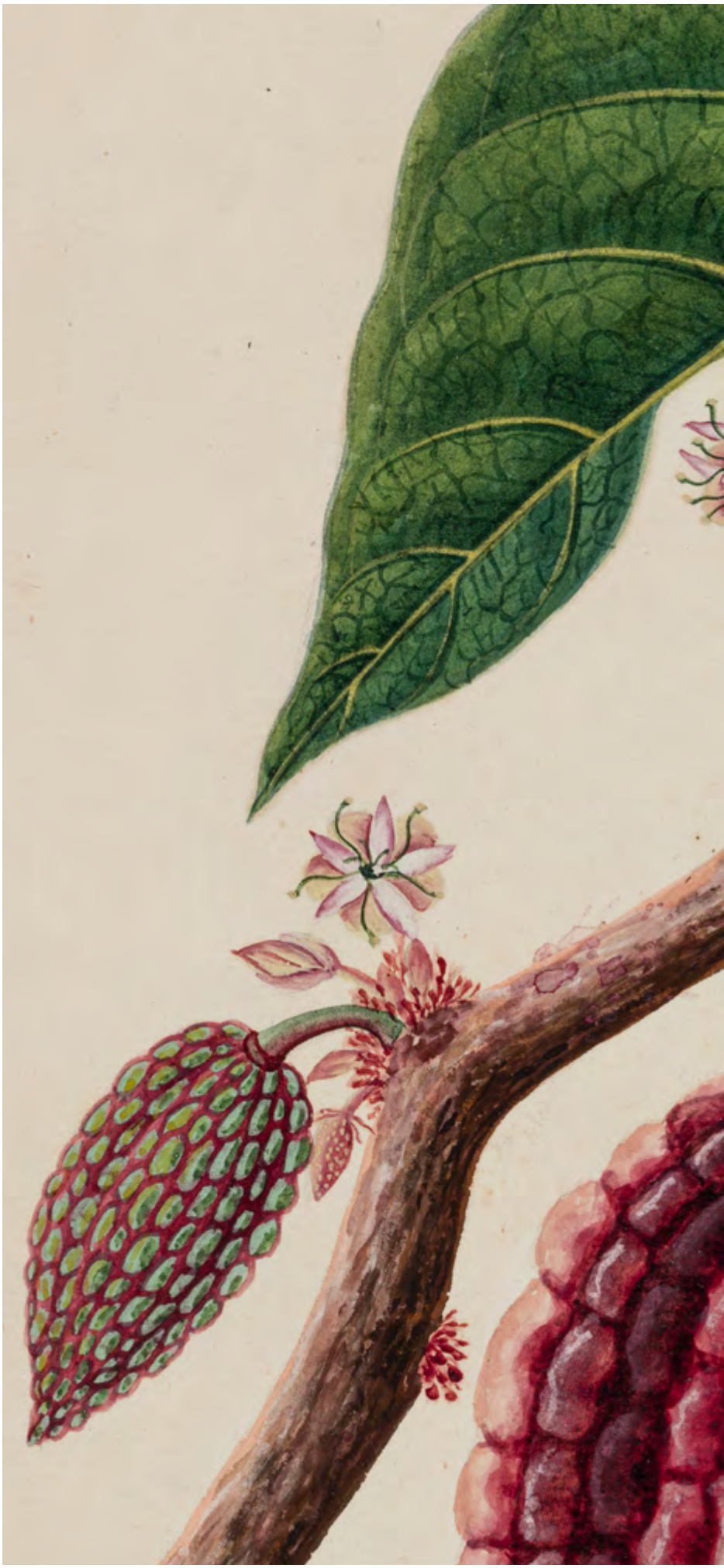
M.L.

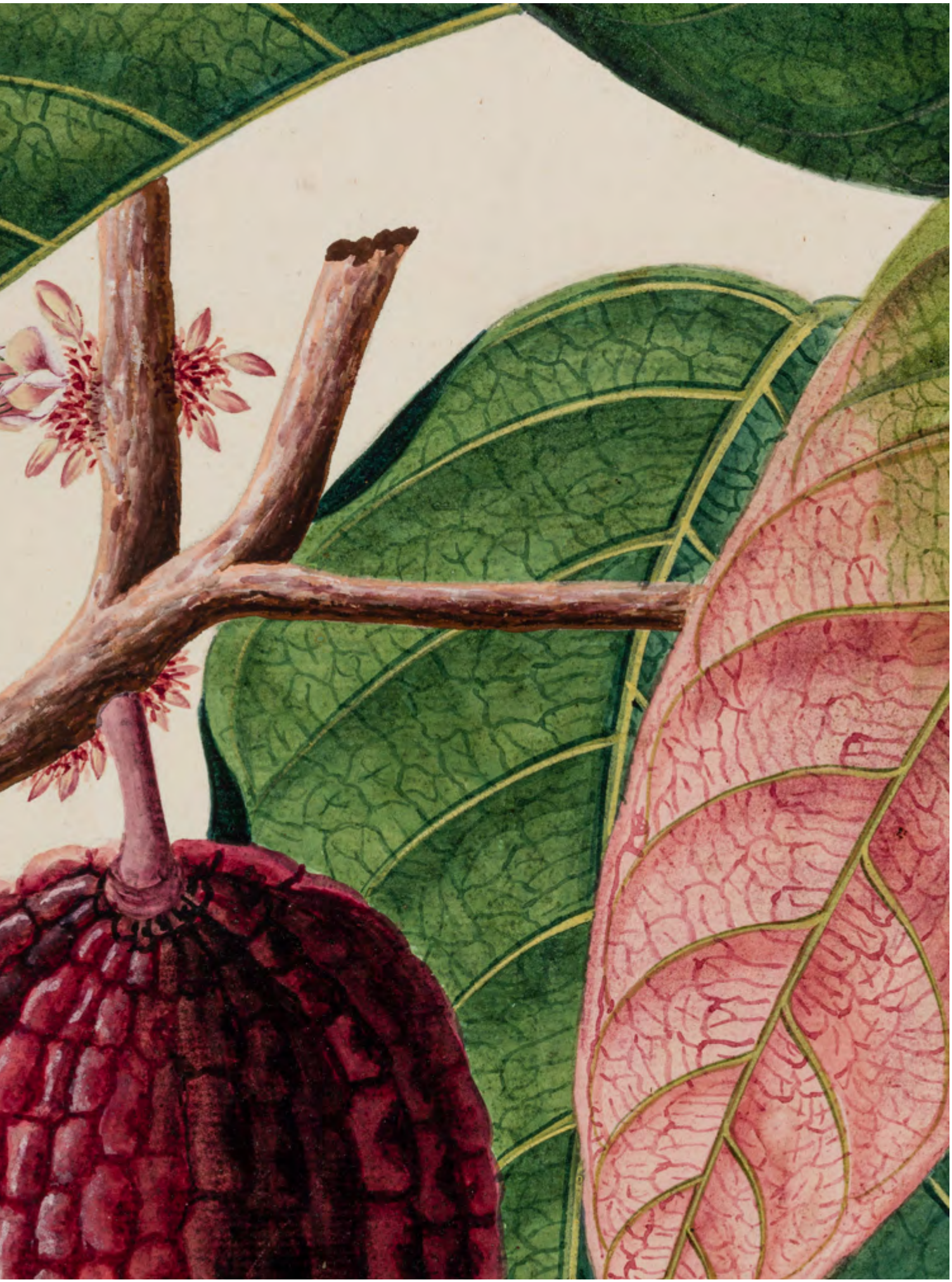
Notes:

1 Noltie, H. J. *Raffles' Ark Redrawn: Natural History Drawings from the Collection of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*. London: The British Library & The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, 2009. p. 124.

2 Pictured in Noltie. Op. cit. p. 13. Fig. 3.

3 'Collection of Drawings and Watercolours from the Raffles Family Collection', *Art Fund*, retrieved from https://www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-weve-helped-buy/artwork/9744/collection-of-drawings-and-watercolours-from-the-raffles-family-collection on 17/1/2024.



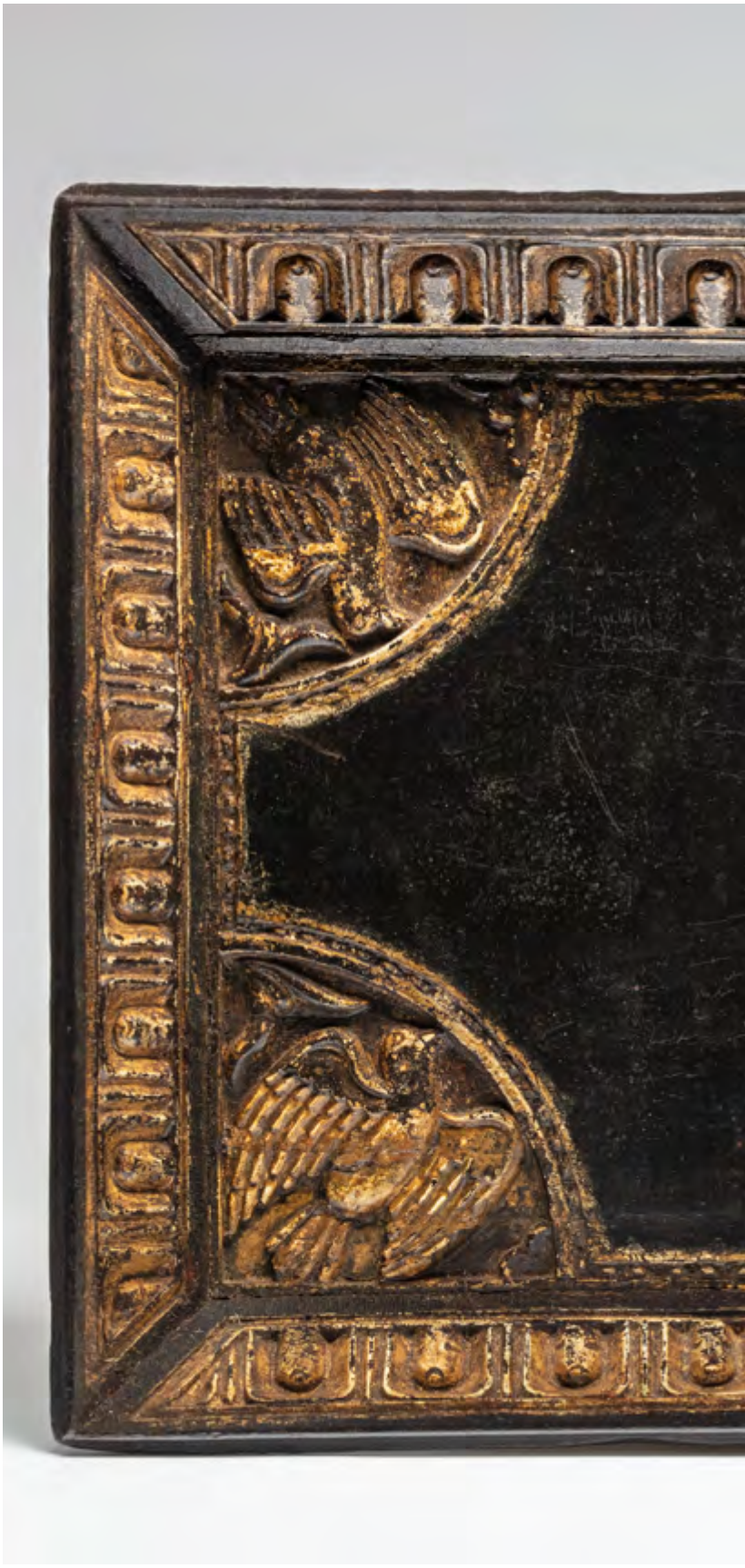


37

Sino-Portuguese Carved Wooden Tray

China, Late 16th to early 17th century

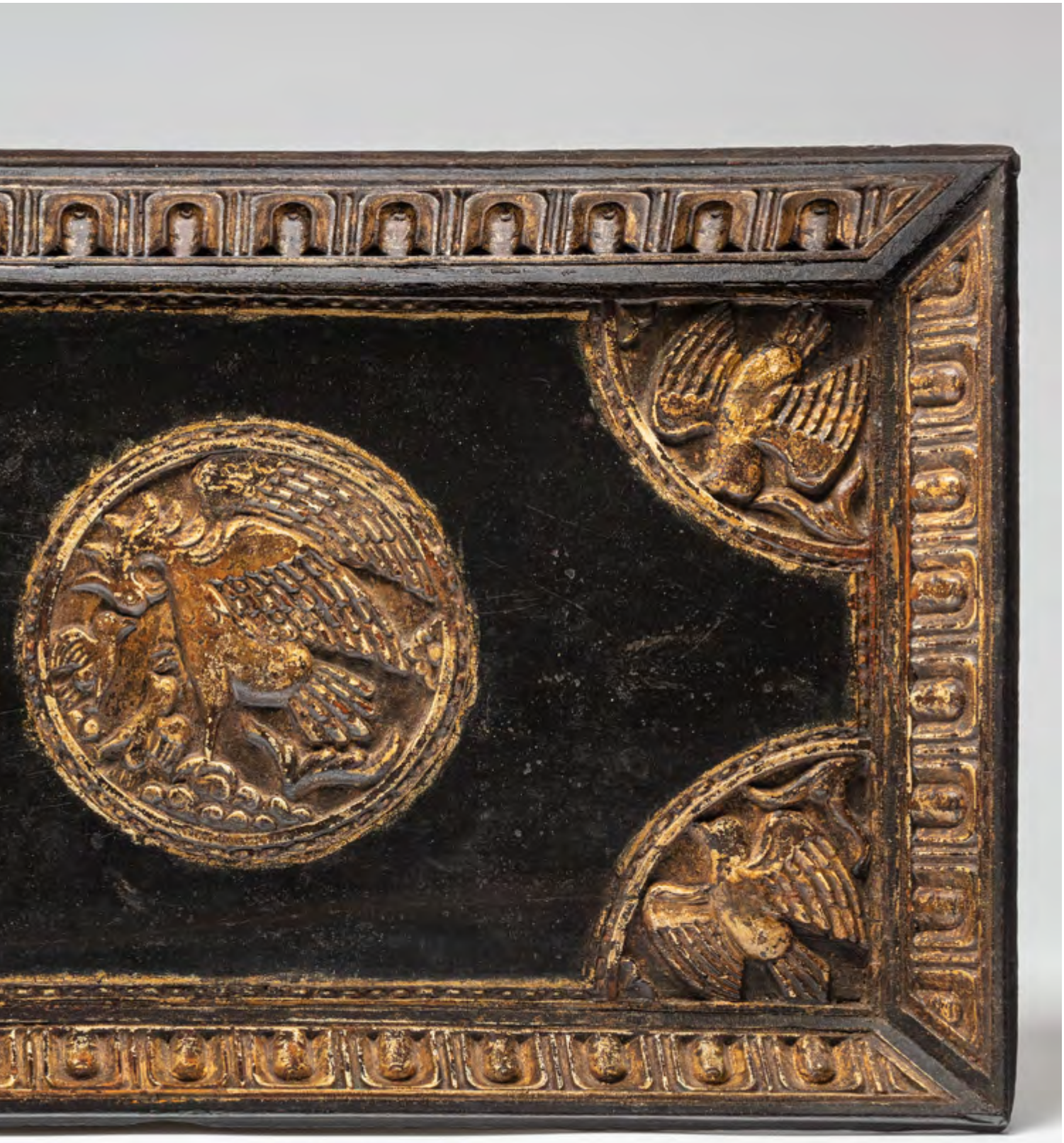
Camphor wood, lacquer, gilding
44cm high, 69cm wide



A rectangular tray with a deep everted border on all four sides, made from carved, lacquered and gilded Chinese camphor wood (*Cinnamomum camphora*). While the border is carved with a lotus petal frieze, the main panel features a central circular medallion carved with a pelican in her piety and carved quarters of a circle set on the four corners depicting flying doves (the Holy Spirit). The border panels are dovetailed together, while the bottom panel is also dovetailed and pinned to the borders with typical Chinese metal peg-shaped nails.[1] Except for the underside, the tray is lacquered in black, with the low-relief carved elements highlighted in gold. Such objects are known in Portuguese as *bandejas* or *tabuleiros*. On the first word, the early modern lexicographer Rafael Bluteau (1638-1734) in his *Vocabulario Portuguez e Latino* (1712-1721) says that these are wooden, round vessels with everted rims within which gifts were sent to friends. As for *tabuleiro*, which fully corresponds to the present tray, Bluteau explains that this is an oblong vessel with an everted rim used to serve bread and sweets. When raised on a trestle, such trays could also be used as portable tables similarly for serving food. This may be observed from contemporary Namban screens - made in Japan for the local merchant elite - where the Portuguese ship's captain, sitting on a Chinese folding horseshoe armchair, is being served from a gilded tray set on a low table with cabriole legs - see Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon (inventory no. 1638 Mov).

This particular shape is Chinese in origin and its introduction to Europe dates to the early modern period, via similarly lacquered objects and also smaller versions in porcelain. Usually set on small feet, though sometimes raised on more elaborate stands, the Chinese prototype would serve as a model for similarly-shaped European objects, such as porcelain trays known in French as *plateau de déjeuner* produced in the 18th century. Its Chinese origin is nonetheless much earlier and was probably first made in precious metal and then copied in less costly materials.[2] An oblong rectangular monochrome black lacquered tray with a scalloped everted border, seemingly copying a gold or silver prototype, which was made around 1127-1279 (the late Song dynasty), is today in the National Museum of Asian Art, Washington (inventory no. S1987.364). Similarly-shaped lacquered trays destined for the home market and made in the late Ming dynasty, from the 15th and 16th centuries, are more abundant. A rare late Ming dynasty tray (47.3 cm in length) with indented corners and lacquered in vivid colours highlighted in gold, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inventory no. Fe.91-1974), has a Tianqi reign mark (r. 1620-1627) and a cylindrical date corresponding to 1624 on the plain black underside.

This tray belongs to a rare group of similarly-shaped objects sharing the same materials and simplified manufacturing techniques typical of Chinese export wares.[3] Some of their lacquer coatings have been scientifically analysed and identified as laccol, from the sap of lacquer trees of the species *Rhus succedanea*, and decorated with gold leaf following Chinese techniques (*tiējīnqī*, or *haku-e* in Japanese), and in some instances featuring



mother-of-pearl inlays. Not only are the shape and decorative techniques Chinese, but also the thin lacquer coating, since laccol is produced from the sap of lacquer trees native to Vietnam, China and Japan, and was widely used in Chinese lacquers. The presence of these trays has been recorded in late 16th and early 17th-century Portuguese inventories. The most eloquent testimony is given in the inventories of Fernando de Noronha (ca. 1540-1698), 3rd Earl of Linhares and his wife Filipa de Sá (†1618) which record a large number of lacquered and gilded Asian objects.[4] Contrary to less reliable contemporary European sources, these exotic commodities are accurately recorded in Portuguese inventories regarding their geographical origin. In the Linhares inventories, a distinction is made between lacquer wares made in the Kingdom of Pegu (in present-day southern Myanmar) and China. Their post-mortem inventories record "four trays from China", including three with the Linhares coat of arms, all "gilded and black", and another three, totalling seven lacquered trays.[5] The geographical identification of this production has nonetheless continued to puzzle curators, art historians and conservators, even giving rise to unlikely, unsubstantiated hypotheses.[6] These include Indian (Cochin or the Gulf of Bengal), Ryukyuan (from the Japanese Ryukyu Islands, then tributary of imperial China), Chinese (Macau) with purported Japanese influence, and even the idea that objects were being carved in one place and lacquered in another. Yet, the scientific analysis and identification of coating materials, decorative techniques and ample archival documentation all point to their South Chinese origin, likely somewhere in the provinces of Guangdong and Fukien.

The most important group of these Chinese carved and lacquered trays belongs to the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon (inventory nos 1 Band, 2 Band, 3 Band, 26 Band, and 44 Band). Before entering the museum collection, all belonged to women's religious institutions. The Museu de Aveiro (inventory no. 120/F) holds one large tray (70.5 x 43.0 cm) featuring a double-headed eagle on its central medallion and stylised floral motifs on the corners. Another (68.0 x 43.5 cm), featuring the Augustinian emblem of a heart trespassed by two arrows on the central medallion and stylised animals (lions?) on the corners, belongs to the Museu Nacional Frei Manuel do Cenáculo, Évora (inventory no. ME 1076); on the underside there is an inscription in Chinese characters. Originally from the Convent of Jesus in Aveiro, it lacks most of its lacquered coating. From the same group, decorated with mother-of-pearl, belongs a much smaller tray (38.5 x 22.5 cm) once in the collection of Fernando Távora (1923-2005), in Porto, Portugal; another (67.5 x 44.0 cm) was once in the collection of Luís Pádua Ramos (1931-2005), in Porto; and yet another (65.0 x 41.5 cm) is in the Collection Távora Sequeira Pinto, Porto. Given their shared features, these seem to have been made around the same workshops. The most elaborate of these carved and lacquered trays (68.0 x 34.0 cm) now belongs to the collection of António Horta Osório, Lisbon-London. Unlike the other known trays, it features an exuberant pattern of circles and stylised leaves on both the interior and borders, and is decorated in gold and highlighted with mother-of-pearl inlays.[7] More elaborate, and probably made elsewhere in China, mention should be made of a tray (67.8 x 43.8 cm) profusely decorated with mother-of-pearl and not carved like the previous examples.[8] It once belonged to the collection of José Lico, Lisbon. It features a courtly love scene on an oval strapwork cartouche copying a contemporary European engraving. Namban examples, made in Japan for export to the European market, albeit much rarer are also known. One such Namban tray (4.1 x 76.5 x 41.0 cm), profusely decorated with mother-of-pearl inlays, is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inventory no. 2002.2). Another, partially made from Japanese cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*) and decorated with mother-of-pearl (62.2 x 36.8 cm), is in the collection of the aforementioned Lisbon museum (inventory no. 20 Band).

One tray in the Lisbon museum (68.0 x 41.0 cm) is identical to the present one, both seemingly made in the same workshop (inventory no. 1 Band). Similarly featuring the lotus-petal frieze central medallion with the pelican in her piety and doves on the corners, the tray in Lisbon lacks most of its original gilding, while the black lacquer coating has become so thin and abraded as to reveal the wood underneath. It originated in the Convent of the Saviour in Lisbon. The pelican in her piety (*pie pellicane*), an iconography also known as the vulning pelican, depicts a mother pelican cutting into her own flesh to feed her young with her blood. This is symbolic of Jesus Christ shedding his precious blood for the redemption of Humanity, and also a symbol for the Church distributing the graces of Christ's redemption in the mass and sacraments. It is a symbol of Christian piety and a recurrent motif in early Asian export art made for the Portuguese market. Despite its more evident Christian iconography and its origins within a religious institution, in contrast with the vast majority of the surviving trays, such imagery was nonetheless typical of secular objects made for the highly religious Portuguese elite between the 16th and 17th centuries.

H.C.

Notes:

1 On the construction of these trays, see Cancela de Abreu, Pedro. 'Técnicas de Construção de Objectos Namban', in Teresa Canepa *et al. Depois dos Bárbaros II. Arte Namban para os mercados japonês, português e holandês*. London – Lisbon: Jorge Welsh Books, 2008, pp. 59-60.

2 Tahira, Namiko. 'The Influence of Metal Works on Monochrome Lacquer from the Late Tang Dynasty through the Song Dynasty', in Chan Kuen On (ed.), *Proceedings of Conference on Ancient Chinese Lacquer*. Hong Kong: Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012, pp. 15-20.

3 On these simplified techniques, see Körber, Ulrike, Schilling, Michael R., Barrocas Dias, Cristina, and Dias, Luís. 'Simplified Chinese lacquer techniques and *Namban* style decoration on Luso-Asian objects from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries', *Studies in Conservation* 61, Supplement 3 (2016), pp. 68- 84.

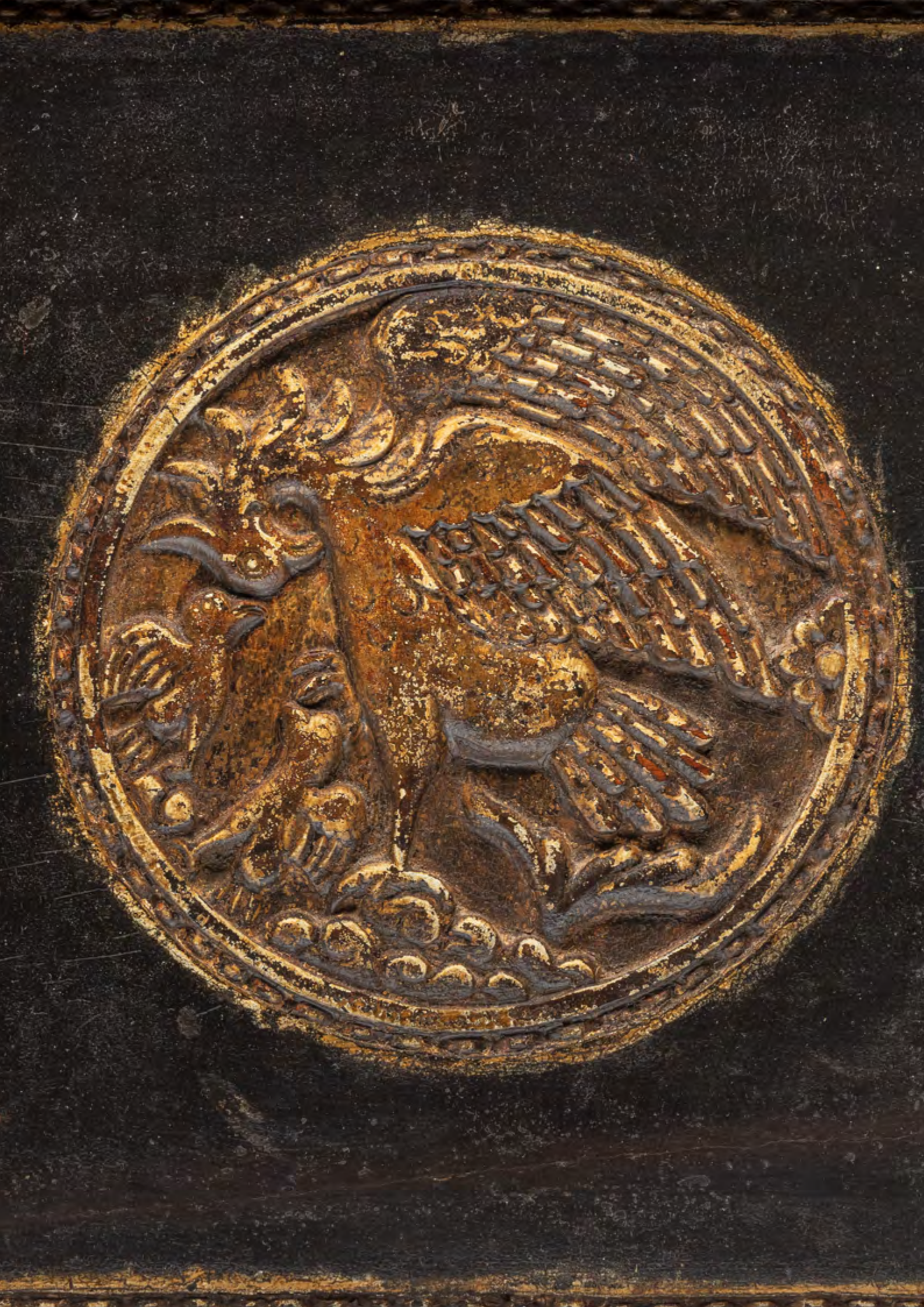
4 Crespo, Hugo Miguel. 'Global Interiors on the Rua Nova in Renaissance Lisbon', in Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, K. J. P. Lowe (eds), *The Global City. On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon*. London: Paul Holberton publishing, 2015, pp. 121-139.

5 Crespo, Hugo. *Choices*. Lisbon – Paris: AR-PAB, 2015, pp. 238-261, cat. 22, ref. p. 254.

6 Hirokazu, Arakawa. 'Ryūkyū Lacquerware in Europe - Focusing on the Haku-e technique', in Kreiner, Josef (ed.) *Sources of Ryūkyūan History and Culture in European Collections*. Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 1996, pp.197-217; Jordão Felgueiras, José. 'Mobiliário Indo-Português dos Austrias', in *El Arte en las Cortes de Carlos V y Felipe II*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1999, pp.169-177; de Moura Carvalho, Pedro. 'Um conjunto de lacas quinhentistas para o Mercado português e a sua atribuição à região de Bengala e costa do Coromandel' in Pedro de Moura Carvalho (ed.) *O Mundo da Laca. 2000 Anos de História* (cat.), Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2001. pp.126-153; Dias, Pedro. *Mobiliário Indo-Português*. Moreira de Cónegos: Imaginalis, 2013. pp. 415-417; and Körber, Ulrike: 'The "Three Brothers": Sixteenth-century Lacquered Indo-Muslin Shields or Commodities for Display', in Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, K. J. P. Lowe (eds). *The Global City. On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon*. London: Paul Holberton publishing, 2015. pp. 212-225.

7 Santos Alves, Jorge (ed.) *Macau. The First Century of an International Port* (exh. cat.) Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 2007. pp. 144-145, cat. 38 (entry by Alexandra Curvelo).

8 Canepa, Teresa *et al. Depois dos Bárbaros II. Arte Namban para os mercados japonês, português e holandês*. London – Lisbon: Jorge Welsh Books, 2008, pp. 336-339, cat. 48 (entry by Teresa Canepa).



38

The Lamentation

Ayacucho, Peru, c. 1675–1700

Carved alabaster (Huamanga stone) with polychromy
and traces of gilding
23cm high, 17cm wide, 6cm deep

This delicately carved devotional plaque in alabaster was made by an Andean artist in the Peruvian city of San Juan de la Frontera de Huamanga (known as Ayacucho following independence) in the late 17th century when this area of Upper Peru was part of the Spanish overseas empire under the Viceroyalty of Peru (*Virreinato de Peru*). It is carved from a local alabaster highly appreciated for its translucency and warmth, commonly known as Huamanga stone (or *piedra de Huamanga* in Spanish) from the area where the material is quarried.[1] The stone, a soft material which can be carved with chisels, knives and files, was first called *berenguela* by the Spanish, and used by local craftsmen for making utilitarian objects such as mortars and bowls. In the local Quechua language, *guamanga* means "soft stone". The first colonial quarries were established in 1586, the stone being used by indigenous sculptors for carving architectural elements for buildings, which included local pre-colonial images (pumas, serpents and other Andean motifs). Starting from the early 17th century, the prized material was used by indigenous, *criollo* and *mestizo* craftsmen for carving Christian images under the patronage of the missionary orders and following carving techniques introduced by Spanish masters from Navarre and Aragon. According to the Spanish Jesuit missionary Bernabé Cobo (1580-1657) in his *Historia del Nuevo Mundo* (1653), 'in the Diocese of Guamanga, there is a large hill full of veins of very fine alabaster, white as snow, from which small, very curious images are carved and valued by whoever carries them; and this stone is so soft that, soaked in water, they carve it with a knife.'[2]

The present plaque depicts *The Lamentation*, with the dead Christ supported by an angel with outstretched wings above and St Mary Magdalene and the Virgin on either side. The superior quality of the carving and the largely intact original polychromy (with traces of gilding), which includes the locally produced multicoloured feathers of the angel's wings, contrasts with other known examples of this Peruvian workshop. These are usually less compact and present areas of undercutting not seen in this *Lamentation*. This might be accounted for by its somewhat earlier date as most of the surviving Huamanga devotional carved plaques are dated to the 18th and 19th centuries. Its carving style is reminiscent of earlier mid-16th century Spanish works, such as devotional painted reliefs made in terracotta by Mannerist artists such as Juan de Juni, a French sculptor settled in Castile; a *Lamentation* attributed to Juni's workshop is held in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inv. 91-1864).

The vertical arrangement of the composition is rare when compared with the usual 16th and 17th century depictions of *The Lamentation* with the lying or seated dead Christ. Its composition seems to derive from a *Lamentation* by the Venetian painter Jacopo Palma il Giovane (1544-1628), painted around 1620 and now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (inv. 1991.19.1). Moreover, the more vertical position of Christ's dead body is similar to that of the present carving, but also its position in relation to the figures of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin are identical. Yet, on the carving, the three figures are brought closer together, whereas the figures on the top register are substituted by that of the angel in the carving. Drawings of the same theme by the same painter survive, while one depicting Christ almost upright being carried by angels is in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1862,0809.32). Nonetheless, the posture of Christ more closely matches that of an engraving by Cherubino Alberti (1653-1615), known as Borghegiano, depicting an angel standing on a cloud supporting the dead Christ, dated ca. 1570-1615; a copy of this is in the British Museum (accession no. 1874,0808.490). The anonymous Peruvian artist likely based his dead Christ supported by an angel on Alberti's print, choosing to include the two female figures and extending the angel's wings to accommodate the wider scene. The figures of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin may have been borrowed from Palma il Giovane considering the similarities, although their attire and the presence of attributes (the ointment vase of the Magdalene) are not seen on Palma's painting, and may thus point to another, probably earlier unknown visual source.

One of the largest assemblages of Huamanga stone carvings is in the collection of the Museo Pedro de Osma, Barranco (Peru). It includes sculptures carved in the round and high reliefs, sometimes with pierced, openwork areas, and devotional plaques of varying sizes, such as the present example. A carved alabaster panel (4.0 x 21.5 x 15.5 cm) similarly made in Peru ca. 1675-1700 depicting Santa Rosa de Lima kneeling before Christ, the Virgin and St Joseph, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (accession no. 8365-1863).[3] A later plaque from around 1780-1800 depicting a Pietà, is in the Museo de Artes of the University of the Andes, Santiago de Chile.

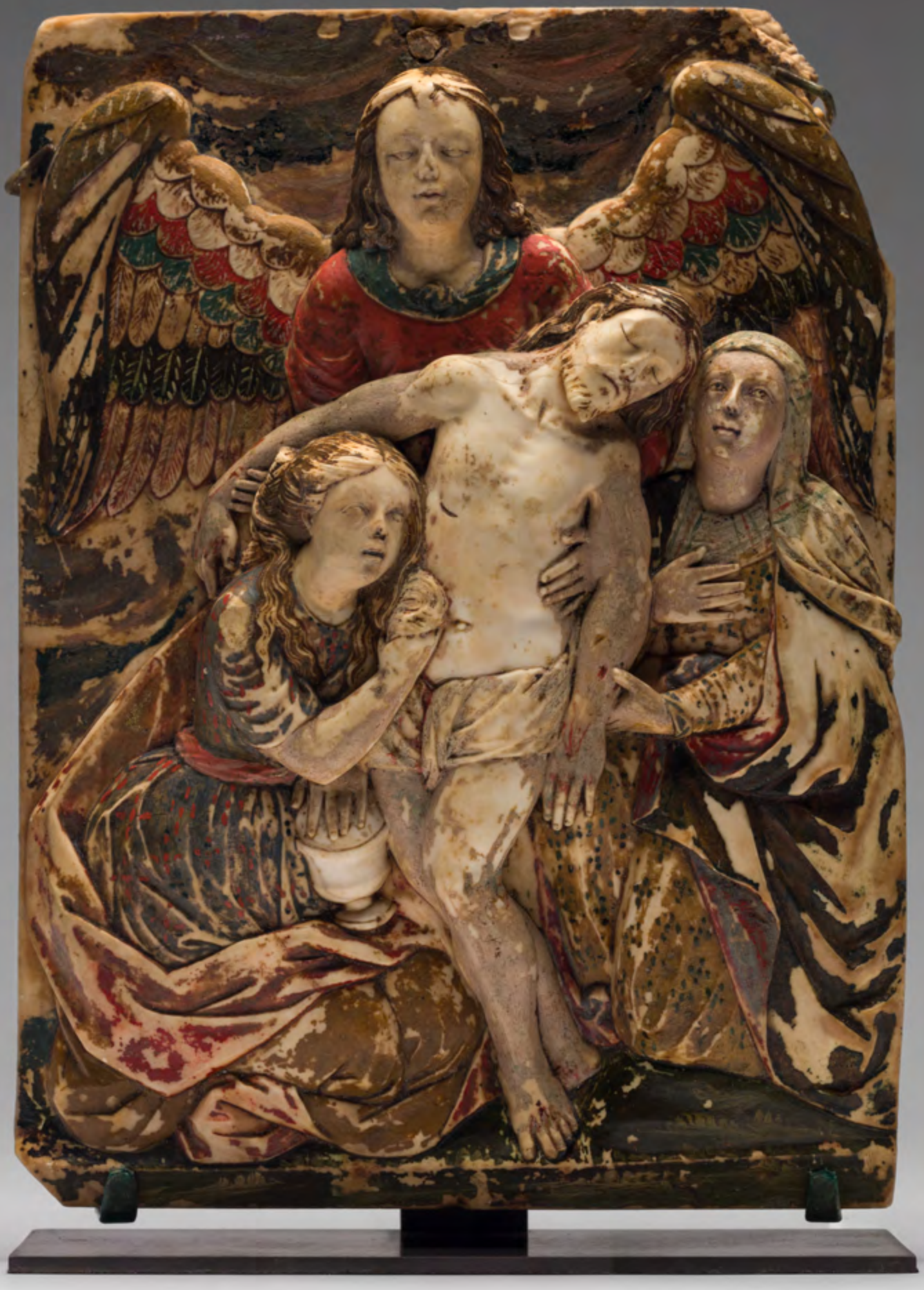
H.C.

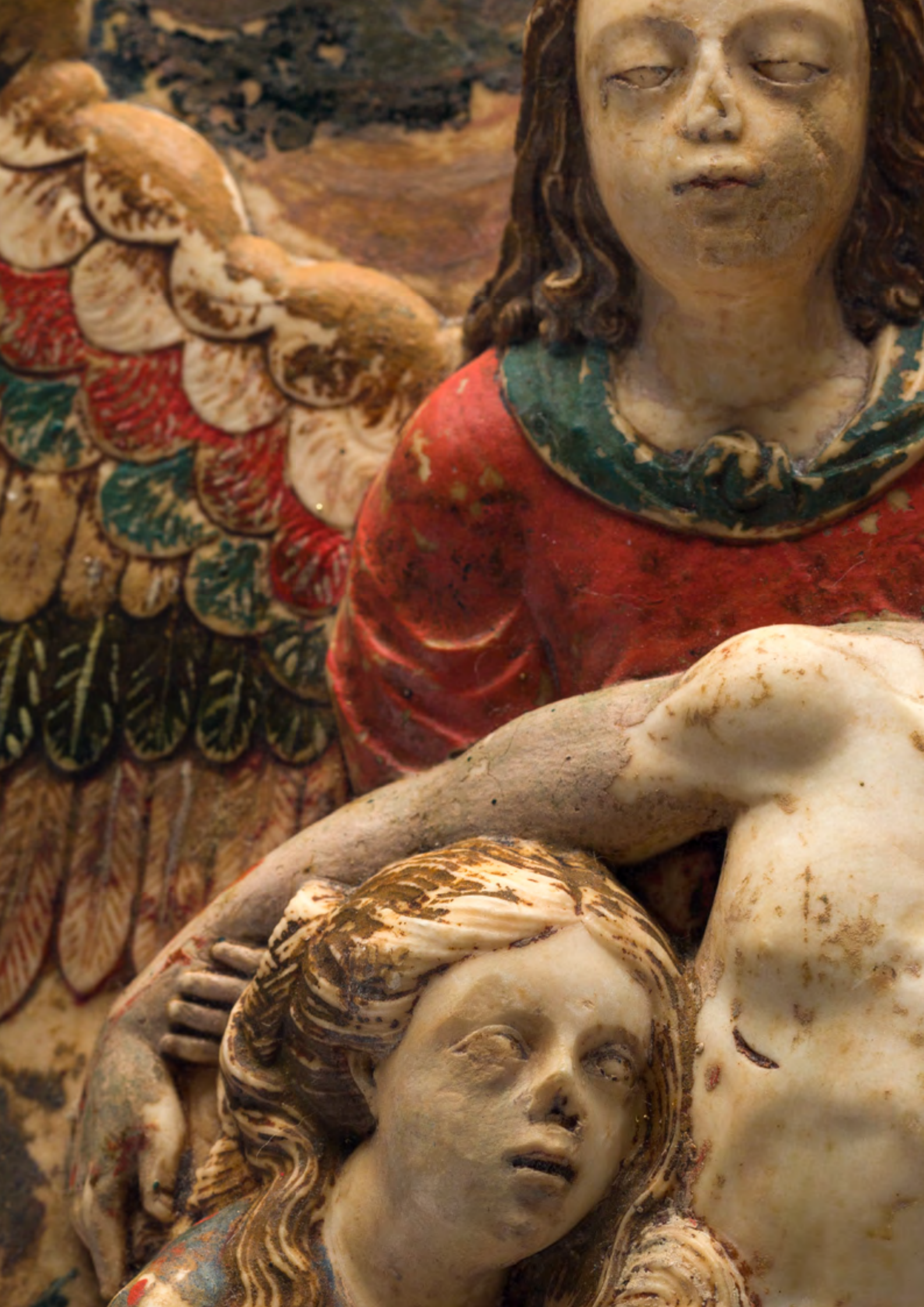
Notes:

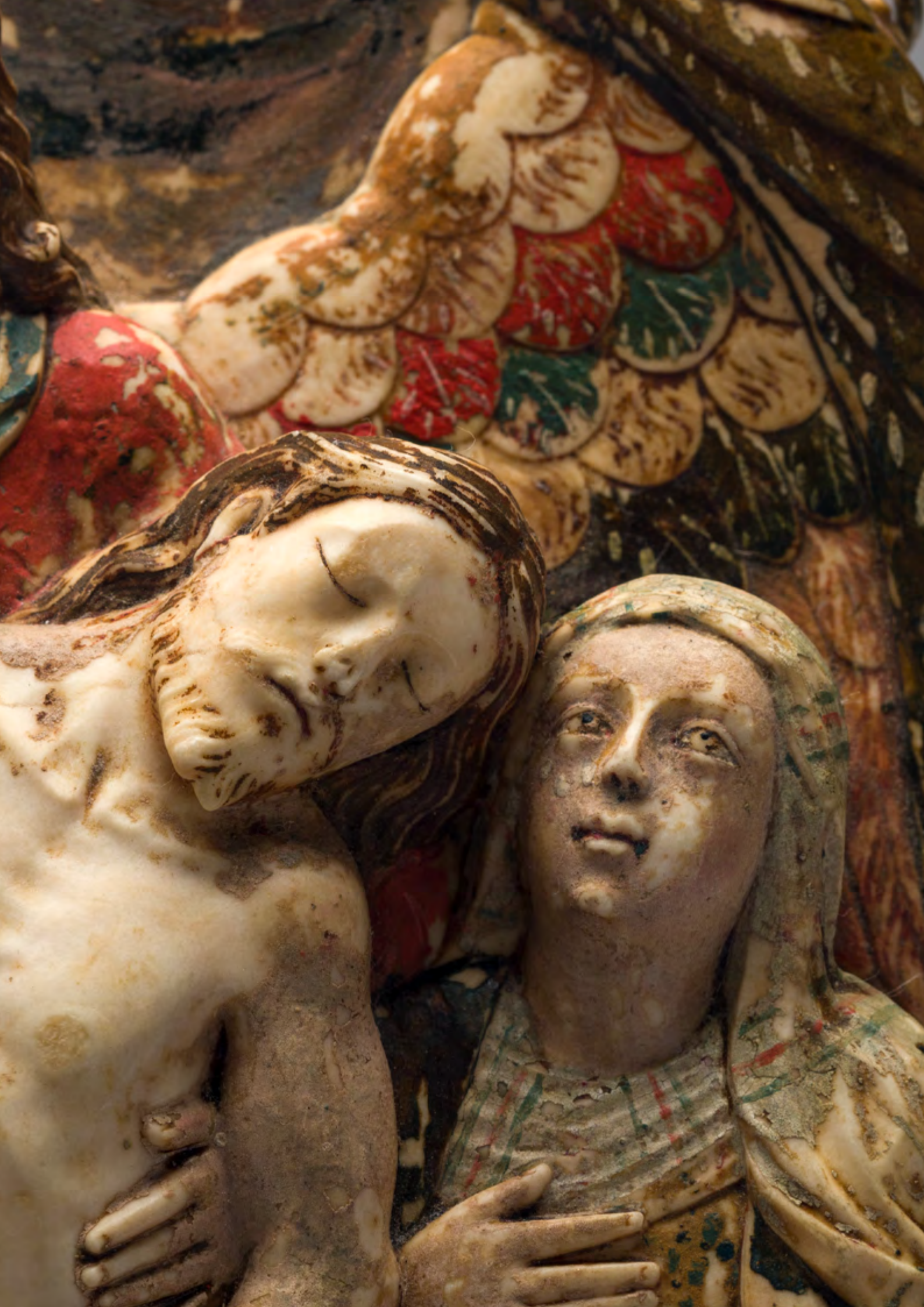
1 On Huamanga stone carvings, see Natalia Majluf, Luis Eduardo Wuffarden. *La piedra de Huamanga. Lo sagrado y lo profano* (exh. cat.) Lima: Museo de Arte, 1998.

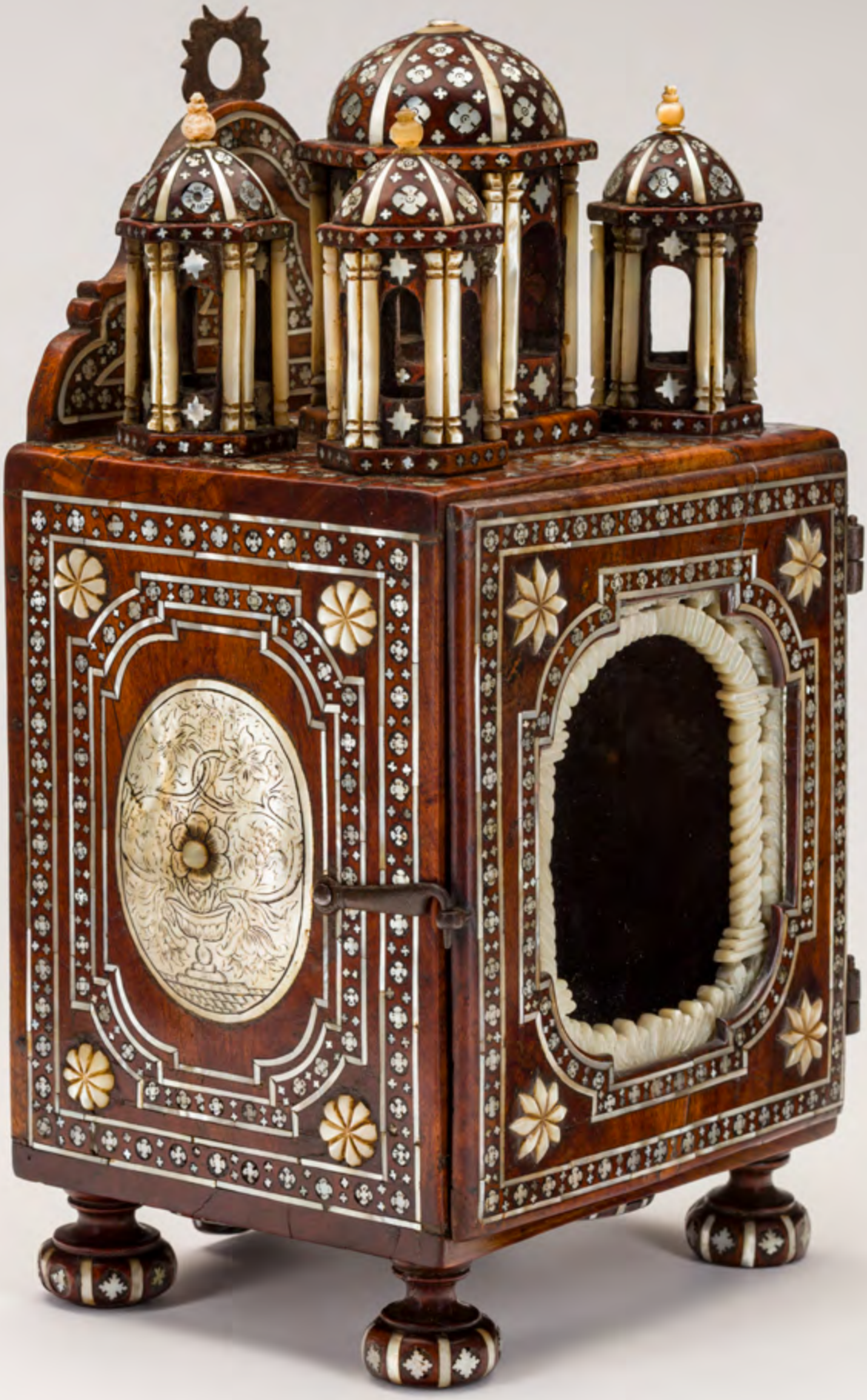
2 Cf. Cobo, Bernabé. *Obras del P. Bernabé Cobo*. Madrid: Atlas, 1964. p. 123: 'En la diócesis de Guamanga hay un gran cerro lleno de vetas de finísimo alabastro, blanco como la nieve, de que se labran imágenes de bulto pequeñas, muy curiosas y estimadas doquiera que las llevan; y es tan blanda esta piedra, que remojada en agua la labran con un cuchillo.'

3 Trusted, Marjorie. *Spanish Sculpture. Catalogue of the Post-Medieval Spanish Sculpture in Wood, Terracotta, Alabaster, Marble, Stone, Lead and Jet in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1996. Pp. 127-128, cat. 59.









39

Jerusalem Reliquary

Jerusalem, 17th century

Olive wood, mother-of-pearl, bone
32cm high, 17cm wide, 14cm deep

Provenance: French private collection.

An olive-wood reliquary from the Holy Land with unique sculptural and architectural detail, inlaid with mother-of-pearl particular to the Bethlehem region. Containers and models of this kind are very rare; this example is exceptional in its quality and figuration. Several models of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, of comparable age and style, feature in the respective collections of the British Museum (OA.10339, OA.10338), the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (2010.7.1.1-16) in Marseille, France and Museum of Fine Arts Boston (2016.91). Models of the sacred sites in the Holy Land were made by Middle Eastern craftsmen in Franciscan monasteries – a presence in Jerusalem since 1335 – as elaborate souvenirs for pilgrims, European diplomats, and Grand Tourists. Such models began to appear around 1600 after concerted excavations and studies of sacred sites in the Holy Land by the Franciscan prior and draughtsman Brother Bernardino Amico.[1] The architectural modelling here is strikingly reminiscent in style and composition to the Franciscan Church of the Condemnation and Imposition of the Cross – the second Station of the Cross along the Via Dolorosa – in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem.

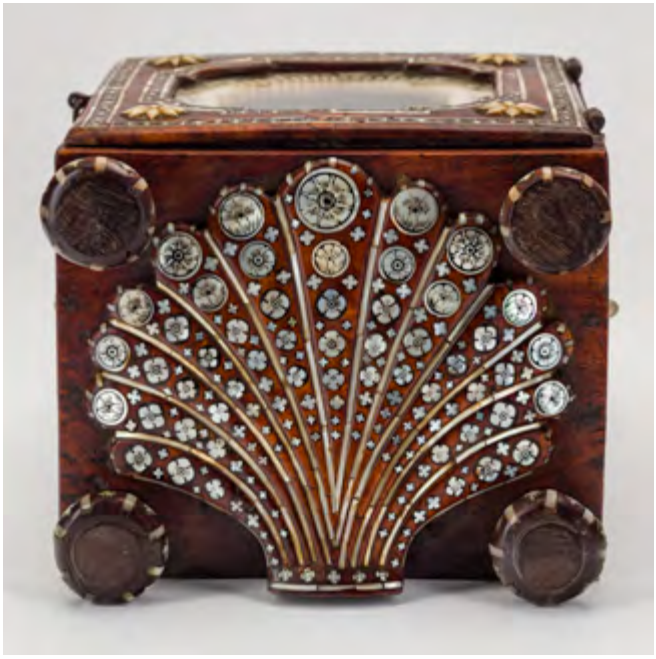
When hung for devotional use, a sculptural carving of a scallop-shell, the symbol of St James, is revealed on the underside of the reliquary. Along with the original hook on the rear, the sizeable relief and fine inlay of floral and solar designs confirm that this was originally designed to be hung, perhaps in a devotional niche or above an altar chapel. This differentiates it from traditional Sepulchre models. The prominent central dome is flanked by four equidistant cupolae, all in the Byzantine architectural style, finely carved and supported by paired mother-of-pearl columns. Each cupola is topped by a spherical finial in carved bone, whilst the central dome would have likely been capped with a "cross-in-dome". These are offset by an inlaid pediment of patterned crosses and archivolts that serve as both a decorative backdrop to the domes when set down, but also a protective headboard when hung. This architectural arrangement is unusual for reliquaries, especially in woodwork, but the grouping gives the container a vertical emphasis and possibly specifies it, at least in stylistic inspiration, to the aforementioned church in the Christian Quarter, rebuilt according to the original plans. Indeed, the Byzantine dome in church-building spiritually represents the Heavenly realm; grouped together as in this arrangement, they appear as a maquette of the Heavenly City.

The relic cavity is framed by exquisitely carved Solomonic columns which support a bone pillowed arch. Its exterior is encircled by an inlaid mother-of-pearl motif of quatrefoils, typical of Palestinian woodwork. An eight-pointed star is positioned in each of the corners of the door in bone relief, a symbol which has varied meanings in Middle Eastern decorative arts, including the Star of Bethlehem and the eight wounds sustained by Christ. This arrangement is repeated on the left and right-hand facets, surrounding matching mid-relief shields in mother-of-pearl. Each is intricately carved with a floral and wide-boat Arabesque planter design centered around a pearl boss, suggestive of the Italianate influence that arrived in the 16th and 17th centuries.

G.Y.

Notes:

1 *Tratto delle piante & immagini de sacri edifizi di Terra Santa* (1609).



Texts by
Hugo Crespo (H.C.)
Dr Rose Kerr (R.K.)
Manon Lever (M.L.)
Ananya Sharma (A.S.)
George Young (G.Y.)

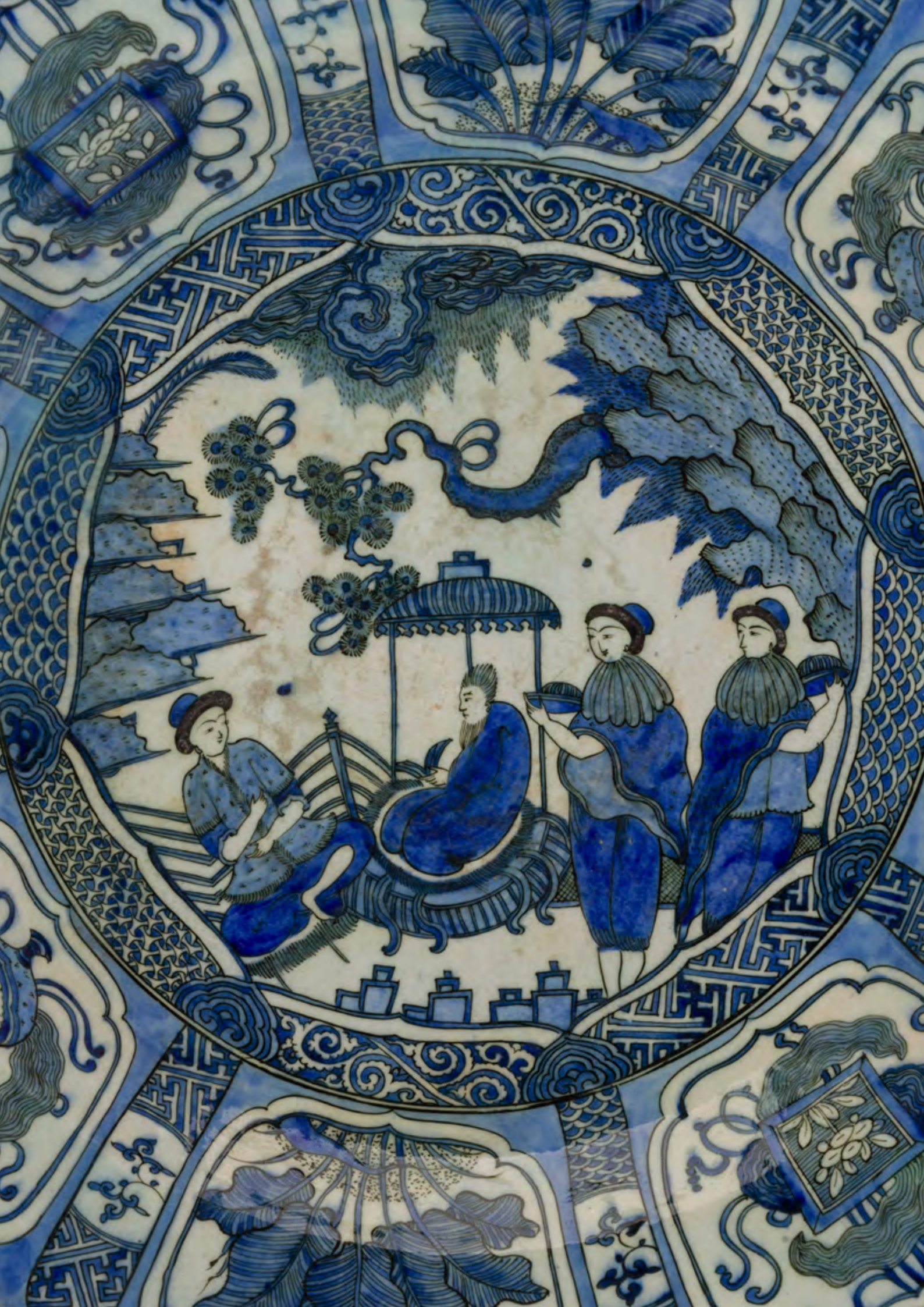
Edited by Dr Marjo Alafouzo, Manon Lever,
and Soha Mohtashemi

Translations by Will Kwiatkowski

Photography by Angelo Plantamura

Design by Struktur Design

Printing by Pureprint Group



Amir Mohtashemi Ltd.

69 Kensington Church Street
London W8 4BG
United Kingdom

info@amirmohtashemi.com
www.amirmohtashemi.com
+44 (0)20 7937 4422