



## CANDLESTICKS

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**CANDLESTICKS.** From the late 6th/12th through the early 10th/16th century the candlestick was one of the most common types of implement produced as a luxury metalware in Iran. Fabricated of bronze or brass, cast or raised from sheet, and inlaid with precious metal or tinned over to produce a silvery surface, the form, decoration, and epigraphic program of these illuminating devices reflect contemporary trends in Iranian metalwork. Despite variations in size, technique, form, and decoration, the candlestick is generally composed of a hollow, upward-tapering base, with a clearly articulated shoulder, from the top of which rises the socket and cylindrical candle-holder. Such candlesticks, regardless of their size or weight, were evidently quite portable, as is indicated by contemporary Persian miniature painting, in which they are depicted in tents or in outdoor settings, as well as by the fact that the actual lighting fixtures are often dedicated to religious shrines located at a great distance from where the candlesticks are manufactured.

The earliest extant candlesticks from Islamic Iran, most of which are datable to the late 6th/12th and early 7th/13th century and attributable to Khorasan (Melikian-Chirvani, 1982, pp. 111-12), are of a very specific type. These tall, cast candlesticks typically bear repoussé ornament in the form of hexagons, lions, and birds and are inlaid with silver and copper ([Plate XCVIII](#)). Exceptionally, candlesticks of this type appear to have been imitated in contemporary pottery, as is demonstrated by a much smaller ceramic version excavated at Nišāpūr (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 39.40.107). Another slightly modified version of the Khorasani candlestick, which seems to include



repoussé hexagons, is illustrated in a miniature painting from the mid-7th/13th century *Warqa wa Golšāh* (Daneshvari, fig. 51, fol. 34b).

A type of small candlestick with polygonal, concave base may have originated in western Iran, as early as the mid-7th/13th century; such devices, which are inlaid with precious metal, continued to be produced through the first half of the 8th/14th century. On several of these later examples the polygonal base is further complicated by pentagonal faceting (Melikian-Chirvani, 1982, fig. 88, p. 194).

A more common variety of candlestick, which was produced in the western Iranian world from the 7th/13th through the 8th/14th century, has a bell-shaped base whose form is echoed by the socket. The earliest dated example is from 622/1225 and is of Jaziran provenance (Rice, pp. 334-40). There are several dated gold and silver inlaid specimens from the 8th/14th century, either cast or of sheet brass, for example, from the years 708/1308 (Melikian-Chirvani, 1987, fig. 7), and 761/1360 (Pope, pl. 1371). The inscriptions from another such candlestick, likewise of western Iranian provenance, indicate that it was made for the Injuid ruler *Abū Eshāq* (721-58/1321-59) (Plate XCIX); typical of the time and place in which it was produced, this candlestick's decoration includes a lavish use of figural ornament, especially several complicated enthronement scenes. The candlestick with bell-shaped base was also represented in 8th/14th century miniature painting, as, for instance, in a page from a dispersed *Šāh-nāma*, ca. 730-36/1330-36, where two slightly different versions are depicted (Plate C).

In the 9th/15th century a differently proportioned candlestick base was introduced, along with a new type of socket. All of these examples, which are attributable to Khorasan, are cast, the sides of the shoulder are characteristically chamfered, while beneath the shoulder the base expands gradually outward toward the wide, splayed bottom. The sockets, when preserved, are in the form of a pair of open-mouthed dragons whose twisted, serpentine bodies form the shaft of the socket (Plate CI). In keeping with the character of 9th/15th century Khorasani metalwork, these candlesticks are sometimes inscribed with Persian poetry that alludes to their function, such as verses celebrating the candle (Komaroff, p. 95; also Ivanov, p. 68).

It must be noted that certain 9th/15th-century candlestick bases, which do not preserve a socket, may have functioned as the base or support for an oil lamp (Melikian-Chirvani, 1987, fig. 1), or, as the sockets were very probably screwed



into rather than soldered onto the base, such objects may have been used for both purposes. This ambiguity in function appears to be confirmed by a later 9th/15th-century miniature painting in which similarly-shaped candlestick bases alternately carry a socket supporting a candle or shafts supporting oil lamps (*Kamsa* of Neẓāmī, British Library, Add. 25 900, fol. 3v).

Candlesticks in metalwork are exceedingly rare in Iran after the first quarter of the 10th/16th century, and by the mid-10th/16th century the candlestick appears to have been supplanted as the preferred portable illuminating device by a pillar-shaped oil lampstand, whose cap, in the form of an inverted footed cup, once righted, functioned as an oil lamp.

That candlesticks continued to be used, if not produced, at least into the second quarter of the 10th/16th century, is suggested by a miniature from the *Haft manẓar* of Hātefī, Bukhara, dated 944/1538 (Plate CII), where three candlesticks are depicted. The candlesticks represented in this miniature painting are of further concern insofar as two of them are of a very specific type; namely they have a slender, outward-tapering base, a socket with tall, slender shaft, and, most significantly, in each case the shoulder is decorated with crenellations. Candlesticks of this exact form are well-known in Ottoman metalwork, especially of the mid-10th/16th century, however, the evidence provided by the miniature painting may help to support further a proposed eastern Iranian prototype for such Ottoman candlesticks (Melikian-Chirvani, 1975, figs. 5-6, and p. 155).

While the use and function of candlesticks in medieval Persia is well demonstrated by contemporary miniature painting, the milieu in which candlesticks are depicted, for example, in a courtly setting (Plate CII) or within a funerary context (Plate C), is likewise corroborated by the inscriptions from the actual objects. Candlesticks, especially in the 8th/14th century, are often inscribed with royal titlature, which occasionally gives the name and titles of a specific ruler (Plate XCIX); the elaborate royal enthronement scenes represented on such objects likewise help to place the candlestick within the confines of the court. Numerous other candlesticks were, according to their inscriptions, donated to, or specifically made for, the mausoleums or shrines of Sufi saints; among the earliest examples is a candlestick dated 708/1308-09, made for the mausoleum of Shaikh Bāyazīd Beṣṭāmī (Melikian-Chirvani, 1987, pp. 121-26, fig. 7).



Finally, certain verses by the poet Kāqānī (active during the 6th/12th century) in which the candlestick (*šam'dān*) appears, at least symbolically, within the tomb of the Prophet (Melikian-Chirvani, 1987, pp. 119-20) suggest that candlesticks were in fact used in mausoleums as early as the 6th/12th century in Persia and that they were furthermore an especially appropriate gift to a shrine.

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Plate XCVIII. Candlestick, brass inlaid with copper and silver, Khorasan, late 6th/12th-early 7th/13th century, Freer Gallery of Art, no. 51.17 (Courtesy of the



Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.)

Plate XCIX. Candlestick, brass inlaid with gold and silver, Fārs, mid-8th/14th century, al-Ḥomayzī Collection, Kuwait

Plate C. The Bier of Eskandar, *Šāh-nāma*, Tabrīz, ca. 730-36/1330-36, Freer Gallery of Art, no. 38.3 (Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.)

Plate CI. Candlestick, brass, Khorasan, late 9th/15th century. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 15201

Plate CII. Couple entertained in a Pavilion, *Haft manzar* of Hātefī, Bukhara, dated 944/1538, Freer Gallery of Art, no. 56.14, fol. 74r (Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.)