



ISRAEL IV. PERSIAN ART COLLECTIONS

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Persian art in most of the Israeli collections represent the entire history of Iran, with a strong emphasis on the Islamic period, and including Judaic-Persian ethnography. The following article is arranged in a chronological order.

The Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem. This museum houses an important collection of ancient Near Eastern artifacts, starting with a decorated clay chalice from Tepe Silak III, dated to 4200-3400 B.C.E.; painted jars and vases from the 3rd millennium B.C.E. in Central Western Iran; a shaft-hole axe with modeled figures; and a spouted ritual goblet from Susa from about 2000-1800 B.C.E. Iron Age II-III is represented by a few clay rhytons, including one with human face and hands; anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels; tiny animals made of baked clay and frit; a metal figurative comb; an Elamite figure of a goddess; a finial of a standard portraying two lions from Luristan; and various kinds of daily objects ([PLATE I](#)).

The Achaemenid collection includes a unique alabaster vessel bearing a royal inscription of Darius I (r. 522-486 B.C.E.) in four languages. Other important objects from this period are: a small silver statue of a Persian nobleman



holding a flower; a fragment of stone relief from Persepolis; a gilded silver incense altar; a rare sword guard; some wonderful pieces of jewelry; coins from the province of Judea and an ostrakon of baked clay with an Aramaic inscription. Parthian objects include a number of New Year festival silver bowls and alabastrons, and a bronze mirror, while some magnificent silver bowls, two incantation bowls made from clay with Aramaic inscriptions, seals, a gold medallion decorated with the image of an eagle, and a gold coin with portrait of Shapur II represent the Sasanian period.

Israel Museum in Jerusalem. This museum has the most comprehensive array of Persian Art and Judaic-Persian ethnography among the Israeli collections. The early periods are represented by a 13th-century clay model of a sacred enclosure; Middle Elamite objects, including pieces of architectural decoration; and further Iranian material in the Ternbach Collection. A few Achaemenid carved fragments from Persepolis and Pasargadae, some of them with inscriptions, are followed by Parthian metal or terra cotta statues, and a large collection of seals; many silver coins; an important group of some 250 glyptic finds; several silver plates; and one helmet from the Sasanian period.

A single post Sasanian silver plate portraying a royal feast leads to the Islamic collection, which starts with 9th and 10th centuries. Vessels made of cut glass; a Buyid burial stretcher and burial shirts; and a large collection of glass vessels from the 8th to the 11th century, representing a variety of functions, forms and techniques. The Saljuq period is represented by beautiful metallic zoomorphic incense burners; lighting vessels; and magnificent pieces of jewelry. Perfect silver and gold coins of all the periods are included in the Balog collection. Equally inclusive is the large ceramic collection, the highlights of which are a group of *minā'i* vessels; a complete Safavid *mehrab* of mosaic-tiles; and lovely Qajar tiles with figurative decoration. The late period is also represented by a glass collection from Shiraz; a silk rug depicting a hunting party; and some carpets from early 20th century. An unusual object, of an unknown date, is a carved wooden Mashaddoor from an unknown religious monument, apparently Shi'ite.

In addition to the decorative arts, the *Israel Museum* possess also Islamic illuminated and illustrated manuscripts and a large collection of detached miniatures. An illustrated Judeo-Persian manuscript, *Musā-nāma* of Sahin, makes part of the very important Judaica collection. Other illustrated Judeo-Persian manuscripts are found at the L. A. Mayer Museum and at the collection of the Ben-Zvi Institute, in Jerusalem.



Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv. Although in a much smaller scale, this interdisciplinary museum, too, hosts archeological, ethnographical, and decorative art objects. The earliest items, hollowed bicolored glass rods for door decoration, originate from the temple near the ziggurat of Čoġā Zambil (q.v.). Glazed ceramic tiles from the same site are on loan at the Bible Lands Museum. Other objects, notably glass vessels, beads, seals, and apothropaic amulets, represent the Eastern Mediterranean regional production during the Achaemenid period, 6th-4th century B.C.E. An unusual ceramic drinking horn portraying the king of Egypt as Amun-Re belongs to this group. From Iran came a few Achaemenid darichs and one sigloi; many Sasanian drachmas; seals and bulai; and a huge hoard of bronze coins.

The Islamic collection comprises of several high quality ceramic vessels from the 11th-13th century; one 14th-century molded and glazed tile depicting hanging lamps within niches; a few long-necked glass bottles from the 10th-13th century Gorgān; Saljuq metal vessels from Khorasan, including a beautifully decorated ink-well; Safavid and Qajar metal works; and a group of glass bottles dating to the 18th-19th century.

Late 19th-century metal objects in the ethnographic department include vessels for daily use and mirror-boxes which were used by the Jewish community as marriage presents; metal amulets and printed maps for the Saturday table with Hebrew Inscriptions; and Jewish marriage contracts (*ketuba*), among which those made in Isfahan are decorated with lions and suns.

The Authority of Antiquities of Israel. This institution possess a few examples of Luristan metalwork from 1200-1000 B.C.E., including a number of Sasanian engraved seals and ceramic incantation bowls, one Islamic apothropeic metal bowl, and a few glazed ceramic vessels from the late 12th to the 14th century C.E.

The Museum of Regional and Mediterranean Archaeology, Gan-Hashlosha. This archeological museum exhibits seventeen large and small clay vessels, decorated with monochrome painting, from the end of the 2nd millennium and the first half of the 1st millennium B.C.E.; and a fragment of stone relief from the Achaemenid palace at Persepolis, portraying a head of a man. The Islamic period is represented by an important collection of soft stone vessels, probably from the Persian Gulf area, and a nice collection of richly decorated glazed ceramic vessels in various techniques.



L. A. Mayer Museum for Islamic Art, Jerusalem. The exquisite collection of this museum, purchased mostly by Richard Ettinghausen (q.v.), represents the best of all the Islamic periods in Iran. It starts with early Islamic metal and glass objects of the transitional period, such as a gilded silver pomegranate cut on a wheel. Next come glass vessels and bottles carved and engraved with animal and bird motifs, and a large group of excellent glass from Nishapur, blown into a mold and decorated in the beveled style. The ceramic collection, representative of all the techniques, includes: an important Samanid group from Nishapur, decorated with inscriptions, birds and animals; colorful vessels and tiles from Ray and Kāšān; small sculptured figurines, mainly zoomorphic; fine Safavid wares; and a few iconographic Qajar tiles.

The highlight of metal work is the 10th-11th century Harari hoard of magnificent gold vessels decorated with gold and niello, found in Nehāvand (PLATE II) and published by Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman (pp. 1349-52). Other groups of metalwork include: Saljuq and Il-khanid brass vessels and candlesticks inlaid with silver and red copper; a rare collection of early gold and silver jewelry, mainly from the 10th-13th century; an inlaid *kaškul* from the Safavid period; various swords, daggers and a fancy Qajar armor set of steel, incrustated with gold and silver threads; and gold and silver coins representing all the periods. An important group, in a different material, consists of ivory and bone chess pieces of various shapes, from the 9th-11th-century Nishapur.

The Persian collection is completed with one 17th-century “Polonaise” carpet from Isfahan; beautifully illuminated Qur’ān pages from the 11th to 14th century; a few illustrated manuscripts; and many detached miniatures, including folios from *Manāfe’ al-ḥayawān*, small *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts, and the dispersed 14th-century “Demotte” *Šāh-nāma* (q.v.).

The Jewish National Library of Jerusalem. This library houses the art of the book, which holds thirteen illustrated manuscripts from Iran: eight from the 15th to the 17th centuries, and five from the Qajar period.



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