



LOUVRE MUSEUM II PERSIAN ART IN THE ISLAMIC COLLECTIONS

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In 1893 a section devoted to “Muslim Art” was created within the Département des objets d’art, and from the outset objects from Persia have been a most important part of this collection. A few pieces of Persian Islamic art belonged to the collections before the 1880s when Emile Molinier served as curator, prior to Gaston Migeon (1861-1930) and the introduction and display of important acquisitions in the collection. At least one piece, a famous Timurid jade bowl, belonged to Louis XIV (MR 199); indeed until quite recently almost all the gemstones belonging to Louis XIV were attributed to Iran. They all entered the “Musée Central des Arts” in 1793.

The first acquisitions were devoted to ceramics and were arranged by Migeon. Persian medieval ceramics were acquired by the Museum either through a number of connoisseurs or through direct purchases. In 1893, a large group of luster tiles from the Saljuqid and Il-khanid periods were bought from the Paris art dealer Mme. Duffeuty, along with the first Iranian metalwares. More pieces, including some Safavid metalwares were obtained in 1895 through W. Schultz (the author of *Persian Islamic Miniature Painting*). Several pieces of Iranian ceramics were given to the museum in the bequests of the French



collectors Dr. Fouquet and Léon Dru, both in 1905. The large Lajavardina plate (OA 6456) was acquired from M. Tabbagh in 1911; and is the only example of this group with a turquoise glaze. During the years 1890-1914 most of the acquisitions of ceramics were of Persian provenance, with a special focus on the “archaic” period, as defined by Maurice Pezard. Many pieces came through the Vignier brothers, art dealers mainly active in Iran; they were given through the Société des Amis du Louvre (the Friends of the Louvre Museum) between 1914 and 1921. They were mostly Saljuq ceramics including the famous epigraphic molded turquoise bowl (OA 6703), a fine pure white bowl with an arabesque drawing (OA 7477), the Abu Ṭālib hare bowl (OA 7478), a famous example of the so called Āḡkand (q.v.) pottery; and fine pieces attributed in provenance to Zanjān and Āmol (OA 7475, 7480). One of the best-preserved mina bowls in the collection (OA 6452) was also given by the Société des Amis du Louvre in 1911. The bequest of Georges Marteau (1916) included his collection of Persian and Mughal paintings, ninety-one items in all, many of which were donated to the Museum. Among them three pages from the great Il-khanid *Šāh-nāma* (see “[DEMOTTE](#)” [ŠĀH-NĀMA](#)), and many pages from a *moraqqa*’, or album, are the most outstanding items. Most of the pages of the *moraqqa*’ are Safavid; one of the most famous pages in the collection is a tinted drawing by Moḥammadi, one of the only two dated pages by the artist (from 1578); another page in the collection has been recently attributed to the same master (Makariou, 1999). The collection includes a beautiful drawing signed by Siyāvoš, and pages by Šayḡ Moḥammad, Moḥammad ‘Ali and Reżā ‘Abbāsi, among others.

After World War I the acquisitions of objects slowed down somewhat. Among the gifts that enlarged the collections, Iranian objects were not as numerous as in the pre-World War II years. In the 1970s the museum acquired some remarkable pieces: namely the cock spout ewer (MAO 442) which once belonged to the collection of the art dealer Acheroff and was exhibited in the Pavillon de Marsan, at the famous Exposition des arts musulmans of 1903. It was a gift of the Friends of the Louvre Museum. A luster ewer adorned with Persian verses as well as Arabic verses by Ebn al-Mo‘tazz was also given by the Société des Amis du Louvre in 1993 (MAO 897; Makariou, 2002, p. 63). The famous mina bowl with a riding falconer (MAO 440) was bought in 1970, enriching the collection with a most impressive piece, which combines minai and luster techniques in a single object (illustrated Bernus-Taylor, p. 53). In the same year the great luster ewer adorned with dragons (MAO 444) was acquired. It is a good example of ceramic whose form imitates metalwork. In



2003 one of the three molded bowls signed by Ḥasan al-Kāšāni was acquired by the Museum from a private collection in Paris.

Most of the acquisitions had focused on earlier periods but lately the Museum has tried to fill its gaps concerning later ceramic. A huge blue and white plate, adorned with a peony, and datable to around 1500, is an example of this; it illustrates the transitional style between late Timurid and early Safavid (MAO 710). Qajar ceramics are also attracting more interest, and more pieces of Safavid ceramics have been acquired by the Museum, including a panel probably originating from the gate built by Shah Ṭahmāsp in the Ardabil shrine, a gate that was destroyed in the early 20th century (MAO 1189; Makariou, 2002, p. 59).

In the field of metal ware, the main part of the collection had been assembled at the end of the 19th century and in the very beginning of the 20th century. In 1893 the Museum purchased an Il-khanid box in the form of a mausoleum, a model known only through three examples (OA 3355). In 1897, the falcon shaped incense burner (OA 4044) was bought from Raoul Duseigneur; and the Khorasan ewer, adorned with the signs of the zodiac (OA 5548), was purchased in 1902. Along with a group of Persian ceramics and other items, the bequest of Charles Piet-Lataudrie (1909) has brought to the Museum the great “ducks candlestick” (OA 6315), made from one sheet of metal in a workshop in Khorasan, as well as other masterpieces in metalwork. Piet-Lataudrie was an extraordinary collector, mainly interested in metalwork and a large part of his collection was given to the museum of his native city, Niort (Deux-Sèvres). In 1916, among the bequest of Georges Marteau, was the great candlestick ordered by Timur for Aḥmad Yasavi’s mausoleum and dated 1396. From the six candlesticks made for the mausoleum, four are still in Yasi in Turkestan, one is in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg and the sixth one, which is incomplete, is in the Louvre. More examples of metalwork from Fārs were transferred from the Cluny Museum (Musée de Cluny, Paris) to the Louvre in 1926, including some candlesticks and basins which provide the evidence for the existence of a specific school of metalwork in the south of Iran. In 1933, Jean David-Weill, a curator of the Islamic collection in the Louvre and a member of a prominent family of connoisseurs and collectors with strong connections to the French museums, gave the well-known lion incense burner (AA 19) to the Museum.

During the years 1932-1945, the Islamic section was separated from the Department of Decorative Arts (Departement des objets d’art) and included in



the newly created Department of Asian Art. The number of acquisitions also declined steadily between 1932 and 1945. During this period some archaeological metalwares entered the collection through the mission of the sinologist Joseph Hackin in 1933 and some more after the mission sponsored by the French industrialist André Citroën to Afghanistan in 1936. But on the whole very few Iranian artifacts entered the collection during these years. During the months before the outbreak of the war, the whole collection was packed under the supervision of J. David-Weill, assisted by the well-known art historian David Storm Rice (1913-1962), who was engaged in research in Paris at the time.

After the end of the war, the Islamic collection went back to the Louvre and meanwhile the Asian art collection gave birth to a new museum, independent from the Louvre. The opening of the Musée Guimet in 1945 marked a new episode for the history of Islamic art in French museums. The Islamic section was from then on subordinated to the Near Eastern antiquities department in the Louvre. The decision was based on the relatively common geographical ground and the partly common institutional tools (namely French institutes in the Near East).

The main advantage for the Islamic field was the complete transfer of the archaeological material excavated by the French mission at Susa. It coincided with the first attempts at registering the finds from the excavations there, although some of this material, though without any stratigraphical evidence, had been already published in 1928 by Raymond Koechlin (1860-1931; curator of the Decorative arts and collector, as well as one of the founder of the Friends of the Louvre Museum in 1897). Since the 1970s, Guillermina Joel has been engaged in providing a complete inventory of the material. The MAO S. (S standing for Susa) inventory includes, at the last count, more than 2000 items (Joel; P'eli; Makariou, forthcoming).

Textiles are clearly a weak spot in the collection. This can be explained by the strong links between the Musée des arts décoratifs—hosted in the same building—and the Musée du Louvre, and more specifically, by the different fields covered by both institutions. In the era of major acquisitions between the years 1890 and 1920, the notion and study of textiles were limited to decorative arts; and for this reason their acquisition was assigned to the Musée des arts décoratifs and inscribed pieces were shared between the Louvre and the Musée de Cluny.



It was in this context that one of the most famous textiles from the Iranian world was bought. The “Shroud of Saint-Josse” was acquired by the Museum in 1922 from the mayor of Saint-Josse-sur-Mer (Pas-de-Calais). The precious silk had been reused as a shroud for Saint Josse’s relics (d. 699); it had arrived at the Abbey of Saint-Josse probably in 1134 as a gift by Etienne de Blois. He was king of England and his father-in law was the brother of Godefroy de Bouillon and Baudouin de Jérusalem (the misidentification of the donor as the father of the king of England has been repeated in almost all publications (including *EIr.* X, fasc. 2, p. 156). It is through this family link that Etienne de Blois might have obtained this textile. It is however difficult to trace back the history of the piece from Khorasan to France. The inscription mentions Boktegin, a Samanid Turkish emir who died in 961. His name is composed from “Tegin,” “prince,” and “Bok” which can be translated as “camel.” The small camels depicted on the side could be an allusion to the name of the owner. This textile is a unique example of Samanid weavers’ art of the middle of the 10th century. Other silk pieces—velvets or lampas—which were bought later, are almost all Safavid

The carpets, although few in number, are of some importance. The great Safavid piece known as “tapis de Mantes” used to be spread out on the floor of the parish church of Mantes, not far from Paris. Its velvet texture is in perfect condition and having been cut to fit the plan of an altar, it gives information about the way it was displayed. It is a huge medallion carpet with bright colors, and vivid decorations including men with firearms, a clue which had initially led to the assignment of this carpet to the beginning of the 17th century, though the second half of the 16th century seems to be a more plausible date.

Recently an effort has been made to expand the collection in new directions. A special interest has been shown in well documented objects from old collections: pages from the Louis Gonse collection, first published in 1903, were bought in 1990; a page which belonged to Mme. Duffeutuy entered the museum in 1998. It once was part of the St. Petersburg album and is attributed to Moḥammad Zamān; a beautiful stucco head, related to two others pieces in Berlin, thought to be from a palace in Ray (MAO 1226, Makariou, forthcoming, 2005), and formerly in the collection of Jean Soustiel; and a stone mould from the end of the 12th century, previously in the collection of the former vice-president of the Société des Amis du Louvre, Jacques Schumann. A large collection of Qajar paintings has also been acquired, some of them



belonging to André Godard (q.v.; 1881-1965), the former director of the archaeological services of Iran (bequest of 1977). More pages were bought in 1987, and form altogether a collection of 58 pages (New York, 1999).

The development of the Islamic art collection, and especially of Iranian objects, have benefited from various factors. The French mission in Susa has given to the Museum its archaeological collection of the early period, especially tin-glaze pottery and luster pottery. The expansion and development also owes much to the talent and energy of the already mentioned curator in the Département des objets d'art, Gaston Migeon. His excellent relation with collectors and donors such as, for example, the Marquess Arconati-Visconti, and Charles Piet-Lataudrie was instrumental in bringing important objects to the Louvre. Friendly relations with Iran were buttressed by the presence of André Godard in that country from 1926 to 1960. After his death in 1977 his wife Yedda offered their entire collection, 78 ceramics and paintings, and their archives to the Museum. In 2003 an independent department of Islamic art was established in the Louvre Museum.

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