



SWEDEN I. PERSIAN ART COLLECTIONS

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Persian art collections in Sweden contain items from the prehistoric period (3600 BCE) to the 19th century. The first artifacts of possibly Iranian origin were brought by Vikings (or *Rus*), who traveled to the shores of the Caspian and there met with merchants from Iran. Notably a 9th-century glass beaker and two bronze jugs, finds from Viking burial sites, bear witness to these contacts. More than 60% of about 80,000 coins from the early Islamic period found in Sweden are of Persian origin. A considerable amount of Sasanian coins was also brought to the country during the Viking period (9th to 10th cent. CE). Apart from its value, the collection of Sasanian and Persian coins of the early Islamic period in the Royal Coin Cabinet (one of the results of international trade) is of major importance as one of the largest collections outside the Muslim world.

From the mid-17th century onwards, Swedish travelers, scholars and diplomats came to Persia. Manuscripts of Persian poetry and science, textiles, carpets and other artifacts were brought to Sweden during this period. Of particular interest was an attempt by Ludvig (Lodewyck) [Fabritius](#), who was of Dutch origin, to establish regular trade and export of silk to Sweden in the



1670s. An illuminated manuscript now in the Uppsala University library (*Kamsa* of Neẓāmi, O.Vet.82), was acquired by Fabritius in Persia (Ådahl, 1981, p. 15).

The main part of the collections was brought to Sweden in specific historical contexts, such as gifts to the king and the royal family, as war booty from campaigns in Europe, or in relation to official visits, but some items were also purchased by collectors in the 20th century. The collections in the Swedish museums were established mainly from the late 19th century onwards. The particular historical connotations of the collections add an interesting and valuable quality to the objects, which are visual evidence of contacts between Persia and Sweden through the centuries.

Sweden's main collection of Iranian art is today in the custody of the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities (MM) in Stockholm (a permanent loan from the National Museum in Stockholm). A small selection of items constitutes a permanent exhibition. The earliest objects were acquired in the 1880s and items were added to it mainly in the 20th century. Among the collectors were internationally renowned Swedish art historians, such as Fredrik R. Martin and Carl Johan Lamm, but also King Gustav VI Adolf (r. 1950-73). Chronologically, beginning in the prehistoric period, the collection holds a number of ceramic objects from Esmā'ilābād, a gift from Moḥammad Reżā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1941-79) to Gustav VI in 1956, as well as from Tepe Giyan (Tappe Giān) and Tepe Siyalk (Tappe Sialk). Excavations were carried out at Shah Tepe (Šāh Tappe) in the 1930s by the Swedish archaeologist, Ture J. Arne. This resulted in the contribution of a collection of objects and fragments, mainly ceramic, from the strata of the tepe dating from the 4th millennium BCE until the early Islamic period (Arne, 1945, [FIGURE 1](#)). Arne also acquired an important collection of Luristan (Lorestān) bronzes (see [BRONZES OF LURISTAN](#)) from a collector in Tehran (Arne, 1962, Marino Hultman, 2000). Two small fragments from the reliefs at Persepolis were presented to Crown Prince Gustav, the future Gustav VI, during his visit to Iran in 1934.

The collection of Islamic art includes ceramic objects and tiles from the 9th to the 17th century, mainly from northeastern Iran and Kashan (Kāšān) ([FIGURE 2](#), [FIGURE 3](#)), metal-ware from the 13th to the 19th century, including two Saljuq mortars ([FIGURE 4](#)), a small collection of textiles (mainly embroidery), notably a fragment of a 17th-century brocade with a figurative motif, a collection of early Islamic glass, bought from the Tehran-based collector A. Hannibal (Lamm 1935), and a small collection of glass from Shiraz (mainly



19th century). In the MM, there is also a small number of Persian miniature paintings, most noteworthy seven miniatures from [Badr-al-Din Helāli](#)'s poem *Šāh o gedā* in late 16th-century Isfahan style (Munthe, 1923; Edahl, 1995; [FIGURE 5](#), [FIGURE 6](#)).

The Royal Armory holds some of the most important Islamic art objects, gifts to the royal family and war booty. Internationally well-known is a silk velvet coat with a Safavid figurative motif of young princes in Safavid costume, probably from 17th-century Isfahan, a gift to Queen Christina (r. 1644-54) from the Russian tsar in the mid-17th century. Two shields with silk spun patterns from the Safavid period are war-booty from the treasury of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II (r. 1576-1612) in Prague (*Islamiskt*, 1985). In the Royal Armory Collection are also a few daggers, sabers and helmets (16th-18th c.) from Iran, collected mainly by King Charles XV (r. 1859-72). The famous 16th-century silk and silver thread hunting carpet, probably from Kashan, a gift to the Swedish royal family from the late 17th century, is in the Royal Palace Collection (*Islamiskt*, 1985). Moreover, in the National Archives are documents on diplomatic relations (*Diplomatica*) and others which are of artistic and calligraphic interest, as well as brocaded silk letter envelopes (Geijer and Lamm, 1945).

In the Röhsska Decorative Arts Museum in Gothenburg is a small collection of mainly Iranian ceramics acquired in the 20th century. The Kulturen Museum in Lund has a small group of Persian ceramics, glass and textiles. In the Hallwyl Museum in Stockholm is a small collection of ceramics. The Ethnographical Museum, also in Stockholm, holds artifacts of Persian origin (i.e., a few early bronzes collected by Fredrik R. Martin), which are, however, generally of lesser artistic interest.

In the Uppsala University Library are a few illustrated Persian manuscripts of interest, such as a *Kamsa* of Neẓāmi, dated 1439 with 52 miniatures in Shiraz style (O. Vet. 82) and Moḥammad Aṣefi's *Dāstān-e Jamāl o Jalāl*, dated 1502 with 34 miniatures (Coll. Nova 2) (Tornberg, 1849; Zetterstéen, 1930; Lamm and Zetterstéen, 1948; Ådahl, 1981). In the Lund University Library are a few illuminated manuscripts, such as K̄vāndamir's universal history *Kolāṣat al-akbār*, dated 1494 (Tornberg, no. 57), with 11 miniatures in Shiraz style from around 1570 and a *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi, completed in Qazvin 1602-03 by Morād b. 'Ali (Tornberg, no. 54) with a large number of miniatures in early 17th-century Qazvin style. Both manuscripts come from the collection of Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson (1740-1807). Items from the Swedish collections



have been often exhibited outside Sweden and extensively written upon in exhibition catalogues, some of the latter have been listed in the bibliography.

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